Southern Victory
by
Harry Turtledove

Author of *THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH*

HARRY TURTLEDOVE

A NOVEL OF THE *SECOND* WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

HOW FEW REMAIN

How Few Remain
Great War [1]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:***
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

From Library Journal

In 1862, the Confederacy won the War of the Rebellion (not by interference of time travelers, as in Turtledove's Guns of the South, LJ 9/1/92, but by their own skillful military and diplomatic efforts). The defeated North has stewed for nearly 20 years. In this alternate history, the South exercises an opportunity to purchase Sonora and Chihuahua from the bankrupt Mexican Empire, having already wrested Cuba from Spain. James G. Blaine, now president of the United States, arrogantly seizes upon this pretext and invades with the aim of reunification. Lincoln has become an outcast of the Republican Party and preaches socialism while Custer is a frustrated and embittered colonel on the frontier, Samuel Clemens a fiery newspaper editor in San Francisco, and Rosecrans the inadequate head of the Union Army. Turtledove is an accomplished professional at this sort of thing and has given us an entertainment that makes us think somewhat about why we are the way we are. Highly recommended for history, historiography, military, and popular fiction collections.?Edwin B. Burgess, U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Lib., Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
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From

Turtledove calls his numerous novels "alternative history." He changed the result of the Civil War by giving General Lee AK-47s in *Guns of the South* (1992); in *Worldwar* (1996), World War II came to a screeching halt as the belligerents united against alien space lizards. This current novel extends the Civil War theme. The year is 1881. Lincoln, since losing the Civil War and then the presidency, is an itinerant socialist speech-maker. In the Confederate States of America, President James Longstreet buys northern Mexico, and the U.S. president declares war, the course of which operates through several historical figures. In San Francisco, antiwar newspaper publisher Samuel Clemens talks himself out of seditious trouble with William Sherman, while the British fleet

reduces the city to rubble. The British/Canadian invasion of Montana is stopped by Teddy Roosevelt, yelling "bully" constantly, and by George Custer, whose brother Tom dies, reappears, and then is later referred to as dead. The War in Mexico goes worse for the bluecoats, as would be expected, since they face the dashing, slashing J.E.B. Stuart and his "camelry" --whether their mounts are dromedaries or Bactrians is unclear. At Louisville, Stonewall Jackson reprises his successes by repelling the Union attack and capturing Frederick Douglass, war correspondent. Turtledove is successful in the plausible, albeit theatrical, characterizations of these figures, and his imaginative curiosity will appeal to the what-if segment of the vast Civil War readership, although they might trip over Tom Custer's dead-or-alive act. *Gilbert Taylor*

How Few Remain

The Great War

Prequel

Harry Turtledove

Now twenty years

have passed away,

Since I here bid farewell

To woods, and fields,

and scenes of play

And school-mates loved so well.

Where many were,

now few remain

Of old familiar things!

But seeing these

to mind again

The lost and absent brings.

The friends I left

that parting day—

How changed,

as time has sped!

Young childhood grown,

strong manhood gray,

And half of all are dead.

—Abraham Lincoln,

"My Childhood Home I See Again"

(1846), stanzas 6-8

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Prelude

1862

W September

OutsideFrederick,Maryland

The Army ofNorthern Virginia was breaking camp. The lean, ragged soldiers, their gray uniforms and especially their shoes much the worse for wear, began the next long tramp, this one north and west towardHagerstown . They were profoundly—and profanely—glad to be getting away fromFrederick .

"That 'Bonnie Blue Flag,' that ain't nothin' but a damn pack o' lies," a corporal announced to anyone who would listen as he slung his haversack over his shoulder.

"You'd best believe it is," one of the privates in his company agreed, pausing in the middle of the agreement to spit a brown stream of tobacco juice from the chaw that bulged out his left cheek. "This here miserableFrederick town, it ain't nothin' but a stinkin' city full of damnyankees. Sons of bitches wouldn't take our money, wouldn't open up their stores so as we could get the supplies we needed, wouldn't—"

Taking a corporal's privilege, the corporal interrupted: "You can't even get into that there town without you have a letter in writin' from your officer, says you can. Otherwise, them lousy provost guards, they'd just as soon arrest you as look at you, goddamn miserable snoops. Hear them talk, you'd think we was the ones in the Yankee uniforms."

"Hell, I *am* in a Yankee uniform—Yankee trousers, anyways," the private answered. "The Northern fellow I took 'em off, he didn't need 'em no more."

The courier's horse daintily picked its way through the chaos, careful where it set its feet. The lieutenant aboard the bay gelding didn't blame the animal for that; once an army had camped in a field, it wasn't a pleasant place any more, no matter how pleasant it might have been to start out with.

They said that, once you'd been encamped for a while, you stopped noticing the stink. The lieutenant wrinkled his nose. He'd never found that to be true. Every time he breathed in, he smelled the slit trenches (and the men hadn't been all that careful about using them; this was, after all, Yankee country), horse manure, thousands of bodies that had done a heap of hard marching without baths any time lately, and the choking smoke from thousands of little fires. The good odors of cooking food, coffee, and tobacco had to fight hard to make themselves noticed against all that.

"Lieutenant!" somebody called from behind him. "Hey, Lieutenant!" The courier paid no particular attention. The Army of Northern Virginia wasn't as big as it should have been, but it was big enough to have a hell of a lot of lieutenants.

Then the call got more specific: "You there, Lieutenant, up on the bay —hold on, will you?"

The courier reined in and looked back over his shoulder. "You want me?"

"No—your cousin back inRichmond ." The corporal who'd been grousing about the provost guards grinned impudently up at him. Getting men to give officers the respect their rank deserved was a battle the army hadn't won yet and wouldn't any time soon. The courier was about to tell the infantryman off when the fellow held up a fat white envelope, now somewhat stained with mud. "You dropped this, sir."

"Good God!" The courier felt woozy, light-headed. "Give it to me!"

"Here you go." The corporal handed it to him. He cocked his head to one side. "You all right, Lieutenant? You don't mind me sayin' so, you look white as a ghost, you do."

"I believe it." The lieutenant clutched the envelope as if he were a drowning man and it a plank. "Do you know what's in here?"

"Cigars, felt like," the corporal answered with the casual expertise of a man who'd done a good deal of foraging.

"Cigars it is." The courier opened the envelope and took them out. There were three, all of them nice and long and thick. He handed the corporal the biggest one. "Here—this is for you." The next went to the private with whom the fellow had been grumbling. "And this is for

you." He stuck the third in his own mouth.

"Obliged, sir." The corporal walked over to the nearest fire, stuck a twig in it, and got his cigar going. He came back pugging happy clouds and leaned close to the private so he could start his. Then he came up to the courier. After he'd given him a light, he remarked, "That's good baccy, but it don't seem enough to be makin' such a much of a much over, like you was doin'."

"No?" The lieutenant's laugh was the high, sweet sound of pure relief. "Do you know what was wrapped around those cigars?"

The corporal shook his head. "Can't say as I do. Reckon you're gonna tell me, though, so that's all right."

"Oh, nothing much," the courier said, and laughed again. "Only a copy of General Lee's Special Order 191, that's all. Only the orders that say where every division in the Army of Northern Virginia's supposed to be going, and what it's supposed to do when it gets there."

The private shifted the cigar to the corner of his mouth and spoke up: "That don't sound like it'd be somethin' you'd want to lose."

"Not hardly!" The lieutenant tried to imagine what would have happened to him if General Lee found out he'd lost the order. Appalling as that notion was, an even worse one replaced it, one so horrific he said it out loud, as if to exorcise it: "If McClellan's men picked up that envelope, they'd know exactly what we aimed to do, and they'd be able to break us right up."

"Damn fine thing we got it back to you, then," the corporal said. "You hang on to it from here on out, you hear?" He touched a forefinger to the brim of his black felt hat. "And I do thank you kindly for the cigar. That was right good of you." Behind him, the private nodded.

"I'm the one who needs to thank you," the courier said. "Hell's fire, gentlemen, the Confederate States ofAmerica might have lost the whole war if you hadn't found that envelope." He waved his gratitude once more, then used the pressure of his legs and a flick of the reins to get his horse moving.

The corporal and private looked after him till he disappeared into the midst of the disorderly throng of soldiers. "Lost the whole war," the corporal echoed scornfully. "He don't think much of himself and the papers he carries, now does he?"

"Ahh, he wasn't a bad feller," the private answered. "He gave us these here cigars, an' he didn't have to do that." He tilted his head back and blew a ragged smoke ring.

****

1 October

Near NewCumberland,Pennsylvania

Long blond hair streaming out behind him, Captain George Armstrong Custer came galloping from General McClellan's headquarters to those of General Burnside, who commanded the Army of thePotomac 's left wing. Brass Napoleons roared. Their cannonballs tore holes in the ranks of the advancing Confederates. Up ahead—up not far enough ahead—rifle muskets barked. Black-powder smoke drifted in choking clouds, smelling of fireworks.

Custer jerked his mount to an abrupt halt by Burnside's tent. An orderly came over and held the horse's head. Custer sprang down. He ran to General Burnside, who was standing outside the tent, a telescope in his hands. "Damn it, General," Custer said, running a hand through his hair, "I've lost my *hat."*

Burnside shielded his own bald crown from the elements with a tall hat that gave him something of the look of a policeman. The whiskers sprouting luxuriantly on his cheeks and upper lip made his round face rounder yet. "I trust the nation will survive," he said. "What word from General McClellan?"

"Sir, you are to hold your position at all hazard," Custer answered.

"I shall do everything in my power." Burnside's frown deepened the dimple in his clean-shaven chin.

"They are pounding us hard, though." As if to underscore his words, a Rebel shell screamed down and exploded perhaps fifty yards from the tent. Custer's horse let out a frightened whinny. It tried to rear. The orderly wouldn't let it.

"You must hold," Custer repeated. "If they get around your left, we are ruined. Also, General McClellan said, you must not fall back any farther. IfJackson 's corps is able to bring its artillery to bear on the bridge over the Susquehanna, our line of retreat is cut off."

"General McClellan should have considered that before offering battle on this side of the river," Burnside said tartly.

"This is where we met the Confederates—this is where we fight them." For Custer, that was an axiom of nature.

Burnside stared gloomily at the sun. Through the clotted smoke, it looked red as blood. "Two hours till nightfall, perhaps a bit more," he said, and frowned again. "Very well, Captain. I have my orders, and shall essay to carry them out. You may assure General McClellan on that point."

"I'll do it." Custer started back toward his horse. He was about to mount when the drumroll of musketry from the battle front suddenly got louder, fiercer. "Wait," he told the orderly, his voice sharp.

Burnside was peering through the shiny, brass-cased telescope. Custer had no such aid, but did not need one, either. Men in blue were streaming back toward him. Now and then, one of them turned to fire hisSpringfield muzzle-loader at the foe, but most seemed intent on nothing more than getting away from the fight as fast as they could.

"What in blazes has gone wrong now?" Custer demanded of the smoky air. The whole campaign had been a nightmare, with Lee getting up throughMaryland and intoPennsylvania almost before McClellan learned he'd leftVirginia . Never a fast mover, Little Mac had followed as best he could—and been brought to battle here, in this less than auspicious place.

Custer vaulted lightly into the saddle. He set spurs to his horse and sent it at a fast trot, not back toward General McClellan's headquarters, but in the direction from which the retreating Federals were coming.

"Go back, sir," one of them called to him. "Ain't no more we can do here. D. H. Hill's men are over Yellow Breeches Creek and on the Susquehanna. They're a-rollin' us up."

"Then we have to drive the sons of bitches back," Custer snarled. Libbie Bacon, his fiancee, wanted him to stop swearing. He hadn't been able to make himself do it, much as he loved Libbie.

He rode forward again. A few men cheered and followed. More, though, kept right on back toward that one precious bridge. *Craack!* A Minie ball zipped past him. Another cut his sleeve, so that he

wondered if someone had tugged at his arm till he glanced down and saw the tear.

He yanked an Army Colt out of his holster and blazed away at the Rebels till the six-shooter was empty.

He wore another, piratically thrust into the top of one of the big, floppy boots he'd taken from a Confederate cavalryman he'd captured. He emptied that pistol, too, then yanked out his saber.

The sun sparkled from the glittering steel edge. Custer urged his mount up into a caracole. He felt the perfect picture of martial splendor.

"Get out of here, you damn fool!" a grimy-faced corporal yelled.

"You reckon you're gonna slaughter all them Rebs with your straight razor there?" He spat on the ground and trudged north toward the bridge.

Suddenly, Custer realized how alone he was. The horse dropped down onto all fours. Custer spurred it through and then past the soldiers from Burnside's beaten left. Behind him, Rebel yells rose like panther screams.

Rebel artillery thundered. Splashes in the Susquehanna said the guns were reaching for that one bridge offering escape from the gray-clad, barefoot fiends of the Army of Northern Virginia. Screams from the bridge said some of the guns were finding it.

As he had in front of Burnside's tent, so Custer leaped down from his horse in front of General McClellan's. Like General Burnside, Little Mac, so hopefully called the Young Napoleon, stood outside.

He pointed south, toward Burnside's position. "I hear the fighting building there, Captain," he said. "I trust you conveyed to General Burnside the absolute necessity of holding in place."

"Sir, General Burnside listened, but Stonewall Jackson didn't," Custer answered. "The Rebs are on the river on this side of Yellow Breeches Creek, and I'm damned if I see anything between there and the bridge to stop 'em."

McClellan's handsome face went pale, even with that ruddy sunlight shining down on it. "It is the end, then," he said in a voice like ashes. His shoulders sagged, as if he had taken a wound. "The end, I tell you,

Captain. With the Army of thePotomac whipped, who can hope to preserve the Republic intact?"

"We're not whipped yet, sir." Even in Custer's own ears, the brave words sounded hollow, impossible to believe.

"Fire!" somebody shouted off in the distance. "Jesus God, the bridge is on fire!"

"The end," McClellan said again. "The Rebs have outnumbered us from the start." Custer wondered about that, but held his peace. McClellan went on, "We are ruined, ruined, I tell you. After this defeat,England andFrance will surely recognize the Southern Confederacy, as they have been champing at the bit to do. Not even that buffoon in the White House, the jackass who dragged us into this war, will be able to pretend any longer that it has any hope of coming to a successful resolution."

Custer, a staunch Democrat, had if anything even less use for Abraham Lincoln than did McClellan. "If that damned Black Republican hadn't been elected, we would still be one nation, and at peace," he said.

"After the disaster his party has been to theUnion , it will be a long time before another Republican is chosen to fill the White House," McClellan said. "I take some consolation in that—not much, I assure you, Captain, but some nonetheless."

Another of McClellan's officers galloped up from the northwest. "Sir," he cried, not even dismounting,

"Longstreet is pounding our right with everything he has, and General Hooker—General Hooker, sir, he won't do *anything*. It's as if he's stunned by a near miss from a shell, sir, but he's not hurt."

McClellan's mouth twisted. "In hisCalifornia days, Joe Hooker was the best poker player the world ever knew," he said heavily, "till it came time to raise fifty dollars. Then he'd flunk. If he flunks now—"

As it had on the left, a great burst of musketry and cannon fire told its own story. "General McClellan, sir, he just flunked," Custer said. He reloaded his pistols—not a fast business, with ball and loose powder and percussion cap for each chamber of the cylinder. After one Colt was charged, he lost patience. "By your leave, General, I'm going to the fighting before it comes to me."

"Go ahead, Captain," McClellan said. His posture said he thought all

was lost. Custer thought all was lost, too. He didn't care. Fighting in a lost cause was even more splendid and glorious than battle where victory was assured. He sprang onto his horse and rode toward the loudest gunfire.

He looked back once. McClellan was staring after him, shaking his head.

Chapter 1

1881

Buffalo bones littered the prairie south ofFort Dodge,Kansas . Colonel George Custer gave them only the briefest glance. They seemed as natural a part of the landscape as had the buffalo themselves a decade before. Custer had killed his share of buffalo and more. Now he was after more dangerous game.

He raised theSpringfield carbine to his shoulder and fired at one of the Kiowas fleeing before him. The Indian, one of the rearmost of Satanta's raiding party, did not fall.

Custer loaded another cartridge into the carbine's breech and fired again. Again, the shot was useless.

The Kiowa turned on his pony for a Parthian shot. Fire and smoke belched from the muzzle of his rifle.

The bullet kicked up a puff of dust ten or fifteen yards in front of Custer.

He fired again, and so did the Kiowa. The Indian's Tredegar Works carbine, a close copy of the British Martini-Henry, had about the same performance as his own weapon. Both men missed once more. The Kiowa gave all his attention back to riding, bending low over his pony's neck and coaxing from the animal every bit of speed it had.

"They're gaining on us, the blackhearted savages!" Custer shouted to his troopers, inhibited in language by the pledge his wife, Libbie, had finally succeeded in extracting from him.

"Let me and a couple of the other boys with the fastest horses get out ahead of the troop and make 'em fight us till the rest of you can catch up," his brother suggested.

"No, Tom. Wouldn't work, I'm afraid. They wouldn't fight—they'd just scatter like a covey of quail."

"Damned cowards," Major Tom Custer growled. He was a younger, less flamboyant version of his brother, but no less ferocious in the field. "They bushwhack our farmers, then they run. If they want to come up intoKansas , let 'em fight like men once they're here."

"They don't much want to fight," Custer said. "All they want to do is kill and burn and loot. That's easier, safer, and more profitable, too."

"Give me the Sioux any day, up inMinnesota and Dakota andWyoming ," Tom Custer said. "They fought hard, and only a few of them ran away intoCanada once we'd licked them."

"And the Canadians disarmed the ones who did," Custer added. "I'll be —dashed if I like the Canadians, mind you, but they play the game the way it's supposed to be played."

"It's cricket," Tom said, and Custer nodded. His younger brother pointed south. "We aren't going to catch them on our side of the line, Autie."

"I can see that." George Custer scowled—at fate, not at the family nickname. After a moment, the scowl became a fierce grin. "All right, by jingo, maybe we won't catch them on our side of the line. We'll just have to catch them on theirs."

Tom looked startled. "Are you sure?"

"You'd best believe I'm sure." The excitement of the pursuit ran through Custer in a hot tide. Whatever consequences came from extending the pursuit, he'd worry about them later. Now all he wanted to do was teach the Kiowas a lesson even that sneaky old devil Satanta wouldn't forget any time soon. He shouted over to the regimental bugler: "Blow Pursuit."

"Sir?" the bugler said, as surprised as Tom Custer had been. Then he grinned. "Yes, *sirl"* He raised the bugle to his lips. The bold and martial notes rang out across the plain. The men of the Fifth Cavalry Regiment needed a moment to grasp what that call implied. Then they howled like wolves. Some of them waved their broad-brimmed black felt hats in the air.

From long experience, the Kiowas understoodU.S. horn calls as well as any cavalry trooper. Their heads went up, as if they were game fearing it would be flushed from cover. *That's what they are, all right,* Custer thought.

As often happened, Tom's thoughts ran in the same track as his own. "They won't duck back into their lair this time," his younger brother said. Now that the decision was made, Tom was all for it.

They pounded past a farmhouse the Kiowas had burned in a raid a

couple of years earlier. Custer recognized those ruins; they meant he was less than a mile from the border with theIndian Territory . Up ahead, the Kiowas squeezed still more from their ponies. Custer smiled savagely. That might get them over the line, but even those tough animals would start wearing down soon. "And then," he told the wind blowing tears from his eyes, "then they're mine, sure as McClellan belonged to Lee twenty years ago."

He fired again at the Kiowas, and shouted in exultation as one of them slid from his horse's back and thudded to the ground, where, after rolling a couple of times, he lay still. "Good shot," his brother said.

"Hell of a good shot."

"We've got 'em now," Custer said. The first Kiowas had to be over the line. He didn't care. "We won't let 'em get away. Every last redskin in that band is ours." How his men cheered!

And then all of Custer's ferocious joy turned to ashes. Tom pointed off to the east, from which direction a squadron of cavalry was approaching at a fast trot. All the Kiowas were over the line by then. They reined in, whooping in their incomprehensible language. They knew they were safe.

Custer knew it, too. Chasing the Kiowas into Indian Territory, punishing them, and then riding back intoKansas with no one but the Indians the wiser, was one thing. Doing it under the watchful eyes of that other cavalry squadron was something else again. Hating those horsemen, hating himself, Custer held his hand high to halt his men. They stopped on theKansas side of the line.

The approaching cavalrymen wore hats and blouses of a cut not much different from those of Custer's troopers. Theirs, though, were gray, not the various shades of blue theU.S. cavalry used. And a couple of their officers, Custer saw, were in the new dirt-brown uniforms the Confederate States had adopted from the British. The limeys called that color khaki; to the Rebs, it was butternut.

One of those Confederate officers rode toward Custer, waving as he moved forward. Custer waved back: come ahead. The Rebel captain proved to be a fresh-faced fellow in his twenties; he would have been wearing short pants during the War of Secession. Seeing him made Custer feel every one of his forty-one years.

"Good mornin' to you, Colonel," the captain drawled, nodding in a way that looked friendly enough.

"You weren't planning on riding over the international border by any chance, were you?"

"If I was, you'll never prove it, Captain—" Custer tried for cool detachment. What came out was a frustrated snarl.

By the way the Confederate cavalryman smiled, he heard that frustration—heard it and relished it. He bowed in the saddle. The Rebs were always polite as cats . . . and always ready to claw, too. "I'm Jethro Weathers, Colonel," he said. "And you're right—I'll never prove it. But you and theUnited States would have been embarrassed if I'd come along half an hour later and found your men inside the territory of the Confederate States."

He sounded disappointed he and his troopers hadn't caught Custer *in flagrante delicto.* Custer's frustration boiled into fury: "If your government would keep those murdering redskinned savages on your side of the border, we wouldn't want to go over yonder"—he waved south, intoIndian Territory —"and give 'em what they deserve."

"Why, Colonel," Captain Weathers said, amusement in his voice, "I have no proof at all those Kiowas ever entered the territory of theUnited States . As far as I can see, you were leading an unprovoked punitive expedition into a foreign country.Richmond would see things the same way, I'm sure. So wouldLondon . So wouldParis ."

Tom Custer spoke up: "There's a dead Kiowa, maybe half a mile north of here."

That didn't faze Weathers a bit: "For all I know, you've already been into the Confederate States, murdered the poor fellow, and then hauled him back into theUSA to justify raiding Confederate soil."

A flush spread up Custer's face; his ears went hot at the sheer effrontery of that. "You—dashed Rebs will pay one day for giving the redskins guns and letting them come up and raid white men's farms whenever it strikes their fancy."

"This is our territory, Colonel," Captain Weathers said, amused no more. "We shall defend it against the incursion of a foreign power—by which I mean theUnited States . And you have no call— none, sir, none whatever—to get up on your high horse and tell me what my country ought and ought not to be doing, especially since the United States harbor swarms of Comanches in New Mexico and turn them loose against west Texas whenever it strikes your fancy."

"We didn't start that until those outrages inKansas grew too oppressive to ignore," Custer answered.

"Why, on this very raid—this raid you have the gall to deny—the savages made two white women minister to their animal lusts, then cut their throats and worked other dreadful indignities upon their bare and abused bodies."

"You think the Comanches don't do that inTexas ?" Captain Weathers returned. "And the way I heard it, Colonel, they started doing it there first."

Custer scowled. "We killed off the buffalo to deny the Kiowas a livelihood, and you gave them cattle to take up the slack."

"The Comanches are herding cattle these days, too." Weathers made as if to go back to his troopers, who waited inside Confederate territory. "I see no point to continuing this discussion. Good day, sir."

"Wait," Custer said, and the Confederate captain, polite still, waited. Breathing heavily, Custer went on,

"When our two nations separated, I had a great deal of sympathy and friendship for many of the men who found high rank in the Army of the Confederate States. I hoped and believed that, even though we were two, we could share this continent in peace."

"And so we have," Jethro Weathers said. "There is no war between my country and yours, Colonel."

"Not now," Custer agreed. "Not yet. But you will force one upon us if you continue with this arrogant policy of yours here in the West. The irritations will grow too great, and then—"

"Don't speak to me of arrogance," Weathers broke in. "Don't speak to me of irritation, not when you Yankees have finally gone and put another one of those God-damned Black Republicans in the White House."

"Blaine's only been in office a month, but he's already shown he's not nearly so bad as Lincoln was,"

Custer answered, "and he's not your business anyhow, any more than Longstreet's ours."

"Blainetalks big," the Confederate captain answered. "People who talk big get to thinking they can act big. You talked about war, Colonel. If your James G. Blaine thinks you Yankees can lick us now when you couldn't do it twenty years ago, he'd better think twice. And if you think you can ride over the line intoIndian Territory whenever it strikes your fancy, you'd better think twice, too, Colonel."

When Weathers moved to ride back to his squadron this time, Custer said not a word. He stared after the Indians whom Weathers' timely arrival had saved. His right hand folded into a fist inside its leather gauntlet. He pounded it down on his thigh, hard, once, twice, three times. His lips shaped a silent word. It might have been *dash.* It might not.

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As the train rattled west through the darkness over theColorado prairie, the porter came down the aisle of the Pullman car. "Make you bed up, sir?" he asked in English with some foreign accent: Russian, maybe, or Yiddish.

Abraham Lincoln looked up from the speech he'd been writing. Slowly, deliberately, he capped his pen and put it in his pocket. "Yes, thank you," he said. He rose slowly and deliberately, too, but his lumbago gave a twinge even so. As best he could, he ignored the pain. It came with being an old man.

Moving with swift efficiency, the porter let down the hinged seat back, laid a mattress on the bed thus created, and made it up in the blink of an eye. "Here you are, sir," he said, drawing the curtain around the berth to giveLincoln the chance to change into his nightshirt in something close to privacy.

"I thank you,"Lincoln said, and tipped him a dime. The porter pocketed it with a polite word of thanks and went on to prepare the next berth. Looking down at the bed,Lincoln let out a rueful chuckle.

ThePullman attendant had been too efficient.Lincoln bent down and undid the sheet and blanket at the foot of the mattress. Pullman berths weren't made for men of his inches. He put on his nightclothes. got into bed, and turned off the gas lamp by which he had been writing.

The rattling, jouncing ride and the thin, lumpy mattress bothered him only a little. He was used to them, and he remembered worse. When he'd gone fromIllinois toWashington after being elected

president,Pullmans hadn't been invented. He'd traveled the whole way sitting upright in a hard seat. And when, four years later, the voters had turned him out of office for failing to hold the Union together, he'd gone back toIllinois the same way.

Ridden out of town on the rails,he thought, and laughed a little. He twisted, trying to find a position somewhere close to comfortable. If a spring didn't dig into the small of his back, another one poked him in the shoulder. That was how life worked: if you gained somewhere, you lost somewhere else.

He twisted again. There—that was better. He'd had a lot of experience on the railroads, these sixteen years since failing of reelection. "Once you get the taste for politics," he murmured in the darkness,

"everything else is tame."

He'd thought he would quietly return to the law career he'd left to go to the White House. And so he had, for a little while. But the appetite for struggle at the highest level he'd got inWashington had stayed with him. Afterwards, legal briefs and pleadings weren't enough to satisfy.

He yawned, then grimaced. The way the Democrats had fawned on the Southern Confederacy grated on him, too. And so he'd started speechifying, all across the country, doing what he could to make people see that, even if the war was lost, the struggle continued. "I always was good on the stump," he muttered. "I even did some good, I daresay."

Some good. TheUnited States had eventually emancipated the thousands of slaves still living within their borders. The Confederate States held their millions in bondage to this day. And a lot of Republicans, nowadays, sounded more and more like Democrats in their efforts to put the party's sorry past behind them and get themselves elected. A lot of Republicans, these days, didn't want the albatross ofLincoln around their necks.

He yawned again, twisted one more time, and fell asleep, only to be rudely awakened half an hour later when the train hissed and screeched to a stop at some tiny prairie town. He was used to that, too, even if he couldn't do anything about it. Before long, he was asleep once more.

He woke again, some time in the middle of the night. This time, he swung down out of his berth. Once a man got past his Biblical

threescore-and-ten, his flesh reminded him of its imperfections more often than it had in his younger days.

Sliding the curtain aside, he walked down the aisle of the sleeper car, past the snores and grunts coming from behind other curtains, to the washroom at the far end of the car. He used the necessary, then pumped the handle of the tin sink to get himself a glass of water. He drank it down, wiped his chin on the sleeve of his nightshirt, and set the glass by the sink for the next man who would want it.

Up the aisle he came. Someone was getting down from an upper berth, and almost stepped on his toes.

"Careful, friend,"Lincoln said quietly. The man's face went through two separate stages of surprise: first that he hadn't seen anyone nearby, and then at whose feet he'd almost abused.

"Damned old Black Republican fool," he said, also in a near-whisper: he was polite to his fellow passengers, if not to the former president. Without givingLincoln a chance to reply, he stalked down the aisle.

Lincolnshrugged and finished the short journey back to his own berth. That sort of thing happened to him at least once on every train he took. Had he let it bother him, he would have had to give up politics and become as much a hermit as Robinson Crusoe.

He got back into bed. The upper berth above his was empty. He sighed as he struggled for comfort again. Mary had been difficult all the years of their marriage, and especially in the years since he'd left the White House, but he missed her all the same. He'd got over the typhoid they'd caught inSt. Louis four or five years before. She hadn't.

The next thing he knew, daylight was stealing through the curtains. His back ached a little, but he'd had a pretty good night—better than most he spent rolling from one town to the next, that was certain.

He got dressed, used the necessary again, and was back in his berth when the day porter came by.

"And the top o' the mornin' to you, sir," he said.Lincoln had no trouble placing *his* accent. "Will you be wanting a proper seat the now, 'stead o' your bedding and all?"

"That I will." A natural mimic, Lincoln needed an effort of will not to copy the porter's brogue. After he tipped the fellow, he asked, "How much longer until we get intoDenver ?"

"Nobbut another two, three hours," the porter answered.Lincoln sighed; he was supposed to have arrived at sunrise, not mid-morning. Well, no doubt the people waiting for him knew of the distant relationship between scheduled and actual arrival times.

"Time enough for breakfast, then," he said.

"Indeed and there is, sir, and to spare," the porter agreed.

Lincolnwent back to the dining car. He did appreciate the bellows arrangements the railroads were using between carriages these days. Going from car to car on a jolting train had been a dangerous business even a handful of years before. More than a few people had slipped and fallen to their death, and a cinder in the eye or a face full of soot was only to be expected.

After ham and eggs and rolls and coffee, the world looked a more cheerful place. He was leaving behind the prairie now, going up toward the mountains. The locomotive laboured over the upgrades and then, as if relieved, sped down the other side of each rise. Watching trees and boulders flying past was exhilarating, even ifLincoln knew how many accidents happened on such downgrades.

At last, nearer three hours late than two, the train pulled intoDenver . The depot was small and dilapidated. A broad stretch of empty ground on the other side of the tracks would,Lincoln had heard, be a fancy new station one day. At the moment, and for the foreseeable future, it was just empty ground.

Wildflowers and weeds splashed it with color.

"Denver!" the conductor shouted, as he had for every hamlet along the way to the biggest city in the heart of the West. "All out forDenver !"

Lincolnput his speech in a leather valise, got up, grabbed his bulky carpetbag, and made his way out of the Pullman car. After a couple of days on the train, solid ground felt shaky under his feet, as it was said to do for sailors just off their ships. He set his stovepipe firmly on his head and looked around.

Amid the usual scenes on a railway-station platform—families greeting loved ones with cries of joy, bankers greeting capitalists with louder (if perhaps less sincere) cries of joy—Lincoln spotted a couple of rugged fellows who had the look of miners dressed up in their best, and probably only, suits. Even before they started moving purposefully through the crowd toward him, he had them pegged for

the men he was to meet.

"Mr. McMahan and Mr. Cavanaugh, I presume?" he said, setting down the carpetbag so he could extend his right hand.

"That's right, Mr. Lincoln," said one of them, who wore a ginger-colored mustache. "I'm Joe McMahan; you can call Cavanaugh here Fred." His grip was hard and firm.

"Long as you don't call me late to supper," Cavanaugh said agreeably. He was a couple of inches taller than McMahan, with a scar on his chin that looked as if it had come from a knife fight. Both men were altogether unselfconscious about the revolvers on their right hips.Lincoln had been in the West a good many times, and was used to that.

"Come on, sir," McMahan said. "Here, let me take that." He picked up the carpetbag. "We'll get you to the hotel, let you freshen up some and get yourself a tad more shut-eye, too, if that's what you want.

These here trains, they're all very fine, but a body can't hardly sleep on 'em."

"They're better than they used to be,"Lincoln said. "I was thinking that last night, when the porter made up my berth. But you're right—they're not all they might be."

"Come on, then," McMahan repeated. "Amos has the buggy waiting for us."

As they walked out of the station, they passed a beggar, a middle-aged fellow with a gray-streaked beard who had both legs gone above the knee.Lincoln fumbled in his pockets till he found a quarter, which he tossed into the tin cup on the floor beside the man.

"I thank you for your kind—" the beggar began in a singsong way. Then his eyes—eyes that had seen a lot of pain, and, by the rheumy look in them, a lot of whiskey, too—widened as he recognized his benefactor. He reached into the cup, took out the quarter, and threw it atLincoln . It hit him in the chest and fell to the ground with a clink. "God damn you, you son of a bitch, I don't want any charity from *you,"* the legless man snarled. "Wasn't for you, I'd be up and walking, not living out my days like this."

Fred Cavanaugh tookLincoln by the arm and hurried him along. "Don't

take no notice of Teddy there,"

he said, the beggar's curses following them. "He gets some popskull in him, he don't know what the hell he's talkin' about."

"Oh, he knows well enough."Lincoln 's mouth was a tight, hard line. "I've heard that tune before, many times. The men who suffered so much in the War of Secession blame me for it. They have the right, I think. I blame myself, too, though that's little enough consolation for them."

Amos, the buggy driver, was cut from the same mold as Cavanaugh and McMahan. The horses clopped up the street. Mud kicked up from their hooves and the wheels of the buggy. For all the wealth that had come out of the mines nearby,Denver boasted not a single paved road. Streams of water ran in the gutters. Trees shaded the residential blocks. Most of the houses—and the public buildings, too—were of either bright red brick or the local yellow stone, which gave the town a pleasingly colorful look.

Miners in collarless shirts and blue-dyed dungarees mingled on the streets with businessmen who would not have been out of place inChicago orNew York . No, after a moment,Lincoln revised that opinion: some of the businessmen went armed, too.

When he remarked on that, Joe McMahan's mouth twisted in bitterness. "A man has more'n what he deserves and don't see fit to share it with his pals who ain't got so much, Mr. Lincoln, he's a fool if he don't reckon they're liable to try and equalize the wealth whether he likes it or not."

"True enough,"Lincoln said. "So true, it may tear our country apart again one day. Slave labour comes in more forms than that which still persists in the Confederate States."

Amos shifted a wad of tobacco into his cheek, spat, and said, "Damn straight it does. That's why we brung you out here—to talk about that."

"I know."Lincoln went back to watching the street scenes. Miner, merchant, banker—you could tell so much about a man's class and wealth by how he dressed. Women were sometimes harder to gauge.

Who was poor and who was not gave him no trouble. But if a woman dressed as if she'd come from the pages of *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* but painted her face like a strumpet, was she a strumpet or the wife of

some newly rich mining nabob? InDenver , that was less obvious than it would have been farther east, where cosmetics were *prima facie* evidence a woman was fast. The rules were different here, and no wonder, for a woman could go—and several had gone—straight from strumpet to nabob's wife.

In its ornate pretentiousness, the Hotel Metropole matched anything anywhere in the country. "Here you go, Mr. Lincoln," Fred Cavanaugh said. "You'll be right comfortable here, get yourself all good and ready for your speech tonight. You'd best believe a lot of folks want to hear what you've got to say about labour nowadays."

"Hear me they shall,"Lincoln said. "What they do if they hear where I'm staying, though, may be something else again. Are they not liable to take me for one of the exploiters over whom they are concerned?"

"Mr. Lincoln, you won't find anybody inColorado got a thing to say against living soft," Cavanaugh answered. "What riles folks is grinding other men's noses in the dirt to let a few live soft."

"I understand the distinction,"Lincoln said. "As you remind me, the essential point is that so many in theUnited States , like virtually all the whites in the Confederacy, do not."

The Hotel Metropole met every reasonable standard for soft living, and most of the unreasonable ones as well. After a hot bath in a galvanized tub at the end of the hall, after a couple of fried pork chops for lunch, Lincoln would have been happy enough to stretch out on the bed for a couple of hours, even if he would have had to sleep diagonally to keep from kicking the footboard. But the speech came first.

He was still polishing it, having altogether forgotten about supper, when Joe McMahan knocked on the door. "Come on, Mr. Lincoln," he said. "We've got ourselves a full house for you tonight."

The hall was not so elegant as the opera house near the Hotel Metropole. It was, in fact, a dance hall with a podium hastily plunked by one wall. But, as McMahan had said, it was packed. From long practice guessing crowds,Lincoln figured more than a thousand men—miners and refinery workers, most of them, and farmers, with here and there a shopkeeper to leaven the mix—stood shoulder-to-shoulder, elbow-to-elbow, to hear what he had to say.

They cheered loud and long when McMahan introduced him. Most of them were young. Young men thought of him as labour's friend in a

land where capital was king. Older men, like the beggar in the railway depot, still damned him for fighting, and most of all for losing, the War of Secession. *I'd have been a hero if I won,* he thought. *And I'd have been a housewife, or more likely a homely old maid, if I'd been born a woman. So what?*

He put on his spectacles and glanced down at the notes he'd written on the train and in the hotel. "A generation ago," he began, "I said a house divided against itself, half slave and half free, could not stand.

And it did not stand, though its breaking was not in the manner I should have desired." He never made any bones about the past. It was there. Everyone knew it.

"The Confederate States continue all slave to this day," he said. "How the financiers inLondon andParis smile on their plantations, their railroads, their ironworks! How capital floods into their land! And how much of it, my friends, how much drips down from the eaves of the rich men's mansions to water the shacks where the Negroes live, scarcely better off than the brute beasts beside which they labour in the fields? You know the answer as well as I."

"To hell with the damn niggers," somebody called from the audience. "Talk about the white man!" Cries of agreement rose.

Lincolnheld up a hand. "I am talking about the white man," he said. "You cannot part nor separate the two, not in the Southern Confederacy. For if the white labourer there dare go to his boss and speak the truth, which is that he has not got enough to live on, the boss will tell him, 'Live on it and like it, or I'll put a Negro in your place and you can learn to live on nothing.'

"And what of ourUnited States , which were, if nothing else, left all free when the Rebels departed from theUnion ?"Lincoln went on. "Are we—are you—all free now? Do we—do you—enjoy the great and glorious blessings of liberty the Founding Fathers fondly imagined would be the birthright of every citizen of our Republic?

"Or are we returning to the unhappy condition in which we found ourselves in the years before the War of Secession? Do not our capitalists inNew York , inChicago , yes, and inDenver , look longingly at their Confederate brethren inRichmond , inAtlanta , in new and brawlingBirmingham , and wish they could do as do those brethren?

"Are we not once more becoming a nation half slave, half free, my

friends? Does not the capitalist eat bread gained by the sweat of *your* brows, as the slavemaster does by virtue—and there's a word turned on its ear!—of the labour of his Negroes?"Lincoln had to stop then, for the shouts that rose up were fierce and angry.

"You know your state, your condition," he continued when he could. "You know I tell you nothing but the truth. Time was in this country when a man would be hired labour one year, his own man the next, and hiring labourers to work for him the year after that. Such days, I fear, are over and done. On the railroads, in the mines, in the factories, one man's a magnate, and the rest toil for him. If you go to your boss and tell him you have not got enough to live on, the boss will tell you, 'Live on it and like it, or I'll put a Chinaman or an Italian or a Jew in your place and you can learn to live on nothing.' "

A low murmur came from his audience, more frightening in its way than the fury they had shown before.

Fury didn't last. NowLincoln was making them think. Thought was slower than anger to flower into action, but it was a hardy perennial. It did not bloom and die.

"What do we do about it, Abe?" shouted a miner still grimy from his long day of labour far below ground.

"What do we do?"Lincoln repeated. "The Democrats had their day, and a long day it was, from my time up until President Blaine's inauguration last month. Did they do a thing, a single solitary thing, to help the lot of the working man?" He smiled at the cries *of No!* before going on, "And Blaine, too, though the good Lord knows I wish him well, has railroad money in his pockets. How much labour can hope for from him, I do not know.

"But I know this, my friends: when theUnited States were a house divided before, they were divided, and did divide, along lines of geography. No such choice avails us now. The capitalists cannot secede as the slavemasters did. If we are not satisfied with our government and the way it treats its citizens, we have the revolutionary right and duty to overthrow it and substitute one that suits us better, as our forefathers did in the days of George III."

That brought a storm of applause. Men stomped on the floor, so that it shook underLincoln 's feet.

Someone fired a pistol in the air, deafeningly loud in the closed hall.Lincoln held up both hands. Slowly, slowly, quiet crawled back.

Into it, he said, "I do not advocate revolution. I pray it shall not be necessary.

But if the old order will not yield to justice, it shall be swept aside. I do not threaten, any more than a man who says he sees a tornado coming. Folks can take shelter from it, or they can run out and play in it.

That is up to them. You, friends, you are a tornado. What happens next is up to the capitalists." He stepped away from the podium.

Joe McMahan pumped his hand. "That was powerful stuff, Mr. Lincoln," he said. "Powerful stuff, yes indeed."

"For which I thank you,"Lincoln said, raising his voice to be heard through the storm of noise that went on and on.

"Ask you something, Mr. Lincoln?" McMahan said.Lincoln nodded. McMahan leaned closer, so only the former president would hear. "You ever come across the writings of a fellow named Marx, Mr.

Lincoln? Karl Marx?"

Lincolnsmiled. "As a matter of fact, I have."

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"Sam!" Clay Herndon spoke sharply. "Sam, you're wool-gathering again."

"The devil I am," Samuel Clemens replied, though his friend's comment did return his attention to the cramped office of the *San FranciscoMorning Call.* "I was trying to come up with something for tomorrow's editorial, and I'm dry as the desert between the Great Salt Lake andVirginia City . I hate writing editorials, do you know that?"

"You have mentioned it a time or two." Now Herndon's voice was sly. That suited the reporter's face: he looked as if he had a fox for his maternal grandmother. His features were sharp and clever, his green eyes studied everything and respected nothing, and his rusty hair only added to the impression. Grinning, he sank his barb: "Or a hundred times or two."

"Still true," Clemens snapped, running a hand through his own unruly mop of red-brown hair. "Do you have any notion of the strain on a

man's constitution, having to come up with so many column inches every day on demand?—and always something new, regardless of whether there's anything new to write about. If I had myTennessee lands—"

Herndon rolled his eyes. "For God's sake, Sam, give me the lecture on editorials if you must, but spare me theTennessee lands. They're stale as salt beef shipped round the Horn."

"You're a scoffer, that's what you are—nothing but a scoffer," Clemens said, half amused but still half annoyed, too. "Forty thousand acres of fine land, with God only knows how much timber and coal and iron, and maybe gold and silver, too, and all of it in my family."

"It's in another country these days," Clay Herndon reminded him. "The Confederate States have been a going concern for a long time now."

"Yes, a long time ago, and in another country—and besides, the wench is dead," Clemens said, scratching his mustache.

Herndon gave him a quizzical look. However clever the reporter was, he wouldn't have known Marlowe from a marlinspike. "The way you do go on," he said. "Let's us go on over to Martin's and get some dinner."

"Now you're talking." Clemens rose from his chair with enthusiasm and stuck his hat on his head. "Any excuse not to work is good enough for me. Weren't for this"—he patted the battered copy of the *American Cyclopedia* on his desk with a touch as tender as a lover's for his beloved—"I don't know how I'd ever manage to come out for something or against something every day of the year. As if any man needs so blamed many opinions, or has any business holding them! Wasting my sweetness on the morning air, that's what I'm doing."

Herndon pulled out his pocket watch. "As of right now, you're wasting your sweetness on the afternoon air, and you have been for the past ten minutes. Now let's get moving, before we can't find a place to sit down at Martin's."

Clemens followed his friend out onto the street. It was an April midday inSan Francisco : not too warm, not too cold, the sun shining down from a clear but hazy sky. It might as easily have been August or November or February. To Clemens, who had grown up with real seasons, always seeming not far from spring remained strange after almost twenty years.

When he remarked on that, Herndon snorted. "You don't like it, go down toFresno . It's always July there, and a desert July at that."

With a lamb chop, fried potatoes, and a shot of whiskey in front of Sam Clemens, life improved. He knocked back the shot and ordered another. When it came, he knocked it back, too, with the sour toast,

"Here's to hard work every day."

Clay Herndon snorted again. "I've heard that one almost as often as theTennessee lands, Sam. What the devil would you be doing if you weren't running the *Morning Calll"*

"Damned if I know," Clemens answered. "Writing stories, maybe, and broke. But who has time? When the big panic of '63 hit after we lost the war and hung on and on and on, the whole world turned upside down. I was damn lucky to have any sort of position, and I knew it. So I hung on like a limpet on a harbor rock. If I ever get ahead of the game—" He laughed. "About as likely as the Mormons giving up their extra wives, I expect."

Herndon had a couple of shots of whiskey in him, too. "Suppose you weren't a newspaperman? What would you do then?"

"I've tried mining—I was almost rich once, which is every bit as fine as almost being in love—and I was aMississippi River pilot. If I wanted to take that up again, I'd have to take Confederate citizenship with it."

"Why not?" Herndon said. "Then you could have yourself another go at thoseTennessee lands."

"No, thank you." Briefly, Clemens had served in a Confederate regiment operating—or rather, bungling—inMissouri , which remained one of theUnited States , not least because most Confederate troops there had been similarly inept. He didn't admit to that; few in theUSA who had ever had anything to do with the other side admitted it these days. After a moment, he went on. "Their record isn't what you'd call good—more like what you'd call a skunk at a picnic."

Herndon laughed. "You do come up with 'em, Sam. Got to hand it to you. Maybe you ought to try writing yourself a book after all. People would buy it, I expect."

"Maybe," Clemens said, which meant *no.* "Don't see a lot of authors living off the fat of the land, do you?

Besides, it may have taken me a while to cipher out what steady work was about, but I've got it down solid now. I lived on promises when I was a miner. I was a boy then, pretty much. I'm not a boy any more."

"All right, all right." Herndon held up a placatory hand. He looked at his plate, as if astonished the beefsteak he'd ordered had disappeared. His shot glass was empty, too. "You want one more for the road?"

"Not if I intend to get any work done this afternoon. You want to listen to me snore at my desk, that's another matter." Clemens got to his feet. He set a quarter and a small, shiny gold dollar on the table.

Herndon laid down a dollar and a half. They left Martin's—a splendid place, for anyone who could afford to eat there—and walked back to the *Morning Call* office.

Edgar Leary, one of the junior reporters, waved a flimsy sheet of telegraph paper in their faces when they got in. He was almost hopping with excitement. "Look at this! Look at this!" He had crumbs in his sparse black beard; he brought his dinner to the *Morning Call* in a sack. "Didn't come in five minutes ago, or I'm a Chinaman."

"If you'll stop fanning me with it, I will have a look," Clemens said. When Leary still waved the wire around, Sam snatched it out of his hand. "Give me that, dammit." He turned it right side up and read it.

The more he read, the higher his bushy eyebrows climbed. Once he'd finished, he passed it to Clay Herndon, saying, "Looks like I've got something for the editorial after all."

Herndon quickly skimmed the telegraphic report. His lips shaped a soundless whistle. "This here is more than something to feed you an editorial, Sam. This here could be trouble."

"Don't I know it," Clemens said. "But I can't do the first thing about the trouble, and I can do something about the editorial. So I'll do that, and I'll let the rest of the world get into trouble. You ever notice how it's real good about taking care of that whether anybody wants it to or not?"

He pulled a cigar from a waistcoat pocket, bit off the end, scraped a match against the sole of his shoe, lighted the cigar, and tossed the match into a shiny brass cuspidor stained here and there with errant expectorations. Then he went over to his desk and pulled out the *George F. Cram Atlas of the World.*

He flipped through it till he found the page he needed.

His finger traced a line. Herndon and Leary were looking over his shoulder, one to the right, the other to the left. Herndon whistled again. "This is going to be big trouble," he said. "Bigger than I thought."

"That's a fact." Clemens slammed the atlas closed with a noise like a rifle shot. Behind him, Edgar Leary jumped. "Hell of a big mess." He spoke with somber anticipation. "But I don't have to worry about what I'm going to write this afternoon, so I'm as happy as Peeping Tom inHonolulu , if half of what they say about theSandwich Islands is true."

He inked a pen and began to write.

If the wires are not liars—and of course experience has made us all familiar with Messrs. Western and Union's solemn vow that only the truth shall be permitted to pass over their telegraphic lines, and with the vigilance with which they guard them from every falsehood; of course experience has done such a thing, we say, for under our grand and glorious Constitution anyone may say what he pleases—if this is so, then it seems that His Mexican Majesty Maximilian has been persuaded to sell his northwestern provinces of Chihuahua and Sonora to the Confederate States for the sum of three millions of dollars.

This is remarkable news on several counts, which is how lawyers speak of indictments. First and foremost, superficially, is the feeling of astonishment arising in the bosoms of those who are familiar in the least with the aforesaid provinces at learning that anyone, save possibly Old Scratch in contemplation of expanding the infernal regions due to present overcrowding, should want to purchase them at any price, let alone for such a munificent sum.

But, as the fellow said after sitting on a needle, there is more to this than meets the eye. Consider, friends. Mexico's principal export, aside from the Mexicans whose charm pervades our Golden State, is, not to put too fine a point on it—that being the needle's business, after all—debt. She owes money to Britain, she owes money to France, she owes money to Germany, she owes money to Russia—no mean feat, that—and she is prevented from owing money to the Kingdom of Poland only by that Kingdom's extinction before she was born.

Being a weak country in debt to a strong one—or to a slew of strong ones—is in these enlightened times the quickest recipe known for

making gunboats flock like buzzards to one's shores, as the Turkish khedives will assure Maximilian if only he will ask them. Time was when theUnited States held up the Monroe Doctrine to shield theAmericas from European monarchs, bill collectors, and other riffraff, but the Doctrine these days is as dead as its maker, shot through the heart in the War of Secession.

So the Empire of Mexico needs cash on hand if it is to go on being the Empire of Mexico, or at least the abridged edition thereof. Thus from Maximilian's point of view the sale of Chihuahua and Sonora makes a deal of sense, but he is apparently going ahead and doing it anyhow. The question remaining before the house is why the Confederate States would want to buy the two provinces, no matter how avidly he might want to sell them.

OwningTexas , the Confederacy would already seem to have in its possession a sufficiency—indeed, even an oversupply—of hot, worthless land for the next hundred years.Sonora , though, has one virtueTexas lacks—not that having a virtueTexas lacks is in itself any great marvel—it touches on the Gulf of California, whileChihuahua connects it to the rest of the CSA. With these new acquisitions, the Confederate States would extend, like the USA, from sea to shining sea, and, even more to the point, run a railroad from the same to the shining same. Is that worth three millions of dollars? Pete Longstreet seems to think so.

Yet to be seen is how the new administration inWashington will view this transaction. There can be no doubt that any of the previous governments—if by that the reader will forgive our stretching a point—would do no more than passively acquiesce to the sale, in much the same manner as the bull acquiesces to the knife that makes him into a steer.Richmond ,London ,Paris , andOttawa form a formidable stall in which the United States are held.

But will James G. Blaine, having been elected on a platform that consisted largely of snorting and pawing the ground, now have to show the world it was nothing but humbug and hokum? Even if it was humbug and hokum, will he dare admit it, knowing that if he should confess to weakness, even weakness genuinely and manifestly in existence, he will become a laughingstock and an object of contempt not only in foreign capitals but in the eyes of the exasperated millions who sent him to the White House to make America strong and proud again and will with equal avidity send him home with a tin can tieˆ iO his tail if he bollixes the job?

Our view of the matter is that caution is likelier to be necessary than to be, while our hope is that, for once, our well-known editorial omniscience is found wanting.

Sighing, Clemens set down the pen and shook his wrist to get the cramp out of it. "I want to buy me one of those type-writing machines they're starting to sell," he said.

"Good idea," Clay Herndon said. "They can't weigh much more than a hundred pounds. Just the thing to take along to listen to the mayor, or to cover a fire: that'd be even better."

"They're the coming thing, so you can laugh all you like," Clemens told him. "Besides, if I had one, the compositors would be able to read the copy I give 'em."

"Now you're talking—that's a whole different business." Herndon got up from his desk and ambled over to Sam. "I never have any trouble—well, never much—reading your writing. You were really scratching away there. What did you come up with?"

Wordlessly, Clemens passed him the sheets. Herndon had a lot of political savvy, or maybe just a keen eye for where the bodies were buried—assuming those two didn't amount to the same thing. If he was thinking along the same lines as Clemens . . .

He didn't say anything till he was through. Then, with a slow nod, he handed the editorial back. "That's strong stuff," he said, "but you're spot on. When I first saw the wire, I thought about the ports on the Pacific, but I didn't worry about the railroad the Rebs'll need to do anything with the ports they get."

"What aboutBlaine ?" Sam asked.

"I'm with you there, too," Herndon answered. "If he lies down for this, nobody will take him seriously afterwards. But I'm damned if I know how much he can do to stop it. What do you think's going to happen, Sam?"

"Me?" Clemens said. "I think there's going to be a war."

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General Thomas Jackson left his War Department office in Mechanic's Hall, mounted his horse, and rode east past Capitol Square toward the

president's residence on Shockoe Hill—some from his generation still thought of it as the Confederate White House, though younger men tried to forget the CSA had ever been connected to the USA.Richmond brawled around him. Coaches clattered over cobblestones, Negro footmen in fancy livery standing stiff as statues at their rear. Teamsters driving wagons filled with grain or iron or tobacco or cotton cursed the men who drove the coaches for refusing to yield the right of way. On the sidewalk, lawyers and sawyers and ladies with slaves holding parasols to shield their delicate complexions from the springtime sun danced an elabourate minuet of precedence.

A middle-aged fellow who walked with a limp tipped his homburg inJackson 's direction and called out,

"Stonewall!"

Jacksongravely returned the salutation. It rang out again, shortly thereafter. Again, he touched a hand to the brim of his own hat. Somber pride filled him. Not only his peers but also the common people remembered and appreciated what he'd done in the War of Secession. In a world where memory was fleeting and gratitude even more so, that was no small thing.

An iron fence surrounded the grounds of the presidential mansion. At the gateway, guards in the fancy new butternut uniforms stiffened to attention. "General Jackson, sir!" they exclaimed in unison. Their salutes were as identical as if they'd been manufactured in succession at the same stamping mill.

Conscientiously,Jackson returned the salutes. No doubt the guards were good soldiers, and would fight bravely if the need ever came. When he measured them against the scrawny wildcats he'd led during the War of Secession, though, he found them wanting. He was honest enough to wonder whether the fault lay in them or in himself. He'd turned fifty-seven earlier in the year, and the past had a way of looking better and the present worse the older he got.

He rode up to the entrance to the president's home. A couple of slaves hurried forward. One of them held his horse's head while he dismounted, then tied the animal to a cast-iron hitching post in front of the building.Jackson tossed him a five-cent piece. The slave caught the tiny silver coin out of the air with a word of thanks.

Tied close by was the two-horse team of a landau with which he was not familiar. The driver, a white man, sat in the carriage reading a

newspaper and waiting for his master to emerge. That he was white gaveJackson a clue about who his passenger might be, especially when coupled with the unfamiliar carriage.

And, sure enough, out of the president's residence came John Hay, looking stylish if a little funereal in a black sack suit. The new minister from theUnited States was a strikingly handsome man of about fifty, his brown hair and beard frosted with gray. His nod was stiff, tightly controlled. "Good day, General," he said, voice polite but frosty.

"Your Excellency,"Jackson said in much the same tones. As a young man, Hay had served as Abe Lincoln's secretary. That in itself made him an object of suspicion in the Confederate States, but it also made him one of the few Republicans with any executive experience whatever.Jackson hoped the latter was the reason U.S. President Blaine had appointed him minister to the CSA. If not, the appointment came perilously close to an insult.

Hay had bushy, expressive eyebrows. They twitched now. He said, "I should not be surprised, General Jackson, if we were seeing President Longstreet on the same business."

"Oh? What business is that?"Jackson thought Hay likely right, but had no intention of showing it. The less the enemy—and anyone in Richmond who did not think the United States an enemy was a fool—knew, the better.

"You know perfectly well what business," Hay returned, now with a touch of asperity: "the business ofChihuahua andSonora ."

He was, of course, correct: an enemy he might be, and a Black Republican (synonymous terms, as far as the Confederacy was concerned), but not a fool. Jackson said, "I cannot sec how a private transaction between the Empire of Mexico and the Confederate States of America becomes a matter about which the United States need concern themselves."

"Don't be disingenuous," Hay said sharply. "President Longstreet spent the last two hours soft-soaping me, and I'm tired of it. If you don't see how adding several hundred miles to our common border concerns us, sir, then you don't deserve those wreathed stars on your collar." GivingJackson no chance to reply, he climbed up into the landau. The Negro who had helped the Confederate general undid the horses. The driver set down his paper and flicked the reins. Iron tires clattering,

the wagon rolled away.

Jacksondid not turn his head to watch it go. Diplomacy was not his concern, not directly: he dealt only with its failures. Back straight, stride steady, he walked up the stairs into the presidential mansion.

G. Moxley Sorrel, Longstreet's chief of staff, greeted him just inside the door. "Good morning, General Jackson," he said, his tone almost as wary as Hay's had been.

"Good morning."Jackson tried to keep all expression from his own voice.

"The president will see you in a moment." Sorrel put whatJackson reckoned undue stress on the second word. The chief of staff had served Longstreet since the early days of the War of Secession, and had served through the time when Longstreet and Jackson, as corps commanders under Lee, were to some degree rivals as well as comrades. Over the years,Jackson had seen that Longstreet never forgot a rivalry—and what Longstreet remembered, Moxley Sorrel remembered, too.

Having little small talk in him,Jackson simply stood silent till Sorrel led him into President Longstreet's office. "Mr. President,"Jackson said then, saluting.

"Sit down, General; sit down, please." James Longstreet waved him into an overstuffed armchair upholstered in flowered maroon velvet. Despite the soft cushions,Jackson sat as rigidly erect as if on a stool. Longstreet was used to that, and did not remark on it. He did ask, "Shall I have a nigger fetch you some coffee?"

"No, thank you, sir." As was his way,Jackson came straight to the point: "I met Mr. Hay as I was arriving here. If his manner be of any moment, theUnited States will take a hard line toward our new Mexican acquisitions."

"I believe you are correct in that," Longstreet answered. He scratched his chin. His salt-and-pepper beard spilled halfway down his chest. He was a few years older thanJackson . Though he had put on more flesh than the general-in-chief of the Confederate States, he also remained strong and vigorous.

"The Black Republicans continue to resent us merely for existing; that we thrive is a burr under their tails.

1 wish Tilden had been reelected—he would have raised no unseemly fuss. But the world is as we find it, not as we wish it."

"The world is as God wills."Jackson declared what was to him obvious.

"Of course—but understanding His will is our province," Long-street said. That could have been contradiction in the guise of agreement, at which the president was adept. BeforeJackson could be sure, Longstreet went on, "And Chihuahua andSonora are *our* provinces, by God, and by God we shall keep them whether the United States approve or not."

"Very good, Mr. President!" Having no compromise in his own soul,Jackson admired steadfastness in others.

"I have also sent communications to this effect to our friends inLondon andParis ," Longstreet said.

"That was excellently done, I am sure,"Jackson said. "Their assistance was welcome during the War of Secession, and I trust they shall be as eager to see theUnited States taken down a peg now as they were then."

"General, their assistance during the war was more than merely necessary," Longstreet said heavily. "It was the *sine qua non* without which the Confederate States should not be a free and independent republic today."

Jacksonfrowned. "I don't know about that, Your Excellency. I am of the opinion that the Army of Northern Virginia had a certain small something to do with that independence." He paused a moment, a *tableau vivant* of animated thought. "The battle of Camp Hill for some reason comes to mind."

Longstreet smiled atJackson 's seldom-shown playfulness. "Camp Hill was necessary, General, necessary, but, I believe, not sufficient. Without the brave work our soldiers did,England andFrance should never have been in position to recognize our independence and force acceptance of that independence on theLincoln regime."

"Which is what I said, is it not?"Jackson rumbled.

But the president of the CSA shook his head. "No, not quite. You will remember, sir, I had rather more to do with the military commissioners of the United States than did you as we hammered out the terms under which each side should withdraw from the territory

of the other."

"Yes, I remember that,"Jackson said. "I never claimed to be any sort of diplomatist, and General Lee was not one to assign a man to a place in which he did not fit."Jackson saw that as a small barb aimed at Longstreet, who was so slippery, he might have ended up a Black Republican had he lived in theUnited States rather than the Confederacy. Being slippery, though, Longstreet probably took it as a compliment.Jackson asked the next question: "What of it, sir?"

"This of it: every last Yankee officer with whom I spoke swore up and down on a stack of Bibles as tall as he was that Lincoln never would have given up the fight if he'd only been fighting against us,"

Longstreet said. "The man was a fanatic—still is a fanatic, going up and down in theUSA like Satan in the book of Job, stirring up trouble wherever he travels. The only thing that convinced him the United States were licked—the *only* thing, General—was the intervention ofEngland andFrance on our behalf. Absent that, he aimed to keep on no matter what we did."

"He would have done better had he had generals as convinced of the righteousness of his cause as he was himself,"Jackson remarked. "As well for us he did not."

"As well for us indeed." Longstreet nodded his big, leonine head. "That, however, is not the point. The point is that the English and French, by virtue of the service they rendered us, and by virtue of the services they may render us in the future, have a strong and definite claim upon our attention."

"Wait."Jackson had not lied when he said he was no diplomat; he needed a while to fathom matters that were immediately obvious to a man like Longstreet. But, as in his days of teaching optics, acoustics, and astronomy at the Virginia Military Institute, unrelenting study let him work out what he did not grasp at once. "You are saying, Your Excellency, are you not, that we are still beholden to our allies and must take their wishes into account in formulating our policy?"

"Yes, I am saying that. I wish I weren't, but I am," Longstreet replied.Jackson started to say something; the president held up a hand to stop him. "Now you wait, sir, until you have answered this question: does the prospect of taking on theUnited States over the Mexican provinces alone and unaided have any great appeal to you?"

"It could be done,"Jackson said at once.

"I do not deny that for an instant, but it is not the question I put to you," Longstreet said. "What I asked was, has the prospect any great appeal to you? Would you sooner we war against theUSA by ourselves, or in the company of two leading European powers?"

"The latter, certainly,"Jackson admitted. "TheUnited States have always outweighed us. We have more men and far more factories now than I ever dreamt we should, but they continue to outweigh us. If ever they found leaders and morale to match their resources, they would become a formidable foe."

"This is also my view of the situation." Longstreet drummed his fingers on the desk in front of him. "And Blainc, likeLincoln , has no sense of moderation when it comes to our country. If he so chooses, as I think he may, he can whip them up into a frenzy against us in short order. This concerns me. What also concerns me is the priceLondon andParis have put on a renewal of their alliance with us. The necessity for weighing one of those concerns against the other is the reason I asked to see you here today."

"A price for continued friendship? What price could the British and French require for doing what is obviously in their interest anyhow?" By asking the question, he proved his want of diplomacy to Longstreet and, a moment later, to himself. "Oh," he said. "They intend to try to lever us into abandoning our peculiar institution."

"There you have it, sure enough," Longstreet agreed. "Both the British and French ministers make it abundantly clear that their governments shall not aid us in any prospective struggle against theUnited States unless we agree in advance to undertake emancipation no later than a year after the end of hostilities. They are acting in concert on this matter, and appear firmly determined to follow their words with deeds, or rather, with the lack of deeds we should otherwise expect."

"Let them,"Jackson growled, as angry as ifBritain andFrance were enemies, not the best friends the Confederate States had. "Let them. We'll whip the Yankees, and after that we'll do whatever else needs doing, too."

"I assure you, General, I admire your spirit from the bottom of my heart," Longstreet said. "If we are assured of success in a conflict against theUSA overChihuahua andSonora , please tell me so, and tell me plainly."

Jacksonhesitated— and was lost. "In war, Your Excellency, especially

war against a larger power, nothing is assured, as I said before. I am confident, however, that God, having given us this land of ours to do with as we will, does not intend to withdraw His gift from our hands."

"That, I fear, is not enough." Longstreet let out a long sigh. "You have no conception, General, to what degree slavery has become an albatross round our necks in all our intercourse, diplomatic and commercial, with foreign powers. The explanations, the difficulties, the resentments grow worse year by year. We and the Empire of Brazil are the only remaining slaveholding nations, and even the Brazilians have begun a program of gradual emancipation for the Negroes they hold in servitude."

"Mr. President, if we are *right,* what foreigners have to say about us matters not at all, and I believe we *are* right,"Jackson said stubbornly. "I believe, as I have always believed, that God Himself ordained our system as the best one practicable for the relationship between the white and Negro races. Changing it now at foreigners' insistence would be as much a betrayal as changing it at the Black Republicans'

insistence twenty years ago."

"I understand this perspective, General, and, believe me, I am personally in sympathy with it," Longstreet said. When a politician, which was what the president of the CSA had long since become, said he was personally in sympathy with something,Jackson had learned, he meant the opposite. And, sure enough, Longstreet went on, "Other considerations, however, compel me to take a broader view of the question."

"What circumstances could possibly be more important than acting in accordance with God's will as we understand it?"Jackson demanded.

"Being certain we do understand it," Longstreet answered. "If we fight theUnited States alone and are defeated, is it not likely that the victors would seek to impose emancipation and even, to the degree they can effect it, Negro dominance upon us, to weaken us as much as possible?"

Jacksongrunted. He had never considered the aftermath of a Confederate defeat. Victory was the only consideration that had ever crossed his mind. Reluctantly, he gave President Longstreet credit for subtlety.

Longstreet said, "Can we successfully fight theUnited States without their coasts' being blockaded, a task far beyond the power of our navy

alone? Can we fight them without pressure fromCanada to make them divide their forces and efforts instead of concentrating solely against us? If you tell me we are as certain, or even nearly as certain, of success without our friends as with them, defying their wishes makes better sense."

"I think, as I have said, we can win without them,"Jackson said, but he was too honest not to add, "With them, though, the odds improve."

"My thought exactly," Longstreet said, beaming, jollying him toward acquiescence. "And if we emancipate the Negro *de jure* of our own free will, we shall surely be spared the difficulties that would ensue if, as the result of some misfortune, we were compelled to emancipate him *de facto."*

There was some truth—perhaps a lot of truth—in that.Jackson had to recognize it. Longstreet made him think of a fast-talking hoaxer, sellingFlorida seaside real estate under water twenty-two hours out of every twenty-four. But the president had been elected to make decisions of this sort. "I am a soldier, Your Excellency,"Jackson said. "If this be your decision, I shall of course conduct myself in conformity to it."

Chapter 2

Theodore Roosevelt looked over his ranch with considerablesatisfaction. *Ranch* was the western word, of course, borrowed from the Spanish; back inNew YorkState , it would have been a farm.

He sucked in a deep breath of the sweet, pure air ofMontanaTerritory . "Like wine in the lungs," he said.

"No coal smoke, no city stinks, nothing but pure, wholesome, delicious oxygen." He'd been a scrawny weakling when he came out to the West a couple of years before, an old man inside though he'd scarcely passed his twentieth birthday. Now, though older by the calendar, he felt years— decades— younger inside. Strenuous labour, that was the trick.

One of the hands, a grizzled ex-miner who possessed but did not rejoice in the name of Philander Snow, cocked an eyebrow at that. "Oxy-what, boss?" he asked.

"Oxygen, Phil,"Roosevelt repeated. "Oxygen. What we breathe. What makes lamps burn. What, without which, life would be impossible."

"I thought that was whiskey, or maybe women, depending," Snow said. "More women in the Territory than there used to be, and nowadays I can't do as much with 'em. Ain't that the way it goes?" He spat a mournful stream of tobacco juice onto the ground.

Rooseveltlaughed, but quickly sobered. His education made him stick out in these parts. He had trouble talking with his hands, with his fellow ranchers, and even with the townsfolk inHelena about anything past superficialities. Sometimes he felt more nearly an exile than an emigrant from his old way of life. The closest civilized conversation was down inCheyenne , or maybe evenDenver .

But then Philander Snow remarked, "It'll be lambing time any day now," and thoughts of the work at hand replaced those having to do with combustion and metabolism.

Off in the distance, the sheep cropped the new spring grass. The ranch had several hundred head, and a couple of hundred cattle to go with them. Along with the fields of wheat and barley and the vegetable plot near the ranch house,Roosevelt produced all the food he needed, and had a tidy surplus to sell.

"Self-sufficiency," he declared. "Every man's dream—and, by jingo, I've got it! Lord of the manor, that's what I am."

"Ain't nothin' wrong with your manners, boss," Snow said, spitting again. "Oh, you was kind of fancified and dudish when you first got here, I reckon, but you've done settled in nice as you please."

"For which I do thank you, Phil, most sincerely." As he had many times in the past,Roosevelt reflected that, while both he and his hands used English, they did not speak the same language.

"This here's a nice spread you got," Snow said. "Not so small you can't do all sorts of things with it, not so big you got to have your own army before you can get any work done. Down inTexas , I hear tell, they got ranches big as a whole county, do nothin' on 'em but raise cows. Pack of damn foolishness, anybody wants to know." Another stream of brown landed wetly in the dust.

"You get no arguments from me." Roosevelt looked south, as if, someone having mentionedTexas , he could see it from here. "Do you know, it broke my father's heart when theUnited States lost the War of Secession, but I'd say we're just as well rid of those Rebels. They'd bring their ways of doing things—everything larger than life, as you say—up here if we were still part of the same nation."

"They'd bring their niggers, too." One more expectoration gave Philander Snow's opinion of that. "Far as I'm concerned, the Rebs are welcome to 'em. This here's a white man's country, nothin' else but."

"I agree with you once again,"Roosevelt said. "TheUnited States are better off without any great presence of the dusky race in our midst. Were it not for the Negro, I doubt we and our former compatriots should ever have come to blows."

"Likely tell, us and the Rebs wouldn't have fought a war, neither," Snow observed.Roosevelt 's metal framed spectacles and the mustache he was assiduously cultivating helped keep his face from showing what he thought. After a moment, the ranch hand went on, "And now it looks like we're goin' to fight them sons of bitches again."

"And bully forBlaine , I say!"Roosevelt clenched his fists. "Lord knows I have no use for the Republican Party except in that it wants us to take a strong line with our neighbors, but that, these days, is an enormous exception."

"You damn straight it is, boss," Philander Snow said with a vehement

nod. "Them Rebs, they been rubbin' our noses in the dirt since we lost the war, and them Easterners, they just smile and take it and say *thank you* meek and mild as you please. Hope to Jesus they get around to lettin'Montana into the Union one day soon, so as I can vote for people who'll show a little backbone. Not even a lot, mind you—a little'd be plenty to make the Rebels climb down off their high horse, you ask me."

"I think you're dead right, Phil, but the Confederates aren't the only ones we have to worry about, not here inMontana they're not." Where Theodore Roosevelt had looked south towardTexas , he now turned north. "Here nearHelena , we're only a couple of hundred miles away from the Canadian border."

"I've met me some Canucks," Snow said. "They ain't the worst people you'd ever want to know.

ButCanada ain't free and independent, not all the way it ain't. The limeys, they do whatever they please there."

"They certainly do," Roosevelt agreed, "and they're able to do it, too, since their transcontinental railroad went through about the time I came toMontana . The only reason they had for building that railroad —the *only* reason, I say, Phil—is to shuttle British soldiers along the frontier to those places where they might prove most advantageous."

"And where they'll do the most good, too," Snow said.

Rooseveltsmiled. His hired hand had no idea what was funny. He didn't explain he had no desire to make the older man feel foolish. Instead, he came round to the other subject uppermost on his mind:

"And now the Confederates, not content with battening on our weakness these past twenty years, have sunk their fangs into the Empire of Mexico as well."

"By what the papers were saying last time you went into town, President Blaine ain't gonna take that layin' down," Snow said.

"He'd better not. If he does, the whole country lies down with him. He wasn't elected to play the coward, which is what I've been saying." Resolution crystallized inRoosevelt . When he made up his mind, he made it up in a hurry, and all the way. "Harness the team to the Handbasket, Phil. I'm going into town to find out what the latest news is. If there's war, sure as the sun comes up tomorrow we'll have hordes of redcoats pouring over the border. By jingo, I wish the telegraph line

reached all the way out here. I want to know what's going on out in the bigger world."

If Philander Snow cared about the wider world, he concealed it very well. He might have been—he probably had been—a rough character once, but work on the farm and the occasional spree inHelena satisfied him now. "Give me just a few minutes, boss, and I'll take care of it." He spat and chuckled and spat again. "You're a hell of a funny fellow, boss, when you take it in your mind to be."

Roosevelt went back into the ranch house for hisWinchester . The ranch lay about ten miles north ofHelena , in a little valley whose surrounding hills protected it from the worst of the winter blizzards. He was more worried about bears than bandits or hostile Indians, but you never could tell. He took a box of

.45 caliber cartridges along with the rifle.

Snow brought the buggy out of the barn almost as quickly as he'd promised. "Here you go," he said, climbing down from the driver's bench soRoosevelt could get aboard. "To Helena Handbasket," he said, and chuckled again. "You struck the mother lode when you came up with that one, sure as hell."

"Glad you like it."Roosevelt liked it, too. He stowed the rifle where he could grab it in a hurry if he had to, flicked the reins, and got the horses going towardHelena .

He reached the territorial capital a couple of hours later. Farms much like his own covered most of the flat land, with stretches of forest between them. Here and there, on the higher ground, were shafts and timbers from mines hopeful prospectors had begun. Most of them were years abandoned. Most of the prospectors, like Philander Snow, were making their living in some different line of work these days.

Helenasat in a valley of its own. Some of the log cabins of the earliest settlers, those who'd come just after the end of the War of Secession, still stood down near the bottom of the valley, by the tributary of the Prickly Pear that had made people pause hereabouts in the first place. Newer, finer homes climbed the hills to either side.

Down on Broadway, asRoosevelt drove the wagon toward the newspaper office, he felt himself returned to a cosmopolitan city, even if not to a sophisticated one. Here riding beside him was a bearded prospector leading a pack mule. The fellow still hoped to strike it rich,

as did some of his comrades.

Every once in a while, those hopes came true. Mines nearHelena , and newer ones by Wickes to the south and Marysville to the west, had made millionaires—but only a handful.

A Chinaman in a conical straw hat walked by, carrying two crates hanging from a pole over his right shoulder.Roosevelt approved of Chinese industriousness, but wouldn't have minded seeing all the Celestials gone from the West. *They don't fit in,* he thought: *too different from Americans.*

Solomon Katz ran a drugstore near the office of the *Helena Gazette;* Sam Houlihan ran the hardware store next door, and Otto Burmeister the bakery next to that. AmongHelena 's ten or twelve thousand people, there were members of every nation ever to set foot on the North American continent.

And, trotting up the street on their ponies, a couple of the original inhabitants of the continent came towardRoosevelt . One of the Sioux wore the buckskin tunic and trousers traditional to his people, the other blue denim trousers and a calico shirt. Idly, Roosevelt wondered what Helena—a medium-sized town at best, but a larger assemblage of people than their tribe had ever managed—seemed like to them.

He shrugged. In the larger scheme of things, their opinion counted for very little. As if to take their minds off the defeat the United States had suffered at the hands of the Confederacy, and also spurred by the Sioux uprisings in Minnesota, the USA had thrown swarms of soldiers across the prairie, subduing the aborigines by numbers and firepower even if not with any great military skill. These days, the Indians could only stand and watch as the lands that had been theirs served the purposes of a stronger race.

Rooseveltlooked for the Indians to head into one of the saloons sprouting like mushrooms along Broadway. Instead, they tied up their horses in front of Houlihan's establishment and went in there.Roosevelt 's head bobbed up and down in approval: Indians who needed hammers or saw blades or a keg of nails were Indians on the way to civilization. He'd heard the Lord's Prayer had been translated into Sioux, which he also took for a good sign.

The *Gazette* had a copy of the front page of the day's edition displayed under glass in front of the office.

A small crowd of people stared at it.Roosevelt worked his way

through the crowd till he could read the headlines,REBEL INTRANSIGENCE,shouted one.BLAINETAKESFIRM LINE

ONCONFEDERATELAND GRAB, Said another. ENGLAND WARNS USANOT TO MEDDLE, declared a third.

"England, she has no right to make such a warning," said one of the men in front ofRoosevelt . He had a guttural accent; *warning* came out *varning.* Roosevelt 's big head nodded vehemently—even a German immigrant could see the nose in front of his face.

He wondered if Blaine would see it or back down, spineless as the Democrats who'd run the country since Lincoln was so unceremoniously shown the door after the war against secession turned out to be the War of Secession. By that second headline, the president seemed to be doing what the people had elected him to do, for whichRoosevelt thanked God.

Behind Roosevelt, the crowd parted as if it were theRed Sea and Moses had come. But it wasn't Moses, it was a fierce-looking fellow with a bushy white mustache and chin beard who wore a banker's somber black suit.

"Mornin', Mr. Cruse," a grocer said respectfully. "Good day, sir," one of the men who worked at the livery stable added, tipping his straw hat. "How's the boy, Tommy?" said a miner who matched Cruse in years but not in affluence.

"Mornin' to you all," Cruse said, affable enough and to spare. A few years earlier, he'd been poorer than the miner who'd greeted him. Roosevelt doubted whether any bank inMontanaTerritory would have lent him more than fifty dollars. But he'd made his strike, which was rare, and he'd sold it for every penny it was worth, which was rarer. These days, he didn't need to borrow money from a bank, for he owned one. He was one of the handful of men throughout the West who'd gone at a single bound from prospector to capitalist.

He'd dealt squarely with people when he was poor, and he kept on dealing squarely with them now that he was rich. Had he wanted to be territorial governor, he could have been. He'd never given any sign of being interested in the job.

Like everyone else,Roosevelt gave way for him. It was a gesture of respect for the man's achievement, not one of servility. Roosevelt had money of his own,New York money, infinitely older and infinitely

more stable than that grubbed from the ground here in the wild territories.

"Good morning, Mr. Roosevelt," Cruse said, nodding to him. The self-made millionaire respected those who gave him his due and no more.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Cruse,"Roosevelt answered, hoping he would be as vigorous as the ex-miner when he got old. He pointed toward the front page of the *Helena Gazette.* "What do you think we ought to do, sir, about the Confederates' land grab?"

"Let me see the latest before I answer." Unlike so many of his comrades, Thomas Cruse would not leap blind. He stood well back from the newspaper under glass, studying the headlines. The crowd of men who had also been reading them waited, silent, for his considered opinion. Once he was done, he spoke with due deliberation: "I think we ought to continue on the course we've taken up till now. I see no other we can choose."

"My exact thought, Mr. Cruse,"Roosevelt agreed enthusiastically. "But if the Confederates and the British—and the French who prop up Maximilian—also continue on their course . . ."

"Then we lick 'em," Tom Cruse said in a loud, harsh voice. The crowd in front of the newspaper office erupted in cheers. Theodore Roosevelt joined them. Cruse could speak for all ofMontanaTerritory . The miner turned banker had certainly spoken for him.

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General James Ewell Brown Stuart's way had always been to lead from the front. As commander of the Confederate States Department of the Trans-Mississippi, he might have made his headquarters inHouston orAustin , as several of his predecessors had done. Instead, ever since being promoted to the position two years earlier, he'd based himself in the miserable village of El Paso, as far west as he could go while staying in the CSA.

Peering north and west along theRio Grande —swollen, at the moment, with spring runoff and very different from the sleepy stream it would be soon—Jeb Stuart looked into theUSA . That proximity to the rival nation madeEl Paso important as a Confederate outpost, and was the reason he'd brought his headquarters hither.

ButEl Paso had been a place of significance before an international

border sprang up betweenTexas andNew MexicoTerritory , between CSA andUSA . It and its sister town on the other side of theRio Grande , Paso del Norte, had stood on opposite sides of the border first betweenMexico and theUSA and then betweenMexico and the CSA. The pass the names of the two towns commemorated was one of the lowest and broadest through theRockies , a gateway between east and west travelers had been using for centuries.

Stuart looked across theRio Grande to Paso del Norte. Not quite twenty years earlier, the national border betweenTexas andNew Mexico had gone up. (It would have gone up farther west and north, but the Confederate invasion ofNew Mexico , mounted without adequate manpower or supplies, had failed.) Now, as soon as Stuart got the telegram for which he was waiting, the border on theRio Grande would cease to be.

His aide-de-camp, a burly major named Horatio Sellers, came walking up to the edge of the river to stand alongside him. Sweat streaked Sellers' ruddy face. Dust didn't scuff up under his boots, as it would in a few weeks, but the heat was already irksome, and gave every promise of becoming appalling.

Sellers peered across into what remained for the moment the territory of the Empire of Mexico. Paso del Norte was larger than its Confederate counterpart, but no more prepossessing. A couple of cathedrals reared above the mud-brick buildings that made up most of the town. The flat roofs of those buildings made the place look as if the sun had pounded it down from greater prominence.

Sellers said, "We're giving Maximilian three million in gold and silver for those two provinces? Three *million?* Sir, you ask me, we ought to get change back from fifty cents."

"Nobody asked you, Major," Stuart answered. "Nobody asked me, either. That doesn't matter. If we're ordered—when we're ordered—to take possession of the provinces for the Confederacy, that's what we'll do. That's all we can do."

"Yes, sir," his aide-de-camp answered resignedly.

"Look on the bright side," Stuart said. "We've got the Yankees hopping around like fleas on a hot griddle. That's worthwhile all by itself, if you ask me." He grinned. "Of course, Longstreet didn't ask me, any more than he asked you."

Sellers remained gloomy, which was in good accord with his nature.

"Two provinces full of desert and Indians and Mexicans, and we're supposed to turn them into Confederate states, sir? It'll be a lot of work, I can tell you that. Christ, Negro servitude is illegal south of the border."

"Well, if the border moves south, our laws move with it," Stuart answered. "I expect we'll manage well enough there." He chuckled. "I'll bet Stonewall wishes he were here instead of me. He likedMexico when he fought there for theUSA —he even learned to speak Spanish. But he's stuck inRichmond , and that's about as far fromEl Paso as you can be and still stay in the Confederate States."

"Sir," Sellers persisted, exactly as if Jeb Stuart could do something about the situation, "supposing we do annexSonora andChihuahua . How the devil are we supposed to defend them from theUSA ?New MexicoTerritory andCalifornia have a lot longer stretch of border with 'em thanTexas does, and the Yankees have a railroad down there, so they can ship in troops faster than we can hope to manage it.

What are we going to do?"

"Whatever it takes, and whatever we have to do," Stuart said, though he recognized the answer as imperfectly satisfactory. "I'll tell you this much, Major, and you can mark my words: once those provinces are in our hands, we *will* have a railroad through to the Pacific inside of five years. We aren't like Maximilian's pack of do-nothings down inMexico City . When the Anglo-Saxon race sets its mind to do something, that thing gets done."

"Of course, sir." Major Sellers was as smugly confident of the superiority of his own people as was Stuart. After a moment, he added, "We'll need a railroad more than the greasers would have, too. We'll use it for trade, the same as they would have done, but we'll use it against theUnited States , too, and they never would have bothered with that."

Stuart nodded. "Can't say you're wrong there. IfMexico ever got into a brawl with theUSA , first thing she'd do would be to pull out of that part of the country and see whether a Yankee army was still worth anything once it got done slogging its way through the desert."

"No, sir." Sellers shook his head. "The first thing Maximilian would do would be to scream for us to help. The second thing he'd do would be to pull out ofSonora andChihuahua ."

"You're likely to be right about that, too," Stewart said. The sound of

boots clumping on the dirt made him turn his head. An orderly was coming up, a telegram clenched in his right fist. "Well, well." One of Stuart's thick eyebrows rose. "What have we here?"

"Wire for you, sir," said the orderly, a youngster named Withers. "FromRichmond ."

"I hadn't really expected them to wire me fromWashington,D.C. ," Stuart answered. Major Sellers snorted. Withers looked blank; he didn't get the joke. With a small mental sigh, Stuart read the telegram.

That eyebrow climbed higher and higher as he did. "Well, well," he said again.

"Sir?" Sellers said.

Stuart realized *well, well* was something less than informative. "We are ordered by General Jackson to assemble two regiments of cavalry and two batteries of artillery at Presidio, and also to assemble five regiments of cavalry, half a dozen batteries, and three regiments of infantry here at El Paso, the said concentrations to be completed no later than May 16." The date amused him. Most officers would surely have chosen the fifteenth. But that was a Sunday, andJackson had always been averse to doing anything not vitally necessary on the Sabbath.

Sellers whistled softly. "It's going to happen, then."

"I would say that appears very likely, Major," Stuart agreed. "Presidio is on the road to the town ofChihuahua , the capital ofChihuahua province, which we would naturally have to occupy upon annexation. And of the larger force to be assembled here, I presume some will go to Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora province—which I suppose will become Sonora Territory—and some will defend El Paso against whatever moves the United States may make in response to our actions."

"We'll have to post guards all along the railroad." Now Major Sellers looked north. The Texas-New Mexico frontier and theRio Grande pinchedEl Paso off at the end of a long, narrow neck of Confederate territory, through which the Texas Western Railroad necessarily ran. Small parties of raiders could do a lot of damage along that line.

"Once the annexation goes through, we won't have any trouble moving south of theRio Grande . We'll have more depth in which to operate," Stuart said. That was true, but it wasn't so useful as it might

have been, and he knew as much. No railroad toEl Paso ran throughChihuahua province; movement would have to be by horseback and wagon. He sighed, folded the telegram, and put it in the breast pocket of his butternut tunic: he was not a man to wear an old-style uniform once the new one had been authorized.

"Have to go back to my office and see what I can move, and from which places."

The longer he studied the map, the less happy he got. To carry out General Jackson's orders, he would have to pull troops from as far away asArkansas , and that would result in weakening a different frontier with theUSA . He would also have to call down the Fifth Cavalry and to denude the rest of the garrisons protecting westTexas from the Comanche raiders who took refuge inNew MexicoTerritory . If the Yankees turned the Comanches loose, there was liable to be hell to pay among the ranchers and farmers in that part of the country.

But there would certainly be hell to pay if he did not obeyJackson 's order in every particular. Old Stonewall had sacked one of his officers during the war for failing to deliver an ordered attack even though the fellow had learned he was outnumbered much worse thanJackson thought he was.Jackson did not, would not, take no for an answer.

By the time Stuart was done drafting telegrams, he had shifted troops all over the landscape. He took the text of the wires over to the telegraph office, listened to the first couple of them clicking their way east, and then went off to watch the cavalry regiment regularly stationed at El Paso go through its morning exercises.

Troops began arriving a couple of days later. So did cars filled with hardtack, cornmeal, beans, and salt pork for the men, and with oats and hay for the horses and other animals. Every time he looked across the river intoChihuahua province, he wondered how he could keep his soldiers supplied there. He also sent out orders accumulating wagons atEl Paso . If he didn't bring food and munitions with him, he suspected he'd have none.

No troop movements on this scale had been seen in the Trans-Mississippi since the end of the war, not even during the great Comanche outbreak of 1874. Some officers had been rusticating in their fortresses sinceLincoln abandoned the struggle to keep the Confederacy from gaining its independence. All things considered, they did a good job of shaking off the cobwebs and going from garrison soldiering to something approaching field service.

By the tenth of May, Stuart was convinced he would have all his troops in place before the deadline General Jackson had sent him. On that day, a messenger came galloping intoEl Paso . "Sir," he said when he came before Stuart, "Sir, Lieutenant Colonel Foulke has crossed the border from Las Cruces under flag of truce and wants to speak with you."

"Has he?" Stuart thought fast. There were any number of places where the Yankees could have sneaked an observer over the border to keep an eye on the one railroad intoEl Paso ; spotting troop trains would have given them a good notion of the force he had at his disposal. But what theUnited States knew and what they officially knew were different things. "I want his party stopped four or five miles outside of town. I'll ride out and confer with him there. Hop to it, Sergeant. I don't want him inEl Paso ."

"Yes, sir." The noncommissioned officer who'd brought him the news hurried away to head off theU.S.

officer.

Stuart followed at a pace only a little more leisurely. Accompanied by Major Sellers and enough troopers to give the idea that he was someone of consequence, he rode up the dirt track that led northwest towardNew Mexico .

He met Lieutenant Colonel Foulke's party nearer three miles outsideEl Paso than five. One of Foulke's aides was peering toward the Confederate garrison town with a telescope he folded up and put away when Stuart and his retinue came into sight. He could have done it sooner without Stuart's seeing it. That he'd waited meant he wanted Stuart to know the Yankees had him under observation.

"Wait here," Stuart told the troopers when they drew close to theU.S. soldiers. "They didn't come here to start a fight, not under flag of truce." He and his aide-de-camp rode on toward the men in blue.

Lieutenant Colonel Foulke and the officer who'd been using the telescope imitated his practice, so that the four leaders met between their small commands. "A very good morning to you, General," Foulke said politely; seeing his baby-smooth skin and coal-black mustache reminded Stuart he himself would be fifty soon.

He didn't let himself dwell on that. "The same to you, Lieutenant Colonel," he answered. "I hope you will not mind my asking the purpose of your visit to the Confederacy here."

"By no means, sir." Hearing the polite phrase in Foulke's Yankee accent—New York, Stuart thought—was strange. TheU.S. officer went on, "I have been instructed by the secretary of war, Mr.

Harrison, and by the general-in-chief of the United States Army to inform you personally that theUnited States will view with great concern any movement of Confederate forces into the territory of the Empire of Mexico."

"I would point out to you, sir, that, when and if the purchase arrangements betweenMexico and the Confederacy are completed, the provinces ofChihuahua andSonora shall no longer be the territory of the Empire of Mexico, but rather that of the Confederate States ofAmerica ." Stuart's smile looked ingratiating, but was anything but. "Surely, Bill—"

"William," Foulke said. "I prefer William. William Dudley Foulke, sir, at your service."

"Beg your pardon, William," Stuart said easily, wondering what such a pompous little fellow was doing so far out West. "As I was saying, surely theUnited States cannot be thinking of forbidding the Confederate States from moving their forces from one part of their own territory to another."

William Dudley Foulke took a deep breath. "I am requested and required to inform you, General, as the government of the United States has informed President Longstreet in Richmond, that the United States consider the sale of Sonora and Chihuahua to be made under duress, and therefore to be invalid and of no consequence."

"Oh, they do, do they?" Stuart had understood that to be the position of theUnited States , but had never heard it explicitly till now. The way it was stated . . . "William, I assure you I mean no offense by this, but you talk more like a lawyer than a soldier."

Foulke smiled: he was amused, not angry. "I considered a career in the law in my early days, General Stuart. In the aftermath of the War of Secession, I determined that I could better use my talents in the service of my country as a soldier than as a jurist. As I am of Quaker stock, my family was distressed at my choice, but here I am today."

"Here you are," Stuart agreed. "And since you are here, Lieutenant Colonel Foulke, I have to tell you that the view of the Confederate States is that, if the sale of Sonora and Chihuahua be completed, those two provinces become territory belonging to the Confederate States of

America, to be administered and garrisoned at the sole discretion of the government of the CSA. In plain English, sir, once they're ours, we'll do with them as we please."

"In plain English, sir, theUnited States do not aim to let themselves be outflanked on the south," Foulke said. "TheUnited States do not aim to let the Confederacy take advantage of a weak neighbor, as you did when you bulliedCuba out ofSpain a few years ago. I expect you will wire a report of this meeting back toRichmond . Rest assured that I am telling you nothing different from what Minister Hay is telling President Longstreet there, or for that matter what President Blaine is telling Minister Benjamin inWashington ."

Major Horatio Sellers spoke up: "You Yankees keep barking that way, Lieutenant Colonel, you're going to have to show whether you've got any bite to go with it."

Foulke flushed: with his fine, fair skin, the darkening was quite noticeable. But his voice was cool as he replied, "Major, if your nation persists in its unwise course, you will feel our teeth, I assure you."

"The United States have already felt our teeth, sir," Jeb Stuart said. "It has been a while, I admit; perhaps you've forgotten. If you have, we are prepared to remind you. And, I will point out, we have good friends, which is more than theUnited States can say."

Lieutenant Colonel Foulke shrugged. "Sir, I have delivered to you the message with which I was charged. I personally have no great use for war, nor does any man, nor any nation, of sense. But you are to know that the United States are firmly resolved in this matter. Good day." Without waiting for a reply, he and the captain with him rode back toward their men.

Stuart watched until all the Yankees started riding off in the direction ofNew Mexico . When he'd been Foulke's age—Lord, when he'd been even younger—he'd loved nothing better than riding to war. Now that he had sons of his own growing to manhood, he was no longer so sure.

He turned to Major Sellers. "The next time we see that Yankee, it will be on the battlefield."

His aide-de-camp gave a sharp, short nod. "Good," he said.

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Colonel Alfred von Schlieffen had heard that the British government designated diplomatic service inWashington ,D.C. , a hardship position on account of the abominable climate of the capital of theUnited States . He didn't know for a fact that that was true. If it wasn't, though, it should have been. The weather had already got hotter and muggier than it ever did inBerlin , and May was only a bit more than half done.

Kaiser Wilhelm I's military attache in theUnited States ran a finger under the tight collar of his blue Prussian uniform to try to let in some air. That helped little, if at all.

Sweating, Schlieffen stepped onto the black cast-iron balcony outside his office. He startled a pigeon on the rail. It flew away, wings flapping noisily. Schlieffen reckoned that a victory of sorts. Too many pigeon droppings streaked the dark red brick of the German ministry.

Against the humidity and heat, though, he won nothing. No breeze stirred the air; it was as hot outside as back in the office. Horses and buggies and wagons rattled up and downMassachusetts Avenue . The street was paved with bricks, so they didn't raise great choking clouds of dust as they might have done, but the racket of iron-shod hooves and iron tires on the paving was terrible.

That racket drove whatever thoughts Schlieffen had had clean out of his head. For a man so intensely intellectual, that could not be borne. He went back inside, closing the French doors behind him. As the air was so still, he made the office no hotter, and, since they were almost all glass, he hardly made it dimmer.

Above his desk hung three framed portraits. A Catholic might have thought them images of a secular Trinity. That had never occurred to Schlieffen, a devout Hutterite. To him, they were merely the most important men in his life: ascetic-looking Field Marshal von Moltke, whose victories over Denmark, Austria, and France had made Prussian-led Germany a nation; plump, imperious Chancellor von Bismarck, whose diplomacy had made von Moltke's victories possible; and, above them both, the Kaiser, bald now, his fringe of hair, mustache, and fuzzy side whiskers white, his chest full of well-earned medals, for he had been a formidable soldier in his own right before succeeding his brother as King of Prussia.

Whenever Schlieffen thought of the Kaiser's soldierly career, he could only marvel, for Wilhelm had first seen action in the Prussian puppet

forces that fought under Napoleon's command when the century was young. "How many men still living can say that?" Schlieffen murmured. And afterwards, Wilhelm had helped guidePrussia 's rise to greatness, had known when to urge his brother to decline the throne of a unitedGermany after the revolutions of 1848, and had known when to accept it himself a generation later.

From the Kaiser's portrait, Schlieffen's eyes fell briefly to the small photograph of a pretty young woman on his desk: the one bit of sentiment he permitted himself in a room otherwise utterly businesslike. Anna had been his cousin as well as, for four wonderful years, his wife. In the nine years since her death in childbed, he'd found it easier to care for the ideal ofGermany than for any merely human being.

He inked his pen and wrote the last few sentences of the report he'd been working on. After scrawling his signature at the bottom, he checked his pocket watch: a few minutes past ten. He had a ten-thirty appointment at the War Department.

Precise as always, he signed the daybook in the front hall, noting his departure time to the minute. The guards outside the door saluted as he left the embassy. He punctiliously returned the courtesy.

He walked half a block southeast onMassachusetts , then turned right ontoVermont , which cut diagonally acrossWashington 's square grid and led straight toward the White House and the War Department building just west of it. Civilians waved to him, mistaking his light blue uniform for one belonging to the U.S. Army. He'd hadU.S. soldiers make the same mistake and salute him.

He ignored the misdirected greetings, as he ignored most human contact. Then a fat man on a pony that didn't seem up to bearing his weight recognized the uniform for what it was. "Hurrah for the Kaiser!" the fellow called, and tipped his hat. Schlieffen acknowledged that with a polite nod. The Kaiser was popular in theUnited States , not least because his army had beaten the French.

Newsboys hawked papers on every corner. Headlines screamed of coming war. Schlieffen's glance lifted toward the Arlington Heights on the far side of thePotomac . Buildings screened most of his view of them, but he knew they were there. He also knew the Confederate States had guns mounted on them, and on other high ground along the southern bank of the river. If war came,Washington would suffer.

More soldiers were on the streets than usual, but not many more. UnlikeGermany , theUnited States had no conscription law, relying instead on volunteers to fill out the relatively small professional army once war was declared. That struck Schlieffen as the next thing to insane, even if the Confederacy used the same system. *Mobs,* he thought scornfully. *Mobs with rifles, that's what they'll be.*

The War Department was a four-story brick building with a two-story entranceway fronted by half a dozen columns. To Schlieffen's way of thinking, it would have been adequate for a provincial town, but hardly for a national capital. The Americans had talked for years of building something finer: talked, but spent no money. Still, the soldiers on duty at the entrance were almost as well drilled as the guards in front of the German embassy.

"Yes, Colonel," one of them said. "The general is expecting you, so you just follow Willie here. He'll take you to him."

"Thank you," Schlieffen said. The soldier named Willie led him up to the third-floor office where the general-in-chief of the U.S. Army carried out his duties. *"Guten Tag, Heir Oberst,"* said the general's adjutant, a bright young captain named Saul Berryman.

"Guten Tag,"Schlieffen answered, and then, as he usually did, fell back into English: "How are you today, Captain?"

"Ganz gut, danke. Und Sie?"Berryman kept up the German for the same reason Schlieffen spoke English—neither was so fluent speaking the other's language as he would have liked, and both enjoyed the chance to practice. *"Der General wird Sie sofort sehen."*

"I am glad he will see me at once," Schlieffen said. "He must be very busy, with the crisis in your country."

"Ja, er ist."Just then, the general opened the door to the outer room where Berryman worked. Seeing him, his adjutant returned to English himself: "Go ahead, Colonel."

"Yes, always good to see you, Colonel," Major General William Rosecrans echoed. "Come right in."

"Thank you," Schlieffen said, and took a chair across the desk from Rosecrans. The military attache's nostrils twitched. He'd smelled whiskey on Rosecrans before, but surely at a time like this—He gave a mental shrug.

"Good to see you," Rosecrans repeated, as if he'd forgotten he'd said it the first time. He was somewhere in his early sixties, with graying hair, a fairly neat graying beard, and a nose with a formidable hook in it. His color was very good, but the whiskey might have had something to do with that. He looked shrewd, but, Schlieffen judged, wasn't truly intelligent; he owed his position mostly to having come out of the War of Secession less disgraced than any other prominentU.S. commander.

"General, I am here to present my respects, and also to convey to you the friendly good wishes of my sovereign, the Kaiser," Schlieffen said.

"Of your suffering Kaiser?" Rosecrans said. "I hope he gets better, with all my heart I do.Germany has always been a country friendly to us, and we're damned glad of that, believe me, considering the way so many of the other countries inEurope treat us."

Schlieffen gave him a sharp look, or as sharp a look as could come from the military attache's nondescript, rather pinched features. Rosecrans showed not the slightest hint of embarrassment, nor even that he noticed the glare. Schlieffen concluded the fault lay in his own accented English, which Rosecrans must have innocently misunderstood. Having concluded that, the colonel dismissed the matter from his mind. If no insult had been offered, he could not take offense.

"I would be grateful, General, if you could make arrangements so that, in the event of war between the United States and the Confederate States, you might transport me to one of your armies so that I can observe the fighting and report on it to my government," he said.

"Well, if the war's not over and done with before you catch up to it, I expect we'll be able to do that,"

Rosecrans said. "You'll have to move sharp, though, because we ought to lick the Rebs in jig time, or Bob's your uncle."

Although Schlieffen knew he was missing some of that—the English spoken in theUnited States at times seemed only distantly related to what he'd learned back inGermany —the root meaning remained pretty clear. "You believe you will win so quickly and easily, then?" He did his best to keep the surprise he felt out of his voice.

"Don't you?" Rosecrans made no effort to hide his own amazement. Very few Americans, as far as Schlieffen could see, had even the least

skill in disguising their thoughts and feelings: indeed, they took an odd sort of pride in wearing them on their sleeves. When Schlieffen didn't answer right away, Rosecrans repeated, "Don't you, sir? The plain fact of the matter is, they're afraid. It's plain in everything they do."

"I am nothing more than an ignorant stranger in your country," Schlieffen said, a stratagem that had often given him good results. "Would you be so kind as to explain to me why you think this is so?"

Rosecrans swelled with self-importance. "It strikes me as an obvious fact, Colonel. The government of theUnited States toldRichmond in no uncertain terms that there would be hell to pay if a single Confederate soldier crossed over theRio Grande . Not a one of 'em has done it. Q.E.D."

"Is it not possible that the Confederate soldiers have not yet moved only because their own preparations remain incomplete?" Schlieffen asked.

"Possible, but not likely," Rosecrans said. "They put a large force of regulars intoEl Paso a couple of weeks ago—that was before we warned 'em we wouldn't stand for any funny business inChihuahua andSonora . And since that day, Colonel, since that day, not a one of the stinking sons of bitches has dared stir his nose out of their barracks. If that doesn't say they're afraid of us, I'd like to know what it does say."

Schlieffen thought he'd already told General Rosecrans what it said. To the American, evidently, *preparations* meant nothing more than moving troops from one place to another. Schlieffen wondered if his own English was at fault again. He didn't think so. The problem lay in the way Rosecrans—and, presumably, President Blaine—saw the world.

"If you fight the Confederate States, General, will you fight them alone?" Schlieffen tried to put the concept in a new way, since the first one had met no success.

"Of course we'll fight 'em alone," Rosecrans exclaimed. "They're the ones who suck up to foreigners, not us." That he was speaking with a foreigner did not cross his mind. His voice took on a petulant tone, almost a whine, that Schlieffen had heard before from otherU.S. officers: "IfEngland andFrance hadn't stabbed us in the back during the War of Secession, we'd've licked the Confederates then, and we

wouldn't have to be worrying about this nonsense now."

"That may be true." Schlieffen felt something close to despair. Rosecrans was not a stupid man; Schlieffen had seen as much. But it was hard to tell whether he was more naive than ignorant or the other way round. "Could your diplomacy not try to keepGreat Britain andFrance from doing in this war what they did in the last, or even more than they did in the last?"

"That's not my department," Rosecrans said flatly. "If they stay out, they stay out. If they come in, I suppose we'll deal with 'em. Stabbed in the back," he muttered again.

"You have, I trust, made plans for fighting the Confederate States by themselves, for fighting them and Great Britain, for fighting them and France, and for fighting them and both Great Britain and France?"

Schlieffen said.

Rosecrans gaped at him. After coughing a couple of times, the American general-in-chief said, "We'll hit the Rebs a couple of hard licks, then we'll chase 'em, depending on where they try to run. Whatever they try themselves, we'll beat that back, and . . . Are you all right, Colonel?"

"Yes, thank you," Schlieffen answered after a moment. He was briefly ashamed of his own coughing fit—was he an American, to reveal everything that was in his mind? But Rosecrans apparently saw nothing more than that he'd swallowed wrong. As gently as he could, Schlieffen went on, "We have developed in advance more elabourate plans of battle, General. They served us well against the Austrians and later against the French."

"I did enjoy watching the froggies get their ears pinned back," Rosecrans agreed. "But, Colonel, you don't understand." He spoke with great earnestness: Americans weren't always right, any more than anyone else was, but they were always sure of themselves. "Can't just go and plan things here, the way you do on your side of theAtlantic . The land's too big here, and there aren't enough people to fill it up.

Too much room to manoeuvre, if you know what I mean, and that's hell on plans."

He had a point—no, he had part of a point. "We face the same difficulty when we think of war withRussia ," Schlieffen said. "There is inRussia even more space than you have here, though I admitRussia

has also more men. But this does not keep us from developing plans. If we can force the foe to respond to what our forces do, the game is ours."

"Maybe," Rosecrans said. "And maybe you're smarter than the Russians you'd be fighting, too. The next general who's smarter than Stonewall Jackson hasn't come down the pike yet, seems to me."

"I do not follow this," Schlieffen said, but then, all at once, he did. His own ancestors must have gone off to fight Napoleon with that same mixture of arrogance and dread. Comparing a backwoods Confederate general to the great Bonaparte, though, struck him as absurd—until he considered that Rosecrans and his ilk were hardly a match for Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Bliicher.

"But we will lick 'em." Suddenly, Rosecrans was full of bluff confidence again. "We outweigh 'em two to one, near enough, and that's plenty to make any general look smarter than he really is—even an old ne'er-do-well like me." The grin he sent Schlieffen had a self-deprecating charm to which the German military attache could not help responding.

And Rosecrans was right. An army with twice the men and guns of its foe went into a war with an enormous advantage. As Voltaire had said, God was always for the big battalions. Even Frederick the Great, facing odds like those, had been at the end of his tether during the Seven Years' War till the opportune death of the Tsarina and her abrupt replacement by a successor who favored the Prussian king made Russia drop out of the war.

"I repeat the question I asked before," Schlieffen said again: "What will you do ifEngland orFrance or both of them at once should enter the war on the side of the Confederate States?"

"The best we can," Rosecrans answered. *Brave,* Schlieffen thought, *but not helpful.* But then the American Army commander looked sly. "Between you, me, and the wall, Colonel, I don't think it's going to happen. The reports we're getting fromLondon andParis say both governments over there are sick to death of the Confederacy keeping niggers as slaves, and they won't lift a finger unless the Rebs say they'll turn 'cm loose. Now I ask you, sir, what are the odds of that? Biggest reason they fought the war was on account of they were afraid theUnited States government would make 'em do something like that. If they wouldn't do it for their own kith and kin, why do you think the stubborn bastards'll do it for a pack of foreigners?"

"This may be an important point," Schlieffen said. It was, at any rate, a point interesting enough for him to take it up with Minister von Schlozer when he got back to the brick pile onMassachusetts Avenue .

He concerned himself with politics as little as he could. Political considerations could of course affect military ones, but the latter were all that fell within his purview. Civilians set policy. He made sure the armed forces could do what the leaders required of them.

Rosecrans said, "If you'll excuse me, Colonel, I do have a deal to see to here, just on the off chance the Confederates get frisky after all."

"I understand." Schlieffen rose. So did Rosecrans, who came around the desk to shake hands with him again. "One more question, General?" the attache asked. "In case of war, you are rather vulnerable to the foe while here inWashington . What would the signal be for shifting your headquarters up toPhiladelphia , which is less likely to come under attack?"

"It had better not," Rosecrans exclaimed. "Soon as the first shell falls, we all pack up stakes and head north. Everything will go smooth as clockwork, I promise you. We aren't fools, Colonel. We know the Rebs will shell this place."

"Very good," Schlieffen said. As he left the War Department, he wondered whether both of Rosecrans'

last two sentences were true.

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Black smoke—and showers of sparks—pouring from her twin stacks, the *Liberty Bell* steamed down theMississippi towardSt. Louis . When he'd boarded the sternwheeler inClinton,Illinois , Frederick Douglass had taken her name as a good omen. With every mile closer to the Confederate States he drew, though, his doubts increased.

He stood on the upper deck, watching farms and little towns flow past. He was the only Negro on the upper deck, the deck that housed cabin passengers. That did not surprise him. But for one of the men who fed wood to the fire under the *LibertyBell's* boiler, he was the only Negro aboard the steamboat. He was used to that, too. Over the years since the War of Secession, he'd grown very used to being alone.

"Look," somebody not far away said. "Look at the nigger in the fancy

suit."

Douglass turned. He was, he knew, an impressive man, with handsome features whose leonine aspect was enhanced by his silvery beard and mane of hair. That silver, and his slow, deliberate motions, told of his age. He thought he was sixty-four, but might as easily have been sixty-three or sixty-five. Having been born into slavery onMaryland 'sEastern Shore , he had, to put it mildly, not been encouraged to enquire into the details of his arrival on the scene.

Two young white men, both dressed like drummers or cheap confidence men (there sometimes being little difference between the two trades) were gaping at him, their pale eyes wide. "May I help you gentlemen?" he asked, letting only a little irony seep into his deep, rich voice.

Despite his formidable presence, despite the rumbles of oratorical thunder audible in even his briefest, most commonplace utterances, the whites were unabashed. "It's all right, it's all right," one of them said, as if soothing a restive child—or a restive horse. "Dick here and me, we're fromSt. Paul , and ain't neither one of us ever got a good look at a nigger before."

"I can sec as much," Douglass said. "I also discern that you have never had occasion to learn how to speak to a Negro, either."

That went right past the two men fromSt. Paul . They kept on staring, as if he were a caged monkey in a zoo. He'd had that feeling too many times in his life already. Seeing they *would* be rude, no matter how unintentionally, he turned his back, set both hands on the rail, and peered out over theMississippi once more.

Ain 't neither one of us ever got a good look at a nigger before.His fingers clamped down on the white-painted cast iron with painful force. He'd heard that, or variations on it, hundreds of times since the war.

He let out a long sigh punctuated by a couple of short coughs. Before the Southern states left the Union to form their own nation, he had been a spokesman for one man in eight in theUnited States . Now, ninety percent of the Negroes on the North American continent resided in a foreign country, and most of the white citizens of theUSA were just as glad it was so. They might have been gladder yet had the figure been one hundred percent. As often as not, they blamed the relative handful of blacks left in theUnited States for the breakup of

the nation.

And if a Negro, tormented beyond endurance, tried to flee from, say, Confederate Kentucky across theOhio into theUnited States and freedom, how was he greeted? With congratulations for his love of liberty and a hearty welcome to a better land? Douglass' laugh was sour. If a U.S. Navy gunboat didn't sink his little skiff or raft in midstream, white men with guns and dogs would hunt him down and ship him back over the river to the CSA. Why not? As an inhabitant of a different nation, he had no claim on theUnited States .

Douglass laughed again—better that than weeping. Before the war, the Fugitive Slave Act had been a stench in the nostrils of most Northerners. Now, though the law was no longer on the book, slavery having at last become extinct in the USA, fugitive slaves found less sympathy than they had a generation earlier. Did calling them foreigners make such a difference? Evidently.

Not wanting to know whether the two white men had finished their examination of him or whether others, equally curious and equally rude, had taken their place, Douglass looked ahead. The dark cloud of smoke and haze blowing west across theMississippi was not a reflection of his mood. It was a reflection of the soft coalSt. Louis , like so many Western cities, burned to heat its homes, cook its food, and power the engines of its factories. The *Liberty Bell* would be landing before long.

Past the northern suburb ofBaden steamed the stcrnwheeler. Over there, black roustabouts carried cargo off barges and small steamers. Douglass warmed to see men of his own color once more, even if those men were doing labour of a sort their brethren still in bondage might have performed at lonely little landing stations along the Confederate-held reaches of the southernMississippi .

Then across the water came the ingenious curses of the white men who bossed those roustabouts.

Douglass' mouth tightened into a thin, hard line. He'd had curses like those fall on his own head back in the days when he was property, before he became a human being of his own. He'd also known the lash then. That, at least, these bosses, unlike the overseers still plying their trade in the CSA, were forbidden.

Perhaps the prohibition made their curses sharper.

Other Negroes floated on theMississippi in rowboats. Douglass watched one of them draw a fish into his boat: the day's supper, or part of it. Blacks and whites both plied larger skiffs, in which they went after the driftwood that always fouled the river. They would not make much money from their gleanings, but none of them, it was likely, would ever make, or expect to make, much money till the end of his days.

St. Louissprawled for miles along the riverbank. The riverbank had long been its *raison d'etre.* On theMississippi , close to the joining of that river with theMissouri and not too far above the joining with theOhio , it was at the center of a commerce stretching fromMinnesota toNew Orleans , from the Appalachians to theRockies . Railroads had only added to its importance. Smoke belching from the stack of its locomotive, a loaded train chugged north. The engineer blew a long blast on his whistle, apparently from nothing more than high spirits.

Not even the rupture of the Union had for long interruptedSt. Louis ' riverine commerce. Many of the steamers chained up at the landing-stages along the stone-fronted levee—no regular wharves here, not with the Mississippi's level liable to fluctuate so drastically— were Confederate boats, with names like *Vicksburg Belle, New Orleans Lightning,* and *Albert Sidney Johnston.* The Stars and Bars fluttered proudly at their sterns. As they had in the days before the war, they carried tobacco and cotton and rice and indigo up the river, trading them sometimes for wheat and corn, sometimes for iron ore, and sometimes for the products into which that ore was eventually made. The Confederate States had their own factories these days (some of them, to Douglass' unending mortification, with Negro slaves as labour), but their demand remained greater than their own industry could meet.

Names were not the only way to tell Confederate steamboats from theirU.S. counterparts. None of the boats from theUnited States posted armed guards on deck to keep parts of their crews from escaping.

The welcome newly fled blacks would receive inSt. Louis was no warmer than anywhere else in theUnited States , but that did not keep some from trying their luck.

To Douglass' mingled pride and chagrin, the *Liberty Bell* pulled in alongside one of those Confederate boats, an immense sidewheeler emblazoned with the name *N.B. Forrest.* The escaped slave wondered how his brethren still trapped felt about sailing in a vessel named for a dealer in human flesh who had also proved a successful officer in the

war.

One of the guards aboard the *Forrest,* looking over to watch the *Liberty Bell* tie up at the landing-stage, saw Douglass standing at the upper-deck rail. He gaped at the spectacle of a colored man there rather than on the main deck, where the poor and the engine crew spread their blankets. Douglass sent an unpleasant smile his way. The guard was close enough to recognize it as unpleasant. He scowled back, then spat a brown stream of tobacco juice into the equally brownMississippi .

Berthed on the opposite side of the *Liberty Bell* from the Confederate steamboat was the USS *Shiloh,* one of a number of river monitors that madeSt. Louis their home port. The gunboat's dark iron armor plating and starkly functional design made a sharp contrast to the *N.B. Forrest's* gaudy paint and gilding and gloriously rococo woodwork.

Among the crowd waiting at the top of the gently sloping levee for the *Liberty Bell* to disembark her passengers was a small knot of black men in clothes much like Douglass': undoubtedly the clergymen he was to meet. He hurried back to his cabin to retrieve his carpet bags. He carried them to the gangplank himself. Though porters—immigrants fromEastern Europe , many of them—were eager enough to assist the whites traveling with him, they were more often than not reluctant to serve a Negro. *How quickly they learn the ways of the land to which they came seeking freedom,* Douglas thought with a bitterness now dull with scar tissue but no less true and real on account of that.

The ministers, by contrast, were eager to relieve him of his burdens. "Thank you, Deacon Younger," he said as he shook hands with them. "Thank you, Mr. Towler. Good to see you gentlemen—and you, too, of course, Mr. Bass; I don't mean to forget you—again. It's been four or five years since I last had the pleasure, has it not?"

"Fo' years, Mistuh Douglass," Deacon Daniel Younger answered. "It sho' enough is a pleasure to set eyes on you again, suh, I tell you truthfully." Like his colleagues, Younger was a man of education. He wrote well, asDouglas knew. His grammar and vocabulary were first rate. But he, like Towler and Bass, retained most of the intonations of slavery in his speech.

Douglass' own Negro accent was much less pronounced; as a boy, he'd learned white ways of speaking from his master's daughter. Over the years, he had seen many times how that made people both white and black take him more seriously. He found it useful and unfortunate at the same time.

"Come on to the carriage wid us," Washington Towler said. "We'll take you over to the Planter's Hotel onFo'th Street . They know you're a-comin', and they will be ready fo' you." By that, he meant the hotel wouldn't make a fuss about having a Negro use one of its rooms for a few days. Douglass, of course, was not just any Negro, either, but as close to a famous Negro as theUnited States boasted.

The Reverend Henry Bass drove the buggy. He was younger than his two colleagues, both of whom were not far from Douglass' age. He said, "Don't know what all the excitement of the past few weeks will do to your crowds, Mistuh Douglass. What has yo' experience been in the other towns where you were?"

"It would be hard to state a general rule," Douglass answered. "Some people—by which I mean white people, of course—"

"Oh, of course," Bass said. He and the other two ministers rolled their eyes at the never-ending indignities of living on sufferance.

"Some people, I say," Douglass resumed, "take the threat of renewed war as a chance to punish the Confederate States, which works to our advantage. Others, though, continue to make the Negro the scapegoat for the dissolution of theUnion , and because of that discount every word I say."

"You will see a deal o' dat last here, I am afraid." Deacon Daniel Younger's broad shoulders—the man was built like a barrel—moved up and down as he sighed. "During the war, there were plenty who fought"—he pronounced it *fit,* as did many, black and white, in the West and in the CSA—"to make Missouri a Confederate state. They have made up their minds to be part o' de Union now, but they are still not easy about it."

"I remember howKentucky fell afterLincoln pulled troops east— too little, too late—to try to halt Lee's army," Douglass said. "1 remember the talk about partitioningMissouri , too, on the order of what was done withVirginia andWest Virginia . I thank God you were preserved entire for theUnited States ."

"We praise Him every day," Washington Towler said. "Without His help, we should still be slaves ourselves." Henry Bass pulled up in front of the Planter's Hotel. Towler pointed to the entrance. "They bought and sold us, Mr. Douglass, right there, even in the days after the war, till emancipation finally became dc law ofde land ."

The Planter's Hotel had a Southern look to it even now. Its arches were of a style old-fashioned in theUSA , incised into the fagade rather than raised in relief from it. Some of the men going in and out wore the white linen suiting common in the warm, muggy South, too, and spoke with drawls: traders up fromNew Orleans andMemphis , Douglass supposed. They stared at his companions and him as if a nightmare had come to life before their eyes—and so, Douglass hoped, one had.

He took his bags and went into the hotel. As he had on the steamboat, he carried them himself. Maybe the white porters assumed that, despite his clothes, he was a servant. Or maybe, and more likely, they just refused to lower themselves, as they saw it, by serving one of the Negroes who had served their kind for so many long, sorrowful years.

"I am Frederick Douglass," he said when he reached the front desk. "A room has been reserved in my name."

He waited for the clerk to shuffle through papers. The fellow lifted up his eyes now and again to stare at Douglass' dark countenance. What followed was as inevitable as night following day. "I'm sorry, s—"

The clerk could not bring himself to say *sir* to a Negro. He started again: "I'm sorry, but I don't find that reservation."

"Young man," Douglass said coldly, "if you do not find it by the time I count ten, I promise you this hotel will be a stench in the nostrils of the entireUnited States by a week from Tuesday, when my next newspaper column goes out over the wires. Your superiors will not thank you for that. 1 commence: one, two, three . . ."

How the clerk stared! And how quickly the missing reservation appeared, as if by magic. Thoroughly cowed, the clerk even browbeat a white bellboy into taking Douglass' carpetbags from him and carrying them to the room. It was one of the smaller, darker rooms in the hotel, but Douglass had expected nothing better than that. Daniel Younger and his friends had probably been able to book no better.

After supper—which he ate at a table surrounded by empty ones—Henry Bass came by to take him to the Merchants' Exchange, where he would speak.St. Louis was a handsome city of gray limestone and a sandstone almost as red as brick, though soot dimmed its color on many buildings. The Merchants'

Exchange proved to take up the whole block between Chestnut and Pine onThird Street . "We've got plenty of room for a good house, Mr.

Douglass," Bass said. "President Tilden was nominated in the Grand Hall back in '76, he was."

But, when Douglass went into the hall, he was sadly disappointed. Plainly, every Negro in and aroundSt.

Louis who could afford a ticket was there. Somber-suited black men and their wives in fancy dresses filled to overflowing the seats allotted to them. Douglass had long prided himself, though, on his reputation for being able to speak to whites as well as blacks. Tonight, it failed him. The bright gaslights shone down on great empty rows of chairs, with here and there a clump of people.

He went ahead with his address; as a professional, he had no other choice. He sounded his familiar themes: tolerance, education, enlightenment, progress, the appropriateness of giving all their due for what they could do, not for the color of their skins. He drew rapturous applause from the Negroes in the hall, and got a polite hearing from the whites.

It could have been worse. He knew that. He'd started riots with his speeches now and again, sometimes meaning to, sometimes not. Tonight, he would have welcomed a riot in place of the near-indifference his white audience showed him. WhenU.S. whites had nothing else on their minds, they were sometimes willing to listen to tales of the Negro's plight and ways by which it might be alleviated. When they were distracted, they might as well have forgotten theUSA still held any Negroes.

Once it was finally over, he stood down from the podium. To his surprise, one of the people who came up to speak with him was a gray-bearded white man, a former Army officer whom Douglass, after a bit, recognized from years gone by. "You must not take it to heart, sir," he said with touching sincerity. "Do remember, our present concern over the Confederate States is also, in its way, concern for your people."

Douglass smelled liquor on his breath. *No wonder he is so sincere,* the Negro thought. *And no wonder he is a soldier no more, despite having won a couple of battles against the Rebels.* By his rather worn suit, the fellow had made no great success of civilian life. *Liquor again.* But he had done his best to be kind on a dismal evening, and he did have a point of sorts. Exercising forbearance, Douglass said,

"Thank you, General Grant."

Chapter 3

Salt Lake City!" the conductor shouted. "all out forSalt Lake City!" The train gave a convulsive jerk—

like a man letting out his last breath, Abraham Lincoln thought—and came to a stop.

Wearily,Lincoln heaved himself up out of his seat and grabbed his valise and carpetbag. After speaking inDenver andColorado Springs , inGreeley andPueblo , inCanonCity andGrand Junction , leavingColorado and coming intoUtahTerritory was almost like entering a foreign country.

That impression was strengthened when he got out of the Pullman car. An eastbound train was loading as his was unloading. Most of the men filing aboard wore the blue tunics and trousers and black felt hats of the U.S. Army, and were burdened with the impedimenta of the soldier's trade. As the crisis with the Confederate States worsened, the regulars were being called to the threatened frontiers.

A crowd of men, women, and children cheered the soldiers' departure. At most train stations, asLincoln had seen during the war, the soldiers would have responded, waving their hats and calling out to the pretty girls. Not here, not now. Every cheer they heard seemed to make them glummer, or perhaps cheerful in a different way. "Jesus," one of them said loudly to a friend, "will I be glad to get out of this God-damned place."

"Sad, isn't it?" said a little man who appeared atLincoln 's elbow while the former president was watching the troops embark. "They aren't cheering to wish the men good luck if they have to fight the Rebs. They're cheering because those fellows arc getting out of *here,* and they hope they won't come back."

"I had the same impression myself, Mister . . . ?"Lincoln hesitated.

"I'm the chap who's supposed to meet you here, Mr. Lincoln: Gabriel Hamilton, at your service."

Despite his small size—Lincolntowered over him—Hamiltonhad a jaunty manner and a way of raising one eyebrow just a little to suggest he was hard to impress. After shaking hands, he went on, "Call me Gabe, if you please, sir. All my Gentile friends do."

"Your—Gentile friends?"Lincoln wondered if he'd heard correctly. His ears, these days, weren't what they had been. Gabe Hamilton had neither a Hebraic name nor Hebraic features.

The little man laughed out loud. "If you're not a Mormon inSalt Lake City , Mr. Lincoln, you're a Gentile.

Aaron Rothman runs a dry-goods shop down the street from me. Here, he's a Gentile."

"And what is his opinion of his . . . unusual status?"Lincoln asked.

"He thinks it's funny as blazes, matter of fact,"Hamilton answered. "He's a pretty good egg, Rothman is.

But Presbyterians like me, Catholics, Baptists, Jews, what have you—inUtahTerritory , we're all outsiders looking in. We hang together better than we would if that weren't so, I expect."

"If you don't hang together, you will hang separately?"Lincoln suggested.

Hamiltontook that for his wit rather than Ben Franklin's and laughed again, uproariously this time.

"You're a sharp man, Mr. Lincoln. I'm glad we've got you out here, for a fact, I am. You'll buck up the miners and the other working folks, and you'll make the bosses think twice about what they're doing, and those are both good things. Come on back to my buggy, sir, and I'll take you to your hotel."

"Thank you."Lincoln followed his guide away from the train. Soldiers were still boarding the one bound for the East. The local crowd was still applauding their departure, too. "Those would be Mormons, I suppose?"

"That they would." Now Gabriel Hamilton sounded more than a little grim. "I tell you frankly, Mr.

Lincoln, the rest of us in town are nervous about it. Without soldiers here, God only knows what's liable to happen. God and John Taylor, I suppose. The Mormons think that's the same thing. Gentiles, though, will tell you different."

"You're referring to Brigham Young's successor?"Lincoln said asHamilton took his luggage from him and loaded it onto the buggy.

"Young was an uncrowned king here during my administration."

"And up till the day he died, four years ago,"Hamilton agreed. "And do you know what? I think he loved every minute of it." He untied the horses from the rail and clambered into the carriage, nimble as a monkey. "Mr. Taylor's got the same power, but not the same bulge, if you know what I mean."

"I do indeed." Law and politics had both shownLincoln that, of two men with the same nominal authority, one was liable to be able to do much more than the other if their force of character differed.

"SoTaylor is King Log instead of King Stork, eh?"

"Wouldn't go so far as that. He's quieter about what he does, that's all. You settled there?" AtLincoln 's nod,Hamilton clucked to the horses, flicked the reins, and got the carriage going. After a little while, he continued, "The Mormons still listen to him, I'll tell you that." He sounded mournful: a man relating a fact he wished a falsehood. "You won't have many of them coming to your speech tomorrow night, I'm afraid."

"That's a pity,"Lincoln said. "From what I've read ofUtah , and from what you've told me, they are the ones who most need to hear it."

As inDenver , the streets inSalt Lake City were all of dirt. Dust rose from the horses' hooves and from the wheels of the carriage. Though traffic was not heavy, a lot of dust hung in the air. But the water that ran over the pebbles in the gutter looked bright and clean enough to drink, and Lincoln saw a couple of women in calico dresses and sunbonnets dipping it up in pails, so he supposed it was used for that purpose.

Trees—poplar, mulberry, locust, maple—grew alongside those gutters, and their branches, green and leafy with the fresh growth of spring, spread above the streets, shielding them from the full force of the sun. The prospect was attractive, especially when compared to either the flat, dull towns of the prairie or the stony gulches in which mostRockyMountain cities were set.

"Where's theGreat Salt Lake ?"Lincoln asked, suddenly realizing he could not see the natural feature for which the city was named.

Hamiltonpointed west. "It's almost twenty miles from here. There's a little excursion train that'll take you there if you want to see it. Don't drink the water if you do go; it'll burn you up from the inside out."

"I've seen if from the train several times, on my way out toCalifornia ,"Lincoln said. "I have no desire for a closer acquaintance—it's only that I haven't been in, as opposed to through,Salt Lake City till now, and so missed it."

A few of the houses were log cabins that tookLincoln back to the long-vanished days of his own youth.

More were of creamy gray-brown adobe bricks, some stuccoed over and whitewashed or painted, others left their natural shade. Newer homes might have been transplanted straight from the East. Almost all of them—cabins, low adobes, and modern clapboards and tired-brick houses—were surrounded by riots of trees and shrubs and climbing vines and flowers, making a spectacle all the more impressive when measured against the bleak, brown Wa-satch Mountains just east of town.

Some of those adobe houses, despite being of a single story, nevertheless had a great many rooms, with several wings spreading out from what had begun as small, simple dwellings. Pointing to one of those, Gabe Hamilton said, "You see a place like that, Mr. Lincoln, and you can bet a polygamist lives there.

He'll take the center for himself and give each wife and her brats a wing." •

"How many Mormons are polygamists, truly?"Lincoln asked. "They write all sorts of things in the Eastern papers."

"They say all sorts of things here, too,"Hamilton answered. "The truth is devilish hard to find, and they don't keep any public records of marriages past the first, which makes it harder yet. I'd say it's about one in ten, if that, but the polygamists have influence beyond their numbers. If you're going to support more than one wife and family, you need more than the common run of money, you see."

"Oh, yes,"Lincoln said. "A case similar to that of slaveholders in the Confederate States. And those not in the elite group will some of them aspire to join it over the course of time, and thus support it even without presently enjoying its benefits."

"Benefits?" Gabe Hamilton let out a derisive guffaw. "Have you ever *seen* most of these Mormon women, Mr. Lincoln? You ask me— not that anybody did—taking 'em is an act of charity."

Like the residential blocks, the central business district of Salt Lake City boasted avenues lined with trees. The buildings back of those trees were modern enough, and included several fine-looking hotels.

Ahead loomed what looked like an enormous Gothic cathedral, about three fourths of the way to completion. "That would be the famousMormonTemple ?"Lincoln asked, pointing.

"That's right."Hamilton nodded. "And that long dome there— the one that'd look handsomer if the wall and the trees didn't hide its lines— that's the Tabernacle, where they worship. They don't think small, do they?"

"No,"Lincoln allowed. "Many things may be said of them, but not thinking small."

From the window of his hotel room,Lincoln could look out at the Tabernacle and theTemple . On scaffolding that seemed hardly thicker than cobwebs, men tiny as ants against the granite bulk of the latter laboured to bring Brigham Young's grandiose vision one day closer to completion.

Lincolnhad just finished unpacking when someone knocked on the door. When he opened it, he found a handsome young man in a dignified suit standing in the hallway. "Mr. Lincoln, President Taylor presents his compliments, and hopes you will be free to take supper with him this evening at seven o'clock," the youngster said. "If that is convenient to you, sir, I will come by with a carriage at about half past six, to convey you to his home."

"President Taylor?" For a moment, the only president by that name who came toLincoln 's mind was Zachary, now thirty years dead. Then he remembered where he was. "The head of your church, you mean?"

"Yes, sir, of course." The emissary had probably learned of Zachary Taylor in school, but John Taylor was the living reality for him.

"Tell him I thank him for the invitation, and I shall be pleased to see him at the hour he named." For the life of him,Lincoln could not see why the spiritual leader of the Latter-Day Saints wanted to meet with him, but what he did not show to the young messenger, that worthy would not guess. And his own ignorance and curiosity would be relieved soon enough.

As promised, the bright young man came by the hotel in a handsome buggy at six-thirty. The journey to John Taylor's home took a little

less than half an hour. The home itself, or at least the central portion of it, would not have looked out of place inChicago orPittsburgh : it was a two-story building, brilliantly whitewashed, with a slate roof. Added to that central portion, though, were enough wings for several butterflies, each, no doubt, housing a separate portion of the Mormon president's extended and extensive family. Poplars, maples, and grape vines surrounded the house, and ivy climbed up the front wall.

WhenLincoln knocked at the front door, a man of about his own age opened it. "Come in, sir," he said in an accent that showed he'd been born inEngland . "I am John Taylor; it is a pleasure to meet you." His hair, his eyebrows, and the beard growing along the angle of his jaw and under his chin were all snowy white. He habitually pursed his lips, which made his mouth look narrow and bloodless; his deep-set eyes, very blue, seemed to have seen more sorrows than joys.Lincoln understood that. He would have said the same of himself.

He looked around with no small curiosity. The central portion of the house seemed no more unusual within than without: the furniture was comfortable without being lavish; bookshelves lined many walls; the knickknacks and gewgaws on tables, the pictures on the walls, were the sort any minister might have had.

Nor was the dining room in any way strange. AsLincoln sat down,Taylor said, "I fear I can offer you only water or milk with your meal, for I have no tea or coffee or liquor in the house."

"Water will do,"Lincoln said.

They talked of small things during supper.Taylor did not offer to introduce the girl—she was about sixteen—who brought bread and butter and beefsteaks and potatoes and squash in from the kitchen.

Maybe she was a servant. Maybe she was a daughter. She didn't look much like him, but she might have favored her mother. Maybe she was a wife.Lincoln did his best to put that unappealing thought (not that the girl herself was unappealing, in spite of what Gabe Hamilton had said about Mormon women) out of his mind.

After she had cleared away the last of the dishes, the Mormon president said, "When you next communicate with President Blaine, sir, I hope you will convey to him that the line the U.S. government has taken here makes it more difficult than it might otherwise be for us to support that government with our full power in the event of a collision with the Confederate States."

"I have no notion when I shall be in touch with Mr. Blaine again,"Lincoln answered truthfully.

John Taylor coughed. "Please, sir, I know you may not love the faith I follow, but that I follow it docs not make me a child or a fool. Can it be a coincidence that the one former Republican president of the United States comes to Deseret—Utah, if you'd rather—at the same time as the present Republican president is leading the country toward war with the CSA? For what other purpose could you be here than to examine our loyalty in the event of a conflict?"

"I was invited here to speak to the working men of this Territory on ways in which they can hope to better their lot,"Lincoln said, again truthfully.

"A plausible pretext, I don't deny,"Taylor said, seeming intent on finding deviousness whether it was there or not. "The timing, however, makes me doubt it conveys the whole story of your visit. Be that as it may, do please tell President Blaine that, since he seems to be continuing the longstandingU.S. policy of attempting to suppress our institutions, some of our number wonder if continued allegiance to theUnited States be worth the cost. All we have ever sought is to be left alone, to practice our own ways as we think best."

"If you will recall, President Taylor, that was also the rallying cry of the Confederate States during the war,"Lincoln answered. "Your people were loyal then—conspicuously loyal. I note also, whether you care to believe it or not, that I have no influence to speak of on President Blaine." Once again, that was true.Blaine did his best not to remember that he and Lincoln were members of the same party.

"Come, come." Having dismissed the truth with two words,Taylor went back to the point he had been making before: "Unlike the case of the Confederacy, our practices have the consent of all those involved in them. We seek to impose them on no one, but the United States have continually laboured to subvert them, the more so since the railroads have brought such an influx of Gentiles into our homeland. Do you wonder at our resentment, sir?"

Lincolnthought again of that young girl. *Could* she have been a wife? Taylor 's public face was the image of decorum. What did he do in private, in this great rambling boardinghouse of a home? That question, and others like it, echoed through the minds of ordinary Americans when they thought of Mormonism.

He shrugged. In any case, it was an irrelevance. "If you like, President Taylor, I shall pass on to President Blaine what you say. I fear I cannot promise that he will take any special notice of it. As I told you, I am not a man he is in the habit of heeding."

"He would be well advised to do so in this instance," John Taylor said. "We left theUnited States once, to come here toUtah . The borders of theUSA then followed us west. We cannot emigrate again, not physically, yet we must be able to practice our religion unimpeded." The light from the kerosene lamps filled his face with harsh shadows.

"I very much hope that is not a threat, sir,"Lincoln said.

The sockets ofTaylor 's eyes were shrouded in darkness. "So do I," he said. "So do I."

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"General Stuart! General Stuart! Telegram fromRichmond , General Stuart!" At a dead run, a messenger came from the telegraph office, waving the flimsy sheet of paper that bore the message.

"Thank you, Bryce." From the runner's tone, Stuart guessed what the telegram said before he read it.

When he did, he nodded to himself. The day had come later than it should have, but was at last at hand.

Major Horatio Sellers came up to Stuart. "Is it what we've been hoping it will be, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"That's exactly what it is, Major," Stuart answered. "We are to enter and occupy the Mexican provinces ofChihuahua andSonora , the movement to proceed on the outline already at hand and to commence at sunrise on Tuesday, the fourteenth of June."

"Three days from now," his aide-de-camp said, his voice thoughtful. A satisfied expression made his heavy features seem almost benignant. "We'll have no trouble meeting that deadline, since we've been ready to go for most of the past month."

"Anyone wants to know my view of the matter, we should have moved the day we had the troops in place," Stuart said. "We've wasted all this time trying to keep the damnyankees sweet about what we're doing, but when you come right down to it, what we do in our own territory

—which this is now—and in our relations with the Empire of Mexico is our business and nobody else's."

Sellers looked north and west, towardLas Cruces , across the international border inNew MexicoTerritory . "What do you suppose Lieutenant Colonel Foulke would have to say about that?" he said, and then changed verb tenses: "What do you suppose Lieutenant Colonel Foulkc *will* have to say about that?"

"Did I not make myself clear, Major?" Stuart said. "I don't care what Foulke or any other Yankee has to say about what we do on our territory. And if theUnited States choose to resent our actions with weapons in hand, they are welcome to make the effort, but I doubt they will have a friendly reception here or anywhere else along our common frontier."

"Sir, do you really think they would be stupid enough to fight a war with us over this?" Sellers asked.

"Don't they know we could lick 'em by ourselves, but odds are we won't have to?"

"We walked away from theUnited States the last time they put a Black Republican in the White House, and they fought to try to hold us to an allegiance we could stand no more," Stuart answered. "Now they have another Republican president, and there's every sign they're feeling frisky again. I hope they act sensibly; having seen one war, I don't care to see another one. But their politicians haven't seen the elephant—all they've done is talk about it. They'd be wiser if they knew more." He shrugged. "Be that as it may, we have our orders, and we are going to carry them out. Go issue the commands that will get the occupation forces ready to commence their movements at the required time, and also the orders for the infantry and artillery that will stay behind to defendEl Paso in case theUnited States do decide to be foolish."

"Yes, sir." Sellers started to hurry away.

"Wait," Stuart said. His aide-de-camp paused and looked back. The commander of the Military District of the Trans-Mississippi grinned at him. "However this works out, Major, it's going to be fun."

Sunday evening, Stuart was summoned to the bridge spanning theRio Grande . At its midpoint, precisely at the border between theConfederateStates and the Empire of Mexico, stood Colonel Enrique Gutierrez, commander of the Mexican garrison in Paso del Norte. His

uniform, of the French pattern Maximilian's men favored, was far brighter and shinier than the plain butternut Stuart wore.

Gutierrez, a lean, saturnine man, spoke good English, which was fortunate, because Stuart had only a handful of words of Spanish. "1 have just received word, General, that the arrangements long under discussion are now complete," the Mexican colonel said. "Accordingly, on the day following tomorrow my men shall withdraw from these provinces."

"That is when we intend to enterChihuahua andSonora , yes," Stuart said. "I am glad the news has reached you fromMexico City . We do not want to come as invaders; the Confederate States are pleased at the good relations we enjoy with the Empire of Mexico." Given the muddle in which Maximilian's government commonly found itself, for Gutierrez to have been only thirty-six hours late in getting the word showed uncommon efficiency.

"I am glad of this," Gutierrez said politely. He didn't show whatever he was thinking. He was, Stuart knew, a pretty fair soldier, and couldn't have been happy to serve a regime so feckless that it had to sell off pieces of the country to pay its bills. After a moment, he went on, "I have a question: as we move back toward territory that will remain under our control, shall we also take with us the city guards who maintain order in the streets?"

"No," Stuart said. "My orders are to class them as police—as officers of the civilian government—not as soldiers. They will go right on doing their jobs until and unless our own government makes changes hereabouts."

"Muy bien. "Gutierrez nodded. He took a deep breath. "Speaking for myself, General Stuart, and as a man, I will say that I would sooner see these provinces pass to the Confederate States, which paid before occupying them, than to theUnited States , which invaded my country and only then paid."

Stuart thought it wiser not to mention that Stonewall Jackson and some other veterans in Confederate service had fought for theUSA during the Mexican War. "Thank you," seemed safer. Colonel Gutierrez snapped off a salute, spun on his heel, and walked back toward the fort he would control for another day and a half.

That Tuesday morning, like most June days inEl Paso , dawned bright and clear and hot. As soon as the sun rose, Jeb Stuart led his infantry

and cavalry and rumbling cannons toward and then onto the bridge.

He did not stop at the midpoint, but kept going till his horse's hooves thudded on the gray-brown dirt at the southern end:Chihuahua was now as much Confederate soil as wasTexas .

A red, white, and green Mexican flag still flew on a pole at the southern end of the bridge. Colonel Gutierrez waited there with a last squad of soldiers in ornate uniforms. Politely, Stuart took off his hat and saluted the Mexican flag. Honor satisfied, Gutierrez barked orders in Spanish. Two of his men ran the flag down the pole for the last time and reverently folded it.

At Stuart's command, a couple of Confederate soldiers raised the Stars and Bars over Paso del Norte and, by extension, over all ofChihuahua andSonora . Polite as a priest, Colonel Gutierrez saluted the new flag as General Stuart had saluted the old. If the Mexican colonel's eyes were unusually bright and moist, Stuart had no intention of remarking on it.

From Paso del Norte, the road ran almost due west, bending only slightly toward the south as it took advantage of the break in the mountains. That meant it stayed close to the border with theUnited States .

Stuart didn't care for the course the geography dictated. Neither did Major Sellers. "All I can say, sir," he remarked, "is that it's a good thing New Mexico Territory is just about as empty as Chihuahua here."

"I agree, Major," Stuart said. "The logistics are poor for both sides in this part of the world." As he had when first learning he would have to move troops into this newly Confederate territory, he sighed. "If General Sibley had been able to keep his men in food and munitions during the war, New Mexico would be ours now, and our worries would be gone—or, at least, farther north."

The country west of the mountains was even more unabashedly desert than that to the east. Saguaro cactuses stood close by the road and far away, their cigar-shaped bodies and angular, sometimes up-thrust arms putting Stuart in mind of giant green men surprised by bandits. The Fifth Cavalry Regiment seemed peculiarly at home in that harsh terrain, even if it did have to travel a bit apart from the rest. It was most often known as the Fifth Camelry, being mounted on ships of the desert rather than horses.

Jefferson Davis had introduced camels to the Southwest asU.S.

secretary of war before the War of Secession. The Fifth, at first stocked with beasts captured wild in the desert, had done good work against the Comanches, showing up in places its troopers could never have reached on horseback.

Here and there, wherever there was water, tiny towns punctuated the route: Janos; Agua Prieta right across the border from the equally sleepy hamlet ofDouglas,New Mexico ; Cananea; Imuris. At Imuris, Stuart detached one regiment of infantry and one of cavalry and ordered them south toHermosillo . To the cavalry commander, Colonel L. Tiernan Brien, who was senior to the infantry regiment's colonel, he said, "The occupation being peaceful thus far, I am not sending so large a force to the interior of this province as originally contemplated. I expect you to split off what part of it you deem necessary for garrisoning Guaymas on the coast and send that portion of your forces there."

"Yes, sir," Brien said. He had served under Stuart since the war, having led a regiment of state troops in thePennsylvania campaign. "If the Mexicans do choose to give us trouble, though, we probably won't be able to do much about it, especially if you're keeping all the artillery for yourself."

"I understand that, Colonel," Stuart answered. "It is, I believe, a good gamble. Colonel Gutierrez may not have loved what his government did, but he accepted it like a soldier and a man. By all the signs, the same will hold true inHermosillo and Guaymas as well. The Mexicans in these little villages haven't tried to resist us in any way; all they've done is stare."

"Well, the camels likely have something to do with that, but it's true enough, heaven knows," Brien said.

He waved out over the barren landscape. "If you keep most of your men so far forward, sir, will you be able to provision them?"

"I certainly hope so," Stuart said. "I'm given to understandHermosillo is in the center of a farming district.

Whatever supplies you can send north will be welcome, the more so if the route west fromEl Paso is ...

interrupted."

"Yes, sir," Tiernan Brien said again. Most of two decades of garrison

duty had laid a heavy patina of routine over the dashing young trooper he'd once been, but, like a lot of the other veteran officers in Stuart's force, he was starting to shine up once more. "By your dispositions, sir, you really do think the Yankees will try to make good on their bluster."

"No, Colonel, truth to tell, I don't," Stuart answered. "But I am going to act as if I did. If the United States are foolish enough to contest this annexation, my judgment is that they pose a greater threat to us than any disaffected Mexicans. That being so, I intend to keep the bulk of my forces where they can best respond to any moves by theUSA ." He grinned. "My dispositions reflect my disposition, which is cautious."

Colonel Brien smiled, showing teeth stained brown by the plug of tobacco that swelled one cheek. "Beg your pardon, sir, but we've been soldiering together for a long time, and I don't reckon cautious is a word I'd put together with your name up till now."

"Maybe I'm getting old," Stuart said. Then he grinned again, and barked a couple of times. "Or maybe I'm learning a new trick."

"Now you're talking, sir," Tiernan Brien said enthusiastically.

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"Wake up, Sam." Alexandra Clemens nudged her husband, then nudged him harder when he didn't move. "It's half past seven."

Reluctantly, Samuel Clemens pried his eyes open. His nostrils twitched. "You're an angel in human form, my dear. I say that, you understand, only because you've already got the coffee boiling."

"You'd throw me in the street if I didn't." Alexandra owned—and honed—a wit that could rival her husband's, and wasn't shy about using it. It was all the more effective because she looked so mild and innocent: wide, fair face; blue eyes mild as milk till the devil came out in them; golden hair that, let down for the night, spilled over her shoulders and onto her white nightdress so that, but for wings, she really did have something of an angelic aspect at the moment.

When Sam, still in his own nightshirt, came downstairs for that coffee, his son Orion leaped into his lap and almost made the cup and contents end up there, too. Not a thing angelic about Orion; sometimes all that kept Sam from strangling him was remembering he'd been even worse at the same age. "Why aren't you busy getting

ready for school?" Sam demanded.

Orion withered him with a glance. " 'Cause it's closed for the summer," he said triumphantly.

"I know that," his father answered. "But if you were, you'd be out of my hair." With six-year-old gusto, Orion stuck out his tongue.

Ophelia, who was four, came into the dining room a little later: of the family, she was fondest of sleeping late. She looked like her mother, with a child's sweetness thrown in for good measure. Walking up to her father, she took his big hands in her little ones and said, "Hello, you old goat."

"Hello, yourself," Sam said gravely. However much Ophelia looked like Alexandra, she behaved more like Orion, which horrified her mother and—most of the time—amused her father. "If you live, you'll go far, my dear." Sam tousled her golden curls, then added, in meditative tones, "Of course, the penitentiary is pretty far from here."

Ophelia, for once, missed the joke. So did Orion. Alexandra, who didn't, sent her husband a severe look he ignored.

Sometimes getting out of the house onTurk Street and heading over to the *Morning Call* offices on Market felt more like escape than anything else. Despite going uphill and down, Sam enjoyed the walk.

Going uphill was harder work for heavily laden horses. Teamsters' whips cracked over and sometimes on the backs of the straining beasts. Then, brakes squealing on the wagons they pulled, the horses had to ease the loads downhill.

Fifteen minutes after kissing his wife good-bye, Clemens walked into the office. When he got there, Clay Herndon leaped at him with almost as much terrifying enthusiasm as Orion had shown. Herndon, though, had an excuse any newspaperman would have forgiven: the telegram he waved in Clemens' face. "You've got to see this!" he shouted.

"How can I argue with logic like that?" Sam took the thin sheet of paper and rapidly read through it.

When he was done, he nodded a couple of times, then said, "A lot of people must be surprised today: everybody who didn't thinkBlaine knew a four-syllable word, for instance."

"If he only knows one, he picked the right one to know," retorted Herndon, a resolute Republican. "I'd say it gives us the headline for the next edition, wouldn't you?"

"'Ultimatum'?" Clemens said. "Now that you mention it, yes. If ever a word screamed for seventy-two-point type, that's the one." He took off his derby and hung it on the hat tree just inside the door. As soon as he got to his desk, he slid off his jacket and draped it over the back of his chair. Then he removed the studs from his cuffs, put them in a vest pocket, and rolled up his sleeves.

"Ready to give it a go, are you?" Herndon said.

His tone was mildly mocking, but Sam ignored that. "You bet I am," he said. "Give me that wire again, will you? I want to make sure I have everything right." He paused to light a cigar, then reread the telegram. "Always a good day when the editorial comes up and whimpers in your face, begging to be set at liberty."

"If you say so, Sam," Herndon replied. "Makes me glad I'm nothing but a humble scribe."

"Get over to City Hall, scribe," Clemens said. "Get the mayor's reaction. In other words, give me the statement that goes with this." He donned an expression somewhere between dumbfoundment and congenital idiocy. The *San Francisco Morning Call* did not love Mayor Adolph Sutro. It was mutual.

Herndon struck a pose that might have been a politician on the stump or a man waiting with concentrated urgency to use the privy. " T am opposed with every fiber of my being to the war that may come, and I expect us to gain great and glorious triumph in it,' " he declaimed. "There. Now I don't need to make the trip."

Sam blew cigar smoke at him. "Go on, get out of here. His Honor might have got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, and if he did he'll say he's all for the war but calculates we'll take a licking. God forbid we should misquote him. He wouldn't notice, since he can't remember on Tuesday what he said the Friday before—figures that's the papers' job—but some of his friends—well, cronies; a creature like that's not likely to have friends—just might."

Snickering, Herndon grabbed his hat, slung his jacket over his shoulder—it was another of those seasonlessSan Francisco days, not quite warm, not quite cool—and departed. Clemens drew on the cigar again, absentmindedly tapped its ash into a brass tray, and set it back

in the corner of his mouth. He knew he was liable to forget about it once he started writing.

Pen scraped across paper.

President Blaine has told the nation and the world that, if the Confederate States do not withdraw their soldiers—soldiers they deployed without the consent of the United States, and against the express wishes of the same—from the provinces of Chihuahua and Sonora within ten days, he will ask Congress to declare a state of war in existence between the United States and the Confederate States.

He fails to include the Empire of Mexico in his ultimatum, which is no doubt only an oversight on his part.

After all, leaving the disputed provinces out of the bargain, theUnited States do still abut Maximilian's dominions where our Upper California touches his Lower, whose cactuses arc every bit as dire a threat to theUnited States as any now sprouted inSonora .

As noted before in this space, acquiring Sonora and Chihuahua represents—or, at least, may represent in the future—a new access of strength for the Confederate Sates, as did their purchase of Cuba a few years ago, a purchase to which the United States consented without a murmur. But we were then under a Democratic administration, and a Congress likewise Democratic: a party whose attitude toward the Confederacy has always been that the blamed thing would not be there if anybody had listened to them in the beginning and patted the then-Southern states on the head and told them what good boys they were until they eventually believed it and went to sleep in place of seceding, and has dealt with them since the War of Secession as if they were so many percussion caps filled with fulminate, and liable to explode if stepped on or dropped.

By contrast, the Confederate States are to the Republican Party—the phrase "a nigger in the woodpile"

is tempting, but no; we shall refrain—an illegitimate child in the family of nations, and so to be deprived of plum pudding every Christmas Eve. Well, the illegitimate child is now above eighteen years of age, and a d—d big b—d, now suddenly the bigger by two provinces gulped down in lieu of the plums once denied it. No wonder, then, that President Blaine is in the way of seeing things red.

The question before the house, however, is—or rather, ought to be, the failure to understand the difference between the two being one of

the chief causes of boiler explosions, marital discord, and drawing in the hope of filling an inside straight—not whether the United States have the right to be displeased at the transaction just concluded between the Confederacy and Mexico, but whether the transaction presents them with a legitimate *ca-sus belli.* This we beg leave to doubt. The suspicion lingers that, had the United States offered a brass spittoon and a couple of candles' value above the price the Confederacy agreed to pay him, the Stars and Stripes would now be flying above Chihuahua and Sonora—and maybe even above the dangerous cacti of Lower California as well—and there would be a great wailing and gnashing of teeth from Richmond, with every politician in Washington sitting back as sleek and contented as the dog that stole the leg of lamb out of the roasting pan.

For better or worse—more like, for better *and* worse—Maximilian's sale of Sonora and Chihuahua strikes us as having been peaceful and voluntary enough to keep anyone sniffing around the deal from gagging at the smell, which in today's diplomacy marks it as something of a prodigy. We find it dashed uncomfortable to share a continent with a people who did not care to share a country with us, but we had best get used to it, because the Confederate States show no signs of packing up and moving to the mountains of Thibet. While we may regret the sale, we have not the right to seek to reverse it by force of arms. We may have been outsmarted, but we were not insulted, and being outsmarted is not reason enough to go to war—if it were, the poor suffering world should never have known its few brief—too brief!—moments when the bullets were not flying somewhere.

He had hardly laid down his pen before Clay Herndon came back into the office, slamming the door behind him. "Sam, have you got whatever you're going to say ready to set in type?" he demanded. "News of the ultimatum is already on the street. If we don't get into print in a hurry, it'll outstrip us. The Ba *ha Califomian* is beating the war drum, loud as it can." He threw himself into his chair and began to write furiously.

"Yes, I'm ready." Clemens exhibited the sheets he'd just finished. "What did the mayor say?"

"Sutro?" Herndon didn't look up from his scribbles. "The way he talks, we'll be inRichmond tomorrow,Atlanta the day after, andNew Orleans the day after that. Huzzah for our side!" He sounded imperfectly delighted with the mayor's view of the world.

"You were aBlaine man last November, Clay," Sam reminded him. "Why aren't you over at the *Californian,* banging the war drum yourself?"

"Me? I'd love to take the Rebs down a peg," Herndon said, "but Blaine's going at it like a bull in a china shop, trying to make up for eighteen years in a couple of months. There." He threw down the pen and thrust paper at Clemens. "Here's mine. Let's see what you wrote."

Sam scrawled a few changes on Herndon's copy; Herndon used adverbs the way a bad cook used spices—on the theory that, if a few were good, more were better. In spite of that, he said, "Good story."

It convicted Sutro of being a pompous fool with his own words, the best way to do it.

"Thanks. You could have said 'a plague on both your houses' and let it go at that," Herndon said. "I'm glad you didn't, though. This is more fun."

The door flew open. Edgar Leary rushed in. Somebody had knocked a big dent in his hat, which he hadn't noticed yet. "They're hanging Longstreet in effigy at the corner of Market and Geary," the youngster said breathlessly. Then he took off the derby, and exclaimed in dismay. "The whole town's going crazy." He held out the hat as if it were evidence.

"Write the piece. Write it fast," Sam said. He took the pages of his editorial back from Herndon.

"Sounds like they're not going to listen to me again." He sighed. "Why am I not surprised?"

Outside, somebody emptied a six-shooter, the cartridges going off in quick succession. Sam hoped whoever it was, was shooting in the air.

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Newsboys onRichmond street corners waved copies of the *Whig* and the *Examiner,* the *Dispatch* and the *Enquirer* and the *Sentinel,* in the air. They were doing a roaring trade; lawyers and mechanics, ministers and farmers, drummers and teamsters and even the occasional colored man who had his letters crowded round them and shoved pennies at them.

Whichever paper the boy on any one corner touted, the main headline was the same: *"Ultimatum runs out today* !" After that, imagination ran riot: "P *resident Longstreet to answer latest Yankee outrage!* " "

Navy said ready to put to sea! " " *Navy said to be already at sea!* " " *Troop movements inKentucky !* "

" *Yankees said to be concentrating inMissouri !* " And one word, like a drumbeat: " *War!" "War!"*

"War! "

General Thomas Jackson, whose business was war, rode through the clamor as if through rain or snow or shellfire or any other minor distraction. "We'll whip 'em, won't we, Stonewall?" a fat man in a butcher's bloodstained apron shouted to him.

"We are not at war with theUnited States , nor have theUnited States declared war against us,"Jackson answered. He'd said the same thing any number of times since leaving the War Department for yet another journey to the presidential residence. "I hope they do not. Peace is too precious to be casually discarded like an outgrown suit of clothes."

That wasn't what the butcher wanted to hear. "We'll whip 'em!"

Jacksonguided his horse past the fat man without saying anything more. He got asked the same question, or a variant upon it, three more times in the next half block. He gave the same answer each time, and began to wish he hadn't started answering at all.

The crush of people thinned as he rode up Shockoe Hill, away fromCapitol Square and the center of town.Jackson let out a small, involuntary sigh of relief: he did not care for being trapped in crowds, and was often happiest when most solitary. Duty, however, came above happiness. Duty came above everything.

One of the sentries who saluted him said, "Reckon we'll lick them damn yankecs good—ain't that right, sir?"

To a soldier,Jackson spoke a bit more openly than to a civilian on the street who might, for all he knew, have been aU.S. spy: "If we have to fight them, Corporal, rest assured we shall beat them."

U.S. Minister John Hay's landau was tied up in front of the residence. Hay, these days, visited Longstreet as often asJackson did, and on related business: if the minister's talks with the Confederate president

succeeded, Longstreet and Jackson would no longer need to confer so much. Hay's driver sat waiting patiently for his principal, reading a copy of the *RichmondWhig.* He nodded toJackson , then went back to the paper.

Moxley Sorrel escortedJackson to the waiting room outside Longstreet's office. "Mr. Hay has come to obtain the president's reply to the ultimatum," the chief of staff said in a near whisper.

"There can be only one response to that piece of impertinence,"Jackson growled. Sorrel nodded. The two men did not love each other, but both saw the interests of the Confederate States in the same light.

Jacksonstarted to say something more, but the door to President Longstreet's office came open. Out stalked John Hay, his handsome face set and hard.Jackson rose politely to greet him. Hay gave a cold half bow. "Sir, I am forced to the conclusion that your president is more inclined to hear your counsel than mine." Moxley Sorrel came over to lead him out to the door. He shook off the chief of staff. "No thank you, sir. I can find my own way." Off he went. Had he owned a tail, it would have bristled.

"Come in, General," President Longstreet called through the open door.

"Thank you, Your Excellency,"Jackson said. He closed the door after himself, then sat down, stiff as usual, in the chair to which Long-street waved him. "By that, sir, am I to gather that you have told theUnited States they have no business meddling in our internal affairs?"

James Longstreet nodded. He looked pleased with himself. "You are to gather precisely that, General.

Had I told him anything else, I have no doubt I should be impeached, convicted, and removed from office by this time next week—and I would vote for my own conviction, too. And I in turn gather that we are in full readiness to meet any emergency that may arise?"

He asked the same question every time he sawJackson . As always, the general-in-chief of the Confederate Army nodded. "Yes, Mr. President, all regular units arc deployed close to theU.S. frontier save those engaged in occupying our new provinces, and General Stuart has done more than anticipate along those lines himself." He briefly summarized Stuart's deployment for Longstreet, who nodded, and then continued, "And we are ready to accept, clothe, arm, train, and deploy volunteers as that may become necessary."

"I fear it will come to that," Longstreet said. "I do not fear the result, you understand, only its being required of us."

"Yes, Your Excellency. I understand."Jackson glanced toward the map on the wall to his right. "As soon as the wires inform our forces that the United States have been so misguided as to declare war on us, we shall strike them a blow that—"

"Wait," President Longstreet said, andJackson obediently halted. Longstreet looked over at the map, too. "General, I must make one thing clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding: regardless of the existence of a declaration of war on the part of theUnited States , they, not we, must strike the first blow in the ensuing conflict. Must, I say, sir. *Must."*

Jackson's eyebrows shot upwards. "Mr. President, do I have to remind you how rash it is to yield the enemy the initiative, even for a moment? Had General Lee been content to stand on the defensive, I fear we should have been defeated in the War of Secession." To cap his point, he essayed a small joke:

"Were this one of theUnited States , sir, you might even find yourself a Republican these days."

"From which fate, God deliver me," Longstreet said. "General Jackson, I do not deny for a moment the general applicability of the rule you state. But other factors militate against it in this particular instance. Do you remember how artfully Abe Lincoln manoeuvreed us into firing the first shots atFortSumter , thereby putting us in the wrong in the eyes of the world?"

"It came right in the end,"Jackson said.

"So it did, but it made our task more difficult." Longstreet plucked at his beard. "I want us to appear unmistakably as the wronged party in the eyes of the world over this affair, General. Is that sufficiently clear, or must I explain myself further?"

Instead of asking for further explanation,Jackson went into one of his intense studies. He was unsure how long he remained in it: not too long, for President Longstreet didn't seem annoyed. "I believe I understand, sir. You particularly desire us to appear the wronged party in the eyes ofBritain andFrance ."

"Just so." Longstreet nodded. "We must show them we have done

everything in our power to remain at peace with theUnited States , and that theUnited States thrust war on us nonetheless."

Jacksonmade a sour face. "This despiteBritain 's having sent soldiers toCanada to reinforce the Dominion's own army? This despiteFrance 's having pledged support for Maximilian, who is her creature? This despite both nations' having moved naval forces in both the Atlantic and Pacific to stations from which they might more readily confront theUnited States ? This despite its being in the obvious interest of bothBritain andFrance to take theUSA down a peg? This despite most of the money Maximilian receives from the sale ofChihuahua andSonora 's going straight to the bankers inLondon andParis ? All these things are true, and yet we are still required not merely to show ourselves wronged, but to show ourselves blatantly wronged? Forgive me, Your Excellency, but I have trouble seeing any justice there."

"Objectively speaking, General, so do I," Longstreet said. "The problem we face—and an all but insuperable problem it has shown itself to be—is thatBritain andFrance do not and cannot view support for us as objectively as we should like. If they *can* find a reason not to move in concert with us, they *will* find it and take advantage of it."

"They are our allies,"Jackson said. "They have been our allies. They gain by remaining our allies. Why would they be so foolish?"

Longstreet looked at him without replying. It was almost a pitying look, the sort of look a mathematics instructor gave a scholar who could not for the life of him prove the Pythagorean theorem. It was a look that said, *This is why I am the president of the Confederate States and you remain nothing more than a soldier.* Jackson had never wanted to be anything more than a soldier. As a soldier, he could remain an honest man, and a godly one. He was unsure how much either word applied to James Longstreet these days. Longstreet, odds were, would die wealthy. What would become of him after that was another question.

And getting that sort of look from anyone, godly or not, rankled. The look said all the pieces lay in front of him, if only he would see them. After a moment, he did. "They deprecate property in Negro slaves to that great a degree, sir?"

"They do," Longstreet said. "They have my pledge to move an amendment to the Constitution requiring manumission and to support the amendment and as far as possible to anticipate it through legislative and executive action—and still they hesitate, not believing I

can accomplish what I have promised."

Jackson, who did not think it should be accomplished, said, "I do not see you manumitting your own slaves, Mr. President."

Now Longstreet's look was a frank and unmistakable glare.Jackson bore up under it, as he had borne up under worse, and from men he reckoned better. He realized, belatedly, that he had been less than diplomatic. That did not bother him, either: he *was* less than diplomatic. But then Longstreet said,

"General, on the successful conclusion of this war, I intend to set at liberty all of the Negroes now my property. I shall at that time urge other members of the executive branch of the government as a whole to do likewise, and hope my example will be emulated by private citizens as well."

"You are in earnest in this matter, sir,"Jackson said in no small surprise.

"1 am," Longstreet said. "I can look ahead and see the twentieth century, with machines performing much of the labour now done by swarms of niggers. What will those swarms do then? Work in factories at no wages, and depress the wages of white men? Become a drain on their present owners' purses? If we do not keep abreast of the times, they will smash us into the dust. And yet I see you have trouble believing me, and so do the illustrious ministers and governments of our allies. Thus our need to be irrefutably in the right in our dispute with theUSA ."

"Very well, sir,"Jackson said. "You have made both the issues involved here and your own resolve pertaining to them clearer in my mind than had previously been the case. It shall, of course, be as you say. Until the Yankees are the first to cry haro, we shall not let slip the dogs of war."

"By Godfrey, General, I didn't know they had you teaching English literature there at the Virginia Military Institute," Longstreet exclaimed. Both men laughed, more at ease with each other than they usually were.Jackson rose to go. Longstreet rose with him, came round the desk, and clapped him on the shoulder. "Wait," the president told him. "Wait until the Yankees hit us first—and then hit 'em hard."

Jackson's pale eyes glowed. "Yes, *sir!"*

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On the parade ground atFort Dodge,Kansas , Colonel George Custer walked curiously around the two newfangled weapons that had just arrived. "I've heard of these Gatling guns before," he remarked to his brother, "but I've never set eyes on one till now. The way I hear it, Gatling invented them about the time the . . . dashed Rebs were getting up intoPennsylvania , and he's been trying to sell them to the Army ever since. I wonder if I ought to be glad he finally turned the trick."

Major Tom Custer was giving the guns a dubious once-over, too. "Looks like aSpringfield was unfaithful with a cannon, and then went and had sextuplets."

"I thought I was the writer in the family," Custer said with jealousy mostly mock. The description fit. Six rifle-caliber barrels were mounted in a long brass body on a carriage that could have carried a field piece.

A separate ammunition limber like that which went with a field piece accompanied the Gatling, too. A crew of five served the weapons. Custer rounded on the artillery sergeant in charge of one gun. *"How* many rounds a minute do you say this thing can spit, Buckley?"

"Sir, when everything is going the way it ought to, about two hundred," the sergeant answered.

"When everything is going the way it ought to," Custer echoed. "And how often is that?" He didn't really want an answer. Scowling, he went on, "Too many gadgets in the world already, if anyone wants to know. We should still be fighting with sabers—then we could tell who the real men are."

His brother pointed to the blockhouses at each corner of the fort. "If we mount these opposite each other, Autie, we could rake the plain around the fort if the Kiowas come calling—or if the Confederates do."

"Maybe," Custer said.Fort Dodge was on highest alert, awaiting a report that President Blaine's declaration of war on the CSA had passed both houses of Congress. Custer scowled. "Wouldn't put it past either the redskins or the Rebs to sneak up here and do us dirt while we're still supposed to be at peace."

Sergeant Buckley said, "Sir, give me good horses for my teams and I'll keep up with any cavalry you like. That's what these guns are for."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Custer said, careless of wounding the Gatling gunner's pride. "For now, we'll leave these white elephants right where they are. Maybe we'll come up with a notion for getting some good out of them." By the way he spoke, he didn't believe it for a minute.

Sentries paced the walkways on the walls ofFort Dodge , dull routine most days but vitally urgent now.

They stared out over the prairie in all four directions. If those on the south-facing wall were particularly alert, Custer did not sec how he could blame them. He worried, though he did his best not to show it.

Against the Kiowas, the fort would stand forever. What a battery of Confederate horse artillery might do to the walls, though, was something else again.

He stalked back toward his quarters. He had a suite of rooms inFort Dodge , where his troopers made do with a footlocker and a straw tick on an iron bed with wooden slats in the barracks. From the walls of his parlors, the heads of a buffalo, two antelopes, and a coyote stared at him with glass eyes. He'd shot all the animals and mounted all the heads, too; practice had made him a fine taxidermist.

A raccoon stared at him from the back of the sofa. It was holding an egg in its handlike paws. The cook, a redheaded Irish girl named Sal, came running in from the kitchen and glared first at the animal and then at Custer. "That is the thievingest creature I've ever seen, and why you keep it 1 cannot be guessing," she snapped.

"Stonewall? He's a fine fellow." Custer's voice held more indulgence then he commonly showed his men.

He'd raised the raccoon from an orphaned pup, and it had been with him longer than Sal. He couldn't keep cooks. They kept marrying soldiers or local civilians— and, if they were pretty, as Sal was, Libbie made a point of introducing them to every male around. Custer was friendly toward women other than his wife. Libbie sometimes thought he was too friendly.

Drawn by Sal's complaint about the coon, she came out of the bedroom: a short, plump, dark-eyed woman close to Custer's age. No matter how friendly he was to other women—and he was as friendly

as he could get away with—he loved her unreservedly. Now she advanced on the raccoon. "Give me the egg, Stonewall," she said, in tones that might have sent a regiment into battle. She was as firm of will as her husband; he sometimes wondered uneasily if she wasn't the smarter of the two of them.

Stonewall, however, instead of surrendering the egg, devoured it. Sal cursed the animal with fury and fluency. Custer laughed at the raccoon and at the cook both. Libbie scowled impartially at beast, servant, and husband. She did not care to have her will thwarted, even by a raccoon.

"Get back to work, Sal," she snapped. Still muttering, the Irish girl returned to the kitchen. Custer watched her hips work as she walked. Libbie watched him watching. "Have to find her a man," she muttered.

"What's that, dear?" Custer asked, recalled to himself.

"Nothing at all, Autie," his wife answered sweetly. "What do you think of those new guns that came in earlier this morning?"

"Not much," he said, and was about to go into detail—Libbie loved details of any sort—when an orderly burst into his quarters and thrust a telegram at him. He unfolded it and read it out loud: "'As of this date, state of war exists betweenUnited States , Confederate States. Prosecute with all vigor. Victory shall be ours. Rosecrans.'" He let out a war whoop a Kiowa would have been proud to claim, then ran out into the parade ground, shouting for the trumpeters to blow Assembly. The men rushed to form up from their drills and fatigues, excitement on their faces—most of them guessed what the unusual summons meant.

When Custer read the telegram to the assembled force, the men cheered. Loudest were the shouts from the officers and the veteran sergeants and corporals: men who remembered the War of Secession and wanted revenge for it.

"We'll kick the Rebs from here to theRio Grande !" Tom Custer yelled. Then he remembered the annexation ofSonora andChihuahua that had brought on the war. "And after that, we'll kick 'em another fifty miles!"

"That's right!" Custer said. "Nobody casts scorn on theUnited States of America ! Nobody, do you hear me? I've waited almost twenty years for this moment to come, and at last it's here." His voice quivered with emotion. More cheers rose. "For now, dismissed. Soon, we start getting our own back."

Buzzing with talk, the men returned to their duties. Tom walked up to his brother. "Autie," he said, "I've got an idea how to get some real use out of those Gatling guns. If it's war, all the better."

Custer sent the weapons a mistrustful look. "I don't think they're good for much, myself. If you want to try to convince me I'm wrong, go ahead."

Tom talked for ten minutes straight, illustrating his scheme with gestures and with sketches in the dust of the parade ground. Finishing, he said, "And, of course, I'll command the party. It's my notion; my neck is the one that should be on the line."

He spoke altogether matter-of-factly. George Custer, as brave a man as any, recognized a braver in his brother. He said, "No, I'll lead it. I won't send someone out with an untried weapon while I stay home safe. Lieutenant Colonel Crowninshield will do a perfectly fine job commanding the regiment while I'm gone. We'll leave at sunrise tomorrow."

Tom Custer's grin was enormous. "Yes, sir, Autie, sir!"

"Pick a dozen men to go with us," Custer said. "Oh, and make certain those guns have good horses pulling them, and the limbers, too. We'll see how they do as they head down toward the border. If they can't keep up, they're useless."

He briefed Casper Crowninshield on the patrols he wanted set out while he was away. The regiment's second-in-command looked horrified when he outlined what he would be doing, but said very little.

Either Custer would come back trailing clouds of glory, or he wouldn't come back at all. No matter which, carping wouldn't matter.

Custer, his brother, a dozen picked cavalry troopers, and the two Gatling guns and their crews rode out ofFort Dodge before the sun was up. As the fort shrank behind him, Custer laughed for joy. "No need to worry about that blasted international border, not any more," he said.

"That's right," his brother said exuberantly. "Only thing we need to worry about is running into a Rebel patrol coming to kick us in the slats before we can get down intoIndian Territory ."

Custer and one of the troopers rode out ahead as scouts to make sure that didn't happen. Without false modesty, Custer was sure he could

outride any of his companions except perhaps his brother. When they thought he couldn't hear, the men of the regiment called him Hard Ass. It didn't anger him; it made him proud. He glanced back over his shoulder at the Gatling guns. They were slowing the party, but not by much. Sergeant Buckley had had a good notion of what he was talking about.

On over theKansas prairie he rode. Here and there, farmhouses poked up from the flat terrain. Some were dugouts, with only chimneys and stovepipes above ground. Some were of sod blocks, some of wood, some—the most prosperous—of brick. Sod or wood or brick, all had something of a fortress look to them—squat and low, with small windows. In country vulnerable to Indian raids, that was safe and smart.

They camped on the prairie that night, boiling coffee, frying salt pork, and then frying soaked hardtack biscuits sprinkled with brown sugar in the grease from the meat. An occasional firefly winked to light, then out. Off in the distance, an owl hooted. Custer rolled himself in his blanket, stared up at the stars sprinkled like powdered sugar across the sky, and fell asleep almost at once.

It was still dark when he woke, but twilight was turning the eastern horizon gray. He shook his brother.

"Wake up, lazybones!" Tom groaned and thrashed. Custer laughed. He'd scored himself a point.

They passed intoIndian Territory —into Confederate territory—a little before noon. Custer let Sergeant Buckley and the Gatling guns catch up to him. "You pick your spot," he said. "You best know the requirements and capabilities of your weapons." The artillery sergeant nodded. Custer hoped the Gatlings *were* capable.

Toward evening, Buckley chose a gently rising little hillock with a commanding view in all directions. The party camped there for the night. When morning came, the Gatling crews stayed behind. Custer, his brother, and the cavalry troopers went out looking for streams, and for the Kiowas' villages they were likely to— were hoping to— find along such waterways.

They found cattle first. The Indians herded cattle these days, instead of hunting the nearly vanished buffalo. "At them!" Custer shouted. At them they went, whooping and waving their hats and shooting their carbines in the air. The cattle bellowed in terror and stampeded.

Custer whooped again, in sheer small-boy delight at having made an enormous confused mess.

A bullet made dirt spurt up, not too far from him. It hadn't come from any of his own men, but from one of the Kiowas who'd been tending the herd. Custer fired back, and missed—good shooting from horseback was next to impossible. He waved his men forward against the Indian herders. The outnumbered Kiowas fled. Their ponies, tails bound up in bright cloth, bounded over the prairie.

Custer knew they were leading him and his cavalrymen toward more of their comrades. He followed as eagerly as the Indians could have wanted. If he didn't stir up the hornets' nest, he wasn't doing his job.

His brother pointed off to the northwest. There, down by the bed of a creek, stood the big village to which the herders belonged. Tom Custer rode straight for it, hard as he could go. The rest of the cavalrymen, George Custer among them, pounded after him. "Stay away from the horses!" Custer shouted. "We don't want to stampede the horses." If they stampeded the horses, the Kiowas wouldn't be able to come after them. That was the idea. Custer hoped it was a good idea. One way or the other, the Gatlings would answer that.

Tom Custer rode right down what did duty for the village's main street, past dogs and children and squaws who all ran like the devil to get out of the way. Again, Custer followed his brother, past hide teepees painted with bears and bear tracks, past screaming women, past an old man who fired a pistol at him and missed from a range where he shouldn't have missed a mouse, let alone a man.

Out the other side of the village galloped the cavalrymen. Custer knew they'd just done a very Indian sort of thing: a wild dash that couldn't help but singe the Kiowas' pride. Behind him, warriors were rushing to their ponies. He fired a couple of rounds at them so they wouldn't get the idea they were doing exactly what he wanted.

He waved his little troop back to the cast, toward the hill on which the Gatlings waited. If he couldn't retrace his way across the plain, he and his men were dead. Somewhere between fifty and a hundred Kiowas were on their trail. The Indians had fresher horses and, thanks to the Confederates, rifles as good as his own.

"This is the one part of the business I don't fancy," Tom Custer said: "I don't like running, even for pretend."

In the chase, one of the cavalrymen slid out of the saddle. Another

trooper's horse went down, which meant the soldier was a dead man shortly thereafter. The cavalrymen, firing over their shoulders, hit two or three Indians and two or three horses.

After a couple of hours of hard riding one of the troopers pointed northeast. "There, sir!" Sure enough, there atop the little hill waited the two Gatling guns and their crews. Custer spurred toward them. The Kiowas came on after his men, shouting in high excitement. They saw the soldiers on the low hillock, too, but they also saw they still greatly outnumbered their foes.

The artillerymen at the Gatlings waved the troopers on. "At the crest of the hill, dismount as if for a last stand," Custer called to his riders. Maybe it would *be* a last stand. The Kiowas were close behind. Up the hill thundered the horses. Custer did his best to stay out of the Gatlings' line of fire, in case they opened up too soon. He reined his blowing, lathered mount to a halt and sprang down. A bullet snapped past him. He shouted to the gunners: "It's your show now, boys!"

Sergeant Buckley and the crew chief of the other Gatling, Sergeant Neufeld, swung the guns so they bore on the Kiowas. Then they began working the cranks at the rear of the weapons. The barrels revolved. As each one fired, it went around till another cartridge from the brass drum magazine atop the Gatling gun was chambered and discharged.

The noise was astonishing, like an enormous sheet of sailcloth being torn in two. The smoke from the black-powder rounds built a fogbank around the top of the hill. As a magazine went dry, the gun crews took it off and replaced it with a full one. When a barrel jammed, that gun went silent for a moment to clear a cartridge or clean away the worst of the fouling. But, for the most part, Buckley and Neufeld cranked and cranked and cranked.

Custer peered through the drifted smoke. The Kiowas might have run headlong into a stone fence.

They'd been in easy range before the Gatlings opened up, and they hadn't had a prayer. More than half their band, more than half the horses, lay still and dead in front of the two guns. The rest were riding off as fast as they could go. They were brave, but they hadn't been ready for what they'd just come up against. "God bless my soul," Custer said softly.

Sergeant Neufeld was also looking out through the smoke, but to the east. "Sir," he called to Custer,

"more riders. They look like Rebs, not Indians."

"Let 'em come, Sergeant." Custer's voice was gay. From no confidence in the Gatlings, he'd swung to the other extreme. "Plenty for everyone, isn't there?"

And the Confederates came. In their shoes, Custer would have done likewise. They had a company's worth of men. A couple of dozen Yankees on a no-account hilltop? Get rid of 'em and start the war in style. If the Rebels noticed the dead Kiowas, they paid them no heed.

They should have. As they came galloping toward Custer's little detachment, the Gatlings began their deadly ripping noise again. Troopers and horses went down as if scythed. Custer and his companions added the fire of their carbines to the mechanical murder the Gatling guns dealt out. Like the Kiowas, the Confederates, meeting weapons they hadn't imagined, broke and ran.

Custer walked over to Neufeld and slapped him on the back. Then he did the same with Buckley. "This may not be sporting," he said, "but it's no humbug."

Chapter4

Alfred Von Schlieffen rode toward the long bridge, the most important bridge fromWashington,D.C. , down into Confederate Virginia. He had no trouble making his way south from the German ministry: many, though far from all, of Washington's civilians had fled north when war broke out, and so traffic was less oppressive than it would have been before the crisis.

Boys still hawked newspapers on the street. From their frantic shouts, some U.S. officer named Custard—Schlieffen didn't think that could be right, but it was what he kept hearing—had singlehandedly massacred a division of Confederates and a whole tribe of Indians somewhere out beyond the Mississippi. In a leap of logic that escaped the German military attache, the war was as a result supposed to be as good as won.

As yet, the war had not made an appearance aroundWashington . The Confederate States could have pounded the capital of theUnited States to bits, but had not fired a shot hereabouts. Neither had localU.S. forces; despite big talk, President Blaine was proving more circumspect when it came to action.

But the Confederates had let it be known they were sending an officer across theLongBridge under flag of truce at noon today. Schlieffen noticed he was not the only military attache heading toward the bridge.

He nodded to Major Ferdinand Foch, his French opposite number. The Frenchman coolly returned the courtesy; like Schlieffen, he had fought in the Franco-Prussian War. Schlieffen wondered how long Foch would be welcome here.

The British military attache was not in evidence, but before long his assistant, a captain still on the eager side of thirty, rode up alongside Major Foch and began trying to converse with him in French.

Unfortunately, the Englishman knew less of the language than he thought. The pauses in the conversation grew longer and longer.

"Get out of our country, you damned redcoat!" somebody shouted at the assistant military attache, who was indeed decked out in his dress reds. He tipped his hat to the heckler. Schlieffen nodded slightly, admiring his panache if not his skill with languages.

Almost but not quite in a group—Schlieffen hung back—the three foreign officers rode south through the Agricultural Grounds west of the Smithsonian Institute, then west along Maryland Avenue toward the Long Bridge. Now Schlieffen could see the positions of the Confederate guns trained on the capital of theUnited States . He had also seen, in amongst the trees,U.S. guns ready to reply. MoreU.S. guns were positioned on the high ground north and west of the city, and elsewhere around it. If the Confederates tried to seizeWashington , those guns could make it an expensive business.

At theU.S. end of theLongBridge waited Captain Saul Ber-ryman—General Rosecrans' adjutant—a few soldiers, and Hannibal Hamlin, theU.S. secretary of state. In his black suit, the jacket unbuttoned in the humid heat to expose a large expanse of white shirtfront, Hamlin resembled nothing so much as a roly-poly old penguin.

Captain Bcrryman nodded to Schlieffen as he dismounted. He did his best to pretend the British and French military representatives, servants of unfriendly powers, did not exist. They took up positions where they could see and remain inconspicuous.

Church bells on both sides of thePotomac began announcing noon. As they did so, a Confederate officer on a black horse rode north over theLongBridge carrying a small white flag. As he drew near, Schlieffen saw by the red trim on his uniform that he was an artilleryman. "I am Colonel William Elliott," he announced, "and I bear a proposal from President Longstreet and General Jackson seeking to avoid the needless effusion of blood."

Captain Berryman and Secretary Hamlin introduced themselves. Hamlin said, "Say what you will, Colonel. The United States do not and shall not condemn unheard any such proposal." Hamlin's accent was different from Elliott's, almost as different as a Bavarian's from a Berliner's: like President Blaine, the secretary of state came fromMaine , as far from the border of the Confederacy as any place in the easternUSA .

"Thank you, sir," Elliott said. "Believing it obvious, then, that theUnited States cannot hope to defendWashington ,D.C. , against the sanguinary bombardment the Confederate States have it within their power to unleash at any time, the president and the general-in-chief ask in the name of humanity that you declareWashington an open city and permit its peaceable occupation by Confederate forces.

Otherwise, they cannot answer for what will ensue."

"I can speak to that," Captain Berryman said quickly, almost treading on the heels of Elliott's last words.

"General Rosecrans has ordered me to reject categorically any such proposal. If you want Washington, Colonel, you arc going to have to fight for it, and that's flat."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Captain," Colonel Elliott said. "I had hoped to be able to avoid visiting destruction on this lovely city."

"You'd hoped to get it for nothing," Berryman replied. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but that's not going to happen."

"Colonel," the British captain said, "do please remember that legations of powers friendly to your nation are located within this city." With his upper-class accent, he swallowed more syllables than theU.S.

secretary of state and the Confederate colonel put together.

"We shall make every effort to strike only military targets," Elliott said.

Hannibal Hamlin said, "In any case, this is irrelevant. Due to the outrageous and unacceptable nature of the notes President Blaine received this morning from the ministers of Great Britain and France, the government of the United States is declaring all diplomatic personnel of those two nations to be *personae non gratae* in this country; arrangements to return the lot of you to your own nations are already under way."

"As a neutral power, the German Empire may be well suited to arrange those transfers in both directions," Schlieffen said.

"Thank you, sir," Hamlin answered. "I believe one of my assistants has an appointment with the German minister to discuss that very arrangement." Schlieffen inclined his head. He had exceeded his authority by making the suggestion, but you never could tell what the Americans might overlook.

"This is your final reply, Captain?" William Elliott asked. When Berryman nodded, the Confederate artillery officer rode back toward his own country. As soon as he was off theLongBridge , Berryman walked over to a telegraph clicker Schlieffen hadn't noticed and rapidly tapped out a message.

A couple of minutes later, an explosion smote the air. Flame and a great cloud of black smoke sprang from theU.S. half of theLongBridge

, which crashed down into thePotomac . Moments after that, other explosions rang out to the east and west, no doubt severing the rest of the bridges linking theUSA and CSA.

"We've already burned our bridges behind us," Captain Berryman said with a jaunty smile. "Now we're blowing them up in front of us. Captain, Major"—he spoke to the British and French officers—"I request and require you to return to your ministries at once, that you may be evacuated with your fellow nationals. My men will accompany you to see that this is done. Colonel Schlieffen, I impose no such order on you, but you might be wise to return to the German ministry anyhow. Surely the Confederates will not make it a target."

"No doubt you are right," Schlieffen said. He clambered up onto his horse and rode back toward the red brick building onMassachusetts Avenue . The Prussian Army had shelled and starvedParis into submission. Then he had been on the giving end of the bombardment. Now he might learn what he had given out.

A column of wagons heading east alongG Street held him up.U.S. cavalrymen guarding them made sure they had the right of way. General Rosecrans rode in a buggy near the head of the column: heading for the train station, no doubt. Had the Confederate gunners chosen that moment to open up, they could have beheaded the U.S. Army. Whether or not that would have made it stupider than it was already, Schlieffen was not prepared to say.

A couple of blocks after that, as he was about to urge his horse up into a canter, a little girl of six or seven darted into the street in front of him. He brought the horse to a halt before any harm was done. The girl's mother hauled her back and spanked her, saying, "Be careful, Nellie! Watch where you're going!"

"I'm sorry, Ma," the girl blubbered. Schlieffen sympathized with her—she reminded him of his own daughters back inGermany —but only to a point. She had to learn discipline.

As soon as he did get back to the ministry, he asked to see Kurd von Schlozer. The minister had served inWashington sinceGermany united under Wilhelm I, and understood theUnited States far better than Schlieffen did. "Very unfortunate," Schlozer said now, running a hand over his glistening bald pate. "The Americans have a gift for antagonizing all their neighbors, and they have chosen this moment to exercise it. I urged restraint on them, but they would not listen. They never listen."

"I have seen the same thing," Schlieffen answered. "As you say, unfortunate. Not the slightest notion of forethought."

"And because they are so stubborn, they find themselves encircled," the German minister said. "They do not have a Bismarck, who has kept French jealousy from wrappingGermany in similar cords."

"Captain Berryman this morning spoke of notes fromEngland andFrance to the government of theUnited States ," Schlieffen said. "Have they declared war?"

"Not in so many words," Schlozer told him. "They demanded theUnited States cease all military action against the Confederate States within twelve hours, on pain of war."

Schlieffen weighed in his mind the forces on either side. "TheUnited States might be wiser to accede to this demand."

"They will not." Sadly, Schlozer shook his head. "President Blaine sees that theUnited States are larger and richer than the Confederate States, and that is all he sees. No European powers have fought in North America sinceEngland and theUnited States had a brush during the Napoleonic Wars.Blaine , I fear, does not fully understand what he is getting into."

"I think you are right, Your Excellency," Schlieffen said. "General Rosecrans called the notes outrageous.

And Rosecrans himself, when I spoke with him before, had made no preparations for war againstBritain andFrance , even knowing such was not only possible but likely."

"Americans insist on improvising, as if the spur of the moment will itself impel them to find the right answer." Kurd von Schlozer sighed, like a judge about to pronounce sentence, and a harsh sentence at that, on a likable rogue. "Until they learn to think before they act, they will not be taken seriously on the stage of the world. Please furnish me by tonight with a written report on what you saw and heard at theLongBridge , so that I may cable it toBerlin ."

"Yes, Your Excellency." Schlieffen went up to his stuffy office and drafted the report. After giving it to the minister's secretary, he went back up and studied for a while the Confederate General Lee's move up intoPennsylvania , the stroke that had won the War of Secession for the CSA. Lee had faced inferior opposition, no doubt of that, but

the move, an indirect rather than a direct threat toWashington , showed considerable strategic insight. The North Americans were raw, but not all of them were stupid.

Schlieffen expected the Confederate guns to open up onWashington at any moment, but they stayed quiet. *Inefficient,* he thought, but then checked himself. Maybe the Confederate States were waiting for their allies formally to join the war before commencing offensive action of their own: again, not the worst strategic notion. He went to bed still wondering, and did so with a perfectly clear conscience. If anything happened, he would know about it.

Dawn was breaking when the bombardment began. Schlieffen sprang out of bed, threw on his uniform, and hurried up to the roof of the ministry. Other buildings around it were of similar height, impeding his view, but he saw more there than he could have anywhere else— and his ears told him some of what he could not sec.

Great clouds of smoke rose from the south and the southwest, from the Confederate batteries on the Arlington Heights and elsewhere along thePotomac .U.S. guns were answering, too: not only the big cannon in the fortresses that had surroundedWashington since the War of Secession but also field guns in the city itself and down by the river. Shells made freight-train noises through the air.

He judged the weight of fire to be about equal. If anything, theUSA might have held a slight edge: so his ears said, at any rate. But what did it matter? TheU.S. guns could chew up Confederate emplacements inVirginia , but nothing more. Meanwhile, though, the Confederate cannon still in the fight were wrecking the capital of theUnited States .

He heard only artillery— no rifle fire. That meant the Confederate States weren't trying to throw infantry across thePotomac . Had he been in charge inRichmond , he would have held back, too: with the small professional army that was all the Confederates had in the field at the moment, they would have taken casualties they could not afford. ShellingWashington was in any case a largely symbolic act, for which artillery more than sufficed.

It was also a destructive act. Schlieffen watched Confederate shells exploding around some of the fortresses in the hills back of the city. He also heard them landing to the south and the southeast, around the White House, with the War Department next door to it. and theU.S. Capitol. Smoke rose from both directions. Schlieffen went downstairs for a moment, returning with a pair of field glasses. Peering southeast

through them, he nodded to himself. Not all of those shells over there were coming down near the Capitol. Others, farther away, pounded the Navy Yard by the eastern branch of thePotomac .

In the streets, panic reigned. People who hadn't fled the city were all trying to leave at once now.

Schlieffen hoped the little girl his horse had almost run over was safe. A tire engine, bell clanging, did its valiant best to force its way through the crush. Its valiant best wasn't nearly good enough.

An errant Confederate shell landed less than a block away from the German ministry. It started a tire.

The fire engine could not get to that one, either. The firemen cursed as their big horses went forward by inches. Schlieffen breathed in gunpowder smoke like a man gauging the bouquet of a new bottle of wine.

After a moment, he shrugged. Too soon to judge the quality of the vintage yet, but it was a war.

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The *Queen of the Ohio* steamed up the river for which she had been named. Frederick Douglass impatiently paced her deck. She'd had a disgracefully long layover inEvansville taking on wood, and she'd been bucking the current ever sinceCairo . He didn't want to be late for his speaking engagement inCincinnati .

"I should have taken the train," he muttered. But he shook his massive head. Whenever he traveled to a city on the northern bank of theOhio , he went by steamboat. That way, standing by the port or starboard rail—depending on whether he was going downstream or up—he could look into Confederate Kentucky.

The green, gently rolling land looked no different from that on theOhio side of the river. The shadow lying over it, unlike the one over smokySt. Louis , was not real. To Douglass, that made the shadow no less palpable, no less oppressive. On the southern bank of the river, millions of his brethren suffered in bondage—and most of his own countrymen did their best to pretend those suffering millions did not exist.

Not far away from Douglass, a white man and his wife were staring

intoKentucky , too. He warmed to the worried expressions on their faces. Not allU.S. whites ignored the plight of the Negro in the Confederate States. Then the woman said, "Jack, are you sure it's safe to travel on theOhio with the war on?"

"Safe as houses, sweetheart," Jack said reassuringly, and patted the woman's hand. He was wearing a flashy brown-and-white checked suit and a derby with a feather in the hatband: someone who wanted to impress the ignorant with an importance he didn't really possess, Douglass guessed. He was certainly doing his best to impress his wife. In a loud, pompous voice, he went on, "If the Rebs were going to make a real fight, they'd have done it by now. You ask me, they don't have the stomach for it. Last night, we got pastLouisville all right, didn't we? And look how that Custer chewed them up out west. Was itTexas or theIndian Territory ? I misremember."

They had got pastLouisville and the Falls of theOhio without trouble, true enough. One reason they'd got past without trouble was that they'd used the canal on theIndiana side of the river, the one painfully excavated through solid rock after the war, not theLouisville andPortlandCanal in Confederate Kentucky.

Douglass understood that, even if Jack didn't.

The *Queen of the Ohio* rounded a bend in the river just pastMadison,Indiana . Jack's wife pointed to the riverbank on theKentucky side. "Those are guns," she said.

Guns they were indeed. Douglass recognized them: four twelve-pounder Napoleons, leftovers from the war. As guns went these days, they weren't anything special. Neither were the troops who manned them.

By their ill-fitting gray uniforms, they wereKentucky militiamen, not Confederate regulars at all.

Antique cannon, amateur soldiers—an armored gunboat would have slaughtered the men and wrecked the guns in a matter of minutes. The *Queen of the Ohio* was anything but a gunboat.

"You! Yankee boat! Surrender!" one of the Kentuckians shouted across the water— the sidewheeler flew a largeU.S. flag. "Come aground on this here bank. We got to search you to make sure you ain't carrying troops, and then you're a prize of war."

Frederick Douglass quickly went down to the main deck and toward

the steamboat's bow. If he had to swim for it, he didn't want to have to swim around the boat before striking out for the northern bank of theOhio . Nothing could have induced him to stay aboard if the boat grounded itself in Confederate territory. If those militiamen caught him, they would sell him into slavery. He'd been free for more than forty years, all his adult life. He was ready to die trying to stay free before going back into bondage.

"Surrender!" the militiaman shouted again. When the *Queen of the Ohio* kept steaming along, the fellow turned to his battery and waved. The gun crews had been standing around watching the side-wheeler.

Now one crew sprang into action.

"Are they going to shoot at us?" an unshaven deck passenger in dirty overalls asked.

"They can't," his equally grubby female companion answered. "They wouldn't."

The Napoleon roared. Flame and smoke belched from its muzzle. The cannonball splashed into the river in front of the steamboat. The gun rolled backwards with the recoil. The artillerymen began reloading.

The other three crews were serving their pieces, too.

"That one was a warning," the Kentuckian shouted to the *Queen of theOhio* . "Surrender or we blow y'all out of the water."

Passengers cried out in alarm and dismay. From the pilothouse up above came an order delivered with such furious vehemence that it cut through the rising din: "Tie down the safety valves and pour on the ether! Get us the hell out of here!"

An order like that meant the steamboat was liable to explode even if the boiler didn't take a hit from the Confederate guns. Douglass couldn't have cared less. He clapped his hands together, applauding the captain's good sense: surrender, for him, was unthinkable. The sooner they got out of range of those Napoleons, the better.

The rest of the battery opened up on the sidewheeler, in earnest this time. One ball whizzed over her, a clean miss. Another went into the river just short of her, throwing water up onto Douglass and the other passengers standing nearby. The third carried away the top couple of feet of one smokestack. The Rebels jumped up and down as if they'd sunk the *Queen of theOhio* . Their commander's furious yells set them

to swabbing out and reloading again.

"My God!" Jack's groans from above reached Douglass' ears. "What do we do?"

"I think we'd better get down onto the main deck," his wife answered —she, evidently, had sense enough for both of them. "If the boat catches fire, we'll have to go into the river."

Passengers by the score flooded out of the steamboat's cabins and salons, down the stairs, and onto the main deck. Some went to starboard, to stare across the river at the militiamen shooting at them. Some ran to port, as if they were assured of safety because they couldn't see the Confederate guns from there.

Those guns proved any such safety illusory a moment later. A ball slammed into the *Queen of the Ohio* superstructure and tore through the boat's timbers as if they were made of pasteboard. A fusillade of screams—some women's, some men's—from the port side said the ball had torn through one of the passengers, too.

"Dear sweet Jesus!" somebody shouted. "If we take a hit in the boiler, this whole damn boat'll go up like it was filled with powder."

That had already occurred to Douglass. He wondered if it had occurred to the Confederate gunners, too. Maybe, to them, it was all good fun, like boys gigging frogs. But the frogs died in earnest— and so would a couple of hundred civilians, if the Rebs chanced to make a lucky, or rather an unlucky, shot ... or if, in their exertions to flee the battery, the crew overstrained the boiler and it went up without being hit.

On the heels of that thought came another, even worse. "How many guns await us around the *next* bend of the river?" the Negro orator asked the heavens.

"Shut your mouth, you damn nigger," snapped a white woman who looked like somebody's maiden aunt.

Douglass fell silent, but that didn't matter. If one battery of guns was out along theOhio , scores would be—U.S.guns as well as C.S., he supposed, but the Confederate cannon were the ones that worried him.

Boom! Wham!A cannonball slammed into the steamboat's starboard paddlewheel. Wood splinters flew.

One of them stabbed a man, who shrieked like a damned soul. The wheel kept turning, though now it put Douglass in mind of a man smiling with a missing tooth.

Under his feet, the *Queen of the Ohio* quivered like a racehorse suddenly given the whip. She fairly leaped forward in the water. Great gouts of smoke and sparks poured from her newly uneven stacks.

The riverbank seemed almost a blur, such was the sidewheeler's speed.

But the boat's fastest clip was a pathetic creep when measured against the speed of a twelve-pound iron ball. More splashes around the *Queen of the Ohio* said the crews firing at her were not masters of their trade. But more crashes and screams said they didn't need to be masters to score hits. "Have we got a doctor on board?" somebody shouted.

Then another shout rose, far more terrible: "Fire!" Not all the smoke shrouding the steamboat was coming from the stacks, not any more. She was built of wood and bore many coats of paint. One of those hits from hot iron might have ignited her. Or a cannonball might have spilled the coals from a stove in the galley or broken a kerosene lamp or ... When he thought about it, Douglass realized how many unpleasant possibilities there were.

"Buckets!" somebody shouted. "The pump!" someone else yelled. Douglass hadn't known the boat carried a pump, but it was irrelevant, anyhow. Peering back, he saw the whole stern of the *Queen of the Ohio* engulfed in flames. A glance told him no one would be able to put out that fire.

A glance must have told the steamboat captain the same thing. The *Queen of the Ohio* turned hard to port, making straight for the U.S. bank of the river. A steward shouted, "Brace yourselves, folks! We're going to ground, and we're going to ground hard. Soon as we do, everybody off by the bow. Gentlemen, help the ladies, please." He might have been talking about dance figures, not a matter of life and death.

The *Queen of the Ohio* ran aground with force surely great enough to tear the bottom out of her—not that that mattered at the moment. Douglass had been grasping a pillar. The impact tore his grip loose. He landed on one hand, hard. Scrambling to his feet, he struggled toward the rail. A drop of about ten feet separated the deck from the muddy riverbank.

"May I assist you, ma'am?" he asked the woman closest to him: the sour spinster who'd cursed him for daring to suggest the Confederates might have more guns along theOhio than this one battery.

She climbed over the rail, nimble despite her long skirt and petticoats, and jumped down on her own without even bothering to give him a no. *A woman of strong convictions,* he thought. Others were not so fussy about letting him take their pale hands in his dark ones and letting him put his black arms around their waists to help them down to safety. Some of them even thanked him.

After a while, the white man next to him said, "Well, Sambo, I reckon it's about time we light out for the tall timber ourselves." Douglass didn't think the fellow intended to offend; he likely would have called someone from the Emerald Isle *Mick* or a *Jew Abe* in the same way—classification, not insult.

Whatever the case there, he was right. Despite the best efforts of the men fighting the flames, they were racing forward. The crackling roar dinned in Douglass' ears; he could feel the heat on his skin and through his clothes. A hot cinder landed on the back of his hand. With an oath, he brushed it away.

He looked around to make sure no women were left on the side-wheeler. He saw none. When he looked back, the man who'd called him Sambo had already gone over the rail. Other men shoved forward, intent on doing the same. Douglass decided he could honorably leave. He swung over the rail, sat on the very edge of the bow, and jumped.

He landed heavily in the mud, going down to one knee and fetching up against someone who'd abandoned the *Queen of the Ohio* a moment before. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, picking up his hat.

"Don't mention it," the man said. "God damn those cursed Rebels to hell!" As if to punctuate his words, another cannonball screamed past.

A man landed right behind Douglass, staggered, and trod on his toes. He didn't bother to excuse himself.

Douglass said, "Perhaps we should get clear of this vicinity, to let those escaping the steamboat more readily descend in safety."

No one argued with him, which was a pleasant novelty. Limping a little, he walked away from the sidewheeler. He didn't look back. All he had left here were the clothes on his back, and they were muddy

and torn. He'd had no more when he fled his master, and then he'd had nothing more anywhere.

Now he was comfortably well off, and only a telegram away from being able to draw on his resources.

"Rebs must've thought the boat was a troopship," somebody not far from him said. That made a certain amount of sense; theU.S. and the C.S. both moved soldiers by steamboat.

"Maybe they're just a filthy pack of stinking bastards," somebody else said savagely. To Douglass, that made sense, too, a lot of sense: he was always ready to believe the worst of the Confederate States.

"Whatever they are, the wholeOhio 's gonna be shut down as tight as a man's bowels with an opium plug up his ass," the first man said. That was crude, but true without any doubt whatsoever: if one side started shooting at steamboats, the other surely would.

And one other thing was also true without any doubt whatsoever: he was going to be very, very late toCincinnati .

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The Handbasket rattled towardHelena . *"Get* up, there!" Theodore Roosevelt called to the horses. They snorted resentfully as he flicked the reins and cracked the whip above their backs. Not only was he making them go faster than they usually did on a trip to town, they were pulling a heavier load.

From the back of the wagon, Esau Hunt said, "Easy, boss, easy. Slow down. We'll get there quick enough, any which way." The other five farmhands who sprawled in the back with him loudly agreed.

Only Philander Snow had chosen to stay back at the ranch, and he'd already seen the elephant. The rest of the hands, like Hunt, like Roosevelt himself, were young men one and all.

"I'm not going to slow down for anything—not for one single thing, do you hear me?"Roosevelt declared. "Our country needs us, and I intend to meet the call, and to meet it as quickly as I possibly can."

"Can't meet it if you drive us off the road into a ditch," said Charlie Dunnigan, another hand.

Rooseveltdidn't answer. He didn't slow down, either. When he conceived in his own mind that something needed doing, he went and did it, and he didn't waste time about it, either. He came up on another wagon heading towardHelena —but not fast enough to suit him. He didn't have much room between the road and the trees alongside it there, but he pulled out and passed, leaving the other driver to cat his dust. The fellow shouted angrily.Roosevelt waved his hat in a derisive salute.

"That's showing him, boss!" Hunt exclaimed.Roosevelt grinned, though he didn't turn back to show the hand he was pleased. Straightforward action, that was the ticket. People who accomplished anything in this world grabbed with both hands. If you didn't, you got left behind with your face dusty.

This time, Roosevelt steered away from the *Gazette* office when he got intoHelena , heading toward the territorial capitol, farther south and cast. "I only hope they still have slots open for us," he said, for about the dozenth time since setting out. Then he went on, again for the dozenth time, "By thunder, if they haven't got any, we'll make our own, that's what we'll do."

"Doesn't look packed to the rafters, anyway," Dunnigan remarked.

Sure enough,Roosevelt had no trouble hitching the buggy close to the capitol. He saw no line snaking out of the small stone building, either. "Is patriotism dead everywhere in the country, save my ranch alone?"

he demanded, not of the farmhands but perhaps of God.

He leaped out of the wagon, tied up the horses, and led his men toward the capitol. As they charged up the steps, a man he knew came out: Jeremiah Paxton, a neighbor. "I know what you're here for,Roosevelt ," he said: "the same thing I was, or I'm a Chinaman. You ain't gonna have any better luck'n I did, neither."

"What do you mean?"Roosevelt asked.

All Paxton said after that was "You'll find out." He spat into the dirt, then strode over to his horse, untied it from the rail, swung up onto it, and rode back toward his ranch. His stiff back radiated disgust with the world.

"Follow me!" Theodore Roosevelt said. He led his men up the steps to the capitol as if they were charging to the crest of an enemy-held hill.

Stopping the first person he saw inside who looked as if he belonged there, he asked, "Where in blue blazes do I find the volunteer office hereabouts?"

"Third door on the left-hand side," the man answered. "But I have to tell you—"

Rooseveltpushed past him, as he'd pushed past the slow wagon. He opened the third door on the left-hand side, which was indeed emblazonedu.s.MILITIA,with an obviously new addition below: & VOLUNTEERS.

Inside the little office sat two clerks. The brass namcplatc on the closer one's desk proclaimed him to be Jasper St. John. "Good day to you, Mr. St. John,"Roosevelt boomed. "These gentlemen and I are here to offer our services to the U.S. Volunteers. High time we taught our high-handed neighbors not to get gay with theUnited States of America ."

JasperSt. John did not look like a clerk. Except for spectacles much likeRoosevelt 's, he looked like a barroom brawler. His voice was a bass rumble: "We aren't accepting applications right now."

"What?"Roosevelt dug a finger in his ear, as if to assure himself he was hearing correctly. "You're not taking volunteers? Why the devil aren't you?"

"We haven't got any orders to do it,"St. John returned stolidly.

"Good God in the foothills!" NowRoosevelt clapped a dramatic hand to his forehead. "We're at war with the Confederate States—by what I've heard, they're shooting up everything that moves on the rivers—we're at war withEngland andFrance , and, for good measure, we're at war with the Dominion of Canada. Have we declared war on ourselves, too? Is that why we don't want volunteers?"

"In theMontanaTerritory , volunteers are only being accepted at U.S. Army posts," Jasper St. John said.

"This is by order of the secretary of war, as received here when war was declared against the Confederate States."

Rooseveltfelt ready to explode. "But there aren't any forts within fifty miles ofHelena !" he shouted.

"I understand that."St. John was as unmoving as a hilltop fortress. "I can only follow the orders I was given. You are not the first patriotic citizen I've had to turn away, believe me."

"Mr. St. John, sir, use your reason,"Roosevelt said, doing his best to keep a rein on his temper. "That order may possibly have made some sense when we were at war with only the Confederate States. I do not say it did; I deny it did; but it is a point on which reasonable men might differ. I understand that we are a long way from the Southern Confederacy here inMontana . But good God in the foothills, Mr. St.

John"—he was shouting again; not for the life of him could he keep from shouting again—"that'sCanada right up over the border there! Has anyone back inWashington bothered to look at a map sinceEngland and the Dominion declared war on us? If they put a proper army over the border, the handful of regular troops we have in the Territory won't be able to stop them. They'll hardly be able to slow them down."

"Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that I accept you and your friends here as U.S. Volunteers, Mister . . . ?"St. John paused.

"Roosevelt. Theodore Roosevelt. Now you're talking, sir!"Roosevelt said enthusiastically.

But the clerk shook his head. "No, not yet," he said. "I'm just beginning. If I do that, you still will not *be* U.S. Volunteers, because I have no authority to make you such. And, as soon as the people above me find out I have done it, they will give me the sack for exceeding what authority I do have. You will be no better off, and I will be worse. Do you see my trouble now?"

"I see it, all right,"Roosevelt said, breathing hard. "The trouble is, you're one hidebound paper-shuffler in a regime full of petty paper-shufflers. If your sort is the best this nation can afford to send out to the Territories, we *deserve* to lose this war. A stronger and more able race will supplant us here, as surely as we have supplanted the savage red man."

Roosevelt's farmhands burst into cheers. JasperSt. John remained unmoved. "That's very pretty, Mr.

Roosevelt," he said, and paused to spit, almost accurately, at the cuspidor next to the desk of the other clerk, who, with his papers, seemed oblivious to the argument. "It's very pretty,"St. John repeated. "You could run for the Territorial Legislature on it, no two ways about

that. But it cuts no ice with me. I have not the power to do what you want. Good day." He inked the pen that had been lying on his desk, ready to go back to his own bureaucratic minutiae.

"God damn it, you stupid fool, I am trying to help my country!"Roosevelt yelled.

Slowly,St. John put down the pen. Slowly, he got to his feet. He was half a head taller thanRoosevelt , and looked half again as wide through the shoulders. "And I," he said pointedly, "am tired of being shouted at. No matter how much you want to help your country, I am not authorized to help you do it."

Regardless of his size,Roosevelt was about to punch him in the nose. He would have felt the same had he been in the office alone; that he had his men with him never entered his mind. But something else did, so the punch remained unthrown. "Then I'll raise my own troops!" he exclaimed. "Roosevelt's Unauthorized Regiment, that's what I'll call "em!"

His men pounded him on the back and shouted themselves hoarse. "Do whatever you please," Jasper St. John said. "Do it somewhere else."

"Come on, boys,"Roosevelt said. "We'll show him not everybody inMontanaTerritory is stuck in the mud."

As they left the Territorial capitol,Roosevelt 's mind whirled with plans. If he was going to recruit the Unauthorized Regiment, he would have to wire back toNew York for money: the ranch, though profitable, didn't make nearly enough to support a project of that size. He didn't think he would have to arm the men he raised, not with Winchesters as common as weeds out here. AWinchester didn't have the range or stopping power of an Army Springfield, but, with their tubular magazines, Winchesters put more bullets in the air than single-shot Springfields. The regiment could take its chances there.

He would have to feed and shelter the men till such time as the Unauthorized Regiment really did pass underU.S. control. And not men alone—"We'll be a cavalry regiment, of course," he said, as if he'd known as much all along. "No use pounding along wearing out boot leather."

"That's it, boss," Esau Hunt said. "First class all the way, that's how the Unauthorized Regiment goes."

The nucleus and, at the moment, the entire membership of Roosevelt's Unauthorized Regiment piled intoRoosevelt 's Ranch Wagon (he was, he knew, thinking in capital letters). He drove over to the *Gazette* office, more sedately now than before: the horses hadn't had a chance to cool down fully during his brief, unfortunate visit to the capitol.

At the newspaper, he bought a large advertisement seeking recruits for the unit he was forming.

"Roosevelt's Unauthorized Regiment?" said the printer who took down the text he dictated. "I know they aren't accepting volunteers—I tried—but this here—"

"May light a fire under them,"Roosevelt interrupted. "And even if it doesn't, I'll still have the troops to present to the U.S. Army. I'll also want you to print up some handbills with the same information as goes into this advertisement. Can you hire someone to paste them up here in town?"

"Sure can," the printer said, "but it'll cost you two dollars extra per five hundred."

"I'll take a thousand,"Roosevelt declared. "I don't want a man to be able to walk down any street inHelena without seeing one of them."

"A thousand should do it," the man in the ink-stained apron said, nodding. "That'll be ten dollars for the advertisement, eight for the handbills—we'll print from the same type, so I'll cut you a break on that; would be ten otherwise—and four more to paper the town with 'em. Comes to twenty-two altogether . .

. Colonel."

Roosevelthad already tossed a double eagle and two big silver cartwheels onto the counter when that registered. "By jingo!" he said softly. If he was raising the regiment, he *would* be its colonel. That was how things had worked in the War of Secession, and the rules hadn't changed since.

He stood straighter and pushed out his chest. Though he'd never fired a shot at anything more dangerous than a coyote, suddenly he felt as one withWashington and Napoleon and Zachary Taylor: a leader of men, a conqueror. This was what he was meant to do with his life. He could feel it in his marrow.

He'd already felt a couple of other callings—writer, rancher—in his

marrow during his twenty-two years on earth, but so what? He'd obviously been mistaken then. He wasn't mistaken now. He couldn't be mistaken now.

"Let's find a saloon, boys," he said. InHelena , that was harder than finding air to breathe, but not much.

He had his choice, only a few doors away from the *Gazette.* He and the farmhands strode into the Silver Spoon. "Drinks on me!" he yelled, which made him friends in a hurry. "Let me tell you aboutRoosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment, gents, if you'll be so kind." His new friends listened. Why not? He was buying.

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Up in Front Royal, Virginia, far to the northwest ofRichmond , General Thomas Jackson felt like a man released from prison. Once real fighting started, he'd taken advantage of it to escape from the capitol to the front line. President Longstreet hadn't liked that decision, not even a little.

Jacksonsmiled at the memory of how disingenuous he'd been. "But, Your Excellency," he'd said, "surely the telegraph can bring me the same intelligence in the field as it can far behind the lines here. It can also convey to me any instructions you have as to the prosecution of the war. And I shall gain the important advantage of viewing some segments of the action at first hand."

"You don't fool me a bit," Longstreet had answered. "You want to get out from under my thumb, and you want to get back into a camp."

Having been a garrison soldier for more years than he cared to recall,Jackson had picked up a certain measure of guile. "Mr. President, my desires, whatever they may be"—he was not about to admit that Longstreet had hit the nail on the head—"are of no importance. All that matters is the country's need.

Can you deny my proposal possesses military merit?"

Try as he would, Old Pete Longstreet hadn't been able to deny it. And soJackson was encamped just north of Front Royal, in charge of a Confederate force that had fallen back in the face of the larger Yankee army that had come out ofWest Virginia andMaryland and was now occupyingWinchester , near the head of theShenandoah Valley .

More than the Confederate defenders had fallen back. Half the civilian population—half the white civilian population, at any rate— had fledWinchester before the invaders. Their tents and lean-tos were scattered promiscuously over the ground around the neat rows of gray and butternut canvas that marked the Confederate bivouac.

Jacksondid not like having to deal with civilians. They clogged the roads, and they were eating up a good part of the supplies that should have gone to his men. And they possessed not the slightest clue about discipline or order. He feared lest they infect his troops with their chaotic stridency.

He also did not like his position. Front Royal sat at the confluence of two branches of the Shenandoah.

An enterprisingU.S. commander could move artillery to the high ground on either side of the town, much as Jackson himself had done against theUnited States during the War of Secession. Fortunately, the Yankees seemed so impressed with having takenWinchester as to have no notion of trying anything more at the moment.

That letJackson enjoy the luxury of sitting on the top rail of a fence outside Front Royal and sucking on a lemon while he contemplated ways and means of doing unto the Yankees before they did unto him. It also let a plump, middle-aged civilian in a cutaway coat and a stovepipe hat—a gentleman who, if he was half so important as he thought himself to be, was a very important fellow indeed—come up to him and say, "See here, General, you simply must do something about the outrageous, illegal, and immoral way the damnyankees are confiscating our property. The first thing they did, sir, the very first thing, on marching into our fair city, was to proclaim the liberation of every last nigger inWinchester . Outrageous, I say!"

"I agree with you,"Jackson said. "They weren't so blatant about it in the last war, but we had much property stolen then in the fashion you describe."

"Well, sir, what do you propose to do about it?" the refugee fromWinchester demanded. "I've lost thousands thanks to their thieving ways, thousands, I tell you!"

"How much do you suppose the nation has lost?"Jackson asked. The important—or, at least, self-important—man stared at him. As the general had thought, concern for the nation had never entered his mind. He cared only for himself.Jackson went on, "The best remedy 1

can conceive, sir, is retakingWinchester from theUnited States . Then their actions are no longer of any consequence to us."

That wasn't strictly true, as he knew. Negroes who had been told they were free would believe it. They might try to escape to theUSA — though the Yankees were anything but eager to have them there. If returned to bondage, they would surely prove fractious and unruly. President Longstreet,Jackson reflected unhappily, might well have known what he was about when he proposed manumission.

"What the devil are you doing perched there chawing on that damn thing"—the man in the stovepipe hat pointed to the lemonJackson was holding—"when you could be liberating the city?"

"Contemplating the best way *to* liberate it." Deliberately,Jackson began sucking on the lemon again. The plump man went right on expostulating.Jackson used the lemon as an excuse not to say another word. He looked through the fellow fromWinchester , not at him. The man took a long time to get the message, but finally did. He went away, muttering dark things under his breath.

An orderly trotted up.Jackson did acknowledge his existence. "Telegram for you, sir," the soldier said, and handed him the sheet.

Jacksonrapidly read through it. "A brigade of volunteer infantry on its way up here, eh?" he said. That would better than double his force. He liked what he'd seen of the volunteer regiments inRichmond before leaving for the action: they had a solid leavening of men in their late thirties and early forties, War of Secession veterans, to help show the younger men what soldiering was about. "That's good. That's very good."

Then, abruptly, he stared through the orderly—not with intentional rudeness, as he had with the plump man, but because his mind was for the moment elsewhere. Still clutching the telegram, he went back to the two-story brick house that served him as headquarters— and also as home for his family.

His son Jonathan was outside, playing with a dog. At fifteen, Jonathan was just too young to go to war, and wild with frustration because of it. "What's up, sir?" he called.Jackson did not answer him.Jackson hardly heard him. Jonathan shrugged and threw the stick again; he'd seen his father like that many times before. The general went inside.

Several young officers in the parlor sprang to stiff attention. They were not studying the map spread over the table there: they had been

chatting with his pretty daughter, Julia, who was—where did the time go?—heading toward nineteen. Under his gaze, the officers soon found urgent reasons to go elsewhere.

"Father!" Julia said reproachfully: she enjoyed the attention.

She got no more answer than had her brother, and flounced off in some dudgeon.Jackson never noticed.

He studied the map for a while, traced a railroad line with his finger, and finally grunted in satisfaction. His wife had come into the parlor to sec why Julia had left so abruptly. He walked past Anna without seeing her, either.

Only when he got to the telegraphy office did he recover the power of speech. "Send a wire at once to Rectorstown," he told the operator before whom he stood. "The troops en route hither must disembark from their trains there, on the eastern side of theBlue Ridge Mountains ." He continued with a detailed stream of orders, which the telegrapher wrote down. At last, he finished: " 'The utmost celerity must be employed, to reach point named by time required.' Now read that back to me, young man, if you'd be so kind."

"Yes, sir," the telegrapher said, and did.

Jacksonnodded his thanks and left. The headquarters of Colonel Skidmore Harris, who had been in command in the northernShenandoahValley tillJackson arrived, were next door. Harris was a stringy, middle-aged Georgian who had commanded a regiment in Longstreet's corps during the war. Without preamble,Jackson told him, "Colonel, I have taken away from this army the brigade of volunteer troops bound this way fromRichmond ."

Harris' pipe sent up smoke signals. "I'm sure you have good reason for doing that, sir," he said, his tone suggesting Longstreet would hear about it in a red-hot minute if anything went wrong.

"I do."Jackson went over to the map Harris had nailed up to a wall and did some explaining. When he was through, he asked, "Is everything now perfectly clear to you, Colonel?"

"Yes, sir." Harris puffed on the pipe. "If the Yankees don't take the bait, though —"

"Then the bait will take them,"Jackson said. "We shall advance at first

light tomorrow, Colonel. Prepare your troops for it. I desire divine services to be held in each regiment this evening, that the men may assure themselves the Almighty favors our just cause. Have you any questions on what is required of you?"

"No, sir." In meditative tones, Colonel Harris went on, "Now we get to see how the new loose-order tactics work out in action."

"Yes."Jackson was curious about that himself. Firing lines with men standing elbow to elbow and blazing away at their foes had taken gruesome casualties from the rifled muzzle-loaders of the War of Secession.

Against breech-loaders, which fired so much faster, and against improved artillery, they looked to be suicidal. On paper, the system the Confederate Army had developed to replace close-order drill in the face of the enemy looked good.Jackson knew wars were not fought on paper. Had they been, General McClellan would have been the greatest commander of all time. "Dawn tomorrow," the *General In Chief* reminded Skidmore Harris. He left before the colonel could reply.

That evening, as the soldiers prayed with their chaplains,Jackson prayed with his family. " *Lord*," he declared on bended knee, " *into Thy hands I commend myself absolutely, trusting that Thou grantest victory to those who find favor in Thine eyes. Thy will be done*." He murmured a favorite hymn: " *Show pity, Lord. Oh, Lord, forgive*!"

He slept in his uniform, as had been his habit during the War of Secession. Anna woke him at half-past three. *"Gracias, senora,"* he said. His wife smiled in the darkness. He put on the oversized boots he favored, jammed on his slouch hat, and went off to war without another word.

Long columns of men in new butternut uniforms and old-fashioned gray ones were already on the move north before the sun crawled over theBlue Ridge Mountains .Winchester was about twenty miles from Front Royal, the Yankee lines a few miles south of the town they'd taken. If not for those lines, he could have been inWinchester before sundown. He hoped to be there by then despite them.

One advantage of the early start was getting as far as possible before the full muggy heat of the day developed. Even on horseback,Jackson felt it. Sweat cut rills through the dust on the faces of the marching men. Dust hung in the air, too. It made gray uniforms look brown, but also let the Yankees, if they were alert, know his forces were

advancing on them.

The men rested for ten minutes every hour, their weapons stacked. Otherwise, they marched. Field guns and their ammunition limbers rattled along between infantry companies. At a little past twelve, the soldiers paused to eat salt pork and corn bread and to fill their canteens from the small streams near which they rested. After precisely an hour, they headed north again.

Just after they'd moved out, a messenger galloped up toJackson from Front Royal and pressed a telegram into his hand. He read it, permitted himself a rare smile, and then rode over to Colonel Skid-more Harris. "The volunteers, Colonel, arc threateningWinchester from the east, by way of both Ashby's Gap and Snicker's Gap," he said. "They report considerable and increasing resistance in their front, which means theU.S. commander inWinchester has surely pulled men from in front of us in order to contest their advance. Having done that, he will find some difficulty in also contesting ours."

Colonel Harris tilted back his head and blew a large, excellent smoke ring. "I'd say that's about right, sir.

They don't have all *that* many more men than this army does—not enough to turn two ways at once and take on two forces our size."

HadJackson been inWinchester with a force not greatly inferior to the one attacking him, he would not have retreated in the first place. But that was water over the dam now. "Onward," he said.

U.S.forces had dug a line of firing pits about half a mile south of Kernstown, a few miles belowWinchester .Jackson smiled again, this time savagely. In the War of Secession, the Yankees had thrown him back from Kernstown. He'd waited more than nineteen years to pay them back, but the hour was at hand.

Their guns opened on his troops at a range of better than a mile and a half. His artillery swung off the roads and went into battery in the fields to reply. At the same time, his infantry deployed from column into line, moving with the drilled smoothness that showed how many times the regulars had bored themselves carrying out the manoeuvre on the practice field.

The line wasn't much thicker than a skirmish line had been during the War of Secession. To a veteran of that war, it looked gossamer thin—until one noticed how many rounds the men were firing as they advanced, and how thick the black-powder smoke swirled around

them. A division of soldiers in the earlier war would have shown no more firepower than this light brigade.

But the Yankees had breech-loaders, too; their Springfields were a match for the Confederate Tredegars. Their commanding officer had left no more than a regiment and a half behind. Even so,Jackson feared for the first few minutes of the fight that the Yankees, with the advantages of position and cover the defender enjoyed, would beat him at Kernstown again.

His men had less practice at advancing by rushes and supporting one another with fire than at close-order drill and at shifting into the looser formations from which they could attack. The galling enemy resistance served to concentrate their minds on the task at hand better than weeks of exercises might have done.

After close to an hour's fighting, the first Confederate soldiers leaped down into the Yankee field works off toJackson 's left. That let them pour enfilading fire along the length of theU.S. line. Once the position began to unravel, it soon disintegrated.U.S. soldiers in dark blue emerged from their trenches and fled back toward Kernstown. Confederate small arms and artillery took a heavy toll on them. More Yankees threw down their rifles and threw up their hands in surrender. Guarded by jubilant Rebels, they shambled back toward the rear.

"We have a victory, sir," Colonel Harris said.

Jacksonfixed him with a coldly burning gaze. "We have the beginnings of a victory, Colonel. I want the pursuit pressed to the limit. I want those Yankees chased out of Kernstown, out ofWinchester , and back to Harper's Ferry and Martinsburg. I want them chased across the Potomac—that part of West Virginia should never have been allowed to leave the state of Virginia—but 1 am not certain we can bring that off in this assault. Still, if we put enough fear in theU.S. forces, they will skedaddle. We'll see how far they run."

Harris stared at him. "You don't want to just lick the damnyan-kees, sir," he said, as if a lamp had suddenly been lighted in his head. "You want to wipe 'em clean off the slate."

"Why, of course."Jackson stared back, astonished the other officer should aim at anything less. "If they face us, the volunteer brigade will take them in the flank. If they face the volunteers, we shall take them in the flank. If they seek to face both forces at once, we shall defeat

them in detail. Now let the thing be pressed."

Pressed it was. TheU.S. troops retreated straight through Kernstown; the locals clapped their hands whenJackson rode through the hamlet. The Yankees tried to make a stand atWinchester , but pulled out just before sunset. The racket of rifle fire coming from the east said the volunteers were at hand.

Their commander, a bespectacled fellow named Jenkins, rode up toJackson in the middle of a wildly cheering crowd inWinchester (thoughJackson saw not a single colored person on the streets). "What do you want us to do now, sir?" he asked. "We've about marched our legs off, but—"

"Your men won't fall over yet,"Jackson said. "We head north, as long as there is light. As soon as it grows light in the morning, we go on. Our task is to drive the foe from our soil, and I do not intend to rest until that is accomplished." He drew his sword and pointed with it; dramatic gestures were all swords were good for these days, but dramatic gestures were not to be despised.

Jenkins looked as astonished as Colonel Harris had south of Kernstown, and then as exalted. He turned to his troops and cried, "You hear that, boys? You see that? Old Stonewall wants us to help him run the damnyankees clean out ofVirginia . I know you're worn down to nubs, but are you game?"

The volunteers howled like catamounts. The veterans of the War of Secession had already taught their younger comrades the fierce notes of the Rebel yell.Jackson waved his hat to thank the men for their show of spirit, then pointed with the sword once more. Through the shrill yells, he spoke one word:

"Onward."

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There were, Abraham Lincoln reflected, undoubtedly worse places in which to be stranded thanSalt Lake City . Technically, *stranded* was the wrong word. He'd had several speaking engagements canceled because of the outbreak of war, and had decided to stay where he was till more came along. The Mormons who made up the majority of the population were unfailingly polite and considerate to him.

Whatever he thought of their religious beliefs, they were decent

enough and to spare.

Even so, he felt more at home among the Gentiles, the miners and merchants and bureaucrats who leavened the town and surrounding countryside. Most of them, especially the officials, were Democrats, but that still left them closer to his way of looking at the world than were the Mormons, who thought in terms of religion first and politics only afterwards.

"They wish we'd all go away," Gabe Hamilton said at breakfast one morning at his hotel. "They wish we'd never come in the first place, matter of fact." He popped a piece of bacon into his mouth, then turned to the waiter, whom he knew. "Isn't that right, Heber?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hamilton; I wasn't listening," Heber said blandly. "Can I get you and Mr. Lincoln more coffee?"

"Yes, thanks,"Hamilton told him, whereupon he went away. Sighing, the sharp little Gentile spoke toLincoln : "What do you want to lay that every word he wasn't listening to goes straight into John Taylor's ear before the clocks chime noon?"

"I don't know what Mr. Taylor is in the habit of doing of a morning,"Lincoln answered. "That aside, I'd say you're likely right."

"Or which of his wives he's in the habit of doing it to, do you mean?"Hamilton said, winking. Mormon polygamy roused some people to moral outrage. It roused others to dirty jokes. So far asLincoln could tell, it left no one not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints indifferent.

He said, "I am glad to have had the chance and taken the opportunity to have learned more about other aspects of the Mormons' way of life while here. I did not know, for instance, that they formerly practiced what might be described as a communistic system during their earlier years inUtah ."

"You mean the Deseret Store?"Hamilton waited forLincoln to nod, then went on, "I'd call it syndicalism myself. People brought their tithes to the store, and it sold what they brought to whoever needed it. The church—and that meant the government—kept some of the profit, too. Brigham Young didn't die poor, Mr. Lincoln, I'll tell you that. I expect you've seen the Lion House?"

"The long, long building where he housed his wives? One could hardly come toSalt Lake City and not see it."Lincoln paused to eat a couple of

bites of tasty ham. "I do thank you, by the way, Mr. Hamilton, for arranging lectures hereabouts to tide me over and help keep me going until other engagements come through."

"Think nothing of it, sir, nothing at all,"Hamilton replied. "You're educating the workers about labour and capital, and you're educating everybody else about the war. I can't think of anybody who'd know more about it who doesn't wear stars on his shoulders."

"The proper relation of labour to capital has concerned me since before the War of Secession,"Lincoln said, "nor has defining and, if need be, regulating it grown less urgent since the war. The Mormons seem to employ the strictures of religion to lessen its harshness, but I do not think that a solution capable of wider application. The Mormons are the godly, pious folk we profess ourselves to be."

"That's a fact." Gabe Hamilton's eyes twinkled. "They won't skin each other, exploit each other, the way capitalists do—or the way they do with Gentiles, come to that. What they skin each other out of is wives."

He couldn't leave that alone. Few of the Gentiles who lived inUtahTerritory *could* leave it alone, from whatLincoln had seen. That was whyUtah had several times failed of admission to theUnion as a state.

Although the Book of Mormon spoke against it, the Latter-Day Saints would not renounce polygamy, while those outside their church could not countenance it.

After looking around to make sure Heber the waiter was out of earshot,Hamilton said, "I'm just glad the Confederates have even less use for the Mormons than we do. If they didn't,Utah would rise up right in the middle of this war, and that's a fact."

Remembering some of the things John Taylor had said at their supper meeting,Lincoln replied, "Don't be too sure they won't rise up on their own, taking advantage of our distraction with the CSA and with the European powers. I think President Blaine was shortsighted to pull the soldiers out ofFortDouglas here."

He didn't care whether or not Heber took his words to John Taylor. He rather hoped the waiter would, to let the Mormon president know someone wondered about his intentions. He did not mention that he also foundBlaine shortsighted for involving theUSA withEngland andFrance . In his administration, he'd done everything he could to

keep the European powers out of the struggle against the Confederacy.

Everything he could had not included enough victories to keep the Confederate States from bludgeoning their way to independence.

"I'd be glad to have some bluecoats around myself, I'll tell you that," Gabc Hamilton said. "Sometimes I thought they were the only thing keeping the Mormons from riding roughshod over us."

"They've behaved themselves well thus far,"Lincoln said. Later— not much later—he would remember the optimistic sound of that.

"So they have,"Hamilton said grudgingly, as if he were talking about a spell of good weather in late fall: something pleasant but unlikely to last. Remembering Brigham Young's loyalty during the War of Secession, Lincoln dared hope the Gentile was worrying over nothing.

After breakfast,Lincoln said, "Mr. Hamilton, would you be kind enough to drive me to theWestern Union office? I want to send my son a wire."

"I'd be happy to, sir,"Hamilton said. "What's your son do, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Robert? He's a lawyer inChicago —a lawyer for the Pullman Company, as a matter of fact."Lincoln 's long, lugubrious face got longer and glummer. "And he doesn't approve of his old pa's politics, not even a little he doesn't." His expression lightened, just a bit. "We don't let that come between us, though, not for family things. We aren't so foolish asUSA and CSA, you see."

Hamiltonchuckled appreciatively. "I like that—though the Rebs wouldn't. To hear them talk, they're as old as we are, and the only tie is that they decided to stay in the same house with us for a while before they moved on to a place of their own."

"I prefer to think of it as knocking down half our house, and using its floors and walls to build their own."

A rueful smile creasedLincoln 's face. "Of course, the Confederate States don't care what I think." As he rose from the table, he stuck up a forefinger in self-correction. "No, that's not quite so."

"Really?" Gabriel Hamilton raised an eyebrow. "I didn't reckon you'd have to qualify that statement in any way, shape, form, color, or size."

"Color is the proper term,"Lincoln said. "I have heard that certain of my writings are popular with the handful of educated Negroes in the Confederacy, their race's labour being exploited even more ruthlessly —or perhaps just more openly—than any in the United States."

"Isn't that interesting?"Hamilton said. "How do they get hold of your speeches and articles and books, do you suppose?"

"Unofficially,"Lincoln answered, picking up his stovepipe hat and going outside. "I am given to understand that my works are on the *Index Expurgatorum* for Negroes in the CSA, along with those of Marx and Engels and other European Socialists. I hope you will forgive my taking a certain amount of pride in the company in which they place me." He climbed up intoHamilton 's carriage.

"You deserve to be there."Hamilton unhitched the horses and got into the carriage himself. "Won't be but a couple of minutes," he said, flicking the reins. "We're just four or five blocks away."

Lincolncoughed a couple of times at the dust the carriage—and all the other buggies and wagons and horses on the street—kicked up. It tasted of alkali on his tongue. Dust was the biggest nuisanceSalt Lake City had.

"You can drop me off, if you want to go on about your own business," he toldHamilton when they got to the telegraph office. "I expect I can find my way back to the hotel without too much trouble."

"It's no bother for me, Mr. Lincoln."Hamilton guided the horses toward a hitching post. As he got down to tie them, he frowned. "The doors to the office should be open. Maybe they've got them shut to try and keep the dust out, but that's a fight they lose before it's started."

"Is that a notice tacked to the door frame?"Lincoln walked over to the Western Union office and read the handwritten words: " 'All lines out ofUtahTerritory are down at the present time. We hope to be able to start sending telegrams to the rest of theUSA again soon. We regret any inconvenience this may cause.' " The former president took off his hat and scratched his head. "What in the dickens could make all the telegraph lines from here—north, south, east, and west— go haywire at the same time?"

"Not *what,* Mr. Lincoln." Gabriel Hamilton sounded thoroughly grim. "The right question is *who: who* could make all those telegraph lines go haywire at the same time?" He looked around as he had back in the hotel dining room, as if expecting to find Hebcr the waiter lurking

behind a cottonwood tree. "As for what the right answer is, I give you one guess."

Lincolnturned his head in the direction of the enormous granite bulk of the risingTemple . "Why would John Taylor—why would the Mormons—want to shut down telegraphy betweenUtah and the rest of the country?"

"Because they're up to something that won't stand the light of day,"Hamilton suggested at once. "I couldn't begin to tell you what that might be, but I'll bet it's nothing I want."

"They'd be very foolish to try that,"Lincoln said. "TheUnited States may be distracted by this war, but not so distracted as to be incapable of dealing with a rebellion here." He clicked his tongue between his teeth. "LikeSouth Carolina ,Utah is too large to be an insane asylum and too small to make a nation, and, unlikeSouth Carolina , lacks other nearby states full of zanies to join her in her madness."

A man on a horse came trotting up. He dismounted and hurried toward the closed door in front of whichLincoln was standing. "Sorry, pal," Gabe Hamilton called to him. "Office is closed. You can't send a wire."

"But I have to," the man exclaimed. "I was supposed to be on the train forSan Francisco , and it couldn't leave the station. There's some sort of break in the tracks west of here—and, from what I heard people talking about, there's one to the east, too."

"Uh-huh,"Hamiltonsaid, as if the fellow had proved an obscure point. "And one to the north and one to the south somewhere, too. What a surprise, eh, Mr. Lincoln?"

All at once,Lincoln didn't feel stranded inSalt Lake City any more. He felt trapped.

Chapter 5

Jeb Stuart led his troopers north out of Sonora and into NewMexicoTerritory. Now that theUnited States andConfederateStates were at war, his opinion was that the best way to keep theUSA from invading the new Confederate acquisitions was to makeU.S. forces defend their own land.

He'd managed to stay in touch withRichmond through a spiderweb of telegraph wires across the Sonoran and Chihuahuan desert back toTexas . He reckoned that a mixed blessing, as it deprived him of fully independent command. But he had heard not a word of reproof from the War Department on his plan to move into theUnited States .

"Not likely that you would, is it, sir?" Major Horatio Sellers said.

"With Stonewall Jackson heading up the Army, do you mean?" Stuart said with a grin. "You're right about that, Major, no doubt about it. Stonewall will never quarrel with a man who goes toward the enemy."

"That's what I meant, all right." Stuart's aide-de-camp checked his map. "Sir, are we going to strikeTombstone orContentionCity ?"

"ContentionCity," Stuart said at once. "That's where the stamping mills and refineries are for the ore, and that's what we want. Where the mines are doesn't matter; what comes out of them is what counts. You think we won't get a pat on the back if we bring home a few tons of refined gold and silver ore?"

"Just might," Sellers said dryly.

It wasn't *might.* Both men knew as much. The Confederate States were shorter than they cared to be on precious metals. TheUnited States had far more in the way of mineral wealth, which helped keep their currency sound. The CSA relied on commerce to bring in most of their gold and silver. Well, this was commerce, too, commerce of a different and ancient sort.

A scout came galloping back to Stuart. "Sir, looks like the damn-yankees have some soldiers in that thereContentionCity ," he reported. "Can't rightly tell how many—don't look like a whole lot, but they won't be showin' all the cards they've got, neither."

The way he spoke gave Stuart an idea. He turned to his aide-de-camp. "Major Sellers, will you be so kind as to ride intoContentionCity under

flag of truce and ask the Yankee commander to ride back here for a parley with me? You won't get back before nightfall, I expect, but that's all right. It's better than all right, as a matter of fact. Tell him I desire to prevent any useless bloodshed on his part, and so will not fall upon him with the overwhelming force at my disposal."

"Yes, sir; I'll tell him," Major Sellers said obediently. He looked around at the cavalry riding with Stuart; they'd left the infantry behind for the dash up into theUnited States . "Begging your pardon, if he's got more than a couple of companies entrenched around that town, this *isn't* an overwhelming force."

"Not now, it isn't." Stuart's voice was light and gay. "It will be by tonight, when everyone joins us. Just you make certain you don't bring the Yankee commander back here till after full dark. Ten o'clock will be perfect."

"Yes, sir," Sellers said again, still obedient but very puzzled. He knew as well as Stuart—maybe better than Stuart—no other Confederate soldiers would or could join them, not for the next several days. He was scratching his head as he rode north after the scout.

Stuart shouted orders to his trumpeter, who blew Halt. The cavalry troopers reined in, as bemused as Major Sellers: they'd been pushing hard toward their goal, and couldn't imagine why their commander was stopping them in the middle of this godforsaken desert. Their confusion only increased when Stuart said, "We'll make camp here, boys."

He gave more orders after that. By the time he was through, the troopers, confused no more, fell to with a will. One of them said, "Any day we get to knock off early is a good day by me." As the work progressed, they discovered they hadn't knocked off early after all. They kept at it, though, fired by the same enthusiasm as had filled Stuart when the idea came to him.

He sent scouts out well in front of his force, so they could intercept Major Sellers and the U.S.

commander (if he chose to come; if he didn't, a lot of work was being wasted) well before they reached the camp. Instead of pitching his own tent near the center of the encampment, as he usually did, he had it set at the northern edge, and made sure the scouts knew as much.

As the sun went down, the men lighted their fires. Sagebrush and greasewood, the staples of campfires farther north, weren't so common

here, but the troopers had scoured the desert roundabout for what they could find, and had also cut down a good many of the cottonwoods and mesquite trees growing alongside theSanPedroRiver . At this season of the year, the San Pedro was as thin and lethargic a stream as theRio Grande , but it kept the trees alive.

Firelight gleamed off cannons, reflected palely from tent canvas. and showed row on row of tethered horses and camels, the latter being closer to Stuart's shelter. Men lined up to get their tin plates filled from the pots hanging over cookfires, and carried beans and salt pork and hardtack back toward their tents with every sign of satisfaction. Halting in mid-afternoon had let the cooks do a proper job of boiling the beans, instead of serving them up as hard little bullets as they so often did.

At five past ten, a scout led Major Horatio Sellers and an officer dressed in the dark blue wool of the U.S. Army up to Jeb Stuart. "General," Sellers said, "allow me to present to you Lieutenant Colonel Theron Winship, commander of theU.S. forces inContentionCity ."

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance," Stuart said politely, shaking hands with theU.S. officer, a sun-browned fellow in his early forties with a neat blond beard. Stuart waved to the fires and tents behind him. "I have no doubt of the courage of your soldiers, sir, but, as you see, we are present in such force as to make any resistance on your part not only foolish but suicidal."

Winship turned and stared. Not far away, a camel brayed, a hideous, almost unearthly sound. Winship's eyes swung to the beast and fixed on it for close to half a minute. Then he surveyed the camp again.

"General," he said at last, his voice hoarse, "had anyone told me you had even a brigade here, I'd have called him a liar to his face. How the devil you managed to move a whole goddamn division so far and so fast is beyond me. My hat's off to you, sir." Fitting action to word, he removed the broad-brimmed black felt from his head.

"I wouldn't have believed it myself," Major Sellers said solemnly.

Stuart was about to kick him in the shins when he redeemed himself by adding, "But the general can do just about anything he sets his mind to."

"I've seen that," Winship said, his voice gloomy. "I was in the Army of thePotomac when he rode all the way around us during the Seven

Days." Turning to Stuart, he asked, "What are your terms for the surrender of my force, sir?"

"About what you'd expect: men to stack arms and yield up all ammunition. You and your officers may keep your sidearms."

"Very well." Theron Winship looked at the acres of campfires, at the men moving from one to another, at the rows of tents, at the rows of animals—with another lingering glance of disbelief at the camels—and at the ranked field guns stretching back toward and into the night. "Under the circumstances, that's generous enough. 1 accept."

"Excellent," Stuart said briskly. "Major Sellers will accompany you back toContentionCity , to make sure you are complying with the terms. We'll see you by eight tomorrow morning. Be ready to travel then."

They shook hands again. Horatio Sellers looked back toward Stuart. Stuart kept his face bland as grits without butter. With a grunt, Sellers and Lieutenant Colonel Winship rode north toward the Yankee garrison. When Stuart announced to his men that theU.S. officer had surrendered, their cheers and Rebel yells split the night.

As soon as it was light enough to travel, they rode up the San Pedro toContentionCity . They reached the refining town before Stuart had said they would. He was glad to see the Yankee troops hadn't burned any of the stamping mills or refineries. He hadn't mentioned that when discussing the surrender with Lieutenant Colonel Winship, for fear of putting ideas in his head.

Winship had his men drawn up in formation, waiting for the Confederates. He had eight companies of infantry there, and a battery of field guns. Fighting from cover, he could have put up a formidable resistance.

When Stuart came up to him, theU.S. officer looked puzzled. "Where are the rest of your men, sir?" he asked. "Have you detached them for duty elsewhere, having obtained my capitulation?"

Stuart knew he should have answered *yes* to that, to increase Winship's confusion. But he couldn't resist the temptation to tell the truth: "Lieutenant Colonel, this is my entire force."

Winship needed a moment to take that in. When he did, he went purple under his coat of tan. "Why, you God-damned son of a bitch!" he shouted, which made his own men stare at him. "You hoaxed me. If

I'd known this was all the men you had, I'd've fought—and I'd've whipped you, too."

"I doubt it," Stuart said, on the whole truthfully; Winship could have hurt him, but he didn't think theU.S.

officer could have kept him out ofContentionCity if he had a mind to break in. He grinned at the furious Winship. "It doesn't matter anyhow, not now it doesn't. You're under my guns, sir."

"You hoaxed me," Winship repeated, as if ruses of war were not permitted. "Let me unstack my guns, General, and fight it out. Fair is fair, and this isn't. You got my surrender under false pretenses."

"Yes, and I'm going to keep it, too," Stuart said cheerfully. "My men worked long and hard to set up that camp and all those fires last night. If you think I'm going to waste what they did, Lieutenant Colonel, you can think again."

"It isn't right," Winship insisted. He kept staring at the Confederate soldiers who were taking charge of his men, as if still convinced there should have been five times as many of them as there were. His company officers, on the other hand, were looking at him. Jeb Stuart would not have been happy, were he on the receiving end of those looks.

More of his troopers, including a couple who knew a good deal about mining, went into the refining works. They came out with enormous smiles on their faces. "General, we're going to make us a hell of a lot of money on this little visit," one of them called to Stuart.

"Load up some wagons, then,'" Stuart answered. He detailed guards to try to make sure the profits accrued to the Confederate States rather than to individual soldiers.

"What are you going to do with us?" Theron Winship asked.

It was a good question. Most of the defenders ofContentionCity were infantrymen. They would have as hard a time keeping up with his troopers as his own foot soldiers would have done. Reluctantly, he decided he had to take them down intoSonora even so. "If I parole you, you'll still be able to fight Indians and free up other men to fight us," he told Winship. "You'll come along south with us, and probably sit out the rest of the war inHermosillo ."

If that prospect appealed to theU.S. officer, he concealed it very well. "General, you've just made a hash of my military career," he said bitterly.

"That's too bad," Stuart answered. "If things had gone the other way, though, you would have made a hash of mine. Since those are my only two choices, I know which one I'd pick if I had my druthers. And since I do—"

Since he did, his soldiers methodically plundered the mineral wealth ofContentionCity , then set fire to the stamping mills and refineries. With great clouds of black smoke rising behind them, they started south down theSanPedroRiver toward the border betweenNew MexicoTerritory andSonora .

They didn't push the pace now, not with prisoners marching on foot and the sun blazing down from the sky. Even as things were, men and animals suffered from the heat. It wasn't nearly so humid as it would have been back inNew Orleans orRichmond , but it was fifteen degrees or so hotter than it would have been back East, which rendered the advantage meaningless.

To Stuart's disappointment, they didn't reach the deceitfully oversized camp with which he'd fooled Theron Winship before darkness forced a halt to the day's travel. The Confederate commander was proud of his work, and wanted to show it to Winship in detail. Whether the man he'd gulled would have appreciated it never crossed his mind.

Stuart had already fallen asleep when Major Sellers came into his tent and shook him back to consciousness. "Sorry to bother you, sir," he said while Stuart groaned and sat up on his folding bed, "but there's some Indians out there want to have a powwow with you."

"Scouts bring 'cm in?" Stuart asked, pulling on his boots.

"Uh, no, sir," his aide-de-camp answered. "One second they weren't anywhere around. Next thing anybody knew, they were right in front of your tent. They could have come in if they'd had a mind to.

They said they've been watching us all day, and we never set eyes on them once."

"They're good at that," Stuart remarked. He stepped out into the night. Sure enough, half a dozen Indians stood there waiting, some with U.S. Springfields, the rest carrying Winchesters. The oldest of them, a stocky fellow in his late fifties or early sixties, let loose with a stream

of Spanish. Stuart, unfortunately, knew none.

One of the younger Indians, who had a look of the older, saw that and translated: "My father likes the way you tricked the bluecoats. He wants to fight the bluecoats at your side. He has been fighting them alone too long." More talk from the old man, this time in his own gurgling tongue. Again, the younger one spoke for him: "He wants—sanctuary, is that the word?—for his band of the *Dineh,* the Apaches, you would say, inSonora , like the Confederacy gives to the tribes in the Indian Territory who right against theUSA . WhenSonora belonged toMexico , the bluecoats would chase us over the border. The Confederate States are strong, and will not let that happen. We will fight for you because of this."

"Does he?" Stuart said. "Will you?" Whoever the old Indian was, he had an astute understanding of the way the Confederacy dealt with the Indian tribes along theU.S. border. If he had any power, he might make a useful ally. Even if he was only a bandit chief, his men would make useful scouts. Stuart spoke carefully to the younger Indian: "Tell your father I thank him. Tell him that because I am new in this country, I do not recognize him by sight no matter how famous he may be, but perhaps I will know his name if he gives it to me."

The younger Indian spoke in Apache. When he fell silent, his father nodded to Stuart, then pointed to his own chest. "Geronimo," he said.

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Riding over the prairie somewhere betweenWichita and the border with theIndian Territory and the Confederacy, Colonel George Custer was in a foul mood. "I have the Thanks of Congress back in my quarters atFort Dodge ," he said to his brother, "there up on the wall where everyone can see it. And what is it for, I ask you?" He answered his own question: "For going after the enemy and hitting him a good lick. It was your idea, I know, but I'm the one with the eagles on my shoulders, so the scroll came to me."

"Don't fret yourself about that, Autie," Tom Custer said. He was not and never had been jealous of his older brother. "Plenty of chances for glory to come our way."

"Not when we're doing what we're doing," Custer ground out. "The Rebs poked atWichita once, so we have to gallop back and forth to make sure they don't do it again. I tell you, it makes us look like a prizefighter covering up where he got hit last instead of doing any

punching himself. And for what?

ForWichita ?" He clapped a hand to his forehead in florid disbelief.

"It's not much of a town," Tom agreed.

"Not much of a town?" Custer said. "Not much of a town? If it weren't on the railroad, it wouldn't have any reason for existing. Oh, the Rebs shipped a few cows through there ten years ago, when they were still pretending to be nice fellows, but they gave that up a good while ago. Now it just sits there, bleaching in the sun like any old bones. And we have to defend it?" He rolled his eyes.

"We have to defend the railroad line and the telegraph, too," Tom said.

Custer sighed. His brother had advanced the one irrefutable argument. Without the railroads and the talking wire, travel and information in theUnited States would move as slowly as they had in the days of theRoman Empire . Even bereft of the Confederate States, theUnited States were too vast to let Roman methods work.

"Trouble is," Custer said, "if we try to defend the whole line of the railroad, that ties up so many men, we can't do much else in these parts."

"I know," Tom answered. "If it's any consolation to you, Autie, the Rebs have exactly the same problem inTexas ."

"The only way I want the Rebs to have my problems is for them to have problems I give 'em," Custer said, which made his brother laugh. "I don't want any problems myself, and they're welcome to as many I don't have as they like."

He waved back toward the two Gatling guns, which weren't having any trouble keeping up with his troopers. The men weren't going flat out, of course, and he'd taken pains to make sure the Gatlings had fine horses pulling them. Tom understood his gesture perfectly, saying, "Yes, that's the kind of problem the Rebels should have, all right. Those guns mowed them down same as they did to the Kiowas."

One of Custer's men let out a yell. The colonel's first glance was to the south—were they about to collide with the Confederates? He looked around for a rise on which to site the Gatling guns. What had worked once would probably work twice.

But he saw no Rebel horsemen, nor Indians, either. More troopers were calling out now, and some of them pointing north. Custer spied a courier riding hard for the regiment. He waved to the bugler, who blew Halt. The men reined in. A couple of them took advantage of the stop by getting out their tobacco pouches and rolling cigarettes.

Bringing his lathered horse to a halt, the courier thrust an envelope at Custer. "Urgent, sir," he said, saluting. "From Brigadier General Pope, up atFortCatton ."

Custer stared at him. "Good God," he said. "That's all the way up inNebraska ." The troopers close enough to have heard him started buzzing with speculation. He didn't blame them. Why the devil was General Pope reaching down to the border with the CSA?

Only one way to find out. Custer tore the envelope open and read the orders it contained. When he was done, he read them again. They still said the same thing, no matter how hard a time he had believing it.

"What's the news, Autie?" Tom Custer demanded impatiently.

"We— the whole regiment, including the Gatlings— are ordered to report toFortCatton as expeditiously as possible." Custer knew he sounded numb. He couldn't help it. In the slang of the War of Secession, this was a big thing, and no mistake. "A regiment of volunteer cavalry will take over patrolling here in southernKansas ."

"FortCatton? On thePlatte ?" Tom sounded as bewildered as his brother felt. "It's a couple of hundred miles from here, and a couple of hundred miles from any fighting, too. Why don't they send the volunteers there?"

"I don't know. It says we'll get further orders when we arrive." Custer pointed to the courier. "You there, Corporal— do you know anything more about this?"

"No, sir," the horseman answered: a simple but uninformative reply.

"What in the blue blazes does General Pope want with me?" Custer muttered. He wondered if it dated back to his service on McClellan's staff during the War of Secession. Pope and Little Mac had been fierce rivals then. After Lee whipped Pope at Second Manassas,Lincoln had relegated Pope to fighting Indians in the West, and he'd been here ever since. Of course, a little later on Lee had whipped McClellan even worse up at Camp Hill. That relegated the whole war to the ash heap, so Pope was in a sense already vindicated.

"We'll have to find out when we get there, that's all," Tom said. He worried less about Army politics than his brother did. If it was a legal order, he would obey it, and that was that.

And it was a legal order. No questions there. Custer muttered again, this time something Libbie would not have approved of. But Libbie was inFort Dodge . Who could guess when he would have the pleasure of sleeping in the same bed with her again? He raised his voice and called out to his troopers:

"We are ordered toFortCatton , men, and to leave the defense of the plains to others." Through the surprised exclamations the horsemen sent up, he went on, "We are ordered to reach the fort as quickly as we can. By the speed with which we arrive, I want to show General Pope what sort of men he is getting when he calls upon the Fifth Regiment." The troopers raised a cheer and set out to the north with a will. Not all of them were disappointed to ride away from the dangers of combat.

FortCattonlay by the confluence of theNorth Platte andSouth Platte , across the river from the Union Pacific tracks. From southernKansas , Custer and his command reached it in a week. The pace told on the men—and even more on the horses. Had Custer had to go much farther, he could not have pressed so hard. But the surprise the sentries at the fort showed when he and the regiment arrived made up for a lot of weariness and discomfort.

He found himself ushered immediately into Brigadier General Pope's office. Pope was a handsome man of about sixty, who wore his hair long—though not so long as Custer did— and had a fine silver beard. "I am altogether delighted to see you here so promptly, Colonel," he said in a deep, rumbling voice; he'd had a reputation for bombast during the War of Secession, and hadn't changed since.

"Reporting as ordered, sir," Custer said. "The orders you sent me said I would receiver further information on coming here."

"And so you shall," Pope declared. "Colonel, President Blaine has named me military governor ofUtahTerritory . The Mormons there are this far— *this* far, Colonel"—he held thumb and forefinger together so they almost touched—"from open revolt against the authority of theUnited States . They have cut off rail service through the Territory, and telegraphy as well. I am charged with restoring them to their allegiance to theUSA by any means necessary, and I intend to do exactly that."

"Yes, sir. I see, sir." Custer hadn't heard anything about what the Mormons were up to, but he'd been in the field and then on a forced march. "Trying to take advantage of our being busy elsewhere, are they? A coward's trick, sir, if you care anything for my opinion."

"That is my precise view of the situation, Colonel," Pope said, beaming. "I aim to bring them to heel and to keep them from perpetrating any such outrage in the future. We've tolerated their evil sensuality far too long, and what is our reward? Disloyalty. Well, thanks to it, they have placed themselves beyond the pale. I am assured on highest authority that whatever I do will be accepted, as long as they are reduced to obedience."

"Very good, sir." Custer breathed a silent sigh of relief that arguments left over from the War of Secession were not what had brought him here. Now to find out what had: "How does my regiment fit into your plan, sir?"

"I am assembling an army with which to occupy the Territory, especially the essential rail lines," Pope said. Custer remembered his own recent thoughts on the importance of railroads. Pope went on, "You and your men have already shown you can do good work, and, as regulars, are more reliable than volunteer units. And I have noted your success with the Gatling gun. I aim to overawe the Mormons, to demonstrate how futile any resistance to my might must be. Many of them, no doubt, have rifles. But they have no artillery to speak of, and they have no Gatlings. Once they see the destructive power of these weapons, they will be less inclined to try anything rash, and more likely to suffer if they do."

"Yes, sir!" Custer said enthusiastically. He hesitated, then asked, "And if they persist in their foolishness, sir? If they attempt to resist us by force of arms?"

"If they are so stupid, Colonel, then we wipe them off the face of the earth." Pope sounded as if he looked forward to such a result. "That's what we've done with the savages who presumed to challenge our expansion over the western plains, and that's what we'll do with the Mormons. If they resist us, they deserve destruction even more than the redskins, for they are not primitive by nature, but rather men of our own stock corrupted by a wicked, perverse, and licentious doctrine."

"Yes, sir," Custer said again. Having come out of McClellan’s camp,

with the natural bias of Little Mac's staff officers against the Young Napoleon's rivals, he had never imagined John Pope to be a man of such obvious and evident good sense. "If they transgress against the moral code universally recognized as correct and legitimate, on their heads be it."

"Well said." Pope was studying Custer with some of the same surprise with which Custer had eyed him.

After coughing once or twice, the brigadier general said, "I hope you will forgive my saying this, Colonel, but I had not expected us to see so many things in so nearly the same light."

"If the general will pardon me, sir, neither had I," Custer answered. "I suspect we are both bound by the prejudices of the past." Impulsively, Custer thrust out his hand. Pope clasped it. Custer went on, "The only enemies I recognize as such—the only enemies I have ever recognized as such—are the enemies of theUnited States of America ."

"I think we shall work very well together, then, for my attitude is the same in every particular," Pope said. His smile, which showed a couple of missing teeth, was not altogether pleasant. "Do you know who happens to be inSalt Lake City at the moment, Colonel?" When Custer shook his head, Pope took no small pleasure in enlightening him: "Abraham Lincoln. I have it on good authority from the War Department."

"Is he, by thunder?" Custer said. "Well, there's the first good reason I've heard yet for letting the Mormons go their own way."

John Pope stared at him, then threw back his head and roared Jovian laughter. "That's good, Colonel; that's very good indeed. It hadn't occurred to me, but I suppose it's true that those who were of General McClellan's party have as much cause to deprecate the capacity of our former chief executive as I do myself." Plainly, he'd forgotten nothing over the years: neither his rivalry with McClellan nor his humiliation at being so ignominiously sent to the sidelines after failing against Lee and Jackson.

Custer said, "Sir, I don't know of anyU.S. officer serving during the War of Secession who does not have good cause to deprecate the capacity of Honest Abe, such as it is. I do know that the only good thing I've had to say about the Republican Party in all the years since is that they've finally given us the chance to have another go at the Confederate States—and now the Mormons are trying to interfere with

that."

This time, Pope reached out to shake Custer's hand. "Colonel, whatever hard feelings may have existed between us in the past, I am suddenly certain we shall work together very well indeed." Custer beamed at him. He was suddenly certain of the same thing. Pope took a bottle and a couple of glasses from a desk drawer. He poured amber liquid into the glasses, then passed one to Custer. "Down with the Mormons, and with Abe Lincoln, too!"

"I'm normally teetotal, General, but how can I resist a toast like that?" Custer drank the whiskey. It burned his throat; he'd drunk hardly at all since the War of Secession. Manfully, he didn't cough. In his stomach, it was warm.

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Philadelphiastruck Alfred von Schlieffen as being a real city, a city with past, present, and future.Washington,D.C. , had always given him the impression of existing in a world of its own, slightly skewed from the rest of the planet. Because it had sprung *ex nihilo* from the wilderness by government fiat, it lacked many of the irregularities and imperfections that made cities interesting and different from one another. And, existing as it had for a generation under the guns of the Confederate States, Washington had also felt impermanent, as if it was liable to be smashed to bits at any moment.

"And so it has been," Schlieffen murmured. Some of the staff of the German ministry remained behind inWashington ; the Confederates had not tried to occupy it, and their bombardment was desultory these days. Schlieffen and Kurd von Schlozer had come north, though, the military attache to maintain his connections in the War Department, the minister to offer whatever services in the cause of peace he could to President Blaine and to represent the interests of Great Britain (though not those of France) with the U.S. government.

Grudgingly, Schlieffen conceded that the War Department's move fromWashington up toPhiladelphia had gone more smoothly than he'd expected. "But," he said to the German minister after the two of them had settled into offices at the headquarters of the German consul inPhiladelphia (a prominent sausage merchant), "but, I say, Your Excellency, they were madmen—madmen, I tell you—to delay so long. One well-placed Confederate shell and theUnited States would have had no War Department left."

"I am not saying you are mistaken, Colonel Schlieffen." Schlozer paused to make a production of lighting a large, smelly cigar— the larger and smellier the cigar, the better he liked it. "I am asking whether it would have made much difference in the way theUnited States arc conducting the war if they were suddenly bereft of this department."

Seeing General Rosecrans leavingWashington , Schlieffen had wondered the same thing. Now he considered the question objectively, as he had been trained to do while serving on the General Staff. "Do you know, Your Excellency, it is very possible that you are right. The *General-In-Chief* has not the competence to serve in his capacity."

"That is your judgment to make. Colonel, but it is not precisely what I meant in any case." Kurd von Schlozer blew a meditative and rather lopsided smoke ring. "The individual American, or the small group of Americans, has far more ingenuity and initiative than the individual German or small group of Germans.

But we are much better at harnessing many small groups to work together for a common purpose. The Americans might be better off without anyone trying to impose order on them, for they do not take to it well."

"You have said several things on this order," Schlieffen replied thoughtfully. "If you are correct, this country must be doomed to anarchy before too long. I would call that a pity, the Americans' situation on this continent having so much in common with our own in Europe."

"If they would set their house in order, they might make valuable allies," Schlozer agreed. "They might make allies of sorts in any case, but they would be worth more if they regimented themselves better."

"This is true of anyone," Schlieffen said, as if quoting God's law from Deuteronomy. Trying to be charitable, he went on, "Even we Prussians needed to put our house in order after Napoleon defeated us."

"Defeat is often a salutary lesson," Schlozer said, nodding. "Of course, a generation ago, theUnited States were defeated in the War of Secession, and seem to have learned little from that. They made an even greater point of antagonizingBritain andFrance this time than in the previous war."

"I wonder what the Confederate States have learned," Schlieffen said. "They are full of Americans, too."

"They have learned at least one thing the United States have not," the German minister replied. He waited for Schlieffen to make a polite interrogative noise, then went on, "They have learned to make alliances, and to make those alliances last. The folk of theUnited States are so cross-grained, this seems not to have occurred to them, and that the Confederate States can do it is certainly part of the resentment theUnited States bear against them."

"Foolishness," Schlieffen said, like a man judging the antics of a neighbor who, while a good enough fellow, could not keep from getting drunk three nights a week. "If theUnited States are not strong enough to do as they desire by themselves, they need allies of their own."

"The last allies they had wereFrance andSpain , in their war of rebellion againstBritain ," Schlozer said.

"Since then, they have lost the knack for making them. They lived alone behind theAtlantic , and, like a woodcutter alone in the forest, forgot how to make friends with others. Now, with the Confederate States bringing alliances to the American continent, theUnited States need to relearn the arts of diplomacy." He sighed. "They have not yet taken this lesson to heart."

"If they learn the lessons of war well enough, the lessons of diplomacy matter less," Schlieffen said. One corner of his mouth twitched, a gesture of irony as dramatic as any he permitted himself. "They have, unfortunately, shown no great aptitude for the lessons of war, either."

"It is a pity," Kurd von Schlozer said.

"Also a pity that I have not yet been permitted to observe any of the war save the Confederate bombardment ofWashington , and that observation was not thanks to the good offices of the government of theUnited States ," Schlieffen said.

"As you requested, Colonel, I have laid on the carriage for you today, so that you may go down to the War Department and protest once more," Schlozer said.

"For this I thank you very much," Schlieffen said. "It is important that I do observe and report my findings to the Fatherland. Weapons have advanced considerably since we fought the French. As with the late war between the Russians and the Turks, what we learn here will apply to any future conflicts of ours. The Russians and Turks were less

than strategically astute, I must say, and so are theUSA and CSA, but still—"

"I have in the past heard you speak well of Confederate strategy and tactics," Schlozer said.

"Compared to those of theUnited States , yes," Schlieffen said. "Compared to ours, no." And then, because he was a judicious man, he added, "On the whole, no. Some of what they do shows a certain amount of insight, I admit."

He took his leave of the German minister of theUnited States and went downstairs, where the carriage was indeed waiting for him. Gustav Kleinvogel's sausage factory, and, therefore, the German consulate, and, therefore, for the time being, the German ministry, were in the appropriately namedGermantown district, north ofPhiladelphia 's city center. It was also appropriate, Schlieffen thought as he got into the carriage, for politics and sausage making to be so inextricably mixed. AsBismarck had observed, in neither did it pay to examine too closely the ingredients that went into the final product.

Washington's reason for being was— or perhaps had been— government. Philadelphia had been a thriving port and industrial center for many years before the results of the War of Secession forced big chunks of the government of the United States to move north, away from the muzzles of Confederate cannon. Factories belched black smoke into the air. So did the stacks of steamships and trains bringing raw materials into the city and taking away finished goods. Schlieffen looked on the smoke with approval, as a sign of modernity.

InPhiladelphia , the War Department operated out of a building of muddy-brown brick northwest ofFranklin Square . It was, Schlieffen thought, an even homelier edifice than the one next to the White House inWashington . He was of the opinion that the military should have the finest headquarters possible, to hearten the men who protected the nation. The view of theUnited States seemed to be that the military, like any other arm of the government, rated only the cheapest headquarters possible.

The sentries at the entrance were not so well trained as those with whom he had dealt inWashington .

That his uniform was close to the shade of theirs convinced them he was no Confederate, but they had not the slightest clue as to what a military attache was, what he did, or what his privileges were. He had

to grow quite severe before one of them would take a message announcing his presence up to General Rosecrans' office. The fellow returning looking flabbergasted at bearing the news that Rosecrans would sec Schlieffen at once.

A different sentry escorted him up to the office of the general-in-chief. In the outer office, he traded English for Captain Berryman's German. He listened to the bright young adjutant with only half an car, for in the inner office General Rosecrans was bellowing, "'Yes, Mr. President . . . I'll try and take care of it, Your Excellency . . . Yes, of course." That left Schlieffen puzzled, for he could not hear President Blaine at all, and the chief executive of theUnited States did not have a reputation for being soft-spoken—on the contrary.

Presently, Rosecrans came out into the antechamber. Looking harassed, he said, "Captain, I am convinced the telephone is an invention of the devil, inflicted upon us poor soldiers so politicians can harangue us at any hour of the day or night, without even the pause for thought sending a telegram affords." That off his chest, he deigned to notice Schlieffen. "Come in, Colonel, come in," he said, invitingly standing aside from the doorway. "Believe me, it will be a pleasure to talk with a man who knows what he's talking about. Have you got telephones inGermany , Colonel?"

"I believe we are beginning to use them, yes," Schlieffen said, eyeing with interest the wooden box and small attached speaking trumpet bolted to the wall by Rosecrans' desk.

"Invention of the devil," Rosecrans repeated. "Nothing but trouble." He waved his visitor to a chair, then asked, "And what can I do for you today besides complain about inventors who should have been strangled in the cradle?Bell 's a Canadian, which probably explains a good deal."

It explained nothing to Schlieffen. Since it didn't, he came straight to the point: "As I asked inWashington

, General, I should like to get a close view of the fighting in this war. Perhaps you will be so kind as to authorize my travel for this purpose to the headquarters of one of your armies in the field."

"Very well, Colonel; 1 can do that." Rosecrans had made promises before. Schlieffen was about to ask him to be more specific when he did so unasked: "We are going to takeLouisville away from the Rebs.

How would you like to watch us while we're doing that?"

Schlieffen glanced at the map hanging by the telephone. "You will send me to theprovinceofIndiana ?

The state, I should say—excuse me. You plan on crossing theOhio River to make your assault? Yes, I should be most interested in seeing that." IfFrance ever mounted an invasion ofGermany , she would have to cross theRhine . Seeing how theUnited States attempted a river crossing in the face of opposition would tell Schlieffen something of what the French might try; seeing how the Confederates defended the province—no, the state—ofKentucky would also be informative.

"Well, that's easy enough, isn't it?" Rosecrans reached into his desk for stationery and with his own hand wrote the authorization Schlieffen needed. "Nice to know *something* is easy, by thunder. The Rebs aren't—I'm finding that out. But you hang onto that sheet there, and I'll send a telegram letting 'em know you're on the way."

"Thank you very much," Schlieffen said, and then, sympathetically, "A pity your arms did not have better luck inVirginia ."

Rosecrans flushed. "They have Stonewall, dammit," he muttered. He had an ugly expression on his face, to go with the ugly color he'd turned. Austrian generals— and Prussian generals, too— must have talked that way about Bonaparte. Austrian generals—and French generals, too— must have talked that way about Moltke.

Sympathetically still, Schlieffen said, "As you have said to me, your land is wide. General Jackson cannot be everywhere at once, cannot take charge of all the battles your two countries are fighting."

"Thank God for that," Rosecrans said. The telephone on the wall clanged, like a trolley using its bell to warn traffic at a corner. Rosecrans went over to it. He listened, then shouted, "Hello again, Mr.

President." That hunted look came back onto his face. Schlieffen left before the general had to order him out. As he walked down the hall toward the stairs, he heard Rosecrans still shouting behind him. All at once, he hoped the General Staff back home inBerlin did without this newfangled invention.

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"Come on!" Samuel Clemens fussed like a mother hen. "Come on, everyone. We've no time to waste, not a single, solitary minute."

Alexandra Clemens set her hands on her hips. "Sam, if you'll look around, you'll see that you're the only one here who isn't ready for the picnic."

"Well, what has that got to do with the price of persimmons?"

Sam demanded. "Pshaw! If you hadn't stolen my jacket, I'd have it on by now."

His wife didn't know anything about persimmons: she was that rarity, a native San Franciscan, having been born a little more than a year after the gold rush started Americans flooding intoCalifornia . She did, however, know where his jacket was: "It's hanging on the chair behind you there, Sam, where you put it when you looked under the bed for your shoes."

"And I found them, too, didn't I?" Clemens said, as if in triumph. He put on the white linen jacket, jammed a hat down over his ears, and handed Alexandra a sunbonnet. "There! All ready. Now we'd better see what mischief the children have got into since you started hiding things from me."

Ignoring that sally, Alexandra Clemens said, "They *are* being quiet downstairs, aren't they?" She swept out of the bedroom in a rustle of skirts. "What *are* they doing?" Sam hurried after her.

The quiet broke even as they hurried—broke into shouts from both Orion and Ophelia, a growl from Sutro the dog, and a series of yowls and hisses fromVirginia the cat.Virginia shot by at a speed that would have done credit to aNevada jackrabbit, then vanished under the sofa in lieu of diving into a hole in the ground.

"She scratched me!" Ophelia said. "Bad kitty!"

Sam examined the damage, which was superficial. "The next question before the house, young lady, is why she scratched you."

Ophelia stood mute. Orion, either more naive or less sure of how much his parents had seen, said, "We weren't really trying to feed Ginny toSutro,Pa. It just looked that way, honest Injun."

"Did it?" Sam said. Departure for the picnic was briefly delayed for reasons having nothing to do with missing clothes. When Orion and Ophelia climbed up into the family buggy, they took their seats with considerable caution. Above their heads, Sam and Alexandra looked into each other's eyes. That might have been a mistake. They both had

all they could do to keep from laughing.

The horse went down a couple of blocks toFulton , and then west toGolden GatePark , a narrow rectangle of land south of theRichmond district. Much of it was sand dunes and scrubby grass. Here and there, where irrigation and better soil had been brought in, real grass grew and young, hopeful trees sprouted.

Sam tethered the horse to an oak that had advanced further beyond saplinghood than most. He gave it a long lead, so it could crop the grass and, thus distracted, not interfere with the family's enjoyment of a Sunday afternoon. Having explained this to his wife, he added, "Don't you wish we could do the same with the children?"

"Not more than half a dozen times a day," Alexandra answered. "Not usually, anyhow." She spread a blanket on the grass, then set the picnic hamper upon it. Ham sandwiches and fried shrimp from a Chinese cafe and hard-boiled eggs—not the elderly sort the Chinese esteemed—and a homemade peach pie and cream puffs from an Italian bakery and lemonade were enough to keep the children from running wild for a while, and gave them sufficient ballast once they were through to slow them down for a while.

"Ha! First match!" Sam said proudly once he got his cigar going. That proved what a fine, mild day it was. The wind blew off the Pacific, as it almost always did, but only gently. "It's not strong enough to lift sand today, let alone dogs, trees, houses, or one of Mayor Sutro's public proclamations," he added. "Of course, they call *that* kind of wind a cyclone."

"I call that kind of wind an editorial," Alexandra said, which made him mime being cut to the quick.

Other picnicking families dotted the grass of the park. Children ran and played and got into fights. Boys barked their bare knees. Somebody who'd brought a bottle of something that wasn't lemonade started singing loudly and badly. Sam lay back, watched the gulls wheeling through the blue sky, and declared, "I refuse to let myself despair on account of God's creation being imperfect to the extent of one noisy drunk."

Alexandra reached out and ruffled his hair. "I'm sure He could have done a much better job if only He'd listened to you."

"It's so nice to know, my dear, that we can stay together when they

start burning freethinkers," he said, quite without irony. "And to think that, if I'd leftSan Francisco , I never would have met you. I didn't intend to settle down here, not for good." He started another cigar, also on the first match. "But it has turned out to be good, I'd say."

Before Alexandra could answer—if she was going to answer with anything more than a smile—the breeze brought a thin scries of cries from the west: "Hut! Hut! Hut hut hut!"

"Hear that?" Orion said to Ophelia, who nodded. "You know what it is?" She shook her head. He was jumping up and down with excitement. "That's soldiers, that's what it is!" He ran off, legs pumping. His little sister followed a moment later, slower both because she was younger and because her dress dragged the ground, but determined even so.

Samuel Clemens got to his feet. "Those *are* soldiers, of sorts," he said; he knew the sounds of drill when he heard them. "I'd forgotten they were teaching the volunteers to walk—I beg your pardon, to march—in the park. I think I'll have a look at them myself. After all, they may be protecting us one day soon—and if that notion doesn't frighten you, for heaven's sake why not?"

"Go ahead," Alexandra said. "I'll stay here and make sure things don't take a mind to wander off by themselves."

Only a couple of low swells of ground had hidden the volunteer troops from Sam. There on the grass, surrounded by admirers, a company raggedly marched and countermarched. Seeing them took Clemens back across the years to his own brief service as a Confederate volunteer. They looked just the way his comrades had: like men who wanted to be soldiers but didn't have it down yet.

About half of them wore Army blouses. About half wore Army trousers. Only a few wore both. The rest of the clothes were a motley mixture of civilian styles. A few carried Army Springfields. Rather more had Winchesters, probably their own weapons. Many still shouldered boards in place of rifles.

"Left!" shouted the sergeant drilling them, a grizzled veteran no doubt from the Presidio. A majority of them did start out with the left foot. He cursed the rest with fury enough to make women flee, small boys cheer, and Clemens smile reminiscently. No, sergeants hadn't changed a bit.

Somebody called, "What the devil good are you people if you can't get

to where the shooting's at because the Mormons have the railroad blocked?"

One of the volunteers took the board off his shoulder and thrust with it as if it were a bayonetedSpringfield . "We ain't afraid o' no Mormons," he declared, "nor their wives, neither. They send us east, we'll clean them bastards out and then go on and slaughter the Rebs." Spectators burst into applause.

The drill sergeant was less impressed. "Pay attention to what I tell you, Henry, you goddamn stupid jackass," he bellowed. "Forget about these, these, these— *civilians."* He could have cursed for a day and a half without venting more scorn than he packed into the single word. Still in stentorian tones, he went on, "How do you know that nosy bastard isn't a Confederate spy?"

"I am not!" the man so described said indignantly.

"I'm sorry, Sergeant," Henry said. "I didn't think."

"Of course you didn't think," the sergeant snarled. "You've got your brains in your backside, and you blow 'em out every time you go to the latrine. And you're not sorry yet. You haven't even started being sorry yet. But you will be, oh yes you will." He spoke in somber anticipation of disaster still ahead for the unfortunate volunteer private. "Hut! Hut! Hut hut hut!"

A small hand tugged at Sam's trouser leg. Face shining, Orion looked up at him. "I wanna be a soldier, Pa, and have a gun. Can I be a soldier when I get big?"

Before Clemens could answer that, Ophelia, who'd tagged after her brother, shook her head so vehemently that golden curls flew out from under the edge of her bonnet. "Not me," she said, and folded her arms across her chest as if things were already settled. "I want to be a *sergeant* ."

Sam threw back his head and shouted laughter. He picked up Ophelia, spun her through the air till she squealed, then set her back on the ground. "1 think you'll do it, too, little one—either that or wife, which is the same job except you don't get to wear stripes on your sleeve."

"What about me, Pa?" Orion jumped up and down. "Pa, what about me?"

"Well, what about you?" Clemens spun his son around and around,

too. By the time he put Orion down, the boy was too dizzy to walk, and had had all thoughts of soldiering whirled out of his head. Sam hoped they wouldn't come back. Having been a small boy himself, he knew what a forlorn hope that was.

When Orion was steady on his pins, Sam took both children back to Alexandra. As if by magic, she produced two more cream puffs. That partially reconciled Ophelia and Orion to going home.

Alexandra was putting the picnic hamper back in the buggy and Sam folding the blanket so he could lay it on top of the hamper when a great roar, like a rifle shot magnified a hundredfold, smote the air. Even the gulls in the sky went silent for a moment, then screeched their anger at being frightened so.

Ophelia squealed. Orion jumped. "Good heavens!" Alexandra said. "What was that?"

"One of the big guns up at the Presidio," Sam answered. "They've had guns there since this place belonged toSpain —never mindMexico . I don't think any of them have ever shot at anything." Another roar, identical to the first, disturbed the tranquility ofGolden GatePark — and of the rest ofSan Francisco

, and, no doubt, of a good stretch of surrounding landscape as well. Sam thoughtfully peered northward.

"Sounds like they're getting ready to, though, doesn't it?"

"Golly!" Orion said. "It'd be fun to shoot one of those." This time, Ophelia agreed with her brother.

"How much fun do you think it would be to have somebody shooting one at you?" Sam asked. His children stared at him. That side of war meant nothing to them. It seldom meant anything to anyone till the first bullet flew past him.

The coast-defense guns kept firing as Sam drove home. "By the sound of them," Alexandra said, "they think we're going to be attacked tomorrow."

"Whatever else may happen in this curious world of ours, my dear, I don't expect the Confederate Navy to come steaming intoSan FranciscoBay tomorrow, flags flying and guns blazing." Sam winked at his wife. "Nor the day after, either."

"Well, no," Alexandra said. "Hardly." Another gun boomed. "I suppose they have to practice, the same as the soldiers you were watching."

"If they're no better at their jobs than those poor lugs, the Indians could paddle a fleet of birchbark canoes into the Bay and devastate the city." Sam held up a forefinger. "I exaggerate: *a flotilla* of canoes."

That made Alexandra laugh, which was what he'd had in mind.

When they got back to the house onTurk Street , Ophelia and Orion ran themselves and the pets ragged. Watching them, listening to them, Sam wondered where they came by the energy; even though they'd torn upGolden GatePark all afternoon, they were still going strong. But, by the time he and Alexandra went through the house lighting the gas lamps, the children were fading. They went to bed with much less fuss than they usually put up, and fell asleep almost at once. Ophelia snored, but then Ophelia always snored.

Once things had been quiet for a while, Alexandra said, "Shall we go to bed, too?" By her tone of voice, she didn't mean, *Shall we go to sleep?*

"Yes, let's." Sam sounded casual, or thought he sounded casual, but the alacrity with which he leaped up and turned off the lamps they'd lighted not long before surely gave him away.

He turned off the bedroom lamp, too, before he and his wife undressed and lay down together. A thin stripe of moonlight came in through the window, just enough to make Alexandra's body, warm and soft in his arms, a more perfect mystery than complete darkness would have done.

She sighed and murmured when he kissed her, when he fondled her breasts and brought his mouth down to them, when his hand found the dampness at the joining of her thighs. As always, her excitement excited and embarrassed him at the same time. Doctors swore on a stack of Bibles that most women knew little or nothing of sexual pleasure, and did not care to make its acquaintance. But then, considering the track record doctors had elsewhere, how much did that prove?

With Alexandra, it proved very little. "Come on, Sam," she whispered after a while, and took him in hand to leave no doubt as to her meaning. Her legs drifted farther apart. He poised himself between them and guided himself into her. Her breath sighed out. When their lips met, she kissed him as she did at no other time. She worked with

him while their pleasure built, and moaned and gasped and called his name when she reached the peak. Her nails were claws in his back, urging him on till he exploded a moment later.

When he would have flopped limply down onto her as if she were a feather bed, she poked him in the ribs. "Terrible woman," he said, and rolled off. It was mostly but not entirely a joke; the delight he took with her sometimes seemed scandalous, married though they were. If she felt any similar compunctions, she'd never once shown it.

They used the chamber pot under the bed and got into their nightclothes in the dark. "Good night, dear,"

Alexandra said, her voice blurry.

"Good night," Sam answered, and kissed her. "Work tomorrow." In its own way, that was a curse as vile as any the foul-mouthed sergeant had used inGolden GatePark .

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Reveille blared from the bugler's horn. Theodore Roosevelt bounded out of his cot and groped for the spectacles on the stool next to it. "Half past five!" he exclaimed as he threw on his uniform: an obliging tailor inHelena had fitted him out. "What a wonderful time to be alive!"

He rushed from his tent into the cool sunshine of early morning. The ranch house stood, comfortable and reassuring, less than a hundred feet away.Roosevelt was glad to have an excuse to avoid comfort. Were comfort all he wanted, he could have stayed inNew YorkState . When the men ofRoosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment lived under canvas, their equally unauthorized colonel would not sleep in an ordinary bed with a roof over his head.

The men of the Unauthorized Regiment lived under a great variety of canvas. Some slept in tents that dated back to the War of Secession. Some, prospectors who'd heard of the Regiment when they came into Helena or another nearby town, had brought the tents in which they'd sheltered out in the wilderness.

There were even a few who shared buffalo-hide teepees that might easily have belonged to the Sioux.

They came tumbling out now, routed by the strident notes of the

morning call. The only thing uniform about their shirts and trousers and hats was a lack of uniformity. Some of them had one article or another of military clothing. Some were veterans, while others had acquired the gear from soldiers either leaving the service or selling it on the sly. Most, though, wore civilian clothes of varying degrees of quality and decrepitude. The variety in hats was particularly astonishing.

Whatever else the men had on, though, each of them wore a red bandanna tied around his left upper arm. That was the mark of the Unauthorized Regiment, and the men had already made it a mark to respect in every saloon within a day's ride ofRoosevelt 's ranch. Several loudmouths were nursing injuries of various sorts for having failed to respect it. No one was dead because of that, and, by now, odds were no one would be: roughnecks had learned the men of the Regiment looked after one another like brothers, and that a challenge to one was a challenge to all.

"Fall in by troops for roll call!"Roosevelt shouted. The men were already doing precisely that. They'd picked up the routine of military life in a hurry. Some, of course, had known it before, either half a lifetime earlier in the War of Secession or in the more recent campaigns against the Plains Indians. Their example rubbed off on the new volunteers—and on Roosevelt, who had everything he knew about running a regiment from tactical manuals by Hardec (even if he was a Rebel) and Upton. "Fall in for roll call!" he yelled again.

"Listen to the old man," one of the Unauthorized troopers said to a friend, who laughed and nodded.Roosevelt grinned from ear to ear. Both men were close to twice his age. That they granted him an informal title of respect usually given to an officer who *was* well up in years showed he'd won their respect as a commander: so he assured himself, anyhow.

Troop officers and noncoms—elected by their comrades, as had been done in volunteer regiments during the War of Secession—went through the men. They broughtRoosevelt the returns: half a dozen sick, three absent without leave. "They're probably hung over in Helena, sir," one of the captains said.

"So they are,"Roosevelt said grimly. "They'll be even sorrier than that when they turn up wagging their tails behind them, too." The manuals stressed an officer's need to be strict in the way he dealt with his men. The manuals, of course, were written for regulars; volunteers needed a lighter touch. Roosevelt's own inclination was to keep a light rein on

his troopers as long as they went in the direction in which he wanted to guide them, but to land on them hard when they strayed from the straight and narrow.

After roll call, the bracing smell of brewing coffee filled the air as the men lined up for mess call. Along with the coffee, the cooks served up beans and salt pork, hardtack, bread, and rolls, and oatmeal. The road betweenHelena andRoosevelt 's ranch was getting deep new ruts in it from supply wagons rattling back and forth. His bank account back inNew York was getting deep new ruts in it, too. He noted that without worrying about it unduly; the country came first.

From breakfast, the troopers went to tend their horses. Along with beans and other provender for men, those wagons brought in hay by the ton, and oats to go with it. No one within a couple of miles downwind of the ranch could have had the slightest doubt that a great many horses were dwelling there.

Flies got bad when the weather warmed up, but they hadn't started buzzing yet.

Philander Snow came up to Roosevelt; toRoosevelt 's disappointment, he still showed no interest in joining the Regiment. Working in the fields and with the livestock—what the troopers hadn't eaten of it—contented him. Pausing now to spit, he observed, "One thing's plain as day, boss—you ain't gonna need to go out and buy manure for about the next hundred years."

"That's a fact, Phil,"Roosevelt allowed. "A regiment's worth of horses leaves a lot on the ground, don't they?" A regiment's worth of cavalrymen left a lot on the ground, too. They'd already had to dig a couple of new sets of slit trenches.Roosevelt didn't want those too close to the creek or the well. That way lay sickness; the Roman legionaries had known as much. If typhoid—or, worse, cholera—broke out, he'd be down to half a regiment in nothing flat.

The first wagon of the day came rattling up fromHelena a little past eight in the morning. Roosevelt's quartermaster sergeant, a skinny little fellow name Shadrach Perkins who was a storekeeper down in Wickes, took charge of the sacks of beans and crates of hardtack it contained. The teamster who'd driven the wagon to the ranch handedRoosevelt a copy of the *Helena Gazette*. "Hot off the press, Colonel," he said.

"Good,"Roosevelt answered, and tossed him a ten-cent tip. Since the

supply wagons had started coming up fromHelena every day, he was far less cut off from the world than he had been before. Now, instead of waiting a week or two between looks at a newspaper, he got word of what was going on as fast as the telegraph brought it into town and the typesetters turned it into words on paper.

WhatRoosevelt read now made him paw the ground like one stallion challenging another over a mare.

He felt that full of rage, too. "Richardson!" he roared. "Get your damn bugle,Richardson !" He fumed until the trumpeter came dashing up, horn in hand, then snapped, "Blow Assembly."

"All right, Colonel,"Richardson answered. "What's up and gone south on us now?"Roosevelt glared at him till he raised the bugle to his lips and blasted out the call.

Men came running; a summons during morning fatigues was out of the ordinary and therefore a good bet to be interesting and maybe even important. The troopers buzzed with talk untilRoosevelt strode out before them, *Helena Gazette* clenched in his left fist. "Do you men know—do you men have any idea—what theConfederateStates , the English, and the French have had the infernal impudence to do?"

he demanded.

"Reckon you're gonna tell us, ain't you, Colonel?" a trooper said.

Rooseveltignored the distraction, which, for a man of his temperament, wasn't easy. But fury still consumed him. "They have had the gall, the nerve, to declare a blockade against the coasts and harbors of theUnited States of America —against *our* coasts and harbors, gentlemen, saying we have not got the right to conduct our own commerce." He squeezed the *Gazette* in his fist and waved it about, as if it were the criminal rather than the messenger. "Shall this great nation let such an insult stand?"

"No!" shouted the cavalry troopers, who were about as far from any coast as men in theUnited States could be.

"You're right, boys!"Roosevelt agreed. "We won't let it stand. By jingo, we *can't* let it stand. These vile foreign dogs will see they're barking at the wrong hound if they think they can impose themselves on theUnited States that way. We'll lick 'em back to their kennels with their tails between their legs."

By the time he was done whipping up the men, they were ready to ride for the Canadian border and shoot everybody they could catch who followed QueenVictoria instead of President Blaine. By the time he was done whipping himself up, he was ready to lead them over the border. He needed a distinct effort of will to remember his Regiment was still Unauthorized. If they went over the border, it wouldn't be war; it would be a filibustering expedition, and the enemy would be within his rights to treat them as bandits.

He sighed. He hated having to remember such fine distinctions.

"Let's ride," he shouted. "To horse and let's ride! We cannot fight the backstabbing Englishman and complacent Canuck, not yet, not until we are formally invested with the mantle of the government of theUnited States . But we can ready ourselves so that, when the investiture comes—as it certainly shall—we'll be ready to do our all for the land we hold dear."

It wasn't what he'd planned to do with the day. It also wasn't the first time his impetuosity had run away with him. He knew himself well enough to be sure it wouldn't be the last time his impetuosity ran away with him. The tide of cheers the men unleashed made breaking routine seem worthwhile.

Almost as fast as he would have liked,Roosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment was mounted and pounding north along the road in a long, sinewy column of fours. They thundered past wagons and buggies and lone horsemen who stared and stared at the powerRoosevelt had assembled and now controlled. Those stares left him happier than the whiskey that flowed like water in theMontana mining towns. Anyone could get a drink of whiskey. Only a few men, special men, *great* men, attracted the awe the Regiment gained for him.

"Heavens above, this is bully!" he cried in a great voice. Just then, he would gladly have kept riding all the way toCanada . He would gladly have kept riding all the way throughCanada . With the men he had at his back, he was sure he could do it.

Prudence prevailed, though.MontanaTerritory was as yet thinly settled; finding open land on which the Regiment could practice its evolutions was only a matter of riding out past the little farms and herds of livestock that clung close to running water. Once out on the prairie, the horsemen went through the tedious but vital business of shifting from column into line, of moving by the left flank and the right, and also, much toRoosevelt 's delight, of charging straight at an

unfortunately imaginary enemy.

But, becauseRoosevelt had read the latest tactical manuals, the Unauthorized Regiment also practiced fighting as dragoons: mounted infantry. With some of their number left behind to hold horses, the rest tramped in skirmish lines through the grass and brush. The troops' captains had to rotate the job of horse-holder through their units, because everyone wanted to go forward and no one was keen to be left behind.

As the afternoon wore along,Roosevelt came to another of his snap decisions. "We'll sleep here in the open tonight, men," he announced. "We need to be hardened, to ready ourselves against the rigors of the field."

Some of the men—the lazy ones who hadn't bothered packing hardtack and salt pork in their knapsacks, unless Roosevelt missed his guess—grumbled at that, but their comrades' jeers squelched them. The soldiers (so Roosevelt insisted on thinking of them, though they remained Unauthorized despite telegrams to the War Department inPhiladelphia) were getting the idea that they had to be prepared when they took the field.

"You never know what may happen,"Roosevelt said. "You simply never know." He was looking north, towardCanada .

Chapter 6

Anna Douglass shook her finger at her husband. "you ain'tnever gonna ride on no steamboats no more,"

she said severely, as if to an errant child. "Never, do you hear me?"

"Yes, dear, I do," Frederick Douglass answered, his voice dutiful. "I am not traveling anywhere for the time being. I'll stay here inRochester with you."

"That's not what I mean," his wife said in tones that brooked no argument. "Sooner or later, out you'll go again—but not by steamboat. Promise me,Frederick , as one Christian to another."

"I promise," Douglass said. These days, he refused Anna nothing she asked. Her health was visibly failing, while he remained robust. He let out a small sigh. He'd never meant to eclipse her, to have her live her life in his shadow, but that was how things had happened. In the beginning, she'd been above him: when they first came to know each other, back inBaltimore almost half a century earlier, she had been free while he still toiled in bondage. After his escape, he'd sent for her, and she'd come. In all the years since then, she'd given him a comfortable home from which he was too much absent and a fine family he'd had too small a part in raising. And now she got feebler by the day. He sighed again. There was nothing he could say, nothing he could do. It was years—decades—too late to say or do anything.

"Don't you worry about me," she said, picking a thought from his mind as a cunning thief might pick a wallet from a pocket. "I'll be fine. Whatever happens, the Lord will provide. But whatever happens, I don't want you ridin' on no steamboats."

"I already promised once," Douglass said. "The vow will not be made twice as strong by my repeating it."

"You just remember, that's all," Anna said, and hobbled back toward the kitchen, leaning heavily on her stick. Rheumatism made her joints ache.

Douglass knew he should have been writing, transmuting his few minutes of fear aboard the *Queen of the Ohio* into prose that would galvanize men both black and white to the effort needed to overthrow the Confederate States and thereby ameliorate the plight of the millions of Negroes still enslaved. His first pieces, which had talked of

his own fear of re-enslavement if the steamboat went aground on Confederate soil, had won wide notice and praise. The newspapers and magazines eagerly awaited more, and had made it plain they would pay well.

But, at the moment, the urge to write was not upon him. He shook his head and grimaced wryly. As a veteran newspaperman, he knew you wrote when you had to write, not when the Muse sprinkled fairy dust in your hair and tapped you with a magic wand. He also knew he didn't *have* to write quite yet.

Instead of going upstairs to his study, he walked outside.

Out on the street, the grandson of one of his neighbors was trying to stay upright on an ordinary. The huge front wheel of the bicycle was almost as tall as its rider. As he pedaled along on a wavering course, he waved proudly to Douglass.

Douglass waved back. He'd lived inRochester for almost thirty-five years, long enough for most people to have come to take him for granted in spite of his color. These days, the city did not separate Negroes by race on trolleys or omnibuses or in places accommodating the public. It hadn't been that way when Douglass first came to upstateNew York . He knew no small pride in having had a lot to do with the changes over the years.

"Look out, Daniel!" he called, just too late. The ordinary went into a pothole and fell over, dashing its rider to the street from a considerable height. The boy picked himself up, picked up the bicycle, and sturdily clambered aboard once more. *You fall down till you do it right,* Douglass thought with an approving nod. *That's the only way to learn.*

Aside from a couple of church steeples, the biggest buildings on the skyline were boxy flour mills. Grain came intoRochester from all the surrounding countryside— theGeneseeValley held some of the finest farmland in theUnited States — and went out again by way of the Erie Canal, the railroads, and theGreat Lakes . From his home, which stood near the crest of a small hill, Douglass could look out across the city to the gray-blue waters ofLakeOntario . But for those waters' being fresh, he might have been looking out at the sea.

As always, barges and small steamers glided slowly across the lake. Pillars of smoke rose from their stacks, as they did from the stacks ofRochester 's factories. The air, though, was far better than that inSt.

Louis or other western towns, for the coal burned here was of higher grade than what they used along theMississippi .

Several unusually large plumes of smoke out on the lake caught Douglass' eye. The vessels from which those plumes sprang were also unusually large, and appeared to be moving together. They madeRochester seem more like a seaside town than ever; when he'd been inBoston andNew York , he'd often watched flotillas of Navy ships steaming into port in tight formation like these.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than fresh clouds of smoke billowed from the ships.

Douglass was seeing them from a long way off. For a moment, he wondered whether their boilers had burst. Then the roars, which took some little time to cross that distance, reached his ears. He froze in place, the ice of remembered terror shooting up his back. He'd heard explosions of that sort not long before, coming from the southern bank of theOhio .

"Dear God," he groaned, "those are naval ships, all right, but they don't belong to the U.S. Navy."

Like foxes in a henhouse, the British warships (or would they be Canadian? Douglass worried little about such niceties, and suspected no one else worried any more), having fired warning shots to let the numerous grain- and flour-haulers know what they were, sent motor launches off to those closest to them. One of those steamers, instead of receiving the boarding party, tried to flee into the harbor. The cannon boomed again, sounding angry this time. The steamer exploded, a thunderclap to dwarf the roar of the guns.

"What's that?" Daniel exclaimed, awe on his face at the blast of noise.

Douglass wasn't sure the boy was talking to him. He answered anyhow: "That," he said in his most impressive and mournful tones, "that is war."

A noise—a small noise—behind him made him turn. "Frederick, what the devil is going on?" his wife demanded sharply.

"The enemy"—that covered bothEngland andCanada —"is attacking our shipping in the lake," he replied. He hung his head, close to tears. "The British people once helped so much in the fight against slavery, and now they stand allied to it. There are times when I think my life's struggle has been in vain."

"You can only keep on," Anna answered. That closely paralleled his own thought about Daniel's effort to master the ordinary, so closely that he had to nod. But, while his intellect agreed, his heart misgave him.

Cannon boomed from the shore. From the War of 1812 to the War of Secession, theGreat Lakes had seen half a century of peace. In the embittered aftermath of the latter war, though, both theUSA and the British and Canadians had built up fleets on these waters and fortified their lakeshore towns, each side mistrusting the other. Few people inRochester thought much of its shore defenses. The government had not had a lot of money to spend in the tight times after the war, and had had so many places to spend it

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In hardly more than the twinkling of an eye, the locals' worries proved justified. The warships turned their fire against the guns that had presumed to engage them. Puffs of smoke rose along the shore as their shells smashed into the emplacements of those guns—and against whatever buildings happened to be close by.

One by one, the cannons defendingRochester fell silent. The guns from the ships kept pounding the waterfront anyhow, as if to punish the city for having the effrontery to resist.

"What are they doing?" Anna Douglass said, her voice not far from a moan.

"Beating us," her husband answered. "Few here ever truly believed we should have to go to war against theBritish Empire . It would appear they took the possibility of war against us rather more seriously."

"What right have they got to shoot at us like this here?" Anna asked. "We folk here inRochester , we never done them any harm."

The short answer was, *They're strong enough to do it.* Trying to be judicious, Douglass steered clear of the short answer. "They declared a blockade against our ports," he said. "When they did it, no one thought — no one here thought, certainly— that they meant anything beyond our ports on theAtlantic and the Pacific. But this is a port, and so areBuffalo , andCleveland , andDuluth . In a blockade, they may close our ports if they can close them."

Here atRochester , at least, the enemy could. The warships

methodically pounded the waterfront to bits.

Neither the quays nor the vessels tied up at them could withstand the shells. Smoke climbed into a sky now rapidly darkening from the great profusion of fumes rising to block the rays of the sun. Not all of the smoke, nor even the greatest part of it, came from the gunpowder that propelled the shells and burst inside them. Douglass could see the fierce yellow-orange of fire crawling along piers and over barges.

A few stubborn guns still fired at the enemy vessels. Contemptuously, the warships ignored them. After the first steamer out onLakeOntario was blown to bits, none of the others tried to make a break for it.

They sat very still in the water, waiting to be boarded. Then, one after another, they steamed off. A couple of the warships shepherded them on their way.

"Northwest," Frederick Douglass said. "TowardToronto , I suppose. Prizes of war."

He sighed again. Back before the War of Secession, asRochester stationmaster for the Underground Railroad, he'd sent plenty of escaped Negroes toToronto , to put them forever beyond the reach of recapture. He'd even sent on a few after the war, though the Underground Railroad had withered and died in the bitterness following theU.S. defeat. And nowBritain andCanada stood against theUSA and with the land from which those Negroes had escaped, and from which so many millions more still longed to escape.

But only a couple of the warships were departing. The rest cruised back and forth, either out of range of the few surviving shore guns or still not thinking their fire worth noticing. With them out there,Rochester 's harbor was effectually closed. They proved that bare minutes later, halting an inbound steamer. It soon headed off in the direction ofToronto , likely with a prize crew on board to make sure it got there.

"Blockade, without a doubt," Frederick Douglass said. "Now we pay the price for not having paid the price since the War of Secession."

"Terrible thing," his wife said. "Now I see for my own self what those Rebels did when they shot up your steamboat. You are *never* going to set foot in one of those contraptions again, not while I live and breathe you won't. You done gave me your promise,Frederick , and I expect you to keep it."

The gunners who'd set the *Queen of the Ohio* ablaze were amateurs with obsolete guns. Real artillerymen with modern breech-loading field guns would never have let the sidewheeler escape. "You know I keep my promises," Douglass said. "I'll keep this one, the same as any other."

All that day and into the night, theRochester wharves burned.

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Superficially, everything inSalt Lake City was normal. So far as Abraham Lincoln could divine, everything fromProvo in the south toOgden in the north was superficially normal. The Mormons went on about their business as they always did, pretending to the best of their ability that the world beyond the fertile ground between theWasatchMountains on the one hand and the Great Salt Lake andUtahLake on the other did not exist. The Gentile minority also tried to pretend it was not cut off from the outside world, a pretense that grew more nervous as day followed day with no trains going into or out ofUtah , with no telegrams connecting the Territory to the rest of the nation of which it was a part.

As if to emphasize thatUtah had not followed the Confederate States into secession from theUSA , the Stars and Stripes still flew from the Council House: the ugly little building nearTemple Square wherein the Territorial Legislature and governor did their jobs. But the legislature, though in session, had no quorum.

The Mormons who made up a majority of its membership were staying home.

The flag still flew aboveFortDouglas , too. But the only soldiers in the fort wereUtah volunteers: Mormons, in other words. In the Mexican War, the Mormon Legion had fought on the American side. In what was being called the Second Mexican War, the Mormons were playing their cards closer to the vest.

Lincoln, these days, was a guest in Gabriel Hamilton's home, the bill he was running up at the Walker House having grown too steep for Hamilton and the other activists who'd invited him toSalt Lake City to go on paying it. Had he been able to send a wire out ofUtah , he could have drawn on his own funds. As things were, he depended on the charity of others.

That galled him. At breakfast one morning, he said, "I hope you're keeping a tab for all this, Gabe, because I intend paying you back every penny of it when I get the chance."

Both Hamilton and his wife, a plump, pretty blonde named Juliette, shook their heads. "Don't you worry about a thing, Mr. Lincoln,"Hamilton said. "None of this here is your fault, and you aren't liable for it."

Lincolngave him a severe look. "I've been paying my own way in the world since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, and since I haven't been knee-high to anything excepting possibly a giraffe for upwards of sixty years"—to show what he meant, he rose from his chair and extended himself up to his full angular height, towering over Gabe and Juliette —"it's not a habit I feel easy about breaking."

"Think of it as visiting with friends who are glad to have you, then,"Hamilton said.

"That's right." Juliette nodded emphatically. "Have some more griddle cakes. We'll put some meat on those bones of yours yet, see if we don't."

"No one's done that my whole life through, either,"Lincoln said, "and 1 expect that means it can't be done. But I will have some more, because they're very fine, and I'll thank you to pass the molasses, too."

"My guess is, you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Lincoln, you haven't had a holiday since you once started in to work," Gabriel Hamilton said, "and you're all at sixes and sevens on account of you don't know what to do with yourself when you're not hard at it."

"Oh, I've had a holiday, all right,"Lincoln said, stabbing at a piece of ham with unnecessary violence. "It took me a couple of years to be up and doing after the people turned me out of the White House. I wanted nothing to do even with my wife, God rest her soul, let alone with the world."

"That's not the same thing—not the same thing at all," Juliette said, speaking ahead of her husband. "No one could blame you for being sad then. You did the best you could, but it didn't work."

"You're kind to an old man,"Lincoln said. Juliette Hamilton would have been a girl of perhaps ten when the War of Secession ended: too young to have been consumed by the political passions of the day.

Looking back,Lincoln thought the whole nation had gone into a funk when the Confederate States made good their independence. Mary had tried to drag him out of his gloom by main force. Maybe, in the end, she'd even succeeded. In the meantime, he'd never come so close to laying violent hands on a woman.

"You don't act old, Mr. Lincoln," Gabe Hamilton said. That was a perceptive comment, perceptive enough to make the former president incline his head in gratitude. Most people would thoughtlessly have said, *You aren 't old, Mr. Lincoln,* no matter how obvious a lie it was.Hamilton went on, "There aren't enough people half your age, sir, who have such a progressive view of what labour in this country needs to do to make its voice felt."

"I think—I've always thought—it's wrong for one man to say to another, 'You bake the bread by the sweat of your brow, and I'll eat it,' " Lincoln answered. "That's plain common sense; whoever wrote the fable of the little red hen knew as much."

To his surprise, two tears ran down Juliette's cheeks. "That was Harriet's favorite fairy tale," she said, dabbing at her eyes with her apron. "We lost her to diphtheria when she was four, and we haven't been able to have another."

"A lot of diphtheria in this town," Gabe Hamilton said, as if by thinking of the disease he did not have to think of his dead child. "I wish they knew what causes it."

"Yes. I grieve with you."Lincoln had lost his young son, Tad, not long after losing the War of Secession.

One pain piled on the other had been almost too much to bear.

"That isn't what we were talking about, though," Juliette said, determined to be gay. "We were talking about your holiday, and how it's high time you had a proper one after working so hard for so long."

"Well, I have it,"Lincoln said. "I might not have wanted it much, but here it is. You finally even put me on the little train over to theGreat Salt Lake , which is an extraordinary place indeed if it will bear up this bony old carcass, as it most assuredly did. In any proper, self-respecting water, I sink like a stone."

"Everything inUtah is contrary," Gabe said, to whichLincoln could only nod.

He said, "I expected the other shoe to drop by now, and the Mormons to declare themselves out of the Union if that was what they had in mind when they cut themselves off from the rest of the states."

"That was what I thought they'd do, too,"Hamilton said. "Maybe they haven't the nerve for it, when push comes to shove."

"On brief acquaintance, I would say the Mormons' nerve suffices for almost anything,"Lincoln answered.

"Did you see the notice in the *Bee* for the ball tomorrow night at the Social Hall? Ten dollars for a gentleman and one wife, with all wives after the first in at two dollars a head." Polygamy had captured his attention in the same way it did the attention of the Utah Gentiles.

"Those affairs were commoner in Brigham Young's day than they are now,"Hamilton said. "And the price is pretty dear there: my guess is, they're raising money for guns or lawyers or maybe both. I don't think they'll up and secede, not now I don't; they've waited too long. If I'm reading John Taylor right, he's trying forUtah 's admission as a state on his terms—he'll promise to let the flag fly ifWashington leaves polygamy alone and lets him keep out the Gentiles so they can't ever outvote the Mormons here. In theUnited States but not of them, you might say."

"They would use the same sorts of laws to keep out certain white men that some states now employ to exclude Negroes, you mean,"Lincoln said. "I might almost be tempted to favor their effort along those lines, if for no other reason than to see that entire class of legislation, which has long outlived its usefulness, cast down."

"I'm only guessing, mind you,"Hamilton said. "Do you want me to take you to the Tabernacle Sunday, to hear what the Mormon leaders tell their flock?"

"I'd be very interested to hear that, and to see it, too,"Lincoln answered. "How easy are they about having Gentiles come in and watch them at worship? Can we do it without causing a ruction?"

"Won't be any trouble at all," Gabe assured him. "Anyone can go into the Tabernacle: they reckon some of the folks who come to watch end up converting, and they're right, too. When theTemple 's built, now, that'll be sacred ground, I hear, with no Gentiles allowed inside."

"If you're sure it would be no trouble, then,"Lincoln said. "I don't want

to keep you from your own devotions."

"Oh, you don't need to fret about that," Juliette assured him. "They don't start their services till two in the afternoon, to let people come intoSalt Lake City from their farms and from the little towns roundabout."

"We'll do it," Gabe Hamilton declared, as decisive as a railroad president ordaining higher freight rates.

Do it they did.Lincoln spent that Sunday morning by himself, reading *Pilgrim's Progress.* Though he believed in God and reckoned himself a Christian, he'd been disappointed by too many preachers who smugly accepted things as they were to attend church regularly. Walking through the wilderness of the world with Bunyan suited him better: he'd known thevalleyofHumiliation , and many times had to fight his way out of the slough named Despond.

Gabe and Juliette came back from church a little before noon and, withLincoln , ate a hasty dinner of sausage and bread, washed down with coffee. When they finished, Gabe asked, "Are you ready, sir?"

"I reckon I am,"Lincoln said. "Do we need to leave so early?"

He soon discovered they did. As Juliette had said, people came from a long way outside ofSalt Lake City to attend the service. A great many people from within the city came to attend the service, too. The streets aroundTemple Square were a sea of carriages, wagons, horses, mules, and people on foot.

TheHamiltons had to tie up their buggy a couple of blocks off and, withLincoln , make their slow way through the press toward the Tabernacle. In most towns, Lincoln would have worried more about leaving the horse and carriage so far from where he was going, but Salt Lake City, save for a small number of hoodlums, seemed an exceptionally law-abiding place.

Lincoln's height and familiar face made some people stop and stare and others draw away to give him and his companions room to advance past the granite blocks awaiting inclusion in the Temple. The net result was that he, Gabe, and Juliette got into the Tabernacle about as fast as they would have had he been inconspicuous and anonymous.

The Tabernacle seemed large from the outside. From the inside, with one great hall covered by the overarching whitewashed roof (the

latter decorated with evergreen and with paper flowers), it was truly enormous. "You could have taken the crowds in both the buildings where I was nominated for president and lost them inside here,"Lincoln said. "How many does this place hold, anyhow?"

"Twelve, thirteen thousand, something like that," Gabe Hamilton answered. Women predominated in the center of the church, while men made up the majority in the side aisles.Hamilton led his wife and Lincoln up into the gallery rather than down onto the floor, explaining, "If you like, we can sit down front, but they'll aim some of the preaching straight at us."

"I've had enough preaching aimed straight at me, thanks,"Lincoln said, at whichHamilton chuckled.Lincoln went on, "If you don't mind, let's find one seat on the aisle, so I can stretch out these long legs of mine." Once seated, he looked around with a lively curiosity. The Tabernacle seemed to be soaking up people as a thirsty towel soaks up water. Many paused to drink from the huge cask of water by one door, dipping it up with the tin cups provided for the purpose.

At the front of the Tabernacle sat the choir, men on one side, women on the other. When the great organ began to play, Gabe Hamilton took his watch from his pocket. "That's two o'clock, on the dot," he said, adjusting the timepiece.

A lay brother in a sack suit announced a hymn. He stood a long way off, butLincoln could hear him clearly: the acoustics of the building were very good. He prepared to add his own voice to those of the folk around him, but the audience did not sing, leaving that to the choir. He'd heard the choir was so fine, you could listen to it once and die happy. He didn't find it so; *good but not grand* was his mental verdict.

The organ accompanying the singers was something else again—as mighty an instrument, and as well played, as he'd ever heard.

Hymn succeeded hymn, all performed by the choir and that formidable organ. Once they were done, another layman-priest—a businessman in everyday life, by his clothes—offered a long prayer. Many of the references, presumably drawn from the Book of Mormon, were unfamiliar toLincoln , but the prayer's moral tone would not have been out of place in any church he had ever visited.

Another choral hymn followed, this one longer than any that had gone before. While it went on, eight bishops of the church cut sliced loaves of bread into morsels for communion. Attendants took the morsels on

trays and passed them out to the audience.

While they were doing so, an elderly man took his place behind the pulpit.Lincoln did not recognize his appearance, not at the distance from which he saw him, but stiffened when the man began to speak: he knew John Taylor's voice.

"I wish to read a couple of verses from the twenty-first chapter of the book of Revelations, and to talk about them with you,"Taylor said. "St.John the Divine begins the chapter as follows: 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'

"My friends, my brethren, have we not here the new Jerusalem? Have we not been tested in the fire of persecution, and assayed as pure metal?"Lincoln found it interesting that he should use a figure drawn from mining. He could not linger on it, forTaylor was continuing: "Has God not given us this land, the new Jerusalem, to use and to shape according to our desire and to His? Have we not richly adorned ourDeseret , which was empty when we came to it?"

In many churches, the congregation would have shouted out agreement. Here they sat quiet as the communion morsels came to them row by row. President Taylor went on, "By the first heaven and the first earth I take John to mean the requirements forced upon us up to this time by the government of theUnited States , requirements violating the freedom of religion guaranteed to all by the first amendment to the Constitution. These infringements on our liberty shall not stand, for now we enter into the new heaven and the new earth. The sea of tears which was our lot shall pass away, and exist no more, as John clearly states.

"In the new heaven and the new earth we are creating, we shall be free to worship and to live as we reckon best and most fitting, and no one shall have the power to abridge our rights in any way. For the United States are undergoing their own apocalypse now; if they choose not to treat with us as we deserve, they shall be given over to that old serpent, call the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.Washington is bombarded.Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city."

Lincolnturned to Gabe Hamilton. "It seems you were right," he

murmured.

"It does, doesn't it?" the activist answered. "I tell you the truth, sir: I'd sooner have been wrong."

The attendants with the trays of communion bread took a long time to reach the gallery. When at last they got toLincoln 's row, he passed the tray on without taking a morsel. He wanted no part of the communion being celebrated in the Tabernacle.

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George Custer sat up straighter in his seat as the train wheezed to a halt west of the little town ofWahsatch ,Utah . The satiny plush upholstery and soft padding made sitting straight require an effort of will: the leading officers in John Pope's hastily improvised army rode in the comfort of a deluxe Pullman car, while the soldiers they commanded were packed like sardines into the cramped and battered confines of cars commandeered from emigrant trains.

"Let me see the map, would you, Tom?" Custer said. His brother, who had the seat on the aisle beside him, handed him the folded sheet. He unfolded it, traced with his finger the route they'd taken thus far, and grunted. "Next would be Castle Rock, and then the bridge over Echo Creek."

"Would beis right," Tom Custer said. "Next is the place where the Mormons have blocked the tracks."

He sounded quiveringly eager to go to war, even if it was against citizens of his own country.

As soon as the train had come to a complete stop, Brigadier General John Pope rose from his seat and addressed his officers in the grandiloquent tones he commonly used: "Gentlemen, we now have the privilege and the opportunity of restoring the refractoryTerritory ofUtah to its proper allegiance to theUnited States of America . I suggest that we now disembark to examine the damage and vandalism the Mormons have inflicted upon the tracks in their illegal and improper effort to separate themselves from our great country."

"That'll give us the privilege and opportunity of getting shot if the damned Mormons decide they don't care to return to their proper allegiance," Tom Custer whispered to his brother. But he was one of the first men to rise and head out of the car.

George Custer was on his brother's heels. It had been hot and stuffy and close in the Pullman car, the air so full of tobacco smoke that Custer might as well have been puffing a cigar himself. Outside, it was hot and dry: gray rocks and roan mixed together. The breeze smclled spicily of sagebrush and tasted of alkali.

Colonel John Duane, the chief Army engineer attached to Pope's command, walked along the tracks till there were no more tracks. Custer trailed along with him. The two men had known each other a long time, both having served in McClellan's headquarters during the War of Secession. Duane had been thin and scholarly looking then, and still was; the only difference in him Custer could see was that his mustache and the hair at his temples had gone gray. After peering west for a couple of minutes, he spoke in tones of professional admiration: "Well, well. They didn't do things by halves, did they?"

"Not a bit of it," Custer agreed. From perhaps a hundred yards west of where the locomotive had stopped, the tracks of the Union Pacific quite simply ceased to exist. The rails were gone. So were the cross ties that anchored them in place. In case that hadn't been enough to get across the impression that the Mormons did not want people traveling throughUtah , they had also dug a series of deep ditches across the roadbed to make repairing it as hard as possible.

John Pope came up to examine the damage. "They'll pay for this," he ground out, "every last penny's worth of it." He started walking west, paralleling what had been the line of the track.

"Where are you going, sir?" Custer called.

"I am going to find some Mormons," General Pope replied. "I am going to tell the first one I do find that if any further destruction of the railroad takes place, their heads and the heads of their leaders shall answer for it." He stumped on. No one had ever impugned his courage, not even at McClellan's headquarters.

Custer glanced back over his shoulder. His brother and the other regimental officers were already taking charge of getting men and horses off the train and readying them for whatever lay ahead. Properly, he should have supervised the job. But danger drew him. So did the chance to make an impression on his commanding officer. "I'm with you, sir!" he exclaimed, and hurried after Pope.

Sweat ran down his face. When he reached up to wipe it away from his eyes, his hand slid across the skin of his forehead as if it had

soapsuds on it. He nodded to himself. The dust was alkaline, sure enough.

Pope glanced over to him as he caught up. "Misery loves company—is that it, Colonel?" he asked, skirting yet another ditch.

"It's a nice day for a walk," Custer answered with a shrug. The Mormons could have posted sharpshooters anywhere in this boulder-strewn landscape. Custer looked neither right nor left. If they had, they had. Custer and Pope strolled along as casually as if they were inNew York 'sCentral Park .

Pointing ahead to a small collection of ramshackle buildings, Custer said, "I do believe that's Castle Rock."

"I do believe you're right," Pope said. "With any luck at all, we'll find some Mormon bigwigs there. If they haven't been waiting for me or somebody like me to show up, I miss my guess."

He'd missed plenty of guesses against Lee and Jackson. Against the Mormons, he was spot on. A small party came out of Castle Rock behind a flag of truce. Pope stopped and let them approach. Custer perforce stopped with him. Along with the standard bearer, the Mormon party included a couple of tough-looking youngsters carrying Winchesters and an old man whose unkempt white beard spilled halfway down his chest.

The old-timer stepped out in front of the others and walked up to Pope and Custer. Nodding to them, he said, "Gentleman, I am Orson Pratt, one of the apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints. I can treat with you."

"I am Brigadier General John Pope of the United States Army, Mr. Pratt," Pope said, not offering to shake hands, "and with me here is Colonel Custer of the Fifth Cavalry. President Blaine has appointed me military governor of theUtahTerritory and charged me with bringing this Territory into full obedience to all the laws of theUnited States . That is exactly what I intend to do, and that is exactly what I shall do." He pointed back toward the train. "I have with me a force I believe adequate to ensure obedience, and can summon more men at need."

One of the rifle-toting young Mormons said, "They'll be sorry if they try it."

"You'll be sorrier if you get in our way," Custer snapped, angry at the

fellow's arrogance. Pope nodded, as if Custer had simply got the words out before he could.

Orson Pratt held up a hand. "I would sooner negotiate than quarrel." His heavy features turned severe. "I will note, however, that your high-handed attitude, General, is a symptom of the prejudice of the government of theUnited States that has brought us to this pass."

"Obedience to the laws of theUnited States is not negotiable," Pope replied. "As military governor of a territory judged to be in rebellion againstU.S. authority, I have powers far beyond those of any civil official. The fewer of those powers you require me to use, the happier you and your people will be.

Remember, a great many back East would be as glad to see you wiped off the face of the earth."

Pratt's countenance darkened with anger. "We are not without strength, General. If you seek to impose yourself upon us by force —"

"We'll do exactly that," Pope declared. "You have not the slightest notion of what you're up against, Mr.

Pratt. This would not be a war of bush-whackers against riflemen. We have the power to smash your troops and smash your towns, sir, and the will to use it if provoked."

"Talk is cheap," Pratt's bodyguard jeered.

Pope turned on his heel. "Come with me," he said. "You have my word you'll be allowed to return here whenever you like. If, however, you judge I am lying about the force at my disposal, I feel myself obliged to disabuse you of your misapprehension." Without looking to see whether he was being followed, he started back toward the troop train. Custer fell in behind him. Pope's bombast had its uses. Pratt and his companions tagged along, as the general must have known they would.

Had Custer been in charge of the Mormons who had chosen to defy the authority of theUnited States , he would have attacked the troop train with everything he had the minute it came within range of his weapons. That the Mormons had failed to do so struck him as cowardice, and as a confession of their guilty consciences. That they might have worried about the consequences of such a precipitate assault never entered his mind, as he rarely worried about consequences himself.

They would not have the chance to attack now. Infantrymen and Custer's cavalry had already formed a defensive perimeter. The foot soldiers were methodically scraping out firing pits in the rocky ground.

Some of them had trowel-shaped bayonets that doubled as entrenching tools. The others used conventional bayonets and whatever other tools they happened to have.

A battery of artillery had come off the freight cars. The brccch-loading field pieces were drawn up in a line facing south; sunlight gleamed from the bright steel of their barrels. Next to them stood the two Gatling guns attached to Custer's regiment. Sergeants Buckley and Neufeld and their crews looked ready and alert.

Orson Pratt was a hard man to impress. "I knew you had soldiers here, General," he said tartly. "I didn't have to walk all that way in the hot sun to see as much."

Pope remained unfazed. "No one who has not seen modern weapons demonstrated has an accurate understanding of their destructive power. You say you are prepared to prevent us from advancing toSalt Lake City . Perhaps you are in fact less prepared than you fondly believe." He raised his voice and spoke to the artillerymen: "Each piece, six rounds, bearing due south, range three thousand yards."

The soldiers with red trim and chevrons on their uniforms sprang into action. Inside of two minutes, each cannon had roared half a dozen times. Choking clouds of black-powder smoke rose. Through them, Custer watched three dozen shells slam into the desert hillside almost two miles away. They threw up smoke and dust, too, all of it coming from a surprisingly small area: Pope had evidently picked his best gunners for the demonstration. Custer hoped it impressed Orson Pratt. It certainly impressed him.

Artillery played only a small role in Indian fighting on the plains. The art had come a long way since the War of Secession.

After the guns fell silent, General Pope said, "That is by no means their extreme range. I could be bombarding Castle Rock now. If I have to fight my way toSalt Lake City , I can bombard it at ranges from which you could not hope to reply."

Pratt looked as if he'd just cracked a rotten egg. "That is an uncivilized way to make war, sir," he said.

"It's also deuced effective," Pope answered. "I have been charged with returningUtah to obedience by whatever means prove necessary. President Blaine cares only about results, not about methods. No one outsideUtah will care about methods, either."

That made the Mormon apostle look even less happy. The mouthier of his two bodyguards spoke up:

"You can't knock everything down with your guns there. What happens when we come at you man-to-man?"

"I was hoping someone would ask me that," Pope said with a nasty smile. He turned to Custer and gave a half bow. "Colonel, the Gatlings being under your command, would you be so kind as to do the honors?"

"My pleasure, sir," Custer replied, saluting. "Will two magazines per gun suffice?" At John Pope's nod, Custer raised his voice:

"Soldiers positioned in front of the Gatling guns, please take yourself out of harm's way." Bluecoats in dust-streaked uniforms hastily abandoned the pits and trenches they'd dug for themselves. Custer nodded to the Gatlings' crew chiefs. "Sergeants, two magazines from each weapon, if you please."

Buckley and Neufeld snapped out orders. Their commands were tiny, but they led them with confidence and skill. As each sergeant cranked his weapon, the barrels revolved, spitting bullets at the astonishing rate in which Custer had delighted down in theIndian Territory . The pauses while full magazines replaced empty ones were barely perceptible.

Silence slammed down after each Gatling went through its second magazine. Into it, Custer addressed the bodyguard with theWinchester : "If you want to charge into that, friend, make sure you tell your mother and your wives good-bye first."

John Pope nodded to Orson Pratt in a friendly-seeming way. "As you see, we are fully prepared to crush without mercy any resistance your people may be rash enough to offer, and have with us the means to do precisely that." He didn't mention that the two Gatling guns the Mormons had seen were the only two he had with him. He did such a good job of not mentioning it, Custer was glad he didn't play poker against him. As if every other freight car were full of Gatlings, Pope went on, "I will have your answer now, Mr. Pratt: either that, or I shall

commence operations against your forces immediately you have returned to them."

Under that beard, Pratt's jaw worked. The Mormon apostle looked a good deal like an angry prophet.

He also, Custer realized with a small chill, looked a good deal like an older, fleshier version of John Brown. But, where John Brown had had no give in him whatever, Pratt's eyes kept sliding to the field guns and especially to the Gatlings. "You drive a hard bargain, General," he said at last, each word dragged from him.

"I am not here to bargain." Pope drew himself up straight. "I am here to rule. Either peacefully yield your usurped authority to me and accept whatever penalties I see fit to impose on your misguided people or chance the hazards of war. Those are your only choices."

"You would hold our people hostage—" Pratt began.

"You are holding theUnited States of America hostage," Pope broke in. He drew his sword. To Custer's surprise, he found something to do with it besides making a dramatic gesture, or rather, he found a new sort of dramatic gesture to make: he drew a ring around Orson Pratt in the dirt. "As the Roman told the Greek king's envoy, say yes or no before you step out of the circle."

Pratt understood the allusion. He also understood that, like the Seleucids when measured againstRome 's might, he had no choice. "I yield, sir," he said. "Under compulsion, I yield. Let me go back to Castle Rock, and I will wire President Taylor to that effect. God will judge you for what you do inUtah , General Pope."

"So will the president," Pope replied. "I worry more about him." Custer clapped his hands together.

"Very good, sir!" he said. Pope beamed. Custer nodded to himself. You couldn't go far wrong praising your commander.

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General Thomas Jackson paced in the antechamber outside President Longstreet's office like a wolf confined for too long in a cage too small for it. After watching him for a few minutes, G. Moxley Sorrel said, "Please be at ease, General. The president will see you soon, I assure you."

"No doubt. No doubt."Jackson didn't sit. He didn't even slow down. "I should not be here at all. I should be in the field, where I belong."

"Being summoned to confer with your chief executive is not an insult, sir," Sorrel said. "On the contrary: it is a signal honor, a mark of the president's confidence in you and in your judgment."

As far asJackson was concerned, Longstreet showed confidence in only one person's judgment: his own, a confidenceJackson reckoned exaggerated. To the president's chief of staff, he replied, "I am not insulted, Mr. Sorrel. I am delayed. Who knows what the Yankees may be doing whilst I fritter my time away in useless consultation?"

The door to Longstreet's office came open. The French minister, a dapper little man who looked like a druggist, strode out, bowed toJackson , and hurried away. President Longstreet followed him. "You think I'm wasting your precious time, do you?" he said.

"Of course I do, Your Excellency,"Jackson said: when asked a direct question, he was never one to back away from a direct answer. Moxley Sorrel, whose principal function, so far asJackson could see, was shielding President Longstreet from unpleasantness of any sort, looked horrified.

Longstreet himself, however, merely nodded, as if he'd expected nothing different. "Well, come on in, General, and we'll talk about it."

"Yes, Mr. President,"Jackson said: he might have been restive, but he understood perfectly well that the president of the Confederate States was his superior. Inside Longstreet's office, he took his usual stiff seat in a chair not really designed to accommodate such a posture.

Longstreet picked up a pen and pointed it at him as if it were the bayonet on the end of a Tredegar. "I know what you're thinking," the president said. "You're thinking what a blasted nuisance it is to have a president who's also a soldier, and that I wouldn't be such an interfering old buzzard if I were a civilian."

"Your Excellency, if this was not a thought that crossed your mind a great many times during the administration of President Davis, I should be astonished,"Jackson said.

"Touche,"Longstreet said with a laugh, and then, "You see how having Monsieur Mclinc here just before you has had its influence on me."

Again,Jackson was frank to the point of bluntness: "Very little influences you, Mr. President, when you do not care to let yourself be influenced."

Longstreet started to reply to that, but checked himself. Setting down the pen, he made a steeple of the fingertips of both hands. "Do you know, General, you can at times be alarmingly perceptive," he remarked. "Perhaps it is as well that you never took any great interest in politics."

"As well for me, certainly,"Jackson agreed, "and, I have no doubt, also for our nation."

Longstreet surprised him by being frank in turn (any frankness from Longstreet surprised him): "By the first part of which you mean you'd sooner see others do the dirty work, so as not to tarnish your own moral perfection." He held up a hand—he used them expressively, as a politician should. "Never mind.

What I'm driving at is that you chafe under me for exactly the opposite reason I—and so many others—chafed under Jeff Davis."

Jacksonrealized he would have to examine, and if necessary root out, what looked like a stain of hypocrisy on his own soul. But that had to wait. Duty first. Always duty first. "I beg your pardon, Mr.

President, but I do not see the distinction you are drawing."

"No?" President Longstreet sounded amused. "I'll spell it out for you. President Davis interfered with the way his commanders fought the War of Secession because he thought he was a better general than they were. I am interfering in the way you fight this war because I think I am a better politician than you are."

"I would not presume to argue that, despite your intimations to the contrary a moment ago,"Jackson replied.

"All right, then," Longstreet said. "Believe me, General, I would constrain you less if I did not have to worry more about keeping our allies satisfied with the manner in which we conduct the war."

"It is war,"Jackson said simply. "We must conduct so as best and most expeditiously to defeat the enemy."

"How best to defeat theUnited States and how to defeat them most

expeditiously may not be one and the same," Longstreet said. "This is one reason I ordered you not to go on and attack Harper's Ferry after beating the Yankees atWinchester ."

"Mr. President, I do not understand."Jackson knew no better way to express the frustration he felt at having to abandon an assault he was certain would have been successful.

"I know you don't. That is why I called you back toRichmond ." Longstreet pointed to the map on the wall. "Suppose we win an overwhelming victory in this war, which God grant. Can we hope to overrun and conquer theUnited States ?"

Jacksondidn't need to look at the map. "Of course not, sir."

"Good." The president of the CSA nodded approval. "There you have the first point: any success we win must of necessity be limited in scope. After it, we still faceUnited States larger and stronger than ourselves." He cocked his head to one side, awaitingJackson 's response. Reluctantly,Jackson nodded in turn. The president proceeded, like a teacher taking a scholar through the steps of a geometric proof: "It therefore follows, does it not, that we should be wise to maintain and cultivate our alliance with the powers whose intervention was essential in securing our independence a generation ago?"

Like a scholar who did not grasp the proof,Jackson said, "I fail to see how the one follows from the other."

"I thought not—another reason to call you away from the front." Longstreet seemed willing, even eager, to go through the proof the long way where the short way had failed. "The key to your understanding, General, is that, in the eyes of our allies, we are engaged in a defensive struggle. TheUnited States declared war against us, not the other way round. TheUnited States first took offensive action, sending their cavalry down into theIndian Territory . That justified our responding."

"You don't win a war by merely responding, Mr. President."Jackson was as unyielding as the stone wall that had given him his lasting nickname.

"We aren't *merely* responding," Longstreet said. "General Stuart has stung the Yankees down in the New Mexico Territory, and our raids into Kansas have been effective in keeping the USA off balance there —and the United States have pulled regular troops from that front to

bring in Mormons in Utah back under their thumb."

"Ah—the Mormons."Jackson leaned forward. "Had we anything to do with their . . . timely disaffection?" That sort of inspired chicanery, sowing trouble in the Yankees' rear, was what he would have expected from Longstreet.

"I despise the Mormons, General, and I thank heaven every day that we have only a handful of them in the Confederacy," the president said.

For a moment,Jackson thought Longstreet had denied abetting the unrest inUtahTerritory . Then he realized the president of the CSA had done no such thing. He suspected he'd got all the answer he was going to get, too. No point to pursuing it further; he returned to the main subject at hand: "What we've given theUnited States are pinpricks, fleabites. We need to hit them hard enough to let them know they're hurt."

"I will not strike them blows that, in my judgment, would causeBritain andFrance to conclude they are being used as instruments of our aggrandizement rather than protectors of our legitimate rights,"

Longstreet said. "I will not. If that makes the war more difficult, so be it. My firm view is that, in the long run, we shall be better for it."

Jacksongot to his feet. "If I cannot prosecute the war to the utmost, Your Excellency, I hope you will accept my resignation."

"Oh, sit down, Tom. Don't be a stiff-necked fool," Longstreet said testily. Surprised,Jackson did sit. The president went on, "Even if I tie one hand behind your back, I need you. You're the best I've got. That's all the more true *because* I tie one hand behind your back. I'm not the only one who needs you. The country does."

Jacksonsaw that Longstreet deserved his place in the executive mansion. The president knew precisely which levers to pull to return a recalcitrant general to obedience. Maybe that meant he knew which levers to pull to keepBritain andFrance on good terms with the Confederate States, and maybe it meant he correctly gauged how important the alliance was. If all that was so ...

"For the sake of the nation we both serve, I retract what I just said."Jackson spoke firmly. Through his life, he'd seldom had to backtrack. When he found the need, he was as unflinching in meeting

it as with any other tactical necessity.

"Did you say something, General?" Longstreet brought a hand to his ear. "I'm an old man. I must be getting deaf, because I didn't hear a word."

That drew a chuckle fromJackson . Longstreet was smoother thanJackson had ever wanted to be, and crookeder thanJackson ever wanted to be, too. But he'd found a way out of a situation from which the general-in-chief would have been too stubborn to retreat unaided. He deserved credit for that.

"Very well, then."Jackson gave him credit by proceeding from the point of their disagreement as if he had in fact agreed. "Recognizing that we cannot hope to conquer theUnited States , how are we to secure victory over them?"

"By demonstrating to them that they cannot hope to conquer us," President Longstreet answered. "The way you ran them out ofWinchester was first-rate, General. That is how we won the War of Secession, after all."

"Our armies were inPennsylvania when we won the War of Secession,"Jackson pointed out.

"True," Longstreet said, "but we were compelled to invade their territory then, for they had gained several lodgments in ours: along theCarolina coast, inVirginia , and in the west. That is not the case now.

Our navy is far more able to defend our shores than was so then, and we have our allies to assist us. We stand in firm control on our side of the Potomac, and have punishedWashington for the effrontery of theUnited States . AndKentucky and the line of theOhio River are now ours, where we had to gain that line by force of arms during the previous war. TheUnited States have not got the initiative, nor shall they gain it."

"Hard to be assured of that while we stand on the defensive,"Jackson said.

Longstreet shrugged his broad shoulders. "Modern weaponry favors the defensive, at least on land.

Having seen the fighting at first hand, do you deny it?"

"No, sir," Jackson said. "Harder now to break a strongly held defensive position than it was in the War of Secession, and it wasn't easy then. As my written report states, a bare regiment of entrenched Yankees fought manfully against my brigade south of Kernstown, though eventually being overcome by superior force."

"Well, then," Longstreet said, as if everything were settled, "is it not more profitable to strike where we and our allies are strong, as in the recent bombardments of U.S. towns on the shores of the Great Lakes, and to let the Yankees beat their heads against the wall coming at us?"

"But the trouble is—"Jackson realized he could not oppose the president of the Confederate States with anything resembling a logical argument. He gave him an emotional one instead: "The trouble is, Your Excellency, I want to hit them a good lick."

"That should not be impossible, even standing on the defensive." Longstreet looked over to the map again. "As you no doubt know, they appear to be massing troops inIndiana oppositeLouisville . Would it make you happy if I sent you toKentucky to supervise the defense of the city?"

Jacksonknew Longstreet was offering him a bribe. If he did as the president desired, he would in essence forfeit the right to express his disagrement with present Confederate policy— especially as he would be an instrument of making that policy succeed. Longstreet was a subtle man, but not so subtle as to be able to disguise what he was about here. Understanding what Longstreet was about, though, did not makeJackson able to resist the temptation set before him. Leaning forward in his chair, he said, "Yes, Mr. President!"

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Major Horatio Sellers came up to Jeb Stuart while the general commanding the Military District of the Trans-Mississippi was engaged in the unmilitary but nevertheless important task of making sure no scorpions had crawled into his boots during the night. Once satisfied on that score, Stuart said, "And what can I do for you this morning, Major?"

Sellers' heavy features were not made for expressing joy under the best of circumstances. Since traveling along the border between Sonora andNew MexicoTerritory was hardly the best of circumstances, Stuart supposed his aide-de-camp could hardly be blamed for looking grim. Sellers said, "Sir, how far are we going to trust these Apache

devils, anyhow? I keep having the feeling that one fine morning we're going to wake up with our throats cut, if you know what I mean."

"I may," Stuart answered. "I just may. But before I answer that, let me ask you a few questions of my own." Since he was the general, the major inclined his head in agreement. Stuart began: "Are these Apache devils the best guides and scouts we could have, or not?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Sellers said. "Not a doubt about that. They know every cactus in this whole damn desert by its first name. They know where the Yankees are, where they were, and where they'll turn up day after tomorrow. If I hadn't seen it so often by now, I wouldn't believe it. It's almost uncanny, like a nigger *gris-gris* woman down inNew Orleans ."

"If Geronimo understood that, he'd thank you for it—from everything I've been able to figure out, he's as much a medicine man as a chief," Stuart said. "It's neither here nor there, though." The general paused to pull on one of his scorpion-free boots before continuing the catechism: "Do these Apache devils hate the Yankees and the Mexicans both?"

"I hope to spit, they do," Major Sellers exclaimed. "Can't say I much blame 'em, either, if you look at things from their side of the mirror. The only reason they can't figure out which bunch to hate worse is that the damnyankees and the Mexicans have both been doing their damnedest to massacre 'em."

"Which means they've got good, solid reasons to be loyal to the Confederate States, doesn't it, Major?"

Stuart said.

"When you put it like that, yes, sir, I suppose it does." Major Sellers neither looked nor sounded happy.

"The only thing I hope, sir, is that we don't end up sorry we ever trusted them."

Jeb Stuart was pulling on the other boot when his aide-de-camp said that. He stopped with it halfway up his calf. Both eyebrows rose. "Good God, Major, you'd have to send me to an idiots' asylum if I trusted them once they were out of my sight. They're as dangerous as ... as scorpions." He finished putting on the boot. "If they weren't, how could so few of them have given so manyU.S. soldiers and so many Mexicans so much trouble for so long?"

"Sir?" Now Sellers wore a new expression: confusion. "In that case, why have we given them all Tredegars?"

"So they can shoot them at the Yankees, of course," Stuart replied. "They will do that. As you said yourself, they have good reason to do that."

"Well, yes, sir," Major Sellers said. "But onceSonora is ours, won't they find reasons to shoot them at us?"

"I hope not. I hope that, onceSonora is ours, they'll go shoot upNew Mexico when they're feeling frisky," Stuart said. "But it's a chance I'm willing to take, for now. If they decided to start raiding our supply line instead of working with us, life could get lively faster than we really wanted, couldn't it?"

He watched Sellers think that over. He watched Sellers look as unhappy as he had while making the same consideration. "Sir, we need that railroad fromEl Paso ," his aide-de-camp said.

"So we do," Stuart said. "Unfortunately, it's not built yet. If the war with theUnited States isn't over by the time it is built, things will have gone a great deal worse than I hope. Once the war is over and the railroad built, I expect we'll be able to deal with any trouble a few hundred redskins cause. Until then, we'll use them to our best advantage. Since that's also to their advantage, I don't see how they can fail to make us useful tools for the time being."

His aide-de-camp's face cleared. "Well, that's all right, then," Major Sellers said with some relief. "As long as you're thinking of them as cat's-paws and not as genuine allies, everything's fine. After all, sir, it's not as if they're white men."

"No, it's not," Stuart agreed. "Of course, even if we are white men, that doesn't stop our allies from using us as cat's-paws against theUSA . After all, it's not as if we were Europeans."

That sailed past Horatio Sellers. Sellers was a detail man, which made him a devil of an aide-de-camp.

He wasn't so good at fitting details inside the frame of a larger picture. Some aides-de-camp used their posts at the side of high-ranking officers to gain high rank themselves. Sellers would likely be a major till he retired, if he lived to retirement.

Every man is good at— *and good for— something,* Stuart thought.

Without Major Sellers, the thin Confederate force operating on theU.S. border would have been far less effective than it was. Without him, too, Stuart would have overlooked any number of things to worry about, some of which probably would have proved important. If Horatio Sellers didn't think something was worth worrying about, it wasn't.

Stuart pulled aside the tent flap and went outside. The day was bright and clear and hot. But for occasional storms that blew up from the south, every summer's day hereabouts was bright and clear and hot. Stuart thought he could see forever. Water seemed to shimmer in the middle distance. He'd warned his men about chasing mirages.

A roadrunner skittered past with a horned toad's tail sticking out of its beak. It gave Stuart a wary glance, as if afraid he might try to steal its breakfast. When he just stood there, it ran off to where it could dine in privacy.

Geronimo and the young son who translated for him approached Stuart. "Good day to you, General,"

said the young man, whose name was Chappo. His accent might almost have come fromNew England .

Stuart didn't know if the sounds of the Apache language made it seem that way, or if Chappo had learned the language from somebody from the northeasternUnited States . Either way, he found it funny.

Also funny was the spectacle of a couple of Indians carrying Confederate Army-issue tin plates full of beans (they carefully picked out the salt pork, which they didn't like) and tin cups full of coffee, both of which (except for the pork) they thought highly.

"Good day to you, Chappo," Stuart answered gravely, "and to your father."

Chappo spoke in the Apache language. Gcronimo answered. His voice was on the mushy side, for he was missing quite a few teeth, which also gave the lower part of his face the pinched-in look often thought of as characteristic of witches. Stuart wondered if that had helped give him reputation among the Apaches. That story they told about his making the daylight hold off for two or three hours so they could escape from a raid . . . No Christian man would believe it, but they did.

"I think you can takeTucson , if you want it," he said now, through his

son.

"Do you?" If the old Indian had been looking for a way to grab Stuart's attention, he'd found one.

WithTucson in Confederate hands, Yankee control over all of westernNew MexicoTerritory south of it would wither. The catch, of course, was that taking it would be anything but easy. Keeping it would be harder still, since it lay on the Southern Pacific line. Stuart had thought it beyond his slender means.

He studied Geronimo with the same sort of cautious gaze the roadrunner had given him. Geronimo might be a savage, but he was a long, long way from a fool. He might well hopeU.S. and C.S. troops would engage in a struggle that depleted forces from both sides, leaving no white soldiers to protect the area from the Apaches.

With something approaching the truth, the general commanding the Trans-Mississippi said, "I don't think we are strong enough to do that, even with the help of the brave Apaches. I wish I did, but I don't."

When Geronimo had that translated for him, he spoke for some time. Chappo had to hold up a hand so he would stop and let the interpreter do his job. "My father says he would not tell this plan to any other man. He thinks you can make it go, though. He says that, if you fooled the bluecoats so well once, you can do it again, and he will help."

"Tell him to go on." Stuart did his best to keep his voice and face impassive. He could read nothing on Geronimo's weathered features. He might have been back in one of the endless card games with which U.S. Army soldiers out West had made time pass before the War of Secession. How big a bluff was Geronimo running? Stuart realized he'd have to see more of the Indian's hand to tell.

Through Chappo, the Apache chief did go on: "With these new rifles you gave us, we will go on the warpath. We will go up towardTucson . We will be loud. We will be noisy. The bluecoats will have to see us."

Stuart had no trouble understanding what that meant. The Apaches would hit farmers and herders and miners between the international border andTucson . Livestock would vanish. Men the Indians caught would die. Women would probably suffer a fate worse than death, and then die, too.

He'd been talking with Major Sellers about how good it would be for

the redskins to keep theUSA too busy chasing them to troubleSonora andChihuahua . Now he had to contemplate what those coldblooded words meant. He hadn't fought like that during the War of Secession. Not even the damn-yankees had fought like that then.

But he hadn't given the Apaches Bible tracts. He'd given them guns, lots of guns. "Ask your father what happens then," he told Chappo.

Geronimo answered in detail. He'd thought this through. Stuart had seen how the fellow who proposed an idea usually had the edge on the fellow who was hearing it for the first time. That still held true, he discovered, when the fellow doing the proposing was an Indian who didn't know how to write his name.

Chappo said, "My father says we can do one thing or the other thing. One thing is, when the bluecoats chase us, we can go up into the mountains and pretend to be rocks and trees. While they look for us, you go behind them and intoTucson ."

Stuart studied Geronimo with surprise and considerable admiration. Had the Apache had a proper military education, he might have been sitting in GeneralJackson 's office inRichmond . But Stuart said,

"For that plan to work, we have to depend on the Yankees' commander inTucson being stupid. By now, he's probably heard the Apaches and the Confederates are friends. He will not forget about us while he goes chasing after you."

Once Chappo translated that, Geronimo looked at Stuart for a moment before going on. His expression didn't change, but Stuart had the strong feeling that he'd just impressed Geronimo the same way Geronimo had impressed him. He should have been angry that a savage presumed to judge him in that fashion. He wasn't. Geronimo had earned his respect. He was glad he'd managed to earn Geronimo's.

The Apache chieftain said, "The other plan is, we war towardTucson . The bluecoats chase us. We do not go into the mountains. We lead them to an ambush you set with your men and your guns. This does not give youTucson . It gives you the men who holdTucson . Is it enough?"

"Hmm," Stuart said, and then again: "Hmm." He hadn't expected a savage to presume to propose a plan of campaign. Nor had he expected the plan to be so tempting once the savage did presume to propose it.

Geronimo said, "For a long time, I have fought the bluecoats and the Mexicans hard, even when I had little. Now you Confederates are on my side, and, with you to help, I can strike a great blow."

"All right—we'll try it," Stuart said, coming to an abrupt decision. Even before Chappo translated, Geronimo caught the tone of his answer and smiled the broadest smile Stuart had seen from him. Stuart smiled back, and clasped his hand. Once the damnyankees were licked and the CSA gotSonora andChihuahua fully under control, the Confederates would have much, and the Apaches little. *One step at a time,* Stuart thought.

Chapter 7

Sitting as it did at the corner ofLarkinandMcallisterin Yerba Buena Park, the San Francisco City Hall was only a few blocks from the offices of the *Morning Call.* Samuel Clemens looked up from the sentence he was writing— *level of bungling last seen when Lot's wife was turned to a pillar of salt and not a single foolish soul thought to carry her along regardless, to sell for a shekel the half-pound*—and spoke to Clay Herndon: "Mayor Sutro's giving a speech in half an hour. Why don't you amble on over there and find out what the old whale's spouting this time?"

"Do I have to, Sam?" Herndon asked in mournful tones. "I've covered him the last three times he's shot off his mouth, and if four in a row isn't cruel and unusual punishment, I don't know what is. Besides, I'm about three-quarters of the way through this story you said you wanted today, and it's going pretty well. I hate to waste a couple of hours listening to His Honor gab, and then come back and find I've forgotten half the good lines I figured on using."

"Which story is that?" Clemens asked. "There were a couple of them, if I recall."

"The one about the defenses ofSan FranciscoBay ," the reporter answered. "I finally talked Colonel Sherman into giving me an interview yesterday, and I went out to Alcatraz and talked with the garrison commander there, too, so I've got the straight dope, all right. 'Muzzle-loading rifled cannon'—it's almost as bad as 'she sells sea shells by the seashore,' isn't it?"

"And their shells may be even more dangerous than sea shells, not that we've seen any proof of that,"

Clemens said. "Well, you're right—I do want that piece, as fast as you can turn it out, so I won't inflict our magnificent mayor on you this morning." He took another look at the editorial he was working on. It was, by something approaching a miracle, for the day after tomorrow, not tomorrow. He got up from his desk. "I'll cover the speech myself. By the way things are going, I'm bound to have more of our blunders to write about by the time I have to give this to the typesetters."

"I didn't want you to have to go and do that," Clay Herndon exclaimed. "I just meant for you to send Leary or one of the other cubs."

"Don't fret yourself about it." Sam threw on his houndstooth coat. As if he were a gentleman of fashion, he buttoned only the top button. As he set his straw hat at a jaunty angle on his head, he went on, "If I go to City Hall, I'm halfway home. You can't tell me Sutro won't talk till noon, or maybe one o'clock.

Whenever he finally decides to shut up, I can walk over for dinner and surprise Alexandra."

"Thanks, Sam," Herndon said. "You're a good boss to work for; you remember what it was like when you were just an ordinary working fellow yourself."

"Get that story about the sea shells onAlcatraz done." Clemens patted his pockets to make sure he had an adequate supply of both pencils and cigars. Satisfied, he grabbed a notebook and headed out the door.

The weather was fine for wearing a mostly unbuttoned coat. The breeze ruffled the flags that, in a display of patriotic fervor, flew from what seemed like every other building and from every trolley and cable-car stop. Despite the admission of several territories as new states since the War of Secession, the flags sported fewer stars than they had before the war. President Tilden had finally ordered the stars representing states now Confederate removed from the banner, which was, Clemens remained convinced, one reasonBlaine beat him.

Sam walked southwest down Market to McAllister, and then west along the latter street to the City Hall, a fine building of composite neoclassical style. He waved to a couple of other reporters who were also coming to hear Mayor Sutro's latest pronouncement.

"Good God in the foothills, Sam, the *Call* must really have its claws out if you're covering this in person,"

said Monte Jesperson, who wrote for the *Aha Californian.* His paper was as staunchly pro-Sutro as the *Morning Call* was anti-.

"Not quite so bad as that, Three-Card," Clemens returned. Regardless of editorial policy, newspapermen got on well with one another. "Only reason I'm here is that Clay's in the middle of a story he needs to get done quick as he can."

"Ah, I've got you." When Jesperson nodded, his flabby jowls and several chins bobbed up and down.

His sack suit had to have been cut from the bones of a great many herrings to fit round his bulk. He stood aside to let Sam go into City Hall ahead of him; the doors weren't wide enough to let them go in side by side.

Noting the rich furnishings, the marble floors, the fancy paintings on the walls, the general profusion of velvet and gilt and elabourately carved walnut and mahogany, Sam said, "I wonder how much stuck to whose pockets when they were running up this place."

Monte Jesperson's sniff was like that of a bloodhound taking a scent. "Ah, that'd be worth knowing, wouldn't it?" he said. "If there be any bodies buried, nobody's ever dug 'em up."

"That's the truth." Clemens cocked his head to one side, listening to Jesperson with a reporter's attentive ear. "So you're one of the ones who still say 'if there be,' are you, Three-Card? I know the fancy grammarians like it better, but if there are' has always been good enough for me."

"I'm an old man." Jesperson ran a pudgy finger along the gray walrus mustache he wore. "The things the modern generation does to the English language are a shame and a disgrace, nothing less. Not you, Sam—you've got some bite to you, under that cloak of foolishness you like to wear—but a lot of the pups nowadays wouldn't know a subjunctive if it kicked 'em in the shins. Comes of not learning Latin, I expect."

Sam's own acquaintance with Latin was distinctly of the nodding variety. Not without relief, he let one of Mayor Sutro's flunkies lead him to the hall where Sutro stood poised behind a podium, ready to give forth with deathless prose. It was, in Clemens' opinion, deathless because it had never come to life.

He sometimes thought Sutro looked as if he'd never come to life, either. The mayor ofSan Francisco was pale and plump, with a brown mustache Jesperson's could have swallowed whole. His eyes, dark lumps in a doughy face, resolutely refused to show any luster. That he wore a suit he might have stolen from an undertaker did not enliven his person.

Along with the reporters, clerks and lawyers helped fill the room. So did some of Adolph Sutro's friends, most of them as dreary as the mayor. Sutro said, "Thank you for coming here today, gentlemen."

He looked down at the podium, on which surely reposed his speech,

nicely written out. Having grown up with politicians who memorized two-hour addresses and were venomously deadly in repartee, Clemens found that all the more dismaying.

"I have called and gathered you here together today," Sutro droned, "for the purpose of delivering a warning pertaining to spies and to matters relating to espionage." I *want to warn you about spies,* Sam translated mentally. He'd edited a lot of bad prose in his time, but little to compare to this. A cleaver wasn't enough to cut the fat from the mayor's speeches; a two-man ripsaw might possibly have done the job.

"In particular this morning, I address my remarks to the noble gentlemen belonging to the Fourth Estate, irregardless of whether or not they and I have previous to this time been in agreement with each other on the concerns concerning our city and our state and theUnited States ," Sutro continued. He doubtless thought of that *irregardless* as a polished touch, and either hadn't noticed *concerns concerning* or laboured under the delusion that it improved the product. With a distinct effort of will, Clemens lowered the flame under his critical boiler. Taking notes on Sutro's speeches was easier because they were so padded and repetitious.

The mayor said, "It is up to you and your responsibility to disseminate to the many who depend on you the vital necessity of being as alert and aware as it is possible to be to the dangers posed by spying and the measures to be taken in order that those dangers are to be reduced to as small an extent as may be.

Now, then, these dangers are—Yes, Mr. Clemens?"

Sam's hand had shot into the air. He couldn't help himself. In his most innocent voice, he asked, "Mayor, can you please tell me how a danger, which is abstract, can have an extent, which is physical?"

Sutro coughed. "This danger is not abstract. It is real. Perhaps we can hold the rest of the questions until the completion of my address. Now, then, as I was saying—"

Invincible dunderhead,Clemens scrawled in his notebook. He glanced over at Monte Jesperson, who would not meet his eye. No matter what Jesperson thought, though, the *Alta Californian* would make Mayor Sutro sound like a statesman when its next edition came out.

To Sam, he sounded like a lunatic. His speech went on for as long as the newspaperman had expected it would, but furnished only a couple

of pages' worth of notes. The gist of it was that Sutro had a bee in his bonnet about spies, because Confederates, Canadians, and Englishmen all spoke English—"in the same way and manner that we do ourselves," the mayor said. Sam was confidently certain many of them spoke it better than Adolph Sutro did, not that that made any enormous compliment.

Still . . . *Mayor Sutro has a point,* Sam wrote. Then he added, *He was not wearing his hat, which let him show the world exactly where he has it.* The mayor's idea was that, since enemy spies didn't give themselves away by how they talked, everyone should report everything (that wasn't quite how he phrased it, but it was what he meant) to the police and to the military authorities, so everybody who said anything could be locked up and the keys either thrown away or filed in the mayor's office, which made them even more certain never to be seen again.

When the speech was finally over, Clemens asked, "Once the entire population of the city is incarcerated, Your Honor, from which states do you plan on importing loyal citizens to take its place?"

"I doubt it will come to that," Sutro answered primly. "Next question, please." Sam sighed. He should have known better. He had known better, in fact, but hadn't wanted to admit it to himself. If U.S. Navy ships were armored against shells as the mayor was against sarcasm, they'd prove unsinkable.

Sam did find one serious question to ask: "Have you reviewed this plan with the chief of police and with the military authorities?"

"Why, no," the mayor said, "but I have the utmost confidence they will show themselves to be as zealous in the pursuit of the sneaking spies who have done so much damage to our cause"—another statement, Clemens thought, that would have been all the better for proof—"as I am myself, and will profit from the assistance of our fine and upstanding vigilant citizens."

"I have the utmost confidence," Sam said as the reporters headed out of City Hall, "that every low-down skunk with a grudge against his neighbor is going to call him a Rebel spy."

"We'll catch some real spies, thanks to this," Monte Jesperson said: faint praise for the speech, but praise.

It made Clemens furious. "Oh, no doubt we will—but how the devil

will we be able to tell which ones they are, when we've arrested their bartenders and blacksmiths and druggists along with 'em? And what about the Constitution, where it says you can't arrest a man on nothing better than somebody's say-so?"

Jesperson's shoulders moved up and down. "It's wartime. You do what you have to do, then pick up the pieces afterwards."

"Three-Card, the very first war this country ever fought was against people who said things like that,"

Sam answered.

Jesperson only shrugged again. Instead of staying to make an argument out of it, he waddled off toward the *Alta Californian's* office onCalifornia Street . If he wrote fast enough, the last couple of editions of his paper would have a no doubt carefully polished version of Mayor Sutro's speech in them, along with an editorial giving half a dozen good reasons for treating San Franciscans like Confederate slaves or Russian peasants.

"Because some petty tyrants are tired of being petty," Clemens muttered under his breath.

He went back to his house almost at a run, hoping Alexandra would be able to lift him out of his evil mood. Part of it lifted at the delighted reception his children gave him: he didn't usually come home in the middle of the day. His own delight at seeing them was somewhat tempered when his wife told him Ophelia had broken a vase not fifteen minutes before.

"It wasn't *my* fault," Ophelia said in tones of virtue impugned. Sam, who had heard such tones before, raised an eyebrow and waited. His daughter went on, "I never would have done it if Orion hadn't ducked when I threw the doll at him."

"Is the world ready?" Sam asked Alexandra.

"I don't know," his wife answered. "If it's not, though, it had better be."

Along with boiled beef and horseradish, that sage comment helped persuade him the world was likely to be able to muddle on a bit longer in spite of Mayor Sutro's aggressive idiocy. He was glad to discover Alexandra disliked Sutro's plan as much as he did.

The dog, hearing everyone saying Sutro over and over, decided people were talking about him. He walked up to Sam and put his head and front paws on his lap. Clemens scratched his ears, which was what he'd had in mind. "Ah, you poor pup," Sam said. "I thought I was insulting the mayor when I gave you your name, and here all the time I was insulting you."

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At theRochester train station, Frederick Douglass embraced his wife and son. "Now don't you worry about me for even a minute," he said. "This will be how I always wanted to enter the Confederate States: With banners flying and guns blazing and a great army leading the way."

"You make sure you let the army lead the way," Anna Douglass said. "Don't go any place where them Rebels can shoot at you."

"Seeing that the invasion is not yet launched, that's hardly a concern," Douglass answered. "I am delighted that General Willcox recalled the plight of the colored man and wanted one of our race present to witness theU.S. return toKentucky ."

His son, Lewis, embraced him. "Don't just *be* a witness, Father. Bear witness for the world."

"I'll do that. I'll do exactly that." A shouted *All aboard!* from the conductor punctuated Douglass'

promise. He climbed up onto the train and took his seat. If the white man next to him was dismayed to have a Negro traveling companion, he was polite enough not to show it, more than which Douglass could not ask.

Going fromRochester toLouisville (or rather, to theIndiana towns across theOhio fromLouisville) took two days. The polite white man left the train atFort Wayne , to be replaced by a fellow who stared at Douglass in a marked manner and kept sniffing, as if to say the Negro had not bathed as recently as he might have done. Since no one in the car was fresh by then, and since several people apparently had not bathed since the start of the year, Douglass felt he was being unduly singled out. But, as the man fromFort Wayne took things no further than that, Douglass ignored him. He'd known worse.

New Albany,Clarksville , andJeffersonville ,Indiana , had been trading

partners withLouisville . They'd sentU.S. manufactured goods into the Confederate States in exchange for tobacco and whiskey and fineKentucky horseflesh. With theOhio closed to shipping, with bridges blown up, with cannon barking at one another, they could have had the look of western mining towns after the veins that spawned them had run dry.

Instead, they boomed as never before. The reason was easy to understand: tent cities bigger than any of them filled the countryside beyond the reach of Confederate guns. The U.S. Army was there in numbers not seen since the War of Secession, and bought everything the Rebels would have and more besides.

A driver was supposed to be waiting for Douglass when he got off the train. He stood on the platform, looking around. No driver was in evidence, and it wasn't likely that the man had gone off with some other elderly colored gentleman by mistake. Douglass sighed. Brigadier General Willcox or one of his officers had managed to make a hash of things.

That meant hiring a cab. The first driver Douglass approached shifted a wad of tobacco deep into his cheek so he could growl, "I don't take niggers." Southern Indiana had never been territory friendly to the cause of abolition, and till the war began the locals had probably associated more with the Confederates across the river than with their more enlightened countrymen from other regions of theUSA . The second cab driver Douglass approached dismissed him as curtly as had the first.

He finally found a man willing to take him—for a ten-dollar fare. "That's robbery!" he burst out.

"That's business," the fellow returned. "Uncle, ain't many folks round here who'd drive you for any money."

Douglass had already seen as much. *Uncle* was one of the less malicious things whites called blacks: not a compliment, certainly, but an improvement over a lot of choices the driver might have made. "Ten dollars it is," the Negro said, and hoped the man wouldn't try to hold him up for twenty when they got to Willcox's headquarters.

The cab had to pick its way down little paths that had never been meant to take much traffic but were now choked with wagon trains bringing the army the munitions it would need to fight and the food it needed till such time as it did go into battle. The dust was

overpowering. Above the rattle of wagon wheels, the driver said, "By the time we get there, pal, we'll be the same color."

If he was exaggerating, he wasn't exaggerating by much. Was that the solution to the problem of white and black in theUSA —and, for that matter, in the CSA? Put everybody behind a dozen wagons on a dusty road on a dry summer's day? Douglass wished things could have been so simple.

He soon discovered he could tell which regiments were Regular Army and which volunteers before he saw the banners identifying them. The regulars knew what they were doing. Everything was neat, everything just so. Even the dust around regular regiments seemed less, as if it were afraid to come up lest some officer give it fatigue duty for untidiness.

Volunteer encampments straggled more. The men themselves straggled more, too, and slouched more, as if some of the iron in regulars' backbones had been omitted from theirs. They looked like what they were: men unsure how to be soldiers but called upon to play the role. A lot of them had been called upon; their regiments far outnumbered those of the long-service professionals who filled the ranks in time of peace. A large part of the volunteer strength of the Army was concentrated here for the blow againstLouisville .

"All right, Uncle." The driver halted the cab. "Ten dollars, like I said." Douglass paid without a murmur, relieved he'd kept to the price he'd set at the station. The driver hauled his trunk down from the roof of the cab, nodded in a friendly enough way, and headed back to town. Douglass guessed he would have gouged a white man almost as badly. That made the orator and writer feel a little better.

General Willcox was supposed to know he was coming. When he strode up to the tent with the general's one-star flag flying in front of it, he discovered the sentries had not been informed. "You want to see the *general'?'1* one of them said, gray eyes widening. He turned to his companion. "Eb, this here dusty old nigger wants to see the general."

Both soldiers guffawed. Eb said, "Yeah, but does the general want to see this here dusty old nigger?"

They thought that was funny, too.

"I am Frederick Douglass," Douglass ground out in icy fury. "I was asked to come here to write the story of this army and its assault

onLouisville . The story I have in mind to write at the moment will not cast the two of you in the best of light, of that you have my assurance."

His tone worked the wonder his appearance had failed to effect: the sentries began to treat him like a man, not like a Negro. The one who wasn't Eb disappeared into the tent, to return with a spruce young captain. "Mr. Douglass!" the officer said with a broad smile. "So good to meet you. I'm Oliver Richardson, General Willcox's adjutant." He shook hands with Douglass with every sign of pleasure. "I trust you had no difficulty finding the headquarters?"

"Finding them—no," Douglass said. Whatever else he might have added, he kept to himself. For all he knew, his difficulties might lie atRichardson 's feet. He'd met plenty of white men who were friendly to his face and called him a nigger the minute he turned his back.

"Let me take you in to see the general, Mr. Douglass,"Richardson said. "I'm sure the men will carry your trunk there to the tent where you are to be quartered."

"Sir, there ain't no such tent," the sentry who wasn't Eb said, "on account of we didn't know this here . . .

fellow was a-comin'."

"Set one up, then,"Richardson snapped. An instant later, he was all affability again. "Come with me, Mr.

Douglass."

Douglass came. He found Brigadier General Orlando Willcox slogging down a mountain of papers, a scene he remembered from visiting head-quarters during the War of Secession. He wondered how generals ever got to fight; they seemed too busy filling out forms and writing reports to have the time for it.

Willcox was a roly-poly man six or eight years younger than Douglass, with a high forehead that looked higher because his hair had retreated from so much of it. "Mr. Douglass!" he exclaimed, putting down his pen with every sign of delight. "God be praised that you have been able to join us before the commencement of the great struggle."

"I had worried about that, yes," Douglass said, "knowing how celerity is so vital a constituent of the military art."

"We are less hasty than we might have been under other circumstances, there being so many volunteers to weave into the fabric of the Regular Army," Willcox said. "But the mingling of warp and weft proceeds well, and I still have every confidence that the good Lord will grant our arms and our righteous cause the victory they deserve."

"May it be so," Douglass agreed. "If, however, you will forgive my speaking on a matter where I am the rankest amateur and you learned in every aspect, much the same sort of talk was heard in General McClellan's headquarters during the War of Secession. The Lord is, as the saying has it, in the habit of helping them that help themselves."

Captain Richardson sent Douglass a venomous glance that made him suddenly surer than he had been where his difficulties in making arrangements had arisen. General Willcox did not see that glance; he was answering, "I forgive you readily, as it is my Christian duty to do. But if you knew how many hours I have spent on my knees in prayer, beseeching God to grant me the answers to the riddles of this campaign, you would be more certain I am acting rightly."

Douglass had nothing against the power of prayer: on the contrary. He did wish, though, that General Willcox also spoke of how many hours he'd spent studying maps, examining the enemy's positions on the far side of theOhio , and sending over spies to examine them close up.

"The event will prove my strategy," Willcox declared.

"Very well, sir," Douglass replied. As he'd said, he was no soldier himself. And Orlando Willcox was certain to be right . . . one way or the other.

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Philander Snow leaned out to spit over the side of the Handbasket. "Six days on the road!" he said.

"Reckon my backside's as petrified as some of the bones them perfessers dig out of the ground."

"If my hindquarters were that petrified," Theodore Roosevelt said, "I wouldn't be able to feel them, and I most assuredly can. But six days of hard riding would have left us just as worn, and we can carry more supplies in the wagon. Besides,FortBenton can't be much farther, not when we passed throughGreat Falls day before yesterday."

"If it *was* much further, I expect I'd be too crippled-up to walk *a-* tall by the time we got there," Snow said.

"If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, Mohammed has to go to the mountain,"Roosevelt said. He saw at once that his traveling companion had not the slightest idea what he was talking about.

Suppressing a sigh, he made himself what he thought was remorselessly clear: "If forts are the only places in Montana Territory where volunteers may be enrolled into the U.S. Army, then I needs must go to a fort to remove the unfortunate adjective from Roosevelt's Unauthorized Regiment."

"Yeah, and all your toy soldiers'll be a real part of the Army then, too," Snow said, which madeRoosevelt swallow another sigh. The ranch hands were good men, honest men, true men: he'd seen as much many times. Just as many times, though, he'd tried to hold any sort of intelligent conversation with one of them, and just as many times he'd failed.

With or without intelligent conversation, he and Phil Snow rattled north east close by the north bank of the Missouri River, on towardFortBenton . They'd followed the river all the way from the farm; except for enormously overdeveloping the buttocks and every single circumadjacent nerve, the trip was easy.

Snow pointed ahead. "Smoke on the horizon, boss. If that don't mean we're about there, I'll swallow my chaw."

"What would happen if you did?"Roosevelt asked, as usual curious about everything.

"I'd sick my guts up, and pretty damn quick, too," Snow said, expecto rating for emphasis. "I done it once, when I got throwed off a horse." His tone turned mournful: "It ain't somethin' you want to do twice."

As he must have known, he didn't have to make good on his promise. Inside of half an hour, the Handbasket rolled intoFortBenton . A considerable town had grown up around the fort, which lay as far west along theMissouri as even the shallowest-draft steamboat could reach. *The same thing happened around the legionary camps in the days of the Roman Empire,* Roosevelt thought. He glanced over to Philander Snow and shook his head. Snow's many admirable qualities did not include an interest in ancient history.Roosevelt kept the thought to himself.

Snow was glancing around, too, into the back of the wagon. "You gonna put on your fancy uniform, boss?" he asked. "Hope it ain't got too wrinkled from sittin' there bundled up this past week."

"I think I'll be smarter leaving it bundled up,"Roosevelt answered. "By what I heard inGreat Falls , this Henry Welton in command of the Seventh Infantry is only a lieutenant colonel himself. I don't want to go in there looking as if I'm claiming to be his superior officer."

"That's clever. That's right clever." Philander Snow shifted the reins to his left hand so he could slap the other down on his thigh. "You don't mind my sayin' so, you're wasting your time runnin' a ranch. You ought to be in politics."

"The thought has crossed my mind,"Roosevelt admitted. "If I hadn't decided to come out here, I might have run for the Assembly back inNew York . I'll tell you this much—we need to see some changes made, and that's a fact. If the people who are running things now won't make 'em, we need to throw the rascals out and put in some people who will."

Snow brought the wagon to a stop across the street from the timber gate and adobe walls ofFortBenton

. Perhaps not coinciden-tally, he brought it to a stop directly in front of a saloon. "You won't need me to go in and talk with this lieutenant colonel, whatever his name was, will you, boss?"

"No, I don't suppose I will."Roosevelt stuck out his lower jaw and looked fierce. "But I will need you in some sort of state to travel when I come out again. Have a few drinks. Enjoy yourself. But if I have to pour you into the wagon, you will regret it, and not only on account of your hangover."

"I'll be good," Snow said. "Don't really fancy the notion of heading back toward the ranch with my head poundin' like a stamping mill." Next to that prospect, nothingRoosevelt threatened could put fear in him.

But he hurried into the saloon with such alacrity thatRoosevelt clicked his tongue between his teeth. Then he shrugged. He'd see when he came out ofFortBenton .

"Mornin' to you," the sentry at the gate said when he approached. "State your business, if you please."

The soldier did not stand aside.

"I wish to speak with Lieutenant Colonel Welton,"Roosevelt answered. "I have assembled a body of volunteer troops to offer to the U.S. Army."

"How big a body of troops?" the sentry asked, unimpressed. "You got five men? Ten? Fifteen, even?

Dribs and drabs is what we're get-tin', and they're hell to put together."

Roosevelt's chest inflated with pride. "My friend," he boomed, "I have a complete and entire regiment of cavalry, ready for action. Your colonel has only to give us our orders, and we shall ride!"

He had the satisfaction of watching the sentry drop his rifle and catch it before it hit the ground. He had the further satisfaction of watching everyone within earshot—and he hadn't tried to keep his voice down: far from it—turn and stare at him. Had the sentry had a plug of tobacco rather than a pipe in his mouth, he might have swallowed it. As things were, he needed a couple of tries before he managed to say,

"You're that Roseyfclt fellow down byHelena , fry me for bacon if you ain't. Heard about you a couple-three days ago, but I didn't believe a word of it."

"Believe it,"Roosevelt said proudly. "It's true."

The sentry did. "Bert!" he called to a soldier within. "Hey, you, Bert! Come take Mr. Roseyfelt here to the old man's office. He's the one that's fitted out a cavalry regiment by his lonesome." Bert exclaimed in astonishment. The sentry now seemed to believe he'd inventedRoosevelt , saying, "It's a fact. You go right on in, Mr. Roseyfelt. I can't leave my post, but Bert there'll take care of you."

"Thank you." Roosevelt strode intoFortBenton . He wouldn't have wanted to try bombarding the place; the walls had to be thirty feet thick. Two bastions at diagonal corners further strengthened the fort. All the buildings faced inward, having the outer wall as their back.

Bert ledRoosevelt across the parade ground to the regimental commandant's office. Through the window,Roosevelt saw a man busily wading through paperwork. He understood that more vividly than he would have a few weeks before; regimental command, even of the as yet Unauthorized Regiment, involved more attention to detail and less glory than he would have dreamt.

When Bert announced him, Lieutenant Colonel Welton set down his pen and stared in astonishment.

"You're theRoosevelt we heard about?" The officer rose from behind his battered desk. "Good God, sir, I mean no offense, but I believe my son is older than you are."

"It's possible, Lieutenant Colonel,"Roosevelt admitted. Henry Welton was about forty-five—twice his own age, more or less—with red-gold hair going gray and a formidable mustache. His grip as they shook hands was odd; he was missing the last two joints of his right middle finger. Once the polite greetings were out of the way, Roosevelt went on, "No one else down towardHelena was doing the job, sir, so I resolved to undertake it myself."

"That's—most commendable, Mr. Roosevelt. A whole regiment? By God, that's amazing." Welton still sounded flummoxed. "Please, sir, sit down." His gray gaze spearedRoosevelt as he grew more alert. "I'll bet you call yourself a colonel, too, don't you?"

"Well—yes."Roosevelt was suddenly very glad he'd left the uniform in the wagon. The man with whom he was speaking looked to be a veteran of the War of Secession, and had earned regimental command with years of patient service. Next to that, having the wealth to outfit a unit all at once seemed a tawdry way to gain such a post. Unwontedly humble, Roosevelt went on, "I would not presume to claim rank superior to yours if and when we are accepted into the service of theUnited States ."

"Ah, that. Yes." Welton shook his head. "I never thought I'd have to worry about taking in a whole regiment at a gulp. You've had 'em gathered together for a bit now, too, if what I hear is anywhere close to straight. I bet they're eating you out of house and home."

"As a matter of fact, they are."Roosevelt leaned forward in his chair. "That's not the reason I ask you to accept them, though." He pointed north, towardCanada . "What lies between this fortress and the Canadian border but miles of empty land? Would you not like to have a regiment of mounted men patrolling that land, guarding against attack from the treacherousBritish Empire and perhaps taking the war into Canadian soil?"

"If the regiment is worth having, I'd like that very much," Welton answered. "If they're a pack of cutthroats, or if they're fair-weather soldiers who look pretty on parade but won't fight, I want no part of

'em." He leaned forward in turn. "What precisely have you got down there by Helena, Mr. Roosevelt?"

For the next hour, the Regular Army officer subjectedRoosevelt to a searching interrogation on every aspect of the Unauthorized Regiment, from recruitment to sanitation to discipline to weapons to medicine to tactics.Roosevelt thanked his lucky stars he had done such a careful job of keeping records. Without them, he would never have been able to respond to the barrage of questions.

"Why Winchesters?" Henry Welton snapped at one point.

"Two reasons,"Roosevelt answered. "One, I could gain uniformity of weapons for my men with them but not with Springfields, which are far less common among the volunteers. And two, mounted men being widely spaced in combat, rapidity of fire struck me as a vitally important consideration."

He waited to see how Welton would respond to that. The officer's next question was about something else altogether, which,Roosevelt hoped, meant the reply had satisfied him.

At last, the commander of the Seventh Infantry set both hands down flat on the desk. After staring down at them for a few seconds, he said, "Well, Mr. Roosevelt, I had trouble believing it when I heard about it, and I had a damn sight lot more trouble believing it when I saw you're still wet behind the ears. But, unless you've got P. T. Bar-num for your adjutant, I'd say you've done a hell of a job—a *hell* of a job, sir.

I saw damn few volunteer regiments twenty years ago that could hold a candle to yours. And you're telling me you had no soldierly experience before you decided to organize this regiment?"

"That's right,"Roosevelt said. "I've always strongly believed, though, that a man can do whatever he sets his mind to do."

"I already told you once, I wouldn't have believed it," Welton said. "Where did you learn what you need to know about being a colonel?"

"From books—where else? I am a quick study."

"Quick study be damned." Henry Welton gaveRoosevelt a very odd look. "Do you have any notion how rare it is for any man, let alone a pup like you, to read something and then up and do it, just like that?" He held up the hand with the mutilated finger. "Never mind. You don't need to answer that. You've answered enough of my questions. Bring

your regiment—the Unauthorized Regiment"— amusement glinted in his eyes—"up here, and I'll swear 'em in. If they're half as good as they sound, Colonel Roosevelt, Uncle Sam's getting himself a bargain."

"Yes, sir!" Theodore Roosevelt sprang to his feet and saluted as crisply as he knew how. As soon as he did it, he realized he shouldn't have, not while he was wearing civilian clothes. He felt ready to burst with pride when the Regular Army officer returned the salute: even if it wasn't proper, Welton accepted it in the spirit with which it was offered.Roosevelt hardly remembered the polite words they exchanged in parting. He was amazed the soles of his boots kicked up dust as he leftFortBenton : he thought he was walking on air.

No one had absquatulated with the wagon while he was in the fort talking with Lieutenant Colonel Welton. He didn't see Philander Snow's body stretched out on the planks of the sidewalk, either bloodied or just stupefied from too much whiskey downed too fast. It was, in fact, in his judgment, as near a perfect day as the Lord had ever created.

A woman in a basque so tight-fitting it might have been painted on her torso and a cotton skirt thin almost to translucence came strolling up the street twirling a parasol for dramatic effect. She paused in front ofRoosevelt . "Stranger in town," she remarked, and set the hand that wasn't holding the parasol on her hip. "Lonely, stranger?"

He studied the soiled dove. She had to be ten years older than he was, maybe fifteen. The curls under her battered bonnet surely got their color from a henna bottle. Despite inviting words, her face was cold and hard as the snow-covered granite of theRockies .Roosevelt had broken an understanding of sorts with Alice Lee when he came out West, and was far from immune to animal urges. He sometimes slaked them down inHelena , but tried to pick friendlier partners than this walking cashbox who smelled of sweat and cheap scent.

Besides, the exultation filling him now was in its way nearly as satisfying as a thrashing tussle between the sheets. As politely as he could, he shook his head. "Maybe another time."

"Tightwad," the harlot sneered, and strutted off.

Rooseveltalmost called after her to let her know a new cavalry regiment was coming to town. That would put fresh fire under her business. But no; Philander Snow deserved to know first.Roosevelt strolled through the swinging doors of the saloon. There sat Phil, still

upright but showing a list. "We're Authorized!"Roosevelt shouted in a great voice.

"Hot damn!" Snow said when the news penetrated, which took a bit.

"Drinks are on me!"Roosevelt said. Such open-handed generosity had won him friends inHelena , and it did the same inFortBenton . *Good,* he thought. I'll *be coming back here soon.*

****

Colonel Alfred von Schlieffen had hoped that, by traveling toJeffersonville ,Indiana , to observe theU.S.

attack onLouisville , he would escape the ghastly summer weather ofWashington andPhiladelphia . In that hope, he rapidly discovered, he was doomed to disappointment. Along the eastern seaboard, theAtlantic exerted at least some small moderating effect on the climate.

Deep in the interior of the continent, as Schlieffen was now, nothing exerted any moderating effect whatever. The air simply hung and clung, so hot and moist and still that pushing through it required a distinct physical effort. His uniform stuck greasily to his body, as if someone had taken a bucketful of water from theOhio and splashed it over him. Almost every house inJeffersonville , even the poorest shanty, had a porch draped with mosquito netting or metal-mesh screen on which people slept in summer to escape the furnace like heat inside the buildings. Even the porches, though, offered but small relief.

All the Americans insisted the climate in the Confederate States was even hotter and muggier. Schlieffen wondered if they were pulling his leg, as their slang expression put it. This side of the Amazon or equatorialAfrica , a worse climate seemed unimaginable.

Under canvas in among General Willcox's headquarters staff (not that, to his mind, it was a proper staff for a general: the men around Willcox were more messengers than the specialists and experts who could have offered him advice worth having), Schlieffen was as comfortable as he could be. He also found himself happy, which puzzled him till, with characteristic thoroughness, he dug out the reason. The last time he'd been under canvas, during the Franco-Prussian War, had been the most active, most useful stretch in his entire career, the time when he'd felt most alive. He could hardly hope

to equal that feeling now, but the back of his mind had recalled it before his intellect could.

Accompanied sometimes by Captain Richardson (who, like General Rosecrans' adjutant, had a smattering of German he wanted to improve), sometimes by another of General Willcox's staff officers, Schlieffen explored the dispositions of the buildingU.S. army. "You have indeed assembled a formidable force," he said toRichardson as they headed back toward headquarters from another tour. "I would not have thought it possible, not when a large part of your numbers is made up—are made up?—of volunteers."

"Is made up."Richardson helped his English as he helped the American's German. *"Danke schon, Heir Oberst."* He fell back into his own language: "We fought the War of Secession the same way."

"Yes." Schlieffen let it go at that. The results of the war did not seem to him to recommend the method, but his guide would have found such a comment in poor taste.

Nevertheless, theU.S. achievement here was not to be despised. Kurd von Schlozer was right: Americans had a gift for improvisation. He did not thinkGermany could have come so far so fast from nearly a standing start (whether theUSA should have begun from nearly a standing start was a different question). Fifty thousand men, more or less, had been gathered in and aroundJeffersonville and the towns nearby, with the supplies they needed and with a truly impressive concentration of artillery.

"How is the health of the men?" Schlieffen asked. The hellish climate hereabouts only added to the problems involved in keeping large armies from dissolving due to disease before they could fight.

"Ganz gut."Richardsonwaggled a hand back and forth to echo that. "About what you'd expect. We've had some typhoid. No cholera, thank God, or we'd be in trouble. And a lot of the volunteers are country boys. They won't have had measles when they were little, not living out on farms in the middle of nowhere. You come down with measles when you're a man grown, you're liable to die of 'em. Same goes for smallpox, only more so."

"Yes," Schlieffen said, this time without any intention of evading the issue. The German Army faced similar problems. He wondered whether relatively more German or American soldiers had been vaccinated against smallpox. Then he wondered if anyone knew, or

could know. So many things he might have liked to learn were things about which no one else bothered to worry.

"One thing," Oliver Richardson said: "I know the Rebs won't be in any better shape than we are."

Schlieffen nodded. That was, from everything he'd been able to gather, a truth of wider application thanRichardson suspected or would have cared to admit. The two American nations, rival sections even before the Confederacy broke away from theUnited States , thought of themselves as opposites in every way, as enemies and rivals were wont to do. They might indeed have been head and tail, but they were head and tail of the same coin.

"Oh, Christ," Captain Richardson muttered under his breath. "Here comes that damn nigger again."

The Negro walking toward them was an impressive man, tall and well made, with sternly handsome features accentuated by his graying, nearly white beard and head of hair. His eyes glittered with intelligence; he dressed like a gentleman. Schlieffen had thought *nigger* a term of disapproval, but perhaps his mediocre English had let him down. "This is Mr. Douglass, yes?" he asked, andRichardson nodded.

"You will please introduce me to him?"

"Certainly,"Richardson replied. Now that the black man had come within earshot, the adjutant was cordial enough. "Mr. Douglass," he said, "I should like to introduce you to Colonel von Schlieffen, the German military attache to theUnited States . Colonel, this is Mr. Frederick Douglass, the famous speaker and journalist."

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Colonel." Douglass' deep, rich voice left no doubt why he was a famous speaker. He held out his hand.

Schlieffen shook it without hesitation. "And I am also pleased to meet you," he said. He'd asked Captain Richardson to introduce him to Douglass, not the other way round. Had the captain assumed Schlieffen was of higher rank because he was a soldier or because he was a white man? On the other side of theOhio , in the CSA, the answer would have been obvious. Maybe it was obvious on this side of the river, too.

Douglass said, "It is good to see, Colonel, thatGermany maintains a friendly neutrality with my country despite the affiliation of the other

leading European powers with our foes who set freedom at nought and whose very land groans with the clanking chains of oppression."

Germanyalso remained neutral toward the Confederate States, a fact Schlieffen thought it wiser to pass over in silence. Instead, he asked, "And when you speak and write of this campaign, what will you tell your . . . your"—he paused for a brief colloquy in German with Captain Richardson—"your readers, that is the word?"

"What shall I tell them about this campaign?" Douglass repeated the question and so gained time to think, a trick Schlieffen had seen other practiced orators use. His answer, when it came, surprised the German officer: "I shall tell them it should have started sooner."

Oliver Richardson scowled angrily. "General Willcox will have overwhelming force in place when he strikes the Rebels," he said.

"And what force will the Rebels have—when he finally strikes them?" Douglass asked, which did nothing to improveRichardson 's temper.

"Knowing when to strike is an important part of the art of war," Schlieffen said, in lieu of agreeing out loud with Douglass. A few sentences from the man had convinced him that Negroes, of whom he knew little, were not necessarily fools.

"As I happen to know, the general commanding the Army of theOhio has informed Mr. Douglass that he has conceived his own understanding of when that time is," Captain Richardson said, "and I am willing to presume that a career soldier knows more of such things than one who has never gone to war."

"The United States have refused to let men of my color go to war, though we would be their staunchest supporters," Douglass rumbled, his temper rising to match that of Willcox's adjutant. Then he shook his massive head. "No, I am mistaken. TheUnited States permits Negroes to serve in the Navy, but not in the Army." He held out his hands, pale palms up, toward Schlieffen in appeal. "Colonel, can you see the slightest shred of reason or logic in such a policy?"

Schlieffen said, "1 have not come to theUnited States to pass judgment on my hosts." *Certainly not in front of my colleagues inU.S. uniform,* he added to himself. *What goes back toBerlin is another matter.*

"When the attack goes in, we shall see who had the right of it,"Richardson said. "After the attack succeeds, I trust Mr. Douglass

will be generous enough to acknowledge his mistake."

"I have acknowledged my errors many times," Douglass said, "which is a good deal more than many of our career soldiers have done, judging by the memoirs that have seen print since the War of Secession.

As for career soldiers' knowing when to strike, was it not President Lincoln who said that, if General McClellan was not using the Army of thePotomac at the moment, he would like to borrow it for a while?"

Richardsonrolled his eyes. "If you're going to hold upLincoln as a paragon of military brilliance—" His expression said what he thought of that.

But he'd misjudged—and underestimated—Douglass. "By no means, Captain." The Negro took obvious pleasure in demolishing his foe's argument: "But he seemed to have a better notion of when to fight than the career soldier in charge of that army, wouldn't you say?"

Oliver Richardson stared. He turned even redder than heat and humidity could have accounted for. But when he found his tongue, he spoke in chilly tones: "If you will excuse me, *Mister* Douglass, I am going to take Colonel Schlieffen back to his accommodations."

"I'm so sorry, Captain. I didn't mean to keep you." Douglass tipped his bowler, as if to apologize. His courtesy was more wounding than spite would have been. He tipped the hat to Schlieffen, too, this time, the German officer thought, with genuine goodwill. "Colonel, a pleasure to meet you."

"Very interesting also to meet you," Schlieffen replied. They shook hands again.

Douglass went on his way, his step jaunty despite age and imposing bulk. He knew he'd won the exchange. So did Captain Richardson.

"Come on, Colonel," he said sharply. A moment later, he muttered something to himself. Schleiffen thought it was *God* damn *that nigger,* but couldn't be sure.

After a few steps, the military attache asked, "If theUnited States let blacks into the Navy, why do they not let them into the Army as well?"

"In the Navy, they're cooks and fuel-heavers in the engine room,"Richardson answered patiently. "Mr.

Douglass is glib as all get-out, I grant you that, Colonel, but you can't expect a Negro to have the courage to advance into the fire of the foe with a rifle in his hands."

If *glib* meant what Schlieffen thought it did, it was about the last word he would have applied to Frederick Douglass.Richardson 's other point perplexed him, too. "Why can you not expect this?" he asked.

Patient still, Richardson explained, "Because most Negroes haven't got the necessities—the spirit, the courage—to lay their lives on the line like that."

"I think perhaps the Englishmen fighting the—Zulus, I believe to be the name of the tribe—in the south of Africa would about this something different say," Schlieffen observed.

Richardsongave him the same stony stare he'd sent toward Douglass. General Willcox's adjutant walked along without another word till they came to Schlieffen's tent. "Here are your quarters, Colonel," he said then, and stalked off without a backwards glance. As Schlieffen ducked his way into the tent, he realized he might as well have challenged Captain Richardson's faith in God as his faith in the inferiority of the Negro.

Though coarse canvas hid the land on the other side of the river, the German military attache glanced south, toward it. The men of the Confederate States held similar opinions. Did that make them right, or merely similar? With his limited experience, Schlieffen could not say.

He wanted to get another chance to talk with Douglass at supper that evening, but the Negro must have chosen a different time to eat or eaten away from the headquarters staff. If Captain Richardson's attitude toward him was typical, Schleiffcn didn't blame him for that. After supper, he decided not seeing Douglass might have been just as well. He himself still had to remain in the good graces of the staff, or he would not learn everything he wanted to know about theU.S. plan to cross theOhio and invade the CSA.

He wondered if General Willcox was coming to regret having chosen to concentrate againstLouisville rather than, say,Covington farther east. Bringing invasion barges down toCincinnati would have been easy, since the Little Miami River ran by the town. The streams that flowed into theOhio oppositeLouisville —the Middle, the Falling Run, the Silver, the Mill—were small and feeble. Most of the barges came to them by rail. That that could be done impressed Schlieffen; that it

had to be done impressed him in a different way.

The next morning, the Confederates started shelling the barges and boats that were being gathered.U.S.

artillery promptly opened up on the Confederate guns. Schlieffen had already noted how many cannon theUnited States had brought to support their attack. Now theUSA used the guns to keep the Confederates from disrupting it.

A considerable artillery duel developed. The C.S. gunners had to take on theU.S. cannon bombarding them, lest they be put out of action without means to reply. That meant they had to stop hammering away at the barges, so theU.S. shelling served its purpose. Schlieffen judged theUnited States had more guns here than did their foes. They did not put the Rebels out of action, though.

Schlieffen shook his head. The Confederate States were bringing men and materiel toLouisville , as theUnited States were on this side of the river. He didn't think the CSA had as much, but defenders didn't need as much, either. Had Willcox struck fast and hard two weeks before, even a week before, he might have had a better chance of carrying the town by main force. That wouldn't be so easy now.

Men and guns and barges kept pouring intoJeffersonville andClarksville andNew Albany , though. When all else failed, numbers worked wonders. Orlando Willcox had numbers on his side. If only, Schlieffen thought, he would get around to using them.

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Abraham Lincoln watched in fascinated wonder asU.S. troops marched intoSalt Lake City from the north. The soldiers, some mounted, others afoot, tipped their hats and grinned widely at the flag-waving crowds who cheered their arrival. DownState Street they came, under the Eagle Gate at the corner of State andTemple . The wooden eagle, its wingspan more than twice as broad as a man was tall, perched on a beehive supported by curved iron supports mounted on pale stone posts. Though the Latter-Day Saints had erected it, and though the beehive was their symbol, its fierce beak and talons now seemed to symbolize the power of theUnited States .

Leaning over toward Gabe Hamilton, who was cheering as loudly as anybody else,Lincoln asked, "In all these people on the street, do you see a single, solitary Mormon?"

"Not a one," Hamilton answered at once. "Not many Gentiles who're missing, though, I'll tell you that."

Surveying the soldiers in their natty blue jackets, the metalwork of their rifles bright and shiny, the sun glaring off the steel barrels of the field guns that rolled along after a troop of cavalry, Lincoln was moved to quote Byron:

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold, And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold; And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea, When the blue wave rolls nightly on deepGalilee

."

Gabe Hamilton clapped his hands together. "That's first-rate stuff. And remember how it ends?

"And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword, Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

I think that's how it goes. I know damn well that's how the Mormons hope it goes."

"True enough,"Lincoln said. "I am of the opinion that they are doomed to disappointment in those hopes, however. President Blaine, whatever else may be said of him, is not a man to take half measures, as we have seen in his recent conduct of foreign affairs. Having decided not to suffer the semisecession ofUtah , he will aim to make certain such a mischance cannot occur again."

A tall, handsome man with a fine gray beard came riding down the street on a gray gelding that was a splendid piece of horseflesh. The fellow's coat was endowed with a superabundance of brass buttons; as he got closer,Lincoln saw that each of his shoulder straps bore a single silver star.

Though they had not set eyes on each other for almost twenty years, Lincoln and Brigadier General John Pope recognized each other at about the same time. Pope broke out of the parade and rode over towardLincoln , the horse's hooves kicking up dust at every step. "I heard you were inSalt Lake City , sir," the general said, nodding. "Are you well?"

"Very well, thank you,"Lincoln replied. "I am glad to see the power of theUnited States return toUtah . It has been sorely missed."

"Glad to see it even under my command, eh?" Pope might not have seenLincoln since the War of Secession, but his glare made it plain he had forgotten nothing in all that time.

"Yes, very glad,"Lincoln said simply.

"You shipped me away from the real war," Pope said. "You sent me off to fight redskins and gave my men back to the Young Napoleon, that lazy, pompous fraud—and look how much better than I he did with them." No, Pope hadn't forgotten a thing. His sarcasm was meant to wound, and it did. "But my duty is to serve my country in whatever place I am given, Mr. Lincoln, and I have done that duty. And so now I find myself able to liberate you along with the rest of this rebellious Territory. Strange how things come full circle, is it not?"

"General, you made errors during the War of Secession. I likewise made errors, and those far worse than yours, else the war should have been won,"Lincoln said. "If you believe a day has passed from that time to this when those errors were not uppermost in my mind, I must tell you, sir, that you are mistaken."

Pope grunted. The soft answer, giving him nothing against which to strike, seemed to discomfit him.

"Well," he said at last, roughly, "I aim to make no mistakes here. I intend putting the fear of God—the proper Christian God, mind you, the God of wrath and vengeance—in these Mormons. They shall obey me or suffer the consequences. No— they shall obey me *and* suffer the consequences." He gave a stiff nod, then kicked his horse up into a canter so he could resume his place in the military procession.

"Well!" Juliette Hamilton said, in a tone altogether different from General Pope's. "Did I hear that man call General McClellan pompous? Has he looked in a mirror any time lately?"

Lincolnsmiled at that. He thought she spoke to vent her own feelings, not to make him feel better.

Paradoxically, that did make him feel better. His relief, however, was short-lived. A cavalry colonel with long golden locks and a fierce mustache gave him a look that made Pope's seem mild and benevolent.

The horseman kept scowling back over his shoulder atLincoln till he was out of sight.

"Fellow doesn't seem fond of you," Gabe Hamilton remarked.

"No,"Lincoln said. Resignedly, he went on, "Not many who served during the War of Secession are, for which who can blame them? I can't remember that man's name, but he was one of McClel-lan's staff officers. I wonder how he likes serving under McClellan's rival now."

"What are his choices? He can like it or lump it."Hamilton leaned forward like a hunting dog going on point. "What the devil are those funny-looking things on the gun carriages? Haven't seen anything like them before."

"Neither have I. They don't look like cannon, do they?"Lincoln 's curiosity was piqued. During the War of Secession, he'd taken a keen interest in military inventions of all sort. He was something of an inventor himself, and held a riverboat patent, though nothing had ever come of it. "Rifle barrels sticking out of a brass case . . ." He shrugged. "My chief hope is that we need not see what destruction they can reap."

A last company of infantry marched past. Following them came a mounted sergeant who called out in a great voice: "Brigadier General Pope, the military governor ofUtahTerritory , will speak inTemple Square at three this afternoon. Everyone should hear him, Mormons and Gentiles alike." He rode on a few yards, then repeated the announcement.

"Military governor, is it?"Lincoln thoughtfully clicked his tongue between his teeth. "No, President Blaine isn't doing things by half. With that title, General Pope will have the power to bind and to loose, sure enough." Pope was not the first man to whom he would have entrusted such power, but President Blaine could not have asked his opinion, and would not have if he could.

Juliette Hamilton said, "Someone needs to bring the Mormons into line." Since that was also true,Lincoln held his peace.

He would have gone toTemple Square alone, but Gabe Hamilton also wanted to hear what Pope had to say.Lincoln hadn't thought the square could be any more crowded than it had been on the Sunday when he'd gone to the Tabernacle, but discovered he was wrong. Both Mormons and Gentiles were thronging to it to hear John Pope lay down the law.

Pope was ready for any trouble the Mormons might cause, which was

likely the best way to keep them from causing trouble. He himself stood on one of the granite blocks that would eventually be raised to theMormonTemple . The men on theTemple now were not Mormon masons, however; they were bluecoats with Springfields. More riflemen were atop the Tabernacle. Behind Pope, a couple of field guns, probably loaded with case shot, bore on the crowd. In front of him stood one of the unfamiliar brass-cased contraptions.

Hamiltontook his watch out of his vest pocket and looked at it. Either it was a little slow or the one Pope was using ran fast, for it showed a couple of minutes before the hour when the military governor ofUtahTerritory held up his hands for silence. He got it, faster and more completely than he would have anywhere else in theUSA : except in matters bearing on their faith *(a large exception,* Lincoln thought), the Mormons obeyed authority.

"Fellow citizens," Pope boomed, the dusty breeze carrying his words out across Temple Square, "with my arrival here, the government of the United States resumes control over this Territory after the illegal and outrageous attempt on the part of the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints to extort acquiescence to its immoral creed by impeding the flow of men and goods and messages across the continent. No government sensitive to its right could possibly yield in the face of the threats and intimidation proffered by these so-called authorities."

Telling Mormons and Gentiles apart by looks or dress was usually impossible.Lincoln had no trouble seeing who was who now. Gentiles cheered and waved their hats. Some of them waved the flags with which they'd greeted the soldiers, too. Mormons stood silent, listening, hardly moving, almost as if they'd been turned to stone.

Pope went on, "Fellow citizens, we are at war: against the Confederate States, againstEngland and lickspittleCanada , againstFrance . In time of war, the leaders of the Mormon Church, through their deliberate actions, offered aid and comfort to the enemies of theUnited States by blocking the rail lines and by cutting the telegraph wires. Offering aid and comfort to the enemy in time of war is treason, nothing less."

"Oh, my," Gabe Hamilton whispered. "He's going to hit them hard."

"He surely is,"Lincoln whispered back.

"By order of President Blaine," Pope continued, "the former civilian government ofUtahTerritory is dissolved, it having proved unable to

maintain the authority of the U.S. Constitution in this area.Utah being a territory in rebellion against theUnited States and now returned to the authority there-of by military might"—he gestured up at the riflemen and back toward the cannon—"it is considered to be under military occupation. As military governor, I—"

"Am the new dictator,"Hamilton murmured.Lincoln nodded.

Pope proceeded to prove them both right: "—hereby declare the suspension of the right to obtain a writ of *habeas corpus.* I declare the suspension of the right to trial by jury, Mormons having corrupted the process by repeated false and outrageous verdicts. Justice henceforward shall be by military tribunal."

"Can he do that?"Hamilton asked.

"Legally, do you mean? Maybe the Supreme Court will say he can't—years from now,"Lincoln answered. "If this Territory is denned as hostile soil under occupation, though, he may well be able to do as he pleases."

"Every male citizen ofUtahTerritory shall be required within the next sixty days to take an oath of loyalty to the government of theUnited States ," Pope declared. "The oath shall also include a denial that the said male citizen is or shall henceforth be wed to more than one woman at any one time. Perjury pertaining to this section shall be punished with the utmost severity by the aforesaid military tribunals. Polygamy within the boundaries ofUtahTerritory is from this time forward abolished and prohibited."

Again, the Gentiles applauded. Again, the Mormons revealed themselves by stonelike silence. Being taller than almost everyone around him,Lincoln could see a considerable part of the crowd. Here and there, two or three or four women, sometimes with children in their arms, stood grouped around one man. What was going through their minds?

Pope said, "Because of its role in instigating and carrying out the rebellion ofUtahTerritory against theUnited States , theChurchofJesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints is declared not to be a religion liable to protection under the First Amendment, but a political organization subject to sanctions for its acts.

Until further notice, construction of the so-calledMormonTemple is suspended. Public worship at the Mormon Tabernacle and other so-called Mormon churches is also suspended, as are all other public

meetings of more than ten persons.

"One last point: any resistance to military authority will be crushed without mercy. Shooting at soldiers and destroying trains, tracks, telegraph lines, or other public necessities of any sort will result in hostages'

being taken. If the guilty parties be not promptly surrendered, the hostages shall be hanged by the neck until dead. Anyone doubting my ability or will to fulfill that promise mistakes me." General Pope looked out overTemple Square . "Return peaceably to your homes, people ofUtah . Obey the legally constituted authority of the military government and all will be well. Disobey only at your peril."

As Lincoln and Hamilton walked back to the carriage in which they'd come to Temple Square, the Salt Lake City man asked, "Does he mean what he says?"

"1 should not care to try to find out the contrary by experiment,"Lincoln answered. "John Pope had a name as a hard man during the War of Secession, and I've heard nothing of how he has conducted himself here in the West in the years since to make me believe he's changed."

That evening,Lincoln was about to sit down to supper at theHamilton 's table when someone knocked on the door. Gabe Hamilton went to open it. He called, "An officer to see you, Mr. Lincoln."

"I'm coming."Lincoln walked to the door, to find himself facing the short, energetic blond cavalry officer he'd noted in the parade. "What can I do for you, Colonel?"

"George Custer, Fifth Cavalry," the man said briskly. "I am told, Mr. Lincoln, that you had conversations with Mr. John Taylor, the Mormons' president." WhenLincoln didn't deny it, Custer went on, "Do you know his present whereabouts?"

"No,"Lincoln said. "If he's not at home, or perhaps at the Tabernacle, I have no idea where he might be.

Why, if you don't mind my asking?"

"He is to be arrested for treason, along with the rest of the Mormon leaders," Custer answered. "We can't lay hands on him, though. He's run off, God knows where—I was hoping you might, too. When we catch him, General Pope aims to hang him higher than Haman."

Chapter 8

GeneralThomas Jackson peered north across the Ohio Riverthrough a telescope. "The onslaught cannot now be long delayed," he said to Brigadier General Peter Turney, who stood by his side. "I thank our heavenly Father for having given us this much time in which to readyLouisville for the storm."

"The Yankees were slowcoaches in the last war," Turney answered, hisTennessee twang contrasting withJackson 's softerVirginia accent. "Doesn't look like they've learned a whole hell of a lot since."

"For which we should also give thanks to God,"Jackson said, and Turney nodded.

Negro labour gangs in tunics and trousers of coarse, undyed cotton—almost the same color as old-style Confederate uniforms—were still busily digging firing pits and building earthworks and abatis throughout Louisville, but especially down by the waterfront. Without the slaves, the defenses of the city would have been far weaker than they were.

Brigadier General Turney asked, "Sir, is it true what I hear, that President Longstreet's going to try and manumit the niggers after the war?" Under bushy gray eyebrows, his broad, earnest face was worried.

"It is true, General,"Jackson said, and Turney grimaced. "He feels the effort to be necessary for reasons of state."

"Reasons of state be damned." Turney pointed toward a gang marching along with picks and shovels shouldered like rifles. "Without slaves like that bunch there, what in blazes are we supposed to do the next time the Yankees pick a fight with us?"

"I can hope that, even if free, the Negro shall not be equal to the white man, and shall be subject to some form of conscription in time of need."

"Turn 'em loose and they'll get uppity—you mark my words," Turney said. Then (rather toJackson 's relief, for he agreed with the views the Tennessean expressed) he changed the subject: "Do you think we knocked out enough of their invasion boats to have held them up?"

"I wish I did, but I very much doubt it,"Jackson answered. "Artillery is

ideally suited for breaking up an attack once launched, but I fear the science has not advanced to the point where it can preempt one.

That day may be coming, but has not yet arrived."

"We'll hurt 'em when they do come—whenever that is," Brigadier General Turney said.

"We shall do more than hurt them, General,"Jackson said. "We shall smash them and wreck any further hopes for the invasion of our country they may have—we shall do that, or I will know the reason why and the men responsible."

He did not raise his voice or make any histrionic gesture. Nevertheless, before Turney quite realized what he was doing, he gave back a pace fromJackson . The brigadier general laughed nervously. "The men won't dare lose," he said. "They're more afraid of what you'd do to 'em than they are of the damnyankees."

Jacksonconsidered. "That is as it should be," he said at last, and swung up onto his horse. Leaving Turney to stare after him, he rode back throughLouisville to the headquarters he'd established south of the city, beyondU.S. artillery range.

Even in its present state, with most of the civilian population fled,Louisville struck him as the least distinctively Southern city in the Confederate States. That didn't spring only from its having been the last town to fall into Confederate hands. Many of the people hereabouts were Yankees by origin or descent, fromNew York andNew England .

And Louisville, like Covington farther east, still looked across the border to the United States, in the same way that Cincinnati, on the other side of the Ohio, looked south to the Confederacy. All three were towns that had grown up trading what the North made for that the South did. That North and South were now two different countries made trade more complicated, but had neither stopped it nor even slowed it much.

Coins jingled inJackson 's pocket. Some had been minted in theUSA , some in the CSA. Both nations coined to the same standard; along the border, that was all that mattered. Yankee greenbacks circulated as readily as the brown banknotes issued in the Confederate States. A lot of people hereabouts not only didn't much care whether the Stars and Bars or the Stars and Stripes flew over them, they hardly noticed

which flag did fly.

"They will, I expect, learn the difference in short order,"Jackson said to himself.

A company of infantry, the soldiers in gray, the officers in the new butternut uniforms, was marching north as he rode south past them. The men grinned and whooped and tossed their hats. "Stonewall!" they shouted. Abstracted,Jackson was by them before he raised his own hat to acknowledge the cheers.

He rode past theUniversityofLouisville , past the downs where, locals told him, people were talking about building a racetrack, and into a grove of oaks where he'd pitched his tent so he could rest under the shade of the trees. After giving his horse to an orderly, he hunted up his own chief artillerist, Major General E. Porter Alexander. "It won't be long," he said bluntly.

"Good," Alexander answered. "High time." He was more than ten years younger thanJackson , with a perpetually amused look on his long, handsome face and a pointed brown beard flecked with gray.

"Much will depend on your guns, General,"Jackson said. "I shall want as much damage as possible done to the Yankees' boats while they are in the water, and to their installations on the northern bank of the river."

"I understand, sir," Alexander said. "We've been trying to hurt them before they launch, but we unmask ourselves when we bombard them, and they have a lot of guns over there trying to knock us out. Say what you will about the rest of the U.S. Army, their artillery has always been good."

He and Jackson smiled at each other.Jackson had begun his military service in the U.S. Artillery.

Alexander himself had started out as an engineer, switching to big guns not long after choosing the Confederate side in the War of Secession.

"It is of the most crucial importance that they not gain such a lodgment on the southern shore of theOhio that they drive us beyond rifle range of the river,"Jackson said. "That would enable them more easily to erect bridges to facilitate the flow of men and equipage into our country, and their engineers are not to be despised, either." He didn't often think to return compliments, and was always pleased with

himself when he did remember such niceties.

"As long as they don't drive us out of cannon range, we can still give them a rough time," Alexander said.

"And our guns range a deal farther than they did in the last war."

Jacksonnoted the artillerist did not promise he could put the bridges out of action with his guns. One reason he appreciated Alexander was that the younger officer never made promises impossible to keep.

"1 shall rely on your men quite as much as on the infantry,"Jackson said.

"Coming from you, sir, I'll take that," Alexander replied. "In fact, I'll let the men know you said it. If anything will make them fight harder, that'll do it."

They conferred a while longer.Jackson went back to his own tent, where he spent an hour in prayer. He had heard that General Willcox, theU.S. commander, was also a man of thoroughgoing piety. That worried him not in the least. "Lord, Thou shalt surely judge the right," he said.

After a frugal supper of stale bread and roasted beef with salt but no other seasoning, a regimen he had followed for many years, he checked with the telegraphers to see if President Longstreet had sent him any further instructions. Longstreet hadn't. Having ordered him to make a defensive fight, Longstreet seemed content to let his gen-eral-in-chief handle the details. Robert E. Lee, God rest his soul, had known how to write a discretionary order. Seeing that Longstreet had learned something from the man who had commanded them both was good.

On returning to his tent,Jackson reviewed his dispositions. He was, he decided, as ready as he could be.

He doubted the same held true on the other side of the river. Taking that as a sign God favored the Confederate cause, he pulled off his boots, knelt beside his iron-framed cot for the day's last petition to the Lord, then lay down and fell asleep almost at once.

Whenever he was in the field, he had himself roused with the first twilight at latest. He'd just sat up in bed after the orderly woke him when a great thundering rose from the north. None of the artillery

duels his forces and General Willcox's had fought were anything close to this. "It begins!" he exclaimed. As usual, all he needed to put on were his boots and his hat. That done, he rushed out of the tent.

He almost collided with E. Porter Alexander, who emerged from under canvas as fast as he did.

Alexander had shed his tunic for the night and was wearing only shirt and trousers, which made him look more like a Yankee labourer on a hot afternoon than a Confederate general before sunup.

"Now we shall see what we shall see," Alexander said, for all the world like a chemistry professor about to drop a bit of sodium into water for the sake of the flame and smoke. "Artillery can do so much more than it could during the last war, but we knew much more about sheltering from it, too."

"A lesson learned from painful experience,"Jackson said. Now, all at once, he wished he'd encamped in the open. The leafy canopy overhead kept him from having any better notion of what was going on than his ears could bring him, and all he could learn from them was that both U.S. and Confederate guns were in action, every one of them sounding as if it was pounding away as hard as it could.

An orderly led upJackson 's horse. At the same time, another man dashed up to the general-in-chief with a telegram clutched in his fist. "This just in from General Turney, sir," he said. "It cuts off halfway—don't know if a shell broke the wire or his operator got hit."

"Give it to me."Jackson put on his glasses, then took the wire. It was hard to read in the still-dim light. A soldier brought over a candle. By the flickering light,Jackson read,U.S.FORCES ON THE RIVER IN

LARGENUMBERS … RESISTING … WITH … ARTILLERY … AND … RIFLE … FIRE ….

NEED …

As the private from the signals office had said, it ended there.

Deducing what General Turney required, though, required no great generalship: a schoolchild could have done it.Jackson shouted for a messenger. When one appeared, he said, "The two brigades quartered near the Gait House are ordered to the waterfront to resist the invaders if their commanders have not sent them forward on their

own initiative." The messenger saluted and dashed off, shouting for a horse.Jackson gave the identical order to the soldier who'd passed him the telegram. "With theU.S.

bombardment, I do not know if a wire can get through, but make the effort."

Not far away, E. Porter Alexander was also giving orders, in a calm, unhurried voice: "Until we know different, we'll go on the notion that the Yankees are doing what we expect. That means Fire Plan One, with guns ranged in on the river and on theIndiana docks to stick to their assigned targets. Any changes from the plan are to be reported to me at once."

When he was done, he turned toJackson with a smile on his face. "A pity, isn't it, General, that battles have grown too large to be commanded from the front? If messengers and telegrams don't constantly tell us what's happening across the field, how can we direct the fighting?"

"In a fight this size, we can't, and I hate that,"Jackson said. "Leading a brigade againstWinchester made me feel a young man again. I tell you this, though, General: I am going to see the fighting for myself, even if only from a distance." He mounted the horse the orderly had brought, and rode out from under the spreading branches of the oaks toward a nearby hilltop.

Sunrisewas near. The eastern horizon glowed with pink and gold light, the spark that was Venus gleaming through it. Only the brightest stars still shone in the darker sky farther west. But the northern quadrant was ablaze with bursting shells;Jackson might have been watching a Fourth of July fireworks display from some distant house.

By where the smoke was thickest, he could tell that theU.S. gunners were giving the wharves of the waterfront a fearful pounding. Had he led the Yankees, he would have ordered the same, to make the Confederate infantrymen keep their heads down and prevent them from bringing too heavy a fire to bear against the invasion boats. The smoke kept him from discerning much more than that. And, with every passing minute, though the light got stronger, the smoke got worse: smoke from the Yankees' guns on the other side of theOhio , smoke from bursting shells, and smoke from the C.S. cannon responding to the enemy's fire.

Jackson's frown was venomous. He wanted nothing so much as to grab

a Tredegar and go where the fighting was hottest. But Major General Alexander had the right of it: if he did that, he could not at the same time command. More men were capable of fighting the damnyankees than of leading the entire army against them. And, had he snatched up a rifle and run off to pretend he was a private soldier, he would have been able to see even less of the battlefield than he could from his present vantage point.

He'd already been too long away from his electric eyes and ears. And messengers would be getting back to headquarters from the fighting by now, too. Regretfully, he used feet and reins to start his horse back toward the tent among the trees.

No sooner had he dismounted than the first messenger arrived, dirty-faced, with a torn and filthy uniform, eyes wide and staring from what was surely his first taste of combat. He stared atJackson , too.

Was that because he was meeting a man legendary in the CSA or simply because he was too battered to recall the message he was supposed to deliver?

Then, very visibly, his wits began to turn, as if they were a steamboat's paddlewheel. "General Jackson, sir!" he exclaimed. "The damnyankees have men ashore on our side of the river." He gulped. "Lots of

'em, sir."

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Even in the predawn stillness, southernIndiana remained sultry, sticky. Frederick Douglass stood in a field just outside the city limits ofNew Albany . Every couple of minutes, he would slap at himself as a mosquito bit him. "I'm an old man," he said sadly. "I remember being able to hear the mosquitoes buzzing around, so that sometimes 1 could get them before they got me. No more, not for years. Now they take me by surprise."

That amused theU.S. artillerymen standing by their pieces awaiting the word to commence. "It ain't no big loss, Pop," one of them said. "That goddamn buzzing drives me crazy, nothin' else but." A couple of his comrades spoke up in agreement.

"Better to know the enemy than to let him take you by surprise," Douglass insisted, which drew another chuckle from theMassachusetts

volunteers. In the couple of days he'd been with them, they'd treated him well: General Willcox had made a good choice in assigning him to their battery when he'd asked to watch the bombardment ofLouisville from among the guns.

A rider came trotting down the road. He halted when he saw the guns: big, dark shapes in what was otherwise an empty field. "Open fire at fourA.M.sharp," he called, and rode on to give the next battery the word.

Someone struck a match, first stepping well away from the guns and limbers to do so. The brief flare of light showed the boyish features of Captain Joseph Little, the battery commander. "Fifteen minutes," he said after checking his pocket watch. "Men, we'll load our pieces now, so as to get the first shots off precisely on the mark."

In darkness just this side of perfect, the gun crews handled unscrewing the breech blocks, loading in shells and bags of powder after them, and sealing the guns once more as smoothly as they might have done at high noon. Douglass had already seen that the artillery volunteers, most of whom were militiamen of long standing, were trained to a standard close to that of their Regular Army counterparts, which could not have been said about the volunteer infantry.

Captain Little spoke up again: "Mr. Douglass, you'll want to make certain"—hisBayState accent made the word come out as *suht'n,* almost as if he were a Rebel—"you're not standing right behind a gun.

When they go off, the recoil *will* send them rolling backwards at a pretty clip."

Douglass made sure he would be out of harm's way. The quarter of an hour seemed to take forever.

Douglass was beginning to think it would never end when, off to the east towardJeffersonville , several cannon roared all at once.

"Well! I like that," Captain Little said indignantly. "Still lacks two minutes of the hour by my watch." He must have been staring at it in the faintest early twilight. "Some people think they have to come to the party early. If we can't be the first, we shan't be the last, either." More guns were going off, some of them much closer than the earliest ones had been. Little raised his voice: "Battery B . . . Fire!"

All six guns bellowed at essentially the same instant. The noise was a

cataclysmic blow against Douglass'

ears. Great long tongues of yellow flame burst from the muzzles of the cannon, illuminating for half a heartbeat the men who served them. Dense smoke shot from the muzzles, too.

Douglass paid that scant heed for the moment. As Captain Little had warned, the cannon recoiled sharply. A couple of artillerymen had to step lively to keep from being run down by the creaking gun carriages.

"Come on, lads!" Little yelled. "Get 'em back in place and give the damn Rebs another dose of the same." Grunting and cursing, the crews man-handled the cannon up to the positions from which they'd first fired. The breeches were opened, swabbed out to make sure no burning fragments of powder bag remained. Then in went another shell, another charge, and the loaders screwed the breeches shut. The guns bellowed once more, not in a single salvo this time but one after another, each crew struggling to be faster than those to either side of it.

The smoke quickly filled the field. Coughing, Douglass moved to one side, seeking not only cleaner air to breathe but also an unimpeded view of the battlefield. As twilight brightened toward day, it was as if the curtain lifted on an enormous stage set out before him.

Seeing that panorama, he understood for the first time why men spoke of the terrible grandeur of war.

Barges and boats packed with soldiers raced across theOhio so the men they carried could close with the foe. Shells from theU.S. guns poured down like rain on the waterfront ofLouisville . Each one burst with a flash of sullen red fire and a great uplifting cloud of black smoke. Douglass could not imagine how any Confederate soldiers compelled to endure such a cannonading could hope to survive.

But the enemy not only survived, he fought. Not only did shells burst along the waterfront. They also burst in theOhio . Looking across the river, Douglass could see flashes from the muzzles of Confederate guns, cannon similar to those theMassachusetts volunteers served. Their thunder reached his ears, too, attenuated by distance but still very real.

Tall plumes of water flew up from the shells that splashed into theOhio . When Douglass noticed those, the spectacle before him suddenly seemed less grand. His breathing came short. His palms got sweaty.

Remembered terror was almost as vivid as the original. He did not need to wonder what the blue-clad men in the invasion boats were feeling. He'd felt it himself, when the Rebel battery shelled the *Queen of theOhio* .

Those Confederates had been but a handful, with only a single battery of old-fashioned guns to bring to bear on their target. The Rebels here had modern cannon by the score and targets to match. Many of them, too, would be their Regular Army men, the best they had.

Not all their shells, then, burst in the river. Some struck the hurrying boats full ofU.S. troops. Douglass groaned when one of those simply broke up and sank, throwing its heavily laden soldiers into the water.

Another stricken vessel must have had either its helmsman hit or its rudder jammed, for it slewed sharply to one side and collided with its neighbor. Both boats capsized.

And, as the barges and boats neared the bank the Confederates held, tiny yellow flashes, like far-off fireflies, began appearing in the midst of the shell-bursts from theU.S. guns: Confederate riflemen got to work. Incredible as it seemed to Frederick Douglass, they had not only lived through the bombardment that still continued, but also retained enough spirit to fight back strongly. Loathe their cause though he most sincerely did, Douglass could not help respecting their courage.

The first boats began to reach the far bank of the river. Tiny as blue ants in the distance, U.S. soldiers swarmed off them, rushing forward to find cover from the galling fire of their foes—and also from the fire of their friends, which had not shifted its targets despite the landings. Artillery put Douglass in mind of some great ponderous stupid beast, liable to step on and crush anyone who came too near it.

He scrawled his impressions of the fight down in a notebook, intending to weave them into a coherent whole back at his tent when he had the leisure. He had, as yet, no idea whether the battle would be won or lost. All he could discern at the moment was that both sides were fighting not only with desperate courage but also with all the resources science and industry could give them.

And then, in the twinkling of an eye, the battle lost its abstract, panoramic quality and the face of war changed for him forever. The C.S. artillery had concentrated on the invasion boats on theOhio and, to a lesser degree, on the quays where the barges and boats took on their cargo of soldiers. Every so often, though, the Rebs would lob a

few shells at theU.S. guns bombarding them, no doubt aiming more to harass than to stop the cannonading.

By the time the sun came up, Frederick Douglass had grown intimately familiar with the astonishing cacophony emanating from an artillery battery working at full throttle. He did not, however, understand what shrill, rising screams in the air meant until three shells burst in swift succession among the Massachusetts volunteers whose deeds he'd intended chronicling.

The ground shook under his feet. Something hissed past his head. Had it flown a few inches to one side of its actual path, any hopes of his chronicling the artillerymen's adventures would have died in that instant.

More screams, these from the ground, not the air: the sounds of agony. Douglass forgot he was a reporter and remembered he was a man. Stuffing the notebook into a pocket, he ran across the field—even now, under the stink of gunpowder, the grass smclled sweet—to give what aid he could.

"Oh, dear God!" He stopped short with an involuntary exclamation of horror. There lay brave, clever Captain Joseph Little, who had never by word or deed shown he thought Douglass less than himself on account of the color of his skin. Captain Little would never think good or ill of Douglass again, not in this world. One of the Confederate shells had burst quite near him. Now he lay like a broken doll. Broken quite literally: his head had been torn from his body, and lay several feet away from the still-twitching corpse. Half the top of it had been blown off, too; red blood pooled on gray brains. More red soaked the green grass under him. The first flies were already landing.

Captain Little, of course, did not scream. The one virtue of his death was that he could have had no notion of what hit him. One second, he was directing his guns, the next . . . gone. The fellow down on the ground beside him—no, by some miracle or insanity, sitting up now—wasn't screaming, either. When the artilleryman sat, his intestines spilled out into his lap. A shell fragment had laid open his belly as neatly as the slave butcher gutted hogs back in Douglass' plantation days.

TheMassachusetts volunteer looked down at himself. "Isn't that something?" he said, his voice eerily calm. Douglass had heard of men with dreadful injuries who seemed unaware of pain, in stories from railroad accidents and such. He hadn't believed them, but now he saw

they were—or could be—true.

The artilleryman's eyes rolled up in his head. He slumped back to the ground, dead or unconscious. If he was unconscious, Douglass hoped he'd never wake, for he had no hope of surviving, not with that dreadful wound.

By one of the hellish freaks of war, another soldier had had his guts torn out in almost identical fashion.

He was not quiet. He was not calm. He rolled and thrashed and shrieked and wailed, spraying blood and fragmented bits of himself in every direction. Douglass heard one of his teeth break as he clenched his jaws against yet another scream. He was perfectly conscious, perfectly rational, and looked likely to stay that way for hours to come.

His eyes, wide and wild and staring, fixed on Douglass and held the Negro's in an unbreakable grip. "Kill me," the artilleryman growled, his voice rough and ragged and ready to dissolve into yet another howl of anguish. "For God's sake, kill me. Don't make me go through any more of this."

He wore a revolver on his belt. With what looked like a supreme effort of will, he jerked one dripping hand away from his belly long enough to get the pistol out and shove it along the ground toward Douglass.

Before Douglass knew what he'd done, he picked up the revolver. It was heavy in his hand. He knew how to use one. He'd carried one in the grim days just after the War of Secession, when whites were liable to blame any Negro they saw for the war and, perhaps, to go from blaming him to hanging him from the nearest lamp post.

He looked around. None of the other artillerymen was paying him the least attention. Some were tending to less dreadfully wounded comrades. Others, farther away, kept on serving their own guns, so as to make sure the Confederates on the other side of the river got their fair share of death and mutilation and horror and torment.

"Shoot me," the eviscerated soldier groaned. "Don't stand there with your thumb up your ass, damn you to fucking hell."

For the first twenty years of his life and more, Douglass had been caught up in the nightmare of slavery.

Now he found another nightmare, one that turned men into beasts—into beasts straight from the abattoir—in different, more abrupt fashion. Caught in the toils of this new nightmare, he pointed the revolver at the artilleryman's forehead and, with a convulsive motion, squeezed the trigger.

The pistol bucked in his hand. A neat, blue-black hole appeared above the wounded soldier's left eye.

The back of his head blew out, splashing hair and shattered bits of skull and brains and blood over the grass. With a cry of disgust and dismay, Douglass set down the pistol and rubbed his blood-smeared palm against a trouser leg again and again, as if by that means he could wipe off the mark of Cain.

Several artillerymen spun toward him at the sound of the shot. Most of them, seeing what he had done, simply went back to what they were doing. One, though, with a sergeant's three red stripes on his sleeve, walked over toward the distraught Negro. After looking at the dead gunner's ghastly wound for a few seconds, he put an arm around Douglass' shoulder. "I want to thank you for what you did, sir," he said.

"Noah was my cousin, and you put him out of his pain. If you hadn't been there, I believe I'd have had to do the job myself, and that would have been mighty hard, mighty hard indeed."

"It was—the only thing I could do," Douglass said slowly. So often, words like that revealed themselves for the shallow self-justification they were. This once, he heard truth in them.

So did the sergeant, Noah's cousin. "That's right," he said. "That's just exactly right, and don't you let it trouble your mind again." He went back to his cannon, leaving Douglass, who was not a Roman Catholic, fully understanding for the first time in his life the power of absolution.

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Alfred von Schlieffen paced along the northern bank of theOhio , growing more frustrated by the moment. A great battle raged a mile away, and he could not get to it. He could not even do a proper job of observing, not from where he was. Too much smoke hung in the air to let him have more than the vaguest notion of how the fight was going.

And theU.S. authorities flatly refused to let him board a boat and cross over to theKentucky side of the river.

"I'm sorry, sir." said Second Lieutenant Archibald Creel, who accompanied him today because General Willcox had more urgent things for Oliver Richardson to do. "The general doesn't want us to have to explain toBerlin how we let their military attaché go and get himself killed."

A couple of Confederate shells smashed to earth within a hundred yards of Schlieffen. "I am on this side of the river to do that," he remarked with some asperity. As if to underscore his words, more shells screamed in.

Lieutenant Creel did not look as if he had been out ofWest Point more than a week. He stood firm, both against the shelling and against the foreign officer he was required to shepherd. "I have my orders, sir," he said. He might have been quoting Holy Writ. In a soldierly way, he was.

"To the devil with your orders," Schlieffen muttered, but in German, which the youngster did not speak.

He tried again: "I am a military man. I am obliged to take risks for my fatherland."

"No, sir," Creel said, and stuck out his chin.

"Donnerwetter,"Schlieffen said. No doubt about it: he was stuck.

Since he was stuck, he decided to make the most of it. He set off at a brisk walk toward the Jcffersonville wharves, which, as an accomplished map reader, he knew to be closer than those ofClarksville . Like a dog on a leash—and so he was, a watchdog—Second Lieutenant Creel tagged along.

Men in blue—some in the faded uniforms of the regulars, more wearing the dark and almost spotless clothes the volunteers had recently donned—waited in long, stolid lines to board the barges and steamboats that would ferry them over the river so they could fight. Schlieffen had watched boats get hit in midstream. No doubt the soldiers had, too. They kept moving toward the boats anyhow, exactly as Germans would have done. That took discipline and courage both, the combination being especially remarkable for volunteer troops.

Long trenches paralleled the lines that led down to the waterfront.

When the Confederates started sending shells at the men near Schlieffen, they lost their stolidity in a hurry, diving into the trenches to shelter from blast and flying splinters.

Schlieffen stayed upright. So did Lieutenant Creel. It was surely the first time he'd been under fire. He handled himself well. As soon as the shells stopped falling, theU.S. soldiers scrambled out of the trenches and resumed their places in line as if nothing had happened. Stretcher-bearers carried away a couple of groaning wounded men, but only a couple.

"These ditches are a good idea," Schlieffen said. "They save casualties."

"That they do." Archibald Creel sounded as proud as if he'd thought of them himself.

So, Schlieffen thought, I have here one small worthwhile thing. Is this enough for sending me so far? Is this enough to have gathered from the greatest battle of the war? The answer, in both cases, was painfully obvious. With more temper than he usually showed, Schlieffen rounded on Second Lieutenant Creel:

"You can tell me for a fact thatU.S. troops arc at this time fighting inLouisville ?"

"Yes, sir, I can tell you that," Lieutenant Creel said.

"Sehr gut.You cannot, however, tell me where inLouisville or how inLouisville or how well inLouisville they are fighting, *nicht wahr?"*

"I don't know those things for certain, no, sir," Creel said. "I wish I did." He laughed nervously. "The fog of war." His wave encompassed the very real layer of thick gray smoke that blanketedLouisville , that hung low and close to theOhio , and that drifted and swirled in eddies on theU.S. side of the river.

"Where will they know—where will they have some idea—how goes the fighting inLouisville ?"

Schlieffen demanded.

"One place is over across the river, sir," Creel said.

"Where I cannot go."

"Where you can't go," the young lieutenant agreed. "The other place

would be General Willcox's headquarters." He laughed again. "Well, Confederate headquarters, too, I suppose, but you can't go there, either."

"No," Schlieffen wondered if the German military attache to the Confederate States was over there. He hoped so. Having reports from both sides of the line would be useful back inBerlin —provided he learned enough here to give his report any value. "Be so good, then, as to conduct me back to General Willcox's tent. To go to the front is for me forbidden, and here in the middle I might as well be in the middle of the sea. Take me back."

"Yes, sir," Lieutenant Creel said. "I don't know how much the general will let you see with the battle still going hot and heavy, but we'll find out. You come along with me, sir, and I'll take you there."

Schlieffen would have got there faster by himself, but not much.

The youngU.S. officer had some notion of where he was and a pretty good idea of how to reach headquarters. Schlieffen, who laid a map in his head over the territory it represented as automatically as he breathed, had to do some unobtrusive guiding only once or twice to keep Creel headed in the right direction.

Creel's presence was enough to get Schlieffen past the sentries outside General Willcox's tent. Given the stream of messengers rushing in and out, Schlieffen suspected he could have got past them without the young lieutenant. Some of those messengers clutched telegrams in their fists. Schlieffen noted that, though he didn't remark on it for fear the Americans would notice him noticing. So they'd managed to get an insulated wire across theOhio , had they? That would help them. General Willcox would have far more intimate knowledge of what his troops were doing and would be able to send them orders far quicker than if he'd had to rely on boat traffic alone.

Getting to see him actually directing the battle, though, took a bit of doing. A staff officer senior to Second Lieutenant Creel halted Schlieffen, saying, "This isn't anything we want any foreigners watching."

"I am not an enemy," Schlieffen said indignantly. "I am a neutral. When General Rosecrans let me come here, he gave me leave to observe the actions of the Army of theOhio . You are preventing me from doing my duty to my country when you keep me from observing."

"I'm doing my duty to my own country," the staff officer retorted.

"I protest," Schlieffen said loudly. He was half the size and twice the age of the soldier barring his path. If the idiot in blue didn't get out of his way, though, he was going to do his best to break him in half.

Lieutenant Creel saw as much, and put a restraining hand on his arm. "Wait a second, Colonel," he said.

"Let me get Captain Richardson. He'll straighten this out." He hurried past the other staff officer, who suffered him to enter General Willcox's *sanctum sanctorum.*

"What's all this about?"Richardson said when he came out. "I haven't got time for any nonsense right now." Schlieffen and the otherU.S. staff officer both started talking at once, glaring at each other while they did.Richardson listened for a little while, then threw up his hands. "Yes, Colonel Schlieffen, you may observe. Hickenlooper, keep out the Rebs and the Englishmen.Germany 's friendly, and she's likelier to stay that way if you let the attache here do his job."

"Danke,Captain Richardson," Schlieffen said. He gave the dejected Hickenlooper a severe look as he strode past him.

As he might have expected, the command center of the Army of theOhio was more chaotic than that which he'd known while serving in the Franco-Prussian War. Messengers and officers rushed in and out and stood around arguing with one another in a fashion no German general would have tolerated for an instant.

Orlando Willcox looked up from the enormous map held flat on a table by a couple of stones, a government-issue tin cup, and one bayonet stabbed through the paper and into the wood. "Ah, Colonel Schlieffen," he said. "Glad to see you. We have our landings on the other side of the river, you see."

Schlieffen bent over the map. Sure enough, pins with blue glass heads showedU.S. forces scattered along theKentucky shore of theOhio and controlling the sandy islands in the middle of the river. Even as the attache watched, an aide stuck in another blue-headed pin, this one a little farther from the riverbank.

"We have to push them back," Willcox said. "We can't bridge the river with snipers picking off our engineers as fast as they get into range. Artillery is bad enough, but Confederates, say what you will about them, produce first-rate sharpshooters. And they'll have every stretch

of theOhio ranged to the inch, too, so they'll know precisely how to sight their rifles."

"The need for accurate sighting is the major drawback of the modern military rifle," Schlieffen agreed. To reach longer ranges, rifle bullets needed considerable elevation, which meant the angle at which they descended was far from insignificant. It also meant a minor error in estimating range was almost sure to result in a miss out past a couple of hundred yards.

Willcox pointed to the red pins measling the map ofLouisville . "It would appear that the C.S.

commander, rather than withdrawing from the city here to engage us on open ground, intends to make his fight withinLouisville itself, thereby subjecting it to all the rigors of war. Such callousness as to its fate and the fate of those civilians remaining there cannot win him favor either with his own people or in the eyes of the Lord."

"This may well be so," Schlieffen said, "but fighting in a built-up area is a good way to cause the foe many casualties. Remember the battle the French had to wage to put down the Paris Commune." He granted the Communards a good deal of thoughtful respect. Their ferocity, along with some of the fighting Napoleon Ill's army had waged even after its cause was lost, in his view gave the lie to those Germans who reckoned France too weak and decadent ever to be a menace again.

"Fighting like that is uncivilized," Willcox declared.

There, he had a point. European practice had long been for armies to engage away from centers of population, both to avoid endangering civilians and to give both sides the greatest possible opportunity to manoeuvre. The Americans had generally followed the same rules during the War of Secession. If the Confederates were changing those rules now . . . "Have you learned for certain who the C.S.

commander is?"

Willcox looked unhappy. "Rebel prisoners are confirming the rumors we had heard. We do face General Jackson."

"Ach, so? Sehr interessant,"Schlieffen murmured. In the War of Secession,Jackson 's reputation had come from manoeuvre so relentless, his infantry got the name of "foot cavalry." A man who could change his entire strategic concept was one who demanded to be taken seriously.

A messenger burst in and said, "General Willcox, sir, Colonel Sully says the First Minnesota is melting likeSt. Paul ice in May. They're pinned down on the waterfront, down to a couple of hundred men now.

The Rebs in front of 'em arc too strong for 'em to go forward, and if they retreat they swim."

"What in heaven's name does Sully want me to do?" Willcox demanded.

"Sir, he asks if you could put some artillery on the Rebs in his front," the messenger answered. "They're either behind barricades or fighting from houses and shops and all. Makes the goddamn sons of bitches twice as hard to kill, sir, hopin' you'll pardon my French."

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain," Willcox said, which gave Alfred von Schlieffen at least a partial understanding of what the idiom meant. Schlieffen knew French, and knew the man had not been speaking it. Willcox consulted the map, then went on, "The First Minnesota is close bySecond Street ?"

"No, sir—more likeSixth Street ," the messenger told him. "Somebody's boats next to ours took a—a goldanged pounding, sir, and we had to slide downstream a ways to keep from gettin' rammed."

"SixthStreet," Willcox snarled, as if it were an obscenity. "I'll do what I can, soldier. I make no promises.

Has Colonel Sully no other way to escape his predicament?"

"Sir, yes, sir," the messenger said. "He told me to tell you if he didn't get some kind of help some kind of way pretty . . . danged quick, he was going to have to surrender."

Willcox jerked as if wounded. "I'll do what I can," he repeated. The messenger saluted and hurried away. When the fellow was gone, Willcox turned to a runner from the signals office. "A wire across the river: Colonel Sully is to attempt to regain his position as indicated in the plan for the attack. That failing, he is at minimum to hold his present position at all hazards. He is to be informed that I am endeavoring to obtain artillery support for him."

The runner departed with a scrawled order. Schlieffen noted that Willcox made no effort to give the First Minnesota the artillery support he'd said he was trying to arrange. Sometimes, when all

resources were committed elsewhere, that kind of deception was necessary to keep a unit fighting a while longer.

Sometimes it meant only that the commanding officer wasn't doing as much as he should to solve a problem.

Which was it here? Schlieffen didn't know enough to be certain. The Army of theOhio had a foothold on the far side of its eponymous river. Schlieffen would not have given good odds on that before the battle began. The next question was what Willcox would do with his bridgehead—and what Stonewall Jackson would do to it.

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Edgar Leary dumped three telegrams on Sam Clemens' desk. "Here you go," the young reporter said:

"More wires on theLouisville fighting."

"These are—what? The sixth, seventh, and eighth today?" Clemens asked. Leary nodded. The editor of the *San Francisco Morning Call* puffed out smoke like a steamboat. "Almost makes me wish the lines inUtah were still down."

He skimmed through the wires. Except for some new casualty figures, higher than the ones he'd seen a couple of days before, he didn't see anything he hadn't known already. He threw two of the telegrams into the trash, keeping the one with the numbers. He'd been about to start a new editorial; they would come in handy.

War, he wrote, is a good deal like a meat grinder, in that you feed in fresh chunks of whole meat at one end, and what comes out the other is fit only for stuffing into frankfurters. By all reports, General Willcox is working the crank for all he is worth in theLouisville campaign. Military meat is different from the ordinary kind, because some of the fragments that come out the business end of the grinder are still able to tell you what they were like before they went into the hopper.

If the figures we have are accurate—and God save the soul of the poor devil charged with aggregating the total—the United States have in the past several days gained anywhere from a quarter of a mile to a mile of land formerly having suffered the great misfortune of flying the Confederate flag, and have purchased this real estate at a cost of, to date, 17,409 young soldiers mutilated and killed. That we have here a great bargain can hardly be denied, for—

"Excuse me, Mr. Clemens," Edgar Leary said. "A couple of gentlemen are here to see you."

"If they're gentlemen," Clemens replied without looking up, "they'll wait till I'm ready to see them. Christ, Edgar, you know better than to jog my elbow when I'm trying to get words down on paper."

"It's not a social call, Clemens," a rough, unfamiliar voice said.

Angrily, Sam spun his chair around. He discovered he was looking down the barrels of two Colt revolvers, each held by a burly individual who did not look as if he would have much compunction about pulling the trigger. Ignoring the guns, he said, "People who use my surname commonly have the courtesy to put *Mister* in front of it, as my friend there did."

The larger of the two men—the one who had spoken before— said, "Next Rebel spy I hear tell of who deserves to get called *Mister'W* be the first."

"Rebel spy?" That sent Clemens bouncing to his feet in fury. "Who the devil says I am, and how in hell has he got the nerve to say it?"

Quick as a striking rattler, the smaller ruffian snatched from his desk the editorial on which Sam had been working. After reading the couple of paragraphs there, he said, "Sure as hell sounds like treason to me."

"God damn you!" Clemens shouted. "Give me that back before I punch you in your stupid nose." He kept on ignoring the Colts leveled at him. So did the men holding them. "If Adolph Imbecile Sutro tries to throw a newspaperman in jail for what he writes, he'll have every newspaperman inSan Francisco by this time tomorrow, and that includes the heathen Chinese. There still is such a thing as the First Amendment to the Constitution, which has a thing or two to say on the subject of a free press. Has either of you blockheads ever heard of it?"

Reporters, typesetters, and printers had been edging through the *Morning Call* offices toward the altercation. A savage grin stretched across Sam's face. If these hooligans tried hauling him away by force, they'd have a battle on their hands. Newspapermen looked after their own.

But then the bigger intruder said, "We ain't here on account of what

you write, *Mister* Clemens."

Unexpectedly, he had the wit to load that with irony, and to add, "Hell, nobody reads it, anyways. We're here on account of it's done been reported that you are a veteran of the Confederate States ofAmerica .

Is it so or ain't it that you were in the Confederate Army during the War of Secession?"

Clemens started to laugh. Then he got a look at the faces of the men who worked with him at the *Morning Call.* None of them had ever heard the story of his brief, absurd stint as a Rebel private inMissouri . None of them looked interested in hearing it, either. Even before he could answer, they started slipping back toward the places where they worked.

"Is it or ain't it?" the ruffian repeated.

"Not to speak of," Sam said at last. "The company I was in never did more than mooch around a bit to impress the girls."

"But you were in, were you?" the big man with the revolver said. "You come along with us, then, pal.

You can do your explaining to the soldiers. If they reckon you're on the up and up, then they do, is all.

But if they don't, they'll put you away where you can't get into any mischief."

"This is an outrage!" Clemens thundered. Nobody else in the offices said anything at all. The smaller ruffian seemed to remember he had a gun. He jerked the muzzle in the direction of the doorway. With a sigh, Clemens walked to the door. He grabbed his hat off the tree as he went by. "Let's get this over with. The sooner we do, the sooner I can come back here and let the world know what a pack of damned fools we've got running around loose these days."

The men with revolvers didn't seem inclined to argue with him. As long as he did what they said, they didn't care what else he did: stacked against a Colt, what did an insult or two matter? They had a buggy tied up outside the building. The silence behind Sam as he shut the door hurt him worse than his sallies hurt the spy-hunters.

"The both of you are plumb loco," Clemens said as the smaller fellow took up the reins and began to drive. "If I've been such a grand and dreadful terror to theUnited States lo these many years, what in sweet Jesus' name was I doing as assistant to the governor's secretary inNevadaTerritory even before the blamed war was over?" That the secretary had been his brother Orion, after whom his son was named, he did not bother mentioning.

"Don't know," replied the bigger gunman, the one with some trace of wit. "What *were* you doing there?"

By his tone, Sam might have been sending a daily telegram toRichmond fromCarson City .

Clemens replied only with dignified silence. He also did not ask where they were going, as he had intended. He judged that would become obvious in short order, a judgment vindicated when the little ruffian headed north and west, away from the heart of the city. The only thing of any consequence in that direction was the Presidio, the Army base charged with defendingSan Francisco .

No matter how long Sam had lived in these parts, he never ceased to marvel at the beauty of the view across the Golden Gate, looking north towardSausalito : blue sky, green-blue sea, the wooded headland rising swiftly above it. A ferry boat, thin black plume of smoke rising from its stack, gave a touch of human scale to nature's grandeur.

So did the stone walls of Fort Point. When a sentry came forward to demand the business of the new arrivals, the bigger of Sam's captors said, "We got a feller here might be a spy."

"Like hell I am!" Sam shouted. As far as the sentry was concerned, he was invisible and inaudible. The bluecoat waved the wagon into the fort.

Having reached the garrison commander's waiting room in jig time, Clemens proceeded to put it to the purpose for which it was named: he waited, and waited, and waited. The bravos who'd shanghaied him didn't wait with him: they had better things to do. When he poked his head out of the door to the parade ground through which he'd come in, a soldier pointed a bayoneted Springfield at him and growled, "You get back in there. The colonel'll see you in his time, not yours." Fuming, Sam retreated.

At last, after what had to be closer to two hours than one, the door to Colonel William T. Sherman's office opened. "Come in, Mr.

Clemens,"Sherman said. Lean and erect, he wore a close-trimmed beard that had once been red and was now mostly white. His mouth was a thin slash; his pale eyes did their best to stare through Sam. Harsh lines ran down his pinched cheeks, losing themselves in his beard near the corners of that narrow mouth. The word that sprang to Clemens' mind for him was *bitter*.

His office presented a stark contrast to the genial clutter that made finding things on Sam's desk an adventure. Everything here was obviously just where it belonged. Sam was sure anything that had the gall to go where it didn't belong, even to sidle an inch out of place, would end up in the guardhouse to teach it never to get gay again.

Shermansat; he did not invite Clemens to sit. Glancing down at the beginning of the editorial the smaller gunman had purloined, and also at a large, neatly written sheet of paper on which Sam could make out his name, he said, "Why don't you tell me why you're here, sir?"

Clemens normally wisecracked without thinking, much as he breathed. Facing this man, he restrained himself. "I am here, Colonel, because I served something less than a month in the Marion Rangers, a Confederate unit of sorts inMissouri , during the War of Secession. Because of that, someone has decided I must be a spy."

Shermansaid, "When Louisiana seceded, I was teaching at a military academy there. I resigned at once, and came north to serve my country as best I could. How is it that you fought under the Stars and Bars?"

"I never fought under them," Sam replied. "I marched a bit and rode a horse a bit, but I never once fought. Governor Jackson called for soldiers to repel theU.S. invaders—so he named them—which is how the Marion Rangers came to be. It was a grand and glorious unit, Colonel—there were fifteen of us, all told. The one time we got near a farmhouse that someU.S. troops were guarding, our captain—Tom Lyman, his name was—told us to attack it. We told him no; to a man, we said no. The rest of my so-called military career was cut from the same stuff. I never fired a shot at a soldier of theUnited States .

None of us did, before the Marion Rangers became as one withNineveh andTyre ."

Sherman's jaw worked. "You put this down to youthful indiscretion, then?—for you would have been a young man in 1861."

"That's just what I put it down to, Colonel," Sam said with an emphatic nod.

"And you did serve theU.S. government inNevada ,"Sherman said, checking that paper again. Sam wondered how much of his life's story was contained thereon. In musing tones,Sherman continued, "Yet these days, you speak out strongly in the papers against the war, as you have here." He let a finger rest on the editorial fragment for a moment. "What connection, if any, has the one to the other?"

"Colonel, you've seen real war at first hand, which is far more than 1 ever did," Clemens said. "What is your opinion of it?"

"My opinion?" He'd startledSherman . But the officer did not hesitate long; Sam got the idea he seldom hesitated long about anything. "War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it. Its glory is all moon-shine. Only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded cry aloud for blood, vengeance, and desolation. War is as close to hell as a merciful God allows upon this earth."

That was more than Sam had bargained for. "If you can speak so strongly and still defend our country, how does questioning the wisdom and conduct of this war make me a Confederate agent?"

Shermanstroked his chin. "You might be an agent, using such a pretext as concealment." His mouth thinned further; Clemens had not thought it could. "But I have no evidence to say you arc, not a particle.

What you say of the Marion Rangers squares with what I have on this sheet here—the men who brought you in were overzcalous. We were all quite mad twenty years ago. It should never have happened." That thin mouth twisted. "I shall write you a good character, Mr. Clemens, which you must show to be released from this fortress, and may show to anyone seeking to trouble you hereafter." He inked a pen and began to write.

"Thank you, Colonel," Clemens said fervently. "One thing more?"Sherman looked up from his work.

Sam went on, "May I beg the use of a horse or buggy? The gentlemen who brought me here did not wait upon the outcome of your hearing." He said not a word about how long he'd waited himself.

"I'll see to it,"Sherman said. The pen scratched over the paper. Sam did not mind waiting now, not a bit.

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Bountiful,Utah lay about ten miles north ofSalt Lake City , on the railroad line. George Custer had come south past it on the army's triumphal march toward and then into the capital ofUtahTerritory . He'd paid it no special mind then: just one more no-account town among so many. Now, though, he wasn't going to pass it by; along with the two troops of cavalry at his back, he was going to go through it like a man searching his pockets for a five-cent piece with which to buy his sweetheart a sarsaparilla. His own sweetheart, worse luck, was back atFort Dodge .

"Blast John Taylor anyhow," he grumbled. "Dash and double-dash him. Why couldn't the old fraud have stayed inSalt Lake City , so we could snatch him up and stretch his neck and have done?"

"Don't be such a sourpuss, Autie," his brother Tom said. "If it weren't for Taylor and the rest of the scoops who ran away, we'd be stuck with garrison duty instead of doing something halfway useful out here."

"Halfway useful is right. We ought to be fighting the Rebs, not sitting on these confounded Mormons."

Custer paused and sent Tom a quizzical look. " 'Scoops'? What's a scoop?"

"A Mormon. Heard it the other day," his brother answered. After removing his hat, Tom mimed removing the top of his skull in the same way and scooping out a large portion of its contents. "Have to have most of your brain missing to buy what they're selling, don't you think?"

"Mm, you're likely right." Custer weighed the word. "Scoops. I like that." He laughed, then pointed ahead. "We've got a whole scoop-ful of scoops coming up."

Much the biggest building inBountiful was the Mormon chapel, a wood-and-adobe structure with five spires that looked as if it might have grown from the ground instead of being built. The lands around the chapel were bountiful enough; no matter how foolish the Mormons' religion was in Custer's eyes, he couldn't deny they made skillful, diligent farmers.

People came out into the street from the chapel, from the houses, and from the barbershop and dry-goods store to stare at the soldiers. Their dogs came out with them. The troopers had shot several dogs on the

way up fromSalt Lake City . They'd probably shoot more here. Mormons' dogs ran from mean to meaner.

Nobody said anything as the troopers rode up. Custer knew he wasn't loved here. He didn't care.

Whatever the Mormons loved, as far as he was concerned, had to have something wrong with it.

He held up his hand. Behind him, the cavalrymen reined in. Every one of them carried a loaded carbine across his knees. That wasn't just for dogs. So far, the Mormons hadn't given any trouble. The best way to make sure they didn't give any trouble was to be ready to smash it down ruthlessly if it arose.

Tom Custer said, "I hate all these staring faces. Back inSaltLake , at least the Gentiles were on our side.

Out here, there aren't any Gentiles to speak of, and nobody's on our side."

"We arc in the right. We must never forget it," Custer declared. He raised his voice and called out to the people ofBountiful : "We are searching for John Taylor. Anyone who knows where this fugitive from justice is lurking will be handsomely rewarded." He waited. No one said a word. The wind, full of the salty tang of theGreat Salt Lake , blew up little dust devils in front of his horse.

He'd expected nothing different, but the effort had to be made. His orders said so. The silence from the Mormons persisting, he moved on to the next step in the program: "We are going to search the houses and buildings of this town for the person of John Taylor, and for the persons of other fugitives from justice in this Territory. You are required to assist and cooperate with the brave soldiers of theUnited States engaged in this task. Any resistance will leave the guilty party subject to summary trial and the full rigors of military justice."

That drew a response from the crowd: somebody called, "Where's your search warrants at?"

Custer's smile was anything but pleasant. "We have none. We need none.UtahTerritory , having been declared a region in rebellion against the lawful authority of the government of theUnited States of America , has forfeited the protections enshrined in the Constitution. You people should have thought more about what would follow from your actions before you attempted to coerce the national government

into approving of your hideous practices. Having willfully flouted the government, you will have to earn its good graces once more by showing you are deserving of them."

He waved to his men, who swung down off their horses. Custer told a squad to follow him to the Mormon chapel. They searched the grounds, finding nothing out of the ordinary, and then went inside.

Other than being ornamented with a large portrait in oils of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, the interior might have belonged to any church.

One of the men ofBountiful came inside. "Gentlemen, Mr. Taylor is not here," he said. "He has not been here."

"Who are you, and how do you know?" Custer growled.

"I'm O. Clifton Haight, and I have for many years been a lay preacher at this chapel," the man replied,

"and I know Mr. Taylor has not been inBountiful because I should have heard of it if he were."

"Not if he's lying low—and not if you're just plain lying, either," Custer said. Haight assumed an indignant expression. Custer, feeling briefly charitable, ignored it. He waved. "This church looks nice and fresh and clean, as if people had been in it just the other day, say, or last Sunday. Public worship in Mormon churches is forbidden by order of General Pope, you will recall."

"Oh, yes, of course," O. Clifton Haight said.

"You haven't by any chance forgotten that order?" Custer said.

"Why, no, of course not." Haight's eyes were wide and candid. He was lying. Custer knew he was lying.

He undoubtedly knew Custer knew he was lying. But he also knew Custer couldn't do anything about it.

Until Pope had enough men to put a permanent garrison into every one of these miserable little towns, the Mormons would ignore every order they could. No one was likely to betray them, not when they all conspired together to set at nought the commands of the military governor.

Shaking his head in angry frustration, Custer stalked out of the chapel. His soldiers followed. His eyes lighted on a house across the square. It was built in a pattern with which he'd become all too intimately acquainted inSalt Lake City : a central structure that had undoubtedly been erected first, with several whitewashed wings spreading out from it. Pointing toward the house, he asked, "Who lives there?"

"That's the Sessions place," Clifton Haight answered. "Peregrine Sessions was the first settler here, better than thirty years ago now. That house there, that belongs to his brother, Zedekiah."

"General Pope forbade more than public worship to you Mormons," Custer said, a certain hard anticipation gleaming in his eyes. "He also forbade the practice of polygamy, which has made you people a stench in the nostrils of decent Americans everywhere. Looking at that house, Mr. Haight, how many wives would you say, uh, Zedekiah Sessions is likely to have?"

"I only know of one," Haight said. "Irma Sessions is a pillar of our little community here."

"I'll bet she is," Custer sneered. "And how many other community pillars carry the name of Sessions?"

"1 know of no others," Haight said. Custer had heard that inSalt Lake City , too. The Mormons habitually dissembled about their plural marriages.

He gathered up his troopers by eye. "We are going to search that house for John Taylor. We are also going to search it for any evidence the abhorrent vice of polygamy is being practiced within. If by some chances we find such evidence, despite the statements of Mr. Haight here, we shall take whatever action I deem at the time to be appropriate. Come along."

Grinning, the soldiers followed him. As they tramped toward the large, rambling house, they told lewd jokes. Custer pretended not to hear them, except when a good one made him laugh out loud.

He walked up to the front door and rapped smartly upon it. When it opened, standing before him was one of the formidable middle-aged women of the sort Brigham Young had apparently married in battalions: broad through the shoulders, broader through the hips, graying hair pulled straight back from a face that had not approved of anything since the War of Secession. Custer thought how good her head would look stuffed and mounted on the wall back atFort Dodge

next to a pronghorn or a coyote. "You are Mrs. Irma Sessions?" he asked.

"I am. And you are aUnited States soldier." By her tone, that put Custer somewhere between a Comanche and a polecat.

"My men and I are going to search these premises for the possible presence of the fugitive John Taylor,"

Custer announced. "All persons inhabiting this residence must first come forth."

"And if we do not?" Irma Sessions inquired.

Custer folded his arms across his broad chest. "Then we shall remove you with whatever force proves needful and bind you over for trial for defying the authority of the United States Army." He pulled out his pocket watch. "You have five minutes."

He watched Mrs. Sessions contemplate calling his bluff. He watched her decide, with obvious reluctance, that he wasn't bluffing. He watched her start to slam the door in his face and then, with even more obvious reluctance, think better of it.

Within the appointed deadline, half a dozen women emerged, the other five as like Irma Sessions as peas in a pod. Along with them came something like two dozen children, ranging from babes in arms up to youths old enough to carry a gun and girls well on their way to becoming stolid copies of their mothers.

"Where is Mr. Sessions?" Custer asked when the patriarch of the family proved not to be in evidence.

"InSalt Lake City , on business," Irma Sessions replied. Maybe it was true, maybe it wasn't.

"And all six of you are his wives?" Custer persisted.

"Oh, no," one of the other women said. "I am his widowed cousin." Another claimed to be his sister, still another said she was Irma's sister, and the last two didn't explain how or why they were living there, save to assert that they were not affiliated with Zcdekiah Sessions in any illegal or immoral manner. They were so shrill, so insistent, Custer would not have believed them even had he previously been inclined to do so, which he was not.

In the midst of the women's denials, a leering trooper brought Custer a photograph in a fancy gilt frame.

It was a family group: a stout, bearded man, presumably Mr. Sessions, surrounded by the six women and their multifarious offspring. He displayed it to them. They went quiet. Rudely, he wondered if Sessions could get the same effect with it. For the sake of the man's peace of mind, he hoped so.

"I say that this photograph shows me you have been imperfectly truthful here," he told them, having been too well brought up to call a woman a liar to her face. "As you must know, General Pope has commanded that polygamy shall be suppressed in this Territory by all available means." He turned to the cavalryman. "Any sign of Taylor, Corporal?"

"No, sir," the soldier answered. "Nobody in there now."

"Very well. Put this place to the torch, that sin may have no dwelling place to call its own. If we needs must cleanseUtah with fire and sword, that is what we shall do."

The six wives of Zedekiah Sessions screamed and wailed, as did their female children. The boys, the older ones, cursed Custer and his men as vilely as they knew how. He'd heard worse. Despite screams and wails and curses, the house burned. Going through the town, he and his men found three more homes obviously belonging to polygamists. Those went up in flames, too. He wondered if the Mormons would shoot at his men for that. He almost hoped they would. They didn't.

"It's not soBountiful any more," he said to his brother as they led the two cavalry troops north to the next little town. Both Custers laughed.

Chapter 9

Tubac drowsed under the relentless sun of the western part ofNew MexicoTerritory . It had been a Mexican village, adobe houses clustered around a Catholic church that was also adobe but whitewashed.

Then it had been a Mormon settlement, one of the many sprouts from the main tree inUtah . Since the War of Secession, unending raids by Apaches and by Mexican and white bandits had left it a sad shadow of its former self.

That left Jeb Stuart, whose army was camped nearby, something short of brokenhearted. "Mormons,"

he said to his aide-de-camp. "You ask me, the damnyankees are welcome to them."

Major Horatio Sellers nodded and said, "Yes, sir." His principal bug-bear, though, was not the Mormons, of whom only a handful were left hereabouts, but the Apaches—not those who'd raided Tubac halfway back to savagery, but those now accompanying the Confederate forces (assuming a distinction could be drawn between those two groups, which was by no means obvious). After coughing once or twice, he said, "The more time we spend with these Indians, sir, the more I think one of the reasons the Empire of Mexico sold usSonora andChihuahua was to give us the joy of putting them down."

"It could be so, Major," Stuart allowed. "If there were more of them, they would be even worse trouble than they are."

"Too damned many of 'em as is," Sellers said, stubbornly sticking out his chin. "If there were more—"

He shuddered. "Sir, we have good men, tough men. But these Apaches, there isn't a one of 'em can't go through this country on foot faster than a trooper can on horseback, come up behind you in the middle of a crowded church, cut your throat, and be out the window before anybody notices you're dead."

He was exaggerating only slightly, and not at all about the Apaches' ability to outperform cavalry. "But they don't want to cut *our* throats," Stuart said. "They want to cut the Yankees' throats, and especially the Mexicans'."

"Nowthey do," Sellers said. "When is it our turn?" He looked around and lowered his voice almost to a whisper: "I still say we ought to fill 'em full of whiskey and get rid of them when they're too polluted to fight back."

"That will be enough, Major," Stuart said sharply. "That will be more than enough. One of the reasons the Apaches hate the Mexicans so much is that the Mexicans would pull that on them again and again. It would work—they like popskull, no two ways about it—but it made enemies forever out of the braves the Mexicans didn't get. I want to use these Indians against theUnited States ; I don't want to give the damnyankees any chance to use them against us."

"Yes, sir," Sellers said.

Stuart hid a smile. He recognized that tone: it was the one a soldier used when he thought a superior was out of his mind. He said, "In the end, my guess is that we civilize them, Major. Geronimo's son, Chappo, now—he's a sharp young fellow. And his cousin, that Batsinas: I've had two different blacksmiths tell me he's been after them to teach him their trade. He's got only a few words of English, and a few more of Spanish, but one of the men who was showing him things said he picked them up as fast as you'd want with a white man."

Major Sellers said nothing at all. He tried to make his face say nothing at all, too. He wasn't as good at it as the Apaches. Clear as if he were shouting, Stuart read his thoughts: *learning things from white men doesn 't civilize Indians, it only makes them more dangerous.*

"Cherokees," Stuart said quietly. "Choctaws. They might as well be white themselves—well, some of them."

"That's different," his aide-de-camp answered, but, when Stuart pressed him, he couldn't say how.

"It doesn't matter, anyway," Stuart said after looking at his watch. "We've got to meet with Geronimo anyhow, get everything in a straight line for his run up toTucson and where we'll bushwhack the Yankees when they come after him."

Actually, the meeting hadn't been set for a specific time; the Indians, though they used telescopes most often taken from dead soldiers, didn't care about watches. But nine-thirty was a close enough equivalent to midway through the morning, which was how Geronimo had put it.

The Apaches approved of the Confederate-issue tents Stuart had given them: they were roomier and faster to put up than the hide-covered brush wickiups the Indians made for themselves. Geronimo was sitting cross-legged in front of a little cookfire, drinking coffee from a tin cup stamped *CSA*. Next to him sat Chappo, whose bronze, broad-cheekboned face showed what his father had looked like as a young man.

As Stuart came up to Geronimo, so did the Apaches' war leaders: Cochise's handsome son Naiche (whom half the Confederates calledNatchez , that having a more familiar sound to their ears); a clever old man named Nana; and Hoo, a tough veteran. Only gradually had Stuart realized that Geronimo's influence, despite lurid tales to the contrary, came more from religion than generalship.

Polite greetings used up some time; both the Apaches and the Confederates were ceremonious folk.

Then, through Chappo, Geronimo said, "Our scouts have found the perfect canyon for us. We can lead the bluecoats into it, and you can be waiting for them with your rifles and your wagons."

"Wagons?" That puzzled Stuart. He and Chappo went back and forth for a couple of minutes before he figured out the Indian was talking about artillery. The cannon traveled on wheels; as far as the Apaches were concerned, that made them wagons. When the misunderstanding was cleared up, Stuart nodded. "It is good. Where is this place?"

"Let me see the paper with places on it, and I will show you," Geronimo said. Stuart drew from his pocket a map ofNew MexicoTerritory and unfolded it. He'd watched Geronimo take in the concept of maps at one big bound. The Apache had gone from complete incomprehension to rapt admiration when he realized what the line of the Southern Pacific (printed complete with little cross ties) represented. From that beginning, he'd made sense of the rest of the symbols in a hurry. Naiche, who could sketch very well himself, also understood maps now. The Apaches weren't stupid. The more Stuart dealt with them, the clearer that became.

He wished they were, almost as much as Major Sellers did. It would have made his life easier.

Geronimo drew a knife from his belt, to use the tip as a pointer. "We are here." He touched it to Tubac with complete confidence. He could not read, but he knew how to make the map in his head, the one a

lifetime in these parts had given him, match the map on the paper. "The canyon is here, a little more than halfway toTucson ." He moved the knifepoint.

"If we are to ambush the bluecoats, we will have to wait there till you have lured them," Stuart said. "Is there water?" In so much of the Southwest, that was the overriding concern.

"Yes." Geronimo smiled for a moment: he'd asked the right question. "Two springs close by. Good water, even in summer: not much water, but enough." He waved around at the Indian encampment.

"Some of us will be with you. If it is not as I say, they are men you may kill."

"Hostages," Stuart said. Chappo's lips moved as he repeated the word to himself so he could learn it.

Stuart plucked at his beard, considering. The Apaches were short on manpower. They thought a raid where they lost a couple of warriors a misfortune, because the fighters could not easily be replaced.

Stuart didn't think Gcronimo would offer hostages unless he was sincere. "We'll try it," he said. "My men can ride this afternoon."

"It is good," Geronimo said through Chappo. "We, most of us, will ride north now. When you are at the canyon, you will see what sort of place it is. You will see where to place your men where they can kill the bluecoats without being seen. You will see where to place your big rifles on wagons so the bluecoats do not know they are there till too late."

Even though Stuart could not understand a word of the Apache lingo, he paid close attention to Geronimo's tone. The Indian sounded as if he was trying to reassure himself that Stuart, though only an ignorant white man, would indeed be able to see these things and do what was required of him. The Confederate general, civilizedly certain of his own expertise, smiled at the savage's conceit.

"I will see these things," he answered gently, trying to ease Geronimo's mind. "You will bring me theU.S.

soldiers, and I will kill them."

That seemed to satisfy the Apache. Geronimo and the war leaders

exchanged a few words, which Chappo did not translate. Stuart resolved to scare up some interpreters who would be on his side, not the Indians'. Half-breeds, Mexicans . . . one way or another, he'd manage. If his allies let something slip, he wanted a chance to know about it.

Geronimo was as good as his word. Most of the Apaches rode out inside the hour. About thirty stayed behind under Naiche. Chappo stayed, too, to translate, though Naiche and some of the others spoke Spanish. Batsinas also stayed, for no better reason Stuart could find than that he was fascinated by everything the white men did, and wanted to learn from them.

A lot of the Indians, though, found the Confederates more amusing than instructive. While the army broke camp, Horatio Sellers came up to Stuart shaking his head. "One of those red devils used a farmer to ask me what I'd do if I heard a gunshot," he said indignantly. "I told him I'd go over and see what in blazes had happened, of course. He thought that was the funniest thing he'd heard in all his born days. So I asked him what he'd do, if he was so blasted smart. He said he'd scout around and find out what was going on without letting anybody ever know he was there. Looked at me like I was a chuckle-headed nigger; and him with a line of yellow paint across his face to show he was on the warpath, the damn savage." Sellers sounded like a man on the warpath himself.

"Don't worry about it, Major," Stuart said soothingly, using much the same tone of voice he had with Geronimo. "We'll position ourselves in this canyon and lick the stuffing out of the damnyankees. That will make the redskins respect us, and I don't think anything else will."

Riding to battle, Stuart felt the same exhilaration he'd known during the War of Secession. Somewhere back inKentucky , his young son and namesake was going up against the Yankees, too. He hoped Jeb, Jr., would be all right. The boy—no, not a boy, not if he was fighting—had all of his own impetuous spirit, and hardly any years to temper it.

Stuart would have navigated by map and compass. The Apaches knew the country as well as—better than—he knew northernVirginia . He got the feeling they could have ridden along with their eyes closed and found their way across three hundred or three thousand miles of desert by the way the dust smelled and how the echoes from their horses' hoofbeats came back to their ears. They'd been here a long time; the roadrunners probably talked with them.

As far as he was concerned, they and the damnyankees were welcome to the country, if you took it strictly as country. Rocks and sand and dust and cactus and brush and lizards and rattlesnakes and endless sun pounding down out of the sky so that, nearly as reliable as clockwork, every hour a Confederate would slide from the saddle and plop to the ground. Most of them recovered after they'd been splashed with precious water and ridden in the wagons for a while, but a couple had died, running unquenchable fevers that cooked them from the inside out.

It was, in fact, country for camels. The Fifth Confederate Cavalry's humped livestock flourished here.

The camels ate cactus, thorns and all, with every sign of relish. They didn't need much water, and the succulent pulp gave them a lot of what they did need. They were gloriously bad-tempered, reveling in the heat where the horses laboured under it.

The Apaches found them endlessly fascinating. The Indians admired the animals' ability to handle the rugged terrain, but thought them the ugliest things they'd ever seen. Chappo rode up alongside Stuart after traveling with the Fifth Cavalry for a while and said, quite seriously, "The god who made those beasts was trying to shape horses, but did not know how."

Stuart started to laugh, then checked himself. He didn't want to offend Geronimo's son. And it was a better explanation of how camels had got to be the way they were than anything else he'd heard.

They crossed theSanta CruzRiver , such as it was, not long before nightfall, and camped close by. The next morning, Naiche and the rest of the Apaches led the Confederates into the desert east of the little town that had grown up around the stagecoach station at Sahuarita, about twenty miles south of Tucson.

About nine o'clock the next morning, Naiche trotted his horse back to Stuart with a broad smile on his wide, Roman-nosed face. *"Aqui estd,"* he said, and then, to his own obvious delight, came up with a word of English: "Here."

Stuart rode ahead with him. The farther ahead he went, the better the place looked. It wasn't one of the narrow valleys down which no pursuers in their right minds would follow fleeing redskins for fear of being bushwhacked. But it wasn't so wide as to make an ambush impossible, either. As Gcronimo had said he would, he spotted just the

place to site his horse artillery, too: a low rise off to one side with a good view of the track down which the enemy would likely come, but not a feature of the landscape that would draw the Yankees' notice too soon.

"Water?" he asked, and made his canteen slosh.

"Ah. *Agua. Si,* " Naiche said. And *agua* there was: two springs, as Geronimo had promised. Stuart's force would have no trouble waiting a couple of days, until the Apaches who had gone on to raidTucson could bring the damnyankees back here in hot pursuit. *"cestd bien?"* Naiche asked. He grinned, finding another English word: "Good?"

"Yes. *Si."* Stuart didn't have a dozen words of Spanish himself, but that was one of them. "Good. Very good."

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"There it is!" Theodore Roosevelt swept out his right hand in the sort of dramatic gesture that came so naturally to him. "There it is, straight ahead: the Promised Land!"

Probably never before had anyone calledFortBenton the Promised Land. But it was as dear to Roosevelt as thelandofIsrael could ever have been to the Hebrews. AndRoosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment had wandered in the bureaucratic wilderness: not for the forty years Moses' followers had endured, true, but everything moved faster in the bustling, mechanized, modern world of the nineteenth century. The weeks that had passed before the volunteers were accepted were far too long.

BehindRoosevelt , the men of the Unauthorized Regiment raised a cheer. Many of them, like their colonel, were delighted at finally becoming U.S. Volunteers. And others (and some of the same men, too, perhaps) were also delighted at the prospect of mustering close by a town, with all the pleasures attendant thereto. Out onRoosevelt 's ranch, they'd been living a life not far removed from the monastic.

"The Promised Land!"Roosevelt shouted once more, and his troopers cheered louder than ever. He nodded in enormous satisfaction and spoke again, this time more quietly: "If you want something done, by jingo, you have to pitch right in and do it yourself."

Soldiers up on the mud-brick wall ofFortBenton were staring at the

oncoming cavalry regiment.Roosevelt could see their arms outstretched as they pointed to the cloud of dust in which the horsemen traveled. He was still too far away to make out the amazement on their faces or to hear their exclamations, but his active imagination had no trouble supplying the lack.

Not far from the fort was a stretch of level ground where the Seventh Infantry was in the habit of practicing its manoeuvres.Roosevelt led the Unauthorized Regiment toward it. "Assemble by troops!" he shouted, and the trumpeters amplified the command.

He'd made sure the troopers practiced that evolution every day of the journey along theMissouri from the ranch outside ofHelena toFortBenton . They performed it flawlessly now. He grinned from ear to ear.

Maybe the only uniform they had at the moment was a red bandanna on the sleeve, but he'd turned them into soldiers, not an armed mob.

"If at the age of twenty-two I can bring order to a cavalry regiment," he murmured, suddenly thoughtful,

"what will I be able to do when I have Lieutenant Colonel Welton's years behind me?"

But those years, as yet, lay ahead of him. He rode towardFortBenton , to bring the commander of the Regular Army garrison out to inspect the Unauthorized Regiment.

Henry Welton did him the courtesy of meeting him halfway. NowRoosevelt was wearing his colonel's uniform. Nevertheless, he saluted Welton first—and, as he did so, noticed the Regular officer had eagles on his shoulder straps, too, not the silver oak leaves he'd worn when they met before. "Congratulations, Colonel Welton!"Roosevelt exclaimed.

"It's your fault, Colonel Roosevelt," Welton answered with a smile, returning the salute. "The War Department had to accept you as a colonel in the U.S. Volunteers, so they gave me the same brevet rank, and made me five minutes senior to you while they were about it."

"As I told you when we first met, sir, that is as it should be,"Roosevelt said.

"I'd be lying if I told you I thought you were wrong," Welton said.Roosevelt nodded; he had nothing but approval for a man who

knew his own worth. Welton went on, "Now, by thunder, let's have a look at the men who stirred up all this fuss."

"With great pleasure, sir." Side by side, the two colonels rode out toward the regimentRoosevelt had raised. They were drawing near whenRoosevelt , unwontedly hesitant, said, "Even after our formal incorporation into the U.S. Army, sir, might we continue to style ourselves the Unauthorized Regiment? I believe it would have a salutary effect on the men's morale."

"I don't see why not," Welton said. "If you look at things fromEngland 's point of view, we're an unauthorized country, wouldn't you say? Formally, what we have here is the First Montana Volunteer Cavalry. I can't do anything about that. Informally—well, since it is informal, no one will fuss at what you call yourselves. Plenty of regiments—even companies—in the War of Secession had nicknames by which they were better known than by their official titles."

Rooseveltstarted to say something more, but checked himself, for Welton and he had come up to the troops, who, as one man, saluted them. Henry Welton rode gravely from troop to troop. He was not a cavalry officer, but his examination struckRoosevelt as being as thorough as the grilling to which he himself had been subjected. Welton had been assessing soldiers for as long asRoosevelt had been alive, and knew what he was doing.

He puzzled the commander of the Unauthorized Regiment for a moment when, instead of keeping on the open path between troops, he rode through one, pausing every now and then to examine one man'sWinchester , another's saddle, the cartridge belt of a third. And then enlightenment struck Roosevelt almost as abruptly as it had struck Paul on the road toDamascus . "Colonel Welton, had you asked, I would have told you that I did not place the best men on the outer edges of the troops, as a dishonest grocer will place a few pieces of good fruit on top of a great many bad ones."

"Had I asked, Colonel Roosevelt, I'm sure you would have told me that, whether it was so or not."

Welton softened the words with a disarming grin. "I'd sooner see for myself. If you possibly can, you should always see for yourself. If you don't make a habit of that, you *will* be disappointed, generally when you can least afford it."

"Thank you, sir. I'll remember that." Doing as much as he could by and

for himself was always one ofRoosevelt 's guiding principles. Having the veteran espouse it only strengthened it in his mind.

Not satisfied with riding through one troop, Henry Welton rode through another. That done, he gave his verdict: "These men are not up to the standards of the Regular Army, Colonel, but they are some of the finest volunteer troops I have ever set eyes on, especially for volunteers who have yet to see the elephant.

If and when they do, I believe they'll manage as well as anyone could hope."

"Thank you again, sir,"Roosevelt said. "You make me feel my efforts on our beloved country's behalf have proved worthwhile."

"And so they have." Welton rode out before the assembled troopers. "Men ofRoosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment," he began, and then had to stop while the cavalrymen yelled themselves hoarse and several of the officers made their mounts caracole. "Men of the Unauthorized Regiment, will you take the oath that makes you into U.S. Volunteers?"

"Yes!" the men cried: one great roar of sound.Roosevelt shouted as loud as he could, but even in his own ears his voice was small and lost amid the others.

Colonel Welton administered the oath to them, one ringing phrase at a time. Behind his spectacles, Roosevelt felt his eyes fill with tears as he spoke the words that took him into the service of theUnited States . Reaching this point had proved a greater struggle than it ever should have, but, unlike Moses, he, having overcome every obstacle, was allowed to enter the land of milk and honey—or, the U.S. Army being what it was, at least the land of hardtack, salt pork, and beans.

The oath completed, he gave Henry Welton another crisp salute. "What are your orders, sir?"

"For now, Colonel, my orders arc going to be very simple, very unexciting, and, I fear, very unwelcome," Welton answered. "Your men are to bivouac by troops here on this plain until such time as my regimental clerks have completed the boring but necessary business of taking down their names and other particulars. This will, among other things, put them on the government's payroll and get them off of yours, and will assure pension benefits to their next of kin in the event of their becoming casualties of war."

Rooseveltsighed. "I do see the necessity, sir, but must it be done on the instant? You have no conception of how I long to strike the British a smart blow, nor of how hard it has been to sit by Helena knowing I had the men at hand for the task but also knowing I was not legally entitled to use them."

"Patience, Colonel." Welton chuckled. "I *do* feel like I'm talking to my son. I say again, patience. The British have made no moves against us as yet in this quarter, nor, even if they do in the next two days—which is not likely—can they sweep down on Fort Benton and catch us unawares in that space of time. You shall have your chance, I assure you. Not quite yet, though."

"Yes, sir." Suddenly and painfully, Roosevelt realized that coming under the authority of the United States not only meant he could lead his troops against the English and the Canucks, it also meant he was required to obey orders he did not like. Then he brightened. "Sir, I shall place at your disposal all my regimental records, which should help your clerks do their jobs more quickly."

"Thank you. I'm sure that will help a great deal." Colonel Welton cocked his head to one side. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if what you've got is a good deal more complete than anything I'm required to keep. There are some forms, though, on which we'll have to get your men's signatures or witnessed marks. Everyone talks about the exploits of the Army in the field. No one mentions the paperwork that makes those exploits—and the survival of the Army between them—possible, but it's part of the life, too."

"I discovered something of this myself, on commencing to recruit the Unauthorized Regiment."Roosevelt bared his teeth in what was not quite a smile. "I should be lying if I said it was the most welcome discovery I ever made."

"Yes, I believe that," Welton said. "This being wartime, you'll have your chance for action, and soon enough, even if not so soon as you might wish. Had you spent as much time in the Regular Army as I have done, you might by now have concluded that for a commanding officer the duty entails paperwork to the exclusion of nearly everything else."

Roosevelttried to imagine himself on garrison duty at some dusty fort out here in the heart of the West, a fort without any hostile Indians nearby to give an excuse for action. He tried to imagine passing year

after year at such duty. His conclusion was that, were the fort anywhere close to a high cliff, he would have been likely to throw himself off it.

That must have shown on his face. Colonel Welton said, "Well, it's not a fate you have to worry about.

Now, would you like to order your regiment to pitch their tents here, or shall I?"

"Sir, why don't you?"Roosevelt answered. "The sooner the men fully understand they are obliged to take orders from any man of rank superior to theirs, the sooner they will become soldiers in every sense of the word."

"Very well." Welton nodded. "And well reasoned, too." Effortlessly, he raised his voice so the entire Unauthorized Regiment could hear him. He did not seem to be shouting, either—Rooseveltwondered if he could learn the trick.

Having given the orders, Welton watched with interest to see how they were obeyed. He chuckled as the troopers pitched their tents. "A bit of variety in the canvas they're living under, eh, Colonel?" A moment later, he stopped chuckling and stared. "Good heavens, is that a teepee?"

"Yes, sir. We have several of them in the regiment. They seem to work about as well as anything we white men make."

"That they do, Colonel. I've served enough time on the plains to be convinced of it. They caught me by surprise, is all." Henry Welton wasn't only watching the soldiers of the Unauthorized Regiment set up their camp. Every so often, he pulled out his pocket watch to see how fast they were doing it.

Rooseveltwanted to get in there among them, to yell and wave his arms and urge them to greater speed.

He made himself quietly sit on his horse and let them do it on their own. If they hadn't learned what he'd worked so hard to drill into them, his harangues wouldn't help now.

His gaze flicked from the troopers to Colonel Welton and back again. The men seemed to take forever.

But, when the last tent was up, Welton put the watch back in his

pocket and nodded pleasantly to him.

"Not bad, Colonel. Once again, not bad at all."

"Thank you very much, sir." Colonel Theodore Roosevelt beamed.

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Colonel Alfred von Schlieffen and Second Lieutenant Archibald Creel strode along what had been the waterfront ofLouisville,Kentucky . Instead of his own uniform, Schlieffen wore the light blue trousers, dark blue blouse, and cap of aU.S. infantry private. The waterfront was inU.S. hands, but the Confederates had a way of sneaking snipers forward that made being in any way conspicuous a conspicuously bad idea.

In his trouser pocket, Schlieffen had one telegram from General Rosecrans authorizing General Willcox to allow him to cross theOhio to observe the battle at close quarters and another telegram from Minister Schlozer assuring Willcox the Fatherland would not hold him responsible if, while Schlieffen was performing his military duty, he was wounded or killed. The military attaché had needed both wires to get Willcox to let him cross.

Lieutenant Creel kept staring around in disbelief. "I've never seen anything like this in my life," he would say. A few minutes later, he would say it again, apparently forgetting his earlier words. After a bit, he rounded on Schlieffen. "Have you ever seen anything like this, Colonel?"

And Schlieffen had to shake his head. "No, I do not think I have."

Wherever war went, it left a trail of devastation. That Schlieffen knew. That he had seen for himself. But he had never seen war visit a good-sized city, decide it liked the place, and settle in for a long stay, as if it were a good-for-nothing brother-in-law. Never till now.

Stonewall Jackson had chosen to make his stand insideLouisville , to make theUnited States , if they wanted the city so badly, pay the greatest possible price for it, and to make sure that, if they ended up taking it, what they took would amount to nothing. The Confederates had fought in every building. They had forced theU.S. to shell whole blocks into rubble, and then fought in the rubble until cleared out by rifle and bayonet. They had taken horrible casualties, but those they'd inflicted were worse.

Schlieffen shook his head as he looked south toward the fighting front, which was still only a few hundred yards away. He could not see a single untouched building, not anywhere. Every single structure had big chunks bitten out of it from artillery, whetherU.S. or C.S. Fire had licked through every building, too, leaving streaks of soot along what battered brickwork remained standing.

Off to Schlieffen's left, a battery ofU.S. field guns started barking. When the battle forLouisville began, General Willcox hadn't worried overmuch about getting cannon onto the southern bank of theOhio . He'd realized soon enough, though—probably as fast as any German general would have—that infantry couldn't do this job by itself. The shells would blast some new part ofLouisville into ruins. If they went where they were supposed to go, they might help the infantrymen advance a few more yards.

The air stank of smoke and death. How many men lay entombed in the wreckage both sides had created? Whatever the number, it was not small. Schlieffen had never smelled the battlefield stench so thick. Some of that was due to the intolerable weather, which hastened corruption. More sprang from the battle's having gone on so long without moving to speak of.

Several pairs of litter-bearers came by, carrying woundedU.S. soldiers out of the fight. A couple of the hurt men lay limp; scarlet soaked through bandages on heads and torsos. Others screamed and thrashed.

Those were the ones who felt worse torment now, but they were also liable to be the ones with the better chance of recovering.

Confederate shells screamed in. Lieutenant Creel threw himself to the ground before they burst, huddling behind a heap of bricks that had once been part of some fine riverfront office or shop or hotel. So did Schlieffen. No hint of cowardice accrued to sheltering from splinters that killed without the courage of a proper human foe. This wasn't his war, either.

He thought the C.S. gunners were aiming for theirU.S. counterparts. As happened in war, their aim went awry. The shells fell closer to the litter-bearers. Fresh screams rose from them, some from already injured men crying out as they were dropped, others from bearers crying out as they were wounded.

"Bastards," Lieutenant Creel said. Mud streaked his uniform. More streaked his face.

"I do not believe this was their purpose, to hurt these men," Schlieffen said.

"Bastards anyhow," Creel answered. He did not seem so young now as he had when Schlieffen first made his acquaintance not long before. He went on, "I'd like to see every one of those Rebel sons of bitches dead."

His fury gave Schlieffen an opportunity he had not been sure he would have. The German military attaché, a General Staff officer to the core, had long since planned what to do if that opportunity arose.

He did not hesitate to put the plan into effect, saying, "Let us forward go, then, to the very front, so we have the best chance of seeing the enemy fall."

Creel had courage. Schlieffen had already seen that. Now his blood was up, too. He nodded. "All right, Colonel, we'll do that. I wish I were carrying aSpringfield , not this blamed revolver on my hip. I'd have a better chance of potting some of them myself."

Being a neutral, Schlieffen bore no weapon of any sort. He did not acutely feel the lack. He knew a certain sympathy for theUSA over the CSA because he was attached to theU.S. forces, and another certain sympathy for theUnited States because the Confederate States were allied withFrance . None of that, however, was enough to make him anxious to go potting Confederates himself.

Together, he and Second Lieutenant Creel picked their way forward through the cratered, rubble-strewn streets. Shirtsleeved soldiers with picks and shovels laboured to clear the paths so fresh troops and munitions could go forward and wounded men come back.

Craack!Before Schlieffen could react, a bullet slapped past his head and buried itself with a slap in some charred timbers. Archibald Creel turned back to him with a wry grin. "You were the one who wanted to do this, remember."

"I remember, yes," Schlieffen said calmly, and kept on.

Trenches started well before the front line. Schlieffen and Creel had been passing trench lines ever since they enteredLouisville , in fact, but the ones close by theOhio were hard to recognize because shellfire had all but obliterated them. Shells were falling on these trenches, too, but they still retained their shape.

"You fellers want to watch yourselves," a grimy, unshaven soldier said as Creel and Schlieffen went by.

"The Rebs got a sniper in one o' them buildings up ahead who's a hell of a shot. Ain't nobody been able to cipher out just where he's at, but he done blew the heads off three of our boys already today."

The closer to the front Schlieffen got, the deeper the trenches grew. That hadn't helped the luckless three the soldier had mentioned, but it did offer their comrades some protection. The German military attaché pondered as he lifted his feet over broken bricks. The French could fight for a town tooth and nail in the same way the Confederates were doing here. If they fought in several towns in a row with this bulldog tenacity, how could an army hope to defeat them without tearing itself to ribbons in the process?

Posing the question, unfortunately, looked easier than answering it.

"I think we're here," Lieutenant Creel remarked. The only way Schlieffen could judge whether theU.S.

officer was right was by how alert the riflemen here looked, and by the fact that no trenches ran forward from this transverse one.

"Where are the Confederates?" Schlieffen asked.

"If you stick your head up, you can see their line plain as day, maybe fifty yards thataway," answered another soldier who looked as if he'd been here for months, not days. " 'Course, if you stick your head up, they can see you, too, and a couple of our fellows here'll have to lug you back to theOhio feet first."

He studied Schlieffen. "You're the oldest damn private I ever did see."

"I am the German military attaché, here to learn what I can of how you are fighting this war," Schlieffen explained.

"Ah. 1 got you." The soldier nodded knowingly. "That's why this here baby lieutenant is taking care of you 'stead of the other way round."

No German officer would for an instant have tolerated such insolence, even if offered only indirectly. All Creel did was grin and shrug and look sheepish. Schlieffen had already seen that standards of discipline were lax inAmerica . He had heard that was even more true in the CSA than in theUSA . If that was so, he wondered how the Confederates could have any standards of discipline whatever.

He shrugged. Except as data, standards of discipline in American troops,U.S. or C.S., were not his problem—unless, of course, they made the men fight less well. For reasons he did not fully grasp, that was not the case. Had it been so, the soldiers here would not have performed so steadily and so bravely in a battle waged under conditions more appalling than any he had known inEurope .

And now that he was here at the front to see them fight, he discovered that, like a man who had wandered down to sit in the first row of seats at a theater, he was too close to the action to get a good view of it. Off to his right, the rifle fire, which had been intermittent, suddenly picked up. He couldn't look to see what was going on there, not unless he wanted to get killed. All he could do was listen.

"I think they drove us back a bit," said the soldier who'd spoken before. "Hope they paid high for it."

"I think perhaps you are right," Schlieffen said: his ears had given him the same impression. But, had he wanted to follow the battle with his ears alone, he could as well have stayed on theIndiana side of theOhio River . He turned to Lieutenant Creel. "Have you any idea how many killed and wounded the Confederates have suffered, compared to your own?"

"No, Colonel," Creel answered. "Only person who'd know that for certain is Stonewall Jackson." He checked himself. "No, probably not him, either, for he'd know their losses, but not ours."

"Yes." Schlieffen hid his amusement. Second Lieutenant Creel was naive.U.S. papers reported the casualty figures in Willcox's army. Schlieffen would have bet papers in the CSA did the same for those ofJackson 's army. Hard-headed officers in Philadelphia and Richmond —and, no doubt, in London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg— would know both sides of the story. So would Willcox and Jackson themselves. If the Army of theOhio was holding the numbers tight, that suggested they were not in its favor.

The grimy soldier echoed his thoughts, saying, "Whoever goes forward in a fight like this gets hurt worse, seems like. That's why I'm hoping the Rebs took a licking there over yonder."

Schlieffen nodded. He had seen inEurope that soldiers at the front often developed a keen instinct for how things were going and for which tactics worked and which didn't. That looked to be the same on both sides of theAtlantic .

"Let us go back," he said to Lieutenant Creel. "I have seen what is here worth seeing."

"Stay low and watch out for Rebel sharpshooters," said the soldier who'd been talking with them. "Them bastards know their business."

Heading north toward the river, Creel dove for cover whenever artillery came near. Bullets, however, he ignored, striding along with his head held high. Schlieffen wondered whether to call that courage or bravado. He recognized the difference between facing danger and courting it. A lot of officers, especially young officers, didn't.

For his part, Schlieffen was not in the least ashamed to duck and hide behind rubble when the Rebels started taking potshots at him.

With the indulgent tolerance of youth, Creel smiled. "You don't really need to worry, Colonel, not now,"

he said. "We're almost back to theOhio . They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance. '

Less than a minute later, a wet, smacking sound announced that a bullet had struck home. Second Lieutenant Archibald Creel crumpled to the ground, blood gushing from a head wound. Schlieffen knelt beside him. He saw at once he could do nothing. Creel gave three or four hitching breaths, made a noise halfway between a cough and a groan, and simply . . . stopped.

"God, judge his courage, not his sense," Schlieffen murmured. He stayed by the fallen lieutenant until a couple of litter bearers carried the body away.

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Abraham Lincoln came out of the general store with a cake of shaving soap wrapped in brown paper and string. Having stayed inSalt Lake City so much longer than he'd planned, he kept needing to replenish such small day-to-day items. With the telegraph back in service, he'd been able to wire for money, and had started staying with theHamiltons as a paying boarder.

AsLincoln started down the sidewalk, a closed carriage stopped in the street alongside him. The curtains were drawn; he could see nothing within. The driver spoke to him in a low, urgent voice: "Please get in, Mr. Lincoln."

"Who . . . ?"Lincoln paused, then stiffened as he recognized the bright young man who'd escorted him to John Taylor's home. That home stood no more; soldiers had wrecked it, giving as their reason the suppression of polygamy.

"Where do you propose to take me?"Lincoln asked. He supposed he might be worth something as a hostage for radical Mormons. Given his own economic radicalism, and the embarrassment he'd become to the Republican Party, he had the idea he'd be worth less than the Mormons thought. That might lead to unpleasant personal consequences for him.

"I can't tell you that," the driver answered. "No harm will come to you, though: by God I swear it." He bit his lip. "If you aim to come, sir, come now. I cannot let soldiers spy me loitering here."

Lincolngot aboard the carriage. Not since his ignominious passage throughBaltimore on his way to his inauguration inWashington had he let concern for his safety change how he behaved. Maybe he could do some good here, if the Mormons hadn't simply snatched him.

"Thank you, sir," the bright young man said as the carriage started to roll.Lincoln did not think he was the sort who made a habit of wearing false oaths. He realized he was betting his life on that.

The carriage made several turns, now right, now left. The Mormon driver had the two-horse team up into a trot; their hoof beats and the jolts and rattlesLincoln felt said they were going at a fine clip. Nothing at all prevented him from opening the curtains and seeing where they were going. He sat quiet. Sooner or later, General Pope or one of his inquisitors would be interrogating him about this ride. He was as sure of that as of his own name. Truthfully being able to claim ignorance looked useful.

After about three-quarters of an hour, the carriage pulled into a building of some sort and stopped.Lincoln thought he was outsideSalt Lake City ; it had been quiet outside the carriage for some time, and the driver had stopped making turns to throw off pursuit or to confuse his passenger. In the latter, at least, he had succeeded;Lincoln did not know whether he was north or south or east or west of the Mormon metropolis.

"You may get out now, Mr. Lincoln," the driver said, climbing down from his own high seat. Outside, someone was closing a door. A bar thudded down.

Barn,wasLincoln 's first thought on emerging from the carriage. He revised it a moment later: *no, livery stable.* His nose filled with the good odors of horse and hay and leather. But for the carriage, the stable was deserted. With the door closed, it was also twilight-gloomy.

The man who had shut the door was coming towardLincoln . Though he had expected to meet John Taylor, he needed a moment to recognize him. The fugitive Mormon president was dressed like a stablehand, in canvas trousers, collarless four-button work shirt, and straw hat. He had shaved his beard and was growing a mustache on his formerly bare upper lip.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me," he said after shaking hands. "To come withOrem here took considerable moral and physical courage."

"I will do what I can for you, Mr. Taylor,"Lincoln said, "for that strikes me as a likely way to bring peace to this Territory. But I must warn you, I do not think I can do much. Bearing a grudge against me as he does, General Pope will not be inclined to act favorably upon any request I make."

"You are the former president of theUnited States !"Taylor exclaimed.

"I told you at our last meeting, you exaggerate the influence that gives me. I told you also, you exaggerated your ability to coerce the government of theUnited States into doing as you desired. Events have proved me right in the second instance. Will you not credit me for knowing whereof I speak in the first, also? In both, you would have done better to leave well enough alone."

Taylorslowly shook his head. It was not so much disagreement as disbelief. "All we wish—all we ever wished—is to live our own lives as our conscience dictates. We harm no one, and what has been our reward? Treatment that would not be meted out to redskins or Negroes. Do the people condemn the outrages we have suffered? No. They applaud, and pile on more."

"Mr. Taylor, from all I have seen in my extended stay inSalt Lake City , the only way you Mormons differ in the general run of your behavior from the mass of the American people is that you excel over them,"Lincoln said. "But—"

"Of course we do,"Taylor said, while the driver—Orem—nodded vigorously.

Lincolnheld up a hand. "I had not finished. However fine you may be

in the general run of your behavior, you have not the slightest chance, so long as you condone and practice polygamy, of ever gaining the acceptance of the vast majority of your fellow citizens."

"This is most unjust,"Taylor said. "We cast no aspersions on anyone else's usages; in principle, none should be cast on ours."

Lincolnsighed. "If you wish to speak of principle, maybe you are right. Do you not see, however, that by insisting on principle in this regard, you have caused the overthrow of the principle of representative government and the principle of rule under the Constitution throughoutUtahTerritory ? Is that what you intended when you led your people into rebellion?"

"Of course not,"Taylor snapped.

"Well, then—"Lincoln spread his hands. "The simplest way for your church to make its peace with the rest of theUnited States would be for it to renounce the doctrines unacceptable to the nation as a whole, and to do so in all sincerity."

"That would require a divine revelation," the Mormon president replied. "None has been forthcoming, nor do I reckon one likely."

"Pity."Lincoln raised one eyebrow. "A convenient revelation now would save your people enormous heartache, enormous grief, later on."

"Revelations are not born of convenience," John Taylor said. "They spring from the will of God."

He thrust his head forward like a stubborn snapping turtle.Lincoln realized he meant what he said from the bottom of his heart. Lawyer and politician,Lincoln reckoned almost everything negotiable. When he had stood foursquare for the principle of the indissolubility of theUnion , rifle musket and cannon had refuted him.

"If you will not change your views in any particular," he said, "what point to asking me to meet with you?

You give me nothing to take to General Pope, even assuming the military governor were inclined to accept anything I might take him."

"We have yielded peacefully to the military power of theUnited States ,"Taylor said. "We might have done otherwise. If we continue to be oppressed, to be treated as a conquered province, we arc liable to do

otherwise. We are men. We can act as men. General Pope and his Cossacks should remember as much."

"Mr. Taylor, if you value your faith, if you value the lives of your followers, I implore you, sir, do not take this course."Lincoln had never spoken more earnestly. "If you rise in arms against theUnited States , they will slaughter you and sow your cities with salt, as the Romans did toCarthage long ago. Do you not understand that many in the Army, many in the government, and many among the citizenry at large would be delighted to have an excuse to do exactly that?"

"We fled here toUtah to escape persecution,"Taylor said. "Persecution pursued us. Should we welcome it with open arms? Should we bow to it, as the Israelites bowed to the Golden Calf?"

"You will have to judge the right for yourself, as every man must,"Lincoln answered. "But I tell you that open resistance will batheUtah in blood in a way never before seen upon this continent. We left religious war behind inEurope . We should be well advised not to let it emigrate from that place to our shores."

"What would you do, Mr. Lincoln, were your faith under attack instead of mine?" John Taylor did not try to hide his bitterness.

He framed sharp questions. He would have been dangerous in a court of law. But none of that mattered.Taylor 's failing was his inability to sec that it did not matter.Lincoln said, "I believe I should have only two choices. One would be to pay the martyr's price, the other to accommodate myself to my neighbors' usages to the degree I could do so without tearing the living heart from what I believed in."

"No accommodation we can make and still keep to our principles would satisfy our foes,"Taylor said.

"That is why I hoped God in His wisdom might reveal to you a course that would let you do so,"Lincoln said delicately. He remained of the opinion that John Taylor and the other leaders of the Mormon Church could produce a revelation if they put their minds to it. "The promise of peace and reconciliation might—and I can say no more than *might,* hardly being in the confidence of General Pope or President Blaine—might, I say, persuade the authorities to rescind the harsh sentences passed against you and your colleagues."

"If I must die on the gallows or in hunted exile, I am prepared,"Taylor said.

Lincolnbelieved him, having seen the same implacable purpose on the faces of abolitionists and Confederate leaders alike. With another sigh, he said, "Then I fear this meeting had little point. I shall take your warning back to General Pope, but I warn you in the strongest terms not to act upon it. Do with your own life what you will, but spare your people the horrors of a war of extermination harsher than any we ever waged against the Sioux." He turned toOrem . "You may as well take me back to town. My friends will be wondering why I needed so long to buy a cake of shaving soap."

The bright young Mormon held the carriage door open soLincoln could get in, then closed it after him.

He did not askLincoln not to open the curtains, but the former president again left them alone. From inside the dark, cramped box of the carriage, he heard John Taylor undo the bar and push the livery-stable door open.Orem clucked to the horses. They leaned into their work.

After the trip back intoSalt Lake City , the driver halted the carriage and said, "If you get out here, sir, you'll have no trouble finding your way to the home where you are staying."

Sure enough,Lincoln saw he was only a couple of blocks from theHamiltons '. "Obliged," he said toOrem , and tipped his tall hat. The bright young man returned the courtesy and drove away.Lincoln supposed he had some secure place where he could go to earth. He needed one.

Juliette Hamilton looked up from the chicken she was plucking whenLincoln came into the kitchen.

"Well, I never," she said in arch mock annoyance. "I was beginning to think you'd come down with a case of Valley Tan." Her eyes twinkled.

"My dear lady, although I have passed my Biblical threescore and ten, I am not suddenly taken with the urge to shuffle off this mortal coil,"Lincoln said. He and Mrs. Hamilton both laughed, and he went on, "In my view, Valley Tan bears the same relation to proper whiskey as a slap in the face does to a kiss on the cheek. Both will get your attention, but I know which I prefer."

"If you're trying to sweet-talk me out of a kiss on the cheek—" Juliette walked over and gave him one.

Then she wagged a finger at him. "But Valley Tan is cooked up complete with added sanctity, or so the Mormons say."

"I have never tasted a better reason for declaring sanctity unconstitutional,"Lincoln answered.

"You are the funniest man," Juliette Hamilton exclaimed. "Why is it that everyone makes you out to be so somber and serious?"

"Part of it is that no one has ever told my face it has the right to be amused,"Lincoln said, "and the other part is that I commonly speak of serious things, even if not always in a serious manner."

"If you mix some honey with the physic, the dose goes down easier," Juliette said.

"That's so,"Lincoln said, "and with your kind permission I'll borrow the notion in a speech one day."

Seeing how astonished Mrs. Hamilton looked, he added, "I am glad to employ any figure that strikes me as both true and well said, and in all my days I have never yet heard a better answer to give to the occasional person who complains of what he calls my unsuitable levity."

Gabe Hamilton had just come into the house when someone pounded on the front door. "Who the devil's that?" he said. The pounding went on. His scowl got darker. "Whoever it is, maybe I ought to have a revolver in my hand when I open the door."

"I think that would be most unwise,"Lincoln said hastily.

He followedHamilton up the entranceway to the door. When his host angrily threw it open, he was not surprised to find a squad of blue-coatedU.S. soldiers outside. A young lieutenant began, "Is Abraham Lincoln—?" and then caught sight of him. "Mr. Lincoln, you are to come with me at once."

"Why should he?" Gabe Hamilton demanded, beforeLincoln could speak.

"By order of the military governor, General Pope, he is under arrest," the lieutenant answered. The soldiers behind him aimed their rifles atLincoln .

"I'll come quietly," he said. "You may lower those, lest someone be injured by mischance." He walked out of the house, leavingHamilton staring after him.

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The portly, gray-bearded man in the tweed sack suit, four-in-hand tie, and derby did not at first glance seem to belong in an army headquarters full of bustling young men in uniform. General Thomas Jackson would have been just as well pleased—far better pleased—had his visitor chosen to remain inRichmond .

"I am glad to welcome you toLouisville , Mr. President," he said, and prayed his stern God would forgive the lie.

"Thank you, General," James Longstreet said. "One of the things I found during the War of Secession was that military reports, however detailed, often conveyed a distorted view of an action. I also learned that newspaper reports seldom conveyed anything but a distorted view."

"There, Your Excellency, we agree completely,"Jackson said. "If you believe what the reporters write, we have by now slain the entire population of theUnited States in this engagement, men, women, and children alike. It is a sanguinary fight, sir, but not so sanguinary as that."

"I had not thought it would be." Longstreet's voice held a rumble of amusement. "I came here to see what sort of fight it *is,* having acquired a fairly good notion of the sorts of fight it is *not."*

"It is, as you requested and required, a defensive fight, Mr. President."Jackson 's voice had a rumble in it, too: a rumble of discontent. "Being thus constrained, I have endeavored to cause theUnited States the maximum of harm while yielding to them the minimum of ground."

"That is precisely why I set you in charge here, General," Long-street said with a courtly dip of his head.

"Precisely. And you have most handsomely done as I hoped you would. Papers in theUnited States are no less given to distortion and exaggeration than our own. Many of them quite vehemently assert you are indeed intent on slaughtering every damnyankee in creation."

"If General Willcox will continue funneling the Yankees intoLouisville , I may in fact accomplish that,"Jackson replied. "It will, however, take me some little while."

Longstreet laughed and slapped him on the back. From under his eyebrows,Jackson shot the president of the Confederate States a suspicious look. Longstreet restraining him, Longstreet arguing with him, Longstreet undercutting him—he'd grown used to those since his former fellow corps commander was inaugurated. Longstreet enthusiastic about what he did—that was so unusual, he didn't know how to react to it.

Military formality gave him a framework in which to respond, just as it gave him a framework for his entire life. He said, "Will you come with me, Your Excellency? You can examine the map, which will give you a good notion of where we are now and what I hope to do in the near future."

"Thank you. I shall take you up on that—it will do for the time being. Later, I intend to go up to the front, to see for myself this new sort of warfare you are inventing here."

Jacksonstared. No one had ever questioned James Longstreet's courage.Jackson had found plenty of fault with Longstreet's common sense over the years, but never for a reason like this. "Mr. President, I beg you to reconsider," he said. "One lucky sharpshooter, one shell landing at the wrong spot—"

"Would you not be just as well pleased, General?" Longstreet said. "Were I to fall, I have no doubt my plan for manumission, which you have made it unmistakably clear you oppose, would fall with me."

Jacksonlooked down at his scuffed, oversized boots. Usually, he was the one who spoke with relentless frankness. After coughing a couple of times, he said, "Of one thing you have convinced me, Your Excellency: that no one in the Confederate States but yourself can hope to guide us through the intricacies of our relations with our allies in this time of crisis."

"I think you do Vice President Lamar a disservice, for he has more experience dealing with the Europeans than I do myself."

"He has not your deviousness,"Jackson declared.

Longstreet smiled at that. "Flattery will get you nowhere," he said roguishly. "To the maps, and then on to the front." His smile got wider

as he took inJackson 's expression. "I assure you, General, I am not indispensable to the cause. So long as you continue to makeLouisville and theOhio run red with Yankee blood, our success is assured."

"We bleed, too,"Jackson said as he led the president toward the tent where he devised his strategy and whence he sent orders to his commanders at the battle line.

Longstreet pointed to the telegraphic operators who sat ready to tap out any commands the general-in-chief might give them. "A good notion," he said. "It saves you the time involved in sending a messenger to the signals tent, and minutes in such matters can be critical."

"Exactly so,"Jackson said. He pointed to the big map ofLouisville . "As you see, Mr. President, forces of theUnited States unfortunately have, despite our best efforts to repel them, gained a stretch of ground several miles long and varying in depth from a few hundred yards to nearly a mile. I console myself by noting the price they have paid for the acquisition."

"How well have they fought?" Longstreet asked.

"As we saw in the last war, they have courage to match our own,"Jackson replied. "They also have numbers on their side, and their artillery is both strong and well handled. Having said so much, I have exhausted the military virtues they display. General Willcox's notion of strategy seems to be to send men forward and ram them headlong into the—"

"Into the stone wall of your defense?" Longstreet interrupted, his voice sly.

Jacksonwent on as if the president had not spoken: "—into the positions we have prepared to repel them. One thing this battle has proved once and for all, Your Excellency, is the primacy of the defensive when soldiers in field works are provided with repeating rifles."

"So we had surmised, based on our own manoeuvres and the recent Franco-Prussian and Russo-Turkish Wars," Longstreet said. "Encouraging to know our pundits were in this instance correct."

"Encouraging? I would not say so, Mr. President,"Jackson answered. "The advantages accruing to the defensive make a war of manoeuvre

far more difficult than it was in our previous conflict with theUnited States ."

"But, General, we do not seek to invade and conquer theUnited States . They seek to invade and conquer us," the president of the Confederate States said gently. "I profess myself to be in favor of that which makes their work harder and ours easier."

"Hmm,"Jackson said. "There is some truth in what you say." Longstreet showed a perspective broader than his own. From the viewpoint of the Confederacy as a whole, the ability to conduct a strong, punishing defense was vital. From the viewpoint of a general with the inclination to attack, the ability of the enemy to conduct a strong, punishing defense was constipating.

"Of course there is." In his own way, Longstreet had a certainty to matchJackson 's.Jackson 's sprang from faith in the Lord, Longstreet's, the general judged, from faith in himself. The Confederate president went on, "Now that I have seen the outline of our position inLouisville , I will sec the position itself."

He looked as if he expectedJackson to argue with him. He looked as if he expected to enjoy overruling his general-in-chief. Saluting,Jackson replied, "Yes, sir. I look forward to accompanying you."

"What?" Longstreet emphatically shook his head. "I cannot permit that, General. You are—"

"Indispensable, Your Excellency?"Jackson presumed to break in on his commander-in-chief. "I think not. The arguments applying to you and Mr. Lamar apply with equal force to me and General Alexander."

"You arc insubordinate, General," Longstreet snapped.Jackson inclined his head, as at a compliment.

Longstreet glowered at him, then started to laugh. "Very well—let it be as you say."

Jacksonput E. Porter Alexander in overall command until he should return, then, Longstreet at his side, rode down intoLouisville , toward the sound of the guns. He went toward that sound as toward a lover.

His wife knew of and forgave him his infidelity, one of the many reasons he loved her.

Even well behind the fighting line, shellfire and flames had taken their

toll onLouisville 's houses and offices and warehouses and manufactories. Some were burnt-out skeletons of their former selves, while others had had pieces bitten out of them, as if caught in the grip of monstrous jaws. The air smelled of stale smoke and gunpowder, with the sick-sweet fetor of death under them.

Longstreet drew in a long breath. His mouth tightened. "I have not smelled that smell since the War of Secession, but it never escapes the mind, does it?"

"No, sir."Jackson had his head cocked to one side, savoring the sounds of battle at close range. For the moment, the artillery was fairly quiet. After some consideration, though, he said, "I do not believe I ever heard such a terrific volume of musketry on any field during the War of Secession. Put that together with the increased power of the guns, and no wonder an attack crumples before it is well begun."

"Yes," Longstreet said abstractedly. A couple of ambulances rattled past them toward the rear. "I have not heard the cries and groans of wounded men since the War of Secession, either, but those likewise remain in memory yet green."

Soldiers coming back from the front, even the unwounded, looked like casualties of war: tattered uniforms, filthy faces, their eyes more full of the horror they had seen than of the debris-strewn paths down which they walked. Soldiers going forward, especially those who had been in the line before, advanced steadily, but without the slightest trace of eagerness. They knew what awaited them.

With every block now, the wreckage of what had been a splendid city grew worse. After a while, a corporal held up a hand. "Nobody on horseback past here," he declared, and then looked foolishly astonished at whom he had presumed to halt.

"Corporal, you are doing your duty,"Jackson said. He and Long-street dismounted and went forward on foot, soon moving from one trench to another along zigzags dug into the ground to minimize the damage from any one shellburst and to keep any advancing Yankees who gained one end of a trench from laying down a deadly fire along its entire length. Some of the trench wall was shored up with bricks and timbers from shattered buildings.

Slaves in coarse cotton laboured to strengthen the defenses further.Jackson made a point of looking at them, of speaking with them, of urging them on. Longstreet made a point of taking no notice

ofJackson .

Up above the trench, on bare ground, a sharpshooter with a long brass telescope mounted on his Tredegar crouched in the military equivalent of a hunter's blind: rubbish cunningly arranged to conceal him from view from the front and sides while he searched for targets behind theU.S. line.Jackson wondered how many snipers he'd passed without noticing them. He also wondered how many similar sharpshooters in Yankee blue were peering south, looking for unwary Confederates.

In the front-line trenches, the soldiers started to raise a cheer for their general-in-chief and president.

Officers in butternut frantically shushed them, lest the damnyankees, getting wind of the arrivals, send a torrent of shells down on Jackson and Longstreet.

The president walked along, examining the trench and pausing now and then to chat with the soldiers defending it.Jackson followed. After a couple of hundred yards, Longstreet turned to him and asked, "Is it possible that the U.S. Army of theOhio may bring in enough in the way of guns and men to drive us out ofLouisville ?"

"Yes, Mr. President, much as it pains me to say so, that is possible,"Jackson answered. "They would pay a fearsome price, but it is possible."

"Having takenLouisville at such a price, could they then rapidly overrun the rest ofKentucky ?"

Longstreet inquired.Jackson laughed out loud, which made the president smile. But he had another question: "Are the Yankees as aware of these facts as we are ourselves?"

"I hardly see how it could be otherwise,"Jackson said. "Why do you ask?"

"To see if your conclusions march with mine," Longstreet said, which, to the general's annoyance, was not an answer at all.

Chapter 10

Colonel George Custer rode back toward Salt Lake City in highgood humor. He had not succeeded in running the elusive John Taylor to earth, but he was bringing back toU.S. justice George Q. Cannon, another eminent leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Cannon, his hands manacled and his feet tied together under his horse, glumly rode along behind Custer and his brother.

In splendid spirits himself, Custer said to Tom, "Did you hear about the Mormon bishop who passed away leaving behind nine widows?"

"Why, no, Autie, I can't say as I did," Tom Custer answered. "Why don't you tell me about the poor fellow?" By his expression, he suspected a joke of lurking in there somewhere. Since he couldn't see where, he willingly played straight man.

"It was very sad," Custer said with a sigh. "As the preacher put it by the graveside, 'In the midst of wives we are in death.'"

Both Custer brothers laughed. So did the other soldiers in earshot. Tom Custer looked over his shoulder at their prisoner and asked, "How many wives are you in the midst of, Cannon?"

"One," the Mormon answered tightly. He was a round-faced little man, his hair cut close to his head, cheeks and upper lip clean-shaven, with a short, curly tangle of graying beard under his chin.

"Why lie?" Custer said with something approaching real curiosity. "We know better. You must know we know better."

"First, I am not lying." Cannon had a precise, fussy way of speaking, more like a lawyer than a revolutionary. "Second, and now speaking purely in a hypothetical sense, if the penalty for polygamy be harsher than the penalty for perjury, would it not profit one in such a predicament to lie?"

"It might, if those were the only charges you were up against," Custer answered. "Next to treason, though, they're both small potatoes."

"I am not a traitor," George Cannon said, as he'd been saying since Custer's troopers caught him in a hayloft nearFarmington . "I want nothing more for my people than the rights guaranteed them under the Constitution of theUnited States ."

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of wives?" Custer suggested, which drew another guffaw from his brother and made the captured Mormon fugitive set his jaw and say no more.

John Pope had established his headquarters atFortDouglas , north and east of the center ofSalt Lake City . The fort sat on a bench of land higher than the town. From it, the artillery Pope had brought with him—and the guns that had come in since government forces reoccupied Utah Territory—could direct a devastating fire on any insurrection that broke out.

Custer rode into the fort like a conquering hero. "Another Mormon villain captured!" he cried in a great voice. The soldiers manning the gates and up on the stockade raised a cheer. Custer took off his hat and waved it about. That drew another cheer.

Hearing the commotion, Brigadier General John Pope came out of his office to see what was going on.

"Ah, Colonel Custer!" he said, and then looked past Custer to the prisoner. "So this is the famous George Cannon of whom you telegraphed me, is it? He doesn't look so much like a wild-eyed fanatic as some of the ones we snared before."

"No, sir," Custer agreed: close enough for his superiors to hear him, he made a point of agreeing with them. "But without their coldhearted, cool-headed comrades egging them on, the wild-eyed fanatics could not do so much damage."

"That, as we have seen here, is nothing less than the truth," Pope said heavily. "Well done, Colonel. Get him down from his high horse"—the military governor laughed at his own wit, and so, of course, did Custer—"and take him to the stockade. In due course, we shall try him, and, in due course, I have no doubt we shall hang him by the neck until he is dead."

Politely, Cannon said, "I presume you shall be the judge at these proceedings? Good to know you come into them unbiased."

"You Mormons have corrupted courts inUtahTerritory too long," Pope replied. "You shall not have the opportunity to do so any more."

Dismounting, Custer walked over to George Cannon's horse and cut the ropes that bound his feet. He helped the manacled prisoner get down from the animal, then started to lead him to the row of cells that

had been intended for drunk soldiers who got into brawls but now held as many Mormon leaders as the U.S. Army had been able to track down.

After a couple of steps across the parade ground, Custer stopped dead. Since he had his arm hooked to Cannon's, the Mormon bigwig perforce stopped, too. Custer, for the moment, entirely forgot the prisoner he'd been so proud of capturing. Pointing across the grounds, he growled, "What in blazes is *he* doing here?"

John Pope's gaze swung toward the tall figure walking along at a loose-jointed amble. In something approaching a purr, the military governor answered, "Honest Abe? He's under arrest for consorting with John Taylor, and for refusing to tell us the miserable rebel's whereabouts."

"Is that a fact, sir?" Custer's eyes glowed. "Can you hang him, too? Heaven knows he's deserved it, these past twenty years. If it hadn't been for him, we wouldn't have had to fight the War of Secession—and, if it hadn't been for him, I think we should have won it." By putting it that way, he managed to blameLincoln for his treatment of both McClellan and Pope.

"I am forbidden to hang him," Pope said unhappily. "I am even forbidden formally to keep him under lock and key, though President Blaine in his generosity does permit me to retain him in custody here at the fort." He muttered something into his beard. Aloud, he added, "Blaineis a Republican, too."

"Republicans," Custer made the word a venomous oath. "They get us into wars, and then they fight them every wrong way they can find. If half—if a quarter—of what the wires are saying about the fighting inLouisville is true—" He kicked up a small cloud of dust, then rubbed his boot clean on the back of his other trouser leg.

"Orlando Willcox always was better at praying than he was at fighting," Pope said. "That impressed the redskins when he was out here in the West. He's not fighting the redskins any more. He's fighting Stonewall Jackson."

"We both know about that," Custer said with a grimace. He abruptly seemed to remember he still had hold of George Q. Cannon. "Come along, you." He jerked the Mormon prisoner forward.

Once he had raced through the formalities of turning Cannon over to the warder, he hurried out to the parade ground once more. He

needed only a moment to spot Lincoln, who was strolling along with as little apparent concern as if in a hotel garden. Custer trotted over to him. "How dare you?" he demanded.

Lincolnlooked down at him: a long way down because, even though beginning to be shrunken by age, the former president was still the taller of them by half a foot or more. "How dare I what?" he asked now, his voice mild. "Take a walk here? I didn't know it was private property, and I'm not stepping on the grass to any great degree."

The parade ground being bare dirt, there was no grass on which to step. Custer scowled at Lincoln, who bore the glower with the air of a man who had borne a lot of glowers. "How dare you treat with the Mormons without leave?" he snapped.

"I hoped I might persuade Mr. Taylor to yield in such a way as to make this occupation do as little damage to the Constitution as possible,"Lincoln answered. "In this, I fear, I was unsuccessful, Mormons possessing the same aversion to having their necks stretched as any other segment of the populace."

"Force is the only lesson the Mormons understand," Custer said.

"He who sows the wind will one day reap the whirlwind,"Lincoln returned. "The store of hatred the U.S.

Army builds for itself will come back to haunt it."

"As the Confederate States ought now to be reaping the whirlwind whose wind you sowed," Custer said. That got through toLincoln ; Custer smiled to watch him grimace. He went on, "How dare you presume to hide from us John Taylor's whereabouts?"

To his surprise,Lincoln laughed at that. "My dear Colonel, do you mean to tell me you believeTaylor will still be where he was?"

Custer felt foolish. He covered that with bluster. "Now, of course not. Had you come to theU.S. military authorities directly you returned from this illicit meeting, we might have been able to capture the traitor, as he would have had only a short head start on our men."

"There you may possibly be correct, Colonel Custer,"Lincoln answered. "But, in his seeking to use me as an intermediary, I judged—and judge still—that Mr. Taylor in effect made me his client, and I would be violating my responsibility to him in revealing where we met."

"If you are going to hide behind every jot and tittle of the law to save a criminal and a traitor from his just deserts, then in my view you deserve to go up on the gallows with him when we do seize him," Custer said. "I have no patience with legalistic folderol and humbug."

"If we do not live by law, what shall we live by?"Lincoln asked.

"When the law fails us, as it has plainly done inUtahTerritory , shall we live by it no matter how dear that may cost us?" Custer returned.

Lincolnsighed. "There, Colonel, you pose a serious question, whether that be your intention or not.

Much of the history of the law in theUnited States —and, indeed, in the world, or what I know of it—springs from the dialectical struggle between your observation and mine."

"The what kind of struggle?" Custer asked.

"Never mind,"Lincoln said. "I would not expect you to be a student of either Hegel or Marx. Their works have come late to this side of theAtlantic , and are not yet appreciated as they should be."

Custer had not heard of either of them. That made him feel smugly superior, not ignorant. "We've got no need for a pack of damned foreign liars. We've got enough homegrown liars, seems to me." He glared fiercely up at the former president. "And if you didn't have a president of your own miserable party to protect you from the consequences of your treason, we would see if we could build a gallows tall enough to stretch you on it."

"My legs have always been long enough to reach the ground,"Lincoln said. "I should prefer that they continue to do so."

"I shouldn't," Custer said, and turned his back on the man he blamed for so many of the country's misfortunes of the previous generation. He strode off. Although he thought he heardLincoln sigh again behind him, he didn't turn around to make certain.

Instead, he sought out General Pope, who was glad enough to see him after his capture of George Cannon. "One by one, Colonel, they fall into our hands," Pope said, "and one by one we shall dispose of them."

"Yes, sir," Custer replied. "It is truly a pity we can't dispose ofLincoln in the same way, or perhaps have him meet with an accident while

attempting escape."

"I have been specifically cautioned against letting any such accident befall him, though he does not know that," Pope said. "It‘s too bad, isn't it?"

"Hiding behind the law to break the law," Custer muttered.Lincoln could put whatever fancy name on it he wanted. In Custer's eyes, that was what it was.

"Just so. Well, we've both known lo these many years the man is a scoundrel, so why should one more proof of it surprise us?" Pope started to say something else, then caught himself. "I remember what I wanted to tell you, Colonel. The War Department is letting us have another half-dozen Gatling guns. As you've had experience with the weapons, I'm assigning them to your regiment."

"Yes, sir," Custer said. "Lord only knows what I'll do with eight of the contraptions, but I will say I can't think of anything handier than one of them for making a pack of rioters wish they'd never been born."

"Just so," Pope repeated. "Once we start hanging Mormon big shots, we may have those rioters. I hope not. If we should, however, I'll expect you and these fancy coffee mills to play a major part in putting them down."

"Sir, it will be a pleasure," Custer said.

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Chappo came up to General Stuart. Geronimo's young son politely waited to be noticed, then said, "Our first men come in. The bluecoats are not far behind them. They push hard; they think they have only us to fight. In another hour, maybe two, you will show them they are wrong."

"Yes." Stuart rubbed his hands together. He waited for the action to begin as eagerly as a bridegroom for the night of his wedding day. "You're sure about the time?"

"How can a man be sure?" Chappo asked reasonably. "If the bluecoats do not scent a trap, though, that is when they will be here."

"Good enough." Stuart turned to his trumpeter. "Blow Prepare

forBattle ."

As the martial notes rang out, Chappo said, "For white men, you hide yourselves well. You should fool other white men." With the precision of youth, he revised that: "You should fool them long enough."

Jeb Stuart reminded himself the redskin meant it as praise, not as a slight. This desert was the Apaches'

country, not his own. He and his men would never know it as they did. That was why they made such useful allies against the damnyankees.

That was also why, while he wouldn't turn on them himself as Major Sellers kept urging, he wouldn't mind seeing a good many Apaches killed and wounded in the fight that lay ahead. They wouldn't be able to blame that on him if it happened. They'd been as ready for this fight with theU.S. soldiers as he was: more ready, since the fight had been their idea. He'd sound as sympathetic as an old mammy when they counted up their losses.

Meanwhile, he sent messengers to the men who'd been sweating in the hot, hot sun the past few days.

All the runners bore the same order: "Don't open fire too soon," Stuart instructed them. "Wait for the signal. Wait till the Yankees are well into the canyon. We don't want to just frighten them. We want to ruin them."

Chappo listened to that with approval. "The only reason to fight is to win," he said. "You see this clear."

"You bet I do," Stuart answered. Even with a general's wreathed stars on his collar, he carried a Tredegar carbine like any other cavalryman. Some officers felt their duty in battle was to lead and inspire the enlisted men, without actually doing any fighting past self-defense. Stuart had never seen the sense in that. He wanted to hurt the enemy any which way he could.

Waiting came hard, as waiting always did. When, off in the distance to the north, he heard rifle fire, his head swung that way like a hunting dog's on taking a scent. He looked around for Chappo. The Apache had vanished, Stuart could not have said exactly when. One second he was there, the next gone. No white man was able to move like that.

Here came the Apaches, some mounted, others afoot. They retreated

steadily through the canyon.

Watching them, Stuart knew nothing but admiration. By the way they were carrying out their fighting retreat, they gave theU.S. forces not the slightest clue they had allies lying in wait. When they formed a line of sorts near the southern end of the canyon, it looked like nothing more than a delaying action on the part of a few to let the rest put more distance between themselves and their pursuers.

And here came the Yankees, riding in loose order, a puff of gray smoke rising every now and then as one of them or another fired at the retreating Indians. Some, a couple of troops' worth, weren't properly bluecoats at all, but men in civilian-style clothes: volunteers, Stuart supposed. Now that the Indians weren't retreating but had formed a line, theU.S. soldiers began to bunch, those in front slowing while those in back came on.

It was the sort of target of which artillerymen dreamt. Stuart waited for the gunners, off on their rise, to decide they had enough damnyankees in their sights. If they waited much longer, some trigger-happy idiot was going to start shooting before they did, and warn the enemy of the trap.

Crash!All the field guns fired as one. All the shells burst close together among the Yankees. The result, seen through smoke and kicked-up dust, was gruesome: men and horses down and thrashing on the burning desert floor, other men and horses, and pieces of men and horses, down and not moving at all.

As to sweet music, Stuart listened to the confused and dismayed cries rising from theU.S. forces. As he'd hoped, they hadn't yet spotted his guns, and thought the Apaches had waylaid them with torpedoes.

"Go wide!" someone yelled, which sent bluecoats riding toward the gentle slopes of the canyon walls—and straight into the withering rifle fire the Confederates, now waiting no longer, poured down on them.

Stuart's Tredegar bucked against his shoulder. The Yankee at whom he'd aimed slid off his horse into the dirt. The Confederate general whooped with glee as he slipped a fresh round into the rifle's breech, though he wasn't absolutely sure his was the bullet that had brought down theU.S. cavalryman. Other soldiers might also have aimed at the fellow.

Now theU.S. soldiers realized they'd run headlong into a box. They still hadn't figured out what kind of box, though. "Straight at 'em!"

shouted an officer leading a squadron of volunteers. "You charge 'em, the damn redskins'll run every time." He swung his hat. "Come on, boys!"

He rode forward at the gallop, brave but stupid. A moment later, he was brave and stupid and dead.

The bullet that caught him in the face blew off the back of his head. Another bullet took his horse in the chest. The beast went down, and in falling tripped up the horse behind it, which fell on its rider.

More shells crashed down on theU.S. troops, not in a single neat salvo but one by one as the guns reloaded and fired. "Christ almighty, it's the Rebs!" That cry and others like it announced that, too late, the Yankees had figured out what was going on.

They fought back as best they could. The volunteers seemed to be armed with Winchesters rather than government-issue Springfields. The hunting rifles' magazine feed and lever action meant those volunteers could fire faster than the regulars on both sides with their single-shot breechloaders. At close range, they did a fair amount of damage.

But not many of them got to close range. TheU.S. forces were at the center of three fires: the Apaches and artillery from ahead, and dismounted Confederate cavalry to either side. Had Stuart been their commander, he didn't know what he would have done. Died gallantly, he hoped, so nobody afterwards would have the chance to blame him for sticking his head in the noose in the first place.

After dying gallantly, the next best thing the officer in charge of theU.S. force could have done was pull back and escape with as many men as he could, perhaps sacrificing a rear guard to hold back pursuit.

The enemy commander didn't try that, either. Instead, though he could not have helped knowing what he was up against, he tried to punch his way through the Confederates dug in on the sides of the canyon.

A young lieutenant close by Stuart screamed as he was wounded. Then he examined the wound and screamed again: "My God! I am unmanned!" Stuart bit his lip. He knew the horrid chances war could take, but no man ever thought of that particular injury without a shudder of dread. Then a bullet cracked past his own head, so close he thought he felt the breeze of its passage. That refocused his mind on his own survival.

He had never seen a battle that came so close to running itself. That was as well, for, with the Yankees in the trap, his messengers had to travel a long, roundabout route to reach the Confederates on the other side of the canyon. But the other half of the army knew perfectly well what it had to do: hold its place and keep shooting at the damn-yankees either till none was left or till the ones who were left had enough and ran away.

The same applied to the men on the west side of the canyon with him. TheU.S. soldiers, regulars and volunteers alike, pushed their attacks with the greatest courage. Many of them advanced on foot, to present smaller targets to their foes. Some got in among the Confederates. The fighting then was with clubbed rifles and bayonets and knives as well as with bullets. But, though the Yankees got in among the C.S. troopers, they did not get through. Those few who survived soon ran back toward the center of the canyon, bullets kicking up dirt near their heels and stretching them lifeless under the sun.

Stuart looked up to the sky. Buzzards were already doing lazy spirals. How did they know?

"Forward!" Stuart called. "If they're going to stand there and take it, let's make sure they have a lot to take."

Cheering, his men advanced. Neither butternut nor gray perfectly matched this country, but both came closer than the dark blue the U.S. soldiers wore—and both were covered with a good coat of dust and dirt, too. The damnyankees found few good targets among their oncoming foes.

The officer in charge of the U.S. forces—whether he was the original commander, Stuart had no way of knowing—finally decided, far too late, to pull out with whatever he would save. By then, rifle fire from both sides of the canyon was far closer than it had been. The Confederate field guns kept sending shells wherever the Yankees were thickest. Only a battered remnant of the force that had pursued the Apaches south fromTucson rode back toward it.

"Splendid, General, splendid!" Major Horatio Sellers shouted.

"Thank you, Major," Stuart told his aide-de-camp, and then went on, in a musing voice, "Do you know you have a bullet hole in your hat?"

Sellers doffed the headgear and examined it. "I know now, yes, sir," he said, and then, with studied nonchalance, set the hat back on his head.

"How vigorous a pursuit were you planning to order?"

"Not very," Stuart answered. "President Longstrcct has made it all too plain that our mission is to protectChihuahua andSonora , not to try to annex any ofNew MexicoTerritory . A pity, but there you are. After this licking, I don't think the Yankees will be panting to invade our new provinces any time soon."

"I think you're right about that," Sellers said. "And I also have to say that you were right about the Apaches. They served us very handsomely here." He looked around and lowered his voice. "And I hope a lot of them bit the dust, too. What they helped us do to the Yankees, they could do to us one fine day."

"They could," Stuart agreed. "We have to persuade them that it's not in their interest. As I've said, being neither Yankees nor Mexicans, we have a leg up on that game." He pointed toward the mouth of the canyon, where the artillery, lengthening its range, was paying the retreatingU.S. soldiers a final farewell.

"And we have a leg up on this game, too."

On what had been the main battlefield, gunfire ebbed toward silence. More and more Confederates broke cover to round up prisoners, do what they could for theU.S. wounded, and plunder the dead. The Apaches emerged from their places of concealment, too. Some of those seemed incapable of concealing a man until an Indian, or sometimes two or three, came forth from them.

A fair number of the Confederates—especially members of the Fifth Cavalry, who had done a lot of Comanche fighting—took U.S. scalps as souvenirs of victory. To Stuart's surprise, the Apaches didn't.

"No, that is not our way," Chappo said when the general asked him about it. He frowned in thought, then qualified that: "Some of the wildest of us will sometimes take one scalp"—he held up his forefinger —"only one, for a special . . ." He and Stuart hunted for a word. "... a special ceremony, yes.

The one who does this spends four days making clean. Not like—" He pointed to the cavalry troopers, who were busy with their knives.

Stuart suffered a timely coughing fit. He was used to whites' being disgusted at Indians' brutality. Here he had an Indian unhappy with the brutality of his own men. When worn on the other foot, the shoe pinched.

To keep himself from dwelling on that, he walked over to have a look at the prisoners. He found that the U.S. Regular Army troopers his men had captured wanted nothing to do with the volunteers who had ridden into battle with them. "You better keep us separate from those sons of bitches," said one blue-coated cavalryman, a dirty bandage wrapped around a bloody crease to his scalp. "God damn the Tombstone Rangers to hell, and then stoke the fire afterwards. 'Got to get them Injuns,' they said. 'Them Injuns is runnin' on account of they's a pack of cowards,' they said. And God damn Colonel Hains for listening to 'em, the stupid fool."

Colonel Hains was not in evidence among either the dead or the captured. The commander of the Tombstone Rangers, however, had had his horse shot under him; the beast had pinned him when it crashed to earth. When Stuart came up to him, he was cursing a blue streak as a Confederate medical steward put splints on his ankle. "If I knew who the shitepoke was that killed my horse, I'd cut the balls off the asshole," he greeted Stuart. "I'm going to hobble around on a stick the rest of my born days, goddamn it."

"Sorry to hear it," Stuart said, a polite fiction. "Your men fought courageously, Colonel . . . ?" They'd charged into a trap—by what the Regular had said, they'd ignored the possibility that it might be a trap, too—so they hadn't fought very cleverly, but they had indeed been brave.

"Earp," the colonel of Volunteers said. Stuart thought it was a nauseated noise, perhaps from the pain of his injury, till he amplified it: "Virgil Earp." He was about thirty, with a dark mustache and a complexion, at the moment, on the grayish side. "You damn Rebs went and slickered us."

"There's nothing in the rules that says we can't," Stuart answered.

"Wish my brother'd come out West with me," the captured Colonel Earp said. "He's the best poker player I ever knew. You wouldn't have fooled him. *Careful* there, you son of a whore!" That last was directed at the man tending to his ankle. He gave his attention back to Stuart. "We wanted to wipe out the dirty redskins, but it didn't quite come off."

"No, it didn't." Stuart knew he sounded smug. He didn't care. He'd earned the right.

Virgil Earp surprised him by starting to laugh. "That's all right, Reb.

You go ahead and gloat. Those bastards are your trouble now."

Abruptly, Stuart turned away. The Volunteer might not have been much of a soldier, but he'd put his finger right on the Confederate commander's biggest worry. If the need to worry was so obvious even an arrogant fool could see it at a glance . . . Stuart didn't care for anything that implied.

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Across theOhio , the guns had fallen silent. Frederick Douglass peered suspiciously over the river toward the wreckage of what had beenLouisville . The Confederates had asked for an eight-hour truce so they could send a representative to Governor Willcox's headquarters, and Willcox, after consulting by telegraph with President Blaine, had granted the cease-fire.

Here came the Confederate now: a major carrying a square of white cloth on a stick as his *laissez-passer.* Seeing Douglass standing close to Willcox's tent, he snapped, "You, boy! What business do you have hanging around here? Speak up, and be quick about it."

He might have been speaking to a slave on a plantation. To Douglass' hidden fury, a couple of theU.S.

soldiers escorting the messenger chuckled. With ice in his own voice, Douglass replied, "What business have I? The business of a citizen of theUnited States , sir." He spoke with as much pride asSt. Paul had when declaring himself a Roman citizen.

"Any country that'd make citizens out of niggers—" The Confederate emissary shook his head and walked into General Willcox's tent.

Douglass was shaking all over, shaking with rage. He turned to one of theU.S. soldiers who had not joined in the amusement at his expense and asked, "Why is that—that individual here, do you know?"

"I'm not supposed to say anything," the bluecoat answered.

Douglass stood as quietly as he could and waited. In his years as a newspaper reporter, he'd seen how proud most people were of knowing things their friends and neighbors didn't, and how important that made them feel. He'd also seen how bad most of them were at keeping their secrets. And, sure enough, after half a minute or so, the soldier resumed: "What I hear, though, is that there Reb is going to

put terms to us for ending the war."

"Terms?" Douglass' ears stood to attention. "What kind of terms?"

"Don't know," the soldier said. His obvious disappointment convinced Douglass he was telling the truth.

"Tell you this much, Uncle: after what I've been through over on the other side of the river, any terms at all'd look pretty damn good to me, and you can take that to the bank."

His companions nodded, every one of them. Douglass made as if to write something in his notebook, to keep the white men from seeing how they had wounded him. Where he'd envisioned a crusade—literally a holy war—to sweep the curse of slavery from the face of the earth forever, they, having fought a bit and seen that the enemy would not fall over at the first blow, were ready to give up and go home.

No feeling among the soldiery for the plight of the Negro in Confederate bondage,Douglass scrawled.

The plight of the Negro, in fact, was not what had engendered the war. He reminded himself of that, grimly. Not evenLincoln had sent men off to battle for the express purpose of freeing the bondsman.Blaine hated the Confederate States because they were a rival, not because they were tyrants.

Had they been exemplars of purest democracy, rivals they would have remained, and he would have hated them no less.

Presently, Captain Oliver Richardson came out of the tent. He was puffing on a cigar and looked mightily contented with the world. When he saw Douglass, he stared right through him. Douglass would have bet he knew the terms the major in butternut had brought. The Negro did not waste his time askingRichardson about them. General Willcox's adjutant cared for him no more than did the Confederate emissary.

A couple of minutes later, a corporal with the crossed semaphore flags of the Signal Corps on his sleeve hurried from Willcox's tent to that of the telegraphers nearby. Slowly, as if without the slightest need to hurry, Frederick Douglass strolled in the same direction. He positioned himself not far from the entrance, looked busy (in fact, he was jotting down unflattering observations about Captain Richardson, of which he had a never-failing supply), and waited.

In due course, the corporal came out once more. Douglass intercepted him in a way that, like any great art, looked effortless even when it wasn't. In confidential tones, he asked, "What sort of impossible terms are the Rebs proposing?"

"They don't sound so impossible to me," the soldier answered.

When he said no more than that, Douglass was tempted to grab him by the front of his blouse and shake the news out of him. Restraining himself with an effort, he said, "What are they, then?" The soldier hesitated, visibly considering whether to reply. "It doesn't matter if you tell me," Douglass assured him.

"Whatever the terms may be, I can neither accept nor refuse them."

"That's true enough," the Signal Corps corporal said, half to himself. "All right, I'll tell you: the offer is to end the war and pretend it never happened, near enough. Both sides to pull back over the border. No reparations, nothing of the sort. We just go on about our business."

Douglass sucked in a long breath of air. Those were generous terms, far more generous than he'd expected the Confederate States to offer. Some—maybe many—in theUnited States would want to accept them, especially as word of the horrors of the battle ofLouisville spread through the land.

Douglass had done some spreading of that word himself, and now all at once bitterly regretted it.

"What ofChihuahua andSonora ?" he asked.

"Huh? Oh, them. Right." The corporal needed to be reminded of the immediate cause of the war. "The Rebs'd keep 'em."

"I see," Douglass said slowly.

"General Willcox said that, far as he was concerned, the Confederates were welcome to 'em, that they weren't worth owning in the first place, and that the only things in 'em was cactuses and redskins and greasers."

Rather than keeping too quiet, the soldier was suddenly talking more than Douglass had expected. "Did he?" the Negro journalist murmured. If an importantU.S. commander didn't think the Mexican provinces were worth the cost the country was paying to try to make the Confederate States disgorge them, how would President Blaine feel?

"He did, sure as I'm standing here next to you," the Signal Corps corporal answered. "And I'm not going to stand next to you any more, though, on account of somebody's gonna spot me and figure I've been bangin' my gums too much." He sidled off, doing his best to look as if he'd never been there at all.

Frederick Douglass wrote down the details the soldier had given him while they were still fresh in his mind. Then he shoved the notebook back into his pocket and walked over to his tent. He'd been under canvas long enough to have grown used to the stark simplicity of a stool, a kerosene lamp, and an iron-framed military cot. They made his home inRochester , which before leaving it he'd thought of as having all the modern conveniences, instead seemed overcrowded and overstuffed.

He sat down on the stool and covered his face with his hands. He was not quite so appalled as he had been after shooting the disemboweledMassachusetts artilleryman. The physical shock of that deed would stay with him till his dying day. The grief flowing through him now, though, ran deeper and stronger than that which had followed the mercy killing.

"I was right then," he said. "Now . . ."

Now, instead of watching a man die before his eyes, he was seeing a lifetime's effort and hope take their last breaths. James G. Blaine had started this war, basically, to punish the Confederate States for winning the War of Secession. Now that he had discovered he was punishing theUnited States even more severely, how could he continue after getting an honorable—no, an honorable-sounding—peace proposal from the CSA?

InBlaine 's place, Douglass would have been hard pressed to keep from accepting such a peace. But if it was made, theUSA and CSA would live side by side for another generation, maybe two or even three, and the vast white majority in theUnited States would go right on despising the handful of Negroes in their midst and doing their best to forget the millions of Negroes in the Confederate States even existed.

Douglass looked up and scowled at the canvas wall of the tent as if it were Oliver Richardson's smoothly handsome face. "I shall oppose this peace with every fiber of my being," he said aloud, as if someone had doubted him. "No matter what the cost, I shall urge that the war go forward, for the sake of my people."

The guns did not resume their deadly work immediately the peace expired. Both sides held back, awaiting President Blaine's decision. Douglass did not realize how constant a companion the roar of battle had been until he discovered the long stretch of silence was making him jumpy.

When he messed with the staff officers in the seemingly unnatural quiet that evening, he found he did not have to pretend ignorance of the proposed peace terms. Everyone was talking about them, and everyone assumed someone else had let Douglass know what they were. Almost to a man, the officers thought President Blaine would accept President Longstreet's offer.

"We'll be going home soon," Captain Richardson predicted. "I'd have liked to lick the damn Rebs, I'll say that, but it doesn't look like it's in the cards here."

Alfred von Schlieffen spoke up: "Did I not hear from the far-writer—no, the telegraph, you say; I am sorry—did I not hear that the Confederate States have inNew Mexico a victory won?"

"I heard that," several people said around mouthfuls of fried chicken. Douglass had not heard it, but he'd been moping in his tent since getting word of the Confederate peace proposal. Somebody said, "The Rebs used the goddamn Apaches to lure our boys into a trap, that's what happened."

"We should have given the Apaches what we gave the Sioux,"Richardson said. He slammed his fist down on the table, making silverware and tin plates jump. "We would have done it, too, I reckon, if they hadn't run down intoMexico every time we got on their tail."

"Yes, and now, instead of running into the Empire of Mexico, which was weak enough to allow our pursuit, they shall, if President Blaine accepts this peace, run down into Confederate territory, where we can no more pursue them than we can the Kiowas of the Indian Territory," Douglass said.

As always, the power of his voice let him command attention. Somebody a long way down the table—he didn't see who—said, "Damned if the nigger isn't right." For once in his life, he felt happier about the agreement than angry at the insulting title.

Thoughtfully, someone else said, "Maybe we've been looking too hard

at all the blood we've spilled here inLouisville and not enough at the whole war."

"I don't know what's to look at," Oliver Richardson said. "We aren't doing any better anywhere else."

"But you are not invaded," Colonel Schlieffen said, "but only in this one far-off Territory. Your armed forces are not beaten. If theUnited States have the will, you can go on with this war."

"You're right, sir," Frederick Douglass exclaimed. "We *can* beat the Confederate States. We are larger and stronger than they. Do you soldiers want them laughing at us for another twenty years, as they've done ever since the War of Secession? If we give up the fight without being defeated, we shall make ourselves a laughingstock before the eyes of the whole world."

"If we go on and keep getting our ass kicked, the rest of the world is going to think that's pretty damn funny, too,"Richardson said.

"But if we win," Douglass replied, "if we win, what glory! And what a triumph for the holy cause of freedom."

"Oh, Christ,"Richardson muttered to the officer next to him, "now he's going to start going on about the slaves again." The other soldier nodded. Douglass almost threw a bowl full of boiled beets at them. With so many in theUSA feeling as Oliver Richardson did, would even victory over the Confederate States bring liberation? And if it did not, what in God's name would?

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Colonel Theodore Roosevelt raised theWinchester to his shoulder, squinted down the sights, and pulled the trigger. The rifle bucked against his shoulder. "Take that, you damned Englishman!" he shouted, working the lever. A brass cartridge case leaped into the air, then fell to the ground with a small clink. He aimed the rifle again, ready for another shot.

He didn't fire. A couple of hundred yards away, the pronghorn, after its first frantic bound, was already staggering. As its herdmates raced off over the plains of northernMontanaTerritory , it took three or four more wobbly steps, then fell.Roosevelt shouted again, this time in triumph. He ran toward the mortally wounded antelope. His boots kicked up dust at every stride.

"Good shot, Colonel!" First Lieutenant Karl Jobst exclaimed. Jobst, only a few years older than his superior, was a Regular Army officer, not an original member ofRoosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment.

Colonel Henry Welton had detailed him to the Volunteers as Roosevelt's adjutant and,Roosevelt suspected, as his watchdog, too. He'd stopped resenting it. Jobst had already made himself very useful.

"Right in the lung, by jingo! That's bully,"Roosevelt said, seeing the bloody froth on the antelope's nose and mouth. The animal tried to rise when he came up to it, but could not. Its large, dark eyes reproached him. He stooped, pulled out a knife, and cut its throat to put it out of its misery. After watching its blood spill over the dirt, he rose, a broad grin on his face. "Good eating tonight!"

"Yes, sir," Jobst said with a grin of his own. "If there's anything better than antelope liver fried up with salt pork, I'm switched if I know what it is." He drew his knife, too. "Let's butcher it and take it back to camp."

They opened the body cavity and dumped the guts out onto the ground. Flies buzzed around them.Roosevelt plunged his knife into the soil again and again to clean it. "I wish this had been an Englishman, by Godfrey," he said. "I chafe at the defensive."

"Sir, our orders are to patrol the border but not to cross it," Lieutenant Jobst said. "If the enemy should invade us, we arc expected to resist him. But we are not to provoke him, not when theUnited States have enough on their plate fighting the Confederates."

He spoke politely, deferentially:Roosevelt outranked him. He also spoke firmly: he was there not only to give the colonel of Volunteers a hand but to make sure he didn't go haring off on his own.Roosevelt knew how tempted he was to do just that, and gave Colonel Welton a certain amount of grudging respect for having anticipated his impulses.

He grabbed the carcass' hind legs, Jobst the forelegs. They carried the dead antelope back to the horses. The pack animal to whose back they tied the antelope snorted and rolled its eyes, not liking the smell of blood. Jobst, who was very good with horses, gave the beast a lump of sugar and calmed it down.

Camp lay close by the bank of theWillowRiver , which at this season of the year was little more than a creek. Roosevelt had patrols

scattered from theCutBankRiver in the west all the way to the Lodge in the east, covering better than a hundred miles of border country with his regiment. Placing his headquarters roughly in the middle of that broad stretch of rolling prairie did not leave him reassured. "How are we supposed to fight the British if they do cross the border?" he demanded of Lieutenant Jobst, not for the first time. "They'll brush aside the handful who discover them the way I brushed off those deerflies back where we made the kill."

"Sir, we aren't supposed to fight them single-handed," his adjutant replied. "We'll fall back, we'll harass them, we'll concentrate, we'll send word of their whereabouts down toFortBenton so Colonel Welton can bring up the infantry, and then we'll lick 'em."

"I suppose so,"Roosevelt said, not quite graciously. He admitted to himself—but to no one else—that he had trouble with the idea of not fighting the foe singlehanded. In all his visions of battle with the British, he saw himself. Sometimes he alone was enough to defeat the foe, sometimes he had help from the Unauthorized Regiment. In none of them did the rest of the U.S. Army play any role. He knew what he imagined and what was real were not one and the same. Knowing it and coming to terms with it were not one and the same, either.

The rest of the small regimental staff greeted him with enthusiasm and the antelope with even more. The cook, an enormous Irishman named Rafferty, had an equally enormous pot of beans going, but he was among the loudest of the men cheering the kill. "Beans'll keep you from starving, that they will," he said,

"but after a while you don't care. This here, now—" He ran his tongue over his lips in anticipation.

Rooseveltwas gnawing on an antelope rib and getting grease in his mustache when a rider came trotting up from the south. "What's the news?"Roosevelt called to him. "Have some meat, have some coffee, and tell us what you know."

"Thank you, sir," the soldier fromFortBenton said. He loaded a tin plate with food—not only a chunk of roast antelope haunch but also a big dollop of Rafferty's beans—and then sat down by the fire. "News could be better."

"Well, what is it?"Roosevelt said. North of Fort Benton lived only a few scattered farmers and sheep herders. No telegraph lines ran north from there, which madeRoosevelt feel cut off from the world beyond

the circle of prairie he could see.

"Rebs and Indians done licked us south ofTucson , down inNew MexicoTerritory ," the courier answered, which produced a chorus of groans from everyone who heard it. "And there's no good news to speak of out ofLouisville , neither. We throw in some men, they get themselves shot, we throw in some more. Don't know what the devil we got to show for it."

Louisville, Roosevelt thought, was the very opposite of the fight he would have to make against the British if they did invadeMontanaTerritory . Down inKentucky , too many men were jammed into too little space, and all of it built up. That was a recipe for slaughter, not war.

Thinking along with him, Lieutenant Jobst said, "Louisville's a bad place to pick for a battle. If the Rebels had gone intoWashington orCincinnati , it's the sort of battle we'd have given them. As things are, we get that end of the stick."

"What happened down inNew Mexico ?" Roosevelt asked the man fromFortBenton .

"Sir, I don't rightly know," the soldier said. He took a note from the pocket of his blouse. "This here is what Colonel Welton gave me to give you. He said I should read it before I set out so I could tell you what it said in case it got soaked or somethin'."

Rooseveltread the note. It told him no more than the courier had: the bare facts of defeat inNew Mexico and bloody stalemate inKentucky . He crumpled it and threw it into the fire, then rounded on Lieutenant Jobst. "If you ask me, Lieutenant, an invasion ofCanada is likely to be the best thing we could do right now. Heaven knows we're going nowhere on any other front."

"That's not for me to say, sir," Jobst replied, "nor, if you'll forgive me for reminding you, for you, either."

"I know it's not."Roosevelt paused to light a cigar. He blew out a cloud of fragrant smoke, then sighed.

"The tobacco in this one's from Confederate Cuba. We don't grow such good leaf here in theUSA , more's the pity."

Taking his change of subject as acquiescence, Karl Jobst said, "I'm sure the War Department will notifyFortBenton if they want us to

undertake any offensive action."

"And why are you so sure of that?"Roosevelt inquired, as sardonically as he could. "Look how long the powers that be took to decide that the Unauthorized Regiment should go into service, and at everything I had to do to convince them."

Lieutenant Jobst hesitated.Roosevelt was, for the moment, his superior, yes. But, when the war ended,Roosevelt would go back to being a civilian while Jobst stayed in the Army. And, despite being a young man, Jobst was older than his regimental commander. Both those factors warred with his sense of subordination. He picked his words with obvious care: "The powers that be did not know how fine a regiment you'd recruited, sir. I assure you, they are aware of the threat the British and Canadians pose to our northern frontier."

Rooseveltwanted to argue with that. He wanted to argue with everything keeping him from doing what he most wanted to do: punish the enemies of theUnited States . Try as he would, he found no way; Jobst was too sensible to be doubted here. "I suppose you have a point,"Roosevelt said with such good grace as he could.

"Sir," the courier asked, "what word should I bring back to Colonel Welton at the fort?"

"All's quiet,"Roosevelt answered. That didn't make him happy, either, for it gave him no excuse to strike back at theBritish Empire . But, he felt, having become a U.S. Volunteer obligated him to give his own superior nothing but the truth. "I have riders constantly going back and forth from each of my troops to this place. Should the foe make so bold as to pull the tail feathers of our great American eagle, I would know it before a day had passed, and would send a messenger to Colonel Welton with orders to kill his horse getting the news down toFortBenton ."

"Pull the tail feathers of the American eagle," the soldier repeated. Then he said it again, quietly, as if memorizing it. "That's pretty fine, sir. You come up with things like that, you ought to write 'em down."

"You're not the first person who's said so,"Roosevelt purred; he was anything but immune to having his vanity watered. "One day, perhaps I shall. Meanwhile, though"—he struck a theatrical pose, not altogether aware he was doing it—"we have a war to win."

"Yes, sir!" the courier said.

Lieutenant Jobst studiedRoosevelt . "Sir, I hope we do get the chance to fight the British," he said. "I think your men would follow you straight to hell, and that's something no one but God can give an officer."

"I don't aim to lead them to hell,"Roosevelt said. "I may lead them *through* hell, but I intend to take them *to* victory."

Jobst didn't say anything to that. The courier fromFortBenton softly clapped his hands together once, before he'd quite realized he'd done it. In the firelight, his eyes were wide and bright and staring.

Rooseveltchose not to sleep inside his tent, not when the weather was dry. Curled in his bedroll later that night, he stared up and up and up at the sky. Stars were dusted across that great blue-black bowl like diamonds over velvet, the Milky Way a ghostly road of light. As he watched, two shooting stars glowed for a heartbeat, then silently vanished.

He sighed. You never saw skies like this inNew York : too much stinking smoke in the air, too many city lights swallowing the fainter stars. This perfection struck him as reason enough by itself to have come toMontanaTerritory . So thinking, he took off his spectacles, slid them into their leather case, and drifted off in bare moments.

He woke, refreshed, at sunrise, breathing cool air like wine. Even in August, even when the day would be hot and muggy by noon, early morning was to be cherished. He pulled on boots, put on spectacles, and began mixing calisthenics with rounds of shadow boxing.

"Colonel, you make me tired just watching you," Lieutenant Jobst said when he woke up a few minutes later.

"You should try it yourself,"Roosevelt panted. "Nothing like exercise for improving the circulation of the blood."

"If I felt any healthier now, I do believe I'd fall over," Jobst replied.Roosevelt snorted and ripped off a couple of sharp right-left combinations that would have stretched any invading Englishman—at any rate, any invading Englishman without a rifle—senseless in the dust.

After antelope meat, hardtack, and coffee,Roosevelt mounted and rode off across the plains on patrol.

Along with commanding his soldiers, he wanted to do everything they

did. And, if the British did presume to invade theUnited States , he wanted at least a chance of being the first to discover them.

Duty and the siren song of paperwork brought him back to camp in a couple of hours. He was busy writing up a requisition for beans and salt pork for A Troop, far off to the west by theCutBankRiver , when someone rode in from the south. Curiosity and a distaste for requisitions, no matter how necessary, made him stick his head out of the tent to see what was going on.

He'd expected the newcomer to belong to one troop or another of the Unauthorized Regiment. But the soldier wore no red bandanna tied to his left sleeve. That meant he was fromFortBenton .Roosevelt 's eyebrows pulled down and together. Colonel Welton wasn't in the habit of sending couriers up to him two days running.

"What's the news?" he called.

The soldier, who had been talking with Lieutenant Jobst, saluted and said, "Sir, I have an urgent message for you."

"I didn't think you'd ridden fifty miles or so for your amusement,"Roosevelt returned. "Go ahead and give it to me."

"Sir, it's only in writing," the courier said.Roosevelt blinked. That wasn't what Welton usually did, cither.

He saw Lieutenant Jobst also looking surprised. The rider took from his saddlebag an oilskin pouch that would have protected its contents regardless of the streams through which he might have splashed. He handed it toRoosevelt . "Here you are, sir."

"Thank you."Roosevelt drew away. Had Welton wanted the courier to know what the message said, he would have told him. Lieutenant Jobst followed Roosevelt, who frowned a little but said nothing.

He opened the pouch. Inside lay a sealed envelope. He opened that, too, and drew out the folded sheet of paper it contained. Together, he and Jobst read the note on that sheet of paper. Both of them let out low whistles, neither noticing the other.

"Longstreet offers peace on the *status quo ante bellum,* except the Rebs get to keep their Mexican provinces?" Jobst murmured. "That could be damned hard for President Blaine to turn down."

"Yes."Roosevelt faced southeast, all thoughts of keeping secrets from

Colonel Welton's courier flown from his head. He shook his fist in the general direction ofRichmond . "You son of a bitch!" he shouted.

"You filthy, stinking son of a bitch! God damn you to hell and fry you black, I went to all the trouble of putting a regiment together, and now I don't even get the chance to fight with it? You *son* of a bitch!" To his own mortification, he burst into tears of rage.

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"Morning, boys," Samuel Clemens called as he took off his straw boater and hung it on a hat tree just inside the entrance to the *Morning Call* offices.

"Mornin', boss." "Good morning, Sam." "How are you?" The answers came back in quick succession, as they had for as long as he'd been working on the newspaper. No outside observer would have noticed anything different from the way it had been, say, a month before. As he walked to his desk, Clemens told himself that was because there was nothing to notice.

He paused to light a cigar at a gas lamp, then sat down and took a couple of puffs. On the desk in a fancy gilt frame sat a tintype of himself, Alexandra, and the children. He could see his reflection in the glass in front of the photograph. He was unsmiling on the tintype because smiles were hard to hold while waiting for the exposure to be completed. His reflection was unsmiling because . . .

"Because there's nothing to smile about," he muttered. Try as he would, he couldn't convince himself things were as they had been before those two ruffians hauled him off to the Presidio. He still carried in a vest pocket the good character Colonel Sherman had given him. No one had accused him of disloyalty since, not out loud.

But when he greeted people, didn't their responses come a quarter of a second slow? Didn't they sound ever so slightly off, like those of a good actor who would die prosperous but whom no one would remember three days after they shoveled dirt over him? And these were his colleagues, here at a newspaper that opposed the present war. If this was what his brief brush with Confederate service got him here, he shuddered to think what the rest ofSan Francisco thought. None of the other papers had made him out to be a traitor, but that was probably only a matter of time.

He was scowling as he sorted through the telegrams that had come in

during the night. For one thing, none of them had the news he really needed. For another, he wasn't sure it even mattered. If people thought he was tarred by the brush of the CSA, if they didn't take seriously what he wrote because he was the one who wrote it, what good was he in the spot he was holding?

Sharp, quick, abrupt footsteps behind him. He recognized them before Clay Herndon said, "Good morning to you, Sam."

"Morning, Clay." Sam spun around in his chair. It squeaked. "I've got to oil that, or else set a cat to catch the mouse in there." He felt a little less morose as he blew smoke at Herndon. The reporter didn't treat him as if he suffered from a wasting sickness. Clemens ruffled the telegrams on his desk. "Still nothing out ofPhiladelphia , I see."

"Not a word," Herndon agreed.

"How long can President Blaine sit there like a broody hen before he hatches a yes or a no?" Clemens demanded.

"Been a day and a half so far," Herndon said. "He doesn't seem to be in much of a hurry, does he?"

"He was in a hurry to start the damned war," Sam said. "Now that he's got a chance to get out of it easier and cheaper than anybody thought he would, I don't know what in creation he's waiting for."

"ChihuahuaandSonora ," Clay Herndon said.

Clemens rolled his eyes. "If he thinks a slab of Mexican desert is worth the Children's Crusade he's thrown against Louisville, he's . . . he's . . . he's the fellow who was in a hurry to start the damned war."

He sighed. "Since he is that fellow, he's liable to keep right on at it, I suppose. But if he can't live with this peace, I don't know where he'll find a better one."

"But if he says yes to it, then he has to go and tell the voters why he went and started a war and then quit before he got anything out of it," Herndon said.

"That's true," Clemens admitted. "But if he says no, he's liable to have to go and tell the voters why he went and started a war and then lost it. That made Abe Lincoln what he is today."

"A rabble-rousing blowhard, do you mean?" Herndon said, and Sam

laughed. The reporter went on,

"What I think is thatBlaine 's like a jackass between two bales of hay, and he can't figure out which one to take a bite out of."

"Blaine's like a jackass more ways than that." Sam threw back his head and did an alarmingly realistic impression of a donkey.

That made Herndon laugh in turn. "Time to get to work," he said, and headed off to his own desk.

"Time to get to work," Clemens repeated. He looked upon the notion with all the enthusiasm he would have given a trip to the dentist. What he wanted to do was write an editorial. He couldn't do that tillBlaine figured out which bale of hay made him hungrier.

Edgar Leary came up with a couple of sheets of paper in his hand. "Here's that story about the people who were stranded inColorado when the Mormons closed down the railroad, boss," he said. "You should hear the way they go on. If it were up to them, there wouldn't be enough lamp posts to hang all the Mormons from."

"Give it here. I'll have a look at it." Sam took the sheets and proceeded to edit them almost as savagely as he'd dealt with Mayor Sutro's inanities over at City Hall. Leary had the *Morning Call's* slant on the story straight: the Mormon troubles wereBlaine 's fault, for the settlers inUtah would never have dared defy the power of theUnited States were that power not otherwise occupied. But the young reporter was wordy, he had trouble figuring out what was important and what wasn't, and once, perhaps absently—Sam hoped absently—he'd written *it's* when he meant *its*.

By the time Sam finished butchering the story, he felt better. He took it over to Leary. "See if I've done anything to it that you can't stand. If I have, tell me about it. If I haven't, clean it up and take it to the typesetters."

"All right, boss," Leary said. Clemens' tone warned him he would not be wise to defend his original version too strenuously. He looked down at the paper, then up at his editor. His unlined face turned red.

"Did I write that?"

"The apostrophe, you mean? It's not in *my* handwriting." Sam strode off.

He spent the rest of the morning arguing with people who didn't want their stories shortened; with people who hadn't finished stories that would eventually need shortening; with typesetters who, by all appearances, couldn't spell *cat* if he spotted them the *c* and the *a;* and with printers who hadn't tightened the nine wood blocks of an engraving of the ruins of Louisville enough to keep the spaces between them from showing on the page as thin white lines.

"No, of course it wasn't you fellows," he said when the printers tried to deny responsibility. "A British spy sneaked in and did it while you weren't looking. If he's hiding under one of your presses and jumps out and does it again, though, I'm going to be very unhappy— and so will you."

Quarreling till noon helped him work up an appetite—or maybe his stomach was growling from nerves because he still didn't know which way President Blaine would jump. However that was, he'd grown ravenous by the time twelve o'clock rolled around. He collared Clay Herndon and said, "Let's go over to the Palace for lunch."

"Bully!" Herndon lifted a gingery eyebrow. "Are you counterfeiting double eagles down in your cellar, or is Mayor Sutro paying you not to run that picture of him and Limber Hannah?"

Clemens' ears burned. He rallied quickly, saying, "If I had that picture, I'd run it on the front page, and I'd make damned sure the printers screwed the engraving blocks together good and tight. In a manner of speaking. Come on. If we're going to live, let's live a little."

"Sold!" Herndon sprang from his seat.

Being onMarket Street , the Palace Hotel was only a few minutes' walk from the *Morning Call* offices.

Going into the restaurant, though, was entering another world. Sam felt released from prison: no more dingy cubbyholes crammed with wisecracking newspapermen and smelling of printer's ink. The restaurant was bright and airy, full of starched white linen and gleaming cutlery, and as full of the odors of good food and even better tobacco. In such surroundings, Sam was almost ashamed to light up one of the cheap cheroots he enjoyed more than any other cigars—almost, but not quite.

He ordered toasted angels—oysters wrapped in bacon, flavored with red peppers and lime juice, and grilled on skewers—and deviled pork

chops. Herndon chose oysters, too, in an omelet with flour and heavy cream. The waiter started to suggest that might make a better breakfast than a luncheon. Herndon fixed him with a steely glare. "If I wanted advice, pal, I'd have ordered some," he said. The waiter bowed and retreated. The reporter got his omelet.

"That's telling him," Clemens said, lifting a sparkling tumbler of whiskey in salute. "Put a fancy suit on some people and they think they own the world—and they make you believe it, too." He sipped from his drink, looked thoughtful, and went on, "That's probably why generals look like gold-plated peacocks."

"You're likely right," Herndon answered. Struck by the aptness of his own thought, Sam looked around the restaurant for officers. There wouldn't be any generals here, not with Colonel Sherman commanding the garrison, but the principle applied, in diminishing degree, to other ranks as well. He spotted a major, a couple of captains, and a lieutenant commander from the small Pacific Squadron of the U.S. Navy: all in all, enough in the way of epaulets and gold buttons and plumed hats to convince him he'd stumbled across a new law of nature.

Then the food arrived, and he stopped worrying about the U.S. Army, or even the Navy. The toasted angels were perfect, or maybe a little bit better: the bacon brought out the delicate, oceanic flavor of the oysters, with the pepper and lime juice adding a piquant counterpoint. And the pork chops, served in a sauce of mustard, horseradish, and chutney, had a solid, fatty taste that made him demolish them one after another.

Across the table from him, Herndon was methodically laying waste to the omelet. "God damn, Sam," he said, features working in the throes of some deep emotion, "why don't we do this more often?"

"Only reason I can think of is that I'm not stamping out double eagles downstairs," Clemens answered, real regret in his voice. "I felt like it today, that's all. I'll feel like it tomorrow, too, but my wallet won't."

After more whiskey, Turkish coffee, and zabaglione, the two newspapermen sorrowfully paid the bill and even more sorrowfully walked back to the *Morning Call.* As soon as they came through the door, Edgar Leary all but leaped on them. He was waving a telegram in his hand and dancing around as if about to hit the warpath.

"Easy, there," Sam said. "Get the rattlesnake out of your

unmentionables and tell us what the devil's going on."

"We've gotBlaine 's answer," Leary said, waving it in Clemens' face. "Came over the wire not five minutes ago." Before Sam could snatch it out of his hand, he went on, "Blainesays no—a big, loud, no.

We aren't licked anywhere, he says—"

"Anywhere butNew MexicoTerritory ," Sam broke in. He checked himself. "Never mind. I'll shut up.

What else does he say?"

"Says we were right to fight at the beginning, and says we're still right now. Says we're going to make the Confederate States cough up what they had no business taking in the first place. Says—"

Clemens could restrain himself no longer: "He says we'll make the Empire of Mexico keep those two worthless provinces if we have to kill every man in theUnited States to do it."

"That's not quite how he put it," Leary said.

"No, but that's what it means." Now Clemens did take the telegram from him. He rapidly read through it, then nodded. "Yes, that's what it means, all right. If we'd spent five millions a few months ago, we could have made Maximilian happy and taken all the steam out of Longstreet's boiler. Now we'll spend ten or twenty or fifty times that much, and for what? What do we get? A war that isn't going anyplace, soldiers maimed and murdered by the thousands, and tomorrow's editorial for me. Isn't that grand?"

Without waiting for an answer, he carried the telegram back to his desk, read it again, and began to write:

"Throw some good money after the bad," you will hear them say, after you have thrown away half your life's savings on a railroad that goes up a mountain but does not come down the other side; or on a street-paving company whose president has lacked the forethought to cross your mayor's palm with silver; or on your brother-in-law, whom you reckon must surely be right this once, having been wrong so often, "throw some good after the bad, and you will earn it all back, and more besides."

This is what they tell you, and once in a blue moon they tell you the truth. The rest of the time, they buy themselves railroad cars—

heavens! railroads!—and yachts and shooting boxes inScotland and Congressmen to shoot from the shooting boxes, and they do it with your bad money and your good impartially.

Yet this appears to be the theory upon which James G. Blaine has chosen to go on with this war, no other theory looking to hold. Not only has he chosen to throw good money after bad, but to throw good men after good. The dead mount up, and the peg-legged, and the hook-handed, and the blind, but never you fear, for we have gained a mile of ground in Kentucky, near enough, and have not lost above forty or fifty miles of New Mexico to make up for it, and have had Washington, D.C., knocked flat besides, and so victory must be right around the corner.

He rubbed his chin, studying what he'd done. "Will this cause them to make me out to be a Confederate spy again?" he murmured. He read the words once more. "To hell with that. It's the truth." He inked his pen and kept on with the editorial.

Chapter 11

Abraham Lincoln watched the soldiers building the gallows outsideFortDouglas . It was a touch of General Pope's, either extraordinarily good or extraordinarily bad, depending on how things worked out, forLincoln was not the only one watching that exercise in practical carpentry. Far from it: the work had to be visible from a goodly part of Salt Lake City, and those of the Latter-Day Saints who could not see it would have heard of it.

AsLincoln watched the men labour, stripped to their shirts, a guard in a blue blouse watched him. He suspected the guard had stretched the truth about his age to get into the Army. The fellow was trying to raise a mustache, but had only a little pale fuzz on his upper lip. His eyes never leftLincoln . It was as if he were tracking a nine-point buck, a resemblance only strengthened by the loadedSpringfield he carried.

The index finger of his right hand never got far from the trigger.

"You want to be careful with that,"Lincoln said mildly, "lest something happen we would both regret afterwards."

"Oh, no, Mr. Lincoln." The guard shook his head. "I wouldn't regret it one bit." His smile was wide and bright and pitiless and about half crazy. "So you're the one who wants to be careful."

"Believe me, I shall,"Lincoln said. *Shot while trying to escape.* How many murders hid behind that stern mask of rectitude? He did not care to add another to the number.

Half a dozen traps on the gallows. Half a dozen nooses, though the ropes were not yet in place. Half a dozen Mormon leaders to dance on air at a time, though they were not yet in place, either.Lincoln knew John Pope wanted to hang him, too. Had Pope had his way, he would soon climb those steps with Orson Pratt and George Cannon and the rest of the high-ranking Mormons the U.S. Army had managed to run down. A Democrat in the White House might have let Pope hang him.

Of course, with a Democrat in the White House, theUnited States would no doubt have passively acquiesced to the Confederacy's acquisition ofChihuahua andSonora . The Mormons would not have gained an excuse for showing their disloyalty to the government that loved them so little. Would that have been better?Lincoln shook his head. TheUnited States should have resisted the expansion of the slave

power, and should have started resisting long since. His smile reached only one corner of his mouth.

TheUnited States should have done a better job of resisting, too.

One of the soldiers up on the multiple gallows tried a trapdoor. It didn't drop. "God damn it," he said, as any workman would have when what he was making didn't perform the way it should. He called to another soldier: "Hey, Jack, bring me over that plane, will you? Got to smooth this old whore down."

Yes, it was just work to him. If he thought about what the work would do, he didn't show it.

Lincolnturned away from the gallows and slowly walked back into the fort. The guard followed, finger still near the trigger of his rifle. "Son, I am not going to run away,"Lincoln told him. "I am seventy-two years old. The only way I could move faster than you would be for someone to throw me off a cliff yonder." He pointed north and east, toward the brown, sun-bakedWasatchMountains .

"That'd be good," the guard said, showing his teeth.Lincoln kept quiet.

InsideFortDouglas , Colonel George Custer was strutting across the parade ground. When he sawLincoln , he scowled and trotted toward him. For a moment,Lincoln thought the cavalry officer would collide with him. But by what he'd seen, Custer lived his entire life going straight ahead at full throttle.

That struckLincoln as needlessly wearing, but the cavalryman wasn't going to ask his advice.

Custer wanted to go chest-to-chest with him, but wasn't tall enough. He had to content himself with going chest-to-belly and fiercely scowling up intoLincoln 's face, as he'd done several times before. "If it were up to me," he growled, "you'd swing."

"I thank you kindly for the vote of confidence, Colonel,"Lincoln said.

Irony to Custer was like a mouse on the tracks to a locomotive: not big enough to notice. He rolled right over it, saying, "You dashed Black Republican, they should have hanged you after we lost the last war, they should have hanged you again for a Communard, and now they should hang you for a traitor. You're luckier than you deserve, do you know that?"

"I'm lucky in all the people who love and admire me, that's plain,"Lincoln answered.

Again, it sailed past the cavalry colonel. He paused to kick dust onLincoln 's shoes, another of his less endearing habits, then jerked a thumb back in the direction of General Pope's office. "The military governor is going to want to see you. You may as well go on over there now."

"I'll do that,"Lincoln said, amiably enough. When Custer did not move, he added, "Just as soon as you get out of my way, I mean." With another growl, the commander of the Fifth Cavalry stepped aside.

AsLincoln ambled along in the direction of Pope's office, the young lieutenant who'd arrested him at Gabe Hamilton's house came out of the stockade, spotted him, and came over at a run. "Mr. Lincoln! I was looking for you. General Pope—"

"Wants to invite me to take some tea with him,"Lincoln said as the lieutenant gaped. "Yes, so I've been informed." Resisting the urge to pat the youngster on the head,Lincoln walked past him toward the beckoning shade.

General John Pope looked up from the sheet of paper he was reading. "Ah, Mr. Lincoln," he said, taking off his spectacles and setting them on the desk. "I wanted to speak with you."

"So I've been told,"Lincoln said. A moment later, he repeated, "So I've been told." It meant nothing to Pope. It probably would have meant nothing to him had he seen both Custer and the young lieutenant come up toLincoln . The former president started to sit, waited for Pope's brusque nod, and finished setting his backside on a chair.

The military governor ofUtahTerritory glowered at him. It was probably a glower that put his subordinates in fear. SinceLincoln already knew Pope's opinion of him and was already in his power, it had little effect here. Perhaps sensing that, Pope made his voice heavy with menace: "You know what would happen to you if your fate were in my hands."

"I have had a hint or two along those lines, yes, General,"Lincoln answered.

"President Blaine forbids it. You know that, too. It's too damned bad, in my opinion, but I am not a traitor. I obey the lawful orders of my

superiors." Pope tried the glare again, not quite for so long this time. "Next best choice, in my view, would be putting convict's stripes on you and letting you spend the rest of your days splitting rocks instead of rails."

"In my present state, I doubt the gravel business would get as great a boost from my labours as you might hope,"Lincoln said.

Pope went on as if he had not spoken: "The president forbids that as well. His view is that no one who has held his office deserves such ignominy—no matter how much he deserves such ignominy, if you take my meaning."

"Oh yes, General. You make yourself very plain, I assure you."

"For which I thank you. I am but a poor bluff soldier, unaccustomed to fancy flights of language." Pope was a grandiloquent twit, given to nights of bombast. He didn't know it, cither; he was as blind about himself as he had been about Stonewall Jackson's intentions during the War of Secession.

"If you can't hang me and you can't put me at hard labour for the rest of my days, what do you propose to do with me?"Lincoln asked.

Pope looked even less happy than he had before. "I have been given an order, Mr. Lincoln, for which, to make myself plain once more, I do not care to the extent of one pinch of owl dung. But I am a soldier, and I shall obey regardless of my personal feelings on the matter."

"Commendable, I'm sure,"Lincoln said. "What is the order?"

"To get you out ofUtahTerritory ." Pope truly did sound disgusted. "To put you on a train and see your back and never see your face again. To make sure you interfere no further in the settling of affairs here."

That was better thanLincoln had dared hope. He did his best to conceal how happy he was. "If you must, General. I was bound forSan Francisco when matters here became unfortunate. I shall have to set up some new engagements there, having been detained so long, but—"

"No," Pope interrupted. "You are not going toSan Francisco . Neither are you going toDenver , norChicago , norSt. Louis , norBoston , norNew York . President Blaine has shown so much sense, if no more."

"Whither am I bound, then?"Lincoln inquired.

"You have a choice. You may go south toFlagstaff , inNew MexicoTerritory , or north toPocatello , inIdahoTerritory , and points beyond. For the duration of the war, you are to be restricted to the Territories north or south ofUtahTerritory . I am to advise you that any attempt to evade the said restriction will, upon your recapture, result in punishment far more severe than this internal exile."

"Ah, I see."Lincoln nodded sagely. "I may go wherever I like, provided I go to a place with, for all practical purposes, no people in it."

"Precisely." Pope was almost as deaf to irony as Custer.

"If you wish to muzzle me, why not simply leave me in confinement here inUtah ?"Lincoln asked.

"Confining you embarrasses the present administration, you being the only other Republican president besides the incumbent," General Pope replied. "Leaving you to your own devices here inUtah , on the other hand, embarrasses *me.* You have already proved beyond the slightest fragment of a doubt that you are not to be trusted here, but delight in meddling in affairs properly none of your concern."

"General, nothing that has happened inUtah since the outbreak of the war has delighted me,"Lincoln said:

"neither the deeds of the Mormon leaders nor those undertaken sinceU.S. soldiers reoccupied this Territory."

"If you equate the Mormons and the United States Army, we are well shut of you," Pope declared. "Had John Taylor and his henchmen simply remained good citizens, none of what we have had to do would have been necessary."

When phrased thus, that was true. ButLincoln had listened to Taylor and the other Mormons enough to know they thought every effort to abolish polygamy a persecution of beliefs they held dear. From what he had seen, they had a point. But did that matter? To anyone who took the view on polygamy of the vast majority of the American people, it mattered not at all.

Pope went on, "The time for coddling the rebels here is past. We have tried to persuade them to obedience, and failed. Persuasion having failed, we shall force them to obedience. One way or another, however, obedience we shall have."

"What you shall have is hatred,"Lincoln said.

"I don't care this much"—Pope snapped his fingers—"if every Mormon wakes up in the morning and goes to bed at night and spends all the time between praying that I roast in hell forever, so long as he obeys me while so praying. When you treat withTaylor , when you hold silence after treating withTaylor , you suggest to these poor ignorant folk that they too have some hope of successfully defying me. That 1

cannot tolerate, and that is why I am sending you out of this Territory."

Lincolnsighed. If singleminded ruthlessness could bring the Mormons to heel, Pope was the right man for the job, and Custer a good right hand for him. The question, of course, was whether such ruthlessness could do the job.Lincoln had his doubts. If John Pope had ever had doubts about anything, he'd had them surgically removed at an early age.

"I would sooner send you out of this Territory to your eternal reward," Pope said, "but, as I have noted, that is not among the choices President Blaine has left me. In fact, he has left the choice to you, and a better one than you deserve, too: north, Mr. Lincoln, or south?"

Lincolnwondered if promising to arrange the peaceable surrender of John Taylor would let him stay here and work to avert the tragedy he so plainly saw coming. Had he seen the slightest hope of success in keeping such a promise, he would have made it. But he did not think the Mormon president would surrender. Even had he reckonedTaylor willing, he did not think General Pope would let him make the arrangements. And he did not think that, ifTaylor should surrender, Pope would do anything but hang him.

"North or south?" the military governor repeated. "That is the sole choice left you."

He was right. Knowing he was right saddenedLincoln as he had not been saddened since having to recognize the independence of the Confederate States. "North," he said.

Pope clapped his hands together. "And I win an eagle from Colonel Custer. He was ten dollars sure you'd say south. But for that, though, it matters little. During the War of Secession, you exiled me toMinnesota to fight redskins, and then lost the war anyhow. Now I get to return the favor, and, if you think it isn't sweet, you're wrong."

"I hope you don't lose the war here,"Lincoln said.

Being in Pope's power, he was not suffered to have the last word. "There is no war here," the military governor said harshly. "There shall be no war here. Your going makes that the more likely. You leave tomorrow."

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General Orlando Willcox studied the map ofLouisville . "Give me your frank opinion, Colonel Schlieffen," he said. "Might I have been wiser to attempt a flanking movement than a frontal assault?"

Alfred von Schlieffen's frank opinion was that General Willcox would have made an excellent country butcher, but was less than ideally suited to command an important army—or even an unimportant one.

He did not think Willcox would appreciate his being so frank as that. Instead, he said, "Perhaps you might have made a small attack here to hold the foe, and a larger one on the flank to beat him."

"That's what I have in mind doing now," the commander of the Army of theOhio said. "I have reinforcements coming; President Blaine is committing the resources of the entire nation to this fight.

Instead of sending them straight intoLouisville , I purpose invadingKentucky at another point farther east, whence I can take the Confederates' defenses of the city in the flank. What is your view of the matter?"

Again, Schlieffen could not make himself be so forthright as he might have liked. "What could have at the campaign's beginning been done and what can now be done are different, one from the other," he said.

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," Willcox said. "But we have the Rebs well and truly pinned down inside ofLouisville now, thanks be to God. They won't be able to shift quickly to respond to such a move now."

Some truth lurked at the bottom of that. How much? Schlieffen admitted to himself he did not know. He did not think the world had ever known a battle like this one. Sieges had been fought around cities, yes, but in all history before now had a siege ever been fought in the heart of a city? That, in essence, was what the fight forLouisville had become.

When he said so aloud, Willcox nodded. "That's just what it's turned into," he agreed. "The question is, are we the besiegers or the besieged?"

"Both at the same time," Schlieffen answered. "Each of you thinks you can the other force back, and so you both push forward— and you collide, and neither of you can go ahead or to fall back is willing. Have you ever seen rams bang heads together?"

"Oh, yes," Willcox said. "That's why I aim to try out this flanking manoeuvre. A ram that butted another in the ribs before it was ready to fight would tup a lot of ewes."

"Before it was ready to fight? Yes, in this you have right— *are* - right." Schlieffen corrected himself with a grimace of annoyance at his imperfect English. Anything imperfect annoyed him. "But if the second ram were already fighting, it would be harder to surprise."

"I don't even know whether this flank move will surprise the Confederates," Willcox said. "My bet is, surprised or not, they'll be too badly beaten up to do anything save ingloriously flee."

"You place on this bet a large stake," Schlieffen said, in lieu of asking Willcox where he was hiding his wits these days.

"Our cause being just, God will provide," the general said. "I have prayed over this decision, and I am confident it is the best thing we can do."

"Prayer is good," Schlieffen agreed from the bottom of his heart. "To prepare is also good. If you do not prepare, prayer asks of God a miracle. God will work a miracle when it suits Him, but suit Him it does not often."

"No, indeed," Willcox said. "If miracles were common, they would not be miracles." Schlieffen waited from him to draw the proper lesson from that. He drew . . . some of it. "We shall get these men intoKentucky and hurl them against the foe as expcditiously as possible."

Schlieffen took *expeditiously* to mean something like *expedition,* and had to have that straightened out, which Willcox did with patience and tact. The German military attache admired Orlando Willcox the man, who from all he could see lived an exemplary Christian life. He wished his opinion of Orlando Willcox the commander were higher.

The man did not lack courage. He had the ability to inspire his subordinates. Both of those were important parts of the general's art. These days, though, the art entailed more.

"InGermany ," Schlieffen said, "we would have done more planning before this battle began. We would have looked at the choices we might make. If so-and-so happened in the fighting inLouisville , we would have known we then needed to do this thing or that. We would have done the thing. We would not have had to think out on the spot what the thing would be to do."

Willcox looked at him with wide eyes. "We haven't got anything like that in theUnited States ."

"I know you have not this thing in your country," Schlieffen said in the pitying tones he would have used to agree with a Turk that railroads were sadly lacking in theOttoman Empire . "You have not in your country the understanding of a general staff."

"General Rosecrans heads up a staff in the War Department,"

Willcox said, shaking his head. "I have a staff here, and a sizable one, too."

"Yes, I have seen this," Schlieffen said. "It is not the sort of staff I mean. Your staff, when you decide the army will do thus-and-so, take your orders to the commanders of corps and divisions. They to you bring back any troubles these men may have with the orders."

"Yes," Willcox echoed. "What else are they supposed to do, for heaven's sake? Aside from the quartermaster and such, I mean."

"The staff of the War Department should have in peacetime been busy at making plans for how you would fight when you had to fight." Schlieffen remembered the incomprehension with which Rosecrans had greeted the idea of having ready-made plans to roll out in case of war, and his own dismayed astonishment at theU.S. general-in-chief's lack of preparation. "Your staff here should on a smaller scale the same thing do."

What he was trying to say was that Willcox shouldn't have decided on the spur of the moment to try a flanking manoeuvre againstLouisville , and only then begun to make plans for such a manoeuvre. It should have been one of the possibilities all along, as thoroughly studied as any of the others. (So it was, zero equaling zero, but that was not what Schlieffen had in mind.) If and when the time came to use it,

everything would be in place beforehand: railroad transport, manpower, artillery, supplies, so much of each, to be delivered to the right place at the right time. What the Army of theOhio had instead was frantic improvisation. Some of it was inspired improvisation, as seemed to be the American way, but not all, not all.

Those thoughts ran through his mind far faster than he could hope to turn them into English. "No, we haven't got anything like that here," General Willcox said in wondering tones, impressed enough by what Schlieffen had managed to bring out. "You Germans really do that? Plan everything out ahead of time, I mean?"

"Aber naturlich," Schlieffen said, and then went back to English: "Of course."

"Maybe we ought to take some lessons from you, then," Willcox said, after a moment adding, "The Confederates haven't got anything like that, either."

"This I believe, yes," Schlieffen said. "They also—is it that you say in English, they make it up as they go along."

"We say that, all right," Willcox answered. "I say something else, too: I say I'm going to send a couple of telegrams toPhiladelphia , one to General Rosecrans and the other to President Blaine. Sounds like theUSA ought to know more of what you're talking about."

"The French have adopted this method," Schlieffen said with something less than delight. "They are our neighbors. They have seen what this lets us do. You are not our neighbors, but you have neighbors to north and south who are strong and with whom you fight, as we do to cast and west and south. It may help you better help yourselves."

"If it can make us win wars the way you Germans have won wars, I don't see how it could be better than that," Willcox said. He suddenly looked like what he was: a tired man, not so young as he had been, saddled with an assignment even he might have sensed was too big for him. In a wistful voice, he went on, "Been a long time since we won a real war. Indians don't count; sooner or later, they get worn down.

But we haven't trounced anybody since the Mexicans, and losing the War of Secession threw us down in the dumps for years."

"This I believe. We inPrussia were downcast when we lost to Napoleon, but we rose up and were soon again strong." Generously,

Schlieffen added, "The United States can also do this."

"I ask the Lord on bended knee every night to make it so," Willcox said. "I am nothing. My country is everything to me."

"You are a good man, General. This is how a soldier must think." Schlieffen turned to go. "I thank you for giving of your time to me. I know you have much to do." Willcox nodded abstractedly. His eyes were back on the map. Of itself, one of his fingers traced the flanking move he was planning. He sighed and plucked at his beard.

As Schlieffen left the army commander's tent, Confederate artillery began tearing at the pontoon bridges U.S. Army engineers had thrown over theOhio . Every so often, the guns of the South managed to put one span or another out of action for a while, but theU.S. engineers were adept at making repairs.

Improvisation again, Schlieffen thought.

Smoke mantledLouisville , as it always did these days. Smoke also rose from the docks on theIndiana side of the river; Confederate gunners did not neglect them, either. In one regard, Orlando Willcox was assuredly correct: a fight on this line would take all summer, and would gain little ground if he kept fighting it the same way.

Schlieffen turned and looked to the north and east. He saw smoke plumes there, too, smoke plumes from the trains bringing in endless streams of reinforcements to be thrown into the fire as children in ancient days had gone into the fire of Moloch.

Maybe Willcox had the right of it after all. What he was doing did not work. That argued some other approach might work better. In the German Army, he would have had a list of such approaches at his fingertips, with similar lists of everything he needed to do to use any one of them. Here, he had to think of them for himself and then figure out their requirements. *Poor devil,* Schlieffen thought.

If theUnited States did try a flanking attack, could they conceal it till the time came to loose it? Schlieffen had his doubts, for a couple of reasons. One was that he doubted the ability of theUnited States to keep secrets as a general principle. Courage, yes. Growing industrial capacity, yes. Discipline? No.

But even with discipline, it wouldn't have been easy. WhenPrussia had fought the Austrians fifteen years before, each side easily spied on the

other. Why not? They both spoke the same language, with only minor differences of dialect. The same applied here. The Confederates could easily sneak men intoIndiana to observe their foes' preparations.

Of course, General Willcox and his henchmen could as easily send spies intoKentucky to keep an eye on Confederate troop movements and such. If Willcox was doing that, Schlieffen had seen no evidence of it. Did the commander of the Army of theOhio know whether his opponents were readying field fortifications to help their men withstand the blow he had in mind?

Schlieffen was tempted to go back and ask General Willcox whether he knew that. The map over which Willcox had been poring had not shown any Confederate field fortifications east ofLouisville . Did that mean none were there, or did it mean he didn't know whether any were there?

After taking a step in the direction of Willcox's tent, Schlieffen turned away once more. He was a neutral here. His duty was to observe and report and analyze the war between theUSA and the CSA, not to involve himself in the result of the struggle.

With a shrug, he headed off toward his own tent to write up what Willcox had told him. Even if he did make suggestions to theU.S. commander, he doubted Willcox would comprehend them anyhow.

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Colonel George Custer strode slowly down the row of men drawn up outsideFortDouglas . He had on his stern face, the one he always used at inspections. *Nothing will escape my eye,* that scowl said. *You had better be perfect — anything less and you will pay.*

It was, to a certain degree, humbug. Custer knew it. Enlisted men had been inventing ways to hoax inspectors since Julius Caesar's day, if not since King David's. Sometimes, though, they got nervous when the commanding officer's glare fell on them. Then they gave away things he might otherwise have missed.

Privately, he doubted that on this inspection. For one thing, he wasn't so sure about what to look for as usual. For another, he had trouble keeping up that stern facade.

About three-quarters of the way down the line, he gave up and let himself grin. "Well, boys," he said, "I expect you'll be able to give the

Mormons holy Hades if they step out of line. What do you say to that?"

"Yes, sir!" chorused the soldiers with the red facings on their uniforms.

"And if you do have to open up on them, I expect they'll die laughing," Custer went on. "I declare, you've got the funniest-looking contraptions there in the complete and entire history of war. I've seen them in action, and they're still funny-looking. What do you say to *that?"*

"Yes, sir!" the Gatling-gun crews chorused once more.

Eight Gatlings now, each one with the brass casing polished till it gleamed like gold. "Do you know what General Pope calls your toys?" he asked the men who served them.

"No, sir," they answered, still in unison.

"Coffee mills," Custer told them, and grins came out on their faces, too. With the big magazines set above those polished casings, with the cranks at the rear of the weapons, they did look as if they'd be suited to turning coffee beans into ground coffee. They could take care of more grinding than that, though. Custer said, "If the Mormons *do* give us trouble, we'll have them ready for boiling up in the pot in nothing flat, won't we?"

"Yes, sir!" the soldiers in artillerymen's uniforms responded.

Some of them glanced toward the gallows not far away. Custer's eyes traveled in that direction, too. The exercise in carpentry was finished now. Each trap had a noose above it. The ropes twisted in the breeze off theGreat Salt Lake . Before long, blindfolded men would twist at the ends of those ropes.

"Traitors," Custer muttered. "Just what they deserve. Pity we couldn't give it to Honest Abe, too." He raised his voice: "If the Mormons riot when we hang the devils who held theUnited States to ransom, will we do our duty, no matter how harsh it may prove?"

"Yes, sir," the Gatling gunners said.

Custer's grin got wider. The next enlisted man he found with any sympathy for the Mormons would be the first. "Remember, boys," he said, "if we do have to shoot them down, we'll be making an uncommon number of widows." The gun crews laughed out loud. A

couple of soldiers clapped their hands with glee.

As far as Custer was concerned, the Mormons were a dirty joke onAmerica . Whatever happened to them, he thought they had it coming. He peered down the row of Gatling guns. As far as he was concerned, they were a joke of a different sort. A couple of them had proved useful against the Kiowas and the Confederates. Eight, now, eight struck him as excessive.

Major Tom Custer came strolling out fromFortDouglas to join his brother. The two of them had matching opinions on the new weapons. In a low voice, Tom asked, "Suppose we really have to go and fight the Rebs, Autie. What in blazes will we do with these ungainly critters?"

"Don't rightly know," Custer admitted, also out of the side of his mouth. He walked a little farther away from the Gatlings so he and Tom could talk more freely. "Best thing I can think of is to do what we did to the Kiowas—put 'em on good ground and let the enemy bang his head against them."

"I suppose so," Tom said. Like his brother, he would have led his men at full tilt against any foe he found.

Also like his brother, he assumed any other officer would do the same.

"I just hope we get the chance to try it, or to move against the Rebs without the Gatlings," Custer said.

"Frankly, I'd prefer that. What good will eight of the things do us? None I can see, and they'll slow us down as soon as we get away from the railroad line."

"Two didn't, not too much," Tom observed.

"That's so, but with eight there are four times as many things to go wrong," Custer replied, to which his brother had to nod. He went on, "Right now, though, everybody thinks they're a big thing, so we're stuck with them come what may. Sooner or later, my guess is that the War Department will decide they're nothing but a flash in the pan."

"You're likely right," his brother said.

"Of course I am." Custer spoke with his usual sublime confidence. He pulled out his pocket watch, looked at it, and let out a low whistle. "Tom, I'm late in town." He pointed down towardSalt Lake City .

"Will you dismiss these fellows and tell them what good boys they are?

If I'm not where I'm supposed to be on time or dashed close to it, I'm going to get skinned."

"Sure, I'll take care of it for you," Tom answered, "but what's so all-tired important down there?"

Custer set a finger in front of his lips for a moment. "I've got a lead that needs following up," he whispered melodramatically. "If it turns out the way I hope it will—well, I don't want to say too much."

Tom's eyes widened. "Don't tell me you've got a line on John Taylor."

"I won't tell you anything," Custer said. "I can't tell you anything. But believe me, I've got to go."

"All right, Autie. If you do bring that scoop back, I'll bet you'll have a brigadier general's stars on your shoulder straps this time tomorrow."

"That would be fine, wouldn't it?" Custer slapped his brother on the shoulder, then hurried off to the stables. The hands in there were supposed to have his horse ready. He was glad they did. He sprang up into the saddle, let the horse walk out ofFortDouglas , and then urged it up into a trot. Tom had the Gatling-gun crews well in hand. Custer had been sure he would. Tom was ready for a regiment of his own. He didn't much want one, fearing higher rank would keep him out of the field more than he fancied.

The road intoSalt Lake City ran south and west. The Mormons Custer passed on it cither gave him hate-filled snarls and glares or pretended he didn't exist. He preferred the former: it was honest. Every so often, a man would clap his hands or wave his hat to the commander of the Fifth Cavalry. Custer always waved back, knowing the Army needed backing fromUtah 's Gentiles, as it would surely get none from the Latter-Day Saints.

He did admire the way the Mormons had lined their boulevards with trees. That helped make the heat more bearable. Under the Eagle Gate he rode, as he had when first enteringSalt Lake City . He kept looking around in all directions while doing his best not to let that be noticed. He wanted nobody, soldier or Mormon, on his trail. The fewer who knew of the business he was on, the better for everyone.

No one was following him when he turned onto a narrow street, really

more of an alley, a few blocks southeast ofTemple Square — though when theTemple would be completed was anyone's guess now.

Probably about the time the Jews rebuild theirs inJerusalem , Custer thought derisively.

He hitched his horse in front of a battered adobe building with cafe painted in faded letters on the whitewash above the door. Before he went in, he looked around again. Nobody but he was on the street. The nearby shops and houses drowsed in the afternoon sunshine. Satisfied, he went through the door.

Inside, the place was full of the good odors of roasting pork and fresh-baked bread. It was, however, empty of customers. In a way, that was too bad: it deserved better. In another way, though, it was perfect for the meeting Custer had in mind.

Hearing the door open and close, the proprietress came out from the back room: a redheaded woman in her late twenties, the map ofIreland on her saucy face. She walked up to Custer and asked, "And what can I do for you today, sir?"

"Ah, Katie, my very dear, it's what we can do for each other," he replied, and took her in his arms.

The first time he'd tried the cafe, he'd been after nothing more than dinner. He'd got that—and a fine one it was, too—and a deal of friendly banter from Katie Fitzgerald besides. That and the food had brought him back. On his second visit, he'd learned she was a widow, doing her best to make ends meet. On his fourth visit . . .

Now, their lips clung, their hands clasped, their bodies molded to each other. Custer, exulting in his strength, picked her up and carried her back to the bedroom. She laughed. She'd squealed, the first time he did it.

"Hurry," she said when he set her down. He needed no urging along those lines. Fast as he could, he divested himself of blouse and shirt, of boots and socks, of trousers and drawers. He was fast enough to be ready to help her loosen the stays of her corset and slide it down over her hips before they embraced again, naked this time, and tumbled down onto the bed.

Custer had strayed off the path of perfect rectitude before, sometimes with Indian women, sometimes with whites. When Libbie was close by, he made himself a model of circumspection. When she wasn't, he

did what he did, as discreetly as he could, and worried about it very little afterwards.

"I love you," Katie Fitzgerald breathed into his ear. He had never said that to her. He was, in his own fashion, honest. But the way his fingers stroked the softness not quite hidden in the fiery tuft of hair between her legs might almost have been an equivalent. Her soft moan said she took it for one.

She moaned again when he went into her, and shut her eyes tight, lost in her own world of sensation.

Custer laughed, deep in his throat. Libbie did the same thing. Then he stopped thinking about Libbie, or about much of anything at all. His hips pistoned, faster and faster. Beneath him, Katie yowled like a catamount. Her nails scored his back.

At the last possible moment, he pulled out of her and spurted his seed over her soft, white belly. He prided himself on his control there as much as he did on his skill with a gun or on horseback.

"It's a sin," Katie whimpered half-heartedly. She was a good Catholic, but she did not want to find herself in a family way. One side of her mouth quirked upward. "It's messy, too. Get off me, so I can clean myself." She did just that, with a rag and some water from the pitcher on the bedside nightstand.

As fast as he'd got out of his uniform, Custer got into it again. As he'd helped Katie undress, he helped her dress, too. When they were both fully clothed once more, he said, "My brother thinks I'm out hunting John Taylor." He found that deliciously funny; a reputation for single-minded devotion to the task at hand was a disguise as effective as false beard and wig. There were tasks, and then there were tasks.

"Well, when you're not here, that's a good thing for you to do," she answered seriously. "The sooner he's on the end of a rope, the better off this place will be." Custer had never yet heard any Gentile with a good word to say about the Mormon president.

"Now I've got to go," he told her. He kissed her and caressed her and pretended he didn't sec the tear slide down her cheek. He'd never told her he was married, not in so many words, but he hadn't pretended to be a bachelor, either. He said, "I'll see you again as soon as I can."

"What if I have a customer?" she asked with a sly little smile.

"I'll be disappointed," he answered, which changed the smile to a different sort. She hugged him one more time, fiercely, then let him

go-No one paid any more than the usual attention to him as he rode

back up toFortDouglas . He whistled "Garry Owen," as he might have done going into battle. But he'd fought his battle here, fought it and won it.

When he got back to the fort, his younger brother collared him at once, as he'd known Tom would.

"Any luck?"

Yes, but not the sort you 're thinking of."Not so much as I should have liked," Custer said, and made himself look unhappy with the world.

"They're wily devils, the Mormons," Tom said sympathetically. "But you have more luck than you know, as a matter of fact."

"Do I?" Custer looked up his sleeve, as if hoping to find it lurking there. As his brother laughed, he asked, "Whereabouts?"

To his surprise, Tom turned and pointed across the parade ground. "Here it comes now," he said.

"Hello, Autie, darling!" Libbie Custer waved to her husband. "They finally let me escape fromFort Dodge , so here I am, with all the animals in tow. I expect they're unpacking the trophies even now." She hurried forward to give Custer a hug.

He had faced death more times than he could count, against Confederates and Indians both. What he did now, he thought, took more courage than any of those desperate fights. He threw his arms wide. "Ah, Libbie, my very dear!" he said enthusiastically, and smiled a big, broad smile.

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"Tombstoneis still ours," Theodore Roosevelt said, the name tolling like a mournful bell in his mouth.

"Let's hope plenty of Rebel tombstones will go up there if General Stuart does choose to attack it."

"Hasn't happened yet, like I told you," the courier fromFortBenton

said.

"I pray to the Lord it does not happen,"Roosevelt declared. "I pray to the Lord that we instead attack the Confederate forces inNew MexicoTerritory and drive them from our soil."

Lieutenant Karl Jobst had been taking a swig of coffee. When he lowered the tin cup from his lips, he said, "We already tried that, sir, and got licked. That's whyTombstone is in so much trouble now."

"A shame and a disgrace,"Roosevelt growled. "Wherever the fighting truly matters—wherever it's bigger than I'll raid your farms and you raid mine—the damned Rebels have the bulge on us."

"There's a reason for that, sir," Jobst said.Roosevelt raised an eyebrow. His adjutant went on,

"Wherever the fighting matters, it's fighting between enough men on each side to have a general commanding them. Our generals fought in the War of Secession and lost. Theirs won. Need I say more?"

"That's pretty damned cynical for so early in the morning,"Roosevelt said. Lieutenant Jobst grinned at him. His own smile was on the strained side. "It also has the unpleasant ring of truth."

The courier spoke up: "Sir, have your men seen any sign that the British are likely to move soon?

Colonel Welton asked me to ask you special."

"Nary a one."Roosevelt sprang to his feet and paced around the cook fire. When he'd recruited the Unauthorized Regiment, his head had been full of the rasping roar of the rifles and the fireworks smell of burnt gunpowder. He'd wanted battle. What he'd got was boredom, and he was beginning to chafe under it. "If he hadn't told me they were inLethbridge , I'd have guessed they hadn't come any closer than Labrador, or maybeLondon ."

"Yes, sir. That's right good, sir." The soldier chuckled. "Sir, if it's like you say and them bastards are being quiet, Colonel Welton asks if you reckon you can leave your command for a couple-three days, come down to the fort and talk things over: how it's all working out up here and what you'll do if the limeys ever should decide to get off their asses and try something."

"Yes!"Roosevelt sprang into the air. This was action. If not the action

against the British his heart wanted as much as his body craved a woman—which was no small yearning—it was something different from what he was doing now. After sameness that seemed unending, that drew him like a magnet. "Let's be off. I can leave as soon as I saddle my horse. We'll get you a fresh animal, so you won't slow the journey with your worn one. Aren't you done with that coffee yet? Good heavens, man, hurry!"

That was pushing things somewhat, but when any idea bitRoosevelt , it bit him hard. Inside half an hour, he and the courier, him with aWinchester on his back, the other man with aSpringfield , were riding south towardFortBenton .Roosevelt pounded a fist down onto his thigh in anticipation of his first return to the civilized world since taking the field. Then he laughed at himself. IfFortBenton counted for civilization, he'd been out in the wilderness too long.

Walk, trot, canter, walk, trot, canter. The two men kept their horses as fresh as they could by varying their gaits.Roosevelt held his mount to a canter longer than usual: as long as his kidneys could stand the jarring. No matter how rough it was, it ate up the miles.

He got intoFortBenton a little past sundown, riding along theMissouri the last few miles. When he dismounted, he discovered his own gait resembled nothing so much as that of a bear with the rheumatism.

As a couple of enlisted men took the horse away to be seen to, he stumped across the parade ground to Colonel Welton's office.

"My dear fellow!" Welton exclaimed. "You look as if you could use a good brush-down and a blanket across your back, and to the devil with your horse." He reached into a desk drawer. The kerosene lamps that lighted the chamber sent shadows swooping in every direction. Welton pulled out a corked bottle full of tawny liquid. "Can't give you that, I'm afraid, but what do you say to a small restorative?"

"I say, 'Yes, sir!' I say, 'Thank you, sir!' "Roosevelt sank into a chair. Sitting hurt as much as moving did.

"Oof! I say, 'Good God, sir!' "

"Don't blame you a bit." Welton poured him a restorative that might have been small for a rhinoceros. "I didn't expect you till tomorrow morning some time. That's a long ride for one day, but you are a chap who takes the bull by the horns. Wouldn't have eagles on your shoulder straps if you didn't, eh?"

"That's about the way I see it, sir."Roosevelt drank. Fire ran down his throat and exploded into contentment in his belly. "Ahh. I say, 'God bless you, sir!' You're right. A man without pluck goes nowhere."

Henry Welton sipped at his own glass of whiskey. "If that's the measure of success, you'll go far—and heaven help anyone who stands in your way." He took another sip. He was still behindRoosevelt , but he didn't need the drink so badly and was wise enough to remember he carried twice his guest's years. "So the British are quiet, are they?"

"Yes, sir—quiet as the tomb."Roosevelt did not even try to keep the regret from his own voice.

"I know how tempted you've been to go over the border and take a whack at 'em, the way a boy whacks a hornets' nest with a stick." Welton chuckled. "Be glad you've restrained yourself. Were you foolish enough to try anything of the sort, you'd get what the hornets would give the boy—if not from the British, then from your own side for disobeying orders."

"I understand that, sir. I'm switched if I like it, but I understand it."Roosevelt stared at his glass. Where had the whiskey gone? "When President Blaine told Longstreet we weren't whipped yet, I thought the Englishmen would come down over the border, to try and make us change our minds. Er—I say, 'Thank you again, sir!' " Welton had restored the restorative.

Setting the bottle back on the desk, the commander of the Seventh Infantry studiedRoosevelt with considerable respect. "I looked for the very same thing, as a matter of fact," he said slowly. "You may be an amateur strategist, Colonel, but you're a long way from the worst one I've ever seen. If you can lead your men in action, too— well, in that case, you'll make a first-rate soldier."

"And I thank you yet one more time for that, sir."Roosevelt made himself be deliberate with his second glass of whiskey. After getting such a compliment, the last thing he wanted was to act the drunken fool—the young drunken fool—before his superior. "You called me down—that is, you said I might come down—so we could confer on how best to resist the British should they happen to recall they are men."

"Your men delay them and concentrate against them, mine join you, we pick the best ground we can, and we fight them," Henry Welton said, ticking the points off on his fingers. "How does that sound to

you?"

"It sounds bully,"Roosevelt said, "but, begging the colonel's pardon, I don't sec how it's any different from what we'd planned before the Unauthorized Regiment went up to watch the border."

"It's not," Welton admitted cheerfully, "but 1 figured a few days in town—even so small a town as Fort Bcnton—would do you a world of good. You're not used to going off on your lonesome for long stretches. Blowing off steam while everything's quiet won't hurt the war, and it'll help you."

As Roosevelt had seen, the fleshpots ofFortBenton were nothing to threatenNew York City , or evenGreat Falls . But Welton was right—the little town by the fort seemed positively sybaritic when set beside a regimental headquarters out in the middle of the emptyMontana prairie.

Still . . . "Sir, if you're generous enough to give me a few days of ease like this—and I do thank you for them; don't mistake me—might I give the troops in the regiment leave to come into Fort Benton one at a time, to blow off their steam? The troops adjacent to that coming in on furlough could spread themselves thinner to cover its ground. I should hate to take advantage of a privilege my men cannot enjoy."

"Well, I hadn't thought of it, but I don't see why not," Welton said. He stared across the desk atRoosevelt . "Colonel, have your troopers any conception of how fortunate they are in their commanding officer?"

"Sir, in this request I am only seeking to apply the Golden Rule."

"You *are* a young man," Henry Welton said. He raised a hand. "No, I mean nothing by that but praise.

We need young men, their energy and their enthusiasm and their idealism. Without them, this part of the country will never come to its full growth."

Had Welton meant nothing by the remark but praise, he wouldn't have felt the need to amplify and justify it so.Roosevelt was not so young as to fail to understand that. But, even with whiskey burning through him, he refused to take offense. Instead, he answered, "Some few men are fortunate enough to retain their youthful energy and enthusiasm and idealism throughout the whole span of their lives. They are the ones the history books written a hundred years after they are dead call great. I cannot judge the course of my life before I run it, but that is

the goal to which I aspire."

Henry Welton didn't say anything for fully five minutes after that. One of the lamps burned out, filling the room with the sharp stink of kerosene and throwing new dark shadows across his face. When at last he spoke, it was from out of those shadows and in a meditative tone suited to them: "I wonder, Colonel, what the old generals and captains who had fought so long and so well under Philip of Macedon thought when Alexander gathered them together and told them they were going to go off and conquer the world.

Alexander would have been about the age you are now, I expect."

Rooseveltstared. Nothing he could say or do sitting down seemed thanks enough. Forgetting his aches and pains, he sprang to his feet and bowed from the waist. "I can't possibly live up to that." Now he felt the whiskey; it put him at risk of sounding maudlin. "God made only one Alexander the Great, and then He broke the mold. But a man might do much worse than trying to walk as far as he can in his footsteps."

"Yes. So a man might." Welton paused again, this time to light a cigar. When he had it going, he chuckled self-consciously. *"In vino veritas,* or so they say. Lord only knows what they say about whiskey from aFortBenton saloon." He suddenly seemed to notice the lamp had gone out. "Heavens, what time has it gotten to be?"

"It's a little past ten, sir,"Roosevelt said after looking at his watch.

"I didn't mean to keep you gabbing here till all hours," Colonel Welton said. "You must be about ready to fall over dead. Let me gather you up and take you off to the bachelor officers' quarters for the night."

"As a matter of fact, I'm fine,"Roosevelt said, and, to his surprise, it was true. "Much better than I was when I first rode into the fort. Must be the excellent company and the equally excellent restorative."

"If you don't get some rest now, you won't be fine in the—" A knock on the office door interrupted Welton before he could finish the sentence. "Come in," he called, and a soldier did, telegram in hand.

Welton raised an eyebrow. "It must be after midnight back inPhiladelphia . What's so important that it won't keep till daybreak?"

"It's not fromPhiladelphia , sir," the soldier answered. "It's fromHelena , from the Territorial governor."

"All right, what's so important inHelena that it won't keep till daybreak?" Welton took the wire, read it, growled something vile under his breath, crumpled up the paper, and flung it across the room. "God damn that lazy bastard!"

"What's wrong, sir?"Roosevelt asked.

"You may have heard they booted Abe Lincoln out ofUtahTerritory for interfering with the military governor? No? Well, they did. He turned up inHelena preaching the power of labour, and started a riot down there. Now he's on his way up toGreat Falls , probably to preach on the same text. I'm supposed to help keep order there, and I'd have had a hell of a lot better chance of doing it if His idiotic Excellency hadn't waited till the day beforeLincoln was getting intoGreat Falls before bothering to tell me he was on his way. He's talking there *tomorrow night."*

"Sir, whomever you send, send me, too!"Roosevelt exclaimed. "I've always wanted to hearLincoln ."

"I'm not sending anyone," Welton said. "I'm going myself. You're welcome to ride along if you like." He waited forRoosevelt 's eager nod, then went on, "And now I will put you to bed, and put myself to bed, too. We have a busy day ahead of us tomorrow, and likely a busier night."

"Good!"Roosevelt said, which made Henry Welton laugh.

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As far as Frederick Douglass knew, he was by at least twenty-five years the oldest correspondent crossing theOhio with the second wave of invaders—no, of liberators—enteringKentucky . He'd wondered how much trouble he would have in getting permission to see the action at first hand.

He'd had no trouble at all. The officer in charge of granting such permissions was Captain Oliver Richardson. Instead of being difficult, General Willcox's adjutant had proved the soul of cooperation.

When the process was done, Douglass had said, "Thank you very much, Captain," with a certain amount of suspicion in his voice, hardly believingRichardson wanted to be helpful.

And then the captain had smiled at him. "It's my pleasure, Mr.

Douglass, believe me," he'd said, and the smile had got wider. That wasn't pleasure; it was gloating anticipation.

He thinks he's sending me off to be killed,Douglass had realized. *He hopes he's sending me off to be killed.* Worst of all, the Negro journalist couldn't say a word.Richardson had only done what he'd asked him to do.

And now, along with a raft—actually, a barge—full of nervous young white men in blue uniforms, a nervous elderly black man in a sack suit set out across the Ohio to go into the Confederate States of America for the first time in his life. On his hip was the comforting weight of a pistol. He didn't expect to do much damage to the Rebels with it. It would, however, keep them from ever returning him to the life of bondage he had been fortunate enough to escape.

U.S.artillery opened up, thunderous in its might. As had happened before the direct assault onLouisville , the southern bank of theOhio disappeared from view, engulfed in smoke. If all went according to plan, the bombardment would leave the Confederates too stunned to reply.

If all had gone according to plan,Louisville would have fallen weeks before, and this second assault would have been unnecessary. Douglass did his best not to dwell on that.

At the rear of the barge, the steam engine began hissing like a whole nestful of snakes. "Here we go, boys!" shouted Major Algernon van Nuys, who commanded that part of the Sixth New York Volunteer Infantry crammed aboard the awkward, ugly vessel. The soldiers cheered. Douglass wondered whether they were outstandingly brave or outstandingly naive.

No matter what sort of noises the engine made, the barge wasn't going anywhere in a hurry. It crawled away from the wharf and waddled south toward theKentucky shore of theOhio , one of many boats and barges in the water. As soon as they started moving, shells started falling among them. "We've been hoaxed!" somebody near Douglass exclaimed. "They said they were gonna knock all these Rebel guns to kingdom come. They lied to us, lied!" He sounded comically aggrieved.

One of his friends, a youngster with a more realistic view of the world, replied, "Likely they said that to the fellows who went over theOhio the first time, too. You think they were right then, Ned?"

Ned didn't answer; a shell that came down very close to the barge drenched everyone and set all the men cursing and trying to dry off.

Douglass decided, too late, that the occasion was probably informal enough for him to have escaped criticism even if he hadn't worn a cravat and wing-collared shirt.

How slowlyKentucky drew near! He felt he'd been on the barge forever, with every cannon in the Confederate States ofAmerica taking dead aim at him and him alone. The logical faculty he so prized told him that was an impossibility: it had been bare minutes since he'd set out from the northern bank of the river. With death in the air, though, logic cowered and time stretched like saltwater taffy.

"Once we land, we'll have to step lively," Major van Nuys called, cool as if his men were going onto the parade ground for drill, not into enemy territory to fight for their lives. "We'll form columns of fours and advance southwest in column till we meet the enemy, then deploy into loose order and sweep him aside.

Our shout will be 'Revenge!' "

His men raised another cheer for that. Only a handful of them were old enough to remember the War of Secession, but the scars from that defeat had twisted the national countenance ever since. Even the young soldiers knew why they wanted revenge. Douglass would have preferred *Libeity!* for a shout, or perhaps *Justice!* —but *Revenge!* would do the job.

The *Queen of the Ohio* had gone aground far harder than the invasion barge did. The steamboat had been going far faster when she grounded, too. Yelling fit to burst their throats, the soldiers of the Sixth New York swarmed off the barge. They swept Douglass along, catching him up in their resistless tide.

He counted himself lucky not to be knocked down and trampled underfoot.

"Get the devil out of the way, you damned old nigger!" somebody bawled in his ear. The soldier, whoever he was, didn't sound angry at him for being a Negro so much as for being an obstruction.

Whichever his reason, Douglass could do nothing to accommodate it. He had no more control over his own movement than a scrap of bark borne downstream by a flood on theMississippi .

And then, suddenly, he spun out of the main torrent of men and realized the muddy ground on which he was standing was not just any muddy ground but the muddy ground ofKentucky , of the Confederate States ofAmerica . He had carefully planned what he would do when at last he bestrode enemy soil.

Shaking his fist toward Stonewall Jackson inLouisville , he cried out, *"Sic semper tyrannis!"*

" 'Thus always to tyrants,' " Major van Nuys echoed. "Well said. But do you know what, Mr. Douglass?

That is the motto of the Confederate state ofVirginia ."

"Oh, they are great ones for taking a high moral tone, the Confederate States," Douglass said. "Taking a high moral tone costs them nothing. Living up to it is something else again."

Van Nuys did not linger to argue the point. He waved his sword to draw the attention of the men under his command—about the only use a sword had on a battlefield dominated by breechloaders and artillery.

Disembarking from the barge had mixed the soldiers promiscuously. Officers, sergeants, and corporals screamed like madmen to get them into some kind, any kind, of order and moving forward against the foe.

A few bullets cut the air. Even as the Sixth New York began its part of theU.S. flanking assault againstLouisville , a man fell with a dreadful shriek, clutching at his belly and wailing for his mother and someone named Annie. Sister? Sweetheart? Wife? Whoever she was, Douglass feared she would never set eyes on her young hero again. He hoped his own Anna would sec him once more.

When the soldiers began to march, the Negro journalist discovered that, with the best will in the world, a man in his sixties had a hard time keeping up with fellows a third his age. He did his best, stumping along heavily and managing to keep the tail of the column in sight.

Panting, he muttered, "The faster they go, the better I like it." If the men of the Sixth New York and all the other regiments thrown into the fight moved swiftly, they did so because the Confederate defenders had not the strength to withstand them. No one going straight intoLouisville had moved swiftly.

Two shells burst up ahead. A man flew up into the air, limp and boneless as a cloth doll tossed away by a girl who didn't feel like playing with it any more. Others were simply flung aside. Still others screamed when shell fragments sawed into their tender flesh.

"Come on, lads! Keep it up. Come on!" Major van Nuys called. "We can't play these games without paying a little every now and then. Believe you me, whatever it costs us, the Rebs will pay more."

More cheers rose from the Sixth New York. Van Nuys then ordered them into open echelon, which suggested to Douglass not only that they were already in the zone of combat but that they were liable to pay more than a little. How much the Confederates were paying was anyone's guess.

One thing was plain: the CSA had not resisted this thrust as they had the one aimed straight atLouisville .

That theU.S. soldiers were advancing and not entrenching to save their lives from devastating Confederate fire proved as much. Douglass hoped that meant the Rebels were at full stretch to contain theUSA inLouisville itself, and had little left to resist elsewhere.

The countryside was pretty: farms with belts of oaks and elms between them. After a moment, Douglass revised his first impression. The countryside had been pretty, and might one day be pretty again. War was rapidly doing what war did—making ugly everything it touched. Shell craters scarred meadows and fields. A couple of farmhouses and barns were already burning, smoke from their pyres staining the morning air. Several small cabins near a farmhouse also burned. For a moment, Douglass simply noted that, as any reporter would. Then he realized what those smaller buildings were.

"Slave shanties," he said through clenched teeth. "Even here, so close to theOhio and freedom, they had slave shanties. May they all burn, and all the big houses with them."

A few minutes later, a couple of U.S. soldiers with long bayonets on their Springfields led half a dozen or so Confederate prisoners back past him toward the river. A couple of the Rebs were wounded, one with his arm in a sling made from a tunic, the other wearing a bloody bandage wrapped round his head. All of them were skinny and dirty and surprisingly short: rumor made six-foot Confederate soldiers out to be runts. They did not look like invincible conquerors—petty vagrants was more like it.

"May I speak to these men?" Douglass asked their guards.

"Sure, Snowball, go right ahead," one of the men in blue replied. "Can't think of anything liable to make

'em feel worse, not off the top of my head I can't."

Douglass ignored that less than ringing endorsement. "You prisoners," he said sharply, to remind them of their status, "how many of you are slaveowners?"

Two men in gray nodded. The fellow with the bandaged head said, *"You* wouldn't bring me fifty dollars.

You're too damn old and too damn uppity."

"I can't help being old, and I'm proud to be uppity," Douglass said. "How dare you presume to own, to buy and to sell and to ravish, your fellow human beings?"

The captured Confederate laughed hoarsely. "You damn crazy nigger, I'd sooner ravish my mule than ugly old Nero who helps me farm." He spat a stream of tobacco juice. "And you got a lot of damn nerve tellin' me what I can and can't do with my property, which ain't none o' your business to begin with."

"Men and women are not property," Douglass thundered, as if to an audience of twenty thousand. "They are your brothers and sisters in the eyes of God."

"Not where I come from, they ain't," the prisoner said, and spat again. He turned to theU.S. soldiers guarding him. "You done caught us. Ain't that bad enough? We got to put up with this damn mouthy nigger, too? Take us away and put us somewheres, why don't you?"

"You're damn lucky you're breathin', Reb," one of the soldiers in blue answered. "You want to stay lucky, you'll do like you're told."

Douglass had often anticipated interviews with ordinary Confederates. This one wasn't going the way he'd anticipated. The other Rebel who admitted to being a slaveholder said, "What in blazes are the yˆw-nited States invadin' us for, anyways? We ain't done nothin' personal to you, nigger. We ain't done nothin' to nobody in theUSA . All we done is buy up a chunk o'Mexico wasn't doin' nobody no good nohow. An' you-all start shootin' at us an' blowin' us up on account of *that"* My pappy

always told me they was funny up inBoston andMassachusetts and them places, and] reckon he was right."

"The existence of a nation built on bondage is a stench in the nostrils of the entire civilized world,"

Douglass said.

"It ain't your business." Both Confederate soldiers spoke as one.

"It is the business of every man who loves liberty," Douglass declared. He threw his hands in the air; he and the slaveholders might have been speaking two different languages. He asked them, "How were you captured?"

The uninjured one said, "Three Yankees yelled at me to throw down my rifle at the same time. Right about then, I reckoned that'd be a plumb good idea."

"What about you?" Douglass asked the other one.

"You really want to know, nigger?" the Reb with the bandaged head answered. "I was squattin' in the bushes with my pants around my ankles, doin' my business, when this motherfucker in a blue coat says he'll blow me out a new asshole to shit through if n I don't put my hands high. So I done it." He gave Douglass a sour stare. "An' looky here—I got me the new asshole anyways."

That set not only the Confederate prisoners but also their guards braying like donkeys. Douglass stomped off. The Rebels' jeers pursued him. He paused to scribble in his notebook: *They are now, as they have long been, ignorant, uncouth, and stubbornly indifferent to the sentiments of their fellow men and to the appeals of simple human justice.*

Only a brute-like hardiness—ironically, the very trait they impute to their enslaved Negroes—enables them to persist in their infamous course.

A second look told him that was hardly objective. He grunted. "So what?" he said aloud. He put the notebook in his pocket and tramped off toward the southwest.

Chapter 12

General Thomas Jackson looked up from the map. "They are throwing everything they have into this," he observed. "Can we reduce our forces within the city ofLouisville to add a core of battle-hardened men to the forces we are deploying against their flanking manoeuvre?"

"I believe so, sir," Major General E. Porter Alexander answered. "They have stepped up their attacks within the city, but their troops there have not the dash and spirit they did when the fighting was new.

They know they are likely to gain little and to pay dearly for what they do get. Few men give their best under such circumstances."

"Any men who fail to give their best under any circumstances deserve the sternest treatment from their own superiors,"Jackson said. "The old Roman custom of decimation has much to recommend it."

"I wouldn't go so far as *that,* sir," Alexander said, trying to turn it into a joke.

"I would," replied Jackson, who saw nothing funny in it. Raising one arm above his head, he went on,

"But back to the nub of things. What can you do, General, about the Yankees' artillery? Their guns seriously hamper our efforts to move troops to face the attack from the east."

"They have more guns than we do," E. Porter Alexander said unhappily. "They've taken some off theLouisville front to do just as you say: to make shifting soldiers harder for us. It's a good thing you had the forethought to build so many trench lines around the city before the Yankees started moving against our flank. If we had to dig while we were fighting, we'd be in worse trouble than we are already."

"This demonstrates a point I have repeatedly stressed to President Long-street,"Jackson said: "namely, that having a servile population upon which we can draw in time of need confers great military advantage on us." He sighed. "The president is of the opinion that other factors militate against our retaining this advantage. Perhaps he is even right. For the sake of the country, I pray he is right."

"Yes, sir." General Alexander hesitated, then said, "Sir, do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"By no means, General. Ask what you will."

Despite that generous permission, Alexander hemmed and hawed before he did put the question: "Sir, why do you stick your arm up in the air like that? I've seen you do it many times, and it's always puzzled me."

"Oh. That."Jackson lowered the arm; he'd all but forgotten he'd elevated it in the first place. "One of my legs, it seems to me, is bigger than the other, and one of my arms is likewise unduly heavy. By raising the arm, I let the blood run back into my body and so lighten the limb. It is a habit I have had for many years, and one, I believe, with nothing but beneficial results."

"All right, sir." Alexander grinned at him. "I expect I ought to be glad I'm the same size on both sides, then."

"Is that levity?" The general-in-chief of the C.S. Army knew he had trouble recognizing it. "Well, never mind. The key to this fight will lie in halting the new Yankee thrust before it can crash into the flank of the position we were previously maintaining. The foe has been generous enough to give us considerable room in which to manoeuvre."

"He's given himself considerable room to manoeuvre, too," Alexander pointed out.

"You have set your finger on an unfortunate truth."Jackson studied the map again. "We have to manoeuvre more effectually, then. We have no other choice. As best I can judge from the reports reaching this headquarters, the intended direction of the Yankee column is—"

"Straight at us, near enough," Porter Alexander broke in.

"I believe you are correct, yes."Jackson took another long look at the indicatedU.S. line of attack.

"Absent interference, they would be here in a couple of hours. I intend to see that such interference is not absent."

"Sir!" A telegrapher waved forJackson 's attention. "I have an urgent wire here from Second Lieutenant Stuart, commanding the Third Virginia south and west of St. Matthews. His line to divisional headquarters is down, so he calls on you. He says the Yankees are there in great numbers. He's thrown an attack at them to delay and

confuse them, but requests reinforcements. 'Whatever you have,' he says."

"He shall be reinforced."Jackson 's head came up. "A lieutenant, commanding a regiment?"

"I don't know anything about that, sir, past what the wire says," the telegrapher answered. "Shall I order him to report the circumstances?"

"Never mind,"Jackson said. "If he has the command, he has it, and does not need his elbow jogged for explanations. Afterwards will be time enough to sort through the whys and wherefores."

E. Porter Alexander said, "One way or another, he won't be a second lieutenant by this time tomorrow.

Either he'll be a captain or maybe a major, or else he'll wind up a private with no hope of seeing officer's rank ever again." He paused. "Or, of course, he may well end up more concerned about his heavenly reward than any he might gain upon this earth. A lot of good men must have fallen for a lieutenant to assume regimental command. If afterwards he ordered an attack, he would hardly be removing himself from danger."

"That's true, General."Jackson studied the telegram, trying to divine more from it than the operator's bald statement had given him. Then, suddenly, his tangled eyebrows rose. "Second Lieutenant Stuart—that's S-T-U-A-R-T, General Alexander. Is our colleague's son not of that rank, and in this army?"

"Jeb, Jr.?" Alexander's eyebrows went up, too. "I believe he is, sir. Of course, even with that spelling, it's far from the least common of names. Would you answer his request any differently if you knew he was, or, for that matter, if you knew he wasn't?"

"In the midst of battle? Don't be absurd."Jackson tossed his head. As he did so, he remembered Robert E. Lee's habitual gesture of annoyance—Lee would jerk his head up and to one side, as if trying to take a bite out of his own earlobe. It was, inJackson 's view, ridiculous. Raising his arm over his head again, he concentrated on the map. "The Fourth Virginia, the Third Tennessee, and theSecondConfederateStates are ordered to support the attack of the Third Virginia, if their commanders shall not have already moved to do so of their own initiative."

"Yes, sir." The telegrapher's key clicked and clicked, almost as fast as

the castanets of the Mexican *senoritas* whose sinuous grace and flashing eyesJackson had admired during his long-ago service in the U.S. Artillery.

No sooner had he thought of artillery in one way than General Alexander did in another, saying, "We have three batteries by thevillageofWest Buechel , sir, that could lend the infantry useful assistance."

"Let it be so,"Jackson agreed, and the telegrapher's key clicked anew.

More and more wires began coming in to headquarters from that part of the field. Second Lieutenant Stuart, from whom nothing further was heard, had been right in reporting thatU.S. troops were there in great force. They had been driving forward, too. They no longer seemed to be doing so; Stuart's attack had done what he'd hoped, rocking them back on their heels. They must have thought that, if the Confederates were numerous enough to assault them, they were also numerous enough to beat back an assault.

Jacksonknew perfectly well that they had not been so at the time when Second Lieutenant Stuart ordered the attack. (Was it Jeb, Jr.? Hadn't Jeb, Jr., been born day before yesterday, or last week at the outside? Hadn't he just the other day graduated from a little boy's flowing dress into trousers?

Intellectually,Jackson knew better. Every so often, though, the passing years up and ambushed him. They had more skill at it than any Yankees. One day, they would shoot him down from ambush, too.) Even had it not been so then, it was rapidly becoming so now. *He who hesitates is lost* was nowhere more true than on the battlefield. The brief halt Stuart had imposed on the enemy letJackson bring forces up to yet another of the lines he had had the conscripted Negro slaves of the vicinity build. (He had every intention of sending President Longstreet an exquisitely detailed memorandum relating everything the slaves' labours meant to his forces. Longstreet, no doubt, would consign it to oblivion. That was his affair.Jackson would not keep silent to appease him.)

By midafternoon, the line had stabilized.Jackson called off the counterattack, which, he knew, must have cost him dear in terms of men. Though his instinct was always to strike at the enemy, he had come to see a certain virtue in the defensive, in makingU.S. forces rise from concealment to attack his men while the soldiers in butternut and gray waited in trenches and behind breastworks. (Unlike his

thoughts on slave labour, he did not plan on confiding that one to James Longstreet.)

When the crisis was past, he told the telegrapher, "Order Second Lieutenant Stuart to report to his headquarters immediately." As the soldier tapped out the message,Jackson sent a silent prayer heavenward that the lieutenant would be able to obey the command.

He caught E. Porter Alexander looking at him. His chief artillerist crossed his fingers.Jackson nodded.

Alexander had been thinking along with him in more than matters strictly military, then.

When Lieutenant Stuart did not report as soon asJackson thought he should, the Confederate general-in-chief began to fear the officer was now obeying the orders of a higher commander. But then, to his glad surprise, a sentry poked his head into the headquarters tent to announce that Stuart had arrived after all. "Let him come in; by all means let him come in,"Jackson exclaimed.

He and E. Porter Alexander both exclaimed then, for it was Jeb Stuart's son. *"How* the devil old are you?" Alexander demanded.

"Sir, I'm seventeen," Jeb Stuart, Jr., answered. He looked like his father, though instead of that famous shaggy beard he had only a peach-fuzz mustache. But for that, though, he looked older than his years, as any man will coming straight out of battle. With his face dark from black-powder smoke, he had the aspect of a minstrel-show performer freshly escaped from hell.

"How did you become senior officer in your regiment, Lieutenant?"Jackson inquired. How young Stuart had become a lieutenant at his age was another question, but one with an obvious answer—his father must have pulled wires for him.

"Sir, I wasn't," Stuart answered. "Captain Sheckard sent me back to Colonel Tinker with word that the Yankees were pressing my company hard."

"I see."Jackson wasn't sure he did, not altogether, but he didn't press it. Had Sheckard decided to get his important subordinate out of harm's way, or had he chosen him because he was worth less on the fighting line than an ordinary private? No way to tell, not from here. "Go on."

"There I was, sir, and a Yankee shell came down, and, next thing I knew, Colonel Tinker was dead and Lieutenant-Colonel Steinfeldt had his head blown off and Major Overall"—Stuart gulped—"the surgeons took that leg off him, I heard later. And the Yankees were coming at us every which way, and everybody was yelling, 'What do we do? What do we do?' " He looked a little green around the gills, remembering.

"Nobody else said anything, so I started giving orders. I don't know whether the captains knew they were coming from me, but they took 'em, and we threw the Yankees back."

Jacksonglanced at Alexander. Alexander was already looking at him. They both nodded and turned back to Jeb Stuart, Jr. Alexander spoke first: "Congratulations, son. Like it or not, you're a hero."

That summed it up better thanJackson could have done. He did find one thing to add: "Your father will be very proud of you."

"Thank you, sir." Stuart was less in awe ofJackson than most young officers would have been, having known him all his life. But the wobble in his voice had only a little to do with his youth. More came from the question he asked: "Sir, what would have happened if it hadn't worked out?"

Jacksonwas not good at diplomatic responses. He managed to come up with one now: "You probably would not be here to wonder about that."

The young officer needed a moment to see what he meant.Jackson was unsurprised; at that age, he'd thought he was immortal, too. Stuart licked his lips. He understood what might have happened, onceJackson pointed it out. He said, "I meant, sir, if I'd failed but lived."

"Best to draw a merciful veil of silence over that," E. Porter Alexander said.

Beneath his coating of smoke and soot, Jeb Stuart, Jr., turned red. "Er, yes, sir," he said, and turned back toJackson . "Sir, *will* we hold the Yankees from our flank?"

"That still hangs in the balance,"Jackson replied. "I will say, however, that we have a better chance of doing so thanks to your action, Lieutenant Stuart." He inclined his head to his old comrade's son. "You will be changing the ornaments on your collar in short order."

Jeb Stuart, Jr., understood that right away. He raised a hand to brush one of the single collar bars marking him as a second lieutenant. His grin lit up the inside of the headquarters tent, brighter than all the kerosene lamps hung there.

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Orion Clemens rolled a hard rubber ball through a couple of squads of gray-painted lead soldiers. "Take that, you dirty Rebs!" he shouted as several of them toppled. Sutro ran barking after the ball and through the soldiers, completing the Confederates' overthrow. With a cry of fierce glee, Orion sent blue-painted lead figures swarming forward. "They're on the run now!"

His father looked up from *Les Miserables.* "If only it were that easy, for our side or theirs," Sam Clemens remarked to his wife. "The war would be over in a fortnight, one way or the other, and we could slide back to our comfortable daily business of killing one another by ones and twos—retail, you might say—instead of in great wholesale lots."

Alexandra set Louisa May Alcott's *After the War Was Lost* on her lap. "I think too many telegrams from the front have curdled your understanding of human nature."

"No." He shook his head in vigorous denial. "It's not the wires from the front that make your belly think you've swallowed melted lead. It's the ones from the politicians, who keep on claiming the boys die to some better purpose than their own stubborn greed and the generals' stupidity."

Even Orion's triumphal advance was interrupted. Ophelia got the ball away from Sutro and threw it at the toy soldiers who wore blue paint. The missile struck with deadly effect. One of the many casualties flew into the air and bounced off Sam's shin.

"Artillery!" Ophelia cried. "Knock 'em all down!"

Sam studied his daughter with the mixture of admiration and something close to fear she often raised in his mind. She couldn't possibly have read the latest despatches out ofLouisville . . . could she? He shook his head. She was, after all, only four years old. She knew her ABCs, she could print her name in a sprawling scrawl, and that was about it. How, then, had she been so uncannily accurate about what the Confederate guns were doing toU.S. attackers?

She was Ophelia. That was how.

"Pa!" Orion shouted angrily. "Look, Pa! See what she did? She broke two of 'em, Pa! This one got his head knocked off, and this other one here, this sergeant, his arm is broke."

"Casualties of war," Clemens said. "See? You can't even fight with toy soldiers without having them get hurt. I wish President Blaine were here, I do. It would learn him a good one, if you don't mind my speakingMissouri ."

"Sam." Alexandra Clemens somehow stuffed a world of warning into one syllable, three letters' worth of sound.

"Well, maybe I could find a better time to talk about politics," her husband admitted. With a sigh, Sam raised his voice. "Ophelia!"

"Yes, Pa?" Suddenly, she sounded like an ordinary four-year-old again.

"Come here, young lady."

"Yes,Pa. " No, not an ordinary four-year-old after all: as she walked toward him, a halo of rectitude sprang into glowing life above her head. Sam blinked, and it was gone. A trick of the gaslights, or perhaps of the imagination, though what a newspaperman needed with such useless stuff as an imagination was beyond him.

"You broke two of your brother's lead soldiers," he said, doing his best to sound stern and not break out laughing at the sight of the oh so precious, oh so innocent countenance before him. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"I'm sorry,Pa. " The voice was small and sweet and pure, like the chiming of a silver bell.

Probably sorry you didn't wipe out the whole blasted regiment,Clemens thought. He turned her over his knee and gave her a swat on the bottom that was as much ritual as punishment. That opened the floodgates for a storm of tears. Ophelia always howled like a banshee when she got smacked. Part of that, Sam judged, was anger that she should be subjected to such indignities. And part of it probably stemmed from a calculation that, if she made every spanking as unpleasant as possible, she wouldn't get so many of them.

Orion seemed properly gratified at the racket his sister made. When

she stalked off to sulk in her tent, he held out the broken lead soldiers and asked, "Can you fix 'em, Pa?"

"I'll take 'em to the paper tomorrow," Clemens answered. "The printers can melt 'em down for type metal."

"Sam!" Three letters and an exclamation point from Alexandra this time. Too late. Orion started crying louder than Ophelia had.

Over those theatrical groans, Sam said, "I was only joking. They'll be able to solder the soldiers back together." He had to say it twice more, once to get his son to hear him through the caterwauling he was putting out and again to get the boy to believe him.

"Can't you remember to save all that for the editorial page and not to bring it home to your family?"

Alexandra asked after relative calm—and calm among the relatives—returned.

"I'm all of a piece, my dear," Clemens answered. "You can't very well expect me to flow like aPennsylvania gusher at the *Morning Call* and then put out pap for no better reason than that I've come home at night."

"Can I expect you to keep in mind that your son *will* believe you no matter what you say, while the politicos who read your editorials *won't* believe you no matter what you say?" Alexandra was never more dangerous than when she worked hardest to hold on to her patience.

Sam wagged a finger at her. "You had better be careful. You will make me remember that once upon a time I was fitted out with a sense of shame, and that's dangerous excess baggage for a man in my line of work."

"Hmm," was all Alexandra said. "Joke as much as you like, but—"

Orion broke in: "Pa, will you really and truly fix my soldiers?"

"They will rise from the dead—or at least the maimed—like Lazarus coming forth from his tomb,"

Clemens promised. Orion looked blank. His father explained: "In other words, yes, I will do that. If only General Willcox could make a similar—"

Alexandra suffered a coughing fit of remarkable timeliness. Sam shot her a look half annoyed, half grateful. Orion said, "As long as they really and truly get fixed, it's all right." He paused, then asked,

"When you get 'em soldered, will it leave scars on 'em, like?"

"I expect it may," Sam said solemnly. "I'm sorry, but—"

"Bully!" Orion exclaimed, which made his father shut up with a snap.

The next morning, Sam walked over to the *Morning Call* carrying the mortal remains of the lead soldiers in a jacket pocket. One of the printers, a wizened little Welshman named Charlie Vaughan, took a look at the casualties of war and said, "Yeah, we can set 'em right again." His cigar, made from a weed even nastier than those Clemens favored, bobbed up and down as he spoke. "Damn shame we can't fix the real soldiers this easy, ain't it?"

"You, sir, have been listening at my window," Sam said.Vaughan shook his head before realizing the editor was joking. He gave Sam a sour look. "Never mind," Clemens told him. "You'll make my son very happy and help my daughter out of trouble." He rolled his eyes. "And God forbid I should use that particular phrase fifteen years from now."

Jerk, jerk, jerk went the printer's cigar as he chuckled. "Know what you mean," he said. "I have three of

'em. Married the last one off a couple years ago, so I don't have to worry about that any more."

"All your children out of the house, then?" Clemens asked. When Charlie Vaughan nodded, he aimed another question at him: "How the devil do you stand so much quiet?"

"You think you're making fun of me again, only you ain't,"Vaughan said. "Gets almost spooky-like, sometimes." The cigar twitched. "Would be worse, I suppose, if my missus'd ever learned to shut her trap."

"I'll be sure to tell her you said that, next time I see her," Sam said, and beat a hasty retreat in the direction of his desk before the printer could choose one of the numerous small, heavy objects within arm's length and throw it at him.

"Morning, Sam," Clay Herndon said when he walked in a few minutes later. "What have you got there?"

"This? Police-court story Edgar turned in last night," Clemens answered, excising an adverb. "Man bites dog, you might say: three Chinamen charged with setting on an Irish railroad worker, whaling the stuffing out of him, and departing with his wallet. Since the Celestials decided the wallet was worth keeping, they must have caught the mick before he started his round of the saloons."

"Ha," Herndon said, and then, "You're right—that's not the way it usually goes. The Irish get liquored up, they cave in John Chinaman's skull, and the judge slaps 'em on the wrist. We've seen that story so many times, it's hardly news enough to put in the paper."

"Back when I first started working for this sheet, in the days when the office was over onMontgomery , you couldn't have put that story in the paper," Sam said. "Publisher wouldn't let you get by with it. He thought it would offend the Irish, though I always reckoned not more than a double handful of 'em could have read it."

"Those must have been the days," Herndon said. "This would have been a rip-snorting town back then."

"It was, when I first got here," Clemens agreed. "Then theUnited States went and lost the war, andSan Francisco got a lot of the snorts ripped clean out of it. The panic was a hell of a lot worse than it ever got back in the States." For the first time in a long while, he hauled out the oldCalifornia expression for the rest of theUSA . "The railroad hadn't gone through yet, remember, and we were about as near cut off from the rest of the world as made no difference—and the rest of the world seemed to like it just fine that way, too."

"I've heard it was pretty grim, all right," Clay Herndon allowed.

"Grim?" Clemens said. "Why, it made dying look like a circus with lemonade and elephants, because once you were dead you didn't have to try and pay your bills with greenbacks worth a hot four cents on the gold dollar—oh, they dropped down to three cents on the dollar for a week or two, but by then everybody who could be scared to death was already clutching a lily in his fist."

"Hard times," Herndon said. "Every time somebody who went through it here starts talking about it, you wonder how people got by."

"You hunker down and you hang on tight to what you've got, if it isn't that damn lily," Sam answered.

"The great earthquake of '65 didn't do us any good, either. You'll have felt 'em here now and again, but there's never been anything like that since, thank heavens, not even the quake of '72, which wasn't a piker. I don't reckon we'll see the like again for another couple of hundred years, and, if God pays any attention to what I think, that'd be too soon, too."

"Even the common, garden-variety earthquakes are bad enough," Herndon said with a shudder. "Makes me queasy just thinking about 'em." He deliberately and obviously changed the subject: "What's the war news?"

"They're killing people," Sam said, and let it go at that. When his friend coughed in annoyance, he blinked, as if surprised. "Oh, you want the *details."* He pawed through the blizzard of telegrams on his desk. "General Willcox has proved he can get stuck in two different places at the same time—a lesser man would have been incapable of it, don't you think? The British gunboats on the Great Lakes have bombardedCleveland again, though Lord knows why, having visited the place once, they felt inclined to come back. The Indians arc on the warpath inKansas , the Confederates are on the warpath inNew MexicoTerritory , and Abe Lincoln's on the warpath inMontanaTerritory . And, with ruffles and flourishes, the War Department announced the capture ofPocahontas,Arkansas ."

"Pocahontas,Arkansas?" Clay Herndon asked in tones that suggested he hoped Sam was kidding but didn't really believe it.

And Sam wasn't. He waved the telegram to prove it. "In case you're wondering, Pocahontas is almost halfway from the border down toward the vital metropolis ofJonesboro ," he said solemnly. "I looked it up. At first I thought it was only a flyspeck on the map, but I have to admit that further inspection proved me wrong. Hallelujah, I must say; no doubt the shock waves of the seizure are reverberating throughRichmond even as I speak."

"Pocahontas,Arkansas?" Herndon repeated. Sam nodded. "Ruffles and flourishes?" the reporter asked.

Clemens handed him the wire. He read it, grimaced, and handed it back. "Ruffles and flourishes, sure enough. Good God Almighty, we shouldn't cackle that loud if we ever do takeLouisville ."

"You can't cackle over the egg you didn't lay," Clemens pointed out. "We haven't gotLouisville , butPocahontas,Arkansas , by thunder, is

ours." He clapped his hands together, once, twice, three times.

"Sam . . ." Herndon's voice was plaintive. "Why do we have such a pack of confounded dunderheads running this country?"

"My theory used to be that we get the government we deserve," Sam said. "Bad as we are, though, I don't think we're *that* bad. Right now, I'm taking a long look at the notion that God hates us." He glanced up at his friend. "I know somebody who's going to hate you if you don't set your posteriors in a chair and get some work done." To soften that, he added, "And I'd better do the same." Returning his attention to Edgar Leary's story, he killed seven adjectives at one blow.

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A brisk crackle of gunfire came from the northern outskirts ofTombstone,New Mexico . Major Horatio Sellers turned to Jeb Stuart and said, "You were right, sir. They are going to try and hold the place. I didn't reckon they'd be such fools."

"I think we rolled most of the real Yankee soldiers back towardTucson —the ones we didn't capture atContentionCity , I mean," Stuart answered. "What we've got left in these parts is mostly Tombstone Rangers and the like, unless I miss my guess. They'll be fighting for their homes here."

"And they haven't got the brains God gave a camel," Sellers said, with which Stuart could not disagree, either. His aide-de-camp rubbed his hands together in high good cheer. "They'll pay for it."

Boom!A roar louder than a dozen ordinary rifle shots and a large cloud of smoke rising from the graveyard north of Tombstone declared that the U.S. defenders had found a cannon somewhere. Stuart stayed unperturbed. "I hope to heaven we know better by now than to pack ourselves together nice and tight for a field gun to mow us down." His smile was almost found. "Those smoothbore Napoleons did a good business during the last war, but we've come a long way since."

His own field artillery, posted on the hills that led up to the Dragoon Mountains north and east of town, consisted of modern rifled guns that not only outranged the Tombstone Yankees' obsolete piece but were more accurate as well. No sooner than the Napoleon revealed its position, shells started falling around it.

It fired a couple of more times, its cannonballs kicking up dust as they

skipped along, then fell silent.

"So much for that," Horatio Sellers said with a chuckle.

A couple of minutes later, though, the old-fashioned muzzle-loader came back to life. "We must have knocked out their number-one crew," Stuart guessed, "and sent them scrambling around for replacements. They've got some brave men serving that gun."

"Much good may it do them." Sellers grunted. "They likely never did have a whole lot of men with much notion of what to do with a cannon. If you're right, sir, and their best gun crew's down, they won't be able to hit a blamed thing now, not without fool luck they won't."

"That makes sense to me," Jeb Stuart agreed. "We don't want 'em to get lucky, though." He turned to Chappo, who, along with Geron-imo, was watching the fight forTombstone alongside the Confederate commander. "Will you ask your father if he can slide some Apaches forward and pick off the Yankees who are tending to their gun?"

"Yes, I will do that." Chappo spoke to Geronimo in their own language. Young man and old gestured as they spoke back and forth. The Apaches used their hands as expressively as Frenchmen when they talked. Chappo returned to English. "My father says he will gladly do this. He wants to punish the white men ofTombstone , to hurt them for all the times they have hurt us. If we take this place together, he will burn it."

Stuart looked down atTombstone 's wooden buildings, baking under the desert sun and no doubt tinder-dry. "If we take this place, it's going to burn whether he burns it or not, I reckon."

Even though he watched with a telescope, he could not spy any of the Apaches moving up toward the Napoleon theTombstone volunteers were still firing. He wondered whether Geronimo had ordered them forward. The ground beyond the graveyard offered more cover than a billiard table, but not much. He wouldn't have cared to send his own men up to try to knock the gunners out of action.

That's why we're allied with the Apaches, the cold, calculating part of his mind said. Let them get hurt doing the nasty little jobs like that.

He glanced over at Geronimo. The Indian—medicine man, was the closest term Stuart could find for his position—was watching litter-bearers carrying wounded Confederate soldiers back toward the tents where the surgeons plied their grisly trade. When Geronimo felt

Stuart's eye on him, the old Indian quickly moved his head and looked in a different direction.

He didn't do it quite quickly enough. I will be damned, Stuart thought. I know just what that dried-up devil of a redskin is thinking, and nobody will ever make me believe I don't. He's thinking, sure as hell he's thinking, That's why we're allied with the Confederates. Let them get hurt doing the nasty big jobs like that. To hell with me if he's not.

Stuart whistled "Dixie" between his teeth. Weeks of travel with Geronimo and the other Apache leaders had taught him they were more than the unsophisticated savages the dime novels made them out to be.

They were, in fact, very sophisticated savages indeed. Not till that moment, though, had Stuart paused to wonder who was using whom to the greater degree.

Now Geronimo looked over toward him. The Apache seemed to realize Stuart had peered into his thoughts. He nodded to the white man, a small, tightly controlled movement of his head. Stuart nodded back. The two of them might have been the two sides of a mirror, each reflecting the other's concerns and each surprising the other when he realized it.

All at once, Stuart noticed the Napoleon had fallen silent again. Now Geronimo looked his way without trying to be furtive about it. The Apache raised his Tredegar to his shoulder and mimed taking aim. Stuart nodded to show he understood and doffed his hat for a moment in salute to the Apache warriors' skill.

Geronimo's answering smile showed only a couple of teeth.

Losing their cannoneers once more dismayedTombstone 's defenders. They fell back from the graveyard into the town. Had Stuart commanded them, he would have had them hold out amongTombstone 's tombstones as long as they could; when they retreated, the Confederates and Apaches promptly seized the high ground.

The Confederate field guns started hammering away atTombstone itself. When shells struck bare ground, smoke and dirt leapt skyward. When a shell hit a building, it was as if a spoiled child kicked a dollhouse. Timbers flew every which way. No doubt glass did, too, though Stuart could not see that even with his telescope. But he knew what flying bits of glass could do to a man's body, having been

educated in the War of Secession.

"Do we wait for fire to do our work for us?" Major Sellers asked. A couple of thin threads of smoke were already rising into the sky.

"No, we'll press it a bit," Stuart replied. "Even in fire, the damn-yankees can hold out for a long time down there, and it wouldn't burn them all out. Besides, if we take the town instead of burning it, we also get to forage to our hearts' content."

"Yes, sir," his aide-de-camp said enthusiastically. The Confederate army inNew MexicoTerritory operated on the end of an enormously long supply line. Thanks to their victories, Stuart's troopers had plenty of food for themselves and fodder for their animals. They had enough powder and munitions for this fight, too. Looking ahead to the next one, Stuart didn't like the picture he saw.

Down from the hills towardTombstone came the dismounted Confederate cavalrymen, four going forward for every one who stayed behind to hold horses. Down from the hills, too, came the Apaches.

Stuart was sure that was so although, again, he could see next to no sign of the Indians.

After a bit, he watched Geronimo instead of trying to spot red-skinned wills-o'-the-wisp. The Indian could plainly tell where his braves were and what they were up to, even if Stuart's eyes could not find them. The Apaches were convinced Geronimo had occult powers. Watching him watch men he could not possibly have seen halfway convinced Stuart they were right.

The volunteers inTombstone kept on putting up a brave fight. As they had been in the valley south ofTucson , theU.S. forces were caught in a box with opponents coming at them from three sides at once.

Here, though, they had good cover. They also had no good line of retreat fromTombstone , which made them likelier to stand where they were. Whenever Confederates or Indians pushed them, they drove off their foes with an impressive volume of fire from their Winchesters.

But then more and more of the saloons and gambling halls and sporting houses—which seemed to make up a large portion ofTombstone 's buildings—on the northern edge of town caught fire. The flames forced the defenders out of those buildings and farther back intoTombstone . The smoke from them also kept the Tombstone

Rangers from shooting as accurately as they had been doing. Confederates and Apaches began dashing between flaming false fronts and intoTombstone . As Stuart rode closer to the mining town, the cheers of his men and the Indians' war cries drowned the shouts of dismay from the U.S.

Volunteers.

Major Horatio Sellers rode alongside him. "Sir, will you send in a man under flag of truce to give the Yankees a chance to surrender?"

Geronimo and Chappo were also riding forward with the Confederate commander. Before Stuart could answer, Chappo spoke urgently to his father in the Apache language. Geronimo answered with similar urgency and greater excitement. Chappo returned to English: "Do not give them a chance to give up.

They have done us too many harms to have a chance to give up."

Sure as the devil, the Apaches were using the Confederates to pay back their own enemies. But then Major Sellers said, "It's not as if they were Regular Army men, sir, true enough. Probably better than half of them are gamblers or road agents or riffraff of some kind or another."

The spectacle of his aide-de-camp agreeing with Geronimo instead of trying to find a persuasive excuse to massacre him bemused Stuart. It also helped him make up his mind. "If the Tombstone Rangers want to surrender, they can send a man to us. I won't make it easy for them."

Chappo translated that for Geronimo. His father grunted, spoke, gestured, spoke again. Chappo didn't turn his response back into English. From the old Indian's tone and expression, though, Jeb Stuart thought he could make a good guess about what it meant: something to the effect of, *Oh, all right. I'd sooner every one of them bit the dust, but if they give up, what can you do?*

A dirty-faced Confederate came running back to Stuart. "Sir, the damn-yankees put a couple of sharpshooters up in that church steeple"—he pointed back through drifted smoke toward what was plainly the tallest structure inTombstone —"and they've done hit a bunch of our boys."

"I can't knock 'em out by myself, Corporal," Stuart answered. He looked back to see where the field guns were. A couple of them had already taken up positions in the graveyard, not far from where the

Napoleon had stood. "Go tell them. They'll take care of it."

The range was short; the gunners were barely out of effectiveWinchester range from the outskirts ofTombstone , and might have come under severe fire from U.S. Army Springfields. Stuart watched shells fall around the church. Then one gun crew made a pretty good shot and exploded their shell against the topmost part of the steeple. No further reports of Yankee sharpshooters there came to Stuart's cars.

That church, he found when he rode into town, was at the corner of Third and Safford. The Tombstone Rangers made a final stand a block south of it, at the adobe Wells Fargo office at Third andFremont and the corral across the street from it, whose fences they'd reinforced with planks and stones and bricks and whatever else they could find. The OK Corral was a target artillerists dreamt of. After a couple of salvos turned the place into a slaughterhouse, the defenders raised a white flag and threw down their guns, and the fighting stopped.

Geronimo, seeing the men who had so tormented the Apaches now in his allies' hands, wanted to change his mind and dispose of them on the spot. "No," Stuart told him through Chappo. "We don't massacre men in cold blood."

"What will you do with them?" the medicine man asked.

"Send them down toHermosillo , along with the rest of theU.S. soldiers we've captured," Stuart answered.

Geronimo sighed. "It is not enough."

"It will have to do," Stuart told him. "We haven't done too badly here, when you think about it. We've clearedU.S. forces from a big stretch of south-westernNew MexicoTerritory , and we did it without getting badly hurt at all."

"Much of what you did, you did because we helped you," Geronimo replied through Chappo. "We should have some reward."

He could not force the issue; he had not the men for that. Stuart said, "You do have a reward. Here is all this land with no Yankee soldiers on it. Here are your braves with the fine rifles they have from us. How can you complain?"

"It is not enough," Geronimo repeated. He said nothing more after that. Stuart resolved to keep a close eye on him and his followers.

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As soon as Abraham Lincoln saw the crowd that had come to hear him inGreat Falls , he knew he would not have such an appreciative audience as he had enjoyed inHelena . By the standards ofMontanaTerritory ,Helena was an old town, having been founded just after the end of the War of Secession.Great Falls , by contrast, was so new the unpainted lumber of the storefronts and houses hardly looked weathered.

More to the point, though, Helena was a mining town, a town built up from nothing by the labourers who worked their claims—and who, most of them, worked luckier men's claims these days—in the surrounding hills.Great Falls , by contrast, was a foundation of capital, a town that had sprung to life when the railroad out to the Pacific went through. If it hadn't been for fear of the British up inCanada , the railroad would probably still remain unbuilt. But it was here, and so were the people it had brought.

Storekeepers and merchants and brokers predominated: the bourgeoisie, not the proletariat.

Lincolnsighed. InHelena , he'd got exactly the response he'd wanted. He'd told the miners some home truths about the way the country treated them. Without more than a handful of Negroes to exploit, it battened off the sweat of the poor and the ignorant and the newly arrived and the unlucky. Capitalists didn't want their victims to know that.

Capitalists had reasons for not wanting their victims to know that, too. After he'd told the miners some things of which their bosses would have preferred them to remain ignorant, they'd torn upHelena pretty well. He smiled at the thought of it. He hadn't touched off that kind of donnybrook in years.

He'd won the supreme accolade from one of the local capitalists, a tough, white-bearded fellow named Thomas Cruse: "If I ever set eyes on you again, you son of a bitch," Cruse had growled, "I'll blow your stinking brains out."

"Thank you, sir,"Lincoln had answered, which only served to make Cruse madder.Lincoln wasn't about to lose sleep over that. From what he'd heard, Cruse had once been a miner, one of the handful lucky enough to strike it rich. Having made his pile, he'd promptly forgotten his class origins, in much the same way as an Irish washerwoman

who'd married well would come back from a European tour spelling her name Brigitte, not Brigid.

Another sigh came from his lips. No, no sparks tonight, not from these comfortable, well-dressed people. A couple of Army officers sat in the second row, no doubt to listen for any seditious utterances he might make. One of them looked preposterously young to be wearing a cavalry colonel's uniform.Lincoln wondered what sort of strings the fellow had pulled to get his command, and why he'd tied a red bandanna around his left upper arm.

Rather nervously, a local labour organizer (not that there was much local labour to organize) named Lancaster Stubbins introduced Lincoln to the crowd: "Friends, let's give a warm Montana welcome to the man who makes it hot for capital, the fiery champion of the working man, the former president of the United States, Mr. Abraham Lincoln!"

Despite Stubbins' images of heat, the most enthusiastic wordLincoln could in justice apply to the round of applause he got was *tepid.* That did not surprise him. Here inGreat Falls , he would have been surprised had it proved otherwise. When he took his place behind the podium, he stood exposed to the crowd from the middle of his belly up. That didn't surprise him, either; almost every podium behind which he'd ever stood—and he'd stood behind a great forest of them—had been made for a smaller race of men.

He sipped at the glass of water thoughtfully placed there, then began: "My friends, they ran me out ofHelena because they said I made a riot there. As God is my witness, I tell you I made no riot there."

No applause came from the crowd. Shouts of "Liar!" rang out. So did other shouts: "We have the telegraph!" and "We know what happened!"

Lincolnheld up a hand. "I made no riot there," he repeated. "That riot made itself." More outcry rose from the audience. The young colonel in the second row wearing a red bandanna seemed ready to bounce out of his chair, if not out of his uniform.Lincoln waited for quiet. When he finally got something close to it, he went on, "Do you think, my friends, the honest labourers who heard me inHelena would have turned the town on its ear had they been happy with their lot? I did not make them unhappy with it.

How could I have done so, having only just arrived? All I did was remind them of what they *had,* and what in law and justice they were

entitled to, and invite them to compare the one to the other. If that should be inciting to riot, then Adams and Franklin and Washington and Jefferson deserved the hangings they did not get."

Sudden silence slammed down. He had hoped for as much. The people still remembered freedom, no matter how the plutocrats tried to make them forget. Heartened, Lincoln continued, "So many in Helena, like so many elsewhere in the United States—so many even here, in Great Falls—labour so that a few who are *rich* can become *richer.* Ignorant old man that I am, I have a moderately hard time seeing the fairness there.

"A capitalist will tell you that *his* wealth benefits everyone. Maybe he is even telling you the truth, although my experience is that these capitalists generally act harmoniously and in concert, to fleece the people. Or do you not think his wealth would benefit *you* more, were some part of it in *your* pocket rather than his?"

That got a laugh—not a large one, but a laugh. "Tell 'em, Abe!" somebody called. Somebody else hissed.

Lincolnheld up his hand again. Quiet, this time, came quicker. He said, "Even before the War of Secession, I made my views on the matter clear. As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master.

Democracy has no place for slaves *or* masters. To whatever extent it makes such a place, it is no longer democracy. A man with silk drawers, a gold stickpin, and a diamond on his pinky may disagree. What of the miner in his tattered overalls or the shopkeeper in his apron? Does not the capitalist trample them down, by his own rising up?

"And does he not sow the seeds of his own destruction in the trampling? For when, through this means, he has succeeded in dehumanizing the labouring proletariat by whose sweat he eats soft bread, when he has again and again put the working man down and made him as nearly one with the beasts of the field as he can, when he has placed him where any ray of hope is extinguished and his soul sits in darkness like the souls of the damned . . . When the capitalist has done all this, does he not fear, while he sips his champagne, that the demon he has made *will one day turn and rend him!"*

That was the sentence upon which his speech inHelena had ended. He had not intended it to end there.

He had planned to go on for some time. But the ragged miners there

construed his words literally, and acted on what he had taken for (or part of him had taken for) a mere figure of speech.

Here inGreat Falls , he got no riot. He did get an audience perhaps more attentive than it had planned on being. When he saw men leaning forward to hear him better, he knew he'd succeeded. "My friends, the defense of our nation lies not in our strength of arms, though 1 wish our arms every success in this war upon which we are engaged. Our reliance is in the *love of liberty* which God has planted in us. If we let it perish, we grow the seeds of tyranny on our own soil. If we suffer our labourers to wear the chains of wage slavery, we look forward to the day when the nation is enchained.

"To our north, inCanada , we find a people with a different government from ours, being ruled by a Queen. Turning south to the Confederate States, we see a people who, while they boast of being free, continue to hold their fellow men in bondage. At present, we are at war with both these peoples, not least because we do not wish to permit their unfree power to be extended. If is altogether fitting and proper that we should struggle, if struggle we must, for such a cause.

"Yet will we fight for the cause of freedom *abroad,* while allowing the same cause to perish *at home'}*

We all declare for liberty; but in using the same *word* we do not all mean the same *thing.* With some, the word means for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and with the product of his labour. With others, the same word means for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men's labour. The fullness of time, I am convinced, will prove to the world which is the true definition of the word, and my earnest hope remains that theUnited States of America shall yet lead the way in the proving."

InGreat Falls , he got applause, warmer than when he was introduced. InHelena , that passage might have touched off the riot had the previous one not done it. In a way, he appreciated the polite hearing. In another way, he would sooner have been booed off the platform. People who listened politely and forgot an hour later what they'd heard were no great asset to the cause of liberty.

"We *shall* have change in this country, my friends," he said. "I leave you tonight with this thought to take to your homes: if we cannot find a *peaceable* way to bring about this change, we shall find *another* way, as our forefathers did in 1776. We have now, as we had then, the revolutionary right to overthrow a government become a tyranny to

benefit only to the rich. I pray we shall have no need to exercise this right. But it is there, and, if the need be there as well, we *shall* take it up, and the foundations of the nation *shall* tremble. Good night."

As he stepped down, he got about what he'd expected: cheers and catcalls mixed together. One fight started in the back of the hall. Instead of joining in, the men around the fighters pulled them apart and hustled them outside.Lincoln smiled, ever so slightly: no, it hadn't been like that inHelena .

Lancaster Stubbins came up toLincoln and shook his hand. "That was very fine, sir, very fine indeed," he said. "You'll stay the night with my family and me?"

"I should be honored,"Lincoln said. Stubbins was earnest and sincere, and, when and if the new revolution came, would undoubtedly be swept away. Still—"It will prove a better bed, I am sure, than the one I enjoyed—though that is scarcely the proper word—in Fort Douglas."

Getting to the promised bed would take a while. Some people came forward to congratulate him. Some people came forward to argue with him. Half an hour after the speech was done, he was still alternately shaking hands and arguing. That brash young cavalry colonel stuck a finger in his chest and growled,

"You, sir, are a Marxian Socialist."

His tone was anything but approving.Lincoln found himself surprised; men who so emphatically disagreed with his positions seldom came so close to identifying their true nature. "That is near the mark—near, but not quite on it, Colonel . . . ?" he said.

"Roosevelt," the cavalry officer answered impatiently. "Theodore Roosevelt." He scowled up atLincoln through his gold-framed spectacles. "How do you mean, sir, not quite on the mark? In what way am I in error?" The challenge in his voice declared that, like George Custer, he saw disagreement as affront.

Still,Lincoln judged the question seriously meant, and so answered seriously: "A Marxian Socialist, Colonel Roosevelt, believes the revolution *will* come, no matter what measures be taken to prevent it. My view is, the revolution will come *unless* strong measures be taken to prevent it."

"Ah."Roosevelt gave a slow, thoughtful nod. "That is a distinction." Unlike Custer, he evidently could feel the intellectual force of a

counter-argument. That index finger stabbed out again. "But you do believe the pernicious Marxian doctrine of the class struggle."

"I do believe it, yes,"Lincoln said. "I do not believe it pernicious, not after spending my time since the War of Secession observing what has been afoot in theUnited States , in the Confederate States, and, as best I can at a distance, inBritain andEurope as well."

"Class struggle is balderdash! Poppycock!"Roosevelt declared. "We can attain a harmonious society by adjusting our laws and their interpretation so as to secure to all members of the community social and industrial justice."

"We *can,* surely. I said as much,"Lincoln replied. "But *shall* we? Or will those in whose hands most capital now rests seek only to gain more? That looks to be the way the wind is blowing, and it blows a fire ahead of it."

Rooseveltsurprised him again, this time by nodding. "The worst revolutionaries today are those reactionaries who do not see and will not admit that there is any need for change."

"You had best be careful, Colonel Roosevelt, or people will be calling *you* a Marxian Socialist,"Lincoln said.

"By no means, sir. By no means," the brash young officer said. "You believe the damage to our body politic is ... I shall give you the benefit of the doubt and say, *all but irreparable.* My view, on the contrary, is that the political system of theUnited States remains perfectible, and that resolute action on the part of the citizens as voters and the government as their agent can secure the blessings of both liberty and prosperity for capital and labour alike."

"I have heard many men with your views, but few who express them so forcefully,"Lincoln said. "Most, if you will forgive me, have their heads in the clouds."

"Not I, by jingo!" Theodore Roosevelt said.

"I wish I could believe you likely to be correct,"Lincoln carried out. "For reform to be carried out in the manner you describe, though, a man of truly titanic energy would have to lead the way, and I see none such on the horizon. I do see workers by the millions growing hungrier and more desperate day by day.

Now if you will excuse me, Colonel, this other gentleman wished to

speak with me."Roosevelt turned away.Lincoln heard him mutter "Poppycock!" under his breath once more. Then the former president, being greeted by a supporter, forgot about the young cavalry colonel.

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Frederick Douglass wished he could go home toRochester . In fact, nothing save his own pride and stubbornness kept him from going home toRochester . If he went home, he would be admitting defeat: not only to those who read his despatches from theLouisville front in their newspapers, but also, and more important, to himself.

As he got out of a carriage Captain Richardson had furnished him and headed for the newly built wharves several miles east of Louisville, he knew defeat was there whether he admitted it or not. Captain Richardson kept right on being obliging, still, Douglass was convinced, in the hope that he could get him killed. With each new time Douglass crossed theOhio intoKentucky , the total chance of his getting killed grew more likely, and he knew it. He kept crossing anyhow, every time he could.

TheUnited States now held two tracts on the southern side of the river, one inside batteredLouisville itself, the other projecting toward it from the east. The shape of that second salient, sadly, was deceiving; the front had not advanced more than a couple of furlongs in the past several days. Hope that the flanking manoeuvre would drive the Confederates fromLouisville had all but died. With it had also died a great many young men inU.S. blue.

Confederate artillery pounded away at theU.S. positions east ofLouisville . This salient was bigger than the one in the city, and had pushed the Rebels out of range of theIndiana side of theOhio . The amount of ground gained, however, was not the be-all and end-all of the campaign. The *be-all* had not come to be, and the *end-all* was not in sight.

Another barge was loading. Barges were always loading, sending in more soldiers to do what they could against the Rebels' entrenchments and rifles and cannon. Some soldiers came back on barges, too, shrieking in anguish. Some stayed inKentucky and fought and did not go forward. Some stayed inKentucky and died and were hastily buried. Some stayed inKentucky and died and were not buried at all.

Sometimes Douglass had trouble persuading the soldiers he had the

right to cross. This time, though, he met no difficulties. Even before he drew from a pocket Captain Richardson's letter authorizing him to go intoKentucky , one of the men tending to the barge's engine waved and said, "Got a letter from my cousin, sayin' she really likes the way you're writin' about the war."

"That's very kind of her," the Negro journalist said as he stepped aboard the barge. Had he been white, he thought the soldier would have called him *Mr. Douglass.* Few white men could bring themselves to call a Negro *Mister.* Making an issue of an act of omission, though, was much harder than doing so about an act of commission. Douglass kept quiet, consoling himself with the thought that he might have been wrong.

Once the one white man had accepted him as an equal, or something close to an equal, the rest did the same. He'd seen that before, too. People all too often put him in mind of sheep. Had that fellow mocked him and called him a nigger, the others packing the barge likely would have followed that lead as readily as the other.

U.S.guns on theKentucky shore not far from the riverbank belched smoke and flames as they tried to put their Confederate counterparts out of action. Near the guns lay wounded soldiers who would go back toIndiana aboard the barge once it had unloaded the men it carried. Some cried out, some groaned, and some lay limp, too far gone in suffering to complain. Along with the soldiers headed toward the battle line, he averted his eyes from the bloodstained evidence of what war could do.

He did not accompany the fresh troops to whatever position they had been assigned. Instead, he made his way toward the men of the Sixth New York. They had come closer than any otherU.S. troops to breaking the Confederate line and smashing intoLouisville as General Willcox had envisioned. Only a desperate countercharge by a Rebel regiment—led by a lieutenant, some said, though Douglass didn't believe it—had knocked them back on their heels and let C.S. forces bring in more troops and solidify their position.

Several Confederate shells came screaming down within a couple of hundred yards of him. He took no notice. Back before the battle began, they would have sent him diving, panicked, for the closest hole he could find. He was astonished at how blase he'd grown about shell-fire.

On toward the line of battle he tramped, not at any great speed but as steadily as if powered by steam.

That comparison made him smile. He puffed less now on such hikes than he had when he'd first made them; his wind was better than it had been for years. He'd always been blessed with a robust constitution, which served him in good stead today.

He'd gone up to the Sixth New York's position so often by now, some of the troops behind the line had grown used to his presence. One made as if to set his watch by Douglass. "How are you this morning.

Uncle?" another called. The Negro answered that with a nod and nothing more; as usual, *Uncle* straddled the line between polite and insulting.

AnotherU.S. soldier whistled and waved and said, "Good morning to you, Fred."

"And to you, Corporal," Douglass answered, this time feeling his face stretch into a broad, almost involuntary grin. A white man who called him *Fred* might be short on formality, but was also short on prejudice. Douglass reckoned that a fair exchange.

He was drawing near the front line, up into the area where entrenchments seamed Kentucky's smooth fields as scars from the lash seamed his own back, when an officious provost marshal whom he hadn't seen before challenged him: "Who the devil are you, and what business have you got here?"

"Don't you recognize Jefferson Davis when you sec him?" Douglass demanded. The joke fell flat; like most provost marshals, this one had no sense of humor. Douglass produced the letter from Captain Oliver Richardson. The soldier read it, moving his lips. At last, reluctantly, he returned it to the journalist and stood aside.

Up in the trenches, the men of the Sixth New York hailed him as an old friend. "You're a crazy old coot, you know that?" one of them said by way of greeting. "We've got to be here, and you don't, but you keep comin' anyhow."

"He reckons we'll keep him safe, Aaron, that's what it is," another soldier said. "Looky! He ain't even carrying his six-shooter no more."

"As you say, I am among heroes." Douglass smiled at the blue-coat, who, along with his companions, hooted and jeered. Many of them

were heroes, but they bore that heroism lightly, as if mentioning it embarrassed them. Douglass had stopped wearing a revolver once the line stabilized, no longer seeing much likelihood he would need it for self-defense. Instead of a Colt, he pulled out a notebook. "And what has gone on here since my latest visit?"

"Snaked a raid over into the Rebs' trenches yesterday afternoon, we did," Aaron said proudly. "Killed two or three, brought back a couple dozen prisoners, only had one feller hurt our ownselves."

"Well done!" Douglass said, and scribbled notes. Inside, though, he winced. This was what the bold if tardy flank assault had come down to: little raids and counterraids that might move the front a few yards one way or the other but meant nothing about when or if the Army of theOhio would ever drive the Confederates out ofLouisville .

Douglass listened to the volunteers as they talked excitedly about the raid. They were caught up by it; because they'd done well in a tiny piece of the war, they thought the whole of it was going well. Douglass had not the heart to disillusion them, even had they chosen to listen to him in turn. He pressed on up to the foremost trench, knowing he would find Colonel Algernon van Nuys there.

Sure enough, van Nuys squatted by a tiny fire, eating hardtack and waiting for his coffee to boil. "Ah, Mr. Douglass, you come back again," the regimental commander said. His knees clicked as he straightened up. "You must be a glutton for punishment. Here, you can prove it: have a hardtack with me." He offered Douglass one of the thick, pale crackers.

"Why do you hate me so?" Douglass asked, which made Colonel van Nuys laugh. Accepting the hardtack, Douglass took a cautious bite. When fresh, the crackers weren't bad. By the way this one resisted his teeth, it might have been in a warehouse since the War of Secession. After he'd managed to swallow, he said, "Do I rightly hear that you poked the Rebels yesterday?"

"A poke is about what it was, a little poke," van Nuys said with a sour smile: he knew too well this wasn't what Orlando Willcox had intended for the flanking move. "Today, tomorrow, the next day, the Rebs'll try to poke us back, I expect. We might as well be playing tag with 'em."

"No, thank you," Douglass said, and the colonel chuckled again. Van Nuys stooped to see how the coffee was doing, and, as if to confirm

his words, Confederate artillery opened up on the Sixth New York. Now Douglass did throw himself flat; these shells came crashing down far closer than a couple of hundred yards away. Fragments scythed through the air above his head, hissing like serpents.

Through the din of the shelling, the roar of rifle fire also picked up. "To the firing steps!" Colonel van Nuys shouted. "Here they come! Let's give it to 'em, the sons of bitches."

A moment later, he cried out wordlessly and reeled back into the trench. The cry was necessarily wordless, for a bullet had shattered his lower jaw, tearing away his chin and leaving the rest a red ruin.

He gobbled something unintelligible at Douglass. Maybe it was I *told you so,* but it could have been *Tell my wife I love her* or anything else. Then his eyes rolled up in his head and, mercifully, he swooned, his blood pouring out onto the floor of the trench. Douglass wondered if he would ever wake again. With that wound, eternal sleep might be a mercy.

High and shrill. Rebel yells rang out from the stretch of ground between C.S. andU.S. trench lines.

"Reinforcements!" Douglass shouted. "We need reinforcements here!" But no reinforcements came.

Cleverly, the Confederates were using the artillery bombardment to form a box around the sides and rear of the length of entrenchments they had chosen to attack. Anyone who tried to get through that bombardment was far likelier to get hit.

AU.S. soldier a few feet away from Douglass fired hisSpringfield . One of the Rebel yells turned into a scream of a different sort. But as the bluecoat was slipping another cartridge into the breech, a Confederate bullet caught him in the side of the head. Unlike Algernon van Nuys, he never knew what hit him. He slumped to the ground, dead before he touched it. The rifle fell from his hands, almost in front of Frederick Douglass.

He grabbed for it, wishing it were a carbine, whose shorter barrel would have made it easier for him to reverse it and blow out his own brains. But all his resolve about not being taken alive came to nothing, for a Confederate in dirty butternut leaping down into the trench landed on his back. Pain stabbed through him—a broken rib? He didn't know.

He didn't have time to think, either. "Come on, nigger!" the Reb screamed. "Up! Out! Move! You're caught or you're a dead man!" No matter what his head thought, Douglass' body wanted to live.

However much it hurt, he scrambled out of the trench and, after getting jabbed in a ham by the Confederate's bayonet, stumbled toward the C.S. lines.

A Rebel captain was shouting, "Come on, you prisoners! Move! Move fast!" When he saw the journalist captured with eight or ten U.S. soldiers, his eyes widened. "Good God," he said. "It can't be, but it is.

Frederick Douglass, as I live and breathe."

"The nigger rabble-rouser?" Three Confederates asked it at once. "Him?"

"Him—the same." The captain had no doubt whatever.

The soldier who'd captured Douglass jabbed him again, harder. "Let's string the bastard up!" His friends bayed approval.

Chapter 13

As the: Louisville campaign ground on, Colonel Alfred Von Schlieffen found himself with ever freer access to Orlando Willcox and to the map-filled tent where the commander of the Army of the Ohio planned his operations. He found himself less and less happy each time he visited theU.S. general. It was too much like having ever freer access to a sickroom where the patient grew visibly more infirm as day followed day.

Brigadier General Willcox seemed uneasily aware of the wasting sickness afflicting his campaign, aware but doing his best to pretend he wasn't. "Good afternoon, Colonel," he said when he spied Schlieffen through the partly open tent fly. "Come in, come in. Ah, I see you have coffee. Very good."

"Yes, General, I have coffee. Thank you." Carrying the tin cup stamped *USA,* Schlieffen ducked his way into the tent and came over to stand beside Willcox. "The guns in the night were not noisier than usual.

Have I right—no, *am* I right; this mistake I make too often— nothing new happened?"

"Nothing new," Willcox agreed with a small sigh. He stared down at the maps, at the blue lines and the red that had moved so much less than he'd hoped. "It's always good to see you here, Colonel. I want you to know that."

"You are too kind to a man who is not of your country," Schlieffen said.

Without looking over at the German military attaché, General Willcox went on, "You always keep your temper. You never judge me.

My corps commanders, my division commanders—sometimes this tent gets like a kettle full of live lobsters over the fire. But I never hear recriminations from you, Colonel, and, if you send telegrams toPhiladelphia , you don't send them to General Rosecrans."

Schlieffen hadn't heard the word *recriminations* before, but he didn't bother asking Willcox to explain it; context made the meaning plain. An army that was winning had little backbiting. When things went wrong, everyone was at pains to prove the misfortune could not possibly have been his fault.

Willcox said, "Tell me what you think of our position at the present time."

"Let me examine the map before I answer." Schlieffen seized without hesitation the chance to think before he spoke. He wished he had Kurd von Schlozer's diplomatic talents, so he might come somewhere near the truth without destroying theU.S. commander's good opinion of him. At last, he said,

"I think it now unlikely that you will from the east intoLouisville break."

Willcox sighed again. "I'm afraid I think the same thing, although, if 1 admit it to anyone but you, I'll see my head go on a platter faster than John the Baptist's after Herodias' daughter danced before King Herod. We came close; I'll wager we scared old Stonewall out of a year's growth. But in war, the only thing that does any good if it's close to where it ought to be but not quite there is an artillery shell."

That was an effective image; Schlieffen filed it away to use if and when he had the luck to return to General Staff duty inBerlin . He said, "In the salient you made with the flanking move, you still have most of your men on the line facingLouisville , and in other places not so many."

"Well, yes, of course I do," General Willcox replied. "I have orders that I am still to do everything I can to capture the city, and I must obey them."

"If you think you can do this, then naturally you . . . are right," Schlieffen said, pleased he'd remembered the English idiom this time. "If you think you cannot do this, and you leave your flank as weak as it is—"

"The Rebs looked to have a weak flank," Willcox said. "It got strong a lot faster than we wished it would have, and that's the Lord's truth. If the Confederates could stop us, I reckon we'll be able to stop them."

"This may well be so, but your situation here seems to me not to be the same as that of the Confederate States," Schlieffen said.

"And why not?" Willcox bristled at what was to Schlieffen a gentle suggestion of something so obvious a schoolchild should see it.

Patiently, the attaché spelled it out in words almost literally of one

syllable: "The Confederate States had more depth to use than you have now. They could halt you for a little while, fall back, halt you again, and so on. This is not something you enjoy. If they break through your trenches from the south, they will go into the rear of the main body of your forces there."

"Ah, I see what you're saying." General Willcox was mollified. Nonetheless, he brushed aside Schlieffen's concern. "We do have men enough and guns enough to make them pay a high price if they try that. Myself, I don't think they'll do it. All their attacks up till now have been aimed at the line closest toLouisville ." Someone came into the tent. Willcox nodded a greeting. "What is it, Captain Richardson?"

After saluting Willcox and politely inclining his head to Schlieffen, the adjutant answered, "Sir, we just got a report that the Rebels have raided the stretch of trench the Sixth New York was holding."

After a glance at the map, Willcox turned triumphantly to Schlieffen. "There? Do you see? They persist in striking us where we are strongest." He spun back toward Oliver Richardson. "A raid, you say? They didn't break through, did they?"

"Oh, no, sir,"Richardson assured him. "I'm sorry to say Colonel van Nuys was killed in the attack, but they seemed to be trolling for prisoners more than anything else—and, I daresay, paying back the Sixth for a raid yesterday. They captured a few men, then withdrew to their own entrenchments."

"Why even bring this to my notice, then?" Willcox asked. He took a longer look at the young captain.

"And why, after a raid in which a colonel was killed, have you that smirk on your face?"

Schlieffen wondered ifRichardson had an enemy in the Sixth New York, of whose demise in the raid he had heard. The adjutant had sounded properly regretful when reporting Colonel van Nuys' death, so Schlieffen doubted he was the man, if any man there were. He would not have wanted an officer who gloated at a comrade's death on his staff. By the building anger on Willcox's round face, the commander of the Army of theOhio felt the same way.

And then Captain Richardson said, "Sir, you must know that Frederick Douglass has made the Sixth New York his pet regiment, and also the horse on which he mounts all his complaints about the manner in which you have conducted this campaign. He was with them today; I

gave him a letter authorizing a river crossing this morning. And I have reports, sir, that he was among those whom the Confederates captured in this raid."

"Ah," Schlieffen said: a short, involuntary exclamation. His opinion of Captain Richardson recovered to some small degree. Disliking a reporter to the point of enjoying his misfortune was a lesser matter than similarly disliking a fellow officer. AndRichardson had made no secret of his distaste for Douglass, though Schlieffen could not understand what, aside from being a Negro, Douglass had done to deserve it.

"Good God!" Willcox exclaimed, taking a point that had eluded the German. "Douglass has been a thorn in the slaveholders' side since long before the War of Secession. What will the Confederates do to the poor man, if he has been so unfortunate as to fall into their hands?"

"I don't know, sir, but my bet would be that they don't do anything good." Yes,Richardson sounded delighted at Douglass' discomfiture. English lacked the word *Schadenfreude,* but not the idea behind it.

Men being the sinful creatures they were, no nation, Schlieffen was sure, lacked that idea.

He said, "But is he not protected from mistreatment as a civilian citizen of theUnited States ?"

"The Confederate States seldom feel obliged to recognize any black man's rights of any sort," Willcox said.

"You ask me, sir, they've got the right idea, too,"Richardson said. "If it hadn't been for the niggers, Abe Lincoln never would have been elected president, and we never would have fought the War of Secession in the first place. Never would have lost it, either."

"How does the second statement follow from the first?" Schlieffen asked. The only answerRichardson gave him was a dirty look. That made him realize he'd been less than diplomatic. He wasn't so upset as he might have been. Failures in logic distressed him; he rejected unclear thinking as automatically as he breathed.

"Most disturbing," Orlando Willcox said. "Most disturbing indeed. I shall pray for Douglass' safety and eventual liberation, however unlikely I fear that may prove."

"I'll pray, too,"Richardson said. "I'll pray, *May God have mercy on his*

soul." He laughed a nasty laugh.

"That will be quite enough of that, Captain," Willcox said, as sharply as Alfred von Schlieffen had ever heard him speak. The German military attache frowned, not understanding whyRichardson 's prayer was offensive. Seeing as much, General Willcox explained: "Colonel, that's what the judge in an American court says after he sentences a prisoner to death."

"Ach, so,"Schlieffen murmured. Truly praying for God to have mercy was one thing, a prayer any Christian ought to be glad to make or to have made for him. Praying for a man to be condemned to death was something else again; Willcox had been right to rebuke his adjutant.

Richardsoncame to attention, saluted, did a smart about-turn, and left the tent with precisely machined steps. That was exactly what a German officer, similarly rebuked yet still feeling himself to be correct, would have done. The only difference Schlieffen could see was that the Americans did not include a heel-click as part of coming to attention.

Willcox drew in a deep breath, held it, and let it out in a long sigh. "He's an able young man, Colonel," he said, as if Schlieffen had denied it. "He's just—unreasonable on the whole Negro question."

"Many in theUnited States are, is this not so?" Schlieffen said. "It is true almost as much in theUnited States as in the Confederate States, yes?"

"Mm, not so bad as that, I'd say," Willcox replied. "On the other hand, one man in three in the CSA is a Negro, near enough, and we have only a relative handful of colored people in theUSA , so white men here have less to get exercised about. A lot of folks do wish, though, we had no Negroes among us: I can't deny that."

"This is foolishness," Schlieffen said, never for a moment thinking of the Polish peasants his ancestors had subjugated to help makePrussia the power that would reshape the German *Reich.*

"I think so myself." Willcox spread his hands, palms up. "Not everyone agrees with me, though. And you'd be hard pressed to say my adjutant is wrong in one regard: absent the Negro, I believe theUnited States would still remain one nation today."

"I understand this reason for resenting Negroes," Schlieffen said. "But if Negroes were not resented before your War of Secession for other

reasons, there would have been no war, is this not true? And these other reasons I must say I do not understand."

"It's a hard business, that it is," General Willcox said, which most likely meant he didn't understand it, either. As if to confirm that, he changed the subject: "I fear Captain Richardson is right in thinking it will be a hard business for Frederick Douglass, too."

"If he is mistreated, will theUnited States avenge themselves by mistreating Confederate prisoners in their hands?" Schlieffen asked. "This is, excuse me for saying it, an ugly way to make war."

"So it is—or so it would be, at any rate," Willcox answered. "As for what will happen, Colonel Schlieffen, I just don't know, and have no way to guess. Right now, I'd say it lies in the hands of God—and of the Confederate States."

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General Thomas Jackson looked as dour as usual while studying the situation map of his two-front battle in and east ofLouisville , but his heart sang within him. "I truly do believe we have nothing more to fear from the Army of theOhio ," he said.

"I think you're right, sir," E. Porter Alexander agreed with a boyish grin. "Been a hard fight—they *are* brave, even if their officers could be better—but I don't really see how they can surprise us now."

"That's why they fight wars, General Alexander: to discover how the other fellow can surprise you."

WhenJackson essayed a joke, he was in good humor indeed. More seriously, he went on, "In my view, however, you are correct. 1 do not think they can break free of their present lines, and the cost of containing them within those lines appears acceptable. That being said, will you take some supper with me?"

"I'd be delighted, sir, so long as you let me put mustard on my meat," Alexander said, grinning still.

"Such sauces are unhealthy,"Jackson insisted. His artillery chef looked eloquently unconvinced.Jackson yielded, as he would not have on the battlefield. "Have it your way. General. You see, I refuse you nothing." Laughing, the two men started out of the tent.

Had Alexander not teasedJackson , they would have been gone when the messenger came rushing in.

Instead, he almost ran into them—he almost ran over them, as a matter of fact. "General Jackson, sir!" he gasped. "They've captured—you'll never guess who they've captured, sir! He's on his way here now, not that far behind me."

He was so excited, he didn't notice he'd failed to giveJackson the name. *"Who* is on his way here now?"

the Confederate general-in-chief inquired. "By the way you sound, young man, it might be General Willcox himself."

"Even better'n that, sir," the messenger answered, chortling with glee. "They just captured Frederick Douglass his own self."

"You don't mean it!" E. Porter Alexander exclaimed. That was foolishness: the messenger obviously did mean it. Alexander turned to look atJackson .Jackson was already looking at Alexander. The same thought had to be uppermost in both their minds. Alexander spat it out first: "We couldn't get a hotter potato right out of the fire, sir. What in blazes do we do with him?"

"I don't know."Jackson briefly felt all at sea. This was not the sort of decision he was supposed to have to make. As soon as that thought crossed his mind, he knew what needed doing. Stepping back into the tent, he walked over to the telegraphers' table. "I am going to wire President Longstreet, requesting instructions. This is more a political than a military matter, and beyond my sphere of competence." He dictated a brief telegram, then turned back to the messenger. "You said Douglass is being brought here?"

"Yes, sir," the man answered.

"I had better stay and await him, then. General Alexander, you may go and eat your mustard without me."

"Sir, by your leave, I wouldn't miss this for the world," Alexander said. "It's almost like having the Antichrist walk into the tent, isn't it?"

"I had not thought of it in those terms, but you are not far wrong,"Jackson agreed. He nodded to an orderly. "Bring back supper for two, Corporal—no, for three: Douglass will be hungry, too, no doubt.

And bring back as well a pot of mustard for General Alexander, since he will have it."

After that, there was nothing to do but wait. The orderly returned with three full plates, a mustard pot, and three cups of coffee. Jackson and Alexander were still wondering whether to begin on their own meals when the tent flap opened and Frederick Douglass walked in ahead of a couple of grinning young soldiers with bayoneted Tredegars. "I thank you for delivering your present, lads,"Jackson told them. "I believe we shall be able to protect ourselves from him henceforward. Go on back to your regiment now."

Saluting, they obeyed.

Frederick Douglass was staring at him. The Negro—mulatto, actually, by his looks—was a fine figure of a man, despite dishevelment and obvious dismay. "You are Stonewall Jackson," he said, his voice deep and rich, his accent that of an educated man of the United States, with only the slightest hint of something else, something softer, underneath.

"I am,"Jackson admitted. He pointed to the food the orderly had just brought. "Will you join General Alexander here and me for supper?'

To his surprise, Douglass burst out laughing. "I beg your pardon, General," he said, checking himself after a moment, "but, seeing you, I feel rather as if I have been ushered into the presence of the Antichrist. In that presence, the last thing I expected was a supper invitation."

Jacksonsaid, "You may be interested to know that, not fifteen minutes before your arrival, General Alexander compared your coming to that of the Antichrist."

"To the unrighteous, the righteous no doubt seem wicked," Douglass replied.

"You are not the least bold of men, to say such a thing here,"Jackson observed, more approvingly than otherwise.

E. Porter Alexander caught something he had missed: "Who here is righteous, who the reverse, and how do you go about proving it?" He held up a hand. "Since we could argue about that through the night, what say we don't, but eat supper instead?"

"I find myself unable to oppose such logic, especially when I but

recently thought a noose my certain fate," Douglass said.Jackson contented himself with a single short, sharp nod.

A couple of minutes later, General Alexander said, "Do you see, sir? Douglass is among the righteous after all—for he eats mustard."

"His digestion would be better if he abstained," said Jackson, who, as usual, used only salt on his meat.

Frederick Douglass looked from one of them to the other, unsure how serious they were.Jackson willed his face to reveal nothing. Only when his artillery chief smiled did the captured Negro agitator relax.

After all three men had finished, Douglass asked the question no doubt uppermost in his mind since he'd entered the tent—no doubt uppermost in his mind since he was taken prisoner: "What do you intend to do with me, General?"

"Hold you here until I have received instructions from President Longstreet."Jackson answered, "then follow them, whatever they may be." He cocked his head to one side, raised his arm in the air, and asked in turn, "What would you have us do with you?"

"What would I have you do?" Douglass said. "Why, release me, of course. I am aU.S. citizen, and a civilian member of the Fourth Estate."

"You are, I have heard, an escaped slave,"Jackson remarked.

Douglass scowled. "I *am* an escaped slave," he said proudly, "but I escaped fromMaryland , which is and has always been one of theUnited States , not a Confederate state, so your cruel laws pertaining to such conduct are without application to my case. Further, on payment of the sum of one hundred dollars, my former master formally manumitted me in December of the year 1846, proof of which I can readily provide if allowed to communicate in any way with my friends. I am, sir, a free man, both in my heart and in point of law."

"You are the cause of more runaways and the wellspring of more plots against the white men of the Confederate States than any other half dozen people I could name," E. Porter Alexander said.

"Thank you," Douglass replied, which nonplussed the artillerist. Douglass added, "You are telling me I have not lived my life as a free man in vain."

"Why should we not condemn you for attempting to create a servile insurrection of the sort John Brown tried raising?"Jackson asked.

"I advised Brown against that, brave patriot though I thought him—and still think him," Douglass said with a defiant toss of his head. "As for why you should not, I told you: I do not fall, and have never fallen, under your jurisdiction. I have broken none of *my* nation's laws. If you declare me *persona non grata* and deport me, you would be within your rights. Condemn me? No, not if you wish to adhere to the law of nations."

Jacksonleaned forward, relishing the argument. "But uprisen slaves have committed many outrages in the Confederate States, some of them citing you as the author of their discontent. In war, shall I shoot the simpled-minded soldier who goes over the hill as a deserter, while taking no notice of the wily civilian who induces him to desert? Your case strikes me as similar."

"How can it?" Douglass raised his impressive eyebrows. "Do you not aim to keep your Negroes in such abysmal ignorance that they are not allowed to learn to read and write, lest the written word lead them to the desire for freedom? How then could your servile populace come to know my words, since assuredly I have never given an address within Confederate territory?"

"We instruct them in the things that matter,"Jackson said. "Why, I myself began and taught a Sunday school for the Negroes in and aroundLexington,Virginia , before the War of Secession. They are, in my view, perhaps not the Regulars of the church, but they assuredly make up the militia."

Douglass started to say something, then stopped. He resumed after an evident pause for thought: "I have come to see, over the years, that few men are entirely of a piece. I did not know you had done such a thing, General; it shall redound to your credit on the day when our Father judges you. How can you, though, justify the manifold evils of slavery while preaching the Gospel that sets all men free?"

"As you must know, the Good Book sanctions slavery,"Jackson replied. "IfProvidence sanctions it, who am I to speak in opposition? I do believe Negro slaves to be children of God no less than myself, and deserving of good treatment."

"You might be wiser, from a master's point of view, if you did not," Douglass observed. "A slave who has a bad master wants a good

master. A slave who has a good master wants to be free."

"Are you not betraying slaves' secrets to tell us this?" Porter Alexander asked.

Douglass shook his leonine head. "A bad master does not become a good one at the pull of a lever. Nor does a good one easily go bad; that can and does happen, as I know to my pain, but slowly, over years."

One of the telegraph keys in the tent began to chatter. Everyone whirled to stare at it. When it fell silent, the telegrapher carried the transcription of the wire over toJackson . Douglass' eyes followed the man's every step.Jackson read the telegram, then smiled a crooked smile. "Anticlimax, I fear," he said. "General Alexander, some of the new shipment of horses that will haul your guns has arrived."

"I'm relieved to hear it." The artillery commander glanced over at Frederick Douglass. "Rather more so than our . . . guest, I daresay."

"I am not your guest, unless I misunderstand and am in fact free to come and go as I please," Douglass snapped. "I am your prisoner."

"Yes, you are a prisoner."Jackson minced few words, and appreciated candor in others. "Whether you will remain a prisoner, and upon what terms—these matters await President Longstreet's decision."

Porter Alexander raised an eyebrow. "I stand corrected. *Our distinguished prisoner,* I should have said, or perhaps *our notorious prisoner.* No, *distinguished* will do, for were you not distinguished, Douglass, were you, say, an ordinary white Yankee, it is moderately unlikely that you should have taken supper with the general-in-chief of the Confederate States."

A beat slower than he might have,Jackson caught the irony there. It won a smile from Frederick Douglass, too, a sour smile. "I note, General Alexander, that however distinguished I may be in your eyes and those of General Jackson, I am not distinguished enough for either of you to preface my name with *Mister."* Jackson blinked. "It never occurred to me to do so," he said. "To the best of my recollection, I have never called a Negro *Mister* in my entire life."

"That in itself speaks unhappy volumes on the history of my race in what are now the Confederate States," Douglass said bitterly, "and, I note, in theUnited States as well."

Another telegraph apparatus began to click. "This is the reply from the president, sir," said the soldier at the chair in front of it. Like every telegrapher, he enjoyed the privilege of learning the content of the message before it reached the man to whom it was addressed.

When the clicking stopped, he brought the wire to Jackson, who donned his reading glasses and skimmed through it. Longstreet made his instructions unmistakably clear.Jackson turned to Douglass. "By order of the president of the Confederate States, you are to be turned over toU.S. military authorities under flag of truce as soon as that may be arranged. You are to be freely given to thoseU.S. authorities; no exchange of any Confederate prisoner now inU.S. hands is to be required or requested. Until such time as you are turned over to theU.S. authorities, you are to be treated with every consideration. Is that satisfactory . . ." He hesitated, but the president had said *every consideration,* and he was not a man to disobey orders. He began again: "Is that satisfactory, Mr. Douglass?"

The Negro's eyes widened; he recognized whatJackson had done. Ever so slightly, he inclined his head to the Confederate general-in-chief. "It is more generous than I had dared hope. As soon as my identity was known to my captors, I thought a rope hoisted over a tree branch my likeliest fate, an apprehension of which they did little to disabuse me. I know your opinion of me here."

"Not far removed from your opinion of us," General Alexander remarked.

"Perhaps." Douglass shoved that aside with one word. His features took on a look of intense concentration. "President Longstreet is a clever politician. He realizes, where many in his position would not, that harming me would in the end also harm the reputation of your country even more, and refrains from taking the brief pleasure that hanging me would bring." His shoulders hunched and slumped as he sighed.

"President Longstreet *is* a clever politician,"Jackson agreed. He eyed Douglass. "And you, sir"— *every consideration*—"unless I find myself badly mistaken, are at the moment somewhat dismayed that you shall not make your cause a martyr after all."

"I cannot contest the charge," Douglass said. "And yet I should also be lying were I to claim that I am not glad to go on living, and, even more so, to be restored to liberty. Having lived without it more than twenty years, I know how dear it is."

"At dawn tomorrow, 1 shall send an officer under flag of truce to arrange for your return to theUnited States ,"Jackson said. "I delay only because a flag of truce may not be recognized at night, and 1 would not willingly expose a man to danger thus."

"I understand." Douglass turned his dark, clever eyes onJackson . "Tell me, General, what would you have done with me absent President Longstreet's instructions?"

"Since I did not know what to do with you, I asked for those instructions,"Jackson answered. It was an evasion, and he knew as much. To his relief, Frederick Douglass did not press him on it.

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Cananea baked in the Mexican sun. No sooner had that thought crossed Jeb Stuart's mind than he rejected it.Sonora now being part of the CSA, Cananea baked in the Confederate sun. The Stars and Bars hung limp from a flagpole in the middle of town. The tents of the Confederate army and its Apache allies vastly outnumbered the squalid adobe houses that made up the miserable little place.

Water mirages danced and shimmered on the desert. Stuart knew they weren't real. They were amazingly convincing, though. Someone thirsty who hadn't seen them before would surely have chased them till he perished or realized that, like wills-o'-the-wisp, they endlessly receded before him and were not worth pursuing.

Major Horatio Sellers walked up beside Stuart. "Good morning, sir."

"Hmm? Oh, good morning, Major," Stuart answered, a little sheepishly. "I'm sorry. I was looking at the mirages and not thinking about very much of anything. If you hadn't come along, the buzzards probably would have picked me up and carried me off in an hour or two."

"Really, sir?" Sellers looked surprised. "I would have guessed you were thinking about your son."

"Captain Stuart, do you mean?" The commander of the Department of the Trans-Mississippi smiled. "If he's not the youngest captain in the history of the Confederate Army, I'll be everlastingly surprised. What I should be is jealous. I wasn't even atWest Point at his age, let alone winning battlefield promotions."

"War will give a push to things that would have happened more slowly without it," his aide-de-camp said. Sellers suddenly looked as if he'd bitten down on a lemon. Without seeing any more than that, Stuart understood what it meant.

Sure enough, Geronimo and Chappo silently came up to stand beside the two Confederate soldiers.

Their soft moccasins were far better suited to quiet movement than the boots Stuart and Sellers wore. As always, Geronimo greeted Stuart as an equal. That bothered the general less than the impression he got that Geronimo was stretching a point to do so.

Through Chappo, the medicine man said, "Is it true your son is now a warrior? I have heard this from my men who have some English."

"It is true," Stuart agreed gravely. "Your son, Chappo here, fought well against the Yankees inNew MexicoTerritory . My son, who is Chappo's age and has the same name I do, fought well against the Yankees in a land called Kentucky, far from here."

"For boys to become men is good," Geronimo said. "Your son, I hear, did something very brave, something very fine. What is it?"

"The Yankees were attacking," Stuart answered, "and all the officers of higher rank in his regiment were killed or wounded." That was oversimplifying, but the Indian wouldn't know the difference, and explaining it struck Stuart as more trouble than it was worth. "He took charge of the regiment and fought back against the Yankees and stopped their attack."

After that was translated, Geronimo and Chappo went back and forth for a couple of minutes, as if the old man was making sure he understood correctly. Then he said, "But your son, with only Chappo's years—how did the other soldiers, the men who were soldiers for a long time, how did they obey him?

They were already men, and he a boy in his first fight, not so?"

"Yes," Stuart said. "But he had higher rank"—again, oversimplifying —"and so they had to obey."

"Foolish to make men who have been in many fights obey a boy in his first. He might lead them wrongly," Geronimo said. Under normal circumstances, he would have had a point. Circumstances where Jeb Jr. was hadn't been normal. And, realizing he might have been

tactless, the Indian added, "But this is your son, and he did well in the fight, you say. This is good. A father is always glad when his son grows up well." He set a hand on Chappo's shoulder, to show that he too had a son of whom he was proud.

They would have gone on, but the *alcalde* of Cananea came up and waited for Stuart to notice him.

Senor Salazar was a round-bellied little man who wore a dirty red sash of office over a black jacket, ruffled shirt, and tight trousers that had all seen better days. "Yes, sir? What is it?" Stuart asked him, respecting the dignity of his office.

Salazar, fortunately, spoke fair English; theU.S. border lay only a few miles to the north. "Can I talk wit'

you, General, by yourself?" His black eyes flicked to Geronimo and Chappo. The Apaches, Stuart had discovered, frightened the whey out of him and out of everybody in Cananea. The farmers had scarcely dared work their parched, meager fields since Maximilian's National Guards withdrew in the wake of the Confederate occupation.

Geronimo sent *Senor* Salazar the sort of look a coyote gave a pork chop, which did nothing for the *alcalde's* composure. Stuart had mercy on the petty official. "Well, yes, *senor,* I suppose so." He stepped a few paces away from the two Indians. Salazar followed with obvious relief.

Geronimo and Chappo both frowned, though their unhappy expressions did not make Stuart start to turn to jelly, as they did with Salazar. The Confederate officer understood why the Apaches were unhappy.

The *alcalde* made Major Horatio Sellers seem as if he were on the Indians' side. Salazar not only feared the Apaches, he hated them with a Latin passion beside which Sellers' feeling toward them hardly rated more than the name of mild distaste. He would have slaughtered them all if he could. He only hated them the more because he couldn't.

To forestall him, Stuart said, "1 do hope you will remember, the Apaches arc our allies."

"Oh, *si,* General Stuart, I remember this." Salazar's eyes flashed. He might remember, but he didn't like it for hell. He needed a deliberate effort of will to set aside his anger. Stuart watched him make it. Like ocean waves with oil poured over them, his face smoothed. "I don't

want to talk about no Apaches."

"That's good," Stuart said equably. "What do you want to talk about, then?"

"We have a ball tonight," Salazar said, "to commence when the sun go down. We have dancing and music and good food and *mescal.* You do us the honor to come? You and so many officers from your country—officers from this country now, I should say—you want to bring?"

If Cananca boasted good food, Stuart had yet to see it. The locals mostly ate *atole,* a cornmeal gruel that reminded him of library paste.

Sometimes they enlivened it with chilies that would have made a man sweat at the North Pole, let alone in the middle of the Sonoran desert. As for *mescal,* it gave the vilestNorth Carolina moonshine a run for its money. Major Sellers swore the Mexicans distilled the stuff from kerosene, but that oath came the morning after a night of copious indulgence.

As much as anything else, curiosity impelled Stuart to say, "Thank you very much, *Senor* Salazar. My men and I will be there." Wickedly, he added, "Does your generous invitation also extend to the leaders of the Indians?"

"Maybe we do that," Salazar said, but he made no effort to hide his scorn for the Apaches. "We do it before. We get them plenty drunk, get them *loco* with *mescal,* then kill all we can. We do it three, four times, every few years. Stupid Apaches come every time. They like to drink plenty *mescal."*

"And you wonder why the ones you don't kill want to kill you?" Stuart said. The *alcalde's* answering shrug was as old as time. Whether Mexicans had first wronged Apaches or Apaches Mexicans no longer mattered much. Each side had been going after the other for so long, the CSA would need lots of years or lots of troops or more likely both to bring firm order here.

"You will come, and not the Indians?" *Senor* Salazar persisted.

"We will come, and not the Indians," Stuart agreed. Salazar bowed stiffly from the waist and departed.

As soon as he was gone, Geronimo and Chappo hurried up to Stuart. "What did he want?" Geronimo demanded. Stuart could hear the hard suspicion underlying the Apache words even before Chappo

translated. "That man is a rattlesnake in stupid Mexican clothes. He would murder every one of us if he had the way and the courage to do it."

That being obviously true, Stuart ignored it. "What he said had nothing to do with you," he answered, which wasn't true but would keep the lid on the kettle. "He invited me and some of my officers to a ball in town tonight."

"Ah," Geronimo said when that was translated. He knew what a ball was, and what accompanied it.

"Mescal." Longing filled his voice. He ran his tongue over his lips. Stuart hadn't altogether believed *Senor* Salazar's claim that the Apaches would frequently come into town for ardent spirits and lay themselves open to massacre. The warriors he'd seen in action had appeared too level-headed for that. Now, he decided the *alcalde* had been telling nothing but the truth.

The explanation did satisfy the old medicine man and his son. To Stuart's relief, they didn't seek to invite themselves to the ball. The commander of the Trans-Mississippi had no trouble finding enthusiastic celebrants among his officers. Those who held a high opinion of *senoritas* were eager to dance and drink with them; those who held a low opinion were even more eager.

At the appointed hour, Stuart led his contingent of officers into Cananea's central square. An orchestra of two drums, two fiddles, and an accordion greeted them with a squeaky rendition of what, about three-quarters of the way through the piece, Stuart recognized as "Dixie." It was, in its way, a compliment. So was the roast pork, basted in a red, no doubt fiery, sauce.

And so was the tumbler of *mescal Senor* Salazar pressed into Stuart's hand. The *alcalde* was armed with a similar tumbler. He raised it. "To the Confederate States ofAmerica !" he said in English and Spanish.

He gulped down half his tumbler.

Stuart had to follow suit. He felt as if a shell had exploded in his stomach. His eyes crossed. His ears rang. Dimly, he realized he had to offer a return toast. He wondered if he could still talk. Duty required him to make the effort. "ToSonora and to Cananea!" he croaked, and everyone within six inches of him could hear his voice. He tried it again, and succeeded in making himself understood the second time. The Cananeans burst into applause. Stuart drank the rest of the

tumbler. That he didn't fall over proved he was made of stern stuff.

"Your glass is empty," Salazar said sympathetically. He filled it from an earthenware jug. Stuart stared, glassy-eyed. The *mescal* didn't seem to bother the *alcalde.*

Food helped. The sauce on the pork was as spicy as it smelled. It started a fire of its own in Stuart's belly, and seemed to counteract the fire from the firewater. He ate bread, too, hoping it would help absorb some of the second tumbler of *mescal.*

Disappointingly few *senoritas* were in evidence. The band thumped out something that might have been a dance tune or an improvisation. Whatever it was, people started dancing to it. About seven out of eight were men. Nobody cared much. After more *mescal* flowed, nobody cared at all.

In the middle of a quadrille with the colonel of the Fifth Confederate Cavalry, Stuart said, "If a horse danced the way you do, they'd shoot it."

"If a *camel* danced the way you do, they'd shoot it," retorted Colonel Calhoun Ruggles, who, when it came to camels, knew whereof he spoke. Being considerably elevated by *mescal,* he needed a moment to remember proper military courtesy. "Sir."

After a while, Stuart decided to take a blow. While he leaned against an adobe wall and watched his officers and the Cananeans cavorting, *Senor* Salazar tapped him on the shoulder. The *alcalde* swayed where he stood; by now, whatever his capacity, he'd illuminated himself even more generously than the Confederates. But he spoke with great earnestness: "Do you know, General, those *Indios* will take your guns and take your bullets and go up into the Sierra Madre"—he pointed west, then, correcting himself, east—"and they be *bandidos* there. They go up there, they be *bandidos* forever."

"They can be *bandidos* against theUnited States ," Stuart said. "They won't be *bandidos* against your people any more."

"Maybe you are right. *Quien sabe?"* The *alcalde* smiled a sweet, sad, drunk smile. "But if you are right, then the *Estados Unidos"* —his English was slipping—"will get *Indios* to be *bandidos* against us. It will be the same in the end. For us, it is *siempre* the same in the end."

How many years of disasters—and how many tumblers of *mescal* —

went into that resignation? Stuart shook his head, which was beginning to throb. "It won't be the same any more. You're in the Confederate States ofAmerica now. You're going places, and you'd better believe it."

The only place the *alcalde* was going was to sleep. His eyes closed. He sagged against the wall and slumped to the ground. Jeb Stuart laughed. Five minutes later, he joined *Senor* Salazar.

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"Well, Colonel," Henry Welton said, "I trust your stay in Fort Benton, and also inGreat Falls , has been a pleasant one."

"Yes, sir. Thank you very much," Theodore Roosevelt answered. "Pleasant in ways I couldn't have anticipated when you ordered me down from my regimental headquarters, as a matter of fact."

Colonel Welton grinned a sly grin. "When I ordered you down, you thought you were coming for nothing but work."

"That's true, sir,"Roosevelt said, "but it's not precisely what I meant. The usual pleasures ofFortBenton

—and even ofGreat Falls —are easily named: saloons, dance halls, bathtubs with hot water." A couple of other pleasures were easily named, too, but he declined to name them.

"Hot water, yes." Henry Welton nodded. "You do miss it in the field."

ButRoosevelt hadn't finished. "As I say, sir, those are the usual pleasures, the commonplace pleasures.

Hearing Abe Lincoln speak, though: that I had not looked for, and I expect I'll remember it all my days."

"After he finished, you and he were going at it hammer and tongs there for a while," Henry Welton said.

"You made him stop and be thoughtful once or twice, too." He chuckled. "You make everybody you meet stop and be thoughtful, seems to me. Twenty-two—you ought to be illegal."

"Twenty-three soon, sir,"Roosevelt said with a grin, which made Welton grimace and mime pathetic decrepitude. Roosevelt went on, "Plainly,Lincoln has a faction that *will* heed him in all he says. As

plainly, there is a large faction that *will not* heed him in anything he says." He laughed. "He has me speaking like him, even yet—he is a demon on the stump. But both those factions I mentioned have their homes in the Republican Party. It could split on account of him."

"It could split if we lose this war, too," Welton replied, which was plain common sense. "Of course, if we lose this war, not enough men will admit to being Republicans for it to matter much whether the party splits or not."

"These things do matter, sir—they always matter,"Roosevelt said seriously. "Look what happened when the Democrats, likeGaul , were divided *in partes tres* in 1860. Had that not happened, theUnited States might well be the only nation lying betweenCanada and the Empire of Mexico."

"Maybe you're right. I'm just a soldier, and soldiers are better off not meddling in politics," Welton said.

"If we hadn't already learned that lesson, the War of Secession would have driven it home like a schoolmaster with a hickory switch." He slappedRoosevelt on the back. "Here come the stablehands with your horse, Colonel. Have a safe trip back to the Unauthorized Regiment, and I hope to see you again before too long."

"Likewise, whether here or in the field,"Roosevelt said. "And, thanks to your generous permission, I will be sending A Troop here for rest and recreation as soon as I can draft the orders."

"That will be fine," Colonel Welton said. "I do very much approve of an officer who looks out for the well-being of his men."

Roosevelt mounted and rode out ofFortBenton , pausing in the gateway to wave back at Welton. His mount, which had done next to nothing since he'd come down toFortBenton , felt lively, almost electric, under him. He had to hold the animal under tight rein to keep its trot from exploding into a gallop.

"Easy, old fellow, easy," he said, patting the horse on the neck. "We've got a long road ahead. If you go too fast now, you'll wear yourself down to a nub long before we get there."

The horse didn't want to listen to him. It wanted to run.Roosevelt laughed as the fort disappeared behind a swell of prairie. He was the same way. When anyone told him to slow down, he generally went

faster.

And not a man in the world had the right to rein him in.

He checked himself. That wasn't quite true. Military discipline did for him what reins did for the horse.

Without it, he would have charged intoCanada by now. But the cases weren't identical. He'd submitted to military discipline of his own free will. The horse didn't have a choice.

Jackrabbits bounded over the plains, sensibly taking no chances on whether he might try to shoot them if they stayed around to watch him ride by. He didn't need to bother with jackrabbits, not today, not with fresh-baked bread and several chunks of fried chicken in his saddlebag. If he spied a herd of pronghorns on his way north, though . . .

He saw some antelope off in the distance, but too far off for him to bother chasing them. Welton had sent a courier up to the headquarters of the Unauthorized Regiment, letting Lieutenant Jobst and the rest of the men know he would be spending some time atFortBenton . He couldn't help feeling he'd been away too long. One thing he emphatically did not want was for his regiment to discover it could get along just as well without him.

Walk, canter, trot. Walk, canter, trot. Mile after mile of prairie unrolled behind him. More miles lay ahead. The horse was still willing, but no longer eager. Roosevelt rode north by the sun and by his compass; not nearly enough horsemen had traveled back and forth between Fort Benton and his headquarters to wear even the beginnings of a trail into the grass. Walk, canter, trot.

Every hour or so, he gave his mount a few minutes' rest and let it snatch at clumps of grass. The grass was still green. It wouldn't stay green forever, nor even much longer. Winter came early toMontanaTerritory , just as it left late.Blaine had rejected the Confederates' peace offer: well and good.

Despite that, though,Roosevelt still hadn't been able to do any fighting. If the damned British didn't get moving, or if his own orders didn't change, he wouldn't be able to start till spring.

When he came to theMariasRiver , he stowed the compass in his saddlebag. He wouldn't need it any more. He rode northwest along the southern bank of the river till he came to a ford. With the water so

low in summer, that didn't take long. His boots stayed dry while his horse splashed across. No steamboat had ever made it up theMarias . "And I know steamboats," he told the horse, "that can pour a barrel of beer into a dry riverbed and make fifty miles on the suds."

The horse snorted. He couldn't tell whether it was derision or appreciation.

He rode up the northern fork of the Marias, which was theWillow . "Almost there now," he told the horse as the sun sank toward theRockies . The horse didn't answer, not this time. It had worked hard all day. He patted its neck. "Come on—not much farther."

He strayed away from the riverbank after dark, and almost rode past the camp. The night was mild—milder than the past few had been—and the men had let the fires die back to embers. He spied their red glow off to his left only a moment before a challenge came out of the night: "Halt! Who goes there?"

"Hello, Johnny," he answered, recognizing the sentry's voice. "It's Colonel Roosevelt, back fromFortBenton ."

"Advance and be recognized, Colonel," Johnny Unger said, playing the game by the rules. His voice held a grin, though. AsRoosevelt rode slowly forward, he whistled to the next nearest sentry and called, "Hey, Sean—the Old Man's come back from town."

"Bully!" Sean said. Neither of their voices would have disturbed the men sleeping back at regimental headquarters.

A booted foot crunched a twig. Johnny Unger materialized, one moment invisible, the next standing right besideRoosevelt . "Yes, sir, it's you, all right," he said, and chuckled. "Go on in. Did you do the trip in one day, or stretch it out over two?"

"Started this morning,"Roosevelt answered. "Never waste time, Johnny. It's the one thing in the whole wide world you can't get back."

"Yes, sir," the sentry said. "If you've been riding that horse all day, I was just thinking, he'll need more seeing to than if you'd done it the easy way."

"I'll tend to him, never fear,"Roosevelt said. He asked for very few of the privileges to which his rank might have entitled him. When the sentry vanished once more,Roosevelt rode the beast into camp.

He poked and fed one of the fires up to brighter life so he could see what he was doing as he brushed down the horse and checked its hooves. One of them had a pebble caught in the horseshoe. He dug it out with a curved steel pick. The beast couldn't have had it long, or it would have started favoring that leg.

Roosevelttried to be as quiet as he could, but a couple of men sat up in their bedrolls to see what was going on. "Good to have you back, Colonel," one of them said softly.Roosevelt waved and went back to work.

After an hour or so, the horse was settled.Roosevelt patted him one last time, then got out his blanket, wrapped himself up in it like a papoose, and fell asleep even while still wriggling around to get comfortable.

He woke with the sun shining in his face, the smell of coffee in the air, and First Lieutenant Karl Jobst standing only a couple of feet away. "Good morning, sir," Jobst said whileRoosevelt stretched and yawned. "By what the courier had to say, you found yourself a livelier time than you looked for when you went down to Fort Benton."

"That's nothing but the truth,"Roosevelt said. "I rode down toGreat Falls with Colonel Wclton, as you'll have heard, to listen to Abe Lincoln. Very fine speaker—no two ways about that—but he spouts nonsense, nothing but Socialistic nonsense. Let him rave, I say. If he keeps at it, he'll split the Republican Party right down the middle, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Uh, sir ... you are a Dutchman," Jobst pointed out. Of German blood himself, he got called a Dutchman a lot, butRoosevelt was the genuine article.

"Proves my point, doesn't it?"Roosevelt said gleefully as he got to his feet. Over coffee and hardtack and antelope, he asked, "Anything new on patrol that's worth hearing?"

"No, sir," his adjutant answered. "All routine. No, I take that back. Somebody in D Troop got bitten by a rattlesnake, but it's not a bad bite, and they're pretty sure he'll pull through."

"I'm glad to hear it—not that he got bitten, but that we won't lose him. The rattlesnakes north of the border arc quiet, though?" When Jobst nodded,Roosevelt went on, "In that case . . ." He set out the scheme for leave Colonel Welton had accepted.

Karl Jobst blinked. Plainly, such an idea would never have occurred to him. Once he heard it, he liked it.

"What a clever notion, sir. You're right—I'm sure it will have a tonic effect on the men's spirits."

"I'll draft the necessary orders,"Roosevelt said. Jobst looked slightly miffed; a lot of regimental commanders would have let him do the job. EverythingRoosevelt could do himself, he did do himself.

Inside of an hour, one courier was on his way to A Troop, announcing a week's leave for its men, and another to B Troop, ordering it to stretch out to cover the ground A Troop would be clearing.

Half an hour after that, another courier rode into regimental headquarters at a pounding gallop:Roosevelt

's farmhand, Esau Hunt, who was serving in B Troop. "Boss!" he shouted, and then, remembering himself, "Colonel Roosevelt, sir! The limeys are over the border, sir. Whole great big column of 'em crossed yesterday. We took a few shots at 'em, but they got a hell of a lot more men than we do."

Theodore Roosevelt stared, briefly speechless. "All leaves cancelled," he murmured. Half a moment later, he was bellowing for couriers at the top of his lungs, some to concentrate his regiment and set it in motion against the British, another to ride down to Fort Benton and bring the rest of the Army the news.

That done, he threw back his head and laughed out loud. "God delivered the Midianites into Gideon's hands, and He has delivered the British into mine." He raised his voice to a great shout: "For the Lord, and for Gideon!"

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Colonel George Custer had a splendid view of the hanging of the Mormon traitors in front ofFortDouglas , but could not watch it so closely as he should have liked. He was too busy keeping an eye on the crowd that pressed up against the restraining rope a couple of hundred yards from the gallows.

"Be ready, men," he called to his Gatling-gun crews. "If anyone crosses that barrier, we are to open fire without warning and without mercy. The scoops know as much. They had better—we've warned them often

enough."

The Mormons were splendidly law-abiding—except when their church elders led them astray. If John Taylor, who remained at large, wanted martyrs in large numbers, he would have them. The believers were likelier to heed his admonitions than those of the hated U.S. Army.

"We'll get 'em, sir," Sergeant Buckley said, and the other gunners nodded.

They were not alone out there. Riflemen stood between the Gatlings, and several cannon shotted with canister bore on the crowd. Custer wished the Gatlings weren't there at all. Their absence would have let him pay more attention to the Mormons' getting what they deserved. But General Pope had assigned him the miserable gadgets, and so he had to make the best of it.

Softly, his brother Tom said, "Here they come, Autie."

And indeed, out through the gate, guarded and led by more soldiers with Springfields, came George Q.

Cannon, Orson Pratt, a Mormon apostle named Daniel Wells, Cannon's brother (whose Christian name—if Mormons' first names deserved that description— Custer had never bothered to learn) and two other leaders of the Latter-Day Saints. Their hands were bound behind them. John Pope followed in dress uniform.

None of the Mormons hesitated in mounting the thirteen steps to the multiple gallows; their steps were firm and sure. Each leader took his place at a noose, beside which stood a hangman in a black hood—

Pope, sensibly, did not want the grimly silent crowd to be able to recognize the executioners.

Each hangman offered his Mormon a hood without eyeholes. Wells, Cannon's brother, and one of the men whose names Custer had not noted accepted; Pratt, George Cannon, and the other stranger refused. The hangmen set the nooses around the Mormons' necks.

In a voice just loud enough for Custer to hear, Orson Pratt asked General Pope, "May I speak to my people one last time? I give you my sacred oath the words shall be of reconciliation, not of strife."

Custer turned his head and watched Pope mull. He would have said no. But Pope answered, "Speak, then. Be brief, though, and remember

that your people shall answer if you betray them into madness."

"I remember, and I thank you," Pratt said, quietly still. The salt-smelling breeze ruffled his bushy white beard. He cried out to the throng who believed as he did: "My brethren, my friends, I leave you today for a better world to come, and give you these words from the second book of Nephi as my parting gift: 'O

then, if I have seen so many great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart leap and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions? And why should 1 yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have placed in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. Do not anger again because of mine enemies. ' " He bowed his hoary head.

"Amen!" George Cannon cried.

"Amen!" the other Mormon leaders echoed more quietly.

"Amen!" It rippled through the crowd, along with the sound of weeping.

"He kept his word," Tom Custer murmured, his voice more serious than was his wont. "That's not the worst prayer I ever heard, either."

"It is nothing but a mockery and an imitation of the Good Book." George Custer remained unmoved.

So did Brigadier General John Pope. "These men have been convicted of treason and insurrection against theUnited States of America ," he declared in a shout that would have been huge had it not followed Orson Pratt's. "For their crimes, I, under the authority given me by President James G. Blaine, have sentenced them to death by hanging. President Blaine having reviewed and confirmed these sentences"—he raised his right hand high in the air—"let the punishment be carried out." The hand dropped.

So did the traps beneath the six condemned Mormons as the hangmen worked their levers. So did the Mormons' bodies. Custer heard neck bones snap; the men who'd tied the hangman's nooses had known

their business. The bodies kicked and spasmed briefly, then were still.

No one surged forward out of the crowd. The sound of weeping grew louder. "Shame!" someone shouted. In an instant, men and women alike took up the call: "Shame! Shame! Shame!" It washed over the soldiers and their weapons and the military governor ofUtahTerritory and the gallows and the bodies dangling from it. For a quarter of an hour, the Mormons repeated their one-word answer to what they had just witnessed.

John Pope had grit. He walked out in front of his men, advancing on the rope barrier till he was within easy pistol range of the crowd that hated him. He raised his hand, as he had done to order the executioners to ready themselves. "Hear me!" he shouted. "People ofUtah , hear me!" And the people did grant him something close to quiet. "Go home. All is over here. Live in peace, and obey the laws and authority of theUnited States of America . Go home."

Some of the Mormons kept on calling, "Shame!" More, though, began the walk back down toSalt Lake City . Little by little, the crowd melted away.

Tom Custer whistled softly. "We got by with it, Autie. I was a long way from sure we would."

"So was I." Custer didn't know whether to be relieved the Mormons had not erupted at the execution of their leaders or disappointed the U.S. Army had not had the chance to teach them precisely how much rebellion could cost.

By the expression on Pope's face, the military governor was contemplating the horns of the same dilemma. "Six traitors dead," he said, walking up to Custer. Apparently choosing to look on the bright side, he added, "God grant the rest learn their lesson."

"Yes, sir." Custer looked back toward the gallows. "They died well." He shrugged to show how little that mattered to him. "Redskins die well, too. In my view, the Mormons arc about as fanatical as the Sioux and the Kiowa."

"And in mine as well." Pope took off his plumed hat and mopped his forehead with a linen handkerchief.

"I took a chance with that rascal Pratt, and I know it. But I reckoned he couldn't make things much worse, and might make them better. And his fanaticism, I have seen, includes a fanatical truthfulness."

"It worked out well, sir." Custer was not about to criticize a superior to his face, especially not after that superior had scored a success. What he said to Libbic come evening was liable to be something else again. He thought of Katie Fitzgerald, of her mouth, of her breasts, of her coppery bush. Ever so slightly, he shook his head. No matter how much of a tigress Katie was between the sheets, he was glad his wife had come toFortDouglas . He could unburden himself to her as to no one else on earth.

Pope pointed to the limp bodies swaying in the breeze. "We'll have to cut that carrion down and bury it.

I don't fancy giving the bodies back to the Mormons so they can riot at a funeral where they didn't at the hanging."

"That's—very clever, sir," Custer said, and meant it. Worrying about the funeral would never have entered his mind. He turned to the eight Gatling-gun crews. "Men, you have helped keep order inUtahTerritory . TheUnited States are in your debt."

"Well said, Colonel," Pope agreed. "That goes for all of us here. We have subdued this Territory, and we are reducing it to obedience. And we have done it with a minimum of bloodshed, and with no need to summon excessive forces away from the armies in the field against the Confederate States."

"I wish I were serving in an army in the field against the Confederate States," Custer said.

"So do I," Pope replied. "We also serve here, however. I remind myself of this daily. And, were I facing the Rebels, 1 should not have had the opportunity, after all these years, to pay Abe Lincoln back at least in part for the bitter lot he imposed upon me and rendered far more bitter by the fact that my sacrifice was made in vain. But I am in some measure avenged for my exile toMinnesota ."

"I wish he'd tried to tread the air with the Mormons here today," Custer said. "From what I hear, he continues to spread trouble wherever he goes."

"You know we are also in complete agreement on that score," Pope said. "But, being soldiers, we can only obey the orders we receive from the duly constituted civil authorities." He cocked his head to one side. "It *is* a pity, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it is," Custer said. "I was General McClellan's man during the War of Secession, and you, of course, were anything but, yet all soldiers who served during that unhappy time cannot possibly have any other view of Honest Abe." He freighted the title with as much contempt as it would bear.

Pope set a hand on his shoulder. "Since coming toUtah , we have proved to be in harmony on more than that view alone, Colonel. You have carried out my wishes in a fashion with which I can not only find no fault, but which pleases me very highly indeed, and I have so stated in my reports at every opportunity."

"Thank you, sir!" Custer said joyfully.

When he told Libbie about it at supper that evening, she beamed, too. "That's splendid news, Autie," she said. "Of course you deserve it, but a man does not always get what he deserves." Her lip curled. "As you said,Lincoln is the chiefest example there."

"Yes." Custer cut a piece off his beefsteak and tossed it up in the air. Stonewall caught it before it touched the ground, gulped it down, and barked for more. "Later, boy," his master told him. Custer patted the dog's head. To his wife, he went on, "I always marvel at how you manage to move everything we have, beasts and all, without missing a beat."

"Your duty is to be a soldier, Autie. My duty is to keep an eye on you, and one way or another I do it."

If Libbie's mouth narrowed a little, if her voice held the slightest edge, Custer, whose gaze was ever most focused on himself, failed to notice.

The cook came out of the kitchen. "Anything else, sir, ma'am?" she asked.

"No, thank you, Esmerelda," Libbie said before Custer could reply. Esmerelda nodded and withdrew.

In a low voice, Custer said, "She cooks well—no one could deny it—but that is one of the homeliest women I have ever set eyes upon, even inSalt Lake City ."

"Really? I hadn't noticed," Libbie said. Custer chuckled at women's blindness about other women. If Libbie wasn't quite so blind as he thought she was, he failed to notice that, too, as he'd failed for a good

many years.

He was pouring cream into his coffee when a soldier rushed up thumping in booted feet to the door to his quarters and pounded on it, shouting, "Colonel Custer! Colonel Custer! General Pope needs to see you right away, sir!"

Custer pushed back his chair and sprang to his feet. "I wonder what it can be," he said. Whatever it was, Stonewall wanted to come along and find out, too. "Down, sir. Down!" Custer commanded. The dog stared at him with resentful eyes as he dashed off, as if to say, *Why do you get to have all the fun ?*

"Hurry, sir!" the orderly said when Custer opened the door.

"Hurry I shall." To prove it, Custer dashed past the soldier and beat him to Pope's office by half a dozen strides. He wasn't quite so young as he had been, but kept himself in top shape. Not breathing hard at all, he saluted and said, "Reporting as ordered, sir."

Pope held up several telegrams. "Colonel, within the last half hour, I have learned that British forces have invadedMontanaTerritory ."

"Good God, sir!" As if lightning had struck close by, electricity arced up Custer's spine.

"I can only presume that their goal is to plunder and ravage the mining regions of that Territory, as the Confederates have done to such unfortunate effect inNew Mexico ," Pope said. "Whatever their purpose, though, we must and shall beat them back, punishing them as they deserve for thus testing our mettle."

"Yes, sir!" Custer said. "We'll lick them. We *must* lick them, and so we shall." And then, hardly daring to hope, he asked, "What can we here inUtah "—by which he meant, *What canI , myself, personally* —

"do to lend a hand?"

And Pope replied, "As I told you earlier today, I have spoken highly of you in my reports back toPhiladelphia . That praise has apparently borne fruit." He picked through the sheaf of telegrams for one in particular. "You and the Fifth Cavalry, and, specifically, the eight Gatling guns attached to your regiment are ordered toGreat Falls,Montana , there to join in defending our beloved country. And you, Colonel, are ordered to take overall command of that defense, with the brevet rank of brigadier general."

He stood up and shook his hand. "Congratulations, General Custer!"

In a pink-tinged daze, Custer shook the proffered hand. "Thank you very much, sir," he whispered. He'd dreamt of stars on his shoulder straps since the day he enteredWest Point . Now, at last, they were his. "I shall save our country, sir," he declared, while an interior voice added, *In spite of those Gatling guns.*

Chapter14

Sam Clemens walked in to the office of the *San Francisco Morning Call*, hung his straw hat on a branch of the hat tree, and asked, "Well, boys, what's gone wrong since I went home last night?"

A chorus of voices answered him, so loud and vigorous that he had trouble sorting out one piece of bad news from the next. The British army inMontanaTerritory was still moving south. British gunboats on the Great Lakes were bombardingU.S. lakeside cities again, with apparent impunity.Louisville remained a bloody stalemate.

"President Blaine didn't think he had reason enough to give over the war before," Clemens observed.

"Our enemies seem to be giving him reason now, don't they?"

"AndPocahontas,Arkansas , has fallen back into Rebel hands," Clay Herndon added.

"Good God!" Sam staggered, as if taking a mortal wound. "That proves the struggle truly hopeless.

How, save by the grace of a thick skull, canBlaine keep from yielding to common sense?"

Edgar Leary delivered the topper: "The wires say British ironclads have appeared offBoston andNew York , and they're bombarding the harbors and the towns."

"Good God," Clemens said, this time in earnest. "They are taking the switch to us. You'd think that, if we were going to get into a war with the whole world, we might have made some sort of an effort to be ready for it ahead of time. But the Democrats reckoned saying 'Yes, Massa' to the Rebs once a day and twice on Sundays would get us by without fighting, so they didn't fret much about the Army and Navy.

AndBlaine didn't fret about 'em, either; he just up and used 'em, ready or not. And now we know which."

From the back of the office, somebody shouted, "Holy Jesus! Telegraph says the French Navy is shellingLos Angeles harbor."

"That does it!" Sam cried. "That absolutely does it! The Confederates wrestle us to the ground,England jumps on us as soon as we're down,

and nowFrance bites us in the ankle. Can't you see her, yapping and panting? Pretty soon, she'll piss on our leg, you mark my word."

Off in the distance, thunder rolled.

Clay Herndon frowned. "It was clear when I got here half an hour ago. Don't usually get thunderstorms this time of year, anyhow. Hell, we don't usually get any rain at all this time of year."

"Fastest thunderstorm 1 ever heard of," Clemens said. "It was clear when I walked in five minutes ago."

"Look out the window," Leary said. "It's still clear."

Sam couldn't see the window. He opened the door. Bright daylight streamed in. Another rumbling roar sounded, though, this one not so far away. "That isn't thunder!" he exclaimed. "It's cannon fire."

"It can't be," Clay Herndon said. "It's not coming from the direction of the forts, and we'd have heard if Colonel Sherman were moving any guns. Most of those big ones don't move, anyhow."

"I didn't say they were our guns, Clay," Clemens answered quietly. "I think somebody's navy has just brought the war toSan Francisco ."

"That's era—" Herndon began. Then he shook his head. It would have been crazy yesterday. It wasn't crazy today, not with the Royal Navy shellingBoston andNew York harbors, not with the French—whose ships, Sam judged, had to be sallying from some port on the west coast of their puppet Mexican empire—bombardingLos Angeles .

And, as if to confirm Clemens' words, more thunderous reports rolled out of the west. But they were not thunder. A few seconds later came another blast, close enough to rattle the front window of the *Morning Call* offices, through which Edgar Leary was still staring as if expecting rain. A rending crash followed.

"That's a building falling down," Herndon whispered.

"No." Clemens shook his head. "That's a building blowing up."

Now, at last, from the northwest came the thunderous reports that had grown familiar through the summer: the cannon inSan Francisco 's fortifications opened up, defending the harbor against the foe.

"They'll never make it through theGolden Gate !" Leary exclaimed.

"I wonder if they even care to try." Sam was thinking out loud, and not liking any of his own thoughts.

"By the sound of their guns, they're standing off the coast—maybe out past the Cliff House—and shooting across the peninsula, either toward the wharves or just toward us. I wonder if they know which themselves, or care."

A shell landed only a couple of blocks away. The floor jerked under Sam's feet from the explosion, as if at a small, sharp earthquake. A moment later, he heard the rumble of collapsing masonry. He'd heard that during earthquakes, too, but not during small ones. Blast and rumble were so loud, he marveled at how faint and distant the following screams seemed.

But, where the roar of the cannons had not, those screams reminded him he was a newspaperman.

"Jesus Christ, boys!" he burst out. "We're sitting in the middle of the biggest story that's happened in this town since 1849. We're not going to be able to cover it standing around here or hiding under our desks.

Leary! Get over to Fort Point. See what the devil the garrison's doing to drive the enemy away. Sec if they're doing anything to drive the enemy away. See if they know who the devil the enemy is. That'd be a good bit of news to put in a story, don't you think?"

"Right, boss!" Edgar Leary pushed past him and out the door.

"Clay!" Sam snapped. "You go to the Cliff House, fast as you can. Whatever you can see of the enemy fleet, note it down."

"I'll do it," Herndon said. Then he hesitated. "What if they've already blown the Cliff House to hell and gone?"

Clemens' exasperated exhalation puffed out his mustache. "In that case, you chowderhead, don't go inside." Herndon nodded quite seriously, as if that hadn't occurred to him. Maybe it hadn't. More explosions were rocking the city now. How could you blame anybody for having a hard time thinking straight?

Clemens sent someone to the harbor, to see if enemy shells were falling there as well as onSan Francisco itself, and also to see what, if anything, the Pacific Squadron was doing about the enemy. He scattered reporters through the city. Whatever happened, he—and the *Morning Call* —would know about it.

One of the last men out the door asked, "Are you going to stay here and put everything together, boss?"

"That's what I have in mind, yes," Sam answered. "Every one of you will know more about some of this business than I do, but I'll end up knowing more about all of this business than any of you."

"Unless a shell comes down on your head," the reporter said with a nervous chuckle.

"Some people who work for this paper, that would hurt the shell more than the head in question."

Clemens fixed the reporter with a glare. "Shall I name names?"

"Oh, no, boss," the fellow said hastily, and departed. Not five seconds after he was out the door, another shell made the building shake. The front window broke in a tinkling shower of glass. Somewhere not too far away, a fire-alarm bell was clanging. Sam grimaced at that. How many gas lines was the bombardment breaking? How many fires had started? How bad would they get? How was the fire department supposed to put them out, with ironclads shelling the men as they worked?

"Those are all good questions," Clemens muttered. "I wonder if any good answers will stick to them."

He stationed himself at his desk. Every time a shell smashed down west of the newspaper office, he scowled and chewed on his cigar. What were Alexandra and Orion and Ophelia doing? This was a nasty way to make war, throwing shells around in the hope of smashing up whatever they hit and not worrying much about what that was.

Most of an hour went by. The local telegraph clicker started to chatter. No one was minding it; Clemens had sent everybody out to cover the story. He got up to see what the message was. It was from Clay Herndon: ROYAL NAVY SHELLING CITY, CLIFF HOUSE WRECKED AND BURNING. AT

NEAREST TELEGRAPH OFFICE TO OCEAN. DAMAGE SEVERE ALREADY. OUR GUNS OF

LITTLE EFFECT.

That gave Sam something to write. He wrote it and gave it to the

typesetters. Other reports began coming in, some by wire, some by messengers the reporters had paid, some by messengers who loudly demanded to be paid. Sam suspected some of those had already been paid once, but he shelled out.

They hadn't had to come here, after all.

A picture began to emerge. The enemy ships did seem to be trying to reach the harbor with their guns, or at least with some of them. Most of the shells were falling short, though. "Thanks," Sam muttered sourly as the *Morning Call* building rattled again. "I never would have noticed that."

The Pacific Squadron was moving out to engage the foe. He suspected the handful of antiquated gunboats would be sorry in short order, but making the effort was their job. He wished Edgar Leary would send him something, but the cub remained silent. Maybe he'd been hit on the way to Fort Point.

Maybe the telegraph lines were down. And maybe Colonel Sherman wasn't inclined to let any news out of the fort and into the city. Considering how little the fort's guns were doing to drive away the British ironclads, the last explanation struck Clemens as most likely.

Men with rifles started running down Market. Other men with rifles started running up Market. "Good to see the Volunteers have everything well in hand," Sam muttered. "Chickens act this way after the hatchet comes down, but chickens aren't in the habit of carrying Springfields." Somebody fired one of those rifles. *How many of our own shall we kill?* Clemens scribbled. *How many of them shall we blame on the British?*

The telegraph clicker started up again. He hurried over to it. The message was to the point:MARINESLANDINGOCEANBEACH . HERNDON.

Sam was still carrying his notebook and pen. He looked down at the two sentences he'd just written.

They were still true. They were, if anything, truer than ever. With three quick, firm strokes, he scratched them out anyhow. "Who's wearing a hogleg?" he shouted, as loud as he could. "The God-damned Englishmen are landing troops!"

"We'll nail the sons of bitches!" a typesetter yelled. He and two of the

men who served the presses dashed out the front door, pistols in their hands. Clemens wondered if the British Marines knew what they were getting into. Apart from the Volunteer companies, a lot of men inSan Francisco carried guns for self-protection—not least, for protection from other men carrying guns.

He wondered whether the Regular Army garrison up at Fort Point and the Presidio knew the ironclads out in the Pacific had landed Marines. Anyone with a lick of sense would have posted lookouts—with luck, lookouts with telegraph keys—all along the ocean front opposite the built-up part ofSan Francisco .

"Which means the Army likely hasn't done it," he said. Then he shrugged. "If they don't know about 'em, they'll find out pretty damn quick."

He went back to his desk and started writing up some of the reports he was getting. As soon as he finished one, he carried it back to the typesetters, who set about turning it into something someone besides him and them and perhaps Alexandra could read.

By the time he'd finished a couple, a great rattle of small-arms fire had broken out to the west. It rapidly got louder and closer. People might be shooting at the British Marines, but they were shooting back, too, and evidently to better effect.

Smoke started floating in through what had been the front window. Clemens coughed a couple of times, then called, "Boys, if you want to go out in the street, I won't say a word. This is a fine paper, but it's not worth burning up for."

Most of the printers and typesetters did leave the building. As long as some of them stuck, Sam did, too, figuring the men out there would warn him before advancing flames got too close. He covered page after page of paper, wondering all the while if what he wrote would meet a hotter critic than he'd ever been.

Clay Herndon burst into the offices without his jacket, with his cravat all askew, and with blood running down the side of his face. "My God, Sam!" he cried hoarsely. "They're coming this way! Nobody can stop them. They're coming!"

Clemens pulled a bottle of whiskey out of a desk drawer. "Here," he said. "Drink some of this." Herndon did, and then wheezed and choked. Sam said, "Wipe your face and tell me what happened to you."

Herndon ran a sleeve across his cheek and seemed astonished when it came away red. "Must have been when a bullet took out a window and sprayed me with glass," he said. "It's nothing. Listen, those Royal Marines make the Regulars look sick. Nobody can shift 'em, and they're not far behind me, either."

"What in tarnation are the limeys up to?" Clemens demanded. "I thought they'd do some shooting and burning for show, but if they're on your heels"—and the ever-swelling racket of gunfire made that obviously true—"they must be after something bigger. But what?"

"Damned if I know," the reporter said. "Whatever it is, who's going to stop 'em?"

"City Hall?" Sam mused. He shook his head. "No, too much to hope for—and if they shoot Mayor Sutro, the city gets stronger." And then, almost with the force of divine relation, he knew, or thought he did: "My God! TheU.S. Mint!"

"I don't know." Herndon took another slug of whiskey. "You can't imagine what it's like out there. All fire and smoke and chaos and people shooting and people running and people screaming and horses screaming and the only ones who have any notion of what they're doing or where they're going are the Marines."

"You sound like a man talking about the devils in hell," Clemens said.

"You aren't far wrong," Herndon said. "Listen, if they are after the Mint, it's not far from here—down onMission , by Fifth." He swayed where he stood. Shock? Whiskey? Some of both? Probably the last, Sam guessed. The reporter gathered himself. "They'll be here soon. That's not good."

"Have to get the story," Sam said, and pushed outside past Herndon. People were still dashing every which way, some with weapons, some without. And then, almost without warning, they weren't running every which way. They were all running east, with rifle fire lashing them on. Every so often, someone with a rifle or pistol would pause to send back a shot or two. After that, he'd run some more.

Except one of them didn't run any more. Instead, he fell, clutching his chest. A moment later, a skinny little man in an unfamiliar uniform not far from Confederate butternut dashed up and bayoneted him to make sure he didn't get up again. Then he yanked the long, bloody bayonet free and aimed his rifle at Sam Clemens.

Time stretched endlessly. As if in a dream, Sam raised his hands to show he was unarmed. The Royal Marine's face was sweaty and smoke-stained. His scowl showed very bad teeth. He couldn't have stood more than fifty feet from Sam: point-blank range. After a hundred years in which Sam's heart beat once, the Englishman turned the rifle aside and ran on.

All the starch went out of Clemens' knees. Even though the Marine had not shot him, he sagged to the pavement. Now, instead of once in a hundred years, his heart thudded a thousand times a second. More and more Royal Marines dashed past him. None of them gave him a second glance; no one could have imagined him a danger at that moment.

More gunfire rang out, not far to the east: the Mint, sure enough. He remained too dazed to feel proud of being right. Some of the British fighting men must have brought dynamite, for loud explosions smote the ear. "Move against them!" shouted a fellow in a captain's uniform: surely a volunteer. No one moved against them, no matter how he bellowed and carried on.

And then, quite suddenly, or so it seemed to Sam, the Royal Marines were running west where they had been running east. He went back into the *Morning Call* offices. "You know what this is?" he said to Clay Herndon. "It's the biggest goddamn bank holdup in the history of the world."

"How much silver and gold do you think however many British Marines there are could carry away?"

Herndon asked in an awed voice.

"Don't know the answer to that one, but I'll tell you this: people are going to fight over the bodies of any who got killed the way lions fought over the Christians in the Coliseum," Sam said.

As the sounds of gunfire had once advanced throughSan Francisco , so now they retreated toward the Pacific. Half an hour after the Royal Marines departed from whatever was left of the U.S. Mint (by the smoke billowing up from it, not much), two natty companies of Regular Army infantry marched past the *Morning Call* offices in neat formation, sun gleaming from their fixed bayonets. Sam didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He took that bottle out of his desk and got drunk instead.

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Brigadier General Orlando Willcox beamed at Frederick Douglass. "How good to have you restored to my table here once more," the commander of the Army of theOhio said, raising his coffee cup in salute as if it were a goblet of wine. "A pleasure to see you returned to freedom, and a pleasure to enjoy your company again. Your very good health." He drank the unspirituous toast.

So did all the officers at his table, even Captain Richardson. "Thank you very much, General," Douglass said. "Believe me, I feel myself delivered, as were the Israelites from Pharaoh's bondage in thelandofEgypt ."

"You are a pious man, Mr. Douglass," Colonel Alfred von Schlieffen said. "This is in my judgment good.

It will take you through hard times in your life more surely than will anything else."

Douglass eyed the German military attaché. What did he know of hard times? In his life,Prussia had gone from triumph to triumph, and now headed a German Empire that was surely the strongest power on the European continent. He had not seen his nation split in two, nor ninety percent of his own people, his own kind, trapped in bondage—*like the Israelites indeed,* Douglass thought.

But then he recalled having heard that Schlieffen had lost his wife in childbed. That was an anguish Douglass had never had to bear. He nodded judiciously. Schlieffen could know whereof he spoke.

"They brought you before Stonewall himself, didn't they?" someone asked. "What was that like?"

What *had* that been like? Stonewall was a name with which mothers in the United States, and especially Negro mothers in the United States, had been frightening naughty children for a generation. "When the Rebel soldiers took me into his tent, I told him I thought I had come before the Antichrist."

"As well you might," General Willcox said, and then, "Oh, thank you, Grady." The cook set on a table a large tray piled high with squab.

The succulently roasted birds went from tray to plates in next to nothing flat. Douglass snagged a couple for himself. Baked potatoes followed shortly. He went on, "The very strange thing was thatJackson

's artillery commander—"

"General Alexander," Oliver Richardson put in.

"General Alexander, yes," Douglass agreed. "Shortly before my arrival there, *he* had likened *me* to the Antichrist."

Richardsonnodded, as if he not only believed Alexander would say such a thing but agreed with it himself. Orlando Willcox asked, "And do you and the Confederate generals still hold this view of each other?"

Cutting up a potato and grinding pepper over it, Douglass paused before answering. Then, slowly, reluctantly, he said, "I, at any rate, do not. General Jackson is a man convinced of his Tightness and of his righteousness, but not the horrific figure of evil I had made of him in my mind."

Captain Richardson looked mischievous. "You'll notice, friends, Douglass says nothing of whether the Rebs changed their minds about him." He spoke lightly, so the words would be taken for a joke, but Douglass did not think he was joking. By the snide laughs that rose around the table, neither did a good many members of Willcox's staff.

"In fact, I believe they did," Douglass answered. "We shall never love one another. We may now know a certain respect previously lacking." He laughed a laugh of his own. "I cannot deny that General Jackson treated me far more respectfully than the Rebel soldiers who first took hold of me." He chuckled again.

That rib didn't seem to be broken after all. He didn't know why not.

Down at the far end of the table, someone said, "They didn't worry about the Antichrist, I'll bet. They likely thought they'd nabbed Old Scratch himself." That got another laugh, this time one in which Douglass felt he could join. That major down there wasn't far wrong.

Colonel Schlieffen changed the subject, saying, "These"—he groped for the English word—"these doves are very good eating. And we have them often, so they must common be. Very good." He sucked the meat off a leg bone.

"Not doves, Colonel." Oliver Richardson enjoyed showing off how much he knew, though this was something any American schoolboy could have told the German military attache. "They're passenger pigeons, and yes, they are very common in this part of the country."

"Not so common as they used to be," General Willcox said. "When I was a lad inMichigan , the flocks would darken the sky, as the Persians' arrows are said to have done atThermopylae against the Greeks.

Swarms of that size are no longer seen: fewer forests here in theMidwest where the birds can rear their young than in the old days, 1 suppose. But, as Captain Richardson says, they do remain common."

"And, as Colonel Schlieffen says, they do remain very good eating." Douglass had reduced the two he'd taken to a pile of bones. He hooked another bird off the tray and devoured it, too.

Schlieffen said, "I am glad, Mr. Douglass, you here again to see, and to know that you are safe after being captured. I will not much longer with the Army of theOhio stay, I think. I have learned much here, and am sorry to have to go, but I think it is for the best."

"I'll miss you, Colonel," Douglass said, and meant it. Like most Europeans he'd met, Schlieffen was far more prepared to accept him simply as a man, and not as a black man, than the common run of Americans. "But, if you're still learning things here, why go?"

"I believe," Schlieffen replied after a perceptible pause for thought, "that what new things I may learn by staying will be small next to the knowledge I have already gained."

Douglass needed a moment to figure out why the German had taken such pains with his answer. Then he saw: Schlieffen was saying he didn't expect the Army of theOhio to accomplish much more than it had already done. He didn't expectU.S. soldiers to break through the Confederate entrenchments ringing them and to rampage acrossKentucky . Had he thought they could manage something like that, he might have stayed to watch them do it.

And, in saying the Army of theOhio was unlikely to accomplish anything more, he was also saying that army had failed. It still did not hold all ofLouisville ; its flanking manoeuvre had been costly but had not dislodged the Rebels. Even if it did eventually dislodge the Rebels fromLouisville , it surely could not launch any triumphal progress throughKentucky thereafter. Since triumph was what Blaine and Willcox had purposed, anything less meant defeat.

No wonder Schlieffen was so careful not to offend. His departure passed judgment on the campaign and on those who ran it.

Richardson said, "Whether he reckons you're the Antichrist or not, Mr. Douglass"—he was smooth when he wanted to be, smooth enough to use a title in public, no matter how hypocritically—"I'm surprised old Stonewall up and let you go instead of keeping you to trade for a Reb or something."

Douglass shrugged. "Had the decision been his, I do not know what he would have done with me—or to me. Had the decision been his, I gather he did not know what he would have done. He referred it to President Longstreet, however, who ordered my release. Having received the order,Jackson not only obeyed but treated me quite handsomely."

Better than you deserved,Richardson 's face said.

Orlando Willcox sighed. "Longstreet was more astute than I had thought he would be. By releasing you so promptly and with such good treatment, he enabled the Confederate States to escape the odium that would have fallen on them had they sought to punish you for your views and actions over the years."

"Yes," Douglass said, and let it go at that. Martyrdom was easier to contemplate in the abstract than to embrace in the flesh.

From across theOhio , artillery rumbled. "Confederate guns," Captain Richardson said, and grimaced.

"We've done everything we could, but we never have been able to beat them down."

"The long range of modern guns makes this hard," Schlieffen said. "So we learned when we fought the French. When the guns you are shooting at are behind a hill or otherwise hidden out of sight, finding accurately the range is not easy."

"True, true," General Willcox said sadly. "During the War of Secession, you could see what you were shooting at, and what you could see, you could hit. Only twenty years ago, but how much has changed since."

"We do use up a lot of ammunition feeling around for where the other fellow is, and that's a fact,"Richardson said. "A good thing he's doing the same with us, or we'd be in the soup."

"Who learns first how to find the range to the enemy's guns will a large advantage have in the war where this happens," Schlieffen said.

Nods went up and down the table. Oliver Richardson said, "When they're in sight, a rangefinder like the ones the Navy uses would do some good. But land isn't flat, the way water is. Guns can hide almost anywhere, and shoot from behind hills, as you say, Colonel. I'd like to see the boys in the ironclads cope with that."

The discussion grew technical. As far as Frederick Douglass was concerned, the discussion grew boring. Changing only the subject of the conversation and not its tone, the soldiers, hashing over the best ways to blow up their foes at enormous distances, might as readily have been steamboat engineers hashing over the best ways to wring a few extra horsepower out of a high-pressure engine.

Stifling a yawn, Douglass shifted in his seat. But before he could rise, General Willcox held up a forefinger. "Something I was meaning to ask you, sir," the commander of the Army of theOhio said.

"What was it, now? Oh, yes, I have it: during your captivity, did you have any occasion to speak with men of your race held in servitude in the Confederate States?"

Douglass settled himself firmly once more. "No, General, I did not. I wish I had had such an occasion, but it was denied me. My captors went to such lengths to prevent me from having any intercourse with my own people that, until I was returned to this side of the fighting line, I had all my meals from the hands of white soldiers detailed for the task. Appreciating the irony of having white servants at my beck and call perhaps more than the Confederate authorities would have done, I refrained from pointing it out to them, although I have every intention of prominently mentioning it in one of my future pieces on the experience."

"They were so afraid you'd corrupt their niggers, eh?"Richardson said. He found himself in a predicament that must have been awkward for him: Douglass had seen how he despised Negroes, but he also despised the Confederate States ofAmerica . Juggling those two loathings had to keep him on his toes.

"If, Captain, by corrupting you mean instilling the desire for freedom into the heart of any *Negro"*

—Douglass stressed the proper word—"upon whom I might have chanced, then I should say you are correct. Should you desire to construe the word in any other sense, I must respectfully ask that you choose another instead."

"That is what I meant, close enough,"Richardson said. Douglass sighed a small sigh. No point to taking it further. None of the officers at the table, not even General Willcox, had noticed that Richardson had called Douglass' brothers in bondage niggers—had, in effect, called him a nigger, too.

No. Colonel Schlieffen had noticed. The mournful eyes in that nondescript face held sympathy for Douglass. Schlieffen, of course, was a foreigner. None of theU.S. officers at the table had noticed anything out of the ordinary. Frederick Douglass wished that surprised him more. Had he really escaped from captivity after all, or only from the name of it and not from the thing itself?

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Brakes squealed, iron grinding against iron.Sparks flew up from the rails, putting General Thomas Jackson in mind of distant muzzle flashes seen by night. The train was a special, laid on by order of President Longstreet. No conductor came down the aisle shouting, "Richmond! All out forRichmond

!"Jackson 's was the onlyPullman behind the engine and tender.

Gaslights turned theRichmond and Danville Railroad depot bright as day. Under that yellowish light, a captain stood waiting. He sprang to attention whenJackson emerged from his car. "Sir, I have a carriage waiting for you right over yonder. You're in less than half an hour later than you were scheduled to get here; President Longstreet will be waiting up for you."

"Very well—take me to him,"Jackson said. Part of him—the frivolous part he'd been fighting all his life—wished the train had been hours late, so Longstreet would have gone to bed and he would have been able to spend the night in the bosom of his family and to see the president in the morning. But duty came first. "The president would not have summoned me had he not reckoned the matter urgent. Let us go without delay."

The captain saluted. "Yes, sir. If you'll just follow me—" As he'd promised, the carriage waited just beyond the glow of the gaslights. He stood aside to letJackson precede him up into it, then spoke to the old Negro holding the reins: "The president's residence."

"Yes, suh." The driver tipped his top hat, clucked to the horses, and

nicked the leather straps. The carriage began to roll. Every so often,Jackson saw men in uniform on the streets ofRichmond . But he might well have done that in peacetime, too, here in the capital of his nation. From the spectacle that met his eyes, he could not have proved the Confederate States were at war.

"Did you have a good trip, sir?" the captain escorting him asked.

"Middling," he replied. "As travel goes, it went well enough. I should be lying, however, if I said I was eager to leaveLouisville with the fight unsettled." He glared at the young officer as if it were his fault. As he'd hoped, that glare suppressed further questions until the carriage had rattled up Shockoe Hill to the presidential mansion.

"Good to see you, General," G. Moxley Sorrel said, as ifJackson had come round from the War Department rather than fromLouisville . "Go right in, sir. The president is waiting for you." *That* was out of the ordinary.Jackson couldn't remember the last time he hadn't had to cool his heels in the anteroom while Longstreet finished dealing with whoever was in his office ahead of the general-in-chief.

This time, Longstreet was going through papers whenJackson came in. "You made good time," he said, rising to shakeJackson 's hand. "Sit down, sit down. Make yourself comfortable. Can I shout for coffee?"

"Thank you, Your Excellency. Coffee would be most welcome." As usual,Jackson sat rigidly erect, taking no notice of the chair's soft, almost teasing efforts to seduce him into a more relaxed posture.

Longstreet didn't shout for coffee; he rang a bell. The steaming brew appeared with commendable promptness.Jackson spooned sugar into his cup, sipped, nodded, and said, "And now, sir, may I inquire what was so urgent as to require removing me from the sight of my command without the battle's end in sight?"

Longstreet drank some coffee, too, before asking, "Do you expect the Yankees to break through while you're away?"

"I do not expect them to break through at all,"Jackson snapped. Longstreet only smiled at him. After a moment, he had the grace to look sheepish. "Very well, Your Excellency: I take your point. Perhaps my absence will not unduly imperil the front. Nevertheless—"

"Nevertheless, I wanted you here, General." Longstreet took a president's privilege and overrode him.

"Conferring by telegraph is far too cumbersome. Were the telephone improved to the point where I could remain in Richmond and you in Louisville, that might serve, but we must deal with life as it is, not with life as we wish it were or as it may be ten years or fifty years from now."

"I do take the point, Mr. President, I assure you,"Jackson said. When Longstreet said *conferring,* he often meant *lecturing.* Like a lot of clever men, he enjoyed hearing himself talk.Jackson had not seen him anywhere near so happy when listening to someone else.

And the president kept right on talking. What came from his lips, though, was praise forJackson , to which the Confederate general-in-chief was not averse to listening: "You did exactly the right thing when you wired me after Frederick Douglass fell into your hands. Next to holding the Yankees' first assault atLouisville , sending that telegram may well prove your most important action in the entire campaign."

"That's very kind of you, Your Excellency, but surely you exaggerate,"Jackson said.

"I do not! In no particular do I overstate the case." Longstreet began ticking off possibilities on his fingers. "Had the soldiers who captured him shot him on realizing who and what he was, we might have claimed he was killed in the fighting. Had they lynched him after realizing who and what he was—"

"A fate he nearly suffered,"Jackson broke in.

"I believe that." Longstreet shuddered. "Had they done it, I should have had to punish them and publish to the world that they had done the infamous act without authorization from anyone higher in rank. And had *you* hanged him, General"—the president of the CSA frowned most severely—"that would have been very bad. I don't know how I could have repaired it."

"Mr. President, you are starting at shadows,"Jackson said. "Douglass"—he'd forgotten about saying *Mister* Douglass—"is a prominent figure in theUnited States , but his prominence does not translate into popularity."

"What you say is true, so far as it goes," Longstreet agreed, nodding his majestic head. "It does not go far enough. You see over the hill to the battle just ahead, but not to the larger fight three weeks later and half

a state away."

"Enlighten me, then,"Jackson said, more than a little testily. He knew he was no match for Longstreet as a politician, but did not enjoy having his nose rubbed in the fact.

Almost to his disappointment, Longstreet *did* enlighten him: "As you say, Douglass is not nearly so popular as he would wish in theUSA . He embarrasses his countrymen by reminding them they lost the War of Secession, an unpalatable fact on which they would sooner not dwell. But Douglass is popular inFrance , and he is extremely popular inEngland , and has been for upwards of thirty years. We would have had an easier time explaining to theUnited States how we had killed one of their citizens than explaining to our allies how we had come to kill a man they revere."

"Ah. Now I see it plain."Jackson dipped his head to the president. "I humbly beg your pardon, Your Excellency: in such matters your mind does cast a wider net than mine."

"Each cat his own rat," Longstreet said. That was not quite the same as admittingJackson made a better soldier than he, but it came close enough to keep the general-in-chief from being offended. Then the president of the CSA leaned forward and asked, "And how did you find Douglass, General?"

He might almost have taken that curiously avid tone had he askedJackson about a lewd photograph or something else at the same time illicit and attractive. After meeting the Negro agitator,Jackson understood why. "He is a ... formidable man, Your Excellency," he answered after a pause spent groping for a word that fit.

"That I believe," Longstreet said.

ButJackson , once begun with his judgment, would not give over until he had completed it: "Were all men of his race endowed with gifts even approaching those he possesses, we should never have succeeded in holding them in bondage."

"I believe that, too, but they are not so endowed. I have read much of his work," Longstreet said.Jackson blinked, startled. The president saw the blink and laughed. "Do you not favor knowing the enemy, General?"

"Mm,"Jackson said. "Put that way, yes, sir."

"Having done so, I will say, within the confines of these four walls and these four ears, that few white men are endowed with gifts even approaching his. In any public setting, of course, I should say nothing of the sort."

"I understand, Your Excellency,"Jackson said. And he did. The Confederate Constitution mandated free speech, but no one used that mandate to proclaim the Negro's equality to the white man, let alone his superiority over him.

"As I say, you did the nation a good turn by your forbearance," Longstreet said. "I have received cables from bothLondon andParis thanking and congratulating us for our prompt release of Douglass. I am convinced it has made our allies more willing to play an active part in the fight against theUSA ."

"They certainly have done that of late,"Jackson said with a smile. Now he told of the blows on his fingers: "Boston,New York , the Great Lakes,Los Angeles —nice to find the French doing something—San Francisco, that town up inWashingtonTerritory —"

"Seattle." Longstreet supplied the name.

"Thank you, Mr. President. And this invasion ofMontanaTerritory is one more stroke against which the Yankees will be hard pressed to find an effective response."

"Ah. I see you have not heard the latest." A smile broke through Longstreet's beard like the sun breaking through clouds. "No fault of yours, General—you've been on the train. But this morning British and Canadian troops crossed over the border fromNew Brunswick intoMaine ."

"Maine?"Jackson shivered theatrically. "Brr! Why would anyone want it? Give meMexico any day. Or, seen fromCanada , doesMaine look warm?"

"There's a—chilling thought," Longstreet said with a smile. "But there are two excellent reasons for invading it. One is that the border, which was not settled until the 1840s, was not settled altogether toEngland 's satisfaction. And the other"—the smile got wider, as if the president was invitingJackson to share the joke—"the other is thatMaine is President Blaine's home state, which makes the invasion doubly humiliating to him."

"Ah,"Jackson said, appreciating the beauty of it.

With a certain savage satisfaction, Longstreet went on, "When I last offered President Blaine peace on the *status quo ante helium,* he refused not least on the grounds that theUnited States were undefeated. If I make him the same offer again, he will have a harder time putting forward that claim."

"He certainly would,"Jackson said with a chuckle. Then he checked himself and studied the president of the Confederate States. "Your Excellency, are you thinking of renewing that offer?"

Longstreet's big, leonine head went up and down. "I am. Along with the matter of Douglass, gaining your opinion of such a move was the other reason I asked you to come here. My view is that at this time no one in the USA or anywhere else in the world could possibly believe we would offer peace because we are weak rather than because we are strong. How say you?"

"Our Lord did say, 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' " Jackson answered, "but I must tell you that I would prefer to see the United States pay a high price for starting a war over something that was none of their proper concern in the first place."

"Having to give up the war while gaining nothing, and having to recognize our right toChihuahua andSonora , to prevent which acquisitions they went to war in the first place, should be price enough, don't you think?" Longstreet asked. "TheUnited States have now twice elected Republican presidents, twice gone to war with us almost immediately thereafter, and twice failed in mortifying fashion to achieve their purpose. Based on that, General, how long do you reckon it will be before they elect a third Republican president?"

"Sooner than you think, perhaps, Mr. President, if you let them down too gently,"Jackson said.

"Are you saying I should not do this?" Longstreet looked unhappy, as he did when anyone disagreed with him. "They *are* there, General." He pointed north. "They will be there. We cannot subdue and occupy them. Now they see they cannot subdue and occupy us. Is it not enough?"

Air hissed out betweenJackson 's teeth. "Put that way—" He was not happy himself, nor anywhere close, but the president had a point. Grudgingly, he said, "Perhaps it could be tried."

"1 knew you'd see it my way." Now Longstreet was all smiles. *Why not?* Jackson thought. *He's got what he wanted.*

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Brakes squealed, iron grinding against iron.Sparks flew up from the rails. Brevet Brigadier General George Custer turned to his brother and said, "Reminds you of muzzle flashes in a night battle, doesn't it, Tom?"

Major Tom Custer shrugged. "Nobody's trying to kill us, not yet, unless it's the railroad line."

The conductor stuck his head into the car that carried the Fifth Cavalry's officers. "Great Falls!" he shouted. "All out forGreat Falls !"

Custer shifted in the scat he'd occupied far too long. Something in his back gave a sharp click. He let out a sigh of relief. "That's a little better, anyhow. The railroads," he muttered. "Ah, the railroads. How I do love it when the faster way to go from hither to yon is around three sides of a square."

He stretched again. Despite that welcome click, his back remained unhappy. To get fromSalt Lake City toGreat Falls , his regiment had had to travel back pastDenver , then up throughNebraska , into the Black Hills country of Dakota Territory, clipping a corner ofWyomingTerritory before they finally enteredMontana . And that had been a while ago;Montana itself was a big place.

"God's own luck it's not General Gordon and the British army meeting us here," he grumbled. "Wouldn't that be fine?—to get shelled and shot up as we were trying to leave the train, I mean."

"Happened a couple of times during the last war, didn't it, Autie?" his brother said. "But you're right—it's not what I'd want to do for fun. We're blasted lucky the Mormons didn't greet us that way when we got toUtah ."

"Oh, don't I know it." Custer got to his feet as the train slowed to a stop. "Well, let's get ourselves disembarked and on the move. The sooner we set to marching, the sooner we can send the damned—the dashed—Englishmen back over the border with their tails between their legs."

He was the first one out of the car. Back in the days when he was a mere colonel, others might have tried to leave ahead of him—more likely Tom than anyone else. But those shiny stars on his shoulder

straps froze the rest of the officers in their seat till he had gone by. *A general,* he thought, and walked straighter. *I'm a general.*

Down to the ground he sprang, boots scuffing on gravel. An infantry colonel stood there waiting to greet him, a blond man a few years older than he was and weathered leathery by sun and wind and snow.

"Welcome toMontana , General Custer," he said, saluting.

His voice was familiar, even if his face hadn't been at first glance. Custer looked again and did a double take. "Henry Welton, you son of a gun!" he exclaimed, and clasped the other man's hand. "I'd heard you were up in these parts, but it went clean out of my head in the rush to get here fromSalt Lake City . By thunder, it's grand to see you again. Been a long time, hasn't it?"

"Since we were a couple of McClellan's bright young men? Almost twenty years," Welton said. "That one didn't turn out the way we wanted it to. Here's hoping we do better this time around."

"Amen, and we'd better," Custer said. He grabbed his brother by the arm. "Henry, did you ever met Tom here?" When Welton shook his head, Custer went on more formally: "Colonel Welton, I'd like to present to you my younger brother, Major Tom Custer. Tom, Henry Welton and I both served together at Little Mac's headquarters in our Army of thePotomac days."

"Very pleased to meet you, sir," Tom said.

"And you, Major." Welton lowered his voice as he spoke to George Custer once more: "And after all that Army of thePotomac duty, how did you find serving under Brigadier General John Pope?"

"As a matter of fact, that went better than I'd thought it would," Custer answered. "We differed, naturally, in our views of General McClellan, but discovered a common aversion to the Latter-Day Saints and another to the abilities and characters, such as they are, of Abraham Lincoln." He stiffened. "Speak of the devil! There he is on the platform. I thought I'd never set eyes on that God-damned old undertaker again"—he forgot about *dashed* and other euphemisms— "after we sent him packing fromSalt Lake City

."

"He's been up here most of the time since, trying to raise trouble," Welton answered. "He managed it inHelena , but he hasn't had such

good luck inGreat Falls . . . Christ, here he comes. What does he want with us?"

Lincolntowered over Henry Welton and both Custers. Tipping his hat to George, he said, "I know you find my good wishes superfluous, Colonel Cus—" He caught himself. He was an observant man. "Excuse me— *General* Custer. Congratulations. In any case, I do hope you enjoy all good fortune in driving the invader back from our soil."

"I aim to do exactly that, Mr. Lincoln," Custer said. "And when I have done it, and when our great nation is once more free to turn to the things of peace, I expect you, sir, will go right on setting class against class and preaching hatred and strife until they plant you in the ground."

"I preach neither of those things,"Lincoln said quietly. "I preach justice and equality for all men in theUnited States ."

"Yes, for the Mormons," Custer jeered. "We gave them justice and equality, all right—they were plenty equal at the end of a rope."

Lincoln's long, sad face grew longer and sadder. "I had already heard of that. May it not come back to haunt us."

"Pah! You care for the Mormons more than for the decent citizens of theUnited States ." With a fine show of contempt, Custer turned his back. "I've wasted enough time. Now to get this regiment moving."

Behind him, he heardLincoln walk away. The ex-president's step was that of a much younger man, firm and regular. As long as he was leaving, Custer didn't care what he sounded like.

Cavalry troopers filed out of the cars behind the one housing the regimental officers. They hurried back to the freight cars that held their mounts. From one freight car emerged not horses but the regiment's Gatling guns and limbers, carefully guided down special, extra-wide ramps by their crews.

"Heavens!" Henry Welton's eyebrows rose in surprise. "You've got enough of those contraptions, don't you?"

"Enough and to spare," Custer answered, not altogether happily. "I had two inKansas , and went down intoIndian Territory and did good work with them. After my regiment got sent toUtah to help overawe the Mormons, the other half dozen were attached to me, for no better

reason than that the first two had done good work. And when I was ordered here, I was ordered here with the Gatling guns specifically included."

Welton asked the first question that would have entered any good soldier's mind: "Can they keep up?"

"The first two did well enough inKansas ," Custer said. "I made sure the gun carriages had good horses, not screws. I've been doing the same with all of them, but now, with eight guns and eight limbers, we have four times as many things that can go wrong." He affected a tone of ruthless pragmatism: "If they cause trouble on campaign, I'll leave them behind, that's all."

"That makes good sense, sure enough," Welton said. "Well, we'll have a chance to see how well they travel from here up to join with the Seventh Infantry. From that point on, we'll be moving against the British, so if they can't keep up, they will have to fall back."

Custer's face crinkled into a frown. "I haven't been so well briefed as I would have liked," he said, which would do for an understatement till a bigger one came along. He exulted at having the command inMontana , but with command went responsibility. "You're not in contact with the enemy?" He didn't care for the sound of that.

"My infantry Regulars aren't, no, sir," Welton replied, which made Custer like it even less. Then the infantry officer went on, "But the First Montana Volunteer Cavalry are skirmishing with the limeys—that's the Unauthorized Regiment, you know."

"Volunteer cavalry?" Custer said scornfully—he didn't know, and had no way of knowing.

"Unauthorized volunteer cavalry?"

"They're good men, sir—as good as a lot of the troopers you have," Welton said. Custer didn't believe that last for a minute, but, if the commander of the Seventh Infantry thought it was true, they might prove better than their name suggested. Welton next addressed that very point: "They started calling themselves the Unauthorized Regiment because they had a devil of a time getting intoU.S. service after their colonel recruited them. They still wear the name with pride—a finger in the eye of the War Department, you might say."

"All right, Colonel—for the time being, I have to take your word about

such things, not having seen them myself." Custer's tone remained dismissive.

Henry Welton held up a warning hand. "Sir, they truly are a fine-looking unit. And their colonel, the fellow who recruited them and organized them, is a lad to watch out for. One way or another, you mark my words, he *will* make the world notice him."

"Their colonel—a lad?" Custer wasn't sure he'd heard right.

"Theodore Roosevelt is twenty-two . . . though he will be twenty-three soon." Welton spoke with a certain somber relish.

"By Godfrey!" Custer exploded.

"That's right, one of those." Welton nodded. "He will run rings around any three ordinary men you could name. He's run rings around me more than once, I'll tell you that. Do you know what he puts me in mind of? He puts me in mind of you, sir, the day you got yourself onto General McClellan's staff. Do you remember?"

"I'm not likely to forget," Custer said with a smile.

Welton went on as if he hadn't spoken: "There we were, on the banks of the Chickahominy, and Little Mac wondered how deep it was. And what did you do? You spurred your horse into the river, got to the other side—God knows how, because it wasn't shallow—and then came back across and said, *'Thai's* how deep it is, General.'Roosevelt would have done the same thing there. I can't think of anyone else I've ever seen who would."

"Hmm." Custer wasn't sure he liked that; he preferred to think of his headlong bravado as unique. "Well, we shall see. A man who goes hard at the foe will find a place for himself, sure enough."

"Yes, sir." Welton looked around. "Your regiment is shaping with remarkable speed. Won't be long before you're ready to move out, will it?"

"We'renot Volunteers, unauthorized or otherwise," Custer said with more than a hint of smugness. "By God, it will be good to get out in the clean air on a horse's back, instead of sitting cooped up in a rolling box breathing the fumes of other men's tobacco until it was as if I were doing the smoking myself."

Welton chuckled. "Well, then, sir, I shan't offer you a cigar, as I was

about to." He got one out, lighted it, and puffed up a happy cloud of smoke.

"Never took the habit," Custer said, "though I really am thinking of starting now, having made such a good beginning at it."

"Here's a habit I know you have." Henry Welton took a flask off his belt. It gurgled suggestively.

But Custer shook his head again. "I was a man who'd raise Hades, sure enough. But I haven't touched spirits and I haven't cursed— much— since I married Libbie right after the War of Secession."

"Well, well," Welton said. "Should I congratulate you or commiserate with you?"

"One of those should do it," Custer answered. "But I'll tell you this, Henry—if we don't lick the British, we may as well get drunk, because the whole country will be up the smokestack." Henry Welton solemnly nodded.

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Jeb Stuart took off his hat and fanned himself with it. "El Pasowas hot," he said to Major Horatio Sellers.

"Cananea's hotter. Don't know whether I'd have believed that if someone told it to me last spring, but it's so."

His aide-de-camp nodded rueful agreement. With his chunky build, the heat told harder on him. When he spoke, he spoke of a different sort of warmth: "Latest wagon train fromEl Paso is overdue, too. If the Yankees hit us now, they could make things hot. We still haven't caught up with all the munitions we used against them inNew MexicoTerritory ."

"I sent a wire off yesterday, asking where the wagons were," Stuart said. "Haven't had an answer yet.

Maybe the line's down again; heaven knows how it stays up, strung from cactus to fence post the way it is. Maybe a cow tripped over a wire. And maybe the Yankees are up to something farther east. If I don't hear anything fromEl Paso by this time tomorrow, I'm going to send out a troop of cavalry and see what's up."

"Railroad line might be broken east ofEl Paso , too," Sellers said. "It's not as if we haven't worried about that."

"No, it's not." Stuart kicked up dust as he paced along Cananea's main street, which would scarcely have made an alley in a proper town, a town that had some life to it. "El Paso's on the end of a long supply line from the rest of the CSA, and we're on the end of a long supply line fromEl Paso . I suppose I ought to get down on my knees and thank God our ammunition has come in as well as it has."

"Embarrassing to try and fight a battle without it," agreed Major Sellers, who had a sardonic cast of mind. "We almost found that out, to our cost, atTombstone . If the Yankees had had a couple of companies of Regulars there along with the Tombstone Rangers, we might have found ourselves biting down hard on a cherry pit."

"That's so." Of itself, Stuart's tongue ran over a broken tooth on the left side of his lower jaw. He hadn't done it on a cherry pit, but on a bit of chicken bone. The comparison struck a nerve even so. He went on, "We've taught the Yankees a lesson, though. Since we licked them in that last fight, they haven't even tried moving soldiers into the stretch of their own country we overran, let alone down intoSonora ."

But counting on theUnited States to stay quiet was a mistake, as Stuart learned that afternoon when a half-dead Confederate cavalry trooper rode a foundering horse into Cananea. A bucket of water poured over his head, another poured down him, and a tumbler of *mescal* poured after it did wonders to revive the soldier. "Drench me again," he said, whether seeking more water on him or more *mescal* in him Stuart did not know.

"What news?" the commander of the Trans-Mississippi demanded.

"Sir, the damnyankees bushwhacked our wagon train, maybe twenty miles west of this Janos place," the trooper answered. "Wasn't like they came ridin' down on us, neither. They was waitin' there, right in the road, like they got there a while ago and they was a-fixin' to stay."

"Oh, they were, were they?" Stuart's eyes lit up. "That's what they think. How many men have they?"

"Looked like a couple troops of cavalry, mebbe some infantry with 'em," the soldier answered. "I was ridin' rear guard, but I reckoned you needed to know what they was up to worse'n the folks back inEl Paso , so I went wide around the ambuscade and managed to get on by them

bastards without 'em spottin' me. They was too busy foragin' 'mongst the wagons to pay much heed to one rider off on his lonesome. You reckon my horse'll live, sir? That's powerful dry country I rode him over, and I didn't do much in the way of stoppin', you know what I mean?"

"Yes," Stuart said. "I don't know about your horse." He did know about foraging in a captured wagon train; he'd done plenty of that during the War of Secession. He also knew the trooper was right about how dry the land between Cananea and Janos was. If he galloped out at the head of a column of horsemen, he'd get to the Yankees a day and a half later with all the mounts at death's door, as this trooper's was now. TheU.S. cavalrymen would ride rings around him.

If he galloped out at the head of a column of horsemen . . .

He hunted up Colonel Calhoun Ruggles, commander of the Fifth Cavalry, and outlined his difficulty. "Oh, yes, sir, we can do that," Colonel Ruggles said confidently. "Those Yankee sons of bitches won't reckon we can drop on 'em anywhere near so quick as we'll do it."

"That's what I hoped I'd hear you say," Stuart answered. "Get your regiment in order, Colonel; we leave as soon as may be."

Colonel Ruggles erected one of his bushy eyebrows like a signal flag. " 'We,' sir?" he asked. "Are you certain?"

"Good heavens, yes," Stuart answered. "Did you think I'd miss the chance to ride with the Fifth Camelry if it ever came up? Or do you deny that a threat to our supply line is business important enough to demand the attention of the army commander in person?"

"No, sir, and no, sir, again. It's only that—" Ruggles' eyes took on a wicked gleam. "It's only that, if you ride a camel the way you dance a quadrille, *sir,* you'll be yanking cactus spines out of your backside with pliers before we've made a mile. Meaning no disrespect, of course."

"Oh, of course. Heaven forbid you should mean disrespect," Stuart said. Both officers laughed. Stuart went on, "I have been aboard the mangy critters your regiment fancies, Colonel, but I've never seen them in this kind of action, striking across the desert from a distance horses can't hope to match."

"That's what they're for, sir," Ruggles said. "We've hit the Co-manches a few licks over the years that they never expected to get, after they raided westTexas from out ofNew Mexico . And now we can hit the

Yankees who paid 'em to do it. This'll be purely a pleasure, sir. We'll be ready to ride in an hour at the outside."

He proved as good as his word. Stuart spent most of that hour convincing Major Horatio Sellers that he wasn't just indulging himself by riding off with the Fifth Camelry. He was indulging himself, and he knew it. But aU.S. force athwart his supply line was serious business, too. "This is what we were talking about before the trooper rode in, if you'll recollect," he said. After he'd said it several times, Major Sellers, both outranked and outargued, threw his hands in the air and gave up.

Despite what Stuart had said to Colonel Ruggles, he hadn't ridden a camel in several years. He quickly discovered several things he'd forgotten: the rank smell of the beast, the strange feel of the saddle under him and the even stranger grip his legs had on the animal, and how high up he was when it reluctantly rose after reluctantly kneeling to let him mount.

Its gait was strange, too, when it set out east across the desert with the rest of the Fifth Confederate Cavalry. It had much more side-to-side sway than a good, honest horse did. Stuart began to suspect they called camels ships of the desert not only because they could travel long distances on little water but also because a man might easily get seasick atop one.

Despite that sway, in another way the camel's trot was smoother than a horse's. Along with the hard hooves on the ends of its toes, it also struck the ground with padded feet. No jolts flowed up its legs to him. Its strides were slow, but they were so much longer than a horse's that Stuart found himself astonished when he realized how quickly the barren countryside was flowing past to his left and right.

And, while the countryside might have seemed barren to him, the camels reckoned it flowing with milk and honey—or at least with cacti and thorn bushes, which they found an adequate substitute. Whenever Colonel Ruggles halted the regiment to let men and animals rest, the camels would forage. Thorns seemed to bother them not in the least. Some of the cacti they bit into dripped with juice, so they were getting something in the way of water to go along with their food.

The sun dropped toward the horizon behind the Fifth Camelry.

Colonel Ruggles called out to Stuart: "I presume we go on through the

night, sir?"

"I should say so." Stuart pointed ahead, where a fat, nearly full moon hung low in the southeast. "That'll light our way. We won't go so fast as we would in daylight, but we'll get some good work done— and we've done amazingly good work so far, if anyone wants to know. We should come down on the Yankees before noon tomorrow, wouldn't you say?"

"You'd best believe it, sir," Ruggles answered. "When you want to get somewhere a long way away in a hurry, camels are the best thing this side of a railroad."

They were also the noisiest things this side of a railroad. They moaned and complained when they started up, they moaned and complained when they stopped, and they moaned and complained in between times to keep from getting bored. Stuart began to see why it took a special sort of trooper to want to have anything to do with them: they were easier to hate than to love. But how their long strides ate up the ground!

On through the night the Fifth Camelry rode. Maybe some of the troopers, long used to their beasts, were able to sleep in the saddle. By the time the sun turned the eastern horizon gray and the moon sank behind Stuart in the west, he was yawning, but he and the rest of the men kept on. As dawn stretched the distance a man could see, Colonel Ruggles sent scouts out ahead of the main body of the regiment to search out the Yankee position.

They found theU.S. force a little past nine o'clock, better than an hour earlier than Stuart would have expected. "Did the damnyankees spy you?" he asked.

"Don't reckon so, sir," one of the scouts answered, and the rest nodded.

Stuart glanced over to Ruggles. "We outnumber 'em. If we spread out and hit 'em from three sides at once, the way the whole army did with the Yanks atTombstone , they shouldn't be able to stand against us."

"Expect you're right, sir," Ruggles said. "I wouldn't say this if we were riding horses, but I think we ought to go in mounted. The stink of camels panics horses that aren't used to them—you'll have seen that— and the sight of them ought to panic Yankees who never set eyes on the like before."

"Good," Stuart said. "We'll do it."

He swung north with three troops from the regiment. Firing had already broken out from the west when his men came into sight of the Yankee position. It was a roadblock with an encampment beyond it, fine for ambushing a supply column but not intended to hold against a serious assault.

The Fifth Camelry howled Rebel yells as their ungainly mounts bore down on the horrifiedU.S. forces. A few Yankees got into the saddle, but their horses wanted nothing to do with the Confederate camels.

MoreU.S. soldiers fought as infantry, but, taken in the flank and caught by surprise, they didn't hold out long.

A couple of rounds snarled past and over Stuart. He fired his Tredegar carbine four or five times, and thought he might have wounded one running Yankee. Then white handkerchiefs and shirts began fluttering in lieu of flags of truce. The fighting couldn't have lasted more than half an hour.

"You damn Rebs don't fight like you should ought to," a disgruntledU.S. sergeant complained.

"Wouldn't have had to fight at all if it weren't for you people," Stuart said, borrowing Robert E. Lee's scornful name for the Yankees. He found himself in an expansive mood—theU.S. forces hadn't yet sent all the captured supply wagons up intoNew Mexico and out of his reach. That made him add, "The way we fight is to win—and I reckon we're going to do it." The sorrowful sergeant did not disagree.

Chapter 15

Redcoats!" the scouts' cries echoed across theMontana prairie. "The redcoats are coming!"

"Come on, lads!" Theodore Roosevelt called to the men of the Unauthorized Regiment, or those troops of it that had joined him to try to impede the progress of the British column penetratingU.S. territory.

"Come on!" he repeated. "The English wore red a hundred years ago, too, when we licked 'em in the Revolution. And the patriotic Continental soldiers wore blue, just as we do. They won against great odds, and so can we. Forward!"

Forward they went, with cheers on their lips. First Lieutenant Karl Jobst said, "Sir, I have to commend you. My opinion of volunteers has gone up immeasurably since we began harassing the British."

Rooseveltnoted his adjutant's phrasing. Jobst didn't say, *My opinion of volunteers has gone up since I joined the regiment.* He'd waited till he saw the Unauthorized troops fight before approving of them.

Maybe that made him a hard man to please. Maybe it just made him an old—or rather, a young—stick-in-the-mud.

"They do grow brave men outside the Regular Army, Lieutenant,"Roosevelt said. He filled his chest with air, then let it out in a shout like the cry of a bull moose: "Close with 'em, boys, and fill 'em full of lead!"

That got another cheer. As Roosevelt rode north after the scouts, he made sure his ownWinchester had a full magazine. Only the firepower his men had at their disposal let them slow down the enemy at all.

Most of the British cavalry was armed with single-shot carbines much like the ones the U.S. Regulars carried. Some of the others were lancers, who but for their revolvers might have fought against Napoleon or Louis XIV or, for that matter, against Joan of Arc.

They were brave, too. He'd seen that. He hadn't seen that it helped them much.

He pointed. Bugler's horns cried out a warning. There ahead was the

cavalry screen the British used to protect the infantry and baggage train advancing intoMontanaTerritory . "Charge!"Roosevelt roared. He wanted to wave his sword about to help inspire his men, but in the end hung onto hisWinchester instead.

Knocking a few limeys out of the saddle would be the best inspiration possible.

Rapidly, the British horsemen swelled from little red specks visible across the prairie to an astonishing distance to scarlet-tunicked, whitc-helmcted men. They opened fire at several hundred yards, well beyond the reach of the Unauthorized Regiment's Winchesters. Puffs of dirty gray smoke shot from their carbines. A horse went down. A man slid out of the saddle.

But not enough horses fell, not enough saddles were emptied, to keep theU.S. soldiers from getting close enough for their Winchesters to bite. And when the magazine rifles bit, they bit hard. A man could shoot two or three times as fast with one as with a single-shot breechloader.

As had happened several times before, the British outriders recoiled back onto the rest of the cavalry in General Gordon's force. Before, the larger force had been enough to drive back the volunteers.

NowRoosevelt had a couple of more troops than he'd been able to deploy at the last skirmish. "Keep at

'em, boys!" he shouted, and waved his hat.

Bullets sang past him. He'd been delighted to discover, not that he felt no fear in battle, but that he had no trouble keeping under control the fear he did feel. And the savage exultation that filled him almost canceled out even his controlled fear.

He raised the rifle to his shoulder and sent a stream of lead at the Englishmen who had stabbed theUnited States in the back. A redcoat dropped his carbine and clutched his right arm.Roosevelt whooped. He wasn't sure that was the limey he'd been aiming for, or that his bullet had wounded the foe, but who could prove it hadn't?

With his extra men, with his extra firepower, he drove back even the reinforced British cavalry. They in turn fell back toward the red-coated infantry. The foot soldiers shook themselves out from column into line of battle. They too fired single-shot Martini-Henrys, but there were far more of them than troopers of the Unauthorized Regiment.

One thing coming out West had eventually taught Theodore Roosevelt: when not to raise on a pair of threes. "Back!" he yelled. A bugler always rode close by him. The order to retreat blared forth.

The British cavalry did not pursue his men when they broke off the fight and galloped off to the south.

They'd learned from painful experience that they paid a high price if they got too far separated from the infantry they screened. *Lancers,* Roosevelt thought derisively. *We 're nearing the end of the nineteenth century, and the British still have lancers in the line.*

"Well done, sir," Karl Jobst said, wiping sweat from his face with his sleeve. "They'll have to go back from line into column, and that will delay them. We bought our country another hour or so there."

"You have a cold-blooded way of looking at war, Lieutenant,"Roosevelt said.

"It's the Regular Army way, sir," his adjutant said. "War is your hobby; it's my profession. Our job is not to drive the British back intoCanada . We can't, not with one regiment against a much larger force. Our job is simply to slow them down as much as we can, so they don't get the chance to plunder anything important before reinforcements join us."

For him, it was a chess problem. He was interposing a pawn into a rook's threatening path so other pieces would have time to move forward and defend his king. As far as Roosevelt could tell, he would have been as happy deciding the result on a chessboard as on the plains ofMontana , too.

Rooseveltsaid, "Such calculations have their place, but they are not the be-all and end-all of warfare. If strategy seemed to call for a long, continuous retreat, how would the soldiers ordered to make it have the spirit to fight once the time came for action?"

"That is an important point, no doubt about it." Jobst smiled to find his superior so acute. "Men are not steam engines, to perform at the pull of a lever." It wasn't the chessboard analogyRoosevelt had in his own mind, but it wasn't far removed. Jobst went on, "Persuading men to fight bravely under such circumstances as you describe is what makes war an art rather than a science. The Germans believe they can reduce it to a science, but I for one remain unconvinced."

"Good,"Roosevelt said. "You do show signs of life after all, Lieutenant." He watched Jobst wonder whether he ought to be insulted. His

adjutant finally decided it was a compliment, and smiled instead.

Rooseveltsmiled, too. "Stout fellow. Having delayed the British, what do we do next?"

"What we have been doing," Lieutenant Jobst answered. "We break away from them, we fall back to the next stream lying across their line of march, we post dismounted riflemen at the easiest fords to contest their crossing, we do our utmost to ensure that we are not outflanked, and, when we have no other choice, we fall back again. Colonel Welton is moving to our aid, as are the more easterly troops of our regiment, and as are reinforcements from outside the Territory."

"And, if we're lucky, we shan't be all used up by the time all those reinforcements come up,"Roosevelt said.

"Yes, if we're lucky," Jobst agreed. His voice was tranquil. If you had to sacrifice a pawn to stave off the other fellow and set up moves of your own later in the game, you did it, and did it with no regrets.

Rooseveltunderstood that attitude, but it didn't come easy to him. The men of the Unauthorized Regiment were a force that might delay the British, yes, but they were more than that to him. They were his comrades, they were his friends, they were—in an odd sort of way, since many of them were older than he—his children. Without him, they would not have been born as a regiment. Without him, they would not be facing danger now. Like a comrade, like a friend—like a father—he felt obligated to keep them as safe as he could.

In thoughtful tones, he said, "We haven't seen much in the way of outflanking moves from this General Gordon of theirs. He seems to think only of going straight for what he wants."

Karl Jobst nodded. "So it would seem, wouldn't it, sir? I daresay it's because of his service inChina and theSudan . With properly disciplined troops, you can go through the heathen Chinese and the bush niggers like a dose of salts. He likely expects to do the same against us."

"Against Americans? Our blood is as fine as his—finer,"Roosevelt declared. "When we gain the numbers to make a proper fight of it, I believe we shall give his excellency Mr. Chinese Gordon a proper surprise." He loaded with scorn the titles he had applied to the British soldier.

"Yes, sir," Jobst said. "By what I know of Brigadier General Custer, our

new commander, he fights the same way. Once everything is in place, it should be like two locomotives heading down one track toward each other."

"Weshall survive the smash,"Roosevelt said. "I hold with this attitude myself, as you will have gathered.

Admiral Nelson may have been a damned Englishman, but he spoke the truth when he said no captain could do very wrong if he placed his ship alongside that of the enemy."

Having made that vaunting statement, he felt the irony inherent in falling back. But he also felt the need.

Having splashed through some small tributary to theMarias , he left behind a couple of dozen of his best sharpshooters. He stayed behind himself, too, to see how they did what they did. So he told himself, at any rate. He kept on telling himself so, too, and almost convinced himself that wanting to take another lick at the British out of sheer personal hatred had nothing to do with why he did not ride on.

Along with his troopers, he concealed himself among the alders and birches and cottonwoods that grew by the river. He might have been hunting canvasbacks instead of redcoats. The only difference was that Englishmen, unlike ducks, were liable to shoot back.

The oncoming British neared the river after he'd been waiting about an hour and a half. They approached with caution; the troopers of the Unauthorized Regiment had stung them at crossings even beforeRoosevelt came galloping in with his headquarters staff to take charge of resistance.Roosevelt drew a bead on a fellow who, by the way he was waving his comrades about, was probably an officer.

The redcoat had courage. He went about his business as if without the slightest notion his foes were liable to be anywhere nearby.

Knowing when to start shooting was an art in itself. Open fire too soon and the British would gallop off and ford the stream a few miles to the east or west, without giving you the chance to hurt them. Wait too long and they'd have enough men forward to overwhelm you even if they couldn't shoot as fast.

One of his men pulled the trigger a little sooner than he would have liked. An Englishman's horse screamed shrilly and fell on him. That made the Englishman cry out, too.Roosevelt fired at the officer, who was a couple of hundred yards off. To his blasphemous disgust, he

missed.

He worked theWinchester 's lever. A brass cartridge case flipped up into the air and fell to the damp ground at his feet. He fired again, and cried out in delight as the Englishman clutched at himself.

Along with his troopers, he emptied his magazine as fast as he could, trying to do the enemy the most damage in the shortest stretch of time. Some of the British cavalrymen fired back, though they had almost as small a chance of hurting his men as their ancestors under General Braddock had had against the skulking redskins during the French and Indian War. Most of the Englishmen, having discovered the enemy, sensibly drew out of range.

Twenty minutes passed. The Englishmen rode forward again. One of Roosevelt's troopers knocked a redcoat out of the saddle at better than two hundred yards, a fine bit of shooting with aWinchester . The rest of the British cavalrymen drew back again, to wait for reinforcements. They couldn't be sure how many men Roosevelt had waiting for them. If he'd chosen to defend the line of the river with everything he had, that could make for a large, hard fight.

He hadn't. He hooted like an owl, the signal for his troopers to withdraw to the horses a handful of their comrades were holding for them. Even in retreat, his smile was broad and triumphant. He'd given the tail of the British lion another nasty yank. "Why not?" he said aloud. "I'm a nasty Yank myself."

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Sam Clemens had never liked his brother-in-law. As far as he was concerned, his wife's most prominent virtue was that she was nothing like her brother. Vernon Perkins was ideally suited to his bookkeeping job: he was bald, thin, bespectacled, fussily precise, and had as much juice in him as a brick. Save that she wasn't bald, his wife Lucy might have been stamped from the same mold. Their two daughters were insipidly well-mannered. Even their dog behaved himself.

And now Vernon Perkins was not only Sam's brother-in-law but also his landlord. Lying on the uncomfortable divan in the tatty parlor of Perkins' house, knowing he wouldn't go to sleep for a good long while yet, Clemens muttered under his breath. "What's wrong, dear?" asked Alexandra, who lay beside him.

She knew what was wrong. Bless her, she didn't mind giving him the chance to blow off steam. And he didn't mind taking it. "Why in the name of all that's holy and a good many of the things that aren't didn't the Royal Marines pass by without setting fire to our house? And why didn't they come up here by Telegraph Hill and burn out your brother instead? Or why, at least, didn't one of their shells fall on this place? Shockingly bad gunnery, if anyone wants to know what I think."

"You don't mean that," Alexandra said.

"I don't?" In the darkness, Clemens raised an eyebrow. "Thank you for informing me of that, because I didn't know it. And why, pray tell, don't I?"

"Because ifVernon 's house was wrecked and ours wasn't, he and Lucy and Mary and Jane and Rover would have moved in with us instead of the other way round," his wife answered.

"Boring names for their children. Boring name for their blasted dog, too." But Sam sighed. "All right, I don't wish your brother's house was wrecked. I wouldn't want him in my pockets, any more than I want to be in his. Heaven only knows how much I wish our house hadn't been torched, though."

Alexandra reached out and set a hand on his shoulder. "I know, Sam. I feel the same way. But we all came through safe, even Sutro, even the cat. That's what matters. How many people weren't so lucky?"

She was right, of course. She usually was. That she was right failed to lighten Sam's mood. "My soul rejoices every time I think the Royal Marines furnished you with a gentleman arsonist." He did his best, which was none too good, to put on a British accent: " 'Terribly sorry to disturb you, ma'am, but if you'd be so kind as to gather up the tykes and the pets so I can pour out the kerosene and touch a match to it?'

Bah!"

From what Alexandra had told him, he wasn't exaggerating much. The British invaders had set a number of fires to cover their withdrawal to the Pacific, andTurk Street was one of the streets down which they'd pulled back. They hadn't actually set fire to his house. They'd set fire to the one next door, and the fire—what a surprise!— had spread. Lots of fires had spread throughSan Francisco in the wake of the British bombardment and invasion. The sour smell of stale smoke still tainted the fog.

"Try to sleep," Alexandra urged.

"I am. I do," he said. "I try every night. Sometimes, Lord knows how, I even turn the trick. A Hindu straight from his bed of nails would have trouble sleeping on this divan."

She patted his shoulder again. "It will be all right," she said. "As soon as we have a place of our own, it will be all right." And with that, and without further ado, she rolled over onto her side and did fall asleep.

Orion and Ophelia were sleeping, too, on piles of rugs and blankets. Their steady breathing mingled with Alexandra's in a rhythm that did nothing whatsoever to lull Sam to sleep. He muttered under his breath again and stared up at the ceiling. Eventually, he did doze off, and tossed and turned through the night, his head full of dreams of exploding shells and snarling rifles.

When morning came, he put on the suit he'd been wearing the day the British came. It was, at the moment, the only suit he owned. He downed a bowl of Lucy Perkins' oatmeal, which stuck to his ribs like a cheap grade of cement, declined a cup of her watery coffee, and fled the house as fast as he decently could, or perhaps a little faster.

He was farther from the *Morning Call* offices than he had been while he still had a home of his own.

Trudging down to Market and then along it showed him a sample of what the British had inflicted onSan Francisco .

Most of the houses along the narrow streets that led down to Market were fine. No Royal Marine incendiaries had penetrated so far north and east. Here and there, though, where a shell from an ironclad's big gun had landed, rubble took the place of what had been a home. Some gaps, where shells had started fires, were bigger still.

The northern end ofMarket Street was more of the same. A couple of shells had landed right in the middle of the street, and dug sizable craters. Dirt and rubble filled those craters. Work gangs— some made up of white men, including convicts in striped suits; others of pajama-wearing, pigtailed Chinese—were clearing away wreckage one ruined house or shop at a time.

And then, a little north of the *Morning Call* offices, three or four blocks were nothing but wreckage.

Those were the blocks the Royal Marines had passed on their way to

and from the Mint. They were also the blocks where some of the hardest, most desperate fighting had gone on. The stench of damp smoke lingered most strongly there. Another stench still lingered, too, the sickly-sweet smell of meat going bad.

A white straw boss was shouting orders to a gang of Chinese. Clemens called out to him: "Hey, Sweeney, find any more bodies in the ruins yesterday?"

"We did that, Sam," the straw boss answered. "Only one, though; better than it has been. Heaven only knows who the poor bastard was, with him so swole up and black and all." He held his nose. "He'll go in one o' the common graves, poor sod, for not even his own mother could be naming him the now."

"Filthy business," Clemens said, and Sweeney nodded. Sam could look west and see some of the swath of devastation the invaders had cut throughSan Francisco . It ran straight toward the ocean; he would have been able to take in more of it had some of the city's hills not blocked his view.

"Is there any word yet on how much in the way of gold and silver the Sassenachs are after stealing?"

Sweeney asked.

"If words were drops of water, Noah would be up at the top of Telegraph Hill right now, building a newArk ," Sam answered, which made the Irishman grin around the stub of his cigar. "Whether there's truth in any of them, heaven only knows. I've heard a quarter of a million dollars, but I've heard fifty million dollars, too."

He tipped his hat and went on his way. Sweeney shouted at the Chinamen. They hadn't slowed down while he was talking with Sam. as a gang of white men would have done. He shouted at them anyhow.

At the *Morning Call* offices, Sam hung his straw hat on one of the trees in the entry hall, then called out the question uppermost in his mind the past few days: "HasBlaine decided to take the carrot yet, or will they have to hit him a few more licks with the stick?"

"Still no word out ofPhiladelphia , boss," Edgar Leary answered. "That means the war's still on."

"Give me two synonyms for 'idiots,' " Clemens said, and then gave

them himself: " 'Fools' and

'Republicans.' They haven't got any notion of when to start wars but, just to make up for it, they haven't got any notion of when to quit them, either. Well, what's gone wrong since yesterday?"

"British are shellingErie,Pennsylvania ," Leary said with a certain weary relish. "Wires say there are big fires down by the waterfront. We know about that here, don't we?" He turned red and grimaced. "Uh, sorry, boss."

"Sorry I got burned out, or sorry you mentioned it?" Clemens asked. "Never mind. You don't need to answer that. You ought to live with my wife's brother; then you'd really know what sorry was all about.

What's the news out ofMontanaTerritory ?"

"There is no news out ofMontanaTerritory ," Leary said. "The British are over the border, that volunteer outfit with the funny name is skirmishing with them—"

"Roosevelt's Unauthorized Regiment," Sam supplied. "I like it. Anybody who's unauthorized and proud of it is my kind of fellow. Why, I come from a long line of unauthorized—" Instead of interrupting Edgar Leary, he interrupted himself. "Montana, dammit."

"Nothing else to tell," the young reporter said. "The cavalry is skirmishing with the British soldiers, and Regulars are moving to help."

"Moving *where!"* Clemens asked irritably. "Montana's a hell of a big place. Are they all over it like measles, or sort of settled down in one spot in particular? And if they are in one spot, which one is it?"

"Whichever spot it is, it's one that's out of reach of the telegraph lines," Leary replied. "Of course, there aren't very many telegraph lines inMontana , on account of there aren't very many people inMontana ."

"One of the biggest stories of the whole war, and it's happening out where nobody can take a proper look at it," Sam said. "Do you know what, Edgar? I'll bet the Army likes that just fine. After the British give us another licking, the donkeys in blue will have an extra couple of days to cipher out how to make it sound like a victory."

Grumbling about the U.S. Army, Vernon Perkins, and other calamities of nature, he went to his desk and lighted a cigar. Spotting three

typographical errors in the first paragraph of a story sitting there did nothing to improve his disposition. Neither did the text of the story itself. "Whoever edited this would have done the world a favor if he'd never learned to read." he muttered. Then he remembered he'd edited it himself. He blew out as large and thick a cloud of cigar smoke as he could, to keep everyone else in the office from noticing him turning red.

Edgar Leary said, "Colonel Sherman announced that two men, Diego Reynoso and Michael Fitzpatrick, were shot at sunrise in the Presidio for looting."

"There, that's another victory," Sam exclaimed. "Can't lick the Royal Marines—Christ, can't even find the goddamn Royal Marines— but we're death on looters, no two ways around it. Of course, if we'd done any kind of proper job fighting off the Royal Marines in the first place, the looters wouldn't have had anything to loot. Maybe, just maybe, if we give them enough hell now, this particular brand of idiocy won't happen the next time we find ourselves in a scrape."

"I hope not, I surely do," Leary said. After brief hesitation, he went on, "Boss, I do hear tell that Colonel Sherman isn't happy about what the paper's been saying since the British hitSan Francisco . And if he isn't happy with the *Morning Call,* he isn't happy with you."

"Well, I have to tell you, Edgar my lad, I'm not very happy about what the Army did when the British hitSan Francisco . And if I'm not happy with the Army, I'm not happy with Colonel Sherman." Sam took sardonic pleasure in turning Lcary's warning on its ear.

The young reporter shuffled his feet uncertainly. "I know that. But I thought I ought to tell you anyway, because you can't throwSherman in the stockade, but he can put you there, and throw away the key once he's done it."

"Throw a newspaperman in the stockade? He wouldn't d—" Clemens began. But he ran down, like a pocket watch that wanted winding. The trouble was, he wasn't just a newspaperman; he was a newspaperman who'd spent a few inglorious weeks as a Marion Ranger, a soldier of sorts on the Confederate side during the War of Secession. IfSherman decided he was lambasting the Army because he sympathized with the Confederate States after all rather than because he was a man who recognized damnfoolery when he saw it ... if that happened, the commandant at the Presidio was liable to lock him up on suspicion of general frightfulness.

He threw back his head and laughed till he started to cough. "Are you all right?" Edgar Leary asked anxiously.

"I'll do, no doubt about it," Sam answered. "It just occurred to me that, considering where I'm staying now, the stockade might be a step up—so long as the estimable Colonel Sherman doesn't fling my brother-in-law into the cell next door."

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Abraham Lincoln stood on the platform at theGreat Falls train station, patiently waiting for disembarking passengers to get off. Then, carrying his carpetbag, he got aboard. He looked around the car, wondering if a couple of unsmiling soldiers would come up, tap him on the shoulder, and order him off. He saw no soldiers, unsmiling or otherwise.

He smiled himself. He'd gauged things about right. When he was the principal menace to law, order, and the peace of mind of the moneyed class inMontanaTerritory , the Army had watched him like a hawk. As soon as the British came over the border, though, everyone forgot all about him. With the invaders heading south, nobody cared a Continental for John Pope's order limiting him to the Territories.

He would, he supposed, have been even more worried about the future of the country had the military authorities kept right on watching him closely even though the British had invaded Montana.

The conductor walked down the aisle, big gold watch in hand. "Now departing forBismarck ,Fargo ,St.

Paul ,Milwaukee , andChicago !" he intoned. "All aboard!"

A blast from the steam whistle also announced the train's departure. Cars jolted in their couplings as it began to roll. A vexing thought madeLincoln 's long face grow longer. He wouldn't be altogether free of the Army's grip till he passedFargo and leftDakota Territory . Maybe no one had tried to keep him from leavingGreat Falls because the soldiers who would stop him were waiting inFargo .

He shook his head. He didn't believe it. No one had tried to keep him from leavingGreat Falls because no one knew, or cared, he was leaving. If no one knew he was gone or where he was going, no one could stop him.

No sooner had he settled back in his seat than the young man across the aisle, a fellow who looked like a miner in ill-fitting Sunday best, asked, "Beg your pardon, but ain't you Abe Lincoln?"

"Yes,"Lincoln answered, warily and wearily. Had he had a dime for every time he'd had a conversation opened with that gambit, he would have been a plutocrat himself. The only commoner opening was, *God damn you, Lincoln, you son of a bitch!* —and that one usually came from older men, men who recalled the sorry course of the War of Secession. "Who are you, son?"

"My name's Hosea Blackford, Mr. Lincoln," the youngster said, and stuck out a hand.Lincoln relaxed a little as he shook it; he'd had enough of curses and to spare lately. It was strong and rough-skinned and callused, the hand of a working man. Blackford went on, "Heard you talk inHelena when you was there."

He nodded, half to himself. "Sure as hell did."

"Is that a fact?"Lincoln said: a little sentence polite in any context.

"Yes, sir!" Hosea Blackford's green eyes glowed. *"Hell* of a speech. Made me reckon we ought to get shut of fightin' our neighbors till we finished muckin' out our own barn first. Like you said, we had ourselves one revolution, and now we could use ourselves another one."

"Thank you, Mr. Blackford,"Lincoln said. "Every now and again, when I hear a young man like you speak, my hope for the country revives."

"Ain't that somethin'!" Blackford said; after a moment,Lincoln realized it was his equivalent of *Is that a fact?*

They talked politics on and off till the miner—Lincolnhad indeed pegged that one correctly—got off the train at Oriska, a tiny spot in easternDakota Territory , where his sister and brother-in-law had a farm.

He didn't even carry a carpetbag; his suitcase was made of cardboard. When he rose to leave, he pumpedLincoln 's hand again.

"You don't know what this here's meant to me," he said. "Ever since I started thinkin' about things, I could see they wasn't right, but I never seen how, or how to go about fixin' 'em. You done opened my eyes, and I reckon 1 can go and open some other folks' eyes my own self.

You got yourself a—what's the Bible word?—a disciple, that's what it is."

"Good luck to you. Mr. Blackford,"Lincoln said. "Be the truth's disciple, not mine. Follow the truth, wherever it may lead you."

The miner bobbed his head in an awkward nod, then hurried away. At a place like Oriska, the train didn't stop long. At a place like Oriska, you were lucky if the train stopped at all.

Lincolnsmiled at the miner's stalwart back. He wondered how long Blackford's enthusiasm would last.

Young men burned hot, but they burned out fast, too.Lincoln thought of that ridiculously young cavalry colonel back inGreat Falls . He was doing something special now, too. How long before he became a lawyer or a banker or something else stuffy and boring and profitable? *Profitable.* Lincoln 's lip curled.

The owners took the profits, and took them from the sweat of the working man.

A few hours and a few stops out of Oriska, the train halted inFargo . No soldiers waited forLincoln

.Fargo was a fair-sized town, and the train paused there half an hour, long enough for him to get off and wire his son that he was on the way.

Boarding again, he crossed intoMinnesota . Out of these flat farmlands John Pope had driven the Sioux when they rose up against white settlers in the hope that the United States would be too distracted by the War of Secession to bring any great force to bear against them. That had been a double miscalculation on the Indians' part. TheUSA had had soldiers enough to fight them and the Confederates both. And, after the war was lost, soldiers originally recruited for it hurled the Indians west across the plains, using numbers and firepower they could not hope to match.

Farms grew thicker and towns larger and closer together as the train carriedLincoln east.Minneapolis andSt. Paul were real cities; some in the East that had been settled a hundred years longer could not compare to them.

The passengers who boarded at the two rival centers were perhaps more warmly inclined toLincoln than people from the rest of

theUnited States . InMinnesota , he was remembered as much for being the man who'd driven the Indians out of the state as for being the man who'd lost the War of Secession. With a sort of melancholy pride, he recalled that he'd carriedMinnesota in the election of 1864. Recalling that wasn't hard; he hadn't carried many states.

The Republicans hadn't carried many states since, not till public disgust at the Democrats' unending soft line toward the CSA sweptBlaine into the White House the autumn before. And nowBlaine had taken a hard line, and done no better with it thanLincoln . How long would it be before the Republicans carried many states again?

Lincolnthought he had the answer, or at least an answer, to that question. He'd thought so for ten years and more now, as he'd watched factories boom and capitalists send their spaniels toEurope on holiday and workers live in squalid warrens at which those pampered spaniels would have turned up their noses.

He'd been able to make only a handful of party leaders pay any attention to him till now.

Now, he thought, now they no longer have any choice. If they don't heed me now, the party will surely go under.

And then, as the train passed fromMinnesota intoWisconsin , he closed his fat Shakespeare, took off his reading glasses and put them in their leather case, and buried his face in his hands. These past ten years, he hadn't even succeeded in persuading his own son he was right. He doubted he would persuade Robert even now. His son, having enriched himself at the practice of law, thought like a rich man these days.

Not that Robert would be anything but glad to see him. In family matters, they were close, as they always had been. Only in politics did a chasm separate them: the chasm that yawned between a man satisfied with his lot and another who could see how many in the country he loved had no reason to be satisfied with theirs.

The tracks beat south and east as they ran throughWisconsin .Lincoln knew no great joy when he left that state and came intoIllinois , even though he'd lived more of his life in the latter state than anywhere else.Illinois had repudiated him in 1864, and had not looked on him kindly since, no matter how great a power in the land Robert had become.

Chicagosprawled along the shores ofLake Michigan . Everything came together there: Great Lakes commerce (however damaged that was at the moment because of the war),Mississippi River commerce (with the same caveat), and railroads from east, south, and west. Smoke from its factories darkened the skies. The great stockyards made the air pungent. The other scent in the air, the one Robert breathed day and night, was the scent of money.

Even with five train stations,Chicago seemed undersupplied.Lincoln 's train waited in the yard of theChicago and Northwestern depot for close to an hour until a platform became available. It inched its way forward, then sighed to a stop.

Robert Lincoln was waiting on the platform. As he embraced his father, he said, "By all accounts, you've had a busy time of it." His tone was no more ironic than he could help.

"Maybe a bit,"Lincoln allowed, matching dry for dry. "It's good to see you, son. You look well."

"Thank you, sir." In his late thirties, Robert Lincoln was plainly his father's son; his neat beard only strengthened the resemblance. But, having his mother's blood in him as well, he was several inches shorter than Abraham, a good deal wider through the shoulders and the face, and, by all conventional standards, a good deal handsomer as well.

"So you'll put up—and put up with—your radical old father for a while, will you?"Lincoln asked, a little later, as they made their way toward Robert's carriage.

"You know I don't fancy the direction in which your politics have taken you," his son answered. "You also know that matters not at all to me when it comes to the family. If you're willing enough to put up with a son reactionary enough to believe in earning money and keeping what he earns, we'll get on splendidly, as we always have."

"Good,"Lincoln said. He climbed into the carriage.

Robert tipped the porter who had carried the bags, and who now heaved them up behind the seats. The man lifted his cap, murmured thanks, and departed. To his driver, Robert Lincoln said, "Take us home, Kraus."

"Yes, sir." By his accent, Kraus had not been in theUnited States long. He too tipped his cap, then flicked the reins and got the carriage

rolling.

"Quite a nabob you're getting to be, son, everyone bowing and scraping over you as if you were an earl on the way to becoming a duke," Lincoln said, hiding dismay behind facetiousness. Robert, who understood him very well without agreeing with him in the slightest, gave him a sharp look.Lincoln sighed; he hadn't really intended to provoke his son. He tried to smooth it over: "As I told you, it *is* good to see you—better than setting eyes on anyone else I've seen lately, and that is a fact."

"Unless I'm much mistaken, it's also faint praise." But Robert, fortunately, sounded amused, not angry.

He went on, "Being held superior to John Pope, whom I suspect you have in mind, is closely similar to being reckoned taller than a snake, lighter than an elephant, or more in favor of abolition than anAlabama planter." His tone grew more sympathetic: "It was very unlucky for you, Father, that you had to fall foul of a man who bore you a grudge from the War of Secession."

"FewU.S. soldiers from the War of Secession bear me no grudge."Lincoln spoke with sadness but without resentment. "They have their reasons: whom better to resent than a man who led them into a losing war? Suffering in war is hard enough in victory, but ten times harder in defeat."

"Few of them are so resentful as to want to put a rope around your neck," Robert said.

Lincolnthought of Pope. He thought of Colonel—now Brigadier General—Custer. He thought of the bloodthirsty guard he'd been assigned, who would still have been soiling his drawers when the War of Secession ended. He didn't answer.

Robert said, "Now that you're here, Father, how do you aim to amuse yourself and stay out of mischief?"

"Amusing myself should be simple enough,"Lincoln replied, "for I intend to get myself into as much mischief as I can: which is to say, I intend to struggle for the soul of the Republican Party. Our main plank can no longer be permanent, unyielding hostility toward the Confederate States. We have tried that twice now, andBlaine is failing with it as badly as I failed. The people will never give us a third chance, and I see no way to blame them for their reluctance. Fighting the Confederate States, England, and France, we are simply

overmatched."

"A conclusion I reached myself some time ago," Robert said as they rolled into the fashionable North Side neighborhood he called home. He paused to get his pipe going, then asked the inevitable question:

"And what plank would you put in its place?"

"Justice for the working man, and freeing him from oppression at the hands of the capitalist who owns the factory in which he labours,"Lincoln said. "We have lost sight of the fact that capital is only the fruit of labour, and could never have existed if labour had not first existed."

"You intend to convene a meeting of Republican leaders and convince them of this doctrine?" Robert said.

"I do,"Lincoln answered simply.

"They will eat you up, Father, the way savages in theSouth Sea Islands eat up missionaries who are sent to convert them to a new faith they do not want."

"Perhaps they will,"Lincoln said. "I aim to make the effort regardless. For I tell you this, son: if the Republican Party *will not* build on this plank, some other party *will,* and *will* make a go of it."

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General Orlando Willcox held out his hand. "Good-bye, Colonel. I have enjoyed your presence here, and I shall miss you."

"I thank you," Alfred von Schlieffen said.

"And I shall miss you as well," Frederick Douglass said, his voice as deep and pure as a tone from the lower register of an organ. "You always treat me as a man first, and as a black man after that if at all."

"You are a man: so I have seen," Schlieffen said, as he might have to a soldier who had fought well.

Captain Oliver Richardson scowled at him. He took no notice of Willcox's adjutant, but climbed up behind the private who would take him to the train on which he'd return toPhiladelphia .

South of theOhio , cannon still bellowed and rifles still rattled.

Schlieffen's driver let out a wistful sigh.

"Colonel, you reckon the president's going to take the Rebs up on that call for peace this time?"

"I am not the man to ask," Schlieffen told him. "Your own officers will a better idea have of what your president wills— *wants*—to do." Had he wornBlaine 's shoes, he would have made peace on the instant, and then got down on his knees to thank the Lord for letting him off on such easy terms. But that was not the question the soldier had asked him.

After spitting a brown stream of what the Americans called tobacco juice into the road, the driver said,

"My officers won't give me the time of day. Hellfire, they won't tell me whether it's day or night. I was hopin' you might be different."

A German officer would not give one of his common soldiers the time of day, either. A German common soldier would not expect to get the time of day from one of his officers. The American private sounded aggrieved that he was not made privy to all his superiors' opinions and secrets. Americans, Schlieffen thought, sometimes let the notion of equality run away with them.

He and a couple ofU.S. officers—one with his arm in a sling, the other walking with the aid of a crutch—had a first-class car to themselves. One of the Americans produced a bottle. They were both drunk by the time the train leftIndiana forOhio .

They offered to share the whiskey with Schlieffen, and seemed surprised when he said no. Once they'd passed it back and forth a few times, they forgot he was there. That suited him fine till they started to sing. From them on, work got much harder.

He persevered. Minister von Schlozer would need a full report on the Battle of Louisville to send toBismarck . Schlieffen himself would need an even fuller one to send to the General Staff.

The report did not go so well as he would have liked, and the music—for lack of a suitably malodorous word—was not the only reason. Parts flowed smoothly; as long as he was talking about matters tactical—the effects of breech-loading rifles and breech-loading artillery on the battlefield—he wrote with confidence. That was part of what the Chancellery and the General Staff had to have. But it was only part.

He sighed. He wished the strategic implications of theLouisville campaign were as easy to grasp as those pertaining to tactics. That breechloaders and improved artillery gave the defensive a great advantage was obvious. So strategists had been sure before the outbreak of the war, and so it proved, perhaps to a degree even greater than they had envisioned.

What remained unclear, while at the same time remaining vitally important, was what, if anything, an army taking the offensive could do to reduce the defenders' advantages. *Unfortunately,* he wrote, *theU.S. forces did not conduct the campaign in such a way as to make such analysis easy, as they took little notice of the principles of surprise and misdirection. Based on what I observed, I can state with authority that headlong assaults against previously readied positions, even with artillery preparation by no means to be despised, is foredoomed to failure, regardless of the quality of the attacking troops, which was also high.*

He sighed again. EveryU.S. campaign he had studied, both here and in the War of Secession, had a ponderous obviousness to it. Like McClellan before him, Willcox seemed to have taken the elephant as his model. If he smashed to pieces everything between him and his goal, he could knock down the tree, reach out with his trunk, and pluck off the sweet fruit.

NoU.S. general seemed to have figured out that, if he went around the tree instead of straight at it, the terrain might be easier than that right in front of it, and the fruit might fall of its own accord. The Confederates understood as much, even if their opponents didn't. Robert E. Lee hadn't gone straight forWashington,D.C. , in 1862. No, he'd moved up intoPennsylvania and forced theUSA to respond to his moves in a fluid situation. Lee seemed to have been blessed with an imagination. The only hint of such a featureU.S. commanders displayed was in their fond belief that they *could* batter their way through anything, and that had proved more nearly a madman's delusion than healthy imagination.

Schlieffen wrestled with his reports till evening, and then after dark by gaslight. By that time, the American officers had stopped singing. Having drunk themselves into a stupor, they were snoring instead.

That racket was, if anything, even worse than the other had been, which Schlieffen hadn't reckoned possible.

They were monstrously hung over the next morning, an indication to Schlieffen that God did indeed mete out justice in the world. In short

order, they put his faith to the test. One of them pulled a new bottle of whiskey from his carpetbag, and they got drunk all over again. This time, Schlieffen was tempted to get drunk with them, if for no other reason than to blot out their raucous voices. Satan sent temptations to be mastered. He mastered this one.

He sent up a hearty prayer of thanksgiving when, late that second night, the train pulled intoPhiladelphia .

Gloating at the sad state of the twoU.S. officers was something less than perfectly Christian. No man, he told himself, was perfect. Gloat he did.

A driver waited to take him back to the sausage manufacturer's establishment. When the fellow greeted him in German, he automatically replied in English. Then, feeling foolish, he thumped his forehead with the heel of his hand. "Please excuse me," he said in his native tongue. "Not only have I used nothing but English lately, I am so tired I can hardly put one foot in front of the other."

"lch verstehe, Hen Oberst," the driver answered reassuringly. "Bitte, kommen Sie mit mir."

Schlieffen did come with the driver. He fell asleep in the carriage, and then, once back in a proper bed for the first time since his departure, did as good an imitation of a dead man as was likely to be found this side of the grave. When he awoke, a glance at his pocket watch sent him leaping from that soft, inviting bed in something close to horror: it was nearly eleven.

Kurd von Schlozer waved aside his mortified apologies. "Think nothing of it. Colonel," the German minister to theUnited States said. "I understand that a man returning from arduous service on his country's behalf is entitled to a night in which to recover himself."

Reminding Schlieffen he had done his duty was the best way to restore him to good humor. "Thank you for your patience with me, Your Excellency," he said. "Now I have been away from newspapers and the telegraph for two days. Has President Blaine yet answered the new Confederate call for peace?"

Schlozer shook his head, a slow, mournful motion. "He has not said yes; he has not said no. I spoke with him yesterday, urging him— as I have urged him before—to accept these terms before he finds himself forced to accept terms far worse."

"And what did he say? What could he say?" Schlieffen asked.

"He actually said little," the German minister replied. "I do not think he believes any longer he can win this war. But I do not think he believes he and his party can afford the embarrassment of admitting they are defeated in a war they began, either."

"Their coasts arc bombarded and sacked. Their lakeside cities are shelled. They are beaten on the border of the provinces whose annexation they are trying to prevent. They are invaded from the north.

Their own invasion of the enemy's territory is one of the bloodiest failures in all the history of war. If this is not defeat, God keep me from it!"

"Colonel, did I think you mistaken, be sure I would say as much," Schlozer answered.

"What docs Blaine say? How does he justify going on with a war he cannot win?" Schlieffen asked.

"He says the United States, because they are still standing, are not beaten," Kurd von Schlozer said.

"How to turn this into anything anyone might recognize as a victory is beyond me. It is also beyond him, although he will not admit as much."

"What can be done to make him see what is so?" Schlieffen asked. "The only reason he has not had to pay fully for his folly is that theUnited States are too large to be devoured at a gulp."

"I understand this, believe me," Schlozer said. "Blaineunderstands it, too; he is not altogether a fool. But he reckons that size is an advantage and a reason to keep fighting. And he is so full of hate forGreat Britain and forFrance for aiding his enemies that he has let his hatred cloud his mind and keep him from thinking clearly."

"Being so large has helpedRussia many times," Schlieffen said. "It is indeed a factor to be reckoned with.

But the Russians use it by letting invaders plunge deep into their land, and by fighting them only when and where they choose: thus did Napoleon come to grief, and the Swedes before him. It is our own greatest concern, should we ever have to fight the Russian Empire."

"But invasion here is no more than a minor issue, and was under-taken only after the United States rejected President Longstreet's peace offer the first time he made it," Schlozer said.

"Yes, the Confederates have adopted a strategy of the defensive, which suits what the new weapons can do," Schlieffen agreed. "Full details will appear in my report. Longstreet is clever, to hold to this strategy even when he could gain more for the moment by abandoning it."

"Longstreet is clever," the German minister to theUSA repeated. "I have heard—you need not ask where—that some Confederate generals strongly advocate imposing a more punishing peace on theUnited States , and a large invasion of theUSA to force its acceptance. Longstreet resists this proposal, and imposes his policy on government and Army both."

"This is what the head of a government is supposed to do," Schlieffen said. "For that matter, Your Excellency, President Blaine has imposed his policy on the government and Army of theUnited States ."

"So he has, Colonel," Kurd von Schlozer said. "So he has. The other thing a head of government is supposed to do, however, is choose a wise policy to impose. Both concerns are important, for, if the policy itself is misconceived, it will fail no matter how vigorously it is imposed. Sometimes, in fact, a misconceived policy will fail more spectacularly the more vigorously it is imposed."

Schlieffen considered that. His main concern was devising policy, not seeing that it was carried out. After a bit of thought, he inclined his head to the German minister to theUnited States . "Your Excellency, I think you may be right."

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On one side of Jeb Stuart stood *Senor* Salazar, the *alcalde* of Cananea. He had forgotten his English, and was screaming at the commander of the Department of the Trans-Mississippi in rapid-fire Spanish.

At Stuart's other side stood Geronimo and Chappo. Geronimo was shouting in the Apache language, far too fast for Chappo to hope to translate. Every so often, the old Indian, who understood and spoke Spanish, would break into that language to respond to something Salazar had said.

Surrounded by unintelligible cacophony, Stuart turned to Major Horatio Sellers and said, "Good God—I think I'd sooner deal with camels." After his wild ride in the direction of Janos and back again, that was a statement of profound distress indeed.

His aide-de-camp nodded. "At least camels don't form factions, sir. Nice to think there's something you can say for the brutes."

Stuart raised a hand. "Gentlemen, please—" he began. Neither the Apaches nor the *alcalde* paid any attention to him. He drew his pistol and fired it into the air. While the report still echoed, he shouted "Shut up, all of you!" at the top of his lungs.

That did the trick, at least for the moment. Into the sudden silence, Major Sellers said, "We've been trying to sort out just what the devil happened here since the day you rode out of town, sir. The only thing I can tell you, even now, is that the Indians and the Mexicans would have had a battle of their own if our own boys hadn't been keeping 'em apart ever since." He shook his head. "You listen to one story and then you listen to the other story and it's as though they're talking about gunpowder and grits—you wouldn't believe both yarns started from the same place."

"You try to listen to both stories at the same time and all you get is a headache worse than the one *mescal* gives you," Stuart said.

Salazar followed that. He nodded. After Chappo translated it for Geronimo, the ghost of a smile appeared on the medicine man's face—but only the ghost, and only for a moment.

Stuart went on, "The people of Cananea—all the people ofSonora andChihuahua —are now the subjects of the Confederate States ofAmerica . We will protect them from anyone who troubles them in any way." *Senor* Salazar looked smug. Before he could say anything, though, Stuart continued, "The Apaches arc our allies, who have fought alongside us and bled alongside us. We will also protect them from anyone who troubles them in any way."

"How in blazes we're going to do both those things at once—" Major Sellers muttered under his breath.

Resolutely, Stuart pretended not to hear that. At the moment, he didn't know how the Confederate States were going to do both those things at once, either. He did know they would have to do both of them if they were going to administerChihuahua andSonora . Feeling rather like King Solomon listening to the two women claiming the

same baby, he said, "Let's see if we can sort this out and keep the peace here. I want to hear these stories one at a time." Digging in his pocket, he produced a fifty-cent piece, tossed it in the air, and caught it. "It's tails. *Senor* Salazar, you go first."

The *alcalde* glared venomously at Geronimo and Chappo. He was bolder around them than he had been when they and the Confederates first came to Cananea, no doubt because he'd seen that the Confederates would not let the Apaches harm him or his people. "They are animals," he hissed. "Why should we live at peace with them? They do not know what peace means."

"You are the ones who break oaths," Chappo shouted, not waiting for any response from his father.

"One at a time." Stuart held up his hand again. "No insults from either side. Just tell me what you say happened. *Senor* Salazar, go on."

"Gracias,"Salazar said with dignity. "Here, I will tell you the precise truth, so you will know the lies of the *Indios* when you hear them." Jeb Stuart coughed. The *alcalde* sent him a look almost as venomous as the one he was aiming at the Apaches, but then went on, "These . . . *Indios"* —he visibly swallowed something harsher—"invaded my village drunk on *mescal,* stole away three of its finest and loveliest virgins, and ravaged them over and over, like the—" He checked himself again. "One is now dead of what they did to her, and the other two have both tried to hang themselves since. Is it any wonder we are outraged?"

"If that's what happened, no." Stuart turned to Chappo and Geronimo. "That is a hard charge against you. What have you got to say about it?"

Chappo had been translating the *alcalde'?,* remarks for his father. Now, when Geronimo spoke, he did the same for Stuart: "My father says Cananea has never had three virgins in it, not here, not *here,* and not *here,* either." He pointed in turn to his crotch, his mouth, and his backside.

SenorSalazar gobbled in fury, and looked about ready to explode. "No insults," Stuart said sternly. If he felt like guffawing, his face never found out about it. "Go on."

Geronimo spoke again. Again, Chappo translated: "My father says three *putas* came to our tents. I do not know how to say *putas* in English: women who give you their bodies if you give them

something."

"Whores," Major Sellers said succinctly.

"Whores—thank you," Chappo said. He collected English words the way his cousin Batsinas collected artisans' tricks. Batsinas had made himself a pretty fair blacksmith in a few months' time, and was always trying to trade for new tools. Stuart took that as a good sign, a sign that the Apaches could, with patience, be civilized. *Perhaps with the patience of Job,* he thought.

Before Chappo could apply his new vocabulary, Salazar erupted again, shouting, "Lies! Lies! All lies!"

"He let you speak," Stuart told him. "You will let him speak, or I will decide this case for him on the spot. Do you understand?" Ever so reluctantly, the *alcalde* composed himself. Stuart nodded to Chappo and Geronimo again.

Through his son, Geronimo said, "Like I say, these three whores"—Chappo pronounced the word with care it did not usually get—"came to our tents. They had *mescal* with them. Some of my warriors enjoyed them, yes, and gave them silver, it could be even gold, for their bodies and for the *mescal."* After a bit, the old medicine man added, "Our women do not make free of themselves like this, and, if they do, we cut off the tip of their nose."

"Ought to do that inNew York City ," Major Sellers said with a coarse laugh. "Sure would be a lot of ugly women there, in that case." The biggest city in theUSA had in the Confederate States the name of being the world's chiefest center of depravity.

However much Stuart agreed with his aide-de-camp, he waved him to silence. Then he asked Geronimo, "How did the woman of Cananea come to die during all this?"

"She is not dead," the Apache leader answered. "She fell in love with one of my men, and they ran off together."

"Bring them back," Stuart said. "Send men after them. If you can prove this, you had better do it."

Chappo translated for Geronimo but then, sounding worried, spoke for himself: "The woman will say the man took her away by force, whether it is true or not. She will try to take the blame off herself."

"It could be," Stuart said in neutral tones. In fact, he thought it likely. No one—Confederate, Yankee, Mexican, Indian—was fond of accepting blame. He turned to *Senor* Salazar. "Who are the two women who did come back to Cananea, and where do they live?"

"One is Guadalupe Lopez; her family's house is by the plaza," the *alcalde* answered. "The other poor victim of the *Indios* desires is Carmelita Fuentes. She lives on the edge of the town, by the road toward Janos."

"Thank you, sir." Stuart tugged at his beard as he thought. After a few seconds, he said to Major Sellers,

"Send men to both these houses. See if there are any unusual amounts ofU.S. gold and silver coins in them. The Apaches have been doing a lot of looting up inNew MexicoTerritory . If they have silver and gold to spend on women, that's the money they'll be spending."

"Yes, sir." His aide-de-camp beamed. "That's very clever, sir."

Now Salazar was the one who spoke in tones of alarm: "I must remind you, General, Cananea has since a long time traded with *los Estados Unidos.* Much money of that country is in this town. You must not be surprised to find it in many homes."

"It could be," Stuart said, as neutrally as he had toward Chappo. "We'll find out any which way, the same as we'll find out whether the Apaches bring in this other girl of yours and what she says when they do."

The *alcalde* bowed. "I will go with your soldiers to the houses of these two poor women and aid them in any way I have the power to do."

"You will do nothing of the sort. You will stay here with me." Stuart put the snap of command in his voice. The last thing he wanted was Salazar telling the women and their families what to do and what to say. He let the *alcalde* save face by adding, "I have men who speak Spanish. Doing this will be good practice for them."

Under the circumstances, Salazar could only acquiesce. He looked very unhappy doing it. Geronimo and Chappo looked unhappy, too. Seeing that, Stuart realized nobody knew exactly what had passed between the women of Cananea and the Apaches, and Indians and Mexicans both feared finding out exactly what had passed would show them in a bad light.

Horatio Sellers had been thinking along the same lines. When he came back from sending soldiers into Cananea, he spoke to Stuart in a low voice: "What do you want to bet we find out the greasers *were* whores and the redskins *did* ravage 'em?"

"Wouldn't surprise me one bit," Stuart answered, also almost whispering. "They aren't sure who did what, but they were sure they were ready to kill each other on account of it. We're going to need more Regulars in the Army than we used to, just because of these two provinces. We'll need to patrol the border with the Yankees, we'll need to patrol the new border with the Empire of Mexico, and we'll need to patrol every foot of ground in between unless we want fights like this one almost was to break out three times a week."

"God help the secretary of war when he tries to explain that to Congress," Sellers said.

"God help Congress if they don't listen," Stuart returned. Whether the congressmen in distantRichmond would listen was anyone's guess. If they didn't, the noise would get louder soon. Stuart was sure of that.

After a couple of hours, the soldiers who had searched the Lopez and Fuentes houses reported to Stuart. "We found fiveU.S. silver dollars at one place, sir, and two U.S. quarter-eagles at the other, sir,"

said the lieutenant who'd led them. "Five dollars at each place—"

"More than those Mexican sluts are worth," Major Sellers muttered.

As if by accident, Stuart trod on his toe. "Doesn't prove anything, not really," the commander of the Trans-Mississippi said. "We *are* close to theU.S. border. The women still insist they were violated?" At the lieutenant's nod, Stuart sighed. "All right. Let's see if the other one turns up. If she doesn't, then I reckon we have to believe the *alcalde.'"*

But she—Maria Guerrero was her name—did indeed turn up, four days later. Once back in Cananea, she loudly proclaimed the outrages the Apache in whose company she was found had inflicted on her.

The warrior in question, a stalwart brave named Yahnozha, as loudly insisted on her willingness. She wasn't bruised and battered and beaten, but she declared she'd been too terrified to resist. Yahnozha said she hadn't wanted to resist.

Impasse. Stuart hated impasses. He hated ambiguity of any kind. The older he got, the more ambiguity he saw in the world. He hated that,

too. "In a battle, by God, you know who's won and who's lost," he complained to his aide-de-camp. "That's what war is good for."

"Yes, sir," Sellers agreed. "But what do we do now, since nobody here knows anything and nobody much wants to find out?"

"Convince the Apaches and the Mexicans to forget this time, since nobody *is* sure about it," Stuart said.

"That's all I can think of now. Next time they quarrel, maybe who did what to whom will be a little clearer. I hope to heaven it is, I tell you that."

He did his best to keep the peace between allies and subjects. Time helped, too. When they hadn't flown at each other's throats for a while, he decided they probably wouldn't, not over this. He wished he could believe either side would really forget it. Try as he would, he had no luck with that.

Chapter 16

Frederick Douglass' Train pulled intoChicago at the south side depot, on the corner of State and Twelfth Streets. Looking out the window at the hurly-burly on the platform, Douglass was forcibly reminded that, while the Army of theOhio butted heads with the Confederates atLouisville , most of theUnited States kept right on with the business on which they had been engaged before the war began.

After seeing nothing but blue uniforms for so long (save only during that brief, appalling interlude when he saw gray and butternut uniforms instead), Douglass blinked at the spectacle of checked and houndstooth and herringbone sack suits and brightly striped shirts on men, and at the fantastic, unfunctional cut and bright colors of women's clothes. Truly this was a different world from the one he'd just left.

Carrying his suitcases, he made his way to the waiting line of Parmelee's omnibuses. The driver, who was taking a feed bag off a horse's head, looked at him with something less than delight. "What would you be wanting?" he asked, brogue and carroty head of hair alike proclaiming him an Irishman.

"To go to the Palmer House," Douglass replied evenly.

As they often did, his deep, rolling voice and educated accent went some way toward making up for the color of his skin. So did his destination, one of the two best hotels inChicago . Instead of snarling at him to take himself elsewhere, the omnibus driver, after a visible pause for thought, said nothing more than,

"Fare is fifty cents."

Have you got fifty cents?lurked behind the words, as it would not have were the driver addressing a white man. With practiced carelessness, Douglass tossed him a half-dollar. "I've been there before," he said.

The driver plucked the coin out of the air, as if it would vanish if he let it touch the ground. Douglass boarded the half-full omnibus. The driver stared at him, as if wondering how much he could get away with. Douglass looked back with imperturbability as practiced as the carelessness. The Irishman's shoulders slumped. He picked up Douglass' bags and heaved them, a little harder than he might have,

into the boot at the rear of the omnibus.

Before long, all the seats on the conveyance were taken—except the one next to Frederick Douglass.

He wondered how many times he'd seen that over the years. More than he could count, certainly. The driver evidently reckoned that last seat would not be filled, for he climbed up into his own place, flicked the reins, and got the omnibus rolling. Above the streets, telegraph wires were as thick as vines in the jungle.

"Palmer House!" the driver shouted when he got to the hotel, which occupied the block onMonroe between State andWabash , the entrance lying on the latter street. Douglass, a couple of other men, and a woman got off the omnibus. Douglass tipped the driver a dime for getting his bags out of the boot, then went inside. The lobby was a huge hall with a floor of multicolored marble tiles. Spittoons rang to well-aimed expectorations; poorer shots gave the marble new, less pleasant, hues.Western Union boys and letter carriers hurried through the hall in all directions.

To Douglass' relief, he had no trouble with his reservation. "Room 211," the desk clerk said, and handed him a key with that number stamped on it. The fellow looked back at the great grid of pigeonholes behind the front desk. "Yes, I thought so—there's a letter waiting for you."

"Thank you." Douglass took the envelope, which bore his name in a script long familiar. The note inside was to the point. *If you are not too tired,* it read, *meet me for supper at seven tonight in the hotel restaurant. We were in at the birth; let us pray we are not to be in at the death.* As usual, the signature ran the cross stroke of the initial of the Christian name into the beginning of the first letter of the surname: *A. Lincoln.*

"Help you with anything?" the desk clerk asked.

"Only in reminding me whether I remember correctly that the entrance to your restaurant is on theState Street side of the building," Douglass replied.

"Yes, that's right." The clerk nodded. He wasn't calling Douglass *sir,* but in all other respects seemed polite enough. The Negro discounted slights far worse than that.

He went upstairs, unpacked, and took a bath in the tin tub down at the end of the hall. Refreshed, he went back to his room, relighted the

gas lamp above the desk, and wrote letters and worked on a newspaper story till it was time to join the former president for supper.

At the Palmer House restaurant, the maitre d' gave him a fishy stare. "I am to dine with Mr. Lincoln," he said, and the ice began to break up. A discreetly passed silver dollar made the fellow as obsequious as any Confederate planter could have wanted in a slave.

Lincolnwas already seated when Douglass came up. He unfolded to his full angular height like a carpenter's jointed ruler. "Good to see you, Fred," he said, and held out his big, bony hand.

Douglass took it. "It's been too long," he said. "But neither of us is in fashion these days, and so we both have to work harder just to make our voices heard. That leaves too little time for sociability."

"Ain't it the truth?"Lincoln said in the rustic accents of his youth. "Well, sit yourself down, we'll get outside some supper, and then we'll hash this out and see what we come up with."

"An excellent proposal." Douglass did sit, then examined the menu. He spoke with firm decision: "I shall have a beefsteak. If I can't get a good one inChicago , they have vanished off the face of the earth."

"I had beef last night, so I believe I'll order the roast chicken,"Lincoln said. "Considering what we shall be about over the next few days, though, I wonder whether cooked goose wouldn't be a better choice."

"Surely things have not come to such a pass," Douglass said.

Lincolnlooked at him.Lincoln , in fact, looked through him. The ex-president said not a word. Douglass, feeling himself flush, was glad his brown skin kept that from showing. When the waiter came round to see what the two men wanted, he reckoned the interruption not far from providential.

His beefsteak, when in due course it arrived, occasioned another interruption, a rapturous one. Across the table from him,Lincoln methodically demolished half a chicken. Both men drank whiskey with their meals.

"How you stay so lean with such an appetite is beyond me," Douglass said, patting his own considerable girth.

Lincolnshrugged. "I eat—and I am eaten." He had not drunk to excess, any more than Douglass had, but perhaps it was the spirits that let his frustration with the world in which he found himself come forth to a degree he did not usually permit. Or perhaps it was something else. After one of his self-deprecating chuckles, he said, "I bear up well in the presence of mine enemies; only with my friends do I let my sorrows show. Having so few friends these days, I am most often quite the jolly gentleman."

He looked as jolly as an undertaker. He usually looked that way, regardless of how he felt. Douglass said, "Surely the state of the Republican Party cannot be so bad as you implied in your invitation to this supper."

"Can't it? Why not?"Lincoln asked, and Douglass had no answer. The former president went on, "This may be the last supper of the Republican Party."

"With the way the war has gone, I fear you're likely right," Douglass said. "I had such hopes when we began it, and now . . ." His voice trailed away.

"Now we've both come closer than we would have liked to making the acquaintance of the hangman,"Lincoln said, and Douglass winced and nodded.Lincoln continued, "But that is not what I meant. Our party would face hard sledding, and face it soon, even had the war gone as we should have liked."

"You are, I believe, too much the pessimist," Douglass said. "Had we succeeded in forcing the Confederate States to disgorgeChihuahua andSonora , Republican strength would have been assured for years to come."

ButLincoln shook his head. "Try as I will, I cannot make myself believe it, for we have abandoned the principles upon which we—you and I and others—founded the party in the first place. When was the last time you heard a Republican speak up for a fair shake for the working man or for justice and equality for all men? Those are the ideals we espoused when we were young. Have they changed from boons to evils as we grew old?"

Douglass frowned and looked down into his glass of whiskey. In those charged, heady days before the War of Secession, everything had seemed possible. He spoke carefully: "Since the war, we may perhaps have grown too concerned with giving the country back its spine and

allowing it to stand tall in the world, and—"

"What about caring what it stands for when it stands tall?"Lincoln broke in. "We have forgotten the working man as the capitalist ground him into the dirt. We have looked outward too *much,* and at ourselves too *little,* and so a pit yawns beneath the party. Unless the mass of men believe we represent them and can better their lot, they will cast their ballots elsewhere, and I for one shall not blame them. In their shoes—when they have shoes—I should cast my vote elsewhere, too."

"I look outward," Douglass said. "I look south, to my brethren yet in bondage."

"I know you do, old friend,"Lincoln said. "Nor do I presume to condemn you, for there your heart lies.

But do you not see that the factory owners in theUnited States abuse the working classes in much the same way as the slaveowners in the Confederate States abuse the Negro?"

"It might seem so, to a white man," Douglass snapped. But then he softened: "We have disagreed here for years, you and I. I ask you, Abraham: where is the factory owner who, when a pretty woman in his employ strikes his fancy, can abuse her chastity as he wishes?" His mouth tightened. The color of his skin, the shape of his features, testified that he was the product of such a union.

Lincolnreplied, "Where is the slaveowner who, when times are slack or when a hand grows old, can turn him out to starve without a backwards glance, as if he were discarding a torn glove? The evils are not identical, but both spring from superiors enjoying untrammeled power over those they call inferiors, which is, as I have long maintained, destructive of democracy."

"The plight of the Negro is worse, and more deserving of attention," Douglass insisted.

"The plight of the Negro in theUnited States is not far different from the plight of other proletarians in theUnited States , and grows less different day by day,"Lincoln said. "In looking toward the Negro in the Confederate States, for whom we can do little, you ignore both the Negro and the white man in the United States, for whom we can do a great deal."

"I look to amend the worst evil I see," Douglass said stiffly.

"Which is also the one least susceptible to amendment." ThenLincoln laughed, which irked the Negro orator and journalist, who found nothing amusing in the discussion. Seeing his expression, the ex-president explained: "I went through what they call the Lincoln-Douglas debates more than twenty years ago, and now I find myself in the midst of the Lincoln-Douglass debate."

"After some of the things the Little Giant said about the colored man, I'll thank you not to compare me to him," Douglass said, but he was smiling now, too. "You lost that election, but those debates made you a force to be reckoned with."

"And all that reckoning with me got the country was a lost war and a new, unfriendly neighbor on our southern border,"Lincoln answered. "All that electing me got the party was the assurance it would not elect another Republican president for the next generation."

Yes, Douglass thought,Lincoln was letting his bitterness show tonight, more than he normally did. The Negro said, "Cheer up, old friend. You yourself spoke of the king who charged his wise men to come up with a saying that would be true and fitting in all times and situations. They gave him the words, 'And this, too, shall pass away.' "

"Yes, and do you know what those wise men were talking about?"Lincoln asked. Douglass shook his head. "The Republican Party," Abraham Lincoln said.

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Captain Saul Berryman looked neither so bright nor so young as he had before the war against the many foes of theUnited States . "Good morning, Colonel Schlieffen," he said wearily. He did not bother speaking German, as he had before, but waved Schlieffen to a seat in the outer office. "General Rosecrans will be with you shortly."

"Thank you," Alfred von Schlieffen told Rosecrans' adjutant. Captain Berryman only grunted by way of reply. He had already immersed himself once more in the paperwork that had engrossed him when Schlieffen walked into the office.

The closed door to Rosecrans' inner sanctum did little to muffle the phrases he was, presumably, bellowing into the telephone: "Yes, Mr. President . . . No, Mr. President . . . No, no, no ... I'm sorry, Your Excellency, but I don't think we can manage that. . . . What? What? I'm sorry, I can't hear you."

That last was followed a moment later by a sharp little crash, as of the newfangled machine's earpiece being slammed back into the bracket on which it rested when not in use.

Major General William Rosecrans opened the door to the inner office and peered out, a hunted look in his deep-set eyes. "Ah, Schlieffen," the gcneral-in-chief of theUnited States said, suddenly genial.

"I'd sure as hell sooner talk with you than with James G."—his beard swallowed a word or two—"Blaine."

"Thank you, General," Schlieffen said, rising and going into Rosecrans' office. What he thought of an officer who would curse his Commander-In-Chief he kept to himself. Instead, pointing to the box on the wall, he said, "I am sorry it did not let you hear well."

"What?" Rosecrans stared. Then he laughed. "I could hear just fine, Colonel. What happened was, I got sick of listening. Any time a man asks you to do what isn't possible, you're a damned sight better off pretending you can't make him out."

Schlieffen thought of the British admiral, Nelson, deliberately raising a telescope to his blind eye so he could keep from officially seeing an order he did not like. With as much sympathy as he could put in his voice, the German military attaché asked, "What does the president ask of you that you cannot do?"

He wondered if Rosecrans would answer him. He wouldn't have answered a question like that from a foreign attaché, were he back inBerlin . But the American soldier did not hesitate. "What does he ask?"

Rosecrans echoed. "What does he ask? He asks me to win the goddamn war for him, that's what. Not so much at this stage of things, is it?"

His breath stank of whiskey. Even a sober man, though, would have been hard pressed to be optimistic at the moment. "How does he want you to do this?" Schlieffen inquired.

"How?" Rosecrans howled, stretching the word out into a cry of pain. "He hasn't the faintest idea how.

I'm the soldier, so that's supposed to be my affair. Have you got a won war concealed anywhere about your person, Colonel Schlieffen? I haven't, sure as the devil."

"If President Blaine still wants you this war to win, I do not know how to tell you to do this," Schlieffen said. "The only question I have is why he does not take the peace the Confederates say they will give him and thank God for it. When weFrance beat, we from them took two provinces and made them pay five milliards of francs."

"What's a milliard?" Rosecrans asked. Schlieffen took a pen from its ink-well and wrote the number on a scrap of paper: 5,000,000,000. Rosecrans looked at it. "Oh. Five billion francs, you mean." He whistled softly. "That's a lot of money."

"Ja, "Schlieffen answered laconically.

"That's a hell of a lot of money," Rosecrans said, as if the German had not spoken.

"Ja,"Schlieffen said again, and then, "and Longstreet wants to take no provinces—no, no states, you would say—from theUnited States . He wants to take no money from theUnited States . He wants to take only the two provinces he bought from the Empire of Mexico, and to have theUnited States say they are his. With what he could do, these are good terms, *nicht wahrT'*

"Oh, they're good terms, all right," Rosecrans said. "You ask me, they're *too* damn good. It's as though Longstreet is saying, 'We can lick you any old time we please, and we don't have to take anything away from you to make that so.' It's—humiliating, that's what it is."

Schlieffen essayed a rare joke: "If President Blaine does not for these terms care, President Longstreet will them harder make. Of this I am sure. Do you not think that I ... am right?" He nodded to himself, pleased he'd again remembered the English idiom.

"In a red-hot minute," Rosecrans said, which the German military attache, judging by the tone, took for agreement. Sighing, scowling, Rosecrans went on, "But he can't do that now, because that would be humiliating, too. Do you understand what I'm saying, Colonel?"

"Oh, yes, I understand," Schlieffen said. "But in war, the way not to be humiliated is to win. If you lose a war, how can you keep this from happening to you? The enemy to be stronger himself has shown."

"Hasn't he, though?" But then Rosecrans violently shook his head. "No, God damn it, the Confederates haven't shown that they're stronger than we are. As strong as we are, maybe, but not stronger. It's only

afterEngland andFrance jumped on our back that everything went into the privy."

"But we of this spoke down inWashington before the war began," Schlieffen said. "BritainandFrance have been friends to the Confederate States since before the War of Secession. TheUnited States should have had ready a plan to fight at the same time all three countries."

"I remember you saying that," Rosecrans replied. "I have to tell you, I didn't take it seriously then. Do you really mean to tell me that back in Berlin you've got a plan for war against France and one for war against France and England and one for war against France and England and Russia and one for—"

"Aber natiirlich,"Schlieffen broke in. "And we think of alsoAustria-Hungary andItaly , though they are now our friend. And we rememberHolland andBelgium andDenmark andSweden andTurkey and—"

The gcncral-in-chief of theUnited States stared at him. "Jesus Christ, you do mean it," Rosecrans said slowly. "What do they do in that General Staff of yours, Colonel, sit around all day studying maps and timetables and lists of regiments and I don't know what all else?"

"Yes," Schlieffen answered, surprised yet again that Rosecrans should be surprised at the idea of military planning. "We believe that, if war comes, we should as little to chance leave as we can."

"A lot of chance in war," Rosecrans insisted. "Can't help it." Yes, he was an American, looking for nothing more than the chance to go out in the field of uncertainty and snatch what he could from it.

"Yes, this is so," Schlieffen said. "A lot, there is. As little as there can be, there should be." What theUnited States had snatched from the field of uncertainty was a thumping defeat.

"Maybe," Rosecrans said, like a man admitting Limburger cheese might possibly taste good in spite of the way it smelled. "Maybe." He brushed a pale speck from the dark blue wool of his tunic. "The more you talk about it, Colonel, the more I do think the United States should send some of our officers to your country after this blamed war is finally over—if it's ever over—so we can take a long look at how you go about things."

"They would be welcome," Schlieffen said. "Your neighbors who do not love you are allied to the French, who do not love us. Since we have one enemy who is the same, it might for us be good to be with each other friends." He held up a hasty hand. "You must understand, I speak here only for myself, not for Chancellor Bismarck."

"Yes, yes." General Rosecrans nodded impatiently. "I can't speak for the secretary of state, either.

Speaking for nobody but William S. Rosecrans, though, Colonel, I'll tell you I like the idea pretty god damn well."

Alfred von Schlieffen sat very still, contemplating what he had just said. *The enemy of my enemy is a friend* was an ancient truth.France , so far as he could see, would never be anything butGermany 's enemy.France was the Confederate States' friend; the Confederate States were an enemy to theUnited States , also unlikely to be anything else.

So far as he could see, real, close friendship betweenGermany and theUnited States made good strategic sense. He wondered what Minister von Schlozer would think of the idea. Up till now, German relations with both theUSA and the CSA had been polite, even cordial, but not particularly close. Would Chancellor Bismarck want to continue what had been working well enough, or would he be interested in changing things? If he was, aU.S. military mission toBerlin might be one tooth of the key in the lock.

Schlozer will have a better idea of the chancellor's mind than I do,Schlieffen thought. Then he realized Rosecrans had just spoken, and he had no idea what the general had said. "I am sorry," he said. "You must please excuse me. I was thinking of something else."

"1 guess you were," Rosecrans said with a chuckle. "The Judgment Trump could have sounded right then, and you never would have noticed. What I said was, I'll take the notion of sending officers toBerlin over to the secretary of state to see what he thinks of it."

"That is good. I am glad to hear it," Schlieffen said.

"Damned if I know what will come of it, though." Rosecrans' good humor vanished. "Ever sinceWashington warned us against entangling alliances, we've held apart from 'em. Of course, inWashington 's day we didn't have nasty neighbors tangled up with foreigners themselves. But he's like the Good Book to a lot of people here, even if he was fromVirginia ."

That Rosecrans was himself talking with a foreigner never seemed to enter his mind. Schlieffen had seen in other Americans the same interesting inability to judge the effects of their own words. It did not offend him, not here; he would not let it offend him. "You will do what you can do, General, with the officials of your country, and I will do what I can with the officials of mine, and we will see what from this comes."

Before Rosecrans could answer, the box on the wall clanged to let him know someone wished to speak with him. He grimaced and swore fiercely under his breath. But then, like a hound summoned to the dinner bowl by the ring of a bell, he got up and went to the telephone. "Rosecrans here," he shouted into it. "Yes, Mr. President, I hear you pretty well right now. What were you saying before, Your Excellency?" A pause. "But, Mr. President . . ."

Schlieffen quickly realized the conversation with President Blaine was liable to go on for some time. He half rose. General Rosecrans nodded permission for him to go. He respectfully dipped his head to the American general-in-chief, then left the inner office.

"Auf wiedersehen, Hen Oberst,"Captain Berryman said when he emerged; Rosecrans' adjutant had regained enough spirit to try German again. *"Ich hoffe alles is mit,* uh, *bei Ihnen gut?"*

"Yes, everything is well with me, thank you," Schlieffen answered. "How is everything with you?"

Before Berryman could answer, Rosecrans' bellow of frustrated fury did the job for him: "God damn it to hell, Mr. President, I can't give you a victory when the sons of bitches are coming at us five ways at once. . . . Yes, well, maybe you should have thought about that more before you dragged us into this miserable war. . . . Maybe you should think about making peace, too, while you've still got the chance."

The sharp click that followed was, again, the earpiece slamming down onto its rest.

Schlieffen and Berryman looked at each other. Neither found anything to say. After a polite, sympathetic nod, Schlieffen let himself out of the antechamber.

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Abraham Lincoln appreciated—indeed, savored—the irony of meeting in the Florence Hotel to do battle for the soul of the Republican Party. Here he was, doing his best to make the party remember the labourers who had helped bring it to power, and doing it in a hotel erected by the Pullman Company on part of the city within a city they owned: factories, houses, blocks of flats, all in the holy name ofPullman .

Robert had arranged it, of course. HisChicago connections were far better than his father's, these days.

The room,Lincoln could not deny, was splendid: magnificent walnut paneling, table with legs even more elaborately carved than that paneling, chairs upholstered in maroon velvet and soft enough to swallow a man, gaslights overhead so ornate, they resembled a forest frozen in beaten bronze.

"I think we are all here,"Lincoln said, looking around the room. Fewer were here than he had hoped.

Some of his telegrams had gone unanswered; some men he had hoped would accept had declined. He wondered whether he had enough strength at hand, even if everything went as he wanted, to turn the party into the path he had in mind. The only way to find out would be the event.

Around the table, heads nodded. There sat Frederick Douglass, with his big frame and white mane and beard as solid and impressive as a snow-topped mountain. There was John Hay, a lighter presence, once Lincoln's secretary, then minister to the CSA inBlaine 's administration till war broke out. There sat Benjamin Butler, a clever mind concealed within a bald, bloated, sagging walrus of a body: before the War of Secession a Democrat who thought Jefferson Davis might make a good president of the United States, at its end a U.S. general who'd had to flee New Orleans in a Navy frigate to keep the returning Confederates from hanging him without trial.

Next toButler , rotund Hannibal Hamlin fiddled with his spectacles. He had beenLincoln 's vice president, and had gone down to defeat with him in 1864. But he was aMaine man, and secretary of state to boot, and as such more likely than others to gain the ear of President Blaine. Senator James Garfield ofOhio sat farthest fromLincoln . An officer during the War of Secession, he had risen to prominence as a member of the military courts that purged the Army of defeatists after the fighting ended.

But for Hay, he was the youngest man in the room.

"I think two questions stand before the house today,"Lincoln said, as if he were addressing the Illinois Assembly. "The first is, where does our party stand now? The second, and more urgent, is, where do we go from here?"

"Where we are, is in trouble," Ben Butler declared in his flatMassachusetts accent. "How do we get out of it?" He shook his big, round head; the gray hair that fringed his bald pate flew this way and that.

"Damned if I know. HangingBlaine from theWashingtonMonument might be one place to start."

"He did what he was elected to do." Hannibal Hamlin spoke up in defense of the president.

"So he did, and did it damned badly, too,"Butler sneered.

"Fighting the Confederate States, opposing their tyranny, is not and cannot be a sin," Frederick Douglass declared.

ButButler had an answer for him, too: "Fighting them and losing is."

"As you will know from the invitations I sent you, I was speaking in more general terms,"Lincoln said.

"The question I wish to address is, assuming the war lost, as it seems to be, how is the Republican Party once more to recover its status with the American people?"

"By doing as it was meant to do from the outset: by championing freedom over all this continent,"

Douglass said.

"In aid of that," John Hay said, his voice light and thin after the Negro's, "I have heard that Longstreet will formally free the Negroes in the CSA once this war ends. His allies are said to have extracted such a promise from him as the price of their aid against us."

"One more reason forBlaine to come to terms, then," Douglass exclaimed, his leonine features lighting with hope. A moment later, though, he spoke more cautiously: "If it be true, of course. You, John, will be the best judge of us all as to that."

"With my few months inRichmond before the fighting started?" Hay said with a laugh full of self-mockery. "I believe it to be true, having heard it from sources I reckon trustworthy, but I can offer no guarantee. Nor, even if it is true, can I guess how much *de facto,* as opposed to *de jure,* freedom the Negroes in the Confederate States are to have."

"Giving them any at all goes dead against the Confederate Constitution,"Garfield pointed out.

"That doesn't always stop us,"Butler said. "I don't see any reason the Rebs will lose a whole lot of sleep over it."

"Your cynicism, Mr. Butler, has truly astonishing breadth and scope," John Hay murmured.Butler gave him an oleaginous smile, as at a compliment. Maybe he thought it was one.

Lincolnsaid, "When a man has *no* freedom, *any* increase looms large, f hope you are indeed correct, John. The Negro unchained will grow in ways the men now his masters do not expect." Frederick Douglass nodded vigorous agreement to that.Lincoln continued, "Even as the chains may fall from the limbs of the slave in the Confederate States, so they are being fitted to those of the labourer in theUnited States . Standing firm against this, we can and shall become the party of the majority once more, after the misfortune of the war sinks below the surface of public recollection."

James Garfield frowned. "I don't see how sounding like radicals will take us anywhere we want to go."

"Justice for the working man is not a radical notion,"Lincoln said, "or, if it is, that stands as a judgment against theUnited States ."

"But what do you mean by justice, Lincoln?"Garfield demanded. "If you call raising a Red rebellion, the way you tried to do inMontanaTerritory —if you call that justice, I want no part of it."

"I make two points in response to that, sir,"Lincoln said. "The first is that I raised no rebellion, Red or otherwise. 1 made a speech, similar to many other speeches I have made over the years. If the miners inHelena were forcefully of the opinion that it fit the circumstances under which they lived, I cannot help it. Second and more basic is the fact that the people do retain the right of revolution against a government they find tyrannical."

"Now you do sound like a Red," Ben Butler rumbled. His jowls shook with the weight of his disapproval.

"Without the right of revolution, we should to this day be British subjects, revering QueenVictoria

,"Lincoln said. "We might make discontented British subjects, but British subjects we should be. If we were still British colonies, we would retain the right of revolution against the Crown. How can we not retain it, then, against the government inWashington ?"

"InPhiladelphia , you mean,"Butler said. "On this theory, you should have let the Confederate States go without firing a shot."

"By no means,"Lincoln said. "They sought to break, and, sadly, succeeded in breaking, a union; they did not aim to establish a more perfect one for the nation as a whole."

"A subtle distinction," saidButler , an admirer of subtle distinctions.

"My view," Frederick Douglass said, "is that, while Mr. Lincoln exaggerates the likenesses between the position of the Confederate slave and that of theU.S. labourer, we may, if we so desire, use such exaggerations to good effect on the stump."

"That is what I meant to say, yes,"Lincoln said, "save that I purpose making this principle the rock on which our platform stands, not just a net with which to sweep up votes when the next election comes."

Hannibal Hamlin said, "If we take this line, the Democrats will call us a pack of Communards, and that alongside all the other low things they are in the habit of calling us."

"The Democrats lined up in support of property when that included property in Negro slaves. They have not changed since."Lincoln did not try to hide his scorn. "If they start flinging brickbats, they'll have to duck a good many, too."

"How much good will any of this do, gentlemen, when we are tarred with the brush of two losing wars in the space of twenty years?" John Hay asked.

"Exactly my point,"Lincoln said. "If we go on as we have been, we are surely ruined. If, on the other hand, we make the changes in our course I have suggested, we offer the entire nation a new birth of liberty. Otherwise, I fear, government of the people, by the people,

and for the people shall perish from this earth, replaced by government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich. The free men who made theUnited States a beacon to the nations of the world shall be reduced to gearing in the vast capitalist engine of profit."

"I just don't see it," Senator Garfield said. "I wish I did, but I don't. No room for compromise in any of this. Without compromise, you can't have politics. The brickbats will be flying, all right, but they'll be real brickbats with real bricks. That's the direction whence class warfare comes."

"Yes, it is,"Lincoln said softly. "Do you think we can avoid it by pretending the seeds from which it springs are not already planted and growing?"

"Whether we can avoid it is one question," Hay said. "Whether we should embrace it is another question altogether."

"You mean that, John."Lincoln 's voice was full of wonder, full of grief. Hay was his protégé. Hay was nearly as much his son as was Robert. As far asLincoln could see, his own course of thought had followed over the years a perfectly logical, perfectly inevitable path. And yet, the handsome young man who was now an even more handsome middle-aged man had not gone in the same direction. For that matter, neither had Robert Lincoln.

Hay said, "I think everyone here, with the possible exception of Mr. Douglass, feels the same as I do."

He sounded sad, too, the way a doctor sounded sad when he had to tell a family the situation for a sick man was hopeless, and that he would soon die.

Lincolnlooked around the table, silently polling the men he had asked to join him inChicago . With him, they could have swung many in the Republican Party to his views. If they were against him, reform along the lines he desired would not come, not through the Republicans. "Gentlemen, think again, please," he said. "Can you not see that this country needs a new birth of freedom if it is to go on being the wonder and the envy of the world?" He knew he was pleading. The last man with whom he'd pleaded was Lord Lyons, the British minister to theUnited States during the War of Secession.

He'd failed then. After Lee's victories inPennsylvania , the British government had recognized the Confederate States as a nation among nations and, withFrance , had forced theUSA to do likewise. He was

failing now, too. He saw that by the way his comrades would not meet his eyes.

Garfieldsaid, "Lincoln, if we Republicans tried to go down your road, I think you would split the party not in two but in three. Some would go with you, and I expect you would gain a few among the Socialists and others who believe in notions even more radical than yours."

"Thank you so much,"Lincoln murmured.

"I mean no offense. I speak the truth as I see it, as you do."Garfield was earnest, sensible, in the middle of the road. He proved as much, continuing, "Some would probably try to hold the party on the course it has now. I lean that way myself, truth to tell. And some would bolt to the Democrats."

"And," Hannibal Hamlin added, "the devil would come down with chilblains before we won another election."

Benjamin Butler said, "It occurs to me that what we may need is not more freedom but a little less.

Compared to any European country, this is a land full of bomb-flinging anarchists. We're so damned free, we've thrown two wars away because we did not properly prepare for either of them. TakeGermany , now—nothing inGermany but coal and potatoes, far as the eye can see. But they've got discipline there, by God, and they're the strongest power on the continent."

"I wouldn't go so far as Mr. Butler," Hay said, "but I am compelled to believe there is some truth in what he says." Hamlin nodded. So did Garheld.

Lincolndiscovered he'd only thought he knew despair. He turned to Frederick Douglass. "What of you, Fred?" he asked.

Douglass had less political clout than any of the others, but more moral authority. After staring for a while at something only he could see, he answered, "My own people, both in the Confederate States and in theUnited States , need more freedom, not less. I must believe the same also holds true for white men."

Had he stopped there, he would have aidedLincoln . But he went on, "Neither am I convinced that taking the Republican Party into the streets, so to speak, is the way to gain a majority for it."

"Let me ask the question another way,"Lincoln said: "Other than taking the Republican Party into the streets, how is it to gain a majority? Only sixteen years of accumulated disgust at Democratic feckless-ness let us win this latest election. Things being as they are now, when do you gentlemen foresee our winning another one, and by what means?"

For close to two minutes, no one answered. Then James Garfield said, "Whatever the means may be, they shall not include riots and rebellion, which would only raise enmity against us."

"Like pressure from steam in an engine, pressure for change *will* rise in theUnited States ,"Lincoln said.

"Whether it rises *through* the Republican Party or *outside* the party remains to be seen. I would sooner see it rise through the party, that we may channel it for the nation's good and for our own."

He looked around the table again. Not even Douglass looked as if he agreed with him. Ben Butler said,

"If workers go into the streets, soldiers go into the streets, too. Soldiers carry more rifles. They always have. They always will."

"Unless and until they turn those rifles against the men who give them orders they cannot in good conscience obey,"Lincoln said, which produced another long silence. Into it, he continued, "Gentlemen, I say this with a heavy heart, but I say it nonetheless: if, as this meeting makes it appear likely, the Republican Party cannot find room to encourage change, I shall work outside the confines of the party to encourage it. For change, sure as I live and breathe, is coming. And, though they may not be here today, there are those calling themselves Republicans who will follow me."

"You would deliberately split the party?" It was half a gasp from Hannibal Hamlin, half a wheeze.

"No, I *would* not,"Lincoln answered. "But I *will."*

"If you try, we shall read you out and pretend you were never in,"Butler said. "The way the Democrats have campaigned against you ever since the War of Secession, we might be better off reading you out."

"An ostrich may bury its head in the sand and pretend the lion is not there,"Lincoln said. "Will that keep the lion from enjoying a supper of ostrich?"

Butlergot to his feet. Since he was short and squat, drawing himself up to his full height was less impressive than it might have been otherwise, but he did his best. "I think we have heard enough," he said. "Thank you for inviting us here, Mr. Lincoln. I expect each of us can find his own way out, his own way back to his hotel, and his own way home."

One by one, the Republican leaders filed pastLincoln and toward the door. As John Hay went by, the ex-president softly asked, *"Et tu,* John?"

"Et ego,Mr. Lincoln." Hay's voice was sad, but it was firm. Like the others, even Frederick Douglass, he left without a backwards glance.

Lincolnstood all alone in the room poor men had built so rich men might confer in it. "Labour first," he said, as he had so many times. "Labour first, *then* capital. If they cannot remember that on their own, I shall make certain they are reminded of it." And he left, too, his back straight, his stride determined. He had been a Whig. He was—no, he had been—a Republican. Now . . .

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"They have lost the war," General Thomas Jackson told Major General E. Porter Alexander. "If they cannot realize that on their own, I shall make certain they are reminded of it."

"Yes, sir." Alexander was not a young man, but retained a large measure of boyish enthusiasm.

"President Longstreet's tried to make 'em take their medicine. If they won't open their mouth, we'll just have to yank it open and shove the pill down their throats whether they like it or not."

"Well put."Jackson studied the dispositions on the map. "Everything appears to be in readiness."

"Everything on my end is, sir," his chief artillerist answered. "The guns await only your order to begin."

"Tomorrow morning at half past five,"Jackson said. "The end of the day, if God grant victory on our arms, should see the removal from our soil of more than half the Yankees now infesting it."

"Here's hoping you're right, sir," General Alexander said. "And if you

are, I'm damned if I can see how they'll be able to go on fighting after that."

"Do not speak so lightly of damnation."Jackson put a rumble of reproof in his voice. "To tell the truth, though, I cannot see how they have gone on fighting so long when so little has gone right for them. Much as I hate to say it, they are braver than I reckoned."

"Hasn't done 'em much good, and that's what counts," Alexander answered.

Absently,Jackson nodded. "Courage and the goodness of one's cause, unfortunately, do not always go hand in hand."

"Yes, sir, that's a fact." His artillery chief nodded, too. "If Douglass taught us anything, he taught us that."

Alexander's chuckle had a slight nervous edge. "And, looking out of the other side of the mirror, he learned the same thing from us, I reckon."

"Goodness does not depend on the position from which one observes it,"Jackson said sternly.

"Goodness *is."* He sounded very certain. He *was* very certain. Even so, he did his best not to think about Frederick Douglass. He also noticed that E. Porter Alexander didn't reply, which might well have meant Alexander, too, carefully wasn't thinking about the Negro.

He went to bed that night with the rattle and bang of rifle fire from the trenches inLouisville and to the east of the city and the occasional rumble of artillery in his ears. Everything sounded as it had since theU.S. flank attack bogged down. Thus lulled, he fell asleep almost as soon as he finished his prayers.

Neither too much noise nor too little would give the Yankees anything out of the ordinary with which to concern themselves.

An orderly shook him awake with the words, "Half past three, sir, like you ordered."

Yawning,Jackson got into his boots and stuck his hat on his head. The orderly gave him a big tin cup full of coffee strong enough to try to climb over the rim. The handle burned his fingers. The coffee burned his mouth when he gulped it down. "Ahh," he said—a gasp of approval. "I'm ready. Now off to meet up with General Alexander."

He reached the artillerist, at batteries east ofLouisville that had come toKentucky gun by gun from all over the CSA, about half an hour before the show was scheduled to begin. "Good to see you, sir,"

Alexander said, saluting. In the dim gray of early dawn, he seemed as much a ghost as a man. "Everything is ready. We await only the hour."

"As it should be,"Jackson said. Every so often, he would hold his watch next to a lantern. Time moved more slowly than it had any business doing. He'd seen that before. It always bemused him. At last, a little after he could see the time without putting the watch up to the light, he said, "The hour is come."

As if his words had been a signal, a great bellow of artillery rose west of him: all the guns that had defendedLouisville against the flanking attack now sent their full fury against the line upon which they had halted theU.S. forces. The flashes from their muzzles lit up the horizon, as if the sun were rising from the wrong direction.

E. Porter Alexander beamed. "Isn't it bully, sir?"

In searching for a description,Jackson would sooner have found one in the Book of Revelations. Even so, he did not reprove his gayer subordinate. "It will do, General. It will do."

U.S.artillery, both in the salient east ofLouisville and on the far side of theOhio , was quick to respond.

All through the fight forLouisville , theU.S. cannon had givenJackson more worry than anything else.

TheUnited States had brought a lot of guns into the fight, and handled them well. Their artillerymen might lack Porter's imagination, but they were solid professionals. Their shells would punish the Confederate entrenchments.

In spite of that countcrfire, the C.S. soldiers in those entrenchments opened up on the Yankees in front of them with their Trede-gars: a hailstone-on-tin-roof accompaniment to the big guns' thunder.Jackson was sure Rebel yells rang out all along the line as the Confederates there went over to the attack, but the roar of the guns drowned them.

"I pity those poor fellows," Alexander said. "They can't possibly break through, and they'll pay a stiff price for trying."

"It is the price of victory,"Jackson said in a voice like iron. His chief

artillerist grimaced, but finally nodded.

The sun rose.Jackson waited, still as a statue, while messengers brought word of the fighting to the west.

As General Alexander had predicted, theU.S. position facingLouisville was more than strong enough to keep the attacking Confederates from doing much past getting into the first couple of lines of trenches.Jackson had hoped for more, but he had not really expected it.

An hour passed. Turning to Alexander, he asked, "Do you think they are fully engaged, reserves coming up, all their eyes turned on the fight right in front of them?"

"Sir, if they're not, they never will be," Alexander replied. With a faint hint of scorn, he added, "They have so much trouble seeing what's right in front of their noses, they sure as the devil aren't going to look any further."

Jacksonconsidered. From the outset, he had held this moment in his hands and his hands alone. He stared eastward. His nostrils flared, like a wolf's when it takes a scent. He nodded, a sharp, almost involuntary motion. "Let it begin," he said.

E. Porter Alexander shouted an order. All the guns within the sound of his voice let loose. That roar signaled the eruption of all the guns the Confederates had assembled along the southern flank of the Yankees' salient. Up till now, nothing much had happened along that flank.Jackson had kept it strong enough to discourageU.S. forces from trying to shift direction and move against it, which hadn't been hard: the enemy's aim remained focused onLouisville alone.

.Along with guns, he'd been quietly bringing men forward over the past few days. Now, as they burst from their trenches and dashed toward those of the Yankees, he did hear Rebel yells through the gunfire, a great catamount chorus of them.

"The men must go forward at all hazard, so long as any hope of success presents itself," he said aloud, as he had in the orders he'd sent to the brigade commanders south of theU.S. salient. "If we are to roll up the Yankees' strong fortified west-facing line, we can only do so by an unexpected assault from the flank and rear."

"Pour it on, boys!" Porter Alexander was yelling. "Pour it on!"Jackson tried to inspire his men to the same clear, cold despisal of the foe and

certainty God was on their side as he felt himself. Alexander was warmer and earthier at the same time. "Give 'em a good boot in the ass!" he shouted. "Come on, you mangy bastards, *work* those guns!"

He got louder and coarser from there.Jackson started to rebuke him, then noticed how splendidly the sweating, smoke-stained artillerymen were handling their cannon. He held his peace. After the battle was over, perhaps he would reprove Alexander for some of his more blasphemous suggestions and ask that he refrain from using them in the future. Meanwhile, the artillery commander was getting results. That counted for more.

Streams of Yankee prisoners began shambling past what had for so long been the dividing point between their army and that of the CSA. One of them, a man old enough to have fought in the War of Secession, recognizedJackson . "God damn you, Stonewall, you sneaky son of a bitch!" he shouted.Jackson tipped his hat—to him, that was praise. The Confederates guarding theU.S. soldiers laughed. So did a few of the Yankees.

Some of theU.S. guns north of theOhio shifted their fire to oppose the Confederate breakthrough.Jackson used a telescope to watch shells bursting among his advancing soldiers. But, for once, theU.S. artillerymen were slower than they should have been in responding to changing conditions on the field. As an old artillerist,Jackson also realized the smoke and dust his own bombardment was kicking up hampered the foe in his choice of targets.

More prisoners came back, some of them carried on makeshift litters by their comrades. Messengers came back, too. One young man, his voice cracking with excitement, exclaimed, "General Jackson, sir, them damn-yankees is unraveling faster'n the sleeve off a two-bit shirt. They would run, only they ain't got nowheres to run to."

"God having delivered them into our hands, let us make certain we do not fail to achieve His great purpose by permitting them to slip through our fingers," Jackson said, and ordered more reinforcements forward.

General Alexander was also sending some of his guns forward so they could bear on the retreatingU.S.

soldiers. "You know something, sir?" he said. "This business is a lot more fun when you're moving ahead than when you're falling back."

"I believe I may have made a similar observation myself, at one time or another in my career,"Jackson said.

"Yankees aren't having much fun right now," Alexander said.Jackson smiled. It was the sort of smile that made blue-tuniced prisoners shiver as they stumbled into captivity.

A messenger ran up. "Sir," he panted, "we-uns just ran over the biggest damn Yankee supply dump you ever did see."

"Put guards around it,"Jackson ordered. "Let no one go into it. Arrest any who try. If they resist even in the least, shoot them. Do you understand me, Private?"

"Y-Y-Yes, sir," the messenger stammered, and fled.

To E. Porter Alexander,Jackson said, "During the War of Secession, we lived off Yankee plunder because we had so few goods of our own. Sometimes we foraged when we should have been fighting.

Now, with a sufficiency of our own supplies, fighting shall come first, as it should."

"Telling soldiers not to plunder is like telling roosters not to tread hens," Alexander said.

"Sooner or later, the philandering rooster ends up in a stew,"Jackson replied. "The plundering soldier is also likely to end up stewing, especially if he pauses to plunder when he should advance."

Before long, disarmed Confederates started coming past him: only a trickle compared to the number of Yankee prisoners, but too many to suitJackson . Some of them called out to him in appeal. He turned his back, the better to remind them they had jeopardized his victory with their greed.

Messengers also kept coming back. They were far more welcome, since almost all the news they brought was good. Here and there, by squads and companies, the Yankees kept fighting grimly. More often, though, they gave way to the alarm that could jolt through even experienced troops when flanked, and tumbled back toward theOhio in headlong retreat.

Slyly, Porter Alexander asked, "What do we do if we go and catch Frederick Douglass again?"

"Dear God in heaven!"Jackson clapped a hand to his forehead. "I forgot to issue any orders about him.

We give him back to theUnited States , exactly as we did before. President Longstreet, I must say, convinced me of the urgent necessity for following that course and no other."

He shouted for runners and sent orders for the good treatment of any captured elderly Negro agitator up to the front along with orders for continued advances. No news of any such prisoner's being taken got back to him. No news of any such Negro's being conveniently found dead on the field got back to him, either. But then, such news wouldn't. If Douglass had been killed by bullet or shell or hasty noose, his body either lay unnoticed where it had fallen or had been flung into a ditch to make sure it stayed unnoticed.

"Maybe he was back inU.S. territory when the attack began,"Jackson said hopefully. "For our sake, I pray he was. For his sake, I pray he was, too."

"You say that about Frederick Douglass, sir?" E. Porter Alexander gave him a quizzical look.

"I do,"Jackson answered. "He has, I would say, already done as much damage to our cause as he is likely to do." He did not mention President Longstreet's plan for manumitting Negroes in the CSA after the close of the war. General Alexander did not need to know about that, not yet.Jackson wished he didn't need to know about it, either.

Over the months since Longstreet had broached his intentions to him, he'd reluctantly decided the president knew what he was doing. Longstreet, as far asJackson was concerned, made a better politician than a soldier; he was full of the deviousness politics required. If he said manumitting the Negro would redound to the advantage of the Confederate States, odds were he knew whereof he spoke.

"Sir!" A messenger shatteredJackson 's reverie. "Sir, we have men on theOhio !"

"Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow,"Jackson murmured.

"We won't keep 'em there," Alexander predicted. "The damnyankees can send too many shells down on

'em from across the river."

"You're likely right,"Jackson said. "But that they are there spells the ruin of this salient, and all done in the space of a couple of hours."

"Uh, sir, look to the sky," Alexander said. "The sun'll be going down in an hour or so."

Jacksonlooked, and blinked in astonishment. Where had the time gone? "Very well, General: in the space of a day. I hope you are satisfied." He used words that seldom passed his lips: "I certainly am."

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"Brother Sam," Vernon Perkins said severely over breakfast, "I must tell you that I am most vexed at the way your dog gobbles everything in his bowl and then steals from the portion allotted to Rover."

"You have to remember, Vern," Sam Clemens answered, "Sutro is named for a politician, so it's in his nature to steal whatever he can grab."

"And stop calling me Vern!" His brother-in-law's voice went shrill. "Vernonis a perfectly good name, and the one by which I prefer to be known."

"All right . . ." Sam was on the point of calling him *Vern* again, as if absentmindedly, but Alexandra's warning glance persuaded him that wouldn't be a good idea. He ate the rest of his insipid, lumpy oatmeal, grabbed his hat, and fled the regimented boredom of his brother-in-law's house for the genial, congenial chaos prevailing at the *San FranciscoMorning Call.*

Wrecking crews were still tearing down buildings the British bombardment and invasion had ruined.

Already, on some sites that had been cleared, new construction was going up: pine frames of a yellow bright enough to hurt the eye. On lots still empty, signs promised resurrection almost as fervently as did the Bible,THE OTTO V. JONES INSTITUTE OF PHRENOLOGY SHALL REOCCUPY THESE

PREMISES, One declared.

"Too bad," Sam said, and walked on.

Half a block farther south, another sign in the middle of a vacant

stretch of ground said,WHEN

COHAN'S OPENS UP AGAIN, WE'LL HAVE A BETTER FREE LUNCH TABLE THAN EVER.

Always a man to prefer five-cent beer and free lunch to phrenology, Clemens beamed at that. Two lots farther on again, yet another sign offered a simple promise:WE'LL BE BACK.

Once Sam got down to the *Morning Call* offices onMarket Street , he forgot about signs. "What's the story onKentucky ?" he called, walking in the door.

"U.S.troops still in the city ofLouisville ," Clay Herndon said. "General Willcox says he pulled back from the salient east of town to consolidate for another push somewhere else. New York quotes Berlin quoting London quoting Richmond quoting Stonewall Jackson saying we pulled back on account of he licked the stuffing out of us."

"That sounds about right, even if it did go through more hands than a streetwalker when the fleet sails into port," Clemens said. "And what's the latest out ofPhiladelphia , or don't I want to know?"

Herndon spoke in a monotonous drone: "President Blaine is reported to be studying the situation and will comment further when more is known." He went back to his normal voice: "He's probably hiding under the bed, waiting for the Rebs to walk in and cart him off."

"Why would they want to cart him off?" Sam asked with a bitter snort. "He does them more good right where he is. I don't suppose he's said anything more about Longstreet's call for peace since yesterday?"

"Nary a word," Herndon answered.

Clemens snorted again. "Well, I don't reckon we ought to be surprised. Since the last time Longstreet said he could have peace if he wanted it, we've been licked up and down both coasts, inNew Mexico , and on theGreat Lakes . If that wasn't enough to give the man a clue, why the devil should he take any notice of throwing away half of what's supposed to be the best army we've got?"

"Damned if I know." Herndon paused to light a cigar, then added, "You forgot aboutMontana ."

"Oh? Have we been licked there, too?" Sam asked. "You didn't say anything about that."

"Don't know if we have or we haven't," his friend replied. "Not enough telegraph lines up where the soldiers are for anyone to know anything. Word goes fromLouisville toRichmond toLondon toBerlin toNew York to here a hell of a lot faster than it leaks out of a place like that."

"They've kicked us around everywhere else," Sam said, *"they* being whoever's gone up against us. No reason to expect anything different out in the middle of nowhere, is there?"

"Can't think of any," Herndon said. "Wish I could."

"Don't we both?" Sam walked over to his desk and sat down. All unbidden, he saw in his mind the grimy face of the Royal Marine who could have killed him out in front of the newspaper offices. Even though he was sitting, his knees quivered. "We were at their mercy," he muttered, more than half to himself. "They could do anything they wanted with us—and they did."

The telegraph clicker started delivering a new message. "Let's see what's gone wrong now," Herndon said. Out came the message, a word at a time. "Londonby way ofBerlin by way ofNew York City — the British and Canadians are saying they've reached the line inMaine that was the British claim line before the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, and they'll stop there and annex it toCanada ."

"Is that what they're saying?" Clemens raised a bushy eyebrow. "How does that square with what Longstreet's been saying about peace without losing pieces of theUSA ?"

"Damned if I know," Herndon said again. "Of course, Longstreet only speaks for the Confederate States. Not likely the limeys would let him tie their hands. They do as they please, not as Old Pete pleases."

"You're right about that," Sam agreed. "TheBritish Empire is the biggest dog around, which is why Englishmen can act like sons of bitches all over the world. But good God, Clay, now they've givenBlaine a reason to keep fighting, and one that makes some kind of sense. This damned war is liable to drag on forever."

"Congressional elections next year," Herndon said reassuringly. "With the House of RepresentativesBlaine 'll get after this fiasco, he won't see two bits of money for the Army. He'd have to give up then."

"He should have given up weeks ago," Clemens snapped. "He shouldn't

have started the blamed war in the first place." He shook his fist in the direction ofPhiladelphia . "I told you so, Mr. President! Now if only you'd gone and listened to me. But what the hell: no one else does, so why should you be any different?"

Herndon didn't answer that. Sam fired up a cigar and filled the space around him with noxious fumes.

Thus fortified, he attacked the pile of stories on his desk. Colonel Sherman was proclaiming that more fortifications could makeSan Francisco invulnerable to attack from the sea. Sam scribbled a note at the bottom of the article: *Comments about stolen horses and locked barn doors would seem to fit here.*

Edgar Leary had covered Mayor Sutro's latest *pronunciamento* about the urgency of rebuilding what the Royal Navy and Marines had devastated. Sam devastated Leary's prose, shelling adjectives and bayoneting adverbs. He had a scrawled suggestion for a further line of development on this piece, too: *The faster we rebuild, the less anyone checks on how much money gets spent and on who spends it. It will stick in somebody's pockets, odds are those of some of His Honor's chums. Whose? Find out, and we'll shake this city harder than any earthquake ever did.*

He didn't think Leary could or would find out; Adolph Sutro had proved adept at covering his tracks and those of his henchmen. But it would give the kid something to do and keep Leary out of his hair for a while, which wasn't the worst bargain in the world. And Leary, even if he couldn't write for beans, was pretty good at getting to the bottom of things.

The rest of the pieces were routine: a looter caught in the act and shot dead, the usual rash of robberies and burglaries and assaults, and praise for the entertainments offered in those theaters to which the Royal Marines had not applied the most incendiary form of dramatic criticism. Having covered both the police-court circuit and the theaters in his time, Clemens knew how hard it was to breathe life into reports concerning them. After marking the copy with a relatively gentle hand, he passed it on to the typesetters.

That done, he pulled out a blank sheet of paper, inked his pen anew, and . . . did not write. He knew what he wanted to say. He knew what he needed to say. He'd been saying it ever since the war broke out, and suggesting it before the war broke out. What point to doing it again? If your editorials sounded the same day after day after day, how did that differ from touring the police courts and recording the

never-ending human folly and viciousness they memorialized?

At last, he found a way. "No wife-beater ever born," he muttered, "no wife-beater with the worst will in the world, does a millionth part of the harm James G. Blaine caused with only good intentions."

That scornful grumble gave him a title for the editorial that would not write itself,GOOD INTENTIONS, he printed in block capitals at the top of the page. The title gave him an opening sentence.

We know what road is paved with good intentions. What we need to do now is take a long, hard look at how the United States found themselves on that road, and how they will be able to get off it again without becoming too badly scorched in the doing. Heaven and the infernal regions both know there is blame and to spare to go around.

Ever since the voters in their wisdom threw Abe Lincoln out on his car —after in their wisdom electing him four years earlier and thus proving what a remarkably changeable commodity wisdom can be; quicksilver won't touch it, and not a single, nor even a married, woman in the electorate to blame it on—after heaving Lincoln over the side, I say, we spent the next many years electing Democrats whose notion of statecraft, as best anyone can tell, was to bow down to Richmond as the pious Mussulman bows in the direction of Mecca. And the voters saw this, and said that it was good.

AndRichmond said it was pretty good, too, and gobbled downCuba without so much as calling for a toothpick, and sent redskins intoKansas until any old run-of-the-mill bald man was reckoned to have had his coiffure lifted by the Kiowas. And the Democrats in the White House sighed and wrung their hands and likely knocked back a beaker or three of whiskey on the sly, since they had hardly more use for the Kansas Jayhawkers than they did for the niggers ofCuba .

Kick a country or any other dog long enough, though, and it will turn and try to bite you. As we had coughed up Abe Lincoln, so in the fullness of time—if last November will do duty for that article—we coughed up James G. Blaine. AndBlaine snarled, andBlaine growled, and, like a fierce old bulldog tormented past endurance,Blaine bit.

Like an old old bulldog, though,Blaine unfortunately neglected to equip the said bite with anything in the least resembling teeth. And so, having closed his gums round the leg of the Confederate States, he has hung on like grim death while they andEngland andFrance all belabour him with a fine assortment of clubs and switches and

bludgeons. He will gnaw off the Rebels' leg or die trying—so his mumbled growls proclaim.

That he *will* die trying—that *we* will die while he tries—has long since become obvious to everyone save him alone; he is evidently an old blind bulldog as well as an old toothless one.

Our own fair city has already paid the price for his bullheaded bulldoggery. If he persists, how long will it be before we once more play the *role* of a china shop?

What will it take to make him come to his senses, if by some accident he should have any left? He—

Sam hadn't noticed the telegraph clicking away. In a voice filled with excitement, Clay Herndon cried,

"Blaine's calling for an unconditional cease-fire on all fronts. He's thrown in the sponge, Sam!"

Clemens stared at the editorial he'd been writing. He picked up the sheet, tore it to shreds, and flung them into the waste-paper basket. He was grinning from ear to ear as he did it, too.

Chapter 17

“On, men!" George Custer shouted. "are we going to let apack of damned Volunteers get the better of us?"

That made his men ride harder, which was what he'd had in mind. It also made Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who was trotting along beside him, display a mouthful of very large teeth in a grin the Cheshire Cat might have envied. "I'm glad you think well of my regiment, General Custer,"Roosevelt said.

"I've seen worse," Custer allowed, which only madeRoosevelt 's grin wider. After coughing a couple of times, Custer went on, "Colonel Welton, who is an old friend of mine, spoke highly of them, and I do begin to understand why. He spoke highly of you, too, Colonel."

"He's very kind,"Roosevelt said. The grin did not diminish.Roosevelt knew others had a good opinion of him. He had a good opinion of himself, too.

Custer wondered if he'd been such an arrogant puppy at the same age. He probably had; as Henry Welton had said, he never would have bulled his way onto General McClellan's staff otherwise. Now, observing the phenomenon from the outside, as it were, he wondered why no one had taken a gun and shot him for the way he'd carried on.

Roosevelt said, "General, didn't I hear that you brought a good many Gatling guns up with you fromUtahTerritory ?"

"I brought them," Custer admitted. "I left them behind with the Seventh Infantry. They slowed down my riders to an intolerable degree." He felt nothing but relief at finally having got rid of the contraptions.

ButRoosevelt frowned. "We haven't enough horse here, even with your regiment and mine combined, to halt the damned Englishmen. The mechanized firepower the Gatlings represent would have been most welcome. Don't you agree that war is increasingly a business where the side with more and better weapons hold an advantage mere courage is hard pressed to overcome?"

"I most assuredly do not," Custer snapped. "Put brave men in one army and a rabble of clerks and tinkers in another, and I know which I would favor. Why do you suppose the dashed Rebels licked us in the War of Secession?"

Rooseveltwas not one to back down, any more than Custer was. "How do you think Lcc's men would have fared, General, had they gone up against today's rifles and artillery with their muzzle-loaders and Napoleons?"

That question had never crossed Custer's mind. He was not much given to abstract thought. Before he could answer, the need for him to answer went away: a scout came riding up, calling, "General Custer!

General Custer! The British are coming!"

Colonel Roosevelt whooped. "Tell me your name's not Paul Revere, soldier."

The scout ignored him. "Sir, their infantry is drawn up in line of battle, they've got cavalry in front and on both wings, and I spotted a couple of field pieces with 'em, too. If we don't get out of their way, they're going to try and bull right through us, you mark my words, sir."

"If they want a fight, they shall have it," Custer declared.

"Sir, I've been dogging that army for a while now,"Roosevelt said. "As I told you before, they badly outnumber us: your regiment and mine together, I mean. Should we not find a defensible position and let them move upon us?"

"Colonel, if you wish to withdraw, you have my permission," Custer said icily. "Perhaps you will permit some of your braver soldiers to remain?"

"Sir, I resent that."Roosevelt scowled and went red. "My men, begging your pardon, have done a damn sight more fighting in this war than yours have. You'll not find us backward now."

"Very well, then," Custer said, having insulted the younger man into doing what he wanted.Roosevelt , if he was any judge, would fight his men with no thought for tomorrow to prove his courage and theirs. "I will want your troopers on either flank, to oppose the enemy's cavalry while we Regulars discuss matters with his foot soldiers."

"Yes, sir."Roosevelt 's salute was so precise, Custer wondered if his arm would break. After a moment, he added, "I understand that General Gordon, the British commander, is very much a straight-ahead fighter, too."

"Is he?" Custer shrugged. It mattered little to him. He knew what he was going to do. Past that, he didn't much care. "I intend to send him straight to a warmer clime than this."Roosevelt liked that. The grin came back to his face. He saluted again, this time as if he meant it rather than as a gesture of reproof, and rode off shouting orders for the Unauthorized Regiment.

Custer started shouting orders, too. "Sounds like a big fight brewing, Autie," his brother said.

"I reckon so, Tom," Custer agreed. "Not quite the enemy I wanted—I still owe the Rebs a couple of good licks—but this will do. This will do, by jingo."

"I'll say it will." Tom Custer beamed. "Did I hear right? Have they got a lot more men than we do?"

"That's whatRoosevelt says." Custer shrugged. "He's the one who's been skirmishing with the limeys ever since they came down out ofCanada . If anybody knows what they've got, he's the man."

"Fair enough." The prospect of going up against long odds didn't bother Tom—quite the reverse. "They won't expect us to hit 'em, then. They'll be looking to have everything their own way. Let's lick 'em, Autie."

"I sure aim to try." Custer reached out and slapped his brother on the back. They grinned at each other.

Tom was the only man in the whole U.S. Army who might have relished a good scrap more than he did.

The Regulars deployed from column to line with a nonchalant ease that came from not just weeks but years of endless repetition on the practice field.Roosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment was nowhere near so smooth. But the Volunteer cavalrymen weren't slow, either. Custer found nothing to complain about on that score. From the right flank,Roosevelt waved his hat to show he was ready to go forward.

Custer waved, too, soRoosevelt would know he'd seen him. The brevet brigadier general turned to the trumpeter beside him. "Signal the advance," he said. As the horn call rang out, the men of the Fifth Cavalry cheered loudly. Not to be outdone, so did the regimentRoosevelt had raised.

When Custer reached the top of a low swell of ground, he pointed ahead and cried out, "There is the enemy. Let us sweep him from our sacred soil, as our forefathers did a hundred years ago in the Revolution." The forefathers of a lot of his troopers had been grubbing potatoes out of the ground ofIreland a hundred years before, but no one complained about the rhetoric. The men raised another cheer.

General Gordon had ordered his army as the scout described: cavalry right and left, a screen of horsemen in front of the infantry, and the thin red line of foot soldiers stretching across the prairie. Off to the right of Custer,Roosevelt 's men shouted. Idly, Custer wondered what their colonel had told them.

The British army disappeared from sight for a while when Custer rode down the far slope of the rise. He wished the Englishmen would vanish as easily when the time for fighting came, as it would in mere minutes. Up another swell of ground he trotted, his men close behind. Thin over a couple of miles of ground, the enemy's cheer reached his hear.

"They've seen us!" he called. A moment later, he spied a flash, and then another one, from behind the line of British infantry. A couple of hundred yards ahead of him, dirt fountained up into the air as two shells landed. Custer laughed out loud. "They can't hit the side of a barn, boys!"

Calmly, methodically, the British artillerymen served their field guns. The cannons flashed and roared again. One of the shells fell short. The other landed behind Custer. Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw a horse down and kicking. His troopers cheered once more.

"This is nothing," Tom called to him.

"You're right," he said. "During the War of Secession, a couple of miserable little popguns banging away like this wouldn't even have been enough to wake us up." He pointed toward the British cavalry ahead.

"By God, they *do* still have lancers! I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

His own men rode in loose formation. The lancers, mounted on horses that might have carried knights of the Round Table, formed lines that were real lines. All their lances came down at once; sunlight glittered off steel. As one, those big horses began to trot.

"What a bully show!" Custer cried, nothing but admiration in him for his enemies' horsemanship.

"Yes, and now we're going to smash it all to pieces," Tom replied. Custer nodded, and then felt his face grow hot. What they would smash it with were breech-loading carbines—modern industry set against medieval courage. Maybe Colonel Roosevelt had known what he was talking about after all.

Custer gauged the range. "Fire at will!" he shouted. Behind him and to either side, the Springfields began to bark. He raised his own carbine to his shoulder, picked one of those lancers, and fired at him.

The man did not go down. Custer had not particularly expected him to, though he'd hoped he would.

But a lot of troopers were blazing away at the Englishmen. All along the line of lancers, those big horses crashed to the ground. Men slid from the saddle or threw down their steel-shod spears to clutch at wounds. The ones who were not hit kept coming. Riders moved up from the second rank to take the places of those in the first who had fallen.

As the lancers drew nearer, Custer felt . . . not fear, for he had never known fear on a battlefield, but a certain amount of intimidation. The big, tough men looked ready to ride over the Fifth Cavalry and trample them into the grass and dirt of the prairie as if they had never been.

Then he shot at an Englishman and hit him square in the chest. The luckless fellow dropped his lance, threw up his hands, and slumped dead over his horse's neck. More and more Englishmen were falling as the range narrowed, and they could do nothing to hit back. None of them wavered, though.

"Christ, they're brave!" he shouted.

"Christ, they're stupid," his brother shouted back, reloading hisSpringfield .

A lancer thundered toward Custer. He fired at the fellow and missed. The lancehead pointed straight at his breastbone. In another couple of seconds, the British soldier would spit him as if he were a prairie chicken roasting over a campfire. He yanked out his Colt revolver and fired three quick rounds. One of them missed, too, but one hit the

horse and one the rider. Custer didn't think any of the wounds would kill, but the lancer lost interest in skewering him.

Here and there, British lancers did spear his men out of the saddle. Here and there, too, the Englishmen drew their own revolvers and blazed away at his troopers. But a lot of the horsemen in red tunics were down, and more of them fell every minute. Flesh and blood, even the bravest flesh and blood, could take only so much. After some minutes of desperate, overmatched fighting at close quarters, the lancers broke away from the Fifth Cavalry and galloped for their lives back toward their infantry or away to the wings to shelter among horsemen whose rifles could protect them.

Custer cheered and waved his hat. "Forward, men!" he shouted—the order he always loved best.

"Follow me! We've given their horse a good lesson. Now to deal with the foot."

He galloped past a dead redcoat, then past a British horse with a broken back trying to drag itself along with its forelegs. Then he and his troopers thundered toward the British infantry, who waited in a two-deep firing line to receive them. A shell chewed up the prairie off to his right. Fragments of the casing hissed past his head. He shrugged and kept riding.

Every so often, along that firing line, a red-coated soldier would go down. The British held their positions as steadily—indeed, as stolidly—as any troops Custer had seen during the War of Secession. As he rode toward the British line, doubt tried to rise in his bosom. Cavalry had had a devil of a time shifting steady infantry during the last war. True, his men carried breechloaders now, but so did their foes. The British lancers had been as brave as any men he'd ever seen. Would the foot soldiers be any different?

He did what he always did with doubt—he stifled it. "Here we go!" he shouted. "For theUnited States of America ! Chaaarge!"

As if held by a single man, all the rifles along the British firing line leveled on the Fifth. As if held by a single man, all those rifles fired at the same instant. A great cloud of black-powder smoke rose above and around the enemy. Through it, flames thrust like bayonets from the muzzles of the Englishmen's Martini-Henrys.

Three balls snapped past Custer. Not all his men were so lucky as to have bullets miss them. The charge broke up almost as if the troopers

had slammed into a wall. Men screamed. Horses screamed— louder, shriller, more terrible cries than could have burst from a human throat.

The British infantry fed more cartridges into their rifles. Precise as so many steam-driven machines, they gave the Fifth Cavalry another volley, and another, and another. The horsemen replied as best they could. Their best was not enough, not nearly. The redcoats not only outnumbered them but were also firing on foot rather than from the bounding backs of beasts. Englishmen, many Englishmen, toppled and writhed and cursed and shrieked. The Americans, though, melted away like snow on a warm spring afternoon.

"We can't do it, Autie!" Tom Custer shouted.

If Tom said a piece of fighting could not be done, no man on earth could do it. "We'll have to fall back,"

Custer said, and then, to the bugler, "Blow Retreat." But no call rang out. The bugler was dead.

"Retreat!" Custer yelled at the top of his lungs. "Fall back!" The words were as bitter as the alkali dust ofUtah in his mouth. So far as he could remember, he'd never used them before.

Fewer of his men heard him than would have heard the horn. But they would have fallen back whether he ordered it or not. They now made the same discovery the British lancers had not long before: some fires were too galling to bear.

Then Tom shouted again, wordlessly this time. The shout ended in a choking gurgle. Custer stared at his brother. Blood poured from Tom's mouth, and from a great wound in his chest. Ever so slowly, or so it seemed to Custer, Tom crumpled from his horse. When he hit the ground, he didn't move.

Custer let out one long howl of pain. The worst of it was, that was all he had time for. Even without Tom—and Tom, surely, would never rise again till Judgment Day—he had to save his force. His head swiveled wildly to east and west. Did the Volunteer cavalry know he couldn't maintain the fight? If they didn't, they would have to face the weight of the whole British army by themselves.

But no—they were breaking away from combat, too, falling back to screen the retreat of the Regulars.

That was humiliating. Even more humiliating was that the British cavalry showed no great inclination to pursue.Roosevelt 's Unauthorized Regiment had given the limeys all they wanted and then some.

The boy colonel rode over to Custer. "What now, sir?" he asked, as if his superior hadn't just finished feeding his own prized regiment into the meat grinder.

What now, indeed?Custer wondered. Without Tom, he hardly cared. But he had to answer. He knew he had to answer. "We fall back on our infantry and await the British attack as the enemy awaited ours,"

he mumbled. It was a poor solution—even with Welton's infantry, he didn't have the manpower General Gordon did. But, battered and dazed as he was, it was the only solution he could find.

"Yes, sir!"Roosevelt , by his tone, thought it brilliant. "Don't worry, sir —we'll lick 'em yet."

"Come on, men!" Theodore Roosevelt shouted. "We've got to keep the damn limeys off the Regulars'

backs a little bit longer."

First Lieutenant Karl Jobst gave him a reproachful look. "Sir, I wish you would have found a politer way to put that."

"Why?"Roosevelt said. "It's the truth, isn't it? Right now, General Custer's men couldn't fight off a Sunday-school class, let alone the British army. You know it, I know it, and Custer knows it, too."

His adjutant still looked unhappy. "They fought General Gordon's men most valiantly—smashed the lancers all to bits and hurt the infantry, too."

"That they did. They charged home as bravely as you'd like,"Roosevelt said. "So did the six hundred atBalaclava . They paid for it, and so did the Regulars. Custer's brother's down, I heard, among too many others. We won our part of the fight. Unfortunately, the result is measured by the whole, which here proves less than the sum of its parts."

Off from behind him came a brief crackle of rifle fire. The British cavalry, confident he would not turn on it with the whole Unauthorized Regiment, was dogging the tracks of theU.S. force, keeping an eye on it as it retreated. Every so often, British scouts and

his own rear guard would exchange pleasantries.

"Sir, do you happen to know where Colonel Welton has positioned the Seventh Infantry?" This was not the first time Jobst had asked the question. Though normally a cold-blooded fellow, he could not keep concern from his voice. The Seventh Infantry was his regiment, Henry Welton his commander, to whose rule he would return whenRoosevelt went back to civilian life.

Now, though,Roosevelt had to shake his head. "I wish I did, but General Custer has not seen fit to entrust that information to me." He rode on for another few strides, then asked a question of his own:

"You being a professional at this business, Lieutenant, what is your view of Custer the soldier?"

"I told you before he came up toMontana , sir, that he had a name for impetuous boldness." Karl Jobst started to say something else, stopped, and then began again: "The reputation appears to be well founded."

After a while,Roosevelt realized that was all he'd get from his adjutant. If Jobst said anything more—something on the order of, *He took a perfectly good regiment and chopped it into catmeat,* for instance—and word of that got back to Custer, it would blight the lieutenant's career. No one could possibly doubt Custer's courage. He'd done everything he could, going straight into the British. But that hadn't been enough, and hadn't come close to being enough, to turn them back.

Rooseveltsighed. "Well, in his shoes I might well have done the same thing. With the enemy in front of him, he could think of nothing but driving them off."

"I do believe, sir, that you might have handled the engagement with rather more finesse," Jobst said.Roosevelt needed a moment to realize that was praise, and another moment to realize how much. If a Regular Army officer felt a colonel of Volunteers could have done better than a Regular brevet brigadier general, that spoke well of the Volunteer indeed—and not so well of George Custer.

A few minutes later, Custer rode back to confer withRoosevelt . Even if Custer had been overeager in the attack, even if the loss of his brother left his face raw with anguish, he was handling the retreat about as well as any man could. He kept a firm rein on both his unit and the Unauthorized Regiment, and made sure he found out

whateverRoosevelt 's riders could learn about British dispositions and intentions.

Rooseveltfound a moment to say, "I'm sorry about your loss, sir."

"Yes, yes," Custer said impatiently—he was surely doing his poor best not to think of that. "Now we have to see to it that our country's loss does not include the whole of this force."

"Yes, sir. I wish I could tell you more,"Roosevelt said. "Their cavalry screen keeps us from finding out as much as we'd like, just as ours does to them."

Custer gnawed at his mustache. "I wish I knew how far ahead of their infantry the cavalry's got. Not far enough to suit me, unless I miss my guess. Infantry pushed hard can almost keep up with horsemen.

Once we've joined with Colonel Welton, odds are we shan't have to wait long before they attack us."

"You don't think they'll simply ignore us and go on down toward the mines aroundHelena , which I presume to be their goal?"Roosevelt said.

"Not a chance of it, Colonel." Custer spoke with decision. "We shall be far too large a force for them to dare to leave us in their flank and rear. We could and would work all sorts of mischief on them."

"That does make sense,"Roosevelt said. "And, from what I've heard, their General Gordon is a headlong brawler, as I believe I've mentioned once before."

"Yes, yes," Custer said again.Roosevelt bristled at the tone, even if Custer was not, could not be, quite himself. Had the general commandingU.S. forces inMontanaTerritory done so well, he could afford to ignore what anyone told him? The answer was only too obvious. Had the general done as well as all that, he and Roosevelt would have been riding north, not south. But then Custer showed he'd heard after all:

"If he's so very headlong, maybe he'll run onto our sword, the way bulls do in the arena."

"I do hope so, sir,"Roosevelt said. Custer's response let him ask the question in whose answer both he and Karl Jobst were keenly

interested: "Where has Colonel Welton set up the position that awaits us?"

"Not far from the Teton River," Custer replied, which toldRoosevelt less than he would have liked but more than he'd already known. The brevet brigadier general went on, "He has orders to pick the best possible defensive position. We should be in it, wherever it proves to be, by nightfall."

There *was* information worth having. "If we are, we'll fight in the morning,"Roosevelt said.

"I expect we will," Custer said. He hesitated, gnawing at his mustache once more. That was unlike him.

After a moment, he went on, "I am thinking of dismounting my men and having them fight on foot. That would leave your regiment, Colonel, as our sole force on horseback. I shall rely on you to keep the British cavalry off our flanks."

"We'll do it, sir,"Roosevelt promised. "That's the sort of job Winchesters were made for." The Unauthorized Regiment would never have got close enough to the British infantry to engage them with the repeating rifles, whose effective range was not great. With Springfields, Custer and the Fifth Cavalry had slugged it out with the foot soldiers in red—and had come out on the short end of the fight.

"I shall rely on you, as I did in the engagement farther north," Custer said.Roosevelt didn't mention that his part of the force had driven back their opponents. Custer already knew that. He nodded absently toRoosevelt and then trotted south, to the regiment he had long commanded.

No sooner had he gone than Karl Jobst rode over toRoosevelt , a questioning look on his face.Roosevelt repeated what Custer had said. Jobst brightened. "Colonel Welton knows how to read a field as well as anyone I've ever seen," he said. "He'll pick the best place he can find for us to make a stand."

"Good,"Roosevelt said. A moment later, he wished his adjutant had put it a different way. Making a stand implied that defeat carried disaster in its wake. That was probably true here, but he would sooner not have been reminded of it.

As Brigadier General Custer had said, they met Henry Welton about four that afternoon. And, as Lieutenant Jobst had said, Welton did

indeed know how to read a field. He'd chosen to defend the forward slope of a low, gentle rise. No one could possibly approach without being seen and fired upon from as far out as rifles could reach.

And not only had he picked a good position, he'd improved on what nature provided. His men had dug three long trenches and heaped up in front of them the dirt they'd shoveled out. The trenches and breastworks didn't look like much from the front.Roosevelt wondered if they were worth the labour they'd cost.

So did Custer, who was arguing with Welton asRoosevelt rode up. Welton looked stubborn. "Sir," he was saying, "from everything I saw in the War of Secession, any protection is a lot better than just standing out in the open and blazing away at the bastards on the other side."

"All right, all right." Custer threw his hands in the air. "Have it your way, Henry. The dashed things are dug, and you can't very well undig them. But while you've been building like beavers, we've been fighting like fiends."

"Yes, sir, I know that," Henry Welton said. He nodded toRoosevelt . "And was I right about the Unauthorized Regiment?"

"They fought well, I'll not deny it," Custer replied. Theodore Roosevelt drew himself up straight at the praise. He thought his troopers deserved even better than that; they'd outfought the Regulars seven ways from Sunday. But, whatever else Custer might have been about to say, he didn't say it. Instead, he stared and pointed. "Colonel, you've posted all my damned"—he didn't bother with *dashed;* he was exercised—"coffee mills in the forward trench? Don't you think we'd be better off with riflemen there?"

"Sir, I thought we might as well use the Gatling guns, since we've got them," Welton answered.Roosevelt stared at them with interest; he'd never seen one before. They did look rather like a cross between a cannon and a coffee mill. Welton went on, "If they perform as advertised, they should be well forward, I think. If they don't, we can always bring riflemen in alongside them."

"They're the only artillery we've got," Custer said worriedly. "That means they belong in the rear." He looked around—probably for his brother,Roosevelt thought. He did not see Tom Custer. He would never see Tom Custer again. Not seeing him, the brevet brigadier general settled forRoosevelt . "What's your opinion in this matter,

Colonel?"

"They're already emplaced,"Roosevelt answered, "and they're not quite like artillery, are they, sir? If you're asking me, I say we leave them."

Custer yielded, as he likely would not have done with Tom to back him: "Have it your way, then. If they don't work, it doesn't matter where in creation they are. I reckon that likely, myself. As you say, though, Colonel Welton, we can always bring up riflemen."

"Sir, with your permission, I'm going to throw out a wide net of cavalry pickets, to make sure the British don't try anything in the night,"Roosevelt said. "When the real fight comes, I'll keep them off your flanks."

"That's what you're here for," Custer agreed. "Go do it." It wasn't quite a summary dismissal, but it was close.Roosevelt saluted and stomped off.

Occasional rifle shots punctuated the night, as American and British scouting parties collided in the darkness. The British weren't trying a night attack; their pickets rode out ahead of their main force to keep the Americans from unexpectedly descending on them.Roosevelt snatched a few hours of fitful sleep, interrupted time and again by riders coming in to report.

He drank hot, strong, vile coffee before sunup as he deployed his men. He commanded the right, as he had in the earlier fight against General Gordon's army. The left wing was largely on its own; he knew he wouldn't be able to keep in touch with it once the fighting started.

And it would start soon. When men found targets they could actually see, cavalry skirmishing picked up in a hurry. On came the British infantry, deployed in line of battle, rolling straight toward the position Custer and Welton were defending.Roosevelt 's men tried without much luck to delay them; their British counterparts held them off.

Behind the British line, the field guns accompanying the men in red opened up on theU.S. entrenchments.

Custer and Welton had nothing with which they could reply; the Gatlings couldn't come close to reaching those cannon. In the trenches, the Regulars, infantry and dismounted cavalry alike, took what the enemy dished out.Roosevelt 's respect for them grew. That had to be harder than fighting in a battle where they could strike back at what was tormenting them.

"Once General Gordon has us properly softened up, or thinks he has, he'll send in the infantry," Karl Jobst said.

Gordon let the two field guns pound away at the entrenchments for half an hour, his foot soldiers pausing just outside rifle range. Then the cannon fell silent. Thin in the distance, a bugle rang out. The British infantry lowered their bayoneted rifles, as the cavalry had lowered their lances. The bugle resounded once more. The Englishmen let out a great, wordless shout and marched forward.

"What a bully show!"Roosevelt exclaimed. "Enemies they may be, but they are splendid men." He raised hisWinchester to his shoulder and tried at very long range to pot some of those splendid men.

Unlike the luckless lancers, the British infantry fired as they advanced; their breechloaders made reloading on the move, which had been next to impossible during the War of Secession, quick and easy.

A cloud of smoke rose above them, thicker and thicker with every forward stride they took.

Smoke rose from the trenches where the bluecoats crouched, too. Englishmen began falling. Their comrades filled their places. No doubt Americans were falling, too, butRoosevelt couldn't sec that. What he could see was the red British wave flowing forward, steady and resistless as the tide. The redcoats drew within four hundred yards of the frontmost entrenchment, within three hundred . . .

"They're going to break in!"Roosevelt cried in bitter pain.

And then, through the din of the rifles, he heard a sound like none he'd ever known before, a fierce, explosive snarl that might have been a giant clearing his throat, and clearing it, and clearing it. ... Amazing puffs of smoke blossomed in the center of theU.S. front line. "The Gatlings!" Karl Jobst yelled, somewhere between astonishment and ecstasy.

Roosevelthad no words, only awe. In what seemed the twinkling of an eye and was perhaps two or three minutes of actual time, those steadfast British lines abruptly ceased to exist, in much the same way as a slab of ice will rot when hot water pours over it. For the first half of that time, the infantry kept trying to go forward in the face of fire unlike anything they'd ever met or imagined. They dropped and dropped and dropped. Not one of them got within a hundred yards of the trench. After that, the foot soldiers, those of them still on their

feet, realized the thing could not be done. They also realized they were dead men if they didn't get out of range of the terrible stream of bullets pouring from the Gatling guns.

It was not a retreat. Custer had led a retreat. It was a rout, a panic-stricken flight, a stampede. The British, surely, were as steady in the face of familiar danger as any men ever born. In the face of the snarling unknown, they broke. Some of them—Roosevelttook off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes to be sure he was seeing straight—threw away their rifles to run the faster.

He spent only a little while luxuriating in amazement. Then he started thinking like a soldier again. "After them!" he shouted. "After them, by jingo! They thought they'd run over us like a train, did they? Well, they've just been train-wrecked, boys. Now we haul away the rubbish."

Now his men, cheering as if their throats would burst, pressed hard upon the fleeing foe. The British horse, which had been screening an advance, suddenly had to try to screen a broken army falling back.

The enemy's field guns fired a few rounds of canister before the men of the Unauthorized Regiment, coming at them from three directions at once, overran them and killed their crews.

"Captured guns," Lieutenant Jobst said cheerfully. "That's the true measure of victory. Has been as long as cannons have gone to war."

"After them!"Roosevelt shouted. "We don't want to let even a single one get away. No, maybe one, to tell his pals up inCanada what it means to invade theUnited States ." He fired at an English cavalryman and knocked him out of the saddle. "Easy as shooting prong-horns!" he exulted.

North over the prairie went the pursuit, as it had gone south the day before. The troopers of the Unauthorized Regiment took rifles away from slightly wounded or exhausted Englishmen they passed and rode on after the main body.Roosevelt didn't think he had enough men to beat them, but they were so shaken he intended to try if he got the chance. They might all throw down their guns and give up at a show of force.

And then, from behind, he heard not one but several buglers blowing Halt. His men looked at one another in surprise, but most, obedient to the training he'd drilled into them, reined in. "No!" he raged.

"God damn it, no! I didn't order that! I'll kill the idiot who ordered

that. We've got 'em licked to a faretheewell."

"Halt!" a great voice shouted: George Custer, who must have almost killed his horse catching up toRoosevelt 's men. ToRoosevelt 's amazement, tears streaked Custer's cheeks, not just tears of grief but tears of fury. To his further amazement, Custer reeked of whiskey from twenty feet away. "Halt, damn it to fucking hell!" he shouted again.

"What's wrong, sir?"Roosevelt demanded.

"Wrong? I'll show you what's wrong!" Custer waved a sheet of paper. "What's wrong is, a cease-fire with the English sons of bitches went into effect yesterday, only we didn't know it. We just licked the boots off the shitty limeys, we just got my brother killed, in a battle we never should have fought, and now we have to let what's left of the bastards go home. I haven't had a drink of liquor, save for medicinal purposes, in almost twenty years—not since before I married Libbie. Do you wonder,Roosevelt , do you wonder that I got myself lit up riding after you?"

"No, sir,"Roosevelt said, and then, "Hell, no, sir." After a moment, he added, "Is anything left in your bottle, sir?"

"Not a drop," Custer answered. "Not a single fucking drop." "Too bad,"Roosevelt said. "In that case, I'll just have to find my own."

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Frederick Douglass got off the train inRochester . His wife and son were the only black faces on the platform. Anna Douglass burst into tears when she saw him. Lewis folded him into a hard, muscular embrace. "Good to have you home, Father," he said. "Let me take your bag there."

"Thank you, my boy," Douglass said. "Believe you me, it is very, very good to be home again." He gave Anna a gentle kiss, then stood up tall and straight before her. "As you see, my dear, I have come through all of it unscathed."

"Don't sound so proud of yourself," she said sharply. "I reckon that was the Lord's doin', a whole lot more'n it was yours."

He looked down at the planks of the platform floor. "Since I cannot possibly argue with you, I shall not even try. The Lord took me

through the valley of the shadow of death, but He chose to let me walk out the other side safe. For that, I can only praise His name."

Anna nodded, satisfied. Lewis Douglass asked the question his father had known he would ask: "What was it like, sir, coming up before Stonewall Jackson?" A frown twisted his strong features; he laughed ruefully. "If working with you on the newspaper hasn't yet taught me the futility of asking what something is like and then expecting to feel the answer as did the man who had the experience, I don't suppose it ever will."

"If it hasn't yet taught me that futility, why should it have done so with you?" Douglass returned. "What was it like? It was frightening." He held up a hand before his son or wife could speak. "Not in the way you think, either. It was frightening because I found myself in the presence of a man both formidable and, I judge, good, but one who believes deep in his heart in things utterly antithetical to those in which I believe, and who reasons with unfailing logic from his false premises." He shivered. "It was, in every sense of the word, alarming."

They all walked out toward the carriage, Anna onFrederick 's arm. As Lewis put the last suitcase behind the seat, he remarked, "You have said before that it is possible for a slaveholder to be a good man."

"Yes." Douglass helped his wife up, then climbed aboard himself and sat beside her. "It is possible," he went on as Lewis took the reins. "It is possible, but it is not easy.Jackson . . . surprised me."

"1 reckon you surprised him, too." Anna patted her husband's arm.

"I hope I did. I rather think I did," Douglass said. "And I have what may be great news: in Chicago, I heard that the Confederates are—no, may be—planning to manumit their bondsmen once the war, now suspended, is truly ended, this being a *quid pro quo* in return for their allies' assistance against the United States."

"Wonderful news, if true," Lewis said. "We've heard the like now and again down through the years, though, and nothing ever came of it. Who told you this time, Father?Lincoln ?"

"No, John Hay," Douglass answered. "Since he was minister to the Confederate States, he should know whereof he speaks.Lincoln had other concerns." He let out a bitter sigh. "Lincolnhas had other concerns than the Negro before, which I say though he is and has always been my friend. In the summer of 1862, he drafted a proclamation emancipating all slaves within the territory of the

Confederate States, then waited for a U.S. victory to issue it, lest it be seen as a measure of desperation rather than one of policy.

The victory never came, and, when our straits indeed grew desperate, he let that paper languish, having been convinced it was by then too late to do any good. I shall go to my grave convinced he was mistaken."

"Of course he was, Father," Lewis said angrily. He looked back over his shoulder. "In all the years since, you have never spoken of this, nor has anyone else I ever heard."

"The proclamation was never widely known, for obvious reasons," Douglass answered. "Once the Confederate States succeeded in breaking away, it became moot, and what would have been the point to mentioning it? As you'll remember, the fight to emancipate the Negro slaves remaining withinU.S.

territory after the War of Secession was quite hard enough."

"That is so, and you may be right about the rest, too," Lewis said, "but it galls me to think the United States went down to defeat when we still had a weapon we could loose against the enemy."

Frederick Douglass let out a hoarse whoop of laughter. "You say that, after the ignominious cease-fire to which President Blaine has agreed? We have an army's worth—no, a nation's worth—of weapons we have not loosed against our enemies in this fight, and now we shall not loose them."

"And that's a right good thing, too," Anna Douglass said, "on account of the only thing we would do with

'cm is shoot our own selves in the leg."

Lewis pointed north, towardLakeOntario . "Two ironclads flying the Union Jack steam back and forth out there. We arc under their guns, as we have been since they first bombarded us. We are helpless against them. The problem is not only poor use of the weapons we have, but also weapons we lack."

"We have now twice gone unprepared to war," Douglass said. "May God grant that, where we did not learn our lesson the first time, we shall do so the second. I hope that, in years to come, smoke will billow from the stacks of the factories producing every manner of gun and munition so that, should another war ever come, we shall at last

be ready for it."

When the carriage reached the street on which Douglass lived, Lewis had to rein in sharply to keep the horses from running down Daniel, who was pedaling his bicycle along without the slightest care for where he was going. The boy handled the high-wheeled ordinary with far more confidence than he'd shown before Douglass left forLouisville : too much confidence, perhaps.

Seeing Douglass, he whizzed close to the carriage. "Welcome back!" he shouted. "Welcome home!"

"Thank you, son," Douglass answered. By then, Daniel was speeding away again. Douglass wondered whether he heard. Even so, the journalist softly repeated the words: "Thank you." To Daniel, he wasn't a Negro, or, at least, wasn't first and foremost a Negro. Before that, he was a neighbor and a man. To Douglass, that was as it should be.

Lewis reined in again, in front of the house where Douglass and Anna had lived so long. "Here we are, Father." He grinned and tipped his cap. "Cab fare, fifty cents."

Douglass gave him two quarters, and a dime tip to boot. He would not let Lewis return the money, either, saying, "It's the best ride I've had since I left home, and one of the cheaper ones, too."

"All right, since you put it that way." Lewis shoved the coins into his pocket. "Good to know I have a trade I can fall back on at need. Heaven knows the newspaper business isn't so steady as I wish it were."

"See what you get for not pandering to the most popular opinions?" Frederick Douglass kept his tone light, but the words were serious, and he and his son both knew it. He got down, then helped Anna. She felt fragile, bony, in his arms. Anxious, he asked, "My dear, how are you?"

"As the good Lord meant me to be," she answered, to which he found no response. She went on,

"Pretty soon I'll see Him face-to-face, and I intend to have a good long talk with Him about the way things do go on in this here world."

"Good," Douglass said. "I'm sure He could have made a much better job of things had He had you to advise Him."

Anna glared, then poked him in the ribs. They both laughed. Together, they walked into the house.

Douglass stopped in the front hall. The feel of the throw rug under his feet, the rows of framed pictures on the walls, the infinitely familiar view of the parlor on one side and the dining room on the other, the faint smell of paper and tobacco and food—all told him he was home, and nowhere else. A long, happy sigh escaped him.

"Are you glad to be back?" Anna asked slyly.

"Oh, maybe just a bit," he answered. They laughed again.

Lewis came downstairs, brisk and quick and sure of himself. "I've put your bags in the bedroom, Father.

That's settled for you." He was a young man still, and certain that things were easily settled. A small problem solved, he moved on to a greater one: "Where do we go from here?"

"How do you mean that?" Frederick Douglass asked. "I myself am going upstairs before long, to find out if I still remember what sleeping in my own bed feels like. If, however you mean *Where does the colored man go from here?* or *Where do theUnited States go from here?* —well, those questions require a little more thought. Only a little, you understand."

"I had suspected they might." Lewis chuckled without much mirth. "Any quick answers, before I see to the horses and the carriage?"

"You let your father rest," Anna said with a touch of asperity. "He hasn't had hisself an easy time of it."

Nothing could have been better calculated to make Douglass say, "I will answer—a horseback guess, before Lewis goes back to the horses. As I said before, the lot of the colored man in the Confederate States may improve, though to what degree I cannot now guess. The lot of the colored man in our own country? I see no great change on the horizon, though I wish I did. We shall have to go on working state by state for laws asserting our rights, for the national government, having finally broken our chains, can go no further without another Constitutional amendment, and you know as well as I how likely that is."

"Un-," Lewis said wryly. "All right, that's not a bad summation for us. Can you do as well for the country?"

"No one can guess where the country goes from here," Douglass said, shaking his massive head. "We shall have to see what the full effect upon us is of this defeat.Lincoln believes the white labourer will be pressed down until he is no better off than the Negro—but Lincoln, being white, cannot fully grasp all the vicissitudes of being black. Ben Butler, if I understand him rightly, feels the national government needs to organize us down to our shoelaces, to make certain we are never again caught short by our enemies.

Whether the national government can do that, whether it will do that, whether it should do that—if I could read a crystal ball, I would wear a turban on my head, not a derby."

"What does President Blaine think?" Lewis asked. "Did you get any hint of that inChicago ?"

"No," Douglass answered. "Surprisingly little was said of him at that meeting. Perhaps that was because he is sure to fail of reelection when his term is up, perhaps because he has not clearly shown he has any thoughts to speak of past unwavering hostility toward the Confederate States, and he has bought only disrepute on that policy."

"More Democrats," Lewis said with a sigh.

"More Democrats," Frederick Douglass agreed, as mournfully.

Anna said, "You was right the first time,Frederick . Now go on upstairs and get yourself some rest. You can do that your own self, and do it this here minute. The rest of it'll still be here when you get up."

"She's right, Father," Lewis said.

"She generally is," Douglass answered. He headed for the stairway.

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Under flag of truce, General Thomas Jackson approached the line where his men had halted the Army of Ohio's push intoLouisville .

His guards looked jumpy, even though no guns had barked for several days. "Do you really trust the damnyankees, sir?" one of them asked.

"They fought honorably,"Jackson answered. "If I was not afraid to come up here while the fighting raged, why should I fear doing so with the cease-fire in place?"

"I don't like it," the guard said, stubborn still. His eyes flicked now here, now there. "Lordy, they made a hell of a mess out of this here place, didn't they?" He paused a moment in thought. " 'Course, we helped, I reckon."

A call came from within theU.S. lines: "That you, General Jackson?"

"Yes, it is I,"Jackson replied. To his ear, theU.S. accent was sharp and harsh and unpleasant.

"Come ahead, General," the Yankee said. "General Willcox is here waiting for you."

"Come I shall,"Jackson said. He picked his way over broken bricks and charred boards. Here in the center ofLouisville , nothing but rubble remained. The only walls to be seen were thoseU.S. and C.S.

soldiers had erected from bits of that rubble. None of the graceful architecture that had madeLouisville such a pleasant place before the war survived.

And President Longstreet,Jacksonthought, *is willing to let theUnited States off without a half-dime's indemnity.* His mouth tightened. Christian charity was all very well, but what point to charity toward those who deserved it not?

A couple of men in blue uniforms showed themselves. They stood up a little warily; for a long time, showing any part of your body was an invitation to a sharpshooter to drive a hole through it. One of them said, "If you'd been here a few days ago, Stonewall—"

"No doubt my men would say the same to you, young fellow,"Jackson answered. He wasn't so severe as he might have been; that was soldier's banter from the Yankee, not out-and-out hatred.

A trim young captain in tunic and trousers far too clean and neat for him to have served at the front line came up out of a trench and nodded. "I'm Oliver Richardson, GeneralJackson —General Willcox's adjutant. If you'll be so good as to come with me, sir . . ."

WhenJackson saw Willcox, he stabbed out a forefinger at him. "I remember you, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Unless I'm much mistaken, you were in theWest Point class of the year following mine—class of '47, are you not?"

"That's it, sure enough," Orlando Willcox answered. "And I went into the Artillery, just as you did." He let out a rheumy chuckle. "We were all on the same side once, we old-timers. Another few years, sir, and no men in your country or mine who served with one another before the War of Secession will be left."

"You're right, General,"Jackson said. "We are now separate, and grow more separate every day—despite, I might add, the ill-advised efforts of theUnited States to exert a nonexistent influence upon our peaceful domestic affairs." Remembering the cease-fire, he held up a hand. "But let that go. It is behind us, God grant forever. Your men here fought most valiantly. You have every reason to be proud of them."

"The same holds of yours," Willcox said.

He paused, perhaps waiting forJackson to praise his generalship so he could again return the compliment.Jackson had not so much diplomacy in him. "To business," he said. "I am charged by President Longstreet to inquire of you when you intend to abandon these lines and withdraw all forces of the Army of theOhio from the soil of the Confederate States."

"I cannot answer that at the present time, General Jackson," Willcox replied. "I have as yet been given no orders on the subject. Absent such orders, what choice have I but to hold the men in place?"

"Sir, I mean no disrespect to you or to your government, but this is not entirely satisfactory." If that wasn't an understatement,Jackson had never uttered one. "TheUnited States requested the present cease-fire, presumably because you felt yourselves to be at a disadvantage. This being so, I must tell you that we shall not indefinitely tolerate your occupying territory that has belonged to our nation since the close of the War of Secession."

"Come with me, General," Orlando Willcox said, and began to walk away from the gathered men of both sides. When his adjutant started to come, too, he waved the young captain back.

Taking that as a hint,Jackson also motioned for the soldiers who had accompanied him inside theU.S.

lines to hold their places. He followed the commander of the Army of theOhio till they were out of earshot of their subordinates. Willcox stopped then, his boots scrunching on broken bricks.Jackson halted beside him. Quietly, the Confederate general-in-chief asked, "How

now, sir?"

"How now?" Willcox said, also in a low voice but with unmistakable anger. "How now? I shall tell you how now, General. Getting any orders out ofWashingtonCity —excuse me, out ofPhiladelphia ; 1 spoke from force of habit—is a miracle comparable to that which our Savior worked with the loaves and fishes.

Getting orders in a timely fashion would be a miracle comparable to the Resurrection. I say *would be* rather than *is,* for I have seen no timely orders."

"This is not as it should be,"Jackson said, and tried to decide whether that was a bigger understatement than the one he'd made a moment before.

"Some such conception had already formed in my mind, yes," Willcox said.Jackson did not remember any sardonic streak in him, but they'd had little to do with each other for more than thirty years, and nothing to do with each other for more than twenty. Maybe Willcox had changed. Maybe, on the other hand, he'd just been tried beyond endurance.

"What am I to tell my president, then?"Jackson asked. "He will suspect your government of having asked for this cease-fire so you could strengthen your position here, not as a prelude to abandoning it."

Longstreet would certainly suspect that. Longstreet and suspicion were made for each other.

General Willcox spread his hands. "This is not the case. The cease-fire requested was on all fronts, against all enemies. What point to making such a request for the purpose of fortifying one relatively small position from which, you must be able to see as well as I, we have no prospect for large or rapid advance?"

"That is so,"Jackson admitted. But then he felt he had to qualify his words: "I say it is so in my own person, you understand. How the president will view the matter when I report to him remains to be seen."

"Of course, General." Willcox's laughter was bitter. "The responsibility for war and peace and, in the broad sense, for the conduct of the war lies with the civilian branches of government. Who, though, who takes the blame when their plans go awry? Do they blame themselves? Have you ever seen them blame themselves?"

Jacksondid not answer. In the main, he agreed with Willcox. Most professional soldiers, in theUSA and CSA both, would have agreed with Willcox. But not all the blunders in theU.S. campaign inKentucky lay with the civilians. Willcox could not have more plainly advertised what he purposed doing had he telegraphedJackson ahead of time, and his flanking attack had been woefully late.

Willcox went on, "I do not desire any more fighting here. Not a man in my command wants any more fighting here. If, however, we are ordered to resume the struggle"—he spread his hands again—"we shall do so. What is the soldier's lot but to obey?"

"What do you judge President Blaine's likely response would be to an ultimatum demanding withdrawal fromLouisville on pain of renewed war?"Jackson asked.

"I cannot answer that question," Willcox said. It was the proper response, but disappointedJackson all the same; he had hoped Willcox's anger might lead him into a revealing indiscretion. The commander of the Army of theOhio went on, "The only one who knows Blainc's mind for certain is Blainc, and, by all we've seen, he is none too sure of it, either."

That was indiscreet. It might have been revealing, had recent events not shown it to be a simple statement of fact.Jackson said, "President Longstreet is not pleased that you remain here, and will grow less pleased by the day."

"I wish I could tell you more," Willcox answered. "I am, however, not a free agent, any more than you are, sir. Probably less than you are, for I doubt the apron strings holding you to your government are as tight as the ones I am compelled to wear."

"I doubt that—but then, I would, wouldn't I?"Jackson said. He and Willcox looked at each other with wry sympathy. Soldiers from one side often had more in common with soldiers from the other than with the civilians who told them what to do. "You have no better word to give me, General? Nothing I can send toRichmond to help ensure that we remain untroubled here?"

"If I had it, I would gladly give it: I assure you of that," Willcox said. "But I cannot give what I do not have."

"Very well."Jackson 's nod was almost a bow. "I thank you for your time, sir, and I thank you for your courtesy. Please do take it as given

that, should you at any time desire to visit me at my headquarters, you shall have no difficulty in passing through the lines and you will be most welcome there."

"You are very kind, sir." Willcox did bow. After further protestations of mutual esteem, the two men parted.Jackson made his way back into Confederate-held territory. He got aboard his horse there; entering theU.S. lines mounted might have made him seem like a man who judged himself a conqueror, and so he had refrained (even if he did so judge himself).

As he rode south, devastation gradually diminished. Single buildings and then whole blocks appeared, as if they were growing out of the rubble. His headquarters, being beyond the range ofU.S. artillery, were set among unharmed trees and houses on the outskirts of town, and were quite pleasant. Taken as a whole, though,Louisville would be a long time recovering.

He wired Longstreet the results, or rather lack of results, of his meeting with General Willcox. The answer came back within a few minutes:WILL ANOTHER BLOW AID IN SHIFTING THE

YANKEES? IF SO, CAN YOU LAY IT ON?

I CAN,he replied by telegraph,WILLCOX JUDGESBLAINE DOES NOT KNOW HIS OWN

MIND. A BLOW MAY RESTART THE WAR.

He paced back and forth, awaiting the president's judgment. Longstreet was right; telegraphic conferences were not all they might be. After a while, the clicker brought the president's response, HAMMERING FULMINATE OF MERCURY UNWISE, Longstreet Said.WE CAN WAIT.

WAITING HURTSUSA WORSE.

ALL IN READINESS HERE AT NEED,Jackson wired.

I ASSUMED NOTHING LESS,Longstreet eventually answered,I RELY ON YOU. KEEP ME

APPRISED OF YOUR SITUATION.

That last wire madeJackson feel good. He knew Longstreet had sent it

for no other reason than making him feel good. Knowing why Longstreet had sent it should have lessened the effect. Somehow, it didn't.Jackson took that to mean Longstreet was a formidable politician indeed.

He chuckled, which made the telegrapher waiting for his reply give him a startled look. "Never mind, son,"Jackson told him. "It's nothing I didn't already know."

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Alfred von Schlieffen's office inPhiladelphia was neither so comfortable nor so quiet as the one he had enjoyed down inWashington . Nor did the German military attaché have here the reference volumes he'd used there. ThatPhiladelphia did not lie under Confederate guns was at the moment, in his view, less of an advantage than the other factors were annoyances.

He had—he hoped he had—the books he needed here. He looked from an account of Lee's advance up intoPennsylvania , the advance that had won the War of Secession for the CSA, to an atlas of the world. Tracing Lee's movements day by day, fight by fight, gave him a fresh appreciation not only of what Lee had accomplished but also of precisely how he had accomplished it.

Indirect approach,Schlieffen scribbled on a sheet of foolscap. He had been studying Lee's campaigns since he came to theUnited States ; they were not so well known to the General Staff as they should have been. When he traced on the map the Army of Northern Virginia's movements, he saw strategic insight of the highest order. He had seen some of that all along. Now he saw more. He also saw, or thought he saw, how to apply that insight to his own country's situation. Up till now, he had been blind to that.

Had Beethoven had this inspired feeling, this dazzling burst of insight, when the theme for a symphony struck him? For his sake, Schlieffen hoped so. The German military attaché felt like a god, noting the movements on the map as if he were looking down on a world he had just made and finding it good.

He underlined *indirect approach.* Then he underlined the words again —for him, an almost unprecedented show of emotion. Lee's goal all along had beenWashington ,D.C. , yet he'd never once moved on the capital of theUnited States . He'd swung up past it and then around behind it, smashing McClellan's army and ending up here

inPhiladelphia beforeBritain andFrance forced mediation on theUSA .

ButWashington had been the *Schwerpunkt* of the entire campaign. Not only had Lee taken advantage of theU.S. government's urgent need to protect its capital, he had also used the great wheel around the city to gain the Confederacy the largest possible moral and political advantages.

Schlieffen flipped pages in the atlas. Since it was printed in theUSA , the states of theUnited States andConfederateStates came before the nations ofEurope , and were shown in more detail.

Provincialism, Schlieffen thought scornfully. But the maps he needed were there, even if toward the back of the book.

"Ach, gut,"he muttered: the map ofFrance also showed theLow Countries and a fair-sized chunk of the western part of the German Empire. In the Franco-Prussian War, the armies ofPrussia and her lesser allies had moved straight intoFrance and, after smashing French forces near the border, straight towardParis . That coup would not be so easy to repeat in a new war; he had seen for himself how stubborn good artillery and good rifles could make a defense.

As if of itself, the index finger of his right hand moved in a wide arc, fromGermany around behindParis .

He smiled and scribbled more notes. That sort of manoeuvre would make the French come out and fight in places they had never intended to defend and hadn't spent years fortifying. And what Frenchman, even in his wildest nightmares, could imagineParis attacked from the rear?

The finger traced that arc again. Schlieffen noticed it ran through not onlyFrance but also throughLuxembourg ,Belgium , and perhapsHolland as well. In case of war betweenGermany andFrance

, all three of theLow Countries were likely to be neutral. Would this manoeuvre be valuable enough to justify violating that neutrality and bringing opprobrium down onGermany 's head?

"Ja,"Schlieffen said decisively. Whether the General Staff would agree with him, he did not know. He did know his colleagues back inBerlin had to see this notion, and had to see it soon. Even if they did not accept it, it would give them a new point of departure for their own thinking.

He was writing furiously, moving back and forth between the maps ofFrance andPennsylvania , when he noticed someone knocking on the door. The knocking was loud and insistent. He wondered how long it had been going on before he noticed it.

"How is a man to get any work done?" he muttered, and gave the door a resentful stare. When that failed to stop the knocking, he sighed, rose, and opened the door. Kurd von Schlozer stood in the hallway, looking less than happy himself. "Oh. Your Excellency. Excuse me," Schlieffen said. "How may I serve you?"

Seeing Schlieffen contrite, the German minister to theUnited States made his own frown vanish. "You must come with me to President Blaine's residence," he said. "Perhaps between the two of us, we can convince him not to resume this idiotic war."

"Must I?" Schlieffen asked, casting a longing glance back toward the maps and papers.

"You must," Schlozer said. Sighing again, Schlieffen obeyed.

While inPhiladelphia , President Blaine resided at the Powel House, a three-story red brick building onThird Street , about halfway betweenWashington Square and theDelaware River . The reception hall was full of rich, ruddy mahogany. Schlieffen noticed it only peripherally. He paid closer attention to James G. Blaine, whom he had never before met.

Blainewas about fifty, with graying brown hair and beard, and would have been most handsome had his nose not borne some small resemblance to a potato. He gave an impression of strength and vigor.

Married to good sense, those were valuable traits in a leader. A vigorous leader without good sense was liable to be more dangerous to his country than an indolent one similarly constituted.

"Minister Schlozer, Colonel Schlieffen—say your say."Blaine sounded abrupt, as if nothing the two Germans might say had any hope of changing his mind.

Kurd von Schlozer affected not to notice. "I thank you, Mr. President," he answered in English more fluent than Schlieffen's. "My attaché and I are here to try to persuade you that, since you have wisely chosen peace, you would do your country a disservice if you allowed the talks between your representatives and those of your opponents to fail."

"I would do my country a worse disservice if I let my enemies ride roughshod over theUnited States

,"Blaine growled.

"But, Your Excellency, how by weapons can you keep them from doing this?" Schlieffen asked. "They have on every front defeated you."

"Not inMontana , by jingo!"Blaine exclaimed with savage pleasure.

"Oh, yes—the battle after the cease-fire," Schlieffen said. TheU.S. press shouted that fight to the skies.

Putting what theU.S. papers said together with what came fromCanada andLondon by way ofBerlin , the military attaché gathered that theU.S. and British had tried to impale themselves on each other's guns, and the British had succeeded.

"That shows what we can do when we set our minds to it,"Blaine declared.

"Yes, Your Excellency—but what of all the fights before the cease-fire? What of all the fights that made you for the cease-fire ask?" Schlieffen said.

Blainelooked as if he hated him. He probably did. Schlieffen bore the hatred of an American with indifference only slightly tinged by regret; it was not as if that could matter to him in any important way.

The president of theUnited States said, "I did what I had to do to still public outcry. That having been accomplished, I am now obliged to seek the best possible peace for my country."

Schlieffen thought of Talleyrand, battling forFrance at the Congress of Vienna after Napoleon's overthrow—and gaining concessions, too, despite the weakness of his position. Then he thought again.

Talleyrand was a gifted diplomat, something the Americans, despite their many abilities, had yet to produce.

"If only we were not so alone in the world,"Blaine said querulously. "If only every nation's hand were not raised against us."

"That is not so," Kurd von Schlozer said. "Throughout this unfortunate time, Mr. President, the hand ofGermany has been outstretched in friendship and in the search for peace."

"Sir, you are right about that, and I beg your pardon,"Blaine replied. "Germanyhas done everything a good neighbor can do. ButGermany , though she is a good neighbor, is not a near neighbor. All the nearest neighbors of theUnited States have joined together in oppressing us."

As you should have anticipated,Schlieffen thought. *As you should have prepared for.* But that was water over the dam now. Aloud, he said, "Your Excellency, General Rosecrans and I have about this talked.Germany is not your near neighbor, no. ButGermany is toFrance a near neighbor, a nearest neighbor.France is now your enemy.France has our enemy been, and is likely our enemy again to be.

Two lands with the same enemy can find it good to be friends."

He watchedBlaine . Slowly, the president of theUnited States nodded. "Rosecrans has mentioned these conversations to me," he said. "For all their history, theUnited States have steered clear of entangling foreign alliances." Rosecrans had used that phrase, too; it seemed deeply engrained in the minds of allU.S. leaders.Blaine might almost have been quoting Scripture.

"Your Excellency, the Confederate States have had foreign allies," Kurd von Schlozer said. "TheUnited States have not. When you and they have quarreled, who has had the better of it?"

Blaine's mouth puckered. His cheeks tautened against the bone on which they lay. "I do take the point, Your Excellency." And then, instead of merely saying he took it, he looked to take it in truth. "When you fought the French, you beat them like a drum. The last time we beat anyone like a drum, it was the Mexicans: not much of a foe, and a long time ago."

"Perhaps, then, you will toBerlin send officers to learn our ways," Schlieffen said. "Perhaps also your minister to my country will speak with Chancellor Bismarck to see in what other ways we can work together to help us both."

"Perhaps we will,"Blaine said. "Perhaps he can. It might be worth exploring, at any rate. If nothing comes of it, we are no worse off."

Schlieffen and Schlozer glanced at each other. Schlieffen knew fellow officers who were avid fishermen.

They would go on at endless, boring length about the feel of a trout or

a pike nibbling the hook as it decided whether to take the bait. There sat James G. Blaine, closely examining a wiggling worm.

"The enemy of my enemy is—or can be—my friend," Schlieffen murmured.Blaine nodded again. He might not bite here and now, but Schlieffen thought he would bite. Nothing else in the pool in which theUnited States swam looked like food, that was certain.

"May we now return to the matter of the cease-fire and the peace which is to come after it?" Schlozer said. Schlieffen wished the German minister had not been so direct; he was liable to makeBlaine swim away.

And, sure enough, the president of theUnited States scowled. "The Confederates hold us in contempt,"

he said sullenly, "and the British aim to rob us of land they yielded by treaty forty years ago. How can I surrender part of my own home state to those arrogant robbers and pirates?"

"Your Excellency, I feel your pain," Schlozer said. "But, for now, what choice have you?"

"EvenPrussia , for a time, yielded against Napoleon," Schlieffen added.

Blainedid not answer. After a couple of silent minutes, the two Germans rose and left the reception hall.

Chapter 18

The cab drew to a halt by the edge of the sidewalk. TheChicago street was so narrow, it still blocked traffic. Behind it, the fellow atop a four-horse wagon full of sacks of cement bellowed angrily. So did a man in a houndstooth sack suit whizzing past on an ordinary. The cab driver said, "That's sixty-five cents, pal. Pay up, so I can get the hell out of here."

Abraham Lincoln gave him a half dollar and a quarter and descended without waiting for change. No sooner had his feet touched the ground than the cab rolled off, escaping the abuse that had been raining down on it.

This was aChicago very different from the elegant, spacious North Side neighborhood in which Robert lived. People packed the streets.Lincoln had the feeling that, were those streets three times wider, they would still have been packed. One shop built from cheap bricks stood jammed by another. All of them were gaudily painted, advertising the cloth or shoes or hats or cheese or dry goods or sausages or pocket watches or eyeglasses sold within. Most had signs in the window proclaiming enormous savings if only the customer laid down his money now.FIRE SALE! GOING OUT OF BUSINESS! SHOP

EARLY FOR CHRISTMAS!

Capitalism at its rawest,Lincolnthought unhappily. The weather was raw, too, a wind with winter in it.

Hannibal Hamlin, who, being fromMaine , knew all about winter, had called a wind like this a lazy wind, because it blew right through you instead of bothering to go around.Lincoln pulled his overcoat tighter about him; he felt the cold more now than he had in his younger days. The wind blew through the coat, too.

He looked around. There, a couple of doors down, advertising itself like all its neighbors, stood the frowzy, soot-stained office of the *ChicagoWeekly Worker.* Lincoln hurried to the doorway and went inside. A blast of heat greeted him. Because the winters inChicago were so ferocious, the means deployed against them were likewise powerful. He hastily unbuttoned his coat. Sweat started on his forehead.

A bald man in an apron and a visor who was carrying a case of type

looked up at the jangle of the bell over the door. "What do you wan —'" he began, his English German-accented. Then he recognized who was visiting the newspaper, and came within an inch of dropping the case and scattering thousands of pieces of type all over the floor. "What do you want, Mr. Lincoln?" he managed on his second try. The type metal rattled in its squares, but did not escape.

"I would like to see Mr. Sorge, if you would be so kind,"Lincoln answered, as politely as if he were addressing one of his son's clients rather than a typesetter who hadn't had a bath in several days. "I do understand correctly, do I not, that he heads the Chicago Socialist Alliance?"

"Yes, that is right," the man in the apron said. "Please, you wait here, uh—" He looked confused and angry at himself. He'd probably been about to say *sir,* and then caught himself because *sir* was not the sort of thing a Socialist was supposed to say. He set down the type case, grunted in relief at being rid of the weight, and hurried into a back room.

A couple of printers and a fellow who, though he was surely a Socialist, too, looked like most of the other reporters Lincoln had seen over the years stopped what they were doing to gape at him. Then the typesetter came out of the back room with a lean man in his fifties, a fellow whose wary, hunted eyes said he'd made a lot of moves one step ahead of the police in the course of his lifetime.

"You *are* Abraham Lincoln," he said in some surprise. "I wondered if Ludwig knew what he was talking about." Like the typesetter's, his speech had a guttural undertone to it. "And I, I am Friedrich Sorge. I have had to fleeGermany . I have had to fleeNew York City — Democrats can be as fierce in their reactions as Prussian *Junkers.* But I will not fleeChicago . *'Hier steh' ich, ich kann nicht anders.' "*

"I don't follow that,"Lincoln said. "I'm sorry."

"Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise," Sorge translated. "Martin Luther. A progressive in his day, aiding the rising bourgeoisie against the church and the feudal aristocracy that supported it. Now, Mr.

Lincoln—why do you stand here?"

"Because it has been made painfully clear to me that the Republican Party is not and cannot be the party that represents the laboring class in theUnited States ,"Lincoln answered. "I believe that class deserves representation. I believe this democracy will fail unless that class has

representation. If the Republican Party is not up to the job, then the Socialists will have to be."

Friedrich Sorge and Ludwig the typesetter exchanged several excited comments in German. After a minute or so, Sorge returned to English: "This is what we have been doing since founding the party ten years ago."

"I know,"Lincoln said. "I've watched you. I've watched your progress with no small interest. I would have watched it with even greater interest had there been more progress to watch."

"Too many American workers are in love with the *status quo* to make progress quick," Sorge said with a grimace. "It is the same as it is inEurope . No, it is worse than it is inEurope . In theUnited States , a man who despairs of factory labour will go and start a farm or prospect for gold in the hope of becoming rich at a stroke. This can never be an answer, but it can look like one, and it gives the capitalists a safety valve to drain off revolutionary energy."

"The safety valve will not stay open much longer,"Lincoln said. "The prairies are filling up. Failed miners become proletarians in Western towns instead of Eastern cities, or they stay on as miners for the lucky handful who do grow rich, and serve as labour in the mines of the big companies."

"Yes." Sorge nodded emphatically. "So, as I say, though progress is slow, the revolution will come, and will throw down the capitalists and their minions."

"You believe the engine *is* broken and *will* explode,"Lincoln said. Sorge nodded again. So did Ludwig.

The ex-president went on, "I believe the engine is broken but *may perhaps* be repaired. The Republicans would not hear me because I dared to say something was wrong with the engine. Will you now cast me forth because I dare to say it may be set to rights?"

For a moment, he thought Sorge would tell him yes, and that would be that. Then the Socialist newspaperman said, "Come back into my office, Mr. Lincoln. We do not need to speak of these things standing here at the counter like men choosing pickles from the barrel."

The office was small and cramped and dark and full of bookshelves. Most of the books on them were in German, the rest in English and

French. The word *Socialist* looked much alike in all three languages.

Sorge had to clear more books off the chair in front of his desk to giveLincoln room to sit down. The desk itself was a disorderly snarl of papers.

SeeingLincoln take the measure of the little room, Sorge chuckled wryly. "I, you see, will never be a wealthy capitalist. Luckily for me, I never wanted to be a wealthy capitalist."

"Had you wanted to be one, I should be here, or perhaps somewhere else close by, speaking of this with someone else," Lincoln answered, "for the Socialists in Chicago would have a leader, regardless of whether or not you were he. Now to come back to the question I asked out front: will you condemn me for not being revolutionary enough, as the Republicans condemned me for being too revolutionary?"

"Socialist thought is divided on whether the proletarian revolution is inevitable," Sorge said. "The Marxian Socialists, now, believe it is, and —"

"I am familiar with the division,"Lincoln broke in. "Not long ago, inMontanaTerritory , Colonel Theodore Roosevelt accused me of being a Marxian Socialist, and I told him I had to decline the honor. This was before he became a national hero, you understand." His laugh was as wry as Sorge's. "Now, of course, I could deny him nothing."

"Of course," the Socialist answered, his voice curdled with irony. "The only confusion the papers have had is whether to fawn more onRoosevelt or on Custer. If something is before their eyes, they will never look farther. Pah!"

"This digression is my fault,"Lincoln said. "I do apologize for it. Let me ask my question a third time: am I too soft for you, as I am too hard for the men of what had been my party?"

Sorge frowned in thought. "I have seen little in the behavior of capitalists to cause me to believe they will not create so much outrage among the proletariat as to make revolution inevitable."

"You have never seen the behavior of capitalists reined in by government regulation, either,"Lincoln replied.

"No, I have not," Sorge said. "I have not seen the second coming of

Jesus Christ, either. I do not expect to see the one thing or the other while I live, and which is less likely I would not even guess."

"Here in theUnited States , the power of the ballot box gives the labouring classes a power, or the potential for a power, that they lacked in the days when Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto,* and in the places he knew best,"Lincoln said.

"Marx yet lives. Marx yet writes," Sorge answered in tones of reproof.

"But he does not live here. He does not write here,"Lincoln said. "By what I have read of his writings, he does not understand theUnited States well. You have lived inNew York , you say. Now you live inChicago . Can you tell me I am mistaken?"

He gave Friedrich Sorge credit: the Socialist gave the question serious thought before answering. At last, Sorge said, "No, Marx does not understand this country as well as he might."

"Good. We can go on from there. Will you also agree this is true of many Socialists in theUnited States

?"Lincoln asked, pressing the newspaperman as if he still were a lawyer questioning an opposing witness.

"With the labour problems this country has, would you not have enjoyed greater success if you could have figured out how to make the voting man see things your way?"

"It could be. It is not certain, but it could be," Sorge said cautiously. "I think you are now coming to say what it is your aim to say. Say it, then."

"I will say it,"Lincoln replied. "Leaving revolution out of the bargain save as a last resort, I feel the Socialists offer the laborers of this country their best chance to reclaim it from the wealthy. If and when I bolt the Republican Party, I can bring some large fraction of its membership—a third, maybe half if I'm lucky—with me into the fold here. That is not enough to elect a president or senators, not yet, but it is enough to elect congressmen, state legislators, mayors, and it is a base from which to build. WhenBlaine goes down in '84, as you know he will, more people will see the Republicans are doomed and join our ranks. Now, how does that look to you?"

Sorge licked his lips. He was tempted;Lincoln could see as much. The prospect of some actual power hit the newspaperman like a big slug of

raw rotgut whiskey. Playing to win was a game very different from playing to agitate. Slowly, Sorge said, "This is not something I can decide at once. Also, this is not something I can decide alone. I shall have to talk with some men here and wire others what you propose." He dug through the rubbish on his desk till he found a pencil.

After licking the point, he scribbled for a minute. Then he said, "If I understand you, what you have in mind is . . ."

"Yes, that's right, nor near enough,"Lincoln said when the Socialist had finished reading back his notes.

"Off the record, Mr. Sorge, how does it strike you?"

"I am more revolutionary than you; you are right about that," Sorge answered. "But you are also right in saying we have not done as much as we might have. Maybe—maybe, I say—this will show us the way."

"This is how the Republican Party was born, more than a generation ago,"Lincoln said. "Antislavery Whigs, Free-Soilers, Know-Nothings, even a few Northern Democrats who couldn't stomach the extension of slavery—we all joined together to work for a common goal. I think this new coalition may do the same in regard to wage slavery."

"I hope you arc right." Sorge gave him a keen look. "President Blaine will call you a traitor, and, when he loses the next election, he will say it is for no other reason than that you and your followers left the party."

"President Blaine is not in the habit of listening to what I say, no matter how hard a time I have convincing people that that is so,"Lincoln said, sadly remembering John Taylor's miscalculation. "I sec no reason why I should be obliged to take notice of what President Blaine says, especially when, from this day forth, we shall no longer be members of the same party."

Friedrich Sorge pulled open a file cabinet behind his desk. When his hand came out of the drawer, it was clutching a whiskey bottle. More rummaging in the cabinet and in his desk produced two tumblers, mismatched and none too clean. He poured a couple of hefty dollops, handed one glass toLincoln , and raised the other high. "To Socialism!" he said, and drank.

Lincolndrank, too. The whiskey was bad, but it was strong. "To Socialism," he said.

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Brigadier General George Custer rode along bare yards south of the forty-ninth parallel of latitude, the border separatingMontanaTerritory fromCanada , along with a troop from the Fifth Cavalry. Bare yards north of the border, not quite in rifle range but not far out of it, a troop of red-coated British cavalrymen rode along dogging his trail. Neither side had fired a shot since General Gordon took his mutilated army of invasion back over the border. Both sides were ready. For his part, Custer was eager.

Several reporters rode along with the Fifth Cavalry. One of them, an eager young fellow named Worth, asked, "How does it feel, General, to have your brevet rank made permanent?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Charlie, it beats the hell out of going to the dentist to get a tooth yanked," Custer quipped. Charlie Worth and the rest of the reporters laughed appreciatively. Custer held up a hand to show he wasn't through. The newspapermen fell silent, to hear what other pearls of wisdom might fall from his lips. He went on in a serious, even a bombastic, vein: "My only regret is that the promotion comes as the result of a battle from which we could not seize the full fruits of victory because of the cease-fire's having gone into effect. Absent that, we should have pursued to destruction the ruffians who dared desecrate our sacred soil."

Awkwardly, the reporters scribbled as they rode. "God damn, but he gives good copy," one of them muttered to another in admiring tones. The second man nodded. Custer didn't think he was supposed to hear. His chest swelled with pride. Truly he was the hero of the hour.

He waved to Charlie Worth. The reporter, honored at being shown such a confidence, rode up close to him. Custer said, "Do you mind if I make another foraging run amongst your cigars, Charlie?"

"Why, not at all, General." Worth held out a leather cigar case. Custer took a fat stogie from it and reined in so he could strike a match. He coughed a couple of times after he got the cigar going and sucked smoke into his mouth. Before the battle by theTeton River , the only tobacco he'd smoked had been in a few peace pipes handed him by the leaders of Indian tribes he'd smashed.

A reporter asked, "What is your view of the cease-fire, General?"

"I regret that it came when it did, as it prevented us from punishing the British as they so richly deserved," Custer replied. "I also regret it even more on general principles, for it has humiliated us before the nations of the world for the second time in a space of less than twenty years."

His stomach knotted at the thought. He had loved his country longer and more faithfully than he had loved his wife. Now, as in 1862, the United States were going down to mortifying defeat, and that despite his victory, a victory which, had he learned of the cease-fire in time, would never have happened.

When he'd married Libbie after the War of Secession, he'd promised to stop cursing and stop drinking.

He'd held to the promise till he learned his victory counted for nothing. He'd stayed drunk for days after that, and let out all the oaths he had in him. He was still drinking, he was still swearing, and he'd taken up smoking for good measure.

Camp that evening brought everybody up close to everybody else; men stayed near the greasewood fires for warmth. To the north, the campfires of the troop of British cavalry were a constellation of brightly twinkling stars on the horizon.

Custer and his troopers wolfed down salt pork and hardtack. Some of them crumbled the biscuits and fried them in the grease from the pork, of which there was always an adequate supply. "How do you people eat this stuff day after day, week after week, and live to tell the tale?" one of the reporters asked.

"So sorry, boys," Custer said. "Next time you ride along with us, we'll make sure we cater the affair fromDenver ."

That got a round of laughter, as he'd hoped it would. Then one of the reporters—it was Charlie Worth, damn him—asked, "How did Colonel Roosevelt and the Unauthorized Regiment take to Army rations?"

"I'm afraid I really don't know," Custer answered, his voice all at once as cool as the breeze hissing down from the north. "I never discussed that with Mr. Roosevelt." He laid the tiniest bit of stress on the civilian title.

The reporters, of course, made their living noticing tiny stresses. "Come on, General," one of them said.

"What do you really think of Colonel Roosevelt"—he laid the tiniest bit of stress on the military title—"as a soldier? What do you think of the men of the Unauthorized Regiment as soldiers?"

"Have mercy, gentlemen," Custer said. "I've answered those same questions a lot of times over the past weeks." *And I'd like it a lot better if you asked them a damned sight less often.* Having to share the limelight with the boy colonel gave him worse dyspepsia than salt pork and hardtack gave the reporters.

They wouldn't leave him alone. He might have known they wouldn't leave him alone. "Come on, General," Charlie Worth coaxed. "Give it to us straight. You can do that."

"I can only repeat what I've said a great number of times," Custer answered: "Colonel Roosevelt and his volunteers were gifted, patriotic amateur soldiers, and fought as well as men of that sort could be expected to fight." Every word of that was true. If the reporters judged the tone to be ever so little on the slighting side, was that his fault?

One of the newspapermen said, "General, isn't it a fact that the Unauthorized Regiment performed better against the limeys than the Fifth Cavalry did?"

"Like hell it's a fact," Custer snarled, "and ifRoosevelt has been saying that, he's a damned glory-sniffing liar."

"No, General, I never heard it from him," the reporter said hastily. "But didn't the Unauthorized Regiment fight Gordon's cavalry to a draw and then chase the redcoats halfway back to Canada after the what-do-you-call-'ems—the Gatling guns—chewed them to smithereens?"

"The Unauthorized Regiment," Custer said, as if lecturing on strategy atWest Point to a class of idiots,

"engaged the enemy forces pursuant to my orders. Had I placed them in the center and us on the wings, we would have done as well against the British cavalry, but they would have fared far worse against Gordon's foot. Since my men were fighting dismounted at the battle by the Teton, they were not so well positioned to pursue as were the Volunteers."

All that was true, too. Had Theodore Roosevelt been sitting by the campfire, Custer was sure he would have agreed with every word. (Custer was also sure he would have tried to aggrandize himself one way or another, though; that trait being acutely developed in him, he

had an eagle eye for spotting it in others.) But reporters were not after agreement. Agreement didn't sell papers. Argument did. "What about the—Gatterling?—guns, General?" another news hawk asked.

"Gatling guns," Custer corrected. "Gatling." *Idiots indeed,* he thought. "Well, what about them? Even if we hadn't had a one of them, Gordon's men hadn't a prayer of carrying our position."

He thought that was true, too, but he wasn't quite so sure. Bold as he was, he wouldn't have cared to mount an infantry assault on men in earthworks. Even in the War of Secession, that sort of business had proved hideously expensive. With the right troops, though—good American boys, not those limey bastards—he might have had a go of it.

Charlie Worth said, "I hear tellRoosevelt says those Gatling guns saved your bacon in that fight—chewed the Englishmen up and spit 'em out again."

"This being a free country, Mr. Roosevelt may say whatever he likes," Custer answered. "If you prefer the word of a man who became a soldier only because he was rich enough to buy himself a regiment over that of one who has devoted his entire life to the service of his country, you may do so, but I daresay no one will take you seriously afterwards."

That flattened young Worth, who gulped his coffee down in a hurry so he could get a big tin cup in front of his red face. But one of the other men asked, "Colonel Welton, down at FortBenton , tells it pretty much the same way, doesn't he?"

"I haven't heard what Henry has to say," Custer replied. "I will note that, while I and many of the officers of my regiment were promoted for our work by the Teton, Colonel Welton remains a colonel. In this you have the War Department's judgment on the value of our respective contributions."

The reporters scrawled furiously. One of them muttered, "When the devil are we going to be able to get to a telegraph clicker?"

Charlie Worth came up with a question no one else had asked Custer: "Andrew Jackson licked the British after the War of 1812 was over, and he ended up president of theUnited States . Now that you've done the same thing in this war, would you like to end up the same way?"

"Why, Charlie, the notion never entered my mind till this moment,"

Custer answered truthfully. Also truthfully, he went on, "Now that it is in there, I have to tell you I like it." The reporters laughed.

"You're a Democrat, aren't you, General?" somebody asked.

"What sensible man isn't?" Custer returned. "Did I hear rightly thatLincoln has shown the Republicans'

true colors by going Communard?" Several reporters assured him he had heard rightly. Sadly, he shook his head. "IfBlaine weren't in the White House, General Pope could have done the country a good turn by hanging old Honest Abe. He'll cause more trouble now, mark my words."

"Lots of Democratic politicians who could run for president," Charlie Worth observed. "We don't have so many soldiers who know how to win battles. What if they want you to stay in the Army?"

"I shall serve theUnited States wherever that service can lend the greatest aid," Custer declared, his tone grandiloquent and, on the whole, sincere.

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Winter was on the way toSonora andChihuahua . That was obvious to Jeb Stuart: instead of being hotter than blazes, the weather was all the way down to warm. As for Stuart himself, he was on the way toEl Paso , which suited him down to the ground.

He turned in the saddle and spoke to Major Horatio Sellers:

"Won't it be fine, getting to spend Christmas somewhere near the edge of civilization?"

"Yes, sir," his aide-de-camp agreed enthusiastically. "IfEl Paso isn't civilization, at least it's on the railroad line to it."

"I like that," Stuart said. "It's true both literally and metaphorically. We are going to have to build a line through to the Pacific just as fast as we can scrape together the capital. Until we have one, and the feeder lines down to the city ofChihuahua and toHermosillo , we aren't going to be able to control these provinces . . . Territories . . . states . . . whatever we finally call them."

"That's true, sir." Major Sellers nodded. "I expect we'll end up with a

Pacific Squadron in the Navy, too, and we'll also need the railroad to keep that supplied." He chuckled. "The damnyankees will love having us for neighbors, too; you can just bet on it."

"One of the reasons they fought this war was to keep our frontier from touching the Pacific; no doubt about that," Stuart said. "But they lost, and now they'll have to make the best of it."

"Serves them right for starting the fight in the first place," Sellers said. "You ask me, sir, President Longstreet ought to squeeze an indemnity out of them that would make their eyes pop. Paying for a railroad would be a lot easier then."

"Old Pete knows what he's doing—you can doubt a lot of things, Major, but you'd better think twice before you doubt that," Stuart said. "My guess is, he reckons theUnited States hate us plenty now that we've licked them twice. Piling on an indemnity would be adding insult to injury: that's how he'd see it, I think."

Before Major Sellers could reply, a commotion to the rear made him and Stuart both look over their shoulders. Stuart soon heard men calling out his name. He waved his hat and shouted to show where he was.

A grimy, sweaty rider on a lathered horse came pounding up to him. "General Stuart, sir," the Confederate trooper gasped, "everything's gone to hell back in Cananea, sir."

"Oh, Lord." Stuart did not look at his aide-de-camp. Horatio Sellers had been sure nothing good would come of cooperating with the Apaches, and maybe he'd turned out to be right after all. "I left a troop of cavalry behind there to make sure the Mexicans and the Indians didn't go at each other."

"Yes, sir," the trooper said. "Wasn't enough, sir. You remember that Yahnozha who ran away with the Mexican gal, and she says he drug her off and he says she was beggin' for more?"

"Oh, yes. I remember," Stuart said, a sinking feeling in his mid-section. "What about him? Did he steal another woman?"

"No, sir," the soldier answered. "The gal's father and her brother, they was layin' for him, and one of 'em put about three bullets in his belly, and the other one, he put two, three more in his head. Then they cut off his privates, sir, and left 'cm sittin' by the carcass for the Indians to find. That started the fightin', and it's been a regular war ever since—

you'd best believe it has."

"Christ," Stuart said, an exclamation that had nothing to do with the approach of the holiday season.

"What the devil have you men been doing to put the lid back on the place?"

The look the trooper sent his way reminded him how insubordinate so many Confederate soldiers had been during the War of Secession. They were men accustomed to speaking their minds regardless of the niceties of rank. This cavalryman was stamped from the same mold. He said, "What we've been doing, sir, is trying to keep from gcttin' ourselves killed. Hell of a lot more Apaches down by Cananea than we-uns, an' every one of 'em totes a Tredegar just like the ones we've got. Hell of a lot more Mexicans than we-uns, too. They got every damn kind of rifle you ever did see. We try and get between the greasers and the redskins, only means we get shot at from both sides at once."

"Who's winning?" Major Sellers asked. His voice was exuberant, almost gleeful. "Whoever gets killed off, long as it isn't our own soldiers, we're well shut of 'em." Stuart glared at him. He stared right back, not so noisily insubordinate as the man who'd ridden in from Cananea, but not backing away from his opinion by even an inch, either.

"Well, sir, that's right hard to say," the Confederate trooper answered. "The Mexicans, they don't get to go out of their houses a whole lot, but they've got plenty of vittles, and any Injun sticks his head up inside of rifle range, he's liable to end up with his brains rearranged, you know what I mean? Every now and again, some of the greasers, the ones with the best guns and the most balls, they'll sneak out of a night and shoot at the Apaches' camp."

"We can't have that," Stuart said. "We can't have any of that sort of nonsense. If we let it go on there, it'll go on all over these two provinces." He heaved a deep, regretful sigh. "So much for Christmas on the edge of civilization. Bugler!"

"Yes, sir!" The trooper produced his polished brass horn.

"Blow Halt," Stuart said. He sighed again. "Then blow About-face. We're going to have to go back there and stamp out that foolishness."

"The whole army, sir?" Major Sellers sounded appalled. He'd been

looking forward to Christmas inTexas , too, perhaps even to taking leave and traveling back toVirginia for Christmas with his family.

But Stuart answered, "Yes, the whole army. The Apaches and the Cananeans arc going to think they were strolling along the railroad tracks when a train ran over them. If we smash both sides now, it will save the Confederate States a lot of trouble for years and years to come."

"All right, sir; we'll do that, then." Sellers' laugh held a gravelly rumble of doom. "I've been saying all along that we ought to clean out those Indians. The faster and harder we do it, the better off these provinces will be."

"I knew you'd say, 'I told you so,' Major," Stuart said, and his aide-de-camp grinned, altogether unabashed. The commander of the Department of the Trans-Mississippi stroked his beard, working through the orders he would have to give to make the army reverse its course. "First thing we need to do is send a wire toEl Paso , letting people know what's happened. Next thing—" He glowered his discontent at the desert all around. "We're already the other side of Janos, better than two days away from Cananea no matter how hard we push." He shook his head, annoyed at his wits for working slower than they should have. "No, most of us arc better than two days away from Cananea. Colonel Ruggles!"

"Sir!" At that shout, the commanding officer of the Fifth Confederate Cavalry rode up on his camel.

Stuart's horse snorted at the other beast's stink and tried to rear. He didn't let it. Calhoun Ruggles went on, "What can I—what can we—do for you, sir?"

Briefly, Stuart explained what had gone wrong in Cananea. He finished, "I want the Fifth Camelry to ride out ahead of the rest of the army and hit the Indians and the Mexicans before either side expects you. If you can, smash 'em up by yourselves. If you can't manage that, do everything you can. You know we won't be far behind you."

"All right, sir, we'll handle it," Colonel Ruggles said. "And if the redskins light out for the mountains, I reckon we'll chase 'em down before they can get there. They say they can go faster on foot than troopers can on horseback. I'd like to see 'em try and outrun my critters." He leaned forward in his peculiar saddle and set an affectionate hand on the side of his mount's neck. The camel twisted

and tried to bite. Ruggles laughed as if he'd expected nothing else.

As Stuart had seen for himself, the Camelry was not in the habit of wasting time. Aboard their moaning, snorting, hideously homely mounts, Ruggles' troopers soon headed west. Stuart would have sworn his horse let out a sigh of relief when the camels trotted away.

Major Horatio Sellers gave Stuart a sly look. "I notice you're not riding with the Fifth this time, sir," he said.

"That's right, I'm not, and I'll give you two good reasons why," Stuart answered. "The first one is that anybody who gets on a camel more than once proves to the world he's a damned fool." He waited for his aide-de-camp to grunt laughter, then went on, "And the second one is that Colonel Ruggles and his regiment are perfectly able to handle the size of the trouble they've got in Cananea without me, and I don't want them thinking that I think they can't."

"Ah." Sellers nodded. "Yes, sir; that makes good sense."

The men grumbled as they headed back toward Cananea. Some of them had wives inEl Paso . Some had sweethearts. All of them, by now, had had a bellyful ofChihuahua andSonora . But, aside from that grumbling, without which they would hardly have been soldiers, they went where they were ordered.

When they came into Janos just before sundown, they found the town in an uproar. The camels of the Fifth Cavalry had gone through and past the town two or three hours earlier. A couple of companies of Confederate soldiers occupied the adobe fortress that was Janos' principal reason for being, and from which Mexican troops had withdrawn when Maximilian sold his northern provinces to the CSA. They were as indignant and almost as upset as everyone else in town; the Camelry had passed by so swiftly, the men of the garrison had hardly had the chance to learn why they were on the move.

"Something in Cananea, ain't it?" one of the Confederates asked as the force Stuart led got ready to camp for the night.

Bugles roused the soldiers well before dawn. Stuart drank cup after cup of strong black coffee, and was still yawning when he swung aboard his horse. His bones ached. He wondered if he was getting too old for much more campaigning. If he was, he wouldn't admit it, not even to himself—perhaps especially not to himself.

He and his troopers kept to a moderate pace on the road between Janos and Cananea, the road they were getting to know altogether too well. Not much water lay between the two towns, and pushing too hard would have killed horses even at this season of the year. Major Sellers remarked, "The Apaches aren't worth a single good cavalry horse, you ask me, and the same goes for the Mexicans."

"We wouldn't have had nearly so much fun up inNew MexicoTerritory if it hadn't been for the Apaches,"

Stuart remarked. Since Sellers could hardly disagree with that, he grunted and did his best to pretend he hadn't heard it.

Stuart waited to see if he would get more reports from Confederate troopers forced out of Cananea, but none came back to him. "Either they aren't coming," he said to Major Sellers, "or Colonel Ruggles is keeping them for himself. If I had to bet, I'd go the second way."

His aide-de-camp nodded. "I think so, too. He's ahead of us, so he needs to know worse than we do."

"Which doesn't mean we don't have to know at all," Stuart said fretfully.

A couple of hours later, a camel rider did come back to Stuart's force with news that fighting in and around Cananea still was going on, or still had been going on when the troopers who brought word to Colonel Rugglcs left the town. "By what everybody says, sir," the messenger reported, "they're going at it hammer and tongs." He paused to spit a stream of dark brown tobacco juice into the light brown dirt.

"Reckon they purely don't like each other."

Stuart got another short night and woke too soon to the blare of the horns. Walk, canter, trot—instead of the ambling pace they'd set on the way east, when they saw no need to hurry, his troopers used the alternating gaits that kept their horses freshest while eating up the ground. As morning passed into afternoon, he heard one of the men say to another, "I hope the damn camel boys kill all the lousy sons of bitches on both sides, so when we get there tomorrow we've got nothin' to do but spit on their graves."

Toward evening, a thick column of smoke rose in the west, silhouetted against the light sky there. The troopers cheered. "I expect that's the Camelry, cleaning up the fight," Horatio Sellers said.

"Hope you're right," Stuart said, and rolled himself in a blanket on his folding cot as soon as he had seen to his horse.

Sometime in the middle of the night, a sentry shook him awake. "Sorry to bother you, sir," the man said,

"but Colonel Ruggles just rode in."

That was plenty to make Stuart open his eyes. He pulled on his boots and ducked out of the tent.

Calhoun Ruggles stood by the embers of a campfire perhaps twenty feet away. "I saw the smoke, Colonel," Stuart said around a yawn. "Was that us, putting down Apaches and Mexicans alike?"

He expected Ruggles to nod, but the commander of the Fifth Confederate Cavalry shook his head. "No, sir. That was the damned Apaches, burning damn near all of Cananea to hell and gone just before we got there. Not much of the place left standing, and a hell of a lot of Mexicans dead."

"Jesus," Stuart said, yawning again. Ruggles joined him. He went on, "How in blazes did that happen?"

"In blazes is right," Colonel Ruggles answered. "A couple of the Mexicans who lived—Salazar the *alcalde* is one of 'em—says the Indians got hold of some kerosene some kind of way, and that clever one called Batsinas poured it in front of doors and such. Then they shot fire arrows into it, and the wind did the rest of the job for 'em."

"Jesus," Stuart said again. "I bet it was Batsinas' scheme, too." The Apache had been so eager to learn from the white man, and had figured out a way to use some of the white man's products to deadly effect, too. Stuart went on, "I hope you licked the redskins once you got to Cananea, anyway."

Glumly, Calhoun Ruggles shook his head again. "No, sir. Time we got there, they'd all hightailed it toward the mountains." Even more glumly, he pointed southwards. "I put men to chasing 'em, but they had a better than decent start on us—and they can move, too. I tell you, sir, they can really move, a hell of a lot faster than I ever thought they could. I reckon they're holed up in the Sierra Madre somewheres, and I'll be damned if I look forward to digging 'em out."

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Rain pattered down onSan Francisco . Having grown up and lived for much of his life in a place where rain was liable to fall any old time, Sam Clemens took it in stride. His wife, a native San Franciscan, did not approve. "It has no business doing this," she said. "It's nothing but a nuisance, especially on a day when you have to go to work."

"Not that big a nuisance," Clemens answered. "If there's one thing about your brother we can count on, it's that he has more than one umbrella. He may even be willing to let me borrow one, provided I post a bond not to stab anyone with it or use it as a swimming hole for sea gulls."

Sure enough, from an ugly ceramic vase in the front hall sprouted the handles of four or five umbrellas.

And, sure enough, Vernon Perkins did not complain about Sam's borrowing one—nor did he ask for the bond Sam had predicted. He was so glad to see his brother-in-law leave his house, he would help in any way he could.

Clemens strode carefully along wet sidewalks and picked his way through puddles in the streets. No matter how careful he was, his feet were wet by the time he got to the *Morning Call* offices. If he'd been a reporter, he wouldn't have been too proud to take off his shoes and put his stockinged feet close by the fire till they dried out. As an editor, he felt that beneath his dignity. That left him with dignity unimpaired and wet feet.

"Thank God for good coffee," he said, pulling the pot off the stove and filling a cup. "I never knew this horrible muddy slop *was* good coffee till my sister-in-law broadened my horizons. Bath water with cream is what she makes." He sipped and nodded. "This, now, this'll grow hair on a man's chest—maybe even on my brother-in-law's. If it weren't that Vern's daughters look like him, poor things, I'd say he was the likeliest man in this town to make his next position harem guard for the Turkish sultan." His voice rose to a screechy falsetto.

"For some reason or other, Sam, I get the feeling you don't *like* your brother-in-law," Clay Herndon drawled. "Why on earth is that?"

"Why on earth is which?" Clemens asked. "Why do you get that feeling, or why don't I like the whey-faced, self-righteous, prissy, tight-fisted little horse's ass? I swear to Jesus, Clay, if brains were stream pressure, he couldn't blow his own nose."

"I'll bet he loves you, too," Herndon said, laughing.

"Doesn't everyone?" Sam said blandly, which made Herndon and all the other newspapermen in earshot laugh even louder. Sam took another sip of snarling coffee, then asked, "Has anyone got a Christmas present for me?"

"More sandpaper to keep your tongue sharp, maybe?" Herndon suggested.

"And it's coal in the stocking for the distinguished correspondent of the *Morning Call,"* Clemens said, at which Herndon made as if to throw his cup at the editor. Sam went on, "What I'd really like is something closer to peace than this miserable cease-fire we've been enduring. Sooner or later, the CSA will get tired of it, orEngland will, and then some poor town on the border will catch hell—or maybe catch hell again, depending."

Edgar Leary spoke up: "If you look at things the right way,San Francisco is a town on the border."

"No, Edgar," Sam said gently. "If you look at things the *wrong* way,San Francisco is a town on the border. That's what worries me more than anything else: I can see some British admiral down in the Sandwich Islands making sure his fleet has enough coal to get from yon to hither, so he can leave a calling card in President Blame's—uh, Blaine's—front hall, just to remind him that England doesn't care to leave her business lying around unfinished."

"Trouble is, the calling card would be aimed atBlaine , but it would land on us," Clay Herndon said.

"That's what war is about," Clemens agreed. "The people on top are stupid—you have to be stupid, to want to be on top—so you have to kill a lot of ordinary folks before you get their notice. Till you've done that, they keep on the way they always have. Why not? They aren't the ones who are bleeding."

He finished the coffee, poured more into the cup—not quite so much this time, to leave room in case he felt like fortifying it from the whiskey bottle in his desk drawer—and carried it away to get some work done. Edgar Leary followed him. He didn't look on that as a good sign; Leary sometimes put him in mind of a puppy slobbering on his shoes—which, he thought, were damp enough already. Hoping to forestall the young reporter, he made a production out of getting one

of his nasty cigars going.

Leary showed no signs of disappearing, not even when Sam (close enough to accidentally, he could say it was and sound as if he meant it) blew smoke in his face. Sighing, Clemens gave up and asked, "Well, what have you got for me today, Edgar?"

"Sir, you remember how you told me to nose around and see what I could come up with about where the rebuilding money here was going?" the youngster asked.

"Oh, yes, I remember that," Clemens agreed. It's kept you out of my hair for weeks. I'd hoped for longer, but this isn 't bad.

"I've found a few interesting things," Leary said. "May I show them to you? I hope you're not too busy."

Sam's desk was disappointingly uncluttered. If he claimed excessive work, he'd make himself a liar so blatant, even Leary could see right through him. "Yes, show me what you've got, Edgar," he said, doing his best to sound enthusiastic about whatever trivial nonsense the cub would lay before him.

Beaming, Leary hurried away. He unlocked a drawer in his desk, took from it a fat manila envelope, and hurried back to Clemens, who manfully suppressed a groan: if Leary was going to show him nonsense, why did there have to be so blasted much of it? The young reporter pulled a stack of papers about half an inch thick from the envelope. "Here you are," he said. "Why don't you start with these? They'll give you a general idea of what I've dug up. I've arranged them chronologically, so you can start at the beginning and work right through."

"Thanks," Sam said tightly. He started flipping sheets of paper. The first few were invoices: construction firms billing their patrons for amounts that didn't seem too far out of line, considering how urgent all the repairs were and how far a lot of things had to be freighted toSan Francisco . Sam was about to start asking rude and pointed questions when the invoices gave way to letters. With an editor's eye, he first noted the bad grammar in the topmost one. Then he saw it was about sharing the profits on a substandard piece of construction. Once he'd spotted that, his eyes flew down to the signature. They widened.

"My God!" he breathed. "Crocker is one of Sutro's right-hand men." He shook his head. "No, that's not right. Sutro is a finger or two on

Crocker's right hand." He looked up at Edgar Leary. "Where in blazes did you come up with this?"

"Which one are you talking about?" Leary looked over his shoulder. "Oh, that. That's not even a good one." He waved his hand in disparaging fashion. "Why don't you keep going a little longer?"

"I don't know. Why don't I?" Sam murmured. Keep going he did, now with interest kindled. By the time he was halfway through the stack of papers, he kept pausing every so often to stare at Leary. When he was all the way through, he let out a long, shrill whistle. "You realize what you've got here means the penitentiary for about half the city government ofSan Francisco ?"

"Only if the other half has the best lawyers in the country," Leary answered, and patted the manila envelope. "There's still a lot in here you haven't seen, don't forget. The only thing missing"—he looked disappointed—"is anything directly tying His Honor to the graft."

"It doesn't matter," Clemens answered. "I never thought I'd say that, but it's true. It doesn't matter. The only question left about our magnificent Mayor Sutro is whether he'll poll even fewer votes inSan Francisco in his next election thanBlaine will in his. I wouldn't have figured such a prodigy possible, but now I see I may be wrong."

"Oh, I don't know," Leary answered. "If all the building-firm bosses and all their labourers vote for Sutro, he's liable to be re-elected."

Sam shuddered. "That's a horrible thought, Edgar." He paused to light another cigar, then pointed at Leary with it. "1 want you to write this all up for me. I think you've got a week's worth of stories here, and every one of them on the front page—hell, every one of them the lead story of the day, unless we get a peace or go back to war or Blaine drops dead or does something else useful. All under your byline, of course."

Leary's eyes glowed. "Thanks," he whispered. He might be young, but he wasn't a cub any more, or he wouldn't be after these stories ran. He'd just put his name on the map in big letters.

"You've earned it," Clemens answered. He could think of editors who would have taken Leary's work and written their own stories from it. He knew what he thought of those editors, too. "Now—before you go and write it up, where in heaven's name did you get your hands on all these papers?"

Edgar Leary's face tightened. Clemens knew what that meant. Sure enough, the youngster said, "From people who don't want their names in the newspaper. When you look at what they've passed to me, can you blame them?"

"Edgar, after this business breaks, you're going to wonder why you ever wanted *your* name in the newspaper." Sam held up a hand to show Leary he wasn't through. "I mean it. These stories will yank the tails of some of the richest, most important people inSan Francisco . They'll come gunning for you, and that's liable not to be a figure of speech."

"If the Royal Marines couldn't get me, I don't reckon the nobs on Nob Hill are up to the job, either,"

Leary said.

"Ah, the blithe confidence of youth," Sam murmured. It was the same sort of confidence that made soldiers charge enemy lines, sure the bullets would miss them. Youth also had another type of confidence, though. "You're certain—absolutely certain—all your toys here are the genuine article?"

"Could anybody put together a sheaf that thick just to set us up for a fall?" Leary demanded.

"I wouldn't think so, but I was surprised the day I found out babies didn't come from the cabbage patch, too," Clemens said.

Leary blushed bright pink. He said, "Besides, I've compared the handwriting on some of these papers to ones I know are genuine, and I haven't seen a one that doesn't match."

"Now you're talking!" Sam exclaimed. "That's what I wanted to hear from you. One day a year from now, a lot of rich men's lawyers are going to call you every sort of liar in the book, and they'll stick in a few new pages and draw your face on every one of 'em. Radicals hire bomb-throwing maniacs. Rich men hire lawyers. They're more expensive, but they ought to be, because they do more damage."

"Does that make you a Socialist, then?" Leary asked, his voice sly. "Are you going to follow Abe Lincoln under the red flag?"

"Edgar, if you'll recollect, I didn't follow Abe Lincoln twenty years ago." For the first time since his brief affiliation with the Marion Rangers landed him in hot water, Sam spoke of it without self-

consciousness.

"I haven't seen any reason to change my mind since. Bomb-throwing maniacs aren't *good* for a country, for heaven's sake— they're not as bad as lawyers, that's all. And talk about damning with faint praise; it's about like saying prettier than camels or wetter than theSahara or more interesting than my wife's brother."

Still sly, Leary asked, "And what would he say about you?"

"I haven't the foggiest notion," Clemens answered. "I always nod off before I get the chance to find out."

Leary laughed. "Think I'm joking, do you?" Sam said severely. "Only shows you've never met dear Vern—or maybe just that you don't remember it. Here." He handed the papers back to the young reporter. "Get to work. Don't waste another minute. You've got a whole city government waiting to be embarrassed."

Leary went back to his own desk and began to write. Sam rose, stretched, and walked to the doorway.

It was still raining, the sky gray as cement. "What a beautiful day." he said.

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A church bell in the town ofFortBenton solemnly intoned the hour. A moment later, a much smaller clock in the office of Colonel Henry Welton also began to chime. Theodore Roosevelt counted with it: ". . . ten, eleven, twelve." He looked around the office in blurry surprise. "Midnight already. Doesn't— *hie!* —seem like midnight. Merry Christmas to you, Colonel."

"And a merry Christmas to you, Colonel." Henry Welton's voice wasn't so clear as it might have been, either. The bottle on the desk between the two men was nearly full. It was not, however, the bottle with which they had begun the evening. Welton poured whiskey first into his glass, then intoRoosevelt 's. "And what shall we drink to now?"

Rooseveltanswered without hesitation: "To the true hero of the battle by the Teton!" He drank. The whiskey hardly burned as it slid down his gullet. He'd had a lot already.

Welton drank, too. "You're kind to an old man," he said. "The reporters

don't reckon you're right. The War Department doesn't reckon you're right. And you're just a damned officer of Volunteers, the nearest thing to an honorary colonel as makes no difference. So what the devil do you know? What the devil can you know?"

"I know that if you hadn't posted those Gatling guns in the front trench line, General Gordon's men probably would have overrun the position,"Roosevelt answered. "I know that General Custer tried his damnedest to talk you into moving them, and you wouldn't do it. I know that Custer's taken all the credit for winning the battle, and left you not a crumb."

"No, Custer hasn't got all the credit," Welton said. "You've managed to lay your hands on a good-sized chunk yourself. And do you know what, Colonel? I don't think Brigadier General Custer likes that for hell. And do you know what else? I don't give a copper-plated damn what Brigadier General Custer likes or doesn't like." He sipped more whiskey.

"You've known him a long time,"Roosevelt said, to which Welton nodded without saying anything.Roosevelt took another drink, too. As if to be fair, he said, "He is a brave man."

"I've seen very few braver," Welton agreed. "But I'll tell you something else, too: I've seen very few who love themselves more, or who work harder to make sure other people love them. There's an old saying that if you don't toot your own horn, nobody will toot it for you. Custer's got himself bigger cheeks than a chipmunk coming out of a corncrib."

Rooseveltwould have found that funny had he been sober. Drunk, he laughed till the tears rolled down his own cheeks. "I'll miss you, Colonel, by God I will," he said with the deep sentiment of the whiskey bottle. "They can't hold off much longer on releasing the Unauthorized Regiment from service, and then I go back to being a rancher outside ofHelena ."

Welton yawned against the hour and the liquor. "Won't be the same, will it, Teddy?" He'd never before calledRoosevelt that. "You're not only an old man of twenty-three now, you're a real live hero to boot."

"I'm—I'm—"Roosevelt yawned, too. Suddenly, figuring out what he was seemed like too much trouble.

"I'm going to bed, Colonel."

"Good night," Welton said vaguely. By the look of things, he was going

to fall asleep where he sat.Roosevelt rose and went outside. It had snowed the day before; the cold slappedRoosevelt in the face, sobering him a little. No snow now—the night was brilliantly clear.

The moon had set a couple of hours before. Jupiter and Saturn shone in the southwest; Mars was brilliant, and red as blood, high in the south.

Slowly, methodically,Roosevelt made his way out to the gate. The camp of the Unauthorized Regiment was only a few yards away. "Here's the old man back," his own sentries called, one to another. He found his tent, wrapped himself in a blanket and a buffalo robe, and either passed out or fell asleep very, very quickly.

Come morning, his head pounded like a locomotive going up a steep grade. The dazzle of sun off snow only made him hurt worse. Every one of his soldiers who spotted him greeted him with "Merry Christmas. Colonel!"—greeted him loudly and piercingly, or so he thought in his fragile state. He had to answer the men, too, which meant he had to listen to his own voice. It sounded as loud and unpleasant as anyone else's.

After a breakfast of coffee, two raw eggs, and half a tumbler of brandy begged from the regimental physician on the grounds that easing a hangover was surely a medicinal use for the stuff, he felt like a human being, although perhaps one whose parts were not perfectly interchangeable. A cigar helped steady him further. He smoked it down to a tiny butt, flipped that into the snow, lighted another, and headed into town.

The saloons were open. As far as he could tell, the saloons inFortBenton never closed. Somebody was playing a piano, not very well, in the first one past which he walked. Several people were singing. The words had nothing to do with the holiday season. Even so, the saloon boasted a Christmas tree, with candles gaily burning on all the branches and a red glass star at the top. Why the tree didn't catch fire and burn down the saloon and half the town was beyond him, but it didn't.

Two doors down stood another saloon, also tricked out with a Christmas tree full of candles. Inside, people were singing carols in the same loud, drunken tones the folks in the first place had used for their bawdy song. Would God be happy to hear carols sung like that? Roosevelt chewed on the question as he made his way toward church.

Before he got to the white clapboard building, a man came out, spotted him, and extended a forefinger in his direction. "Colonel Roosevelt!" the fellow called. "Merry Christmas! May I speak with you for a moment?"

"And a merry Christmas to you, Zeke,"Roosevelt replied. ZekePreston wasn't the preacher. He was a reporter. Most of the men who had swarmed intoMontanaTerritory to cover the British invasion were gone now. Of the handful still inFortBenton ,Preston was probably the best. Not only that, a lot of papers back inNew YorkState printed what he wrote. ThusRoosevelt knew it behooved him to stay on the reporter's good side. "What can I do for you today?"

Prestoncame down the steps and kicked his way through the snow. "Can I trouble you with a couple of questions before you go in?" He was a lean man in his thirties who wore a walrus mustache that didn't go with his pale, narrow face;Roosevelt wondered if he was consumptive.

"Go ahead,"Roosevelt said. "You've caught me fair and square."

"Good." The reporter reached into an overcoat pocket and drew out a notebook and pencil. "Lucky I don't have a pen," he remarked. "Weather like this, the ink'd freeze solid asBlaine 's head." He waited forRoosevelt 's chuckle, then said, "The more time passes after the battle by the Teton, the more credit General Custer takes for himself. What do you think of that?"

He'd told Colonel Henry Welton exactly what he thought of it. Welton was his friend. He knew reporters well enough to know they had their own axes to grind. "He was the overall commander, Zeke.

If we'd lost, who would have ended up with the blame?"

"He says your men fought well—for Volunteers." Sure as hell,Preston was trying to goad him into saying something that would make a lively story.

"It's Christmas. I'm not going to pick a quarrel on Christmas." ButRoosevelt couldn't quite leave that one alone. "I will say that the Unauthorized Regiment was the force running Gordon and his men back towardCanada when word of the cease-fire reached us and made us hold in place."

Prestonscribbled, coughed, scribbled again. "What's your opinion of Gatling guns, Colonel?"

Roosevelthad been over that one with Henry Welton, too. For the reporter, he put on a toothy grin and answered, "My opinion is that I would much rather be behind them than in front of them. If you ask General Gordon, I expect you will find his opinion the same."

"I've heard some argument about how those guns should have been positioned," Preston remarked after an appreciative chuckle atRoosevelt 's comment. "Where do you stand on that?"

"They did well where they were,"Roosevelt said. "I saw no point to moving them from the front line—and they were not moved, if you'll recall. General Custer was persuaded they belonged there."

He waited for Zeke Preston to ask him about that persuading. Maybe, belatedly, Colonel Welton wouldn't be an unsung hero after all. ButPreston flipped the notebook shut and stuck it and the pencil back in his pocket. "Thanks very much, Colonel. I won't bother you any more, not today I won't. Merry Christmas to you." Off he went, breath smoking in the chilly air.

Rooseveltsighed and went up into the church. It was Methodist, which would have to do; that faith certainly came closer to his own than the one preached in the two Catholic churches FortBenton also boasted. When he walked in, the congregation was singing "Away in the Manger," a good deal more tunefully than the same carol would have been managed in the saloon.

He added his own booming baritone to the song. His voice, his uniform, and his upright carriage drew the notice of the folk who crowded the little church, almost all of them in their holiday best.Roosevelt gave notice as well as drawing it; some of the women were worth noticing. A blonde in a deep blue princess dress with a satin jabot and laced, pleated cuffs—it would have been the height of style inNew York City five years earlier—caught his eye and held it.

When he'd had enough of caroling—and more than enough of the prune-faced Methodist preacher—he made his way toward the door. The pretty young woman contrived to leave the church at the same time.

They walked down the narrow stairway side by side. She smelled of rosewater.

"Merry Christmas to you, miss,"Roosevelt said when they were down on the tracked, snowy ground once more.

"The same to you, Colonel." She kept walking along beside him. His hopes rose. In a casual tone of voice, she went on, "If you care for some mince pie, I baked one yesterday. I'd be days and days eating it all by my lonesome."

"Why, that's very kind of you—very kind of you indeed." He smiled. "If your family won't mind sharing, I'd be delighted."

"I am a widow," she answered.

Sometimes that was a euphemism for a streetwalker. Sometimes it wasn't. If she was a woman of easy virtue, she was cleaner and, by all appearances, better-natured than most of her fallen sisters. "Mince pie, then,"Roosevelt said—and if she felt like giving him more than mince pie, that would be fine, too.

She lived in a tiny, astringently neat cabin next door to a saloon— not that anything inFortBenton was far from a saloon. Sure enough, a mince pie sat on the table. She cutRoosevelt a slice. It was good. He said so, loudly, adding, "Thank you for making a soldier far from home happy."

"How happy would you like to be?" she asked, and walked around the table and sat down on his lap.

The bed was close to the stove. Everything in the cabin was close to the stove, which helped keep the place tolerably warm. Roosevelt had had a couple of other women throw themselves at him since he rode down to Fort Benton a hero, or as much of a hero as this hash of a war offered. The experience had been both new and delightful. He wasn't sure whether this was another hero's reward or a business transaction. As he fumbled with the buttons of his trousers, he resolved to worry about it later.

"Oh," she said when, presently, he went into her. She was quiet after that, working intently beneath him, till she stiffened again and quivered and cried out, "Oh, Joe! Oh, God, Joe!" He didn't think she knew what she was saying; he hardly knew what she was saying himself then. His own ecstasy came less than a minute later. Afterwards, he decided she probably was a widow after all.

Being twenty-three, he would have been ready for a second round in short order, but she got off the bed and started dressing again, so he did, too. He was left with a puzzling problem in etiquette after that. If she was a streetwalker as well as a widow, he'd anger her if he didn't

offer to pay. If she wasn't, he'd offend her if he did.

He stood irresolute, a rare posture for him. Without answering the question behind it, she solved the problem for him: "Merry Christmas, Colonel Roosevelt."

"Thank you very much," he said, and kissed her. "I don't think I've ever had a nicer present, or one more charmingly wrapped." She smiled at that. He opened the door, and grunted at the cold outside. He'd gone several steps back toward the Unauthorized Regiment's encampment before he realized he'd never learned her name.

Chapter19

The clock in Frederick Douglass' parlor chimed twelve. AlloverRochester , clocks were striking twelve.

Douglass raised a glass of wine to his wife and son. "Happy New Year," he said solemnly.

"Happy New Year, Frederick," Anna Douglass said, and drank. "When I was young, I never reckoned I'd live to see such a big number as 1882."

"May you see many more new years, Mother," Lewis Douglass said.

"You're not drinking, son." Frederick Douglass had emptied his own glass, and was reaching for the decanter to refill it.

"No, I'm not," Lewis said, "for the year ahead looks none too happy to me."

"Compare it to the year just past," Douglass said. "When seen from that perspective, how can it fail of being a happy year?"

Lewis gravely considered that. He showed the result of the consideration not by words but by downing the wine in front of him in a couple of quick gulps. When Douglass held out the decanter, he poured his glass full again, too. "Compared to the year just past, any year save perhaps 1862 would seem happy."

Anna cocked her head to one side, listening to bells ringing un-constrainedly and to firecrackers and pistols and rifles going off in the street, some quite close by. "It don't sound the way it ought to," she said.

"It doesn't, does it?" Douglass said. "Something's missing."

Lewis supplied the deficiency: "No cannon this year. No cannon, by order of the mayor and the governor and whichever soldier makes the most noise around these parts. They all fear the British gunboats out on the lake will mistake the celebration for an attack on themselves and use it as a pretext for bombarding the city. A happy new year indeed, is it not?"

"They might do it, too," Douglass said gloomily. "They might enjoy doing it, the better to coerce the president into yielding to their

demands."

"He might as well," Anna said. "Things ain't gwine get no better on account of he don't. They done licked us, so they gets to tell us what to do."

Anna's grammar was not all it should have been. That did not make what she said any less true. Lewis must have thought as much, for he said, "Mother, we ought to send you toWashington , because you sec these things a lot more plainly than President Blaine is able to."

"WhatBlaine can see and what he can do are liable to be two different propositions," Douglass said, regretting every word of defense he spent on the man who had had the best chance since the presidency of Abraham Lincoln to do something about the Confederate States—had it and squandered it. "He's made his bed, and now—"

"And now the whole country has to lie in it," Lewis broke in. He reached for the wine decanter once more, then yanked his hand away. Bitterness filled his voice as he went on, "I'd get drunk, but what's the use? Things wouldn't be any better when I sobered up again."

"Well, I don't aim to get myself drunk any which way," Anna Douglass said. "It's a sinful thing to go and do. What I aim to do is go to bed." She struggled to her feet. "Frederick, you'll help me up the stairs."

"Of course I will, my dear." Douglass rose, too. His body still responded readily to his will. He helped his wife up to the bedroom, helped her out of her dress and corset, and made sure she was comfortable before he went back down to talk with his son a while longer.

Lewis was taking short, quick, furious puffs on a cigar when Frederick Douglass came back to the parlor. "What's the use, Father?" he asked as Douglass sat down once more. "What in God's name is the use? Why don't we all pack up and move toLiberia ? We might accomplish something there."

"You may, if you like," Douglass answered evenly. "I've thought about it once or twice—maybe more than once or twice." His son stared at him. He nodded, his face grave. "Oh, yes, I've thought about it.

InLiberia , the pond is so small as to make me—or you, should you ever choose to go—a very large fish indeed, which cannot help but feed a man's pride. But if I left, I should be giving up the fight here, and as much as proving the Confederates right when they say the

black man cannot compete equally against the white. Every column I write here shows the CSA to be founded on a lie. How could I do the same inAfrica ?"

Lewis did not answer right away. He took the cigar from his mouth and sat for some time staring at the glowing coal. Then, savagely, he stubbed out the cigar. "Well, you're right," he said. "I wish to heaven you weren't, but you are." He got up and clapped Douglass on the shoulder. "Happy New Year, Father.

You were right about that, too. Set next to the one we've escaped, the year ahead can't be so bad. Good night. You needn't get up—rest easy."

Douglass rested easy. He heard his son take his overcoat off the tree in the front hall, put it on, open the door, and close it after him. Bells on the carriage jingled as Lewis drove home. Douglass looked at the decanter of wine. Like a voyage toLiberia , it tempted him. But, ever since his escape from slavery, he had seldom run away, and he had never been a man who drank alone. Picking up the cut-glass stopper, he set it in its place. Then, with a grunt, he rose once more and went off to bed. He listened to clocks striking one. He expected he would also listen to them striking two, but drifted off before they did.

Other than having a new calendar, 1882 seemed little different from the vanished 1881. Warships flying the Union Jack remained outsideRochester harbor, as they did outside otherU.S. harbors along theGreat Lakes . No warships flying the Stars and Stripes came out to challenge them. That sprang in part from the cease-fire, but only in part. The rest was that the U.S. Navy'sGreat Lakes flotilla was incapable of challenging its British counterpart.

One day in the middle of January, the War Department announced that the troops of the Army of theOhio were returning toU.S. soil. By the way the announcement sounded, no one would have guessed it meant the U.S. Army was abandoning the last foothold it held inKentucky . The telegram made the move sound like a triumph.

"Look at this!" Douglass waved the announcement in his son's face. *"Look* at this. How many dead men inLouisville ? *They* won't be coming back toIndiana . And for what did they die? For what, I ask you?"

"For President Blaine's ambition," Lewis answered. "Nothing else." The abject failure of theU.S. war effort had left him even more estranged

from and cynical about the society in which he lived than he had been before the fighting started.

But Douglass shook his head. "The cause for which we fought was noble," he insisted, as he had insisted all along. "The power of the Confederate States should have been kept from growing. The tragedy was not that we fought, but that we fought while so manifestly unprepared to fight hard.Blaine gets some of the blame for that, but the Democrats who kept us so weak for so long must share it with him. If we are to have a return engagement with the Confederacy, we must be more ready in all respects. I see no other remedy."

"I never thought I'd live to see the day when you and Ben Butler were proposing the same cure for our disease," Lewis said. "The Democrats like him, too."

That brought Douglass up short.Butler had no more kept silent about the proposals he had made in the meeting at the Florence Hotel outsideChicago than Abraham Lincoln had about his. Both men were stirring up turmoil all through the battered country, and each one's followers violently opposed the other's.

AsLincoln had joined with the Socialists, soButler was indeed drifting back toward the Democrats, from whose ranks he had deserted during the War of Secession.

Reluctantly, Douglass said, "An idea may be a good one no matter who propounds it."

"Nero fiddled whileRome burned," Lewis retorted. "You temporize while the Republican Party goes up in flames."

"I am not temporizing," Douglass said with dignity. "I have done all I could to hold the party together. I am still doing all I can. It may not suffice—I am only one man. But 1 am doing my best."

"You'd have a better chance if your skin were white," Lewis said. Douglass stared at him. Negroes in theU.S. seldom spoke so openly of the handicap they suffered by being black. Lewis glared back in furious defiance. "It's true, and you damn well know it's true."

But Douglass shook his head. "Not for me. Had I been born white—had 1 been born *all* white"—he corrected himself, to remind his son they both had white blood in their veins—"I suspect I would have drifted into some easy, profitable trade, never giving a second thought, or even a first, to politics. Being the color I am, I have been

compelled to face concerns I should otherwise have ignored. It has not been an easy road, but I am a better man for it."

"I do not have your detachment, Father, nor, frankly, do I want it," Lewis said. "I wish you a good morning." He departed Douglass' home without much ceremony and with a good deal of anger.

Douglass had to go out himself a couple of days later, when his wife developed a nasty cough. The new cough syrups, infused with the juice of the opium poppy, really could stop the hacking and barking that seemed such a characteristic sound of winter. Thanking heaven for modern medicine, Douglass bundled himself up and trudged off to the nearest drugstore, a few blocks away.

He thanked heaven for the day, too. As January days inRochester went, it was good enough—better than good enough. It was bright and clear and, he guessed, a little above freezing. Not too much snow lay on the ground. Even so, he planted his feet with care; the sidewalks had their share of icy patches.

"Half a dollar," the druggist said, setting on the counter a glass bottle with the label in typography so rococo as to be almost unreadable. His voice was polite and suspicious at the same time. Douglass'

fur-collared overcoat argued that he had the money to pay for the medicine. His being a Negro argued, to far too many white men, that he was likely to be shiftless and liable to be a thief.

He reached into his pocket and found a couple of quarters, which he set beside the bottle of cough elixir.

Only after the druggist had scooped the coins into the cash box did his other hand come off the bottle.

That care made Douglass want to laugh. He was stout, black, and well past sixty. Even if he did abscond with the medicine, how could he possibly hope to get more than a couple of blocks without being recognized or, more likely, tackled with no ceremony whatever?

He was carrying the bottle of cough syrup out of the store when three middle-aged white men started to come in. He stood aside to let them use the narrow doorway ahead of him. Instead of going on past, though, the fellow in the lead stopped, rocked back on his heels, and looked at him with an expression of mingled contempt and insult.

"Well, looky here, Jim. Looky here, Bill," he drawled. "Ain't this a fine buck nigger we got?" His friends laughed at what they and he thought to be wit.

Douglass stiffened. "If you gentlemen will excuse me—" he said, his voice chillier than the weather outside.

"Listen to him, Josh," either Jim or Bill exclaimed. "Talks just like a white man, he does. Probably got a white man inside him, that he ate up for breakfast." All three of them found that a very funny sally, too.

"If you gentlemen will excuse me—" Douglass repeated, bottling up the fury he felt. He took a step forward. More often than not, his sheer physical presence was enough to let him ease through confrontations like this.

It didn't work today. Instead of giving way before him, the white man in the lead—Josh—deliberately blocked his path. "No, we don't excuse you, Sambo," he said, and looked back over his shoulder. "Do we, boys?"

"No," one of Jim and Bill said, while the other was saying, "Hell, no."

Josh stuck a ringer in Douglass' face. "And do you know why we don't excuse you, boy? I don't excuse you because it's all your goddamn fault."

"I have no idea what you arc talking about," Douglass said, now alarmed as well as furious. This sort of thing hadn't happened to him inRochester for many years. He knew too well how ugly it could get, and how fast it could get that way. Carefully, he said, "I do not know what you believe to be my fault, but I do know I have never set eyes on any of you before in my life." *And, if God be kind, 1 shall never see you again.*

"Not you, you—you niggers," Josh said. "Hadn't been for you niggers, this here'd still be one country.

We wouldn't have fought two wars against the lousy Rebels, and they wouldn't have licked us twice, neither."

"Yeah," said Jim or Bill.

"That's right," Bill or Jim agreed.

They weren't drunk. Douglass took some small comfort in that. It

might make them a little less likely to pound him into the boards of the floor. He said, "Black men did not ask to be brought to these shores, nor did we come willingly. The difficulty lies not in our being here but in the way we have been used. I myself bear on my back the scars of the overseer's lash."

"Ooh, don't he talk fancy," one of the men behind Josh said.

"Reckon that's why the overseer whupped him," Josh replied, which was a disturbingly accurate guess.

He didn't attack, he didn't make a fist, but he didn't get out of Douglass' way, either. "Ought to all go back toAfrica , every stinking one of you. Then we'd set things to rights here."

"No." Now Douglass let his anger show. "For better and for worse, I am an American, too—every bit as much as you. This is my country, as it is yours."

"Liar!" Josh shouted. His friends echoed him. Now he did fold his hand into a fist. Had the bottle Douglass held been thicker, he would have used it to add strength to his own blow. As things were, he feared it would break and cut his palms and fingers. He got ready to throw it in Josh's face instead.

From behind him came a short, sharp click. It was not a loud noise, but it was one to command immediate, complete, and respectful attention from Douglass and from the three white men of whom he'd fallen foul. Very slowly, Douglass turned his head and peered over his shoulder. The druggist's right hand held a revolver, the hammer cocked and ready to fall.

"That's enough, you men," he said sharply. "I've got no great use for niggers myself, but this fellow wasn't doing you any harm. Let him alone, and get the hell out of here while you're at it."

Josh and Jim and Bill tumbled over one another leaving the drugstore. The druggist carefully uncocked the pistol and set it down out of sight. Frederick Douglass inclined his head. "I thank you very much indeed, sir."

"Didn't do it for you so much as to keep the place from getting torn up," the druggist replied in matter-of-fact tones. "Like I said, I don't much care for niggers, especially niggers like you that put on airs, but that ain't the same as saying you deserved a licking when you hadn't done anything to deserve one. Now take your cough elixir and go on

home."

"I'll do that," Douglass said. "A man who, for whatever reason, will not let another be beaten unjustly has in himself the seeds of justice." He tipped his hat and walked out of the store.

Once on the sidewalk, he looked around warily to see whether the white ruffians might want another try at him. But they were nowhere around. They must have had enough. His sigh of relief put a fair-sized frosty cloud in the air.

When he got home, Anna was sitting in the parlor, coughing like a consumptive. "Hold on, my dear," he said. "A tablespoon of this will bring relief."

"Fetch me a glass o' water with it, on account of it's gwine taste nasty," she answered. She sighed when he brought the medicine and the water. "I ain't been out of the house in a good while now. Anything much interestin' happen while you was at the drugstore?"

Douglass gravely considered that. After a moment, he shook his head. "No," he said. "Nothing much."

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Snow blew into Friedrich Sorge's face. As it had a way of doing inChicago , the wind howled. Sorge clutched at his hat. The Socialist newspaperman had an exalted expression on his face. Turning to Abraham Lincoln, he shouted, "Will you look at the size of this crowd? Have you ever in all your life seen anything like it?"

"Why, yes, a great many times, as a matter of fact,"Lincoln answered, and hid a smile when Sorge looked dumbfounded. He set a gloved hand on his new ally's shoulder. "You have to remember, my friend, that you have been in politics as an agitator, a gadfly. From now on, we will be playing the game to win, which is a different proposition altogether."

"Yes." Sorge still sounded dazed. "I see that. I knew our joining would bring new strength to the movement, but I must say I did not imagine it would bring so much." He laughed. The wind did its best to blow the laughter away. "Until now, I did not imagine how weak we were, nor how strong we might become. It is ... amazing. Not since I left the old country have I been part of anything to compare to this— and in

the old country, we were put down with guns."

Lincolnhad different standards of comparison. To him, it was just another political rally, and not a particularly large one at that. Muffled against the cold and the wind, men and women trudged south alongCottage Grove Avenue towardWashingtonPark . Considering the weather, it wasn't a bad crowd at all. It was also, without a doubt, the most energetic crowdLincoln had seen since the War of Secession.

Red flags whipped in the wind. It had already torn some of them into streamers. Men had to wrestle to keep the signs they held from flying away,JUSTICE FOR THE WORKING MAN,some said,TAX

CAPITALISTS' INCOME,others urged,REVOLUTION IS A RIGHT,still others warned.

Some of the people on the sidewalks cheered as the marchers walked past. Others hurried along, intent on their own business or on finding someplace to get out of the cold. Policemen in overcoats of military blue were out in force. They had clubs in their hands and pistols on their belts. If peaceable protest turned to uprising—or, perhaps, if the police thought it might, this gathering too could be put down with guns.

Trees inWashingtonPark were skeletally bare. What little grass snow did not cover was yellow and dead. It was as bleak and forbidding a place asLincoln could imagine. But it also struck him as the perfect place to hold a rally for the new fusion of the Socialists and his wing of the Republican Party.

"In the summer, you know, and when the weather is fine, the rich promenade through here, showing off their fancy carriages and matched teams and expensive clothes," he said to Friedrich Sorge.

Sorge nodded. "Yes, I have seen this." He scowled. "It is not enough for them that they have. They must be seen to have. Their fellow plutocrats must know they, too, are part of the elite, and the proletariat must be reminded that they are too rich and powerful to be trifled with."

"Thanks to their money, they think it is summer in theUnited States the year around,"Lincoln said. "To the people coming intoWashingtonPark now, blizzards blow in January and July alike."

"This is true," Sorge agreed emphatically. He hesitated. "It is also very well said, though with my English imperfect you will not, perhaps,

find in this much praise. But I think you have in yourself the makings of a poet."

"Interesting you should say so,"Lincoln replied. "I tried verse a few times, many years ago—half a lifetime ago, now that I think about it. I don't reckon the results were altogether unfortunate, at least the best of them, but they were not of the quality to which I aspired, and so I gave up the effort and turned back to politics and the law, which better suited my bent."

"You may have given up too soon," Sorge said. "Even more than other kinds of writing, poetry repays steady effort."

"Even if you are right, as you may well be, far too many years have passed for it to matter now,"Lincoln said. "If, by lucky chance, some phrase in a speech or in an article should strike the ear or mind as happily phrased, maybe it is the poet, still struggling after so long to break free."

More miserably cold-looking policemen directed the throng to an open area in front of a wooden platform from which more red banners flew. The wind was methodically ripping them to shreds. "Say your say and then go home," a policeman toldLincoln . The former president judged that likelier to be a plea from the heart than a political statement; the fellow's teeth were chattering so loudly, he was hard to understand.

Friedrich Sorgc said, "Not too hard, is it, to know which of our followers came from your camp and which from mine?"

"No, not hard,"Lincoln said. The difference interested him and amused Sorge. About four out of five people in the crowd obeyed without question the police who herded them where they were supposed to go. The fifth, the odd man out, called theChicago policemen every name in the book, sometimes angrily, sometimes with a jaunty air that said it was all a game. The fifth man, the odd man, was far more likely to be carrying a red flag than the other four.

"Some people, Lincoln, you see, truly do believe in the revolution of the proletariat," Sorge said.

"I do recollect that, believe me,"Lincoln answered. "What *you* have to remember is that some people don't. Looking over the crowd here, I'd judge that most of the people in it don't. What we have to do to build this party is to make the people who don't believe in revolution want to join so they can reform the country, and at the same time keep the ones who are revolutionaries in the fold."

Sorge's mouth puckered as if he'd bitten into an unripe persimmon. "You are saying—you have been saying since we first spoke— that we must water down the doctrines of the party the way a dishonest distiller will water down the whiskey he sells."

"Look at the crowd we have here today,"Lincoln said patiently. "With a crowd like this, we can make the bosses think twice before they throw workers out in the streets or cut their pay. With a crowd like this, we can elect men who see things our way. Wouldn't you like to see a dozen, or two dozen, Socialist congressmen on the train forWashington after the elections this fall?"

"I do not know," Sorge said. "I truly do not know. If they call themselves Socialists but hold positions that are not Socialist positions —"

"If they're not pure enough to satisfy you, you mean,"Lincoln said, and Sorge nodded.Lincoln 's sigh swirled him in fog. "You can stand against the wall and shout 'Revolution!' as loud as you like, but you won't have many people standing by you if you do. If you want to get on the floor and dance, you have to know the tunes the folks out there arc dancing to."

Another policeman made his way over to Lincoln and Sorge. He was swinging his arms back and forth and beating his hands together, and still looked miserably cold. He wore a bushy mustache full of ice crystals. "If you ducks have to go speechifying, why the hell don't you do it and get it over with?" he said.

"More time you waste, the better the chance somebody's going to freeze to death waiting for you to get on with it. Me, for instance."

"That's a good idea,"Lincoln said, and Sorge did not disagree.

They ascended to the platform together. A hum of anticipation ran through the crowd. The hard-line Socialist minority began shouting slogans: "Workers of the world, unite!" "Down with the capitalist oppressors!" "Revolution!" They tried to turn that last into a rhythmic chant.

Abraham Lincoln held up his hands for quiet. Slowly, he gained it.

Friedrich Sorge had agreed, with some reluctance, that he should speak first.Lincoln 's logic was that a fiery call for revolution would frighten off the more moderate members of the crowd if they heard it before they heard anything else: they would think the party had no

room for them.Lincoln hoped to show them otherwise. Once he'd done that, Sorge could be as fiery as he liked.

"My friends,"Lincoln said, "let me begin by speaking to you of religion." That intrigued some of the crowd and, no doubt, horrified the rest, including the men waving red flags. Intrigued or horrified, they listened. He went on, "Some men think God has given them the right to eat *their* bread in the sweat of *other* men's faces. That is not the sort of religion upon which people can get to heaven."

Silence persisted for another few seconds. Then a great roar rose up from the crowd, not only from the ordinary, respectable folks who had been Republicans and were trying to find out why Lincoln was abandoning the party he had led to the White House but also from the hard cases waving red flags.

Friedrich Sorge clapped his gloved hands together again and again.

"Here,"Lincoln said, and now the crowd hushed at once to hear him. "I am a poor hand to quote Scripture, but I will try it. It is said in one of the admonitions of the Lord, 'As your Father in heaven is perfect, be ye also perfect.' He set that up as a standard, and he who did most toward reaching that standard, attained the highest degree of moral perfection. So I say in relation to the principle that all men are created equal. If we cannot give perfect freedom to every man, let us do nothing that will impose slavery on any man." He had to pause again, for no one could have heard him through the cheers.

When he could speak once more, he went on, "Let us turn this government back into the channel in which the framers of the Constitution originally placed it. Let us stand firmly by each other. And let us discard all quibbling about this class and that class and the other class." Now Sorge looked less ecstatic.Lincoln did not care. He forged ahead: "Let us hear no more how this man is only a labourer, and so counts for nothing. Let us hear no more how that man is a great and wealthy capitalist, and so his will must be obeyed. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once again stand up declaring that all men are created equal."

Again he drew cheers from both factions in the crowd. When they washed over him, he felt neither chilled nor old. As they ebbed, he resumed: "I think this new Socialist Party is and shall be made up of those who, peaceably as far as they can, will oppose the extension of capitalist exploitation, and who will hope for its ultimate extinction—

who will believe, if it ceases to spread, that it is in the course of ultimate extinction.

"We have to fight this battle upon principle, and upon principle alone. So I hope those with whom I am surrounded here have principle enough to nerve themselves for the task and leave nothing undone that can be fairly done, to bring about the right result. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

I shall not keep you here much longer, my friends. Our purpose should be, must be, and is simple: to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

He stepped back. For a moment, no applause came, and he wondered if he had somehow lost his audience as he ended. But no: when the cheers and clapping thundered out, he realized the crowd had granted him that moment of enchanted silence every speaker dreams of and few ever get. He bowed his head. In that brief stretch of time, some of the bitterness of almost twenty years' wandering in the wilderness left him at last, and, when he stood straight again, he stood very straight indeed.

Friedrich Sorge tugged at the sleeve of his coat. He bent down to listen to his colleague through the ongoing roar of the crowd. Half angrily, half admiringly, Sorge demanded, "What am I supposed to say, after you have said all this?"

"What you were going to say—what else?"Lincoln answered. "I spread oil on the waters where I could.

Now you go on and stir them up to a storm again."

And Sorge did his best. It was a speech that would have set a torch under one of the small crowds of dedicated men he was used to addressing, and it did set a torch under some of the crowd inWashingtonPark . When he spoke of Marx, when he spoke of 1848, when he decried the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune, he struck chords in many of them. To many who heard him, though, those were foreign things of little meaning, and he did nothing to relate them to the experience of the working man in theUnited States .

Listening to him,Lincoln understood why Socialism had remained so small a movement for so long: it simply was not, or had not been, aimed at the common American labourer. He aimed to change that. He thought he'd made a good start.

On and on Sorge went, considerably longer thanLincoln had done. People began drifting out of the park.

When the Socialist finished—"Join with us! You have nothing to lose but your chains!"— some of the applause he got seemed more relieved than inspired.

Policemen began shouting: "Now you've heard 'em! Now get the hell out of here! Show's over. Go on home." Near the platform, one of those policemen turned to his pal and said, "Anybody wants to know, we ought to take all these crazy bomb-throwing fanatics and string 'em up. That'd go a long way toward setting the country to rights."

He made no effort to keep his voice down; if anything, he wanted the men on the platform to hear.

Sorge turned toLincoln and said, "You see how the oppressors' lackeys have learned their masters'

language. You also see how they ape their masters' thoughts. When we go to the barricades—"

ButLincoln shook his head. "You notice he does not do anything about it. The first amendment to the Constitution protects our right to speak freely." He let out a chuckle the wind flung away. "The first amendment also protects his right to speak freely, however distasteful I find his opinion."

Sorge made a sour face. "Bah! You Americans, I sometimes think, suffer from an excess of this freedom."

"If you feel that way, you should have allied yourself with Benjamin Butler or with the Democrats, not with me,"Lincoln answered. "And when you say *you Americans,* you show why the Socialists have not made a better showing up until now. You must remember, you arc not looking at theUnited States and their citizens from some external perspective. You are—we are—a part of them."

Had he spoken angrily, the union between his wing of the Republican Party and the Socialists might have broken down then and there. As it was, the look Sorge sent him was thoughtful rather than irate.

"Perhaps you touch here on something important. Perhaps you do indeed," the newspaperman said. In musing tones, he went on, "Socialism fromFrance is different from Socialism inGermany . Perhaps

Socialism in theUnited States will prove different from both."

"Come on down from there, you damned crazy loons," said the policeman who'd called a moment earlier for hanging them, "before you both freeze to death, and before I do, too."

Sorge might not have heard him. "When the time comes for it to grow, as the dialectic proves that time will come, I wonder what face Socialism will wear in the Confederate States."

Lincolnpaused halfway down the steps. "A black one," he predicted. "If ever there was a proletariat ruthlessly oppressed and valued only for its labour, it is the Negro population of the CSA."

"An interesting notion," Sorge said. "It is for now a *lumpen-proletariat,* one without an intelligentsia through which to vent its rage. But, in the fullness of time, this too may change." He suddenly seemed to realize he was alone on the platform. He also suddenly seemed to realize how cold he was. "Brr! Let us be off."

Surrounded by their supporters, Sorge and Lincoln made their way out ofWashingtonPark . Cabs waited to take them back intoChicago . Friedrich Sorge jumped into one. He waved toLincoln . "Today the city, tomorrow the world," he said gaily, then gave the driver his address. The cab clattered off.

Ducking his head to fit through the short, narrow doorway,Lincoln climbed into another cab. "Where to?" the driver asked him. He gave his son's address. The driver said nothing, but flicked the reins and got rolling.

Friedrich Sorge lived in a cramped, cluttered, dingy South Side flat.Lincoln had visited him there. He had not visitedLincoln in turn; Robert had made it very plain that, while his father was welcome at his luxurious home, his father's political associates were not.Lincoln sighed. He would, sometime soon, have to find a place of his own. The idea of a Socialist leader operating out of a mansion struck him as too absurd for words.

The cab made its slow way through the bustle ofChicago . The deeper into the city it got, the more streaked with soot the snow on the ground was.Lincoln peered out through the smeary window at bustle and filth alike. "Tomorrow the world," he said softly. "Tomorrow—the world."

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Jeb Stuart surveyed the magnificent terrain surrounding him with an emotion closer to despair than admiration. The Sierra Madre Mountains, the extension of the Rockies south of the U.S. border, were steep and treacherous and full of endless trails not wide enough for two men to ride abreast—often barely wide enough for one man on camel- or horseback—and full of endless valleys where endless numbers of Indians could camp and elude his men. And moving guns was even harder than moving men.

Colonel Calhoun Rugglcs rode only a couple of men ahead of him. "I wish the Camelry had been able to run down the damned Apaches," Stuart said. He regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth; he knew Ruggles had done everything he could to run the red-skinned warriors to earth.

The commander of the Fifth Confederate Cavalry looked back over his shoulder. "Sir, I honest to God thought we'd run 'em the way hounds run a coon. They made fools out of me and my troopers, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. Any men who can make fools out of my troopers—well, they're men in my book."

"They made fools of the Yankees for a lot of years," Stuart said, doing his best to encourage Ruggles after tearing him down. "They helped us make fools of the Yankees, too, remember. Maybe they decided it was our turn now."

Colonel Rugglcs shook his head. "That's not it, or not all of it, anyway. After they burned Cananea, they knew damn well we couldn't let them get by with it, and so they lit out for the mountains." His head went this way and that, too, with no sign whatever that he was enjoying the scenery. "And now we're supposed to dig them out. Rrr." The noise he made was very unhappy.

From behind Stuart, Major Horatio Sellers spoke up: "There is one good thing about this whole business."

"What? About wandering through the mountains for more than a month, with damn near the only times the Apaches show themselves the times when they bushwhack some of our scouts?" Stuart exclaimed.

Calhoun Ruggles also shook his head in disbelief.

But, sure enough, Sellers came up with one, saying, "If we do flush the

Apaches out of their hiding places here, there's not a chance they'll ever come up with new ones, because there can't be any better in the whole wide world."

"By God, Major, you're right about that," Ruggles said. Stuart found himself nodding, too. In an odd sort of way, Sellers' words offered consolation. The aide-de-camp was right: ground just didn't come any worse than this.

Slowly, tortuously, the troopers descended into a valley where they'd camp for the night. Stuart did not have nearly so big a force with him as had set out from Cananea in pursuit of the Apaches. For one thing, supplying a large force in this cut-up land was impossible. For another, guarding the supplies that did come in required a lot of soldiers. Some of those supplies, inadequately guarded, were now in the Apaches' hands.

Something small and bright and colorful as a jewel hovered in front of Stuart for a moment. It stared at him for a moment out of beady black eyes, then shot off impossibly fast at an equally impossibly angle.

"Hummingbird!" he said, startled. He'd seen hummingbirds back inVirginia , of course, the familiar ruby-throats;El Paso had others, occasionally glimpsed as they buzzed from flower to flower like oversized bees. But he'd never seen one with a purple crown and brilliant green throat before. He wondered what other strange creatures the mountains harbored.

He must have said that aloud, for Major Sellers grunted laughter. "Well, there's the Apaches, for starters," he said. He took the saddle off his horse and set it down on a round brown rock, then started currying the animal. As with any good trooper, his horse came first.

A scout came up to Stuart. "Sir," he said, "there's a trail up ahead, looks like one the Apaches used once upon a time, anyway. Got Mexican plunder all along it: dresses, saddles, flour sacks, things like that.

None of it's what you'd call fresh, though. Reckon they came that way some other time when they was raidin' through these parts. Might mean we're gettin' closer to 'em, though."

"So it might." Stuart scanned the peaks ahead. The sun still shone on some of them, though shadow filled the valley. Somewhere up there, along those ridge lines, Apaches were spying on his encampment, even if he had not the slightest hope of spotting them. Almost to a

man, the Indians had sharp eyes. They also had, and knew how to use, telescopes looted from the U.S. Army. They were liable to know what he was up to better than he did himself.

That thought had hardly crossed Stuart's mind before Horatio Sellers burst out in a storm of angry curses. Stuart spun around. "What's the matter, Major?" he asked.

"My blasted saddle's disappeared," Sellers answered. "I set the stupid thing on a rock right there"—he pointed—"and now it's gone."

Gone it was. "You *did* put it there," Stuart said. "I saw you do it. It isn't there now." That was pointing out the obvious.

"The son of a bitch goddamn well didn't up and walk off by itself," Sellers said. "If I find the bastard who lifted it, I'll make him sorry he was ever born." He glared around at the amused soldiers who were watching and listening to him. Stuart would have suspected— Stuart did suspect—them, too. The next soldier who didn't relish a practical joke on a superior would be the first.

One of the men pointed toward a patch of waist-high scrub oak near the edge of the light the campfire cast. "Sir, ain't that your gear?"

Sellers' gaze followed the trooper's outthrust finger. "It is, by Jesus!" he rumbled. "How in the damnation did it get way the hell over there?" He rounded on the nearby cavalrymen. "All right, 'fess up. Which one of you blackguards went and shifted it?"

Instead of confessing, the soldiers denied everything, each more vehemently than the last. Stuart had heard a great many soldiers tell a great many lies in his day. As with anything else, some were good, some bad, some indifferent. Either these men were all inspired liars, or—"Major, I think they may perhaps be telling you the truth."

"Yes, sir!" Major Sellers came to attention stiff as rigor mortis: respect exaggerated to the point of parody. He performed a precise about-face and stomped over to the saddle. When he picked it up, he let out an oath that was startled rather than furious: "Son of a bitch! Did you see that?"

Several people, Stuart included, said, "No." Most of them added "What was it?" or words to that effect.

"An armadillo." Sellers stood there holding the saddle, an

extraordinarily foolish expression on his face.

"I must have put this thing"—he hefted it—"on top of a big goddamn armadillo instead of a rock. It just ran off into the bushes."

With a certain amount of relish, Stuart said, "The saddle didn't up and walk off by itself, eh? This time, it damn well did."

Sellers carried it back over by his horse and set it down, with ostentatious care, on a piece of flat, level ground. That care didn't keep him from getting ragged unmercifully by the Confederate troopers the rest of the night. Stuart did his share of the ragging, or maybe a little more. If the lurking Apaches, wherever they were, had been able to figure out what the fuss and feathers were all about, they were probably laughing, too.

When morning came, though, the time for laughter was gone. Stuart's army swung into motion once more, advancing along the trail the scouts had found the evening before. It was broad and easy at first, but soon narrowed and climbed steeply. A pack mule went over the side and rolled to the bottom of a gully. It scrambled up onto its feet, none the worse for wear except for a patch of hide scraped off its flank. A few minutes later, another mule missed a step. Its bray of terror cut off abruptly halfway down the rocky slope. It did not get up when it stopped rolling, and would not get up again. Its head twisted at an unnatural angle.

A little past noon, a scout came back to Stuart with a prize: a Tredegar cartridge an Apache must have dropped. "Has to be one of the redskins we're after, sir," the fellow said. "Means we're on the right trail."

"Yes." Stuart's head came up. "Can't mean anything else." Trede-gars were mighty thin on the ground south of the border—back when this had been south of the border. "Maybe we'll catch up with them yet." He frowned. "And maybe they left it there for you to find so they could draw us into a trap." He ordered more scouts forward, and sent men to scrambling along the ridge line to smell out any ambush on either flank.

In the next valley they came to, they found the remains of a Mexican army camp. The camp looked to have been abandoned in great haste a couple of years before, and then plundered by the Indians. "They did try to put them down," Colonel Calhoun Ruggles said.

"Yes, and look what it got them." Major Sellers spoke like a man

passing judgment.

"We'll do better," Stuart said. "The Empire of Mexico hasn't been what anyone would call vigorous about fighting the Indians. We *will* do it, because they haven't got any place to run to from here."

"They could go up into theUSA , sir," Sellers said.

Stuart shook his head. "Not after they made common cause with us against the Yankees. TheUSA would sooner kill 'em than look at 'em after that, you mark my words. We'd be the same. If a Comanche band comes out ofNew Mexico and wants to take our side against the damnyankees, do we let 'em?"

Ruggles was best qualified to speak to that, and did: "No, sir. It happened once or twice, not long after the War of Secession: some of the Comanches reckoned they could play us and theUnited States off against each other." His smile was thoroughly grim. "Buzzards ate well for a few days afterwards."

Two valleys deeper into the mountains, the Confederates came upon an abandoned Apache encampment, and not an old one, either: some of the ashes in the fire pits were still warm, while flies buzzed around the bones of butchered beeves. "Now we're getting somewhere," Stuart said with more satisfaction than he'd shown since the army plunged into the divinely beautiful, hellishly rugged terrain of the Sierra Madre. "If we can get them on the run, they'll start making mistakes, and they can't afford that."

He snapped orders. Three trails led out of the valley. Mounted scouts trotted rapidly down all of them.

Within half a minute of one another, three explosions shattered the quiet. All told, they cost four men killed and half a dozen wounded. One of those wounded, one of the luckier ones, told Stuart, "It was a charge buried in the ground, sir, with a trip line for a horse or a man to set it off." Blood was soaking through the rag wrapped around his forearm. "I didn't think those Apache bastards knew about little tricks like that."

Stuart and Major Horatio Sellers looked at each other. Both spoke the same name at the same time:

"Batsinas." Stuart went on, "What's the name of that Yankee who comes up with a new invention every day before breakfast? Tom Edison, that's who I mean. The Apaches have got themselves a regular

Tom Edison in that fellow."

"If they're going to start planting torpedoes in the road, we won't be able to rush after them," Sellers said.

"We can't rush after them in this country, anyway," Stuart answered. "So long as we get them, that's what counts."

Unhappily, Sellers said, "Damned redskins didn't even give us a clue about which way they went. If they'd put a torpedo on one trail and left the other two alone, we'd have a pretty fair notion which one to follow."

"Not necessarily," Stuart said. "A torpedo on one trail could as easily lure us into an ambush or a false path as to show the way the Indians did go. They're more than clever enough to do something like that.

We've seen as much."

Major Sellers looked unhappier still before at last nodding. "I said before, we should have slaughtered them," he muttered.

"We got good use out of them up inNew MexicoTerritory ," Stuart said. "If they hadn't quarreled with the Mexicans, we'd still be on good terms with them." He craned his neck to look around. Which of the crags ahead held Apaches with Tredegars? Behind which bushes were they crouching? He couldn't begin to guess, and that worried him. He did some muttering of his own: "Now we have to make sure they don't slaughter us."

With some misgivings, he pushed his force down the trail the scouts reported to be most used. The column had not got far when boulders thundered down the mountainside above them. The avalanche scraped several men and horses and camels and mules off the paths into a ravine below. For a moment, Stuart spied men up above him, looking at what their handiwork had done. When Confederate troopers opened fire on them, they disappeared. He hoped his men had hit some of them, but he wouldn't have bet on it.

"Come on," he called to the soldiers. "We just after keep after 'em, that's all."

Perhaps half a mile farther down the trail, another landslide took its toll. Doggedly, the Confederates pressed on. "This is the difference between us and the Empire of Mexico," Major Sellers said. "If the Apaches gave the Mexicans a little licking, they'd leave. The redskins

must reckon we'll do the same." He shook his head. "Won't happen."

"No, indeed," Stuart said. "We shall teach them a new reckoning."

Maybe his army's persistence started giving the Indians that new reckoning. Or maybe he had chosen the right trail after all, and was nearing whatever encampment Geronimo's men had set up after abandoning the shelters his troopers had already found. Whatever the reason, the Apaches started shooting at the Confederates from the slopes above them and from in back of rocks and bushes ahead.

Soldiers who were hit screamed. Soldiers who were not, though, went into action with a fierce joy. If the Apaches would stand and fight, they could fight back. At Stuart's shouted orders, they went forward dismounted, so they could advance over ground their mounts could not cross. Gray and butternut uniforms were hard to see against rock and dirt as they moved ahead.

Stuart shouted other orders, too, to a runner. The man dashed back along the trail, breasting the tide of troopers going forward. He did his job better—which meant faster—than Stuart had dared hope. Only a few minutes passed before first one and then another of the army's field guns began landing shells on the positions from which the Apaches were fighting. Getting those guns over what passed for trails in the Sierra Madre had been backbreaking labour—luckily, not man-killing labour—but it paid dividends now.

The Apaches did not care for coming under shellfire—or perhaps it unnerved them where bullets whipping past did not because it was less familiar. It made some of them break cover, a mistake often fatal. Yelling and whooping, the Confederates on foot went forward.

U.S.soldiers in a position like the one the Apaches held would have slugged it out with their Confederate opponents and made them pay a high price for every foot they gained. Had Stuart been defending that position against the Yankees, he would have done the same. The Apaches, though, did not fight to spend men. He'd seen that before. When they were under pressure, they saw nothing shameful about escaping from danger.

Firing slowly died away as the C.S. troopers found no more targets, real or imaginary: for Stuart was sure his men had frequently fired at bushes and rocks and even—he glanced over at Major Sellers—armadillos. "Forward!" he shouted, and forward the column went.

A few hundred yards beyond the place where the Apaches had made

their stand, the trail led into another wide, fertile valley. Water trickled down from springs on the hillsides. Even in winter, everything was green. Birds chirped and warbled. Flies buzzed. The Apaches had had a camp there. It was far more hastily abandoned than the one Stuart's army had overrun early in the morning. A couple of beef cattle the Indians hadn't been able to take with them lowed mournfully.

Major Horatio Sellers rubbed his hands together. "We've got 'em on the run now, by God!"

Jeb Stuart looked around, as he had at the other abandoned camp. He saw no one but his own men.

That did not mean no one but his own men saw him, and he knew it. "They've got enough places to run to," he said, not so delighted with having driven the Indians from their refuge as he'd thought he would be.

"Sooner or later, we'll get 'em," his aide-de-camp said.

"Yes, I figure we will, too," Stuart agreed. "As you said, Major, we're a lot more stubborn than the Mexicans. But I hadn't realized how many hiding places this country offers till I traveled it. We'll be a good long while at the job, I fear—years, most likely."

Sellers' mouth twisted. "I don't like that notion so very much."

"Neither do I, not even a little." Stuart drew himself up straighter. "It's got to be done, though, and I expect we'll do it ... eventually." After that last word was out of his mouth, he wished he hadn't said it.

Then he looked around at the Sierra Madre again. He sighed. *Eventually* had needed saying.

From a bush so small no white man would ever have imagined using it for a hiding place, a rifle barked.

Something hit Stuart a heavy blow in the belly. He grunted, as if at acute indigestion. "My God!" Horatio Sellers cried. "The general's shot!"

Next thing Stuart knew, he was lying in the dirt. Someone was making a noise like a fox with its leg in a trap. He realized it was he. The pain had started. It was very bad. It was worse than very bad. It was tremendous, appalling, all-consuming. He writhed and moaned and then shrieked, unashamed. None of it did any good.

Leaning over him, Sellers shouted, "Fetch the surgeon, dammit!"

Blood poured between Stuart's fingers as he clutched at himself. The surgeon wouldn't do any good, either. Wishing he could lose consciousness again, Stuart was only too sure of that. He shrieked again.

He couldn't help himself. However long *eventually* was, he wouldn't be here to see it.

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Brigadier General George Custer threw more coal into the stove in his quarters atFortBenton . The fire in the stove glowed a cheery red. Despite that, he was anything but warm. A blizzard howled outside.

He scraped a match against the sole of his boot and lighted a cigar. Libbie gave him a disapproving look.

"Must you do that?" she demanded.

"Dashed right I must," Custer said, and sucked in smoke. He didn't cough at all now. Sometimes the smoke even tasted good.

"Dashed?"Libbie set her hands on her hips. Her eyes sparked. She was a very determined person. "

Autie, you didn't just promise not to swear where I could hear. You promised not to swear at all."

Another nice thing about a cigar, Custer had discovered, was that it gave him an excuse not to talk for a little while. Libbie wasn't just determined; she was tenacious as a terrier. Tom would have known how disapproving of his new vices she'd be. Tom had loved her, too, loved her like a brother. Poor Tom.

Custer wondered if the empty place inside him would ever disappear. He didn't think so. When he couldn't use the cigar to keep quiet any more, he said, "Times have changed, and not for the better, either."

"And," Libbie went on implacably, "you promised your sister you would never again drink liquor, and I know you have violated that pledge as well."

"When I promised her, I never dreamt my beloved country would go down to humiliating defeat at the hands of the Black Republicans not

once but twice," Custer said. "Can you blame me if I seek consolation?"

"I might not blame you had you sought consolation *once,* though even that would be a violation of your promise," Libbie said. "But, having reacquired the habit you abandoned so long ago, you have indulged it not once but repeatedly."

The reason for that was simple: after twenty years, Custer had rediscovered how much he enjoyed the feel of whiskey coursing through him. Coming right out and saying so, however, struck him as impolitic.

What he did say was "I am far more moderate than in the old days."

"If you mean you aren't staggering down the street puking every few steps, well, yes, that is true." Such acid filled Libbie's voice, Custer flinched from it as he never had from enemy fire. Inexorably, she went on, "But if you think you are fulfilling your promise, I cannot agree."

Custer did not answer. He felt trapped. Not only did the blizzard keep him from escaping his wife, it also kept him from escaping Colonel Henry Welton. Welton was a model of military punctilio; nothing he did, nothing he said, could possibly be construed as offensive toward the newly promoted superior now residing in what had been his fort for so long. All the same, Custer felt about as welcome as a man in the last stages of cholera.

Libbie might have picked the thought out of his head. She said, "That foolish infantry colonel thinks he should have more of the credit for winning the battle by the Teton, Autie. I can't imagine why, but he plainly does. Everyone wants some of the glory that should rightly attach to you."

Whatever she thought of Custer's shortcomings—and she was seldom reticent in telling him what she thought—she was as determined as he to wring the greatest possible advantage out of his virtues. He said, "I still maintain, and shall continue to maintain, that we should have done as well against the British without the Gatling guns as we did with them. Tom would back me, I know it. Dear Lord, if only he could have then! I wish the stupid things had not been on the field at all; in that case, no occasion for argument would have or could have arisen."

"Of course not," Libbie said soothingly. Then her brow, which she prided herself on keeping smooth, furrowed. "I wish that that Colonel Roosevelt had not been on the field, either. He has stolen much of the

approbation that would otherwise have gone to you."

"I've thought about that," Custer said, "and I have decided it does not matter."

"It certainly does," Libbie exclaimed indignantly. He nodded, ever so slightly; he'd succeeded in diverting her from his flaws. She continued, "How can you possibly say it does not matter when he has what should be yours?"

"Because whether he has it or not, what can he do with it?" Custer said. "He is a colonel of Volunteers whose regiment has been mustered out ofU.S. service, so he cannot harm my Army career. And he is a puppy of twenty-three, so he cannot be my rival for any political office, the Constitution disqualifying him from such a pursuit on account of his age. Q.E.D., as my instructors in the mysteries of geometry were given to saying."

"All that may be so," Libbie said, and then, grudgingly, "I suppose all that is so. Nonetheless, I am ever so glad he has leftFortBenton . Say what you will about him, enough ambition burns in that man for a hundred Henry Weltons. Deny it if you can." Her chin jutted defiance.

"Let him be as ambitious as he likes," Custer said. "His desires cannot impinge on mine."

Her voice dropped almost to a whisper: "Do you think you can be nominated for the presidency? Do you think you will be nominated for the presidency?"

"I *can* be," he answered. "Jacksonwas.Harrison was.Taylor was. Winfield Scott was, too, though he failed of election."

"Whoever facesBlaine year after next will not lose," Libbie said.

"No, I shouldn't think so," Custer agreed. "Whether I *will* be nominated depends on whether I can keep my name in the public's eye between now and then, and also on whether the leaders of the party decide I am the man whose name they want to put forward at the convention."

"And whatever fame thisRoosevelt gained at your expense will make both of those things less likely,"

Libbie pointed out. "There. Do you see? You have contradicted yourself." She looked as triumphant as if she had just driven back an

invading British army.

Before Custer could reply, someone knocked on the door to his quarters. Through the yowling wind, a soldier called, "Colonel Welton's compliments, General, and would you and your lady care to join him for supper?"

"Yes, we'll come," Custer said, and then, to Libbie, "Wrap yourself up warm, my dear, and we'll see what the cooks have done with— or to —supper." Her coat was ofAngora sheep, and warm. His own, of buffalo hide, had served him well in the field.

Even so, that first dreadful breath of air once he left his quarters almost froze him from the lungs outwards. His teeth chattered. A moment later, he heard Libbie's clicking away, too.

Snow swirled around him, making even the short walk to the officers' dining room an adventure. The way was made more uncertain because the dining-room shutters, like most of the rest atFortBenton , were closed to help hold in heat. Custer had to grope for the latch. Only when he opened the door did yellow lamplight spill out and illuminate the endlessly blowing snow—and no sooner had he opened the door than shouts of "Close it!" rang out from within.

He waved Libbie in ahead of him, then went into the dining room and shut the door after himself. The first breath of warm air inside was nearly as stunning as the first frigid breath outside had been. Sweat sprang out on his forehead. He got out of his overcoat in a hurry. So did Libbie.

"Good evening, General Custer, ma'am," Henry Welton said. He rose and saluted.

Custer returned the salute. "Good evening, Colonel," he said. Yes, everything was perfectly proper, perfectly correct, and colder than the blizzard outside. Everything had been that way since he'd brought the Fifth Cavalry down toFortBenton after the first of the year. He sniffed and smiled. "What's for supper?" he asked. "Whatever it is, it sure smells good."

Sometimes his pretense broke the ice for a little while. Today was one of those times. Henry Welton actually smiled back and answered in civil tones: "Fried potatoes from our own garden, boiled beans and salt pork, and roast prairie chickens." He even essayed a small joke: "Not too hard keeping meat fresh, this season of the year."

"No, indeed." Custer tried to joke back: "Not too hard keeping meat *hard,* cither, this season of the year."

Welton smiled again. So did a couple of his junior officers. So did Custer, with some effort. It didn't help much. He and the officers of Welton's Seventh Infantry were smiling past one another, like carriages going by on opposite sides of the road.

Custer was fond of fried potatoes, though he would have liked fried onions—or onions of any sort—even more. The beans and pork were beans and pork; he'd been eating them for so many years, he hardly noticed them on his plate except insofar as they helped fill his belly. He enjoyed the prairie chickens. They were all dark meat, and full of flavor.

A couple of whiskey bottles and a pitcher of lemonade from concentrate went around the table. Most of the officers drank whiskey. Libbie filled her tin cup with lemonade and pointedly passed the pitcher to Custer. "Wouldn't you like some, Autic?"

That would have sounded harmless to anyone who didn't know her well. To Custer, it was anything but.

"With the weather like this, I do believe I'd sooner have something to help keep me warm," he said. One of the whiskey bottles sat within reach. He poured some—not an enormous tot, by any means—into his cup, then raised it high. "Confusion to our enemies!"

Not even Welton and his officers could find fault with that toast. They drank with Custer. As the liquor ran down his throat, Libbie gave him a look that should have completely counteracted its warming effect, but somehow didn't quite. She did no more than that. In public, she stood foursquare behind Custer, for behaving in any other way might have harmed his chances. What she was liable to say when they went back to their quarters was another matter. Custer didn't care to think about that. To help keep him from thinking about it, he poured more whiskey into the cup. Libbie sent him another glacial glance.

"Confusion to our enemies indeed," Henry Welton said. He was drinking whiskey, too, and making no bones about it. "It's the best thing that could strike them, from our point of view, and the only thing that could bring them down to our level."

When it came to politics—with, no doubt, the exception of Custer's political ambitions—Custer and the officers of the Seventh Infantry

were not so far apart. Almost to a man, they loathed the administration currently inWashington , or rather inPhiladelphia , having been shelled out ofWashington . Only the presence of Libbie Custer and some of the other officers' wives kept them from expressing their opinion in terms even more forceful than the ones they used.

Custer said, "We didn't know what the devil we were doing when we made war, and we don't know what the devil we're doing now that we're trying to make peace, either."

"Blainecan't stomach giving away half ofMaine ," Welton said scornfully. "If he does, it'll make the state we ship him back to smaller."

"We should have hangedLincoln —look at the rabble-rousing he's doing now—and we should hang that dashed idiot Blaine, too," Custer said. Even with whiskey in him, he would not curse in the presence of women.

"That's what comes of electing Republicans," Libbie said. There her opinions marched with her husband's.

"Once we finally do have peace—if we finally do have peace— that'll be a sham, too, nothing but a hoax and a humbug," Custer said. "It always has been. Sooner or later, the Fifth will go back to Kansas, and we'll ride along the border with the CSA, and sure as the devil the Kiowas and the Comanches will ride up and burn a farm and kill the men and do worse to the women, and then they'll go back down into Indian Territory where we can't follow 'em. It's been going on ever since the War of Secession, and what can we do about it? Not a blasted thing I can see." A considerable silence followed. Into it, Custer added, "That's the way it's always been, and I don't sec it changing any time soon. I wish I did, but I don't."

Not quite quietly enough, one of Henry Welton's officers muttered, "I wish to Jesus the Fifth *would* go back toKansas , and get the devil out of *our* hair."

Another considerable silence filled the room, this one not nearly so sympathetic nor companionable as the first. Custer might have blown up. Instead (and he saw Libbie looking at him in surprise), he sipped his whiskey and affected not to hear. When the Fifth did go back toKansas , he would not be going back with it, at least not as regimental commander. That was too small a position for a brigadier general to hold. Maybe, as John Pope had been doing before being

sent toUtah , he would take charge of several regiments. Maybe the War Department would send him back toWashington , to help clean up the mess there. Whether or not he did that, someone would have to take care of it.

And maybe, when 1884 rolled around, he would lay down his commission, take off his uniform, put on a civilian sack suit and top hat, and campaign not against the British or the Confederates or the Indians but against the manifest and manifold iniquities of the Republican Party. That, though, was not entirely up to him. He would have to see what—and whom—the leaders of the Democrats had in mind.

Henry Welton said, "General, when you do go back toKansas , would you arrange to leave behind some of your Gatling-gun crews as a defense against another British invasion?"

"Why, certainly," Custer said. "As a matter of fact . . ." He was about to say, *You 're welcome to every blasted one of them.* Before he could, he saw Libbie looking intently at him. That look reminded him of the slaughter the Gatlings had wreaked on the Kiowas. They might do the same again. Tom would surely have thought so. He softened his words: "As a matter of fact, you can have several of them."

"Thank you, sir." By Welton's tone, he'd expected Custer to give him all the contraptions.

Maybe the whiskey helped fuel Custer's chuckle. Being too predictable didn't do. "See me tomorrow, Colonel, and we'll see if we can't settle on how many can stay here and how many will go with us."

"Yes, sir, I'll do that," Welton answered. "I do wish you all the best on your return toKansas ." That was more polite than the way his junior officer had phrased it, but meant the same thing. Henry Welton did not care for having a bigger chief in the teepee with him.

When supper was over, Custer and Libbie made their way back to their quarters. It was cold outside, and had got colder since they'd come to the dining room. Inside, it was nice and warm. Libbie spoke one word: "Whiskey." All at once, it was chillier in there than out in the snow. Custer wanted another drink.

Chapter 20

AS IT then agreed, General?" Alfred Von Schlieffen asked. "You will send officers toBerlin to study the methods of the German Empire?" *You will send officers toBerlin to learn how to do things right?* was what he meant, but, although no diplomat, he knew better than to phrase it so.

Major General William S. Rosecrans scratched the end of his long nose, then nodded. "It is agreed, Colonel," he told the German military attache, "or rather, the president, the secretary of state, and I agree to it. The Royal Navy, unfortunately, has other ideas."

Schlieffen said, "Had President Blaine made peace some time ago, the British would not have found it necessary the blockade of your coast to resume."

"I am painfully aware of that," Rosecrans said, and his voice did indeed hold pain. "The entire country, I would say, is painfully aware of that—the entire country, less one man."

"What can be done to persuade him?" Schlieffen asked. "Even if he would for more war make ready, he cannot fight more now. He needs to win time in which theUnited States can get over this fight. So it has always been. So, I think, it will always be."

"Do you know the fable about the goddamn donkey dithering between two bales of hay, Colonel?"

Rosecrans asked. After Schlieffen had nodded, theU.S. general-in-chief went on, "Well, sir, James G.

Blaine is that donkey, except both bales are poisoned. If you were one of my colonels instead of one of the Kaiser's colonels, I'd say he was a prize horse's ass, too. But you aren't, so I won't."

"But you just—" Schlieffen broke off, realizing exactly what Rosecrans had done. The military attaché sniffed, as if he had a cold. He'd smelled liquor on Rosecrans' breath before. He didn't smell it now.

Anger and frustration could also drive a man into indiscretion.

Rosecrans went on, "One bale of hay is making peace with the bastards who beat us. But that means admitting they beat us, and he can't stomach it. The other bale is going back to war with 'cm. But if

we do, the only thing that'll happen is that they'll lick us some more. He knows as much, but he keeps trying to sick it up, too. And that leaves him nothing to do but dither. Stupid fool's got pretty good at it, too, wouldn't you say? He's had practice enough lately, anyway."

"This dithering, though—" Schlieffen liked the sound of the word, and repeated it: "This dithering cannot last. President Blaine must remember, he is not the only one who can begin again the war. Come soon or come late, your enemies will force you to fight if you do not obey now. This blockade is only a small thing. Much more could come. Much more would come."

Rosecrans' wrinkles got deeper. "I know that, damn it. You'll have a friend inRichmond —your attache to the Confederate States, I mean."

"Aber naturlich,a colleague." Schlieffen made the correction without noticing he'd done it. Since his wife's death—to a large degree before his wife's death, too—he'd so immersed himself in work that he had no time for friends.

"Then you'll have got word from him, one way or another, that the Confederate States are moving troops toward the Potomac," Rosecrans said.

"I had heard this, yes," Schlieffen said, nodding. "I was not going to speak of it if you did not; such is not my place."

"They're moving a good many troops." Rosecrans' voice was sour, heavy. "The railroad makes it easy to move a lot of troops in a hurry—hell of a lot easier than moving 'em on roads knee-deep in mud would be. They aren't coming up toward the border for their amusement, or for ours."

"You are also moving troops, I know," Schlieffen said.

"Oh, yes." TheU.S. general-in-chief bobbed his head up and down. "If they hit us, we'll give 'em the best damn fight we can—don't doubt it for a minute, Colonel, the best fight we can. But what you may not have heard"—he was almost whispering now, like a boy talking about some bugbear or hobgoblin—"is that General Jackson is back inRichmond ."

"No, I had not heard that," Schlieffen said. On hearing it, he heard also that Rosecrans was a beaten man. No matter how many men the USA moved down to the Potomac, Jackson would find a way to beat them,

because Rosecrans thought Jackson would find a way to beat them. Someone—Schlieffen annoyed himself by not recalling whether it was Napoleon or Clausewitz—had wisely said that the moral was to the physical in war as three was to one. As Austrian and Prussian armies had for so long gone into battle against Bonaparte convinced before the fighting started that they would lose, so Rosecrans faced the prospect of confrontingJackson .

"Well, it's true; God damn it to hell, it's true," Rosecrans said.

Schlieffen listened with half an ear, trying to remember which military genius had come up with the maxim. He couldn't. Like a bit of gristle stuck between two back teeth, it would bother him till he did. He became aware that Rosecrans had said something else, something he'd missed entirely. "Excuse me, please?" he said, embarrassed at piling one professional failure on another.

"I said, a few friends in the world sure would come in handy about now," Rosecrans repeated.

"For this war, you have no friends who can give you help," Schlieffen said. "This was, I hear from every American, the idea of your President Washington. This man has not been your president for many years.

Maybe it is time to think that matters have perhaps changed since his day."

"I'll tell you what I'm starting to think," Rosecrans said savagely. "I'm starting to thinkWashington was nothing but a stinking Virginian, and the Rebs can damn well keep him and his ideas both."

Schlieffen did not smile. He made a point of not smiling. Not only would smiling have been against his interest and his country's, he was such a resolutely moderate man that smiling did not come easy to him anyhow. In his usual careful way, he said, "I hope you will also say this to your president and to your foreign minister—no, secretary of state you call him."

"I've been saying it since things started going downhill without any brakes," Rosecrans answered. "I've been saying it to anyone who will listen. Colonel, if you think President Blaine is inclined to listen to me, you had better think again. If you think he's inclined to listen to anybody, you had better think again."

"This is not good," Schlieffen said.

The telephone jangled. Rosecrans jerked as if a horsefly had bitten him. "Guess who that is," he said with a martyred sigh. "He may not listen, but by Jesus he likes to talk."

Schlieffen left the office of the general-in-chief. Behind him, Rosecrans bellowed into the newfangled instrument. As Schlieffen came out into the outer office, Captain Saul Berryman looked up from his paperwork with a martyred expression. *"Auf Wiedersehen, Herr Oberst,* " he said.

"Good-bye, Captain," Schlieffen answered. He had more than a little sympathy for Rosecrans' adjutant, a capable young man trapped in a position where his ability did his nation less good than it might have in the field.

The calendar said spring was only a few days away. Freezing rain pelted down in spite of what the calendar said. Schlieffen hardly noticed as he walked to the carriage waiting for him and climbed in. His mind was elsewhere. *Napoleon or Clausewitz? Clausewitz or Napoleon?* That he could not make a fact he knew spring up and stand to attention infuriated him.

"Back to the consul's establishment, Colonel?" the driver asked.

"Yes," Schlieffen snapped. He paid no more attention to the driver's chattering teeth than he had to the weather that caused them. The wheels of the carriage slipped a little on the icy paving stones, but then the toe calks on the horse's shoes bit and the carriage began to roll.

Despite the weather, some sort of political demonstration was going on not far from the War Department building. *Socialists,* Schlieffen thought, seeing the red flags that hung sodden from their staffs.

He'd seen more Socialist demonstrations than he liked back inGermany , but never till now one of this size in theUnited States .

When he reported what he had seen to Kurd von Schlozer, the German minister to theUSA nodded.

"One faction ofBlaine 's own party has made common cause with the Socialists," Schlozer said.

"Really? I had not heard." Save as they affected military affairs, Schlieffen paid little attention to politics.

Schlozer gave him a look that said he should have heeded them more closely. "If we have no peace, soon we shall have fighting in the streets. With the Socialists now stronger, we may have revolution, Red revolution," he said. "This is a land of revolution, and the Socialists—the new Socialists, I mean—know it and exploit it."

"God forbid," Schlieffen said. "If they try to raise a revolution, may they be met with iron and blood."

After usingBismarck 's famous phrase, he nodded to Schlozer. "You know I feel the same about the Socialist movement in the Fatherland."

"Oh, yes, my dear Colonel, of course," Schlozer said. "No man of property, no man of sense, could possibly say otherwise. But too many Americans, like too many Germans, have neither property nor sense. And the leaders of the Socialists here, like the leaders there, have an oversupply of cunning, if not of sense."

"This has not been true in theUnited States ," Schlieffen said. "So much I know—otherwise, the Socialists here would have stirred up far more trouble than they have."

"Now, though, men who really know something of politics have started waving red flags for purposes of their own," the German minister said. "In matters of politics,Blaine is now as dead as a salt herring. Even if he could have been reelected before—which would have taken an act of God—he has no hope whatever with a large part of his party going over to the radicals. He must understand as much."

"This is not good," Schlieffen said, as he had to Rosecrans. "A man without hope will do irrational things.

SinceBlaine did irrational things even when the situation for himself and his country looked better, who knows how crazy and wild he might become now?"

"We shall see." Kurd von Schlozer sounded less gloomy than Schlieffen would have. Schlieffen wondered if his superior was deluding himself about how sensible President Blaine could be. From what the German military attache had seen, expecting common sense from Americans was like looking for water in a desert: you might find some, but, even if you did, it would be only an oasis in a vast stretch of hot, dry, burning sand.

"Napoleon!" he exclaimed suddenly, and felt much better about the world. Hot sand had made him think ofEgypt , which had made him

think of Bonaparte's campaign there, which in turn had reminded him of whose adage had crossed his mind during his conversation with Rosecrans.

Kurd von Schlozer gave him a curious look.

A couple of days later, after a cable fromBerlin , Schlozer requested an audience withBlaine . When the request was granted, the German minister asked Schlieffen to accompany him. "Of course, Your Excellency," Schlieffen said, "if you think my being there will do some good. If not, I have other matters to occupy my time." He was still refining the plan for movement againstFrance whose basic idea he'd borrowed from Lee's campaign inPennsylvania . He'd had wires of his own fromBerlin ; the General Staff was enthusiastic about the outline he'd sent.

But Schlozer said, "Military affairs are likely to be discussed, so your place is with me." However much Schlieffen would have liked to go on burrowing through his books—inadequate though his research tools here inPhiladelphia were—he could only obey. Hiding a sigh, he set down his pen and, carefully locking the door to his office behind him, followed Schlozer downstairs to the carriage.

Bright sunshine made him blink. The bad weather had blown pastPhiladelphia the day before; now he could believe spring was at hand. Soon—all too soon—summer would grip the eastern seaboard of theUnited States in its hot, sweaty fist.

Down fromGermantown the carriage made its way, dodging among others like it, rumbling wagons, men on horseback, men on bicycles with improbably high front wheels, and swarms of men and women on foot. And then, as had happened to Schlieffen coming back from the War Department, a political rally snarled traffic that would have been bad without it. Now red flags rippled in a friendly breeze; now not only the most dedicated Socialists, those fearing neither catarrh nor pneumonia, assembled under the flags. Now nervous-looking soldiers helped police route buggies and horses and pedestrians around the streets the demonstrators clogged.

Schlieffen and Schlozer never came within two blocks of the rally. Even so, the Socialists' shouts rose above the clatter of horses' hooves, the rattle of iron tires on paving, and the squeals and groans of axles needing grease. "Can you make out what they are saying, Your Excellency?" Schlieffen asked.

"I believe the cry is, 'Justice!' " Schlozer clicked his tongue between his teeth. "If I were petitioning the Almighty, or even my government, I would sooner ask for mercy. But then, I am an old man, and well aware of how much I need it. Waving flags in the street is not an old man's sport."

Because of the rally, they got to the Powel House fifteen minutes late. President Blaine brushed aside Kurd von Schlozer's apologies. "Don't trouble yourself about it, Your Excellency,"Blaine said. "I want to tell you that I received yesterday a telegram from theU.S. minister inBerlin informing me that his talks with Chancellor Bismarck continue to go well, and that prospects look bright for increased cooperation in all spheres between our two great countries."

"I am delighted to hear this, Mr. President," Schlozer said, and Schlieffen nodded, knowing *all spheres* included the military. But the German minister looked grim as he continued, "I also received yesterday a telegram fromBerlin , whose contents I wish to discuss with you now. I must tell you that the governments ofBritain ,France , and theConfederateStates are most dissatisfied with the dilatory pace of negotiations with your government. SinceGermany is neutral in this conflict, they have united in asking Chancellor Bismarck to make me the channel through which they express to you their dissatisfaction. If you refuse to meet their demands, I cannot answer for the consequences."

Blaineflushed. His large, bulbous nose went redder than the rest of his face. "Their demands are outrageous, impossible!" he shouted, as if he were on the rostrum rather than sitting in his office. "How am I to yield so large a portion of my home state to the invaders? How am I to acquiesce in the Confederacy's acquisition of lands to which that nation has no right?"

"If you had yieldedSonora andChihuahua before, you would not now the loss of part ofMaine face,"

Schlieffen said. "You have lost the war. *'Vae victis,'* as Brennus theGaul said to the Romans he had beaten."

Blaineglared at him. "The Romans ended up whipping the Gauls, so that 'Woe to the conquered' applied to the conquerors. We can fight on, too."

Sadly, Schlieffen shook his head. "No, Your Excellency, not in this war. You are defeated."

Kurd von Schlozer said, "The reason we were tardy, Mr. President, was the large Socialists demonstration that forced traffic to make a detour around it."

Blaine's complexion darkened once more. "Socialists!" he said, as if pronouncing an obscenity. "Most of them are traitors to the Republican Party, nothing else."

"As may be," Schlozer said. "Would you not agree, though, that they leave your own political future more . . . uncertain than it was before the schism in your party took place?"

NowBlaine had heard blunt talk from both the German attaché and the German minister. "You tread close to the edge, sir," he growled. Schlozer sat impassive, waiting for a more responsive answer. At last, obviously hating every word,Blaine said, "You may be right."

That was the response for which Schlozer had waited. "Being now without hope and so without fear, Your Excellency, can you not act as a disinterested statesman and serve with a whole heart the needs of your country? You have the chance, Mr. President, and a rare chance it is for an elected official, to do just that without considering your own future political advantage, for you can have none."

HadBlaine not been in the room, Schlieffen might have smiled. Schlozer could not have urged a more sensible, more logical course on the president of theUnited States . The only question remaining was whether sense and logic could still reach James G. Blaine.

Schlieffen added a few words of his own: "If you do not do this, Your Excellency, your country will only suffer more. In your heart, you must know this is so."

Again,Blaine stayed silent a long time. At last, very low, he repeated, "You may be right." He let out a long, shuddering sigh. "Making peace with the enemies of my country is like looking into my open grave.

But, as you say, I am already dead, so what does it matter how I am buried?"

"Think of your country," Schlozer said.

"Think of the future, and what your country and mine may do there," Schlieffen said. Slowly,Blaine nodded.

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Philander Snow spat a brown stream into a drift of the stuff whose name he bore. Theodore Roosevelt had changed the calendar from March to April a couple of days before. He'd seen spring snow inNew YorkState ; seeing it inMontanaTerritory did not delight him, but it did not surprise him, either.

His mind had a way of running toward what would be. "We've got to plant as soon as we can, Phil," he said. "We shan't have a long growing season—we never do, not here, but it will be even shorter this year.

Everything must be in readiness to move the moment conditions permit."

Snow spat again. "It will be, Colonel." He'd taken to callingRoosevelt that since his boss' return from commanding the Unauthorized Regiment. Having been mustered out of the U.S. Army,Roosevelt no longer had any formal right to the title. The next time he corrected the ranch hand about it would be the first.

"That's good, Phil. That's what I want to hear," he said, now, adding, for about the hundredth time, "I know I can rely on you. If I'd ever had any doubts—which I haven't—the way you and the rest of the hands who didn't join my regiment brought in the harvest last fall would have shot them right between the eyes."

"That's white of you, Colonel. We reckoned it was the least we could do, seein' how you and the Unauthorized Regiment was doin' everything you could to keep them goddamn English bastards from comin' down and burnin' us out." Snow loosed yet another stream of tobacco juice. "Ask you somethin'?"

"You may ask,"Roosevelt said. "I don't promise to answer."

"Fair enough." Snow nodded. "All kinds of talk been goin' around about how you'll up and sell this here ranch and go back toNew York to do some politicking there. Is it so, or is it a pile of humbug?"

"I'd love to go back toNew York and politic there,"Roosevelt answered. "The only trouble with the notion is that, in order to run for the State Assembly, I must have attained the twenty-fifth year of my age.

I am old enough to have fought for my country and to have commanded men in battle, but not old enough to help legislate for my state."

"Plumb crazy, you ask me," Philander Snow opined. " 'Course, nobody asked me."

"Crazy it may be,"Roosevelt said. "The law of the state it is. And so I shall stay here inMontanaTerritory

, here on the ranch, a while longer, at any rate." He did his best to speak lightly, as if that mattered to him only a little. Inside, he seethed with worry lest the fickle populace forget him before he reached the age where he could offer himself for approval.

"Well, I'm powerful glad to hear that," Snow said. "Powerful glad. I've been pleased with my situation here, and I'd hate to have to go looking for another one on account of you was sellin' the place for no better reason than to go back East and tell lies to people the rest of your days."

"Is that what politics means to you?"Roosevelt demanded. The ranch hand nodded without hesitation.Roosevelt 's sigh loosed a cloud of steam into the chilly air. "I give you my solemn word: I shall always tell the truth to the people."

"I've heard a lot of people say that." Snow spoke in ruminative tones. "Maybe you're telling the truth, Colonel. I hope to Jesus you are, matter of fact. But it wouldn't startle me out of my stockings if I found out you wasn't."

"I shall always tell the truth to the people,"Roosevelt repeated. "Always. Do not doubt me on this, Phil; I mean every word I say. You are right when you assert that the American people have already heard too many lies."

Snow cocked his head to one side and studiedRoosevelt for a while before saying, "It's a young man's promise, Colonel. Maybe there's a reason a fellow has got to be twenty-five before he can run after all.

You get older, you figure out there's a deal of gray between black and white."

"A man who will see gray once will see gray all the time." Theodore Roosevelt scornfully tossed his head. "A man who sees gray will never see black, nor white either, even when they are there. That, I think, defines your run-of-the-mill politician to a T. I may be a politician one day—I *would* be lying if I said I didn't fancy the notion—but, whatever else history may record of me, it shall never say I was run-of-the-mill."

Philander Snow gave him another measuring appraisal, punctuating it by putting another brown spot in the white by his feet. "I don't reckon anyone will call you that. Some other things, maybe, but not that one there."

"I hope no one does,"Roosevelt said. "Even those who were great in their time are so easily forgotten.

Who now recalls the deeds of Lysander the Spartan or Frederick Barbarossa?"

"Not me, that's for damn sure," Snow said at once.

"Just so,"Roosevelt said. "Just so. I want my name to *live,* to be a possession for all time." Phil wouldn't have heard of Thucydides, either, soRoosevelt didn't bother explaining where he'd got that last phrase.

But, even if the ranch hand hadn't heard of him, a lot of what the Greek historian had to say about the war betweenAthens andSparta in the fifth century before Christ could as readily have been written about the modern struggles between theUSA and the CSA. Just as Sparta had got aid from rich Persia against Athens, which otherwise was probably the stronger, so the Confederate States had used help from England and France to put down the United States, which alone was the larger, richer, and more populous of the two.

Snow said, "Good shootin' the breeze with you, boss. I'm headin' off to check on the stock." He trudged down toward the barn, his boots crunching as each step broke the crust on the latest snowfall.

Rooseveltwent inside to catch up on the bookkeeping. No sooner had he got to work than dark clouds rolled across the sun. He lighted a lamp in the study. A few minutes later, it went dry, filling the room with the stink of kerosene. When he went to put more into it, he discovered the ranch house was almost out.

He went to the door and shouted for Philander Snow. Eventually, Snow stuck his head out of the barn.

WhenRoosevelt asked him if there was any kerosene in there, the ranch hand answered, "Sure as hell ain't. We should have bought some the last time the Handbasket went down toHelena , only we forgot."

"Damnation,"Roosevelt muttered. "None in the hands' quarter, either?"

"Sure as hell ain't," Snow repeated. "Oh, maybe enough for a day or two, you spread it out amongst there and the barn and the ranch house. But maybe not even that much, neither."

"Damnation,"Roosevelt said again. Then he brightened. "Well, hitch up the horses to the Handbasket.

We'll just have to go down toHelena again and get some." Any excuse to get into town, even his own absentmindedness, was a good one as far as he was concerned. Here on the ranch, he was feeling isolated again. The year before, he'd been part of great events. Now, unless he went down to Helena, he didn't even know about them till long after they happened—not till someone chanced to bring word up to the ranch.

Thinking along with him, Snow said, "We got the chance to find out what in hell's gone wrong the past few days. Swear to Jesus, sometimes I laugh till I'm like to bust, listenin' to you cuss old Blaine and the Socialists and whoever else you ain't feelin' happy about of a mornin'."

"I'm so glad I amuse you,"Roosevelt said. "I wish I amused myself. You do know that what you're laughing about is the humiliation of theUnited States ?"

"Oh, no, Colonel—what I'm laughin' about is you cussin' the humiliation of theUnited States ," Snow said, a distinction a Jesuit might have envied. BeforeRoosevelt could remark on it, the hand went back into the barn, presumably to hitch the horses to the farm wagon. When he brought the wagon out, he gaveRoosevelt a wistful look. "Don't suppose you'd want some company on the way down toHelena ?"

"I alone committed the sin of omission,"Roosevelt answered. "I alone shall atone for it." Philander Snow let out a gusty sigh. He'd done his best to get out of several hours' work: done his best and failed, in which he resembled his country. Having failed, he went back to the unending chores that bulked so large in farm life.

Rooseveltrattled down the road by himself. In the back of the wagon, the five-gallon milk cans in which he'd bring back the lamp oil did considerable rattling of their own. They had kerosene painted on them in big red letters, to make sure no milk went into them by mistake.

With snow on it, the ground was still hard. Before long, the snow

would melt, and everything would turn to mud. Getting toHelena through the resulting morass was liable to be an all-day job, as opposed to a couple of hours each way.

A horseman came up the road towardRoosevelt . As the fellow trotted past, he took off his hat and waved it, saying, "Good day to you. Colonel."

"And to you, Magnussen,"Roosevelt answered. "You look well. How's that leg of yours feeling? I remember your captain saying you fought bravely."

"Oh, thank you, Colonel." The former trooper of the Unauthorized Regiment blushed like a girl. "The leg is good. How do you recall all your men, and who got hit in the leg, and who in the arm, and so on?"

"How? You just do it."Roosevelt saw nothing out of the ordinary in carrying a flock of details in his head.

"It's no harder than memorizing the multiplication table—easier, for men have faces and voices, and numbers don't."

Magnusscn laughed. "Easier for you, maybe, Colonel, but not for the likes of me." He lifted his hat again, then rode on.

"A man can do anything he sets his mind on doing,"Roosevelt called after him. Magnussen gave no sign that he'd heard, though he wasn't out of earshot.Roosevelt shrugged. Too many men would not set their minds on anything worth doing. That, to him, was why they did not succeed. He loosed an angry snort at the absurdity of Abraham Lincoln's Socialist notions.

When he got toHelena , he took some little while reaching the general store. Men who'd served in the Unauthorized Regiment were thick on the ground in the territorial capital. If Roosevelt had taken all of them up on the drinks they wanted to buy him, he would have forgotten his name, let alone such minutiae as where he lived and what he'd come into town to buy.

He filled the milk cans from the big wooden barrel behind the counter at the store. The proprietor, a big redhead named McNa-mara, said, "I reckoned you was runnin' low last time you was in, Colonel, but you always know your own business so good, figured I was crazy myself."

"Even Jove nods,"Roosevelt said, which meant nothing to the storekeeper. Grunting,Roosevelt carried the full milk cans out to the

wagon. He turned down another drink while he was doing that.

Virtue unalloyed would have sent him straight back to the ranch. His virtue turned out not to be quite free of admixture. Instead of riding out of town with the kerosene, he went over to the offices of the *Helena Gazette.* As usual, a crowd had gathered in front of the building to read the newspaper on display under glass.

Roosevelthitched the wagon and started working his way through the crowd toward the paper. He didn't worry about the kerosene; nobody could inconspicuously amble off with a five-gallon milk can full of the stuff. Men made way for him, so he got to the *Gazette* far sooner than he would have before he'd recruited the Unauthorized Regiment. They reached out to shake his hand or slap him on the back.

IfHelena had anything to say about it, he could have been elected president tomorrow.

What he read, though, made him grind his teeth. "The arrogance of our enemies!" he burst out. "But forMaine , they hold not a single square inch of our sacred soil, yet they presume to order us around as if we were beasts of burden."

"What are we going to do to them?" somebody asked. "What *can* we do to them? We're too busy squabbling among ourselves to hurt anybody else." He pointed to a story about a Socialist parade inBoston that had got out of hand. The police had opened fire, and four were dead, including one policeman. *Red is the color of the blood of martyrs,* a Socialist spokesman was quoted as saying.

"To hell with Abraham Lincoln,"Roosevelt ground out. "Custer was right—Pope should have hanged him while he had him under lock and key inUtahTerritory . He's ten times as much trouble as all the Mormons and all their wives put together." He heard himself in some surprise; he hadn't thought he might agree with Custer on anything.

About half the crowd in front of the copy of the *Gazette* loudly approved his words. The other half—miners, mostly—as loudly told him where to go and how to get there.Helena , he remembered, had broken out in riots after one ofLincoln 's speeches, whileGreat Falls had stayed calm. To a man who had nothing to offer but the sweat of his brow, class warfare was a seductive strumpet indeed.

"I don't thinkLincoln 's is the best way for the working men of this country to get a square deal," he said, sticking out his chin. "And besides, if we fight one another, who wins? Do the capitalists win? Do

the workers win? Not a chance in hell, either way. I'll tell you who wins: the British and the French and the Confederates. Nobody else."

That got him a thoughtful silence. He was happy enough to gain even so much; he'd been wondering whetherHelena would erupt again on account of him. He knew where the Gatling guns were. Colonel Welton had kept most of them even after Custer returned toKansas . They were the most telling argument yet prepared against the rise of Socialism.

But then a miner said, "Colonel, you can talk about winners and losers as much as you like—when you're one of the winners. When you're putting in twelve, fourteen hours underground six days a week and you don't make enough to feed yourself, let alone your wife and children, well, hell, you've already lost. How are you worse off then if you try and do something different? What can you throw away that ain't already gone?"

The miner drew applause from people who had booedRoosevelt ; those who had agreed with him stood silent, waiting to hear what he would say. He picked his words with care: "Do you want to burn down the timbers that arc holding up the roof of the tunnel? That's what Red revolution means. If you want to shore up the roof so it doesn't come down on your head, peaceably petition the government for redress of grievances."

"And a hell of a lot of good that'll do," the miner said. "They only listen to the bastards with money."

"No,"Roosevelt said. "They listen to the bastards with votes. And you mark my words, sir: they will go a hell of a long way to keep the revolution from coming. A man will do a great many startling things if all his other choices look worse. On that you may rely."

"Lincolnsaid the same damn thing, and you were going on about hanging him," the miner said.

"Lincolnpays lip service to peaceable redress, but he doesn't believe in it,"Roosevelt said. "I do."

The miner looked him up and down. "You don't mind me saying so, there's a hell of a lot of difference between what some pup who was a cavalry colonel for a little while thinks and what goes through the head of a fellow who was president of the United States and who's been trying to help the little fellow, the labouring man, his whole life long."

Some little pup who was a cavalry colonel for a little while.A flush heatedRoosevelt 's cheeks and turned his ears to fire. Now he knew what came after hero: has-been. Savagely, he said, "Lincolnis the past. I am the future. And Socialism, sir, Socialism is the road to ruin."

If he impressed the miner, the man—who had to be at least twice his age—did not show it. "Talk is cheap," he said. "You get to be as old asLincoln is nowadays, you look back and see what you've done, see if you measure up. You ask me, it ain't likely."

"I will take that wager, and I will take that chance," Theodore Roosevelt said. "And there is one thingLincoln has done that I swear before almighty God I shall never do."

"Yeah?" The miner laughed. "What is it?"

"If the chance should come my way to fight the Confederate States ofAmerica , I shall never lose a war to them,"Roosevelt promised. The miner laughed again.Roosevelt didn't care.

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General Thomas Jackson had just finished the last piece of fried chicken on his plate and was wiping his fingers when someone knocked on the door of hisRichmond house. "Who could that be?" his wife said in some annoyance. "I had looked for a quiet evening at home. Since the war took you away from your family for so long, I think I am entitled to look for a few quiet evenings at home with you."

"Let us hope it is some traveler who has lost his way and seeks directions, then,"Jackson said. "But if it is not, Mary, that too is as God wills."

Cyrus, the butler, came into the dining room. "General Jackson, suh, Senator Hampton say he wish to have a word with you," the slave reported.

"Hampton?"Jackson 's eyebrows rose. So did he. "Of course I'll see him. You've put him in the parlor?"

Cyrus nodded.Jackson headed in that direction. "I wonder what on earth he can want with me, though."

When he went into the parlor, Wade Hampton III rose from a sofa to shake his hand. The senator fromSouth Carolina was five or six years

older thanJackson , portly but erect, balding, with a neat beard once brown but now mostly gray and splendid mustachios. He and Jackson had known each other for twenty years, since the days when the former planter commanded a cavalry brigade under Jeb Stuart.

After the greetings were done, afterHampton had declined food and drink, the South Carolinian closed both doors into the parlor, having first looked up and down each hallway to ensure that no one lurked nearby. That bit of melodrama accomplished, he said, "I must have your word, General, that, come what may, what we say and do here tonight shall remain solely between the two of us."

"Well, sir, that depends,"Jackson said. "If you are contemplating treason against the government of the Confederate States, I'm afraid I cannot help you."

He'd meant it for a joke, a piece of light badinage. The last thing he expected was for Wade Hampton to look as if he'd just taken a gunshot wound. Slowly,Hampton said, "Treason against the government of the Confederate States is not the same as treason against the Confederate States. Of this I am convinced down to the bottom of my soul. If you disagree, tell me at once, and I shall bid you a good evening and beg your pardon for having disturbed you."

"You had better tell me more,"Jackson said, also slowly. "I must confess, I have not the faintest idea of what you are talking about. Do you believe that I, in my recent conversation with General Rosecrans and Mr. Hay, am somehow betraying our country? If so, sir, we would be wiser to continue this conversation through our friends." Dueling had been illegal inVirginia for many years. From time to time, though, gentlemen still traded fire on the field of honor.

ButHampton hastily held up a hand. "By no means!" he exclaimed. "You do not tarnish the honor of the Confederacy; your every action brightens it. Would to God others might say the same instead of trampling our beloved Constitution in the dust."

"Take a seat, sir; take a seat,"Jackson urged. AfterHampton sat, so did the Confederate general-in-chief, on a cane-backed chair well suited to his rigid posture. "You still have the advantage of me, for I know of no plots brewing against our government."

"You have a sizable army in northernVirginia , ready to compel the Yankees to obedience,"Hampton said. AfterJackson nodded, the senator went on, "I trust the men would also obey you if you called on

them to preserve our republic from those who would destroy the principles on which it was founded."

"Speak your mind, if that is what you came for,"Jackson said. Wade Hampton did nothing of the sort, but sat mute.Jackson 's bushy eyebrows came down low over his eyes. The scowl that made soldiers quail had no effect on the senator. Sighing,Jackson did something out of the ordinary for him: he gave ground. "Very well—you have my promise."

"I knew you were a true patriot,"Hampton breathed. "Here, then: I shall ask my question, which is this—if you order your men to defend the Constitution of the Confederate States, will they move against the men here inRichmond who set it at naught?"

WhenHampton spoke of setting an army in motion againstRichmond , that *was* liable to be treason, thoughJackson could not imagine his old comrade-in-arms disloyal to the CSA. "From whom, in your view, does the Constitution want defending?" he asked.

And, at last, the senator from South Carolina brought his fear and anger out into the light: "From President Longstreet, General, and from any other man who would tamper with the structure of society we have so long maintained in our beloved nation."

"Ahh."Jackson let out a long exhalation. "You oppose him because he intends to manumit the Negro."

"Of course I do,"Hampton said. "What right-thinking white man in this country does not? My home state was first to leave theUSA because of the federal government's continued interference with slavery, as our ordinance of secession clearly shows. Shall we tolerate fromRichmond the tyranny that led us to break withWashington ?"

Jacksonsighed again, this time with deep regret. "I am afraid we shall, Senator," he said.Hampton stared at him. He went on, "The president has persuaded me that his policy is in the best interest of our country.

If not for the intervention ofBritain andFrance , we might well have failed in the War of Secession. If not for their intervention, we should have had a far more difficult time in this war. If we forfeit their support by maintaining an institution they despise, how shall we fare against the Yankees the next time we have to face them?"

"We'll lick 'em, of course," Wade Hampton III replied at once. "We always have. We always will."

"I wish I shared your certainty,"Jackson said. "From the bottom of my heart, I wish I shared your certainty. But I do not. I cannot. Since I do not and cannot, and since I know the president purposes giving the Negro the name of freedom but not much of the thing itself, I am willing to suspend my disagreement with him on this matter and to believe him better acquainted with what will best serve us than I am myself."

Hampton's countenance darkened. "General, you are making a mistake if you choose to side with a man who would cast down our peculiar institution."

"Senator, you are making a mistake if you seek to suborn me into treason against the duly elected head of my government,"Jackson answered evenly. "The Army *will* stand behind the president, sir; you may take that to be as much a given as one ofEuclid 's axioms of geometry. This being so, have we anything further to say to each other?"

"I think not." Senator Hampton headed for the door. "You need not accompany me, General; I can find my own way out." He opened the door from the parlor to the front hall, then slammed it shut.

Another window-rattling slam marked his departure fromJackson 's home.

"Good heavens!" his wife exclaimed when he returned to the table. "You sent the senator away unhappy, Tom." She took a longer look atJackson . "And you are unhappy, most unhappy, yourself. What happened between the two of you?"

"Nothing I much care to discuss,"Jackson answered. "Least said, soonest mended." He hoped with all his heart that his flat rejection ofHampton 's overtures would persuade the senator any attempt at a *coup d'etat* was foredoomed to failure. If it didn't, force of arms would persuadeHampton and whoever backed him of the same thing. "We had a disagreement, that's all, and the senator fromSouth Carolina is and has always been a man of somewhat hasty temper."

His son's eyes glowed. "Hampton's red-hot for holding the nigger down and putting a foot on his neck,"

Jonathan said. "I'll bet he was trying to talk Father into going against manumission."

Jacksonrolled his eyes up to the heavens. "Senator Hampton is a fool,"

he growled. Jonathan grinned an enormous grin, convinced his father's words meant he was right. So they did, though not quite for the reason he thought. Jackson himself paid as little attention to politics as he could.Hampton 's appeal had taken him by surprise. But if his purpose was so obvious that even a youth—a youth more politically alert than the Confederate general-in-chief—could see it, people of greater prominence than that youth also would see it.

And, sure enough, whenJackson went to the War Department the next morning to continue discussion with General Rosecrans and Minister Hay, he was not altogether astonished to have a young lieutenant take him aside and lead him down the hall to a small room where President Longstreet sat waiting.

Without preamble, Longstreet said, "You had a visit from Wade Hampton last night."

"Yes, Your Excellency, I did,"Jackson said.

"He asked you to help overthrow the government if I persist in moving us toward manumission."

Longstreet did not phrase it as a question.

"By his request, Mr. President, what passed between us last night is a private matter,"Jackson said.

"You need not tell me—I knowHampton 's mind," Longstreet said. "I also know you sent him away with a flea in his ear."

"How do you know—?"Jackson paused. "You are having him watched." Spoken so baldly, it sounded like a transgression.

But Longstreet nodded, unembarrassed. "I most certainly am. If he were actor enough to simulate the fury he showed outside your home, he would do better before the footlights than in the Senate. I assure you, General, I do not intend our nation to be torn asunder in the hour of our greatest triumph."

"Our greatest triumph."Jackson sighed. "A great pity General Stuart cannot now enjoy it with us."

"That it is," Longstreet agreed. "Still, he fell in action, as he no doubt would have wished to do, and we have avenged and shall avenge ourselves upon the Apaches manyfold for his assassination." But nothing, not even the death of a friend of many years, could derail

Longstreet's train of thought for long. "Believe me, General, I am glad you share my views on the integrity of our nation."

"I do indeed,"Jackson said. On the other hand, Abraham Lincoln had not intended theUnited States to be torn asunder, either.

But Longstreet, almost as if in response toJackson 's thought, went on, "And I shall not allow Hampton and his fellows any opportunity to do us mischief, either. I shall steal their thunder. Easter has come and gone; the end of April approaches. StillBlaine delays and delays and delays. He shall delay no more. Is the army gathered by thePotomac in readiness?"

"You know it is, Your Excellency,"Jackson replied, as if he had been insulted.

"Of course I do," the president said soothingly. "Still, the question had to be asked. At today's session with the Yankees, you and Minister Benjamin are to tell them the war will resume in forty-eight hours unless we, the British Empire, andFrance have the full acquiescence of theUnited States to all demands made against them before that time shall have expired."

"Yes, sir!"Jackson 's voice bubbled with enthusiasm. "We shall punish them as they deserve." He thought for a moment. "And, in so doing, we makeHampton and his complaints into smaller matters than they would be otherwise."

"Just so," James Longstreet said. "I have told you before, I believe, that you are, or you can be, more astute in matters political than one might suppose."

"You natter me beyond my deserts, sir,"Jackson said. "Like you, my son had no trouble ciphering out the reason on account of which Senator Hampton paid me a call, though I did not realize what it was until he made himself unmistakably plain."

"Jonathan's a clever lad," Longstreet said, smiling. "Remember, theUnited States are to have forty-eight hours from the moment you deliver the ultimatum. Make careful note of the time, that we may not unduly delay their punishment should its infliction prove necessary."

"I shall carry out your orders in every particular, Mr. President,"Jackson said. "You may rest assured on that score."

"I do, General, believe me." Longstreet got to his feet. "And now

Lieutenant Latham will take you to Mr.

Benjamin. I leave to the two of you the manner in which you present the ultimatum to theUnited States . I am confident that, between your ingenuity and his, you will devise a plan more likely to meet our needs than any my poor wits might conceive."

" *I* am confident I know a man hiding his light under a bushel when I see one,"Jackson said. Ignoring Longstreet's modest little wave, he went on, "I also have great faith in Mr. Benjamin's ingenuity." He rose and followed the young officer to the room where the Confederate minister to theUSA waited.

"Ah, General Jackson!" Judah P. Benjamin exclaimed in delight, or an artful counterfeit thereof. "The president has told you of his intention?"

"He has."Jackson knew how abrupt his nod was. Benjamin's round, smiling, Semitic face, framed by hair and beard dyed a black that defied and denied his years, never failed to make the Confederate general-in-chief nervous. The statesman was too openly successful, too openly clever a Jew to suitJackson 's stern Christianity.

"My view, General, is that you should be the one to deliver the ultimatum," Benjamin said now. "Coming from your lips, it will possess an aura of authority I could never give it. Were I to present it to Hay and Rosecrans, they would the more readily assume it to be negotiable."

"So they would,"Jackson agreed. Benjamin's smile never wavered.Jackson did not think to wonder if he had insulted the Jew by assuming him to be flexible in all circumstances. Drawing out his pocket watch, he said, "The Yankees should be here in a few minutes."

Another young Confederate lieutenant escorted theU.S. representatives into the room. After polite greetings, John Hay said, "I should like to bring to your attention a new proposal President Blaine has authorized me to—"

"No,"Jackson interrupted.

"I beg your pardon?" theU.S. minister to the Confederate States said.

"No,"Jackson repeated. "The time for proposals from President Blaine has passed. He is in no position to offer them. He has, in fact, but one choice left: peace on our terms or war." He delivered Longstreet's

ultimatum in tones as fierce as he could muster. Having done so, he noted down the time on a scrap of paper: twenty-seven minutes past ten in the morning.

Hay and Rosecrans both stared at him, the one with something like horror on his handsome face, the other in a sort of weary resignation. Rosecrans found his tongue first: "And what happens if President Blaine makes no reply, saying neither yes nor no?"

"That is a well he has drunk dry: it will be construed as rejecting the ultimatum,"Jackson replied. "If we do not hear that he has accepted our terms within the space of forty-eight hours, now less"—he looked at the watch again—"two minutes, the war shall begin again, and where it shall end is known but to God."

"General, this is a brutal and most unreasonable way of forcing your will upon us," John Hay said.

"Yes, it is, isn't it?"Jackson agreed placidly. He said no more than that, leaving theU.S. minister to the Confederate States nothing on which he could hang a further protest.

Judah P. Benjamin spoke for the first time: "Gentlemen, I would suggest that, in view of the present circumstances, you might be well advised to communicate this ultimatum to President Blaine as soon as is practicable, to give him the greatest possible amount of time in which he can decide."

Under his breath, General Rosecrans muttered, "Blaine's had months to decide. What the devil difference will two more days make?"

Jackson and Benjamin both started to speak at the same time. The Confederate minister to theUSA caughtJackson 's eye. Benjamin's own eyes, dark and all but fathomless, glinted.Jackson inclined his head, allowing his clever companion to say whatever he intended. Turning another of his woundingly bland smiles on theU.S. representatives, Benjamin remarked, "I believe it was Samuel Johnson, gentlemen, who observed, 'When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.' "

Hay winced. Rosecrans muttered again, this time unintelligibly. Gathering himself, Hay said, "I hope you will permit us an adjournment, then, to wire your demands to our president."

Now Judah Benjamin nodded toJackson . "I not only permit it," the Confederate general-in-chief said,

"1 require it."

Rosecrans' comments to himself sounded sulfurous, even ifJackson could not make them out in detail.

With a sigh, Hay asked, "May we have a written copy of the ultimatum, to be sure it is communicated accurately to President Blaine?"

Jacksonshook his head. "No, for I have not got one. The terms are of the simplest, however: either your government shall yield within forty-eight hours less . . . thirteen minutes now, or there will be renewed war."

"War *a I'outrance"* Benjamin added. Rosecrans, who plainly did not understand the French phrase, glared at him. Hay, who plainly did, also glared, in a different, more nearly desperate way. The twoU.S.

representatives rose, shook hands again with their Confederate counterparts, and took their leave.

"From now on, sir, these talks will be in your hands alone, I expect,"Jackson said to Benjamin. "I shall shortly travel north to the Potomac, to take charge of operations against theUnited States in that region."

"In my opinion, General, you need not be overhasty," the minister to theUnited States replied.

"I dare not take the chance of your being mistaken,"Jackson said.

"However you like." Benjamin habitually looked amused. At the moment, he looked more amused than usual. "Whether we do go to war or not, though, the president has effectively spiked Senator Hampton's guns, would you not agree?"

"You know about Senator Hampton?"Jackson blurted, and then felt extraordinarily foolish: whatever went on in the Confederate States without Judah P. Benjamin's knowledge could not be worth knowing.

Benjamin's laugh made his big belly shake. "Oh, yes, General, I know about Senator Hampton. A great many people know about Senator Hampton. That you did not until last night speaks well of your devotion to duty."

The Jew was indeed a statesman,Jackson thought; he had never been

called blind more politely. In musing tones, he asked, "Could he have raised a revolution with my help?"

"With your help, General, anything would be possible," Judah Benjamin answered. "Without it, he is bound to fail." Benjamin hesitated, then went on, "Had President Longstreet reckoned your help likely to be forthcoming, the distinguished senator fromSouth Carolina would have found himself unfortunately unable to call on you yesterday."

"Would he?"Jackson murmured. Benjamin gave him a solemn nod. He nodded back, unsurprised. After a moment's consideration, he nodded again, this time in firm decision. "Good."

****

Samuel Clemens woke with the bed shaking. He sat bolt upright, ready to run if it was an earthquake.

By the way Alexandra smiled at him, it wasn't. He could barely see her smile; the sun hadn't risen yet.

"What time is it?" he asked around a yawn.

"A little before five," his wife answered. "You wanted me to get you up early, though—remember?Philadelphia sun time is more than three hours ahead of us here."

Clemens grimaced and nodded. "Which means that, whateverBlaine aims to do, he'll do it too early in the morning." He got out of bed with a martyred sigh. "Light the lamp, will you, my dear?" Gas hissed.

Alexandra struck a match. Yellow light filled the bedroom. Sam sighed again as he walked to the closet.

"We're finally back in a home of our own—in a bed of our own, by God—andBlaine routs me out of it on a Saturday morning. There is no justice in the world—and no clean trousers, either, by the look of things."

"There are so," Alexandra declared. By then, Sam was getting into a pair of them. She gave him a dirty look.

He affected to ignore it, but from then on aimed his barbs at the administration rather than his wardrobe:

"He shouldn't have started the war in the first place. Once he'd botched it, he should have quit when Longstreet gave him the chance. That would have savedSan Francisco , and saved us the torture of living with your brother."

"You can't blame the president for that," Alexandra said.

"Who says I can't? I just did." Clemens warmed to his theme: "He dithered till he lost half ofMaine , too.

And now that the ultimatum's landed on him, he still can't make up his blasted mind. If he doesn't give in before half past seven or so, we're going to take *another* licking, and for what? For what, I ask you?"

His wife said, "Why don't you finish dressing? I'll go downstairs and make some coffee for you." It was not a responsive answer, but Sam doubted James G. Blaine could have given him a better *one. And heaven only knows what sort of coffeeBlaine makes,* he thought, rummaging in a drawer for a cravat.

Fortified with coffee, bread and butter, and a slab of ham left over from supper the night before, he headed east alongTurk Street toward the *Morning Call.* Not all the houses in the neighborhood had yet been rebuilt; empty lots gave the street the aspect of a barroom brawler who led with his teeth instead of his left.

Every few paces, Clemens looked back over his shoulder. Hills hid the Pacific from his eyes. Whether he could see it or not, though, he knew it was there. Somewhere on it, probably somewhere not far from San Francisco, sailed a Royal Navy flotilla. He was sure of that. The Pacific Squadron of the U.S. Navy, or what was left of it, was out there, too, but he had no faith in its ability to halt the British warships, or even to slow them much. When a fast steamer from theSandwich Islands gave them the word to move . .

.

Since the British attack onSan Francisco , Colonel Sherman had brought in many more guns to defend the coast. Clemens didn't think they would do much good, either: they were small-caliber field pieces, which had the twin advantages of being common and mobile but were hardly a match for the huge cannon the ironclads of the Royal Navy mounted. Still,Sherman was making an effort, which put him ahead of most of theU.S. government.

Market Street was quiet as Sam turned onto it. Not only was Saturday a half day for most people, he was earlier than usual getting to the office. He walked in just before a quarter to seven. He wasn't the first man there, either, not by a long chalk. Reporters clustered round the telegraph clicker like relatives round the bed of a sick man who was not expected to live.

"No news yet, eh?" Clemens asked.

"Not a word," Clay Herndon answered, before anyone else could speak. "The only question left is whether the wire comes fromPhiladelphia or thePotomac . WillBlaine see sense, or will he throw awayWashingtonCity andMaryland to go along withMaine ?"

"Blainewill let the war go on." Edgar Leary spoke with great assurances. His whole manner had changed since his stories on corruption in the rebuilding ofSan Francisco ran in the *Morning Call.* Now he seemed to reckon himself a man among men, a pup no longer. He had reason for that new-found confidence, too; thanks to those stories, several prominent men were presently occupying small rooms with poor accommodations and unpleasant views. He went on, "He's dragged his heels all the way through this mess. Why would he change now?"

No one argued with him. Clocks in the office and outside struck seven. "Less than half an hour to go,"

Herndon muttered. "Big story coming, one way or the other."

"Bastards," somebody said softly. Clemens wondered whether the fellow meant the enemies of theUnited States or theBlaine administration. After a moment, he realized the curse could be inclusive.

At nineteen minutes past seven, the telegraph receiver began to click. "It's early," Edgar Leary noted.

"Have the Rebs jumped the gun, or hasBlaine thrown in the sponge? My bet's on the Rebs."

But the telegram came out ofPhiladelphia . Clay Herndon, who happened to be closest to the machine, read the Morse characters emerging word by word on the tape as readily as if they were set in fourteen-point Garamond. "President Blaine accedes to Confederate ultimatum," he said, and then, through a burst of startled exclamations

and cheers, "President Blaine's complete statement follows."

"Read it out, Clay," Sam said. "Read it on out. Let's see how he puts it in the best light he can."

He promptly regretted that, forBlaine went on at greater length than he'd expected. But neither he nor anyone else in the offices of the *Morning Call* interrupted the reporter as he gave voice to the words flowing from the clicking receiver:

"Finding no hope for the successful employment of our arms against the enemies who ring us round and who have unjustly combined against us, I am compelled at this hour to yield to the demands imposed upon the United States by the Confederate States, Great Britain, and France. I do this with the heaviest of hearts, and only in the certain knowledge that all other courses are worse.

"This surrender offers a fitting occasion to present ourselves in humiliation and prayer before that God Who has ordained that it be so. We had hoped that the year just past would close upon a scene of victory for our righteous cause, but it has pleased the Supreme Disposer of events to order it otherwise.

We are not permitted to furnish an exception to the rule of Divine government, which has prescribed affliction as the rule of nations as well as of individuals. Our faith and perseverance must be tested, and the chastening which seems grievous will, if rightly received, bring forth its appropriate fruit.

"It is meet, therefore, that we should repair to the only Giver of all victory, and, humbling ourselves before Him, should pray that He may strengthen our confidence in His mighty power and righteous judgment. Then we may surely trust in Him that He will perform His promise and encompass us as with a shield.

"In this trust and to this end, I, James G. Blaine, president of the United States, do hereby set apart today, Saturday, the twenty-second day of April, as a day of fasting, humiliation, prayer, and remembrance, and I do hereby invite the reverend clergy and people of the United States to repair to their respective places of worship and to humble themselves before almighty God, and pray for His protection and favor to our beloved country, and that we may be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us.

"And I do further urge and direct the citizens of the United States to

observe the twenty-second day of April in each succeeding year as a day of humiliation and remembrance, so that the infamous defeat we have suffered on this date shall never be lost from the minds of the said citizens until such time as it may, by the grace of God, be avenged a hundredfold."

The clicker fell silent. Several men sighed. Sam realized he wasn't the only one who'd been holding his breath toward the end. Clay Herndon said, "Well, well, who would have thought it? Even James G.

Blaine can read the writing on the wall, provided only that you make the letters big enough."

"The writing on the wall, eh?" Sam said. "That must be why he blamed God for our losing, or one reason for it, anyhow. The other two that spring to mind are that God doesn't vote, and He hardly ever stands up on His hind legs and calls someone a damned liar."

Outside, church bells began to ring out. Noise on the street swiftly swelled: shouts and cheers and snatches of song. Here and there, gunshots rang out. One of them sounded as if it came from right outside the offices. Somebody yelled, "That's the boy, Reuben! Shoot 'em all off—we ain't gonna need

'em no more." Another shot shattered the morning, presumably from Reuben's gun.

"We aren't the only ones with the news," Herndon observed. "That one would have gone to a whole raft of telegraph instruments."

"Everybody who has it likes it, too," Edgar Leary said.

Samuel Clemens made himself stop thinking like an American delighted the war had indeed ended—regardless of the terms on which it had ended—and start thinking like a newspaperman again.

"Half the people who've got the word print papers of their own," he growled. "Out of that bunch, we're going to be the ones who put the news on the street first, or I'll know the reason why."

That blunt announcement sent people flying away from the telegraph clicker as if it had suddenly become red-hot. One of the typesetters yelled, "We'll need a transcript of whatBlaine had to say. If somebody writes it out, it'll be a hell of a lot faster to set than if we've got to do it from the Morse."

"Clay, you take care of that," Sam said. "You've already read it through once, so you've got a head start on everybody else. Headline above it will be 'War Ends'—screamer type, of course."

"You want seventy-two point?" the typesetter asked.

"No, ninety-six, Charlie," Clemens answered. "Hell, 108 if you've got it. That's not a headline we get to use every day. If only we could write *BlaineTarred, Feathered, and Ridden Out ofPhiladelphia on a Rail* underneath it, everything would be perfect." He hesitated. "Well, almost perfect: we'd have to drop the type size a good deal to fit that on one line."

"Boss, you'll give us an editorial to run alongside ofBlaine 's statement?" Leary said.

"What?" Sam frowned. "Oh. Yes, I suppose I'd better, hadn't I?"

He went back to his desk, swept a snowdrift of papers out of the way so he'd have room to write, and set a fresh sheet down in the middle of the space he'd cleared. After he'd inked a pen, he stared at the blank paper. For a man who wrote for a living, getting started was always the hardest part of the job.

Words did not want to come. He'd set everybody else on the *Morning Call* running like a dog with a tin can tied to its tail, and the words did not want to come. He glared at the paper. He glared at the pen. The fault was not in them. He knew where the fault was. He did not have a mirror at his desk, so he could not glare at himself.

He took out a cigar, scraped a match afire, and lighted the malodorous stogie. Neither the harsh smoke he held in his mouth nor the stinking fogbank with which he surrounded himself helped concentrate his mind on the business at hand, as they often did. He smoked the cigar down to a dank, soggy butt with quick, angry puffs, then lighted another. Nothing even vaguely resembling inspiration struck.

Setting the second cigar in the grimy brass ashtray that held the corpse of the first, he opened a desk drawer. If inspiration wasn't lurking in tobacco today, maybe it was hiding somewhere else. He pulled the cork from the bottle with his teeth and took a long swig. Whiskey ran molten down his throat. His eyes opened very wide. He took another drink. It exploded in his stomach like a ten-inch shell from a British ironclad. He felt ready to whip his weight in wildcats.

He picked up the pen and poised it above the paper. No words came

out. He was as silent and frustrated as a veteran actor—say, one of the Booth brothers, whose careers went back before the War of Secession, and whose tours had crisscrossed the USA and the CSA ever since—inexplicably stricken with stage fright in front of a packed house.

Clay Herndon trotted up to him, carrying a sheet full of words from edge to edge and top to bottom.

Sam ground his teeth, even though he knew the words were Blaine's and not Herndon's. "Here's the transcription of the statement," Herndon said, waving it about. "I'll give it to the typesetters. What are you going to say in your—?" Most of a sentence too late, his eye fell on the still-blank page in front of Clemens.

Sam's eye fell on it, too . . . balefully. "Damned if I know," he ground out.

"Even if it's only 'Mary had a little lamb,' you'd better say it fast," Herndon said. "You were right—we can't be the only paper getting a new edition to press as fast as we can set the type."

"I know, God damn it, but I'm dry," Sam said. "I haven't been this dry since the stagecoach ride through the desert fromSaltLake toVirginia City ."

"You've got to say *something,"* Herndon insisted.

"Yes, but what?" Clemens said. "What the devil can I say thatBlaine didn't already? The war's done. We lost. Any fool can see that, and even a fool can see it now, orBlaine wouldn't have given up. The thing is so obvious, it's impossible to write about without sounding like an idiot." Herndon didn't say anything.

Sam caught him not saying anything. "When has that ever stopped me before, eh?"

"You can't prove that's what I was thinking," the reporter answered with a grin.

"And a damned lucky thing for you I can't, too," Sam said. "Go on, get that set. I'll come up with something in the next few minutes, or else we just have to go on without me." He didn't like that. It was embarrassing. But getting the news out on the street third would be a lot more embarrassing. Herndon dashed away to the typesetters.

It's over.Almost of its own will, Clemens' pen set down two words. He stared at them. They came close to serving as an editorial by themselves. What else did he need to say? He thought about that for a few seconds, then wrote one more sentence: *Thank heaven!* He nodded, picked up the paper, and hurried after Clay Herndon.

Author's Note

This is a novel about the aftermath of a Confederate victory in the Civil War. It is not in any sense a sequel to my earlier novel about a Confederate victory in the Civil War, *The Guns of the South.* Here, the Confederacy is imagined to have won by natural causes, so to speak, rather than by intervention from time-travelers with an agenda of their own, and to have done so in 1862 rather than 1864.

The differences are crucial. The Civil War is, and deserves to be, perhaps the most intensely examined period of American history. For better and for worse, all that the United States is today (even that we say *The United States is,* not *The United States are),* it is because of what happened in and immediately after the Civil War. Change anything there, and subsequent history changes drastically.

Take the three cigars around which Lee's Special Order 191 was wrapped. In real history, two Union soldiers, Corporal Barton Mitchell and First Sergeant John Bloss, discovered them after a Confederate courier lost them. Learning Lee's battle plan and how widely Lee had divided his army while invadingU.S. territory let General McClellan win the battle ofAntietam . That victory, in turn, letLincoln issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which changed the moral character of the war. It effectively made sure that Britain and France, which were at the time trembling on the brink of recognizing the Confederate States and forcing mediation on the United States, did not do so.

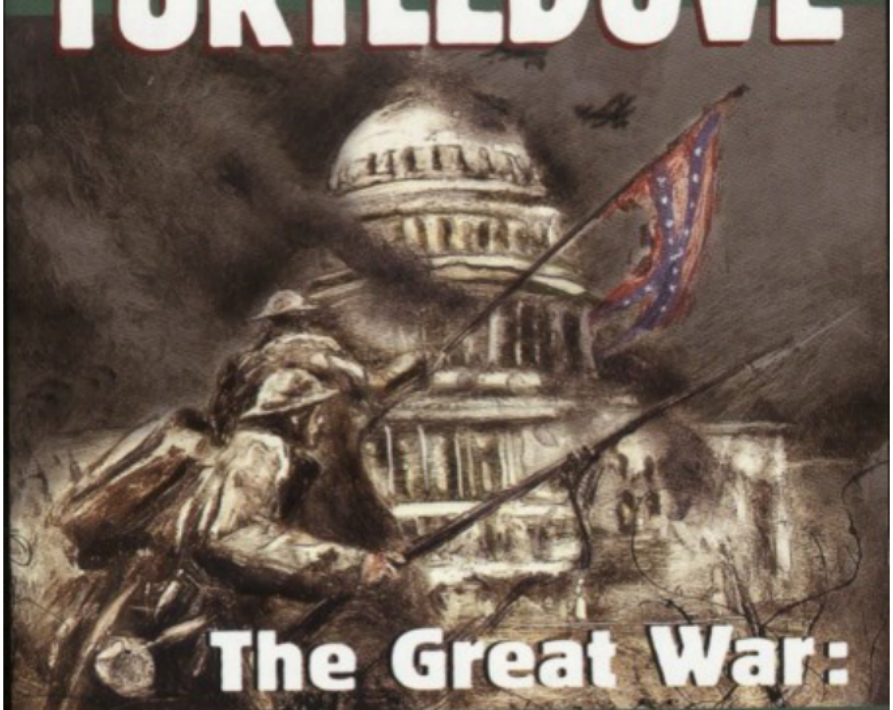
Had those cigars and that order not been lost . . . the world would be a different place today.

I need to make a couple of remarks about my handling of the characters in this novel. All speeches and writings attributed to Samuel Clemens, in particular, are of my own devising. The same does not apply to the political speeches I have put in the mouth of Abraham Lincoln. In them, I have frequently used his own words on the relationship between labour and capital and between employee and employer, sometimes verbatim, sometimes adapting his thought on slaves and owners to apply to workers and owners. I have done this not only for dramatic effect but also to show the plausibility (and

what more can one demand of a novelist?) of the views I have ascribed to him in the changed circumstances I have envisioned here.

HARRY TURTLEDOVE

Author of *THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH*



The Great War:

AMERICAN FRONT

"The definitive alternate history saga of its time."
— *Booklist*
(starred review)

American Front
Great War [2]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:***
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

Amazon.com Review

Harry Turtledove's second multivolume saga of 20th-century "alternative history," __, takes place in a world in which the Confederate States win the Civil War and in 1914, allied with England and France, go to war against the United States once more. All the horrors of World War I, such as trench warfare and mustard gas, are present, only this time they're situated in a North American theater of operations where the U.S. fights enemies on both its northern and southern borders while Confederate blacks, studying up on left-wing radicals Karl Marx and Abe Lincoln, prepare for the revolution. As in Turtledove's earlier Worldwar series, the majority of attention is paid to an assortment of people at the battlefields and home fronts, their stories unfolding in gradual increments that, at least so far, only intermittently connect with each other. And there's not as much in the way of "real" historical figures popping up in this first volume of The Great War series, save for cameo appearances by U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt, Confederate president Woodrow Wilson, an aging General Custer, and a handful of others. It remains to be seen whether future entries in the series will feature such obvious candidates for inclusion as the young Ernest Hemingway, and *how* they'll appear in this strange new world. --*Ron Hogan*

From Publishers Weekly

This masterpiece of alternate history takes place in the same world as Turtledove's How Few Remain and begins a projected tetralogy of a First World War fought with Germany and the U.S. allied against Britain, France and the Confederacy. The reader is drawn in at once as a German cruiser approaches Boston and Jeb Stuart III trains his artillery on the Capitol Dome, and Turtledove sustains high interest throughout the lengthy narrative. As in How Few Remain, the author gives full recognition to social and economic factors (e.g., how conscription impacts politics; how labor shortages affect the position of barely emancipated blacks in the Confederacy). He also plausibly

depicts the opening stages of race war. In addition, he unleashes the horrors of trench warfare on American soil and shows how an American army of occupation might look from the point of view of the occupied Canadians. With shocking vividness, Turtledove demonstrates the extreme fragility of our modern world, and how much of it has depended on a United States of America. This is state-of-the-art alternate history, nothing less. Author tour.
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AMERICAN FRONT

[redacted]

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Prelude

[redacted]

1 OCTOBER—OUTSIDE CAMP HILL, PENNSYLVANIA

[redacted]

"That is very fine," Lee murmured. He peered through the thick smoke, but piercing it was impossible, even with the polished brass spyglass that lay on the folding table in front of him. He had to rely on reports from couriers like this eager young man, but all the reports, from just after the rising of the sun when the battle was joined till now with it sinking in blood—*more blood,* he thought—behind him, had been what he'd prayed to hear.

Colonel Robert Chilton, his assistant adjutant general, was no more able than the courier to contain his excitement. "Very fine, sir?" he burst out. "It's better than that. With Longstreet holding the Yankees in the center, McLaws outflanking them on the left, and now Stonewall on the right, they're in a sack Napoleon couldn't have got out of. And if there's one soldier in the world who's no Napoleon, it's the 'Young Napoleon' the Federals have."

"General McClellan, whatever his virtues, is not a hasty man," Lee observed, smiling at Chilton's derisive use of the grandiloquent nickname the Northern papers had given the commander of the Army of the Potomac. 'Those people'—his own habitual name for the foe—"were also perhaps ill-advised to accept battle in front of a river with only one bridge offering a line of retreat should their plans miscarry."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant said, and repeated the order back to make sure he had it straight. Wheeling his bay gelding, he galloped off towards General Jackson's position.

"The Army of the Potomac cannot hope to resist us, not after this," Colonel Chilton said. "Philadelphia lies open to our men, and Baltimore, and Washington itself."

"I'd not relish attacking the works those people have placed around Washington City," Lee replied, "but you are of course correct, Colonel: that possibility is available to us. Another consideration we cannot dismiss is the probable effect of our victory here upon England and France, both of whom

have, President Davis tells me, been debating whether they should extend recognition to our new nation."

"They'll have the devil's own time not doing it now," Chilton declared. "Either we are our own nation or we belong to the United States: those are the only two choices." He laughed and pointed toward the smoke-befogged battlefield. "Abe Lincoln can't say we're under his tyrant's thumb, not after this."

"Diplomacy is too arcane a subject for a poor simple soldier to vex his head over its niceties and peculiarities," Lee said, "but on this occasion, Colonel Chilton, I find it impossible to disagree with you."

4 NOVEMBER—THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Both horses that brought Lord Lyons' carriage to the White House were black. So was the carriage itself, and the cloth canopy stretched over it to protect the British minister from the rain. *All very fitting,* Lord Lyons thought, *for what is in effect a funeral.*

"Whoa!" the driver said quietly, and pulled back on the reins. The horses, well-trained animals both, halted in a couple of short, neat strides just in front of the entrance of the American presidential mansion. The driver handed Lord Lyons an umbrella to protect himself against the rain for the few steps he'd need to get under cover.

"Yes, sir," the driver said.

Lord Lyons got down from the carriage. His feet splashed in the water on the walkway as he hurried toward the White House entrance. A few raindrops hit him in the face in spite of the umbrella. Miller chirruped to the horses and drove off toward the stable.

"Thank you, Mr. Nicolay." Lord Lyons hesitated, but then, as Nicolay turned away to lead him to Lincoln's office, decided to go on: "I would like the president to understand that what I do today, I do as the servant and representative of Her Majesty's government, and that in my own person I deeply regret the necessity for this meeting."

When you got right down to it *(American idiom,* Lord Lyons thought), it made very little difference. He was silent as he followed Nicolay upstairs. But for the personal secretary and the one servant, he had seen no one in the White House. It was as if the rest of the staff at the presidential mansion feared he bore some deadly, contagious disease. And so, in a way, he did.

John Nicolay seated him in an antechamber outside Lincoln's office. "Let me announce you, Your Excellency. I'll be back directly." He ducked into the office, closing the door after himself; Lord Lyons hoped he was delivering the personal message with which he had been entrusted. He emerged almost as quickly as he had promised. "President Lincoln will see you now, sir."

Abraham Lincoln got up from behind his desk and extended his hand. "Good day to you, sir," he said in his rustic accent. Outwardly, he was as calm as if he reckoned the occasion no more than an ordinary social call.

"Er—no," Lord Lyons said. Lincoln had a gift for unexpected, apt, and vivid similes; one of me British minister's molars gave him a twinge at the mere idea of visiting the dentist. "As Mr. Nicolay may have told you—"

"Yes, yes," Lincoln interrupted. "He did tell me. It's not that I'm not grateful, either, but how you feel about it hasn't got anything to do with the price of whiskey." He'd aged ten years in the little more than a year and a half since he'd taken office; harsh lines scored his face into a mask of grief that begged to be carved into eternal marble. "Just say what you've come to say."

"Very well, Mr. President." Lord Lyons took a deep bream. He really didn't want to go on; he loathed slavery and everything it stood for. But his instructions from London were explicit, and admitted of no compromise. "I am directed by Lord Palmerston, prime minister for Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, who is, I am to inform you, operating with the full approbation and concord of me government of His Majesty Napoleon III, Emperor of France, to propose mediation between the governments of the United States and Confederate States, wkh a view to resolving the differences between those two governments. Earl Russell, our foreign secretary, generously offers himself as mediator between the two sides."

Lord Lyons sighed. "You say this, Mr. President, with the Army of Northern Virginia encamped in Philadelphia?"

[redacted]

"That would mean war between England and France on the one hand and the United States on the other," Lincoln warned.

"Indeed it would, Mr. President—and, as the United States have shown themselves unequal to the task of restoring the Confederate States to their allegiance, I must say I find myself surprised to find you willing to engage in simultaneous conflict with those Confederate States and with the two greatest powers in the world today. I admire your spirit, I admire your courage, very much—but can you not see there are times when, for the good of the nation, spirit and courage must yield to common sense?"

"Let's dicker, Lord Lyons," Lincoln said; the British minister needed a moment to understand he meant *bargain.* Lincoln gave him that moment, reaching into a desk drawer and drawing out a folded sheet of paper that he set on top of the desk. "I have here, sir, a proclamation declaring all Negroes held in bondage in those areas now in rebellion against the lawful government of the United States to be freed as of next January first. I had been saving this proclamation against a Union victory, but, circumstances being as they are—"

Lord Lyons spread his hands with genuine regret. "Had you won such a victory, Mr. President, I should not be visiting you today with the melancholy message I bear from my government. You know, sir, that I personally despise the institution of chattel slavery and everything associated with it." He waited for Lincoln to nod before continuing, "That said, however, I must tell you that an emancipation proclamation issued after the series of defeats Federal forces have suffered would be perceived as a *cri de coeur,* a call for servile insurrection to aid your flagging cause, and as such would not be favorably received in either London or Paris, to say nothing of its probable effect in Richmond. I am truly sorry, Mr. President, but this is not the way out of your dilemma."

[redacted]

"Accept the good offices of Her Majesty's government in mediating between your government and that of the Confederate States," the British minister urged

him. 'Truly, I believe that to be your best course, perhaps your only course. As Gladstone said last month, the Confederate States have made an army, a navy, and now a nation for themselves."

With slow, deliberate motions, Lincoln took off his spectacles and put them back in their leather case. His deep-set eyes filled with a bitterness beside which that of John Nicolay seemed merely the petulance of a small boy deprived of a cherished sweet. "Take what England deigns to give us at the conference table, or else end up with less. That's what you mean, in plain talk."

"That is what the situation dictates," Lord Lyons said uncomfortably.

"Yes, the situation dictates," Lincoln said, "and England and France dictate, too." He sighed again. "Very well, sir. Go ahead and inform your prime minister that we accept mediation, having no better choice."

'Truly you will go down in history as a great statesman because of this, Mr. President," Lord Lyons replied, almost limp with relief that Lincoln had chosen to see reason—with Americans, you never could tell ahead of time. "And in time, the United States and the Confederate States, still having between them a common language and much common history, shall take their full and rightful places in the world, a pair of sturdy brothers."

Lincoln shook his head. "Your Excellency, with all due respect to you, I have to doubt that. The citizens of the United States *want* the Federal Union preserved. No matter what the Rebels did to us, we would fight on against them —if England and France weren't sticking their oar in."

"My government seeks only to bring about a just peace, recognizing the rights of both sides in this dispute," the British minister answered.

'That strikes me as unfair, Mr. President," Lord Lyons said, though it wasn't altogether unfair: a large number of British aristocrats were doing exactly as Lincoln had described, seeing in the defeat of the United States a salutary warning to the lower classes in the British Isles. But he put the case as best he could: "The Duke of Argyll, for instance, sir, is among the warmest friends the United States have in England today, and many other leaders by right of birth concur in his opinions."

"Oh, yes, you said it. You just didn't make me believe it, is all," Lincoln told him. "Well, you Englishmen and the French on your coattails are guardian angels for the Rebels, are you? What with them and you together, you're too strong for us. You're right about that, I do admit."

"I see what is, all right. I surely do," the president said. "I see that you European powers are taking advantage of this rebellion to meddle in America, the way you used to before the Monroe Doctrine warned you to keep your hands off. Napoleon props up a tin-pot emperor in Mexico, and now France and England are in cahoots"—another phrase that briefly baffled Lord Lyons—"to help the Rebels and pull us down. All right, sir." He breathed heavily. "If that's the way the game's going to be played, we aren't strong enough to prevent it now. But I warn you, Mr. Minister, we can play, too."

"Mighty generous of you," Lincoln said with cutting irony. "And one fine day, I reckon, we'll have friends in Europe, too, friends who'll help us get back what's rightfully ours and what you've taken away."

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His back made little popping noises as he came out of this stoop. *I'm getting too old for this line of work,* he thought, though he was only twenty-eight. He rubbed at his brown mustache with a leather-gloved hand. A fish scale scratched his cheek. The sweat running down his face in the late June heat

made the little cut sting.

[redacted]

Captain Patrick O'Donnell came out of the cabin and pressed a spyglass to his right eye. "Warship, sure enough," he said, his Boston mixed with a trace of a brogue. "Four-stacker—German armored cruiser, unless I'm wrong."

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"She's going to pass close to us," Enos said. He could see the great gray hull of the ship now, almost bow-on to the *Ripple.* The plume of black coal smoke trailed away behind.

Captain O'Donnell still had the telescope aimed at the approaching ship. "Imperial German Navy, sure enough," he said. "I can make out the ensign. Now—is that the *Roon* or the *Yorck?"* He kept looking, and finally grunted in satisfaction. "The *Yorck,* and no mistaking her. See how her cranes are pierced? If she were the *Roon,* they'd be solid."

"If you say so, Captain. You're the one with the spyglass, after all." Enos' chuckle suited his wry sense of humor. He took another naked-eye look at the oncoming *Yorck.* The cruiser *was* nearly bow-on. When he spoke again, he sounded anxious: "We see her, Captain, but does she see us?"

The question was anything but idle. As the *Yorck* drew near, she seemed more and more like an armored cliff bearing down on the steam trawler. The *Ripple* was 114 feet long and displaced 244 gross tons. That made her one of the bigger fishing boats operating out of Boston harbor. All at once, though, Enos felt as if he were in a rowboat, and a pint-sized rowboat at that.

"How big is she, Captain?" Fred Butcher asked. The huge hull and great gun turrets gave him pause, too.

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"If she runs us down, she won't even notice, in other words,"

Enos said.

"That's about right, George," O'Donnell answered easily. He took pride in the strength and speed of naval vessels, as if having served on them somehow magically gave him strength and speed as well. Even so, though, his glance flicked to the American flag rippling atop the foremast. The sight of the thirty-four-star banner rippling in the brisk breeze must have reassured him. "They'll see us just fine. Here, if you're still worried, I'll send up a flare, that I will." He dug a cigar out of his jacket pocket, scraped a match against the sole of his boot, and puffed out a cloud almost as malodorous as the coal smoke issuing from the *Yorck's* stacks.

As if his cigar *had* been a message to the German cruiser, signal flags sprouted from her yards. O'Donnell raised the telescope to his eye once more. The cigar in his mouth jerked sharply upward, a sure sign of good humor. "By Jesus, they want to know if we have fish to sell!" he burst out. He turned to Butcher. 'Tell 'em yes, and don't waste a second doing it."

The affirmative pennant went up almost as quickly as the order had been given. The *Yorck* slowed in the water, drifting to a stop about a quarter-mile from the *Ripple.* Then everyone aboard the steam trawler whooped with delight as the German cruiser let down a boat. "Hot damn!" yelled Lucas Phelps, one of the men minding the trawl the *Ripple* had been dragging along the shallow bottom of Georges Bank. "The Germans, they'll pay us better'n the Bay State Fishing Company ever would."

"And it all goes into our pockets, too," Fred Butcher said gleefully. On fish that made it back to Boston, the crew and the company that owned the boat split the take down the middle. Butcher went on, "We're light five hundred, a thousand pounds of haddock, that's not ever gonna get noticed."

The happy silence of conspiracy settled over the *Ripple.* Before long, the eight men in the *Yorck s* lifeboat came alongside the trawler. "Permission to come aboard?" asked the petty officer who evidently headed up the little crew.

"Permission granted," Patrick O'Donnell answered, as formally as if he were still in the Navy. He turned to Enos. "Let down the rope ladder, George."

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O'Donnell scowled in thought, then turned to Butcher. "Would you work that out, Fred? You'll do it faster 'n' straighter than I would."

The first mate got a faraway look in his eyes. His lips moved in silent calculation before he spoke. 'Two hundred forty marks overall? That makes sixty bucks for... thirteen hundred pounds oi fish more or less. Nickel a pound, Captain, a hair under."

"Herr Feldwebel, we'll make that deal," O'Donnell said at once Everybody on board did his best not to light up like candles on a Christmas tree. Back in Boston, they'd get two cents a pound, three if they were lucky. Then O'Donnell looked sly. "Or, since it ain't like it's your money you're playing with, why don't you give me fifty pfennigs a kilo—you can tell your officers what a damn Jew I am—and we'll throw in a bottle of rum for you and your boys." He turned and called into the galley: "Hey, Cookie! Bring out the quart of medicinal rum, will you?"

"Have it your way, *Feldwebel"* O' Donnell answered.' I said I d make that deal, and I will." His eyes narrowed. "You mind telling me why it's better if you don't take the rum now? Just askin' out of curiosity, you understand."

"Oh, *yes—curiosity" the* petty officer said, as if it were a disease he'd heard of but never caught. "You have on this boat, Captain, a wireless telegraph receiver and transmitter?"

"I should not anything say," the petty officer answered, and he didn't anything say, either. Instead, he gave O'Donnell the 240 marks he' d agreed to pay. O' Donnell handed the money to Butcher, who stuck it in his pocket.

The captain of the *Ripple* kept on trying to get more out of the German sailor, but he didn't have any luck. Finally, in frustration, he gave up and told George Enos, "Hell with it. Give 'em their fish and we'll all go on about our business."

"Right," Enos said again. Had he got the extra ten pfennigs a kilo, he would have worked extra hard to make sure the *Yorck* got the finest fish he had in the hold. Some of the haddock scrod down there, the little fellows just over a pound, would melt in your mouth. When Charlie fried 'em in butter and bread crumbs—he got hungry just thinking about it.

But me young fish would also bring better prices back at the docks. He gave the Germans the bigger haddock and sole the trawl had scooped up from the bottom of the sea. They'd be good enough, and then some.

More flags broke out on the signal lines as the *Yorck* began steaming toward Boston once more. "Thank you," Captain O'Donnell read through the spyglass. "Signal 'You're welcome,' Fred."

"Sure will, Captain," the mate said, and did.

"Not when you stand to get away with it clean as a whistle, like them squareheads did," Phelps answered. "Wonder what the hell was chewin' on their tails. That's good rum Cookie's got, too."

They hauled in the trawl full of flipping, twisting bottom fish. Once the load had gone into the hold, Captain O'Donnell peered down in there to see how high the fish were stacked. They could have piled in another couple of trawlfuls, but O'Donnell said, "I think we're going to head for port. We're up over twenty tons; the owners won't have anything to grouse about. And we'll have some extra money in our pockets once Fred turns those marks into dollars at the bank."

Enos went into the galley for a mug of coffee. He found Fred Butcher in there, killing time with the Cookie. By the rich smell rising from Butcher's mug, he had more than coffee in there. Enos blew on his own mug, sipped, and then said, "Bet we'd be out longer if that petty officer hadn't got the captain nervous."

The *Ripple* puffed back toward Boston. At nine knots, she was most of a day away from T Wharf and home. Supper, near sunset, was corned beef and sauerkraut, which made the sailors joke about Charlie White's being a German in disguise. "Hell of a disguise, ain't it?" the cook said, taking the ribbing in good part. He unbuttoned his shirt to show he was dark brown all over.

"You must be from the Black Forest, Charlie, and it rubbed off on you," Captain O'Donnell said, which set off fresh laughter. Enos hadn't heard of the Black Forest till then—he'd gone to work when he was a kid, and had little schooling—but from the way the captain talked about it, he figured it was a

real place in Germany somewhere.

They rigged their running lamps and chugged on through the night. The next day, they passed between Deer Island Light and the Long Island Head Light, and then between Governor's Island and Castle Island as they steamed toward T Wharf.

On the north side of the Charles River, over in Charlestown, lay the Boston Navy Yard. Enos looked that way as soon as he got the chance. So did Captain O'Donnell, with the spyglass. "There's the *Yorck,* all right, along with the rest of the western squadron of the High Seas Fleet," he said. "Doesn't *look* like anything's wrong aboard 'em, any more man it does on our ships. All quiet, seems like." He sounded annoyed, as if he blamed the Germans and the Americans—easily distinguishable because their hulls were a much lighter gray—for the quiet.

Fred Butcher had his eye on profit and loss: he was looking ahead to T Wharf. "Not many boats tied up," he said. "We ought to get a good price at the Fish Exchange."

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"You go to hell, Shaw!" Enos shouted back at him. He turned to the Cookie. "Don't pay him any mind, Charlie. Remember, his family were mucky-mucks before me damn Rebels broke loose. They lost everything after the war, and he blames colored folks for it."

"Lots of white folks do that," Charlie said, and then shut up. It was hard for me few Negroes in the United States to get away from the scapegoat role that had dogged them for more than fifty years now. Compared to their colored brethren south of the Mason-Dixon line, they had it easy, but that wasn't saying much. The Rebels didn't have nigger hunts through the streets, either—those were an American invention, like the telegraph and me telephone.

"You're jake with us, Charlie," Lucas Phelps said, and all the fishermen from the *Ripple* nodded. They'd proved that, in brawls on the wharf and in me saloons just off it. George Enos rubbed a scarred knuckle he'd picked up in one of those brawls.

T Wharf was chaos—horse-drawn wagons and gasoline trucks, pushcarts and cats and dealers and screeching gulls and arguments and, supreme above all else, fish—in the wagons, in the trucks, in the carts, in the air.

Shouting newsboys only added to the racket and confusion. George didn't pay mem any mind till he noticed what they were shouting: "Archduke dies in Sarajevo! Bomb blast kills Franz Ferdinand and his wife! Austria threatens war on Serbia! Read all about it!"

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Lucas Phelps' finger stabbed out toward a paragraph farther down. "In Richmond, Confederate President Wilson spoke in opposition to me oppression of small nations by larger ones, and confirmed mat me Confederate States are and shall remain part of the Quadruple Entente." Phelps spoke up on his own hook: "England and France'll lead 'em by the nose the way they always *do, the* bastards."

"They'll be sorry if they try anything, by jingo," Enos said. "I did my two years in the Army, and I wouldn't mind putting the old green-gray back on, if that's what it comes down to." "Same with me," Phelps said.

"Good old Charlie!" George declared. " 'Course you would." He turned to the rest of the crew. "Let's buy Charlie a beer or two." The motion carried by acclamation.

From the heights of Arlington, Sergeant Jake Feamerston peered across the Potomac toward Washington, D.C. As he lowered me field glasses from his eyes, Captain Jeb Stuart III asked him, "See anything interesting over there in Yankeeland?"

"No, sir," Feamerston answered. His glance slipped to one of the three-inch howitzers sited in an earthen pit not far away. 'Time may come when, if we do see anything interesting, we'll blow it to hell and gone." He paused to shift me chaw of tobacco in his cheek and spit a stream of brown juice onto the red dirt. "I'd like that."

"So would I, Sergeant; so would I," Captain Stuart said. "My father got the chance to hit the damnyankees a good lick thirty years ago, back in the Second Mexican War." He pointed over the river. "They repaired the White House and the Capitol, but we can always hit them again."

He struck a pose intended to show Feamerston he was not only a third-generation Confederate officer but also as handsome as either his famous father—hero of me Second Mexican War—or his even more famous grandfather—hero of the War of Secession and martyr during the Second Mexican War. That might even have been true, though me mustache and little tuft of chin beard he wore made him look more like a Frenchman than a dashing cavalry officer of the War of Secession.

Well, Feamerston had nothing against handsome, though he didn't incline that way himself. Though he was a first-generation sergeant, he had nothing against third-generation officers ... so long as they knew what they were doing. And he certainly had noming against Frenchmen. The guns in his battery were

copies of French 75s.

Pointing over to the one at which he'd looked before, he said, "Sir, all you got to do is tell me which windows you want knocked out of the White House and I'll take care of it for you. You can rely on that."

"Oh, I do, Sergeant, I do," Captain Stuart answered. A horsefly landed on the sleeve of his butternut tunic. The British called the same color khaki, but, being tradition-bound themselves, they didn't try to make the Confederacy change the name it used. Stuart jerked his arm. The fly buzzed away.

"If they'd had guns like this in your grandfather's day, sir, we'd have given Washington hell from the minute Virginia chose freedom," Featherston said. "Not much heavier than an old Napoleon, but four and a half miles' worth of range, and accurate out to the end of it—"

"Took you long enough," Stuart grumbled. "Fetch me a glass of something cold. While you're at it, bring one for the sergeant here, too."

"Somethin' col'. Yes, suh." Pompey hurried off.

Featherston had been a boy when the Confederacy amended the Constitution to require manumission. He remembered his father, an overseer, cussing about it fit to turn the air blue.

"Yes, sir," Featherston agreed. "The Yankees thought so, too, or they wouldn't have gone to war to keep us from having 'em."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant repeated. Like any good Southerner, he took the stupidity of his benighted distant cousins north of the Potomac as an article of faith. "If Austria does go to war against

Serbia—"

It wasn't changing the subject, and Captain Stuart understood as much. He picked up where Featherston left off: "If that happens, France and Russia side with Serbia. You can't blame 'em; the Serbian government didn't do anything wrong, even if it was crazy Serbs who murdered the Austrian crown prince. But then what does Germany do? If Germany goes to war, and especially if England comes in, we're in the scrap, no doubt about it."

"Not hardly," Stuart said with a vigorous nod. "You think Cowboy Teddy Roosevelt doesn't know it?" He spoke the U.S. president's name with vast contempt. "Haven't seen him south of Philadelphia since this mess blew up, nor anybody from their Congress, either."

Featherston chuckled. "You don't see anybody much there when it gets hot." He wasn't talking about the weather. "The last thirty years, they find somewheres else to go when it looks like there's liable to be shooting between us and them."

"They were skedaddlers when we broke loose from 'em, and they're still skedaddlers today." Stuart spoke with conviction. Then his arrogant expression softened slightly. "One thing they always did have, though, was a godawful lot of guns."

Now he looked across the Potomac, not at the White House and Capitol so temptingly laid out before him but at the heights back of the low ground by the river on which Washington sat. In those heights were forts with guns manned by soldiers in uniforms not of butternut but of green so pale it was almost gray. The forts had been there to protect Washington since the War of Secession. They'd been earthworks then. Some, those with fieldpieces like the ones Captain Stuart commanded, still were. Those that held big guns, though, were concrete reinforced with steel, again like their Confederate opposite numbers.

"I don't care what they have," Featherston declared. "It won't stop us from blowing that nest of damnyankees right off the map."

" 'Fraid you're right, sir," Featherston agreed mournfully. "They hate Marse Robert and everything he stood for."

Featherston took his glass of lemonade, which was indeed both cold and good. As he drank, though, he narrowly studied Pompey. He didn't think Stuart's servant was one bit sorry. When a Negro apologized too much, when he threw "Marse" around as if he were still a slave, odds were he was shamming and, behind his servile mask, either laughing at or hating the white men he thought he was deceiving. Thanks to what Jake's father had taught him, he knew nigger tricks.

What could you do about tat kind of shamming, though? The depressing answer was, *not much.* If you insisted—rightly, Featherston was convinced—blacks show whites due deference, how could you punish them for showing more deference than was due? You couldn't, not unless they were openly insolent, which Pompey hadn't been.

"Get on back to the tent now, Pompey," Stuart said, setting the empty glass on the Negro's tray. He smacked his lips. "That was mighty tasty, I will tell you."

"Glad you like it, suh," Pompey said. "How's yours, Marse

Jake?"

"Fine," Featherston said shortly. He pressed the cold glass to his cheek, sighed with pleasure, and then put the glass beside the one Stuart had set on the tray. With a low bow, Pompey took
them away.

"Yes, sir," Featherston said once more, this time with the toneless voice noncommissioned officers used to agree with their superiors when in fact they weren't agreeing at all. Stuart didn't notice that, any more than he'd noticed Pompey laying the dumb-black act on with a trowel. He was a pretty fair officer, no doubt about it, but he wasn't as smart as he thought he was.

Of course, when you got right down to it, who was?

Cincinnatus stepped on the brake as he pulled the Duryea truck up behind the warehouse near the Covington docks. He muttered a curse when a policeman—worse, by the peacock feather in his cap a Kentucky state trooper—happened to walk past the alleyway and spy him.

The trooper cursed, too, and loudly: he didn't have to hide what he thought. He yanked his hogleg out of its holster and approached the Negro at a swag-bellied trot. Pointing the revolver at Cincinnatus' face, he growled, "You better show me a pass, or you is one dead nigger."

"Got it right here, boss." Cincinnatus showed more respect than he felt. He pulled the precious paper out of his passbook and handed it to the state trooper.

The man's lips moved as he read: "Cincinnatus works for Kennedy Shipping and has my leave to drive the Kennedy Shipping truck in pursuit of his normal business needs. Thomas Kennedy, proprietor." He glowered at Cincinnatus. "I don't much hold with niggers drivin', any more'n I do with women." Then, grudgingly: "But it ain't against the law—if you're really Tom Kennedy's nigger. What do you say if I call him on the tellyphone, hey?"

"Go ahead, boss," Cincinnatus said. He was on safe ground there.

"I got you, boss," Cincinnatus assured him. The trooper nodded and went on his way. When his back was turned, Cincinnatus allowed himself the luxury of a long, silent sigh of relief. That hadn't turned out so bad as it might have, not anywhere near. He was resigned to playing the servant to every white man he saw; if you didn't want to end up swinging from a lamppost, you did what you had to do to get by. And the state trooper had even given him what the man meant as good advice. That didn't happen every day.

As far as Cincinnatus was concerned, the fellow was crazy, but that was another matter. Keep all the black folks away from the Covington docks? "Good luck, Mr. Trooper, sir," Cincinnatus said with a scornful laugh. Every longshoreman and roustabout on the docks was colored. White men dirty their hands with such work? Cincinnatus laughed again.

Then, all at once, he sobered. Maybe the state trooper wasn't so crazy after all. If war came, no riverboats would come down the Ohio from the United States or up it from the Mississippi and the heart of the Confederacy. Both sides had guns up and down the river trained at each other. Without that trade, what would the dock-workers do? For that matter, what would Cincinnatus do?

He looked toward the Ohio himself. One thing he wouldn't do, he figured, was try to run off to the United States, no matter how the trooper worried about that. In the Confederacy, there were more Negroes around than whites wanted (except when dirty work needed doing), so the whites gave them a hard time. In the United States, which had only a relative handful of Negroes, the whites didn't want any more—so they gave them a hard time.

"Shit, even them big-nosed Jews got it better up there than we-uns do," Cincinnatus muttered. Somebody could doubt whether you were a Jew. Wasn't any doubting about whether he was black.

Wasn't any doubt he'd spent too long daydreaming in the truck, either. A big-bellied white man in overalls and a slouch hat came out of the warehouse office and shouted, 'That you out there, Cincinnatus, or did Tom Kennedy get hisself a real for-true dummy for a driver this time?"

"Sorry, he says." Goebel mournfully shook his head. He pointed to a hand truck. "Come on, get those typewriters loaded. Last things I got in this warehouse." He sighed. "Liable to be the last Yankee goods we see for a long time. I ain't old enough to remember the War of Secession, but the Second Mexican War, that was just a little feller. This one here, it's liable to be bad."

Cincinnatus didn't remember the Second Mexican War, he was within a year either way of twenty-five. But the newspapers had been screaming war for the past week, troops in butternut had been moving through the streets, politicians were ranting on crates on every corner... "Don't sound good," Cincinnatus allowed.

White folks take so much for granted, Cincinnatus thought as he stacked crated typewriters on the dolly and wheeled it out toward the Duryea. If Clem Goebel wanted to get out of Covington, he just upped and went. If Cincinnatus wanted to get out of town and take his wife with him, he had to get written permission from the local commissioner of colored affairs, get his passbook stamped, wait till acknowledgment came back from the state capital—which could and usually did take weeks—then actually move, reregister with his new commissioner, and get the passbook stamped again. Any white man could demand to see that book at any time. If it was out of order—well, you didn't want to think what could happen then. Jail, a fine he couldn't afford to pay, anything a judge—bound to be a mean judge—wanted.

The typewriters were heavy. The stout crates in which they came just added to the weight. Cincinnatus wasn't sure he'd be able to fit them all into the bed of the truck, but he managed. By the time he was done, the rear sagged lower on its springs. Sweat soaked through the collarless, unbleached cotton shirt he wore.

Clem Goebel had stood around without lifting a finger to help: he took it for granted that that sort of labor was nigger work. But he wasn't the worst white man around, either. When Cincinnatus was done, he said, "Here, wait a second," and disappeared into his little office. He came back with a bottle of Dr Pepper, dripping water from the bucket that kept it, if not cold, cooler than the air.

"Thank you, sir. That's right kind," Cincinnatus said when Goebel popped off the cap with a church key and handed him the bottle. He tilted back his head and gulped down the sweet, spicy soda water till bubbles went up his nose. When the bottle was empty, he handed it back to Goebel.

A policeman in gray uniform and one of the tall British-style hats that always reminded Cincinnatus of fireplugs held up a hand to stop him at the corner of Fourth and Greenup: a squadron of cavalry, big, well-mounted white men with carbines on their shoulders, revolvers on their hips, and sabers mounted on their

saddles, was riding west along Fourth. *Probably going to camp in Devon Park,* Cincinnatus thought.

[redacted]

After the last horse had clopped past, the Covington policeman, reveling in his small authority, graciously allowed north-south traffic to flow once more. Cincinnatus stepped on the gas, hoping his boss wouldn't cuss him for dawdling.

[redacted]

"No, sir," said Cincinnatus, whose acquaintance with flying machines was similarly limited. 'That wasn't no barnstormin' aeroplane, though—did y'all see the flag painted on the side of it?" "Didn't even spy it," Kennedy confessed. "I was too busy just gawpin', and that's a fact." He was a big, heavyset fellow of about fifty, with a walrus mustache and ruddy, tender Irish skin that went into agonies of prickly heat every summer, especially where he shaved. Now he turned a speculative eye toward Cincinnatus. He was a long way from stupid, and noticed others who weren't. "You don't miss much, do you, boy?"

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"That's a fact," Kennedy said. "You're pretty damn sharp for a nigger, that's another fact. You aren't shiftless, you know what I mean? You act like you want to push yourself up, get things better for your wife, the way a white man would. Don't see that every day."

Cincinnatus just shrugged. Everything Kennedy said about him was true; he wished he hadn't made his ambition so obvious to his boss. It gave Kennedy one more handle by which to yank him, as if being born white weren't enough all by itself. Sometimes he wondered why he bothered with ambitions that would probably end up breaking his heart. Sure, he wanted to push himself up. But how far could you push when white folks held the lid on, right above your head? The wonder wasn't that so many Negroes gave up. The wonder was that a few kept trying.

Seeing he wasn't going to get anything more than that shrug, Kennedy said, "You pick up the whole load of typewriters all right?"

"Sure did, sir. They was the last things left in Goebel's warehouse, though. He ain't gonna be left much longer his own self— says he's headin' down to Lexington with his cousin. This war scare got everybody jumpy."

"Can't say as I blame Clem, neither," Kennedy said. "I may get out of town

myself, matter of fact. Haven't made up my mind about that. Wait till it starts, I figure, and then see what the damnyankees do. But you, you got nowhere to run to, huh?"

"No, not hardly." Cincinnatus didn't like thinking about that. Kennedy had more in the way of brains than Clem Goebel. If he didn't think Covington was a safe place to stay, it probably wasn't.

He understood Cincinnatus was stuck here, too. Sighing, the laborer said, "Let me unload them typing machines for you, boss."

That kept him busy till dinnertime. He lived down by the Licking River, south of Kennedy's place, close enough to walk back and forth at the noon hour if he gulped down his corn bread or salt pork and greens or whatever Elizabeth had left for him before she went off to clean white folks' houses.

A shape in the river—a cheese box on a raft was what it looked like—caught his eye. He whistled on the same note Tom Kennedy had used when he saw the aeroplane. By treaty, the United States and the Confederate States kept gunboats off the waters of the rivers they shared and the waters of tributaries within three miles of those joindy held rivers. If that gunboat—the Yankees called the type monitors, after their first one, but Southerners didn't and wouldn't—wasn't breaking the treaty, it sure was bending it.

Cincinnatus whistled again, a low, worried note. More people, higher-up people, than Goebel and Kennedy thought war was coming.

"Mobilize!" Flora Hamburger cried in a loud, clear voice. "We must mobilize for the inevitable struggle that lies before us!"

The word was on everyone's lips now, since President Roosevelt had ordered the United States Army to mobilize the day before. Newsboys on the corner of Hester and Chrystie, half a block from the soapbox—actually, it was a beer crate, filched from the Croton Brewery next door—shouted it in headlines from the *New York Times* and the early edition of the *Evening Sun.* All those headlines spoke of hundreds of thousands of men in green-gray uniforms filing onto hundreds of trains that would carry them to the threatened frontiers of the United States, to Maryland and Ohio and Indiana, to Kansas and New Mexico, to Maine and Dakota and Washington State.

Just by looking at the crowded streets of the Tenth Ward of New York City, Flora could tell how many men of military age the dragnet had scooped up. The men who hurried along Chrystie were most of them smooth-faced youths or their gray-bearded grandfathers. The newsboys weren't shouting that the reserves, the men of the previous few conscription classes who'd served their time, were being called up with the regulars—they wouldn't reveal the government's plan to the Rebels or to the British-lickspittle Canadians: their terms. But Flora had heard it was so, and she believed it. The papers told of pretty girls rushing up and kissing soldiers as they boarded their trains, of men who hadn' t been summoned to the colors pressing twenty-dollar goldpieces into the hands of those who had, of would-be warriors flocking to recruiting stations in such numbers that some factories had to close down. The Croton Brewery was draped in red-white-and-blue bunting. So was Public School Number Seven, across the street.

The entire country—the entire world—was going mad, Flora Hamburger

thought. Up on her soapbox, she waved her arms and tried to bring back sanity.

"We must not allow the capitalist exploiters to make the workers of the world their victims," she declared, trying to fire with her own enthusiasm the small crowd that had gathered to listen to her. "We must continue our ceaseless agitation in the cause of peace, in the cause of workers' solidarity around the world. If we let the upper classes split us and set us one against another, we have but doomed ourselves to more decades of servility."

A cop in a fireplug hat stood at the back of the crowd, listening intently. The First Amendment remained on the books, but he'd run her in if she said anything that came close to being fighting words—or maybe even if she didn't. Hysteria was wild in the United States; if you said the emperor had no clothes, you took the risk of anyone who spoke too clearly.

But the cop didn't need to run her in; the crowd was less friendly than those before which she was used to speaking. Somebody called, "Are you Socialists going to vote for Teddy's war budget?"

"If war comes," that same fellow called, "will you Socialists vote the money to fight it? You're the second biggest party in Congress; don't you know what you're doing?"

But she had to answer him. She paused a moment to adjust her picture hat and pick her phrases, then said, "We will be caucusing in Philadelphia day after tomorrow to discuss that. As the majority votes, the party will act."

Almost pleadingly, Flora said, "Can we let the madness of nationalism destroy everything the workers not just here in the United States but also in Germany and Austria and in France and England and even in Canada and the Confederacy?—yes, I dare say that, for it is true," she went on over a chorus of boos, "have struggled shoulder to shoulder to achieve? I say we cannot. I say we must not. If you believe the sacred cause of labor is bound up in the idea of world politics without war, give generously to our cause." She pointed down to a washed-out peach tin, the label still on, that sat in front of her crate. "Give for the workers who harvested that fruit, the miners who by the sweat of their brow dug out the iron and tin from which the can is made, the steelworkers who made it into metal, the laborers in the cannery who packed the peaches, the draymen and drivers who brought them to market. Give now for a better tomorrow."

The thought depressed her. The Party had been educating the proletariat all over the world, showing the workers how they could seize control of the means of production from the capitalists who exploited their labor for the sake of profit. They'd made progress, too. No civilized government these days would call out troops to shoot down strikers, as had been commonplace a generation before. Surely the revolution, whether peaceful or otherwise, could not be far away. What sort of weapon could the plutocrats devise to resist the united strength and numbers of the working classes?

Her lips thinned into a bitter line. How simple the answer had proved! Threaten to start a war! All at once, you estranged German workers from French, English from Austrian, American from Confederate (though the Rebels also called themselves Americans). Few Socialists had imagined the proletariat was so easily manipulated.

Tenth Ward party headquarters was on the second story of a brownstone on Centre Market Place, across the street from the raucous market itself. A kosher butcher shop occupied the first story. Flora paused for a moment in front of the butcher's plate-glass window before she went upstairs. Some of her dark, wavy hair had come loose from the bobby pins that were supposed to hold it in place. With quick, practiced motions, she repaired the damage. Inside the shop, the butcher, aptly named Max Fleischmann, waved to her. She nodded in reply.

Fleischmann came out and looked down into the peach tin. He shook his head. "You've made more," he said in Yiddish, then reached into his pocket and tossed a dime into the can.

"So 1 voted for Roosevelt? This means my money isn't good enough for you? *Fell!"* Fleischmann's wry grin showed three gold teeth. "If you people go bankrupt and have to move out from upstairs, who knows what kind of crazy maniacs I get right over my head?"

"Crazy is right." Fleischmann clenched a work-roughened hand into a fist. 'The Confederates, they're moving all sorts of troops to the border, trying to get the jump on us. And the Canadians, their Great Lakes battleships have left port, it says in the papers. What are we supposed to do, what with them provoking us from all sides like this?"

Flora gaped at the butcher in blank dismay. The bacillus of nationalism had infected him, too, and he didn't even notice it. She said, "If all the workers would stand together, there'd be no war, Mr. Fleischmann."

"Oh, yes. If we could trust the Rebels, this would be wonderful," Fleischmann said. "But how can we? We know they want to fight us, because they've fought us twice already. Am I right or am I wrong, Flora? We have to defend ourselves, don't we? Am I right or am I wrong?"

"But don't you see? The Confederate workers are saying the same thing about

the United States."

"Fools!" Max Fleischmann snorted. Realizing the argument was hopeless, Flora started upstairs. The butcher's voice pursued her: "Am I right or am I wrong?" When she didn't answer, he snorted again and went back into his shop.

The Socialist Party offices were almost as crowded as the tenements all around: desks and tables and file cabinets jammed into every possible square inch of space, leaving a bare minimum of room for human beings. Two secretaries in smudged white shirtwaists tried without much luck to keep up with an endless stream of calls. They mixed English and Yiddish in every conversation— sometimes, it seemed, in every sentence.

Herman Bruck nodded to her. As usual, he seemed too elegant to make a proper Socialist, what with his two-button jacket of the latest cut and the silk ascot he wore in place of a tie. His straw boater hung on a hat rack near his desk. He looked so natty because he came from a long line of tailors. "How did it go?" he asked her. Though he'd been born in Poland, his English was almost without accent.

Bruck's sour expression did not sit well on his handsome features. "A telegram came in not half an hour ago," he answered. "They voted eighty-seven to fourteen to give Roosevelt whatever money he asks for."

"On theoretical grounds, the vote does make some sense," Bruck said grudgingly. "After all, the Confederacy is still in large measure a feudal economy. Defeating it would advance progressive forces there and might lift the Negroes out of serfdom."

"Would. Might." Flora laced the words with scorn. "And have they declared Canada feudal and reactionary, too?"

"Putting the best face on things doesn't make them right," Flora said with the stern rectitude of a temperance crusader smashing a bottle of whiskey against a saloon wall.

Bruck frowned. A moment before, he'd been unhappy with the delegates of his party. Now, because it *was* his party and he a disciplined member of it, he defended the decision it had made: "Be reasonable, Flora. If they'd voted to oppose the war budget, that would have been the end of the Socialist Party in the United States. Everyone is wild for this war, upper class and lower class alike. We'd have lost half our members to the Republicans, maybe more."

"Whenever you throw away what's right for what's convenient, you end up losing both," Flora Hamburger said stubbornly. "Of course everyone is wild for the war now. The whole country is crazy. *Gottenyu,* the whole *world* is crazy. Does that mean we should say yes to the madness? How wild for war will people be when the trains start bringing home the bodies of the laborers and farmers the capitalists have murdered for the sake of greed and markets?"

Bruck raised a placating hand. "You're not on the soapbox now, Flora. Our congressmen, our senators, are going to vote unanimously—even the fourteen said they'd go along with the party. Will you stand alone?"

[redacted]

'That's right," Bruck said with an emphatic nod. "You're just worn out because you've been on the stump and nobody's listened to you. What do you say we walk across the street and get something to eat?"

"All right," she said. "Why not? It has to be better than this." Bruck rescued his boater from the hat rack and set it on his head at a jaunty angle. "We'll be back soon," he told the secretaries, who nodded. With a flourish, he held the door open for Flora, saying, "If you will forgive the bourgeois courtesy."

“"This once," she said, something more than half seriously. A lot of bourgeois courtesy was a way to sugar-coat oppression. Then, out in the hall, Bruck slipped an arm around her waist. He'd done that once before, and she hadn't liked it. She didn't like it now, either, and twisted away, glaring at him. "Be so kind as to keep your hands to yourself."

[redacted]

"Socialists should be free to show affection where and how they choose," Flora answered. "On the other hand, they should also be free to keep from showing affection where there is none."

"Does that mean what I think it means?"

[redacted]

They walked across Centre Market Place toward the countless stalls selling food and drink in a silence that would have done for filling an icebox. From behind the butcher-shop counter, Max Fleischmann watched them and shook his head.

[redacted]

"Is that a fact?" the other replied, not a bit put out by such familiarity, not today. "I should be adding up great long columns of figures, myself. But how often do we have the chance to see history made?"

"Not very often," Bartlett said. He was a round-faced, smiling, freckled man of twenty-six, the kind of man who wins at poker because you trust him instinctively. "That's why I'm on my way. The pharmacist told me to keep things running while he went to hear President Wilson, but if he's not there, will he know I'm not there?"

[redacted]

There weren't many Negroes in the crowd, far fewer in proportion to the mass than their numbers in Richmond as a whole. Part of the reason for that, probably, was that they had more trouble getting away from their jobs than white men did. And part of it, too, was that they had more trouble caring about the glorious destiny of the Confederate States than whites did.

The bell in the tower in the southwestern corner of Capitol Square rang the alarm, over and over again. *Clang, clang, clang... clang, clang, clang... clang, clang, clang.* Most often, those three chimes endlessly repeated meant fire in the city. Today the alarm was for the nation as a whole.

Bartlett nimbly dodged round carriages and automobiles—some Fords imported from Yankee country; a Rolls full of gentlemen in top hats, white tie, and cutaways; and several Manassas machines built in Birmingham—that could make no headway with men on foot packing the streets. Even bicycles were slower than shank's mare in this crush.

He rounded a last corner and caught sight of the great equestrian statue of George Washington in Capitol Square. Washington, in an inspiring gesture, pointed south—toward the state penitentiary, wags said whenever scandal rocked the Confederate Congress.

The bronze Washington also pointed toward an even larger, more imposing statue of Albert Sidney Johnston. He and the bronze warriors in forage caps who stood guard at the base of the pedestal he topped memorialized the brave men, prominent and humble alike, who had fallen for freedom in the War of Secession.

Just to one side of the Johnston Memorial, a team of carpenters had hastily run up a platform to set dignitaries above the level of the common throng. The pine boards of the platform were still bright and yellow and unweathered. The same could not be said for the men who sat in folding chairs upon it. A lot of the graybeards had seen service not merely in the Second Mexican War but also in the War of Secession. Nor were the beards all that was gray: there side by side sat Patrick Cleburne and Stephen Ramseur wearing identical uniforms of the obsolete color more like what the Yankees wore nowadays than modern Confederate military dress. Aging lions, though, could wear what they pleased.

The few ladies in the crowd were bumped and jostled almost as much as their male counterparts—not intentionally, perhaps, but unavoidably. "Beg your pardon, ma'am," Bartlett said after being squeezed against a pretty young woman more intimately than would have been proper on a dance floor. He couldn't tip his hat; he hadn't room to raise his arm to his head.

By dint of stubbornness worthy of what folks said about New England Yankees, Bartlett slithered and squirmed up to within a few yards of the ring of butternut-clad soldiers who held the crush away from the platform with bayoneted rifles. "Don't you take a step back, Watkins, damn you," the officer in charge of them shouted. "Make them do the moving."

Bartlett wondered if the guards would have to stick someone to make the crowd stand clear. The pressure behind him was so strong, it seemed as if the people could crush everything between themselves and the platform.

A high mucky-muck—not a graybeard but a portly, dapper fellow with a sandy, pointed beard like that of the King of England—leaned down over the railing and spoke to that officer. After a moment, Bartlett recognized him from woodcuts he'd seen: that was Emmanuel Sellars, the secretary of war. Was he giving the command for a demonstration against the crowd? Bartlett couldn't hear his orders. If he was, it would be pandemonium. Bartlett got ready to flee, and hoped the stampede wouldn't run over him.

The officer—a captain by the three bars on either side of his collar—shouted to his men. Bartlett couldn't make out what he said, either, but fear ran through him when some of the guards raised the rifles to their shoulders. But they aimed up into the air, not at the people, and fired a volley. Bartlett hoped they were shooting blanks. If they weren't, the bullets were liable to hurt somebody as they fell.

The president turned this way and that, surveying the great swarm of people all around him in the moment of silence the volley had brought. Then, swinging back to face the statue of George Washington—and, incidentally, Reginald Bartlett—he said, "The father of our country warned us against entangling alliances, a warning that served us well when we were yoked to the North, before its arrogance created in our Confederacy what had never existed before—a national consciousness. That was our salvation and our birth as a free and independent country."

"Jealous still, the United States in their turn also developed a national consciousness, a dark and bitter one, as any so opposed to ours must be." He spoke not like a politician inflaming a crowd but like a professor setting out arguments—he had taken the one path before choosing the other. 'The German spirit of arrogance and militarism has taken hold in the United States; they see

only the gun as the proper arbiter between nations, and their president takes Wil-helm as his model. He struts and swaggers and acts the fool in all regards."

"And now, as a result of our honoring our commitment to our gallant allies, that man Roosevelt has sought from the U.S. Congress a declaration of war not only against England and France but also against the Confederate States of America. His servile lackeys, misnamed Democrats, have given him what he wanted, and the telegraph informs me that fighting has begun along our border and on the high seas.

II

Nellie Semphroch huddled behind the counter in the ruins of her coffeehouse, wondering if she would die in the next instant. She'd been wondering that for hours, ever since the first Confederate shells began falling on Washington, D.C.

Beside her, her daughter Edna wailed, "When will it stop, Mother? Will it ever stop?"

"It wasn't like this when the Southerners shelled us before," Nellie said, at last able to get in another complete sentence. "When I was a girl, they bombarded Washington, yes, but after an hour or so they were done. I was scared then, but only for a little while. That's why we didn't leave when—"

Now, instead of a shell, Edna interrupted her: "We should have, Mama. We should have gotten out while we could, along with everybody else."

"Kill all those Rebel bastards!" Edna shouted. "Blow Arlington to hell and gone so we don't have the God-damned Lees looking down on us like lords. Blow their balls off, every fucking one of them!"

Nellie stared at her daughter. "Where ever did you learn such language?" she gasped. Absurdly, at that moment, her first impulse was to wash Edna's mouth out with soap. After a moment's reflection, though, she wished she let the words out more readily herself. She knew them—oh, she knew them. And when hell came up here on earth, what did a few bad words matter?

"I'm sorry, Mama," Edna said, but then her chin came up. "No, I'm not sorry, not a bit of it. I wish I knew worse to call the Confederates. If I did, I would, and that's the truth."

More freight-train noises filled the air, these from the east and south: Rebel artillery, striking back at U.S. guns. Because the Confederates were trying to hit the cannons, shells stopped falling on Washington itself and began smashing the hills that ringed the city.

Edna stood up. "Maybe we can get out of town now, Mama," she said hopefully.

A shell fragment had ripped into the fancy brass coffee grinder that gleamed out in front of the counter. Nellie wouldn't be grinding coffee with it again, not any time soon. She shivered and had to grasp the counter for a moment. If a fragment had done that to sturdy, machined brass, what would it have done to flesh? A few feet to one side and she would have found out. No, 1881 hadn't been like this.

She walked toward what had been her front window and was now a square opening with a few jagged shards round the edges. Out in the street—which had suddenly acquired deep pocks, like the face of a man who'd never been vaccinated—a shattered delivery wagon sat on its side, the horses that had drawn it grue-somely dead in the traces. Nellie gulped. She'd killed and plucked and gutted plenty of chickens, and even a few pigs, but artillery was a horrifyingly sloppy butcher. She hadn't imagined horses had that much blood in them, either. A scrawny stray dog came up and sniffed the pool. She shouted at

it. It ran away. Behind the wagon, she could just see an outflung arm. No, the driver hadn't been luckier than his animals.

"Can we get out of town, do you think, Ma?" Edna repeated.

Nellie raised her eyes from the street to the high ground. For a moment, she did not understand what she was seeing, and thought a Midwestern dust storm had suddenly been transplanted to those low, rolling hills. Dust there was aplenty, but no wind to raise it. Instead, it came from the carpet of shells the Confederates were laying down. When she looked more closely, she spied the ugly red core of fire in each explosion. She wondered how anything could live under such bombardment, and if anything did.

Her question there was answered a moment later, for not all the flames came from landing shells. Some sprang from the muzzles of U.S. guns hurling death back at the enemy. To her amazement, she discovered she could briefly follow some of the big American shells as they rose into the sky.

From behind her, Edna said, "Let's go, Ma."

Across the street, something moved inside a battered cobbler's shop. Nellie's heart jumped into her mouth until she recognized old Mr. Jacobs, who ran the place. He waved to her, calling, "You are still alive, Widow Semphroch?"

"I think so, yes," Nellie answered, which brought a twisted smile to the cobbler's wizened face.

Before she could say anything more, the sound of many booted men running made her turn her head. A stream of green-gray-clad American soldiers in matching forage caps pounded past the wrecked delivery van and dead horses. Sunlight glinted from the bayonets they'd fixed to the ends of their rifles.

"You civilians better get back under cover," one of them shouted. "The damn Rebs—beg your pardon, ma'am—they're liable to try comin' across the river. They do, we're gonna give 'em what for. Ain't that right, boys?"

The soldiers made harsh, eager grunts unlike any Nellie had heard before. Not all of them were fuzz-bearded boys; some had to be close to thirty. Mobilization had scooped up a lot of men who'd done their two years a long time ago, and put them back in the Army.

A couple of the soldiers were trundling a machine gun along on its little wheeled carriage. When they came to shell holes in the street, they either maneuvered it around them or manhandled it over. Its fat brass water jacket must have been newly polished, for it gleamed brighter than the bayonets.

One of the machine-gun handlers stared at Edna and ran his tongue over his lips as if he were a cat that had just finished a saucer of cream. Nellie glanced over

to her daughter, who was filthy, bedraggled, exhausted ... but young, unmistakably young.

Men, Nellie thought, a one-word indictment of half the human race. Not long ago, or so it seemed, they'd looked at her that way, and she'd looked back. She'd done more than look back, in fact. That was the start of how Edna came to be, and why her name had changed from Houlihan to Semphroch in such a tearing hurry.

She heard a fresh noise in the air, a sharp, quick *whizz!* A couple of soldiers looked up to see what that was. A couple of others, wiser or more experienced, threw themselves flat on the ground.

Only a couple of seconds after the *whizz!* first reached her ears, it was followed by a huge *bang!* at the head of the column. Men reeled away from the explosion, shrieking. There were more whizzes in the air now, too. The Confederates had spotted the moving infantrymen, and decided to open up on them.

"We have to help them, Ma," Edna said. "We have plenty of rags and things—"

Nellie hadn't noticed her daughter get up beside her. She nodded, though she knew what would happen if more shells caught them out in the open.

Stretcher bearers were taking charge of some of the wounded. They nodded gratefully, though, when they saw Nellie and Edna come out with old clothes in their hands.

The second man Nellie bandaged was the machine gunner who'd leered at Edna. Now his face was waxy pale instead of ruddy and alight with lust. Nellie had to force his hands—protectively cupped too late—away from the wound at the

base of his belly before she could try to stanch the bleeding. If he lived, he wouldn't be doing much with the girls, not any more.

Mangled and in agony though he was, the machine gunner smiled a little. He knew what the sound was, though Nellie didn't. Seeing his knowledge made her understand, too.

"So that's the noise a machine gun makes," Nellie murmured. The pale-faced soldier nodded, a single short jerk of his head. "Good," Nellie told him. "That means the Rebs are catching it hot." He nodded again.

The wheat was turning golden under the warm August sun. From the front porch of his farmhouse, Arthur McGregor surveyed the crop with dour satisfaction. The quick-ripening hybrid Marquis strain he'd put in the ground these past few years beat the old Red Fife all hollow. Here a quarter of the way from the U.S. border to Winnipeg, every day you could shave off the growing season was a good one, especially since half your ground lay fallow each year.

And so it was Maude who said, "They've come over the border, eh?"

Maude turned and looked southward, as if in fear of locusts, though soldiers from the United States were liable to prove even more destructive. Under her bonnet, she wore her red hair tightly pinned down against her head, but it was so fine, wisps kept escaping the pins and springing out in front of her face. She brushed them back from her gray eyes with work-roughened hands: like her

husband, she'd never known an easy day in her life. "The devil's own lot of them down there," she said, her voice worried.

"Don't I know it? Don't we all know it?" McGregor sighed again. "Sixty, sixty-five million of them, maybe eight million up here." By the way he spoke, he expected everyone in the United States, young or old, man or woman, to parade past the farmhouse in the next few minutes.

"We're not alone, eh?" Maude said; maybe she was seeing sixty or sixty-five million angry Americans in her mind's eye, too. "We've England with us, and the Confederacy, and the Empire of Mexico."

[redacted]

Maude peered south again, this time as if looking past the USA to the CSA. "I don't know I much care for having those people on our side, when you get down to it. The way they treat their colored people, they might as well be—"

[redacted]

"Pa! Pa!" His son Alexander came running toward the house, his voice cracking in excitement as any fourteen-year-old's was apt to do. "There's soldiers coming, Pa!" He pointed to the north.

Arthur, his mind focused on the threat from the United States, hadn't looked back toward Winnipeg in a while. Now he did. Sure enough, as his son had said, here came a cavalry troop, small in the distance, down toward the border with Dakota. Alexander jumped up and down, waving frantically at the soldiers. Arthur McGregor waved, too, but in a more measured way. He had a much better idea than his son of what war actually entailed.

The troopers waved back. Then, to McGregor's surprise, one of them peeled off from the rest and guided his chestnut toward the farmhouse at a fast trot. He reined in just in front of the porch: a little sallow fellow with waxed mustache who lifted his cap to Maude before nodding gravely to Arthur and less gravely to Alexander, who was all but hopping out of his overalls.

"Good day, my friends," the cavalryman said with a French accent that explained his swarthiness. "I am Pierre Lapin, lieutenant"—his fingers brushed the single pip on his shoulder board—"of the horse. Is it that my men and I could use your well for the purpose of watering ourselves?"

"Yes, sir, go right ahead, all of you." McGregor had to make a conscious effort not to stiffen to attention. The couple of weeks he spent drilling every year made him give an officer automatic deference.

"You are gracious. *Merci,"* Lapin said, and waved to his men. They all followed the path he had taken.

"Dipper's in the bucket," Maude McGregor said, pointing to the well. Lieutenant Lapin tipped his hat to her again, which made her flush and giggle like a schoolgirl.

[redacted]

McGregor went up to Lapin, who was waiting for his men to finish before he drank himself. Quietly, so Maude wouldn't hear, the farmer asked, "Will they get this far?" When the cavalry lieutenant didn't answer, he went on, "I've got a rifle in the house—use it for hunting. I'll hunt things in green-gray if I have to."

Lapin's shoulders went up and down in a Gallic shrug. "Whether they will come so far I cannot say with certainty. I will say, though, if they do come so far and you have not been called to the colors to resist them, be cautious with that rifle. The Americans, they take their lessons from the *Boches"*—his curled lip said what he thought of that—"and the *Boches,* in the war with France in the last century, were harsh against *francs-tireurs."*

[redacted]

"What should matter and what does matter, *monsieur,* are not one and the same thing, I regret to say," Lapin answered with another shrug.

[redacted]

"*Vous avez raison,"* Lieutenant Lapin agreed. "I could wish you were wrong, but—" Yet another shrug. "And so perhaps it grows more likely the Americans will reach this place. But if they do, they will have paid a stiff price."

[redacted]

"That is of no consequence, not to my country," Lapin replied. His turn at the well came at last. He drained the dipper dry, refilled it, and drained it again. "It is the price I agreed to pay when I joined the Army." He touched the brim of his cap in half a salute. "I thank you for the water, and I wish you the best of fortune in the hard days that surely lie ahead." He swung up onto his horse, calling on his men to hurry and remount. They soon rode away.

More of what wasn't thunder came from the south. It didn't sound closer, but it was louder: more guns in action, or bigger guns. *Both, most likely,* McGregor judged. Now that the fight had started, the Americans, the Canadians, and the men of the mother country would throw everything they had into it.

With that growing rumble in the background, McGregor's satisfaction in his

fields of amber grain evaporated. With his country and the United States harvesting the fruits of longtime enmity, any chance he'd have to bring in his own harvest seemed small and dim.

Instead of watching the waving wheat, he kept gazing southward, after the cavalrymen. Before long, he saw motion on the road coming up from the south. Without turning his head, he said, "Fetch me the rifle, Alexander."

"Yes, Pa," his son answered. The boy thundered up the stairs two at a time and returned a moment later holding the pump-action Winchester with the careful confidence of someone long used to guns. Arthur McGregor checked to make sure he had a cartridge in the chamber, then stood and waited to see what sort of onslaught was coming.

[redacted]

He had a buggy in the barn. If he hitched up the horses to it and loaded Maude and Alexander and his two little daughters into it, he could be on the road to Winnipeg inside an hour, and there the day after tomorrow.

[redacted]

[redacted]

It was getting louder—and, unquestionably, getting closer.

[redacted]

He woke several times in the night, not something he usually did—if God had invented anything more exhausting than farm labor, McGregor hadn't heard of it. But when he sat up in the blackness, he heard the crash of guns, not so steady as they had been during the day, but not stopping, either.

McGregor opened his mouth for an angry shout. It died unspoken. That first soldier he'd seen was but one of many. Trotting through the wheat, their bodies hidden, only heads and shoulders showing, they looked like nothing so much as shipwreck survivors bobbing in the sea. Here, though, what might have been wrecked was Canada.

Before long, horsemen joined the retreat. They were in better order than the infantry, stopping every so often to fire shots in the direction of an enemy Arthur McGregor could not yet see. A cavalry officer leading a couple of packhorses and a squad of soldiers who seemed to be under his command rode up to McGregor.

"Lieutenant Lapin!" he said in surprise.

"Oui, monsieur, we meet again," the French-Canadian officer answered wearily. If he'd slept at all since riding south the previous day, he didn't show it. But he still had fight in him. Pointing to the packhorses, he went on, "I have here a pair of machine guns, ammunition, and soldiers who know how to use them. I desire to make strongpoints of your house and your barn. We have, as you see, been thrown back. We may yet damage the invader, though."

"Go ahead," McGregor said at once. He knew his permission was irrelevant. Lapin had disguised a firm statement of intent with politeness, but the intent remained. The farmer went on, "Can your men drive the livestock out of the barn first, and give me and mine a chance to get clear of the house?" Strongpoints drew fire; he knew that all too well. *I'd better hide the rifle,* he thought. Secrecy came easy to him, and fear made it come easier.

He was about halfway to the dirt track when Alexander exclaimed, "Here come the Americans!"

Then the machine guns began to hammer, back in the buildings the neighbors had helped his father run up. Their hideous racket made his head snap back toward the house and barn. When he looked back in the direction of the American soldiers once more, it was as if his fields had had a thresher go over them: where the soldiers had been wheat, they were mowed into stubble. More of them came forward, and more of them went down as the machine guns spat fire through their ranks. They were too far away for McGregor to see how they died, only that they died. Not all of them died at once, of course; a great chorus of agony rose from the fields, even above the racket of machine guns and rifle.

McGregor couldn't make them stop. If he could have, he wouldn't. He exulted to see the Americans fall and writhe and die. What business did they have, invading his country? Like their German allies, they seemed to specialize in attacking small, defenseless nations that had done them no harm. One way or another, he vowed to himself, he would make them pay.

They were paying now, but they were also still moving forward. A bullet kicked up dust, not far from McGregor's feet. He heard more bullets smacking into the timbers of the house and the barn, where Pierre Lapin was holed up. The machine guns kept working a fearful slaughter, but the skirmish line Lapin had set up was thin, and did not, could not, hold. To east and west, Yanks in green-gray bypassed the strongpoint, as if it were high ground still above water in the middle of a flood.

That didn't last long. The Americans swung round behind the buildings. Firing around them—firing inside them—grew to a crescendo before abruptly falling silent.

"That there your house?" asked one of the Yanks, a fellow with corporal's stripes on his sleeves. He and his companion smelled the way McGregor did before Maude heated up water for a Saturday night bath, only more so.

"It's mine," McGregor said shortly.

The American corporal gestured with his rifle. "Go on back to it. Put your critters in the barn again. We cleaned out your soldiers, and we ain't got nothin' against civilians. Go on back." He scratched his cheek. Maybe the upswept wings of the Kaiser Bill mustache tickled.

"Ever think maybe civilians have something against you?" Alexander said, his voice hot.

"You got a mouthy kid," the corporal said to Arthur. "He gets too mouthy, maybe the house and the barn catch on fire—just by accident, understand?"

"I understand," McGregor said. He didn't know whether, in the end, Canada could win the war. He did know he and his family had just lost it. "Dowling!" The general's voice, cracking and full of phlegm, echoed through the St. Louis headquarters of the U.S. First Army. "God damn it to hell, Dowling, have you gone and died while I wasn't looking? Get yourself in here this instant, or you'll be sorry you were ever born!"

"Dowling!" Wheezing thunder—the general hadn't heard him. The general was hard of hearing: not surprising, since he was heading toward seventy-five. Even when he did hear, he was confounded hard of listening.

"Here, sir." Dowling rushed into the office. He wanted to wipe off his face; he was built like a rolltop desk, and moving quickly in hot, muggy weather made sweat pour down his ruddy cheeks. But that would have been a violation of military decorum, and his commander—the First Army's commander—made men pay for such trifling lapses.

"About time, Major," the general grumbled, but let it go at that. Dowling knew some relief; the old fool was just as likely to have kept riding him all day. "Get me a cup of coffee, man, and put something in it to open my eyes up. You know what I mean."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said. The coffeepot sat on top of an alcohol lamp to keep what was inside hot. More alcohol rested in the sideboard drawer—brandy of a finer grade than the Army used for medicinal purposes. The general liked his medicine, though. His adjutant poured a hefty nip into the coffee cup, then handed it to him.

"I'm not satisfied with the reports the cavalry is bringing us from western Kentucky," Custer declared, "not satisfied at all. By God, Major, they call that scouting? They call that gathering intelligence? Why, when I was in a blue uniform instead of this moss-colored monstrosity—"

Dowling inserted a couple of mental earplugs as his commander ranted on. Most of the men who'd fought in the War of Secession were dead, and just about all the ones who weren't dead had long since been put out to pasture. Custer should have been, as far as Dowling was concerned, but he hadn't. He'd flourished, albeit more on account of persistence and luck than any military virtue past blind aggressiveness.

The real problem was that he'd had only a couple of new thoughts since the 1860s, and none since the 1880s. Gently, Dowling tried to bring him up toward modern times: "Much harder for cavalry to move now, sir, than it used to be. Machine guns have been hard on horses, you know. Our aeroplanes have brought back excellent sketches of Confederate defenses, though, and with them —"

"Machine guns are all very well for mowing down savages, but properly trained and disciplined troops shouldn't be so leery of them," Custer said. "Our troops are shying from them like so many virgins at the touch of a man. And as for aeroplanes—" He snapped his fingers. "They're all very fine for impressing yahoos at county fairs, but you can't take them seriously as weapons of war. Mark my words, Major: in five years' time the newfangled contraptions will be as forgotten as Ozymandias."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said, that seeming a safer course than asking who Ozymandias was and having to sit through a lecture that had nothing to do with the war. Still trying valiantly to remind Custer that they had reached the twentieth century, he went on, "The couple of armored automobiles we've been able to deploy have also given good service."

"Yes, sir—if," Dowling said. If, on the other hand, one of those heavily armed, heavily armored craft got loose among the barges and such shipping Americans across the river, the slaughter would be horrendous. And, since the monitors were so heavily armored, holding them away from the landing force would be anything but easy—no wonder the Navy was shillyshallying about that.

"I shall go to the front," Custer said suddenly, catching Dowling off guard. "Yes, that's what I'll do. My presence there will surely inspire the men to give the utmost effort. And," he added with an angry snort, "I am sick to death of being bombarded with telegrams demanding that I move faster. Roosevelt delights in having the War Department nag me. He has delighted in making my life difficult for more than thirty years." The general commanding First Army and the president had fought the British together during the Second Mexican War. By all the signs, neither had enjoyed the experience. Custer went on, "We are punching into Canada, I hear—but that is all Roosevelt will let me do: hear about it, I mean."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said in his most placating tones.

"I'm sure it must be, sir," Dowling said with some sympathy-some, but not much, for he'd been listening to Custer on the same subject for longer than he wanted to. Custer would not let it go. He clung like a bulldog, or, considering the bare natural state of his gums, perhaps more like a leech.

He took a couple of deep breaths, then went on, "We are fighting hard all across the plains. We have invaded western Virginia—so why, the brass hats in Philadelphia demand, don't I move? Idiots! Cretins! Imbeciles! Because Teddy Roosevelt has it in for me, they do, too. To them, Dowling, the Ohio and the Mississippi are little squiggly blue lines on a map, nothing more. I am the one who has to find the way across. Make arrangements at once to transfer headquarters to Vienna, Illinois, as soon as is practicable. Why are you still standing there gaping?"

"I'll attend to it immediately, sir," Dowling promised. Custer had a point—throwing an army into Confederate territory wasn't going to be easy here. But if he thought his presence at the front would help things along, he was probably

fooling himself. Whether he understood it or not, war had changed over the past fifty years. Most of the soldiers wouldn't know he arrived, and most of the ones who did know wouldn't care.

"And one more thing," Custer ordered. "Keep it secret. Half these Missourians and more than half the downstate Illinoisans wish they were Rebs. Our scouts may have trouble in Kentucky, but theirs, I have no doubt, enjoy a fine old time here."

"We'd better." Custer bared his teeth in what was meant for a fearsome grimace. Since those teeth were far too white and even and perfect to have stayed in his own mouth for three-quarters of a century, the effect was more nearly ludicrous than frightening. Dowling quickly turned his back so the commanding general wouldn't see him giggle, then hurried off to do Custer's bidding.

Baking in the late summer sun, the plains of Kansas didn't look much different from the plains of Sequoyah just to the south. "Hell-fire," Corporal Stephen Ramsay said, "once we got past the barbed wire, we ain't had any trouble a-tall."

"Good," Sergeant Bobby Brock answered. "We want to do this quick and get the hell out." He looked around at the two companies of cavalry. "We ain't got the men to stand up to any big bunch o' Yankee soldiers."

"Sure enough do," Brock agreed.

Ramsay liked to talk. "Anything that makes our job easier is all right by me," he said. "I don't expect any trouble here. Not even the Yankees got enough men to cover all the barbed wire on all the frontier. Our boys shoot off some cannon a ways east of us, they all go runnin' over there to find out what we're doin', an' we slip across easy as you please."

"That'd be good," Brock said, and let it go, from which Ramsay concluded his sergeant had some doubts. He shrugged. Bobby Brock could be a bit of an old

lady sometimes, but you didn't want anybody else along when the fighting got serious.

They rode past a farmhouse. The farmer was out in his fields. He knew right off they were from the Confederate States, and started running like hell back to his farmhouse. "Shall we get rid of him, sir?" Ramsay asked the captain in charge of the raiders.

Captain Hiram Lincoln often made himself out to be the toughest bird around, maybe because he had such an unfortunate last name. But now he shook his head. "Can't waste the time," he said. "Fellow doesn't have any telephone wires goin' into his house, so he's not going to get word to anybody. We keep riding. We'll hit the railroad track pretty soon."

"Remind me again, sir," Ramsay said, bowing to the appeal to military necessity. "We going in west of Kingman or east?"

The standard-bearer, a kid named Gibbons, pointed ahead to a smudge on the horizon. "Reckon that's Kingman, sir."

'There's the track," Lincoln said. "Let's go!"

Ramsay's horse shied under him at the flat, harsh bark of the explosion. Clods of dirt came raining down on him and the animal both; he hadn't moved back quite far enough. You could make a hell of a hole with dynamite, a hole that would take a long time to fill by pick-and-shovel work. The explosive also did a good job of twisting rails out of shape. Till the Yanks brought in some fresh iron, they weren't going to be using this line to ship things from one coast to the other.

Dismounting, Ramsay gave the reins to a cavalryman who was already holding two other horses. Then he went over to the pack animals and started pulling crowbars off the panniers they carried to either side. "Come on, boys!" he shouted. "Let's tear up some more track."

"Come on!" Ramsay said again. He lugged a cross tie over to the fire and threw it in. The rest of the troopers followed his example. Then, several men to a rail, they hauled the lengths of track over and threw them in, too. They'd slump in the heat and have to be taken to an ironworks to be straightened.

They had one rail left to cast into the fire when gunshots rang out in the east, over toward Kingman: not just rifle shots, but the hard, quick chatter of a machine gun. "Mount and form skirmish line!" Captain Lincoln yelled. "No more horseplay, not a bit—we've got some real work to do now."

Ramsay reclaimed his horse and sprang into the saddle. He checked to make sure he had a round in the chamber of his Tredegar carbine, then made sure his front pockets were full of fresh five-round clips. He had a cavalry saber, a copy of the British pattern of 1908, strapped to the left side of his saddle, but who could guess whether he'd get a chance to use it against a machine gun?

Captain Lincoln was holding a pair of field glasses up to his eyes. "Looks like they've got maybe half a company of horse," he said. "Half a company of horse and—uh-oh. They got one of those newfangled armored automobiles with 'em, too. That's where the machine gun is at." A predatory grin stretched across his face. "Well, let's go see what the contraption is worth. *Move 'em out!"* His voice rose to a shout again.

Before long, Ramsay could pick out the armored car without any help from field glasses. As it bounced over the prairie, it kicked up more dust than half a dozen horses would have. The Confederate pickets fell back before it; the Yankee horsemen, encouraged by the mechanical monster's presence, pursued a lot more aggressively than they would have otherwise, considering how outnumbered they were.

He rapidly discovered that wasn't quite true. Not only did the gun traverse in its mounting, but the driver, by swinging the front end of the armored car this way and that, could bring it to bear on targets it wouldn't have been able to reach otherwise. And the Yankee troopers were doing their best to make sure the Confederates couldn't outflank the ugly, noisy thing, anyhow.

A bullet cracked past Ramsay's head. The noise—and the fright it gave him—made him realize this wasn't practice any more. The U.S. soldiers were doing their damnedest to kill him, and their damnedest, by the way his comrades and their horses were crashing to the ground, was better than he'd expected. He'd never seen combat before, not even fighting Mexican bandits along the frontier with the Empire. His cherry was gone now, by Jesus.

He raised his carbine to his shoulder and fired at a green-gray-clad Yankee. The fellow did not pitch from the saddle, so he had to have missed. He worked

the bolt to get rid of the casing and chamber a fresh round, then fired again. Another bullet zipped past him, and another. Now he didn't bother looking after he fired, to see what effect each round had. The more he put in the air, the better his chance of hitting something.

Bobby Brock made a noise somewhere between a groan and a scream. There was a neat hole in the front of his uniform tunic. As he slumped down over his horse's neck, Ramsay got a look at the hole the bullet had made going out through his back. That wasn't neat at all. It looked more as if somebody had set off half a stick of dynamite in his chest.

The trooper right alongside of Brock went down as his horse took three bullets—neck, barrel, and hock—from that damned machine gun in the space of a second and a half. The cavalryman pulled himself free, but he didn't bounce to his feet. Having a horse fall on your leg wasn't the best thing that could ever happen to it.

Ramsay threw back his head and let out the catamount wail of a Rebel yell. "Damn thing is stuck, boys!" he shouted. "Now we can get around behind it and settle the rest of these bastards."

"And now we settle with this goddamn thing," Captain Lincoln said, riding toward the armored car from the rear. The machine gunner proved to have a firing port in the back of the steel box that enclosed him. He banged away with a pistol. The range was still long for a handgun, and he missed. Captain Lincoln yelled, "Parley, dammit!" The U.S. soldier held his fire. Lincoln said, "You come out of that damned iron turtle of yours, or we'll chuck a couple of sticks of dynamite under it and blow y'all to kingdom come."

He never got any farther than that. Somebody's carbine barked at almost point-blank range. The back of his head blew off in a spray of blood and brain and bone. He collapsed, dead before he knew what hit him. With a cry of horror, the armored-car driver tried to dive back into his machine. Several more shots stretched him lifeless beside it.

"Chew our people up and make like it's a game you can just walk away from, will you?" Ramsay said. He hadn't fired at the men who'd surrendered, but he didn't miss them a bit, either.

"All right, we did what we came to do," Lincoln said, looking from the funeral pyre of the armored car to the wrecked stretch of track. "Let's get back home."

Ramsay was happy to obey. Yes, they'd done what they'd come to do, but the cost— Of every three men who'd left Sequoyah, only two were going back, and one of them was wounded. And all that, or almost all of it, from one armored car that bogged down pretty fast.

He spurred his horse up close to Captain Lincoln's. "Sir, what's cavalry supposed to do when we run into four or five of those machine gun-totin' machines, not just the one like we fought today?"

Lincoln didn't answer for so long, Ramsay started to wonder if he'd heard. The captain looked back over his depleted command. "I don't know, Corporal. I just don't know."

"Come on! Come on! Come on!" Captain Irving Morrell urged his men forward. Dust spurted up under his boots as, with every stride, he penetrated deeper into Confederate Sonora. "The faster we move, the less chance they have of setting up lines against us."

One of his soldiers, sweat soaking through his uniform as he slogged through the desert under the weight of a heavy pack, pointed up into the sky. "They already got their lines set, sir," he said.

Morrell hadn't heard the buzz of a spying Confederate aeroplane, but looked up anyhow. He burst out laughing. No aeroplane up there, just half a dozen vultures, all of them circling hopefully. *"They* won't get us, Altrock," he said. 'They're waiting for us to feed 'em some Rebs."

“That must be how it is, sir," the infantryman agreed. He stepped up his pace to match that of his commander.

[redacted]

"We've only come twenty miles, for God's sake," Morrell said in some exasperation. "We've got a long haul before we get to Guaymas."

Morrell refused to be distracted. He scrambled between strands of barbed wire that marked the outer bounds of some ranch's property. He could see the ranch house and its outbuildings a couple of miles ahead, shimmering in the heat haze. As on the U.S. side of the border, ranches were big here; because water was scarce and precious and the ground scrubby as a result, you needed a lot of

acreage for your stock.

A rifle barked, up ahead. A bullet kicked up dirt, maybe fifty yards from Morrell's feet. As if that first one had been a test, a fusillade of rifle shots rang out. Morrell threw himself flat on his belly. Somewhere behind him, a wounded man let out a breathless, angry curse.

The Confederates had had time to dig themselves holes, and their dun-colored uniforms weren't easy to spot against the gray-brown dirt: here, at least, they matched the terrain better than the U.S. troops did. They could not let themselves be taken from the sides, though, and began falling back toward the ranch house and other buildings as their foes moved forward. Here and there, a brave man or two would stay in a hole and die in place, buying his comrades time to retreat.

He got out and resumed the advance. "We can't let 'em get set," he said. "Press 'em hard, every one of you."

A U.S. soldier was already sprawled behind a woodpile near the house, firing at the Rebels inside. A body sprawled out through a window and poured blood down onto the flowers below.

"Come on!" Morrell shouted to his own men. He burst from the cover of a scraggly bush and sprinted toward the Confederates, firing as he ran. They fired, too; a couple of bullets cracked past him.

He didn't have time to be afraid. He fired again, saw one man fall, worked the bolt on his Springfield, and pulled the trigger. His only reward was a dry click; he'd just spent the last round in the magazine. No chance to fumble for a

fresh one. The Rebels couldn't have been more than twenty or thirty feet away. He'd always been pretty good with the bayonet. If he stuck one Confederate, maybe the rest would run. Shouting once more for his men to follow him, he rushed at the enemy.

Next thing he remembered, the sun was in a different part of the sky. Somebody was rolling him over onto his back. Did they think him dead? The very idea made him indignant. But no—Private Altrock was wrapping something around his leg.

"Get that belt good and tight," Lieutenant Hoyland said. "He's already lost a hell of a lot of blood."

"Did we—take the position?" Morrell asked, each word a separate effort.

"Yes, sir," Hoyland told him. "You take it easy now. We'll get you out of here." Off to one side, a couple of men were improvising a stretcher from two poles and a shelter half. When they were done, Altrock and Hoyland got Morrell onto it, lifting him like a sack of grain. He remembered the stretcher coming off the ground, but blacked out again after that.

He woke up out of the direct sun, looking up at green-gray cloth. *A hospital tent,* he thought dimly. A man in a gauze mask bent over him with an ether-soaked rag. "Wait," Morrell croaked. "If you go into close combat, make sure you've got the last bullet." The rag came down, and with it blackness.

Seaman First Class Sam Carsten looked on the refueling process with something less than approval: he was swabbing the deck nearby, and saw more work piling up for him every moment. "Can't you lugs be careful?" he demanded. "Bunch of filthy slobs, is what you are."

"Sorry, mother dearest," one of the men on the refueling party said in a high, scratchy falsetto. His comrades laughed. So did Carsten, who leaned on his mop to watch the work go on. He laughed easily, even at himself. He was a big, slow-moving blue-eyed blond, his skin ever more sunburned these days.

"It's hot, sure as hell," the other sailor agreed. Black oil stains spotted his dungarees. "It ain't near as hot as we're gonna make it for the goddamn limeys, though."

"That's right," another hose-handler agreed. He eyed Carsten. "You're gonna be toast, are you? Maybe we'll use you for the Sandwich Islands, then." He snickered at his own wit.

"Pretty funny," Carsten said amiably. He swabbed a few strokes to satisfy any watching petty officer, then took it easy again. He'd been in the Navy five years, and was used to its rhythms and routines. Things had sped up on account of the war, sure, but not that much: on a ship you had to do things by the numbers even in peacetime, which wasn't so true in the Army. He paused to roll himself a cigarette, lighted it with a match he scraped to life on the sole of his shoe, and sucked in a breath of smoke before going on, "Any luck at all, we'll cornhole the limeys but good."

"Cornhole 'em, hey?" one of the hose jockeys said. "I like that, damned if I don't. We're sure comin' up at 'em the wrong way."

"Yeah." Carsten plied the mop again. If you looked busy, people would figure you were. If you didn't, they'd find something for you to do, probably something you'd like less than what you were doing now.

"Wish we'd have beaten the British to annexing those damned islands," said the sailor with the oil-spotted dungarees. "Then we could have sailed from there 'stead of the West Coast, and we'd be steaming for Singapore."

One good surprise— Alarms began to ring. "Battle stations! Battle stations!" came the cry. "Aeroplane spotted. Not known whether hostile."

The fleet had launched a pair of aeroplanes a couple of hours before, to scout out what lay ahead. But were these American aeroplanes returning, or British machines doing some scouting of their own? If they were British, the fleet had to knock them out of the sky before they could report back to the Royal Navy and to the land-based guns defending Pearl Harbor.

Behind him, the hose went back aboard the *Vulcan,* as if an elephant had owned a retractable trunk. They had enough fuel on board for the attack, and they could worry about everything else later.

"You ready, Sam?" Kidde asked.

Kidde patted the breech of the gun—affectionately, as if it were a trollop's backside in some Barbary Coast dive in San Francisco. "Wish we had some high-explosive shells for this baby along with armor piercing. She'd make a hell of an antiaircraft gun, wouldn't she?"

"Damned if she wouldn't," Carsten said. "Have to fuse 'em just right, to burst around the aeroplane, but damned if she wouldn't. You ought to talk to somebody about that one, Mate, you really should."

'Tough," Kidde said flatly. "Next time, don't waste time wipin' your ass. It won't matter what you smell like—we get into a real scrap and we'll all be shittin' ourselves any which way."

Carsten laughed till he incautiously jerked around and barked his shin on the edge of an ammunition rack. He swore, but kept on laughing. Part of that was good nature, part of it nerves. He didn't try to figure out which part was which.

"You think it's really true?" Hoskins breathed.

"Why not?" Sam Carsten said. "Battle stations got you that way, didn't it?" The other seaman glared at him, but he wasn't easy to get angry at.

"If it's so," Kidde said, "you can serve those Englishmen up with tea and crumpets, because they're dinner. They hit us a low blow back in granddad's day, comin' in on the side of the Rebels. Now we give it back. Sweet suffering Jesus, do we ever! All those ships sittin' inside Pearl Harbor, waiting for us to smash 'em ..." His smile was beatific.

'There it is!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Land on the horizon! We'll give 'em what-for any minute now. Well— Holy Jesus!"

"What?" The rest of the gun crew, the ones who weren't looking out themselves, all shouted the question together.

"Harbor defense guns just opened up on us. They may not have known we were here, but they sure as hell do now."

He didn't see the shell splash into the sea. Almost a minute later, though, the sound of the great cannon reached him: a thunder that cut through not only the roar of the *Dakota's* engines but also the hardened steel armor of the sponson.

And then, bare seconds after that, the battleship's main armament cut loose,

the two fourteen-inch guns in the forward super-firing turret and then the three from the A turret just below and ahead of it. He'd heard the noise from the distant British cannon; the roar of the guns from his own ship enveloped him, so that he felt it with his whole body more than with his ears. When the guns went off, the *Dakota* seemed to buck for a moment before resuming its advance.

Sailors crowded up to see what they could see. The shore and the harbor wouldn't be in range of their secondary armament for some time to come. It was like having a moving picture unreel right before your eyes, Carsten thought, except this had sound—all the sound in the world, not some piano-pounding accompanist—and bright colors.

More thunderclaps came from the guns of the other battleships in the fleet. The shore defenses sent up answering gouts of smoke and flame. This time, Carsten spied the splashes from a couple of shells. If you took a Ford, loaded it with explosives, and dropped it into the sea from a great height, you'd get a plume of water like that. Some of the splashes were close enough to the destroyers for the upthrown seawater to drench the men aboard.

"Christ!" Altogether involuntarily, Carsten turned away from his viewing slit. One shell from the salvo hadn't landed by a destroyer, but on it. The ship might suddenly have rammed headlong into a brick wall. In an instant, it went from a yappy little terrier leading the fleet into action to a pile of floating—or rather, rapidly sinking—wreckage.

The *Dakota* began to zigzag violently at what seemed like random intervals. Armored against such shells, it could take far more punishment than a thin-skinned destroyer. That didn't mean you wanted to be punished—anything but. "Cap'n" Kidde summed that up in one short phrase: "Hate to be zigging when we should have zagged."

Sure enough, one of the *Dakota's* zigs to port became a full turn, so that she presented her whole ten-gun broadside to the emerging British warships, which could reply only with their forward-facing cannon.

"Hit!" everybody screamed at once as gouts of smoke spurted from a stricken British vessel, and then again, a moment later, "Hit!"

"Wish I could see what was happening on the port beam," Carsten said. "Have they bracketed us?"

"Sam, is that somethin' you really want to know?" Kidde asked him. After a moment, Carsten shook his head. If they put one salvo in front of you and one behind, the next one came down right on top of you.

"We in range for our piece yet, 'Cap'n'?" Hoskins asked.

Carsten pictured the turrets that housed the main armament swinging back into position to carry on the fight. You fought your ship to bring them to bear on the most important targets the enemy had. If a torpedo boat or destroyer made a run at you, the five-inchers like the one Carsten manned were supposed to settle its hash. They were good for giving shore batteries hell, too: batteries that weren't main harbor defenses, anyhow.

Now, though, all Carsten could do was stare out to sea and wait for his turn. It bothered him less than he'd thought it would. Out there were the transports with the soldiers and Marines. If they all landed safely, the Sandwich Islands would fly the Stars and Stripes. The odds looked good.

"Hell of a start," he muttered. The dandy up from Charleston studied the painting with a curious and critical eye. His pose was so languid and exquisite, Anne Colleton thought, that he should have been wearing knee breeches and frock coat and sneezing after a pinch of snuff, not in a dinner jacket and smoking a fragrant Habana. His Low Country drawl only strengthened the impression of aristocratic effeteness: "Upon my word, Miss Colleton, we surely have here an extraordinary series of contrasts, do we not?"

She brushed back a lock of pale gold hair that was tickling her cheek. "I can think of several," she said. *Starting with, why are you here at Marshlands while both my brothers have gone to serve their country?* But to say that out loud would have been impolite and, however often she flouted the code of a Confederate gentlewoman, she still adhered to some of it. And so, not a hint of worry showed in her voice as she went on, "Which ones cross your mind, Mr. Forbes?"

Alfred Forbes pointed to the canvas he had been examining. "First and foremost, hanging that sense-stretching cubist portrait and all these other pieces from Picasso and Duchamp and Gauguin and Braque and the other moderns here in this hall strikes me as making contrast enough all by itself." He examined the painting once more, then grinned impishly. "Are you sure it's right side up?"

"Quite sure," Anne replied, with less frost in her voice than she would have liked. Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* had been upside down for a day before anyone noticed. It hadn't been the fault of her Negro servants, either; a curator who'd accompanied the exhibition from Paris had made the mistake. They couldn't even ship him home in disgrace, not with Yankee and German warships prowling the Atlantic. She went on, 'Til have you know Marshlands was avant-garde in its day, too."

"No doubt, no doubt," Forbes said. Now his smile was somewhere between speculative and predatory. "But even should I have been so ungallant as to doubt, I could point out that yesterday's avant-garde is tomorrow's—" He checked himself.

"Yes?" Anne Colleton said sweetly. "You were about to say?"

'Tomorrow's treasured tradition, I was about to say," he replied. He'd probably been about to say something like *tomorrow's crashing bore,* but he'd managed to find something better. His blue eyes were so wide and innocent, Anne smiled in spite of herself.

"It does now," Anne said. "These works would never have been seen in the Confederate States if I hadn't made the effort"— *and spent the money,* she thought, although saying that would have been vulgar—"to bring them here. This is my home, sir. Where would you have me exhibit them? The New York Armory, perhaps?"

Forbes laughed out loud, showing off even white teeth. "Not likely! The next progressive Yankee I know of will be the first. When the USA ships in art from abroad, it's fat German singers in brass unmentionables bellowing about the Rhine while the orchestra does its level best to drown them out—presumably not in the said river."

Anne smiled again. "They deserve each other, the Yankees and the Germans." The smile slipped. "But we don't deserve either of them, and we have the Yankees on our border and the Germans helping to harry the coast."

"Which brings me to yet another contrast," Forbes said: "how long the exhibition was supposed to stay on these shores and how long it may actually be here. Wouldn't want these paintings sunk."

"No, though a Yankee ship captain would likely boast of having rid the world of them." Anne Colleton dismissed the USA with that sentence and a curl of her lip. But the USA was not so easily dismissed. "A pity the Royal Navy took such a beating in the Sandwich Islands last week."

"Thank you, Scipio," Anne said, and took a crystal champagne flute.

"We had him specially trained in elocution," Anne said. "A butler, after all, reflects the standards of the house."

"Very true." Alfred Forbes raised his glass. "And here's to culture on the Congaree! Let New York keep the rancid Rhine; the wave of the future is here!"

Anne drank to that, quite happily. Forbes hung around and tried to draw her out, tried to make her interested in his admittedly handsome, well-groomed person. She could all but read his thoughts— *a woman who is a patroness of cubist art is surely a woman with other modern ideas, and a woman with modern ideas is surely a loose woman.* She pretended not to notice his hints. When he stepped forward to try to set his hand on her arm, she moved to one side: not in any offensive way, for he had not been offensive, but not permitting the contact, either. After a while, he gave up and went off to look at other paintings.

A couple in their fifties came up to scrutinize the Picasso. "Isn't it exciting?" the woman said. "You can see her back and her, er, bosom both together there. It's a whole new way of looking at the world."

"Maybe it takes special eyesight," the man replied with a dubious chuckle. The left sleeve of his jacket hung limp. Anne wondered whether he'd lost the arm during the Second Mexican War or, less romantically, in a railroading accident.

The salt of the earth, she thought with mingled admiration and scorn. Joseph and his wife, obviously, would never do anything scandalous, but they'd never do anything interesting, either.

Life should be interesting, she thought. *If it's not, what point to living it?* She felt like Eleanor of Aquitaine, free beyond the common limits of the world in which she lived. Royal birth had given Eleanor that freedom. Modern times were simpler: money did the job for Anne Colleton. The useless swamp along the Conga-ree aside, most of the land between St. Matthews and Columbia was Colleton cotton country.

She'd grown used to patronizing Tom and Jacob in her mind. What they were getting into these days was worse than mischief. The casualty lists in the newspapers were hideously long, and the battles not going so well as everyone had been sure they would. *Too many damnyankees,* she thought bitterly.

And who would remember the Marshlands Exhibition of Modern Art now, except as the show that was going on when war raced around the .world? She knew to the penny what the show had cost to set up and publicize. She'd made that back—she couldn't remember the last investment where she'd failed to turn a profit— and the artists had sold a good many works, but much of the fame that should have come to both the Marshlands mansion and to herself was gone forever now, lost in the cannon's roar. *One more reason to hate the United States.*

But, even if not quite so notorious as she'd hoped (in this modern age, what difference between notoriety and fame?), she was still free, and still reveling in that freedom. As she sometimes had before, she wondered how best to enjoy it.

Work for the vote for women? That thought had crossed her mind before, too. As she had when it last did, she shook her head. For one thing, advocates of suffrage were earnest to the point of boredom, and she did not want to be bored: life was too short for that. The cause, while worthy, reeked of bourgeois respectability. And, for another, South Carolina had only recently come to grant the vote to all white men, and its districts were so arranged that half of those white men or more might as well not have had it. Making headway against such resolute conservatism struck her as a long, slow job.

That thought had hardly passed her mind when some sort of commotion broke out at the front of the mansion. She hurried forward to see what was going on. Looking out the window, she spied a new automobile near the mansion: a dusty Manassas, probably hired in St. Matthews. But getting out of it was ...

She threw open the door and hurried forward, stopping to curtsy as her grandmother might have done before the War of Secession. "Mr. President!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea you would honor me with a visit here." Part of that was, *Why didn't you telegraph ahead, dammit?* But another part, a gloating part, said, *Now people* will *remember this exhibition, by God!*

"I am glad to hear you say it," Wilson replied. "Your support for the Whig Party has been generous, and I certainly hope it may continue."

"I don't think you need to worry on that score," Anne said with a slow, thoughtful nod. She wondered just how impromptu the president's visit really

was. Maybe Wilson himself didn't know. Politicians, in her experience, inevitably and inextricably mixed politics with every other facet of their lives—and her support for the Whigs had always been anything but ungenerous. She went on, "Please come in, Your Excellency. Don't stand there in the sun. If you had a heatstroke, they'd probably shoot me for treason."

Servants—all save Scipio, who remained gravely impassive— gaped as the president of the Confederate States came into the Marshlands mansion, Anne Colleton on his arm. He let her guide him through the exhibition. He also let her shield him from people who might have pestered him. This time, she smiled inside, where it didn't show. Wilson knew who was important and who wasn't—and she was.

"Not just preserving it," Anne said. "Helping it grow."

"Of course." He accepted the correction with good grace, accepted it and took it as his own. But then the creases in his long, thin face got deeper. 'The price, though, the price is dreadfully high. You have a brother in the service, don't you?"

'Two brothers," she answered proudly. The worry she couldn't help feeling she kept to herself.

"I hope, I pray, they will come through safely," Wilson said. "I do the same for every man in the Army and Navy. Too often—far too often already—my prayers have gone unanswered."

Before Anne could decide how to answer that, Scipio came back with his silver tray. "Would you like a glass of champagne, Your Excellency?" she asked the president.

"Thank you," Wilson said, and took one. So did Anne. He lifted his crystal flute to her. "To civilization, to victory, and to the safe return of your brothers."

"I'll gladly drink to that," Anne said, and did. She turned to Scipio. "You may go."

"Yes, madam." He bowed and went on his way, back straight, wide shoulders braced almost as if he were on parade.

"A fine-looking fellow," Wilson remarked. "Well-mannered, too."

"Yes, I'm lucky to have him here." Anne watched Scipio go. He

[redacted]

Lightning bugs flashed on and off as he made his way out to the rows of Negro cottages behind Marshlands. He had every right to make the trip, but glanced back over his shoulder anyhow. It wasn't the mistress he thought was staring at him: it was Marshlands itself. The three-story Georgian mansion had been sitting here for more than a hundred years, and seemed to have a life of its own, an awareness of what went on inside and around it. The mistress would have called that superstitious nonsense. Scipio didn't care what she called it. He knew what he knew.

Perhaps, today, he also still felt the presence of Woodrow Wilson, though the president had gone back to St. Matthews to reboard his train and continue on down to Charleston. His mistress associated with any number of prominent people—which meant he did, too, not that they paid him much attention. He was, after all, only a Negro.

[redacted]

Some of the little brick cottages were already dark. If you worked in the fields sunup to sundown, you needed all the rest you could get sundown to sunup. But you needed a little time to live, too. From out of open windows and doors flung wide against the muggy heat came snatches of song, cries of joy or dismay as dice went one way or the other, and the racket of children. More children made more racket outside, running after one another and pretending to be soldiers. None of them ever admitted he'd been killed. Scipio shook his head again. Too bad the real war didn't work out that way.

[redacted]

Scipio walked past Jonah's cottage, and was surprised to find no light burning in there. Jonah and his woman Letitia were always ones for singing and playing and dancing and carrying on. When he got to Cassius' cabin, though, the door was open and light streamed out into the night.

"No, ain't nobody to home here," Cassius answered. That drew raucous laughter from whoever else wasn't in there with him.

Snorting, Scipio went inside. If you took Cassius seriously, you were in trouble. He'd pull your leg till it came off in his hands, then walk off and leave you to hop home without it. But he was also the best hunter on the plantation, and that had been so for a long time. If you wanted something special for the larder, as Scipio did tonight, he was the man to talk to, even if you had to take your chances on everything else.

Cassius and the rest of the male field hands wore unbleached cotton shirts and trousers with no shape to them, nothing like Scipio's fancy suit of clothes—though better suited to this breathless heat. A couple of them had bright bandannas on their heads or wrapped around their necks to give themselves a spot of color. The women, by contrast, were in eye-searing calicoes and plaids and paisleys, with no shade of red too hot, no green too vibrant.

"You done been talking wid de president," Cassius said. "You don' reckon you too good to talk wid de likes of we now?"

"I talks wid de president," Scipio agreed with a weary sigh. "De president, he don't talk wid me. You hear what I say?"

"Jonah?" Cassius shook his head. "He ain't here no more, not he. He leff this afternoon. Gone fo' good, I reckon."

"Not no mo'," Cassius said. "He say he light out fo' Columbia, he work in one o' them factories makin' shells and things."

Scipio stared. "They don' let no niggers work in they factories. Those is jobs fo' white folks, nobody else."

"Whole powerful lot o' white folks is gone to be sojers," Cassius pointed out. "But they still got to have they shells to shoot, o' the damnyankees kick they butts. Nigger kin do the job, nigger gonna get the job. They don' pay he like he was white folks, so the factory bosses, they happy, an' Jonah, he happy, too, 'cause they do pay more'n he make here. An' Letty, she gwine try an' fin' work at one of they tex-tile plants takin' care o' the cotton *after* it picked 'stead o'befo'."

"Mought do that my own self," said one of Cassius' friends, a big man called Island for no reason Scipio had ever been able to learn. "Mo' money fo' less work sound right good."

"Mo' money, yeah," Cassius said. "Less work?" He snorted. "When you ever know white folks give mo' money 'cep' fo' mo' work, an' heaps o' times not then, neither."

Island thought about that, then nodded. But he said, "Hard to think o' anything bein' mo' work'n growin' cotton."

Scipio, who knew how lucky he was to have escaped the fields, also nodded. Plenty of field hands would think the same way; he was sure of that. Jonah and Letitia wouldn't be the only ones to head off the plantation for the factory. He was sure of that, too. And how would the mistress like it? Not much, he figured. Could she do anything about it? He wasn't sure about that. She was a power, but not the only one in the state, not by a long shot.

"Reckon I kin," the hunter answered. His eyes, cool and confident, flicked to the shotgun above the mantel. "Yeah, reckon I kin."

Scipio's eyes also went to the gun and the mantel. On the length of pine wood sat a pamphlet or little book, upside down and open. "What this?" Scipio asked, and reached for it, expecting to find a religious tract. And sure enough, the bright blue paper cover said,

He noticed how quiet it had grown inside the cottage. He looked up from the page and saw Cassius and Island and the rest of the people who'd been in there with him, and how they were all staring at him. He didn't like what he saw in their eyes. Those intent looks frightened him even more than the book he held in his hands, and that wasn't easy.

"We knows," Cassius said, just as softly. "So they kills we fast 'stead of slow. So what? White folks, they in this big war. They ain't got time to pay no attention to we, we who is doin' they work fo' they. One fine day, they ain't 'spectin' it nohow, the revolution come. It a whole new world then."

"Come the revolution," one of the women—Cherry, her name was—said with a longing croon in her voice, the way a lot of women sounded in the clapboard Baptist church of a Sunday morning, praying for Jesus' second coming. "Come the revolution, this here gwine be a *different* country, it sho' will."

Something glittered in Island's hand—a knife. Scipio watched it with horrified fascination. He gathered himself to fight, knowing how bad his chances were. Island glanced over at Cassius. "We got to shut he up. He a *house* nigger, tell everything he know to the mistress."

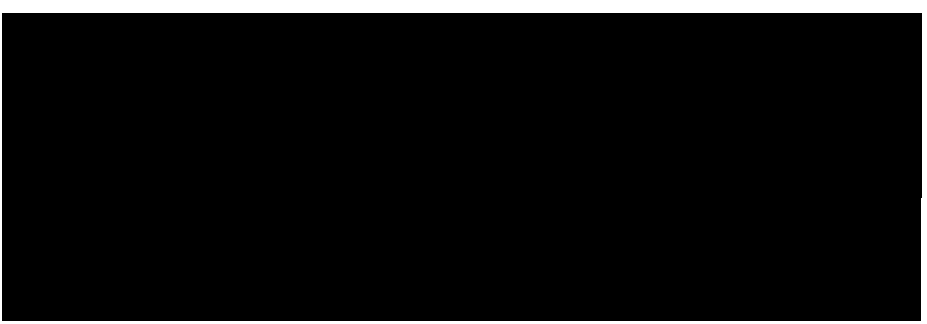
Somehow—perhaps by magic—Cassius had produced a knife, too. Almost meditatively, he said, "Kip here, he have the chance to do me wrong plenty times. He never do it oncet, not even. He even take the blame hisself when huntin' go bad. Maybe he keep a secret here, too. Kip, what you think o' that book you holdin'?"

"I think niggers rise up against white folks, we get licked," Scipio answered truthfully. "I think I wish I wasn't so curious." How long had Karl Marx been here at Marshlands? The mistress didn't have the first notion Red revolution was simmering under her nose. Scipio hadn't the first notion, either. What was that white poet's line? *Ignorance is bliss,* that was it. That white folks had known what he was talking about.

Cassius said, "Mos' times, sho', we get licked. Ain't so many guns away from the border, now. Ain't so many white folks to tote 'em, neither. We rise up, they gonna use they army 'gainst we? Damnyankees tromp they into the mud, they try that." He wasn't arguing; he'd already made up his mind, and might have been a preacher talking about the Gospel. His gaze sharpened. "Now, tell me true, Kip—you gwine say about this to the mistress?"

"Not a word," Scipio declared. He thought about adding some strong oath to that, but in the end held his tongue. It was likelier to make Cassius and the others think he was lying than to make them believe him.

"I still say we stick he," Island said.



But he would live. His legs swayed under him in reaction and relief. Then he realized how he would be living from here on out. *Playing both ends against the*

middle didn't begin to describe it. A phrase a preacher had used a few weeks before fit better. *Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea:* that was how he felt, all right. Corporal Chester Martin paused behind an oak to spy out the ground ahead. Somewhere not far ahead was the Confederate strongpoint his squad had been sent out to find. In this miserable country, they were liable to find it by blundering onto it, in which case none of them would be able to bring the news back to the artillery so the boys with the red piping on their hats could give it a good walloping.

"I think God had His mind on something else when He was making this part of Virginia," he muttered under his breath.

One of his privates sprawled beneath a bush close enough to let him hear that mutter. Roger Hodges chuckled, almost inaudibly. "You ought to know better'n that," he answered in an upcountry twang that said he'd been born not far away. "God ain't had nothin' to do with it. This here part of the world is the Devil's business, and no mistake."

"Won't get any arguments from me," Martin answered. "Nothin' but up-and-down mountains and trees and brush and little creeks that don't go anywhere. The couple-three farms we found, they look like they're right out of Daniel Boone. And the people talk even funnier than you do, Roger. Hell of a place to try and fight a war, that's all I got to say."

"Captain said do it, so we do it." Hodges sighed.

Smiling still, Martin grunted and slid forward another few feet toward the top of Catawba Mountain. He wasn't a mountain man himself—he'd been working in a steel mill in Toledo when his regiment was mobilized—but even these early days of the war had impressed on him the need to be careful with every move you made. The Confederates didn't have anywhere near the numbers of the U.S. force that had entered enemy territory from West Virginia, but the men they did have in the Alleghenies might all have been born there by the way they used the rough country to bushwhack one unit after another, then fell back to the next high ground and did it all over again.

"See any of the bastards?" he called to Hodges.

"I expect that's how it went, all right," Hodges agreed. 'They don't give niggers guns, but they're worth almost as much as soldiers, way they free up white men to fight."

Messengers from the squad that had first developed the Confederate position must have got back to the artillery, because shells began whistling down on the enemy line. Some of them fell short; one burst only a dozen yards or so from Martin, showering him with clods of dirt and sending shrapnel balls whistling malignantly above his head.

"Sons of bitches!" Hodges shouted through the din. 'They're more dangerous to us than they are to the damned Rebels!"

The barrage went on for half an hour. More shells fell short. Not far away, somebody screamed like a lost soul. You got hurt just as bad if your own side nailed you as you did from an enemy shell.

When the bombardment abruptly ended, whistles blew up and down the American line, piping like insistent sparrows. Martin scrambled to his feet, ignoring the pack that weighed him down like a mule. "Come on, you lugs!" he shouted to his men. "Let's go get 'em!"

Fear made his feet light as he rushed toward the Confederate line. That hadn't been a very long pounding, and the little mountain howitzers that were the only guns able to move up through this godawful country hardly threw any kind of shell at all. Plenty of Rebels would be left to draw beads on the oncoming men in green-gray. Maybe one of them was drawing a bead on his brisket right now.

That was the last thing he ever said. As he hung there writhing, trying to twist free of the iron barbs that snagged him, two bullets smacked home in quick succession. They sounded like fists. He still hung after that, but no longer writhed.

Martin cautiously approached the area where his squadmate had found the wire the hard way. The Confederates hadn't made a real belt of it, just two or three strands to slow up their attackers. That had been all they needed to pot poor Roger Hodges.

If you knew the wire was there, a few snips with a cutter and you were through it. Martin ran on. Now he could see the Rebels' firing pits, and the flames that spurted from the muzzles of their rifles whenever they pulled trigger. All those flashes seemed aimed right at him. The Confederates were much more readily visible than his own comrades, who took advantage of every bit of cover they could find.

For the last few yards, there was no cover. Yelling like fiends, U.S. troopers were crossing those yards and routing out the Confederates with rifle fire and with bayonet. Chester Martin yelled, too. It helped, not much but a little. He sprinted toward the nearest hole he saw. He was almost there when a big fellow in butternut popped up in it and started to bring his rifle to his shoulder.

Martin shot from the hip. Drill sergeants said you never hit anything that way. He proved them right, because he missed. But he didn't miss by much, and he did rattle the Rebel enough to make him miss, too. The man never got a chance for a second shot; Martin's bayonet punched into his throat while he was still working the bolt to his rifle.

Blood sprayed into Martin's face. The Confederate made a horrible gobbling noise and clutched both hands to his neck. He swayed, tottered, and fell. In dozens of little fights like that one, the U.S. soldiers cleared the Rebels from their line. The Confederate machine guns fell silent. The men who fought under the Stars and Bars were brave enough and to spare; most of them died rather than retreating. A few plunged back into the trees and made for their next line, up closer to the crest of Catawba Mountain.

Martin looked around for his squad, trying to keep some order as the Americans advanced. Roger Hodges he didn't need to worry about; he already knew that. He was jolted, though, to find he had only five men with him. Another soldier was dead besides Hodges, he heard, and three more wounded.

[redacted]

He'd probably meant it for a joke, the kind of graveyard humor that came naturally in the middle of a battle. But Chester Martin had the sort of mind that figured things out. Lose half the squad in the next attack and you'd have three left. Do it again and you'd have one and a half—say two, if you were lucky. Do it one more time after that and you'd be down to your last guy. No law said that guy had to be Corporal Martin, either.

By the looks on the soldiers' faces, they were working through the same calculation, and not liking what they came up with any more than he did. He paused to roll himself a cigarette and then, after he'd lighted it, to go through the pockets and pack of the Rebel he'd killed for whatever tobacco he had on him. The little cloth sack in which the fellow had carried his fixings had blood on it, but there was nothing wrong with the fine Virginia weed inside. Martin stuck it in his own pocket.

[redacted]

[redacted]

'That's telling them, Corporal," said Captain Orville Wyatt, the company commander.

Martin hadn't seen him since the attack started. "Glad you're okay, sir," he said.

[redacted]

Some of the Rebs who'd run off into the woods hadn't run all the way back to their next line after all. Instead, they started sniping at the U.S. troops who'd taken away their firing pits and trenches. A couple of groups of cursing Americans turned the captured machine guns around and fired long bursts at the trees upslope. That reduced the enemy fire but didn't stop it.

[redacted]

Captain Wyatt, as if annoyed at untimely rain, remarked, "We're not going back, and I don't much fancy staying here. Only thing left to do is advance."

Martin tossed the tiny butt of his cigarette into the dirt and ground it out

with his heel. "You heard the man," he told his squad—or what was left of it. "Into the woods we go, off to Grandmother's house. Keep your eyes open and watch where you set your feet. We already know there's wolves in there."

They'd gone a couple of hundred yards farther up the mountain, trading shots with Confederates they couldn't see and who—God willing—had trouble seeing them, too, when they came to a clearing, an oval meadow maybe two hundred yards wide and a hundred across. It would have been the most inviting place in the world, except for the machine gun hammering away from the far side of it.

"Can't just charge that," Martin said, almost as if someone had asked him to do it. 'We'd have dead piled up higher out there than they did at Camp Hill." His grandfather had been wounded in that fight. He'd worn a peg leg ever afterwards, and counted himself lucky to come out alive.

"We'll have to flank it out," Captain Wyatt agreed, and the corporal let out a silent sigh of relief. In spite of knowing what he was doing, Wyatt was a West Point man, and sometimes they got funny ideas about being duty-bound to die for their country. Chester Martin was more in favor of living for his country.

A fiisillade of rifle fire put an end to the machine gun's deadly chatter. "Wonder what that cost," Andersen said glumly.

"Ahh, shut up, Paul," Martin told him. "If you aren't demoralizing the rest of the guys, you're sure as hell demoralizing me."

This time, he and his men found the Confederate barbed wire before it found them. Cutters clicked; the wire went *twangg!* as the tension on it was released. As before, the Rebs had run up only a couple of strands, not enough to impede troops who were alert for it—and a lot of men who hadn't been alert before were dead now.

As before, the fight was sharp but short; the U.S. forces had brought enough men forward that the advantage fighting from cover gave their foes wasn't enough to check them. "Come on!" Captain Wyatt shouted, even before the last Rebels in the line had been slain. "We're almost at the top of the mountain."

"We'll get 'em out," Martin said grimly. Only a few miles separated him from Big Lick. He wondered how long it would take to get there.

* * *

The horse snorted again and got the wagon moving a little faster. Galtier chuckled under his breath. He and the horse had been playing this game for the past ten years. He hadn't used the whip since summer before last. He didn't expect to need it for another year or two more. They understood each other, the horse and he.

Drizzle slid down out of a leaden sky. He pulled his hat lower over his face—dark heavy eyebrows, swarthy skin, deep-set brown eyes, a goodly nose above a mouth that was almost a rosebud, dimpled chin in need of shaving—and wished he'd put on oilskins like the sailors wore. His shrug might have come from Paris. Not even a farmer could guess right about the weather all the time. *Not even a saint can do that,* he thought.

He couldn't see far through the rain. He didn't need to see far, though. He knew where he was—a couple of miles outside Riviere-du-Loup on the St. Lawrence River. The countryside was the same here as everywhere else in the neighborhood—farmland with wooden houses painted white, with the beams of the red-painted roofs projecting forward to create a veranda. Because of the drizzle, he couldn't see the tin spires of the churches in St.-Modeste and St.-Antonin, but he knew they were there. To look at things, all was as it might have been 250 years before.

"It is a terrible thing, war," Galtier told his horse. He and his ancestors hadn't seen the thing close up in a century and a half, not since the days when the British took Quebec away from France. It was here now, though. His nostrils twitched. Even through the rain, he could smell the sickly sweet odor of dead horses—and maybe dead men, too.

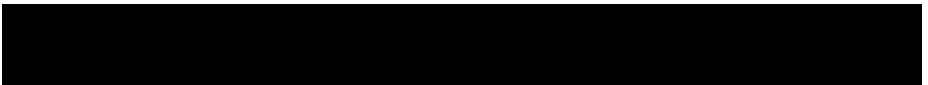
His horse also knew the odor for what it was, and made a nervous, snuffling noise. "Go on," Lucien told it. "Go on, my old. It cannot be helped and must be endured." How many times had his father said that to him and his brothers and sisters? How many times had he said it to his two sons and four daughters?

Boom! With a snort of fright, the horse stopped dead. Galtier wondered if he'd have to use the whip after all. *Boom! Boom!* Having reached the St. Lawrence, the Americans had put a battery of field guns with their wheels right on the edge of the bank. Now they were shooting at merchant ships on their way down to Montreal, ships whose captains hadn't got the word that the southern bank was in enemy hands. *Boom! Boom!*

Boom! Boom! Now the sound of the artillery mingled with the plashing roar of the waterfall that plunged off the rock of Riviere-du-Loup and down ninety feet into the great river below. *Boom!* Like every other man his age, Galtier had done his time in the Army. He'd been an infantryman, like most conscripts, but he knew a little something about artillery. He wondered how the devil the fool of an American could find a target, let alone hit it, in this wretched weather.

Houses grew closer together as he came into town. Artillery had wrecked some of them. Once, a whole block was nothing but burnt-out wreckage. The stench of death lingered here, too. Some of the telegraph poles that had connected Riviere-du-Loup to the outside world were down, some leaning drunkenly, some standing but with the wires tangled at their bases.

Posters, now turning soggy in the drizzle, had been nailed or pasted to a lot of the telegraph poles, free at last from British tyranny, some of them said in French, and showed Quebec's fleur-de-lis banner side by side with the Stars and Stripes. "I, for one, did not feel myself tyrannized," Lucien Galtier said—softly, for he was not alone on the road now. He leaned forward and asked his horse, "Did you feel yourself tyrannized?" The horse did not answer, which he took for agreement.



"No, thank you," Galtier answered, and rode on toward the market. *Ce-Soir* had experienced a remarkable change in content since the Americans came to Riviere-du-Loup. Before then, it had trumpeted of Confederate, Russian, and French triumphs against the USA, Austria, and Germany.

free at last, another poster shouted. Several American soldiers, bayonets fixed on their Springfields, stood on a street corner keeping an eye on people. They were almost invisible in the mist till Lucien got right up close to them. Their green-gray was even better than khaki at blending into the background here.

But Lucien had known they were there long before he saw them. The harsh sounds of English filled his ears. He'd learned some of the language in the Army, but not used it much since: some fishermen who came into town from the Maritimes spoke it, but he had little to do with them beyond passing the time of day in a tavern. Now, like the Americans, it had invaded Riviere-du-Loup. And they spoke of freeing the area from British tyranny! English-speaking Canadians for the most part had had the courtesy to stay away.

The hens in the back of the wagon clucked. That drew the American soldiers' eyes to Lucien Galtier. "Hey, buddy!" one of them called. "You want to sell me one of them birds?"

But the soldier who'd spoken first—Pete—shook his head. "Can't get away with that kind of stuff here in town—too many people watching. We'd wind up in Dutch, and I got some money in my pocket." He turned to Lucien. "How much for a chicken, hey? *Combien?"*

To his amazement, the American, instead of offering half that or less, reached into his pocket, pulled out a silver coin, and tossed it to him. It was a half-dollar: a U.S. half-dollar, of course, with President Reed's plump profile on one side and the American eagle in front of crossed swords on the other. But fifty cents was fifty cents; Canada, the USA, and the CSA all coined to the same standard. Carefully keeping his face blank, Galtier stuck the coin in his own trouser pocket and pulled a chicken out of the latticework traveling coop for Pete.

"Obliged," the soldier said, holding the chicken by the feet with its head

down toward the ground. He'd come off the farm, then, odds were.

[redacted]

He sold five birds in the space of a couple of minutes, at half a dollar apiece. He was delighted. So were the soldiers. One of them said, "Pal, if you'd been eating hardtack and canned beast ever since the damn war started, you'd know how much we crave real grub for a change."

Was he supposed to sympathize with them? If they hadn't come over the border into his country, they could have been eating whatever they pleased back in New York. His only answer, though, was a shrug. He had his wife to think of, and his children. He could not take chances, not when he was one farmer with nothing more dangerous than a folding knife in his pocket and they soldiers with rifles and bayonets. He reminded himself of that, a couple of times.

[redacted]

Galtier couldn't make out much of what the major was saying. Whatever it was, Father Pascal was listening hard. That worried the farmer a little. Father Pascal was a good man, but ambitious— witness his desire for Riviere-du-Loup's becoming a bishopric. If the Americans fed his ambitions, he was liable to go further with them than he should.

[redacted]

And then, to his surprised delight, that dim shape answered with booms of its own, booms attenuated by traveling over some miles of water but plainly of much larger caliber than the three-inch popguns that had fired at them. Explosions followed almost instantly thereafter, in the place from which the field guns had been firing. Some of the housewives jumped up and crossed themselves. Galtier waited to hear if the field guns could reply to what had to be at least a cruiser out there. They remained silent. He drove home, a contented man.

IV

Paul Mantarakis wished he had a chaplain of his own faith with whom he could pray. He'd heard there were a few Orthodox priests in uniform, but he'd never seen one. Protestant ministers, yes. Catholic priests, yes. Rabbis, even—yes. But none of his own.

He fingered his amber worry beads and murmured, *"Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison."* Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

"Shut up, both of you," Sergeant Peterquist said. "Come on, get moving onto the damn barge."

"Come on, pack in tight, you birds!" Peterquist yelled in his raspy-foghorn voice. "Come on, come on, come on!" All over the barge, noncoms and officers said the same thing in a lot of different ways.

Mantarakis already felt like one anchovy in a whole tin. Anchovies and sardines, you packed the fish in tight as you could, because the oil that went in with 'em was worth more than they were. Finding out stuff like that was the only bad

part of being a cook, as far as he was concerned: sometimes, because you were in the business, you learned things you'd rather not know.

Well, now he was in the business of killing people, and he had the feeling he was going to learn all kinds of things he'd rather not know. At the moment, what he was trying to learn was how to breathe without moving his chest.

"We're tight enough now, don't you think?" Paddy O'Rourke said in his musical brogue. "If I was jammed up against the pretty girls, now—but faith! It's all you ugly bastards."

The men around him laughed. When everyone exhaled at once, it did seem to give more room. Mantarakis said, "You're pretty ugly your own self, Paddy."

"Ah, but I can't see me," the Irishman answered.

What seemed like all the artillery shells in the world opened up then, on the Illinois side of the river. The roar of the guns, large and small, was music to Mantarakis' ears. The more shells that came down on the Rebels' heads, the fewer of the sons of bitches would be left to try and shoot him. He stood on tiptoe, trying to get a look at just what kind of hell the Kentucky side of the river was catching, but he couldn't see over the shoulders of his bigger comrades.

The steam engine that powered the barge started up, making the timbers tremble under his feet. "Cast off!" somebody yelled; Mantarakis heard the order through the thunder of the artillery. Somebody must have obeyed because, ever so slowly, the barge crawled away from the landing and out into the Ohio.

If he turned his head to one side, Mantarakis could see the river and catch glimpses of other barges wallowing across the current toward Kentucky. Something came down with a splash between his barge and the one closest to it. Cold water fountained up and splashed down on him.

"That came too damn close to hitting us," somebody behind him said. Only then did Paul realize the something had been a Confederate shell. If a shell did hit a barge packed with soldiers— He dug in his pocket and started working the worry beads again. If that happened, it would be like an explosion in a slaughterhouse, with young men playing the role of raw meat.

More shells landed in the river. Mantarakis got splashed again, and then again. Somewhere off to his left, he heard a shell hit a barge, and then heard a clamor of anguish from it. When you headed for battle this way, you were as helpless as a cow being driven along the chute to the fellow with the sledgehammer. You couldn't even fire back, the way you could when you got to solid ground.

How long to cross the river? It seemed like forever, though it couldn't have taken above fifteen minutes, twenty at the most. The soldiers in the front rows, who could see where they were going, passed word back that they were nearing the enemy side of the Ohio. One of them said, "Hope the Rebs don't have no machine guns down by the bank, or we ain't ever gonna make it onto dry land."

[redacted]

Paul fingered the worry beads harder than ever. His sympathies were with the soldier who'd threatened to push Smitty overboard. The very idea of machine-gun bullets stitching through men who couldn't even duck was enough to make his testicles try to crawl up into his belly.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

The water got shallower fast. Ahead of him, soldiers were running up onto dry land and then fanning out as they moved away from the bank. Now he saw what the artillery had done to the local landscape. It had probably been pleasant before the war started. It wasn't pleasant any more. Whatever grass and bushes had grown here were churned out of existence. He could tell that there had been trees down along the riverbank, but they were stumps and toothpicks now.

Beyond the trees—beyond what had been trees—the ground looked as if a chunk of hell had decided to take up residence in the Confederate States. He hadn't imagined anything could be so appalling as that cratered landscape. The U.S. guns had done their work well. Surely nothing could have survived the bombardment they'd laid down.

[redacted]

Up ahead, something moved, or Paul thought it did. Then, for a split second, he thought he'd made a mistake. And then, as flame spat from a rifle muzzle, he realized he hadn't; it was just that the Confederates' uniforms made them almost impossible to spot when they were in the dirt.

The rifle spat fire again. Ten or fifteen feet to Mantarakis' left, a man went

down clutching at his leg. Paul went down, too, landing heavily enough to jolt half the wind from him. He brought his Springfield to his shoulder and drew a bead on the shell hole where he'd spotted the Reb. Was that movement? He fired, then crawled away on his belly. His own uniform, especially smeared with mud and dirt, gave pretty good concealment, too.

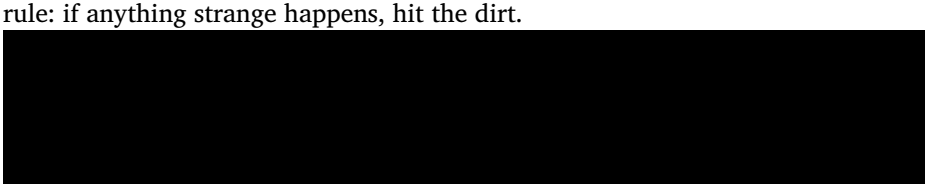
He found out how good the concealment was a moment later, when an American soldier he hadn't even seen got up, peering into the hole at which he'd shot, and waved everyone on. Paul got up and started to run before realizing he'd just killed a man. */ should be feeling something,* he thought. The only thing he felt was fear.

He stumbled in a hole in the ground and fell, counting himself lucky he didn't twist an ankle. When he got back to his feet, he looked behind him. He'd intended to see how the men on the barge were doing and whether it was all unloaded, but he kept staring, heedless of the occasional bullets still flying, at the grand spectacle of the Ohio River.

The river was full of barges and ferries of every size and age, with all the vessels laden to the wallowing point, almost to the capsizing point, with men in green-gray. Smoke billowed from scores, hundreds, of stacks, a deep black smoke different from the kind artillery explosions kicked up. Paul cheered like a madman at the display of the might the United States were putting forth. With that great armada, with the stunning artillery the gunners were laying down to ease the way for the Americans, how could the Confederate States hope to resist?

The plain answer, Paul thought, was that they couldn't. He cheered again, seized for a moment by war's grandeur instead of its terror.

And then, without warning, most of the barrage still descending on the Confederates ahead ended. "What the hell?" Paul said when the shelling eased up. He'd been in combat half an hour at most, but he'd already learned a basic rule: if anything strange happens, hit the dirt.



The river monitor—Mantarakis knew the Rebs didn't call them that, but he did—carried a turret like those aboard armored cruisers out on the ocean. Shooting up barges at point-blank range with six-inch guns was like killing roaches by dropping an anvil on them: much more than the job required. But the job got done, either way.

Shells rained down around the gunboat, too, and on it—that was why the

U.S. artillery had stopped its covering fire for the landing. If the guns didn't knock it out in a tearing hurry, there wouldn't be a landing, or not one with any chance of success. All at once, Paul realized he was in enemy country. Behind him, the Ohio looked uncrossably wide. He wondered if he'd ever see the other side of it again if the gunboat wasn't destroyed. Then he wondered if he'd ever see the other side of it if the gunboat *was* destroyed.

The barges it hadn't wrecked kept on coming across the Ohio. More loaded up and left the U.S. side of the river. The United States had a lot more manpower than did the Confederacy. Paul Mantarakis wondered if they had enough manpower to compensate for the mistakes their generals were bound to make.

Steel poured from a crucible into a cast-iron mold. The blast of heat sent Pinkard reeling. "Godalmightydamn," he said in the harsh-soft accent of a man who'd grown up on an Alabama farm, bringing up a gloved hand to shield his face. "I don't care how long you work iron, you don't never get used to that. And doin' it in summertime just makes it worse."

"You think I'm gonna argue with you, Jeff, you're even crazier than I know you are," Bedford Cunningham answered. They'd worked side by side at the Sloss Furnaces for going on ten years now, and were like as two peas in a pod: broad-shouldered, fair-haired men with pale skins that turned red from any sun and even redder from the furnace atmosphere in which they labored.

The big crucible from which the molten metal had come swung away, not so smoothly as Pinkard would have liked. "New kid han-dlin' that thing don't know what the hell he's doin'," he observed.

Cunningham nodded. "He's gonna kill somebody 'fore they take him off—and it ain't likely it'll be hisself. God don't usually work things out that neat." He spat into the new pig of steel, as if quenching it. His spittle exploded into steam the instant it touched the metal. Meditatively, he added, "Wish ol' Herb hadn't got hisself called to the colors."

"You don't need to go preachin' to the choir," Cunningham said. "I already believe, I surely do. Bunch o' damn fools runnin' things up in Richmond, dogged if they ain't." Then he paused again. He was more given to contemplation than his friend. " 'Course, the other thing is, if they ain't got enough soldiers, they can't fight the war, neither."

"They want more soldiers, they should oughta pull 'em off clerkin' jobs and such like that, not the ones we do here," Jefferson Pinkard said stubbornly. "Folks like us, we should be the last ones chose, not the first."

When Pinkard turned around, he found his replacement and Bedford Cunningham's waiting to take over for them. After a couple of minutes of the usual chatter—half Sloss Furnace gossip, half war news—the two men going off work grabbed their dinner pails and let the evening shift have the job. Another steelworker, Sid Williamson, joined them from the next big mold over. He could have been cousin to either one of them, though he was several years younger and hadn't been at the furnace as long. "Tired," he said, and then fell silent. He never could rub more than a couple of words together

Along with a lot of other tired, dirty, sweaty men in overalls and cloth caps, they all trudged out toward the gate. Some of the workers—the sweepers, the furnace stokers, men with jobs like that—were black. They kept a little bit apart from the white men who did more highly skilled work and made more money.

He strode up to Pinkard and Cunningham as if he owned the walkway, then stopped right in front of them, so they either had to stop or run into him. "Do somethin' for you?" Pinkard asked, not much deference in his voice: by his clothes and bearing, the stranger had more money than he was ever likely to see, but so what? One white man was as good as another—that was what the Confederate States were all about.

The stranger said, "Where's your hiring office?"

"Back over yonder." Pinkard pointed to a long, low clapboard building that got whitewashed about once a week in a never-ending battle against the soot Sloss Foundry and the rest of the Birmingham steel mills poured into the air. To get a little of his own back for the fellow's arrogant attitude, Pinkard added, "Lookin' for work, are you?"

"Bet your ass he ain't," Cunningham agreed. "Hiring office, they don't care what a nigger's passbook says, not these days. They just want to know if he's got the muscle to do the job. If he's a prime cotton-pickin' nigger, strong like that, they'll fix his passbook so it looks the way it ought to."

"I know," Cunningham said. "But what are you gonna do, Jeff? This place has been jumpin' out of its tree ever since it looked like the war was comin'. When we went to three shifts, we had to get the bodies from somewheres, you know what I mean? Hell, we was runnin' tight for two, way things was. Night shift, I hear tell they got niggers doin' white man's work, on account of they just can't get enough whites."

"I heard that, too," Pinkard said, "an' I seen it when we come on shift in the mornin'. An' that ain't right, neither."

"What are you gonna do?" Cunningham repeated, shrugging. 'They don't pay 'em like they was white, but even so, if you're chopping cotton for seventy-five cents a day, a dollar an' a half in the foundry looks like big money."

The conversation had carried them out of the Sloss Furnace grounds and into the company housing that surrounded them. The Negro workers lived to the right of the railroad tracks, in cabins painted oxide red. The paint, like the cabins, was cheap.

Pinkard and Cunningham lived side by side in identical yellow cottages on the white men's side of the tracks. Cunningham's was closer to the foundry. He waved to Pinkard as he went up the walk toward his veranda. "See you in the mornin'," he called.

She turned and kissed him on the tip of the nose. The motion made her blue cotton skirt swirl away from the floor so he got a glimpse of her trim ankles. "Chicken and dumplings and okra," she said. "Cornbread biscuits already baked."

Spit flooded into his mouth. He thumped himself in the belly. "And it wasn't even your cooking I married you for," he exclaimed.

"Oh?" Something that looked like ignorant innocence, but wasn't, sparkled in her blue eyes. "What did you marry me for, then?"

Instead of answering with words, he gave her a long, deep kiss. Even though she wasn't wearing a corset, he could almost have spanned her waist with his two hands. She wore her strawberry-blond hair—almost the color of flames, really—

in a braid that hung halfway down her back. She even smelled and tasted sweet to him.

When they broke apart, she said, "You still haven't answered my question."

The beer was homebrew; Alabama had gone dry a couple of years before, which meant they didn't ship Jax up from New Orleans any more. As he yanked the corks out of the bottles, Pinkard supposed going dry was a good thing for a lot of people. But a beer every now and then didn't seem to him like drinking—and it went awful well with chicken and dumplings.

She paused before answering. It wasn't a full-mouth pause; she was thinking something over. At last, she said, "I went into town today to get some groceries—so much cheaper than the company commissary, when we've got the cash money to pay for things right there—and they were talkin' about that same kind of thing, about how there's so much work and not enough hands. It's not just the foundry. It's all over the place. Grocer Edwards, he was grumbling how he'd had to raise his clerk's pay twice since the war started to keep him from goin' off and workin' in one o' them ammunition plants."

"Wish somebody'd go an' raise my pay," Jeff said. "Way things look, they're liable to end up cuttin' it instead." Once more, he summarized part of what he and Bedford Cunningham had said.

"Milo's letting Dotty go to work at a factory?" Pinkard said, surprised. If your wife had to work, that meant you couldn't support her the way you should. *Shiftless* wasn't a name you wanted to wear.

How were you supposed to argue with that? Jefferson Pinkard turned it over in his mind. Far as he could see, you couldn't argue with it, not very well.

And then, after yet another hesitation, Emily said, "You know, honey, I wouldn't mind goin' to work there my own self. They got lots of ladies, like I said, so it wouldn't be like I was the only one, and with an extra two dollars a day, we could really set some money aside for when we do have young'uns." She looked at him sidelong. "Might be any day. You never can tell."

Two dollars a day was a little more than half what the ammunition factory paid the men who worked there: better than nigger wages, but not a whole lot. That was probably one reason the bosses were hiring women. But women were dexterous, too; Pinkard wouldn't have argued with that. He'd struggled a couple of times to thread a needle with his clumsy, work-roughened hands. Watching Emily do it easy as pie made him swear off trying to sew for good.

"I know you would, honey," Emily answered. "But I'd be able to keep things goin' here, too; I know I would. It ain't like I'm thinkin' about it just on account of gettin' out of housework or that I don't love you or that I don't think you're workin' hard enough to make us all the money we need. It's nothin' like that, I swear to God it's not. You know I'm speakin' the truth, now don't you?"

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than Emily said, "If the damnyankees lick us, it don't hardly matter that we stuck by what was right and proper beforehand, now does it?"

He threw his hands in the air in defeat. "All right, Emily. That's what you want to do, you go do it. Like you say, the war's makin' everything all topsy-turvy. We'll put it back to rights oncet we done licked the United States again. Shouldn't take long, I reckon."

"Thank you, honey!" Emily got up, threw herself down into his lap, and flung her arms around his neck. The dining-room chair creaked; it wasn't used to holding two people's worth of weight. They didn't stay there long, though. Pretty soon, they got up and went into the bedroom.

From a mile in the air, the world looked like a map spread out below you. Not

many people had been lucky enough to see the world that way, but Lieutenant Jonathan Moss was one of them.

[redacted]

Shells pounded the enemy line south of Hamilton. "That's the way to go, boys!" Moss shouted, slamming a fist down on his thigh. The U.S. eagle and crossed swords were painted big and bold and bright on the fuselage, wings and tail of his Curtiss Super Hudson pusher biplane. He liked the pusher configuration; it gave him a better view of the ground than he could have got from a tractor machine, and also let him mount a machine gun in front of him to shoot at any aeroplanes that rose up to challenge his aircraft. If you mounted a forward-facing machine gun on a tractor aeroplane, you'd chew your own prop to bits when you opened fire.

[redacted]

The words were gone, but not the fact. For all the big talk in the United States about mopping the floor with the Dominion of Canada, reality, as reality has a way of doing, was proving harder. The damned Canucks and limeys had spent years fortifying the Niagara Peninsula, the part that ran west from Niagara Falls; every time they were blasted and bayoneted out of one position, they fell back to the next, just as tough as the one before. Forcing the crossing of the Welland Canal alone had put women by the thousands into mourning black.

But the canal had been crossed. Now the Canadians and British were moving back toward their last line, the one that ran from Hamilton on Lake Ontario through Caledonia to Port Dover on Lake Erie. When the United States broke through there, the country would widen out and numbers would count for more than they had yet.

As yet, the breakthrough hadn't happened. And, indeed, though the enemy had been thrown back on Hamilton in the north, they were still holding part of the line of the Grand River south of Caledonia. Farther west, the assault from Michigan hadn't been the walkover everyone—everyone south of the border, anyhow—had figured it would be. The line centered on London, Ontario, hadn't cracked yet, either, and when it would was anybody's guess.

Moss sighed. "We put too much money into Great Lakes battleships," he told the unheeding sky. He'd told everybody the same, since the day the war started. A fat lot of good it did, too. Great Lakes battleships weren't really battleships to rank with the great vessels in the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets: they were smaller and slower and didn't mount so many guns. In navies like Holland's or Sweden's, they would have been called coast-defense battleships.

What people in the USA had called them was victory. Each Great Lake had its own flotilla of them, and the Canadians didn't— couldn't—build ships to match, in quality or numbers. When war came, they'd bombard enemy towns and positions with a weight of metal you couldn't move by land.

The only problem being, it hadn't worked out that way. The first thing the Canadians had done when war broke out was to sow the Great Lakes with mines as thickly as potato soup was sown with potatoes. The *Perry* and the *Farragut,* both steaming full tilt toward Toronto, had blown up and sunk within a couple of hours of each other, as had the *John Paul Jones* over on Lake Huron. Losing millions of dollars' worth of ships and a couple of thousand trained sailors had made the flotillas less intrepid in a hurry.

As if that weren't bad enough, the Canadians had submersibles, too. Nobody —nobody American, anyhow—knew how many, but they'd picked off a Great Lakes battleship and a couple of light cruisers, too, before scuttling back to their home ports. Put it all together and it meant the Army was advancing through the toughest part of the enemy's defenses without a good bit of the fire support it had expected to have. And so the going was tough.

Jonathan Moss peered down at the Canadian and British guns. From a mile in the air, they looked like tiny lead toys, and the bare-chested men who served them like pink ants. He scribbled some more on the makeshift map. The enemy lines really did look like *lines* from up here: a zigzagging series of entrenchments that cut across the land. Even the entrenchments that ran back from the front-line positions zigzagged, to make a shell landing in one of them do as little damage as possible.

'Those bastards have been thinking about this for a long time," Moss said, penciling squiggles over the page to represent the zigzag entrenchments.

The American positions facing the foe were less neat. For one thing, the U.S. forces had to form their lines in territory they'd taken away from the Canadians, and every inch of that territory had been fought over till it was nothing but a crumpled, battered landscape that reminded Moss of nothing so much as telescopic photographs of the craters of the moon. For another, the Americans hadn't planned to conduct such a grinding campaign of attrition, and hadn't yet worked out the doctrine for fighting in those conditions.

Even getting supplies forward to the troops at the sharp end of the wedge was anywhere from hard to impossible. The railroads had been chewed up along with everything else in the territory over which the Americans had advanced. Food and ammunition had to come forward by wagon or else on people's backs.

By contrast, the rail network the defenders used was all but intact: Moss watched several trains chugging along toward the front, each one full of troops or munitions or food and fodder. He made a sour face. You could move more faster by train than with horses or people. That was what the second half of the nineteenth century had been about, if you looked at it the right way. It gave the defenders what struck him as an unfair advantage.

He was so busy noting the arriving trains, he didn't spot the other aeroplane till it started shooting at him. The sound of Lewis-gun bullets drumming through the fabric of his wings—and whip-cracking past his head—got his

attention in a hurry. He was banking to the left before he even looked up.

The Avro 504 ahead of him tried to turn with him, but his aircraft was more agile than the tractor machine. He swung away from the area the observer in the front cockpit could cover with his machine gun. The pilot in the rear cockpit blazed away at him with a pistol, but only fool luck would let you hit anything with a pistol when both you and your target were moving crazily and at high speed in different directions.

At high speed— The Avro was faster on the level than his Super Hudson, and could climb faster, too. That would nullify his ability to turn inside it if he didn't do something in a hurry. He lined up the nose of his aircraft on the Canadian biplane's tail and squeezed the triggers of his Maxim gun.

Brass cartridge cases streamed out of the breech, glittering in the sun as they fell away. In the Avro, the pilot threw up his hands and slumped forward against the fairing that helped deflect the slipstream. The Canadian aeroplane's nose went down; it began to dive, and then to spin.

"Jesus!" Jonathan Moss shook like a man with the grippe. He'd never fired the Maxim gun in anger before. He'd never expected to have to fire it, despite reports of other aerial combats. He hadn't even wanted it mounted on his aeroplane. But it had just saved his life.

"Jesus!" he said again, and licked his lips. With the wind blasting in his face, they would have been dry anyhow; some pilots smeared petroleum jelly on them before taking off. Moss' lips were drier now. His stomach turned loops that had nothing to do with the acrobatic abilities of the Super Hudson.

He'd thought one of the nice things about being an aerial observer was not having to kill anybody personally. War down on the ground was a filthy, nasty business, filthier and nastier than anyone had expected when it broke out. Watching the slow advance across the Niagara Peninsula had shown Moss that. And he'd seen it from high in the air, as if he were looking down on a chess match where both players could move at the same time. An awful lot of poor damned pawns had been captured and removed from the board.

"A knight," he said, and touched the Maxim gun as if it were the lance a knight in shining armor carried into battle with him. "A knight of the air."

'That would be the easy way, the cheap way, to go about it," he said. It was also a pipe dream, as he knew full well. Statesmen didn't go out to fight for themselves; that had fallen out of fashion after the Crusades, he didn't know exactly when. Statesmen sent young men out to do the killing—and the dying—for them.

"Hell of a gun!" Featherston shouted appreciatively. "Them Frenchies, they knew what they were doin' when they made the model." He pulled the lanyard yet again. *Boom!* Another shell went on its way toward the Yankee positions just outside of Glen Rock, Pennsylvania. Thanks to the muzzle brake on the French-designed howitzer, its recoil was a lot less than that of U.S. guns of similar caliber, which meant corrections between rounds were also less, which meant a good gun crew could get off a dozen rounds a minute. Featherston had a damn good gun crew.

A horse-drawn wagon full of wooden crates stenciled with the Confederate battle flag came rattling up. Jake Featherston and his crew let out a cheer. " 'Bout time we got more rounds," shouted Jethro Bixler, the loader. "You didn't show up soon, they was gonna give us Tredegars an' stick us in the damn infantry."

Nero and Perseus came—at a faster clip than they'd used when the war first broke out. Then, they might have been picking cotton for a plantation owner they despised. They'd come to realize, though, that keeping their crew in shells was liable to mean keeping themselves alive. As with the soldiers they served, survival was a powerful incentive toward good performance.

Each crate held twelve shells. Counting the weight of the wood in the crate itself, the weight the blacks were hauling was up close to a couple of hundred pounds each go. Grunting with effort, they unloaded crates as the driver and the gun crew watched. Then, sweat running down their faces, they went back to the animals they'd been watching.

"Lazy," the driver repeated. He flicked the reins. The horses strained in harness. The driver tipped his hat to the artillerymen and headed southwest down the dirt track called School Road toward the division supply dump.

Jethro Bixler attacked the tops of the ammunition crates with a pry bar. Nails squealed as the tops came up. Bixler flung each aside in turn. He would have made two of either Nero or Perseus: a big blond broad-shouldered fellow with the look of a blacksmith to him. When one of the ammunition crates wasn't close enough to the howitzer to suit him, he picked it up singlehanded and set it where he wanted it. Then he struck a circus strongman pose, as if to proclaim to the world that that had been a deliberate demonstration of prowess, not a white man stooping to do nigger work.

Other wagons turned off from School Road for the rest of the guns in the battery. The Negroes attached to the artillery unit stopped what they were doing to unload the shells. Through the roar of guns that kept firing, Featherston listened to the artillerymen screaming at the blacks to hurry.

"Flip those lids over, Jethro," Featherston said when Bixler was through opening up the new crates. "Don't want anybody stepping on a nail. He'd miss all the fun." He let out a wry chuckle.

"Right y'are, Sergeant," Bixler said. "I tell you, I done had just about all the fun I can stand, thank you kindly. 'Fore we started, wasn't nobody said it'd be like this here. The damnyankees, they're tougher'n Paw an' Granddad made 'em out to be."

"Yeah." Jethro Bixler slammed a meaty fist into an equally meaty thigh in his enthusiasm. "My family, we had kin in Baltimore, back before the War of Secession. Hellfire, for all I know, we still do, but nobody on our side o' the border's heard from 'em in fifty years. We should have taken Maryland away from the damn-yankees after we made peace with 'em the first time."

"And Delaware," added Pete Howard, one of the shell carriers. "All that country is ours by rights, by Jesus."

"Before it's ours, we got to take it," Featherston said, which drew more nods from the rest of the crew. "We ain't even in Baltimore yet."

"Ain't supposed to be *in* it," answered Bixler, who fancied himself a strategist. "Supposed to wheel around and cut it off so it damn well falls."

"Yeah, but we ain't done that yet, is the problem," Featherston retorted. 'The damnyankees still got that railroad goin' through down alongside Chesapeake Bay. We can't wheel round an' cut that line, they're liable to do some cuttin' of their own and leave us stranded up here."

"No wonder the Yanks are givin' us such a hard time," Jake muttered.

Captain Jeb Stuart III trotted up to Featherston's gun. "Get the team hitched to your piece," the battery commander called. "We're moving forward, maybe a mile." He pointed northeast. "The damnyankees are holed up in a couple of stone farmhouses out that way, and they've got a whole regiment stalled on its track—haven't been able to clear 'em out with rifles and machine guns, so they want us to knock the houses down."

It hadn't rained for several days, so the road—or rather, track— to the new

position wasn't muddy. When a howitzer bogged down hub-deep in muck, everybody, blacks and whites together, put shoulders to it to keep it moving. Leaves on some of the trees were beginning to go from green to gold and red. They wouldn't have started turning this early in September back in the CS A.

Since the dirt track was dry, they got dust instead of mud. By the time they reached the new position, everyone was the same shade of grayish brown, Featherston no less than Nero. The artillery sergeant peered through the field glasses at the farmhouses Captain Stuart wanted the battery to destroy.

"Range about thirty-five hundred yards, I'd make it," he said, and worked the* elevation screw to lower the field gun's barrel to accommodate the shorter range. Stuart had been right; the Confederates had advanced past the farmhouses to either side, but were halted in front of them. Even through field glasses, corpses were tiny at two miles, but Featherston saw a lot of them.

Jethro Bixler set a shell in the breech, then closed it with a scrape of metal against metal. He bowed to Featherston as if they were a couple of fancy gentlemen—say, Jeb Stuart III and one of the Sloss brothers—at an inaugural ball in Richmond. "Would you care to do the honors?"

He lowered the barrel a little more and brought it over another few minutes of arc to the left. The second round fired for effect was straight, but still long. The third fell a few yards short. By then, the other guns in the battery had gone into action, too, so he had to hesitate before he could be sure the round he had seen really came from his gun. He turned the elevation screw counterclockwise, about a quarter of a revolution, waited a couple of seconds for a fresh load, and fired again at the farmhouse.

"Hit!" The whole gun crew shouted it together. Smoke and dust shot up from the building; through the field glasses, Featherston saw a hole in the roof.

He swung his field glasses to the other farmhouse. Half the guns in the battery had chosen that one, and it was in no better shape than the one his howitzer crew had helped to destroy. Confederate troops swarmed up out of the shallow trenches they'd dug to protect themselves from the fire coming out of those two buildings and rushed toward them. To his dismay and anger, he saw the barrage, though it had wrecked the farmhouses, hadn't killed or driven off

all the enemy soldiers in them. Men in butternut fell, not quite in the horrific numbers Featherston had seen in some assaults, but far too many all the same.

"We gotta keep hitting 'em!" he shouted to the gun crew. More shells went out, fast as the artillerymen could serve the howitzer.

Featherston kept watching the assault on the farmhouses. The Confederate infantrymen surged toward them, still taking casualties but advancing now. Featherston held fire when they reached the buildings, not wanting to hit the soldiers on his own side. When he saw tiny figures in butternut waving their comrades forward past the farmhouses, he knew the position had been carried.

"Good job, boys," he said. It wasn't every day you could actually see what your firing had accomplished. A lot of the time, your shells were just part of a massive bombardment aimed at targets too far away for you to tell whether you'd done any good against them or not.

Perseus pointed up into the sky. "Lookit that—it's one o' them aeroplane contraptions," the Negro shouted. "Wonder whose side it's on."

What he wished was that he had a gun able to knock that snooping U.S. aeroplane right out of the sky. Wishing, though, didn't magically provide him with one. As the machine passed nearly overhead, something fell out of it and sped toward the ground. For a moment, Jake hoped that meant the pilot had gone overboard, or whatever the aeronautical equivalent was.

Jethro Bixler looked back at where they'd blown up, then shook his fist at the aeroplane, which was now flying away toward the Yankee lines. But then he grinned and shrugged. "That wasn't so much of a much," he said. "By the sound of those things, they weren't a whole lot bigger'n what our three-inchers throw. An' we can put 'em just where we want 'em, and put a whole bunch of 'em there, 'stead o' droppin' a couple an' runnin' for home."

"They can put 'em back of our lines farther than artillery can reach," Featherston said, giving such credit as he could: the Confederacy had bombing aeroplanes of its own, after all, and he didn't want to think they were useless. But he also took pride in what he did: "Reckon you're right, though. Set alongside these here guns, I

don't figure aerial bombs'll ever amount to much."

* * *

"Mr. Peterson at the Coal Board office, he didn't say anything about that, and you can bet there were a lot of people asking him, too." Sylvia Enos' thin face was angry and tired and frustrated. She often looked that way when she got home from a couple of hours of fighting Coal Board paperwork, but more so today than usual. "All he said was, the factories have to have coal if they're going to make all the things we need to fight the war, and everybody else gets what's left over. The surtax is going up another penny a hundredweight, too."

"I already knew that much," George Enos said. "Some company bigwig was grousing about it when we coaled up *Ripple* before we went out last Monday."

"Well, sit down and rest a bit," Sylvia told him. "I haven't seen you since then, you know, and little George and Mary Jane haven't, either. It's hard for them, their father gone days at a time. Supper'11 be about twenty minutes more."

His wife nodded sadly. "Always the war scares. I don't know how many from then till now, but a lot of them. And all the factories busy all the time, making guns and shells and ships and I don't know what all else to use if the war came. And now it's come. But we'd have had so much more for ourselves if we hadn't been worrying about the war all the time."

"But we'd probably have lost it, too, because the Rebs have been building every bit as hard as we have," he said. "Harder, maybe; if they use their niggers in their factories, they don't have to pay 'em anything to speak of. Same with the Canadians, except they don't have niggers."

Talking about niggers made him think of Charlie White. But the Cookie was somebody he worked with, a friend, who just happened to have dark brown skin and hair that grew in tight curls. It wasn't the same, though he couldn't have put

his finger on why it wasn't.

Sylvia said, "The Canadians, they have Frenchies instead of niggers." She sniffed loudly, but not on account of French Canadians. "I have to turn those potatoes, or they'll burn. And I'll start frying the fish with them in a couple of minutes, too."

[redacted]

George, Jr., came over and hugged one of his legs. Seeing that, Mary Jane toddled up and hugged the other one. She tried to imitate everything her older brother did, which often made her the most absurd creature George had ever seen. "Dadadada!" she said enthusiastically. She was a year and a half old now, and sometimes said "Daddy," but when she got excited—as she always did when her father first came home from the sea—she went back to baby talk.

Fresh sizzling noises from the kitchen said the fish had gone into the frying pan. The Enoses, like any other fisherfolk, ate a lot of fish: nobody begrudged George's bringing home enough to feed his family. He didn't have to fill out any forms to get it, either. Through the sizzle, Sylvia called, "When do you think you'll be going out again?"

"Don't know exactly," he answered. "Soon as Captain O'Donnell or somebody from the company can lay hold of more coal, I expect. Business is good, prices are up, and so they're sending us out as often as they can. Might be the day after tomorrow, might be—"

Somebody knocked on the front door, hard.

"Might be tomorrow morning," Enos said, heaving himself up out of his chair. In the kitchen, Sylvia groaned, but softly. He understood what she was feeling, because he was feeling all the same things himself. Getting to see his family once in a while mattered a lot. But he'd brought home a lot of money in the weeks since the war started. Prices were up, too, but as long as he stayed busy, he stayed ahead of them.

He opened the door. Sure enough, there stood Fred Butcher. "Hate to do this to you, George," the mate said, "but we've swung a deal for some fuel. We sail at half past five tomorrow morning."

"I'll be there," Enos said—what else could he say?

[redacted]

George Enos shut the door. "Supper's on the table," Sylvia called at the same moment. As he walked into the kitchen, she went on, "I can guess what that was all about. Nice I get to give you one meal before Charlie White gets his hands on you again. You eat more of his cooking than you do of mine, seems like."

[redacted]

"You'll do as you're told, though," Enos said.

George, Jr., knew that tone brooked little argument. He changed his tack, asking, "Why do I have to go to bed early? Mama? Daddy? Why?"

"I can sleep on the *Ripple,"* he said as he climbed back on top of her. "I can't do this." She laughed and clasped her arms around his sweaty back.

By the time he was dressed, Sylvia, who'd thrown a quilted robe over her white cotton nightdress, pressed a cup of coffee into his hands. He gulped it down, hot and sweet and strong. "You should go back to bed," he told her. She shook her head, as she did whenever he said that in the small hours of the morning. She puckered her lips. He set down the cup and kissed her good-bye.

Some of the streets on the way down to T Wharf had gaslights, some new, brighter electric lamps. The lamps weren't bright enough to keep him from seeing stars in the sky. The air was crisp and cool. Fall wasn't just coming—fall was here. They might get a couple of weeks of Indian summer, and then again they might not.

T Wharf didn't care about day or night; it was busy all the time. And sure enough, there ahead of him strode Charlie White, a knitted wool cap on his head. "Hey, Cookie!" George called. The Negro turned and waved.

The day dawned bright and clear. Gulls screeched overhead. They knew fishing boats were a good place to cadge a meal, but they weren't smart enough to tell outbound boats from inbound. Off in the distance floated a plume of smoke from a warship outbound ahead of the *Ripple.* Enos liked seeing that; it made trouble from Confederate cruisers and submarines less likely. The warship, intent on its own concerns, soon left the *Ripple* behind; the smoke vanished over the eastern horizon.

"My pa used to talk about that," George Enos said. "Cold currents shifting almost killed 'em off, or something like that." He headed up to the galley for yet another mug of coffee.

When they reached the Georges Bank that night, the trawl splashed into the sea. The *Ripple* crawled along, dragging it over the ocean bottom. To keep from drawing raiders, Captain O'Don-nell left the running lights off; he posted a double watch to listen for approaching vessels and avoid collisions.

But they might have been alone on the ocean. Another clear dawn followed, with water around them stretching, as far as the eye could tell, all the way to the end of the world. No smoke told of other fishing boats or warships anywhere nearby.

Enos was gutting fish when the captain spotted a smoke plume approaching from the east. "Freighter heading in toward Boston," he judged after a spyglass examination. He looked some more. "Carrying something under tarps on the bow, something else at the stern."

And then the captain shouted, "Cut the trawl free! We've got to run for it. Those are guns under there!"

Too late. One of the guns roared, a sound harsh even across a couple of miles of water. A shell splashed into the sea a hundred yards in front of the *Ripple's* bow. Then the other gun, the one at the armed freighter's stern, belched smoke and fire. That shell landed about as far behind the steam trawler.

Signal flags fluttered up the freighter's lines. Captain O'Donnell read them through the telescope. " 'Surrender or be sunk,' they tell us," he said. Like the rest of the fishermen, George Enos stood numb, unbelieving. You never thought it could happen to you, not so close to home. But that freighter, while no match for the cruiser that hadn't seen it, could do with the *Ripple* as it would. One of those shells would have smashed the steam trawler to kindling.

"What do we do, Captain?" Enos asked. O'Donnell was an old Navy man. Surely he'd have a trick to discomfit the approaching ship, which, George could see, now flew the Stars and Bars above the signal flags.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Wordlessly, McGregor took it out of an inside pocket and handed it to him. The farmer had wrapped the pass in waxed paper before setting out for Rosenfeld, knowing he'd need it: the Americans were sticklers for every bit of punctilio they'd set up in the territory they occupied, and people who didn't go along disappeared into jail or sometimes just disappeared, period.

After carefully inspecting the document, the sentry handed it back. "Awright, go ahead," he said grudgingly, as if disappointed he didn't have an excuse for giving McGregor more trouble. He gestured with his Springfield. Water beaded on the bayonet; he'd done a good job of greasing it to keep it from rusting.

Rosenfeld's only reason for being was that it lay where an east-west railway line and one that ran north-south merged into a single line heading northeast: in the direction of Winnipeg. Along with the train station, it boasted a general store, a bank, a couple of churches, a livery stable run by the blacksmith (who also did his best to fix motorcars, not that he saw many), a doctor who doubled as a dentist, a weekly newspaper, and a post office. McGregor hitched the horses in front of that last.

"Shut the door behind you," called Wilfred Rokeby, the postmaster, when McGregor came in. The farmer obeyed, not blaming him a bit: the coal stove made the interior of the post office deli-ciously warm. McGregor stood dripping on the mat just inside the door for a couple of minutes before going on up to the counter.

Rokeby nodded in approval. He was a small, fussy man with a thin mustache and with mouse-brown hair parted precisely in the center and held immovably in place by some cinnamon-scented hair oil that always made McGregor think of baked apples. "And what can I do for you today, Arthur?" he asked, as if certain the farmer had something new and exotic in mind.

McGregor took out another sheet of waxed paper. This one was folded

around half a dozen ordinary envelopes. "Want to mail these," he said.

Rokeby looked pained. He always did, but today more than usual. "They're going to destinations in the occupied zone, I hope?"

"Can't send 'em anyplace else from here, now can I?" McGregor answered sourly. "Any mail wagon goes from one side of the line to the other, first the Yanks shoot it up and then we do."

"That is unfortunately correct." The postmaster made it sound as if it were McGregor's fault. He pointed to the envelopes lying on the counter between them. "Those'll have to go through the American military censor before I can send 'em out, you know."

"Yeah, I'd heard about that." McGregor's expression said what he thought of it, too. "It's all right." He spread the envelopes out fan-fashion so Rokeby could read the addresses on them. "Two to my brothers, two to my sisters and brothers-in-law, two to my cousins, just to let 'em know I'm alive and well, and so is the rest of the family. Censors can read 'em till their eyes cross, far as I'm concerned."

"All right, Arthur. Wanted to make sure you remembered, is all." Wilfred Rokeby lowered his voice. "The Yanks have arrested more'n a couple of people on account of they were careless about what they put in the mail. Wouldn't want anything like that to happen to you."

"Thanks," McGregor said gruffly. He dug in his pocket and came out with a handful of change. Setting a dime and two pennies on the counter beside the envelopes, he went on, "Why don't you let me have the stamps for them, then?"

"I'll do that." The postmaster scooped up the coins and dropped them into the cash box. Then he pulled out a sheet of fifty carmine stamps, tore off a strip of six, and handed them to McGregor. "Here you go."

"Thanks. I'll—" McGregor took a closer look at the stamps Rokeby had given him. The color wasn't quite right—that was what had first drawn his eye. When he took that closer look, he saw they didn't bear the familiar portrait of King George V, either. They were U.S. stamps, with a picture of Benjamin Franklin on them. On

Franklin's plump face, the phrase Manitoba mil. dist. was overprinted in black ink. "What the devil are these?"

'The stamps we have to use from now on," Rokeby answered. "Ugly, aren't they? But I don't have a choice about what I sell you: military governor says no mail with the old stamps goes out any more. Penalty for disobeying is ... more than you want to think about."

He shoved the letters at Rokeby, then turned on his heels and stomped out of the post office without another word. Suddenly the warmth in there felt treacherous, deceptive, as if by being comfortable Rokeby was somehow collaborating with the United States. He knew the idea was absurd, but it wouldn't go away once it occurred to him. The cold, nasty rain that beat in his

face when he went outside was a part of his native land, and so seemed oddly cleansing.

The general store was a couple of doors down. His feet thumped on the boards of the sidewalk. A bell jingled when he went in. Henry Gibbon looked up from a copy of the Rosenfeld *Register.* He took a pipe out of his mouth, knocked it against an ashtray, and said, "Morning to you, Arthur. Haven't seen you in a while. Everything all right out at your place?"

"Right enough, anyhow," McGregor answered: a measure of life in wartime. "We didn't get hurt, thank God, and we didn't lose our buildings or too much of the livestock. I've heard of plenty of people who came through worse."

"So what can I sell you today?" Gibbon asked. Unlike some storekeepers McGregor had known, he made no bones about being in a business where he gave customers goods in exchange for money.

"Thing I need most is ten gallons of kerosene," the farmer answered, "Nights are starting to get longer, and they'll be really long pretty soon. I've got plenty of coal laid in for the winter, but lamp oil, now—" He spread his hands.

"It's what I can sell you," Gibbon said. "Arthur, I'd do more if I could, but I got a family. You get in trouble with the Americans, you get in bad trouble." He waved the copy of the *Register,* much as he had the U.S. forms. Then he pointed to an item and read aloud: " "The U.S. military governor in the town of Mor-den announces that ten hostages have been taken because of the shooting death of an American soldier. If the perpetrator of this vile and dastardly act of cowardice does not surrender himself to the duly constituted authorities within seventy-two hours of this announcement, the hostages will be executed by firing squad.' "

"Let me see that!" McGregor said. He'd paid little attention to the town weekly since the American tide rolled over this part of Manitoba. Now he got a good look at how things had changed since the occupation.

Oh, not everything was different from what it had been. Local stores still advertised on the front page of the *Register,* as they had for as long as Malachi Stubing had been publishing it—and through the tenures of two other publishers before him. He still announced local births and marriages. Farmers still plunked down money to tout the service of their stallions and jackasses, with the invariable ten-dollar fee and the phrase "Colt to stand and walk." If the foal was stillborn, the fee was waived. McGregor had put a good many such notices in the paper over the years.

Another story listed men known to be prisoners of war, and gave their kin instructions on how to send them packages. "All parcels are subject to search," it warned. "Any found containing contraband of any description will result in the addressee's forfeiting all rights to receive future parcels."

That blunt warning took McGregor to the columns of small print that covered the broader world. And there, most of all, that world might have turned upside down with the arrival of the Americans. Suddenly Germany became the trusted ally, England and France the hated foes. The German failure in front of Paris was glossed over as a small setback, and much made of the victory the Kaiser's forces had won over Russians poking their noses into eastern Prussia.

As far as the *Register* was concerned, the United States could do no wrong, though each story did bear the disclaimer, *furnished by the American Military Information Bureau.* If you believed what you read, the Yanks were in Winnipeg, in Toronto, and bombarding Montreal and Quebec City, to say nothing of the triumphs they'd won against the Confederacy and the victories their Atlantic Fleet and the German High Seas Fleet had gained over the Royal Navy and its French and Confederate allies.

The storekeeper paused before he spoke. "Well, the paper it's on is pretty thin now," he said at last. "That makes it better for wipin' your ass than it used to be."

McGregor stared at him, then chuckled, down deep in his throat. "I don't expect the American Military Information Board'd like that answer, Henry."

"Faster, dammit!" the lieutenant screamed, setting a hand on the grip of his

pistol. He clapped the other hand to his forehead, and almost knocked the green-gray cap off his head. "Jesus Christ, no wonder the stinking Rebs go on about niggers the way they do."

Cincinnatus would have liked to see the lieutenant haul as much as he was hauling, or even half as much. The noisy little pecker-wood ofay'd fall over dead. But he had the gun, and he had the rest of the U.S. Army behind him, and so Cincinnatus didn't see that he had much choice about doing what he was told.

Another grunt, another sack of grain on his shoulder, another walk to the truck. The lieutenant shouted at him every inch of the way. No, you didn't cuss a steam engine the way that fellow cussed Cincinnatus. The Negro couldn't figure out whether the U.S. soldier blamed him for being black or for being the reason the South had broken away from the United States. He didn't think the lieutenant knew, or cared. The man could abuse him with impunity, and he did.

A white man, a U.S. soldier, drove away in the truck. "I could do that, suh," Cincinnatus told the lieutenant. "You could use your boys for nothin' but fightin' then."

But the damnyankees weren't stupid, not in everything, and you were in trouble if you didn't remember that. The railroad bridge and the highway bridge over the Ohio had crashed into the water as soon as the war started, blown up by Confederate sappers to keep U.S. troops from using them. The Yankee bombardment had done a lot of damage to the Covington docks and, when invasion looked imminent, the Confederates had done a lot more, again to keep

the United States from gaining a military advantage. When Cincinnatus came out of the storm cellar of his house after the Confederate army retreated southward and the artillery fire tapered off, he was horrified at the devastation all around.

Cincinnatus sighed. If the damnyankees had done as well dealing with the people of Covington as they had with transportation into and out of the place, everybody would have been better off. Nobody, though, had taught them the first thing about how to engineer human beings, and they weren't good at it. This damn lieutenant was a case in point.

When the owner of a livery stable complained about having had some horses requisitioned without getting paid for them, the lieutenant told him, "What you need isn't money or horses; it's the horsewhip, nothing else but. You damned traitor, you're dealing with the United States of America now, not your Rebel government. You'd better walk small or you'll be sorry. We're back now, and we're going to stay, and if you don't like it, you can jump in the river for all I care."

When sunset came, the men on the docks lined up to get their pay. Armed guards stood around the paymaster to make sure nobody tried redistributing the wealth on his own. "Name," said the paymaster, a middle-aged white man with

sergeant's stripes on his sleeves.

The paymaster handed him a green-gray U.S. dollar bill. Covington was a border town, so some of those bills, along with U.S. coins, circulated here all the time. Now, though, the brown Confederate banknotes were no longer legal tender in areas the United States controlled. Till that moment, Cincinnatus hadn't noticed how each side's paper money matched its army uniform.

"Name?" the paymaster asked him.

"No." Shaking his head, the paymaster pointed across the Ohio River. "Cincinnati's over there." He chuckled. Cincinnatus smiled back. It wasn't the worst joke in the world, even if he heard it at least once a week. And the white sergeant didn't seem to have a chip on his shoulder, the way most damnyankees did. The fellow checked his name off on the list in front of him, then handed him a dollar and a fifty-cent piece. "Lieutenant Kennan says you get a hard-work bonus."

"He *does?'* Cincinnatus said, amazed.

"Yes, sir, go ahead," Cincinnatus said. The fellow seemed friendly enough—and having a white man ask him permission for anything before going ahead and doing it was a novelty in and of itself.

"All right." The sergeant leaned back in his chair and put his hands behind his head, fingers interlaced. "What I want to know is, how come all you niggers down here carry such highfalutin names?"

"Never hardly studied it," Cincinnatus said. He did, for a couple of seconds, then answered, "Reckon it's on account of the law don't allow us no last names—maybe they figure we'd be good as white folks if we had 'em, I don't know. So we only have the one, and we got to make the most of it."

"Makes as much sense as any other guess I've heard," the paymaster allowed. Now he did wave Cincinnatus on, asking the next man in line, "Name?"

With an extra four bits in his pocket, Cincinnatus spent a nickel of it for a ride home on the trolley, which had been running for only a couple of days. He went to the back of the car and stood there, hanging onto a leather strap, as it clattered along. Some seats in the forward, white, section were vacant, but the U.S. officials hadn't changed the rules, and the U.S. soldiers in the forward section were liable to beat up a black man who tried to sit among them. He'd heard that had already happened more than once.

The trolley rolled past the city hall. The Stars and Stripes flew in front of it and on top of its dome. To Cincinnatus, the U.S. flag looked crowded and busy,

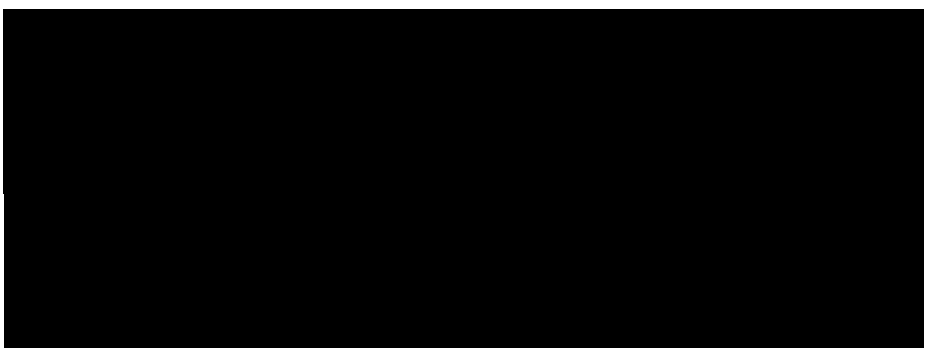
with too many stars and too many stripes. *The Bleeding Zebra,* Southerners called it, and he could see why.

Plump, prosperous-looking white gentlemen wearing homburgs and somber suits, carrying fancy leather briefcases, and smoking cigars strode in and out of the city hall, as they had before the United States occupied Covington. Some were U.S. administrators, some Covington politicians licking the Yankees' boots.

And some, maybe, really did want to work with the USA. Kentucky was the only Confederate state that hadn't left the Union at the start of the War of Secession; Braxton Bragg had conquered it for Richmond when Lincoln pulled soldiers eastward to try to repair the disaster at Camp Hill. Up till the time of the Second Mexican War, when U.S. forces wrecked Louisville, a lot of Kentuckians had had sympathy for the United States, and, sympathy or not, Kentucky had always done a hell of a lot of business with the USA.

Along with the prosperous gentlemen, a good many U.S. soldiers held positions around the Covington city hall. Machine guns protected by sandbags stood at either side of the entrance. Not everybody in Covington sympathized with the damnyankees, not by a long shot.

Cincinnatus got out of the trolley not far from Tom Kennedy's warehouse. The lines did not run through the colored section of town. Standing still for the journey let him know how tired he was; he walked south to his house with the stoop-shouldered, stiff-jointed gait of an old man.



"Be five, ten minutes," his wife Elizabeth answered. She waved to him from the kitchen. Then, to his surprise, his mother did, too. A heavyset woman of about fifty, she beamed at him and Elizabeth both. "My boy Cincinnatus, he has a *good* nose," she declared.

'That he does, Mother Livia," Elizabeth said. "You were right—he could tell. Must be the spices."

"What are you doin' here, Mama?*' Cincinnatus asked. "Not that I ain't glad to see you, but—"

"I came to help my daughter-in-law," his mother said.

Cincinnatus scratched his head. His wife was as capable as she needed to be and then some, and his mother had said as much ever since they were married. Elizabeth had got out of her black-and-white housekeeper's clothes and put on a

shirtwaist too old and spotted to wear in public any more and a bright red cotton skirt that set off her light brown skin—she was two, maybe three shades paler than Cincinnatus. "You're home sooner than I reckoned on," she said.

[redacted]

"All right," Elizabeth said, more grudgingly than he'd expect. "I wish you'd saved every penny, but—all right."

[redacted]

Then she set both hands on her belly, about where the shirtwaist tucked into the skirt. "Reckon we gonna have us a little one some time next spring."

"A little one?" Cincinnatus stared. All at once, he understood why his mother had come. He hurried forward to embrace Elizabeth. 'That's wonderful!" And it was wonderful, even if the timing could have been better. But now he wished he hadn't spent that nickel. The troop train rattled through Lynchburg and west toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. "If I'd known they were going to pack us into these cars like canned sardines," Reginald Bartlett said, feeling not just canned but cooked in his uniform and heavy kit, "I never would have volunteered."

"Ahh, quit whinin'," said Robert E. McCorkle. Since McCorkle was a corporal, his opinion carried considerable weight. So did he; his uniform could have held a couple of men of ordinary girth. He went on, "You don't like it, write your congressman."

"I can't," Bartlett said. "Can't raise my arms to write."

That put a smile on McCorkle's face; even noncommissioned officers responded to Bartlett's charm, a sure proof of its effectiveness. The corporal said, "Well, you ain't as bad as some here, and that's the Gospel truth. Some o' these birds, they even grouse in their sleep."

"Birds? Grouse?" Reggie Bartlett laughed, but McCorkle failed to join him: he didn't notice he'd made a joke. What were you supposed to do with such people? Burying them struck Bartlett as a good idea, but only for a moment. A lot of young men were getting buried, off in the direction they were going.

[redacted]

"Or Germany," somebody said from behind the corporal.

"Yeah, or Germany," McCorkle allowed. "But it's different with the Huns. If it's got buttons on its coat, they salute it. The soldiers in the United States, once upon a time they was Americans, same as you an' me. Not any more. It's all the damn foreign riffraff they let in, you ask me."

[redacted]

Reginald Bartlett made himself as comfortable as he could. Considering all the gear with which he was festooned, that wasn't very comfortable, but at least he had a seat on a hard second-class bench. The aisles were full of men who'd been standing since they left Richmond and* who were trying to squat or lie down so they could try to get a little sleep.

That didn't come easy, for them or for him. His pack dug into his spine. If he let his head flop backwards, it went over the back of the seat, and made him feel his neck was breaking. If he leaned forward, he hit himself in the forehead with the rifle he held between his knees. The men on either side of him kept poking him with their elbows, and neither of them, by all the evidence, had ever heard of soap and water—or maybe Bartlett was just smelling himself.

'This whole business of war is a lot more entertaining to read about than to be a part of," he complained. "All the writers who go on about the Revolution and the Secession and the Second Mexican War leave out the parts that have no glory in them.»

"And when they do talk about glory, they're talking about the fellows who lived," Corporal McCorkle added. "The poor bastards who died, yeah, they wave good-bye to them, you might say, but that's all."

Just when he finally managed to doze off, the troop transport started down the grade on the western slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Couplings bumped and jolted—the weight of the train had shifted from the back end to the front. Bartlett jerked bolt upright. His start woke the soldier next to him, who cursed foully. He'd heard more blasphemy and obscenity in a few weeks of soldiering than he had in all his civilian life—but he remembered that from a few years before, when his birth class had been conscripted.

Iron wheels screamed on iron rails as the train slowed to a stop. "This here must be Vinton," McCorkle said. 'This is where we get out."

Bartlett peered through the window. He couldn't see anything. If they were at a station, it was news to him. The doors at either end of the railroad car opened, though, and his companions stumbled out into the night. When his turn came, he went, too.

Captain Wilcox led them down a path full of pungent horse manure to a field where campfires were already burning. "We'll bivouac here tonight," he declared. "Bedrolls only—no tents. Get what rest you can—tomorrow we go into action."

As Bartlett spread his blanket on the ground and wrapped himself in it, a mutter of distant thunder came from the west. He looked up into the sky. The stars of early autumn twinkled down on him. The trees would be changing color, though he couldn't see that in the darkness. The thunder came again—only it wasn't thunder, it was artillery. Somewhere over there, gunners were launching shells into the dark—and when those shells came down, they probably killed people. That didn't strike Bartlett as glorious. He was too tired to care. He fell asleep almost at once.

"Listen here, you birds!" Captain Wilcox sounded indecently alert and indecently cheerful for whatever the hour was. "The damnyankees want to take Big Lick away from us, take away the mines, take away the railroad junction. There's so damn many of 'em, they've made it over the Alleghenies and they're coming down toward the city. That's why we're here—to keep 'em from taking it. The company—the regiment—the division—we all go across the Roanoke at ten this morning and we drive the Yankees back into the mountains. Sooner or later, we drive 'em out of Virginia. Any questions? I know you'll fight hard. We'll get us some breakfast and then we'll get us some damnyankees."

Negro cooks passed out cornmeal muffins and bacon. Bartlett wolfed his down. He filled the screw-on cup that doubled as a canteen lid with chicory-laced coffee. It made him feel more nearly alive.

He was gulping a second cup when the artillery barrage opened up. The noise was brutal, appalling, overwhelming. He loved every second of it. "More of that racket there is," he shouted to anyone who would listen, "more damnyankees the Devil's dragging down to hell, the fewer of 'em there are left up here to shoot at me."

"Amen to that," said one of his squadmates, a skinny, bespectacled fellow named Clarence Randolph. He'd been a preacher before the war started, and could have joined the Army as a chaplain, but he hadn't wanted to be a noncombatant. If he wasn't the best shot in the company, Bartlett didn't know who was.

Captain Wilcox blew a whistle. Its shrill screech cut through the roar of the barrage and the occasional blasts from shells the U.S. gunners threw back in reply. "Let's go," Wilcox said, waving his arm. Along with the rest of the regiment, along with the rest of the division, the company moved forward.

"Good place for 'em," Clarence Randolph said. "I am a man brimming over with Christian charity, but I don't believe in wasting it on damnyankees."

A shell fell short and landed among a knot of soldiers off to Bartlett's left. Some of the screams that rose from them were those of injured men, others of sheer fury at wounds inflicted by friend rather than foe.

"Come on up." A corporal in a grimy uniform waved Captain Wilcox's company into the firing pits and connecting trenches that made up the Confederate line. "Come on up, new fish, come on up."

Their looks shocked Bartlett. It wasn't just that their uniforms and persons were filthy, though that was what he noticed first. The look in their eyes said more. They'd seen things he hadn't. Some of them—the ones who took obvious delight in those questions— knew a malicious glee that he and his comrades were about to see those things, too.

Some gave good advice: "You go forward, stay low. Zigzag a lot—don't let 'em draw a bead on you. Get down on your belly and crawl like a snake."

Maybe the barrage would go on forever. Maybe the artillery would kill all the damnyankees and leave nothing for the infantry to do. Maybe staying behind a pharmacy counter back in Richmond hadn't been such a bad thing. Maybe Bartlett should have waited for his old regiment to be called up instead of volunteering in a new one. Maybe—

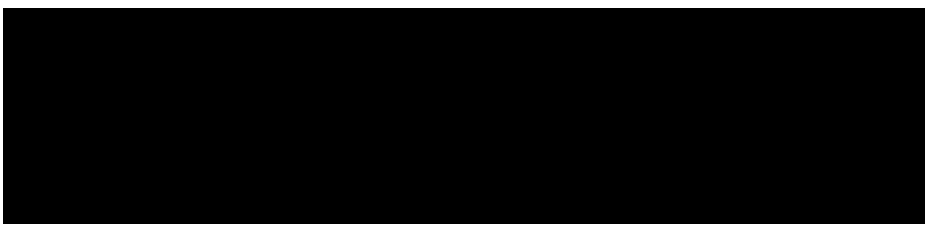
As suddenly as it had begun, the barrage stopped. Captain Wilcox blew that damned whistle again. Bartlett wished he'd lose it or, better yet, swallow it.

Soldiers started surging up over the steps. Somebody gave Bartlett a shove. He stumbled forward. His feet hit the first step and climbed all by themselves, regardless of what his mind was telling them. Then he was up on level if battered ground. He ran toward the even more battered firing pits and trenches ahead.

He could hardly see them because of all the smoke and dust the barrage had kicked up. Men in butternut trotted ahead of him, alongside him, behind him. He was part of the thundering herd. As long as he did what everyone else did, he'd be all right. A little more than a quarter of a mile—surely less than half a mile— and what had been Yankee lines would belong to the Confederacy once more.

Through the smoke of dust—*the fog of war,* he thought with the small part of his mind that was thinking—evil yellow lights began winking and flashing. The bombardment hadn't killed all the U.S. soldiers, then. Men started falling. Some crawled ahead. Some thrashed and twisted and screamed. Some didn't move.

Bartlett leaned forward, as if into a gale. He wasn't the only one. Lots of the soldiers still on their feet had that forward lean, as if bracing against a bullet's anticipated impact. Then, rifles and machine guns (he turned to tell Clarence Randolph that machine guns were satanic tools, but Clarence wasn't there, wasn't anywhere nearby—had, in fact, taken only a few steps before a bullet tore out his throat, but Bartlett didn't know that) tearing at them, they struggled through the Yankee wire and, screeching, threw themselves at the men in green-gray who had invaded their nation.



"Come on!" Captain Wilcox shouted. "Spread out and move forward. They'll counterattack as soon as they can. We want to take back as much ground as we're able, then hold it against anything they can do to us."

Maybe the damnyankees had had trenches leading up into their forward positions, as had been true in the Confederate lines. If they had, the Confederate bombardment had destroyed them. Going deeper into the U.S.-held territory was a matter of scrambling from one shell hole to the next. Enemy fire picked up all the time.

There next to Bartlett was Corporal McCorkle. Wide as he was, he'd kept up with the assault and hadn't stopped a bullet. Turning to him, Bartlett said, "Aren't you glad we've won this land back for our dear country?" He waved—cautiously, so as not to expose his arm to a bullet—at the shell-pocked desolation all around.

McCorkle stared, then started to laugh. The postman came to the coffeehouse, delivered a couple of advertising circulars, and went on his way. Nellie Semphroch glanced at the circulars. She didn't throw them away, as she might have before the war. Crumpled up, the papers would make good kindling.

Edna Semphroch came to the doorway to stand beside her mother. She looked after the postman, who was going on down the street whistling some new ragtime tune Nellie didn't recognize. "Doesn't seem right to see old Henry coming around every day, same as he did before the Rebs jumped on us," Edna said.

"Well, he does only come once a day now, instead of twice,"

Nellie said, "but yes, I know what you mean. He's—normal—and everything else has gone straight to the devil, hasn't it?"

Nellie had only to look at her own shop to see the truth of that. The front window, blown out in the earliest Confederate bombardment of Washington, D.C., was covered over with boards, and she was glad she had those. You couldn't get glass for love nor money: literally. One glazier she'd talked to had said, "I had a lady offer me an indecent proposal if I'd get her windows repaired." The fellow had chuckled. "Had to turn her down—couldn't find the goods for her any which way."

"The Rebs are having themselves a fine old time here," Nellie said to Edna in a low voice. You had to use a low voice if you called them Rebs. They'd tolerate Rebels, but preferred Confederates or even—travesty!—Americans.

Her daughter nodded. "Far as they're concerned, it might as well be *their* capital." She bared her teeth in what someone who didn't know her might have taken for a friendly smile.

'That's right." The Confederate major nodded. He wore the tight, high boots and yellow uniform trim of a cavalry officer. "Mighty fine it is, too, ma'am—smooth as I've ever drunk."

"I'm glad you like it." Nellie refilled the cup from one of the pots behind the counter. Not all the cups matched any more—she'd foraged from here and there and everywhere to replace the ones broken in the fighting. "Enjoy it while you can—when it's gone, heaven knows how I'll be able to get more."

Edna looked as if she might have said yes to that. The cavalry major was personable enough: even handsome in a florid way. But Nellie answered before her daughter could: "No, thank you. We'd best save it for the customers: can't afford to drink up our own stock in trade."

"However you like," the officer said with a shrug. There were a lot of Confederate cavalrymen in Washington. When they went closer to the front, they had a way of getting killed in a hurry. Their own comrades in the infantry and artillery ragged them about it; the coffeehouse had seen a couple of fights. Confederate military police swung billy clubs with the same reckless abandon Washington city constables had used.

"Of course you don't," Nellie muttered when he was gone. "It's like play money to you." The scrip the Confederates had instituted for Washington and for the chunks of Maryland and Pennsylvania they'd taken from the United States—the dollar note the major had set down bore the picture of John C. Calhoun—was nominally at par with the U.S. and Confederate dollars. But Confederate soldiers could buy occupation scrip for twenty cents of real money on the dollar. They spent freely—who wouldn't, with a deal like that?— which drove down the value of the scrip. Prices were going up, anyway; so much scrip in circulation just made them go up faster.

Nellie walked out to the doorway. Across the street, Mr. Jacobs' cobbler's shop had a sign tacked to the boards covering what had been his window: discount for silver. If the Rebs didn't make him take that sign down, it struck Nellie as a good idea. If you fixed the discount as you should, you'd make money whether you got scrip or cash.

And Jacobs was doing a terrific business. You could get leather locally; it wasn't like coffee. Marching wore down boots, too, so Confederate soldiers were always going into the shop. He'd even had a general make use of his services, said worthy having arrived in a motorcar driven by a colored chauffeur with a face of such perfect insolence, it seemed to be aching for a slap.

Quietly—for there were still a couple of Confederate cavalry lieutenants in the coffeehouse, hashing out on the table the breakthrough that hadn't yet come and, God willing, never would—Edna said, "Ma, I wish there was something we could do to give the Johnny Rebs a hard time."

Nellie's ears got hot. "What is the younger generation coming to?" she exclaimed: the cry of the older generation throughout recorded history. "Radicalism and rebellion and free love—" She'd been seduced at the age of fifteen and knew more than she wanted of sporting houses, but conveniently chose not to remember that.

"No, it isn't," Nellie declared.

The cobbler laughed at their confusion. "Dowling!" As usual, George Custer made too much noise. The shout would have drawn his adjutant from the next county, not just the next room.

"Coming, sir!" Abner Dowling said, also loudly, the better to overcome the commanding general's deafness—which, of course, the commanding general denied he had.

Custer stabbed a nicotine-stained forefinger down at the map on the table before which he stood. "Major, I am not satisfied with our progress, not satisfied at all."

He wasn't lying there, not even a little bit. The crossing of the Ohio had gone better than he'd expected—much better than he'd expected, considering that Custer was in charge of it. Facing simultaneous thrusts aimed at Louisville and Covington, the Confederates hadn't been able to put enough men into Kentucky to defend all of it. That First Army headquarters was in Marion these days proved the point.

"Well, I don't, dammit," Custer bellowed, which made Dowling draw back another half a pace, both from volume and from fumes. "Look at the map, you overfed twit! Second and Third Armies are going to break into the bluegrass country long before we do."

"Our advance has hurt the Rebs a lot already," Dowling said stoutly, refusing to take offense at the general's gibe. "Why, we've deprived them of all the fluor spar mines here around Marion, and—"

"Fluor spar!" Custer sneered. "Fluor-stinking-spar! Teddy Roosevelt will be thrilled to get a telegram telling him we've captured a whole great pile of fluor-goddamn-spar, now won't he? He'll send me to command in Canada because of fluor spar, won't he? Oh, yes, he'll be delighted—no doubt about it." Even by Custer's standards, the sarcasm was venomous. 'The greatest horse country in the world just ahead of us, and you're babbling about fluor-fucking-spar? God preserve me from idiots!"

"But—" Dowling gave up. If you were going to make steel by any modern process, you needed fluor spar, and you needed it in multiton lots. But Custer had been a cavalry general back in the days when cavalry was good for something more than getting mowed down by machine guns, and so horses were all he thought about. *That he's a horse's ass doesn't hurt, either,* Dowling thought. He usually tried to keep from thinking disloyal thoughts, but that wasn't easy when Custer rode him on account of his size.

The general said, "I want to put paid to the Confederate cavalry once and for all."

"I should hope you do," Custer declared. "Cavalry's done a lot of good work in this war, especially on the far side of the Mississippi."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said again, now in resignation. Try as you would, sometimes you couldn't win. Custer was going to go after cavalry horses, and that was all there was to it. Never mind that the Rebs west of the Mississippi drew their mounts from local stock. Never mind that the reason cavalry could be dashing and bold out West was that there were miles and miles of miles and miles out there, and not enough soldiers, Yankee or Confederate, to keep raiders from breaking through every so often. Never mind that two other armies were already advancing on the bluegrass country. Never mind any of that. Custer wanted his glory, and by jingo he was going to get it.

He said, "We'll push east past Madisonville and break through there. The Confederates can't keep throwing up lines against us indefinitely. Sooner or later, the losses they're suffering will force them to recognize they've met their match and then some in me." He struck a triumphal pose that put his adjutant in mind of a plaster-of-paris statue made by a bad artist having a worse day.

[redacted]

That was especially true because Custer didn't—wouldn't— allow enough time for proper artillery bombardment before he sent the poor damned infantry forward. Kentucky wasn't like the country west of the Mississippi. Here, the Confederacy had plenty of Negroes to build works and plenty of white men in butternut to man them. That was one of the reasons cavalry here didn't count for much.

Also— "Sir, if we concentrate our main thrust along an east-west line, we can't take proper precautions against the Confederate buildup we've been watching between Hopkinsville and Cadiz, southeast of here. If they take us in flank, we'll be as embarrassed as our German friends were on the Marne a few weeks ago."

"Fiddlesticks," Custer retorted. "I don't believe the Rebs can muster the sort of force they'd need to shift us, nor anything close to it. They're too heavily committed here and on too many other fronts. We have the initiative, Major, and we shall retain it."

"But, sir—" Dowling had to protest. He went through the papers in Custer's in-basket. Sure enough, there were the reconnaissance reports he'd stamped urgent in crimson ink, and sure enough, Custer hadn't looked at any of them. 'These scouting reports from our aeroplane pilots clearly show—"

[redacted]

"The whole country knows, sir," Dowling answered unhappily.

"Yes, but do you?" Custer glowered at him. "I ordered the charge, Major, that's what I did. We sent a raft of redskins to the happy hunting grounds by suppertime, and hardly let a one get back to the Confederate side of the border." He struck his splendid pose once more. "And no one has missed them from that day to this. Now I am going to order the charge again. If the enemy is there, you must strike him."

'The Confederates are better soldiers than those red savages were, I'm afraid, sir," Dowling said.

"They're not good enough to withstand a stroke from the brave soldiers of the

United States of America," Custer declared, "and I aim to give them one they'll never forget. Besides which, as I've told you before, aeroplanes are nothing but newfangled claptrap."

[redacted]

Outside, soldiers opened up on the aeroplane with their Spring-fields and with a couple of machine guns. Their chances of bringing it down were about the same as those of taking on the steel trust in court and winning.

[redacted]

Clutching his injured hand, Dowling reflected that he was obviously worth less than a fly to his commander. Well, that wasn't anything he hadn't already known. Later, he found out one of the bombs had fallen in the midst of a knot of soldiers, killing five of them (as well as an unfortunate local Negro who was cooking for them) and maiming another three.

But that was later. At the moment, he said, "We do have an urgent request for reinforcements on the southeastern part of our line. Wouldn't it be prudent to—"

[redacted]

"Yes, sir," Dowling said miserably.

Flora Hamburger stepped out onto the fire escape to get away. She wasn't trying to escape the heat trapped inside the flat she shared with her parents, an older sister, a younger sister, and two younger brothers. Escaping the heat was what you did in summer, and here with October heading toward November you were likelier to throw on a sweater or a coat, although she hadn't bothered doing that.

She wasn't going out to escape the noise, either. Her father and mother seldom spoke to each other or to their children at anything less than a shout, and her brothers and sisters weren't the quietest people God ever made. Flora wasn't one of those people, either, and she knew it.

But going out onto the iron floor of the fire escape didn't make the noise disappear. What her family lost in volume, the rest of New York gained. It was getting dark outside, but boys still played and screeched in the street below. "I got you, you lousy Reb!" one of them yelled in Yiddish in a high, piercing voice. "You're dead, so fall over!"

"You missed me by a mile!" another boy called back, this one in English, even more shrilly. "Nyah-nyah-nyah! Couldn't hit a barn." The first boy imitated a

machine gun, which set Flora's teeth on edge. However many imaginary bullets he spat, though, he couldn't kill one real child. In the real war, unfortunately, it didn't work like that.

Every day, the front page of the *New York Times* screamed of battles won and battles lost. Every day, bordered in black, ran long lists of names: men and boys who would never come home because of those battles won and lost. More than anything else, the black-bordered casualty lists were what had driven Flora outside, away from her family.

If the rest of New York cared, it didn't let on. Along with the children playing, babies howled from every second flat. Flora's parents weren't the only ones shouting. Folk of their generation yelled in Yiddish or Russian or Polish or Magyar or Romanian. Folk of Flora's generation answered back, when they answered back, in all those languages, and sometimes in English, too. Sometimes getting an answer in English made parents yell even more, because it seemed to mean their children were slipping away from them, becoming American. And, sure enough, their children were.

"I'm upset," Flora said. "Does anyone care about that? Thousands of people are getting blown to bits every day. Does anyone care about *thatV* She pointed down to the street and across it, to another crowded brownstone just like the one in which she and her family lived. "It doesn't look like it to me."

"People don't want our soldiers to get killed in the war. Nobody wants that," Sophie said reasonably. "But we can't do anything about it. Life has to go on, the way it's supposed to."

"This isn't the way it's supposed to, and it won't be the way it's supposed to until we find a way to make the fighting stop," Flora insisted. "And all the capitalists are making money from the fighting, so it can go on forever as far as they're concerned. If anyone goes against it, it will have to be the members of the working class—like you, for instance." She stared defiantly at Sophie.

Sophie sighed. She was—not surprisingly, given the hours she worked—exhausted when she came home, and every bit of that weariness showed in her voice. "Flora, I don't need you to agitate for me here," she said. Had she been more like her sister, she would have grown furious. "I hear plenty from the Socialist recruiters every day at the shop."

"You hear, but you don't listen," Flora exclaimed.

"However you like," Sophie answered. "But I'll tell you this much: the agitation

sounds a lot more foolish than it would if the Socialists hadn't voted for the war credits. It takes a lot of *chutzpah"*—she had been speaking English, but let the Yiddish word find a place—"to say yes to something out of one side of your mouth and no from the other."

[redacted]

Before Sophie could reply, her mother stuck her head out onto the fire escape and said, "Yossel is here to see you."

"Oh, good," Sophie said, and, smiling, went back inside.

Sarah Hamburger glanced over to her middle daughter. "Flora, you'll say hello to your sister's fiance, I hope?"

"All right," Flora said resignedly. She did not dislike Yossel Reisen, even if he was a reactionary—or maybe just an anachronism. Here in New York in the twentieth century, as progressive an era and as progressive a city as had existed in the history of the world, he could find nothing better to do with his life than to study Torah and Talmud. He might make a rabbi one day, but even if he did, Sophie would likelier end up supporting him than the other way round. But Sophie was happy, so Flora, for the sake of family peace, kept her opinions there to herself.

When she stepped back into the flat, Sophie and Yossel were sitting side by side on the divan couch against the far wall of the front room. Yossel, a tall, pale, thin fellow whose rusty beard obscured half the high collar on his shirt, was saying, "I have some news I should tell you." He spoke Yiddish with a hissing Litvak accent; every *sh* sound turned into an *s.*

[redacted]

"Why did you do that?" Sophie exclaimed, her placid face suddenly full of harsh lines of pain. "Why, Yossel, why? When they didn't call you up as soon as the war started, I thought—" She didn't go on. What she meant to say was probably something like, */ thought we could be married and go on with our lives as if the world weren't coming to pieces around us.* But the world was always there, no

matter how much you tried to pretend it wasn't if you didn't look at things from an economic perspective.

"I am in the United States," Yossel said stiffly. "Now I can be *of* the United States, too. This is my country. I will fight for it. And now, even if I wanted to, I could not withdraw my enlistment. But I do not want to."

Along with the rest of Captain Lincoln's command, Corporal Stephen Ramsay rode out of Jennings, Sequoyah, on horseback to repel U.S. raiders. "Wouldn't think the damnyankees'd get the idea so quick," he said mournfully. It had rained the night before, and the horses were kicking up a lot of mud. Everybody

would be filthy by the time the company got back into Jennings—everybody who was alive.

"Good luck to anybody shippin' anything on the Atlantic," Ramsay said. "Best I can tell, it's like a cavalry campaign a whole ocean wide."

Lincoln chuckled at that, though Ramsay had meant it seriously. Warships and liners and freighters and submarines from the CSA and the USA and England and France and Germany were scurrying all over the ocean, and shooting at one another whenever they knocked heads.

"I'm not going to tell you you're wrong, Corporal," Captain Lincoln said. The territory between the Cimarron and the Arkansas, which came together about twenty miles east of Jennings, was rough and rugged: wooded hills and gullies took over for prairie. There were caves in the hills, if you knew where to find them. Outlaws and robbers had infested the area for years, because just about all the people who could find them after they'd fled from their crimes were either friends or relations.

"One other thing," Ramsay said. 'They ain't gonna get one o' those armored automobiles through here. You try and run a motorcar in this kind of landscape and it'll fall to pieces before you've gone ten miles."

"Damn good thing, too," the company commander said, to which Ramsay could only nod. A lot of the men with them in the company were new recruits. Confederate raids into Kansas hadn't lasted long; the damnyankees had the initiative now, pushing down into Sequoyah and threatening the oil fields that gave the Confederacy so much of its petroleum.

The U.S. troopers were not better soldiers than their Confederate counterparts; anyone who claimed they were would have got himself pounded by any cavalryman in butternut who happened to hear. But what Ramsay and Lincoln had feared from the time of their first encounter was a reality: the U.S. cavalry usually advanced with armored cars bolstering the horsemen. Confederate armored automobiles, by contrast, were often promised, seldom seen. In open country, protected, mobile machine guns were deadly all out of proportion to their numbers.

Ramsay chuckled reminiscently as an exception to that rule came to mind. "Remember when we had that battery of field artillery with us, up near the border with the Yankees? We made 'em pay that day, by Jesus."

"Sure did," Captain Lincoln agreed. "Sure do. Pretty damn fine to have guns to outrange those damn cars—and to blow one of 'em to hell and gone when you hit it."

"Yes, sir," Ramsay said enthusiastically. The quick-firing three-inch field guns had hit two armored cars, setting them ablaze and making their fellows scuttle on back toward Kansas. They'd also started a grass fire that had slowed

up the advance of the U.S. horsemen, who weren't nearly so eager to go forward without their mechanical buddies, anyhow.

But there weren't enough batteries of field artillery to go around, and the Yankees kept coming. Even if they weren't very good at what they did, enough mediocre soldiers were eventually liable to wear down a smaller force of good ones. And now parts of Sequoyah lay in U.S. hands.

[redacted]

He sharply jerked the horse's head up. The beast let out an indignant squeal of complaint, but it didn't fall. Ramsay knew everything there was to know about complaining—he was a soldier, after all. He'd heard better, from men and horses.

The damp, muddy road wound round the edge of some bare-branched scrub oaks and opened out into a valley wider than most. A couple of farms took up most of the horizontal land and some that wasn't: the sheep grazing on a hillside would have done better if their right legs had been shorter than their left. Smoke curled up from the chimneys of both wooden farmhouses: cabins might have been a better word for them.

[redacted]

[redacted]

"Yes, we're Confederates," Captain Lincoln answered gravely, brushing the brim of his hat with a forefinger. He pointed to the flag the standard bearer carried. "See for yourself, ma'am."

The woman peered at it, peered at him, and then nodded. She turned the barrel of the shotgun away from the troopers, using it to point north and west. "Yankees in them woods. Leastways, they was there last night. Seen their fires. Don't know how many— less'n you, reckon. Go over there and *kill* 'em."

Her vehemence made little chills run up Ramsay's back. One thing you could rely on: the Indians in the state of Sequoyah were loyal to Richmond. The government of the United States had made them pack up and leave their original homelands back east for this country. Since the War of Secession, though, the Confederacy had treated them with forbearance, and that was paying off now.

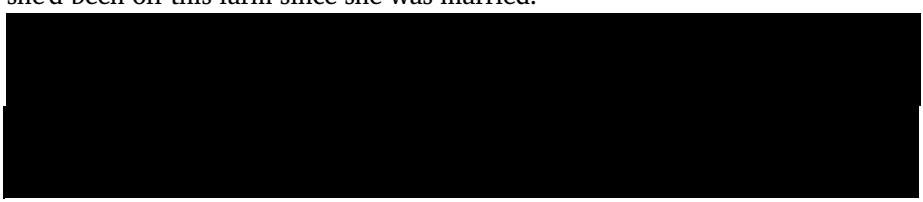
"Whereabouts exactly were they?" Captain Lincoln asked, getting down off his horse and standing beside the woman. A chicken walked over and pecked at the brass buckle of his boot—maybe the stupid bird thought it was a grain of

corn.

The woman pointed again. "Halfway up this here side of that hill—you see it? Ain't seen 'em move out since. Maybe they still there."

Captain Lincoln touched his hat again. "Thank you, ma'am. Don't want to ride into trouble blind, you know."

"You just keep them damnyankees from tramplin' our garden and stealin' our critters," the woman said, as if such petty thievery were the only reason U.S. soldiers were in Sequoyah now. She probably thought that; Ramsay wondered if she'd been off this farm since she was married.



"Sorry, ma'am," Lincoln said, color rising in his face. A couple of the troopers snickered. One of them was in Ramsay's squad. He'd rake Parker over the coals later on; couldn't let discipline go to pot. The captain was saying, "Hope he comes home, too. Hope we all do, when this war is over." He swung back up into the saddle and waved to the company. "Let's go find those damnyankees."

They rode in loose order, with plenty of scouts forward and more out on either flank. This whole country was made for bushwhacking. And then, up ahead, they heard a brisk crackle of gunfire. "Somebody else done found 'em for us," Ramsay yelled. "Now we go in there and clean 'em out."

As the Confederates rode toward the shooting, a machine gun started hammering away. "That's Yankees, all right," Lincoln said. "God knows the outlaws have plenty of rifles, but they don't have any of those."

A winding little track led through the scrub oaks toward the fighting. Lincoln dismounted his men and sent them through the woods on foot, using them like dragoons rather than true cavalry. Ramsay heartily approved—galloping up that path was asking to be massacred.

Before long, the dismounted troopers ran into Yankee pickets. Whoever was commanding the U.S. forces was doing the same thing with them as Lincoln was with the Confederates: they might have ridden to get to the fight, but they were making it on foot.

They also seemed to be outnumbered, and had to give ground again and again to keep from being outflanked and cut off. What with the thick undergrowth, you couldn't see much. If anything moved, you took a shot at it.

And when you moved, people you couldn't spot shot at you. Getting a taste of what infantry did for a living, Ramsay discovered he didn't much care for it.

"Ease off, you Rebs!" somebody yelled. "You got us."

Firing slowly died away. "All right, Yanks, come out," Captain Lincoln called. The U.S. troopers obeyed, hands high over their heads. Nobody shot them down. This wasn't like the skirmish up in Kansas, the one by the railroad track. This one had been fair all the way—no armored automobiles to mess up the odds.

There were, all told, maybe twenty-five U.S. soldiers. Their leader, a fellow with a Kaiser Bill mustache that had lost a good deal of its waxed perfection, wore the single silver bars of a first lieutenant. "We have some wounded back there," he said, pointing in the direction from which he'd come.

"We'll take care of them," Captain Lincoln promised, and told off a detachment to lead the Yankee prisoners back toward the road.

"A good haul," Stephen Ramsay said, standing up and emerging from cover. "We'll pick up that machine gun and as much ammunition as they have left for it, and then somebody'll shoot it back at 'em till all the cartridges are gone."

Captain Lincoln gathered him up by eye. "Come on, Corporal," he said. "Let's go see who we rescued there."

Captain Lincoln stopped. So did Ramsay, right behind him. "Who are you?" Lincoln asked; it hadn't sounded like a Yankee holdout.

A hoarse laugh answered him. "Ain't none of your damn business who we are and who we ain't," the unseen man said. "You jus' go on home, Captain; we ain't got a quarrel with you now, even if mebbe we used to."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ramsay muttered.

"Yeah, and now we got a nice new Maxim gun to play with, too, you want to come in after us. You want to fight the USA, fine. Leave us the hell alone."

"What do we do, sir?" Ramsay asked.

"Hell of a thing," Ramsay said when they were back among their comrades, and then, "We could take 'em."

"Oh, no doubt," Lincoln agreed. "But that's not our mission. We're having enough trouble with what is." Ramsay thought that over and decided the captain was right. Sam Carsten wished he were someplace else. He'd had that feeling before, but never so bad. If he got noticed—

'This is what I get for volunteering," he muttered under his breath as the ugly freighter pulled away from Kapalama Basin, around Sand Island, and west over Keehi Lagoon toward the entrance to Pearl Harbor. "Cap'n" Kidde could have told him as much. Hell, Kidde *had* told him as much—after it was too late for him to do anything about it. But the gunner's mate hadn't been standing next to him when the captain of the *Dakota* asked for volunteers for a dangerous mission, and so his hand had shot up along with everybody else's. He hadn't particularly expected to be picked, but here he was.

Off to the west, the sound of big and medium-sized guns never let up. All of Oahu belonged to the United States Navy and Marines—all of it except one lump of rock and cement that made the U.S. hold on every thing else a hell of a lot less secure than it should have been.

Smoke wreathed Fort William Rufus, the fort everybody, limey and Yank alike, called the Concrete Battleship. "Why the devil did the damned English have to go and build a fort right there?" Carsten said.

"Drive us crazy?" somebody next to him suggested.

It was as good an answer as any, and better than most. Anybody in his right mind would have thought batteries on the mainland were plenty to keep Pearl Harbor safe. The Royal Navy had to have been hearing voices when it built an artificial island to go with those mainland forts. But, since the mainland forts had fallen to the Marines and the Concrete Battleship was still very much a going concern, maybe the English hadn't been so stupid after all.

And so, brute force and sweet reason having failed, the Navy was trying something new: sneakiness. Carsten didn't know which bright boy in glasses had come up with this scheme. What he did know was that, if it went wrong, nobody would ever find enough pieces of him to bury.

The freighter rounded the headland and sped toward the stern of the Concrete Battleship. The only gun it had ever had that could be brought to bear in that direction was a three-inch antiaircraft cannon, which wasn't turret mounted. The limeys weren't going to use that one now; the bombardment had long since wrecked it.

Most of the Navy ships were at extreme long range, for good and cogent reasons. The Concrete Battleship could still return fire—and did, with a salvo from one of its big-gun turrets. The noise of those two twelve-inchers going off was like the end of the world.

All at once, the Navy guns fell silent. Carsten approved of that; a couple of shells had come closer to the freighter than to the Concrete Battleship. The ship slid up to the stern or rear or whatever you wanted to call it of the fort, making contact with a decided thump.

"Well, if those bastards didn't know we were here, they do now," somebody close to Carsten said. That was undoubtedly true, and did nothing to make him feel better about the world.

A couple of Marines at the top of the boarding tower secured it to the broken concrete atop the fort. They waved. Sailors and Marines swarmed up the ladder, fast as they could. Sam was somewhere near the middle of the rush. His feet seemed to touch only every third rung. Then he was up on top himself, running through rubble to

make sure no limeys came out of their starboard sally port to interfere with what the Americans were doing.

He got down behind a broken chunk of concrete and pointed his Springfield in the direction from which the British would come if they were trying something. He hoped to Jesus they wouldn't— after all, what harm could a few American sailors with rifles do on top of a fortress that had defied every big gun the U.S. Navy owned? "Here come the guys with the hoses!" a Marine corporal yelled.

And, sure enough, here they came, up over the boarding tower with hoses just like the ones the *Vulcan* had used to fuel the *Dakota.* The Concrete Battleship had no fueling ports, of course. But it did have air vents, and the combat engineers knew where they were. They weren't badly covered with broken concrete, either; the Englishmen would have made sure of that.

Somebody fired up through one of the vents. An engineer howled and reeled backwards, clutching his shoulder. Carsten, seeing that plenty of people were covering the sally port, ran over to the vent and shot down into it a couple of times. He didn't know how much good he did; he heard the bullets ricocheting off the metal of the air ducts.

"Hell with that, sailor," an uninjured combat engineer barked at him. 'Take Clem's place on the hose and hang on tight."

"All right," Sam said agreeably.

At the rear edge of the Concrete Battleship, somebody yelled "Let 'er rip!" down to the freighter. The hose jerked in Carsten's arms like a live thing. He did have to hang on tight, to keep it from getting away. A stream of thick, black liquid gushed from the nozzle and poured down the vent. Twenty feet away, another hose crew sent more of the stuff into the opening to a second ventilator shaft. Petroleum odors filled the air.

"What the hell is this stuff?" Carsten asked, doing his best to breathe through his mouth.

"Two parts heavy diesel oil, one part gasoline," the combat engineer answered. He let out a wry chuckle. "You don't want to go lookin' for a match for a cigar right about now, do you, buddy?"

"Good pumps," Sam observed. *"Damn* good pumps."

"It's not like we've got time to waste up here," the combat engineer said. He and Carsten held onto the hose till it suddenly went limp. Then he took a surprisingly small square box out of his pack and set it by the vent. In spite of his warning to Sam, he did light a match and touch it to the fuse. He looked up and grinned. "Now we get the hell out of here, is what we do."

"Yes, *sir*\" Carsten grabbed his rifle and ran for the boarding tower. Most of the boarding party was already off the Concrete Battleship. A couple of engineers were still busy lighting more demolition charges here and there on the roof.

Sam went down the boarding tower even faster than he'd gone up it. He wanted to get away from Fort William Rufus, far away, as fast as he could. "Everybody off?" somebody yelled. When no one denied it, that same voice shouted, "All astern full!" The freighter backed away from the Concrete Battleship.

"How long a delay did you put on those fuses?" Carsten asked the combat engineer, who'd come down right behind him.

"Jesus!" Carsten said, and wished the freighter would go faster.

When they'd backed a few hundred yards, shore batteries opened up on the Concrete Battleship to discourage the Englishmen from heading up onto the roof. "If one of their shells fouls up our charges, I'll kill those sons of bitches with my own hands," the engineer promised.

Sam wasn't worrying about that. He was still hoping the freighter could make something better than its current slow progress away from the Concrete Battleship. How long had he taken to run across the battered but unpierced concrete roof? How long had he needed to get down the boarding tower? How much time had gone by since then? And what would happen when—?

That last thought had just gone through his mind when it happened. Fort William Rufus went up in a titanic blast of fire and smoke that obscured the whole artificial island. The shock wave from the explosion slapped the freighter like a barmaid's hand across your face when you got fresh and she didn't like it. Heat hit Sam as if he'd

stuck his head in front of an oven.

He hardly noticed. He was watching an enormous slab of reinforced concrete fly high, high, high into the air—hundreds of feet up there, flung like the lid of a pot by a playful kid. But this lid weighed tons uncounted.

Beside him, the combat engineer clapped his hands with glee. "We did know where the main powder magazine was," he said happily.

"I guess you did," Carsten agreed. The ruined roof fell into the Pacific with a splash bigger than a hundred twelve-inch shells all hitting the same place at the same time. "I guess you did," Sam repeated. Fresh explosions tore at the Concrete Battleship. "We aren't going to have any trouble getting in and out of Pearl Harbor, not any more we're not."

Lucien Galtier chased bits of rabbit-and-prune stew around his plate with knife and fork. He ate some potato, too, then reached for a little glass of applejack that sat nearby. "Hard times coming," he said in a mournful voice.

"It will be all right," his wife, Marie, said. "Would you like more?" When he nodded, she picked up his plate and handed it to Nicole, their oldest daughter. "Get your father some more stew, please."

But he would not let Nicole distract him from his worries. "Hard times coming," he said again, and then went on before Marie could answer: "Wives, now, wives, they look at things and they say, It will be all right,' no matter what it is, no matter how unlikely things are to be right ever again. We face starvation, nothing less—starvation, I tell you."

"Yes, Lucien, of course," Marie said, full of calm acceptance, as Nicole brought back his plate, piled high with steaming stew and potatoes. The plums that made the prunes had come from his own little orchard. The potatoes were from his farm, too. So were the rabbits, who had paid the penalty for being uninvited guests. He knew how to make applejack, but old Marcel, two farms away, had a still going and did not charge outrageous prices, so what was the point in cooking up his own? He finished the glass, savoring the warmth it put in his middle.

After he'd methodically plowed through the second helping, he

said, with the air of a man granting a great concession, "Of course, here on the farm it could be that times are not so hard as they are in the town. I do not say it is, mind you, but it could be."

'This I think is so," Marie replied. "In Riviere-du-Loup, in St.-Antonin, in St.-Modeste, people cannot get along with what they are able to make so easily as can we, who raise our own food and who can even make our own clothes at need." She glanced from Nicole to her other, younger, daughters, Susanne, Denise, and Jeanne. "In the attic, stored away, are a spinning wheel and the parts for a loom. I have not brought them down and shown you what to do with them because, till now, there has been no need; we have sewn with cloth bought from the store. But my mother taught me, as her mother taught her, and I can teach you if we are able to get no more cloth, as may happen."

The girls, who ranged in age from Jeanne's seven to Nicole's twenty, all clamored for Marie to bring down the old tools and teach them how to make cloth. Marie sent Lucien an amused glance. He returned it, saying, "See how bravely they take on new work. I remember my mother making cloth, too. I do not recall her being so eager to do it, though." He hid pride in his daughters behind gruffness.

"They want to find out something new, Lucien, or something so old, it seems new to them," Marie said. "That is not bad. When it is no longer new to them, it will no longer be exciting, either; no doubt you are right about that."

Lucien looked at his two sons: Charles, sixteen, compact like Marie, and Georges, a couple of years younger but already bigger than his brother. "Some people," he said pointedly, "have no interest in work even when it is of a new sort."

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Even more predictably, Georges turned it into a joke, asking, *"Eh bien,* Papa—this laziness, do you think we get it from you or from Mama?"

[redacted]

Outside, the dogs began to bark. A moment later came the sound of several men approaching the house, some of them mounted, others afoot. The Galtiers exchanged sudden glances of alarm. So many neighbors would never come together, not unannounced. That meant Americans, and Americans meant trouble.

Sure enough, in English rough as sandpaper, one of the men out there said, "Those hounds try and bite, you stick 'em or shoot 'em. The major, he ain't gonna give you no Purple Heart for a dog bite, boys."

Lucien realized he was the only one in the family who understood what the newcomers were saying. His sons would have learned their English in the Army when their time came; his wife and daughters would have had few occasions ever even to hear it.

"Shall we fight, Papa?" Charles demanded. He wanted to. At sixteen, you knew you could do the impossible.

At forty-three, you knew damn well you couldn't. "We have one rifle," Lucien said. "It is better for rabbits than for men. They have many guns out there, and can bring many soldiers here. No, we do not fight. We do as they tell us." When Charles and even Georges looked mutinous, he added, "Then we see what we can do afterwards." To his relief, that satisfied his sons. They were too young to be killed in a hopeless fight. It also had an element of truth that salved his own pride.

One of the Americans rapped on the door. The whole farmhouse shook. He had to be using his rifle butt, not a fist. Galtier opened the door. The American, a sergeant almost a head taller than he was, checked a piece of paper and said, "Galtier, Lucien." It was not a question, though the fellow mangled the pronunciation so badly that Lucien needed a moment to understand his own name.

"Good. You speak English," the U.S. sergeant said. Then his eyes, hard and pale, narrowed. "Round here, that means you been in the Army, ain't that right, Frenchy?"

"Crippled?" the American said. "Yeah, that's so, I guess. All right." He looked down at Lucien's stocking feet. "Get your shoes on, Frenchy. We're gonna have a look round your barn and your storehouses. You don't wanna waste time." He turned to a couple of his men and shouted, "Gosse, Hendrick, you go and start. Frenchy here'll be along."

"What is it you do here?" Galtier asked as he pulled on first one boot, then the other. He was glad they stood by the door, so he did not have to go away and let the sergeant—and maybe his followers—come in. To his family, he called in French, "Stay here. I am attending to this."

He understood French, then, even if he didn't deign to speak it. He went on, in ugly English, "Requisition of supplies, by order of the brigadier general commanding."

"You got it in one, buddy," the U.S. soldier said.

"You do not pay," Galtier went on.

A couple of soldiers—presumably Gosse and Hendrick—were pawing over what Lucien had spent a lifetime maintaining and adding to, the farm having been in his family for generations. One of them said, "Sarge, he's got enough here to keep the battalion in food all winter long."

"Yeah?" the sergeant said. He turned around and shouted toward one of the mounted men who'd come up to the farm. "Blocksage! Ride back and tell the QM to send a truck out here. No, better make it two trucks. Plenty of goodies, yes indeed." The horse went trotting away.

Before he could finish, the sergeant pointed his rifle at him. *"This* gives me the right, pal," he said. "We're the ones who won the war, remember? Now, we're supposed to treat you Frenchies nice, so you'll

get some compensation, don't you worry about that. But don't you go telling us what we can do and what we can't, either. You'll be real sorry real fast, if you understand what I'm saying. You understand?"

"Oh, yes, *monsieur,"* Galtier said. "I understand."

Wherever the quartermaster had set up his headquarters, it wasn't far away. Within a few minutes, a couple of trucks came wheezing and rattling up the dirt road before turning and approaching the farmhouse. The looting began immediately thereafter.

They left Lucien his horse. They left him a cow and a few sheep and a pig. They left him a handful of hens and his rooster. They left him enough fodder to feed the animals he had left through the winter —if it wasn't too long or too hard and he didn't feed them too much. By the time they were done hauling away glass jars, they left his family in the same shape as the livestock: most of the food Mane had laboriously preserved was gone, along with lovingly smoked hams and flitches of bacon.

Galtier didn't yell or scream or swear, no matter how much he wanted to. He stood silent, holding the copy of the list of supplies requisitioned from him, as the big American soldiers finished their job, started the trucks' engines, and left. The infantry and horsemen went on to the next farm down the road. They were noisily arguing about whether it would yield more or less than they'd got from him.

When they were all gone, he went back into the house. His family crowded round him. "Thank God you are well," Marie said, taking his

hand in a public display of affection unlike any she'd given him since they were newlyweds. "What have the *Boches americains* done?"

[redacted]

His family stared at him; he hardly ever said such things where even his sons, let alone his wife and daughters, could hear him. "It's all right," Marie said. "God will surely forgive you, so we must as well."

Lucien nodded gratefully to her. She always found a way to make things right. He said one thing more: *"Je me souviens*—I will remember."

[redacted]

Not all her money, not all her influence, had been able to get her a Pullman berth for herself and her colored maidservant, Julia. When she boarded the train, she found out why: the Pullmans were full of military men, too, some of them with cots adding to their carrying capacity. When set against the needs of war, luxury was no longer practical.

Luxury no longer seemed fashionable, either. That distressed Anne: what point to living if you couldn't live graciously? With a cynicism older than her years but not older than her sex, she suspected the powers that be would soon grow bored with their egalitarian pose. These weren't the United States, after all: class mattered in the Confederacy, especially looking down from the top. Pretending that wasn't so struck at the heart of the nation's *raison d'etre.*

Not that she wasn't the center of attention all the same. She coolly took that for granted, as much as she did Julia's presence beside her. Had the train been almost all women and only a handful of men instead of the other way round, she would have been as confident of drawing those men to her. Looks told. Even President Wilson responded to her smile. So did breeding. And, she thought, smoothing a pleat on the skirt of the cranberry-red silk dress she was wearing, so

did money. She toyed with the lace at her throat, affecting not to notice that she was being watched.

Ordinary soldiers and sailors eyed her without approaching; they knew she was beyond them. Yes, breeding and money told. A couple of soldiers who stank of cheap whiskey tried to approach Julia, looking for nothing more than female flesh with which to slake their lusts. Anne Colleton sent them on their way with a few low-voiced words that left their ears red and tingling.

Officers, though, officers were drawn to Anne as moths were drawn to fires. And, like moths, they drew back with their wings singed. Attracting men was great sport. But most of the officers, especially those from the Navy and the cavalry and artillery, were aristocrats with all the virtues of their class—they were brave and loyal and randy—and also its vices—they were crashing bores, or so Anne found them.

[redacted]

[redacted]

They sat down. The crowd behind them thinned regretfully. The one who'd asked her leave was a lieutenant, senior grade, with wreathed stars on his shoulder straps and a stripe and a half of gold on each sleeve. He was growing a sandy beard; at the moment, he looked as if he'd forgotten to shave.

His companion, a lieutenant, junior grade, with plain stars and single sleeve stripes, was so blond and perfect, he might have stepped off a recruiting poster. Anne dismissed him at once. The other one, though, backwoods accent or not, was ... interesting.

[redacted]

[redacted]

"Very fine, ma'am," the waiter assured her.

"I'll have that, then, and a glass of rose to go with it."

"Steak and potatoes for me, too," the junior lieutenant agreed.

"Medium," the lieutenant, junior grade, said.

"What was that?" the handsome junior lieutenant—Ralph— asked.

The lieutenant, senior grade, raised a gingery eyebrow. "You're right, ma'am. Not many white folks—especially not many white women—know that one."

"Submarines!" Now Anne looked at both of them with respect. They might not be gentlemen, but they had courage and to spare. You had to have courage—or be a little touched in the head—to go down under the ocean in what was basically a metal cigar.

"Submarines," the senior lieutenant repeated. "I'm Roger Kimball, off the *Whelk,* and this lug here is Ralph Briggs, off the *Scallop*. Heading for New Orleans, both of us, for reassignment."

"I'm on my way to New Orleans, too," Anne said, and gave her name.

Neither of them knew who she was. Even so, Ralph Briggs started slavering as if he were a dog and she that steak he'd ordered, not cooked medium but raw. Kimball, on the other hand, just shrugged and nodded.

"We've laid ours, the damnyankees have laid theirs, and by the time both sides are done, won't be any room for boats left in the whole ocean, and I mean our boats and theirs both—ships, too," Kimball said.

"Don't know what to do about it," Briggs said, pouring whiskey from the bottle into his glass. He drank, then laughed, and said, "If we were still in those gasoline-engine boats, I'd be drunker'n this, just off the fumes."

"Diesel's the way to go there," Kimball agreed. "Gas-jag hangover is worse than anything you get from rotgut."

"And when you do do it, you want to do it right," Briggs said.

'That's a fact." Kimball laughed out loud, a laugh that invited everyone who could to share the joke. "Ensign on my boat opened the wrong valve at the wrong time and got his own back—right between the eyes." He laughed again, and so did Ralph Briggs. Kimball finished, "After that, the poor miserable devil wouldn't even try unless he was crouched down in front of the pan."

When Anne Colleton discussed modern art, she and her fellow cognoscenti used terms that shut the uninitiated out of the conversation. Now she found herself shut out the same way. She didn't care for it. "What *are* you talking about?" she asked with some asperity.

If Briggs had been red before, he was incandescent now. Kimball leaned back in his chair and waited to see how she'd take his blunt answer. She nodded to him. "Thank you. This happened to someone in your crew?"

"That's right. We were laughing about it for days afterwards," Kimball answered.

"Everyone but him, of course," Anne said.

Kimball shook his head. "Jim, too, after he got hold of a washrag."

Briggs poured his glass of bourbon full and gulped it down, maybe in an effort to drown his own embarrassment. Perhaps not surprisingly, he fell asleep in his chair about ten minutes later.

Kimball leaned him against the wall of the dining car. "There," he said in satisfaction. "Now he won't fall down and hurt himself." He got to his feet. "Thanks for sharing the table with us, Miss Colleton."

Not even *A pleasure to have met you* or *Hope to see you again sometime,* Anne noted, more than a little annoyed. She glanced back toward the table where Julia was eating and laughing and joking with other servants and some of the colored train crew. Her maid would be there for a while: she might stay there all night if she got the chance. Anne rose from her seat. "I'm going up to my car, I think."

Kimball made no effort to take up the unspoken invitation to walk with her. He didn't move so fast, though, as to leave her behind. They went through a couple of cars not quite together, not quite apart. Then he stopped in the hallway to a Pullman and said, "This is my compartment. Ralph's, too, matter of fact, but he found himself that berth in the diner. Not the one I'd take, but what can you do?" His eyes twinkled.

[redacted]

Afterwards, just as efficient, he helped her dress again, those clever hands doing up hooks and buttons with accurate, unhurried haste. He stuck his head out into the hallway to make sure she could leave the compartment unnoticed. Now he did say, with a knowing smile, "A pleasure to have met you." As soon as she was on her way, he shut the door behind her.

[redacted]

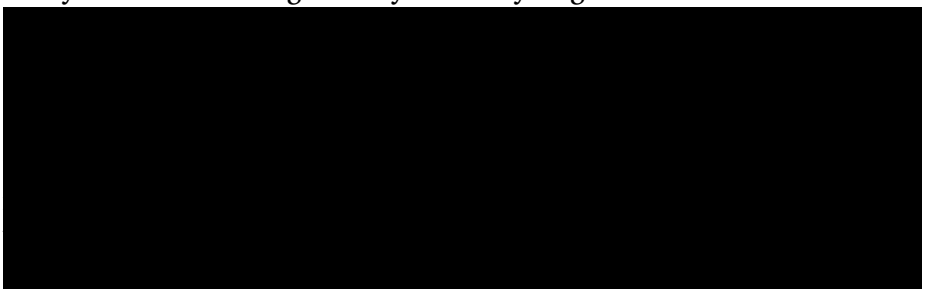
He looked back toward Catawba Mountain. Coming down it had been almost as bad as fighting his way up it. The Rebs moved back from one line to another, and made you pay the butcher's bill every time you attacked.

"Dumb fool luck," he muttered. "That's the only reason I'm here, let alone a three-striper."

"You bet, Sarge," said Paul Andersen, who was using a wire-cutter to snip his way into a can of corned beef that let out an embalmed smell when he got it open. He wore a corporal's chevrons now himself, for the same reason that Chester was a sergeant. "A machine gun, it doesn't care how smart you are or how brave you are. You get in front of it, either you go down or you don't. All depends on how the dice roll."

"Yeah." Martin tore his eyes away from the scarred slopes of Catawba Mountain and looked east, toward the Roanoke River and Big Lick. He didn't stand up for a better look; you were asking for a sniper to blow your lamp out for good if you did anything that stupid.

The lines were quiet right this minute, but what did that mean? Only that the Rebel snipers, who were used to shooting for the pot and reckoned men deliciously large targets, had plenty of time to get ready to take advantage of any chance you gave 'em.



He dug in his own mess kit and chose a hardtack biscuit. Hard was the word for it; it might have been baked during the War of Secession. And at that, troops were better supplied than they had been at the start of the campaign. Railroads were snaking out of West Virginia to the front, to bring in food and ammunition faster and in bigger lots than horses and mules and men could manage.

"Now if we could only put the Rebel trains out of action," he said. That was a big part of the reason the brass had attacked Big Lick in the first place. But the tracks remained in Confederate hands, though repeated bombardment meant the Rebs tried running trains through only at night.

"Good luck, Sarge," Andersen said. Now he pointed east. " 'Stead of earthworks, they got their niggers runnin' up new lines out of range of our guns, anyhow. Don't seem fair."

Chester Martin nodded gloomily. Captain Wyatt had been grousing about those lines, too. But the captain's grousing wasn't what worried Martin about the Confederate tracklaying. Sure as hell, the brass would want to push guns up close enough to pound the new lines. And who'd have to do the dirty work to make that happen? Nobody he could see but the infantry.

"Yeah, who ever saw a skinny cook?" Martin said, peeling silver paper off the bar before he crammed it into his mouth. "Mm—thank you, sir. Beats the hell out of biscuits and corned beef." Wyatt was a damned good officer—he looked out for his men. If your captain took care of things like that, odds were good he'd also be an effective combat leader, and Wyatt was. He was also up for promotion to

major, for most of the same reasons Martin and Andersen had seen their ranks go up.

"Good," Martin said. "Hope the limeys starve."

Captain Wyatt knew nobody could make a speech like TR, too. He skimmed and summarized, saying, "He wants the world to know we're at war to support our allies and to restore what's ours by rights, what the English and the French and the Rebs took away from our grandfathers ... Wait. Here's the best bit." He stood very straight and drew back his lips so you could see all his teeth, a pretty good TR imitation. " 'A great free people owes to itself and to all mankind not to sink into helplessness before the powers of evil. I ask that this people rise to the greatness of its opportunities. I do not ask that it seek the easiest path.' "

"That *is* good," Andersen said with a connoisseur's approval.

Chester Martin nodded, too. Roosevelt knew about the harder path. Along with Custer, though on a slightly smaller scale because he'd been just a colonel of volunteers, he'd come out of the Second Mexican War a hero, and his stock had been rising ever since. No nation could have hoped for a better leader in time of war.

"No more champagne? *Merde!"* Marcel Duchamp clapped a dramatic hand to his forehead. Everything the modern artist did, as far as Scipio could tell, was deliberately dramatic. Duchamp was tall and thin and pale and in the habit of dressing in black, which made him look like a preacher—until you saw his eyes. He didn't behave like a preacher, either, not if half—not if a quarter—of the stories Scipio heard from the maids and kitchen girls were true. Now he went on, "How shall I endure this rural desolation without champagne to console me?"

Whiskey was the first thought that came to Scipio's mind. If it worked for him, if it worked for the Negroes who picked Marshlands' cotton, it ought to do the job for a dandified Frenchman. But he'd been trained to give the best service he could, and so he said, 'The war has made importing difficult, sir, as it has disturbed outbound travel. But perhaps my mistress, Miss Colleton, would be able to procure some champagne in New Orleans and order it sent here for you. If you like, I will send her a telegram with your request."

By now, Scipio knew better than to try to match wits with Duchamp. The artist's conversation was as confusing as his paintings; he used words to reflect back on one another till common sense vanished from them. Stolidly, the butler repeated, "Would you like me to wire my mistress about the champagne, sir?"

Marcel Duchamp stabbed out a long, pale forefinger. "You are her servant. You were, at one time, her slave, is it not so?" He waved a hand to encompass not just the dining room of the Marshlands mansion but the entire estate.

"I was a slave of the Colleton family, yes, sir, although I was manumitted not long before Miss Anne was born," Scipio said, nothing at all in his voice now. He didn't like being reminded of his former status, even if his present one represented no great advance upon it.

"It may be so in theory," Scipio said warily, "but Miss Colleton would never—"

Duchamp waggled that forefinger to interrupt him. "Never mind. It is in this sense of the word that you are her servant. Now, you say *she* is *your* mistress. How may you, in your turn, punish her if she fails of the requirements of a mistress?"

"Oh, I do know it. I know it full well. Many have accused me of being mad, but few of being stupid." The artist winked, as if to say even here he did not expect to be taken altogether seriously. But he was, or at least he sounded, serious as he went on, "So how is the charming and wealthy Miss Colleton *yours,* eh, Scipio? You cannot punish her, you cannot control her, you cannot possess her, either in economic terms or in the perfumed privacy of her boudoir, you—"

Scipio abruptly turned on his heel and walked out of the dining room, out of the mansion altogether. That Frenchman was crazy, and the people who'd told him so knew what they were talking about. In the Confederate States of America, you had to be crazy if you talked about a Negro servant possessing a white woman in her bedroom—even if you called it a boudoir. Oh, such things happened now and again. Scipio knew that. They always ended badly, too, when they were discovered. He knew that, too. But whether they happened or not, you didn't go around *talking* about them. You sure as the devil didn't go around suggesting them to a Negro.

"Words," Scipio said in his educated voice. Then he repeated it in the slurred dialect of the Congaree: "Words." Marcel Duchamp played games with them nobody had any business playing.

And Anne Colleton hadn't a clue that was so. There were a lot of things the mistress *(his* mistress?—he'd have to think about that) didn't have a clue about when it came to what really went on at Marshlands. Scipio hadn't had a clue about them, either, not until he discovered the forbidden book in Cassius' cottage.

He still wished he'd never seen it. But, to protect his own hide, he'd been reading a lot of Marx and Engels and Lincoln, and then talking things over with Cassius. The more you looked at things from an angle that wasn't the one white folks wanted you to use, the uglier the whole structure of the Confederacy looked.

Cassius couldn't wave, but did nod. "How you is?" he asked. "I been better," Scipio answered, as usual in the dialect in which he was addressed.

"You gwine get youself killed, is all, you talk like that," Scipio said. 'The white folks, they shoot we, they hang we. The poor buckra, they look fo' the chance every day. You want to give it to they?"

"The poor buckra in the Army, fight the rich white folks' war," Cassius said. "Not enough leffto stop we, come de day."

Scipio stared at Cassius. Whatever else you could say about him, he didn't think small. At last, cautiously, Scipio said, "They ain't got enough niggers in the USA to rise up against they gov'ment."

He sounded like a preacher stirring up the congregation. That was what he was, though he would have been furious had Scipio said so. But a lot of workers on the plantation took *The Communist Manifesto* as Gospel. Gloomily, Scipio said, "You gwine get a lot o' niggers killed. They rise up in the USA, lots o' they poor buckra get killed. We don' rise up together. They white, we black. Things is like that, an' that's how things is."

"Come the revolution, black an' white be all the same," Cassius said.

For once, Scipio got the last word: "Yeah. All be *dead* the same."

VII

Captain Irving Morrell lay between starched white sheets in an airy Tucson hospital that smelled of carbolic acid and, below that, of pus. He was sick of hospitals. The words *sick to death of hospitals* ran through his mind, but he rejected them. He'd come too close to dying to make jokes, or even feeble plays on words, about it.

The doctor pulled back the top sheet. He peered down at the valley in the flesh of Morrell's thigh. "Not too red," he said, scribbling a note. The skin of his hands was red, too, and raw, cracked from the harsh disinfectant in which he scrubbed many times a day.

Another note, another prod. "How about that?"

Two orderlies came into the warm, airy room, one pushing a wheeled gurney, the other walking beside it. Bandages covered most of the head of the still figure lying on the gurney. Yellow serum stained the white cotton at a spot behind the left temple. Between

them, the orderlies gently transferred what had been a man from the gurney to a bed. The axles creaked slightly as they turned the gurney in a tight circle and rolled it away.

In his time on his back, Morrell had seen a lot of wounds like that. "Poor bastard," he muttered.

[redacted]

Morrell shivered. "Better to be shot dead quick and clean. Then it's over. You're not just—lingering."

"That's a good word," the doctor said. "Head wounds are the dreadful ones. Either they do kill the man receiving them—and so many do, far out of proportion to the number received—or they leave him a vegetable, like that unfortunate soldier." He clicked his tongue between his teeth. "It's a problem where I wish we could do more."

[redacted]

[redacted]

"The *Pickelhaube"* Morrell agreed. "That might help if you fell off a bicycle, but it won't stop a bullet, either. A steel helmet might, if it wasn't too heavy to wear. You probably couldn't make one that would keep everything out, but—"

[redacted]

"The sooner something will get done," Morrell finished for him. He hated the way Army wheels got mired in bureaucratic mud. Maybe, with the war on, things would move faster. He hadn't had a chance to find out; he'd been flat on his back almost since fighting broke out. But the doctor had spoken a magic word. "Discharge?"

"You're not one hundred per cent sound," the doctor said, glancing

down at the notes he'd written. "Odds are, you'll never be a hundred per cent sound, not with that wound. But you have function in the leg, the infection is controlled if not suppressed, and we may hope exercise will improve your overall condition now rather than setting it back. If not, of course, you will return to the hospital wherever you happen to be reassigned."

"Of course," Morrell said piously, not meaning a word of it. Inactivity had been a pain as bad as any from his wound. Once he got back in the field, he wouldn't report himself unfit for duty, not unless he got shot again—and not then, either, if he could get away with it. He'd buy a walking stick, he'd detail a sergeant to haul him around as necessary—but he'd stay in action. There had been times when he thought he'd go crazy, just from being cooped up in one place for weeks at a time.

"I am serious about that," the doctor said; Morrell had had better luck fooling some of the other quacks they'd sicced on him. "If the infection flares up again, or if it should reach the bone, amputation will offer the only hope of saving your life."

"I understand," Morrell said, which didn't mean he took the medical man seriously. If they hadn't chopped the leg off when it was swollen to twice its proper size and leaking pus the way an armored car with a punctured radiator leaked water, they weren't going to haul out the meat axe for it now.

"I will be glad to get out of here," Morrell said, "but isn't there any chance of sending me back down to the campaign for Guay-mas? Last I heard, we'd bogged down less than a hundred miles from the town."

"That's my understanding, too," the doctor said. "The reassignment center, however, has been established in St. Louis. You'll get your orders there, whatever they turn out to be."

And, of course, there were no guarantees he'd get sent back to Sonora. He could as easily end up in Pennsylvania or Kansas or Quebec or British Columbia. War flamed all over the continent.

He started to ask the doctor when he could expect to head out of Tucson, but the fellow had moved on to the next bed and was examining a sergeant who'd taken a shell fragment that had shattered his arm. He had suffered an amputation, and was bitter about it. Now that the doctor was looking at him, Morrell might as well have ceased to exist.

Knowing he would soon be allowed to escape the confines of the military hospital, to see more of Tucson's notched, mountainous skyline than the window showed him, should have given him the patience to bear his remaining time in enforced captivity with good grace. So he told himself. Instead, he felt more trapped in his bed than ever. He fussed and fidgeted and made himself so unpleasant that the nurses, with whom he had for the most part got on well, started snapping back at him.

Three days later, though, an orderly brought him a new captain's uniform to replace the hospital robe he'd worn so long. In size, the new uniform was a perfect match for the blood-drenched, tattered one in which he'd been wounded. It hung on him like a tent. He could have concealed a football under his tunic without unduly stretching it, and he had to use the point of a knife to cut a new hole in his belt so his trousers would stay up. They flapped around his skinny legs like the baggy cotton bloomers women wore when they exercised.

He didn't care. Even with the stick, walking down the corridor to the buggy that would take him to the train station left him dizzy and light-headed. He didn't care about that, either. The driver was a gray-haired civilian who, by his bearing, had spent a good many years in the Army. "Glad to be getting back into it, sir?" he asked as Morrell struggled up into the seat behind him. After he spoke, he coughed several times. Morrell wondered if he'd come here to New Mexico in hopes of healing consumptive lungs.

That was however it was. The question had only one possible answer. "Hell, yes!" Morrell said. The driver chuckled and flicked the reins. The two-horse team started forward. Morrell leaned back in his seat. He could relax now. He was heading back toward the world where he belonged. By the time Jonathan Moss pulled on woolen long Johns, trousers, boots, tunic, heavy wool sweater, even heavier sheepskin coat, and leather flying helmet and goggles, he felt as if he'd doubled in weight. He'd certainly doubled in width. And, with so many layers of clothing swaddling him, he could hardly move. He

waddled through the doorway of the battered barn by the airfield. Forcing each leg forward took a separate and distinct effort.

One of the mechanics looked up from a poker game in the corner and said, "Think you'll be warm enough, Lieutenant?" He laughed and, without waiting for an answer, turned his attention back to the dealer. "Gimme two, Byron, and make 'em good ones for a change, why don't you?"

Nettled, Moss snapped, "It's cold enough down here, Lefty. Go up five thousand feet and it's a hell of a lot colder."

[redacted]

One thing about flying: going up in the air meant Moss wouldn't lose any money to the mechanic for a while. Bad weather had grounded the reconnaissance squadron the past few days. It wasn't exactly choice out there now, but they might be able to get up, look around, and come back in one piece.

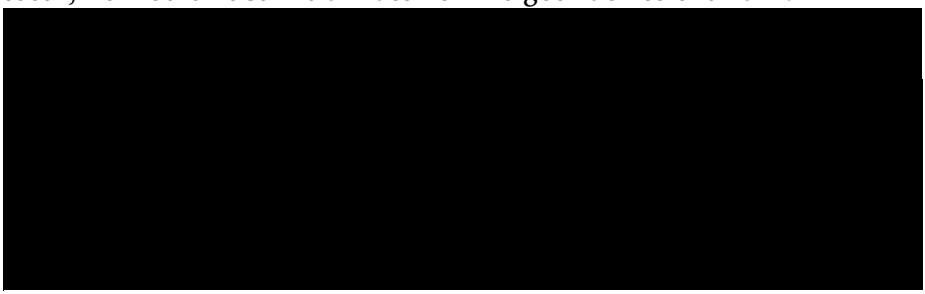
Moss chuckled wryly to himself as he walked out into watery sunshine. When the fighting started—which seemed like a devil of a long time ago now—a lot of officers hadn't wanted to pay any attention to the reports the aeroplane pilots brought back. Now people were screaming blue murder because they'd been deprived of those reports for a few days. *Go on and fly,* the attitude seemed to be. *So what if you crash?—as long as we get the information.*

"Nice to be wanted," Moss said, and chuckled again. He climbed up into his Super Hudson. The first thing he did was check the action of the machine gun mounted in front of him. The next thing he did was check the belt of ammunition that fed the machine gun. He found a couple of cartridges he didn't like. He took off his mittens, extracted the bad rounds from the belt, and yelled for an armorer. He soon had new cartridges more to his satisfaction. If your machine gun jammed in an aerial duel, all you could do was run away. Since the Avros the Canadians flew were faster than the Curtiss machines, you didn't want to have to try to do that.

One by one, the other pilots of the four-aeroplane flight came out of the barn and got up into their aircraft. Baum and Nelson and McClintock were as heavily wrapped as he was, and distinguishable one from another mostly because McClintock was half a head taller than Nelson, who overtopped Baum by a like amount. They too

started checking their machine guns and ammunition.

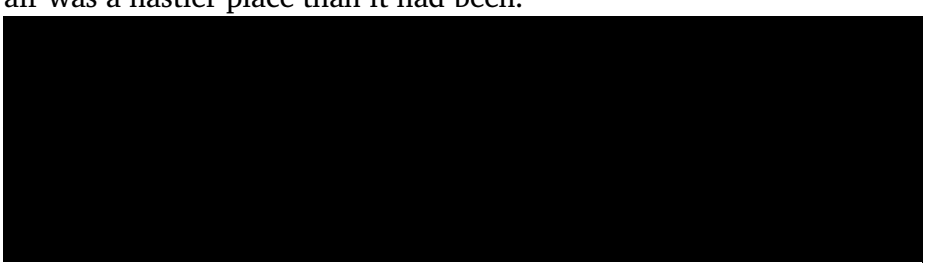
After what seemed like forever but couldn't have been more than a couple of minutes, the mechanics deigned to put down their cards long enough to help send the airmen on their way. Lefty sauntered out to Moss' aeroplane. He had an unlighted cigar clamped between his teeth; he wouldn't strike a match till he got back to the barn.



Moss glanced over to his flightmates. Baum's engine was going, and so was McClintock's. Lefty trotted toward Nelson's aeroplane, as did a couple of other mechanics. Nelson spread his hands in frustration. You hated to break down, but what were you supposed to do sometimes?

Moss pounded a fist down onto his leg. He could hardly feel the blow through all the clothes he had on, but that didn't matter. The flight would be short a man, no help for it. If they got jumped, the Canucks and limeys would have an edge.

He shook his head. Lone wolves of the air didn't last long these days. The British and Canadians had started formation flying, and U.S. pilots had to match them or else come out on the short end whenever a single plane met up with a flight. The kind of scout mission he'd flown in September would have been suicidally risky nowadays; the air was a nastier place than it had been.



He flew as leader, with Baum on his right and McClintock off to his left. He wished Nelson had been able to get his engine to turn over, then shrugged. He'd made a lot of wishes that hadn't come true. What was one more?

The flight buzzed along, inland from the northern shore of Lake Erie. After untold exertions and untold casualties, the U.S. Army had

finally dislodged the limeys and Canucks from their grip on Port Dover. It did them a lot less good than it would have a couple of months before. For one thing, the Canadians had had plenty of time to build up new defensive lines behind the one that had fallen—the exhilarating hope of a charge to take the defenses at London in the rear remained just that, a hope.

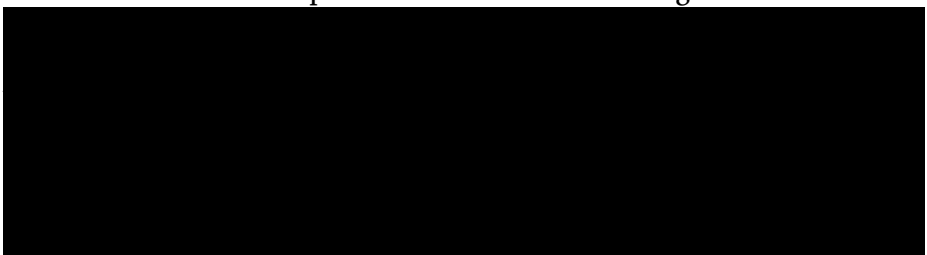
And for another, the weather made movement so hard that the Canadians and British could probably have pulled half their men out of line without the Army's being able to do much about it. The closest big U.S. town to the fighting was Buffalo, and Buffalo was notorious for frightful winters. Moving up into Canada didn't do a thing to make the wind blow less or the snow not fall.

"The war was supposed to be over by now," Moss muttered. Troops weren't supposed to have to try to advance—hell, aeroplanes weren't supposed to have to try to fly—in weather like this. Canada was supposed to have fallen like a ripe fruit, at which point the United States could turn the whole weight of their military muscle against the Confederates.

Oh, parts of the plan had gone well. Farther east, the Army hadn't had any great trouble reaching the St. Lawrence. Crossing it, though, was turning out to be another question altogether, and the land on the other side was fortified to a fare-thee-well. They'd come ever so close to Winnipeg, too, though they probably wouldn't get there till spring, which in those parts meant May at the earliest.

But not quite reaching Winnipeg meant trains full of wheat and oats and barley kept heading east from the Canadian prairie—and there was talk that the Canucks, weather be damned, were pushing another railroad line through north of the city. The grain's getting through, in turn, meant the Canadian heartland, the country between Toronto and Quebec City, wouldn't starve. Of course, it hadn't been intended to starve Canada into submission, not at first—out-and-out conquest was the goal. But both the first plan and the alternative had failed, which left—what?

"Which leaves a whole lot of poor bastards down there dead in the mud," Moss said. When things didn't go the way the generals thought they would, soldiers were the ones who had to try to straighten them out—and who paid the price for doing it. The only thanks they got were mentions in TR's speeches. It didn't seem enough.



He and his wingmen were only a couple of thousand feet above the ground. The Canucks and Englishmen down there opened up on them with everything they had. *Thrum! Thrum!* The noise of bullets tearing through tight-stretched fabric was not one Moss wanted to hear. One of those accidental rounds—or maybe not so accidental, not flying this low—could just as easily tear through him.

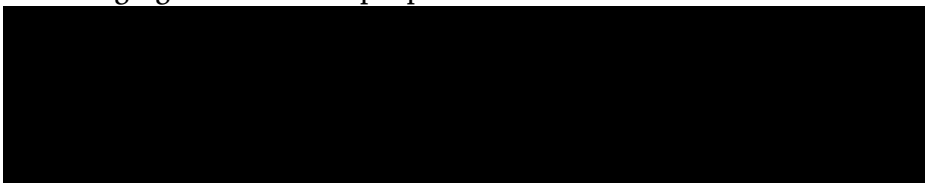
After playing hide and seek for a minute or so, he came back down into plain sight so he could do his own job as it needed doing.

And here came what looked like a procession of toy trucks and wagons, bringing supplies up from the railhead to the front. Jonathan Moss let out a whoop the slipstream blew away. He waved to catch his wingmen's attention, and pointed first down to the supply column and then to the machine gun mounted in front of him. The limeys and Canucks—and even the Americans—had been taking potshots at them the whole flight long. Now they could get some of their own back.

He swooped down on the column like a red-tailed hawk on a pullet in a farmyard. Safely back of the lines, the wagons and trucks had no armed escort whatever. He squeezed the triggers to the machine gun and sprayed bullets up and down the length of it. As he pulled up and went around, he yelled with glee at the chaos he, Baum, and McClintock had created. Some horses were down. So were some drivers. Two trucks were burning. Two more had run into each other when their drivers jumped out and dove into a ditch rather than staying to be machine-gunned. A cloud of steam in the chilly air said one of them had a broken radiator.

The three pilots shot up the column twice more, starting fresh fires and knocking over more horses, and then, at Moss' wave, flew eastward again, back toward the aerodrome. When he neared the front line this time, Moss was not ashamed to use the cover of clouds

to avert antiaircraft fire. Getting information was important, but so was bringing it back to the people who could use it.



When his biplane bounced to a stop, he jumped out of it, an enormous grin on his face. Baum, a little skinny guy with a black beard, and McClintock, who, for reasons known only to himself, affected the waxed mustache and spikily pointed imperial of a Balkans nobleman, were also all teeth and excitement. "Wasn't that bully!" they shouted. "Wasn't it grand?"

"Just like the ducks in a shooting gallery," Moss agreed, and then, quite suddenly, he sobered. Not long before, he'd been sick because he had to shoot down a Canadian aeroplane to save his own life. Now here he was celebrating the deaths of a whole raft of men who, unlike the aeroplane pilot and observer, hadn't even been able to shoot back.

He'd always been glad he wasn't an infantryman: if you were a mudfoot, war, and the death and maiming that went with war, were random and impersonal. What had he just been doing but dealing out random, impersonal death? He'd thought of himself as a knight in shining armor. What sorts of filthy things had knights done that never got into the pages of Malory and *Ivanhoe?* He didn't know. He didn't want to find out, not really.

He looked down at himself. His imaginary suit of armor seemed to have a patch or two of rust on it. No matter who you were or what you did, you couldn't stay immaculate, not in this war. "Close to quitting time," Jefferson Pinkard grunted as he and Bedford Cunningham secured a mold that would shape the steel just poured from the crucible into a metal pig a freight car could carry to whatever factory would turn it into weapons of war.

Before his friend could even begin to agree with him, that grand-daddy of a steam whistle proclaimed to the whole Sloss Foundry that he'd been right. "Lived through another Monday," Cunningham said, not altogether facetiously.

Accidents were way up since the start of the war. Everybody was working flat out, with no slack time from the start of a shift to the end. A lot of the men were new because so many had gone into the Army, and the new fellows made more mistakes than the old hands they replaced. And, what with working like dogs every minute of every shift, new hands and old got drunk more often to ease the strain, which didn't help—especially on Mondays.

No sooner had that thought crossed Pinkard's mind man a horrible shriek rang out on the casting floor. "Oh, Christ!" he said, breaking into a run. "That damn fool up there poured when they weren't paying attention—probably talking about going off shift, just like we was."

There by the mold next to his lay Sid Williamson. He wasn't quiet now, as he usually was. He writhed and shrieked. The stink of hot iron was everywhere. So was the stink of burnt meat. Jeff looked at him and turned away, doing his best not to be sick to his stomach. He'd been burned plenty of times himself, but never like this—oh, God, never like this.

He wiped his sweaty, grimy face with a sweaty, grimy forearm. It was chilly and wet outside, but not in here. In here, it was always somewhere between August and hell, not that, in Birmingham, there was a whole lot of difference between one and the other. Even so, some of the sweat on his face was cold.

Still shaking, he and Cunningham turned together to let the fellows on the evening shift take over the work, which had to get done no matter what, no matter who. They both stopped with the turns a little more than half made. Pinkard watched Cunningham's jaw drop. He felt his own doing the same thing. He needed a couple of tries before he could say, "Where's Henry? Where's Silas?"

The two Negroes in collarless shirts looked nervous. They were big, strong bucks—they looked plenty strong enough to be steel-workers. But that didn't have anything to do with anything, and they knew it. So did Pinkard and Cunningham. One of the Negroes said, "They's in the Army, suh. We is their replacements."

"And who the hell are you?" Bedford Cunningham set his hands on his hips. Both black men were bigger than he was, and younger, too, but that didn't have anything to do with anything, either. A black

man who fought back against a white—his goose was cooked, anywhere in the CSA.

"My name's Justinian," the other one said.

"I don't care if you're Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost," Jeff Pinkard exploded, which won him a startled chuckle from Cunningham. "What the hell they doin', puttin' Negroes on the evenin' shift? Nights was bad enough, but this here—"

"Suh, we been on nights since they let us," Lorenzo said, which was true; Pinkard had seen him around for a while. "When these white folks you was expectin', when they goed into the Army, the bosses, they look around, but they don't find no other whites kin do the job—no *'sperienced* whites, I should oughta say. And so here we is."

"World's goin' to hell in a handbasket, Jeff, no two ways about it," Bed Cunningham said mournfully. "We seen it comin', an' we was right. Next thing you know, a couple of coons'll be doin' *our* jobs, too."

"Yeah, well, if that's so, it's on account of they put a rifle in my hands instead," Pinkard answered. "And I'll tell you somethin' else, too: when I get out o' the Army, I'm *still* gonna have that rifle in my hands. Any nigger who tries to keep my job when I want it back, he's gonna be sorry. And any boss who tries to help him keep it, he's gonna be sorrier yet."

"Amen," Cunningham said, as if he'd been preaching in the Baptist church of a Sunday morning. "We had ourselves two revolutions in this here country to make it like we want it. Reckon we can have us a third one to keep it that way." He spat on the floor. "Shit, how do we even know these boys can do the work? Maybe we better watch and find out." He folded his arms across his chest.

"Ought to find out if they've got the balls to do it, too," Jeff said. He pointed over to the other mold. "You boys know what happened to Sid just now?"

"Yes, suh," Lorenzo answered quietly. "We seen that before, workin' nights. Hope he come through all right."

And, for the next half hour, he and Cunningham did nothing but

watch. To his dismay, the Negroes had no troubles. They weren't so smooth together as the two white men they were replacing, but they hadn't worked together for years, either. They did know enough of what they were doing to do just about all of it right.

At last, Jeff stuck an elbow in Cunningham's ribs. "Let's go home," he said. "Wives'll be worryin', thinkin' we got hurt or somethin'." He shivered. "Wasn't us, but it might have been."

"Yeah," his friend said with a strange kind of sigh: not quite defeat, but a long way from acceptance. As one, they turned their backs on the Negroes and left the Sloss Foundry building.

Walking home felt strange. Because they'd stayed past shift changeover, they were almost alone. A few men coming in late for evening shift rushed past them, worried expressions on their faces. They'd catch hell from the foremen and they'd see their pay docked. Would they get fired? An hour earlier, Pinkard would have thought no—who'd replace them with so many white men in the Army? Now that question had a possible new answer, one he didn't like.

Sure enough, when they got back to their side-by-side yellow cottages—though they looked gray in the fast-fading evening twilight—Emily Pinkard and Fanny Cunningham were standing together on the grass of their front lawns, grass that was going brown from the cold December nights. "Where have you been?" the two women demanded as one.

"Stayed a little late at the foundry, is all," Jefferson Pinkard said.

[redacted]

"What were you doing at the foundry?" Emily asked, evidently satisfied he was telling the truth.

Then the tale came out, Jefferson and Bedford splitting it, their breath steaming as they spoke. Their wives exclaimed in indignation and fear, both because of what had happened to Sid Williamson and because of the news about the black men. Pinkard understood that plenty well. Henry and Silas had been replaced by Negroes after they went into the Army. Would Pinkard and Cunningham be replaced so they could go into the Army? Or would they be replaced for no better reason than that the foundry bosses could save some money?

[redacted]

Pinkard had a pretty good notion what those things might be. Bedford had teased him when he'd let Emily go to work in the munitions factory, but all of a sudden he was pretty damn glad he had. Even if they did throw him out of work, he and Emily wouldn't go hungry. If his friend wasn't thinking about having Fanny look for some kind of work, he would have been surprised.

"I waited supper on you," Emily said. "I put that roast and the potatoes in the covered crock 'fore I left this mornin', and they'll still be fine now."

[redacted]

And supper, as she'd promised, was fine. She made a lot of meals like that these days: things she could fix up in a hurry, put over a low fire before she went out the door, and then just serve as soon as she and Jefferson were both home.

“That's mighty good," he said, patting his belly. "And since I wasn't off gettin' lit up like you thought I was, why don't you get me a bottle of beer?"

Even by the ruddy light of the kerosene lamp, he could see her face go red. "You knew, too?" she said over her shoulder as she went back into the kitchen. "You didn't let on like Bedford did."

"I think Fanny nags Bedford more'n you do me," he answered. "Makes him feel like he got to get his own back every so often. Ah, thanks." He took the illicit bottle she handed him, swigged, and made a sour face. "He's done a lot better'n that—tastes like he had a horse stand over the bottle." He swigged again. "A sick horse, you ask me."

Emily giggled, deliciously scandalized. She also drank. "It's not *that* bad," she said: faint praise. And, as usual, she was right. The beer was drinkable—or, if it wasn't, Jefferson's bottle emptied by magic.

[redacted]

"Mine ain't much better," Emily said, scrubbing a greasy plate with harsh lye soap. "Clara Fuller, she hurt her hand on a drill press. They say she's liable to lose her little finger."

“That's no good," Pinkard said. "Accident like that, the whole shift is looking over its shoulder the next two days." Only after he'd said it did he realize how strange the idea of a woman at a machine would have struck him before the war started. About as strange as the idea of a Negro doing his job on the evening shift, as a matter of fact.

When the dishes were done and dried and put away, they went out to the living room and talked and read for a little while, till they were both yawning more than they were talking. After a few minutes of that, they gave up with sleepy laughs. They went out to the outhouse, first Emily, then Jeff. She was in bed by the time he came back to put on his pajamas. He slid under the cover and blew out the lamp.

Her back was to him. He reached over and closed a hand around her right breast. She didn't stir. She didn't say anything. She was already deep asleep. A moment later, so was he. Somewhere up ahead along the muddy, miserable road lay the town of Morton's Gap, Kentucky. Somewhere beyond and maybe a little north of Morton's Gap lay Madisonville. Somewhere beyond Madisonville—in a mythical land far, far away, as best as Paul Mantarakis could tell—lay the much-promised, seldom-seen glittering thing called Breakthrough.

There stood Gordon McSweeney, his canvas shelter half wrapped around his shoulders as a cloak to hold the rain at bay, water dripping off the brim of his green-gray—now green-gray-brown—forage cap. His long, angular face was muddy, too, and set in its usual disapproving lines. McSweeney disapproved of everything on general principles, and of Mantarakis not just on general principles but also—and particularly—because he wasn't Presbyterian.

And then, to Mantarakis' amazement, those gloomy features rearranged themselves into a smile so bright, it was almost sweet. "Merry Christmas, Paul," McSweeney said. "God bless you on the

day."

"If Christ is in your heart, where your body rests does not matter," McSweeney said. When he talked like that, he usually sounded angry. Today, though, the words came out as if he meant them, no more. He really must have had the Christmas spirit deep in his heart.

"Merry Christmas," Mantarakis repeated. He kept walking. It was Christmas for McSweeney, it was Christmas for everybody in his unit—and for the Rebs in their wet trenches a couple-three hundred yards away—but it wasn't Christmas for him. It wouldn't be Christmas for him till January 6. The Orthodox Church had never cottoned to the Gregorian calendar. *Maybe I should tell McSweeney it's Papist,* Mantarakis thought with a wry smile. That would give the Bible-thumper something new to get in a sweat about, not that you could sweat in this miserable weather.

"You do it up the best way you know how, that's all," Peterquist said. "Make us a hell of a Christmas dinner."

He unsheathed the bayonet he wore on his left hip: twenty inches of sharp steel. It wasn't a proper butcher knife, but it would do the job. He'd just squatted down over the lamb when a Southern voice, thin in the distance, called, "Hey, you Yanks! Wave a hankie an' stick a head up! We won't shoot y'all—it's Christmas!"

"Shit, they ain't gonna lie to us like that," the sergeant answered. He dug in his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief, then gave it a dubious look: it was more nearly brown than white. He waved it anyway, and stuck his head up above the front lip of the trench. Now he whistled. "I'll be damned."

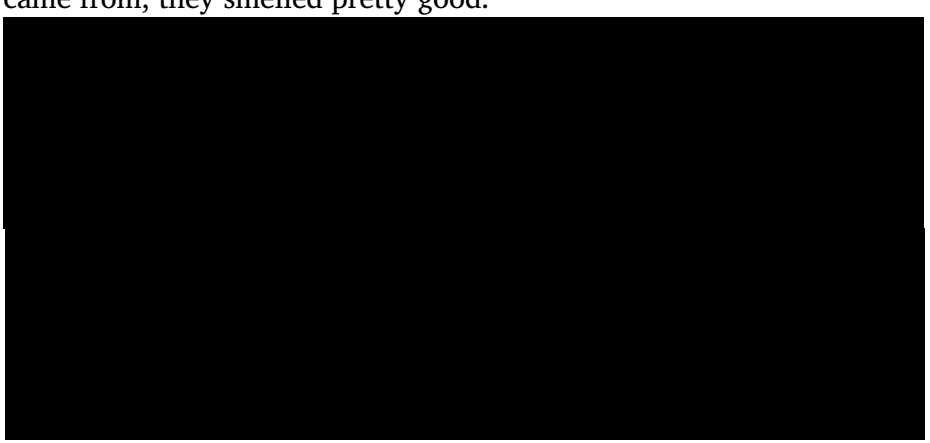
Some of the Confederates had rifles slung on their shoulders, but they, like he, seemed to have forgotten about them. "Hey, you!

Yank!" one of them called, and pointed at him. "Want some *see*-gars? Got anything you can swap me for 'em?"

"Got some cinnamon, a little bit," Paul said. He hid the scorn he held for the Confederate: how could you dislike garlic? But the fellow's eyes lit up when he mentioned cinnamon, so maybe they had some hope of a deal after all. Mantarakis dug in his pack and displayed the little tins of spice, whereupon the Rebel held up four cigars. After some dickering, they settled on six.

By then, a couple of paths through the wire had been cleared. Paul went through one of them, toward the Confederate lines. He had the feeling of being partly in a dream, as if nothing could happen to him no matter what he did. It was the exact opposite of what he usually felt on a battlefield: that he was liable to end up dead or mangled in spite of everything he could do to prevent it.

He handed the tins over to his Confederate counterpart and received the cigars in return. The bands, printed on shiny, metallic paper, bore the picture of a fellow with a bushy gray beard, who, the gold letters underneath his face declared, was Confederate President Longstreet, who'd licked the United States in the Second Mexican War. Maybe the cigars were Habanas, then. He sniffed them. Wherever they came from, they smelled pretty good.



"I'm Colby Gilbert, Paul," the Rebel answered. He stuck out his hand. Mantarakis shook it. The Reb grinned. "Right glad to meet you, Paul, long as you don't ask me to say your last name. What do I do? I got me a farm, forty, maybe fifty miles outside o' Little Rock, Arkansas. How about your own self?"

"Cook in Philadelphia," Paul answered.

"No wonder you got them nice spices, then. You got a family?" Gilbert asked. Before Mantarakis could answer, the Reb pulled a photograph out of his breast pocket: himself, a plain blond woman, a little boy, and a baby of indeterminate sex, all in what had to be Sunday best. "This here's me and Betsy and Colby, Jr., and Lucy." The baby was a girl, then.

Colby Gilbert scratched his head, then laughed. "Didn't know you damnyankees could be funny. Never even thought you might. Ain't that queer?"

"Shitfire," a loud Southern voice declared, "if I'd knowed damnyankees was people just like us, damn me to hell if I'd've been so all-fired eager to grab me a gun an' shoot 'em."

"You Rebels, I think you may be Christians, too." That was Gordon

McSweeney, sounding surprised. For once, Paul didn't blame him. If you lived in the USA, you figured everybody in the CSA grew horns and a pointy tail. From the way the Confederates talked, they seemed to think the same thing about Americans.

"What the hell we fightin' for, then?" somebody asked. Man-tarakis didn't know whether the question had come from a soldier of the USA or the CSA. He decided it didn't matter, anyhow. And nobody tried to answer it.

The crowd from the football match dispersed slowly, reluctantly. A few U.S. soldiers followed new-made friends into the Confederate lines for supper; a few Rebs, Colby Gilbert among them, came back with the U.S. troops. "I'll show you what garlic is good for," Mantarakis said, going to work on the lamb carcass he'd been about to cut up before the impromptu Christmas truce broke out.

Gilbert showed his family photo again, and admired those of the U.S. soldiers who were married. He traded cigars for this and that, and did admit the meat Paul was cooking smelled mighty good. Mantarakis had just put a big chunk of roast leg on Gilbert's mess tin (shaped a little different from those the U.S. soldiers carried) when Lieutenant Norman Hinshaw, the platoon commander, came up to the fire, no doubt drawn by the rich cooking odors.

"Aw, have a heart, Lieutenant," Mantarakis said. "At least let him finish eating. It's Christmas, right?" Even if it wasn't Christmas for him, he used the argument without qualm of conscience.

Lieutenant Hinshaw looked at the rest of his men. When he saw all of them, even Sergeant Peterquist, nodding, he threw up his hands. "All right, he can stay," he said. "But tomorrow, if we see him, we kill him."

"Same to you, Lieutenant," Colby Gilbert said. "Nothin' personal, of course."

He ate slowly, enjoying every bit, garlic or no. Mantarakis gave him another chunk of meat to take back to his own lines. A chorus of good-byes followed him when he left the U.S. trenches. As the sun set a couple of hours later, a new chorus rang out: Christmas carols, sung first by the U.S. soldiers, then by the Confederates, and at last by both armies together.

Not a shot disturbed the night. Paul rolled himself in his blanket, confident for once he'd wake up to see the dawn.

And when dawn came, a savage U.S. artillery bombardment tore at the Confederates' front-line positions. Mantarakis huddled in a little ball in the mud, for the Rebs were shelling the U.S. trenches, too. Maybe the brass on both sides was making sure the truce wouldn't last more than a day. If so, they got their wish. Rifles began to bark, and machine guns to hammer. The war had come back, and come back strong.

In the next room, George, Jr., whimpered. Most nights when he did that, Sylvia prayed he'd go right back to sleep. Now she wouldn't have minded his waking ... too much.

She whimpered a little herself, and bit her lip to make herself stop. Not knowing was the hardest part. The *Ripple* hadn't come back from Georges Bank, and hadn't come back, and hadn't come back— and now, two months and more after it put out, no one, not even Sylvia, thought it would come back.

"Please, God, do whatever You want with me, but let George be safe," Sylvia said quietly in the darkness. She hadn't been much given to prayer before the *Ripple* disappeared, but she'd found it made her feel she was doing something, however small a something, for her husband. Past prayer, she had nothing to do.

At last, she fell asleep, only to be wakened a few minutes later by a drunken brawl out in the hallway in front of her flat. The racket woke Mary Jane, too. She was wet, so Sylvia groggily changed her diaper and put her back to bed. The toddler sighed and went to sleep right away. Sylvia wished she'd be so lucky, but wasn't.

When the alarm clock went off beside her head, she thought at first it was the bells from the midnight just past. The clattering went on and on, though. Under her breath, she muttered something George had brought home from T Wharf. His hair would have curled to hear

her say it, but there was no one to hear her say it, and so she did.

She struck a match and lighted the gas lamp by the bed, then quickly put on her corset, shirtwaist, and long, dark blue wool skirt over her winter underwear. She let out a silent thank-you to whatever gods of fashion had decreed bustles no longer mandatory. That saved time.

She stoked up the fire in the stove and set water to boil for oatmeal and for coffee. Breathing a sigh of relief that she'd managed to get through the month with a little coal left in the scuttle, she went into the other bedroom to get the children up and moving. "I don't want to get up," George, Jr., moaned. "I don't want to get up, either, but I have to, and so do you," Sylvia said. He grumbled some more, but got out of bed. If he'd dawdled, the flat of her hand on his backside would have got him moving in a hurry, and he knew it. Mary Jane, on the other hand, woke up sweetly, as she did most mornings.

[redacted]

Sylvia knocked on her door. She had to knock loudly; the racket inside the flat was already frightful, and, when Brigid Coneval opened the door, Sylvia saw that only about half her usual mob had arrived. "Good mornin' to you, Mrs. Enos," Mrs. Coneval said in a musical brogue. "Have you had any word of that man o' yours, now?"

"No," Sylvia said bleakly. "Just—nothing." She urged her children into the flat, saying, as she did every day, "Do as Mrs. Coneval tells you, and play nicely with the other children." George, Jr., kissed her good-bye; Mary Jane nibbled the end of her nose, which amounted to the same thing.

Inside the flat, somebody sneezed. Sylvia sighed. Cooping her

children up with so many others was asking for them to come down with colds or worse; diphtheria and measles, whooping cough and chicken pox (though George, Jr., had already had most of those) ran riot in wintertime, when people stayed tightly packed together so much of the time. But what else could she do? Unlike Brigid Coneval, she had no husband sending home even a little money. For all she knew, she had no husband at all.

A couple of women were wearing black; they'd lost their husbands in the fighting that sprawled across North America. Sylvia wondered if she should be doing the same. Stubbornly, she refused to give up hope. She wouldn't don widow's weeds till she knew for a fact she was a widow.

You did have to watch out that the labeling machine didn't run out of paste, and every once in a while the endless strip of labels would jam. When that happened, you had to shut down the line till you could clear and fix the feed mechanism. Most days, though, it was just pull this one, pull that one, pull the other one, then pull this one again, from the start of the shift right through to the end.

Sometimes time crawled by. Sometimes it sped; Sylvia had found herself almost mesmerized by what she was doing, and had an hour or two slip by almost without conscious thought. You could talk through the clatter of thousands of cans and of the machinery that moved them on their way, but often there wasn't a whole lot to say.

Saturday half-shift often passed more slowly, at least in mental terms, than a full day's work. Sylvia had expected that, especially after being off for the New Year's holiday. But it didn't happen. She came out into the bright winter sun with the feeling that she had a lot of time to do the rest of the day's chores. She went to the grocer's and the butcher's and the yard-goods store for cloth and patterns for the clothes her children would be wearing come spring.

"Good to see you, Mrs. Enos," the clerk there said as he took her money. "Business has been slow. A lot of people are buying ready-to-wear goods these days."

"Making them myself is cheaper—if I can find the time." Sylvia shook her head. She didn't have much money since George had disappeared, but she didn't have much time, either. How could you win?

When she got back to her apartment building, she checked the rank of mailboxes in the front hall. She found a couple of advertising circulars, a Christmas card from her cousin in New York (she muttered rude things about the post office), and an envelope with a stamp she did not recognize and a rubber-stamped notice saying it had been forwarded through the International Society of Red Cross Organizations.

The rubber stamp nearly obscured the address. When she got a look at that, she shivered and felt so light-headed, she had to lean against the iron bank of mailboxes for a moment before she could open the envelope: it was in her husband's handwriting.

Dear Sylvia, the note inside read, */ want you to know I am all right and not hurt. The* Ripple *was caught and sunk by the* (here someone had rendered a word or two illegible with black ink). *They took us to north Carolina, where I am now. They treat us well. The food is all right You can write me in care of the Red Cross and it will get to me sooner or later. They may end up letting me go in a while because I wasn *t in the Navy and they exchange civilians with the United States. I hope so. I love you. Give my love to the children to. I hope I see you before to long. Love again from your George.*

Sylvia leaned against the mailboxes again. Tears ran down her cheeks. "Oh, dear," Henrietta Colling wood, a neighbor, said as she came downstairs. She pointed to the letter Sylvia was still holding. "I hope it is not bad news." By her voice, she sounded certain it was.

George Enos and the rest of the captured fishermen obediently got up and headed across the barbed-wire enclosure of Fort Johnston for their daily louse inspection. Anybody discovered with the little pests got his hair washed with kerosene and his clothes and bedding baked in an oven. That killed the lice for a while, but in a week or two they'd be back again.

Enos shivered. The wind off the Atlantic here at the outlet of the Cape Fear River was bitingly cold, though he still had on the gear he'd been wearing when the commerce raider *Swamp Fox* captured the *Ripple*. "I thought North Carolina was supposed to be hot and sticky all the time," he said.

No matter what anybody called him, though, George felt like a prisoner of war. The worst of it was, he hadn't even been at war when the Confederates nabbed him. All he'd been doing was trying to make a living. The Rebels didn't give a damn about that. To them, capturing a fishing boat counted as a blow against the United States. It struck him as dreadfully unfair. War was about soldiers and sailors. It wasn't about fishermen, not as far as he was concerned. But nobody cared what he thought. Nobody cared how much he missed his wife, either. That was something else war was about: not caring.

[redacted]

But they didn't treat him as they would have treated a white man, either, always jeering at him—and, to a lesser degree, at the crewmen of the *Ripple* for insisting he was their friend, not a servant or a pet. They had Negro servants here at Fort Johnston, men who acted like dogs around Southern whites. Enos wondered what they used for self-respect.

He didn't have much left himself. The medical orderly—the Rebs didn't waste a doctor on damnyankees, not unless they were dying—snapped, "Bend over, nigger-lover." When Enos obeyed, the fellow ran fingers through his hair, examining the nape of his neck and the short hairs behind his ears. Reluctantly, the orderly said, "All right, you're clean—go on."

Enos went. He suspected the Rebs of claiming the men from the *Ripple* were lousy even when they weren't, just so they could put them through the process of getting rid of the vermin. Afterwards, your head smelled for days as if you'd been soaking it in the well of a kerosene lantern.

[redacted]

O'Donnell went over to the barbed wire and stood around looking bored. Enos walked up and stood beside him. "Another exciting day, isn't it, Skipper?" he said.

[redacted]

Thinking of that made George Enos laugh again. "Remember that time when Fred got a whole strip of meat in his sowbelly? I bet they fired the cook who gave it to him the day after, because it sure hasn't

happened again."

"Bet you're right," the skipper said. "Sure sounded like they were giving somebody holy hell that night, too. Might' ve been the cook."

Ever so casually, he turned and glanced toward the disappearing turrets that held Fort Johnston's three twelve-inch guns. Any ships that tried to ascend the Cape Fear River and bombard or mine Wilmington, North Carolina, would have to pass the guns here and in other forts farther up the river. Enos wouldn't have liked to try it. In their endless practices, the Rebs seemed very alert.

He'd never asked O'Donnell why he spent so much time by the wire. It wasn't really his concern, and confirming his suspicions wouldn't have done him or the captain of the *Ripple* any good. But he was pretty sure that, when they finally did get exchanged, O'Donnell would give the U.S. Navy a set of drawings for the interior grounds of Fort Johnston better than anything they had now.

Enos had other things on his mind. "You think they'll give us our jobs back when we get out of here?" he asked. "God only knows what Sylvia's doing to make ends meet."

"I hope you get your job back, George," O'Donnell answered. "With me, it doesn't matter so much." A skipper who lost his ship, even if it wasn't his fault, had trouble getting another one. But that wasn't what O'Donnell meant. If and when the Confederates shipped him back to the United States, he was going straight into the Navy. They'd be glad to have him again, what with his experience.

They'd probably be glad to have George Enos, too. He'd never served on a warship, but he was a sailor. He'd have an easier time figuring out what was going on than some landlubber from Dakota.

He didn't *want* to go into the Navy, the way O'Donnell did. Being kept away from Sylvia and his children had forcibly reminded him how much he missed them. You went aboard a cruiser, you were there for months at a time, and even when you got back to port, who could say where that port would be? If you were in San Diego, say, and got forty-eight hours' liberty, so what? You couldn't get back to Boston, let alone make the round trip, in that length of time.

He laughed. "What's funny?" O'Donnell asked.

And liberty from Fort Johnston was a different thing for the two

white men from what it was for Charlie White. A Confederate soldier walked up and stood watching the *Ripple's* cook chop wood. "Hey, nigger," he said in an assumed tone of casual interest, "you think maybe back 'fore we manumitted you coons, my pa or granddad fucked your mother?"

Charlie stopped chopping. For a horrible second, George was afraid he'd try to use his hatchet against a rifle. But he just paused, then shook his head. "Nan. If that had happened, I'd be a whole lot uglier."

Every detainee who heard the answer howled and jeered at Charlie's comeback. The Reb who'd walked into it turned red as brick. He started to bring his rifle to bear on the cook. Now the detainees yelled even louder for a Confederate officer. Before anybody with bars or stars on his collar got to the barbed-wire enclosure, the soldier lowered the rifle, snarling, "Nigger gets uppity, he gets his sooner or later, wait an' see if he don't."

"Fuck you, too, pal—fuck you special," the guard said. Phelps slowly and deliberately turned his back and walked away. The guard raised his voice: "Where you think you're goin', nigger-lover?"

"Watch it, Lucas," George Enos said softly. Then he and all the other fishermen cried out in alarm and horror, for the guard brought the rifle up to his shoulder, took aim—he could hardly have missed, not from a range of twenty feet at the most—and fired at the back of Lucas Phelps' head. Phelps took another half step and then crumpled, surely dead before he knew what hit him: George got a good look at the blasted ruin the bullet had made of his face as it exited. All the detainees screamed "Murder!" at the top of their lungs.

At the sound of the shot, an officer did come. He led the soldier away. Two days later, the fellow was back at his post, looking meaner than ever. Nobody said a word to him, not if he could help it.

Enos had another reason to hope exchange came soon. It was already too late for his comrade.

VIII

Dashing in spats and a double-breasted herringbone overcoat with a breast pocket slanted at the latest angle—or so he said—Herman Bruck came into the Socialist Party headquarters with a copy of the *New York Times* in one hand. He quickly hung his homburg on a tree and got out of the overcoat. It was icy outside, but very much the reverse with a couple of coal stoves and a steam radiator heating the office.

He went over to Flora Hamburger and set the newspaper on the desk in front of her. "Bully speech by Senator Debs," he said, pointing. The newsprint had smudged on the gray calfskin of his gloves.

Flora bent over it. "Let me see," she said. Debs had been the first Socialist elected to the Senate, coming out of Indiana when the Republicans broke up in disarray in the aftermath of the Second Mexican War. He'd been there ever since, and twice run unsuccessfully for president.

Flora nodded. She read on down the column to the reply by Senator Lodge, who often spoke as Roosevelt's surrogate in the Senate. Halfway through the summary of his remarks, she winced and softly

quoted one sentence: " 'The distinguished gendeman's remarks on the power of principle would seem more forceful had he not, in this very chamber, recently voted to support and finance the war he now so eloquently professes to despise.' " Her chin went up in defiance. "I knew that was a mistake, and I said so at the time."

"So you did," Bruck admitted. He saw the smudges on his gloves and took them off. His hands were winter pale. He spread them. "But what could we do? If we'd voted against the credits, we wouldn't have had five Socialists left in Congress after the November elections. As things are, we picked up half a dozen seats."

"What good does it do us to pick them up if we don't act like Socialists once we have them?" Flora said.

A secretary, an Italian woman named Maria Tresca, who, along with her sister Angelina, was one of the few gentiles in the Tenth Ward office, quoted from the New Testament: " 'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' "

It was not language commonly heard in the Socialist Party office, but no less effective for that. Herman Bruck spread his hands again. "We've been talking about that ever since the Party decided to run for office and accept seats if we won. Does working within the government advance the cause of the proletariat or delay the revolution?"

The argument that spawned kept the office lively the rest of the day. While Bruck was putting on his hat and overcoat to leave for the evening, he asked Flora, "Would you like to go to the moving pictures with me? The Orpheum is showing the new play with Sarah Bernhardt in it."

"I can't, Herman," she answered, also buttoning her coat. "We're having cousins over for supper, and I promised my mother I wouldn't be late."

[redacted]

[redacted]

Esther was in the kitchen, helping their mother. David and Isaac bent over a chess board at the table from which they would soon be evicted so everyone could eat supper. Flora glanced at the game. Isaac was a couple of pawns up, which was unusual; his brother beat him more often than not. The two mental warriors said hello without looking up from their battlefield.

As if thinking about her were enough to bring her home, Sophie came in just then, worn out as usual. She sank down onto the divan couch with a soft sigh and a posture so limp, it said she didn't want to have to get up again for anything in the world.

Esther stuck her head out of the kitchen and said, "Oh, good, that was you. I thought I heard the door. Ready in a minute." Sophie nodded wearily. She'd even been too tired to eat lately, which alarmed her mother. Esther's eyes flicked to her brothers. Pointedly, she repeated, "Ready in a minute." When that didn't shift them, she started setting the table. They had to move the chess set in a hurry to keep from having a plate land on top of it.

After supper, she and Esther washed and dried dishes. Esther wanted to talk about how the war was going. Flora didn't. That it was going at all was bitter as wormwood to her.

As soon as she'd put the last fork in its drawer, she got her coat and went out onto the fire escape. Her mother's voice pursued her: "We're

not good enough for you?" But that wasn't it, even if her family thought it was. It was just that she didn't fit in among them, and the harder they tried to drive her back into what had been her place, the less it suited her.

It was chilly out there, but not intolerable. The nip of January air on her cheeks made her feel as if she were in a sleigh gliding down some quiet country road, not in the middle of the most crowded part of the biggest city in the United States, though she had to ignore the racket from her building and all the others to make the illusion complete.

A couple of minutes later, Sophie stepped out to join her. "Fresh air," her older sister said gratefully. "It's so stuffy in there."

Flora sent her a sympathetic look. "And you were cooped up in front of your sewing machine all day before that," she said. "No wonder you want to get all the air you can." She wouldn't have called New York City's air, full of smoke and soot and fumes, fresh, but if her sister wanted to, she wouldn't argue, either.

[redacted]

Alarmed, Flora hurried over to her and put an arm around her shoulder, dragging her away from the rail. "What's wrong?" she demanded. "Is it something at work? I know they've been exploiting you without mercy, giving you much too much to try to do. The way you come home every night—"

Sophie shook her head. "It's nothing to do with work," she said, "and they aren't working me any harder than they were before. 'Exploiting'!" She laughed softly, though not in a way that said she thought anything was truly funny. "It's not anything—political."

"Then what is it?" Flora asked. "People don't talk about jumping off a building for nothing, you know."

Her sister's shiver had nothing to do with cold, no more than her laugh had had anything to do with mirth. "What is it, Flora? Do you really want to know?"

"Of course I do," Flora answered, indignant now. "I'm your sister. That counts for more than politics, even if we don't agree all the time."

[redacted]

"All right, then." But Sophie needed to gather herself before she brought the words out, all in one low-voiced rush: "Flora, I'm going to have a baby."

Her sister stared. She felt as if she'd walked in front of a train without seeing or hearing it coming. "How did it happen?" she whispered.

[redacted]

"Does mother know you're—expecting?" Flora asked. She put her arm around her sister, who clung to her like a survivor from a torpedoed liner.

[redacted]

"What am I going to do?" Sophie wailed—but softly, not wanting anyone inside to hear her.

The obvious answer was, *You're going to have this baby.* What sprang from that— Flora thought. At last, as if she'd just come up with a good campaign plank for a Congressional candidate, she

clapped her hands together, also softly. "We won't tell mother," she said. "Mother is too perfectly conventional for words. All she'll do is throw a fit, and we don't need that, not now."

"I wasn't finished," Flora said. "She has to know before she finds out that way. No, we won't tell her. We'll tell Papa. He won't get excited, the way Mother would; he has some common sense. And then, after he and we figure out what to say, he can tell Mother for us. He can be a—what's the word I want?—a buffer, that's it." "I don't know." Again, Sophie's shiver had nothing to do with the cold.

"It has to be done. It will be better afterwards," Flora insisted, as if to someone with a toothache whom she was trying to get to go to the dentist.

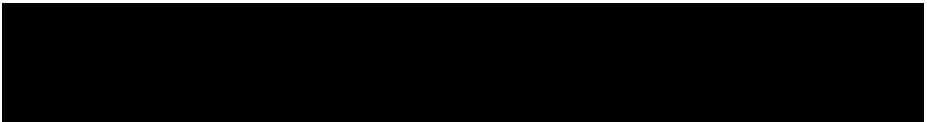
Dread drove hope from her sister's face once more. "It won't be better," Sophie said quietly. "It will never be better, not any more."

Flora feared she was right. Even so, she opened the window that gave access to the fire escape and said, "Papa, can you come out here for a moment, please?"

Benjamin Hamburger had been standing over the kitchen table, kibitzing that game of chess—or maybe a new one by now—between David and Isaac. A puff of smoke rose from his pipe when he exhaled in surprise. "All the plots hatched out there, and this is the first time I've been invited," he remarked as he walked over and stepped out onto the landing.

That mild irony encouraged Flora. She closed the window. Isaac, David, Esther, and her mother all peered out toward the fire escape. They were used to her going out there. They were used to Sophie's going out there every so often. But when the two of them invited their father out, that was new, so it had to be suspect. Flora hadn't thought of that. Keeping the secret wouldn't be easy.

But, having started, she couldn't very well draw back. Her father was looking from her to Sophie and back again. If he wasn't the picture of curiosity, he'd do till a better one came along. Flora hoped Sophie would say what needed saying. When she didn't, Flora sighed and said, "Papa, we have to tell you something." Then she stopped. It wasn't easy, not when you got down to it.



"She already knows, or wonders, too," her father said, which made Flora and Sophie both stare. He coughed a couple of times before he went on, "Remember, Sophie, she does your laundry, and—" He stopped, most abruptly, and coughed some more. After a moment, Flora understood why. Her face heated. Of all the things her father had never expected to do, discussing intimate bodily functions with his daughters had to rank high on the list.

Again, though, without some other intimate bodily functions, the discussion would not have arisen. And if their mother had known, or at least suspected, and kept quiet about it, that said there was more to her than Flora had suspected.

Benjamin Hamburger stood silent again. "The best we can," he answered. "I don't know what else to say to you right now. The best we can." Flora had been worried a few minutes before, but now she began to hope that best might be good enough.

Abner Dowling escaped First Army headquarters with the air of a man leaving the scene of a crime. That was how he felt. Providence, Kentucky, was less than ten miles away from the front lines; the pounding of U.S. guns—and answering fire from Confederate artillery—was a never-ending rumble from the east, irksome like a low-grade headache.

"They've had more gasps than a brothel," Dowling said. His belly shook as he laughed at his own wit. Custer didn't laugh at anything. No, that wasn't true. When he heard about a squad of Rebs machine-gunned as they foolishly broke cover, he'd chortled till his upper plate fell out of his mouth.

A train chugged into Providence out of the west: another reason the little town was currently First Army headquarters was that the railroad tracks came under Confederate artillery fire when you got a little closer to the front line. Doors opened. Soldiers in green-gray, their uniforms clean and neat, their faces open and naive, spilled out of the cars and formed up into columns under the profane instructions of their noncoms.

Mud spattered their boots and puttees and breeches. The main streets of Providence had been paved with bricks, but the Confederates had fought for the town before finally retreating from it; the U.S. bombardment and, later, Confederate shellfire from the east had torn great gaps in the paving. The soldiers stared down anxiously at the dirt they were picking up, as if expecting the corporals and sergeants to start screaming about that. *Unblooded troops,* Dowling thought with a sigh. They conscientiously marched in step as they tramped toward the front. They wouldn't worry about dirt there, not even a little bit. They'd be blooded, and bloodied, all too soon. "Meat for the meat grinder," Custer's adjutant said sadly.

[redacted]

But after the ambulatory patients came the great many who had to be carried onto the train in litters. Some of them moaned as their bearers moved them. Some didn't, but lay very still. None of them—none of the walking wounded, either—wore fresh uniforms. Theirs were tattered and dirty, and their faces, even those of the men who seemed chipper, were a study in contrast to the way the raw troops looked. They'd seen the elephant, and he'd stepped on them.

Dowling wished Custer would come and take a look at what soldiers who had been through the grinder were like. But that didn't interest the general. He saw the glory he'd win with victory, not the price he was paying for advances that looked not the least bit victorious to anyone but him.

Down the street about a block and a half from First Army headquarters stood a nondescript brick building that hadn't been too badly shelled. Providence was supposed to be a dry town, but if you needed a drink you could find one. Dowling needed one now.

[redacted]

"Thanks, uh—what's your name, anyhow? Haven't seen you here before."

"No, suh. I'm new hereabouts. Name's Aurelius, suh."

"You could do worse. You're named after a great man," Dowling said. By the bartender's smile, polite but meaningless, he didn't know anything about Marcus Aurelius. Dowling gulped down the whiskey and shoved the glass back for a refill. He didn't know why he'd expected a Southern Negro to know anything about the Roman Empire; from everything he'd seen, the Rebs did everything they could to keep their Negroes ignorant. He asked, "How do you like it in the United States?"

The bartender gave him a hooded look, of the sort he was used to getting from soldiers who'd been caught with dirty rifles. "Don't seem too bad so far, suh," the fellow answered. "Ain't easy nowheres, though, you don't mind me sayin' so."

And that was probably—no, certainly—nothing but the truth.

Dowling thanked his rather deaf God he'd been born with a nice, pink skin. Niggers had it tough, USA, CSA, any old place. "Maybe you should go to Haiti," he remarked. "That's nigger heaven if ever there was one."

"No, suh." The bartender sounded very sure of himself. "Only difference 'tween Haiti and anywhere else is, in Haiti it's black folks doin' it to black folks, 'stead o' whites like it is here."

[redacted]

As he raised the whiskey glass to his lips, the rumble of artillery fire outside got louder. Dowling's head came up like a hunting dog's at a scent. The new roar of the big guns wasn't coming from the east, but from the south.

[redacted]

"I'll give it a shot," the corporal said, showing less than perfect faith in the gadget with which he'd been entrusted. He turned the crank and shouted into the mouthpiece: "Hello, Central?" When nobody shouted back at him, he muttered something that made what the

lieutenant had said sound like an endearment. He cranked again. "Hello, Central, goddammit!"

Waiting for the connection—waiting to see if the corporal could make the connection—Featherston wished he'd sent a runner back to Red Lion. It was only a few miles southwest of Martinsville; the runner wouldn't have needed more than two hours—three at the outside—to make it there and back again.

"Hello, Central!" the corporal screamed. Featherston was about to give it up as a bad job and walk off—he could tell the captain he'd tried to use the phone, but it hadn't wanted to work—when the operator said, in reverent tones, "I'll be a son of a bitch." He turned to Jake. "Who'd you say you wanted to talk to again? Been so long, I plumb forgot."

But, now, a thin, scratchy voice sounded in the earpiece: "That's right. Who're you and what d'you need?"

"Whole army's mighty low on shells," that disembodied voice answered. "We can maybe get you a few up there, but not a whole lot. Sorry." The soldier back in safe, comfortable Red Lion didn't sound sorry. As best Jake could make out over this infernal apparatus, he sounded bored. Saying no was a lot easier over a wire than face to face.

The telephone reproduced a sigh. "Featherstitch or whatever your name is, I can't give you what I ain't got. Some of the shells we were supposed to be gettin', they went to Kentucky instead, for the big push there."

That got him a chuckle as tinny as the sigh had been. "Makes you feel any better, First Richmond, the Yanks are as bad off as we 'uns. You can shoot off shells faster'n you can make 'em, and that's a fact."

If the dump didn't send enough shells forward, as seemed highly likely, Captain Stuart would have to do the calling next time. What was the point of carrying a famous name if you couldn't exploit it every now and then?

When Featherston got back to his battery, he discovered his men gathered around a major he'd never seen before: a major of infantry, for the single stars showing his rank were mounted on blue-faced collar tabs. "What's up?" Jake asked, which really meant, *What the devil is the infantry doing sniffing around an artillery unit?*

The major turned to him. The fellow wasn't very big and his face wasn't very tough, but Featherston wouldn't have wanted any damnyankee with those hard, gray eyes staring at him over the sights of a Springfield. Almost without realizing he'd done it, he stiffened to attention and saluted.

Crisply, the major returned the salute. "Clarence Potter, Army of Northern Virginia Intelligence," he said. His voice was harsh and clipped and had a trace of a Yankee accent; Featherston wondered if he'd gone to college in the United States. Potter went on, "I am here to investigate a conspiracy threatening the security not only of this army but of the Confederate States of America."

"Jesus Christ!" Jake exclaimed, and then said, "Excuse me, sir, but I don't know anything about anything like that, and I'd be right surprised—I'd be more than right surprised—if anybody here does."

"That's how it is, all right," Bixler said, and the rest of the gun crew nodded agreement. Featherston relaxed. His best guess was that the intelligence unit had too much time on its hands and was running around making work for itself so it would look busy and important.

"I be go to hell," Jake said softly. The rest of his men gaped at the major from Intelligence.

[redacted]

Jake glanced over toward the laborers and teamsters who were standing around watching the artillerymen chew the fat with this stranger. You couldn't tell anything from their faces, but then you never could. Jake's father had taught him that almost before he was out of short pants: overseers' lore, even though there weren't any overseers left, not in the old sense of the word, since manumission went through. He wouldn't have given long odds against the Negroes' knowing who Potter was: jungle telegraph, white men called it. He wondered what the blacks thought.

"Well?" the major snapped.

[redacted]

Or it mostly held true. Jake said, "Captain Stuart's nigger, Pompey, he's ... not uppity, but he thinks a good deal of himself, if you know what I mean."

[redacted]

"Yes, sir, sure would," Featherston agreed.

[redacted]

Jethro Bixler laughed softly. "Every time there's an election, everybody starts brayin' about how one white man, he's just as good as the next. Sounds mighty fine, don't it? Look what it's worth when you bump up against one of the big ones, though."

The crew of Featherston's gun nodded, all together. But then an ammunition wagon came doggedly forward over the muddy road. "This here First Richmond Howitzers?" called the driver, a white man. When the gun crew nodded again, the fellow said, "Why the devil didn't you say this here was Jeb Stuart's battery? Jeb Stuart III needs ammunition, by Jesus he gets it."

Featherston started to laugh. The rest of the gun crew joined in, uproariously. The driver first gaped and then started to get mad. For some reason, that only made Jake laugh harder. Every coin had two sides. If Pompey was plotting revolution, he'd be hard to get rid of, because Captain Stuart liked him and trusted him. But if the battery needed shells, shells the battery would have, because Captain Stuart commanded it.

[redacted]

"Serves 'em right," he said over supper one long early February night: salt pork from pigs he'd raised himself and bread baked from his own wheat. "They wanted to come up here and take away what's ours, did they? I wish they'd take our winter and ship it back to the USA with 'em, to some place that could use a hard one: Maryland, maybe, or—what was the name of that state of theirs?" Geography had never been his favorite subject in school, and he hadn't cracked a school book in more than half a lifetime.

His son Alexander was no great scholar, either, but his memory was fresher than Arthur's. "California?" he suggested.

'That's the one I meant," Arthur McGregor agreed.

"They say there are parts of that state where it doesn't snow for years and years at a time," Alexander said. "I can't hardly believe that."

Maude got up and carried dishes to the kitchen. She was coming back for a second load when somebody knocked on the door. Maude froze; Arthur admired her for not dropping any of the dishes. Ice that had nothing to do with the weather ran up his back. The best he could hope for was that it was a neighbor in some kind of trouble. The worst... Sometimes, when the Americans ran short of supplies, they made up the lack by plundering the people whose land they'd invaded.

The knock came again, louder, more insistent. Now Arthur thought

about getting the gun. None of his neighbors would have knocked like that, which left American troops as the next best bet. But one against however many still looked grim. Slowly, he walked to the door. "Who's there?" he called without putting his hand on the latch.

Two words came through the timbers: "A friend."

McGregor scratched his head. Any neighbor would have said who he was, and probably would have been angry at him for not opening up right away, too. And the Americans would also have said who they were, loudly and rudely. Whom did that leave? Nobody likely to come to his door he could think of. "What kind of friend?" he demanded.

[redacted]

He scowled, but threw the door wide. When he saw the uniformed rifleman outside in the snow, he thought the fellow was an American. Then he realized the greatcoat wasn't green-gray, but the khaki he'd once worn himself. Along with the greatcoat, the Canadian soldier wore a fur cap on his head and long, narrow boards on his feet. McGregor had snowshoes in his own closet, of course, but he wasn't good on skis. "Come in," he said now. "You're a friend indeed, and among friends."

[redacted]

[redacted]

Alexander McGregor, on the other hand, looked as if he was going to bow down before the scruffy Canadian soldier the way the . Israelites bowed down to the Golden Calf. Arthur's son was at the age where he was prone to hero worship, and anyone who could hit back at the United Sates was a hero in his eyes now.

[redacted]

Maude glanced toward Arthur. Almost imperceptibly, he nodded back. He would have expected nothing less from her than giving a guest the best they had. Yes, sugar was in short supply in these days of occupation, but they wouldn't waste away and die for want of a couple of teaspoonsful.

[redacted]

'The Little Black Devils," Alexander breathed. His father nodded, too. The 90th Battalion had always had a good reputation and a fierce name. Alexander went on, "What are you down here for, sir?"

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Lockerby obeyed the command with as much elan as any field marshal could have wanted. McGregor's wife refilled his teacup, and then filled it again. She brought a second helping of pork and more bread. Only when the sergeant leaned back in his chair with a sigh of contentment did she desist.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

"So there is," McGregor agreed. 'Tell us the news, or more of it than we get from the lying papers the Americans make people print. Is Winnipeg still holding out?"

After sitting for a few more minutes, he got up, donned pack and rifle once more, and went outside to put on his skis. As far as McGregor was concerned, they were outlandish contraptions, but when Lockerby went on his way, he glided across the surface of the snow amazingly fast, amazingly smooth. The farmer stared after him till he vanished into the night.

McGregor also watched the endless wind blowing away his trail. He looked north. Already, you could not tell Lockerby had come to the farm. That suited McGregor fine—better than fine. If mischief befell the Americans, he didn't want it traced back to him unless he'd had a part in it: no, not even then, he decided. Especially not then.

Lockerby's sudden appearance gave the family something to talk about till they went to bed. When Arthur McGregor got up the next morning, he hurried out to use the outhouse and feed the livestock he had left. The day was bright and clear. He peered west, toward the railroad tracks. He could see a train, and it wasn't moving. Wagons and men were gathered around it; he could make out no more because of the distance.

Whenever he went out for chores, he looked toward the stalled—sabotaged? bombed?—train. Toward evening, it got moving again. It went up the track for about half a mile. Then, all at once, it stopped. The engine and several of the cars left the tracks, or so McGregor

thought, anyhow: with the sun in his face, it was hard to be sure.

"That Lockerby, he did good work there," McGregor said to no one in particular, breath puffing out of his mouth in a frosty cloud as he spoke. He wondered how many other explosives the sergeant had planted along the track. The Americans would have to be wondering the same thing. How long would the line be out of service while they checked it? How many of them would get frostbite or pneumonia checking it?

Normally dour, he smiled from ear to ear as he went back inside.

Captain Wilcox stabbed a finger out at Reginald Bartlett. "How'd you like to lay some barbed wire tonight?" he said.

The Confederate soldiers who heard him laughed and snorted and cheered. One or two of them sent up Rebel yells to show they agreed with the sentiment expressed. Captain Wilcox grinned. By now, he'd got used to the idea that expecting Bartlett to take anything, war included, seriously was asking too much.

"Only trouble is, Reggie, they wouldn't want to lay you," he said. "Your uniform is filthy, your face is grubby, you've got lice in your hair and nits in every seam of your clothes, and you smell like a polecat would if he didn't take a bath for about a year. Barbed wire, now, barbed wire doesn't care about any of that."

[redacted]

"I hear tell they've tried that in Kentucky," Captain Wilcox said. "Didn't work. The Yankees shot at them like they were us, and they didn't have any guns to shoot back with. The ones who lived, you couldn't make 'em go up again."

The other half-dozen men nodded. He'd been fighting along the Roanoke longer than any of them, so they took his word as Gospel, even if he had no more rank than they did. He was that mystical, magical thing, a veteran. A lot of the men who'd come to the fight with him were dead now. That he wasn't was partly luck and partly being able to remember what he'd learned in his first few fights well enough not to repeat any of the stupid parts.

He set down his hands with great care every time he moved forward. Behind him, somebody let out a soft, disgusted oath, probably because he'd crawled over a soft, disgusting corpse or piece of corpse. The fine had swung back and forth several times; a lot of the dead from both sides had gone without proper burial. And even those who had been thrown into hasty graves or holes in the ground might well have been disinterred by the endless, senseless plowing of the artillery. The smell was that of a meat market that had been out of ice for a month in the middle of a hot summer. Up above his head, something went *fwoomp!* "Freeze!" he hissed frantically as the parachute flare spread harsh white light over the field. If you didn't move, sometimes they wouldn't spot you even when you were out there in plain sight. Some of the men in his company spoke of walking right past deer that had bounded away once they'd gone by.

"Come on," Bartlett whispered. "Come on, but come quiet."

Like most things, that was easier said than done. When at last they got to the wire barrier they were to strengthen, the men couldn't just unroll the wire and scoot for home. To make it a proper obstruction, they had to mount it on poles and shove the poles in the ground. In some places, the ground was damp. Things were easy there. In some places, though, the ground was frozen. You had a choice then: either stab the supports into the dirt, knowing they wouldn't stay well, or hammer at them with a shovel or whatever you had, knowing the noise was liable to draw fire. Bartlett opted for quiet. "Hell," he muttered to himself, "it ain't like there's not enough wire out here already."

Somebody, though, somebody had to get intrepid. *Tap, tap tap.* In the middle of a quiet night, the noise might as well have been a shell going off. Along with everybody else in the wiring party, Bartlett made frantic shushing noises. The damnyankees would start tapping, too, the two-inch tap an experienced machine gunner used on the barrel of his weapon to traverse it through its deadly arc of fire.

And sure enough, the U.S. soldiers did open up, first rifles, then machine guns. When a bullet clipped the barbed wire, it sparked blue. There were a lot of blue sparks, as if lightning bugs had suddenly come to roost between the lines of the two armies.

"Out of here!" Bartlett said urgently. He'd just about finished unreeling his wire; he unhooked the roll from his back and, suddenly lighter, hurried back toward the Confederate front line. Never had a muddy, stinking hole in the ground seemed so welcome, so wonderful.

Somebody struck a match. "It's Jordan," he said, and then, a moment later, quite unnecessarily, "He's dead."

"Good job you picked him up even so," Captain Wilcox said out of the darkness. "You can't know, not for sure. How did the wiring go?"

"One, two, three, four," the men sounded off. "Miss Maggie's why we'll win the war!"

Maggie Stevenson had been in business for herself when the Union Jack flew over Honolulu, and the recent change of ownership hadn't

fazed her a bit. Indeed, because there were more American sailors, soldiers, and Marines here now than there had been Englishmen before, her business was better than ever.

[redacted]

" 'Cap'n,' with Maggie it's not what you hear, it's what you see."

[redacted]

"Not quite just for the asking," Carsten said. "For the paying. If she's not the richest gal in these islands, it ain't for lack of effort."

"Effort?" Kidde laughed. "There's coal-heavers down in the black gang don't work as hard as she does, I hear tell. You know about the setup dear Maggie's got?"

[redacted]

"Shut up," Kidde said. "What the hell was I talkin' about? Oh, yeah —her place. They say she's got this big room with four, maybe five, Pullman-sized compartments in there, nothin' in any of 'em 'cept a red couch and a horny guy on it, and she just goes from couch to couch to couch, long as she can walk."

[redacted]

"Yup," Kidde agreed. "And she's got 'em lined up for every damn compartment, too, even if she does charge thirty bucks a throw." His

hard, blunt face grew dreamy for a moment. "She must be a piece of ass and a half."

"She's got a lot—" the gunner's mate started.

The half-timbered house might have been transplanted from London, though it wouldn't have had palm trees around it there. From what "Cap'n" Kidde had said, Carsten had expected to see a line

around the block. He didn't. Then the Oriental driver waved him and the rest of the newcomers around to the back. The line was there. *Discreet,* he thought.

[redacted]

"You get on top," he said. "I want to see you, too."

"All right." And she did. Those perfect, pink-tipped breasts hung like ripe fruit, inches from his face. He squeezed them and kissed them and licked them. His hands clenched her meaty backside tight.

He wanted to make it last as long as he could. But he hadn't had any in a while, and Maggie made her money by having lots of customers on any one day, so she tried hard to hurry him along. She knew just what she was doing, too. Try as he would to hold back, he bucked and jerked and came, hard enough to leave him dizzy for a moment.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Sam got dressed and left, too. One more Oriental in fancy dress showed him the way out. He was whistling as he walked back to the trolley stop. It had been a hell of a good time. Was it worth thirty bucks, worth coming back again? He didn't think so, not really, but he wasn't sorry he'd done it once.

Three or four guys in uniform were walking up the other side of the street toward Maggie Stevenson's place. One of them, he saw with amusement, was a spruced-up Hiram Kidde. He started to wave, then stopped. Later on, maybe, he'd find out if the "Cap'n" thought he'd got his money's worth. Cincinnatus and his wife Elizabeth were getting ready for bed when someone knocked on the back door. It wasn't that late, but, ever since Elizabeth had found out she was going to have a baby, she'd been tired a lot of the time, even more tired than her domestic's work usually made her. "Who is that?" she said in some irritation. "I don't want visitors."

[redacted]

The knock came again. It wasn't very loud, as if whoever was out there didn't want the neighbors to notice. Cincinnatus frowned, wondering if it was a strong-arm man trying to trick him into opening the door. Crooks were having a field day. The Yankees didn't seem to care what people in Covington did to one another, so long as they left U.S. troops alone.

If it was a strong-arm man, Cincinnatus vowed to give him a hell of a surprise. He plucked a heavy iron spider out of the draining rack by the sink. Clout somebody upside the head with that and he'd forget about everything for a good long while.

[redacted]

Even in the dim light of the lamp from the kitchen, Tom Kennedy looked as if the devil had indeed brought him to his present state. He was haggard and skinny and dirty, and his eyes tried to move every which way at once, the way a fox's did when hounds were chasing it. "Can I come in?" Cincinnatus' former boss asked.

[redacted]

"Sure is," Kennedy said, and said no more.

That made Cincinnatus ask the next question: "What are you doin' *here,* Mr. Kennedy? You don't mind me sayin' so, this ain't your part of town." If mat wasn't the understatement of 1915, it would do till a better one came along. Why the devil would a white man come into the colored part of Covington after curfew? The only thing Cincinnatus was sure about was that it wasn't any simple, ordinary, innocent reason.

"Who is it?" Elizabeth called from the bedroom.

Kennedy's hunted look got even worse. "Don't say my name so loud," he hissed urgently. "The fewer people who know I'm here, the better off everybody will be."

Elizabeth came into the kitchen. She'd put on a quilted cotton housecoat over her nightgown. Her eyes got wide. "It *is* Mr. Kennedy," she said, and then, determined to be a good hostess no matter what the irregular circumstances in which she found herself, "Shall I put on some coffee for you?"

Kennedy shook his head, a quick, jerky motion. "No, nothing, thanks. I've been running on nerves for so long, coffee would just make things worse."

"Can you hide me for a couple of days?" Kennedy asked. "I won't tell you any lies—I'm on the dodge from the damnyankees. They catch up with me, it's a rope around my neck or a blindfold and a cigarette—except I don't think they'd bother with the cigarette."

"You're in real trouble," Cincinnatus said quietly. A moment later, he realized that meant he was in real trouble, too. The U.S. authorities didn't take kindly to people who harbored fugitives from what they called justice. Elizabeth's eyes widened again. She must have figured out the same thing at the same time. Cincinnatus clicked his tongue between his teeth. "Why'd you come here?" he asked, directing the question as much to the world at large as to Tom Kennedy.

"Yes, I'm in real trouble," Kennedy said. "My life is in your hands. You

want to holler for the patrols, I'm a goner. They'll put money in your pocket, too. Up to you, Cincinnatus. All depends on how you like living under the USA, because I'm doing everything I can to throw the damnyankees out of Kentucky. That's why they're after me, in case you haven't worked it out."

"Oh, I worked it out, Mr. Kennedy," Cincinnatus said, softly still. "I'm studyin' what I should oughta do about it, is all." He had no reason to love the CSA; what black man did? But the men from the United States hadn't shown him his lot was better with them in charge, not even close.

He glanced over to Elizabeth. Her belly hadn't started to swell, certainly not to the point where anyone could notice it when she was wearing clothes. He was acutely aware of her pregnancy all the same. It made him less willing to take chances than he would have been a few months before, and far less willing to take chances than he would have been before he got married.

[redacted]

That made a certain amount of sense. Most times, Cincinnatus would have accepted it without argument. Now— He felt a curious sense of reversal. For what might well have been the first time in his life, he had the upper hand in a conversation with a white man. Even though he did, he used it cautiously, deferentially: "I don't know why they want you, suh, I don't know whether I should oughta help you or help them get you. You understand what I'm sayin'?"

"You won't buy a pig in a poke, not even from me," Kennedy said. Cincinnatus nodded—that was it, in a nutshell. Tom Kennedy sighed. He recognized the reversal, too. "All right, have it your way. I haven't broken any little old ladies' legs with a crowbar or stolen from the church poor box or anything like that. But I'm in the hauling and moving business, Cincinnatus, right? Some of the things I've hauled into Covington aren't the ones the U.S. Army's real happy to have here."

[redacted]

"You don't make it easy, Mr. Kennedy," Cincinnatus said. He came

close to hating his former boss for putting him in a spot like this— not just his neck on the line now, but Elizabeth's and the coming baby's, too. If he turned him out into the street without saying anything to the authorities but Kennedy got caught later, he'd be in just as much trouble as if he'd concealed him. The only way not to be in trouble with the U.S. authorities was to hand Kennedy over to them now. He didn't have the stomach for that. As white men went, Kennedy had been pretty decent to him— far better than that screaming U.S. lieutenant who bossed him nowadays.

He had just reached that conclusion when Elizabeth said, "Here, come on with me, Misruh Kennedy. I got a good place to put you." That relieved Cincinnatus, because he hadn't come up with any good place to hide Kennedy. He didn't want him under the bed, and the Yankees would be sure to look behind the couch and down in the storm cellar. He'd been wondering if he could take Kennedy over to his mother's or some other relative's, but he wasn't enthusiastic about involving them in the danger the white man had brought to him.

Elizabeth opened the door to the pantry by the stove. It was full of sacks of potatoes and beans and black-eyed peas. Cincinnatus didn't feel the least bit guilty about hoarding. No matter how bad things got, he and his wouldn't starve.

When Elizabeth started taking out the sacks, he quickly moved her aside and did it himself. That wasn't something he wanted his wife doing, not when she was in a family way. The sacks took up a surprising lot of room, all spread out on the kitchen floor.

Once he had them all out, he saw that several boards at the back of the pantry were rotten at the bottom. He hadn't noticed that before, but Elizabeth had. He stepped into the little cramped space and pulled at the boards. They came out with squeaks and squeals of nails, revealing a black opening behind them.

"God bless you both," Tom Kennedy said, and squeezed into the opening. Cincinnatus replaced the boards as well as he could by hand. He hoped Kennedy would be able to breathe with them back. One thing seemed pretty clear, though: if U.S. soldiers caught up with Kennedy, his former boss wouldn't be breathing much longer. Still muttering to himself, Cincinnatus put back the produce sacks; Elizabeth swept up a few beans that had escaped from one of them.

"I'll take care of that in the morning," Elizabeth answered around an enormous yawn. Cincinnatus felt himself fading, too. Now that he was horizontal, he suspected sleep might sneak up on him after all.

"What you want?" Cincinnatus asked. He didn't have to struggle very hard to sound stupid, not as tired as he was. Fright came easy, too.

The Yankee officer, hard to see past that powerful torch, said, "You know a white man name of Tom Kennedy, boy?"

Cincinnatus shook his head. "No, suh. Sure ain't, not since jus' a little while after de war start. He run out o' town, I hear tell, 'fore you Yankees come." He laid the Negro accent on with a trowel; it would help make the U.S. soldiers think he was stupid. He'd have done that for Confederates, too.

"Wish to Jesus he had," the officer said, so feelingly that Cincinnatus blinked; he hadn't thought any damnyankees took Jesus Christ seriously. The fellow went on, "He's been seen in Covington, and he's been seen not far from right here, so what we're gonna do is, we're gonna search this shack." He waved to the soldiers with him.

One of the soldiers got down on hands and knees to peer under the stove, though a midget would have had trouble hiding there. Another one flung open the pantry door. The officer—short, skinny, with gold-rimmed spectacles and a mean look—shone that torch in there. Cincinnatus' heart thumped—*had* he got those boards back well enough? He did his best not to show what he was thinking.

"Nothin' but a pile of beans," the officer said disgustedly, and slammed the pantry door. He turned to Cincinnatus. "All right, boy, looks like you were tellin' the truth." He dug into his pocket, pulled out a silver dollar, and tossed it to the Negro. "For the damage." He raised his voice. "Come on, men. We got other places to search."

Nellie Semphroch sighed wearily as she carried the big cloth grocery bag back toward the coffeehouse. The bag itself was lighter than she'd wished it would be; the grocers had trouble keeping things in stock. But she was tireder than she thought she should have been, and felt old beyond her years. Winter always wore at her, and this year it wasn't just winter, it was Rebel occupation, too. She slipped, and had to flail her arms wildly to keep from falling: the sidewalk was icy in spots. Across the street, Mr. Jacobs came out of his shop with a Confederate soldier wearing one pair of boots and carrying another. The Reb strutted up the street as if he owned it, which, in effect, he did. As far as he was concerned, Nellie wasn't worth noticing.

Mr. Jacobs, being occupied rather than occupier, could see— and

admit seeing—his fellow U.S. citizens. "You are all right, Widow Semphroch?" he called.

"Yes, I think so, thank you," Nellie answered. "One more thing on top of everything else." She bit her lip. What she wanted to say was, *I've been through so much. Why can't life be easy for a change?* The answer to that one was depressingly obvious, though: her life had never been easy, so why should it start now?

Nellie shook her head. Things had come to a pretty pass, hadn't they, when even the shoemaker knew she was failing and pitied her? With stubborn pride, she picked up the grocery bag and went into the coffeehouse.

The little bell above the door didn't tinkle as she went in. After surviving the Confederate bombardment at the start of the war, it had fallen off its mounting a few weeks before, and she'd never bothered replacing it. Not much point to that, not when she or Edna was almost always there—and not when customers were few and far between, too.

But Edna wasn't behind the counter now. Frowning, Nellie set down the grocery bag. No customers were being slighted—all the tables in the front part of the shop were empty. But her daughter hadn't told her she was going anywhere—and, if Edna had decided to go out, she should have locked the front door. Nellie started down the hall, turned the corner—and there stood Edna, kissing a cavalryman in butternut, her arms tight around him, his big, hairy hands clutching at her posterior. Nellie gasped—not in dismay, but in fury. "Stop that this instant!" she snapped.

Intent on each other and nothing more, her daughter and the cavalry officer hadn't noticed her till she spoke. When she did, they sprang apart from each other as if they were a couple of the clever

magnetic toys that had been all the go a couple of years before.

Nellie ignored her. "Young man, what is your name?" she demanded of the Confederate soldier.

"Well, Mr. Nicholas Henry Kincaid"—Nellie freighted the name with all the scorn it would bear—"your commanding officer will hear of this—this—this—" She couldn't find the word she wanted. But Edna wouldn't go the way she had gone. Edna *wouldn't.* Nellie shouted, "Get out!" and pointed to the front door.

"Because you let some boy pull your knickers down a long time ago, and now you've decided I shouldn't." Edna tossed her head in disdain. "I'm grown up now, and you can't keep me from being alive myself, no matter how much you want to."

Nellie stared in dismay. Her cheeks got hot. The worst was, her daughter's shot was an understatement. Edna didn't know that, thank God. As parents will, though, Nellie rallied. "As long as you are living under my roof, you will—"

"By lifting your skirt, you mean," Nellie retorted. "No daughter of mine is going to make her way through the world by selling herself on street corners, I tell you that. I won't just report that cavalryman's name to the Rebel commandant, Edna—I'll give him yours, too."

"Not that kind," Nellie said, breathing hard. (She wished she could say everything Edna had.) "You want that kind, find yourself a man you're going to marry. *Then* you can have it." Only after she was done speaking did she realize how little Edna's language, which would have been shocking before the war began, shocked her now. Everything was coarsened, cheapened, turned to trash and vileness.

'That man was not going to marry you," Nellie said positively. "All he wanted was to have his way with you." Edna did not have a snappy comeback to that, by which Nellie concluded she'd won a point. Trying to sound earnest rather than furious, Nellie went on, "You just can't trust men, Edna. They'll say whatever they have to to get what they want, and afterwards they'll leave you flat, go off whistling, and never care whether they've left you in a family way—"

"I'm not going to die an old maid, Ma," Edna insisted.

"I didn't ask you to," Nellie said. "But I—"

"Sure sounded to me like you did," her daughter interrupted.

"Don't go out, don't meet nobody; if you do meet somebody, don't have any fun with him, on account of all he wants to do is lay you anyways. You maybe caught me this time, Ma, but you can't watch me every hour of every day. I'm not gonna wear your ball and chain, and

you can't make me."

At last, she dug in her handbag for a cheap cotton handkerchief. She wiped her eyes and blew her nose. Then, slowly, her steps dragging, she went to the door, too. She opened it, stepped outside, and looked up and down the street. She didn't see Edna. She started to cry again.

The little bell above his door worked. He looked up from the marching boot he was repairing. Behind magnifying lenses, his eyes looked enormous. The wrinkles on his round little face rearranged themselves into an expression of concern. "Widow Semphroch!" he exclaimed. "Whatever can be wrong?"

"Oh, good Lord, so do I!" Nellie said fervently.

The shoemaker continued to study her. "When the Rebs came into your coffeehouse, they must have had all sorts of ... interesting stories to tell. Wouldn't you say that's so, Widow Sem-phroch? It is here, that I can tell you. The ones who come in to get their shoes repaired, they do run on at the mouth. And me, I just listen. I listen very carefully. You never can tell what you might hear."

She said, "If I hear anything like that, Mr. Jacobs, maybe you'd like me to let you know about it. If you think that would be interesting, of course."

Even the trend-setting exhibition of modern art she'd arranged, the trend-setting artists who'd crossed the Atlantic to exhibit their works, now seemed more albatross than triumph. She set hands on hips and spoke to Marcel Duchamp in irritable, almost accent-free French: *"Monsieur,* you are not the only one who regrets that the outbreak of war has left you here rather than in Paris, where you would rather be. I agree: it is a great pity. But it is not something over which I have any say. Do you understand this?"

/ haven't got the time to deal with this now, Anne thought. Aloud, she said, "You did not sound this way when you accepted my invitation—and my money—to come to the Confederate States last summer."

"I had not thought I would be here an eternity!" Duchamp burst out. "What is bearable—forgive me: what is pleasant—for a time in the end becomes unpleasant, imprisoning."

Duchamp paced back and forth, so swiftly that he almost appeared

to be many places at once, as if he were the inspiration for his own *Nude Descending a Staircase.* Anne Colleton judged that much of his agitation was real. "Yes," he said. "Ships do sail. You have reason there. But it is also true that they reach their intended ports far less often than a prudent man would wish."

"Even prudence is not always prudent," Anne replied. "What did Danton say before the Legislative Assembly? *L'audace, encore Vaudace, toujours l'audace.* If you wish so much to be gone, you will find the audacity to go."

In the Confederate States of America, mutability was not well thought of. The CSA tried to hold change to a minimum. If you shut your eyes just a little, the thought went, you could believe everything was as it had been before the War of Secession.

"We need to be reminded that isn't so," Anne murmured. "It just isn't." That was one of the reasons she'd arranged her exhibition: to make more people see what the twentieth century really meant. It was also one of the reasons the exhibition had been so deliciously scandalous.

She took the tray from him. His sober features were as familiar to her as anything else at Marshlands, and more comfortable than a lot of the furniture. She wondered for the briefest moment how she would run the plantation if Scipio took a position elsewhere. But no. It was inconceivable. Born and bred here, a fixture since the days when Negro slavery remained the law of the land, Scipio was as much a part of Marshlands as she was herself. *Nice to have something on which I can rely,* she thought.

"Do you require anything else of me, madam?" Scipio asked.

He had already started to turn to go when Anne said, "Wait. As a matter of fact, I should like to discuss something with you in a few minutes." Obediently, the butler froze into immobility. He would stay frozen till she let him know he could move, however long that took.

To her disappointment, none of the letters was from her brothers. They were both in combat. Neither, so far, had been hurt, but she knew that was only by the grace of the God in Whom she believed so sporadically. Notes from friends and distant cousins were welcome, but could not take the place of news of her own flesh and blood.

And whom did she know in Guaymas? The grimy port and railroad town wasn't anyplace you'd want to go on holiday, especially not when the United States were still liable to cut the railroad line that linked it to the rest of the Confederacy. Making it back to civilization through the bandit-ridden hinterlands of the Empire of Mexico struck her as adventurous without being enjoyable.

[redacted]

No spy would be sure they'd been lovers, either. She worried about that less than most women might have, but it remained in her mind. She wondered whether to answer the letter or pretend she'd never got it. The latter choice was surely safer, but Anne had not got where she was by always playing safe. Either way, she didn't have to decide right now.

[redacted]

Could she believe that? She did some fast thinking of her own, and decided she could. Scipio's duties centered on the mansion, and on keeping it and its staff in smooth working order. The field hands weren't his main concern. "Let me ask that another way," she said. "Have you noticed unusual unrest among any of the hands? I'm especially concerned about the new ones, you understand. I'm sure the bucks and wenches who've grown up on this plantation are contented with their lot: again, except possibly over money."

Scipio's dark, handsome features reflected nothing but meticulous attention to her words. So he had been trained, and no one could deny the training was a success. Not even Anne, who had caused that perfect mask to be made, could hope to lift up one *edge,* so to speak, and see what lay behind it. And his beautifully modulated voice revealed only a polite lack of curiosity as he replied, "Madam, I assure you I make every effort to weed out any undesirable influences before they find positions here. And, as you say, the loyalty of your longtime staff is of course unquestioning."

"Thank you, Scipio. You do relieve my mind," Anne said. With a gracious nod, she released him to pursue the rest of his duties. He'd told her exactly what she wanted to hear. The Confederates had the U.S. soldiers exactly where they wanted them, or so they thought.

Captain Irving Morrell wondered how— wondered if—he was going to prove them wrong. The war to which he'd returned two and a half months before bore only a faint resemblance to the one from which he'd been carried in Sonora back in August. For that matter, the heavily forested Kentucky hill country in which he was operating now wasn't anything like the dusty desert where he'd been wounded.

[redacted]

Atop the hill ahead and in the trenches at its base were enough Confederates not just to slow the U.S. advance but to bring it to a halt. With the lieutenants and sergeants under him, Morrell slipped from one tree to another, drawing as close to the Rebel line as he could.

The sergeants would have been doing that job anyhow, but both lieutenants—their names were Craddock and Buhl—looked notably unhappy. "See for yourself," Morrell said as they sheltered behind a gnarled oak. He spoke as if he were in the pulpit expounding on Holy Writ. "See for yourself. Without good reconnaissance, your force is only half as useful as it would be otherwise—sometimes less than half as useful."

They couldn't argue with him—he outranked them. But they didn't look convinced, either. It wasn't that they were cowards; he'd already seen them fighting with all the courage any superior officer could want from his men. What they lacked was imagination. The way the war was chewing up the officer corps, they'd make captain if they lived. He supposed they might even end up majors. He was damned, though, if he saw them going any further, not if the war lasted till they were ninety.

Bill Craddock pointed out to the cleared ground in front of the Confederate line. "How are we supposed to cross that, sir?" he said, clearly with the expectation that Morrell would have no answer. "Rebel machine guns'11 chew us up like termites gnawing on an old house."

[redacted]

Had he been commanding the Confederate defenders, he would have moved his line east from the base of the hill to the top of that reverse slope, so he'd have had men covering the ground Rebel bullets could not now reach. If the Rebs were going to be generous enough to *give* him a present like that, though, he wouldn't turn it down.

"Ranking party will attack at 0530 tomorrow morning," he said. "Buhl, you'll lead that one. We'll give you a couple of extra machine guns, too. If things go well, you won't be only a feint: your attack will turn into the real McCoy. You understand what you're to do?"

"I'll lead the main force myself, starting at 0545," Morrell said. That left Craddock with no job but support. Morrell didn't care. For that matter, support mattered here, and could easily turn into something more. Crossing the open space toward the Confederate trenches was liable to get expensive in a hurry, and Craddock, however imperfectly qualified for company command, was liable to have it thrust upon him.

The reconnaissance party slid along the front for a while, then drifted back through the forest to where the rest of the company waited. An overeager sentry almost took a potshot at them before they

could call out the password. When the soldier started to apologize, Morrell praised him for his alertness.

After darkness fell, Morrell guided the machine-gun crews forward to the positions he wanted them to take. That was nerve-wracking work; Confederate patrols were prowling the woods, too, and he had to freeze in place more than once to keep from giving away his preparations for the assault.

It was well past midnight when everything was arranged to his satisfaction. He returned to his soldiers, huddled without fire on that chilly reverse slope, and wrapped himself in his green wool blanket. Try as he would, sleep refused to come. Moving pictures kept running behind his eyes: all the different ways the attack might go, all the different things that could go wrong.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Lieutenant Buhl got his half of the attack going at 0530 on the dot. He was, if uninspired, at least reliable. And, with a couple of machine guns yammering away for fire support, he sounded as if he had a hell of a lot more than a platoon's worth of men with him.

[redacted]

Morning twilight was just beginning to seep through the branches of the trees. You could see a trunk a couple of paces before you'd walk into it, but not much farther than that.

[redacted]

And so would he. He blew the whistle again, this time twice, burst from the cover of the woods, and ran, bad leg aching under him, toward the Confederate trenches. If you led like that, your soldiers had no excuse not to follow. Follow they did, yelling like so many madmen, firing their Springfields from the hip as they came. You weren't likely to hit anybody that way, but you made the fellows on the other team keep their heads down. That meant they couldn't do as much shooting at you.

More grenades, more gunfire. A few Confederates kept fighting. More threw down their rifles and threw up their hands. And still more fled through the gulleys that ran east and south from their trench line.

"King of the mountain, sir," one of his soldiers said with a big grin.

"It's not that I'm afraid to go or anything like that," Cunningham said. "You know me, Jeff—I ain't yellow." Jefferson Pinkard nodded,

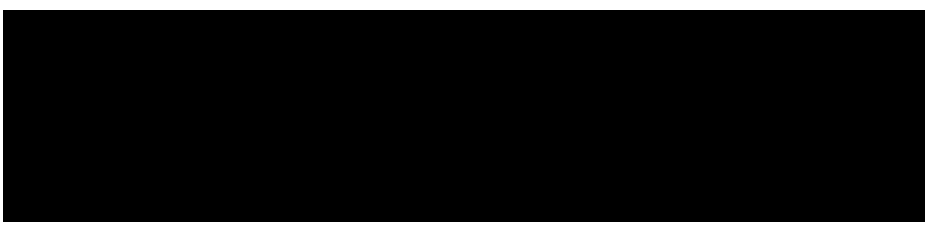
for that was true. His friend went on, "Hell and damnation, though, ain't I worth more to the country here in Birmingham than I am somewhere on the front line totin' a rifle? Any damn fool can do that, but how many folks can make steel?"

"Not enough," Pinkard said. Like a lot of men, he'd picked up almost an attorney's knowledge of the way wartime conscription worked. "You could appeal it, Bed. If the local Bureau board won't listen to you, I bet the governor would."

But Cunningham gloomily shook his head. He'd kept his ear to the ground when it came to conscription, too. "Heard tell the other day how often the governor overrules the CCB when it comes to suckin' people into the Army. Three and a half percent of the time, that's it. Hell, three and a half percent don't even make good beer."

"I missed that one," Jeff Pinkard admitted.

"Three and a half percent," Cunningham repeated with morose satisfaction. "States' rights ain't like what it was in the War of Secession, when a governor could stand up and spit in Jeff Davis' eye and he'd have to take it. Don't dare do that no more, not with everybody so beholden to Richmond. Sorry damn world we live in, when a governor ain't any better'n the president's nigger, but that's how it goes."



"When do you have to report?" Pinkard asked, that seeming the only question still open.

"Day after tomorrow," Cunningham answered. "They give a man a lot of time to get ready, now don't they?"

"It's not right," Fanny Cunningham said. "It's not fair, not even a little bit."

"Fair is for when you're rich," her husband answered. "All I could do is the best I could. We'll get by all right now that you're workin', honey. I didn't like the notion, I tell you that much, but it's turned out pretty good." He set a hand on Jefferson Pinkard's shoulder. "You're the one I feel sorry for, Jeff."

"Me?" Pinkard scratched his head. "I'm just goin' on doin' what I always did. They ain't messed with me, way they have with you."

"Not yet they ain't, but they're gonna, an' quicker'n you think." Cunningham sounded very certain, and proceeded to explain why: "All right, I take off my overalls an' they deck me out in butternut. Foundry work's got to go on, thought—we all know that. *Who they gonna get to take my place?"*

Emily Pinkard saw what that meant before her husband did. "Oh, lordy," she said softly.

The light went on in Jeffs head a moment later. 'They ain't gonna put no nigger on day shift," he exclaimed, but he didn't sound certain, even to himself.

"Hope you're right," Cunningham said. "I won't be around here to see it, one way or the other. You drop me a line, though, once I find out where my mail should head to, and you tell me whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong. Bet you a Stonewall I'm right." The Confederate five-dollar goldpiece bore Jackson's fierce, bearded image.

"If they do... what'll you do?"

"Gotta make the steel. Gotta win the war," he said after some thought. "Don't win the damn war, nothin' else matters. Nigger don't get uppity, reckon I have to work with him—for now. Come the day the war's over, though, comes the day of payin' back debts. I got me a vote, an' I know what to do with it. Gets bad enough, I got me a

gun, too, an' I know what to do with that."

[redacted]

The day after that, Pinkard walked to Sloss Foundry by himself, which seemed strange. His head pounded as if someone were pouring molten metal in there, then rolling and trip-hammering it into shape. He'd done more drinking after he and Bed got home. Hangovers made some men mean. He didn't feel mean, just drained, empty, as if part of his world had been taken away.

He got to the foundry on time, hangover or no hangover. There waiting for him stood Agrippa and Vespasian, the two Negroes who were his and Bedford Cunningham's night-shift counterparts. However wrong having them around had seemed at first, he'd grown used to it. Most days, he'd nod when he came on and even stand around shooting the breeze with them before they went home to get some sleep, almost as if they'd been white men.

He didn't nod this morning. His face went hard and tight, as if he were in a saloon and getting ready for a fight. Three black men stood waiting for him today, not just two. "Mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," Vespasian said. Agrippa echoed him a moment later. They knew what he had to be thinking.

"Mornin'," Pinkard said curtly. The moment had really come. He hadn't believed it. No, he hadn't wanted to believe it. It was here anyhow. What was he supposed to do about it? Before it turned true, telling your wife you'd stay was easy. Now— Should he stand up on his hind legs and go home? If he didn't do that, he'd have to stay here, and if he stayed here, he'd have to work side by side with this Negro.

"Mistuh Pinkard, this here's Pericles," Vespasian said, nodding at the black man Jeff hadn't seen before.

"Mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," Pericles offered. Like all the Negroes Sloss Foundry had hired since the war began, he was a big, strapping buck, with muscles hard and thick from years in the cotton fields. He

couldn't have been more than twenty-one or twenty-two; he had open, friendly features and a thin little mustache you could hardly see against his dark skin.

Years in the cotton fields ... Pinkard almost demanded to see his passbook. Odds were, Pericles had no legal right to be anywhere but on a plantation. But the same probably held true for Agrippa and Vespasian, and for most of the other newly hired Negroes at the foundry. If the inspectors ever started checking hard, they'd shut the Sloss works down—and the steel had to be made.

"He kin do the work, Mr. Pinkard," Vespasian said. "We been learnin' him on nights, so he be ready if the time come." He hesitated, then added, "He be my wife's cousin. I vouch for him, I surely do."

Fish or cut bait, Jeff thought. Damn it to hell, how could you walk out on your job when your country was in the middle of a war? You had to win first; then you figured out what was supposed to happen next—he'd had that much right, talking with Emily the night before. "Let's get to work," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Pinkard," Vespasian breathed. Pinkard didn't answer. Vespasian and Agrippa didn't push him. Even if things were changing, they knew better than that. They nodded to Pericles and headed off the floor.

When Pinkard finally did speak, it wasn't aimed at Pericles, but at the world at large, the same useless complaint Fanny Cunningham had made the night before: "It ain't fair."

Pinkard chewed on that for a while. It sounded a hell of a lot like what his friend had said a couple of nights before. When you were down, everybody above you looked to have it easy. When you were a Negro, you were always down, and everybody was above you. He'd never really thought of it in those terms before. After a bit, he shoved the idea aside. It made him uncomfortable.

But he did start talking with Pericles after that. Some things you couldn't explain with just your hands, and some things Bedford Cunningham would have done without thinking were just the sort of

things Pericles didn't know, any more than any other new hire would have. The Negro caught on fast enough to keep Pinkard from snarling at him.

A couple of times, Pericles tried to talk about things that weren't directly tied to the job. Pinkard stonily ignored those overtures. Answering back, he thought, would have been like a woman cooperating with her ravisher. After a while, Pericles gave up. But then, when the closing whistle blew, he said, "G'night, Mr. Pinkard. See you in the mornin'."

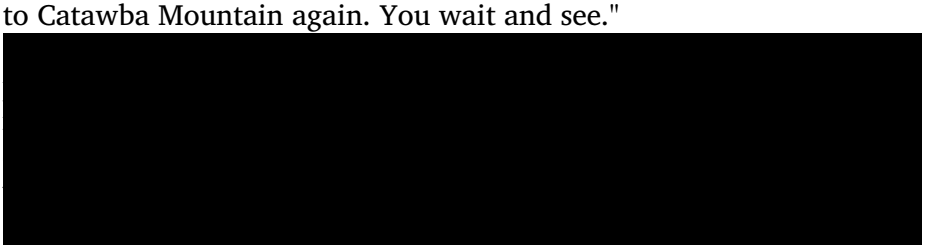
"Yeah," Pinkard said, his mouth out in front of his brain. *What the hell?* he thought as he walked home alone. *Didn't do any real harm. Maybe I'll even say "Mornin' " tomorrow—but nothin' after that, mind.*

* * *

Chester Martin knew the Roanoke River lay only a few hundred yards ahead, though he also knew better—much better—than to stick his head up and see just how close the river was. The latest U.S. push had moved the battle line in western Virginia forward into the suburbs of Big Lick again. A couple of more pushes and they'd be over the river at last so they could clean out the eastern side of the Roanoke valley.

"That's what Captain Wyatt says, anyhow," Martin remarked to Paul Andersen, summarizing the latest Army bulletins. "You believe it any more than I do?"

"Hell, no, Sarge," the corporal answered. "What's gonna happen next is, the Rebs'll put on a push of their own, knock us halfway back to Catawba Mountain again. You wait and see."



"I can see it in the fancy history some fool will write after the war," Andersen said: "you know, some educated fool, the kind who wears those spectacles that stick on your nose but don't have any side pieces to hook 'em to your ears. He'll talk about the thirty-seventh battle of the Roanoke, and that'll be us pushin' the Rebs back a ways, and then

he'll talk about the thirty-eighth battle of the Roanoke two weeks later, and that'll be the Rebs kickin' us back to where we started from, and maybe another half a mile besides."

"That all sounds pretty likely," Martin agreed. "I just hope to Jesus we ain't any of the ones who get buried before that thirty-eighth battle." Most of the time, you didn't like to think about such things, not when the whole battlefield stank of death to the point where, if you weren't used to it and just fell here from, say, Philadelphia, you'd puke your guts up for a week. It wasn't cold enough to fight the stink, as it had been a few weeks before.

"Heads up." Andersen pointed down the trench. "Visiting fireman coming this way."

Chester Martin's head whipped around. It couldn't be, but it was. Andersen was staring and staring. Captain Wyatt said, "Boys, here's the President of the United States, come to see the war for himself."

Martin hadn't come to attention in the front-line trenches in months. Now he stiffened to straightness so suddenly, his backbone cracked like knuckles. Beside him, Andersen also came to a stiff brace. "At ease," Teddy Roosevelt said. "As you were. I came here to see soldiers, not marionettes."

"Yes, *sir!"* Martin relaxed, though not all the way. If the battlefield stench bothered TR, he didn't let on. He acted like a soldier, though he hadn't led troops into battle in thirty years or so. But he really could have been an elderly major, not just some politician posturing for the newspapers.

"Yes, sir, they sure would," Martin said If the Confederates did know the president was here, they'd do everything they could to keep him from getting away again.

[redacted]

When you listened to the president talking, you forgot the reek of unburied bodies, the mud, the lice, the barbed wire, the machine guns. You saw farther than your length of trench. You got a glimpse of the country that would come out the other side of this war. It was a place where you wanted to be, too.

Yeah, and what are the odds of that? asked the part of Martin that had been under fire for months. *Do you really think you're going to come through alive, or with all your arms and legs if you do live?*

[redacted]

"Bully," TR said. "Our German allies have offensives in the works, too. With God's help, they'll strike the French and the English a heavy blow on the continent." He shook his head. "I don't know what we would have done without Germany, boys. With England and France backing up the Rebels, we were fighting out of our weight when we tried to scrap with them. Not now, though, by jingo, not now."

"Yes, sir," Martin said. "We have friends in high places, eh?"

"The All-Highest place," TR answered with his famous chuckle, still boyish though he was in his mid-fifties. "Kaiser Wil-helm's done everything he could for us, and we've paid him back, thanks to soldiers like you men."

Martin didn't stand straighter now; Roosevelt had ordered him to be at his ease. But he felt tall and proud just the same. Again, TR made him believe the war had a point, a goal, beyond the miseries of the front. He wondered how long he'd go on believing that once the president left.

A few hundred yards off, a couple of U.S. machine guns started hammering away at some Confederate target or other. Rifle fire answered from the Rebel lines, and then their machine guns. After a few minutes, U.S. field guns started pounding the enemy's forward trenches.

[redacted]

Paul Andersen threw himself flat, Captain Wyatt threw himself flat. To Martin's horror, he saw TR start to stand up on a firing step so he could get a better look at what was going on. Without thinking, he knocked the president down with a block from behind that would have been illegal in a football match, then flopped over TR's squirming body. "Stay flat, dammit!" he shouted. He'd never expected to have the president's ear. Now that he did, this was what he got to tell him? It would have been funny if he hadn't worried about getting killed.

Shrapnel balls and jagged bits of shell casing whined through the air. Bigger U.S. guns started firing, trying to silence the Confederate field pieces. Bigger Rebel guns struck back at the bigger U.S. guns. Both sides forgot about the men at the front for a while.

Warily, Chester Martin sat up. That let TR get up, too. Martin gulped, wondering what the penalty was for leveling the president. But all Roosevelt said was, "Thank you, Sergeant. You know conditions here better than I."

X

Lucien Galtier muttered unhappily to himself as he loaded the jug of kerosene into the back of his wagon. The ration the American soldiers allowed people was ridiculously small. Thank God, nights were shorter now than they had been in the middle of winter, but he still had to leave a lot of his lamps dry. The world, he was convinced, held no justice.

[redacted]

Strictly speaking, that wasn't true. None of the taverns in Riviere-du-Loup had signs up ordering—or even advising—townsmen and local farmers to stay out. Nor were the taverns out of liquor; a lot of their stock these days was shipped up from the United States, but that did not mean it would not burn in your boiler. Drinks, in fact, were actually cheaper these days than they had been before the war started, because the occupying authority taxed liquor at a lower rate than the provincial government had.

All of which was silver lining on a large, dark cloud. If you went into a tavern, you were almost certain to find it full of American soldiers, which was the reason the occupying authority held down liquor prices. And American soldiers, especially American soldiers with drink in them, did not take kindly to sharing what they thought of as their taverns with the locals.

[redacted]

The horse snorted. Maybe that meant it agreed. Maybe that meant it thought Galtier was complaining too much, too. If it did, too bad. He could complain to the horse without worrying his wife—and without making her angry, too, for she was less than delighted when he went into a tavern even for one whiskey, her fixed view of the matter being that no one ever went into a tavern for only one whiskey.

Galtier was just climbing up into the wagon when, from behind him, a cheery voice said, "God bless you, Lucien."

"There is no need to apologize, my son," Father Pascal said with an amiable wave of his hand. "You are full of your own concerns, as any busy man would of course be." He studied Galtier. His black eyes, though set rather close together, were clever and keen. "I pray your affairs march well?"

"They march well enough, thank you, Father." Lucien would complain to his horse. He would complain to his wife. He would not complain to Father Pascal. These past months, he had even taken to editing his confessions, which he knew imperiled his soul but which helped keep his mortal flesh secure. Father Pascal was too friendly to the Americans to suit him.

"I am glad to hear that." The priest salted his words with the lightest sprinkling of irony. Lucien sometimes thought he talked like a lawyer. Father Pascal went on, "I am glad to see you have survived a winter difficult in so many ways."

"Yes, I have survived," Galtier agreed. */ would have done better than that had the Americans whom you love so well not stolen everything that would have let me get through with something more than bare survival.*

"We are well, thank you, yes." No one had starved, no one had come down with tuberculosis or rheumatic fever. Was that thriving? Lucien didn't know, not for certain. Whatever doubts he had, though, he would not admit to the priest.

Father Pascal raised his hands in a gesture of benediction. His palms were pink and plump and soft, with none of the calluses ridging Galtier's hands. His nails were clean, and not a one of them broken. Truly, he lived a different life from that of a farmer.

But Father Pascal did not go away. "In God's hands. Yes. We are all in God's hands. The course of the war—who can guess the course of the war? But then, who would have guessed a year ago the Americans would be here?"

"I am so glad you do," the priest said heartily, laying one of those smooth, well-manicured hands on Lucien's arm. "For too many people, impartiality is often mistaken for its opposite. Do you believe it, I am often accused of favoring the Americans?"

"If you should hear this vicious lie, I beg of you, give it no credit," Father Pascal said, with such earnestness in his voice that for a moment Lucien wondered whether what everyone said was wrong. But then the priest continued, "Should you hear such calumnies, my son, I would be in your debt if you would be generous enough to inform me who has spoken them, that I may pray for the salvation of his soul."

"Of course, Father," Lucien said. Clocks in the church towers began chiming eleven, which gave him the excuse he needed. "Father, forgive me, but I have a long ride back to my farm, and the hour is later than I thought."

"I would not keep you. Go with God." Smiling, sleek, doing ever so well under the new regime, Father Pascal went on down the street with the determined strides of a man who has important places to go, important things to do. He nodded to two American soldiers and then to an old woman in mourning black.

"Does he think me a simpleton, a cretin?" Lucien asked his horse when they were well out of Riviere-du-Loup and the animal's ears were the only ones that could hear. 'Tell me who is saying bad things about me and I will pray for him, he says. He will pray, by God: pray that the Americans catch the poor fellow. And he will tell the American commandant, to help make his prayers come true. What do you think of that, my old?"

To Lucien's silent, patient audience of one, he went on, "A simpleton? A cretin? No, he thinks me worse than that. He thinks me a collaborator, as he is himself. And this, this is what I think of him." He leaned over the side of the wagon and spat in the dirt. The very idea offended him. Why would anyone collaborate with the Americans?

Whenever Scipio went to Cassius' cottage, he went with fear and trembling in his heart. The fear was not a simple one, which only made it tougher to deal with. Half the time, he was afraid the mistress had found out what he was doing and that white patrollers — or maybe white soldiers—with rifles and bayonets and dogs with long sharp teeth were on his trail. The other half, he was afraid Cassius and his fellow would-be revolutionaries had somehow divined he was not heart and soul with them in their Red fervor, and that they were going to get rid of him because of that.

Sometimes, too, he carried both fears at once. In odd moments, he tried to figure out which was deeper, more compelling. It was like trying to decide whether you'd rather be hanged or shot—*just like that,* he thought uncomfortably. When all your choices were bad, did worse matter?

Here was the cottage. He felt conspicuous coming out to the huts in his fancy butler's livery, though he'd been doing it for years. He'd been passing a good deal of time in Cassius' cottage for years, too. He kept telling himself no one should notice anything amiss. Making himself believe it was harder. Never till the previous fall had he done the kinds of things in this cottage he was doing now. He knocked.

"That you, Kip?" came the question from within: Cassius' voice. "This me," Scipio agreed, swallowing the misery he dared not show.

The door opened. There stood Cassius. "Come in wid we/' he said, smiling, slim, strong, dangerous as a water moccasin in the swamps.

"Set a spell. We talk about things, you 'n' me."

"We do dat," Scipio said, and stepped into the cabin. He never saw anyone there but the people who had been reading *The Communist Manifesto* together the night he'd found out they weren't just laborers but Reds. That made sense; the less he knew, the less he could betray.

"Wet yo' whistle?" Cassius asked, and pointed to a jug of corn whiskey sitting up on the mantel.

Scipio started to shake his head, but found himself nodding instead. Cassius handed him the jug. He took a long pull. The raw, illegal whiskey ran down his throat like a river of fire and exploded in his belly.

The woman named Cherry said, "You he'p we learn dese prayers, Kip?" She handed him a paperbound book with an orange cover. The printing on that cover did indeed proclaim it a tract, just as the blue-covered book that had got him into this mess had said it was a hymnbook. You couldn't tell a book by its cover, though, not in Cassius' cottage you couldn't.

Island and a couple of other people did start to sing hymns, in case anybody was snooping around outside. Under cover of their racket, Cassius sat down by Scipio at the rickety table in his cottage and bent over the book with the orange cover with him. The hunter's finger pointed out a passage. "Read dat," he said.

"What you think o' that there?" Cassius asked.

"All fit in wid everything else," Scipio answered. "Sound like de trut'." He almost slipped out of the dialect of the Congaree; the words he'd just read did not fit in with that ignorant speech.

"Who write this?" Scipio asked. A lot of what he'd read here had the taste of being translated from a foreign language. Not this; it was simple and direct and powerful, English as it was meant to be written. One of the things he'd acquired serving Anne Colleton, and which he discovered he could not simply abandon, was a sense of style.

Cassius' eyes gleamed with amusement. "Same fellow write the other."

Scipio gave the hunter a dirty look. Cassius enjoyed leading him around by the nose, the same way he enjoyed all reversals and practical jokes. Cassius also enjoyed having an intellectual advantage on him. Scipio had never believed Cassius did much thinking at all. He hadn't even known the hunter could read. He'd turned out to be wrong. Cassius' thought was anything but wide-ranging, but in its track it ran deep.

"Why for you say dat?" Cherry demanded. She looked as if she wanted to drop Scipio in the Congaree swamp right then and there.

Cassius laughed. "Got we aperfesser here. But is he *dat* smart?" He shook his head. "No, or he know who do dat work." Unlike a lot of jokers, he knew when to cut a joke short, as he did now. "These words wrote by Abraham Lincoln."

Now he said, "Miss Anne, she talk wid any new strange white folks? They after our scent like hounds. We got to watch sharp."

"Nobody new I see," Scipio answered truthfully. Then he asked, "How they after we?" From the moment he'd first set eyes on the deadly words of *The Communist Manifesto,* he'd known what sort of game he was playing and what its likely outcome would be, but he didn't like Cassius reminding him of it.

The hunter—the Red—said, "They done cotched a few o' we: Army niggers get careless, talk too much where de white folks hear. Sometimes you catch one, he know de name o' 'nudder one, and *he* know *two* more names—"

Cassius said, "De day don' wait much longer. De revolution happen, an' de revolution happen *soon.* We rise up, we get what dey hoi' back from we fo' so long. De white folks want de cotton, let de white folks grow de cotton an' grub it out o' de groun'. Dey don't 'sploit us no mo', never again."

He wondered if he could get into the Empire of Mexico some kind of way, and never, ever come back. Marching with a hangover was

not Paul Mantarakis' idea of fun. It did, however, beat the stuffing out of going into a front-line trench to be shot at and shelled. He'd be doing that soon enough—much too soon to suit him. Any time between the current moment and forever would have been much too soon to suit him.

A couple of men away from Mantarakis, Gordon McSweeney tramped along singing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." McSweeney had a big bass voice and couldn't have carried a tune in a washtub. His booming false notes made Mantarakis' headache worse.

[redacted]

Even hung over, guile Mantarakis had. "That was a good leave, wasn't it, Gordon?" he said.

Addressed directly, McSweeney felt obliged to answer, which meant he stopped singing: the point to the exercise in guile. "Indeed, a good leave," he said seriously—he was always serious, except when he was furious. "I prayed harder, I think, man I ever have before."

"Dice weren't going your way, eh?" Mantarakis knew that was a mistake, but couldn't resist. The idea of praying in a town like Dixon, Kentucky, after it had become a U.S. Army leave center tickled his sense of the absurd.

"I do not gamble," McSweeney said indignantly. "I do not poison my body and my spirit with spirituous liquors, and I do not consort with loose, vile, immoral women."

[redacted]

"I will not be mocked," McSweeney said, about as close as he dared come to telling his sergeant to go to hell. He was bigger than Peterquist, and meaner, too, but Mantarakis would have bet on the noncom if they ever tangled. Peterquist was a sneaky bastard. He would have made a pretty fair Greek, Paul thought, meaning it as a compliment.

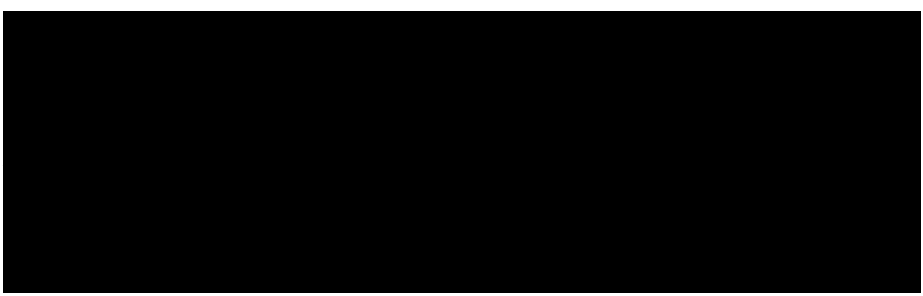
Ignoring McSweeney, the sergeant asked Mantarakis, "You go to a house with white girls or colored?"

[redacted]

McSweeney started singing his hymn again, louder than ever, so he wouldn't have to listen to his comrades' lewd conversation. Peterquist looked at Mantarakis. They both grinned ruefully. Maybe neither of

them made a good Greek—they should have been able to figure out what the effect of talking about going to a whorehouse would have on the pious McSweeney. But when you were coming out of Dixon, what was on your mind (unless you were pious) was all the different ways you'd had a good time.

The countryside looked as if hell had been there, but had gone away on vacation. Like every inch of Kentucky in U.S. hands, it had been fought over, but that had been the fall and winter before. New grass was beginning to spring up, hiding the worst scars of the fighting.



There were munitions dumps scattered here and there across the landscape, too, shells standing on the ground as if they were the dragon's teeth Cadmus had sown to raise a crop of soldiers. But they didn't raise men; they razed them. When the pun occurred to Mantarakis, he tried to explain it to the men marching with him, and got only blank looks for his trouble.

The Rebel offensive had been halted just south of Dawson Springs. There, hell hadn't gone on vacation. The Confederates might not have managed to take the town, but they'd shelled it into ruin. So many of the buildings were either burnt or wrecked, so many craters pocked the ground, it was hard to tell where exactly the roads had run before Dawson Springs made war's acquaintance.

Just past Dawson Springs, Mantarakis heard a buzzing in the air. His head swiveled rapidly till he spotted the aeroplane coming north. It skimmed along low to the ground, paralleling the road down which he was marching. For a moment, that made him think it was an

American aeroplane returning from the front. Then he spied the Confederate battle flags painted on the fabric under each wing.

The pilot must have seen the regiment before Paul noticed him. He brought the aeroplane down even lower, right down to treetop height. That gave the observer a perfect chance to rake the column of U.S. soldiers with his machine gun.

Men screamed and fell and ran every which way. A few, cooler-headed than the rest, stood in place and fired back at the Rebel aeroplane with their Springfields. Mantarakis admired their sangfroid without trying to imitate it. He was utterly unashamed to dive into a muddy ditch by the side of the road. Bullets kicked up dirt not far away.

Ignoring the rifle fire, the aeroplane wheeled through a turn and came back south down the other side of the road, raking the regiment all over again. Then, pilot and observer no doubt laughing to each other about shooting fish in a barrel, it streaked away for home, going flat out now.

"Popery—damned popery," McSweeney said above him.

"Oh, shut up, Gordon," Mantarakis said, as if to a pushy five-year-old. The really funny thing was that the Orthodox Church reckoned the pope every bit as much a heretic as any Scotch Presbyterian did.

Nobody said anything for half a minute or so. Mantarakis shuffled his feet and looked down at the bloodstained dirt; he didn't want to get a name for blowing his own horn. Then Gordon McSweeney said, "It was the little Greek, sir."

Mantarakis saluted. "Thank you, sir." That meant more pay, not that you were ever going to get rich, not in this man's Army. It also meant more duties, but that was how things went. You got a little, you gave a little. Or, in the Army, you got a little and, odds were, you gave a lot. The pillar of black, greasy smoke rose high into the sky northwest of Okmulgee, Sequoyah, maybe higher, for all Stephen Ramsay knew, than an aeroplane could fly. The fires at the base of that pillar didn't crackle, didn't hiss, didn't roar—they bellowed, like a herd of oxen in eternal agony. Even from miles away, as he was now, it was the biggest noise around. It was the biggest sight around, too: an ugly red carbuncle lighting up a whole corner of the horizon.

"Less than you'd think, Sergeant, less than you'd think," Lincoln said. "Put a charge of dynamite in the right place and *whumpf*—out it goes. But even if the damnyankees do that, they won't be drawing any crude oil or gas from those wells for a long time, which was the point of the exercise."

"They sure won't, sir." Ramsay sighed and patted his horse's neck

with a gloved hand. "Who would've thought the damnyankees could push us back like this? We don't do *some* fightin' back, they're gonna run us out of Sequoyah altogether, push us into Texas an' Arkansas."

"Yeah, well, if he doesn't like it, he's just going to have to go peddle his papers," Ramsay said. "Either that or pull some men out from under his war bonnet."

"Makes us a hell of a lot freer than the damnyankees," Ramsay said, it being an article of faith in the CSA that living in the USA was at most a short step better than living under the tyranny of the czars. These days, of course, Russia was an ally, so nobody said much about the czars, but the principle remained the same.

"Yeah, it does," Lincoln said with another sigh. "But it means sometimes we have to go through a whole lot of arguing to get through something the Yanks could deal with by giving a couple of orders. And here in Sequoyah, you may have noticed, it's even more complicated than it is anyplace else."

"Now that you mention it, sir, I have noticed that," Ramsay admitted, drawing a wan smile from the captain.

Sequoyah, by itself, was a Confederate state. But within its borders lay five separate nations, those of the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles, the Five Civilized Tribes. They kept their local autonomy and guarded it with zeal; the governor of Sequoyah sometimes had more trouble getting their chiefs to cooperate with him than President Wilson did with the governors of the Confederate states. And, since a lot of the state's petroleum and oil lay under land that belonged to the Indian nations, they had enough money on their own to keep the state government coming to them hat in hand.

Lincoln said, "If I have to tell Charlie Fixico I'm pulling out of

Okmulgee without even trying to defend the town, you know what he's going to do? He's going to write his congressman, back in Richmond. And since his congressman just happens to be named Ben Fixico, that makes me toast without any marmalade. But what am I supposed to do?"

[redacted]

And come up with an answer Lincoln did. He got help from a Yankee field gun, which started landing shells in front of the cavalry company. The fountains of smoke and dirt were several hundred yards short, but the Confederates had no field guns of their own with which to reply. Before long, the U.S. forces would move that gun forward and bring up others alongside it.

"Back to Okmulgee!" Lincoln shouted. At his order, the company bugler sounded the retreat.

With the rest of the company, Ramsay rode southeast toward the capital of the Creek Nation. Okmulgee lay in a low, broad valley, with tree-covered hills on either side. As the Confederates came into the valley, Ramsay saw that the town was seething like an anthill to which somebody had just delivered a good swift kick. A train was pulling out, heading south. It had nothing but freight cars, but Ramsay would have bet those were packed with people; he'd even seen some with signs painted on their sides: 36 men or 8 horses. The road south out of Okmulgee was certainly packed, with people, wagons, buggies, barrows, horses, and other livestock. Captain Lincoln might have intended retreating through Okmulgee rather than into it, but getting out the other side wouldn't be easy.

[redacted]

"Save our city!" the Indian cried. "Save our nation! Do not abandon us to the merciless United States, whose soldiers we fought a hundred years ago, long before the South saw it had to escape the brutal oppression that came from Washington. As chief of the nation, I beg you. The delegations from the House of Kings and the House of Warriors beg you as well."

Charlie Fixico gestured to the Indians in fancy dress. They added their voices to his. It was, when you got down to it, a hell of an impressive performance.

He moved his hand, and the delegation—local senators and congressmen, Ramsay supposed they were—fell silent so he could talk some more. "We do not ask you to perform any duty we would not share," he said, now pointing to the young Indians with armbands. "We will help you defend our homes and our lands. We will fight whether you stay or go, but we beg you to stand by us now as we stood by you in the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War."

Captain Lincoln looked mad at first, and then helpless. Stephen Ramsay understood that. It was a hell of a speech. He wondered how many times Charlie Fixico had practiced it in front of a mirror so he could bring it out pat like that. If Captain Lincoln led the cavalry out of Okmulgee now, he'd feel like a skunk for the rest of his days—and a lot of the troopers who heard the speech would think he was a skunk, too.

Ramsay glanced over to the young Creek men. Were they really ready to do or die for the Creek Nation? Even if they were, would it make any difference? You ran amateur soldiers up against veterans, odds were the amateurs would come out looking as if they'd just been through a grinding mill.

He was glad the decision was not his to make. Captain Lincoln looked back toward the northwest, toward the burning oil wells his troopers had had to abandon. There were more oil wells in and around Okmulgee, and still more south of town. If he could save any of them for the Confederacy, that would be worth doing. If, on the other hand, he was just throwing his command away ...

Charlie Fixico went down on his knees and held his hands up high in the air. At that, so did the men from the House of Kings and the House of Warriors. Ramsay had never seen anybody just get down and beg like that.

Charlie Fixico scrambled to his feet, spry for a fellow a long way from young. He clutched Lincoln's hand. "God bless you, Captain. You won't be sorry for this," he exclaimed.

By the look in his eye, Captain Lincoln was sorry already. In town here, the company would have to fight as infantry, sending their horses south with the retreating Creeks. Ramsay took charge of the young men—*am I supposed to call 'em braves?* he wondered—with armbands on their sleeves. They were ready as all get-out to shoot at the damnyankees, but when he sent them into a hardware store to commandeer shovels so they could start digging foxholes and trenches, they almost balked.

"Look," he said, more patiently than he'd expected, "the idea is to kill the other guy, not to get killed yourself. Shells start falling here, bullets start flying around, you're going to be damn glad to have a hole in the ground to hide in."

They weren't soldiers. It wasn't so much that they didn't believe him. They didn't have a clue as to what he was talking about. They worked like sulking Negroes till Charlie Fixico yelled something at them in their own language. After that, they sped up—a little.

Captain Lincoln sited one of the company machine guns so it fired up Sixth Street and the other so it fired up Fourth. When the Yankees came into town, those would give them something to think about. "Wait till you have a good target," Ramsay told the crew at Sixth and Morton, in front of the Creek Council House. "We want to make the bastards pay for everything they get."

U.S. troops were not long in coming. Field guns started landing three-inch shells on the town. The red-armbanded Creeks dove for the holes they hadn't wanted to dig. To Ramsay's amazement, one of them shouted an apology to him.

He waved back. He wondered how much ammunition each Indian had for his gun. With all those different calibers, no hope in hell the cavalry could resupply them when they ran dry. He also wondered what the Yankees would do with any Creeks they captured. Was a red armband uniform enough to let them count as prisoners of war? Or would the Yanks call them *francs-tireurs* and shoot them out of hand, the way the Huns had done in France and were doing in Belgium? For the Creeks' sake, Ramsay hoped they didn't find out.

He had his own foxhole nicely dug, sited under a tree that would give him cover if and when he had to pull back, as he probably would sooner or later. He peered north up Fifth Street, looking to see how close the Yanks were.

His own men understood the reasoning behind the order. But the Creeks had never been in combat before. As soon as they saw U.S. soldiers, they started shooting at them. Sure as hell, one of them not far from Ramsay did have a rifle musket from his grandfather's day. A great cloud of black-powder smoke rose above the kid's firing pit.

Well, the game didn't always go the way you wished it would. "Fire at will," Captain Lincoln shouted, sounding as disgusted as Ramsay felt. The machine guns started chattering. U.S. soldiers fell. Ramsay found a target and fired. The Yankee he'd aimed at went down.

But more U.S. soldiers kept coming. The Confederates fired steadily, taking a good toll. And the Creeks surprised Ramsay. They stayed in their places and kept shooting. You couldn't hope for anything more, not from raw troops. They might not have had discipline, but they were brave.

When their entry into Okmulgee stalled, the damnyankees gave the town another, bigger dose of artillery to make the defenders keep their heads down. Under cover of the bombardment, they got men into the northern fringes of the built-up area. The forwardmost Confederate troopers came running back toward the center of town. Ramsay didn't notice any Creeks coming back. He whistled softly. They *were* brave.

He felt cramped, fighting in amongst buildings rather than out on the plains. Unhorsed, he felt slow, too. *Could* he get away, if trouble got bad? He began to think he'd have to find out the hard way.

Ramsay whooped like an Indian—just like an Indian, because several Creeks not far away were letting out the same kind of happy yells. They probably figured the fight was as good as won. Ramsay wished he could believe the same thing. Unfortunately, he knew

better. Whatever else you said about the Yankees, they were stubborn bastards.

Still, if there was artillery in the neighborhood, maybe there was infantry around, too. Put a regiment in here instead of a cavalry company and some ragtag civilians, and Okmulgee would hold against damn near anything the USA could throw at it. He looked back over his shoulder, then started laughing all over again.

"Hell of a war," he muttered, "when the cavalry's got to look to the infantry to come to the rescue."

* * *

Captain Elijah Franklin expounded on the Wilbur's virtues: "Now we have aeroplanes than can climb and dive with the Avros the damned Canucks and limeys are flying. We won't have to scurry for home if we get in trouble."

"Sir?" Moss stuck up a hand.

"What is it?" Franklin asked, a bit testy at being interrupted before his spiel was done. He had a pinched, narrow face, and looked as if his stomach pained him all the time. It probably did. That didn't keep him from drinking like a fish when he wasn't flying.

"Sir, one of the biggest advantages we had in the Curtiss was a forward-facing machine gun," Moss said. "This is a tractor machine, with the prop in front. Now we're going to be limited to observer fire,

just like the Canucks. If I see a target, I want to be able to aim at it and shoot it straight on, not wiggle around so the observer gets to fire off at an angle."

[redacted]

The terse announcement produced more hubbub. Through it, Jonathan Moss called, "You mean somebody has finally made a working interrupter gear, sir?"

If you could synchronize the speed at which your machine gun fired with that at which your prop revolved, you could mount a forward-facing gun on a tractor aeroplane and not shoot yourself down faster than the enemy. Moss had heard of a couple of people who'd shod their wooden propellor blades with steel to deflect ill-timed bullets, but sooner or later a ricochet was going to come straight back at you, so that wasn't the ideal solution. An interrupter gear, though—

[redacted]

McClintock stomped toward the squadron commander, of whom he made close to two. Franklin moved not an inch. It wasn't i his rank armoring him, Jonathan Moss knew, just a stubborn determination not to back down to anybody. McClintock shouted, "God damn it, Captain, you know I'm no coward. But when I switch buses, I want to have a pretty good idea that I'm doing it for a reason, that the new bus"—he jerked a thumb toward a Wilbur— | "is likelier to keep me in one piece than the old one was."

[redacted]

"It doesn't turn as well," Moss said.

[redacted]

Moss kept quiet. It was so. You didn't want the Canadians or British chasing you, because they'd damn well catch you. But he'd got comfortable with his old machine. It was, he supposed, like a marriage: you knew what your partner was going to do. Now he was going to a partner he didn't know nearly so well.

Lyman Baum said, "Other thing is, sir, I don't like trusting my neck to the observer. I'd rather have my own gun now instead of waiting to get one in the great by-and-by. Observers—"

As if Baum's question had been a cue, a truck chugged up to the aerodrome and started disgorging men in khaki with overladen duffel bags and with flight badges that had only one wing, not a pilot's two. Captain Franklin nodded; he'd expected them. "Gentlemen, your observers," he said while the newcomers were still getting out. "Does anyone care to express any further ill-founded opinions?... No? Good."

Moss kicked at the dirt. The captain had a point. You couldn't condemn out of hand a man you'd never met. But Baum had a point, too. If a fellow was liable to be a lemon, did you really want to meet

him?

[redacted]

"Jonathan Moss," Moss said, shaking it, and studied Captain Franklin's idea of a joke. Stone was a couple of years younger than he, he guessed, with a long, ruddy face, a brown Kaiser Bill mustache, and a disarming grin underneath it. He didn't look like a loser or a washout. "What did you do before the war started?" Moss asked him.

"I had a little photography studio in Ohio," Stone answered. "You?"

[redacted]

"No wonder at all," Stone agreed. "I wanted to be a pilot. They told me if I kept squawking about it they'd stick me in the infantry, and I could see how I liked that. You know what, Lieutenant Moss? I believed 'em."

"Good thing you did," Moss said. "I don't have any doubt the powers that be meant every bit of it." He kicked Stone's duffel bag, then picked it up himself. "Come on; let's get you settled in. Tomorrow, if the weather's decent, we'll get up there and you can take some pretty pictures of the enemy line. How does that sound?"

"Better than a poke in the eye with a carrot," Stone said, and both young men grinned. The observer waved toward the tents. "Lead on, Macduff!" It was a misquotation, but Moss wasn't about to ruffle any feathers by saying so.

As if the arrival of the observers had changed the squadron's luck, the weather, which had been cold and foggy and drizzly, turned something close to springlike the next morning. Of course, by the calendar spring was only a week and a half away, but, up till now, Ontario had shown no signs of paying attention to the calendar. As far as Moss could see, blizzards were liable to keep coming all the way through July.

The next morning, Percy Stone exclaimed with pleasure when he saw the camera he was to use. "Ah, one of the new models," he said. "They're the next thing to foolproof. In fact, they're the next thing to moronproof." He exclaimed again when he discovered the Wright in which he was to fly had a conical recess in which the camera would fit built into the fuselage floor in the observer's cockpit. "Someone was awake during the design work here."

Moss shrugged as he climbed into the forward cockpit. A groundcrew man spun the prop. The engine started to roar, seemingly right in his lap. He didn't like that. The slipstream blew the noise to him now, not away from him as it had in a Curtiss pusher. No help for it, though. This was the bus he had, so this was the bus he'd fly.

Fly he did, north and west. Every so often, Percy Stone would shout something at him. He caught perhaps one word in five. One of these days, somebody would have to figure out how to let pilot and observer talk back and forth and understand each other. That could be as important as perfecting the interrupter gear.

[redacted]

Under his flying goggles, Moss made a sour face. The limeys and Canucks, damn them, hadn't been idle while the U.S. soldiers pounded at their front door. They'd built a whole new series of lines behind the ones they'd had to abandon. Smash one and you found the next just as tough.

Black puffs of smoke started appearing in the sky, all around Moss and Stone. Moss started stunting the aeroplane, changing course and speed at random intervals to confuse the antiaircraft gunners and throw off their aim. The gunnery—the hate, everybody on the receiving end called it—was more a nuisance than anything else, but you didn't want to think you'd stay lucky all the time.

Back there, the observer would be yanking the loading handle to bring the first photographic plate into position, then pulling a string every few seconds. Every time he did, the camera would expose the plate then behind the lens. Sliding the loading handle forward and back again brought the exposed plate down into an empty changing box below and to the side of the camera body and slid a fresh one into place, ready for the next pull of the string. The camera held eighteen plates altogether.

The aeroplane rolled to a stop on the landing strip. Moss killed the engine. For a moment, silence seemed louder than the roar had. He needed a distinct effort of will not to shout as he said, "That wasn't so bad." After a reflective pause, he added, "Any run where they don't send their aeroplanes up after you is a pretty good one, as a matter of fact."

"Oh, I don't know," Percy Stone said. "I was sort of looking forward to the chance of shooting the tail right off my own bus." His grin was so disarming, it almost let Moss forget that that was one of the things that could happen when an observer got overeager.

She sat down in one of the hard chairs that filled the open area in front of the Coal Board office windows. George, Jr., sat down next to her. She plopped Mary Jane into the chair on the other side. "Be good, both of you, while I answer these questions," she said.

[redacted]

COAL RATION ALLOTMENT REASSESSMENT EVALUATION SURVEY

report, the form said at the top. Sylvia sighed. It seemed to be a law—or perhaps a Coal Board policy—that every form had to be more complicated than the one it replaced. This one certainly lived up to the requirement.

[redacted]

None of those boxes fit her husband, and there was no other line on which to explain. Painful experience had taught her nothing caused more trouble than filling out a Coal Board form the wrong way. She glanced at her children. They both seemed occupied. "Wait here," she told them. "I have to go ask that man a question."

[redacted]

She pointed to the check-off boxes. "What do I do about my husband here?" she asked. "He's a Confederate prisoner at—"

"Prisoners of war go under the Military heading," the clerk said, more exasperated than ever.

"But he's not a prisoner of war; he's a detainee," Sylvia said. "A commerce raider captured him when he was out on Georges Bank."

'Then he's a Civilian Gainfully—" The Coal Board clerk stopped. You couldn't say George Enos was gainfully employed, not when he was at a camp or wherever the Rebs kept their detainees down in North Carolina. But he wasn't unemployed, either. The clerk looked as if he hated Sylvia. He probably did, for breaking up the smooth monotony of his day. He turned and called, "Mr. Colfax, can you please come here for a moment?" Being his superior, Mr. Colfax rated politeness. Sylvia barely rated the time of day.

She turned to look back at her children. George, Jr., was teasing Mary Jane with the lollipop. She could have told him that was a mistake. Mary Jane grabbed the lollipop and stuffed it into her own mouth. George, Jr., started to scream.

"Excuse me," Sylvia said hastily. She took the lollipop away from Mary Jane, returned it to its rightful owner, swatted every available backside, and warned of measures yet more dire if the two of them didn't behave themselves. That done, she went back to the clerk. The next woman in line had come up to the window in the meanwhile, giving him an excuse to pretend she didn't exist. He seized on the excuse with alacrity.

Upon hearing of the ambiguity, Mr. Colfax chewed on his lower lip, which was red and meaty and made for such mastications. At last, he said, "Properly speaking, this man should not be included in the calculations, for no coal need be expended on cooking and heating water for him."

"No, he is a detainee, as you yourself specified," the window clerk said, relishing his moment of petty triumph. "Fill out the form accordingly and take it to Window C. Thank you, Mr. Colfax." Mr. Colfax nodded and disappeared. Sylvia wished he were gone for good.

When she looked to her children again, Mary Jane was toddling over to take a good look at the brass cuspidor in one corner of the room. Its polished, gleaming surface was stained here and there— as was the floor around it—by the tobacco-brown spittle of men whose intentions were better than their aim. Sylvia let out a small shriek and, skirts flapping around her, managed to intercept Mary Jane just before her daughter got feet and hands in the disgusting stuff.

Heads turned, all through the Coal Board office. Sylvia felt herself flushing, and wished she could sink through the floor. "Don't play with them any more, do you hear me?" she told George, Jr. "They're dirty and nasty."

At last, she got the chance to finish filling out the form. It asked for things she didn't know, like the quality of the insulation in her flat, and for things she had a devil of a time figuring out, like the number of cubic feet the flat contained. Her education had stopped in the middle of the seventh grade, when it became obvious she needed a job more than schooling. She hadn't had to figure out the volume of anything since then, and hadn't expected to need to do it now.

At last, the dreadful task was done. By the time it was, Mary Jane was getting cranky. Sylvia carried her over to the line in front of Window C. "You stay here," she told George, Jr., "and no more bugs, not if you want to be able to sit down when we ride the trolley home." *If we ever get a chance to go home,* she thought wearily. But she'd got through to her son, who sat on both hands, as if to protect the area she'd threatened.

The line moved about as slowly as U.S. troops advancing on Big Lick, Virginia—Big Licking, the papers had taken to calling it. Some of the people must have made mistakes on their forms, because, faces set and angry, they had to go back to the previous window and get new copies to fill out. They had to stand in line again there, too.

When she finally reached him, the clerk who reigned supreme over Window C proved to be a fresh-faced young fellow who, for a miracle, seemed friendly and anxious to help. He smiled at Mary Jane, who stared back at him over the thumb she had in her mouth.

Then he glanced down at the coal ration form. "I don't see your husband listed here, ma'am," he said to Sylvia. "You're a widow?" He actually sounded sympathetic, which, from Sylvia's previous

experience with Coal Board clerks, should have been more than enough to get him fired.

"No," she said, and explained what had happened to George.

"That doesn't matter," the clerk said. "If he's a captive of the Confederate States, you're entitled to the coal for him."

"Doesn't matter," the clerk repeated, his voice firm. "Mr. Colfax doesn't know everything there is to know."

Sylvia shot a venomous look back at that window. But when she started to cross lines out and make changes on the form, the clerk said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but these forms must be perfect the first time, to eliminate any suspicion that the changes originated in this office. I'm afraid you do have to go back and get a fresh copy to fill out."

She stared at him, at Mary Jane, at George, Jr. (would he catch a mouse instead of forbidden bugs?), and at the line to the window from which she'd thought she'd escaped. She needed the coal. Coal Board rations were stingy. Even with what she'd get for George, she'd have none too much. But standing in line again—in two lines again—and then having to fill out the requisition form once more, even if this time she could copy from what she'd done before Another half hour? Another hour? Was it worth the time? When could she shop?

"Come on, lady," a gruff voice said behind her. "I ain't got all day."

XI

"Fire!" he yelled, and the field gun blasted a shell back at the damnyankees on the far side of the Susquehanna. The whole battery was pounding the U.S. positions, as far back as it could reach.

Trouble was, the battery couldn't reach far enough. The Confederacy's three-inch field guns had been the most wonderful thing in the world when the war was new and positions changed not just from day to day but from hour to hour. They moved with the advancing columns of men in butternut and slaughtered the U.S. soldiers who opposed them: slaughtered by tens, by hundreds, by thousands.

"Only goes to show," Featherston muttered. "People ain't as smart as they wish they was."

The USA had the big guns, or more of them than the CSA did. Now that the front had stabilized along the Susquehanna, the United States had brought up their heavy artillery, and their gunners were using the big, long-range shells to raise hell deep among the Confederates' secondary positions. If the Yankees decided to try to force the Susquehanna line, they could beat down the opposition with their artillery till the Confederate forces would have a tough time fighting back.

"Wish we could do more to those damned six- and eight-inch guns," Jethro Bixler said as he set another shell in the breech of the field piece.

"Yeah." Featherston adjusted the elevation screw for maximum range, then pulled the lanyard. The field gun bucked and roared, but the muzzle brake kept the recoil short. If they hadn't worn the rifling out of the barrel of the gun, it wasn't because they hadn't tried. As Bixler slammed yet another shell into the breech, Jake went on, "What I wish is, we weren't so damned far forward. We got to be, I know, but if they do start dropping stuff on us, they'll be awful damn accurate on account of it won't be way out at the end of their range, like we are when we try to reach where they're at."

[redacted]

Pompey came up to Featherston and waited to be noticed. When the sergeant gave him a curt nod, he said, "Cap'n Stuart's compliments, suh, and we gonna shift our fire to a new Yankee position, range 5,300 yards, bearing 043."

[redacted]

Featherston sighed. He didn't know whether Major Potter had investigated Pompey or not. If the major had, nothing had come of it. Pompey remained Jeb Stuart Hi's trusted servant: too trusted, as far as Jake was concerned. He knew Captain Stuart had given the command. All the same, getting it from Pompey was too close to taking orders from a Negro to suit him.

[redacted]

And then he stopped worrying about things as trivial as the right status of the Negro in the Confederate States of America. At any other time, that would have been important. Not now, not when Yankee shells came whistling in straight toward where he was standing.

Big ones, he thought with a chill as the freight-train noises in the sky grew to a roar, a scream. The damnyankees' three-inchers fired more slowly than the Confederacy's guns, but their shells gave the same scant warning coming in. A little *whizz* before the bang, that was all you got.

Not these. Through the growing shriek of torn air, Jethro Bixler screamed something. If it wasn't "Get down!" it should have been. A split second before the shells went off, Featherston threw himself flat.

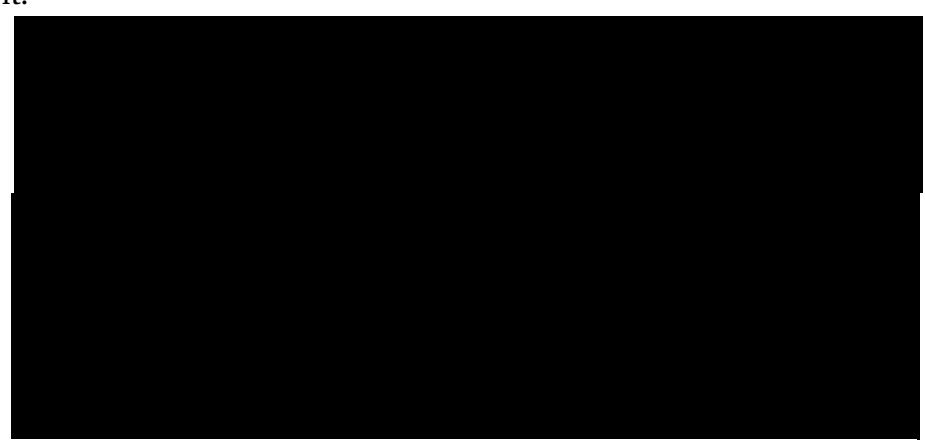
Back home outside of Richmond, he'd gone to church a lot of times to hear a preacher work himself up into a good sweat over hellfire and damnation and brimstone. You listened to a preacher who was good enough, who threw off his jacket and waved his white-shirtsleeved arms at the congregation, you could get the feeling hell wasn't more than half a mile off.

That's what he'd thought then. Since the war started, he'd begun to get the notion he had a more intimate personal acquaintance with hellfire than any preacher ever spawned—unless the preacher served a gun, too.

But now, with the war that had started in summer and should have ended before winter still going strong at the start of spring and heading into its second summer of what looked like a great many yet to come, he discovered he didn't know so much after all. The battery had been under fire before, plenty of times. That was why he wasn't working with all the same gun-crew men who'd started out with him bombarding Washington, D.C. You shot at the damnyankees, they shot at you. That was fair.

They weren't just shooting at the battery this time, though. They wanted to wipe it off the face of the earth. He frantically hugged the dirt as the big shells burst all around him. Black puffs of smoke with red flame at their hearts sprang into being everywhere. Shrapnel balls and fragments of shell casing hissed through the air. The ground jerked and bucked. Featherston had never felt an earthquake, and after this bombardment was convinced he didn't need to. If you were in a house when an earthquake hit, the worst that would happen was things falling on you. Things weren't just falling here. They were accelerated, viciously accelerated, by high explosive.

Worst was knowing that whether he lived or died was altogether out of his hands. If a shell came down so near the blast ripped his lungs to bits from the inside out, if an explosion blew him to smithereens, if a tiny steel splinter awled through his skull and into his brain ... then that was what happened. He had no say, and whether he was a good soldier or a bad didn't matter. Luck, that was it.



Blast from a near miss picked him up and slammed him back down

to the ground, the way you might throw a kitten you didn't want against a brick wall to get rid of it. "Oof!" he said, and then, as he got more air back into his lungs, several less printable remarks.

He ran to the howitzer. His head swiveled wildly. He had a target artillerymen dreamed of—but if he had to handle the three-incher by himself, he couldn't possibly fire often enough to do the CSA any good. He spied motion. Somehow, Nero and Perseus had come through the bombardment with as little damage as he had.

"You niggers!" he shouted. "Get your black asses up here on the double!" The laborers obeyed. If they hadn't, he would have drawn his pistol and shot them both. As things were, he barked, "You've seen the crew serve this gun often enough. Reckon you know how to do it your own selves?"

"No time for buts." Featherston pointed toward the Susquehanna. "Every damnyankee in the world is headin' straight this way. They get this far, they're gonna kill you the same as me. Only way to keep 'em from gettin' this far I can think of is to blow 'em up first. Now—you gonna serve the gun?"

He didn't know whether his logic or his hand on the butt of his pistol was the more convincing. But the Negroes, after glancing at each other again, both nodded. "I kin load, I reckon," Nero said, "an' Perseus, he kin tote the shells. You got to do the rest, Marse Jake. We don't know nothin' 'bout how to aim."

"I'll handle that," Featherston promised. He looked around for Jethro Bixler, then wished he hadn't. The loader was spread out over the ground like an anatomy lesson. He hoped Nero wasn't lying to

him, the way blacks did sometimes when they wanted to impress a white man.

Nero wasn't. He waited while Jake frantically worked the elevation screw to lower the muzzle of the gun and shorten range, then opened the breech, slammed in a shell, and dogged it shut almost as fast as poor dead Jethro could have done.

With a whoop, Featherston yanked the firing lanyard. The howitzer bellowed. A couple of seconds later, the shell burst among the swarming Yankees. They were close enough for Jake to watch the ones near the burst going down like ninepins. He whooped again and traversed the piece a little to the left.

Nero worked the breech. Out came the old shell casing. In went the new round. Jake jerked the lanyard. More U.S. soldiers fell. Methodically, he kept pumping shells into them. Despite the Yankee bombardment, not all the Confederate machine gunners were blasted out of their positions. They too began scything the U.S. attackers with bullets. Some of the Yankees did manage to ford the river and get into the Confederate trenches. The only ones who went any farther than that came to the rear as prisoners.

Seeing the glum, bloodied men in green-gray, Nero howled like a wolf. "We done it!" he shouted. "Jesus God almighty, we done it!"

They hadn't done it all by themselves—some guns from other batteries had spread death through the Yankee ranks, too—but they had done it. The eastern bank of the Susquehanna was littered with corpses tossed at every possible angle, and at too many impossible ones. A few last U.S. soldiers were scuttling back to their own trenches, like dogs fleeing with tails between their legs.

[redacted]

[redacted]

But if Featherston hadn't put them on the gun, he almost certainly wouldn't have been alive to worry about things like that. If Major Potter ever found out he'd turned them into impromptu artillerymen, he was liable to order them dragged off somewhere and shot. Part of Jake said that was a good idea. Hell, part of him wanted to yank out his pistol and use it now, so nobody would know what he'd done.

[redacted]

He wondered if they could obey, even if they wanted to. They'd just been soldiers, after all. One of the reasons you didn't let a Negro get a gun in his hands was that, if he did some fighting with it, he'd start feeling like a man, not like a servant. A Negro who felt like a man was liable to be a dangerous Negro.

[redacted]

[redacted]

And who would serve the guns in 1917, or 1919, or 1921, or however long the war lasted? Negroes? He shook his head. It couldn't happen, not really. He glanced over at Perseus and Nero. Could it?

[redacted]

"Sir." Major Abner Dowling took a deep breath. Every time Custer

started bellowing about breakthroughs, men died by thousands for gains best measured in yards. "Sir, with the machine gun and barbed wire and artillery, breakthroughs don't come easy these days."

That was not only true, it was the understatement of the year. But Custer shook his head. He didn't want to see it, so he wouldn't. If you imagined a dumpy, half-senile ostrich with its head in the sand, that was Custer, at least in Dowling's uncharitable imagination. But, though he wore no epaulets, he did have stars on his shoulders. "The Rebs have worn themselves out," he declared. "Holding us off has been hard enough on them, and then they tried an offensive of their own. What can they possibly have left?"

Direct argument having failed again and again, he tried analogy: "Sir, when Coronado came into the USA from Mexico, he was looking for the Seven Cities of Cibola, all of them stuffed with gold. What did he find? Nothing but a bunch of damn redskins living in mud huts."

"I just meant, sir, that we keep looking for breakthroughs and keep thinking the Rebs are back to their last ditch, but it never seems to be true. Maybe we ought to try some different way of going at 'em," Dowling said.

"Shall we settle the war with a game of football, the way some idiots tried doing Christmas Day?" Custer suggested with sardonic glee.

In a way, the generality of the truce was too bad. If it had happened here and nowhere else, TR would have had all the justification he needed for sacking Custer and replacing him with someone who had some notion of how the world had changed since 1881. But no, no such luck.

[redacted]

But if Dowling didn't know what the answer was, he had a pretty clear notion of what it *wasn 't.* "Sending men out by the division to charge into machine-gun fire wastes lives, sir," he said. "We'd be better off pounding the Rebs with artillery, using soldiers to create positions from which we could pound them from three sides at once, things like that."

"We have the advantage in manpower, Major," Custer said. "What good is it if we don't use it?"

If we keep using it your way, we won 't have it much longer, Dowling thought. Saying that aloud was probably fatal to a career. He braced himself to speak up anyway; maybe they'd give him an actual combat battalion as punishment for his crime.

Before he could make himself say anything, though, someone knocked on the door to Custer's office. The commanding general snarled something profane, then barked at Dowling: "See who the devil that is."

[redacted]

"Well?" the general commanding First Army snapped. "Don't just stand there like an upright piano. Tell me what in tarnation this is all about."

Dowling stiffened to rigid attention. Doing his best to keep vengeful glee from his voice, he said, "Yes, sir. Sir, you are ordered to detach two divisions from your front for immediate transfer to another theater."

[redacted]

"They aren't being transferred to General Pershing, sir." Now Dowling concealed regret: Pershing had made far more progress against the Rebels than Custer had. He'd also had the sense to save lives by pinching off Louisville from the flanks instead of going straight into the city, as the U.S. Army had tried to do during the Second Mexican War. "The order comes directly from General Wood, at General Staff headquarters in Philadelphia."

Custer expressed an opinion of the relationship between Wood and Roosevelt that reflected poorly on the heterosexuality of either man. Like any underling with an ounce of sense, Dowling knew when to feign deafness. "Why the devil is Wood stealing my men, then?" Custer said, rather more pungently than that.

"God damn them to hell, and may the U.S. Army send them there," Custer exclaimed. "We should have done it before the War of Secession, and we really should have done it during the Second Mexican War, when they tried to sneak out of our beloved Union. If anyone had listened to me then—" He shook his head. "But no. We had to clasp the viper to our bosom. I was there, by God. I wanted them to hang all the Mormons' leaders, not just a handful of them. I wanted them to hang Abe Lincoln, too, while they had the chance. But would anybody hear a word I said? No. Are we better off because no one would? No again."

"Sir, I wouldn't call what we did in Utah during the Second Mexican War clasping the Mormons to our bosom, or afterwards, either," Dowling said; Custer had a selective memory for facts. John Pope and later military governors in Utah had jumped on the Mormons with both feet then, to make sure they didn't try giving the USA any more hard times. He supposed he could see why they'd

outlawed polygamy, but suppressing public worship along with all other public meetings had always struck him as far too heavy-handed. Even after Utah joined the Union, public worship by groups larger than ten remained illegal; since the Second Mexican War, the Supreme Court hadn't been much inclined to interfere with claims of military necessity. And so the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City remained empty to this day. No wonder the Mormons didn't love the U.S. government.

"Could be either one," Custer judged. 'The Mormons don't like niggers much better than the Rebels do, but the Canadians could be seducing them with lies about freedom of religion." He laughed unpleasantly. "If they were up in Canada, they'd have gotten the same short shrift the Germans who settled that town called Berlin did, and you can bet your bottom dollar on it."

"That's probably true, sir," Dowling said, and for once simple agreement was just that, nothing more. He went on, "Shall I draft orders implementing this command for your signature, sir?"

"Yes, go ahead," Custer said with a melodramatic sigh. 'They must have timed their damned uprising with a view to spoiling my offensive and robbing me of the breakthrough I surely would have earned. They'll pay, the scum."

Another soldier coming his way, though, nodded in complete understanding. "Just back from the front, are you?" he said.

Bartlett nodded. "Sure am." His laugh was self-deprecating. "You can take the soldier out of the trenches, but it's not so easy taking the trenches out of the soldier. This is my hometown, and I feel like I'm a stranger here."

"Know what you mean, pal," the other soldier said. "You get away for a while and it doesn't seem like the real world's real, if you know what I mean." He stuck out a hand. "Name's Alexander Gribbin—Alec, they call me." He had swarthy, handsome features and a neat little chin beard that made him look like a Frenchman.

"Friend, I like the way you think," Gribbin said enthusiastically. "If this is your town, you ought to know about places like that, eh?"

"You just want a drink, we can do that anywhere," Bartlett said.

"I've seen that," Gribbin agreed. "Thank your lucky stars, Reggie my friend, the Drys haven't gotten their way here in Virginia. Down in Mississippi, where I come from, it's a desert, nothin' else but."

"Not only that," Reggie Bartlett said, "but I've got money in my pocket—some, anyhow—and it spends as good as any other money the mint ever made."

Alec Gribbin grinned widely. "I'm the same way, and so is my money. Let's go."

"Hell of a place," Gribbin said with a low whistle, gazing around at the rococo splendor of the lobby. He winked and lowered his voice: "Wouldn't it make the bulliest damn sporting house in the whole wide world?"

"Matter of fact, it would," Bartlett said, "but I wouldn't have the money to go into a sporting house tricked out this fancy." He walked down the hall. His boots sank into the thick pile of the Turkish carpets underfoot. That wasn't so bad; the rugs didn't try to pull the boots off his feet, the way the trench mud had in the Roanoke River valley.

The saloon was a saloon: long bar, brass rail, mirror behind it so the bottles of whiskey and gin and rum looked to be twice as many as they really were, free-lunch counter with a painting of a nude above it. But the place catered to a prosperous crowd. Not only was the free lunch more appetizing than the usual run of sardines and sausage and limp cheese, but the nude, a voluptuous redhead, was a lot more appetizing than the common saloon daub.

"Makes me wish I was an artist," Gribbin said, eyeing her with genuine respect. "Get to see girls like that, and in the altogether—I tell you for a fact, Reggie, it just beats the stuffing out of freezing your feet in a trench in Pennsylvania. That country's so cold in the wintertime, the Yanks are welcome to it, far as I can see."

"Not your five-cents-a-shot place," Gribbin observed. Then he knocked back the whiskey. His eyes got big. "I see why, too. That's the straight goods there. Those cheap joints, they put in red peppers and stuff, make you think you're getting better'n raw rotgut. You know, real whiskey's *good."* He watched Bartlett drink half his schooner of beer, then said, "Come on, finish that so as I can buy you another one. We can hit the free lunch, too. We drink enough, they won't care how much we dent the profits with what we eat."

Bartlett drained the schooner. "Ahh," he said. His new friend slapped down a quarter. The barkeep, a Negro in a boiled shirt, fixed refills.

The two portly fellows were talking about pension plans for soldiers after the war was over: congressmen, or else lobbyists. Important people, yes, but Bartlett wasn't much interested in pension law. He wished he had more money now, sure, but he wasn't going to worry about fifty years down the line, especially not when his life expectancy once he got back to the front was more likely to be measured in weeks than in years.

A tough-looking fellow in a foreign naval uniform came up and stood at the bar next to Bartlett. He ordered scotch, which, with his accent, gave a pretty clear notion of his nationality. Nodding affably to Bartlett, he said, "Confusion to the Yankees, what?" and lifted his glass.

"I'll drink to that." Reggie proceeded to prove it.

The Englishman made his drink disappear so fast, he might have done it by magic or inhalation. He got another, then raised his glass again and proceeded to elaborate on his earlier toast: 'To the Empire and the Confederacy, and to keeping the United States in their place."

Before replying, the Royal Navy man ordered a third scotch. Then he said, "Damned if I know how it will all turn out. Damned if anyone knows how it will all turn out. Honors about even thus far in the Atlantic. Argentina's coming in on our side, I'd say, outweighs Chile's joining the Americans and Germans, though none of the South American navies is important enough to swing the balance in any decisive way." Then, seeming to contradict himself, he went on, "I do wish the Empire of Brazil would come to a decision of one sort or the other."

He had thought that a convincing argument. He kept on thinking it a convincing argument. The Royal Navy man called for yet another drink and gulped it with the same alacrity he'd shown with the ones before. "Allies," he muttered, but it didn't sound like a toast. Mostly to himself he went on, "The South and the czars. God have mercy on a free country."

"And what the devil is that supposed to mean?" Alexander Gribbin

demanded. He sounded a lot hotter with whiskey in him than he had without. "You saying we aren't free? Is that what you're saying? Go up to the USA and see how you like it there. The Confederacy is the freest country in the world, and that's a fact."

The bartender looked from the English officer to the two Confederate privates and back again. He didn't say anything, though his eyes were wide in his dark face. "Oh, hell, what are you asking him for, anyway?" Bartlett said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "He's just a nigger. He doesn't know anything."

"Something more than one man in three of your populace falls into that category," the Royal Navy man said. "In spite of that, you still call yourself the freest country in the world?"

"Of course we do," Reggie said. "We are."

He and the Englishman stared at each other in mutual incomprehension. "Enjoy it, then," the fellow said at last. He called for one last drink, drained it, and left after adding a tip for the bartender.

"Don't worry about it, soldier," one of the prominent men in dark suits said. 'There's a certain kind of Englishman who thinks that if you're not English, you're sort of halfway to being a nigger yourself."

"Yes, sir," the bartender said, and brought him one.

The bartender picked up a rag and polished the gleaming surface of the bar, over and over again. He did not look up at the two soldiers. Sam Carsten slept in the middle bunk on the *Dakota,* which made him feel like the meat in a sandwich. You had a guy on top of you and a guy underneath, to say nothing of a whole bunk room full of guys all around. Your skinny mattress creaked and groaned on the iron frame, as did those of your two bunkmates. Everybody snored. Everybody farted. Nobody washed his feet often enough.

And, half the time or more, you didn't even notice, not from lights-out to the klaxon that yanked you from your bunk as if it physically grabbed you and threw you down on the deck. If you weren't dead beat when you lay down, you'd figured out how to screw around so well, it looked as if you were working to some chief petty officers who'd long since seen every kind of screwing around known to man.

"Yeah, and if I was, I wouldn't want nothin' to do with the likes of you," Crosetti said, scrambling into his trousers.

Sam got dressed, too, and staggered down the hall to the galley for breakfast. After oatmeal, bacon, stewed prunes, and several mugs of scalding, snarling coffee, he decided he was going to live. He went up on deck for roll call and sick call.

"Romantic," he muttered under his breath as he started chipping paint, stopping rust before it got started. 'The South Pacific is supposed to be romantic. What the hell's so romantic about looking like an Easter ham all the goddamn time?" Chip, chip, chip. Chip,

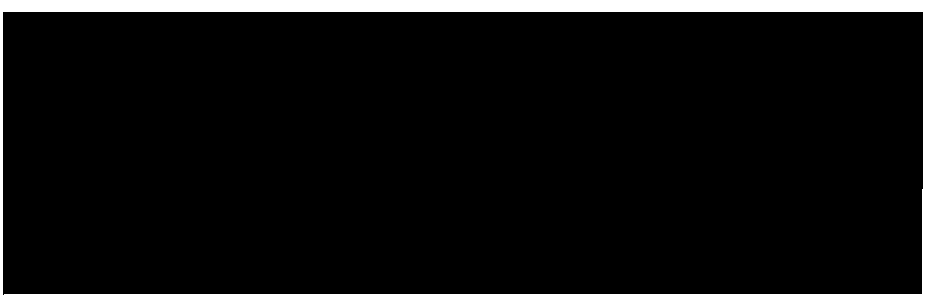
chip, chip. The *Dakota* plowed through light chop, several hundred miles south and west of Honolulu. The only way to find out what the limeys and the Japs were up to—if they were up to anything—was to go out on patrol and look around.

With the *Dakota* steamed the *Nebraska* and the *Vermont,* as well as a pair of cruiser squadrons and a whole flotilla of speedy destroyers. The fleet could handle any probe the English and the Japanese tried, and could damage a fiill-scale assault against the Sandwich Islands, meanwhile warning Honolulu of impending danger. "We caught the limeys napping," Carsten said, chipping away so industriously, no one could give him a hard time about it. 'They won't give us the same treatment."

As if to underscore his words, a high-pitched buzzing, as if from a gnat made suddenly bigger than any eagle, rose from the bow of the *Dakota.* Sam stopped what he was doing and looked that way. The buzz rose in volume, then steadied. It was followed by an enormous hiss that might have come from an outsized snake alarmed at the outsized gnat. A rattling and clattering unlike any found in nature accompanied the hiss.

The compressed-air catapult threw the aeroplane off the deck of the *Dakota.* Inside a space of fifty feet, it had accelerated the flying machine up past forty miles an hour, plenty fast enough for the aeroplane to keep on flying and not fall into the Pacific.

Carsten stood for a moment, watching the aeroplane gain altitude. He shook his head in bemusement. It was such a flimsy thing, wood and canvas and wire, a mere nothing when measured against the armor plate and great guns of a battleship. But if it spotted the enemy where the bulge of the earth still hid them from the *Dakota,* it made a formidable tool of war in its own right.



He worked away for a while. Then horns blared and voices started shouting through megaphones. Sam sprinted toward the forward starboard sponson, one running sailor among hundreds. "Battle

stations!" officers and senior ratings shouted, over and over again. "Battle stations!"

When he was working out in the open, Carsten hadn't too much minded the warm, muggy air. He would have enjoyed it, had the sun not pounded down on him. Down below in the sponson, the sun wasn't baking him. In that hot, cramped place, though, he felt as if he were being steamed like a pot of beans in the galley.

'This the real thing?" he asked Hiram Kidde.

The gunner's mate shrugged. "Damned if I know," he answered. "Could be, though. That new wireless they've put on board the aeroplanes, it lets 'em pass on the news before they come back to us."

[redacted]

Kidde nodded. "Sure would. But the new aeroplanes got bigger engines, so they can carry more'n the ones we brought with us last year, and the new wireless sets are lighter than the ones they had then, too."

[redacted]

"Not any time soon." Kidde set an affectionate hand on the breech of the five-inch gun whose master he was. But then he looked thoughtful. "Or maybe you're right. Who the devil can say for sure? You're just a pup; the way it looks to you, the Navy hasn't changed a whole hell of a lot since you've been in. Me, though, I joined in 1892. An armored cruiser nowadays'd run rings around what they called battleships back then, and blow 'em to hell and gone without breaking a sweat. You look back on things, they ain't the same as they used to be. Nobody ever heard of aeroplanes when I joined up, that's for damn sure. So who really does know what things'll look like twenty, thirty years from now?"

"I was thinking about aeroplanes when we launched ours," Carsten said.

[redacted]

"Who, me?" Sam answered, drolly innocent. Kidde laughed again. Carsten went on, "I was thinking how good they were for spotting, but that they couldn't really do anything to a ship. What you're saying, though, makes me wonder. If their engines keep getting bigger, maybe they'll be able to haul big bombs or even torpedoes one of these days."

"Yeah, maybe." Kidde frowned. "I wouldn't like to be on the receiving end of something like that, I tell you. Torpedoes from submersibles, they pack more punch than a twelve-inch shell, even if they don't have the range. But you can outrun a submersible. You can't outrun an aeroplane."

"You can shoot an aeroplane down, though, a lot easier than you can get at a submersible when it's under the water," said Luke Hoskins, sticking an oar into the conversation.

Before either Hiram Kidde or Sam could answer the other shell-heaver, the all-clear sounded. Carsten let out a sigh of relief. "Nothing but a drill," he said.

Despite the all-clear, the gun crew stayed at their station till the starboard gunnery officer poked his head into the sponson and dismissed them. Carsten went back to the upper deck at about a quarter of the speed at which he'd run to his gun. When you'd just wondered whether you were about to go into battle, fighting rust didn't seem so important any more.

A couple of hours after the all-clear was given, the aeroplane splashed down into the water not far from the *Dakota.* Before long, the battleship's crane hauled it out of the Pacific, only a few feet away from where Sam was working. He waved to the pilot as the fellow came level with the upper deck of the ship.

The pilot waved back, a big grin on his face. "Always good to come home," he called. "Gets lonesome out there when all you can see is ocean."

Fleet orders were to have either an aeroplane or a kite balloon aloft as nearly continuously as possible. Balloons, of course, couldn't fly away from the U.S. ships the way aeroplanes could, but, floating four thousand feet above the fleet, could see a lot farther than lookouts on even the tallest observation masts.

Carsten was glad to watch the sausage floating up there. It felt like a life insurance policy to him. If the Royal Navy or the Japanese spotted the Americans before the U.S. fleet saw them, that meant trouble, big trouble. You wanted to be in position to do what you intended to do, and do it first. What had happened at Pearl Harbor would have taught that to anyone foolish enough to doubt it.

Sam waved to the balloonist, as he had to the aeroplane pilot. Unlike the pilot, the balloonist didn't see him. That was all right. The balloonist had more important things to look for than one friendly sailor.

With luck. Those were the key words. With luck, the *Swamp Fox* never would have spotted the *Ripple* in the first place, and Enos' ordeal in Confederate prison camps wouldn't have started. He hoped his luck was better now than it had been then.

There, in the east—not a star, but a plume of smoke. He turned to Fred Butcher and said, 'That's the Spanish ship—I hope."

'They were saying, before we set out, that ships from Argentina don't go into the open waters of the North Atlantic any more," Enos said. "They scurry across to Dakar in Africa where the ocean's narrowest, and then hug the coast the rest of the way up to England."

"England would starve without that Argentine grain and beef," Butcher said. "I wish they would starve, but we can't get at those ships, not way the hell out there we can't."

[redacted]

The Negro nodded. "I don't care if that's the neutral ship to take us home to the USA or a cruiser that's going to sink us," he said. "Either way, it's better off than being a colored fellow down in the CSA."

He was a lot skinnier than he had been when they were captured. Somehow, his rations had never come out quite right—and the Confederates had worked him harder than any white detainee. All that was supposed to be against the rules, which didn't keep it from happening.

[redacted]

"I believe it," Enos said. He peered across the ocean again. Now he could see a ship out there, not just smoke. It looked slow and boxy, not like a steam-powered shark. "That's a freighter—and I think that means it's the Spanish ship."

Closer and closer came the ship to the *Mercy*. Not only did it fly a huge Spanish flag, it also had Spain's red-and-gold flag painted on its flanks, the same way the *Mercy* bore the Red Cross. It looked gaudy, but that was better than looking like a juicy target.

An officer in the dark gray of the Confederate Navy shouted, "Detainees, line up by the boats for exchange!"

Along with the other crewmen from the *Ripple* and several dozen more U.S. sailors captured by Confederate submersibles, commerce raiders, and warships, George Enos hurried to take his place by a lifeboat. The officer, who had a list on a clipboard, went down the line of men, checking off names. He had to ask George who he was, but needed to put no such question to Charlie White, who stood behind Enos. "All right, nigger," he said, drawing a thick, black line through White's name, "we're rid of you. Got rid of your great-granddaddy a while ago, and now we're rid of you. What do you think of that?"

"Sir," Charlie White said (even angry, he was polite), "since you

ask, sir, I think that when my grandfather—that's who it was—ran away from Georgia, he knew what he was doing."

The Confederate officer stared at him. George Enos bit his lip. Half of him wanted to cheer Charlie; the other half feared the Negro's outspokenness would queer the exchange for everyone. The officer took a deep breath, as if to shout an order. But then, reluctantly, he shook his head. "If we weren't getting our own back for you, nigger, you'd pay plenty for that," he said, and wrote something next to the name through which he'd just lined. "And you'd better get down on your black knees and pray we don't ever catch you again, you understand me?"

"Oh, yes, sir," White answered. "I understand that real well." The officer gave him one last glare before continuing down the line.

"Good for you, Charlie," George whispered when the Rebel was out of earshot.

The Spanish ship—her name was *Padre Junipero Serra*— loomed up like a gaudily painted steel cliff. Her sailors had hung nets over the side, up which the detainees could scramble. A Spanish officer in a uniform fancy enough to have come out of a comic opera took the names of the sailors as they clambered up on deck and checked them off on a list he held on a clipboard exactly like the one his Confederate counterpart had used.

When everyone was accounted for, the Spaniard blew a whistle. A line of thin men in shabby clothes came up out of the hold and walked to the *Junipero Serra*'s lifeboats. *They look just like us,* George thought, and then shook his head—why should that surprise him? Only the sailors' drawls—an accent he heartily hoped never to hear again—said they came from the CS A, not the USA.

No doubt the Rebels on the *Mercy* scrutinized their returning detainees as closely as they had the men they were releasing. Some little while went by before they ran up signal flags: all proper, thank you. Black smoke poured from the *Mercy's* funnels. Picking up speed, she made a long, slow turn and started back toward her home port.

"I bet there's mines outside of Boston harbor, too, to keep the Rebs and the limeys from getting too close," Fred Butcher said. "World hasn't stood still while we were stuck in that camp."

A Spanish sailor, working with a few words of English and a lot of dumb show, took the exchanged detainees belowdecks to their cabins. Enos' would have been small and cramped with two men in it, and it held four. He didn't much care. Except for sleeping, he didn't plan on spending much time there.

If Charlie White had turned out chow anything like what the *Junipero Sena's* cooks served up, the *Ripple's* crew would have lynched him and hung his body on T Wharf as a warning to others.

Enos didn't care about that, either. He didn't think he'd starve to death before they got to New York.

The cigar a Spaniard gave him turned out to be nasty, too. He smoked it anyway, and went up on deck to look around. The Atlantic —what a surprise!—looked the same from the *Junipero Serra* as it had

from the *Mercy*. In the west, the sun was going down toward the ocean. Most ships on most oceans these days showed no lights at night: people who noticed them were too likely to be enemies. But the *Junipero Serra* lit herself up like a Christmas tree. She wanted everyone on both sides of the war to know exactly what she was. The more obvious she made it, the less likely she'd become a target.

Enos looked around again. He changed his mind. The Atlantic did seem different after all. "I'm going home," he said. Irving Morrell stared at the list Lieutenant Craddock had just handed him. "You know, Bill," he said mildly, "I don't have time for this." That made a pretty fair understatement. He'd been promoted to major after winkling the Rebs in southeastern Kentucky out of their tough hilltop position, and was now heading up the battalion where he'd commanded a company till a couple of weeks before.

"I understand that," Morrell said, trying for patience. "I handed on the orders myself, if you'll remember. But don't you think getting ready for our next move against the Rebs is more important than a witch hunt?"

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Morrell exploded. "All right, you hunted through the pay records. We have in this battalion"—-he glanced down at the list Craddock had given him—"four, count them, four Mormons. Has any one of them ever given the slightest sign of disloyalty?"

"Lying," Morrell corrected absently.

"Yes, sir, they might be lying, too," Craddock agreed with earnest ignorance. Morrell heaved a silent sigh. The lieutenant said, "But the orders require that they be identified and interrogated. As you see, sir, I've identified them."

Morrell sighed again, this time loud and long. "All right, Bill. Bring the Mormons to me and I'll have a talk with them." He didn't think a Kentucky forest the ideal spot for this sort of procedure, but this was where he happened to be.

"Yes, sir!" Now Craddock sounded happier. Things were going as they were supposed to on paper, which warmed the cockles of his heart. "I'll go get them. One at a time, of course, so they can't overpower the two of us, escape through the woods, and warn the Rebs of our plans."

Beyond arguing by then, Morrell said, "However you want to do it." Craddock hurried away, intent on his mission. If he'd used that much ingenuity figuring out the trouble real enemies could cause, he would have been a better soldier for it.

He soon returned with a young, towheaded private who looked confused and worried. Morrell would have looked the same way if he'd suddenly been hauled up before his commanding officer. The soldier came to stiff attention. "Dinwiddie, Brigham," he said, rattling off his pay number.

"At ease, Dinwiddie," Morrell said. "You're not in trouble." Lieutenant Craddock's face set in stern, disapproving lines. Morrell ignored him. Dinwiddie was from the company he'd commanded. He'd always thought of the youngster as too good to be true. Dinwiddie didn't drink, he didn't smoke, he didn't gamble, he wasn't out to lay every woman he set eyes on, and he obeyed every order promptly, cheerfully, and bravely. What little Morrell knew about Mormonism made him think it was a pretty silly religion, but it had to have something going for it if it turned out people like Dinwiddie. Picking his words with care, Morrell asked, "What do you think of what's going on in Utah these days, son?"

He'd never seen Dinwiddie's bright-blue eyes anything but open and candid. He did now. Shutters might have slammed down on the private's face. He spoke like a machine: "Sir, I don't know much about it."

"Glad to hear it," Morrell said, on the whole sincerely. "With things

the way they are, how do you feel about being a soldier in the United States Army?"

[redacted]

Morrell wondered what things were going to be like for Mormons in the USA after the Army finished crushing the Deseret revolt. They hadn't been easy before; they'd get harder now. It had been more suppression than persecution. What it was going to be ... Well, if Brigham Dinwiddie hadn't thought of that for himself, no point doing the job for him. "All right, Dinwiddie— dismissed," Morrell said. "Go on back to your unit."

The Mormon saluted and left. Lieutenant Craddock said, "Sir, forgive me, but I didn't think that was a very thorough interrogation."

[redacted]

Homer Benson, another private, again gave almost the same set of responses. Lieutenant Craddock's granite jaw stuck out like the Rock of Gibraltar as he listened, his face even more disapproving than it had been at the start of the interrogations. He didn't say anything when Morrell dismissed Benson back to his unit, but his stiff posture and even suffer manner spoke volumes.

Dick Francis, still another private, was the last man on the list Craddock had so laboriously compiled. He looked enough like Dinwiddie to have been his first cousin, and shared his diffident

manner. But when Morrell asked him what he thought about the Mormon uprising in Utah, he said, "I hope they kick the Army out of there, sir. That's our land. All the United States ever did was give us grief."

"Want a whole houseful of wives, do you?" Lieutenant Craddock said, a nasty leer on his face.

'That will be enough, Lieutenant," Morrell said sharply.

But the damage was done. "You see what I mean, sir?" Francis said. "Why should I love a government that looks at us like that? The way we get treated, we're the niggers of the USA."

From what Morrell had heard, the Mormons didn't treat Negroes as if they were their brothers. That, though, was neither here nor there. Morrell rubbed his chin. "What the devil am I supposed to do with you, Francis?" he asked. He hadn't expected this problem, assuming all the Mormons in the battalion would stay loyal. Craddock looked vindicated.

Dick Francis shrugged. "Why are you asking me, sir? You're the United States Army officer." While sounding perfectly respectful, he somehow managed to turn Morrell's title into one of reproach.

Morrell thought hard about doing nothing whatever to him. When the Rebs started shooting his way, he'd have to shoot back if he wanted to go on living. But Morrell couldn't take the chance, not with somebody who'd openly admitted he was hoping for the ruination of the USA.

"I'm going to send you back to divisional headquarters," he said. "I don't want any man on the front line whose first loyalty isn't to his country and to the men on either side of him."

He didn't know what Division HQ did with people like Francis. The Mormon soldier did; he'd had more incentive to learn such things. "Detention camp for me, then," he said, sounding not a bit put out. "I'll pray for you, sir. For a gentile, you're a good man."

Not knowing what to do with such faint praise, Morrell turned to Craddock. "Take him back to Division," he said. 'Tell them he doesn't feel in good conscience he can go on being a soldier." He tried not to

think about what lay in store for Francis. He hadn't made a point of learning about detention camps, either, but they bore an evil reputation.

"Yes, sir," Craddock said enthusiastically. He turned to Francis. "Let's go, you."

Watching them tramp away from the front, Morrell shook his head. War would have been a much simpler, easier business with politics out of the mix.

XII

Jefferson Pinkard was still plowing his way through bacon and eggs. He got up, though, when his wife set her cup in the tin sink, and grabbed her. "Give me a kiss before you go," he said. When she did, he tightened his arms around her. Her lips and tongue were warm and sweet and promising. "Mm," he said, still holding her. "I don't think I want you to leave."

She twisted away from him. "I got to, Jeff," she said. "You can just walk on over to the foundry, but I got to catch the trolley if I'm gonna get where I'm going. They dock you every minute you're not there, too. I'll see you tonight, honey." Her eyes told what she meant by that.

It was everything he could have hoped for and then some.

Reluctantly, he nodded, no matter how much he wanted to take her back to the bedroom now. By the time they got home tonight, they'd both be worn to nubs. "Miserable war," he growled, and sat back down to finish his breakfast.

[redacted]

Jeff did soak his breakfast dishes. The quicker Emily got them clean, the more time she'd have for other things. He'd been doing more chores around the house than he'd expected when she started working, just to keep her from being too tired to feel like making love. Life got crazy sometimes, no two ways about it.

He grabbed his dinner pail and headed out the door himself. Walking to work alone still felt unnatural, but Bedford Cunningham was toting a gun these days, not a sledgehammer or a crowbar or a long-handled slag rake. The Cunningham house looked sad and empty. Fanny was gone, too, on her way to work. Pinkard wondered if she and Emily were riding the same trolley car.

He had his own job to worry about, though, and trudged off to Sloss Foundry. You had to take care of your business first, and worry about the rest later. What he did didn't take a wagonload of brains, but his life had got a lot more complicated, these months since the shooting started.

[redacted]

Pericles, now... "Mornin', Pericles," Pinkard said. He talked to the young black man now, the same way he did with Agrippa and Vespasian. He'd decided life was too short to get yourself all in an uproar over little things, and working the day through without gabbing with the guy alongside reminded him of nothing so much as a fellow who'd had a fight with his wife trying to show her who was boss by clamming up. It didn't work at home, and it didn't work here, either.

"Mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," Pericles answered. There wasn't

anything wrong with the way he acted, not so you could put your finger on it there wasn't, but his manner was somehow different from those of the older Negroes who worked the night shift. Pericles acted as deferential to Jefferson Pinkard as they did, but—

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Pinkard knew the same thing happened with him, but he turned fiercely red from working up by the pour. Pericles seemed unaffected, as if he were made of cold-forged iron himself. He handled his tools with nonchalant confidence; a little more experience and he'd be as good a steel man as Bedford Cunningham ever was.

[redacted]

"Thank you, Mistuh Pinkard," Pericles answered. That was fine. So was his self-effacing tone of voice. But then he added, "Ain't so hard, is it? Once you get the hang of it, I mean."

Neither Agrippa nor Vespasian would have said anything like that. Even if they thought it, they wouldn't have said it. Every once in a while, though, Pericles came out with something like that, something that made the way he acted around Jefferson Pinkard seem just that: an act. You couldn't call him for being uppity; he never showed disrespect, nor anything close to it. But even a Negro with self-confidence was something new on Jeffs mental horizon.

[redacted]

"Sure did," Pinkard said. "That's funny: I was thinking about him not so long ago, when the kid up there was pouring. What about him?"

"It sure as hell don't," Pinkard agreed. He thought about it for a little while. "That grates so much, I don't know that I want to swallow it."

Pericles held up his right hand. The bottom of the pale patch on his palm showed below the edge of his leather glove. "I ain't makin' it up, swear to God I ain't," he said, now sounding completely serious.

"Emily will know," Jeff said. "I'll ask her when she gets home tonight. If it is so, it's a pretty low-down piece of dealing, that's all I've got to say."

" 'Fore I started workin' here, what I was thinkin' was that everybody white in this whole country had it easy, just on account o' he *was* white," Pericles said. "More I look, though, more I see it ain't like that. The white folks in the suits an' the collars an' the tall hats, they do things to the white factory hands, ain't so much different than happens to niggers every day."

'That there is a natural-born fact," Pinkard said, slamming one gloved fist into the palm of the other hand to emphasize his words. "Damn all we can do about it, though. They got the money, they got the factories, like you say. All we got is our hands, an' there's always plenty more hands around."

"Hard row everybody hoes these days," Pericles said. "Shouldn't be harder'n it's got to. The men who work in the factory, they should have some kind o' say in how the factory runs. Got more right to it

than the fat cats with the bulgin' money bags, you ask me." He paused, as if wondering whether he'd said too much.

But Jefferson Pinkard clapped his hands together. "Damn straight!" he said. 'Things'd run a hell of a lot smoother if somebody who knew what he was doin'—if somebody who'd done the work himself—had charge of things, not a big wheel with a diamond ring on his pinky."

I'm talking politics with a nigger, he realized. And if that didn't beat all, when Pericles couldn't even vote. But the young black man had touched Pinkard's own dissatisfaction with the way things were, and had brought it out into the open so he could see all of it for himself.

When the closing whistle wailed, Pinkard almost ran home, he was so anxious to find out from Emily whether Pericles had the straight goods about Herb's widow. He got back to the yellow cottage before his wife did; she was probably still on the trolley. He busied himself by setting the table for the two of them, as he'd got into the habit of doing when he made it home first. Bedford Cunningham, had he known about that, would have given him a hard time over it. But Bed was worried about machine-gun bullets these days, not china and cheap iron flatware.

The door opened. In came Emily. "You'll never guess what they've done to Daisy Wallace," she said.

"I got ways," he answered, a little smugly. "Sure does stink, don't it?"

Even over the stew of salt pork and hominy and green beans, both of them kept on fuming about the way the crucible man's widow had been treated. Borrowing Pericles' idea, Jeff said, "We'd all be better off, I reckon, if the workers had the say in how the factories got run."

"You ain't talkin' about me," Jefferson Pinkard declared. "Don't want no revolution—nothin' like it. Just want what's right and what's fair. Lord knows we ain't been gettin' enough of that."

"Well, that's so," Emily said, nodding. She ate the bite that had hung suspended. Neither one of them said much more about politics afterwards, though.

Jeff worked the pump while Emily did the dishes. Afterwards, he slid his arm around her waist. He didn't need to do much talking about that to let her know what he had in mind. By the way she smiled at him, she was thinking the same thing. They went into the bedroom. He blew out the lamp. In the darkness, the iron frame of the bed creaked, slow at first, building to a rhythm almost frantic.

Pericles, a Red? The idea was ridiculous. He was just a poor damned nigger sick of getting stuck with the short straw every draw. In his shoes, Jefferson figured he would have felt the same way. Hell, he *did* feel that way, thanks to the dislocations the war was bringing. He'd thought having a white skin made him immune to such worry, but he'd turned out to be wrong.

"Maybe we need another revolution, after all," he muttered. He was glad Emily hadn't heard that; it would have made her fret. But saying it seemed to ease his mind. He rolled over, snuggled down into his pillow, and fell asleep. A voice with a Southern twang: "Ma'am?" An arm encased in a butternut sleeve, holding up an empty coffee cup. "Fill me up again, if you please."

"Of course, sir," Nellie Semphroch said, taking the cup from the Rebel lieutenant colonel. "You were drinking the Dutch East Indian, weren't you?"

"Heard tell about that," the lieutenant colonel said. "Damned—pardon me, ma'am," he added with a glance toward Nellie, "I say, damned if I know whether they ought to pin medals on those niggers or take 'em out somewhere quiet, have 'em kneel down in front of a hole, and then shoot 'em, cover 'em up, and try to make out the whole thing never happened." All the Rebs around the table nodded. The lieutenant colonel nodded to the artillery captain. "You're closest to the matter, Jeb. What do you think about it?"

"I don't like it myself," the lieutenant colonel said. "We've got ourselves a white man's country. That's how it ought to be, and that's how it ought to stay."

"Well, gentlemen, you won't hear me disagreeing there," Jeb said, "but if it turns into a matter of winning the war with niggers or losing it without 'em, what do we do then?"

An uncomfortable silence followed that question. The major with the flask poured another shot into his cup. What he had in there was probably more hooch than coffee. That didn't keep him from gulping it down as if it were water. "Ahh!" he said again, and then, "What we do is, we pray to God to keep that cup from passing to us."

The major started telling a long, complicated story about a mule that had tried to kick an aeroplane to death. It would have been funnier if he hadn't had to go back and repeat and correct himself over and over again. *That's what the demon rum does to you,* Nellie thought; in her mind, all liquor got lumped together as rum. *It calcifies the brain, and serves you right.*

She had other tables on which to wait. The coffeehouse was jumping these days, business better than it had been since before the war, maybe better than it had ever been. Being able to get her hands on all the coffee she needed didn't hurt there. A lot of places in Washington had gone belly-up, just as she had been at the point of doing not so long before.

She'd wondered if anyone would ask how she managed to keep getting coffee beans in the middle of a tightly rationed town. But that hadn't happened. Even Edna hadn't been unduly curious. *She probably thinks I'm sleeping with someone,* Nellie thought sadly. It was, she feared, what her daughter would have done in her place. Or maybe Edna only noticed the beans were there and truly did think no more about it.

The next morning, Nellie and Edna were sweeping up the floor by the light of a couple of kerosene lamps—neither gas nor electricity had yet come back to this part of Washington. Outside, black night brightened toward dawn; a coffeehouse's customers started showing up early. As Nellie emptied the dustpan into a waste-basket, a light went on across the street.

A small pot of coffee was already on the coal stove, to give her and Edna an eye-opener before customers started coming in. Nellie poured a cup from the pot and set it in a saucer. "I see Mr. Jacobs is up and about, too," she said. "I'll take this over to him. It will be better than anything he's likely to make for himself."

"It is my pleasure," he said, and then, sipping again, "It *is* my pleasure. And it is so very kind of you to bring a cup to me every morning." He cocked his head to one side. "You hear all sorts of interesting news in a coffeehouse. What have you heard lately?"

Nellie told him what she'd heard lately, chief among the stories being the one about the Negroes who had served as artillerymen after the men for whom they labored went down, wounded or killed. She

recounted the tale in as much detail as she could. "The commander of the battery was a captain named Jeb, though I don't know his last name," she finished.

"I do not know this, either, but I think I may have friends who will." Mr. Jacobs nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, thank you for bringing this to my notice, Widow Semphroch. I think my friends may be most interested to hear it. I am very glad we were able to help you in your difficulty." He finished the coffee and set cup back in saucer. "Here you are. Your business grows busy before mine, and I would not keep you from it."

"Edna will take care of things till I get back," Nellie said. But she picked up the cup and saucer and hurried back to the coffeehouse even so. Leaving Edna alone in there with all those lecherous Confederates was asking for trouble.

And sure enough, when she walked inside, there sat the handsome artillery captain from the night before, with Edna pouring him a cup of coffee and looking, to Nellie's jaundiced eye, as if she was about to plop herself down in his lap. But the scene was outwardly decorous, so Nellie, in spite of what she was thinking, kept her mouth shut.

[redacted]

But Nellie had gone across the street for patriotic reasons, not vile ones. She said, "We were just talking—he's a good friend. Why don't you go back and scrub out the sinks?" *Why don't you wash out your mouth with soap while you 're doing it, too?*

[redacted]

Jeb followed Edna with his eyes till she disappeared. Then he seemed to remember the coffee growing cold in front of him. He gulped it down, set a coin on the table, and rose, setting his red-corded artilleryman's hat on his head. Touching the brim, he nodded to Nellie and said, "Obliged, ma'am."

Nellie nodded back. *Why not?* she thought. She was obliged to him, too, for running off at the mouth so freely the night before. And he

hadn't got his hands on Edna: the moonstruck way he looked at her proved that. She knew all about the ways men looked at women. If he'd had her, his stare would have been more possessive, more knowing. He was still wondering what she was like, and all the more twitchingly lustful for that.

Keep right on wondering, you stinking Reb, Nellie thought. Plowing the land had an ancient, timeless rhythm to it. Walking behind horses, guiding the plow, watching the rich, dark earth of Manitoba furrow up on either side of the blade made Arthur McGregor think of his grandfather, who had done the same thing back in Ontario; of his several-times-great-grandfather, who had done his best to scratch a living from the stony soil of Scotland; and, sometimes, of an ancestor far more distant than that, an ancestor who didn't speak English or Scots Gaelic, either, an ancestor who wore barely tanned skins and walked behind an ox scratching a furrow in the ground with a stick sharpened in the fire.

Like his ancestors, going back to that ancient, half-imaginary one, McGregor eyed the sky, worrying about the weather. If he hadn't, his son would have taken care of that for him. Here came Alexander, with a pitcher of cold water from the well. 'Think it's safe, getting the seed in the ground so soon, Pa?" Alexander asked, as he already had more than once. "A late frost and we're in a lot of trouble.'›

"They can't do that!" Alexander exclaimed. "We'd starve."

"And if the lot of us did, do you think they'd shed a single tear?" Arthur McGregor shook his head. "Not likely."

There, for once, his son had a hard time disagreeing with him. But Alexander found a different question to ask: "Even if we do get our crop in, will they let us keep enough of it to live on?"

His father sighed. "I don't know. But if we have no crop, I'm certain sure we'll not be able to live on that."

Arthur McGregor looked north. Like all his ancestors save a couple of lucky ones, he worried about war hardly less than weather. The front lay a good way off now—but who could guess where it would be when harvest time rolled around? Would the Yanks have overrun Winnipeg by then? Or would the Canadians and British have rallied

and pushed the thieves in green-gray back south over the border where they belonged? If you read the newspapers, you figured Canada was in a state of collapse. But if you believed all the lies the Americans made the papers tell, Winnipeg had already fallen twice, Montreal three times, and Toronto once— maybe for luck.

Alexander persisted: "How do you feel about raising a crop when the Americans will end up eating most of it while they're fighting Canada?"

"I could do that, I suppose, if I didn't need to make some cash to buy the things we can't raise on the farm," Arthur McGregor said. He eyed his son with genuine respect; the boy—no, the young man—could have come up with many worse notions. But— "If I try that, too, the other thing likely to happen to me is farming at the point of an American bayonet."

The only drawback to the movement was that it didn't exist. Arthur McGregor shook his head: no, it had more. "For one thing, son, with all the Yanks in Manitoba these days, they likely do have enough men to put a bayonet at every farm. And for another, the way they shoot hostages, they wouldn't wait more than a minute or two before they started shooting farmers. And once they shot a few, the rest would—"

"Rise up and throw the Yanks off our soil!" Alexander broke in. "Not that easy," McGregor said with a sigh. "I wish it was, but it's not. They shoot a few, most of the rest will do just what they say and nothing else but. Other thing is, there's too many Americans up here for us to throw 'em out even if we did rise up. Oh, we could make nuisances of ourselves, that I don't deny, but no more. The Yanks are bastards, sure enough, but we've seen too much to have the notion that they are

cowards and they are fools. They'd beat us down, and we'd spend our blood for nothing."

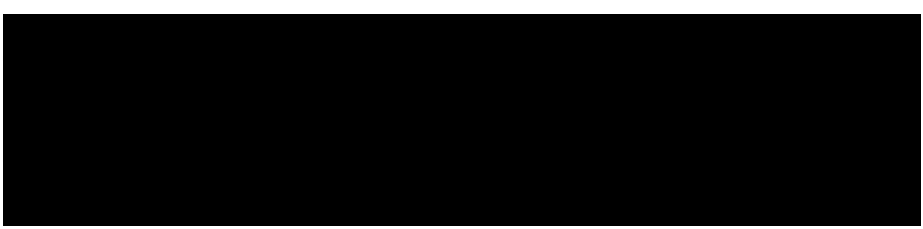
Alexander still looked mutinous. It was in the nature of youths his age to look mutinous: that is, to have their looks accurately reflect their thoughts. To quell the mutiny, McGregor didn't shout or bluster. Instead, he pointed to the roadway. Small in the distance but growing steadily larger as they approached, here came a battalion of U.S. soldiers marching north toward the front. In column of fours, they made a green-gray snake slithering across the land. The snake was having heavy going, the road still being muddy from melted winter snows.

After the troops came supply wagons topped with white canvas, lineal descendants of the Conestogas in which so many Americans—and not a few Canadians, too—had gone west to settle. Hooves and wagon wheels had even more trouble advancing through mud than did marching boots.

About half a mile behind that battalion came another, barely visible in the distance as yet but all too soon to approach in turn. "Do you see, son?" McGregor asked, his voice halfway between gentle and rough. 'There are just too many of them, and us spread too thin on the ground to be much use fighting 'em. Either we find some other way to drive 'em mad, or we do as much of what they tell us as we have to and trust to God it'll all come out right in the end."

'That's a bitter pill, Father," Alexander said.

"I never told you it wasn't," McGregor agreed. "And trusting in God is hard, because He does what He wants, not what we want. I don't know what else to say, though. We get along, and we wait, and we see what happens."



The horses stopped, snorting, their ears twitching. McGregor

stopped, too. For a moment, he failed to sense anything out of the ordinary. Then he too caught the low rumble out of the north. Far-off thunder, he would have thought the year before. He knew better now, an education he would willingly have done without. That was artillery. He hadn't heard it for a while. The front was a long way off these days. A bombardment had to be big to be noticed across so many miles.

[redacted]

And it was still roaring away when he took the horses out to the fields at sunrise. A train no doubt full of troops roared up the track toward the front; the road was full of marching men. By afternoon, ambulances and trains showing the Red Cross rolled south. Were their wounded the residue of advance or retreat? The hell of it was, Arthur McGregor had no way of knowing. For Remembrance Day, Flora Hamburger and the other Socialists, not only from the Tenth Ward and the rest of the Lower East Side but from all over New York, came to Broadway to watch the parade. Coming as it did just nine days before May Day, their own great holiday, it was a rival focus for the energy and allegiance of the American working class.

As always, the parade route was packed to commemorate the day of mourning. Flags fluttered from poles on top of every building, every one of them flown upside down, symbolizing the distress of the United States when they had had to yield to the forces of the Confederacy, England, and France, and to recognize the Confederate States' acquisition of Chihuahua and Sonora.

Burly policemen cordoned the Socialist Party delegation away from the rest of the crowd. Brawls broke out every year after the Remembrance Day parade. Now, with the war on, who could say what might happen?

Flora peered across Broadway, to the three-story brick building that housed Slosson's Cafe and Billiards. Men looked out through the plate-glass window of the pool hall, and men and women both watched from the cloth-awninged windows of the upper floors. She wondered

what sort of bosses squeezed profit from their labor.

"So many have lost husbands and brothers and sons," she said, nodding, "and for what? How are we better? What have we gained? How many more young men will have to die on the altar of capitalism and nationalism before the war ends?"

"All that is true," Maria Tresca put in, "but some will say, 'We have come this far, so how can we stop halfway?' This is the biggest stumbling block we have to overcoming the support of the masses for the war." Her sister Angelina nodded.

"It is a problem," Flora admitted. "I have run into it many times myself."

A few feet away, a policeman with a red Irish face heard that. He turned to Bruck and, smiling nastily, made motions as if of counting money. Then, with theatrical scorn, he turned his broad, blue-clad back.

"Do you see?" Flora said triumphantly. "We voted to finance the war along with everyone else, and now no one lets us forget it. I said at the time that was a mistake."

Behind them marched another group of veterans, these middle-aged, many of them plump and prosperous: men who had fought in the Second Mexican War. Where their predecessors seemed proud of what they had done even in defeat, these ex-soldiers, some of them, had almost a hangdog air, as if they felt they should have done better but didn't quite know how. Then came Count von Bernstorff, the German ambassador, fantastically bemedaled and riding in a limousine flanked by a color guard of German soldiers carrying the black-white-red banners of the German Empire. Those drew both cheers and jeers, many of the jeers either in German or in Yiddish, close enough to German for the spike-helmeted soldiers in field-gray to understand.

"Germany taught the USA to ignore the needs of the proletariat!" Herman Bruck shouted, shaking his fist.

[redacted]

The mixture of applause and catcalls went on after the German ambassador and his escort passed. Behind him came a troop of men hardly younger than the Second Mexican War veterans: Soldiers' Circle members of the first class, men who had served their two years in the Army after conscription was passed in the wake of two lost wars.

Flora and Bruck and Maria and Angelina Tresca and all the Socialist representatives joined with their Party members in the crowd in shouting abuse at the marching men of the Soldiers' Circle, each successive troop from the conscription class a year later than its predecessor. Men who stayed in the Soldiers' Circle after they served their time were apt to be of a reactionary cast of mind: men who gladly served as strikebreakers, scabs, goons, men to whom even Teddy Roosevelt was a dangerous radical for worrying about the untrammeled power of the bosses.

[redacted]

With a roar of rage, the fellow he'd cursed rushed at him, pulled out a knife, and plunged it into his side. The Soldiers' Circle man went down with a groan, blood bright on his white shirt. Four of his comrades threw the man with the knife to the ground, kicked the blade away, and methodically began stomping the stabber.

[redacted]

Flora Hamburger turned her back on it. To her fellow Socialists, she cried, "Stay here! Don't join it! Don't let the reactionaries exploit us in the newspapers!"

Angelina and Maria Tresca loudly added their voices to Flora's. Flora looked around for support from Herman Bruck. To her dismay, she saw him, along with several other hot-blooded Socialists, running straight toward the men from the Soldiers' Circle. They had their own rallying cry: "Direct action!" The Socialist call to arms had rung out in mines and factories and lumber camps and fields across the USA for a generation, but now ... ? Flora shook her head in dismay. The place and the timing could hardly have been worse.

Riot spread up the parade, toward the Marine marching band at the front. From that direction, Flora heard a couple of explosions louder and fiercer than pistol shots. "Bombs!" she exclaimed. "They're throwing bombs!"

She didn't know who *they* were, but she feared with sick horror the Socialists would get the blame. In the 1880s and 1890s, *direct action* had often meant more than words; the Party's past had blood in it.

Another bomb went off, this one frighteningly close. Injured men and women screamed. Above their cries rose a great voice bellowing, "Justice for Utah!"

Absurdly, relief flooded Flora: maybe the hard hand of the government would land on the Mormons, not on the Party. She was ashamed of herself a moment later. *Do it to them, not to us* was not the answer; the government, no matter how TR thundered about swinging a big club, had no right to oppress anyone.

Analyzing that in fullness, though, would have to wait. She grabbed Maria and Angelina. "We'd better get out of here," she said. The secretaries nodded vehemently.

It was easier said than done. A lot of the crowd was trying to flee the brawls and battles that roiled in the middle of Broadway, but almost as many people, women as well as men, were pressing forward, trying to get into the fray. Yet another pistol shot rang out, this one terribly close, terribly loud. Angelina Tresca shrieked. Blood, vividly, impossibly red, stained the white front of her shirtwaist. She stood staring in astonishment. When she opened her mouth to say something, only more blood came from it—not a word. Blood poured from her nose, too. She swayed, toppled, fell.

More *pop-pop-pops* went off, incongruously cheerful. Maria's shriek was louder than her sister's. She couldn't even run to Angelina; the crowd, panicked by gunfire, swept them apart. When Maria tried to go against it, she was swept off her own feet. Flora dragged her up before she could get too badly trampled, then dragged her away.

[redacted]

Maria Tresca didn't react, staring numbly. Maybe she was too numb to think too much about Angelina yet.

"It would be better if they knew not to do such things," Flora said, not wanting to think about Angelina, either, "but we have to educate them if they don't."

She wished her sister had stuck a hat pin in Yossel Reisen. But no, that wasn't fair. He hadn't taken anything from Sophie she hadn't wanted to give. It was only what he'd given her in return...

A man stepped on her foot. He didn't try to feel her up; he just went on his way as if she didn't exist. That she didn't mind so much; it could have happened at any time in the streets of New York City, the biggest, most indifferent city in the USA. In a way, in fact, it almost comforted her, showing the world wasn't devoid of normality even in the midst of riot.

Off Broadway, things were quieter. Flora and Maria walked quickly down Twenty-third Street, to put some distance between themselves and the insanity that had swallowed the Soldiers' Circle parade.

"Trouble will come from this," Flora said grimly, and then amended that: "More trouble, I mean." Back behind them, Angelina was almost surely dead.

[redacted]

"Shame!" Flora cried, and Maria added her voice an instant later. Flora went on, "You have no business beating a man for what he believes, only for what he does. Haven't you heard of the Constitution of the United States?" Yes, thinking of politics was easier than thinking of death unleashed on the streets of New York.

The policeman stamped toward her and Maria, nightstick still upraised. To Flora's relief, at the last moment he discovered he didn't quite have the crust to beat two women. Voice strangled with rage, he said, "Get out o' here this minute, or I'll run the both of you in."

"Get out!" the policeman screamed. His face was crimson, furious. He spat on the sidewalk. "And *that* for the God-damned Constitution of the United States. There's a war on now, and the gloves are off. *Get* out!"

A Negro maid lifted her feather duster from the windowsill—not that she'd been working hard anyhow, but an excuse to stop was always welcome—in one of the forward-facing rooms at Marshlands and said to Scipio, "Here come de man from de *Mercury* wid a paper for we."

He checked for himself before going to the front hall to open the door; the rest of the staff was not above playing small jokes. But, sure enough, here came Virgil Hobson on a mule, carrying with him a copy of the *Charleston Mercury*. Anne Colleton got the *Daily Courier,* too, and the *South Carolinian* and *Southern Guardian* from Columbia. Marshlands was a good way out of the way for all of them, but you

declined to render its mistress a service at your peril.

[redacted]

"Afternoon," Virgil said. He walked straight, but very gently, as if touching the ground hurt. That meant he was after a binge, not in the middle of one. He thrust the *Mercury* at Scipio. "Here y'are." Without waiting for a reply, he turned and walked back toward his long-eared mount.

[redacted]

On reading past the headlines, the other thing he noted, less happily, was that the U.S. Army, despite the claims of unrest in its ranks, was going about the business of keeping a lid on New York City. The people they were putting a lid on might be Socialists, but they were white folks. If damnyankee soldiers would put down an uprising from white folks, what would Confederate troops do if—when—their Negro laborers rose up under the red flag?

He was afraid he knew the answer to that question. He'd tried telling it to the Reds among the field hands here. They kept laughing at him. He resolved to hang on to this newspaper and the others that came in over the next few days, to let Cassius and his fellow revolutionaries see what happened in the real world. How could you expect a band of Marxist fanatics to seize power in a country? They didn't seem to understand how big a place a country was.

"No," she said crisply into the mouthpiece. "I told you to buy, not sell. You shall carry out my instructions as I give them, sir, or I will find another broker and you will find a lawsuit... What? ... An oversight? I have no more tolerance for oversights than I have for deliberate errors. Whatever it was, this is your first, last, and only warning. Good day." She hung up, muttered something sulfurous under her breath, and then, anger expunged, smiled at Scipio. "I hope you have better news for me than that chucklehead did."

Her eyes widened. Her mouth twisted into something halfway between a smile and the expression a tiger wears on spotting a juicy sheep. Scipio was heartily glad that expression bore on the newspaper, not on him. The mistress of Marshlands rapidly read through the stories having to do with the troubles in the USA, pursuing them into the inner pages. When she finished, she looked up at Scipio and asked, "Did you take any notice of these?" She paused. "You must have. You told me the news was good."

"Yes, ma'am," Scipio repeated. Some of the sweat springing out on his face came from having to wear tailcoat, vest, and boiled shirt on a muggy spring day that threatened summer. Part, though, came from his own fear. Sharp as Anne Colleton was, she looked right at Negroes—at one person in three in the CSA—without even seeing them ... or maybe seeing them only as laborers, not as people. An awful lot of white folks saw—or didn't see—blacks the same way. Anne Colleton was more clever than most of them, though. If she ever really looked instead of taking things for granted—

She looked... toward a clock on the wall. Her expression faded to one of discontent. "Probably too late for Cassius to bring in a couple of turkeys before nightfall. Go tell him to hunt tomorrow. I want to lay on a fancy supper then."

Normally, Scipio dreaded that invitation, though he found it impossible to refuse. Today, though, he thought he would do more talking than usual. As soon as Cassius shut the door to give them privacy, he began, "You know what de Socialists do in New York City? They rise up, an' do Jesus! they make the USA—"

Scipio stared. "But de newspaper jus' say today—"

"White folks' paper." Cassius laced his voice with even more scorn than before. "Dey got to wait, dey got to decide what they want they good little boys an' girls to hear about. De buckra, you give bad news to they, they get res'less."

"How you know 'fo' de newspaper come?" Scipio asked.

[redacted]

Saying a thing didn't make it so. Scipio knew that. He'd even tried telling Cassius and Island and the other Reds as much. They didn't listen to him, any more than the preacher would have if he'd denied Jesus. If they had men on wireless sets—maybe, just maybe, they had reason not to listen.

[redacted]

A Confederate bullet smacked the other side of the bricks. Maybe it had been aimed at him, maybe fired at random. He had no way of knowing. What he did know was that the bricks were good and solid, and would keep rifle and machine-gun fire from him, as long as he stayed low. Anybody who hadn't learned to stay low by now was already dead or wounded.

[redacted]

Paul Andersen crawled up beside him. "Ain't this fun?" he said, also pausing to reload.

"Now that you mention it," Chester said, "no."

"Nobody's trying to kill you back there?" Andersen exclaimed. "You mean you didn't think they were trying to bore you to death?"

"Hmm," Martin said, and then, "Yeah, maybe they were. I mean, if you don't like lemonade and you don't like hot water that stinks like somebody cut the cheese in it, not a hell of a lot to do back there."

"I hear they got saloons—hell, I hear they got whorehouses—in leave towns on what used to be Confederate territory," Andersen said. 'The Army has charge there, and the Army knows what soldiers want to do when they get away from the front for a while. But White Sulphur Springs, mat's back in the USA, and it ain't the Army in charge. It's the damn preachers."

"No whiskey," Chester Martin agreed. "No women, except the *Red* Cross girls handing out the lemonade. A couple of them were pretty, but once I'm back there and cleaned up, I want to do more than look at a woman, you know what I'm saying?"

"You bet I do," Andersen answered. "Me, too. Hell, looking is harder, some ways, than not being around 'em at all."

"I think so, too," Martin said. "I—" He shut up then, and flattened himself out among the bricks, because the Rebs started throwing whizz-bangs into the neighborhood. The shells burst all around, throwing deadly fragments every which way.

The barrage—mostly those damned three-inchers that seemed to fire almost as fast as machine guns, but some bigger cannon, too—went on for about half an hour. Stretcher-bearers hauled groaning, thrashing U.S. soldiers back toward the doctors. Some men didn't need stretcher-bearers. If all that was left of you was your leg from the knee down, your foot still in your boot, doctors wouldn't do you any good.

As soon as the bombardment stopped, Martin and Andersen popped up like a couple of jack-in-the-boxes. Sure as hell, here came the

Rebs, dashing forward through the ruins of Big Lick. They ran low and bent over, not wanting to expose themselves any more than they had to. *Veteran troops,* Martin thought; new fish had less sense.

[redacted]

He squeezed the trigger. The Springfield slammed against his shoulder. A Reb pitched over on his face. Martin worked the bolt and fired again. Another Confederate soldier fell, this one grabbing at his arm. Martin seemed to have all the time in the world to swing his rifle toward a third figure clad in butternut, to squeeze the trigger, to watch the fellow topple.

Beside him, Paul Andersen was also banging away. Somewhere not far off, a machine gun started hammering. A lot of Rebels went down. But a lot of them kept coming, too. They pitched improvised grenades at the U.S. soldiers. Martin didn't like the idea of carrying those damn things around—if a bullet hit one, it would blow a hole in you they could throw a dog through. But he didn't like being on the receiving end of grenades, either. It was as if the infantry started having its own artillery.

Shouts of alarm from the left made him whip his head around. The Confederates were in among the U.S. trenches and foxholes, trying to drive the Americans back to White Sulphur Springs without benefit of leave.

[redacted]

An unmistakable Rebel leaped out from behind a pile of rubble and swung one of those short-handled shovels at Chester Martin's head. He threw up his rifle just in time to fend off the blow. The force of it

staggered him even so. The Confederate, intent on his work, drew back the shovel for another blow. Before he could deliver it, a bullet—from a U.S. soldier or a Rebel, Martin never knew—caught him in the shoulder. The spade spun from his hands. "Ahh, shit," he said loudly. "You got me now, Yank."

The U.S. soldiers stripped their prisoners of ammunition, grenades, and knives, and of their pocket watches and cash, too. None of the Confederates said a word about that. Several of them had U.S. coins and bills in their pockets, which argued they'd stripped a prisoner or two themselves.

"Hammerschmitt, Peterson, take the Rebs back to where they can deal with 'em," Martin said. The rest of the U.S. soldiers looked enviously at the two men their sergeant had chosen: they'd get away from the front and the fighting, if only for a little while.

As Specs Peterson and Joe Hammerschmitt gestured with their bayoneted rifles to get the prisoners of war moving, Chester Martin answered, "Listen, Rebs, I'll give you one warning: whatever you do, don't let 'em ship you to White Sulphur Springs."

The sergeant nodded, grateful for the advice, then looked puzzled when the U.S. soldiers started laughing. "Come on, you lugs," Peterson

said, sounding as fierce as any man with glasses could. Hands still high, the Confederates shuffled off into captivity.

"You're a regular devil, Sarge, you are," Paul Andersen said as the U.S. soldiers shared out the weapons and other loot they'd got from the Rebels. Four men all wanted a knife with a brass handle made as a knuckle-duster; they had to go down on their knees and roll dice to decide who got to keep it.

"Who, me?" Martin said. "Listen, how much difference is there really between a prisoner camp and where they sent us? You can't do what you want either place, now can you?"

"Hadn't looked at it like that," the corporal admitted after a little thought.

"And I'll tell you another thing," Martin said, warming to his theme: "we can joke however goddamn much we want, but they're both better than being at the front." This time, Paul Andersen nodded at once.

XIII

Usually, Scipio or one of the lesser servants looked out from the front windows to see who was coming. This time, Anne Colleton did the job herself. It would not give the Negroes any wrong ideas about her place and theirs in the Marshlands scheme of things, not when the motorcar she was waiting for had her brother in it.

She wondered whether she ought to give Tom a sisterly hug and a kiss or box his foolish ears for him. The first clue she'd had that he was anywhere but up in Virginia was a telephone call from Columbia less than an hour before. He'd just got off the train, he'd said, and was on his way.

Scipio came up to her, tall, imposing, perfectly formal. "Have you any special suggestions on how we may make your brother's stay as comfortable and pleasant as possible?" he asked in his pipe-organ voice.

Anne waved him away. "I leave it in your hands, Scipio. I can't think now. Maybe I'll have some ideas later. If I do, I'll tell you." The butler bowed and withdrew. Since the start of the war, he'd pulled back even further than usual into the shell of service he wore around himself like

armor. He'd always been a private person, even before his training for high service, but now it was as if he didn't want anyone having the slightest inkling of what he was thinking or feeling.

Stinking war—it oppresses everyone, she thought. *Sometimes I wish I were a simple field nigger, so I wouldn't have to think about it.* But even the plantation hands were thinking about the war, thinking how they could make money from it by going to work in the factories instead of staying here where they belonged and raising cotton. Anne sighed. Even for a field nigger, life wasn't simple any more.

She drew herself straighten All right. Life wasn't simple. Up till now, she'd always reveled in complication, and profited from it, too. Nostalgia belonged to the last century. If you didn't look ahead, you were in trouble.

Then all such worries vanished from her head. Here came the motorcar, kicking up a cloud of dust from the red-dirt path that led up to the mansion. The Negro driver stopped the automobile, leaped out of it, and got out Tom Colleton's bags. Then he opened the door to the rear seat and let out Tom, who handed him a silver coin that sparkled in the sun. Tom picked up his own bags and carried them to Marshlands' front door.

He wouldn't have done that before the war started, Anne thought, and then, an instant later, with concern more maternal than sisterly, *He's gotten so thin.*

She hurried to the door. Scipio somehow got there ahead of her; he shared with cats the ability to leave later than you did but to arrive sooner anyhow, and without seeming to have crossed the intervening space. He opened the door, letting in the warm May air, and said, "Welcome home, Captain Colle—" He stopped, for a moment looking quite humanly surprised. Tom Colleton wore a single star on each collar tab. Scipio corrected himself: "Welcome home, *Major* Colleton."

Anne threw herself into her brother's arms. He dropped his bags and squeezed her tight. After the joyous hellos and I-love-yous and good-to-see-yous, Anne said indignantly, "You didn't tell me you've been promoted again."

Tom shrugged. "We've seen a lot of casualties. Somebody has to step up and do the work." When he'd joined the Army, bare days after war broke out, he'd put a fancy plume in his hat and gone off gaily, like a knight heading out on a Crusade. Now he sounded both tired and

altogether matter-of-fact about his business, more like a cabinetmaker than a cavalier.

He looked tired, too. His forehead had lines that hadn't been there the year before—he was eighteen months younger than Anne—and he carried dark circles under his eyes. His cheeks were hollow; a long, pink scar seamed one of them. Hesitantly, Anne reached up to touch it. "You didn't tell me about this, either."

Her brother shrugged again. "Got kissed by a shell fragment. Battalion doctor's assistant sewed it up. I didn't lose any duty time, so I didn't think it was worth talking about."

"You've changed," Anne said, perhaps more wonderingly than she should have. The young man who'd gone off to war had been the little brother she'd always known: witty, easygoing, not too effectual—certainly not effectual enough to want to put in any work at operating Marshlands when his sister seemed happy enough doing it all. And that had suited Anne fine; she rejoiced in the power it gave her. But when she looked into the eyes of the lean near-stranger who was her own flesh and blood, she didn't know what she saw. It flustered her. Tom had always been so easy to read, so predictable.

Scipio scooped up the bags. "I shall put these in your room, sir," he said.

"My room," Tom echoed, as if the phrase were in a foreign language. Slowly, he nodded. "Yes, go ahead and do that, Scipio." The butler carried the bags into the mansion. Tom took one step to follow him, then stopped, still outside. "Very strange," he murmured. "Unbelievable."

"What is?" Anne asked. She wasn't used to being unable to follow his train of thought.

"That all this"—Tom waved at the Marshlands mansion—"and all this"—the next wave encompassed the many square miles of the Marshlands estate—"is mine—part mine; excuse me, dear sister. And excuse me for sounding not quite like my old self. For most of the past nine months, my horizons have been limited to a hole in the ground and whether there'd be enough beans in the pot for my men and me. Coming back to this is like falling asleep and dreaming you've gone to heaven."

"It should be like waking from a nightmare," Anne said. "This is where you live. This is where you belong." At least for as long as you don't

get in my hair while you 're here. You never used to. Will you now? Harder to tell.

Her brother's mouth set in a hard line: another expression she'd never seen on his face till now. "I'm going back to the front in three days' time," he said, his voice flat. "Till the war is done, this is the dream. And when the war is done, it's liable to disappear like a dream, too."

"What *are* you talking about?" Of all the people in the world, Anne should have been able to keep up with—to keep ahead other brother. Ever since they were tiny, she'd been the clever one, the dominant one, in the family. She'd taken that so much for granted, it had never occurred to her things might change.

"Never mind." Tom stepped past her, into the hallway. His grin was more like the one she'd known, though not quite the same. "Feels good to get out of the sun." He kept on walking, and looked up toward the second-floor galleries. Like the grin, his chuckle had something new in it—restraint, maybe. Pointing, he said, "Still got the funny pictures hanging on the walls, do you?"

"Some of them," Anne said; he'd teased her about the exhibition ever since she'd had the idea for it. "Marcel Duchamp is still here, too."

"Is he?" Tom's lips thinned again. "Do we have any liquor left, and how many yellow babies are due?" That wasn't teasing, it was cold contempt, one more thing she wasn't used to hearing from him. That it matched her own feelings about the Frenchman was, next to the unaccustomed harshness, a small thing.

She decided taking Tom literally might be the best way to defuse the situation: "There's enough whiskey left for you to have a drink, if you want one." When her brother nodded, she called for Scipio. As usual, he answered the call faster than should have been possible. "Two whiskeys over ice," she told him. He bowed and disappeared again.

"Ice," Tom said. "Saw plenty of that this past winter. Not in my drink, though." He shook himself, as if realizing at last he really was away from the trenches of the Roanoke valley. "I heard from Jacob not long before I hopped on the train down here. He's well, or was then."

"I got a letter from him just the other day," Anne answered. "He said it looks like the Yankees are up to something in Kentucky, but nobody seems to know what it is or when the storm breaks."

"Won't be long now," Tom said. "Roads should all be dry. They can

build their supply dumps up to as big as they want them, put their reserves in place. As soon as they're ready, they'll hit us." He spoke again like someone discussing the ins and outs of a business he knew well. Musingly, he went on, "Show probably would have started there already if they hadn't had to pull men to deal with the revolt in Utah."

Anne nodded. "Between the Mormons and the Socialists, they have so much trouble inside their own borders, it hurts them when they try to fight us." She spoke with vindictive relish. Scipio returned then, two tumblers full of amber whiskey gleaming on a silver tray. Ice clinked gently. Anne took one drink, Tom the other. She said, "It's not like that here, thank God. We all stand behind the cause."

To her amazement, her brother threw back his head and laughed. "This is the dream, all right," he said, and knocked back his whiskey with a flick of the wrist. "You're not living in the real world, that's certain." Being the object of her brother's scorn angered her. "Who in the Confederate States throws bombs and rises up against the government?" she demanded, and then answered her own question: "No one, that's who."

"No?" Tom set the tumbler down hard on the tray Scipio still held. 'These past few months, they've executed a couple of dozen niggers in my division alone. Reds, every last one of 'em, out-and-out Reds. Worse than plain old Socialists and Mormons put together, if you ask me."

"That's not the same as—" Anne began.

Her brother cut her off, one more thing he wouldn't have done—wouldn't have dared do—before the war. "And that's just in my division alone. Others, it's been worse. And God only knows how deep the rot has spread, away from the front."

"I've heard that. I don't believe it," Anne said firmly. "It's not a problem here, I can tell you that much."

When she used that tone of voice, it was supposed to make Tom shut up and knuckle under. It always had in the past. It didn't any more. "Everybody says the same thing—till they get their noses rubbed in it," he told her. "A plantation this size, if there's not a Red cell somewhere on it, I'll eat my hat." He pointed to the brown felt he'd hung just inside the door, and turned a hard and thoughtful gaze on Scipio.

That was too much for Anne. "Tom, stop this at once, or you'll make me sorry you've come home," she said. "Scipio has raised both of us

since we were babies. The idea that he could be a Red— it's disgusting. That's the only word I can find for it."

"Things change." Tom Colleton swung back toward her. He leaned forward a little. The implied threat of attack made Anne take half a step back before she realized what she'd done. And her brother did attack, though only with words: "You're the one who's always going on about change. It's not as much fun as you make it out to be, not all the time it isn't. And if you think it can't happen right here at Marshlands, you're deliberately blinding yourself."

Anne stared, first at him, then at Scipio. Her brother's face was grim and intent. Scipio showed nothing of what he thought, but then, he never did. Anne finished her whiskey, then, even harder than her brother had done, slammed the tumbler down onto the tray the butler was holding. A chunk of ice jumped out, leaving a little wet trail as it skidded across the polished silver surface.

"Get me another drink, Scipio." She kept her voice low, but it was brittle with fury even so. The butler hurried away. When he came back a moment later with the second whiskey, she drank it fast, too. She could feel the liquor building a transparent wall between her and the world, but even that numbing could not disguise the fact that her kid brother's homecoming, far from being the celebration she'd expected, looked more like a disaster.

Percy Stone was dressed in his flying togs and had his camera by his side, but that hadn't kept him from sitting in on a poker game while he waited for Jonathan Moss to finish getting ready to fly. By the expression on his face, it hadn't kept him from losing money to Lefty the mechanic, either. He was in good company there; almost everybody rash enough to sit down with Lefty ended up sadder, if not necessarily wiser.

"Oh, thank God—duty calls," Stone said when Moss came in. "I think I'd sooner go up there and get shot at than stay here and get skinned." Amid laughter, he studied his cards, then tossed a big silver coin into the pot. "Raise a dollar."

"And other one." The mechanic named Byron tossed in a folded bill.

Two other players threw in their hands with various noises of disgust. Lefty said, "I'll see those and bump it another three." He made his five dollars with a gold half-eagle.

"That's enough for me," Stone said, and folded. Byron looked harassed,

but called—and promptly regretted it. Chuckling, Lefty scooped up the pot.

"I could have told you not to play cards with Lefty," Moss said as Stone picked up the camera and the two fliers walked out to their Wright 17. "As a matter of fact, I *have* told you not to play cards with Lefty."

"It's the Socialist in me," Stone answered. Moss let out a questioning grunt. The observer explained: "I make more money than Lefty does, but at the poker table we redistribute the wealth." He shook his head. "I wouldn't mind it so much if the redistribution

Moss blew air out through his lips with a snuffling noise, like a horse. "I'm a Democrat," he said. "Always have been, probably always will be. If I earn something, I figure it's mine, and I want to keep it. I don't much like riots, either, so Socialism was a hard sell for me even before the Remembrance Day horrors."

"That was pretty bad, if you believe what you read in the newspapers," Stone agreed. He lifted the camera into his cockpit, then climbed in after it. Once he'd set it in the mount, though, he added, "Of course, if you believe what you read in the newspapers, we've already won the war four or five times by now, which does make me wonder what the two of us are doing, going up in this contraption." He slapped the doped linen fabric covering the side of the fuselage. It was taut, and thumped like a drum.

He had such a disarming manner to him that even political arguments that could have turned hot and heavy in a hurry got defused. "Earning our salaries, so you can give yours to the groundcrew," Moss replied, scrambling into the forward cockpit/

"You have less faith in my card-playing than 1 do, and I didn't think that was possible," Stone said. He whacked the pilot on the shoulder with a length of rubber tubing to which a cheap tin funnel had been attached. "Stick this up to your ear and let's see how it does."

The rubber tubing was of the sort that ran from the speedometer to the pitot tube out at the far end of the wing. Moss undid the funnel and stuck it through one ear hole of his flying helmet, then fixed it to the tube again. Stone tossed him another length of rubber tubing with funnel. That one Moss left in his lap; his observer would have the other end pressed to one ear.

Stone's voice sounded metallically in his ear: "Can you hear me all right?"

Moss spoke into the funnel of the second tube: "Yeah, sure, down here when it's quiet. How we'll do at eight thousand feet with the engine going is liable to be a different ball of wax." He chuckled. "This isn't a whole hell of a lot fancier than tying a couple of tin cans to a string, the way we did when we were kids."

"Sure isn't," Stone agreed. "They don't pay off for looks, though, not in this man's army they don't. If we can make it work, somebody else'll make it pretty, sooner or later."

The groundcrew men came out to help them get the two-seater started. Lefty grinned through gibes about bulges in his trousers that had more to do with his financial endowments than his masculine ones. He spun the prop. The Wright's motor buzzed to life at once.

Tachometer, gasoline gauge, gasoline-flow indicator, gasoline feed system pressure indicator, oil gauge, oil-pressure gauge, radiator temperature indicator—all the instruments were good. Moss waved to the groundcrew men. Byron and another mechanic, a fellow named Edwin, pulled the chocks away from the wheels. Moss advanced the throttle. The Wright 17 bounced down the airstrip. After enough bounces, it didn't come back to earth.

Percy Stone's voice sounded in his ear: "Can you hear me?"

He shifted the other tube to his mouth. "I sure can. Can you hear me?" When the observer assured him he could, Moss went on, "Say, this is great. We can really talk to each other now." Percy Stone promptly started singing "America the Beautiful." Moss made a hasty amendment: "Maybe it's not so great after all."

Both young men laughed, pleased with their ingenuity. More seriously now, Stone said, "We have to spread the word about this. Biggest problem two-seaters have is that the pilot and observer can't talk back and forth."

"I've seen that with us working together," Moss agreed. "Now that we know pitot tubing makes a good speaking tube, we could come up with better earpieces and mouthpieces than these funnels, I bet. Playing with them makes me feel like I'm home from school on summer vacation."

"That's not bad," Stone said. "Better than thinking about this like it is school, anyway. If you flunk here, they don't make you take the class over. You get expelled—for good."

"Yeah," Moss said; it wasn't anything on which he cared to dwell. He peered ahead. "Front's coming up. Get ready for some hate."

Land over which the American and Canadian armies had already fought was barren, chewed to shreds, as if an insane giant had gnawed on it for a while and then, deciding it wasn't to his taste, spit it out again. Over the front itself, smoke and dust rose high into the air, a legacy of the shelling the two sides kept trading. Percy Stone said, "You'd think we'd have fired enough shells by now to kill all the Canadians there are, by hitting them over the head if no other way."

"Don't I wish we had," Moss said, "them and the Englishmen both." British reinforcements for the dominion hadn't come in any great numbers, but the ones who had come had stiffened the Canucks' will to keep fighting in spite of being outnumbered and outgunned by the USA. And, in spite of being outnumbered and outgunned, the Canadians were a long way from out for the count.

As soon as the Wilbur flew over the front, the Canucks proved that. They gave the American aeroplane all the hate anyone could want. Black puffs of smoke filled the sky all around the Wright machine. The ones that burst close sounded like big, mean dogs barking: *waugh! waugh! waugh!*

"Nice to know they love us," Stone said. Moss laughed. He sped up and slowed down and turned now off to the left of his course, now off to the right, all in an effort to keep the gunners down on the ground from putting a lucky shell right where the aeroplane would be. He had never been sure dodging and changing speed did that much to improve the odds, but they couldn't hurt.

"The front hasn't moved much for a while," he said sadly. He'd expected things to pick up with the coming of spring, but it hadn't happened yet. He knew, from seeing the mud back at the aerodrome, how thick and clinging it was. Trying to advance in it was anything but easy. The Canuck and British offensive south from Winnipeg had started off alarmingly well, but the enemy proved to have no easier time advancing through muddy, broken country than did the Americans.

Once he flew past the reach of American artillery, the towns and rich farmlands of southern Ontario gave him much more attractive things to view than he'd had till then. The farms glowed green with early growth: the Canucks not yet at the front were getting in what crops they could.

Even the farmlands, though, bore scars. Looking down and seeing the same thing, Percy Stone said, "They're digging in for a long fight." Digging in the Canadians and British certainly were. Trench lines drew dark brown furrows across green fields every mile or so, with zigzag communication trenches running back from one set to the next. Just as in the Niagara Peninsula, if the U.S. Army blasted them out of one position, they'd fall back to the next and keep on fighting.

"They fight hard, too," Moss said, giving the foe grudging respect. "I go to bed every night getting down on my knees and thanking God for not making me an infantryman."

"Ahh-men!" Percy Stone sang out, as if at the end of a hymn. Then, in an entirely different tone of voice, he said, "Jesus!" He amplified that: "Bandit on our tail, and diving on us!"

Moss swung the Wright's nose up till the aeroplane almost stalled, then rolled hard to the right, trying to slip away from the pursuer he hadn't seen. Fear and excitement ran through his body, a jolt stronger than 151 -proof rum. The rum wouldn't kill you, even if, come the next morning, you wished it had. The enemy, though—

He thanked God for the speaking tube. Without it, Stone would have had the devil's own time warning him they had company in the sky. They weren't supposed to have had company; the enemy's aeroplane force was supposed to have been so beaten down, one-aeroplane missions were allowed again. Like a lot of things that were supposed to have happened, that one hadn't.

He gave the aeroplane full throttle, swinging through a quick circle in the sky to try and get on the foe's tail instead of the other way round. Acceleration and centrifugal force threw him around in the cockpit.

Halfway through the turn, he got his first glimpse of the enemy bus: an Avro, an aeroplane whose performance closely matched the Wilbur's. The Canadian pilot—or maybe, for all Moss knew, he was an Englishman—rolled through a maneuver like his own, so the two flying machines turned away from each other.

Behind him, Percy Stone squeezed off a burst with his machine gun. The Avro's observer fired back; Moss saw flame burst from the muzzle of the enemy machine gun. Tracers sparked across the open, empty air.

Thwump! Thwump! Thwump! Bullets punched through fuselage fabric, sounding like flung stones off a tightly stretched awning. Stone's fire

abruptly ceased. "I'm hit!" sounded tinnily in Moss' ear.

He couldn't answer for a moment; he needed both hands to twist the aeroplane through a roll that had earth and sky twisting dizzily all around him. Where was the Avro? Were more enemy aeroplanes in the sky? With his observer wounded, he couldn't fight back. He wished again for the Super Hudson he wasn't flying any more. Of course, had he been in that bus, the bullets might have gone through him, not Stone.

His head swiveled wildly as he leveled off and scooted back toward the American lines. His altimeter was still unwinding; it hadn't been able to keep up with his dizzying dive. He didn't need it to tell him he'd shed several thousand feet. His ears ached dully. They'd popped several times in the descent, but, like the altimeter, hadn't caught up with the rest of him.

He didn't see any Canucks or limeys. Grabbing the speaking tube, he shouted into it: "Percy! You there? How bad are you?"

"One in the side, one ricocheted off the damn camera and nicked me in the leg," Stone answered. A moment later, another word dragged from him: "Hurts."

Moss flew straight and level, sacrificing everything for speed, till tracer bullets zipped past the Wright 17. Then he began dodging and swerving again. You couldn't outrun a bullet; your best hope was to evade one. Behind him, the observer's machine gun started chattering. He had no idea how accurately Percy Stone was firing. That he was firing at all seemed a good sign.

But tracers were coming from more than one direction, which, by unpleasant logic, meant he had more than one aeroplane on his tail. That *wasn't* a good sign. Anything you did to evade one was liable to bring you right under the gun of another.

And then, like angels with flaming swords, a flight of American aeroplanes dove on the Canucks or limeys, who went from pursuers to pursued in seconds. "They're breaking away," Stone said. Moss didn't like how quiet and tired he sounded. He should have been screaming for joy, leaning forward to pound his pilot on the back. Straight and level, that was the answer: get Stone to a sawbones on the double.

Enemy antiaircraft gunners sent up a storm of hate as Moss flew over the front line. He didn't waste time on evasive action, not now. Odds weren't so good as if he'd been dodging all over the landscape, but

they were still on his side.

He got away with it. "Almost home, Percy," he said. Stone didn't answer. Moss looked back over his shoulder. The observer was slumped to one side, his eyes closed. Moss tried to fly even faster, but the Wilbur was already going flat out.

He landed at as high a speed as he could, using the whole airstrip and taxiing to a stop close to the barracks. He was waving for help before the aeroplane stopped rolling. As soon as it did, he scrambled back into the observer's cockpit.

Blood was everywhere back there: on the walls, on the seat, on the floor, on the camera—and on Percy Stone's flying togs. Moss yanked back the observer's sleeve and jabbed his finger down on the inside of Stone's wrist. He let out a whoop when he felt a pulse.

"Hurry up, dammit!" he shouted. "He's hurt bad!"

By then the groundcrew were already at the bus. They had a stretcher with them. Lefty helped Moss unbuckle Stone and get his limp weight out of the cockpit and down to the ground. "Can't let him die," the mechanic said. "I need his money." If he was kidding, he was kidding on the square.

He and Byron rushed Stone away. Jonathan Moss looked down at himself. His friend's blood was on his flight suit, on his boots, on his hands. Wearily, he trudged in to make his report to Captain Franklin. No pictures to develop, not today; Stone had got hit before he had the chance to take any—and the camera looked to be *hors de combat,* too.

Somebody brought him a whiskey. He gulped it down without tasting or feeling it. After what seemed a very long time, the telephone jangled. Lefty got it before Moss could even move from his chair. "Yeah?" the mechanic said, and again: "Yeah? All right. Good. Thanks." He hung up, then turned to Moss. "Collapsed lung and he's lost a lot of blood, but they think he's gonna pull through." "Thank God," Moss said, and fell asleep where he sat.

Stephen Ramsay sipped coffee from a tin cup, then said, "Captain Lincoln, sir, ain't this a hell of a war? I've been a cavalryman a long time. When we got into Okmulgee here, I didn't mind fighting like a dragoon, on account of that's what you got to do when you fight in built-up country. But now they've dragooned us into the infantry—and it's not even the Confederate States infantry. Well, not exactly," he amended.

"You're the captain now, Ramsay," Lincoln said. "I'll have you remember I'm a colonel these days." His hand went to his collar. He didn't wear the three bars of a Confederate captain any more, or the three stars of a Confederate colonel, either. Instead, he had two red costume-jewelry jewels, the newly devised insigne for a colonel in the equally newly devised Creek Nation Army.

Ramsay had shed his sergeant's stripes, too. He wore one red costume-jewelry jewel on either side of his collar. Both he and Lincoln also had red armbands on the left sleeves of their tunics. Other than that, they, unlike the soldiers they were now commanding, retained ordinary Confederate uniform.

"Captain? Me?" Ramsay snorted. "Doesn't seem real." He drank some more coffee. It was hot and strong. Past that, he couldn't think of anything good to say about it. After swallowing, he went on, "Last time I got paid, though, it was a captain's money, so I can't kick about that."

"Same here—I got a colonel's money," Lincoln said. "And we're earning what they pay us, by God. Do you doubt it?"

"When you put it that way, no sir." Ramsay laughed a little. "Crazy how things work out, isn't it? We were the first white soldiers in town, we helped the Creeks throw back the damnyankees, so Chief Fixico figures we're the ones to turn his braves into real soldiers." Under his breath, he added, "Stupid damn rank badges, anyone wants to know."

"I told him the same thing." Lincoln's chuckle was wry. "They turned out to be his idea, so we're stuck with them as long as we do this job." He shrugged. "I hear tell English officers, when they get of Indian, I mean, not ours—they have to wear the native-style uniform, too. It could be worse—they could have put us in war paint and feathers."

"Creeks don't seem to go in for that kind of thing much," Ramsay said. "You look around at this place—the way it was before the fighting started, anyway—and it could be anybody's town. You wouldn't know red—uh, Indians—had built it."

You had to be careful about saying *redskins* hereabouts. The Indians didn't like it for beans. Ramsay had the idea Negroes didn't like being called niggers, either, but he didn't let that stop him. It was different with the Creeks, though. They weren't just hewers of wood and drawers of water. By law and by treaty, they were every bit as much Confederate citizens as he was. Up till manumission, they'd kept slaves

of their own.

"Captain Ramsay?" That was Moty Tiger, probably—no, certainly—the best sergeant Ramsay had. He was the young fellow who'd apologized to Ramsay when he suddenly got a lesson in what foxholes were worth. Now his broad bronze face was worried.

When Moty Tiger worried, Ramsay figured he ought to worry, too. "What's up, Moty?" he asked, getting to his feet.

"I've got a discipline problem, Captain," the Creek sergeant said carefully.

"Well, let's see what we can do about that," Ramsay said. The Indian with the picturesque name turned and led him down the trench, presumably toward whoever was involved in the discipline problem.

Ramsay kicked at the muddy dirt as he followed. The Creek Nation Army—both regiments of it—had an inordinate number of discipline problems. Part of that was because the men had been under military discipline for only a few weeks. They chafed under it, like barely broken horses. And part of it was that they were Indians, and maybe less used to taking orders from anybody than a like number of whites would have been.

They particularly didn't like taking orders from their own people. They accepted it better from their white officers. Ramsay didn't think that was because he was white, as he would have if he were dealing with Negroes. But the Creeks seemed to figure that, as a real live working soldier, he knew what he was doing, whereas to them their noncoms were the same kind of amateurs they were.

'Ten-shun!" Moty Tiger called as he came up to the knot of Indians gathered around a fire. The Creeks got to their feet, not with the alacrity Confederate regulars would have shown, but fast enough that Ramsay couldn't gig them about it. In lieu of uniforms, which hadn't arrived yet from back East, they wore denim pants, flannel shirts with red armbands like Ramsay's, and a variety of slouch hats.

"All right, what's going on here?" Ramsay asked with something close to genuine curiosity.

"He gave me the shit duty again!" one of the Creeks exclaimed.

"Somebody's got to have it, Perryman," Ramsay said. "We don't take the honey buckets to the pit and cover it up, we'd get even worse

stinks than we have already, and we'd start getting sick before long, too. No way to keep clean or anything close to it, but we've got to do what we can."

'Those damn buckets are disgusting," Perryman said. "Hauling them is nigger work, not soldier work."

"Mike, we ain't got no niggers here," Moty Tiger said, more patiently than Ramsay would have expected. "All we got is us, and if we don't do it, nobody will. And it's your turn."

uts it your turn?" Ramsay asked Mike Perryman; there was always the chance Moty Tiger was picking on his fellow Indian, which would have to be stopped if it was happening. But, reluctantly, Perryman nodded. "Then you've got to do the job," Ramsay told him. "I've done it myself, on maneuvers and out in the field. Take 'em to the pit, fling 'em in, cover everything up, and then you can pretend it never happened."

"You really did that?" Perryman asked, his black eyes scanning Ramsay's face, searching for a lie.

But it was the truth. Ramsay nodded with a clear conscience. "You're a soldier now," he said. "This isn't a lark and it isn't a game. It isn't pretty. It isn't a whole lot of fun. But it's what needs doing. So—are you going to be a soldier, or are you going to be an old soldier, somebody who's always complaining and carrying on when he's got no cause to? You said yourself your sergeant wasn't being unfair. If you don't do the job, somebody else will have to, and that wouldn't be fair to the rest of the men in your squad."

He waited to see what would happen. He didn't want to have to punish Mike Perryman. He'd already seen that punishment didn't work as well with the Creeks as it did with white soldiers. The Indians only resented you more.

Perryman muttered something Ramsay only half heard. He didn't think it was in English. That was liable to be just as well. If he didn't understand it, he didn't have to notice it. But then, slowly and with nothing like enthusiasm or even resignation, the Creek got to his feet and headed off to the latrine bay dug out from the main trench. Nobody watched him as he carried the buckets off to the disposal pit. Nobody watched him bring them back, either—more courtesy than white soldiers would have shown one of their comrades in the same fix.

"Thank you, Captain," Moty Tiger said quietly as the two of them walked back toward where Ramsay had been drinking his coffee.

"You're welcome," Ramsay answered. "You were right, so I backed you up. Before too long, everybody will have the idea, and you won't need me to back you up."

"I shouldn't have this time." The Creek sounded angry at himself.

As an old sergeant himself, Ramsay understood that. But things were different here from the way they were in the Confederate Army or any other long-established force. "Next time, or maybe the time after that, everything will go smooth," Ramsay said. "What you want to do is this—you want to make sure they do what you tell 'em before the damnyankees try another push into Okmulgee. That'll keep a lot more of 'em alive, whether they're smart enough to know it or not. They won't thank you for it, but they'll be here."

"I understand," the Creek sergeant said. He hesitated, then asked, "If the United States soldiers do attack here, can we hold them back?"

"We've got the Creek Nation Army, we've got some good Texas infantry, we've got artillery back of town and over in the hills," Ramsay said, and then, because honesty compelled him, "Damned if I know. Depends on how hard the Yankees push things. Attacking costs more than defending, but they've got more men than we do, too."

Moty Tiger nodded soberly. "This is not war, the way we Creeks talk of war. This is not warrior against warrior. It is a whole nation throwing itself at another nation. It does not bring men glory or fame. It uses them up, and it buries them, and then it reaches out and uses more."

"You're only wrong about one thing," Ramsay said. The Indian looked a question at him. He explained. "A lot of the time, this here war doesn't bother with buryin' the men it uses up."

Moty Tiger pondered that. He showed his teeth in a grimace of pain, but didn't argue with Ramsay. Instead, after a grave nod, he turned around and went back down the trench, back toward his squad. They and he—and Ramsay—hadn't been used up... yet.

* * *

The train shuddered to a stop. Paul Mantarakis, conscious that the two dark green stripes on the sleeve of his tunic meant he had more

important work to do—and that he had to do it under more important eyes—than before, said, "My squad, get ready to pile on out." Soldiers stirred on the floor of the boxcar. Not so long ago, it had been carrying horses. The strong smell lingered. Some of the farm boys found it soothing. As far as Paul was concerned, that was their problem, not his. They grabbed their rifles, made sure they had all their gear, and grunted as they slung their packs onto their backs.

Not far away, Gordon McSweeney, also sporting corporal's stripes, was telling his squad, "Properly speaking, these Mormons are not even Christians. They will go to hell regardless of whether we shoot them down or they die in bed. Spare not the rod, then, for not only are they heretics, they are rebels in arms against the United States of America."

Lieutenant Norman Hinshaw was talking to the whole platoon: "We have to root out these bandits and rebels and bring Utah back under the Stars and Stripes. Remember, most of the people we come across will be loyal Americans. Only a handful have sold themselves to the Canucks and the Rebs, and they're the ones causing all the trouble. Once we get rid of them, Utah should be a peaceable state, just like all the others." He paused to let that sink in, then went on, "When they first hatched their plot, these Mormon madmen blew up the railroad line right at the border and seized the weapons in every arsenal in the state. Now we've pushed more than halfway to Salt Lake City. The town ahead of us is called Price. We'll take it, repair the tracks, and move on." He didn't ask for questions. He worked the latch on the boxcar door and slid it open. "Let's go!"

After so long cooped up on the train, Mantarakis' eyes filled with tears when he stepped out into bright sunshine. The first breath of fresh air told him he wasn't in Kentucky any more, or in Philadelphia, either. It was hot and dry, with an alkaline tang to it. It wasn't summer yet, but it felt that way. Ahead—westward—and to the north, he saw forested mountains in the distance. A nearer line of green marked the Price River. But the land where he was standing had only scattered sagebrush and tumbleweeds and other desert plants on it. All it needed was the bleached skull of an ox to make it the perfect picture of an arid waste.

'This is the abomination of the desolation, as was spoken of in the Book of Daniel," McSweeney said, and Mantarakis, for once, was not inclined to disagree.

The boxcar from which they'd emerged was one of dozens, hundreds, carrying the two divisions pulled out of Kentucky to their new theater

of operations. They unloaded men, horses, mules, wagons, trucks, guns—all the tools needed to wage war in the modern age, and to keep on waging it in country like this, where they would be hard pressed to draw supplies from the land.

Every officer of captain's rank or higher was running around with a list and a pencil, checking things off as fast as he could. In an amazingly short time, what had been two entrained divisions turned into two divisions ready for action. In spite of himself, Paul was impressed. Soldiers spent a lot of time groaning about officers, but every now and then they showed what they were worth.

Dust puffed up under Mantarakis' boots as he marched along. Dust hovered all around the thousands of marching men. It held a stronger dose of the alkaline tang he'd noticed before. How the devil were you supposed to raise crops on soil like this?

Plainly, the Mormons did it. He marched past a big farmhouse of a sort he'd never seen before: it looked to be made of rammed earth. In a country where it rained more often, a house like that would fall apart pretty damn quick. This one looked to have been standing for a generation, maybe two.

It stood open now. So did the barn alongside. Whoever had lived here didn't want to stick around and greet the United States Army with a big smile and an American flag. *They like the Rebels,* Mantarakis thought, not very happy with the idea. If only a handful of people were in revolt, why had the squad run across some of them so soon?

Then, ahead and off to the right, the familiar *pop-pop-pop* of gunfire rang out. "We will move to the firing, to support our soldiers under attack," Lieutenant Hinshaw proclaimed. The whole platoon—the whole company—did just that.

The Mormons were holed up in another farmhouse. It had a big flag flying above it, on what had to be a makeshift pole. Paul couldn't make out what the flag was, but it wasn't the Stars and Stripes. He saw muzzle flashes from several windows; the Mormons were putting a lot of lead in the air, doing their best to hold the U.S. troops at bay.

They hadn't built the place for defense, though. The barn offered one avenue blind to them for soldiers to approach. The well and the haystacks and the outhouse gave other approaches. Before long, Mantarakis' whole company was peppering the farmhouse from pretty short range. A machine gun came up and started rattling away. Dust

flew from the adobe as bullets stitched back and forth. Its pole clipped, the flag fell in the dirt in front of the house. Mantarakis and his comrades cheered.

"Let's go!" Lieutenant Hinshaw shouted. Under cover of the machine gun, he rushed toward the farmhouse. Mantarakis and the rest of his squad followed. So did McSweeney and his men. If an officer had the guts to go out there, you couldn't let him go by himself.

A bullet whistled past Paul's head—not everybody in the farmhouse was down. The machine gun blasted away at the window from which the shot had come. Paul trampled on the fallen flag—it was, he saw, a beehive with the word deseret beneath it—on the way to the front door. Along with several men, he hammered at it with the butt of his rifle. Someone inside fired through the door. A U.S. soldier fell with a groan.

Then the door went down. Soldiers were already clambering into the house through the windows. Mantarakis rushed in. Somebody shot at him from point-blank range—and missed. After a last fusillade of firing, silence fell: only U.S. soldiers were left alive in there.

Of the Mormon defenders, five had been men and two women. They had all had rifles, and had all known what to do with them. Mantarakis had seen plenty of death, but never till now a woman in a white shirtwaist with pearl buttons and a long black skirt—and with half her head blown away. He turned away, a little sickened. 'They fought harder'n the Rebs ever did," he muttered.

"Fanatics," Lieutenant Hinshaw said. "This is what they warned us about, these nests of maniacs. But most of the people are loyal to the USA. We'll see that when we get into Price. Come on, men." He led his soldiers outside. Once out there, he picked up the Mormons' flag. "Spoil of war. Now—on with the advance."

If the people of Price, Utah, were loyal to the United States, nobody had bothered telling them about it. They had a trench line just east of town, and defended it ferociously till machine-gun and artillery fire drove them back in amongst the buildings. But when the U.S. soldiers tried to advance into Price, rifle fire and a couple of Mormon machine guns hurled them back with heavy losses.

"Looks like we're going to be in the next wave," Mantarakis told his squad unhappily. He'd become numbed to the prospect of charging straight ahead at the enemy's line: that was how First Army operated.

But the divisional commander showed a little more imagination than General Custer ever had. Instead of drowning Price in U.S. blood, he decided to shell it into ruins. Back of the U.S. line, more artillery unlimbered and started bellowing away. The Mormons had machine guns, but evidently no cannon of their own. A great cloud of smoke and dust rose above the Utah town.

In an abstract way, Mantarakis sympathized with the Mormons who'd been stupid enough to rise up against the might of the United States. He'd had artillery barrages come down on his position only too often; he knew what being under one of them was like. He hoped, though, that this one would be so stunning, so deadly, that the defenders would be either blown to bits or too battered to fight back. After the barrage let up, his neck would be on the line.

It went on for three hours. When it stopped, whistles blew, ordering the U.S. soldiers forward. Paul came up out of the foxhole in which he'd crouched and sprinted toward the outskirts of Price.

He hadn't gone fifty yards before a Mormon machine gun started stuttering out death. After that, he didn't run any more. He scrambled from one piece of cover to the next, firing as he went. So did the men with him. They'd learned in a hard school.

He didn't know where the Mormons had learned. Wherever it was, they'd earned high marks. They defended every ruined store and pile of rubble as if losing it meant losing the war. They wouldn't retreat. They wouldn't surrender. Sometimes they would hold their fire till a party of U.S. soldiers had gone by, then shoot at them from behind, blazing away with no hope of escape until they were either dead or too badly wounded to hold a rifle.

Men, women, children down to about the age of eight—every Mormon in Price—fought, and fought to the death. Every smashed house had to be combed through room by room, every cellar checked for lurkers with guns. It was a grimmer, bloodier, more expensive nightmare than Paul had ever imagined.

He crouched down behind tumbled boards that had probably once been a false front and lighted a cigarette. A moment later, Gordon McSweeney took cover with him. 'Tobacco is a filthy weed," McSweeney said.

As far as Mantarakis could see, the big Scotsman disapproved of everything. "I'm not making you smoke it," he pointed out. He blew a

stream of smoke toward the little patch of Price to which the Mormons still clung. "Still think this is just a few fanatics fighting us? If the rest of Utah is anything like this, the next Mormon who likes us will be the first."

"You may be right about that," McSweeney said. "But what if you are? I keep telling you, the Mormons will burn in hell regardless of what they do here on earth."

"Thanks a lot, Gordon," Mantarakis muttered. McSweeney didn't see it, but to him fighting a whole bunch of people who all hated you was different from fighting fanatics who hated you hidden among people who mostly didn't. If all the Mormons hated the U.S. government, what did that make them when they rose up against it? Patriots?

Whatever it made them, it made them dangerous. A couple of bullets snapped by, too close for comfort. Paul stubbed out his cigarette on a rock, made sure he had a full clip in his Springfield, and went back to clearing the Mormons out of Price.

Sylvia Enos looked at her husband in dismay. "Are you sure this is what you should do?" she asked, in lieu of screaming, *Are you out of your mind?* "You haven't been home long enough to be sure of anything."

"I'm sure of this," he answered, and she could hear he meant it.

But being sure wasn't the same as being right. "Can't you wait a little longer before you join the Navy?" Sylvia knew she was pleading. She didn't care.

"Would you rather I signed up on a fishing boat?" George asked. Sylvia flinched by way of answering. The Confederates, the Canadians, and the British had sown Georges Bank and the other fishing waters around Boston full of mines. Not a week went by when a boat didn't blow up. If another boat was nearby, it sometimes brought back survivors. More often than not, though, the only way you knew—or thought you knew—a fishing boat had hit a mine was when it didn't come back to T Wharf.

"I'd rather you didn't put to sea at all," Sylvia said. It was about the worst thing a fisherman's wife could tell her man. Sylvia knew that, and said it anyhow. She was listening to George, Jr., and Mary Jane snoring in their bedroom. They were both getting over colds, with their heads full of snot. They counted for something, too. She went on, "I'd rather you stayed ashore, is what I'd rather."

He didn't get angry, as she'd expected he would. He just shook his head in absolute rejection. "I had a lot of time to think about this, down in the camp in Rebel country. Nobody on land would hire me. Fishing is all I know."

"They'll take any bodies they can get," Sylvia shot back. "I didn't know anything to speak of, and they hired me."

"Yeah, but conscription won't drag you into the Army, like it will me," George answered. "I wouldn't last a month before the letter came. If I'm going to go fight, I'd rather do it on the water. I thought about that, too. I thought real hard."

Sylvia didn't have a good comeback. She'd already had a cousin wounded. The Army seized men and mangled them—that was the sense you got when you scanned the casualty lists every day, anyhow. She let out a sad, defeated sigh. "You were gone so long. You had to make friends with your children all over again after you got off the train. How long will you be away if you join the Navy? Years at a time, maybe. Stay here a while."

He shook his head again. "And live off the money you're making? That's not anything for a man to do. I know you had to get work while I was gone. You had to keep bread on the table. But I feel useless sitting around here. If I'm in the Navy, they'll send part of my pay home every month to help you and the kids out. That's a better bargain."

"Pride," she said bitterly, as if it were a dirty word. As far as she was concerned, it was. "Men's pride." Along with the children's snores, she heard the relentless ticking of the alarm clock from the bedroom she now shared once more with her husband. Shared now ... but for how long? Every tick meant a second less. She did not have that many ticks to spare. "What good is it? If it weren't for men's pride, we wouldn't have this war."

"I don't know anything about that," George told her. "All I know is, I didn't like what the Rebs did to me—I sure as the devil didn't like them murdering poor Lucas Phelps—and I'm going to give some of it back to them when I get the chance."

That was men's pride, too, but what point to saying so? *He got me, so I'm going to get him back.* You heard it in the schoolyards, on the streets. You saw it in feuds between fishing captains, feuds that sometimes ended up fought out with broken bottles or with pistols.

And here was a war, throwing half the world into the fire. *He got me, so I'm going to get him back.*

"I wish I were a heathen Chinese," Sylvia said. "They have better sense than to mix themselves up in such foolishness."

"No, they don't," her husband answered. "They're on the Rebs' side, same as the Japs are. I remember one of the guards gloating about it and about all the people China has. And Captain O'Donnell, he looked at that Confederate and he said, 'Yeah, and all of 'em put together ain't worth a regiment of United States Marines in a scrap.' That Reb, he was angry, but he didn't know what to say."

"Captain O'Donnell!" The light that went on in Sylvia's head was brighter than the gas lamps that lit their apartment; it blazed like an electric light. "You spent all that time down there in North Carolina listening to him. He's the reason you want to join the Navy so bad."

When George didn't answer right away, she knew she'd hit that one on the nose. At last, slowly, he said, "We talked about it, sure, but I wouldn't say I made up my mind just on account of him."

"You wouldn't say that? Does that mean it's not true?"

When she had him, he folded up. To his credit, he didn't usually bluff and bluster, the way so many men did. He took her by surprise by not folding up now. "It wasn't just the captain," he insisted. "Like I said, a lot of it was the way the Rebs treated us down there, like we were dirt because we came from the USA. They shot poor Lucas. And what they did to Charlie White ... He's joining the Navy, too. For all I know, he may have signed up already—I haven't seen him, past couple of days."

That surprised Sylvia, too, in a different way. She said, "I didn't know they let colored people into the Navy."

"Not in the Army, no," George said, "but in the Navy they do. Even back in the War of Secession, they did. Coal-heavers, cooks, that kind of thing. The way Charlie is with a frying pan, he'd get himself whatever rank they give number one cooks in nothin' flat."

Sylvia had no great use for Negroes in general, but Charlie wasn't a Negro in general. He was a Negro in particular, and somebody who fed her husband at least as often as she did. She saw him more as a man and less as a colored man than anyone else of his race she'd ever known—not that that took in any great sample of Boston's Negro community.

"I can see why Charlie would want revenge, but—" she said, and then stopped in dismay at her own words. *He got me, so I'm going to get him back.* God in heaven, where did it end?

"Like I said, we all owe the Rebs," George said, sensing her hesitation. "And me joining the Navy is the best I can do. Safer than being a fisherman these days, safer than being in the Army by a long shot. If I sit idle or if I get a land job, the Army hooks me sure." If you looked at things logically, what he said made good sense. Sylvia didn't want to look at things logically. What she wanted, now that George was home at last, was for him to stay home. He didn't want to stay home. Even if he had reasons for not wanting to stay home, it still hurt. She put her face in her hands and started to cry. She'd kept up a strong front for the children for so long that when the dam finally broke, it broke wide open.

"Honey, cut that out." George sounded nervous, almost alarmed. Sylvia didn't cry very often, and he didn't know how to cope when she did. Helplessly, he went on, "It doesn't do any good."

He was right, but Sylvia couldn't stop. "You just came back, and now you're—going away again," she sobbed. That was it, in a nub.

George slid closer on the sofa. He reached out awkwardly to stroke her wet cheek. His hand wasn't so hard and rough as it had been before the Rebs captured him. Whatever they'd had him doing down there in the prison camp, it was easier than fishing. "It'll be all right," he said, and put his arm around her.

They ended up in the bedroom not much later. Since he'd come home, they'd made love more than they had even when they were first married; Sylvia had joked about pausing to take an occasional look at the floor, because all she ever saw was the ceiling. This had more a feel of desperation to it. Even when she gasped and quivered as. powerfully as she ever had in her life, fear as much as healthy excitement drove her to that height.

And afterwards, lying there spent in the darkness beside her husband, she realized making love didn't do any more good than crying did. When you were done, the world hadn't changed a bit.

"God damn the war," she whispered as she got up to put on her nightgown. George didn't hear her. He was already breathing the deep, regular breaths of sleep. She lay down beside him. She knew she had to go to the canning plant in the morning, but lay a long time

awake even so.

Ugly as a drunk white man with a chunk of firewood in his hand looking for a Negro to beat on, the barge made its slow way up to the Covington wharf. Unlike a drunk white man, though, it was in full and complete control. The fellow piloting it was a master, in fact; Cincinnatus had never seen anybody do a better job of easing such an ungainly craft into place.

The Army men on board threw lines up to a couple of roustabouts on the wharf. Even before the barge was fully fast, they ran a gangplank up to the wharf, too. That was what Lieutenant Kennan had been waiting for. "All right, you lazy niggers," he shouted to the work gang of which Cincinnatus was a part, "you been lollygagging long enough. Now get your black asses down there and get to work. Two men to a crate. That's what my order says, and that's how we're gonna do it. Move, God damn you!"

"Lord have mercy," said a gray-haired Negro named Herodotus. "I been workin', doin' *hard* work, since slavery days, an' I didn't never have no overseer with as mean a mouth as that Yankee."

"Watch out he don't hear you," Cincinnatus warned, though the other Negro, being no one's fool, had kept his voice down. "Ain't just his mouth that's mean. He'd just as soon kick a black man as look at him."

Along with the rest of the work crew, he and Herodotus went down into the barge. Tne crates they were to unload were a funny shape, as long as a man, but only a foot or so high and wide. They were of more solid wood than the usual run of box, and bound with iron straps, too. Whatever was in there, the people back in the USA who'd packed it didn't want it coming out.

Each crate had, neatly stenciled on it, battery f, and, below that, disinfection. Cincinnatus scratched his head. You put those two together, they didn't make a whole lot of sense. But then, you could say that about a whole lot of things he'd seen since the war started.

He and Herodotus lifted a crate. It was heavy enough to need two men on it, sure enough. "You niggers want to watch out what you're doin'," Lieutenant Kennan said as they started up the gangplank. "Anybody who drops one of these here crates, he doesn't just get his ass fired. He gets himself blacklisted—no work at all for him. And you want to know what I think about that, I hope the fucker starves, and all the little pickaninnies he's spawned, too."

"Give that man a whip and put him in the cotton field, he get five hundred bales to the acre," Herodotus said.

"Yeah, till one fine mornin' they find him with his head broke in, and what a shame, nobody knows who done it," Cincinnatus said. "Wouldn't take long, neither." Herodotus nodded. That sort of thing happened, every so often.

But Lieutenant Kennan had more than a whip to back him up. He had the United States Army on his side. If anything happened to him, the Yankees would take hostages and shoot them. That had happened before, too.

Cincinnatus and Herodotus loaded the long, narrow crate into the back of a motor truck. Whatever it was, that said it had a certain amount of importance, because things that weren't of high priority got hauled to the front in horse-drawn wagons. More than the usual number of U.S. soldiers were standing around the trucks, too, keeping an eye on the loading but not, of course, deigning to help with what they, like whites in the CSA, called nigger work.

Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Cincinnatus was glad he was wearing leather gloves. His hands were hard, but the rough boards of the crates would have torn them up anyhow. He didn't want to stop for the dinner break. He'd got into a rhythm. Pausing to eat took him out of it. When you were working like a machine, that happened sometimes. But stop he did. If you didn't take whatever breaks the Yankees doled out to you, they were liable to figure you didn't need 'em and not dole out any; they were nasty in a more efficient, cold-blooded way than Confederate whites.

Sure enough, when he went back to work after his sowbelly and greens and his canteen full of cold coffee, he needed a while to get used to things again, and he never did quite find the trancelike state in which he'd been working before dinner. Thinking about what he was doing made the afternoon seem to last three times as long as the morning had.

About halfway through the afternoon, another big barge came across the river from Cincinnati. It too was loaded almost to the wallowing point with long, skinny crates stenciled battery f and disinfection. As the Negro laborers unloaded the crates, U.S. soldiers strung up electric lamps so another crew could eventually replace them and keep working through the night.

Herodotus raised an eyebrow. "Ain't never seen 'em do that before," he said. Cincinnatus nodded; he hadn't seen them do that before, either.

At last, Lieutenant Kennan shouted, "All right, nigs, knock off. Anybody back here even one minute later than seven o'clock tomorrow morning, he can kiss my ass, but he still won't get any work. Go on now, get the hell out, and we'll put some fresh mules on the job."

"That's how he thinks of us—mules," Cincinnatus said as he and Herodotus lined up to get their day's pay. Cincinnatus knew he'd busted his hump, but Kennan wasn't handing out fifty-cent bonuses to anybody, not today.

"Mus' be his time of the month," Herodotus said. "He's sure enough cranky like that."

Some of the work gang stood at the trolley stop and waited for a ride back to the Negro district of Covington. Others—men who saved every nickel—left them with waves and weary calls of, "See you in the mornin'," and started walking south, away from the Ohio. Cincinnatus was one of those. He hadn't ridden the trolley since he found out Elizabeth was in a family way.

A little south of downtown, he peeled off from the group of laborers. "Got to buy me some new laces for my shoes," he said. "Got so many knots holding these ones together, it's like puttin' rocks in my shoes."

"You could pick a better place," Herodotus said. "Conroy there"—he pointed to the name on the awning above the storefront— "he don't like black folks much. Feldman down the street, he's a better bet."

"I ain't never had no trouble with Conroy, an' he's cheaper to buy from than the Jew," Cincinnatus answered. Herodotus shrugged, waved, and kept on walking.

Conroy's general store was typical of the breed. The proprietor, a big, red-faced fellow with a formidable grizzled mustache and a wad of tobacco in one cheek, looked a lot more pregnant than Elizabeth did. He had dry goods at the right of the store, yard goods at the back, groceries to the left, with barrels of flour, sugar, and crackers in front of his counter. Cigars and candy reposed in glass jars on the counter.

A white man and a couple of white women were in the store. Cincinnatus took off his cap and waited till Conroy served them. Another white man came in after Cincinnatus but before the

storekeeper was done taking care of the others. He got served ahead of Cincinnatus, too.

At last, the laborer's turn came. The storekeeper got him three pairs of shoelaces and gave back ninety cents change on the day's dollar Cincinnatus handed him. Some of the coins were Confederate, others U.S.

"Seen somethin' interesting," Cincinnatus remarked, making sure Conroy hadn't shortchanged him. Casually, as if it were no particular import—and, for all he knew, it wasn't—he described the unending loads of crates he'd hauled all day long, and the curious words on them.

Conroy tugged at one end of his mustache. "That a fact?" he said. "Well, you're right. Mebbe that is interesting." He spat, and fell a little short of the cuspidor. By the brown stains on the pale pine boards near the spittoon, he missed a good deal of the time.

With ninety cents in change clinking in his pocket, Cincinnatus irrationally felt richer than he had with a single silver cartwheel. He got out of the store as fast as he could; passing the time of day like that with a white man felt unnatural to him, and, by Conroy's attitude, to the storekeeper as well.

When he got home, Elizabeth had a stew of chicken and okra and rice waiting for him. "I was startin' to be worried about you," she said, and then yawned. She'd been tired all the time since she was expecting, but she hadn't worked any less. With everything more expensive because of war and occupation, she couldn't afford that.

"Put in some extra time," Cincinnatus explained. "Didn't get any extra money for it, but I didn't have no choice, neither. And afterwards, I stopped by Conroy's, bought me some shoelaces."

"Did you?" Elizabeth said, and let out a long sigh. "Dear God, I wish we didn't have to have nothin' to do with Conroy or any of the other people still spyin' for the CSA up here."

"Lord have mercy, so do I," Cincinnatus said, "but after we didn't give Tom Kennedy to the Yankees, they got themselves a hold on us."

"No good will come of it," Elizabeth predicted gloomily. "No good at all."

Cincinnatus couldn't argue, and didn't try. While Kennedy was in the

house, he'd had the upper hand on the white man. Once Kennedy had left, though, despite whatever profuse thanks he gave, the upper hand was his again, because he could blackmail Cincinnatus and Elizabeth, threatening to let U.S. authorities know what they'd done. He hadn't ever made that threat, but when he asked Cincinnatus to let Conroy the storekeeper know about anything intriguing he picked up on the wharfs, his former driver didn't see how he could say no.

"Besides the shoelaces, why did you stop by Conroy's?" Elizabeth asked him. He explained. His wife nodded. "That's peculiar, it sure is. Did Conroy say anything about it when you told him?"

"Not a word," Cincinnatus answered. "But he wouldn't. If I don't know it, I can't blab it."

"That's so," Elizabeth said. "What do *you* suppose is in them crates?"

"No way to know," he replied, "but I expect we'll find out."

XIV

Lucien Galtier looked up in the sky with something like approval. Winters were long. Winters were hard. They wore at a man; it seemed he never saw the sun for weeks at a time. But spring, when it finally burgeoned, made up for that... at least until winter came again.

Fluffy white clouds drifted from west to east, their shadows sailing across the farmland like clipper ships across a smooth sea. The weather—he paused to thank God—had been very good this year. True, from time to time, there were Americans on the road, in trucks or on horseback or in long columns afoot, but God didn't take care of all the little details in your life. You had to do some of the work for yourself. If the farm survived the ravages of rabbits and rats and insects, it was likely to survive the ravages of Americans, too.

Here came Georges, running up the path that separated potatoes on the one side from rye on the other. "Papa!" he called, and waved when Lucien straightened up from weeding the potato plot. "Papa, Father Pascal is back at the house with an American officer, and they want to see you."

"Calisse," Galtier said; he'd been so engrossed in his hoeing, he'd paid no attention to traffic on the road for a while. Now he put the hoe up on his shoulder, as if it were a rifle. "Well, if they want to see me, then see me they shall. It is an invitation I cannot refuse, not so?"

His younger son's eyes twinkled. "They want to see you, but they did not bother to ask if you wanted to see them," Georges said with Gallic precision.

"They do not care. They have no reason to care. They are the authorities, and I? I am but a farmer of the humblest sort." Lucien sounded too humble to be quite convincing, but that was what happened when you took on an unfamiliar role. And, as he had said, whether he wanted to see them was an irrelevance. He tramped back toward the farmhouse, Georges running ahead to let the important visitors know he was coming.

Father Pascal and the American officer, whoever he was, had come in the priest's buggy; the horse bent its head down to crop grass by the rail to which it was tethered. Seeing the buggy relieved Galtier's mind. He would have thought senility closing in on him had he missed the noisy arrival of a motorcar.

Inside, Marie and Nicole had already presented the priest and the officer—he was, Lucien saw, the heavyset major with whom Father Pascal had been talking when Galtier first went into Riviere-du-Loup not long after the Americans arrived—with coffee and cakes. He would have been astonished had his wife and eldest daughter done anything less. Even if your guests' going would have been more welcome than their coming, you had duties as a host— or hostess.

"Here he is," Father Pascal said, rising from the sofa with a wide smile on his smooth, plump face. "Allow me to present to you the truly excellent husbandman, Lucien Galtier. Lucien, I have brought here Major Jedediah Quigley."

"Enchante, Monsieur Galtier," Quigley said in the elegant Parisian French Lucien had heard him using up in town. "Father Pascal has been loud in singing your praises."

"He honors me far beyond my poor worth," Galtier replied, wishing the priest had chosen to throw himself into the St. Lawrence rather than praising him to the occupying authorities. The less notice he attracted from them, the happier he was.

"You are a modest man," Father Pascal said. "This is the mark of a godly man, a Christian man of solid virtue. I have also taken the liberty of passing on to Major Quigley your generous willingness to inform me of anyone who misunderstood my role in the situation as it is."

Galtier spread his hands. They were hard and rough, with cal-lused palms and dirt under his nails and ground into the folds of skin at each knuckle. "I am desolate, Father, that I have had nothing of which to inform you. Spring is a busy season for a farmer, and I have had little to do with anyone of late."

"Galtier, Lucien." Major Quigley took a piece of paper from one of the many pockets with which his uniform was adorned. From another pocket he drew a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, which he set on his nose. He unfolded the paper and studied it for a moment. "Ah, yes. I regret that the requisitions drawn from this farm were so heavy last winter. I should not be surprised if it turned out that the soldiers who carried out the program did so with an excess of zeal. As a result, you must think less than kind thoughts of the American military government for this district."

"Major, in a war, each side does what it can to win," Galtier answered with a shrug. "I am not a soldier now, but you must know I served my time. I know these things." He chose his words with great care. This American major who talked like a Parisian aristocrat was liable to be as dangerous as half a dozen of the likes of Father Pascal.

Quigley folded up the paper and put it in his pocket. He got out a pipe, a pouch of tobacco, and a match safe. After a glance toward Marie for permission, he lit the pipe. Once it was drawing well, he spoke in musing tones: "I am confident that, when requisition time comes round again, it will be easier to restrain the enthusiasm of the soldiers carrying out their duties."

Not, *it may be easier to restrain them*—if *you cooperate.* Most men, trying to establish such cooperation, would have spelled out the terms of the bargain to be struck. That was how Father Pascal operated, for instance. Not Major Quigley. He started at the point of assuming cooperation and went on from there. A man to reckon with, indeed.

And, of course, it would be impossible to keep the neighbors from learning he and Father Pascal had been here. Some of them would assume that alone meant Lucien was collaborating with the Americans: why else would the major and the priest have come? Keeping his good name was going to take Galtier some work.

He wanted to glance over at Marie, to see what she was thinking, A winter free of requisitions—or anything close to that— would all but guarantee a successful year. A full belly, peace of mind against what was in essence robbery at gunpoint—those were not small items on

the balance sheet... provided he grew a beard so he did not have to look at himself in the mirror when he shaved every morning.

But looking at yourself in the mirror was not a small item, either. "As I say, Major, I am only a farmer, and spend most of my time here on my land. I am not a man who often hears things of any sort—certainly not scandal and slander spoken about the pious father here."

"No, eh? Father Pascal led me to believe it might be otherwise. What a pity," Major Quigley said. He didn't snarl and bluster at Lucien. He didn't turn and glower at Father Pascal, either. He just spread his hands. "Such is life." He got to his feet, which meant the priest also had to rise hastily. Major Quigley bowed to Marie. 'Thank you, Madame Galtier, for your generous hospitality. We shall not take up any more of your time, or of your husband's—he is, as he says, a busy man."

He didn't even warn Galtier that the requisitions, instead of being extra gentle when harvest time came around, would be extra harsh. If Lucien couldn't figure that out for himself, he'd learn come fall.

But Lucien knew perfectly well what would happen come fall. He also knew he'd have to spend almost as much time working to make the farm seem poor as he would making sure it really wasn't. As the major with the strange Christian name had said, that was life.

Major Quigley climbed into the buggy. Father Pascal untied his horse, then joined the American soldier. The priest was expostulating violently and gesturing with such passion, he could hardly handle the reins. But the horse must have been used to his theatrics. It turned around and started back up the road toward Riviere-du-Loup.

Lucien Galtier sighed. Now he did turn to Marie, wondering if she was going to shout at him for guaranteeing the whole family a harder time when autumn rolled around. Instead, she ran to him and squeezed the breath out of him with the tightest embrace she'd given him outside the bedroom in years. A moment later, Nicole and Georges piled onto him, too, and after that his three younger daughters, who must have been listening somewhere out of sight. Only his son Charles, busy in the barn, didn't know to join and mob him, and Galtier knew perfectly well how Charles felt about the American occupiers.

"Oh, Papa, you were so brave!" Nicole exclaimed.

"I was?" Lucien said: that had not occurred to him. "What was I supposed to do, turn my coat? For a little more in the barn? It is not

worth it."

"You were very brave, Lucien," Marie said; if she thought so, it was likely to be true. "We would have loved you whatever you told the American, but after what you did—we are proud of you."

"Well," Galtier said, "this is all very good, I am sure, and I am glad you are proud of me, but pride does nothing to weed the potato patch. I shall have to work harder today because of the *Boche americain* and the foolish priest. For that, I do not thank them. I work long enough as it is." He disentangled himself from the arms—the proud arms—of his family, went outside, picked up his hoe, shouldered it, and headed back toward the potatoes.

Not much was left of Slaughters, Kentucky, a few miles north of Madisonville. U.S. troops pushing east had managed to drive the Confederates out of it only a few days before, after fighting that fully lived up to the name of the place fought over. As far as Abner Dowling was concerned, the fight, like most of those General Custer planned, had been far more expensive than it was worth.

However much he wanted to, he couldn't say that to the war reporter walking through the ruined streets of Slaughters beside him. Custer's famous name was what had drawn Richard Harding Davis out to Kentucky to see the American troops in action.

Davis had seen a lot of wars, all around the world. His reports from Manila as the Japanese were entering the city were classics in their way. So were his reports on what they'd done to the Spanish prisoners they'd taken, though those hadn't been filed till he was safely out of the Philippines.

And now here he was with Custer's First Army—and with the chance, even if he hadn't known it when he got here, to write stories about something new in warfare on the North American continent.

"You're sure the general will let me go right up to the front?" the reporter asked Dowling for about the fourth time. Davis was fifty or so, ruggedly handsome (though his color wasn't all it could have been, and he panted a little as he walked along beside Dowling), and wore a green-gray jacket halfway between a military style and one a big-game hunter might have used. It had more pockets than you could shake a stick at. Dowling wished he owned one like it.

"Mr. Davis," he answered, "General Custer is going up to the front. He wants to see this for himself. He has already told me repeatedly, you

are welcome to accompany him and me." *Now that you're here, Mr. Davis, General Custer would strangle with his own liver-spotted hands anyone who had the gall to try to get between him and headlines, which is to say, between you and him.*

Custer had billeted himself in one of the few houses in Slaughters only rightly damaged: a two-story Victorian structure whose windows had only jagged shards of glass in them but whose walls and roof remained intact. A couple of sentries stood outside the front door. They'd dug foxholes nearby, into which they could dive in case the Rebs started shelling the town again. They saluted Dowling and eyed Richard Harding Davis with respectful curiosity. He wasn't just a reporter, but had a name as a novelist and playwright as well.

"Go on in," one of them said, opening the door. "The general should be finishing up his breakfast about now, and I know he'll be glad to see you."

As the sentry had said, Custer sat at the kitchen table. The view through the bay window had probably been lovely, back before it turned into a prospect of charred rubble and shell holes. The general was attacking his plate with knife, fork, and great gusto.

He turned when Dowling and Davis came into the room. Pointing down at his breakfast, he exclaimed, "Raw onions!" Such was his delight that, had he been writing, he probably would have used capital letters and four exclamation points.

Dowling did not share that delight. He coughed and did his best not to inhale, but his eyes started watering to beat the band in spite of the improved ventilation the shattered bay window gave the kitchen. He'd known about Custer's love for onions—anyone who had anything to do with Custer found out about that—but why had the general chosen today of all days for them?

Richard Harding Davis did his best to take the potent vegetables in stride. "A warmup for the rest of the day's show, eh?" he said, but could not help wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

'That's right, by jingo!" Custer said, shoveling another odorous forkful into his mouth. He went on till he was done. When he'd finished the whole plate, he spoke in meditative tones: 'Those onions could have used some salt. Well, can't be helped. Shall we go disinfect some Rebels, gentlemen?"

Off they went. Custer's motorcar, despite having to veer off the road a

couple of times to avoid craters, brought them past the artillery posts, where men without shirts stood waiting in the June sunshine for the order to rain death down on the Confederate lines. Custer talked gaily about Custer all the while. Davis scribbled an occasional note. Dowling wished the commanding general would shut up, not only because he'd heard all the stories before but also because, even with the wind streaming by in the open motorcar, Custer's breath was still hideously vile.

Once they came to the rear of the trench system, the motorcar could advance no farther. Dowling wondered if Custer would make it to the front under his own power. The commanding general was a long way from being the spry, dashing soldier of thirty-odd years gone by, though obviously he was convinced that time's wrinkled hand hadn't touched him at all.

He was spry enough to reach the trenches without undue difficulty, though. Richard Harding Davis proved to be the one who had trouble there. "Wind isn't what it used to be," he said apologetically, letting a hand rest on his chest for a moment, as if his heart pained him. He lighted a cigarette and went gamely on.

Here and there along the way, pieces of crates stenciled battery f and disinfection were used as corduroying on the floor of the trench or as pieces of lean-tos and other shelters cut into the earth of the trench wall. Custer had just started talking about them when a Confederate aeroplane came buzzing overhead.

"Shoot him down!" the general shouted, his sagging features twisting in alarm. "If the Rebs see what we're up to, there'll be hell to pay!"

For once, Dowling agreed completely with his commander. Yelling in the middle of the trench line, though, didn't strike him as the best way to get the antiaircraft gunners to go to work. Fortunately, they didn't need Custer's encouragement. They opened up on the Confederate scout with everything they had. The air around his aeroplane filled with black puffs, as intense a barrage as Dowling had ever seen. The Reb must have felt the same way. He turned around and scooted for his own lines. The antiaircraft fire followed him till he was out of range.

Moving forward grew difficult then, because the trenches were packed with men in green-gray, their gauze masks making them all look alike, waiting to storm forward when the order was given. It wouldn't be long now. Dowling's bulk and the magic of Custer's name cleared the

path enough that the general, his adjutant, and Davis were able to reach the very forwardmost trenches in good time.

Resting at the front of those trenches, spaced several yards apart, were metal cylinders about as long as a man, each one painted dark blue. Alongside each cylinder stood a masked man with a wrench, ready to open the fitting and let its contents spew forth into the air.

"What is the hour, Major?" Custer demanded.

He had a pocket watch of his own, but asking Dowling the question was easier than taking it out and looking at it. "Sir, it's 0625," Dowling said resignedly after checking his own watch.

"Splendid!" Custer said. "Capital! Couldn't be better. We're scheduled to begin at 0630, provided the wind holds." He licked a finger and stuck it up in the air. He stuck it up high enough, as a matter of fact, that he was lucky not to get shot in the hand. "Holding very nicely—straight out of the west, just as we want." "When the Germans used chlorine gas against the French and the English at Ypres, they made gains, but not a breakthrough," Davis said. "How will you make sure we do better than our allies?"

That was a good question. Dowling wondered how Custer would answer it. Dowling wondered if Custer *could* answer it. The truth was that the USA, like everyone else in the war, seized eagerly on anything that might yield a small edge in the murderous struggle. Every U.S. army in Kentucky was trying chlorine gas today. Making gains without losing men by the tens of thousands looked very good, even to Custer, who normally used up soldiers as if they were so many pieces of blotting paper.

But instead of replying, Custer shouted, "Release the gas!" It was, by Dowling's watch, still a minute early, but Custer's watch might have run faster—not that he checked to find out.

The men at the closest chlorine cylinders gave counterclockwise twists with their wrenches. Puffs, as of pale green smoke, spurted from the cylinders. Custer had been right about one thing; the wind was out of the west. It blew the puffs of smoke into a single dirty green cloud and sent that cloud rolling and billowing toward the Confederate trenches.

"That'll shift them!" Custer said jubilantly. He got up on the firing step to watch the progress of the gas. Davis got up beside him. If he didn't watch the progress of the gas, he didn't have much of a story. And Dowling got up there, too. As long as he was Custer's adjutant, this

was as close to real combat as he was likely to come.

Every now and then, little bits of high ground between the U.S. and C.S. lines would remain visible above the chlorine cloud, which, being heavier than air, stuck close to the ground except when the wind blew it up into little puffs and wisps. Despite that steady wind, the harsh, bleachlike odor of the gas made Dowling's throat raw, his nose sore, and his eyes even more watery than Custer's vicious onions had done.

As soon as the chlorine cloud rolled over and into the Confederate trenches, observers telephoned word back to the U.S. artillery emplacements. They opened up with a savage bombardment. Explosions sent dirt flying and made the gas jump and writhe like a plateful of gelatin.

Before long, the cylinders of chlorine gas were empty. The artillery stopped pounding the Confederates' forwardmost trenches and moved back to the support trenches to keep reinforcements from moving up. All along the U.S. line, officers' whistles blew.

Cries of "Let's go!" and "Get moving!" rang out. One nearby officer added, "Come on, the closer we stay to the hind end of that gas cloud, the worse shape the Rebs'll be in when we hit 'em." Over the top the troops went.

That would have been plenty to inspire Abner Dowling to follow close behind the chlorine. Only in books by writers who'd never smelled powder (more to the point, who'd never smelled the shit from spilled guts) did soldiers want a fair fight. What soldiers wanted was a walkover, with none of them getting hurt. They didn't get what they wanted very often. Maybe today ...

"Brave men," Richard Harding Davis said quietly, watching the soldiers in green-gray, their uniforms fading almost to invisibility when seen against the chlorine, swarming out of the U.S. trenches and toward those of the Confederates. "Very brave men."

Here and there, rifle and machine-gun fire greeted the Americans. Not all of the Rebels had been overcome by the poisonous gas. Men caught between the trench lines fell, sometimes one by one, sometimes in rows. But most of the U.S. soldiers moved forward. One after another, the weapons aimed at them fell silent.

"Do the Rebels know how to block the chlorine's effect?" Davis asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Dowling said, at the same time as General

Custer was snapping, "I doubt it."

Custer glared at his adjutant. Dowling hung his head and muttered an apology. Reports from Europe, though, showed how chlorine could be countered. Even something as simple as pissing in a rag and holding it over your mouth and nose could keep most of the gas out of your lungs, though it would still burn your eyes. And the limeys and the frogs were supposed to be using the same sort of masks German and now U.S. troops had, too.

"I shan't give any details," Davis said, "though I doubt the Confederate States need to read my columns to garner military intelligence." That was sure to be true; where the USA had German reports on the effects of chlorine, the CSA would have got details from Paris and London.

Whatever the reports had said, though, the Rebs hadn't paid much attention to it. U.S. soldiers still flooded forward, and, now, Confederate prisoners, herded along by jubilant Americans—some wearing their masks, some with them hung around their necks— came stumbling back to the U.S. lines.

Some of the Rebs were ordinary captives, either men who'd surrendered in the fighting or were taken after being wounded. But others showed the effects of the poisonous gas. Some had blood running from their mouths or bubbling out of their noses. Others seemed to be doing their best not to breathe at all. From the tiny taste of chlorine Dowling had got, he tried to imagine what their throats and chests felt like. He was glad he failed. A couple of Confederates tried to scream at every breath they took, but emitted only little gasping sounds of agony.

"Not much glory here," Dowling observed, watching the wretched prisoners.

"Defeating the enemies of my country is glory aplenty for me," Custer declared. In his own way, he meant it, but his own way included seeing his name in the newspapers, preferably in letters several inches high.

And, by the way the attack was developing, he might get glory on his own terms. A big victory here, and Roosevelt would be hard pressed to keep from giving him the command in Canada he so desperately craved. A runner came up and said, in tones of high excitement, "Sir, we just captured a whole battery of those damn fast-firing three-inch guns the Rebs have. Not a man at 'em: most of the gunners ran, and

the gas got the rest."

'That's first-rate," Custer said. "Positively first-rate. We have to keep throwing men at them till they crack. Pour it on, by God! Pour it on!"

"Have you got more chlorine ready, to make another breach in their lines after they manage to plug this gap?" Davis asked.

Dowling nodded. Again, the reporter had found the right question to ask. The right answer, unfortunately, was no. The USA didn't turn out—or hadn't turned out—chlorine in the quantity Germany, a chemical powerhouse, did. If the thought of not having more bothered Custer, he didn't let on. "We won't need more," he said grandly. "Now that we've got them on the run, we'll make sure they keep running. I'll send in the cavalry to complete their demoralization. The stalemate on this front, Mr. Davis, is over, and you can quote me."

Davis wrote the words down. He didn't ask any more questions. Maybe that meant Custer had convinced him. Maybe, on the other hand, it meant the reporter had seen enough war on his own to know the general commanding First Army was talking through his hat. Abner Dowling was glumly certain about which way he would have bet.

* * *

Retreat. It was an ugly word. Jake Featherston hated the sound of it. But he hated the sound of *annihilation* a lot more. If the First Richmond Howitzers hadn't pulled back from the Susquehanna when they did, they would have been in no position to do it later.

"I knew we were in trouble when we didn't make it to the Delaware," he muttered as he trudged along a dirt road that coated him, the horses, the guns, and everything else nearby with a red-brown haze of dust.

He hadn't expected to be overheard, not through the clopping of the horses' hooves and the rattle and squeak of the gun carriage. But the new loader for the piece, a youngster named Michael Scott, said, "Why's that, Sarge?"

Featherston scowled. He almost didn't answer. As far as he was concerned, Nero and Perseus had manned the gun better than the kind of replacements you got nowadays. What they'd learned when they were serving their time as conscripts, God only knew. Featherston wasn't convinced they'd learned anything. But he replied, as patiently

as he could, "When we didn't finish the big wheel to the Delaware, that let the damnyankees keep shipping supplies into Baltimore. And that let the bastards break out of Baltimore, too. If they cut us off, we're still liable to be in a lot of trouble."

"Never happen," Scott declared. "Not in a million years. We'll whip 'em, same as we've done twice running."

"I figured the same thing when the fighting started," Featherston answered. "It's already gone on a hell of a lot longer than I figured it would. The Yankees this time, feels like they mean business, same as us."

They crossed Codorus Creek, the gun-carriage wheels rumbling over the planks of the bridge. On the southwestern side of the creek, Negro laborers and Confederate infantry were digging in, aiming to hold back the advancing U.S. troops, at least for a while, and to hold on to the town of Hanover, a couple of miles to the west.

Featherston was glumly certain they wouldn't keep Hanover long. With the chunk of land they'd carved out of Yankee territory being nibbled away at the base, they'd have to keep moving back toward Washington, and smartly, or the U.S. soldiers would cut them off. But they couldn't just skedaddle, not unless they wanted endless grief from the damnyankees who'd halted them at the Susquehanna.

Scott said, "If things had gone the way they were supposed to, we'd have been in Philadelphia a long time ago."

"Yeah, and if pigs had wings, we'd all carry umbrellas," Feather-ston replied with a snort. "When you've been through even a little more fighting, kid, you're going to see that things just *don't* go the way they're supposed to. The Yanks, they've got their own set of supposed-to's, and what we get is what's left over when ours bump up against theirs."

The loader nodded respectfully. Not only was Featherston a sergeant, he was that even more exalted creature, a veteran. The combination gave his views an authority few mortals could claim.

More hoofbeats: here came Pompey, mounted on one of Captain Stuart's fine horses. "Captain's compliments, Sergeant," he said in his syrupy voice, "an' we gonna go into battery by that slate quarry over yonder." He pointed off to the west of the road.

"All right," Featherston said shortly. He still didn't care for the way

Stuart used the Negro to relay orders, but however much authority he might seem to have to Michael Scott, to the battery commander he was just another noncom who did what he was told. Pompey rode on to give the rest of the guns in the battery the word.

Jake admitted to himself that Stuart had picked a good spot in which to deploy the howitzers. They were only a couple of miles back of Codorus Creek, in good position to pound the Yankees when they approached the line the Confederates were creating. Better yet, piles of spoil from the mine offered fine cover for the guns, and Negroes were already busy digging firing pits to protect them even better.

As Featherston supervised the emplacement of his own howitzer, Captain Stuart rode up himself. Featherston saluted. Stuart watched the black men in butternut tunics of simpler, baggier cut than soldiers wore. With a sly grin, he said, "Got yourself a whole ready-made gun crew this time, in case the one the government issued you goes down."

"Uh, yes, sir," Jake said, a little nervously. He still wasn't happy about having used Nero and Perseus as fighting men. Nobody else was happy about it, either, except possibly the two Negroes—and their opinion didn't count. What the reaction of the brass amounted to was that Featherston had done what he'd had to do, and it was too damn bad he'd had to do it. That was pretty much how he felt about it himself.

Stuart swung down off the horse and tied the reins to a sapling. "What really makes life difficult is that you put the niggers on the guns right after that Major Potter came sniffing around with all his crazy talk about every other nigger in the army being a damned Red. Would you believe it, he wanted to take Pompey away for questioning."

"Is that a fact, sir?" Featherston said, in tones he devoutly hoped were unrevealing. He, after all, had been the one who'd suggested Pompey could do with some investigating.

"It is indeed." Jeb Stuart III kicked at the ground to show his indignation. It wasn't aimed at Jake, from which he concluded Stuart didn't know who mistrusted his supercilious servant. "I had to get hold of my father back in the War Department, and he had to do some pretty plain talking to the Army of Northern Virginia Intelligence before they turned Pompey loose. When those people question somebody, he's lucky if he comes out of it in one piece, especially if he's a nigger."

Ever since the days of Robert E. Lee, Confederates had used *those people,* spoken in a particular tone of voice, as a euphemism for *the enemy.* Featherston had never heard it used that way to mean part of the Confederate Army, not till now. He hoped he didn't hear it used that way again for another fifty or sixty years.

So Jeb Stuart, Jr., had saved Pompey from the tender mercies of Army Intelligence, had he? If Pompey wasn't any more than an ordinary black servant stuck up beyond his station because of whom he served, that was fine. If Pompey was a snake in the grass, it was anything but fine. But how were you supposed to know which if you didn't try to find out?

"Pompey's family has been with my family since my greatgrandfather's day," the captain said. "He'd be loyal to the Stuarts before he'd join up with a pack of Red revolutionaries just because they have black skins."

Featherston didn't answer. Arguing with your superior had no future in it. Arguing with your superior when he was also in the third generation of a leading Confederate military family had less than no future.

And, in any case, he had enough other things to do. Making sure the gun was sited as well as it could be, making sure the wheel brakes were set and the spade on the end of the trail dug into the ground, making sure there was a good, thick earthen rampart between the ammunition and the crew so a lucky shell hit wouldn't—or might not—blow them all to Jesus ... all that took time and work.

As he readied the position, he kept peering over the creek, looking for the caterpillar ripples on the distant ground that marked advancing Yankee infantry. Sure enough, here they came. Larger dots punctuating the ripples were horses. *Cavalry,* Featherston thought, with a mixture of respect for their courage and scorn for their uselessness.

Then the dots peeled off. They know better than to get their precious horses—and their precious selves—too close to the machine guns, Jake thought. Poor dears might get hurt. Cavalry would charge, though, when ordered. After staring a moment, he recognized the pattern the horses were forming.

"That's not cavalry!" he shouted. 'That's field artillery."

Jeb Stuart III came trotting up beside him. He nodded as he stuck a brass telescope up to his eye. "Field artillery, sure as hell," he agreed.

"I make the range about two and a half miles—say, four thousand yards for starters. Let's give them a hello, shall we?"

He started bawling for the whole battery. Featherston handled his gun. It was the second one of the battery to open up. The shell fell a couple of hundred yards short of the U.S. field gun. The next shell, a few seconds later, was long. After that, they started landing in the right general area. You put enough shells in the right general area, you did damage. The Yanks had probably figured they could get their battery into position and into action before the retreating Confederates were ready to reply. They'd made a mistake there, and they were going to pay for it.

The U.S. battery did get a few shots off, shells crashing down on the trench line behind Codorus Creek. But that kind of nuisance firing went on every day of the war. It was hardly worth noticing, even by the Negro laborers, who were more flighty than soldiers when it came to being on the receiving end of bullets. Since they couldn't shoot back, Jake found it hard to blame them for that.

He glanced over to Nero and Perseus. They stood by the horses, and were plainly ready to dive into the foxhole if the damnyankees started hurling shells at the battery. They'd shot back. Featherston hoped to high heaven they'd never have to do it again.

After a few minutes, the U.S. field guns couldn't stand the heat from deploying out in the open. They started moving again, this time against the tide of the advancing U.S. infantry. "So long!" Featherston shouted at them. "Tell your mama what it's like when you really have to work for a living." His gun crew yelled and waved their hats. At Captain Stuart's orders, they started pouring shells into the foot soldiers approaching the creek.

They worked a formidable slaughter among them, too, but a couple of hours later they had to abandon their position and pull back another mile or two: somewhere farther west, the Yankees had forced a crossing of the creek.

"Doesn't seem right," Michael Scott grumbled as Nero and Perseus hitched the horses up to the guns. "We were massacring the bastards."

"Wasn't so much what they did in front of us that made us start this retreat," Featherston answered. "It was what happened off to the flank and the rear. You can win your own part of the battle and still have the whole army lose."

"I wish you hadn't said that," the loader told him. After Jake thought about it for a while, he wished he hadn't said that, too.

When Flora Hamburger went downstairs from the Socialist Party offices to walk across Centre Market Place and buy a sandwich in the market, Max Fleischmann was arguing with two goons outside his butcher's shop.

"No, I don't got no ham," he said to them. "Don't got no pig's knuckles. Don't got no head cheese. Don't got no bacon. Don't got no time for no silliness, neither, I'm a Jew. You maybe may have noticed."

"Yeah, pop, we noticed," one of the goons said. His nasty grin showed a couple of broken teeth. "Maybe you noticed this." He raised the billy club he carried in his right hand. The armband wrapped around his left sleeve read, peace and order. He and his equally unpleasant friend looked like a couple of Soldiers' Circle men, and were helping to hold down the staunchly Socialist neighborhood by main force.

"Leave that man alone," Flora said crisply. Her English was precise and almost unaccented. The two volunteer policemen gaped at her as she went on, "Not only has he done nothing to you, but if you beat him, you will be beating one of the few Democrats in this part of New York."

"Ain't no Democrats here," said the goon with the club ready to use. "Just Jews and Socialists." He leered at her. "Which are you, lady?"

"Both," Flora answered. The thugs undoubtedly knew that; they hung around the Socialist Party office to harass the Party regulars, and, Maria Tresca aside, few gentiles came here. Angelina Tresca wouldn't, ever again. Flora's party affiliation, though, was a sword that cut both ways. "And if you beat me today—or if you beat Mr. Fleischmann—every Socialist paper in the country will carry the story tomorrow." That was true. By the unhappy look on the goons' faces, they knew it, too. The one with the club raised lowered it. "Come on, Paddy," he said in disgust. "We'll find games to play somewheres else." They mooched off, looking for people more willing to be intimidated.

"Thank you," the butcher said to Flora in English before dropping back into Yiddish. "When you go home, you stop in here. I'll have something for you to take back to the flat. Not something big, maybe, but something."

"You don't need to do that," she said, also in Yiddish.

"Hush," Fleischmann told her, his voice stern. "You have a sister who can use good food right now. Take it for her, if not for you." His stiff-backed pose declared he would allow no disagreement.

Flora gave up. "I'll stop," she promised, wondering how Fleischmann knew about Sophie. Gossip on the crowded Lower East Side was an amazing thing. No doubt Fleischmann also knew the baby would be illegitimate. Flora sighed. Even if you disapproved of bourgeois conventions, you couldn't escape them.

More goons patrolled the Centre Market. The Remembrance Day riots had given the authorities the excuse they needed to clamp down on Socialist strongholds throughout New York City, though no one had proved or could prove a Socialist had started the disturbances.

Flora bought a smoked-tongue sandwich from a little stall in the market, a couple of pickled tomatoes from a man who carried his great vat of spiced brine on a pushcart, and coffee from another fellow with a pushcart, this one mounting a samovar. She ate quickly, then went back upstairs, where she spent the afternoon writing one letter after another, all of them aimed at getting Roosevelt's repressive restrictions lifted from New York City.

"If the president keeps up with them," said Herman Bruck, who was also writing, "he'll provoke a working-class uprising a hundred times worse than anything we saw in the Nineties. That will play hob with carrying on his foolish war."

His bruises had faded. Roentgen-ray photographs had shown his left hand wasn't broken after all. He wore as a badge of honor the gap in his smile that he'd got when somebody wearing a heavy Soldiers' Circle ring had punched him in the face during the riots, and loudly proclaimed to whoever would listen that he preferred it to going to the dentist for bridgework. Flora found that absurd, but didn't say so; whenever she argued with Bruck about anything, he thought it meant she was interested in him. Maria Tresca, in mourning black, was very quiet.

Flora finished her letter-writing, said her good-byes, and went downstairs. Max Reischmann stood waiting for her, as if in ambush. He thrust a paper-wrapped package into her hands. Her eyebrows flew up at the weight of it. "This is too much!" she exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, I'm not hearing very well today," the butcher said, and went back into his shop. That left her the choice of pursuing him

when he plainly did not want to be pursued and going home. Shaking her head, she went home.

"What do you have there?" her mother asked when she walked into the crowded apartment.

"I kept Mr. Fleischmann the butcher from having some trouble with TR's hooligans, so he gave me this," she answered, and opened it on the kitchen counter. "Marrow bones and stewing beef: there must be three or four pounds of it."

"That's very nice," her mother said. "We can use that—barley soup with onions and carrots, maybe, the way your father likes."

"Yes, Mama," Flora said; to her mother, utility made anything, even Socialism, worthwhile. "I'll put it in the icebox."

Her brothers came in then, bantering with her and their younger sister Esther as they hung up their jackets and caps. David lighted a cigarette, a habit he was just acquiring and one Flora wished he'd lose. The harsh smoke made the flat stink; it wasn't flavorful like the pipe tobacco their father used—even the cheaper grades he was using nowadays smelled better than this nasty weed.

When Benjamin Hamburger came in, he got the pipe going right away, perhaps in self-defense. Sophie dragged in last of all. The war had created relentless demands on seamstresses in New York City, all over the USA, and, no doubt, all over the world. The bosses didn't care if you were going to have a baby. You had to show up and you had to work no matter how tired, no matter how sick you were. If you didn't, somebody else was waiting to do your job.

Over small helpings of pot roast and big ones of potato kugel, Benjamin Hamburger remarked on that: "With so many jobs needing doing now, wages may be going up. *Alevai,"* he added, dragging superstition into a discussion of what should have been the most unsuperstitious study of economics.

Before Flora could turn the discussion into a more rational pattern, someone knocked on the door. Flora's mother bounced to her feet and strode to the door with a determined stride, saying, "A peddler who comes round at suppertime deserves a *choleryeh* he'll remember for a year, and I'll give him one, you see if I don't."

But when she threw open the door, it was not a peddler hawking knives or pens or stereoscope slides through the block of flats. Instead,

it was an unfamiliar-looking man in a green-gray uniform. "Yossel!" Sophie exclaimed, recognizing him without his beard where Flora had not.

"May I come in?" Yossel Reisen asked when Sarah Hamburger showed no signs of getting out of his way.

"You may come in," Benjamin called over his wife's shoulder. When she whirled around to protest, he waved for her to calm down, continuing, "How long you stay depends on what you have to say for yourself once you are in here."

Thus appeased, Sarah grudgingly stepped out of the way. Yossel came past her and into the flat. Esther quickly got up. "Here, find a chair and eat something," she said, hurrying into the kitchen and returning with a plate piled high with potato kugel.

'Thank you." Reisen did sit down, and looked around nervously. The grimace with which he greeted Sophie was no doubt intended for a smile, but failed of its purpose. "Hello," he said, cautiously, as if she were an armed Rebel behind a wall. "How are you?"

"As well as I could be—considering," she answered. "You know how I am—the rest of it, though. You must have got my letters, even if I haven't heard from you." She stared at him as defiantly as a Confederate soldier in arms.

He had a mouth full of kugel, and used that respite to good advantage. "Yes, I know," he said, and then, "I'm sorry, Sophie. I didn't intend that to happen."

Didn't intend which to happen? Flora wondered. Didn't intend to sleep with Sophie or didn’t intend to get her with child? But she held her tongue, to see what her older sister would do.

"People don't intend that to happen," Sophie said, taking him to mean he hadn't planned to impregnate her. "But it does, and then they have to decide what to do next."

"That's why I came here," Yossel answered. "I managed to get four days' leave. I spent most of one day coming up from Maryland, and I'll need most of another to get back. Between times"— he licked his lips —"we can get married."

Bourgeois respectability, Flora thought as Sophie clapped her hands together once and nodded. The idea should have carried more scorn

than it did. Somehow, the feeling of contempt for bourgeois values was harder to come by when those values benefited her sister.

Benjamin Hamburger also nodded, as if he'd expected nothing less from Yossel. Maybe he had expected nothing less. But he raised an objection: "Even with the war, you'll have trouble finding a rabbi to perform the ceremony on such short notice."

Yossel Reisen shrugged. "Then we'll find a judge, and find a rabbi when I get a longer leave, or else after the war is over."

"You say that?" Flora exclaimed. "You, who wanted to do nothing but sit on your *tokhus* and study Talmud all day?"

"Flora!" Sophie said indignantly. Flora realized everyone else must have heard what she said as an insult. She hadn't meant it that way; what she'd been expressing was astonishment.

For a wonder, Yossel understood that. He held up a hand, which, after a moment, quieted the angry outcry from the rest of Flora's family. "Yes, I say that," he answered. "When you have been where I have been, when you have seen what I have seen, when you have done what I have done..." His voice trailed away. He was sitting across the table from Flora, and looking in her direction, but he wasn't looking at her. He looked through her, to some place he alone saw, some place maybe more real to him than the crowded apartment in which he sat. He needed a little while to realize he had stopped talking, and coughed a couple of times before he resumed: "When all that is true, you know, right down to the soles of your boots you know, how little time there is. And when you have a little of that little time, you do what you can with it, and what you cannot do now, you will do later, if God lets you."

No one spoke for a minute or so after that. Then, quietly, Benjamin Hamburger asked, "Sophie, is this all right with you?"

"Yes," Sophie answered, also quietly. Perhaps of its own accord, her left hand settled on her belly, which was beginning to bulge. "As Yossel said, we have only a little time. We'll do as much as we can with it."

Flora's father looked to her mother. Sarah Hamburger didn't say yes, but she didn't say no, either. "It is not a perfect arrangement," Benjamin said, "but what in life is perfect except God? If Sophie agrees, it will do."

Flora was temperamentally opposed to compromise of any kind: she was the one who'd wanted to fight to the end against voting to pay for Roosevelt's war. Here, though ... when it was her own family, things didn't look the same. It wasn't her choice, anyhow; it was Sophie's.

"You'll sleep here on the divan tonight," her father told Yossel, "as if you were a boarder again." Everybody smiled at that. Benjamin Hamburger got up and went into the kitchen. He rummaged in the pantry and in a cabinet, and came back with a bottle of whiskey and enough glasses for everyone; Flora's brothers told how the old men at the *shul* had given each of them his first shot just before his bar mitzvah.

Amid toasts of *"L'chaym!"* everybody knocked back the drinks. Isaac might have been emboldened by the whiskey, for he asked Yossel Reisen, "What—is it like at the front?" Emboldened or not, he sounded hesitant.

Yossel looked into the depths of his glass as he had looked through Flora. At last, he answered, "Think of all the worst things you know in the world. Think of them all in one place. Think of them as ten times as bad as they really are. Then think of them ten times worse than that. What you are thinking about when you do that is one ten-thousandth of what the front is like."

Nobody asked him any more questions.

Somewhere in the Yankee lines in the ruins of Big Lick, Virginia, a rifle cracked. About fifty feet away from Reggie Bartlett, an incautious Confederate soldier toppled back into the trench, shot through the face. He wasn't dead, not yet; a scream bubbled through the blood flooding from his nose, his mouth, and the wound between them.

"God damn that fucking sniper to hell," somebody snarled as a couple of men hauled their wounded comrade back toward the doctors to see if they could do anything for him. "That's the fourth one of us he's got on this sector this week. We ever catch him, I'll gut-shoot him and watch him die."

Bartlett hardly looked up, either for the gunshot or for the screams and curses following it. He was hunting lice, a matter that could have taken up most of his waking day if duties demanded by his officers hadn't intervened. Every one of the little bastards you crunched between your thumbnails was one more that wouldn't bite you, one more that wouldn't leave sores and scabs in your hair, one more that

wouldn't leave itchy welts on your body.

He tried to remember his leave in Richmond. He knew he'd been there, seen old friends, made new ones, got drunk, got laid at a soldiers' brothel full of bored-looking colored girls. It was a matter of a few weeks, not months or years, but seemed far more distant than that. When you were at the front, everything else was distant.

If you singed the seams of your tunic and trousers, you killed nits and drove lice out to where you could grab them and squash them. Reggie lighted a candle, shed his tunic, and ran the flame along one sleeve, pausing every so often to slaughter the vermin he'd flushed out.

A fat rat came strolling down the middle of the trench. It was light enough not to get stuck in the mud from the recent rains; Bartlett wished he could have said the same. The rat paused and stared at him with its beady black eyes. *I'll steal your rations, see if I don't,* it seemed to say. *And if I don 7, one day soon a Yankee shell will turn you into rations—for me.*

Shells never seemed to kill rats—or maybe it was just that there were so many of them, every piece of artillery in the world couldn't have slaughtered them all. Well, if wholesale didn't work, there was always retail. Reggie snatched up the entrenching tool beside him and threw it at the rat. The rat was quick and alert, but he'd guessed right about which way it would jump, and it couldn't outrun the sharpened shovel blade, which cut it almost in two. Bartlett retrieved the tool and used it to smash in the twitching rat's head. The twitching ceased. He looked around to see if any more rats were close by. Spying none, he went back to debusing his tunic.

"You hammered that fat, ugly bastard," Corporal Robert E. McCorkle said.

"Sure did," Bartlett agreed. McCorkle was a fat, ugly bastard himself, but saying so struck Reggie as impolitic. 'They're getting awfully bold these days, parading through the trenches like they've got stars in wreaths on their collars."

McCorkle laughed at that. Reggie relighted the candle, which had gone out, and went back to killing lice. He had just started on the other sleeve when first one man and then several began banging with entrenching tools on shell casings that had been hung like temple bells from tripods made of boards. With the unmusical banging, a warning cry raced up and down the trench line: "Gas! The Yanks are using gas!"

Being shot at, having artillery shells land all around, even going out between the trench lines to lay wire or to raid—Reggie was used to all that, almost to the same degree he'd been used to waiting at a Richmond corner for the streetcar to pick him up on his way between his apartment and the pharmacy where he'd worked. It wasn't that he was fearless; it was much more that anything, even the worst of horrors, becomes routine, and what is routine no longer terrifies.

But gas, gas was new. The U.S. soldiers hadn't used it on the Roanoke front, not till now. The masks—which looked like plump versions of the ones surgeons wore over their mouths and noses— and the hyposulfite solution in which to soak them had arrived days before. He snatched his mask out of the breast pocket in his tunic where he'd stowed it and sprinted, bare-chested, for the hyposulfite tin.

There, he discovered arrangements could have been better. Everybody else was as frightened of the poisonous stuff the damnyankees were spewing as he was, and the big tin stood at the center of a struggling knot of men.

"Form a line!" Corporal McCorkle shouted from behind him. "God damn you, form a line, and on the double!"

Discipline held; when a voice with command told the men what to do, they did it. Bartlett dipped his mask into the big, wide-mouthed tin and tied it over his face as the first yellow-green tendrils of chlorine gas came down into the trench like so many poisonous snakes slithering in the late spring sun.

His eyes burned. He passed the palm of his hand over the dripping mask and then over his eyes. That helped, a little. He had no idea whether the hyposulfite solution would hurt his eyes. He knew damn well the chlorine would, though.

His lungs burned, too. He could smell the harsh chlorine in his nose, taste it in his mouth. The mask he wore like a cold, clammy veil was anything but perfect. But men who hadn't donned masks, or who hadn't tied them tight, were coughing and choking, clutching at their throats and turning blue. Not perfect, no, but a hell of a lot better than nothing.

"If you can't get to the chemical, piss on your mask!" That was Captain Wilcox, his voice muffled by the mask he was wearing. "It's disgusting, but it may keep you alive."

As the chlorine spread from the front-line trenches toward those

farther to the rear, U.S. artillery opened up, pounding the Confederates with a harsh bombardment. Reggie Bartlett huddled in the mud near the rat he had killed. Any one of those shells could lay him open the way his entrenching tool had gutted the rat. He held his hands over his face, both to protect it from splinters and to keep his mask on tight.

The bombardment was sharp, but it was also short: no more than fifteen minutes. "Up, dammit, up!" Captain Wilcox shouted. Farther along the trench, the battalion commander, Major Colleton, echoed the command: "Get up and fight like Americans! Here come the damnyankees!"

Bartlett's eyes burned worse than ever; tears streamed down his face. But he hadn't been killed, he hadn't been maimed. *Thank you, Jesus.* He scrambled to his feet and ran to the firing step. Sure enough, the Yankees were cutting their way through the wire. Most of them wore masks like his. The white cloth squares made good targets. He fired again and again and again. U.S. soldiers fell. More kept coming, though, their uniforms almost the color of chlorine.

Confederate machine guns opened up. The damnyankees started falling faster. But still they came, urgent shouts blurred under the hyposulfite-soaked gauze pads on their mouths. Some of them got close enough to throw grenades. One burst near Bartlett, leaving him stunned and half deafened. After a moment, he realized his left leg hurt. *Fragment or a nail or whatever must have kissed me,* he thought. When he put weight on the leg, it held. He could worry about the wound later, then.

A few Yankees leaped down into the Confederate trench, but none near him: those men were dead or wounded or running or crawling back to their own lines. A pistol barked, its sharp report like a terrier yapping amid retrievers. Probably Major Colleton, doing some of his own fighting. You couldn't fault him for guts.

"God damn," a man in butternut beside Reggie said reverently as the firing slowed. "We beat the sons of bitches back."

Bartlett needed a moment to recognize Jasper Jenkins with a mask on his face, even though the two of them had shared corn-bread and jam and coffee for breakfast that morning. "Sure as hell did, Jasper," he answered, using his friend's name to cover his own embarrassment. "These masks do help. Nice to know we got something at least partway right."

Negro stretcher-bearers, Red Cross armbands on their left sleeves and masks on their faces, came forward to take the men who had been gassed and the other casualties back to where the doctors could work on them. Staring at the yellowish foam on the lips of one poor fellow who moaned with every breath he took, Reggie wondered what the quacks could do for him, and if they could do anything at all. He brought his hand up to his mask. If he'd been at the tail end of that line instead of near the front...

"I'd have pissed on my mask," he said. "Anything is better than nothing." He unbuttoned his fly and faced the wall of the trench. He noticed he was pissing on a dead rat. Nobody had smacked it with an entrenching tool: like the gassed soldier he'd seen, it had yellow foam on its whiskers.

As he walked along the trench, he saw more rats, either frozen in death or thrashing like soldiers who'd inhaled what wasn't an immediately fatal dose of chlorine. He kicked a couple of the corpses, and stamped the life out of a couple that were still breathing.

"Gas must bring the sons of bitches up out of their holes," Jasper Jenkins said.

"Reckon so," Reggie agreed. "They come up for fresh air, but there isn't any fresh air. Maybe we'll have a few days without them thieving and chewing on dead bodies." He picked up the tunic he'd thrown down when the gas attack started. "I wonder if that chlorine stuff kills lice, too. If it does, there may be something to it after all." He squatted down to examine the tunic and find out.

Nellie Semphroch went from table to table with a tray for empty plates and coffee cups and a damp rag to wipe the tables clean of spilled coffee and bits of bread from sandwiches. Thanks to Mr. Jacobs, she hadn't had any trouble getting good bread and meats, despite what her ration books said. No snoopy Confederate inspectors had walked in and started asking questions; Mr. Jacobs evidently knew a way to keep that from happening, too.

She looked around the coffeehouse. Business was good. Business, in fact, was booming. If she wasn't careful, she'd get rich. Confederate inspectors might not come into the coffeehouse, but Confederate officers did, and they told their friends, and— She stiffened. There sat Nicholas H. Kincaid, moodily sipping at a cup of coffee. He hadn't come in for food or drink. He'd come in to try to seduce Edna, having

come so close once before.

Why, Nellie thought resentfully, *hasn *t he gone and gotten himself killed?* She wished she could walk up to him and throw him out on his ear. Since he was an occupier and she one of the occupied, she couldn't do that. What she could do, and did, was thank heaven she had Edna in the back washing dishes and not here out front waiting tables. With a final scowl at Kincaid, she carried the tray back to her daughter.

"Hello, Ma," Edna said, looking up from the sink. "You got more presents for me? Why don't you bring me a diamond ring and a motorcar, instead of all these miserable, stinking, goddamn dishes?"

"You've got the soap right there." Nellie pointed to it. "Why don't you wash your mouth out with it?"

Mother and daughter glared at each other. Mother and daughter had been doing a lot of that lately. The more Nellie tried to keep an eye on Edna, the more Edna took to sneaking around. Nellie didn't know what to do about it. She had to sleep, she had to eat, she had to mind the customers—and Edna was so wild for life these days—that was what the young people called it, anyway; to Nellie, it was just another word for *loose*—that fifteen or twenty minutes unwatched might well have been all she needed.

"Why don't you let me be?" Edna said.

"Oh, no," Nellie answered. "I know you too well." *You 're too much the way I was, more than half a lifetime ago.* Easing back never occurred to her, nor did the notion that part of Edna's wild-ness might have sprung from being watched too closely too often for too long.

With a martyred sigh, Edna took the cups and saucers and plates from the tray and set them in the soapy water in the sink. Nellie nodded—that was what her daughter was supposed to be doing. Leaving Edna to the scrubbing, Nellie went back out to see what her customers needed.

A couple of Rebels held up empty cups and asked for refills. One of them asked for another ham sandwich, too. It was a good thing she was getting those extra rations, thanks to Mr. Jacobs; if the Rebs fought half as well as they ate, the United States were in more trouble than they knew.

She had just served the sandwich when a civilian came into the

coffeehouse. That did happen now and again; some Washing-tonians came in arm-in-arm with Confederate officers, and a lot of those who didn't still had the slick, prosperous look of men who were getting along well by getting along well with the enemy. She'd passed a name or two to Mr. Jacobs, in the hope of helping a collaborator to an untimely demise.

This fellow didn't have that look. He was a middle-aged man with gray muttonchop whiskers, and hadn't shaved the rest of his face any time in the past couple of days. He wore a suit and tie, but he'd been wearing his collar for a while, and his jacket had shiny elbows and a couple of spots on the front.

Nellie prominently posted her prices. One look at them was plenty to send most customers not armed with either Confederate scrip or good connections fleeing out into the street. The stranger studied the list, sighed, shrugged, and sat down at a corner table. Nellie went over to him. "May I help you, sir?"

He looked up at her, sharply, almost disconcertingly. His eyes were tracked with red. He might have had a drink or two, but he didn't stink too badly of booze. "A turkey sandwich and a cup of coffee/' he said.

"Yes, sir," Nellie answered. When a customer didn't say what kind of coffee he wanted, he got the cheapest she had. "That'll be a dollar even," she went on, in a tone of voice suggesting she wanted to see the dollar before she served him.

Getting the unspoken message, the fellow dug in his trouser pocket. A big silver cartwheel chimed sweetly on the tabletop. "There you are," he said, still studying her.

She ignored that. She was good at ignoring men when they looked at her more closely than they should have. She didn't ignore the dollar. That she scooped up. Maybe this fellow thought he could leave it sitting there till she gave him his order, then scoop it up and slide out the door. Washington had always been full of grifters, and all the more so since the Rebs occupied it.

Money in hand, she went back behind the counter, poured the coffee, and made the man his sandwich. Because he looked down on his luck, she piled the smoked turkey higher than she would have for a damned Reb, and stuck a couple of sweet pickles alongside even though she usually tacked on an extra nickel apiece for them.

She carried the turkey sandwich and the steaming coffee cup over to him. He smiled, which stretched his mouth out almost to the tips of his muttonchops. "That looks mighty good," he said, tucking the napkin into his collar to protect his shirtfront. 'Thank you, Little Nell."

Nellie froze. No one had called her that since a couple of years before Edna was born. She'd hoped—she'd thought—no one would ever call her that again, as long as she lived. "Eat your sandwich, whoever you are," she said tonelessly. "Eat your sandwich, drink your coffee, get out, and never come back here again."

'Time was when you gave me something better for my dollar than meat and bread," the man said with a reminiscent leer. Yes, there was whiskey on his breath.

"Get out now," Nellie said, perhaps more quietly than she'd intended, because she felt a scream boiling up inside her that would shake the place down if she let it loose. "Get out now, or I'll have the Rebs here throw you out."

He assumed an injured expression. "Don't take it like that, Little Nell. Don't you remember Bill Reach of the *Evening StarV*

And, for a wonder, she did. He'd been panting after stories in those days. He'd been panting after anything else he could get his hands on, too, and he'd got his hands on her once a week or so for months at a time. He'd been better than some, but that wasn't saying much, not with what she'd seen there for a couple of years. Men were brutes, men were beasts, no doubt about it.

"Your voice hasn't changed at all," he said, which explained how he'd recognized her. "You're not as blond as you used to be, though."

Her golden curls had come out of a bottle. They drew customers, so she'd kept them that color till she managed to escape the life she'd been leading. Bill Reach's looks weren't what they had been, not by a long shot. He looked to be about two steps up from a bum, too. *Serves him right,* she thought.

But, because he'd been better than some—only out for his own pleasure, not actively cruel—she said, "All right, eat before you go. But don't come back. Don't you ever come back here."

"Is that any way to talk to an old friend?" he demanded indignantly. Maybe that was how he thought of himself. As if she'd made friends with the men who set money on the nightstand! The idea made her

want to laugh in his stubbly face. The only thing they'd ever done to make her happy was to get up, get dressed, and leave.

A large shape loomed up beside her: a Confederate officer. "Is this man bothering you, ma'am?" Nicholas H. Kincaid asked. The clear implication was that, if she said yes, Bill Reach would regret it for a long time.

She would have been happier with anyone but Kincaid coming to her aid. He wasn't helping her because he felt like helping her; he was helping because, if she approved of him, he'd have a better chance at laying Edna. She knew how men's minds worked, oh yes she did, all too well.

"It's all right," she said, surprising Reach and disappointing Kincaid. "He didn't mean any harm." She looked that eat-and-get-out warning at the ex-reporter. (What was he doing now? Nothing too well, by the look of him.) Reluctantly, Kincaid went back to his" table and sat down again.

Nellie stayed out front till Reach had eaten and left. Then she

gathered up his dirty dishes and those from several other tables and carried them in to Edna.

"What's the matter, Ma?" her daughter asked. "You look like you seen a ghost or something."

"Maybe I have," Nellie answered. Her daughter scratched her head.

XV

Major Irving Morrell was waiting for the stew pot full of odds and ends to come to a boil when a runner hurried up to him. "Sir," the fellow said, saluting, "I'm supposed to bring you back to division headquarters right away."

"Are you?" Morrell raised an eyebrow. "Well, you're going to have to wait a minute, anyhow." He raised his voice: "Schaefer!"

"Sir?" the senior captain in the battalion called.

"I'm ordered back to Division, Dutch," Morrell told him. "Try not to let the Rebs overrun us till I get back."

"I'll do my best," Captain Schaefer said, chuckling. "As long as you're

going back there, see if they'll send another couple of machine guns forward. We can use the firepower."

"I'll do that," Morrell promised. He turned to the runner. "All right, lead the way."

He was sweating by the time he got out of the front-line trenches; the runner had taken him literally, and was setting a hard pace. His wounded leg had unhappy things to say about that. Sternly, he told it to be quiet. It didn't want to listen. He ignored the complaints and pushed on through the hot, muggy summer night.

Division staff was too exalted to try to survive under canvas. They'd taken over several houses in the little town of Smilax, Kentucky. The one to which the runner brought Morrell had sentries all around and a U.S. flag in front of it. He gave the fellow a startled look. "You didn't say General Foulke wanted to see me."

"Yes, sir, that's who," the runner said. He spoke to one of the sentries: "This here's Major Morrell." The soldier nodded and went inside. He emerged a moment later, and held the door open for Morrell to go in and see the divisional commander. As Morrell climbed the stairs, the runner trotted off down the street, perhaps on another mission, perhaps to escape one.

Major General William Dudley Foulke was sitting in the front room scribbling a note when Morrell came in. The general was a plump man in his mid-sixties, with a bald crown, a white fringe around it, and a bushy white mustache. He looked more like a French general than an American one; all he needed was a kepi and a little swagger stick to complete the impression.

"At ease, Major," Foulke said after they exchanged salutes. "Effective immediately, I am removing you from command of your battalion."

"Sir?" Morrell hadn't expected to be summoned before the divisional commander at all, and certainly not for that reason. "On what grounds, sir?"

"What grounds?" Foulke wheezed laughter, then held up a plump, pink hand. "On the grounds that Philadelphia asked me for a younger officer who could fill a staff position there, and that your name topped the list. Are those satisfactory grounds, Major?"

"Uh, yes, sir," Morrell said. "I can't imagine any better ones, and a whole slew that are worse." When General Foulke had told him he was

being removed, he'd imagined that slew of worse grounds, though he didn't think he'd given reason for invoking any of them. Stubborn honesty, though, compelled him to add, "After I spent so long in the hospital, sir, I do regret being pulled away from active service again, if you don't mind my saying so."

"I don't mind at all," General Foulke said. "I'd be disappointed if you said anything else, as a matter of fact. A staff officer who likes being a staff officer because he has a soft billet far away from the line isn't a man of the sort the country needs. Men who want to go out and fight, they're the sort who do well for the general staff. You *will* be fighting, I promise you; the only difference will be, you'll do it with map and telegram, not with a rifle."

"Yes, sir." Morrell knew he should have been overjoyed; a tour on the General Staff would look very good on his record. But he reveled in the rugged outdoor life, whether in the Sonoran desert or the Kentucky mountains. Getting stuck behind a desk struck him as altogether too much like being stuck in a hospital bed.

William Dudley Foulke was thinking along with him, at least up to a point. Steepling his fingers, the general said, "Staff work can be the making of a promising young officer. If you see opportunity, by all means seize it. Here." He handed Morrell a book. "Something for you to read on the train: my translation of the Roman military writer Vegetius. Either it will engage your interest or help you sleep the miles away."

'Thank you very much, sir," Morrell said, wondering whether an ancient writer's precepts would have any bearing on the modern art of war.

"My pleasure." Foulke sighed. "When I was a boy, I thought I would be a lawyer or a scholar. But I was fourteen years old when the Rebs beat us the first time, and I knew then I wanted to spend the rest of my fife in the military service of my country. That little volume there is a relic of what might have been, I'm afraid, nothing more." He grew brisk again. "Well, you don't want to hear an old man maundering on about himself. I certainly didn't when I was a young officer, at any rate."

Morrell flushed. That embarrassed him, which only made him flush more. "I'll treasure the book, sir," he said.

"Or perhaps you won't," Foulke said. "It's all right either way, Major. I've sent Philadelphia a wire, letting them know you're on your way.

Now the trick will be getting you there. This part of Kentucky isn't what you'd call overburdened with railroads. We'll send you up the Hyden-Hazard road, and east from there to Hazard, where you can catch a train. You're ready to go now, I assume."

"Uh, two things, sir," Morrell said. "First, I promised I'd ask for a couple of more machine guns for my battalion."

'They'll have them," Foulke promised. "What else?"

Morrell looked down at himself. "If I'm going to Philadelphia, shouldn't I clean up a bit first?"

Foulke snuffled air out through his mustache. "Seeing what a real front-line soldier looks like would do Philadelphia good, but you may be right." He called for his adjutant—"Captain Rothbart!"—and said, "Get Major Morrell a hot bath, get him a fresh uniform, and get him on the road to Hazard so he can catch the train for Philadelphia."

"Yes, sir!" Rothbart said, and efficiently took care of Morrell. If he handled eveiything as smoothly for the divisional commander, General Foulke was well served.

Inside an hour's time, Morrell, clean and newly decked out, was jouncing along in a motorcar over dirt roads never intended for automobile traffic. The motorcar had three punctures before he got to Hazard, which, in the light of that experience, seemed well-named. Morrell stood guard with a rifle while the driver fixed the first two punctures; bushwhackers and Rebel guerrillas still roamed behind U.S. lines, looking like innocent civilians when they weren't out raiding. For the third puncture, Morrell pitched in and helped with the repair job. He thought about the state of his uniform only after his knees were already dirty. No Rebs shot at the motorcar, but the train he boarded in Hazard took gunfire three different times before it got out of Kentucky, and once had to turn around on a siding when the Confederates blew up a bridge on the route north. Occupied, eastern Kentucky might have been; subdued it was not.

Under the white glare of the train's acetylene lights, Morrell pondered Vegetius. Some parts of the book, the ones that dealt with Roman military equipment, were as dry and dusty as he'd feared, and Vegetius' own proposed inventions didn't strike him as any great improvements. He started wondering why General Foulke had wasted his time translating such a useless work.

But when Vegetius started talking about principles of the military art,

the book came to life. It was as if more than fifteen centuries had fallen away, leaving Morrell face-to-face with someone who worried about all the same things he did: ambushes, ways to deceive the enemy, the importance of intelligence, and other such concerns as vital in the twentieth century as they had been in the fourth.

And one sentence seized his attention and would not let it go: "Let him who desires peace prepare for war." Being ready to fight, he thought, instituting conscription and all the rest of it, had kept the United States from having to do more fighting after the defeat in the Second Mexican War.

When he finished the volume, he set it down not only with respect, but also with real regret. Not only was it interesting in and of itself, but General Foulke wrote gracefully, an attribute more common among officers of the War of Secession than their busy modern successors.

He changed trains in Wheeling, West Virginia. The new one pulled into the Pennsylvania Railroad station at Thirtieth and Market in the middle of the night. Waiting for him at the station was a spruce young captain who might have been Rothbart's cousin. His hat cords were intertwined black and gold; he wore black lace on his cuffs and a badge with the coat of arms of the United States superimposed on a five-pointed star—the marks of a General Staff officer.

His salute might have been machined. "Major Morrell?" he said, his voice as crisp as the creases on his trousers. At Morrell's nod, he went on, "I'm John Abell. As soon as we pick up your bags, I'll take you over to the War Department and we'll find quarters for your stay in the city."

"I haven't got any bags," Morrell told him. "When General Foulke let me know I'd been detached from my battalion, he gave me time to take a bath and put on a clean uniform, and then he stuck me in an automobile. My gear will catch up with me eventually, I expect."

"No doubt," Captain Abell said, looking at the mud on Morrell's knees. Well, if a General Staff officer didn't know motorcars got punctures on bad roads, that was his lookout. The captain shrugged, plainly deciding not to make an issue of it. "Let's go, then."

A couple of antiaircraft cannon stuck their snouts in the air outside the train station. "Philadelphia's been in the war," Morrell observed.

"That it has." Captain Abell waved. A driver in an open-topped Ford

came up. He opened the door to the rear seat for the two officers, then used the hand throttle to give the automobile more power as he chugged east through the streets of Philadelphia toward the War Department headquarters. Abell went on, "When the Rebs came storming up out of Virginia, we were afraid we'd either have to fight for the town or declare it an open city and pull out. That would have been very bad."

"I'll say it would," Morrell agreed. Since the War of Secession, and especially since the Second Mexican War, Philadelphia had been the *de facto* capital of the United States: Washington was simply too vulnerable to Confederate guns in the hills on the south side of the Potomac. Could the United States have gone on with the war after losing both their *de jure* and *de facto* capitals? Maybe. Morrell was glad they hadn't had to find out.

Despite the hour, motor traffic kept rumbling through the city, probably interrupting bureaucrats' sleep. Philadelphia wasn't just an administrative center; it was also a key assembly point for southbound men and materiel. Here and there, Morrell saw houses and shops and buildings that had taken damage. "The Rebs never got into artillery range of you, did they?" he asked.

"No, sir," Abell answered. "They send bombing aeroplanes over us when they can, though. A lot of bombs have fallen around the War Department, but only a couple on it." His lip curled. "They can't aim for beans."

It wasn't as if the War Department were a small target, either. It covered a lot of space between the United States Mint and Franklin Square. Thinking of it as one building was a mistake, too; it was a whole great complex, some structures of marble, some of limestone, some of prosaic brick. The driver had to jam on the brake several times to keep from running down uniformed men hustling from one building to another.

When he finally stopped, it was in front of a building that looked more like a tycoon's house than anything the government maintained. "One way to keep from being noticed is to look poor and worthless," Captain Abell said, noting Morrell's expression. "Another way is to look rich and useless."

If the Confederates didn't know exactly where the U.S. Army General Staff made its headquarters, Morrell would have been astonished. He didn't say anything, though, but hopped out of the Ford and followed

Captain Abell into the building. By the captain's reasoning, the sentries outside should have been decked out in servants' livery and carried trays for visitors' cards rather than rifles. Morrell was relieved to see they weren't and didn't.

Inside, the place was ablaze with electric lamps. Morrell blinked several times. The security officer to whom Captain Abell took him was brisk, thorough, efficient. After satisfying himself that Morrell really was Morrell, he gave him a temporary pass and said, "Good to have you with us, Major."

"Thanks," Morrell answered, still a long way from sure he was glad to be here. No matter what William Dudley Foulke had said, could you really fight a war in a fancy place like this?

Then Abell took him into the map room. Morrell had always had a fondness for maps; the more you studied them, the more you geared strategy and tactics to the terrain, the better off you were liable to be.

And here was the whole war, spread out before him in blue and red lines and arrows. Both Ontario fronts kept on being clogged, the enemy had the initiative in Manitoba, Kentucky still hadn't been knocked out of the fight. Guaymas remained in Rebel hands. (Morrell's leg twinged.) Utah was still in flames, too. But the Confederates were being driven from Pennsylvania, the USA had bitten off big chunks of Sequoyah, and the Rebs had been chased from New Mexico and well back into Texas. Other maps showed the confused fighting at sea.

His head swung back and forth, as if on a swivel. Seeing all the maps together, he felt like a general, not just a major worrying about his tiny part of the big picture. "I think I'm going to like this

place," he said.

* * *

The motorcar carrying Jacob Colleton kicked up a plume of red-brown dust as it came up the path toward Marshlands. "Is everything ready?" Anne Colleton demanded of Scipio, her voice harsh.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered; she would have been astonished to hear him say anything else. "The room is waiting for him. Dr. Ben-veniste should be here momentarily, and we are prepared to do all we can."

"All we can," Anne echoed. There in the back seat of the motorcar sat her brother, stiff and pale as a mannequin. He'd be sitting or standing

for a long time, maybe for the rest of his life. If he lay down, the telegram had warned her, the fluids in his gas-ravaged lungs were liable to choke him to death.

She opened the door as the motorcar jounced to a stop. Scipio rolled out the wheeled chair that had belonged to her greatgrandfather after he started having strokes. But he'd been an old man. Jacob should have had a long, healthy life stretching ahead. It might still be long. The question was, did Jacob wish it would be short?

The Negro chauffeur (Anne wondered if he was the man who'd driven Tom down from Columbia, but who paid enough attention to Negroes to be sure?) opened the door so Jacob could get out of the motorcar. The effort of sliding over, getting out, and walking two steps to the chair set him coughing, and that set him groaning. He sighed when he sat in the chair, and that made him groan anew.

Anne gave the chauffeur two dollars. "Thank you, ma'am!" he exclaimed, tipping his cap. The grin was broad and white across his black face; she'd greatly overpaid him. She didn't care. Her brother was worth it. The Negro climbed back into the automobile, put it in reverse so he could turn away from the mansion and the people who had come out of it, and drove off.

Jacob Colleton looked up at his sister. "Not quite the homecoming I had in mind when I went off to war," he said. His voice was a rasping whisper, as if he were a hundred years old and had smoked a hundred cigars a day for every one of those years.

"You hush, Jacob. We'll make you as comfortable as we can," Anne replied. Her brother's voice, so far from the vibrant baritone she remembered, made her grind her teeth at the inadequacy of what she'd just said. So did the purple circles under his eyes, almost the only color in his corpse-pale face. "You're coming home a hero, the same way they did after the War of Secession."

"A hero?" His laugh was a coughing wheeze. "I'd had two cups of coffee and I was on my way to the latrine when the damnyankees gassed us. Only fool luck my men took me with 'em when they fell back. Otherwise I'd be in a prison camp or a Yankee hospital. Not a damn thing heroic about it."

Speaking so much gave him color, but not of a healthy sort: his whole face turned a leaden violet, as if he were being strangled. And so he was, from the inside out. He sounded much the way Tom had, too,

utterly forgetful of the patriotism that had sent him rushing to join the fight against the USA.

"When we get you to your room, what can we bring you?" Anne asked.

"Whiskey," Jacob answered. "Morphia, if you can lay hold of it."

"Dr. Benveniste is on his way," she said. "He'll prescribe it." *If he doesn't, he'll be sorry.* She nodded to Scipio. "Take him upstairs. We'll discuss permanent service arrangements for him shortly."

"Yes, ma'am," the butler said, and then, to Jacob, "I'll be as careful as I can, sir."

Jacob let out a sound full of pain only once, when Scipio had trouble getting the chair smoothly over the threshold. Then, in the front hall, he had to stop, because Marcel Duchamp was standing there and would not move. The artist stared avidly at Jacob Colleton. "Modern man as defective part in the assembly line of war," he murmured. "Or is it man as perfect part?—the end product of what war is designed to produce."

He probably did not mean to be offensive; he must have seen Jacob not as Anne's injured brother but as an inspiration for art. At that moment, she did not care what he meant. "Get out," she said in a cold, deadly voice. "Pack your paintings and be gone from this house by tomorrow."

"But where shall I go?" Duchamp exclaimed in horror, sweat beading on his forehead.

"You can go to Columbia. You can go to Charleston. Or, for that matter, you can go to hell," Anne told him crisply. "I don't care. You are no longer welcome here." He tried to outstare her, to will her into changing her mind. Men had tried that with her before, and all of them had gone away defeated. So did Marcel Duchamp.

Then he tried for the last word: "You are not modern. You are only a rich atavism, playing with the new but belonging to the old."

That held enough truth to hurt. Looking down at poor Jacob, Anne saw how important things like the ties of family truly were to her. If those things had a smaller place in the world Duchamp inhabited, she would turn her back on that world, or on the parts of it she did not care for. She let the Frenchman see none of that. "I'll take my chances," she said. "And what I told you stands. Now get out of the

way, or I'll throw you out this instant."

"Should have thrown him out before he got here," Jacob croaked; like Tom, he'd had no use for the exhibition of modern art. "But you don't need to throw him out now on account of me. Far as I can see, he was right. That's what war does: makes lots and lots of thingsjustlikeme."

'Take him upstairs, Scipio." Anne didn't directly answer her brother, but she was never one to change her mind once she'd made it up. Duchamp would go, or she would throw him out.

Dr. Saul Benveniste arrived a few minutes later: a short, dark, clever man who looked, she thought, as Confederate founding father Judah P. Benjamin might have looked were he as thin as Alexander Stephens. The doctor went upstairs and came down a few minutes later. "I've given him morphia," he said. "I'll leave a supply here so you can give him more whenever the pain is very bad. Past that—" He spread his hands and shrugged.

"Is there any treatment you can give?" Anne asked. "Something that will make his lungs better, I mean, not just something to relieve the pain."

"I don't know of any," the doctor answered, his brown eyes mournful. "But then, nobody knows much about the business of poisonous gases, though I expect we'll all learn. You have to understand—the tissue in there is burned. I can't repair that from the outside. Breathing warm, moist air may help, and Marshlands has a good supply of that. He may heal some on his own, too. I can't really offer a long-term prognosis. I'm too ignorant."

"Thank you for being honest with me," she said.

"I'll do everything I can for him," Benveniste said. "I don't want you to get any exaggerated notions of how much that's likely to be, though."

"Thank you," Anne repeated. Then she said, "He wants whiskey. Will having it make him worse?"

"His lungs, you mean? I don't see why," Dr. Benveniste told her. "Most of the time, I don't have much good to say about drinking whiskey. Now, though—" He shrugged again. "If he hurts less drunk, is that so bad?"

"Not in the least," she said. "All right, Doctor. I'll call you as I need you." Benveniste nodded and left. His Ford started up with a bang and

a belch, then rattled away.

Anne went upstairs. Her brother was sitting up in bed, propped up by pillows. He had a bit more color than when he'd arrived at Marshlands. Nodding to Anne, he said, "Here I am, a relic of war," in his ruined voice.

"Dr. Benveniste said they might come up with new ways to make you better before too long," Anne told him. Dr. Benveniste hadn't quite said that, but he had said he didn't know much about treating poison-gas cases, so surely he and other medical men would be learning new things about them. And giving her brother hope counted a good deal, too.

"Best thing he could have done for me was shoot me through the head," Jacob said. "Morphia's the next best thing, though. I'm still on fire inside, but it's not as big a fire." He yawned; the drug was making him sleepy. Though his bedroom was rather dim, the pupils of his gray eyes were as small as if he'd been in bright sunshine.

He yawned again, then started to say something. The words turned into a soft snore. Without his seeming to realize it, his eyelids slid shut. The snore got deeper, raspier; Anne could hear the breath bubbling in and out of his tormented lungs, as if he had pneumonia.

She walked out into the hall and called one of the servants: "Julia!" When the Negro woman had come into Jacob's bedroom, she said, "I want you to sit here and make sure my brother does not lie down, no matter what. If he starts to slump away from the pillows that are supporting him, you are to straighten him up. Someone will have to be here all the time when he's asleep. I'll make arrangements with Scipio for that. Do you understand what I've told you?"

"Yes, ma'am," Julia said. "Don' let Mistuh Jacob lay hisself down, no matter what."

"That's right. You stay here till he wakes up or till someone takes your place." When Julia nodded again, Anne went out of the room, half closing the door behind her. Quite cold-bloodedly, she decided to arrange for Jacob's tenders to be chosen from among the younger, better-looking wenches of the household. She didn't know whether, injured as he was, he would be able to do anything with them or have them do anything for him. If he could, she would give him the chance.

In her office, a few doors down from Jacob's room, the telephone rang. She hurried down the hallway, the silk of her dress rustling

around her ankles. Picking up the earpiece, she spoke into the mouthpiece: "Anne Colleton."

"How do, Miss Anne?" The voice on the other end of the line had a back-country rasp to it: not a Carolina accent at all, and certainly not the almost English phrasing of her broker, who was the likeliest person to call at this hour and who came from an old Charleston family. She couldn't immediately place who this caller was, though he did sound vaguely familiar. When she didn't say anything for a few seconds, he went on, "This here's Roger Kimball, Miss Anne. How are you?"

She needed a moment to place the name, even though he'd written to her more than once after their encounter on the train to New Orleans: the randy submersible skipper. "Hello, Lieutenant Kimball," she said. "I'm well, thank you. I didn't expect to hear from you. Where are you calling from?"

"Lieutenant Commander Kimball now," he told her proudly, "though I reckon you know me well enough to call me Roger." That was true in a biblical sense, but probably in no other. "Where am I at? I'm in Charleston, that's where. Fishing over on the other coast is so bad, they moved a good many of us back here."

"I wish you luck with your fishing," Anne said. That was true. After what the damnyankees had done to her brother, she wanted every ship flying their flag to go straight to the bottom of the sea. True or not, though, she wished she'd phrased it differently. Kimball would think ...

Kimball did think. "Since I'm so close now, I was figurin' on gettin' me some liberty time, and then comin' up there and..." He let his voice fade, but she knew what he had in mind. Since she'd already given herself to him, he thought he could have her any time he wanted.

That she'd made a related calculation about Jacob and her serving women never once entered her mind. What did enter it was anger. "Lieutenant Commander Kimball, my brother just now came from the Western Kentucky front, suffering from chlorine in the lungs. I am not really in the best of positions to entertain visitors"—let him take that however he would—"at the present time."

"I'm very sorry to hear that, Miss Anne," the submariner said after a short silence. *Sorry to hear which?* Anne wondered. *That Jacob's been gassed, or that I won't let you lay me right now ?* No sooner had the

thought crossed her mind than Kimball continued, "That chlorine, that's filthy stuff, by everything I've heard tell about it. I hope your brother didn't get it too bad."

"It isn't good," Anne said, a larger admission than she would have made to someone with whom she was socially more intimate. The physical intimacy she'd known with Kimball was of different substance, somehow; despite it, the two of them remained near-strangers.

"I really do hope he gets better," Kimball said, and then, half to himself, "Nice to know there's *somethin'* in this war you don't have to worry about aboard a submersible." That brief bit of self-reflection done, he went on, "All right, I won't come up there right away—you'll be busy and all. Maybe in a few weeks, after I make a patrol or two."

His arrogance was breathtaking, so much so that Anne, instead of going from mere anger to fury, admired the quality of his nerve. He *had* been enjoyable, on the train and in New Orleans, a town made for enjoyment if ever there was one. Thinking about Jacob, she also thought she was liable to need relief from thinking about Jacob. She tapped a fingernail on the telephone case; indecision was unlike her. "All right, Roger, maybe in a few weeks," she said at last, but then warned, "Do telephone first."

"I promise, Miss Anne," he said. She didn't know what his promises were worth, but thought him likely to keep that one. He started whistling before he hung up the telephone. Anne wished she had any reason to be so happy.

George Enos set his gutting knife down on the deck of the steam trawler *Spray,* opened the ice-filled hold, and threw in the haddock and halibut he'd just finished cleaning. Then he went back to the latest load of fish the trawl had just scooped up from the bottom of Brown's Bank.

The seaman who was helping him clean the fish, a fellow named Harvey Kemmel who spoke with a harsh Midwestern accent utterly unlike Enos' New England dialect, wiped his face on his sleeve and said, "This here fishing for a living, it's damned hard work, you know?"

"I had noticed that, as a matter of fact," George answered dryly as he yanked another squirming halibut up off the deck, slit its belly open, and pulled out the guts. He tossed the fish into the hold and grabbed

another one.

Patrick O'Donnell came aft, a mug of the Cookie's good coffee clamped in his right hand. With his left, he slapped the side of the hold. "Nice the boat's so much like the *Ripple"* he said. "Means 1 don't hardly have to think to know where things are at."

"Same with me, Skipper," George Enos agreed, "and I heard

Charlie say the same thing about the galley. I like it that we're all still together—except poor Lucas, I mean."

"Me, too," O'Donnell agreed. He glanced down at the load of fish Enos and Kemmel were gutting. "We bring those into Boston, we'll make ourselves some pretty fair money off 'em." His gaze swung northward. Brown's Bank lay north and east of Georges Bank, where the *Ripple* had usually operated. In time of peace, that would have mattered only because it cost them more fuel to reach. Now, with the southern coast of Nova Scotia, some of it still uncon-quered, not so far away, other concerns also mattered. Under his breath, O'Donnell added, "If we get back to Boston."

Work went on. Work always went on, and there were never enough men to do it. Like Harvey Kemmel, several of the other sailors were working aboard a steam trawler for the first time. That meant O'Donnell and Enos and even Charlie White spent an inordinate amount of time explaining what needed doing, which in turn meant they didn't have as much time as they would have liked to do their own work.

One of the new men, a tall, skinny fellow named Schoonhoven who'd started life on a Dakota farm, was the first to spot the approaching boat. "Skipper," he called, his voice cracking with what might have been alarm or excitement or a blend of the two, "tell me that's not a submarine."

O'Donnell raised a telescope—just like the one he'd had aboard the *Ripple*—to his eye. "All right, Willem, I'll tell you that's not a submarine," he said, and then, after a perfectly timed pause, he added, "if you want me to lie to you."

Cleaning flatfish forgotten, Enos hurried to the rail and peered out across the Atlantic. It was indeed a submarine, traveling on the surface now because the *Spray* couldn't possibly hurt it. In case the fishermen hadn't noticed it was there, it fired its deck gun. A shell sent up a plume of seawater a couple of hundred yards in front of the

trawler.

Patrick O'Donnell ducked into the cabin, then came out again in a hurry. "Run up the white flag!" he shouted. "Maybe they'll let us take to the boats before they sink the trawler." As the signal of surrender fluttered up below the U.S. flag the *Spray* was flying, O'Donnell peered once more through the telescope at the submersible. "That's a Confederate boat," he ground out. "The bastards cruise up to Canada and back, same as the Canucks do to their ports."

The submersible closed rapidly. Soon Enos could see the Stars and Bars flying above it, too. A sailor ran out onto the deck of the Confederate vessel and began working the signal lamp. "Abandon—ship." Along with the rest of the *Spray's* crew, Enos read the Morse as it flashed across the water, letter by letter, word by word. "We—aim—to—sink—her."

"There's a surprise," Charlie White said with a grunt of laughter. "I figured they were going to buy our fish off us."

"Nova—Scotia—coast—100—miles—north," the signal lamp said. "Some—Yank-held—Good—luck—getting—there."

"Thanks a hell of a lot," Enos said. He helped Schoonhoven and Kemmel put the boat over the side. It looked very small, and a hundred miles of ocean enormously large. He glared toward the Rebel submersible, muttering, "And the horse you rode in on, too."

One after another, the crewmen from the *Spray* scrambled down into the boat. As captain, Patrick O'Donnell came last. "Let's get clear," he said. They worked the oars and moved away from the trawler. If no storm rose, you could row a hundred miles. The boat had food and water and a compass. All the same, Enos hoped they wouldn't have to try it.

Off to the other side of the *Spray,* he spotted what looked like a length of pipe sticking up out of the water and moving toward the Confederate submarine. He deliberately looked away from it. The Rebs on board the submersible paid it no heed. They were intent on coming right up to the *Spray* so they could sink her at point-blank range. If you didn't miss, you didn't waste shells. *Pay attention to the trawler,* he thought at the Confederates. *Pay attention to the trawler a little longer.*

He'd just started to think that again when three men in the boat who hadn't made themselves not look at that moving length of pipe

whooped at the top of their lungs. O'Donnell's whoop had words in it: "The fish is away!"

Everybody stopped rowing. Along with everybody else, George watched the torpedo's wake speed toward the Confederate submersible. He'd never seen anything move so fast in the water. "Run true," he breathed. "Come on—run true."

The torpedo did run true. It couldn't have had more than five hundred yards to travel: it was a point-blank shot, too. Three Rebs were standing with their heads and shoulders out of the conning tower. An instant before the torpedo slammed home, one of them spotted it. Enos saw him point. He might have yelled something, but that was lost in the dull *boom!* of the torpedo's slamming into the submarine a little before amidships.

Water and spray spurted up from the explosion, hiding the submersible for a moment. When it became visible again, it had broken in half. Bow and stern portions both sank amazingly fast. Diesel oil from the submarine spread over the water, flattening out the light chop. In the oil floated bits and pieces of debris and three splashing men—probably the ones in the conning tower, George thought. Most of the crew wouldn't have known they were in danger till the torpedo hit.

"Let's go pick 'em up," O'Donnell said, and they rowed toward the Confederates struggling in the Atlantic. As they did so, the U.S. submersible that had torpedoed the Rebel boat surfaced like a broaching whale. Men tumbled out of the conning tower and ran to the deck gun to cover the Confederate sailors.

Enos reached out a hand to one and helped drag him into the boat filled with the crew of the *Spray*. The Reb was filthy with fuel oil and, beneath that dark brown coating, looked stunned. "My name is Briggs, Ralph Briggs," he gasped in the accent George had learned to hate down in North Carolina. "Senior lieutenant, Confederate States Navy." He rattled off his pay number.

"Welcome aboard, Senior Lieutenant Briggs," O'Donnell said as sailors hauled the other two Rebel survivors into the boat. "You're a prisoner of the United States Navy."

Briggs looked over to the U.S. submarine, then glared at O'Donnell. "You're the luckiest damned fisherman in the history of the world, pal, having that damn boat show up just when we were about to blow you

to hell and gone."

O'Donnell erupted in laughter. So did George Enos. So did all the other sailors from the *Spray.* 'That wasn't luck, Reb," O'Donnell said, a huge grin on his face. "We were out hunting boats like you. We had the *Bluefin* there on tow behind us all the time. When you came up, I telephoned 'em, they slipped the line, and they put a fish in your boat while you were busy with us."

"We don't need to give you to the *Bluefin* to make you U.S. Navy prisoners, either," Enos added gleefully. *"We're* U.S. Navy, too, but I don't have to tell you my name, rank, and number."

More laughter roared out of the sailors and ex-fishermen who crewed the *Spray.* Charlie White said, "How many more Rebel submarines do you think we can sink before your boys catch on?"

Briggs and the other Confederates looked appalled to discover the trap into which they'd walked. The senior lieutenant had spunk, wet and stunned though he might be. Savagely, he ground out, "I hope you sons of bitches tow that damned boat right into a mine."

"You go to hell," Enos said, horrified at the notion. Several other sailors echoed him.

An officer from the *Bluefin* used a megaphone to shout across the water: "Shall we take your friends off your hands? We have more men aboard to keep an eye on them."

"Sounds good to me," Patrick O'Donnell yelled back. They rowed over to the submersible. Sailors there—sailors in Navy whites, not fishermen's dungarees—helped the Confederate survivors up onto the *Bluefin* s deck and then marched them into the conning tower and down below. When they had disappeared, O'Donnell said, "All right, we can go home now."

They returned to the *Spray,* which bobbed in the chop. Once up on deck, Charlie White shook himself, as if awakening from a happy dream. "Lord, that was sweet," he said.

For the black man, jeering at the Rebels had to be doubly delightful. It was plenty sweet enough for George, too. "Didn't figure I'd just keep on doing a fisherman's job after I joined the Navy," he said. "It's worked out pretty well, though—couldn't have worked out better." He turned to Patrick O'Donnell. "This whole hunting scheme was your idea. Do you think they'll make you an officer now that it's worked?"

"I'm too old and too stubborn to make an officer out of me now," O'Donnell said. "CPO suits me fine." He waved to the Cookie. "Charlie, why don't you break out the medicinal rum? This may be the first submersible a fishing boat ever sank, but it isn't going to be the last."

"Yes, sir!" White said enthusiastically. You weren't supposed to call a chief petty officer *sir,* but O'Donnell didn't correct him.

Sam Carsten was walking along the wharf toward the *Dakota* when all the antiaircraft guns at Pearl Harbor started going off at once. Guided by the puffs of black smoke suddenly blossoming in the sky, he spotted an aeroplane flying so high, it seemed nothing more than a speck up in the sky, too high for him to catch the sound of its engine.

For a moment, he stood watching the spectacle, wondering if the guns could bring down the aeroplane. Then he realized that, if they were shooting at it, it had to be hostile. And a hostile aeroplane could not have come from anywhere on the Sandwich Islands, which were firmly under the control of the United States. It had to have been launched from an enemy ship, and an enemy ship not too far away.

"And an enemy ship means an enemy fleet," he said out loud. "And an enemy fleet means one hell of a big fight."

He started running back toward the *Dakota.* As he did so, klaxons and hooters began squalling out the alert the guns had first signaled. When he got to the battleship's deck, he looked around for the aeroplane again. There it was, streaking away to the southeast.

He pointed to it. "We follow that bearing and we'll find the limeys or the Japs."

One of the sailors near him said, "Yeah." Another one, though, said, 'Thanks a lot, Admiral." Carsten shook his head. You said anything on a ship, somebody would give you a hard time about it.

"Battle stations!" shouted people who really were officers. "All hands to battle stations. Prepare to get under way."

Carsten sighed as he sprinted toward his own post. Inside the sponson, you couldn't see anything. All you ever got were orders and rumors, neither of which was apt to tell you what you most wanted to know.

As usual, Sam got to the five-inch gun after Hiram Kidde, but only moments after him, because no one else but the gunner's mate was there when he arrived. "Do you know what's up for sure, 'Cap'n'?" he

asked.

Kidde shook his head. "Limeys or Japs, don't know which." That Carsten had figured out for himself. The gunner's mate went on, "Don't much care, either. They're out there, we'll smash 'em."

The rest of the crew was not far behind. Luke Hoskins said, "I heard it was the Japs." One of the other shell-jerkers, Pete Jonas, had heard it was the English. They argued about it, which struck Carsten as stupid. What point to getting yourself in an uproar about something you couldn't prove?

The deck vibrated under Carsten's feet as the engines built up power. Lieutenant Commander Grady, who was in charge of all the guns of the starboard secondary armament, stuck his head into the cramped sponson to make sure everything and everyone was ready, even though they were still in harbor. He didn't know to whom the aeroplane had belonged.

After Grady had hurried away, Carsten said, "There—you see? If the lieutenant commander doesn't know what's going on, anybody who says he does is just puffing smoke out his stack."

"We're moving," Kidde said a few minutes later, and then, after that, "I wonder how they—whoever *they* are; Sam's right about that—managed to sneak a fleet past our patrols and aeroplanes. However they did it, they're gonna regret it."

There wasn't much to see. There wasn't much to do, either, not until they'd caught up to whatever enemy ships had dared approach the Sandwich Islands. The gun crew took turns peering through their narrow view slits. Hoskins and Jonas quit arguing about who the enemy was and started arguing about how much of the fleet had sortied with the *Dakota.* Given how little they could see, that argument was about as useless as the other.

After he couldn't see Oahu any more, Carsten stopped looking out. He'd seen a lot of ocean since he joined the Navy, and one trackless stretch of it looked a hell of a lot like another. He didn't get bored easily, which was one of the reasons he made a good sailor.

Lieutenant Commander Grady came back, his thin face red with excitement for once. "It's the Japs," he said. "One of our aeroplanes has spotted them. Looks like a force of cruisers and destroyers— they must have figured they could sneak in for a raid, throw some shells at us, and then run home for the Philippines again. We get to show 'em

they're wrong. Doesn't look like they know they've been seen, either." He rubbed his hands in anticipation.

'Told you it was the Japs," Hoskins said triumphantly.

"Ahh, go to hell," Jonas said: not much of a comeback, but the best he could do when his idea had struck a mine.

"Stupid slant-eyed bastards," Hiram Kidde said. "If they're raiding us, they don't want their damned aeroplane spotted. That pilot's going to join his honorable ancestors when they find out he dropped the ball like that."

"Cruisers and destroyers," Sam said dreamily. He patted the breech of the five-inch gun. "They'll be sorry they ever ran into us. The big guns up top'U pound 'em to bits at a lot longer range than they can hit back from."

'That's why we built 'em," Kidde said. He didn't sound dreamy. He sounded predatory.

By the sound, by the feel, of the engines, they were making better than twenty knots. An hour passed after they steamed out of Pearl Harbor, then another one. A colored steward came by with sandwiches and coffee from the galley. Pete Jonas got out a deck of cards. Kidde waved for him to put it back in his pocket. He made a sour face, but obeyed.

All of a sudden, the *Dakota* swung hard aport. The engine's roar picked up the flank speed. "What the deuce—" Luke Hoskins said, an instant before the torpedo slammed into the port side of the ship.

The deck jerked under Carsten's feet. If you got hit the right— or rather, the wrong—way, the shock wave from an explosion like that could break your ankles. That didn't happen, but Sam sat down, hard, on the steel plates of the deck. The electric lights in the sponson flickered. Then, for a dreadful second or two, they went out. "Oh, sweet Jesus," Jonas moaned, which was pretty much what Carsten was thinking, too.

He scrambled to his feet. He'd just regained them when the lights came back on. He glanced toward the door that led out of the sponson, out to the stairway to the top deck, out to the deck itself, out to the lifeboats. He didn't move toward the door, not a step. Nobody else did, either, in spite of bawling klaxons and shouts outside in the corridor. They were still at battle stations. Nobody had given any

orders about abandoning ship.

Danger—hell, fear—made his mind work very quickly, very clearly. "We got sucker-punched," he exclaimed. "Nothing else but. The Japs put that little fleet out there where we had to spot it— Christ, they sent out that aeroplane to lead us right to it. And they posted submersibles right out here between it and Pearl, and just sat there waiting for us to come running out. And we did—and look what it got us."

"How come you're so goddamn much smarter than the admiral?" Kidde sounded half sardonic, half respectful.

"Not likely," Sam answered. "Now that we've been torpedoed, I bet he's figured out what's going on, too."

"If the engines quit, we're in trouble," Luke Hoskins said. 'That'll mean the boilers are flooded." He stood quite still, a thoughtful look on his face. "We're listing to port, I think."

Carsten could feel it, too: the deck wasn't level, not any more. He glanced to the doorway again. If he left without orders, it was a court-martial. If he stayed and the battleship sank, a court-martial was the least of his worries. But the engines kept running, and the list wasn't getting worse in a hurry.

Lieutenant Commander Grady came in. "Looks like we're going to make it," he said. "Compartmenting's holding up, engines are safe, and the aft magazine didn't go up." He scratched his chin. "If it had, I think we would have known it."

"So what have we got, sir?" Kidde asked. "A couple thousand tons of water in us?"

"Something like that," Grady agreed. "We limp back to Pearl Harbor if we can, we go into drydock for six months or however long it takes to patch us up again, and then we go back to war." His features, lean, scholarly—more a professor's face than a naval officer's—went grim. "We got off lucky. They sank the *Denver,* and it doesn't look like many of her crew had time to get off before she went down. Not a better cruiser in the Pacific Fleet than the *Denver."*

"They were laying for us," Carsten said. "They showed the fleet and the aeroplane to bring us out, and then—"

"I'd say you're right," Grady replied. "The ships kept the submarines in

fuel and supplies, too: not likely they'd have the range to go from Manila to here and back without stocking up along the way. I hope the rest of the fleet manages to punish them. We're out of the fight for now."

Out of the fight. The words seemed to echo in the sponson as Grady left to pass the news to the rest of the gun crews under his command. The *Dakota* swung through a long, slow turn, as awkward as a horse with a lame hind leg, and began limping back toward Pearl Harbor. They hadn't done anything wrong except pursue too eagerly, but they were, sure as hell, out of the fight.

"Fuck it. We're alive," Luke Hoskins said.

Sam looked back at the doorway one last time. He wouldn't have to run out through it, hoping he could make it up on deck before water or fire engulfed him. When you got down to it, that wasn't such a bad bargain. "We're alive," he repeated, and the words sounded very fine.

Mary McGregor bounced up and down on the seat of the wagon beside her father. "What are we going to get?" she said. She'd been saying that ever since they'd left the farm for the trip into Rosen-feld, Manitoba.

As he'd done every time she asked, Arthur McGregor answered, "I don't know. You're the one who's turning seven today. I've got fifty cents in my pocket, and you can spend it any way you please."

"I'll get a store doll, one with real glass eyes," Mary declared. Then she shook her head, making her auburn curls fly around her face. "No, I won't. I'll get candy. How much candy can I get for fifty cents, Pa?"

"Enough to make you sick for a week," McGregor answered, laughing. His youngest child was full of extravagant notions. He figured a few more years of living on the farm would cure her of most of them.

Off to the north, artillery rumbled. Mary took no notice of it, prattling on cheerfully about everything on which she might spend her half-dollar. If she got everything she wanted, it could easily have cost McGregor fifty times that. Moreover, her choice was liable to be severely limited: if Henry Gibbon didn't have it in his general store, she couldn't get it. Her father let her go on all the same. Dreams were free, even if presents weren't.

The artillery rumbled again. Arthur McGregor sighed. Though dreams were free, they didn't always come true. When the Anglo-Canadian

offensive opened and pushed the Americans south from Winnipeg, he'd dreamt they would throw the Yankees out of Canada altogether. But Rosenfeld had never seen a single khaki uniform, not unless the Yanks had shipped prisoners through. The town and his farm hadn't even come within artillery range of the front. It was high summer now, and everything around these parts remained under the muscular thumb of the USA.

Coming into Rosenfeld, he saw just how muscular that thumb had become. Soldiers in green-gray crowded the streets, some no doubt going up toward the front, some coming back for relief. Their boots, and the tires of motorcars and great grunting White trucks, made dust swirl like fog all through the town.

They had soldiers serving as traffic policemen, now halting a stream of trucks so an officer in an automobile could cut across, now halting a column of men who looked fresh off the train so more trucks could get through, and now holding up McGregor to let another column of soldiers, these men veterans, go by. From the veterans, whose uniforms were sun-bleached and imperfectly clean, rose a smell that put him in mind of the farmhouse the morning before the bathtub got filled. He'd smelled it in barracks, too, and especially out on maneuvers—men on the front line had little incentive and less ability to keep clean.

"Get off the main road, Canuck," one of the soldiers called, pointing the wagon onto a little side street. There wasn't any particular animosity in the order. McGregor could even see the need for it. But—

"What's a Canuck, Pa?" Mary asked as he stopped disrupting traffic.

"You are," he answered, getting out of the wagon to tie the horse to a hitching post. "I am." He picked her up and put her down on the plank sidewalk. "It's what Americans call Canadians when they don't like us much."

"Oh." She thought about that, then nodded. "You mean the way we call them goddamn stinking Yanks?"

"Yes, just like that," he said, and coughed. "But we don't call them that where they can hear us. And, for that matter, who called them that where you could hear him?"

"It wasn't a him—it was Ma," Mary answered, which made McGregor cough all over again. He'd have to have a talk with Maude when he got home. Mary went on, "How come they get to call us names

whenever they please and we don't get to call them names whenever we please? That's not fair."

"Because they have more guns than we do, and they drove our soldiers out of this part of the country," he told her. "If you have more guns in a war, you get to say what's fair."

She chewed on that. To his relief, she didn't argue with him about it. He took her hand and walked toward the general store. Several U.S. soldiers smiled at her along the way. A lot of them weren't far from McGregor's age: reservists called up for the war, probably with daughters as old as Mary or maybe even older. She took no notice of the Americans. She made a point of taking no notice of the Americans.

"Mornin', Arthur," Henry Gibbon said when they went into the general store. Gibbon beamed down at Mary. "And a good mornin' to you, little lady."

"Good morning, Mr. Gibbon," she answered, very politely: the storekeeper, being a Canadian, deserved not only notice but respect.

"Reason we're here," McGregor said, "is that somebody here just turned seven years old, and she's got half a dollar to spend however she pleases. She'll be wanting to look at your toys and dolls and candy, unless I miss my guess."

"We can probably do somethin' along those lines," Gibbon said. He beckoned Mary over to the jars of sweets on his counter. "Why don't you have a look at these here, little lady, and I'll see what I've got in the way of toys." He glanced up at Mary's father. "We're apt to be a bit picked over, things bein' like they is."

"I understand that," he answered. "But if anybody in Rosenfeld has anything good, you're the man."

"That I am," the storekeeper agreed solemnly. He had just turned around to see what a pasteboard box held when something exploded across the street. The plate-glass window at the front of the general store shattered, fragments flying inward. One glittering shard flicked McGregor's sleeve; another stuck out of the floor boards bare inches from his foot.

Mary screamed. He ran to her and scooped her up, afraid some of the shrapnel-like slivers of glass had cut or stabbed her. But she wasn't bleeding anywhere, though glass dust sparkled in her hair like diamonds. She trembled in his arms.

"Holy Jesus!" Henry Gibbon said. He looked at what had been his window and said "Holy Jesus!" again, louder. Then he looked out through what had been his window and said "Holy Jesus!" a third time, louder still. This time, he amplified it somewhat: "That's the *Register* office, blown to hell and gone."

McGregor had been too worried about his daughter even to think about what might have blown up out there. Now he looked, too. Sure enough, the wood-and-brick building that had housed Rosenfeld's weekly newspaper was nothing but a ruin now, and beginning to burn. If the fire engines didn't get here in a tearing hurry, that whole block was liable to go up in smoke, and maybe this one, too, if the wind blew sparks across the street.

In the street lay U.S. soldiers, some down and writhing, some down and still. A couple of horses were down, too, screaming like women in torment. An officer went up to them and quickly put them out of their torment with his pistol. McGregor thought well of him for that; he would have done the same.

In that spirit, he set Mary down and went out of the general store to see if he could do anything for the wounded U.S. soldiers. They were the enemy, yes, but watching anybody suffer wasn't easy. One of them had a leg bent at an unnatural angle. McGregor knew how to set broken bones.

He never got the chance. The officer who'd shot the two horses swung up his pistol and aimed it at McGregor's head. "Don't move, Canuck," he snapped. "You'll be hostage number one. We'll take twenty of you bastards, and if the bomber doesn't give himself up, we'll line you up against a wall and teach you a lesson you'll remember the rest of your life." He laughed.

McGregor froze. He'd known the Yankees did things like that, but he'd never imagined it could happen to him.

Mary came flying out of the general store. "Don't you point a gun at my pa!" she screamed at the officer. McGregor grabbed her before she could hurl herself against the American. He had to move to do that, but the man didn't fire.

Henry Gibbon came out of the store, too. "Have a heart, Crane," he said to the U.S. officer. "Arthur McGregor's no bomber, and he doesn't live in town, so he doesn't make much of a hostage, neither. Only reason he came in is that today's his little girl's seventh birthday." He

pointed to Mary.

The U.S. officer—Crane—scowled—but after a moment he lowered the pistol. "All right," he said to McGregor. "Get the hell out of here."

McGregor's legs felt loose and light with fear and relief, so he seemed to be floating above the ground, not walking on it. He steered Mary toward the side street on which he'd left the wagon.

"But I didn't get my birthday presents!" she said, and started to cry.

"Oh, yes, you did," he told her.

"No, I didn't!" she said. "Not anything, not even one peppermint drop."

"Oh, yes, you did," he repeated, so emphatically that she looked up in puzzled curiosity. He pointed to himself. "Do you know what you got? You got to keep me."

She kept on crying. He wasn't a doll or a ball or a top or a peppermint drop. He didn't care. He was alive, and he was going to stay that way a while longer.

Jefferson Pinkard got to the foundry floor at the Sloss works a few minutes early, as he usually did. Vespasian and Agrippa, the two Negroes who'd taken over the night shift, nodded and said, "Mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," together.

"Mornin'," Pinkard said. Both blacks had proved themselves solid workers, worthy of being talked with almost as if they were white men. He looked around. "Where's Pericles at? He's usually in here before I am."

After a pause, Vespasian said, "He ain't comin' in today, Mistuh Pinkard."

"Oh?" Jeff said. "He sick?" Pericles and Vespasian were kin or in-laws or something of the sort; he couldn't quite remember what. Just because you talked with black men didn't mean you had to keep track of every little thing about them.

Vespasian shook his head. "No, suh, he ain't sick," he answered. He sounded tired unto death, not just because of the night's work but also from a lifetime's worth of weariness. A moment later, the words dragging out of him one by one, he went on, "No, suh, like I say, he ain't sick. He in de jailhouse."

"In the jailhouse? Pericles?" That caught Pinkard by surprise. "What the devil did he do? *Get* drunk and go after somebody with a busted bottle?" That didn't sound like Pericles, a sober-sided young buck if ever there was one.

And Vespasian shook his head again. "No, suh. He do some-thin' like that, we can fix it. He in de jailhouse for—sedition." He whispered the word, pronouncing it with exaggerated care.

"Sedition?" Now Jefferson Pinkard frankly stared. Vespasian was right, he thought. You could fix a charge of brawling against a black man easily enough—provided he hadn't hit a white, of course. If he was a good worker, a couple of words from his boss to the police or the judge would get him off with a small fine, maybe just a lecture about keeping his nose clean. But sedition—that was another ball of wax.

Neither Vespasian nor Agrippa said much more about it. They waited till it was time for them to go off shift, then left in a hurry. Pinkard didn't suppose he could blame them. When one of your own got into trouble, you didn't spend a lot of time talking about that trouble with an outsider.

He had to start his shift by his lonesome, which left him too busy to think about anything else. About half an hour into the shift, a colored fellow who introduced himself as Leonidas joined him. Jeff hoped to high heaven Leonidas wouldn't take Pericles' place for good. He was strong enough, but he wasn't very smart, and he didn't remember from one minute to the next what Pinkard had told him. Jeff kept him from getting hurt or from messing up the job at least half a dozen times that morning. It was more nerve-racking than doing everything by himself would have been, because he never knew ahead of time when or how Leonidas would go wrong, and had to stay on his toes every second.

When the lunch whistle blew, Pinkard sighed with relief—half an hour when he wouldn't have to worry. "See you at one, suh," Leonidas said, taking his dinner bucket and heading off to eat with other Negroes.

"Yeah," Pinkard said. He wondered if Leonidas could find some way to kill himself when he wasn't anywhere near the foundry floor. He wouldn't have been a bit surprised: the Negro was an accident waiting to happen, and probably could happen any old place.

Pinkard opened his own dinner pail. He had a chunk of corn-bread and a couple of pieces of roasted chicken in there: leftovers from the night before. He'd just started to eat when a couple of middle-aged

fellows in gray police uniforms came up to him. "You Jefferson Davis Pinkard?" asked the one who wore a matching gray mustache. "That's me," Jeff said with his mouth full. He chewed, swallowed, and then asked more clearly, "Who're you?"

"I'm Bob Mulcahy," the policeman with the mustache answered. He pointed to his clean-shaven partner. "This here's Bill Fitzcolville. We're looking into the matter of a nigger named Pericles. Hear tell he's been working alongside you a while."

"That's a fact," Pinkard agreed, and took another bite of chicken. They weren't going to hold things up on the floor because he was talking with police. If he didn't feed his face, he'd have to go hungry till suppertime.

"This Pericles, he been a troublemaker, uppity, anything like that?" Mulcahy asked.

"Not hardly." Pinkard shook his head. "Didn't cotton to the notion of workin' with a nigger, not even a little bit, I tell you. But it ain't worked out too bad. He does his job—did his job, I guess I oughta say. This nigger Leonidas, buck they gave me instead of him, he ain't fit to carry guts to a bear, doesn't look like. But Pericles, he pulled his weight."

Fitzcolville scribbled down his words in a notebook. Mulcahy shifted a good-sized chaw of tobacco from right cheek to left, then asked, "This nigger Pericles, he a smart fellow or a dumb one?"

"Nothin' dumb about him," Jeff answered. "You show him somethin' once, you tell him somethin' once, you don't need to do it twice, on account of he remembers it and does it right his own self."

"Uh-/iw/i," Fitzcolville grunted, as if Pinkard had said something altogether damning.

Mulcahy kept on with his questions, steadily, imperturbably: "He ever talk about anything *political* while the two of you was working together?"

"Political?" Pinkard paused for a bite of cornbread. "What the hell kind of politics is a nigger supposed to have? It ain't like he can vote or nothin'."

"Oh, niggers have politics, all right," Mulcahy said. *"Red* politics, too damn many of 'em. This Pericles, he ever talk about how the war was

going or how the war was changing things here back at home?"

Red politics. Emily had said something like that, and he hadn't taken it seriously. The Birmingham police did. Jeff said, "We was talkin' one time about how, after Herb Wallace got hisself killed in the war, the Sloss folks threw his widow out of factory housing here. Pericles didn't reckon that was fair."

"XJh-huh," Fitzcolville said again, and scrawled more notes.

"You gonna call him a Red for that?" Pinkard demanded. "You better call me a Red right at the same time, 'cause I think it stinks like shit, too, what they done to Daisy. Here her husband's gone and got killed for the sake of the fat cats up in Richmond, and they throw her out of her place like a dog. You call that the way things oughta be?"

He'd gone too far. He could see it by the way the two policemen stared at him—stared through him, really. "Maybe you *are* a Red," Mulcahy said, "but I doubt it. Most of the ones who are have too much sense to run off at the mouth like you do. 'Sides, white men can pretty much say what they please—it's a free country. Niggers, now, we gotta watch niggers."

"I been watchin' this crazy damnfool nigger Leonidas every goddamn minute of the mornin' shift," Pinkard said. "You give me a choice between him and Pericles, I'll take Pericles every goddamn time. When he's here, he does his job. I don't know what he does when he ain't here, and I don't care."

"That's not your job," Mulcahy said. "It is our job, and we've found this nigger tied up in all sorts of stuff niggers got no business sticking their noses into."

"Whatever else he is, he's a steel man," Jeff answered. "Steel he's helped make, I reckon it's done more to hurt the damnyankees than anything else he's done has hurt us."

The two policemen looked at each other. Maybe they hadn't thought of it like that. Maybe, too, they just didn't care for the idea of a white man speaking up for a black. That second maybe soon proved the true one, for Mulcahy said, "You like that nigger pretty well, don't you?"

Pinkard surged to his feet. "Get out of here," he said, his voice thick with anger and cornbread both. Both policemen gave back a step, too. The foundry floor was no place for anyone unused to it to feel comfortable, either. Jeff had an advantage, and he used it. "You got a

lot o' damn nerve, you know that? Callin' me a nigger-lover like I ain't a proper white man. Go on, get the hell out."

"Didn't mean it like that, Pinkard," Bob Mulcahy said. "Just trying to get to the bottom of who all this damn nigger's been messing with."

"He ain't messed much with me, and he know what he's doin', too, not like this lamebrained halfwit they saddled me with now that you took him away," Pinkard said. "Pretty soon, way things look, they're gonna drag my ass off to war—hell of a lot o' whiten gone already. You want to keep makin' steel, it's gonna be gers doin' the work, mostly. Maybe you ought to think about ff like that a little more often, 'fore you start haulin' hard-rkin' bucks off to the jailhouse for no reason at all." "We've *been* thinking about it," Bill Fitzcolville said, proving did have more words in him than *uh-huh.* "Don't like the wers we get, neither."

"But this here Pericles, we got him dead to rights," Mulcahy 1. "Found all kinds of subversive literature at his house: Marx I Engels and Lincoln and Haywood and I don't know who all :. Niggers ain't allowed to have that kind of stuff. He'll spend a Lie cooling off in jail, that's for damn sure. We're trying to track *m* how much damage he's done, is what we're doing here." 'Like I said, he ain't done me any damage I know of," Pinkard I. The policemen shrugged and left. But he didn't think that int he was going to get Pericles back any time soon. He'd just e to go and see if he couldn't turn Leonidas into something a *z* bit like a steelworker. The odds were against him; he could see much already. He sighed. Life could be a real pisser some-5S, no two ways about it.

XVI

Captain Elijah Franklin stuck out his hand. "We're going to miss you here, Moss," he said. The pilots and observers in Jonathan Moss' squadron all nodded. So did the mechanics. Moss knew why Lefty would miss him: no more easy pickings at the poker table.

"I'll miss you, too, sir, and everybody else here," he said. "But I've been sort of a fifth wheel ever since Percy got hurt, and when this chance to transfer came along, it looked too good to pass up."

"Fighting scouts? I should say so," Stanley McClintock said. He twiddled with one of the waxed spikes of his mustache. "You never did like the idea of company in your aeroplane, did you?"

"Why, darling, I didn't know you'd miss me *that* way," Moss said archly. The laugh he got let him slide over the fact that McClintock

had a point. He'd been the one who'd complained longest and hardest about the introduction of the two-seater Wright 17s. In the old Super Hudsons, you had nobody but yourself to blame if you made a mistake up there. The new fighting scouts were like that, too. You did what you did and, if you did it right, you lived and you got to keep on doing it. If not, it was your own damn fault, no one else's.

People crowded round him, pressing chocolate and flasks of brandy and whiskey into his pockets. They slapped him on the back and wished him luck. McClintock wasn't the only one who looked jealous. If you did your job in a two-seater, your observer took his pictures and you came home and got them developed. If you did your job in a fighting scout, you shot down enemy aeroplanes, and soldiers in the trenches shouted their heads off for you. So did reporters. If you shot down enough enemy aeroplanes, people back home shouted their heads off for you.

"Come on, let's go," Lefty said. Moss shouldered his duffel bag and climbed into the Ford that did duty as squadron transport. Unlike models that came off the assembly line, this one had been modified to boast an electric starter button on the dashboard. Lefty mashed it with his thumb. The engine thundered to life. As they rolled away from the aerodrome, Lefty handed Moss a pair of dice. "You ever get in a hot crap game where you need some sevens in a hurry, these are the babies to have."

Moss stared down at the ivory cubes in the palm of his hand. Lefty doubtless meant them for a thoughtful going-away present. They made him thoughtful, all right. He thought about what a profitable time Lefty had had ever since the squadron went into Canada.

As if reading his mind, the mechanic said, "I never use 'em myself, and nobody'11 ever be able to prove I do. Same goes for poker, Lieutenant, in case you're wondering. Know what you're doing and you'll never need to cheat."

By which, he was saying Moss didn't know what he was doing at cards or dice. He probably knew what he was talking about, too.

The Ford rattled along. The road was nothing to boast about, which made the motorcar's big wheels and high ground clearance all the more valuable. Nothing in American-held Ontario was anything to boast about, though. Every inch had been fought over, every inch wrecked. What had been little farms by the side of the road were now cratered ground and rubble, with hardly a house standing. Here and

there, skinny people came out of ruins to glower at the automobile as it rolled past.

Lefty pulled off the road and onto a new track made by U.S. vehicles after the war had passed this stretch of Canada. The fighting scouts, having shorter range than the observation aeroplanes, were based closer to the front. The strip on which they took off and landed had so much fresh dirt on it, it had pretty obviously been shelled not long before, the land then releveled by tractors or more likely by lots of men working hard.

Alongside the strip sat the Martin single-deckers. Next to the bulky Wilburs he'd been flying, they looked little and low and fast. Next to the Curtiss Super Hudsons, pushers with more wires and struts than you could shake a stick at, they looked like something out of the 1930s, maybe the 1940s, not merely next year's model.

"You got to hand it to Kaiser Bill's boys," Lefty said, stamping on the none too effective brake to bring the Ford to a halt (when you needed to stop in a hurry, stamping on the reverse was a better idea). Puffy summer clouds drifted lazily across the sky. "They know how to make aeroplanes, no two ways about it."

"Yeah," Moss said with a small sigh. The Wright brothers might have flown the first aeroplane in 1904, but the machines had evolved faster in Europe than in the USA. The single-decker was a straight knockoff of the Fokker monoplanes now flying above France and Belgium. Also a knockoff was the machine gun mounted above the engine, almost the only bulge marring the smooth lines of the aeroplane. "Good to know somebody finally figured out how to build a decent interrupter gear. Even if it wasn't us, we get to borrow it."

"That's right, Lieutenant," Lefty said. "Chew the hell out of the Canucks and the limeys for me, you hear?" He stuck out his hand. Moss shook it, then grabbed his duffel bag and jumped down from the Ford. Lefty took his foot off the brake, gave the motorcar more throttle with the hand control, and *putt-putted* away.

Shouldering the bag, Moss made for the canvas tents that housed his new squadron. Such arrangements were all very well now, with the weather warm, but could you live in a tent in the middle of winter? Maybe the war would be over and he wouldn't have to find out. He clicked tongue between teeth. He'd believed nonsense like that the year before. He was a tougher sell now.

Somebody came out of the closest tent and spotted him. "Moss, isn't it?" the man called with a friendly wave. "Welcome to the monkey house."

'Thank you, Captain Pruitt," Moss said, letting the bag fall so he could salute. Shelby Pruitt lazily returned the gesture. Moss had already gathered he'd have to get used to a new style here; Captain Franklin, his CO since the start of the war, had been the sort who dotted every i and crossed every t. Pruitt didn't seem the sort to make much fuss over little things, as long as the big ones were all right.

Now he said, "Come along with me. We'll give you someplace or other where you can lay your weary head." He didn't particularly look like a flier—he was short and dark and on the dumpy side— and his southwestern accent made him sound almost like a Reb. When you watched him move, though, you got the idea he always knew exactly where every part of him was at every moment, and that was something a pilot certainly needed.

He led Moss along the row of green-gray canvas shelters till he flipped up one flap. "Ah, thought so," he said. "We've got room at the inn here."

Peering in, Moss saw the tent held four cots, the space around one of them conspicuously bare and empty. One airman sat on the edge of his bed, writing a letter. He looked up at Moss and said, "You're the new fish, are you? I'm Daniel Dudley—they mostly call me Dud." He shrugged resignedly. He had a pale, bony face and a grin that was engaging even if a little cadaverous.

"Jonathan Moss," Moss said, and shook hands. He set his gear down on the empty cot. Pruitt nodded to him, then went off on whatever other business he had. Moss understood his offhanded-ness: he wouldn't really be part of the squadron till he'd flown his first mission.

Dudley made a small production out of sticking the cap back onto his fountain pen. That let him effectively do nothing till Captain Pruitt was out of earshot. Then he asked, "What do you think of Hardshell so far?"

Moss needed a moment to grasp the nickname. 'The captain, you mean?" he asked, to make sure he had it right. When Dudley didn't say no, he went on, "He seems all right to me. Friendlier than the fellow I'm leaving, that's clear. What do *you* think of him?"

"He'll do, no doubt about it." Dudley took a panatela out of a

teakwood cigar case. He offered the case to Moss, who shook his head. The pilot bit off the end of his cigar, lighted it, and sighed with pleasure.

"Who else sleeps here?" Moss asked, pointing to the other two cots.

'Tom Innis and Luther Carlsen," the other pilot answered. "Good eggs, both of 'em. Luther's a big blond handsome guy, and thinks he's a wolf. If the girls thought so, too, he'd do pretty well for himself."

"That's true about a lot of guys who think they're wolves," Moss said, to which Dudley nodded. Moss turned serious in a hurry, though. "What can you tell me about the Martin that I won't have picked up from training on it?"

"Good question," Dudley said. A wide smile only made him look more skull-like than ever, but he couldn't help that. "We've just been flying Martins a month or so ourselves. They don't have a lot of vices that we've found: good speed, good view, good acrobatics." He paused. "Oh. There is one thing."

"What's that?" Moss leaned forward.

"Every once in a while, the interrupter gear will get a little bit out of alignment."

"How do you find out about that?"

"You shoot your own prop off and you shoot yourself down," Daniel Dudley answered. His face clouded. 'That's what happened to Smitty, the guy who used to have that cot. If it does happen to you, the beast is nose-heavy. You have to watch it in your glide."

"Thanks. I'll remember." Moss started unpacking his bag. "When do you suppose they'll let me up in one?"

'Tomorrow, unless I'm all wet," Dudley answered. "Hardshell doesn't believe in letting people sit around and get rusty."

He was right. Captain Pruitt sent Moss up as tail-end Charlie on a flight of four Martins—himself and his tentmates—the very next morning. His scout aeroplane was factory-new, still stinking of the dope that made the fabric of wings and fuselage impenetrable to air. But the mechanics here had modified it as they had the other three Martins of the flight: by mounting on the left side of the wooden cockpit frame a rearview mirror like those on some of the newest

model motorcars. Moss found that a very clever idea, one that would keep his neck from developing a swivel mount.

The rotary engine kicked over at once when a mechanic spun the prop. Castor-oil fumes from the exhaust blew in his face. The in-line engine in the Wright he had flown had been petroleum-lubricated, which had made his bowels happier than they were liable to be now.

One after another, the four single-deckers took off. Moss tried to get a handle on Innis and Carlsen by the way they flew their aeroplanes; he hadn't had much chance to talk with them the day before. Carlsen was always exactly where he was supposed to be in the flight, which Dud Dudley led. Captain Franklin would have approved of that precise, finicky approach. Innis, on the other hand, was all over the place. Whether that bespoke imagination or carelessness remained to be seen.

Up to the front they flew. Dudley swung the nose of his Martin so that he flew parallel to the front, on the American side of the line. The rest of the flight followed, Innis frisking a little, up and down, from side to side. They were under orders as strict as Captain Pruitt could make them not to cross over to enemy-held territory no matter what. Neither the Canadians nor the British yet had a working interrupter gear, and nobody in the USA wanted to hand them one on a platter.

Flying a combat patrol was nothing like being trained on a new aeroplane. Moss had discovered that when he'd made the transition from the Super Hudson to the Wright 17, and now found out all over again. When you were in training, you were concentrating on your aeroplane and learning its idiosyncrasies. When you were up here on patrol, all you cared about was the other fellow's aeroplane, with your own reduced in your thoughts to a tool you'd use to shoot him down. He spotted the Avro in that newfangled rearview mirror. It had probably been flying a reconnaissance mission on the American side of the line, and was now heading back toward Canadian territory with its pictures or sketches or whatever it had. Moss peeled off from the flight and gave his Martin single-decker all the power it had as he raced toward the Avro.

Its pilot spotted him and tried to bank away, which also gave the observer a better shot at him. He dove and then climbed rapidly. All he had to do was point his aeroplane's nose at the enemy and squeeze the firing button on his machine gun. He'd practiced shooting during training, but having the bullets miss the prop still seemed half like black magic to him.

The Avro was still trying to maneuver into a position from which it could effectively defend itself. He kept firing, playing the stream of bullets as if they were water from a hose. All at once, the Avro stopped dodging and nosed toward the ground. As he had with his first kill, back when the war was young, he must have put the pilot out of action. The observer kept snooting long after he had any hope of scoring a hit. Martin respected his courage and wondered what he was thinking about during the long dive toward death.

He looked around to see if he could spot any more British or Canadian aeroplanes. He saw none, but all his flightmates were close by. He hadn't noticed them coming to his aid; he'd been thinking about the Avro, nothing else.

Dudley, Innis, and Carlsen were waving and blowing him kisses. He waved back. He might not have fully belonged in his new squadron the day before, but he did now.

The U.S. Army sergeant doing paymaster duty shoved a dollar and a half across the table at Cincinnatus and checked off his name on the list. "You get the bonus again today," he said. "That's twice now this week, ain't it? Don't usually see Lieutenant Kennan actin' so free and easy with the government's money."

Don't usually see him give a Negro anything close to an even break, was what he meant. Cincinnatus had no doubt that was true. But—for a white man, for a U.S. soldier—the paymaster seemed decent enough. Figuring he owed him an answer, Cincinnatus said, "Whatever you do, you got to do it as good as you can."

"Yeah, that ain't a bad way to look at things," the sergeant agreed. "But you made Kennan notice how good you're doin' it—you got a black hide and you manage that, you got to be doin' awful damn fine."

"My wife's gonna have a baby," Cincinnatus said. "Extra half-dollar now and then, it means a lot." He cut it short after that; no point to getting the laborers in line behind him angry.

He was about halfway home when it started to rain. Herodotus and a couple of the other Negroes with whom he was walking ducked under an awning for protection. The awning, conveniently for them, was in front of a saloon. They went on inside. Cincinnatus kept going. He took off his hat and turned his face up to the warm rain, letting it wash the sweat off him. That felt good. Sometimes, after a hot, muggy day, he felt as crusted in salt as a pretzel.

When he walked past Conroy's general store, he looked in through the window, as he often did. One lone white man was in there with the storekeeper. After a second glance, Cincinnatus stiffened. That white man was Tom Kennedy.

Kennedy saw him, too, and waved for him to come inside. He did, his heart full of foreboding. A U.S. Army patrol was walking down the other side of the street. One of the men paused to smear petroleum jelly on his bayonet to hold back the rain. All they had to do was look over and recognize Kennedy and everything went up in smoke. They didn't. They just kept walking, one of them making a lewd crack about what else you could do with a greasy hand.

"Hello, Cincinnatus," Kennedy said, about as cordially as if Cincinnatus had been white. He didn't know whether he liked that or not. It made him nervous; he did know that. He wished Kennedy had never come knocking at his door in the middle of the night.

But Kennedy had. "Evenin'," Cincinnatus answered reluctantly. "What kin I do for you today?"

"Glad you stopped in," Kennedy said, again sounding as if Cincinnatus were a favorite customer rather than a Negro laborer. "Would have had somebody by to pay you a visit tonight if you hadn't."

"Is that a fact?" Cincinnatus sounded dubious. The last thing he wanted was some white man coming around his house late at night. He'd been lucky none of the neighbors had said anything to the U.S. soldiers after Kennedy paid him a visit that first time. Lucky once didn't have anything to do with lucky twice, though. Half— probably more than half—the Negroes in Covington preferred the USA to the CSA, although *a plague on both their houses* had wide popularity among them, too. "Who wants to visit me, and how come?" Kennedy and Conroy looked at each other: Kennedy kept doing the talking, which was smart, because Cincinnatus trusted him further than the storekeeper. He said, "We've got a delivery we need you to make." He grinned. "Sort of like old times, isn't it?"

"Not so you'd notice," Cincinnatus answered. "What did you have in mind? Drive a truck up in front of my house? Don't think I'd much fancy that." He'd been trained to be cautious and polite around whites, so as not to let them know everything that was going on in his head. That was the only thing that kept him from shouting, *Are you out of your skull, Mr. Kennedy, sir?*

"Nothing like that," Kennedy said, raising a soothing hand. "We'll have somebody bring by a wagon with a mule pulling it— nothing that would look out of place in your part of town." The unspoken assumption that that was the way things ought to be in the Negro district of Covington grated on Cincinnatus. Oblivious, Kennedy went on, "We'll have a colored fellow drivin' it, too, so you don't need to worry about that, either."

"You already got a wagon and a driver, you don't need me, Mr. Kennedy," Cincinnatus said. He put his hat back on and touched a forefinger to the brim. "See you another time. Evenin', Mr. Conroy."

"Get back here," Conroy snapped as Cincinnatus turned to go. "We know where you live, boy, remember that."

Cincinnatus had had all the threats he could stomach. Blackmail cut both ways. "I know where you're at, too, Mr. Conroy. Ain't never had reason to talk to the Yankee soldiers, but I know."

Impasse. Conroy glanced at Cincinnatus. He didn't glare back; in the Confederacy, even the occupied parts of it, blacks showed whites respect whether they deserved it or not. "We'd really rather you did this, Cincinnatus," Kennedy said. "We've got this other fellow, yeah, but we don't know how reliable he is. We can trust you."

"You can trust me?" Cincinnatus said. Kennedy's reasonable tones, in their own way, irked him more than the storekeeper's bluster. Bitterly, he asked, "How do I know I can trust you? Why should I? Suppose the Confederate States do win this here war. What kind of place are they gonna be for colored folks afterwards? Everything stay the same, it ain't worth livin' for us, not hardly."

Conroy looked as if he'd just taken a big bite out of a Florida lemon. Tom Kennedy sighed. "Reckon it's going to be some different," he said. "All the niggers working in factories these days, the CSA could hardly fight the war without 'em. You think they can send 'em all packing, send 'em back to picking cotton and growing rice and tobacco when the war is over? They can try, but you can't unring a bell. I don't think it'll work."

What he said made the storekeeper look even more unhappy. "Never should have set the niggers free in the first place," Conroy muttered.

"A little too late to worry about that now, wouldn't you say?" Kennedy scraped a match on his shoe and lighted a stogie. "Hell, I hear there's talk about putting Negroes in butternut and giving 'em rifles. You get

in a war like this, you've got to fight with everything you have."

"Damn foolishness," Conroy said. He looked Cincinnatus straight in the eye. "And if you want to tell the Yankees I said so, go right ahead." He was, at least, honest in his likes and dislikes.

Tom Kennedy blew a smoke ring, then held his cigar in a placatory hand. "We don't want to get in a quarrel here, Joe," he said, from which Cincinnatus learned Conroy's Christian name. "But if a nigger fights for the CSA, how are you going to take his gun away and tell him he's got to go back to being a nigger once the fighting's done? He'd spit in your eye, and would you blame him?"

"Shit," Conroy said, "even the damnyankees got better sense than to go giving niggers guns."

"Mr. Conroy," Cincinnatus said quietly, "I ain't carryin' no Tredegar rifle, but ain't I fightin' for the CSA? The Yankees catch me, they won't give me no medal. All they do is put me up against a wall and shoot me, same as they'd do with you."

"He's right, Joe," Kennedy said. "Go ahead, tell him he isn't."

"He doesn't want to take the packages over to the Kentucky Smoke House, he ain't right at all—just a damn lyin' nigger," Conroy said.

"Kentucky Smoke House? Hell, you don't need me to take anything there," Cincinnatus said. "Y'all could go your own selves, an' nobody'd notice anything different." That was only the slightest of exaggerations. The Kentucky Smoke House did up the best barbecue anywhere between North Carolina and Texas. That was what the proprietor, an enormous colored fellow named Apicius, claimed, and by the hordes of Negroes and steady stream of whites who came to the tumbledown shack out of which he operated, he might well have been right.

"Easier sending somebody colored—safer, too," Kennedy said, which was probably true. "If you're making the delivery, people will think you're bringing him tomatoes or spices or something like that. Joe or me, we'd stick out too much hauling crates."

That was also probably true. Cincinnatus sighed. Sensing his weakening, Conroy said, "Got the wagon and mule out back in the alley, waiting to be loaded."

Cincinnatus sighed again, and nodded. "Good fellow," Kennedy said,

and tossed him something he caught automatically. "This is for taking the risk." Cincinnatus looked down at the five-dollar Stonewall in his hand. A moment later, the goldpiece was in his pocket, along with the dollar and a half he'd made (bonus included) for eleven and a half hours of grueling labor on the docks.

Without another word, Conroy led him into the back room and pointed to a couple of crates and a tarp. He opened the door out onto the alley. Cincinnatus picked up the crates, which felt very full and were heavy for their size, then heaved the canvas sheet over them. The rain had stopped, but no guessing whether it might start up again. The weight of the crates and the need for the tarpaulin made Cincinnatus guess they held pamphlets or papers of some sort.

He hadn't driven a mule for a while; Kennedy had bought motor trucks three years before. But, he discovered, he still knew how. And the mule, a tired beast with drooping ears, didn't give him any trouble.

Kennedy and Conroy had done one thing right: no one, black or white, paid any attention to a Negro on a battered wagon pulled by a lazy mule. If they'd wanted him to leave a bomb in front of U.S. Army headquarters, he could have done that, too, he thought, and slipped away with no one the wiser.

His nose guided him to the Kentucky Smoke House. A lot of buggies and wagons were tied up nearby, along with a couple of motorcars. Again, he remained inconspicuous. The sweet smell of smoke and cooking meat made spit flood into his mouth when he went inside. There stood Apicius, splashing sauce on a spitted pig's carcass with a paintbrush.

"Got a couple boxes for you from Mistuh Conroy," Cincinnatus said, coming up close so nobody else could hear.

The fat cook nodded. "Felix!" he bawled. "Lucullus!" Two youths with his looks but without his bulk came hurrying up to him. He jerked a thumb at Cincinnatus. "He got the packages we been waitin' fo'."

His sons—for so Cincinnatus figured them to be—hurried outside and carried the boxes into a back room of the restaurant. One of them gave Cincinnatus a package wrapped in newspapers through which grease was starting to soak. "Best ribs in town," he said.

"I know that already," Cincinnatus said. "Obliged."

He drove Conroy's wagon back to the general store, then walked home. The smell of the ribs tormented him all the way there. When he opened the door, Elizabeth started to yell at him for being late. That savory package started the job of calming her down. The five-dollar goldpiece finished it.

Because of the Yankee curfew, nights were usually quiet. The sound of banging—not gunfire, but something else—woke Cincinnatus a couple of times. When he headed for the docks the next morning, every other telegraph pole and fence post was adorned with a full-color poster of Teddy Roosevelt leading a detachment of U.S. soldiers, all of them wearing German-style spiked helmets, each one with a baby spitted on the bayonet of his rifle, peace, the poster said, freedom.

In his mind's eye, Cincinnatus saw lots of Negro boys with hammers and nails running here and there, putting up posters in the dead of night. With his real eyes, he saw U.S. soldiers tearing them down. He didn't know for certain he'd had anything to do with that. Doing his best to take no notice of the angry U.S. troops, he kept on walking toward the docks.

Once upon a time, Provo, Utah, had probably been a pretty town. Mountains towered to the east and northeast; to the west lay Utah Lake. The streets were wide, and shade trees had lined them. This July, as far as Paul Mantarakis was concerned, the place was nothing but a bottleneck, corking the advance of U.S. forces toward Salt Lake City. The trees had either been blasted to bits by artillery fire or cut down to form barricades across the broad streets. Thanks to the mountains and the lake, you couldn't go around Provo. You had to go through it.

Mantarakis scratched his left sleeve. He was probably lousy again. The only notice he took of the third stripe on that sleeve was that the double thickness of cloth made scratching harder.

Captain Norman Hinshaw—a captain because of casualties, the same reason Mantarakis was a sergeant—squatted down in a foxhole beside him. He pointed ahead. "The big set of buildings—that big set of ruins, I should say—that's what's left of Brigham Young College. That's where the damned Mormons have all their machine guns, too. That's what keeps us from taking the whole town."

"Yes, sir," Mantarakis said. He knew where the Mormons had their machine guns, all right. They'd killed enough Americans with them. Deadpan, he went on, "Of course, it's just a few goddamn fanatics

doing all the fighting. The rest of the Mormons all love the USA."

Hinshaw's narrow, sour face looked even narrower and more sour than usual. "They're still feeding that tripe to the people back home," he said. "Some of them may even still believe it. Only soldiers who still believe it are the ones who got shot right off the train."

"That's about the size of it, sir," Mantarakis agreed. As he spoke, he checked right, left, and to the rear. As in Price, the Mormons in Provo had the nasty habit of letting U.S. soldiers overrun their positions, then turning around and shooting them in the back. Paul summed it up as best he could: "If you're a Mormon in Utah, you hate the USA."

"Isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" Hinshaw said. "Only people who give us any sort of assistance at all are the ones the Mormons call gentiles—and they assassinate them whenever they get the chance." He snorted. "Even the sheenies in Utah are gentiles, if you can believe it."

"I'd believe anything about this damn place," Paul said. "Anybody who's seen what we've seen getting this far would believe anything."

Back of the line, back behind the train station, U.S. artillery opened up on Brigham Young College again. Up above, an aeroplane buzzed, spotting for the guns. The Mormons shot at it, but it was too high for their machine guns to reach.

Hinshaw looked up at the aeroplane. "Good for him," he said. "He'll find out where the bastards are at, and we'll blow 'em up. I like that. The more of 'em we kill, the less there are left to kill."

"You said it, sir," Paul agreed. "They *do* fight harder than the Rebs, every damn one of 'em."

"Amen to that," the captain said. "The Rebs, they're sons of bitches, but they're soldiers. When the war comes through, the civilians get the hell out of the way like they're supposed to. Here, though, anybody over the age of eight, boy or girl, is an even-money bet to be *afranc-tireur*. I heard tell they planted an explosive under a baby, and when one of our soldiers picked up the kid—*boomr*

Mantarakis wondered if that was true, or something somebody had made up for the sake of the story, or something somebody had made up to keep the troops on their toes. No way to tell, not for certain. That it was even within the realm of possibility said everything that needed saying about the kind of fight the Mormons were putting up.

As if to remind him what kind of fight that was, the Mormons in the front-line foxholes and shelters in the rubble opened up again on the U.S. positions south of Center Street. Rifle fire picked up all along the line as government soldiers started shooting back. Machine guns began to bark and chatter. Here and there, wounded men shrieked.

"Be alert out there!" Paul shouted to his men as he got to his feet. 'They're liable to rush us." The Mormons had done that to another regiment in the brigade, down near the town of Spanish Fork. Farmers and merchants in overalls and sack suits, a couple even wearing neckties, had thrown the U.S. soldiers back several hundred yards, and captured four machine guns to boot. That regiment had had its colors retired in disgrace; it was off doing prisoner-guard duty somewhere these days, being reckoned unfit for anything better. Mantarakis didn't want the same ignominy to fall on his unit.

But the religious fanatics—*religious maniacs* was what Mantarakis thought of them, even if that did make him seem unpleasantly like Gordon McSweeney to himself—didn't charge. They weren't eager about battling their way through barbed wire, not any more. A few gruesome maulings at the hands of troops more alert than that one luckless regiment had pounded that lesson into them. Even if they didn't have uniforms, they were beginning to behave more like regular troops than they had: the effect, no doubt, of fighting the U.S. regulars for some weeks.

They still had more originality left in them than most regulars, though. Something flew through the air and crashed into the foxholes and trenches behind Mantarakis. He shook his head in bemusement. It had looked like a bottle. He wondered what was in it. Not whiskey, that was for sure—the poor stupid damn Mormons were even drier than the desert in which they lived.

Another bottle hurtled toward the U.S. lines. The Mormons had used some sort of outsized slingshot arrangement to fling makeshift grenades at the soldiers battling to crush their rebellion; Paul would have bet they were throwing their bottles the same way. But why?

A trail of smoke followed that second one. It smashed maybe twenty yards from Mantarakis, and splashed flame into the bottom of the trench. "Jesus!" he yelled, and crossed himself. "They've got kerosene in there, or something like it."

“That's a filthy way to fight," Captain Hinshaw said. Half walking, half waddling, he started down the trench line. "Let me get to a field

telephone. We'll teach them to play with fire, God damn me to hell if we don't."

"Look out, Captain!" Paul shouted. The Mormons must have been saving up bottles, because they had a lot of them. Here came another one. Hinshaw ducked. That didn't help him. It hit him in the back and shattered, pouring burning kerosene up and down his body.

He screamed. He thrashed. He rolled on the ground, trying to put out that fire. It didn't want to go out. It wasn't just the kerosene burning any more, but also his uniform and his flesh. The harsh, acrid stink of scorched wool warred with a sweet odor a lot like that of roasting pork. Had Mantarakis smelled that odor under other circumstances, he might have been hungry. Now he just wanted to heave up his guts into the bottom of the trench.

He lacked the luxury of time in which to be sick. He jumped on top of Captain Hinshaw, smothering the flames with his body, beating at them with his hands, and then shoveling dirt onto them.

Hinshaw kept on screaming like a damned soul. Mantarakis remembered he'd asked God to damn him. Even as the Greek battled the fire burning his captain, he shivered. When you said something like that, you were asking for trouble.

A couple of other soldiers came running up and helped Mantarakis extinguish Hinshaw. More kerosene-filled bottles kept dropping all around. More men screamed those horrid screams, too.

Captain Hinshaw was still smoking, but he didn't seem to be burning anywhere, not any more. He sat up. That gave Mantarakis and the other two men the first look at his face they'd had since the bottle hit him. Mantarakis wanted to look away. "Jesus," one of the other soldiers said softly. It wasn't a live man's face any more, but a skull covered here and there with bits of charred meat.

In a voice eerily calm, Hinshaw said, "Will one of you please take your weapon and kill me? Believe me, you'd be doing me a favor."

"We can't do that, sir," Mantarakis answered through numb lips. He raised his voice to shout for stretcher-bearers. Trying to sound soothing, he went on, "They'll have moiphia for you, sir."

"Morphia?" Hinshaw's laugh made Paul's hair stand on end. The officer groped for his own pistol, and got it out of the holster. Mantarakis knew he ought to stop him, but crouched, frozen. Neither of the other

two soldiers moved. Hinshaw's hand was burned, too, but not too burned to pull the trigger. He fell over, mercifully dead.

A few minutes later, artillery stopped pounding Brigham Young College and started hammering the Mormons in the front-line positions. A couple of shells fell short, too, plowing up the ground too close to Paul for comfort.

Whistles shrilled. For once, Mantarakis was glad to go over the top, glad to struggle through paths in the wire that weren't paths enough—anything to get away from the roast-meat horror Captain Hinshaw had become. Beside that, the bullets cracking past him were nuisances, distractions, nothing more. By the way his men were shouting as they rushed the Mormon lines, they felt the same as he did.

He sprang down into a length of trench. The Mormons fought hard. They always fought hard. Hardly any of them threw down their rifles, even in the face of death. That didn't matter, not today it didn't. He hadn't planned on taking prisoners, anyhow.

From an upstairs bedroom came the insistent clanging of a bell. "I'll speak further to you later, Griselda," Scipio said. The servant, who'd given Anne Colleton rancid butter, looked suitably downcast, but he hadn't quite turned away before she stuck out her tongue at him.

She would have to go, he realized as he hurried up the staircase. Whether that meant another situation indoors somewhere else or work out in the fields, he didn't know, but such insubordination could not be tolerated. And then, around three steps higher, he remembered he was part of a revolutionary movement that, if it succeeded, would sweep away Negro servitude forever. Until it succeeded, though, the most he could do to help it was to make everything seem as normal as he could. Yes, Griselda would have to go.

"Coming, Captain Colleton," he called, for the bell went on and on and on. He had been too well-trained ever to look like someone in a hurry, but he was walking very fast by the time he got to Jacob Colleton's bedroom.

"Took you long enough," Colleton said in a slurring rasp. That didn't spring from the effects of the gas alone; he was drunk, as he was most of the time: a cut-glass whiskey decanter, nearly all the whiskey it had once held now decanted, sat on a table by the chair in which he perched.

"I am sorry to have inconvenienced you, sir," Scipio said. He had to

fight to keep his air of servile detachment around Jacob Colleton. You knew people came back from war wounded, even maimed. You didn't think they could come back ruined this particular way, though, condemned to maybe a full life's worth of hell.

Chlorine gas ... that was stuff more appalling than anyone had imagined back before the war. If the Confederates had thought of it, they wouldn't have used it against the USA, not at first they wouldn't. They'd have used it to keep their own blacks in line. He had a sudden, horrid vision of black men and women lined up and made to breathe the stuff. A lot more efficient than just shooting them...

In that choking wreck of a whisper, Jacob Colleton said, "I want to see Cherry. Bring her here to me. She can tell me a story, one of those Congaree yarns you niggers spin, take my mind off how wonderful the world is for me these days." He coughed. His face, already the color of parchment, went paler yet, to the shade milk had once you'd skimmed off the cream.

"You understand, sir, that she is in the fields at present," Scipio said. Colleton nodded impatiently. Face not showing any of what he was thinking, Scipio said, "I shall fetch her here directly."

Muggy heat smote him when he went outside. He felt himself starting to sweat. It was, for once, honest sweat, sweat having nothing—well, only a little—to do with fear. The kinds of stories Cherry told Jacob Colleton had nothing to do with words. Colleton, of course, had no notion Cherry was anything but one more Negro wench to distract him and keep his mind off his pain.

What she thought about him was harder for Scipio to unravel. She gave Colleton what he wanted from her; the butler was sure of that much. He wouldn't have kept asking for her if she didn't. Understanding why she did was harder. Come the revolution, Jacob Colleton, like every other white aristocrat in the CSA, was fair game.

Maybe he told her things, when they were in there together with the doors closed. Cassius might know about that; Scipio didn't. He didn't have the nerve to ask the hunter, either. Maybe Cherry reveled in making herself feel worse now so revenge would be all the sweeter when it came. And maybe, too, revolutionary sentiments or not, she also felt something akin to pity for Jacob Colleton. People weren't all of a piece, not whites, not blacks, not anybody. Scipio was sure of that.

He sent a little boy who wore nothing but a grin and a shirt that came halfway down to his knees out to find Cherry. That meant he'd have to give the little rascal a couple of pennies when he came back, but going out into the fields after a particular woman was beneath a butler's dignity.

While he waited for the boy to return with Cherry, he looked back at the Marshlands mansion. Halftone photographs in the newspapers showed what towns looked like after the rake of war dragged through them. He tried to imagine Marshlands as a burnt-out shell. Horror ran through him when he did. He loved and hated the place at the same time himself.

Here came Cherry, a plain cotton blouse over an equally plain cotton skirt, but a fiery red bandanna tied over her hair. Scipio gave the boy three pennies, which was plenty to send him capering off with glee. "Why fo' you wants me?" Cherry asked.

"Ain't me." Scipio shook his head in denial. "Marse Jacob, he want you. Say he want you to tell a story to he."

"He say dat?" Cherry asjced. Scipio nodded. Now he was sweating from nerves. If Cherry told Jacob Colleton the wrong story, he himself was a dead man. He hoped she didn't truly care for Miss Anne's brother. If she did, she was liable to talk more than she should. That was the last thing Scipio wanted. She said, "Well, he gwine like de story he get."

Scipio wouldn't have doubted that. She was a fine-looking woman, with high cheekbones that said she had some Indian in her. You'd have never a dull moment between the sheets with her; of that much Scipio was sure. All the same, knowing what he knew, he would sooner have taken a cougar to bed.

Cherry walked on toward Marshlands. Scipio followed her with his eyes. Any man would have, the roll she put to her hips. She opened the door, closing it after her as she went inside. Something else occurred to Scipio, something he hadn't thought through before. Cherry was going up to that bedroom to do what Jacob Colleton wanted. Colleton probably didn't care much about whether it was what she wanted. If the uprising of which she dreamt ever came off, Scipio wouldn't have cared to be in the shoes Miss Anne's brother was —or, at the moment, most likely wasn't— wearing.

Well, that was Jacob Colleton's lookout, not Scipio's. The butler had

enough to worry about, keeping Marshlands going with servants constantly leaving for better-paying jobs, and with the threat of revolt from the field hands growing worse every day.

And, he remembered, with insolence from the servants he did have. Dealing with Griselda came within the normal purview of his duties. That it was normal made it all the more attractive to him now. Straightening up until he looked as stiff and stern as the Confederate sergeant on the recruiting poster pasted to every other telegraph pole, he marched back to the mansion.

Griselda, predictably, screamed abuse at him when he told her she had to go. 'That will be enough of that," he said, using his educated voice: he was speaking as Anne Colleton's agent now, not as himself. "If you comport yourself with dignity, I will prevail upon the mistress to write you a letter that will enable you to find a good situation elsewhere. Otherwise—"

But that was not so effective as it would have been a year earlier. "Fuck yo' letter, an' fuck you, too," Griselda shouted. "Don' need no letter, not these days I don't. Take myself to Columbia, git me work at one o' the factories they got there. Don' have to lissen to no nigger talkin' like white folks what needs to go take a shit, neither." She stormed out of Marshlands, slamming the door behind her.

Scipio stared out the window as she flounced down the path that led to the road. She hadn't even bothered going to her room and getting her belongings. Maybe she'd be back for them later, or maybe she'd have somebody send them on to her when she found a place in town. Wherever the truth lay there, she never would have behaved that way before the war made it possible for her to find a job without worrying about her passbook or a letter of recommendation or anything past a strong back and a pair of hands.

"The war," he muttered. It had dislocated everything, including, God only knew, his own life.

Anne Colleton came out of her office and looked down at him from the second floor. "What was that all about?" she asked. "Or don't I want to know?"

"One of the house staff has seen fit to resign her position, ma'am," Scipio answered tonelessly.

Miss Anne raised an eyebrow. "I didn't know an artillery accompaniment was required with resignations these days," she

remarked, but didn't seem inclined to take it any further, for which Scipio was duly grateful.

The mistress of Marshlands was turning away from the railing when another door opened upstairs. Cherry walked by Anne Colleton, nodding to her almost, although not quite, as an equal. Miss Anne looked at her, looked back to the door from which she had emerged, and went back into her office, shaking her head as she went.

Cherry paused by Scipio. "I hear one of the house niggers up an' leave?" she asked. When the butler nodded, she said, "How about you give de job she was doin' to me? I kin do it better dan she could, I bet you."

Scipio licked his lips. She might well have been right, but— "I gwine ask Cassius, see what he say." Using that dialect inside the mansion, even speaking quietly as he was now, made him nervous. Cassius would probably be glad to have an extra set of eyes and ears inside Marshlands, but if for some reason he wanted his followers to stay as inconspicuous as possible, Scipio didn't want to cross him. Scipio didn't want to cross Cassius for any reason. The hunter was altogether too good with a gun or a knife or any other piece of lethality that came into his hands.

Cherry tossed her head. "Cain't ask Cassius. He ain't here."

"What do you mean, he isn't here?" Scipio asked, returning to the form of English that seemed more natural—or at least safer—to him inside Marshlands. "Has he gone hunting in the swamps for a few days?"

"He gone, but not in de swamp," Cherry agreed. She too dropped her voice, to a throaty whisper. "Who know what kind o' good things he bring back wid he when he come home?"

What the devil was that supposed to mean? Scipio couldn't come right out and ask: too many ears around in a place like Marshlands, and not all of them—none of the white and too few of the black—to be trusted. He focused on what lay right before him. "Very well, Cherry," he said starchily. "We shall try you indoors for a time, and see how you shape in your new position. Have you anything more suitable for wear inside Marshlands?"

"Sho' do." Her eyes flashed deviltry. "Jus' axe Marse Jacob." She slipped outside, laughing, while Scipio was still in the middle of a coughing fit.

Chester Martin scratched his head. The gesture, for once, had nothing to do with the lice that were endemic in the front lines near the Roanoke—and everywhere else. "Sir, these are the craziest orders I ever heard," he said.

Captain Orville Wyatt said, 'They're the craziest orders I ever heard, too, Sergeant. That hasn't got anything to do with the price of beer, though. We got 'em, so we're gonna obey 'em." But behind the wire-rimmed spectacles, his eyes were as puzzled as Martin's.

"Oh, yes, sir," Martin said. "But how are we supposed to pick out this one particular nigger? Those bastards do a lot of deserting." He scratched his head again. You had to want in the worst way to get out of your country if you were willing to crawl through barbed wire, willing to risk getting shot, to escape. And it wasn't as if the USA were any paradise for colored people, not even close. What did that say about the CSA? Nothing good, Martin figured.

Captain Wyatt said, "He'll let us know who he is. And when he does, we're supposed to treat him like he's whiter than the president." He spat down into the mud of the trench. That stuck in his craw, the same as it did for Martin.

The sergeant sighed. "Son of a bitch would have to pick our sector for whatever he's up to. I'll pass the word on to the men."

Specs Peterson, who was cleaning his eyeglasses on a rag that looked likelier to get them dirty, looked up, his gray eyes watery and unfocused. His voice was very clear, though: "What a lot of fuss over one damn nigger." The rest of the soldiers in the squad nodded.

So did Chester Martin, for that matter. But he answered, "When the order comes down from Philadelphia, you don't argue with it, not if you know what's good for you. Anybody who shoots that fellow when he's coming through the wire is gonna wish he'd shot himself instead."

"But, Sarge, what if this is all some kind of scheme the Rebs cooked up and they sneak a raiding party through? We won't shoot at them, neither, not till too late," Joe Hammerschmitt protested.

"You ought to be writing for *Scribner's* instead of what's-his-name, that Davis," Martin said. "Maybe you can make a gas attack sound exciting instead of nasty, too. But if the Rebels are that smart, they're probably going to overrun us. You ask me, though, they ain't that smart, or if they are, they sure haven't shown it."

With that the men—and Martin himself—had to be content. It turned out to be enough, too, for two nights later Hammerschmitt shook Martin awake. As he always did when he woke up, he grabbed for his Springfield, which lay beside him. "Don't need to do that, Sarge," the private said. "I think I got that nigger with me you were talking about the other day."

"Yeah?" Martin sat up, rubbing his eyes. It was dark in the trench; the Confederates had snipers watching for any light and anything it showed, same as the USA did. The man beside Hammerschmitt wasn't much more than a shadow. Martin peered toward him. "How you going to prove you're the one we've been waiting for?"

" 'Cause I de one gwine bring de uprisin' o' de proletariat to de white folks o' de CSA," the Negro answered. "Gwine end de feudal 'pression, gwine end de capitalis' 'pression, gwine end *all* 'pres-sion. De dictatorship o' de proletariat gwine come, down in de CSA." His eyes glittered as he peered toward Martin. "An' de revolution gwine come in de USA, too, you wait an' see." His accent was thick as molasses, but if anything it added to the grim intensity of what he was saying.

"Jesus Christ, Sarge," Hammerschmitt burst out, "he's a fuckin' Red."

"He sure is," Martin answered. Plainly, the Negro wasn't just a Socialist. Martin voted Socialist as often as not, though he'd favored TR in the last election. The Negro was an out-and-out bomb-throwing Red, Red as a Russian Bolshevik, probably Redder than an IWW lead miner or fruit picker out West. Martin scrambled to his feet. "I'll take you to the captain, uli— What's your name? They didn't tell us about that."

"I is Cassius," the Negro answered. "You sho' you got to waste time wid de captain? I got 'portant things to do up here in Yankeeland."

"Think a good bit of yourself, don't you, Cassius?" Martin said dryly. "Yes, you have to go see Captain Wyatt. You satisfy him, he'll pass you on up the line. And if you don't—" He didn't go on. Cassius sounded like a man with a head on his shoulders. He could work that out for himself.

Cassius picked his way over and around sleeping men and avoided holes in the bottom of the trench with an ease a cat would have had trouble matching and Martin couldn't approach. The Negro couldn't have acquired that sense of grace and balance chopping cotton all day. Martin wondered what he had done.

Captain Wyatt, as it happened, was awake, studying a map under the tiny light from a candle shielded by a tin can. He looked up when Martin and Cassius drew near. "This the man we're looking for, Sergeant?" he asked.

"I think so, sir," Martin answered. "His name's Cassius, and he's a Red." He wondered how the Negro would react to that. He just nodded, matter-of-factly, as if he'd been called tall or skinny. He *was* a Red.

Wyatt frowned. Martin knew he was a Democrat, and a conservative Democrat at that. But after a moment his face cleared. "If the Rebs have themselves a nice Red revolt in their own backyards, that won't make it any easier for them to fight us at the same time." He swung his eyes toward the black man. "Isn't that right, Mr. Cassius?" Martin had never heard anybody call a Negro *Mister* before. Cassius nodded. "It's right, but we make dis revolution fo' our ownselves, not fo' you Yankees. Like I tol' you' sergeant here, one fine day you gits yo' own revolution."

"Yes, when pigs have wings," Wyatt said crisply. The two men glared at each other in the gloom, neither yielding in the least. Then the captain said, "But it's the CSA we're both worried about now, eh?" and Cassius nodded. Wyatt went on, "I still don't know if it was them or the Canucks who set Utah on its ear, but your people will do worse to them than Utah ever did to us." He pointed to Martin. 'Take him back to the support trenches and tell them to pass him on to divisional headquarters. They'll see he gets what he needs."

"Yes, sir," Martin said. He headed for the closest communications trench, Cassius following. As they made their way back through the zigzag trench connecting the first line to the second, Martin remarked, "I sure as hell hope you give those Rebs a hard time."

"Oh, we do dat," Cassius said. With a dark skin, wearing a muddy Confederate laborer's uniform, he might almost have been an invisible voice in the night. "We do dat. We been waitin' fo' dis day a long time, pay they back fo' what dey do to we all dese years."

Chester Martin tried to think of it as an officer would, weighing everything he knew about the situation. "Even with the Rebs' having to fight us, too, you, uh, Negroes are going to have the devil's own time making the revolution stick. A lot more whites with a lot more guns than you've got."

"You Yankees gwine help wid de guns—I here fo' dat," Cassius said.

"An' dis ain't no uprisin' o' jus de niggers o' de CSA. Dis an uprisin' o' de proletariat, like I done say befo'. De po' buckra—"

'The what?" Martin asked.

"White folks," Cassius said impatiently. "Like I say, de po' buckra, he 'pressed, too, workin' in de factory an' de mill fo' de boss wid de motorcar an' de diamond on he pinky an' de fancy *seegar* in he mouf. Come de revolution, *all* de proletariat rise up togedder." He walked on a couple of steps. "What you do 'fo' you go in de Army?"

"Worked in a steel mill back in Toledo," Martin answered. "That's where I'm from."

"You in de proletariat, too, den," Cassius said. 'The boss you got, he throw you out in de street whenever he take a mind to do it. An' what kin you do about it? Cain't do nothin', on account of he kin hire ten men what kin do jus' de same job you was doin'. You call dat fair? You call dat right? Ought to point you' gun at dey fat-bellied parasites suckin' de blood from yo' labor."

'Telling a soldier to rise up against his own country is treason," Martin said. "Don't do that again."

Cassius laughed softly. "Tellin' de proletariat to rise up fo' dey class ain't no treason, Sergeant. De day come soon, you see dat fo' your own self."

A sergeant in the secondary trenches called a challenge that was more than half a yawn. Had Martin and Cassius been Confederate raiders, the fellow probably would have died before he finished. As things were, he woke up in a hurry when Martin identified his companion. "Oh, yes, Sergeant," he said. "We've been told to expect him."

Martin surrendered the Negro with more than a little relief and hurried back up toward the front line. Some of the things Cassius had said worried him more than a little, too. So did the Red's calm assumption that revolution *would* break out, come what may, not only in the Confederate States but in the United States as well.

Could it? Would it? Maybe it had tried to start in New York City on Remembrance Day, but it had been beaten down then. Would it stay beaten down? Capital and labor hadn't gotten on well in the years before the war. Plenty of strikes had turned bloody. If a wave of them came, all across the country ...

After the war, something new would go into the mix, too. A lot of men who'd seen fighting far worse than strikers against goons would be coming back to the factories. If the bosses tried to ignore their demands—what then? The night was fine and mild, but Martin shivered.

Captain Stephen Ramsay remained convinced that his Creek Army rank badges were stupid and, with their gaudiness, were more likely to make him a sniper's target. He also remained convinced that entrenching in—or, more accurately, in front of—a town was a hell of a thing for a cavalryman to be doing.

Not that Nuyaka, Sequoyah, was much of a town—a sleepy hamlet a few miles west of Okmulgee. But, with the damnyankees shifting forces in this direction, it had to be defended to keep them from getting around behind Okmulgee and forcing the Confederates out of the Creek capital.

Where the blacks had run off, everybody had to do nigger work. Ramsay used an entrenching tool just as if he still was the sergeant he'd been not so long before. Alongside him, Moty Tiger also made the dirt fly. Pausing for a moment, the Creek noncom grinned at Ramsay and said, "Welcome to New York."

"Huh?" Ramsay answered. He paused, too; he was glad for a blow. The heat and humidity made it feel like Mobile. "What are you talking about?"

"New York," Moty Tiger repeated, pronouncing the name with exaggerated care, almost as if he came from the USA. Then he said it again, pronouncing it as a Creek normally would have. Sure as hell, it sounded a lot like *Nuyaka.*

'This... little town"—Ramsay picked his words with care, not wanting to offend the Creek sergeant—"is named after New York City?" Moty Tiger nodded. Ramsay asked, "How come?"

"Back in Washington's time, when the Creeks still lived in Alabama and Georgia, he invited our chiefs to New York to make a treaty with him," the sergeant told him. "They were impressed at how big and fine it was, and took the name home with them. We took it here, too, when the government of the USA made us leave our rightful homes and travel the Trail of Tears." His face clouded. "Richmond has been honest with us. The USA never was. Being at war with the USA feels right."

"Sure does," Ramsay said. But the Creeks had been fighting the USA back when his ancestors were U.S. citizens. That made him feel strange whenever he thought about it. The Confederate States had been part of the United States longer than they'd been free. If they'd lost the War of Secession the damnyankees had forced on them, they'd still be part of the USA. He scowled, thinking, *Christ, what an awful idea.*

Perhaps luckily, he didn't have time to do much in the way of pondering. When you were digging like a gopher trying to get underground before a hawk swooped down and carried you away, worries about what might have been didn't clog your mind.

Colonel Lincoln, whose two-jewel insigne was twice as absurd as Ramsay's, came up to look over the progress the Creek regiment had made. He nodded his approval. "Good job," he told Ramsay. "You've got foxholes back toward town dug, so you can fall back if you need to, you've got the machine guns well sited, you've done everything I can think of that you should have."

"Thank you, sir," Ramsay said. "And this isn't any ordinary town, either." He told Lincoln the story of how Nuyaka had got its name.

"Is that a fact?" Lincoln said.

"Yes, sir," Moty Tiger answered when Ramsay glanced his way. Colonel Lincoln shook his head in bemusement. Like Ramsay, he was careful to do or say nothing that might offend the Indians he

commanded. But Nuyaka, any way you looked at it, was pretty damn funny.

Lincoln peered back toward Okmulgee. Smoke and dust were rising up above the hills rimming the valley in which the town sat. The rumble of artillery carried across the miles. "They're pounding each other again," he said.

"Sure sounds that way, sir," Ramsay agreed. "I'm glad to be out of there, you want to know the truth. This here"—he waved at the Creeks preparing the position in front of Nuyaka—"it ain't cavalry fighting, but it's better than what it was back there. For now it's better, anyways."

"For now," Colonel Lincoln echoed. "The fight around Okmulgee has got itself all bogged down, the way things are in Kentucky and Virginia and Pennsylvania: a whole lot of men battling it out for a little patch of ground. But Sequoyah's got too much land and not enough men for most of it to be like that. And where men are thinner on the ground, you can get some movement."

"Not cavalry sweeps," Ramsay said mournfully. "Hell of a thing, training for years to be able to fight one kind of way, and then when the war comes, you find you can't do it."

"Machine guns," Lincoln said. By the way he said it, he couldn't have come up with a nastier curse if he'd tried for a week. He pointed to the ones the Creeks were setting up. "They'll mow down the Yankees if they try to come in this direction, but they mow down horses even better than they do men."

"Yes, sir, that's a fact," Ramsay said. He thought back to the days when the Confederates had been raiding up into Kansas rather than U.S. troops pressing down into Sequoyah. "If this war ever really gets moving again, it'll have to be with armored motorcars, not horses."

"Armored motorcars?" Moty Tiger said. "I read about those in the newspapers. Bad to run up against, are they?"

"You shoot a horse, it goes down," Ramsay said dryly. "You shoot one of those motorcars, the bullets mostly bounce off. It's got machine guns, too, and it keeps right on shooting at you. I'm just glad the damnyankees don't have a whole lot of them."

"More than we do." Captain Lincoln sounded grim. "Back before the war started, they were building a lot more automobiles than we were."

"They come this way, we'll deal with 'em, sir," the Creek sergeant said. Ramsay didn't want to discourage pluck like that. The Creeks had turned out to make far better, far steadier soldiers than he'd ever figured they would. One of the reasons was, they thought they could do anything. When you thought like that, you were halfway—maybe more than halfway—to being right.

They got the rest of that day, that night, and the first hour or so of daylight the next morning to dig in before the first U.S. patrols started probing their positions. Pickets in rifle pits well in front of the main Creek position traded gunfire with the Yankees.

Things had changed over the past year. When the war was new, infantry running up against opposition would mass and then hurl itself forward, aiming to overwhelm the foe by sheer weight of numbers. Sometimes they did overwhelm the foe, too, but at a gruesome cost in killed and wounded.

No more. The damnyankees coming down toward Nuyaka from the north must have been veteran troops. When they started taking fire, they went to earth themselves and fired back. Instead of swarming forward, they advanced in rushes, one group dashing up from one piece of cover to another while more soldiers supported them with rifle fire that made the Creeks keep their heads down, then reversing the roles.

In danger of being cut off from their comrades, the pickets retreated to the main line. When the U.S. troops drew a little closer, the machine guns opened up on them, spraying death all along the front. Again, the U.S. soldiers halted their advance where a year before they would have charged. It was as if they were pausing to think things over.

Not far from Ramsay, Moty Tiger peered out over the forward wall of the trench. "Uh-oh," he said. "I don't like it when they stop that way. Next thing that happens is, they start shooting cannon at us."

"You're learning," Ramsay told him. He looked back over his own shoulder. The Confederates had promised a battery of three-inch field pieces to help the Creek Nation Army hold Nuyaka. Ramsay hadn't seen any sign of those guns. Getting shelled when you couldn't shell back was one of the joys of the infantryman's life with which he'd become more intimately acquainted than he'd ever wanted.

Instead of rolling out the artillery, though, the damnyankees, as if to give Moty Tiger what he'd said he wanted, rolled out a couple of

armored motorcars. The vehicles didn't come right up to the trench line. They cruised back and forth a couple of furlongs away, plastering the Creek position with machine-gun fire.

Ramsay threw himself flat as bullets stitched near. Dirt spattered close by, kicked up by the gunfire. Cautiously, he got to his feet again. "Shoot out their tires, if you can," he shouted to the Creek machine-gun crews. The tires weren't armored, although these motorcars, unlike the first ones Ramsay had encountered, carried metal shields covering part of the circumference of the wheels.

One of the armored motorcars slowed to a stop. The Creeks cheered. It was less of a victory than they thought, though, as they soon discovered. The motorcar, though stopped, kept right on shooting. "Where are those damn guns?" Ramsay growled. "A target you'd dream about—"

Sometimes dreams did come true. He'd just sent a runner back toward Okmulgee to demand artillery support when earth started fountaining up around the automobile. Its hatches flew open. The two-man crew fled for the nearest Yankee foxhole moments before the machine was hit and burst into flames. The other armored motorcar skedaddled, shells bursting around it. It hid itself behind bushes and trees before it got knocked out. The Creeks yelled themselves hoarse.

"The damnyankees already have one New York," Ramsay said to Moty Tiger, trying to pronounce the name as the Indian did. "What the hell do they need with two?" His sergeant grinned at him by way of reply.]

XVII

Sylvia Enos finished tying George, Jr.'s, shoe. Her son had just turned five; pretty soon she or, better, George would teach him to tie shoes for himself, and that would be one less thing she'd have to worry about every morning. Quite enough would be left as things were.

She looked up. In the half minute during which she'd been dealing with those shoes, Mary Jane had disappeared. "Come here this instant," she called. "We're going to be late."

"No!" Mary Jane said from the bedroom she shared with her brother. No was her standard answer to everything these days; not long before, she'd answered *no* when asked if she wanted a piece of licorice. She'd realized that tragic error a moment too late, and burst into tears.

Sylvia didn't have much time or patience left. "Do you want me to

whack you on the fanny?" she demanded, clapping her hands together.

"No!" Mary Jane answered, this time with alarm instead of defiance.

"Then come out here and behave yourself," Sylvia said. "I have to go to work, and you have to go to Mrs. Coneval's. Come out right now, or —"

Mary Jane appeared, both hands pressed over her bottom to protect it from the slings and arrows of an outraged mother. Sylvia knew she shouldn't laugh; that just encouraged her daughter's mischief, and a two-year-old needed no such encouragement. She couldn't help herself, though.

Virtuously, George, Jr., said, "*I'm* all ready, Mama."

"Good," Sylvia said. "And now Mary Jane is ready, too, so we'll go to Mrs. Coneval's." She held out her hands. George, Jr., took one and Mary Jane the other. They paraded down the hall to Brigid Coneval's flat. At Sylvia's knock, Mrs. Coneval opened the door. "Ah, 'tis the hero's children," she said. "Come in, the two of ye." George, Jr., puffed out his little chest and looked impressive and important. It all went over Mary Jane's head.

"I'll see the two of you tonight," Sylvia said, bending down to kiss her children.

"Good-bye, Mama," George, Jr., said. "I'll be good."

"I'm sure you will, lamb." Sylvia turned to Mary Jane. "You'll be good, too, won't you?"

"No," Mary Jane said, which might have been prediction or warning or —Sylvia hoped—nothing more than the answer she gave to most questions these days.

"She's no trouble at all," Brigid Coneval assured Sylvia. "Good as gold, she is ... most o' the time. But if I've coped with my own hellions so long, she'll have to go some to put me out of kilter." She cocked her head to one side. "And how does it feel to be after having your husband's picture in the papers and all?"

"It feels wonderful. We have a copy of the *Globe* framed in the kitchen," Sylvia answered, and then, "I wish they'd never done it."

Confusion spread across Mrs. Coneval's long, pale face. "Begging your

pardon, but I don't follow that."

"Now that the papers have blabbed what that fishing boat did and how it did it, it'll be harder and more dangerous for them to do it again," Sylvia explained. "I wish the Rebs didn't have any idea what sort of trick they used."

"Ah, now I see," Mrs. Coneval breathed. "God bless you, Mrs. Enos, and may He keep your man safe." She crossed herself.

"Thank you," Sylvia said from the bottom of her heart. She did a lot of praying, too. It had brought George safe from the sea to North Carolina, and from North Carolina back to Boston.

Whatever God chose to do about that, He wouldn't let her stand around flapping her gums with Brigid Coneval. She hurried downstairs. The air was cooler and fresher outdoors than in the apartment building, but that wasn't saying much. It was going to be hot and sticky. It was usually hot and sticky in Boston in July, but she hadn't known what that meant, not really, till she'd put in a few shifts under a corrugated tin roof at the fish-canning plant.

She got onto the trolley. A man who looked like a factory worker stood up and gave her his seat. She sat down with a murmur of thanks. Men were more inclined to be gentlemanly in the morning, she'd found, than in the evening after a full day's work, when they were tired and wanted to get a load off their feet. Then it was everyone for himself. She'd heard women complain and shame men to their feet, but she never did that herself. She knew all about being tired.

Riding the streetcar gave her a few minutes to herself, even in a crowd of strangers. She spent half the time thinking of the pork chops she'd fry up for supper when she got home that night, the other half, inevitably, worrying about George. The *Spray* was out on patrol again. What she hoped most of all was that the boat would come back from the Banks with a hold full of hake and halibut, having seen no Confederate, Canadian, or British warships of any description. That had happened on one cruise already, and was probably the only thing the Navy was doing during the war to turn a profit.

Next best would be to sink an enemy submersible. George would have disagreed with those priorities, but what did he know? Going face to face with the Rebs and Canucks put him in even more danger than simply going out to sea, and so many men never came home in time of

peace.

And, of course, the tables could turn. That was even more likely now, thanks to the enterprising reporters who'd published their stories about fishing boats that were so much more than they seemed. Making the foe wary might tempt him to shoot at long range or make him more watchful for the towed submarine or any number of other unpleasant possibilities.

On that cheerful note, she got off the trolley and walked to the factory. A couple of cats stared at her with green, green eyes. The smell of the fish-canning plant—and the scraps outside—drew them like a magnet. She wondered if they were jealous, watching her go into the dingy building. If they were, it was only because they didn't know what she did in there.

Her children's best efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, she got to work on time. "Has the machine been behaving itself?" she asked Elena Gomes, who worked the night shift.

"It did not jam much—not too much," the other woman answered. "Some nights, I think it has the Devil in it, but tonight it was not bad." She patted her lustrous black hair. Instead of cutting it short, as most of the women at the factory did, she wore it under a hairnet to keep it from getting caught in the machinery.

'That's something, anyway," Sylvia said, though what the label-gluing machine did on one shift was no guarantee of what it would do on the next. For the moment, as shifts changed all through the canning plant, the production line was quiet.

"Your husband, he is well?" Elena asked.

"As far as I know, yes," Sylvia said. "But his boat put to sea again three nights ago, so I won't know for certain till they come back from the trip." And if something did go wrong, she wouldn't know till days, maybe weeks, passed. Dead? Captured? She'd been through the agony of wondering once; she didn't know if she could stand to go through it again.

The Portuguese woman made the sign of the cross. "I pray for him, as I do for my own husband."

"Thank you," Sylvia said, as she had to Brigid Coneval. "How's your Pedro?" Elena Gomes' husband was in the Army, somewhere out in the Southwest. "Have you heard from him lately?"

"I got a letter yesterday, thank God," Elena said. "They are moving farther into Texas, to a town called—" She frowned. "Lummox? Is that right?"

"Lubbock, I think." Sylvia remembered seeing the name in the newspaper. "I'm glad he's all right."

"Oh, so am I," the other woman replied. "He says they are thinking of making him a corporal. He talks it down: he says it is only because—again, thank God—he has stayed alive. But I can tell he is proud of it. Still, it is nothing like what your George has done. To be one of the crew that sank a submarine—" Her eyes glowed.

What George had had to say about that was that the *Spray* had gone to sea with a big sink me! sign painted on the cabin, and that the Confederate submarine had thought it was part of the free-lunch spread at a saloon. He didn't think being a decoy was worth getting as excited over as the papers had gone and done.

Before Sylvia found a way to put any of that into words, the conveyor belt gave a couple of jerks. She knew what that meant—it would start up in earnest in a minute or two. Elena Gomes understood that, too. "I am going to go home and try to get some sleep," she said with a wan smile, "so I can come back tonight and do the same thing all over again. Such is life." She hurried away.

Such is life, Sylvia thought: drudgery, exhaustion, never enough money, never the time to lift up your head and look around. Wasn't it last week she'd had George, Jr., the day before yesterday she'd given birth to Mary Jane? If it wasn't, where had the time gone? How had it slipped past her? She hadn't even been working then— if, that is, you didn't call raising children work. People who didn't have to do it didn't think it was, which, as far as she was concerned, only showed how little they knew. Or maybe they thought it wasn't work because women didn't get paid for it. That was nothing but more foolishness.

With a clatter, the conveyor belt got rolling in earnest. Sylvia thought, *The trouble with this job is that I don't get paid. .. enough.* If she'd been a man, she would have made more money. Then again, if she'd been a man, she probably would have been in the armed forces by now. Soldiers and sailors didn't get paid much, either, and the things they did ...

She remembered George talking about the torpedo that had slammed into the Confederate submersible. "It was there," he'd said, "and then it

was in two pieces, sinking. Nobody had a chance to get out." He'd known some pride in being part of the ambush that sank it, but also a sailor's horror of watching any vessel go to the bottom.

She pulled the levers on her machine. As Elena had said, it was behaving pretty well. When the paste reservoir ran low, she poured more into it from a big bucket that sat by her feet. She had to keep an eye on the labels, too, to make sure the machine didn't run out of them. She'd let the feeder go empty once, and had the foreman screaming at her because unlabeled cans were going down the line. She never wanted that to happen again.

She ate dinner with Isabella Antonelli, whose husband had been a fisherman and these days was fighting somewhere up in Quebec. "He say they going to do something big," she told Sylvia. "What it is, I don' know. The—how you say?—the censor, he scratch out so much, I cannot tell what his big thing is gonna be."

"I hope he'll be all right," Sylvia answered, not knowing what else to say. Isabella nodded and then started complaining about her machine, which fastened strips of tinned steel into cylinders that would be soldered to make the bodies of cans. If half of what she said was true, it made the labeling machine a delight by comparison. But she liked to complain, so who could guess whether half was true?

When she finally slowed down about the machine, she said, "Your husband, he's a hero. You don't get no extra money for that, so you no have-a to work here?"

"I wish I did," Sylvia said. "But what I really wish is that we weren't at war at all, so he could just catch fish and make a living and we wouldn't have to worry about anything else. I wish we never had the war."

"So do I," Isabella Antonelli said. "But we have it. What can you do?"

"Nothing," Sylvia answered bleakly. "Nothing at all." She gulped her cold coffee and went back to work.

Behind Lucien Galtier, a motorized rumble and rattle and racket grew rapidly. He paid it no mind, clucking to his horse and saying, "In a little while, we shall be at Riviere-du-Loup. No point in hurrying on such a fine day—I am certain you agree." If the horse disagreed, it didn't tell him so.

Brakes squealed. Lucien did not look back over his shoulder. Then he

heard the raucous squawk of a horn's rubber bulb as it was vigorously squeezed again and again. Through those squawks, an American bellowed at him: "Get out of the road, you goddamn stinking Canuck, or we'll run you down!"

Now Galtier did look back. Sure enough, he was holding up a convoy of big, snorting White trucks, all of them painted the green-gray of the U.S. uniform. "I am desolate," he said, dropping the reins so he could spread his hands in apology. "I did not know you were there."

The driver of the lead truck shook a fist at him through the dust-streaked windscreen. "Get the hell out of the road," he shouted again, "or we won't know you're there."

Lucien fumbled as he picked up the reins, which made the driver start squeezing that rubber bulb again. Lucien tipped his hat to show he did at last hear, then guided the wagon onto the verge to let the truck convoy pass. Delaying things any longer, he calculated, would be more dangerous than enjoyable.

Truck after truck roared past, gears clashing as drivers upshifted for better speed. The noise of the growling engines was appalling. So was the dust the trucks kicked up from the road. The horse snorted indignantly and twitched its ears, as if blaming Lucien for the gray, choking cloud that enveloped them. "I am sorry," Lucien told the animal. "We would have had the same trouble had we pulled off right away." The horse looked unconvinced. So did the chickens in the slotted crates in the back of the wagon; they squawked almost as loud as the truck horn and flapped their wings in a vain effort to escape. Galtier wasted little sympathy on them, not when they were bound for the stew pot or the roasting pan.

He counted the trucks that passed him, noting how many carried men and how many supplies. Having done that, he laughed at himself. The army stint he'd put in had trained him well: when in contact with the enemy, gather intelligence. The only problem with that was, he had nowhere to convey the intelligence he'd gathered. And even if he had known to whom to convey it, how much good would that have done him? Anyone on this side of the St. Lawrence would have needed a wireless set to pass the information on to where it might do some good. He knew no one with such exotic equipment.

Dust from the trucks hung in the air when he got back onto the road and headed up toward Riviere-du-Loup once more. Before he got to town, he had to pull off again to let another convoy pass him. As he

had with the first one, he waited to the last possible moment and then a couple of moments more, forcing the whole convoy to slow down to a horse's walking speed before finally noticing the trucks were there and getting out of their way.

"How much good does this do, do you think?" he asked the horse when they started traveling again, after the curses of the U.S. drivers finished washing over him. "This getting them angry and giving them a couple of minutes' delay, is it worthwhile?"

Again, the horse did not answer. He got the distinct impression the horse did not care, although the animal had no great use for trucks whether delayed or rolling past. *Foolish beast,* he thought.

As he drew near Riviere-du-Loup, the wagon rolled through an enormous U.S. encampment: more tents than he had ever imagined, and he was familiar with tents. Soldiers bustled about, doing soldierly things. But for the color of their uniforms and the fact that their brand of soldiers' slang had no French in it, they might have been the sons of the men with whom he had served a generation before.

Up near the river, artillery pieces squatted like long-necked, dangerous beasts. Some of them were big, six- or eight-inchers, not just the three-inch popguns that had been here the year before. The Americans could answer warships in kind now. He still remembered the weight of metal the cruiser had been able to hurl at those popguns; thinking about it brought a smile to his lips.

Out in the river, guns boomed. For a moment, he hoped naval vessels were shelling the camp: it would be a target of the sort about which gunners dreamed. But then he realized it was the battery the Americans had placed on the Isle aux Lievres, the Isle of Hares, out in the St. Lawrence. He wondered if the guns were shooting at ships on the river or at the Canadian and British positions on the north bank. Either way, they would miss if God was kind.

Those guns out on the Isle aux Lievres had shelled the south bank once, after a couple of companies of picked men rowed over from St.-Simeon or somewhere nearby under cover of darkness and wiped out the American garrison. The locals had laughed about that for weeks, even though the soldiers of the British Empire hadn't been able to hold the island against a massive U.S. counterattack.

Into Riviere-du-Loup Lucien rode, enjoying such summer warmth as Quebec offered. Before he got to the market square, U.S. soldiers not

once but twice inspected him, the horse, the wagon, and the chickens he hoped to sell. They didn't turn him back and they didn't demand payment in exchange for letting him go forward, so he supposed he had no real complaint. Maybe they thought he'd hidden a bomb in one of the capons. He thought about making a joke with them about that, but decided not to. They did not look as if they would be amused.

He found a place to hitch his wagon not far from the Loup-du-Nord. He thought about going in, too, but the place was bustling with soldiers. Neither the idea of good liquor nor that of leering at Angelique and the other barmaids was enough to counterbalance their presence.

As soon as he had his chickens on display, American soldiers came up and started buying them. The birds mostly went for a couple of dollars apiece; prices had shot up since the Americans came into Quebec, because there was little to buy here. Besides, most of the soldiers knew no more about haggling than they did about archery.

He soon found one exception to that rule, a small, swarthy man older than the latest class or two of conscripts. Where most of the U.S. soldiers looked like English-speaking Canadians, this one might have been a cousin of Lucien's. He also understood something of bargaining, to Galtier's disappointment. He had patience, which most of the Americans signally lacked. "Come on, Anto-nelli, you gonna stand there all day?" one of his comrades asked. "Buy the damn chicken, already."

"I'll buy it when this guy here quits trying to steal my money," Antonelli said. He turned back to Galtier. "Awright, you damn thief, I'll give you a dollar ten for the bird."

"/ steal?" Galtier assumed an injured expression. "1? No, *monsieur,* you are the thief. Even at a dollar forty, it is for me no bargain."

He ended up selling Antonelli the hen for a dollar and a quarter. He could have done better by refusing to deal with the American at all and getting more from a less able haggler, but he enjoyed the bargaining enough to make the deal at that price simply for the sake of having met a worthy opponent. Marie, no doubt, would cluck at him when he got back to the farm, but money was not the only thing that brought satisfaction to life.

When the Americans had snapped up all the chickens he had for sale, he put the crates back in the wagon and then wandered over to the

edge of the river. More boats were tied up at the quays below the town than he was used to seeing there. Not all of them were the usual sort of fishing boats and tramp steamers, either. He didn't think he'd ever seen so many barges at Riviere-du-Loup. A lot of them looked new, as if they'd just been put together from green timber and had engines bolted to them. They wouldn't go far or fast. For a moment, he had trouble figuring out why they were there.

Then he did, and crossed himself. As soon as he'd done that, he looked around to see whether anyone—especially Father Pascal— had noticed. But the priest was nowhere in sights for which he thanked God. So many men around Riviere-du-Loup, so many barges and boats of all kinds assembled here, could mean only one thing: the Americans were making ready to cross the St. Lawrence and inflict on the rest of Quebec] all the delights their rule had brought here.

"Mauvais chance—bad luck," he murmured under his breath. Too much of France already lay under the boots of the Americans' German allies —would all the French speakers in the world now be occupied and tyrannized? "Prevent it, God," he said quietly.

He wanted to run to the church, so his prayers would have more effect. But who presided over the church in Riviere-du-Loup? No one other than the odious Father Pascal. To the priest, his own advancement counted for more than the fate of his countrymen. When the day of reckoning came (if God was kind enough to grant such), Father Pascal would have much for which to answer.

Glumly, Lucien walked to the general store and bought his monthly ration of kerosene with some of the money he'd got from selling the hens. He was pleased by how little he paid for it; compared to other things, it hadn't risen so sharply. It would, he expected, but it hadn't yet. He understood military bureaucracies and how slowly they worked, having been part of one himself, but hadn't expected to be able to turn that to his advantage. With another half-dollar of hen money, he bought hair ribbons in several bright colors for his womenfolk.

He put the kerosene and the ribbons into the back of the wagon. He was just coming up onto the seat when Angelique came out of the Loup-du-Nord hand in hand with an American soldier. "Look at that little whore," one housewife said to another near Lucien.

The second woman's claws also came out: "Why doesn't she simply tie a mattress on her back? It would save so much time."

And then, as if to prove their own virtue and piety, the two of them turned their backs on the barmaid and, noses in the air, strode into the church: Father Pascal's church. Galtier sat scratching his head for a minute or two, then flicked the reins and got the wagon moving. Getting out of Riviere-du-Loup felt more like escape than it ever had before.

"It is a very strange thing," he told the horse when he was out in open country and could safely have such conversations, "how those women despise Angelique, who at most gives the Americans her body, and think nothing of going in to confess themselves to Father Pascal, who has assuredly sold the Americans his soul. Do you understand this, *mon cheval?"*

If the horse did understand, it kept its knowledge to itself.

"Well, I do not understand, either," Lucien said. "It is, to me, a complete and absolute mystery. Soon, though, I shall be home, and then, thank God, I shall have other things to worry about."

The horse kept walking.

Nellie Semphroch pasted a sign to the boards that still did duty for her shattered front window: yes, we have iced coffee. She'd lettered it herself, along with the slogan just below: come in & try it. it's good. With summer's heat and humidity as they were, she would have lost half her business without iced coffee.

"Have to go to the bank," she muttered, and then laughed at herself. Banks in Washington, D.C., weren't safe these days. Anyone with any sense kept his money at home or in his store or buried in a tin can in a vacant lot. A robber might take it away from you, but the Army of Northern Virginia might take it away from the bank. The Confederates, from everything she'd seen of them, made the local robbers seem pikers by comparison.

Off in the distance, artillery rumbled. Nellie hadn't heard that sound since the early days of the war, for the Confederates' opening drive had pushed the front too far north for the gunfire to carry. It had returned with the U.S. Army's spring offensive, the breakout from Baltimore. But the breakout, like so many breakouts in the war, had not turned into a breakthrough. The Rebs, though they'd drawn back from Pennsylvania, still held most of Maryland, and U.S. forces were nowhere near ready to regain poor Washington. As if to underscore that, a couple of Confederate soldiers came out of Mr. Jacobs'

shoemaker's shop across the street, one of them holding a pair of marching boots, the other shiny black cavalry boots. The fellow with the cavalry boots must have told a joke, for the other Reb laughed and made as if to throw half his own footgear at him.

Nellie ducked back inside the coffeehouse and said, "I'm going over to Mr. Jacobs' for a few minutes, Edna."

"All right, Ma," her daughter answered from behind the counter. The place was busy—too busy, Nellie hoped, for Edna to get into any mischief while she was gone. Nicholas Kincaid wasn't in there soaking up coffee and mooning over Edna, which Nellie took for a good sign.

She had to hurry across the street to keep a big truck from running her down. The colored man at the wheel of the truck laughed because he'd made her scramble. She glared at him till the truck turned a corner and went out of sight. She was a white woman. She deserved better treatment from a Negro. But, she reminded herself sadly, she was also a damnyankee, and so deserving of no respect from Confederates, even black ones.

The bell above the shoemaker's door jingled as Nellie went inside. She'd thought Jacobs was alone, but he was in there talking with another gray-haired, nondescript man. They both fell silent, quite abruptly. Then Mr. Jacobs smiled. "Hello, Widow Sem-phroch," he said smoothly. "Don't be shy—this is my friend, Mr. Pfeiffer. Lou, Widow Semphroch runs the coffeehouse across the street. She is one of the nicest ladies I know."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," Lou Pfeiffer said.

"And you, Mr. Pfeiffer, I'm sure." Nellie glanced over at the shoemaker. "Since you have your friend here, Mr. Jacobs, I'll come back another time."

"Don't hurry off," Jacobs said. "Mr. Pfeiffer—Lou—was telling me something very interesting. You might even want to hear it yourself. If you're not too busy, why don't you stay?"

"Well, all right," Nellie said, a little surprised. She'd intended giving Mr. Jacobs some of the dirt she'd gleaned from the coffeehouse, and he had to know that. He wouldn't have wanted her to do it while anyone else was around. So why keep her here when she couldn't speak of what really mattered? She shrugged. "Go ahead, Mr. Pfeiffer."

"I was just telling Hal here what a nuisance it is to try and keep

pigeons in Washington these days," Pfeiffer said. *Hal*—Nellie raised an eyebrow. Years across the street from Mr. Jacobs, and she'd never known his first name. His friend went on, "The Rebs don't want anybody having birds these days. Pigeons aren't just pigeons, not to them. A pigeon can carry a message, too, so they've confiscated all the birds they could find."

"But they haven't found all of them, eh, Lou?" Jacobs said.

Pfeiffer shook his head. He had a sly look to him that had nothing to do with his rather doughy features—more the glint in his eye, the angle at which he cocked his head. "Not all of 'em, no. Not mine, for instance. Not some other people's, too. We've got an underground, you might say. We keep birds, but the Rebs don't know it. Makes life exciting, so to speak." He set a finger by the side of his nose and winked.

A few months before, Nellie would have taken his jaunty talk at face value and not even thought to look below the surface. Now— Now she was convinced everything had unplumbed depths. "That *is* interesting, Mr. Pfeiffer," she said. She looked at him, then at Mr. Jacobs: a silent question.

Ever so slightly, the shoemaker nodded. He turned to Pfeiffer and started to laugh. "You see, Lou? Not just a nice lady, but a clever one, too."

"I see," Pfeiffer said agreeably. "I've thought so, from what you've said about her every now and then."

That cleared up the last small doubt Nellie had had. "Can I tell you some interesting things I've heard in the coffeehouse, Mr. Pfeiffer, or would you rather have me wait and tell Mr. Jacobs so he can tell you?"

"She *is* a clever lady," Pfeiffer said, and then, to Nellie, "You can tell me—eliminate the middleman." He and Jacobs both wheezed laughter.

So Nellie, as if casually gossiping, told of the troop movements and other interesting bits of news she'd heard in the coffeehouse over the past couple of days. She got interrupted once, when a colored servant brought in a Confederate officer's boots for resoling. The Negro paid no attention to anything but his business, and was soon gone. Nellie finished her—*report* was the right word for it, she thought.

"Well, well," Lou Pfeiffer said. "Yes, I am glad I still keep pigeons, that I am. Thank you, Widow Semphroch."

"Nellie, isn't it?" Mr. Jacobs said suddenly.

"That's right—Hal," she answered, smiling at him. He smiled back. They'd knocked down a barrier, one they'd taken for granted but one that had been there for a long time. She smiled at Mr. Pfeiffer, too, partly for being what he was, partly for his help in making that barrier fall. "Gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I have to go back across the street and keep the Rebs in order at the coffeehouse. A pleasure to have met you, Mr. Pfeiffer."

"And you, Widow Semphroch," Pfeiffer said as she went out the door.

When she got back into the coffeehouse, Edna discreetly beckoned her over. She went, curious to see what could make her daughter circumspect. In a low voice, Edna said, "There was a man came in here askin' after you, Ma, and I didn't fancy his looks even a little, if you know what I mean."

Fear leaped up and bit Nellie. The Rebs would have people hunting U.S. spies. "What did he look like?" she asked, forcing herself to speak quietly, too.

"Old and ugly," Edna answered with the callousness of youth. "Either he ought to shave or else he ought to let his whiskers grow, one way or the other. Said his name was Bill or Phil or Pill or something like that." She shrugged. It hadn't been important to her.

A chill ran through Nellie. That sounded altogether too much like Bill Reach to suit her. "If he ever comes back, tell him I don't want his business here. If he doesn't like that, throw him out. I'm sure some of our customers would be delighted to help you do anything you ask."

"Yeah, probably," Edna said; she enjoyed being attractive to the Rebs. Her gaze sharpened. "He's known you for a long time, this fellow, whoever he is, hasn't he?"

"Why do you say that?" Nellie asked, at the same time as she was thinking, *Longer than you 've been alive.*

Edna gave back some of that thought: "He said I looked just like you did when you were my age, maybe even younger. Did he know you way back then, Ma? That's a long time ago now."

Don't I know it. Nellie made her shrug quiet, casual, easygoing. "I knew a lot of men when I was a young lady." *And even more when I wasn't being a lady.* "I don't remember anybody named Phil or Pill, though." She hoped her smile was disarming.

It wasn't disarming enough. "How about somebody named Bill?" Edna said.

"A lot of Bills back then." Nellie tried a small joke: "Always a lot of bills, never enough money to pay 'em."

"You're giving me the runaround, Ma." Edna didn't raise her voice, but sounded very certain. She had a right to sound that way; a lifetime with her mother had made Nellie transparent to her. "How well did you know this fellow, anyways? Did you ... ?" She wouldn't say it, but she was thinking it.

"None of your business," Nellie hissed, and then, louder, "Go serve that man there, would you? He wants himself filled up again."

Edna glared at her, but went over to give the Confederate lieutenant another cup of coffee. "There you go, Toby," she said, smiling a smile very close to the ones Nellie had once had to paste onto her own face.

"Thank you, Miss Edna," Toby said. She put a little extra wiggle into her walk, too; the Reb's eyes followed her every inch of the way back behind the counter. Nellie wanted to grab her daughter and shake her or, better yet, pour a pitcher of iced coffee over her head.

And serving the Confederate hadn't distracted Edna or made her forget what she'd asked her mother. "C'mon, Ma," she said. "Don't tell me you actually had a *life* back then?"

"Whatever I had back then, it wasn't very good," Nellie said. "All I'm trying to do is keep you from going through the same things I did."

Edna shrugged. "You got through 'em, looks like, even if you're too goody-goody to talk about it now. You don't want me to have a good time, that's all. It ain't fair."

Nellie sighed. They'd had this fight before. Likely they were going to go right on having it, too. "You don't know what you're talking about," Nellie said. That was true. It was also the problem. Edna didn't know, and was wild to find out. *I won't let her,* Nellie told herself fiercely. *I won't.*

Bremen, Kentucky, had been a coal-mining town before the U.S. First Army drove the Confederates out of it. Abner Dowling had no doubt the place had been grimy and ugly and smelly back in peacetime. Now it was grimy, ugly, doubly smelly thanks to so many dead horses nearby, and wrecked to boot. Given a choice, it was not where Dowling would have made First Army headquarters. He had not been given a choice.

"Dowling!" George Armstrong Custer shouted. His rasping, old man's voice put his adjutant in mind of the braying of the donkey in the fairy tale about the musicians of Bremen. Dowling had done plenty of braying himself, reading his nieces the fairy tale. They'd giggled wildly, back ten years before. "Dowling!" Custer yelled again. "Coming, sir," Dowling said. Listening to a real donkey bray wasn't nearly so much fun as impersonating one. The major squeezed his bulk through the narrow doorway of the house Custer had taken over. He came to attention; Custer was a stickler for courtesy—from subordinates. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Bring me some coffee from the mess," Custer said. "Put some fuel in it before it gets here, too."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said resignedly. He turned to go. Custer didn't drink so much as some officers he'd known—but then, they hadn't been in command of whole Armies, either.

"Do you know," Custer said, "I hardly drank at all—no more than for medicinal purposes—till after we lost the Second Mexican War. No matter the renown I won in that last campaign, the thought of my beloved country having gone down to defeat at the hands of rebels and traitors and stabbed in the back by foreign foes twice in a generation's time was too much for me to bear. Since then, I have been known to indulge myself, as an anodyne if nothing else."

"Yes, sir," Dowling repeated. He didn't know whether the lieutenant general was telling the truth or not. He didn't much care, either. However Custer had first made the acquaintance of the brandy bottle, he'd since become quite intimate with it.

Getting the coffee and adulterating it was a matter of a few minutes. Dowling was carrying the steaming cup back to Custer when the general let out a great bellow, as if he'd been gored by a bull. *Oh, Lord, what now?* Dowling thought. It wasn't, he was sure, that the First Army drive on Morehead's Horse Mill had stalled: it had been obvious for days that U.S. forces weren't going to reach the road junction that

had been their goal since they forced the Rebs out of Madisonville any time soon. It also wasn't the casualty figures coming from their efforts to reach the town. Custer viewed casualty figures with considerable equanimity, especially seeing how many of them his own headlong ferocity caused. What was rattling his cage, then?

"Is something wrong, sir?" the major said, advancing with the coffee cup. "Here, drink this and you'll feel better for it." *At least you won't be able to scream while you're drinking it.*

Custer seized the cup and poured its contents down his throat. His face, already red, got redder. He coughed a couple of times before coherent if highly irate speech emerged. "That son of a bitch! That no-good, lying, stinking scoundrel. That fiend in human shape. When I'm through with the bastard, he'll wish he was never born. I already wish he was never born."

"Uh—who, sir?" Dowling asked. If Custer was swearing at General Pershing or one of the other younger officers in the service, Dowling's job was to listen and calm him down and make sure he wouldn't do anything that would damage not only himself (something Dowling didn't mind at all) but also First Army (which would be regrettable).

"Who?" Custer thundered. "That blackguard Davis, that's who!" For a moment, Dowling remained confused, Davis being anything but an uncommon name. Then Custer pointed to the *Scribner's* magazine on his desk. It hadn't been there when Dowling went to get the general's coffee. A messenger must have delivered it to Custer and then disappeared in a hurry.

Dowling felt a certain amount of sympathy for that messenger. Unfortunately, he didn't have the option of disappearing in a hurry. Very cautiously, he asked, "You're disappointed in the coverage you got from Richard Harding Davis?"

"Disappointed? Great heavens, the man proves himself a pathological liar." Custer picked up the offending periodical and thrust it at his adjutant. "See for yourself, Major."

The title of Davis' article was innocuous enough: "The First Army Attacks: Part Two." Part One had run a couple of weeks before, and had been a paean of praise for First Army's courage. Custer had not complained about it at all. Dowling rapidly skimmed through Part Two. The more he read, the more he had to work to keep his face not merely straight but sympathetic. Richard Harding Davis, a manly man

himself, had been imperfectly impressed with the person of George Armstrong Custer: "neck wattled like a turkey's," "squinting little pouchy eyes," and "hair that bought its color from a bottle in a vain attempt to hold back Father Time" were some of the choicer epithets.

Davis hadn't had much good to say about the generalship involved in the first gas attack, either. "Opportunity squandered" was a phrase he used several times. "Failure to achieve a breakthrough despite the advantages given by the preceding chlorine barrage" was also sure to raise Custer's hackles. To Dowling's way of thinking, though, the most telling bit of evidence that the war reporter did know what he was talking about was the comment that "up and down the front, troops were committed to battle in a deployment more aggressive than strategically sound." That was Custer's style, set out in black and white for all to see.

"I'm sorry, sir," Dowling said, handing the *Scribner's* back to the commanding general. 'Those reporters, they're not to be trusted." Inside, he was chortling. Custer was drawn to publicity like iron filings to a magnet. He'd used it astutely, enabling himself to stay in the Army past what should have been retirement age. Now it had turned on him and bit him. There was a saying about he who lived by the sword, and another one about the pen's being mightier than that sword. Put those together and examine their implications...

Custer was not in a mood for logical examinations. "If I ever set eyes on that lying son of a whore again, I'll horsewhip him within an inch of his worthless life. I trusted him to tell the truth about me—"

/ trusted him to paint me in glowing colors, the way too many reporters have done for too many years: Dowling had no trouble making his own translation of Custer's remarks.

The general was in full spate now: "—and my boys in the trenches, hearing about this—this tripe, will wonder whether I have the right stuff to lead them against the hereditary foe."

Reluctantly, Dowling admitted to himself that Custer had a point there. The men who did the actual fighting needed to think their general had their best interests at heart and was using them wisely. The loss of that feeling was what had made McClellan's Army of the Potomac fall to pieces after Camp Hill during the War of Secession: figuring they'd get licked no matter what they did, the rank and file gave up.

Back then, the feeling had been justified; studying McClellan's campaigns, Dowling had been struck by the way he was always a step and a half behind Lee. The trouble was, he didn't think Custer's men were justified in having confidence in their commander. Custer was brave and liked to go right at the enemy. Having said that, you exhausted his military virtues.

No—in military politics, at least, he had a solid Machiavellian streak in him. "Davis is TR's fair-haired boy, too," he muttered gloomily. "When the president sees this, I can kiss Canada goodbye forever—he's going to want my scalp."

That last was true only metaphorically, Custer being bereft of hair on the portion of his scalp Indians had customarily removed. "It will be all right, sir," Dowling said, sympathetically if not sincerely. "You and TR fought side by side against the limeys in the Second Mexican War. I'm sure he'll remember that."

Half to himself, Custer muttered, 'Teddy always did say his troops outperformed my regulars."

Roosevelt's volunteer cavalry, a regiment of miners and farmers, had indeed done yeoman work in Montana, fighting their British opposite numbers to a standstill, and had led the pursuit after the British blundered straight into Custer's Gatling guns. In Dowling's view, TR had a point; only the armistice U.S. President Blaine had had to accept had kept the triumph from being bigger than it was.

"I'd have licked them anyway," Custer said, sounding as if he was trying to convince himself. Maybe he would have: nobody examined Chinese Gordon's campaigns alongside Napoleon's. Dowling's opinion remained that Custer had probably needed all the help Teddy Roosevelt gave him.

All of which was irrelevant. He pointed to the *Scribner's.* "What do we do about that, sir?"

"First, I shall write a memorial and send it to President Roosevelt, detailing the lies and calumnies and false accusations this Richard Harding Davis has leveled against me," Custer declared, using the correspondent's full name with equally full contempt. Dowling nodded. That was like Custer: if threatened, attack head-on, and never mind scouting the ground first. Sometimes you won that way; more often, you got your nose bloodied. Dowling would have bet TR would be imperfectly delighted to receive Custer's memorial, and that it

would sharpen the president's focus on details he might otherwise have ignored. But that was Custer's lookout, not his. The general commanding First Army went on, "And after that is done and on its way, I am going to tear these lying pages out of the *Scribner's* and wipe my backside with them, which is precisely what they deserve, no more, no less. What do you think of *that,* Major Dowling?"

"Revenge is, uh, sweet, sir," Dowling said. He fled then, before his own big mouth got him into even bigger trouble.

Reggie Bartlett sighed with relief as he tramped away from the front line east of Big Lick, Virginia. He and his comrades were battered, worn, filthy, unshaven. Some of them had bandages on minor wounds; several were coughing from chlorine they'd sucked into their lungs during one gas attack or another. None of them would have been invited to serve as a model for a Confederate recruiting poster.

"Here come the rookies," Corporal Robert E. McCorkle said, pointing at the men marching up to replace Reggie's regiment. They were obviously raw troops, just out of one training camp or another. It wasn't so much that they wore clean uniforms; soldiers coming back to the line were often issued fresh clothes. It was more the look in their eyes, the way they stared at the veterans as if they'd never seen such spectral apparitions before.

"You think *we're* ugly," Reggie called to them, "you should see the fellows who aren't walking out."

That drew gales of laughter from his comrades. They'd seen everything war could do to the human body: bullets, shells, gas. If you didn't laugh about some of the things you'd seen, you'd go mad. A couple of men had gone mad, or so convincingly given the appearance of it as to fool their officers. They were out of the fight for good, not merely coming back for baths and delousing and a show or two from a charitable group. Reggie envied them intensely.

"You got to watch out for the front-line lice, boys," Jasper Jenkins said to the replacements. "Some of them babies is big enough so they have you 'stead of you havin' them." He scratched his crotch.

One of the men going up to the line, a tall, thin, pale fellow who looked so earnest that Bartlett pegged him for a preacher's son, went paler yet and visibly gulped. *Poor bastard,* Reggie thought with abstract, abraded sympathy. He'd been fairly fastidious himself, back in his civilian days. Anybody who couldn't stand living like a pig—

right down to wallowing in the mud—had an even worse time at the front than everyone else.

He didn't like being in the zigzag communication trenches. They weren't deep enough, and they didn't have any shelters into which to dive if the damnyankees started throwing artillery around. The officers felt the same way he did. "Move along, boys, move along," Captain Wilcox said. "We don't want to camp here."

Major Colleton hustled up and down the fine of marching— actually, more like shambling—men to deliver the same message: "Keep it moving there, fellows." His uniform was as spruce and neat as any of the ones the replacements were wearing. With Colleton, it was no more than part of his jaunty persona. He'd have been a plumed cavalryman back in the War of Secession. Cavalry these days wasn't what it had been, though.

And Major Colleton's jauntiness wasn't quite what it had been, either. "Shake a leg," he said. "Sooner we're back behind the secondary trenches, sooner the Yankees won't be able to reach us any more."

A lot of people—Colleton among them, and Reggie Bartlett, too—had gone into the war wanting nothing but the thrill of combat. Bartlett had seen plenty of combat. If he never had another thrill of that sort for the rest of his life, he'd be content.

And he, unlike Major Colleton, was the only man of his family in the Army. "Sir, how's your brother?" he asked when the major came near.

Colleton's face clouded. "He's back home now. From what my sister writes, he's never going to be able to do much for himself any more: a couple of more breaths of chlorine and they'd have put him under the ground. Likely that would have been a mercy." He remembered his manners; he had the virtues of the Southern gentleman. "Kind of you to ask, Bartlett."

Reggie nodded. Colleton went on his way, still urging the men to hurry. He knew just about everyone in the battalion by name. Of course, the battalion carried only about half of its establishment strength, which made learning names easier than it would have been when the war was young.

Machine guns poked their snouts over the parapets of the secondary trenches, ready to rake the ground ahead with fire if a U.S. attack should carry the front-line positions. In theory, Reggie approved of the precaution. In practice, a U.S. attack sufficient to bring those machine

guns into action would likely have left him dead, wounded, or captured. He was happy they sat there quiet.

The men in the secondary trenches were veterans: grimy, worn men much like Bartlett and his comrades. A couple of them nodded toward the troops going out of the front line. One fellow touched his butternut slouch hat in what looked like half a salute. He'd likely been up there, and knew what the regiment coming back was escaping.

Behind the secondary trenches, Negro laborers, their uniforms dark with sweat rather than dirt, were digging positions for Confederate guns. "Nice to see those," Reggie said to Jasper Jenkins. "The Yanks have been throwing more shells at us than we've been able to give back."

"Ain't that the sad and sorry truth?" Jenkins looked back over his shoulder toward the front line. "One good thing about havin' to pull back to this side o' the river is, we don't have the damnyankees shellin' us like they was whenever we had to cross it."

"I've been places I liked more than some of those bridges," Bartlett agreed with a reminiscent shudder. His comrade's chuckle said Jenkins appreciated the understatement. Reggie went on, "It might not have been hell on earth, but if it wasn't, you could sure as blazes see it from there."

"You got a good way with words," Jenkins said. "You ever try your hand at writin' or anything like that?"

"Oh, all the time," Bartlett answered. Jasper Jenkins stared at him, maybe wondering whether he'd been serving alongside a famous author without knowing it. Jenkins could sign his name, but that was about as far as his reading and writing took him. Reggie explained: "I worked in a drugstore in Richmond. The pharmacist would make the pills and the syrups, and I'd write Take four times a day' or Take two before meals' or [4]Do not take on an empty stomach' and glue the label to the bottle. It was a wild and exciting life, I tell you that."

"Sounds like it." Jenkins tramped on for another few paces, then said, "Bet you'd trade this for it in a red-hot minute."

"No takers," Reggie said with considerable feeling. Both men laughed as they marched back toward the base camp.

That was near the little town called Clearwater, a name it might once have lived up to but no longer deserved. No little town suddenly

inundated by a great sea of butternut tents could hope to keep its water clear. The wonder was that it still had enough water for the men to drink. To men who had spent a turn in the trenches, the idea of sleep under canvas on veritable cots looked very attractive indeed.

But before they could approach the earthly paradise, they had to pass through purgatory. Purgatory was guarded by stern-looking military policemen, and bore the banner, delousing station. "Peel off by squads," one of the military policemen shouted, and then, seeing how small the squads were (*What does he know about the front?* Reggie thought scornfully), corrected himself: "No—by sections."

The men had been through the drill before. They didn't need the military policeman, exultant in his petty authority, to tell them what to do. Along with the rest of the men in his section, Reggie went into one of the big delousing tents. He got out of his clothes and handed them to a Negro attendant, who threw his underwear into a pile that would go back to the corps laundry farther from the front and put his outer garments into a bake oven that went by the name of a Floden disinfector, after the genius who had invented the exercise in futility.

That done, Bartlett soaped himself at a footbath. The soap was strong and stinking. He rubbed it into his scalp, his half-grown beard, and the hair around his private parts anyhow, in the hope that it would get rid of the nits he was surely carrying. Then, along with the rest of the men in his section—and, he saw with amusement, with Major Colleton—he leaped with a splash into a great tub, almost a vat, of steaming-hot water.

Everyone was splashing and ducking everyone else. The major joined in the horseplay with no thought for his rank. He came up spluttering by Reggie after someone else pulled him under. Saluting, Reggie said, "It's a rare honor to share an officer's lice, sir."

"Don't know what's so damned rare about it," the battalion commander retorted. "You've been doing it in the trenches for the past year." And he ducked Reggie, holding him under till he thought he was going to drown.

The disinfector baked the soldiers' uniforms for fifteen or twenty minutes. When they were done, more colored attendants issued fresh underwear.

"Feels good—not itching, I mean," Reggie said, buttoning up his tunic. The laundrymen had ironed and brushed it, so he looked as smart as

he was going to.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," Jasper Jenkins said.

They went with the rest of the unit to stake places in the tents assigned to them, and then had the rest of the afternoon to themselves. Before they even found the tents, they spotted a crowd of men listening to a tall, thin man in a black sack suit and a straw hat. Reggie's eyes widened. 'That's the president!" he exclaimed.

"I'll be a son of a bitch if you're not right," Jenkins said. "Shall we find out what the devil he's got to say for himself?"

"Might as well," Reggie answered. "I was there in Capitol Square in Richmond when he declared war. Might as well find out how he likes it now that he's seen a year's worth." They hurried over and joined the crowd.

Woodrow Wilson was speaking earnestly, but without the changes in tone and volume and the dramatic gestures that were likeliest to win his audience over. He sounded more like a professor than the leader of a nation at war: "We must continue. We must dedicate our lives and fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when the Confederate States are privileged to spend their blood and their might for the principles that gave them birth and happiness and the peace they have treasured.

"The challenge, in fact, is to all mankind. The choice we make for ourselves must be made with a moderation of counsel and a temperament of judgment befitting our character and our motives as a nation. We must put excited feeling away. Our motive will not be revenge or the assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of which we are but a single champion in concert with our allies."

'That's pretty fancy," Reggie murmured to Jasper Jenkins.

'Too goddamn fancy for me," Jenkins whispered back. "What I want to do is, I want to smash those damnyankee bastards. If he'd tell me how we're going to do that, I'd be a sight happier."

"We must stay the course," Wilson said, though a few soldiers drifted away as others came to listen. "We must not swerve suddenly in the middle of the great conflict upon which we have embarked. Giving ourselves over to foolish radicalism at a time like this would only spell

disaster for our nation and for all we hold dear."

A light dawned on Reggie. He'd wondered why Wilson had come to the base camp when speaking before soldiers was so obviously unnatural, even uncomfortable, to him. "Presidential election's less than three months off," he said. "He wants to make sure we don't go and elect the Radical Liberal."

"He don't have a hell of a lot to worry about," Jenkins said. "We've never sent one of those crazy bastards to Richmond yet, and I don't reckon we will this time, neither."

"Politicians take all sorts of crazy chances—don't suppose we'd be in this damn war if they didn't," Bartlett said. "But they sure as hell don't take chances about what happens to their party. Wilson can't run again himself, so he wants to make damn sure the vice president, whatever the devil his name is, gets the job."

"Sims? Sands? Something like that," Jenkins said. "Whoever the hell he is, I'm gonna vote for him."

"Me, too, I think," Reggie said, "but I've got better things to do than listen to speeches that tell me to do what I'm already going to do."

"Yeah," Jenkins agreed, and they both walked off. Signboards here and there in the base camp listed attractions. "Let's go watch a boxing match," Reggie suggested.

"White men or colored?" somebody asked.

Bartlett ran his finger down the list of matches to see who was fighting whom. "Our division's colored champion is taking on a fellow from the Confederate Marines who's touring base camps," he said. 'That's gonna be the best fight today, no doubt about it."

Nobody argued with him. The crowd around the squared circle was already large by the time he got there. He and Jasper Jenkins so effectively used their elbows to get closer to the ring that they almost started a couple of fights of their own.

They cheered Commodus, the division champion, and lustily booed the Negro from the Confederate Marines, whose name was Lysis. "Which," shouted the soldier doing duty as announcer, "means *Destruction"* More boos.

Reggie bet another soldier two dollars that Commodus would win. He

had to pay up depressingly soon: Lysis knocked Commodus cold in the third round. Attendants had to flip water into the fallen champion's face before he could get up and groggily stagger out of the ring.

"That's one tough nigger," Bartlett said as Lysis swaggered around with arms upraised in victory. He gave the fellow he'd bet a two-dollar bill. Then a strange thought struck him: "I wonder how he'd do against a white man his size."

"Bet he wonders, too," the fellow who'd won his money answered. "If he's a smart nigger, he won't let anybody know it, though. Wouldn't be much point if he did—nobody'd let a fight like that happen any which way."

"You're right, I expect," Reggie said. "Niggers start thinking they can fight white men, we got more trouble than we need. And seeing as how we've already got more trouble than we need—"

At that moment, as if on cue in a stage play, one leg started to itch in an all too familiar way. He scratched and swore and scratched again. The Floden disinfector was like an artillery barrage—it made the lice put their heads down, but it didn't get rid of all of them. Some nits always survived and hatched out after you'd had your clothes on for a while. He sighed and scratched still more. No matter what you did, you couldn't win.

Anne Colleton wrote a check, computed the balance remaining in the account, and made a nasty face. Everything cost more these days—niggers' wages, their food, the manure to keep the cotton fields fertile, the kerosene for the lamps in the nigger cottages— everything. She'd got more money than usual for the latest crop she'd brought in, but the rise in prices hadn't stopped since then. If anything, it had got steeper.

A discreet tap at the door to her office made her look up. There stood Scipio, starched, immaculate, stolid. In his deep, rumbling voice, he said, "Ma'am, as you ordered, I have brought the Negro Cassius here for your judgment at his recent abscondment." She nodded. Disciplining the field hands was a job she undertook from a sense of duty and necessity, not because she enjoyed it. Disciplining a top-flight hand like Cassius was especially delicate. Being too lenient with him would provoke worse indiscipline from the field force. Being too harsh, though, would make another three or four or half a dozen Negroes up and leave the fields for factory work in Columbia or down in Charleston.

But disciplining him didn't look so repugnant as it usually did, not when the alternative was paying more of the bills that made her capital flow away like the waters of the Congaree—in fact, more swiftly than the lazy waters of the river. She nodded again. "Send him in."

"Yes, ma'am." Scipio turned and murmured to his companion in the hallway. Cassius showed himself for the first time. His shapeless cotton garments, brightened only by the blue bandanna he wore round his neck, made a sharp contrast to Scipio's formal livery.

Anne glared at Cassius for a few seconds without saying anything. Scipio silently slipped away, not wanting to hear—or to be known to hear—whatever punishment the mistress of Marshlands meted out. *He respects Cassius' position on the plantation, too,* Anne thought. Yes, she had to proceed with caution.

Cassius could not long bear up under her scrutiny. He cast his eyes down to the hardwood floor. Anne watched him intently. His gaze flicked to right and left, taking in the books that filled the office. She'd deliberately summoned him here, to add the intimidating alien environment to the moral effect of taking punishment from a white.

"What do you have to say for yourself?" she asked, her voice crisp and businesslike. "It had better be good."

He interlocked the fingers of his hands, a gesture almost prayerful in its supplication. "I is sorry, Miss Anne, I truly is," he said. "I couldn't he'p myself." The dialect of the Negroes of the Congaree district spilled thick as molasses from his lips. A white from Charleston would have had trouble understanding it; a white from, say, Birmingham would have been all at sea. So would a black from Birmingham, for that matter. Anne followed his speech as readily as she followed Scipio's formal, precise language. She'd grown up with the Negro dialect all around her. As a child, she'd spoken it half the time, till trained out of it by parents and teachers.

She didn't think of speaking it now. Using her own brand of English helped remind Cassius who was superior, who inferior.

" 'Sorry' might be enough to make amends for being gone a day or two," she snapped. "You were gone for four mortal weeks. Where did you go? What did you do? Did you think you could just show up here again one day and go on about your business as if nothing had happened? Answer me!"

Cassius did some more hand-wringing. He was good at it—too good to be altogether convincing. He had a foxy gleam in his eye, too, one that never quite went away no matter how contrite and woebegone the rest of his face looked. "Whe' I was at? Miss Anne, I was up de country a ways. I was huntin'." He nodded in sudden assurance. "Dat's what I was doin'—huntin'."

"I don't believe a word of it," she answered. "If you wanted to go on a long hunting trip, you know you wouldn't have had any trouble arranging it with me. You've done that before—never for four weeks, but you've done it."

He hung his head again. Now she thought she recognized the expression on his face. If he'd been white, he would have blushed. After a long silence, he said, "Miss Anne, kin Ah talk to you like you was a man?"

Not *a white man,* she noted, just *a man.* A suspicion began forming in her mind. "Go ahead," she told him.

He twisted his hands once more, this time, she judged, in embarrassment. She wasn't a man; no one who was had any cause to doubt that. "Miss Anne," Cassius said, "what I huntin', she 'bout nineteen year ol', an' you kin put yo' nan's roun' she waist"—he made a circle to show what he meant—"an' yo' fingers, dey touches they selves. *Dat's* what I was huntin', fo' true."

Since he'd been gone that long, Anne reckoned he'd bagged her, too. He was a good deal more than nineteen—he was a good deal more than twice nineteen—but those things happened. She knew those things happened. She was still angry at the hunter, but not so angry as she had been. "What's her name?" she said. "Whereabouts exactly does she live? How did you meet her?"

"She name Drusilla, Miss Anne. She live on de Marberrys' plantation, over by Fo't Motte. She come into St. Matthews dis one time, I see she, I know I got to have she."

"And so you just went off after her." For all her effort, Anne couldn't make herself sound as severe as she would have liked. Men had their appetites, and whether they were white or black didn't seem to matter much there. A pretty face, a nice shape, and they were off like a shot. Sounding exasperated came easier: "I don't suppose anyone bothered checking your passbook?"

"No, ma'am." Cassius shook his head. But he might have said the same

thing before the war. He was far and away the best hunter on the plantation; he was liable to make himself invisible to anyone who wanted to keep an eye on him.

Well, now that he'd come back, he wasn't invisible any more. Turning up the intensity of her glare, Anne said, "I am going to check on you. If I find out you are lying to me, you will regret it."

"I ain't lyin', Miss Anne. I is a truthful man."

"Scipio!" Anne called. When the butler came back, she said, 'Take Cassius downstairs and have him wait there. We shall see what we shall see."

She picked up the telephone, rang Jubal Marberry's home, and put her questions to him. "What? Drusilla?" he said, shouting at her; he was old and deaf. "Yes, there's been some new buck nigger sniffing around Drusilla. There's always a buck or two sniffing around Drusilla, same as there's always flies buzzing around sugar water, heh, heh." The last was a wheezy chuckle. Anne wondered if Marberry was too old to go sniffing around Drusilla himself.

But that, whether or not it was his affair, was his concern. He'd told her what she needed to know. She summoned Cassius back to the office. "All right—it seems you were where you say you were. You could have gotten into worse mischief. Even so ... Of course your pay for the time you were gone is gone, too." Cassius grimaced, but didn't say anything. Anne could have done worse. She did, in fact, do worse: "I'm also going to dock you every other week's pay for the next eight, to take out a matching sum. Losing both may remind you to stay here where you belong and not go chasing after every pretty woman you happen to see."

"Maybe, Miss Anne, but I doubts it." Cassius' grin was jaunty and very, very male. Anne wanted to throw something at him. Instead, she made a sharp gesture of dismissal. Grinning still, Cassius took his leave. *Just like a nigger,* she thought. *Too happy-go-lucky to care he's thrown away two months' pay, plus whatever he wasted on that Drusilla tart.* Anne hoped the Negro wench had soaked Cassius good.

She went back to her bill-paying. A few minutes later, the telephone rang. She was alert as she picked it up—maybe Jubal Mar-berry had done some more checking and found out that the Negro who'd been keeping Drusilla company wasn't Cassius after all. But the voice on the other end of the line wasn't old and rheumy, but young and vigorous:

"Miss Anne? This here's Roger Kimball. I was just callin' to ask how your brother was doin'."

I was just calling to find out whether the coast is clear for me to go up there and sleep with you. Anne Colleton almost laughed in the submariner's face. She could have mortally offended him if she'd told him how much he reminded her of her black hunter. But, instead, she answered the question he'd asked: "I'm sorry, Roger; I'm afraid I have to tell you he's not much improved."

"Oh. I'm right sorry to hear that." *Sorry both ways, probably,* she thought; the wounded tone in his voice certainly suggested he was sorry she wasn't inviting him up despite poor Jacob's condition. And then he said, "Maybe you could come down to Charleston one day and pay me a visit, then."

Anne almost slammed down the earpiece of the telephone. The arrogance Kimball displayed infuriated her—but, as it had on the train to New Orleans, also attracted her. What with Jacob, what with the never-ending bills, what with escapades like Cassius', didn't she deserve a little amusement, a little escape, a little plain, old-fashioned physical relief? Life was about more things than simply running Marshlands. And so, instead of hanging up, she said, "Maybe I will, Roger. Maybe I will."

XVIII

Jefferson Pinkard shoveled a last forkful of ham and eggs into his mouth, then sprang to his feet. Emily, who'd already finished breakfast, was about to head out the door, and he didn't want to let her go without getting a kiss. Every time he took her in his arms, he felt like a brand new bridegroom. He knew how lucky he was, to have that feeling still after years of marriage.

All things considered, though, he'd had better kisses than the one he got this morning. "You all right, darlin'?" he asked his wife.

"I think so," she said. "Lately I'm just tired all the time. That's what it is, I reckon. They're workin' us hard. We got our quota kicked up again the other day—got to turn out more shells, make up for the ones the soldiers're shootin' at the damnyankees."

"Damnyankees," Pinkard muttered. The war had passed a year old now, no end in sight. "Who woulda thought they could fight like this here?" They stood in western Virginia, in Kentucky, in Sequoyah, in Texas, in Sonora. They were pushing Confederate forces out of

Pennsylvania and Maryland, and giving the Canadians and British a hard time, too. "Ain't like it was in the last two wars."

Emily nodded, pecked him on the cheek, and hurried off to catch the trolley. Her step didn't have the bounce to it he'd once taken for granted. She wasn't pink and perky, either, the way she had been; maybe working to fill the increased quota was what made her seem so wrung out, so sallow.

"God damn the war," Jeff said sincerely. He grabbed his dinner pail and headed for the Sloss works.

As they did every morning, Agrippa and Vespasian greeted him with polite respect. He accepted that as nothing less than his due. "Leonidas ain't got here yet," Vespasian told him.

"Why ain't I surprised?" Pinkard said scornfully. "You ever hear anything about Pericles?"

"No, sun," Vespasian said. "He still in the jailhouse. I dunno if they ever gonna let him out."

"Hope to Jesus they do," Jeff said. "That Leonidas, he don't have the brains God gave a possum. Hell, the two of you do better' n I do with him, on account of I got to carry all my own weight and about three quarters of his. I been yellin' for a replacement—an' I don't care if he's black or white, long as he ain't stupid—but no luck so far."

Vespasian and Agrippa looked at each other. Pinkard wondered if he'd offended them, calling Leonidas stupid. So much landed on Negroes in the Confederacy, they stuck together and defended their own whether their own deserved it or not. But, God damn it to hell, Leonidas *was* stupid. He would have been stupid if he were white. Hell, he would have been stupid if he were green.

Slowly, cautiously, Vespasian said, "Mistuh Pinkard, suh, this here would be a different place if mo' people cared about gettin' the job done an' less of 'em cared about who was doin' it." When Jeff didn't blow up at that remark, the black steelworker made another, even more wary, comment: "Not jus' a different place. A better place."

"Get your ass out of here. Go on, go home," Pinkard said. "You don't want those policemen throwin' you in the jug for sedition."

Vespasian took off, Agrippa right behind him. Pinkard looked after

them with something as close to approval as he was likely to give two Negroes. They did their job, they didn't complain—much, they didn't try to rock the boat. What more could you want from people?

He looked around. Still no sign of Leonidas. He didn't miss him. A lot of ways, he was better off without him. Handling his shift by himself would leave him dog-tired when the closing whistle blew, but the world wouldn't end on account of that. Jeff knew what he was doing.

Leonidas came in about half an hour late. The floor foreman reamed him out about it as he started to work. When the fellow finally let him be, he shook his head and said, "Lord, I wish that man would shut hisself up. Got me a hangover, make my po' head ring like a bell."

Pinkard grunted. He'd done that—once in a great while. When your head already felt as if somebody were forging steel in there, going to a place where they really were forging steel wasn't high on the list of enjoyable things. Leonidas had been working here for only a couple of months, and this was a long way from the first time he'd strolled in a good deal the worse for wear. *Stupid,* Jeff thought again. Some people belonged in the cotton fields.

Leonidas got through the day without maiming either himself or Pinkard. He managed partly by not doing much, but that didn't matter, since he never seemed to do much. Pinkard minded less than he would have with a more capable partner. The more Leonidas did, the more he was liable to foul up.

The quitting whistle made the young Negro jerk as if he'd sat on a nail. "Thank God, I can get out of here," he said, and proceeded to do just that, moving faster than he had out on the floor.

Pinkard followed more slowly. He was just as tired as he would have been had Leonidas stayed home with an ice bag or whatever his preferred hangover cure was. He hadn't had to do quite so much as he would have had Leonidas stayed home, but being careful for two was hard work.

When he got back to his house, he built up the fire in the stove, sliced a few potatoes, and set them to frying in lard in a black iron skillet likely made from metal worked at the Sloss foundry. They'd go nicely with the pork roast Emily had put in the oven over a low fire before she went off to work. It wasn't really cooking, he told himself, only a way to save time and have supper ready sooner.

Emily came in about twenty minutes after he did. "Smelled those

potatoes outside, comin' up the walk," she said. 'They always smell so good like that, give me some of my appetite back."

"You haven't hardly been eating enough to keep a bird alive," Pinkard said. He took the potatoes off the stove so they wouldn't burn while he was kissing his wife. He wondered if she was finally in a family way, only not far along enough to be sure. She was tired all the time, she hadn't been eating well, and he'd noticed at breakfast how sallow she was.

He took another look at her in the evening sunlight pouring through the kitchen window. She wasn't just sallow—her skin was downright yellow. "Honey, what the dickens is the matter with you?" he demanded, and heard the alarm clanging in his voice.

"What do you mean, what's the matter with me?" Emily said.

He held her hand up in a sunbeam. It looked all the more yellow against his own rough, red, scarred skin. "I mean you're only a couple steps this way from bein' the color of a baby chick, that's what."

"Oh, that," his wife answered. "I didn't even hardly notice. It happens to a lot of the girls who work around the smokeless powder like me. It does somethin' to your liver, blamed if I know what, but it makes you yellow that way. Like I say, some of the girls are almost lemon color."

"Does it get better?" Jeff demanded.

"Oh, yeah, it does," Emily said casually. "When somebody gets sick—not just yellow, I mean, but really sick—they move her to another section of the plant for a while, till she gets over it. We haven't had but a couple of people come down that bad."

"Oh." Pinkard was about to shout at her, to demand that she quit her job and come back home where she belonged. The words died unspoken. People got killed every year at the Sloss works, and had been getting killed there long before the war pushed everybody up into a higher gear. He remembered poor Sid Williamson. Emily and her comrades were making munitions for the CSA. The country depended on them, hardly less than it did on the courage and tenacity of the Confederate soldiers.

"It'll be all right, darlin'," Emily said. "Now why don't you go sit down? I'll finish doin' up the potatoes and bring you your supper."

Jeff went and sat down. His wife had the right way of looking at

things, and he couldn't very well complain about it. He had to hope her supervisors or foremen or whatever they called them there were paying attention to what they were doing. From what she'd said, it sounded as if they were.

When she came in with a full plate for him, he asked anxiously, "This color you're getting, it will go away if you stop doin' what you're doin', right?"

She nodded. "I've seen it happen with some of the other girls, the ones they had to move away from the powder. But this here, what I've got, it ain't hardly nothin'. And besides"—she cocked her head at a saucy angle and stuck out her hip—"ain't you got a yen for a high-yellow gal?"

He'd just taken his first mouthful, and almost choked on it. Men told smoking-car and after-supper stories about Negro women with a lot of white blood in them. They were supposed to provide some of the fanciest stock in the fanciest sporting houses all over the CSA. Jeff didn't know anything about fancy sporting houses, not from experience. Some of the stories about high-yellow women were pretty fancy all by themselves, though.

He tried to sound severe: "The way you do talk." He couldn't do it; he started laughing. So did Emily. He said, "Gal I got a yen for is you. An' if I say that after the day I put in, you better know it's the truth."

"I like that," Emily said. "I feel the same way about you." She'd always been a bold-talking woman. A lot of men, Pinkard supposed, wouldn't have liked that. He didn't understand why. As far as he was concerned, thinking about it and talking about it were almost as much fun as doing it.

After supper, he dried pots and dishes, as he'd been doing for a while. No sooner had he put the last plate back in the cupboard than Emily said, "You are the helpingest man. That's another reason I love you."

"Is that a fact?" He still didn't quite know himself how he felt about doing women's work. He never told anybody at the foundry he did it, for fear people would say he was henpecked. Emily usually didn't say much about it, either, maybe to keep him from worrying his own mind. Now that she had said it, he felt obliged to answer gruffly: "You know why I'm doin' this, don't you?"

"Why, dear, I haven't got the faintest idea." Her smile and her voice and the way she stood all conspired to make a liar out of her. "Why

don't you tell me?"

Instead of telling her—or rather, instead of telling her with words—he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. She squealed and beat at his shoulders, but she was laughing while she did it. Getting out of his own clothes was the work of a moment. Getting her out of hers required more complicated unbuttonings, unhookings, unlacings. His hands were big and clumsy, but he managed.

He scraped a match afire and lighted a kerosene lamp on the nightstand by the bed. The light it gave was ruddier than sunlight; by it, he could hardly tell Emily's skin had changed color. He didn't care. That wasn't why he'd lighted it. "You are one *fine-lookiri'* woman," he told his wife. The words came thick from his throat.

"And what do you propose to do about that?" she asked. He reached out for her and showed her, again without words.

Afterwards, with her curled up, head on his shoulder, both of them drifting off toward sleep, he wondeied if Fanny Cunningham had listened to the bedsprings creaking. He and Bedford had teased each other about that every now and again, heading off toward work of a morning. If Fanny heard it now, though, it had to remind her that her husband wasn't there. Pinkard hoped Bedford was all right. He hadn't heard anything different, but what did that prove? Not enough.

"Might be my turn next," he muttered; conscription had scooped more white men out of the Sloss works over the past couple of weeks.

"What's that, honey?" Emily asked drowsily. "You say somethin'?"

"No," he said, and she fell asleep. Eventually, he did, too.

Herman Bruck's face twisted in annoyance. "Why don't you want to go to the play with me tonight?" he asked in a low voice, doing his best not to draw the notice of anyone else at the Socialist Party office.

"I just don't, Herman," Flora Hamburger told him. "When I'm done with work, I'm tired. What I want to do is go home and rest, nothing else." That wasn't the entire reason, but it was polite and true, as far as it went.

Bruck, as usual, did not know how to take no for an answer. "But it's one of Gordin's best," he exclaimed. "It has the most powerful arguments against the war I've seen anywhere."

"I'm already against the war," she reminded him. "I don't need any fresh arguments to be against it. What educates the proletariat is liable to bore me."

"But it shows the effect of the war on the poor, on the working classes," he persisted. "You'll find things you can borrow and get use of here."

Flora exhaled. Bruck was drawn to her, and had trouble realizing she was not drawn to him in return. She'd done her best to avoid being rude; after all, whether she went out with him or not, they had to work together. Instead of sharply telling him to go away and stop bothering her, she answered, "I can see the effect on my own family, thank you very much. My sister married to a soldier, my brothers both turning into militarists and liable to go through conscription as soon as they get old enough ... I was against this war before it was declared, remember."

"Do you have to keep throwing that in my face?" he said angrily. "Maybe you were even right. I don't know. But if the United States win this war and we're seen as opposing it, we won't win an election anywhere in the country for the next twenty years. People will vote for the Republicans before they vote for us."

"I don't know about that," Flora said. "I don't know about that at all. With so many dead, with so many maimed, even winning this war won't be enough to make anyone glad we fought it."

"Write that down!" Bruck exclaimed. "It's a good propaganda point, and I haven't seen it anywhere else." He swung from suitor to political animal like a weathervane in a shifting wind.

Flora preferred him as political animal. There his instincts were good, which she would not have said about him as a suitor. She did write down the idea. "We should let it come from someone who isn't operating out of New York City," she said. "The Roosevelt propaganda machine has made New York Socialists pariahs, as far as the rest of the country is concerned."

"That's not right," Bruck said. "It's not fair." He calmed down. "But it is real, no doubt about that. We'll manage. Roosevelt can't censor everything we do, no matter how much he wishes he could."

Figuring ways to do that kept Bruck happily occupied till quitting time. Indeed, Flora was able to slip out the door and down the stairs while he was still shouting into a telephone. When she could, she

preferred to deal with annoying men peacefully and indirectly, rather than whipping out a hat pin. When peaceful, indirect means didn't work—

"Speak softly and carry a sharp pin," she murmured, laughing at the way she'd twisted TR's slogan. But the laughter did not last long. Roosevelt's stick had not been big enough to knock over either the Confederacy or Canada at the first onslaught, which meant casualties by the tens, by the hundreds of thousands over chunks of land hardly large enough to serve as burying grounds for the dead.

Soldiers' Circle men still prowled through the Lower East Side, but fewer of them than in the days just after the Remembrance Day riots. They weren't so likely to break heads as they had been then, either. She'd even heard a story that one of them had put aside his truncheon after falling in love with a pretty Jewish girl. She didn't know whether it was a true story; no one seemed to have details. That people were telling it was interesting, though. True or not, they wanted to believe it.

When she got back to her family's apartment, her sister Esther was helping their mother get supper ready. Her brother Isaac had his nose in a book. Her other brother, David, walked in a few minutes after she did, looking tired. He'd got a sewing job, and was putting in long hours at it.

Her father came in next. He'd worked the same hours as his son, more or less, but bore them better, or at least more easily: he'd been putting in a back-breaking day for many years, and was used—or resigned—to it. His pipe smoke, though harsher than it had been in the days before the war started, still blended nicely with the odor of the stewing chicken in the pot on the stove.

Sophie dragged herself in last of all. She was very close to her time of confinement, but that didn't keep her from putting in a full day's work. If you couldn't do the job, the boss would find someone who could. Once she'd recovered from having the baby, she'd have to find a new position, too; no one would hold the old one for her. It wasn't right, it wasn't just, but, as Herman Bruck had said, it was real.

"Did I get a letter from Yossel today?" she asked as soon as she walked into the apartment. A framed photograph of Yossel Reisen, looking stern in his U.S. Army uniform, stood on the table next to the divan-sofa where he'd slept so many nights.

"Not today, Sophie," Esther answered.

Sophie looked disappointed. "That's three days now with nothing," she said, setting both hands on her swollen belly as if to say the baby expected to hear from its father, too. Her fingers had got too swollen to let her wear the wedding band Yossel had bought for her, but she had worn it and, more to the point, had the right to wear it.

"He hasn't been writing every day," Flora said, and then quickly added, "but he has been very good about sending you letters." For one thing, that was true. For another, now that Yossel had made Sophie his wife, she defended him like a tigress defending its young. Flora didn't want her thinking she had to do that now.

"Supper's ready," their mother said, another way of defusing a situation that could get sticky.

Over chicken stew, Benjamin Hamburger said, "I saw in the papers today that we are making good progress in the Roanoke valley, that we are pushing the Confederates back there. Soon, *alevai,* we will clear them out of the land between the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies."

"You sound like a general, Papa," David Hamburger said with a smile. "Did you know where these places were before we went to war?"

"I didn't know where these places were before I had a son-in-law fighting there," his father answered. He snapped his fingers. "And I didn't care that much, either. You care about what touches you. Everything else is not so important."

"That's shortsighted, Papa," Flora said, respectfully but firmly. "That's how the bosses keep the workers under their control: by mystifying them about what really is important to their well-being."

"Politics at the supper table we can do without," Benjamin Hamburger said. "I wasn't talking about politics. I was talking about this family."

"You can't separate them like that," Flora said. Her father started to raise a hand. She got in one last shot before he could: "If it weren't for politics, would Yossel be in Virginia now?"

"That's different," he said. A moment later, he looked sheepish. "If you ask me to explain exactly how it's different, I may have a little trouble." Flora smiled at him, liking him very much right then. Not many people had the intellectual honesty to admit something like

that. Because he had admitted it, she didn't push him any further. The rest of the meal passed in peace.

Afterwards, Sophie sat and rested while her mother and Esther and Flora washed the dishes. The kitchen was crowded with the three of them in it, but they made short work of plates and glasses and pots and silverware.

Someone knocked on the door. Someone was always knocking on the door: neighbors wanting to borrow something, neighbors giving something back, young men coming to talk or play chess or cards with David and Isaac, young men coming to call on Esther, older men coming to talk and smoke with Benjamin, women coming to gossip, delivery boys ...

Flora was closest to the door, so she opened it. The young man who stood in the hall was a few years too young for a military uniform, but the Western Union uniform he had on was of similar color and cut, even if its brass buttons were shinier and more aggressively visible than a soldier would have liked.

'Telegram for Mrs. Sophie, uh"—he looked down at the yellow envelope he was carrying—"Sophie Reisen."

"Sophie!" Flora called, and started to give him a nickel for delivering the wire. She was, for a moment, puzzled: who would send Sophie a telegram?

Then the Western Union boy said, "No, ma'am, I never take money for delivering these." He took off his hat when Sophie came to the door, handed her the envelope, and hurried away.

"Who is sending me a telegram?" Sophie asked: the same question Flora had put to herself. Suddenly, Flora knew a dreadful certainty. *God forbid,* she thought, and bit her tongue to keep from saying anything while Sophie opened the thin, flimsy envelope. "It's from Philadelphia," Sophie said, "from the Secretary of War." Her voice got weaker and more full of fear with every word she spoke. " 'It is my sorrowful duty to inform you that—' "

She didn't go on, not with words. Instead, she let out a great, full-throated wail of grief that had doors flying open up and down the hallway. Flora took the telegram from her limp fingers and read through it. Yossel had died in Virginia, "heroically defending the United States and the restoration of their proper place among the nations of the continent and of the world and the cause of liberty."

Flora wanted to crumple up the telegram and throw it away, but didn't because she thought her sister might want to keep it. The only truth in it, she thought, was that Yossel was dead. Everything else was patriotic claptrap.

Sophie hugged her belly and moaned, "What am I going to do? What are we going to do? I'm a widow, and I never even had a husband!" That wasn't quite true, but it wasn't far wrong, either.

People came flooding into the apartment. The building had heard that kind of anguished cry more than once before. Everyone knew what it meant. Women began bringing food. Everyone who'd ever met Yossel Reisen had a good word for him, as did a good many people who hadn't.

In the midst of the gathering, Esther asked Flora, "Are we going to sit *shiva* for Yossel?"

"Sophie will," Flora answered, but that went almost without saying. Would the rest of the family sit in mourning with torn clothes and pray for a solid week? Everything American in Flora— and, evidently, in Esther, too—cried out against it, especially for a man who wouldn't yet have been part of the family if he hadn't impregnated their sister. But when death struck, new customs had a way of sloughing off and old ones reasserting themselves. Resignedly, Flora said, "If Mother tells us to do it, how can we say no?" Esther's mouth twisted, but in the end she nodded.

And Flora knew that, while she was rocking back and forth sitting *shiva* for Yossel, she would not be mourning him alone, but the country and the whole world thrown onto the fire of war.

"Salt Lake City!" Paul Mantarakis said with considerable satisfaction. "One more fight to go and then we've licked these Mormon bastards once and for all."

"Matter of fact, I hear tell there's one big town after Salt Lake City," Ben Carlton said. "Place called Ogden, north of here."

"Yeah, all right, I heard about Ogden, too," Mantarakis admitted. "But it stands to reason, once they lose their capital, they ain't gonna have a whole lot of fight left in 'em."

"Just like the USA and Washington, right?" the cook said with weary cynicism.

Mantarakis gave him a resentful look. "It's not the same," he said. "Salt Lake's the only real city—city-type city—the Mormons have. Provo and Ogden, they're just towns. I'm from Philly, remember. I know the difference. Next to what I'm used to, even Salt Lake City isn't a big thing."

"Be a hell of a big fight, though," Carlton predicted gloomily. He stirred the cookpot. The smell that rose up from it was none too appetizing: he'd made some kind of horrible stew from bully beef and hardtack and whatever else he happened to have handy. Paul sighed. Since he'd started wearing stripes on his sleeves, he hadn't been able to see to the cooking nearly so often as he had before. That meant the whole company ate worse than they would have otherwise.

Gordon McSweeney, a man with a cast-iron stomach (or at least no sense of taste to speak of) came up, smelled the pot, looked into it, and scowled at Carlton. "If I were a Papist, I'd give that last rites," he said.

He was a sergeant these days, too, so the cook could only assume an expression of injured innocence. "It'll be ready pretty soon," he said, which, considering McSweeney's editorial comment, was apt to be something less than a consummation devoutly to be wished.

But McSweeney, luckily for him, was looking north, toward Salt Lake City." 'Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: there every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire,' " he said. " 'Because they had no root, they withered away.' So it says in the Holy Scriptures, whose words shall be fulfilled."

Mantarakis looked north, too. Here and there, flames burned in the Mormons' capital. Artillery fire had blown the gilded angel off the east-center tower of the Temple and had knocked down two of the other towers, but the big building, the heart of Salt Lake City, still stood. Enormous beehive flags flapped defiantly from the towers that survived. "They read a different book there," Paul said.

"And they will burn in hell because of it," McSweeney answered, sounding as certain as he generally did when speaking of matters of religion. "The *Book of Mormon* is no more the word of God than is an advertising circular for stomach powders."

It wasn't so much that Mantarakis thought McSweeney wrong— he didn't figure the *Book of Mormon* was divinely inspired, either. But the way McSweeney said it, like the way McSweeney said anything, put

his back up. "Lot of people up there think you're wrong, Gordon," he remarked.

"The more fools they," McSweeney said. "They suffer in this world for their arrogance and overweening pride, and in the next for their false and blasphemous faith." He wasn't simply armored in his faith, but also used it as a sword against the foe. Mantarakis supposed that helped make him a good soldier; it also made him a scary man.

An aeroplane flew in lazy circles above Salt Lake City, spotting targets for the U.S. artillery. All of a sudden, black puffs of smoke started dotting the otherwise clear summer sky around the aeroplane. What artillery the Mormons had was mostly here; they'd got their hands on it by overrunning Camp Douglas, east and north of town. They knew the aeroplane was the U.S. artillery's eye in the sky. If they brought it down, they could fight on more nearly even terms. And bring it down they did. The aeroplane seemed to stagger in the sky, then plunged earthward, trailing smoke and flame. It crashed just inside the Mormon lines. The cheer the religious rebels raised rang in Mantarakis' ears. *"Kyrie eleison,"* he muttered.

For once, Gordon McSweeney did not upbraid him for praying in Greek. "Damn them," McSweeney said, over and over again. "Damn them, damn them." It wasn't cursing; it was nothing like the casual way in which most soldiers would have brought out the words. It sounded more as if McSweeney was instructing God about what needed doing and how to go about it. Paul wanted to take a couple of steps away from the other sergeant, in case God got angry at him for using that tone of voice.

With their great factories, the United States had guns especially devoted to antiaircraft fire and others given nothing but ground targets. The Mormon insurgents did not enjoy the luxury of specialization. Having shot down the aeroplane, they began working over the front-line trenches in which Mantarakis and his companions sheltered. He crouched down in the dirt, hands clutching his head, his body folded up into a ball to make himself the smallest possible target.

He'd been through worse in Kentucky; the Confederates had far more guns to fire at U.S. forces than the Mormons did. But any barrage was a bowel-loosener. The ground shook and jumped. Shrapnel balls and fragments of shell casing filled the air. Whether he lived or died wasn't really in his hands, not for the time being. Either God's providence or random luck, depending on how the world worked, would decide his fate.

After about half an hour, the Mormon guns eased up. Men helped their wounded comrades back toward the rear. Mormon snipers took potshots at them. The Mormons were short of men, short of guns, short of munitions, but they not only held the high ground (they had their artillery on the mountain spur above Temple Square, not far from the wreckage of what had been the state capitol before the revolt), but they also knew the terrain well and squeezed from it all the advantages they could. First Lieutenant Cecil Schneider made his way down the battered trench line seeing how his company had come through. He was a little weedy fellow who would have looked more at home in mechanic's coveralls than in his grimy U.S. uniform. He'd been leading the company since Captain Hinshaw died; a lot of companies had lieutenants commanding them these days, and more than one had no surviving officers left at all.

Schneider sniffed at Ben Carlton's stew pot, sighed, and crouched down by it. He took out his mess kit. "I'm hungry enough for this to smell good," he said. Paul Mantarakis didn't know if he could get that hungry, but he was aware he had higher standards than most people.

Carlton, as if vindicated, filled the lieutenant's tray with stew. Schneider dug in, sighed again, and kept on eating. That Mantarakis understood. You had to keep the machine fueled or it wouldn't run.

When Schneider was nearly done, Mantarakis asked, "Sir, is there any way of rooting out the Mormons without going straight at them?"

"General Staff doesn't seem to think so," Schneider answered. "They've got the Great Salt Lake on one side and the mountains on the other, after all. It's not going to be pretty, but it's what we've got to do."

Not going to be pretty was a euphemism for forward companies' getting melted down to nothing, like candles burning out. Paul knew that. So, no doubt, did Lieutenant Schneider. "Sir," Mantarakis said, "are the two divisions we've got here going to be enough to do the job?"

"I hear we have more troops on the way," Schneider answered. 'This sort of fighting chews up men by carloads." He sighed one more time, now not about the vile stew. "We have the men to spend, and we're spending them. This narrow front makes the fighting as bad as it is in the Roanoke valley or in Maryland."

"Mormons don't help," Ben Carlton said. "The Rebs fought fair, anyways. Any civilian you see here—man, woman, boy, girl—is gonna cut your throat in a second if he catches you asleep."

"You got that right." Mantarakis turned to Lieutenant Schneider. "Sir, once we beat these Mormons flat, what the hell are we going to do with them? What the hell *can* we do with them?"

"Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant," Schneider answered. That made Gordon McSweeney rumble, down deep in his chest. He obviously didn't know what it meant, but he knew it was Latin. Given how he felt about the Catholic Church, that was plenty to make him suspicious.

"Sir?" Paul said. He didn't know what it meant, either. He'd grown up speaking Greek, but you needed more in the way of education than he'd picked up to throw Latin around like that.

" 'Where they make a desert, they call it peace,' " Schneider said.

McSweeney rumbled again, this time in approval. "Just what the Mormons deserve," he said: "Solitude Lake City."

Mantarakis stared at him. McSweeney joking was about as likely as pigs with wings. He couldn't let it go by without trying to top it. "Yeah, we'll make a desert out of Deseret," he said.

Lieutenant Schneider laughed. Ben Carlton looked from one punster to the other, equally disgusted with both. "You birds don't shut up, I ain't gonna feed you."

"Promises, promises," Paul said, which made Schneider laugh louder than ever.

Irving Morrell studied the situation map of Utah with considerable dissatisfaction. If it had been up to him, he would have tried to push men through the Wasatch Mountains, and he would also have had a column coming down from Idaho to make the Mormons divide their forces and keep them from concentrating everything they had on the main U.S. attack.

But it wasn't up to him. He was new at General Staff headquarters, and only a major. He'd made suggestions. He'd sent memoranda. He might have been shouting into the void, for all the attention the higher-ups paid him. He hadn't expected much different. Sooner or later, they'd listen to him on something small. If it worked, they'd listen to him on something bigger.

A lieutenant came up to him, saluted, and said, "Major Morrell?" When Morrell admitted he was who he was, the lieutenant saluted and said,

"General Wood's compliments, sir, and he'd like to see you immediately. If you'll please follow me, sir—"

"Yes, I'll follow you," Morrell said. Without another word, the lieutenant turned and hurried away. Walking along behind him, Morrell wondered what enormity he'd committed, to make the Chief of the U.S. General Staff land on him personally. He didn't think his memoranda on the Utah campaign had been as intemperate as all that. Maybe he was wrong. No—evidently he was wrong. He shrugged. If speaking his mind made them want to ship him out, odds were they'd send him back to one of the fighting fronts and let him command a battalion again. That wasn't so bad. A captain in an outer office who was pounding away on a typewriter looked up when the lieutenant brought in Morrell. After he'd been identified, the captain—presumably Wood's adjutant— nodded and said, "Oh, yes, let me tell the general he's here." He vanished into the chief of staffs inner sanctum, then emerged once more. "Come right in, Major Morrell. He's expecting you."

He didn't sound overtly hostile, but the General Staff had an air of genteel politeness over and above the usual military courtesies, so that didn't signify anything. Wondering whether to ask for a blindfold, Morrell walked past the captain and into the office. He came to stiff attention and saluted. "Major Irving Morrell reporting as ordered, sir."

"At ease, Morrell," Leonard Wood said, returning the salute. He was a broad-shouldered man in his mid-fifties, with iron-gray hair and a Kaiser Bill mustache waxed to a pointed perfection that didn't quite go with his craggy, tired-looking features. Morrell eased his brace only a fraction. Wood said, "Relax, Major. You're not in trouble. The reverse, in fact."

"Sir?" Morrell said. He couldn't fathom why the general had summoned him, if not to call him on the carpet.

Instead of explaining, Wood went off on a tangent: "You may have heard that I earned a medical degree before I went into the Army."

"Yes, sir, I have heard that," Morrell agreed. He didn't know where General Wood was going, but he wasn't about to try to keep him from getting there.

"Good," the chief of staff said. 'Then you'll have an easier time understanding why I was extremely interested when a memorandum from you and Dr. Wagner reached my desk earlier this year."

"Dr. Wagner?" In any setting less august, Morrell would have scratched his head. "I'm afraid I don't remember—"

"From Tucson," Wood broke in impatiently. "The memorandum where the two of you were discussing the potential advantages of protective headgear."

Light dawned on Morrell. "Oh. Yes, sir," he said. He'd utterly forgotten the physician's name, if he'd ever known it. He'd forgotten their conversation shortly before he was discharged, too. He'd figured the doctor had also forgotten it, but that looked to be wrong. Not only had Wagner remembered, but he'd remembered to give Morrell half the credit, too. Not just a doctor—that damn near made him a prince.

General Wood leaned over the side of his chair, picked something up, and set it on his desk: a steel helmet shaped like a bowl, with a projecting brim in front and an extension in the back to give the neck a little extra protection. "What do you think of your idea, Major?" he asked.

Morrell picked up the helmet. It weighed, he guessed, a couple of pounds. Leather webbing inside kept it from resting right on a man's head; a leather chin strap with an adjustable buckle would help it stay on. He rapped the green-gray painted metal with his knuckles. "Will it really stop bullets, sir?" he asked.

Wood shook his head. "Not square hits, no—it would probably have to be three times as heavy to do that. But it will deflect glancing rounds and a lot of shrapnel balls and shell fragments. Head wounds are so often fatal, anything we can do to diminish them works to our advantage."

"Sir, you're a hundred per cent right about that," Morrell said. He thought of the man in the bed next to him in Tucson, the man who'd been made into a vegetable in the blink of an eye. The memory made him want to shiver. Better to die straight out than to linger on like that without hope of ever having a working mind again.

"A commendation for this idea will go into your permanent file, Major," Wood said. "Our German allies, I understand, are going to copy the notion from us, and I've heard, though it's always hard to gauge how much truth comes from sources in enemy country, that the froggies are also working along similar lines. But we have the helmet first, and that's thanks in large part to you."

"Thank you very much, sir," Morrell said. Getting credit for the idea

had never crossed his mind, not least because he'd never thought it would see the light of day. "I hope Doctor, uh, Wagner gets a commendation, too, sir. If it hadn't been for him, this never would have gotten off the ground."

"Yes, he has a commendation coming, too," General Wood assured him. "But such things count for rather more on a fighting soldier's *curriculum vitae,* eh?"

"Yes, sir." Morrell hefted the helmet. "Sir, may I keep this one? If I'm ever transferred back to the front, I'll need one, and I'd be honored to have it be the one you gave me yourself."

"My pleasure," Wood said, and Morrell tucked the helmet under his left arm. The chief of staff studied him. "So you want to get back to the front, do you? Why does that not surprise me? Fighting the war with map and wire isn't your chosen style, is it?" Morrell had had very much the same thought himself. "Sir, I like the outdoors; I always have. I like hiking and fishing and hunting a lot better than filling out forms and such. I think I'm more useful to the country up at the front, if you want to know the truth."

General Wood steepled his fingers. "What you're saying, Major, is that you'd have a better time up at the front than you do here, which is not the same as being more useful to the country. We're going to teach you everything we can here, Major, and I suspect you'll teach us a few things, too. If you measure up, we'll change the color of the oak leaves on your shoulders, maybe give you eagles instead, and we'll send you back to the front in charge of a regiment. *Then* you'll be more useful to your country."

"Uh, thank you, sir," Morrell said again. He'd dared hope something like that might happen, but he hadn't taken the notion seriously. He made a mental note to write General Foulke a thank-you letter. Foulke must have seen something in him that he liked, and sent him on to the General Staff to find out if they saw it, too. That was how careers got made, if you were good—and lucky enough to be good when people were watching.

Wood said, 'This isn't for your benefit, Major: it's for the benefit of the United States of America. We are surrounded by foes on all sides, as we have been since the days of the War of Secession: the Confederate States and the Empire of Mexico to the south, Canada to the north, England and France across an Atlantic none too wide, and the Japanese and the British Empire across the Pacific. Seizing the

Sandwich Islands was a heavy blow against them; otherwise, they'd be menacing our western coast even now. But they are going to try to take those islands back, as a first step toward carrying the war to our shores. Surrounded, as I say, we can't afford to waste talent if we see it." He went from cordial to brisk in the space of a heartbeat. "Dismissed, Major."

Morrell saluted, did a smart about-face, and left the office of the Chief of the General Staff. The lieutenant was still in the antechamber with General Wood's adjutant. He bounced to his feet. "Do you need me to guide you back to your assigned area, sir?"

"I don't think so," Morrell answered. "I expect I can manage on my own, unless the birds have eaten the trail of crumbs I left behind." The lieutenant looked blank. The adjutant chuckled, recognizing the allusion.

Three different men stopped Morrell in the hallway, all of them exclaiming about the helmet he was carrying. Two of them, like him, were ecstatic. The third, a white-bearded brigadier general in his late sixties who might have first seen action in the War of Secession, shook his head in dismay. "It's a damned shame we have to resort to means like those to fill the men with the spirit of aggression," he growled, and walked on.

Being far outranked, Morrell didn't answer. He didn't see anything wrong with giving the common soldier some slightly better chance to do his job without getting killed or dreadfully wounded.

He set the helmet down beside the map of the Utah rebellion. Try as he would, he couldn't make himself believe the General Staff had come up with the best possible plan there was. His first efforts to convince his superiors otherwise had failed. If he was going to try again, he'd have to be more subtle.

He was poring over the map when someone behind him said, "Major Morrell?"

"Yes?" Morrell turned around. Before the turn was completed, he came to attention and revised his words: "Yes, Mr. President?"

Theodore Roosevelt pointed to the helmet. "General Wood tells me that's partly your idea. It's a bully one, I must say. We aim to win this war, but we aim to do it with the greatest possible efficiency and care for the men who fight it. Your notion goes a long way toward that end. Congratulations."

"Thank you, sir," Morrell said. He'd known Wood and TR were longtime friends. He hadn't imagined that might ever matter to him.

"What other useful ideas have you?" Roosevelt pointed to the map of Utah. "How would you cauterize that running sore, for instance?" He sighed. "My experience has been that, man for man, Mormons make excellent, even outstanding, citizens. In a mass, though, their religion gives them the ambition to be a nationality of their own rather than Americans. This, I realize, is in no small measure engendered by the treatment they have received at the hands of the United States since the 1850s. But fault is irrelevant. Revolt and secession from our country cannot be tolerated."

"Yes, sir," Morrell said. "What would I do in Utah, sir?" He took a deep breath and explained to the president what he would do in Utah.

Roosevelt listened with poker face till he was through, then said, "Have you presented these ideas to the General Staff with a view toward implementing them?"

"I have presented them, yes, sir," Morrell answered. "My superiors are of the opinion they're impractical."

"Fiddlesticks," TR burst out. "Your superiors are of the opinion that, since they didn't think of these things themselves, they can't be any good. That's what you get for your low rank, Major Mor-rell." He stood up straight and stuck out his chest. "*I* have not got a low rank, Major. When I see something worth doing, it has a way of getting done. I'm glad we had this little talk. A very good day to you." He hurried off.

Morrell stared after him, somewhere between horror and delight. If Roosevelt started shouting orders, the plan for operations in Utah *would* change. Morrell was confident enough that the results could not be worse than those now being obtained. Would they be better? Would they be perceived as being better? If they were perceived as being better, would he get the credit for that—or the blame?

Roosevelt slammed a door behind him. He was shouting already. Morrell glanced over to the helmet he'd brought from General Wood's office. He snorted. When he took it, he hadn't imagined he'd need to wear it inside General Staff headquarters. But TR might have taken care of that.

Achilles started crying. This was the third time he'd started crying since Cincinnatus and Elizabeth had gone to bed. Cincinnatus didn't think it was far past midnight. The baby might wake up a couple of

more times before morning. When he woke up, Cincinnatus woke up. He'd be a shambling wreck on the Covington docks. He'd been a shambling wreck a lot of the days since Achilles was born.

With a small groan, Elizabeth staggered out of bed and over to the cradle where Achilles lay. She picked him up and carried him into the front room to nurse him. Nights were even harder on her than they were on Cincinnatus. She came back from her domestic's work ready to fall asleep over supper.

Cincinnatus twisted and turned, trying to get comfortable and get back to sleep. In the process, he wrapped sheet and blanket around himself till he might have been a mummy. When Elizabeth came back, she had to unroll him to give herself some bedclothes. That woke him up again.

When the cheap alarm clock on the nightstand jangled, he jerked upright, as horrified as if a Confederate aeroplane had dropped a bomb on the house next door. Then he had to shake Elizabeth out of slumber; she hadn't so much as heard the horrible racket the clock made.

They both dressed in a fog of fatigue. The smell of coffee drew Cincinnatus to the kitchen like a magnet, though the stuff for sale in Covington these days had more chicory in it than the genuine bean. Whatever it was made of, it pried his eyelids open. After bacon and eggs and cornbread, he was more nearly ready to face the day than he would have believed possible fifteen minutes earlier.

Someone knocked on the front door. Elizabeth opened it. "Hello, Mother Livia," she said.

"Hello, dear," Cincinnatus' mother answered. "How's my little grandbaby?" Without giving Elizabeth a chance to answer, she went on, "He must have been a terror in the night again—I kin see it in your face."

Cincinnatus grabbed his dinner pail and hurried out the door, pausing only to kiss his mother on the cheek. That damned Lieutenant Kennan timed things with a stopwatch; if you were half a minute late, you could kiss work for the day good-bye. Cincinnatus had seen it happen to too many other people to intend to let it happen to him.

"Get your black ass going," the U.S. lieutenant snarled at him when he got to the waterfront. From Kennan, that was almost an endearment. Barges full of crates of munitions had crossed the Ohio. Cincinnatus

and his work crew unloaded the barges and loaded trucks and wagons. U.S. soldiers drove them off toward the front. Cincinnatus had given up asking to be a teamster. The Yankees wouldn't hear of it, even if it would have freed up more of their men for actual fighting at the front lines.

He disguised a shrug in a stretch as he walked back to unload another crate. Whites in the CSA had better sense. Black men in the Confederacy did everything but fight. They drove, they cooked, they washed, they dug trenches. Without them, white Confederate manpower would have been stretched too thin to have any hope of holding back the U.S. hordes.

When the long day was done, the paymaster gave Cincinnatus the fifty-cent hard-work bonus. "God damn!" said Herodotus, who stood behind him in line. "That there's gettin' to be your reg'lar rate."

"Got me a baby in the house now," Cincinnatus said, as if that explained everything—which, to him, it did.

Herodotus said, "Plenty fellers here got five, six, eight chillun in de house. Don't see them gettin' no bonus."

Cincinnatus shrugged again. That wasn't his lookout. An awful lot of people in this world wanted just to get by, no more. He'd always had his eye on doing better than that. Even now, in the middle of the war, he had his eye on the main chance. He didn't know what would come of it, but he did know he couldn't win if he didn't bet.

Herodotus made a point of not walking home with him, as if to say he disapproved of such effort. That meant Cincinnatus was by himself when he noticed a wonderful smell in the warm, wet, late summer air. A moment later, a delivery wagon with the words Kentucky smoke house painted in big red letters rounded the corner. He waved to the driver, Apicius' son Felix.

Felix slowed down and waved back. "My pa, he say for you to come in some time before too long," he called. "He got somethin' he want to talk over with you."

"Do it right now," Cincinnatus said. Felix nodded, flicked the reins, and got the wagon moving again.

When Cincinnatus got to the Kentucky Smoke House, the aroma there reminded him how hungry he was after a day hauling heavy crates. Apicius' other son, Lucullus, was basting the meat that turned on a spit

over the firepit. Seeing Cincinnatus, he waved him into a little back room.

In there, Apicius was stirring spices into a bubbling pot, making up more of the wonderful sauce that went onto his barbecued beef and pork. "Ha!" he said when Cincinnatus came in. "Saw Felix, did you?"

"Sure did," Cincinnatus answered. "He said you wanted to see me 'bout somethin'. Somethin' to do with the underground, I reckon." He spoke quietly, after having closed the door behind him.

Apicius gave the mixture in the iron pot another stir. "Might say that," he replied after a moment. He gave Cincinnatus a thoughtful glance. "How'd you get mixed up with those underground folks, anyways?"

"Wish I hadn't, pretty much," Cincinnatus said, "but the white man I used to work for, he's one of 'em, and he was always pretty decent to me. 'Sides, from what I've seen, I ain't got much use for the USA, neither." He met and held Apicius' eyes. "How 'bout you?" Unless he got answers that satisfied him, he wasn't going to say anything more.

Apicius' massive shoulders went up and down in a shrug. "First time the Yankee soldiers come in here, they clean me out of everything I got, they say they shoot me if I squawk, an' they call me more kind o' names'n I ever hear before. They ain't done nothin' like that since, mind you, but it don't make me want to cheer for the Stars an' Stripes."

"Yeah, that's about right." Cincinnatus sighed. "I be go to hell, though, if I see us black folks gettin' any kind o' square deal after the war, an' it don't matter if the USA or the CSA win."

"Dat's the exact truth," Apicius said emphatically. "The exact truth, an' nothin' but the truth, so help me God." He held up a meaty hand, as if taking oath in court—not that blacks could testify against whites in court, not in the CSA. After stirring the barbecue sauce again, he went on, "On de odder hand, there's undergrounds and then there's undergrounds."

"Is that a fact?" Cincinnatus said. If Apicius was going to come to a point, he hoped the fat cook would do it soon.

And, in his own way, Apicius did. Offhandedly, he asked, "You ever hear tell about the *Manifesto?"*

He didn't say what kind of manifesto. If Cincinnatus hadn't heard of it,

he probably would have slid the talk around to something innocuous, then sent him on his way none the wiser. But Cincinnatus did know what he was talking about. He stared, wide-eyed. "Be you one of the people who—" He didn't go on. He'd heard *about* Reds a good many times, always in the whispers that were the only safe way to mention such people. He hadn't really imagined he would meet such an exotic specimen.

"We git justice for ourselves," Apicius said in a voice that had nothing in it of the jolly-fat-man persona he affected, only steely determination. "Come the revolution, nobody treat a workin' man like dirt only on account of he be black."

That was a heady vision. Cincinnatus, however, had already met the heady visions of the Confederacy and the United States, and seen how neither reality lived up to those visions. He had no reason save hope blinder than he could justify to believe the Red vision would be different. And besides— "Even if the revolution come in the CSA, right now we be under the USA, and it don't look like they gonna give us up."

"Revolution comin' in the USA, too," Apicius replied with calm certainty. "Now we kin help the Red brothers in the CSA—we git stuff they kin use, ship it south, an'— What so funny?"

Between giggles, Cincinnatus got out, "We take stuff the white men in the Confederate States ship north, an' use it to drive the damnyankees crazy. Then we take stuff the damnyankees ship south, an' use it to drive the white men in the CSA crazy. If that ain't funny, what is?"

Apicius' smile was thin (the only thin thing about him), but it was a smile. "You wif us, then?"

When Elizabeth found out, she'd want to kill him. He had a baby now. He was supposed to be careful. That consideration made him hesitate a good half a second before he answered, "Yes."

Up in Pennsylvania, Jake Featherston had been acutely conscious that he'd come to a foreign country. Houses looked different; the winter weather had been harsher than he was used to; the local civilians, those who hadn't fled before the advancing Army of Northern Virginia, had looked and sounded different from their counterparts in the CSA; and they hadn't made any bones about despising the men in butternut who'd overrun their farms and towns.

Now the Army of Northern Virginia wasn't advancing any more. It

wasn't in Pennsylvania any more, either. Hampstead, Maryland, where Jake's battery in the First Richmond Howitzers was stationed, looked a lot more like a corresponding small town in Virginia than had anything he'd seen in Pennsylvania. The Old Hampstead Store, for instance, wouldn't have been out of place in some rural county seat outside of Richmond: a two-story clapboard building, a hundred years old if it was a day, in the shape of an L, with a massive water pump shielded from the street by the longer side of the L.

Nero was working the pump. When he'd filled a bucket, Perseus lugged it over to the horse trough. The draft animals that had pulled the battery's cannons and ammunition limbers drank greedily. "Don't give 'em too much too fast," Jake said warningly. 'They're liable to get the colic and peg out, and we can't afford that, not now."

"Yes, suh, Marse Jake, I knows," Perseus answered. "But they got to drink some. They been workin' hard."

"I know," Featherston said. "I don't think we'll do much more moving back, though." He paused to wipe his sweaty forehead. "We better not, or we'll be fighting this damn war back in Virginia."

Jeb Stuart III came round the corner in time to hear that. "It will not happen, Sergeant," he said crisply. 'They will not get past us. They will not come any farther. All right: we couldn't take Philadelphia. That's too bad; it might have made the damnyankees roll over and show us their bellies like the cowardly curs they are. But Maryland we hold, Washington we hold, and we're going to keep them."

"Yes, sir," Jake said—you didn't get anywhere arguing with your captain. But he couldn't help adding, "If the damnyankees are such terrible cowards, how come they're moving forward and we're going back?"

"We aren't," Stuart said. "Not one more step back—I have that straight from the War Department in Richmond."

When Jeb Stuart HI had something straight from the War Department in Richmond, he had it straight from his father, who'd worn the wreathed stars of a Confederate general for a good many years. That sort of information came straight from the horse's mouth, then. Featherston said, "It's good to hear, sir—if the Yankees cooperate."

For a moment, Stuart seemed more a tired modern soldier than the cavalier he tried to be. His shoulders sagged a little. "The trouble with the Yankees, Sergeant, is that God was having an off day when he made them, because he turned out altogether too many. They die by thousands, but more thousands keep coming— as you may perhaps have noticed."

"Who, me, sir?" All too well, Featherston remembered the U.S. barrage that had cost him his first gun crew, and remembered pouring shells into oncoming green-gray waves till they broke barely beyond rifle range of his piece. 'There's a lot of weight behind them," he agreed.

"There certainly is—weight of metal and weight of men," Stuart said. "And they use that advantage of size in place of true courage, battering us down by stunning us with their big guns and then drowning us in those assaults that leave hillsides and meadows paved with broken bodies from one end to the other. You ask me, Sergeant, that has very little to do with real courage, real *elan,* as our gallant French allies call it. *Elan* consists of throwing yourself at the foe regardless of his size, and in going forward for the simple reason that you refuse to admit to yourself you might be beaten. Look what it did for us in the opening days of the war."

"Yes, sir," Jake said. "Took us all the way to the Susquehanna— but not quite to the Delaware."

"If we'd made it to the Delaware, we surely would have crossed it and broken into Philadelphia," Stuart agreed, "and Baltimore would have withered on the vine. But without *elan,* could we have stopped the Yankee breakout from Baltimore before it trapped all our forces up in Pennsylvania?"

"I guess not, sir," Featherston said, which, by the sour look Stuart gave him, was not a good enough answer. But he didn't know whether it had been *elan* or good field fortifications that had stopped the U.S. drive. For that matter, he didn't know for a fact it was stopped. The Yankees were still shipping men and materiel down into the bulge around Baltimore. Sooner or later, it would burst again, like any carbuncle. "But if they break past Poplar Springs toward Frederick, we may have to skedaddle out of here yet."

Now Stuart looked angry: he'd had his theory contradicted. He put a biting edge in his voice: "Sergeant, I've seen the trench lines we've constructed to make sure the Yankees don't break out. I am confident they will hold against any pressure brought to bear against them, just as I am confident the lines ahead of us will hold against any conceivable pressure from the north."

"Yes, sir," Featherston said woodenly. He was kicking himself for disagreeing with the captain after he'd told himself not to be so foolish. But, damn it, wasn't he a free white man, with the right to say anything he chose? The way the Army treated you, you had to act like a Negro to your superiors. He didn't see the justice in that.

Pompey came up and said, "Captain Stuart, suh, your supper will be ready in a couple minutes. We found us a nice wine to go with your lamb chops, suh. I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

"I don't doubt that," Stuart said. Pompey went on his way. Watching him, Stuart returned to the argument with Jake: "Without our niggers, the Yankees would squash us flat, no way around it. But with them to build the works we use, every white Confederate man is a fighting man. We use our resources more efficiently than the USA can."

"Yes, sir, that's a fact," Featherston agreed, now anxious for nothing so much as to get the battery commander out of his hair. He was watching Pompey, too, still wondering whether he'd been right to tell that major about Stuart's servant. He'd never find out now, not with the influence a Stuart had in Richmond just because he was a Stuart.

Happier now that the sergeant was agreeing with him, Captain Stuart headed off, presumably to enjoy his lamb chops. Featherston wasn't going to be eating lamb chops; he'd have whatever came out of the battery kettle, probably some horrible slumgullion whose sole virtue was filling his belly. He wouldn't have a nice wine with his slop, either. He clicked tongue between teeth. The First Richmond Howitzers had been an aristocratic regiment since the days of the War of Secession. He'd managed to get in because he was good at what he did. Everybody above the rank of sergeant had got in by being good at who he was. Some times the differences were more glaring than others.

To Nero, Perseus said, "Bet you that Pompey, he gwine eat his-self lamb chops tonight, too."

"I dunno," Nero answered. "Maybe he gwine wait till Cap'n Stuart done used 'em up, then go to the latrine to git 'em." Both black men laughed. So did Jake Featherston, down deep inside. Seeing the Army's Negroes distrusting one another made white men sleep better at night.

Actually, nothing could have made Featherston sleep well that night. U.S. aeroplanes buzzed over Hampstead, dropping bombs at random. None of them landed within a couple of hundred yards of the battery; none of them, so far as Jake could judge from the absence of screams and cries of alarm from Confederate soldiers, landed within a couple of hundred yards of any worthwhile target.

Even landing out of the range where they could do any damage, though, they made a hell of a racket. Antiaircraft guns hammered away at the U.S. bombers, adding to the din. They didn't hit anything —or, at least, the rhythm of the engines throbbing overhead didn't falter.

Eventually, the U.S. aeroplanes gave up and flew back to the north. Jake rolled himself tighter in his blanket—which was sti-flingly hot but which had the virtue of shielding large areas of his anatomy from mosquitoes—and went back to sleep.

Some time in the wee small hours, another flight of bombing aeroplanes visited Hampstead. Again, they dropped their bombs with nothing more than the vaguest idea of where those bombs might land. And again, the bombs did no damage Featherston could discern. They did, however, wake him up and keep him awake when he would sooner have grabbed as much sleep as he could get.

The next morning, shambling around like a drunk, barely remembering his own name, he realized the bombers had done some damage after all.

XIX

A few miles outside of Boston harbor, Patrick O'Donnell stuck his head out of the cabin of the *Spray* and called to George Enos, "The submersible has cast off the tow and the telephone line. Haul 'em aboard."

"Aye aye, Skipper," Enos answered; the biggest difference between life aboard the *Spray* and the way things had gone aboard the *Ripple* was that commands got answered in Navy talk these days.

George wished he had a winch with which to haul in the thick line and the insulated telephone wire wrapped around it. But the *Spray* had no winches for its own trawls, and one would have looked decidedly out of place at the stern. The steam trawler wanted to look like an ordinary fishing boat, not arousing the suspicions of Entente warships till too late. And so he did the work by hand.

Harvey Kemmel said, 'Talk about locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen."

Although he had been in the Navy for years, Kemmel still flavored his speech with Midwestern farm talk George Enos sometimes found incomprehensible and often amusing. Today, though, he could do nothing but nod. "We were a little on the excited side when we sank that Rebel submarine," he admitted. "Beginners' luck, you might say."

"One way to put it," Kemmel said. "Christ, our pictures in the paper and everything. Felt good while it lasted, but we haven't had a sniff from the Rebs or the Canucks since."

A nibble, Enos would have said. However you said it, though, the message was the same. Nobody could prove the enemy was wise to the trick the *Spray* and other boats like her were trying to play, but neither she nor any of those other boats had lured a cruiser or a submarine to destruction since, either. "Hey, we've got a good load offish in the hold," George said, pausing for a moment to look back over his shoulder.

Kemmel rolled his eyes. "I don't think I'm ever going to look a fish in the face again, now that I know what a hell of a lot of work it is to try and catch the bastards. I thought I was tired on a destroyer, but I didn't know what tired was. I feel like somebody rode me hard and put me away wet."

That was another comparison Enos never would have come up with on his own; he had trouble remembering the last time he'd ridden a horse. Again, though, he understood what his comrade was driving at. He answered, "The smaller the boat, the more work it takes."

"You did this stuff for *years,* didn't you?" Kemmel said. "Each cat his own rat, but—" He shook his head in bemusement.

"I'd sooner fish than watch a horse's rear end all day," George answered, dirt farming being the only thing he could think of that might possibly have been harder work than fishing.

"Soon as I got old enough, though, I got off my pa's farm and as far away as I could go," Kemmel shot back. "War hadn't come along, you would have kept on doing this your whole blessed life."

George Enos shut up and went back to pulling in the heavy, wet rope and the telephone line, one tug after another, hand over hand. It was hard work, but easier than bringing in the trawl full of fish. There was, at the moment, nothing at the end of this rope.

He'd just brought in the dripping end and coiled the rope neatly in place when a tug steamed up alongside the *Spray* and demanded her papers: no ship got into the harbor these days without being stopped and inspected first. Since they were Navy, passing the inspection proved easy enough. A pilot came aboard to guide them through the mine fields protecting Boston from enemy raiders. Every time they came back from a trip out to one fishing bank or another, more mines had been sown. Every once in a while, the mines came loose from their moorings, too. Then, pilot or no pilot, a boat or even a ship was likely to go to the bottom in a hurry.

"Wonder where the submersible's gone," Enos said. As had become its custom, the submersible had remained under the sea after releasing the towline. Maybe it went into Boston, sneaking under the mines, or maybe to one of the other ports nearby.

Harvey Kemmel laughed. "I can tell you ain't been in the Navy long—you still ask questions. What they want you to know, they'll tell you. What they don't want you to know ain't your business anyhow." George would have argued with him, but he looked to be right.

The pilot brought them in to T Wharf as if the *Spray* were an ordinary fishing boat. Patrick O'Donnell disposed of the catch as if she were an ordinary trawler, too. Then the illusion that she was still a part of the civilian world took a beating: an officer with a lieutenant commander's two medium-width stripes surrounding a narrow one strolled up the wharf to the *Spray* and said, "Men, you'll come with me. We have some matters to discuss." By that, he meant he would tell them what to do and they would do it.

"What's going on, sir?" George asked him. Off to one side, Harvey Kemmel snickered. Enos' ears got hot. He *did* still ask questions. The United States were a free country, and most places you could do things like that. But when you were in the Navy, your freedom disappeared.

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that," the lieutenant commander said. The hell of it was, George understood the fellow was doing him a favor.

They all walked down T Wharf after the officer. Real fishermen and other people with business on the wharf gave them curious looks, those who didn't know they were Navy themselves. What the dickens did a spruce lieutenant commander want with a bunch of ragamuffins in dungarees and overalls and slickers and hats that had seen better days?

Most of the couple of blocks just back of T Wharf were full of tackle shops and saloons and boatbuilders' offices and whorehouses: businesses serving the fishing trade and the men who worked it. In one of the whorehouses, a girl stood naked behind a filmy curtain: a living advertisement. A cop across the street looked the other way. Actually, he looked right in at her, but he didn't do anything about her. George looked at her, too. He was happy being married to Sylvia, but he was a long way from blind.

He flicked a glance up toward the lieutenant commander. The man's head never moved. Maybe his eyes slid to the right, but George wouldn't have bet on it. He seemed as straight an arrow as Enos had come across in some time.

He led the crew from the *Spray* into a Navy recruiting station sandwiched between a saloon and a cheap diner. Charlie White said," 'Scuse me, sir, but we already joined up." The ex-fishermen all laughed. The sailors who filled out the crew didn't.

A couple of young men sat in there, talking earnestly with a gray-haired petty officer. Enos had a pretty fair idea what they were doing: trying to convince him they ought to be allowed to put on whites before conscription made them don green-gray. From things he'd read about what life in the trenches was like, and from the black-bordered casualty lists the papers printed day in and day out, he had a hard time blaming them.

The lieutenant commander led the men from the *Spray* into a back room. "Be seated, men," he said, waving to the chairs around the big wooden table. There were just enough chairs for the ersatz fishermen and, at the head of the table, for the officer. As George Enos sat down, he wondered if that was a coincidence. He had his doubts. The Navy didn't run on coincidences.

He also wondered if Patrick O'Donnell would start asking questions. O'Donnell, after all, had commanded a naval vessel that had helped sink a Confederate submarine, while the lieutenant commander had the look of a man who didn't go to sea much. But the former skipper of the *Ripple* sat silent. He had too much Navy in his blood to pressure an officer.

The lieutenant commander coughed. Maybe he was having trouble coming to the point. George didn't like that. If somebody didn't want to tell you something, odds were you didn't want to hear it, either. At last, the officer did speak: "Men, we are ending the program in which you have been engaged. Results have not shown themselves to be commensurate to the effort involved."

Kemmel and Schoonhoven and a couple of other regular Navy men aboard the *Spray* nodded. It didn't matter to them. One job, another job—so what? They were little rivets on a big machine. They'd fit wherever someone put them.

Now Patrick O'Donnell found his voice: "But, sir, we did sink a

submarine."

"I know you did," the lieutenant commander said. "Another towing couple sank one off the western coast of the Empire of Mexico, too. Both, though, came in the very earliest days of the program, and both, unfortunately, received wide publicity. Now our enemies are suspicious of targets that look too tempting to be true, and towed submersibles are operating with a far smaller range than would be the case if they were cruising on their own. And so—" He spread his hands.

"What do we do now, sir, in that case?" O'Donnell asked.

"You'll be reassigned, of course," the lieutenant commander answered crisply. "Orders have already been cut for all of you, and transportation arranged for those being moved out of the area." He pushed back his chair; the legs scraped against the floor. "I have them in my office. I'll distribute them to you. Wait here."

He left the room, returning a moment later with a manila folder from which he drew envelopes with names typed on them. He handed O'Donnell his without hesitation, but had to ask who the other men were.

George Enos' fingers fumbled with the flap of the envelope, as if they didn't want to find out what lay inside. No, not *as if* he had no desire whatever to learn that the faceless red-tape twisters in Philadelphia had sent him to New York or San Diego or San Francisco or—

Want to or not, he pulled out the papers folded into the fat envelope. The name leaped out at him at once: "St. Louis," he said, his voice a raw hiss of pain. *Report at once to the river monitor USS* Punishment, *St. Louis, Missouri.* A train ticket fell out of the mass of other papers. He stared at it in horrified dismay. "Sir, this says I'm supposed to leave this afternoon!"

'That's correct," the lieutenant commander agreed. "We expected the *Spray* in three or four days ago, and made arrangements accordingly. Your family will be notified, I assure you."

Your family will be notified. A bloodless way to say it, a gutless way to do it. Sylvia would be at the canning plant now; he couldn't reach her there. The children were at Mrs. Coneval's, but she had no telephone, any more than his own apartment did. Send a wire? He shook his head. That would make Sylvia think he'd been killed.

Charlie White said, "San Diego," in that same wounded, disbelieving voice. They looked at each other. Despite the difference in the color of their skins, they were, in that moment, very much alike.

Marshlands had two wheelchairs now, the old one for upstairs and a new one with bigger wheels, one also easier to maneuver outside, for downstairs. Anne Colleton had bought the second chair without a murmur after watching Scipio bump her brother down the stairway and escape losing control of the chair only by luck.

Getting Jacob Colleton downstairs without having to bring his chair along certainly made matters easier for Scipio. He wheeled the mistress' brother to the top of the staircase, helped him rise, draped one of Jacob's arms over his own shoulder, let the gassed man hang onto the banister with the other hand, and walked down more or less normally. Then he eased Jacob Colleton down into the other wheelchair. "My gun," Colleton rasped.

"Are you certain that is what you require, sir?" Scipio asked tonelessly. As usual, Jacob reeked of whiskey. He'd also given himself an injection of morphia not long before. The butler did not think well of a drunk, drugged man's prospects for straight shooting.

Jacob Colleton glared at him. His body was wrecked, his eyes red-tracked and blurry, but the hate and rage that poured out from them made Scipio back up half a step in alarm. They weren't aimed at him in particular, but at the world as a whole, the world that had done what it had done to Jacob. That made them more frightening, not less. "Bring me my gun," Colleton hissed. He paused to draw a painful breath, then added, "If you're lucky, I'll give you a running start."

Scipio's laugh was dutiful. He might have found that funnier if he hadn't been sure Miss Anne's brother at least half meant it. "I'll be back directly, sir," he said, and went upstairs again. Hung on brackets above the bed in which he could sleep only propped up by pillows, Jacob Colleton had a Tredegar military rifle. Scipio took it and a couple of ten-round clips of ammunition and carried them down to Colleton. Jacob laid the rifle across the arms of his wheelchair and stuck the ammunition in one of the deep pockets of his robe.

"Push me over by that stand of trees," he told Scipio. "You know, the one by the nigger cottages."

"Yes, sir," Scipio said.

"See what kind of varmints I can get," Colleton went on. What a .303

caliber bullet meant for knocking over men at five hundred yards did to a squirrel at fifty wasn't pretty, but Jacob Colleton didn't seem to care much about that. He was a good shot—a far better shot than he had been before he went off to war. He looked up at Scipio, those pale eyes blazing. "I keep wishing it was damnyankees in my sights. Do you have any idea what I'm telling you? No, you wouldn't. How could you?"

But Scipio did. As he opened the front door so he could push Jacob Colleton out of Marshlands, he thought of the Negro revolutionary cell to which he'd so unwillingly become attached, and of their endless, hungry murmurs of *Come de revolution.* Come the revolution, they'd take aim at Jacob Colleton with exactly the same loving hate he lavished on the men of the USA.

A couple of Negro children broke off their games to stare at Jacob and Scipio as they went by. Colleton made as if to lift his rifle. "You better run fast, you damn little pickaninnies," he croaked. Run the children did, squealing in delicious fear. Colleton laughed his ghastly, shattered laugh. He looked up at Scipio again. "If I don't have any luck in the woods, I'll bag 'em on the way back to Marshlands."

Scipio maintained a prudent silence. Again, he thought Colleton was making a joke. Again, he wasn't sure enough to be comfortable.

Some of the trees by the Negro cabins bore fruit or nuts. The plantation hands shared out what they got from them. Some of the trees and bushes were just there, and had been there since before the War of Secession, maybe before the American Revolution.

Colleton clicked a magazine into the Tredegar and chambered the first round. Scipio stood behind the wheelchair. He had other things he needed to be doing, plenty of them. Unless Miss Anne called him, they wouldn't get done for a while. Jacob wanted to be moved every so often if he didn't shoot anything. If Scipio wasn't there to move him, he really might use the butler for target practice on his reappearance.

A crow flapped by and landed in a pecan tree. Fast as a striking snake, Jacob Colleton slapped the rifle to his shoulder, aimed, and fired. The report, as always, made Scipio jump and his heart start to pound. He wondered what war sounded like. Every time he tried to imagine it, his imagination rebelled.

The crow lost its perch and fell to the ground with a plop. It lay, a black puddle, on the grass and moss and leaves below the tree. With a

click, Jacob Colleton worked the bolt and brought a fresh cartridge into the chamber. The brass casing he'd ejected glittered by the wheelchair.

"Good shot, sir," Scipio said. "Shall I recover the bird?"

"Don't bother," Colleton wheezed. "Crow isn't worth eating. No kind of crow is worth eating."

You say that, to a Negro? Scipio wanted to snatch the rifle out of his hand and smash in his skull. When whites came out with widess cracks like that, it did more than Cassius' Red rhetoric to make Scipio think the black revolution was not only needed but might succeed. No matter how sharp Jacob Colleton's eyes were, he was blind.

Colleton fired again, missed, and swore. His trainwrecked voice made ordinary words sound extraordinarily vile. Killing a foolish possum a few minutes later partially restored his spirits. "You can get that," he told Scipio. "Give it to one of those little niggers for the pot." Every once in a while, he remembered he was still supposed to be a gentleman.

Scipio carried the possum back by the tail. Jacob Colleton had put a bullet half an inch back of one eye. The ugly little beast couldn't have known what hit it. And possum, after some time in the pot or the bake oven, was tasty eating indeed. "Very good shooting, sir," Scipio said, laying the little body down beside the wheelchair.

Jacob Colleton started to say something, but coughed instead. He kept coughing, and finally started to turn blue. At last, as Scipio helplessly stood by, he mastered the spasm. "Lord God almighty," he whispered, "feels as if they're taking sandpaper and a blowtorch to my insides." Along with the clips of ammunition, he had a silver flask in one pocket of his robe. He gulped from it, swallowed, and gulped again. His color slowly improved. He looked down at the possum he had killed. "Good shooting, Scipio?" He shook his head. "This is nothing. It's not even proper sport. The possum can't shoot back."

"Sir?" Scipio knew he was supposed to say something in response to that, but for the life of him couldn't figure out what.

Colleton breathed whiskey up into his face. "Don't look at me like that. I wasn't joking, not even slightly. What better game to play, what more exciting game to play, than wagering your life that you're a better shot than the damnyankee on the far side of the barbed wire? But machine guns cheat, artillery cheats, gas cheats worst of all. It

doesn't care how good a soldier you are. If you're in the wrong place, it kills you—and there's no sport at all about that."

Again, Scipio kept his mouth shut. A robin flew down toward a treetop. Jacob Colleton fired while it was still on the wing. It seemed to explode in midair. Feathers drifted to the ground. Scipio's eyes got wide. That wasn't just good shooting—it was outstanding shooting. And, since there wasn't much left of the poor songbird, Colleton hadn't done it for any reason but to show off... and maybe to savor the moment of killing something. Scipio shivered.

After he'd killed a squirrel and missed a couple of shots, Jacob said, "Enough of this. Take me back inside."

"Yes, sir," Scipio said, and he did. He helped Miss Anne's brother upstairs and back into the pillow-strewn bed in which he could not lie down. Scipio, whose mind took strange leaps these days, wondered how he did what he did with the women he summoned to his room. The Negro, who was very conventional in those matters, had trouble imagining alternatives.

He escaped from the bedroom with more than a little relief. But, try as he would, he could not escape Jacob Colleton. Down in the kitchen, he ran into Cassius; the hunter was bringing in a turkey he'd killed in the woods beyond the cotton fields. Cassius had been very quiet since his return from what he'd told Anne Colleton was Jubal Marberry's plantation. Now he signaled Scipio with his eyes. The two of them walked outside.

A stove had made the kitchen blazing hot. No stove burned outside, but it was blazing hot there, too, and so muggy Scipio expected rain. He and Cassius strolled along side by side. They made an incongruous pair because of their difference in dress, but nobody paid them any mind. Both the field hands and the white folks were used to seeing them together.

In a low, casual voice, Cassius said, "Kip, you got to keep Marse Jacob 'way from them trees." He pointed to the little wood into which Jacob Colleton had been shooting.

"How kin I do dat?" Scipio demanded. In a flash, he went from Congaree dialect to the English he used around Miss Anne and other whites. " 'I'm sorry, sir, but the huntsman-in-chief requires you to take your sport elsewhere' ?" He fell back into dialect: "Ain't gwine happen, Cass."

Cassius guffawed and slapped his thigh. "Do Jesus, that funny." He grew serious again in a hurry, though. "Don' care how you do it, but you do it, hear?"

Scipio stared at him in something approaching agony. "Ah *cain't*, Cass. He say go dere, we gots to go dere. I tell he no, I dance me all round why fo' no, he jus' git mo' and mo' 'spicious. You hear what I say?"

"I don't got to hear you, Kip. You *got* to hear me," Cassius said, not loudly, but not in a way Scipio thought he could ignore, either. "Don' wan' no white folks traipsin' through they woods. Don' wan' no white folks nowheres *near* they woods, you hear?"

"Better shoot me now," Scipio said. He'd never tried standing up to Cassius till this moment. He'd never had any chance before; the hunter had effortlessly dominated him. But now he'd asked the impossible. If he was too stupid to recognize that, too bad—too bad for everyone, too bad for everything.

He stared at Scipio now; defiance was the last thing he'd expected. "You *got* to, Kip," he said at last. "Ain' no two ways 'bout it. You *got* to." But he wasn't ordering now; he sounded more like a man who was pleading.

"How come I got to?" Scipio demanded.

Cassius didn't want to tell him. He could see that, with no room for doubt. After a long, long pause, the hunter said, "On account of I got a whole raf o' guns, whole raf o' bullets back in there. White folks finds that, ain't gwine do nothin' but hang all the niggers on this here plantation."

"Reckoned it were sumpin' like dat," Scipio said, nodding; wherever Cassius had been when he was away, it wasn't in bed with a nineteen-year-old wench named Drusilla. Where had he got the weapons? How had he got them back here? Scipio didn't know, or want to know. He pointed toward the woods in question. "You worry too much, you know dat? Marse Jacob, he cain't git out o' that chair, not hardly. He shoot hisself a possum, *I* gits it an' brings it back. He ain't goin' in they woods. An' you wants me to ruin everything on account of you gits de vapors. Do Jesus!" He clapped a hand to his forehead.

Cassius soberly studied him. "All right, Kip, we does it yo' way," he said, and Scipio breathed again. "You better be right. You is wrong, you is dead. You is wrong, we all dead."

He walked off shaking his head, perhaps wondering if he'd done the right thing. Scipio stood where he was till he stopped trembling. He'd got away with it. Not only had he been right, he'd made Cassius recognize that he was right. As triumphs went, it was probably a small thing, but he felt as if he'd just won the War of Secession all by himself.

"Pa," Julia McGregor asked with the intent seriousness of which only eleven-year-old girls seem capable, "are you going to send me back to school when it opens again after harvest time?"

Arthur McGregor looked up from the newspaper he was reading. He rested while he could; harvest would be coming soon. The paper was shipped up from the USA, and full of lies; since the demise of the *Rosenfeld Register* (which had been only half full of lies), no local paper had been permitted. But even lies could be interesting if they were new lies: why else did people read so many books and magazines?

"I'd thought I would," he answered slowly. "The more you learn, the better off you'll be." He brought that last out like an article of faith, even if he couldn't see how he was all that much better off for his own schooling. He studied his elder daughter. "Why? Don't you want me to?"

"No!" she said, and shook her head so vigorously that auburn curls flipped into her face.

"I don't want to go, either," Mary exclaimed. "Hush," he told her. "I'm talking to your big sister." Mary did hold her tongue, but looked mutinous. She had an imp in her that wouldn't placidly let her do as she was told. Her backside got warmed more often than Julia's or Alexander's ever had. But the imp also drove her to acts of real, even foolhardy, courage, as when she'd charged at the American officer who'd wanted to take McGregor hostage in Rosenfeld. Her father turned back toward Julia. "You used to like school. Why don't you want to go any more?"

"You remember how I went last spring, when the Yankees let the schools open up again?" Julia asked. Arthur McGregor nodded. His daughter went on, "The books they made the teachers use, they were *American* books." She couldn't have spoken with greater contempt had she called them Satan's books.

"Numbers are numbers, and you do have to learn to cipher," he said.

Reluctantly, Julia nodded back at him. He added, "Words are words, too."

"No, they aren't," his daughter said. "Americans spell funny."

McGregor spelled funny himself. His spelling had probably got funnier in the years since he'd escaped the classroom. Julia, though, had always been clever in school. That must have come from Maude's side of the family; he knew it hadn't come from his. He said, "They don't spell all their words different—not even most." He thought that was true. He hoped it was.

At any rate, Julia didn't argue it. What she did say was, "It's not that stuff so much, Pa. It's the history lessons. I don't ever want to go to another one of those again." She looked and sounded on the edge of tears.

McGregor glanced down at the newspaper, which had come from a little town in the state of Dakota. He remembered what he'd thought about it moments before. 'They telling you lies in the schoolroom, sweetheart?" he asked.

Julia's nod was as emphatic as her headshake had been. 'They sure were, Pa," she answered. "All kinds of lies about how America was right to have the Revolution, and the king of England was a wicked tyrant, and the Loyalists were traitors, and they should have conquered us in 1812, and Canada was worse off for staying with England, and how England and France and the CSA kept stabbing the United States in the back. None of it's true, not even a little bit."

"Not even a little bit," Mary echoed happily.

"Hush," Arthur McGregor told her. He picked his words with care as he spoke to Julia: "It's what they have to teach to keep the schools open at all, same as the *Register* had to print what the Americans told it to a lot of the time."

"I understand *that."* Julia's voice was impatient. He'd underestimated her, and disappointed her because of it. She went on, "I know they're teaching us a pack of rubbish. I know what really happened, just like they taught me before when they were telling the truth. That isn't what bothers me, or not so much, anyway. But I don't think I can stand going back to school and listening to the teacher talk about all the lying things the Americans make him say and reading the books that say the same stupid things *and watching the other pupils at the schoolhouse listen to all the same lies and believe them"*

"Do they?" McGregor wished he had enough tobacco to let himself light a pipe right now. It would have helped him think. He looked at the Dakota newspaper again. People all over American-occupied Manitoba were getting papers on the same order as this one. He didn't take seriously the propaganda with which it was laced, and had assumed nobody else did, either. But how true was that assumption? All at once, he wondered.

"They really do, Pa," Julia said seriously, making him wonder all the more. "It's like they never paid attention before, so when the teacher tells them American lies and the books say the same thing, they don't know any better. They just give it back like they were so many parrots."

"Awrk!" Mary squawked. "Polly want a cracker?"

"Polly want to go to bed right now?" McGregor asked, and his youngest got very quiet. He sat there thinking, his chin in his hand. He was a hard-nosed, rock-chinned Scotsman; he knew what was so and what wasn't. So did his wife. They'd brought up their children to do the same, and evidently succeeded.

But what about the people who weren't the same and who didn't do the same for their children? He hadn't thought much about them. Now, listening to Julia, he realized that was a mistake. What about the light-minded souls who believed the Germans were about to take Petrograd and Paris and the Americans Richmond and Toronto, for no better reason than that the newspapers said as much? What about their children, who believed when they got told the Confederacy had had no right to secede from the United States or that Custer's massacre of General Gordon's brave column had been a heroic victory, not a lucky ambush? What about all the people like that?

McGregor got an answer, far more quickly and with far more confidence in his accuracy than if he'd had to do arithmetic on paper. If you filled the heads of people like that with nonsense like that, and did it for a few years or maybe for a generation at most, what would you have? You'd have people who weren't empty-headed Canadians any more. You'd have people who were empty-headed Americans instead.

"Maybe we won't send you back to that school after all," he said slowly. Julia beamed at him, looking as much surprised as delighted. And Mary let out such a whoop of delight that her mother came out of the kitchen to see what had happened.

When Arthur McGregor explained what he said and why, Maude nodded. "Yes, I think you're right," she said. "If they're going to try to make us over, we can't very well let them, can we?"

"I aim to do everything I can to stop them, anyhow," he answered. "We have primers of one sort or another here around the house, anyway. You and I can give the girls some lessons, anyhow. That way, when this country is back in Canadian hands the way it's supposed to be, they won't have lost too much time with their schooling."

"Oh, thank you, Papa!" Julia breathed. "Thank you so much."

Mary was looking less pleased with the solution. "You mean we'll have to go to school *here?"* she said. "That's no good."

"I expect your mother and I can probably do a better job of riding herd on you than any schoolteacher ever born," McGregor said.

By the expression on Mary's face, she expected the same thing, and the expectation filled her with something other than delight. She turned on her big sister. "Now look what you've gone and done," she said shrilly.

"It's not my fault," Julia said. Before Mary could demand whose fault it was if not hers, as Mary was plainly about to do, she answered the not yet spoken question on her own: "It's the Americans' fault." That, for a wonder, satisfied her little sister. Mary believed the Americans capable of any enormity. Arthur McGregor was inclined to agree with her.

Later that night, after the children were asleep and he and Maude lying down in their bed, his wife said to him, "I wouldn't mind so much sending the children to the school, no matter what it taught about history and such, if..." Her voice trailed away.

McGregor understood what she meant. He didn't want to say it, either, but say it he did: "If you thought they'd only have to listen to American lies for another year, or two at the most."

Beside him, Maude nodded. The night was warm, but she shivered. "I'm afraid we're going to lose the war, and I'm afraid we won't have a country we can call our own any more."

I'm afraid we're going to lose the war. Neither of them had come out and said that before now. "I think we'll beat them in the end," McGregor answered, trying to keep up his spirits as well as hers. "They haven't

licked us yet, and the mother country is helping all she can. Everything will turn out right. You wait and see."

"I hope so," she said. But then she sighed and fell asleep. Arthur McGregor hoped so, too, but he'd long since discovered the difference between what he hoped and what came true. Now that Maude had named the fear, he could feel it nibbling at his soul, too. *I'm afraid we're going to lose the war.* No matter how tired he was, sleep took a long time catching up with him.

Sam Carsten peered out of the barracks at Pearl Harbor toward the drydock where the damaged *Dakota* was being repaired. Other buildings hid the drydock from sight, but he knew exactly where it was. He thought he could have been dropped anywhere in or near Honolulu and pointed accurately toward it, just as a compass reliably pointed north. His affinity for the ship was hardly less than the instrument's for the North Magnetic Pole.

Knowing the *Dakota* was wounded ate at him, so much so that he burst out, "I'm afraid we're going to lose the goddamn war."

Hiram Kidde understood him perfectly. "Fleet's not gonna go to the devil on account of we're one battleship light," the gunner's mate said reassuringly. He got a sly look in his eye. " 'Sides, Sam, I know what's really eating you."

"What's that?" Carsten said.

"Now that we're stuck here on the beach, we have to make like soldiers instead of sailors," Kidde answered.

"That's not all bad." Carsten pointed to the row on row of iron cots. "Nice to be able to get some sack time without Crosetti farting in my face from the top bunk. Chow's better, too, same as it always is when we're in port instead of steaming. But... yeah. I haven't been out of a ship for such a long stretch since I joined up. I don't much like it."

"Me, neither," Kidde said, "on both counts, and I been in the Navy damn near as long as you've been alive. Other thing is, when you're on a ship you aren't just spinning your wheels. You keep things clean, you keep things neat, on account of it makes the ship work better. Doing it on dry land... Why bother?"

"Orders," Carsten said, making it a dirty word. "Somebody says you got to do it, you got to do it, never mind whether it makes sense."

"I'm damn glad you understand how that is, Sam, damn glad," Kidde said in a tone of voice that made Carsten realize he'd been betrayed—worse, that he'd just gone and betrayed himself. Smiling at how nicely the trap had worked, Kidde went on, "Got a lot of walks out there that need policing. Get yourself a broom and get to it."

"Have a heart, 'Cap'n,' " Sam said piteously. "You send me out in the sun for a couple hours here and they can stick an apple in my mouth and serve me up at the officers' mess tonight. I'll be cooked meat." He ran a hand along his arm, showing off his fair, fair skin.

"Grab a broom," Kidde said, all at once sounding much more like a chief petty officer than a buddy.

"I hope you screw Maggie Stevenson," Carsten said, and then, while Kidde was still blinking (any male human being who didn't want to screw Maggie Stevenson had to have a screw loose himself), he added, "right after the guy with the chancre."

There were people who, when they said things like that, started fights. When Carsten said things like that, he got laughs. "You're a funny guy—funny like a crutch," Kidde said, but, if he was trying not to chuckle, it was a losing effort. "Go on, funny guy, get moving."

Sam smeared his arms and his nose and the back of his neck with zinc oxide ointment. He was unhappily aware that the stuff didn't do much good, but it was, or at least it might have been, better than nothing. He supposed that made up for the medicinal stink of the goop.

Resigning himself to baking, he went out, broom and dustpan in hand. The dustpan wasn't standard military issue; some ingenious soul had mounted it on the end of a broomstick, too, so Sam didn't have to bend down every time he swept something into it. He approved of that. He approved of anything that made work easier, especially when it was work he had to do.

The walks were pretty clean. Even ashore, sailors were most of them neat people, carrying over the habits they'd picked up at sea. Whenever he came across a cigar butt or a crumpled-up empty pack of cigarettes or a scrap of paper, he swept it into the dustpan with a muttered, "God damn the Marines."

He muttered his curses for two reasons. First, he didn't know whether Marines were actually responsible for the trash, though he would have bet on it: they weren't trained to neatness the way ordinary Navy men were. The other reason was that, even if he'd been right, some Marines

walking by might have heard him, and they'd have beaten the stuffing out of him just as enthusiastically as if he'd been wrong.

Marines strolled through Pearl Harbor as if they owned the world. Marines acted that way even aboard ship. It drove Navy men crazy—but you had to be worse than crazy to want to mess with one of the hard-faced men in forest green. Even if you were a tough guy and you beat him, all of his buddies would come after you then, and they hung together a lot tighter than sailors did. Marines put Sam in mind of mean hunting dogs. You took them to where the game was, you pointed them at it, and you stood back and let them kill it. If you got in the way, they'd chew you up, too.

And so, when, after an hour or so of Sam's being out in the sun, a Marine walking past turned to his friend and said, "You smell something scorched?" Carsten kept on pushing his broom. Both Marines, themselves bronzed and fit-looking, laughed. He sighed. He couldn't do anything about the kind of skin he had except wish he were back in San Francisco, or maybe up in Seattle. Seattle was a good town if you were fair. The sun hardly ever came out, and when it did it was a lot paler than the lusty fire in the sky above Pearl Harbor.

Thinking of things in the sky above Pearl Harbor, Sam scanned it for aeroplanes. He didn't see any, either American or belonging to the enemies of the USA. He wished he hadn't seen the last aeroplane, that one from Japan. If it hadn't come buzzing around, the *Dakota* wouldn't have been in drydock with a large hole blown in her flank.

A couple of Navy men came by. They weren't off the *Dakota;* Carsten hadn't seen them before. He picked up snatches of their conversation—place names, mostly: "Kodiak... Prince Rupert... Victoria... Seattle."

Since he'd just been thinking wistfully of a cooler clime, he called after them: "What about Seattle?"

The two men stopped. "Nothing good," one of them answered. "The goddamn Japs have reinforced the limey fleet off British Columbia."

"You're right—that isn't good," Sam agreed. The places they'd mentioned made sense to him now. "They sailed up by way of Russian Alaska and then down along the west coast of Canada, did they?"

"That's what they did, all right, the bastards," the other sailor agreed unhappily. "On account of it, the North Pacific Squadron can't hardly stick its nose out of Puget Sound."

"You don't have to tell me about the Japs," Carsten said. "I was on the *Dakota* after they suckered us out of Pearl." The two strangers nodded sympathetically, for once at a predicament other than his sunburn. He went on, "You ask me, everybody in the whole damn Pacific had better watch out on account of the Japs. They're making like they're buddy-buddy with England, but if the limeys ever turn their backs on 'em, they'll get cornholed faster'n you'd believe. Us, too. I already seen that happen."

"We weren't out here yet when the Japs suckered you guys," one of the strangers said. He stuck out his hand. "Homer Bradley, off the *Jarvis"* He was sandy-haired but, to Carsten's annoyance, suntanned.

"Dino Dascoli, same ship," his companion added. The Honolulu sun wouldn't faze him; he was as swarthy as Vic Crosetti.

Carsten shook hands with both of them and introduced himself. Then he explained how the Americans' dash after the fleet that had launched the aeroplane had gone wrong, finishing, "As soon as we got torpedoed, it was easy to figure out what the hell we hadn't thought about. Next time, I hope we don't stick our dicks in the meat grinder that particular way."

"That's the truth," Bradley agreed. He studied Carsten's uniform. "You talk like a Seaman First, Sam, but you sort of sound like you think like an officer, you know what I mean?"

"Too damn much time on my hands, that's what it is, just like everybody else on the *Dakota* who isn't fixing her up," Sam said. "Nothin' to do but stuff like this or else sit around and play cards and shoot the breeze and think about things." He grinned. "Catch me at my battle station and I'm as stupid as anybody could want."

His new acquaintances grinned. "You got a good way of lookin' at things, Sam," Dino Dascoli said. He lowered his voice. "And since you got a good way of lookin' at things, maybe you got a good way of lookin' for things, too. A guy wants to have a good time around here, where's the best place at?"

"A good, good time?" Sam asked. Dascoli nodded. "You don't mind spending some money?" Dascoli nodded again. Sam smiled till his sunburned face hurt. "All right. What you do, then, is you hop on the trolley into Honolulu and you get off at the Kapalama stop. There's this gal named Maggie Stevenson ..." Dascoli and Bradley leaned closer.

Down below Jonathan Moss, the town of Guelph, Ontario, was dying a slow, horrible death. Incessant artillery fell on the Canadians and Englishmen still holding out in the provincial town built of gray stone. The guns had been hammering at the Church of Our Lady Cathedral for days; the Canucks weren't shy about putting artillery observers up in the spires, and so the spires had to come down. Come down they had. Only smoke rose above the cathedral now. It rose high enough to make Moss cough and choke some thousands of feet above the ruined house of God.

In a way, he wished the order loosing the one-deckers to fly above enemy-held territory had not come. It would have spared him the sight of towns given over to pounding from the big guns. He'd seen plenty of that while piloting observation aeroplanes, and would not have minded missing it in his flying scout.

In another way, though, it mattered little. Although he might not have seen them as they were being wrecked, he'd flown over plenty of towns after the United States took them away from Canada, and they made a pretty appalling spectacle then, too.

And, thrusting ahead like this, he felt he was doing more to help the American soldiers on the ground push forward against the unceasing and often insanely stubborn opposition of the Canadian and British troops struggling to hold them back.

"More than a year," he said through the buzz of the engine. "More than a year, and we still aren't in Toronto." He shook his goggled head. Back in August 1914, no one would have believed that. The Americans weren't in Montreal. As long as Canada still hung on to the land between the one big city and the other, she was still a going concern.

Moss knew better than to let such gloomy reflections keep him from doing what he needed to do to stay alive. He kept an eye on his position in the flight of four Martins. Without consciously thinking about it, he checked above, below, and to both sides; his head was never still. He used the rearview mirror the mechanics had installed on his aeroplane, but did not rely on it alone. Every minute or so, he'd half turn and look back over his shoulder.

He hoped that was all wasted precaution, but his hope didn't keep him from being careful. The Canucks hadn't been sending many aeroplanes up lately to oppose the U.S. machines, but the British were shipping over more and more aeroplanes and pilots to make up for the

shrinking pool of Canadian men and aircraft. He and his comrades had found out about that the hard way.

If the prospect of running into more British airmen bothered Dud Dudley, he didn't let on. The flight leader waggled his wings to make sure his comrades were paying attention to him, then dove down toward the ground. Moss spotted the target he had in mind: a column of men in butternut—no, he reminded himself, up here they called that color khaki, limey fashion—moving up toward the front.

The first time he'd machine-gunned men on the ground, he'd felt queasy and uncertain about it for days afterwards. He'd heard robbers were the same way: the first job they pulled was often almost impossibly hard. After that, things got easier, till they didn't really think about what they were doing, except the way any laborer might on the way to work.

He didn't know about robbers, not for sure. He did know that the only things going through his mind as he swooped on the marching soldiers like a hawk on a chipmunk were considerations of speed and altitude and angle, all the little practical matters that would help him do the foe as much damage as he could.

He swore when the men on the ground spotted him and his flightmates a few seconds faster than he'd hoped they would. The infantrymen began to scatter, and had good cover in which to shelter, for the road along which they were marching ran through what had been a built-up area that American artillery had rather drastically built down.

Little flashes from the ground said the soldiers down there were shooting at him. He didn't think much of it: after antiaircraft fire from cannon dedicated to the job, what were a few rifle bullets? Then one of them cracked past his head, almost close enough to be the crack of doom.

"Jesus!" he shouted, and stabbed his thumb down on the firing button of his machine gun. Bullets streamed out between the spinning blades of his propeller. He wished Dudley had never told him what happened when an interrupter gear got out of adjustment. If he shot himself down now, flying so low and fast, he'd surely crash. And even if, by some miracle, he did manage to glide to a landing, no insurance salesman would give him a dime's worth over coverage if he landed anywhere near the men he'd been shooting up. In their shoes, he would have settled his own hash, too.

There was a knot of them, running for the shelter of rubble that might once have been a row of shops. As long as he didn't shoot himself down, he held the whip hand. He fired another long burst and saw some of the men in khaki fall before he zoomed by.

Those are people, he thought with a small part of his mind as he gained altitude for another firing run. He had no trouble ignoring that small part. Those fleeing shapes in uniforms of the wrong color? They were just targets. And if they weren't targets, they were the enemy. He'd just been thinking about what they'd do if they caught him. They hadn't caught him. He'd caught them instead.

He turned and shot them up again. They put a lot of lead in the air, trying to shoot down his aeroplane and those of his flightmates. After the second pass, Dud Dudley waved for the flight to pull up and head back toward the American lines. Moss had no trouble obeying the flight leader. Neither did Tom Innis. But smoke was pouring out of Luther Carlsen's engine. The careful pilot hadn't been careful enough.

After the smoke came fire. It caught on the fabric of the one-decker's fuselage and licked backwards with hideous speed; the doping that made the fabric resist the wind was highly inflammable, and the slipstream pushed the flames along ahead of it.

Carlsen did everything he could. He beat at the flames with the hand he didn't keep on the controls. He brought the aeroplane's nose up into a stall, to reduce the force of the wind. But when he recovered from the stall—and he did that as precisely and capably as he did everything else—the fire engulfed the aeroplane. He crashed into what might once have been a pleasant block of houses in Guelph.

Numbly, Moss, Innis, and Dudley flew back to their aerodrome, which, with the forward movement of the front, had advanced to near the city of Woodstock. Woodstock, before the war, had been famous for its tree-lined avenues. When the front passed through it, the famous trees were reduced to kindling, in which sad state they remained. Woodstock had also been prominent for its munitions plants. Nothing was left of them but enormous craters: the retreating Canadians had exploded them to deny them to the USA.

The three survivors landed without any trouble. Groundcrew men asked what had happened to Carlsen. The pilots explained, in a couple of short sentences. The mechanics didn't push them. Those things had happened before. They would happen again, all too often.

Captain Shelby Pruitt took their report. "Nothing to be done," he said when they were through. "Go where there are bullets and they're liable to hit you." He shook his head. "It's too damn bad. He knew what he was doing up there." Pointing to a big tent not far from the one in which he made his office, he added, "Go on over to the officers' club. I'm not going to send you up tomorrow." That was the polite way of saying, *Go get drunk and then sleep it off.* The pilots gratefully took him up on it. Staring down into a glass of whiskey, Tom Innis said, "I always figured I would be the one to go. Luther did everything right all the time. Now he's dead. God damn it to hell, anyway." He knocked back the drink and signaled for another.

"Don't talk about who's going to go," Moss said, earnestly if a little blurrily—the tip of his nose was getting numb, and so was his tongue. "Bad luck."

"Bad luck," Innis repeated. He gulped down the new drink, too. "How many pilots who started the war will still be alive at the end of it, do you think?"

Moss didn't answer that. He didn't want to think about it, not at all. To keep from thinking about it, he got as drunk as he could as fast as he could. He and Innis and Dud Dudley were all staggering when they made their way back to their tent. By the time they got there, somebody had cleaned out Luther Carlsen's personal effects, to send back to his next of kin. Seeing the bare, neat, empty cot made Moss shiver. He'd taken over a cot like that. Who, one of these days, would take over the one over which he now sprawled at an angle no sober man would have chosen?

He was lucky. He fell asleep—or passed out—before he could dwell on that one for long. When he woke up the next morning, the whiskey had taken its revenge, and he hurt too bad to dwell on anything.

But that afternoon, after gallons of coffee and the hair of the dog that bit him, he felt almost human, in an elderly, melancholy way. He was writing a letter to a cousin in Cleveland when the tent flap opened. Captain Pruitt led in a gawky young man with a green-gray duffel slung over his shoulder. "Gentlemen," he said, "this is Zach Whitby. Lieutenant Whitby, we have here Dan Dudley, Tom Innis, and Jonathan Moss."

Whitby threw the duffel down on the cot that had been Luther Carlsen's. He stuck out his hand. "Pleased to meet you all."

"You all?" Moss ran the words together. "Look out, boys, we've got a Reb flying with us." If you laughed, you didn't have to think about it... not so much, anyhow.

"Why, Major, why did you pick *my* farm?" Lucien Galtier demanded. As he knew perfectly well what the answer to that question was, he was not so much seeking information as plumbing the depths of Major Jedediah Quigley's hypocrisy.

"I have several excellent reasons, *Monsieur* Galtier," Quigley answered. As he spoke, he ticked them off on his fingers, which, with his elegant Parisian accent and his incisive logic, made him seem more a lawyer than a soldier to Galtier: an invidious comparison if ever there was one. "First, *monsieur,* your farm is sufficiently far back from the banks of the St. Lawrence as to be beyond artillery range even from the gunboats that try to harass our operations on the river and our crossings. This is an important matter in the placement of a hospital, as I am sure you must agree." Without waiting to learn whether Galtier agreed or not, he went on, "Second, the road is already paved to within a couple of miles of your farm. Extending it this much farther is a work of no great trouble."

"I would not put you to any trouble whatever," Galtier said, knowing he was fighting a losing battle.

"As I say, it is a small matter," Quigley replied. "It will even work to your advantage: an all-weather road passing by your farm will enable you to sell your produce ever so much more readily than you do now."

"I shall have ever so much less produce to sell, however, as you are taking so much of my patrimony for the purpose of building this hospital," Lucien told him. "And you appear to be taking the best land I have, that given over to wheat."

"Only the most convenient," Major Quigley assured him. "And you will be compensated for the use."

"Compensated as I was for my produce last winter?" Galtier shot back. Quigley shrugged, a fine French gesture to go with his fine French tongue. Yes, his hypocrisy was deep indeed. He never once mentioned Lucien's refusal to give names to Father Pascal or to collaborate with the Americans in any other way. But the farmer was as sure as he was of his own name that, had he chosen to collaborate, the hospital would have gone up on someone else's land.

Quigley said, "Do not think of this hospital as a permanent structure,

Monsieur Galtier. It will serve its purpose for the time being and then pass away and be forgotten. As we establish and enlarge our foothold north of the St. Lawrence, no doubt it will become practical for us to build hospitals in secure areas there."

"No doubt," Lucien agreed tonelessly. Thinking he ought to learn all he could about the American incursion on the far side of the river, he asked, "And how is the war faring for you there?"

Major Quigley spread his hands. Though not a real Frenchman, he played the role well enough to take it on the stage. "Not so well as we would like, not so poorly that the enemy will be able to throw us back into the river."

By *the enemy,* of course, he meant the forces of Galtier's rightful government and those of Great Britain, which was proving a loyal ally to France. Lucien did not reply. What could he say? He was just an ordinary farmer. He supposed he should have been grateful that the American's revenge was no worse than this. From what he had heard, people who crossed the U.S. military government sometimes disappeared off the face of the earth. He had a wife and half a dozen children who needed him. He could not afford to let his tongue run as free as he might have liked.

When he didn't say anything, Jedediah Quigley shrugged again. 'There you are, *Monsieur* Galtier. We should start construction in the next few days. If you have any objections to the plan as currently constituted, you can offer them to the occupation authorities in Riviere-du-Loup."

'Thank you so much, Major Quigley," Galtier said, so smoothly that the American did not notice he was being sardonic. Oh, yes, you could make a trip up to Riviere-du-Loup for the privilege of complaining to the authorities about what they were doing to you. But, since they'd already decided to do it, how much was that likely to accomplish? The short answer was, *not much.* The longer answer was that it might do harm, because daring to complain would get his name underlined on the list the occupation authorities surely kept of those they did not trust.

"Now that I have given you the news, *Monsieur,* I must return to town," Quigley said. He climbed onto an utterly prosaic bicycle and pedaled away.

Off to the north, across the river, artillery rumbled. Galtier wondered whether it belonged to the American invaders or to those who tried to

defend Quebec against them. The defenders, he hoped. He glanced up to the sky. The weather was still fine and mild. How much longer it would remain fine and mild, with September heading toward October, remained to be seen. Long enough for him to finish getting in the harvest—that long, certainly, if God was merciful even to the least degree. But the day after the harvest was done...

"Let the snow come then," he said, half prayer, half threat. The Americans would not have an easy time keeping an army on the far side of the wide river supplied if the winter was harsh. The defenders would not have an easy time, either, but they would not be cut off from their heartland as the invaders would. How well did Americans, used to warm weather, deal with weather that was anything but? Before long, the world would find out.

Marie came out of the farmhouse and looked down the road toward Riviere-du-Loup. Major Quigley, a rapidly disappearing speck, was still visible. Lucien wished Quigley would disappear for good. His wife asked, "What did the *Boche americain* want of you?"

"He was generous enough to inform me"—Lucien rolled his eyes—"the Americans are taking some of our land for the purpose of building a hospital on it. It is a safe place to do so, Major Quigley says."

Marie stamped her foot. "If he wants to build it in a safe place, why does he not put it in Father Pascal's church? No one would bring war to holy ground, is it not so?"

"That is an excellent thought," Galtier said. "Even the pious father could not disagree with it, good and Christian man that he is." He shook his head. The war was making him more cynical than he'd ever dreamt of being before it began.

"But no," Marie went on. "It must be on our good cropland. Well, I have a hope for this hospital of theirs."

"I have the same hope, I think," Lucien said. His wife looked a question his way. "I hope it is very full of Americans," he told her. She nodded, satisfied. They'd been married a long time, and thought a lot alike.

Stephen Ramsay used a makeshift periscope to look up over the parapet at the Yankee lines between Nuyaka and Beggs. If he'd stuck his head up to have a look around, some damnyankee sniper would have blown off the top of it. The Creek regiment in which Ramsay was a captain had pushed U.S. troops a few miles back from Nuyaka, but

then the lines had set like concrete.

He turned the periscope this way and that. What he saw remained pretty much the same, regardless of the angle: barbed wire, some shiny and new, some rusting; firing pits for Yankee scouts; and then another trench line just like his.

Lowering the periscope—a couple of little hand mirrors mounted at the proper angles on a board—he turned to Moty Tiger and said, "Far as I can see, those damnyankee sons of bitches are here to stay."

"That's not good, sir," the Creek sergeant answered seriously. 'This is our land, Creek land. If we can, we have to throw them off here. You Confederates have the right to be here. You are our friends. You are our allies. But we have been enemies of the United States for many generations. The Yankees do not belong here."

"I'm not going to argue with you, Sergeant," Ramsay said. "All I'm going to do is give you this here periscope and let you take a look for yourself. If that looks like a position we can rush, you tell me straight out. Go on—take a look."

Moty Tiger looked. He looked carefully—or as carefully as he could, given the limitations of the instrument. As Ramsay had before him, he lowered it. His coppery face was glum. "Doesn't look easy, Captain," he admitted.

"I didn't think so, either," Ramsay said, with more than a little relief. He'd been afraid Moty Tiger would think like a Creek before he thought like a soldier, and would feel duty-bound to try to recover every scrap of Creek territory regardless of the cost. He outranked his sergeant, of course, but Moty Tiger was a Creek and he wasn't. In a contest for the hearts and minds of the soldiers in the Creek Nation Army, that counted more than rank did. For that matter, Moty Tiger didn't just influence the opinions of his fellow Indians: he also reflected those opinions.

There the matter rested till late that afternoon, when Colonel Lincoln came up to the front-line trench. When Ramsay saw the regimental C.O.'s face, his heart sank. Lincoln looked thoroughly grim. He didn't say anything. Ramsay got the idea that wasn't because he didn't know anything—more likely because he knew too much, and didn't like any of it.

When Lincoln stayed quiet for more than five minutes, Ramsay, who favored the direct approach, asked him, "What's gone wrong now, sir?"

Colonel Lincoln gestured for Ramsay to walk with him. Once they got out of earshot of the men, Lincoln said, "I'll tell you what's gone wrong. Charlie Fixico's up and decided he's a goddamn general, that's what."

"Uh-oh," Ramsay said, without any great eloquence but most sincerely. "What sort of stupid, impossible thing does he have in mind for us to do?" He still thought like a sergeant, not an officer: what were generals for but ordering troops to try to do stupid, impossible things?

Lincoln was a longtime officer, but he looked to feel the same way. Pointing northeast, he answered, "He wants us to break through that Yankee line and retake Beggs."

"Jesus," Ramsay said. He'd talked Moty Tiger out of that. Talking the chief of the Creek Nation out of it wasn't going to be easy. "Why does he want to do that? Isn't he grateful we saved Okmulgee for him?"

"Not any more, he's not. That was a while ago, and politicians aren't what you'd call good at remembering," Lincoln answered. "Why? Two reasons, far as I can make out. First one is, he wants to get back the oil fields around Beggs. Second one is, it's Creek territory, it's got damnyankees on it, and he wants 'em gone. That's about what it boils down to."

"Jesus," Ramsay said again. "Doesn't he know that if we try to take those Yankee positions, we're gonna get ourselves slaughtered, nothing else but?"

"If he doesn't, it's not because I didn't tell him till I was blue in the face," Lincoln answered. "He ordered the attack to go in anyhow."

"I hope you got the Confederate corps commander to overrule him, sir," Ramsay said. "It'd be suicide, like I said."

"I went to corps headquarters, yes," Lincoln said. "They told me that if Chief Fixico wants an attack, Chief Fixico gets an attack. Two reasons, again. One is, his own men—us—are in it, so he's not asking the CSA to do all his work for him. Two is, near as I can tell, they don't want to make the Indians angry, so they go along with any requests they get. Bombardment begins tomorrow morning at 0300—supposed to chew up the barbed wire between us and them and make reaching their trenches easier. We go over the top at 0600."

"Yes, sir," Ramsay said. He couldn't think of anything else to say. He knew what was liable to happen shortly after 0600. He wasn't afraid—

or not very much afraid, at any rate. What he felt was more like numbness, as if he'd been told out of the blue he'd need a surgical operation.

He went up and down the trench line, letting the men know what they'd be doing at dawn tomorrow. Some of the Creeks, especially the younger ones and the replacements who hadn't seen much action, looked excited. A couple of them let out happy yowls: war cries. Moty Tiger just glanced up at Ramsay and nodded. What was going on behind those black eyes, that impassive face? Ramsay couldn't tell.

He made sure his rifle was clean and that he had plenty of ammunition, then wrapped himself in his blanket and tried to sleep. He didn't think he would, but he did. The beginning of the barrage at 0300 woke him. He got up and made sure the men would be ready to move forward when the shelling stopped. "With luck," he said, "the damnyankees'll be too battered to do any shooting back till we're in amongst 'em. Good luck, boys."

At 0600 on the dot, the bombardment ended. Colonel Lincoln blew a whistle. "Let's go!" he shouted.

Out of the trenches swarmed the Creek Nation Army, along with Confederate troops proper to either side of them. They went forward as fast as they could, knowing their best hope for safety was getting to the enemy front line before U.S. troopers could recover from the barrage they'd taken and reach the firing steps— and the machine guns they surely had all along the line.

The shelling had knocked aside or wrecked some of the barbed wire, but not all, or even most. First one Creek, then another, then another, got hung up in it. "Don't try and cut 'em loose," Ramsay called. "Keep moving. That's the best thing we can do." It wasn't easy. The stuff grabbed and clung and bit, so you felt as if you were moving underwater with sharks nipping you, or through a nightmare, trying without much luck to run from a monster you dared not turn around and see.

But the monster was in front. Here and there along the Yankee line, muzzle flashes showed men who, despite the artillery barrage, knew they had to kill the attackers now or die themselves in moments. Then a couple of machine guns, one right in front of Ramsay, came to hammering life.

Men of the Creek Nation Army fell before that hateful patter like

wheat before a reaper. There went Moty Tiger, clutching at his belly. There went Colonel Lincoln, down with boneless finality.

My regiment now, Ramsay thought. He waved the survivors forward. "Come on!" he shouted. "We can still—"

One moment, he was advancing. The next, without warning, he found himself lying in a shell hole, staring in confusion at dirt and a couple of bits of rusty barbed wire. He had trouble breathing. He couldn't figure out why till he tasted blood in his mouth. *How did that happen?* he wondered vaguely. He looked up at the sky. It was going black. *That's not right,* he thought. *It's morning, not*

XX

Sylvia Enos collected the mail from the box in the front hall of her apartment building. She crumpled up a patent-medicine circular. The allotment check from the Navy she kept.

Her lips twisted in a bitter smile. She had the money, drawn from George's pay, as he'd said she would before he enlisted. The only trouble was, she didn't care about the money. She would sooner have had her husband back. When he'd stayed in Boston after joining the Navy, when he'd, in essence, gone back to being a fisherman, she'd been overjoyed. Her life had returned to one not far different from what she'd known before the war started, even if she had kept her job at the canning plant. Considering all the dislocations that had come since 1914, she'd counted herself lucky.

"So much for luck," she said as she started upstairs. Now George was gone, and gone farther and more irrevocably than when he'd languished in Confederate imprisonment. All she had by which to remember him were the monthly allotment checks and an occasional letter. There could have been more letters, she supposed, but George had never been much of a writer.

The hallway and the stairwell were not so warm as they had been a few weeks before: Boston's summer, hot while it lasted, couldn't be counted on to last far into September. For the moment, cutting the heat only made days and nights more pleasant. Pretty soon, though, she wouldn't be wrangling with the Coal Board over fuel enough to cook her food. She'd be wrangling with its inflexible clerks and stubborn supervisors over fuel enough to keep her from freezing during the winter.

She left the stairwell and trudged wearily down the hall to Mrs.

Coneval's apartment. She stood there in front of the doorway for a moment before she knocked. It sounded as if the children were fighting a battle of their own inside, a battle about the size of some of the big ones on the Kentucky front. She wondered how Brigid Coneval put up with the noise.

When she did knock, she needed to hammer on the door to get anyone within to notice she was there. After a while, Brigid Coneval opened the door. The racket, without wood between it and Sylvia, grew from alarming to appalling. "A bit rowdy they are today," Mrs. Coneval said with a smile that could only be described as wan.

"So it would seem," Sylvia agreed. She knew she would have gone crazy, cooped up in there the day around with a horde of screaming children. Given the choice between that and the factory job she had, she would have chosen factory work a hundred times out of a hundred. Her own two children were plenty to try to keep under control.

"I'll get your wee ones," Brigid Coneval said, and disappeared back into chaos. A toddler smaller than Mary Jane started to howl. Sylvia thanked heaven she hadn't got pregnant again after George came back from the CSA. Trying to take care of a new baby by herself, along with two small children, was nothing to anticipate with glee.

Mrs. Coneval came back holding Mary Jane by one hand and George, Jr., by the other. George, Jr., twisted in her grasp and fired an imaginary rifle at one of the other children. "I got you, Joey, you dirty Reb!"

"No, you didn't—you missed me," Joey shouted back—the next small boy who admitted himself slain in imaginary conflict would be the first. "And I'm not the Reb—you are!"

"Liar, liar, pants on fire," George, Jr., yelled at him, which made Mary Jane giggle. George, Jr., said, "Hello, Mama. Joey cheats."

"I don't either!" Joey exclaimed.

"It doesn't matter now, one way or the other," Sylvia said. By the look on his face, her son was prepared to disagree with that as eloquently as he could. She didn't give him the chance. "See you tomorrow morning," she said to Mrs. Coneval, and took her children back to their apartment.

It seemed empty without her husband there. She was used to having

him gone for days at a time; she'd even had to grow used to having him gone for much longer than that while he was a Confederate detainee. Now, though, with him in St. Louis, she had the strong sense she wouldn't see him again till the war ended, and it didn't look as if it was going to end any time soon.

She had some good scrod in the icebox. She hadn't lost the connections she'd made down on T Wharf; as a fisherman's wife (even if her husband wasn't actually fishing right now), she could find better fish than the ordinary shopper and pay less for it. She breaded the scrod, pan-fried it in lard on top of the stove, and served it up with mashed potatoes.

George, Jr., ate everything up and demanded more. He ate almost as much as a man, or so it seemed. She was probably wrong about that, she admitted to herself as she gave him more potatoes, but she wasn't wrong about his outgrowing all his clothes. She patted her purse. The allotment check would come in handy the next time she went shopping at Filene's.

Mary Jane, by contrast, had to be cajoled into eating much of anything. Sylvia produced a gumdrop from a bowl on a shelf too high for the children to reach. She set it on the table. "Do you want it?" she asked her daughter.

Eyes wide with longing, Mary Jane nodded. Having once made the dreadful error of saying no to candy, she wasn't about to repeat it.

"All right," Sylvia said. "Eat up your supper and you can have it." Sometimes that got results, sometimes a tantrum. Today it worked. Mary Jane cleaned her plate and stretched out a hand that needed washing. "Good girl," Sylvia told her, handing her the sweet.

After she'd scrubbed the dishes, she settled the children down on the couch, one on either side of her, and read to them from *Queen Zixi of Ix.* Mary Jane's attention sometimes wandered. When she got off the couch, went over to get a doll, and then came back to play with it, Sylvia didn't mind. The story held George, Jr., rapt for most of an hour. By then, it was time for Sylvia to get the children into bed. Morning came all too early.

Then she had the apartment to herself, before she also had to go to bed. When George was home, they'd sit and talk while he smoked a pipe or cigar. When he was out fishing, she'd look forward to his return. Now... now he was gone, and the place seemed large and

empty and quiet as the tomb.

She walked around for a while with a feather duster, flicking specks from tables and gewgaws. What with the dirt and soot always in the air, things got dusty faster than they had any proper business doing. That would worsen in winter, when everyone burned more coal—always assuming the Coal Board didn't decide to let people turn to blocks of ice instead.

She realized she was dusting a china dog for the third time. Shaking her head, she put the feather duster away. Time hung heavy when she was alone, but not that heavy. She went into the bedroom, changed into a nainsook cotton nightgown with lace at the neck and sleeves, and set out the drawers and skirt and shirtwaist she'd wear the next morning. Then she went into the bathroom, where she cleaned her teeth and gave her hair a hundred strokes with the brush in front of the mirror over the sink. Evening ritual done, she went back into the bedroom, turned off the gas lamp, and lay down.

She sat up with a start. "Lord have mercy, I'd forget my head if it wasn't sewed on tight!" she exclaimed. Not wanting to get up and light the lamp again, she fumbled in the darkness with the alarm clock on the nightstand. Had she forgotten to set it, she would surely have been late to work, which would have got her docked at best and fired at worst. "Can't have that," she said, as if someone lying beside her was trying to talk her into sleeping as long as she wanted.

But no one was lying beside her. The bed felt large and empty. Some nights, she was so tired she hardly noticed George was gone and would be gone God only knew how long. Others, she missed him to the point where tears ran down her face. They did no good. She knew that. Knowing didn't help.

She lay on her back, staring at the ceiling and trying without much luck to go to sleep. She closed her eyes, which didn't seem to make the room much darker. But with her eyes closed, as they usually were when she and George made love, it was easier to imagine him on top of her, imagine his familiar weight pressing her down on the mattress, imagine his breath warming the hollow of her shoulder in quick gasps.

Imagination, now, was all she had. She shifted restlessly on the bed. If George were there now, she'd be able to sleep pretty soon. She shifted again. The hem of her nightgown rode up past her knees. She reached down. Instead of straightening it, she hiked it up to her waist.

A few minutes later, she rolled over onto her side. She would sleep now. She knew it. She bit her lip, not caring to remember what she'd just done. But when your man was away for months, maybe for years, what were you supposed to do? It wasn't as good as the real thing with George (actually, that wasn't quite true—it felt as good, or maybe even better, but it was lonely at the end), but it was better than nothing.

"Better than nothing," she muttered drowsily. With the war on, wasn't that as much as anybody had any business expecting? Her eyelids slid down over her eyes, of themselves this time. She started to say something else, but only a soft snore passed her lips.

"Masks and goggles!" Captain Orville Wyatt ordered as the bombardment of the Confederate positions east of the Roanoke began. Chester Martin quickly tied the hyposulfite-impregnated mask over his mouth and nose. He breathed in chemical dampness. That was unpleasant, but much less so than breathing in the poison gas that shells were spreading up and down the Rebel lines. He took off his newly issued helmet to strap the goggles over his eyes. He didn't know whether to curse the weight of the thing or bless it for making his brains less likely to be splattered over the landscape.

Beside Martin, Specs Peterson swore. "They've been usin' this damn gas more since they started loading it into shells than they did when they shot it out of those projector things, and I fucking hate it," he said. "I can leave my glasses on and have the chlorine eat my eyes up, or I can take 'em off and fall on my damn face half a dozen times before I get to where the Rebs are at. Hell of a deal, ain't it?"

"I'm in the same boat, Peterson," Captain Wyatt said, touching the earpiece to his own spectacles. "I've been leaving my glasses on. My eyes get better after a couple of days, seems like."

"Yeah, but you want to be a hero," Peterson muttered under his breath. "Me, I just want to get out of this in one piece."

"Amen," Chester Martin said. "All I want to do is live through this damn war and go home and make steel. I used to complain about that job like nobody's business. It was hot and it was dirty and it was hard and it was dangerous. And it's still every damn one of those things. And you know what else? Next to what we're doin' now, it's so fine, I'll never grouse again."

"Nothin' worse than farm work—I always used to say that," Corporal

Paul Andersen put in. "Only goes to show I didn't know what the hell I was talking about. You do your two years as a conscript and that's not so bad. You figure real soldiering works out the same way. Ha!" His wave took in the trenches, the filth, the vermin, the fear, the foe.

Captain Wyatt said, "Once upon a time, Virginia used to belong to the USA. Now we're working to take it back. It's not the kind of job anybody wants to do, but it needs doing. If everything goes right, we keep their front trenches. No matter what happens, we bring some prisoners back for interrogation." He went up and down the trench line, checking to make sure his soldiers' masks and goggles were on securely. He was a long way from being the most good-natured of men, but he fussed over the soldiers in his company like a mother cat with a litter of kittens. As far as Martin was concerned, that made him a good officer.

The bombardment went on and on. Every so often, the Confederates would lob a few shells back at the U.S. lines, but they were taking it a lot harder than they were dishing it out. That suited Martin fine. He'd been on the receiving end of too many barrages to suit him. Giving was better—an un-Christian thought but a true one nonetheless.

Sharp as an axe coming down, the shelling ended. Up and down the trench line, whistles sounded. Martin scrambled up the steps made of sandbags, over the parapet, and toward the Rebel lines.

Pioneers had cut some paths through the barbed wire between the U.S. and Confederate lines, marking them with strips of cloth tied to the wire. Martin liked that and hated it at the same time. It gave him an easier way toward the enemy trenches, but also gave the Rebel machine gunners a notion of what the way was. If they'd zeroed their weapons on it... He tried not to think about that, as he tried not to think of any of the disasters that might befall him.

Here and there, the bombardment had knocked down the posts that supported the barbed wire, leaving it sprawled in snaky coils on the rubble-strewn ground of what had probably been a suburb of Big Lick, Virginia. When Chester Martin saw relatively clear stretches of that sort, he used them to move forward. The Rebs wouldn't have so many guns pointed there as they would at the paths.

He blew out through the thick, wet gauze pad he wore over his mouth. The first couple of gas attacks had let U.S. forces gain and consolidate their positions east of the Roanoke River. Now, though, the Rebs had learned how to defend themselves against the new

American weapon, and pushing them back had turned into another hard job.

He wasn't more than halfway toward their trenches, and already the Rebels were shooting back at him and his men, the muzzle flashes of their rifles seeming bright as the sun. Machine guns started up a moment later. Somewhere not far away, he heard the wet smack of a bullet striking flesh. Whoever was hurt there, he hoped it wasn't too bad and he hoped they'd be able to get the fellow to a doctor before he bled to death. That also made him hope nobody would get hurt picking up the wounded man. Nobody was supposed to shoot at people wearing Red Cross armbands, but bullets, as he'd learned too well, weren't fussy about whom they hit.

One of the machine guns, traversed by what their crews matter-of-factly called a two-inch tap, sent bullets kicking up dirt not far from his feet. He dove headlong into a shell hole in front of him. A horrid stench rose. Part of it came from the pool of noisome, stagnant water at the bottom of the hole. More was from the body, or rather fragments of body, entombed under dirt and shattered bricks. U.S. forces were advancing, so the dead man was presumably a Confederate. But he would have smelled just as bad had he been born in Michigan.

Martin wished the gauze mask he wore were as good at neutralizing stenches as it was at keeping chlorine from searing his lungs. That, though, wasn't why it had been designed. He tried to keep his unruly stomach under control. If he took off the mask to puke, who could guess how much poison gas he'd breathe in after every retch?

The hail of machine-gun bullets passed on beyond the shell hole. Crawling through muck of a sort he didn't care to contemplate, Martin peered out over the forward lip of the hole. Whatever else he did he couldn't stay there. Grunting under the weight of his pack, he heaved himself upright again and ran on.

Here came the trenches. He could see murky spots up and down their length, spots where chlorine gas still lingered. The Confederate defenders wore masks like his. A lot of them had goggles, too. They were either bareheaded or in caps, though: no one had yet issued them helmets.

One of the Rebs raised a rifle to shoot at Martin. He shot first, though, on the run and from the hip. As much by luck as anything else, the Confederate howled and dropped his weapon to clutch at his chest.

Yelling, Martin leaped down into the trench. He used his bayonet to make sure the Confederate wasn't going anywhere, then pulled a grenade improvised from nails and a half-pound block of explosive out of one of his equipment pouches and flung it into the next trench back. Somebody screamed a moment after it exploded, so he supposed he'd done that right.

He looked around, collected a couple of his soldiers by eye, and headed down the trench toward the next traverse. Like U.S. forces, the Confederates sensibly did not dig their trenches as long, straight gashes in the earth. Had they been so foolish, any foes who got into them could have delivered a deadly enfilading fire. Unfortunately, the game was harder than that. Firebays like the one he and his companions were in led to other firebays advanced or recessed from them by a short stretch of perpendicular trench, a traverse, so that the line, if viewed from an aeroplane, took on the look of a postage stamp perforated with insane regularity. Just because your side held a firebay didn't mean the enemy wasn't still lurking in the next traverse.

Finding out who was in the next traverse—or the next firebay, if you were in a traverse—was not a job for the faint of heart. Neither was getting rid of those people, if they happened to be wearing butternut while you were in green-gray. One way was to go up out of the trenches and crawl along the ground between them. Doing that, though, was a lot like a snail's jumping out of its shell to run faster: the poor creature was all too likely to get squashed.

Charging round a corner was not recommended, either. The other fellow had had too much time to prepare nasty surprises for you. Nearing a corner of the firebay, Martin called, "Give up, you Rebs!"

The only answer he got back was a grenade flying through the air. It was thrown too far, and detonated on the level ground beyond the firebay. His own men knew how to reply to it. Several grenades, tossed with better effect, rained down on the Confederates. Grenades, Martin reflected, were handy things: they gave an infantryman a little artillery of his own. And, like artillery, they didn't have to wound to be effective. Even a near miss could leave a soldier shaken and stunned.

Martin bet his life the grenades had stunned the Rebs in the traverse for a couple of vital seconds. He charged round the corner of the trench. One Reb had been stationed there to deal with any such unwelcome newcomers, but he was down and thrashing, blood pouring from his belly out between his fingers. Followed by the men

he'd gathered, Martin ran past him and around the next bend. Another Confederate was down there, and still others on their feet. "Hands up, you Rebs!" he screamed.

Reggie Bartlett could barely hear the screamed order to surrender. One of the grenades the damnyankees had thrown had gone off only a few feet away from him. He looked down at his trouser leg. He was bleeding. Neither the pain nor the flow of blood was too bad, though, so he guessed whatever fragment or nail had hit him had drilled straight through muscle without getting stuck there or slamming into bone.

"Hands up!" the Yankee sergeant yelled again. Reggie let his rifle fall to the mud of the trench floor and raised his hands over his head. He knew he and his companions were lucky to get a chance to surrender after they'd tried to fight back. A lot of times, in situations like that, the side winning the fight in the trenches left only the losers' corpses.

The U.S. soldiers swarmed over him, Jasper Jenkins, and the other privates who hadn't been hurt—or not badly hurt, anyway, as a couple of them bore minor wounds not much different from Bartlett's. Corporal McCorkle lay on the ground, moaning. The U.S. soldier shook his head. "Poor bastard must have taken most of a grenade's worth, right in the gut," he said.

"He had a lot of gut to take it in," the sergeant answered, truthfully but unkindly. He frisked Reggie with thorough haste, depriving him of his pocket watch, his wallet, and whatever loose change he had in his pockets. Bartlett made no move to stop him, understanding it would be the last move he ever made if he did. Confederate troops plundered Yankee prisoners just as enthusiastically when they got the chance.

Off toward either side and back deeper in the Confederate position, the sound of fighting was picking up. The U.S. sergeant peered ever so cautiously over the parados at the rear of the trench, treating it as if it were the parapet at the front, which, from his point of view, it was.

He fired a couple of rounds at whatever he saw back there, then shook his head. The iron kettles he and his men wore gave them a look as if out of another time, old and fierce and sullen. What with helmet, goggles, and mask, hardly any of his face was actually visible. One of his men, who wore ordinary glasses instead of goggles and whose eyes were red and teary, said, "We ain't gonna be able to hold these trenches, Sarge."

"Yeah, I think you're right," the sergeant answered regretfully after gauging the noise again. "We're bringing back prisoners, so the brass can't grouse too bad." He turned to Bartlett and the other captured Confederates. "All right, you lugs, up over the top and back to the American lines. Don't try anything cute or you'll find out how cute dead is."

Reggie had gone over the top a good many times, but never before without a rifle in his hands. He felt very naked, very much exposed as he awkwardly got up into no-man's-land and scrambled back through the barbed wire toward the forwardmost U.S. trenches. A few of the damnyankees in those trenches shot at him and his comrades. He was glad they quit when they saw the Yankee soldiers coming along behind the men in butternut.

He'd hoped he'd have a chance to jump in a shell hole and have the sergeant and the rest of the Yankees go on by so he could sneak back to his own lines. It didn't happen. One reason it didn't was that the Confederates whose positions hadn't been overrun were shooting at the damnyankees, who bunched up close to their prisoners to discourage that. How were you supposed to escape a man who kept stepping on your bootheels?

The unhappy answer was, you couldn't. Bartlett had jumped down into U.S. trenches, too, but this time the Yankees had rifles and he didn't. "Well done, Sergeant," said one of them—an officer, by his demeanor.

'Thank you, Captain Wyatt," the sergeant answered. "Long as you're back here, I don't suppose I'm in trouble for not holding onto that stretch of Rebel entrenchment."

"No, nothing to worry about there, Martin," the officer—Wyatt— said. "Sometimes we manage to advance a few yards, sometimes we don't. They're more ready to face gas than they used to be." He pointed to the mask on Reggie's face.

"Yes, sir." Sergeant Martin shed his own mask and goggles. He rounded on Bartlett. "All right, Reb, let's have it."

"Reginald Bartlett, private, Confederate States Army," Reggie answered, and recited his pay number.

"What unit, Bartlett?" Sergeant Martin asked.

"I don't have to tell you that," Bartlett said.

The sergeant glanced over to his captain. Like one of Martin's soldiers, Captain Wyatt wore spectacles. Behind them, his eyes were not only reddened by chlorine but thoroughly grim. "I'm only going to tell you this once, Bartlett, so you'd better listen hard—the rest of you Rebs, too. Do you know how many thousand miles this godforsaken chunk of Virginia is from the Hague?"

It wasn't a geography question, although, from the way Jasper Jenkins frowned and scowled, he thought it was. Reggie knew better. What Wyatt had just given him was a warning: no matter what the formal laws of war said about forcing information out of prisoners, he was going to ask whatever he was going to ask, and he expected answers.

"Let's try again, Bartlett," Martin said, proving Reggie had been right. "What unit?"

If he didn't talk, he knew exactly what would happen to him. He didn't want to die in a Yankee trench, without even a chance to hit back at the enemy. He wished the U.S. sergeant had picked someone else on whom to start the questioning. He wouldn't have been so ashamed had he been the second or third man to open up rather than the first.

"Seventh Virginia Infantry," he said rapidly. There. It was done.

Captain Wyatt turned to the rest of the Confederates. "How about you boys?" The other men fairly fell over themselves agreeing. Reggie wondered if Wyatt had called them *boys* to stress that they were as much his inferiors as Negroes were whites' inferiors in the CSA. If so, the captain was one devious fellow. Bartlett covertly studied him. That seemed likely.

"Who's your battalion commander?" Wyatt demanded.

"Major Colleton." Jasper Jenkins got it out a split second ahead of Reggie. As if to make up for that, Reggie added, "I don't think he was there when you all raided us—he was back at Division HQ."

"Was he?" Wyatt said in an interested voice. "What was he doing there?"

"Don't know, sir," Bartlett answered truthfully. He didn't like the expression on the Yankee captain's face. It spoke of bodies forgotten in shell holes. He touched his sleeve and said, "I'm just a private, sir. The only time officers tell me anything is when they tell me what to do." A chorus of agreement rose from his fellow prisoners.

"It could be." Wyatt's face went from grim to thoughtful. "It might even be true with us—and you Rebs, your officers are a pack of damned aristocrats, aren't they?" Somehow, he contrived to look languid and effete for a moment before turning to Sergeant Martin. "Next time we hit them, we have to catch some bigger fish than privates. These boys don't know anything."

"Raids like this, sir, you take what you can grab," Martin said, which matched Bartlett's experience in the trenches.

"Maybe." From the way Wyatt acted, that seemed to mean he was yielding the point. Sure enough, he jerked his head toward the opening to a communication trench. "All right, Sergeant, take 'em back. We'll let the chaps from Intelligence see if they have any—intelligence, I mean."

"Yes, sir," Martin said. He picked out a couple of his own men with quick hand gestures. "Specs, Joe, come on along with me. These desperate characters'd probably knock me over the head and run off to assassinate TR in a red-hot minute if I was with 'em all by my lonesome." His grin said he was not to be taken seriously.

Reggie Bartlett felt like a desperate character, but not in the way the Yankee sergeant meant. If you were a prisoner of war, you were supposed to try to escape. That much he knew. How you were supposed to try was another question. He didn't have time to think about it. Martin gestured with his bayonet-tipped rifle. The Confederate prisoners got moving.

"Keep those hands high," warned the damnyankee with the glasses—-Specs. Guys with glasses were supposed to be mild-mannered. He wasn't, not even close.

Confederate shells—a belated response to the gas barrage and trench raid—fell not far away as they went out of the front line. Reggie swore. He'd almost been killed a couple of times by short artillery rounds. What irony, though, to end his days on the receiving end of a perfectly aimed Confederate shell.

Martin and his comrades turned the Confederate prisoners over to other men farther back, then returned to their position. The grilling Reggie got from U.S. Intelligence seemed perfunctory— occupation before the war, name, rank, pay number, unit, a few questions about what they'd been doing and what they might do, and a few more questions, just as casual, about the state of morale of the Negro

laborers attached to their units.

"Who pays attention to niggers?" Jasper Jenkins said. "You tell 'em what to do, they do it, and that's that." The man recording the answers, a wizened little fellow who looked like a born clerk, wrote down the words without comment.

When he was through with the interrogation, the wizened fellow said, "All right. You're going back to a holding camp now. Don't forget your pay number. We'll keep track of you with it. I expect you'll be bored. Can't help that." He nodded to a couple of guards in green-gray.

Almost, it was like going out of the line. Almost. The prisoners were marched back toward a railhead out of artillery range of Confederate guns. That felt familiar, even if nobody boasted about the havoc he aimed to wreak in saloons or brothels. Waiting for a train was familiar, too. Getting into a stinking boxcar that had once held horses was less so, although not unknown.

The train fought its way up over the Blue Ridge Mountains. That line hadn't existed before the war started. The Yankees had built it to haul supplies to the Roanoke front. It was a two-track line; several eastbound trains growled past the one on which Bartlett unhappily rode. "Damnyankees do a lot of haulin', don't they?" Jasper Jenkins said, his voice mournful.

Somewhere on the downhill grade—or rather, one of the downhill grades—they passed out of Virginia and into its breakaway cousin, West Virginia. When the train hissed to a stop, armed guards threw open the doors and shouted, "Everybody out! Move, move, move, you damn Rebs!"

Again, Bartlett might almost have been back in a rest camp. He went through the same surely useless delousing process he had then. He also had his hair clipped down to his scalp. The uniform he drew on completion of all that, though, was not his own. The tunic was tight, the trousers and boots too large. He complained about it. The fellow handing out clothes looked at him as if he were insane. "Shut up," he said flatly. Reggie shut up.

Prisoner barracks were of rough, unpainted wood, with spaces showing between boards. Reggie didn't look forward to that in winter. Bunks were similarly rough, and stacked on top of one another not double, not triple, but quadruple. He found a third-level one to call his own and climbed into it. "Home," he said sadly.

Evening was coming to Hampstead, Maryland. As far as Jake Featherston was concerned, it looked like a pretty good evening. The Yankees out in front of the Confederate lines had been quiet, and the battery had needed to fire only a few rounds at them. Some of those had been gas shells, too.

"About time," Featherston muttered to himself. The United States had been using gas against the Confederacy for months. Being able to respond in kind felt good. "Let those bastards worry about masks and goggles when we want 'em to, not the other way round."

He got his mess kit and went over to the stew pot Perseus had bubbling. Some damnyankee farmer was short a chicken. Jake found himself imperfectly sympathetic, especially when the Negro ladled a drumstick into his mess tin. He smacked his lips. Sure as hell, things were looking up.

He sat around shooting the breeze with his gun crew. It wasn't the same as it had been back in the old days, with the veterans who'd served beside him before the shooting started. But the new fish weren't virgins any more, either. "We've got us a pretty good gun here," Featherston said, looking back at the howitzer.

'The best," Michael Scott said. The loader was probably right, at least as far as the battery went. By their smug grins, the rest of the gun crew agreed with him. "We got us the best niggers in the battery, too," he added in the fond tones a man might use about a child of whom he is proud: the typical tones of a Confederate white talking about the achievements of a Confederate Negro. He patronized so automatically, he had no idea he was doing it.

"That they are," Jake Featherston said. His tone of voice was a little different: he'd used Nero and Perseus as men, however uncomfortable that had made both him and them. He shook his head. He neither particularly liked nor particularly trusted Negroes, and the principal reason for that was his certainty that they had more capacity than they showed. As an overseer's son, that worried him. The surprise you got if you kept thinking a man a boy was apt to be dreadful.

He didn't mention that the two Negroes had helped him fight the gun. The crew he had now knew it, but they seemed intent on pretending they didn't. He understood that; he tried to pretend it hadn't happened, too. Doing anything else tore a hole in the fabric of the Confederate way of life. He was glad Nero and Perseus hadn't turned uppity on account of their exploit. They would have been sorry for

that, and some of the blame would have stuck to him, too.

He wandered over to see if anything was left in the stew pot, and came back with a couple of potatoes. The rest of the chicken seemed to have walked with the Lord, or more likely with the cooks. He shrugged. You had to expect that. Who ever heard of a cook's going hungry?

After he'd disposed of the potatoes, he washed his mess tin in a bucket of water and scrubbed it with a rag till the metal took on a dull gleam. He made sure the rest of the gun crew did the same. Nothing gave you food poisoning faster than eating out of a dirty mess tin.

Scott broke out a deck of cards. Jake declined to get into a poker game, saying, "My luck's been lousy lately." That was, if anything, an understatement; he'd lost most of a month's pay a week before, betting a full house against four artfully concealed nines.

He walked out onto Hampstead's main street and peered north. The fall air was cool against his cheek. He couldn't see anything much in the deepening twilight, and told himself that was just as well. If he had seen something, it would have been Yankee artillery flashes lighting up the horizon, which would have meant Yankee shells paying the battery a visit. This past year, he'd had all the glory and drama and excitement of combat he'd needed to prove to him that the best thing to hope for in the middle of a war was a nice, quiet day—or two or three of them in a row.

Since he didn't feel like sleeping, he went back to check on the horses. Perseus and Nero had done their usual capable job of taking care of the animals. He patted the gray gelding on the nose, then headed out of the barn where the animals were resting.

A cricket chirped. Somewhere off in the middle distance, an owl let loose with a mournful hoot. From the front came the occasional crack of rifle fire. It was only occasional, though, not the continuous, almost surflike roar it became when the action heated up. He looked up to the rather cloudy heavens and thanked God he wasn't an infantryman.

Captain Stuart's tent was pitched not far from Jake's gun. A lot of officers, instead of living under canvas, would have commandeered a house and made themselves comfortable there. That would have been all right with Featherston; what point to being an officer if you couldn't take advantage of it? But Stuart, despite his fancy dinners and such, still affected a pose as just another artilleryman—except when

he needed something from his father. The hypocrisy irked Jake.

He heard a low murmur of voices from beyond the battery commander's tent. He frowned. What was going on back there? The voices grew quiet as he approached. He found Nero and Perseus, along with the Negro laborers from the rest of the guns in the battery and even with Captain Stuart's servant Pompey, gathered in a circle around a tiny fire. Walls all around made it impossible for any Yankee to spot from the ground; they could smother it in an instant if aeroplanes came over.

Near the fire lay a pair of dice and some money. "Evenin', Sergeant," Pompey said in his mincing voice when he recognized Jake. "We is just spreadin' the wealth around, you might say." He grinned. His teeth were very white in his dark face.

"Yeah, well, I done spread my wealth around lately," Featherston said. Perseus and Nero laughed. They'd heard him grouse about losing his shirt with that full house. When Pompey reached for the dice, Jake shrugged and left.

His own gun crew had their poker game going strong. He watched for a while, then pulled out what money he had left and sat in with them. He won a couple of little hands, lost a couple, then lost with a flush to a full house. That cost him a big piece of the anemic bankroll he'd brought to the game. He quit in disgust and went off to wrap himself in his blanket.

Some time in the middle of the night, somebody gently shook him awake. He looked up to find Perseus squatting beside his bedroll. In a voice not much above a whisper, the laborer said, "We ain't actin' like niggers no more, Marse Jake. Figured I'd tell you, on account of you know we don't got to. You want to be careful fo' a while, is all I got to say." He slipped away.

Featherston looked around, not altogether sure he hadn't been dreaming. He didn't see Perseus. He didn't hear anything. He rolled over and went back to sleep.

A little before dawn, Captain Stuart's angry voice woke him: "Pompey? Where the hell are you, Pompey? I call you, you bring your black ass over here and find out what I want, do you hear me? Pompey!"

Stuart's shouts went on and on. Wherever Pompey was, he wasn't coming when called. And then Michael Scott hurried up to Jake, a worried look on his face. "Sarge, you seen Nero or Perseus? Don't

know where they're at, but they sure as hell ain't where they're supposed to be."

"Jesus," Featherston said, bouncing to his feet. "It wasn't a dream. Sure as hell it wasn't." Scott stared at him, having no idea what he meant. He wasn't altogether sure himself. One thing seemed clear: trouble was brewing.

The policeman at the comer of Beaufain and Meeting Street—a pudgy, white-mustached fellow who might have fought in the War of Secession—threw up his right hand, halting north-south traffic on Meeting so trucks and wagons on Beaufain could continue making their way to and from the Charleston railroad lines and harbor.

Anne Colleton snarled something distinctly unladylike and stomped on the brakes of her Vauxhall Prince Henry. The motorcar groaned and squeaked to a stop, its radiator grill projecting slightly out onto Beaufain. She'd bought the Vauxhall because it could go fast, not for its ability to stop in a hurry. The brakes were a good deal weaker than the sixty-horsepower engine.

A man in a battered Ford was stopped alongside her. He gave her a look halfway between curious and rude. She'd long since grown used, if not resigned, to that look. Even in the USA, lady automobilists were a small minority. In the more conservative Confederacy, they were rare. She smiled back at the man. He might have thought it a sweet smile ... if he were an imbecile.

Rather nervously, he tipped his straw hat. "Sure you know what you're doing in the car"—he proved himself a Charleston native by pronouncing it *cyar*—"little lady? Wouldn't you rather have a chauffeur drive you around?"

Anne smiled again, even more savagely than before. "I had to fire my last two chauffeurs," she answered. "They went too slow to suit me."

The policeman halted traffic on Beaufain and let the waiting vehicles on Meeting Street move. Anne put the potent Vauxhall— with three times the power of the Ford next to it—through its paces. She left the Ford's driver choking on her exhaust.

She was almost sorry the Charleston Hotel lay only a couple of blocks south of Beaufain. The sensation of speed in the Vauxhall exhilarated her far more than the same speed would have in a train. Here she was the engineer, her foot on the throttle. *Freedom,* she thought.

A pair of Negro servants came dashing out from under the columned portico of the hotel. One of them handed her down to the sidewalk. Then both of them grabbed her suitcases and followed her inside. The doorman, a fat colored fellow in a getup that made him look like a Revolutionary soldier, threw wide the door to allow the procession to enter.

Electric fans mounted on the ceiling stirred the air without cooling it. Anne strode up to the desk clerk, gave her name, and said, "I believe you have the Presidential Suite reserved for me."

"Uh, Miss Colleton, I'm uh, very sorry, ma'am," the clerk said, plainly alarmed at having to give her bad news, "but we've, uh, had to move you to the Beauregard Suite on the third floor."

She froze him with a glance. "Oh? And why is that?" Her voice was low, calm, reasonable ... dangerous.

"Because, ma'am, President Wilson's in the Presidential Suite," he blurted.

"Oh," she said again. Her laugh, much to the unhappy clerk's relief, held acquiescence. "Nothing you can do about that, I suppose. I didn't know he was going to be in Charleston."

"Yes, ma'am," the clerk said. "He's come down to launch the *Fort Sumter*—you know, the new cruiser that just got built. That's tomorrow. Tonight there's a reception and dance here. In fact..." He turned back to the rectangular array of message slots behind the registration desk and pulled out a cream-colored envelope. "You have an invitation here. When Mr. Wilson's private secretary learned who had been booked into the Presidential Suite before him, he made sure to give you one."

"I should hope so," Anne said, conscious of her position in South Carolina. Then she turned the warmth up on her smile. "That *was* thoughtful. The Beauregard Suite, you say. It will do." After she'd ridden upstairs in the lift and tipped the servants carrying her bags, she sat down on the bed and laughed till tears rolled down her cheeks. The Charleston Hotel was modern enough to boast telephones in its fancy suites, the Beauregard among them. She made a call. "Roger?" she said when the connection was established. "I'm afraid I won't be able to see you tonight after all... Yes, I'm seeing someone else ... Who? ... Why should I tell you? ... Oh, all right, I will—it's President Wilson."

That produced a good fifteen-second silence on the other end of the line. Then Roger Kimball said, "I hope you're not going to see as much of him as you were going to see of me."

Though the submariner couldn't see her, she nodded approvingly. He had gall. She admired that. "How can I be sure?" she said. "He hasn't asked me." That made Kimball sputter, as she'd hoped. She went on, "I will see you tomorrow—unless the president sweeps me off my feet."

Kimball chuckled. "Or you sweep him off his. But he's a long ways from young. Two nights running'd probably be tough for him. Tomorrow, then."

"He *does* have gall," Anne murmured after she'd hung up. She pondered her luggage. She'd brought clothes for going out with a young, none-too-wealthy naval officer, as well as some frilly, silky things for more private moments with him. What did she have that was suitable for dinner with the President of the Confederate States of America?

She went through the dresses she had with her. When she came to the summer-weight rose floral voile, she smiled. The full, pleated skirt would flow nicely around her legs as she moved, and the laced bodice over the white voile chemisette might draw the eye even of a president no longer young. The dress was wrinkled from its time in the suitcase. She grabbed for the bell pull by the bed. A maid knocked at the door less than a minute later. She gave the colored woman the dress for pressing.

As she'd been sure it would, it came back in plenty of time for the dinner, which, the invitation said, was to begin at eight o'clock. She had expected to have dined earlier and to be engaged in other things by then, but what you expected and what you got weren't always the same.

Like the Presidential Suite, the Beauregard Suite had not only cold but also hot running water. Anne ran the bathtub full and washed away the dust and grime of the trip from Marshlands down to Charleston. She knew she would start perspiring again as soon as she stepped out of the tub, but no one could do anything about that, not in South Carolina. She was glad she wore her hair short and straight, so the bath did not badly disarrange it.

She went downstairs about half past seven. As she'd expected, a crowd of rich and prominent South Carolinians had already gathered outside

the doors of the banquet hall; a couple of Negro attendants with almost the presence of Scipio made sure those doors did not open prematurely.

Being a rich and prominent South Carolinian herself, Anne Colleton knew a good many of the people there. Being younger, more attractive, and more female than most of them, she had as much company as she wanted, and perhaps rather more. She saw a couple of wives whose husbands had abandoned them to talk to her sending imperfectly friendly looks in her direction. She sent back the same sort of carnivorous smiles she'd given the fool in the Ford.

They pride themselves on being useless, she thought. They don 't know anything, and they don ут want to know anything. If you asked one of them to drive a motorcar, she 'd tell you how unladylike it was, and how she had a chauffeur to take her everywhere she wanted to go. Old-fashioned, boring frumps. She wondered what they would have made of the exhibition of modern art she'd organized. Her lips pulled back in even more contempt. As if any of them could have brought off a show like that!

The women's stares turned even more poisonous when, after opening the doors, the attendants began escorting people to their seats. Not only was she placed at the president's table, but right across from him. "We were told to put you here, ma'am," her Negro guide said, "to make amends for Mr. Wilson taking your room away from you." He pulled out her chair so she could sit down.

Woodrow Wilson strode in, long and lean, at exactly eight o'clock. Everyone stood to honor him. He had something less than the almost demoniac energy of Theodore Roosevelt; you could not imagine him leading a charge across no-man's-land, as you would with the Yankee Kaiser. His appeal was more to the intellect, and he gave the impression of having that and to spare.

Which was not to say he could not be charming in his own way. Smiling across the table at Anne, he said, "I do hope you will forgive me for so rudely dispossessing you this afternoon, Miss Colleton."

"Quite all right. I feel I'm doing my patriotic duty by moving, Your Excellency," Anne answered. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw she was getting more looks from people who didn't know exactly who she was. Down deep where it didn't show, she grinned. President Wilson had known who she was long before he'd taken the suite away from her. He'd visited Marshlands, after all. And Anne would have been

astonished if more than half a dozen men in the banquet hall had contributed more money to Wilson's election campaign back in 1909 than she had. Her brothers had laughed at her then, but she thought the investment had paid off well.

No sooner had the thought of Tom and Jacob crossed her mind than Wilson said, "I understand one of your gallant brothers was wounded this summer in a U.S. attack."

"He was gassed, yes," Anne said shortly. Having Jacob back at Marshlands in such a state would have been hard enough. Having him back at Marshlands in such a state and drugged on morphia and drunk when he wasn't drugged (and sometimes when he was) and fornicating his way through the colored wenches was ten times worse. That Cherry was getting so stuck up, it was as if she thought herself the rightful mistress of Marshlands.

At her anger, Wilson's narrow, deeply lined face hardened. "It is because the United States, like the Huns across the sea with whom they are allied, employ such vile and unrestrained means of waging war that they and their arrogant pretensions must be checked."

Down the table, a plump man with a red face that had grown redder with each glass of wine he'd poured down said loudly, "The damnyankees need whipping on account of they're damnyankees. Once you've gone and said that, what more needs saying?"

Anne nodded emphatic agreement. But Woodrow Wilson shook his head. "I would share this continent with them if I could," he said. "If tomorrow they would agree to a peace based on the *status quo ante helium* with us and our brave Canadian comrades, I would accept on the instant. Then this half of the world would be at peace, and we could work toward peace as well between our allies on the one hand and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other."

"They won't agree to any such thing, though," Anne said. "They tried to keep us from becoming a nation in the first place and they still think we belong to them by rights. If they can snuff us out, they will. We can't let them."

"Unfortunately, Miss Colleton, I fear you are correct," the president said sadly. "And so we have no choice but to continue the struggle, confident that God and justice are on our side. I came down to South Carolina to celebrate our production of another tool toward our ultimate triumph." He still seemed unhappy about such duty, and

paused, shifting from the political to the personal: "But you undoubtedly know why I am here. What brings *you* to Charleston? Business or pleasure?"

He did not say that slightingly, as many a man might have: he knew she was a businesswoman in her own right. "Pleasure," she answered. It was, at the moment, pleasure she was forgoing for the sake of the dinner, but President Wilson did not need to know about that.

Colored waiters cleared away dishes. Wilson got up and made a brief speech, one line of which stuck in Anne's memory: "There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our nation and our people to be ignored or violated." It got, she thought, less applause than it deserved.

Colored musicians began playing a sprightly waltz. Couples drifted out onto the dance floor. Anne succeeded in dismaying the old frumps once more, for President Wilson asked her for the first dance. He had been a widower for more than twenty years, but must have had a good deal of practice at affairs like this, for he was strong and sure; Anne enjoyed dancing with him. She thought he took pleasure in it, too, and wondered if he was interested in something more than dancing.

Whether he was or not, she wasn't, despite the way she'd teased Roger Kimball. If you slept with a man of such power, he might want to go to bed with you again. Anne flattered herself that, if she slept with Woodrow Wilson, he *would* want to go to bed with her again. But if she slept with him, he would never take her seriously again. To her, that was more important.

When the music ended, she said, "Win the war, Your Excellency. Whatever it takes, win it."

"I have done 'my utmost, Miss Colleton, and shall go on doing my utmost till next March," he answered. "After that, God willing, it will be in the capable hands of Vice President Semmes."

"God willing," Anne agreed. She suspected Gabriel Semmes might prosecute the war with more vigor than Wilson had done. For that matter, Semmes' principal opponent in the November elections, Doroteo Arango, would probably prosecute the war with more vigor than Wilson had done: Arango was a young fire-eater if ever there was one. But Arango, she thought, had almost no chance of winning; the

Radical Liberals, who had nominated him, would sweep Sonora, Chihuahua, and Cuba, and might take Texas, too, but she doubted they'd have much luck farther north and east. Wilson said, "Will you be at the launching tomorrow, Miss Colleton? If you would like to come, see my secretary for an invitation in the morning."

"I may do that. Thank you, Your Excellency," Anne said. Going down to the harbor would make meeting Roger Kimball all the more convenient.

The music started up again. Three gray-haired men with the look of financiers almost got into a football scrimmage with one another, inviting her to dance. They'd dutifully waltzed the first round with their gray-haired wives, and now, obviously, had decided they were entitled to some fun.

Anne danced with each of them in turn. She stayed on the floor till a little past eleven, then went to bed. When she checked with the front desk the next morning, she discovered Wilson's secretary had given her an invitation to the launching ceremony even without her asking for it. She put it into her handbag, then went back to her room, telephoned Roger Kimball, and arranged to meet him at the Firemark on State Street, not far from the harbor.

The launch of the *Fort Sumter* disappointed her for a couple of reasons. For one, even with the pass, she couldn't get close enough for a good view of President Wilson smashing a bottle of champagne against the cruiser's bow. And, for another, Wilson, a staunch temperance man, made it plain in his speech that the champagne hadn't really been champagne, but soda water instead. Anne heartily approved of overturning some traditions, but that wasn't one of them.

Roger Kimball was waiting under the Firemark—a seal dating back to the seventeenth century showing that the building on which it was affixed carried fire insurance—when Anne drove up in her Vauxhall. The submariner looked avidly at her, and even more so at her motorcar. "May I drive it?" he asked.

She judged he would sulk and pout unless she indulged him, so she said yes and slid over into the passenger seat. Kimball bounded into the automobile and roared up and down the streets of Charleston with a panache that sometimes bordered on the suicidal. Anne prided herself as a bold driver, but after a few hairsbreadth escapes realized she had to yield the palm to her companion.

"Try not to put both of us through the windscreen," she said with some asperity as Kimball screeched to a stop bare inches from a Negro fisherman selling shrimp out of a basket. The Negro jumped back from the Vauxhall, but spilled no seafood.

After a moment, he realized he wouldn't be crushed after all. Smiling at the Navy man in his dashing whites and at his pretty companion, the fisherman held out the basket and gave forth with his sales call:

"Ro-ro swimp!

Ro-ro swimp!

Roro-ro-ro-ro swimp!

Coma and git yo' ro-ro swimp!"

Kimball took him at his word, jumping out of the automobile and buying a couple of pounds of them. The motorcar rested on a slight downgrade; Anne had to reach out a leg and stamp on the none-too-potent brake to keep the Vauxhall from getting the fisherman after all, and Kimball with him.

"What *are* you doing?" she demanded when the submariner, his hands full of crustaceans, got back into the motorcar.

Nothing fazed him. He dropped the shrimp, a couple of them still feebly flailing little legs, on the seat between them. "I know a little place where they'll cook the shrimp or the fish if you bring it in. Can't be beat." He smacked his lips, then added, "And it's only a couple of blocks from a hotel that never heard of house detectives."

"And how do you know that?" she asked.

"How many girls have I brought there before you, do you mean?" he returned. "Does it matter? If we aren't doing this for fun, why are we doing it?"

To that, she had no answer. Kimball had never claimed to offer more than amusement, or to want more than that from her. Under those circumstances, wondering about others before her was foolish. She hadn't been a virgin there in the Pullman car on the way to New Orleans, either. She nodded and said, "Let's go."

The restaurant was in the far northwest of Charleston, well away from the fancy part of the city. It was, in fact, much closer to one of the

Negro districts, which began only a few blocks away. The proprietor, who looked as if he might have been a quadroon passing for white, greeted Roger Kimball as an old friend. If he was used to seeing the submariner in variegated company, he gave no sign of it.

What he did with those little shrimp made the visit worthwhile. Cooked with rice and okra and chopped bacon and some spices he coyly refused to name, they made a better meal than Anne had had with President Wilson the night before. She didn't tell him that, assuming he wouldn't have believed her. She did give him as much praise as she thought he could accept. He bowed low when she left on Kimball's arm. The Navy man looked bemused, remarking, "He's never done that before."

He handed Anne into the Vauxhall, then drove to the hotel, which was even closer to the Negro section of town than the restaurant had been. As if to impress on her that it was a tough district, he took the key out of the ignition and gave it to her, a precaution with which she seldom bothered.

As he'd predicted, the desk clerk placidly nodded when Kimball signed the registry, *Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson Davis. A* night's rent was a night's rent. The second-story room was small but surprisingly clean. Kimball locked the door behind him, lighted the kerosene lamp, and then turned to Anne with a grin. "What are we waiting for?"

"Not a thing." She smiled back. From a lot of men—from most men—such brashness would have put her off, but it was what drew her to Roger Kimball. She stepped forward into his arms. He squeezed her to him, tilted her chin up, and delivered an authoritative kiss.

For him to get out of his uniform, a little later, was the work of a few moments. Once naked, he saluted her without using his hands. He took his time about undressing her, pausing to kiss and caress each new bit of flesh revealed. She sighed with relief when, after detaching her stockings from their garters and sliding them down her legs, he finally peeled her out of her steel-stiffened corset.

"You men are so lucky not to have to wear those things," she said, "especially in weather like this."

He set his hand on her sweaty belly, then let it stray lower. Suddenly impatient, she caught his shoulders and pulled him onto her. He rode her hard, which was just what she wanted. When they were through, he rubbed at his back. "You clawed me good there," he said, sitting up.

"I hope it was good," Anne answered, sated and greedy at the same time. The room had no sink, but did have a pitcher and a bowl. She used some water to wash him off, then took him in her mouth. She wanted him hard again. As soon as he was, she straddled him and rode him as ferociously as he'd taken her, until she quivered again and again and he groaned beneath her as if in pain rather than ecstasy.

Afterwards, they lay side by side on the bed, too spent to move, neither of them much wanting to get back into stifling clothes when being naked felt so much better. Roger Kimball fell asleep first. Anne was going to tease him about it, but discovered she was yawning, too. She dozed off a few minutes later.

Sometime in the middle of the night—the lamp had burned out, leaving the hotel room very dark—she woke up, needing to use the chamber pot. Her motion woke Kimball, and they made love again, lazily this time, she on her side facing away from him, barely touching save at one sweet place in the warm, muggy night.

When Anne woke again, dawn was beginning to leak through the Venetian blinds over the window. But the light was not what roused her. From out in the street came a terrific racket of shouts and crashes and, after a moment, gunshots.

Roger Kimball sat bolt upright. Unclothed though he remained, he was suddenly and obviously a military man, not a lover. "What the devil... ?" he said, his voice sharp as a cracking whip.

Right under the window, a black man, without intending to, gave him his answer: 'To de barricades!" the fellow yelled. "De revolution comin'!"

Anne and Kimball stared at each other. "Oh, Lord," they said together.

Below them, the cry grew louder and came from more and more throats, till it seemed to fill the whole world: "De revolution! De revolution comin'!"

Scipio was talking with one of the cooks in the Marshlands kitchen when the woman's scream came from upstairs. "Good God in heaven, what can that be?" the butler exclaimed. Since he was talking as an extension of the estate rather than in his own person, he used the elegant formal English he would have employed when addressing Anne Colleton or some white guest at the mansion.

"Dunno, but I gwine find out," the cook said, and, ignoring the fine

points of the pecan-and-sweet-potato pie about which Scipio had been trying to instruct him, ran up toward the front of the house.

Scipio followed. He had no sooner reached the foot of the stairs than another scream rang out, this one louder than before. "No! Godalmighty, no!" the woman up there wailed.

"Who dat?" the cook demanded.

"I believe that is Cherry," Scipio replied. Had it not been undignified to do so in front of the cook, he would have scratched his head. The second scream and the wail had both come from Jacob Colleton's room—so, presumably, had the first. But that made no sense. Cherry had gone up to Jacob's room a great many times. Scipio didn't know exactly what she and the mistress' gassed brother did behind that closed door, but he did know she'd always kept quiet about it till now.

The closed door opened, then slammed shut. Cherry came running out. Now the cook said "Godalmighty!" in a tone half shock, half admiration: she was naked and, though she clutched her dress to her, quite a lot of her remained on display.

She dashed down the stairs, moaning, "Dat debbil! Dat horrible debbil! What he try an' make me do!" She ran past Scipio and the cook, both of whom stared even more, for she was not covered at all from behind. She opened the front door and ran outside, out toward the fields if the direction from which her cries came was any indication.

"Damn white folks," the cook muttered, glaring up toward the closed door from which Cherry had emerged.

A moment later, the door opened again. Jacob Colleton wheeled himself out to the banister. "Come up here, Scipio," he croaked.

Scipio obeyed, as he had obeyed white men and women every day of his life. "How may I help you, sir?" he asked, his voice the polite, attentive, meaningless counterpart to the mask of service stretched across his face.

Instead of answering at once, Jacob Colleton wheeled back into his room, motioning for Scipio to follow him. Once they were inside, Colleton demanded, "What's the matter with that wench? Has she gone mad?"

"Sir, I would not have the faintest idea," Scipio answered stiffly.

"Oh, don't act stupid with me," Colleton said, anger bubbling in his hoarse whisper. "You know we don't play caroms up here. We were about to screw, not to put too fine a point on it, the same way we've screwed two dozen times before this, when all of a sudden she went tearing out of here as if—I don't know as if what. I haven't found anything she doesn't do—and like doing, too, by God."

He panted, trying to catch his breath after such a long speech. To Scipio's own surprise, he believed Colleton. He knew bewilderment when he saw and heard it. What was wrong with Cherry, then? *Had* she gone round the bend?

Scipio glanced out the window toward the fields. Sure enough, there stood Cherry, still holding the dress in front of her, haranguing a swelling group of field hands. Scipio couldn't hear what she was saying, but he recognized the pose from meetings of the Reds in Cassius' cottage.

And— Scipio stiffened. Here came a good many Negroes with rifles in their hands. All at once, everything came clear. This was the moment Cassius and Island and Cherry and the rest had been talking about for so long. Jacob Colleton hadn't done anything out of the ordinary with or to Cherry ... but she was saying he had, to bring doubters over to the cause.

Whatever Colleton had or hadn't done with Cherry, he had seen Scipio's attention focus on what was happening outside. Coughing and swearing in rasping gasps, he had a look for himself. And then, most abruptly, he reminded Scipio he had been a soldier, and a good one: he had the Tredegar down off the wall and a clip in it before the butler could blink. He pointed it straight at Scipio's head.

Scipio stared down the barrel. It was black as midnight in there, and looked about a foot wide to his frightened gaze. He could smell gun oil. "Get out of here, boy," Colleton said, his bubbling whisper making the words all the more deadly cold. "You niggers want to play games, I'll show you how it's done up at the front." He was smiling. Scipio hadn't seen him so happy since he'd been gassed. The rifle barrel twitched toward the doorway. "Git!"

Scipio fled, not just out the door but down the stairs. Jacob Colleton slammed the door behind him, and locked it. The first shot from upstairs rang out when Scipio got to the front door, which Cherry hadn't closed after her.

He reached the doorway just in time to watch Island's head explode into red mist. The revolutionary took half a step, then fell on what was left of his face. The rifle he'd been carrying bounced on the ground beside him.

"Git *down!"* Cassius yelled as another rifle shot barked and another Red went down, probably for good. Some of the armed Negroes listened to the hunter. Some just started banging away at Jacob Colleton's window. The racket was like the end of the world. Then Colleton fired again, and another black man sprawled twitching in the grass. By then, Cassius had taken cover behind a buggy. A *bang!* from upstairs and yet another Red went down. Scipio remembered what Colleton had said about the game of war. He was getting another chance to play, sure enough, and he still remembered how.

"Rush de house!" Cassius shouted. "I cover you." His men— and there could be no possible doubt they were *his* men—did as he ordered. Colleton knocked down another of them, but Cassius was shooting at him, and Cassius was no mean shot, either. Three barefoot Negroes in gray homespun dashed past Scipio up the stairs.

They pounded on the door to Jacob Colleton's room with their rifle butts. One fell back with a groan, shot from inside the room. But the door flew open. More shots rang out, and then a black man's whoop of triumph: "Dat white debbil, he done fo'!"

Cassius came walking up to Marshlands, rifle in his hand. He shouted for everyone to get out, waited half a minute, shouted again, and then went inside. "Wish dat damn Frenchman still have he ugly paintings here," he remarked to Scipio. "I do dis wid dey." He struck a match and touched it to a gauzy curtain. Flames raced up it, reached the wall above the window, and caught there. Grinning, Cassius hurried back outside, catching Scipio by the arm and hustling him along.

Scipio stared in through the window at the growing fire, feeling a pang for beauty destroyed no matter upon how much suffering it rested. *The bourgeois in you,* Cassius would have said. "You got to do dat, Cass?" he asked.

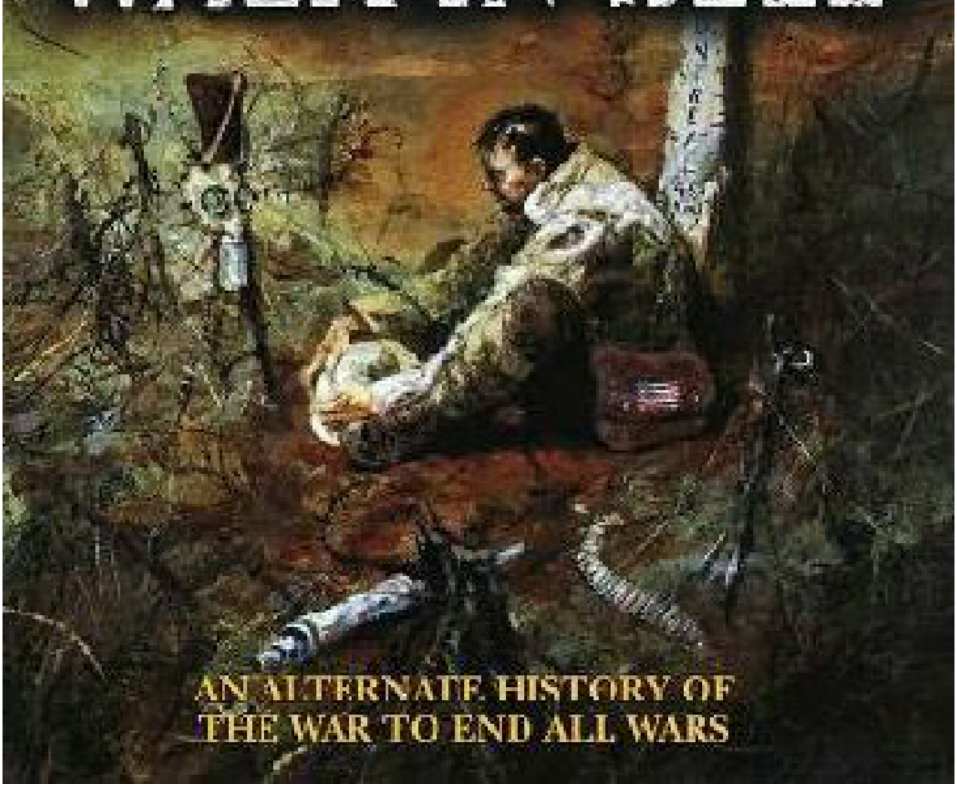
"Got to," Cassius said firmly. "Gwine burn it all, Kip. De revolution *here."*

HARRY TURTLEDOVE

AUTHOR OF *THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH*

THE GREAT WAR:

WALK IN HELL



AN ALTERNATE HISTORY OF
THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

Walk in Hell
Great War [3]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:****
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

Amazon.com Review

Harry Turtledove marches on through history with *The Great War: Walk in Hell*. In his alternate timeline, the Confederate States of America won the Civil War, aided by Britain and France. In the 1880s (**), Americans fought again after the CSA acquired parts of Mexico--and the CSA won again. When WWI begins with Archduke Ferdinand's assassination in 1914 (**), the 34-state USA under Teddy Roosevelt allies with Imperial Germany and Austria against Britain, France, Russia, Japan, Canada, and Woodrow Wilson's CSA. Trenches divide Canada, fierce fighting rages from Tennessee and Kentucky into Pennsylvania, a Mormon uprising against the USA consumes Utah, and a black socialist rebellion distracts the CSA, where slavery has ended but blacks still await full citizenship.

Walk in Hell takes us from fall, 1915, through 1916. Soldiers, sailors, and airmen continue the fight, but much happens behind the lines too. Turtledove's characters include Jewish immigrants who are socialist and antiwar, a widow running a coffee house in CSA-occupied Washington, D.C., who passes information to the USA, and two Canadian farmers living under U.S. occupation in Quebec and Manitoba. He vividly conveys the human side of war. When Joe Hammerschmitt gets a shoulder wound in the Virginia trenches:

> ... pain warred with exultation on his long, thin face. Exultation won. 'Got me a hometowner, looks like,' he said happily. Half the men up there with him made sympathetic noises; the other half looked frankly jealous. Hammerschmitt was going to be out of the firing line for weeks, maybe months, to come, and they still risked not just death but horrible mutilation every day.

Some find Turtledove's cast too large, the story's action too slow. Others complain that *Walk in Hell* is too similar to his Worldwar series. Alternate history buffs, however, will marvel at his mastery of detail, enjoy following his logic as he pursues military and social

developments onward in time, and find it hard to wait for the next in the series. --*Nona Vero*

From Publishers Weekly

The Hugo Award-winning master of alternate world histories presents the second volume in the WWI series he began last year with The Great War: American Front. In Turtledove's version of the War to End All Wars, conflict rages on the American continent between the USA (with 34 states) and the Confederate States of America, which won secession during the Civil War. Allied with Germany and France, the USA in 1915 hopes to take advantage of a weakened CSA, which is plagued by a socialist revolution engineered by its former slaves. Setting his tale on a suitably large canvas, Turtledove introduces a variety of characters who exemplify the diverse political and economic circumstances of the period: Anne Colleton, a former Confederate landowner, must learn to cooperate with her activist fieldhands; Flora Hamburger, a New York intellectual, fights against class injustice and runs for a seat as a socialist congresswoman; Confederate sub commander Roger Kimball plans a risky attack on New York Harbor. Turtledove judiciously blends famous historical characters into the plot, so readers learn of General Custer's frustration at being unable to conquer Tennessee and see Woodrow Wilson as a Confederate president. Although there are numerous battle scenes, the gore is restrained. Instead, the author emphasizes character, and his thorough knowledge of the period's history will, as usual, captivate his readers, Foreign rights sold in the U.K. (Aug.)
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The Great War: WALK IN HELL

Harry Turtledove

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“Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight? Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows, Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish, Baring teeth that leer like skulls’ teeth wicked? Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic, Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets? Ever from their hair and through their hands’ palms Misery swelters. Surely we have perished Sleeping, and walk in hell; but who these hellish?”

—Wilfred Owens, “Mental Cases”

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MANITOBA
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Columbia R.
Missouri River
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ALABAMA
MISSISSIPPI
LOUISIANA
Mobile
Jekyll Island
FLORIDA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Gulf of Mexico
Habana
CUBA (C.S.A.)

I

George Enos looked across the Mississippi toward Illinois. The river was wide, but not wide enough to let him forget it was only a river. Here in St. Louis, he was, beyond any possible doubt, in the middle of the continent.

That felt very strange to him. He'd lived his whole life, all twenty-nine years of it, in Boston, and gone out fishing on the Atlantic ever since he was old enough to run a razor over his cheeks. He'd kept right on going out to fish, even after the USA went to war with the Confederate States and Canada: all part of the worldwide war with Germany and Austria battling England, France, and Russia while pro-British Argentina fought U.S. allies Chile and Paraguay in South America and every ocean turned into a battle zone.

If a Confederate commerce raider hadn't intercepted the steam trawler *Ripple* and sunk it, George knew he'd still be a fisherman today. But he and the rest of the crew had been captured, and, being civilian detainees rather than prisoners of war, eventually exchanged for similar Confederates in U.S. hands. He had joined the Navy then, partly in hopes of revenge, partly to keep from being conscripted into the Army and sent off to fight in the trenches.

They'd even let him operate out of Boston for a while, on a trawler that had gone hunting for enemy vessels with a submarine pulled on a long tow. He'd helped sink a Confederate submersible, too, but the publicity that came from success made any future success unlikely. And so, instead of his being able to see his wife and children when he wasn't at sea and to work like a fisherman when he was, they'd put him on a train and sent him to St. Louis.

He called up to the deck officer aboard the river monitor USS

Punishment: “Permission to come aboard, sir?”

“Granted,” Lieutenant Michael Kelly said, and Enos hurried up the gangplank and onto his ship. He saluted the thirty-four-star flag rippling in the breeze at the stern of the *Punishment*. Kelly waited till he had performed the ritual, then said, “Take your station, Enos. We’re going to steam south as soon as we have the full crew aboard.”

“Aye aye, sir,” Enos said. Because he was still new to the Navy and its ways, he hadn’t lost the habit of asking questions of his superiors: “What’s going on, sir? Seems like everybody’s getting pulled on board at once.”

From some officers, a query like that might have drawn a sharp reprimand. Kelly, though, understood that the expanded Navy of 1915 was not the tight-knit, professional force it had been before the war began. The formal mask of duty on his face cracked to reveal an exuberant grin that suddenly made him look much younger: like Enos, he was tanned and lined and chapped from endless exposure to sun and wind. He said, “What’s up? I’ll tell you what’s up, sailor. The niggers down in the CSA have risen up against the government there, that’s what. If the Rebs don’t put ’em down, they’re sunk. But while they’re busy doing that, how much attention can they pay to us? You see what I’m saying?”

“Yes, sir, I sure do,” Enos answered.

“Mind you,” Kelly said, “I haven’t got any great use for niggers myself—what white man does? And if the scuttlebutt is the straight goods, a lot of these niggers are Reds, too. And you know what? I don’t care. They foul up the Rebels so we can lick ’em, they can fly all the red flags they want.”

“Yes, sir,” George said again. After the commerce raider snagged him, he’d been interned in North Carolina for several months. He’d seen the kind of treatment Negroes got in the CSA. Technically, they were free. They’d been free for more than thirty years. But—“If I was one of those Negroes, sir, and I saw a chance to take a shot at a Confederate—a white Confederate, I mean—I’d grab it in a second.”

“So would I,” Kelly said. “So would anybody with any balls. Who would have thought niggers had balls, though?” He turned away from Enos as a couple of other sailors reported back aboard the *Punishment*.

The river monitor was, in the immortal words that had described the first of her kind, a cheesebox on a raft. She carried a pair of six-

inch guns in an armored turret mounted on a low, wide ironclad hull. She also had several machine guns mounted on deck for land targets not worth the fury of guns that could have gone to sea aboard a light cruiser.

Enos had been a fisherman, which meant he was adept at dealing with lines and nets and steam engines, even if the one the *Ripple* had carried was a toy beside the *Punishment*'s power plant. Having made use in his first assignment of the things he knew, the Navy plainly figured it had done its duty and could now return to its normal mode of operation: his station on the *Punishment* was at one of those deck machine guns.

He minded it less than he'd thought he would. Any New England fisherman worthy of the name was a born tinker and tinkerer. He'd learned to strip and clean and reassemble the machine gun till he could do it with his eyes closed. It was an elegantly simple means of killing large numbers of men in a hurry, assuming that was what you wanted to do.

At Kelly's shouted orders, sailors unfastened the ropes binding the *Punishment* to the pier. Black coal smoke pouring from her twin stacks, the monitor edged out into the Mississippi. The first hundred miles or so of the journey down the river, as far as Cairo, Illinois, were a shakedown through country that had always belonged to the USA.

Nobody got to relax, though, shakedown or no. Kelly shouted, "Keep your eyes peeled, dammit! They say Rebs sneak up from Arkansas and dump mines in the river every so often. Usually *they're* full of malarkey when *they* say something, but we don't want to find out the hard way, now do we?"

Along with everyone else, George Enos peered out at the muddy water. He was used to the idea of mines; Boston harbor had been surrounded by ring upon ring of minefields, to make sure no Canucks or Rebs or limeys paid an unexpected and unwelcome visit. He didn't see any mines now, but he hadn't seen any then, either.

A little north of Cairo, they took a pilot on board. The *Spray*, the steam trawler that had acted as a decoy for Entente warships, had done the same thing coming back into Boston after a mission. Here as there, the pilot guided the vessel through a U.S. minefield. The Confederacy had gunboats of its own on the Mississippi (though it didn't call them monitors), which had to be kept from steaming upstream and bombarding U.S. positions and supply lines.

When sunset came, the *Punishment* anchored on the river, the Missouri Ozarks on one side, Kentucky on the other. Kentucky was a Confederate state, but most of it, including that part lying along the Mississippi, lay in U.S. hands.

Over fried catfish and beans belowdecks, Enos said, “When I got transferred here, I thought we’d be going down the river looking for Rebel ships heading up, and we’d have a hell of a fight. That’s what you read about in the newspapers back in Boston, anyway.”

“It happens,” said Wayne Pitchess, the closest friend he’d made on the *Punishment*: a former fisherman from Connecticut, though he’d joined the Navy back in peacetime. Pitchess scratched at his mustache before going on. Like George, he wore it Kaiser Bill–style, with waxed points jutting upward, but his was blond rather than dark. “It does happen,” he repeated. “It just doesn’t happen very often.”

“Good thing it doesn’t happen very often, too,” added Sherwood McKenna, who was the third man in the tier of bunks with George and Pitchess. “Monitors can sink each other in a godawful hurry.”

George Enos took a swig of coffee. It was vile stuff, but that wasn’t the cook’s fault. The Empire of Brazil, which produced more coffee than the rest of the world put together, had remained neutral. That meant both the Entente and the Quadruple Alliance went after its shipping with great enthusiasm. Most of the other coffee-growing countries were in the Entente camp. Not even the finest cook in the world could have done much with the beans that had gone into this pot.

“Well, if we don’t fight other monitors much,” George said, setting down his mug, “what do we do?”

“Bombard enemy land positions, mostly,” Pitchess answered. “Moving six-inch guns down a river is easy. Hauling them cross-country is anything but. And we’re a harder target to hit back at than guns on land, too, because we can move around easier.”

“And because we’re armored,” Enos added.

“That doesn’t hurt,” Sherwood McKenna agreed. “Another monitor can smash us up, but we just laugh at those little fast-firing three-inch field guns the Rebs use. Lots of difference between a three-inch shrapnel shell and a six- or eight-incher with an armor-piercing tip.”

Lifting the coffee mug again, this time as if to make a toast with it,

George said, “Here’s hoping we never find out what the difference is.” Both his bunkmates drank to that.

Sleeping belowdecks was stifling, especially in the top bunk, which Enos, as a newcomer aboard the *Punishment*, had inherited. Sometime in the middle of the night, though, a couple of the deck machine guns began to hammer, waking up everyone who was asleep. George didn’t stay awake long. As soon as he figured out the shooting wasn’t aimed directly at him, he rolled over—carefully, so as not to fall out of the narrow bunk—and started sawing wood again.

Next morning, he found out somebody on the Kentucky shore had fired a machine gun at the *Punishment*, hoping to pick off someone on deck or in the cabin. Wayne Pitchess took that in stride. “He didn’t hurt us, and we probably didn’t hurt him,” he said around a mouthful of sausage. “That’s the kind of war I like to fight.”

Cautiously, the *Punishment* pushed farther down the river. Now Tennessee lay to port. They steamed past the ruins of a Confederate fort that had mounted guns able to sink a battleship, let alone a river monitor. More such forts, still untaken, lay farther south. On the stretches of the Mississippi it owned, the USA had its share of them, too. They were another reason combats between monitors were scarce.

Enos eyed the woods running down to the river. U.S. forces were supposed to have cleared away all the Rebs, but the exchange of fire the night before showed that wasn’t so. He wondered how he would get any sign of the enemy, or, for that matter, of the Negroes who had rebelled against the Confederacy. All he saw were trees. He saw a hell of a lot of trees. He was used to the cramped confines of Massachusetts, where everything was jammed up against everything else. It wasn’t like that here. The land was wide, and people thin on the ground.

With a low rumble, the turret of the *Punishment* began to revolve. The guns rose slightly. George had never heard them fired before. He braced himself.

Bracing himself wasn’t enough. The roar seemed like the end of the world. Sheets of golden flame spat from the guns’ muzzles. One of them blew a perfect smoke ring, as he might have done with a cigar, only a hundred times bigger.

His ears still ringing, he watched the gun barrels rise again, an even

smaller movement than they had made before. They salvoed once more. He couldn't tell where the shells were coming down. Someone evidently could, though, and was letting the *Punishment* know, perhaps by wireless. That repositioning must have been what was wanted, for the twin six-inchers fired again and again. Somewhere, miles inside Tennessee, the shells were creating a good approximation of hell. Here, they were just creating an ungodly racket.

After a while, the bombardment stopped. The gunners came out on deck. It had probably been hell inside the turret, too. They stripped off their sweat-soaked uniforms and jumped naked into the river, where they proceeded to try to drown one another. It was, George Enos thought, a strange way to fight a war.

Anne Colleton gunned the Vauxhall Prince Henry up the Robert E. Lee Highway from Charleston, South Carolina, toward her plantation, Marshlands, outside the little town of St. Matthews. The motorcar hit a pothole. Her teeth came together in a sharp click. The so-called highway, like all roads outside the cities, was nothing but dirt. Even with a lap robe and a broad-brimmed hat with a veil, Anne was caked with red-brown dust. She supposed she should count herself lucky she hadn't had a puncture. She'd already repaired two since leaving Charleston.

"Punctures?" She shook her head. "Punctures are nothing." She counted herself lucky to be alive. With a dashing submersible commander, she'd been at a rather seedy hotel near the edge of one of Charleston's Negro districts when the riot or uprising or whatever it was broke out. They'd piled into the Vaux-hall and escaped just ahead of the baying mob. She'd delivered Roger Kimball back to the harbor and then, not bothering to get the bulk of her belongings out of the much finer hotel where she was registered, she'd headed for home.

Down the road toward her, filling up most of it, came a wagon pulled by a horse and a mule and filled to overflowing with white men, women, and children—several families packed together, unless she missed her guess. She stepped on the brake, hard as she could. The Vauxhall came to a shuddering stop. Its sixty-horsepower engine could hurl it forward at a mile a minute—though not on the Robert E. Lee Highway—but slowing down was another matter.

Some of the whites wore bandages, some of those rusty with old blood. Over the growl of the motorcar's engine, Anne called, "What's

it like up ahead?”

“It’s bad, ma’am,” the graybeard at the reins answered, tipping his battered straw hat to her—he could see she was a person of consequence, even if he didn’t know just who she was. “We’re lucky we got out alive, and that’s a fact.”

The woman beside him nodded vehemently. “You ought to turn around your ownself,” she added. “Niggers up further north, they gone crazy. They got guns some kind of crazy way and they got red flags flyin’ and sure as Jesus they’re gonna kill any whites they can catch.”

“Red flags,” Anne said, and heads bobbed up and down again in the wagon. Her lips moved in a silent curse. Her brother Tom, a Confederate major, had said earlier in the year there were Red revolutionaries among the Negro laborers in the Army. She’d scoffed at the idea that such radicals might also have gained a foothold at Marshlands. Now fear clawed her. Her other brother, Jacob, was back at the mansion, an invalid since the Yankees had gassed him within an inch of his life. She’d thought it surely safe to leave him for a few days.

The fellow in the straw hat tipped it again, then guided his mismatched team off the road so the wagon could get around the automobile. As soon as she had the room, she put the Vauxhall in gear and zoomed forward again. Along with other innovations, she’d had a rearview mirror installed on the motorcar. Looking into it, she saw faces staring after her from the wagon as she drove toward trouble rather than away from it.

Every so often, trees shaded the road. Something dangled from an overhanging branch of one of them. She slowed down again. It was the body of a lynched Negro. A placard tied round his neck said, THIS IS IF WE KETCH YOU. He wore only a pair of ragged drawers. What had been done to him before he was hanged wasn’t pretty.

Anne bit her lip. She prided herself on being a modern woman, on being able to take on the world straight up and come out ahead, regardless of her sex. Outdealing men had made her rich—well, richer, since she was born far from poor. But business was one thing, this brutality something else again.

And what were the Negroes, the Reds, doing in whatever lands—not Marshlands, surely—they’d seized in their revolt? How many old scores, going back how many hundred years, were they repaying?

As much to escape questions like that as to get away from the tormented corpse (around which flies were already buzzing), Anne drove off fast enough to press herself back into the seat. Perhaps a mile farther up the road, she came to another tree with dreadful fruit. The first had shocked her because of its savagery. The second also shocked her, mostly by how little feeling it roused in her. *This is how men get used to war,* she thought, and shivered though the day was warm and muggy: more like August than late October.

She drove past a burnt-out farmhouse from which smoke was still rising. It hadn't been much of a place; she wondered whether blacks or poor whites had lived there. Nobody lived there now, or would any time soon.

More traffic coming south slowed her progress. The road wasn't wide; whenever her motorcar drew near someone coming in the opposite direction, somebody had to go off onto the shoulder to get around. Wagons, buggies, carts, occasional motorcars came past her, all of them loaded with women, children, and old men: most of the young men were at the front, fighting against the USA.

Anne needed a while to wonder how widespread in the Confederacy the uprising was, and what it would do to the fight against the United States. Confederate forces had been hard-pressed to hold their ground before. Could they go on holding, with rebellion in their rear?

"We licked the damnyankees in the War of Secession," she said, as if someone had denied it. "We licked 'em again in the Second Mexican War, twenty years later. We can do it one more time."

She came up behind a truck rumbling along toward the north, its canvas-canopied bed packed with uniformed militiamen. Some wore butternut, some the old-fashioned gray that had been banished from frontline use because it was too much like Yankee green-gray. A lot of the militiamen wore beards or mustaches. All of those were gray—except the ones that were white. But the men carried bayoneted rifles, and looked to know what to do with them. Against a rabble of Negroes, what more would they need?

They waved to her when she drove past. She waved back, glad to do anything to cheer them. Then she had to slow almost to a crawl behind a battery of half a dozen horse-drawn cannons. Those couldn't have come close to matching her Vauxhall's speed under the best of circumstances, and circumstances were anything but the best: the guns had to fight their way forward against the stream of refugees fleeing

the revolt.

Some of the southbound wagons and motorcars had Negroes in them: a scattering of black faces, among the white. Anne guessed they were servants and field hands who'd stayed loyal to their employers (*masters* wasn't the right word, though some people persisted in using it more than a generation after manumission). She was glad to see those few black faces—they gave her hope for Marshlands—but she wished she'd spotted more.

Truck farms abounded all around the little town of Holly Hill, about halfway between Charleston and St. Matthews. The farms seemed to have come through pretty well. Not much was left of the town. A lot of it had burned. Bullet holes pocked the surviving walls. Here and there, bodies white and black lay unburied. A faint stench of meat going bad hung in the air; buzzards wheeled optimistically, high overhead.

Anne wished she could have got out of Holly Hill in a hurry, but rubble in the road made traffic pack together. A gang of Negro laborers was clearing the debris. That was nothing out of the ordinary. The uniformed whites covering them with Tredegar rifles, though…

A couple of miles north of Holly Hill, a middle-aged white man whose belly was about to burst the bounds of his butternut uniform stepped out into the road, rifle in hand, and stopped her. "We ain't lettin' folks go any further north'n this, ma'am," he said. "Ain't safe. Ain't nowhere near safe."

"You don't understand. I'm Anne Colleton, of Marshlands," she said, confident he would know who she was and what that meant.

He did. Gulping a little, he said, "I'd like to help you, ma'am," by which he undoubtedly meant, *I don't want to get into trouble with you, ma'am*. But he went on, "I got my orders from Major Hotchkiss, though—no civilians goin' up this road. Them niggers, they got a regular front set up. They been plannin' this a long time, the sons of bitches. Uh, pardon my French."

She'd been saying a lot worse than that herself. "Where do I find this Major Hotchkiss, so I can talk some sense into him?" she demanded.

The Confederate militiaman pointed west down a rutted dirt track less than half as wide as the Robert E. Lee Highway. "There's a church up that way, maybe a quarter mile. Reckon he'll be up in the steeple,

trying to spot what the damn niggers is doin'."

She drove the Vauxhall down the road he'd shown her. If she didn't find the church, she intended to try to make her way north by whatever back roads she could find. This Major Hotchkiss might have banned northbound civilian traffic from the highway, but maybe he hadn't said anything about other ways of getting where she still aimed to go.

But there stood the church, a white clapboard building with a tall steeple. White men in butternut uniforms and old gray ones milled around outside. They all looked her way as she drove up. "I'm looking for Major Hotchkiss," she called.

"I'm Jerome Hotchkiss," one of the men in butternut said; sure enough, he wore a single gold star on each collar tab. He didn't look too superannuated. Then Anne saw he had a hook in place of his left hand. That would have left him unfit for frontline duty, but not for an emergency like this. He nodded to her. "What is it you want?"

"I'm Anne Colleton," she said again, and caused another stir. She went on, "Your sentry back by the highway said you were the man who could give me permission to keep going north toward Marshlands, my plantation."

"If any man could do that, I would be the one," Major Hotchkiss agreed. "I have to tell you, though, it's impossible. You must understand, we are not trying to put down a riot up ahead. It is a war, nothing less. The enemy has rifles. He has machine guns. He has men who will use them. And he has a fanatical willingness to die for his cause, however vile it is."

"No, you don't understand," Anne said. "I have to get back to the plantation. My brother is an invalid: the damnyankees gassed him this past spring. Do you know if Marshlands is safe? I tried to telephone from Charleston, but—"

"Specifically, no," Hotchkiss answered. "And most telephone lines are down, as you will have found. I can tell you this, though: it's not safe to be white—unless you're also a Red, and there are a few like that, the swine—between here and Columbia. Like I say, ma'am, we have ourselves a war here. In fact—" He stopped looking at her and started looking at the Vauxhall. "I'm going to ask you to step out of that motorcar, if you don't mind."

"What? I certainly do mind."

“Ma’am, I am confiscating your motorcar in the name of the Confederate States of America,” Hotchkiss said. “This is a military area; I have that right. The vehicle will be returned to you at the end of this emergency. If for any reason it cannot be returned, you will be compensated as required by law.” When Anne, not believing what she was hearing, made no move to get out, the major snapped, “Potter! Harris!” Two of his men trained rifles on her.

“This is an outrage!” she exclaimed. The soldiers’ faces were implacable. If she didn’t get out, they would shoot her. That was quite plain. Quivering with fury, she descended to the ground.

Major Hotchkiss pointed farther up the road. “There’s a crossroads general store up there. We’ve got a fair number of folks in tents already. It’s about half a mile. You go on, Miss Colleton. They’ll take care of you best they can. We smash this Colored Socialist Republic or whatever the niggers are calling it, then we can get on with the fight against the damnyankees.”

“Give me a rifle,” Anne said suddenly. “I’m a good shot, and I’m a lot less likely to fall over dead than half your so-called soldiers here.”

But the Confederate major shook his head without a word. She knew she was right, but what good did that do her if he wouldn’t listen? The answer tolled in her mind: none. Dully, she began walking up the road. When war reached out its hand, what did wealth and power matter? A fool with a gun could take them away. A fool with a gun had just taken them away.

Major Irving Morrell and Captain John Abell took off their caps when they went into Independence Hall to see the Liberty Bell. Philadelphia, being the headquarters of the War Department, was full of U.S. military men of all ranks and branches of service. Only someone very observant would have noted the twisted black-and-gold cords on the caps that marked these two as General Staff officers.

Abell, who had a bookish look to him, fit the common preconception for the appearance of a General Staff man. Morrell, though, was more weathered, his face lined and tanned, though he was only in his mid-twenties. He wore his sandy hair cropped close to his head, as field officers commonly did. He felt like a field officer. He’d been a field officer: he’d almost lost a leg in the U.S. invasion of Confederate Sonora, and then, after a long recuperation, he’d led a

battalion in eastern Kentucky. What he'd done there had impressed his division commander enough to get him sent to Philadelphia.

Intellectually, he knew what a plum this was. It didn't altogether fill him with joy, though. He wanted to be out in the forest or the mountains or tramping through the desert—somewhere away from the city and close to the foe.

"Come on, let's get moving," he said now, and hurried ahead of Abell to get a good look at the Liberty Bell. His thigh pained him when he sped up like that, and would probably go on paining him the rest of his life. He ignored it. You could let something like that rule you, or you could rule it. Morrell did not aim to let anything keep him from doing what he wanted to do.

"It's been here a long time, Major," Abell said. "It's going to be here for a long time yet."

"Yes, but *I'm* not going to be here for a long time," Morrell answered. When he'd learned enough, or so the promise had gone, they'd promote him and send him back to the field to command a unit bigger than a battalion. "I want to fight with guns, not with maps and dividers and a telegraph clicker."

He looked back over his shoulder as he said that, just in time to catch the sidelong glance Abell gave him. The captain, like most General Staff officers, preferred fighting the war at a distance and in the abstract to the reality of mud and bad food and wounds and terror. Battle always seemed so much cleaner, so much neater, when it was red and blue lines on a chart.

Then such thoughts left Morrell's mind as, with a good many other soldiers, he crowded round the emblem of freedom for the United States. The surface of the bell was surprisingly rough, testimony to the imperfect skill of the founders who had cast it. Around the crown ran the words from Leviticus that had given the bell its name: *Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof*.

He wondered whether Robert E. Lee had seen the Liberty Bell when he occupied Philadelphia in 1862. Lee's victories had given the Confederate States a liberty the USA had not wanted to grant them, but he hadn't taken the bell back south with him. That was something, albeit not much.

Morrell reached out and touched the cool metal. "We're still free," he murmured. "Still free, by God."

“That’s right,” John Abell said beside him. “The freest nation on the face of the earth.” Normally cold-blooded as a lizard in a blizzard, he sounded genuinely moved by the Liberty Bell. Then, almost gloating, he added, “And we’re going to pay the Rebs back for all they’ve done to us these past fifty years, and the English, and the French, and the Canadians, too.”

“You’d best believe it,” Morrell said, and took his hand away. The metal of the bell had grown warm under his fingers. He smiled, enjoying the idea that he had had a connection with history. No sooner had he stepped back from the bell than a fresh-faced lieutenant came up and caressed its smooth curves with almost a lover’s touch.

Independence Hall also boasted a facsimile of the Declaration of Independence. Facsimiles, though, meant little to Morrell. What was real counted. If you wanted to be theoretical…you belonged on the General Staff. He snorted, amused by the conceit.

“What’s funny, sir?” Captain Abell asked. Morrell just smiled and shook his head, not wanting to insult his companion.

They walked up Chestnut, back toward the War Department offices that had swallowed so much of Franklin Square. Philadelphia buzzed with all sorts of Federal activity; especially after the Confederate bombardment of Washington during the Second Mexican War, the Pennsylvania city had become the *de facto* capital of the USA. That was as well, for Washington now lay under the bootheels of the Rebels.

The opening Confederate attack in the war had been aimed at Philadelphia, too, but was stopped at the Susquehanna, one river short of the Delaware. Here and there, buildings bore scars from Confederate bombing raids. These days, with the Rebels pushed back into Maryland, bombing aeroplanes came over more rarely. Even so, antiaircraft cannon poked watchful snouts into the air in parks and at street corners.

Abell bought a couple of cinnamon rolls, a Philadelphia specialty, from a street vendor. He offered one to Morrell, who shook his head. “I don’t want anything that sweet,” he said. Half a block later, he came upon a Greek selling grape leaves stuffed with spicy meat and rice. To make them easier to handle, the fellow had skewered them on sticks. Morrell bought three. “Here’s a proper lunch,” he declared.

He and Abell both slowed down to eat as they walked. They hadn’t

gone far when someone behind them shouted, “Get the hell out of here, you stinking wog! This is a white man’s town.”

Morrell turned on his heel, Abell imitating him. A beefy, middle-aged civilian was shaking his finger in the Greek foodseller’s face. Ignoring the twinge in his bad leg, Morrell walked rapidly back toward them. As he drew near, he saw the beefy man wore a pin in his lapel: a silver circle, with a sword set slantwise across it. Soldiers’ Circle members made up a sort of informal militia of men who had served out their terms of conscription. They were perhaps the leading patriotic organization in the country, especially to hear them talk.

A lot of them, of course, the younger ones, had been reconscripted since the war broke out. Others had proved useful in other ways: serving as additions to the New York City police, for instance, after the Mormons and Socialists had touched off the Remembrance Day riots this past spring. And some of them, like this chap, liked to throw their weight around.

“Sir, why don’t you just leave this man alone?” Morrell said. The words were polite. The tone was anything but. At his side, Captain Abell nodded.

“He’s a damned foreigner,” the Soldiers’ Circle man exclaimed. “He’s almost certainly not a citizen. He doesn’t look like he *ought* to be a citizen, the stinking wog. *Are* you a citizen?” he demanded of the Greek.

“Not your *gamemeno* business what I am,” the foodseller answered, bolder than he had been before he had anyone on his side.

“You see? He doesn’t hardly speak English,” the Soldiers’ Circle man said. “Ought to put him in a leaky boat and ship him back to where he came from.”

“I got son in Army.” The Greek shook his finger at the fellow who was harassing him. “In Army to do fighting, not to play games like you was. Paul is sergeant—I bet you never got no stripes.”

The Soldiers’ Circle man went bright red. Morrell would have bet that meant the Greek had scored a bull’s-eye. “Why don’t you take yourself somewhere else?” Morrell told the dedicated patriot. Muttering under his breath, the corpulent fellow did depart, looking angrily back over his shoulder.

Morrell and Abell waved off the foodseller’s thanks and headed up

Chestnut again, toward the War Department. “Those Soldiers’ Circle men can be arrogant bastards,” Abell said. “He was treating that fellow like he was a nigger, not just a dago or whatever the hell he is.”

“Yeah,” Morrell said, “and a Confederate nigger at that.” He checked himself. “The other side to that coin is, the niggers down in the CSA are giving the white folks there a surprise or two.”

“You’re right,” Abell said. “Now what we have to do is see how we can best take advantage of it.”

Morrell nodded. Taking advantage of the enemy didn’t come easy, not when machine guns knocked down advances before they could get moving—assuming artillery hadn’t already done that before soldiers ever came out of the trenches.

He sighed. An awful lot of U.S. officers—including, as far as he was concerned, too many on the General Staff—didn’t, maybe couldn’t, think past slamming straight at the Rebs and overwhelming them by sheer weight of numbers. The USA had the numbers. Using them effectively was proving to be a horse of another color.

You went into General Staff headquarters through what looked like, and once had been, a millionaire’s mansion. Morrell had always doubted that that fooled the Confederate spies surely haunting Philadelphia, but nobody’d asked his opinion. Inside, a sober-faced sergeant checked his identification and Abell’s with meticulous care, comparing photographs to faces. *Bureaucracy in action,* Morrell thought: the noncom saw them every day.

After gaining permission to enter the sanctum, they went into the map room. Abell pointed to the map of Utah, where U.S. forces had finally pushed the Mormon rebels out of Salt Lake City and back toward Ogden. “That was your doing, more than anyone else,” he said to Morrell, half admiring, half suspicious.

“TR listened to me,” Morrell said with a shrug. Instead of straight-ahead slugging, he urged attacks through the Wasatch Mountains and from the north, to make the Mormons have to do several things at the same time with inadequate resources. He’d proposed that to the brass on arriving here. They’d ignored him. A chanced meeting with the president had revived the plan. Unlike a lowly major, TR could make the General Staff listen instead of trying without any luck to persuade it.

Except for the soldiers actually fighting there (and perhaps except

for the resentment higher-ups in the General Staff might show against him for being right), Utah was old news now, anyhow. Morrell looked at a new map, one that had gone up only a few days before. On it, the Confederacy, especially from South Carolina through Louisiana, seemed to have broken out in a bad case of the measles, or maybe even smallpox.

He pointed to the indications of insurrection. “The Rebs will have a jolly time fighting their own Negroes and us, too,” he said.

“That’s the idea,” John Abell said. Both men smiled, well pleased with the world.

Scipio was not used to wearing the coarse, colorless homespun shirt and trousers of a Negro laborer. As butler at the Marshlands mansion, he’d put on formal wear suitable for a Confederate senator in Richmond, save only that his vest was striped and his buttons made of brass. He wasn’t used to sleeping in a blanket on the ground, either, or to eating whatever happened to come into his hands, or to going hungry a lot of the time.

But he would never be butler at Marshlands again. The mansion had gone up in flames at the start of the Marxist revolt—the mostly black revolt—against the Confederate States. If the Congaree Socialist Republic failed, Scipio would never be anything again, except a stinking corpse and then whitening bones hanging from a tree branch.

The headquarters of the Congaree Socialist Republic kept moving, as the Confederates brought pressure to bear against now one, now another of its fluid borders. At the moment, the red flags with the broken chains in black flew over a nameless crossroads not far north of Holly Hill, South Carolina.

Cassius came up to Scipio. Cassius had worn homespun all his life, and a shapeless floppy hat to go with it. He had been the chief hunter at Marshlands, and also—though Scipio hadn’t known of it till after the war with the USA began, and had learned only by accident then—the chief Red. Now he styled himself the chairman of the Republic.

“How you is, Kip?” he asked, the dialect of the Congaree thick as jambalaya in his mouth. But he did not think the way white folks thought their Negroes thought: “Got we anudder one fo’ revolutionary justice. You is one o’ de judges.”

“Where he is?” Scipio asked. When talking with his fellows, he used the Congaree dialect, too. When talking with whites, he spoke standard English better than almost any of them. That had already proved useful to the Congaree Socialist Republic, and likely would again.

“Here he come,” Cassius answered, and, sure enough, two young, stalwart black men were hustling along a short, plump white. His white linen suit was stained with smoke and grass; several days of stubble blurred the outlines of what had been a neat white goatee. In formal tones, Cassius declared, “De peasants an’ workers o’ de Congaree Socialist Republic charges Jubal Marberry here wid ownin’ a plantation an’ wid ’sploitin an’ ’pressin’ he workers on it—an’ wid bein’ a fat man livin’ off what dey does.”

Two others came up beside Scipio to hear the case, not that there was much case to hear at one of these revolutionary tri-bunals. One was a woman named Cherry, from Marshlands, whose screams had helped touch off the rebellion there. The other was a big man named Agamemnon, who had labored at Marberry’s plantation.

He spoke to his former boss—probably his former owner, too, since, like Scipio, he was past thirty: “You got anything to say befo’ the co’t pass sentence on you?”

Marberry was old and more than a little deaf; Agamemnon had to repeat the question. When he did, the white man showed he had spirit left: “Whatever you do to me, they’ll hang you higher than Haman, and better than you deserve, too.”

“What is de verdict?” Cassius asked.

No one bothered with witnesses for the defense, or for the prosecution, either. The three judges walked off a few feet and spoke in low voices. “Ain’t no reason to waste no time on he,” Agamemnon said. “He guilty, the old bastard.”

“We give he what he deserve,” Cherry said with venomous relish.

Scipio didn’t say anything. He’d been in several of these trials, and hadn’t said much at any of them. He’d never intended to be a revolutionary—it was either that, though, or die for knowing too much. He had no love for white folks, but he had no love for savagery, either.

His silence didn’t matter. Had he voted for acquittal, the other two

would have outvoted him—and odds were he soon would have faced revolutionary justice himself after such an unreliable act. He'd survived so far by keeping quiet. He hoped he could keep right on surviving.

Agamemnon and Cherry turned back toward Cassius. They both nodded. So did Scipio, a moment later. Cassius said, "Jubal Marberry, you is guilty of the crime of 'pression 'gainst the proletariat of the Congaree Socialist Republic. De punishment is death."

Marberry cursed at him and tried to kick one of the men who held him. They dragged the planter off behind some trees. A pistol shout sounded, and then a moment later another one. The two Negroes came out. Jubal Marberry didn't.

With considerable satisfaction, Cassius nodded to the impromptu court. "You done fine," he told them. Agamemnon and Cherry headed off, both of them obviously well-pleased with themselves. Scipio started to leave, too. One of these days, he was going to let his feelings show on his face despite the butler's mask of imperturbability he cultivated. That would be the end of him. Even as he turned, though, Cassius said, "You wait, Kip."

"What you want?" Scipio did his best to sound easy and relaxed. The Congaree Socialist Republic went after enemies of the revolution within its own ranks as aggressively as it pursued them among the whites who had for so long oppressed and battened on the Negro laborers of the area.

But Cassius said, "Gwine have we a parley wid de white folks officer. We trade de wounded white folks sojers we catches fo'de niggers dey gives we. You gwine talk wid de officer." His long, weathered face stretched into lines of anticipatory glee.

Scipio didn't need long to figure out why. With a deliberate effort of will, he abandoned the Congaree dialect: "I suppose you will expect me to speak in this fashion, thereby disconcerting them."

Cassius laughed and slapped his knee. "Do Jesus, yes!" he exclaimed. "You set your mind to it, you talk fancier'n any o' they white folks. An' you don' git angried up in a hurry, neither. We wants a cool head, an' you got dat."

"When we do dis parley?" Scipio asked.

"Right now. I take you up to de front." Cassius reached into his

pocket, pulled out a red bandanna, and tied it around Scipio's left upper arm. "Dere. Now you *o*fficial." No doubt because the Confederacy, if you looked at it from the right angle, was nothing but an elaborate hierarchy of ranks and privileges, the Congaree Socialist Republic acted as if such matters did not exist. The revolution was about equality.

The front was just that, a series of trenches and firing pits. Both the black soldiers of the Socialist Republic and their Confederate foes were in large measure amateurs, but both sides were doing their best to imitate what the professionals from the CSA and USA had been doing.

Cassius took Scipio to a tent where the white officer waited. "Ain't gwine let you cross out of de country we holds," he said. "Cain't trust white folks not to keep you an' give you a rope necktie."

Considering what had just happened to Jubal Marberry and to many others, Scipio reckoned the barbarism equally distributed. Saying so, however, struck him as inexpedient. And he knew he should have been grateful that Cassius worried about his safety rather than planning to liquidate him.

The tent was butternut canvas, captured Confederate Army issue. Scipio pulled the flap open, ducked his head, and went inside. A man in Confederate uniform sat behind a folding table. He did not stand up for Scipio, as he would have on meeting a U.S. officer during a parley.

"Good day," Scipio said, as if greeting a guest at Marshlands. "Shall we discuss this matter in a civilized fashion, as it involves the well-being of brave men from both sides?"

Sure enough, the Confederate major's eyebrows rose. He wasn't a gray-bearded relic like a lot of the men the CSA was using to try to suppress the revolution; Scipio judged he would have been fighting the Yankees if he hadn't lost a hand. "Don't you talk pretty?" he said, and then, as if making a great concession, "All right, I'm Jerome Hotchkiss. I can treat for Confederate forces along this front. You can do the same for your people?"

"That is correct, Major," Scipio answered. "For the purposes of this meeting, you may address me as Spartacus."

Hotchkiss let out a bark of laughter. "All you damn Red niggers use that for an alias. Best guess I can give about why is that maybe you reckon we won't know who to hang once we've put you down. If

that's what you think, you're dreaming."

Scipio feared the major was right. Showing that fear, though, would put him in Cassius' bad graces. Cassius being more immediately dangerous to him than were the forces of the CSA, he said, "I suggest, Major, that it is wise to kill your bear before you speak of skinning him."

"You want to watch the way you talk to me," Hotchkiss said, as if rebuking a Negro waiter at a restaurant.

"Major, you would be well advised to remember that you are in the sovereign territory of the Congaree Socialist Republic," Scipio returned. Hotchkiss glared at him. He looked back steadily. The shoe was on the other foot now, and the white man didn't care for the fit. Scipio understood that. He'd spent his whole life not caring for the fit. He said, "Shall we agree to put other matters aside for the time being, in the hopes of coming to terms on this one specific issue?"

"Fair enough," Hotchkiss said, making a visible effort to control himself. "Some of our wounded who got left behind when we had to pull back…When we advanced again, we found 'em chopped to bits or burned alive or…Hell, I don't need to go on. You know what I'm talking about."

"I also know that your forces are seldom in the habit of taking prisoners of any kind, wounded or not," Scipio answered. "How many Negroes have been hanged, these past days?"

Plainly, the thought in Hotchkiss' mind was, *Not enough*. "Negroes caught in arms against the Confederate States of America—"

Scipio surprised him by interrupting: "Lackeys of the oppressors caught in arms resisting the proletarian revolution of the Congaree Socialist Republic…" The Marxist rhetoric he'd learned from Cassius came in handy here, no matter how low his opinion of it commonly was. He went on, "Our causes being as repugnant to each other as they are, is it not all the more important to observe the laws of war with especial care?"

"That'd mean admitting you have the right to rebel," Hotchkiss said.

But Scipio shook his head. "The USA did not admit the CSA had that right in the War of Secession, yet treated Confederate prisoners humanely."

He could see Hotchkiss thinking, *White men on both sides*. But the major didn't say that. What he did say was, "Maybe."

Taking that for assent, Scipio said, "Very well. We undertake to exchange under flag of truce men too badly wounded to go on fighting at a place and time you may choose, said men to have been treated as well as possible by the side capturing them. Is it agreed?"

"Agreed," Hotchkiss said, "but only as a war measure. It doesn't mean we say you have any right to do what you're doing. After we smash you, you'll still hang for rebellion and treason."

"First catch the bear, Major," Scipio answered. He'd done what Cassius wanted. He thought it would bring some good. How much? For how long? He wished he knew how the revolution fared across the rest of the Confederacy.

The adobe farmhouse outside Bountiful, Utah, sat on a low rise, so that it commanded the ground in front of it. The Mormon rebels against the authority of the United States had had months of hard fighting in which to learn their craft. They'd learned it all too well, as far as Paul Mantarakis was concerned. When they found a position like this, they fortified it for everything it was worth, then stayed in it and fought, sometimes men and women both, until U.S. forces finally overwhelmed them.

A machine gun inside the farmhouse opened up, spitting death down at the trenches Mantarakis and his comrades had dug. He ducked, making sure the top of his head was below the level of the parapet. The fancy new helmet he wore didn't keep out direct hits. People had found out about that the hard way.

He waited till the machine gun's fire was directed elsewhere along the trench, then stood up on the firing step and popped a couple of rounds from his Springfield at the adobe. He didn't think they were likely to accomplish much: the mud brick in a lot of these Utah farmhouses was thick enough to stop a bullet, though it had been intended to keep out heat and cold, not flying lead. And, for good measure, the Mormons had put up corrugated iron sheets over the windows, turning them into first-rate firing slits.

Ben Carlton came up to Mantarakis. "Hey, Sarge, you want to come check the stew pot?"

“Sure.” Paul followed him down the line of trench. Carlton was the official company cook, and had a gift for scrounging from sources both official and unofficial. But Mantarakis really had been a cook back in Philadelphia, though getting stripes on his sleeve kept him from exercising his talents these days as often as he would have liked.

The pot smelled more savory than it often did. “Chickens and a couple rabbits,” Carlton said, “and potatoes and beets and onions and —all kinds of things. It’s downright—bountiful around here.” He laughed at his own joke.

“Yeah.” Mantarakis tasted the stew. “Not bad,” he said. “Just kind of bland, you know what I’m saying? You need some garlic and some basil, maybe, or oregano, to perk it up. Not too much,” he added hastily as Carlton started to pour most of a tin of garlic powder into the pot. “You want to make the stew taste better—you don’t want to just taste the spice, either.” Little by little, he was educating Carlton.

He suddenly stopped worrying about the stew, for U.S. artillery opened up on the adobe and the line it anchored. The noise was terrific, overpowering, enough to drive a man mad. To Mantarakis, it was also sweet as fine wine. Without artillery, his guess was that U.S. forces would still be bogged down somewhere south of Provo. It was the one thing government troops had in prodigal supply and the Mormon rebels largely lacked.

Captain Cecil Schneider hurried up into the frontmost trench. Schneider still wore single silver bars, not double; he’d won his promotion just after the ruins of the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City passed into government hands. With him came Gordon McSweeney, who, like Mantarakis, had started the war a private and who, also like Mantarakis, now sported sergeant’s stripes.

“When the barrage lets up, we go after that farmhouse,” Schneider said. He didn’t sound enthusiastic—no one who’d been through the fall of Salt Lake City was apt to be enthusiastic about fighting ever again—but he sounded determined. Casualties had made him a company commander the same way they’d made Paul and McSweeney noncoms, but he’d turned out to be a pretty good one.

Because of that, the first thing out of Paul’s mouth was, “Yes, sir.” The second thing, though, was, “What the devil is he got up as, sir?” He pointed to Gordon McSweeney, who instead of a pack wore a big metal drum on his back and carried in his hands a hose attached to it.

McSweeney spoke for himself: “This is a device for sending the misbelievers into the fiery furnace.” As far as he was concerned, anyone less grimly Presbyterian than himself was heading straight for hell. That included papists and the Orthodox Paul Mantarakis, but it also most especially included Mormons, who, as far as he was concerned, were not Christians at all.

Captain Schneider amplified that, saying, “The gadget’s supposed to be able to deal with strongpoints that laugh at rifles and machine guns. If the artillery doesn’t punch the ticket on that farmhouse, we’ll send Gordon up to see what he can do. Only disadvantage is, it’s a short-range weapon.”

“I will bring it close enough to the farmhouse to be used,” McSweeney promised. Whatever the thing was, he sounded quiveringly eager to use it. Mantarakis had no idea what the Mormons felt about Gordon McSweeney, or even whether they knew he existed among the multitude of soldiers in the U.S. force. He knew McSweeney scared him to death.

Ever so warily, he peered up over the parapet. The rebels’ line was taking quite a pounding; through dust and smoke, it looked as if several large bites were gone from the farmhouse. Maybe it would be easy this time. It had been, once or twice. Some of the other times, though…

He would have liked to see the artillery go on for days, for weeks, killing all the Mormons without any need for the infantry to do their work. But, for one thing, there wasn’t enough ammunition for a bombardment like that, not on a secondary front like Utah. And, for another, he’d seen fighting the Confederates that even the longest, most savage barrages didn’t kill all or even most of the enemy soldiers at whom they were aimed.

After an hour or so, the guns fell silent. Captain Schneider blew a whistle. Up out of the trenches swarmed his company and several others. “Come on!” Mantarakis called to the men of his squad. “We don’t want to spend a lot of time in between the lines where they can shoot us down. We want to get right in there with ’em.”

The ground was chewed up from previous failed assaults on the Mormon position, and chewed worse by short rounds from the latest shelling. None, for once, seemed to have come down on the U.S. trenches, which Paul reckoned a small miracle. He dashed past stinking corpses and pieces of corpses, some still in green-gray often

stained black with old blood. Flies rose in buzzing clouds.

Sure enough, some of the Mormon defenders remained alive and angry at the world, or at least at that portion of the United States Army attacking them. All along their line, flames showed riflemen shooting at the soldiers in green-gray heading their way. Somewhere not far from Paul, a man took a bullet and began shrieking for his mother.

And, sure enough, the machine gun in the adobe farmhouse started up, too. As he dove headlong into a shell crater, Mantarakis was convinced the racket a machine gun made was the most hateful noise in the world.

He looked toward the farmhouse. He and however many men still survived from his squad had come well past the high-water mark of earlier U.S. attacks. He was, he thought, within a hundred yards of that infernal device hammering out death up ahead. He was also damned if he knew how he was going to be able to get any nearer than that.

Somebody thudded down into the crater beside him: Gordon McSweeney. “I have to get closer,” the dour Scotsman said. “Twenty yards is best, though thirty may do: one for each piece of silver Judas took.”

Mantarakis sighed. He too knew they had to take out that machine gun. If McSweeney had a way—“I’ll go left. You go right a few seconds later. We’ll keep moving till you’re close enough.” *Or until you get killed—or until I do*. He wished he could take out his worry beads and work them.

They weren’t the only soldiers pushing up toward the adobe. The Mormons in there had even less idea than Paul did of what the strange contraption on McSweeney’s back was. Working his way to within twenty yards of the machine gun was slow and dangerous work, but he managed.

To Mantarakis’ horror, McSweeney stood up in the hole where he’d sheltered. He aimed the nozzle end of the hose he carried at the machine gun’s firing slit. Before the gun could cut him down, a spurt of flame burst from the nozzle, played over the front of the farmhouse, and went right through the narrow slit at the crew serving the machine gun.

Paul heard the lyingly cheerful sound of rounds cooking off inside

the farmhouse. McSweeney dashed toward it. He stuck the nozzle right up against the slit and let loose another tongue of fire.

Along with the sound of cartridges prematurely ignited came another—the sound of screams. Gordon McSweeney's face was transfigured with joy, as if he'd just taken Jerusalem from the pagans. And then something happened that Paul had never before seen in Utah: three or four men came stumbling out through a hole in the side of the adobe, their hands lifted high in surrender.

Joyfully smiling still, McSweeney turned the nozzle of the flamethrower hose on them. "No, Gordon!" Paul yelled. "Let 'em give up. Maybe we can break this rebellion yet."

"I suppose it could be so," McSweeney admitted reluctantly. The Mormons shambled off into captivity. Out from the adobe floated the strong stench of burnt meat. Mantarakis didn't care. With its linchpin lost, this line wouldn't hold. One fight fewer, he thought, till Utah was done.

* * *

For this first time since the land was settled in the seventeenth century, a paved road ran between Lucien Galtier's farm and the town of Rivière-du-Loup on the St. Lawrence. If Lucien had had his way, the road would have disappeared, and with it the American soldiers and engineers who had built it. But, regardless of what he wanted, the Americans maintained their hold on Quebec south of the St. Lawrence, and had pushed across the mighty river at Rivière-du-Loup, intending, no doubt, to sweep southwest toward Quebec City, and then toward Montreal.

The push across the river and the newly paved road were anything but unrelated. As Lucien trudged in toward the white-painted wood farmhouse with the steep red roof after feeding the horse, he glanced at the much larger wooden building, painted what he thought a most unattractive shade of green-gray, that had gone up not far away, on what had been some of his best wheat land.

While he watched, a green-gray ambulance bearing on each side panel a large red cross inside a white circle pulled up to the building. The driver leaped out. He and an attendant who emerged from the rear of the vehicle carried a man on a stretcher into the U.S. military hospital. They hurried back and brought in another injured man. Then the ambulance, engine snarling, headed back toward Rivière-du-Loup

to pick up more casualties.

Lucien wiped his feet before he went into the farmhouse. Though not a big man himself, he towered over his wife, Marie. That did not mean he could track muck inside without hearing about it in great detail.

“Warm in here,” he said approvingly. “It is only October, but the wind outside is ready for January.”

“May it freeze the Americans,” Marie answered from the kitchen. Like her husband, she spoke in Quebecois French. It was the only language she knew. Lucien had picked up some English during his conscript time in the Canadian Army, just as English-speaking Canadians soaked up a little French there. He’d forgotten most of what he’d learned in the twenty-odd years since he’d served, though having to deal with the Americans had brought some of it back.

He walked toward the kitchen, drawn not only by the warmth of the stove but also by the delicious smells floating out toward him. He sniffed. He prided himself on an educated nose. “Don’t tell me,” he said, pointing to the covered pot. “Ham baked with prunes. And are there potatoes in the oven, too?”

Marie Galtier regarded him with mixed affection and exasperation. “How am I supposed to surprise you, Lucien?”

He spread his hands and shrugged. “As long as we’ve been married, and you still expect to surprise me? You make me happy. That is enough, and more than enough. What do I need of surprises?”

Also in the kitchen, helping her mother, was their eldest daughter, Nicole. She was slight and dark like Marie, and put Lucien achingly in mind of what her mother had been like when he’d first started courting her. Now she said, “I can surprise you, Papa.”

“Of this I have no doubt,” Lucien said. “The question is, my little bird, do I want to be surprised?” He didn’t remember only what Marie had been like when he was courting her. He also remembered, all too well, what he had been like. He did not think the young male of the species likely to have shown any dramatic improvement over the intervening generation.

And when Nicole answered, “Papa, I do not know,” his heart sank. She took a long, deep breath before going on, and that heart, seemingly a relentless gymnast, leaped into his mouth. Then she said,

“I have been thinking of doing nurse’s work at the American hospital. It is very close, of course, and we could use the money the work would bring.”

After all the dreadful possibilities he had imagined, that one seemed not so bad…at first. Then Lucien stared. “You would help the Americans, Nicole? The enemies of our country? The allies of the enemies of France?”

His daughter bit her lip and looked down at the apron she wore over her long wool dress. To Galtier’s surprise, his wife spoke up for her: “If a man is hurt and in pain, does it matter what country he comes from?”

“Father Pascal would say the same thing,” Lucien replied, which made Marie wince, because the priest at Rivière-du-Loup, whatever anyone’s opinion of his piety might be, collaborated eagerly with the Americans.

“But, Papa,” Nicole said, “they *are* hurt and in pain. You can hear them moaning in the night sometimes.” Lucien had heard those moans, too. They had been sweet to his ears. He shook his head in dismay to discover his daughter did not feel the same. Nicole persisted, “You know what I think of Father Pascal. You know what I think of the Americans. None of that would change. How could it? And they would be giving money to people who despise them.”

“You don’t even speak any English,” Galtier said. As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he knew he was in trouble. When you had to shift your reasons for saying no, you were liable to end up saying yes.

And Nicole pounced: “I can learn it, I know that. It might even be useful for me to know if, God forbid—” She didn’t go on. She didn’t need to go on. Lucien had no trouble completing the sentence for himself. *If, God forbid, the United States win the war and try to make us all use English afterwards*. That was what she’d meant, or something very much like it.

He didn’t try to answer on the spur of the moment. Believing Canada and France and England and the Confederacy could be defeated went dead against all his hopes and dreams. What he did say was, “How Major Quigley will laugh when he learns you are working for the Americans.”

He spoke with more than a little bitterness. Nicole bit her lip. The

French-speaking U.S. major had placed the hospital on Galtier land not least because Lucien would not collaborate with the American occupying authorities.

Marie spoke up again: “Actually, that may be for the best. The major may believe we are coming round to his view of things after all, and so become less likely to trouble us from now on.”

Lucien chewed on that. It did make a certain amount of sense. And so, instead of putting his foot down as he’d intended, he said, “We shall speak of this more later.” His wife and eldest daughter nodded, outwardly obedient to his will as women were supposed to be. He knew they both had to be smiling inside, though. Sooner or later, they would get what they wanted. Talking about things later was but one short step from giving in.

At supper, he discovered he was the last one in the family to hear about what Nicole had in mind. That saddened him but didn’t unduly surprise him. For one thing, he did more work away from the farmhouse than anyone else. For another, he was the one from whom permission would have to come. Nicole would have wanted to know she had support from the rest before bearding him.

“I wish I could go there, too, and make money of my own,” his daughter Susanne said wistfully. Since she was only thirteen, they would not have to worry about that unless the war went on appallingly long. *Or, of course, unless there is another war after this one,* Lucien thought, and then shivered, as if someone had walked over his grave.

His older son, Charles, did not approve of Nicole’s plan. “I say the Americans are just another pack of *Boches*, and we should have as little to do with them as we can.” He spoke with the certainty of seventeen. In another year, he would have gone into the Canadian Army to serve his time. The only good thing about the war was that it had rolled over this part of Quebec before he could take part in it.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Georges, who was a couple of years younger than his brother and almost the changeling of the family: not only was he larger and fairer than his parents and brother and sisters, but he also had a rollicking wit out of keeping with the pungent sarcasm Lucien brought to bear on life. Now he grinned at Nicole across the table. “Maybe you’ll meet a handsome American doctor and he’ll sweep you off your—Oww!”

By the dull thud from under the table, she'd kicked him in the shin. To underscore a point that needed no underscoring, his littlest sister, Jeanne, said, "That was mean." Eight-year-old certainty wasn't of the same kind as the seventeen-year-old variety, but it wasn't any less certain, either. Denise, who was a couple of years older than Jeanne, nodded to show her agreement. Jeanne turned to Nicole and said, "You'd never do anything like that, would you?"

"Certainly not," Nicole said, frost in her voice. The look she turned on Georges should have turned him into a block of ice, too. It didn't. He stayed impudent as ever, even if he did have to bend over to rub his injured leg.

"Now wait, all of you," Lucien said. "No one has said that Nicole will have any opportunity to meet American doctors, even if she wanted to do such a thing, which I already have no doubt she does not."

"But, Papa," Nicole said, "are you changing your mind?"

"No, for I never said yes," he answered. His eldest daughter looked stricken. He glanced down to Marie at the foot of the table. He knew what her expressions meant. This one meant she'd back him, but she thought he was wrong. He sighed. "Perhaps it might be possible to try…but only for a little while."

II

Lieutenant General George Armstrong Custer slammed his fist down on the table that held the maps of western Kentucky. “By heaven,” he said, “the War Department’s finally come out with an order that makes sense. General attack all along the line! Draft the orders to implement it here in First Army country, Major Dowling. I’ll want to see them by two o’ clock this afternoon.”

“Yes, sir,” Abner Dowling said, and then, because part of his job as adjutant was saving Custer from himself, he added, “Sir, I don’t believe they mean all units are to move forward at the same moment, only that we are to take the best possible advantage of the Confederates’ embarrassment by striking where they are weakest.”

Saving Custer from himself was a full-time job. Dowling had broad shoulders—there wasn’t much about Dowling that wasn’t broad—and needed them to bear up under the weight of bad temper and worse judgment the general commanding First Army pressed down on him. Custer had always been sure of himself, even as a brash cavalry officer in the War of Secession. Now, at the age of seventy-five, he was downright autocratic…and no more right than he had ever been.

His pouchy, wrinkled, sagging face went from pasty white to dusky purple in the space of a couple of heartbeats. Neither color went well with his drooping mustache, which he peroxided to an approximation of the golden color it had once had naturally. The same applied to the locks of hair that flowed out from under his service cap. He wore the cap all the time, indoors and out, for it concealed the shiny expanse of the crown of his head.

“When I see the order ‘general attack,’ Major, I construe it to mean attack all along the line, and that is what I intend to do,” he snapped

now. The only time his voice left the range from petulant to irritable was when he was talking to a war correspondent: then he spoke gently as any sucking dove. “We shall go at the enemy and smash him up.”

“Wouldn’t it be wise, sir, to concentrate our attacks where he shows himself to be less strong, break through there, and then use the advantages we’ve gained to make further advances?” Dowling said, doing his best—as he’d done his best since the outset of the war, with results decidedly mixed—to be the voice of reason.

Defiantly, Custer shook his head. Those dyed locks flipped back and forth. Not even the magic word *breakthrough* had reached him. “Without their niggers to help ’em, the Rebs are just a pack of weak sisters,” he declared. “One good push and the whole rotten structure they’ve built comes tumbling down.”

“Sir, we’ve been pushing with all we have for the past year and more, and it hasn’t tumbled down yet,” Dowling said. *If it had, we’d be a lot deeper into the Confederacy than we are—and even good generals have trouble against the Rebs*.

“We’ll drive them out of Morehead’s Horse Mill,” Custer said, “and that, thank God, will have the added benefit of getting us out of Bremen here. You can tell why this town is so small: no one in his right mind would want to live here. And once we have the railroad junction at Morehead’s Horse Mill, how in the name of all that’s holy can the Rebs hope to keep us out of Bowling Green?”

Dowling suspected there would be a number of ways the Confederate forces could keep the U.S. Army out of Bowling Green, even with Negroes in rebellion behind Rebel lines. He didn’t say that to Custer; a well-developed sense of self-preservation kept his lips sealed however much his brain seethed.

What he did say, after some thought, was, “So you’ll want me to prepare the orders with the *Schwerpunkt* aimed toward Morehead’s Horse Mill?” With the Confederates in disorder, they might actually take that town. Then, after another buildup, they could think about moving in the direction of—not yet *on*—Bowling Green.

“Schwerpunkt.” General Custer made it sound like a noise a sick horse might make. “It’s all very well to have the German Empire for an ally—without them, we’d be helpless against the Rebs and the limeys and the frogs and the Canucks. But we imitate them too much, if you ask me. A general in command of an army can’t walk to the

outhouse without the General Staff looking in the half-moon window to make sure he undoes his trouser buttons in the proper order. And all these damned foreign words fog up the simple art of war."

The United States had lost the War of Secession. Then, twenty years later, they'd lost the Second Mexican War. Germany or its Prussian core, in the meantime, had smashed the Danes, the Austrians, and the French, each in short order. As far as Dowling was concerned, the country that lost wars needed to do some learning from the side that won them.

That was something else he couldn't say. He tried guile: "If we do break through at Morehead's Horse Mill, sir, we'll be in a good position to roll up the Rebel line all the way back to the Ohio River, or else to push hard toward Bowling Green and make the enemy react to us."

All of that was true. All of it was reasonable. None of it was what Custer wanted to hear. Much of Dowling's job was telling Custer things he didn't want to hear and making him pay attention to them. What Dowling wanted was to get up to the front and command units for himself. The only reason he didn't apply for a transfer was his conviction that more men could handle a battalion in combat than could keep General Custer out of mischief.

Before Custer could go off like a Yellowstone geyser, a pretty young light-skinned colored woman poked her head into the room with the map table and said, "General, suh, I got your lunch ready in the kitchen. Mutton chops, mighty fine."

Custer's whole manner changed. "I'll be there directly, Olivia. Thank you, my dear," he said, courtly as you please. To Dowling, he added, "We'll resume this discussion after I've eaten. I do declare, Major, that young lady is the one redeeming feature I have yet found in western Kentucky."

"Er—yes, sir," Dowling said tonelessly. Custer took himself off with as much spry alacrity as a man carrying three quarters of a century could manage. He didn't bother hiding the way he pursued Olivia. Amused First Army rumor said she'd been caught, too, not just chaste. Dowling thought the rumor likely true: the general carried on like an assotted fool whenever he was around his cook and housekeeper. The adjutant was more inclined to fault Olivia's taste than Custer's. You'd think the old boy would have had his last stand years before.

An orderly came in with the day's mail. "Where shall I dump all this, sir?" he asked Dowling.

"Why don't you give it to me, Frazier? The general's eating his lunch." *Or possibly his serving wench*. Dowling shook his head to get the lewd images out of it. Coughing, he went on, "I'll sort through it for him so he can go through it quickly when he's finished."

"Yes, sir." Frazier handed him the bundle and departed. Dowling made three piles on the map table. One was for administrative matters pertaining to First Army, most of which he'd handle himself. One was for communications from the War Department. He'd end up handling most of those, too, but Custer would want to look at them first. And one was for personal letters. Custer would answer some of those—most likely, the ones full of adulation—himself. Dowling would get stuck with the rest, typing replies for the great man's signature. His lip curled.

And then, all at once, the sour expression vanished from his broad, plump, ruddy face. He arranged the piles and waited with perfect equanimity for General Custer to return. Meanwhile, he studied the map. If they could break through at Morehead's Horse Mill, they really might accomplish something.

Custer came back looking absurdly pleased with himself. Maybe he'd managed to get a hand under Olivia's long black dress. "The mail came in, sir," Dowling said, as if reporting the arrival of a new regiment.

"Ah, capital! Let's see what sort of big thing it brings us today," Custer said grandly, hauling out a piece of slang forgotten by almost everyone since the War of Secession. As Dowling had known he would, he picked up the stack of personal mail first. As Dowling had known he would, he went from grand to glum in a matter of moments. "Oh. A letter from my wife."

"Was there, sir? I didn't notice," Dowling lied. He twisted the knife a little: "I'm sure you must be glad to hear from her."

"Of course I am." Custer sounded like a liar himself. His letter opener was shaped like a cavalry saber. He used it to slit the envelope. Elizabeth Custer was in the habit of writing long, even voluminous, letters. So was the general, come to that, when he bothered to write her at all. Dowling would have bet he hadn't said anything about Olivia in any of them, though.

Custer fumbled for his reading glasses, perched them on his nose, and began to wade through the missive. Suddenly, he turned red, then white. His hand shook. He dropped one of the pages he hadn't yet read.

"Is something wrong, sir?" Dowling asked, wondering if God had chosen this moment to give First Army a new commander.

But Custer shook his head, sending his curls flying once more. "No," he said. "It's good news, as a matter of fact." If it was, no one had reacted so badly to good news since Pyrrhus of Epirus cried, *One more such victory and we are ruined!* Custer went on, "Libbie, it seems, has secured permission from the powers that be to enter into the war zone, and will soon be brightening my life here in Bremen for what she describes as an extended visit."

"How lucky you are, sir, that you'll have your own dear wife here to help you bear the heavy burden of command." Dowling brought that out with an absolutely straight face. He was proud of himself. None of the delight he felt showed in his voice, either. Having Elizabeth Custer come to Bremen for a visit was better, more delightful news than any for which he'd dared hope.

He wondered what sort of convenient illness Olivia would contract the day before Mrs. Custer arrived, and whether she'd recover the day after Mrs. Custer left or perhaps that very afternoon. By the thoughtful look in his eye, the distinguished general might have been wondering the same thing.

Whatever Custer came up with, that, by God, was not something he could pile onto the shoulders of his long-suffering adjutant. He'd have to take care of it all by his lonesome.

"I'll draft the orders for the push against Morehead's Horse Mill," Dowling said.

"Yes, go ahead," Custer agreed abstractedly. Dowling had been sure he would be abstracted at the moment. Custer had made it plain he had no use for German terminology. Dowling reminded himself not to call the concentration against Morehead's Horse Mill the *Schwerpunkt* of First Army action. But German was a useful language. English, for instance, had nothing close to *Schadenfreude* to describe the glee Dowling felt at his vain, pompous, foolish commander's discomfiture.

* * *

Despite the many things Lieutenant Commander Roger Kim-ball had thought he might do in a submarine—and his fantasies had considerable scope, ranging from laying a pretty girl in the captain's cramped cabin to sinking two Yankee battleships with the same spread of torpedoes—sailing up a South Carolina river on gunboat duty hadn't made the list. But here he was, heading up the Pee Dee to bombard the revolting Negroes—in both senses of the word—who called themselves the Congaree Socialist Republic.

Diesel smoke poured from the exhaust of the *Bonefish* at the back of the conning tower on which he stood. The submersible drew only eleven feet of water, which meant it could go farther up the river before grounding itself than most of the surface warships that had been in Charleston harbor when the rebellion broke out.

All the same, Kimball was proceeding at a quarter speed and had a man with a sounding line at the bow. The sailor turned and called, "Three fathoms twain, sir!" He cast the line again. The lead weight splashed down into the muddy water of the Pee Dee.

"Three fathoms twain," Kimball echoed to show he'd heard. Twenty feet—plenty of water under the *Bonefish*'s keel. He turned to the only other officer on the submersible, a junior lieutenant named Tom Brearley, who couldn't possibly have been as young as he looked. "What I wish we had here is a river gunboat," he said. "Then we could haul bigger guns further upstream than we'll manage with our boat."

"That's a fact, sir," Brearley agreed. He wasn't long out of the Confederate naval academy at Mobile, and agreed with just about everything his commander said. After a moment, though, he added, "We have to do the best we can with what we've got."

That was also a fact, as Kimball was glumly aware. His own features, blunter and harsher than Brearley's, assumed a bulldog cast as he surveyed the weaponry aboard the *Bonefish*. The three-inch deck gun had been designed to sink freighters, not to bombard land targets, but it would serve that purpose. For the mission, a machine gun had been hastily bolted to the top of the conning tower and another one to the deck behind it. Take all together, the three guns and the vital sounding line used up everyone in the eighteen-man crew who wasn't required to stay below and keep the diesel running.

The hatch behind Kimball was open. From it wafted the reek with which he had become intimately familiar in three years aboard submersibles, a reek made up of oil and sweat and heads that never

quite worked in the manner in which they'd been designed. Here, at least, as opposed to out on the open sea, he didn't have to keep the hatch dogged if he didn't want to flood the narrow steel tube inside which he and his men did their job.

"Three fathoms twain!" the sailor with the lead sang out again.

"Three fathoms twain," Kimball repeated. His eyes flicked back and forth, back and forth, from one side of the Pee Dee to the other. Most places, forest—or maybe jungle was a better word—came right down to the riverbank. He didn't like that. Anything could be hiding in there. He felt eyes on him, though he couldn't see anyone. He didn't like that, either.

Here and there, plantations had been carved out of the forest. He didn't know what they grew in these parts—maybe rice, maybe indigo, maybe cotton. He was from the hills of northeastern Arkansas himself. The farm where he'd grown up turned out a little wheat, a little tobacco, a few hogs, and a lot of strapping sons. Some Confederate officers looked down their noses at him because of his back-country accent. If you were good enough at what you did, though, how you talked mattered less.

But that wasn't why he growled whenever they passed a plantation. The mansions in which the Low Country bluebloods had made their homes were one and all burnt-out shells of their former selves. "I wonder if that happened to Marshlands, too," he muttered.

"Sir?" Tom Brearley said.

"Never mind." Kimball knew how to keep his mouth shut. It was none of Brearley's business that he'd been in the sack with the mistress of Marshlands at a cheap hotel when the Negro uprising broke out. He hoped Anne Colleton was all right. Like him, she had a way of running straight toward trouble. That was probably a good part of what had attracted the two of them to each other. It made for a good submarine commander. In a civilian, though, in what might as well have been the middle of a war…

A rifle cracked in the thick undergrowth. A bullet ricocheted off the side of the conning tower, a yard from Kimball's feet. He felt the vibration through the soles of his shoes. The rifle cracked again—or maybe it was another one. The round slapped past his ear.

"Hose 'em down!" he shouted to the men at the machine guns. Both guns started hammering away in the general direction from which the

shots had come. The greenery by the riverbank whipped back and forth, as if in a hailstorm rather than a hail of bullets. Whether that hail of bullets was doing anything about getting rid of the uprisen Negroes who'd fired on the *Bonefish* was another matter. Kimball didn't know enough about fighting on land to guess one way or the other. He suspected he would acquire more of an education in that regard than he really wanted.

"Wouldn't it be fine, Tom, if we could land a company of Marines and let them do the dirty work for us?" he said.

"It surely would, sir," Brearley answered. He looked up and down the length of the *Bonefish*. "It would be nice if this boat could hold a company of Marines. For that matter, it would be nice if this boat would hold all of us."

"Hey, don't talk like that. You're an officer, so you've got a bunk to call your own, and a good foot of room between the edge of it and the main corridor," Kimball said. "You sleep in a hammock or triple-decked in five and a half feet of space and you'll find out all about crowded."

"Yes, sir," Brearley said. "I know about that from training."

"You'd better remember it," Kimball told him. Another reason he'd joined the submersible service was that you couldn't be an aristocrat here—the boats weren't big enough to permit it.

He was about to say something more when the man at the bow cried out and tumbled into the Pee Dee. The fellow came up a moment later, splashing feebly. Around him, the muddy water took on a reddish cast.

Then one of the sailors working the conning-tower machine gun crumpled. He pounded at the roof of the conning tower in agony, but his legs didn't move—he'd been hit in the spine. Crimson spread from around a neat hole in the back of his tunic.

For a moment, that didn't mean anything to Kimball. Then another bullet cracked past his head, and he realized the fire was coming not from the northern bank of the Pee Dee, the one the machines guns were working over, but from the southern bank.

"Christ, we're caught in a crossfire!" he exclaimed. The Pee Dee was no more than a couple of hundred yards wide. The Negroes hiding in the bushes had only rifles (he devoutly hoped they had only rifles),

but they didn't need to be the greatest shots in the world to start picking off his men. He thought about turning the deck gun on the southern riverbank, but that would have been like flailing around with a sledgehammer, trying to smash a cockroach you couldn't even see.

"What do we do, sir?" Brearley asked.

Without waiting for orders, one of the men from the deck gun crew had leaped into the river after the wounded leadsman. He hauled the fellow back up onto the deck. It might have been in the nick of time. Kimball thought he saw something sinuous moving through the water toward the submersible, then going away. Did alligators live in the Pee Dee? Nobody had briefed him, one way or the other.

He didn't have a doctor on board the *Bonefish*, or even a pharmacist's mate. He knew a little about first aid, and so did one of the petty officers who kept the diesels going. He wished again for a river gunboat, one with its guns housed in protective turrets against just this sort of nuisance fire. It would have been nuisance fire against such a gunboat, anyway. Against the vessel he commanded, it was a great deal worse.

"All hands below!" he shouted. The sailors on deck scrambled up the ladder to the top of the conning tower, then swarmed down into the *Bonefish*. The leadsman had a bullet through his upper left arm, a wound from which he'd recover if it didn't fester. He got up and down as fast as an uninjured sailor. The man who'd been hit in the spine presented a harder problem. Moving him at all would do his wound no good, but leaving him where he sprawled was asking for him to be hit again and killed.

Kimball waited until he and the wounded machine gunner were the only men left on top of the conning tower. Bullets kept whipping past them. At the top of the ladder, Tom Brearley waited. "Nichols, I'm going to get you below now," Kimball said.

"Don't worry about me, sir," the sailor answered. "What the hell good am I like this?"

"Lots of people in your shoes now," Kimball told him. "That's a fact—goddamn war. They'll figure out plenty of things for you to do. And the wheelchairs they have nowadays let you get around pretty well."

Nichols groaned, maybe in derision, maybe just in pain. Kim-ball ignored that. As carefully as he could, he slid the wounded sailor toward the hatch. When Brearley had secure hold of Nichols' feet, he

guided the man's torso through the hatchway, then hung on to him as they descended.

The petty officer—his name was Ben Coulter—was already bandaging the leadsman's arm. His jowly, acne-scarred face twisted into a grimace when he saw how Nichols was dead from the waist down. "Nothing I can do about that, sir," he told Kim-ball. "Wish there was, but—" He spread his hands. He'd washed them before he got to work, but he still had dirt ground into the folds of his knuckles and grease under his nails.

"I know," Kimball said unhappily. Then he burst out, "God damn it to hell, we're not built to fight close-in actions. We have any sheet metal or anything we can use to shield our gunners' backs?" The deck gun had a shield for the front, good against shell splinters but maybe not against bullets. As things stood, the machine guns were altogether unprotected.

"Maybe we could do something like that, sir," Coulter said. He hesitated. "You mean to go on after this?"

"Hadn't thought of doing anything else," Kimball answered. He looked from the petty officer to Tom Brearley to the rest of the crew packed together in the cramped chamber under the conning tower. "Haven't had any orders to do anything else, either. Anybody who doesn't want to go on, I'll put him off the boat right now and he can take his chances!"

"You mean here, among the niggers?" somebody asked. Lucky for him, he was behind Kimball, who couldn't tell who he was.

"Hell, yes, I mean here among the niggers," the submersible commander said. "Anybody who thinks I'm going to back off and let those black bastards—those Red bastards—take my country away from me or help the damnyankees whip us had better think twice. Maybe three times." He looked around again. If anybody disagreed with him, it didn't show. That was the way things were supposed to work. He nodded once, brusquely. "All right. Let's get to work and figure out how to do what needs doing."

Tiny Yossel Reisen woke up and started to wail. When he woke up, everyone in the crowded apartment woke up with him. Flora Hamburger opened her eyes. It was dark. She groaned—softly, so as

not to disturb anyone who, by some miracle, might still have been asleep. This was the third time her baby nephew had awakened in the night. Her parents and siblings had to get up too early to go to work as things were. When a howling baby cut into what little sleep they got, life was hard.

"*Sha, sha*—hush, hush," Sophie Reisen murmured wearily as she stumbled toward the baby's cradle. Flora's older sister scooped Yossel out, sat down in a chair, and began to nurse him. Little urgent sucking noises replaced his desperate cries.

Flora rolled over on the bed she shared with her younger sister Esther and tried to go back to sleep. She'd just succeeded when the alarm clock beside her head went off, clattering as if all the fire alarms in New York City were boiled down into its malevolent little case.

Blindly, almost drunk with weariness, she fumbled at the clock till it shut up. Then she staggered out of bed and splashed cold water on her face to bring back a semblance of life. She stared at herself in the mirror above the sink. Her dark eyes, usually so lively, were dull, with purplish circles under them. Her skin had a pallor that had nothing to do with fashion, but threw her cheekbones and prominent nose and chin into sharp relief. *And he's not even my baby,* she thought with tired resentment.

Esther pushed her away from the mirror. She dressed quickly. By the time she got out to the kitchen, her mother had sweet rolls and coffee pale with milk already on the table. Her younger brothers, David and Isaac, were there eating and drinking. They'd risen no earlier than she had, but they hadn't had to struggle with a recalcitrant corset.

Her father came in a moment after she did. The biggest mug of coffee was reserved for him. He already had his pipe going. The tobacco was harsher than what he'd used before the war cut off imports from the Confederacy, but the odor of smoke was still part of breakfast as far as Flora was concerned. Benjamin Hamburger bit into a roll, sipped his coffee, and nodded approvingly. "That's good, Sarah," he called to Flora's mother, as he did every morning.

Sophie sat down, too. "He's asleep again," she said, sounding half asleep herself. "How long it will last—*Gott vayss*." Her shrug was barely visible, as if she lacked the energy to raise her shoulders any higher. She probably did.

Flora Hamburger's eyes went to the framed photograph of Yossel Reisen—baby Yossel's father—near the divan in the living room. There he stood in his Army uniform, looking nothing like the *yeshiva-bucher* he'd been till he enlisted. Because he was going into the Army and might very well never come back, Sophie, who'd been his fiancée then, had given him a going-away present as old as history. He'd given her one as old as history, too, though it had taken nine months to find out whether that one was a boy or a girl.

He had married her when he came back to the Lower East Side on leave: the baby did bear his name. That was all of him it had, though; shortly before Sophie's time of confinement, he'd been killed in one of the meaningless battles down in Virginia.

Flora had hated the war long before it came home to her family. As a Socialist Party activist, she'd done everything she could to keep the Socialist delegation in Congress—the second-largest bloc, behind the dominant Democrats but far ahead of the Republicans—from voting for war credits. She'd failed. Now it was the Socialists' war, too. She and her party were to blame for that picture of a man who wasn't coming home, and for so many like it from the black-bordered casualty lists the papers printed every day.

Her father, her sisters, her brother hurried off to work in the sweatshops that, these days, turned endless bolts of green-gray cloth into tunics and trousers and caps and puttees for men to wear as they went out to get slaughtered. David had just turned eighteen. She wondered how long it would be before he got his conscription call. Not long, she thought worriedly, not at the rate the war was going through the young men of two continents.

Before long, it was time for Flora to go, too. She kissed her mother on the cheek, saying, "I'll see you tonight. I hope the baby isn't too much trouble."

Sarah Hamburger smiled. "I've had a lot of practice with babies by now, don't you think?" She turned a speculative eye on Flora. "One of these days, *alevai,* it would be nice to take care of one of yours."

That got Flora out of the apartment in a hurry. She didn't even wait to adjust her picture hat in front of the mirror, but put it on as she was walking downstairs. If it was crooked, too bad. Her mother didn't see, wouldn't see, that living a full life didn't have to include a life full of men (or full of one man) and full of babies.

Socialist Party headquarters for the Fourteenth Ward were in a crowded second-floor office above a butcher shop on Centre Market Court, across the street from the stalls and little shops in the Centre Market. Buyers already went from stall to store, looking for early morning bargains. Soldiers' Circle men prowled through the marketplace, some of them wearing armbands, others pins, all of them carrying truncheons or wearing pistols on their hips. They'd been suppressing dissent and resistance to the war in Socialist neighborhoods ever since the Remembrance Day riots.

As often happened, a couple of them were leaning up against the brick wall near the stairway up to Socialist Party headquarters. They'd eased off on that for a time, but had come back in greater force since the Socialist uprising in the Confederate States. If the oppressed Negroes could rise up in righteous revolutionary fury there, what about the oppressed proletariat of all colors in the USA?

Flora waved to Max Fleischmann, the butcher downstairs. He waved back, smiling; she helped keep the Soldiers' Circle goons from bothering him. Nothing could keep them from leering at her. Not by accident did the flowers in her hat conceal a couple of long, sharp hatpins.

Perhaps grouchy from lack of sleep, she glared back at the Soldiers' Circle men. "I don't know why you waste your time hanging around here," she said, exaggerating for effect. "Aren't you grateful that people who see the need for class struggle are helping the United States win the war?"

"Reds are Reds, whether they're black or white," one of the men answered. "We've got the answer for any what gets out o' line." He set his fist by the side of his neck, then jerked his arm sharply upward and let his head fall to one side, as if he'd been hanged. "Anybody tries a revolution *here*, that's what they get, and that's what they deserve."

"I'm sure you would have told George Washington the same thing," Flora said, and went upstairs. She felt the eyes of the Soldiers' Circle men like daggers in her back till she opened the door and walked inside.

Party headquarters, as usual, put her in mind of a three-ring circus crammed into about half a ring. Typewriters clattered. People shouted into telephones in Yiddish and English, often with scant regard for which language they were using at any given moment. Other people

stood in the narrow spaces between desks or sat on the corners of the desks themselves and argued loudly and passionately about anything that happened to cross their minds. Flora looked on the chaos and smiled. It was, in an even larger, even more disorderly style, her family writ large.

"Good morning, Maria," she said to her secretary as she hung her hat on a tree near the desk.

"Good morning," Maria Tresca answered. She was one of the few gentiles at the Fourteenth Ward office, but was as enthusiastic for Socialism and its goals as anyone else; her sister, Angelina, had died in the Remembrance Day riots the year before. She studied Flora, then added, "You look pleased with yourself."

"Do I? Well, maybe I do," Flora said. "I gave the bully boys downstairs something to think about." She explained her crack about Washington. Maria grinned from ear to ear and clapped her hands together.

Over at the next desk, Herman Bruck hung up the telephone on which he'd been speaking and sent Flora a stern look. A stern look from Bruck was not something to bear lightly. He might have stepped out of the pages of a fashion catalogue, from perfectly trimmed hair and neat mustache to suits always of fine wool and most modish cut. He often made a spokesman for the Socialists, simply because he looked so elegant. Money had not done it for him; coming from a family of fancy tailors had.

"Washington was no revolutionary, not in the Marxist sense of the word," he said now. "He didn't transfer wealth or power from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, and certainly not to the peasants. All he did was replace British planters and landowners with their American counterparts."

Flora tapped a fingernail against the top of her desk in annoyance. Herman Bruck would probably have made an even better Talmudic scholar than poor Yossel Reisen; he delighted in hairsplitting and precision. Only in chosen ideology did he differ from Yossel.

"For one thing, Soldiers' Circle goons don't care about the Marxist sense of the word," Flora said, holding onto her patience with both hands. "For another, by their use of the term, Washington *was* a revolutionary, and I got them to think about the consequences of denying the right to revolution now. Either that or I got them angry at

me, which will do as well."

"It's not proper," Bruck answered stiffly. "We should be accurate about these matters. Educating the nation must be undertaken in an exact and thoroughgoing fashion."

"Yes, Herman." Flora suppressed a sigh. The one thing Bruck lacked that would have made him a truly effective political operative was any trace of imagination. Before he could go on with what would, no doubt, have been a disputation to consume the entire morning, his telephone rang. He gave whoever was on the other end of the line the same sharply focused attention he had turned on Flora.

Her own phone jangled a moment later. "Socialist Party, Flora Hamburger," she said, and then, "Oh—Mr. Levitzsky. Yes, by all means we *will* support the garment workers' union there. That contract will be honored or the rank and file will strike, war or no war. Teddy Roosevelt makes a lot of noise about a square deal for the workers. We'll find out if he means it, and we'll let the people know if he doesn't."

"I'll take that word to the factory manager," Levitzsky said. "If he knows the union and the Party are in solidarity here, he won't have the nerve to go on calling the contract just a scrap of paper. Thank you, Miss Hamburger."

That was the sort of phone call that made Flora feel she'd earned her salary for the day. Workers were so vulnerable to pressure from employers, especially with the war making everything all the more urgent: or at least seem all the more urgent. The Party had the collective strength to help redress the balance.

Herman Bruck got off the phone himself a minute or so later. In a new tone of voice—as if he hadn't been criticizing her ideological purity a moment before—he asked, "Would you like to go to the moving pictures with me tonight after work? Geraldine Farrar is supposed to be very fine in the new version of *Carmen*."

"I really don't think so, not tonight—" Flora began.

Bruck went on as if she hadn't spoken: "The bullfight scene, they say, is especially bully." He smiled at his pun. Flora didn't. "So many people wanted to sit in the amphitheater while it was being photographed, I've heard, that they didn't have to hire any extras."

"I'm sorry, Herman. Maybe when Yossel sleeps a little better, so I

can be sure I'll sleep a little better. He kept everyone awake through a lot of last night."

Herman Bruck looked like a kicked puppy. He'd been trying to court Flora almost as long as they'd known each other. The next luck he had would be the first. That didn't stop him from going right on trying. Abstractly, Flora admired his persistence: the same persistence he showed in his Party work. She admired it even more there than when it was aimed at her.

Turning away from Bruck and toward Maria Tresca, she asked, "What's next?"

Jake Featherston stuck out his mess tin. The Negro cook for the First Richmond Howitzers gave him a tinful of stew. He carried it back among the ruins of Hampstead, Maryland, and sat down with his gun crew to eat.

Michael Scott, the three-inch howitzer's loader, said, "Stew tastes pretty good, Sarge. Now all we have to do is hope it ain't poisoned."

"Funny," Jake said. "Funny like a truss." He dug in with his spoon. Scott had been right; the stew was good. Trying to look on the bright side of things, he went on, "This Metellus, he seems like a good nigger. He knows his place, and he don't give anybody any trouble."

"Not that we know about, anyways." That was Will Cooper, one of the shell haulers for the three-inch gun. Like Scott, he was a kid; both of them had joined the regiment after heavy casualties along the Susquehanna thinned out most of the veterans who had started the war with Jake. But the kids had been around for a while now; their butternut uniforms were stained and weather-beaten, and the red facings on their collar tabs that showed them to be artillerymen had faded to a washed-out pink.

Featherston kept on eating, but scowled as he did so. The trouble was, Cooper was right, no two ways about it. "Be a long time before we can trust the niggers again," Jake said glumly.

Heads bobbed up and down in response to that. "At this here gun, we were lucky—this whole battery, we were lucky," Scott said. "Our laborers just ran off. They didn't try and turn our guns on us or on the infantrymen in front of us."

Now Jake spoke with fond reminiscence: “Yeah, and we gave the damnyankees a good warm welcome when they came up out of their trenches, too. They figured we couldn’t do nothin’ about ’em with all our niggers givin’ us a hard time, but I reckon we showed ’em different.”

When the wind blew out of the north, it wafted the stench of unburied Yankee bodies into the Confederate lines. It was a horrible stench, sweet and ripe and thick enough to slice. But it was also the stench of victory, or at least the stench of defeat avoided. U.S. forces had driven the Confederacy out of Pennsylvania, but the Stars and Bars still flew over most of Maryland and over Washington, D.C.

Occasional crackles of gunfire came from the front: scouts thinking they’d spotted Yankee raiders, snipers shooting at enemies in the trenches rash enough to expose any part of themselves even for a moment, and, on the other side of the line, Yankee riflemen ready to do unto the Confederates what was being done unto them.

Another rifle shot rang out, then two more. Featherston’s head came up and his gaze sharpened, as if he were a coon dog taking a scent. Those shots hadn’t come from the front, but from well behind the line. He scowled again. “That’s likely to be some damn nigger trying to bushwhack our boys.”

“Bastards,” Cooper muttered. “We finish dealin’ with them, they’re gonna spend the next hundred years wishin’ they didn’t try raisin’ their hands to us, and you can take that to church.”

“I know,” Featherston said. “Back in the old days, my old man was an overseer. Till they laid him in the ground, he said we never ought to have manumitted the niggers. I always thought, you got to change with the times. But with the kind of thanks we got, damned if I think that way any more.”

The whole gun crew nodded in response to that. Jake finished his stew. Maybe Metellus really knew which side his bread was buttered on and did all the things he was supposed to do. But for all Jake knew, maybe he unbuttoned his fly and pissed in the stewpot when nobody was looking. How could you tell for sure? You couldn’t, till maybe too late.

From what he’d heard, it had been like that up and down the CSA—worst in the cotton belt, where whites were thin on the ground in big stretches of the country, but bad everywhere. He didn’t know how

many of the ten million or so Negroes in the Confederacy had joined the rebellion, but enough had so that some troops had had to leave the fighting line against the USA to help put them down.

No wonder, then, that the damnyankees were pushing forward in western Virginia, in Kentucky, and in Sonora. The wonder was that the Confederate positions hadn't fallen apart altogether. He glanced over to his gun. The quick-firing three-incher, copied from the French 75, was one big reason they hadn't. The USA lacked a field piece that came close to matching it.

He heard footsteps coming up from the south. He wore a pistol on his hip, in case Yankee infantry somehow God forbid got close enough to his gun for him to need a personal weapon. He hadn't drawn it till trouble broke out among the Negroes. Now—Now he was a long way from the only artilleryman to have a weapon ready. "Who goes there?" he demanded.

"This Battery C, First Richmond Howitzers?" Whoever owned the voice, he sounded crisp and decisive. He also sounded white. Featherston knew that didn't necessarily mean anything, though. He'd known plenty of Negroes who could put on white accents. But this voice…He scratched his head. He thought he'd heard it before.

"You're in the right place," he answered. "Advance and be recognized." He didn't take his hand off the pistol.

Into the firelight came a small, spruce major and a bedraggled Negro. Jake and the rest of the men in the gun crew scrambled to their feet and stood at attention. The major's pale eyes flashed; a hawk might have wished for such a piercing gaze. Those pale eyes fixed on Jake. "I know you. You're Sergeant Featherston." The fellow spoke with assurance.

"Yes, sir," Featherston said. He *had* met this officer before. "Major Potter, isn't it, sir?"

"That's right. Clarence Potter, Intelligence, Army of Northern Virginia." None too gently, he shoved the Negro up close to the fire. "And since you were here when I last visited the battery, perhaps you will be good enough to confirm for me that this ragged scoundrel"—he shoved the Negro again—"is in fact Pompey, former body servant to your commander, Captain Stuart. Captain Jeb Stuart III, that is." He spoke the battery commander's full name with a certain savage relish.

Everybody in the gun crew stared at the Negro. Jake could make a

pretty good guess as to what the men were thinking. He was thinking a lot of the same things himself. But Potter hadn't asked the question of anyone save him. He had to look closely to be certain, then said, "Yes, sir, that's Pompey. He's usually a lot neater and cleaner than he is now, that's all."

"He's been living a little harder lately than he's used to, poor darling." Potter spoke with flaying sarcasm. He pointed to Will Cooper. "You. Private. Go find Captain Stuart and bring him here, wherever he is and whatever he's doing. I don't care if he's got some woman in bed with him—tell him to take it out, get dressed, and get his ass down here."

"Yes, sir," Cooper said, and disappeared.

Pompey spoke up: "I never done nothin' bad to you, did I, Marse Jake?" His voice didn't have the mincing lilt it had carried when he served as Captain Stuart's man. He'd put on airs then, as if he were something special himself because of who his master was.

Before Featherston could answer, Potter's voice cracked like a whiplash: "You keep your mouth shut until I tell you to speak." Pompey nodded, which Jake thought wise. The major was not the sort of man to disobey, most especially not if you were in his power.

Will Cooper came back with Captain Stuart a few minutes later. The captain bore a strong resemblance to his famous father and even more famous grandfather, except that, instead of their full beards, he wore a mustache and a little tuft of hair under his lower lip, giving him the look of a seventeenth-century French soldier of fortune.

"Captain," Major Potter said, as he had to Jake Featherston, "is this nigger here your man Pompey?"

"Yes, he's my servant," Stuart replied after a moment; he'd needed a second look to be certain, too. "What is the meaning of—?"

"Shut up, Captain Stuart," Potter interrupted, as harshly as he had when Pompey spoke without his leave. Jake's eyes widened. Nobody had ever addressed Jeb Stuart III that way in his presence. Jeb Stuart, Jr., wore wreathed stars on his collar tabs and was a mighty power in the War Department down in Richmond. But Potter sounded utterly sure of himself: "I'll ask the questions around here."

"Now see here, Major," Stuart said. "I don't care for your tone."

“I don’t give a damn, Stuart,” Clarence Potter returned. “I was trying to sniff out Red subversion among the niggers attached to this army last year—*last year,* Stuart. And I got information that your nigger Pompey wasn’t to be trusted, and I wanted to interrogate him properly. Do you remember that?”

“I did nothing wrong,” Stuart said stiffly. But he looked like a man who had just taken a painful wound and was trying to see if he could still stand up.

“No, eh?” The major from Intelligence knocked him down with contemptuous ease. “You didn’t talk to your daddy the general? You didn’t have me overruled and the investigation quashed? You know better than that, I know better than that—and the War Department knows better than that, too.”

Till now, Jake had never seen Captain Stuart at a loss. Whatever else you said about him, he fought his guns as aggressively as any man would like, and showed a contempt for the dangers of the battlefield any hero of the War of Secession would have envied. But he’d never been threatened with loss of status and influence, only death or mutilation. Those latter two might have been easier to face.

“Major, I think you misunderstood—” he began.

“I misunderstood nothing, Captain,” Potter said coldly. “I was trying to do my duty, and you prevented that. If you’d been right, you’d have gotten away with it. But this nigger was taken in arms with a band of Red rebels, and every sign is that he wasn’t just a fighter. He was a leader in this conspiracy, and had been for a long time. If I’d questioned him last year—but no, you wouldn’t let that happen.” Potter’s headshake was a masterpiece of mockery.

“Pompey?” Stuart shook his head, too, but in amazement. “I can’t believe it. I won’t believe it.”

“Frankly, Captain, I don’t give a damn,” Potter said. “If I had my way, I’d bust you down to private, give you a rifle, and let you die gloriously charging a Yankee machine gun. Can’t have everything, I suppose, no matter how much damage your damn-fool know-it-all attitude cost your country. But your free ride to the top is gone, Stuart, and that’s a fact. If you drop dead at ninety-nine and stay in the Army all that time, you’ll be buried a captain.”

Silence stretched. Into it, Pompey said, “Marse Jeb, I—”

“Shut up,” Potter told him. “Get moving.” He shoved the Negro on his way. Jeb Stuart III stared after them. Jake Featherston studied his battery commander. He didn’t quite know what he thought. With Stuart under a cloud, life was liable to get harder for everybody: the captain’s name had been one to conjure with when it came to keeping shells in supply and such. On the other hand, as an overseer’s son Jake wasn’t sorry to watch an aristocrat taken down a peg. *More chances for me,* he thought, and vowed to make the most of them.

The USS *Dakota* steamed over the beautiful deep-blue waters of the Pacific, somewhere south and west of the Sandwich Islands. Sam Carsten was delighted to have the battleship back in fighting trim once more; she had been laid up in a Honolulu dry-dock for months, taking repairs after an unfortunate encounter with a Japanese torpedo.

Carsten admired the deep blue sea. He admired the even bluer sky. He heartily approved of the tropic breezes that kept it from seeming as hot as it really was. The sun that shone brightly down from that blue, blue sky…

Try as he would, he couldn’t make himself admire the sun. He was very, very fair, with golden hair, blue eyes, and a pink skin that turned red in any weather and would not turn tan for love nor money. When he was serving in San Francisco, he’d thought himself one step this side of heaven, heaven being defined as Seattle. Honolulu, however pretty it was, made a closer approximation to hell. He’d smeared every sort of lotion known to pharmacist’s mate and Chinese apothecary on his hide. None had done the least bit of good.

“Far as I’m concerned, the damn limeys were welcome to keep the Sandwich Islands,” he muttered under his breath as he swabbed a stretch of the *Dakota*’s deck. He chuckled wryly. “Somehow, though, folks who outrank me don’t give a damn that I sunburn if you look at me cross-eyed. Wonder why that is?”

“Wonder why what is?” asked Vic Crosetti, who was sanitizing the deck not far away and who slept in the bunk above Carsten’s. “Wonder why people who outrank a Seaman First don’t give a damn about him, or wonder why you look like a piece of meat the galley didn’t get done enough?”

“Ahh, shut up, you damn lucky dago,” Sam said, more jealousy than rancor in his voice. Crosetti had been born swarthy. All the sun did to

him was turn him a color just this side of Negro brown.

“Hey, bein’ dark oughta do me *some* good,” Crosetti said. No matter what color he was, nobody would ever mistake him for a Negro, not with his nose and thick beard and arms thatched with enough black hair to make him look like a monkey.

Sam dipped his mop in the galvanized bucket and got another stretch of deck clean. He’d been a sailor for six years now, and had mastered the skill of staying busy enough to satisfy officers and even more demanding chief petty officers without really doing anything too closely resembling work. Crosetti wasn’t going at it any harder than he was; if the skinny little Italian hadn’t been born knowing how to shirk, he’d sure picked up the fundamentals in a hurry after he joined the Navy.

Carsten stared off to port. The destroyer *Jarvis* was frisking through the light chop maybe half a mile away, quick and graceful as a dolphin. Its wake trailed creamy behind it. The *Jarvis* could steam rings around the big, stolid *Dakota*. That was the idea: the destroyer could keep torpedo boats and submersibles away from the battlewagon. That the idea still had some holes in it was attested by the repairs just completed on the *Dakota*.

Crosetti looked out over the water, too. “Might as well relax,” he said to Carsten. “Nobody in the Navy’s seen hide nor hair of the Japs or the limeys since we got bushwhacked the last time. Stands to reason they’re mounting patrols to make sure we ain’t goin’ near the Philippines or Singapore, same as we’re doing here.”

“Stood to reason last time, too,” Sam answered. “Only thing is, the Japs weren’t being reasonable.”

Crosetti cocked his head to one side. “Yeah, that’s so,” he said. “You got a cockeyed way of looking at things that makes a lot of sense sometimes, you know what I’m saying?”

“Maybe,” Carsten said. “I’ve had one or two guys tell me that before, anyway. Now if there was some gal who’d tell me something like that, I’d have something. But hell, gals here, they ain’t gonna look past the raw meat.” He ran a sunburned hand down an equally sunburned arm.

“If that’s the way you think, that’s what’ll happen to you, yeah,” Crosetti said. “It’s all in the way you go after ’em, you know what I’m saying? I mean, look at me. I ain’t pretty, I ain’t rich, but I ain’t

lonesome, neither, not when I'm on shore. You gotta show 'em they're what you're after, and you gotta make 'em think you're what they're after, too. All how you go about it, and that's a fact."

"Maybe," Sam said again. "But the ones you really want to hook onto, they're the ones who won't bite for a line like that, too."

"Who says?" Crosetti demanded indignantly. Then he paused. "Wait a minute. You're talkin' about gettin' married, for God's sake. What's the point to even worrying about that? You're in the Navy, Sam. No matter what kind of broad you marry, you ain't gonna be home often enough to enjoy it."

Carsten would have argued that, the only difficulty being that he couldn't. So he and Crosetti talked about women for a while instead, no subject being better calculated to help pass time of a morning. Sam didn't really know how much his bunkmate was making up and how much he'd really done, but he'd been blessed with either a hell of a good time or a hell of an imagination.

An aeroplane buzzed by. Sam looked at it anxiously: following a Japanese aeroplane had got the *Dakota* torpedoed. But this one bore the American eagle. It had been out looking for enemy ships. Carsten guessed it hadn't found any. Had it sent back a message by wireless telegraph, the fleet would have changed course toward any vessels presumptuous enough to challenge the USA in these waters.

"You really think the English and the Japanese are just sitting back, waiting for us to come to them?" Sam asked Crosetti. "They could cause a lot of trouble if they took the Sandwich Islands back from us."

"Yeah, they could, but they won't," Crosetti said. "When the president declared war on England, I don't figure he waited five minutes before he sent us sailing for Pearl Harbor. We caught the damn limeys with their drawers down. They hadn't reinforced the place yet, and they couldn't hold it against everything we threw at 'em. But we got more men, more ships there than you can shake a stick at. They want it back, they're gonna hafta pay one hell of a bill."

"That's all true," Carsten said. "But now that we've got all those men there and we've got all those ships there, what are the limeys and the Japs going to think we'll do with 'em? Sit there and hang on tight? Does that sound like Teddy Roosevelt to you? They're going to figure we're heading out toward Singapore and Manila sooner or later unless they do something about it. Even if they don't land on Oahu, they're

going to do their damnedest to smash up the fleet, right?"

Vic Crosetti scratched at one cheek while he thought. If Sam had done anything like that, he probably would have drawn blood from his poor, sunbaked skin. After a bit, Crosetti gave him a thoughtful nod. "Makes pretty good sense, I guess. How come the only stripe you got on your sleeve is a service mark? Way you talk, you oughta be a captain, maybe an admiral in one of those damnfool hats they wear."

Carsten laughed out loud. "All I got to say is, if they're so hard up they make *me* an admiral, the USA is in a hell of a lot more trouble than the Japs are."

The grin that stretched across Crosetti's face was altogether impudent. "I ain't gonna argue with you about that," he said, whereupon Sam made as if to wallop him over the head with his mop. They both laughed. Crosetti grew serious, though, unwontedly fast. "You do talk like an officer a lot of the time, you know that?"

"Do I?" Carsten said. His fellow swabbie—at the moment, in the most literal sense of the word—nodded. Sam thought about it. "Can't worry about chasing women all the damned time. You got to keep your eyes open. You look around, you start seeing things."

"I see a couple of lazy lugs, is what I see," a deep voice behind them said. Sam turned his head. There stood Hiram Kidde, gunner's mate on the five-inch cannon Carsten helped serve. He had plenty of service stripes on his sleeve, having been in the Navy for more than twenty years. He went on, "Go ahead, try and tell me you were workin' hard."

"Have a heart, 'Cap'n,'" Carsten said, using Kidde's universal nickname. "Can't expect us to be busy every second."

"Who says I can't?" Kidde retorted. He was broad-faced and stocky, thick through the middle but not soft. He looked like a man you wouldn't want to run into in a barroom brawl. From what Sam had seen of him in action, his looks weren't deceiving.

"Petty officers never remember what it was like when they were seamen," Crosetti said. He looked sly. "'Course, it is kind of hard remembering back to when Buchanan was president."

Kidde glared at him. Then he shrugged. "Hell, I figured you were gonna say, when Jefferson was president." Shaking his head, he walked on.

“Got him good, Vic,” Carsten said. Crosetti grinned and nodded. They went back to swabbing the deck—still not working too hard.

Jefferson Pinkard kissed his wife, Emily, as she headed out the door of their yellow-painted company house to go to the munitions plant where she’d been working the past year. “Be careful, honey,” he said. He meant that a couple of ways. For one, her usually fair skin was still sallow from the jaundice working with some of the explosives caused. For another, riding the trolley in Birmingham, as in a lot of cities in the Confederacy these days, was something less than safe.

“I will,” she promised, as she did whenever he warned her. She tossed her head. These days, she’d cut her strawberry-blond hair short, to keep it from getting caught in the machinery with which she worked. Jeff missed the braid she’d worn halfway down her back. She kissed him again, a quick peck on the lips. “I got to go.”

“I know,” he said. “You may get home a little before me tonight—I got to vote, remember.”

“I know it’s today,” she agreed. She gave him a sidelong look. “One of these days, I reckon I’ll be voting, too, so you won’t have to remind me about it.”

He sighed and shrugged. It wasn’t worth an argument. She’d come up with more radical ideas since she started working than in all the time they’d been married up till then. She hurried off toward the trolley. He stood in the doorway for half a minute or so, watching her walk. He would have forgiven a lot of radical ideas from a woman who moved her hips like that. It gave him something to look forward to when he came home from work.

Because the company housing was only a few hundred yards away from the Sloss foundry, he didn’t have to leave as soon as his wife did to get to work on time. He went back in, finished his coffee and ham and eggs, set the dishes to soak in soapy water in the sink, grabbed his dinner pail, and then headed out the door himself.

As he walked into the foundry, he waved to men he knew. There weren’t that many, not any more: most of the whites in the Sloss labor force had already been conscripted. Every time he opened his own mailbox, Pinkard expected to find the buff-colored envelope summoning him to the colors, too. He sometimes wondered if they’d

lost his file.

Along with the white men in overalls and caps came a stream of black men dressed the same way. Many of them, nowadays, were doing jobs to which they wouldn't have dared aspire when the war began, jobs that had been reserved for whites till the front drained off too many. They still weren't getting white men's pay, but they were making more than they had before.

Pinkard had been working alongside a Negro for a good long while now. Though he'd hated the notion at first, he'd since come to take it for granted—until the uprising had broken out the month before. Leonidas, the buck he was working with these days, had kept right on coming in, uprisings or no uprisings. That would have made Pinkard happier, though, had Leonidas shown the least trace of brains concealed anywhere about his person.

He went into the foundry and out onto the floor. The racket, as always, was appalling. You couldn't shout over it; you had to learn to talk—and to hear—under it. When it was cold outside, it was hot in there, hot with the heat of molten metal. When it was hot outside, the foundry floor made a pretty good foretaste of hell. It smelled of iron and coal smoke and sweat.

Two Negroes waited for him: night shift had started hiring blacks well before they got onto the day crew. One was Agrippa, the other a fellow named Sallust, who didn't have a permanent slot of his own but filled in when somebody else didn't show up.

Seeing Sallust made Jeff scratch his head. "Where's Vespasian at?" he asked Agrippa. "I don't ever remember him missin' a shift. He ain't shiftless, like that damn Leonidas." He laughed at his own wit. Then, after a moment, he stopped laughing. Leonidas *was* shiftless, and, at the moment, late, too.

Agrippa didn't laugh. He was in his thirties, older than Pinkard, and right now he looked older than that—he looked fifty if a day. His voice was heavy and slow and sober as he answered, "Reason he ain't here, Mistuh Pinkard, is on account of they done hanged Pericles yesterday. Pericles was his wife's kin, you know, an' he stayed home to help take care o'—things."

"Hanged him?" Pinkard said. "Lord!" Pericles had been in jail as an insurrectionist for months. Before that, he'd worked alongside the white man in the place Leonidas had now. He'd been a damn sight

better at it than Leonidas, too. Pinkard shook his head. “That’s too damn bad. Maybe he was a Red, but he was a damn fine steel man.”

“I tell Vespasian you say dat,” Agrippa said. “He be glad to hear it.” Sallust sent him a hooded glance. Pinkard had seen its like before. It meant something on the order of, *Go on, tell the white man what he wants to hear*. Very slightly, as if to say he meant his words, Agrippa shook his head.

The two black men from the night shift left. Jeff got to work. He had to work harder without Leonidas around, but he worked better, too, because he didn’t have to keep an eye on his inept partner. One of these days, Leonidas would be standing in the wrong place, and they’d pour a whole great crucible full of molten metal down on his empty head. The only things left would be a brief stink of burnt meat and a batch of steel that needed resmelting because it had picked up too much carbon.

Leonidas came strutting onto the floor twenty minutes late. “Lord, the girl I found me las’ night!” he said, and ran his tongue across his lips like a cat after a visit to a bowl of cream. He rocked his hips forward and back. He was always talking about women or illegal whiskey. A lot of men did that, but most of them did their jobs better than Leonidas, which meant their talk about what they did when they weren’t working was somehow less annoying.

Pinkard tossed him a rake. “Come on, let’s straighten up the edges of that mold in the sand pit,” he said. “We don’t want the metal leaking out when they do the next pouring.”

Leonidas rolled his eyes. He couldn’t have cared less what the metal did in the next pouring, and didn’t care who knew it. Without the war, he would have had trouble getting a janitor’s job at the Sloss works; as things were, he’d been out here with Pinkard for months. *One more reason to hate the war,* Jeff thought.

He kept Leonidas from getting killed, and so wondered, as he often did, whether that made the day a success or a failure. Pericles, now, Pericles had been a good worker, and smart as a white man. But he’d also been a Red, and now he was a dead Red. A lot of the smart Negroes were Reds. Pinkard supposed that meant they weren’t as smart as they thought they were.

When the quitting whistle blew, he headed out of the foundry with barely a good-bye to Leonidas. That was partly because he didn’t have

any use for Leonidas and partly because he was heading off to vote and Leonidas wasn't. Given what Leonidas used for brains, that didn't break Jeff's heart, but rubbing the black man's nose in it at a time like this seemed less than clever.

Sometimes a couple of weeks would go by between times when Jefferson Pinkard left company grounds. He spent a lot of time in the foundry, his friends—those who weren't in the Army—lived in company housing as he did, and the company store was conveniently close and gave credit, even if it did charge more than the shops closer to the center of town.

The polling place, though, was at a Veterans of the War of Secession hall a couple of blocks in from the edge of company land. He saw two or three burnt-out buildings as he went along. Emily had seen more damage from the uprising than he had, because she took the trolley every day. He shook his head. Steelworkers armed with clubs and a few guns had kept the rampaging Negroes off Sloss land; the black workers, or almost all of them, had stayed quiet. They knew which side their bread was buttered on.

A line of white men, a lot of them in dirty overalls like Pinkard's, snaked out of the veterans' hall, above which flapped the Stars and Bars. He took his place, dug a stogie out of his pocket, lighted it, and blew out a happy cloud of smoke. If he had to move slowly for a bit, he'd enjoy it.

By their white hair and beards, the officials at the polling place were War of Secession veterans themselves. "Pinkard, Jefferson Davis," Jeff said when he got to the head of the line. He took his ballot and went into a booth. Without hesitation, he voted for Gabriel Semmes over Doroteo Arango for president; as Woodrow Wilson's vice president, Semmes would keep the Confederacy on a steady course, while Arango was nothing but a wild-eyed, hot-blooded southerner. Jeff methodically went through the rest of the national, state, and local offices, then came out and pushed his ballot through the slot of the big wood ballot box.

"Mr. Pinkard has voted," one of the elderly precinct workers said, and Pinkard felt proud at having done his democratic duty.

He walked home still suffused with that warm sense of virtue. If you didn't vote, you had no one to blame but yourself for what happened to the country—unless, of course, you were black, or a woman. And one of these years, the way things looked, they'd probably let women

have a go at the ballot box, no matter what he thought about it. He supposed the world wouldn't end.

Emily came out onto the porch as he hurried up the walk toward the house. "Hi, darlin'!" he called. Then he saw the buff-colored envelope she was holding.

III

Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid raised a forefinger. “Another cup of coffee for me here, if you please,” the Confederate cavalry officer said.

“I’ll take care of it,” Nellie Semphroch said quickly, before her daughter Edna could. Edna glared at her. Half the reason Kincaid came into the coffeehouse the two women ran in occupied Washington, D.C., was to moon over Edna, his eyes as big and glassy as those of a calf with the bloat.

That was also all the reason Nellie tried to keep Edna as far away from Kincaid as she could. She’d caught them kissing once, and who could say where that would have led if she hadn’t put a stop to it in a hurry? She shook her head. She knew where it would have led. She’d been down that path herself, and didn’t intend to let Edna take it.

Edna filled a cup with the blend from the Dutch East Indies that Kincaid liked, set the cup on a saucer, and handed it to Nellie. “Here you are, Ma,” she said, her voice poisonously sweet. She knew better than to argue out loud with Nellie when the coffeehouse was full of customers, as it was this afternoon. That didn’t mean she wasn’t angry. Far from it.

Nellie Semphroch glared back at her, full of angry determination herself. Given a generation’s difference in their ages—a short generation’s difference—the two women looked very much alike. They shared light brown hair (though Nellie’s had some streaks of gray in it), oval faces, fine, fair skin, and eyes somewhere between blue and green. If Nellie’s expression was habitually worried, well, she’d earned that. In this day and age, if you were an adult and you didn’t have plenty to worry about, something was wrong with you.

She carried the steaming cup over to Lieutenant Kincaid. “Obliged,

ma'am," he said. He was polite, when he could easily have been anything but. And, when he dug in his pocket, he put a real silver quarter-dollar on the table, not the Confederate scrip that let Rebel officers live like lords in the conquered capital of the USA.

Outside in the middle distance, a sudden volley of rifle shots rang out. Nellie jumped. She'd been through worse when the Confederates shelled Washington and then fought their way into town, but she'd let herself relax since: that had been well over a year ago now.

"Nothin' to worry about, ma'am," Kincaid said after sipping at the coffee. "That's just the firing squad getting rid of a nigger. Waste of bullets, you ask me. Ought to string the bastards up. That'd be the end of that."

"Yes," Nellie said. She didn't really like talking with Kincaid. It encouraged him, and he didn't need encouragement to come around. But Confederate soldiers and military police were the only law and order Washington had these days. The Negro rebellion that had tried to catch fire here hadn't been against the CSA alone; a good part of the fury had been aimed at whites in general.

Kincaid said, "Those niggers were damn fools—beg your pardon, ma'am—to try givin' us trouble here. Places where they're still in arms against the CSA are places where there weren't any soldiers to speak of. They take a deal of rooting out from places like that, on account of we can't empty our lines against you Yankees to go back and get 'em. But here—we got plenty of soldiers here, coming and going and staying. Why, we got three regiments comin' in tonight, back from whipping the Reds in Mississippi and heading up to the Maryland front. And it's like that every day of the year. Sometimes I don't think niggers is anything but a pack of fools."

"Yes," Nellie said again. *Three regiments in from Mississippi, going up to Maryland*. Hal Jacobs, who had a little bootmaking and shoe-repair business across the street, had ways of getting such tidbits to people in the USA who could do something useful with them.

"Bring me another sandwich here, ma'am?" a Confederate captain at a far table called. Nellie hurried over to serve him. Despite the rationing that made most of Washington a gray, joyless place, she never had trouble getting her hands on good food and good coffee. Of themselves, her eyes went across the street for a moment. She didn't know exactly what connections Mr. Jacobs had, but they were good ones. And he liked having the coffeehouse full of Confederates talking

at the top of their lungs—or even quietly, so long as they talked freely.

"You had a ham and cheese there?" she asked. The captain nodded. She hurried back of the counter to fix it for him.

Nicholas H. Kincaid was not without resource. He gulped down the coffee Nellie had given him and asked for another refill while she was still making the sandwich. That meant Edna had to take care of him. Not only did she bring him the coffee, she sat down at the table with him and started an animated conversation. The person to whom she was really telling something was Nellie, and the message was simple: *I'll do whatever I please*.

Seething inside, Nellie sliced bread, ham, and cheese with mechanical competence. She wished she could haul off and give her daughter a good clout in the ear, but Edna was past twenty, so how much good could it do? *Why don't young folks listen to people who know better?* she mourned silently, forgetting how little she'd listened to anyone at the same age.

She took the sandwich over to the captain, accepted his scrip with an inward sigh, and was about to head back behind the counter when the door opened and a new customer came in. Unlike most of her clientele, he was neither a Confederate soldier nor one of the plump, clever businessmen who hadn't let a change of rulers in Washington keep them from turning a profit. He was about fifty, maybe a few years past, with a black overcoat that had seen better times, a derby about which the same could be said, and a couple of days' stubble on his chin and cheeks. He picked a table near the doorway, and sat with his back against the wall.

When Nellie came over to him, he breathed whiskey fumes up into her face. She ignored them. "I thought I told you never to show your face in here again," she said in a furious whisper.

"Oh, Little Nell, you don't have to be that way," he answered. His voice, unlike his appearance, was far from seedy: he sounded ready for anything. His eyes traveled the length of her, up and down. "You're still one fine-looking woman, you know that?" he said, as if he'd seen right through the respectable gray wool dress she wore.

Her face heated. Bill Reach knew what she looked like under that dress, sure enough, or he knew what she had looked like under her clothes, back when she'd been younger than Edna was now. She hadn't seen him since, or wanted to, till he'd shown up at the

coffeehouse one day a few months before. Then she'd managed to frighten him off, and hoped he was gone for good. Now—

"If you don't get out of here right now," she said, "I'm going to let these officers here know you're bothering a lady. Confederates are gentlemen. They don't like that." *Except when they're trying to get you into bed themselves*.

Reach laughed, showing bad teeth. It looked like a good-natured laugh—unless you were on the receiving end of it. "I don't think you'll do that."

"Oh? And why don't you?" She might be betraying Rebel information to Hal Jacobs, but that didn't mean she'd be shy about using Confederate officers to protect herself from Bill Reach and whatever he wanted.

But then he said, "Why? Oh, I don't know. A little bird told me—a little homing pigeon, you might say."

For a couple of seconds, that meant nothing to Nellie. Then it did, and froze her with apprehension. One of Mr. Jacobs' friends was a fancier of homing pigeons. He used them to get information out of Washington and into the hands of U.S. authorities. If Bill Reach knew about that—"What do you want?" Nellie had to force the words out through stiff lips.

Now the smile was more like a leer. "For now, a cup of coffee and a chicken-salad sandwich," he answered. "Anything else I have in mind, you couldn't bring me to the table."

Men, Nellie thought, a one-word condemnation of half the human race. *All they want is that. Well, he's not going to get it*. "I'll bring you your food and the coffee," she said, and then, to show him—to try to show him—she wasn't intimidated, she added, "That will be a dollar fifteen."

Silver jingled in his pocket. He set a dollar and a quarter on the table—real money, no scrip. He'd looked seedy the last time she'd seen him, too, but he hadn't had any trouble paying her high prices then, either. She scooped up the coins and started back toward the counter.

She almost ran into Edna. "I'm sorry, Ma," her daughter said, continuing in a low voice, "I wondered if you were having trouble with that guy."

“It’s all right,” Nellie said. It wasn’t all right, or even close to all right, but she didn’t want Edna getting a look at the skeletons in her closet. Edna was hard enough to manage as things were. One of the things that helped keep her in line was the tone of moral superiority Nellie took. If she couldn’t take that tone any more, she didn’t know what she’d do.

And then, from behind her, Bill Reach said, “Sure is a pretty daughter you have there, Nell.”

“Thank you,” Nellie said tonelessly. Edna looked bemused, but Nellie hoped that was because Reach’s appearance failed to match the other customers’. At least he hadn’t called her *Little Nell* in front of Edna. The most unwanted pet name brought the days when he’d known her back to all too vivid life.

“I’d be proud if she was my daughter,” Reach said.

That was too much to be borne. “Well, she isn’t,” Nellie answered, almost certain she was right.

The cold north wind whipped down across the Ohio River and through the Covington, Kentucky, wharves. Cincinnatus felt it in his ears and on his cheeks and in his hands. He wasn’t wearing heavy clothes—overalls and a collarless cotton shirt under them—but he was sweating rather than shivering in spite of the nasty weather. Longshoreman’s work was never easy. Longshoreman’s work when Lieutenant Kennan was bossing your crew was ten times worse.

Kennan swaggered up and down the wharf as if the green-gray uniform he wore turned him into the Lord Jehovah. “Come on, you goddamn lazy niggers!” he shouted. “Got to move, by God you do. *Get* your black asses humping. You there!” The shout wasn’t directed at Cincinnatus. “You don’t do like you’re told, you don’t work here. Jesus Christ, them Rebs were fools for ever setting you dumb coons free. You don’t deserve it.”

Another laborer, an older Negro named Herodotus, said to Cincinnatus, “I’d like to pinch that little bastard’s head right off, I would.”

“You got a long line in front of you,” Cincinnatus answered, both of them speaking too quietly for the U.S. lieutenant to hear. Herodotus

chuckled under his breath. Cincinnatus went on, “Hell of it is, he’d get more work if he didn’t treat us like we was out in the cotton fields in slavery days.” Those days had ended a few years before he was born, but he had plenty of stories to give him a notion of what they’d been like.

“Probably the only way he knows to deal wid us,” Herodotus said.

Cincinnatus sighed, picked up his end of a crate, and nodded. “Ain’t that many black folks up in the USA,” he said. “They mostly didn’t want us before the War of Secession, an’ they kep’ us out afterwards, on account of we was from a different country then. Me, I keep wonderin’ if Kennan ever set eyes on anybody who wasn’t white ’fore he got this job.”

Herodotus just shrugged. He did the work Kennan set him, he groused about it when it was too hard or when he was feeling ornery, and that was that. He didn’t think any harder than he had to, he couldn’t read or write, and he’d never shown any great desire to learn. Saying he was content as a beast of burden overstated the case, but not by too much.

Cincinnatus, now, Cincinnatus had ambition. An ambitious Negro in the CSA was asking for a broken heart, but he’d done everything he could to make life better for himself and his wife, Elizabeth. When the USA seized Covington, he’d hoped things would get better; U.S. law didn’t come down on Negroes nearly so hard as Confederate law did. But he’d discovered Lieutenant Kennan was far from the only white man from the USA who had no more use for blacks than did the harshest Confederate.

Along with Herodotus, he hauled the crate from the barge to a waiting truck. He could have driven that truck, freeing a U.S. soldier to fight; he’d been a driver before the war started. But the Yankees wouldn’t let him get behind the wheel of a truck, for no better reason he could see than that he had a black skin. That struck him as stupid and wasteful, but how was he supposed to convince the occupying authorities? The plain answer was, he couldn’t.

And so he did what he had to do to get along. He and Elizabeth had a son now. Better yet, Achilles was sleeping through the night most of the time, so Cincinnatus didn’t stagger into work feeling three-quarters dead most mornings. He thanked Jesus for that, because what he did was plenty to wear him out all by itself, without any help from a squalling infant.

He and Herodotus finally loaded the day's last crate of ammunition into the last truck and lined up for the paymaster. Along with the usual dollar, they both got the fifty-cent hard-work bonus. The gray-haired sergeant who paid them said, "You boys is taming that Kennan half a dollar at a time, ain't you?"

"Maybe," Herodotus said. Cincinnatus just shrugged. The paymaster wasn't a bad fellow, but he didn't feel easy about trusting any white man, even one who criticized a comrade.

Herodotus spent a nickel of his bonus on trolley fare and headed for home in a hurry. Cincinnatus had always saved money, even before he had a child, so he walked through Covington on his way to the colored district that lay alongside the Licking River.

Walking through Covington was walking through a minefield of resentments. The Stars and Stripes floated over the city hall and all the police stations. Troops in green-gray uniforms were not just visible; they were conspicuous. The Yankees had the town, and they aimed to keep it.

Some local whites did business with them, too. With Cincinnati right across the Ohio, Covington had been doing business with the USA for as long as Kentucky had been in Confederate hands. But more than once, Cincinnatus saw whites cross the street when U.S. soldiers came by, for no better reason he could find than that they didn't want to walk where the men they called damnyankees had set their feet.

Cincinnatus didn't worry about that. He walked past Joe Conroy's general store. The white storekeeper saw him, but pretended he didn't. Nor was there any advertising notice taped to the lower left-hand corner of Conroy's window. That meant neither Conroy nor Tom Kennedy, who had been Cincinnatus' boss before the war and was now a fugitive from the Yankees, wanted to talk with him tonight.

"And that's a damn good thing," he muttered under his breath, "on account of I don't want to talk with them, neither." If he hadn't hidden Tom Kennedy when a U.S. patrol was after him, he never would have been drawn into the Confederate underground that still functioned in Covington and, he supposed, in other Yankee-occupied parts of the CSA as well.

He shook his head. If the U.S. soldiers had just treated Negroes like ordinary human beings, they would have won them over in short order. It hadn't happened; it didn't seem to have occurred to anyone

that it should happen. And so he found himself, though far from in love with the government that had been driven out of these parts, no less unhappy with the regime replacing it. *As if life wasn't hard enough,* he thought.

After a while, the big white clapboard houses and wide lawns of the white part of town gave way to smaller, dingier homes packed tightly together, the mark of a Negro district in any town in the Confederate States of America. The paving on a lot of the streets here was bad. The paving on the rest of the streets did not exist at all.

Boys in battered kneepants kicked a football up and down one dirt street. One of them threw it ahead to another, who caught it and ran a long way before he was dragged down. "Yankee rules!" the two of them shouted gleefully. As football had been played in the Confederacy, forward passes were illegal. North of the Ohio, things had been different. This wasn't the first such pass Cincinnatus had seen thrown. The U.S. game was catching on here.

He walked past a whitewashed picket fence. Like fresh blood, red paint had been daubed here and there on the whitewash. A couple of houses farther on, he came to another fence similarly defaced. On the side of a shack that nobody lived in, somebody had painted REVOLUTION in big, crimson letters, and a crude sketch of a broken chain beside the word.

"Ain't nobody happy," Cincinnatus muttered. Whites in Covington hated the U.S. occupiers who kept them apart from the Confederacy most of them held dear. Blacks in Covington hated the U.S. occupiers who kept them from joining the uprising against the Confederacy most of them despised.

He turned a corner. He was only a couple of blocks from home now. Being an up-and-coming man, he lived on a street that was paved and that boasted real concrete sidewalks. That meant horses and mules drawing wagons and buggies didn't step on the wreaths there, and meant that the blood on the sidewalk, though it had gone brown rather than crimson and looked gray, almost black, in the deepening twilight, had not been washed away by rain.

He kicked at the sidewalk with his shabby shoes. Yankee soldiers didn't hesitate to shoot down Negroes aflame with the beauty of the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Maybe the revolution would succeed down in the Confederacy, with so many armed whites having to stay in place and fight the USA. It would not work here, not

now, not yet.

A kerosene lamp burned in the front window of his house. The savory smell of chicken stew wafted out toward him. All at once, he could feel how tired—and how cold—he was. As he hurried up the walk toward the front door, it opened. His mother came out.

His wife was right behind, Achilles in her arms. “You sure you won’t stay for supper, Mother Livia?” Elizabeth asked.

Cincinnatus’ mother shook her graying head. “That’s all right, child,” she said. “I got my own man to take care of now—he be gettin’ home about this time. Got some good pork sausages I can do up quick, and fry some potatoes in the grease. I see you in the mornin’.” She paused to kiss her son on the cheek, then headed back to her own house a few blocks away.

Achilles smiled a large, one-tooth smile at his father. Cincinnatus smiled back, which made the baby’s smile get larger. Elizabeth turned and went back into the house. Cincinnatus came with her. He shut the door, then gave her a quick kiss.

Standing in the short front hallway, they looked at each other. Elizabeth looked worn; she’d put in a full day as a domestic while her mother-in-law watched the baby. No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than she said, “You look beat, honey.”

“Could be,” he admitted. “That Kennan, he’d be happier if they gave him a bullwhip for us, but what can you do?” He pulled money out of his overalls. “Got me the bonus again, anyways.”

“Good news,” she said, and then, “Come on into the kitchen. Supper’s just about ready.”

Cincinnatus dug in with a will. The way he worked, he needed to eat hearty. “That’s right good,” he said, and without missing a beat added, “but it ain’t a patch on yours.” That made Elizabeth look happy. Cincinnatus had learned better than to praise his mother’s cooking at the expense of his wife’s.

He played with Achilles in the front room while Elizabeth washed supper dishes. The baby could roll over but couldn’t crawl yet. He thought peekaboo was the funniest game in the world. Cincinnatus wondered what went on inside that little head. When he covered his face with his hands, did Achilles think he’d disappeared? By the way the baby laughed and laughed, maybe he did.

Elizabeth came out, sniffed, gave Cincinnatus a reproachful stare, and went off to change Achilles. When she came back she sat down in the rocking chair to nurse the baby. She didn't have a lot of milk left, but enough to feed him in the evening before he went to sleep and sometimes in the morning when they first got up, too.

He fell asleep now. The tip of her breast slid out of his mouth. Cincinnatus eyed it till she pulled her dress back up over her shoulder. He'd thought he was too beat to try to get her in the mood for making love tonight, but maybe he'd been wrong. When she carried Achilles off to his cradle, Cincinnatus' gaze followed her. She noticed, and smiled back over her shoulder. Maybe she wouldn't need too much persuading after all.

She'd just sat down again when somebody knocked on the door. Cincinnatus wondered who it was. Curfew would be coming soon, and U.S. soldiers were especially happy about proving their shoot-to-kill orders were no joke in the black part of town.

Sighing, Cincinnatus opened it, and there stood Lucullus. The young black man, the son of Apicius, the best barbecue chef in a goodly stretch of the Confederacy, had yet to develop his father's formidable bulk. "Here's the ribs you ordered this afternoon," he said, and handed Cincinnatus a package. Before Cincinnatus could say anything, Lucullus had hurried down the walk, climbed into the Kentucky Smoke House delivery wagon, and clucked the mule into motion.

The package was not ribs. Considering what Apicius did with ribs, that sent a pang of regret through Cincinnatus. "What you got?" Elizabeth called. "Who was that, here and gone so quick?"

"Lucullus," Cincinnatus answered. Elizabeth caught her breath. Cincinnatus hefted the package. Though wrapped in old newspaper and twine like Apicius' barbecue, it made a precise rectangle in his hands, and was much heavier than he would have guessed from the size.

A note was attached. *Put in third trash can, Pier 5, before 7 tomorrow,* it said, very much to the point. After reading it, he tore it into small pieces and threw them away. Elizabeth asked no more questions. She took one look at the package, then refused to turn her eyes that way.

Cincinnatus wondered what was under the newspaper. Set type, by the size and startling heft: that was his best guess. Whoever picked it out of the trash can would print it, and the Reds would have

themselves another poster or flyer or news sheet or whatever it was.

He shook his head. Being part of the Confederate underground was hard and dangerous. Being part of the Red underground was harder and more dangerous. Being part of both of them at once…at the time, all his other choices had looked worse. He wondered how long he could keep juggling, and how bad the smashup would be when he started dropping plates.

"Chow call!" the prison guard in the green-gray uniform shouted. Along with several thousand other captive Confederates, Reginald Bartlett lined up, tin mess kit and spoon in his hand. The guard, like all the guards, wore an overcoat. Reggie wore an ill-fitting butternut tunic and trousers, not really enough to keep him warm in a West Virginia autumn that had not a drop of Indian summer left to it.

Actually, the tunic fit better than it had when he'd got to the prison camp: he was skinnier than he had been. But he had to belt his pants with a piece of rope to keep them from sliding down over what was left of his backside. The boots they'd given him were too big, too; he'd stuffed them with crumpled paper to help keep his feet warm.

"This here prisoner business, it ain't no fun *a*-tall," Jasper Jenkins said. He and Reggie had been captured in the same raid on Confederate trenches east of Big Lick, Virginia. A lot of men from both sides had died in the struggle for the Roanoke valley between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Alleghenies. A lot more from both sides had been captured. But—

"You never think it's going to happen to you," Reggie agreed. "Maybe if I think real hard, I'll find out it didn't." He gave a whimsical shrug to show he didn't intend that to be taken seriously. He'd always been cheerful, he'd always been good-natured, he'd always been able to make people like him…and what had it got him? A third-tier bunk in a damnyankee prison camp. *Maybe I should have been more of a bastard,* he thought. *Couldn't have turned out much worse, could it?*

Jasper Jenkins, on the other hand, *was* more of a bastard, a dark, lanky farmer who looked out for himself first and everybody else later. And here he was, too. So what did that prove?

Jenkins looked around at the prisoners, almost all of them as much alike as so many sheep. "This here war's too big for people, you ask

me," he remarked.

"Now why the devil do you say that?" Bartlett asked, deadpan. He and Jenkins both laughed, neither of them happily. The line in which they stood made Reggie think of nothing so much as a trail of ants heading for a sandwich that had been dropped on the ground. Compared to the size of the war in which they'd been engaged, that was about what they were.

"And to think I went and volunteered for this." Jenkins shook his head. "I was a damn fool."

"Yeah, me, too," Reggie agreed. "I was there in Capitol Square in Richmond when President Wilson declared war on the damnyankees. I went and quit my job right on the spot and joined the Army—didn't wait for the regiment I'd been conscripted into to get called up. Figured we'd win the war in a couple of months and go on home. Shows how much I knew, doesn't it?"

"Nobody who didn't live by it knew about the Roanoke then," Jasper Jenkins said. "Wish I didn't know about it now. That damn valley is going to be sucking lives till the end of the war."

"I only wish you were wrong," Bartlett answered.

They snaked toward the front of the line, moving not quite fast enough to stay warm in the chilly breeze. As they drew near the kettles that would feed them, Reggie held his mess tin in front of him with both hands. That was how the rules said you did it. If you didn't follow the rules in every particular, you didn't get fed. The cooks enjoyed finding an excuse not to give a prisoner his rations.

"Miserable bastards," Jenkins muttered under his breath, glaring at the men who wore white aprons over their baggy butternut clothes. But he made sure he kept his voice low, so low that only Bartlett could hear. If the cooks found out he was complaining about them, they'd find ways to make him sorry.

They were prisoners, too; the USA wasn't about to waste its own men to feed the Confederates it captured. But whoever had thought up the prison-camp system the United States used had been a devilishly sneaky fellow. What better way to remind soldiers in enemy hands what their status was than to make them dependent on the goodwill of the Negroes who had formerly been their laborers and servants?

White teeth shining in their dark faces as they grinned unpleasantly

at the men they fed, the cooks ladled stew—heavy on potatoes and cabbage and bits of turnip, thin on meat that was probably horse, or maybe cat, anyhow—into the mess kits. If they liked you, you got yours from the bottom of the pot, where all the good stuff rested. If they didn't, you ate nothing but broth. Complaining did no good, either. The damnyankees backed up the Negroes all the time.

A few men in front of Reggie, a Confederate cursed when he saw what he'd been given. "You stinkin' niggers're tryin' to starve me to death," he snarled. "I'll git you for that if it's the last thing I ever do, so help me God I will."

"Shut up, Kirby," one of his friends told him. "You're just gonna make things worse, you keep going on like that."

That was good advice. The prisoner named Kirby didn't take it. "To hell with all of 'em," he shouted, and shook his fist at the Negro cooks. They didn't say anything. They just looked at him. *Memorizing his face,* Reggie thought. Mr. Kirby was going to be on short commons for a long, long time. He must have known that, too, but he didn't care. Maybe he was already too hungry to care. He went on, "You black sons of bitches think you're so great on account of the damnyankees let you lord it over us'ns. But it don't matter. You're still niggers to them, too."

His friend shoved him along to keep the line moving. If the line didn't move, the prisoners caught hell from the guards. Kirby started cussing all over again when the piece of hardtack he got was both small and full of weevils. *What do you expect, you damn fool?* Bartlett thought, hoping Kirby's outburst wouldn't make the cooks take out their anger on everybody anywhere near the loudmouthed prisoner.

His bowl of stew, when he got it, had a decent amount of real food in with the watery broth. He nodded to the Negro who'd dished it out. "Thanks, Tacitus," he said. The cook nodded back, soberly. Some of the prisoners tried sucking up to the cooks—*acting like niggers themselves,* Reggie thought with distaste—in the hopes of getting better rations. He couldn't make himself do that, and he hadn't seen that it helped, either. Treating them a little better than he would have before he got captured seemed like a good idea, though.

He took the square of hardtack another cook handed him. It wasn't too big, but it wasn't too small, either. He shrugged. It would do. He and Jenkins found a place where the wind wasn't blowing too hard, sat down there, and began to eat.

“Lettin’ niggers lord it over white men just ain’t right,” Jenkins said. “That Kirby fellow knew what he was talkin’ about. This here war’s over and done with, it’s time to pay back what we owe ’em.”

“Wonder what it’s going to be like when we get home again,” Reggie said around a mouthful of potatoes. “Wonder what’s going on with the Negro uprising down there.”

He and Jasper Jenkins had argued about that for a while. Jenkins had refused to believe blacks could rise up against the whites who had dominated the Confederacy since its founding, and the South before that. But fresh-caught prisoners confirmed at least some of the stories the Yankee guards so gleefully told to the men who had been captured earlier.

Now Jenkins said, “We’ll smash the bastards flat, and then we’ll go on and smash the damnyankees, too, no matter how long it takes.”

Reggie nodded. Inside, though, he wondered. He still wanted to believe everything would turn out all right, but it got harder every day. It had been getting harder since the first time he saw what machine guns did to charging men, no matter whose uniform those men wore. If the war went on long enough, he figured nobody on either side would be left alive.

When he’d finished eating, he took his mess tray over to a barrel of water, waited for his turn, and sluiced the tray around before drying it on his shirttail. He made sure he’d got all the gunk out of the corners. If you came down with food poisoning here…well, the prison camp was a bad place, but the hospital next door was worse.

“Work detail!” a Confederate officer bawled. Some men went off to chop firewood, others to clean the latrines, still others to police up the grounds of the camp.

Jasper Jenkins shook his head in bemusement. “Never thought I’d be glad of a chance to work,” he said, “but it sure as hell beats standing around doing nothing like we been doin’.”

“Yeah,” Reggie agreed; like Jenkins, he had no duties today. And when there wasn’t anything to do, you just waited for the minutes and the hours to crawl by, and every one of them moved on hands and knees. He’d never imagined the worst part of being a prisoner of war was boredom, but the damnyankees didn’t care what their captives did in here, so long as they didn’t try to escape and so long as they didn’t try to get U.S. soldiers to do anything for them.

“Feel like some cards?” Jenkins asked.

“Not right now, no,” Bartlett answered. “I think I’m going to stand here till the dust covers me up. Maybe the Yanks won’t notice me any more after that.” Jasper Jenkins laughed. He thought Reggie had made a joke. Reggie knew too well he hadn’t.

Sergeant Chester Martin cowered in a bombproof shelter in a trench dug through the ruins of what had been Big Lick, Virginia, waiting for the Confederate artillery bombardment to end. The bombproof was thirty feet below ground level; even a shell from an eight-inch gun landing right on top probably wouldn’t collapse it. And the Rebels didn’t have many heavy artillery pieces, though their light field guns were better than anything the U.S. Army owned.

But a collapsed roof wasn’t Martin’s worst worry, although his lips skinned back from his teeth whenever a shellburst nearby made the candles jump. Nobody could see the expression on his face, though, not behind the soaked pad of cotton wadding he wore over his mouth and nose. The chemicals in the pad would—with luck—keep poison gas out of his lungs. Without luck…

He feared gas more than a direct hit. The dugout that sheltered him from explosives and splinters could be a death trap now, for gas, heavier than air, crept down and concentrated in such places. The USA had started using the deadly stuff several months before the Confederacy could answer in kind, but the Rebs had the knack now.

Sitting there beside him in the flickering near-dark, squeezed up tight against him as a lover, Corporal Paul Andersen muttered something over and over again. The mask he wore muffled the words, but Martin knew what he was saying: “Fucking bastards.” He said it a lot. It was a sentiment with which few of the men in the company would have disagreed.

All at once, sudden as a kick in the teeth, the barrage stopped. Martin’s stomach knotted in pain. He was senior man in the bombproof. He had to order the men to rush out to their posts—or to stay there. The Rebs were sneaky sons of bitches. Sometimes they’d stop shelling you long enough to draw you out from your cover, then pick up again with redoubled fury once you were more nearly out in the open.

But sometimes they'd send their men at your lines the minute after a barrage ended. If they reached the trenches before your troops got up to the firing steps and the machine guns, you were gone: captured if you got lucky, more likely dead. No wonder his guts knotted. He had to figure out which way to jump, his own life depending on the answer along with everyone else's.

He weighed his choices. *Better to guess wrong about more shelling than about a raid,* he decided. "Out! Out! Out!" The words were muffled and blurry, but nobody had any doubt about what he meant.

Men streamed out of the dugout and ran shouting up the steps cut into the earth. Those steps were full of dirt that had cascaded down from hits up above; enough hits like that and it wouldn't matter whether the bombproof caved in or not, because nobody could escape it anyway.

Clutching his rifle, Martin ran for a firing step, waving for his men to follow him. Sure as hell, here came the Rebels. They didn't move forward yowling like catamounts, not any more. They'd learned better than that. But come on they did.

Martin started shooting at the butternut-clad figures stumbling toward him through no-man's-land. The Rebs went down, not in death or injury so much as to take shelter in shell holes and what had been trenches and were now ruins. In their mud-caked boots, he would have done the same.

Not all of them took refuge. Some kept moving, no doubt thinking their best chance for survival lay in seizing a length of U.S. trench. They might have been right. But then a couple of machine guns added their din to the mix. At that, some of the Confederate soldiers did yell, in horrified dismay. Advancing against rifle fire was expensive, but might be possible. Advancing against machine-gun fire was suicide without the fancy label.

None of the Rebs made it into the trenches. The ones who hadn't fallen broke and made for their own lines. Some of the ones who had fallen lay still. Others twisted and writhed and moaned, out there in no-man's-land. Some U.S. soldiers took pleasure in shooting the Rebs who came out to try to recover their wounded. Some Confederates did the same thing to U.S. soldiers seeking to pick up their comrades.

Martin took off his gas mask. He breathed warily. The air still had a chlorine tang to it, but it didn't make him choke and turn blue. "We

threw 'em back," he said. "Not too bad."

Maybe twenty feet down along the firing step, Joe Hammerschmitt suddenly cried out. He dropped his rifle and clutched a hand to his right shoulder. The Springfield fell in the mud. Red started oozing out between his fingers.

He opened his hand for a moment to examine the wound. Once he'd done that, pain warred with exultation on his long, thin face. Exultation won. "Got me a hometowner, looks like," he said happily.

Half the men up there with him made sympathetic noises; the other half looked frankly jealous. Hammerschmitt was going to be out of the firing line for weeks, maybe months, to come, and they still risked not just death but horrible mutilation every day.

"Get him back to the doctors," Martin called. A couple of Hammerschmitt's buddies roughly bandaged the wound and helped him out of the front line of trenches. They got envious looks, too. They weren't going on a long vacation like Joe's, but they were able to escape the worst of the firing till they'd turned him over to the quacks in the rear.

"You take care of yourself, Joe," Specs Peterson told his friend. "Don't let the bugs bite you back at the hospital." Everyone laughed at that. The bugs bit harder in the trenches than anyplace else. Peterson went on, "I'll see if I can't shoot the damn Reb who got you there." For that moment, he looked and sounded altogether serious. Birds who wore glasses were supposed to be peaceable types. Somehow Specs hadn't got the word.

Paul Andersen let out a long sigh. He sat down on the firing step, took off his iron helmet, and ran a dirty hand through his dirty-yellow hair. "Another one of the old boys down," he remarked.

Chester Martin sat down beside him and began to roll a cigarette. "Yeah," he said. "Time this war's finally done, ain't gonna be a lot of people left who went in at the start."

"Don't I wish you were wrong." Andersen touched the two stripes on his sleeve, then the three on Martin's. He didn't say anything. He didn't need to say anything. They'd both been promoted because men senior to them had gone down. One of these days, you had to figure they would go down, too, and fresh-faced kids would inherit their jobs.

Martin lighted the cigarette and sucked in smoke. It rasped his lungs raw. Maybe that was because the U.S. tobacco wasn't so good as the stuff from the CSA that you could get only from Rebel corpses nowadays. Or maybe the chlorine still mixed with the air had something to do with it. Martin didn't know. He didn't care, either. The cigarette eased his nerves.

Back of the line, U.S. artillery opened up on the Confederate forward positions. "Go ahead," Martin exclaimed with the bitterness any veteran comes to feel about the shortcomings of his own side. "Hit the sons of bitches *now*. That's bully, that's what that is. Doesn't do us a damn bit of good. Why didn't you shell them when they were coming up over the top at us?"

Andersen also got out makings for a cigarette. "Damn right," he said while rolling it. "'Course, that would have done us some good, so we can't have it, now can we?" He leaned forward to get a light from Martin's smoke.

"They were probably getting shelled, too," Martin allowed, trying to be fair.

Paul Andersen wasted no time on such useless efforts. "Poor babies," he said. "Yeah, they get shelled every once in a while. So what? You bring those bastards up to the front line and they'd turn up their toes double quick. Tell me I'm lying—I dare you."

"Can't do it," Martin said. Infantrymen took as an article of faith the notion that nobody else in the Army had a nastier job than theirs. It was, as far as Martin was concerned, a faith justified by works. He laughed. "At least the artillery fights. You ever seen a dead cavalryman?"

"Not likely," Andersen exclaimed. "Hey, they're all sitting back there, living soft and sharpening up their sabers for the breakthrough."

"The breakthrough we're going to give them," Martin said. He and his friend laughed. That they would see a breakthrough in their lifetimes struck both of them as unlikely. That the cavalry would be able to exploit it if it ever came was even more absurd. Meditatively, Martin observed, "A horse makes a hell of a target for a machine gun, you know that?"

"It's a fact, sure enough," Andersen said. They both smoked on till their cigarette butts were too tiny to hold. Then they tossed them into

the mud at the bottom of the trench.

Rain began pattering down a few minutes later. “Always comes right after a bombardment,” Martin said. That wasn’t strictly true, but shelling and rain did seem to go together. At first, he welcomed the rain, which washed the last remnants of poison gas from the air. But it did not let up. It kept raining and raining and raining, till the trenches went from mud to muck.

Martin ordered men to start laying down boards, so they could keep moving up and down the trench in spite of the rain. That would work—for a while. Eventually, if the rain kept up, the muck would start swallowing the boards. Martin had seen that the winter before. He’d never expected to spend two winters in the trenches. But then, when the war started, he hadn’t figured on spending one winter in the trenches.

“Only goes to show,” he muttered, and began to fix himself another cigarette. He hadn’t known how to keep one going in miserable weather till the war started. He did now. *The sort of talent I could live without,* he thought as he struck a match and lighted the cigarette, shielding it from the wet with his cupped hands as he did so. He sucked in more smoke. As long as he had the talent, he saw no reason not to use it.

“Come on,” Sylvia Enos said to George, Jr., and Mary Jane. “We’re going to be late to the Coal Board if you two don’t stop fooling around.”

Her son was five, her daughter two. They didn’t understand why being late for a Coal Board appointment—as with any government appointment in the USA—was a catastrophe, but they did understand *that* it was a catastrophe. They also understood Sylvia would warm their backsides hotter than any coal fire if they made her late. She’d made that very plain.

Taking one of them in each hand, she started to head away from Brigid Coneval’s flat, which lay down the hall with the one she and her children had shared with George, Sr., till the Navy sent him off to the Mississippi.

George, Jr., said, “Why can’t we stay with Mrs. Coneval? We like staying with Mrs. Coneval.” Mary Jane nodded emphatically. She

couldn't have said anything so complex, but she agreed with it.

"You can't stay with Mrs. Coneval because she has an appointment with the Coal Board this afternoon, too," Sylvia answered. Had George meant, *We like staying with her better than staying with you*? Sylvia tried not to think about that. She worked all day five days a week and a half-day Saturday like everyone else. That meant her children spent more time awake with Brigid Coneval, who hadn't taken a factory job when her husband was conscripted but made ends meet by caring for the children of women who had, than with their own mother. No wonder they thought the world of her these days.

"Don't wanna go Coal Board," Mary Jane said.

Sylvia Enos sighed. She didn't want to go to the Coal Board, either. "We have to," she said, and let it go at that. The Coal Board, the Meat Board (not that she couldn't evade that one, with her connections to the fishing boats that came into T Wharf), the Flour Board…all the bureaucracies that kept life in the United States efficient and organized—if you listened to the people who ran them. If you listened to anyone else, you got another story, but no one in power seemed interested in that tale.

Mary Jane stuck out her plump lower lip, which had a smear of jam beneath it. "No," she said. Being two, she used the word in every possible intonation, with every possible variation on volume.

"Do you want to go to the Coal Board, or would you rather have a spanking?" Sylvia asked. As she'd known it would, that got Mary Jane's attention. Her daughter held still long enough so she could button the girl's coat all the way up to the neck. It was early December, still fall by the calendar, but it felt like winter outside, and a hard winter at that.

George, Jr., had buttoned his own buttons. He was proud of everything he could do on his own, in which he took after his father. He had, unfortunately, buttoned the buttons wrong. Sylvia fixed them quickly, and with as little fuss as she could, nodded to Mrs. Coneval, and took the children downstairs and down to the corner where the trolley stopped.

Had she imagined it, or did Brigid Coneval seem to be looking forward to a trip to the Coal Board offices? Putting up with a dozen or more little ones from before sunup to after sundown had to wear at her nerves; George, Jr., and Mary Jane were often plenty to make

Sylvia wish she'd never met her husband, and they were her own flesh and blood. If you didn't sneak into the whiskey bottle while caring for your neighbors' brats, you were a woman of stern stuff.

Out on the street, newsboys wearing caps and wool mufflers against the chill hawked copies of the *Boston Globe* and other local papers. They were shouting about battles in west Texas and Sequoyah, and up in Manitoba, too. Sylvia thought about spending a couple of cents to get one, but decided not to. The black-bordered casualty lists that ran on every front page would only make her sad. So long as the newsboys weren't yelling about gunboat disasters on the Mississippi River, she knew everything about the war that mattered to her.

She clambered onto the trolley and put a nickel in the fare box. The driver cast a dubious eye at George, Jr. "He's only five," Sylvia said. The driver shrugged and waved her on. She was having to say that more and more. Next year, she'd have to pay her son's fare, too. When every five cents counted, that hurt.

"Coal Board!" the trolley man shouted, pulling up to the stop half a block away from the frowning gray-brown sandstone building. As if by magic, his car nearly emptied itself. It filled again a moment later, when people who had already arranged for their coming month's ration climbed aboard to go home.

"It didn't used to be this way," an old man complained to his wife as Sylvia shepherded the children past them. "Back before the Second Mexican War, we—"

Distance and the crowd kept Sylvia from hearing the rest of that. It mattered little. She knew how the old man would have gone on. Her own mother had always said the same sort of thing. Back in the 1870s, the USA hadn't been full of Boards watching every piece of everybody's life and making sure all the pieces fit together in a way that worked best for the government. Back then, the CSA, England, and France had humiliated the United States only once, in the War of Secession, and people figured it was a fluke. After the second time, though, it seemed pretty obvious that the only way to fight back was to organize to the hilt. Thus conscription, thus the Boards, thus endless lines and endless forms…

Coal Board forms were stacked in neat piles, a whole array of them, on a long table just inside the entrance. Sylvia started to reach for the one that said, ENTIRE FAMILY DWELLING IN SAME LIVING QUARTERS. She jerked her hand away. That hadn't been the right form for some months now.

Instead, she grabbed the one reading, FAMILY MEMBER ON MILITARY SERVICE.

She sat down on one of the hard, uncomfortable chairs in the vast office. After fishing a cloth doll out of her handbag for Mary Jane and a couple of wooden soldiers painted green-gray for George, Jr., she guddled around in there till she found a pen and a bottle of ink. Normally, she would have contented herself with a pencil, if anything, but since the start of the war all the Boards had grown insistent on ink.

The form was long enough to have been folded over on itself four different times. As she did each month, she filled out the intimate details of her family's life: ages, address, square footage, location of absent member(s), and on and on and on. She wished the bureaucrats could remember from one month to the next what she'd put down the month before. That didn't seem to be in the cards, although, if you invented a palace for yourself so you could get a bigger coal ration, they generally did find out about that, whereupon you wished you hadn't.

"Come on," she said to the children. They got into the line appropriate to the form. It was, naturally, the longest line in the entire office: conscription had made sure of that. Up at the distant front, a clerk standing behind a tall marble counter like that of a bank examined each form in turn. When satisfied, he plied a rubber stamp with might and main: *thock! thock! thock!*

"Wonder what's keeping *him* out of the Army," the middle-aged woman in front of Sylvia muttered under her breath.

"When they start conscripting clerks, you'll know the war is as good as lost," Sylvia said with great conviction. The woman in front of her nodded, the ragged silk flowers on her battered old picture hat waving up and down.

The line inched forward. Sylvia supposed she should have been grateful the Coal Board offices stayed open all day Saturday. Without that, she would have had to leave work at the fish-canning plant in the middle of some weekday, which would not have made her bosses happy about her. Of course, she would have been far from the only one with such a need, so what could they have done? Without coal, how were you supposed to cook and to heat your house or flat?

When she was three people away from pushing her form over the high counter to the clerk behind it, paying her money, and collecting

the ration tickets she'd need for the month ahead, the woman whose turn it was got into a disagreement with the clerk. "That's not right!" she shouted in an Italian accent. "You think you can cheat me on account of I don't know much English? I tell you this—" Whatever *this* was, it was in Italian, and Italian so electrifying that a couple of women who not only heard but also understood it crossed themselves.

It rolled off the clerk like seawater down an oilcloth. "I'm sorry, Mrs., uh, Vegetti, but I have applied the policy pertaining to unrelated boarders correctly, as warranted by the facts stated on your form there," he said.

"Lousy thief! Stinking liar!" The rest was more Italian, even more incandescent than what had gone before. People from all over the Coal Board offices were staring at anyone bold enough to vent her feelings in that way before the representative of such a powerful organ of government.

The clerk listened to the stream of abuse for perhaps a minute. So, wide-eyed, did George, Jr. "What's she saying, Mama?" he asked. "She sure sounds mad, whatever it is."

"I don't understand the words myself," Sylvia answered, relieved at being able to tell the literal truth.

Clang! Clang! The clerk had heard enough. When he rang the bell, a couple of policemen came up to the irate Italian woman. One of them put a hand on her shoulder. *Wham!* She hauled off and hit him with her handbag. The two cops grabbed her and hustled her out of the office. She screeched every inch of the way. "Shut up, you noisy hag!" one of the policemen shouted at her. "No coal for you this month!"

A sigh ran through the big room. The woman in front of Sylvia said, "It would almost be worth it to have the chance to tell the no-good rubber stampers what you really think of them."

"Almost," Sylvia agreed wistfully. But that was the operative word. The Italian woman was going to lose a month's fuel for the sake of a few minutes' pleasure. Like a foolish woman who fell into immorality, she wasn't thinking far enough ahead.

Sylvia smiled. There were temptations, and then there were temptations….

At last, she reached the head of the line. The clerk took her form, studied it with methodical care, and spoke in a rapid drone: "Do you

swear that the information contained herein is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, knowing false statements are liable to the penalty for perjury?"

"I do," Sylvia said, just as she had when the preacher asked her if she took George as her lawful wedded husband.

Thock! Thock! Thock! The rubber stamp did its work, a consummation less enjoyable than the one that had followed the earlier *I do*. But then George had heated her only through the wedding night. The Coal Board clerk would let her keep herself and her children warm all month long.

She passed money over the counter, receiving in return a strip of ration tickets, each good for twenty pounds of coal. The clerk said, "Be ready for a ration decrease or a price increase, or maybe both, next month."

Nodding, she took George, Jr., and Mary Jane by the hand and headed out of the office. *Be ready,* the clerk had said. He made it sound easy. But where was the extra money supposed to come from? What was she supposed to do if they didn't—couldn't—give her enough coal for both cooking and heating?

The clerk didn't care. It wasn't his problem. "Come on," she told her children. Like all the others the war caused, the problem was hers. One way or another, she would have to deal with it.

Outside the farmhouse, the wind howled like a wild thing. Here on the Manitoban prairie, it had a long running start. Arthur McGregor was glad he wouldn't have to go out in it any time soon. He had plenty of food; the locusts in green-gray hadn't been so thorough in their plundering as they had the winter before.

He even had plenty of kerosene for his lamps. Henry Gibbon, the storekeeper over in Rosenfeld, had discovered a surefire way to cheat the Yankees' rationing system. McGregor didn't know what it was, but he was willing to take advantage of it. Cheating the Americans was almost like soldiers making a successful raid on their lines, up farther north.

As if picking that thought right out of his head, his son Alexander said, "The Yanks still don't have Winnipeg, Pa." At fifteen, Alexander

looked old enough to be conscripted. He was leaner than his father, and fairer, too, with brown hair that partly recalled his mother Maude's auburn curls. Arthur McGregor might have been taken for a black Irishman had his craggy features not been so emphatically Scots.

"Not after a year and a half of trying," he agreed now. "The troops from the mother country helped us hold 'em back. And as long as we have Winnipeg—"

"We have Canada," Alexander finished for him. Arthur McGregor's big head went up and down. His son was right. As long as grain could go east and manufactured goods west, the dominion was still a working concern. The USA had almost cut the prairie off from the more heavily settled eastern provinces, but hadn't quite managed it.

"The real question is," Arthur rumbled, "can we go through another year like this one and the last half of the one before?"

"Of course we can!" Alexander sounded indignant that his father should presume to doubt Canada could hold on.

Arthur McGregor studied his son with a mixture of fondness and exasperation. The lad was at an age where he was inclined to believe things would turn out as he wanted for no better reason than that he wanted them to turn out so. "The United States are a big country," he said, that being another oblique way to say he wasn't so optimistic as he had been.

"We're a big country, too—bigger than the USA," Alexander said, "and the Confederacy is on our side, and England, and France, and Russia, and Japan. We'll lick the Yanks yet, you wait and see."

"We're a big country without enough people in it, and our friends are a long way away," McGregor answered. Always dark and cold, December was a good time of year in which to be gloomy. "If the Yankees had chosen to stand on the defensive against the CSA and throw everything they had at us, they would have smashed us in a hurry and then gone on to other things."

"Nahh!" Alexander rejected the idea out of hand.

But Arthur McGregor nodded. "They would have, son. They could have. They're just too big for us. But one thing about Americans is, they always think they can do more than they really can. They tried to smash us and the Confederates and England on the high seas, all at the same time. And I don't care how big they are, I don't care how

much they love the Kaiser and the Huns, no country on the face of the earth is big enough and strong enough to do all that at once."

At last, he'd succeeded in troubling his son. "*Do* you think they're going to win the war, Pa?"

McGregor had lain awake at night from that very fear. "I hope not," he said at last. "It's just that there are so blasted *many* of them."

That put a sour twist on Alexander's mouth; it was inarguably true. In Arthur McGregor's mind's eye, he saw endless columns of men in green-gray tramping north, endless queues of snarling canvas-topped trucks painted the same shade, endless teams of horses hauling wagons and artillery pieces, endless trains also bringing men and supplies up toward the front. True, there were also endless ambulances and trains marked with the Red Cross, taking wounded Yankees away for treatment, and, no doubt, endless corpses at the front. But somehow the U.S. military machine kept grinding on despite the wastage.

Alexander said, "What can we do?"

"Hope," McGregor answered. "Pray, though God will do as He likes, not as we like." He was as stern a Presbyterian as he looked. "Cooperate with the Americans as little as we can—though if they hadn't bought our grain, however little they paid for it, I can't imagine what we'd do for money."

He scowled. A farm didn't need much in the way of cash, especially when a war knocked deeds and land taxes all topsy-turvy. You could live off your crops and your livestock and you might even make your own cloth from wool and from flax if you'd planted any, but you couldn't make your own coal or your own kerosene or your own glass or books or…a lot of things that made life come close to being worth living.

"It's not enough," Alexander said. "Not going along with the Yanks, I mean—it's not enough. We shouldn't be talking about not doing things with them—that's why you don't send my sister to the school they set up. Like I say, it's good, but it's not enough. We've got to figure out ways to do things *to* the Americans."

"Like that bomb in Rosenfeld?" Arthur McGregor asked. His son nodded, gray eyes fierce. But McGregor sighed. "It's possible, I suppose, but it's not easy. They almost made me one of the hostages they took after that bomb went off, remember. They would have given

me a blindfold, lined me up against a wall, and shot me. This is a war, son, and you can't back out and say you didn't mean it if something goes wrong."

"I know *that*!" Alexander exclaimed. But the jaunty tone with which he'd replied gave him away. He didn't believe for a moment that anything could go wrong in a scheme to tweak the Yankees' tails. When you were fifteen, you knew everything always turned out fine in the end. Arthur McGregor was a good deal past twice fifteen. He knew how foolish you were at that age.

He addressed his son with great seriousness: "I want you to promise me you won't go off on your own to try to do anything to the Americans. And once you make that promise, I expect you to keep it."

Now Alexander McGregor looked most unhappy. "Aw, Pa, I don't want to have to lie to you."

"I don't want you to have to lie to me, either," his father said. McGregor was at the same time proud of his son for not taking a lie for granted and alarmed at how serious he was in wanting to do something to strike at the American soldiers holding—and holding down—Manitoba.

"Believe me, Pa," Alexander went on, "I'm not the only fellow who wants to—" He stopped. Kerosene light was on the ruddy side, anyhow, but McGregor thought he turned red. "I don't think I should have said that."

"I wish you hadn't, I'll tell you that." McGregor studied Alexander, who did his inadequate best to show nothing on his face. How many boys were there on the scattered farms of Manitoba—and boys they would have to be, for everyone of conscription age before the land was overrun had already been called to the colors—plotting heaven only knew what against the USA?

"Whatever these fellows have in their minds, you will not be a part of it. Do you understand me?" Arthur McGregor knew he sounded like a prophet laying down the Law. He hadn't taken that tone with Alexander for years; he'd had no need. Now he wondered whether his son, who was nearly a man and who thought himself more nearly a man than he was, would still respond to it as he had when he was smaller. And, sure enough, defiance kindled in Alexander's eyes. "I understand you, Pa," he said, but that was a long way from pledging his obedience.

McGregor exhaled heavily. “I’m not just saying this for myself, you know. What do you suppose your mother would do if the Yanks caught you at whatever mischief you have in mind?” He knew that was a low blow, and used it without compunction or hesitation.

It went home, too. Alexander winced. “It wouldn’t be like that, Pa,” he protested.

“No? Why wouldn’t it?” McGregor pressed the advantage: “And how would you keep Julia out of it, once you got in? Or even Mary?”

“Julia’s just a girl, and she’s only twelve,” Alexander said, as if that settled that.

“And she hates the Americans worse than you do, and she’s stubborner than you ever dreamt of being,” McGregor said. Before Alexander could respond, he went on, “And one of these days you and your pals would decide that the Yanks couldn’t think she was dangerous because she’s a girl and she’s only twelve. And you’d send her out to do something, and she’d be proud to go. *And what if she got caught, son?* The Yanks are nasty devils, but Lord help you if you think they’re stupid.”

“We’d never—” Alexander began, but he didn’t finish the sentence. When you were in a war, who could say what you might be driven to do?

Neither of them spoke of Mary. That was not because she had but seven years. It had more to do with a certainty father and son shared that the littlest girl in the house would take any chance offered her to hurt the U.S. cause, and an equally shared determination not to offer her any such chance. Mary was very bright for her age, but unacquainted with anything at all related to restraint.

“I asked you once for your promise, and you would not give it,” McGregor said. “I’m going to ask you again.” He folded his arms across his chest and waited to hear what his son would say. If Alexander said no…He didn’t know what he would do if Alexander said no.

His son let out a long, deep sigh, the sigh not of a boy but of a man facing up to the fact that the world doesn’t work the way he wished it would. It was the most grown-up noise McGregor had ever heard from him. At last, voice full of regret, he said, “All right, Pa. I promise.”

“Promise what, Alexander?” That was Mary, coming out of the

kitchen, where she'd been putting away the plates her mother had washed and her big sister dried.

"Promise to tickle you till you scream like there's American soldiers coming down the chimney instead of Santa Claus," Alexander said, and made as if to grab her. That could be dangerous; she fought as ferociously as a half-tame farm cat.

But now she hopped back, laughing. She turned to Arthur McGregor. "What did he promise, Pa?"

"To be a good boy," McGregor said. Mary snorted. That sort of promise meant nothing to her. McGregor had to hope it meant something to her brother.

IV

Jonathan Moss peered down at his whiskey, then up toward the ceiling of the officers' club; the rafters were blurry not from the effects of drink—though he'd had a good deal—but because of the haze of tobacco smoke. He knocked back the whiskey, then signaled the colored steward behind the bar for another one.

"Yes, sir," the fellow said, and passed him a fresh glass full of the magical amber fluid that inflamed and numbed at the same time.

His tentmates sat around the table: Daniel Dudley, who usually went by "Dud," the flight leader; Tom Innis, fierce as a wolf; and Zach Whitby, new in the tent, replacing a casualty, and still a little hesitant on the ground because of that. None of the four lieutenants was far past twenty. All of them wore twin-winged pilot's badges on the left breast pockets of their uniform tunics.

Tom Innis got a villainous pipe going. Its fumes added to those already crowding the air. Moss flapped a hand in his direction. "Here," he said, "don't start shooting poison gas at us."

"You should talk, those cheroots you smoke," Innis retorted, running a hand over his brown, peltlike Kaiser Bill mustache. "They smell like burning canvas painted with aeroplane dope."

Since that was at least half true, Moss didn't argue with it. He leaned back in his chair, almost overbalancing. Dud Dudley spotted that, as he might have spotted a Canuck aeroplane with engine trouble trying to limp back toward Toronto. "How are you supposed to handle a fighting scout when you can't even fly a chair?" he demanded.

"Well, hell." Moss landed awkwardly. "When I'm up in a fighting scout, I'll be sober. It does make a difference."

That struck all four men as very funny, probably because none of them was sober. The weather had been too thick to fly for several days now, leaving the pilots with nothing to do but fiddle with their aeroplanes and gather in the officers' club to drink. As Moss had found the year before, winter in Ontario sometimes shut down operations for weeks at a time.

He sipped his fresh whiskey and looked around the club. Other groups of pilots and observers had their own circles, most of them raucous enough that they paid little attention to the racket he and his friends were making. On the walls were pictures of the fliers who had served at the aerodrome: some posed portraits, some snapshots of groups of them or of them sitting jauntily in the cockpits of their aeroplanes, a few with their arms around pretty girls. Moss hadn't had much luck along those lines; most Canadian girls wanted little to do with the Americans who occupied their country.

A lot of the pilots in the photographs were men he'd never known, men killed before he'd joined the squadron as a replacement, new as Zach Whitby. Others had died after Moss came here: Luther Carlsen, for instance, whose place Whitby was taking. The rest were survivors…up till now. *The quick and the dead,* he thought.

Also on the walls were souvenirs of the aerial action that had accompanied the grinding, slogging American advance through southern Ontario toward—but, all plans aside, not yet to—Toronto: blue, white, and red roundels cut from the canvas of destroyed enemy machines. Some were from British aeroplanes, with all three colors being circles, others from native Canadian aircraft, where the red in the center was painted in the shape of a maple leaf.

Along with the roundels were a couple of two-bladed wooden propellers, also spoils of war. Seeing the souvenirs—or rather, noticing them—made Jonathan Moss proud for a moment. But his mood swung with whiskey-driven speed. "I wonder how many canvas eagles the Canucks and the limeys have in their officers' clubs," he said.

"Too damn many," Zach Whitby said. "Even one would be too damn many."

"We might as well enjoy ourselves," Dud Dudley said, "because we aren't going to live through the damned war any which way."

"I'll drink to that," Innis said, and did.

The quick and the dead, Moss thought again. The hell of it was,

Dudley was right, or the odds said he was, which amounted to the same thing. Moss looked again at those photographs of vanished fliers. Back in the observers' unit from which he'd transferred after his photographer was wounded, they'd had a similar display. One of these days, would Zach be explaining to some newcomer still wet behind the ears who he'd been and what he'd done? Contemplating things like that was plenty to make you want to crawl into a whiskey bottle and pull the cork in after you.

The door to the officers' club opened. Captain Shelby Pruitt, the squadron commander, walked in. With him came a blast of cold Ontario air. Some of the smoke in the big room escaped, though not enough to do much good.

"I want to tell you miserable drunks something," Pruitt said loudly, and waited till he got something approaching quiet before going on, "Word from the weathermen in Manitoba is that they've had a couple of days of clear weather, and it's heading our way. We may be flying tomorrow. You don't want to drink yourselves altogether blind."

"Who says we don't?" Tom Innis demanded.

"I say so," Pruitt answered mildly, and Innis nodded, all at once meek as a child. The squadron commander hadn't earned his nickname of "Hardshell" by breathing fire every chance he found, but he expected obedience—and got it. Like Moss' previous CO, he not only commanded the squadron but also flew with it, and he'd knocked down four enemy aeroplanes on his own, even if he was, by the standards of the men who flew fighting scouts, somewhere between middle-aged and downright doddering.

Zach Whitby waved to the bartender. "Coffee!" he called. "I got to sober me up. We run into any limeys up there, I don't want to do anything stupid."

"Hell with coffee," Innis said. "Hell with sobering up too much, too. I'd rather fly with a hangover—it makes me mean."

"I'll have my coffee in the morning, and some aspirin to go with it," Moss said. "If I load up on java now, I won't sleep for beans tonight. We go up there, we ought to be in the best shape we can." Dudley nodded. Moss had noticed that he and his flight leader often thought alike.

Under Hardshell Pruitt's inexorable stare, the officers' lounge emptied. Fliers scrawled their names on bar chits and strode, or

sometimes lurched, off to their cots. Pruitt sped them to their rest with a suggestion that struck Moss as downright sadistic: “Here’s hoping Canuck bombing planes don’t come over tonight.”

His was not the only groan rising into the chilly night. The thought of enduring a bombing raid while hung over was not one to inspire delight. As things were…“The groundcrew will be cleaning puke off somebody’s control panel tomorrow,” he predicted.

“Puke is one thing,” Dudley answered. “Getting blood out of a cockpit is a whole different business. But you know about that, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I know about that.” Moss remembered Percy Stone, his observer. He remembered how much blood had splashed Stone’s cockpit after he’d been wounded. He’d heard Stone had lived, but the photographer still hadn’t returned to duty.

Enough thick wool blankets stood on Moss’ cot to have denuded half the sheep in Canada. Living under canvas in Canada wasn’t easy half the year. It was, however, a hell of a lot easier than living in the trenches. Aviators who groused too much about how tough they had it sometimes got handed a Springfield, which did wonders for shutting them up.

He took off his boots, burrowed under the blankets like a mole, and fell asleep. Waking up in gray twilight the next morning was something he would sooner have skipped. He gulped coffee and aspirin tablets and began to feel human, in a somber sort of way. Tom Innis’morning preparation consisted of brandy and a raw egg, then coffee. One way probably worked about as well as the other.

Sure enough, the day dawned clear. The pilots swaddled themselves in the leather and fur of their flying suits. It was cold at altitude even in scorching midsummer; during the worst of winter, the flying suits rarely came off. Moving slowly—bending your knees wasn’t easy with all that padding around them—they went out to their aeroplanes.

Groundcrew men had already removed the canvas covers from the Martin one-deckers: U.S. copies of a German design. Also copied from the Fokker monoplane was the interrupter gear that let a forward-facing machine gun fire through the spinning propeller without shooting it off and sending the machine down in a long, helpless glide…or that let the machine gun shoot through the prop most of the time, anyhow.

Clumsily, Moss climbed into the cockpit. A couple of bullet holes in the side of the fuselage from his most recent encounter with an enemy aeroplane had been neatly patched. The machine could take punishment. Had the bullets torn through his soft, vulnerable flesh, he would have spent much longer in the shop.

He nodded to a mechanic standing by the propeller. The fellow, his breath smoking in the cold morning air, spun the two-bladed wooden prop. After a couple of tries, the engine caught. Moss studied his instruments. He had plenty of gas and oil, and the pumps for both seemed to be working well. He tapped his compass to make sure the needle hadn't frozen to its case.

When he was satisfied, he waved. The airstrip was full of the growl of motors turning over. Dud Dudley looked around to make sure everyone in his flight had a functioning machine, then taxied across the field—ruts through gray-brown dead grass. Moss followed, watching his ground speed. He pulled back on the joystick, lifting the fighting scout's nose. The aeroplane bounced a couple of more times. After the second bounce, it didn't come down.

He climbed as quickly as he could, going into formation behind his flight leader and to his left. Zach Whitby held the same place relative to him as he did to Dudley. On the right, Tom Innis flew alone.

Down in the trenches, men huddled against cold and mud and frost. The line ran from southeast to northwest between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron. Behind it, on land the United States had had to fight to win, everything had been wrecked by stubborn Canadian and British defense and equally stubborn American attacks. On the other side, the terrain still showed what a fine country this was.

Machine guns spat fire at the aeroplanes from the enemy's trenches. That was futile; machine-gun bullets reached only a couple of thousand feet, and the Martin single-deckers flew a good deal higher. But soon Canadian and British Archibald—or Archie, as he was more familiarly known—would start putting antiaircraft shells all around them. A lucky hit could bring down an aeroplane. Moss knew that, as he knew of a thousand other ways he could die up here. He did his best to forget what he knew.

Dud Dudley wagged his wings to draw the flight's attention. He pointed to the south. The enemy was in the air, too. There, buzzing along contentedly, as if without a care in the world, was a Canadian—or perhaps a British—two-seater, an old Avro no longer fit for front-

line combat but still good enough to take a photographer over the American lines to see what he could see.

As Moss swung into a turn toward the enemy reconnaissance aircraft, he glanced in the rearview mirror, then up and back over his shoulder. Were scouts lurking up there, waiting to pounce when the Americans attacked the Avro? Keeping an eye peeled for such was really Zach Whitby's job, but you didn't get to go back to the officers' lounge and have more drinks if you took too seriously the notion that you didn't have to worry about something because someone else would.

On flew the Avro, straight as if on a string. That meant the observer was taking his pictures, and the pilot, a brave man, wouldn't spoil them even if he was under attack. Moss knew what that took, since he'd piloted observation aircraft himself. He prepared to make the enemy pay for his courage.

He'd just fired his first burst when tracers streaked past him—not from the Avro, but from behind. Zach Whitby's fighting scout tumbled out of the sky, not in any controlled maneuver but diving steeply, a dead man at the controls, flame licking back from the engine. Sure as hell, the Canucks had had a surprise waiting.

Moss threw his own aeroplane into a tight rolling turn to the right. He was more maneuverable than the two-seater on his tail, but the biplane kept after him, firing straight ahead. That wasn't right—the enemy wasn't supposed to have an interrupter gear yet. And they didn't, but this enterprising chap had mounted two machine guns on his lower wing planes, outside the arc of the propeller. He couldn't reload them in flight, but while they had ammo he was dangerous any way you looked at him.

Then, all at once, he wasn't. Tom Innis knocked him down as neatly as he and his chums had ambushed Whitby. Then Innis and Dudley teamed up against one of the other aeroplanes, which caught fire and fell like a dead leaf.

Moss' own turn brought him close to the decoy observation aircraft. The observer, done with photos now, blazed away at him from a ring-mounted machine gun. He fired a burst that made the observer clutch at himself and slumped the pilot over his joystick, dead or unconscious. If he was unconscious, he would die soon; his weight on the stick sent the aeroplane nosing toward the ground.

Jonathan Moss looked around for more foes. He found none. The last enemy two-seater had streaked away, and had gained enough of a lead while the Americans were otherwise engaged to make sure it would not be caught.

Got no guts, Moss thought with weary anger. But for himself and Dudley and Innis, the sky was clear of aircraft. He turned the nose of his Martin toward the aerodrome. *Wonder what they'll find us to fill the fourth cot in the tent*. With Whitby dead, he knew he should have felt more, but for the life of him that was all his weary brain would muster.

Rain drummed down on the big canvas refugee tent. Here and there, it came through the canvas and made little puddles on the cold ground. One of the puddles was right in front of Anne Colleton's cot. Unless she thought about it, she stepped right into the puddle when she got down.

A couple of little wood-burning stoves in the open space in the middle of the tent glowed red, holding the worst of the chill at bay. One of the women who made the dreary place her home looked at a watch and said, "Five minutes to twelve."

A couple of women and girls murmured excitedly. Anne knew her own face remained stony. Who cared whether 1916 was only five minutes away? The one thing for which she could hope from the year to come was that it would be better than the one that was dying. She did not see how it could possibly be worse, but what did that prove? She was no longer so confident as she had been that she had such a good grasp on what might lie ahead.

"Come on," said the woman with the watch—her name was Melissa. "Let's sing 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

Some of the women did begin to sing: softly, so as not to disturb those who had gone to sleep instead of staying up to see in the new year. Off in the distance, artillery rumbled, throwing shells at the territory still proclaimed to be the Congaree Socialist Republic, the territory that, shrunken though it was in the fighting of late, still included Marshlands.

Before the Red revolt, Anne could not have told that distant artillery from distant thunder, nor the crack of a Springfield from that of a

Tredegar. She'd learned a lot, these past few weeks, and would have given a lot to unlearn it.

Melissa looked across the tent at her. "You're not singing, Miss Colleton," she said, her voice full of shrill complaint. She was plump and homely, and her hair must have stolen its golden sheen from a bottle, because the part of it closest to her head had grown out mouse-brown.

"That's right. I'm not singing," Anne replied. *Take it or leave it,* her tone said. She did not feel like being sociable. Unlike most of the women in the tent, unlike their male kin in other tents, she could have escaped the refugee camp any time she chose. But she could not make herself move any farther from Marshlands than she had to. She had food of a sort, shelter of a sort, clothing of a sort. Yes, she'd been used to better, but she was discovering *better*, while pleasant, was less than necessary. Here she would stay, till the rebellion collapsed—or till she strangled Melissa, which might come first.

The pale, pudgy woman with the two-tone hair certainly seemed to be trying to promote her own untimely demise. Glaring at Anne, she remarked, "Some people don't seem to care about anyone but themselves."

"Some people," Anne said, relishing the chance to release the bile that had been gathering inside her ever since the Negro uprising began, "*some* people don't care about anything except stuffing their faces full of sowbelly till they turn the same color as the meat and the same size as the hog it came from."

She heard the sharp intakes of breath from all around the tent. "*Here* we go," one woman said in a low voice to another. So they'd been expecting a fight, had they? They'd been looking forward to one? Anne had thought only of entertaining herself. But if she entertained other people, too…She showed her teeth in what was more nearly snarl than smile. If she entertained other people, too…that was all right.

Melissa's mouth opened and closed several times, as if she were a fish out of water. "Weren't for you damn rich folks, the niggers never would have riz up," she said at last.

Two or three women nodded at that. Anne Colleton laughed out loud. Melissa couldn't have looked more astonished had Anne flung a pail of water in her face. For about two cents, Anne would have, and

enjoyed it, too.

"It's the truth," Melissa insisted.

"In a pig's eye," Anne replied sweetly. "It's you who—"

"Liar!" Melissa squealed, her voice shrill. "If you'd have been born on a little farm like me, nobody would've ever heard of you."

"Maybe," Anne replied. "And if you'd been born at Marshlands, nobody would ever have heard of you, either." A classical education came in handy in all sorts of unexpected ways. The jibe was so subtle, the eager listeners needed a moment to take it in. When they did, though, their hum of appreciation made the wait worthwhile.

Melissa needed longer than most of the women around her to understand she'd been punctured. When she did, she sent Anne a look full of hate. That look also had fear in it, as if she'd only now realized she might have picked a dangerous target. *Proves you're a fool, for not seeing it sooner,* Anne thought, not that she'd been in any great doubt of that.

But Melissa did not back away from the argument. "Go ahead, make all the smart cracks you want," she said, "but you rich folks, you—"

"Stop that," Anne said coldly. "You talk like the Negroes with their red flags, pitting rich against poor. Are you a Red yourself?" Melissa didn't have the brains to be a Red, and Anne knew it full well. But she also calculated the other woman would need some little while to find a comeback.

That calculation proved accurate. Melissa looked around the tent for support. When she saw she wasn't getting any—no one there, for good and sufficient reasons, wanted anything to do with either Reds or even ideas possibly Red—she resumed her attack, though she had only one string on her fiddle: "Weren't for you rich folks, niggers'd just stay in their place and—"

"What a pile of horseshit," Anne said, drawing gasps on account of the language as she'd known she would. She'd also shocked Melissa into shutting up, as she'd hoped would happen. Into that sudden and welcome silence, she went on, "Yes, I'm rich. So what? If you ask me, it's the way the po' buckra"—she dropped into the Negro dialect of the Congaree for those two scornful words—"like you treat the Negroes that—"

Melissa surged to her feet. “Po’ buckra? Who are you calling white trash?”

“You,” Anne told her. “And I don’t need to give you the name, because you give it to yourself by the way you act. You’re the sort of person who treats a Negro like an animal, because if you treated him any different, he might think—and you might think—he was as good as you.”

She rose, too, as she spoke, and just as well, for Melissa rushed over to her, aiming a roundhouse slap at her face. As her brothers had taught her in long-ago rough-and-tumble, Anne blocked the blow with her left hand while delivering one of her own with her right. She didn’t slap, but landed a solid uppercut with a closed fist square on the point of Melissa’s chin.

The other woman staggered back and sat down hard. She’d almost stumbled into one of the stoves, which would have given her even worse hurt than Anne had intended. Blood dribbled from the corner of her mouth. She stared up at Anne like a dog that rolls over onto its back to present its belly and throat to a stronger rival.

“Before they sent me to this camp,” Anne said, “I asked them to give me a rifle and let me fight alongside our soldiers and militiamen. They wouldn’t let me—*men*—but I could have done it. And anyone who thinks I can’t take care of myself without a gun is making a mistake, too.”

Nobody argued with her, not now. She’d not only flayed Melissa with words but also thrashed her. The plump woman slowly stood up and went back to her own cot, one hand clutched to her jaw. She sat down on the canvas and blankets and didn’t say a thing.

Anne spoke into vast silence: “Happy New Year.” Before the war, people had celebrated the hour by shooting guns in the air. These past two New Years, they’d shot with intent to kill, not only on the hour but all day long, all week long, all month…

Convinced the trouble in the tent was over for the time being, Anne sat down again. As she did so, the irony of one of the arguments she’d used to discomfit Melissa suddenly occurred to her. She hadn’t been wrong when she’d said that poor whites in the Confederacy were more concerned about keeping blacks down than were the rich, who would stay on top no matter what the relationship between the races happened to be.

A few miles to the north, though, the agitators of the Congaree Socialist Republic were using similar arguments to spur their followers to fresh effort against their white foes. Did that mean the Negroes had been right to rebel?

She shook her head. That wasn't what she'd had in mind at all. They weren't building anything up there, just tearing down. She wondered if anything would be left of Marshlands by the time she was finally able to return to it. One way or another, though, she figured she would get along. She wasn't Melissa, to fall into obscurity. No. Melissa hadn't fallen into obscurity. She'd never been anything but obscure. Many fates might yet befall Anne Colleton, but not, she vowed, that one.

"Look at that bastard burn," Ben Carlton said, his voice as full of joy as if he'd never seen anything more beautiful than the flaming factory in Clearfield, Utah.

Watching the Utah Canning Plant go up in smoke felt pretty good to Paul Mantarakis, too. As they had a habit of doing, the Mormons had used the big, strongly built building to anchor their line. Now that it was a blazing wreck, they'd have to abandon it, which meant the United States Army could take one more grinding step on the road toward the last rebel stronghold in Ogden.

"Three quarters of the way there," Mantarakis muttered under his breath. They were only nine miles from Ogden now. He could see the town from here—or he could have seen it, had the smoke from the great burning here in Clearfield not obscured the northern horizon.

"Soon all the misbelievers shall be cast into the fiery furnace and receive the punishment they deserve," Gordon McSweeney said. He had the drum and hose of the flamethrower strapped onto his back. He hadn't been the one who'd set the canning plant on fire, though; artillery had managed that. Had the big guns failed, Paul could easily imagine the other sergeant going out there and starting the blaze.

Pop! Pop-pop! Short, sharp explosions began sounding, deep within the bowels of the Utah Canning Plant. "Some poor dead son of a bitch's ammo cooking off," Ben Carlton said.

Paul shook his head. "Doesn't sound quite right for that."

Thump! Something slammed into the ground, hard, not ten feet from where he stood. Almost a year and a half of war had honed his reflexes razor-sharp. He was flat on his belly before he had the slightest conscious notion of what that thump was. Better by far to duck and not need to than to need to and not duck. Another thump came, this one from farther away.

Thump! A foot soldier nearby started to laugh. “What the hell’s so funny, Stonebreaker?” Paul demanded. “We’re under bombardment.”

“Yeah, I know, Sarge.” But Dan Stonebreaker was still laughing. He went on, “I damn near got killed by a can of string beans.”

“Huh?” Mantarakis looked at the missile that had landed close to him. Sure as hell, it was a tin can that must have exploded in the fire inside the plant. He examined the goop inside the can. “This one wasn’t beans. Looks more like apricots, something like that.”

In short order, the soldiers also identified beets and peas. Whenever some more cans exploded inside the factory, the men would sing out, “Vegetable attack!” and take cover more melodramatically than they did against artillery or machine-gun fire.

They took casualties from the superheated produce, too. One fellow who wasn’t wearing his helmet got a fractured skull when a one-pound can of peas landed right on his luckless, foolish head. Hot bits of metal, almost as dangerous as shrapnel or shell fragments, burned several more.

Then the U.S. guns opened up with another barrage. When it eased, the soldiers went up and over the top and drove the Mormons out of Clearfield. The men—and women—who fought under the beehive banner and the motto DESERET fought as hard as ever, but there were fewer of them in these trenches than there had been farther south.

“I think we’ve finally got them on the run,” Captain Schneider said. He looked like a Negro with a bad paint job—his face was black with soot, but smeared here and there just enough to suggest he might be a white man after all. Paul Mantarakis looked down at himself. He couldn’t see his own face, but his hands and uniform were as filthy as those of the company commander.

“Come on!” Gordon McSweeney shouted, his voice ringing over the field like a trumpet. “We have the heretics on the run. The more we push them, the greater the punishment we give. Forward!”

Mantarakis' opinion was that McSweeney was a hell of a lot crazier than the Mormons. He didn't say so; McSweeney was, after all, on his side. And the shouts were doing some good, pulling U.S. soldiers after the Scotsman as he singlehandedly advanced against the enemy. He would have advanced, though, had not a single man followed.

Crazy, Mantarakis thought again, and tramped north himself.

For the next mile, maybe two, the going was easy. The Mormons had no real line of solid fortifications here. Men retreating before the American advance traded shots with their pursuers, but it was hardly counted as a rear-guard action. "Maybe we do have 'em on the run," Paul said to nobody in particular. Even the fanaticism of the Mormons had to have limits…didn't it?

Before long, he was doubting that again. U.S. troops ran up against yet another defensive line prepared in advance and manned by still more determined warriors. Such a line called for spadework in return, and the Americans began turning shell holes into a trench line of their own.

Captain Schneider pointed west, toward some ruins not far from the horizon. "We want to be careful the enemy doesn't pull a fast one on us. Those buildings, or what's left of them, are the Ogden Ordnance Depot. It'd be just like the Mormons to pack 'em full of powder and touch 'em off as our forces were moving up to 'em."

The buildings were not part of the Mormon defensive line, which only increased Mantarakis' suspicions: the rebels fought from built-up positions till forced out of them by artillery or, more often, by the bayonet. But, before long, U.S. troops had not only occupied the Ordnance Depot buildings, they were firing from them on the Mormon defenses farther north. When an American aeroplane dropped a couple of bombs nearby—whether because it thought the enemy still held the depot or because it simply couldn't aim worth a damn, Paul never knew—the soldiers shooting from it began waving a big Stars and Stripes to show under whose ownership it had passed.

Maybe the sight of the American flag in the ruins of the Ordnance Depot was some kind of signal. Paul never knew that, either. But, whether by plan or by coincidence, the ground rocked under his feet a couple of minutes later.

He staggered, stumbled, fell. "What the hell…?" he shouted while clods of earth rained down on him from the wall of the trench in

which he'd been standing—and from on high, too, or so it seemed. He was afraid the whole trench would collapse.

Through the shaking, through the hideous din, Captain Schneider shouted, "Earthquake! I was in the Presidio in San Francisco ten years ago, and it was almost like this." He managed to stay on his feet.

"Make it stop! Jesus, make it stop!" Ben Carlton howled. It would have taken Jesus to make it stop; that was surely beyond the power of an infantry captain, or even of Teddy Roosevelt himself.

Mantarakis succeeded in standing. The rumble had faded, leaving behind an awful silence. The sound that came through it was not one he had expected to hear in the wake of a natural catastrophe: it was cheering, and it was all coming from the Mormon lines.

Gordon McSweeney got up on the firing step, or on what was left of it after the ground had shaken. "The misbelievers are coming out of their trenches and moving forward in an attack," he reported. His head turned to the left, so that he was looking west. For once, not even his stern rectitude was proof against merely human astonishment. "They've blown a hole in our lines you could drive a freight train through," he burst out, his voice squeaking with surprise.

"What?" Paul got up there beside McSweeney. Sure enough, any resistance from the U.S. lines ended perhaps a quarter of a mile west of where he stood. A great haze of dust and smoke hung in the air west of that, but no U.S. gunfire was coming from the ground under the haze. And that ground, what little he could see of it, looked different: sagging, slumped.

Captain Schneider's mouth fell open when he saw that. "It *wasn't* an earthquake," he said accusingly, as if angry at having been mistaken. "The filthy, stinking Mormons mined the ground under us, and touched off their charge when we got on top of it."

He went on cursing in a harsh, steady monotone. Mantarakis didn't blame him. It looked as if a whole great chunk had disappeared from the U.S. line—the U.S. line in an advance that had been, up till then, finally turning into the rout it should have been from the beginning.

Then a bullet cracked past his head. The Mormons weren't trying to overwhelm only the part of the line they'd blown to kingdom come. They were aiming to take out all of it, to throw the Americans back as far as they could. Of itself, the Springfield jumped to Paul's shoulder. He aimed and fired. A man in overalls went down, whether hit or

diving for cover he couldn't have said.

"Bad position to try to defend," Captain Schneider muttered. "We don't have a whole lot of wire in front of us." He grabbed Carlton by the arm and pointed him west. "Go on down as far as there are any live men in the trench and tell them to fall back at a right angle to our line—or what used to be our line. We don't want the Mormons to be able to roll us all up. They've got their breakthrough—we have to keep them from exploiting it too much."

Carlton went. Mantarakis admired the captain's presence of mind. In these circumstances, he himself was having enough trouble figuring out what he needed to do. Worrying about the bigger picture was altogether beyond him. Schneider was earning his pay today—assuming he lived to collect it. Right now, that didn't look like the best bet in the world.

More and more Americans were shooting back at the Mormons now, but the enemy kept coming, some of them singing hymns as they advanced. They'd learned how to move forward against heavy fire, some shooting from cover to make their foes duck while others advanced. And they used their machine guns aggressively, manhandling the heavy weapons forward so they too could make the Americans keep their heads down.

"Jesus, you'd think we'd have killed all the damned Mormons in Utah by now," Captain Schneider said. He was blazing away with the pistol he wore on his belt, and the enemy was close enough to the trench line for it to be about as effective a weapon as a Springfield.

"I wish we had," Paul said with great sincerity. He was getting low on ammunition, and heaven only knew when more would come forward.

Three Mormons popped up out of a shell hole not fifty feet away. The winter sun pierced the haze rising from the exploded mine to glitter off the bayonets of the rifles they carried. Shouting the rebel battle cry—"Come, ye saints!"—they rushed for the trench.

Gordon McSweeney laughed the triumphant laugh of a man seeing the enemy delivered into his hands. He fired a single jet of flame that caught all three Mormons in it. Only one of them had even the chance to cry out. All three jerked and writhed and shrank, all in the blink of an eye, blackening into roasted husks like those of insects that littered the street below gas lamps of a summer's evening.

“Come on!” McSweeney shouted. “Who wants the next dose? You might as well come ahead—you’re all going to hell, anyhow.”

The Mormons kept coming, up and down the line. Machine-gun fire hammered many of them into the ground, and McSweeney got to use his infernal weapon several more times. After that, the rebels avoided the stretch of trench where he was stationed; even their spirit proved to have limits. Here and there, they did break into the trench line, but they did not force the Americans out—not, at least, in the stretch where the line hadn’t been blown sky-high.

Farther west, Paul could trace the progress of the fighting only by where the gunfire was coming from. By the sound of it, the Mormons were pushing on south toward Clearfield through a gap that was bigger than he’d thought.

“How much dynamite did they pack underground, anyway?” he asked, as if anyone nearby had the slightest chance of knowing.

“Tons,” Captain Schneider said—not an exact answer, but one with plenty of flavor to it. “Has to be tons.” He shook his head in disbelief. “And if we’d been over there instead of over here—” That thought had already gone through Paul’s mind. If he’d been over there instead of over here, he’d have been blown up or buried or one of any number of other unpleasant possibilities. As things stood, all he had to worry about was getting shot. He hadn’t imagined that that could seem an improvement, but suddenly it did.

“What do we do now, sir?” he asked.

“Form a perimeter, try to hold on, hope there are enough government soldiers in Utah to patch something together again here,” the company commander answered.

Mantarakis nodded. Schneider gave straight answers, even if they weren’t the sort you were delighted to hear. If he was still alive tomorrow, and if he still remembered (he wondered which of those competing unlikelihoods was less likely), he’d have to tell the captain that.

Roger Kimball looked out from the conning tower of the *Bonefish* toward the northern bank of the Pee Dee. He hadn’t brought the submersible so far up the river this time as he had on his earlier run

against the black rebels of the Congaree Socialist Republic, not yet, but he figured he'd end up going farther now than he'd managed then.

Tom Brearley stood up there with him. "What do you think of the new, improved model, Tom?" he asked his executive officer.

Brearley answered with the same serious consideration he usually showed: "You ask me, sir, the boat looked better before."

"Yeah, you're right about that," Kimball admitted. "But who the hell ever thought they'd have to modify a sub to do gunboat duty?"

The plain truth was, nobody had ever thought of that. Nobody had imagined the need. But need and the *Bonefish* had been in the same place at the same time, and so…In the Charleston shipyard, they'd put steel armor all around the three-inch deck gun's mount, so its crew could shelter against bullets from the riverbank. And they'd mounted the machine guns on circular slabs of iron with cutouts in them, so the gunners could revolve them with their feet to bear on any target. More steel armor coming up from the outer edges of the slabs gave the machine guns protection against rifle fire, too.

Kimball pointed toward the bank. "You ask me, that's where our real improvement is."

"Oh, the Marines? Yes, sir," Brearley said. "This whole operation really makes you understand what the Army is talking about when it comes to how important seizing and holding ground is, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Kimball said, and then, under his breath, "To hell with the Army." As far as he was concerned—as far as almost any Confederate States Navy officer was concerned—the Army was a dismal swamp that sucked up enormous sums of money, most of which promptly vanished without trace: money that could have gone for more battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines…

Marines, of course, were the Navy's admission that some action on dry land did have to be contemplated every now and again, no matter how distasteful the notion might be. Somehow or other, somebody with pull had arranged to land a couple of companies of them at the mouth of the Pee Dee and have them work their way northwest along the river toward the black heart of the Congaree Socialist Republic.

Had Anne Colleton managed that? It was the sort of thing Kimball would have expected from her, but he didn't know for a fact that she was alive. Whoever had thought of it, it was a good idea. The

insurgent Negroes couldn't ignore the Marines, and Kimball didn't think any irregular troops in the world could stand against them.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than a brisk *pop-pop* of small-arms fire broke out along the riverbank. He couldn't see where the Negroes were; they'd concealed themselves in amongst the heaviest undergrowth they could find. But he knew where the Marines were; they'd made a point of keeping in touch with the *Bonefish* and apprising him of their position. He didn't have to be a Jesuit to own enough logic to realize that the fellows who were shooting and weren't Marines had to be the enemy.

"All right, boys," he called to the gun crews. "Let's show the people why they brought us to the dance."

The machine gun on top of the conning tower opened up a split second before the one mounted on the rear deck. The racket was appalling. Kimball's head started to ache. He tried to imagine standing next to a machine gun after a good, friendly night in port. The mere thought was plenty to make his headache worse.

He got the response for which he'd been hoping: the Negroes turned a machine gun of their own, either captured from Confederate forces or donated by the damnyankees, on the *Bonefish*. As soon as it started firing, he and Brearley ducked down the hatch into the conning tower. Being in there under machine-gun fire was like standing in a tin-roofed shed during one hell of a hailstorm.

But, in firing, the Negroes' machine gun revealed its position. The *Bonefish*'s machine guns were not the only weapons that opened up on it: so did the deck gun, at what was point-blank range for a cannon. After six or eight shells went into the woods, bullets stopped clanging off the side of the conning tower.

Kimball, who was closer to the top than Brearley, grinned down at his exec. "With luck, we just wrecked their gun. Even without luck, we just put a crew who knew how to serve it out of action."

"Yes, sir," Brearley said. "The Negroes can't have a whole lot of trained fighting men. The more of those we eliminate, the faster the rebellion as a whole will fall apart."

"That's right," Kimball said. "Hell, these niggers haven't been through conscription. Where are they going to come by the discipline they need to stand up against some of the best fighting men in the Confederate States?"

“Don’t know, sir,” Brearley answered. Then he went on, perhaps unwisely, “I never thought they had the discipline to stand up against whites any kind of way. If I’d known they could fight the way they’ve already shown, I’d have been for conscripting them along with us and letting ’em kill some Yankees.”

Kimball shook his head, so sharply that he almost smacked it against the inside of the conning tower. “Mr. Brearley, I have to tell you that’s a mistake.” He hadn’t called his executive officer by his surname since the first couple of days they were working together. “Suppose niggers do make soldiers. I don’t believe it for a minute, but suppose. Suppose we send ’em up into the trenches and they do help us lick the damnyankees and win the war. Then they come back home. Right? You with me so far?”

“Yes, sir,” Brearley answered. He sounded like a puppy that doesn’t understand why it’s just been paddled.

Normally, Roger Kimball would have felt some sympathy for him. Not now. He continued, “All right, the war is over, we whipped the Yankees, and we got, say, five divisions of nigger soldiers coming on home. What the hell do we do with ’em, Mr. Brearley? They’ve been up at the front. They’ve been killing white men. Hell, we’ve been payin’ ’em to kill white men. What are they gonna do when we tell ’em, ‘Good boys. Now go on back to the cotton field and the pushbroom and forget all about that business of shooting people’? You reckon they’re gonna pay much attention to us?”

The junior lieutenant didn’t answer right away. When at last he did, he said, “Seems to me, sir, if they fight for us, it’d be mighty hard to make ’em go back to being what they were before the war started. Thing of it is, though, it’s already gotten to be hard to put ’em back where they were. So many of ’em have gone to factories and such, making ’em into field hands again is going to be like putting Humpty-Dumpty back together again.”

“Yeah, well, it’d be a lot worse if they were toting guns,” Kim-ball insisted. The executive officer’s response hadn’t been what he’d expected or what he’d wanted. “Hell, one of the reasons we fought the War of Secession—not the only one, but one—was so we could do what we wanted with our niggers, not what anybody else wanted us to do.”

“Yes, sir, that’s true,” Brearley said. “When we decided to manumit them twenty years later, after the Second Mexican War, we did it on

our own. And if we wanted to reward them for fighting for us, would it be so bad, sir?”

Kimball stared down at the innocent-looking youngster perched on the steel ladder a few rungs below him. It was as if he’d never seen Brearley before—and, in some important ways, maybe he hadn’t. “You’d let ’em all be citizens, wouldn’t you, Mr. Brearley? You’d let niggers be citizens of the CSA.”

He might have accused Brearley of eating with his fingers, or perhaps of practicing more exotic, less speakable perversions. The executive officer bit his lip, but answered, “Sir, if they fought for us, how could we keep from making them into citizens? And if it’s a choice between having them fight for us or against us, which would you sooner see?”

That wasn’t the way the argument was supposed to go. “They’re niggers,” Kimball said flatly. “They can’t fight whites, not really.”

“Yes, sir,” Brearley said, and said no more. He needed to say no more. If Negroes couldn’t fight, why was the *Bonefish* coming up the Pee Dee for a second run against them? Even more to the point, why hadn’t the Congaree Socialist Republic and the other Red rebel outfits the blacks had set up collapsed weeks before?

Would all this have been prevented had the Confederacy let blacks join the Army and, strange as the notion felt, let them vote? Kimball shook his head. “The Army laborers are Reds, too. And if the black bastards voted, they’d have elected that damn lunatic Arango last year.”

This time, Brearley didn’t say anything at all. When your commanding officer had expressed his opinion and you didn’t agree with it, nothing was the best thing you could say.

Clang! A bullet hit the outside of the conning tower. The deck machine guns opened up, blasting away at where they thought the fire had come from. And then, defiantly, a machine gun—maybe the same machine gun that had shot at the *Bonefish* before—began hosing the submersible down again.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The deck gun roared out its reply. Kim-ball looked down at Brearley again. The exec still didn’t say anything. But a silent reproach was no less a reproach because it was silent.

A portly colonel sporting the little medal that said he'd fought in the Second Mexican War looked down his nose at Irving Morrell. "Not as smart as we thought we were, eh, Major?" he said. Instead of a Kaiser Bill mustache, he sported white wraparound whiskers that, with his bald head, gave him a striking resemblance to Franz Joseph, the elderly Austro-Hungarian Emperor.

"No, Colonel Gilbert," Morrell answered tonelessly. Longtime General Staff officers had been saying things like that to him ever since the Mormons exploded their mines south of Ogden. The only safe response he had was agreeing with them, and also the only truthful one. The Mormons had done a hell of a lot of damage with those mines, and he hadn't anticipated them.

He looked glumly at the situation map for Utah. The drive toward Ogden, the last major rebel stronghold, no longer proceeded nearly north, with east and west ends of the line parallel to each other. The eastern end of the line was still about where it had been, anchored against the Wasatch Mountains, but now the line ran back on a ragged slant, the western end touching the Great Salt Lake a good ten miles farther south than it had been. Only frantic reinforcement had kept the disaster from being even worse than it was.

Colonel Gilbert studied the map, too. "If we hadn't had to pull those troops out of Sequoyah and Kentucky, Major, our progress against the Confederates would have been a good deal greater than it is."

"Yes, sir," Morrell said. The USA should have been taking advantage of the uprising within the enemy's territory, not quelling an uprising of its own. He knew that as well as the white-whiskered colonel. Knowing it and being able to do anything about it, unfortunately, were two different things.

Captain John Abell came into the room, too. Seeing Morrell and Colonel Gilbert examining the Utah situation, he came over and looked at the map himself. He put his hands behind his back and interlaced his fingers; his face assumed an expression of thoughtful seriousness. What he looked like, Morrell thought, was a doctor hovering over the bed of a patient who had taken a turn for the worse. Morrell had seen plenty of doctors with that expression, when it had looked as if he would lose his leg.

"Unfortunate," Abell murmured. He couldn't very well say anything

more; Morrell outranked him. But what he was thinking was plain enough.

And there was nothing Morrell could do about it. He'd gained the credit for his notion of hitting the Mormons from several directions at once to weaken their resistance to the main line of effort. Because the notion had worked, he'd come to be thought of as the expert on Utah. And when something happened there that he hadn't allowed for, he found blame accruing to him as readily as credit had before.

No, more readily than credit, for credit had come grudgingly even after his success was obvious. No one blamed him only grudgingly. Here he was, an outsider, a newcomer, who'd dared to presume himself more astute, more clever, than General Staff veterans. When he turned out not to have thought of everything, it was as if he hadn't thought of anything.

The door to the map room opened. The newcomer was a lieutenant so junior, he hardly seemed to have started shaving. He too made a beeline for the map of Utah. That didn't surprise Morrell, not any more; misery loved company.

But the lieutenant wasn't interested, or wasn't chiefly interested, in the strategic situation there. He was interested in Irving Morrell. Saluting, he said, "General Wood's compliments, sir, and he would like to see you at your earliest convenience."

"I'm coming," Morrell said; when the chief of the General Staff wanted you at your earliest convenience, he wanted you right now. The lieutenant nodded; he might have been even greener than his uniform, but he understood that bit of military formality.

Behind Morrell, Colonel Gilbert spoke to Captain Abell: "Maybe the general is trying to figure out how we can get blown up on the Ontario front, too." Maybe he hadn't intended Morrell to hear that. Maybe. But when Abell snickered, Morrell knew he was supposed to have heard that. The young captain was too smooth to offer insult by accident.

Escape, then, became something of a relief. The lieutenant led him through the maze of General Staff headquarters without offering a word of conversation, and responded only in monosyllables when Morrell spoke. That made Morrell fear he did not stand in General Wood's good graces.

He clicked his tongue between his teeth. He thought he should still

have had credit in his account with the head of the General Staff. Utah wasn't the only matter concerning which he'd come to Wood's notice. Along with a doctor back in Tucson, New Mexico, he'd suggested the steel helmets that by now had been issued to just about every U.S. front-line soldier. That should have counted for something against the troubles in Utah.

Wood's adjutant sat at a desk in an outer office, pounding away at a typewriter hard and fast enough to make the rattle of the keys sound almost like machine-gun fire. Idly, Morrell wondered if the adjutant had ever heard real machine-gun fire. They led sheltered lives here.

"Major Morrell," the adjutant said, rising politely enough. "I'll tell the general you're here." He went into Wood's private office. When he returned a moment later, he nodded. "Go on, sir. He's expecting you." The staccato typing resumed as Morrell walked past him.

Morrell came to stiff attention before General Leonard Wood. "Reporting as ordered, sir," he said, saluting.

"At ease, Major," Wood answered easily. "Smoke if you care to. It's not the firing squad for you, or the guillotine, either." One of his hands went to the back of his neck. "That's what a Frenchman comes up with when he thinks about efficiency. Let it be a lesson to you."

"Yes, sir." Morrell wouldn't have minded a cigar, but didn't light up in spite of Wood's invitation.

The general sighed and studied Morrell with that same sickroom expression he'd come to loathe. From the chief of the General Staff, the look came naturally: he'd earned an M.D. before joining the military. He sighed again. "It didn't quite work out, did it, Major?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?" Morrell replied, though he'd long since reached the same conclusion.

"It's too bad," Wood said. "I honestly don't know if this place is good for you, but you've certainly been good for it. We get insulated against the soldier in the field and what he needs. You're a breath of fresh air here."

"Too fresh, I'd say by what's happened lately." Morrell spoke without rancor.

"Major, it's not your fault we did not anticipate the Mormons' mining us," Wood said. "No blame for that will go into your record, I

assure you. But Utah had turned into your baby, and when the baby turned out to have warts—"

"More than warts, I'd say, sir," Morrell answered. "They wrecked most of a division there, and we only had two in the front line."

"That is very much in people's minds right now," Wood agreed. "I think it's unfortunate, but it's true. As a result, your usefulness here has been compromised through what is, I repeat, no fault of your own."

"Sir, if my usefulness here is compromised, could you please return me to the field?" Morrell could hear the eagerness in his own voice. A chance to get out of Philadelphia, to get back to real action—

And General Wood was nodding. "I'm going to do exactly that, Major. As you know, I would have liked you to stay around longer, to learn some more tricks of the trade, so to speak. But situations have a way of changing, like it or not. My eye is still on you, Major. Now, though, I think it best to have it on you at a distance for a while. I assure you once more, no imputation of blame will appear in your personnel file."

Morrell barely heard that. It mattered little to him. What did matter was that he would be able to fight his way now, out in the open, face to face with the foe. He had learned a few things here, and was eager to try them out along with everything he'd known before he came.

"Where do you plan on sending me, sir?" he asked. "Someplace where things are busy, I hope."

"You've given the Rebels a hard time through the first year of the war," Wood said, which was true only if you neglected the months during which Morrell had been flat on his back. Being the chief of the General Staff, Wood was allowed to neglect details like that. He said, "You've shown a knack for mountain warfare. What would you say if they sent you up to the Canadian Rockies and helped us cut the Pacific Coast off from the rest of the Canucks?"

"What would I say? Sir, I'd say, 'Yes, sir!'" Morrell knew he was all but quivering as he stood there. The mountains in eastern Kentucky had been little gentle knobby things. The Canadian Rockies were mountains with a capital M, full of ice and snow and jagged rocks. Nobody would figure you could accomplish much on that kind of terrain at this time of year. All the more reason to go out and prove people wrong.

“I’ll make the arrangements, then,” Wood said. “Good luck, Major.”

“Thank you very much, sir,” Morrell said, much more for the promised arrangements than the polite wishes. *The Canadian Rockies*… The prospect sang in him. John Abell would think him a fool. He didn’t care what John Abell thought.

* * *

After not too hard a day doing not too much—although anyone who heard him talking about it might conclude he’d been at slave labor since he tumbled out of his bunk—Sam Carsten lined up for evening chow call.

“We been out here a long time, wherever the devil ‘here’ is,” he said. “I want to get back to Honolulu, spend some of the money I’ve earned. I can feel it burnin’ a hole in my pocket while I’m standing here.”

“Yeah, well, if it gets loose, it can come to me,” Vic Crosetti said. “I got one pocket in every set of dungarees lined with asbestos, just for money like that.”

Carsten snorted. So did everybody else who heard Crosetti. The sailor in front of him, a big, rangy fellow named Tilden Winters, said, “Wish my stomach had a pocket like that. The slop they’ve been giving us the past few days, I wouldn’t feed it to a rat crawling up the hawser.”

“You tried feedin’ it to a rat crawling up the hawser, he’d crawl back down—rats aren’t stupid,” Carsten said. That got a laugh, too, but it was kidding on the square. The *Dakota* had indeed been out on patrol a long time, and gone through just about all the fresh food with which she’d left port. Sam went on, “Some of the things the cooks come up with—”

“And some of the things the purchasing officers bought, figuring we’d be stupid enough to eat ’em,” Winters added. “That salt beef yesterday tasted like it had been in the cask since the Second Mexican War, or maybe since the War of Secession.”

Again, loud, profane agreement came from everybody in earshot. There were several conversations farther back in the chow line that Carsten couldn’t make out, but their tone suggested other people were also imperfectly delighted with the bill of fare they’d been enjoying—

or rather, not enjoying—lately.

Vic Crosetti's long, fleshy nose twitched; his nostrils dilated. "Whatever that is they're gonna do to us, it ain't salt beef." He made the pronouncement in a way that brooked no disagreement.

A moment later, Carsten caught the whiff, too. "You're right, Vic." He made a sour face. "That's fish, and it's been dead a long, long time."

Tilden Winters delivered his own verdict: "You ask me, one of the cooks got diarrhea again."

"If that joke ain't as old as the Navy, it's only on account of it's older," Sam said. The closer he got to the pots from which the horrible smell was coming, though, the more he wondered if it was a joke this time.

He took a tray with more reluctance than he'd ever known. As he came up to one of the cooks, the fellow ladled a dollop of stinking yellowish stuff onto the tray, then added some sauerkraut, a hard roll, and a cup of coffee. Sam pointed at the noxious puddle. "You got a sick cat, Johansen?"

"Funny man. Everybody thinks he's a cotton-picking funny man," the cook said. "It's herrings in mustard sauce, and I'll say 'I told you so' when you come back for seconds."

"Don't hold your breath," Sam told him, which, considering the stench, was a curse of no mean proportion. He took the tray over to a table, sat down, and looked dubious. "Hey, Vic, maybe the padre ought to give it the last rites."

Crosetti shook his head. "Way it smells up the galley, it's been dead a hell of a lot too long for that to do any good."

Ever so cautiously, Carsten scooped up a forkful and brought it to his mouth. "Jesus!" he exclaimed. "It tastes as lousy as it smells." He looked down at the tray with loathing that was almost admiration. "I didn't figure it could."

Tilden Winters made the taste test, too, then gulped down his coffee as if it were the only thing standing between him and an early grave. Seeing their reaction, Crosetti said, "I don't think I want any. Never was much for sauerkraut, but tonight—"

Most of the time, such grumbling would have got them in Dutch with the cooks. This evening, their complaints went unnoticed in the wider tide of revolted complaint echoing through the galley. “Do the officers eat this shit, too?” somebody shouted.

Carsten’s eyes lit up. He knew he could trust Crosetti for what he had in mind, and Winters was a pretty square guy, too. “Listen,” he said, “if they try and feed us this kind of slop, they oughta know what we think of it, right?”

“Sounds good to me,” Winters said. “Sounds damn good to me.” Crosetti nodded, too. Carsten gestured to both of them. They all put their heads together. After they were done laughing, they solemnly clasped hands to seal the bargain.

Tilden Winters got up first. He slammed his tray down on the stack, then started saying to the cooks what everybody else had been saying to one another. He had a talent for abuse, and certainly a fitting subject for it, too. A good many other sailors joined in his vehement griping. That brought several cooks over, both to defend their honor, such as it was, and to keep the men from getting any creative ideas like flinging the herrings around the galley.

Carsten, however, had already had a more creative idea than that. He and Crosetti took advantage of the confusion to slip behind the galley counter, grab one of the kettles full of the herring-and-mustard mixture—fortunately, one with a lid—and slip off before anyone noticed what they were doing. As soon as they were away, they looked like a couple of sailors on some assignment or other; the kettle wasn’t that different from any of a number of containers aboard the *Dakota*.

No one paid them the least attention as they headed up into officer country. Again, looking as if you belonged was more important than actually belonging. In a prison-yard whisper, Crosetti said, “Only slippery part is gonna be if he’s in there.”

“Hey, come on,” Carsten said. “If he is, we go, ‘Sorry, sir, wrong cabin,’ and we ditch the stuff instead of dumping it. Either way, we’re jake.”

The cabin door bore a neatly stenciled inscription: LIEUT.-CMDR. JONATHAN Y. HENRICKSON, CHIEF SHIP’S PURCHASING OFFICER. Sam knocked, his knuckles ringing off steel. Nobody answered. He turned the latch. The cabin door opened easily. He grinned again. He’d been wondering if

Henrickson was the sort who locked his door. But no.

Inside, the cabin was as neat as a CPO's dreams of heaven, with everything in its place—*exactly* in its place—and a place for everything. Somehow, that only made what they were about to do the sweeter.

"Come on, let's get going," Crosetti said. "Our luck ain't gonna hold forever." That might have been cold feet, but it didn't sound as if it was—just a steady professional warning his comrade (*no, his accomplice,* Sam thought) of things that could go wrong.

They took the lid off the kettle. Instantly, the stink of the herrings filled the cabin. They proceeded to make sure the stink wasn't all that filled it: they methodically poured herrings and mustard sauce over everything they could, desk, bedding, clothes, deck, everything. As soon as they'd finished, they got the hell out of there.

An officer in the passage would have spelled disaster. Sam's shoulders sagged in relief when the long, gray-painted metal corridor proved bare. "Now all we got to do is look ordinary."

"You're too ugly to look ordinary," Crosetti retorted. But Carsten took not the slightest offense—they'd pulled it off. When they got back down to their proper part of the ship, Tilden Winters looked a question at them. They both nodded. So did he. That was all he did, too, before returning to the friendly argument about Honolulu whores in which he'd been involved before his partners in crime returned.

The hue and cry started about an hour later. Grim-faced petty officers started escorting cooks and galley helpers up to officer country near the bridge. When the first batch of them returned, rumor of what had happened started spreading through the sailors. The general reaction was delight.

"If I knew who done that," Hiram Kidde declared, although no one yet was quite sure of what *that* was, "the first thing I'd do is kick his ass." He was, after all, a CPO himself. But he'd suffered through the herrings in mustard sauce, too. "And after that, by Jesus, I'd pick him up and buy him a beer. Hell, I'd buy him all the beer he could drink." The gunner's mate roared laughter. "What I wouldn't give to see Henrickson's face."

None of the cooks knew anything. Carsten carefully didn't look at Crosetti. Somebody might have noticed them lifting the kettle. But it didn't seem as if anyone had. That didn't stop the officers from trying

to get to the bottom of who had perpetrated the atrocity. They kept right on trying, all the way up until the *Dakota* docked in Honolulu.

Carsten went up before Lieutenant Commander Henrickson himself. “No, sir,” he said. “I’m sorry, sir. All I know is ship’s scuttlebutt.”

“What did you think of the fish?” the purchasing officer demanded, his thin mouth set in a tight, bloodless line.

“Sir, beg your pardon, but I didn’t like it worth a damn,” Carsten told him.

He sighed. “I’m afraid everyone says that. I hoped the bastards who did this would sing songs about how good it was, to try to turn looks away from them. No such luck, though. Damn sailors are too damn sly.” That last was an angry mutter. Carsten carefully did not smile.

V

Back when Scipio had been butler at Marshlands, he'd wondered how a man could ever get used to the racket of battle. Even single gunshots had been plenty to set his heart pounding. He was inclined to laugh at his former self nowadays. He hadn't known much back then.

He hadn't known much about a lot of things back then. As far as a lot of them went, he would gladly have remained ignorant, too. Much of what Cassius fondly thought of as revolutionary practice looked to Scipio an awful lot like what the whites of the Confederate States had been doing, only stood on its head.

Sometimes the strain of keeping his mouth shut was almost more than he could bear. But he'd turned his own experience in the days before the Congaree Socialist Republic to his advantage, too. Anne Colleton hadn't been able to see past the smooth butler's mask he wore, and neither could Cassius now.

Fortunately, Cassius hadn't noticed that he hadn't noticed Scipio's mask. The chairman of the Republic had plenty of other things on his mind. He somehow managed to make the undyed, unbleached cotton homespun of Negro field laborers into a good approximation of a uniform, and even to look smart in it, which was far beyond Scipio's ability. What he could not do, though, was lose the worried expression on his face.

"Ain't got enough white folks wid we, Kip," he said now. "De po' buckra, de gov'ment 'press them same as it done to we. Dey gots to see where dey class int'rest is at. Dey gots to see de revolution fo' dey, too, not jus' fo' we." He shook his head. "But dey don'. Dey is still de dogs o' de massers dat 'sploits dey. Cipher dat out fo' me, Kip. Don' make no sense."

Scipio still found revolutionary rhetoric and the Congaree dialect an odd blend. No one cared about his opinion in such matters, though, and he was canny enough to keep it to himself. Cassius had asked his opinion about the other matter, though, and might even have been ready to hear it. Scipio decided to take a chance there.

He pointed to what had been the country courthouse of Kingstree, South Carolina. The two-story, buff-colored building with a fancy, fanlighted pediment, built in the style of the early years of the last century, no longer flew the Stars and Bars. Instead, the red revolutionary banner of the Congaree Socialist Republic fluttered above it. Red paint had been daubed over the name KINGSTREE, which was carved into the frieze above the pediment. In letters equally blood-colored, someone had given the town a substitute name: PEOPLE'S TREE.

"Dat kind o' thing, Cass—an' we done a lot of it—dat kind o' thing, like I say, dat skeers de white folks out o' dey shoes," he said.

Cassius looked back at the courthouse, then swung his gaze toward Scipio once more. As soon as Scipio saw the expression on the chairman's face, he knew he had failed. "Ain't gwine have no backslidin' in this here revolution," Cassius declared. "We is bringin' liberty to de people, an' if dey is too foolish to be grateful, dey pays de price."

He truly did not seem to realize that terrorizing everyone who was not ardently on his side to begin with would ensure that he drew few new supporters who didn't have great grievances against the Confederate States. Hardly any Negroes lacked such grievances. But, exactly because whites had been inflicting grief instead of taking it, the system that had been in place suited them well enough.

And now he went on, "De niggers here in People's Tree, dey live in the sections dey call Buzzard's Roost and Frog Level. You t'ink de white folks, dey want to live in sections wid they names?" He spat on the ground to show how likely he reckoned that was. Scipio didn't think it was very likely, either. But destroying white privilege only boosted white fear. And then Cassius wondered why whites fought against the Red revolution with everything they had.

Once more, Scipio tried to suggest that: "De more we puts they backs up, the harder they tries to put us down."

For a moment, he thought he'd got through to Cassius. The

chairman of the Congaree Socialist Republic sighed and shook his head. He said, “We git a messenger under flag o’ truce las’ night.”

“Dat a fact?” Scipio said. If it was a fact, it was news to him. That was worrisome in and of itself. Cassius had been in the habit of letting him know what happened as soon as it happened. A change in the pattern was liable to mean Scipio’s status was slipping, which was liable to prove hazardous to his life expectancy. Warily, he asked, “Dis messenger, what he say?”

“He say dat, if we doesn’t lay down we arms, de white folks liable to start killin’ de niggers in de part o’ de country we ain’t managed to liberate. What you t’ink o’ dat?”

Scipio’s first reaction was horror. His second reaction was horror, too. The Confederates could do that, and who would be able to stop them? The answer to that question came all too clear: *nobody*. “What you say?” he asked Cassius.

“I say two things,” the ex-hunter answered. “I say, if dat de game dey gwine play, we got plenty white folks to kill, too. Dey got mo’ niggers’n we got white folks, but dey think one white folks worth a whole heap o’ blacks. So dat make dis cocky ’ristocrat think some.”

Scipio nodded. It was a brutal ploy, but one to match the threat from the CSA. He had no doubt Cassius would carry it out, either, and was sure the chairman had left no doubt in the Confederate envoy’s mind. “Dat one,” he said, his voice showing his approval. “What de other?”

Cassius startled him by laughing out loud, a deep, rich, nasty laugh, the kind of laugh you let out after you’d heard a really good, really ripe dirty story. A moment later, Scipio understood why, for the chairman said, “I tell he, we don’t even got to do no killin’ to git our own back, if de ’pressors start de persecution in de unliberated land. I tell he, dere plenty white folks wimmin in the Congaree Socialist Republic. I don’ say no more. Ain’t got no need to say no more.”

“Do Jesus!” Scipio said. Confederate laws against miscegenation were harsh, and vigorously enforced. For some reason, Confederate white men seemed convinced that the first thing blacks would do, given any sort of chance, was make a beeline for white women. Even after the uprisings in the Congaree Socialist Republic, it hadn’t happened much. Scipio had heard of a few cases, but the revolutionary government had more urgent things—survival, for

instance—with which to concern itself. But now, to use the mere idea as a club with which to beat the Confederates over the head…Scipio stared at Cassius in astonished admiration. “You is a devil, you is.”

Cassius took that as the compliment it was intended to be. “Wish you was there. This white folks captain, he got a *see*gar in he mouth. When I say dat, he like to swallow it.” He laughed again.

So did Scipio. The story was worth laughing about—if it turned out to have a happy ending. “Once he cough de *see*gar up, what he say?”

“He say we never dare do no such thing.” Cassius’ eyes glittered. “I tell he we is a pack o’ desp’rate niggers, an’ who know what we do? De white-folks gov’ment been sayin’ dat so much an’ so loud, dey lackeys all believes it. So he say, de honor o’ de white folks wimmin matter to de gov’ment, an’ dey don’t do nuffin to hurt it. You know what dat mean.”

“Mean dey don’t want white folks wimmin birthin’ a pack o’ yaller babies,” Scipio said.

Cassius nodded with yet another chuckle. “Marx, he know ’bout dis. If de peasant wench have de lord’s baby, dey call dat de *droit de seigneur*.” What he did to the pronunciation of the French words was a caution, but Scipio understood him. He went on, “But de lord’s lady, if she have a baby by de peasant, everybody run around like chickens wid a fox in the henhouse. An’ if that baby *yaller*, like you say—”

“You reckon de white folks think twice, then?” Scipio asked.

“Dey think fo’-five times ’fore they want the likes o’ me humpin’ dis fifteen-year-old buckra gal wid de hair in de yaller braids,” Cassius said positively, and Scipio thought he was right. The chairman spat again. “Like I got me trouble findin’ wimmin wants to do it.”

He wasn’t boasting, just stating a fact. He’d boasted plenty, back when he was chief hunter on the Marshlands plantation. As chairman of the Congaree Socialist Republic, he seemed to find it beneath his dignity. Scipio prodded him a little: “Drusilla,” he said slyly.

He won a chuckle from Cassius, which relieved him: when Cassius was thinking about Cassius, he wasn’t thinking about Scipio. “Ain’t looked fo’ she since de revolution come,” Cassius said. “Maybe I ought to.” His hands described an hourglass in the air. He’d used the excuse of fooling around with Drusilla, who’d lived on the late, purged Jubal Marberry’s plantation, to travel by routes only he knew and bring

back weapons from the USA.

Scipio spoke another name: “Cherry.”

He’d intended that to come out sly and man-to-man, too. Somehow it didn’t, not quite. And Cassius stopped grinning. His answer, this time, was serious: “Dat gal, she do anything to help de revolution. If dat mean sleep wif you, she do it.”

“That so,” Scipio agreed. She’d slept with Jacob Colleton, to keep the mistress’ gassed brother distracted from any of the revolutionary buildup on the plantation, and then she’d used his abuse of her—or what she claimed to be his abuse of her—to touch off the uprising at the right moment. She was, Scipio knew, sharing a bed with Cassius these days.

But the chairman, instead of leering and bragging—for Cherry was one fine-looking, strong-minded woman—held up a forefinger in warning. “She do *anything* to help the revolution,” he said. “Anything at all. If dat mean cut yo’ balls off while you sleep, she do dat, too, an’ she don’ think twice.”

If he thought Scipio would argue with him, he was mistaken. The former butler was more afraid of Cherry than he was of Cassius, and that was saying something. Finding out that she also intimidated the chairman was interesting. He wondered if and how he’d be able to use that.

Before he had a chance to think about it, he heard a screaming whistle in the sky, coming out of the south. Several artillery shells burst with thunderous roars a few hundred yards outside of the renamed People’s Tree. More explosions farther south meant the People’s Revolutionary Army line was taking a pounding. Artillery was the one thing the Republic conspicuously lacked.

Cassius swore with bitter resignation. “I don’ reckon we gwine hold they white folks out of this here town more’n another two-three days.”

“What we do then?” Now Scipio sounded nervous, and knew it. When Cassius was optimistic about the way the fighting was going, he was often wrong; when he was pessimistic, he was always right.

“Fall back. What else *kin* we do?” the chairman answered. “We maybe lose dis here stand-up war”—the first time he had admitted the possibility, which sent a chill up Scipio’s spine—“but we go to de deep swamp, fight they white folks forever. An’ some o’ we, we jus’ goes

back to bein' ordinary niggers again, niggers what ain't never done nothin' de white folk get they-selves in a ruction about—till we sees de chance. We sees de chance, an' we *seize* de chance." He looked sharply at Scipio, to make sure he caught the wordplay.

Scipio did, and gave back a dutiful smile. He hoped that smile covered what was no longer a chill but a blizzard inside him. If Cassius admitted the revolution was starting to come unraveled, then it was. And, while Cassius and some of his followers could no doubt carry on a guerrilla campaign against the Confederacy from out of the swamps they knew better than any white man did, Scipio wasn't any of those followers. His skills at living under such conditions were nonexistent. He couldn't go back to being an ordinary Negro, either; the uprising had literally destroyed the place he'd had in the world.

What did that leave? He saw nothing. He'd always had trouble believing the revolution would succeed. Whenever he'd oh so cautiously raised doubts, no one paid him any mind. Now he saw himself vindicated. *Much good it does me,* he thought bitterly.

George Enos looked to his left. The woody shoreline of Tennessee lay to port of the monitor *Punishment*. George looked to his right. To starboard were the hills of northeastern Arkansas. U.S. land forces held the Tennessee side of the Mississippi. God only knew who could lay claim to the Arkansas side of the river. It wasn't trench warfare over there—more like large-scale bushwhacking.

Wayne Pitchess came up to Enos. He was looking toward the Arkansas bank of the Mississippi, too. "If we ever clear out those Rebs, we'll have a better chance of heading down the river and grabbing Memphis," he said.

"Thank you, Admiral," George said, which made Pitchess glare at him in mock anger. He went on, "We get Memphis, that's a long step toward cutting the CSA right in half. Sure would be fine."

"Now who's the admiral?" Pitchess retorted, and Enos spread his hands, admitting to attempted strategizing. His buddy's face took on a wistful expression. "Wonder if we'll ever see the day. If it takes us a year and a half to clear a quarter of the river, how long do we need to do all of it?"

"Reminds me of the kind of questions that ran me out of school and

onto a fishing boat," George said, to which Pitchess nodded. George looked south now, toward the distant Tennessee city. "I feel like Moses looking toward the Promised Land, knowing I'm never going to get there."

"Sailor, you have the wrong attitude," Pitchess declared, sounding very much like the morale-building lectures that came out of the Navy Department and were read with straight faces by the officers of the *Punishment*. "If only we don't worry about the minefields in the Mississippi and the shore batteries that can blow us out of the water and the Confederate river monitors, we'll waltz into Memphis day after tomorrow."

"Now there's sugar for my morning coffee," Enos exclaimed, and Wayne Pitchess laughed out loud. "Now, Mr. Sugar, sir, what happens if I do worry about those things, or even about one of 'em?"

"Then it takes longer," Pitchess said, "and you get written up for malicious fretting and impeding the war effort. They issue you a ball and chain and a sledgehammer, and you start making boulders into sand. Sounds bully, don't it?"

The *Punishment* inched down the Mississippi. Everyone on deck kept an eye peeled for the round, spiked ugliness of mines. George methodically checked and cleaned the action of his machine gun. Lieutenant Kelly would have given him hell had he neglected it, but he didn't need the officer riding him to make sure he attended to what needed doing. Hosing bullets out at the Rebs was the likeliest way he'd stay alive in an action; if the gun jammed, that gave the enemy a free shot at him. Best, then, that it didn't jam.

Kelly came up behind him and watched in approval so silent that George jumped when he turned around and discovered him there. "You take care of the equipment," the Navy man said, as if surprised to discover that trait in someone so recently a civilian.

"Sir, I put in a lot of years on a fishing trawler," George answered. "We didn't spend so much time polishing things as we do here, but everything had to work." The Atlantic, he thought, was much less forgiving of mistakes than the Mississippi. It would, quite impersonally, kill you if you gave it even a quarter of a chance.

On the other hand, the Rebels would kill you most personally if they got their chance, or even a piece of their chance. He supposed that pretty much balanced things out. Kelly might have been thinking

along those lines, too, for he said, “We have to be ready every second.”

“Yes, sir,” Enos agreed.

Kelly sighed. “I do wish we were something more than fire support for the Army. Out on the ocean, by all I hear, ships do what they need to do, not what some fool in green-gray thinks they need to do.”

As far as George was concerned, a dark blue uniform could also cover up a fool. He carefully did not mention that to Kelly, who was liable to think Enos had him in mind with the comment. What he did say was, “Crazy kind of war we’re fighting here.”

“Sailor, if you think I’m going to argue with you, you’re the one who’s crazy,” Kelly told him. “Snapping-turtle Navy is a strange sort of place.”

Enos would have said more, but klaxons started shouting. He would have run to his battle station, but he was already there. What he did do was run a belt into his machine gun, then look around to see what he was supposed to use for a target. He didn’t spot anything.

Word was not long in coming. Fingers began pointing south. Squinting, Enos spotted a tiny smudge of smoke on the horizon. It was what the smoke from the *Punishment*’s stacks might have looked like, if seen from a distance of several miles. Which meant—

“Well, well,” Lieutenant Kelly said, whistling tunelessly between his teeth. “You don’t see ship-to-ship actions very often in river warfare. Aren’t you glad we’ve found an exception for you, Enos?”

“Sir, I’ll fight,” George said. “You know I’ll fight. Expecting me to be glad about it is probably asking too much.” He’d had revenge enough by now for what the Rebs had done to him while he was a fisherman. He wouldn’t have minded spending the rest of the war somewhere far away from the roar of guns and close to Sylvia, George, Jr., and Mary Jane. He wondered if his little girl remembered him. Then he wondered if Sylvia remembered him—he hadn’t had a letter for a while.

Kelly said, “The next interesting question is whether we saw the Rebs before they saw us.” *Interesting* was such a nice, bland word to apply to a question that was liable to determine whether the *Punishment* remained a river monitor or turned into a flaming hulk in the next few minutes.

With a small noise, half whir, half grind, the turret of the *Punishment* began to revolve. The big guns elevated a few degrees. Before they could fire, though, a couple of great columns of water fountained up from the Mississippi, several hundred yards ahead of the monitor. Secondary splashes rose from shell fragments hitting the water.

"Well, well," Kelly said again, as calmly as if the toast were too dark to suit him. "That answers that, doesn't it?"

It did, and, as far as George was concerned, it was the wrong answer. He felt singularly useless. Whatever happened in the duel between the *Punishment* and the Confederate monitor, it wasn't going to happen at ranges where a machine gun would do any good. That meant he had to remain a spectator at what might be his own destruction. He'd had to do that before, aboard the submersible-hunting trawler *Spray*. He didn't think he'd get used to it if he had to do it a hundred times.

The *Punishment*'s guns bellowed. The deck quivered under Enos' feet. He hoped the fellow at the rangefinder knew his business. No way to be certain, not with land and the twists of the river hiding the enemy from sight. Only smoke by which to gauge positions—it was a particularly deadly version of blindman's buff.

Smoke spurted from the *Punishment*'s stacks. Now the monitor had to move quickly, either that or present a sitting target to its Confederate counterpart. Moving, though, was as likely to mean heading into the path of enemy fire as away from it. George wondered how Commander Heinrich, the skipper of the *Punishment*, chose which way to go. However he did it, he earned his money.

More shells from the Confederate gunboat splashed into the Mississippi. These were closer, so that some of the water they kicked up came raining down onto the deck of the *Punishment*. Enos wished he had his slicker from the *Ripple*.

Lieutenant Kelly, though, was grinning. "They haven't straddled us," he said. "Their next salvo will be long, and the one after that, if we're lucky, longer yet. That gives us more time to find them and hit them." He spoke as if that were all in a day's work—and so, in fact, it was. George still hadn't got used to the notion that, wearing this uniform, his day's work involved killing people.

Boom! Boom! The guns in the *Punishment*'s turret replied to the

Confederate fire. George hadn't watched to see whether their muzzles had moved up or down or whether they thought they had the range. How, firing with only smoke to go by, would they know if they'd made a hit? By seeing more smoke, he supposed, or by having the enemy gunboat quit shooting at them.

It hadn't quit shooting at the moment, worse luck. As Kelly had predicted, the next two shells were long. Enos waited anxiously for the salvo after that. How clever was the Rebel captain?

George had heard the Confederate shells roaring overhead before they splashed into the Mississippi. When the roar came again, he cringed at his machine gun: the shells screaming down sounded as if they were going to land on top of his head. "Brace yourselves, boys," Lieutenant Kelly shouted through the screech of their descent. "They're—"

One of them hit just to port of the *Punishment*, the other, half a second later, to starboard. The monitor staggered under Enos' feet, as if it had fallen into a hole. But there were no holes in the Mississippi—or rather, there hadn't been. That stagger was part of what knocked George off his feet. The rest was blast, which flung him against the side of the turret.

A fragment from the shell clanged off the turret about the same time as he hit it. A fresh, bright scar appeared on the metal, less than six inches above his head. He sucked in a breath, wondering if he'd feel the stab of a broken rib or two. To his relief, he didn't.

Dazedly, he sat up and looked around. Lieutenant Michael Kelly hadn't been so lucky as he was. There Kelly sprawled, cut almost in half by a piece of flying steel. To his horror, he saw the lieutenant's eyes still had awareness in them. Kelly's mouth moved, but only blood came from it. Then, mercifully, he slumped down dead.

And then, quite as if nothing had happened, the *Punishment*'s guns bellowed out a reply to the Confederate salvo. The crew might have been damaged, but the warship lived on. It would keep doing its job, too. George had an uneasy vision of a stream of men entering its hatches like beeves being driven into a slaughterhouse, the cannon firing, and out the far hatches coming, not steaks and ground meat, but coffins. But that would not matter to the ship. There would always be more men to feed into it, as there were always more men to feed into the trenches.

Across the water came a deep, low rumble, like thunder far away. For a moment, Enos thought it was the sound of the Confederate gunboat firing. But he hadn't heard it when the other vessel's previous salvos reached for the *Punishment*. The distant plume of smoke suddenly swelled enormously at the base.

"Hit!" somebody shouted. Somebody else yelled, "Blew the bastards to kingdom come!" George Enos started yelling, too. It was victory. Then he looked at Mike Kelly, or what was left of him, and at the gouge on the metal of the turret so close to where his own head had been. As easily as not, Kelly could have been alive and himself dead and mutilated. He yelled louder than ever.

Jefferson Pinkard was one of the lucky ones: he had a real seat in a real passenger coach on the troop train rumbling through the night somewhere in southern Georgia. *If this is good luck,* he thought, *I don't want to know what bad luck is like*.

His backside and the base of his spine ached; the seat was bare wood. It might have been a car for whites too poor to afford even second-class fare, or it might have been reserved for Negroes. If Pinkard had had to ride in cars like this whenever he took the train, he might have risen up himself against the people who made him do it.

He couldn't stretch his legs out, either; the space between his seat and the one in front of it was too narrow. It would have been too narrow even if he hadn't been kitted out with a pack on his back and a rifle between his knees. As things were, he felt like a sardine jammed into its tin. His newly issued helmet, a low-crowned iron derby with a wide rim on the British model, added to that canned feeling.

What he didn't feel much like was a soldier. They'd given him his uniform, they'd given him his Tredegar, they'd given him a couple of weeks' screamed instruction at close-order drill and ri-flery, and then they'd hauled him and his training regiment out of the camp near Birmingham and put them on the train.

Even his drill instructors—ogres in human shape if ever there were any—hadn't been happy about that. "Weren't for them damn niggers, y'all'd be here another month, likely tell longer," one of them had said when the orders arrived. "Y'all was goin' up against the damnyankees, wouldn't be a man jack of you left breathing in two weeks' time. But

they reckon y'all are good enough now to whip them Red niggers back into line."

Pinkard turned to the raw private on the hard, cramped seat next to his: a skinny little fellow with spectacles who'd been a clerk in Dothan till the Conscription Bureau finally swept him up. "Stinky," he said, "if them niggers was soldiers as lousy as they say, we'd have done licked 'em already, don't you reckon?"

"My name," Stinky Salley said in tones of relentless precision, "is Christopher." He'd said the same thing in the same tone to the drill sergeants who'd rechristened him after he'd evaded bath call one evening. He'd kept on saying it even after they knocked him down—he had spirit, maybe more than his scrawny body could safely contain. It did no good; the nickname had stuck.

"Listen, Stinky," Pinkard went on, "it stands to reason that—"

One of the soldiers who sprawled in the aisle between seats, somewhere between sitting and lying, spoke up: "Stands to reason somebody's gonna kick your ass, you don't shut the hell up and let him sleep if he's able."

Pinkard did shut up. He wished he could sleep. He was too uncomfortable. He wondered how he'd be when the train finally stopped. *Probably shuffle around like a ninety-year-old man with the rheumatism,* he thought.

The window three seats in front of his suddenly blew in, spraying glass around the car. He yelped when a piece stung his cheek. A warm trickle of blood began to flow. "What the hell—?" somebody yelled.

Another window blew out, this one behind him. He felt something—probably more glass—rebound from his helmet. Back there, a man started screaming: "Oh, Mother!" he wailed. "I'm hit! Oh, God! Oh, Mama!"

Realization smote. "They're shooting at us, the sons of bitches—niggers in the night, I mean."

He couldn't do anything about it, either. He had no target at which to shoot. All he could do was sit there and hope the Red revolutionaries would miss him. That might have been worse than anything else about it—or so he thought till his squad leader, a dour corporal named Peter Ploughman, said, "Thank God they ain't got but a rifle or two. You boys ain't never seen what comes out of a train that

done got chewed up by a machine gun."

A couple of the men near the wounded soldier did what they could for him, which wasn't much. The car held neither a doctor nor a medical orderly. Jeff had no idea how anybody who knew anything could have come from another car to the hurt man, not with the way soldiers had been shoehorned into this train. The poor fellow would have to suffer till it stopped.

And it wasn't stopping. The reverse, in fact: it was speeding up, to escape the harassing fire from the brush by the tracks. In a speculative voice, Ploughman said, "How sneaky are them damn niggers, anyways? They tryin' to spook us into runnin' right over some explosives they planted?"

"Jesus!" Jefferson Pinkard said. He was glad he wasn't the only one who said it. He'd thought working at the Sloss foundry was such a dangerous job, war would hardly faze him afterwards. But in the Sloss works even Leonidas, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, wasn't actively trying to kill him and devoting all his ingenuity toward that end. The idea that the Red Negroes might be using a small incident to give rise to a big one, as if they were throwing stones to flush game out of deep cover to where it could more readily be shot—that made the hair stand up at the back of his neck.

Acceleration pressed him against his seat. Things in his pack dug into his spine and his kidneys. He tried to brace himself against an explosion that would fling the car off the tracks like a toy kicked by a brat with a nasty temper. He didn't think anything he did would help much, but sitting there like a lump of coal wouldn't help at all.

Without warning, he wasn't being pressed back any more. He had everything he could do to keep from going facefirst into the back of the seat in front of him. Soldiers in the corridor, who could not steady themselves, tumbled over one another in a shouting, cursing heap.

Iron screamed on iron, rails and wheels locking in an embrace so hot, it sent orange-red sparks leaping up higher than the window through which Jefferson Pinkard stared. Absurdly, he wondered if he'd helped bring any of that iron into being.

Groaning and shuddering, the train staggered to a halt. Pinkard saw a couple of men with kerosene lanterns outside. Their voices came through the shattered windows of the car: "Out! Out! Everybody out!"

That wasn't easy or quick. It wouldn't have been easy or quick with

veteran troops. With raw recruits, all the shouting of their officers and noncoms helped only so much. They got in one another's way, went in this direction when they should have gone in that, and generally blundered their way out of the coaches into the night.

Cold nipped at Pinkard as he stood in the darkness. A coal stove and a lot of bodies had kept the car warm. Now he got out the overcoat stowed in his pack. He wished he were home in bed with Emily, who would warm him better than any Army overcoat could. Most of the time, he'd been too busy to notice how much he missed her. Not now, standing here all confused, breathing in coal smoke from the engine, breathing out fog from the chill.

"Just in time—" The phrase started going through the raw soldiers, some of them plainly repeating it without any clear idea of why they were. Then somebody who sounded as if he did know what he was talking about spoke up: "We hadn't been able to flag the engineer down in time, reckon this here train would have blown sky high."

"What did I say?" Corporal Peter Ploughman sounded both vindicated and smug. Pinkard shrugged. If Ploughman didn't know more about the soldiering business than the men he led, he had no business wearing stripes on his sleeves. But Jeff supposed the noncom did need to impress them every now and again with how much he knew.

"Where are we?" someone asked.

"About twenty miles outside of Albany," the authoritative-sounding voice answered. Albany, or its outskirts, had been their destination. Jeff had a ghastly suspicion he knew how they were going to get there now.

A moment later, that suspicion was confirmed. Captain Connolly, the company commander, shouted, "Form column of fours!" Grumbling and cursing in low voices, the soldiers obeyed, again less efficiently than veterans might have done. And off they tramped, eastward along the line of the railroad toward Albany.

Pinkard promptly tripped over a rock, almost falling on his face. "They're going to pay for this," he muttered. He'd had to make only one night march during his abbreviated training. He hadn't liked it for beans. Now he discovered practice was a lot easier than the real thing.

After some endless time, dawn began to break. What had been dark punctuated by deeper black turned into trenches and shell crates and

burned-out Negro shacks and also the occasional burned-out mansion. Fresh-turned red earth in the middle of winter meant new graves. There were a lot of them. A faint odor of corruption hung in the air.

"Niggers are playing for keeps," Stinky Salley remarked, in tones full of the same surprise and disbelief Pinkard felt. "Never would have reckoned they could do nothin' like this."

"Whole damn world's gone crazy since the war started," Jeff said. "Women workin' men's jobs, niggers workin' white men's jobs, and now, hell, niggers fightin' damn near like white men. Shitfire, I wish they were fightin' the damnyankees, not me."

That argument had raged on the train and in the training camp, as it had all over the Confederacy since the Negro uprising began. Stinky Salley was on the other side. He stared at Pinkard with withering scorn. "Yeah, and I bet you wish they was marrying your womenfolks, too," he said.

"Don't wish anything of the kind, goddammit," Pinkard said. "Just use your eyes instead of your mouth for a change, why don't you? If niggers was the happy-go-lucky stay-at-homes everybody been sayin' they are, you and me wouldn't be *here*. We'd be fighting the USA instead." Salley's glare didn't get any friendlier, but he shut up. Not even he could argue that they were where they'd figured on being, or that Negroes in arms weren't opposing the Confederate government.

"Let's get moving," Captain Connolly shouted. "You don't want to fall out of line hereabouts—niggers'd sooner cut your throat than look at you. Sooner we put these stinking Reds down, sooner we can get back to whipping the damnyankees. Train can't do the work, so your legs got to. Keep movin'!"

Keep moving Pinkard did, though his feet began to ache. He wondered if the CSA really could recover from this rebellion as if nothing had happened. The captain certainly seemed to think so. Looking at the devastation through which they were marching, Pinkard wasn't so sure. Who would repair everything that had been damaged?

A couple of Negroes, a man and a woman, were working in a garden plot near the tracks. They looked up at the column of white men in butternut. Had they been rebels a few days before? Had they hidden their weapons when government forces washed over them? Would they cut his throat if they saw half a chance? Or were they as

genuinely horrified by the uprising as a lot of blacks in Birmingham were?

How could you know? How were you supposed to tell? Pinkard pondered that as he tramped past them. Try as he would, he found no good answers.

Lucien Galtier spoke to his horse as the two of them rolled down the road from Rivière-du-Loup toward his home: “This paving, it is not such a bad thing, eh? Oh, I may have to put shoes on you more often now, but we can go out and about in weather that would have kept us home before, *n’est-ce pas?*”

The horse didn’t answer. The horse never answered. That was one of the reasons Lucien enjoyed conversing with it. Back at the house, he had trouble getting a word in edgewise. He looked around. Snow lay everywhere. Even with overcoat, wool muffler, and wool cap pulled down over his ears, he was cold. The road, however, remained a black ribbon of asphalt through the white. The Americans kept it open even in the worst of blizzards.

They did not do it for him, of course. The racket of an engine behind him and the raucous squawk of a horn told him why they did do it. Moving as slowly as he could get away with, he pulled over to the edge of the road and let the U.S. ambulance roar past. It picked up speed, racing with its burden of wounded men toward the hospital the Americans had built on Galtier’s land.

“On my patrimony,” he told the horse. It snorted and flicked its ears, as if here, for once, it sympathized with him. His land had been in his family for more than two hundred years, since the days of Louis XIV. That anyone should simply appropriate a piece of it struck him as outrageous. Had the Americans no decency?

He knew the answer to that, only too well. Major Quigley, the occupier in charge of dealing with the Quebecois, had blandly assured him the benefits of the road would make up for having lost some of his land. Quigley hadn’t believed it himself; he’d taken the land for no other reason than to punish Lucien. But it might even turn out to be so.

“And what if it is?” Lucien asked. Now, sensibly, the horse did not respond. How could anyone, even a horse, make a response? Thievery

was thievery, and you could not compensate for it in such a way. Did they reckon him devoid of honor, devoid of pride? If they did, they would be sorry—and sooner than they thought. So he hoped, at any rate.

Another ambulance came up the road toward him. He took his time getting out of the way for this one, too. That was a tiny way to resist the American invaders, but even tiny ways were not to be despised. Perhaps a man who might have lived would die on account of the brief delay.

He glanced toward the west. Ugly clouds were massing there: another storm coming. Even on a paved road, Galtier did not care to be caught in it. He flicked the reins and told the horse to get moving. The horse, which had been listening to him for many years, snorted and increased its pace from a walk…to a walk.

Here came a buggy toward his wagon. He stiffened on the seat. The man in the seat did not wear American green-gray. American soldiers at least had the courage to fight their foes face to face, however reprehensible their other habits might be. The small, plump man in black there, far from fighting his foes, embraced them with a fervor Galtier found incomprehensible and infuriating.

The priest waved to him. "*Bonjour,* Lucien," he called.

"*Bonjour,* Father Pascal," Galtier called back, adding under his breath, *"Mauvais tabernac."* Even English-speaking Canadians thought the Quebecois way of cursing peculiar, but Lucien did not care. It satisfied him more than their talk of manure and fornication.

Father Pascal's cheeks were always pink, and doubly so with the chilly wind rising as it was now. "I have given those poor injured men a bit of spiritual solace," he said, smiling at Lucien. "Do you know, my son, a surprising number of them are communicants of our holy Catholic church?"

"No, Father, I did not know that." Galtier did not care, either. They might be Catholics, but they were unquestionably Americans. That more than made up for a common religion, as far as the farmer was concerned.

Father Pascal saw the world differently. "*C'est vrai*—it's true," he said. Father Pascal, Lucien thought, saw the world in terms of what was most advantageous for Father Pascal. The Americans were here, the Americans were strong, therefore he collaborated with the

Americans. Nodding again to Lucien, he went on, “I had the honor also to see your lovely daughter Nicole at the hospital. In her whites, I did not recognize her for a moment. The doctors tell me she is doing work of an excellent sort. You must be very proud of her.”

“I am always very proud of her,” Lucien said. That had the virtue of being true and polite at the same time, something which could not be said about a good many other possible responses. Galtier glanced over toward the building clouds. “And now, Father, if you will pardon me —” The horse broke into a trot this time, as if it truly did understand how much he wanted to get away.

“Go with God, my son,” Father Pascal called after him. He waved back toward the priest, hoping the snowstorm would catch him before he got back to Rivière-du-Loup.

If Lucien was to reach the farmhouse, he had to drive past the hospital. It was almost as if Major Quigley had set a small town on his property: the hospital certainly had more ambulances coming to it and leaving it than Rivière-du-Loup had had motorcars at the start of the war. It also had a large gasoline-powered generator that gave it electricity, while trucks and big wagons brought in coal to keep it warm against the worst a Quebec winter could do.

People bustled in and out the front door, those going in pausing to show their bona fides to armed guards at the doorway. A doctor stood outside the entrance, smoking a cigarette; red spattered his white jacket. Out came a U.S. officer in green-gray, a formidable row of ribbons and medals on his chest and an even more formidable scowl on his face. Lucien would have bet he hadn’t got what he wanted, whatever that was. And here came a couple of women pulling overcoats on over their long white dresses to fight the chill outside.

Galtier steered the wagon toward them and reined to a halt. *“Bonsoir, mademoiselle,”* he said, formal as a butler. “May I offer you a ride to your home?”

Nicole Galtier smiled at him. “Oh, *bonsoir,* Papa,” she said. “I didn’t expect you here at just this time.” She started to climb into the wagon, then turned back toward the other nurse. “See you tomorrow, Henrietta.”

“See you tomorrow,” Henrietta said. She went over to the doctor. He gave her a cigarette and lighted it with his own, leaning his face close to hers.

The horse had taken several strides before Lucien fully noticed what he'd heard. "You spoke to her in English," he said to Nicole.

"I am learning it, yes," she answered, and tossed her head so that the starched white cap she wore almost flew off. "If I am to do anything that is important and not just wash and carry, I have to learn it." She glanced at him to see how he was taking that. When he didn't say anything, she went on, "You have learned it, and use what you have learned, is that not so?"

"Yes, it is so," he told her, and wondered where to go from there. Discovering he had no idea, he kept quiet till he had driven the wagon into the barn. "Go on to the house," he said then. "I'll see to the horse and be in with you in a few minutes."

Brushing down the animal and making sure it had food and water—but not too much of either—was a routine he took for granted. He had heard that rich farmers had motorcars of their own, and tractors and threshers with motors, too. He wondered what they thought of doing without horses. He shrugged. He was not a rich farmer, nor likely to become one.

As he often did, he sighed with pleasure on walking into the farmhouse. Not only was it warm, it was also full of the good smells of cooking. "Is that chicken stew?" he called in the direction of the kitchen.

Marie's voice floated resignedly out: "Yes, Lucien—chicken stew. One day, I swear, I shall buy a zebra or a camel, so I can roast it in the oven and not have you know at first sniff what it is."

"Zebra would probably taste like horse," their son Georges said, and then, exercising his gift for the absurd, "although it could be the meat would have stripes."

"Thank God we have not been hungry enough to have to learn the taste of horse," Lucien said. "Thank Him twice, for the beast we have is so old, he would surely be tough."

Charles said, "I have read in a book on the French Foreign Legion that the roasted hump of a camel is supposed to be a great delicacy."

"Since a man has to be a fool—a brave fool, yes, but a fool—to join the Foreign Legion, I do not think he is to be trusted in matters of taste," Galtier said. "And I do not think a camel would do well in the snow."

“You do not have reason, Papa,” Charles said, glad to show off knowledge at his father’s expense. “Not only are there camels that live in the desert, there are also others—Bactrians, they are called—that live in cold countries.”

“But not in Quebec,” Lucien said firmly. He caught the evil gleam in Georges’ eye and forestalled him: “Nor, for that matter, have we any great herds of zebras here.” Georges pouted; he hated having his father anticipate a joke.

Over the supper table, they talked of camels and zebras and of more practical matters like the price chickens were bringing in Rivière-du-Loup, whether the kerosene ration was likely to be cut again, and what a good bunch of applejack this latest one from their neighbor was. “Warms you better than the fire does,” Charles said, sipping the potent, illegal, popular stuff.

And Nicole, as had become her habit, talked about the work she did at the hospital. “The officer had a wounded leg full of pus, and I helped drain it,” she said. “I did not do much, of course, as I am so new, but I watched with great care, and I think I will be able to do more next time.” Her nose wrinkled. “The smell was bad, but not so bad that I could not stand it.”

Susanne screwed up her face into a horrible grimace. “That’s disgusting, Nicole,” she exclaimed, freighting the word with all the emphasis she could give. The rest of her sisters, older and younger, nodded vehemently.

Gently, Marie said, “Perhaps not at supper, Nicole.”

“It is my work,” Nicole said, sounding as angry as Lucien had ever heard her. “We all talk about what we do in the day. Am I to wear a muzzle because I do not do what everyone else does?” She got up and hurried away from the table.

Lucien stared after her. When he had hesitated over letting her take the job at the hospital, it had been because he feared and disliked the company into which she would be thrown there. He had never thought that, simply by virtue of doing different things from the rest of the family, she might become sundered from it—and might want to become sundered from it.

He knocked back his little glass of applejack and poured it full again. The problems he had expected with Nicole’s job had for the most part not arisen. The problems he had not expected…“Life is

never simple," he declared. Maybe it was the applejack, but he had the feeling of having said something truly profound.

"Gas shells," Jake Featherston said enthusiastically. "Isn't that fine? The damnyankees have been doing it to our boys, and now we get to do it right back."

Michael Scott grinned at him. "Chokes me up just thinkin' about it, Sarge," he said, and did an alarmingly realistic impression of a man trying to cough chlorine-fried lungs right out of his chest. After the laughter at the gallows humor subsided, he went on, "When they going to have 'em for the big guns?"

"God knows," Jake said, rolling his eyes. "Best I can tell, we got our factories stretched like a rubber band that's about to break and hit you a lick between the eyes. There's a war on, case you haven't noticed, so they got to make more stuff than they ever reckoned they could. They got to do that with most of the men who were workin' in 'em before totin' guns now. And they got to do it with half the niggers, maybe, up in arms instead of doin' the jobs they're supposed to be doin'. Damn lucky the Yankees ain't ridden roughshod over us."

That produced a gloomy silence. It also produced several worried looks toward the north. The first U.S. attacks after the Red uprising had been beaten back, and the damnyankees, as if taken by surprise that they hadn't easily overwhelmed the Confederates, seemed to have paused to think things over. Signs were, though, that they were building up to try something new. Whenever the weather was decent, U.S. aeroplanes buzzed over the Confederate lines, spying out whatever they could. Confederate reconnaissance reported more activity than usual in the Yankee trenches.

Featherston added one thing more, the artilleryman's tipoff: "Their guns been firing a lot of registration shots lately." When a few shells came over, falling around important targets, you started worrying. That usually meant the other side's artillery was taking exact ranges. Before too long, a lot more than a few shells would be dropping thereabouts.

"Sarge, we got these gas shells to go with the rest of what we shoot," Michael Scott said. He glanced around. Nobody was in earshot of the gun crew. Even so, he lowered his voice: "With things like they are with Captain Stuart and all, we gonna be able to get enough of 'em

to shoot to do any good?”

“That’s a damn fine question,” Jake told him. “Wish to Jesus I had me a damn fine answer for it. Way things used to be, we had shells the way a fellow been eatin’ green apples gets the runs—they were just fallin’ out of our ass, on account of Jeb Stuart III was Jeb Stuart III, and that was plenty to get him everything he wanted. Nowadays…” He sighed. “Nowadays I reckon I’d sooner have me Captain Joe Doakes in charge of the battery, or somebody else no one ever heard of. We might not get a whole raft o’ shells, but we wouldn’t get shortchanged, neither. And I got the bad feeling we’re gonna be from here on out.”

Everybody in the gun crew sighed. Jeb Stuart III wasn’t Richmond’s fair-haired boy any more. Now he was under a dark cloud, and that meant the whole battery had to go around carrying lanterns. Sooner or later, Stuart would pay the price for not having kept a better eye on Pompey. Trouble was, the rest of the battery would pay it along with him.

Featherston filled his coffee cup from the pot above the cook-fire. The coffee was hot and strong. Once you’d said those two things, you’d said everything good about it you could. Nothing was as good as it had been before the Negroes rose up against their white superiors, not the chow, not the coffee, not anything.

“Damn niggers,” Jake muttered. “If we lose this damn war, it’s their fault, stabbing us in the back like they done. We could have licked the damnyankees easy, wasn’t for that.”

As if to contradict him, U.S. artillery opened up in earnest then. As soon as he saw the flashes to the north, as soon as he heard the roar of explosions and the scream of shells in the air, Jake knew the enemy guns weren’t doing registration fire this time. They meant it.

The howitzer he commanded had a splendid view north. “Come on!” he shouted, pointing toward the gun. “Let’s give it back to ’em!”

He didn’t think any of his men could have heard him, not through the blasts of shells landing close by and the whine and hiss of shrapnel balls and flying fragments of shell casing. But they’d been bombarded before. They knew what to do. In less than a minute, they were flinging shells—gas and shrapnel both—back at the U.S. lines.

Those lines were working, vomiting out men the way an anthill vomited ants after you kicked it. Featherston whooped when shells

burst among the damnyankees swarming toward the Confederate lines, whooped when men flew through the air or sprawled bonelessly on the ground or threw themselves flat and stopped moving forward.

But a godawful lot of damnyankees kept right on toward the Confederate trenches, which were taking a fearful pounding. The infantry in the trenches couldn't do any proper shooting at the advancing Yanks, not with tons of metal coming down on their heads. So much dust and dirt flew up from the Confederate lines, Jake had trouble spotting targets at which to aim his piece. "They're gonna get in!" he yelled. If the U.S. troops didn't just get into the Confederate lines but also through them—if that happened, the Confederate position in north-central Maryland was going to come unglued in a hurry.

Back in his training days, he'd learned that the three-inch howitzer, with its muzzle brake to keep recoil short and not fling the carriage backwards at every shot, could in an emergency fire twenty rounds a minute. Most of the time, that was only a number; the normal rate of fire was less than half as fast. No picky drillmaster was standing over the crew with a stopwatch now, as had been so back on the firing range. But if Jake and his men didn't smash every firing-range record ever set, he would have eaten his hat—had he had any idea where the damn thing was.

In spite of the shells falling on them, the other guns of the battery matched his round for round, or came close enough as to make no difference. And in spite of all they did, the damnyankees kept coming. Men started emerging from the Confederate trenches up ahead—men in butternut, at first. Some of them looked for new firing positions from which to shoot back at the U.S. soldiers who had forced them out of what had been the safety of their lines. Others were running, nothing else but.

Then Featherston spotted men in green-gray. "Shrapnel!" he shouted, and depressed the barrel of the howitzer till he was all but firing over open sights. He yanked the lanyard. The shell roared. Again, he watched men tumble. They were closer now, and easier to see. He could even spy the difference in shape between their roundish helmets and the tin hats some of the Confederate troops were wearing.

A rifle bullet cracked past the gun's splinter shield, and then another. He shook his head in dismay. He'd done a lot of shooting at enemy infantry during the war—that was what the three-incher was for. Up till now, though, he'd never been in a spot where enemy

infantry could shoot back at him.

“Running low on ammunition!” somebody shouted in the chaos—he wasn’t sure who. Shells from the guns of the battery still in action tore great holes in the ranks of the oncoming U.S. soldiers, but they kept coming nonetheless, on a wider front than the field guns could sweep free.

“Bring the horses up to the gun and to the limber!” Jake shouted. He looked around for the Negro laborers attached to the gun. They were nowhere to be seen. He wasted a few seconds cursing. Nero and Perseus, who had been with the battery from the day the war started, would have done as he told them no matter how dangerous the work was. He’d seen that. But Nero and Perseus had been infected by the Red tide, too, and had deserted when the uprising broke out. God only knew where they were now.

“If the niggers won’t do it, reckon we got to take care of it our own selves,” Will Cooper said. Along with a couple of other men, he went back to the barn nearby and brought out the horses. The animals were snorting and frightened. Jake Featherston didn’t worry about that. He was plenty frightened himself, thank you very much. And if they didn’t get the howitzer out of there in a hurry, he’d be worse than frightened, and he knew it. He’d be dead or captured, and the gun lost, a disgrace to any artilleryman.

“God damn it to hell, what the devil do you think you’re doing?” It wasn’t a shout—it was more like a scream. For a moment, Featherston didn’t recognize the voice, though he’d heard it every day since before the war. His head snapped around. There stood Jeb Stuart III, head bare, pistol in his hand, eyes blazing with a fearful light.

“Sir—” Featherston pointed ahead, toward the advancing Yankees. “Sir, if we don’t pull back—” He didn’t think he needed to go on. The Confederate front was dissolving. A bullet ricocheted off the barrel of the cannon. If they didn’t get out, they’d be picked off one by one, with no chance of doing anything to affect the rest of what was plainly a losing battle.

Jeb Stuart III leveled the pistol at his head. “Sergeant, you are not going anywhere. We are not going anywhere—except forward. There is the enemy. We shall fight him as long as we have breath in us. Is that clear?”

“Uh, yes, sir,” Jake said. The barrel of the pistol looked as wide to

him as that of his howitzer.

“Call me naive, will they? Call me stupid? Say my career is over?” Stuart muttered, not to Featherston, maybe not even to himself—more likely to some superior who wasn’t there, perhaps to his father. He had, Jake realized, decided to die like a hero rather than living on in disgrace. If he took a gun crew to glory with him, so what?

They unhitched the horses and fired a couple of shells at the damnyankees. Stuart made no effort whatever to seek shelter. On the contrary—he stood in the open, defying the Yankees to hit him. In short order, he went down, blood spurting from a neck wound. The gun crew got the horses hitched again in moments. Under Featherston’s bellowed orders, they got the howitzer out of there—and Captain Stuart, too. They saved the gun. Stuart died before a doctor saw him.

* * *

Chester Martin wished he’d had a bath any time recently. He wished the same thing about the squad he led. Of course, with so many unburied corpses in the neighborhood—so many corpses all up and down the Roanoke front—the reek of a few unwashed but live bodies would be a relatively small matter.

Turning to the distinguished visitor (without whose presence he wouldn’t have cared nearly so much about the bath), he said, “You want to be careful, sir. We’re right up at the front now. You give the Rebel snipers even the littlest piece of a target, and they’ll drill it. They won’t know you’re a reporter, not a soldier—and the bastards probably wouldn’t care much if they did know.”

“Don’t you worry about me, Sergeant,” Richard Harding Davis answered easily. “I’ve been up to the front before.”

“Yes, sir, I know that,” Martin answered. Davis had been up to the front in a good many wars over the past twenty years or so. “I’ve read a lot of your stuff.”

Davis preened. He wasn’t a very big man, but extraordinarily handsome, and dressed in green-gray clothes that were the color of a U.S. uniform but much snappier in cut—especially when compared to the dirty, unpressed uniforms all around him. “I’m very glad to hear it,” he said. “A writer who didn’t have readers would be out of work in a hurry—and then I might have to find an honest job.”

He laughed. So did Martin, who asked, “Are you all right, sir?” Handsome or not, Davis was an old geezer—well up into his fifties—and looked a little the worse for wear as he strode along the trench.

He was game enough, though. “I’m fine. Bit of a bellyache, maybe. I eat Army chow when I come up to the front. God knows how you poor souls survive on it.” It probably wasn’t anything like the fancy grub he ate back in New York City, Martin thought with a touch—more than a touch—of envy. Then Davis went on, “As a matter of fact, Sergeant, I know your work, too. That’s why I chose this unit when I decided to visit the Roanoke front.”

“Beg your pardon, sir?” For a second, Martin didn’t get it.

Richard Harding Davis spelled it out for him: “Teddy Roosevelt recommended you to me, as a matter of fact. He said you knocked him flat and jumped on him when the Rebs started shelling your men while he was on an inspection. If you’d do it for him, he said, you might even do it for me.” He flashed that formidable smile again.

“Do you want to know the truth, sir?” Martin said. “I’d almost forgotten about that. Been a lot of war since, if you know what I mean.”

Davis produced a notebook from a coat that had as many pockets as Joseph’s must have had colors and scribbled in it. “If you forget about the president of the United States, Sergeant, what do you remember?”

Martin chewed on that. When you thought about it, it was a damn good question. Most of what happened in the trenches wasn’t worth remembering. Most of what happened in the trenches, you would have paid anybody anything to forget. Davis right behind him, he turned out of a traverse and into a long firebay, and there found his answer. “When you get down to it, sir,” he said, “the only thing you want to remember is your buddies.”

Here came Paul Andersen, who’d been with him from the start. After so many casualties, that alone was plenty to forge a bond between them. Here came Specs Peterson, who looked as if he ought to be a pharmacist and who was probably the meanest, roughest son of a gun in the whole battalion. Here came Willard Tarrant, Joe Hammerschmitt’s replacement, who carried the name of Packer because he worked at the Armour plant in Chicago.

“Fellas, this here’s Richard Harding Davis,” Martin said, and let them tell the correspondent their own stories.

They had plenty of stories to tell him. If you stayed alive for a week at the front line, even a week where the official reports called the sector quiet, you'd have stories enough to last you the rest of your life—stories of courage and suffering and fear and endurance and everything else you could name. Experience was intense, concentrated, while it lasted…if it lasted.

Davis' hand raced over the pages of the little notebook, trying valiantly to keep up with the flood of words. At last, after what might have been an hour or so, the tales that came of themselves began to flag. To keep things going, the correspondent pointed east across the rusting barbed wire, across the cratered horror of no-man's-land, over toward the Confederate line, and asked, "What do you think of the enemy soldiers?"

Now Packer and Specs and the rest of the privates fell silent and looked to Martin and Andersen. It wasn't, Martin judged, so much because they were sergeant and corporal: more because they'd been there since the beginning, and had seen more of the Rebels than anybody else. Chester paused to gather his thoughts. At last, he said, "Far as I can see, Rebs in the trenches aren't a hell of a lot different than us. They're brave sons of bitches, I'll tell you that. We've got more big guns than they do, and there was a good long while there last summer when we had gas and they didn't, but if you wanted to move 'em back, you had to go in there with more men than they had and shift 'em. No way in hell they were going to run then, and they don't now, either."

Paul Andersen nodded. "That's how it is, all right. They're just a bunch of ordinary guys, same as we are. Too damn bad they didn't let us have a real Christmas truce last year, way there was in 1914. Nice to be able to stick your head out of the trench one day a year and know somebody's not going to try and blow it off. But what the hell can you do?"

"I'll tell you something, Corporal," Davis said. "The reason there wasn't a truce last year is that the powers that be—in Philadelphia and Richmond both, from what I hear—made certain there wouldn't be, because they watched the whole war almost fall to pieces on Christmas Day, 1914."

"What? They think we'd have quit fighting?" Packer Tarrant shook his head at the very idea. "Got to lick 'em. Taking longer than anybody figured, but we'll do it."

Several men nodded, most of them new to the front. Richard Harding Davis wrote some more, then asked, “If they’re just like you are in the trenches, what keeps you going against them?”

In a different tone of voice, the question would have been subversive. As it was, it produced a few seconds of thoughtful silence. Then Specs Peterson said, “Hell and breakfast, Mr. Davis, we done too much by now to quit, ain’t we? We got to beat those bastards, or all of that don’t mean nothin’.”

“That’s about the size of it,” Chester Martin agreed. “One of my grandfathers, he got shot in the War of Secession—and for what? The USA lost. Everything he did was wasted. Jesus, it’d be awful if that happened to us three times in fifty years.”

Corporal Andersen pointed over to the enemy lines. “And the Rebs, they don’t want to find out what losing is all about, either. That’s why they keep comin’at us, I guess. Been a lot of what the newspapers been calling Battles of the Roanoke, anyway.” As if to underscore his words, a machine gun started rattling away, a couple of hundred yards to the north. Rifles joined in, and, for five or ten minutes, a lively little firefight raged. Gradually, the firing died away. Anything might have started it. Martin wondered if anyone had died in the meaningless exchange of bullets.

“Are the Rebels any different since their Negroes rose in revolt?” Davis asked.

The soldiers looked at one another. “Not when we’re coming at them, that’s for sure,” Martin said, and everybody nodded. “You think about it, though, they haven’t been coming at us as hard lately. ’Course, it’s been winter, too, so I don’t know just how much that means.”

“Confederates more inclined to stand on the defensive.” Richard Harding Davis said the words aloud, as if tasting them before setting them down on paper. Then he grunted. It sounded more like surprise than approval. He looked at Martin—no, through Martin. His mouth opened, as if he was about to say something else.

Instead, he swayed. The notebook and pencil dropped from his hands into the mud. His knees buckled. He collapsed.

“Jesus!” Martin and the other soldiers crowded round the fallen reporter. Martin grabbed for his wrist. He found no pulse. “He’s dead,” the sergeant said in blank amazement. Davis’ body bore no wound he

could see. He knew a shell fragment as tiny as a needle could kill, but no shells had landed anywhere close by.

His shouts and those of his squadmates brought a doctor into the front line within a couple of minutes. The soldiers wouldn't have rated such an honor, but Davis was important. The doctor stripped the correspondent out of his fancy not-quite-uniform. Try as he would, he couldn't find a wound, either. "His heart must have given out on him, poor fellow," he said, and shook his head. "He's not—he wasn't—that old, but he'd been working hard, and he wasn't that young, either."

"Isn't that a hell of a thing?" Martin said as a couple of soldiers carried the mortal remains of Richard Harding Davis to the rear.

"Terrible," Paul Andersen agreed. "You got a cigarette?"

"Makings," Martin answered, and passed him a tobacco pouch. "Hell of a thing. You ever expect to see man die of what do you call 'em—natural causes—up here? What a fucking waste." Andersen laughed at that as he rolled coarse tobacco into a scrap of newspaper. After a moment, Martin laughed, too. Yes, graveyard humor came easy at the front. It was the only kind that did.

VI

"There is, there is, there *is* a God in Israel!" George Armstrong Custer chortled, brandishing a newspaper at his adjutant.

"Sir?" Abner Dowling said. He'd already seen the Army newspaper. He hadn't noticed anything in it to make him want to do a buck-and-wing. He wondered what the devil General Custer had spotted to bring him out of the bad-tempered depression in which he'd been sunk ever since his wife got to Kentucky.

Custer wasn't just happy, he was gloating. "Look!" he said, pointing to a story on the second page of the paper. "Richard Harding Davis had the good grace to drop dead on a visit to the front. I wish he would have done it while he was on *this* front, but damn me to hell if I'll complain."

Davis had written about Custer in less than flattering terms: a capital crime if ever there was one, as far as the general commanding First Army was concerned. "Sir, his work is being judged by a more exacting Critic now than any editor he knew here," Dowling said, which not only smacked of truth (if you were a believing man, as Dowling was) but was noncommittal, letting Custer pick for himself the way in which the late correspondent was likely to be judged.

He picked the way Dowling had been sure he would: "How right you are, Major, which means they've got him on a frying pan hotter than the one that does my morning bacon—and he'll stay there a lot longer and get a lot more burnt, not that that's easy these days." He hadn't stopped complaining about the ways the meals that were cooked for him had gone downhill since Olivia left. He hadn't stopped complaining to Dowling, that is. He hadn't said one word where his wife was liable to hear it. To Dowling's regret, the old boy had a

keenly developed sense of self-preservation.

Still snorting with glee, the illustrious general waddled into the kitchen. Dowling suspected the corporal doing duty at the stove for the time being would hear fewer fulminations than usual. When Custer was in a good mood, everything looked rosy to him. Trouble was, he wasn't in a good mood very often.

Libbie Custer came downstairs a moment later. She was only a few years younger than her husband, and had the look of a schoolmarm who would sooner crack a ruler over her pupils' knuckles than teach them the multiplication table. Her eyes were the gray of the sky just before it settles down to rain for a week. When she fixed her gaze on Dowling, he automatically assumed he'd done something wrong. He didn't know what yet, but he figured Mrs. Custer would tell him.

She, however, chose an indirect approach: "Did I hear the general laughing just now?" She often spoke of her husband in that old-fashioned way.

"Uh, yes, ma'am," Dowling answered. He had not taken long to decide that at least two thirds of the brains in the Custer family resided in the female of the species.

Libbie Custer did her best to prove herself more deadly than the male, too. "Where is she?" she hissed. "I'll send her packing in a hurry, I promise you that, and afterwards I'll deal with the general, too." She sounded as if she looked forward to it. More—she sounded as if she'd had practice at it, too.

But Dowling said, truthfully if not completely, "There's no woman here, ma'am. It was only—"

"Don't give me that." Mrs. Custer cut him off so abruptly, he was glad she didn't have a knife in her hand. "He's been doing this for forty years, the philandering skunk, ever since he found that pretty little Cheyenne girl, Mo-nah-see-tah—did you ever think you'd learn how to say 'stinking whore' in Cheyenne, Major Dowling? When he laughs that way, he's done it again. I know him. I ought to, by now, don't you think?"

"Ma'am, you're wrong." That was truthful, too, if only technically. Dowling had enough troubles serving as intermediary between Custer and the rest of First Army; serving as intermediary between Custer and Mrs. Custer struck him as conduct above and beyond the call of duty—far above. Rather desperately, he explained.

For a wonder, Libbie Custer heard him out. For another wonder, she didn't call him a liar when he was done. Instead, she nodded and said, "Oh, that explains it. Mr. Richard Harding Davis." George Armstrong Custer had sworn at Davis. He'd said he would use Davis' reportage in the outhouse. Nothing he had said, though, packed the concentrated menace of those four words. Mrs. Custer went on, "Yes, that would explain it. Thank you, Major."

She swept into the kitchen, her long, gray dress almost brushing the ground as she walked. She clung to the bustle, which had gone out of style for younger women a few years before. As far as Dowling was concerned, it made her look more like a cruising man-of-war than a stately lady, but no one had sought his opinion. No one was much in the habit of seeking his opinion.

From inside the kitchen came the sounds of mirth and gaiety—Dowling couldn't hear the words, but the tone was unmistakable. The general and his wife were happy as a couple of larks. Dowling scratched his head. A moment before, Mrs. Custer had been ready to scalp her husband. Now the two of them seemed thick as thieves. It didn't figure.

And then, after a bit, it did. Libbie Custer would come down on George like a dynamited building for any of his personal shortcomings. Given the scope of those, she had plenty of room for action. But Mrs. General Custer protected General Custer's career like a tigress. Bad press jeopardized the general, not the man.

"I couldn't live like that," Dowling muttered. And yet the Custers had been wed since the War of Secession. Marital bliss? Dowling had his doubts. He shook his head. He didn't have doubts, he damn well knew better. Whether they were what any outsider would call happy or not, though, they'd grown together. He doubted one of them would live more than a year or two if the other died. Libbie Custer looked ready to last another twenty years. Dowling wasn't so sure about the general. But he'd have bet Custer would have keeled over from a heart attack or a stroke, not Richard Harding Davis. You never could tell.

The two Custers came out of the kitchen arm in arm. For the moment, they presented a united front against the world, and would probably go right on doing so till Libbie found out for sure about Olivia. To his wife, the general said, "I do have to fight the war now. I'll see you in a while." She nodded and went upstairs. Custer turned to Dowling. "Major, I'll want to consult with you about the artillery preparation for the attack on Bowling Green. Give me ten minutes to

study the maps, then come into my office."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said. Custer was acting more like a proper general these days. That was likely to be Libbie's influence, too. *The brains of the outfit,* Dowling thought again.

While he was waiting for Custer to finish studying (an unlikely notion in and of itself), the kitchen door opened again. "Uh, sir?" It was the corporal who'd been frying everything in sight since Olivia made herself scarce.

"What is it, Renick?" Dowling asked.

The corporal, who looked more like a light-heavyweight prizefighter than a cook, opened his left hand to display a small gold coin. "Look, sir, the general gave me a quarter eagle. Said I was the best cook anybody could ask for. Said he'd write me a letter of commendation any time I wanted."

"Good for you, Renick," Dowling said. "I'll make sure he does that today." Davis' death was doing the cook some good, anyhow—but if Custer didn't sign that letter while still in the warm glow of euphoria, Renick didn't stand a Chinaman's chance of getting it added to his record, not on skill alone he didn't.

Dowling hurried to the tiny downstairs room he used as his own office, ran a sheet of Army stationery into his typewriter, and banged out the letter. Eventually, Mrs. Custer would go back to Michigan and Olivia would replace Corporal Renick. If he had that letter in his file, he might end up cooking for some other officer, not in the trenches. He seemed a good kid—why not give him a better chance to come out of the war in one piece?

And, sure enough, General Custer did sign the letter. "Fine lad," he said, "that young—whatever his name is."

"Renick, sir." Dowling put the letter back in the manila folder from which he'd produced it.

"Ah, yes, of course," Custer said, which meant he hadn't heard the answer but was too vain to ask his adjutant to say it over again louder. He picked up a pointer and aimed it at the situation map of Kentucky. "I am of the opinion, Major, that Bowling Green falls at the next onslaught."

"Seeing as we're approaching from the west and the north, the

Confederates will have a hard time keeping us out, yes, sir," Dowling agreed. "But fighting in built-up country can be expensive as the devil. As you said before, we need to use our superiority in artillery to the best advantage."

Custer hadn't actually said anything quite like that, but had talked about the artillery preparation, which, as far as his adjutant was concerned, came close enough. He scratched at his mustache. "We'll give the Rebs enough artillery preparation to blow them right back to the War of Secession," he growled. "And then we'll follow it with infantry, and then with cavalry—"

"I think the ground troops may well be able to capture the city without the cavalry, sir," Dowling said. Custer would probably remain sure to his dying day that cavalry could exploit any breakthrough the infantry made. Try as Dowling would, he hadn't been able to convince the general otherwise. Breakthroughs of any sort looked to be illusory in this war, and, if they came, the cavalry wasn't going to exploit them, not till somebody bred an armor-plated horse it wasn't.

"Ground troops," Custer grumbled. "Artillery." He let out a long, wheezy sigh. "The spirit has gone out of warfare, Major. It's not as it was when I was a young man."

"No, sir." Dowling wondered if he would be saying the same thing if he lived till 1950 or so. Maybe he would, but Dowling hoped he wouldn't try to turn an entire army on its head because he didn't care to adjust to a new reality.

Custer whacked the map with the stick. "And after Bowling Green falls, Major, we advance on Nashville! We took it in the War of Secession, and we held it, too, till the stinking limeys and frogs made us give it back. When we take it this time, we'll keep it."

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for? The words from Browning ran through Dowling's head. They'd needed a year and a half to get to—not yet into, but to—Bowling Green. At that rate, another year might, with luck, see them on the Cumberland. By the way Custer talked, he expected to be there week after next. As grand strategy, what he said made a certain amount of sense. Turning it from grand strategy to tactical maneuvering, though…was liable to fall squarely on Abner Dowling's broad shoulders.

"We'll need help from the Navy," he warned. "And up till now, their monitors haven't been able to get anywhere near Nashville."

“Well then, seems to me that they’ll need help from us, too,” Custer observed. The comment was so much to the point that Dowling frankly stared at the general commanding First Army. He’d been glad to have Libbie Custer come visit for no better reason than to see her husband dismayed. But if her presence meant Custer turned into something close to the general First Army needed, Dowling hoped she’d never leave.

And if that meant Custer didn’t get to jump on Olivia’s sleek brown body any more, everyone had to make sacrifices to win the war. *Hell,* Dowling thought, *I’ll even put up with Renick’s godawful cremated bacon*.

Cincinnatus pulled the wool sailor’s cap down over his ears to keep them warm as he walked to the Covington wharves. The sun wasn’t up yet, though the eastern sky glowed pink. Days were getting longer now, noticeably so, but it was still one snowstorm after another.

He walked past a gang of U.S. soldiers. They were busy tearing posters off walls and pasting up replacements. Some of the ones they were destroying had been smuggled up from the unoccupied CSA. Cincinnatus turned a chuckle into a cough so the soldiers wouldn’t notice him. He knew about those.

The other posters going down were printed in red and black—images of broken chains, stalwart Negroes with rifles, and revolutionary slogans. Cincinnatus knew about those, too.

He paused for a moment to have a look at the posters the U.S. soldiers were putting up to replace the Confederate and Red propaganda. The art showed three eagles—the U.S. bald eagle, the German black one, and the two-headed bird symbolizing Austria-Hungary—with their talons piercing four red-white-and-blue flags: those of the CSA, England, France, and Russia. The message was one word: VICTORY.

“Not bad,” he murmured, and disguised another chuckle behind a glove. He’d never expected to become a connoisseur of poster propaganda, not before the war started. A lot of things he’d never expected had happened since the war started.

He saw more of the three-eagle posters as he came closer to the riverfront, and nodded to himself: so the Yanks were going to be putting out a new type, were they? It had the look of the first in a

series. He wouldn't have thought of that kind of thing back in 1913, either.

When he got to the wharves, he waved to the other Negro laborers coming in to help keep the U.S. war effort moving. Some of them, no doubt, also belonged to Red revolutionary cells. He didn't know which ones, though. He hadn't had the need to know. What you didn't know, you couldn't tell.

Here came Lieutenant Kennan. *Goddamn pipsqueak,* Cincinnatus thought. If he ever got the chance, he knew he could snap Kennan in two like a stale cracker. But Kennan had the weight of the U.S. Army behind him. Now he fixed Cincinnatus with his customary glare. "You, boy!" he snapped.

"Yes, suh?" Cincinnatus said warily. Kennan sounded more filled with bile than usual, which was saying something.

"Don't I remember you bragging once upon a time that you could drive a truck?"

"Don't know about braggin', suh, but I can drive a truck," Cincinnatus said. "Been doin'it for a while before the war started." *Before the war started.* Here it was barely sunup, and that phrase had already crossed his mind several times. It was going to be a dividing line for his life, for everybody's life, for a long time to come.

Lieutenant Kennan looked as if every word he was about to say tasted bad. "You see that line of trucks over yonder? You get your ass over there, ask for Lieutenant Straubing, and tell him you're the nigger I was talking about."

"Yes, suh," Cincinnatus said. Were the Yanks finally getting smart? If they were, they'd taken their own sweet time about it. Better late than never? Cincinnatus wouldn't have bet on that, not till he saw for certain. "If I'm drivin' a truck, suh, what do they pay me?"

"I don't know anything about that," Kennan said, as if washing his hands of Cincinnatus. "You take it up with Lieutenant Straubing. You're his baby now." No, he didn't want to have anything to do with Cincinnatus. He rounded on the rest of the men in the labor gang. "What are you coons doing, standing around gaping like a bunch of gorillas? *Get* your nigger asses moving!"

Cincinnatus had all he could do not to spring over to the trucks to which Kennan had directed him. Nobody, he told himself, could be a

worse boss than the one he was escaping. But then, after a moment, he shook his head. Since the war began, he'd learned you couldn't tell about things like that.

A sentry near the trucks wore one of the helmets that made U.S. soldiers look as if they had kettles on their heads. He carried a Springfield with a long bayonet, which he pointed at Cincinnatus. "State your business," he snapped, with a clear undertone of *it had better be good*.

"Lieutenant Kennan back there, suh"—he pointed toward the wharf where his old gang, under Kennan's loud and profane direction, was beginning to unload a barge—"he tol' me to come see Lieutenant, uh, Straubing here."

For a moment, he wondered if there'd be no Lieutenant Straubing, and if Kennan, for reasons of his own (maybe connected with Cincinnatus' dealings with one underground or another, maybe only with Kennan's loathing for blacks) had sent him here to get in trouble, or perhaps to get shot.

But the sentry, though he didn't lower the rifle, did nod. "Stay right here," he said, as if Cincinnatus were likely to be going anywhere with that bayonet aimed at his brisket. Then he raised his voice: "Hey, Lieutenant! Colored fellow here to see you!"

Colored fellow. It was just a description. Cincinnatus, not used to being just described, heard it with some incredulity. Out from around the row of trucks came an ordinary-looking white man with silver first-lieutenant's bars on the shoulder straps of his U.S. uniform. "Hello," he said to Cincinnatus. "You the man Eddie was telling me about last night?" Seeing Cincinnatus' frown, he added, "Lieutenant Kennan, I mean?"

"Oh. Yes, suh." Cincinnatus had labored for Kennan for well over a year without learning, or wanting to learn, his Christian name.

"He says you can drive a truck," Straubing said. He waited for Cincinnatus to agree, then went on, "How long have you been doing that?"

"Couple-three years before the war started," Cincinnatus answered. "Haven't had the chance to do it since."

Lieutenant Straubing cocked his head to one side. "You don't hardly look old enough to have been driving that long." For a moment,

Cincinnatus thought he was calling him a liar. Then he realized Straubing meant he had a young-looking face. “Come on,” the lieutenant said, and walked him past the sentry. He halted in front of one of the big, green-gray White trucks. “Think you can drive this baby?”

“Reckon I can,” Cincinnatus said. The White was a monster, a good deal larger than the delivery truck he’d driven for Tom Kennedy. But it was still a truck. A crank was still a crank, a gearshift still a gearshift.

“All right. Show me. The key’s in it.” Lieutenant Straubing scrambled up into the truck, sliding over to the passenger’s half of the front seat.

Cincinnatus had no trouble starting the truck. It was a bare-bones military model, without even a windscreen, which surprised him when he climbed in behind the wheel, but he didn’t let it worry him. He didn’t ask Straubing about pay, either, not right then. That he wasn’t hauling heavy crates was plenty to keep him happy for the moment.

“Pull out of the line and take me on a spin through town. Be back here in, oh, twenty minutes or so,” Lieutenant Straubing told him over the growl of the motor.

“Yes, suh,” Cincinnatus said. He put the truck in gear and got moving. Every once in a while, he sneaked a glance over at the soldier beside him. He wanted to scratch his head, but didn’t. Something in the way Straubing dealt with him was peculiar, but he had trouble putting his finger on it.

They didn’t get back to the parked trucks in twenty minutes. They had a blowout not five minutes after getting on the road. Cincinnatus fixed it. Straubing helped, not the least bit fussy about getting mud and grease on his hands or on his uniform. “All right, where were we?” he said when the two of them got back onto the rather hard seat.

Cincinnatus didn’t answer. He didn’t feel he had to answer, even though a white man had just spoken to him. When he realized that, he realized what was funny about how the U.S. soldier was treating him: as one man would treat another, regardless of whether he was white and Cincinnatus black. No wonder Cincinnatus had taken so long to figure that out: as best he could remember, he’d never run into anything like it before.

Some white men hated Negroes, plain and simple. He’d met a good

many of those before having the imperfect delight of busting his hump for Lieutenant Kennan for so long. But that kind of out-and-out hatred wasn't the most common response he'd had from whites over the years. More treated him as they would have treated a mule: they gave him orders when they needed him and made as if he were invisible when they didn't.

He'd even had white men grateful to him: Tom Kennedy's image rose up in his mind. After he'd hidden his former boss and kept U.S. soldiers from finding him, Kennedy had been nice as you please. But it had been a condescending sort of niceness, even then: a lord being kind to a serf who by some accident of fate had been in position to do him a good turn.

He didn't feel any of that from Lieutenant Straubing. The way Straubing was acting, they might both have been white—or, for that matter, they might both have been black. He'd never run into that from Confederate white men. He hadn't run into it from Yankees, either, not till now. He didn't know how to react to it.

Straubing suddenly spoke up: "You can go on back now, Cincinnatus. I'm sold—you can drive a truck. Better than I can, wouldn't be surprised." As Cincinnatus turned back toward the riverfront, the lieutenant went on, "Dollar and a half a day suit you?"

"It's what I'm makin' now, most days," Cincinnatus answered, "but yes, suh, it suits. Work'll be easier."

"I thought longshoreman's rate was a dollar a day," Straubing said with a small frown. Then he laughed—at himself. "And I'm a dimwit. I think half the reason Kennan sent you over to me is that you were ruining his accounts, getting the extra half-dollar so often. The other half, unless I'm wrong, is that you were getting the extra half-dollar so often, you were ruining his notions of what colored people are like. He probably hasn't figured that half out for himself yet. Tell you what —I won't tell him if you don't."

Now Cincinnatus did stare at him. He almost ran down a horse and buggy before he started paying attention to the road again. Never in all his born days had he heard—or expected to hear—one white man discussing another's attitude toward Negroes, and discussing it in tones that made it obvious he thought Lieutenant Kennan was a damn fool.

"You're changing jobs—you ought to do better for yourself,"

Straubing said. “Hmm. Can you read and write?”

Cincinnatus looked at Lieutenant Straubing. One rule of survival for blacks in the Confederacy had always been, *Never let the white man find out how much you know*. Without that rule, the Red underground would never have had the chance to pull off its rebellion—not that the rebellion looked as if it would succeed, worse luck. He clicked his tongue between his teeth. “Yes, suh.”

“Good,” the U.S. lieutenant said. “In that case, my accounts’ll stand paying you a buck six bits. How does that sound?”

Before the war—that phrase again—$1.75 a day had been white man’s wages, and not the worst white man’s wages. It was a good deal more than Tom Kennedy had been paying him. “You got yourself a driver, Lieutenant,” Cincinnatus said.

“Good,” Lieutenant Straubing answered. “Glad to hear it. I can use people who know what they’re doing.”

Cincinnatus expected him to go on, *I don’t care if they’re white or black*. He’d heard that before, every now and then. Most of the time, it was a thumping lie: that you needed to say it proved it was a lie. But Straubing didn’t say it. By everything Cincinnatus could see, he took it for granted.

After Cincinnatus had parked the truck, Straubing led him into a dockside building and spoke to a clerk there. The clerk took down Cincinnatus’ name and where he lived and who his family were. Then he swore him to loyalty to the United States. Cincinnatus was already sworn to loyalty to the Confederate underground and to the Negro Marxist underground. He took the oath without hesitation—after so many, what was one more?

The clerk slid papers across the desk at him. “Make your mark here to show all this information is correct and complete. Lieutenant, you’ll witness it for him.”

Cincinnatus took the pen. He looked at the clerk. He signed his name in a fine, round hand. The clerk stared at him. “Good thing you know your letters,” Lieutenant Straubing said. “It’ll make you a hell of a lot more useful.”

Tom Kennedy had known he could read and write, too. Kennedy had also used that to his advantage. But with him, there had always been something of the flavor of a man using a high-school horse. It

wasn't there with Straubing. Cincinnatus'ear for such things was keen. Had it been there, he would have heard it.

Before long, blacks from the wharves were loading crates into the back of Cincinnatus' truck. They weren't from his labor gang, but he knew several of them even so. They looked at him from the corners of their eyes. Nobody said anything, not with white men all around: most of the other truck drivers were white, for instance. Cincinnatus waited to see how that would go.

The trucks rumbled out of Covington before nine o'clock. The front was between Lexington and Richmond, Kentucky: about a four-hour trip. A little more than halfway there, they rolled past the Corinth Monument, which commemorated Braxton Bragg's victory in late 1862 that had brought Kentucky into the Confederacy. Bragg's statue was gone from its pedestal these days, and the pedestal itself plastered over with fresh, crisp three-eagles posters. The USA aimed to keep as much of Kentucky as it had seized.

Laborers, mostly black but some white, unloaded the trucks. Some of what those had brought would go to the front in small wagons, some on muleback or on man's back. Cincinnatus ate his dinner out of the dinner pail, then drove the truck back to Covington. Everyone took him for granted. He still had trouble knowing what to make of that.

He got back into Covington with his headlamps on. Straubing paid off the drivers himself. Some got $1.50, some $1.75, some two dollars even. One of the two-dollar men was black. Nobody raised a fuss.

Money jingling in his pocket, Cincinnatus headed for home with more news for Elizabeth than he could shake a stick at. He went past Conroy's general store, as he always did when coming home from the riverfront. Conroy had a paper stuck in the bottom left-hand corner of his window. That meant he and Tom Kennedy wanted to see Cincinnatus.

"Well, I'll be damned if I want to see them," Cincinnatus muttered. "Paper? What paper? I didn't see no paper." He walked right past the general store.

* * *

Three eagles glared out at Flora Hamburger from every other wall as she walked to the Socialist Party offices. She glared right back at

them. She was sick to death of wartime propaganda. What worried her most was that the Democrats were getting better at what she'd thought of as a Socialist specialty.

Other posters (some with text in Yiddish as well as English; the government didn't miss a trick) exhorted people to buy the latest series of Victory Bonds, to use less coal than their legal ration (which was, most of the time, not big enough as it was), to take the train as little as they could (which also saved coal), to turn back glass bottles and tin cans, to give waste grease to the War Department through their local butcher shop, to…she lost track of everything. Anyone who tried to do all the things the posters urged him to do would go mad in short order.

But then, the world already seemed to have gone mad.

Here and there, among the eagles and the handsome men in green-gray and the women who had to be their wives or mothers, Socialist Party posters managed to find space. Keeping them up there wasn't easy. As fast as boys went round with pastepots and brushes, Soldiers' Circle men followed, tearing down anything that might contradict what TR wanted people to think today.

PEACE AND JUSTICE, one of the Socialist posters said. A SQUARE DEAL FOR THE WORKER, shouted another. A good many copies of that one stayed up; some of the Soldiers' Circle goons took it for a government-issued poster. Stealing the opposition's slogan was always a good idea.

Fewer Soldiers' Circle men prowled the Centre Market than was usually so. And, most uncommonly, none loitered in front of Max Fleischmann's butcher shop. Fleischmann was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the shop when Flora came up. "Good morning, my dear," he said with Old World courtliness. He was a Democrat himself, which didn't keep the government goons from giving him a hard time. With his shop right under Fourteenth Ward Socialist Party headquarters, it was guilt by association in the most literal sense of the words.

"Good morning, Mr. Fleischmann," Flora answered. "How are you today?"

"Today, not so bad," the butcher answered. "Last night—" He rolled his eyes. "You've seen the 'turn in old grease' posters?" After pausing to see if Flora would nod, he went on, "Last night, just as I was closing up shop, one of those Soldiers' Circle *mamzrim* brought in a gallon tin —of lard."

"Oy!" Flora exclaimed. That was more nastily clever than the Soldiers' Circle usually managed to be. A gallon of pig's fat in a kosher butcher shop…

"*Oy* is right," Fleischmann agreed mournfully. "Thank God I had no customers just then. I shut the shop and brought my rabbi over. The place is ritually clean again, but even so—"

"I can complain to the City Council about that kind of harassment, if you'd like me to," Flora said.

But the butcher shook his head. "Better not. If one of them does it one time, a *kholeriyeh* on him and life goes on. If you give the idea to a whole great lot of them, it will happen over and over for the next six months. No, better not."

"It shouldn't be like that," Flora said. But she'd spent enough time as an activist to know the difference between what should have been and what was. Shaking her head in sad sympathy with Max Fleischmann, she went upstairs.

People were still coming into the Socialist Party offices, which meant the chaos wasn't so bad as it would be later in the day. She had time to get a glass of tea, pour sugar into it, and catch up on a little paperwork before the telephones started going mad.

"How are you this morning?" Maria Tresca asked.

"I've been worse—little Yossel slept through the whole night," Flora answered. "But I've been better, too." She explained what the Soldiers' Circle man had done to Max Fleischmann.

Maria was Catholic, but she'd spent enough time among Jews to understand what lard in the butcher shop meant. "It's an outrage," she snapped. "And he probably went out to a saloon and got drunk afterwards, laughing about it."

"Probably just what he did," Flora agreed. "Anyone who could think of anything so vile, he should walk in front of a train."

Herman Bruck walked in just then. Flora wished fleetingly that he would walk in front of a train, too. But no, that wasn't fair. Yes, Herman was a nuisance and wouldn't leave her in peace. But he'd never yet made her snatch a hatpin out from among the artificial flowers where it lurked, and she didn't think he ever would. There were nuisances, but then there were nuisances.

“Good morning, Flora,” he said, setting his homburg on the hat tree. “You look pretty today—you must have had a good night’s sleep.”

“Yes, thanks,” she answered shortly. She wasn’t going to tell him about little Yossel. She didn’t encourage him—but then, he needed no encouragement.

He’d got himself some tea and sat down at his desk when a Western Union messenger opened the door to the office. Flora thought about the messenger who’d brought word of little Yossel’s father’s death back to Sophie at the apartment the family shared. She shook her head, annoyed at herself. That wouldn’t happen here. People didn’t live here, however much it sometimes seemed they did.

She accepted the yellow envelope, gave the delivery boy a nickel, and watched him head back down to the street. “Who is it from?” Herman Bruck asked.

“It’s from Philadelphia,” she answered, and tore the envelope open. Her eyes slid rapidly over the words there. She had to read them twice before she believed them. *No one would bring bad news here*. The thought jeered in her mind. “It’s Congressman Zuckerman,” she said in a voice so empty, she hardly recognized it as her own. “He was walking downstairs with Congressman Potts from Brooklyn, and, and, he tripped and he fell and, he, he broke his neck. He died not quite three hours ago.”

She had never heard the Socialist Party office go so quiet, not even in the aftermath of the Remembrance Day riots. Myron Zuckerman had been a Socialist stalwart in Congress since before the turn of the century. Come November, his reelection would have been as automatic as the movement of a three-day clock. The Democrats wouldn’t have put up more than a token candidate against him, and the Republicans probably wouldn’t have run anyone at all. All of a sudden, though, everything was different.

“There’s no doubt?” Maria Tresca asked.

“Not unless the telegram is wrong,” Flora answered. Her voice was gentle; she knew Maria hadn’t been doubting so much as hoping. She looked down at the telegram. It blurred, not from changing words but from the tears that filled her eyes.

“That’s—terrible.” Herman Bruck’s voice was shaken, as if he was holding back tears himself. “He was like a father to all of us.”

“What are we going to do?” Three people spoke at the same time. Everyone in the office had to be thinking the same thing.

Maybe because Yossel Reisen’s death had got her used to thinking clearly through shocks, Flora answered before anyone else: “The governor will appoint somebody to fill out the rest of his term.” That brought dismayed exclamations from everyone; Governor MacFarlane was as thoroughgoing a Democrat as anyone this side of TR.

“Almost a year of being represented by someone who does not represent us,” Maria Tresca said bitterly. The syntax might have been imperfect, but the meaning was clear.

“It’s liable to be longer than that,” Flora said. “Whoever he is, he’ll have most of that time to establish himself, too. He may not be so easy to throw out when November comes, either.”

“We’ll have to pick the finest candidate we can to oppose him, whoever he turns out to be,” Herman Bruck said. He stood up and struck a pose, as if to leave no doubt where he thought the finest candidate could be found.

Flora studied him. He was bright. He was earnest. He would campaign hard. If he was elected, he would serve well enough. He was also bloody dull. If Governor MacFarlane named someone with spirit, the Socialists were liable to lose this district. That would be… *humiliating* was the word that came to Flora’s mind.

I’d make a better candidate than Herman Bruck, she thought. At first, that was nothing but scorn. But the words seemed to echo in her mind. She looked at Bruck. She looked down at her own hands. Women could vote and hold office in New York State. She was over twenty-five. She could run for Congress—if the Socialists would nominate her.

She looked at Herman Bruck again. No one had shouted his name to the rafters, but there he stood, confident as if he were already the candidate. Of one thing she was certain: anyone so confident with so little reason could be overhauled. She didn’t know how it would happen, or even if she would be the one to do it, but it could be done. She was sure of that.

Arthur McGregor rode the farm wagon toward Rosenfeld, Manitoba.

Days were almost as long as nights now, but snow still lingered. They could have more snow for another month, maybe six weeks—and for six weeks after the thaw finally began, the road to Rosenfeld would be hub-deep in mud.

Most years, McGregor cursed the spring thaw, which not only cut him off from the world but also made working the fields impossible or the next thing to it. Now he turned to Maude, who sat on the seat beside him, and said, “The road’ll make it hard for the Yanks to move.”

“That it will,” she agreed. “Weather’s never been easy here for anyone. I expect they’ve found that out for themselves by now.”

Alexander McGregor sat up in the back of the wagon. “You know what they say about our seasons, Pa,” he said, grinning. “We’ve only got two of ’em—August and winter.”

“When I first came to this part of the country, the way I heard it was July and winter,” McGregor said. “But it’s not far wrong, however you say it. And when the weather’s bad, they have the devil of a time getting from one place to another.”

“Except for the trains,” Alexander said, making no effort to conceal his anger at the railroads. “If it’s not a really dreadful blizzard, the trains get through.”

“I can’t say you’re wrong, son, because you’re right,” McGregor answered. The way he thought about trains was another measure of how the past year and a half had turned the world on its ear. Up till the day the war started, he’d blessed the railroads. They brought supplies into Rosenfeld in all but the worst of weather, as Alexander had said. They also carried his grain off to the east. Without them, he would have had no market for most of what he raised. Without them, the Canadian prairie could not have been settled, nor defended against the United States if somehow it was.

But now the USA held the tracks leading up toward Winnipeg, and used them to ship hordes of men and enormous amounts of matériel to the fighting front. In peace, he’d blessed the railroad and cursed the mud. In war, he did the exact opposite. He nodded to himself. Things were on their ear, all right.

Mary stuck her head up and looked around. With her eyes sparkling and her round cheeks all red with cold, she looked like a plump little chipmunk. “We ought to do something about the railroads,” she said

in a voice that did not sound at all childlike. What she sounded like was a hard-headed saboteur thinking out loud about ways and means.

"You hush, Mary," her mother said. "You're not a soldier."

"I wish I was," Mary said fiercely.

"Hush is right," Arthur McGregor said. He looked back over his shoulder at Alexander. So far as he knew, his son was keeping the promise he'd made and not trying to act the part of a *franc-tireur*. So far as he knew. Till the war, he hadn't savored the full import of that phrase, either. It was what he didn't know that worried him.

Half a mile outside of Rosenfeld, a squad of U.S. soldiers inspected the wagon. McGregor hated to admit it, but they did a good, professional job, one of them even getting down on his back on the dirt road to examine the axles and the underside of the frame. They were businesslike with him, reasonably polite to Maude, and smiled at his daughters, who were too young to be leered at. If they gave Alexander a sour look or two, those weren't a patch on the glares he sent them. After a couple of minutes, they nodded and waved the wagon forward. Fortunately, Alexander didn't curse them till it had gone far enough so they couldn't hear him.

Julia gasped. Mary giggled. Arthur McGregor said, "Don't use that sort of talk where your mother and sisters can hear you." He glanced over to Maude. She was keeping her face stiff—so stiff, he suspected a smile under there.

Rosenfeld, as it had since it was occupied, seemed a town of American soldiers, with the Canadians to whom it rightfully belonged thrown in as an afterthought. Soldiers crowded round the cobbler's shop, the tailor's, the little café that had been struggling before the war started (what ruined most folks made a few rich), and the saloon that had never struggled a bit. There were three or four rooms up above the saloon that must have had U.S. soldiers going in and out of them every ten or fifteen minutes. McGregor had never walked up to one of those rooms—he was happy with the lady he'd married—but he knew about them. He glanced over to Maude again. She probably knew about those rooms, too. Husband and wife had never mentioned them to each other. He didn't expect they ever would.

Henry Gibbon's general store was full of U.S. soldiers, too, buying everything from five-for-a-penny jawbreakers to housewives with which to repair tattered uniforms in the field to a horn with a big red

rubber squeeze-bulb. “You don’t mind my askin’,” Henry Gibbon said to the sergeant in green-gray who laid down a quarter for that item, “what the devil you going to do with that?”

“Next fellow in my squad I catch dozing when he ain’t supposed to,” the sergeant answered with an evil grin, “his hair’s gonna stand on end for the next three days.” A couple of privates who might have been in his squad sidled away from him.

A tiny smile made the corners of McGregor’s mouth quirk upward. Back in his Army days, he’d had a sergeant much like that. When they were just being themselves, the Yanks were ordinary people. When they were being occupiers, though…The smile disappeared. If they had their way, they’d do whatever they could to turn all the Canadians in the land they’d occupied into Americans. That was why Julia and Mary didn’t go to the school they’d reopened.

McGregor held onto Mary’s hand; Maude had charge of Julia. They picked their way toward the counter. Some of the U.S. soldiers politely stepped aside. Others pretended they weren’t there. That rude arrogance angered McGregor, but he couldn’t do anything about it. He held his face still. So did Maude. Their children weren’t so good at concealing what they felt. Once he had to give Mary’s hand a warning squeeze to get rid of the ferocious grimace she gave an American who’d walked through the space where she had been standing as if she didn’t exist.

“Good day to you, Arthur,” Henry Gibbon said. Had a moving picture wanted to cast somebody as a storekeeper, he would have been the man, if only his apron had been cleaner: he was tubby and bald, with a gray soup-strainer of a mustache that whuffed out when he talked. “Brought the whole kit and kaboodle with you, I see. Well, what can I do for you this mornin’?”

“Need a couple of hacksaw blades, and a sack of beans if you’ve got some. We’ll get our kerosene ration, too, I expect, and the missus is going to make a run at your yard goods. And tobacco—”

“Ain’t got any.” Gibbon moved his hand just enough to suggest that the Yanks had bought him out. McGregor looked glum. So did Alexander. Life was hard. Life without a pipe was harder.

“And we’ll see what kind of candy you’ve got here, too,” McGregor said. His eye went to the Minnesota and Dakota papers piled on the counter. He reached out and shoved one of them at the storekeeper,

too. It would be full of Yankee lies, but new lies might be interesting.

He went over and stood by the pickle barrel, waiting while Maude told Gibbon what she needed and he compared that to what he happened to have, which was a good deal less. He wasn't quite emptied out, though, as McGregor had feared he would be. That was something, anyhow.

When McGregor took a look at the hacksaw blades while walking back to the wagon, he understood why. "These were made in the United States," he exclaimed, and then, a few steps later, "No wonder Henry's still got stuff on his shelves."

"Traitor," Alexander said, low enough so that none of the U.S. soldiers passing by could hear him.

But, after a moment, McGregor shook his head. "Everybody's got to eat," he said. "Storekeeper can't live selling dust and spiderwebs. I'm surprised he's able to get things from the USA, that's all." He rubbed his chin. "Maybe I'm not, not with all the soldiers he has in there. No, maybe I'm not. They're getting things from him they likely can't get straight from their own quartermasters."

"I don't like it," Alexander said as they got into the wagon.

"Everybody's got to eat," Arthur McGregor repeated. "Rokeby the postmaster sells those occupation stamps with ugly Americans on them, because those are the only stamps the Yankees let him sell. That doesn't make him bad; he's just doing his job. Weren't for the Yankees buying our crop last fall, I don't know what we'd be doing for cash money right now."

That produced an uncomfortable silence, which lasted for some time. None of the McGregors cared for the notion of the United States as an entity with which they and their countrymen did business, and upon which they depended. But whether you cared for the notion or not, it was true.

When they got back to the farmhouse, the front door was open. Maude spotted it first. "Arthur," she said reproachfully, "all the heat will have gone out of the house." McGregor started to deny having failed to shut it, but he'd ducked back inside for his mittens after everyone else was in the wagon, so it had to have been his fault.

So he thought, glumly, till a man in green-gray walked out onto the front porch and pointed at the wagon. Several more U.S. soldiers, all

of them armed, came running out of the house. “What are they *doing* here?” Alexander demanded, his voice quivering with indignation.

“I don’t know,” McGregor answered. Some of the Yankees were aiming rifles at him. He made very sure they could see both his hands on the reins.

The man who’d first spotted the wagon walked toward it. He wore a captain’s bars on each shoulder strap. “You are Arthur McGregor,” he said in a tone brooking no denial. He pointed. “That is your son, Alexander.”

“And who the devil are you?” McGregor asked. “What are you doing in my house?”

“I don’t have to tell you that,” the captain said, “but I will. I am Captain Hannebrink, of Occupation Investigations. We have uncovered a bomb on the railroad tracks, and arrested some of the young hotheads responsible for it. Under thorough interrogation”—which probably meant torture—“more than one of them named Alexander McGregor as an accomplice in their vicious attempt.”

“It’s a lie!” Alexander said. “I never did anything like that!”

Captain Hannebrink pulled a scrap of paper from his breast pocket. “Are you acquainted with Terence McKiernan, Ihor Klimenko, and Jimmy Knight?”

“Yes, I know them, but so what?” Alexander said. Arthur McGregor knew them, too: boys his son’s age, more or less, from nearby farms. He knew Jimmy and Ihor were hotheads; he hadn’t been so sure about the McKiernan lad.

“Do you deny having joined with them in discussing subversion and sabotage?” Hannebrink went on, all the more frightening for being so matter-of-fact.

“No, I don’t even deny that,” Alexander said. “I’m a patriot, the same as any good Canadian. But I never knew anything about a bomb on the tracks, and that’s the truth.”

The American captain shrugged. “We’ll find out what the truth is. For now, you’re coming with us.” A couple of his soldiers gestured with their rifles. Alexander had no choice. He scrambled out of the wagon and walked with them to a big motor truck they had waiting behind the barn. Its engine roared to life. It rolled away, back toward

Rosenfeld.

Arthur McGregor stared after it till it was no more than a black speck. Alexander had been talking about the railroad that very morning, but his father still thought he had kept the promise he'd made. That Alexander's keeping the promise might not matter hadn't occurred to him, not till now, not till too late.

Jonathan Moss looked down from several thousand feet on a yellow-green cloud of gas rolling from the American line toward the defensive positions the British and Canadians were holding. Chlorine was heavier than air. None of it, surely, had any way of reaching him here, more than a mile up in the sky. In any case, the goggles he was wearing against the wind would have given his eyes some protection against the poison gas. They stung in spite of that, and he felt like coughing.

He shook his head, annoyed at himself. "If the cook takes the head off a chicken, you don't get a pain in the neck," he said. The roar of the engine drowned the words, while the slipstream blew them away.

Artillery thundered down onto the Canucks and limeys in the wake of the gas. Some of the shells ripped through the air alarmingly close to his Martin single-decker. Those near misses made the aeroplane buck like a poorly broken horse. Accidental hit…You didn't want to think about an accidental hit. *Odds are against it,* Moss told himself very firmly.

Sure as sure, the Canucks and the English soldiers who helped fill their trenches were catching hell. Whenever their long, slow retreat moved them back into another town, they fought harder than ever. Now they were trying to hold on to Acton, a no-account little place a few miles east of Guelph. Acton had been no-account, anyhow. Now its name was going into the history books in letters of blood.

When the artillery let up, Americans swarmed out of their trenches and rushed across fields, some snow-covered, others brown-black with mud, toward the enemy line. Watched from high in the sky, it looked as if God's hand were moving pieces on an enormous board: more like chess than war.

One thing neither God nor gas nor shelling had managed was to sweep all the Canucks and limeys from that board. Machine guns

began winking from redoubts of timber and sandbags. Between them came flashes of rifle fire. From his lofty perch, Moss saw the American advance falter.

He also saw Dud Dudley wagging his wings up ahead of him. The flight was supposed to support the infantry attack on Acton. Dudley put the nose of his fighting scout down and dove on the enemy trenches. Tom Innis followed. So did Moss, the wind howling past the wires supporting his wings. So did Phil Eaker, who had replaced Zach Whitby, who had replaced Luther Carlsen, who had probably replaced…

Moss didn't want to think about that, either. He was a replacement here, too, even if he'd been in the war from the beginning. Instead, he thought about the rapidly swelling scene below. Yes, the attack had bogged down, sure as the devil. The artillery hadn't cut enough wire in front of the enemy trenches to give the Americans decent avenues to close with their foes. The United States had come as far as they had in Canada on the strength of overwhelming numbers. If they kept throwing men away at this rate, their numbers wouldn't stay overwhelming forever.

"That's what I'm here for," Moss said. "To get rid of some numbers on the other side."

He squeezed the firing button for his machine gun. Tracers let him guide the stream of bullets down the trench ahead of him as he roared over it at treetop height. The way the khaki-clad soldiers scattered before him made him feel treetop tall himself, as firing at men on the ground always did. He felt like a boy in short pants, amusing himself by stepping on bugs.

If you fooled with the wrong bug, though, you were liable to get stung. And the soldiers in the traverses, which ran perpendicular to his line of fire, blazed away at him instead of scattering. He laughed, as he would have laughed stepping on a bee while wearing shoes. They'd have a hell of a time hurting him: how could they draw a bead on a target streaking past at almost a hundred miles an hour?

Thwump! A bullet passing through canvas made a noise like a drumstick tapping on a rather loose drumhead. A lot of bullets were in the air. Some, dammit, *would* touch the aeroplane. He'd found that out in scraps with the limeys and Canucks, right at the start of the war. It was unnerving *(thwump!)*, but you could put a lot of holes in an aeroplane's canvas and it would keep on flying. *Thwump!*

Clang! He swore. That wasn't canvas, that was the engine. His oil pressure began to drop. Maybe, he thought hopefully, the bullet had only damaged the pump mechanism. He had a hand squeeze-bulb to augment that; the pump was often balky. He couldn't shoot and work the squeeze-bulb at the same time. When he stopped shooting to work the bulb, the pressure kept dropping. It wasn't the pump mechanism. A fine mist of oil started coating his goggles. He could leave them on and not see well from oil…or take them off and not see well from the breeze.

Clang! "That's not fair!" he shouted angrily. Fair or not, the damage the second bullet had done was immediately obvious. A plume of hot water from the radiator rained back on him.

He turned back toward the U.S. lines and put the Martin into a steep climb, figuring he'd need all the altitude he could get before—No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than the engine started dying. He throttled back for a moment, to see whether it would run better at low revs.

When it didn't, he gave it all the power it had. "A short life but a merry one," he said, and wondered whether he was talking about the engine or himself. He'd find out, one way or the other.

Abruptly, the engine went from dying to dead. That left him in charge of a nose-heavy glider a couple of hundred feet above no-man's-land. He kept the nose up as best he could. The ground got closer with every beat of his heart.

He was over the American trench line—not very far over it, either. An idiot took a shot at him. *Thwump!* The bullet drilled through the fuselage, not far behind him. *Nice to know our boys on the ground are such good shots*, he thought, and then, *If I ever find out who that son of a bitch is, I'll kick his teeth in*.

Between trenches and shell holes, he couldn't have found a worse landscape in which to try to set down an aeroplane. If he'd had a choice, he wouldn't have tried it. He had no choice. There was a road of sorts, one on which fresh ammunition and supplies came to the front. And there was a little train of wagons on it, bringing forward whatever they were bringing.

Would he—could he—get over them and set the Martin down? "I'll do it or die trying," he said, and giggled. Never had a hackneyed phrase been more literally true.

With his engine fallen silent, he could hear the horses whinny in fright. He could hear their drivers cuss, too. He thought that, if he'd wanted to, he could have reached down and snatched the caps off those drivers' heads. He cleared their wagons that closely.

A moment later, his landing gear thudded down on rutted earth. The ruts, God be praised, ran in the direction he was going. The surface, he thought thankfully, wasn't that much worse than the usual landing strip.

Then one of the wheels went into a hole. His teeth slammed together on his tongue. Blood filled his mouth. The aeroplane tried to stand on its nose. If it had succeeded, it would have shoved the engine and machine gun back into his chest and squashed him into jelly. It didn't have quite enough momentum. The tail slammed back to earth. Moss bit his tongue again.

He unfastened his harness and scrambled out of the Martin. It hadn't caught fire, but that didn't mean it couldn't. He stood there on the muddy, half-frozen ground, looking for any sign of the rest of his flight. He saw no aeroplanes at all.

The driver of the rearmost wagon hopped down and ran toward him. "You all right, buddy?" he asked.

Moss spat a mouthful of red into the muck, but then he nodded. "Think so," he answered. Talking hurt, but other than that and what would probably be bruises where the harness had kept him from going facefirst into the instrument panel, he didn't seem damaged.

"Thought you was going to clip me there," the driver said. "Had time for one Hail Mary"—he crossed himself—"and then you was over me."

"Yeah." Moss' legs suddenly felt as if they were made of some cheap grade of modeling clay, not flesh and bone. Now that he was down, he could realize what a narrow escape he'd had. Before, up in the air, he'd been too busy trying to stretch every last inch from his bus.

Soldiers came out of the trenches to shake his hands and congratulate him on being in one piece. Among them was a captain who asked, "Where's your aerodrome, pal?"

"Back near Cambridge," he answered.

"We'll get you home," the captain told him. "Probably tomorrow,

not today. You can enjoy the hospitality of the trenches tonight." He stuck out a hand. "I'm Clyde Landis."

"Jonathan Moss, sir." Just then, the Canucks started lobbing artillery at where they thought his aeroplane had gone down. Diving into the trenches seemed the most hospitable thing in the world.

All the rest of that day, the soldiers made much of him. They gave him cigars and big bowls of horrible slumgullion and enough shots of the rotgut they weren't supposed to have to make his head swim. They all sounded convinced he was a hero, and made him tell story after story of what fighting in the air was like.

More shells rained down. He wouldn't have done an infantryman's job for a million dollars. If there were any heroes in the war, the foot sloggers were the ones. They laughed when he said so.

"This is a letter from your father," Sylvia Enos said to George, Jr., and Mary Jane. "See how it says NAVAL POST on the envelope by the stamp?" George, Jr., nodded impatiently. He knew his ABCs, and he could read a few words. To Mary Jane, the rubber-stamped phrase didn't mean anything.

Sylvia opened the envelope and took out the letter. She read aloud in a portentous tone: "'Dear Sylvia'—that's me—'I hope you and the children are well. I am fine here. We have done some fighting on the river. I came through it fine and so did the ship. We hit the enemy and he did not hit us.'"

"Boom!" George, Jr., yelled, as if he were a shell going off. Then, as best he could on the floor of the front room, he imitated a stricken warship capsizing and sinking, finishing the performance with a loud, "Glub, glub, glub!"

Mary Jane thought that was very funny. So did Sylvia, till it crossed her mind that the *Punishment* could have been the vessel going to the bottom as easily as its foe. "Do you want to hear the rest of the letter?" she asked, more sharply than she'd intended. *She* wanted to finish it; George didn't write so often as she wished he would. With a touch of guilt, she realized her own letters were also fewer and further between than they should have been.

"Yes, Mama," George, Jr., said, Mary Jane chiming in with, "Rest of

letter!”

“‘I miss all of you and I wish I could come back to Boston,’” she resumed. “‘Here in the middle of the country you cannot get any fish that is very good. The cooks do up catfish we catch in the river but no matter what you do to it it still tastes like mud.’”

“Yuck!” George, Jr., exclaimed. Mary Jane stuck out her tongue.

“‘I love all of you and hope I will get some leave one day before too long,’” Sylvia finished. “‘Tell the children to be good. I bet they are getting as big as can be. Your husband, George.’”

“George,” Mary Jane said in tones of wonder. She pointed to her brother. “George.”

“That’s right,” Sylvia said. “George, Jr., is named after his papa—your papa, too, you know.”

“Papa.” Mary Jane dutifully repeated the word and nodded, but she didn’t sound convinced. She hadn’t seen her father for months. Sylvia wondered if she remembered him. She said she did, but then she said all sorts of things that had only the vaguest connection with reality. Seeing her, remembering George, Jr., at the same age, Sylvia was convinced two-year-olds lived in a very strange world. She wondered if she’d been like that at the same age. She probably had.

George, Jr., asked, “Will Papa ever come home before the war ends and we’ve beaten the Rebs all up?”

Where does he hear such things? Sylvia wondered. At home, she didn’t talk much about the war. That left Brigid Coneval and the other children she watched. Sylvia shrugged. She supposed war needed hate, but wished it didn’t. The question deserved an answer, though, no matter how it was framed. She said, “When Papa talked about getting leave in his letter, that meant he hoped he could come for a visit before he had to go back to his ship.”

“Oh,” her son said seriously. “Well, I hope he can, too.”

“I’ll get supper going now, and then we’ll wash you two and put you to bed,” Sylvia said. That drew mixed responses. Her children were hungry, but unenthusiastic about baths and even more unenthusiastic about bedtime. She told them, “If you eat all your supper up and you’re good in the bathtub, maybe you can play for a little while afterwards.”

They wolfed down fried halibut and potatoes, they didn't do anything too outrageous when she took them out of the apartment and down the hall to the bathroom at the end (a good thing, too, with her carrying hot water to mix with the cold), and they didn't splash up the place too badly. She brought them back swaddled in towels, and changed George, Jr., into pajamas (which made him look very grown-up) and Mary Jane into her nightgown.

George, Jr., played with toy soldiers, the U.S. troops storming trench after Confederate trench. Sylvia wished it were really so easy. Mary Jane gave her doll a bottle, then climbed up into Sylvia's lap and fell asleep there. Not even the bloodcurdling explosions her brother kept producing did anything to stir her.

Maybe so much warmaking had worn out George, Jr., too, for he didn't put up his usual complaints about going to bed. That left Sylvia the only one awake in the apartment, which seemed, as it often did at such times, too big and too quiet.

"I should write to George," she said. She found paper and a pen soon enough, but the bottle of ink had escaped. She finally came upon it lurking in her sewing box. "*I* didn't put it there," she declared, and wondered which of her offspring had. Mary Jane would say no to everything on general principles, and George, Jr., knew better than to admit to anything that would get him spanked.

Dear George, Sylvia wrote, *I got your letter. It was good to hear from you. I am glad you are well and safe. I saw Charlie White's wife on T Wharf and she says he is out to sea on a cruiser. They will have good food on that ship*. Despite his name, Charlie was black, not white, and had been the cook on the *Ripple*. Reinking her pen, she went on, *I am well. The children are well. We all hope you do get leave so we can see you. We miss you. I love you. Sylvia*.

When she was done, she read the letter over. It seemed so flat and empty. She wished she were a better writer, to be able to say all the things she wanted to say, all the things that really mattered. Maybe she could have done that if she'd had more schooling. As things were…it would have to do. More searching scared an envelope out of cover. *Seaman George Enos,* she wrote on it. *U.S. Navy. Central River Command. St. Louis, Mo*. She went on one more scouting expedition, this time through her handbag in search of a stamp. She found one, stuck it on the envelope, and put the letter in the handbag so she could mail it in the morning.

In the chaos of getting the children ready and over to Mrs. Coneval's and then of getting herself off to work, she forgot about the letter. She remembered only when her machine stuck the first label on a can of mackerel. Can after can followed that first one. She had to pull three levers for each can, keep the machine full of labels and paste, and clear the feeding mechanism when it jammed, as it did every so often.

After a while, she noticed Isabella Antonelli wasn't at the machine next to hers. The foreman, Mr. Winter, was running it instead. Mr. Winter was fat and fifty-five and walked with a limp from a wound he'd got in the Second Mexican War. The Army didn't want him, which made him a godsend for the canning plant.

When she asked him where her friend was, she thought for a moment he hadn't heard her over the rattle of the lines that sent the cans moving from one station to the next. Then he said, "She called on the telephone this morning. Western Union visited her last night."

"Oh, God," Sylvia said. Isabella Antonelli's husband had been a fisherman on a little boat that operated out of T Wharf. Then the Army had taken him and sent him off to Quebec. The newspapers did their best to be optimistic about the fighting north of the St. Lawrence, but their best wasn't all that good. The going was hard up there, and bad weather liable to last till May.

Mr. Winter nodded. He was bald, with a fringe of gray hair above his ears; the lights shone off his smooth pate. "She'll be out a few days, I'm afraid," he said. "They'll put a temporary on the machine here tomorrow, I expect, till she can come back."

Sylvia nodded, too, hiding a flash of fury frightening in its fierceness. Yes, Mr. Winter was a godsend for the canning plant, all right. He thought of getting the mackerel out before he worried about the people who got it out. *Keep the machines running, no matter what,* she thought. Antonelli was one more line in the casualty lists? So what?

She filled the paste reservoir to her machine from one of the cans under it. The foreman at the paste plant probably had the exact same attitude. For that matter, the generals probably had the exact same attitude, too. What was Antonelli to them but one more line in the casualty lists?

All the canning machines, including Sylvia's, ran smoothly, unlike the war machine. She pulled her three levers, one after the other, then

went back and did it again and again and again. If you didn't notice how your feet got sore from standing by the machine for hours at a time, you could get into a rhythm where you did your job almost without conscious thought, so that half the morning could go by before you noticed. Sylvia didn't know whether to like those days or be frightened of them.

Mr. Winter's voice startled her out of that half-mesmerized state: "*Your* husband well, Mrs. Enos?"

"What?" she said, and then, really hearing the words, "Oh. Yes. Thank you. I got a letter from him yesterday, as a matter of fact. I wrote an answer, too," she added virtuously, "but I forgot to mail it this morning. I'll do it on the way home."

"Good. That's good." The foreman's smile displayed large yellow teeth, a couple of them in the lower jaw missing. "Good-looking woman like you, though, I bet you get lonely anyhow, no man around. Being lonely's no fun. I know about that, since Priscilla died a few years ago."

Numbly, Sylvia nodded. The machine ran low on labels, which let her tend to it without having to say anything. Mr. Winter hadn't been crude, as men sometimes were. But she felt his eyes on her as she loaded in the labels. He was the foreman. If he pushed it and she said no, he could fire her. The line kept running smoothly, but she never got the easy rhythm back.

VII

Among the butternut uniforms in the West Virginia prisoner-of-war camp were a few dark gray ones: Navy men captured by the damnyankees. Reggie Bartlett found himself gravitating toward them. For a while, he wondered why; he'd never had any special interest in the Confederate States Navy before the war began. After a bit, he found an answer that, if it wasn't the whole picture, was at least a good part of it.

The trouble was, soldiers were boring. He'd done as much hard fighting as any of them, and more than most—war in the Roanoke valley was as nasty a business as war anywhere in the world. He'd seen almost all the horrors there were, and heard about the ones he hadn't seen. Soldiers told the same kinds of stories, over and over again. They got stale.

Navy men, now, Navy men were different, and so were their stories. They'd been in strange places and done strange things—or at least things Reggie Bartlett had never done. Those tales made the time between stretches of chopping wood and filling in slit trenches and the other exciting chores of camp life pass more quickly.

Even when things went wrong in the stories, they went wrong in ways that couldn't happen on dry land. A senior lieutenant who somehow managed to look clean and spruce and well-shaved in spite of the general camp squalor was saying, "Damnyankees suckered me in, neat as you please. There sat this fishing boat, out in the middle of the Atlantic, no ships around her, naked as a whore in her working clothes. So up came my boat to sink her with the deck gun—cheaper and surer than using one of my fish—"

"One of your what, Lieutenant Briggs?" Reggie asked, a beat ahead

of a couple of other prisoners who had gathered around the Navy lieutenant for reasons probably similar to his own.

“Torpedoes,” Briggs explained. Under his breath, he muttered, “Landlubbers.” But he resumed after a moment, as glad to tell the story as the others were to hear it: “You can’t always trust a whore, though, even when she’s naked. And sure enough, this was the badger game. The fishing boat was towing a Yankee sub on a cable with a telephone line attached. I let the fishermen go over the side before I sank their boat, and what thanks did I get? Their damned submersible blew me out of the water.” His face clouded. “Only a couple-three of us lived. The rest went right to the bottom, never had a chance.”

“It’s almost like what the Mormons done to the damnyankees, blowin’ up all that powder right under ’em,” somebody said.

“More like sniper’s work,” Reggie contradicted. “A lot of times, a sniper’ll be hiding, and he’ll try and make somebody on the other side look up to see what’s going on further down the trench. And if you’re dumb enough to do it, the bastard with the scope on his rifle, he’ll put one right in your earhole for you.”

“Good analogy,” Briggs said, nodding. He wasn’t a whole lot older than Bartlett, but better educated and also stiffer in manner; had he been a civilian, he would have been something like a junior loan officer at a bank. He was steady, he was sound, he was reliable—and Reggie would have loved to play poker against him, because if the Yankees could play him for a sucker that way, Reggie figured he could, too.

He’d just noticed that his analogy, whether Briggs approved of it or not, took things back to the trenches when the U.S. guards started shouting, “Prisoners form by barracks in parade ranks!”

Senior Lieutenant Briggs frowned. “This isn’t right. It’s not time to form parade ranks.” The break in routine irked him.

“Probably got some kind of special announcement for us,” Bartlett said. The guards had done that before, a time or two. The special announcements they handed out weren’t good news, not if you backed the Entente.

He didn’t get the chance to learn Briggs’ opinion of his guess; he had to hurry off to form up outside his own harsh, chilly building, a good ways away from where the Navy man was holding forth. The uniforms he and his comrades in misery wore would have given a

Confederate drill sergeant a fit, but the ranks the men formed were as neat and orderly as anything that sergeant could have wanted.

“What do you reckon this is?” Jasper Jenkins asked, taking his place beside Bartlett.

“Dunno,” Reggie told his friend. “I hope it’s that we’ve had a couple more escapes, and they’re gonna make the rest of us work harder on account of that. I don’t mind paying the price they put on it. Worth it, you ask me.”

“Yeah, that’d be good,” Jenkins agreed. “They haven’t figured out that we’re gonna keep on tryin’ to break out o’ here no matter what they do. Only a fool’d want to stay, and that’s a fact.”

A U.S. captain strode importantly to the front of the prisoners’ formation. He unfolded a sheet of paper and read from it in a loud, harsh voice: “The Imperial German government, the loyal ally of the United States, has announced the capture of the city of Verdun, the French having evacuated the said city after being unable in six weeks of battle to withstand the might of German arms. Victory shall be ours! Dismissed!”

The neat ranks of prisoners broke up into pockets of chattering men. Jasper Jenkins tugged at Bartlett’s sleeve. “Hey, Reggie, where’s this Vair-done place at?” he asked. Before the war, he probably would have asked the same thing about Houston or Nashville or Charleston; his horizon had been limited to his farm and the small town where he sold his crops and bought what little he couldn’t raise for himself.

Reggie could have done better at the geography of the Confederate States. When it came to foreign countries, even foreign countries to which the CSA was allied…“I dunno, not exactly,” he admitted. “Somewhere in France, it has to be, and I reckon somewhere near Germany, or the Huns wouldn’t have been fighting for it. Past that, though, I can’t tell you.”

“Damnyankees sound like losin’ it’s about two steps from the end o’ the world for the Frenchies,” Jenkins said.

“I know they do,” Reggie answered, “but you’ve got to remember two things. First one is, for all you know, they’re lying just to get us downhearted. Second one is, even if they’re not, I expect they’re making it out to be more important than it really is. What are we going to do, call ’em liars?”

“They’re damnyankees—of course they’re liars,” Jenkins said, as if stating a law of nature. “You got a good way of lookin’ at things, pal. Thanks.” He went off, whistling a dirty song.

Having made his friend happy, Reggie discovered he was unhappy himself: Jenkins had made his bump of curiosity itch. He went off looking for Senior Lieutenant Briggs. The naval officer being an educated man, he would be the one to know where Verdun was and what its fall meant.

He found Briggs without much trouble, then wished he hadn’t. The Navy man sat on the ground in front of his barracks, head in hands, the picture of misery. Bartlett didn’t think the news the Yankees had announced could do that to a man, and wondered if Briggs had just got word his brother had been killed or his sweetheart had married somebody else.

But when he asked what the matter was, Briggs, like Poe’s raven, spoke one word and nothing more: “Verdun.”

“Sir?” Reggie said. Losing one town didn’t sound like that big a catastrophe to him. The Confederacy had lost a good many towns, all along the border, but was still very much in the fight.

“Verdun,” Briggs repeated, and climbed heavily to his feet. “From everything I heard, the French were swearing they’d defend the place to the last man. Now they’ve pulled back instead. The Germans have hit ’em such a lick, they couldn’t afford to keep on fighting where they were, not if they wanted to hang on. Best they think they can do now, looks like, is make the Huns pay such a price for the land they get that they decide it’s not worth the cost.”

“That’s not so bad,” Reggie began, but then corrected himself: “It’s not so good, either. The Germans, they’re inside France, and the French, they don’t have any soldiers inside Germany.”

“Now you’re getting the picture,” Briggs agreed. “Same sort of picture we’ve got over here, too—a goddamn ugly one.”

“Yes, sir.” Reggie tried to look on the bright side: “We’ve still got us Washington.”

“For now,” the Navy man said—the report from France seemed to have taken all the wind from his sails. “I tell you this, though, Bartlett: our country is going to need every man it can lay its hands on if we’re going to give the American Huns what they deserve.” He paused to let

that sink in, then added in a low voice, “It is the positive duty of every prisoner of war to try to escape.”

Reggie felt a sudden hollow in the pit of his stomach having nothing to do with the hunger that never left. “The Yankees can shoot you if they catch you trying to escape,” he remarked. “They catch you after you’ve got out, they can pretty much do what they want to you.” Under the laws of war, Confederate guards had the same rights with U.S. prisoners, but he didn’t dwell on that.

Briggs just nodded, as if he’d remarked on the weather. “If we once get out, we can get away. We wouldn’t be like Frenchmen stuck in the middle of Germany. We speak the same language as the Yankees.”

“Not just the same language,” Reggie objected. “They talk ugly.”

“I think so, too,” Briggs said. “But I know how they talk and how it’s different from the way we talk. I can teach you. Come with me.” The last three words had the snap of an order. Bartlett followed him into the barracks. The senior lieutenant picked up an object made of galvanized sheet iron and walked across the room with it, asking, “What am I doing?” as he walked.

“Why, you’re toting that pail, sir.” Reggie stated the obvious.

But Briggs shook his head. “That’s what I’d be doing in the CSA,” he said. “If I’m doing it in the USA, I’m carrying this bucket. You see?”

“Yes, sir,” Bartlett said, and he did see. For that last part of the sentence, Briggs hadn’t sounded like a Confederate at all. He’d not only chosen different words, he’d sort of pinched his mouth up, so all the vowel sounds were somehow sharper. “How’d you do that?”

“Got started in theatricals at the Naval Academy down in Mobile,” Briggs answered. “If we can get outside the wire, it’ll come in handy. Like I say, I can teach you. Do you want to learn? Do you want to do the other things you’ll have to do to get outside the wire?”

It was a good question. If he stayed here, Reggie could sit out the war, if not in comfort, at least in security. If he tried to escape, he guaranteed himself all the risks involved with Yankee guards and patrols. If he managed to evade them and got back to the CSA, what would happen next? He knew exactly what would happen: they’d pat him on the back, grant him a little leave, and then hand him a new uniform and a Tredegar and put him back in the line. Hadn’t he had enough of that for a lifetime?

“I’m carrying the bucket,” he said, trying to pronounce the words as Briggs had. He wasn’t getting them right. He could hear that.

“Listen.” Briggs repeated the phrase. Bartlett tried it again. “Better,” the Navy man said. Reggie didn’t know exactly how he’d agreed to try to escape from the prisoner-of-war camp, but, by the time he left Briggs’ barracks, he had no doubt he’d done just that.

“Closing time, gentlemen,” Nellie Semphroch said as the clock in the coffeehouse finished striking nine. When none of the Confederate officers—or the Washingtonians who’d grown rich dealing with them—showed any sign of being ready to leave, she added, “I’m following the regulations you people set down. You wouldn’t want me to break your own rules, would you?”

A plump, gray-haired colonel who did not look to be the sort for late night adventures rose from his chair, saying, “We must set an example for the lovely ladies here.” He tossed a half-dollar down on the table and walked out into the night.

With him taking the lead, the rest of the men and the handful of women—*loose women,* Nellie thought, for what other kind would consort with the occupiers?—drifted out of the coffeehouse. Last of all went Nicholas H. Kincaid, who paused outside the doorway to send a mooncalf look back at Edna till Nellie almost broke his nose by slamming the door in his face.

“Ma, you keep doin’ things like that, he won’t come back no more,” Edna said, gathering up cups and saucers and plates and tips, some in scrip, some in good silver money.

“God, I hope he doesn’t,” Nellie said. “He’s not here for the coffee and victuals. He’s here because he’s all soppy over you.” The reverse, as she knew, also held; she’d caught them kissing and well on their way to worse a year before, and had watched Edna like a hawk ever since.

Her daughter just tossed her head. “He’s all right,” she said carelessly. “There are plenty of others, though.” That was calculated to make Nellie steam, and achieved the desired effect. Nellie was bound and determined that her daughter should go to the altar a maiden—she knew too well how grim the alternative could be. But Edna, and Edna’s hot young blood, weren’t making things easy.

Work helped. Running the coffeehouse kept the two of them hopping from sunup till long past sundown. If you were busy, you didn't have time to get into trouble. Nellie said, "Start doing up the dishes. I'll help in a minute—I want to count up what's in the till first."

"All right, Ma," Edna said. She *would* work, Nellie admitted to herself, more than a little grudgingly. She wasn't a *bad* girl, not really, just a *wild* girl, wild for life, wild for anything she could get her hands on, wild to let life—and the men crawling through life—get their hands on her.

The cash box was nicely heavy. Nellie had thought it would be. If she could do any one thing, it was gauge how busy the place had been through the day. Most of the take was in silver, too; as her place had become a favorite stop for the occupiers, they became more likely to give her real money and fob off their nearly worthless scrip on merchants whose goodwill mattered less to them.

"A couple of dollars less than I thought there would be," she murmured, and then shrugged. She was doing well enough that a couple of dollars one way or the other mattered much less to her than they would have before the war started. She had no use for the Rebs, she spied on them whenever their loose talk gave her the chance, but she was getting, if not rich, at least well-to-do off them. *Serves them right,* she thought, and went to help her daughter clean up.

Artillery rumbled, off to the north and northeast, the noise clearly audible through splashing and the clank of china on china. "Louder these days," Edna remarked, glancing in the direction of that deep-throated roar.

"Were you listening to the Rebs tonight?" Nellie asked. Edna shook her head. That exasperated her mother; Edna saw the war only in terms of how it affected her—not least by supplying her with handsome young Confederate officers to meet. Nellie went on, "They say they think they can stop our attack out of Balti-more, but it didn't sound to me like they were real sure about it. If we're lucky, we may run the Rebs out of here this summer."

Edna kept right on drying saucers. She didn't say anything for a while. The way she stood, though, suggested she wasn't altogether sure it would be good luck. She liked the way things were going. Business wouldn't be the same with the USA holding Washington again.

That wasn't all that wouldn't be the same. Mother and daughter spoke together. Nellie said, "The Rebs won't want to give this town back," while Edna put it more gamely: "They'll fight like bastards to hold on to Washington."

They finished doing the dishes in gloomy silence. There wouldn't be much left of Washington after a big fight for it. The city had been badly damaged when the Rebels overran it in 1914, and they'd taken it pretty quickly. What would it look like if they chose to defend it street by street, house by house?

Nellie lighted a candle at one of the downstairs gas lamps, then turned them out. She and Edna went up the stairs to their bedrooms by the light of the candle. She used it to light the lamps in those rooms, then blew it out. "Good night, Ma," Edna said around a yawn.

"Good night," Nellie answered, hiding a smile. Keep Edna busy enough and she wouldn't have time for mischief, all right. Maybe she wouldn't. Nellie undid the hooks and eyes that held her skirt closed, then unbuttoned the long row of mother-of-pearl buttons on her shirtwaist. She tossed it into the wicker clothes hamper. The hamper was almost full; she'd have to go to the laundry soon. The corset came off next. She sighed with pleasure at being released from its steel-boned grip. She put on a long cotton nightdress, turned off the gas lamp, and climbed under the blankets.

Falling asleep seldom took her long. She'd almost done it when the Confederates sent a column marching up the street in front of the coffeehouse. The tramp of boots on pavement, the rattle of steel-tired wagon wheels, and the clop of horses' hooves made her sit up. It was a good-sized column; they hadn't sent so many men north in a while.

She tried to figure out what that meant. Was it good news or bad? Good, if the Rebs were moving because they needed men against the U.S. attacks. Not so good, if these were troops freed up because the Negro uprisings in the CSA were collapsing. She'd have to see if she could find out tomorrow.

When the column had passed, she settled back down again. She was drifting toward sleep when someone knocked on the door. The knock was soft but insistent, as if whoever was there wanted to make sure she and Edna heard but also wanted to be equally sure no one else did.

She got out of bed in the dark. Her first suspicious glance, when she

reached the hall, was to Edna's bedroom. But Edna was in there snoring. She'd never been able to fool her mother about being asleep. Scratching her head, Nellie slowly and carefully went downstairs.

The knocking persisted. She wished she had a pistol down there by the cash box. She'd never thought she'd need one, though, not with so many Confederate soldiers always in the coffeehouse. And the Rebs had made it against their rules for locals to keep firearms, with penalties harsh enough to make her not want to take the chance of hiding one right under their noses.

They hadn't made any rules against keeping knives. She picked up the biggest carving knife she had, one that would have made a decent sword with a different handle, and walked to the door. "Who's there?" she asked, making no move to open it.

"It's me, Little Nell." Bill Reach didn't name himself, confident she could identify his voice. She didn't, but no one else these days—thank God!—used the name from her sordid past. When she neither said anything nor worked the latch, he hissed, "Let me in, darlin'. I got nowhere else to go, and it's late—way past curfew."

Nellie knew what time it was. "Go away," she said through the door, quietly, so as not to wake Edna. That he had the nerve to call her *darling* filled her with fury. "Don't you ever come here again. I mean it." Her hand closed on the handle of the knife, hard enough to hurt.

"Listen, Nell," Reach said, also quietly, "if you don't let me in, I'm a dead man. I can't stay on the dodge any more, and they—"

"If you don't get out of here this instant," Nellie told him in a deadly whisper, "I'll scream loud enough to bring every Confederate patroller for a mile and a half around this place on the dead run."

"But—" Reach muttered something under his breath. Then he grunted, an involuntary, frightened sound. "Jesus, Nell, here they come—it's a whole goddamn Confederate column. They see me here, I'm dead and buried."

For a moment, Nell thought he was trying to trick her. Then she too heard the rhythmic thump of marching men and the jingle of harness. Another column—probably another regiment—heading up toward the fighting. Nellie bit her lip till she tasted blood. She didn't want the Rebs to lay their hands on…anyone. *Even Bill Reach?* she asked herself silently, and, with great reluctance, nodded. *Even Bill Reach.*

She opened the door. Reach scurried inside like a rat running into its hole. “God bless you, Nell,” he said while she closed it as quietly as she could. “If they’d have caught me, they’d have squeezed everything out of me, about you and this place and the shoemaker and—*guk!*”

Nellie held the tip of the knife against his poorly shaved throat. “Don’t you talk about such things, not to me, not to them, not to anybody,” she said in a voice all the more frightening for being so cold. “I’m not the foolish girl I was, and you can’t blackmail me. When that column marches past, you’re going out the door again. If you come around here after that, I’ll shove this in”—she did shove the knife in, perhaps a quarter of an inch; Reach moaned and tried to pull away, but she wouldn’t let him—“and I’ll laugh while I’m doing it. Do you hear me? You laughed when you shoved it into me, didn’t you? My turn now.”

He didn’t say anything. That was the smartest thing he could have done. A little moonlight came through the plate-glass window from outside. His eyes glittered. The fear smell, sharp and acrid, came off him in waves.

The Confederates tramped past the coffeehouse. Maybe the noise of their passing woke Edna. Nellie would have sworn she hadn’t been noisy enough to disturb her daughter. But, from the hall, Edna asked, “Ma, what’s going on? Who’s this bird? And—” Edna’s breath caught sharply. “What are you doing with that knife?”

“He’s trouble, nothing else but.” Nellie’s voice was grim. “But he’s in trouble, too, so he can stay here till the Rebs have gone by outside. After that, he’s gone forever.”

“I knew your mother, before you were born,” Bill Reach said to Edna, “back in the house at—” He drew a frightened breath of his own, for Nellie had stuck the knife in farther. *How deep do you have to stab to kill a man?* she wondered. A couple of more words out of Reach and she would have found out.

The sounds of marching feet, clattering wagons, and clopping hooves drowned out the drone of aeroplane engines high overhead. Maybe someone in the Confederate ranks was unwise enough to strike a match to light a cigar or pipe; maybe the moonlight let a U.S. pilot spot the column even without such help. However that was—Nellie had no way of knowing—a stick of bombs came falling out of the sky.

“Oh, Jesus!” Reach said when he heard the high-pitched shriek of

air rushing past the bombs' fins. Nellie needed a split second longer to identify the noise; U.S. bombers hadn't come over Washington all that often.

A split second after that, sharp explosions left no possible doubt of what was going on. One bomb fell a little in front of the head of the Confederate column. Then two more in quick succession landed right in the middle of it. Either the U.S. bomb-aiming was extraordinarily good or the bombardier was trying for another target altogether and got lucky—again, Nellie never knew.

Glass sprayed inward. A sharp shard caught Nellie in the leg. She yelped. Edna screamed. Bill Reach let out a groan and clutched at his midsection. Nellie staggered back from him. He sank slowly to the floor.

A moment later, the front door opened, hitting him and knocking him sideways. It wasn't another bomb; it was Confederate soldiers, seeking shelter from the rain of destruction from the sky. Outside in the street, injured soldiers screamed and groaned. A horse screamed, too, on a higher note. Officers shouted for medical orderlies and Negro stretcher-bearers.

Seeing Nellie, one of the Rebs pointed to Reach and said, "This here your husband the damnyankees done hurt, ma'am?" Even at such a time, he worked to separate the people of Washington from the government of the USA.

"I should say not," she answered, and raised her voice, hoping Reach wasn't too far gone to pay attention: "He's a burglar. I caught him breaking in here. I was going to give him to you." If they thought him an ordinary criminal, they wouldn't ask him questions about anything but burglary. She didn't know how he knew what else he knew, or exactly how much that was. She did know it was too much.

One of the Confederate soldiers said, "All right, ma'am, we'll take charge of him—throw him in a wagon till we find somebody we can give him to. Don't want to leave him bleedin' all over your floor here. Come on, you." He and a buddy got Bill Reach to his feet and out the door.

The bombs had stopped falling. The rest of the Rebels who'd tumbled into the coffeehouse took their leave. Some of them even apologized for bothering Nellie.

"—And your pretty daughter," one of them added, which did him

less good in her eyes than he would have guessed.

Nellie shut the door after the last departing Reb, a futile gesture with the window smashed. She looked around at glinting, drifted glass. “Go on upstairs and get me some slippers, Edna,” she said. “I’ll cut my feet to ribbons if I try to walk through this stuff.” She sighed, but went on, “It’s not near so bad as it was after the Rebs shelled us.”

“No, I reckon not,” Edna agreed. She started toward the stairway, then stopped and looked back at Nellie. “What was that crazy fellow talking about houses for? I ain’t never lived in a house, and I didn’t think you had, neither.”

Not all houses are homes, ran through Nellie’s mind. “I never did live in a house,” she answered. “He’s crazy like you said, that’s all. Get me those slippers—and get me a blanket, too, will you? With the windows gone, I think I better stay down here till sunup.”

“All right, Ma,” Edna said. “But I still think that feller knows you a whole lot better than you let on. If he didn’t, you wouldn’t let him get you all upset like you do.”

“Just get me my things,” Nellie snapped. Shaking her head, Edna went upstairs. Nellie shook her head, too. Sooner or later, the tawdry tale *would* come out. She could feel it in her bones. And what would she do then? How would she keep Edna in line at all?

Out in the street, wounded Confederates kept on groaning. They did give her a sense of proportion. You didn’t die of mortification, however much you wished you could. Bombs falling out of the sky were something else again.

Thunder filled the air. Artillery was pounding ever closer to St. Matthews, South Carolina, from the south and from the east. Negroes streamed back through the town. Some of them wore red armbands and carried the rifles with which they had fought their white, capitalist oppressors so long and so hard. One or two even wore helmets taken from Confederate corpses. They still had the look of soldiers to them. More, though, had thrown away armbands and weapons and were looking for escape, not more battle.

Scipio wished he could have fled, too. But he was too prominent, too recognizable to escape the square so easily. He’d been one of the

leaders of the Congaree Socialist Republic from the beginning—*from the beginning till the end,* he thought. The end could not be delayed much longer.

I tried to tell them. He hadn't sought the revolution. He'd been drawn into it, that seeming a safer course than letting himself be eliminated for knowing too much. And it had been a safer course—for a little more than a year. Now, with everything ending in fire, he saw—as he'd seen from the beginning—that going along with the Reds had bought him only a little time.

The rest of the leaders of what had been the Congaree Socialist Republic and was falling to pieces still refused to admit the game was up. Cassius stood in the town square, shouting, "Rally! Rally, God damn de lot of you! Rally 'gainst de 'pressors! Don' let dey take yo' freedom!"

He had picked men with him, men who could have formed a line and stopped—or tried to stop—the collapse, but who stood with their rifle butts trailing in the dust and watched men who had been fighters but were now only fugitives running past.

Cherry's appeal to the faltering followers of the Republic was more fundamental: "Kill de white folks! Got to kill de white folks! Dey catches you, dey kills you sure!"

She was probably right. No—she was almost certainly right. But the men who had done so much had concluded they could do no more. Neither her fiery words nor her even more fiery beauty were enough to turn them back toward the trenches they could not hold.

She rushed over to Scipio and, to his startlement and no small alarm, threw herself into his arms. Her breasts were firm and soft against his chest. "Make dey stop, Kip," she said in a bedroom voice. "Make dey stop, make dey fight. You de best talkin' man we gots. Make dey go back an' fight and I is yours. I do whatever you wants, you make dey stop." She ran her tongue over her full lips, making them even moister and more delicious-looking than they had been. Every sort of promise smoldered in her eyes.

Scipio sighed and shook his head. "Cain't," he said regretfully—not so much regret that he would not have her, for she frightened him more than he wanted her, but regret that this collapse would get so many people killed, with him all too likely to be among them. "Cain't, Cherry. It over. Don't you see? It over."

“Bastard!” she screamed, and twisted away from him. “Liar! Quitter!” She slapped him, a roundhouse blow that snapped his head sideways on his neck and left the taste of blood in his mouth. *Blood on my hands, too*, he thought. *Blood on all our hands*. Cherry cared nothing about the blood on her hands. He counted himself lucky she hadn’t pulled out a knife and gutted him with it.

In spite of haranguing the Negroes who didn’t want to be soldiers any more, Cassius heard the exchange between Cherry and Scipio. Cassius, as best Scipio could tell, never missed anything. He came trotting over to the two of them. Scipio’s guts knotted with fear all over again. Cherry was Cassius’ woman. No—Cherry was her own woman, and had been giving herself to Cassius. That wasn’t quite the same thing, even if, from Cassius’ point of view, it probably looked as if it were.

But Cassius didn’t want to quarrel. The ex-hunter, now chairman of what was left of the Congaree Socialist Republic, sadly studied Scipio. “It over now, Kip?” he asked. “You t’ink it over now fo’ true?”

“Don’t you?” Scipio waved his arms. As he did so, a shell landed only a couple of hundred yards away, black smoke with angry red fire at the core. Dirt leaped upward in graceful arcs, beauty in destruction. “We done everything we kin do. Dey gots too many buckra, too many rifles, too many cannons. Dey whip we, Cass.”

“Too many buckra,” Cassius said bitterly. “Dey don’ rise fo’ dey class int’rest, de fools. De ’ristocrats got dey all mystified up.” He lifted a weary hand. “We been over this before. I know. We make de struggle go on.” He pointed north, toward the swamps of the Congaree. “Gwine make de stand up there. De niggers in de ’pressed zones, dey always gwine know de struggle go on. De white folks, dey never takes we fo’ granted again.”

That, no doubt, was true. Scipio wished he thought it likelier to help than to hurt. It was liable to be another fifty years before the Negro cause revived in the CSA. He didn’t say that. What point, now? What he did say was, “I cain’t go to de swamp with you, Cass.”

To his surprise, the ex-hunter burst out laughing. “I knows that—you was just a house nigger, and you don’t know nothin’ ’bout that kin’ o’ life. What you gots to do is, you gots to blend in. Don’ let nobody know you got dat white folks’ talk hidin’ in your mouth. Git work in de field, in de factory, be a good nigger till de heat die down, then hurt they white folks however you kin.” He slapped Scipio on the

back. Then he and Cherry, hand in hand, headed north along with some of the other Negroes who still had fight in them.

Scipio stood in the St. Matthews square till shells started landing a good deal closer than a couple of hundred yards away. Then he turned on his heel and ran, along with so many other blacks, men and women both. From behind came shouts of, “De buckra! De buckra comin’!” He ran harder. The leaders of the Congaree Socialist Republic, unlike their Confederate counterparts, hadn’t gone in for fancy uniforms. In his undyed cotton homespun, he could have been anybody at all.

And anybody at all was just who he aimed to pretend to be. Once white control washed over this part of what was again South Carolina, he’d lie low, find work, eventually find better work, and spend the rest of his life trying to pretend this whole unfortunate business had never happened.

He stopped running about half a mile outside St. Matthews. That was partly because his wind wasn’t all it should have been; before the uprising, he *had* lived soft. It was also partly because he calculated that a Negro overrun while fleeing was more likely to be killed on sight than one who looked to have some business where he was. If he seemed a field hand or a farmer, maybe the white soldiers wouldn’t figure he’d been in arms against them. And, as a matter of fact, he hadn’t. He’d never once fired a weapon at the duly constituted forces of the Confederated States of America.

Not that that mattered. His laugh came bitter as Cassius’. If the white folks ever figured out who he was, he’d hang. He wouldn’t simply hang, either. What they’d do to him first…

He moaned a little, down deep in his throat. He’d never been a physically brave man. The idea of being tortured made him want to piss himself with fright. He forced himself to something dimly resembling calm. *Your wits are all you’ve got now,* he thought. *If you don’t use them,* that *will kill you.*

Gunfire and faint shouts rose behind him. That would be the white folks, entering St. Matthews. He nodded to himself. The Congaree Socialist Republic was dead, all right, even if Cassius could keep a nasty ghost of it going in the swamps.

When Scipio came to a patch of woods, he chose a winding path through them over going around. In the woods, he thought, he would be perceived as doing something in particular rather than simply

trying to escape from the victorious whites. That again might help keep them from shooting him for the fun of it.

Maybe there was a farm on the far side of the woods. Maybe the world had just gone topsy-turvy. Whatever the reason, a fat hen walked out from among the pine trees and stood in the path, staring at him from beady black eyes. For a moment, that didn't mean much to him. Then it did. *Food,* he thought. No more communal kitchens, no more suppers arguing the workings of the dialectic. If he was going to eat, he'd have to feed himself.

Slowly, he bent and picked up a fist-sized stone. The chicken kept watching him from about ten feet away. He drew back his arm—and let fly, hard as he could. The bird had time for one startled squawk before the stone hit. Feathers exploded out from it. It tried to run away, but had trouble making its legs work. He sprang on it, snatched up the stone, and smashed in its little stupid head.

He wore a knife on his belt. He cut off the broken head and held the chicken by the feet, letting it bleed out. Then he gutted it. He worked slowly and carefully there; he'd seen the job done in the kitchens at Marshlands more times than he could count, but couldn't remember the last time he'd done it himself. He saved the liver and gizzard and heart, putting them back inside the body cavity.

He'd just tossed the rest of the offal into the bushes by the side of the path—a fox or a coon or a possum would find a treat—when a white man called, "You there, nigger! What are you doin'?"

"Got me a chicken, suh," Scipio said. He turned toward the white man—a Confederate major—and put on a wide, servile smile. "Be right glad to share, you leave me jus' a little bit." That was how sharing between blacks and whites worked (when it worked at all) in the CSA.

"Give it here," the major said: a lot of the time, sharing didn't work at all in the CSA. Scipio handed the bird over without a word. The officer took its feet in his right hand. His left hand wasn't a hand, but a hook.

Scipio stiffened in dismay. He'd dealt with this white man, arranging to exchange wounded prisoners. Maybe, though, the fellow wouldn't recognize him. One raggedy Negro looked a lot like another, especially when you hardly saw them as human beings at all.

But Major Hotchkiss, even if he was mutilated, wasn't stupid. His

eyes narrowed. “I know your voice,” he said, half to himself. “You’re the nigger who—” From narrow, his eyes went wide. He didn’t bother saying, *talks like a white man,* but dropped the chicken and grabbed for his pistol.

He was a split second too slow. Scipio hit him in the face with the rock he’d used to kill the hen. The Negro leaped on him as he had on the bird, pounding and pounding with the stone till Hotchkiss was as dead as a man ever would be.

Scipio reached for the major’s pistol, then jerked his hand away. He didn’t want to be caught with a firearm, not in these times. He didn’t want to be caught with a blood-spattered shirt, either. He stripped it off and hid it in a hole in the ground. A shirtless Negro would draw no comment.

The chicken was another matter. It was *his*. “You damn thief,” he muttered to the late Major Hotchkiss. He picked up the bird and got out of there as fast as he could, before any more white soldiers came along to connect him to the major’s untimely demise.

Paul Mantarakis strode warily through the ruins of Ogden, Utah. “Boy, this place looks like hell,” he said. “I can’t tell whether what I’m walking on used to be houses or street.”

“Hell was let loose on earth here,” said Gordon McSweeney, who still wore on his back the flamethrower which had loosed a lot of that hell. But then he went on, “Hell let loose on earth, giving the misbelievers a foretaste of eternity.”

Beside them, Ben Carlton said, “Feels damn strange, walking along where there’s Mormons around and not diving for cover.”

“They surrendered,” Mantarakis said. But he was warily looking around, too. He carried his Springfield at the ready, and had a round in the chamber.

“For all we know, they ain’t gonna go through with it,” Carlton said. “Maybe they got more TNT under this here Tabernacle Park, and they’ll blow us and them to kingdom come instead of giving up.”

“Samson in the temple,” McSweeney murmured. But the big Scotsman shook his head. “No, I cannot believe it. Samson worked with the Lord, not against Him. I do not think Satan could steel their

souls to such vain sacrifice."

"The whole damn state of Utah is a sacrifice," Paul said. "I don't know what the hell made the Mormons fight like that, but they did more with less than the damn Rebs ever dreamt of doing. Only way we licked 'em is, we had more men and more guns."

Here and there, people who were not U.S. soldiers picked through the remains of Ogden. Women in bonnets and long skirts shoved aside wreckage, looking for precious possessions or food or perhaps the remains of loved ones. Children and a few old men helped them. The spoiled-meat smell of death hung everywhere.

A few men not old also went through the ruins. Most of them wore overalls, with poplin or flannel shirts underneath. Their clothes were as filthy and tattered as the soldiers' uniforms, and for the same reason: they'd spent too long in trenches.

"If looks could kill…" Paul said quietly. His companions nodded. The Mormon fighting men no longer carried weapons; that was one of the terms of the cease-fire to which their leaders had agreed. They stared at the American soldiers, and stared, and kept on staring. Their eyes were hot and empty at the same time. They'd fought, and they'd lost, and it was eating them inside.

"My granddads fought in the War of Secession," Carlton said. "I seen a photograph of one of 'em after we gave up. He looks just like the Mormons look now."

They tramped past a five-year-old boy, a little towhead cute enough to show up on a poster advertising shoes or candy. His eyes blazed with the same terrible despair that informed the faces of the beaten Mormon fighters.

The women were no different. They glowered at the victorious U.S. troopers. The prettier they were, the harder they glared. Some of them had carried rifles and fought in the trenches, too. Soldiers who won a war were supposed to have an easy time among the women of the people they'd defeated. That hadn't happened anywhere in Utah that Paul had seen. He didn't think it would start happening any time soon, either.

But the Mormon women didn't aim that look full of hatred and contempt at the Americans alone. They also sent it toward their own menfolk, as if to say, *How dare you have lost?* Even the Mormon fighters quailed under the gaze of their women.

Carlton pointed ahead. “Must be the park.”

Most of Ogden was shell holes and rubble. Tabernacle Park was, for the most part, just shell holes. The only major exception was the burned-out building at the southeast corner. It had been the local Mormon temple, and then the last strongpoint in Ogden, holding out until surrounded and battered flat by U.S. artillery.

Captain Schneider was already in the park. He waved the men of his company over to him. Pulling out a pocket watch, he said, “Ceremony starts in fifteen minutes. General Kent could have got himself a fancy honor guard, but he chose us instead. He said he thought it would be better if soldiers who’d been through it from the start saw the end.”

“That is a just deed,” Gordon McSweeney rumbled—high approval from him.

“Congratulations again on your medal, sir,” Mantarakis said.

Schneider looked down at the Remembrance Cross in gold on his left breast pocket, won for rallying the line south of Ogden after the Mormons exploded their mines. “Thank you, Sergeant,” he said. “I shouldn’t be the only one wearing it, though. We all earned them that day.”

Under his breath, Ben Carlton muttered, “Damn fine officer.” Paul Mantarakis nodded.

Here came Major General Alonzo Kent, tramping along through the rubble like a common soldier. He waved to the veterans gathering in front of the wrecked Mormon temple. “Well, boys, it was a hell of a fight, but we licked ’em,” he said. He wasn’t impressive to look at, not even in a general’s fancy uniform, but he’d got the job done.

And here came the Mormon delegation, behind a standard-bearer carrying the beehive banner under which the Utah rebels had fought so long and hard and well. Most of the leaders of the defeated Mormons looked more like undertakers than politicians or soldiers: weary old men in black suits and wing-collared shirts.

One of them stepped past the standard-bearer. “General Kent? I am Heber Louis Jackson, now”—he looked extraordinarily bleak as he spoke that word—“president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I have treated with your representatives.”

“Yes,” Kent said: not agreement, only acknowledgment.

The Mormon leader went on, “With me here are my counselors, Joseph Shook and Orem Pendleton. We make up the first presidency of the church, and are the authority in ultimate charge of the forces that have been resisting those of the government of the United States. And here”—he pointed to the youngest and toughest-looking of the Mormons in his party—“is Wendell Schmitt, commander of the military forces of the Nation of Deseret.”

“The Nation of Deseret does not exist,” General Kent said in a flat voice. “President Roosevelt has, as you know, declared the entire state of Utah to fall under martial law and military district. He has also ordered the arrest of all officials of the rebel administration in the state of Utah on a charge of treason against the government of the United States of America. That specifically includes you gentlemen here.”

“Pity they’ll shoot them or hang them,” Gordon McSweeney whispered to Mantarakis as Heber Jackson bowed his head. “They should be burned.” He touched the nozzle to his flamethrower. Mantarakis hissed at him to be quiet; he wanted to hear what the Mormons said.

Wendell Schmitt took an angry step forward. “The terms you set us were already hard enough without that, General. The Constitution—”

“Does not apply here, because of the president’s declaration,” General Kent interrupted. “You people put yourselves beyond the pale when you hopped into bed with the Confederates and the Canadians. Now that you have made that bed for yourselves, you shall be made to lie in it. You tried to destroy our government here. You failed. We *will* destroy your government here. This surrender will let the common people of the state survive. If you reject it, we will destroy them, too, and turn Utah back into the desert it was before they came.”

“And call that peace,” Joseph Shook murmured. It sounded like a quotation, but Paul didn’t know what it was from.

General Kent evidently did: “If you like, Mr. Shook. But you Mormons *will* not joggle our elbows again while we are fighting this bigger war, and you *will* not disturb the peace in the USA once we have won the war.” He opened an attaché case and took out a sheet of fancy paper. “Here is the formal instrument of surrender. Before we affix our signatures to it, I am going to summarize its provisions one last time, so that we have no unfortunate misunderstandings. Is that agreeable to you?”

“Hard terms,” Heber Jackson said softly.

“Having fought us tooth and nail for a year, you cannot expect a kiss on the cheek now,” Kent retorted. He fumbled in the case again, this time for a pair of reading glasses. “‘Item: all troops in resistance to the government of the United States’…Well, we’ve done that; they laid down their arms when you asked for the cease-fire.

“‘Item: all firearms in Utah to be surrendered within two weeks. Penalty for possession after that time is death.

“‘Item: any act of violence against soldiers of the United States shall be punished by the taking and execution of hostages, not to exceed ten for each soldier wounded or fifty for each soldier killed.

“‘Item: all public gatherings of more than three persons are banned. This includes churches, vaudeville houses, picnics’—you name it. ‘Violators will be fired upon without warning by soldiers of the United States.

“‘Item: all property of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is forfeit to the government of the United States in reparation for the cost of suppressing this rebellion.

“‘Item: gatherings in private homes to worship in the fashion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Days Saints shall be construed as public gatherings under the meaning of the previous item, and shall be dealt with like any other public gatherings under the terms of that item.

“‘Item…’” He droned on and on. After a while, Paul stopped paying close attention. The Mormons had tried to break away from the USA, and they were paying a heavy price for it. In effect, they *had* broken away, and were being treated not as a state returning to the Union but as a conquered province. As far as he was concerned, they’d earned it. He’d been in Utah most of a year, and nasty strangers had been trying to kill him the whole time.

One of General Kent’s aides unfolded a portable table and produced a pen and bottle of ink with which to sign the instrument of surrender. “May I say something before I set my name there?” Wendell Schmitt asked.

“Go ahead,” General Kent told him. “If you think anything you say will change matters, though—”

“Not likely,” the Mormon military commander broke in. “No, what I want to tell you is that terms like these will come back to haunt you, years from now. You’re sowing the seeds of hatred and bloodshed that will grow up in the days of our grandchildren, and of their grandchildren, too.”

“Do you know what?” General Kent said. “I don’t care. Teddy Roosevelt doesn’t care, either. And if they have to, Mr. Schmitt, my grandchildren will come in here to Utah and blow your grandchildren sky-high all over again. If more damn fools like you come to power here, that’s just what will happen. If you people are smart enough to realize you’re fighting out of your weight, it won’t.” He folded his arms across his chest.

Biting his lip, Wendell Schmitt signed the surrender document. So did the three men who made up the first presidency of the Mormon Church. Last of all, so did General Kent. His aides took the Mormon leaders into custody. The Mormon standard-bearer handed the beehive banner to one of those U.S. aides. With deliberate contempt, the American soldier let it fall in the dirt.

“It’s over,” Ben Carlton said.

“Yeah,” Paul agreed. “Now we either get to stay here for occupation duty, with everybody hating us like rat poison, or else they ship us back to fighting the Rebs or the Canucks.” He laughed ruefully. “Sounds like a bully time either way, doesn’t it?”

Anne Colleton cranked to life the engine of the battered Ford they’d given her. The motorcar shivered and shuddered like a man with the grippe. It sounded as if it would fall to pieces at any moment—it was about as far a cry from her Vauxhall roadster as an automobile could possibly be.

She didn’t complain, not any more. She’d had to move heaven and earth to pry the Ford out of Confederate officialdom. It would, with luck, get her back to Marshlands, which was all she wanted for the time being. God only knew where the Vauxhall Major Hotchkiss had confiscated was now. That might well have been literally true; Hotchkiss himself, she was given to understand, was dead, killed along with so many others in the death throes of the Congaree Socialist Republic.

“Anyone want to ride with me?” Anne asked, not for the first time. None of the women with whom she’d shared a refugee tent for so many months made a move toward her. The bayoneted Tredegar with a full clip she’d laid in the middle of the seat probably had something to do with that.

“The officers say you’re asking to get yourself killed—or else somethin’ even worse—if y’all go into that country now,” the fat woman named Melissa declared. By her tone, she looked forward to that prospect for Anne.

“I’ll risk it,” Anne answered. “I’ve always been able to take care of myself, unlike a lot of people I can think of.” Being on the point of leaving gave her the last word. She hopped into the Ford, released the hand brake, put the motorcar in gear, and *put-putt*ed away.

Going was slow, as she’d known it would be. The Robert E. Lee Highway had been one of the main lines of Confederate advance, which meant the Red Negro rebels had defended it as well as they could, which in turn meant the artillery had gone to work, which meant what was called a road was in many places anything but. Anne was glad she’d managed to get her hands on several spare inner tubes and a pump and patches.

Not many trees along the road were standing; most had been blasted to tinder. Those that did stand often held ghastly fruit: rebels captured and then summarily hanged. Ravens and buzzards flew up from them as the noisy Ford rattled past. The stench of death was everywhere, and far stronger than the hanged bodies could have accounted for by themselves. Anne wondered if the fronts between the CSA and USA were full of this same dreadful reek. If they were, how did the soldiers endure it?

In a field by the side of the road, Negroes were digging trenches that would probably serve as mass graves. From a distance, the scene looked almost as it would have before the Red uprising began. Almost, for the couple of whites who supervised the laborers carried rifles: the spring sun glinted off the sharp edge of a bayonet.

Anne bit her lip. Putting Humpty-Dumpty back together again in the CSA wouldn’t be easy. If whites had to get labor out of blacks at gunpoint, how were they supposed to fight the damnyankees at the same time? And if they offered concessions to make Negroes more willing to go along with them, wasn’t that as much as saying the Reds had been right to rise against the government?

Reaching St. Matthews took her more than twice as long as she'd thought it would, and she hadn't been optimistic setting out from the refugee camp. By the time she got to the town nearest Marshlands, she found herself astonished she'd made it at all. She was also filthy from head to foot, having repaired three punctures along the way.

St. Matthews shocked her again. It wasn't so badly smashed up as some of the territory through which she'd driven; the rebellion had been dying on its feet by the time Confederate forces reached the town, and the Reds hadn't fought house to house here. But St. Matthews was the town she knew best: in the back of her mind, she expected to see it as it always had been, with whitewashed picket fences, neatly painted storefronts and even warehouses, and streets lined with live oaks shaggy with moss.

Most of the fences had been knocked flat. Two of the four big cotton warehouses were only burnt-out wreckage. Some of the live oaks still stood, but the artillery bombardment before the assault on the town had put paid to most of them. It would be a hundred years before saplings grew into trees that could match the ones now ruined.

Anne's eyes filled with tears. She'd kept trying to think of the rebellion as something that, once defeated, could in large measure be brushed aside. Negroes working under white men's guns had gone a fair way toward telling her how foolish that was. The blasted oaks, though, warned even more loudly that the uprising would echo for generations.

A gray-haired white man in an old-fashioned gray uniform shifted a plug of tobacco from one ill-shaven cheek to the other and held up a hand, ordering her to stop. "What the—blazes you doin'here, lady?" he demanded. "Don't you know there's still all kinds o' bandits and crazy niggers running around loose?"

"What am I doing here?" Anne replied crisply. "I am going home. Here is my authorization." She handed the militiaman a letter she had browbeaten out of the colonel in charge of the refugee camp.

By the way this fellow stared at the sheet of paper, he couldn't read. That she had it, though, impressed him into standing aside. "If'n they say it's all right, reckon it is," he said, touching the brim of his forage cap. "But you want to be careful out there."

"I intend to be careful," Anne said, a thumping lie if ever there was one. She put some snap in her voice: "Now kindly give that letter

back, so I can use it again at need."

"Oh. Yes, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am." Where her grimy appearance and this beat-up motorcar hadn't convinced the militiaman she was a person of quality, her manner did. He handed the letter back to her.

The road from St. Matthews to Marshlands was not so heavily cratered as the highway up to town had been. By the time the rebels abandoned St. Matthews, they'd pretty much abandoned organized resistance against Confederate forces, too. But that thought had hardly crossed her mind before she heard a couple of brisk spatters of gunfire from the north, the direction of the Congaree swamps. Not all the Reds, it seemed, had given up.

Woods blocked any view of Marshlands from the road till not long before a traveler needed to turn onto the lane leading up to the mansion. *I am ready for anything,* Anne told herself, again and again. *Whatever I see, I will bear up under it.*

Coughing and wheezing, the Ford passed the last trees. There, familiar as the mole she carried on one wrist, was the opening into that winding lane. Just before you turned, you looked along the lane and you saw…

"Hell," she said quietly. She'd been hoping the place had survived, but it looked like a skeleton with most of the flesh rotted away. Altogether against her will, tears blurred her eyes. "Jacob," she whispered. If Marshlands had burned, her brother must have burned with it.

By contrast, the Negro cottages off to one side of the great house looked exactly as they had before the Red uprising began. A couple of men were out hoeing in their gardens; a couple of women were feeding chickens; a whole raft of pickaninnies were running around raising hell.

After a little while, her eyes left the vicinity of the mansion and traveled out to the cotton fields. Her teeth closed hard on the soft flesh inside her lower lip. If anyone had done anything with the cotton since she'd left for Charleston all those months before, she would have been astonished. Was that what the Red revolution had been about—the freedom not to work? Her face twisted into an expression half sneer, half snarl.

If the rest of the plantations in what had been the Congaree Socialist Republic looked the same way, a lot of planters were

bankrupt, busted, flat. She wasn't; she'd invested wisely ever since Marshlands came into her hands. Most people, though, couldn't see past their noses. And, speaking of seeing…

One of the men in the garden plots had spotted her. He dropped his hoe and pointed, calling out to the rest. One after another, heads swung in her direction. Other than that, none of the Negroes moved. That in itself chilled her. Before the uprising, they would have come running up to her motorcar, calling greetings and hoping she had trinkets for them. *Telling lies,* she realized. *Hiding what they really thought.*

For a moment, she was especially glad of the Tredegar on the seat beside her. Then, all at once, she wasn't. How much good would it do her? What kind of arsenal did the Negroes have hidden in those cabins? She'd prided herself on knowing her laborers well. She hadn't known them at all. Maybe the Army men had been right when they thought her crazy to come here by herself.

A woman walked slowly toward her. It was, she realized after too long, Julia, who had been her body servant. The young woman, instead of a maid's shirtwaist and black dress, wore homespun made gaudy with bits of probably stolen finery. She was also several months pregnant.

The only reason Anne hadn't taken her to Charleston was that she'd gone there for an assignation, not legitimate business. Had it been otherwise, would Julia have turned on her? The thought was chilling, but could hardly be avoided.

"So you's come back, Miss Anne," Julia said. Her voice had something of the old servile tone left in it, but not much.

"Yes, I'm back." Anne looked over the neglected acres of what had been the finest plantation in South Carolina. "I don't know why the hell I bothered."

"Things, they ain't the same no mo'," Julia said. Had truer words ever been spoken, Anne hadn't heard them.

Almost as one equal to another, she asked, "And what did you do in the uprising, Julia? What did the niggers here do?"

"Nothin'," Julia said. "We stay here, we mind we bidness." But now she didn't meet Anne's eyes.

Anne nodded. This was a lie she recognized. “What happens when the soldiers start asking the same thing?” she said. Julia flinched. Anne smiled to herself. Yes, no matter what, she could manage. “Mind my business”—she pointed to the forgotten fields—“along with your own, and I’ll keep the soldiers off your back. You know I can do things like that. Have we got a bargain?”

Julia thought for most of a minute, then nodded. “Miss Anne, I think we has.”

George Enos had felt constricted on the Mississippi. He was used to the broad reaches of the Atlantic, to looking around from his perch on deck and seeing nothing but the endless ocean in all directions. Next to the Atlantic, any river, even the Father of Waters, seemed hardly more than an irrigation ditch.

And the Cumberland was considerably narrower than the Mississippi. These days, he and his fellow deck hands aboard the *Punishment* wore Army helmets painted Navy blue. This stretch of the river was supposed to be pretty clear of snipers, but nobody with the brains God gave a haddock felt like betting his life on it.

Before the *Punishment* headed up the Cumberland, Navy ironworkers had installed protection around the deck machine guns, too. Little by little, the war heading toward two years old, they were figuring out that this riverine fighting had rules of its own. George was glad of that, but wondered what the devil had taken them so long.

As far as he could tell, the Rebs had got the idea from the beginning. He pointed to the mine-sweeping boat moving slowly down the Cumberland ahead of the *Punishment* and said, “Anybody would think the damn Rebs did nothing but build mines in all the time between the Second Mexican War and now.”

“Near as I can tell, that’s right,” Wayne Pitchess answered, his Connecticut accent not far removed from the flat vowels and swallowed r’s of Enos’ Boston intonation. Then he shook his head and pointed out to the battered farms out beyond the river. “I take it back. They raise tobacco, too.”

“That’s so,” George agreed. Some of it got into Navy supply channels, too, probably by most unofficial means. He had a pouch of pipe tobacco in a trouser pocket. It wasn’t as good as it might have

been—which meant it had been cured, or half cured, after the war started—but it was a lot better than nothing.

Flags fluttered up the minesweeper's signal lines. The *Punishment*'s engine changed its rhythm. The monitor began crawling away from the sweeper as the screw reversed to give power astern rather than ahead. "I'd say they found one," Pitchess remarked.

George nodded. "I'd say you're right. Other thing I'd say is, I hope they haven't missed one."

"There is that," Pitchess agreed. You had to hope they hadn't missed one, as you had to hope a storm wouldn't sink you out on the Atlantic. You couldn't do much about it, either way.

The mine-sweeping boat cut the cable mooring the deadly device to the bottom of the Cumberland. When it bobbed to the surface, the sweeper cut loose with its machine guns. The explosion showered muddy water down onto Enos a quarter of a mile away; the *Punishment* rocked as waves spread from the blast.

"Lord!" George had known what mines could do, but he'd never been so close to one when it went off. "If it's all the same to everybody else, I'd just as soon not run over one of those."

"Now that you mention it, I think I'd rather be on top of my wife, too," Wayne Pitchess said with a veteran's studied dryness.

George laughed at the comparison, then walked over to his machine gun and got busy checking the mechanism he'd finished cleaning not five minutes before. Most of the time, he managed not to think about how much he missed Sylvia. He hadn't yet visited one of the whorehouses that sprouted alongside rivers like toadstools after rain. He had stained his underwear once or twice, waking up from dreams he didn't much remember, dreams of the sort he hadn't had since not long after he started going to the barbershop for a shave.

Engineers were busy at Clarksville, Tennessee. As U.S. monitors pushed up the Cumberland toward the town, the Confederates had dropped two railway bridges right into the water. Before the U.S. monitors advanced any farther, the steel and timber and the freight cars the Rebs had run out onto the bridge to complicate their enemies' lives all had to be cleared away.

It was slow work. It was dangerous work, too; every so often, Confederate batteries off to the south would lob some three-inch shells

in the direction of the fallen bridges. The engineers didn't have a lot of heavy equipment with which to work. Once they'd cleared the river, the U.S. presence in this part of Tennessee would firm up. Then they could bring in the tools they really needed now. Of course, they wouldn't need them so much then.

"Yeah, that's a hell of a thing," Pitchess said when George remarked on the paradox. "But hell, if you wanted things simple, you never would have joined the Navy."

"I suppose you're right," Enos said. "I joined the Navy so I could give the Rebs a kick in the slats to pay them back for the one they gave me. I was already a sailor, so what the hell?—and I didn't want to get conscripted into the Army. But I never thought they'd stick me here in the middle of the country. You join the Navy, you think you'll be on the ocean, right?"

"Didn't matter to me one way or t'other," his friend answered. "I wasn't making enough to keep a roof on my head and food in my belly when I was fishing. I figured I wouldn't starve in the Navy, and I was right about that." A wry grin stretched across his lean, weathered face. "Maybe I didn't think about getting blown to smithereens as much as I should've."

Men and mules, straining mightily, hauled a freight car out onto the north bank of the river. Pointing, George said, "I expect that'll be the last train to Clarksville for a good long time."

"Yeah," Pitchess said. "Till we get our own rolling stock running through, anyways."

Confederate field guns opened up with another barrage just then. Shells screamed down on the engineers, who dove for cover. Mules weren't smart enough to do that (*or*, George thought, *stupid enough to start a war in the first place*). Thin across the water, the screams of wounded animals floated over to the *Punishment*.

The guns had the bridge zeroed to a fare-thee-well, and could strike at the wreckage or at either bank, as they chose. They didn't have the range for the *Punishment* down so precisely. That didn't keep them from trying to hit her, though. Shells splashed into the river and chewed up the bushes on the northern bank.

George dove into the shelter the ironwrights had built around his machine gun. A splinter hit the steel and clattered away. He hadn't thought enough about getting blown to smithereens, either.

Growling and grumbling on its bearings, the *Punishment*'s turret swung round so the six-inch guns it carried bore on the field pieces harassing them. On land, six-inch cannon were heavy guns, hard to move at any sort of speed except by rail. On the water, though, they were nothing out of the ordinary, and the *Punishment* gave them a fine, steady platform from which to work.

They roared. The monitor heeled ever so slightly in the water from the recoil, then recovered. Sprawled out as he was, George felt the motion more acutely than he might have on his feet. Up in the armored crow's nest atop the mast, an officer with field glasses would be watching the fall of the shells and comparing it to the location of the Rebel guns.

More grumbling noises—these smaller, to correct the error in the turret's previous position. The big guns boomed again. Wafting powder fumes made George cough and sent tears streaming from his eyes.

Confederate shells kept falling, too. One of them exploded against the turret. A whole shower of splinters rattled off Enos' protective cage. He'd wondered whether the ironworkers had made it thick enough. Nothing tore through it to pierce him. Evidently they had.

The turret carried more armor than any other part of the *Punishment*. It was made to withstand a shell from a gun of the same caliber as those it carried. It didn't laugh at a hit from a three-inch howitzer, but it turned the blow without trouble.

And it replied with shells far heavier than those the field pieces threw. "Hit!" shouted the spotter from the crow's nest. "That's a hit, by God!" He whooped with glee. The guns fired several more salvos. The spotter kept yelling encouragement. What encouraged George more than anything else was that, after a while, no new fire came toward either the *Punishment* or the Clarksville bridges.

He got to his feet, ready to hose down the riverbank with machine-gun fire in case the Rebs, having lost their guns, chose to bring riflemen forward to make the engineers' jobs harder—and perhaps to snipe at the men on the monitor's deck, too. They often tried that after big, waterborne guns smashed their artillery.

Not this time, though. All was calm as the *Punishment* floated on the Cumberland. The engineers got back to work. The mine-sweeping boat ran right up to the wreckage to pick up a couple of wounded men. On

the shore, pistol shots rang out. Soldiers were shooting wounded mules.

Just another day's work, George thought. Noticing that thought brought him up sharply. It was the sort of thought a veteran might have. "Me?" he muttered. No one answered, naturally, but no one needed to, either.

VIII

Roger Kimball stood up on the conning tower of the *Bonefish*. He looked around. All he saw were the cool, gray waters of the North Atlantic. All he smelled was clean salt air—none of the rotting stinks of the South Carolina swamps. He sucked in a long, deep breath and let it out like a connoisseur savoring a fine wine.

His executive officer smiled. “Feels good to be back at sea, doesn’t it, sir?” Junior Lieutenant Brearley said.

“Feels better than good, Tom,” Kimball answered. “We’re doing our proper job again, and about time, too. If I’d wanted to be a policeman and wear a funny hat, I’d have joined the police in the first place.”

A wave crashed against the *Bonefish*’s bow. The conning tower and the hatch leading down into the submersible were protected by canvas shields—or so claimed the men who’d designed the shields. Kimball supposed they were better than nothing. They didn’t keep him and Brearley from getting seawater in the face. They didn’t keep more seawater from puddling under their feet or from dripping down the hatch.

Brearley used a sleeve to wipe himself more or less dry. His smile now was rueful. “Harder to keep the boat dry than it was on the river.”

“Price you pay for doing the proper job,” Kimball said airily. He could afford to be airy now, up here. When he went below, the diesel-oil and other stenches inside the *Bonefish*—all produced despite everything the crew could do—would easily surpass those of the swamps flanking the Pee Dee.

Since that couldn’t be helped, he put it out of his mind. Wiping the

lenses of his field glasses with a pocket handkerchief, he raised the glasses to his eyes and scanned the horizon for a telltale plume of smoke that would mark a ship. The wind quickly whipped away the exhaust from the *Bonefish*'s diesel. Bigger vessels, though, burned coal or fuel oil, and left more prominent signatures in the air.

He spied nothing. The *Bonefish* might have been alone in the Atlantic. He didn't like that. Letting the binoculars thump down against his chest on their leather strap, he pounded on the conning tower rail with his fist. "Damn it, Tom, they're supposed to be out here."

"Yes, sir," the exec said. That was all he could say. Intelligence had reported the U.S. Navy was gathering for a push against the British and French warships protecting their home countries' merchant vessels. Sending one or two of those Yankee ships to the bottom would make life easier for the Entente powers against the twin colossi of the USA and Germany.

As if picking the thought from his mind, Brearley said, "We have managed to keep the damnyankees and the Huns from joining hands."

"We'd better go right on keeping 'em from doing that, too, sonny, or you can kiss this war good-bye," Kimball answered dryly. "We've got to keep the trade route from Argentina to French West Africa open, too, or England starts starving even worse than she is already. And we've got to keep the route from England to Canada at least partway open, or else the USA sits on Canada like an elephant squashing a mouse. If we manage to do all of that, the soldiers can go on doing what they're supposed to do."

"Have we got enough ships?" Brearley asked. "Have all of us together—us and the British and the French and the Russians and whatever the Canadians have left—have we got enough ships to do everything we have to do?"

Kimball clapped him on the back. "We've done it so far—just barely. Reckon we can keep on doing it—just barely. And don't forget the Japanese. They're giving England and Canada quite a hand in the Pacific, by everything I hear."

"Don't know as how I really care for them fooling around in a white man's war," Brearley said, "but I suppose we have to grab the help now and be thankful for it, and then worry later about sorting out what it means."

“That’s how it works,” Kimball agreed. As soon as he’d spoken, though, he wished he’d kept his mouth shut. Brearley was all for cutting a deal with the Negroes, too, and then sorting out what that all meant later.

Had his exec set him up, so he would notice he was arguing one way on one of the questions and the other way on the other? He let his eyes slide toward Tom Brearley. Sure as hell, the young pup looked ever so slightly smug. But Brearley had too much sense to say anything, so Kimball couldn’t gig him for it. This round went to the junior lieutenant.

So Kimball wouldn’t have to admit as much, he raised the field glasses once more to scan the horizon. He did not do it expecting to spot anything: more to give him an excuse not to answer, and to change the subject when he did speak again. But there, off to the northeast, rose an unmistakable plume of smoke.

He stiffened and thrust out an index finger, as if he were a bird dog coming to the point. Tom Brearley didn’t have field glasses of his own. Before the war, most of them had been made in Germany, and they remained in short supply throughout the Entente powers. But, after a minute or so, Brearley nodded. “Yes, sir. I see it, too.”

Kimball called down to the petty officer at the wheel: “Change course to 045.”

“Oh-four-five, aye aye, sir,” Ben Coulter answered. His voice caught with excitement as he sent a question up the hatchway: “You spotted something, sir?”

“Something, yes,” Kimball answered: submersible officers and crew paid less attention to the minutiae of military formality than any other part of the C.S. Navy. “Don’t know what yet.”

He peered through the field glasses again. A swell lifted the *Bonefish*, extending the horizon for him. He got a glimpse of the hull producing the smoke. “That’s a Yankee destroyer, sure as hell it is. Now the fun begins.” His lips curled back from his teeth in what was more nearly snarl than smile.

He started calculating at a furious clip. A destroyer could run away from his submersible even when he was surfaced, or could attack him with bigger guns than he carried. Submerged, the *Bonefish* made only nine knots going flat out—a pace that would quickly exhaust her batteries and force her to the surface again. He couldn’t pursue the

U.S. ship, then. He had to see if he could place the submarine in her path and lie in wait for her. If not, he'd have to let her escape. If so…

"Let's go below, Tom," Kimball said. His exec nodded and dove down the hatch. Kimball followed, dogging it shut after him. He bawled an order to the crew: "Prepare to dive—periscope depth!"

Klaxons hooted. Tanks made bubbling, popping noises as water flooded into them. The *Bonefish* slid under the water in—"Thirty-eight seconds, I make it," Brearley said, an eye to his pocket watch. Kimball grunted. That was acceptable but something less than wonderful.

He raised the periscope. "Hope the damn thing isn't too misted up to see through," he muttered. The odds were about even. He grunted again, this time appreciatively. The view was, if not perfectly clear, clear enough.

He turned the periscope in the direction of the destroyer he'd spotted. The fellow hadn't altered course, which Kimball devoutly hoped meant he hadn't a clue the *Bonefish* was anywhere about. He was, unless Kimball had botched his solution, making about twenty knots, and about two miles away.

"Give me course 090," Kimball told the helmsman, and then spoke to the rest of the crew: "Ready the torpedoes in the two forward tubes."

The *Bonefish* crept east. The U.S. destroyer was doing most of the work, coming right across his bow, leaving itself wide open for a shot—if it didn't pick up speed and steam past the submersible before the latter was in position to launch its deadly fish.

"I want to get inside twelve hundred yards before I turn 'em loose," Kimball remarked, more as if thinking out loud than talking to Tom Brearley. "I'll shoot from a mile if I have to, though, and trust to luck that I'm not carrying any moldies."

"Yes, sir," Brearley agreed; duds were the bane—and often the end—of a submariner's existence. The executive officer went on, "Are you sure you want to shoot from such long range, sir? A miss will bring the U.S. fleet after us full bore."

"Just because they're after us doesn't mean they'll catch us," Kimball said smugly. "So yes, I'll take the chance, thanks." He grinned. "After all, if I sink that destroyer, that'll bring the U.S. fleet after us, too."

“Yes, sir.” Brearley sounded as if he was smiling, too; Kimball didn’t look away from the periscope to see. *A good kid,* he thought absently. *A little on the soft side, but a good kid*.

And here came the destroyer, fat and sassy. He’d have lookouts peering in all directions for periscopes, but some of those fools would have seen enough periscopes that weren’t there to make officers leery of taking their reports too seriously. They wouldn’t be expecting Confederate company quite so far out to sea, either; the *Bonefish* was well past her normal cruising radius. But she’d picked up fuel from a freighter not long before, and so…“We’ll give you damnyankees a surprise,” Kimball muttered.

He wasn’t going to get a shot off at twelve hundred yards. The electric engines were too puny to get him close enough fast enough. But he would be inside a mile. Any time you could split the difference between what you really wanted and what you’d settle for, you weren’t doing too bad.

“Depth?” he asked quietly.

“Thirty-five feet, sir,” Brearley answered after checking the gauge.

“Give me a couple more degrees south, Coulter,” Kimball said. “A little more…steady…Fire number one!” Fearsome clangs and hissings marked the launch of the first torpedo. A moment later, Kimball shouted, “Fire number two!”

He studied both tracks with grave intensity. They looked straight, they looked good. The destroyer had less than a minute to react, and momentum that kept her from reacting fast. She started to turn toward the *Bonefish*, presenting the smallest area for the fish to reach.

Kimball couldn’t tell whether the first torpedo passed under her bow or hit and failed to explode. He hadn’t snarled more than a couple of curses, though, when the second one caught her just aft of amidships. “Hit!” he screamed. “Hell of a hit! She’ll go down from that, damn me to hell if she don’t.” The destroyer lay dead in the water, and bent at an unnatural angle. She was already starting to list. Some of the Yankees aboard would make her boats, Kimball thought, but some wouldn’t, too.

Rebel yells ripped through the narrow steel tube in which the *Bonefish*’s crew lived and worked. The men pounded one another on the back. “Score one for the captain!” Ben Coulter whooped. Everybody pounded Kimball on the back, too, something unthinkable

in the surface Navy.

“Give me course 315,” Kimball told the helmsman. Heading obliquely away from the path of the torpedoes was a good way not to have your tracks followed. “Half speed.” He’d have mercy on the batteries.

After an hour, he surfaced to recharge them. Foul, pressurized air rushed out of the *Bonefish* when he undogged the hatch. All the stinks seemed worse, somehow, right at that moment. He went up onto the conning tower. To his relief, now, he spied no smoke plumes on the horizon.

“Good shooting, sir,” Tom Brearley said, coming up behind him.

“Thanks,” Kimball said. “That’s what they pay me for. And speaking of pay, we just made the damnyankees pay plenty. We done licked ’em twice. They’re stupid enough to think we can’t do it three times running, no matter what our niggers try doin’, they can damn well think again.”

“Yes, *sir!*” Brearley said.

“Snow in my face in April!” Major Irving Morrell said enthusiastically. “This, by God, this is the life.”

“Yes, sir.” Captain Charlie Hall had rather less joy in his voice. “Snow in your face about eight months a year hereabouts.” The snow blowing in his face and Morrell’s obscured the Canadian Rockies for the moment. Morrell didn’t mind. He’d seen them when the weather was better. They were even grander than they were in the USA. They were even snowier than they were in the USA, too, and that was saying something.

“I hope you don’t mind my telling you this,” Morrell said to Hall, “but I think you’ve been going at this the wrong way. Charge straight at the damn Canucks, and they’ll slaughter you. You’ve seen that.”

Hall’s face twisted. He was a big, bluff, blond man, bronzed by sun, chapped by wind, with a Kaiser Bill mustache he kept waxed and impeccable regardless of the weather. He said, “It’s true, sir. I can’t deny it. We sent divisions into Crow’s Nest Pass and came out with regiments. The Canucks didn’t want to give up for hell.”

“And they were waiting for us to do what we did, too,” Morrell said. “Give the enemy what he’s waiting for and you’ll be sorry a hundred times out of a hundred. The Canucks made us pay and pay, and what did we have when we were done paying? Less than we’d hoped. They just stopped running trains through Crow’s Nest Pass and doubled up in Kicking Horse Pass.”

He pointed ahead. U.S. forces had been slogging toward Kicking Horse Pass for the past year and a half. He didn’t intend to slog any more. He was going to move, and to make the Canadians move, too.

“And when we finally take this one, they’ll go on up to Yellow-head Pass,” Hall said. “This war is a slower business than anyone dreamt when we first started fighting.”

“If we drive enough nails into their coffin, eventually they won’t be able to pull the lid up any more,” Morrell said.

“I like that.” Hall’s face was better suited for the grin it wore now than for its earlier grimace. A couple of Morrell’s other company commanders joined them then: Captain Karl Spadinger, who for looks could have been Charlie Hall’s cousin; and First Lieutenant Jephtha Lewis, who would have seemed more at home behind a plow on the Great Plains than in the Rockies of Alberta. With them came Sergeant Saul Finkel, who had a dark, quiet face and the long, thin-fingered hands of a watchmaker—which he had been before joining the Army.

“Here’s what we’re going to do,” Morrell said, pointing to the Canadian position ahead of them and then to the map he took from a pouch on his belt. The view was better on the map; the snow didn’t obscure it. “We’ve got this fortified hill ahead of us. I will lead the detachment advancing to the west. Sergeant Finkel!”

“Sir!” the sergeant said.

“You and one machine-gun squad from Lieutenant Lewis’ company will cover the ridge road up there”—he showed what he had in mind both through the blowing snow and on the map—“and block the Canadians from coming down and getting in our rear. I rely on you for this, Sergeant. If I had to make do with anyone else, I’d leave two guns behind. But your weapon always works.”

“It will keep working, sir,” Finkel said. Morrell looked at his hands again. Anyone who could handle the tiny, intricate gearing of watches was unlikely to have trouble keeping a machine gun operating, and Finkel, along with being mechanically ept, was also a brave, cool-

headed soldier.

Morrell pointed to Captain Spadinger. “Karl, you’ll take the rest of your company and open the hostile position on the eastern side of the slope. Hold your fire as long as you can.”

“Yes, sir,” Spadinger said. “As you ordered, we’ll be carrying extra grenades for when actual combat breaks out.”

“Good,” Morrell said. Spadinger’s efficiency pleased him, which was why he’d given him the secondary command for the attack. He went on, “Captain Hall, your rifle company and Lieutenant Lewis’ machine-gun company, less that one squad I’m leaving with Sergeant Finkel, will accompany me on the main flanking thrust. If we can chase the Canucks off this hill, we’ve gone a long way toward clearing the path to Banff. Any questions, gentlemen?” Nobody said anything. Morrell nodded. “We’ll try it, then. We advance as rapidly as possible. Keep speed in your minds above all else. We move at 0900.”

In the fifteen minutes before they began to move, he checked his men, especially the teams manhandling the machine guns across country. They were good troops; in grim Darwinian fashion, most of the soldiers who didn’t make good mountain troops were dead or wounded by now.

He felt the men’s eyes on him, too. This would be the first real action they’d faced with him commanding them. He didn’t suppose they knew about his having had to leave the General Staff—he hoped they didn’t, anyhow—but they had to be wondering about what he and they would be able to do together. Well, they were finding out he didn’t care to huddle in trenches.

“Let’s go,” he said.

Spruce and fir and swirling snow helped screen the men in green-gray from the Canadians above. No firing broke out off to the right, which relieved Morrell to no small degree. He grinned, imagining Spadinger’s men rounding up sentries and poking bayoneted rifles into dugouts, catching the Canucks by surprise.

His own men scooped up a fair number of prisoners, too. One of them, brought back to Morrell, glared at him and said, “What the devil are you bastards doing so far from where the fighting is?”

“Why, moving it someplace else, of course,” he answered cheerfully, which made the Canuck even less happy.

Morrell's leg tried to protest when he pushed up to the very head of his force, but he ignored it. *It's only pain,* he told himself, and, as he usually did, managed to make himself believe it. He reached the lead just in time to help capture a machine-gun position the Canadians had blasted out of the living rock of the hill, again without firing a shot.

"This is wonderful, sir!" Captain Hall exclaimed. "We've got the drop on the Canucks for sure this time."

"So far, so—" Morrell began. Before *good* got out of his mouth, a burst of fire made him whip his head back toward the direction which Captain Spadinger and his company had gone. It sounded as if they were heavily engaged. "We appear to have lost the advantage of—" Morrell didn't get to finish that sentence, either. Machine guns from atop the hill opened up on his detachment before he could say *surprise*. That was a surprise to him, and not a pleasant one.

"Dig in!" he shouted. "Do it now! Sweat saves blood!" As the riflemen began to obey, he turned to Lieutenant Lewis. "Get those machine guns set up. We've got to neutralize that fire."

The machine-gun crews mounted their heavy weapons on top of the even heavier tripods in time that would have kept a drill sergeant happy on the practice field. It wasn't for prestige here; it was for survival.

Morrell cursed as one of his men slumped over, briefly kicking in a way suggesting he'd never get up again. "Advance on them!" he yelled. "Shift to the northeast, so we can take that hilltop and support Captain Spadinger's company. Move, move, move!"

It wasn't the fight he'd wanted, but it was the fight he had. Now he had to make the best of it. Keeping everything as fluid as possible would also keep the Canucks confused about how many men he had and what he intended to do with them. Since he suspected he was outnumbered, that was all to the good.

Back where this movement had originated, Sergeant Finkel's machine gun started hammering. Morrell nodded to himself. The Canucks wouldn't be getting into his rear. Now he had to see if he could get into theirs. "Hold fire as much as you can as you advance," he called to the riflemen. "Let them think Spadinger has the main force. If they concentrate on him, we'll make them regret it."

"Aren't you telling the men more than they need to know?" Captain Hall shouted as the two of them ran to a boulder and flopped down

behind it side by side. Bullets whined away from the other side of the stone, then went elsewhere in search of fresh targets.

"Just the opposite, Captain," Morrell answered. "This way, if I go down, the attack will go forward, because they'll know what I expect of them." Hall didn't look convinced, but he didn't argue with his commanding officer, either. If Morrell's methods didn't work, odds were he'd end up dead and so beyond criticism. Morrell raised his voice: "Keep the machine guns well forward, Lieutenant Lewis!"

Lewis and his machine gunners, bless their hearts, didn't need that order. They treated the machine guns almost like rifles, advancing at a stumbling run from one patch of cover to the next they saw—or hoped they saw.

Even so, Morrell was worried, and worse than worried. From the sound of the fighting off to the east, Spadinger's men weren't withholding fire. On the contrary; it sounded as if every man was in the line, fighting desperately to stay alive. If the forces they'd run into could crush them, those forces would swing back on him and smash him up, too. "Hold on, Karl!" he whispered fiercely. "Make them pay the price."

One of the Canuck machine guns up at the crest of the hill fell silent. Morrell whooped as he ran forward. The Canadians were used to facing slow, carefully set up attacks, not to this sort of lightning strike with things hitting them all at once from every which way.

And then he whooped again, for men in khaki scrambled out of their trenches and ran down—to the southeast, toward Captain Spadinger's embattled company. They gave Morrell's men the kind of target soldiers dreamt about. "Now!" he shouted. "Give 'em everything we've got."

Again, the men did not need the order. They loosed a storm of lead at the Canadians, who shouted in dismay at taking such fire from the right flank and rear. Yelling with glee, the U.S. soldiers dashed forward to take out the foes giving their comrades so much trouble.

Half an hour later, Morrell stood on the height he'd intended to bypass. A long file of dejected prisoners, many of them roughly bandaged, stumbled back toward what had been the U.S. line. "You don't fight fair," one of them shouted to Morrell.

"Good," Morrell answered. The Canuck scowled. His own men laughed. They felt like tigers now. For that matter, he felt on the

tigerish side himself. Things hadn't gone exactly as he'd thought they would, but they seldom did. One thing both real war and the General Staff had taught him was that no plan long survived contact with the enemy.

He looked around. The view was terrific. He'd taken the objective. He hadn't taken crippling casualties doing it. *How* he'd taken it didn't matter. *That* he'd taken it did. He looked around again. A new question burned in his mind—what could he do next?

Jefferson Pinkard looked down at himself. His butternut uniform was so full of stains from the red dirt of southern Georgia, it might as well have started out mottled. He smelled. By the way his head itched, he probably had lice. Emily would have thrown him in a kettle, boiled him, and shampooed him with kerosene before she let him into the house, let alone into her bed.

He didn't care. He was alive. He'd seen too many different kinds of horrible death these past few weeks—he'd dealt out too many different kinds of horrible death these past few weeks—to worry about anything past that. The Black Belt Socialist Republic was dying. When he'd set out, he'd supposed that would make everything worthwhile. Did it? He didn't know. He didn't care much, either.

He detached the bayonet from his Tredegar and methodically cleaned it. It was clean already, but he wanted it cleaner. It had had blood on it, a couple of days before. He couldn't see that blood, not now, but he knew it was there.

"Damn niggers ought to give up," he muttered under his breath.

"What you say?" That was Hip Rodriguez, a recruit from down in Sonora. He didn't speak a whole lot of English. Most of what he did speak was vile. Up till the Conscription Bureau nabbed Jeff Pinkard, he'd thought of Sonorans and Chihuahuans as one step above Negroes, and a short step to boot. But Rodriguez had saved his life. If that didn't make him a good fellow, nothing ever would.

And so, instead of barking, Jeff repeated himself, adding, "They're licked. They damn well ought to know it."

Rodriguez shrugged. "We keep licking they, they quit—one way or t'odder." He carried a thoroughly nonregulation knife on his belt, and

a whetstone to go with it. When he honed that blade, it made a vicious little grinding sound. He smiled, enjoying it.

"That's true," Pinkard admitted. "No two ways around it, I guess. Question that keeps comin'up in my mind, though, is what happens afterwards. They gonna be pullin' knives like yours out o' their hip pockets and stabbin' white men twenty years from now when they think they got the chance? That's a hell of a way to try and run a country, you know what I'm sayin'?"

Rodriguez shrugged again. "They try that, they get killed. Is no big never-mind to me." He flashed a big, shiny grin at Jeff. "In Sonora, we don't have no *mallates*—no niggers—till you Confederates, you buy us from Mexico. You bring in the problem. You should ought to fix it, too."

With some amusement, Pinkard noted that Rodriguez looked down his nose at Negroes, too. In a way, it made sense: if not for them, he would have been on the bottom himself. But the blacks *were* on the bottom. That made putting them down harder, because they had so little to lose from their rebellion.

Off to one side, a field piece began barking, throwing shells into Albany, Georgia. Captain Connolly looked up from his tin cup of coffee and said, "All right, boys, now we go and take their capital away from 'em. About time, I'd say. And doing that'll just about put the last nail in the coffin. Can't hardly claim they've got a country when they haven't got a capital any more, can they?"

"Damnyankees do," Stinky Salley said.

Connolly didn't catch him opening his mouth. He looked around. "All right, who's the smart bird?" he demanded. Nobody said anything. He gulped down the rest of the coffee—heavily laced with chicory and God only knew what all else, if it was anything like Jeff's. Pinkard didn't care. It was hot and strong and made his heart beat faster. The captain said, "Come on, boys. Time to do it."

He didn't tell them what to do and sit back on his duff. He went out with them and helped them do it. Pinkard had appreciated that in a foundry foreman. He appreciated it even more in an officer. After patting himself to make sure he had plenty of spare clips for the Tredegar, he scrambled to his feet and trudged on toward Albany.

The front hereabouts was too wide, with too few men covering too many miles, for proper entrenchment. You dug foxholes where you

happened to be, fought out of them, and advanced some more. The survivors of the new regiment to which he belonged weren't advancing in neat files of men now. They'd learned better. They moved forward in open order, well spread out. *More space for the bullets to pass between,* Pinkard thought.

A shot rang out—behind him. One of his comrades went down, clutching at the back of his left thigh. Half a dozen men close by went down, too, hitting the dirt at the first sound of gunfire. Pinkard was one of them. He'd developed a tremendous respect for the horrid things flying lead could do to the human body.

Another shot kicked up red dirt and spat it in his face. "It's another one of those hideout sons of bitches," he said unhappily. As their strength faltered, the Reds had formed the nasty habit of digging in with concealed foxholes facing not toward their Confederate foes but away, and holding their fire till the soldiers had gone past them. They'd done considerable damage that way. This fellow looked to have added to it.

Stalking him through the pine woods was a deadly game of hide and seek. He wounded another man before Rodriguez flushed him out of his hole with a grenade and three other soldiers shot him from three different directions. He wasn't quite dead, even after that. Jeff put a round through his head at close range, which made him stop thrashing and moaning.

"What did you go and do that for?" one of the other Confederates asked. "Bastard deserved to suffer, I reckon."

"Yeah, but if we went and left him, he might have found a way to do more mischief, even shot up like he was," Pinkard answered.

"Oh, tactics. That's all right, then," said the other soldier, a hulking Tennessean named Finley. "You talk kind of soft on niggers sometimes, so I wondered if you was just doing him a kindness."

Pinkard bristled. He wasn't a hardliner, and nobody could make him one—he was a free white man, with a right to his opinion. "Listen," he said, "there's ten million of 'em in the CSA, or ten million take away however many got themselves killed in this stupid uprising of theirs. We got to figure out what to do with 'em after this part of the shooting's done."

"Put the slave chains back on 'em," Finley snapped. "Serve 'em right."

Not many Confederates wanted to go that far, for which Pinkard thanked God. “They done showed they can fight,” he said. “You buy a big buck nigger now, Finley, you think you ever dare turn your back on him?” Finley scowled from under the brim of his helmet. He didn’t say anything, which suited Jeff fine.

They emerged from the woods a few hundred yards outside of Albany. Field pieces were still pounding the town. Answering fire came mostly from the big houses on the north side of the main street: from what had been the white section of the city. Red flags still flew defiantly above several of those houses. “Bastards are doing it on purpose, hurting whites as much as they can,” Finley said. Now Pinkard was the one who didn’t answer.

One of those big houses with a two-story colonnaded porch held a machine gun. It spat death out toward the advancing soldiers in butternut. The fields had been plowed with shell holes. Pinkard jumped into one. Once he was in it, he discovered he shared it with the stinking corpse of a Negro. He stayed where he was, stench or no stench. With bullets whining past overhead, he figured he’d wind up a corpse himself if he moved too soon.

But, however much you might like the notion, you couldn’t huddle in a hole forever. When the machine gun chose a different target, he got up and ran for another hole closer to Albany. He got fired on again, but made it safely.

The Confederates were moving on the city from the west and the north. The Red rebels holed up inside did not have the firepower to keep them out. But instead of fading back into the countryside, the Negroes fought house to house, making the government forces clear them out with grenades and, once or twice, with the bayonet.

At last, the Reds were pushed back to the last couple of houses where they still had machine guns up and firing. A flag still flew from one of them. Inside, the Negroes shouted the defiant cry they’d raised through the whole unpleasant engagement: “The people! Fo’ the people!”

When gunfire eased for a moment, Pinkard shouted back: “Give up, you lying bastards! We *are* the people!”

“Liar your own self!” One of those machine guns lashed the rubble in which he lay. He’d expected that, and stayed very low behind the big pile of red bricks that had been a chimney before a shell knocked

it down. But his words seemed to have angered the black rebels so much, they didn't just want to kill him. The same fellow who'd yelled before shouted out again: "You ain't the people. You is the dogs o' the aristocracy, is what you is!" He barked derisively.

"The hell you say!" Pinkard answered, a measure of how good his cover was. "Lot more white men than niggers in the CSA."

"Not in the Black Belt Socialist Republic," the Red retorted. "Not in the others, neither." He laughed. "We havin' our own War o' Secession, if'n you want to put it like that."

Jeff didn't want to put it like that, even to himself. It would have made the fight the Negroes were raising seem altogether too legitimate to him. And then another Red let out a dark, nasty laugh and added, "Sure as hell ain't mo' white folks than niggers in the Black Belt Socialist Republic nowadays. We done took care o' that."

From off to the side, a Confederate soldier started pitching grenades into the house where the Red revolutionaries were holed up. Pinkard had no idea whether they wounded any of the Negroes. They did set the house on fire.

That left the Reds a desperate choice. They could stay and burn or flee and get shot down. They fled, disciplined enough to carry the machine gun with them to set up again if they found fresh refuge. They didn't.

One more house and the fighting was done. Captain Connolly carried a red flag as he strode through the shattered wreckage of what had been a prosperous Georgia farming town. "It's over," he said. "Here, it's over."

Pinkard looked around. He felt giddy, half stunned, half drunk at being alive. Wearily, he shook his head. The fighting might have ended, but the revolt and its aftermath weren't over. He wondered how many years would pass before they were. He wondered if they ever would be.

Remembrance Day passed quietly in New York City. Soldiers' Circle men and military bands paraded, as did newly raised units going off to the front. Enough soldiers with glittering bayonets and full clips in their rifles stood along the parade route to have marched on

Richmond and taken it in about ten days—that was Flora Hamburger's sardonic thought, at any rate. The soldiers had orders—highly publicized orders—to shoot to kill at the first sign of trouble and a look that said they would have enjoyed doing it. They seemed disappointed when the Socialists didn't give them the chance.

"Now it's our turn," Flora said back at the Fourteenth Ward Socialist Party offices after the sun set on a day without incident. "May Day next week, and then we show them what we really think of their government and their war."

"They still may try to find some way to keep us from holding our parade," Herman Bruck said nervously.

"There is such a thing as the Constitution of the United States," Flora said. "We have the right to petition for redress of grievances, unless they put New York under martial law the way they did to Utah, and we'll make absolutely certain we give them no excuse to do that."

"We don't necessarily have to give them any excuses." Maria Tresca's brown eyes flashed. "An *agent provocateur*—"

"I wouldn't put anything past Teddy Roosevelt," Bruck said darkly.

"As a matter of fact, I doubt TR would authorize anything like that," Flora said. "He's a class enemy, but he has the full set of upper-class notions about legitimate and illegitimate ways and means." As a storm of disagreement washed over her, she held up a warning hand. "That doesn't mean I don't think there will be any provocations. His henchmen don't worry about the niceties. But I don't think the order for provocations comes straight from the top. Give the devil his due. Better—give him a good kick in the *tukhus* and send him home in November."

That swung people back to her. Planning went on—the order of march for unions from all the different trades that would be joining up, and, as important, the order of the speakers. Bruck said, "Such a pity Myron won't be here to tell the people the truth."

Everyone sighed. For a moment, the mood in the offices went soft and sad. Congressman Zuckerman had been able to rouse a crowd almost the way a *goyishe* preacher could in a tent-show revival. Reverently, Flora said, "If you weren't a Socialist after you heard Myron Zuckerman, you'd never be a Socialist." She forced herself back to business, back to practicality: "But he's not here, and we have to go on without him."

Herman Bruck appointed himself to the podium. Flora bit down on her lower lip. Herman wouldn't come close to Zuckerman as an orator if he lived twenty years longer than Methuselah. As far as she was concerned, Zuckerman dead was a better orator than Herman Bruck alive.

She was about to add her own name to the list to counteract Bruck (not that she would have put it so crassly) when he said, "And of course, to keep the ladies happy, we'll have a woman speaker or two. Flora, why don't you take care of that for us?"

She'd never had to get out the hatpin to stop him from feeling her up. She felt like pulling it from her hat now, though, and sticking it into him about three inches deep. The way he casually dismissed the importance of half the human race was, in a way, a worse violation than if he'd tried to squeeze her bosom. Maybe worse still was that he hadn't the slightest idea of what he'd done.

"I'll speak to the women," she said through tight lips, "and to the men, too."

"That's fine," Bruck said, nodding genially—no, he hadn't a clue. She studied him—perfect coif, perfect clothes, perfect confidence. Inside, where it didn't show, she smiled a hunter's smile. Perfect target.

When she got home that evening, she found her mother and her younger sister, Esther, in tears. Little Yossel, her nephew, was in tears, too, but only in the ordinary, babyish way of things. "What's wrong?" Flora exclaimed in alarm.

With trembling finger, her mother pointed to the supper table. There, among the advertising circulars, lay an envelope with a formidable heading:

Government of the United States of America, War Department

The next line, set in slightly smaller type in the same hard-to-read font, said,

Bureau of Selection for Service

The envelope was addressed to David Hamburger.

“Oh, no,” Flora whispered. The older of her younger brothers had turned eighteen a few months before, and had dutifully enrolled himself at the local Selection for Service Bureau offices. The penalties for failing to enroll—and the rewards for informants—were too high to make any other course possible. Ever since then, the family had known this day might and probably would come. That made it no easier to bear on its arrival.

Benjamin Hamburger came in next. He spotted the envelope without prompting. He said nothing, but walked into the kitchen, filled a shot glass with whiskey, and knocked it back. He breathed heavily. After a moment, he filled the glass again and drained it as quickly as before. He often took one drink. Flora could not remember the last time he’d taken two.

The apartment was eerily silent when David walked in. As Flora had, he asked, “What’s wrong?” No one spoke, just as no one ever mentioned the Angel of Death. But the angel was there, mentioned or not. So was the envelope. No one had opened it; the Hamburgers never opened one another’s mail, and when it was likely to be a letter like this…David did the job himself. “They want me to report for my physical examination next Tuesday—the second,” he said.

Sophie had come in while he was opening the envelope. She still wore mourning for her husband. She began to wail as she had when she’d learned Yossel was dead. Nothing could console her. Her dismay set little Yossel, who had calmed down, to wailing again. That was the scene on which Isaac Hamburger walked in.

“It’ll be all right,” David said, over and over, perhaps trying to convince himself as well as his kin. “It can’t be helped, anyhow.” Where the other might well have been wrong, that, at least, was true.

Flora never remembered what she had for supper that night. While she was making final preparations for the May Day parade, her brother would be looking forward to getting poked and prodded by coldhearted men in white coats, intent on seeing how he would suit as cannon fodder. She found herself wishing he were pale and consumptive, not strong and ruddy and bursting with life. Life could burst, all right, so easily. The family had seen that.

She went into the office the next morning full of grim determination to keep countless other young men from having to face the danger her brother was all too likely to confront. That meant throwing all her energy into working with the groups taking part in the parade, and into working with the authorities to make sure it went off with as little interference as possible.

"We *will* be peaceable," she promised over and over again. "We won't provoke anything. Don't provoke us in return, and don't let the Soldiers' Circle goons provoke us. The United States still have a Constitution, don't they?" The authorities needed to be reminded of that even more than Herman Bruck did.

Some of the answers she got from police captains and city bureaucrats were conciliatory, some ambiguous at best, and more than a few downright hostile. She did what she could to defuse those. Sighing late in the afternoon on the Saturday before the parade, she said, "I've made more compromises the past week than in all the time I worked here up till then."

"It's good training for Congress," Maria Tresca answered. The look she sent toward Flora was speculative, to say the least. Flora didn't answer, not in words, but her smile was jauntier than she would have thought possible, considering how tired she was.

Herman Bruck never noticed the byplay. He was busy, too—impressively, ostentatiously busy—drafting his speech.

May Day dawned warm and muggy, a day right out of July. More than a few men in the crowds lining Broadway sported straw hats instead of homburgs or caps, as if it truly were summer. The band at the head of the parade—not so fancy as the military bands that strutted down the avenue on Remembrance Day—struck up the "Internationale," then the "Marseillaise," and last the "Star-Spangled Banner." Everyone cheered the national anthem; the other two brought mingled cheers and boos.

"The hell with the frogs, and the hell with their song!" somebody shouted.

"It's a song of revolution," Flora shouted back as she marched along. "It's a song against tyranny and oppression, and for freedom. Don't you think we need that?"

"They're the enemy!" the heckler yelled to her.

“They’ve forgotten freedom,” she returned. Defiantly, she added, “And so have we.”

A few eggs flew out of the crowd toward the parade. The cops didn’t do anything about that. When somebody threw a bottle instead, though, they waded in, nightsticks swinging. Flora gave a judicious nod. Throwing eggs wasn’t that far from heckling, and the Constitution protected heckling no matter who did it. A bottle, now, a bottle was liable to be lethal.

One of the red banners the Socialists carried showed a bare-chested Negro carrying a rifle. REVOLUTION OF THE CSA—1915. REVOLUTION IN THE USA—19??.

“The Rebs put the niggers down!” That cry came out of the crowd at least twice every city block.

The Socialists were ready for it: “Does that mean you want us to act just like the Confederates?” Identifying U.S. actions with those of the hated enemy reduced all but the most politically savvy hecklers to confusion—better yet, to speechless confusion.

Jews and Irishmen, Italians and a few Negroes, Anglo-Saxons and Germans, too, the marchers made their way up to Central Park, where they congregated for the speeches. Herman Bruck and Flora climbed up onto the platform packed with politicians and labor leaders. Bruck eyed her with complacent glee and introduced her to some of the Socialist bigwigs (something even an egalitarian party possessed) she hadn’t yet met.

Big Bill Haywood eyed her, too, in a manner that tempted her to take out the hatpin. He had only one eye that tracked and he stank of whiskey, but the furious energy he brought to any cause—whether organizing or striking—made him a force for the money power to reckon with. “Give ’em hell, missy,” he said in a gravelly bass. “They deserve it.”

Senator Debs of Indiana was more urbane but no more ready to back down. “TR wants to deal with us as the French dealt with the Paris Commune,” he said. “We’ll show him we are stronger, even in the midst of this foolish war we never should have agreed to help finance.” He grimaced at the tactical blunder his party had made back in 1914. Flora wondered, though, whether he would say the same thing if, as seemed likely, he gained the Socialist nomination for president later in the year.

One speaker after another went up to the podium, blasted the Democrats, praised labor to the skies, and withdrew. “And now, from the Fourteenth Ward, home of the late, great Congressman Zuckerman, Mr. Herman Bruck!” yelled the fellow in charge of keeping the speeches in some kind of order.

He stepped back. Herman Bruck stepped forward. He delivered his speech. Flora stopped listening to it about a minute and a half in. It was everything she’d thought it would be, in its strengths and weaknesses, the latter summarized by the yawns she saw out in the crowd.

Bruck finished and stepped back to polite, tepid applause. “Also from the Fourteenth Ward, Miss Flora Hamburger!” the presenter shouted.

Trying to ignore the pounding of her heart, Flora looked out over the podium at the sea of faces out there. “Birds have nests!” she cried, and pounded a fist down on the polished wood. “Foxes have dens! What does the proletariat have? Nothing but the strength of its right arms, for the capitalists have stolen everything else! And now, not content with that, they send the workers of our country—the workers of the world—out to die by millions in a war that has nothing to do with them. Do we sit idly by and let that happen? Or do we take action, brothers and sisters?”

Maybe fear for David, who would go in for his examination tomorrow, lent her even more passion than she would have had otherwise. However that was, by the time she finished, the applause she got lifted her far higher above the crowd than could have been accounted for by the platform alone. She stepped back dazed, hardly knowing what she’d done.

Big Bill Haywood’s hungry stare put her in mind of a wolf eyeing a slab of steak. Eugene Debs said, “Young lady, I think I shall tear up my own speech.” Herman Bruck looked half astonished, half terrified. That, somehow, was sweetest of all.

* * *

Tom Kennedy put a friendly arm around Cincinnatus’shoulder. “Come on into the back room,” he said. “Have a cigar with us.” He laughed. So did Joe Conroy. The storekeeper waved Cincinnatus into that back room.

With no small reluctance, he followed the two white men in there. Inside, he was sighing—no, worse, he was sweating. He didn't want to have anything to do with the Confederate underground still operating in Covington, Kentucky, not any more he didn't. But, quite literally, they knew where he lived. If they wanted him to play along, he either had to do it or betray them to the U.S. occupying authorities and then live in fear for the rest of his life. For now, going along seemed less dangerous.

The back room smelled of tobacco and spices and sweets and leather, with a faint undertone of potatoes going bad. To his surprise, Conroy reached into a cigar box and handed him a plump panatella. "Thank you, suh," he said in some surprise. Kennedy was the one who'd always treated him pretty well. To Conroy, he'd been just another hired nigger.

"Hear tell you've been drivin' trucks all over creation for the damnyankees these past few weeks," Conroy said. "Reckon that's why you ain't been in to see us much, even when we put the signal up in the window for you."

"It's a fact, suh," Cincinnatus agreed, gratefully seizing on the excuse the storekeeper offered him. "Sometimes I'm gone fo' days at a time."

"That's fine," Tom Kennedy said. He was thin and dapper and clever; it wasn't by accident he'd been running the hauling firm for which Cincinnatus had worked before the war. "I always knew there was a lot to you, Cincinnatus. Once we win the war, smart black fellows like you will have a lot more chances in the CSA, I reckon. It's in the cards."

"You say that even after the Red uprisin'?" Cincinnatus asked. Kennedy and Conroy didn't know he was a part-time Red himself, but he was in no danger of blowing his cover with the question—the only people who didn't know about the Red Negro attempted revolution were dead.

Kennedy nodded, quite seriously. "Hell, yes, I say that. Richmond won't ever want that kind of thing to happen again, not ever, I tell you. Too many niggers to hold down all of you, so I figure they'll have to give you some of what you want. Don't you?"

Cincinnatus shrugged. He eyed Joe Conroy. The storekeeper nodded, however unenthusiastically. That made Cincinnatus think

Kennedy might be right. The next question was, did he care? That was harder to answer. A few weeks before, he would have said a Confederacy with some rights for blacks didn't sound too bad. But now that he'd met Lieutenant Straubing, it didn't sound too good, either. He'd seen that men who didn't care about color were rare in the USA. In the CSA, they weren't rare—they simply didn't exist.

Taking his silence for consent, Kennedy picked up the box from which Conroy had drawn the panatella and the box under it. He opened the one under that. It held, not cigars, but thin-walled lead cylinders of about the same size. Cincinnatus didn't know what they were for, but he figured Kennedy would tell him.

He was right. Kennedy picked up one of the tubes and said, "Thanks to these little sugar plums, we can make the Yankees very unhappy. There's a copper disk edge-on right in the middle here"—he held the cylinder toward a kerosene lamp, so Cincinnatus could see it wasn't hollow quite all the way through—"that divides it into two compartments. You put sulfuric acid in one, picric acid in the other, cork both ends with wax plugs—and then all you have to do is wait."

"Wait for what?" Cincinnatus was starting to get an idea, but, again, he didn't know enough to be sure.

"When the sulfuric acid eats through the copper, it mixes with the picric acid, right?" Kennedy said with a grin that would have made him a hell of a snake-oil salesman. "And out both ends of the tube comes the nicest little spurt of flame you ever did see. Melts down the bomb so nothing's left and starts a hell of a fire, both at the same time. Set one in a crate of shells, say—"

"I see what you're talkin' about, Mr. Kennedy, I surely do," Cincinnatus said. The Confederates had indeed come up with a nasty little toy here. "How much time goes by 'fore the stuff in there eats through the copper and the fire starts?"

"Depends on how thick the copper disk is," Conroy answered. "Anywhere from an hour or so to a couple of weeks. We got all kinds. You don't need to worry about that."

"Good," Cincinnatus said. It wasn't good, but it was better than it might have been. If he started setting firebombs all over creation, the Yankees would take a while to associate the blazes with him. But, sooner or later, they would. He had no doubt of that. The Yankees weren't stupid. Even Lieutenant Kennan did his job well enough, no

matter how wrongheaded his ideas about Negroes were.

Conroy and Kennedy probably didn't think the Yankees were stupid, either. What they did think was that Cincinnatus was stupid. With a big, false smile pasted across his face, the storekeeper said, "See how easy it'll be, boy? Not a chance in the world of getting caught."

Cincinnatus glanced over to Tom Kennedy. Kennedy treated him as well as any Confederate white had ever done, and sometimes showed, or seemed to show, some understanding that dark skin didn't mean no brains. If Kennedy warned him to be careful now when he picked his spots, and to make sure he didn't bring suspicion down on himself… he wasn't sure what he'd do then, but at least he'd have proof in his former boss' actions that the CSA might see its way clear to looking at Negroes as human beings once the war was done.

Kennedy smiled, too. "Joe is right, Cincinnatus," he said. "You can see for yourself, they won't ever have a clue about how the fires start. You can do the cause a whole lot of good."

"I see that, Mistuh Kennedy, suh," Cincinnatus said slowly. The Confederate cause came first with Kennedy, too. "How do I tell the few-hour bombs from the ones that go for days 'fore they catch on fire?"

Tom Kennedy's smile got broader. He clapped Cincinnatus on the back. "You're a good fellow, you know that? Here, I'll show you." He held out one of the lead tubes. "The time it's set for is stamped right here, you see. This one's a six-hour delay." He held up a warning forefinger. "That's not perfect, mind you. It might be four hours, and it might be eight. But it won't be two hours, and it won't be two days, either."

"I got you," Cincinnatus said. It was a good system. It would do damage. It would also get traced back to him, sure as the sun would set tonight and come up again tomorrow.

Conroy and Kennedy had a rucksack ready for him to carry home. It contained lead tubes inset with copper disks of varying thickness, a glass jar full of oily-looking sulfuric acid, and another jar that held a powdery, yellowish substance, presumably picric acid. It also had a couple of dozen wax stoppers, a spoon, and a couple of glass funnels. "You don't want to get this stuff, either kind, on your skin, or let the one go through the funnel that's held the other," Conroy said. If the storekeeper was warning him, Cincinnatus figured he was dealing

with nasty stuff indeed.

The rucksack was small, but surprisingly heavy—lead was like that. Cincinnatus felt almost as if he'd lugged a crate of ammunition home with him. When he got back to the house, Elizabeth's eyebrows shot up at the burden he brought in. "You don't want to know," he told her, and she didn't ask any more questions. She'd learned you were liable to be better off without some answers than with them.

That evening, working in the sink after Elizabeth had gone to bed, Cincinnatus carefully made up three firebombs, one with a one-day disk, one with a two-day disk, and one with a fourteen-day disk, the longest in the whole set of tubes the men from the Confederate underground had given him. He accidentally spilled a drop of sulfuric acid on the galvanized iron. It steamed and bubbled and was doing its best to eat its way right through the sink till he poured lots of water on it. Afterwards, he eyed the discolored spot with considerable respect.

He didn't like having the bombs in his pocket when he went to work the next morning. If a stopper came loose, he figured he'd like it even less. Nodding in a friendly way to Lieutenant Straubing came hard.

Along with the other drivers, he rattled south, and stopped to drop his cargo—small-arms ammunition, from what was stenciled on the crates—a little past one in the afternoon. While laborers unloaded the trucks, he ate his lunch and wandered around. Planting a couple of bombs was as easy as Kennedy and Conroy had said it would be.

Night had fallen by the time he got back to Covington. "See you tomorrow, Cincinnatus," Lieutenant Straubing called, and waved.

"Yes, suh." Cincinnatus waved back. He walked home. No signal for him in Conroy's front window today—the Confederate underground had got what it wanted from him. The general store was quiet and dark, closed for the day. He ducked into the alley behind the place to make sure nothing was wrong, then went on home.

He made up a couple of more bombs that evening, and planted them the next day. That evening, Conroy waved to him as he walked past—word of the first fire he'd set must have already got back to the storekeeper. *Glad you're happy,* Cincinnatus thought, and returned the wave, as he had Lieutenant Straubing's.

Twelve days later, Conroy's store burned to the ground.

Jonathan Moss' thumb stabbed the firing button. The tracers his machine gun spat helped him guide the line of fire across the fuselage of the British biplane whose pilot hadn't spied him coming till too late. The flier slumped over his controls, dead or unconscious. His aeroplane spun down, down, down. Moss followed it down, on the off chance the limey was shamming. He wasn't. The aeroplane crashed into the battered ground of no-man's-land and began to burn.

Moss pulled up sharply. Down there in the trenches, men in khaki were blazing away at him. He didn't take them for granted, not any more. They'd brought him down once. He wanted to give them as little chance of doing it again as he could.

A couple of bullets punched through the fabric covering his single-decker's wings. The sound brought remembered fear, in a way it hadn't when the Englishman put some rounds through there. No aeroplane had ever knocked him out of the sky, which meant he could make himself believe no aeroplane *could* knock him out of the sky. He couldn't pretend, even to himself, that the infantry, which had got lucky once, might not get lucky again.

Small arms still aimed his way. Looking back in the rearview mirror mounted on the edge of the cockpit, he saw muzzle flashes bright as the sun. But his altimeter was winding steadily. By the time he passed twenty-five hundred feet, which didn't take long, he was pretty safe.

Up above him, Dud Dudley waggled his wings in a victory salute. Moss waved back to the flight leader. His buddies had covered for him while he flew down to confirm his kill of the British biplane. He waved again. *Good fellows,* he thought.

Looking around for more opponents, he found none. Dudley waggled his wings again, and pointed back toward the aerodrome. Moss checked his fuel gauge. He had less gas left than he'd thought. He didn't argue or try to pretend he hadn't seen, but took his place in the flight above, behind, and to the left of Dudley.

One after another, the four Martin single-deckers bounced to a stop on the rutted grass of the airstrip outside Cambridge, Ontario. Groundcrew men came trotting up, not only to see to the aeroplanes but also to pick up the word on what had happened in the war in the air. "Johnny got one," Tom Innis said, slapping Moss on the back hard enough to stagger him. Innis' grin was wide and fierce and full of

sharp teeth, as if he were more wolf than man.

“That’s bully, Lieutenant!” The groundcrew men crowded around him. One of them pressed a cigar into a pocket of his flying suit. “Knock ’em all down, sir.” “The more you sting, the fewer they’ve got left.”

Eventually, the fliers detached themselves and headed for Captain Pruitt’s office to make their official report. “That was really fine shooting, sir,” Phil Eaker said. He was skinny and blond and unlikely to be as young as he looked. Nobody, Moss thought from the height of his mid-twenties, was likely to be as young as Phil Eaker looked. He also hadn’t had enough flying time to harden him yet. That would come—if he lived.

“I dove on him out of the sun,” Moss said, shrugging. He could smell the leftover fear in his sweat now that the slipstream wasn’t blowing it away. “If he doesn’t know you’re there, that’s the easiest way to do the job. He only got off a few rounds at me.”

When the war broke out, he’d thought of himself as a knight of the air. Nothing left him happier now than a kill where the foe didn’t have much chance to kill him. He suspected knights in shining armor hadn’t cried in their beer when they were able to bash out a Saracen’s brains from behind, either.

Hardshell Pruitt looked up from the papers on his desk when Dudley and the men of his flight ducked into his tent. The squadron commander pulled out a binder, dipped his pen into a bottle of ink, and said, “Tell me, gentlemen. Try to give me the abridged version. I spend so much time filling out forms”—he waved at the documents over which he’d been laboring—“I haven’t been getting the flight time I need.”

“Yes, sir,” Dudley said. Concisely and accurately, he reported on the flight. The most significant item was Moss’ downing the British flying scout. Moss told a good deal of that tale himself.

“Well done,” Captain Pruitt said when he’d finished. “Let me just see something here.” He shuffled through some manila folders, opened one, read what was in it, and grunted. Then he said, “Very good, Moss. You’re dismissed. I have some matters I need to take up with your pals here. You may see them again, or I may decide to ship them all out for courts-martial.”

“I’m sure they all deserve it, sir,” Moss said cheerfully, which got

him ripe raspberries from the other men in the flight. He ignored them, making his way back to his own tent. When he peeled off his flight suit, he realized how grimy and sweaty he was. The aerodrome had rigged up a makeshift showerbath from an old fuel drum set on a wooden platform. The day held a promise of summer. He didn't even ask to have any hot water added to what was in there. He just grabbed some soap and scrubbed till he was clean.

Dudley, Innis, and Eaker still hadn't returned from Captain Pruitt's office by the time Moss got back to his tent. He scratched his freshly washed head. Maybe Hardshell hadn't been joking, and they really were in Dutch.

He smoked the cigar the groundcrew man had given him, stretched out on his cot, and dozed for half an hour. His tentmates weren't back when he woke up. He muttered under his breath. What the devil had they done? Why the devil hadn't they let him do some of it, too?

He got up, went outside, and looked around. No sign of them. Hardly any sign of anybody, when you got down to it. He ambled over to the officers' lounge. You could always find somebody there. It was nearly sunset, too, which meant the place ought to be filling up for some heavy-duty, professional drinking, the way it did every night.

Except tonight. Oh, a couple of pilots from another squadron were in there soaking up some whiskey, but the place was dead except for them. "Somebody get shot down?" Moss wondered out loud. It was the only thing he could think of, but it didn't strike him as very likely. When a fellow died up in the sky, his comrades usually drank themselves stupid to remember him and to forget they might be next.

Drinking alone wasn't Moss'idea of fun, and the other two pi-lots didn't seem interested in company. Having nothing better to do, he was about to wander off and sack out when a groundcrew corporal poked his head into the lounge, spotted him, and exclaimed, "Oh, there you are, sir! Jesus, I'm glad I found you. Hardshell—uh, Captain Pruitt—he wants to see you right away. I was you, sir, I wouldn't keep him waiting." He disappeared.

Moss hopped to his feet. Whatever trouble his flightmates were in, maybe he'd found a piece of it after all. He hurried over to the captain's tent, which was only a few feet away, wishing he hadn't been so blithely agreeable about Hardshell's court-martialing his friends. He was liable to be seeing a court himself.

Captain Pruitt stood outside the tent. Moss didn't think that was a good sign. Shadow shrouded the squadron commander's face. He grunted on seeing Jonathan approach. "Here at last, are you?" he growled. "Well, you'd better come in, then."

Rudely, he ducked through the tentflap by himself and didn't hold it for Moss. Shaking his head, Moss followed. He was going to get it, all right. Braced for the worst, he lifted the canvas and followed Captain Pruitt inside.

Light blazed at him. All the fliers he hadn't been able to find packed the inside of the tent. They lacked only a coating of olive oil to be sardines in a can. Tom Innis pressed a pint of whiskey into Moss' hand. "Congratulations!" everybody shouted.

Moss stared in astonishment. "What the devil—!" he blurted.

Laughter erupted and rolled over him in waves. "He doesn't even know!" Dud Dudley hooted.

"Clear a space and we'll show him, then," Captain Pruitt said.

Clearing a space wasn't easy. A few people, grumbling, had to go outside. When Moss finally saw Pruitt's desk, it was for once clear of papers. A cake sat on top of it instead, a rectangular cake with white frosting. A big chocolate symbol turned it into an enormous playing card, with chocolate A's at the appropriate corners.

"My God!" Moss said. "Was that my fifth?" He counted on his fingers. "Jesus, I guess it was."

"Here we have something new," Pruitt observed: "the unintentional ace."

More laughter rang out. Dud Dudley said, "It's a good thing you finally showed up. We were going to eat this beauty without you in a couple of minutes, and then spend the next five years gloating about it."

"Give me a piece," Moss said fiercely.

"You want a piece, go to the brothel," Innis told him. "You want some cake, stay here." A bayonet lay next to the cake. He picked it up and started slicing.

Cake and whiskey wasn't a combination Moss had had before. After

he'd taken a couple of good swigs from the pint, he didn't much care. The hooch was good, the cake was good, the company was good, and he didn't think at all about the man he'd killed to earn the celebration.

IX

Jake Featherston went from gun to gun, making sure all six howitzers in the battery were well positioned, supplied with shells, and ready to open up if the Yankees decided to pay the trenches a call. He didn't think that would happen; the drive through Maryland had taken an even crueler toll on U.S. forces than on those of the Confederacy, and the latest Yankee push had drowned in an ocean of blood a couple of days before.

All the same, he made sure he hunted up Caleb Meadows, the next most senior sergeant in the battery, and said, "You know what to give the damnyankees if they hit us while I'm gone and you're in charge."

"Sure do." Meadows' Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he spoke. He was a scrawny, gangly man who spoke as if he thought somebody was counting how many words he said. "Two guns sighted on that ridge they got, two right in front of our line, and t'other two ready for whatever happens."

"That's it," Jake agreed. "I expect I'll be back by suppertime."

Meadows nodded. He didn't say anything. That was in character. He didn't salute, either. How could he, when he and Featherston were both sergeants? Jake had commanded the battery ever since Captain Stuart went out in a blaze of glory. He was still a sergeant. He didn't like still being a sergeant.

He went back through Ceresville, past a couple of mills that had stood, by the look of what was left of them, since the days of the Revolutionary War. They weren't standing any more. U.S. guns had seen to that.

The bridge over the Monocacy still did stand, though the ground all

around both ends of it had been chewed up by searching guns. Military policemen stood on the northeastern bank, rifles at the ready, to keep unauthorized personnel from crossing. Jake dug in his pocket, produced his pass, and displayed it to one of the men with a shiny MP's gorget held on his neck by a length of chain. The fellow examined it, looked sour at being unable to find anything irregular, and waved him across.

He had to ask several times before he could find his way to the headquarters of the Army of Northern Virginia. They were farther back toward Frederick than he'd thought, probably to make sure no long-range U.S. shells came to pay them a call. Once he got into the tent city, he had to ask for more directions to get to Intelligence.

A corporal who looked more like a young college professor was clacking away on a typewriter inside the flap of the tent, which was big enough to be partitioned off into cubicles. He finished the sentence he was on before looking up and saying, "Yes, Sergeant?" His tone said he outranked Featherston regardless of how many stripes each of them wore on his sleeve.

"I have an appointment with Major Potter." Jake displayed his pass once more.

The corporal examined it more carefully than the military policeman had done. He nodded. "One moment." He vanished into the bowels of the tent. When he came back, he waved for Jake to accompany him.

Major Clarence Potter was typing, too. Unlike the corporal, he broke off as soon as he saw Featherston. "Sit down, Sergeant," he said, and then, to the noncom who'd escorted Jake back to him, "Fetch Sergeant Featherston a cup of coffee, why don't you, Harold? Thanks." It was an order, but a polite one.

"*Good* coffee," Jake said a minute or so later. You couldn't make coffee this tasty up near the front, not when you were brewing it in a hurry in a pot you hardly ever got the chance to wash. Jake realized he couldn't complain too much, not when the infantry hardly boasted a pot to their name, but made their joe in old tin cans.

"I'd say you've earned good coffee," Major Potter said equably. "Glad you like it. We get the beans shipped up from a coffeehouse in Washington. But enough of that." He glanced down to whatever paper he had in the typewriter. "I'd say you've earned any number of things,

but my opinion is not always the one that counts. Which is, I suppose, why you asked to see me today."

"Yes, sir," Featherston said. And then, as he'd feared it would, all the frustration came boiling to the top: "Sir, who the devil do I have to kill to get myself promoted in this man's Army?"

Potter frowned at him. The major didn't look like much, not till you saw his eyes. *Sniper's eyes,* the soldiers called a glance like that: they didn't necessarily mean the fellow who had them was good with a rifle, only that you didn't want to get on his bad side or he'd make you pay. But Jake was also frowning, too purely ticked off at the world to give a damn about what happened next.

And Potter looked down first. He fiddled with some of the papers on his desk, then sighed. "I'm afraid killing Yankees doesn't do the job, Sergeant. I wish it did. It's the criterion I'd use. But, as I told you, my views, while they have some weight, are not the governing ones."

"I been running that battery every since Captain Stuart went down, sir," Jake said, and Clarence Potter nodded. "We've fought just as good with me in charge of things as we did with him, maybe better. Besides"—he had enough sense to hold his voice down, but he couldn't keep the fury out of it—"that damned fool would have got every man jack of us killed for nothin' better than him goin' out in a blaze of glory. We would have lost every man and every gun we had."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," Major Potter said. "But you asked whom you had to kill to get a promotion, Sergeant?" After waiting for Featherston to nod in turn, he went on, "The plain answer is, you will never be promoted in the First Richmond Howitzers, and you are most unlikely to win promotion anywhere in the Confederate States Army, for the simple reason that you killed Captain Jeb Stuart III."

Jake stared at him. Potter was dead serious. "I didn't, sir, and you know I didn't," Jake said, holding up one hand to deny the charge. "When I was starting to move the battery out, I did everything I could to get him to come along. He stopped me. He stopped the whole battery. If the damnyankees hadn't shot him, he would have kept us there till they overran us."

"'If the damnyankees hadn't shot him,'" Potter repeated. "And why, Sergeant, did he put himself in a position where the Yankees were able to shoot him so easily?"

"You ought to know, sir," Jake answered. "On account of the

trouble he got into with you for keeping that snake-in-the-grass nigger Pompey around and not letting anybody find out the son of a bitch really was a Red."

"That's right," Major Potter said. "And, having fallen under a cloud, he did the noble thing and fell on his sword, too—or the modern equivalent, at any rate." His nostrils twitched; by the way he said *the noble thing*, he meant something more like *the boneheaded thing*. "But now we come down to it. Who was it, Sergeant Featherston, who first alerted Army of Northern Virginia Intelligence to the possibility that there might be something wrong with this Pompey?"

When a heavy shell landed close to the battery, it picked you up and slammed you down and did its level best to tear your insides out right through your nose and mouth and ears. That was how Jake Featherston felt now, sitting in a wood-and-canvas folding chair in a tent too far back of the line to have to worry about shellfire. "Christ," he said hoarsely. "They're blaming me."

"Of course they are." Major Potter's manner was as mild as his appearance; to look at him or listen to him, you'd peg him for a schoolteacher—until you noticed what he had to say. "You wouldn't expect them to blame Jeb Stuart III, would you? All he did, Sergeant, was cause the suppression of an investigation. If some low, crass individual hadn't mentioned this Pompey's name, no one would have needed an investigation in the first place, and Captain Stuart could have continued on his brave, empty-headed track toward a general's stars and wreath."

Featherston stared at the Intelligence officer again, this time for an altogether different reason. Once he'd drunk the stuff the Russians cooked up from potatoes. It didn't taste like anything, so he hadn't thought he was drunk—till he tried to stand up and fell over instead. Potter's words were like that. They unexpectedly turned the whole world sideways.

"That's not fair, sir," Jake said. "That's—"

"Shooting the messenger for bad news?" Potter suggested. "Of course it is. What do you expect? That they should blame their own? Not likely, Sergeant. You must know the First Richmond Howitzers are a blue-blood regiment if ever there was one. You must know Jeb Stuart, Jr., has a fancy office in the War Department down in Richmond, from which he sends eager young men out to die for their country. I've done everything I can for you, Sergeant. I know your

record. I've urged your promotion. Set that against the traditions of the First Richmond Howitzers and the animus of Jeb Stuart, Jr., and it doesn't amount to a hill of beans. I'm sorry."

"If I transfer out, I'll be—"

"A sergeant, I'm afraid, till your dying day," Major Potter interrupted. "Jeb Stuart III blighted his career by being wrong. You've blighted yours by being right. Sergeant Featherston, I *am* sorry. I feel I ought to apologize for the entire Confederate States of America. But there's not one damned thing I can do about it. Have you got any more questions?"

"No, sir." Jake got to his feet. "If that's how it is, then that's how it is. But if that's how it is, then something stinks down in Richmond. Sir."

He figured he'd said too much there. But Clarence Potter slowly nodded. "Something does stink down in Richmond. If we try to root it out now, we're liable to lose the war in the confusion that would follow. But if we don't try to root it out, we're liable to lose the war from the confusion it causes. Again, I have no good answers for you. I wish I did."

Featherston saluted. "Thank you for trying, sir. I hope you don't end up hurt on account of that. All I've got to say is, sooner or later there has to be a reckoning. All these damn fools in fancy uniforms who let the niggers rise up without having a notion they were going to, all the damn fools who can't think of anything past promoting their friends and relations—they ought to pay the price. Yes, sir, they ought to pay the price."

"That's a political decision, not one for the military," Potter said.

"If that's what it is—" Jake broke off. He saluted again and left the tent, heading back to his battery. All right, he wasn't going to be a lieutenant. He had a goal even so.

Major Abner Dowling hurried into the fancy house on the outskirts of Bowling Green, Kentucky. "Here's the motorcar, sir, come to take you back toward Bremen," he called loudly—you had to call loudly, if you expected General Custer to hear you.

Libbie Custer heard him. She was sitting in the parlor, reading

Harper's. Her expression became remarkably similar to that of a snapping turtle on the point of biting. Back in Bremen was Olivia. She didn't know—Dowling didn't think she knew—about Olivia, not in particular, but she knew there was someone like Olivia back there, and she didn't like it for beans. But the car had been laid on not at General Custer's instance, but at that of the Secretary of War, and she couldn't do anything about it. No wonder she looked ready to chomp down on a broom handle.

And here came Custer, looking no happier himself. "This is all a pack of nonsense and idiocy," he said loudly. "Why don't they leave a man alone so he can run a proper campaign? But no, that doesn't satisfy them. Nothing satisfies them. Pack of ghouls and vultures is what they are back in Philadelphia, crunching the bones of good men's reputations."

At first, Dowling thought that soliloquy was delivered for Libbie's benefit. But Custer kept on grumbling, louder than ever, after he went outside and waddled toward the green-gray-painted Ford waiting for him in front of his residence. The driver scrambled out and opened the door to the rear seat for him and Dowling. Neither of them was thin, which made that rear seat uncomfortably intimate.

As they rattled off toward the northwest, Custer leaned forward and asked the driver, "What is this stupid barrel thing you're taking me to see? Some newfangled invention, I don't doubt. Well, let me tell you, Lieutenant, I am of the opinion that the world has seen too many new inventions already. What do you think of that?"

"Sir," the driver said, a gloriously unresponsive but polite answer. Dowling didn't know whether to wish the First Army commander would shut up or to hope he'd go on blathering and at long last give the War Department enough rope to hang him.

A couple of miles later, Custer ordered the driver to stop so he could get out and stand behind a tree. Along with so much of the rest of him, his kidneys weren't what they had been forty years earlier. He came back looking even more dissatisfied with the world than he had when he'd scrambled up into the motorcar.

The road ran roughly parallel to the railroad line. Every so often, it would swing away, only to return. At one of the places where it came very close to the tracks, the driver stepped on the brake. "Here we are, sir," he said.

Here was a meadow that had been part of the Confederate line defending Bowling Green, about halfway between the tiny towns of Sugar Grove and Dimple. But for wrecked trenches and dozens of shell holes big enough to bury an elephant, the only thing to be seen was an enormous green-gray tent with a couple of squads' worth of soldiers around it. Why the driver had chosen to stop at this particular place was beyond Abner Dowling.

It was evidently beyond Custer, too. "We aren't even halfway back toward Bremen," he complained. Olivia *had* been on his beady little mind, then. Libbie Custer knew her husband well.

"If you'll just come with me, sir." The driver got out of the automobile and handed down Custer and Dowling as if they were a couple of fine ladies. He headed for the tent. The general and his adjutant perforce followed: it was either that or be left all alone by the motorcar. At every other step, Custer snarled about what the mud was doing to his boots.

A man came out of the tent. He was wearing ordinary Army trousers, but with a leather jacket and leather helmet that put Dowling in mind of flying gear. With a wave, he hurried toward Custer. As he got nearer, Dowling saw he wore a major's oak leaves on that jacket, and, a few steps later, that he had the eagle-on-star badge of a General Staff officer.

"General Custer?" he said, saluting. "I'm Ned Sherrard, one of the men from the Barrel Works." The way he said it, you could hear the capital letters thudding into place. The only trouble was, Dowling had no idea whether or not whatever he was describing deserved those capitals.

Custer had evidently formed his own opinion. "And when do you and the Barrel Works go over Niagara Falls?" he inquired with acid courtesy.

Major Sherrard's smile showed white, even teeth, as if Custer had made a good joke. "We can't quite manage that yet with our barrels, sir, but we're working on it." He stuck out his hand to Dowling, a greeting of equal to equal. "Major, I'm pleased to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you, too, Major," Dowling returned. "So what are these barrels, anyway? I've heard the name a few times the past couple of weeks, and I'm curious."

"I wish you hadn't heard it at all," Sherrard said. "Security, you

know. But it can't be helped, I suppose. We've got one inside the tent, and you can see for yourself. We'll even put it through its paces for you. We want the commanding generals on all fronts familiar with these weapons, because they will play an increasing role on the battlefield as time goes by."

"Newfangled foolishness," Custer said, not bothering to keep his voice down. But Sherrard's cheerful smile didn't waver. He was made of stern stuff. Turning, he led Custer and Dowling toward the tent. Some of the soldiers outside came to attention and saluted. Others ducked into the tent ahead of the officers.

Sherrard held the flap open, but not wide open. "Go on in," he said invitingly. "You can see what barrels are like better than I could explain them to you in a month of Sundays."

Custer, of course, went first. He took one step into the enormous tent and then stopped in his tracks, so that Dowling almost ran into him. "Excuse me, sir, but I'd like to see, too," the adjutant said plaintively.

As usual, Dowling had to repeat himself before Custer took any notice of him. When the general commanding First Army finally did move out of the way, Dowling stared in wonder at the most astonishing piece of machinery he'd ever seen.

It impressed Custer, too, which wasn't easy. "Isn't that bully?" he said softly. "Isn't that just the bulliest thing in the whole wide world?"

"More like the ugliest thing in the whole wide world," Dowling said, too startled for once to watch his tongue as well as he should have.

He got lucky. Custer didn't hear him. Major Sherrard did, but didn't act insulted. Custer said, "So this is what a barrel looks like, eh? Bigger than I thought. Tougher than I thought, too."

Had Dowling named the beast, he would have called it a box, not a barrel. Big it was, twenty-five feet long if it was an inch, and better than ten feet high, too: an enormous box of steel plates riveted together, with a cannon sticking out from the slightly pointed front end, four machine guns—a pair on either flank—a driver's conning tower or whatever the proper name was sticking up from the middle of the top deck, and, as Dowling saw when he walked around to the rear of the thing, two more machine guns there.

"You've got it on tracks instead of wheels," he remarked.

“That’s right,” Sherrard said proudly. “It’ll cross a trench seven feet wide, easy as you please—climb out of shell holes, too, and keep on going.”

“How big a crew?” Custer asked.

“Eighteen,” Major Sherrard answered. “Two on the cannon—it’s a two-incher, in case you’re wondering, sir—two on each machine gun, two mechanics on the engines, a driver, and a commander.”

“Engines?” Dowling said. “Plural?”

“Well, yes.” Now the major sounded a trifle embarrassed. “*Sarah Bernhardt* here does weigh something over thirty tons. It takes a pair of White truck engines to push her along. They’re a handed pair, like gloves, one with normal rotation, one with reverse. That lets us put the exhausts, which are very hot, in the center of the hull, and the carburetors and manifolds toward the outside.”

“Thirty—tons,” Dowling murmured. “How fast will, uh, *Sarah* go?”

“Eight miles an hour, flat out on level ground,” the barrel enthusiast told him. “You must remember, Major, she’s carrying more than an inch of steel armor plate all around, to keep machine-gun fire from penetrating.”

“Are these chaps gathered here and around the tent the crew?” Custer asked eagerly. “If they are, may I see the barrel in action?”

“They are, and you may,” Sherrard said. “That’s why I brought you here, sir.” He clapped his hands and called out a couple of sharp orders. The crew scrambled into the barrel through hatches Dowling had hardly noticed till they swung wide. Major Sherrard opened the whole front of the tent, which was, Dowling realized with that, a special model itself, made to shelter barrels. The War Department was serious about barrels, all right, if it had had tents created with them in mind.

The driver and commander, up in that little box of a conning tower, opened their armored vision slits as wide as they could; no one would be shooting at them today. The engine—no, engines, Dowling reminded himself—must have had electric ignition, because they sprang to noisy, stinking life without anyone cranking them.

“Let’s step outside,” Major Sherrard said. “Even with the slits wide, the driver hasn’t got the best view of the road. Wouldn’t do to have us

squashed flat because he didn't notice we were there, heh, heh."

Dowling's answering chuckle was distinctly dutiful. Custer, though, laughed almost as loud as he had on learning Richard Harding Davis had dropped dead. He was enjoying himself. Dowling wasn't. The day was hot and sticky, the worst kind of day for anyone with a corpulent frame like his. As the sun beat down on him, he wondered what it was like for the crew of the barrel inside that steel shell. He wondered what it would be like in combat, with the hatches and slits closed down tight. He decided he was glad to be on the outside looking in, not on the inside looking out.

The rumble changed note as the driver put *Sarah Bernhardt* into gear. Tracks clattering, the barrel slowly crawled out of the tent. Through the slit, Dowling heard the commander shouting at the driver. In spite of the shouting, he wondered if the driver could hear anything.

Down into a shell hole went the barrel. The engine note changed again as the driver shifted gears. Up out of the hole the barrel came, dirt clinging to its prow. Down into another hole it went. Up it came once more. It rolled over some old, rusty Confederate barbed wire as if the stuff hadn't been there. As Major Sherrard had said, it showed no trouble crossing a trench wider than a man was tall.

"Do you know what this is, Major?" Custer said to Dowling. "This"—he gave an utterly Custerian melodramatic pause—"is armored cavalry. This, for once, is no flapdoodle. This is a breakthrough machine."

"It may well prove useful in trench warfare, yes, sir," Dowling agreed—or half agreed. Custer had always wanted to use cavalry to force a breakthrough. Dowling remembered thinking about armored horses, but, to his mind, *Sarah Bernhardt* didn't measure up—the barrel struck him as more like an armored hippopotamus.

But Custer, as usual, was letting himself get carried away. "Give me a hundred of these machines on a two-mile front," he declared, "and I'll tear a hole in the Rebs' lines so big, even a troop of blind, three-legged dogs could go through it, let alone our brave American soldiers."

Major Sherrard coughed the polite cough of a junior-grade officer correcting his superior. Abner Dowling knew that cough well. "War Department tactical doctrine, sir," Sherrard said, "is to employ barrels

widely along the front, to support as many different infantry units with them as possible."

"Poppycock!" Custer exclaimed. "Utter goo and drivel. A massed blow is what's required, Major—nothing less. Once we get into the Rebs' rear, they're ours."

"Sir," Major Sherrard said stiffly, "I have to tell you that one criterion in the allocation of barrels to the various fronts will be commanders' willingness to utilize them in the manner determined to be most efficacious by the War Department."

Custer looked like a cat choking on a hairball. Dowling turned to watch *Sarah Bernhardt* climb out of yet another shell hole so his commanding officer wouldn't see him laugh. Custer had gall, all right, if on three minutes' acquaintance with barrels he presumed to offer a doctrine for them wildly at odds with that of the people who'd invented them in the first place. Well, Custer's gall wasn't anything with which Dowling had been unacquainted already.

"Very well," the general commanding First Army said, his voice mild though his face was red. "I'll use them exactly the way the wise men in Philadelphia say I should."

"Good." Major Sherrard smiled now. Of course he smiled—he'd got his way. "Progress on this front, I am sure, will improve because of them."

"I'm sure of that myself," Custer said. Now Dowling did look at him, and sharply. He was sure of something, too—sure his boss was lying.

Reggie Bartlett glanced over at Senior Lieutenant Ralph Briggs. Briggs no longer looked like a recruiting poster for the Confederate States Navy, as he had all through his stay in the prisoner-of-war camp near Beckley, West Virginia. What he looked like now was a hayseed; he was wearing a collarless cotton shirt under faded denim overalls he'd hooked off a clothesline while a farm wife was busy in the kitchen. A disreputable straw hat perched on his head at an even more disreputable angle.

Reggie looked down at himself. By his clothes, he could have been Briggs' cousin. His shirt, instead of hiding under overalls, was tucked into a pair of dungarees out at the knee and held up by a rope belt in

lieu of galluses. The straw hat keeping the sun out of his eyes was even more battered than the one Briggs wore.

Catching the glances, Briggs clicked his tongue between his teeth. “We’ve got to do something about our shoes,” he said fretfully. “If anyone takes a good long look at them, we’re ruined.”

“Sure are, Ralph,” Bartlett said in his not very good rendering of a West Virginia twang, an accent altogether different not only from his own soft Richmond intonations but also from the Yankee way of talking Briggs had tried to teach him. His brown, sturdy Confederate Army boots were at least well made for marching. Briggs’ Navy shoes, both tighter and less strongly made, had given him trouble after he and Reggie and several others tunneled their way out of the prisoner-of-war camp. Reggie went on, “Hard to steal shoes, though, and no promise they’ll fit once we’ve done it.”

“I know,” Briggs said, unhappy still. “Wish we could walk into a town and buy some, but—” He broke off. Reggie understood why, all too well. For one thing, they had no money. For another, in these little hill towns they were strangers with a capital S. And, for a third, showing himself in Confederate footgear was the fastest ticket back to camp Reggie could think of.

Way off in the distance behind them, hounds belled. The sound sent chills running down Reggie’s spine. He didn’t think the hounds were after Briggs and him; they’d been free for several days now, and had done everything they knew how to do to break their trail. But other pairs of Confederate prisoners were also on the loose. Every bunch the damnyankees recaptured hurt the cause of the CSA.

And besides—“Now I know what niggers must have felt like, running away from their masters with the hounds after them,” Reggie said.

“Hadn’t thought of that.” Briggs paused for a moment to take off his hat and fan himself with it. He set the straw back on his head. His expression darkened. “I’d like to set the dogs on some niggers, too, the way they rose up against us. They ought to pay for that.”

“Way they lorded it over us in camp, too,” Reggie said, full of remembered anger at the insults he’d endured.

“Damnyankees set that up,” Briggs said. “Wanted to turn us and them against each other.” Reggie nodded; he’d seen the same thing himself. The Navy man went on, “I will say it did a better job than I

ever thought it would. Those niggers had no loyalty to their country at all."

He would have said more, but a bend in the road brought a town into sight up ahead. "That'll be—Shady Spring?" Reggie asked doubtfully.

"That's right." Ralph Briggs sounded altogether sure of himself. It was as if he had a map of West Virginia stored inside his head. Every so often, when he needed to, he'd pull it down, take a look, and then roll it up again. Reggie wondered how and why he'd acquired that ability, which didn't seem a very useful one for a Navy man to have.

Whatever the name of the town was, though, they had to avoid it. They had to avoid people and towns as much as they could. U.S. forces paid a bounty on escaped prisoners the locals captured. Even had that not been so, West Virginians weren't to be trusted. When Virginia seceded from the USA, they'd seceded from Virginia, and made that secession stick. They had no love for the Confederate States of America.

The hillsides surrounding Shady Spring weren't too steep. Forests of oaks and poplars clothed them. So Ralph Briggs said, at any rate; Bartlett, who'd lived all his life in Richmond, couldn't have told one tree from another to escape the firing squad.

When he and Briggs came to a rill, they stopped and drank and washed their faces and hands, then splashed along in the water for a couple of hundred yards before returning to dry land. "No point making the dogs' lives any easier, in case they are on our trail," Reggie remarked.

"You're right about that," Briggs said, although hiking through the water soaked his feet and did his shoes more harm than it did to Bartlett's taller boots.

Here and there in the woods, sometimes by themselves, sometimes in small clusters, sometimes in whole groves, dead or dying trees stood bare-branched, as if in winter, under the warm spring sun. Reggie pointed. "What's wrong with them?" he asked, having developed considerable respect for how much Bartlett knew.

And the Navy man did not disappoint him. "Chestnut blight," he answered. "Started in New York City ten, maybe twelve years ago. Been spreading ever since. Way things are going, won't be a chestnut tree left in the USA or the CSA in a few years' time. Damnyankees let

all sort of foreign things into their country." He spat in disgust.

"Chestnut blight," Reggie echoed. Now that Briggs mentioned it, he remembered reading something about it in the newspapers a couple of years before. "So these are chestnuts?" He wouldn't have known it unless Briggs had told him.

"These *were* chestnuts," Briggs corrected him now. "The Yankees got the blight, and now they're giving it to us." He scowled. "Chestnuts, the war—what's the difference?"

Reggie's stomach rumbled. It had been doing that right along, but this was a growl a bear would have been proud to claim. Reggie went through his trouser pockets. He came up with half a square of hardtack: the last of the painfully saved food he'd brought out of camp. Even more painful was breaking the fragment in two and offering Briggs a piece.

"We don't get our hand on some more grub, we're not going to make it out of West Virginia whether the damnyankees catch up with us or not," Reggie said.

"You're right." Briggs sounded as if he hated to admit it. "We're going to have to kill something or steal something, one or the other."

They tramped on through the woods. Bartlett's nostrils twitched. "That's smoke," he said. At first, he thought it came from Shady Spring, but they'd gone west to skirt the town, and the breeze was blowing into their faces, not from their backs. "That's a farm up ahead somewhere," he added.

Briggs was thinking along with him. "Lots of chances to get food from a farm." He sniffed. "That's not just smoke, either. Smells like they're smoking meat—venison, or maybe ham. Hell, in these back woods, maybe even bear, for all I know."

Reggie knew nothing about bears. The thought of there being bears in these woods hadn't occurred to him till the Navy man mentioned it. He looked around, as if expecting to see black, shaggy shapes coming out from behind every tree. Then he sniffed again. Smelling meat after months on camp rations made him ready to fight every bear in the USA for a chance at some—or to eat one if the farmer had done the fighting for him. "Let's follow our noses," he said.

Carved out of the middle of the woods were some tiny fields full of corn and tobacco. A couple of children fed chickens near a barn. A

woman bustled between that barn and the farmhouse. No man was visible. “He’s probably in the Army,” Briggs whispered as he and Bartlett stared hungrily from the edge of the forest at the hollow log mounted upright over smoldering hickory chips. From the top of the log issued the wonderful smell that had drawn them here.

“We’ll wait till dark, till they’ve all gone to bed,” Reggie said. “Then we grab it and get the hell out.”

“Liable to be a dog,” Briggs said. “Meat’s liable not to be smoked all the way through, either.”

“I don’t see any dog. I don’t hear any dog. Do you?” Bartlett asked, and Ralph Briggs shook his head. Reggie went on, “And I don’t care about the meat, either. Hell, I don’t care if it’s raw. I’ll eat it. Won’t you?” When Briggs didn’t answer, he presumed he’d won his point.

And the thievery went off better than he’d dared hope. A couple of kerosene lanterns glowed inside the farmhouse for half an hour or so after sundown, then went out. That left the night to the moon and the stars and the lightning bugs. Reggie and Briggs waited for an hour, then sauntered forward. No dog went crazy. No rifle poked out of a window. They stole the hollow log and carried it away with nobody inside the farmhouse any the wiser.

It proved to be pork in there, ribs and chops and all sorts of good things. “Don’t eat too much,” Briggs warned. “You’ll make yourself sick, you were empty so long.”

He was an officer, so Reggie didn’t scream *Shut up!* at him. He ate till he was deliciously full, a feeling he hadn’t known for a long time.

Carrying the smoked pork they couldn’t finish, the two of them headed south again. They’d done a deal of traveling by night, when they could use the roads with less risk of being recognized for what they were. And every foot they gained was a foot their pursuers would have to make up in the morning.

Since the war started, the USA had punched a railroad south and east from Beckley through Shady Spring and Flat Rock to join the lines already going into eastern Virginia. “The damnyankees are throwing everything they’ve got into this war,” Reggie said, pointing to the new bright rails gleaming in the moonlight close by the road.

“I know.” Briggs’ voice was bleak. “It worries me.”

Half an hour later, a southbound train came by. Reggie and Briggs hid by the side of the road till it passed. To Bartlett's surprise, it had only a few passenger cars; behind them came a long stretch of flatcars carrying big shapes shrouded in canvas. Each flatcar also carried a couple of armed guards.

"They're singing something." Now Ralph Briggs sounded indignant, as if U.S. soldiers had no business enjoying themselves. "What in blazes are they singing?"

"I know that tune," Reggie told him. "It's 'Roll out the Barrel.'"

A couple of officers from the Corps of Engineers came up to the stretch of trench on the Roanoke front Chester Martin's squad called their own. "What are you up to?" Martin called to them, curious about the strips of white cloth they were tying to pegs.

"Setting up the approach," replied one of the engineers: a stocky, bald, bullet-headed fellow with a close-cropped fringe of gray hair above his ears and at the back of his neck. The answer didn't tell Chester anything much, but it didn't anger him, either; the engineer sounded like a man who knew his own business so well, he forgot other people didn't know it at all. Martin approved of people who knew what they were doing. He'd seen too many who hadn't the foggiest notion.

Sunshine glinted off the wire frames of Captain Orville Wyatt's glasses. Martin worried about his captain, another competent man he didn't want to lose: those spectacles might make him easier for a sniper to spot. Wyatt said, "Don't joggle Lieutenant Colonel Gross' elbow, Sergeant. This has to do with what was discussed in the briefing yesterday."

Martin shook his head, annoyed at himself. "I'm sorry, sir. I should have figured that out." He looked around to see how many of his men were paying attention. He hated looking dumb in front of them.

"Don't worry about it," Lieutenant Colonel Gross said. He seemed younger when he smiled. "This is new for everybody, and we have to work out what needs doing as we go along. The real point is, this'll be new for the Rebs, too." He pointed over past the U.S. barbed wire, past no-man's-land, past the C.S. wire, to the trenches beyond.

“If everything goes according to Hoyle,” Captain Wyatt said, “we’ll take a big bite out of the Rebs’ real estate tomorrow morning.”

Specs Peterson was standing not far from Martin. He pitched his voice so the sergeant could hear but the captain couldn’t: “Yeah, and if it doesn’t work, they’re going to bury us in gunnysacks, on account of the Rebs’ll blow us all over the landscape.”

“I know,” Martin said, also quietly. “You got any better ideas, though, Specs? This duking it out in the trenches is getting us nowhere fast.”

“Hey, what are you talkin’ about, Sarge?” Paul Andersen said. “We’ve moved this front forward a good ten miles, and it hasn’t taken us two years to do it. At that rate, we ought to be in Richmond”—the corporal paused, calculating on his fingers—“oh, about twenty minutes before the Second Coming.”

Everybody laughed. Everybody pretended what Andersen had said was only funny, not the gospel truth. Specs Peterson liked an argument as well as the next guy, and wasn’t shy about arguing with his superiors, but he didn’t say boo. He just made sure he had the full load of grenades everybody was supposed to carry over the top.

Darkness fell. This sector of the front had been pretty quiet lately. Every so often, a rifle shot would ring out or somebody on one side or the other would spray the foe’s trenches with a couple of belts of machine-gun fire, but the artillery didn’t add its thunder to the hailstorm effects from both sides’ small arms. Martin knew that wouldn’t last. He rolled himself in his blanket and got what sleep he could. He wouldn’t be sleeping much tomorrow, not unless he slept forever.

At 0200, the barrage began. Martin didn’t sleep any more after that; the noise, he thought, was plenty to wake half the smashed-up dead whose corpses manured the Roanoke River valley.

Some of his men, though, did their damnedest to sleep right through the bombardment. He made sure everybody was up and ready to move. “Listen, this is my neck we’re talking about, Earnshaw,” he growled to one yawning private. “If you’re not there running alongside me, it’s liable to mean some damn Reb gets a chance to draw a bead on me he wouldn’t have had otherwise. You think I’m going to let that happen so you can sleep late, you’re crazy.”

Captain Wyatt was up and prowling the trench, too. “Where the hell

are the barrels?" he said about half past three. "They were supposed to be here at 0300. Without them, we don't have a show."

That wasn't quite true. The infantry, no doubt, would assault the Confederate lines with or without barrels. Without them, the foot soldiers were sure to be slaughtered. With them, they were…less sure to be slaughtered.

Two barrels came rumbling up at 0410. "Where the devil have you been?" Wyatt demanded, his voice a whiplash of anger. Chester Martin didn't say anything. This was the first time he'd actually seen barrels. Their great slabs of steel, spied mostly in silhouette, put him in mind of a cross between a battleship and a prehistoric monster.

"Sorry, sir," one of the men riding atop a barrel said through the unending thunder of the barrage and the flatulent snarl of the machines' engines. "We got lost about six times in spite of the tape, and we broke down a couple times, too."

"That's where *Bessie McCoy* is now," somebody else added. "The engine men said they thought they could get her running again, though."

Martin approached the barrel. "You fellows better get inside, if that's what you do," he said. "You're at the front now. The Rebs figure out you're here, a few machine-gun bursts and you won't be any more."

With obvious reluctance, the soldiers climbed down off the roofs of the barrels and into their places inside the contraptions. It had to be hotter than hell in there, and stinking of gasoline fumes, too. Maybe the steel kept bullets out, but it kept other things in.

Bessie McCoy limped into place at 0445, fifteen minutes before the attack was due to start. As twilight brightened toward dawn, Martin made out the names painted on the other barrels: *Vengeance* and *Halfmoon*, the latter with an outhouse under the word. He still didn't know whether to be encouraged all three barrels had made it or dismayed they'd had so much trouble doing it. If *dismayed* turned out to be the right answer, he figured he'd end up dead.

At 0500 on the dot, the barrage moved deeper into the Confederate trench system, to keep the Rebels from bringing up reinforcements. Captain Wyatt blew his whistle. The barrels rumbled forward at about walking pace, treads grinding and clanking. The cannon each one of them carried at its prow sent shells into the Confederate trenches.

From across no-man's-land, Chester Martin heard the shouts of fear and alarm the Rebs let out. Rebel rifles and machine guns opened up on the barrels. They might as well have been shooting at so many ambulatory boulders. Sedate but deadly, the barrels kept coming. They rolled through the U.S. barbed wire. They went down into shell holes and craters and came up the other side, still pounding the Rebel trenches. They flattened the Confederate barbed wire.

"Let's go, boys!" Captain Wyatt shouted. "That Bessie, she *is* the McCoy!"

Chester Martin and his squad scrambled out of the trench and sprinted toward the Confederate lines. Only light fire came their way; most of what the Rebs had was focused on the barrels. It wasn't doing much good, either. All three machines kept moving forward, firing not just cannon now but the machine guns on their sides, too.

Bessie McCoy rumbled up to the foremost Rebel trench and poured enfilading fire down its length. *Vengeance* and *Halfmoon* were only a few yards behind. *Vengeance* went right over that first trench and positioned itself to enfilade the second. *Half-moon* blazed away at Confederate soldiers who were—Martin rubbed his eyes to make sure he saw straight—running for their lives.

Half a mile to the north, a couple of more barrels had forced their way into the Confederate position. Half a mile to the south, two others had done the same, though a third sat burning in the middle of no-man's-land.

Martin noticed the other barrels only peripherally. He scrambled over the parapet and leaped down into the Confederate trenches. A lot of men in butternut lay in them, some moving, some not. He threw a grenade over the top into a traverse and then dashed into it, ready to shoot or bayonet whomever he'd stunned.

"Don't kill us, Yank!" several men cried at once. They threw down their rifles and threw up their hands. "We give up!"

"Go on back there, then," Martin growled, pointing toward the U.S. position from which he'd come. The new-caught prisoners babbled thanks and obeyed.

"What are those horrible things?" one of them asked, pointing toward the barrels, which were systematically raking trench line after trench line, concentrating most of all on machine-gun nests.

“I think,” Martin said, “I think they’re called victory.”

All along the line, Rebs were giving up in numbers greater than he ever remembered seeing, and they were running away, too, unwilling to die to no purpose trying to halt the invincible barrels. In all the time he’d spent at the front line, he’d never seen Confederate soldiers run like that. He’d dreamt of it, but he’d never seen it.

Paul Andersen shouted another word of which he’d dreamt: “Breakthrough!”

For much of the rest of that morning, Martin thought his buddy was right. They stormed through the Confederate trench system. Whenever a machine gun or some holdouts in a strong position gave them trouble, one barrel or another waddled over to it and poured bullets or shells into it until the diehards either surrendered or died.

“I don’t believe it,” Captain Wyatt said, over and over. “We’ve come a good mile since daybreak.” No wonder he sounded disbelieving; on this front, mobility was more often measured in yards. “We keep it up, we’ll be out of the trenches and into their rear by nightfall.”

“Yes, sir,” Martin said. He had trouble believing it, too. A deep-throated rumble behind him made him turn his head. “Here comes *Bessie McCoy*, over another trench.”

The barrel, by then, had crossed so many of them that he’d come to take its ability for granted. The lip of this one, though, was soft and muddy, and gave way under the weight of the massive machine. It went into the trench at an awkward, nose-down angle. Martin saw at a glance that it couldn’t move forward any more. Its engine roared as it tried reverse. That didn’t help, either.

One of the side machine-gunners opened up a hatch and shouted, “We’re stuck! You’re going to have to dig us out if you want us to keep moving.” More hatches opened, and barrel crewmen came out to help with the digging and to escape the heat and fumes in which they’d been trapped for hours. Some of them simply sprawled in the dirt and sucked in great long breaths of fresh air.

Now Captain Wyatt looked worried. “That’s the second barrel we’ve lost. *Halfmoon* broke down back there, and they still haven’t been able to get it going again. If anything happens to *Vengeance*—”

The barrel in question fired its cannon. The men who’d pushed farthest into the Confederate works started shooting, too, and kept it

up even though not much answering fire came back. Martin stuck his head up to see why everybody was excited.

Here came a battery of those cursed Confederate quick-firing three-inch guns. They sensibly stopped outside of rifle range, in such cover as they could find, and started firing over open sights at *Vengeance*. The barrel returned fire, but it had only one cannon, and that far slower between rounds than the Rebel pieces. *Vengeance* was armored against rifle and machine-gun bullets, but not against shells. If you let a sledgehammer fall onto an iron floor from a building a hundred stories high, you might get a noise like the one the shells made slamming into armor plate.

Vengeance started burning. Hatches popped open. Crewmen dove out. The Confederate guns shelled them, too. Rebel yells announced the arrival of reinforcements for the enemy. Now U.S. troops, thin on the ground and without barrels to support them, were the ones who had to fall back. *Bessie McCoy*'s crew salvaged her guns and set her afire to deny her to the Confederates, then joined the retreat.

When night fell, Martin was still in what had been Confederate trenches, but not very far in; the Rebs had taken back about two-thirds of what they'd lost in the morning. He turned to Paul Andersen and let out a long, weary sigh. "Not quite a breakthrough."

"No, I guess not," Andersen allowed. "We got more work to do." He started rolling a cigarette. "Not quite a breakthrough, but goddamn—you could see one from where we were."

"Yeah." Martin sighed again. "And I wonder how long it'll be before we see another one."

Arthur McGregor rode his wagon toward Rosenfeld, Manitoba. Maude sat on the seat beside him, her back ramrod straight, hands clasped tightly in her lap. They both wore seldom-used Sunday best; the wing collar and cravat seemed to be trying to strangle McGregor, who couldn't remember the last time he'd put on a jacket with lapels.

"Maybe we should have brought the girls," Maude said, her voice under tight rein. Only her mouth moved; she did not turn her head to look at her husband.

He shook his head. "No—better we left them with the Lang-dons."

His own harshly carved face got harsher yet. “The Yanks won’t take pity on us because we’ve got ’em along, Maude. Next Yank officer who knows what pity’s about will be the first. If we’re going to persuade them to let Alexander go, we’ll have to make a case, like we were in court.”

She nodded once, jerkily, and then sat still again. The wagon jounced on toward Rosenfeld. The ruts in the road didn’t fit the width of the wheels any more; U.S. trucks had cut their own ruts. Outside of town, U.S. soldiers inspected the wagon as carefully as they had when the whole McGregor clan came into Rosenfeld the day Alexander was seized. Finding nothing, the soldiers let the wagon go on.

As usual these days, Yankees far outnumbered Canadians on Rosenfeld’s few streets. Their traffic—wagons, trucks, a swarm of honking Fords—took priority over civilian vehicles, too. McGregor hitched the wagon as soon as he could, put a feed bag on the horse’s head, and walked toward what had been the sheriff’s office and jail but now confined not drunks and burglars but men guilty of nothing worse than wanting to be free of the smothering embrace of the United States.

Outside the entrance stood two armed sentries in green-gray. One of them patted down McGregor. The other spoke to Maude: “Come with me, ma’am. We have a woman next door to search you.” When she made as if to balk, the sentry said, “Ma’am, if you aren’t searched, you don’t go in. Those are the orders I have, and I can’t change ’em.” Back quivering with indignation, she followed him.

“You aren’t trying very hard to make friends for yourselves, are you?” McGregor said to the remaining sentry.

The fellow shrugged. “Better safe than sorry.”

Maude returned in a couple of minutes, looking even more furious coming than she had going. She must have satisfied the searcher, though, for the sentries opened the door and stood aside to let her and her husband make their petition to the occupying authorities.

Captain Hannebrink sat at a desk, filling out forms. But for his uniform, he might have been a postmaster like Wilfred Rokeby, or perhaps a bank teller. But he’d seemed soldierly enough and to spare out at McGregor’s farm. He set down his pen now and got to his feet. “Mr. and Mrs. McGregor,” he said, polite enough even if his minions weren’t.

“Good morning, Captain,” Arthur McGregor said. He hated having to crawl before any man. He’d worked like a plow horse—he’d worked harder than his plow horse—before the war, but he’d been free.

No. He’d thought he’d been free. It was just that the government—the government he’d frequently despised—had held trouble at arm’s length from him. Then it couldn’t do that any more, and the regime under which he now lived made trouble as close as a punch in the eye.

He might not have crawled for himself. For Alexander, for his only son, he would crawl. What was pride worth, set against your boy? He began again: “Captain Hannebrink, sir, by now you must know Alexander didn’t have anything to do with that bomb on the train tracks.”

“I *must* know it?” The American officer shook his head. “Here, sit down, both of you. I’ll hear what you have to say.” The chairs to which he pointed were hard, angular, and functional: U.S. Army issue, as out of place in the office as his sharp American accent. He let Arthur McGregor do the fussing for his wife, accurately surmising she would not want him pushing the chair about for her. When she was as comfortable as she could be, he sat back down himself. “All right, tell me why I must know that.”

“Because of what you done to the other boys you caught,” McGregor blurted. His lips skinned back from his teeth in a snarl of anger at himself: he hadn’t meant to say it like that. Saying it like that made him think about how harsh the occupying authorities really were.

Captain Hannebrink steepled his fingers. “The penalty for sabotage against the United States Army is death, Mr. McGregor,” he said. “We have made that very plain. It cannot come as a surprise to anyone, not now.”

“Boys,” McGregor said thickly. “You shot boys.”

“They were playing a man’s game, I’m sorry to say. If they’d succeeded, what they would have done to our train would have been no different because they were young,” Hannebrink said. “This way, perhaps, other boys here in Manitoba will come to understand that this is not a bully, romantic lark. This is a war, and will be waged as such.”

He didn’t look particularly fearsome. He was on the lean side, with sandy hair, mild gray eyes, and a long, thoughtful face. Only his

uniform and his waxed Kaiser Wilhelm mustache said he wasn't a Canadian. Somehow, that very plainness made him more frightening, not less.

Licking his lips, Arthur McGregor said, "But you didn't shoot Alexander. That must mean you know he didn't have anything to do with it, because—" *Because if you had even the slightest suspicion, you would have dragged him out against a wall, given him a blindfold, and sent him home to me in a pine box for burial*. But he couldn't say that to the American.

"Your son's case is not clearcut: I admit as much," Hannebrink said. "It is possible he did not know about this particular explosive device." He held up one finger, as if expecting McGregor to interrupt. "Possible, I say. By no means proven. There appears to be no doubt he associated with these subversives and saboteurs."

"They're his *friends*," Maude McGregor burst out. "Captain, they're boys he's known as long as he's been on this earth. And besides, where in Canada will you find any boys that age who don't—"

Conversations with Captain Hannebrink had a way of breaking down in midsentence. This one should have broken down a few words sooner. Hannebrink fiddled with one point of that absurd, upjutting mustache, then finished for Maude: "Where will I find Canadian boys that age who don't despise the United States and everything they stand for? There are some, Mrs. McGregor, I assure you of that."

His matter-of-fact confidence was more chilling than bluster would have been. And Arthur McGregor feared he was right. Some people had to be on the winning side, no matter what, and the USA looked like the winning side right now. *Bootlickers,* McGregor thought.

But that did not help Alexander. McGregor said, "You can't blame him for what these others tried to do."

"Why can't I?" Hannebrink returned. "Canadian law recognizes the concepts of an accessory before the fact and of concealment of knowledge of a crime to be committed."

"You've never claimed you had anyone who said Alexander knew about this, only that he knew some of the boys you say did it," Arthur McGregor said stubbornly. "Is that enough to go on holding him?"

"Of course it is," Captain Hannebrink answered. "I assume anyone who consorts with saboteurs and says nothing about it either is a

saboteur himself or wants to be one."

"You don't want reasons to let my boy go." Maude's voice went shrill. "You just want an excuse to keep him in an iron cage when he hasn't done anything."

Arthur McGregor set a big-knuckled, blunt-fingered hand on his wife's arm. "That doesn't help," he said mildly. If Maude lost her temper here, it wouldn't just be unfortunate. It would be disastrous.

Captain Hannebrink said, "Mrs. McGregor, I can understand how you feel, but—"

"Can you?" she said. "If we'd invaded your country and dragged your son away to jail, how would you feel?"

"Wretched, I'm sure," he answered, though he didn't sound as if he meant it. He went on, "Please let me finish the point I was trying to make. You still do not seem to fully understand the situation. You are in occupied territory, Mrs. McGregor. The military administration of the United States does not need any excuses to confine individuals. We have the authority to do it, and we have the power to do it."

Maude stared at him, as if she'd never imagined he would put it so baldly. And McGregor stared, too, catching as his wife had not quite done what lay behind the American captain's words. Hoarsely, he said, "You don't care whether Alexander had anything to do with that bomb or not. You're going to keep him locked up anyhow."

"I did not say that, Mr. McGregor."

"No, you didn't, Captain, did you? But you meant it, and that's worse, if you ask me." McGregor got to his feet. Maude rose with him, uncertainty on her face. He took no notice of it. He took no notice of anything but his contempt, and that was big as the world. "But then, what do you care what Canuck trash thinks? I'm sorry we wasted your time—and ours. I had chores I could have done instead of coming here." He walked out onto the street, Maude following.

Maybe Captain Hannebrink stared at his back. He didn't turn to see.

Nellie Semphroch was about to cross the street to visit Mr. Jacobs, the cobbler, when the guns started roaring north of Washington, D.C. As if drawn by a lodestone, her head turned in that direction. She

nodded in slow, cold satisfaction. For a while, Washington had been too far south of the front line to let her hear much artillery fire. Then the rumble had been distant, like bad weather far away. Now it was guns, unmistakably guns, and louder, it seemed, every day.

A Confederate dispatch rider trotted past her, mounted on a bay gelding whose coat gleamed in the hot June sun. He tipped his slouch hat to her. Taken all in all, the Rebs *were* a polite lot. That made her distrust them more, not like them better.

Flies buzzed in the street as she crossed. She flapped with a hand to drive them away. There were fewer than there had been ten years before. Say what you would about motorcars, they didn't attract flies.

She opened the door to Mr. Jacobs' shop. The bell above it chimed. Jacobs looked up from the buttery-soft black cavalry boot to which he was fitting a new heel. The wrinkles on his face, which had been set in lines of concentration, rearranged themselves into a smile. "Good morning, Nellie," he said, setting down his little hammer and taking from the corner of his mouth a couple of brads that hadn't interfered with his speech at all. "It's good to see you today. It's good to see you any day."

"It's good to see you, too, Hal," she answered. She didn't view him with the relentless suspicion she aimed at most of the male half of the human race. For one thing, he was at least fifteen years older than she. For another, he'd never tried to get out of line with her. Up till the year before, they hadn't even called each other by their Christian names.

"Would you like some lemonade?" he asked. "I made it myself." He sounded proud of that. He'd been a widower for a good many years, and took pride in everything he did for himself.

"I'd love some, thank you," Nellie said. He went into the back room and brought it out in a tumbler that didn't match the one sitting by his last. Nellie sipped. She raised an eyebrow. "It's very good lemonade." And it was—tart and sweet and cool and full of pulp.

"For which I thank you," he answered, dipping his head in what was almost a bow. His courtly, antique manners were another reason why he set off no fire bells of alarm in her mind. "I am going to fill my glass again. Would you like another?"

"Half a glass," she answered. "I had a cup of coffee a couple of minutes before I came over here."

“Did you?” He chuckled. “Drinking up your own profits, eh?” He went into the back room again, returning with his glass full and Nellie’s, as she’d asked, something less than that. After giving it to her, he asked, “And what do you hear in the coffeehouse these days?”

Before Nellie could reply, a young Confederate lieutenant came in, picked up his boots, and bustled out again without looking at her once. That suited her fine. Once he was gone, she answered the question that had sounded casual but wasn’t: “They’ve been talking about strengthening the bridges over the Potomac. I don’t know why. It can’t be for anything really important: they keep going on about barrels and tanks, not guns or trucks or wagons. Maybe they’re bringing beer up for their men.”

“Maybe they are. It would be fine if they were.” Jacobs muttered something his bushy gray mustache swallowed. Aloud, he said, “Anything you hear about tanks and barrels would be—interesting.”

“All right.” Nellie knew he wasn’t going to tell her anything more than that. Ignorance was her best protection, though she already knew too many secrets, guilty and otherwise. But Jacobs had connections—about most of which she was also ignorant—back to the U.S. government, whereas she was no more than one of his sources of news. She assumed that meant he knew how to run his business.

Another Confederate officer came in: the owner of the boot on which the cobbler was working. The fellow glowered. “You said that was going to be ready today,” he growled.

“So I did, sir,” Jacobs answered. “And it will be. I didn’t say it would be ready first thing in the morning, though.”

“As soon as you can,” the Reb said. “My unit is heading north this afternoon, and I want these boots.”

“I’ll do all I can,” Jacobs said. “If you come back about half-past eleven, this one should be all fixed up.” Shaking his head unhappily, the Confederate left. Nellie would have bet Hal Jacobs knew to which unit he belonged, and that the information about its movements would soon be in U.S. hands. And Jacobs had his own way of harassing the enemy: “Won’t it be a shame when some of the nails I put in go through the sole and poke the bottom of his foot? What a pity—he’s made me hurry the job.”

The bell rang again. Nellie wondered if it was the Reb, too impatient to wait for eleven-thirty. It wasn’t. It was Edna. That meant

something was wrong. Except for a couple of times to get shoes fixed, Edna didn't come in here.

"Ma," Edna said without preamble, "there's a Rebel major over across the street, says he's got to talk to you right now."

"You go tell him I'll be right there," Nellie said. When Edna had gone, she gave Mr. Jacobs a stricken glance. "What do I do now?"

"It depends on what he wants," replied the cobbler who wasn't only a cobbler. "I know you will do your best, come what may. Whatever happens, remember that you have more friends than you know."

Cold comfort. Nellie nodded, composed herself, and went back across the street. The major was waiting for her outside the coffeehouse, which she did not take as a good sign. When she first came up to him, he said, "Mrs. Semphroch, you are acquainted with William Gustavus Reach." It was not a question. She wished it had been.

"Yes, I know him some," she said through ice in her belly so cold, she thought it would leave her too frozen to speak at all. Part of it was fear for herself, part fear for Mr. Jacobs, and part, maybe the biggest part, fear of what Edna, standing not five feet away, would hear and learn. "He came by this place every so often." She made her lip curl. "Last time he came by, he was trying to steal things when they dropped bombs on us that night."

"The acquaintance goes back no farther than that?" The Confederate major was one of those smart men who think themselves even smarter than they are. How much did he know? How much had Reach spilled? How much could she say without spilling more to Edna?

She picked her words with care, doing her best to sound careless: "I knew him a long time ago, a little, you might say, but I hadn't set eyes on him from before my daughter here was born till he showed up again." That was all true, every word of it; it helped steady her.

"Uh-*huh*." The Reb looked down at his notebook. "You are not, and never have been, his wife?"

Edna stared at Nellie. Nellie stared, too, in astonishment commingled with relief. Maybe she'd come out of this in one piece after all. "I hope to Jesus I'm not," she exclaimed—more truth. "I hope to Jesus I never was, and I surely hope to Jesus I never will be! If I never see him again in all my born days, it'll be too soon."

“Uh-*huh*,” the Confederate major said again. “Well, if you had been his wife and weren’t any more, you might say the same thing, but I reckon—” He didn’t say exactly what he reckoned, but it didn’t seem like anything bad for Nellie. “Maybe you can tell me what sort of friends he has, then.”

“Next friend of his I know about will be the first,” Nellie said.

Edna giggled. The major started to smile, then stopped, as if remembering he was on duty. He said, “This here Reach tells more stories than Uncle Romulus, and that’s a fact. Some of them, ma’am, we have to check.” He chuckled. “We’re going to send him to a place where nobody listens to his stories for a long, long time.”

“If you think I’m going to miss him, Major, you can think again.” Nellie sounded as prim and righteous as she did when taking the high line with Edna. The Rebel tipped his hat to her and went on his way.

“That wasn’t so bad, Ma,” Edna said. “Way he was asking after you, though, heaven only knew what he wanted.”

“You’re right,” Nellie said. *You don’t know how right you are*.

She went back across the street to the shoe-repair shop. The bell jangled. Mr. Jacobs looked up—warily—from his work. Her enormous smile said everything that needed saying. He set down the little hammer, came around the counter, and took both her hands in his. To her astonishment, she leaned forward and kissed him full on the mouth. She hadn’t done that with a man since well before her husband died. His arms went around her, and he kissed her, too. She enjoyed it. That hadn’t happened since well before her husband died, either.

“Some good out of Bill Reach after all,” she murmured to herself.

Hal Jacobs stiffened. “Out of who?” he barked, his voice too loud, his mouth too near her ear. She explained, sure he’d misheard. He sagged away from her, his face pale as whitewash. “I wondered what was wrong,” he gasped. “Hadn’t heard from him in too long. Bill runs—ran, maybe—our whole organization here. And he’s caught? Good God!”

“Good God!” Nellie said, too, for very different reasons. All at once, she wondered if she was backing the wrong side.

X

"Not much further now," Lucien Galtier told his horse as he rode up the fine American-paved road toward Rivière-du-Loup. In the back of the wagon, several hens clucked, but they were not a true part of the conversation. He and the horse had been discussing things for years. The hens' role, though they did not realize it, was strictly temporary.

Off to the east, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, a steam whistle shouted as a train hurried up toward the town. *"Tabernac,"* Galtier muttered under his breath: a Quebecois curse. The soldiers on the train, no doubt, would cross the St. Lawrence and then try to push on toward Quebec City. The Americans, worse luck, were making progress, too, for the artillery from the north bank of the river sounded farther off than it had when the campaign was new. The newspapers extolled every skirmish as one Bonaparte would have admired (clumsy propaganda, in a province that had never reconciled itself to the French Revolution), but anyone who believed all the newspapers said deserved nothing better than he got.

The whistle screamed again. The horse twitched his ears in annoyance. The chickens squawked and fluttered in their cages. No, they were not suited for serious talk—too flighty.

Cannon by the riverbank started going off—*wham, wham, wham!* The horse snorted. The chickens went crazy. Lucien Galtier raised a dark eyebrow. "Those are quick-firing guns," he told the horse, "the kind they use when trying to shoot down an aeroplane. And so—"

Through the cannons' roar, he picked up a rapidly swelling buzz. Then he spotted the winged shapes. Before the war, he had never seen an aeroplane. Here, now, were two at once, flying hardly higher than the treetops. They both carried blue-white-red roundels on their wings

and flanks. The red was in the shape of a maple leaf.

“There, what did I yell you?” Lucien said to the horse. “And not just any aeroplanes, but Canadian aeroplanes.” He reined in to watch.

In front of the pilots, machine guns hammered. He wondered how the men managed to fire through the propellers without shooting themselves down. However they did it, they shot up the troop train, spun in the air like circus acrobats, and then shot it up again. Then, still low, they streaked back toward the free side of the St. Lawrence.

Galtier expected the train to streak toward Rivière-du-Loup. Instead, it came to a ragged halt. Maybe the aeroplanes had killed the engineer, and the brakeman was doing what he did best. Maybe they had filled the boiler with so many holes, it was either kill the pressure inside or explode.

“It could even be—both,” Galtier said, not altogether unhappily.

Soldiers started spilling out of the train. Some of them came running his way. He scowled and thought himself a fool for having stopped to watch the spectacle. But if he tried to leave now, those soldiers would not be pleased with him. And they had rifles.

“Frenchie! Hey, Frenchie!” they shouted as they got closer. “Bring your wagon on over here. We got wounded.”

“Mauvais tabernac,” Lucien snarled. No help for it, though. As he pulled the wagon off the road and bounced toward the track, he felt a curious mixture of joy at having the enemies of his country wounded and sorrow at having young men who had never personally done him wrong wounded.

The chickens did not approve of the rough ride he was giving them. “Be still, you fools,” he told them, for the first time including them in his…He groped for a word. *In my salon,* he thought, pleased with himself. “This will keep you alive a little longer.”

Ahead, soldiers in green-gray were sometimes helping out of the train, sometimes carrying from it other soldiers in green-gray extravagantly splashed with red. “How many can you hold?” a captain called to Lucien as he drew near. “Four, maybe five?”

“Yes, it could be,” the farmer had replied. Exposure had improved his English—to a point. When he turned to indicate the chickens and their cages in the wagon bed, he was reduced to a helpless wave and a

single word: “But—”

“Here.” The American captain dug in a trouser pocket and tossed something to Galtier, who automatically caught it. “That ought to cover them.” He looked down to see what he had: a twenty-dollar U.S. goldpiece.

He took off his hat in salute. *“Oui, monsieur. Merci, monsieur.”* The American could simply have had the chickens thrown out onto the ground. He’d expected the *Boche americain* to do just that. Instead, the fellow had given him more than a fair price for them. Lucien jumped down and piled the cages in a wobbly pyramid, then hurried to help the Americans land their comrades in the space thus vacated. *A service for a service,* he thought.

“Here, pal,” an unwounded U.S. soldier said. “Careful with Herb here. He’s a damn good fellow, Herb is.” As gently as he could, Lucien arranged the damn good fellow so he could sit against the side of the wagon. Herb had a rough bandage, rapidly soaking through with blood, on his right leg. He also had a streak of blood running down his chin from one corner of his mouth; he must have bitten through his lip against the pain.

The horse snorted and tried to shy, uneasy at the stink of blood. One of the American soldiers caught his head and eased him back toward something approaching calm. There was no earthly reason Americans should not be good with horses. Nonetheless, Lucien felt almost as betrayed as if his wife had been unfaithful with a man who wore green-gray.

“We came past a hospital back there, didn’t we?” the captain asked. “I thought I saw it through the window.”

“Yes, sir,” Galtier answered. “It is, in fact, on my land.” The American didn’t notice the resentment with which he said that. Well, the fellow had paid him. One surprise of a day was plenty; with two, nothing would have seemed certain any more. In the memory of the one surprise, Galtier added, “And my daughter works as a nurse’s helper there.”

“I’m afraid we’ve given her more work to do,” the captain said, to which Lucien could only nod. The wagon was already packed tight with wounded, some moaning, some ominously still. More lay on the ground. Their unhurt comrades were doing what they could for them, but most, obviously, had little skill.

Lucien pointed to the road. “There is an ambulance from the hospital. It goes to Rivière-du-Loup to pick up the blessed.” The captain looked confused. Lucien realized he’d made a mistake, using a French word for an English one with the same sound but a different meaning. He corrected himself: “The wounded.”

“He doesn’t need to go that far, not now he doesn’t,” the captain said. Soldiers were waving to the ambulance. As Galtier had done before, it pulled off the road and came jouncing over the rough ground toward the tracks. The driver and his attendant scrambled out of the machine. The attendant shook his head. “What a mess,” he said.

“Yeah.” The ambulance driver scowled. He couldn’t have been more than seventeen or so, not with that unlined face, but was dark and handsome and looked strong as a bull. “This is what you do. You die.” He sounded world-weary beyond his years. “You do not know what it is about. You never have time to learn.”

“Let’s get ’em on the stretcher and into the bus,” the attendant said.

“Yeah,” the driver said again. But then he recognized Galtier. He nodded. “You are Nicole’s father, *n’est-ce pas*?” His French was bad, but few Americans spoke any.

“Yes,” Lucien answered. In spite of himself, he’d come to know some of the people at the hospital. “*Bonjour,* Ernest.”

“Not a *bon jour* for them,” the ambulance driver said. His broad shoulders—almost the shoulders of a prizefighter—went up and down in a shrug. “We will take them back. We will do what we can for them.”

Up in Rivière-du-Loup and elsewhere along the St. Lawrence, the antiaircraft guns started banging away again. Lucien noticed that only in the back part of his mind till he heard the buzz of aeroplane engines.

“Jesus fucking Christ!” an American screamed—doubly a blasphemy for Galtier. Then the man in green-gray said something even worse: “Here they come again!”

Whether they were the same two aeroplanes or two others, Lucien never knew. All around him, soldiers scattered, some diving for cover under the halted train, others running as far away from it as they could. Lucien stood there, foolishly, as the machine guns began chewing up the dirt close by.

The pilots did not try to shoot up either his wagon or the ambulance near it. He was and remained convinced of that. But they were flying fast, and didn't miss by much. The captain who'd given him the goldpiece spun and toppled like someone with no bones at all, the top of his head shot off. Fresh cries of pain rose from every direction.

Roaring just above his head, the aeroplanes streaked away. A couple of Americans fired their rifles at them. It did no good. They were gone. Galtier looked around at carnage compounded.

A moan that stood out for anguish even among all the others made him turn his head. The young, strong ambulance driver lay beside the soldier he had been about to help. Now he was wounded, too. His hands clutched at himself. Lucien shivered and made the sign of the cross. Maybe, if God was kind, he had been wounded near there, but not *there*.

The ambulance attendant, whose name Galtier did not know, came over to him and the injured driver. "We're going to have to bandage that and get him back to the hospital," he said, to which Lucien could only nod. The attendant stooped beside the driver. "Come on, kid, you got to let me see that."

In the end, Lucien had to hold the fellow's hands away from the wound while the attendant worked. The driver writhed and fought. He wasn't altogether conscious, but he was, as he looked, strong as the devil. Hanging onto his hands turned into something just short of a wrestling match.

Lucien hadn't intended to look as the attendant cleaned and bandaged the wound. But his eyes, drawn by some horrid fascination of their own, went to it. He winced and wanted to cross himself again. *There,* indeed.

He and the attendant got the driver into the back of the ambulance with another wounded man. "Thanks for the help," the attendant said.

"Not at all." Galtier hesitated. "With this bl—*wound*—do you think he can—? Will he be able to—?" He ran out of English and nerve at the same time.

"If he's lucky," the attendant said, understanding him anyhow, "if he's real lucky, mind, he'll be able to *just* do it." He climbed into the ambulance and drove it back toward the hospital. Galtier followed at his necessarily slower pace. He said nothing at all to the horse.

Klaxons hooted, everywhere on the *Dakota*. Sam Carsten threw his mop into a bucket and ran for his battle station. He'd expected the call even before the battleship fished its aeroplane out of the waters of the Pacific. Officers had been bustling around with the look that said they knew something he didn't. The aeroplane must have spotted something out there ahead of the fleet and sent word back by wireless.

And, out here south and west of the Sandwich Islands, the only thing to spot was the enemy. "The limeys!" Carsten gasped to Hiram Kidde when he ducked into the forwardmost starboard five-inch gun sponson.

"Them or the Japs," Kidde agreed. The gunner's mate rubbed his chin. "Taken 'em damn near two years, but they finally figured they could come out and play with the big boys. Now we got to show 'em they made a mistake, on account of if we don't, the Sandwich Islands are up for grabs again." He'd been in the Navy his whole adult life. He might not have been able to order units around like an admiral, but he had no trouble figuring out the way tactics led into strategy.

Lieutenant Commander Grady stuck his head into the sponson. "All present and accounted for?" asked the commander of the starboard-side secondary armament.

"Yes, sir," Kidde answered. "Loader"—he nodded at Carsten—"gun layers, shell jerkers, we're all here. Uh, sir, who are we fighting?"

Grady grinned. "Looks like one hellacious fleet of British battleships over the horizon," he answered, "along with all their smaller friends. I don't expect they sailed out of Singapore just to pay their respects." His face clouded. "By what the pilots say, they're at least as big a force as we are. They're playing for keeps, no doubt about it."

"So are we, sir," Kidde said. "We'll be ready." Grady nodded and hurried away, his shoes ringing off the steel of the deck.

"We don't have the whole Sandwich Islands fleet out here on patrol with us," Carsten said unhappily. "If the limeys smash us up and push past us—"

Kidde shrugged. "Chance you take when you join the Navy. If they smash us up and push past us, thing we have to make sure of is that we do some smashing of our own."

The sponson had only small vision slits for laying the gun. Even those had armored visors to protect against shell splinters in action. The visors were up now. Carsten looked out through one of the slits as the *Dakota* swung into a long, sweeping turn. The patrolling fleet was going into battle formation, the line of half a dozen battleships anchoring it, with smaller, swifter cruisers and destroyers supporting and screening them.

He felt a rumble through the soles of his feet. “That’s the big turrets moving,” he said unnecessarily.

Luke Hoskins, one of the shell-jerkers, made an equally unnecessary comment: “They’ve spotted the limeys, then.” He already had his shirt off against the exertions that were to come. Even now, with him doing nothing, sweat gleamed on his muscle-etched torso.

Carsten peered through the vision slit again, looking for smoke on the horizon. He saw none, but the fire director for the main armament, up in the armored crow’s nest, enjoyed—if that was the word—a view far better than his.

All at once, a great column of water fountained up into the sky, about half a mile from the *Dakota*. Sam might not have been able to see the British ships, but the director surely could, because they could see him. “Hell of a big splash,” he said. That wasn’t surprising, either: at a range like this, only a battleship’s big guns had a chance of hitting.

A moment later, the *Dakota*’s main armament salvoed in reply. The noise was like the end of the world. “Here we go,” Hiram Kidde said. He sounded, if not happy, at peace with himself and with the world. He was getting ready to do the job he did better than anything else in the world.

“Odds are, we’re gonna sit here with our thumbs up our asses all day long, too,” Hoskins grumbled. “Anybody think we’re gonna get close enough to the limeys to really use secondary guns?”

“Listen, if we could sink ’em from a hundred miles away and they never came close to hitting us, I’d be happy as a clam,” Carsten said. Nobody in the hot, crowded sponson argued with him.

In a thoughtful voice, Kidde said, “That wasn’t a broadside we fired at the limeys, just the forward turrets. We’d better swing”—and sure enough, the *Dakota* was again heeling through the water in another turn—“or they’ll cross the T on us at a range short enough to hurt us

bad."

Carsten grimaced, and he wasn't the only one. If the enemy crossed your path and fired broadsides at you while you could answer only with your forward guns, he was sending you twice the weight of metal you were giving back. Every admiral dreamt of crossing the T, and every one had nightmares about its being crossed on him.

More splashes rose, these closer to the *Dakota*. If somebody dropped an elephant into the Pacific from a mile up, it might make a splash like that. Shrapnel rattled off the armored sides of the battleship. Carsten whistled softly. "Wouldn't care to be up on deck right now," he said.

The rest of the gun crew made noises showing they agreed. "Cap'n" Kidde said, "It's going to get worse before it gets better, too."

Nobody argued with that, either. "Hard standing around here," Carsten said, "waiting for something to happen or for us to get close enough to the limeys to shoot at them. I feel like I'm along for the ride, but I'm not doing anything to earn my keep."

He looked out through the vision slit again. Some of the cruisers had started firing their main armament: guns of a range not that much longer than those he served. His turn would come before too long.

And then, as he watched, one of the cruisers, the *Missoula*, took a direct hit from what had to be a battleship shell. Its turrets went up one after the other, like the most spectacular Fourth of July fireworks display he'd ever imagined. When, bare seconds after the hit, flame reached the main magazine, the whole ship exploded in a spectacular fireball. One of the cruiser's big guns hung suspended on top of the flames for what had to be close to half a minute. But when the flames and smoke finally cleared, only roiled water remained. Nothing else was left to show where six or seven hundred men had been—no boats, no wreckage, nothing.

"Jesus," Sam said, and looked away. Imagining the same thing happening to the *Dakota* was all too easy.

Kidde kept peering out of his slit. "You can see the limeys, all right," he said. "Won't be long now"—the same thought Carsten had had a minute or so earlier.

As the main armament thundered again, Lieutenant Commander Grady stuck his head in to say, "Pick your own targets, boys. Ship's

movements will be to give the main armament the best possible firing opportunities. Us small fry down here, we have to take whatever we can find." He hurried off again.

Not much later, Kidde whooped with glee. "Sure as hell, that's a British cruiser out there," he said, pointing. He stared into the rangefinder and twiddled with the controls. "I make it about twelve thousand yards," he said, and shouted orders to the gun layers, who swung their cranks to shift the five-inch gun to bear on the foe. "Fire for effect!" the gunner's mate yelled.

Grunting, Luke Hoskins grabbed a heavy shell and passed it to Carsten, who slammed it into the breech, dogged it shut, and nodded to Kidde. The chief of the gun crew yanked the lanyard. The cannon roared and jerked. Cordite fumes filled the sponson.

"Short," Kidde announced, watching the splash, as Sam, coughing, got the casing out of the breech and threw it down to the deck with a clang. Pete Jonas, the other shell-jerker, passed him a new round. Ten seconds after the first one, it was on its way. No more than half a dozen rounds had gone out before Kidde whooped to announce a hit, and then another one.

And then another hit announced itself. It felt as if God had booted the *Dakota* right in the tail. All at once, she swerved sharply, and missed colliding with the next battleship in line, the *Idaho*, by what seemed bare inches. "What the hell—?" Pete Jonas burst out.

"We just lost our steering," Hiram Kidde said matter-of-factly. "Goddamn limeys got lucky." He looked out to see where they were headed, and his next words were much less calm: "Lord have mercy, we're steaming straight for the British line of battle."

Straight was not the operative word; the *Dakota* was swinging through an enormous circle. "Rudder must be jammed hard to port," Carsten said. "We've got to keep moving best way we can, though. If we're dead in the water, we're dead."

They passed a burning U.S. cruiser. Afterwards, Sam figured that did more good than harm: the fire that had been directed against the less heavily armored vessel now fell on the obviously out of control *Dakota*. At the time, it was a distinction he could have done without.

"What do we do if we get right in among 'em?" he asked, that being the worst thing he could think of.

“Sink,” Kidde answered, which was very much to the point but not what Carsten wanted to hear. The gunner’s mate added, “Hurt as many of ’em as bad as we can before we go down.”

With nothing better to do, they kept firing as they spun within eight or nine thousand yards of the British line of battle. Smoke enveloped the enemy battleships: some the smoke of damage, more from the big guns the ships carried. Shells from those big guns and from the enemies’ secondary armament rained down on the *Dakota*.

Sam lost count of how many times the ship was bracketed. Seawater from near misses rained down on her, too, and fragments pattering like deadly hail. And, every so often, she would shake when another shell struck home. Damage-control parties—everyone not serving a gun or the engines—dashed along the corridors, fighting fire and flood.

“Thank God, we’re turning away,” Kidde said, peering out through the vision slit. That meant that, for the time being, his gun didn’t bear on the British fleet. *A chance to take it easy,* Carsten thought. But then the gunner’s mate let out a hoarse, vile exclamation. “We got more ships bearin’ down on us from the north.” He stared at them, out there in the distance. His voice cracked in anger: “Those aren’t limeys—they’re Japs!”

“I don’t care who they are,” Luke Hoskins said. “We’ll smash ’em up.”

Methodically, as if they were a pair of machines, he and Pete Jonas took turns passing shells to Carsten. “Cap’n” Kidde yelled like a wild man when they started scoring hits on the Japanese. “The limeys, now, they’re good,” he said. “Till the slant-eyed boys messed with us, the only fight they ever picked was with Spain. Hey, I can lick my grandmother easy enough, too, but that don’t mean I’m a tough guy.”

Carsten heard that, but paid it little mind. He was a machine himself, a sweating machine coughing in the fume-laden air but doing his job with unthinking accuracy and perfection. Load, close, wait for the round to go, get rid of the case, load, close…

Shells kept falling around and sometimes on the *Dakota*. Were they British or Japanese? They didn’t leave calling cards—not calling cards of that sort, anyhow. From not far away, Lieutenant Commander Grady screamed for sand to douse a fire. Nothing exploded, so Sam supposed the fire got doused. The guns in the turrets kept thundering

away. So did all the weapons of the secondary armament that would bear on the foe.

"Christ on His cross," Kidde said, "we're going around through our own fleet again."

He was right. Carsten got glimpses of other ships with spouts from near misses splashing up around them and still others aflame. But the U.S. ships were shooting back, too; smoke from the guns, smoke from the fires, and smoke from the stacks all dimmed the bright sunshine of the tropical Pacific. "Are we winning or losing?" Sam asked.

"Damned if I know," "Cap'n" Kidde answered. "If we live and we make it back to Honolulu, we can find out in the papers." He barked laughter, then coughed harshly. "And if we don't live, what the hell difference does it make, anyway?"

Luke Hoskins came up with another good question: "We ever going to get this beast under control again? We've done one whole circle, just about, and now…"

With the five-inch gun screened from the enemy by the bulk of the ship, Sam took his place at a vision slit beside Hiram Kidde. He saw they'd come round behind most of the American fleet, and…He grimaced in dismay. "Looks like we're going to swing toward them again," he said.

Kidde whistled between his teeth. "It does, don't it? Well, that means the gun'll bear again. Get your ass back there, Sam. If they take us out, it ain't gonna be like we didn't give 'em something to remember us by."

"Yeah," Carsten said, and then, "You know, I wouldn't mind that much if they remembered some other guys instead." Pete Jonas handed him a shell. He slammed it into the breech.

* * *

Newsboys shouted their papers as Sylvia Enos walked from her apartment building to the trolley stop: "Battle of the Three Navies! Read all about it!" "Extra! USS *Dakota* in circle of death!" "American fleet crushes the Japs and limeys off Sandwich Islands!"

Sylvia paid her two cents and bought a *Boston Globe*. She read it on the way to the canning plant. As often seemed true in the war, the

headlines screamed of victory while the stories that followed showed the headlines didn't know what they were talking about.

The U.S. fleet hadn't crushed those of the two enemy empires, any more than the German High Seas Fleet had crushed the Royal Navy in the North Sea the month before. The papers had shouted hosannas about that, too, till it became obvious that, even after the fight, the bulk of the German Navy couldn't break out to help the U.S. Atlantic Fleet against the British and the French and the Rebs.

In the Pacific, though, what seemed to be a drawn battle worked for the United States, not against them as it had on the other side of the world. Where the Germans hadn't been able to break out into the Atlantic, the British and Japanese hadn't been able to break in toward the Sandwich Islands, which remained firmly in American hands.

Though the *Globe* hadn't been the paper whose headlines screeched loudest about the *Dakota*, its account of the fight did prominently mention the battleship's double circuit straight into the guns of the opposing fleets. "The valiant vessel sustained twenty-nine hits," the reporter said, "nine definitely from the enemy's large-caliber guns, eleven definitely from smaller shells, and nine that might have come from either. Although drawing thirty-six feet of water at the end of the battle, as opposed to thirty-one at the outset, the *Dakota* and the heroes aboard her also inflicted heavy damage on the ships of the foe and, miraculously, suffered only fourteen killed and seventeen wounded, a tribute to her design, to her metal, and to the mettle of her crew."

Sylvia left the newspaper on the trolley seat when she got out and hurried over to the plant: let someone else have a free look. She'd wondered why the Navy, in its wisdom, had sent George to the Mississippi rather than the open sea. Now she thanked God for it. The *Dakota* had got off lightly as far as casualties were concerned, but what about the cruisers and destroyers and battleships that had gone to the bottom with all hands, or near enough to make no difference?

Going down with all hands could happen to a monitor, too. Sylvia made herself not think about that. Coming up the street toward the factory was Isabella Antonelli. Sylvia waved to her friend. "Good morning," she called.

"Good morning," Mrs. Antonelli answered. Seeing her, though, did not take Sylvia's mind as far away from the war as she would have liked. Isabella Antonelli wore black from head to foot, with a black

veil coming down from her hat over her face. In her imperfect English, she said, “All this talk of the big Navy fight, I think of you, I think of your husband, I pray he is all right—” She crossed herself.

“He’s fine, yes. He wasn’t anywhere near this fight out on the ocean, thank God,” Sylvia said.

“Thank God, yes,” Mrs. Antonelli said. They walked into the plant and punched their time cards together. As Sylvia did whenever she talked about the war with her friend, she felt faintly guilty that George still lived while Mr. Antonelli had met a bullet or a shell somewhere up in Quebec. The black-bordered casualty lists the papers printed every day showed how easily it could have been the other way round.

She welcomed the mesmerizing monotony of the line that sent cans into her labeling machine and then out again. If she concentrated on the work, she didn’t have to think about the war—although she wouldn’t have been here without the war. She would have been at home with George, Jr., and Mary Jane.

Was what she had now better or worse? Having George away—and in harm’s way—tipped the balance, of course. Suppose George were home—or home as often as he was when he went out on his fishing runs. What then? The children sometimes drove her mad. Even so, she missed them fiercely every moment she was away from them.

Mr. Winter came limping down the line to see how things were going. He smiled at her. She nodded back.

“Good morning, Mrs. Enos,” the foreman said, smiling to show off his bad teeth. “How are you this morning? Your husband wasn’t in the big battle the papers are talking about, I hope?”

“I’m fine, thank you, Mr. Winter,” she answered. “My husband, too, so far as I know. He’s on the Mississippi, not in the Pacific.”

“That’s right, you told me. I just remembered he was in the Navy, is all.” Winter shook his head in chagrin, whether real or put on she couldn’t tell. Then he went back to business, which relieved her: “Machine behaving all right?”

“It seems to be, yes.” With someone else, Sylvia might have joked that saying it was working well would make it break down. The thought was in her mind, but she kept it there. The less she had to do with Mr. Winter outside of things that were strictly business, the

better she liked it.

He nodded to her. “That’s fine, then.” With another nod, he headed over to the machine Isabella Antonelli ran. “Hello, ’Bella. How are you this morning?”

The paste reservoir on Sylvia’s machine ran low just then. She had to bend down, pick up the bucket of thick white paste, and refill the reservoir, all without missing a beat on the three levers she had to pull for every can of mackerel feeding through to be labeled. While she was doing that, she felt like a juggler with too many balls in the air.

It also distracted her from the conversation the foreman and Isabella Antonelli were having. She couldn’t have heard all of it anyhow, not over the unending clatter and rumble of the line that moved the cans ahead and the racket of the machines along the way, but she might have heard some. She wanted to hear some. She’d never noticed Mr. Winter using a shortened version of Isabella’s name before. Did that mean he hadn’t done it before, or that she hadn’t noticed?

Like everyone else at the canning plant, Isabella Antonelli had taken off her hat when she started work. That was all the more necessary for her, what with the veil depending from the hat. Before heading toward the next machine on the line, Mr. Winter chucked her under the chin, said something Sylvia didn’t catch, and made as if to kiss her on the cheek but didn’t. He was laughing when he left her station.

Sylvia concentrated on her own machine with a fury whose intensity startled her and was only made worse because it was so futile. She jerked the levers so hard, she jammed the machine, which shut down the whole line till she could clear it.

Mr. Winter came over at a limping trot. “Thought you said it was going good,” he said. “You shut us down, it costs the owners money. They don’t like that, Mrs. Enos. They don’t like that even a little bit.”

“I’m sorry,” she lied. “It was behaving fine till a minute ago.” She used a screwdriver to lever a tin can out of the works. “Let me just check.” She pulled the lever that had started the trouble. It functioned smoothly now. “You can start things up again.”

“All right.” He gave her a grudging nod. “You fixed it fast enough, I will say that.” Cans started flowing once more.

Restraining the anger she’d taken out on the labeling machine made her stomach hurt. She was glad when the lunch whistle blew. Picking

up her dinner pail, she fell into step beside Isabella Antonelli. It was hot and muggy outside the factory building, and the view was only of another canning plant across the street, but that still meant cooler weather and a prettier prospect than inside.

They sat down on a bench. Sylvia had a fish sandwich—leftovers from the night before—and Mrs. Antonelli some sort of funny-shaped noodles in tomato sauce. After they'd eaten for a while, Sylvia asked, "Is he bothering you?"

"Who?" Isabella was intent on her food. They had only half an hour before they went back to work.

"Him. Mr. Winter. The foreman. I saw him, what he did this morning. That's not right." Remembering, Sylvia got angry all over again.

To her own mortification, a certain amount of relief accompanied the anger. *He's not bothering* me, *thank God,* was the nasty little thought somewhere near the bottom of her mind. Recognizing it for what it was only made her more furious, both at the foreman and at herself.

"Mr. Winter?" Isabella's eyes grew wide for a moment. Then, to Sylvia's surprise, she laughed. "Oh, that. No, that is nothing much. I do not worry about it. He is a lonely man, Mr. Winter. And I, now I am lonely, too." She set down her fork and touched the sleeve of the black dress.

"But—" Sylvia began. She stopped, not knowing how to go on. If, God forbid, something had happened to George, she wouldn't have been able to look at a man for years. She was sure of it. She was so sure of it, she hadn't imagined anyone else could be different.

Isabella Antonelli said, "I do not think anything will come of it. If anything does come of it, that would not be so bad." For a moment, she looked altogether pragmatic. "He is a Catholic. I have found out."

"Is he? Have you?" Sylvia didn't scratch her head, but she felt like it. The more you looked at the world, the more complicated it got.

The white man in the munitions plant hiring office scribbled something on the form in front of him, then looked across the table at Scipio. "Well, boy, you sound like you'll do," he said in the sharp

accent typical of Columbia, South Carolina. “Why don’t you let me have your passbook so we can get this here all settled right and proper?”

Scipio’s heart leaped up into his throat. He’d expected the demand. No Negro in the CSA could have failed to expect the demand. Since the start of the war, things were supposed to have loosened up. That was how it had looked when he was the butler back at Marshlands, anyhow. God only knew what the aftermath of the rebellion had done toward tightening things again, though.

God knew, and he was about to find out. Donning what he hoped was an ingratiating smile, he said, “Ain’t got none, suh. I used to, yes suh, but I plumb lost it in the ruction.”

“I bet you did,” the clerk said with a thin smile. “You talk like a nigger from further down on the Congaree—that right, Nero?”

“Yes, suh,” Scipio said. Nero was one of the commonest names Negro men bore. He wondered what the white man—whose desk bore a little placard proclaiming him to be Mr. Staunton—would have thought had he suddenly started his other way of speaking. He didn’t intend doing anything so foolish. Talking like an educated white might give him away and would surely get him tagged as uppity. He couldn’t afford that, not if he wanted work.

“Let’s see your hands,” Staunton said suddenly. Trying not to show any reluctance, Scipio displayed them. That unpleasant smile flashed across the clerk’s face again. “Not a field nigger—a house nigger, I reckon. And you don’t have a passbook? My, my. What *were* you doing, these past few months?”

That hit too close to the center of the target. Scipio said, “A minute ago, suh, you says you wants to hire me. Now you talkin’ like I was one o’ dey bad niggers raise all de ruction.” He wanted to flee. Only a well-founded suspicion that he wouldn’t make it outside the door kept him standing where he was.

“Oh, I’ll hire you,” Staunton said. He lowered his voice. “For niggers without passbooks, though, we got a special arrangement. Have to get you a new book, right? Lots of patrollers around these days, that’s a fact.”

“Yes, suh,” Scipio said again. Now he stood at ease once more. Staunton wasn’t going to betray him, just shake him down. “How much I gots to pay you, git de new book?” He also spoke quietly.

“Ain’t you a smart nigger?” By the way the clerk’s pale eyes sparked, that was more warning than compliment. “Half your pay the first month,” Staunton said, greed evidently overcoming suspicion. “End of the month, you be a good boy, you get yourself a book. Understand?”

“Yes, suh.” The repetition was getting monotonous. Scipio let out a mournful sigh. “Not much left fo’ me.” At the start of the war, a dollar and a quarter a day would have been good money for a Negro, and half that survivable for a month. Wages and prices had gone up a good deal the past two years, though.

“Nigger without a passbook ain’t gonna get a better deal no place else,” Staunton said, and that, odds on, was true.

Scipio sighed again. He’d be drinking water and eating cornmeal mush for the next month, no two ways about it—and that with sleeping in the cheapest flophouse he could find. After Marshlands, even after the hectic life as part of the ruling council of the Congaree Socialist Republic, it had all the earmarks of a thoroughly joyless existence.

“God damn the Reds,” he muttered. Nobody had bothered to listen to him, though he’d warned again and again that the uprising would lead only to disaster. Having acquired a fair smattering of a classical education at Marshlands, he found himself wishing Cassandra were a masculine name. He would have used it for an alias instead of Nero.

Mr. Staunton heard what he said, and interpreted it his own way. “God damn the Reds is right, Nero,” he said. “Weren’t for them, wouldn’t hardly have to worry about passbooks at all, not the way things were going. We wanted bodies so bad, we didn’t care. But now it’s gonna cost you money to get fixed up right, on account of what they did. Too bad, boy.” He spoke with the soppy condescension that seemed to be as close as a Confederate white could come to showing sympathy for a black.

“When do I start?” Scipio asked.

“Tomorrow morning, seven o’clock,” the clerk answered. He shoved the form across the desk at Scipio and handed him a pen. “Put your mark right on the line here. We’ll get you a time card made. Foreman’ll punch it for you—you don’t need to worry about pickin’it out. Just so you know to tell him, you’re Nero number three.”

Scipio placed an X on the line the clerk indicated. By what he saw

of the form, his spelling and handwriting were considerably better than Staunton's. He didn't aim to show that. The less the white man knew about him, the better he liked it.

But, even though he'd written an X, the way he'd taken the pen, as if his hand was accustomed to it, made the clerk's eyes narrow. "House nigger," Staunton said, half to himself. "You read and write some, don't you, boy?"

"Some, yes, suh," Scipio answered cautiously. Damn it, why couldn't he have dealt with a dull, bored white clerk rather than an alert, grasping one?

But Staunton visibly decided not to make an issue of it. "Go on, get out of here," he said. "You ain't here at seven sharp tomorrow, don't ever come round again, neither." He pushed his chair back from his desk and swiveled so he could put Scipio's paperwork in a file cabinet. That was the first time the Negro had the chance to see his right leg was missing from halfway down the thigh.

After that, Scipio got out of there in a hurry. He had a couple of dollars in his pocket, from odd jobs he'd done on farms and in little towns before he decided the big city was safer. As he walked along Columbia's busy streets, he wondered if he'd made a mistake.

Probably not, he decided. Negroes were on the streets, and a lot of them looked as ragged as he did. Soldiers tramped along the streets, too, some of them regulars in butternut, some recalled militia in old-fashioned gray that made them look like policemen. They didn't seem to be checking blacks' papers, just showing themselves to keep trouble from breaking out.

Columbia had seen trouble during the Red insurrections. It was a city of fine and stately homes and shops, many of them dating from before the War of Secession. Here and there, a block would have a house missing, like a man with a missing front tooth. A couple of places in town, whole blocks were missing, even the rubble cleared away. The Negroes might have lost, but they'd put up a fight.

Much good it did them, Scipio thought gloomily. He ducked into a store whose sign forthrightly proclaimed CHEAP CLOTHES and bought a pair of dungarees and a couple of collarless cotton shirts. He wouldn't be able to afford any new clothes for the next month, not on sixty-two and a half cents a day he wouldn't.

A bowl of thin stew cost him another fifteen cents, and a mattress in

a tiny, airless cubicle a quarter on top of that. He was left with the munificent sum of half a dollar with which to face the world. It was Wednesday night. Payday would be Friday. He had enough for a bed tomorrow night, and for some bread or mush to keep the hole in his belly from getting any worse. Sighing, he tried to sleep.

On that uncomfortable bed, in that uncomfortable roomlet, waking up in time to be at the munitions plant was not the problem. Sleeping at all before then was. When dawn began showing through the small, rectangular window that wouldn't open, he gave up, put on the dungarees and one of the shirts he'd bought the evening before, and then discovered he had to pay the flophouse proprietor a dime to watch the clothes he had left so they'd be there when he got back. *Day-old bread,* he thought, and sighed again.

"Nero number three, eh? All right, you're on time, boy," the foreman said when he got to the factory: grudging approval, but approval. The white man punched his card into the clock, then took him back into the factory. "They stack the crates of empty shells *here*, at the end of this line," the fellow said, pointing. "You haul 'em over *there*, where they pick 'em up to be filled. You got that?"

"Yes, suh," Scipio said. Several crates already stood there. "I do 'em one at a time by hand, suh?"

"'Less you got a servant to do 'em for you, that's what you do, by Jesus," the foreman said. "I wanted me a butler, I'd've hired a nigger wearin' different clothes." He laughed at his own joke.

Scipio, luckily, managed to keep his face straight. "Don't mind workin', suh," he said. "Ain't what I mean. Jus' thinkin' that, you give me a hand truck, I could do mo' work in de same time."

The foreman laughed again. "First time I ever heard of a nigger wanting to do *more* work, 'stead of less." He rubbed his chin. "It ain't the worst idea I ever heard, though. Tell you what—you do it this way for today. We'll see what happens tomorrow. I got to talk with a couple people first."

"Yes, suh," Scipio said again. *If they think it's a good idea, I'm going to take the credit for it,* was what the white man meant. Scipio couldn't do anything about that. He strode over to the crates, picked one up, and carried it to where the foreman had told him to put it.

It was heavy. The rough wood bit into his hands. The edge of the crate struck his thighs halfway between knee and hip. He'd be bruised

there by evening—hell, he'd be bruised there by noon. He walked back and got another crate. The foreman nodded, satisfied, and went back to supervising check-in.

A Negro in good, well-made work clothes picked up the crate Scipio had set down. The two black man stared at each other. Scipio spoke first. He had to speak first, before the other man used his true name. "How you is, Jonah?" he said. "You 'member ol' Nero, eh?"

Jonah had been a field hand at Marshlands. He and his woman had gone into Columbia looking for factory work not long after the war started, and not even Anne Colleton had been able to get them back. "Nero," he said now, after a brief, thoughtful pause. "Yeah, I 'member you good, Nero. So now we is workin' together again, is we?"

"Dis world a small place," Scipio said solemnly. He wished it hadn't been quite so small. If Jonah felt like betraying him, he could. They'd got on well enough at the plantation, but there was always the distinction between house nigger and field nigger. And Jonah might well have heard of the role he'd played in the Congaree Socialist Republic. If, like a good many Negroes, he disapproved of the uprising…

Then Jonah smiled and said, "You come home fo' supper wid me tonight, Nero. Letitia, she glad to see an ol' friend."

"T'ank you," Scipio said. "I do dat." It would get him fed and let him save what little money he had left. And it meant—Lord, how he hoped it meant!—Jonah wasn't going to turn him in to the Confederate authorities. He picked up another clanking crate of shell casings. It hardly seemed to weigh a thing.

The hall was packed. The hot, muggy air would have been thick enough to slice even had it been empty. A small, forlorn electric fan did overmatched battle against the heat of too many bodies, against the fact that a lot of those bodies hadn't bathed quite so recently as they might have, and against enough cigar, cigarette, and pipe smoke to make Flora Hamburger think of poison gas.

Coughing a little, she turned to Maria Tresca. "They've come out, no two ways about it," she said.

Maria nodded. "That works for you, not against you," she said. "The

regulars would sooner see Herman Bruck with the nomination, even after Remembrance Day." She sniffed; the smoky air turned the sniff into a cough louder than Flora's. "They're reactionaries, that's what they are. How can they be reactionaries and Socialists at the same time? My sister Angelina never was."

"When they think of it, they're progressive," Flora said with a shrug. "You have to think about your ideology; if you don't think about it, you haven't got one. But if you don't think about your social attitudes, it's not that you don't have any, it's just that yours are the same as your neighbor's." She sighed. "And if your neighbors are petty bourgeoisie and proletarians who aspire to the petty bourgeoisie—"

Maria Tresca's face darkened into a frown. "In that case, they might as well be Democrats."

"No." Flora shook her head. "That's not the problem. The problem is making them think about social issues. When they do think instead of feeling, they're sound enough. They have to stop taking those concerns for granted, that's all."

"Or else the revolution, when it comes, will sweep them away with it," Maria said. "Sometimes I think you're too gentle, Flora. My sister was the same way, and look what it got her." Angelina Tresca had died in the Remembrance Day riots the year before. "If they cannot adapt, they deserve to be swept away." Maria was as full of revolutionary consciousness as anyone Flora knew: frighteningly full sometimes.

"Sometimes the uprising comes too soon," Flora said. "Look at the Confederacy. The proletariat failed there—nothing but banditry left now."

"Race mystified the white proletarians, splitting the laboring class," Maria returned. "That won't happen here in the United States. When the workers rise up against the trusts and the capitalists, they'll all rise together and overthrow the rotten system." She sounded messianically certain.

Up on the platform at the front of the hall, the chairman rapped loudly for order. Slowly, Saul Masliansky got some small semblance of it. When it didn't come fast enough to suit him, he rapped again, this time as if firing a gun. "Be quiet, there!" he shouted, first in Yiddish, then in English. "Do you want to caucus, or do you just want to talk?"

"With this crowd, that's about even money," Flora said with a smile.

“You should have accepted somebody besides Masliansky,” Maria Tresca said, not smiling back. “He favors Herman.”

“I know. Everyone who could chair this caucus favors Herman, as far as I can tell,” Flora answered. “But Saul is honest. When he sees what the people want, he won’t thwart them.”

“Ha!” Maria said darkly. “He’s assistant editor for the *Daily Forward*. He’s going to go right on favoring Bruck, because Herman got everything he knows about Socialism straight out of the newspaper.”

That was so unfair, and at the same time so delicious, that Flora couldn’t help giggling. She’d expected to be too nervous here to see straight, let alone to speak well, and now she wasn’t any more. She hoped the delightful, flighty feeling would last. “He’s honest,” she said again. “I’ve seen him admit he’s wrong. How many others who might have done the job can you say that about?”

“We’re not going to have a caucus if you people can’t keep quiet,” Saul Masliansky said, like a schoolteacher confronting a classroom full of hooligans. He didn’t look like a teacher, or like an editor, either. With an embroidered vest and a high, pale forehead, what he looked like was a professional gambler. He played his trump card with the air of a gambler pulling an ace out of his sleeve, too: “Do you want to hear the candidates? We’ve agreed we’re all going to support whichever one we choose, so picking the better one strikes me as a pretty good idea. Anybody who thinks different can go outside to talk.”

“Anyone who thinks different can *geh in drerd*,” Maria Tresca said. Flora laughed again. Maria had acquired an excellent, often scurrilous command of Yiddish.

“Mr. Chairman,” somebody called, “I move that, when we pick, we pick by secret ballot.”

“Second!” Herman Bruck shouted.

“You keep quiet,” Masliansky barked at him. “Candidates aren’t members of the caucus. You can’t second. You talk to us, and that’s all. Do I hear a *proper* second?” He did, a moment later. The motion passed on a voice vote.

Member or not, Flora shouted against it. “If you can’t stand up and be counted at a caucus, when can you?” she demanded.

“You’re right—and you’re wrong,” Maria said. “Herman thinks secrecy will work for him, but I think he’s wrong. More people will go against the bigwigs if they aren’t looking over their shoulders.”

“Maybe,” Flora said.

Saul Masliansky plied his gavel once more. “Will the contenders please come forward?” he said.

“There he goes, selling his paper again,” some wit shouted, and got a laugh.

Flora made her way up to the platform. So did Herman Bruck, in a dark gray suit that shouted *respectability* at the world. Had Flora been respectable in the same sort of way, she wouldn’t have presumed to seek the Congressional nomination in the first place.

Herman nodded to her. He took her more seriously than he had before her Remembrance Day speech, but not so seriously as he would have taken, say, Saul Masliansky. Masliansky, after all, was a man, not someone he’d pestered to go to the cinema with him.

The chairman said, “We tossed a coin to see who would talk to you when. Our esteemed comrade, Mr. Herman Bruck here, won the toss. He chose to speak first. Herman Bruck!”

“Friends, Myron Zuckerman gave our district the best years of his life,” Bruck said, and won sympathetic applause from everyone who revered Zuckerman’s memory—which meant from everyone in the hall. “I aim to go to Philadelphia to do my best to fill his shoes, to keep the Fourteenth Ward as it has been, at the forefront in the fight against the trusts, and, I hope—*alevai*—to work with the next president of the United States of America, Senator Eugene V. Debs of Indiana!”

The Socialists’ national convention wouldn’t come until next month, but Debs’ nomination to face TR was a forgone conclusion. Again, Herman Bruck got loud cheers. Flora did her best not to let that worry her. He’d been applauded for invoking Zuckerman’s name, and again for invoking that of Debs. She wondered when he’d say anything about himself that deserved cheers.

As far as she was concerned, he never did. That didn’t mean he didn’t get applause, only that he was breathtakingly conventional in every position he took. He might as well have said, *I agree with what all the other Socialists think,* half a dozen times and then sat down.

After a while—after what seemed to Flora a very long while—he did sit down. Saul Masliansky said, “And now, Miss Flora Hamburger will tell you why she thinks Herman Bruck has been talking nonsense for the past twenty minutes.” He grinned at her.

It wasn’t quite the introduction she’d expected, but it would serve. She could make it serve, though that meant junking the opening she’d worked out in advance. She decided to take the chance: “Herman Bruck doesn’t talk nonsense. He’s a good Socialist. If you choose him, I will support him—that’s what the caucus is all about. But—”

She took a deep breath. “Herman Bruck is *safe*. Is being *safe* what the Socialist Party, the party of revolution, stands for? I don’t think so. He tells you what we’ve done in the past. He tells you what he’ll do in the future if you choose him as your candidate. The one is just the same as the other. If we elect people who will go on doing the same things, are we radicals or are we reactionaries?” The talk with Maria before she’d come up here was paying dividends—an alarmingly capitalistic thought for a would-be Socialist candidate.

“If you want life to go on as it always has, if you don’t want to work for radical change in this country, if you don’t want peace between us and our neighbors, you might as well vote for a Democrat. If you want to let Teddy Roosevelt know we don’t intend to let war mean unending oppression of the proletariat, you’ll choose me.”

She embroidered on that theme for a while, then returned to the other: “As I say, Herman Bruck is a sound man. He is a safe man. I think he’s sound and safe enough to lose this November. If you want someone to run hard and do everything she can to get this seat out of TR’s clutches, you’ll vote for me today and you’ll vote for me again in the fall.”

She stepped back. She thought she got as much applause as Herman Bruck had. More? She couldn’t tell. Saul Masliansky said, “Now we fight it out. We have a waiting room for the two of you. We have two waiting rooms, in fact, if you’d rather—?”

“It’s all right,” Flora said. “We aren’t enemies.” Herman Bruck nodded.

They didn’t say much to each other in the waiting room. Flora sat in a hard chair under one of the electric lamps hanging from the ceiling. Bruck smoked a cigarette, and another, and another. Through the closed door, Flora listened to the shouts from the caucus. She wished

she were out there. She and Bruck weren't members, so she couldn't be.

After what seemed like forever, the door opened. She and Herman Bruck both sprang to their feet, facing Masliansky with the same eager anxiety fathers in a hospital maternity-ward waiting room showed when the doctor came in. But only one of them would get to keep this baby; like the one in the biblical story of Solomon, it was indivisible.

"*Mazeltov,* Flora," the caucus chairman said.

Bruck stubbed out his last cigarette under the heel of his gleaming shoe. *"Mazeltov,"* he echoed. "Anything I can do, you know I will." He managed a joke, something rare for him: "That's true, even though you won't go out with me."

"Thank you." Flora felt light-headed. "Talk like that more often, and I might. But now"—she could hardly believe it—"let's put this seat back where it belongs."

"I am godalmighty sick of troop trains," Jefferson Pinkard announced to anybody who would listen as the one on which he was riding rumbled west through Texas toward the front line, which lay somewhere east of Lubbock.

Nobody said anything. As best Jeff could tell, nobody had the energy to say anything. It was hot and muggy outside. That meant it was hotter and muggier on the train. Every window that would open was open. The breeze that came in was like the breath of hell, the occasional cinder or tiny bit of coal blowing in with the breeze only adding to the resemblance.

Pinkard looked outside. Texas, as far as he could see, was nothing but miles and miles of miles and miles. It had been green and lush when the troop train pounded out of Arkansas. Some of the men who sounded as if they knew what they were talking about said parts of it were as swampy and wet as Louisiana, full of alligators and who could say what all else.

This part of Texas wasn't like that. If God had taken an iron about the size of South Carolina and pressed everything here down flat, that might have given the countryside its look. It was as hot as if it had just been ironed, too. They called it prairie, but wasn't the prairie

supposed to be green with grass? This was yellow at best, more often brown.

"I never left home till they conscripted me," Jeff went on after a while. "Way things look here, I ain't never going to leave again once the war's over, neither." He sighed. "Birmingham, now, Birmingham is green all the time. Even in winter, most of the grass stays green. Does it ever even get green here?"

"I don't know why you complain so much, *amigo,*" Hip Rodriguez said from the seat behind him. "This land here, this is better than what I was farming."

"Better?" Pinkard awkwardly turned around to stare at the little Sonoran. "How in blazes could this be better than anything?"

"It is very easy." As Rodriguez made his points, he ticked them off on his fingers. "It is good flat land, not mountains like where I come from. It has not so much *calor*—heat. It gets more water—you can see."

"Maybe you can see," Pinkard said stubbornly. "Looks dry as the desert the Israelites walked through to me."

Rodriguez laughed in his face. "You do not know what a desert is, if you call this a desert." Only two things kept Jeff from starting a fight then and there. One was that he was in the Army, so he'd get in trouble. The other was that he really didn't know what a desert was like. Next to Alabama land, what they had here was pretty appalling. He tried to picture in his mind the kind of land that would make west Texas look good.

Mountains he could imagine. But land that was hotter and drier than this? If this wasn't hell, that would have to be.

The train chugged to a stop outside a little town called Post. To Jeff Pinkard's jaundiced eye, the town, as they rolled through it, seemed as sunbaked and defeated as the country surrounding it. The wooden buildings hadn't been painted or whitewashed for years, and most of the timber was more nearly gray than brown or yellow. Even the bricks seemed faded from their proper, bright oranges.

When Pinkard, grunting and sweating under the weight of his kit, came out of the car in which he'd been ensconced so long and so uncomfortably, he heard artillery off in the distance. When he'd been fighting the Negroes of the Black Belt Socialist Republic, that had been

an encouraging sound: his side had the guns, and the enemy didn't. It wasn't going to be like that here.

Captain Connolly addressed the formed-up company: "We are going to stop the damnyankees, men. Not only are we going to stop them, we are going to throw them back into New Mexico where they belong." That got a few yips and cheers from the men, but not many. It was too hot. They were too tired.

Connolly went on, "This isn't going to be the kind of fighting they have on the other side of the Mississippi. Too many miles for that, and not enough men filling them. If we dig trenches, they go around, and the same the other way. Not a lot of railroads around here, either. Nobody can keep big armies supplied away from the tracks. So we're going to drive the Yankees back toward Lubbock, and we are going to have detachments out to make sure they don't get around us while we're doing it. That last is what the particular task of this company will be. Any questions?"

Nobody said anything. The captain didn't even give the order to march. He just started marching, and the men followed: not only the company, but a couple of regiments' worth. Pinkard and his companions were somewhere in the middle of the column. The dust was of a slightly redder shade than the butternut of his uniform. It got in his nose. It got in his eyes. It got in his mouth, so his teeth crunched whenever they came together.

He wasn't sure whether this had been a road before the war started. It was a road now, a road defined by marching men and by the ruts of wagons and those of motor trucks. It led to a bridge over a river that didn't look wide or deep enough to need bridging.

"If that poor thing was in Alabama," he said to Stinky Salley, "they'd ship it back to its mama, on account of it's too little to show itself in public."

"We're not in Alabama any more," Salley replied with his usual annoying precision. "Or maybe you hadn't noticed."

"Oh, put a sock in it, Stinky," Pinkard answered, too weary even to threaten doing any of the drastic things Salley so richly deserved. The captain came by just then, making sure everybody in the company—less a couple of men who'd passed out, overcome by the heat—was in good shape. Jeff called to him: "Sir, what river is this?"

"Unless the map they gave me is a liar—and God knows it's

possible, way the hell out here—this is the Double Mountain fork of the Brazos," Connolly answered. Answering the next question before Pinkard could ask it, he went on, "From what they say, it's supposed to have a lot more water in it in the wintertime."

"Couldn't hardly have much less," Pinkard said.

The bridge, when he got to it, looked to have been there a while; it wasn't a recent erection by the Confederate Army Engineering Corps. That argued the road had been there a while, too. He wondered where it ended up going. As far as he could tell, it was a road to nowhere.

They camped a little north of the Double Mountain fork. Try as he would, Jeff couldn't see the mountains that were supposed to have given the fork its name. The ground was a little higher up ahead, but so what? He supposed that, in these parts, anything high enough to serve as a watershed got reckoned a mountain.

Night fell. It didn't get any cooler, not so far as Pinkard could tell. He ambled over to a chow wagon. The Negro cook was serving up stale bread, tinned beef, and coffee. "Reckon I'd do just about anything for some of Emily's fried chicken right about now," he said mournfully, examining the unappetizing supper.

"Hey, soldier, you've got food," said Sergeant Albert Cross, a veteran with the ribbon for the Purple Heart above his left breast pocket. "Believe me, time'll come when you're glad you've got anything. Ever carve a steak off a mule three days gone?"

He didn't sound as if he was joking. He didn't look as if he was joking, either. Sergeants seemed to have had their sense of humor surgically removed when they were children. Pinkard ate what was set before him. He unrolled his blanket and lay down on top of it. The next thing he knew, the sun was shining in his face.

The force of which he was a part resumed their march not long after sunrise. "We'll take that high ground," Stinky Salley declared in his best impression of the Secretary of War, "and then we'll defend it from the damnyankees when they show up."

From ahead, tiny in the distance, came the crackle of rifle fire. "Deploy from column into line by the left flank—move!" Captain Connolly shouted. The soldiers moved: awkwardly, because they hadn't had enough training in such maneuvers before they got thrown into action against the Red rebels.

Out ahead, through the dust of the march, Pinkard saw men on horseback blazing away at the advancing Confederates. *Yankee cavalry,* he realized. As Connolly had said, the land was wide hereabouts. Cavalry had room to maneuver, as it didn't farther east.

He didn't see the field artillery with the horsemen, not even after it started shelling him. He heard a whistle in the air, and then a crash somewhere close by. A moment later, he heard screams. Another whistle, another crash. More screams.

"Get down!" Sergeant Cross screamed. Jeff was already on his belly, wondering how the Negroes in Georgia had fought on without guns to give as they received. At Cross' order, he and his comrades started shooting at the U.S. cavalrymen. "Nothing to worry about—just a skirmish," the sergeant said. Pinkard supposed he was right, and found the prospect of a big battle even less appealing than supper the night before.

XI

Paul Mantarakis looked around. Most of what he saw was mountains baking under a savage sun. The rest was waterless valley full of boulders and cactus and nothing any man in his right mind could possibly want to own, let alone want it badly enough to take it away from the poor fools unfortunate enough to be in possession of it at the moment.

When he said that out loud, Gordon McSweeney's big, fair head went up and down in agreement. "Amen," the Scotsman said. "The Empire of Mexico is welcome to it, for all of me."

"You ought to take another couple of salt tablets, Gordon," Paul said. "You look like a lobster that's been in the pot too long."

For once, he was thankful for his swarthiness. Even here in Baja, California, all he did was go from brown to browner. Back in the normal world of the USA he dimly remembered, the whiter you were, the more breaks you got. Here, all you got was sunburn and heatstroke.

Captain Wyatt tramped past them. He wasn't cooked quite so badly as McSweeney, but he was suffering, too. He said, "If we take this miserable stretch of land away from the Mexicans, we'll be able to keep an eye on the Confederate Pacific coast—if the Rebs have any Pacific coast left once the war is done."

"That'd be fine, sir," Mantarakis said. "But once we've got bases here, how do we keep them supplied? No railroads except the one we built ourself. No roads, either, not unless you call what we're on a road."

"This isn't just a road, Sergeant," Captain Wyatt said. "This is damn

near *the* road." He paused to swig from his canteen. The water it held, if it was anything like what Paul had, was bloodwarm and stale. Wyatt went on, "We cut across the peninsula here to Santa Rosalía, and then we can look across the Gulf of California at the Rebs in Guaymas."

"A shame and a disgrace that the Rebs still *are* in Guaymas," Gordon McSweeney observed.

"Well, you're right about that, Lord knows," Captain Wyatt said. "But they are, and, from everything I've heard, it's not much easier fighting over in Sonora than it is here." He made a sour face. "And, of course, we're starved for everything here, because we're so far west. The war on the other side of the Mississippi is the big top; we're just the sideshow."

Something glinted for a moment, high on the side of the conical mountain ahead. Mantarakis pointed to it, saying, "Sir, I think the Mexicans—or maybe it's the Rebs; who knows?—have an observation post way the hell up there."

"Up on the slope of the Volcano of the Three Virgins, you mean?" Wyatt said. Paul nodded. The captain shrugged. "I would, sure as the devil, if I were in their shoes. I didn't see anything. Show me again where you think it's at." After Mantarakis pointed, the captain nodded. "A little bit above that crag there?" He shouted for a runner, gave the fellow the location Mantarakis had spotted, and told him, "Pass it on to the field artillery. Maybe a howitzer can reach him from here. If that's no good, we'll just have to get used to them keeping an eye on everything we're doing."

Mantarakis said, "Haven't seen much in the way of real fighting since we got down here. Not that I miss it," he added hastily, "but are these Mexicans any good?"

"They won't be as good as the Mormons were," Ben Carlton put in. "'Course, nobody's going to be as good as the Mormons were, unless I miss my guess. But if they were all that bad, we'd've already licked 'em."

"Something to that," Captain Wyatt agreed. "But we've been fighting the terrain as much as the Empire of Mexico, and there are some Rebs, too, helping their pals. But if you ask me—"

Paul didn't ask the company commander. He didn't have a chance to ask the company commander. A whistle in the air made him throw himself to the ground without consciously thinking he needed to do

that. A shell burst, maybe fifty yards away.

He had his entrenching tool out and was busy digging himself a foxhole before the second shell came down. “Where are they coming from?” somebody shouted. “Don’t see any flash or anything.”

“Got to be a trench mortar,” Paul yelled back. “They must have put a couple of them on these hills, figured they’d drop some bombs on us. Trouble is, we don’t have any trenches.” He felt naked trying to fight without one, too.

“I’ll lay odds you’re right, Sergeant,” Captain Wyatt said. “The Mexicans don’t have any money to speak of; they can’t afford real artillery. In a place like this, though, what they’ve got is plenty good.”

It was, in Paul Mantarakis’ opinion, better than plenty good. Shells or bombs or whatever they were kept falling on the Americans. The ground, under a few inches of sandy dust, was hard as a sergeant’s heart (that Paul thought such things proved he’d come up through the ranks). He couldn’t get the foxhole deep enough to suit him.

And then somebody shouted, “Here come the bastards!” Resentfully, he threw down the entrenching tool and set his rifle against his shoulder. The enemy wasn’t playing fair. How was he supposed to kill them without getting hurt himself if they wouldn’t let him dig in properly?

Trench mortars up on the hilltops might have been Mexicans. Like any American, he thought of Mexico as backwards and corrupt and bankrupt; if the Emperor had been able to pay his bills, he wouldn’t have had to sell Chihuahua and Sonora to the CSA. And when the United States had fought Mexico, back before the War of Secession, they’d actually won. So Paul, in spite of what Captain Wyatt had said, expected any soldiers bold enough to charge to be Confederates propping up their allies.

But he was wrong. These men wore a khaki lighter than Confederate issue, so light it was almost yellow. In this terrain, it gave better protection than green-gray. They wore widebrimmed straw hats, too, not felts or steel derbies. And their shouts yipped like coyotes’ howls; they weren’t the cougar screams the Rebs used for battle cries.

Mantarakis fired, one of the first who did. Several Mexicans went down. He didn’t think they were all hit; they were taking cover, too. A bullet kicked dust into his face. He shivered despite the heat. A miss

was as good as a mile, or so they said, but what did they really know, whoever *they* were?

Fire was coming at the Americans from the front and from both flanks. That wasn't good. That was how you got shot to pieces. That was also probably why, after most of two years of war, the Americans hadn't got to Santa Rosalía yet.

"Let's get moving," Mantarakis shouted to his squad. "We stay here, they're going to chop us to bits." Not without a pang of regret, he quit the unsatisfactory foxhole he'd dug and headed off to the right to see if he couldn't do something about the flanking fire coming from that direction. His men followed him. He'd known of officers who found out too late they were moving all by themselves. Most of them hadn't come back from moves like that.

Rifle bullets buzzed past him, clipped branches from the chaparral through which he ran, and made dust spurt up again and again. He noted all that only peripherally. What he did note, with glad relief, was that the Mexicans hadn't brought any machine guns forward with them. Maybe machine guns were like proper artillery: too expensive for them to afford. He fervently hoped so.

He dove behind a sun-wizened bush, snapped off a couple of rounds to make the enemy keep their heads down, and then got moving again. He came cautiously around a yellow boulder that might have been there since the beginning of time—and almost ran into a Mexican soldier doing the same thing.

They stared at each other. The Mexican had two cartridge bandoliers crisscrossed over his chest, which made him look like a bandit. His bristly mustache and the black stubble on his chin only added to the impression.

Paul saw the Mexican very distinctly, as if a sculptor had carved him and the entire scene behind him into a sharp-edged simulation of reality. The man seemed to raise his rifle with dreamlike slowness, though Paul's swung to bear on him no more swiftly.

They both fired at essentially the same instant. Time speeded up then. The Mexican let out a startled grunt and reeled away, blood coming from a small hole in the front of his uniform and a huge gaping exit wound about where his left kidney was—or had been.

With that hole in him, he was surely a dead man. He didn't know it yet, though. He still held his rifle, and tried to aim it at Paul.

Mantarakis discovered his left leg didn't want to hold him. *I can't have been shot,* he thought—*I don't feel anything*. Falling heavily onto his side kept him from getting shot again, for the Mexican's bullet cracked through the place where he'd been.

Then he fired once more, and the enemy soldier's head exploded in red ruin. Paul tried to get up and discovered he couldn't. He looked down at himself. Red was soaking through the dust on the inside of his trouser leg. Seeing his own blood flooding out of him made him understand he really had been hit. It also made the wound start to hurt. He clamped his teeth together hard against a scream.

"Sergeant's down!" somebody shouted, off to one side of him. He did an awkward, three-limbed crawl back behind the shelter of that boulder. Then he detached his bayonet and cut the trouser leg with it before fumbling for the wound dressing in a pouch on his belt.

His hands didn't want to do what he told them. He'd barely managed to shove the bandage against the hole in his leg when a couple of U.S. soldiers grabbed him. "Got to get you out of here, Sarge," one of them said.

"Got to get us all the hell out of here," the other added. "Damn Mexicans got us pinned down good."

"We'll lick 'em," Paul said vaguely. His voice sounded very far away, as if he were listening to himself along a tunnel. He wasn't hot any more, either. A long time ago, hadn't they bled people who had fevers? He tried to laugh, though no sound came out. Sure as sure, he wouldn't have any fever now.

One of the men supporting him grunted just as the Mexican had and crumpled to the ground. A few paces farther on, the other soldier said, "Can you help any, Sarge? We'd move faster if you could do something with your good leg." Getting no reply, he spoke again, louder: "Sarge?"

He stooped, letting his burden down behind another of the strangely shaped rocks that dotted the valley. When he got up again, he ran on alone.

Anne Colleton felt trapped. Living as the only white person at what had been—and what she was fiercely determined would again be—

Marshlands plantation with the remnants of her field hands was only part of the problem, though she made a point of carrying a small revolver in her handbag and preferred not to go far from the Tredegar rifle when she could help it. You couldn't tell any more, not these days.

That was part of the problem. The Red uprising had shattered patterns of obedience two hundred years old. The field hands still did as she told them. The fields were beginning to look as if she might have some kind of crop this year, no matter how late it had been started. But she couldn't use the Negroes as she had before. She'd taken their compliance for granted. No more. Now they worked in exchange for her keeping the Confederate authorities from troubling them for whatever they might have done during the rebellion. It was far more nearly a bargain between equals than the previous arrangement had been.

But only part of her feeling of isolation was spiritual. The rest was physical, and perfectly real. She'd made trips into St. Matthews and into Columbia, trying to get the powers that be to repair the telephone and telegraph lines that connected her to the wider world. She'd had promises that they would be up two weeks after her return to the plantation. She'd had a lot more promises since. What she didn't have were telephone and telegraph lines.

"God damn those lying bastards to hell," she snarled, staring out along the path, out toward the road, out toward the whole wide world where anything at all might be happening—but if it was happening, how could she find out about it? She'd prided herself on her modernity, but the life she was living had more to do with the eighteenth century than the twentieth.

Beside her, Julia stirred. "Don' fret yourself none, Miss Anne," she said. Her hands rested on the broad shelf of her belly. Before long, she would have that baby. If she knew who the father was, she hadn't said so.

Anne ground her teeth. Julia would have been ideally suited to the eighteenth century, or to the fourteenth century, for that matter. She let things happen to her. When they did, she cast around for the easiest way to set them right and chose that.

"Better to be actor than acted upon," Anne said, more to herself than to her serving woman. She'd always believed that, though she'd had scant experience of being acted upon till the Red revolution cast

her into the hands of the military. Having gained the experience, she was convinced she'd been right to loathe it.

She looked over toward the ruins of the Marshlands mansion. The cottage in which she was living now had belonged to Cassius the hunter. From what she'd heard, he'd had a high place in the Negroes'Congaree Socialist Republic. He'd been a Red right under her nose, and she'd never suspected. That ate at her, too. She hated being wrong.

Even more galling was having been wrong about Scipio, who was also supposed to have been a revolutionary leader. *I gave him everything,* she thought: *education, fine clothes, the same food I ate—and this is the thanks he gave me in return?* He'd vanished when the revolt collapsed. Maybe he was dead. If he wasn't, and she found him, she swore she'd make him wish he were.

And the Ford she was driving these days made as unsatisfactory a replacement for her vanished Vauxhall as the nigger cottage did for her vanished mansion. She hated the balky, farting motorcar. The only thing she would have hated worse was being without one altogether.

An automobile rattled past on the road, kicking up a trail of red dust as it went. It was, she saw, an armored car, with a couple of machine guns mounted in a central turret. Resistance still sputtered in the swamps by the Congaree. Otherwise, that armored car would have been of far more value shooting down damnyankees, its proper task.

Julia's eyes followed the armored car till it disappeared behind a stand of trees. Despite her broad lips, her mouth made a thin, hard line. She swore up and down that she'd never been a rebel, that she hated everything the Reds stood for. Anne's opinion was that she protested too much. Wherever the truth lay there, Julia did not take kindly to seeing such deadly machines out hunting black men. That was also true even of the Negroes who had, Anne thought, genuinely disapproved of the Socialist uprising. Anne sighed. Life kept getting harder.

A couple of minutes later, a party of horsemen turned off the road and onto the path leading up to…the ruins of Marshlands. Two of the three riders had the look of superannuated soldiers, and carried carbines across their knees. The third, the postman, wore a Tredegar slung on his back.

Anne walked toward him, nodding as she did so. "Good morning,

Mr. Palmer," she called. With the telephone and telegraph out of commission, the postman was her lifeline to the wider world.

He swung down off his horse and touched the brim of his hat with a forefinger. Producing a pencil and a printed form, he said, "Mornin' to you, Miss Colleton. Got a special delivery you got to sign for—and quite a special delivery it is, too. Ah, thank you, ma'am." He passed her the envelope, and then the rest of the day's mail. That done, he gave her another half-salute, remounted, and urged his horse up from walk to canter. The two armed guards rode off with him, their eyes hard and alert.

"Richmond," Anne said, noting the postmark on the envelope before she spotted the return address in the upper left-hand corner, in a typeface that might have come straight off a Roman monument:

RESIDENCE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA

Her head went up and down in a quick, decisive nod. "About time Gabriel Semmes got off his backside and wrote to me."

"Who it from, Miss Anne?" Julia asked.

"The president," Anne answered, and the Negro woman's eyes got big and round.

Anne tore the envelope open. The letter was in Semmes' own hand, which partly mollified her for not having heard from him sooner. *My dear Miss Colleton,* the president of the CSA wrote, *Let me extend to you my deepest personal sympathies on the loss of your brother and the damage to your property during the unfortunate events of the recent past*.

"Unfortunate events," Anne snorted, as if the two words added up to some horrible curse—and so, maybe, they did. Before he'd been elected, Gabriel Semmes had made a name for himself as a man who went out and did things, not a typical politician. Anne had thrown money into his campaign on that basis. But if he called an insurrection an unfortunate event, maybe she would have been better served spending it elsewhere.

She read on: *As you no doubt know, these unfortunate events have adversely affected our ability to resist the aggression of the United States of America, which seek to reduce us once more to the state of abject*

dependency existing before the War of Secession. To meet their challenge, we shall have to utilize every resource available to us.

"I should hope so," Anne said, as if the president were standing there before her. She was sure she knew what would be coming next: some sort of higher taxes, which she would be asked to support in the name of continued Confederate strength and independence.

She looked around Marshlands. She didn't know how she could pay higher taxes. She didn't know how she could pay the taxes already due. One way or another, she would have to manage. She understood that. If the choice was between paying more and having the damnyankees win, she would—somehow—pay more. With the Yankees' having gassed Jacob, and with Tom still at the Roanoke front, how could she do anything less?

Her eyes returned to the letter: *For that reason, I have introduced into the Congress of the Confederate States of America*… She nodded and stopped reading for a moment. Yes, Gabriel Semmes was perfectly predictable…. *a bill authorizing the recruitment, training, and employment against the United States of America of bodies of Negro troops, these to serve under white officers and noncommissioned officers, the reward for their satisfactory completion of service, or for their inability to do so because of wounds, to be the franchise and all other rights and privileges pertaining to full citizenship in the Confederate States of America, intermarriage being the sole exception thereto*.

"Good God," Anne said. Taxes, she'd expected. This, no. She felt as if she'd been kicked in the belly. The Negroes rose up in bloody revolt, and Semmes proposed to reward them for it? He did indeed go forth and do things, and she wished to high heaven he'd been content to hold still.

He continued, *I am soliciting your support for this measure because I know that you judge the continued independence of the country we both love to be of primary importance, with all else subordinated to it. Now we are come to a crisis the likes of which we have never known, one that calls for a supreme effort from every man, woman, and child in the Confederate States, white and black alike. Anything less would be a dereliction of duty from all of us. I hope and trust you will use your not inconsiderable influence both within your circle of acquaintances and with your Congressional delegation to let us turn back the ravening hordes of American Huns. Your ob't servant*—and a florid signature.

"Good God," Anne said again. "I should have backed Doroteo

Arango."

"Miss Anne?" Julia knew nothing of politics, unless perhaps Red politics, and cared less.

"Never mind." Anne carried the rest of the mail into the cottage. Julia followed her. She sorted through it, separating out bills; requests for money and time for charitable organizations that, these days, would have to go unanswered; advertising circulars that would make good kindling for the fireplace but were otherwise worthless; and, at the bottom of the stack, a letter from Tom.

She opened that one eagerly. She wondered what Tom would think of having nigger troops put on Confederate butternut. No, she didn't wonder. She was perfectly sure. She'd never credited her brother with a whole lot of sense, but how much sense did you need to see folly?

Dear Sis, Tom wrote, *Just a note to let you know I'm alive and well. Not a scratch on me—they do say that if you're born to hang, nothing else can hurt you.* Anne snorted again. Her brother was about the least likely man to go to the gallows she could imagine. She read on: *It has been lively, I will say. The damnyankees have come as far as*—a censor had cut out the name of the place—*which we never expected them to do.*

The trouble is, they're using these armor-plated traveling forts prisoners call—another censor's slice denied her the knowledge of what they were called, though she could not for the life of her see why—*and they've gained a lot of ground because of it. Artillery will take them out. So will brave soldiers, but it's hard being brave with one of those things bearing down on you.* This time, the censor, damn him, had cut out a whole sentence. When she was allowed to resume reading what her brother wrote, he said, *If they keep throwing more and more machines at us, I don't know where we'll come up with the men to hold them back.*

I hope to get leave before too long, and will come home to have a look at Marshlands. I am sure you are whipping the old place back into shape. Tom was always sure of that. Till now, his confidence had always been justified. Now—Anne didn't want to think about now. Her eyes went to the last couple of sentences: *Who would have dreamt the damned niggers could raise so much Cain? If I'd thought they could do half so much, I'd have sooner had them shooting at the damnyankees so we could get some use out of them. But even though everything else is turned upside down from before the war, I still love you, and I'll see you soon—Tom.*

“Miss Anne?” Julia said when Anne stood there motionless, reading the letter over several times.

“Hush,” Anne Colleton replied absently. After a bit, she put the letter down and picked up the one from the president of the Confederacy. She read through that letter twice, too. Her breath whistled out in a long sigh.

“You all right, Miss Anne?” Julia asked, sounding for once very much like the concerned body servant she’d been till not long before.

“No,” Anne said. “Not even close.” She’d misjudged her brother—and if she couldn’t tell what Tom was thinking these days, how could she trust her judgment on anything else? The short answer was, she couldn’t. She sighed again, even louder this time. “Maybe Gabriel Semmes isn’t a complete utter damn fool after all. Maybe.” She tried to make herself sound as if she believed it. It wasn’t easy.

George Armstrong Custer stood at the edge of the road, by a sign that had an arrow saying KENTUCKY pointing north and another saying TENNESSEE pointing south. A photographer snapped several pictures. “These’ll make bully halftones, General,” he said.

“Splendid, my good man, splendid,” Custer replied grandly. Major Abner Dowling felt ready to retch. That road sign was as resurrected as Lazarus—everything hereabouts, like everything everywhere the rake of war passed, had been stomped flat. When it came to getting his name—and, better yet, his photograph—in the papers, Custer was not a man to let mere rude facts stand in his way. Dowling would have thought he’d had the sign made up special for the occasion, but that order would have gone through him, so Custer must have come up with a real one instead.

The photographer put down the camera and pulled out a notebook and pencil; he doubled as a reporter. “To what do you attribute your success in this spring’s campaign, General?” he asked.

Before Custer could reply, a barrel came rumbling down the road, heading south into Tennessee. Another followed, then another. Everybody except the drivers rode on top of the machines, not inside them. Men had died from heat prostration inside barrels, trying to fight in this hideous summer weather. Kentucky had been bad. Tennessee promised to be worse.

Custer pointed to the machines. “There is your answer, sir. The barrels have filled Rebel hearts not only with fear but also with a good, healthy respect for the prowess of the American soldier and for the genius lying behind what I call with pardonable pride old-fashioned Yankee ingenuity. I have always insisted that machines as well as men will make the difference—are you all right, Major Dowling?”

“Yes, sir. Sorry, sir,” Dowling said. “Must have been the dust the barrels kicked up, or maybe those stinking exhaust fumes. I couldn’t breathe for a second or two there.”

“I hope you’re better now,” Custer said doubtfully. “You sounded like a man choking to death. Where was I? Oh yes, barrels. I—”

Custer barreled on. Dowling took out a pocket handkerchief and daubed at his sweaty forehead and streaming eyes. Custer disapproved of the aeroplane. He disapproved of the machine gun, though he’d risen to prominence in the Second Mexican War because he’d had a few attached to his command. He disapproved of the telephone and the telegraph. He undoubtedly would have disapproved of the telescope had it not been invented before he was born.

But barrels—he approved of barrels. Barrels, to him, remained cavalry reborn, cavalry proof against everything machine guns could do. Since he’d grown up in the cavalry, he’d transferred his affection to these gasoline-burning successors. And Custer, being Custer, never did anything by halves. When he fell in love, he fell hard.

To prosaic Dowling, barrels were bully infantry support weapons. Past that…he failed to share Custer’s enthusiasm. Custer had any number of enthusiasms he did not share, that for Custer being perhaps the largest.

But even Dowling was prepared to admit the barrels had done some good. The first few times the Rebs saw them, they’d panicked. They were good soldiers; as one of their sincerest foes, Dowling admitted as much. Even the best soldiers, though, would run if the alternative was dying without having the chance to hit back at their enemies.

They weren’t panicking quite so much now. They were starting to figure out ways to blow up barrels, too. The armored machines had proved vulnerable to artillery fire, though artillery had trouble hitting moving targets even if the movement was no swifter than the barrels’ mechanized waddle. Still, Dowling had thought he’d grow old and die

in Kentucky, and here he was in Tennessee, or at least on the border.

"Next stop—Nashville!" Custer declared, waving his staff as if he were a train conductor. Dowling wished he thought it would be so easy.

"General, what will your men do if they come up against black troops in Confederate uniform?" the reporter asked.

"I'll believe that when I see it," Custer answered. Here, for once, Dowling agreed with him completely. He went on, "If it does happen, it will be only one more sign that the Rebels are scraping the bottom of the barrel—heh, heh. The frogs are padding their lines with African savages these days, so I suppose the Rebs *might* give their home-grown niggers guns—not that they haven't grabbed guns of their own already, to use on the whites who now talk about using them against us."

"Er—yes." The fellow with the camera and notebook hadn't bargained for a speech. He came back to the question he'd really asked: "But how will your soldiers respond to them, if they are enlisted?"

Custer's drooping mustache and even more drooping jowls made his frown impressively ugly. "How will they respond to them?" he repeated, not caring for the fact that his earlier answer hadn't satisfied the man. "I expect they'll shoot them in great carload lots, that's how."

"Great—carload—lots." The reporter scribbled furiously. "Oh, that's good, sir, that's very good. They'll like that—it'll probably get a headline."

"Do you think so?" All of a sudden, the general commanding First Army was sweetness and light once more. Even Dowling thought it was a pretty good line, and he was not inclined to give his commander much credit for such things.

The reporter asked a couple of more questions. Custer, having succeeded with one joke, tried some others, all of which fell flat. They fell so flat, in fact, that the reporter put away his notebook, picked up his camera, and departed faster than he might otherwise have done.

Custer, as usual, was oblivious to such subtleties. Puffing out his flabby chest, he turned to Dowling and said, "I think that went very well."

Of course you do, his adjutant thought. *It was publicity*. It was, as usual, hard to go wrong with an answer of, “Yes, sir.”

“And now back to headquarters. I want to prepare the orders for our next attack against the Rebs’ positions.”

“Yes, sir,” Dowling said again. Custer was taking a more active interest in the campaign these days, partly, Dowling supposed, because Libbie was still with him and partly because, like a child with new Christmas toys, he was playing with the barrels to find out what all they could do.

When he got back to the building doing duty for headquarters these days—a whitewashed clapboard structure with the legend GENERAL STORE: CAMP HILL SIMES, PROP.—orders got delayed for a while. Someone had brought in a wicker basket full of ripe, red strawberries and a bowl of whipped cream. Custer dug in with gusto, pinkish juice dribbling down his chin and bits of clotted cream getting stuck in the peroxided splendor of his mustache. Since Major Dowling wasn’t shy about enjoying the bounty either, he refrained from even mental criticism of the general.

“Where did we come by these?” Custer asked after he’d eaten his fill.

“Little town called Portland, sir,” said Captain Theodore Heissig, one of the staff officers. “Just south of the Tennessee line. They grow ’em in bunches.”

“No, no,” Custer said. “Bananas grow in bunches.” Unlike the man with the notebook and camera, the staff officers were obliged to find all his jokes funny, or to act as if they did. Dowling bared his teeth in what bore at least some resemblance to a grin.

Once the strawberries were all disposed of, Custer walked over to the map and examined it with less satisfaction than he might have shown, considering the amount of progress First Army had made since the Confederate States were distracted by their own internal turmoil, and especially since barrels had begun to make trenches something less than impregnable. “We need more help from the Navy,” he grumbled. “How long have they been stuck just past this miserable Clarksville place? Weeks, seems like.”

“Sir, they’re saying they need Army help to go farther,” Captain Heissig said.

“Balderdash!” Custer boomed, a fine, bouncing exclamation that sprayed little bits of cream onto the map.

“Sir, I don’t think it is,” Abner Dowling said, gingerly trying, as he so often had to do, to lead Custer back toward some vague connection to military reality. “The Rebs have mined the Cumberland heavily, and they’ve got big artillery south of the river zeroed on the minefields. The Navy’s lost too many monitors to be very eager to push hard any more.”

“Then what the devil good are they?” Custer demanded. “If they can’t get where we need them, they might as well not be there at all.” That conveniently ignored several facts, some small, some immense, but Custer had always been good at ignoring facts he didn’t like. He rounded on the luckless Captain Heissig. “I want you to arrange cooperation on our terms, Captain, and I want you to do it by this afternoon.”

“I’ll do my best, sir,” the young captain said.

“You’ll do it, Captain, or this time next week you’ll be chasing redskins and bandits through the parts of the Sonoran desert we were supposed to have pacified a year and a half ago,” Custer said. He meant it, too, as the luckless Captain Heissig had to know; his staff had the highest turnover of any commander of an army’s.

There were times—a lot of times—when commanding a battalion in the Sonoran desert would have looked very good to Dowling. But Custer, worse luck, didn’t threaten to ship him out. He just used him as a whipping boy. Dowling sent poor Captain Heissig a sympathetic glance. Misery loved company.

* * *

Cincinnatus’ nostrils dilated as he approached the Kentucky Smoke House. When the wind was right, you could smell the barbecue all over Covington. Even when the wind was wrong, as if was tonight, the irresistibly savory smell made spit flood into people’s mouths for miles around.

And when you walked into Apicius’ barbecue place, you felt certain you were going to starve to death before you got your pork or your beef, smothered in the hot, spicy sauce that made the Smoke House famous and spun on a spit over a hickory fire. Even if you weren’t coming in for the food, as Cincinnatus wasn’t, you wanted some—you

wanted that splendid sauce all down your shirtfront, was what you wanted.

Blacks ate at the Kentucky Smoke House. So did Covington's whites, unwilling to let their colored brethren have such a good thing to themselves. And so did Yankee soldiers and administrators. A man who kept his ears open there would surely learn a lot.

Lucullus, Apicius' son, was turning the spit in the main room. The carcass of a pig went round and round above the firepit. However much his mouth watered, Cincinnatus ignored the prospect of barbecued pork. That Lucullus was working the spit meant Apicius had to be in one of the back rooms, and Apicius was the man he'd come to see.

But when he headed for the back rooms, Felix, Apicius' other son, stood in front of him to bar the way. "Pa's already in there talkin' with somebody," he said. "Be a good idea if you see him later."

"Who's he talkin' to that I ain't supposed to know nothin' about?" Cincinnatus answered scornfully. "Be a good idea if I see him *now*. I been drivin' all over creation the whole day long. I don't got to do none o' this, you know. I could go home to my wife and my little boy. Don't get to see them often enough, way things are. I'm goin'in."

Felix was a couple of years younger than Lucullus. He hadn't quite got his full growth, and he hadn't quite acquired the arrogance that would have let him tell a grown man no and get away with it. He looked toward Lucullus for support, but Lucullus kept basting that pig with a long-handled brush. When Cincinnatus took a step forward, Felix scowled but moved aside. Cincinnatus knew which back room Apicius was likely to use—why not? He'd been in there himself, often enough.

The fat Negro barbecue cook looked up in startlement when the door opened. So did the man with whom he'd been bent in intent conversation. All at once, Cincinnatus wished he'd paid attention to Felix. The man with whom Apicius had been talking was Tom Kennedy.

"I'm gonna have to give my boy a good kick in the slack o' his britches," Apicius said, and then, to Cincinnatus this time, "Well, come in and shut that thing behind you, 'fore people out front start payin'more heed to what's goin'on in here than they should ought to." To Kennedy, he said, "Sorry, Mister Tom. Didn't 'spect we'd get

interrupted."

"Could be worse," Kennedy said. "Cincinnatus and me, we've known each other for a long time and we've done a deal of work together. You know about that, I suppose."

His tone was—*cautious* was the word on which Cincinnatus finally settled. Cincinnatus had put firebombs into U.S. supply dumps over much of central Kentucky. He'd gone right on doing that after Conroy's general store burned down. He didn't like doing it, but he thought it would be wise. The Confederate underground hadn't troubled him, so he supposed he'd made the right choice. Buildings did sometimes burn down without firebombs, after all, or seem as if they did. There had, in fact, been a fire in a livery stable down the block from the general store a couple of nights later.

"Well, all right, you're here," Apicius said roughly. He slid down on the bench he was occupying to give Cincinnatus room to sit beside him. "What you got to say that won't keep for nothin'?"

But Cincinnatus didn't say anything, not right away. He kept an eye on Tom Kennedy. Kennedy had used Apicius and his sons to help spread Confederate propaganda in occupied Kentucky. Cincinnatus didn't know whether Kennedy knew Apicius headed a Red cell in Covington. Till he found out, he wasn't going to say anything to let Kennedy in on the secret. The war between the Reds and the Confederate government was liable to continue, here in this land neither of those two sides controlled.

Kennedy said, "I was just telling Apicius here about what I told you months ago would come true—more rights for Negroes in the CSA on account of the war and on account of the goddamn uprising."

"You did tell me about that, Mr. Kennedy—that's a fact," Cincinnatus said. "I own I didn't reckon you knew what you was talking about, but it do look like you did."

"Got to get through the Congress before it's real, and the Congress don't move what anybody'd call real quick," Apicius observed.

"I think Congress will move quicker here than you figure," Kennedy said. "You read the papers—"

Apicius shook his head. "Felix does, and Lucullus. Not me. All I knows is how to cook meat till it fall off the bone into yo' mouth."

And how to sandbag, Cincinnatus thought. Maybe Apicius was illiterate. If he was, he had the remarkable memory people who couldn't read and write often developed; details never slipped his mind.

The display of ignorance didn't impress Kennedy, either. "You know what's going on," he corrected himself impatiently. "You know the Confederate States need all the help they can get against the USA, and you know that if that means giving Negroes more, they'll do it."

"Reckon I do know that," the cook said. "Question is, do I care? The CSA is a pack o' capitalists and oppressors, an' de USA is a pack o' capitalists and oppressors, too. Why the devil does we care what the devil happens to one pack o' capitalists and imperialists or the other?"

Cincinnatus knew he was staring. Apicius chuckled. Tom Kennedy chuckled, too, a little self-consciously. They both started to talk at the same time. With a wave of the sort he'd probably learned as a boy back in slavery days, the black man deferred to the white. Kennedy said, "When you're underground, things are different. Down in Mississippi, I'd hang Apicius from the first branch—well, the first really big branch—I could find…if he didn't bushwhack me first. Up here, we both worry about the USA more than we do about each other." He nodded to Cincinnatus. "I know who I'm working with. And I know who's working with me, too."

Was that a warning about Conroy's store? What else could it be? But if Kennedy had drawn his own conclusions about that…Cincinnatus wondered why he was still breathing, in that case.

Apicius said, "That don't mean what I said beforehand don't hold. You got to remember that, Mister Tom. Most of the black folks who think about politics at all, we is Marxists. We is oppressed so bad, what else can we be? The war you got, it's an imperialist war. Why shouldn't we sit by and let the capitalists shoot each other full of holes?" Cincinnatus wondered how long the cook had been a Red, to talk that way if he couldn't read the words.

Kennedy answered, "Because whoever's left on top is going to lick the tar out of you if you do. You aren't strong enough to go it alone. You've seen that. If you couldn't lick the CSA when we had one hand and half of the other one tied behind our backs, you'll never do it. You can't fight, not well enough. You have to deal."

"Who says we didn't lick the CSA?" Apicius asked quietly. "The U.S.

soldiers, they down in Tennessee these days. You think you ever gonna see soldiers in butternut back on the Ohio? Don't hold your breath, Mister Tom."

"The Yankees can put soldiers on every railroad track and streetcorner in this state. That doesn't mean they can run it." Kennedy would have been more impressive if he hadn't sounded as if he were whistling in the dark.

"It don't matter nohow," Apicius said. "In the long run, Mister Tom, it don't matter *a*-tall. The revolution gonna come in the CSA, and the revolution gonna come in the USA. Not all the soldiers in the world can stop it, on account of it's the way things gonna work out everywhere in the world. You kin fight it an' go under, or you kin be progressive an' make yourself part of the risin' power o' the proletariat."

"If the Yankees weren't holding us both down—" Kennedy said. Apicius nodded, his heavy-jowled face calm and certain. Cincinnatus had seen that look before, most often on the faces of preachers convinced of their own righteousness than anywhere else.

He wondered if Apicius really knew what he was talking about. If the united workers of the world were so strong—"If the workers are so strong," he said, more thinking aloud than intending to criticize, "why didn't they all say two years ago they didn't want to go out and kill each other, instead of lining up and cheering and waving their flags?"

But disagreeing with both of them at the same time, he did the same thing the U.S. invasion of Kentucky had done: he got Apicius and Tom Kennedy to unite against him, though for divergent reasons. "Why? Because they're patriots, that's why," Kennedy said. "And they'll go on being patriots, too, even the colored ones, when they find out they have something worth fighting for."

Apicius shook his head. "They fight on account of they is mystified into thinking country and race count for more than class. The capitalists got them fooled, is why they go off cheerin'."

"Nothing counts for more than country and race," Kennedy said with conviction.

Although Cincinnatus had worked with the Confederate underground, he did not think of himself as Tom Kennedy's political ally. But he had the feeling Kennedy was right here. You could usually tell a man's race just by using your eyes. You could usually tell a

man's country just by using your ears to hear how he talked. Set against those basics, the idea of class seemed as fragile as something made from spun sugar.

As if to cleanse himself of agreeing with a white man against a black (and if that wasn't race in action, what was it?), Cincinnatus said, "Some of the states in the USA, I hear tell, they already let their colored men vote."

Kennedy accepted the challenge without flinching; he had nerve, no doubt of that. "Sure they do, Cincinnatus. They don't have enough blacks to worry about. You think the white men of Kentucky are going to feel the same way?"

Apicius smiled a nasty smile. "Maybe that don't matter none. Maybe the Yankees, they only think about who wants to do things for them, and about who they reckon they can't noway trust. Maybe when the war is over, maybe *only* the black folks in Kentucky gets to vote. How you gonna like that there, Mister Tom?"

Kennedy's face showed how well he would like that. He said, "There'd be an uprising so fast, it'd make your head swim. And you know what, Apicius? A lot of the damnyankee soldiers would join it, too."

Cincinnatus thought about Lieutenant Kennan. Would he back whites against blacks and against his own government? He might. But Kennan wasn't the only kind of Yankee there was. "Not all of them would," he said with as much certainty as Kennedy had shown not long before. "Not all of them would, not by a long shot."

"What are you doing here, then?" Kennedy asked. "You like the Yankees so well, why aren't you with them?"

"Because I saved your neck, Mr. Kennedy, once upon a time," Cincinnatus answered. That made Kennedy shut up. It also made Cincinnatus wonder if he was on the right side—any of the right sides—after all, which surely was not what the white man had had in mind.

Lucien Galtier led his family into the biggest church in Rivière-du-Loup for Sunday morning mass. More often than not, he and they worshiped in St.-Modeste or St.-Antonin, both of which were closer to

his farm and both of which had priests less inclined to fawn on the American occupiers than was Father Pascal.

“Every so often, it is interesting to hear what the good father has to say,” he remarked to his wife as they and their children filed into a pew and took their seats. “He speaks very well, it is not to be doubted.”

“You have reason,” Marie agreed in fulsome tones. No informer could have taken their words in any way amiss. That was fortunate, since they were surely under suspicion for having failed to collaborate with Father Pascal and the Americans as fully as they might have done.

Even in the midst of war, peace filled the church—or did its best to do so. The buzzing roar of aeroplane motors pierced the roof. The aeroplanes were flying north, across the St. Lawrence, to drop bombs or shoot at the soldiers defending unconquered Quebec from the invaders. Lucien had neither seen nor heard aeroplanes flying south since the ones that had shot up the American troop train. More from that than from the improbabilities the newspapers published these days, he concluded that the defenders of the province were having a hard time.

You could not tell as much from Father Pascal’s demeanor. Here he came up the aisle toward the altar, flanked by altar boys in robes of gleaming white. The procession was not so perfectly formal as it might have been, for the priest stopped every few rows to greet someone with a smile or a handshake. He beamed at Lucien and his family. “Good to see you here today, my friends,” he said before passing on.

Lucien nodded back, not so coldly as he would have liked. Part of that was simple caution, part his reaction, however involuntary, to Father Pascal’s genuine charm. He scowled down at his hands once the priest’s back was to him. He would have respected Father Pascal as a foe more easily had the man not pretended an amity that had to be false.

The mass, however, was the mass, no matter who celebrated it. The sonorous Latin that Lucien understood only in small snatches bound him, understood or not, with worshipers all over the world and extending back in time to the days of Christ Himself. Even in Father Pascal’s mouth, it made the farmer feel a part of something larger and older and grander than himself.

Once the prayers were over, Father Pascal returned to French to address the congregation. “My children,” he said, adding with a roguish smile, “for you are the only children I shall ever have: my children, I know that many among you are upset and disturbed in your hearts at the travail France is suffering in this great war that covers the whole of the earth. I do not blame you for this feeling. On the contrary—I share it with you.”

He set both plump, pink, well-manicured hands over his heart for a moment. The woman in the pew in front of Lucien sighed at the gesture. Galtier suppressed the urge to clout her in the head. It wouldn’t knock sense into her, and would get him talked about.

Father Pascal went on, “But although France is the mother from which we have all sprung, I must remind you, painful duty though it is, that the France of today, the France of the Third Republic, has cut herself off from the ways and traditions we proudly maintain. You must understand, then, that her punishment is surely the will of God.”

“He’s right,” that woman whispered loudly to her husband. “Every word he says is true, and you cannot deny a one of them.” Her husband’s head went up and down in an emphatic nod. Now Lucien wanted to clout both of them. He needed a distinct effort of will to hold still and listen as the priest kept spinning his seductive web.

“The France we know today is not the France that sent our ancestors forth to this new world.” Father Pascal’s voice dripped regret. “This is the France that murdered its king, that disestablished our true and holy Catholic Church, that made the blessed pope a spectator as Bonaparte set the crown on his own head, that has lost her moral compass. Such a country, I believe, needs to be reminded of where her true duties and obligations lie. Once she has been purged in the fire of repentance, then, perhaps—I pray it shall be so—she will deserve our respect once more.”

A couple of women, including the one in front of Lucien, broke into sobs at the iniquities of modern France. He was more inclined to dwell on the iniquities of Father Pascal, and to wonder how much the American Major Quigley had bribed him, and in what coin.

“I also note for your edification, my children, that in the United States all religions truly are treated as being equal,” Father Pascal said. “You have surely seen for yourselves that the occupying authorities have in no way interfered with our worship here in Rivière-du-Loup or in the other regions of *la belle province* that they

have liberated from the English."

At that, Galtier sat up very straight. He made a point of glancing over to his two sons to make sure they did nothing foolish. Georges laughed silently, but not with the good-natured laughter that was his hallmark. Charles was tight-lipped with anger. Neither one, fortunately, seemed ready to raise an outburst. Nor did his wife or Nicole. His three younger daughters, though—He caught their eyes, one by one. His warning might have been silent, but it got through.

Father Pascal continued, "The Protestants, the Presbyterians"—he loaded the names with scorn—"in Ottawa and all through Ontario are surely just as glad to have you, to have us, gone from their midst, gone from their Protestant dominion. Well, God will have an answer for them, too, if not in this world then in the world to come."

Now Lucien was the one who had to struggle to keep silent. *It's not like that!* was the shout he wanted to raise. Looking around the church, he saw several men of roughly his own age also seeming discontented. They were the ones who had been conscripted into the Canadian Army, served their terms, and who had done so enough years before that they were not recalled to the colors when the war began, not until the Americans had overrun this part of Quebec.

No one who had served in it could doubt the Army ran more nearly according to the wishes of the English than those of the French. That was hard to resent, with more Canadians being of English blood than French. But any man of either stock who buckled down and obeyed his superiors would get on well, and veterans knew that, too, whether Father Pascal did or not.

The priest said, "We have survived more than a century and a half of rule by Protestants who despise and fear us. France has suffered for more than a hundred years under one godless regime after another. Accommodating ourselves to the freedom we shall have in the United States, and to the chastisement of the erring mother country, should not be difficult or unpleasant for us, my children. We shall do well, and France, if God is kind, will return to the ways of truth abandoned so long ago."

"He is a beautiful man," the woman in front of Lucien said to her husband, who nodded again. "He sees the truth and he sets it forth, as if he were writing a book for us to read."

And then, to Galtier's alarm, Marie said, "He is a very persuasive

man, is he not?" Lucien had to study her face carefully before noticing one eyebrow a hair's breadth higher than the other. He sighed in relief. For a moment, he'd feared Father Pascal had seduced his wife—no other word seemed to fit.

"Very persuasive, yes," Lucien said. He did his best to sound fulsome, in case that idiot woman or anyone else within earshot proved a spy.

People filed up to receive communion from Father Pascal. As he bent to let the priest place the wafer in his mouth, Lucien had to remind himself that a cleric was not required to be in a state of grace for the sacrament he administered to be efficacious; to believe otherwise was to fall into the Donatist heresy. Galtier could not recall—if he had ever known—who the Donatists were, or where they had lived. Staring at sleek, prosperous Father Pascal, though, he wondered if they hadn't been better theologians than the Church proclaimed them. On his tongue, the Body of Christ tasted like ashes.

When the last communicant had taken part in the miracle, Father Pascal said, "The mass is over. Go in peace." He again abandoned the ritual Latin for French to add, "And pray there may be peace here in our province and all over the world."

As Galtier and his family were leaving, they passed Major Quigley, who stood waiting outside the church. Nodding to Lucien as if to a friend, he walked over to the rectory next door, no doubt to speak with the priest who was doing so much for his cause.

"Some of the Americans," Nicole said hesitantly as the wagon made its slow way back to the farm, "some of the Americans are very nice people."

"This is what you get for working in the hospital," Charles snapped at his sister.

Lucien had had similar fears, but held up a hand. "If we quarrel among ourselves, on whom can we rely?" he asked. Both his daughter and his son looked abashed. *I have raised them well,* he thought with no small pride. He went on, "I agree—some of the Americans *are* very nice people. My opinion, however, is that all of them, without exception, would be nicer still were they back in America."

"You have reason, Father," Nicole said. Lucien had to fight to keep from crowing all the way back to the farm.

Still commanding the battery that had been Jeb Stuart III's, still a sergeant, likely to be a sergeant till the day he died, Jake Featherston knew that day was liable to be close at hand. The Army of Northern Virginia maintained its presence on this side of the Monocacy, but that was for the most part because the Yankees had been pushing harder elsewhere in Maryland, not because Confederate defenses were strong here.

And now the United States were pounding in this sector, too. Shells burst all around the battery. A couple of men were down. The worst of it, though, wasn't explosions or flying splinters. The worst of it was that the Yankees were firing a lot of gas shells along with their high explosives.

"Come on!" Jake shouted to the men of his own gun. "Pound those Yankee trenches! They're gonna swarm like bees any minute."

Even when he did shout, his words sounded hollow and muffled. The gas helmets Confederate soldiers were wearing these days did a better job of protecting lungs and especially eyes from poison gas than had the chemical-soaked gauze pads that had been the original line of defense against the new and horrid weapon. But wearing a helmet of rubberized burlap that covered your entire head and neck was a torment in its own right, the more so as days got ever hotter and muggier.

Jake rubbed at the glass portholes of the helmet with a scrap of rag. That didn't help; the round windows weren't so much dirty as they were steamy, and the steam was on the inside of the gas helmet. He could have taken off the helmet. Then the portholes would have been clean. Of course, then he would have been poisoned, but if you were going to worry about every little thing…

The Yankee barrage dropped back into the front-line trenches. "Be ready, y'all!" Featherston shouted. "They're going to be coming out any—"

He didn't even get the chance to finish the sentence. The U.S. soldiers swarmed out of their trenches and rushed toward the Confederate lines. The U.S. bombardment didn't ease off till they were within fifty yards of those lines; Jake gave the enemy reluctant credit for a very sharp piece of work there.

Even before the damnyankees' guns stopped pounding the Confederate trenches, though, men in butternut were pouring machine-gun fire into their foes. The barrage was liable to kill them, but, if they didn't keep the U.S. soldiers out of their trenches, they were surely dead.

The battery poured shrapnel into the Yankees advancing across no-man's-land, shortening the range as the soldiers in green-gray drew closer to the Confederate line. Shell casings lay by the breech of the gun in the same way that watermelon seeds were liable to lie by a Negro sleeping in the sun: signs of what had been consumed.

Dirt fountained up from every explosion. Men fountained up, too, or pieces of men. Others dove for the shelter of shell holes old and new. For a moment, the attack faltered. Jake had watched a lot of attacks, both Yankee and Confederate, falter: generals had a way of asking men to do more than flesh and blood could bear. "Be ready to lengthen range in a hurry," he called to his gun crews. "When they run, we want to hurt 'em as bad as we can so they don't try this shit again in a hurry."

But then a cry of alarm and despair rose, not from the ranks of the Yankees but from the Confederates' trenches. Men started running away from the front, straight toward Jake Featherston's guns.

"Barrels!" Michael Scott shouted. With the gas helmet he had on, Jake couldn't see his face, but he would have bet it was as pale as whey. "The damnyankees got barrels!"

There were only three of them, belching out gray-black clouds of exhaust as they lumbered forward with a clumsy deliberation that put Featherston in mind of fat men staggering out of a saloon. But, like fat men not so drunk as to fall down, they kept on coming no matter how clumsy they looked.

Machine-gun bullets struck sparks from their armored hides, but did not penetrate them. They had machine guns, too, and poured a hail of bullets of their own on Confederate positions that kept on resisting. Where those machine-gun bullets proved inadequate, they used their cannon to pound the foes into silence.

They were, Jake saw, deadly dangerous weapons of war. They were also even more deadly dangerous weapons of terror. Rumors about them had raced through the Confederate Army weeks before this, their first appearance on the front here. Seeing that they were nearly as

invulnerable as rumor made them out to be, most of the men thought flight the best if not the only answer.

“That armor of theirs, it doesn’t keep shells out,” Jake said. “They’re not going any faster than a man can walk, and every damn one of ’em’s as big as a battleship. We don’t fill ’em full of holes, we don’t deserve to be in the First Richmond Howitzers.”

He felt the sting of that himself. As far as the powers that be were concerned, he didn’t deserve to he an officer in the First Richmond Howitzers. When his life lay on the line, though, pride took second place. At his shouted orders, all the guns in the battery took aim at the barrels.

Despite the encouraging words he’d used, he quickly discovered hitting a moving target with an artillery piece was anything but easy. Shell after shell exploded in front of the barrels or far beyond them. “If I was a nigger, I’d swear they were hexed,” Michael Scott growled.

“If you were a nigger—” Featherston began, and then stopped. He didn’t know how to finish the thought. He’d fought that very gun with two Negro laborers, up in Pennsylvania, after a Yankee bombardment had killed or wounded everyone in the crew but him. The fire he and Nero and Perseus delivered had helped drive back a U.S. assault on the trenches in front of the battery.

Yet the two blacks had sympathized with the Red revolt enough to desert the battery when it began, and he hadn’t seen them since. He wondered if they’d managed to get their hands on any guns and turn them against their Confederate superiors. He doubted he’d ever know.

But he was sure that, if not for the Negro uprising, the war against the USA would be going better now. Blacks were mostly back to work yes, but you couldn’t turn your back on them, not the way you had before. That made them only half as useful as they had been before the red flags started flying—and that meant the war against the United States was still feeling the effects of the uprising.

“We’ll pay ’em back one of these days,” Jake said. He had no more time in which to think about it. One of the barrels was clumsily turning so that its cannon bore on his gun. Barrels couldn’t stand hits from artillery. He’d told his gun crew as much, and hoped for the sake of his own neck he was right. He didn’t need anyone to tell him guns out in the open couldn’t do that, either.

Flame spurted from the muzzle of the cannon inside the traveling

fortress. The shell was short. Fragments clattered off the splinter shield that was all the protection his gun crew had. Nothing got through. Nobody got hurt. He knew perfectly well that that was luck.

“Left half a degree!” he shouted, and the muzzle of the howitzer swung ever so slightly. He yanked the lanyard. The gun roared. So did he: “Hit! We hit the son of a bitch!”

Smoke poured out of the barrel. Hatches popped open all over the ungainly machine. Men, some carrying machine guns and belts of ammunition, dove out of the hatches and into whatever cover they could find. The gun crew raked the area where they were cowering. “I hope we kill ’em all, and I hope they take a long time dying,” Michael Scott said savagely.

At Featherston’s orders, his gunners also sent several more rounds into the burning barrel, to make sure the damnyankees couldn’t salvage it. Another barrel had stopped on the open ground between two trenches. Jake didn’t know why it had stopped. He didn’t care, either. What difference whether it had broken down or its commander was an idiot? It made an easy target. Nothing else mattered. Soon it was burning, too.

Seeing the seemingly invincible barrels going up in flames put fresh heart into the Confederate infantry that had been on the point of breaking. The men in butternut stopped running and started shooting back at the U.S. soldiers in their trenches. The last surviving barrel made a slow, awkward turn—the only kind it could make—and lumbered away from the battery of field guns that had treated its comrades so roughly.

Its tail carried a two-machine-gun sting, but Jake had never been so glad to see the back of anything. All the guns in the battery sent shells after the barrel. No one was lucky enough to score a hit on it.

“It’s going,” Featherston said. “That’s good enough for now, far as I’m concerned. If it comes back tomorrow, we’ll worry about it tomorrow. Meantime, let’s see if we can make the damnyankees sorry they ever made it into our trenches.”

Before long, the U.S. soldiers in the Confederate positions were very unhappy; the battery showered them with both gas and shrapnel. The troops they’d driven back counterattacked aided by reinforcements hurrying across the Monocacy on bridges the Yankees hadn’t been able to knock down.

The U.S. soldiers did hold on to the first couple of lines of trenches, but that wasn't enough of an advance to make the battery change site. Glum-looking Yankee prisoners filed back toward the Monocacy bridges, their hands high in the air.

Once the fighting had eased, officers came out to examine the burned-out hulks of the barrels. One of them was Major Clarence Potter. On his way back to Army of Northern Virginia headquarters, he stopped for a couple of minutes at Jake Featherston's battery. "I'm given to understand we have your guns to thank for those two ruined behemoths," he said.

"Yes, sir, that's right." Featherston dropped his voice. "They won't promote me for it, but I did it."

"Any way you could have gotten us a barrel in working order, not one that's been through the fire?" Potter asked. He held up a hand. "That won't get you promoted, either, Sergeant, but it will help our cause."

"Sir, if those barrels had kept running, they'd be visiting you about now, not the other way round," Jake answered. "We got any more men back of the line, sir? One more attack and we can push the Yankees all the way back where they started from."

But the intelligence officer shook his head. "Lucky we were able to throw in as much as we did." Now he was the one who spoke quietly: "If we don't get more men in arms, be they white or black, we'll be reduced to standing on the defensive all along the line, and that's no way to win a war."

"Black soldiers." Featherston's lip curled.

"You know they can fight," Potter said. "You of all people should know that." He'd heard about the use to which Jake had put Perseus and Nero.

"Yes, sir, I do know that," Jake said. "But I'll be damned if I think they ought to get any kind of reward for trying to overthrow the government in the middle of the war. That's what giving 'em guns and giving 'em the vote would be. They stabbed us in the back. Somebody—anybody—does that to me, I'll make him pay." Some of the faces in his mind when he said that were black. Some were white and plump and prosperous, the faces of soldiers and bureaucrats in the War Department in Richmond.

XII

Jonathan Moss peered down at the battlefield in dismay. The advance through Ontario toward Toronto had been slow and brutally expensive, but it had been a continuous advance. One enemy defensive line after another had been stormed and overwhelmed. Now, for the first time, American troops were in headlong, desperate retreat. From the air, they looked like ants fleeing a small boy's shoe.

That was, in effect, what they were. A handful of bigger shapes moved on the ground, grinding through American barbed wire and into the U.S. trenches. "Son of a bitch," Moss said, and the wind blew his words away. "The limeys and Canucks have barrels of their own."

They looked different from American barrels, of which he'd seen one or two. He flew lower for a better look, figuring that the more he could put in his report, the better it would be. That battalions of American infantrymen were getting much more intimately acquainted with the barrels advancing on them than he could in an aeroplane never once crossed his mind.

The lower he flew, the stranger the enemy barrels looked. They were forward-leaning rhomboids, with tracks going all the way around the outside of their hulls. He wondered why the Canucks—or was it the limeys?—had settled on such a stupid design till he saw a barrel climb almost vertically out of a trench into which it had fallen. However odd the setup seemed, it had its merits.

Instead of mounting a cannon in the nose like U.S. barrels, the ones currently pushing back the American infantry carried two, one on each side, mounted in sponsons whose design—if not the actual pieces of forged iron themselves—had been taken from the secondary armament of warships. Some of the barrels mounted machine guns in

one or both sponsons instead of cannon.

“I wonder whose are better, theirs or ours,” Moss said. He had no way to tell at the moment. American barrels still being thin on the ground, and used mostly to spearhead long-planned attacks, none was anywhere nearby to challenge the machines the enemy was hurling at the poor bastards down in the trenches.

Moss dove on the barrels, machine gun blazing. He walked his tracers across one, another, a third. As far as he could tell, they did the massive machines no harm. He cursed himself for a fool. American barrels were armored to hold out enemy machine-gun fire. Whatever you could say about the Canadians and the British, they weren’t stupid. They’d do unto the USA as they’d been done by themselves.

He cursed his stupidity for another reason as well. The advancing foe loosed a storm of lead at his Martin one-decker. Ground fire had shot him down once already. Now again he heard the thrumming pop of bullets tearing through canvas.

Clang! That bullet hadn’t torn through canvas—it had hit something metal. His eyes flicked over the instrument panel. Everything looked all right. If he was lucky, the bullet had ricocheted off the side of the engine block without breaking anything. If he wasn’t lucky, he’d find out soon enough—most likely at the moment he could least afford to.

That *clang*, though, was an urgent reminder that he couldn’t afford to linger indefinitely down here. He pulled back on the stick. The nose of his fighting scout rose.

As Moss gained altitude, Tom Innis made his own firing run on the advancing enemy. Perhaps profiting from his flightmate’s experience, he didn’t try to shoot up the barrels. Men were always more vulnerable. Banking toward the American lines—or what had been the American lines before the attack—Moss watched men in khaki dive for cover. He whooped with glee and shook his fist in the slipstream.

But not all the British and Canadians tried to shelter themselves from Innis’ gun. They shot back at him as ferociously as they had at Moss. And a streak of smoke began streaming back from Tom’s engine cowling.

“Get out of there!” Moss shouted—uselessly, of course. “Get out of there while you can!” He looked around for Dud Dudley and Phil Eaker—they’d have to shepherd Innis back toward the aerodrome. He’d be a sitting bird if the Canadians or British pounced on his

crippled bus.

He swung the one-decker back toward the west. The smoke wasn't getting better. It was getting worse. "Climb, damn you!" Moss yelled to him, as if he could hear. The more altitude he gained, the farther he'd be able to glide when his engine quit. Moss knew all about that, the hard way.

Innis had to know it, too. But the Martin didn't get any higher off the deck. The only reason for that, Moss figured, was that it couldn't get any higher off the deck. And that meant his flightmate was in trouble.

Moss bared his teeth in an anguished grimace—it wasn't just smoke streaming back from the engine now, it was flame, too. The slipstream blowing in Moss' face made it hard for him to close his mouth again. The slipstream also blew the flames back toward Tom Innis.

He beat at them with his fist and arm. They spread faster than he could knock them down. "Land it!" Moss screamed. "Land it, God damn you!" He wasn't cursing his friend. He was cursing fate, without a doubt the most dreadful fate any airman could face. Better to yank out your pistol and put one through your head than go down in a burning crate, as far as he was concerned.

That was especially true if you were going down in a burning crate from, say, fifteen thousand feet. If you were only a couple of hundred feet off the ground when your aeroplane caught fire, you had a chance to put it down and get the hell out before you roasted, too.

You had a chance…. The trouble was, every yard of territory here abouts was as cratered as the surface of the moon: the USA had had to blast the Canucks off the land before advancing through it, and then, even after having had it taken from them, the Canadians and the limeys had shelled it to a faretheewell to make sure the Americans didn't enjoy owning it.

With a healthy aeroplane, Tom Innis would have had more choices. Of course, with a healthy aeroplane, he wouldn't have needed to land in the first place. He did the best he could, steering for a meadow that still had some green grass mingled with the brown of earth thrown up from shell blasts.

"Come on. Come on," Moss whispered, his hand trying to move on the joystick as if he were landing his own aeroplane. Despite smoke and flames and what had to be mortal fear, Innis got the Martin down.

You didn't need much in the way of ground to kill all the speed and hop out. "Come on," Moss said again as he buzzed overhead. "Taxi, taxi…"

The Martin nosed down into a shell hole and flipped over. It kept right on burning. Nobody came out of it. Nobody was going to come out. Moss knew that. If the fire hadn't killed Tom, getting the engine and machine gun slammed back into his chest would have done the job.

Infantrymen in green-gray ran toward the crash. Moss and his flightmates kept circling above it. Some of the infantrymen, their faces small pale ovals, looked up at them and shook their heads. No luck. It was over.

Moss felt empty inside as he flew back toward the aerodrome. *It could have been me* echoed in his mind again and again. It nearly had been him, not so long before. What was the difference between the way he'd put his damaged aeroplane down and how Tom Innis had done it? Luck, nothing more. You didn't like to think you were alive for no better reason than dumb luck. Was he an ace by dumb luck, too?

When only three returned where four had set out, the mechanics on the ground didn't need a handbook to figure out what had happened. "What went wrong?" one of them asked quietly. Dud Dudley was the flight leader. That meant he had the delightful job of telling them.

The surviving fliers went into Shelby Pruitt's tent. The squadron commander looked up from his paperwork. His mouth twisted. "Dammit," he said, and then, mastering himself, "All right, give me the details."

Dudley did that, too. When he was through, Moss spoke of the enemy barrels spreading havoc through the U.S. lines. That had seemed the most important news in the world when he'd spotted them. Now he had to flog his memory to come up with details.

Hardshell Pruitt took notes. He had to be a professional about the business of slaughter, too. He asked his questions, both about Innis' demise and about the barrels. Then he said, "All right, boys. I don't expect the three of you will be doing any flying tomorrow. Don't worry about morning roll call, either, come to that. You'll be recorded as present. Dismissed."

If that wasn't an order to head for the officers' club and get

smashed, it might as well have been. Moss would have headed there anyway. Dudley and Eaker matched him stride for stride.

News traveled fast through the aerodrome. When the Negro behind the bar saw them come in, he set a bottle of whiskey, a corkscrew, and three tumblers on the bar, nodded, and said not a word. It was almost as if he stood at the bedside of a patient whose chances weren't good.

As suited his station as flight leader, Dud Dudley carried the bottle. Moss picked up the glasses. That left the corkscrew for Eaker, who brought it over to the table as if glad to have something to do.

Dudley used the corkscrew, tilted the bottle, and poured all the glasses full. "Well, here's to Tom," he said, and drained his without taking it from his lips. When it was empty, he let out a long sigh. "I always thought the ornery son of a bitch would be doing this for me, not the other way round."

"Yeah." The whiskey burned in Moss' throat, and in his stomach. He could feel it climbing to his head. "He went out the way you'd figure, if he was ever going to go. He wanted to hit the Canucks and limeys one more lick."

"That's a fact." Dudley filled the tumblers again. "He was a wolf when he drove a bus, nothing else but. Never saw a man who just aimed himself at the enemy and fired himself off like that."

"Best straight-out aggressive pilot I ever saw," Moss agreed. "And Luther was the best technical flier I ever saw. And they're both dead and we're alive, and what the hell does that say about the way the world works?"

"It's a damn shame," Eaker said. The whiskey was already slurring his speech, but he attacked the second glass as single-mindedly as Tom had ever shot up a target. "Not fair. Not fair."

He'd joined the flight as Luther Carlsen's replacement. Now another set of personal goods would have to be cleared from the tent. Somebody else new would be sleeping on Innis'cot. They'd have to point Tom out in the pictures on the wall and explain what kind of a man he'd been. It wouldn't be easy, any of it.

"God damn the Canucks, anyhow," Moss said. "If they'd just rolled over when the war started, we wouldn't be in this mess in the first place."

“That’s right,” Eaker said. “Then we could have thrown everything we’ve got at the goddamn Rebs, and that would be the war over and done with, right there.”

“Yeah, and if the Russians hadn’t invaded Germany when things got started, France would have gone down the drain and Kaiser Bill would have won his war, too,” Moss said. “But instead, we’ve got—this.”

He waved a hand to encompass *this*. It was the hand holding the glass of whiskey. Fortunately, he’d already drunk most of it. A little spilled on the table and on his trouser leg, but not much. He started to pick up the bottle to fill the tumbler once more. “It’s empty,” Dud Dudley said.

“You’re right. It is.” Moss stared at it. “How did it get empty so fast?” Before he could get up and do anything about that, the bartender brought over a fresh bottle. Moss nodded. His neck felt loose. “That’s better.”

“How did it get empty so fast?” Eaker echoed. He sounded even more surprised than Moss had, as if there weren’t the slightest connection between his stumbling speech and that poor dead bottle.

“It got empty the same way we did,” Moss said. “It got empty the same way the whole stupid world did.” Rapidly getting drunk as he was, he couldn’t tell whether that was foolish maundering or profound philosophy. The next day, hung over and wishing he was dead, he couldn’t tell, either, and the day after that, climbing into his one-decker for another flight above the trenches, he still didn’t know.

Night lay like a cloak over the *Bonefish*. “Ahead one quarter,” Roger Kimball called from his perch atop the conning tower.

“Ahead one quarter—aye aye, sir,” answered Ben Coulter, the helmsman, his voice floating up the hatchway to the skipper.

“If we bring this off, sir—” Tom Brearley breathed.

Kimball made a sharp chopping motion with his right hand, cutting off his exec. “We *are* going to bring this off,” he said. “No ifs, ands, or buts. I don’t care how many mines the damnyankees have laid in Chesapeake Bay, I don’t care how many shore guns they’ve got watching from Maryland. We are going to pay them a visit. If they aren’t glad to see us, too damn bad.”

“Yes, sir,” Brearley said, the only thing he could say under the circumstances. After a few seconds, he went on, “It’s a shame the USA pushed down so far toward Hampton Roads.”

“You’re right about that,” Kimball said. “If we were holding onto both sides of the mouth of the Bay as tight as we ought to…Things’d look a lot better if that was so, I tell you.”

There were, at the moment, any number of ways in which the war could have looked better from the Confederate point of view. Kimball wasted little time worrying about them. They’d given him the job of penetrating as far up the Chesapeake Bay as he could and doing as much damage as he could once he got there, and he aimed to follow his orders to the letter.

Softly, under his breath, he let out a snort. “As if they’d hand this assignment to Ralph Briggs.”

“Sir?” his executive officer said.

“Never mind, Tom,” Kimball answered. “Woolgathering, that’s all. And maybe there’s more to old Ralph than I give him credit for, anyway.”

He’d never expected to see Briggs back in the CSA till the war ended, not when he’d had his submersible torpedoed out from under him and been fished out of the drink by the damnyankees who did him in. But Briggs had managed to break out of the prisoner-of-war camp where they’d stowed him and to make it through enemy lines (or rather, to make it through some country so broken, it had no real front line) and back into Confederate territory. If he could run a submarine as well as he’d run his own escape, he might yet make a captain to be reckoned with.

Tom Brearley coughed, calling Kimball’s attention back to the here-and-now. “Sir, we’re passing between Smith Island and Crisfield.”

“Thank you, Tom,” Kimball said. “I guess we’ll have to start paying attention, then, won’t we?” Even in the midnight darkness, his grin and Brearley’s answering one were broad and white.

The USA had run steel-mesh nets from Point Lookout on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay over to Smith Island, and then again from the island to Crisfield on the Bay’s eastern shore, precisely to keep Confederate raiders like the *Bonefish* from coming up and making nuisances of themselves in the Bay’s upper reaches. They backed up

the nets with minefields and patrol boats.

From everything the Confederacy had been able to learn, though, the damnyankees had concentrated their efforts on the wider stretch of water west of Smith Island. Their ruling assumption seemed to have been that nobody was crazy enough to try to run a boat through Tangier Sound. Up at the northern end of the sound, only a mile or two of water separated the mainland from Bloodsworth Island. The nets would tangle a submersible that dove, and the guns would put paid to one that didn't.

Kimball whistled tunelessly between his teeth. "Do I look like a crazy man to you, Tom?" he asked.

"No more so than usual—sir," Brearley answered, which made Kimball laugh out loud.

"Best way to run through the nets," he said, "is to take 'em on the surface and slide through halfway between two buoys." He peered through his clandestinely imported German binoculars, trying to spot the buoys to which the nets were attached, and laughed again. "This is a trick we've learned from the Huns, mind: it's how they slip through the English obstacles in the Channel."

Brearley didn't have binoculars, but he did have sharp eyes. "There, sir!" He pointed ahead and to starboard. Sure enough, a buoy bobbed there in the light chop.

Kimball swept the binoculars to port till he found the next buoy supporting the net. He grunted in satisfaction. "Won't even have to change course," he said, and then called down the hatch: "All ahead full!"

"All ahead full—aye aye, sir!" The diesels that powered the *Bonefish* roared as the submarine sped up. Kimball hoped they didn't roar so loud as to draw the attention of guns and searchlights on the shore or on Smith Island. His lips pulled back from his teeth. Maybe the Yanks weren't so far wrong when they figured only a crazy man would try Tangier Sound.

"Through!" Brearley said, his voice rising in triumph. Kim-ball felt triumphant himself, with one set of buoys behind him.

At his order, the diesels throttled back. Now that he was in the Sound, the trick, he figured, was to act as if he owned the place. "All right, we've got the minefield coming up next," he said. "We have to

steer along the chain of islands here, right close to shore. We'll be in good shape then."

If the damnyankees hadn't done any minelaying since the CSA got their latest reports, and if no mines had come loose and drifted into her path, the *Bonefish* would be in good shape. Kim-ball had to take the channel slowly, though, to give himself the chance to stop and withdraw if he or a sailor at the bow spotted a spiked sphere bobbing in the sea. That meant the submersible hadn't passed the Bloodsworth Island gap by dawn.

"Shall we dive, sir, and spend the day on the bottom?" Brearley asked. "That won't be much fun, but—"

"We'll do nothing of the sort," Kimball declared. "I want you to take down the naval ensign, Mr. Brearley, and go to the flag locker for—"

"A U.S. flag, sir?" the exec said in some alarm. "Going under false colors is—"

"Technically legal, if we run up the true ones before we start to fight," Kimball said. "But that's not what I want, Mr. Brearley. I want you to replace the naval ensign with the national flag. And then I intend to go through the channel as if I had every right to do so. I'll bet you a Stonewall the damnyankees see what they expect to see, not one thing more."

He wasn't betting a five-dollar Confederate goldpiece. He was betting his life and the lives of the boat's complement. But Tom Brearley, once he got the idea, didn't argue any more. Down came the naval ensign, which, like the Confederate battle flag on land, displayed St. Andrew's cross in blue on red. Both looked as they did for the same reason: the CSA's Stars and Bars too closely resembled the USA's Stars and Stripes for them to be readily distinguished at any distance. Normally, that confusion was dangerous. Every once in a while, it could be exploited.

Flying the Stars and Bars, the *Bonefish* made for the narrow passage between Bloodsworth Island and Maryland's eastern mainland. Kimball made no effort to avoid being seen. On the contrary. He sailed along as if he had every right in the world to be where he was. Field glasses were surely trained on him from the land. Guns could have been, at a moment's notice.

No one fired. He crossed the net as he had the one before, but with even greater panache. "This is astonishing, sir," Tom Brearley

breathed.

Kimball shrugged. “They see a submersible out in the open. They look at the flag. They see red, white, and blue. Nobody’d be stupid enough to do what we’re doing. And so—”

He looked north, toward the mainland. He saw a few gun positions, close by the shore, and there were surely others he didn’t see farther inland, ones mounting bigger guns. The horizon dipped and swooped as he swung the field glasses around to examine Bloodsworth Island. The day was rapidly lightening. He could see men in white U.S. uniforms close by the edge of the sea. He waved in their direction. One of them was peering at him with field glasses, too. The fellow waved back.

“You know what it’s like?” Kimball said, chuckling. “It’s like seducing a woman.” He thought of Anne Colleton; for a moment, warmth tingled through his loins. Then he returned to the subject at hand: “You let her see that there’s any doubt in your mind about what you’re going to do, all that happens is, you get your face slapped for your trouble. But if she’s sure you’re sure, hell, her corset’s off and her legs are open before she worries about whether it’s right or wrong or purple.”

“Yes, sir,” Brearley said, nothing but reverence in his voice. They were past the nets now. The sun came up, red as fire in the east. All the guns that could have turned them to crumpled, smoking metal lay silent, silent.

“Go below, Tom,” Kimball said, following his exec down into the *Bonefish* a moment later. He dogged the hatch after him. “Take us down to periscope depth,” he ordered Ben Coulter, his voice relaxed and easy. To the rest of the crew, he went on, “We’ll go down nice and slow. No rush about submerging now. It’s going to be like we’re putting on our show for the damnyankees out there—this is how a submersible dives, boys.”

“Of course I’ll always love you, darling,” Tom Brearley said, sounding very much like a successful seducer sliding out the door.

Kimball laughed out loud and clapped him on the shoulder. “You’re learning, Tom. You’re learning.” The sailors didn’t quite know what their officers were talking about, but it sounded dirty. That was plenty to get them laughing, too.

The *Bonefish* slid away from the dangerous narrow waters of

Tangier Sound, out into Chesapeake Bay. Here behind the nets and the minefields, everything was clear. Kimball saw plenty of fishing boats through the periscope, but didn't waste fish on them or rise to sink them with gunfire. He wanted bigger prey—he hadn't taken these risks for fishermen.

And he got his reward. Steaming along came an ocean monitor, a bigger version of the river craft the USA and CSA both used: basically, one battleship turret mounted on a raft. It couldn't get out of its own way, but in these confined waters was deadly dangerous to anything those big guns could reach. Sneaking up on it was hardly tougher than beating a two-year-old at football.

The first torpedo, perfectly placed just aft of amidships, would have been plenty to sink the monitor. The second, a couple of hundred feet farther up toward the bow, made matters quick and certain. "Too easy, sir," Brearley said as the long steel tube echoed with cheers.

"You gonna make us throw her back, then?" Kimball demanded.

"No, sir," the exec answered. "Hell no, sir." He didn't ask how Kimball planned to extricate the *Bonefish* from Chesapeake Bay now that, belatedly, the Yankees knew she was there. He might have done that before, but not now. He figured Kimball would find a way.

I figure I will, too, Kimball thought. *Getting it in is the tough part. Once you manage that, pulling out afterwards is easy*.

Major Irving Morrell wondered why he in particular had been saddled with two officers from America's allies. Maybe someone on the General Staff back in Philadelphia remembered his service there and reckoned he could show visiting firemen how the war was fought on this side of the Atlantic. And maybe, too, someone on the General Staff—Captain Abell came to mind, among other candidates—remembered his work there and hoped he would wreck his career once and for all by botching this assignment.

If Abell or someone like him had had that in mind, Morrell thought he would be disappointed. Though the German officer belonged to the Imperial General Staff, both he and his Austrian counterpart gave every sign of being good combat soldiers. They seemed very much at home squatting by a campfire, sketching lines in the dirt with a stick to improvise a map.

“I’m glad both of you understand my German,” Morrell said in that language. “We all study it at West Point, of course, but I’ve used it more for reading than speaking since.”

“It is not so bad, not so bad at all,” said Major Eduard Dietl, the Austrian of the duo: a dark man, thin to scrawniness, with an impressive beak of a nose. “Your teacher was a Bavarian, I would say.”

“Yes, that’s so,” Morrell agreed. “Captain Steinhart was born in Munich.”

“Here in the United States, I feel surrounded by Bavarians,” said the German officer, Captain Heinz Guderian. He was shorter and squatter than Dietl, with a round, clever face. He went on, “The U.S. uniform is almost the exact color of those the Bavarians wear.” His own tunic and trousers were standard German Imperial Army field-gray, a close match for Dietl’s pike-gray Austrian uniform. Neither differed much in cut from that which Morrell wore; the German uniform had served as the model for those of the other two leading Alliance powers.

Dietl sipped coffee from a tin cup. “This is such a—spacious land,” he said, waving his hand. “Oh, I know I think any land spacious after Heinz and I crossed the Atlantic by submersible, but the train ride across the USA and up into Canada to reach the front here…amazing.”

“He is right,” Guderian agreed. “West of Russia, Europe has no such vast, uncrowded sweeps of territory.”

“And these mountains.” Dietl waved again, now at the Canadian Rockies. “The Carpathians are as nothing beside them.” He spoke with the air of a man accustomed to comparing peaks one to another: unsurprising, since he wore the *Edelweiss* badge of a mountain soldier himself. Sighing, he went on, “Almost I wish the Italians had thrown away their neutrality. They’ve always wanted to; everyone knows it. But they never have dared. No nerve, damn them. Fighting in the Alps would be like this, I think.”

“Fighting is not a sport. Fighting is for a purpose,” Guderian said seriously. “The idea would be to break out of the mountains and into Venetia and Lombardy below—if there were a war, of course.”

Morrell thought that would be more than Austria-Hungary could manage, still fighting the Russians and the Serbs as she was. But he held his peace. Dietl struck him as a man like himself, happiest in the field. Maybe Guderian had worn red stripes on his trousers a little too

long.

And then the German officer said, “Besides, you can’t conduct a proper pursuit in the mountains. Get around the enemy and smash him up—that’s what the whole business is about.” Morrell revised his earlier assessment.

Dietl said, “The problem of pursuit is the basic problem of this entire war. The foe retreats through territory not yet devastated, and toward his own railheads, while you advance over country that has been fought in, and away from your own sources of supply. No wonder we measure most advances in meters, not kilometers.”

“Barrels help this problem by making breakthroughs possible once more,” Guderian said.

“Barrels help, but they’re not enough, not by themselves,” Morrell said. “They’re too slow—how can you have a breakthrough at a slow walk? How can you outrun the retreating enemy when you’re not running? Once the barrels force a hole in the enemy’s defenses, we need something faster to go through the hole and create the confusion that really kills.”

Guderian smiled. “Some people would say cavalry is the answer.”

“Some people will say the earth is flat, too,” Morrell said. He made a quick sketch of a sailing ship falling off the edge. The German and Austrian observers laughed. He went on, “With machine guns and rifles, cavalry’s no answer at all. We need better machines, faster machines.”

“I can see why they called you to Philadelphia, Major,” Guderian said. “You have the mind of a General Staff officer. You impose yourself on the conditions around you; you do not let them impose themselves on you.”

“Is that what I do?” Morrell said, faintly bemused. He was a man without strong philosophical bent; his chief concern was to hit the enemy as hard as he could and as often as he could, until he didn’t need to hit him any more.

Someone on the Canuck side of the line had the same idea. Canadian artillery, which had been quiet for the previous several days, suddenly sprang to life. Morrell threw himself flat on the ground. So did Dietl. So did Guderian; he might have spent most of his time in amongst the maps, but he knew how to handle himself in the open air,

too.

Along with the bombardment came a great crackle of rifle fire off to Morrell's right. Trained on the British model, the Canucks made formidable riflemen. They were quick and accurate, and every shot of theirs counted. And, by the sound of what was going on over there, they had found the weak spot in Morrell's line. He'd posted one company rather thinly over a long stretch of woods he'd reckoned almost impassable. The Canadians seemed intent on showing why *almost* was a word that didn't belong in war-planners' dictionaries.

Guderian and Dietl were both looking at him. *All right, we have come into the field to observe the American Army and to observe this man:* he could all but hear what they were thinking. *He now finds himself in difficulty. How does he respond?*

"Runners!" Morrell shouted, and the men came over to him: some running, some crawling along the ground, for shells were still dropping thick and fast. An American machine gun started banging away, there on the right, and he let out the briefest sigh of relief. That was where he'd posted Sergeant Finkel's squad, and the Canadians would have a devil of a time shifting him if he didn't feel like being shifted. And sure enough, shouts of dismay said the Canuck advance had suddenly run into a roadblock.

Morrell snapped orders: "Half of Captain Spadinger's company to pull out of line and contain the damage. The same for the machine-gun company from Captain Hall's company. The rest of the units not under immediate assault will counterattack, aiming to pinch off the neck of the Canadian advance. I will lead this counterattack personally." The runners hurried away. Morrell smiled gaily at the observers. "Will you join me, gentlemen?"

Neither of them hesitated. Running doubled-over, ignoring his bad leg, Morrell got to Hall's company bare moments after the runner he'd sent. The machine-gun men were already on their way off to the east, to shoot up any Canadians who burst out of those not quite impassable woods. Dietl and Guderian, both breathing hard, flopped into foxholes.

Captain Hall said, "I don't think we'll have any trouble holding them, sir. They can't come too far."

"Ich will nicht nur zu—" Morrell snarled in exasperation and switched from German to English: "I don't want to hold them. I want

to drive them back, to hurt them." He pointed northeast.

"If their artillery is alert, they'll slaughter us, sir," Hall said.

"I don't think they will be," Morrell answered. *They'd better not be*. "They've got this bombardment laid on to cover an attack. Who'd be cuckoo enough to move forward when they're putting pressure on us?" He didn't give the company commander any chance to argue. He also didn't give himself any chance to think twice. "Let's go!" He scrambled to his feet and ran for the Canadian lines, Springfield in his hands.

His men followed, whooping like Red Indians. He'd gained them a couple of major advances toward Banff by all-out audacity; they were willing to believe he could buy them one more. For close to thirty seconds, the Canucks left behind in their trenches were too intent on their comrades' push to pay much attention to what the Americans were doing off to the west. That was about fifteen seconds too long. Before a machine gun started mowing down the oncoming men in green-gray, they were within grenade range of its position. It fell silent. More grenades flew into the Canadian trenches. The Americans followed.

As Morrell leaped over the parapet, a Canadian aimed at him from point-blank range. He braced himself for another wound. *Christ, not that leg again,* he thought. *I don't want to be on crutches or in a wheelchair for the rest of my life. Blow my brains out and get it over with*.

The Canuck fired. The bullet went wild, for the fellow in khaki had taken a wound of his own in the instant that he pulled the trigger. Morrell finished him with the bayonet, then looked over his shoulder to find Major Dietl there with a pistol in his hand. *"Danke schön,"* he said.

"Bitte," the Austrian answered, with such Hapsburg formality that Morrell expected him to click his heels. He didn't. He leaped down into the trench instead. Cleaning it of Canadians was the ugly business it always seemed to be. Dietl held his own. At one point, though, he observed, "These foes of yours are in greater earnest than the Russians and have discipline of a sort the Serbs have never imagined."

"The Canadians are good soldiers," Morrell agreed. "The Confederates, too, come to that."

Having driven the Canucks back, his men turned their fire on the Canadian detachment that had gone ahead. Caught between two

forces, some of the Canadians went down, some threw down their rifles and threw up their hands in surrender, and some, the hard cases, dug in among the pines and firs and spruces to make the Americans pay a high price for them.

Morrell paid the price, having made the cold-blooded judgment that he could afford it. When the fighting had died away to occasional rifle shots, the Americans were still holding the trenches from which the Canadian attacking party had jumped off. “Very nicely done,” Captain Guderian said. “You used the enemy’s aggressiveness against him most astutely.”

“Coming from an officer of the Imperial General Staff, that’s quite a compliment,” Morrell said.

“You have earned it, Major. It will be reflected in my report.”

“And mine,” Dietl agreed. Morrell grinned, more pleased with the day’s work itself than with the praise it had garnered, but not despising that, either. *I wonder if favorable action reports from German and Austro-Hungarian observers cancel out the Utah fiasco,* he thought, and looked forward to finding out.

Reggie Bartlett examined the trench line just outside of Duncan, Sequoyah, with something less than awe and enthusiasm. “Lord,” he said feelingly, “don’t they teach people around here anything about digging in?”

“You listen good, Bartlett,” said Sergeant Pete Hairston, his new squad leader. “Just on account of they gave you a pretty stripe on your sleeve for bustin’out o’the damnyankees’prisoner camp, that don’t mean you know everything there is to know. Where were you fighting before the Yankees nabbed you?”

“I was on the Roanoke front,” Bartlett answered.

Hairston’s lantern-jawed face, the face of a man who’d acquired three stripes on his own sleeve more by dint of toughness than any other military virtue, changed expression. More cautiously, he asked, “How long you put in there?”

“From a few weeks after the war started till the Yanks got me last fall,” Bartlett said with no small pride. Anybody who’d spent almost a year and a half fighting between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the

Alleghenies could hold his head high among soldiers the world over.

Hairston knew that, too. “Shitfire,” he muttered, “all the fighting in Sequoyah’s nothin’ but a football game in the park, you put it next to the clangin’ and bangin’ back there.” He hadn’t bothered asking about Reggie’s previous experience till now. After a moment’s thought, he went on, “But I reckon that’s why this here ain’t like you expected it would be. We ain’t got the niggers to dig all the fancy trenches like I hear tell they got back there, and even if we did, we ain’t got the soldiers to put in ’em.”

“I see that,” Bartlett said. “I surely do.”

It horrified him, too, though he saw no point in coming out and saying so. The sergeant was right—there weren’t enough trenches, not by his standards. A lot of what they called trenches here were only waist-deep, too, so you might not get shot while you crawled from one foxhole to another. Then again, of course, you might. There wasn’t that much barbed wire out in front of the lines to keep the U.S. troops away, either. And, as Hairston had said, there weren’t that many Confederate soldiers holding the position, such as it was.

The sergeant might have picked that thought out of Reggie’s mind. “Ain’t that many damnyankees up here, neither,” he said. “They put four or five divisions into a big push, reckon they’d be in Dallas week after next.” He laughed to show that was a joke, or at least part of a joke. “’Course, they ain’t got four or five spare divisions layin’ around with dust on ’em, any more’n we do. An’if they did, they’d use ’em in Kentucky or Virginia or Maryland, just like we would. This here’s the ass end o’ nowhere for them, same as it is for us.”

“Not quite the ass end of nowhere,” Reggie said, liking the sound of the phrase. “I saw those oil wells when I came up through Duncan.”

“Yeah, they count for somethin’, or the brass reckons they do, anyways,” Hairston admitted. “You ask me, though, you could touch a match to this whole goddamn state of Sequoyah, blow it higher’n hell, an’ I wouldn’t miss it one goddamn bit.”

On brief acquaintance with Sequoyah, Bartlett was inclined to agree with the profane sergeant. To a Virginian, these endless hot burning plains were a pretty fair approximation of hell, or at least of a greased griddle just before the flapjack batter came down. Somewhere high up in the sky, an aeroplane buzzed. Reggie’s head whipped round in alarm. For the briefest moment, half of him believed he wouldn’t see

any man-made contraption, but the hand of God holding a pitcher of batter the size of Richmond.

Hairston said, “We’ll take you out on patrol tonight, start gettin’ you used to the way things are around here. It ain’t like Virginia, I’ll tell you that. Ain’t nothin’ like Georgia, neither.”

His voice softened. Reggie hadn’t been sure it could. He asked, “That where you’re from?”

“Yeah, I’m off a little farm outside of Albany. Hell.” The sergeant’s face clouded over. “Probably nothin’ left of that no more anyways. By what I hear tell, them niggers tore that part o’ the state all to hell and gone when they rose up. Bastards. You think about things, it ain’t so bad, not havin’ that many of ’em around.”

“Maybe not.” Reggie had been in the Yankee camp all through the Red Negro uprising. The U.S. officers had played it up, and the new-caught men had gone on and on about it, but it didn’t feel real to him. It was, he supposed, like the difference between reading about being in love and being in love yourself.

Hairston stuck his head out of the foxhole and looked around in a way that gave Bartlett the cold shivers. Do that on the Roanoke front and some damnyankee sniper would clean your ear out for you with a Springfield round. But nothing happened here. The sergeant finished checking the terrain, then squatted back down again. “Yanks are takin’it easy, same as us.”

“All right, Sarge.” Reggie shook his head. “I am going to have to get used to doing things different out here.” He didn’t think he’d ever get used to exposing any part of his precious body where a Yankee could see it when he wasn’t actually attacking.

As promised, Hairston took him out into no-man’s-land after the sun went down. No-man’s-land hereabouts was better than half a mile wide; he’d counted on a couple of hundred yards of it back in Virginia, but seldom more than that.

Going on patrol did have some familiar elements to it; he and his companions crawled instead of walking, and nobody had a cigar or a pipe in his mouth. But it was also vastly different from what it had been back in the Roanoke valley. For one thing, some of the prairie and farmland north of Duncan hadn’t been cratered to a faretheewell.

For another…“Doesn’t stink so bad,” Bartlett said in some surprise.

“You haven’t got fourteen dead bodies on every foot of ground. Back in Virginia, seemed like you couldn’t set your hand down without sticking it into a piece of somebody and bringing it back all covered with maggots.”

“I’ve done that,” said Napoleon Dibble, one of the privates in the squad. “Puked my guts out, too, I tell you.”

“I puked my guts out, too, the first time,” Bartlett agreed. But it wasn’t quite agreement, not down deep. By the way Nap Dibble talked, he’d done it once. Reggie had lost track of how many times he’d known that oozy, yielding sensation and the sudden, stinking rush of corruption that went with it. By the time the damnyankees captured him, having it happen again hadn’t been worth anything more than a mild oath.

Something swooped out of the black sky and came down with a thump and a scrabble only a few yards away. Hissing an alarm, Reggie swung his rifle that way. To his amazement, Sergeant Hairston laughed at him. “Ain’t nothin’ but an owl droppin’ on a mouse, Bartlett. Don’t they got no owls up on the Roanoke front?”

“I don’t hardly remember seeing any,” Reggie answered. “They’ve got buzzards, and they’ve got crows, and they’ve got rats. Don’t hardly remember seeing mice—rats ran ’em out, I guess. Hated those bastards. They’d sit up on their haunches and look at you with those beady little black eyes, and you’d know what they’d been eating, and you’d know they were figuring they’d eat you next.” Napoleon Dibble made a disgusted noise. Ignoring him, Bartlett finished, “The one good thing about when the Yankees would throw gas at us was that it’d shift the rats—for a little while.”

“Gas,” Hairston said thoughtfully. “Haven’t seen that more than a time or two out here. Haven’t missed it any, neither, and that’s a fact. You run up against any of those what-do-you-call-’ems—barrels?”

“No, I’ve just heard about those, and seen ’em on a train after I got out of the Yankee camp,” Bartlett answered. “They hadn’t started using them by the time I got captured. They have ’em out here?”

“Ain’t seen any yet,” the sergeant said. “Like I told you, this is the ass end of the war. Those armored cars, now, I’ve seen some of those, but a trench’ll make an armored car say uncle.”

“Don’t like ’em anyways,” Nap Dibble said, to which the other members of the squad added emphatic if low-voiced agreement.

Not too far away—farther than the owl that had frightened Reggie, but not all that much—something started screaming. He froze. Was it a wounded man? A crazy man? A woman having a baby right out in the middle of no-man's-land? "Coyote," Sergeant Hairston explained laconically. "Scares you out of a year's growth the first time you hear one, don't it?"

"Lord, yes." Reggie knew his voice was shaky. His heart pounded too fast for him to feel more than mildly embarrassed. Crazy coyotes were something he hadn't had to worry about back on the Roanoke front.

And then, from up ahead, he heard a noise he did recognize: the metallic click of a bayonet against a rock. He stiffened and stared around for the nearest shell hole into which to dive. The other members of the patrol looked around, too, but not with the tight-lipped intensity they would have shown back in Virginia. Softly, Pete Hairston called, "That you, Toohey?"

"Yeah, it's me. Who the hell else is it gonna be?" A Yankee voice came floating out of the night. The accent was different from the one Ralph Briggs had tried to get Reggie to learn, but it wasn't like anything that had ever been heard in the CSA. Toohey went on, "Your damn artillery don't ease up, you're gonna run into a patrol where the sergeant don't feel like doin' any business 'cept shootin' you Rebs."

"Chance we take in this here line o' work," Hairston answered. "You got what you said you was gonna have?"

"Sure as hell do." Something in a jug sloshed suggestively. Toohey went on, "What about youse guys?"

Several of the men in Hairston's squad passed the sergeant their tobacco pouches. He went forward by himself and exchanged a few low-voiced words with the U.S. soldiers. When he came back, he didn't have the tobacco any more, but he was carrying the jug.

The Yanks withdrew. They were pretty quiet, but not quiet enough to have kept star shells from going up on the Roanoke front and machine guns and mortars from chasing them back to their lines. Things *were* different out here. "Is that what I think it is, there in the jug?" Bartlett asked, pointing.

"Sure as hell is," Hairston answered. "Hard to get popskull around these parts. All sorts of Indians here in Sequoyah, and they all got chiefs that hate the stuff. So what we do is, we swap smokes for it

with the damnyankees: tobacco they got is so bad, it's a cryin' shame."

Napoleon Dibble added, "We got to fight the sons of bitches, sure, but that don't mean we can't do a swap every now and then when we ain't fightin'. Won't change how the war turns out, one way or t'other." He laughed a loud, senseless laugh; Reggie didn't think he was very bright.

"I suppose you're right," Reggie said slowly. "But what does Lieutenant Nicoll—is that his name?—think about it?"

Hairston stared at him. The whites of the sergeant's eyes glittered in the starlight. "You out of your mind, Bartlett? Who the devil you think set this deal up in the first place?"

Reggie didn't say anything. He couldn't think of anything to say. All he could do was try to figure out exactly what they thought the war was all about out here in the west.

"Here they come!" Chester Martin threw himself into a shelter dug into the forward wall of the trench a split second before the Confederate shells started landing. The earth shook. Fragments hissed through the air. He sniffed anxiously, wondering whether the Rebs were throwing gas and he needed to pull his mask on over his head. He didn't think so.

He wasn't the only one in the shelter. He was lying on top of Specs Peterson in a position that would have been a hell of a lot more enjoyable had Specs been a perfumed whore instead of a bad-tempered private who hadn't been anywhere near soap and water any time lately.

"They've been shellin'us like bastards the past couple weeks," Peterson bawled in his ear—not much, as sweet nothings went.

"Yeah, they—oof!" Martin's rejoinder was rudely abridged when somebody dove in on top of him, making him the squashed meat in a three-man sandwich. Peterson, in the role of the lower piece of bread, didn't much care for it, either. Everybody thrashed around till nobody was kneeing anybody too badly, at which point two more soldiers came scrambling into the hole in the ground. It couldn't hold five men, but it did.

"Amazing how you can pack these shelters when it's a choice

between packing ’em and getting blown to cat’s meat out there,” said Corporal Paul Andersen, one of the latest arrivals.

“Yeah,” Martin said again. “Now what we got to do is, we got to synchronize our breathing. You know how the officers are always synchronizing their watches when we go over the top. If we all breathe in and out at the same time, maybe we all really can squeeze in here.”

“Hell, maybe the Rebs’ll drop a big one right on top of us,” Specs Peterson said. “Then we won’t have to worry about breathing at all no more.” Martin and Andersen stuck elbows in him, which had the twin virtues of giving them more room and making him shut up.

Martin took advantage of the extra room to draw a deep breath. “Like I was saying before half the division jumped on me, I figure the reason the Rebs are shelling us so hard is on account of they ain’t got no barrels. They’ve moved a hell of a lot of artillery forward to shoot at the ones we got when they come up—and to make life miserable for us poor bastards in between times.”

“Makes sense, Sarge,” Andersen said. “Wish it didn’t, but it does.” A big shell, a six-incher or maybe even an eight-, did land almost on top of the shelter then. Dirt rained down between the boards holding up the roof; some of the boards themselves cracked, with noises like rifle shots. That sent more dirt spilling down on the soldiers.

Can I claw my way out if I get buried? Martin wondered. Even inside the shelter, shielded from the worst of the blast, he felt his lungs trying to crawl out through his nose. Get too close to a big one and the blast would kill you without leaving a mark on your body.

With commendable aplomb, Andersen picked up where he’d left off: “We came up with the barrels, I thought that first morning we were going to win the war then and there. But even if the Rebs don’t have any, they’ve sure as hell figured out how to fight ’em. Same with gas earlier.”

“You notice, though,” Peterson said, “the Rebs ain’t makin’ many attacks these days, not like they were doin’ before we made it over to this side o’ the Roanoke. Costs us more when we got to go to them instead of the other way round.”

“We got what we came for,” Martin said. “We got the iron mines. ’Course, we can’t use ’em much, because their long-range guns still reach most of ’em. And we got the railroad, too. ’Course, they’ve

already built new track further east and slid around the part of the valley we took away from ’em.”

“Ain’t it great when we’re winnin’ the damn war?” Andersen said.

That drew a profane chorus from the men stuffed into the shelter with him. A few minutes later, the Confederate barrage abruptly stopped. It didn’t do anything to ease Chester Martin’s mind. Sometimes the Rebs would really stop. Sometimes they’d stop long enough for people to come out of their shelters and then start up again to catch them in the open. And sometimes, no matter what Specs Peterson said, they’d send raiders over the top, hoping the U.S. soldiers would stay huddled in the bomb-proofs. What to do? For this shelter, it was his call. He was the sergeant here.

“Out!” he shouted. “They start shelling again, we jump back in.”

People spilled out. By the way things worked, Martin was the next to last one to make it out into the trench. Every muscle in his body twanged with tension. If the Rebs were going to open up again, it would be right about…now. When the moment passed without fresh incoming shells, he breathed a little easier.

Back behind the U.S. lines, artillery came to life, answering the Confederate barrage. “Let the big guns shoot at the big guns,” Paul Andersen said. “Long as they leave me alone, I don’t care, and that’s the God’s truth.”

“Amen.” Chester looked around the trenches and sighed. “Got us some spadework to do, looks like to me.” High explosive and steel and brass had had their way with the landscape, blowing big holes in the trenches, knocking down stretches of parapet and parados, and incidentally knocking a couple of vital machine-gun positions topsy-turvy.

Here and there, up and down the line, wounded men were shouting—some wounded men were screaming—for stretcher-bearers. Heading toward one of those shouting men, Martin rounded the corner of a firebay, stepped into a traverse, and was confronted by a man’s leg, or that portion of it from about the middle of the shin downward, still standing erect, foot in shoe, the rest of the man nowhere to be seen. A little blood—only a little—ran down from the wound to streak the puttee.

He’d seen too much, these past nearly two years. Put a man in a place where he grew acquainted with horror every day, and it ceases

to be horrible for him. It becomes part of the landscape, as unremarkable as a dandelion puffball. He reached out with his own foot and kicked the fragment of humanity against the traverse wall so no one would stumble over it.

“Poor bastard,” Paul Andersen said from behind him. “Wonder who he was.”

“Don’t know,” Martin answered. “Whoever he was, he never knew what hit him. Hell of a lot of worse ways to go than that, and Jesus, ain’t we seen most of ’em?” About then, by the noise, a couple of other men came on the wounded soldier for whom they’d been heading. He’d found one of those worse ways.

Andersen sighed. “Yeah,” he said, and stood against the wall, a few feet away from the severed foot, to relieve himself. “Sorry,” he muttered as he buttoned his fly. “Didn’t feel like holding it till I got to the latrine. Damn shelling probably blew shit all over the place, anyway.”

“I didn’t say anything,” Chester Martin told him. “You got any makings, Paul? I’m plumb out.”

“Yeah, I got some.” The corporal passed him his tobacco pouch.

He rolled a cigarette in a scrap of newspaper, pulled out a brass lighter, flicked the wheel, and got the smoke going. “Ahh, thanks,” he said after a long drag. “Hits the spot.” He looked around. “Sort of feels the way it does after a big rainstorm, you know what I mean? Peaceful-like.”

“Yeah,” Andersen said again, quite unself-consciously. A couple of rifle shots rang out, but they were three, four hundred yards away: nothing to worry about. “Might as well finish taking stock of what they did to us this time.”

All things considered, the company had got off lucky. Only a couple of men had died, and most of the wounds were home-towners, not the sort where the fellow who’d taken them begged you to shoot him and put him out of his anguish, and where, if you did, nobody ever said a word about it to you afterwards. Martin had seen his share of wounds like that; talking with the other soldiers in his squad, he said, “You see one like that, it’s your share for a lifetime and then some.”

“Yeah.” Specs Peterson laughed. “You want to hear something stupid, Sarge? Back before the war started, I was thinkin’ about lettin’

my beard grow out, on account of I couldn't stand the sight of blood when I nicked myself with a razor."

"That's pretty stupid, all right," Martin agreed, which made Specs glare at him in what might have been mock anger and might have been real. He went on, "You too cheap to pay a barber to do it for you? Those boys, they make damn sure they don't cut you."

"Too cheap, hell," Peterson came back. "Where you from, Sarge?"

"Toledo," Martin answered. "You know that."

"Yeah, you're right. I forgot," Peterson said. "All right, Toledo, that's the big city. Me, I'm off a farm in the western part of Nebraska. The barber in the little country town, he was so drunk all the time, it's a wonder he never cut anybody's throat. And I was ten miles outside of town, and we ain't never gonna have the money for a flivver. So how the hell am I supposed to get a barber to shave me?"

"Damned if I know," Martin answered. "So blood doesn't bother you any more, that right?"

Specs Peterson snorted. "What do you think?"

Martin inspected him. He was even filthier than he had been before the dive into the shelter, and had unkempt stubble sprouting on cheeks and chin. Frowning sadly, Martin said, "So why the hell haven't you shaved any time lately?"

"I was going to this morning, Sarge, honest, but the Rebs started shelling us." Behind his steel-rimmed spectacles, Peterson raised an eyebrow. "You may have noticed."

"Oh, yeah." Martin snapped his fingers. "You know, I knew something was goin' on then, but I couldn't quite remember what." Paul Andersen threw a clod of dirt at him. In the trenches, though, it passed for wit.

The *Dakota* steamed out of Pearl Harbor. Standing on deck, Sam Carsten said, "You know somethin', Vic? This ship puts me in mind of the old joke about the three-legged dog. The wonder is, she goes at all."

"Yeah, well, I ain't gonna argue with you, you know what I'm

saying?" Vic Crosetti answered, scratching his hairy arm. "I'll tell you something else, too. She's as ugly as a three-legged dog right now."

"Yeah," Sam agreed, mournful for a couple of reasons. For one thing, if he'd scratched himself half as hard as Crosetti was doing, he'd have drawn blood from his poor, sunburned hide. For another, the *Dakota* really *was* ugly these days. "What she's really like is a guy who took one in the trenches and he ends up with a steel plate in his head."

"Got enough steel plates to eat a whole steel dinner off of," Crosetti said, whereupon Carsten made as if to pick him up and fling him over the rail.

Bad pun aside, though, the description was accurate enough. Not all the damage the *Dakota* had taken in the Battle of the Three Navies was repaired; parties were still patching, strengthening, refurbishing. Some of the damage wouldn't be fixed, probably, till the war was over. But the battleship could make twenty knots and fight, and the Japanese and the British hadn't disappeared off the face of the earth. Ugly or not, jury-rigged or not, she was going back out on patrol.

"I just hope the steering holds us," Carsten said.

Vic Crosseti's bushy eyebrows went up and down. "Why the hell do you want that? Didn't you think it was fun, charging the whole damn British fleet all by ourselves? Nobody else had the balls to try anything like that. The other guys, they stayed in line like good little boys and girls. You want to stand out from the crowd, is what you want to do."

"When they shoot you if you stand out, it's not as bully as it would be otherwise," Carsten said. Crosetti laughed. Then he got busy in a hurry, swiping a rag against the nearest stretch of painted metal. Sam imitated him without conscious thought. If somebody near you started working for no obvious reason, he'd spotted an officer you hadn't.

Commander Grady—the fat stripe where a thin one had been before got sewn onto his cuff after the Battle of the Three Navies—said, "Never mind the playacting, Carsten." He sounded amused; as sailors knew the nasty ways in which officers' minds worked, so officers had some clues about how sailors operated. Grady went on, "You come with me. I've got some real work for you."

"Aye aye, sir," Sam answered. As he followed the commander of the starboard secondary armament, he knew without turning his head when Vic Crosetti would put down the rag and light himself a smoke.

He also knew the little dago would be grinning like a monkey, because Sam had had to go do something real while he got to stand around a little longer.

Grady said, “We’re trying to get the number-four sponson into good enough shape so we can fire the gun if we have to.”

“Yes, sir,” Carsten said doubtfully. The number-four sponson had taken a hit from somebody’s secondary armament, whether British or Japanese nobody knew—nobody had been taking notes, and the shell hadn’t left a *carte de visite*: except for smashing the sponson to hell and gone, that is. Nobody had come out of there alive. Thinking about it gave Sam the horrors. It could have been the number-one sponson, easy as not.

“I think they can do it,” Grady said. “In fact, they damn near *have* done it. But the gun mount still isn’t quite right, and there’s not a lot of room in there, what with all the other repairs they’ve had to make. I want somebody familiar with a sponson as it’s supposed to be to pitch in with some good advice for them.”

“Yes, sir,” Sam said again. “Uh, sir, so you know, ‘Cap’n’ Kidde has forgotten more about sponsons than I’ll ever know.”

“He’s still helping with the rebuilding of the number-two on the port side. That got it worse than this one. He suggested you for the duty.”

“All right, sir,” Carsten answered. He didn’t know whether Kidde was mad at him and wanted to keep him hopping or whether the gunner’s mate was putting him in a spot where he could shine for the higher-ups. A little of both, maybe: that was “Cap’n” Kidde’s way. If he did this right, he’d look good where looking good could really help him. If he fouled up, he’d pay for it.

He ducked through the hatchway. Commander Grady didn’t follow; he had other fish to fry. Even the bulkhead around the hatchway showed the damage the sponson had taken. It was a mass of patches and welds, none of them smoothed down or painted over. There might be time for that later. There hadn’t been time for it yet.

Inside, the sponson was even more crowded than it had been when the gun crew filled it during the Battle of the Three Navies. A bunch of men in dungarees turned their heads to stare at Sam. One of them said, “You must be the guy Commander Grady was talking about.”

“Yeah, I’m Sam Carsten, loader on the number-one gun, this side.” Carsten pointed toward the bow.

“Good.” The fellow in dungarees nodded. “Then you know how one of these damn things goes when it’s working right.” He jabbed a thumb at his own chest. “Pleased to meetcha, Sam, by the way. I’m Lou Stein. These here lugs are Dave and Mordecai and Bismarck and Steve and Cal and Frank and Herman.”

Sam spent the next couple of minutes shaking hands and wondering how the hell he was going to keep the repair crew straight in his head. The only one he knew he wouldn’t forget was Mordecai, who’d lost a couple of fingers in some kind of accident and whose handshake was strange because of it. He couldn’t have had any trouble with tools, though, or they wouldn’t have let him do his job.

At the same time as Sam was sizing up the repair crew, he was also sizing up the sponson. It was even more cramped than it would have been otherwise, because they’d welded steel plates inside the inner curve to cover up the damage the entering shell had done. They hadn’t covered quite all of it. Above the new steel, a dark, reddish brown stain still marked the inside of the armor plate. Carsten tried not to look at it. It might easily have come from a loader.

He shook himself. *Got to get down to business,* he thought. “Commander Grady said you were having some kind of trouble in here—I mean, besides all this stuff.” He waved at the roughly welded steel slabs. He wouldn’t have wanted to serve this gun—might as well put toilet paper between him and enemy gunfire as that thin metal. But then again, the armor plate over it didn’t look to have done the best job of protecting the sailors in here, either.

Mordecai said, “Damn gun won’t traverse the way it’s supposed to. It gets all herky-jerky about a third of the way through the arc. Here, I’ll show you.”

He demonstrated. Sure as hell, there was one point at which the five-inch gun would not hold a target steadily. “That’s pretty peculiar, all right,” Carsten agreed. “Acts like there’s a kink in the hydraulic line some kind of way, don’t it?”

“That’s what we figured, too,” Lou Stein said. “But if there is, we sure as hell ain’t been able to find it. Those things are armored, after all; they shouldn’t kink.”

“If I hadn’t done all the things I shouldn’t do, my mama would be a

happier lady today," Sam answered, which made the repair crew laugh. He went on, "Besides, in this mess, how the devil can you tell which way is up, anyhow?" He waved his hand. The plate on the inner curve of the armor wasn't the only new, raw repair, not by a long shot it wasn't. Other rectangular plates of metal covered damage to the roof and to the deck.

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he wondered if this crew had done all that quick, rough work. If they had, he'd just stuck his foot in his face. But Mordecai said, "Tell me about it, why don't you?"

"Let me go under there and take a look," Carsten said. "Got a flashlight I can borrow?"

Stein wore one on his belt. Hiram Kidde would have wanted one like it; it had the size and heft to make a hell of a billy club. The door that let Sam down below into the mechanism that moved the gun worked stiffly; the metal in which it was set had been bent and imperfectly straightened.

With the door open so he could call to the repair crew above, he said, "Run it through there, would you?" They did. He shined the flashlight on as much of the hydraulic line as he could see. "Damn. Doesn't look like anything wrong here."

"That's what we thought," Mordecai answered. "You're doing everything exactly the way we did it."

"Am I? All right." Stubbornly, Carsten traced the hydraulic line from the gun back to where it ran behind the steel door through which he'd come. Behind the door…He whistled tunelessly between his teeth. Wondering if Lou or Bismarck or any of them had done it before him, he shut the door.

He whistled again, louder. A peeled-back strip of steel from the shell hit had been pushed between two links of the flexible armor the hydraulic line wore. You couldn't see that from above, because the hasty repairs to the deck hid it. And you might not be able to see it when you came down here, either, because you literally shut the door on it. But when the gun moved to that particular position, the line moved and the steel pinched off the flow of hydraulic fluid.

"Lucky it never pierced the hose in the armor," Sam muttered. He opened the door again. "Lou, you want to come down here and take a look at this?"

“I’ll be a son of a bitch,” Lou Stein said when Carsten showed him what he’d found. “Jeez, I wish it *had* pierced the line. Then we would have found out what the hell was wrong. Well, we can fix it, anyhow.”

A cutting torch made short work of the offending metal. Mordecai used it with as much assurance as if he’d had ten fingers, not eight. He said, “Sam, we get back to Pearl, everybody on this-here repair crew will buy you a beer. This one’s been makin’ us crazy for a while, let me tell you. Look *behind* the goddamn door. What do they call it? Hiding in plain sight?”

“Yeah.” Sam chuckled. “Hell, any sailor who doesn’t want to work knows how to do that.” He and Mordecai grinned at each other.

XIII

“What’s the matter, Ma?” Edna Semphroch asked. “Lord, you ought to be dancing out in the street at how bully things are, but you’ve done nothing but mope the past month.” She dried a last cup and set it in the cupboard. “We’ve got more money than I ever thought I’d see in all my born days, and we haven’t seen hide nor hair of that awful Bill Reach since the Rebs hauled him off. I don’t miss him, neither. He gave me the horrors.” She shuddered.

“I don’t miss him, either,” Nellie Semphroch answered. She was drying silverware, and threw a fork into the drawer with unnecessary violence. “I wish to God I’d never set eyes on him.”

She waited for Edna to start prying again about who Reach was, who he had been, and what he’d meant to her. She’d fended off those questions for months now. What Edna would learn if she got the true answer would not only make her wilder, it would also probably make her despise Nellie.

But, for once, Edna took a different tack tonight. She said, “Is Mr. Jacobs across the street all right? You ain’t been over there for a while now, and you were going every few days for a long time.”

If Edna had noticed that, had some alert Confederate intelligence officer noticed it, too? Nellie grimaced; she wondered if she even cared. She dried a teaspoon. “As far as I know, he’s fine,” she answered, doing her best to sound unconcerned, indifferent.

Edna looked at her out of the corner of her eye. “Were you sweet on him, Ma?” she asked in a tone that invited woman-to-woman confidences. “Is that what it is? Were you sweet on him and you had a quarrel?”

“We’ve never had a quarrel,” Nellie snapped, all pretense of indifference vanishing before she could try to keep it. The irony was that she *had* discovered she was sweet on Hal Jacobs—and he on her—bare moments before she discovered he was working for Bill Reach, whom she still loathed with the deep and abiding loathing that clung to every part of her life before she’d met Edna’s father.

Too clever for her own good, Edna noticed the hot denial at once, both for what it said and for what it didn’t. “It’s all right, Ma, it really is,” she said tolerantly. “You know I wouldn’t mind if you found somebody. Pa’s been dead so long, I don’t hardly remember him anyways. And Mr. Jacobs seems nice enough, even if—” She stopped. “He seems nice enough.”

Even if he’s old and not very handsome. Nellie could read between the lines, too. She sighed. Edna wanted license for herself, and was consistent enough, maybe even generous enough, to grant the same license to everyone else, even to her mother. That Nellie might not want it never occurred to her. But then, she didn’t know Nellie had had far too much license far too young. Nellie hoped she would never find out.

“You really ought to make up with him, Ma,” Edna said. “I mean—” She stopped again. This time, she didn’t amend anything. She didn’t need to amend anything. Nellie could figure out what she meant. *You’re not getting any younger. You’re not going to catch anything better.*

“Maybe I will,” Nellie said with another sigh. She hadn’t brought Hal Jacobs any information gleaned at the coffeehouse since she found out to whom he’d been giving it. One reason—one big reason—the place flourished as it did was that his connections helped it get food and drink hard to come by in hungry, Confederate-occupied Washington, D.C. If she didn’t do anything for him, why should he do anything for her?

I’ll do this for you, and you’ll pay me off, Nellie thought. How was that different from the sweaty bargains she’d made in little, narrow rooms back when she was too much younger than Edna? “Damned if I know,” she muttered.

“What did you say, Ma?” Edna asked.

“Nothing.” The coffeehouse had become so popular with the Rebels, they’d probably help keep her in supplies if the shoemaker across the street didn’t. But that felt like an illicit bargain, too. They hadn’t been

the kindest nor the gentlest occupiers, and a good many of them frequented her place for no better reason than the hope of seducing Edna. Nellie was sure of that, too.

And, to make matters worse, who could guess how long the Confederates were going to hold on to Washington? If she aligned herself with them now, what would the reckoning be when the United States reclaimed their capital? She thought that *was* going to happen, and perhaps not in the indefinite future. Oh, the Confederates bragged about and made much of what a submersible of theirs had done in the Chesapeake Bay, but was that anything more than a pinprick when you measured it against the hammering U.S. forces were giving the Rebs in Maryland? She didn't think so.

"You ought to go over there, Ma," Edna said. "He's a nice man."

"Tomorrow." Nellie didn't often yield an argument to her daughter, but most of their arguments were about what Edna was doing, not about what she was doing herself. She turned off the gaslight in the kitchen. "It's late. Let's go on up to bed."

The next morning, she did cross the street to Mr. Jacobs'shop. Dirt and gravel had been shoveled into the hole the U.S. bomb made in the street; the Rebs weren't going to be bothered with proper pavement. She kicked at the gravel. Watching the little stones spin away from her shoe, she wished she could kick a lot more things.

It was early. She tried the doorknob anyway. She wasn't surprised when it turned in her hand. Hal Jacobs didn't sleep late. The bell above the door chimed. The shoemaker stood behind the counter, a hammer in his hand. His eyes widened a little beneath bushy eyebrows. His smile showed teeth not too bad, not too good. "Hello," he said, and then, more warily, "Widow Semphroch."

That he didn't use her Christian name said he'd noticed how she'd not been in lately. "You can still call me Nellie, Hal," she said.

He nodded. "Good morning, Nellie," he said. He coughed a couple of times. "I was afraid I had offended you the last time you were here."

Afraid he'd offended her by kissing her, she meant. "No, that's all right," she answered. As she had with Edna, she spoke before she'd fully figured out what she should have said. Claiming offense would have given her the perfect excuse for having avoided him. Now she couldn't use it. She found a question of her own: "What have you

heard about Bill Reach?”

He made a face. “In prison. In a Confederate prison as a burglar. This had to do with you, didn’t it?” She found she didn’t like him scowling at her. But after a moment, he went on, “But you knew him some time ago, is that not true?” He looked at her with mixed kindness and suspicion.

“I kind of knew him, yes, you might say so.” Nellie bit her lip. She wouldn’t have recognized Reach now, any more than she would have recognized any of the other men she’d kind of known. But he’d recognized her, and presumed on old…acquaintance. “I thought he was just a tramp. And I thought—” But she couldn’t say that.

“You thought, perhaps, he did not want to treat you as a lady should be treated,” Jacobs said. Nellie nodded, grateful for the graceful phrase. The cobbler sighed. “He did have an eye for pretty women. I sometimes worried it would get him in trouble. I did not think it would get him into this sort of trouble.”

“I wish to heaven he’d left me alone,” Nellie said, which was nothing but the truth. “Why he had to come around after all these years—”

“No one is perfect.” Hal Jacobs tugged at a stray curl of gray hair that had slid over the top of one ear. “You really must dislike him very much.”

“Why do you say that?” Nellie asked, in lieu of screaming, *I hated him. I still hate him the same way I hate all the other men who used me, and all the men who want to use Edna, too.*

“Because if you were not embarrassed to come here for what we did, the only other reason you would not come here—the only other reason I can think of, anyhow—is that you dislike Bill Reach.”

“Well, yes, that probably had something to do with it,” Nellie admitted. “If Bill Reach was an angel, I’d think hard about rooting for the devil.”

Hal Jacobs looked distressed. “But you must not say this! Without him, the United States would not know half of what we’ve learned of the doings of the enemy from the Atlantic to the mountains.”

“Without *me*, you wouldn’t know half of that stuff,” Nellie returned with no small pride.

“I admit it,” Jacobs said. “I have been very worried here. I—”

He had to break off then, because a Confederate corporal brought in a marching boot with a broken heel. “Kin I have it this afternoon?” he drawled. “We-uns is a-movin’ out of here tomorrow.”

“I’ll have it for you, sir, I promise. By two o’clock.” Jacobs was, no doubt, noting the regimental number and state abbreviation the corporal wore on his collar. Word that that regiment was on the move might well head for Philadelphia before this afternoon. Confirming that, the shoemaker waited till the soldier was gone and then said, “As you see, Wid—Nellie, I have my own sources of information.”

“Yes, I see that,” she said. “And I see you’re managing to use ’em without having anything to do with Bill Reach. As far as I’m concerned, you can go right on doing that. If he rots in jail, I won’t shed a tear.”

“What did he do to you, to make you hate him so?” Jacobs asked. Nellie set her jaw and said nothing. The shoemaker let out a long, sad sigh. “Whatever it was, he does not deserve these feelings you have about him. He kept track of everything, sorted it out, put pieces of the puzzle together…If any one man kept the Rebs from reaching the Delaware and bombarding Philadelphia, he is the one.”

“A few hundred thousand soldiers had something to do with it, too, I think,” Nellie answered tartly. She looked down at the dingy rug on the dingy floor of the shoemaker’s shop. “Most important thing I’ve heard in the past week is that the Rebs think they’re going to be getting barrels—or maybe plans for barrels, I’m not sure which—from England sometime soon. I think they’re talking about barrels, anyway. Sometimes they call ’em tanks instead.”

“That’s what the English call them,” Jacobs said. “Worth knowing. I suppose we should have expected as much.” He did not sound very surprised or very interested. Maybe he wasn’t. Maybe he just didn’t want her to know how important her information was. Then he inclined his head in what was almost a bow, part of the old-time courtliness she enjoyed with him. “I hope you will come in again on such matters. And if you wish to come in for other reasons, I want you to know I am always glad to see you.”

Nellie felt her cheeks grow hot. He meant he wanted to kiss her again. She’d liked it when he’d kissed her before. She wasn’t used to being kissed any more, or to enjoying it when she was. He might even

have meant he wanted to do more than kiss her. The idea didn't disgust her as much as she thought it should.

Flustered, she said, "We'll have to see," and hurried out of there as fast as she could go.

A Confederate major stood outside the door to the coffeehouse. "Ah, here you are," he said, tipping his cap. "I looked inside, but I didn't see anyone."

"That's odd." Nellie opened the door for him. The bell jingled merrily. "Please, sir, come in. My daughter should be here." She raised her voice: "Edna!"

"Coming, Ma!" Edna called from upstairs, and came down as fast as anyone could have wanted.

"Get the major here his coffee and whatever else he wants," Nellie said severely. "If we're open for business, I want you down here ready to work. We lose customers if you aren't."

"Yes, Ma. I'm sorry, Ma." Edna hurried over to the Rebel. "What can I get for you today, sir?"

"Cup of coffee and a fried-egg sandwich," the major answered. To Nellie, he added, "It's all right, ma'am. Don't you worry about it."

"I do worry about it," Nellie said, "and it's not all right." But she let it drop; Edna had the coffee on the table for the major in jig time, and was frying eggs and slicing bread with practiced efficiency.

The bell jingled again. A couple of lieutenants came in. One of them leered disgracefully at Edna. Nellie made a point of serving that pair herself. Breakfast business was slower than usual, though. After an hour or so had gone by, the place was for the moment empty.

Nellie took advantage of that for a trip to the bathroom. When she came out, Edna was setting a cup of coffee in front of Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid. The big lieutenant nodded to Nellie. "Morning, ma'am," he said, polite as usual.

"Good morning," she answered coolly. She wished he wouldn't come around here. He wanted to do more than leer at Edna; he'd made that plain. And she, young and foolish as she was, wanted to let him. Nellie shook her head. That wouldn't happen, not if she had anything to do with it.

Suddenly, she stiffened. She hadn't heard the doorbell ring. She should have heard it; the bathroom door was thin. She usually heard customers come in when she was in there. If she hadn't…if she hadn't, Edna had been upstairs before, and probably Kincaid had, too. Did Edna look smug?

She did. Without a doubt, she did. She looked like a cat that had fallen into a pitcher of cream. And Lieutenant Kincaid…As always, his eyes followed Edna. Still, that gaze was different now. He didn't look as if he wondered and dreamt of what she was like under her clothes. He looked as if he knew.

Nellie's hands balled into fists. Edna saw that, and laughed silently. Nellie wanted to throw a cup at her daughter. But what could she do? She couldn't prove a thing. Edna had made sure of that. All in a rush, for the first time in her life, Nellie felt old.

Arthur McGregor came in from the fields. The sun was at last dipping toward the northwestern horizon. He'd been up since it rose, or a little before. Manitoba summer days were long. He thanked God for that. Otherwise, he wouldn't even have come close to doing all the things he had to do if he wanted to bring in a crop. He couldn't do them all, not now. With the long days, he could come close.

As he walked in, Julia came out of the barn. "I've taken care of the livestock, Pa," she said. She was thirteen now, shooting up fast as a weed, tall as her mother or maybe even taller. He shook his head in bemusement. She wasn't a little girl any more. Where had the time gone?

"That's good," he told her. "That's very good. One more thing I don't have to worry about, and I've got plenty."

"I know," she answered seriously—she'd always been serious, no matter how little. McGregor sometimes thought she'd used up all the seriousness in the family, so that her sister Mary ended up with none. Julia went on, "I know I can't do as much as Alexander could, but I'm doing all I can."

"I know you are," her father told her. The whole family was doing all it could. In spite of themselves, his wide shoulders slumped. When the damned Americans had arrested Alexander, he'd known at once how big a hole it would leave in the family. What he'd realized only

gradually was how big a hole not having his son left in the daily routine of the farm.

He made himself straighten. You did what you had to do, or as much of it as you could possibly do. His nostrils twitched. “Whatever Ma’s cooking in there, it sure smells good.”

“Chicken stew,” Julia said.

McGregor’s eyes went to the chopping block between the barn and the house. The stains on it were fresh, and the hatchet stood at an angle different from the way it had this morning. He smiled and nodded at his older daughter. “Good,” he said. “Sticks to the ribs.”

The inside of the farmhouse, as always, was spotless, immaculate. McGregor wondered how Maude managed to keep it that way. She’d taken on extra work, too, with Alexander gone. The weeding in the potato patch, for instance, was in her hands, because no one else had time for it.

And here came Mary, a rag in her hand, a look of fierce concentration on her face, the tip of her tongue peeking out of the corner of her mouth. Whenever she saw dust on anything, she pounced on it like a kitten pouncing on a cricket—and looked to be enjoying herself like a kitten, too.

“Pa!” she said indignantly. “You didn’t wipe your feet very well.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, and meant it. Maude would have given him a hard time about that, too. He went back out and did it better. Seeing that he’d satisfied Mary—who would have let him know if he hadn’t—he walked past her into the kitchen.

His wife looked up from the stew she was stirring. “You look worn to a nub,” she said, worry in her voice.

“So do you,” Arthur McGregor answered. They smiled at each other, wanly. He poured water from a pitcher over his hands and splashed some onto his face. Maude handed him a towel with which to dry himself. That was all the washing he did. Finding time for a bath even once a week wasn’t easy.

“Supper soon,” Maude said.

“Good.” Walking in from the wheatfields, McGregor had thought he was too tired to be hungry. The first whiff of stew convinced him

otherwise. He was ravenous as a wolf, and his stomach, empty since dinner long, long before, was growling like one, too.

He sat down in a chair in the front room to wait, and pulled out a copy of *Ivanhoe* with which to spend those few minutes: the first rest he'd had since dinner, too. The book was old, the binding starting to work loose from the pages. It had come out here with him from Ontario, and felt more like a companion than a novel. He sighed. He'd found himself in a world harsher and more merciless than the one Sir Walter Scott's hero knew.

Over the stew, Maude said, "Biddy Knight came by in the buggy this afternoon, while you were out working."

"Did she?" McGregor said. "I hope there weren't any Americans on the road to see her." Not least because he'd known Biddy's son, Alexander was in the Rosenfeld gaol now. But Biddy had a harder burden than that to bear: her boy was dead, executed by Yankee bullets. "What did she want?"

"Social call," his wife answered lightly—too lightly. "Her husband would take it kindly if you dropped in on him one of these days."

"Don't know that I want to." McGregor, as usual, was blunt. "If the Americans know we visit those people, it won't do Alexander any good." Maude nodded. Julia looked angry—she'd been angry at the Americans since the day they invaded. For once, something got past Mary, who was playing with the wishbone.

But McGregor hadn't been so blunt as he might have been. He feared Jimmy Knight's father was cooking up some kind of scheme to hurt the Americans, and wanted him to be a part of it. He didn't aim to join any plots. However much he despised the United States and everything they stood for, U.S. soldiers could kill his son any time they chose. That was a powerful argument in favor of prudence.

When Maude said, "Maybe you're right," he just nodded. Whenever his wife and he saw things the same way, they weren't likely to be on the wrong track.

While the womenfolk washed dishes, he indulged himself in the luxury of a pipe. It wasn't much of a luxury, not with the vile U.S. tobacco Henry Gibbon had to stock these days, but it was better than nothing. McGregor sighed for lost Virginia and North Carolina leaf as he paged through *Ivanhoe*. Scott made war feel glorious, nothing like the squalid reality that had roared past the farm.

The kitchen went dark. Kerosene was in short supply these days, too; no lamp ever burned in an unoccupied room. “Let’s go outside, then upstairs to bed,” Maude said. Mary’s yawn was big as the world.

McGregor was the last to use the outhouse. By the time he got back in, his younger daughter was already snoring. “Saxons,” he muttered as he pulled off his boots. “Saxons in a country the Normans stole from them.”

“What are you talking about?” his wife said. But she was puzzled for only a moment. “Oh. That’s right. You’ve been reading *Ivanhoe* again.”

He nodded and undid his overalls. They were old, and hardly blue at all any more; the fabric, softened by many washings, conformed perfectly to the shape of his body. “Living in a land that had been theirs, and then somebody took it away. How did they stand it? How could they?”

Maude sighed. “You’re going to break your heart, Arthur, if you dwell on things you can’t do anything about. Getting Alexander home, we can do something about that. Maybe we can. I pray to God every night we can. But getting Canada back, that’s too big for the likes of us.”

“It shouldn’t be,” he declared. But half of that—more than half—was Sir Walter Scott speaking through him, and he was wise enough to understand as much.

If he hadn’t been, Maude would have nailed it down tight: “If you don’t think so, why didn’t you want to go see poor Jimmy Knight’s father? Sounds like he’s going to try to do something—”

“Stupid,” he finished for her. She nodded; he hadn’t meant it for a joke, and she hadn’t taken it for one. She blew out the lamp, plunging the bedroom into blackness. No moon, not tonight, and no town close by, either. Sometimes, when all the guns up at the front were going at once, that glow would flicker on the horizon: the Northern Lights of death. But the guns were quiet tonight, too, or as quiet as they ever got.

Still in his union suit, McGregor slid under the covers. Afterwards, he didn’t know whether he first reached for Maude or she for him. After being married so long, after working so hard every day, desire was a flame that guttered, and sometimes guttered low. But it had never quite gone out, and, like any guttering flame, sometimes flared high, too.

Neither one of them undressed. They were almost as formal with each other as they would have been with strangers. He kissed her carefully, knowing he hadn't had time to shave in the past couple of days, knowing also he would rasp her face raw if he wasn't careful.

His hand closed on her breast through the cotton nightshirt she wore. She sighed. He squeezed her nipple. It stiffened against the soft fabric. He did the same with her other breast. They were still firm after nursing three children—and, in any case, in the darkness she was always a bride and he a bridegroom ever so glad to be out of his uncomfortable fancy suit and the top hat he'd never had on a day of his life before or since.

He reached under the hem of the long nightshirt. Her legs slid apart for him. His hands were hard with endless labor, and she—she was softer there than anywhere else. Of themselves, her legs drifted wider. When her breath began to come short and quick, he stopped what he was doing and unbuttoned the union suit with fingers clumsy not only from work but from desire. He poised himself above her. The mattress rocked, ever so slightly. She was nodding, urging him to hurry, something she would never have done with words.

She gasped when he entered her, and soon shuddered beneath him. He went on, intent on what he was doing—and also too tired to be able to do it quickly. She began to gasp again, her arms tightened around his back, her hips moving no matter how unladylike motion at such times was. She let out a small, involuntary moan at about the same time joyous fire poured through him.

He rolled off her almost at once, and set his underwear to rights. "Good night," she said, turning onto her side to get ready to sleep.

"Good night," he answered. They always said that. He kept wondering if there shouldn't be something more. But if there was more, their bodies had said it. For a little while, he hadn't thought about anything, not even Alexander. But making love didn't make trouble go away; it just shoved the trouble to one side. He brooded, but not for long. Sleep shoved trouble to one side, too.

In the morning, though, the sun would rise. The trouble would still be there.

George Enos slapped at a mosquito. He killed it—he squashed it flat,

smearing red guts across his forearm. “That means it’s bitten somebody,” Wayne Pitchess said. “That’s blood in there.”

“Of course it’s bitten somebody, for God’s sake.” Enos rolled his eyes. “You think I squashed it because it was throwing pillows at me?”

The *Punishment* lay at anchor a few miles beyond Clarksville, Tennessee. George didn’t like lying at anchor. He looked to the south, to the hills below which the Cumberland flowed. Somewhere out there, the Rebs were liable to have a gun waiting to start throwing shells at the river monitor, and a moving target was harder to hit than a stationary one.

What worried him more than anything else was that monitors regularly tied up here: so regularly that the locals—the colored locals, anyhow—had run up a couple of shanties by the riverside to cater to Yankee sailors’ needs—or their desires, anyhow. If you were off duty, and if your commanding officer was in a good mood, you could row over to the shanties, eat fried chicken or roast pork, drink some horrible homemade rotgut that tasted as if it should have gone into a kerosene lamp instead of a human being, or get your ashes hauled in the crib next door.

George had eaten the food, which was pretty good. He’d drunk the whiskey, and awakened the next morning with a head that felt like the *Punishment*’s boiler at forced draft. He hadn’t laid his money down for any of the colored women, not yet. The sailors who had gone into the shabby little makeshift whorehouse came out with stories of how ugly the girls were. That hadn’t stopped a lot of them from going back.

That was another reason he wished the *Punishment* would go upstream or down. He didn’t want to be unfaithful to Sylvia, or the top part of his mind didn’t. But he’d been away from her and without a woman for a long time now. If he went over to one of those shacks for some pork ribs and had himself a glass or two of that godawful bad whiskey, maybe he wouldn’t care how ugly the whores were supposed to be or how much he missed Sylvia. Sometimes you just wanted to do it so badly, you…

He found himself fondling the curve of the water jacket on his machine gun as if it were Sylvia’s breast—or, for that matter, the breast of one of the colored women in that shack. He jerked his hand away from the green-gray painted iron as if it had become red-hot, or as if everyone on the monitor could see what was on his mind.

He went back to work, stripping and cleaning the machine gun with the same dogged persistence he might have shown trawling for haddock in the North Atlantic. He wished he were trawling for haddock in the North Atlantic, or would have wished it had the ocean not been full of warships and commerce raiders and submarines, all of which looked on a fishing boat as a tasty snack.

And keeping the machine gun in perfect order didn't only distract him from thoughts of Sylvia (though, when he thought on how he'd rubbed the cooling jacket, it hadn't distracted him much, had it?); it also made his coming through a fight alive more likely. He approved of that.

But, as the sun began to slide down the sky in the afternoon, three men made for one of the *Punishment*'s boats to improve their outlook on life. One of them called to George: "Come on, have a few with us."

The deck officer was standing close by. Moltke Donovan was a fresh-faced lieutenant who took his duties very seriously. One of those duties was keeping his men in top fighting trim, and that meant, every now and then, letting them go off on a toot. Lieutenant Kelly would probably have said no. His replacement smiled and said, "Go ahead, Enos. That machine gun's in better shape than when they tore it out of its crate."

"Yes, sir," George said, if not happily, then without sackcloth and ashes, too. He set down the rag, stuck the little screwdriver into a loop on his belt, and hurried for the boat.

As he clambered in, one of the other sailors said, "I know you got money in your pocket, on account of you were lucky last night."

"Lucky, hell," Enos said indignantly. "That was skill, Grover, nothing else but."

"Skill, my foot," Grover retorted. "Anybody who draws three cards and comes out holding a flush shouldn't play poker with honest people. You ought to go looking for wallets instead."

Said in a different tone of voice, that would have been an invitation to brawl. As things were, it was only rueful mourning over lost cash. George said, "Well, all right, maybe I was lucky." Laughing, they rowed across the Cumberland to the waiting shacks.

They tied up the boat at a bush by the edge of the river, there being no other wharf: till the war, this hadn't been a place where anyone

stopped. But it was a place where people stopped now. George smelled ribs cooking in some kind of spicy sauce. He hadn't known he was hungry, but he knew it now. He scrambled out onto the mud of the riverbank and hurried toward the shack.

"Good day to you, gentlemens," said the colored fellow who ran the place. His name was Othello. He grinned, showing white teeth all the whiter for being set in a black, black face. "Got me some barbecue cookin', best you gwine find this side o' the Kentucky Smoke House."

He spoke as if that were some kind of touchstone. Maybe it was, but it didn't touch George. Still, he said, "All I know about Kentucky is that *we're* on this side of it. And all I know about that meat is that it smells better than anything that ever came out of the galley."

To that, Grover and the other two sailors—Albert and Stanley—added loud, profane agreement. Othello grinned again, and served up great slabs of sizzling-hot meat. Barbecue wasn't something Enos had known back in Boston, but, he thought, it was something he could get used to.

Othello had rags for napkins and sometimes eked out his mismatched, battered china with box lids. None of that mattered. "This pig died happy," George declared, and again no one argued with him.

"You boys want somethin' to wash that there down?" Othello asked, looking sly. Cumberland water wasn't so bad. Next to the water of the Mississippi, Cumberland water was pretty damn fine. But the jars the cook displayed, though they'd come out of the Cumberland and were dripping to prove it, hadn't been in there to fill with water, only to keep cool.

Grover shook his head. "God only knows why we drink that panther sweat," he said. "I could get the same feeling hittin' myself in the head with a hammer six or eight times, and it'd be cheaper."

"Taste better, too," Stanley said. But when Othello set a jar on the rickety table around which the sailors sat, nobody asked him to take it away. Nobody threw the cups and mugs he gave them at him, either. They paid him, poured the deadly-pale whiskey, and drank it down.

"Jesus," George wheezed when he could speak again. Another mug of that, he thought, and he was liable to know Jesus face to face—and, in the mood he'd be in, he'd probably want to wrestle. He drank the second mug. Jesus didn't appear, and he didn't die. Tomorrow

morning, he might want to, but not now.

A colored woman walked into the shack. All she wore was a thin cotton shift. When she was standing between anybody looking at her and a source of light, the shape of her body was easy to make out.

“Boys,” she said, “if you done spent *all* your money here, my friends and me, we is gonna be powerful disappointed in y’all.”

Othello laughed. George didn’t know whether he got a rakeoff from the whores who’d set up shop next door, but that laugh made him think so. “Mehitabel, I left ’em with somethin’,” he said. “You kin git yo’ share.” He made no bones about being there for any other reason than skinning the men from the *Punishment* or any other U.S. river monitors that came by. And if the Confederate Navy made it back to this stretch of the Cumberland, he’d skin them, too.

Mehitabel placed herself so she was displayed to best advantage. George wished he hadn’t let that second mug of whiskey char its way to his stomach. He wasn’t thinking about Sylvia now, any more than a stallion thought of anything when you put him in with a mare in season.

He got up from the table. The other sailors shouted bawdy advice. Rolling her big hips, the whore led him out of one shack toward the other. In broad daylight, she might as well not have been wearing that shift. She sure as hell wasn’t wearing anything underneath it.

George’s heart drummed in his chest. His breath whistled in his throat. That was what he thought at first, with rotgut half stunning his senses. But he knew the sound of incoming shells in his gut, not just in his head, which wasn’t working very well right then.

He threw himself flat—not on top of the whore, but to the ground. The roar of the explosions stunned him. Mehitabel screamed like a cat with its tail in a door. Dirt flew as shells smashed into the soft ground south of the Cumberland. Great columns of water leaped from shells landing in the Cumberland. And, to George’s horror, two enormous columns of smoke and flame sprang from the *Punishment* as one shell struck her near the stern, the other square amidships.

More shells walked across the Cumberland toward him. Some of the water they kicked up splashed down onto him and onto Mehitabel, plastering the thin shift to her rounded contours. Enos didn’t care about that. He didn’t care about anything except approaching death and the fate of his crewmates.

The shells stopped falling before they reached the north bank of the Cumberland. He looked out toward the *Punishment*. The river monitor was burning and sinking fast. A moment later, as flame reached the magazines, it stopped burning and exploded. Mehitabel's mouth was open as wide as it would go, which meant she had to be screaming, but George couldn't hear a thing.

The heat of the fireball scorched his face. When at last it faded, twenty feet or so of the bow of the *Punishment* stuck up out of the river like a tombstone. The rest of the monitor was gone. A couple of bodies and a few pieces of bodies floated in the water, food for the snappers.

Stanley and Albert and Grover came out of the shack where they'd been drinking. They looked as bad as Enos felt. He suddenly realized he wasn't drunk any more. Horror and terror had scorched the whiskey out of him.

He also realized, looking at his crewmates, that they were the only four Yankee sailors in hostile country, and that none of them carried anything more lethal than a belt knife. Absurdly, he wished he hadn't wasted so much time on that machine gun when all it turned out to be good for was getting blown up.

"Get into bed this minute, do you hear me?" Sylvia Enos snapped at George, Jr., punctuating her words with a whack on his fanny.

As nothing else would have, that convinced him she meant what she said. "Good night, Mama!" he exclaimed, and planted a large, wet kiss on her cheek. He hurried off into the bedroom, humming an artillery march.

Sylvia looked down at the palm of her hand. It still stung, which meant his behind had to sting, too. He hadn't even noticed, except that the swat had reminded him of what he needed to do. She stared after him. Was she raising a little boy or training a horse?

Mary Jane had peacefully gone to bed an hour before. By the haggard look on Brigid Coneval's face when Sylvia had picked up her children, the reason Mary Jane was peaceful in the evening was that she'd raised hell all afternoon, and worn herself out doing it.

It wasn't even nine o'clock yet. *An hour to myself,* Sylvia thought. *I*

can read a book. I can write a letter. I can just sit here and think about how tired I am. That last sounded particularly good to her.

She'd sat for about five minutes when someone knocked on the door. That should have been the signal for George, Jr., to come bounding out of the bedroom, demanding to know what was going on. But he didn't: only soft, steady breathing came from there, not a little boy. Well, he'd been raising hell all afternoon, too; he must have run down as soon as his head hit the pillow.

Sylvia laughed to herself as she walked to the door. Try as she would, she had the devil of a time getting any peace and quiet. Here was somebody wanting to borrow some molasses or salt, or to tell her the latest scandal of the apartment house, or to give her some cookies or…a little community in its own right, the building was a busy place.

She opened the door. Standing there was no one she knew, but a youngster a year too young to do a proper job of raising the downy, fuzzy excuse for a mustache he had on his upper lip. He wore a green uniform, darker than the Army green-gray, with brass buttons stamped "WU." "Mrs. Enos?" he said, and, at her automatic nod, went on, "Telegram for you, ma'am."

Numbly, she accepted the envelope. Numbly, she signed for it. Numbly, she closed the door as the delivery boy hurried away. And, numbly, she opened the envelope with shaking fingers. It was, as she'd feared, from the Navy Department. REGRET TO INFORM YOU, she read, and a low moan came from her throat, THAT YOUR HUSBAND, ABLE SEAMAN GEORGE ENOS, IS LISTED AS MISSING IN EXPLOSION OF USS PUNISHMENT. NO FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME. YOU WILL BE INFORMED DIRECTLY SHOULD HE BE FOUND OR CONFIRMED LOST. The printed signature was that of the Secretary of the Navy.

She stared at the telegram till the words were only shapes on paper, shapes without meaning, without sense. But it did not help. The meaning had already been imparted, and lay inside her mind like an icy spear, piercing and freezing everything it touched. She crumpled the flimsy yellow sheet of paper. She felt crumpled, used and used up and thrown away by something bigger than herself, something bigger than the whole country, something eating the world. It was blind and sloppy, and it would not stop until it had its fill.

Her body knew what to do. Her mind did not fight it when it set the alarm on the clock by the bed, undressed itself, and lay down. It tried to make itself go to sleep, too. It knew how tired it was. But her mind

had something to say about that, and said it, loud and emphatically.

She lay and lay and lay, mind spinning useless like a trolley wheel on an icy track. Convinced she would not sleep at all, she closed her eyes to look at the darkness inside her eyelids instead of the different darkness of the ceiling. She tried to guess when it was four, when five, when six and time to rise.

She jerked in horror when the alarm went off. She had fallen asleep after all. She wished she'd had a moment's forgetfulness on first getting up, but no. She knew. As she had after the telegram arrived, she let her body do what needed doing, and roused her children, fed them breakfast, and took them over to Brigid Coneval's apartment almost without conscious thought.

"Are you all right, dearie?" Mrs. Coneval asked. Her husband was in the Army. "You look a bit peaked, you do."

"It's—nothing," Sylvia said. She kissed her children and left for work. Brigid Coneval stared after her, shaking her head.

Mechanically, Sylvia boarded the trolley. Mechanically, she rode to the right stop. Mechanically, she got off. Mechanically, she punched in. And, mechanically, she headed for her machine.

The mechanism broke when she saw Isabella Antonelli, or rather when her friend saw her. "Sylvia!" Isabella exclaimed, recognizing the dazed, haggard face staring at her for what it was. "Your husband, your Giorgio. Is he—?"

"Missing." Sylvia forced the word out through numb lips. "I got—the telegram—last night…" She started to cry. She should have been working already. "I'm sorry, but—" She dissolved again.

Isabella Antonelli came over and wrapped her arms around Sylvia, as Sylvia might have done for Mary Jane had her little daughter broken a favorite doll. "Oh, my friend," Isabella said. "I am so sorry he is gone."

"Missing," Sylvia said. "The telegram said missing."

"I will pray for you," Isabella answered. She said nothing more than that. *Missing* was a forlorn hope, and one all too likely to sink on the sea of truth. She knew that. Sylvia knew it, too. She would not have admitted knowing it, not if her own life depended on that admission.

Mr. Winter came limping along to see that the day shift's run was beginning as it should. When he saw the two women huddled together between their machines, he hurried over to them. "Here, what's this?" he asked, his voice not angry but not calm, either. For him, the line came first, everything else afterwards. "What's going on?"

Sylvia tried to answer and could not. Calmly—with the sort of calm that comes from having experienced too much rather than not enough—Isabella Antonelli spoke for her: "Her husband, he is missing, she hears last night from the Department of Wars." Sylvia didn't bother correcting her.

"Oh. I am sorry to hear that," the foreman said, and sounded as if he was telling, if not the whole truth, then at least most of it. He studied Sylvia. "Do you want to go home, Mrs. Enos?"

"No," Sylvia answered quickly. If she went home, they would find a substitute for her, and they might keep the substitute, too. But that was not the only reason she spoke as she did: "I'd rather be here, as a matter of fact. It will help me take my mind off, off—" She didn't go on. Going on would have meant thinking about what she most wanted not to think about.

Mr. Winter gnawed at his mustache. "I dunno," he said. But Isabella Antonelli gave him such a reproachful look that he softened. "All right, Mrs. Enos; we'll see how it goes." Had he not been interested in Sylvia's friend as something more than an employee, he might have decided differently. Sylvia noted that enough to be amused by it, and then got angry at herself for letting anything amuse her.

She went to her machine and began pulling levers. She hoped desperately to fall into the routine that sometimes overtook her, so that half the day would go by without her consciously noticing it. To her disappointment, it didn't happen. Her body did what it had to do, pulling her three levers, loading labels, filling the paste reservoir, and her mind ran round and round and round like a pet squirrel in a wheel.

When she went home, she said nothing to Brigid Coneval. The Irishwoman's green eyes glowed with curiosity, though; surely the whole floor and probably the whole apartment building knew by now that she'd got a telegram in the night. But explaining to Mrs. Coneval would have meant explaining to George, Jr., who, like any little pitcher, had enormous ears. She sometimes marveled that he could hear anything, what with all the noise he made, but here he did.

George is only missing, Sylvia told herself fiercely. *I don't* have *to say anything till I know for certain. Time enough then.*

She did her best not to let her demeanor show either of her children anything was wrong. That she was even more tired than usual from having slept so badly the night before probably helped rather than hurt her cause. The evening passed quietly, not too far from normal.

Four days went by like that. Sympathy replaced curiosity in Brigid Coneval's face. "It's a brave front you put up, Mrs. Enos," she said, having drawn her own conclusions. When Sylvia only shrugged, Mrs. Coneval nodded, as if she'd received all the answer she needed.

Sylvia's mood veered from despair to fury, with many stops in between. She'd expected a second telegram hard on the heels of the first, either letting her know George was well or—more likely, she feared—very much the reverse. Either way, she would have known how to respond. She couldn't respond to nothing, though. It left her adrift on a chartless sea.

Her work was not all it might have been. Mr. Winter proved more forbearing than she'd expected. "You're doing the best you can, Mrs. Enos; I can see that," he told her. Was he saying that because he was a veteran himself, and a widower, too, and so knew what suffering was like, or because he had an ulterior motive if George really was lost? With no way to be sure, she cautiously gave him the benefit of the doubt.

Another four days went by. Sometimes life seemed almost normal. Sometimes Sylvia thought she was losing her mind. Sometimes she hoped she would.

Press, step, press, step, press, go back to the beginning and begin the cycle anew…She *had* succeeded in immersing herself in the rhythm of her machine when another Western Union delivery boy interrupted her. "Mrs. Enos?" he said, holding out a yellow envelope. "They told me at your apartment house where you was at, ma'am."

She signed the sheet he had on his clipboard. He got out of there in a hurry—telegraph delivery boys were not welcome visitors, not in wartime. Cans began to stack up as Sylvia pulled none of her three levers.

She opened the envelope. Yes, from the Navy Department—who else? Isabella Antonelli came hurrying over to her. She didn't notice. Again, she was reading: MY PLEASANT DUTY TO INFORM YOU YOUR HUSBAND,

ABLE SEAMAN GEORGE ENOS, CONFIRMED AS UNINJURED SURVIVOR OF LOSS OF MONITOR USS PUNISHMENT. TO BE REASSIGNED, LEAVE POSSIBLE. She read but did not notice the Secretary of the Navy's name.

"God hears my prayers," said Isabella, who had been looking over her shoulder.

"Good heavens!" Sylvia exclaimed. "The line!" All at once, life stretched out ahead of her again. Small things mattered. Waving the telegram like a banner, she hurried back to deal with all the cans that had stacked up. Mr. Winter never said a thing.

"This west Texas country would be wonderful terrain for tanks," Stinky Salley said.

Several of the Confederate soldiers gathered around the campfire looked at him. "You mean barrels, don't you?" Jefferson Pinkard said at last.

"I prefer to use the name our allies have given them," Salley said loftily, with his usual fussy precision. "Let the damnyankees call them what they will."

"Oh, give it up, Stinky," Pinkard said. "Everybody's calling the damn things barrels, us and the Yanks both."

"That does not make it proper," Salley returned, "any more than it is proper to call me Stinky rather than my given name."

"Proves my point, doesn't it?" Jeff said, and got a laugh from his squadmates. Stinky Salley glared, but he spent a lot of time glaring.

"It would be good country for barrels, except only for one thing," Hip Rodriguez said, holding one finger up in the air.

"What the devil do you know about it, you damn greaser?" Salley said with a snort. "It's perfect country for tanks." He kept on using his word, regardless of what anyone else did. Waving a hand, he continued, "It's flat, it's wide open—it's ideal."

Rodriguez looked at him expressionlessly. "I gonna tell you two things," he said in his uncertain English. As he had before, he held up one finger. "It ain't no perfect country for barrels on account of ain't no train stations close to here nowhere. Barrel got to run by itself,

barrel breaks down.”

“Everything I’ve heard about them damn things, he’s right,” Sergeant Albert Cross said. “Bastards break down if you look at ’em sideways.”

“Gracias.” With considerable dignity, the Sonoran soldier inclined his head to the noncom. Then he undid his bayonet from his sheath and made as if to clean his nails with it. Looking straight into Salley’s face, he went on, “I tell you the second thing now. You call me a damn greaser again, I cut your fucking throat.” His voice was flat and emotionless—not so much a threat as a simple statement of how the world would be.

Salley’s pale eyes went wide. His mouth formed a startled O. He turned to Cross. “Sergeant, did you hear that?”

“I heard it,” the noncom answered. “I heard you, too. If I was you, I’d watch the way I ran my big mouth.” He noisily sipped coffee from his tin cup.

Salley stared at Hip Rodriguez as if he’d never seen him before. Maybe he hadn’t, not really. Sonorans and Chihuahuans and Cubans—Cubans without black blood in them, anyhow—had a curious place in the CSA: better off than Negroes, but not really part of the larger society, either, cut off from it by swarthiness, language, and religion. But a Sonoran with a weapon in his hand was not something to take lightly. Stinky Salley kept quiet after that—he made a point of keeping quiet after that.

Instead of making cornmeal into little loaves, Rodriguez wet his share and shaped it into patties he fried in lard and wrapped around his tinned rations. Pinkard and a couple of other soldiers in the squad were doing that, too; beans and beef went down easier and tastier. Pinkard took a bite out of his—*tortilla,* Hip called a cornmeal patty—then said in a low voice, “You shut him up sharp.”

Rodriguez shrugged. “If you step on a scorpion when he is small, he don’t get no bigger.”

“Yeah.” Jeff’s eyes slid to Stinky Salley. The ex-clerk still didn’t look as if he knew what had hit him. That, Pinkard thought, wasn’t so good. Stinky’d done well enough against U.S. soldiers, out at a distance. But when Rodriguez delivered his warning, he’d folded up. In a way, it was just Stinky’s problem. But in another way, it warned of a weakness in the squad, and that was everybody’s problem.

Off in the distance, a rifle barked. Pinkard's head came up, as a watchdog's would do at the sound of someone walking past his house. Another shot followed, also a long way off. Then silence. He relaxed.

Rodriguez swigged from his canteen and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He'd already put the bayonet away, having made his point with it. "You know what?" he said to Pinkard. "I miss my *esposa*. How you say *esposa*, Jeff? My woman, my—"

"Your wife?" Pinkard said.

"*Sí,* my wife." Rodriguez pronounced the word with care. "I go to sleep in the night, I see my wife in a *sueño*." Not knowing or not caring that wasn't English, he went on, "When I wake up, all I see is *soldados feos*—ugly soldiers." *Sueño* was something like *dream*, Jeff realized. Hip Rodriguez sighed. "I do better, I stay to sleep." He glanced over toward Pinkard. "You got a wife, yes, Jeff?"

"Yeah. I wish I was home with her, too." Pinkard was amazed at how little he'd thought of Emily since he got his notice from the Conscription Bureau and reported for duty. Now that she flooded into his mind, he understood why he'd done his best to block the memories—they hurt too much, when set alongside the squalid reality of the life he was living.

Fleas and lice and fear and mutilation and stinks and—He turned away from the campfire, a scowl on his face. If he weren't here, if he hadn't got that damned buff-colored envelope, he could have been in Emily's arms right now, making the bedsprings creak, her breath warm and moist on the skin of his neck, her voice urging him on to things he hadn't imagined he could do or else rising to a cry of joy that must have made Bedford Cunningham and all his other neighbors jealous. Dear God, she loved to do it!

Courteous as a cat, more courteous than most curious Confederates would have been, Hip Rodriguez left him alone with his thoughts. For a few seconds, Jeff was glad of that. And then, all at once, he wasn't.

Back before the government put him in butternut and stuck a rifle in his hands, he'd matched Emily stroke for stroke, given her everything she'd wanted in the way of loving. Now he wasn't there any more. She'd grown used to making love all the time. Would she be looking for a substitute?

He shivered, regardless of how hot and muggy the evening was. In his imagination, he could see her thrashing on the bed with—whom?

The face on the male form riding her didn't matter. It wasn't his own. That was enough, and bad enough.

His fists bunched. *This is all moonshine,* he told himself fiercely. He'd never had any reason to believe Emily would want to be unfaithful to him. If ever two people loved each other, Emily and he were those two. But he'd never been away from her before. And she didn't just love him. She loved love, and he knew it. *Moonshine, dammit, moonshine*.

When he hadn't said anything for some little while, Rodriguez quietly asked, "You are lonely, *amigo*?"

"You bet I am," Pinkard said. "Ain't you?"

"I am lonely for my *esposa*, my wife. I am lonely for my farm. I am lonely for my village, where I go to drink in the *cantina*. I am lonely for my proper food. I am lonely for my *lengua*, where I can talk and I don't got to think before I say every word. I am lonely for not being nowhere near these *yanquis* who try of killing me. *Sí,* I am lonely."

Jeff hadn't thought of it like that. Even though the filthy picture in his imagination wouldn't go away, he said, "Sounds like I got it easy next to you, maybe."

"Life is hard." Rodriguez shrugged. "And after life is done, then you die." He shrugged again. "What can anyone do?"

It was a good question. It was, when Pinkard thought about it, a very good question. If there were any better questions out there, he had no idea what they might be. "You do the best you can, is all," he answered slowly, and then looked around at the hole in the ground in the middle of nowhere he was currently inhabiting. "If this here is the best I can do, I been doin' somethin' wrong up till now."

"I also think this very thing," Rodriguez said with a smile. "Then I think what they do to my *compadres* who do not come into the Army when it is their time. Beside that, this is *muy bueno*."

"Yeah, you try and dodge conscription, they land on you with both feet." Pinkard yawned. Exhaustion was landing on him with both feet. He spread his blanket under him—too hot to roll himself in it—and smeared his face and hands with camphor-smelling goo that was supposed to hold the mosquitoes and other bugs at bay. As far as he could see, it didn't do much good, but he was happier with it in his nostrils than with what he smelled like after God only knew how long

since his last bath.

The next morning, Captain Connolly got the company moving before sunup. The promised drive on Lubbock hadn't happened. Nobody was saying much about that, but nobody was very happy with it, either. Trying to build a front to keep the damnyankees from moving deeper into Texas wasn't the same as throwing them out of the state when they had no business there.

What can anyone do? Hip Rodriguez's question echoed in Jeff's mind. So did his own answer. *You do the best you can, is all*. If the best the CSA could do was keep the USA from pushing deeper into Texas, the war wasn't going the way everybody'd figured it would when it started.

The Yankees were extending their line northward, too. Texas, Jeff thought wearily as he tramped through it, had nothing but room. The invaders kept hoping they could get around the Confederates' flank, and the job for the boys in butternut was convincing them they couldn't.

A brisk little fire fight developed, both sides banging away at each other from little foxholes they scraped into the hard earth as soon as the bullets started flying. Neither U.S. nor C.S. forces were there in any great numbers; it was almost like a game, though nobody wanted to be removed from the board.

"Hold 'em, boys," Captain Connolly yelled. "Help's on the way." Firing at a muzzle flash, Jeff figured the Yankees' commander was probably shouting the same thing. One of them would prove a liar. After a moment, Jeff realized they both might prove liars.

But Captain Connolly had the right of it. A battery of three-inch howitzers came galloping up behind the thin Confederate line and started hurling shrapnel shells at the equally thin Yankee line. The U.S. soldiers, without artillery of their own and not dug in to withstand a bombardment, sullenly drew back across the prairie. The Confederates advanced—not too far, not too fast, lest they run into more than they could handle.

"We licked 'em," Jeff said, and Hip Rodriguez nodded. Pinkard took off his helmet to scratch his head. Victory was supposed to be glorious. He didn't feel anything like glory. He was alive, and nobody'd shot him. He fumbled for tobacco and a scrap of paper in which to wrap it. Right now, alive and unshot would do.

Barracks swelled Tucson, New Mexico, far beyond its natural size. In one of those barracks, Sergeant Gordon McSweeney sat on a cot wishing he were someplace, anyplace, else. “I want to get back to the field,” he murmured, more than half to himself.

Ben Carlton heard him. McSweeney outranked Carlton, but, as cook, the latter enjoyed a certain amount of license an ordinary private soldier, even a veteran, would not have had. “Rather be here than that damn Baja, California desert,” he declared, “and you can take that to church.”

McSweeney shook his head. He was big and tall and fair, with muscles like rocks, a chin and cheekbones that might have been hewn from granite, and pale eyes that looked through a man, not at him. He said, “A soldier’s purpose is fighting. If I am not fighting, I am not fulfilling my appointed purpose in life.” If he did not do that, his infinitely stern, infinitely just God would surely punish him for it in the days to come.

Carlton would not be silenced. “To hell with my appointed purpose, if the damn fool who appointed me to it gets his brains out o’ the latrine bucket. Sendin’ us down there with no support or nothin’, that was murder, and that’s all it was.” He stuck out his own chin, which was nowhere near so granitic as McSweeney’s. “Go ahead and tell me I’m wrong. I dare you.”

From most men, to most men, that would have been an invitation to fight. Gordon McSweeney reserved his wrath for the men on the other side, a fact for which his mates had had a good many occasions to be thankful. “God predestined our failure, for reasons of His own,” he said now.

Ben Carlton looked as if he had bitten into something that tasted bad—*something he cooked himself, then,* McSweeney thought. “Damn me to hell if I can see how God’s will had anything to do with poor Paul bleedin’ to death like a stuck pig way the devil out in the middle of the desert,” Carlton said.

McSweeney’s gaze fixed on him as if over the sights of a Springfield. “God will surely damn you to hell if you take His name in vain.” His expression softened, ever so slightly. “Paul Mantarakis, as I saw, was a brave man, for all that he was a papist.”

“He weren’t no Cath-*o*-lic,” Carlton said. “He was whatever Greeks are—orthosomething, he called it.”

“He carried with him a rosary of beads, which condemns him of itself. A pity, I admit, for he was a man of spirit.” McSweeney spoke with the assurance of one who knew himself to be a member of the elect and thus assured salvation.

Carlton gave it up. “There’s worse men than Paul as are still breathing in and out,” he said.

“Such is God’s will,” McSweeney answered. “Only a fool, and a blasphemous fool at that, would question it. Be assured: the unjust shall have their requital.”

He got left alone after that, which suited him well enough. Even in the crowded trenches of western Kentucky, he had been left alone a good deal. He knew why: a man of fixed purpose naturally confounded the greater number who had none, but drifted through life like floating leaves, going wherever the current chanced to take them. God anchored him, and anchored him firm.

That he used the time to make sure his flamethrower was in good working order also helped ensure his privacy. Few in the company seemed eager to associate, either in the field or away from the fighting, with anyone who carried such horror on his back. In the field, the enemy made flamethrower operators special targets, so McSweeney could see the sense in staying away from him, even if it filled him with scorn. Back here? He shrugged. If the men gave in to superstition, how could he stop them?

After evening mess call, the soldiers gossiped and smoked and gambled till lights out. McSweeney read the Book of Kings, an island of rectitude in the sea of sin all around. Then one of the men in his squad shouted “Goddammit!” after losing a poker hand he thought he should have won.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain, Hansen,” McSweeney said, glancing up from the small type of the Bible.

“Yes, Sergeant. Sorry, Sergeant,” Private Ulysses Hansen said hastily. He was not the smallest nor the weakest nor the least spirited man in the regiment, but his sergeant not only outranked him but also intimidated him. He kept his language circumspect thereafter.

In the morning, McSweeney inspected the persons and kits of his

squad with his usual meticulous care. When he'd reported to Captain Schneider the infractions he'd found, the company commander raised an eyebrow and said, "Sergeant, can't you learn to let some of that go? You gig men for things that aren't worth noticing."

"Sir, they are against regulations," McSweeney answered stiffly.

"I understand that, Sergeant, but—" Schneider looked exasperated. For the life of him, Gordon McSweeney could not understand why. He stood at stolid attention, not showing his perplexity. Schneider was a brave soldier, and not altogether ungodly; he might perhaps have been numbered among the elect. After a pause to marshal his thoughts, he went on, "A smudged button or a speck of dust on a collar won't cost us the war. These are real soldiers, remember, not West Point cadets."

"Sir, I did not invent the infractions," McSweeney said. "All I did was note them and report them to you."

"You'd need a magnifying glass to note some of them," Schneider said.

McSweeney shook his head. "No, sir, only my eyes."

Schneider looked unhappier still. "Could you stand the kind of inspection you're giving your men?"

"Sir, I hope so," McSweeney answered. "If I fail, I deserve whatever punishment you care to inflict on me."

Now the captain shook his head. "You don't get it, Sergeant. I don't want to punish you for small things. I don't want you making your men hate you so much they won't follow you, either."

"Sir, they will follow me." McSweeney spoke with a calm, absolute confidence. "Whatever else they may feel about me, they're afraid of me."

"I don't doubt that," Captain Schneider muttered, perhaps more to himself than to McSweeney. But he shook his head again. "That won't do, I'm afraid. A U.S. noncom or officer whose men hate him or fear him ends up with a wound from a Springfield, not a Tredegar."

Gordon McSweeney considered that. "Whoever would do such a thing would surely spend eternity in hell."

“As may be,” Schneider said. “That’s not the point. The point is to keep your men from wanting to shoot you in the first place.”

“If they would only do that which is required of them, we would not have this problem,” McSweeney said.

Captain Schneider sighed. “Sergeant, have you ever, even once in your life, considered the wisdom of tempering justice with mercy?”

“No, sir,” McSweeney answered, honestly shocked.

“I believe you,” Schneider said. “The one thing—the only thing—I’ll give you is that you hold yourself to the same standards as everyone else. That time a couple of days ago when you reported yourself for not polishing the inside of your canteen cup—that was a first for me, I tell you. But what did I do about it?”

“Nothing, sir.” McSweeney’s voice reeked disapproval.

Captain Schneider either didn’t notice or pretended not to. “That’s right. That’s what I’m going to keep on doing when you bother me with tiny things, too. Sergeant, I order you not to report trivial infractions to me until and unless they constitute a clear and obvious danger to the discipline or safety of your squad. Do you understand me?”

“No, sir,” McSweeney said crisply.

“All right, then, Sergeant. I am going to leave you with two quotations from the Good Book, then. I want you to concentrate on the lessons in John 8:7 and Matthew 7:1.” With an abrupt about-face, Schneider stalked off.

Gordon McSweeney knew the Scriptures well. But those were not verses he was in the habit of studying, so he had to go and look them up. *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,* he read in John. The verse in Matthew was even shorter and more to the point, saying, *Judge not, that ye be not judged*.

He stared out the door through which Captain Schneider had departed. The captain, as far as he was concerned, had the letter without the spirit. If God chose to urge mercy, that was His affair. Could a man not so urged by the Lord afford such a luxury? McSweeney didn’t think so.

He was, in any case, by temperament more drawn to the Old

Testament than to the New. The children of Israel, now, had been proper warriors. God had not urged them to mercy, but to glorify His name by smiting their foes. And their prophets and kings had obeyed, and had grown great by obeying. Against such a background, what did a couple of verses matter?

Jesus Christ hadn't always been meek and mild, either. Hadn't He driven the money-changers from the Temple? They hadn't been doing anything so very wrong. *Trivial infractions,* Captain Schneider would have called their business, and thought Jesus should have left it alone.

McSweeney flipped back a few pages in the Book of Matthew and grunted in satisfaction. "Chapter 5, verse 29," he murmured: *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

He looked at the men in his squad. None of them dared meet his eye. Would any have the nerve to shoot him under cover of battle? He shook his head. He didn't believe it, not for a moment. Would they leave him in the lurch when he attacked? Maybe they would. His glance flicked to the flamethrower. Anyone who carried one of those infernal devices was on his own anyhow.

"Justice," McSweeney said, and gave a sharp nod. Only the wicked feared justice, and with reason, for they deserved chastisement. Thus the United States would chastise their seceded brethren, and chastise as well the wicked foreigners who had made secession possible.

God wills it, McSweeney thought, for all the world like a Crusader before the walls of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem would fall. He would make it fall, and break anyone and anything standing in the way.

XIV

Achilles smiled at Cincinnatus, a smile that showed one new tooth in a wide, wet mouth. The baby said something wordless but joyful. Cincinnatus smiled back. To Elizabeth, he said, “He’s in a happy mood this mornin’, ain’t he?”

His wife smiled back, wanly. “Why shouldn’t he be happy? He can sleep as long as he wants, an’ he can wake up whenever he please. An’ he’s still too little to know his ma can’t do likewise.”

“I heard him there in the middle of the night,” Cincinnatus said, digging into the ham and eggs Elizabeth had made. “He sounded happy then, too.”

“He *was* happy,” she said, rolling her eyes, which were still streaked with red. “He was so happy, he wanted to play. He didn’t want to go back to bed, not for nothin’ he didn’t. Did you?” She poked Achilles in the ribs. He thought that was the funniest thing in the world, and squealed laughter. When he did, his mother visibly melted. All the same, she said, “What I wanted to do was give him some laudanum, so he’d go back to sleep and I could, too.” She yawned. Achilles squealed again—everything was funny this morning.

No sooner had Cincinnatus shoveled the last fluffy scrambled egg into his mouth than someone knocked on the door. He grabbed for his mug of coffee and gulped it down while hurrying to let in his mother. “How’s my little grandbaby?” she asked.

Cincinnatus was still swallowing. From the kitchen, Elizabeth answered, “Mother Livia, he must be sleepin’ while you got him, on account of he sure don’t do none o’ that in the nighttime.”

“He jus’ like his father, then,” Cincinnatus’ mother said. She turned

to him. “You was the wakinest child I ever did hear tell of.” Without taking a breath, she went on in a different tone of voice: “Looks like it’s fixin’ to storm out there, storm somethin’ fierce.”

“Does it?” Cincinnatus looked outside himself. His mother was right. Thick, dark clouds were boiling up in the northwest, over Ohio, and heading rapidly toward Covington. The air felt still and heavy and damp. He reached into the pocket of his dungarees and pulled out a nickel. “Gonna ride me the trolley down to the docks.”

“Gettin’ pretty la-de-da, ain’t you?” his mother said. “Trolley here, trolley there, like you got all the money is to have. Pretty soon you gwine buy youself a motorcar, ain’t that right?”

“Wish it was,” Cincinnatus said, and gave her a kiss as he hurried out the door. When the CSA had ruled Covington, a motorcar for a black man would have been out of the question, unless he wanted to be branded as uppity—and, perhaps, literally branded as well. Under the USA…maybe such a thing would be possible, if he got the money together. Maybe it wouldn’t, too.

The rain began just before he got to the trolley stop, which wasn’t particularly close to his house. One stop served the entire Negro district near the Licking River. He remembered the complaints he’d heard about routing the track even so close to his part of town.

When the trolley car rattled up, he threw his nickel into the fare box and sat down in the back. The Yankees hadn’t changed the rules about that sort of thing; they had rules of their own, not quite so strict as those of the Confederacy but not tempered by intimate acquaintance, either. He sighed. If your skin was dark, you had trouble finding a fair shake anywhere.

Lightning flashed. Thunder boomed. Rain started coming down in sheets. The trolley filled up in a hurry, as people who usually would have walked to work decided against it today. Whites started moving back into the Negro section. One by one, Cincinnatus and his fellow blacks gave up their seats and stood holding the overhead rail. None of them complained, not out loud. Men down from the USA ousted them as casually as did native Covingtonians.

Water sprayed up from the trolley’s wheels as it slid to a stop near the wharves. Cincinnatus and several other Negro men leaped down and ran for their places. The others were all roustabouts; they’d be drenched by the time the day was through. Cincinnatus didn’t expect

to be much better off. For one thing, it was almost as wet inside the cab of a White truck as it was outside. For another, he'd be outside a good deal of the time, certainly while loading and unloading his snarling monster, and probably while fixing punctures as well.

"Morning, Cincinnatus," Lieutenant Straubing said when he splashed into the warehouse that served as headquarters for the transportation unit. "Wet enough out there to suit you?"

"Sure enough is, suh," Cincinnatus answered. As usual, his color seemed not to matter to Straubing. He still had trouble believing that could be true, but had seen no evidence to make him suppose it was an act, either.

The lieutenant looked troubled. "Cincinnatus, we have a problem, and I think we could use your help to solve it."

"What kind of problem you talking about, sir?" the Negro asked, expecting it to be something to do with the bad weather and what it was doing to the schedule and to Kentucky's miserable roads.

Lieutenant Straubing looked even less happy. "A sabotage problem, I'm afraid," he answered. Just then, an enormous clap of thunder gave Cincinnatus an excuse for jumping, which was just as well, because he would have jumped with an excuse or without one. Straubing went on, "An unhealthy number of fires have broken out in areas we've served. Please be on the alert for anything that seems suspicious."

"Yes, suh, I'll do that," Cincinnatus said, knowing everyone would be on the alert for *him*, a distinctly alarming notion.

Straubing said, "Damned if I can figure out who's playing games with us, either. Maybe it's the Reds"—he didn't say anything about niggers, as most whites, U.S. or C.S., would have done—"or maybe it's Confederate diehards. Whoever it is, he'll pay when he gets caught."

"Yes, suh," Cincinnatus said again. "He deserve it." He shut up after that, not wanting to draw the U.S. lieutenant's attention to himself. Part of that, of course, was simple self-preservation. Part of it, too, was not wanting the one white man who'd ever treated him like a human being to be disappointed in him. If the United States had produced more men like Lieutenant Straubing, Cincinnatus never would have worked to harm them. As things were…

"I'm letting everyone know," Straubing said. "If you've seen anything, if you *do* see anything, don't be shy."

“I won’t, suh.” Cincinnatus wondered if he could buy his own safety by betraying the Confederate underground. The trouble was, the only man whose whereabouts he knew for certain was Conroy. No, that was one trouble. The other was that, here in Covington, Confederates and Reds worked hand in hand. He’d betray Apicius and his sons along with the men who waved the Stars and Bars. Some things cost more than they were worth.

More drivers, white and black, came dripping into the shed. Straubing spoke to them all. Cincinnatus wondered how good an idea that was. Everyone would be eyeing everyone else now. And anyone who had a grudge against anyone else would likely seize the chance to have the occupation authorities put the other fellow through the wringer.

“Let’s move out,” the lieutenant said at last. “We’ve got a cargo of shells the artillery is waiting for.”

“Weather like this, they’re going to be waiting a while longer,” said one of the drivers, a white man Cincinnatus knew only as Herk.

Lieutenant Straubing was a born optimist. A man who treated blacks and whites the same way had to be a born optimist—*or a damn fool,* Cincinnatus thought darkly. Even the Yankee soldier did not contradict Herk. All he said was, “We’ve got to give it our best shot.”

Out they went. Cincinnatus was glad he hadn’t had to buck the heavy crates of shells into the bed of the White truck himself. He wondered when he’d get home again: not as in *at what time*, but as in *on what day*. The front kept moving south. That meant an ever-longer haul from Covington. If he was lucky, the roads would be terrible and not too crowded. If he wasn’t lucky, they’d be terrible and packed, and he might not get home for a week.

Right from the start, he had the feeling he wouldn’t be lucky. The truck’s acetylene headlamps didn’t want to light, and, once they finally did, hissed and sputtered as if about to explode. He had to crank the engine half a dozen times before it turned over. One of those fruitless tries, it jerked back on him, and he yanked his hand off the crank just in time to keep it from breaking his arm.

Unlike some, the truck had a windshield and a wiper for it. It thrashed over the glass like a spastic man’s arm, now two or three times quickly, now all but motionless. The idea was good. As far as Cincinnatus was concerned, it needed more work.

Even on the paved streets of Covington, the White seemed to bang unerringly into every pothole. Nor was Cincinnatus the only one with that complaint: a couple of trucks limped toward the curb with punctures. Changing an inner tube in the rain was not something he looked forward to with delight.

So thick were the clouds, it seemed more like twilight than advancing morning. Cincinnatus stuck close to the rear of the truck in front of him, and saw in his mirror the headlamps of the next White to the rear just behind him. He thought of elephants in a circus parade, each grasping the tail of the one in front with its trunk.

Paved road ended about twenty-five miles south of Covington. Before the war, it had ended at the city limits: Yankee engineers were pushing it on toward the front for reasons of their own. The difference between pavement and dirt was immediate and appalling. Muck flew up from the back tires of the White in front of Cincinnatus, coating his truck's headlamps and splattering the windshield. The wiper blade smeared more than it removed.

Swearing, Cincinnatus slowed down. Spacing between trucks got wider as other drivers did the same thing. Then they came upon what had to be at least a division's worth of infantry heading south along the road. Drivers in the lead trucks squeezed the bulbs on their horns for all they were worth. That was supposed to be the signal for the infantrymen to get out of the way. Even in good weather, the soldiers in green-gray didn't take kindly to moving onto the shoulder. With the rain, they barely seemed to move at all. The Whites splattered them as readily as one another. Curses rang in Cincinnatus' ears as he crawled past and through the marching men.

The trucks sped up again once they finally got beyond the head of the infantry column. A little farther along, *they* had to go onto the shoulder: a pair of bogged barrels plugged the road tight as a cork in a bottle. Cincinnatus hoped he'd reach the next fuel depot before his truck ran out of gas.

A noise like a gunshot made him jump in his seat. The truck slewed sideways. It wasn't Confederates or Reds. "Puncture," he said resignedly, and pulled off the road to fix it.

By the time he scrambled back into the cab of the truck, he was soaked from head to foot and all over mud. He felt as if he'd been wrestling somebody three times his size. He'd put a board under the jack before he tried using it. It had done its level best to sink into the

ooze board and all. The ordeal was almost enough to make him wish he were back at the docks.

He shook his head. “I ain’t that stupid,” he said, gunning the engine to try to catch up with the rest of the convoy.

He did, too, soon enough; no one could make any sort of time through the mud. He managed to get more gasoline before he stopped dead. Putting everything together, the trip wasn’t so bad as he’d expected. *Only goes to show I don’t expect much,* he thought.

The raiders hit the convoy a little south of Berea. One moment, Cincinnatus was contentedly chugging along not far from the rear—other fellows who’d had to stop for one breakdown or another had fallen in behind him. The next, an explosion up ahead made him stamp on the brake. As the truck skidded to a stop, rifle and machine-gun fire rang out from the side of the road, stitching down the convoy toward him.

He had no gun. He carried nothing more lethal than a clasp knife. Without a moment’s hesitation, he dove out of the cab and away from the White as fast as he could go. That proved smart. Flames started licking up from under the hood in spite of the rain: a bullet or two must have smashed up the motor. Cincinnatus just watched those flames for a moment. Then, with a moan of fright, he crawled farther away from the truck, not to escape the bullets still flying, but to get away from the—

The flames spread rapidly. With a soft *whoomp*, the gas tank went up, setting the whole truck ablaze. A minute or so after that, the fire reached the artillery rounds in the bed. At first, a couple of them exploded individually. And then, with a great roar, the whole truckload went up.

Cincinnatus had been on his hands and knees. The blast knocked him facedown into the mud. Shell fragments and shrapnel balls slashed the air around him. Some of them fell hissing into puddles of rainwater close by.

As other trucks began exploding, he tried desperately to put more distance between himself and them. He heard screams from drivers who hadn’t been able to get away, and Rebel yells from the raiders still shooting up the convoy. The explosions, though, kept the raiders from coming after him.

Or so he thought, till a shape wallowed toward him. He grabbed for

his little knife, knowing it would do no good against a rifle, but then stopped. “That you, Herk?” he asked, not sure he recognized the filthy, dripping driver.

But the white man nodded. “Yeah. How the hell do we get out of this?”

“Dunno,” Cincinnatus answered. He started laughing. Herk stared at him, eyes wide and shining in his dirty face. Cincinnatus explained: “We got us the chance to find out, though.” Very solemnly, Herk nodded again.

Very solemnly, Abner Dowling peered south through his field glasses, toward the wooded hills north of the little Tennessee town called White House. He stood under a green-gray canvas awning, so the hot August rain didn’t splash down onto his lenses. But the rain cut down on visibility nonetheless, masking those hills from clear observation. What little he could see, he didn’t like.

He turned to General Custer. “Sir, the Rebs have that line as fortified as all get-out. They’re not going to be easy to shift, not even a little bit.”

“Yet shift them we must, and shift them we shall,” Custer said, as usual mixing desire and ability. He raised his field glasses to his face, holding them with one shaky, liver-spotted hand. “That line in front of White House is the last one they can hold to keep our artillery out of range of Nashville. Once it goes down, we commence bombarding the city.” He let the binoculars fall down on the leather strap holding round his neck so he could rub his hands in anticipation.

“I understand that, sir,” Dowling said. “The trouble is, I’m very much afraid the Confederates understand it, too. That is a formidable position they have there—not only high ground, but wooded high ground, so we have trouble pinpointing their dispositions.”

He had no trouble pinpointing Custer’s disposition: it was petulant. The general commanding First Army said, “I intend to bombard that area until every tree in it has been made into toothpicks and matchsticks. Toothpicks and matchsticks,” he repeated, relishing the rhyme.

“Yes, sir,” Dowling said, working to remind Custer of reality. “We

lost a good deal of ammunition when that convoy was ambushed last week."

"True," Custer said. "You will of course note that, although those munitions were intended for my force, that shocking breach of security occurred in an area under General Pershing's jurisdiction, not mine."

"Of course, sir," his adjutant agreed: where self-preservation was concerned, Custer had a keen enough grasp on reality. Dowling went on, "However that may be, though, the ammunition is not here. And"—he pointed toward the dark, tree-clad, rolling hills—"that's not good country for barrels. No country is good country for barrels in this rain."

"We'll send them in anyhow," Custer said, which was just like him: he'd found a weapon that worked once, so he'd keep right on using it, regardless of whether circumstances warranted such use. He continued, "And we have plenty of ammunition, even without that which was lost. And, no doubt, our soldiers will make up with their courage any minor deficiencies in the preliminaries."

Translated into English, that meant a hell of a lot of young Americans were about to get shot, a good many of them unnecessarily. Custer had already fought a lot of battles like that in western Kentucky, and advanced at a snail's pace: the pace of a snail whose trail was blood, not slime. Dowling said, "It might be wiser to hold off a bit, sir, until the weather's more favorable and we have better reconnaissance."

"Major, we have been fighting for two years and more now," Custer replied. "Would you not say we have already seen a sufficiency of delay?" Without giving Dowling a chance to answer, he said, "I expect the bombardment to commence tomorrow morning and to continue until the Rebel positions are pulverized, at which point we advance, barrels and infantry both."

What Custer expected, Custer got. That was the advantage of being a lieutenant general. The next day, the guns began to roar. Dowling didn't envy the artillerymen serving them in the mud. Again, no one asked his opinion. He watched explosions wrack the Confederate hilltop lines. First Army had a lot of guns and a lot of ammunition even without what the raiders had blown up. They pounded the positions north of White House with high explosive and shrapnel and gas.

Custer watched, too, with the delight of a small boy at a fireworks show. “Give it to ’em,” he said hoarsely. “Give it to ’em, by jingo!”

As Dowling had foreseen, the Confederates understood perfectly well what the unending barrage implied. Their own guns pounded the U.S. trenches. In the wretched weather, accurate counterbattery fire was next to impossible, because the U.S. artillery had and could gain no exact notion of the Rebel guns’ positions.

The U.S. artillery preparation went on for five days. By the end of that time, as Custer had desired, the hills were no longer tree-covered. Seen through Dowling’s field glasses, they resembled a close-up photograph of an unshaven man who’d survived a bad case of smallpox: all over craters and old eruptions, with now and then, as if by afterthought, something straight sticking up from one of them. It was easy to imagine that every Confederate in those hills had been blown to kingdom come.

It was especially easy for Custer to imagine as much. “We’ve got ’em now,” he told Dowling in the middle of it, preening like a cock pheasant. “The Lord has delivered them into our hands, and our soldiers have only to storm forward and capture whatever demoralized wretches chance to remain alive.”

“I hope you’re right, sir,” Dowling said, “but in the big fights in Pennsylvania and Maryland, and even the ones First Army had in western Kentucky, the defenders ended up with an advantage all out of proportion to their numbers.”

“That’s why we’re laying on the artillery preparation.” Custer looked at his adjutant as if he’d just crawled out from under a flat rock. “Never in the history of the planet had any place on the face of the earth been bombarded like those hills there. Only a wet blanket would think otherwise.”

Dowling sighed. Custer had reckoned him a wet blanket since the earliest days of their association. That he’d proved right more often than not had done nothing to endear him to the general commanding First Army—on the contrary. This was one of the times Dowling devoutly hoped he was wrong. Custer had laid on one hell of a bombardment, and maybe it would be good enough to wipe out the foe. Maybe.

It went on for two more days, till the artillerymen were as near deaf as made no difference. Even when the U.S. soldiers swarmed out of

their trenches and rushed for the ruined woods, the barrage kept on, now dropping down on where Intelligence thought the Rebels had their front-line trenches. Some of the Americans unrolled telephone wire as they advanced. Others carried signal flags, in case the wires broke as they so often did.

From under that camouflaged awning, Custer and Dowling watched the troops. Dowling saw sparklike points of light begin to spurt here and there in the woods. “We didn’t get quite everyone, sir,” he said.

“Leftover dust to be swept away by the broom of the infantry,” Custer said grandly. “A broom five miles wide, Major.”

Confederate artillery started falling in no-man’s-land. U.S. troops got hung up in the belts of barbed wire not even the titanic American barrage had been able to tear up. More and more Confederate machine guns, muzzle flashes winking like malign eyes filled with horrible amusement, opened up on the U.S. soldiers stuck out in the open.

Every so often, a runner or a staff officer would bring news of the progress the attack was making. By the time the news reached Custer and Dowling, it was old and stale. “What’s the slowdown?” Dowling demanded.

“Too many phone lines broken by the Rebel artillery, sir,” answered a lieutenant who didn’t seem to realize he was bleeding from a wound in his upper arm. “Too many runners getting shot before they can make it back, too. And the goddamn Rebel snipers are concentrating on our signalers. It’s worth your life to stick up a banner.”

Custer moved blue counters on a map. “We *are* making progress,” he insisted. “We need to send in the reserves, to take advantage of the gains the first wave has carved out.”

In went the reserves. For all they gained, the ground might as well have swallowed them up. The ground had swallowed too many of them up, and they would never rise from it again. Toward evening, Custer committed more reserves. “Once we break the hard crust and reach the softness it protects, they are ours,” he said.

The third wave of reserves went in the next morning, a couple of hours slower than they might have. The Rebs had been dislodged from most of their forward trenches, and from some of the secondary trenches as well. The line, though, still held. And the cost! “Sir,” Dowling said late that second afternoon, “we’ve lost almost a

division's worth of dead, and twice that many wounded. How long can we go on like this?"

"As long as it takes," Custer replied. "All summer, if we need to."

By the end of summer, Dowling feared, First Army would be down to battalion size. The question, he supposed, was whether the Confederates opposing them would have any men left at all. Even if they didn't, was that a victory? Could the U.S. survivors go on and take Nashville, which was, after all, the point of this entire exercise?

Custer seemed to entertain no doubts. "If you hammer the anvil long enough, Major, it breaks."

Dowling didn't answer. He had blacksmiths in his family, and knew what Custer might not: if you hammered the anvil long enough, it broke, all right, but *it* was the hammer, not the anvil. He wondered if he should try explaining that to the general commanding First Army. After a moment, he shook his head. General Custer hadn't been in the habit of listening to him before. Why would he start now?

Major Irving Morrell said, "What we've got going now is the big push toward Banff. The last thing we want to do is go straight at the place. The Canucks are set up and waiting for us to try it. If we do, they'll slaughter us. We have to make them watch the cape, the way the bullfighters do in the Empire of Mexico. If they keep their eyes on the cape, they won't notice the sword."

Captain Heinz Guderian nodded. "This is sound doctrine, Major. Deception. Deception by all means." He spoke in German, which not only Morrell but also his officers understood.

"Thanks, Captain." Morrell turned an ironic eye on the German staff officer. "I thought you'd have headed back to Philadelphia along with Major Dietl."

Guderian shrugged. "Dietl goes back to a real war, so he has no compunctions about leaving this one. If I go back to Germany, I go back to fighting at a desk, with machine pencil and large-caliber typewriter." His eyes sparkled. "If I am to make my life as a soldier, I intend to *be* a soldier, not a clerk in a field-gray uniform."

"Fair enough." Morrell took a map from one of his pockets. "Let's have a look at exactly what we've got here."

Guderian and Morrell's own company-grade officers huddled close to him. Captain Karl Spadinger pointed to the map. "What do these 'I.T.' markings stand for?" he asked.

"The abbreviation means 'Indian trail,'" Morrell answered. "Shows what kind of country we're operating in. And we'll have the devil's own time doing anything with the Canadians watching us—they're bound to have observers here on this peak"—he pointed toward Pigeon Mountain—"and it's almost two miles high."

"How are we going to fool them, then?" Captain Charlie Hall asked. "If they know we're coming, they're going to bake us a cake."

He had a gift for the obvious; Morrell had long since seen that. But what was obvious to him would also be obvious to the Canadians. "What's obvious," Morrell observed, "isn't always true."

Guderian's head bobbed up and down. He got it. So did Captain Spadinger. So, for that matter, did Lieutenant Jephtha Lewis. Hall's tanned, handsome face was still blank. Rather sourly, Morrell decided that made him perfect for leading half the attack he had in mind: if its own commander didn't understand it, the Canadians were sure to be fooled.

But no, he decided after a brief hesitation. Sending Hall in blind would surely get him killed. He was liable to get killed anyway; his role would be expensive. And so Morrell condescended to explain: "You'll take your company and most of the machine guns around to the east of the mountain there. Don't do anything in particular to keep from drawing attention to yourself. As soon as you get opposition, I want you to plaster it with rifle fire and those machine guns—make it seem as if you're in charge of the whole battalion. While you're keeping the Canucks busy, the rest of us are going to be sneaking up one of these Indian trails to see if we can slide past the observer without getting observed."

Captain Hall's eyes widened. "What a good idea, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I'm glad you like it." Morrell knew his voice was dry, but he couldn't help it. It didn't matter. Hall no more noticed the tone than he had figured out what lay in Morrell's mind before the battalion commander put it in words of one syllable for him.

Morrell kept Sergeant Finkel's machine-gun squad; the rest went on the diversionary move. Since he was leaving himself with only one gun, he chose the best. Guderian had seen that, too. "The sergeant

there should be an officer," he observed quietly. "Is he held back because he is a Jew?"

"Maybe a little," Morrell answered. "He holds himself back, too, though: he'd rather deal with the machine guns himself than with men who would be dealing with machine guns, if you know what I mean."

"I know exactly what you mean," Guderian said, nodding. "Those are indeed the ones who make the best noncommissioned officers."

Once he judged Captain Hall's force well begun on its diversionary move, Morrell led the rest of the battalion north and west on narrow trails through the thickest woods he could find. He strung the men out so that, even if the Canadians up on Pigeon Mountain should spot them, they would have a hard time judging how many U.S. soldiers were on the march.

He tramped along at the head of the column, map in one hand, compass in the other, hoping the two of them could guide him. His boots scuffed almost soundlessly through a carpet of needles fallen from the tall, dark conifers all around. Their resinous, aromatic scent filled his nostrils.

"You are a lucky man, Major," Captain Guderian said, "to have escaped being chained behind a desk."

"I think so, anyhow," Morrell said. "Some people *want* to coop themselves up with stoves and electric lamps and telephones and typewriters. You need those people, too, if you're going to win a war, but I am not any of them. This, for me, is better."

Guderian was on the point of replying when gunfire broke out, off to the east. It was a good deal of gunfire. The German's head went up, like a hound's on taking a scent. "The Canadians' attention has been drawn, I should say. Nothing like machine guns to do that, is there? Soon we see how much attention they are paying over on that side of the mountain."

"They can't have a whole great swarm of men themselves," Morrell said. "They're trying to hold off the USA all across their country, and we're bigger than they are, even if we're fighting the Confederacy, too."

"One hopes they can't," Guderian answered. Morrell grinned. The foreigner was as dry with him as he'd been with Captain Hall. Unlike Hall, though, he was alert enough to the world around him to realize

as much.

He was sure the Canadians had pickets in the woods—he would have, in their shoes. He didn't run into any of them for quite a while, though. As the trees hid him from Pigeon Mountain, they also hid the mountain from him. That meant he had no choice but to navigate by the map, which he didn't fully trust. If it was even close to right, he was almost to decent terrain that would take him straight toward the railroad line—and toward the last line of Canadian defenders in front of it.

Just when he'd begun to think he'd used the Indian trails so cleverly as to evade every picket the Canucks had posted, a rifle shot rang out up ahead. The bullet zipped past his head before he heard the report from the rifle that had sent it on its way. He was burying his face in those fragrant needles before a second bullet drilled through the space where his body had been.

Map and compass went flying when he dove. As he grabbed for his Springfield, he shouted, "Get 'em fast. Don't let this look big." He fired in the direction from which the shots had come.

His men dashed into the woods on either side of the trail. The little battle that followed was a lot like fighting Indians—running from tree to tree, ambushes, small desperate stands of resistance. After ten or fifteen minutes, no one was shooting anymore. Morrell hoped the Canucks were dead and hadn't been able to send runners back to announce he and his soldiers were on the way.

The racket of the fight was liable to have done that for them. "Now we push it!" Morrell called as the Americans moved forward once more. "If the Canucks know we're here, we don't want them to have time to get ready for us."

He'd rescued the map—that was precious. God only knew where the compass had landed. He commandeered Captain Spadinger's. Twenty minutes later, the U.S. force burst out of the woods. There in the distance was the railroad running alongside the Ghost River. A train, tiny as a toy, chugged west. But between him and the object of his desire lay rifle pits and trenches with Canadians in them. He shouted for Sergeant Finkel.

Quiet and competent, the noncom and his crew had kept up with everyone else. Setting up the machine gun on its tripod was a matter of moments. One gun wasn't much to cover the advance of a battalion,

but it was what Morrell had. If nothing else, it would make the Canucks, however many Canucks there were, keep their heads down some of the time.

“Fire and move!” Morrell yelled. “Fire and move!”

As they often had before, his men ran toward the Canadians in small groups, flopped down and fired so their comrades could sprint past them, then moved up again when those comrades took cover. The Canucks fought hard, but, as he’d hoped, their lines weren’t so full as they might have been. Sergeant Finkel engaged at long range some men trying to rush back from the east.

When the first U.S. soldiers started jumping down into the Canadian trenches, Morrell refrained from following them long enough to shout for a runner. He told the men, “Get back to division HQ and tell ’em to send reinforcements after us. From where we are, all we have to do is hold and we can mortar that railroad line to hell and gone. Tell ’em to push it, too; the Canucks’ll try and throw us out. We’ll hold on here as long as we can.”

Bent low at the waist to make himself a small target, the runner dashed back the way he’d come. Morrell figured his men would have to hold on by themselves for most of a day. He figured they could do it, too. And then—and then the Canadians would have only one pass left through the Rockies, and that one higher and farther north and less usable through the winter than either of the two that would be lost to them.

“One more nail in the coffin,” he muttered. But that wasn’t quite right—it was one more stroke of the saw that was cutting the country in half. He nodded, as pleased with his metaphor as he was with his victory.

Brakes squealing, the train pulled into the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad depot. “Richmond!” the conductors shouted, again and again. “All out for Richmond!”

Anne Colleton shook her head in mingled scorn and bemusement. After the train had rattled over the long bridge across the James River, people would have to be idiots not to know it was coming in to the capital of the Confederate States. But then, a lot of people were idiots. She’d seen that often enough. She’d grown rich, then richer, because

of it. And she'd grown poorer because of it, too, since blacks proved no more immune to the disease than whites.

"Porter!" she called, stepping out of the compartment. A Negro with a hand truck came hurrying up. Despite the black uprising, that tone of imperious command got results. The colored fellow piled her trunks —not so fine as the ones she'd had before the Marshlands burned— onto the dolly and followed her out of the Pullman coach onto the smoky, noisy platform that served as gateway between train and world. Once out there, she stuck two fingers in her mouth and let out a piercing whistle she'd learned from her brothers. "Taxi!" she yelled, imperious as ever.

Others had got there before her, but her clothes, her manner, and the way the porter followed her all said she was a person of consequence. She forced her way through the milling crowd. The porter loaded her luggage into the automobile. She gave him a quarter. He grinned and tipped his cap and went off to help someone else, his brass buttons gleaming.

"Where to, ma'am?" the taxi driver asked after handing her into the car.

"Ford's Hotel," she answered. He had hardly put the cab into gear before she found a question of her own: "Why aren't you in uniform?"

"Ma'am, I got hit once in the shoulder and once here." He took his left hand off the wheel for a moment. It was encased in a leather glove, three of whose fingers were unnaturally full and stiff. "They decided they'd had as much of me as they could use, so they let me go."

"Very well," she answered. As he drove north toward Capitol Square, she saw plenty of other such expended men on the street: men on crutches with one trouser leg pinned up, men who had no legs in wheelchairs, men with an empty sleeve or a hook doing duty for one hand, men with a patch over one eye, and a couple of men with black silk masks who kept a hand on a companion's shoulder so they could find their way.

Traffic was appalling, with trucks and heavily laden horse-drawn wagons slowing things to a crawl for everyone else. The air tasted of exhaust fumes and coal smoke and horse manure and chemical stinks Anne could not name. The driver coughed a couple of times when it got particularly ripe, then spoke as if in apology: "Place stinks like one

of those miserable U.S. cities, don't it, ma'am?"

"It had better," Anne said sharply. "We need weapons and men both, and we have to make the weapons, because the sea war won't let us import them."

"You know about these things," the cabbie said respectfully.

He'd turned left on Canal Street for a block, then gone up Seventh to Grace, where he turned right and went on till he came to Ninth, which abutted Capitol Square. There he waited and waited and waited till he finally found the chance to turn left and go on for half a block, and then to turn right onto Capitol Street. When he got to Eleventh, he—slowly—turned left again, and went past the bulk of Ford's Hotel to the entrance, which was at the corner of Eleventh and Broad.

A Negro in a uniform fancier than any a general wore took charge of Anne's luggage. She paid the fare, adding a tip of the same size. The taxi driver took off his cap with his good hand and bowed to her. "Stay well," she told him.

"Ma'am," he said, "I used to cuss about traffic till the first time I got shot. Now it don't worry me none—not even a little bit."

"No servants, ma'am?" the desk clerk asked.

"Do you see any?" Anne demanded. Julia was not long delivered of a baby girl. No one else who remained at Marshlands seemed suitable as a traveling companion, and she had not wanted to hire a servant. She had enough trouble trusting Negroes she knew—or thought she knew.

Flushing, the clerk gave her a big bronze key with the number 362 stamped onto it. An arthritic elevator took her, the bellman, and her cases upstairs. The room was large and fancy, with thick carpets, landscapes on the walls, elaborately carved tables, and a great profusion of lacework doilies and maroon plush upholstery. It was, no doubt, intended to impress the daylights out of the prosperous businessmen and lobbyists who usually stayed here, and no doubt succeeded. The exhibition of modern art Anne had put together just before the war broke out had been the antithesis of everything the room stood for. "Looks more like a whorehouse than a hotel room," she remarked as she tipped the bellhop. He let out a scandalized giggle and fled.

Anne unpacked—after living for months in a refugee camp, she

could still see having a room to herself as a luxurious waste of space—and went downstairs for supper. The restaurant was as spectacularly overdecorated as the room. But they did a fine job on crab cakes—the boast of "Best in the CSA" on the menu didn't seem misplaced—so she had little cause for complaint.

The bed was comfortable enough, too. After a Pullman, any bed that didn't sway and rattle seemed splendid. The next morning, she looked at the gray linen dress she'd intended wearing and shook her head. She hadn't seen how wrinkled it was the night before, or she would have had it pressed. She chose a maroon silk instead.

After breakfast in the hotel, she hailed a cab. "The Executive Mansion," she said crisply. The driver, a sensible man, did not bother pointing out that the building was only two blocks north and one east from where she'd got in. What the damnyankees still disparagingly called the Confederate White House also stood near the top of Shockoe Hill; Anne had no intention of arriving there as draggled and sweaty as a housemaid. The cab labored up the hill to the corner of Clay and Twelfth, where the driver let her out. She reckoned the quarter fare and dime tip money well spent.

Armed guards patrolled the grounds of the mansion behind a wrought-iron fence whose points were not only decorative but looked very sharp. A white man who wore formal attire but carried himself with a military bearing examined her letter of invitation and checked her name off on a list before allowing her to proceed. "I am not an assassin," she remarked, half annoyed, half amused.

"I know that, ma'am—now," the fellow replied. Anne Colleton seldom yielded anyone else the last word, but made an exception here.

As she'd expected, she had to wait before being admitted to President Semmes'presence. A Negro servant offered her coffee and cakes dusted with powdered sugar. She ate one, then prudently checked her appearance in the mirror of her compact. *Wouldn't do to see the president with sugar on my chin,* she thought.

After most of an hour—half an hour past the nine-thirty for which her appointment was scheduled—another servant led her into Gabriel Semmes' office. Since the man who walked out past her was the secretary of war, she did not think the president had delayed meeting her to be inconvenient.

President Semmes certainly received her with every sign of

pleasure. “So very good of you to come up from South Carolina,” he said, and moved the chair across from his desk slightly to suggest that she sit in it. “Here, please—make yourself comfortable. Can I have the staff bring you anything?”

“No, thank you,” she answered. “Let’s get straight down to business, shall we?”

“However you like, of course,” he answered. He looked like a Confederate politician, or rather the apotheosis of a Confederate politician: in his early fifties, handsome, ruddy, a little beefy, with a mane of gray hair combed straight back from his forehead, a mustache, and a little chin beard that was almost pure white. The absence of tobacco stains from that beard was enough almost by itself to place him outside the common herd. He went on, “I won’t beat around the bush with you, Miss Colleton—I need your help on this bill to arm our Negroes and use them against the USA.”

Any time a politician said he wouldn’t beat around the bush, you were well advised to keep your hand on your wallet. “You’ll have to show me things are as bad as you said in your letter inviting me here,” she told him. “The press certainly does not make them out to be so desperate.”

“Have you ever heard of any war in the history of the world where the press did not make things out to be better than they were?” Gabriel Semmes returned. “If you look at papers in the USA during the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War, you will see they thought they were winning each time until almost the moment of their overthrow.”

“As may be,” she said. “I am not yet convinced.” She did not tell him what her brother Tom kept saying in his letters. Politicians were not the only ones who learned to hold their cards close—business taught the same lesson.

President Semmes said, “A glance at the map will show you much of the trouble. We have lost ground against the USA almost everywhere, and our remaining gains in Maryland are threatened. Our latest effort to reclaim western Texas failed—there is no other word. They hammer us on every front. We do have some counterstrokes in the offing, and we have thus far managed to avoid losing anything vital, but that cannot continue forever. We are under more pressure than our allies in Europe, and have little prospect of aid from them.”

“We hurt the Yankees worse than they hurt us in every fight, is that not so?” Anne said. “That’s one reason why we stand on the defensive so much.”

“Yes, we do, by a ratio of close to three to two,” Semmes answered. “Each U.S. conscription class, though, outnumbers our corresponding class of whites by about three to one. Add in the Negroes and the deficit shrinks to about two to one. Better, actually, for we would be calling up several conscription classes of blacks at once.”

Anne pursed her lips thoughtfully. “But not all the U.S. soldiers are used against us,” she pointed out. “Many of them go into the fight against Canada. That helps even the numbers somewhat.”

“Somewhat, yes, for now,” President Semmes agreed. “But, even with troops from Britain aiding them—they have the advantage of the northern route—the Canadians, I tell you in confidence, are in a bad way. How long we can rely on them to continue siphoning off Yankee resources, I cannot say.”

Beyond what he asserted, beyond what the papers asserted (which, thanks to censorship, was liable to be the same thing), she didn’t know how things stood with Canada. Would he lie for political advantage alone? Probably. But she could check what he said with her senators and the congressman from her district, the men he wanted her to influence. He would know that. Therefore, he was likely to be telling the truth, or most of it.

“The other question is,” she said, as much to herself as to him, “what will the Confederate States be like with Negroes as citi-zens? Is that better, or is losing as we are?”

“Miss Colleton, I always thought you were on the side of modernity, of progress, of change,” President Semmes said, a shrewd shot that proved he—or his advisors—knew her views well. “And if we lose, can we stay as we are? Or would we face another round of Red upheaval?”

That was another good question. The answer seemed only too obvious, too. Try to freeze in the mold of the past, or take a chance on the future? If you didn’t gamble, how were you going to win? But when she thought about what blacks had done to Marshlands and to her brother—“I hate this,” she said quietly.

“So do I,” the president of the Confederate States replied.

“I’ll do what I can,” Anne said, trying not to see the disapproving look on dead Jacob’s face. Well, better the damnyankees should have gassed a Negro than poor Jacob. If you looked at it the right way, they’d killed him before the Negro uprising could finish the job.

“From the bottom of my heart, I thank you, and your country thanks you as well,” President Semmes said. He rose and bowed to her, then went on, “Now that we know ourselves to be in agreement, perhaps you will accompany me to a ceremony where your presence will surely serve as an inspiration to the brave men we honor.”

Roger Kimball was bored. The ceremony should have started at half past ten. He drew out his pocket watch. It was closer to eleven. Almost imperceptibly, he shook his head. Civilians could get away with nonsense like that. For a naval officer, it would have meant trouble at least, maybe a court-martial.

Not only was he bored, he was hot, too. They’d run up an awning so he didn’t have to stand in direct sunshine, but it didn’t cut the heat much or the humidity at all. He felt as if he were melting down into his socks. The only advantage he found to sweating so much was that he wouldn’t have enough water left in him to need to take a leak—probably for the next three days.

Out on the lawn, old people sat in folding chairs and looked at him and the other hunks of uniformed beef on display under the awning. Ladies fanned themselves. Some of their male companions used straw hats to make the air move. By the way the old folks were turning red in the vicious sunshine, they needed the awning worse than he and his companions did.

Off to one side of the awning, a band struck up “Dixie.” Kim-ball came to attention; maybe that meant things really would get rolling now. The Negro musicians were in black cutaway coats and black trousers. They didn’t have an awning, either. He wondered how they could play without keeling over. He shrugged. They were just niggers, after all.

A woman walked quickly forward to take a seat near the front. Roger’s eyebrows came to attention, as the rest of him had at the national anthem. Unlike most of the audience, she was anything but superannuated. Her maroon silk dress clung tightly to her rounded hips and, daringly short, revealed trim ankles. Under her hat, her hair

shone in the sun, but it shone gold, not silver.

Next to Kimball, an Army sergeant murmured through unmoving lips, “The president ought to pin her on my chest instead of a medal.”

“Yeah,” he whispered back. Then he stiffened far beyond the requirements of attention. “Christ on a crutch, that’s Anne Colleton!”

“You *know* her?” the sergeant said. Microscopically, Roger nodded. The Army man sighed. “Either you’re a liar, Navy, or you’re one lucky bastard, I’ll tell you that.” And then, recognizing him, too, Anne waved, not too obviously but unmistakably. The sergeant sighed again. “You *are* a lucky bastard.”

Here came President Gabriel Semmes, all sleek and clever, to present their decorations. Kimball noticed him only peripherally. He’d had a note from Anne when she was stuck in that refugee camp, but nothing since. He hadn’t been a hundred percent sure she was still alive, and found himself damn glad to discover she was.

President Semmes made a speech, of which he heard perhaps one word in three. The gist of it was, with bravery like that which these heroes had displayed, the Confederate States were surely invincible. Roger Kimball didn’t believe that for a minute. Semmes didn’t believe it, either, or why was he pushing that bill to put guns in the hands of black men?

A flunky brought the president a silver tray with dark blue velvet boxes stacked on it. Reporters scribbled as Semmes read out the deeds of the heroes he was honoring. One of the awards was posthumous: a Confederate Cross for a private who’d leaped on a grenade to save his pals.

Kimball wasn’t up for a C.C. himself; Semmes would pin an Order of the *Virginia* on him, the next highest award a Navy man could get. To earn the Confederate Cross and live through it, you had to be brave, lucky, and crazy, all at the same time. Without false modesty, he knew he was brave and he’d been lucky, but he hadn’t—quite—been crazy up there in Chesapeake Bay.

The sergeant standing there next to him *had* won a Confederate Cross. “P.G.T.B. Austin, without concern for his own safety, climbed onto the top of a U.S. traveling fort,” President Semmes said, not calling it a barrel, “and threw grenades into the machine through its hatches until fire forced the crew to flee, whereupon he killed three with his rifle, wounded two more, and accepted the surrender of the

rest. Sergeant Austin!" The audience applauded. Photographers snapped away as Austin went up to get his medal. Kimball nodded to himself. Brave, lucky, and crazy, sure enough.

His own turn came a moment later. After hearing what the Army man had done, he felt embarrassed to accept even a lesser decoration. The president shook his hand and told him what a splendid fellow he was. He already knew what a splendid fellow he was, so he didn't argue. The medal, a tiny gold replica of the Confederacy's first ironclad hanging from a red, white, and blue ribbon, did look impressive on his chest.

He went back to his place under the awning and waited for the rest of the medals to be awarded. Then, as he'd expected, the men who'd won them got the chance to mingle with guests and reporters.

He wondered if Anne Colleton would still give him the time of day. He wasn't a big fish, not in this pond. If she wanted heroes, she had her pick here. But she came straight up to him. *Maybe she wants an ornery so-and-so,* he thought. *Takes one to know one*.

"Congratulations," she said, and shook his hand man-fashion. "I'm glad to see you here and well."

"Same to you," he answered. The feel of her flesh against his sent a charge through him, as if he'd touched a bare wire. He watched her face. Her pupils got bigger; her nostrils flared, ever so slightly. She wanted to be alone with him, too. Heat different from that of Richmond August filled him. "Last I got a look at you, you were seeing how fast you could get away from the Charleston docks."

"I did fine, halfway to Marshlands." Her voice turned bitter. "Then my car got stolen."

"Rebels? Reds?" Kimball said. "You're lucky they didn't kill—"

"Not Reds," Anne broke in. "Soldiers. Our soldiers. Oh, I suppose they needed it against the uprising, but—" She didn't go on.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw men gathering around them, drawn to Anne Colleton like moths to a flame. He knew how good a comparison that was, too. But he was no moth; he had fire of his own. So he told himself, anyhow. Quickly, while he still had the chance, he asked, "Where are you staying?"

"Ford's," she answered. "Would you like to celebrate your medal by

having supper with me there tonight?”

“Can’t think of anything I’d like better,” he said. He could, in fact, think of several things, but those were things you did, not things you talked about. “Half past six?” he asked, and, when she nodded, he drifted away as if she were just someone in the crowd he happened to know.

He showed up at the hotel a couple of minutes early. She was waiting in the lobby and, again, had drawn a crowd. Some of the officers were of considerably higher rank than lieutenant commander; all the civilians looked more than prosperous. Everyone stared after Kimball and Anne when they went off to the dining room, her hand on his arm.

He grinned over at her. “I could get used to this,” he said.

A tiny vertical crease appeared between her eyebrows. “Don’t,” she said, more seriously than he’d expected. “If people think of you because of whoever’s with you—so what? Make them remember you for yourself.”

He thought about that, then nodded. “I started on a little farm. I’ve come this far on my own. I’ll go farther, if I can.”

“That’s the way to look at it,” she agreed. “Any one of those fat lawyers back there would love to take care of my affairs—and you can take that any way you like. I won’t let them. *I* run my life, no one else.” That had the sound of hard experience behind it, and also, perhaps, a note of warning.

Ford’s Hotel did right by its dinner spread. “Wouldn’t hardly know there’s a war on,” Kimball said happily, digging into almost fork-tender leg of lamb.

Anne Colleton stayed serious. “What do you think of President Semmes’bill?” she asked. She didn’t need to say which bill. Only one mattered now.

“I’m against it,” he answered firmly. “As long as we’re holding our own, or even anything close, we should go on doing what we’ve been doing. Far as I can see, we’re giving the darkies a kiss on the cheek, right after they tried to up and knock our heads off.”

She nodded, slowly. “Is that how most Navy men feel?”

Kimball knocked back the whiskey in his glass. “It’s not even the way my exec feels. All you hear these days is arguments.”

“What if we can’t win the war, can’t hope to win the war, if things keep on going as they have been?” Anne said. “Would you want to arm Negroes then?”

“Hung for a sheep or hung for a lamb, you mean?” He shrugged, unable to come up with a better answer. “If we’re that bad off, putting rifles in niggers’ hands won’t help us, far as I can see. And if we do that, and we lose anyhow, what will the country look like afterwards? Be a hell of a mess, begging your pardon—not that it isn’t already.”

“A point,” she said. “It may be the most serious point in opposition I’ve heard yet.” A colored waiter came up and cleared away plates. After a tutti-frutti ice, brandy, a cigar for Kimball and a couple of cigarettes for Anne, the waiter came back. “Charge this to my room,” she told him, and he dipped his head with practiced obsequiousness.

Roger Kimball’s hand had been going to his wallet. He scowled, angry that she’d accepted the bill before he had the chance. “I’m not broke—” he began.

“I know,” she answered, “but, for one thing, I invited you to supper, not the other way round, and, for another, I promise I have more money than you do; I know what naval officers make. It’s my pleasure, believe me.”

“Weren’t you the one talking about making your own way when we came in here?” he asked, unhappy still.

“I didn’t suggest annoying your friends by being stubborn when that’s plainly foolish,” she said, a touch of sharpness in her voice.

He subsided, looking for a word he’d heard a few times but had had little occasion to use. *Gigolo,* he thought. *She’s made me her gigolo tonight*. He seemed to have no choice but to accept that. Well, all right. Gigolos had privileges of their own. He remembered how she looked under that maroon silk, and how she felt, and how she tasted, too.

If the Ford Hotel boasted a house detective, he was good at making himself invisible. Kimball and Anne went up to her floor and walked down the richly carpeted hallway to her room without interference. She opened the door with her key, leaned forward to brush his lips with hers…and then said, “Good night, Roger. I hope you sleep well.”

It was not an invitation to come in. “What the devil—?” he said roughly. “We’ve been—”

“I know what we’ve been,” she answered. “We won’t be, not tonight. The very first time we met, you did a splendid job of seducing me.” Her eyes glinted, half amusement, half remembered anger of her own. “And so, tonight, no. Call it a lesson: never, ever take me for granted. Maybe another time, probably another time—but not tonight.”

He wasn’t that much bigger than she, but he knew he was stronger. With a lot of other women, he would have picked them up, thrown them on the bed, and taken what he wanted. If he tried that with her—even if he succeeded, because he knew she’d fight like a wildcat—he figured she was liable to stab him or shoot him as he left.

“You *are* a bitch,” he said, reluctantly admiring.

“I know.” She knew, all right, and she was proud of it.

He seized her, jerked her chin up, and kissed her, hard. He figured she’d fight that, too, but she didn’t. Her body molded itself against him. When the kiss broke, though, she pushed him away. She was laughing—and panting a little. So was he. “Thanks for supper,” he said, and tipped his hat. He strode down the hall toward the elevator without a backward glance.

Out on the sidewalk, a drunken artillery sergeant walked right into him. “Watch where you’re going, you goddamn medal-wearing son of a bitch,” the fellow snarled. By the way his mouth twisted, he was looking for a fight wherever he could find one.

Kimball didn’t feel like fighting, which, since he hadn’t got laid, surprised him. “I’m an officer,” he warned, meaning the sergeant would catch special hell if he fought with him.

“Watch where you’re going, you goddamn medal-wearing son of a bitch, *sir,*” the sergeant said.

Laughing, Kimball peeled off a five-dollar note he hadn’t spent at supper and pressed it into the noncom’s hand before that hand could close into a fist. The sergeant stared. “Go on, get drunker on me,” Kimball said. He slapped him on the back, then headed off to his barracks close by the James.

Jake Featherston gaped in owlish disbelief at the banknote that had magically appeared in his hand. Even if the fellow who'd given it to him was a Navy man, he had, until the grayback pressed it on him, wanted to smash his face: not only was he an officer, he was a decorated officer. Jake knew damn well he deserved to be an officer. He also knew he deserved several medals, not just one.

"And am I gonna get 'em?" he asked the empty air around him. "Sure I am—same time as I get promoted." He laughed a loud, raucous, bitter laugh. He wasn't holding his breath.

He ambled around Capitol Square, like a sailing ship tacking almost at random. That was how he felt, too. He wasn't going anywhere in particular, just letting his feet and the crowds in the streets take him wherever they would. Half seriously, he saluted the statues of Washington and Albert Sidney Johnston in the square.

"They'd know how to take care of a soldier," he muttered to himself. Muttering did no good. Complaining out loud did no good, either. He'd seen that when he went to Major Clarence Potter. Maybe if he walked into the Capitol itself and started screaming at congressmen and generals—

He shook his head, which made the world spin alarmingly. No good, no good. It was late. He didn't know how late it was, but it was late. No congressmen working in the Capitol now, by Jesus. They'd all be in bed with their mistresses. And the generals…the generals would be in bed with Jeb Stuart, Jr. He laughed. The truth in that hurt, though. If the powers that be in the Confederate War Department hadn't been sucking up to the father of his late, brave, stupid company commander, they would have given him his due. But they did suck up, they hadn't given it to him, and they damn well never would.

"Bastards," he said. "Sons of bitches." The words were hot and satisfying in his mouth, the way the whiskey had been at that saloon—those saloons—earlier. Pretty soon, he figured he'd go looking for another saloon. He was sure he'd have no trouble finding one.

Around him, Richmond didn't so much ignore the war as take it in stride. He wandered south and east, away from Capitol Square. Plenty of soldiers and sailors on leave clogged the sidewalks and the streets themselves, making people in buggies and motorcars yell at them to get out of the way. They didn't want to get out of the way, not with so many women to look for, so many stores open so late, so many saloons…

Most of the men in civilian clothes were Negroes. Featherston glowered at them. They were out celebrating as hard as the white people. They had their nerve, he thought. Here white men went out to fight and die, and all the blacks had to do was stay home and have a high old time. Stories of lazy niggers his overseer father had told him ran through his head. He had no doubt every goddamn one of them was true, too.

A big buck in a sharp suit—too sharp for any Negro to deserve to wear—bumped into him. “Watch it, you ugly black bastard,” he snarled.

“Sorry, suh,” the Negro said, but he wasn’t sorry—Jake could see it in his eyes. If people had been paying better attention, the whole Red uprising would have been nipped in the bud. When the fellow didn’t get out of the way fast enough, Featherston shoved him, hard. The black’s hand closed into a fist as he staggered.

A fierce joy lit Jake. “So you want to play, do you?” he said genially, and gave the black buck a knee square in the balls. The fellow went down as if he’d been shot. Jake wished he had shot him. He wished he could shoot all of them. Brushing his hands together, he headed off down the street, leaving the Negro writhing on the pavement behind him. No one said boo.

He was about to cross Franklin Street, a good way down from Capitol Square, when military policemen blocked the way. He felt like cursing them, too, but that would land him in jail, and he still had a couple of days’leave before he had to go back to the Maryland front. So he stood and watched as a long column of soldiers tramped past.

Farther up the street, people were laughing and cheering. A hell of a racket was coming from somewhere up there, too. Jake craned his neck. A moment later, he laughed and cheered, too. Four barrels—nobody who’d faced the Yankee version said *tanks*—rumbled toward him, battle flags painted on the front and sides. They looked different from the ones the USA manufactured; Featherston wondered whether the CSA had built them or they’d somehow been imported from England.

However that was, he was damn glad to see them. “Give ’em hell!” he shouted, and a soldier riding on top of one of them waved his way. He yelled again: “Let the damnyankees know what it’s like, by Jesus!” Had he been in the infantry, he probably would have shouted even louder.

The barrels were so heavy, their wraparound tracks tore up the concrete surface of the street. They'd probably come through town to build morale. *Sure built mine,* Jake thought. More soldiers followed, young, serious-looking men intent on keeping step. They'd learn what was important and what wasn't pretty damn quick. Jake knew that.

Having been born and raised in Richmond, he also knew which railroad station the men and barrels were heading for: the Richmond and Danville. He wished they'd been coming up to Maryland, but the Roanoke front was probably the next best place for them. Grudgingly, he admitted to himself that the Roanoke front might have been the best place to send them. The Yanks were in Virginia there, as opposed to fighting them on their own soil farther north and east.

To celebrate the chance of throwing the damnyankees out of his own state, Jake went into a saloon and poured down whiskey. To celebrate that whiskey, he had another one, and then another. When he came out of the saloon, he'd spent a good piece of the note that Navy man had given him. And, when he came out, he didn't need to turn his head sharply to make the world revolve.

Off in the distance, he heard, or thought he heard, a low-pitched, droning rumble. More barrels? He shook his head, and almost fell over. The troop trains pulling out? No, this wasn't a train noise. It was real, though. He hadn't been sure of that before, but he was now.

It sounded like…aeroplanes. His face twisted in slow-witted puzzlement. "If it is aeroplanes, it's a hell of a lot of 'em," he said, thinking out loud. He wondered why the Confederacy would put so many aeroplanes in the sky so late at night. "Damn foolishness," he mumbled.

The part of his mind that functioned at a level below conscious thought came up with the answer. "Sweet suffering Jesus, it's the Yankees!" he exclaimed, a moment before the first antiaircraft gun outside the Confederate capital began pounding away at the intruders.

He knew too well how futile antiaircraft fire often turned out to be. At night, hitting your target was even harder. And the United States had put a hell of a lot of aeroplanes in the air. They'd bombed the front. They'd bombed Confederate-occupied Washington. Till now, they hadn't done much to Richmond. All that, evidently, was about to change. Featherston dove under a bench at a trolley stop, the first shelter he spied.

With so many lights on in the Confederate capital, the bombers had targets to dream of. Most of the explosions sounded as if they were close to Capitol Square—most, but not all. The damnyankees seemed to have plenty of bombing aeroplanes to carpet the whole city.

From under the bench, Featherston watched a sea of feet and legs, men's and women's both, running every which way. "Like chickens with their heads cut off," he said, and then raised his voice to a shout: "Take cover, dammit!"

They didn't listen to him. Nobody listened to him. Civilians paid him no more mind than soldiers ever had. And, when the bombs started falling all around, the civilians of Richmond found out that they should have paid attention, just as the Confederate brass should have listened when he tried to tell them Pompey was no damn good.

Crummp! Crummp! For him, the bombing of Richmond was like being under a medium-heavy artillery bombardment, except it didn't last so long. It wasn't that he had no fear—anybody who wasn't afraid when things were blowing up nearby was crazy, and Mrs. Featherston had raised no fool. But he, like most of the soldiers in town, had faced such horrors before. His chiefest wish was to be able to shoot back.

For civilians, though—for Negroes, for women, for the old and the young—the raid had to seem like the end of the world. Screams rose into the night, those of the panicked side by side with those of the injured. Then secondary screams went up as the panicked discovered the injured, and the dismembered, and the dead. Civilians had no notion of what high explosives and sharp-edged fragments of flying metal could do to the human body. Courtesy of the Yankees, they were learning.

Bombs or no bombs, somebody had to do something to help. Jake got out from under his bench as if he were leaving a dugout to serve his howitzer under fire. He passed by a groaning black man to bandage a cut on a white woman's head.

More bombers roared past up above. He could hear them, but couldn't see them. No—he could see one, for smoke and fire were trailing from it, getting brighter every second. The antiaircraft guns ringing Richmond weren't entirely useless, then: only pretty much so.

The stricken bomber nosed down and dove. It seemed to be coming right at him. He flattened himself out on the street, absentmindedly knocking down the woman he'd just bandaged, too. The bombs the

aeroplane hadn't had the chance to drop exploded when it crashed a block away.

He got picked up and slammed down again, right on top of the woman. It wasn't anything erotic. He scrambled off her. The houses where the bomber had crashed were burning furiously.

Through the chaos, he heard the fire alarm bell from Capitol Square. It made him throw back his head and laugh. "Thanks for the news!" he shouted. "Thanks for the goddamn news! Never would have known it without you!"

XV

"I don't like it," Paul Andersen said, peering across no-man's-land toward the Confederate lines. "Those bastards are too damn quiet."

"Yeah." Chester Martin took out his entrenching tool and knocked some bricks that had probably been part of a chimney out of the way. If he had to flatten out in a hurry, he didn't want to land on them. "One thing about the Roanoke front is, they never give anything up cheap and they always hit back any way they can."

"You got that right." Andersen nodded emphatic agreement.

"This past while, though," Martin went on, "they haven't been counterattacking, they haven't been shelling us…much—they've just been sitting there. Whenever they do things they haven't done before, I don't like it. It's liable to mean they'll do something else they haven't done before, and that's liable to mean yours truly gets his ticket punched."

Andersen nodded again. "Two years o' this shit and hardly a scratch on either one of us. Either I'm leading a charmed life and you're all right, too, on account of you hang around with me—or else it's the other way round. You know what? I don't want to find out which."

"Yeah, me neither," Martin said. "We've seen a hell of a lot of people come and go." He scowled. He didn't want to think about that. Too many men dead in too many horrible ways.

Somebody's observation aeroplane buzzed overhead. It was too high up for Martin or anyone else on the ground to tell whether it belonged to the USA or the Rebels. That didn't stop Specs Peterson from raising his Springfield to his shoulder and squeezing off a couple of rounds at it.

“What the hell you doing?” Martin demanded. “What if it’s on our side?”

“Who gives a damn?” Peterson retorted. “I hate all those flyboy bastards. War’d be a lot cleaner if they weren’t up there spying on us. If it’s a Reb, good riddance. If it’s one of our guys—good riddance, too.”

Martin reminded himself the aeroplane was too high for rifle fire to have any chance of hitting it. If Specs wanted to work out some anger by blasting away at it, why not?

And, evidently, it belonged to the CSA anyhow. U.S. antiaircraft guns opened up on it. Puffs of black smoke filled the air all around the biplane. Like every other small boy ever made, Martin had tried catching butterflies in flight with his bare hands. The antiaircraft rounds had about as much luck with Confederate aeroplanes as he’d usually had going after butterflies.

Every once in a while, though, every once in a while he’d caught one. And, every once in a while, antiaircraft guns knocked down an aeroplane. He let out a yell, thinking this was one of those times—something red and burning came out of the aircraft and hung up there in the sky. Then he swore in disappointment.

So did Paul Andersen. “It’s only a flare,” the corporal said.

“Yeah,” Martin said ruefully. “I really thought they’d nailed the son of a bitch.” He eyed the observation aeroplane with sudden suspicion. “What the hell are they doing shooting off flares? They’ve never done anything like that before.”

A moment later, the Confederates gave him the answer. The eastern horizon exploded with a roar that, he thought, would have made the famous Krakatoa volcano sound like a hiccup. One second, everything was quiet, as it had been for so long. The next, hell came down on earth.

Along with everybody else in the trenches, he scrambled for the nearest bombproof he could find. Some limey cartoonist had drawn one where a soldier was saying to his buddy, “Well, if you knows of a better ’ole, go to it.” The Rebs had got the slogan from the limeys, and U.S. soldiers from the Rebs. For anybody on either side who’d ever been in a trench, it summed up what life under fire was like.

Men started banging on empty shell casings, which meant the Rebs

were throwing gas along with all their other lovely presents. Trying to fumble a gas helmet out of its canvas case when he was jammed into a dugout with twice as many soldiers as it should have held was not one of the things Chester Martin enjoyed most, but he managed. Somebody who couldn't manage started coughing and choking and drowning for good air, but Martin couldn't do anything about that except curse the Confederates. He couldn't even tell who the poor bastard getting poisoned was.

The bombardment went on for what felt like forever. It covered miles of the front. The Rebs didn't stick to the trenches right up against the barbed wire, either. They gave it to the U.S. positions as far back as they could reach, and they had more heavy guns firing along with their damned three-inchers than had been so during the first year of the war.

During a lull—which is to say, when the Rebs were going after U.S. guns rather than front-line troops—Martin shouted to Paul Andersen, "Well, now we know why they were so goddamn quiet for so long."

Andersen nodded mournfully. "They were savin' it up to shoot off at us all at once." A couple of miles to the west, something blew up with a thunderous roar loud even through the surrounding din. "There went an ammo dump—stuff we ain't gonna be able to shoot back at 'em."

"Yeah, and it's a shame, too." Martin frowned. "Next question is, are they just shelling the hell out of us, or are they going to come over the top when all this lets up?"

"That's a good one," Andersen said. "No way to know till we find out."

Before long, Martin became sure in his own mind the Confederates were coming. They'd never laid on a bombardment like this one before. He heartily hoped they'd never lay on another one, either.

Andersen reached the same conclusion. "Get ready for the hundred and forty-first battle of the Roanoke, or whatever the hell this one is," he said. They both laughed. Back when the war was new, they'd joked about how many battles this valley had seen. They'd seen all of them, small and big alike. Martin had the feeling this was going to be one of the big ones.

Sneaky as usual, the Rebels halted their barrage several times, only to resume a few minutes later, catching U.S. defenders out of their

shelters and slaughtering them. The real attack, though, was marked by long bursts of machine-gun fire from the Confederate trenches, supporting the soldiers who were moving on the U.S. lines.

"Up!" Martin screamed. "Up! Up! Let's get 'em!" He'd come up before, and counted himself lucky not to have been killed. Now he stood in the wreckage of the trench line, blinking like a mole or some other animal not used to the light of day. The barrage had blown most of the parapet to hell and gone, and a lot of the wire that had stood in front of it, too. He could look out across no-man's-land at the Confederate soldiers running toward him.

If he could see them, they could see him. He dropped to one knee and started shooting. Specs Peterson did the same thing beside him, but then pointed off to the left and hollered, "Barrel!"

A barrel it was, but not a U.S. barrel. Martin hadn't known the Rebs had any of their own. They were picking a good time to spring the surprise, too. He watched the ungainly contraption go into a trench and climb out the other side. It looked to climb even better than the ones made in the USA, though it seemed to carry fewer guns.

As far as he could tell, the one Specs had spotted was the only one close by. He wondered how many of the stinking machines the Confederates had altogether. Getting up and trying to find out didn't strike him as the best idea he'd ever had. He shoved a fresh clip into his Springfield, peered over the sights to find a Reb to shoot at, and—

The bullet caught him in the left arm, just below the shoulder. "Aww, shit!" he said loudly. Without that hand supporting it, the muzzle of the Springfield dropped; he fired a round into the dirt almost at his feet.

"Sarge is hit!" Specs Peterson shouted. He quickly wrapped a bandage around the wound, then tugged Martin's good arm over his shoulder. "Let's get you the hell out of here, Sarge."

"Yeah." Martin knew he sounded vague. Everybody said a wound didn't hurt when you first got it. As far as he was concerned, everybody lied. His arm felt as if he'd had molten metal poured on it. He knew too many people in Toledo to whom that had happened. He tried to wriggle the fingers of his left hand, but couldn't tell whether he succeeded or not.

Getting him the hell out of there turned out to be hell of its own kind. The Confederate bombardment had pasted the communications

trenches along with everything else. Plenty of other wounded men were trying to get to the rear, too, and plenty of men who weren't wounded as well. "Jesus," Peterson said, struggling through the chaos all around. "The whole fucking line is coming to pieces."

Martin was less interested than he might have been. Putting one foot in front of the other so he wasn't a dead weight took all the concentration he had. The bandage Specs had slapped on him was red and dripping.

Somewhere back toward the rear, a couple of men with Red Cross armbands took charge of him. "Go back to your unit, Private," one of them said to Peterson.

"If I can find it," Specs answered. "If there's anything left of it. Good luck, Sarge." He turned around and trotted toward the sound of the fighting before Martin could answer.

He spoke to the stretcher-bearers—who bore no stretcher—instead: "How is it?"

He'd meant his wound, but they had other things on their mind. "It's a hell of a mess, Sergeant," one of them answered as they helped him stumble westward, away from the firing. "They drove a hell of a lot of barrels through up to the north and down south of us, too. With those bastards on their flanks, a lot of our infantry just caved in."

As if to demonstrate the truth of that, several unwounded soldiers trotted past them. A military policeman shouted a challenge. Several shots rang out. Martin didn't see the panicked soldiers coming back his way, which meant they'd shot first or best and were still running.

"It's a disaster, is what it is," the second stretcher-bearer said. "They're liable to push us all the way back to the river—maybe over it, for God's sake." Even through the blazing agony of his wound, that got through to Martin. The USA had spent two years and lives uncounted to drive the Confederates back to the Roanoke River and then over it. If they lost all that in one battle…

He stumbled just then, jarring his arm. He'd only thought he hurt before. The battered landscape turned gray before his eyes. He tasted blood, from where his teeth had bitten down too hard on a scream. Whatever he'd been about to say disappeared, burned away by shrieking nerves.

When they got him to the field hospital, the stretcher-bearers

exclaimed in dismay, because it was dissolving like Lot's wife in the rain. "Evacuation!" somebody yelled. Somebody else added, "We're gettin' the hell out before the Rebs overrun us."

By luck—and maybe because, since he wasn't on a stretcher, he didn't take up much room—Martin got shoved aboard an ambulance. Jouncing west over the shell-pocked track toward the river was a special hell of its own. He couldn't look out, only at the other wounded men shoehorned in with him. Maybe that was a blessing of sorts. He couldn't see how many Confederate shells were falling on the road, how many others throwing up water from the Roanoke River as they searched for the bridge.

Engine roaring flat out, the ambulance sped across. The driver whooped triumphantly when he got to the other side: "Made it!" He, of course, was still in one undamaged piece. Martin couldn't decide whether he was glad he hadn't been blown up or sorry.

Flora Hamburger stood on a little portable stage in front of the Croton Brewery on Chrystie Street. The brewery was a block outside the Fourteenth Ward, but still in the Congressional district, whose boundaries didn't perfectly match those used for local administration. She thought she would have come here even had it been outside the district. The associations the brewery called up were too perfect to ignore.

"Two years ago," she called out to the crowd, "two years ago from this very spot, I called on President Roosevelt to keep us out of war. Did he listen? Did he hear me? Did he hear the will of the people, the farmers and laborers who *are* the United States of America?"

"No!" people shouted back to her, some in English, some in Yiddish. It was a proletarian crowd, women in cheap cotton shirtwaists, men in shirts without collars and wearing flat cloth caps on their heads, not bourgeois homburgs and fedoras or capitalist stovepipes.

"No!" Flora agreed. "Two years ago, the Socialist Party spoke out against the mad specter of war. Did Teddy Roosevelt and his plutocratic backers heed us? Did they pay the slightest attention to the call for peace?"

"No!" people yelled again. Too many of the women's shirtwaists were mourning black.

“No!” Flora agreed once more. “And what have they got with their war? How many young men killed?” She thought of Yossel Reisen, who hadn’t had the slightest notion of the ideological implications of the war in which he’d joined—and who would never understand them now. “How many young men maimed or blinded or poisoned? How much labor expended on murder and the products of murder? Is that why troops paraded through the streets behind their marching bands?”

“They wanted victory!” someone shouted. The someone was Herman Bruck, strategically placed in the crowd. He’d borrowed clothes for the occasion, the fancy ones he usually wore being anything but suited for it.

“Victory!” Flora exclaimed. Bruck was doing everything he could to help her beat the appointed Democrat. That she had to give him. “Victory?” This time, it was a question, a mocking question. She looked around, as if she thought she would see it close by. “Where is it? Washington, D.C., has lain under the Confederates’ heavy hands since the first days of the war. We have won a few battles, but how many soldiers has General Custer thrown away to get to Tennessee? And how many battles were shown to be wasted when the Confederates, only two weeks ago, drove our forces back to the Roanoke River? How can anyone in his right mind possibly claim this war is a success?”

Applause poured over her like rain. Two years ago, when she’d urged the people here not to throw the United States onto the fire of a capitalist, imperialist war, she’d been ignored or booed even in the Socialist strongholds of New York City. Now people had seen the result of what they’d cheered to the skies. Having seen it, they didn’t like it so well.

She went on, “My distinguished opponent, Mr. Miller, will tell you this war is a success. Why shouldn’t he tell you that? It’s made *him* a success. He was a lawyer no one had ever heard of till Governor MacFarlane pulled his name out of a top hat after Congressman Zuckerman died, and sent him off to Philadelphia to pretend to represent this district.

“Friends, comrades, you know I wouldn’t be standing here today if Myron Zuckerman were alive. No, I take that back: I might be standing here, but I’d be campaigning for him, not for myself. But I tell you this: if you remember what Congressman Zuckerman stood for, you’ll send me to Philadelphia this November, not a fancy-pants

lawyer who's made his money doing dirty work for the trusts."

More applause, loud and vigorous. In preparation for her speech, party workers had done a fine job of sticking up election posters printed in red and white on black all over the brewery, the synagogue across the street, and even the school at the corner of Chrystie and Hester. The Democrats had more money and more workers, which meant they usually put up more posters and hired people to tear down the ones the Socialists used to oppose them. Not this time, though.

And no hulking Soldiers' Circle goons lurked to break up the rally, either. As the fighting heated up, more and more of them—the younger ones—had been called into the Army they so loudly professed to love. And, as the Remembrance Day riots of 1915 slowly faded into the past, the lid on New York City politics slowly loosened. Socialists elsewhere in the country were using government repression in New York as a campaign issue, too. Embarrassment was often a good tool against the minions of the exploiting class.

A couple of caps went through the crowd. Before long, they jingled as they passed from hand to hand. Party workers talked that up: "Come on, folks, give what you can. This is how we keep the truth coming to the American people. This is how we beat the Democrats. This is how we end the war."

Flora descended from her platform. A couple of men—boys, rather—and a couple of solidly built women who looked like factory workers disassembled it and hauled it off to the wagon on which it had come from Socialist Party headquarters. Conscription had hit the party as hard as anyone else.

Herman Bruck made his way out of the crowd. Flora wondered how and why he'd been lucky enough to stay in gabardine and worsted and tweed and out of the green-gray serge most men his age wore. Her brother David was in green-gray, and, from his latest letter, about to be shipped off to one of the fighting fronts. If the war went on long enough, the same thing would happen to Isaac, who was two years younger.

So how *had* Herman escaped? It wasn't as if he had a job in an essential industry. On the contrary—a lot of Socialist activists had been conscripted in spite of employment in industries related to the war. Asking him would have been rude, but she almost asked anyhow. Before she could, he said, "That was a fine speech. Hearing you out in the crowd instead of being up on the platform with you, I see how you

came to be our candidate. I think you'll win."

She knew he had an ulterior motive—several ulterior motives, some personal, some political—for speaking as he did. But she was no more immune to flattery than any other human being ever born. "Thank you," she said. "I think I will, too. The bad news in the war does nothing but help us. It reminds the people that we opposed the fighting from the start, and that we were right when we did."

Bruck's mouth twisted down. Her record on opposing the war was sounder than his. But then a sly glint came into his eye. "When they do elect you, you'll have the salary of a capitalist—$7,500 a year. What will you do with all that money?"

Any notion of asking him why he wasn't in the Army flew out of her head. She'd thought about winning the election and about taking her seat in the House of Representatives. Up till that moment, she hadn't thought about getting paid for her services. Herman Bruck was right—$7,500 was a lot of money. "I'll be able to make sure my family doesn't want for anything," she said at last.

He nodded. "That's a good answer. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the families here"—his wave encompassed the entire district—"didn't want for anything? *Nu*, that's why you're running." The sly look returned to his face. "And now you'll have another reason to say no when I ask you out: what would a rich and important lady see in a tailor's son?"

Flora snorted. "One thing I see in a tailor's son is someone who nags like a grandmother."

"If I ask you out, maybe you'll say no, but maybe also you'll say yes," Herman answered. "If I don't ask you out, how can you possibly say yes?"

She had to laugh. As she did so, she was more tempted to let him persuade her than she had been for a long time. This didn't seem to be the right place, though, not with the crowd drifting away after the rally. And here came a couple of policemen, looking like old-time U.S. soldiers in their blue uniforms and forage caps. "All right, Miss Hamburger, you've had your speech," one of them said in brisk tones. "No one gave you a bit of trouble during it or before it, and I'll thank your people not to give me trouble now."

"No trouble because of what?" she asked warily.

The cop didn't answer. A couple of his friends came down Chrystie Street, one of them twirling a nightstick on the end of its leather strap. And then a shiny new White truck, the same sort the Army used, pulled to a stop in front of the Croton Brewery. Instead of being green-gray, it was painted red, white, and blue. DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF NEW YORK CITY, said the banner stretched across the canvas canopy. Another, smaller, banner below it read, *Daniel Miller for Congress*.

Out of the back of the truck jumped half a dozen men in overalls. A couple of others handed them big buckets of paste, long-handled brushes, and stacks of freshly printed posters. On the front of every one was Miller's smiling face, half again as big as life, and the slogan, HELP TR WIN THE WAR. VOTE MILLER—VOTE DEMOCRATIC.

Into the buckets went the brushes. Matter-of-factly, the work crew went about the business of smearing fresh paste over Flora's posters that had gone up only the day before. She stared in mute outrage that did not stay mute long. "They can't do that!" she snarled at the policeman.

"Oh, but they can, Miss Hamburger," he answered, respectful enough but not giving an inch. "They will. It's a free country, and we let you have your posters and your speech and all. But now it's our turn."

Up went Daniel Miller's posters, one after another. "Free country?" Flora said bitterly. Some of the last of the crowd she'd drawn were hanging about, watching with anything but delight as her message was effaced. If she shouted to them, they'd resist these paperhangers. New York City had seen political brawls and to spare since the rise of the Socialists. But, after Remembrance Day the year before, could she contemplate another round of riots, another round of repression?

"Don't even let it cross your mind," the cop said. He had no trouble thinking along with her. "We'll land on the lot of you like a ton of bricks, and hell will freeze over before you get yourself another peaceable rally, I promise you."

"Do you mean we, the police, or we, the Democratic Party?" she demanded. The policeman just stared at her, as if the two were too closely entwined to be worth separating. In fact, that wasn't *as if*. Coppers could harass the Socialists, and so could Democratic agitators and hooligans. Her party could return the favor, but only on a smaller scale.

She glanced at Herman Bruck. If he was ready to raise hell to keep the Democrats from silencing her posters, neither his face nor his body showed it. Maybe he'd avoided the Army by the simple expedient of being afraid to fight. Or maybe, she admitted to herself, he'd simply done a good job of figuring out how likely—or how unlikely—they were to succeed here.

"Democrats are free," she told the policeman. "Socialists and Republicans and other riffraff are as free as the Democrats let them be." He stared steadily back at her, a big, stolid man doing his job and doing it well and not worrying about the consequences of it, maybe in honest truth not even seeing that those consequences were bad.

Inside half an hour's time, Daniel Miller's posters had covered every one of hers.

Flying was beginning to feel like work again. Jonathan Moss' eyes went back and forth, up and down, flicking to the rearview mirror mounted on the side of the cockpit. He looked back over his shoulder, too, again and again. It was the one you didn't see who'd get you, sure as hell.

He still felt out of place, flying to the right of Dud Dudley. That was Tom Innis' slot in the flight, no one else's. Or it had been. But Tom was pushing up a lily now, with a rookie pilot named Orville Thornley sleeping on the cot that had been his. Thornley got endless ribbing because of his first name, but he didn't seem to be the worst flier who'd ever come down the pike.

"A good thing, too," Moss said, his eyes still on the move. The limeys had managed to sneak a few Sopwith Pups across the Atlantic, and, if you were unlucky enough to run up against one of them in a Martin one-decker, odds were the War Department would be sending your next of kin a telegram in short order. A Pup was faster, more maneuverable, and climbed better than the bus he was riding, and the British had finally figured out how to do a proper job with an interrupter gear.

Just thinking about the Pup was plenty to make him grimace. "Good thing they don't have very many of 'em here," he said. "It'd be a damn sight better if they didn't have any at all. Damn Navy, asleep at the switch again."

That was not fair. He knew it wasn't fair. He didn't care. The Atlantic Fleet had been built to close the gate between Britain and Canada, and to help the High Seas Fleet open the gate between Germany and the USA. It hadn't managed to do either of those things. Among them, the British, the French, and the Confederates made sure none of the Atlantic was safe for anyone at any time, and the Germans remained bottled up in the North Sea. *Too bad,* Moss thought. *Too damn bad.*

He looked down. The front over which he flew was quiet now, nobody doing much of anything. The Canucks and the limeys had run out of steam after pushing the U.S. line four or five miles farther from Toronto, and the Army hadn't yet tried pushing back. It was as if the mere idea of having had to fall back so startled the brass, they hadn't figured out what to try next.

Dud Dudley waggled his wings and pointed off toward the west. *Let's go home,* he meant, and swung his fighting scout into a turn. Moss wasn't sorry to get away from the line, not if that meant another run where he didn't meet any Pups. A year before, the enemy had been terrified of the Martins and their deadly synchronized guns. Now, for the first time, he understood how the fliers on the other side of the line had felt.

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than a single aeroplane dove at his flight from the rear, machine gun spitting flame through the prop disk. He threw the joystick hard over and got the hell out of there. The flight exploded in all directions, like a flock of chickens with a fox in among them.

Tracers stitched their way across Orville Thornley's bus. It kept flying, he kept flying, and he was shooting back, too, but Jesus, Jesus, how could you keep your gun centered on the other guy's aeroplane when he was thirty miles an hour faster than you were? The short answer was, you couldn't. The longer—but only slightly longer—answer was, if you couldn't, you were dead.

Moss maneuvered now to help his flightmate, trying to put enough lead in the air to distract the limey bastard in the Pup from his chosen prey. He couldn't keep a bead on the enemy aeroplane. Everything they'd said about it looked to be true. If it wasn't doing 110, he'd eat his goggles. You couldn't make a Martin do 110 if you threw it off a cliff.

And climb—The enemy pilot came out of his dive and clawed his

way up above the U.S. machines as if they'd been nailed into place. And here he came again. Yes, he still wanted Thornley. He'd probably picked him for easy meat: last man in a flight of four would be either the worst or the least experienced or both.

The kid was doing his best, but his best wasn't good enough. The Pup got on his tail and clung, chewing at him. Moss fired at the limey, but he was a few hundred yards off, unable to close farther, and he didn't think he scored any hits.

Thornley's single-decker went into a flat spin and plummeted toward the ground below, smoke trailing from the engine cowling. Moss didn't see Thornley doing anything to try, no matter how uselessly, to bring the aeroplane back under control.

No time to worry about that now anyway. The Pup was like a dragonfly, darting everywhere at once, spitting fire at the American aeroplanes from impossible angles. Bullets punched through the canvas of the fuselage. None of them punched through Moss. None of them started a fire, for which he would have got down on his knees and thanked God—but he had no time for that, either.

And then, as swiftly and unexpectedly as it had appeared, the terrible Pup was gone, darting back toward the enemy lines at a pace that would have made pursuit impossible, even had the shaken Americans dared to try. Maybe the bus had run low on fuel. That was the only thing Moss could think of that might have kept it from destroying the whole flight. What would have stopped it? It had the American aeroplanes outnumbered, one against four.

Landing was glum, as it always was after losing a flightmate. "What happened?" one of the mechanics asked.

"Pup," Moss said laconically.

The fellow in the greasy overalls bit his lip. "They really as bad as that?"

"Worse." One word at a time was hard enough. More would have been impossible.

Along with Dudley and Phil Eaker, Moss went into Shelby Pruitt's office. The squadron leader looked up at them. He grimaced. As the mechanic had, he asked, "What happened to Thornley?"

Instead of answering directly, Dudley burst out, "God damn it to

hell, when the devil are we going to be able to sit our asses down in an aeroplane that'll give us half a chance to go up there and come back alive, not one of these flying cart horses that isn't fast enough to go after the Canucks and isn't fast enough to run away from 'em, either?" All of that came out in one long, impassioned breath. On the inhale, Dudley added, "Sir."

Major Pruitt looked down at his desk. The flight leader had told him what he needed to know. "Pup," he said. It was not a question.

"Yes, sir." Moss spoke this time. "One Pup against the four of us. Those aeroplanes are very bad news, sir. How many do the Canucks have? Like Dud says, how long till we get something that can stand up to them?"

"They don't have many," Pruitt said. "We know that much. They aren't manufacturing them on this side of the water, either: not yet, anyhow. What do you suggest we do, gentlemen? Only go up in squadron strength so we can mob them when we come across them?"

Moss and his flightmates looked at one another. What that meant was, they weren't going to get an aeroplane that could stand up to the Pup, not tomorrow they weren't, and not the day after, either. Slowly, Dud Dudley said, "That might help some, sir. We'd pay a bundle for every one we brought down, but we might bring some down, sure enough. Once they ran out of 'em, things'd be like they were—except we'd be missing a hell of a lot of pilots."

"I wish I could tell you you were wrong, but I don't think you are," Pruitt said, shaking his head. "And it'll all be wasted effort, too, if the limeys get another shipload of 'em over here. The Germans, now, the Germans have aeroplanes that can match these Pups and whatever the froggies are throwing at 'em. We were supposed to get plans for some of 'em, I hear, but the submersible that set out with them didn't make it across the Atlantic. These things happen."

"And how many of us are going to end up dead because they happen?" Moss burst out. The question had no exact answer. It didn't need one. The approximate answer was quite bad enough.

Eaker said, "What do we need the Germans for, anyway? Why can't we build our own aeroplanes, good as any in the world? We invented them."

"I know we did," Pruitt answered. "Up till the start of the war, ours were as good as anybody's, too. But the Germans and the French and

the British, they've all been pushing each other hard as they could, ever since the guns started going off. The Rebs and the Canucks haven't done that to us, not to where we've needed to come up with a new kind of fighting scout every few months because the old ones would get shot down if we kept flying 'em. What do they call it? Survival of the fittest, that's right."

"We've got to worry about it now," Dud Dudley said.

"I know we do," Pruitt answered. "This time next year, if the war's still going, I expect we'll have aeroplanes to match anything the Kaiser's building. Once we know we need to do something, we generally manage."

"A lot of people are going to end up shot to pieces because Philadelphia was slow getting the message," Moss said. "Thornley was a good kid. He had the makings of a good pilot—if he'd had a decent bus to fly." *And if the fellow in the Pup had decided to go after me instead of him…*

"I don't even run this whole aerodrome, let alone the Bureau of Aeroplane Production." Hardshell Pruitt got up from his swivel chair, which squeaked. He led the three survivors of Dudley's flight to the officers' club, threw a quarter-eagle down on the bar, and carried a bottle of whiskey over to a table.

As Moss started to drink, he looked over at the photographs of fliers dead and gone. *One more to put up,* he thought, and then wondered whether Orville Thornley had had a photo taken since he joined the squadron. Moss didn't think so. Thornley hadn't been here very long. Moss gulped down his drink. If he tried hard enough, maybe he could stop thinking about things like that. Maybe he could stop thinking at all.

When Lucien Galtier came in from the fields, the sun was going down. As summer slid into fall, it set ever sooner, rose ever later. The air had—not quite a chill, but the premonition of a chill—it hadn't held even a couple of weeks earlier. Pretty soon, frost would fern across the windows when he got up in the morning.

Marie came bustling out of the farmhouse to meet him before he came inside. She didn't usually do that. Automatically, he began to worry. Any change in routine portended trouble. A lifetime's

experience and a cultural inheritance of centuries warned him that was true.

So did his wife's face. "What is it now?" he asked her, and picked the two worst things he could think of: "Have we had a visit from Father Pascal while I was cultivating? Or is that the American, Major Quigley, was here?"

"No, neither of those, for which I thank *le bon Dieu*," Marie answered. "But it is, all the same, something of which I wish to speak to you without having any of the children hear." She looked down to make sure none of their numerous brood was in earshot.

Lucien did the same thing. "Of course, our trying to keep them from hearing but makes *them* try the more to hear," he said, again from long experience. "But what is it that you would keep a secret from them?"

"Not from all of them, not quite." Marie took a deep breath. When she spoke, the words tumbled out all in a rush: "Nicole just came home from the hospital"—she did not look at the big building the Americans had run up on Galtier land; she made a point of not looking at it—"and she, she, she asked permission of me to bring to supper tomorrow night one of the doctors who works there."

"'Osti," Lucien said softly. Once, and once only, he stomped a booted foot on the ground. "I knew it would come to this. Did I not say it would come to this? When she went to work at that place"—he not only did not look at the hospital, he refused even to name it—"I knew it would come to this."

"His name is O'Doull," Marie said, pronouncing the un-Quebecois appellation with care. "He speaks French, Nicole says, and he is himself a member of the holy Catholic Church—so she assures me."

"He is himself a member of the United States Army," Lucien retorted. Since that was manifestly true, Marie could only nod. Her husband went on, "The people in Ottawa—the Protestants in Ottawa—had the courtesy, more or less, to leave us alone. The Americans, merely by their coming, are taking from us our patrimony."

"I did not tell Nicole yes, and I did not tell her no, either," Marie answered. "I told her I would tell you, and that you would decide."

Galtier opened his mouth to declare that he had already decided, and that the answer was and would always be no. Before he did so,

though, he cast a quizzical eye on Marie. She knew everything he'd said, and knew it at least as well as he did. More cautiously than he'd expected, he asked, "Why did you not say no on your own behalf?"

Marie let out a long sigh. "Because I fear the Americans will remain here in Quebec for a long time to come, and I do not believe we shall be able to make it as if they do not exist. And because I do not believe that Nicole would come to know any fondness for a man who is wicked, even if he is an American. And because one supper, here in front of the lot of us, is not the end of the world. And it could even be that, seeing this…man O'Doull here in our own place, not at the other one where she works, would be the best way to convince her he is not the proper one."

Yes, I had good reason to be cautious, Lucien thought. Aloud, he said, "And if I still believe this should not be?"

"Then it shall not be, of course," his wife replied at once. She was always properly submissive, and she usually got her way.

She would get her way this time, too. "It could even be," Galtier said in a speculative voice, "that seeing all of her family will have a chilling effect on this Dr. O'Doull." He smiled, remembering. "This is often true, when a man who is not serious meets a young lady's family."

"You have reason," Marie answered, smiling too. "Let us go in now, and tell Nicole she may bring him, then."

"Very well," Lucien said. It wasn't very well, or anywhere close to being very well, but he seemed to have no good choices whatever. In that, he thought of himself as a tiny version of the entire province of Quebec.

Nicole squealed when Marie told her (Lucien could not make himself do anything more than nod) she might invite the doctor for supper. Georges said, "Ah, so I am to have an American brother-in-law, *n'est-ce pas*?" Nicole's face turned the color of fire. She threw a potato at him. It thumped against his ribs. Grinning still, he said, "I am wounded! The doctor must cure me!" and thrashed about on the floor.

Charles, his older brother, said nothing, not with words, but the look he sent Lucien said, *Father, how could you?* Galtier's shrug showed how little true choice he had had. Nicole's three younger sisters couldn't seem to decide whether to be horrified or fascinated by the

news.

Galtier went through the next day's work as if he were a machine wound up to perform its tasks without thought. His mind had already leapt to the evening, and to the meeting with the American, O'Doull. In his mind, he ran through a dozen, a score of conversations with the man. Whether any of them would have anything to do with reality he had no idea, but he played them out all the same.

He looked up in some surprise to see the sun near setting. *Time to go in,* he realized, on most days a welcome thought but today one so much the opposite that he looked around for more chores to do. Talking with the American in the privacy of his own mind was one thing. Talking with the man in the real world was a different, far more daunting prospect.

He wiped his boots with special care. Even so, he knew he brought the aromas of the farmyard into the house with him. How could he help it? Knowing he could not help it, knowing he was not the only one on the farm who did it, he thought nothing of it most of the time. Now—

Now, there in the parlor sat a tall, skinny stranger in town clothes; he was talking with Nicole and doing what looked to be his gallant best not to be upset at having her brothers and sisters stare at him. He sprang to his feet when Lucien came in. So did Nicole. "Father," she said formally, "I would like to introduce to you Dr. Leonard O'Doull. Leonard, this is my father, *Monsieur* Lucien Galtier."

"I am very pleased to meet you, sir," O'Doull said in good French, the Parisian accent with which he'd learned the tongue overlain by the rhythms of the Quebecois with whom he'd been working. Galtier took that as a good sign, a sign of accommodation. He could not imagine Major Quigley sounding like a Quebecois if he stayed in this country a hundred years.

O'Doull's hands were pale and soft, but not smooth. The skin on them was chafed and reddened and cracked in many places, some of those cracks looking angry and inflamed. Doctors had to wash often in corrosive chemicals to keep their hands free of germs.

As for the rest of the doctor, he looked like an Irishman: fair skin with freckles, sandy hair, almost cat-green eyes, a dimple in his chin so deep a plow might have dug it. He was unobtrusively sizing up Galtier as the farmer examined him. "I do thank you very much for

letting me come into your home," he said. "I know it is an intrusion, and I know it is a"—he cast about for a word—"an awkwardness for you as well."

He was frank. Lucien liked him the better for that. "Well, we shall see how it goes," he said. "I can always throw you out, after all."

"Father!" Nicole exclaimed in horror. But one of O'Doull's gingery eyebrows lifted; he knew Galtier hadn't meant that seriously. Again, against his will, Galtier's opinion of the doctor went up.

Marie served up potatoes and greens and ham cooked with prunes and dried apples. Lucien got out a jug of applejack he'd bought from one of the farmers nearby. He hadn't expected he'd want to do that. O'Doull, though, even if he was an American, seemed a man of both sense and humor. He also made appreciative noises about Marie's cooking, which caused her to fill up his plate once more after he'd demolished his first helping. The second disappeared as quickly.

Georges made a show of looking under the table. "Where does such a scrawny fellow put it all?" he asked.

"I have a secret pocket, like a kangaroo," O'Doull answered gravely. Georges blinked, unused to getting as good as he gave.

When supper was done and the womenfolk went off to wash and dry, the American handed cigars to Lucien and Charles and Georges. Lucien poured more apple brandy for them all. *"Salut,"* he said, raising his glass, and then, experimentally, before drinking, *"Je me souviens."*

I will remember: the motto of Quebec in the face of many difficult times, this one more than most. He was not surprised to see that Leonard O'Doull understood not only the words but also the meaning behind them. The American doctor drank the toast, then said, "I understand how hard this is for you, and I thank you again for being so hospitable to an outsider."

Galtier had had enough applejack by then to loosen his tongue a little. He said, "How can you understand, down deep and truly? You are an American, an occupier, not one of the occupied."

"My homeland is also occupied," O'Doull answered. "England has done more and worse for longer to the Irish than she ever did to Quebec." He spoke now with absolute seriousness. "My grandfather was a starving boy when he came to the United States because all the potatoes died and the English landowners sold the wheat in the fields

abroad instead of feeding the people with it. We are paying back the debt."

"The Irish rebellion has not thrown out the English," Galtier said.

"No, but it goes on, and ties down their men," O'Doull replied. "It would be better if the U.S. Navy could bring more arms to them, but boats do put in at little beaches every now and then, in spite of what the British fleet can do to stop them, and machine guns aren't so big and bulky."

"You say this here, to a country that might rise in revolt against the United States as Ireland has against England?" Even with applejack in him, Lucien would have spoken so openly to few men on such brief acquaintance: fewer still among the occupiers. But while the doctor might disagree, Lucien did not believe he would betray him to the authorities.

O'Doull said, "You will be freer with the United States than you ever were in Canada. It has proved true for the Irish; it will prove true for you as well. This I believe with all my heart."

Charles, who usually kept his own counsel, said, "Few countries invade their neighbors for the purpose of making them free."

"We came into Canada to beat the British Empire," O'Doull answered, blowing a smoke ring. "They and the Rebels stabbed us in the back twice. But I think, truly, you will be better off outside the Empire than you were in it."

"If we left Canada, if we left the British Empire, of our own will, then it could be you are right," Lucien said. "Anyone who forces something on someone and then says he will be better for it—you will, I hope, understand me when I say this is difficult to appreciate."

"It could be you said the same thing when your mother gave you medicine when you were small," O'Doull replied.

"Yes, it could be," Lucien said. With dignity, he continued, "But, *monsieur le docteur,* you are not my mother, and the United States are not Quebec's mother. If any country is, it is France."

"All right. I can see how you would feel that way, M. Galtier." O'Doull got to his feet. "I do thank you and your wife and your enchanting family for the fine supper, and for your company as well. Is it possible that I might come back again one day, drink some more

of this excellent applejack, and talk about the world again? And we might even talk of other things as well. If you will pardon me one moment, I would like also to say good-bye to Nicole."

She was one of the other things the American would want to talk about, Galtier knew. He felt the pressure of his sons' eyes on him. Almost to his own surprise, he heard himself saying, "Yes, this could be. Next week, perhaps, or the week after that." Until the words were out of his mouth, he hadn't fully realized he approved of the doctor in spite of his country and his ideas. *Well,* he thought, *the arguments will be amusing.*

" 'Nother day done. Praise de lord," Jonah said when the shift-changing whistle blew. "I see you in de mornin', Nero."

"See you then," Scipio agreed. He was very used to his alias these days, sometimes even thinking of himself by it. He wiped his sweaty forehead on the coarse cotton canvas of his shirt. Another day done indeed, and a long one, too. The white foreman stuck his card in the time clock to punch him out of work. He trudged from the factory onto the streets of Columbia, a free man.

Even after three months or so at the munitions plant, he had trouble getting used to that idea. His time was his own till he had to get back to work in the morning. He'd never known such liberty, not in his entire life. As house servant and later as butler at Marshlands, he'd been at the white folks' beck and call every hour of the day or night. As a member of the governing council of the Congaree Socialist Republic, he'd been at Cassius' beck and call no less than at Miss Anne's before. Now…

Now he could do as he pleased. If he wanted to go to a saloon and get drunk, he could. If he wanted to chase women, he could do that. If he wanted to go to a park and watch the stars come out, he could do that, too—though Columbia still had a ten o'clock curfew for blacks. And if he wanted to go back to his apartment and read a book, he could also do that, and not have to worry about getting called away in the middle of a chapter.

He walked into a restaurant not far from the factory, ordered fried chicken and fried okra and cornbread, washed it down with chicory-laced coffee, and came out full and happy. Nobody knew who he was. Nobody cared who he was. Oh, every now and then he still saw

wanted posters for the uncaptured leaders of the Congaree Socialist Republic, and his name—his true name—still appeared among them, but that hardly seemed to matter. It might have happened a lifetime before, to someone else altogether.

Had Cassius understood that desire to escape the revolutionary past, it probably would have been enough for him to want to liquidate Scipio. Out in the swamps by the Congaree, Cassius and his diehards kept up a guerrilla war against Confederate authority even yet. Every so often, the newspapers complained of some outrage or another the rebels—the papers commonly called them bandits—had perpetrated.

But the papers talked much more about the bill to arm Negroes under debate up in Richmond. People talked about it, too, both white and black. The talk had only intensified once it cleared the House and got into the Senate. More than half of the black men Scipio knew were for it. As best he could judge, fewer than half the whites in Columbia were. How much his judgment was worth, he had trouble gauging.

When he got back to his apartment building, he let out a heartfelt sigh of relief. Now that he no longer had to pay half his salary to the white clerk who'd hired him, he could afford something better than the dismal flophouse where he'd endured his first nights in Columbia. The place was shabby but clean, with gas lights and a bathroom at the end of the hall. It had cockroaches, but not too many, and his own astringently neat habits gave them little sustenance.

Coming up the corridor from the bathroom, the mulatto woman who had the apartment across the hall from his smiled. "Evenin', Nero," she said.

"Evenin', Miss Sempronia," he answered. He thought she was a widow, but he wasn't sure. He didn't pry into the business of others, not least because he couldn't afford to have anyone prying into his. That smile, though, and others he'd got from her, made him think he wouldn't have to run very fast if he decided to chase her.

He went into his own apartment and closed the door after him. It was getting dark early these days; though he'd left the drapes open, he had to fumble to find the matches he'd set on the shelf near the gaslight. He struck one and got the lamp there going. That gave him the light he needed to start the lamp above his favorite chair.

Since the apartment boasted only one chair, that made the choice easier than it would have been otherwise. But it *was* comfortable, so

he didn't complain. If the upholstery was battered, well, so what? This wasn't Marshlands. "I am, however, not the tiniest bit dissatisfied with my present circumstances," he said softly, in the starchy white-folks' voice he hadn't used more than a couple of times since the Red uprising broke out. He smiled to hear himself. Now that he wasn't used to it any more, that accent struck him as ridiculous.

On the rickety pine table beside the chair lay a battered copy of Flaubert's *Salammbô* he'd picked up for a nickel. He opened it almost at random and plunged in. He wondered how many times he'd read it. More than he could count on his fingers, he was sure of that. Most literate Negroes in the CSA had read *Salammbô* a good many times. The story of the revolt of the army of dark-skinned mercenaries against Carthage after the First Punic War struck a chord in the heart of the most peaceable black man.

He grimaced and sighed. That revolt had failed, too. He kept reading anyhow.

When the cheap, loudly ticking alarm clock he'd bought said it was a little past nine, he carried a couple of towels and a bar of soap down to the bathroom. One thing years of being a butler had done: made him more fastidious than most factory hands, white or black, in the CSA. The weather was still warm enough for him to find a cold-water bath invigorating. How he'd feel about that when winter came around, he didn't want to think.

Next morning, the alarm clock's clatter got him hopping out of bed, heart pounding as if Confederate soldiers were bombarding the apartment house. He dressed, made himself coffee, breakfasted on bread and jam, and made a sandwich of bread and tinned beef to throw in his dinner pail. Thus fortified, he walked the half a mile to work, the dinner pail brushing his left thigh with every step he took.

A lot of black men in overalls and collarless shirts and heavy shoes were on the street; he might have been invisible among them. Some, like him, went bareheaded; some wore homemade straw hats, as if they still labored in the fields; some wore cloth caps like most white factory hands. Not many white factory hands were left, though: supervisors, youngsters not yet ripe for conscription, wounded veterans no longer fit for the front, and a few others with skills or pull enough to keep them out of butternut.

Here and there, men who worked in his plant waved to him and called out his *nom de travaille*. "Mornin', Nero." "How you is, Nero?"

The broader he made his Congaree patois in answer, the happier the other workers seemed. He'd seen that back at Marshlands, too. It saddened him—his fellows were locking themselves away from much that was worthwhile—but he also understood it.

Greetings flew thick and fast as he lined up to punch in. He'd made his own place here, and felt no small pride at having done so. "Mornin', Solon," he said with a wave. "How you is, Artaxerxes? A good mornin' to you, Hadrian."

The foreman said, "Apollonius already took off, Nero, so I reckon you got yourself a few crates to haul there."

"I'll do it," was all Scipio said, to which the white man nodded. The fellow who worked the night shift slid out of the factory as fast as he possibly could every morning. One day he'd slide out too fast, and have the door slammed in his face when he came back. It wasn't as if the bosses couldn't find anyone to replace him.

Sure enough, several crates of empty shell casings waited to be hauled to the belt that would take them to the white women who filled them and installed their fuses and noses. Scipio loaded two onto a dolley and pushed it over to Jonah, who stood waiting to receive it. When he hurried back to do more, Jonah shook his head. "Dat Apollonius, he one lazy nigger," he observed. "You, Nero, you does yo' work good."

"T'ank you," Scipio said. Jonah, as usual, sounded faintly surprised to admit that, no doubt because he remembered Scipio from his soft-handed days as a butler. None of the then-field hands had ever realized how much work Scipio actually did at Marshlands because so much of it was with his head rather than his hands or his back. He was ready to admit headwork was easier, but it was still work.

Back and forth, back and forth. He got no credit for the dolly, but it helped. Lift, carry, push, lift, carry, push. His hands and his muscles had hardened; he didn't go home every night shambling like a spavined horse any more. He knew a certain amount of pride in that. He was stronger than he had been, and sometimes tempted to get into fights to show off his new strength. He resisted that temptation, along with most others. Fighting might make him visible to the whites of Columbia, which was the last thing he wanted.

Working with his body left his mind curiously blank. He listened to what was going on around him, to the clatter of the lines, to the

chatter of the people working them, and, after a while, to the foreman out front: “Are you sure you want to go back there? It’s a dirty, smelly place, and parts of it are dangerous, too, what with the explosives and fuses and such-like.”

The words weren’t far out of the ordinary. The tone was. The foreman, normally master of all he surveyed here, sounded deferential, persuasive. That more than what he was saying made Scipio notice his voice in the first place. A moment later, he understood why the foreman sounded as he did. The reply came with the unquestioning, uncompromising arrogance of a Confederate aristocrat: “I am a stockholder, and not a small stockholder, in this corporation. I have the right to see how its operations function. You may guide me, or you may get out of the way and let me see for myself. The choice is yours.”

Scipio dropped at Jonah’s feet the crate he was hauling; the shell casings clanked in their plywood-partitioned pigeonholes. “Do Jesus!” Scipio exclaimed in a horrified whisper. “Dat are Miss Anne!”

“I knows it,” Jonah answered, looking at least as discomfited as Scipio felt. Regardless of what his passbook had said he could do, Jonah had left Marshlands for his factory job two years earlier. His position was less desperate than Scipio’s, but far from what he would have wanted.

Before Scipio could make up his mind whether to hope he wasn’t recognized or to flee, Anne Colleton came in, the foreman trailing after her and still trying ineffectually to slow her down. As Scipio knew, anyone who tried to slow her down was bound to be ineffectual. “This area here, ma’am,” the foreman said, still not grasping how outgunned he was, “is where the casings come off the line over yonder and go to get filled over here.”

“Is it?” Anne said. She nodded to the Negro laborers. “Good day, Scipio, Jonah.” Then, without another word, she headed off into the filling area. The two Negroes looked at each other. She knew who they were—she knew and she hadn’t done a thing about it. That worried Scipio more than anything else he could think of.

Sylvia Enos knew how drunk she was. She rarely touched whiskey, but she’d made an exception tonight. She was ready to make exceptions about lots of things tonight. She giggled. “Good thing I’m

not going anywhere," she said, and giggled again. "I couldn't get there."

"Not going anywhere at all," her husband agreed. George had drunk more than she had, but showed it less. The whiskey wasn't making him laugh, either. It was just making him very certain about things. His certainty had swept her along, too, so that she lay altogether naked beside him even though the children couldn't have been in bed more than fifteen minutes themselves.

If George, Jr., came in right now—well, that would be funny, too. Whiskey was amazing stuff, all right. Sylvia ran her hand over George's chest, the hair there so familiar and so long absent. From his chest, her hand wandered lower. Ladies didn't do such things. Ladies, in fact, endured it rather than enjoying it when their husbands touched them. *If George gets angry, I'll blame it on the whiskey,* she thought as her hand closed around him.

"Oh," he said, more an exhalation than a word. Nor was that the only way he responded to her touch.

"Is that what you learned in the Navy—how to come to attention, I mean?" she said. He laughed. Then, without even being asked, she slid down and took him in her mouth. Ladies not only didn't do such things, they didn't think of such things. A lot of ladies had never heard of or imagined such things. Since she had…His flesh was smooth and hot. *The whiskey,* she thought again. Being inexperienced in such things, she bore down more than she should have, and had to withdraw, choking a little.

If they hadn't been married, if she hadn't wanted him as much as he wanted her, what followed would have been a rape. As it was, she wrapped her arms and legs around him while he plunged above her, and whispered endearments and urged him on.

He shuddered and groaned sooner than she would have liked, which was, she supposed, a disadvantage of doing as she'd just done. Instead of pulling free, though, he stayed in her. In an amazingly short time, he was hard again. The second round was almost as frantic as the first, but, kindled by that first time, she felt all thought go away just as he spent, too.

"Always like a honeymoon, coming back to you after I've been away at sea," he said, a smile in his voice. "I've been at sea a long time this time—and I never even saw the ocean."

Sylvia didn't answer right away. She felt lazy and sated, at peace with the world even if the world held no peace. But the body had demands other than those of lust and love. "Let me up, dear," she said, and, regretfully, he rolled off her. She regretted it, too, when he came out. *Nothing good ever lasts,* that seemed to say.

She pulled the chamber pot out from under the bed and squatted to use it. Some of his seed ran out of her, too. That she did not mind; it made getting pregnant less likely. She got back into bed. George stood and used the chamber pot, too, then lay down beside her in the darkness once more.

"I got the telegram that said you were missing," she said, "and—" She didn't, couldn't, go on with words. Instead, she clutched him to her, even tighter than when his hips had pumped him in and out of her as if he were the piston of a steam engine and she the receiving cylinder.

He squeezed her, too. "I hid in the woods with my pals till another boat got down there to see if anybody had lived through the explosion. They were the brave ones, 'cause the Rebs had that spot zeroed. None of the shells hit, though, and we rowed out to them and they got us away from there."

"Four," she said wonderingly. "Four, out of the whole crew."

"Luck," George answered. "Fool luck. We were up at this colored fellow's shack on the riverbank. Charlie White would have killed anybody who kept a place that dirty, and they made the whiskey right around there. You drank it, you could run a gaslight on your breath. I had a glass, and some food—place was dirty, yeah, but they cooked better than anything our galley turned out—and I had some more whiskey, and then I went outside, and then…the Rebels dropped two, right on the *Punishment*." Remembering made him shiver.

"What did you go outside for?" Sylvia asked.

She meant the question casually. *To stand next to a tree* was the answer she'd expected, or something of that sort. George stiffened in her arms, and not in the way she'd found so enjoyable. "Oh, just to get a breath of air," he said, and she knew he was lying.

"What did you go outside for?" she repeated, and tried to see his face in the darkness. No good: he was only the vaguest blur.

He stayed unnaturally still a little too long. Was that the glitter of

his eyes opening wide to try to see her expression, too? “It wasn’t anything,” he said at last.

Where the whiskey had made her giddy and then randy, now it made her angry. “What did you go outside for?” she said for the third time. “I want you to tell me the truth.”

George sighed. When Sylvia breathed in as he breathed out, she could smell and taste that they’d been drinking together. Sober, he might have found a lie she would believe, or else might have been able to keep his mouth shut till she got sick of asking questions. He’d managed that, every now and then.

He sighed again. “There was another place, next to this saloon or tavern or whatever you call it. I was going over there, but I never made it. I hadn’t taken more than a couple of steps that way when the shelling started.”

“Another place?” she echoed. George nodded, a gesture she felt instead of seeing. “Well, why didn’t you say so?” she demanded. “What kind of place was…?” All at once, she wanted to push him away from her as hard as she could. “You were going to a—” Her hiss might have been more deadly than a shout.

“Yeah, I was.” He sounded ashamed. That was something, a small something, but not nearly enough. He went on, “I didn’t get there. Sylvia, I swear to you it’s the only time I was gone that I was going that way. I’d been away so long, and I didn’t know when I’d be back or if I’d ever be back.” He laughed, which enraged her till he went on, “I guess God was telling me I shouldn’t do things like that even once.”

“And I let you—” Her voice was cold as the ice in the hold of a steam trawler. She hadn’t just let him touch her, she’d wanted him to touch her, she’d wanted to touch him. She couldn’t say that; her body had fewer inhibitions than her tongue did. Her tongue…She’d had that part of him in her mouth, and she thought she’d throw up. She gulped, as if fighting back seasickness.

“Nothing happened,” George said.

She believed him. She wanted, or part of her wanted, to think he was lying; that would have given her all the more reason to force him away from her. Had he been telling the truth when he said that was the only time he’d gone to—or toward—such a place? Again, she thought so, but she wondered if it mattered when you got down to the bottom of things. Still in that frozen voice, she said, “Something

would have happened, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I guess it would," he answered dully.

He wasn't trying to pretend. That was something, too. Try as she would, she had trouble keeping the flame of her fury hot. Being apart from him had been hard on her, too, and she'd known he wasn't a saint before she married him. "You were pretty stupid, do you know that?" she said.

"I thought so myself," he answered, quickly, eagerly, a man splashing in the sea grabbing for a floating spar. "If I hadn't had that second glass of whiskey, I never would have done it."

"Whiskey gets you into all sorts of trouble, doesn't it?" she said, not quite so frosty now. "Makes you go after women you shouldn't, makes you talk too much when you're with the woman you should—"

He laughed in relief, feeling himself slide off the hook. His thumb and forefinger closed on her nipple; even in the dark, he found it unerringly. Sylvia twisted away: he wasn't *that* forgiven yet.

"I was plenty stupid," he said, which not only agreed with what she'd just said but had the added virtue of likely being truer than *I'm sorry*.

"I hope to heaven this terrible war ends soon, so you can come home and spend the rest of your days with me," Sylvia said. *And,* she added to herself, *so I can keep an eye on you.* She'd never thought she'd need another reason for wishing the war over, but George had given her one.

He understood that, too. "I hope they'll really send me out to sea this time," he said. "Then I'll be away from everything"—*everything in a dress,* he meant—"for months at a time."

Sylvia nodded. George didn't mention what happened when sailors came into a port after months at a time at sea. Maybe he was trying not to think about it. Maybe he was hoping she wouldn't think about it. If so, it was a forlorn hope. Boston was a Navy town. More than one sailor had accosted Sylvia on the street. She did not imagine her husband was a great deal different from the common lot of men. Had she so imagined, he would have taught her better.

He clutched her to him. "I don't want anybody but you," he said.

Now you don't, she thought. He gave proof with more than words that he did want her. With a small sigh, she let him take her. He was her husband, he had come home alive out of danger, he hadn't (quite) (she didn't think) been unfaithful to her. So she told herself. But, where only the speed of his explosion the first time had kept her from joining him in joy, where she had done just that the second time, and been as eager, even as wanton, then as ever in her life, now, though she tried, though she strained, though she concentrated, pleasure eluded her.

George didn't notice. Somehow that hurt almost worse than anything he'd told her. In a while, she supposed, he'd want a fourth round, too. "Have we got any more whiskey?" she asked.

XVI

Arthur McGregor tramped through the snow toward the barn. The harvest was in, and just in time; freezing weather had come early this year. But the livestock still needed tending. He shook his head. Alexander should have been out here helping him. But Alexander still languished in the Rosenfeld gaol. If he ever got out—

Sometimes, now, hours at a time would go by when McGregor didn't think of his son's being freed. Every fiber of him still hoped it would happen. (*How could it not happen?* he thought. *The only thing the boy did was hang about with a few of the wrong people and let his tongue flap loose. Not one in a hundred would be left free if you locked up everybody who did that.*) He didn't count on it or expect it as he had right after Alexander's arrest, though. Scar tissue was growing over the hole the extraction of his son from the family had left.

He fed the horses, the cows, the pigs, the chickens. He forked dung out of the stalls. He gathered eggs, storing them inside his hat. The hens pecked at his hands, the way they always did when he robbed their nests. The rooster couldn't have cared less. All he had eyes for was his harem, as splendid to him as the Ottoman sultan's bevy of veiled beauties.

McGregor's breath smoked as if he'd just lighted a cigarette when he left the barn. The first inhalation of cold outside air burned in his lungs like cigarette smoke, too. After a couple of breaths, though, he felt all right. Once winter really came down, he'd feel as if he were breathing razors whenever he stuck his head out of any door.

Off to the north, artillery coughed and grumbled. It was farther away than it had been halfway through the summer, when Canadian troops and those from the mother country had pushed the Yankees

south from Winnipeg. “But not south to Rosenfeld,” McGregor said sadly. Winnipeg still held, though. So long as Winnipeg held, and Toronto, and Montreal, and Quebec City, Canada lived. The Americans had claimed Toronto’s fall a good many times. Lies, all lies. “What they’re good for,” McGregor told the air, and started back toward the farmhouse with the eggs.

As usual, the north-south road that ran by the farm was full of soldiers and guns and horses and trucks on the move, most of the traffic heading north toward the front. What went south was what didn’t work any more: ambulances full of broken men, trucks and horses glumly pulling broken machines. The more of those McGregor saw, the better he reckoned his country’s chances.

And here came an automobile, jouncing along the path toward the farmhouse. The motorcar was painted green-gray. Even had it not been, he would have known it for an American vehicle. Who but the Americans had gasoline these days?

As if it had not been there, McGregor brought the eggs in to Maude. “Trouble coming,” he said. His wife didn’t need to ask him what he meant. Automobiles were noisy things, and you could hear their rattle and bang and pop a long way across the quiet prairie.

“Americans,” Mary said fiercely, sticking her head into the kitchen. “Let’s shoot them.”

“You can’t say that, little one, not where they can hear you,” McGregor told his younger daughter. “You can’t even think it, not where they can hear you.” Mary’s nod was full of avid comprehension. She had an instinctive gift for conspiracy the war had brought out young in her, as a hothouse could force a rose into early bloom.

The automobile sputtered to a stop. A door slammed, then another. Booted feet—several pairs of booted feet—came stomping toward the door. “Shall we open it?” Maude whispered.

McGregor shook his head. As quietly, he answered, “No. We’ll make ’em knock. They have to know we’re here—where else would we be? It’ll annoy them.” By such tiny campaigns was his war against the invaders fought. Mary’s eyes glowed. She understood without being told the uses of harassment—but then, she had an older brother and sister.

“Damn Canucks,” said one of the American soldiers outside. McGregor nodded, once. Mary giggled soundlessly.

“Quiet.” That was a voice McGregor recognized: Captain Hannebrink. All the farmer’s pleasure at annoying the occupiers changed to mingled alarm and hope. What was the man who had arrested Alexander doing here? He hadn’t come out to the farm since the day of the arrest.

Maude knew his voice, too. “What does he—?” Her voice cut off in the middle of the question. Hannebrink was knocking at the door.

It was an utterly ordinary knock, not the savage pounding it should have been with a car full of American ruffians out there. Stories said they used rifle butts. Not here, not today.

McGregor went to the door and opened it. The captain nodded, politely enough. Behind him, the three private soldiers came to alertness. They had rifles, even if they hadn’t used them as door knockers. Hannebrink didn’t say anything, not right away. “What is it?” McGregor asked as silence stretched.

From behind him, Mary asked, “Are you going to let my brother go?”

“Hush,” Maude said, and pushed Mary back to Julia, hissing, “Take care of her and keep her quiet”—not an easy order to follow.

Captain Hannebrink coughed. “Mr. McGregor, I have to tell you that over the past few days we obtained information confirming for us that your son, Alexander McGregor, was in fact an active participant in efforts to harm United States Army occupying forces in this military district, and that he should therefore be judged as a *franc-tireur*.”

“Information?” McGregor said, not taking in all of the long, cold, dry sentence at once. “What kind of information?”

“I am not at liberty to discuss that with you, sir,” Hannebrink said stiffly. He scratched at the edge of his Kaiser Bill mustache, careful not to disturb its waxed perfection.

“Means somebody’s been filling your head up with lies, and you don’t have to own up to that or say who it is,” McGregor said.

The American shrugged. “As you know, sir, the penalty for civilians resisting in arms the occupying forces is death by firing squad.”

Behind McGregor, Julia gasped. He heard Maude stop breathing. Through numb lips, he said, “And you’re going to—shoot him? You

can't do that, Captain. There has to be some kind of appeal, of—"

Hannebrink held up a hand. "Mr. McGregor, I regret to have to inform you that the sentence was carried out, in accordance with U.S. Army regulations, at 0600 hours this morning. Your son's body will be released to you for whatever burial arrangements you may care to make."

Mary didn't understand. "Father—?" Julia said in a halting voice; she wasn't sure she understood, and desperately hoped she didn't. Maude set her hand on McGregor's arm. She knew. So did he.

They shot him at sunrise, he thought dully. *Before sunrise*. It would have been dark and chilly, even before they wrapped a black rag over Alexander's bright, laughing eyes, tied him to a post or stood him up against a wall or did whatever they did, and fired a volley that made him one with the darkness and ice forever.

The American soldiers behind Captain Hannebrink were very alert. McGregor would have bet they'd had this duty before, and knew hell could break loose. "If it is any consolation to you, sir," the captain said, "he went bravely and it was over very fast. He did not suffer."

McGregor couldn't even scream at him to get out. They had Alexander's body, the body that, the Yank said, had not suffered, but was now dead. "Take it," McGregor said, stumbling over the words, "take it to the Presbyterian church. He'll go in, in the graveyard there."

Julia shrieked. So did Mary—she knew what the graveyard meant. She sprang for Captain Hannebrink as she had for the U.S. officer in Rosenfeld when he'd wanted to arrest her father. McGregor grabbed her and held her. He didn't know what those narrow-eyed soldiers behind Hannebrink might do to an attacker, even an attacker who was a little girl, and he didn't want to find out.

"I shall do as you request," Captain Hannebrink said. "As I told you, sir, I deeply regret the unfortunate necessity for this visit."

"Somebody went out and told you one more lie, Captain, and you piled it on top of all the other lies you heard, and it finally gave you enough of a stack so you could shoot my boy, the way you've been looking to do all these months," McGregor said.

"We do not believe it was a lie," Hannebrink said.

“And I don’t believe you,” McGregor said. “Now get out of my sight. If I ever set eyes on you again—” Maude’s hand tightened on his upper arm and brought him a little way back toward himself.

“Mr. McGregor, I understand that you are overwrought now,” the U.S. officer said, trying to be kind, trying to be sympathetic, and only making McGregor hate him more on account of it. He turned to his soldiers. “Come on, boys. We’ve done what we had to do. Let’s go.”

All the men walked back to the Ford. Hannebrink got in. So did the private soldiers, one at a time, ever so warily. When one cranked the engine back to life, another covered him. McGregor wondered how often they’d been fired on after delivering that kind of news. Some people, after hearing it, wouldn’t much care whether they lived or died.

He didn’t much care whether he lived or died himself. But he did care about Maude and Julia and Mary. His family. All the family he had left.

He turned back to his wife. Tears were running down her face. He hadn’t heard her start crying. He was crying, too, he suddenly realized. He hadn’t noticed that start, either. They clung to each other and to their daughters—and to the memory of their son.

“Alexander,” Maude whispered, her faced pressed against his shoulder.

“Alexander,” he echoed slowly. His mind raced ahead. Look ahead, look behind, look around—if you didn’t look at where you were, you wouldn’t have to think about how bad things were here at the focused moment of *now*.

He saw Alexander laid to rest in the churchyard, the grass there already sere and brown. He saw past that. His son had said—had no doubt said up until the very moment the rifles fired—he’d had no part in the things he was accused of doing. McGregor believed him.

Someone had lied, then. Someone had lied to bring him to death before sunrise. Someone, probably, whose son really had done the things Alexander stood accused of doing, and wanted to see the McGregors suffer along with him, no matter how unjustly. Whoever it was, McGregor figured he could find him, sooner or later. *An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth.*

And the Americans had believed the lie. They must have known it

was a lie. But they hadn't shot anybody lately, and maybe they needed examples to keep the Canadians quiet.

Whatever their reasons, he vowed they weren't going to keep him quiet. They'd shot Alexander for a *franc-tireur*. He hadn't been one. McGregor was sure of that, down to the marrow of his bones. But in shooting him, they'd made themselves a *franc-tireur*, all right.

"I'm twenty years out of the Army," he murmured. Maude stared at him. She would know what he was thinking. He didn't care, not now he didn't. He'd forgotten a lot of things over half a lifetime or so. If he had to use them again, though, he expected they'd come back soon enough.

Having wished that, after so long in river monitors, he might go back to sea, George Enos was repenting of his decision. He had gone to sea in fishing boats since before the time when he needed a razor. Going to sea in a destroyer was an altogether different business, as he was discovering day by day.

"It's like you've ridden horses all your life, and they were the horses the brewery uses to haul beer barrels to the saloon," he said to Andy Conkling, who had the bunk under his. "Then one day they put you on a thoroughbred and they tell you you'll do fine because what the hell, it's a horse."

Conkling laughed at him. He had a round red face and a big Kaiser Bill mustache, so that he put George in mind of a clock with its hands pointing at ten minutes to two. He said, "Yeah, she does go pretty good, don't she?"

"You might say so," Enos answered, a New England understatement that made his new friend laugh again. To back it up, he went on, "She cruises—just idles along, mind you—at fifteen knots. No boat I've ever been on could do fifteen knots if you tied down the safety valve and stoked the engine till it blew up."

"Not brewery horses," Conkling said. "Mules. Maybe donkeys."

"Yeah," George said. "And the *Ericsson* gives us what, going flat out? Thirty knots?"

"Just under, at the trials. Some other boats in the class made it. But she'll give twenty-eight easy," Conkling told him.

Fifteen felt plenty fast to Enos. He stared out at the Atlantic racing past under the destroyer's keel. The USS *Ericsson* was a bigger, more stable platform than any steam trawler he'd ever sailed, displacing over a thousand tons, but the waves hit her harder, too. And besides —"You've got to remember, I'm just off a river monitor. After that, any ocean sailing is rough business."

"Those things are snapping turtles," Andy Conkling said disdainfully. "This here is a shark."

From what Enos had seen and heard, deep-sea sailors had nothing but scorn for the river-monitor fleet. From what he'd seen aboard the *Punishment*, the monitors didn't deserve any such scorn. Trying to convince shipmates of that struck him as a good way to waste his breath. He kept quiet.

In a thoughtful tone of voice, Conkling went on, "Of course, this here is a *little* shark. That's why we need to be able to run so damn fast: to get away from the big sharks on the other side."

"Yeah," Enos said again. He looked out across the endless sweep of the Atlantic once more. That was no idle sightseeing—far from it. Spotting smoke on the horizon—or, worse, a periscope perilously close —might mean the difference between finishing the cruise and sliding under the waves as smoking refuse. "The limeys are out there looking for us, too."

"You bet your ass they are, chum," Conkling said. "They don't want us running guns to the micks. They don't want it in a really big way. If they can, they're gonna keep us from doing it."

"I know about micks," Enos said. "Coming out of Boston, I'd damn well better know about micks. If the ones on our side of the ocean can't stand England, what about all the poor bastards over there, living right next to it? No wonder they rose up."

"No wonder at all, at all," Conkling said, winking to make the brogue he'd put on seem funnier. He set a finger by the side of his nose. "And no wonder the good old Kaiser and us, we all got to give 'em as big a hand as we can."

"Hell of a mess over there, if half what you read in the papers is true," George said, though that was by no means guaranteed. "Shooting and sniping and bombs on the bridges and the Ulstermen massacring all the Catholics they can catch and the Catholics giving it right back to 'em and more limeys tied down there every day, sounds

like.”

“England’s got to do it.” Now Andy Conkling made himself sound serious, as if he were a Navy Department bigwig back in Philadelphia. “They let the Irish go and we or the Germans put men in there, that’s curtains for the King, and they know it damn well.”

“*I* don’t know it,” Enos said. “The Kaiser can’t supply soldiers in Ireland. When the Germans send guns to the Irishmen, they have to do it by submarine. And look at us, sneaking in like we’re going to bed with somebody else’s wife. Don’t suppose we can go at it any other way, not in England’s back yard.”

“Say you’re right,” Conkling replied. “I don’t think so, but say you are. How come England’s making such a big to-do over something that can’t happen?”

“A lot of times people make a big to-do over things that didn’t happen.” For about the hundredth time, George wished he hadn’t had to tell Sylvia where he’d been going when the *Punishment* was wrecked. *I was drunk when I went and I was drunk when I told her,* he thought. *That tells me I shouldn’t get drunk*. She still blamed him for what he hadn’t done. She probably wouldn’t have been much angrier if he had gone and done it, which made part of him wish he had. Only part, though: Mehitabel, looked back on in memory rather than at with desire, wasn’t much.

Smoke poured from the *Ericsson*’s four stacks. George thought the design was ugly and clumsy, but nobody cared what a sailor thought. The destroyer picked up speed, fairly leaping over the ocean. “Getting close to wherever we’re going,” Conkling remarked.

“Yeah,” George answered. Nobody bothered telling sailors much of anything, either. Ireland the crew knew, but only a handful knew where they’d stand off the coast of the Emerald Isle.

Officers and petty officers went up and down the deck. “Be alert,” one of them said. “We need every pair of eyes we’ve got,” another added. A third, a grizzled CPO, growled, “If we hit a mine on account of one of you didn’t spot it, I’ll throw the son of a bitch in the brig.”

That drew a laugh from Conkling, and, a moment later, after he’d worked it through, one from Enos as well. He said, “If they’ve laid mines, how the devil *can* we spot ’em, going as fast as we are? The monitor I was on just crawled along the Mississippi, and we had a sweeper go in front of us when we thought the Rebs had mined the

river.”

“Turtles,” Conkling said again. That didn’t answer George’s question. After a few seconds, he realized the question wasn’t going to get answered. That probably meant you couldn’t spot mines very well when you were going full speed ahead, an imperfectly reassuring idea.

“Land ho!” somebody shouted. George stared eastward. Sure enough, in a couple of minutes he saw a smudge on the horizon too big for a smoke plume and too steady to be a cloud. After a moment, he realized that, if he could see land, people on land could also see the *Ericsson*. Someone might be tapping on a wireless key or cranking a telephone even as he stood on the deck, in which case the boat would have visitors soon.

Moved by that same thought, Andy Conkling murmured, “The limeys on shore’ll take us for one of their own. Always have before.” Whether that was expectation or mere pious hope, George didn’t know. He did know it was his hope, pious or not.

“Landing parties to the boats,” a petty officer shouted. Enos hurried to the davits. He had more practice in small boats than most of the men aboard the *Ericsson*, and less experience on the destroyer herself. That made him a logical man for the landing party.

Each boat had a small gasoline engine in the stern, and each was packed with crates that bore no markings whatsoever. Enos scrambled up into a boat. “Steer between Loop Point and Kerry Head,” the petty officer told him and his five comrades. “Ballybunion’s where you’re going, on the south side of Shannon-mouth past the lighthouse. You’ll know the place by the old castle—a big, square, gray, ugly thing, I’m told, not hardly what you think of when *castle* goes through your head. Your chums’ll be waiting for you a little west of the castle. Good luck.”

Hoists lowered Enos’ boat and two more into the sea. They rode low in the water. Those crates weren’t stuffed with feathers. George got the motor going and steered for the distant land. “Jesus,” said one of the sailors in the boat with him, a big square-head named Bjornsen, “I feel naked in something this small.”

“Italians go fishing out of T Wharf back home every day in boats smaller than this,” George said.

“Crazy damn dagos,” Bjornsen muttered, and fell silent.

“Should have taken along a line and some hooks,” Enos said. “Might have brought back something the cooks could have fried for our supper.” He peered down into the green-gray sea. “Wonder what they have in the way of fish over here.”

That sparked another couple of sentences from Bjornsen: “Fish is one thing. I just hope they haven’t got any cooked goose.”

Loop Point boasted a lighthouse. Enos hoped nobody was staring down from it with a pair of field glasses. If somebody was staring down from it with a pair of field glasses, he hoped his boat and the two chugging along behind it looked enough like little local fishing boats to draw no notice.

The land was low and muddy and not particularly green, in spite of Ireland’s fabled reputation. Here and there, George spotted stone houses with turf roofs. They looked little and cramped and uncomfortable, a small step up from a sodbuster shack out on the prairie. He wouldn’t have wanted to live in any of them.

A petty officer named Carl Sturtevant had a map. “There’s the Cashen River inlet,” he said, pointing to a stream that, as far as George was concerned, wasn’t big enough to deserve to be a river. “A couple-three miles to Ballybunion.”

Ballybunion Castle had, at some time in the distant past, had part of one wall blown out of it, making it worthless as a fortification. Enos saw it only in the distance. Closer, some men were waving cloth caps to signal to the boats. “There they are,” he said happily.

“Yeah, those should be our boys,” Sturtevant agreed. “If those ain’t our boys, we’re in a hell of a lot of trouble.”

“Shit, if the limeys were wise to us, they wouldn’t waste time with no ambush,” said Bjornsen, a born optimist. “They’d haul a field piece out behind a haystack, wait till we got close, and blow us so high we’d never come down.” He glanced at those anonymous crates. “One hit would do the job up brown, I calculate.”

The men in baggy tweeds came trotting toward the boats. Out from behind a haystack came not a British field gun but several carts. “We’ve got more toys here than they can haul away in those,” George said as his boat beached.

“That’s their worry,” Sturtevant said. He and the other sailors, Enos among them, started unloading the crates.

“God bless you,” one of the Irishmen said. His comrades were lugging the Americans’ presents to the carts. He had a present himself: a jar with a cork in it. “Have a nip o’ this, lads.”

Quickly, the jar went from sailor to sailor. The whiskey tasted different from what George was used to drinking, but it was pretty good. He took a long pull. When he swallowed, he felt as if he’d poured lava down his gullet. The Irishmen didn’t water it to make it stretch further, as bartenders were in the habit of doing.

Wise in the ways of the sea, the Irishmen helped the sailors shove the boats back into the water, some calling thanks in brogues so thick, Enos could barely make them out. Free of the crates, the boats bobbed like corks. He headed out to sea once more, out toward the *Ericsson*.

“How about that?” Sturtevant said. “We just bit the King of England right in the ass.”

“Now all we have to do is see whether we got away with it,” George said. He wished the boat would go faster.

“Will you *look* at that crazy son of a bitch!” Vic Crosetti burst out.

Sam Carsten looked. The Sandwich Islander in question was indeed crazy, as far as he could tell. The fellow was skimming over the waves toward shore standing upright on a plank maybe nine or ten feet long and a foot and a half or two feet wide.

“Why the devil doesn’t he fall off and break his fool neck?” Sam said. “You wouldn’t even think a monkey could do that, let alone a man.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Crosetti said. “But I ain’t gonna let him hear me call him a monkey. He’d break me in half.” That was undoubtedly true. The surf-rider, who came up onto the beach with the plank on his head, was a couple of inches above six feet and muscled like a young god, which was all the more evident because he wore only a dripping cotton loincloth dyed in bright colors.

“Hey, pal,” Carsten said, and tossed him a dime. “That’s a hell of a ride you had there.” Crosetti coughed up a dime, too.

“Thank you both very much, gentlemen,” the fellow said. Like a fair number of his people, he talked like an educated Englishman, which

made it hard to treat him like a nigger. His skin was only a couple of shades darker than Crosetti's, anyhow.

"Where did you learn to do that, anyway?" Sam asked. The moment the words were out of his mouth, he realized he'd been stupid. Too late to do anything about it then, of course. That was the way the world worked.

The native laughed at him. It wasn't a snotty laugh, it was a friendly laugh: maybe because the surf-rider was a friendly guy, maybe because he knew better than to get himself in trouble squabbling with the U.S. Navy. Both, Sam judged. The fellow said, "Having grown up here in Honolulu with the sea as my neighbor, so to speak, it was a sport I acquired as a boy. I confess I can see how surprising it might appear to those born in other climes."

"Other climes, yeah," Carsten said, while Vic Crosetti did his best, which wasn't any too good, to keep from snickering. As always, every inch of Sam's flesh the sun touched was cooked red and juicy.

"How come you talk so damn fancy?" Crosetti asked.

"This is how English was taught to me," the Sandwich Islander said with another shrug. "Since you Americans came here, I have learned the language may be spoken with a number of different accents."

"Haven't heard anybody here who's got quite as much mush in his mouth as you do," Crosetti said. Was he looking for a fight in spite of denying it before? He hadn't had that much to drink yet; he and Sam had only just come on leave from the *Dakota*.

The surf-rider sighed. "You must understand, gentlemen, that under the previous administration my father was assistant minister for sugar production, thus enabling me to acquire rather better schooling than most of my contemporaries."

Sam needed a moment to realize that *under the previous administration* meant *when the British ran the show*. He needed another moment to realize something else. "Your father was assistant what-do-you-call-it, and you took our dimes? Christ on His cross, I bet you can buy and sell both of us and hardly even notice you've done it."

"It may be so, but, for one thing, we Hawaiians—we prefer that to Sandwich Islanders, if it matters to you—have discovered expediency to be the wiser course in dealing with the occupying authorities. Had I refused your money, you might have thought I was insulting you, with

results unpleasant for me." The fellow's smile revealed large, gleaming white teeth. "And besides, you both chose to reward me for my skill out of what I know to be your small pay. Especially in wartime, acts of kindness and generosity should not be discouraged, lest they disappear altogether off the face of the earth."

"Whew!" Carsten couldn't remember the last time anybody had done that much explaining. "You ought to be a chaplain, uh—"

"John Liholiho, at your service." The surf-rider's bow could have been executed no more smartly had he been wearing top hat, cutaway, and patent-leather shoes rather than gaudy loincloth and bare feet. "And with whom have I had the pleasure of conversing?"

Carsten and Crosetti gave their names. Crosetti plucked at Sam's sleeve, whispering, "Listen, do you want to spend the time chewing the fat with this big galoot, or do you want to get drunk and get laid?"

"We got a forty-eight, Vic—don't have to be back on board ship till day after tomorrow," Sam answered, also in a low voice. "God knows it's easy to find a saloon and a piece of ass in this town, but when are you going to run across another real live aristocrat?"

"Ahh, you want to be a schoolteacher when you grow up," Crosetti snarled in deeply unhappy tones. But he didn't leave. He hooked his thumbs into the pockets of his tropical white bell-bottoms and waited to see whether Sam could make standing on the beach banging his gums with a native more interesting than a drunken debauch.

John Liholiho peered over toward the jutting prominence of Diamond Head while the two sailors talked with each other. The presumably British school he'd attended had trained him in more things than an upper-crust accent; he showed very plainly that he was not listening to a conversation not intended for him. Carsten wished most of the sailors he knew had a matching reserve instead of being snoops.

He didn't really know how he was going to make this more fun than getting lit up and having his ashes hauled, either. After a little thought, he asked, "So how do you like it, living under the Stars and Stripes?"

The Sandwich Islander—no matter how he thought of himself, that was how Carsten thought of him—frowned. "You do realize, of course, that this is a question on which circumspection might be the wisest course for me?" Seeing Sam hadn't the slightest idea what

circumspection was, he translated his English into English: “I might be wiser to keep quiet or lie.”

“What am I going to do, shoot you?” Sam said, laughing. Crosetti plucked at his sleeve again. He shook off his pal.

Liholiho gave him a serious look. “Two friends of my father’s of whom I know for certain have suffered this fate. It does give one pause. On the other side of the coin, the protectorate the British exercised over these islands was also imperfectly humane. Mr. Carsten, would you prefer to be thought of as a bloody wog or a nigger?”

Since Sam had been thinking of John Liholiho as a nigger not ten minutes before, he had to work as hard at keeping his face straight as when he was raising on a pair of fives in a poker game. “Anybody called me either one of those things, I’d punch him in the teeth.”

“Yeah.” Now Vic Crosetti’s attention was engaged. “I get called a fuckin’ dago or a wop, that’s bad enough.”

“People seldom *call* me these things to my face, though I have heard *nigger* in a mouth or two since you Americans came.” The surf-rider seemed to have a British sense of precision, too. He went on, “What one is *called*, however, sometimes matters less than how one is *seen*. If the powers that be reckon one a wog or a nigger, one is not apt to be taken seriously regardless of the potential value of one’s contributions.”

“That’s too complicated for me,” Carsten said, thinking he should have headed out and got drunk after all.

But Crosetti got it. “He’s saying it’s like he’s an ordinary sailor, and he’s trying to convince an admiral he knows what he’s talking about.”

John Liholiho beamed at him. “Mr. Crosetti, I am in your debt. You Americans and our former British overlords do tend to look at race as if it were rank, don’t you?—yourselves being admirals, by the very nature of things. I shall have to use the analogy elsewhere.”

A Sandwich Islander as near naked as made no difference…with whom would he use an analogy (whatever an analogy was; Sam gathered it meant something like *comparison*, but it was another word he didn’t think he’d ever heard before)? Then Carsten remembered that, even though John looked like a savage, he was a local bigwig’s son. That he had to think twice before the fellow’s station came to

mind went a long way toward making his point for him.

Dipping his head again, the brown-skinned man said, “And now, if you will excuse me—” He turned and, carrying his surfriding board, trotted out into the Pacific. Once in the water, he climbed up onto the board, lay on his belly atop it, and used his arms to paddle farther from shore.

Sam turned to Vic Crosetti. “All right, *now* we can have all the fun we want to. That didn’t take real long, and it was sort of interesting.”

“Yeah, sort of.” Crosetti stared out at John Liholiho’s receding shape. “I bet he’s a limey spy. He sure talks like a limey spy, don’t he?”

“He talks like a limey, anyway,” Carsten answered. “But so what? Even if he is a spy, how’s he going to get word off the island? And if you’re going to start seeing spies under every bed—”

“If I look under a bed,” Crosetti said with great assurance, “it’s to make sure I can hide there if her husband comes home before he’s supposed to.” Both men laughed, and headed into town to see what kind of damage they could do to the fleshpots there.

Reggie Bartlett trudged wearily into Wilson Town, Sequoyah. Seeing houses around him felt strange after so long on the prairie with no human-made artifacts close by but the occasional oil well…and the trenches, and the shells, and the other appurtenances of war.

Lieutenant Jerome Nicoll called, “We got to hold this town, boys. Ain’t a whole hell of a lot of Sequoyah left to us, and we have to hang on to what there is, not let the damnyankees run us out of the whole state. Remember, the Germans don’t hold all of Belgium even now.”

“I ain’t seen any Germans in Sequoyah,” Nap Dibble said. Sweat cut ravines through the dust caking his face. “You see any o’ them damn Huns, Reggie? Yankees is bad enough, but them folks—”

“Haven’t seen any Germans, Nap,” Bartlett answered. He’d long since figured out Nap, while a good fellow, wasn’t what anybody would call sharp. When Dibble lined up in front of the paymaster, he signed his name with an X. No wonder he’d be on the lookout for Germans smack in the middle of Sequoyah.

“We have to save this town,” Lieutenant Nicoll repeated. A shell crashed down a few hundred yards off to the left, arguing that the Confederate soldiers didn’t have to do any such thing.

Bartlett would have been more impressed with the speech if the lieutenant hadn’t said the same thing about Duncan, which had fallen several weeks before. He’d heard the same kind of speech on the Roanoke front, too. There it had sometimes presaged a retreat like this one, and sometimes a counterattack that left dead men piled high in exchange for retaking a couple of hundred yards of chewed-up, worthless ground.

Nicoll tried something new. Pointing south, he spoke in dramatic tones: “There are the people who depend on us to protect them.”

As far as Reggie could see, the people of Wilson Town weren’t depending on the Confederate Army for any such thing. A lot of houses already looked to have been abandoned. More folks—Indians, whites, a handful of Negro servants and laborers—were throwing whatever they could into buggies and wagons and hightailing it south toward the Texas line.

Sergeant Pete Hairston spat in the dust of the road. “If the damnyankees want a pack of damn redskins, they’re welcome to ’em, far as I can tell. Weren’t for the oil round these parts, hell, I’d give Sequoyah to the USA and say, ‘You’re welcome to it.’”

“Will you look at that?” Bartlett pointed to a side-curtained grocery wagon and to the tall, gray-bearded man in a black suit and homburg who was, instead of loading things into it, selling things from it. “Crazy Jew peddler, doesn’t he know he’s liable to get blown to hell any minute?” He raised his voice to a shout: “Hey, you! Hymie!”

That got the peddler’s attention. He wasn’t just big; he looked strong and tough, too, in spite of those snowy whiskers. “Vot you vant?” he asked, his voice wary—no matter how tough he was, he had the brains not to argue with anybody toting a Tredegar.

“You’d better get out of here before you get killed,” Bartlett told him.

“Oh. Dot vot you talk about.” The peddler shrugged. “Soon I go.”

Hairston made money-counting motions. “Business is good, huh?” He laughed. “Damn fool Jew. Money ain’t worth your neck.”

The Jew muttered something under his breath. Reggie didn't think it was a compliment. He didn't think it was English, either, which was likely to be just as well: if he didn't understand it, he didn't have to notice it. That made something else occur to him: "Hey, Hymie, you sell a lot to the Indians around here?"

"A lot, yes," the peddler answered. "Is most of folk."

"How do you talk to 'em?" Bartlett asked. The Jew stared at him, not following the question. He tried again: "What language do you use when you sell to them?"

"Oh." The Jew's face lit with intelligence. "They speak Henglish, same like me." Reggie burst out laughing; from what little he'd seen of them, most of the local Chickasaws and Kiowas spoke English better than the peddler.

"Go on, get the hell out of here," Hairston said, and the peddler, not without a sigh or two of regret for business lost, scrambled up into the wagon and rattled south out of Wilson Town, almost the last one to leave it.

Methodically, the troops of Lieutenant Nicoll's company began to dig in. Nap Dibble said, "Wish them niggers what was in this town would've stayed a bit. They could have done this here entrenching for us."

"Back on the Roanoke front, we had us lots of nigger labor battalions," Reggie said as he made the dirt fly. "Haven't seen so much of that here out west."

"*Ain't* that much of it," Sergeant Hairston said. "Like I been tellin' you since you got here, Bartlett, ain't that much of anything."

"Except Yankees," Reggie said.

"Yeah, except them," Hairston agreed. "But they ain't got any more'n—well, ain't got a whole lot more'n—what we do, 'cept maybe soldiers."

"Except," Reggie said again. He dug and dug, steady as a steam shovel. The ground was the perfect consistency: not so hard that he had to labor to force his entrenching tool into it, not so soft or muddy that the edges of the trench he was digging started falling down into what he'd already dug. He flipped the dirt up in front of his excavations to form a parapet. "Wish we had some more barbed wire."

He scooped out another couple of shovelfuls. “Wish we had *any* barbed wire.”

“Wish for sugarplums for Christmas while you’re at it,” Sergeant Hairston said. “Oh, we may get some wire—we had a good bit in front o’ Duncan, once we’d stayed there a while. But this here ain’t the Roanoke front—that kind of good stuff don’t grow on trees here. I just told you that a couple seconds ago, dammit. Ain’t you listenin’ to me?”

“Yeah, Sarge. I always listen,” Bartlett answered, so mildly that Hairston went back to digging for another stroke or two before giving him a dirty look. Reggie grinned back, a grin that had occasionally softened even the Yankee prison guards in West Virginia. He looked around, not to see if the Yankees were coming or the Chickasaws getting the hell out but to spot his company commander. “Now that the fighting’s picked up again, what’s the lieutenant going to do for his hooch?”

“Damned if I know.” As if reminded of what he’d traded to the men in green-gray for Lieutenant Nicoll’s supply of whiskey, Hairston rolled himself a cigarette. He sucked in smoke before going on, “Hope nothin’ bad’s happened to Toohey. He ain’t a bad guy.” After another drag, he chuckled. “Crazy sayin’ that about one of those Yankee bastards, but it’s so.”

“I know what you mean, Sarge,” Reggie replied. “Fellow who captured me, there in the Roanoke valley, he could have shot me and my pals easy as not. I ever run into him once this damn war is over, he can do all the boozing he wants. I’ll buy till he can’t even see, let alone walk.”

The sporadic Yankee shelling had been falling short of Wilson Town, so much so that the Confederate soldiers had gone on about the business of digging in without pausing at the explosions a couple of furlongs to the north. Now, suddenly, the U.S. gunners began to find the range. Hearing the hideous whistle of a shell that might have his name on it, Reggie dove headlong into the stretch of trench he’d just dug. The round hit behind him. Fragments and shrapnel balls hissed through the air. One of the lead spheres with which the shell had been loaded drilled a neat hole in the dirt he’d heaped up in front of the trench. It would have drilled a neat hole in him, too.

He got back up and started digging again. A hoarse shout from the southern edge of town made him turn his head. The Jewish peddler

didn't care for artillery close by. He was getting his horses up to a gallop so he could escape Wilson Town in jig time. Others who had lingered, the last few, now delayed their departure no more.

Reggie laughed. "Look at 'em go," he said, pointing. After a moment, though, it didn't seem funny. "If two guys are in a dangerous place, and one leaves while the other stays, which one of 'em is stupid?"

Hairston laughed, too, but singularly without humor. "That'd be funny, Bartlett, if only it was funny, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, Sarge, I do. Wish to Jesus I didn't." Bartlett looked out across the broad Sequoyah prairie. "Here come the damnyankees. I don't think they think we're ready for 'em yet."

"Yeah, well, if they don't, they're gonna be real sorry real fast," Hairston said.

The artillery fire supporting the men in green-gray who trotted forward got heavier, but it didn't turn into anything that would have been reckoned worse than harassment back in Virginia. Here and there, a Confederate soldier shrieked or abruptly fell silent, forever blasted from man to butcher-shop display in the blink of an eye.

But most of the C.S. troopers crouched down in the field fortifications they'd been digging and waited for the Yankees to get closer, so they could sting the enemy hard. Reggie wouldn't have wanted to be trudging through that yellowed autumn grass, waiting for the machine guns to open up on him. He wondered how much experience the damnyankees up there had. Were they brave men advancing into what they knew would be awful or raw fish too ignorant to tell they were heading for a fish fry? In the end, it didn't much matter. They'd kill him or he'd kill them. War reduced everything to a brutal simplicity.

Closer, closer…A couple of Confederate riflemen opened up on the Yankees. Men in green-gray started dropping, most not because they were hit but to keep from getting hit. Others kept coming forward, running now, not trotting, as if they knew they didn't have much time to do before they were done by. Raising his rifle to his shoulder, Bartlett picked one.

He pulled the trigger at the same time as the first machine gun began spraying precisely measured death at the U.S. soldiers. More and more of the men in green-gray were falling, and taking cover had

little if anything to do with it. A couple of hundred yards off to the left, the second Confederate machine gun joined its satanic chattering to that of the first. More and more Yankees toppled.

None of the foe got within a hundred yards of the position the Confederates had chosen to defend. As the attack finally broke down, cold rain began falling on U.S. and C.S. troops alike. Looking west, Reggie saw more and more clouds rolling his way. He pointed in that direction and said, “Looks like we’ve got ourselves a new commanding officer.”

“What are you talkin’ about?” Pete Hairston asked.

“General Winter,” Bartlett answered. Hairston did a double take, but then he nodded. If the rain kept coming, the way it looked as if it would, nobody on either side would go anywhere fast, not for a good long while.

“Ma’am?” Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid loomed over Nellie Semphroch. “May I speak to you for just a minute, ma’am?”

“What do you want?” Nellie knew her voice was cold, and did nothing to warm it. Speaking with the Confederate officer who’d seduced her daughter (or so she’d thought of it, not that Edna would have needed much seducing) was the last thing she wanted. “Whatever it is, you’d better make it snappy. We’re goin’ to be busy very soon, I expect.”

“Yes, ma’am. I know that, ma’am. That’s why I came here so early, ma’am.” Kincaid stood there, holding his butternut slouch hat in both hands. He kept twisting it every which way, though he didn’t seem to notice. He took a deep breath, held it so long he began to turn red, and then blurted, “Ma’am, me and your daughter, we’d like to get married, ma’am.”

Nellie’s head whipped around. There stood Edna, stacking cups on the countertop by the coffeepots so she and Nellie could serve a lot of coffee in a hurry. Edna’s face wore what Nellie could think of only as an idiot grin. “That’s right, Ma,” she said, and the grin got wider.

“You’re too young,” Nellie said automatically.

“I’m older’n you were when you got married,” her daughter retorted. “And I sure do want to marry Nick there.” It was the first

time she'd called Kincaid that—no, the first time Nellie had heard her call him that. When she did, he started grinning an idiot grin, too.

And she was right. Nellie had been younger than Edna was now when her name abruptly became Semphroch. Her name had had to change abruptly. "Edna, are you in a family way?" she demanded.

Lieutenant Kincaid turned red, the blush starting at his collar and rising all the way to his forehead. Edna indignantly tossed her head. "I am not—no such thing," she answered. "And I ought to know, too." When Kincaid heard that, he got even redder.

"All right." Nellie knew when to beat a retreat. *She'd* been in a family way when she got married, though she didn't think Edna knew that. The less Edna ever found out about her unsavory past, the better she'd like it.

"Ma'am, your daughter and I, we really do love each other," Kincaid said earnestly. "We'll be happy together for the rest of our lives, I know we will."

If I laugh at him, he'll get angry at me, and so will Edna. Nellie made herself hold her face still. It wasn't easy. He'd managed to get Edna's corset off her once (maybe more than once; Nellie admitted to herself she didn't know for sure about that) and both of them had liked what followed, so they thought they'd be happy together forever. Nellie knew better. She'd learned better the hard way. She wanted to pass on what she'd learned, but they wouldn't listen. She knew they wouldn't listen. The only way anyone learned those lessons was the hard way.

Off in the middle distance, artillery rumbled. Lately, days didn't go by—hours hardly went by—without that sound in the air. It reminded Nellie of her second biggest problem with Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid, after his being a man. "Edna," she said, as gently as she could, "he's a Confederate. Do you want to go *down there* to live?" By the way she said *down there*, she might have been talking about dropping into hell for a visit.

Now Edna turned bright red. Like every child in the USA since the War of Secession, she'd been taught to think of Confederates as the enemy, with a capital E. That hadn't worried her when Kincaid started sniffing after her. But maybe she hadn't faced, even in her own mind, all the implications of what marrying him would mean. "I love him," she said defiantly.

"You think you can stay here in Washington the rest of your days?"

Nellie asked. The artillery rumbled again, louder this time. “How much longer do you think the CSA can hold on here?”

“We’ll hold Washington,” Kincaid said. “President Wilson said it was our capital by rights, and we’ll keep it. President Semmes says the same thing, so that’s how it’ll be.” He thrust out his already prominent chin, as if to stay the Yankee hordes with the granite contained therein.

Nellie thought about mentioning the jawbone of an ass, but forbore. What she did say was, “You Confederates have said a lot of things that haven’t come true. What makes you think this’ll be any different?”

“Don’t you rag on him, Ma!” Edna said shrilly.

When Nellie heard that tone of voice from her daughter, she knew the game was lost. Edna would do whatever Edna intended doing, and nothing and nobody would stop her. *My God,* Nellie thought. *How am I going to explain this to Mr. Jacobs?* The daughter of a spy for the United States running off and marrying a Confederate officer? He’d never trust Nellie again.

Edna, of course, hadn’t the slightest idea Nellie was a spy for the USA. *A good thing, too,* Nellie thought. She’d never imagined life could get so complicated. Knowing it was weak, she tried a new card: “Suppose I say no?”

Kincaid didn’t answer, which told Nellie the card was even weaker than she’d thought. He’d seemed so polite, she’d hoped a refusal might make him go away. Edna did reply, firmly: “Ma, we’d run off. Nick knows this chaplain—he told me so.” Kincaid blushed again, but after a moment nodded. Edna went on, “You can’t stop us, and you know it. You got to sleep sometime.”

“You’d leave me to run the coffeehouse all by my lonesome?” Nellie asked, shifting with the changing breeze as adroitly as a politician. “It’s too much for one person. It’s too much for two people, sometimes.”

“Hire yourself a nigger,” Edna told her. “Ma, you know you’re making good money. You can hire a couple of niggers, easy.”

Again, that was probably true. Kincaid said, “Edna, honey, when we get back down into *my* country”—he spoke as if to assure her the CSA was far superior to this benighted northern land—“you won’t have to lift a finger. You’ll have niggers doing all your work for you.”

Nellie did laugh then. She couldn't help it. "Niggers doing all your work for you, Edna, on a lieutenant's pay?" she said. "Likely tell. Besides, aren't the Confederate States buzzing like a hornets'nest about how niggers aren't going to be like servants no more?"

"I don't reckon that'll come to anything," Lieutenant Kincaid said. He sounded none too confident, though, and he said not a word about how easy keeping Negro servants on a junior officer's pay would be. That relieved Nellie; she'd feared he would announce that his father owned a plantation stretching halfway across Alabama, and that what he got from the Confederate War Department was less than pocket change to him.

Before the argument—*the losing argument,* Nellie was convinced—could go on, the door to the coffeehouse opened. The bell above it chimed. A fierce smile of triumph lighted Edna's face. "Ma," she said sweetly, "why don't you go take care of Mr. Reach there?"

Not five minutes earlier, Nellie had wondered how life got so complicated. Now she wondered if God had decided to show her she didn't know what complicated meant. Sure as hell, there was Bill Reach folding himself into a chair at a table by the window. He looked the same as he always had since he'd returned, all unbidden, to Nellie's life: dark, unkempt clothes, stubbled chin and cheeks, bleary eyes.

As she went up to him, she heard Lieutenant Kincaid say, "I never did fancy that fellow, not from the first time I set eyes on him."

Edna giggled. "I think he's one of Ma's old beaus." Nellie's back stiffened.

"Hello, Little Nell," Reach said when Nellie reached his table. Edna giggled. Nicholas Kincaid chuckled. Nellie steamed.

Speaking very softly, she said, "If you *ever* call me that again, I will tell the Confederate occupying authorities exactly—exactly, do you hear me?—what you are."

Those bleary eyes widened. "Me? I'm not anything much," he said, but the certainty that usually informed his gravelly voice was missing.

"You heard me," Nellie whispered. "I don't ever want to see you round here again, either." In normal tones, she went on, "Now what'll it be?"

“Cup of coffee, couple fried eggs, and buttered toast,” Reach said, his tone grudging. He smelled of whiskey.

“I’ll be right back,” Nellie told him.

As she started frying the eggs and toasting the bread, Lieutenant Kincaid said, “Ma’am? Can you give me your answer, ma’am?” He sounded plaintive as a calf calling for its mother.

“No,” Nellie snarled. The Rebel officer looked as if she’d kicked him.

Edna set a hand on his arm. “It’ll be all right, Nick. Don’t you worry about it none. She’s just my mother. She ain’t my jailer, and she can’t hold me back when I go with you.” Not *if I go with you*, Nellie noted. *When*.

“I don’t know what this world is coming to,” she said, “when children don’t pay any attention at all to the people who brought them into this world in the first place.” Edna didn’t answer. She kept staring at Lieutenant Kincaid as if she’d just invented him. Nellie sighed and slipped a metal spatula under the eggs to turn them in the pan. She repeated what she’d said a moment before: “I don’t know what this world is coming to.”

Lieutenant Kincaid leaned over and pecked Edna on the lips. He set his hat back on his head, tipped it to Nellie, and went out of the coffeehouse whistling “Dixie” loudly and off-key. “Isn’t he wonderful?”

“No,” Nellie snapped. A couple of other Confederate officers came in. Nellie pointed their way. “You take care of them.” She slid the eggs out of the frying pan, took the toast from the rack above the fire in the stove, spread butter on it, poured coffee, and carried Bill Reach his breakfast. “Here you are. That’ll be a dollar ten.”

He winced slightly, but laid down a dollar and a quarter. “Don’t worry any about the change,” he said. He spread salt and pepper liberally over the eggs before he began to eat. Then he looked up at her. “Back in those days, I didn’t know you could cook, too.”

She glared. “Do you think I won’t turn you in?” she said in a low, savage voice. “You better think again. My daughter is going to marry a Confederate officer.” And then, to her helpless horror, she began to cry.

“Are you all right, Ma?” Edna came rushing over. She looked

daggers at Bill Reach. “What’d he do?” Hearing that, the two Confederate officers jumped to their feet. They were nothing if not gentlemen.

Nellie waved everyone away. “It’s all right,” she insisted. “I’m just—happy for you, that’s all.” She’d told Edna a lot of lies for the foolish girl’s own sake. After so many, what was one more?

Doubtfully, Edna retreated. The Rebs settled back into their seats. In a half-apologetic mumble, Bill Reach said, “Hal told me not to come around here any more.”

“Then why didn’t you listen to him?” Nellie said. She sat down at the table with Reach, which made Edna stare in surprise but succeeded in convincing the Confederates nothing was wrong.

“Now that I found you, I can’t stay away from you,” Reach answered. He started to reach out to set his hand on hers, but stopped when she made as if to pull away. He sighed, then coughed. “All these years, all that water over the dam, and I never forgot even a little of what we did, and I knew it had to be the same for you.”

She wanted to cry some more, or maybe scream. If he’d been mooning after her since before Edna was born…that made him crazy, was what it did. Try as she would, she had trouble remembering him at all from those long-ago days. Just another face, just another cock—But nowadays, he was the USA’s number-one spy in Washington. She wondered if the people to whom he fed his information knew he was on, or over, the ragged edge.

He got to his feet, tipped his battered black homburg, and said, “I’ll see you again, Nellie, one day before too long.” His walk to the door was slow and deliberate, as if he was daring her to tell the Rebs who he was.

He hadn’t called her Little Nell. She kept quiet. But he hadn’t taken any notice when she’d told him to go away and stay away, either. *What am I going to do?* she thought. She had no more answer for that than for, *What is the world coming to?*

“Sir,” the truck driver in green-gray said to Lieutenant Straubing, packing what should have been a title of respect with all the scorn he could, “it ain’t right, us white men working alongside niggers.” He set

hands on hips and glared at Cincinnatus, who happened to be the black man closest to him.

“See here, Murray,” Straubing said, “you will do as you are ordered or you will face military punishment.”

“Then we will, won’t we, boys?” Murray turned for support to the new truck drivers—well over half the unit—who had joined the transport company to replace the men killed, wounded, or captured in the Confederate raid south of Berea, Kentucky. He was a little, skinny, bandy-legged fellow, with a narrow face, a receding chin, a beaky nose, and a shock of red hair: all in all, he reminded Cincinnatus of an angry chicken.

But he had backers. The new men in the unit were fresh out of the USA. A lot of them, probably, had never seen a Negro before coming down to Covington, let alone thought of working alongside one—or rather, a good many more than one.

“Don’t want to maybe trust my life to a coon,” one of them said.

“Hear tell some of them get paid more’n white men,” another added. “Ain’t nobody can tell me that’s proper.”

Cincinnatus looked over to Herk. The two of them had escaped the Rebel raiders together, and had shared what food they could steal and what miserable shelter they could find till they came upon a U.S. outpost. Herk hadn’t treated Cincinnatus like a nigger then. Of course, Herk had needed him then. Now the white man stood silent as a stone, when Cincinnatus needed him.

“You men are making a mutiny,” Lieutenant Straubing warned. “A court-martial will take a dim view of that.”

Murray, who had enough mouth for any three men, laughed out loud. “No court’s going to say anything but that white men are better than niggers, sir, and that’s the truth.”

Under the tan he’d got from going out with his trucks, Straubing turned pale. Cincinnatus’ heart sank. His guess was that Murray knew what he was talking about. Without much conscious thought, Cincinnatus and the rest of the black truck drivers bunched together. The whites with whom they’d been driving stood apart from them. Those whites didn’t go over with the new men who backed Murray, but they didn’t support their colored comrades, either.

Reds are right, Cincinnatus thought bitterly. *CSA and USA, it's the same thing—whites are so mystified, they put race ahead of class*.

"That's your last word, Murray?" Lieutenant Straubing demanded tensely. When the redheaded driver nodded, Straubing hurried out of the warehouse depot, biting his lip. A chorus of jeers rang out behind him, as if chasing him away.

"Get you black boys hauling like mules, the way God made you to," Murray said to the Negro truck drivers. The men at his back nodded.

"Don't know why you so down on us," Cincinnatus said. "We just doin' our jobs, makin' our pay, feedin' our families."

"Doing white man's work," Murray snapped. Like Lieutenant Kennan, he looked to be one of those U.S. whites who hated Negroes more savagely than any Confederate did, not least because he was so much less familiar with them than Confederates were. Cincinnatus, who had been driving a truck in the CSA before the war broke out, thought about pointing his old job out to the damnyankee. But he didn't think it would help, and kept quiet.

The door to the depot flew open. In strode Lieutenant Straubing, followed by a squad of soldiers carrying bayoneted Springfields. Straubing pointed to Murray. "Arrest that man," he snapped. "Charges are insubordination and refusal to obey lawful orders."

Two of the men in green-gray stomped up to Murray, who looked comically amazed. One of them grabbed him by the arm. "Come on, you," he snapped. Murray perforce came.

Straubing's gaze traveled over the other new drivers. "Anyone else?" he asked in a voice that held nothing but ice. A couple of drivers stirred where they stood. "Vasilievsky, Heintzelman, you are under arrest, too. Same charges as Murray."

"Come on, you two lugs," one of the soldiers Straubing had brought said when neither driver moved for a moment. "You won't like it if we have to come and get you, I promise."

Numbly, their eyes wide with shock, the two white men obeyed. "Anyone else?" Lieutenant Straubing said again. None of the new drivers moved or spoke. As Cincinnatus had seen other soldiers do, they tried to disappear while standing in plain sight. Straubing nodded. "Very well." He turned to the men he'd called. "Take those three to the stockade. Murray—this fellow here—is the ringleader. I

will prefer formal written charges when I have the time, which I don't right now. These shenanigans are liable to make me late, and I won't stand for that."

Saluting, the soldiers led Murray, Heintzelman, and Vasilievsky out of the depot. The three drivers looked as if they were standing in front of White trucks bearing down on them at thirty miles an hour. None of them could have been more astonished than Cincinnatus. He'd associated Lieutenant Straubing's uncommon easiness on matters of race with a certain weakness. Evidently he'd been wrong.

Straubing glanced over toward the new truck drivers who hadn't been arrested. As if they were puppets controlled by the same puppeteer, they stiffened to attention. "If this sort of nonsense happens again," Straubing said pleasantly, "it will make me angry. Do you gentlemen want to find out what happens when I get angry?"

"No, sir," the drivers chorused.

"Good," Straubing said. "Now that we understand that, I am going to give you the idea behind what we're doing here. What we're doing here is moving supplies from the riverside here down to the fighting front. Anything that helps us do that is good. Anything that hurts is bad. If a man does his job, I don't care—and you won't care—if he is black or white or yellow or blue. If he can't or won't, I will run him out of here. If you are white and I order you to work with a Negro who is doing his job, you will do it. If you are white and I order you to work beside a trained unicorn who is doing his job, you will do that, too. Again, do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir," the new drivers said in unison.

"Then let's get on with it," Lieutenant Straubing said. "We are going to have to press harder than we would have, thanks to this idiocy. You would be safer blaspheming the Holy Ghost than you would, tampering with my schedule."

As the drivers went off to their vehicles, Cincinnatus approached Straubing and said, "Thank you kindly, suh."

The white man looked almost as nonplused as Murray had when he was arrested. "I suppose you're welcome, Cincinnatus," he answered after a moment, "but I didn't do it for you."

"Sir, I understand that," Cincinnatus said. "I—"

“Do you?” Straubing broke in. “I wonder. I did it for the sake of the United States Army. You Negroes have shown you can do this job, and if you do it, white men don’t have to, and we can put rifles in their hands. I would sooner have taken on more of you, but this new contingent got sent to me instead. We’ll see what we can make of them.”

“Uh, yes, sir,” Cincinnatus said. Straubing was indeed a good deal less sentimental, more hardheaded than he’d reckoned.

The lieutenant went on, “And no one who deserves to keep his rank badges will let himself be disobeyed, even for an instant. Is there anything else before you get to work?”

“No, suh,” Cincinnatus said. Maybe, instead of being kindly and sentimental, Straubing was the most cold-blooded human being he’d ever met, so cold-blooded that he didn’t even get excited about matters of race, matters Cincinnatus had thought guaranteed to stir the passions of every man, white or black, Yankee or Confederate.

Cincinnatus went out to tend to his truck. There a couple of vehicles over stood Herk, fiddling with the driver’s-side acetylene lamp on his own machine. He nodded to Cincinnatus, then went back to getting the reflector the way he wanted it.

He didn’t even notice he hadn’t backed Cincinnatus and the other colored drivers when Murray started running his mouth. Cincinnatus couldn’t help scowling. And then, slowly, his anger faded. Herk did his job. He let Cincinnatus do *his* job, too, and didn’t fuss about that. If he did so much, did Cincinnatus have any business expecting more?

“I can hope,” Cincinnatus mumbled. That made Herk look up from what he was doing, but only for a moment. Cincinnatus sighed. He might hope white men would treat him the same as they treated one of their own, but a lifetime had taught him he had no business expecting it.

Black roustabouts hauled crates from the wharves toward the line of trucks. With them came Lieutenant Kennan, raving at them to work harder, harder. Nobody put Kennan under arrest for abusing blacks. But he was following U.S. orders, not disobeying them as Murray had done. If he might have got more work from his crew without the abuse…who cared? No one in authority, that was certain.

With another sigh, Cincinnatus cranked his White’s motor into rumbling life. Lieutenant Straubing let him do his job, too. In the

scheme of things, that wasn't so bad. It could have been worse, and he knew it.

XVII

Private Ulysses Hansen looked around. “Once upon a time, probably, this was real pretty country,” he said.

“Not any time lately,” another private—Sergeant Gordon McSweeney couldn’t see who—answered. The whole squad, with the exception of McSweeney, chuckled.

“Silence in the ranks,” McSweeney said, and silence he got: all proper and according to regulation. He looked around at what had been a northeastern Arkansas pine forest and was now a wasteland of jagged stumps and downtumbled branches. That it might once have been beautiful hadn’t occurred to him. He hadn’t particularly noticed how hideous it was at the moment, either. It was country that had once held the enemy but was now cleared of him, that was all. No, not quite all: it was country that led to land the enemy still infested.

Captain Schneider came bustling along past the company as the soldiers trudged south and east. Schneider nodded toward Gordon McSweeney. “Not so pretty as it used to be, is it, Sergeant?” he said.

“No, sir,” McSweeney answered stolidly. The company commander outranked him, and so could say whatever he pleased, as far as McSweeney was concerned.

Schneider went on, “Trouble is, the damn Rebs knew we were coming, so they baked us a cake. A whole bunch of cakes, as a matter of fact.”

“Sir?” McSweeney said: when his superior spoke directly to him, he had to answer. He regretted the necessity. Ever since their clash over the need to enforce all regulations to the fullest—gospel to him, but evidently not to Schneider—he’d feared the captain was trying to

seduce him away from the straight and narrow path he had trodden all his life.

“Toward Memphis,” Schneider amplified. “They fortified all this delta country in eastern Arkansas to a fare-thee-well, and so here it is two years after the damn war started and we’re only getting to Jonesboro now.”

“Oh. Yes, sir,” McSweeney said. Matters military he would willingly discuss with his superior, even if Schneider was sometimes profane. “And, of course, since we stand on the far side of the Mississippi, we get half the resources of those east of the river. General Custer’s First Army, I recall—”

“Don’t talk about any of that,” Schneider broke in. “It hurts too much when I think about it. We’re not going to have an easy time up ahead, either.”

“At Jonesboro? No, sir, I don’t expect we will,” McSweeney said. He could see the Confederate strongpoint without any trouble. Why not? None of the timber was tall enough to block his view, not any more. The town sprawled along the top of Crowley’s Ridge, in most places not a feature worth noticing but here in this flat country high ground to be coveted. “What’s the altitude here, sir?”

“At Jonesboro? It’s 344 feet,” Captain Schneider said. “That’s 344 too many, you ask me. And we lose even what little cover these woods —or what’s left of ’em—give us, too, because it was farming country out to three or four miles in front of the town.”

“I see that also, sir,” McSweeney answered. He raised his voice to call out to his men: “Give way to the right for the column coming back.”

The column coming back was made up of soldiers returning from the front line, soldiers for whom McSweeney’s squad, Schneider’s company, were among the replacements. They looked the way any soldiers coming away from the front line looked: dirty, haggard, exhausted seemingly past the repair of sleep, some managing grins as they thought about what they’d do now that they’d finally got relieved, others shambling along with blank stares, as if they hardly knew where they were. That happened to some men after they’d taken too much shelling. McSweeney had seen as much, though he didn’t understand. How could a man whom the Lord had spared be anything but joyful?

One of the soldiers leaving the front pointed to the tank of jellied oil he bore on his back. “Rebs catch you with that contraption, pal, they won’t bother sendin’ you to no prison camp. They’ll just cut your throat for you and leave you for the buzzards.”

“They shall not take me alive.” McSweeney spoke with great assurance. He generally spoke with great assurance. The soldier who’d presumed to remark on the flamethrower stared, shrugged, and kept on marching.

Noncoms left behind guided the company into the section of trench they would inhabit till taken out of line themselves. “I don’t like this for hell,” Captain Schneider said. “Not for hell I don’t. We’re right out in the open, with whatever guns the Rebs have up on that ridge looking straight down our throats.”

“And the men who were here before us were not careful enough about that, either,” McSweeney said. For once, he needed to give his squad no orders. Seeing the same thing he did, every man jack of them had taken out his entrenching tool and was busy improving the shelter with which they had been provided. McSweeney turned to Schneider. “I would wager the barbed wire will be as weak.”

“You’re likely right, Sergeant,” Schneider answered, “but I’m not going to stick my head up to find out, not in broad daylight I’m not. Come tonight, we’ll send out a wiring party—if there’s any wire to be had.”

“Yes, sir,” McSweeney said. “I sometimes think Philadelphia cares not at all whether the war on this side of the river is won or lost. Utah mattered to the powers that be, because it was on the rail line to the Pacific. Here—” He shook his head. “Out of sight, out of mind.”

“You’ll get a lot of people who do the real fighting to tell you the fools back in Philadelphia are out of their minds,” Schneider said with a grin. When McSweeney didn’t grin back, the captain frowned. McSweeney wondered why.

The wiring party did not go out that night: a wiring party without wire was nothing but wasted effort. Ben Carlton cooked up a stew inedible even by his own standards, which were low. “The enemy seeks to wound us,” McSweeney told him. “You should not.”

Carlton gave him a resentful stare. “Ain’t like you could do better.”

“I admit it,” McSweeney said.

“You do?” The cook stared again, this time in a different way. “Ain’t never heard you admit nothin’ before.”

“However,” McSweeney went on implacably, as if Carlton had not spoken, “I was not assigned to cook. You were.” Resentment returned to Carlton’s face. McSweeney ignored it, as he always did, confident in his own rightness and righteousness.

No new wire came up to the front. Captain Schneider swore. McSweeney sent Carlton out to see if he could come up with any: the man was a menace as a cook, but an inspired scavenger. When Carlton had no luck, McSweeney concluded there truly was no wire to be had. He went up and down the line, making sure the machine guns were well sited. Only after that was done did he wrap himself in his blanket and go to sleep.

Rebel artillery made sure he did not sleep late. Those guns up on top of Crowley’s Ridge started shelling the U.S. position a couple of hours before dawn. “Gas!” somebody screamed in the middle of the unholy din. McSweeney donned his gas helmet as calmly and quickly as if he were practicing in front of a mirror.

“Be ready!” he yelled as soon as the first light showed in the sky. Not five minutes later, Confederate machine guns added their racket to the crashes from the artillery.

Shouts rose up and down the trench: “Here they come!” “Here come the goddamn motherfucking sons of bitches!” Beneath the gas helmet, McSweeney’s face set in disapproving lines. He’d never find out who had committed the obscene blasphemy. And then a shout rose that made him forget to worry about discipline and propriety: “Barrel! Jesus, the Rebs have a stinking barrel!”

He stuck his head up over the top of the parapet. Sure enough, one of those tracked traveling fortresses was slowly rumbling and clanking straight toward the U.S. line—straight toward *him*, it looked like. The U.S. machine guns went from raking the soldiers in butternut advancing with the barrel to aiming their fire exclusively at it, trying to knock it out of action before it could get into the trenches.

It was a British-style machine, with cannon mounted in sponsons on either side. One of those cannon spat fire. A machine gun fell silent. The barrel clattered forward once more. Its own machine guns sprayed bullets at the U.S. soldiers.

The glass portholes in McSweeney’s gas helmet were fogged on the

inside and streaked with dust on the outside. That did not keep him from noticing a couple of men running away from the barrel. “Halt!” he roared at them. It did no good. At last, the men had discovered something they feared worse than they feared him.

Boom! The barrel fired again. Another machine gun abruptly stopped shooting at it. Ricochets whined off the steel armor, striking sparks but failing to penetrate. McSweeney wondered how many more barrels that he could not see were moving forward.

He shrugged. If he couldn’t see them, he couldn’t do anything about them. He could see this one. He bent and, careful not to disturb his gas helmet, shrugged over his shoulders the straps to the metal tank that fueled his special weapon. Then he waited. Bullets seemed unable to hurt the barrel.

Here it came, grinding its way through and over the few strands of wire protecting the U.S. trenches. Having thicker belts out there wouldn’t have stopped it. More soldiers in green-gray fled the machine they could not stop.

It crushed the parapet and stood poised up there above the edge of the trench, triumphant, like a great bull elephant. As it began its plunge into the U.S. works, McSweeney sent a stream of flame in through one of the machine-gun ports. An instant later, he did the same with the other port on the right side of the barrel, thereby making sure neither of those guns would bear on him.

Through the shelling, through the firing going on all around, through the coughing roar of the barrel’s engine, he heard screams inside the metal hull. Hatches flew open on top of the barrel. Men started scrambling out. Smiling behind the canvas of the mask, McSweeney burned them down. They tumbled back into the machine, black and shrunken and flaming, like insects that had flown into the flame of a gaslight.

Smoke poured from the barrel. Ammunition started cooking off in it. McSweeney regretfully moved away, that hard, tight grin still on his face. A Confederate soldier sprang onto the parapet. He fired from the hip at McSweeney—and missed. He never got a second chance. A tongue of flame licked over him. He tumbled back, burning, burning.

A grenade flew down into the trench. The blast was deafening. A fragment bit McSweeney’s leg. But when a Rebel followed the grenade, he too became a torch. No more Confederate soldiers tried

coming down into the U.S. trenches, not anywhere the flame could reach. The sight of the blazing barrel took the heart out of their attack.

"You'll get a medal for this!" someone shouted: someone in captain's bars. Schneider hadn't run, then. That was something. The company commander went on, "A Medal of Honor, if I have anything to do with it."

"Thank you, sir." McSweeney was as unflinchingly honest about himself as about everything and everyone around him. "I earned it."

The envelope with the familiar handwriting had caused a small stir when it got to Scipio's apartment house. Any time mail arrived there was a small occasion, for only a few of the Negroes in the building were able to read and write. "Who it from?" asked the apartment manager, a plump black fellow named Demosthenes. "Sho''nuf write pretty."

Scipio had professed ignorance; the imperturbable mask a butler had to be able to don at will was proof against Demosthenes' curiosity. Behind that mask, he'd been trembling. *How did Miss Anne find out where I was living?* he wondered. The war had made people forget about registering newly arrived blacks, and in any case he was but one Nero among many Negroes by that name in Columbia.

In his haste to find out what his former mistress wanted, he'd ignored yet another inviting glance from the widow Jezebel, ignored it so flagrantly that he knew he'd offended. He hadn't cared.

The message, as was Anne Colleton's way, was to the point. *Come to Marshlands Sunday before noon,* she'd written. *If you do, no harm will come to you. If you do not, I shall not answer for the consequences*.

And so, early Sunday morning, Scipio, not doubting her word for a moment, had hopped aboard the beat-up Negro car of a train at Confederacy Station, traveled southeast and then southwest around two sides of a triangle to reach St. Matthews (no direct rail route on the third side existing), and then trudged out of town down a muddy road that got muddier as a chilly drizzle came down, heading west toward the plantation where he'd lived his whole life till the past year.

Marks of the Negro uprising still scarred the countryside: burnt-out

houses and barns, cotton fields gone to weeds, trees shattered by the artillery that had done more than anything else to break the Congaree Socialist Republic. Despite the scars, Scipio had the feeling he was walking back into his own past. He wondered if Anne Colleton would have a brass-buttoned tailcoat waiting for him when he got back to the plantation.

All things considered, he preferred life as a laborer, which had more freedom to it than he'd ever imagined. Very few people, though, had ever cared about what he preferred. He hiked through the forest where he'd killed Major Hotchkiss. If anyone ever found out about that, none of Miss Anne's promises would matter in the least.

Coming up the familiar path, turning onto it, and seeing the Marshlands mansion in ruins brought home to him how much things had changed. The Negro cottages still standing alongside those charred ruins brought home to him how much things hadn't.

A battered, filthy, rusty Ford was parked next to one of those cottages: no sign anywhere of the fancy motorcar Miss Anne had driven. None of the field hands would have had an automobile, though, no matter how battered. That had to be where the mistress was staying. As Scipio approached the cottage, a chill ran down his back. Before the uprising—the revolution that had failed—that had been Cassius'cottage. Scipio wondered if Anne Colleton appreciated the irony.

A few children were playing outside in spite of the drizzle. In his city clothes, he was a stranger to them. Strangers, these days, were objects of fear, not curiosity. "What you wan'?" asked one of the boys, a chap who would have been just too young to fight in the revolutionary army, which had had more than one twelve-year-old carrying a rifle.

"I wish to speak with the mistress of Marshlands, Ajax," Scipio answered. "Will you be so good as to tell her I have arrived?"

Ajax and the other children stared at him, not expecting that kind of language to come from the mouth of a black man wearing a frayed, collarless shirt and a pair of dungarees with patches at the knees, a cloth cap on his head against the rain. Then the youngster recognized him in spite of the unfamiliar habiliments. "It Scipio!" he yelped. "Do Jesus, Scipio done come back!"

That shout brought faces to windows and made several doors come

open so the inhabitants of those cottages could gape—or could warily study—the returned prodigal. One of the opening doors was that of the cottage formerly Cassius'. Out came Anne Colleton, who ignored the nasty weather. "Good morning, Scipio," she said, almost—but not quite—as she might have done before the revolt. "You were wise to come."

"Ma'am, I thought so myself, which is why I did," he answered.

She stood aside. "Well, come in," she said. "I have coffee waiting, and cold chicken, and sweet-potato pie. You'll be hungry, I expect."

"Yes, ma'am," he said again. He went into the cottage, pausing only to wipe his feet on the jute mat in front of the door. The cottage hadn't boasted a mat when Cassius had lived there. It hadn't boasted an icebox, either, or a small stove to supplement the fireplace. Nor had it held a bookcase, even if the titles on the shelves were worn secondhand copies like the ones he bought for himself. But there had been literature here: Marx and Engels and Lincoln and other Red and near-Red writers. Cassius, though, had had to keep all that hidden.

Anne Colleton closed the door behind them. "Help yourself to anything," she said. "I don't want anyone but the two of us hearing what we have to say to each other." That explained why she had no servant present. And for her to serve him had undoubtedly never once crossed her mind. She was, after all, a sort of commingling of feudal landlord and capitalist oppressor. Scipio had read Cassius' books, too.

Unless he planned on killing her and then fleeing, he had to do as she said for the moment. He'd thought about that, walking out from St. Matthews. But even if the field hands didn't try stopping him as he ran, she would have put aside a letter or something somewhere to point the finger at him. She was not the sort to miss such a trick.

As if to underscore that, she pulled a pistol out of her handbag. "In case you were foolish," she remarked. "I didn't really expect you to be, but one never knows these days."

"I have no intention of being foolish," he answered gravely. She'd put out two coffee cups. He poured one for her, one for himself. Since she'd set out only one plate, he assumed she'd already eaten. The food was plain, nothing like the fancy banquets she'd served in the days before the war, but good enough. Since he'd had nothing but a slice of bread before leaving for the train station, he ate his fill now.

With more patience than she usually showed, his former mistress let

him finish before saying anything. When he was done, she began without preamble: “I want you to tell me how my brother Jacob died.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He made his voice as flat as he could, a fitting complement to the features he schooled to stillness. Her face and voice were similarly chary of giving him clues. How much did she know? How much did he dare lie? After no more than a heartbeat, he decided that anyone who lied to her was a fool. The truth, then, as much of it as he could give. “Ma’am, he perished most courageously.”

“I wouldn’t have expected anything else,” she answered. “Courage Jacob always had. No brains to speak of, but courage. That wench Cherry would have played a part in it, wouldn’t she?”

“Ma’am, if you know the answers, what need have you to question me?” Scipio asked.

“I am in a position to question you,” Anne said. “You are not in a position to question me. She would have used her charms to soften him up, wouldn’t she?” That was not a question; she sounded wearily sure she knew whereof she spoke. “And Cassius. He’s still stealing things hereabouts, you know.”

“So I have heard, yes,” Scipio said. The more he talked about Cassius now, the less he would have to talk about what had happened a year before.

“He still has a price on his head, too,” Anne said. “If he comes round here”—the pistol twitched in her hand—“I shall kill him.” She studied Scipio, as if deciding whether to butcher a hog now or to wait. “And, of course, you still have a price on your head as well.”

“You said no harm would come to me if I visited you here,” Scipio said quickly. If she hadn’t had the pistol, he *would* have thought about trying to kill her. Living with her, serving her, had taught him how devious she was.

But when she said, “And I meant that,” he thought she was telling the truth. She went on, “You and Julia are the only members of the house staff I’ve been able to find. She and the field hands deny knowing anything. I’ve made my investigations, but you are the only eyewitness to what happened I’ve been able to…find.”

Catch was what she meant. Wherever she’d learned whatever she’d learned, she knew a good deal. Scipio had not defied Cassius when the Red leader made it plain his choices were cooperation and death. The

stuff of defiance was not in him. Maybe it never had been; maybe his servile upbringing had trained out whatever he'd once owned.

He told the whole story, from Cherry's claim of abuse to the gun battle in which Jacob Colleton had defended himself so well to the storming of the bedroom door behind which Anne's gassed brother had barricaded himself. "Three or four men did that," he said. "They rushed past me so fast, I do not know for certain who they were. I do not know which of them fired the fatal shot, either. Ma'am, you may do with me what you will, but I am being truthful in this regard."

"I believe you," Anne said, which caught Scipio by surprise. Sitting where she sat, he wouldn't have believed himself. She went on, "The reason I believe you is that, if you were lying to me, you would have come up with a better story. The truth, I've found, is usually confused."

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"Now—" Her voice sharpened. "Who burned the Marshlands mansion?"

"That was Cassius, ma'am," he answered, adding, "I wish he had not done it. Many beautiful things were lost."

"In five words, you've just given the story of this war," she said. "I know you had a role in the so-called Congaree Socialist Republic. From what I've heard, you usually did what you could to stop its excesses. I suspect your reasons had as much to do with what would happen after the uprising was put down as they did with any special milk of human kindness in your veins, but only God can look into a man's heart, and I've found out that, whatever else I may be, I am not God."

Not knowing what to say to that, Scipio kept quiet. If Anne Colleton hadn't thought she was God before the Red revolt, she'd done a fine job of concealing the fact. He wondered what she'd gone through. He didn't have the nerve to ask. He didn't have the nerve for a lot of things. In a nutshell, that was the tale of his life.

Wearily, Anne said, "Go back to Columbia. Go back to your work. Once we win the war, that will have been enough. Don't ever come here again, unless I summon you."

"Ma'am, on that you may rest assured." Scipio wondered if he was talking like an educated white man for the last time in his life. In a

way, he would miss it if that proved so. In another way, giving up what had been imposed on him was a sort of freedom in itself.

He rose, half bowed to Anne, and left the cottage. Field hands and children stared after him. He didn't look back. As he got to the forest where he'd killed Major Hotchkiss, he decided he needed a new apartment, a new job, a new name. The widow had wanted to go to bed with him. He sighed. It wouldn't happen now. "Odder chances," he said aloud. "Dey is odder chances." He kept walking toward the train station.

Brakes squealing, the train pulled into the station. "Cincinnati!" the conductor shouted. "All out for Cincinnati!"

Men, most of them in uniform, and a scattering of women rose from their seats so they could depart. Irving Morrell stayed where he was. So did Heinz Guderian beside him. "How far now from Cincinnati to Philadelphia?" Guderian asked in German.

Morrell visualized a map. "Six hundred miles, maybe a little less," he answered in the same language. Seeing Guderian look puzzled, he amplified that: "About 950 kilometers." He moved back and forth between one system of measurement and the other readily enough, but had learned the German found it harder.

Sure enough, Guderian twitted him about it: "How many feet in a mile? It is 5,280, *nicht wahr?* What a foolish number to have to keep straight every time you need to make a calculation."

Before Morrell could defend the American system, the conductor leaned over and said with a smile, *"Wir willen winnen der Krieg."*

Guderian stared at him, not because he spoke German so badly (he'd said "We want to win the war," not "We will win the war," which was what he'd probably meant, and he'd botched his article and his word order, too), but because he spoke it at all: he was a black man with a mouth full of gold-crowned teeth. *"Ja!"* Guderian managed at last, and the conductor, smiling still, headed down the central aisle. To Morrell, the German General Staff officer said, "I had not realized just how popular my country was in the United States."

"Oh, yes," Morrell said with a nod. "Good thing we weren't speaking French, or he'd have probably thought we were spies. A

classmate of mine at the Academy, Jack Lefebvre, changed his name to Schmidt after the war started. It was either that, he told me, or kiss promotion good-bye. And I happen to know his people have been in the USA since before the War of Secession."

"This business of everyone coming from elsewhere or having parents or grandparents who came from elsewhere is very strange to me," Guderian said. "In Europe, we have been where we are since the *Völkerwanderungen* of a thousand years ago and more."

Passengers were boarding the train as well as leaving it. Some of them came from elsewhere, too, speaking with accents plainly sprung from the CSA. A couple of those fellows, looking prosperous with big bellies, expensive black suits, and homburgs, sat down across from Morrell and Guderian. "It'll be right strange," one of them said to the other with a ripe drawl, "but I reckon we can do it."

Shifting to English, Morrell leaned over and asked, "Who are you people, anyway?" Talk about spies—!

The man sitting closer to him stuck out a plump hand. "Major, I'm Davis Lee Vidals, lieutenant governor of Kentucky—of the *United* State of Kentucky, I make haste to assure you."

Morrell reached out and shook the proffered hand, being careful not to squash it. He gave his own name. "That's wonderful news!" he said. "Welcome back to the country where you belong."

"Thank you very kindly, Major Morrell," Vidals said. "That fellow sitting beside you—is he a *German*?" His voice was half dread, half awe: he might have been one of the people helping to bring Kentucky back into the USA, but he didn't seem to know how to feel about U.S. allies who had been enemies of the Confederate States.

"*Ja,* I am a German." Guderian spoke English with a heavy accent, but was fluent enough. He grinned at the Kentucky politician. "You would not expect to find an American officer traveling with a Frenchman, would you?" He'd paid attention to the story of Jack Lefebvre, now Schmidt, all right.

"Good God almighty, I hope not!" Vidals exclaimed. "Gentlemen, let me introduce to you my friend and colleague here: this is Luther Bliss, chief of the Kentucky State Police. We're both on our way to Philadelphia to settle arrangements for electing congressmen and senators next month."

Bliss leaned across his traveling companion to shake hands with Morrell and Guderian. He was hard-faced and sallow, with a scar seaming one cheek. His eyes were a light, light brown, about the color of a hunting dog's. Morrell wouldn't have cared to let the Kentuckian stand behind him; he was the sort of man who looked to have a stiletto stashed up his sleeve. *Kentucky State Police,* Morrell suspected, was a euphemism for *Kentucky Secret Police*.

"How did Kentucky go about applying for readmission to the United States?" he asked. The curiosity was more professional than personal. Administering conquered territory and bringing it under the control of the USA was something that might be part of his responsibilities one day.

The train started rolling as Davis Lee Vidals started talking. Morrell quickly discovered the train was more likely than the lieutenant governor to slow down. "We convened a gathering of distinguished Kentuckians eager to renew their historic ties to the United States of America," Vidals began, "and discussed ways and means by which this might be accomplished. We—"

"How many Kentuckians?" Morrell asked.

Vidals began another speech. It went on for some time, and told Morrell nothing. When the politician paused to inhale—which took a while—Luther Bliss interjected, "Couple hundred." His superior—his nominal superior, at any rate—gave him a dirty look and started talking again.

Several well-modulated paragraphs of rhetoric later, Morrell asked, "Did you need any soldiers to make sure things went the way you had in mind?"

Davis Lee Vidals waxed indignant, eloquently indignant, at the very idea. He didn't, however, say no. He also didn't say yes. He did *say*, and say, and say. Presently, he paused again, this time to light a cigar. In that brief interval of silence, Bliss got another chance to open his mouth. "Couple regiments," he said, and fell silent again.

Morrell nodded. That told him everything he thought he needed to know about the new state government of Kentucky: without massive help from the U.S. Army, it wouldn't exist. But Heinz Guderian spoke up, in German: "This is not so bad as it may sound, Major. When, forty-five years ago, we annexed Alsace and Lorraine from France, many of the people there resented and resisted us. There remain some

who do, but those provinces also remain a part of the German *Reich*, and grow more accustomed to our rule with each passing day."

Vidals' eyes got wider with every guttural he heard, and wider still when Morrell answered in German. He might have been bringing Kentucky back into the USA, but he was also bringing a lot of ideas from the Quadruple Entente with him. Luther Bliss, by contrast, listened quietly. Morrell wouldn't have bet against his understanding every word that was said.

The only thing that finally slowed Vidals down was sleep. No matter that he was sitting in a seat that didn't recline. He set his homburg in his lap, put his head back, and snored like a thunderstorm in training. That he was so aggressively asleep meant everyone else in the crowded car had trouble joining him.

Outside, the countryside was dark as the tomb. That hadn't been so farther west, but here in Ohio and Pennsylvania, Confederate bombing aeroplanes remained a nuisance. The enforced darkness after sunset made it harder for them to find worthwhile targets.

Morrell had finally drifted into a fitful doze when the train pulled into Philadelphia at a little before four in the morning. He grunted and groaned and rubbed his eyes. Across the aisle, the lieutenant governor of Kentucky kept on snoring till the conductor shouted out the arrival. Luther Bliss didn't look to have slept a wink, or to have needed sleep, either.

When the doors opened, a brass band started blaring "The Star-Spangled Banner." There on the platform stood President Roosevelt. When the Kentuckians got out, he folded them into a bearhug. "Welcome back, prodigal sons!" he cried, while photographers' flash trays went off with almost as much smoke and noise as an artillery bombardment. "A new star joins the flag; a new star shines in the firmament!" The band switched to "My Old Kentucky Home."

Let's see what Senator Debs can do to match that, Morrell thought; bringing Kentucky back into the USA before the election had to be worth thousands of votes. Soldiers weren't supposed to have politics. Such politics as Morrell did have were Democratic.

Waiting for him and Guderian was not the president of the United States but Captain John Abell of the General Staff. "Welcome, Captain Guderian," the clever, almost bloodless officer said in excellent German. He turned to Morrell and returned to English: "General Wood

has ordered me to extend his personal greetings to you, Lieutenant Colonel."

"Lieut—" Morrell didn't get any further than that, because Guderian was pounding him on the back. Cutting off the Canadian railroad that ran through Banff had earned him a promotion, and evidently got him forgiven for the difficulties the USA had had in Utah. If Captain Abell was pleased at that, he hid it very well.

He said, "As you know, you are assigned to duty here in Philadelphia once more, Lieutenant Colonel. I assure you, I look forward to working with you in every way."

A liar, but a polite liar, Morrell judged. Guderian said, "See, my friend? You have won a victory, and they have put you back behind a desk. It almost tempts one to lose, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Morrell said. "Almost."

"Lord, I wish Emily was here." Jefferson Pinkard stabbed himself with a needle, about the fourth time he'd done that.

Hipolito Rodriguez gave him an amused look. "Most of the time, *amigo,* you say you wish you was with your *esposa*. Now you want her here with you. You no can make up your mind?" He waved around at the bleak west-Texas prairie. "I think she rather you home with her."

Pinkard snorted. "Yeah, I'd rather I was home with her, too. But she can do *this* a hell of a lot easier'n I can." Stubbornly, he kept sewing the single chevron to the sleeve of his uniform tunic. "If I'd known it was gonna be so blame much trouble, maybe I wouldn't have let 'em promote me."

"*Sí,* life is easier when you have only yourself to worry about," Rodriguez agreed with obvious sincerity.

"Hell, Hip, if they reckon you can do the job, how you gonna tell 'em no?" Jeff asked. He could complain about making private first class after the fact; he hadn't complained when Captain Connolly told him he'd done it. He fought through another couple of stitches, then surveyed his handiwork and found something else over which to complain: "That stripe's pretty light, isn't it? Make it easier for those Yankee sons of bitches to spot me."

“Wait till it rains again and you go through the mud,” Rodriguez told him. “Then your whole uniform the same color again.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Pinkard dug out some cornbread he hadn’t finished at breakfast. It had got hard. He didn’t care. Even when it was fresh, it hadn’t been a patch on what Emily made. Her cornbread and her skill with the needle weren’t what he really missed about her, though. He wanted to be back home in Birmingham to warm her bed—and to make sure nobody else was warming it for him.

He stood up in the trench to put on the tunic to which he’d affixed his new chevron—and a bullet cracked past his head. He threw himself—and the tunic—down flat into the trench. “Got to dig it deeper,” Hip Rodriguez said seriously. “They shouldn’t see you when you get up like that.”

“Yeah,” Jeff said again. “They wouldn’t see *you*, I don’t guess.” He was several inches taller than the littler Sonoran. This time, he donned the fresh tunic sitting down. It wasn’t so fresh any more; he’d smeared dirt over a good part of it, including the sleeves. He stopped worrying about sharpshooters’ spotting him on account of one stripe.

A few more bullets flew from the U.S. trenches. Here and there, Confederates along the line east of Lubbock shot back. Pinkard didn’t hear any of his countrymen cry out in pain. He didn’t know whether they got any Yankees, either. And if they had hit somebody, so what? Did that mean they would run the U.S. Army out of Texas? He knew too well it didn’t. That was what his regiment had come here to do. How many lives were gone, without the line’s moving one way or the other? Too many, that was sure.

As if to underscore the point, a Confederate machine gun opened up, maybe at a Yankee out of his nice, safe burrow, maybe just for the sake of using up some ammunition. Half a minute later, a U.S. machine gun answered. A couple of hundred yards away from Pinkard, somebody started screaming for his mama.

“Shit,” Hip Rodriguez said, and crossed himself. He shook his head, then got a tobacco pouch out of his pocket and began rolling a cigarette.

After a while, both machine-gun crews decided they’d made their pointless points. They quit firing. Rifles kept banging a few minutes longer, nervous, excited men shooting at what they thought were targets. At last, quiet returned.

“You know what all this here reminds me of?” Jeff said, by then having seen a lot of meaningless fire fights that conformed to the same general pattern. When Rodriguez shook his head, Pinkard went on, “It’s like a rainstorm, ain’t it? First you get a few drops, then it comes down hard for a while, then it tapers off, and it’s all quiet and the sun’s out again.”

“That is clever, what you say.” Rodriguez nodded now. “This time, we don’t get no—” The noise he made could have been thunder rolling or artillery going off. It fit either way.

Up the communications trench into the front line came Stinky Salley. Most times, Pinkard would have been as glad to see him as to encounter a new kind of louse, but Salley had somehow used his civilian career as a clerk to convince Captain Connolly that no one else could possibly match him as the man to pick up and distribute the mail. He carried a butternut canvas bag labeled CSAMPO. “Letters!” he called. “I’ve got letters!”

He needed more than being the bearer of news from home to make him popular with his fellow soldiers, but that didn’t hurt. Men came hurrying over to him, arms outstretched, smiles on their faces. “Come on, Stinky,” somebody said. “Cough ’em up!” But even that wasn’t so peremptory as it would have been had Salley not borne letters.

He took them out of the sack and started reading off names: “Burroughs! Dalton! Pinkard!” Jeff took the envelope with an enormous grin; he recognized Emily’s handwriting. “Captain Connolly, one for you, sir.” To officers, Salley was painfully obsequious. “Pratt! Ambrose! Pinkard again—you lucky dog.” Jeff’s promotion hadn’t quite sunk in on his fellow Alabaman.

“Two in one mail call!” Pinkard exclaimed joyfully as he carried both letters—the second, he saw, also from his wife—away from the crowd around Salley. He sat down beside Hip Rodriguez. Rodriguez never got mail; as far as Jeff could tell, the little Sonoran didn’t know anyone who could read or write, and had only started learning those arts himself since he’d joined the Army. He liked listening to other soldiers read their mail, though, as did anybody who’d drawn a blank in the distribution.

Jeff looked to see which letter had the earlier postmark, and opened that one first. “‘Dear Jeff,’” he read aloud, “‘I am fine. I wish you was home with me, so I could give you a kiss and—’” He skipped most of the next paragraph, at least with his voice, though his eyes lingered on

it. Every once in a while, Emily would do something like that. It made him more anxious than ever to get home. Rodriguez grinned at him, probably guessing what he was leaving out.

Coughing a little, he resumed where the spice left off: "'I am fine, and working hard. I hope so much you are well and have not got yourself hurt. Fanny got herself a telegram from the War Department yesterday that says poor Bedford got wounded, and she is frantic.'"

Turning to Rodriguez, Jeff explained, "I worked with Bedford Cunningham, and him and his wife live next door to me."

"This is hard," the Sonoran said. "This is very hard." He sounded altogether sincere; he had a good deal more sympathy in him than the run-of-the-mill Confederate soldier. "For you, my *amigo*, and for your, your wife"—he remembered the English word—"and more for your *amigo*'s wife, and most of all for him. How *peligroso*—how dangerous—is the wound?"

"Letter doesn't say," Pinkard answered. "Reckon Fanny didn't know, so Emily wouldn't've, either." Rodriguez pointed to the other envelope. Nodding, Jeff tore it open. He didn't read it out loud all the way though, but rapidly skimmed through it, looking for news of Bedford Cunningham.

When he found it, his face gave him away. "It is very bad?" Hip Rodriguez asked quietly.

"Right arm"—Jeff held up his own, partly to help Rodriguez's uncertain English, partly to remind himself he still owned that precious piece of flesh—"gone above the elbow, Emily says. Bedford's on his way home now. He'll get better. What's he going to do, though, with a wound like that? Never get on the floor at the Sloss Works again, that's certain, and iron's about the only thing he knew."

Rodriguez closed his right hand into a fist. He watched it carefully as he did so. Pinkard watched, too: all the marvelous, miraculous interplay of muscle and tendon and bone beneath a sheath of wonderfully unbroken skin. *Gone in an instant,* Jeff thought. *Wonder if a bullet got him, or if a shell came down right next door. Wonder if he knows. Wonder if he cares*.

"If this happen to me," Rodriguez said, "I take whatever money I have, I go to the *cantina*, and I don't do nothing but drink from then on. What else am I good for, without my right hand?"

“Don’t know,” Pinkard said. “You couldn’t farm one-handed, any more than you could go back to the foundry. It’s funny,” he went on after a little while. “Just reading this here letter about Bedford hits me harder than seeing some of the people from the company get hurt right in front of my eyes. Is that crazy, or what?”

“No,” Rodriguez answered. “This is a good friend, almost like your *hermano*, your brother. We are still some of us like strangers.”

“Yeah, maybe.” That still tasted wrong, but it was closer than any explanation Jeff had come up with. “God damn the war,” he muttered. Rodriguez nodded solemnly. A Yankee machine gun started up, the gunner spraying bullets over a wide arc to see what he could hit. “God damn the war,” Jeff said again, and checked to make sure his Tredegar had a full clip.

From under the awning, Lieutenant General George Armstrong Custer stared gloomily at the hills above White House, Tennessee. “We have to have a victory,” he said. “We have to. The war requires it, and politics require it, too.”

Cautiously, Major Abner Dowling said, “Joining battle for the sake of politics is a recipe for getting licked, sir. We learned that in the War of Secession, and all over again during the Second Mexican War.”

Custer’s pouchy stare swung from the stalled battlefield toward his adjutant. “Most times, Major, I would agree with you,” he said after what was for him an unusual pause to reflect. “Now, though—do you want that wild-eyed lunatic Debs sitting in the White House come next March? He’s already said he’ll treat for peace with the Rebels and the Canucks if he gets elected. Is that what you want, Major? *Is* it?”

“No, sir,” Dowling said at once; he was as good a Democrat as Custer.

He might as well not have spoken; once the general commanding First Army got rolling, he kept rolling till he ran down. “God in heaven, Major!” Custer burst out, a rheumy thunderer. “We’re winning on every front—on every front, I tell you—and that crackbrained maniac wants to give it up? And for what? For an honorable peace, he calls it. Honorable!” With his age-loosened, wrinkled skin and enormous mustache, Custer had a formidable sneer when he turned it loose, as he did now.

“I agree with you, sir,” Dowling said, for once telling Custer the unvarnished truth. “We just have to hope the people back home haven’t got too sick of the war to want to fight it through to the finish.”

“They had better not try quitting,” Custer growled. “If Debs calls the troops home, we’ll have a brand-new American Revolution, mark my words.”

Dowling did mark them. They filled him with horror. His head whipped around. After a moment’s panic, he heartily thanked God. Nobody but he had heard Custer. As casually as he could, he said, “Armed rebellion against the government of the United States is treason, sir.”

“I know that.” Custer sounded testy, not repentant. “Still some Rebs left alive who need hanging, by God, unless their own niggers shot ’em for us. Too much to hope for, that, I daresay. Now you listen to me, Major.” Dowling, who had done his share and more of listening, made himself look attentive. Custer resumed: “I don’t want a rebellion, not even a little bit. Do you understand me? What I want is to make a rebellion unnecessary, and that means victory, to give the people the idea—the true idea, mind you—that we stand on the edge of the greatest triumph in the history of mankind.”

“The Rebs are still fighting hard, sir,” Dowling said, in what had to be the understatement of this or any other decade: the front hadn’t moved a mile closer to the White House since the enormous U.S. offensive opened. “So are the Canadians, which forces us to divide our efforts.”

“Teddy Roosevelt bit off more than he could chew, right at the start of the war,” Custer said. This, from a man whose notion of reconnaissance was a headlong charge at an obstacle with everything he had, struck Major Dowling as a curious utterance—which, for once, did not mean it was wrong.

Rather to Dowling’s relief, the debate on grand strategy stopped then, for one of Custer’s division commanders came up, stood under the awning, and waited to be noticed. He waited a while, too; Custer was jealous of his own prerogatives. At last, grudgingly, he said, “Good morning, Brigadier General MacArthur.”

“Good morning, sir.” Brigadier General Daniel MacArthur came to stiff attention, which made him tower even more over both Custer and

Dowling. Dowling understood why Custer was touchy around this particular subordinate. MacArthur was, visibly, a man on the rise. At thirty-two, he was the youngest division commander in the U.S. Army. Unlike earlier conflicts, this was one where an officer had a devil of a time making a name for himself by pluck and dash. As far as anyone could do that in an age of machine guns and trenches and barbed wire, Daniel MacArthur had done it.

He made sure people knew he'd done it, too, which was one reason he'd got his division. In some ways, he and Custer were very much alike, though both of them would have angrily turned on Dowling had he been rash enough to say such a thing. Still, as far as the adjutant was concerned, the long ivory holder through which MacArthur chain-smoked cigarettes was as much an affectation as Custer's gold-dyed locks.

MacArthur said, "Sir, we need a breakthrough. The Army needs one from us, and the country needs one from us."

"The very thing I was saying to my adjutant not five minutes ago," Custer replied. He looked up at the young, lean, ramrod-straight officer standing beside him. His smile was cynical and infinitely knowing. Dowling would not have wanted that smile aimed at him. After pausing to cough, Custer went on, "And you wouldn't mind having a breakthrough for yourself, either, would you, Daniel?"

"The country's needs come first, sir," MacArthur answered, and sounded as if he meant it. Maybe he even believed it. But he was still very young. Dowling saw how he tensed, almost as if he'd seen a beautiful woman walk by. Yes, he lusted after a breakthrough, all right.

"We've been pounding the Rebs for weeks now," Custer said. "They haven't given us anything at all, and we haven't been able to take much. They know as well as we do that the White House line is the last thing keeping our guns from letting Nashville know the full taste of war."

"Yes, sir," MacArthur said, and pulled a map from the breast pocket of his uniform. Unlike Custer, who was old-fashioned enough to relish the epaulets and other fancy accoutrements accruing to his rank, MacArthur wore an ordinary officer's uniform set apart only by the single silver stars of his rank: ostentatious plainness, as opposed to ostentatious display. He unfolded the map. "I believe I know how to get past them, too."

Custer put on his reading glasses, a concession of sorts. “Let’s see what you have in mind, General.”

“Misdirection.” Daniel MacArthur spoke the word solemnly, as if it were the capstone of a magic spell. Dowling figured he’d cooked his own goose then and there; Custer had about as much use for misdirection as an anteater did for snowshoes. The dashing division commander (and how many major generals gnashed their teeth at that, when they led only brigades?) said, “As you know, my men are stationed on our far left, in front of Cottontown.”

“Yes, yes,” Custer said impatiently, though Dowling wouldn’t have bet more than half a dollar that he’d been sure where in the line MacArthur’s formation did belong.

“We have found to our cost how strong the Confederate defenses due south and southwest of our position are,” MacArthur said. Custer nodded, those peroxided curls flapping at the back of his neck. MacArthur continued, “Aerial reconnaissance suggests, though, that the Rebels’ line is weaker toward the southeast. If we strike in that direction, toward Gallatin, we can set our men to taking lines less formidably manned, thereby giving them the opportunity to swing back toward Nashville, cutting in behind the entrenchments that have delayed them so long.”

Custer sucked at something between two of his false teeth. Abner Dowling scratched his chin. “Sir,” he said, “it’s not a bad scheme.” He suspected he sounded surprised. He didn’t much care for MacArthur, having seen in Custer what the passage of years was likely to do to such a man.

Custer studied the map a while longer. MacArthur had used bright blue ink to show exactly what he wanted to do. “No,” Custer said at last, “it’s not.” He sounded imperfectly enamored of it, but seemed to recognize it was a better plan than any he’d come up with. Since most of his plans amounted to nothing more than finding the enemy and attacking him (not necessarily in that order), that did not say as much as it might have otherwise.

Unlike the general commanding First Army, MacArthur did his homework ahead of time. The map was not the only sheet of paper lurking in his breast pocket. Handing Custer a typewritten list, he said, “Here are the additional artillery requirements for the assault, sir, and other ancillaries as well.”

“See what you think of this, Major,” Custer said, and passed the sheet to Dowling. Precise control of details had never been his strong suit.

MacArthur puffed and puffed, blowing smoke into Dowling’s face as if it were phosgene gas. Dowling read rapidly through the list before turning to Custer. “Sir, he wants all the heavy artillery concentrated on his division’s front, and he also wants almost all of our barrels for the assault.”

“Moving the heavy artillery will take time,” Custer said, “especially with the roads as muddy as they have been lately. I’m sure we can move some of it, but asking for all asks for too much.”

“Even half the First Army reserve would probably be adequate,” MacArthur said. He was smarter than Custer had ever been, Dowling thought: he knew enough to ask for more than he really wanted, to help assure his getting at least that much. He couldn’t quite keep the eagerness from his voice as he asked, “And the barrels—?”

“Ah, the barrels.” Custer assumed a mournful expression. “I have to remind you, General, that I am under strict orders from the War Department not to concentrate the barrels in the manner you suggest. Approved doctrine requires keeping them widely spread along the entire length of the front.”

“But, sir—” Dowling closed his mouth a split second before it got him in trouble. Custer had argued ferociously for concentrating barrels in a mass. Why was he rejecting the idea when one of his subordinates had it?

After a moment, the major understood: Custer was rejecting the idea *because* one of his subordinates had had it. If a division-sized attack spearheaded by a swarm of barrels succeed, who would get the credit? Not Custer—Daniel MacArthur.

MacArthur said, “Once you let me proceed, sir, I can show those fools in Philadelphia the proper way to do things.”

Abner Dowling sighed. He was but a major; neither of the exalted personages under the awning even noticed. MacArthur couldn’t have said that worse if he’d tried for a week. Custer, as Dowling knew full well, despised those fools back in Philadelphia as much as any man alive. But when MacArthur said *I can show*, that meant Custer couldn’t show. Custer wanted victories, yes. Custer wanted Teddy Roosevelt reelected, yes. But, most of all, Custer wanted glory for George

Armstrong Custer.

Almost sorrowfully, he said, “I wish I could help you more, General, but my own orders in this regard are severely inflexible. I may be able to furnish you with, oh, half a dozen extra barrels without having some pipsqueak inspector-general calling me on the carpet, but no more than that, I fear.”

“But, sir, nothing ventured, nothing gained,” MacArthur protested.

“I am venturing what I can, General, I assure you,” Custer said icily. “Yours is not the only division in the line. Will you prepare a revised attack plan conforming to the available resources, or will you stand on the defensive?”

“You’ll have it before the day is out, sir.” MacArthur’s voice held no expression whatever. Like a mechanical man, he saluted, spun, and stalked off.

Very softly, Custer laughed at his retreating back. Dowling stared at the general commanding First Army. Custer, here, knew just what he was doing—and he enjoyed it, too. *You bastard,* Dowling thought. *You sneaky old bastard*. Was that admiration or loathing? For the life of him, he couldn’t tell.

* * *

Roger Kimball peered avidly through the periscope. The fish was running straight and true. Suddenly, the U.S. destroyer realized it was under attack. Suddenly, it tried to turn away from the creamy wake the torpedo left. Suddenly, the torpedo struck just aft of amidships. Suddenly, a great pillar of smoke and flame rose into the air. The destroyer, broken in half, sank like a stone—like two stones.

Cheers filled the narrow steel tube that was the working area of the *Bonefish*, drowning out the echoes of the explosion that the water carried to the submersible. “Hit!” Kimball’s own bloodthirsty howl was but one among many.

He brought his eyes back to the periscope. Only a couple of boats bobbed in the Atlantic; the damnyankees hadn’t had time to launch any more. If he’d been a German submarine commander, he would have surfaced and turned the deck gun on them. The Huns played by hard rules. There were times when Kimball, feeling the full weight of the USA pressing down on him and his country, wanted to play that

way, too.

Such thoughts went by the board in a hurry when, turning the periscope, he saw another destroyer running straight for him. His fierce joy curdled and went cold in the twinkling of an eye. “Dive!” he shouted. “Take us down to 150, Tom, and make it snappy!”

“Aye aye, sir, 150 feet,” his exec answered. Compressed air bubbled out of the buoyancy chambers; seawater gurgled in to take its place. Up on the surface, those bubbles would help the Yankee sailors figure out where he was, though they were liable to have a pretty good idea already, what with the course their fellow boat had been making and the way it had tried to escape his fish.

With more and more of the North Atlantic piled atop it, the hull of the *Bonefish* creaked and squealed. There were a couple of little drips where the seams weren’t perfectly tight, but they were in the old familiar places. Kimball didn’t worry much about them.

Through the hull, the noise of the engine and screw up above them was perfectly audible. No—engines and screws. Two boats were moving back and forth up there. “Leveling off at 150, sir,” Tom Brearley said, straightening the diving planes. In the dim orange light, his grin was almost satanic. “They aren’t what you’d call happy with us.”

“Ain’t been happy with them since we went to war,” Kimball replied, “or before that, either, you get right down to it. Them and us, we don’t—”

He broke off abruptly. Through the pounding drone of the destroyers’ engines, he’d heard another sound, the noise that might have come from a garbage can full of cement being flung into the ocean.

“Depth charge,” Ben Coulter said hoarsely. The veteran petty officer tried to make light of it: “Those damn things, most of the time they don’t work for beans.” A moment later, another splash followed the first.

“Give me eight knots, Tom, and change course to 270,” Kim-ball said.

“Changing course to two-seven-zero, sir, aye aye, and eight knots,” Brearley acknowledged, a certain amount of doubt in his voice. Kimball didn’t blame him. Eight knots used up battery power in a

hurry, cutting deeply into the time the *Bonefish* could stay underwater.

Without much humor, Kimball tried to make a joke of it: “When the boys on top start throwing things at you, Tom, it’s time to get out from under ’em.”

“Well, yes, sir, but—” Brearley didn’t get any further than that, for the first depth charge exploded just then.

It was, Kimball supposed, something like being in an earthquake. It was also like standing inside a metal pipe while giants pounded on the outside of it with sledgehammers. Kimball staggered and smacked the side of his head against the periscope mounting. Something wet started running down his cheek. It was warm, not cold, so he supposed it was blood rather than seawater.

Men stumbled and cursed. The lights flickered. A few seconds later, the other depth charge went off. It was farther away than the first one, so it only felt like a big kick in the ass from an angry mule.

“Sir, on second thought, eight knots is a right good idea,” Brearley said.

“Everything still answer?” Kimball asked.

Brearley nodded. “Seems to, sir.”

“We got a new leak back here, sir,” one of the men in the black gang called from the engines toward the stern. “Don’t seem too bad, though.”

“It had better not,” Kimball answered. “Tom, take her down to 200. I want to put some more distance between us and them.”

“The leaks will get worse,” Brearley said, but that was more observation than protest. The bow of the *Bonefish* slanted down. If the leaks got a lot worse, Kimball knew he’d have to rise. No one shouted in alarm, so he kept quiet till Brearley said, “Leveling off at 200.”

Splash! Splash! Two more depth charges went into the water. *Where* they went into the water was the key factor, and the one Kimball couldn’t gauge till they detonated. All he could do was hope he’d picked a direction different from the one the Yankees had chosen. Even with the *Bonefish* going flat out submerged, those destroyers had better than three times his speed. The only thing he had going for him was that they couldn’t see him. Hydrophones gave only a vague clue

about his direction, and they had to guess his depth.

Wham! Wham! Explosions rocked the submarine. They were both closer than that second one had been, but not so close as the first. All at once, he grinned. “All stop,” he snapped to Brearley.

“All—stop,” the exec answered. He looked back over his shoulder at Kimball. “You’re not going to—?”

“Bet your balls I am, son,” the skipper of the *Bonefish* said. “The damnyankees guessed with me, far as direction goes. They know how fast we are. What do you want to bet they keep right on that track, pounding away? They must have some new kind of charges, too, on account of I don’t think they’ve tossed any duds at us.”

“Isn’t that wonderful?” Brearley said. Along with most of the crew, Kimball chuckled. The life of a submariner had never been easy. By what the damnyankees were throwing at the *Bonefish*, it had just got harder.

Splash! Splash! With even the quiet electric motors running only enough to power lights and instruments, the noise the depth charges made going into the ocean was all too audible. In his mind’s eye, Kimball saw them twisting slowly down through the green-gray waters of the Atlantic (almost the color of a Yankee soldier’s uniform), looking for his boat. He cursed himself for an overactive imagination.

Wham! Wham! He staggered. A tiny new jet of seawater sprayed coldly down the back of his neck. As they had with the first attack, the lights flickered before steadying.

“Those were in front of us, sir,” Tom Brearley said.

“I know,” Kimball answered. “Here we sit.” He could feel eyes boring into him, as he had when he’d taken the *Bonefish* up the Pee Dee River looking for Red rebels. Then, though, the watchful eyes had belonged to the Negroes in the swamps along the riverbank. Now they were the eyes of his own crew.

He understood exactly why, too. The previous spread of charges had been aft of the submersible, this one in front. If that meant the U.S. destroyers up there had somehow located him…the next pair would go off right on top of his conning tower.

“One thing, boys,” he said into the drip-punctuated quiet. “If it turns out I’m wrong, we’ll never know what hit us.” If water at seven

atmospheres' pressure flooded into the *Bonefish*, it would smash everything in its path, surely making no exceptions for flimsy human beings.

"Sir," Brearley asked, "if you have to, how deep will you take her?"

"I'd go to 300 without blinking an eye," Kimball answered. "It gets wet fast down that deep, but odds are you'll come back up from it. Nobody really knows how deep you *can* go if you're lucky enough. I've heard stories of 350, even 400 feet, when the sub was damaged and couldn't control its dive till it touched bottom." He grinned wryly at his exec. "'Course, the ones who go down that deep and never surface again—you don't hear about those."

Sailors chuckled. He looked round at them: a grimy, unshaven crew, all the more raffish in the orange lighting. They fit here, the same as he did. They would have been—some had been—outcasts, frequent inhabitants of the brig, almost outlaws, in the gentlemanly world of the Confederate States surface Navy. As far as he was concerned, they'd done the cause more good than ten times their number aboard fancy battleships.

Splash! Splash! Everyone involuntarily sucked in a long breath of the humid, fetid air. In a very little while, Kimball would find out whether his training and instincts had saved their bacon—or killed them all.

In casual tones, Coulter remarked, "Wish I had me a beer right now."

"We get back to Charleston, I'll buy everybody here all the beer you can drink," Kimball promised. That was liable to be an expensive promise to keep, but he didn't care. Getting back to Charleston would make being poor for a while afterwards worthwhile and then some.

How long for a depth charge to reach the depth for which it was fused? The new pair seemed to be taking forever. Maybe they were duds, Kimball thought. The damnyankees couldn't have come up with a way to make them work all the time…could they?

Wham! Wham! Maybe they could. "Jesus!" Tom Brearley exclaimed. "That took forever!" Kimball wasn't the only one for whom time had stretched like a rubber band, then. The exec turned to him with a smile as radiant as any worn, greasy man could show in that light. "Well ahead of us, both of 'em, sir."

"Yeah," Kimball said, as if he hadn't just bet his life and won. "Now

we sit here for as long as the batteries will let us and wait for our little friends up there to get tired and go away. How long *can* we wait, Tom?"

Brearley checked the gauges. "It would be longer if we hadn't tried that sprint after we sank the destroyer, sir, but we've got charge enough for five or six hours."

"Should be enough," Kimball said jovially. *It had better be enough,* echoed in his mind. He took a deep breath and made a face. "Things'll stink too bad for us to stand it any longer'n that, regardless." That was phrased like a joke and got laughs like a joke, but it wasn't a joke, and everybody knew it. The longer you sat submerged, the fouler the air got. That was part of the nature of the boat.

Five and a half hours after the *Bonefish* sank its target, Ben Coulter found he couldn't keep a candle alight in the close, nasty atmosphere inside the pressure hull. "If we had a canary in here, sir, it would have fallen off its perch a hell of a long time ago," he said to Kimball.

"Yeah," the captain answered. His head ached. He could feel how slowly he was thinking. He nodded to Brearley. "Blow forward tanks, Tom. Bring her up to periscope depth."

A long, careful scan showed nothing on the horizon. Kimball ordered the *Bonefish* to the surface. Wearily, he climbed the ladder to the top of the conning tower, the exec close behind him to make sure the pressurized air didn't blow him out the hatch when he opened it.

When he did undog the hatch, his stomach did its best to crawl up his throat: all the stenches so long trapped inside the submersible seemed ten times worse when they rushed out in a great vile gale and mixed in his lungs with the first precious breath of fresh, clean sea air. Fighting down his gorge, he climbed another couple of rungs and looked around. Late-afternoon sunshine felt as savagely bright as it did during a hangover. The ocean was wide and empty. "Made it again, boys," he said. The crew cheered.

XVIII

Maria Tresca fiddled microscopically with Flora Hamburger's hat. The Italian woman stepped back to survey the results. "Better," she said, although Flora, checking the mirror, doubted the naked eye could tell the difference between the way the hat had looked before and how it did now.

"Remember," Herman Bruck said, "Daniel Miller isn't stupid. If you make a mistake in this debate, he'll hurt you with it."

He looked and sounded anxious. Had he been running against the appointed Democratic congressman, he probably would have made just such a mistake. Maybe he sensed that about himself and set on Flora's shoulders his worries about what he would have done.

"It will be all right, Herman," she said patiently. She sounded more patient than she was, and knew it. Beneath her pearl-buttoned shirtwaist, beneath the dark gray pinstriped jacket she wore over it, her heart was pounding. Class warfare in the USA hadn't reached the point of armed struggle. The confrontation ahead, though, was as close an approach as the country had yet seen. Democrat versus Socialist, established attorney against garment worker's daughter… here was the class struggle in action.

Someone pounded on the dressing-room door. "Five minutes, Miss Hamburger!" the manager of the Thalia Theatre shouted, as if she were one of the vaudevillians who usually performed here on Bowery. She felt as jumpy as any of those performers on opening night. The manager, who stomped around as if he had weights in his shoes, clumped down the hall and shouted, "Five minutes, Mr. Miller!"

Those last minutes before the debate went by in a blur. The next thing Flora knew, there she stood behind a podium on stage, staring

out over the footlights at the packed house: a fuller house than vaudeville usually drew, which was the main reason the manager had rented out the hall tonight. There in the second row sat her parents, her sisters—Sophie with little Yossel in her arms—and her brothers.

And here, at the other podium to her right, stood Congressman Daniel Miller, appointed to the seat she wanted. He wasn't quite so handsome and debonair as his campaign posters made him out to be, but who was? He looked clever and alert, and the Democrats had the money and the connections to make a strong campaign for whatever candidate they chose.

Up in between the two candidates strode Isidore Rothstein, the Democratic Party chairman for the Fourteenth Ward. A coin toss had made him master of ceremonies rather than his Socialist opposite number. More tosses had determined that Miller would speak first and Flora last.

Rothstein held up his hands. The crowd quieted. "Tonight, we see democracy in action," he said, making what Flora thought of as unfair use of his party's name. "In the middle of the greatest war the world has ever known, we come together here to decide which way our district should go, listening to both sides to come to a fair decision."

Here and there, people in the crowd applauded. Flora wondered how much anything they did here tonight would really matter. The Democrats would keep a strong majority in Congress unless the sky fell. One district—what was one district? But Myron Zuckerman had spent his whole adult life working to improve the lot of the common people. His legacy would be wasted if this Democrat kept this seat to which he had been appointed. Plenty of reason there alone to fight.

"And now," Isidore Rothstein thundered, a bigger voice than had any business coming out of his plump little body, "Congressman Daniel Miller!" Democrats in the crowd cheered. Socialists hissed and whistled.

Miller said, "Under Teddy Roosevelt, the Democrats have given every American a square deal. We are pledged to an honest day's pay for an honest day's work, to treating every individual as an individual and as he deserves"—the code phrase Democrats used when they explained why they were against labor unions—"to the rights of cities and counties and states to govern themselves as far as possible, and to __"

“What about the war?” a Socialist heckler shouted. Before the debate, the two parties had solemnly agreed not to harass each other’s candidates. Both sides had sounded very sincere. Flora hadn’t taken it seriously, and didn’t expect the Democrats had, either.

Daniel Miller was certainly ready for the shout. “And to keeping the commitments made long ago to our friends and allies, I was about to say,” he went on smoothly. “For years, the USA was surrounded by our enemies: by the Confederacy and Canada and England and France, even by the Japanese. Germany was in the same predicament on the European continent. We are both reaching out together for our rightful places in the sun. Not only that, we are *winning* this war. It hasn’t been so easy as we thought it would be, but what war is? To quit now would be to leave poor Kaiser Bill in the lurch, fighting England and France and Russia all alone, or near enough as makes no difference, and to guarantee that the old powers will hold us down for another fifty years. Do you want that?” He stuck out his chin. In profile, as Flora saw him, his jawline sagged, but from the front he probably looked most impressively political.

She made her own opening statement. “We are winning this war, Mr. Miller says.” She wouldn’t call him *Congressman*. “If you want to buy a pound of meat, you can go down to the butcher’s shop and get it. If you have to pay twenty dollars for it, you begin to wonder if it’s worth the price. Here we are, almost two and a half years into a fight the Socialist Party never wanted, and what have we got to show for it? Quebec City is still Canadian. Montreal is still Canadian. Toronto is still Canadian. Winnipeg is still Canadian. Richmond is still Confederate. Our own capital is still in Confederate hands, for heaven’s sake.

“And Nashville is still Confederate. Just this past week, the brilliant General Custer, the heroic General Custer, attacked again. And what did he get? Half a mile of ground, moving *away* from Nashville, mind you, not toward it. And what was the cost? Another division thrown away. Three-quarters of a million dead since 1914, two million wounded, half a million in the enemy’s prisoner-of-war camps. *Poor* Kaiser Bill!” Her voice dripped venom.

“And will you have all those brave men die in vain?” Daniel Miller demanded. “Will you have the United States abandon the struggle before it’s over, go back to our old borders, tell our enemies, ‘Oh, we’re sorry; we didn’t really mean it’?” He was sarcastic himself. “Once you’ve begun a job of work, you don’t leave it in the middle. We have given as good as we’ve got; we have given better than we’ve

got. The Canucks are tottering; the Confederates are about to put rifles into black men's hands. We are *winning*, I tell you."

"So what?" Flora said. The blunt question seemed to catch her opponent by surprise. She repeated it: "So what? What can we win that will bring those boys back to life? What can we win that's worth a hundredth part of what they paid? Even if we make the CSA make peace instead of the other way round, what difference does it make? Two thousand years ago, there was a king who looked around after a battle and cried out, 'One more victory like this and I am ruined!' He could see. He gave up the war. Is the Democratic Party full of blind men?"

"No. We're full of men who remember what happened in 1862, who remember what happened twenty years later," Miller shot back. "We're full of men who believe the United States of America must never be humiliated again, men who believe we must ten times never humiliate ourselves."

"A man who makes a mistake and backs away from it has sense," Flora said. "A man who makes a mistake and keeps on with it is a fool. We—"

"Traitor!" came a voice from the crowd. "You're just a woman. What do you know about what war costs?"

Tight-lipped, Flora pointed to her family. "Sophie, stand up." Her sister did, still holding little Yossel. "There's my nephew," Flora said into sudden silence. "He'll never know his father, who died on the Roanoke front." She pointed again. "David, stand up." The older of her two brothers rose, wearing U.S. green-gray. "Here is my brother. He has leave. He's just finished his training. He goes to the front day after tomorrow. I know what this war costs."

The crowd applauded. To her surprise, the heckler subsided. She'd thought the Democrats would have pests more consistent than that fellow.

No matter. She turned to—turned on—Daniel Miller. "You love the war so well, *Congressman*." Now she did use the title, etching it with acid. "Where are *your* hostages to fortune?"

Miller was a little too old to be conscripted himself. He had no brothers. His wife, a woman who looked to be very nice, sat in the audience not far from Flora's family. With her were her two sons, the older of whom might have been thirteen. Flora had known the

Democratic appointee couldn't well come back if she raised the question, and she'd been hoping she'd get or be able to make the chance to do it.

And, just for a moment, her opponent's composure cracked. "I honorably served my time in the United States Army," he said. "I yield to no one in—"

"Nobody was shooting at you then!" Four people, from four different sections of the hall, shouted the same thing at the same time. A storm of applause rose up behind them. Miller looked as if he'd had one of his fancy clients stand up in court and confess: betrayed by circumstances over which he had no control.

The debate went on. Daniel Miller even made a few points about what a Democratic congressman could do for his district that a Socialist couldn't hope to match. "Wouldn't you like to have the majority on your side again?" he asked, almost wistfully. It was not the best question, not in a hall full of Jews. When, since the fall of the Second Temple, had they had the majority on their side? And, after the blow Flora had got in, it mattered little.

At last, like a referee separating two weary prizefighters, Isidore Rothstein came out again. "I know you'll all vote next month," he told the crowd. "I expect you'll vote the patriotic way." Flora glared at the Democratic Party chairman. He had no business—no business but the business of politics—getting in a dig like that.

Now more like a corner man than a referee, Rothstein led Miller away. Flora had to go offstage by herself. Only when she was walking down the dark, narrow corridor to the dressing room did she fully realize what she'd done. Her feet seemed to float six inches above the filthy boards of the floor.

When she opened the door, Maria Tresca leaped out and embraced her. "It's ours!" she exclaimed. "You did it!"

Right behind her, Herman Bruck agreed. "His face looked like curdled milk when you reminded people he has no personal stake in watching the war go on."

"That stupid Democratic heckler gave me the opening I needed," Flora said. "Rothstein must be throwing a fit in the other dressing room."

Maria looked at Bruck. Bruck looked uncommonly smug, even for

him. “That was no stupid Democrat. That was my cousin Mottel, and I told him what to say and when to say it.”

Flora stared at him, then let out a shriek, then kissed him on the cheek. “Shall we go out and have supper to celebrate?”

She thought she’d meant the invitation to include Maria, too, but Maria didn’t seem to think so. And Flora discovered she didn’t mind. Herman Bruck had just given her the congressional seat on a silver platter. If that didn’t deserve a dinner what did?

Besides, she always had her hatpin, if she felt like using it. Maybe she wouldn’t.

“We’ve got to hold this town, boys,” Lieutenant Jerome Nicoll said. “Below Waurika, there’s no more Sequoyah left, not hardly. There’s just the Red River, and then there’s Texas. The whole Confederacy is depending on us. If the damnyankees push over the river and into Texas, you can kiss Sequoyah good-bye when the war is done.”

“Wish I could kiss Sequoyah good-bye right now,” Reginald Bartlett muttered under his breath. “Wish I was back in Virginia.”

Napoleon Dibble gaped. “You wish you was back on the Roanoke front, Reggie?” He sounded as if he thought Bartlett was crazy.

Had Reggie wished that, he would have been crazy. “No. I wish I was back in Richmond, where I came from.” Dibble nodded, enlightened, or as enlightened as he got. Under his breath, Reggie went on, “The other thing I wish is that Lieutenant Nicoll would get himself a new speech.”

Nap Dibble didn’t hear him, but Sergeant Hairston did. “Yeah,” he said. “We got to hold this, we got to hold that. Then what the hell happens when we don’t hold? We supposed to go off and shoot ourselves?”

“If we don’t hold a place, the damnyankees usually shoot a lot of us,” Bartlett said, which made Pete Hairston laugh but which was also unpleasantly true. The regiment—the whole division—had taken a lot of casualties trying to halt the U.S. drive toward the Red River.

An aeroplane buzzed overhead. Reggie started to unsling his rifle to take a shot at it: it wasn’t flying very high, for gray clouds filled the

sky. But it carried the Confederate battle flag under its wings. He stared at it in tired wonder. The USA didn't have many aeroplanes out here in the West, but the CSA had even fewer.

Hoping it would do the damnyankees some harm, he forgot about it and marched on toward Waurika. The town's business district lay in a hollow, with houses on the surrounding hills. "We'll have to hold the Yanks up here," he said, as much to himself as to anyone else. "We go down there into that bowl, we're going to get pounded to death."

As had been true up in Wilson Town, not all the civilians had fled from Waurika. Most of the men and women who came out of the houses to look over the retreating Confederates had dark skins: Waurika, Lieutenant Nicoll had said, was about half Kiowa, half Comanche. Reggie couldn't have told one bunch from the other to save himself from the firing squad.

Some of the civilians had skins darker than copper: the Indians' Negro servants. Most of those, or at least most of the ones Bartlett saw, were women. The men had probably been impressed into labor service already: either that or they'd run off toward the Yankees or toward the forests and swamps of the Red River bottom country, where a man who knew how to live off the land could fend for himself for a long time.

More than a few Indians, men wearing homespun and carrying hunting rifles, tried to fall in with the column of Confederate soldiers. "You braves don't know what you're getting into," Lieutenant Nicoll told them. "This isn't any kind of fighting you've ever seen before, and if the damnyankees catch you shooting at them without wearing a uniform, they'll kill you for it."

"What will the Yankees do to us if they take this land?" one of the Indians answered. "We do not want to be in the USA."

"Our grandfathers have told us how bad the living was under the Stars and Stripes," another Indian agreed. "We want to stay under the Stars and Bars." He pointed toward the business section of Waurika, where several Confederate flags flew in spite of the threatening weather.

At that moment, the weather stopped threatening and started delivering chilly rain mixed with sleet. Shivering, Bartlett consoled himself with the thought that the rain would be harder on the Yankees, who would have to fight their way through it, than on his

own unit, which had already reached the place it needed to defend.

Sergeant Hairston spoke in a low, urgent voice: “Sir, you can’t give them redskins any stretch of line to hold. They ain’t soldiers.”

“We are warriors,” one of the Indians said proudly. “The tribes in the east of Sequoyah have their own armies allied to the Stars and Bars.”

“I’ve heard about that,” Nicoll said. “Isn’t anything like it hereabouts, though.” He scowled, visibly of two minds. At last, he went on, “You want to fight?” The Indians gathered round him made it loudly clear they did indeed want to fight. He held up a hand. “All right. This is what we’ll do. You go out in front of the line we’ll hold. You snipe at the damnyankees and bring us back word of what they’re doing and how they’re moving. Don’t let yourselves get captured. You get in trouble, run back to the front. Is it a bargain?”

“We know this country,” one of the Indians answered. “The soldiers in the uniforms the color of horse shit will not find us.” The rest of the men from Waurika nodded, then trotted quietly north, in the direction from which the U.S. soldiers would come.

Reggie turned to Nap Dibble. “The damnyankees may not find ’em, but what about machine-gun bullets? I don’t care how brave or how smart you are, and a machine gun doesn’t care, either.” He spoke with the grim certainty of a man who had been through the machine-gun hell of the Roanoke River valley.

All Nap Dibble knew was the more open fighting that characterized the Sequoyah front. No: he knew one thing more. “Better them’n us,” he said, and, taking out his entrenching tool, began to dig in.

Along with using the Indians of Waurika as scouts and snipers, Lieutenant Nicoll used the few Negro men left in town as laborers. None of the Indian women and old men left behind objected. No one asked the Negroes’ opinions. With shovels and hoes and mattocks, they began helping the Confederate soldiers make entrenchments in the muddy ground.

Once there were holes in which the men of Nicoll’s company could huddle, the lieutenant set the blacks to digging zigzag communications trenches back toward a second line. “Lawd have mercy, suh,” one of them said, “you gwine work us to death.”

“You don’t know what death is, not till the Yankees start shelling

you," Nicoll answered. Then his voice went even colder than the weather: "Weren't for the way you niggers rose up last winter, the Confederate States wouldn't be in the shape they're in."

"Weren't us, suh," said the Negro who had spoken before. "Onliest Reds in Sequoyah, they's Indians, and they was born that way." The other black men impressed into labor nodded emphatic agreement.

"Likely tell," Nicoll said, dismissing their contention with a toss of the head. "You want to show me you're good, loyal Confederates, you dig now and help your country's soldiers beat the Yanks."

Sullenly, the Negroes dug alongside the soldiers. Bartlett began to hope the Confederates around Waurika would have the rest of the day and the whole night in which to prepare their position for the expected U.S. onslaught. Having slogged through a lot of mud himself, he knew what kind of time the Yankee troops would be having.

But, a little past three in the afternoon, a brisk crackle of small-arms fire broke out ahead of the line. He found himself in a trench and peering out over the parapet almost before he realized he'd heard the rifles. Some of the reports were strange; not all rifles sounded exactly like the Tredegars and Springfields with which he'd been so familiar for so long.

Machine guns were heavy. Units not of the first quality—which, on the Sequoyah front, meant a lot of units—didn't make sure they kept up with the head of an advancing column. But that malignant hammering started only moments after the rifle fire broke out.

"Now we see what kind of balls the redskins have," Sergeant Hairston said with a sort of malicious anticipation. "Warriors!" He hawked and spat in the mud.

Here came the Kiowas and Comanches, running back toward the hastily dug entrenchments. Behind them, trudging across the fields, firing as they advanced, were U.S. soldiers. An Indian fell, then another one. An Indian leaped into the trench near Bartlett. "Why do you not shoot at them?" he demanded. "Do you want them to kill us all?"

"No," Reggie answered. "What we want is for them to get close enough for us to hurt 'em bad when we do open up. Fire discipline, it's called."

The Indian stared at him without comprehension. But when the

Confederate company did open up with rifles and machine guns and a couple of trench mortars, the U.S. soldiers went down as if scythed. Not all of them, Reggie knew, would be hit; more were taking whatever cover they could find. But the advance stopped.

More Indians jumped into the trenches with the Confederates. They kept on shooting at the Yankees, and showed as much spirit as the men alongside whom they fought. “Maybe they are warriors,” Bartlett said.

Sergeant Hairston nodded. “Yeah, maybe they are. I tell you one thing, though, Bartlett. They give the niggers guns the way it looks like they’re gonna, them coons ain’t never gonna fight this good.”

Reggie thought about that. The Kiowas and Comanches—most of the Indians in Sequoyah—had done pretty well for themselves under the rule of the Great White Father in Richmond. As these young men had said, they wanted to stay under the Stars and Bars.

How many Negroes wanted the same thing? “Maybe they’ll fight for the chance to turn into real citizens,” he said at last.

“Shitfire, who wants niggers voting?” Hairston exclaimed. Since Reggie himself was a long way from thrilled at the idea of their voting, he kept quiet. It all seemed abstract anyhow. Wondering about if and how soon the Yankees would be able to haul their artillery forward through the thickening muck was a much more immediate concern.

Riding a swaybacked horse he’d no doubt rented at the St. Matthews livery stable, Tom Colleton came slowly up the path toward the ruins of Marshlands. Anne Colleton stood waiting for her brother, her hands on her hips. When he got close enough for her to call out to him, she said, “You might have let me known you were coming before you telephoned the train station. I would have come to get you in the motorcar.”

“Sis, I tried to wire you, but they told me the lines out from St. Matthews weren’t up or had gone down again or some such,” Tom answered. “When I got into town, I telephoned just on the off chance—I didn’t really expect to get you. I was all set to show up and surprise you.”

“I believe it,” Anne answered. Tom had always been one to do things first and sort out the consequences later. She pointed to the wire than ran to the cabin where she lived these days. “They finally put that in last week. If you knew what I had to go through to get it —”

“Can’t be worse than Army red tape,” Tom said as he swung down from the horse. He looked fit and dashing and alert; his right hand never strayed far from the pistol on his hip. The scar on his cheek wasn’t pink and fresh any more.

He also wore two stars on either side of his stand collar. “You’ve been promoted!” Anne exclaimed.

He gave a little bow, as a French officer might have done. “Lieutenant-Colonel Colleton at your service, ma’am,” he said. “My regiment happened to find a hole in the Yankee lines up on the Roanoke, and they pushed forward half a mile at what turned out to be exactly the right time.” He touched one of the stars signifying his new rank, then the other. “Each of these cost me about a hundred and fifty men, killed and wounded.”

Slowly, Anne nodded. Tom had gone into the war as a lark, an adventure. A lot had changed in the past two years.

A lot had changed here, too. He strode up to her and gave her a brotherly embrace, but his eyes remained on what had been the family mansion. “Those sons of bitches,” he said in a flat, hard voice, and then, “Well, from what I hear, they paid for it ten times over.”

“Maybe not so much as that,” Anne said, “but they paid.” She cocked her head to one side and sent him a curious glance. “And you’re one of the people who want to put guns in niggers’ hands?”

He nodded. “For one thing, we’re running out of white men to be soldiers,” he said, and Anne nodded in turn, remembering President Semmes’ words. Tom went on, “For another, if niggers have a stake in the Confederate States, maybe they won’t try and pull them down around our ears. We smashed this rebellion, sure, but that doesn’t mean we won’t have another one ten years from now if things don’t change.”

“This one’s smashed, but it’s not dead,” she said. “Cassius is still out in the swamps by the river, and the militiamen they’ve sent after him and his friends haven’t been able to smoke them out.”

“He’s the kind of nigger I wish we had in the Army,” Tom said. “He’d make one fine scout and sniper.”

“Unless he decided to shoot at you instead of the damnyankees,” Anne answered, which made her brother grimace. Then, suddenly, she noticed a new ribbon in the fruit salad above Tom’s left breast pocket. Her eyes widened. Pointing to it, she said, “That’s an Order of Lee, and you weren’t going to say a thing about it.”

She’d succeeded in embarrassing him. “I didn’t want to worry you,” he replied, which went a long way toward explaining the circumstances under which he’d won it. The Order of Lee was the Army equivalent of Roger Kimball’s Order of the *Virginia*: only one step down from the Confederate Cross.

“I’ve been worried from the beg—” Anne started to say, but that wasn’t quite true: in the beginning, she, like most in the CSA, had thought they’d lick the Yankees as quickly and easily as they had in their first two wars. She made the needed change: “I’ve been worried for a long time.”

Julia came up to them then, her baby on her hip. “Mistuh Tom, we got yo’ cabin ready fo’ you.”

“That’s good,” he answered. “Thank you.” He spoke to her in a tone slightly different from the one he would have used before the war started, even if the words might have been the same then. In 1914, he would have taken the service completely for granted; now, he spoke of it as if she was doing him a favor. Anne found herself using that tone with blacks these days, too, and noticed it in others.

Tom went back to his horse, detached the saddlebags and bedroll from the saddle, and carried them while he walked after Julia. In 1914, a Negro would have dashed up to relieve him of them. If he missed that level of deference, he didn’t show it.

And, before he went into the cabin, he asked, “You’re not putting anyone out so I can stay in here, are you?”

“No, suh,” the serving woman answered. “Ain’t so many folks here as used to be.”

“I see that.” Tom glanced over at Anne. “It’s a wonder you’ve done as much as you have out here by yourself.”

“You do what you have to do,” she said, at which he nodded again.

Before the war, that hard logic had meant nothing to him. The Roanoke front had given him more than rank and decorations; he understood and accepted the ways of the world these days. As soon as Julia went out of earshot, she continued, in a lower voice, “We made a bargain of sorts—they do the work that needs to be done, and I make sure nobody from St. Matthews or Columbia comes around prying into what they did during the rebellion.”

“You said something about that in one of your letters,” Tom answered, remembering. “Best you could do, I suppose, but there are some niggers I wouldn’t have made that bargain with. Cassius, for one.”

“Even if you’d want him for a soldier?” Anne asked, gently mocking.

“Especially because I’d want him for a soldier,” her brother said. “I know a dangerous man when I see one.”

“I have no bargain with Cassius,” Anne said quietly. “Every so often, livestock here—disappears. I don’t *know* where it goes, but I can guess. Not that much to eat in the swamps of the Congaree, even for niggers used to living off the land.”

“That’s so,” Tom agreed. “And he’ll have friends among the hands here. Sis, I really wish you weren’t out here by your lonesome.”

“If I’m not, this place goes to the devil,” Anne said. “I didn’t get a great crop from it, but I got a crop. That gave me some of the money I needed to pay the war taxes, and it meant I didn’t have to cut so far into my investments as I would have otherwise. I don’t intend to be a beggar when the war ends, and I don’t intend for you to be a beggar, either.”

“If the choice is between being being rich and being a beggar, that’s one thing, Sis,” he said. “If the choice is between being a beggar and being dead, that’s a different game.” His face, its expression already far more stern than it had been before the war, turned bleak as the oncoming winter. “That’s what the Confederate States are looking at right now, seems to me: a choice between being beggars and being dead.”

He walked up into the cottage. Anne followed him. He tossed the saddlebags and bedroll onto the floor next to the iron-framed cot on which he’d sleep. Looking around, he shook his head. “It’s not the way it was any more,” he said, half to himself. “Nothing is the way it was any more.”

“No,” Anne said. “It’s not. But—I talked with President Semmes not so long ago. He’s worried, yes, but not *that* worried.” She checked herself; if the president hadn’t been *that* worried, would he have introduced the bill calling for Negro troops? Trying to look on the bright side, she pointed to Tom’s tunic. “That was a victory, there in the valley.”

“And it makes one,” her brother answered bitterly. “I pray to God we can hold the ground we gained, too. We need every man in the CSA at the front, and we need every man in the CSA working behind the lines so the men at the front have something to shoot at the damnyankees. If everybody could be two places at once twenty-four hours a day, we’d be fine.”

“That’s why the president wants to give the blacks guns,” she said.

“I understand.” He sounded impatient with her, something he’d rarely done…before the war, that endlessly echoed phrase. “We’ve put them in the factories to make up for the white men who’ve gone. Maybe we can put enough women in to make up for the niggers. Maybe.”

She didn’t want to argue with him any more. “Supper soon,” she said. “Come over to my cottage and we’ll talk more then. Get yourself settled in for now.”

“For now,” he repeated. “I’ve got to catch the train day after tomorrow.” He sighed. “No rest for the weary.”

Supper was fried chicken, greens, and pumpkin pie, with apple brandy that had no tax stamp on it to wash down the food. “It’s not what I would have given you if things were different,” Anne said, watching with something like awe as the mountain of chicken bones on her brother’s plate grew and grew. “No fancy banquets these days, though.”

“It’s nigger food,” Tom said, and then held up a hand against the temper that sparked in her eyes. “Wait, Sis. Wait. It’s good. It’s a hundred times better than what I eat at the front. Don’t you worry about it for a minute.” He patted his belly, which should have bulged visibly from what he’d put away but somehow didn’t.

“What are we going to do?” she said. “If this is the best we can hope for once the war is over, is it worth going on?”

“Kentucky is a state in the United States again,” Tom said quietly.

“The Yankees say it is, anyhow, and they have some traitors there who go along with them. The best may not be as good as we hoped when we set out to fight, but the worst is worse than we ever reckoned it could be.” He yawned, then got up, walked over to her, and kissed her on the cheek. “I’m going to bed, Sis—can’t hold ’em open any more. You don’t have to worry about anything tonight—I’m here.” He walked out of the cottage into the darkness.

Julia took away the dishes. Anne got into a long cotton nightgown, blew out the lamps, and lay down. Off in the distance, an owl hooted. Off farther in the distance, a rifle cracked, then another, than a short volley. Silence returned. She shrugged. Ordinary noises of the night. As always, her pistol lay where she could reach it. She even carried the revolver when she needed to go to the outhouse instead of using the pot, though it was no good against moths and spiders.

Did she feel safer because her brother was here? Yes, she decided: now there were two guns on which she could rely absolutely. Did she feel he was taking on the job of protecting her, so she wouldn’t even have to think of such things as long as he was nearby? Laughing at the absurdity of the notion, she rolled over and went to sleep.

* * *

George Enos was swabbing the deck on the starboard side of the USS *Ericsson* when shouts of alarm rang out to port: “Torpedo!” He jumped as if someone had stabbed him with a pin. As klaxons began to hoot, he sprinted toward his battle station, a one-pounder antiaircraft gun not far from the depth-charge launcher at the stern of the destroyer. Someone, by some accident, had actually read his file and given him a job he knew how to do. The one-pounder wasn’t that different from an outsized machine gun.

“Torpedo!” The shouts grew louder. The *Ericsson*’s deck throbbed under Enos’ feet as the engines came up to full power from cruising speed. Thick, black smoke poured from the stacks. The smoke poured back toward him. He coughed and tried to breathe as little as he could.

The deck heeled sharply as the destroyer swung into a tight turn. The turn was to the right, not to the left as he’d expected. “We’re heading into the track,” he shouted.

At the launcher, Carl Sturtevant nodded. “If it misses us, we charge down the wake and pay the submarine a visit,” the petty officer said.

“Yeah,” George said. If it missed them, that was what would happen. But it was likelier to hit them when they were running toward it than if they’d chosen to run away. Enos did his best not to think about that. He was sure the whole crew of the *Ericsson*—including Captain Fleming, who’d ordered the turn—were doing their best not to think about that.

He peered ahead, though the destroyer’s superstructure blocked his view of the most critical area. His fate rested on decisions over which he had no control and which he could not judge till afterwards. He hated that. So did every other Navy man with whom he’d ever spoken, both on the Mississippi and out here in the Atlantic.

Something moving almost impossibly fast shot by the onrushing *Ericsson*, perhaps fifty feet to starboard of her. Staring at the creamy wake, George sucked in a long breath, not caring any more how smoky it was. “Missed,” he said with fervent delight. “Is that the only fish they launched at us?”

“Don’t hear ’em yelling about any others,” Sturtevant said.

Lieutenant Crowder came running toward the stern. “Load it up!” he shouted to Sturtevant and his comrades. “We’ll make ’em pay for taking a shot at us.”

“Yes, sir.” Sturtevant sounded less optimistic than his superior. The depth-charge launcher was a new gadget, the *Ericsson* one of the first ships in the Navy to use it instead of simply rolling the ashcans off the stern. Like a lot of new gadgets, it worked pretty well most of the time. Like a lot of sailors, George Enos among them, Sturtevant was conservative enough to find that something less than adequate.

Like a lot of young lieutenants, Crowder was enamored of anything and everything new, for no better reason than that it *was* new. He said, “By throwing the charges off to the side, we don’t have to sail right over the sub and lose hydrophone contact with it.”

“Yes, sir,” Sturtevant said again. His mouth twisted. George understood that, too. A hydrophone could give you a rough bearing on a submersible. What it couldn’t tell you was where along that bearing the damn thing lurked.

An officer on the bridge waved his hat to Lieutenant Crowder. “Launch!” Crowder shouted, as if the depth-charge crew couldn’t figure out what that meant for themselves.

The launcher roared. The depth charge spun through the air, then splashed into the sea. Carl Sturtevant's lips moved. In the racket, George couldn't hear what he said, but he saw the shape of the words. *Here goes nothing*—and it was just as well that Lieutenant Crowder couldn't read lips. Another depth charge flew. The chances of hitting a submarine weren't quite zero, but they weren't good. The charge had to go off within fifteen feet of a sub to be sure of wrecking it, though it might badly damage a boat at twice that range. Since the destroyer and the submersible were both moving, hits were as much luck as in a blindfold rock fight.

As the third depth charge arced away from the *Ericsson*, water boiled up from the explosion of the first one. "Damnation!" Lieutenant Crowder shouted: only white water, nothing more. By the disappointed look on his face, he'd expected a kill on his very first try.

Another charge flew. The second one went off, down below the surface of the sea. Another seething mass of white water appeared, and then a great burst of bubbles and an oil slick that helped calm both the normal chop of the Atlantic and the turbulence the bubbles had kicked up.

"Hit!" Crowder and Sturtevant and the rest of the depth-charge crew and George all screamed the word at the same time. Skepticism forgotten, Sturtevant planted a reverent kiss on the oily metal side of the depth-charge launcher.

More bubbles rose from the stricken submersible, and more oil, too. Peering out into the ocean, George was the first to spy the dark shape rising through the murky water. "Here he comes, the son of a bitch," he said, and turned the one-pounder in the direction of the submersible. The gun was intended for aeroplanes, but Moses hadn't come down from the mountain saying you couldn't shoot it at anything else.

Vaster than a broaching whale, the crippled sub surfaced. English? French? Confederate? George didn't know or care. It was the enemy. The men inside had done their best to kill him. Their best hadn't been good enough. Now it was his turn.

Some of the enemy sailors still had fight in them. They ran across the hull toward the submersible's deck gun. George opened up with the one-pounder before Lieutenant Crowder screamed, "Rake 'em!"

Shell casings leaped from George's gun. It fired ten-round clips, as if

it were an overgrown rifle. One of the rounds hit an enemy sailor. George had never imagined what one of those shells could do to a human body. One instant, the fellow was dashing along the dripping hull. The next, his entire midsection exploded into red mist. His legs ran another stride and a half before toppling.

George picked up another clip—it hardly seemed to weigh anything—and slammed it into the one-pounder. He blew another man to pieces, but most of the clip went to chewing up the submersible's conning tower. The sub wouldn't be doing any diving, not if it was full of holes.

As he was reloading again, one of the *Ericsson*'s four-inch guns fired a shell into the ocean twenty yards in front of the submarine's bow, a warning shot that sent water fountaining up to drench the surviving men who had reached the deck gun. They didn't shoot back at the destroyer. Their hands went up in the air instead.

"Hold fire!" Lieutenant Crowder said. George obeyed. A moment later, a white flag waved from the top of the conning tower. More men started emerging from the hatch and standing on the hull, all of them with their hands raised in surrender.

Crowder used a pair of field glasses to read the name of the boat, which was painted on the side of the conning tower. *"Snook,"* he said. "She'll be a Confederate boat. They name 'em for fish, same as we do. Looks like a limey, don't she?"

Flags fluttered up on the *Snook*'s signal lines. "He's asking if he can launch his boats," said Sturtevant, who had far more practice at reading them than did George.

Captain Fleming's answer came swiftly. Crowder read it before Sturtevant could: "Denied. We will take you off." He inspected the dejected crew of the submersible. "I don't see their captain, but they're all so frowzy he may be there anyhow."

Boats slid across the quarter-mile of water separating the *Ericsson* and the *Snook*. Confederate sailors were already boarding them when one more man burst from the submersible's hatchway and hurried onto one of them.

"*There's* the captain," Sturtevant said, and then, "She's sinking! The goddamn bastard opened the scuttling cocks. That's what he was doing down below so long. Ahh, hell, no way to save her." Sure enough, the *Snook* was quickly sliding down into the depths from

which she had arisen. She would not rise again.

Up onto the deck of the *Ericsson* came the glum Confederates. U.S. sailors crowded round to see the men who had almost sunk them. The attitude of the victors was half relief, half professional respect. They knew the submariners could have won the duel as easily as not.

When the Confederate captain came aboard the destroyer, George's jaw fell. "Briggs!" he burst out. "Ralph Briggs!"

"Somebody here know me?" The Rebel officer looked around to see who had spoken.

"I sure do." George pushed through the crowd around the Confederates. His grin was enormous. "I'd better. I was one of the fishermen who helped sink you when you were skipper of the *Tarpon*."

"What? We already captured this damn Reb once?" Lieutenant Crowder exclaimed. "Why the devil isn't he in a prisoner-of-war camp where he belongs, then?"

"Because I escaped, that's why." Briggs stood straighter. "International law says you can't do anything to me on account of it, either."

"We could toss him in the drink and let him swim to shore," Carl Sturtevant said, without the slightest smile to suggest he was joking.

George shook his head. "When he was going to sink my trawler, he let the crew take to the boats. He played square."

"Besides, if we ditched him, we'd have to ditch the whole crew," Lieutenant Crowder said. "Too many people would know, somebody would get drunk and tell the story, and the Entente papers would scream like nobody's business. They're prisoners, and we're stuck with 'em." He pointed to the Confederate submariners, then jerked a thumb toward the nearest hatch. "You men go below—and this time, Briggs, we'll make damn sure you don't get loose before the war is done."

"You can try," the submersible skipper answered. "My duty is to escape if I can." He nodded to George Enos. "I wish I'd never seen you once, let alone twice, but I do thank you for speaking up for me there."

George looked him in the eye. "If you were the skipper of the damn commerce raider that got my fishing boat when I was still a civilian,

you'd be swimming now, for all of me."

"Get moving," Lieutenant Crowder said again, and, along with his crew, Ralph Briggs headed for the—

"The brig. Briggs is going to the brig," George said, and laughed as the Confederates, one by one, went down the hatchway and disappeared.

Standing in Bay View Park, Chester Martin peered east across the Maumee River to the Toledo, Ohio, docks. Mist that was turning to drizzle kept him from seeing as much as he would have liked, but a couple of light cruisers from the Lake Erie fleet were in port, resupplying so they could go off and bombard the southern coast of Ontario again.

Martin turned to his younger sister. "You know what, Sue? This business of watching the war from the far side of the river is a…lot more fun than being in it up close." The pause came from his swallowing a pungent intensifier or two. In the trenches, he cursed as automatically as he breathed. He'd horrified his mother a couple of times, and now tried to watch himself around his female relatives.

Sue giggled. She'd caught the hesitation. She found his profanity more funny than horrifying, but then she was of his generation. They shared a sharp-nosed, sharp-chinned family look, though Sue's hair was brown, not sandy heading toward red like his.

She said, "I'm just sorry you had to get hurt so you could come home for a while."

"Oh, I knew it was a hometowner as soon as I got it," he said, exaggerating only a little. "Never worried about it for a minute. Now that my arm's out of the sling, I expect they'll be sending me back to the front before too long."

"I wish they wouldn't," she said, and took his good right hand in both of hers. She was careful with his left arm, even if he'd finally had it released from its cloth cocoon.

From behind him, a gruff voice said, "You there, soldier—let's see your papers, and make it snappy."

Martin's turn was anything but snappy; it let the military policeman

see the three stripes on his sleeve. The MP was only a private first class. He didn't worry about that, though, not with the law on his side. Martin was convinced the military police attracted self-righteous sons of bitches the way spilled sugar drew ants.

But this fellow wouldn't be able to give him a hard time. He took the necessary paperwork from a tunic pocket and handed it to the MP. "Convalescent leave, eh?" the fellow said. "We've seen some humbug documents of this sort lately, Sergeant. What would happen if I took you back to barracks and told you to show me a scar?"

"I'd do it, and you'd get your ass in a sling," Martin answered steadily. He looked the private first class up and down with the scorn most front-line soldiers felt for their not-quite-counterparts who hadn't seen real action. "Why is it, sonny boy, the only time you ever see a dead MP, he's got a Springfield bullet in him, not a Tredegar?"

Sue didn't get that. The military policeman did, and turned brick red. "I ought to keep these," he said, holding Martin's papers so the sergeant couldn't take them back.

"Go ahead," Martin said. "Let's head back to your barracks. We can both tell your commanding officer about it. Like I say, doesn't matter a bean's worth to me."

A soldier ready to go back to barracks and take his case to the officer of the day was not a spectacle the MP was used to. Angrily, he thrust Martin's papers back at him. Angrily, he stomped off, the soles of his boots slapping the bricks of the walkway.

"That's telling him," Sue said proudly, clutching her brother's arm. "He didn't have any business talking to you like that."

"He could ask for my papers, to make sure I'm not absent without leave," Martin said. "But when he got nasty afterwards—" He made a face. "He didn't have any call to do that, except he's a military policeman, and people have to do what he tells them."

"Like the Coal Board officials," Sue said. "And the Ration Board, and the Train Transportation Board, and the War Loan subscription committees, and—" She could have gone on. Instead, she said, "All those people were bad enough before the war. They're worse now, and there are more of them. And if you're not a big cheese yourself, they act like little tin gods and give you a nasty time just to show they can do it."

“Makes you wonder what the country’s coming to sometimes, doesn’t it?” Martin said. “Old people say there used to be more room to act the way you pleased, back before the Second Mexican War taught us how surrounded we are. Gramps would always go on about that, remember?”

She shook her head. “Not really. I was only six or seven when he died. What I remember about him was his peg leg, and how he always pretended he was a pirate on account of it.”

“Yeah. He got hurt worse than I did, and the doctors in the War of Secession weren’t as good as they are nowadays, either, I don’t suppose. He used to talk about stacks of cut-off arms and legs outside the surgeons’ tents after a battle.”

Sue looked revolted. “Not with me, he didn’t.”

“You’re a girl,” Chester reminded her. “He used to tell me and Hank all the horrible stuff. We ate it up like gumdrops.”

She sighed. “I was only seven when Henry died, too. What a horrible year that was, everybody wailing all the time. I miss him sometimes, same as Gramps.”

“I was—eleven? Twelve? Something like that,” Martin said. “He was two years older than me, I know that much. I remember the way the doctor kept shaking his head. For all the good he did us, he might as well have been a Sioux medicine man. Scarlet fever, any of those things—I wish they could cure them, not just tell you what they are.”

“He’d be in the Army, too—Henry, I mean.” Sue’s laugh was startled. “I don’t think I ever thought of Henry all grown up till now.”

“He’d be in the Army, all right,” Chester agreed. “He’d be an officer, I bet. Hank was always sharp as a razor. People listened to him, too. I didn’t—but I was his brother, after all.” A chilly breeze from off the lake seemed to slice right through his uniform. “Brr! Enough sightseeing. Let’s go home and sit in front of the fire.”

They caught the trolley and went southwest down Summit, alongside the Maumee. After three or four miles, the trolley car turned inland and clattered past the county courthouse and, across the street from it, the big bronze statue of Remembrance, sword bared in her right hand.

Pointing to it, Sue said, “We just got some new stereoscope views of

New York City. Now I know how good a copy of the statue on Bedloe's Island that one is, even if ours is only half as tall."

"We've still got a lot to pay people back for—the United States do, I mean," Martin said. Now he laughed. "I've got a Rebel to pay back, and I don't even know who he is."

The trolley took them over the Ottawa River, a smaller stream than the Maumee, and up into Ottawa Heights. The closest stop was three blocks from their apartment house. Chester remembered how cramped he'd felt in the flat before the war started. He had no more room now—less, in fact, because they'd had to make room for him when he came back to convalesce—but he didn't mind. After crowded barracks and insanely crowded bombproof shelters, a room of his own, even a small one, seemed luxury itself.

His mother—an older, graying version of Sue—all but pounced on him when he came in the door. "You have a letter here from the White House!" Louisa Martin exclaimed, thrusting the fancy envelope at him. The Martin family had a strong tradition of never opening one another's mail; that tradition, obviously, had never been so sorely tested as now.

"Don't be silly, Mother," Chester said. "The Rebs are still holding onto the White House." His mother glared at him, and with reason. Even if business got done in Philadelphia, Washington remained the capital of the USA.

Sue squeaked. "Open it!" she said, and then grabbed his arm so he couldn't.

He shook her off and did open the envelope. "'Dear Sergeant Martin,'" he read from the typed letter, "'I have learned you were wounded in action. Since you have defended not only the United States of America but also me personally on my visit to the Roanoke front, I dare hope my wishes for your quick and full recovery will be welcome. Sincerely yours, Theodore Roosevelt.'" The signature was in vivid blue ink.

"That's wonderful," Louisa Martin said softly. "TR keeps track of everything, doesn't he?"

"Seems to," Martin agreed. He kept staring at that signature. "Well, I was going to vote for him anyhow. Guess I'll have to vote twice now." If you knew the right people, in Toledo as in a good many other U.S. towns, you could do that, though he'd meant if for a joke.

His mother sighed. “One of these days, Ohio may get around to granting women’s suffrage. Then you wouldn’t need to vote twice.”

Stephen Douglas Martin, Chester’s father, came home from the mill about an hour later. “Well, well,” he said, holding the letter from TR out at arm’s length so he could read it. He was too old to worry about conscription, and had been promoted three times at work since the start of the war, when younger men with better jobs had to put on green-gray. “Ain’t that somethin’, Chester? Ain’t that somethin’? We ought to frame this here letter and keep it safe so you can show it to your grandchildren.”

“That would be something, Pop,” Martin said. He thought of himself with gray hair and wrinkled skin, sitting in a rocking chair telling war stories to little boys in short pants. Gramps’stories had always been exciting, even the ones about how he’d lost his leg. Could Chester make life in the trenches exciting? Was it anything he’d want to tell his grandchildren? Maybe, if he could show them the president’s letter.

“I’m proud of you, son,” his father said. “The Second Mexican War was over before they called me up. My father fought for our country, and now you have, too. That’s pretty fine.”

“All right, Pop,” Martin answered. For a moment, he wondered what his father would have said if he’d stopped that bullet with his head instead of his arm. Whatever it was, he wouldn’t have been around to hear it.

“Supper!” his mother called. The ham steaks that went with the fried potatoes weren’t very big—meat had got expensive as the dickens this past year, he’d heard a hundred times—but they were tasty. And there were plenty of potatoes in the big, black iron pan. She served Chester seconds of those, and then thirds.

“You’re going to have to let out the pants on my uniform,” he said, but all she did was nod—she was ready to do it. His father lighted a cigar, and passed one to him. The tobacco was sharp and rather nasty, but a cigar was a cigar. He leaned back in his chair as his mother and sister cleared away the dishes. For now, the front seemed far, far away. He tried to stretch each moment as long as he could.

“Come on!” Jake Featherston called to the gun crews of his battery.

“We’ve got to keep moving.” Rain poured down out of the sky. The southern Maryland road, already muddy, began turning to something more like glue, or maybe thick soup. “Come on!”

A whistle in the air swelled rapidly to a scream. A long-range shell from a Yankee gun burst about a hundred yards to Featherston’s left. A great fountain of muck rose into the air. None splattered down on him, but that hardly mattered. He’d long since got as muddy as a human being could.

More U.S. shells descended, feeling for the road down which the First Richmond Howitzers were retreating. The damnyankee gunners couldn’t quite find it. The barrage, instead of swinging west from where the first one hit, went east. That meant they’d probably find another road and hurt a different part of the Army of Northern Virginia. Jake didn’t care. If he got out in one piece, he’d settle for that.

“Hey, Sarge!” Michael Scott said. With the shelling and the rain, the loader had to call two or three times to get Featherston’s attention. When he finally had it, he asked, “What do we do when we get to the Potomac?”

“You think I’m the War Department, God damn them to hell?” Featherston answered. The War Department, and especially its upper echelons, did not contain his favorite people. “If the damnyankees’ aeroplanes haven’t bombed all the bridges to hell and gone, I reckon we cross over ’em and go back into Virginia.”

“But what are we gonna do there?” Scott persisted.

“I told you, I’m not the goddamn War Department,” Jake said. He shook his head, which made cold rainwater drip down the back of his neck. They wouldn’t make him an officer, they didn’t have the brains to notice when the niggers were going to rise up, and they were still in charge of running the war? Where was the justice in that? And his own men expected him to think like a fancy-pants Richmond general? Where was the justice in *that*?

“But, Sarge—” the loader said, like a little boy complaining when his mother wouldn’t let him do what he wanted.

“All right,” Featherston said wearily. “Here’s what we do, you ask me. We cross the bridge, if it’s still up there. All the artillery we’ve got goes into battery on the south bank. Soon as the last man from the Army of Northern Virginia comes out of Maryland, we drop the bridge

right into the middle of the river, *bam*. Soon as the damnyankees get in range of our guns, we start plastering them, hard as we can. Those sons of bitches are already in the western part of the state. Sure as the devil don't want 'em getting a toehold anywhere else, do we?"

"Nope." Scott sounded—not happy now, but contented. He'd got Jake to tell him what he could have worked out for himself if he'd had an ounce of sense. Featherston shook his head again. More rainwater ran down his neck. What difference did that make, when he was already so soaked?

He cursed the Yankees, he cursed the mud, and he cursed the War Department, the last more sulfurously than either of the other two. "Christ, no wonder we're losing," he told the unheeding sky. "If the damn fools can't do the little things right, how are they supposed to do the big ones?" He supposed the United States Army was afflicted with a War Department, too, but somehow it seemed to be overcoming the handicap.

To make his joy with the world complete, the lead gun went into a puddle and bogged to the hubs. The horses strained in their harness, but it did no good. That gun wasn't going anywhere any time soon, not with just the team trying to get it out. And the others piled up in back of it.

Along with the rest of the gun crew, he lent his own strength to the work, pushing from behind as the horses pulled. The gun remained stuck. Jake spotted Metellus, the cook, lounging on the limber that traveled behind the gun. "Get your black ass up here and do something to help, damn you," he snarled. "The Yankees do find this here road with their guns, the shells won't care what color you are. They'll blow you up, same as me." His grin was ferocious. "If that ain't nigger equality, I don't know what the hell is."

Metellus got down and got as dirty as any of the white men, but the gun wouldn't budge. "Sarge, the horses are gonna founder if we work 'em any more right now," Michael Scott said. "They'll plumb keel over and die."

"Shit." Featherston looked around, feeling harassed by too many things at once. The whole battery would bog down if he didn't move the rest of the three-inchers around the lead gun. But if he had to abandon it, the higher-ups would crucify him. The only way he'd kept his head above water was by being twice as good as anybody else around. If he showed he was merely human, they'd cook his goose in

jig time.

Here came a battalion of infantry, marching through the mud by the side of the road because the guns were occupying the mud in the middle of the road. “Give us some help, boys!” Jake called to the foot soldiers. “Can’t afford to lose any guns.”

Some of the infantrymen started to break ranks, but the lieutenant in charge of the company shouted, “Keep moving, men. We have our own schedule to meet.” He gave Featherston a hard stare. “You have no business attempting to delay my men, Sergeant.”

“Yes, sir. Sorry, sir,” Jake said, as he had to: he was just a sergeant, after all, not one of God’s anointed officers. How he hated that smug lieutenant. Because of his arrogance, the Confederate States would lose a gun they could have kept, a gun they should have kept.

“What’s going on here?” someone demanded in sharp, angry tones. An officer on horseback surveyed the scene with nothing but disapproval.

Featherston kept quiet. He was only a sergeant, after all. The lieutenant answered, “Sir, this, this enlisted man is trying to use my troops to get out of his trouble.”

“Then you’d better let him, hadn’t you?” Major Clarence Potter snapped. The lieutenant’s jaw dropped. He stared up at Potter with his mouth wide open, like a stupid turkey drowning in the rain. The intelligence officer went on, “Break out some ropes, get your men on that gun, and get it moving. We can’t afford to leave it behind.”

“But—” the infantry lieutenant began.

Major Potter fixed him with the intent, icy stare that had impressed Jake on their first meeting up in Pennsylvania—and how long ago that seemed. “One more word from you, Lieutenant, and I shall ask what your name is.”

The lieutenant wilted. Featherston would have been astounded had he done anything else. Twenty men on a rope and more on the hubs and carriage got the three-inch gun up out of the morass into which it had sunk. On more solid ground, the horses could move it again.

“Thank you, sir,” Jake said, waving the rest of the guns from the battery around the bad spot in the road.

“My pleasure,” Potter said, crisp as usual. “We’ve done a pretty fair job of fighting the enemy in this war, Sergeant, but God deliver us from our friends sometimes.”

“Yes, *sir*!” Jake said. That put his own anger into words better than he’d been able to do for himself.

“Keep struggling, Sergeant,” Potter said. “That’s all you can do. That’s all any of us can do.”

“Yes, sir.” Jake stared furiously after the now-vanished infantry lieutenant. “He could have been heading up a labor brigade, and if he was, he wouldn’t have let me use any niggers, either.”

“I’d say you’re probably right,” Potter said. “Some people get promoted because they’re brave and active. Some people get promoted for no better reason than that all their paperwork stays straight.”

“And some people don’t get promoted at all,” Featherston said bitterly.

“We’ve been over this ground before, Sergeant,” Potter said. “There’s nothing I can do. It’s not up to me.”

Jake would not hear him. “That damn lieutenant—beg your pardon, sir—wouldn’t pay me any mind, on account of I wasn’t an officer. I command this battery, and I damn well deserve to command it, but he treated me like a nigger, on account of I’m just a sergeant.” He glanced over to the intelligence officer. “It’s true, isn’t it? They are going to give niggers guns and put ’em in the line?”

“It’s passed the House. It’s passed the Senate. Since President Semmes was the one who proposed the bill, he’s not going to veto it,” Major Potter said.

“You know what, sir?” Featherston said. “You mark my words, there’s gonna be a nigger promoted to lieutenant before I get these here stripes off my sleeve. Is that fair? Is that right?”

Potter’s lips twisted in what might have been a sympathetic grin or an expression of annoyance at Jake’s unending complaints. The latter, it proved, for the major said, “Sergeant, if you think you’re the only man unfairly treated in the Army of Northern Virginia, I assure you that you’re mistaken.” He squeezed his horse’s sides with his knees. The animal trotted on.

“Ahh, you’re just another bastard after all,” Jake said. Thanks to the rain, Potter didn’t hear him. Featherston turned back to the battery. “Come on. Let’s get moving.”

They bogged down again, less than half a mile in front of the bridge. This time, Jake had no trouble getting help, for a Negro labor gang was close by, and the white officer in charge of it proved reasonable. Featherston worked the black men unmercifully hard, but he and his comrades were working hard, too. The guns came free and rattled toward and then over the bridge.

The firing pits that waited for them on the south side of the Potomac were poorly dug in and poorly sited. “Everything’s going to hell around here,” Featherston growled, and went tramping around to see if he could find better positions no other guns would occupy.

He had little luck. If the artillery hadn’t had to stay close to the river to defend the crossing, he wouldn’t have wanted anything to do with the area. When the Yankees came down and got their guns in place, his crew was going to catch it.

He’d come down close by the Potomac when the engineers blew the bridge and sent it crashing into the water, as he’d predicted. Somebody near him cheered to see it fall. Featherston’s scowl never wavered. How long would the wrecked bridge keep the Yankees out of Virginia? Not long enough, he feared.

XIX

Destroyers and a couple of armored cruisers screened the *Dakota* and the *New York* as the two battleships steamed southeast through the Pacific. On the deck of the *Dakota*, Sam Carsten said, “I won’t be sorry to leave the Sandwich Islands, and that’s a fact.” As if to emphasize his words, he rubbed at the zinc-oxide ointment on his nose.

“You’re gonna bake worse before you get better,” Vic Crosetti said with a chuckle. He could afford to laugh; when he baked, he turned brown. “We’re going over the equator, and it don’t get any hotter than that. And besides, it’s heading toward summer down in Chile.”

“Oh, Jesus,” Carsten said mournfully. “Sure as hell, I forgot all about that.” He looked at his hands, which were as red as every other square inch of him exposed to the sun. “Why the devil didn’t the Chileans get into trouble with Argentina six months ago?”

Crosetti poked him in the ribs. “Far as I’m concerned, all this means is, we’re doing pretty well. If we can detach a squadron from the Sandwich Islands to give our allies a hand, we got to figure ain’t no way for the limeys and the Japs to get Honolulu and Pearl away from us.” He paused, then added, “Unless that John Liholiho item tells them exactly what we’ve got and where everything’s at.”

“You know, maybe we ought to send a letter back to the Sandwich Islands when we get to Chile,” Sam said. “About him being a spy, I mean. They’ll rake him over the coals, you bet they will.”

“Yeah, maybe we should do that,” Crosetti said. “Hell, let’s.”

“Reckon you’re right about the other, too, dammit.” Carsten scratched one of his sunburned ears. Did being happy for his country outweigh being miserable at the prospect of still more sunburn? That

one was too close to call without doing some thinking.

“Right about what?” Hiram Kidde asked as he came up. Carsten and Crosetti explained. The veteran gunner’s mate nodded. “Yeah, the brass has got to think the islands are ours to keep. We’ve got enough guns and enough soldiers on ’em now that taking ’em away would cost more than the limeys can afford.”

“What about the Japs?” Sam said. “They showed better than I ever figured they could, there in the Battle of the Three Navies.”

“Yeah, I suppose the Japs are a wild card,” Kidde admitted. “But as long as we don’t fall asleep there at Pearl, I expect we’ll be able to take care of them all right.” He studied Carsten. “You’re looking a little down in the mouth. You find a gal in Honolulu you didn’t feel like leaving?”

“Nah, it’s nothing like that, ‘Cap’n,’” Carsten answered. “I was hoping I’d get out of the damn sun for a while, but Vic here just reminded me the seasons do a flip-flop down there.”

Kidde let out an undignified snort. “Old son, that ain’t gonna matter a hill of beans. How long you think we’re going to stay in Valparaiso? Not anywhere near long enough to get to know the señoritas, I bet. Once we refit and refuel there, we’re gonna head south to join the Chilean fleet. I don’t care whether it’s summer or not, your poor, miserable hide won’t burn in the Straits of Magellan.”

Sam considered that. “Yeah, you’re right,” he said happily—so happily that Kidde snorted again.

“Listen, Sam,” he said, “sunburn’s not the only thing that can go wrong with you, you know. We get down there, you’ll find out what kind of a sailor you are. The *Dakota*’s a good sea boat, and she’s gonna need to be. Down in the Straits, they’ve got waves that’ll toss around a ship as big as this one like she was a wooden toy in a tin tub with a rambunctious five-year-old in it. I’ve made that passage a couple-three times, and you can keep it for all of me.”

“‘Cap’n,’if I start puking, I know it’ll be over sooner or later, no matter how bad I feel while it’s going on,” Carsten said. Ever so gently, he touched his flaming face. “This here sunburn never stops.”

“I’m gonna remember you said that,” Vic Crosetti told him, “and if I ain’t too sick myself, I’m gonna throw it in your face.”

“And if you are that sick, you’ll throw somethin’ else in his face,” Hiram Kidde said. “I’ve done my share of puking down in that part of the world, I’ll tell you. You take a beating there, you and the ship both.”

That made Sam think of something else: “How’s our steering mechanism going to do if we take a pounding like that? The repairs were a pretty quick job.”

Kidde grunted. “That’s a good question.” He laughed without humor. “And we get to find out what the good answer is. Hope we don’t have to do it the hard way.”

“Can’t be any harder than the last time,” Crosetti said. “No matter what Argentina’s got, we ain’t sailin’ straight at the whole British and Japanese fleets—and a damn good thing we ain’t, too, anybody wants to know.”

“Amen,” Sam said solemnly. Hiram Kidde nodded. After a moment’s contemplation, Crosetti crossed himself.

“*New York* took the next biggest beating in the Battle of the Three Navies after us, now that I think about it,” Kidde said. “Looks like they’re sending what they can most afford to be rid of at the Sandwich Islands.”

“That makes sense to me,” Carsten said. “It probably means they don’t think the Argentines are very good, either.”

“Listen,” Hiram Kidde said positively, “if we fought the goddamn Royal Navy to a standstill, we ain’t gonna play against a tougher team anywhere in the whole damn world—and that includes the Kaiser’s High Seas Fleet. The limeys are bastards, but they’re tough bastards.”

Vic Crosetti started to say something—maybe agreement, maybe argument—but klaxons started hooting all over the ship, summoning the sailors to battle stations. Everyone ran, and ran hard. Sam ran as hard as he could. He’d never yet beaten Hiram Kidde to the five-inch gun they both served. Since the two of them were starting from the same place, and since he was younger than Kidde and had longer legs, he thought this was going to be the time.

It wasn’t. Kidde stuck to him like a burr on the deck. Once they went below, the gunner’s mate’s broad shoulders and bulldog instincts counted for more than Sam’s inches and youth. The “Cap’n” shoved men aside, and stuck an elbow in their ribs if they didn’t move fast

enough to suit him. He got to the sponson a couple of lengths ahead of Carsten.

The rest of the gun's crew tumbled in seconds later. "All right, we're ready," Luke Hoskins said, his hand on a shell, ready to heave it to Sam. "What do we do now?"

Kidde was peering out of the sponson, which gave a very limited field of view through a couple of slit windows. "I don't see anything," he said, "not that that proves one hell of a lot. Maybe somebody here or aboard one of the destroyers heard a submersible through the hydrophones or spotted a periscope."

"If they'd spotted a periscope," Sam said, "we'd be making flank speed, to get the hell away from it." Hoskins and the rest of the shell-heavers and gun-layers nodded emphatic agreement.

But Hiram Kidde spoke in thoughtful tones: "Maybe, maybe not. Remember how that aeroplane decoyed us out of Pearl and into that whole flock of subs? They might be letting us see one so we don't think they've got any more waiting up ahead."

"Mm, maybe," Sam said. "Wouldn't like to charge straight into a pack of 'em, and that's the Lord's truth." His wave encompassed the vast empty reaches of the Pacific. "This isn't the best place to get torpedoed."

Hoskins spoke with great authority: "Sam, there ain't no good place to get torpedoed." Nobody argued with that, either.

The klaxons stopped hooting. Commander Grady stuck his head into the sponson a moment later. "Good job, men," the commander of the starboard secondary armament said. "Only a drill this time."

Luke Hoskins let out a sigh of relief. Sam was relieved, too: relieved and angry at the same time. "Damnation," he said. "It's almost like the shore patrol raiding a cheap whorehouse when you're the next in line. I'm all pumped up and ready, and now I don't get to do anything."

"Don't you worry about *that*," Kidde said. "Nothing wrong with shore leave in Valparaiso, no sir. Nothing wrong in Concepción farther south, either. There's some pretty, friendly—and pretty friendly, too," he amended, noting his own pause, "señoritas in Chile, and that's the truth."

In more than twenty years in the Navy, Kidde had been to just

about every port where U.S. warships were welcome—and some where they'd had to make themselves welcome. He had considerable experience in matters pertaining to señoritas, and wasn't shy about sharing it.

Sam hadn't been so many places. His working assumption was that he'd be able to find something or other in the female line almost anywhere, though, and he hadn't been wrong about that very often. So, instead of asking about women, he said, "What's Valparaiso like?"

"Last time I was there was—let me think—1907, I guess it was," Kidde answered. "It was beat up then; they'd had themselves a hell of an earthquake the year before, and they were still putting things back together."

"That's the same year as the San Francisco quake, isn't it—1906, I mean?" Sam said.

"Now that I think about it, I guess it is." Kidde laughed. "Bad time to be anywhere on the Pacific Coast."

Luke Hoskins said, "What were the parts that weren't wrecked like?"

"Oh, it's a port town," the gunner's mate answered. "Good harbor, biggest one in Chile unless I'm wrong, but it's open on the north. When it blows hard, the way it does in winter down there—June through September, I mean, not our winter—the storms can chew blazes out of ships tied up there. I hear tell, though, they've built, or maybe they're building—don't know which—a breakwater that'll make that better'n it was."

"Not storm season now, then," Hoskins said.

"Not in Valparaiso, no," Kidde answered. "Not in Concepción, either. Down by the Straits of Magellan, that's a different story."

"You know what I wish?" Sam said. "I wish there was a canal through Central America somewhere, like there is at Suez. That would sure make shipping a lot easier."

"It sure would—for the damn Rebs," Hiram Kidde said. "Caribbean's already a Confederate lake. You want them moving battleships through so they could come up the West Coast? No thanks."

"I meant in peacetime," Carsten said. For once, his flush had

nothing to do with sunburn. He prided himself in thinking strategically; his buddies sometimes told him he sounded like an officer. But he'd missed the boat this time.

Kidde drove the point home: "I guess you were still a short-pants kid when the Confederates talked about digging a canal through Nicaragua or one of those damn places. President Mahan said the USA would go to war the minute the first steam shovel took a bite, and they backed down. Reckon he's the best president we had before TR."

Commander Grady peered into the sponson again. One of his eyebrows rose quizzically. "Not that much fun in here, boys," he remarked.

He might have broken a spell. The gun crew filed out. Hot and stuffy as the sponson was, Sam wouldn't have minded staying there a while longer. Now he'd have to go out in the sun again. Out of the entire crew of the *Dakota*, he might have been the only man looking forward to the Straits of Magellan.

Arthur McGregor hitched his horse to the rail not far from the post office. His boots squelched in mud till he got up to the wooden sidewalk. He scraped them as clean as he could before he went inside.

Wilfred Rokeby looked up from a dime novel. "Good day to you, Arthur," the postmaster said. "How are you?" He spoke cautiously. Everyone in Rosenfeld, like everyone in the surrounding countryside, knew of Alexander McGregor's execution. Arthur McGregor had been into town once since then, but he hadn't stopped at the post office.

"How am I, Wilf?" he said, and paused to think about it. That was probably a mistake, for it required him to come out with an honest answer in place of a polite one: "I'm right poorly, is how I am. How would you be, in my shoes?"

"The same, I expect." Rokeby licked his thin, pale lips. Lamplight glistened from the metal frames of the half-glasses he was wearing, and from the lenses that magnified his eyes without making them seem warm. "What can I do for you today, eh?"

"Want to buy some postage stamps," McGregor answered. "When I need beans, I'll go to Henry Gibbon." In a different tone of voice, it would have been a joke. As he said it, it was only a statement of fact.

He'd seldom joked before Alexander was shot. He never joked now.

"Sure enough." Rokeby bent his head down and looked over the tops of those glasses as he opened a drawer. McGregor studied the part that ran down the middle of his crown, dividing the brown hair on one side from that on the other as if Moses had had a bit of a miracle left over after parting the Red Sea. To make sure none of his hairs got Egyptian tendencies, Rokeby slicked them all down with an oil reeking of spices. The odor was part of coming to the post office for McGregor, as it was for everyone in and around Rosenfeld. After taking out a sheet of stamps, Rokeby looked up at the farmer. "How many you need?"

"Let me have fifteen," McGregor answered. "That'll keep me for a while."

"Should, anyway," the postmaster agreed. "Sixty cents'll do it."

McGregor stared at him, then at the stamps. They were some shade of red or other, though only a stamp collector could have told at a glance exactly which. Every country in the world used some sort of red for its letter-rate stamps. And the letter rate in occupied Manitoba, as it had been before the war, as it was in the USA and CSA, was two cents.

"Don't you mean half that?" he asked Wilfred Rokeby. "Look, Wilf, I can see for myself they're two-cent stamps." They were, as far as he was concerned, ugly two-cent stamps. They showed a U.S. aeroplane shooting down one either British or Canadian—the picture was too small for him to be sure which.

"Two cents still is the letter rate, sure enough," Rokeby said. "But you got to pay four cents each to get 'em, all the same. These here are what they call semipostal stamps: only kind we're gonna be able to sell hereabouts from now on. See? Look." He pointed to the lower left-hand corner of the stamp. Sure enough, it didn't just say *2*. It said *2 + 2*, as if it were part of a beginning arithmetic lesson.

"Semi—what?" McGregor said. "What the devil is that supposed to mean? And if two cents is the letter rate but I've got to pay twice that much to get one of these things, where do the other two cents go?"

"Into the Yankees' pockets—where else?" the postmaster said. "Into a fund that pays 'em to send actors and dancing girls and I don't know what all out toward the front to keep their soldiers happy."

“We get to pay so they can do that?” McGregor demanded. Wilfred Rokeby nodded. McGregor took a deep breath. “That’s—thievery, is what it is,” he said slowly, suppressing the scream.

“You know it, and I know it, and I expect the Yankees know it, too,” Rokeby said. “Next question is, do they care? You can figure that one out for your own self. If we’re paying for their damn vaudeville shows, they can spend more of *their* money on guns.”

In its way, the casual exploitation of occupied Canada appalled McGregor almost as much as the casual execution of his son. It showed how the invaders had the conquest planned out to the last little detail. “What happens if we don’t pay the extra two cents?” he asked, already sure of the answer.

“The surcharge, you mean?” Rokeby’s fussiness extended to using precisely the right word whenever he could (come to that, McGregor didn’t remember ever hearing *damn* from him before). “If you don’t pay the surcharge, Arthur, I can’t sell you the stamps, and you can’t mail your letters.”

“You don’t happen to have any of the old ones left?” McGregor asked.

“Not a one,” Rokeby said. “Sold out of ’em right quick, I did, when these here first came out last month. I’d have expected you to notice the new stamps on your mail by now.”

“Who pays attention to stamps?” McGregor said, which drew a hurt look from the postmaster. The farmer took another deep breath and dug in his pocket. “All right, sell ’em to me. I hope the dancing girls give the Yankee soldiers the clap.”

Rokeby giggled, a high, shrill, startling sound. He gave McGregor fifteen cents’ change from the quarter and half-dollar the farmer laid on the counter. McGregor took the change and the stamps and left the post office shaking his head.

Henry Gibbon’s general store was only a few doors down. The storekeeper nodded when McGregor came inside. “Mornin’, Arthur,” he said.

“Good morning.” McGregor’s eyes needed a little while to adjust to the lantern-lit gloom inside the general store. Boards covered what had been the big window fronting on the street before a bomb blew it out. That was a year ago now. “When are you going to get yourself a

new pane of glass?”

“Whenever the Yanks say I can have one,” Gibbon answered; no U.S. soldiers were in the store to overhear his bitterness. “I ain’t holding my breath, I’ll tell you that. How’s your family, Arthur?”

“What I have left of it, you mean?” McGregor said. Bitterness…how could you replace a broken son? But the storekeeper had meant the question kindly. “They’re healthy, Henry. We’re all down at the mouth, but they’re healthy—and thank God for that. We’ll get by.” He stood a little straighter, as if Gibbon had denied it.

“That’s good,” Gibbon said. “I’m glad to hear it. Like I told you last time you were in, I—” He broke off abruptly, for two men in green-gray walked in off the sidewalk and bought a few cents’ worth of candy. When they had left, the storekeeper shook his head. “You see how it is.”

What McGregor saw was Henry Gibbon making money. He didn’t say anything. What could he say? “You still have any of those beans, Henry? I want to buy a couple of sacks if you do.” *No postage stamps here,* he thought, and almost smiled.

“The kidney beans, you mean? Sure enough do.” Grunting, Gibbon put two sacks of them on the counter. “What else you need?”

“Sewing-machine needles and a quart of vinegar for Maude, and some nails for me,” McGregor answered. “Ten-pennies, the big ones. Got some wood rot in the barn, and I’m going to have to do a deal of patching before the weather gets worse. Don’t want the stock to freeze.” He gave the storekeeper a quart bottle.

“You’re right about that,” Gibbon said, filling the bottle from the spigot of a two-hundred-pound barrel. “How many nails do you want?”

“Twenty pounds’ worth should take care of things,” McGregor said.

“I should hope so,” the storekeeper said with a chuckle. He dug into the relevant barrel with a scoop. But as he dumped a scoopful of nails onto the scale, a frown congealed on his plump features. “Only thing I got to give ’em to you in is a U.S. Army crate. Hope you don’t mind.”

“It’s all right,” Arthur McGregor answered wearily. After a moment, he added, “Not the box’s fault who made it.”

“Well, that’s right.” Gibbon sounded relieved. “It’s only that, what with everything, I didn’t think you’d care to have anything to do with the Yanks.”

“It’s just a crate, Henry.” McGregor dug in his pocket. “What do I owe you for everything?”

“Dollar a sack for the beans,” Gibbon said, scrawling down numbers on a scrap of butcher paper. “Sixty-eight cents for the needles, nineteen for the vinegar, and ninety for the nails. Comes to…” He added up the column, then checked it. “Three dollars and seventy-seven cents.”

“Here you are.” McGregor gave him four dollars, waited for his change, and then said, “Let me bring the wagon by, so I don’t have to haul everything.” The storekeeper nodded, patting the beans and the crate and the jar and the little package to show they’d stay safe till McGregor got back.

As the farmer headed out of Rosenfeld, soldiers in green-gray inspected his purchases. They didn’t usually do that; they were more concerned about keeping dangerous things from coming into town. Seeing what he had, they waved him on toward his farm.

A week later, in the middle of the night, he got up from his bed as if to go to the outhouse. Maude muttered something, but didn’t wake. Downstairs, he threw a coat and a pair of boots over his union suit, then went outside. The night was very still. Clouds in the west warned of rain or snow on the way, but the bad weather hadn’t got there yet. For the moment, no traffic to speak of moved on the road near the farm. He nodded to himself, went into the barn, saddled the horse in the darkness, and rode away.

When he came back to bed, Maude was awake. He’d hoped she wouldn’t be. “Why were you gone so long?” she whispered as he slid in beside her.

“Getting rid of some things we don’t need,” he answered, which was no answer at all. He waited for her to press him about it.

All she said was, “Be careful, Arthur,” and rolled over. Soon she was asleep again. Soon he was, too, however much he wanted to stay awake. If anything happened in the night, he didn’t know it.

Three or four days later, Captain Hannebrink drove out to the farm in his green-gray Ford. Out he came. Out came three ordinary soldiers,

all of them with guns. Half a minute after that, another automobile, this one all full of soldiers, stopped alongside Hannebrink's.

Arthur McGregor came out of the barn. He scowled at the American. "What do you want here now, you damned murderer?" he demanded. Through the kitchen window, he saw Maude's frightened face.

Calmly—and well he might have been calm, with so many armed men at his back—Hannebrink answered, "I hear tell you bought some nails from Henry Gibbon not long ago."

"I am guilty of that, which is more than my son was guilty of anything," McGregor said. Maude came outside to find out what was going on. She held Julia's hand in one of hers, Mary's in the other. She was holding both daughters tight, for they both looked ready to throw themselves at Hannebrink and the soldiers regardless of rifles and bayonets. McGregor went on, "Have you come to put the blindfold over my eyes because of it?"

"Maybe," Hannebrink said, calm still. "Show me what you've done with them."

"Come back in here with me," McGregor told him, motioning toward the barn. Hannebrink followed. So did the American soldiers. So did Maude and Julia and Mary. McGregor pointed here and there along the wall and at the hayloft and up among the rafters. "You'll see where I've done my repairs."

"Davis—Mathison—Goldberg." Hannebrink told off three men. "Check those. See if they're fresh work."

"Look to be, sir," one of the men said after he'd clambered up to inspect McGregor's carpentry at close range. The other two soon called agreement.

"All right, Mr. McGregor," Hannebrink said, easygoing, in nothing like a hurry. "Say you used a pound or two of nails there. By what I hear, you bought more like twenty pounds. Where's the rest of 'em?"

"On my workbench here." McGregor pointed again. "Still in the box Henry Gibbon used for 'em."

Captain Hannebrink strode over. He picked up a couple of the nails. "New, all right," he said. "Still have that shine to 'em." He let them clank back in among their fellows, then picked up the box. He nodded again. "Heft is about right, figuring in what you would have used.

Good enough, Mr. McGregor. Thank you."

"Want to tell me what this is all about?" McGregor asked.

"No." Without another word, Hannebrink and the U.S. soldiers left the barn, got into their motorcars, and drove back toward Rosenfeld. Maude started to say something. McGregor set a hand on her shoulder and shook his head. She took their daughters back into the house. He wondered if she'd ask him questions later. She didn't do that, either.

A day or two later, he had to go into town again himself. He stopped by the post office to see if Wilfred Rokeby had any stamps but those larcenous semipostals. Rokeby didn't, but he did have news: "The Knights are in more trouble with the Yanks," he said.

"What now?" McGregor asked. "Haven't been off the farm since I was here last, and nobody much comes and visits. People figure bad luck rubs off, seems like."

"Bomb in the roadway near their land killed the man who stepped on it last week, and three more besides," Rokeby answered. "Good many hurt, too. Yanks say they planted it because of their boy."

"Stupid to set a bomb by your own house," McGregor remarked, "but the Knights have never been long on brains, you ask me. Biddy's always going around gossiping about this and that, and Jack's no better. Anybody who runs on at the mouth that way, you have to figure there's no sense behind it."

"That's so." Rokeby nodded vigorously, but not vigorously enough to disturb the greased perfection of his hair. "They would even talk to the Americans now and then, people say, in spite of what happened to their boy."

"Really?" McGregor sucked on his pipe. "I have to tell you I hadn't heard that." Because he had to tell it to Rokeby didn't make it true. As he'd calculated, Captain Hannebrink had been so interested in those new nails that he hadn't thought buying new ones meant McGregor could get rid of old ones. And a farm was a big place. You could search it from now till doomsday and never find dynamite and fuse and blasting caps, even if they were there—which some of them, at any rate, weren't, not any more. Some of the Yankees blown to hell and gone, the runny-mouthed Knights in hot water—very hot water, he hoped—with the occupying authorities…Two revenges at once wasn't bad. "No, I hadn't heard that," McGregor repeated. "Too bad."

Nellie Semphroch set fresh coffee in front of the Confederate colonel. “I do thank you, ma’am,” he said, courteous as the Rebs were most of the time. Once the words had passed his lips, though, he might have forgotten she existed. Turning back to the other officers at the table, he took up where he’d left off: “If we have to leave this town, we ought to treat it the way the Romans treated Carthage.”

The classical allusion meant nothing to Nellie. The officers to whom he was speaking understood it, though. “Leave no stone atop another?” a lieutenant-colonel said.

Another colonel nodded. “We’ll give the damnyankees a desert to come home to, not a capital. This place has been frowning down on the Confederacy as long as we’ve been independent.”

“Too right it has,” said the first colonel, the one to whom Nellie had given the new cup of coffee. “Let them rule from Philadelphia. Washington was a capital made before we saw how we were treated in that union.”

“Tyrants they were, tyrants they are, tyrants they shall ever be,” the second colonel agreed. “The White House, the Capitol, all the departments—dynamite them all, I say. The Yankees only maintained their presence here after the War of Secession to irk us.”

Nellie glanced over toward Edna, hoping her daughter was listening as the Rebel officers calmly discussed the destruction of the capital of the United States. Edna, however, was casting sheep’s eyes at Lieutenant Kincaid. *Why should she care?* Nellie thought bitterly. *She’s got a Rebel officer for a fiancé.*

The lieutenant-colonel said, “Too bad about the Washington Monument. No matter what we did with the rest of the town, I would have left that standing. Washington was a Virginian, after all.”

“Fortunes of war,” the colonel said. “Can’t be helped—it was in the way of our barrage when the war started, and of the damnyankees’ fire once we forced an entrance into the city.”

“That sort of destruction is one thing,” the lieutenant-colonel said. “But deliberately wrecking the monuments as we retire may cost us Yankee retribution elsewhere.”

For a wonder, that made both colonels thoughtful. Before the war,

the arrogant Rebs wouldn't have worried about how the USA might respond to anything they did. Now—Now Nellie had a hard time holding on to her polite mask. Now they'd learned better.

Edna got up and filled Nicholas Kincaid's coffee cup. She didn't charge him, which annoyed Nellie but about which she could say nothing. She didn't want Edna to marry the Confederate lieutenant—she didn't want Edna marrying any man—but she knew she couldn't do anything to stop it. She consoled herself by thinking that marrying Kincaid might get Edna out of Washington before the United States battered their way back into the city. Had Nellie had some way of escaping the bloodbath that likely lay ahead, she would have taken it.

She did have a way to escape the coffeehouse, if only for a little while. "I'm going across the street to see Mr. Jacobs," she said to Edna. "Take care of everybody while I'm gone, would you, dear?"

"All right, Ma," Edna said sulkily. She no doubt suspected that her mother wanted to keep her from spending so much time with Nicholas Kincaid. She was right, too, but she couldn't do anything about it.

The bell above Jacobs' door jangled when Nellie came in. The cobbler looked up from the boot he was resoling. "Why, hello, Nellie," he said, as if his fondest wish had just been realized. "How good to see you this morning."

"Good to see you, too, Hal," Nellie said, a little stiffly. She was still nervous about having let him kiss her once, and even more nervous about having liked it. But that didn't matter, or didn't matter much. Business was business, and wouldn't keep. "You remember how I told you not so long ago that the Rebs would do anything to try and hang onto Washington, on account of they reckoned it was their capital by rights, and not ours?"

"Yes, of course I remember that," Jacobs said, peering at her through his spectacles. Then he took them off, blinked a couple of times as he set them on the counter, and looked up at her again. He smiled. "That's better."

Nellie said, "I think they're starting to get the idea they can't keep Washington no matter what they do. The USA won't get it back in one piece, sounds like." She told the shoemaker what the Confederate officers had been discussing in the coffeehouse.

Jacobs clucked reproachfully. "This is foolish wickedness," he said. "No other word for it, Widow Sem—Nellie. I promise you, I will make

certain it is known, if you happen to be the first to have heard of it. Your country owes you a great debt if we can use this knowledge to keep the CSA from carrying out such a vile scheme."

"That would be good, I guess," she said. "If they want to show they're grateful, they can keep from shelling this part of town when their guns get into range."

"Yes, I also think this would be an excellent reward," Jacobs said with a smile. But that smile did not last long. He coughed before continuing, "Widow Semphroch, I am glad you came by today, because there is something of importance I need to take up with you."

"What's that?" she asked. It was something important, or he wouldn't have returned to the formality with which they'd once addressed each other.

He coughed again. It wasn't something he wanted to bring up, plainly. At last, he said, "Widow Semphroch, what have you done to Bill Reach?"

"I haven't done anything to him, except tell him to stay away," Nellie answered. "You know I don't want anything to do with him." She cocked her head to one side. "Why?"

Even more reluctantly than before, he said, "Because he is acting—strangely—these days. I believe he is drinking far too much for a man in his position. He often speaks of you, but gives no details."

Thank God for that, Nellie thought. Aloud, she said, "The last time I saw him, I thought he'd been drinking," which was politer than, *He stank of rotgut*.

"If there is anything you can do for him—" Jacobs began.

"No, Mr. Jacobs. I am sorry, but there is nothing." Now Nellie threw up the chilling wall of formality. "Good day. I will call again another time." She left the cobbler's shop without a backwards glance, and without giving Jacobs the chance to say a word.

She supposed she should have been warned. But all she wanted to do with Bill Reach was put him out of her mind, and so she did not pay as much heed to Jacobs as she might have done. Two evenings later, Reach threw open the door to the coffeehouse and lurched inside.

Nellie was in back of the counter, pouring coffee, making sandwiches, and frying ham steaks and potatoes. Edna was out among the customers: the usual crowd of Confederate officers, the sleek Washingtonians who collaborated with them, and a sprinkling of fancy women who collaborated more intimately with both Rebels and local cat's-paws.

All of them stared at Bill Reach, who looked even more disreputable than usual. By the boneless way he stood, Nellie knew he'd had his head in a bottle all day, or maybe all week. His eyes held a wild gleam she didn't like. She started out toward the front of the coffeehouse, certain he was going to do something dreadful.

She hadn't taken more than a step and a half before he did it. "Little Nell!" he said loudly—but he wasn't looking at Nellie at all. He was looking at Edna, so drunk he couldn't tell daughter from mother. "Makes me feel young just to see you, Little Nell, same as it always did." Edna was less than half his age—no wonder seeing her made him feel young. A leer spread over his face.

"Get out of here!" Nellie shouted, but he was too drunk, too intent on what was going on inside his own mind, to hear her.

And Edna, after a glance back at her mother, a glance filled with both curiosity and malice, smiled at him and said, "What do you want tonight, Bill?"

It wasn't quite the right question, but it was close enough. Over Nellie's cry of horror, Reach pulled a quarter-eagle out of his pocket, slapped the gold coin down on a tabletop as if it were a nightstand, and said, "Tonight? Well, we'll go upstairs like always"—he pointed to the stairway leading up to Nellie and Edna's rooms, which was just visible from where he stood swaying—"and then you can suck on me for a while before you get on top. I'm feelin'—*hic!*—lazy, if you know what I mean. I'll give you an extra half a buck all your own if you're good."

"Get him out of here!" Nellie screamed.

A couple of Confederate officers were already rushing toward Bill Reach. They landed on him like a falling building, pummeling him and flinging him out into the street with shouts of, "Get your foul mouth out of here!" "Never show your face here again or you're a dead man!" One of them noticed the quarter-eagle. He threw it out after Reach, then wiped his hand on a trouser leg, as if to clean it of

contamination. That done, he bowed first to Edna and then to Nellie. “You tell us if that cur comes back, ladies. We’ll fix him for good if he dares show his ugly face in here again.”

Nellie nodded. Her customers worked hard to show good breeding by pretending nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Edna didn’t say a thing. Edna didn’t need to say a thing. Whatever else she was, Edna was no fool. She could figure out why Bill Reach thought he had any business saying those filthy things to Nellie—or to someone he thought was Nellie. The only possible answer was the right one.

Edna glanced back at Nellie again. Her mother could not meet her eye. That told her everything that still needed telling. Nellie hung her head. She’d tried to stay respectable for her daughter’s sake. That was over. Everything was over now.

Over the past couple of winters, Lucien Galtier had discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that he liked chopping wood. The work took him back to his youth, to the days before he was conscripted. He’d swung an axe then, swung it and swung it and swung it.

After he came back from the Army, the farm had burned far more coal than wood. The Americans, though, were niggardly with their coal rations, as they were niggardly with everything else. He was glad old Blaise Chrétien, only a couple of miles away, had a woodlot. It made the difference between shivering through the winter and getting by comfortably enough.

Chopping wood also kept him warm while he was doing it. Down came the axe—*whump!* Two chunks of wood leaped apart. “Ah, if only those were Father Pascal’s head and his fat neck,” Lucien said wistfully.

His son Georges was walking by then. Georges had a way of walking by whenever he had the chance to create mischief. “You want to be careful, Papa,” he called. “Otherwise you’ll end up like Great-uncle Léon after Grandfather took off his little finger with the axe when they were boys.”

“You scamp, *tais-toi,*” Lucien retorted. “Otherwise your backside will end up like your grandfather’s after he took off Léon’s finger with the axe.”

Georges laughed at him. Georges had a right to laugh, too. He was sixteen now, and almost half a head taller than his father. If Lucien tried to give him a licking, who would end up drubbing whom was very much in doubt. Lucien thought he would win even yet—you learned tricks in the Army that simple roughhousing never taught you. But he didn't want to have to find out.

Up went the axe. Down it came. More wood split. Marie would be happy with him. "No, she cannot call me lazy today," he said. Some people, he had seen, worked simply for the sake of working. A lot of English-speaking Canadians were like that, and Americans, too. Fewer Quebecois had the disease. Lucien worked when something needed doing. When it didn't (which, on a farm, was all too seldom), he was content to leave it alone.

He wiped his forehead with the back of his sleeve. He'd worked up a good sweat, though it was chilly out here. The day was clear, though, the sunshine streaming down as if it were spring. Only the slightly deeper blue of the sky argued otherwise.

Up in the sky, something buzzed like a mosquito out of season. He stopped chopping for a little while and peered upward, trying to spot the aeroplane—no, aeroplanes: a flight of them, droning north. His mouth twisted. "I hope all of you are shot down," he said, shaking his fist at the heavens. "This is our patrimony, not yours. You have no business taking it from us."

Afterwards, he blamed the American aeroplanes for what happened when he went back to chopping. They had, after all, broken the smooth rhythm he'd established before they disturbed him. And if he hadn't blamed them, he would have blamed Georges instead. Better to put it on his enemy's head than on his own flesh and blood.

He knew the stroke was wrong the second the axehead started on its downward arc. He tried to twist it aside; in the end, he didn't know whether that made things better or worse. The axe hit the piece of wood on the chopping block a glancing blow and then bit into his left leg.

"Tabernac!" he hissed. The blade had a red edge when he pulled it free. Blood started running down his calf into his shoe. It was warm on what had been cold skin. "Ah, *mauvais tabernac*."

The axe had sliced into meat, not bone. That was the only good thing he could say about the wound. He started to throw the axe aside

so he could hobble to the farmhouse, but held onto the tool instead. That leg didn't want to bear much weight, and the axe handle made a stick to take it instead.

Marie let out a small shriek when he made it inside. "It is not so bad," he said, hoping it was not so bad. "Put a bandage on it, and then I will go out and finish what I have to do."

"You will go nowhere today," she said, grabbing for a rag. "You should be ashamed, bleeding on my clean floor."

"Believe me, I regret the necessity more than you do," he said.

She got off his shoe and sock and pulled up his trouser leg. "This is not good," she said, examining the wound. He did not want to look at it himself while she worked. He had not a qualm about slaughtering livestock, but his own blood made him queasy. "It is bleeding right through the bandage," she told him. "A cloth will not be enough for this, Lucien. It wants stitching, or heaven knows when it will close."

"That is nonsense," he said. Even as he spoke, though, the two raw edges of the wound slipped against each other. His stomach lurched. He felt dizzy, a little lightheaded.

Firmly, Marie said, "*J'ai raison*, Lucien. I have sewn up a cut hand once or twice, but I do not think I should sew this. It is too long and too deep. I think you should go to the American hospital, and let them do a proper job of putting you back together."

The mere idea of going to the hospital was enough to restore her husband to himself. "No," he said. "No and no and no. It was bad enough that the Americans took my land, took land in this family since before the battle on the Plains of Abraham, took my patrimony for their own purposes. To use this hospital, to acknowledge it is there: this is a humiliation that cannot be borne. Sew it yourself."

"If you do not acknowledge the hospital, why does Nicole work there?" Marie asked. "If you do not acknowledge the hospital, why have you drunk applejack with Dr. O'Doull three times in the past month? Why have you probably got one of his cigars in your pocket even now?"

Galtier opened his mouth to give her the simple, logical explanation to the paradoxes she propounded. Nothing came out. His wits, he thought, were discommoded because of the wound. He told her that instead.

She set her hands on her hips. “Then, foolish man, it is time to get the wound seen to, *n’est-ce pas*? You will come with me.”

Go with her he did, still using the axe as a stick and with his other arm around her shoulder. Even with such help, he had to stop and rest three or four times before they got to the hospital. When they did, one of the workmen there tried to turn them away: “This place is for Americans, not you damn Canucks.”

“Hold on, Bill,” a nurse said. “That’s Nicole’s father. We’ll take care of him. What happened to you?” The last was to Galtier.

“Axe—cutting wood.” Remembering English was hard.

“Come on in,” the nurse said. “I’ll get Dr. O’Doull. He’ll do a proper job of patching you up.” She pointed to the door, maybe seeing that Marie had no English.

At the door, Lucien ordered his wife home. “They will help me the rest of the way,” he told her, pointing to the nurse and the workman. When she protested, he said, “Some of what is here, you should not see.” He knew what war looked like. She didn’t, not really. He wanted to keep it that way.

In English and in horrible French, the people from the hospital told her the same thing. She was still protesting when an ambulance skidded to a stop in front of the hospital. The driver and an attendant carried in a man on a stretcher. A bloody blanket lay over the lower part of his body; it was obvious he’d lost a leg. Marie abruptly turned and walked back toward the farmhouse.

The first thing Lucien noticed inside the hospital was how warm it was. The Americans did not have to stint on coal. The second thing he noticed was the smell. Part of it was sharp and medicinal: the top layer, so to speak. Under it lay faint odors he knew from the barnyard—blood and dung and, almost but not quite undetectable, a miasma of bad meat.

“You wait here,” the nurse told him, pointing to a bench. “I’ll get the doctor to see you.”

“Merci,” he said, his injured leg stretched out straight in front of him. A couple of soldiers, young men hardly older than Charles, his older son, sat there, too. The wounded man who’d been brought in on the stretcher wasn’t in sight. They were probably working on him already.

One of the soldiers asked, “You speak English, pal?” At Lucien’s nod, the youngster asked, “You get that from a shell?” He pointed to the wound.

“No, from to chop the wood.” Lucien gestured to eke out his words. The American nodded in turn. Seeing him polite, Lucien asked, “And you—what have you?”

“Flunked my shortarm inspection,” the young soldier answered, flushing. That didn’t mean anything to Lucien. The Yank noticed. “This hoor up in Rivière-du-Loup, she gave me the clap,” he explained. Lucien had heard that phrase in his own Army days. Inside, he laughed. He had a more honorable wound than the American.

“Well, well, what have we here?” That was good French, from the mouth of Dr. Leonard O’Doull. He wore a white coat with a few reddish stains on it. Looking severely at Lucien, he said, “*Monsieur* Galtier, if you want to visit me here, it is not necessary to do yourself an injury first.”

“I shall bear that in mind, thank you,” Lucien said dryly. “It was, you must believe me, not the reason for which I hurt myself.”

“Of that I have no doubt,” O’Doull replied. He undid just enough of the bandage to see how big the wound was, and whistled softly when he did. “Yes, you were wise to come.”

“It was my wife’s idea,” Galtier said.

“Then you were wise to listen to her. As long as one in the family is wise, things go well. I shall have to show you how neatly I can sew.” He turned and spoke to a nurse in English too rapid for Lucien to follow. She nodded and hurried off.

“I am glad you are the one to help me,” the farmer said.

“I speak French,” O’Doull answered, “and you are the father of my friend.” Did he hesitate a little before that last word? Lucien couldn’t tell. O’Doull went on, “This is a duty and an honor both, then.” The nurse came back with a tray full of medical paraphernalia. The doctor went on, “It is an honor that will be painful for you, though, *monsieur*. I am going to give you an injection to keep you from getting lockjaw. This will not hurt much now, but may make you sore and sick later. We must roll up your sleeve—”

Next to the fire in Galtier’s leg, the injection was a fleabite. Then

O'Doull said, "And now we must disinfect the wound. You understand? We must keep it from rotting, if we can." Lucien nodded. He'd seen hurts go bad.

O'Doull poured something that smelled almost like applejack into the wound. Galtier gasped and bit his lip and crossed himself. If the wound was a fire, O'Doull had just poured gasoline on it. *"'Osti,"* the farmer said weakly. Tears blurred his vision.

"I do regret it very much, but it is a necessity," O'Doull said. Lucien managed to nod. "Now to sew it up," the doctor told him.

Before O'Doull could get to work with needle and thread, another nurse came in. That was how Galtier thought of her till she exclaimed, "Papa!"

"Oh, *bonjour,* Nicole," he said. He'd seen her in the white-and-gray nurse's uniform with the Red Cross on the right breast before, of course, but here he'd looked at the uniform instead of the person inside it. Embarrassed, he muttered, "The foolish axe slipped."

"Nothing that can't be fixed," O'Doull said, fitting fat thread to a large needle. "Do hold still, if you'd be so kind. Oh, very good. I have seen soldiers, M. Galtier, who gave far more trouble with smaller wounds."

"I have been a soldier," Lucien said quietly. He counted the sutures: twenty-one. O'Doull bandaged the wound thicker and more tightly than Marie had done. Lucien dipped his head. *"Merci beaucoup."*

"Pas de quoi," O'Doull answered. "I will give you a week's supply of sterile wound dressings. If it's still oozing after that much time, come in and see me and we will disinfect it again. Let your sons do the work for a while. They think they're men now. Work will show whether or not they are right. We'll take you home in an ambulance, if you like."

"No," Lucien said. "Marie will think I have died."

"Ah. Well, let me get you a proper walking stick, then." O'Doull did that himself. The stick with which he returned was so severely plain, it was obviously government issue. That the U.S. government manufactured large numbers of walking sticks for the anticipated use of wounded men said more plainly than words what sort of war this was.

But, as Lucien made his slow, hobbling way home, he despised the

Americans less than he had before. Almost everyone at the hospital had been good to him, even though he was a civilian, and an enemy civilian at that. No one had asked him for a penny. He was not used to feeling anything but scorn for the occupiers, but he prided himself on being a just man. “It could be,” he said, slowly, wonderingly, “that they are—that some of them are—human beings after all.”

“I wish Pa would come home again,” George Enos, Jr., said.

“Me, too!” Mary Jane said loudly. She didn’t say *no* as much as she had when she’d first turned two, for which Sylvia Enos heartily thanked God. Now her daughter tried to imitate George, Jr., in everything she did. Most of the time, that wasn’t bad at all. Every so often—as when she piddled standing up—it proved unfortunate.

“I wish he would, too, dears,” Sylvia said, and wondered just how much she meant that. No time to worry about it now. “Come on, both of you. We have to get you to Mrs. Coneval, or I’ll be late for work.”

They followed her down the hall to Brigid Coneval’s apartment. Several other children were in there already, and making a racket like a bombardment on the Maryland front.

“A fine mornin’ to you, Mrs. Enos,” Mrs. Coneval said after she’d opened the door. “I’ll see you tonight. Come in, lambs.”

Sylvia went downstairs and headed for the trolley stop. Newsboys hopped up and down on their corners, trying to stay warm. The sun wouldn’t be up for a little while yet, and the air had a wintry snap in it, though Indian summer had lingered till only a few days before.

Nobody was shouting about great naval battles in the Atlantic, nor about a destroyer lost at sea. With the war now in its third year, Sylvia knew how little that meant. A sunken destroyer was the small change of war, hardly worth a headline. Anything might have happened to the *Ericsson*, and she wouldn’t know about it till she found the paragraph on page five.

If she bought a paper at all, that is. These days, she didn’t do that every day, as she had when George was serving on the river monitor. She walked past the newsboys today, too, and stood waiting for the trolley without a *Globe*.

“Men,” she muttered as the streetcar clanged up to the stop. She

threw a nickel in the farebox. An old man stood up to give her his seat. She thanked him, hardly noticing he was of the sex she'd just condemned for existing.

She wished George had been either a better person or a better liar. She would have preferred the first, but the other might have done in a pinch. For him not to have the need to visit a whore (*and a nigger whore at that,* she thought, appalled by his lack of taste as well as his lack of judgment) would have been best. If he had gone and done it, she wished she'd never found out.

Actually, he had gone, but he hadn't quite done it. That didn't make things any better. How was she supposed to trust him now? (That he wouldn't have been worth trusting if he hadn't told her about going to the whore never occurred to her.) When he wasn't in her sight but was ashore, what would he be doing? "Men," she said again.

She was so lost in her angry reverie, she almost missed the stop in front of the canning plant. The trolley was about to start up again before she leapt from her seat and hurried out the door. The driver gave her a reproachful look. She glared at him. He was a man, too, even if he had a white mustache.

She punched in and hurried toward her machine. Isabella Antonelli was already at hers. "Good morning, Sylvia," she said with a smile that did not match the mourning she still wore.

"Hello, Isabella," Sylvia answered as she made sure the machine had plenty of labels in the feeder and the paste reservoir was full. That done, she really noticed the smile she had seen, and smiled back at her friend. "You're looking cheerful this morning." Her own smile was mischievous. "Did you put a little brandy in your coffee before you came to work?"

The capitalists who ran the canning plant hadn't spent any more than the bare minimum on lamps. The ceiling was high, the bulbs dim. And Isabella Antonelli was as swarthy as any other Italian, which made her seem very dark indeed to fair-skinned Sylvia. Nevertheless, she blushed. It was unmistakable.

Sylvia waggled a finger at her. "You *did* put some brandy in your coffee."

"No such thing," Isabella said. Maybe she hadn't. Sniffing, Sylvia couldn't smell any brandy, but they weren't standing face to face with each other, either, and the whole plant reeked of fish anyhow. But

Isabella Antonelli had done something or other. What? How to find out without embarrassing her further?

Before Sylvia could come up with answers to either of those questions, the production line, which had shut down for shift changeover, started up again. Here came the cans. They came fast enough, nothing else mattered. Sylvia began pulling the three levers that carried them through her machine, gave each one a couple of girdling squirts of paste, and put on the label bearing a fish that looked much more like a fancy tuna than the mackerel the cans contained.

Pull, step, pull, step, pull, back to the beginning, pull, step…It was going to be a good day. Sylvia could feel that already. A good day was a day she got through barely noticing she'd been at the plant at all. On bad days, her shift seemed to last for years.

Here came Mr. Winter, limping up the line, a cigar clamped between upper and lower teeth. "Good morning, Mrs. Enos," the foreman said, almost without opening his mouth. "How are you today?"

"Fine, thank you," she answered, politely adding, "And you?"

"Couldn't be better," Mr. Winter said. His mouth still didn't open wide, but its corners moved upwards. He was happier than she'd seen him in a good long while. After a moment, he returned to business: "Machine behaving?"

"Yes—see for yourself." Sylvia hadn't missed a lever while talking with the foreman. "The action feels smoother than it has."

"They oiled it last night. About time," he said. After a brief pause, he went on, "Hope your husband's all right."

"So do I," Sylvia answered, despite everything more truthfully than not.

"God's own miracle he was saved off the *Punishment*," Mr. Winter said.

"I suppose that's true." Sylvia had all she could do not to laugh in the aging veteran's face. George had gone up on the riverbank to get drunk and commit adultery. The God she worshiped wasn't in the habit of manufacturing miracles of that shape.

“God’s own miracle,” the foreman repeated. He, of course, didn’t know all the details. Sylvia wished she didn’t know all the details, either.

Nodding to her once more, Mr. Winter went on up the line to see how Isabella Antonelli and her machine were. Over the noise of the line and of her own machine, Sylvia couldn’t hear much of what the two of them said to each other. She could see, though: could see the foreman’s hand rest lightly upon Isabella’s for a moment, could see the way the widow’s body bent toward his as a flower bends toward the sun.

Sylvia automatically worked her machine. She stared at her friend, stared and stared. She was not a blind woman. When things went on around her, she noticed them. If Mr. Winter and Isabella Antonelli weren’t lovers, she would have forfeited a week’s pay.

I should have known what kind of smile that was, she thought, annoyed at herself for not recognizing it on Isabella’s face. She’d worn it often enough herself, when things with George had been good. Mr. Winter’s smile wasn’t quite the usual large male leer, but the cigar would have fallen out of his mouth if it had been.

Pull, step, pull, step…She wanted to see if Isabella would say anything at lunch. All of a sudden, the day that had been moving swiftly ceased to move at all. At half past twelve, the line finally stopped. The weather was too raw for Sylvia and Isabella to eat outside, as they had earlier in the year. They sat down together on a bench not too far from one of the handful of steam radiators the factory boasted.

Isabella solved Sylvia’s problem for her by speaking first. She blushed again as she said, “I saw you watching me.”

Sylvia’s face heated, but she nodded. “Er—well, yes.”

“He is not a bad man. I have said this since he and I were only friends.” Isabella Antonelli tossed her head, as if defying Sylvia to make something of that. Sylvia only nodded again. That seemed to mollify her friend, who went on, “He has been lonely for years now, since his wife died. I know what being lonely means—*Dio mio,* how I know. Believe me when I tell you not being lonely is better.”

Sylvia imagined lame old Mr. Winter touching her, caressing her. She didn’t know whether to be revolted or burst out laughing. But she was lonely herself a good deal of the time these days, with George

aboard the *Ericsson*…and when he had been home, had she been anything more than a piece of meat for him, a more convenient piece of meat at the moment than a Negro harlot? Did she want him to love her, or to leave her alone? For the life of her, she didn't know.

And so, very slowly, she nodded. "You may be right after all, Isabella," she said. "You may be right."

Jonathan Moss had reached that pleasant stage of intoxication where his nose and the top part of his cheeks were going numb, but he was still thinking clearly—or pretty clearly, anyhow. As he generally did at such times, he stared into his whiskey glass with bemused respect, astonished the amber fluid could work such magic on the way he felt.

Dud Dudley stared around the officers' lounge. "What we need here," he declared, "are some women."

"I'll drink to that," Moss said, and did. "They ought to bring some up from the States, as a matter of fact. All the Canuck gals treat us like we're poisonous." That wasn't strictly true; every now and then a pilot would find a complaisant young woman in Ontario. Moss never had, though.

His flight leader nodded vigorously. "There's an idea!" Dudley said. "They can call them something that sounds as if it's military supplies, so the bluenoses won't have conniptions. 'Tool mufflers,' maybe. Yeah, tool mufflers. How do you like them apples?"

It seemed funny and then some to Moss. "We ought to give Hardshell a requisition for 'em, start it going through the Quartermaster Corps. 'Yeah, Fred, we need another couple dozen tool mufflers on the Toronto front.'" He spoke into an imaginary telephone. "'Split 'em even between blondes, brunettes, and redheads.'"

He would have gone on embroidering that theme for quite a while, but an orderly poked his head into the officers' lounge, spotted him, and brightened. "Lieutenant Moss, sir?" he said. "Major Pruitt needs to see you right away, sir."

"I'm coming." Moss got to his feet, a process that proved more complicated than he'd expected. "I'm coming. Lead on, Henry."

Henry led on. As Moss left, Dudley called after him: “Requisition a couple extra redheaded tool mufflers for me, pal.” They both laughed. Henry the orderly grinned in a nervous sort of way, not getting the joke.

Major Shelby Pruitt raised an eyebrow when he saw the state Moss was in. That was all he did. The weather was too lousy to let aeroplanes get off the ground, so the pilots had little to do but sit around and drink. The salute Moss gave him was crisp enough, at any rate. “Reporting as ordered, sir.”

“At ease,” Pruitt said. He passed Moss a little velvet box with a snap lid. “Here. As long as you’re celebrating, you can have something *to* celebrate.” Moss opened the box. Two sets of a captain’s twin silver bars sparkled in the lamplight. He stared at them, then at Pruitt. The squadron commander grinned at him. “Congratulations, Captain Moss.”

Moss said the first thing that popped into his head: “What about Dud, sir?”

He made Hardshell Pruitt smile. “That does you credit. His are in the works. They should have come in with yours, but there’s some sort of paperwork foul-up. I’d have saved yours to give them to the both of you at the same time, but I can’t. You’re both getting shipped out, and to different places, and they’ve laid on a motorcar for you in an hour. As soon as you leave here, go pack up what you have to take with you. The rest of your junk will follow you sooner or later, maybe even by the end of the war.”

Things were moving too fast for Moss to follow. He thought—he hoped—they would have been moving too fast for him to follow had he been sober. “Sir, could you explain—?” he said plaintively.

“You’re a captain now.” Pruitt’s voice was crisp, incisive. He used it as a surgeon uses a scalpel: to slice through the fat to the meat. “You’ll be a flight leader for certain, maybe even a squadron leader if casualties keep on the way they’ve been going.”

“We keep flying Martins against these Pups, sir, we’ll have a lot of casualties,” Moss said with conviction.

“I understand that,” Major Pruitt answered. “Well, it just so happens the Kaiser’s come through for us. Wright is building a copy of the Albatros two-decker; a German cargo submarine finally made it across the Atlantic with plans and with a complete disassembled aeroplane.

The orders detach you to train on the new machine."

"That's—bully, sir," Jonathan Moss breathed. "Can we really fight the limeys in this new bus?"

"Everybody seems to think so," the squadron leader answered. "The copied Albatros isn't quite as fast as the Pup, but it'll climb quicker and it's just about as maneuverable. And we'll have a hell of a lot more of them than the limeys and Canucks will have Pups."

"Good—we'll make 'em have kittens, then," Moss said. When sober, he was sobersided. He wasn't sobersided now.

Hardshell Pruitt also grinned. "Go pack your bags, Captain. Pack the undowithoutables and don't worry about anything else. I want you back here at 2130, ready to move out for London. Here are your written orders."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." Moss looked at the pocket watch he wore strapped to his wrist. Like a lot of fliers, he'd started doing that because of the difficulty of groping for a watch while wearing a bulky flight suit. Learning at a glance what time it was had proved so convenient, he wore the watch on a strap all the time now. "See you in forty-five minutes, sir."

He seemed to float several feet above the muddy ground as he made his way back to the tent he shared with Dudley and with Phil Eaker and Thad Krazewski, who'd taken the place of Orville Thornley, who'd taken the place of Tom Innis. A match got a kerosene lantern going. The space around his cot was as full of junk as more than a year's settling in and an easygoing view of military regulations would allow.

One green-gray canvas duffel bag didn't seem enough. He wondered if he could lay hands on a White truck, or maybe two. He shrugged. He'd manage, one way or another. And whatever he left behind wouldn't go to waste. Some would, as Major Pruitt had said, follow him wherever he went. The other fellows in the flight were welcome to the rest.

He heard Eaker and Krazewski coming. Eaker said, "Jonathan'll be glad we sweet-talked the cook out of a corned-beef sandwich for him. I've never seen anybody as keen for the stuff as he is."

The two young fliers came into the tent and stared. Grinning, Moss said, "I will be glad for the sandwich, boys. It'll give me something to eat while they take me wherever I'm supposed to go."

“Sir?” they said together, twin expressions of blank surprise on their faces.

Moss wanted to tell them everything. The whiskey in him almost set his mouth working ahead of his brain. He checked himself, though. Saying too much—saying anything, really—wouldn’t be fair to Dud Dudley, who had to stay a while longer because of his botched paperwork.

What Moss did end up saying was, “They’re shipping me out. I’m going into training on a new aeroplane.”

“That’s wonderful, sir,” they exclaimed, again in unison. Krazewski clapped his hands together. With his wide cheekbones, blue, blue eyes, and shock of wheat-blond hair, he would have made a gorgeous woman. He made a hell of a handsome man, and the Canucks and limeys hadn’t managed to kill him yet. He asked, “Does Lieutenant Dudley know, sir?”

That’s Captain *Dudley*, Moss thought, *but Dud doesn’t know it yet*. “I’ll tell him as soon as I finish packing,” Moss said. He didn’t say anything about all the stuff he wouldn’t be able to pack. His tentmates would go through it soon enough, almost as if he’d died.

He had intended to head for the officers’ lounge as soon as the duffel bag was full. That didn’t happen, because Dud Dudley came in when he was trying to stuff a tin of shaving soap into a bag already full to the point of seam-splitting. “A fine day to you, Captain Moss!” he exclaimed in a voice to which whiskey gave only part of the glee.

He’s heard, Jonathan realized. *Hardshell must have decided he couldn’t keep it a secret*. “A fine day to *you*, Captain Dudley!” he returned. The two men solemnly—well, not so solemnly—shook hands while Eaker and Krazewski gaped all over again.

“Too damn bad we’re going to different aerodromes to train,” Dudley said, which reconfirmed Moss’ guess. The flight leader slapped him on the back. “I’ll miss you, you son of a bitch. We’ve got to look each other up if we both come through this stinking war in one piece.” He scrawled his name and address on a scrap of paper. “Here. This is me.”

Moss found his own scrap and borrowed Dudley’s pen. “And this is me. I’ll miss you, too, Dud. And I’ll miss these two sorry ragamuffins —” At that, the pilots who would stay behind gave him a pair of raspberries. He shook hands with both of them, too, then slung his

duffel bag over his shoulder. He mimed collapsing under the weight, which wasn't far from being true, and tramped back toward Major Pruitt's tent.

A Ford was waiting there for him, the motor running. The driver took the duffel, gave him a reproachful stare at its weight, and tossed it into the automobile. "Hop in, sir," he said. "Off to London."

The drive was less than a delight. The Ford's headlamps were taped so they gave out only a little light; the enemy's aeroplanes would shoot up anything that moved at night. The road would have been bad even had the driver been able to spot all the potholes. Not spotting them meant he and Moss got to fix several punctures along the way. They didn't do better than ten miles an hour, which made a hundred-mile journey seem to take forever.

Dawn was breaking when they finally reached the aerodrome. No one seemed to be expecting Moss, which, after the time he'd had getting there, didn't surprise him at all. "Well," a sergeant said doubtfully, "I guess we'll put you up in Tent 27. Basler!" A private appeared, as if by magic. "Take Captain Moss to Tent 27. He'll fit in there, one way or another." The noncom's face bore a strange sort of smile.

Moss, who hadn't managed to doze in the automobile, was too worn to care what a sergeant thought. The private led him to a green-gray tent distinguishable only by the number stenciled on its side. "Here you are, sir."

"Thanks." Moss went inside. Sure enough, there was a cot with no belongings nearby. The three officers in the tent, who were readying themselves for the day, looked him over. One of them, a tall, thin, good-looking fellow, exclaimed, "Jonathan!"

"Percy!" Moss said. "Percy Stone!" Then he burst out laughing. "Now I know why that billeting sergeant said I belonged here. Moss and Stone, like the old days." He pumped Stone's hand. "Jesus, it's good to see you in one piece, chum."

"It's good to *be* in one piece again," Stone said. He'd been Moss' photographic observer when Moss was still flying two-seaters instead of fighting scouts, and a Canuck had badly wounded him. He pointed to the pilot's insigne on his chest. "You see I've got both wings now."

"Yeah," Moss said enthusiastically. "Between us, we're going to show the Canucks a thing or two." Percy Stone nodded. They shook

hands again.

XX

Every time Abner Dowling walked into the Tennessee farmhouse where General Custer was staying these days, he braced for trouble. Since the First Army had basically stopped moving forward these days, Custer's accommodations hadn't shifted lately, either. That meant Libbie Custer had come down from Kentucky to stay with her husband.

It also meant Custer had to stop paying such avid attention to the pretty, young mulatto housekeeper he'd hired before Libbie came down. The wench, whose name was Cornelia, kept right on cooking and cleaning. Dowling didn't know whether she'd done anything more than that before. He was sure Custer had wanted her to do more, though, and had hoped to convince her to do more. Libbie was sure of that, too, which made the farmhouse into a sort of front of its own.

The illustrious general commanding First Army was in the kitchen eating lunch when Dowling arrived. The tubby major's nostrils twitched appreciatively. Regardless of whether Cornelia was helping Custer forget his years, the wench could cook.

"Why, that damned, lying little slut!" Custer shouted.

Waiting out in the parlor, Dowling jumped in alarm. The worst thing he could think of would have been for Cornelia to go telling Libbie tales. Whether the tales were true or not didn't matter. Libbie would believe them. Custer would deny everything. Libbie wouldn't believe that. By the sound of things, the worst had just happened.

But then, to the adjutant's astonishment, Libbie spoke in soothing tones. Dowling couldn't make out what she said, but she wasn't screaming. Dowling wondered why she wasn't screaming. How many damned lying little sluts besides Cornelia did Custer know? Dowling

was sure Custer would have liked to know a regiment's worth, but what he would have liked wasn't the same as what was so.

A few minutes later, Custer came out of the kitchen, a scowl on his face and a newspaper in his hand. When Dowling saw that, he relaxed. So someone had savaged Custer in the press. The general commanding First Army would rage like a hurricane when a story threatened to tarnish his refulgent image of himself, but that kind of bluster didn't amount to a hill of beans in the long run.

In the short run, putting up with Custer's bad temper was what the War Department paid Dowling to do. As far as he was concerned, Philadelphia didn't pay him enough, but he would have said the same thing had he raked in a million in gold on the first of every month.

"Is something wrong, sir?" he asked now, as if he'd heard nothing from the kitchen and had just chanced to notice the general's frown.

"Wrong?" Custer thundered. "You might possibly say so, Major. Yes, you just might." He flung the paper into Dowling's lap.

Predictably, he'd folded it so the story that had offended him was on top. That way, he could reannoy himself whenever he glanced at it, and stay in a fine hot temper the whole day through. He would have pointed it out to Dowling had his adjutant not spotted it at once.

"Oh, the Socialist candidate in one of those New York City districts giving you a hard time about the Cottontown attack," he said. "Don't take it to heart, sir. It's only politics. Goes to show women can play the game as dirty as men, I suppose."

"What's her name?" Custer demanded. "Hamburger, was that it? I'd like to make hamburger out of her, by Godfrey! Didn't I tell you we needed a victory here to put a muzzle on those miserable, bomb-throwing anarchists?"

"Yes, sir, you did." Dowling spoke with some genuine sympathy, being a Democrat himself. "And I see that Senator Debs—"

But Custer, once he got rolling, would not let even agreement slow him down. "And you were there, weren't you, Major, when General MacArthur came to me with that half-baked plan for attacking southeast before shifting the direction of his advance? I warned him he needed to have more resources than I could afford to commit if that attack had even a prayer for success, but he wheedled and pleaded till I didn't see what I could do but give in. And this is the

thanks we get for it." He reached out and slapped the newspaper onto the floor.

Bending over to pick it up gave Dowling the chance to pull his face straight by the time Custer saw him again. The general commanding First Army often rewrote history so it turned out as he wished it would have, but this was a particularly egregious example.

"General MacArthur did request more resources than you were prepared to provide, yes, sir," Dowling said cautiously.

"That's what I told you," Custer said. It didn't sound that way to Dowling, but arguing about what had happened was a pointless exercise. Trying to keep similar disaster from happening later occasionally even succeeded.

Libbie Custer came out and nodded to Major Dowling. "Did you see the lies they were telling about Autie, Major?" she said, setting a hand on Custer's shoulder. "They're all a pack of shameless jackals, jealous of his fame and jealous of the victories he's won for his country."

George Armstrong Custer was a blowhard. He'd blow hot, and then five minutes later he'd blow cold. Elizabeth Bacon Custer, as far as Dowling had been able to tell, wavered not at all. When she got angry at someone, she stayed angry forever. Some of that anger she aimed at anyone presumptuous enough to criticize her husband in any way. And some of it she aimed at Custer himself. From some of the things she'd said to Dowling, she'd been furious at the famous general for better than forty years.

Long-handled feather duster in hand, Cornelia came out and started cleaning. "Excuse me, Major Dowling, suh," she said when she dusted near him. He nodded and smiled at her. Every time he looked at her—and she was worth looking at—he wondered how the men of the Confederacy reconciled their claims of Negro inferiority and their own mingling of blood with the Negroes in the Confederate States.

He shrugged a tiny shrug his uniform hid. The Rebs didn't need to reconcile anything. They were the masters down here. They could do what they wanted. No. They had been the masters. Despite hard times on the battlefield, the United States were changing things.

Custer, now, Custer looked at Cornelia in exactly the way one of those Rebels might have done. *This is mine,* his eyes seemed to say. *If I want it, all I have to do is reach out and take it*.

Libbie Custer's eyes said something, too. *If you do reach out, George,* they warned, *I'll whack you on the wrist so hard, you'll think you're back in primary school again*. Dowling didn't think the general commanding First Army was going to get away with much, not here, not now.

Having Cornelia go elsewhere was a relief. Tension in the front room went with her, as it did in a front-line bombproof when the barrage shifted to supply dumps farther back. Dowling found himself able to think about the war again. "Do you think we'll be able to accomplish anything worthwhile this winter, sir?" he asked. *Or will we keep on wasting men the way we have been doing?*

"We may have to make the effort, Major," Custer replied. "For the moment, though, however reluctantly, I am accumulating men and matériel to make sure we have reserves and adequate stocks on hand in case we do have to make any mass assaults in the next few months."

Digging a finger in his ear to make sure he'd heard correctly would have been rude. Dowling was tempted, even so. One thing he'd seen over and over again was Custer ignoring reserves and logistics. His gaze slid to Libbie. Brief acquaintance had convinced him she was a hell of a lot smarter than her heroic husband. If she was smart enough to have convinced him of the need to prepare, Dowling was ready to call her a genius.

Custer said, "It's the election, of course. If that snake Debs slithers into the White House, we shall have to go all out to force the CSA to make peace before TR leaves office in March. I want to be ready."

"I—see," Dowling said slowly. Maybe Libbie had put that bug in Custer's ear, but maybe he'd thought of it all by himself. He did pay attention to politics. And maybe word had come down from Philadelphia, quietly recommending buildups all along the line in case the U.S. Army had to try to force the Rebs to yield in the four months between Debs' election and his inauguration.

"Do you know, Major," Custer said, "that back in '84 there was some talk of procuring the presidential nomination for *me*? I was quite the man of the hour, after all. But I had chosen to make the United States Army my life's labor, and I would not resign my commission under any circumstances. I sometimes wonder how things might have turned out had I decided otherwise."

Dowling valiantly didn't say anything. He was convinced

commanding First Army was beyond Custer's capacity. For the life of him, he didn't see why the War Department kept the old warhorse in the saddle instead of putting him out to pasture. Things were going well enough on most fronts that the retirement of an aging lion shouldn't produce any great outcry, no matter how much the public revered Custer's name.

President Custer? There was an idea to make any man who didn't believe things could have been worse for the United States think twice. Even though it hadn't happened—and probably hadn't been so close to happening as Custer asserted now, thirty-two years after the fact—contemplating it was enough to make Dowling…

"Are you well, Major?" Libbie Custer asked sharply. "You look dyspeptic. Maybe the general should send this wench Cornelia over to your quarters to cook for you and bring you back up to snuff."

"I'm sure that won't be necessary, dear," Custer said. "Anyone can see that the good Major Dowling is not off his feed." He chuckled.

Libbie Custer glared at him because he refused to remove the attractive housekeeper from his not very attractive house. Dowling glared at him because he'd called him fat. Dowling knew he was fat. He didn't appreciate being reminded of it.

Oblivious to having angered both people with whom he was conversing, Custer went on, "Now we shall just have to wait until after the seventh. If God be kind, both Senator Debs and this ignorant, vicious Hamburger woman will get the drubbing they so richly deserve. And if the Lord should choose to inflict Debs on us because of our many sins, we shall still have four months in which to redeem ourselves."

Dowling sighed. Agreeing with Custer on anything, even a matter of politics, tempted him to take another look to make sure he wasn't wrong. He hadn't dreamt anything might incline him toward Socialism, but if Custer loathed it, it had to have its good points.

Somebody knocked on the door of Socialist Party headquarters. "Another Western Union boy!" Herman Bruck shouted over the election-night din that filled the place.

Flora Hamburger happened to be standing close to the door. "I'll get

it," she said. Opening the door for a moment would let a little of the tobacco smoke hazing the atmosphere escape. Her own father's pipe was but one among a great many sources of that smoke, as he and the rest of the family had come down with her to learn whether she would be going to Philadelphia when the new Congress convened in January.

But it wasn't another messenger with a fistful of telegrams standing out there in the hall. It was Max Fleischmann, the butcher from downstairs. He carried a tray covered with brown paper. "You people will be hungry," he said. "I've brought up some salami, some bologna, some sausages…"

"You didn't have to do that, Mr. Fleischmann. You didn't have to do that at all. You're a Democrat, for heaven's sake."

"You people—and especially you, Miss Hamburger—you don't let politics get in the way of beings friends," the butcher said. "This is the least I can do to show you I feel the same way."

After that, Flora didn't see what she could do but take the tray. "This is very kind of you," she told the old man, "and if more people felt the way you do, the United States would be a better place to live."

"Getting rid of those Soldiers' Circle goons would be a good start," Fleischmann said. "Well, I hope you win, even if you're not from my party. What do you think of that?"

"I hope I win, too," Flora blurted, which made the butcher smile. He bobbed his head to her and went back downstairs.

She put the tray on a desk near the door. People descended on it as if they hadn't already demolished a spread of cold cuts and pickles and eggs and bread that would have done justice to the free-lunch counter at a fancy saloon. Everyone was eating as if there would be no tomorrow.

Someone else knocked on the door. This time, Maria Tresca got it. This time, it *was* a Western Union messenger. She took the sheaf of flimsy envelopes from him. "New returns!" she shouted. "I have new returns!" Something approaching silence fell.

She started opening envelopes. "Debs leading by seven thousand in Wyoming," she said, and a cheer went up. "The Socialist there is going back to Congress, too, it looks like." Another cheer. She opened a new telegram, and her face fell. "Roosevelt ahead by ten thousand in Dakota."

Groans replaced the applause. Dakota had voted Socialist most of the time since being admitted to the United States. Herman Bruck let out a long sigh and said the thing most of the people in the room had been thinking for some time: “We aren’t going to elect a president this year. The people are too mystified to put aside the war.”

A few party workers called out protests, but most only nodded, as when a doctor delivers a diagnosis grim but expected. “We carried New York,” three people said at the same time, as if that were a consolation prize.

“We aren’t carrying any of the other big states, though,” Bruck said, looking at a map of the USA. “And, now that the returns from west of the Mississippi are coming in, it doesn’t look like we’re going to carry enough of the Midwest and the West to make up for that.”

“Foolishness,” Flora said. She’d been saying the same thing since the beginning of the war. For the life of her, she didn’t understand why more people didn’t feel the same way. “If you have a mine that doesn’t give you any gold, why spend more money on it?”

Along with everyone else in the room, her mother and father, both sisters, and the younger of her two brothers nodded at that. She wished David Hamburger had been there to nod, too. But he was down in Virginia now. That filled Flora with dread. Yossel Reisen had gone down to fight in Virginia, too, and never came back. His little son slept in Sophie’s arms.

A telephone rang. Herman Bruck picked it up. He scribbled numbers on a piece of foolscap, then hung up. “New returns from City Hall,” he announced in a loud, important voice, cutting off Maria’s reading of results from farther away. “Latest returns for our district…Miller, 6,482; Hamburger, 7,912. That’s the biggest lead we’ve had tonight.”

Howls of glee filled the air. Benjamin Hamburger’s pipe sent up smoke signals. He looked over at Flora, smiling broadly around the pipe. “This is a fine country. Never doubt it for a minute. This is a fine country,” he said. “I came here with the clothes on my back and not a thing more, and now I have not a son but a daughter—a daughter, mind you!—in the Congress of the United States.” More cheers rose.

“Angelina would be proud of you,” Maria Tresca said quietly. She added, “And if the results hold, you can keep your brother out of any danger.”

“I can, can’t I?” Flora said in some surprise. The War Department

would likely pay attention to the wishes of any member of Congress, even a young woman from the opposition. The War Department might even pay special attention to her wishes, in the hope that, by doing as she wanted, it could influence her vote on matters pertaining to the war.

And, in making that calculation, the War Department might prove right. All at once, leading by fifteen hundred votes, Flora contemplated the differences between running for office and being in office. The Socialists down in Philadelphia often compromised on issues Party regulars back home would sooner have seen fought to a finish. They'd compromised on war credits back in the summer of 1914, and Flora was far from the only one who wished they hadn't.

Now came her turn in the barrel. Would she have to make deals with the Democratic majority? Could the Socialists and the few surviving Republicans do anything to slow down Teddy Roosevelt's juggernaut?

Then she asked herself another question: if she used her Congressional office to protect David, wasn't she taking for herself one of the privileges of the elite that Socialists from Maine to California decried? But if she didn't do what she could to keep her brother out of harm's way and something (God forbid!) happened to him, how could she ever look at herself again? Was her ideology more important, or her family?

Asking the question gave her the answer. In a sudden burst of insight, it also gave her a clue to something that had puzzled her since the war began: why Socialists the world over, in Germany and Austria-Hungary and England and Canada and France and the USA, and even in unprogressive countries like Russia and the Confederate States, rushed to their nations' colors when ideology should have made them stand together against the madness.

Blood is thicker than water. Was the cause of the nation, of kith and kin, more urgent than the rarefied summons of Socialist egalitarianism? It was a dismal notion, but made an alarming amount of sense.

A Western Union messenger brought her out of her reverie with a new batch of telegrams. When he saw who was taking them from him, he smiled and said, "I hope you get elected."

"Thank you," she said, startled. He was developing his ideological

awareness early on; he wouldn't be able to vote for another six or seven years.

"What's the latest?" four people called at once.

Flora started opening telegrams. "Senator LaFollette is out in front in Wisconsin," she said, which drew cheers. A moment later, she added, "And Senator Debs is sure to carry the presidential race in Indiana; he's leading three to two." Noise filled the Socialist Party offices again. Flora was pleased, too, but if Debs couldn't carry his own home state, what was the point in having him run?

Herman Bruck was studying the map, the slow trickle of incoming returns, and a couple of sheets of paper filled with calculations. "If things go on like this," he announced, "I think we'll pick up about a dozen seats in the House and two, maybe three, in the Senate."

That brought a fresh wave of applause. Bruck's calculations had been pretty good during the Congressional elections of 1914. That made Flora think she could place some confidence in them now.

"Roosevelt repudiated!" somebody shouted. Somebody else let out a real war whoop, almost a Rebel yell.

"It's not enough," Flora said, and, being almost a congresswoman, got instant attention from everyone. "It's not enough," she repeated. "If the people had wanted to repudiate TR, to repudiate him properly, I mean, they would have elected Debs. And another couple of senators and another handful of congressmen—"

"And congresswomen!" Maria Tresca broke in.

"—Aren't enough to matter," Flora went on, as if her friend hadn't spoken. "The Democrats still have a big majority in both houses. TR can jam any bill he likes right down the country's throat, and we can't stop him. There aren't enough progressive Democrats to join us in a united front and keep him out of mischief. We've done something this year—a little something. When 1918 comes, we have to do much more."

She got some applause for that impromptu speech. She also got some thoughtful silence, which struck her as even more important. The Socialist Party had some notion of the shape of this election now. They had to look ahead, to see where they could go next.

A phone rang. Herman Bruck answered it. He waved for quiet,

which meant he was getting fresh returns. After he wrote them down, he shot a fist into the air in triumph. “Miller, 8,211,” he announced. “Hamburger, 10,625. He’ll never come back from that.”

Sarah Hamburger had been sitting, watching election night with interest but without much visible concern. Now, though, deliberately and with great dignity, she got up, walked over to her daughter, and embraced her. Tears ran down the older woman’s cheeks, and the younger one’s as well.

A few minutes later, the telephone rang again. Again, Herman Bruck answered it. After a moment, he waved, put a finger to his lips. Then he waved again, this time for Flora. “It’s Daniel Miller,” he said.

Silence fell in the offices as Flora walked over to the telephone. She took the earpiece from Herman and leaned close to the mouthpiece. “Hello?”

The Democratic appointee to Congress sighed in her ear. “I’m calling to congratulate you, Miss Hamburger,” he said. “The latest returns do seem to show that you have won this seat. That being so, I don’t see much point in wasting everyone’s time by not admitting the obvious.”

“Thank you very much, Congressman Miller,” she said. He was being gracious; she would return the favor. All around her, the Party workers started cheering once more, understanding why Miller had to be calling.

She tried waving them to silence, as Herman Bruck had done. It didn’t work. Now that they’d gained what they worked so long and hard to accomplish, they weren’t going to be quiet for anybody, not even their own candidate. Hearing the racket, Daniel Miller managed a chuckle. “Enjoy it, Miss Hamburger,” he said. “I wish it were mine. If there’s anything I can do to help you in the next couple of months, I’m sure you know how to reach me. Good night.” He hung up.

“He’s conceded,” Flora said, also setting the earpiece back on the hook. She didn’t think any of her colleagues heard her. It didn’t matter. They already knew. So did she. She was going to Congress.

The best thing—Lieutenant Colonel Irving Morrell sometimes thought it was the only good thing—about getting back to General

Staff headquarters was the maps. Nowhere else in all the world could he get a better idea of how the war as a whole was going. Looking at them, one after another, he thought it was going pretty well. War Department cartographers had already amended national boundaries on the maps to show Kentucky as one of the United States.

Captain John Abell came into the map room. Morrell nodded to him. That Abell still *was* a captain filled Morrell with a sense that there might be justice in the world after all, no matter how well life attempted to conceal it.

“Good morning, Lieutenant Colonel Morrell,” Abell said—coolly, as he said everything coolly. That Morrell was now a lieutenant colonel seemed to fill him with a sense that there was no justice in the world.

“Morning,” Morrell agreed. The use of such polite formulas let even men who didn’t care for each other find something safe to say, and no doubt often kept them from going after each other with knives. Morrell didn’t need to look very hard to find something else safe: “With TR on the job for another four years, we’ll have the chance to make these end up looking the way they should.” He waved to the maps.

“So we will,” Abell said. “Debs would have been a disaster.”

“This is already a disaster,” Morrell said. Abell looked at him as if he’d suddenly started speaking Turkish. To the General Staff officer who’d spent the whole war in Philadelphia, the conflict was a matter of orders and telegrams and lines on maps, nothing more. Having almost lost a leg himself, having seen men bleed and heard them scream, Morrell conceived of it in rather more intimate terms. He went on, “It would be an even worse disaster if we dropped it in the middle, though. Then we’d just have to pick it up again in five years, or ten, or fifteen at the most.”

“There is, no doubt, some truth in that.” Abell sounded relieved, at least to the degree he ever sounded much like anything. “We have the tools, and we can finish the job.”

“Hope so, anyhow,” Morrell said. “The Canadians are in a bad way, and that’s a fact. If we knock them out of the war, that will let us pull forces south and give it to the CSA with both barrels.”

“If the Canadians had any sense, they would have long since seen they were fighting out of their weight.” Abell scowled at the situation maps of Ontario and Quebec. “They’re as irrational as the Belgians.”

Morrell shrugged. “They’re patriots, same as we are. If the Belgians had rolled over, our German friends would long since have got to Paris. If the Canadians had rolled over, we wouldn’t just be in Richmond—we’d be in Charleston and Montgomery by now.”

“I believe you’re right about that, sir.” A light kindled in Abell’s pale eyes. “We may get there yet, in spite of everything.”

“Yes,” Morrell said, and the word sounded…hungry. “We’ve owed the Rebs for a long time, and now, maybe, we can finally pay them back.”

Abell smiled. So did Morrell. They distrusted each other, being as different as two men could be while both wearing the uniform of the United States. But no matter how different they were, they shared the U.S. loathing for the Confederate States of America.

“Two generations of humiliation,” Abell said dreamily. “Two generations of those drawling bastards telling us what to do, and giving us orders out of the barrel of a gun. Two generations of their hiding behind England’s skirts, and France’s, knowing we couldn’t fight them and their friends all at the same time. We tried it once, and it didn’t work. But we have friends of our own now, so the Confederates have to try to take us on by themselves this time, and it’s turning out to be a harder job.”

Morrell walked over to the map that showed how things stood on the Maryland front. The cartographers had left on the map the Confederate advance to the Susquehanna, as if it were the high-water mark of a flood. And so, in a way, it had been—if the Rebs had got to the Delaware instead, the war would look a lot different now.

But that high-water mark was not what had drawn Morrell’s attention. These days, western Maryland was cleared of the invaders. One day soon, U.S. forces would cross the Potomac and carry the war into the Confederate States. Fortunes changed, and so did the enemy’s responses. Thoughtfully, he said, “I wonder how much trouble their nigger troops are going to cause.”

“That is the wild card,” Abell admitted. “Those black units will be riddled with Reds, so we can dare hope they won’t fight hard. And, after all, they are only Negroes.”

“The French have had pretty good luck with their colored soldiers,” Morrell said. “Guderian was telling me the Germans don’t like facing them for beans. When they attack, they put everything they’ve got

into it, and they don't want to be bothered with prisoners, either."

"Yes, I've heard that, too," Abell said. "But I've also heard they've got no staying power to speak of. That's what the Rebs will need, being on the defensive as they are. They're in no position to attack us. Even if the Canucks stay in the fight, the initiative is in our hands."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," Morrell said. "If the Rebs stand on the defensive, they'll lose. We'll hammer them to death—and the voters just gave Teddy Roosevelt four more years—well, two, anyhow, till the next Congressional elections—to do exactly that. If the Confederates want to stop us, they'll have to do some striking of their own."

"Perhaps you're right, Lieutenant Colonel." By the way Abell said it, he thought Morrell was out of his mind but, inexplicably being of two grades' superior rank, had to be humored. "The maps make it difficult to see where they could hope to do so, however."

"Maps are wonderful," Morrell said. "I love maps. They let you see things you could never hope to spot without 'em. But they aren't a be-all and end-all. If you don't factor morale into your strategic thinking, you're going to get surprised in ways you don't like."

"Perhaps," Abell said again. Again, he sounded anything but convinced. Since he had few emotions of his own, he didn't seem to think anyone else had them, either. Maybe that accounted for his still being a captain.

"Never mind," Morrell said, a little sadly. "But I'll tell you this, Captain: anybody who's looking defeat in the face isn't going to fight a rational war once he figures he's got nothing left to lose."

"Yes, sir," Abell said. It didn't get through to the General Staff captain. Morrell could see as much. He wondered when Abell had last fired a Springfield. He wondered if Abell had ever had to command a platoon on maneuvers. He had his doubts. Had Abell ever done anything like that, he wouldn't have retained such an abiding faith in rationality.

"What will you do when the war's over?" Morrell asked.

Abell didn't hesitate. "Help the country prepare itself for the next one, of course," he replied. "And you?"

"The same." For the life of him, Morrell couldn't think of anything

he'd rather do. "I think, if I get the chance, I'm going to go into barrels. That's where we'll see a lot of effort focused once the fighting's done this time."

Abell shook his head. "They've been a disappointment, if you ask me. Like gas, they promise more than they deliver. Now that the enemy has seen them a few times, we don't get the panic effect we once did, and enemy barrels are starting to neutralize ours. They may have occasional uses, I grant you, but I think they'll go down in the history of this war as curiosities, nothing more."

"I don't agree," Morrell said. "They need more work; they'd be much more useful if they could move faster than a soldier can walk. And I'm not sure our doctrine for employing them is the best it could be, either."

"How else would you use them, sir, other than all along the line?" Abell asked. "They are, as you pointed out, an adjunct to infantry. This matter has been discussed here at considerable length, both before your arrival and during your absence."

Had Abell been wearing gloves, he might have slapped Morrell in the face with one of them. His remarks really meant, *Who do you think you are, you Johnny-come-lately, to question the gathered wisdom of the War Department and the General Staff?*

"All I know is what I read in the reports that come back from the field, and what I've seen in the field for myself," Morrell answered, which didn't make Captain Abell look any happier. "They've done some good, and I think they could do more."

"I suggest, then, sir, that you put your proposals in the form of a memorandum for evaluation by the appropriate committee," Abell said.

"Maybe I will," Morrell said, which startled John Abell. *One more memorandum no one will ever read,* Morrell thought. *Just what the war effort needs now*. Aloud, he went on, "Yes, maybe I'll do that. And maybe I'll do something else, too." The gaze Abell gave him held more suspicion than any the smooth young captain had ever aimed at the Confederates and their plans.

Roger Kimball said, "You're all volunteers here, and I'm proud of

every one of you for coming along on this ride. I knew the *Bonefish* had the finest damn crew in the C.S. Navy, and you've gone and proved it again."

"Sir," Tom Brearley said, "we wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Brearley was the executive officer, and was supposed to think like that. Kimball wanted to get a feel for how the ordinary sailors felt. Yes, they'd all volunteered, but had they really understood what they were getting into?

Then Ben Coulter said, "If we can give the damnyankees'nuts a good twist, Skipper, reckon it'll turn out to be worth it." The rest of the crew, some in greasy dungarees, some in black leather that was every bit as greasy but didn't show it so much, rumbled their agreement with the veteran petty officer. A lot of them had quit shaving after they sailed out of Charleston, which made them look even more piratical than they would have otherwise.

"All right," Kimball said, heartened. "You understand what we're doing here. If it goes wrong, we ain't gonna be like my old chum Ralph Briggs. Calls himself a submariner, and the Yankees have captured him *twice*." He spat to show what he thought of that. "If it goes wrong, we're sunk." His eyes gleamed. "But if it goes right, there's gonna be a lot of unhappy Yankees in New York harbor."

That wolfish growl rose from the crew again. Rationally, Kim-ball knew the odds were he'd said his last good-byes to everybody except the crew of the *Bonefish*, and he'd probably never get the chance to say good-bye to them. But the risk was worth the candle, as far as he was concerned.

Bookish and thoughtful where Kimball was fierce and emotional, Tom Brearley said, "We've loaded this boat with so many extra batteries, we only need to fill our buoyancy tanks half full to go straight down to the bottom." That was an exaggeration, but not a big one. Brearley went on, "We've got chemicals aboard to take some of the carbon dioxide out of the air while we're submerged, too. What all that means is, we can submerge farther out from New York City than the Yankees think, sneak up on them, do our worst, and then get away again."

"That's what we can do, all right," Kimball said. "That's what we're *going* to do."

He went up the ladder to the conning tower and looked all around. The Stars and Bars flapped where the Confederate naval ensign would normally have flown. As it had been in the Chesapeake Bay, that was part of the deception scheme he'd laid on. A passing ship or aeroplane would see red, white, and blue and—he hoped—assume the boat belonged to the U.S. Navy. What made it especially delicious was that it didn't even slightly contravene international law.

The *Bonefish* was only a couple of hundred miles southeast of New York harbor now, and ship traffic was heavy. As he'd counted on, none of the merchantmen paid any attention to a surfaced submersible sailing along on what were obviously its own lawful occasions.

An aeroplane with the U.S. eagle-and-swords emblem flew past, at first taking the *Bonefish* for granted but then sweeping back for a closer look. Cursing under his breath—if that aeroplane carried wireless and identified him as a hostile, all his preparations were wasted—Kimball took off his cap and waved it at the Yankee flying machine.

It came no closer, but waggled its wings and flew off, satisfied. He let out a sigh of relief. Five minutes later, he spotted a U.S. airship, a giant flying cigar. He cursed again, this time not at all under his breath. The airship could look him over at close range and hover above his boat, penetrating its disguise. He stayed up top, ready to order the *Bonefish* to dive if the dirigible turned his way. It didn't, evidently taking the sub for a U.S. vessel if it noticed the boat at all.

When he was inside a hundred miles of the harbor—and also about to enter the first ring of mines around it—he went below, dogged the hatch after himself, and said, "Take her down to periscope depth, Tom. Five knots."

"Aye aye, sir. Periscope depth. Five knots," Brearley said. The *Bonefish* slid below the surface with remarkable alacrity; those extra batteries were heavy. Without them, though, he couldn't have come close enough to the harbor to contemplate an attack.

Confederate Naval Intelligence had given him their best information on where the lanes through the mines lay. He was betting his boat—betting his neck, too, but he didn't care to think of it that way—the boys in the quiet offices knew what they were talking about.

And then, as he'd hoped he would, he caught a break. Peering through the periscope, he spotted a harbor tug leading a little flotilla

of fishing boats back toward New York. “We’re going to sneak up on their tails and follow ’em in,” he said to Brearley, and gave the orders to close the *Bonefish* up on the last of the fishing boats, which, in among the mines, were going no faster than he was.

He was reminded of stories about a gator swimming behind a mother duck and her ducklings and picking them off one by one. He let the ducklings swim. All of them together wouldn’t have satisfied his hunger.

The periscope kept wanting to fog up. Kimball invented ever more exotic curses and hurled them at its lenses and prisms. Down inside the steel tube with him, the sailors snickered at his extravagances. It *was* funny, too, but only to a point. If he couldn’t see where he was going, he wouldn’t get there.

He spotted Sandy Hook off to port and then, a little later, Coney Island to starboard. His lip curled. “Here we are, boys,” he said, “where all the damnyankees in New York City”—a symbol of depravity all over the Confederate States—“come to play.”

Nobody frolicked on the beaches today. The weather topside was chilly and gray and dreary. He swept the periscope around counterclockwise till he recognized Norton’s Point, the westernmost projection of Coney Island, which stuck out almost into the Narrows, the channel that led to New York’s harbors.

“There’s the lighthouse,” he said, confirming a landmark, “and there’s the fog bell next to it, for nights when a light doesn’t do any good. And—what the hell’s going on there?”

Cursing the blurry image, he stared intently into the periscope. His left hand folded into a fist and thumped softly against the side of his thigh. “What is it, sir?” Tom Brearley asked, recognizing the gesture of excitement.

“Must have had themselves a foggy night last night or somewhere not long ago,” Kimball answered. “Somebody’s aground on the mud flats by the lighthouse—sub, I think maybe. And they’ve got themselves one, two, three—Jesus, I see three, I really do—battleships sitting like broody hens around the cruiser that’s pulling her off. To hell with anything else. I’m going to get me one of those big bastards if it’s the last thing I ever do.”

“What are they doing there?” Brearley asked.

“Damned if I know,” Kimball answered. “But this is New York City, after all. They would have been in port, and some half-smart son of a bitch probably said, ‘Well, we’ve got ’em right close by. Let’s use ’em to make sure nobody gets frisky while we’re pulling our boat back into the water.’ It’s only a guess, mind you, but I’ll lay it’s a good one.”

“Bet you’re right, sir,” Brearley said.

Kimball didn’t care whether he was right or not. *Why* didn’t matter. *What* mattered, and there in front of him was the juiciest *what* this side of a fox sauntering into an unguarded henhouse. At his orders, the *Bonefish* pulled away from the fishing boats she’d been following and slid through the water toward the battleships.

They didn’t have a clue the boat was on the same planet, let alone closing toward eight hundred yards. They weren’t keeping anything like a proper antisubmersible watch, not here so close to home. All four of his forward tubes already had fish in them. He’d known from the beginning he would have to shoot fast and run.

“Five-degree spread,” he ordered. “I’m going to give two targets two fish apiece. I can’t get a clean shot at the third one. Are we ready, gentlemen?” He knew how keyed-up he was—he hadn’t called his crew a pack of bastards or anything of the sort. “Fire one! And two! And three! And four!”

Compressed air hissed as the fish leaped away. They ran straight and true. A bare instant before they reached their targets, one of the battleships began showing more smoke, as if trying to get away.

The explosions from at least two hits echoed inside the *Bonefish*. Whoops and cheers from the men drowned them out. “Right full rudder to course 130, Tom,” Kimball said exultantly. “Let’s get the hell out of here. If we don’t hit a mine, we’re all a pack of goddamn heroes—I think I nailed both those sons of bitches.”

And if we do hit a mine, it’s still a good trade for the C.S. Navy, he thought. But that had nothing to do with the price of beer. He’d done what he’d come to do; he’d done more than he’d thought he would be able to manage. Up till then, he hadn’t cared what would happen afterwards. Now, all at once, he very much wanted to live, so he could give the damnyankees’ balls another good kick somewhere further down the line.

If the hiring clerk at the cotton mill in Greenville, South Carolina, had been any more bored, he would have fallen out of his chair. “Name?” he asked, and yawned enormously.

“Jeroboam,” Scipio answered. After his meeting with Anne Colleton, he didn’t dare keep the false name he’d borne before, any more than he’d dared stay in Columbia.

“Jero—” That got the clerk’s attention: it made him unhappy. “You able to spell it for me, nigger?” Scipio did, without any trouble. The clerk drummed his fingers up and down on the desktop. “You read and write? Sounds like it.”

“Yes, suh,” Scipio answered. He’d decided he didn’t need to lie about that. It wasn’t against the law, and wasn’t even that uncommon.

“Cipher, too?” the clerk asked. He yawned again, and scratched his cheek, just below the edge of the patch covering his left eye socket, a patch that explained why a white man in his twenties wasn’t at the front.

“Yes, suh,” Scipio said again, and cautiously added, “Some, I do.”

But the clerk just nodded and wrote something down on the form he was completing. For a moment, he almost approached briskness: “You got a passbook you can show me, Jeroboam?”

“No, suh,” Scipio said resignedly.

“Too bad,” the clerk said. “That’s gonna cost you.” Scipio had been sure it was going to cost him; now he wanted to find out just how much. He had more money now than when he’d come to Columbia; he figured he could get by till this petty crook was through shaking him down. But, to his amazement, the clerk went on, “These last couple weeks, we’ve been paying twenty-dollar hiring bonuses to bucks with their papers all in order, on account of they stay with us longer and we want to keep ’em in the plant.”

“Ain’t got no papers,” Scipio repeated, doing his best to hide how surprised he was. “Been a busy time, dese pas’ couple years.”

“Nigger, you don’t know the half of it,” the clerk said. Considering what all Scipio had been through, the clerk didn’t know what he was talking about. But then he scratched by the eye patch again, so he knew some things Scipio didn’t, too. He asked, “How old are you?”

“I’se fo’ty-fo’—I think,” Scipio answered.

“All right.” The clerk wrote that down, too. “Even if you took your black ass down to the recruiting station, they wouldn’t stick you in butternut, so we ain’t real likely to lose you anyhow, ain’t that right?”

“I reckon not,” Scipio said. All of a sudden, things made more sense. “You losin’ a lot o’ de hands to de war, suh?”

“Too damn many,” the clerk said. “Always knew niggers was crazy. You got to be crazy if you want the chance of gettin’ shot and next to no money while you’re doin’ it.” He scratched by the patch yet again. “I been through all that, and I purely don’t see the point to it.”

“Me neither, suh,” Scipio said. But he did, though he wouldn’t say so to a white man. The clerk had gone to war along with his peers, masters of what they surveyed. If Negroes put on butternut, they hoped to gain some measure of the equality the clerk took for granted.

“Well, that’s as may be,” the one-eyed white man said. “Pay is two dollars an’ fifty cents a day. You start tomorrow mornin’, half past seven. You make sure you’re here on time.”

“Yes, suh. I do dat, suh.” Scipio had expected warnings far more dire. That this one was so mild told him how badly the mill needed workers. So did their attitude toward his papers, or lack of same. The clerk called him *nigger* in every other sentence, but the clerk had undoubtedly called every black he saw a nigger from the day he learned how to talk. He did it more to identify than to demean.

Scipio went looking for a room at a boardinghouse, and found one not far from the cotton mill. The manager of the building, a skinny, wizened Negro who called himself Aurelius, said, “We’s right glad to have you, Jeroboam, and that’s a fac’. Lots o’ folks is leavin’ here fo’ to join the Army. Up from the Congaree country, is you?”

“Dat right,” Scipio said. Aurelius’ accent was different from his, closer to the way the white folks of Greenville spoke than to the Low Country dialect Scipio had learned on the Marshlands plantation.

Aurelius scratched his head. His hair had more gray in it than Scipio’s. “You know somethin’, Jeroboam?” he said. “If I thought they’d let me tote a rifle, I’d join the Army my own self. Reckon I wouldn’t mind votin’ an’ all them other things the white folks is givin’ to niggers who goes to war for ’em.”

“Maybe,” was all Scipio said. Having fought against the Confederate government, having the blood of a Confederate officer on his hands, he didn’t think he wanted to put on butternut himself, even had he been young enough for recruiters to want him.

His room was bigger and cleaner and cost less than the one in Columbia. Being just a mill town rather than the state capital, Greenville didn’t have to put on airs. The work Scipio got was marginally easier than what he’d been doing before. Instead of hauling crates of shell casings from one place to another, he loaded bolts of coarse butternut-dyed cloth onto pallets so someone else could haul them off to the cutting rooms.

Two days after he got the job, the young Negro who had been hauling those pallets quit. Another young black took his place. This one lasted a week. A third Negro held the position two days. All three of them resigned to put on that butternut cloth once it had been made into uniforms.

Scipio saw his first black man in Confederate uniform a little more than a week after he came to Greenville. Three big, tough-looking Negroes in butternut came down Park Avenue side by side. They swaggered along as if they owned the sidewalk. Blacks of all ages and both sexes stared at them as if they’d fallen from the moon. Scipio was one of those who stared. He wondered if any of the brand-new soldiers had worn the red armband of the Congaree Socialist Republic the winter before.

As the uniformed Negroes strode along the avenue, sighs rose up from every woman around. If the men in butternut were out for a good time, their problem would be picking and choosing, not finding.

That much, though, Scipio could have guessed beforehand. He found watching whites far more interesting. They stared at the Negroes in uniform, too. Their attitude was more nearly astonishment and uncertainty than delight. Their legislators had passed the bill authorizing Negro soldiers. Now that they were confronted with the reality, they didn’t know what to make of it.

A white captain, perhaps home on leave, came out of a shop on Park Avenue. The three Negroes snapped to attention and gave him salutes so precise, they might have been machined. The captain stopped and looked the black men over. *Damnfool buckra,* Scipio thought. *If a white officer doesn’t treat them like soldiers, who will?*

But the captain, though half a beat late, did return the salutes. Then he did something better, something smarter: he nodded to the three Negroes before he went on his way. They nodded back; one of them saluted again. The captain gravely returned that salute, too. He hadn't acknowledged them as his equals, but they weren't his equals in the Army. He had acknowledged them as belonging to the same team he did. In the Confederacy, that was epochal in and of itself.

A sigh ran through blacks and whites alike. Everyone recognized what had happened. Not everyone, Scipio saw, was happy with it. That didn't surprise him. What did surprise him was that none of the whites on Park Avenue raised a fuss. The three Negro soldiers found a saloon and went into it one after another.

More and more blacks in butternut began appearing as time went by. A couple of weeks after Scipio saw his first colored recruits, he was going home from the mill when a white corporal stopped a black man in Confederate uniform. The white man had his right arm in a sling. In a voice more curious than anything else, he asked, "Nigger, why the hell you want to take the chance of getting a present like this one here?" He wiggled the fingers sticking out of his cast.

The Negro came to attention before he spoke. "Co'p'ral, suh," he said, "my big brother, he was in one o' they labor battalions, an' a damnyankee shell done kilt him. He didn't have no gun. He couldn't do nothin' about it. Them damnyankees ain't gwine shoot at me without I shoots back."

"All right. That's an answer, by Jesus," the corporal said. "Kill a couple o' them bastards for your brother, then kill a couple for your own self."

"That's what I aims to do," the Negro said.

Scipio was very thoughtful all the way back to his boardinghouse. After the CSA pounded the Congaree Socialist Republic into the ground, he'd been convinced everything Cassius and Cherry and the rest of the Marxist revolutionaries had tried to achieve had died with the Republic. He wasn't so sure, not any more. Maybe Negroes were getting a taste of greater freedom after all, even if not in the way the Reds had aimed to give it to them. And maybe, just maybe, the struggles of the Congaree Socialist Republic hadn't been in vain.

When the field hands lined up in the morning, two more men were missing. “Where did Hephaestion and Orestes disappear to?” Anne Colleton asked. “Are they off somewhere getting drunk?” Instead of sounding furious, she hoped that was what the two stalwart hands were doing.

But the field foreman, a grizzled buck named Maximus, shook his head. “No, ma’am,” he said. “Dey is on de way to St. Matthews—dey leave befo’ de fust light o’ dawn.” Maximus had an unconsciously poetic way of speaking. “Dey say dey gwine be sojers.”

“Did they?” Anne bit down on the inside of her lower lip. She had helped get the bill allowing Negro soldiers passed, and now she was paying the price for it. In front of the hands, she had to keep up a bold façade. “Well, we’ll make do one way or another. Let’s get to work.”

Out to the fields and to their garden plots trooped the Negroes. The young men among them had found a loophole in the silent agreement they’d made with her after the Congaree Socialist Republic collapsed. If they joined the Confederate Army, they didn’t need her to shield them from authority—and they didn’t need to do as she said.

Grimly, Anne headed back toward her cabin. She had letters to write, bills to pay. How she was supposed to put in a proper crop of cotton next year if all her hands departed was beyond her. Her shoulders stiffened. She’d managed a crop of sorts after the Red uprising. If she’d worked one miracle, she figured she could work another. She’d have to, so she would do it.

Julia was already busy in the cabin, feather duster in one hand, baby in the crook of her other elbow. She couldn’t join the Army. Anne appraised her as coldbloodedly as if she’d been a mule. She wouldn’t be much good out in the fields, either.

“Mornin’, ma’am,” Julia said, unaware of the scrutiny or ignoring it. “It gwine be Christmastime any day now.”

“So it will,” Anne said. She’d driven into Columbia a few days before, and sent Tom half a dozen pairs of leather-and-wool gloves. She’d also bought a crate of the usual trinkets for the workers on the plantation. She couldn’t make herself believe they deserved anything but the back of her hand, but couldn’t afford any more trouble with them. She had troubles enough. A little bribery never hurt anything, and a congressman, for instance, would have been far more expensive.

“De tree sho’ smell fine,” Julia said. “Jus’ a little feller dis yeah, not

like in de old days.”

In the old days, Anne had had the halls of Marshlands in which to set a tree that *was* a tree. Here in the low-roofed cottage, this sapling would have to do. She was making the best show she could with tinsel and a cheap glass star on top.

Julia cleaned at a glacial pace. Anne had learned hurrying her was useless. She would just look hurt and stare down at her baby. She’d been slow before she had the baby. She was slower now. Anne waited impatiently. Maybe she let the impatience show. Julia dropped and shattered the chamber pot, then spent what felt like half an hour sweeping up shards of china. Anne was ready to kick her by the time she finally left the cottage.

At last, the mistress of Marshlands, such as there was of Marshlands these days, got down to her own work without anyone peering over her shoulder. She was gladder by the day that she’d been in fine financial shape before the war started. She wouldn’t be in fine shape by the time it was done. If she survived, though, she knew she’d be able to get her own back once peace finally returned.

She picked up the telephone mouthpiece to call a broker down in Charleston. The line was dead. She said something pungently unladylike. Nothing worked the way it was supposed to, not any more. It was either write another letter or drive into St. Matthews to send a telegram. She wrote the letter. More and more these days, she felt nothing at Marshlands got done unless she stayed here to see it get done.

To add to her foul mood, the postman was late. When he finally did show, up, he rode toward her with a bigger armed escort than usual. “You want to watch yourself, ma’am,” he said. “They say them Red niggers is feelin’ fractious.”

“They say all sorts of things,” Anne answered coldly. She took the envelopes and periodicals the fellow gave her and handed him the letters she’d written. He stuck those in his saddlebag and rode off.

Once he was gone, she regretted snapping at him. The guards accompanying him argued that people in St. Matthews were taking seriously the threat from Cassius’ diehards.

She checked her pistol. It lay under her pillow, where it was supposed to be. Wondering if Julia or one of the other Negroes had pulled its teeth, she checked that, too. No: it was fully loaded. That

eased her mind somewhat, arguing as it did that the Marshlands Negroes didn't expect an imminent visit from their friends and comrades skulking in the swamps of the Congaree.

"Comrades." The word tasted bad in her mouth. Now that the Reds had degraded it, it wasn't a word decent people in the Confederate States could use comfortably any more. No sooner had that thought crossed her mind than she laughed at herself. Before the war, she'd had nothing but contempt for the stodgy, boring folk who counted for the Confederacy's decent people. Now she reckoned herself one of them.

She laughed again, though it wasn't funny. It was either laugh or scream. The Red uprising had proved as painfully as possible how much she had in common with her fellow white Confederate Americans.

Julia brought in chicken and dumplings for supper. Anne ate, hardly noticing the plate in front of her. Her body servant took it away. Anne lighted the lamps, one by one. They didn't give her proper light by which to read, but they were what she had. She wasn't holding her breath about getting electricity restored to Marshlands, any more than she was about getting back a telegraph line. On the off chance, she tried the telephone again. It was still silent, too. She snarled at it.

A couple of magazines told in great detail how the CSA might yet win the war. She would have had more faith in them if they hadn't contradicted each other in so many places. She also would have had more faith in them if either author had shown more signs he knew what he was talking about and wasn't whistling in the dark.

She poured herself a cup of coffee. The coffee remained good. As long as the Caribbean remained a Confederate lake, imports from Central and South America could still reach Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola.

However good it was, the coffee did nothing to keep her awake. She drank it so regularly, it had next to no effect on her. When she started yawning over a particularly abstruse piece on Russia's chances against the Germans and Austrians in 1917, she set down the magazine, blew out all the lamps but the one by her bed, and changed into a nightgown. Then she blew out the last lamp and went to bed.

She woke up sometime in the middle of the night. As she'd tossed and turned, her right hand had slipped under the pillow. It was resting

on the revolver. That, though, wasn't what had wakened her. "Coffee," she muttered under her breath. She reached down for the chamber pot, only to discover it wasn't there and remember why. Off to the privy, then—no help for it.

Her lips twisted in frustrated anger as she started to get out of bed. Marshlands had had flush toilets longer than she'd been alive; it had been one of the first plantation houses in South Carolina to enjoy such an amenity. She'd taken indoor plumbing for granted. The refugee camp had taught her it was too precious, too wonderful, not to be properly admired—and, at the moment, she had not so much as a pot to call her own.

Even in the mild climate hereabouts, a nighttime trip to the privy was a chilly business. She shut the door behind her to keep the cold out of the cottage. Going to the privy was also a smelly, disgusting business. And spiders and bugs and occasional lizards and mice visited the place, too.

Almost absentmindedly, she scooped up the pistol and carried it along with her when she went out into the darkness. She was halfway to the outhouse before she consciously recalled the warning the postman had given her. When she got to the privy, she set the little handgun down beside her before she hiked up her gown.

She spent longer in the noisome place than she'd expected. She had just risen from the pierced wooden seat when she heard voices outside. They were all familiar voices, though she hadn't heard a couple of them in more than a year. "She in dere?" Cassius asked. The hunter—the Red revolutionary leader—wasn't talking loud, but he wasn't making any special effort to keep his voice down, either.

"She in dere," Julia answered more quietly. "You don' wan' to wake she up, Cass. She gots a gun. She come out shootin'."

"Den we shoots she, and dat de end o' one capitalist 'pressor," Cassius said. "We gots dis cottage surrounded. Ain't no way out we ain't got covered. I oughts to know—de place was mine."

"Shootin' too good fo' dat white debbil bitch." Another woman's voice: Cherry's, Anne realized after a moment.

"Oh, is you right about dat!" Julia agreed enthusiastically. "I wants to watch she burn. She use me like I's an animal, she do. Ever since she come back, I wants to see she dead."

See if I give you *a Christmas present this year, Julia,* Anne thought. She'd got the idea Julia didn't much care for her, but this venomous hatred…no. She shook her head. She'd thought she'd known what the Negroes on Marshlands were thinking. She'd been fatally wrong about Cassius, and now almost as misled about Julia. She wondered if she understood at all what went on inside blacks' minds.

Cherry said, "Her brudder done use me. He have hisself a high old time, right till de end." Her laugh was low and throaty and triumphant. "He don' find out till too late dat I usin' he, too."

So Scipio told me the truth about that. Thinking about what had happened kept Anne from worrying unduly about the predicament she was in now. She'd seen some of it for herself; Cherry had put on airs, even around her, on account of what she did in the bedroom with Jacob.

Cassius said, "Don' matter how she die, so long as she dead. Top o'all de other crimes she do, I hear tell she behin'dat bill dat mystify de niggers to fight fo' de white folks' gummint. We strikes a blow fo' revolutionary justice when we ends de backers o' dat wicked scheme."

"So light de matches, den," Cherry said impatiently.

Through the tiny window cut in the outhouse door, light flared, brilliantly bright. Cassius and the other Reds must have doused the doorway to the cottage—and maybe the walls as well—with kerosene or perhaps even gasoline. Had Anne been inside there, she wouldn't have had a chance in the world to get free. The most she could have hoped for would have been to blow out her own brains before the flames took her.

"How you like it now, Miss Anne?" Julia shouted, exultation in her voice. "How you like it, you cold-eyed debbil?"

Cassius and Cherry and the rest of the Reds howled abuse at the cabin, too. After a moment, so did a rising chorus of Marshlands field hands, roused from their beds by shouts and by flames.

Anne realized that, if she was going to escape, she would have to do it now, while everyone's attention was on the burning cottage and nowhere else. She opened the privy door and stepped outside, holding up a hand to shield her face from the fierce glare of the fire. She started to step away from the outhouse, but then stopped and shut the door behind her—no use giving her foes (which seemed to mean everyone on the Marshlands plantation) a clue as to where she'd been.

Maybe the Reds would think smoke and fire had overcome her before she woke up.

She wished her nightgown were any color but white. It made her too easy to spot in the darkness. Putting the privy between her and the fire, she made for the closest trees. Those couple of hundred yards seemed ten miles long.

No sooner had Anne reached the trees than the harsh, flat crack of gunfire came from behind her. Remembering everything Tom and Jacob had said about combat, she threw herself flat. That took care of her worries about the white nightgown, because she landed in cold, clammy mud. Shouts of alarm from the Negroes behind her told her what the gunfire was: rounds in the box of revolver ammunition in the cottage cooking off.

Deliberately, she rolled in the mud, so her back was as dark as her belly. Then she set out for St. Matthews, four or five miles away. A couple of plantations between Marshlands and the town had a sort of spectral half-life, but, after what had just happened to her, she was not inclined to trust her fate to any place where the field hands vastly outnumbered the whites. “I kept the government off them,” she said through clenched teeth, “and this is the thanks I got? They’ll pay. Oh yes, they’ll pay.”

After Scipio had visited Marshlands, she’d taken him off her list. When she was in Columbia, she’d learned he’d quit his job and didn’t seem to be in town any more. That had been wise of him. She bared her teeth. In the end, it would do him no good. She’d have her revenge on him as on all the others now.

She stayed in the undergrowth alongside the road instead of going straight down it. That slowed her and wounded her bare feet, but left her less visible. As far as she was concerned, the latter was more important.

Every so often, she stopped in the best shelter she could find and listened to try to find out if anyone was pursuing her. She heard nothing. That made her feel only a little safer. She knew how good a hunter Cassius was. But every painful step she took brought her closer to safety.

She was, she thought, more than halfway to St. Matthews when a horse-drawn fire engine, lanterns blazing in the night, came clattering up the road toward Marshlands. A couple of armed guards on

horseback trotted along beside it.

Anne stepped out into the roadway, waving her arms. She was so muddy, the fire engine almost rolled over her instead of stopping. “Jesus Christ!” one of the firemen exclaimed. “It’s Anne Colleton.”

“Don’t go any farther,” she said. “You haven’t got enough firepower. Cassius and his Reds will be waiting to bushwhack you. And besides”—her mouth twisted—“the fire will have done whatever it can do.”

The fireman who’d recognized her helped her up onto the engine. It stank of coal smoke from the steam engine that powered the pump. From a long way away, a rifle barked. The fireman grunted and crumpled, shot through the head. Another shot rang out, the bullet ricocheting off the engine before the sound of the report reached her.

“Get the hell out of here, Claude!” one of the guards shouted to the driver. The other guard started shooting in the direction from which the shots had come.

Claude could handle horses. He turned the six-animal team and headed back toward St. Matthews faster than Anne would have thought possible—but not before another fireman got hit in the foot. He cursed furiously, pausing every so often to apologize to Anne for his language.

Cassius, she thought. *It has to be Cassius*. The iron bulk of the pump shielded her from any more bullets. All she had to do, all the way back to town, was think about how the hunter, the Red, had ruined her twice. But she was still alive, still fighting—and so, in spite of the Negro uprising and everything else, were the Confederate States.

We’ll whip the Yankees yet, she thought. *And you, Cassius, I’ll whip you.*

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THE WORLDWAR SAGA

WORLDWAR: IN THE BALANCE

WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE

WORLDWAR: UPSETTING THE BALANCE

WORLDWAR: STRIKING THE BALANCE

COLONIZATION

COLONIZATION: SECOND CONTACT

COLONIZATION: DOWN TO EARTH

COLONIZATION: AFTERSHOCKS

HOMEWARD BOUND

THE VIDESSOS CYCLE

THE MISPLACED LEGION

AN EMPEROR FOR THE LEGION

THE LEGION OF VIDESSOS

SWORDS OF THE LEGION

THE TALE OF KRISPOS

KRISPOS RISING

KRISPOS OF VIDESSOS

KRISPOS THE EMPEROR

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HOW FEW REMAIN

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THE GREAT WAR: AMERICAN FRONT

THE GREAT WAR: WALK IN HELL

THE GREAT WAR: BREAKTHROUGHS

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AMERICAN EMPIRE: BLOOD AND IRON

AMERICAN EMPIRE: THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

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Klaxons hooted the call to battle stations. George Enos sprinted along the deck of the USS *Ericsson* toward the one-pounder gun near the stern. The destroyer was rolling and pitching in the heavy swells of an Atlantic winter storm. Freezing rain made the metal deck slick as a Boston Common ice-skating rink.

Enos ran as confidently as a mountain goat bounding from crag to crag. Ice and heavy seas were second nature to him. Before the war sucked him into the Navy, he'd put to sea in fishing boats from Boston's T Wharf at every season of the year, and gone through worse weather in craft a lot smaller than this one. The thick peacoat was warmer than a civilian slicker, too.

Petty Officer Carl Sturtevant and most of his crew were already at the depth-charge launcher near the one-pounder. The other sailors came rushing up only moments after Enos took his place at the antiaircraft gun.

He stared every which way, though with the weather so bad he would have been hard pressed to spot an aeroplane before it crashed on the *Ericsson*'s deck. A frigid gust of wind tried to yank off his cap. He grabbed it and jammed it back in place. Navy barbers kept his brown hair trimmed too close for it to hold in any heat on its own.

"What's up?" he shouted to Sturtevant through the wind. "Somebody spot a periscope, or think he did?" British, French, and Confederate submersibles all prowled the Atlantic. For that matter, so did U.S. and German boats. If a friendly skipper made a mistake and launched a spread of fish at the *Ericsson*, her crew would be in just as much trouble as if the Rebs or limeys had attacked.

"Don't know." The petty officer scratched at his dark Kaiser Bill

mustache. “Shit, you expect ’em to go and tell us stuff? All I know is, I heard the hooter and I ran like hell.” He scratched his mustache again. “Long as we’re standing next to each other, George, happy New Year.”

“Same to you,” Enos answered in surprised tones. “It is today, isn’t it? I hadn’t even thought about it, but you’re right. Back when this damn war started, who would have thought it’d last into 1917?”

“Not me, I’ll tell you that,” Sturtevant said.

“Me, neither,” George Enos said. “I sailed into Boston harbor with a hold full of haddock the day the Austrian grand duke got himself blown up in Sarajevo. I figured the fight would be short and sweet, same as everybody else.”

“Yeah, so did I,” Sturtevant said. “Didn’t quite work out that way, though. The Kaiser’s boys didn’t make it into Paris, we didn’t make it into Toronto, and the goddamn Rebs did make it into Washington, and almost into Philadelphia. Nothin’ comes easy, not in this fight.”

“Ain’t it the truth?” Enos agreed fervently. “I was in river monitors on the Mississippi and the Cumberland. I know how tough it’s been.”

“The snapping-turtle fleet,” Sturtevant said with the good-natured scorn sailors of the oceanic Navy reserved for their inland counterparts. Having served in both branches, George knew the scorn was unjustified. He also knew he had no chance of convincing anyone who hadn’t served in a river monitor that that was so.

Lieutenant Armstrong Crowder came toward the stern, a pocket watch in one hand, a clipboard with some increasingly soggy papers in the other. Seeing him thus made Enos relax inside, though he did not ease his vigilant posture. Lieutenant Crowder took notes or checked boxes or did whatever he was supposed to do with those papers.

After he was done writing, he said, “Men, you may stand easy. This was only an exercise. Had the forces of the Entente been foolish enough to try our mettle, I have no doubt we would have sunk them or driven them off.”

He set an affectionate hand on the depth-charge launcher. It was a new gadget; until a few months before, ashcans had been “launched” by rolling them off the stern. Crowder loved new gadgets, and depth charges from this one actually had crippled a Confederate submarine. With a fisherman’s ingrained pessimism, George Enos thought that

going from one crippled boat to a sure sinking was a long leap of faith.

Eventually, Lieutenant Crowder shut up and went away. Carl Sturtevant rolled his eyes. He had even less faith in gadgets than Enos did. “If that first torpedo nails us,” he said, “odds are we’re nothing but a whole raft of ‘The Navy Department regrets’ telegrams waiting to happen.”

“Oh, yeah.” George nodded. The all-clear sounded. He didn’t leave the one-pounder right away even so. As long as he had reason to be here by the rail, he aimed to take a good long look at as much of the Atlantic as he could. Just because the call to battle stations had been a drill did not mean no enemy submarines lurked out there looking for a target.

Quite a few sailors lingered by the rail, despite the rain and sleet riding the wind. “Don’t know why I’m bothering,” Carl Sturtevant said. “Half the Royal Navy could sail by within a quarter-mile of us and we’d never be the wiser.”

“Yeah,” Enos said again. “Well, this makes it harder for the submersibles to spot us, too.”

“I keep telling myself that,” the petty officer answered. “Sometimes it makes me feel better, sometimes it doesn’t. What it puts me in mind of is playing blind man’s buff where everybody’s got a blindfold on and everybody’s carrying a six-shooter. A game like that gets scary in a hurry.”

“Can’t say you’re wrong,” Enos replied, riding the deck shifting under his feet with automatic ease. He was a good sailor with a strong stomach, which got him respect from his shipmates even though, unlike so many of them, he wasn’t a career Navy man. “Could be worse, though—we could be running guns into Ireland again, or playing hide-and-seek with the limeys around the icebergs way up north.”

“You’re right—both of those would be worse,” Sturtevant agreed. “Sooner or later, we *will* cut that sea bridge between England and Canada, and then the Canucks *will* be in the soup.”

“Sooner or later,” George echoed mournfully. Before the war, the plan had been for the German High Seas Fleet to break out of the North Sea and rendezvous with the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, smashing the Royal Navy between them. But the Royal Navy had had plans of its

own, and only the couple of squadrons of the High Seas Fleet actually on the high seas when war broke out were fighting alongside their American allies. “Sooner or later,” Enos went on, “I’ll get some leave and see my wife and kids again, too, but I’m not holding my breath there, either. Christ, George, Jr., turns seven this year.”

“It’s hard,” Sturtevant said with a sigh that made a young fog-bank grow in front of his face. He peered out at the ocean again, then shook his head. “Hellfire, I’m only wasting my time and trying to fool myself into thinking I’ll be able to spot anything anyhow.”

That was probably true. George shook his head. No, that was almost certainly true. It didn’t keep him from staring at the sea till his eyelashes started icing up. If he saw a periscope—

At last, he concluded he wasn’t going to see a periscope, not even if a dozen of them were out there. Reluctantly, he headed back toward the bulkhead from which he’d been chipping paint. One big difference he’d discovered between the Navy and a fishing boat was that you had to look busy all the time in the Navy, regardless of whether you were.

Smoke poured from the *Ericsson*’s four stacks. No one had ever claimed beauty for the destroyer’s design. There were good and cogent reasons why no one had ever claimed beauty for it. Some people did claim she looked like a French warship, a claim that would have been vicious enough to start barroom brawls during shore leave if it hadn’t held such a large measure of truth.

Enos picked up the chisel he’d set down when the exercise began. He went back to work—chip, chip, chip. He spotted no rust under the paint he was removing, only bright metal. That meant his work was essentially wasted effort, but he’d had no way of knowing as much in advance. He went right on chipping. He couldn’t get in trouble for doing as he was told.

A chief petty officer swaggered by. He had less rank than any officer but more authority than most. For a moment, he beamed around his cigar at George’s diligence. Then, as if angry at letting himself be seen in a good mood, he growled, “You *will* police up those paint scraps from the deck, sailor.” His gravelly voice said he’d been smoking cigars for a lot of years.

“Oh, yes, Chief, of course,” Enos answered, his own voice dripping virtue. Since he really had intended to sweep up the paint chips, he wasn’t even acting. Propitiated, the petty officer went on his way.

George thought about making a face behind his back, then thought better of it. Long tours aboard fishing boats even more cramped than the *Ericsson* had taught him he was always likely to be under somebody's eyes, whether he thought so or not.

Another strip of gray paint curled against the blade of his chisel and fell to the deck. It crunched under his shoes as he took half a step down the corridor. His hands did their job with automatic competence, letting his mind wander where it would.

It wandered, inevitably, back to his family. He smiled at imagining his son seven years old. That was halfway to man-sized, by God. And Mary Jane would be turning four. He wondered what sort of fits she was giving Sylvia these days. She'd hardly been more than a toddler when he went into the Navy.

And, of course, he thought about Sylvia. Some of his thoughts about his wife were much more interesting than chipping paint. He'd been at sea a long time. But he didn't just imagine her naked in the dark with him, making the mattress in their upstairs flat creak. She'd been different, distant, the last time he'd got leave in Boston. He knew he never should have got drunk enough to tell her about being on the point of going with that colored whore when his monitor got blown out of the water. But it wasn't just that; Sylvia had been different ever since she'd got a job in the fish-packing plant: more on her own, less *his wife*.

He frowned as he tapped the chisel yet again. He wished she hadn't had to go to work, but the allotment she took from his salary wasn't enough to keep body and soul together, especially not with the Coal Board and the Ration Board and all the other government bureaus tightening the screws on civilians harder every day to support the war.

Then he frowned again, in a different way. The throb of the engines changed. He not only heard it, he felt it through his shoes. The *Ericsson* picked up speed and swung through a long, smooth turn.

A few minutes later, the chief petty officer came back down the corridor. "Why'd we change course?" Enos asked him. "Which way are we heading now?"

"Why? Damned if I know." The chief sounded as if the admission pained him. "But I know which way we're heading, by Jesus. We're heading south."

Private First Class Jefferson Pinkard sat in the muddy bottom of a trench east of Lubbock, Texas, staring longingly at the tin coffeepot above the little fire burning there. The wood that made the fire had been part of somebody's fence or somebody's house not so long before. Pinkard didn't give a damn about that. He just wanted the coffee to boil so he could drink it.

A few hundred yards to the south, a couple of Yankee three-inch field guns opened up and started hitting the Confederate lines opposite them. "God damn those sons of bitches to hell and gone," Pinkard said to anybody who would listen. "What the hell good do they think they're going to do? They'll just kill a few of us and maim a few more, and that'll be that. They're not going to break through. Shitfire, they're not even *trying* to break through. Nothin' but throwin' a little death around for the fun of it, is all."

The nearest soldier happened to be Hipolito Rodriguez. The stocky little farmer from the state of Sonora was darning socks, a useful soldierly skill not taught in basic training. He looked up from his work and said, "This whole war, it don't make no sense to me. Why you think any one part of it is supposed to make sense when the whole thing don't?"

"Damn good question, Hip," Pinkard said. "Wish I had me a damn good answer." He overtopped Rodriguez by nearly a head and could have broken him in half; he'd been a steelworker in Birmingham till conscription pulled him into the Army, and had the frame to prove it. Not only that, he was a white man, while Hip Rodriguez, like other Sonorans and Chihuahuans and Cubans, didn't fit neatly into the Confederate States' scheme of things. Rodriguez wasn't quite black, but he wasn't quite white, either—his skin was just about the color of his butternut uniform. What he was, Pinkard had discovered, was a fine soldier.

The coffee did boil then, and Jeff poured some into his tin cup. He drank. It was hotter than the devil's front porch in July and strong enough to grow hair on a little old lady's chest, but that suited him fine. Winter in Texas was worse than anything he'd known in Alabama, and he'd never tried passing an Alabama winter in a soggy trench, either.

Rodriguez came over and filled his cup, too. Sergeant Albert Cross paused on his way down the trench line. He squatted down by the fire

and rolled himself a cigarette. “Don’t know where the dickens this war is getting to,” he remarked as he held the cigarette to the flames.

Pinkard and Rodriguez looked at each other. Sergeant Cross was a veteran, one of the trained cadre around whom the regiment had been formed. He wore the ribbon for the Purple Heart to show he’d been wounded in action. That was about all that kept the other two men from braining him with the coffeepot. Pinkard couldn’t begin to remember how many times over the past few weeks Cross had made the same weary joke.

Wearily, Pinkard pointed north and east. “Town of Dickens is over that way, Sarge,” he said. “Christ, I wish we’d run the damnyankees back toward Lubbock a ways, just to get us the hell out of Dickens County and make you come up with somethin’ new to say.”

“Godalmightydamn,” Cross said. “Put a stripe on somebody’s sleeve and listen to how big his mouth gets.” But he was chuckling as he sipped his coffee. He knew how often he said the same thing. He just couldn’t stop himself from doing it.

And then, with flat, harsh, unemphatic bangs, U.S. artillery began shelling the stretch of trench where Pinkard and his comrades sheltered. His coffee went flying as he dove for the nearest dugout. The shells screamed in. They burst all around. Blast tried to tear the air out of Pinkard’s lungs and hammered his ears. Shrapnel balls and fragments of shell casing scythed by.

Lying next to him in the hole scraped under the forward wall of the trench, Sergeant Cross shouted, “Leastways it ain’t gas.”

“Yeah,” Pinkard said. He hadn’t heard any of the characteristic duller explosions of gas shells, and no one was screaming out warnings or pounding on a shell casing with a rifle butt to get men to put on their masks. “Ain’t seen gas but once or twice here.”

Even as they were being shelled, Cross managed a chuckle with real amusement in it. “Sonny boy, this front ain’t important enough to waste a lot of gas on it. And you know what else? I ain’t a bit sorry, neither.”

Before Pinkard could answer, rifles and machine guns opened up all along the line. Captain Connolly, the company commander, shouted, “Up! Get up and fight, damn it! Everybody to the firing steps, or the damnyankees’ll roll right over us.”

Shells were still falling. Fear held Pinkard in what seemed a safer position for a moment. But he knew Connolly was right. If U.S. troops got into the Confederate trenches, they'd do worse than field guns could.

He grabbed his rifle and scrambled out of the dugout. Yankee bullets whined overhead. If he thought about exposing himself to them, his bowels would turn to water. Doing was better than thinking. Up to the firing step he went.

Sure enough, here came the U.S. soldiers across no-man's-land, all of them in the world seemingly headed straight toward him. Their green-gray uniforms were splotched with mud, the same as his butternut tunic and trousers. They wore what looked like round pots on their heads, not the British-style iron derbies the Confederates called tin hats. Pinkard reached up to adjust his own helmet, not that the damned thing would stop a direct hit from a rifle bullet.

He rested his Tredegar on the dirt of the parapet and started firing. Enemy soldiers dropped, one after another. He couldn't tell for certain whether he was scoring any of the hits. A lot of bullets were in the air. Not all the Yankees were falling because they'd been shot, either. A lot of them went down so they could advance at a crawl, taking advantage of the cover shell holes and bushes offered.

Sometimes a few U.S. soldiers would send a fusillade of rifle fire at the nearest stretch of trench line. That would make the Confederates put their heads down and let the Yankees' pals move forward. Then the pals would bob up out of whatever hiding places they'd found and start blazing away in turn. Firing and moving, the U.S. troops worked their way forward.

Pinkard's rifle clicked harmlessly when he pulled the trigger. He slammed in a new ten-round clip, worked the bolt to bring a cartridge up into the chamber, and aimed at a Yankee trotting his way. He pulled the trigger. The man in green-gray crumpled.

Pinkard felt the same surge of satisfaction he did when controlling a stream of molten steel back at the Sloss Works: he'd done something difficult and dangerous and done it well. He worked the bolt. The spent cartridge casing leaped out of the Tredegar and fell at his feet. He swung the rifle toward the next target.

In the fighting that made the headlines, in southern Kentucky or northern Tennessee, on the Roanoke front, or up in Pennsylvania and

Maryland, attackers had to work their way through enormous belts of barbed wire to close with their foes. It wasn't like that in west Texas, however much Jefferson Pinkard might have wished it were. Hereabouts, not enough men tried to cover too many miles of trenches with not enough wire. A few sad, rusty strands ran from pole to pole. They would have been fine for keeping cattle from straying into the trenches. Against a determined enemy, they did little good.

A roar in the air, a long hammering noise, screams running up and down the Confederate line. The U.S. aeroplane zoomed away after strafing the trenches from what would have been treetop height had any trees grown within miles. Pinkard sent a bullet after it, sure the round would be wasted—and it was.

"That ain't fair!" he shouted to Sergeant Cross, who had also fired at the aeroplane. "Not many flying machines out here, any more'n there's a lot of gas. Why the hell did this one have to shoot up our stretch of trench?"

"Damned if I know," Cross answered. "Must be our lucky day."

Stretcher bearers carried groaning wounded men back toward aid stations behind the line. Another soldier was walking back under his own power. "What the devil are you doing, Stinky?" Pinkard demanded.

"Christ, I hate that nickname," Christopher Salley said with dignity. He was a skinny, precise little pissweed who'd been a clerk before the Conscription Bureau sent him his induction letter. He was, at the moment, a skinny, precise, wounded little pissweed: he held up his left hand to display a neat bullet hole in the flesh between thumb and forefinger. Blood dripped from the wound. "I really ought to get this seen to, don't you think?"

"Go ahead, go ahead." Pinkard turned most of his attention back to the Yankees. A minute or so later, though, he spoke to Sergeant Cross in tones of barely disguised envy: "Lucky bastard."

"Ain't it the truth?" Cross said. "He's hurt bad enough to get out of the fight, but that'll heal clean as a whistle. Shit, they might even ship him home on convalescent leave."

That appalling prospect hadn't occurred to Jeff. He swore. The idea of Stinky Salley getting to go home while he was stuck out here God only knew how far from Emily…

Then he forgot about Salley, for the U.S. soldiers were making their big push toward the trench line. The last hundred yards of savage fire proved more than flesh and blood could bear. Instead of storming forward and leaping down in among the Confederates, the soldiers in green-gray broke and ran back toward their own line, dragging along as many of their wounded as they could.

The firefight couldn't have lasted longer than half an hour. Pinkard felt a year or two older, or maybe like a cat that had just used up one of its lives. He looked around for his tin cup. There it was, where he'd dropped it when the shelling started. Somebody had stomped on it. For good measure, it had a bullet hole in it, too, probably from the aeroplane. He let out a long sigh.

"Amen," Sergeant Cross said.

"Wonder when they're going to start bringin' nigger troops into line," Pinkard said. "Wouldn't mind seein'it, I tell you. Save some white men from getting killed, that's for damn sure."

"You really think so?" Cross shook his head to show he didn't. "Half o' those black bucks ain't nothin' but the Red rebels who were trying to shoot our asses off when they rose up. I think I'd sooner trust a damnyankee than a nigger with a rifle in his hands. Damnyankees, you *know* they're the enemy."

Pinkard shrugged. "I was one of the last white men conscripted out of the Sloss Works, so I spent a deal of time alongside niggers who were doin' the work of whites who'd already gone into the Army. Treat 'em decent and they were all right. Besides, we got any hope of winning this war without 'em?"

Albert Cross didn't answer that at all.

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Vyacheslav Molotov was not happy with the budget projections for the upcoming Five Year Plan. Unfortunately, the parts about which he was least happy had to do with the money allocated for the Red Army. Since Marshal Zhukov had rescued him from NKVD headquarters after Lavrenti Beria's coup failed, he couldn't wield a red pencil so vigorously as he would have liked. He couldn't wield one at all, in fact. If he made Zhukov unhappy with him, a Red Army–led coup would surely succeed.

Behind the expressionless mask of his face, he was scowling. After Zhukov got all the funds he wanted, the Red Army would in essence be running the Soviet State with or without a coup. Were Zhukov a little less deferential to Party authority, that would be obvious already.

The intercom buzzed. Molotov answered it with a sense of relief, though he showed no more of that than of his inner scowl. "Yes?" he asked.

"Comrade General Secretary, David Nussboym is here for his appointment," his secretary answered.

Molotov glanced at the clock on the wall of his Kremlin office. It was precisely ten o'clock. Few Russians would have been so punctual, but the NKVD man had been born and raised in Poland. "Send him in, Pyotr Maksimovich," Molotov said. Dealing with Nussboym would mean he didn't have to deal with—or not deal with—the budget for a while. Putting things off didn't make them better. Molotov knew that. But nothing he dared do to the Five Year Plan budget would make it better, either.

In came David Nussboym: a skinny, nondescript, middle-aged Jew. “Good day, Comrade General Secretary,” he said in Polish-flavored Russian, every word accented on the next-to-last syllable whether the stress belonged there or not.

“Good day, David Aronovich,” Molotov answered. “Take a seat; help yourself to tea from the samovar if you care to.”

“No, thank you.” Along with Western punctuality, Nussboym had a good deal of Western briskness. “I regret to report, Comrade General Secretary, that our attempt against Mordechai Anielewicz did not succeed.”

“Your attempt, you mean,” Molotov said. David Nussboym had got him out of his cell in the NKVD prison. Otherwise, Beria’s henchmen might have shot him before Marshal Zhukov’s troops overpowered them. Molotov recognized the debt, and had acquiesced in Nussboym’s pursuit of revenge against the Polish Jews who’d sent him to the USSR. But there were limits. Molotov made them plain: “You were warned not to place the Soviet government in an embarrassing position, even if you are permitted to use its resources.”

“I did not, and I do not intend to,” Nussboym said. “But, with your generous permission, I do intend to continue my efforts.”

“Yes, go ahead,” Molotov said. “I would not mind seeing Poland destabilized in a way that forces the Lizards to pay attention to it. It is a very useful buffer between us and the fascists farther west.” He wagged a finger at the Jew, a show of considerable emotion for him. “Under no circumstances, however, is Poland to be destabilized in a way that lets the Nazis intervene there.”

“I understand that,” David Nussboym assured him. “Believe me, it is not a fate I’d wish on my worst enemies—and some of those people are.”

“See that you don’t inflict it on them,” Molotov said, wagging that finger again: Poland genuinely concerned him. “If things go wrong, that is one of the places that can flash into nuclear war in the blink of an eye. It can—but it had better not. No debt of gratitude will excuse you there, David Aronovich.”

Nussboym’s features were almost as impassive as Molotov’s. The Jew had probably learned in the gulag not to show what was on his mind. He’d spent several years there before being recruited to the NKVD. After a single tight, controlled nod, he said, “I won’t fail you.”

Having got the warning across, Molotov changed the subject: “And how do you find the NKVD these days?”

“Morale is still very low, Comrade General Secretary,” Nussboym answered. “No one can guess whether he will be purged next. Everyone is fearful lest colleagues prepare denunciations against him. Everyone, frankly, shivers to think that his neighbor might report him to the GRU.”

“This is what an agency earns for attempting treason against the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union,” Molotov said harshly. Even so, he was disquieted. He did not want the GRU, the Red Army’s intelligence arm, riding roughshod over the NKVD. He wanted the two spying services competing against each other so the Party could use their rivalry to its own advantage. That, however, was not what Georgi Zhukov wanted, and Zhukov, at the moment, held the whip hand.

“Thank you for letting me continue, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich.” Nussboym got to his feet. “I won’t take up any more of your time.” He used another sharp nod, then left Molotov’s office. Molotov almost wished he’d stayed longer. Anything seemed preferable to returning to the Five Year Plan.

But then the intercom buzzed again, and Molotov’s secretary said, “Comrade General Secretary, your next appointment is here: the ambassador from the Race, along with his interpreter.”

Next to confronting an irritable Lizard—and Queek was often irritable—the Five Year Plan budget suddenly looked alluring. *Bozhemoi!* Molotov thought. *No rest for the weary.* Still, his secretary never heard the tiny sigh that fought its way past his lips. “Very well, Pyotr Maksimovich,” he answered. “I will meet them in the other office, as usual.”

The other office was identical to the one in which he did most of his work, but reserved for meetings with the Race. After he left it, he would change his clothes, down to his underwear. The Lizards were very good at planting tiny electronic eavesdropping devices. He did not want to spread those devices and let them listen to everything that went on inside the Kremlin: thus the meeting chamber that could be quarantined.

He went in and waited for his secretary to escort the Lizard and his human stooge into the room. Queek skittered in and sat down without

asking leave. So did the interpreter, a stolid, broad-faced man. After the ambassador spoke—a series of hisses and pops—the interpreter said, “His Excellency conveys the usual polite greetings.” The fellow had a rhythmic Polish accent much like David Nussboym’s.

“Tell him I greet him and hope he is well,” Molotov replied, and the Pole popped and hissed to the male of the Race. In fact, Molotov hoped Queek and all his kind (except possibly the Lizards in Poland, who shielded the Soviet Union from the Greater German *Reich*) would fall over dead. But hypocrisy had always been an essential part of diplomacy, even among humans. “Ask him the reason for which he has sought this meeting.”

He thought he knew, but the question was part of the game. Queek made another series, a longer one, of unpleasant noises. The interpreter said, “He comes to issue a strong protest concerning Russian assistance to the bandits and rebels in the part of the main continental mass known as China.”

“I deny giving any such assistance,” Molotov said blandly. He’d been denying it for as long as the Lizards occupied China, first as Stalin’s foreign commissar and then on his own behalf. That didn’t mean it wasn’t true—only that the Race had never quite managed to prove it.

Now Queek pointed a clawed forefinger at him. “No more evasions,” he said through the interpreter, who looked to enjoy twitting the head of the USSR. “No more lies. Too many weapons of your manufacture are being captured from those in rebellion against the rule of the Race. China is ours. You have no business meddling there.”

Had Molotov been given to display rather than concealment, he would have laughed. He would, in fact, have chortled. What he said was, “Do you take us for fools? Would we send Soviet arms to China, betraying ourselves? If we aided the Chinese people in their struggle against the imperialism of the Race, we would aid them with German or American weapons, to keep from being blamed. Whoever gives them Soviet weapons seeks to get us in trouble for things we haven’t done.”

“Is that so?” Queek said, and Molotov nodded, his face as much a mask as ever. But then, to his surprise and dismay, Queek continued, “We are also capturing a good many American weapons. Do you admit, then, that you have provided these to the rebels, in violation of

agreements stating that the subregion known as China rightfully belongs to the Race?"

Damnation, Molotov thought. *So the Americans did succeed in getting a shipload of arms through to the People's Liberation Army.* Mao hadn't told him that before launching the uprising. But then, Mao had given even Stalin headaches. The interpreter grinned offensively. Yes, he enjoyed making Molotov sweat, imperialist lackey and running dog that he was.

But Molotov was made of stern stuff. "I admit nothing," he said stonily. "I have no reason to admit anything. The Soviet Union has firmly adhered to the terms of all agreements into which it has entered." *And you cannot prove otherwise…I hope.*

For a bad moment, he wondered if Queek would pull out photographs showing caravans of weapons crossing the long, porous border between the USSR and China. The Lizards' satellite reconnaissance was far ahead of anything the independent human powers could do. But the ambassador only made noises like a samovar with the flame under it turned up too high. "Do not imagine that your effrontery will go unpunished," Queek said. "After we have put down the Chinese rebels once and for all, we will take a long, hard look at your role in this affair."

That threat left Molotov unmoved. The Japanese hadn't been able to put down Chinese rebels, either Communists or Nationalists, and the Lizards were having no easy time of it, either. They could hold the cities—except when rebellion burned hot, as it did now—and the roads between them, but lacked the soldiers to subdue the countryside, which was vast and heavily populated. Guerrillas were able to move about at will, almost under their snouts.

"Do not imagine that your colonialism will go unpunished," Molotov answered. "The logic of the historical dialectic proves your empire, like all others based on the oppression of workers and peasants, will end up lying on the ash heap of history."

Marxist terminology did not translate well into the language of the Race. Molotov had seen that before, and enjoyed watching the interpreter have trouble. He waited for Queek to explode, as Lizards commonly did when he brought up the dialectic and its lessons. But Queek said only, "You think so, do you?"

"Yes," Molotov answered, on the whole sincerely. "The triumph of

progressive mankind is inevitable."

Then Queek startled him by saying, "Comrade General Secretary, it is possible that what you tell me is truth." The Lizard startled his interpreter, too; the Pole turned toward him with surprise on his face, plainly wondering whether he'd really heard what he thought he had. With a gesture that looked impatient, the Lizard ambassador continued, "It is possible—in fact, it is likely—that, if it is truth, you will regret its being truth."

Careful, Molotov thought. *He is telling me something new and important here.* Aloud, he said, "Please explain what you mean."

"It shall be done," Queek said, a phrase Molotov understood before the interpreter translated it. "At present, you Tosevites are a nuisance and a menace to the Race only here on Tosev 3. Yet your technology is advancing rapidly—witness the Americans' *Lewis and Clark*. If it should appear to us that you may become a risk to the Race throughout the Empire, what is our logical course under those circumstances?"

Vyacheslav Molotov started to lick his lips. He stopped, of course, but his beginning the gesture told how shaken he was. Now he hoped he hadn't heard what he thought he had. Countering one question with another, he asked, "What do you believe your logical course would be?"

Queek spelled it out: "One option under serious consideration is the complete destruction of all independent Tosevite notempires."

"You know this would result in the immediate destruction of your own colonies here on Earth," Molotov said. "If you attack us, we shall assuredly take vengeance—not only the peace-loving peasants and workers of the Soviet Union, but also the United States and the *Reich*. You need have no doubts about the *Reich*." For once, he was able to use the Germans' ferocity to his advantage.

Or so he thought, till Queek replied, "I understand this, yes, but sometimes a mangled limb must be amputated to preserve the body of which it is only one part."

"This bluff will not intimidate us," Molotov said. But the Lizards, as he knew only too well, were not nearly so likely to bluff as were their human opposite numbers.

Again, their ambassador echoed his unhappy thoughts, saying, "If

you think of this as a bluff, you will be making a serious mistake. It is a warning. You and your Tosevite counterparts—who are also receiving it—had better take it as such.”

“I shall be the one who decides how to take it,” Molotov replied. He concealed his fear. For him, that was easy. Making it go away was something else again.

Praise for Harry Turtledove and *The Great War: American Front* Chosen by *Publishers Weekly* as one of the Best Books of 1998

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—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Turtledove again gives us rounded characters, honest extrapolations of historical branching, and a solid notion that all this could have happened."

—*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

"Turtledove has proved he can divert his readers to astonishing places. He's developed a cult following over the years; and if you already been there, done that with real-history novelists Patrick O'Brian, Dorothy Dunnett, or George MacDonald Fraser, for your Next Big Enthusiasm you might want to try Turtledove. I know I'd follow his imagination almost anywhere."

—*San Jose Mercury News*

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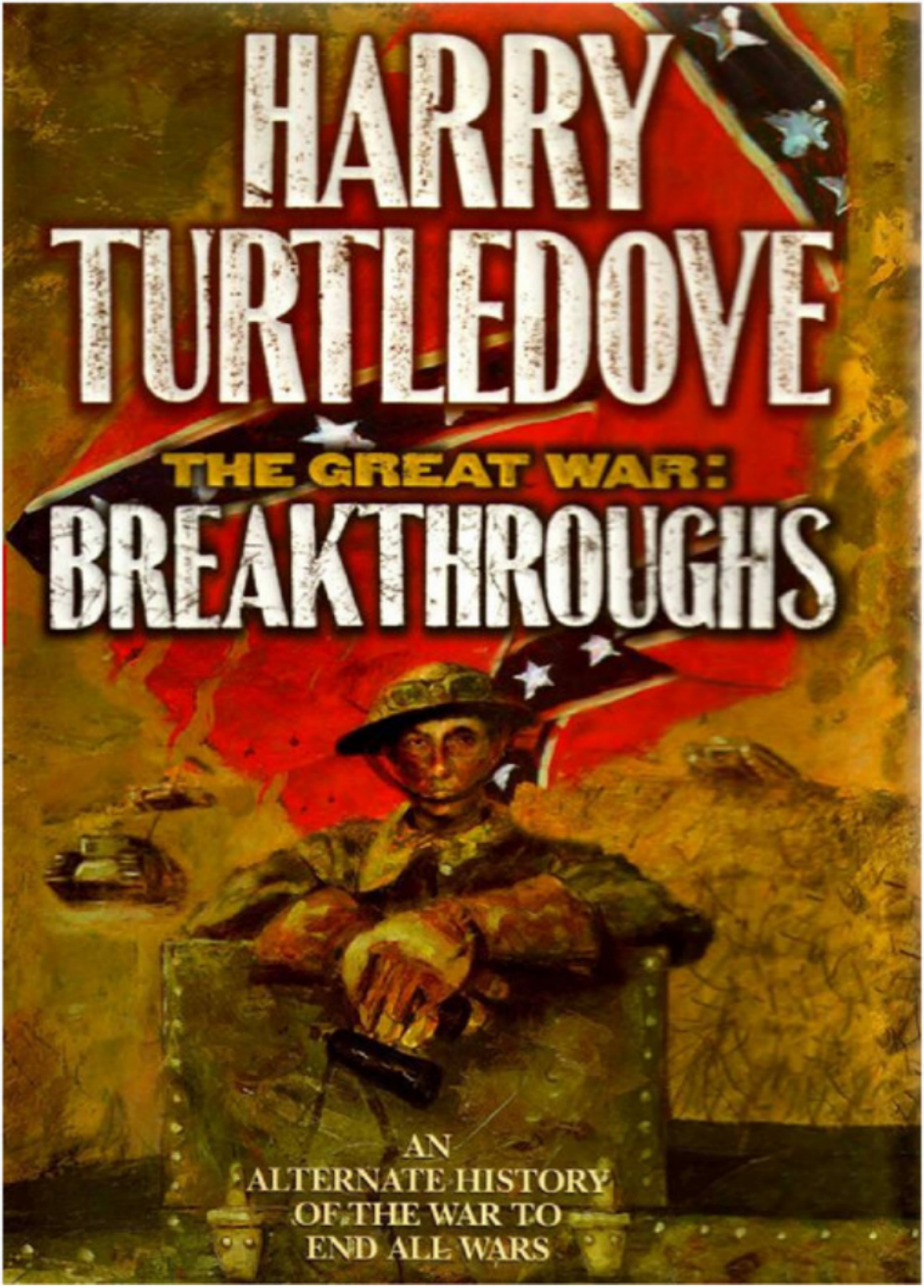
HARRY TURTLEDOVE

THE GREAT WAR: BREAKTHROUGHS



AN ALTERNATE HISTORY OF THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

Breakthroughs
Great War [4]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:****
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

From Publishers Weekly

The historian and the creative writer unite in Turtledove to craft another impressive novel, this one the third in his series about an alternate WWI (American Front, Walk in Hell), which has seen a weakened Confederate States of America not only combating the U.S.A. but facing a communist revolt from within staged by its black slaves. In this imaginative sequel, Turtledove displays his usual mastery at maintaining suspense across a broad canvas, with characters that fans will be glad to encounter again: feisty Southern aristocrat Anne Colleton leads a group of militiamen to try to wrest control of her shattered plantation, Marshlands, from the Reds; short-order cook Nellie Semphroch and her amorous daughter escape trial as collaborators thanks to a visit from Teddy Roosevelt; General Custer and his unprecedented command of the army's "barrels"AtanksAdivision leads to the U.S. scoring some lightning-fast victories. Peace is won, but at a high cost: working mother Sylvia Enos must face the future without a job and as a widow, while Confederate sub commander Roger Kimball may face a war crimes tribunal. Echoing the Treaty of Versailles, the victors make the grave mistake of punishing their enemies so that they dream of revenge. Although a complete and skillfully executed tale in itself, this epic story leaves enough plot threads dangling to demand a fourth novel to tie them up. (Aug.)
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From Library Journal

As World War I rages across a divided American continent, the beleaguered United States seeks the opportune moment to gain revenge against its Confederate enemies regardless of the cost. Building on the momentum of the previous two series novels, The Great War: American Front and The Great War: Walk in Hell, Turtledove follows his large cast of historical and fictional characters through the turning point of the war to end all wars. Alternate history's

grand master displays his acute knowledge of American history as well as his keen imagination as he paints a vivid portrait of a past that could have been. A good choice for most libraries.
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The Great War: Breakthroughs

Harry Turtledove

The "Southern Victory" Series

How Few Remain
The Great War: American Front
The Great War: Walk in Hell
The Great War: Breakthroughs
American Empire: Blood and Iron
American Empire: The Center Cannot Hold
American Empire: The Victorious Opposition
Settling Accounts: Return Engagement
Settling Accounts: Drive to the East
Settling Accounts: The Grapple
Settling Accounts: In at the Death

About the Author

HARRY TURTLEDOVE was born in Los Angeles in 1949. After flunking out of Caltech, he earned a Ph.D. in Byzantine history from UCLA. He has taught ancient and medieval history at UCLA, Cal State Fullerton, and Cal State L.A., and he has published a translation of a ninth-century Byzantine chronicle, as well as several scholarly articles. He is also a Hugo Award-winning and critically acclaimed full-time writer of science fiction and fantasy. His alternate history works have included several short stories and the novels A *World of Difference, The Guns of the South* (a speculative novel of the Civil War), and the *Worldwar* tetralogy that began in 1994 with *Worldwar: In the Balance.* Following on the heels of *How Few Remain* and the first two books of *The Great War* series, *American Front* and *Walk in Hell, The Great War: Breakthroughs* is the third volume of Turtledove's alternate-history tetralogy of World War I.

He is married to fellow novelist Laura Frankos. They have three daughters: Alison, Rachel, and Rebecca.

I

Klaxons hooted the call to battle stations. George Enos sprinted along the deck of the USS *Ericsson* toward the one-pounder gun near the stern. The destroyer was rolling and pitching in the heavy swells of an Atlantic winter storm. Freezing rain made the metal deck slick as a Boston Common ice-skating rink.

Enos ran as confidently as a mountain goat bounding from crag to crag. Ice and heavy seas were second nature to him. Before the war sucked him into the Navy, he'd put to sea in fishing boats from Boston's T Wharf at every season of the year, and gone through worse weather in craft a lot smaller than this one. The thick peacoat was warmer than a civilian slicker, too.

Petty Officer Carl Sturtevant and most of his crew were already at the depth-charge launcher near the one-pounder. The other sailors came rushing up only moments after Enos took his place at the antiaircraft gun.

He stared every which way, though with the weather so bad he would have been hard pressed to spot an aeroplane before it crashed on the *Ericsson's* deck. A frigid gust of wind tried to yank off his cap. He grabbed it and jammed it back in place. Navy barbers kept his brown hair trimmed too close for it to hold in any heat on its own.

"What's up?" he shouted to Sturtevant through the wind. "Somebody spot a periscope, or think he did?" British, French, and Confederate submersibles all prowled the Atlantic. For that matter, so did U.S. and German boats. If a friendly skipper made a mistake and launched a spread of fish at the *Ericsson,* her crew would be in just as much trouble as if the Rebs or limeys had attacked.

"Don't know." The petty officer scratched at his dark Kaiser Bill mustache. "Shit, you expect 'em to go and tell us stuff? All I know is, I heard the hooter and I ran like hell." He scratched his mustache again. "Long as we're standing next to each other,

George, happy New Year."

"Same to you," Enos answered in surprised tones. "It is today, isn't it? I hadn't even thought about it, but you're right. Back when this damn war started, who would have thought it'd last into 1917?"

"Not me, I'll tell you that," Sturtevant said.

"Me, neither," George Enos said. "I sailed into Boston harbor with a hold full of haddock the day the Austrian grand duke got himself blown up in Sarajevo. I figured the fight would be short and sweet, same as everybody else."

"Yeah, so did I," Sturtevant said. "Didn't quite work out that way, though. The Kaiser's boys didn't make it into Paris, we didn't make it into Toronto, and the goddamn Rebs did make it into Washington, and almost into Philadelphia. Nothin' comes easy, not in this fight."

"Ain't it the truth?" Enos agreed fervently. "I was in river monitors on the Mississippi and the Cumberland. I know how tough it's been."

"The snapping-turtle fleet," Sturtevant said with the good-natured scorn sailors of the oceanic Navy reserved for their inland counterparts. Having served in both branches, George knew the scorn was unjustified. He also knew he had no chance of convincing anyone who hadn't served in a river monitor that that was so.

Lieutenant Armstrong Crowder came toward the stern, a pocket watch in one hand, a clipboard with some increasingly soggy papers in the other. Seeing him thus made Enos relax inside, though he did not ease his vigilant posture. Lieutenant Crowder took notes or checked boxes or did whatever he was supposed to do with those papers.

After he was done writing, he said, "Men, you may stand easy. This was only an exercise. Had the forces of the Entente been foolish enough to try our mettle, I have no doubt we would have sunk them or driven them off."

He set an affectionate hand on the depth-charge launcher. It was a new gadget; until a few months before, ashcans had been "launched" by rolling them off the stern. Crowder loved new gadgets, and depth charges from this one actually had crippled a Confederate submarine. With a fisherman's ingrained pessimism, George Enos thought that going from one crippled boat to a sure sinking was a long leap of

faith.

Eventually, Lieutenant Crowder shut up and went away. Carl Sturtevant rolled his eyes. He had even less faith in gadgets than Enos did. "If that first torpedo nails us," he said, "odds are we're nothing but a whole raft of 'The Navy Department regrets' telegrams waiting to happen."

"Oh, yeah." George nodded. The all-clear sounded. He didn't leave the one-pounder right away even so. As long as he had reason to be here by the rail, he aimed to take a good long look at as much of the Atlantic as he could. Just because the call to battle stations had been a drill did not mean no enemy submarines lurked out there looking for a target.

Quite a few sailors lingered by the rail, despite the rain and sleet riding the wind. "Don't know why I'm bothering," Carl Sturtevant said. "Half the Royal Navy could sail by within a quarter-mile of us and we'd never be the wiser."

"Yeah," Enos said again. "Well, this makes it harder for the submersibles to spot us, too."

"I keep telling myself that," the petty officer answered. "Sometimes it makes me feel better, sometimes it doesn't. What it puts me in mind of is playing blind man's buff where everybody's got a blindfold on and everybody's carrying a six-shooter. A game like that gets scary in a hurry."

"Can't say you're wrong," Enos replied, riding the deck shifting under his feet with automatic ease. He was a good sailor with a strong stomach, which got him respect from his shipmates even though, unlike so many of them, he wasn't a career Navy man. "Could be worse, though—we could be running guns into Ireland again, or playing hide-and-seek with the limeys around the icebergs-way up north."

"You're right—both of those would be worse," Sturtevant agreed. "Sooner or later, we *will* cut that sea bridge between England and Canada, and then the Canucks *will* be in the soup."

"Sooner or later," George echoed mournfully. Before the war, the plan had been for the German High Seas Fleet to break out of the North Sea and rendezvous with the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, smashing the Royal Navy between them. But the Royal Navy had had plans of its

own, and only the couple of squadrons of the High Seas Fleet actually on the high seas when war broke out were fighting alongside their American allies. "Sooner or later," Enos went on, "I'll get some leave and see my wife and kids again, too, but I'm not holding my breath there, either. Christ, George, Jr., turns seven this year."

"It's hard," Sturtevant said with a sigh that made a young fogbank grow in front of his face. He peered out at the ocean again, then shook his head. "Hellfire, I'm only wasting my time and trying to fool myself into thinking I'll be able to spot anything anyhow."

That was probably true. George shook his head. No, that was almost certainly true. It didn't keep him from staring at the sea till his eyelashes started icing up. If he saw a periscope—

At last, he concluded he wasn't going to see a periscope, not even if a dozen of them were out there. Reluctantly, he headed back toward the bulkhead from which he'd been chipping paint. One big difference he'd discovered between the Navy and a fishing boat was that you had to look busy all the time in the Navy, regardless of whether you were.

Smoke poured from the *Ericsson's* four stacks. No one had ever claimed beauty for the destroyer's design. There were good and cogent reasons why no one had ever claimed beauty for it. Some people did claim she looked like a

French warship, a claim that would have been vicious enough to start bar room brawls during shore leave if it hadn't held such a large measure of truth.

Enos picked up the chisel he'd set down when the exercise began. He went back to work—chip, chip, chip. He spotted no rust under the paint he was removing, only bright metal. That meant his work was essentially wasted effort, but he'd had no way of knowing as much in advance. He went right on chipping. He couldn't get in trouble for doing as he was told.

A chief petty officer swaggered by. He had less rank than any officer but more authority than most. For a moment, he beamed around his cigar at George's diligence. Then, as if angry at letting himself be seen in a good mood, he growled, "You *will* police up those paint scraps from the deck, sailor." His gravelly voice said he'd been smoking cigars for a lot of years.

"Oh, yes, Chief, of course," Enos answered, his own voice dripping virtue. Since he really had intended to sweep up the paint chips, he wasn't even acting. Propitiated, the petty officer went on his way. George thought about making a face behind his back, then thought better of it. Long tours aboard fishing boats even more cramped than the *Ericsson* had taught him he was always likely to be under somebody's eyes, whether he thought so or not.

Another strip of gray paint curled against the blade of his chisel and fell to the deck. It crunched under his shoes as he took half a step down the corridor. His hands did their job with automatic competence, letting his mind wander where it would.

It wandered, inevitably, back to his family. He smiled at imagining his son seven years old. That was halfway to man-sized, by God. And Mary Jane would be turning four. He wondered what sort of fits she was giving Sylvia these days. She'd hardly been more than a toddler when he went into the Navy.

And, of course, he thought about Sylvia. Some of his thoughts about his wife were much more interesting than chipping paint. He'd been at sea a long time. But he didn't just imagine her naked in the dark with him, making the mattress in their upstairs flat creak. She'd been different, distant, the last time he'd got leave in Boston. He knew he never should have got drunk enough to tell her about being on the point of going with that colored whore when his monitor got blown out of the water. But it wasn't just that; Sylvia had been different ever since she'd got a job in the fish-packing plant: more on her own, less his wife.

He frowned as he tapped the chisel yet again. He wished she hadn't had to go to work, but the allotment she took from his salary wasn't enough to keep body and soul together, especially not with the Coal Board and the Ration Board and all the other government bureaus tightening the screws on civilians harder every day to support the war.

Then he frowned again, in a different way. The throb of the engines

changed. He not only heard it, he felt it through his shoes. The *Ericsson* picked up speed and swung through a long, smooth turn.

A few minutes later, the chief petty officer came back down the corridor. "Why'd we change course?" Enos asked him. "Which way are

we heading now?"

"Why? Damned if I know." The chief sounded as if the admission pained him. "But I know which way we're heading, by Jesus. We're heading south."

Private First Class Jefferson Pinkard sat in the muddy bottom of a trench east of Lubbock, Texas, staring longingly at the tin coffeepot above the little fire burning there. The wood that made the fire had been part of somebody's fence or somebody's house not so long before. Pinkard didn't give a damn about that. He just wanted the coffee to boil so he could drink it.

A few hundred yards to the south, a couple of Yankee three-inch field guns opened up and started hitting the Confederate lines opposite them. "God damn those sons of bitches to hell and gone," Pinkard said to anybody who would listen. "What the hell good do they think they're going to do? They'll just kill a few of us and maim a few more, and that'll be that. They're not going to break through. Shitfire, they're not even *trying* to break through. Nothin' but throwin' a little death around for the fun of it, is all."

The nearest soldier happened to be Hipolito Rodriguez. The stocky little farmer from the state of Sonora was darning socks, a useful soldierly skill not taught in basic training. He looked up from his work and said, "This whole war, it don't make no sense to me. Why you think any one part of it is supposed to make sense when the whole thing don't?"

"Damn good question, Hip," Pinkard said. "Wish I had me a damn good answer." He overtopped Rodriguez by nearly a head and could have broken him in half; he'd been a steelworker in Birmingham till conscription pulled him into the Army, and had the frame to prove it. Not only that, he was a white man, while Hip Rodriguez, like other Sonorans and Chihuahuans and Cubans, didn't fit neatly into the Confederate States' scheme of things. Rodriguez wasn't quite black, but he wasn't quite white, either—his skin was just about the color of his butternut uniform. What he was, Pinkard had discovered, was a fine soldier.

The coffee did boil then, and Jeff poured some into his tin cup. He drank. It was hotter than the devil's front porch in July and strong enough to grow hair on a little old lady's chest, but that suited him

fine. Winter in Texas was worse than anything he'd known in Alabama, and he'd never tried passing an Alabama winter in a soggy trench, either.

Rodriguez came over and filled his cup, too. Sergeant Albert Cross paused on his way down the trench line. He squatted down by the fire and rolled

himself a cigarette. "Don't know where the dickens this war is getting to," he remarked as he held the cigarette to the flames.

Pinkard and Rodriguez looked at each other. Sergeant Cross was a vet eran, one of the trained cadre around whom the regiment had been formed. He wore the ribbon for the Purple Heart to show he'd been wounded in action. That was about all that kept the other two men from braining him with the coffeepot. Pinkard couldn't begin to remember how many times over the past few weeks Cross had made the same weary joke.

Wearily, Pinkard pointed north and east. "Town of Dickens is over that way, Sarge," he said. "Christ, I wish we'd run the damnyankees back toward Lubbock a ways, just to get us the hell out of Dickens County and make you come up with somethin' new to say."

"Godalmightydamn," Cross said. "Put a stripe on somebody's sleeve and listen to how big his mouth gets." But he was chuckling as he sipped his coffee. He knew how often he said the same thing. He just couldn't stop himself from doing it.

And then, with flat, harsh, unemphatic bangs, U.S. artillery began shelling the stretch of trench where Pinkard and his comrades sheltered. His coffee went flying as he dove for the nearest dugout. The shells screamed in. They burst all around. Blast tried to tear the air out of Pinkard's lungs and hammered his ears. Shrapnel balls and fragments of shell casing scythed by.

Lying next to him in the hole scraped under the forward wall of the trench, Sergeant Cross shouted, "Leastways it ain't gas."

"Yeah," Pinkard said. He hadn't heard any of the characteristic duller ex plosions of gas shells, and no one was screaming out warnings or pounding on a shell casing with a rifle butt to get men to put on their masks. "Ain't seen gas but once or twice here."

Even as they were being shelled, Cross managed a chuckle with

real amusement in it. "Sonny boy, this front ain't important enough to waste a lot of gas on it. And you know what else? I ain't a bit sorry, neither."

Before Pinkard could answer, rifles and machine guns opened up all along the line. Captain Connolly, the company commander shouted, "Up! Get up and fight, damn it! Everybody to the firing steps, or the damnyankees'll roll right over us."

Shells were still falling. Fear held Pinkard in what seemed a safer position for a moment. But he knew Connolly was right. If U.S. troops got into the Confederate trenches, they'd do worse than field guns could.

He grabbed his rifle and scrambled out of the dugout. Yankee bullets whined overhead. If he thought about exposing himself to them, his bowels would turn to water. Doing was better than thinking. Up to the firing step he went.

Sure enough, here came the U.S. soldiers across no-man's-land, all of them in the world seemingly headed straight toward him. Their green-gray uniforms were splotched with mud, the same as his butternut tunic and trousers. They wore what looked like round pots on their heads, not the British-style iron derbies the Confederates called tin hats. Pinkard reached up to adjust his own helmet, not that the damned thing would stop a direct hit from a rifle bullet.

He rested his Tredegar on the dirt of the parapet and started firing. Enemy soldiers dropped, one after another. He couldn't tell for certain whether he was scoring any of the hits. A lot of bullets were in the air. Not all the Yankees were falling because they'd been shot, either. A lot of them went down so they could advance at a crawl, taking advantage of the cover shell holes and bushes offered.

Sometimes a few U.S. soldiers would send a fusillade of rifle fire at the nearest stretch of trench line. That would make the Confederates put their heads down and let the Yankees' pals move forward. Then the pals would bob up out of whatever hiding places they'd found and start blazing away in turn. Firing and moving, the U.S. troops worked their way forward.

Pinkard's rifle clicked harmlessly when he pulled the trigger. He slammed in a new ten-round clip, worked the bolt to bring a cartridge up into the chamber, and aimed at a Yankee trotting his way. He pulled the trigger. The man in green-gray crumpled.

Pinkard felt the same surge of satisfaction he did when controlling a stream of molten steel back at the Sloss Works: he'd done something difficult and dangerous and done it well. He worked the bolt. The spent cartridge casing leaped out of the Tredegar and fell at his feet. He swung the rifle toward the next target.

In the fighting that made the headlines, in southern Kentucky or northern Tennessee, on the Roanoke front, or up in Pennsylvania and Maryland, attackers had to work their way through enormous belts of barbed wire to close with their foes. It wasn't like that in west Texas, however much Jefferson Pinkard might have wished it were. Hereabouts, not enough men tried to cover too many miles of trenches with not enough wire. A few sad, rusty strands ran from pole to pole. They would have been fine for keeping cattle from straying into the trenches. Against a determined enemy, they did little good.

A roar in the air, a long hammering noise, screams running up and down the Confederate line. The U.S. aeroplane zoomed away after strafing the trenches from what would have been treetop height had any trees grown within miles. Pinkard sent a bullet after it, sure the round would be wasted— and it was.

"That ain't fair!" he shouted to Sergeant Cross, who had also fired at the aeroplane. "Not many flying machines out here, any more'n there's a lot of gas. Why the hell did this one have to shoot up our stretch of trench?"

"Damned if I know," Cross answered. "Must be our lucky day."

Stretcher bearers carried groaning wounded men back toward aid stations behind the line. Another soldier was walking back under his own power. "What the devil are you doing, Stinky?" Pinkard demanded.

"Christ, I hate that nickname," Christopher Salley said with dignity. He was a skinny, precise little pissweed who'd been a clerk before the Conscription Bureau sent him his induction letter. He was, at the moment, a skinny, precise, wounded little pissweed: he held up his left hand to display a neat bullet hole in the flesh between thumb and forefinger. Blood dripped from the wound. "I really ought to get this seen to, don't you think?"

"Go ahead, go ahead." Pinkard turned most of his attention back to the Yankees. A minute or so later, though, he spoke to Sergeant Cross in tones of barely disguised envy: "Lucky bastard."

"Ain't it the truth?" Cross said. "He's hurt bad enough to get out of the fight, but that'll heal clean as a whistle. Shit, they might even ship him home on convalescent leave."

That appalling prospect hadn't occurred to Jeff. He swore. The idea of Stinky Salley getting to go home while he was stuck out here God only knew how far from Emily . . .

Then he forgot about Salley, for the U.S. soldiers were making their big push toward the trench line. The last hundred yards of savage fire proved more than flesh and blood could bear. Instead of storming forward and leaping down in among the Confederates, the soldiers in green-gray broke and ran back toward their own line, dragging along as many of their wounded as they could.

The firefight couldn't have lasted longer than half an hour. Pinkard felt a year or two older, or maybe like a cat that had just used up one of its lives. He looked around for his tin cup. There it was, where he'd dropped it when the shelling started. Somebody had stomped on it. For good measure, it had a bullet hole in it, too, probably from the aeroplane. He let out a long sigh.

"Amen," Sergeant Cross said.

"Wonder when they're going to start bringin' nigger troops into line," Pinkard said. "Wouldn't mind seein' it, I tell you. Save some white men from getting killed, that's for damn sure."

"You really think so?" Cross shook his head to show he didn't. "Half o' those black bucks ain't nothin' but the Red rebels who were trying to shoot our asses off when they rose up. I think I'd sooner trust a damnyankee than a nigger with a rifle in his hands. Damnyankees, you *know* they're the enemy."

Pinkard shrugged. "I was one of the last white men conscripted out of the Sloss Works, so I spent a deal of time alongside niggers who were doin' the work of whites who'd already gone into the Army. Treat 'em decent and they were all right. Besides, we got any hope of winning this war without 'em?"

Albert Cross didn't answer that at all.

Iron wheels screaming against steel rails, the train slowed to a halt. The con ductor worked his way through the cars, calling out the destination: "Philadelphia! All out for Philadelphia!"

Flora Hamburger's heart thudded in her chest. Until this train ride, she had never been out of New York State—never, come to that, been out of New York City. But here she was, arriving in the de facto national capital as the newly elected Socialist member of the House of Representatives for her Lower East Side district.

She wished the train had not come into the Broad Street station at night. Blackout curtains on the windows kept light from leaking out of the cars— and kept her from seeing her new home. The Confederates' night bombers were not hitting Philadelphia so hard as the aeroplanes of the United States were punishing Richmond—they had to fly a long way from Virginia—but no one wanted to give them any targets at which they might aim.

Her lip curled. She had opposed the war from the beginning, and wished her party had been more steadfast in opposing it. After once supporting war loans, the Socialists had been unable to avoid doing it again and again.

No one sharing the car with her knew who she was. Several young officers—and a couple of older men in business suits—had tried to strike up a conversation on the way down from New York City. As was her way in such situations, she'd been polite but resolutely distant. Most of them were likely to be Democrats, and few if any were likely to be Jews. She wondered what living outside the crowded and solidly Jewish neighborhood in which she'd grown up would be like. So many changes . . .

She got up, put on the overcoat she'd removed as soon as she boarded the car, and filed off with everyone else. "Be watching your step, ma'am," a porter with a face like a freckled map of Ireland said as she descended to the platform.

Broad Street Station was an impressive pile of brick, terra cotta, and granite. It would have been more impressive without the cloth awnings that helped shield the electric lights inside from the air. It would also have been more impressive had more of those lights been shining. As things were, walls and doors and windows barely emerged from twilight. Shadows leaped and swooped wildly as people hurried by.

"How crowded it is!" someone behind her exclaimed. She had to smile. Whoever said that had never seen the Lower East Side.

A man walked slowly along the platform holding a square of

cardboard with a couple of words printed on it in large letters. Peering through the gloom, she finally made them out: CONGRESSWOMAN HAMBURGER. She waved to catch the man's attention, then called, "Here I am!"

"You're Miss Hamburger?" he asked. At her nod, his eyes widened a little. With a shrug, he tossed the sign into the nearest rubbish barrel. His laugh was on the rueful side. "I knew you were young. I didn't expect you to be quite so young."

He was probably twice her age: an erect but portly fellow in his early fifties, with a gray mustache and gray hair peeping out from under a somber black homburg. "I don't know what you expected," she said, a little more sharply than she'd intended. "I *am* Flora Hamburger." She held out her hand, man-fashion.

That surprised him again. He hesitated a moment before shaking hands. If he'd paused any longer, she would have grown angry. His grip, though, proved pleasantly firm. "I am pleased to meet you," he said, and tipped his hat. "I'm Hosea Blackford."

"Oh!" she said, now surprised in her turn. "The congressman from Dakota!" She felt foolish. She'd expected the Socialists to have someone waiting to meet her at the station, but she'd thought the fellow would be a local ward captain or organizer. That a U.S. Representative—*another U.S. Representative,* she thought with more than a little pride—would come here had never crossed her mind.

"I do have that honor, yes," he said. "Shall we collect your baggage? I have a motorcar outside. I'll take you to the flat we've found for you. It happens to be in the building where I have my own flat, so there is some method to the madness. You've got your claim tickets, I trust?"

"Yes." Flora knew she sounded dazed. It wasn't just because Congress man Blackford was meeting her here. The idea of having a flat to herself was every bit as astonishing. Back in New York, she'd shared one with her father and mother, two sisters, a brother (her other brother having gone into the Army not long before), and a nephew. What would she do, with so much space to herself? What would she do with so much quiet?

A porter with a dolly wheeled Flora's trunks out to Blackford's automobile, a small, sedate Ford, and heaved them into it. The congressman tipped the fellow, who thanked him in Italian-accented

English. Despite the chilly breeze, Flora's face went hot. She should have tipped the man herself, but she hadn't thought of it till too late. Till now, she hadn't been in a lot of situations where she was supposed to tip.

Blackford cranked the engine into life. It started readily, which meant it hadn't been sitting long. The headlamps had masking tape over most of their surface, so they cast only the faintest glow out ahead of the motorcar. Congressman Blackford drove slowly and carefully, so as not to run into anything before he knew it was there.

"Thank you for taking all this trouble over me," Flora said above the Ford's grunts and rattles and squeaks.

"Don't make it out to be something bigger than it is," Blackford answered. "I'm not just taking you home: I'm taking myself home, too. And believe me, the Socialist Party needs every representative and senator it can lay its hands on. If you have a strong voice, you will be able to make yourself heard, I promise you."

"Yes, but how much good will it do?" Flora could not hide her bitterness. "The Democrats have such a majority, they can do as they please."

Blackford shrugged. "We do what we can. Lincoln didn't quote the Scripture that says, 'As your Father in heaven is perfect, be ye also perfect,' because he wanted people to truly be perfect. He wanted them to do their best."

"Yes," Flora said, and no more. Blackford's comment went over less well than he'd no doubt intended. For one thing, the Scripture Lincoln had quoted was not Flora's. And, for another, while Lincoln had made the Socialist Party in the USA strong by bringing in his wing of the Republicans after the fiasco of the Second Mexican War, Socialism in New York City stayed closer to its Marxist roots than was true in most of the country.

Blackford said, "I met Lincoln once—more than thirty-five years ago, it was."

"Did you?" Now Flora put more interest in her voice. Whether or not she agreed with all of Lincoln's positions, without him the Socialists likely would have remained a splinter group instead of overtaking the Republicans as the chief opposition to the Democratic Party.

He nodded. "It changed my life. I'd been mining in Montana, with no bet ter luck than most. I was taking the train back to Dakota to farm with my kin, and I happened to have the seat next to his. We talked for hours, till I came to my stop and got off. He opened my eyes, Miss Hamburger. Without him, I never would have thought to read law or go into politics. I'd still be trying to coax wheat out of the ground out West."

"He inspired a lot of people," Flora said. After losing the War of Secession and having to yield independence to the Confederate States, he'd inspired a lot of people to hate him, too.

The Ford stuttered to a stop in front of a four-story brick building. Hosea Blackford pointed west. "Liberty Hall is just a couple of blocks over that way. It's an easy walk, unless the weather is very bad. They'll swear you in day after tomorrow, and the new Congress will get down to business."

A doorman came over to the motorcar. He nodded to Blackford, then spoke to Flora: "You must be Congresswoman Hamburger. Very pleased to meet you, ma'am. I'm Hank. Whatever you need, you let me know. Right now, I expect you'll want your bags taken up to your flat. Don't you worry about a thing. I'll handle it."

And he did, with efficiency and dispatch. She remembered to tip him, and must have gauged the amount about right, for he touched a forefinger to the

patent-leather brim of his cap in salute before he vanished. Flora was amazed she remembered anything. The flat was astonishing beyond her wildest flights of fancy. All for herself, she had twice the room her entire family enjoyed—or sometimes did not enjoy—on the Lower East Side.

Congressman Blackford stood in the doorway. Careful of convention, he did not go into her flat. He said, "I'm straight across the hall, in 3C. If Hank can't help you with something, maybe I can. Good night."

"Good night," Flora said vaguely. She kept staring at all the space she was somehow supposed to occupy by herself. She had thought the Congressional salary of $7,500 a year—far, far more than her entire family made—the most luxurious part of the position. Now she wasn't so sure.

Opening the trunk in which she'd packed her nightgowns, she put on a long wool flannel one and went to bed. Tomorrow, she told herself, she would explore Philadelphia. The day after tomorrow, she would go to work. For all her good intentions, she was a long time falling asleep. Not long after she did, she woke up to the distant pounding of antiaircraft guns and the roar of aeroplane engines right overhead. No bombs fell nearby, so those engines probably belonged to U.S. pursuit aeroplanes, not Confederate raiders.

When morning came, she discovered the kitchen was stocked with every thing she might want. After coffee and eggs, she found a shirtwaist and black wool skirt that weren't impossibly wrinkled, put them on along with a floral hat, threw on the coat she'd worn the night before, and went downstairs. Hank was already on duty. "I'll see that everything is pressed for you, ma'am," he promised when she inquired. "Don't you worry about a thing. I'll take care of it. You look like you're going out. Enjoy yourself. I vote Socialist, too, you know. I hope you keep coming back to Philadelphia for years and years."

She nodded her thanks, more than a little dazed. She'd never had so much attention lavished on her. No one in her family had ever had time to lavish so much attention on her. Out she went, to see what Philadelphia was like.

It struck her as being a more serious, more disciplined place than New York City. Big, forthright, foursquare government buildings—some of them showing bomb damage, others being repaired—dominated downtown. They were all fairly new, having gone up since the Second Mexican War. Not only had the government grown greatly since then, but Philadelphia had taken on more and more of the role of capital. Washington, though remaining in law the center of government, was hideously vulnerable to Confederate guns—and had, in fact, been occupied by the CSA since the earliest days of the fighting.

Liberty Hall was another pile of brick and granite, rather less impressive than the Broad Street station. It looked more like the home of an insurance firm than that of a great democracy. Down in Washington, the Capitol was splendid ... or had been, till Confederate cannon damaged it.

Liberty Hall stood near one of the many buildings through which the War Department sprawled. Men in uniform were everywhere on the street, far more common than in New York. New York at most accepted the war— reluctantly, sometimes angrily. Philadelphia

embraced it. Seeing that sobered Flora. She wondered how parochial her opposition would seem.

She stayed out all day. When she got back, she found her clothes un packed, pressed as promised, and set neatly in closets and drawers. Nothing was missing—she checked. Seven cents in change lay on the nightstand. It must have been in one of her trunks.

She dressed in her best tailored suit, a black and white plaid, for her first trip to the House. Despite her businesslike appearance, a functionary in semi- military uniform tried to keep her out of the House chamber, saying, "The stairs to the visitors' gallery are on your right, ma'am."

"I am Congresswoman Flora Hamburger," she said in a wintry voice, and had the satisfaction of seeing him turn pale. Another uniformed aide took her down to her desk.

She looked around the immense chamber, which was filling rapidly. The only other woman in the House was a Democrat, an elderly widow from out side of Pittsburgh whose husband had held the district for decades till he died a few days before the war broke out. Flora didn't expect to have much in common with her. She didn't expect to have much in common with the plump, prosperous men who were the majority here, either, though she did wave back when Hosea Blackford waved to her.

Then she was on her feet with her right hand raised in a different fashion. "I, Flora Hamburger, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of Representative of the United States, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

When she sat down again, her face bore an enormous smile. She belonged here. It was official. "Now to set this place to rights," she muttered under her breath.

Winter nights up in southern Manitoba were long. Arthur McGregor wished they were longer still. If he lay in bed asleep, he would not have to think of his son Alexander, executed by the U.S. occupiers for sabotage—sabotage he had not committed, sabotage McGregor was convinced he had not even planned.

He stirred in bed, wishing he could sleep: a big, strong, hard-faced Scots farmer in his early forties, his dark hair grayer than it had been before the war started, grayer than it would have been had the Yankees stayed on their own side of the border. *Damn them.* His mouth silently shaped the words.

Maude stirred beside him. "You can't bring him back, Arthur," she

murmured, as if he'd shouted instead of soundlessly whispering. "All you can do is make yourself feel worse. Rest if you can."

"I want to," he answered. "The harder I chase after sleep, though, the faster it runs away. It didn't used to be like this."

Maude lay quiet. *It's because I'm right,* McGregor thought. Before the Americans came, he'd fallen asleep every night as if he were a blown-out lantern. Farm work did that to a man. It did that to a woman, too; Maude hadn't lain awake beside him. Now worry and anguish fought their exhaustion to a standstill.

"We have to go on," Maude said. "We have to go on for the sake of the girls."

"Julia's turning into a woman," he said in dull wonder. "Thirteen. God, where does the time go? And Mary ..." He didn't go on. What he'd started to say was, *Mary would kill every American in Manitoba if she could.* That wasn't the sort of thing you should say about an eight-year-old girl, even if it was true—maybe especially if it was true. —

"Arthur—" Maude began. She fell silent again, and then spoke once more: "Whatever you do, Arthur, be careful."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he answered stolidly. "Been a goodish while since I let the horse kick me."

"That's not what I meant." Maude rolled over, turning her back on him. She was angry. She would have been angrier if she hadn't had to tell him that, though. He was sure of it.

Eventually, he slept. When he went downstairs the next morning, Julia had oatmeal ready and fried a couple of eggs while he ate it. The oatmeal and the eggs came straight from what the farm produced. The coffee Julia poured, however, he'd bought in Rosenfeld, the nearest town. He made a face when he drank it. "I'm sorry, Father. Didn't I make it right?" Julia asked anxiously.

"It's as good as it can be," he answered. "It's about one part coffee to ten parts burnt roots and grain, is all. I expect the Americans think they're good-hearted for letting us have any of the real bean at all."

"Are you sure it's all right?" Julia said. McGregor was a serious man in a practical way, as farmers have to be. Julia was serious, too, but more thoughtfully so; she'd been outraged at the lies the Yankees were having the schools teach, and even more outraged because some of her classmates accepted those lies for truth. Now she seemed to wonder if her father was trying to deceive her about the coffee.

"I'm sure," he told her. "Your mother couldn't have made it any better." That did reassure her. McGregor went on, "And no matter what else, it's hot. The Yanks can't take that from us—unless they rob us of fuel, too, that is."

"I wouldn't put it past them," Julia said darkly.

McGregor wouldn't have put it past them, either. As far as he was concerned, the Americans were nothing but locusts eating their way through everything he and the rest of the Canadians whose land they occupied had spent years—sometimes generations—building up. Whatever fragments they happened to leave behind, the Canadians could keep. His mouth twisted in what was not a smile. He hoped such generosity wouldn't bankrupt them.

After finishing breakfast, he put on his coat, mittens, earmuffs, and a stout felt hat. He was already wearing two undershirts under a wool shirt and two pairs of long Johns under jeans. Thus fortified against the weather, he opened the door, slamming it behind him as fast as he could.

As always, the first breath of outside air made him feel as if he'd inhaled a lungful of knives and saws. His work boots crunched in the snow as he made his slow way toward the barn. The second breath wasn't so bad; by the third, the air was just cold. He'd felt it much colder; he doubted it was any more than ten below. This sort of winter weather came with living in Manitoba.

A north-south dirt road marked the eastern boundary of his farm. Most winters, it would have been all but empty of traffic. Not this one, nor the two previous. Big snorting White trucks painted green-gray growled over the frozen ground, hauling men and supplies toward the front south of Winnipeg.

"Not far enough south of Winnipeg," McGregor said under his steaming breath. Canadian and British troops still held the United States out of the link between the west and the more densely populated provinces to the east, but the sound of artillery from the front was no more than a low mutter on the horizon, not the thunder it had been the summer before, when for a while he'd hoped the Yanks would be driven from his land.

Horse-drawn wagons and columns of marching men supplemented the trucks. McGregor hoped the marching soldiers would all come down with frostbite. Some of them surely would; the United States did not have winters to match these.

Other trucks carried soldiers south, away from the fighting. Ambulances with red crosses painted on their green-gray side panels carried soldiers away from the fighting, too, probably for good. Any man hurt badly enough to need treatment so far away from the front was likely to be in bad shape. McGregor hoped so.

He went into the barn and tended to the livestock. He didn't have so much livestock to tend as he'd had before the war started; U.S. requisitions had made sure of that. He milked the cow and fed it and the horse and the pigs. He shoveled dung. When spring came, he'd manure his acres as best he could. He gathered eggs from under the chickens, who squawked and tried to peck. He put corn in a trough for them, glad he still had corn to give.

Before too long, the work with the animals was done. He could have gone back to the house and its warmth. But it wasn't so cold in here; the enclosed space and the body heat of the livestock brought the temperature up a good deal. He took off his mittens and stuffed them into a coat pocket.

Along with the animals, he kept all sort of tools and supplies in the barn. Most of those tools were openly displayed, hung on pegs above his workbench. Near the workbench lay an old wagon wheel, a couple of wooden spokes broken, the iron tire streaked with rust the color of old blood. It looked as if it had lain there for a long time. It was supposed to look as if it had lain there for a long time.

With a grunt, he picked it up and leaned it against the wall. A rake swept away the dirt under it, the dirt that concealed a board which he heaved up and leaned against the wagon wheel. Under the board was a hole in which sat a wooden crate about half full of sticks of dynamite, a couple of medium-sized wooden boxes, and a small

cardboard box of blasting caps, a long coil of fuse, and, carefully greased against rust, a fuse cutter and crimper.

McGregor looked down into the hole with considerable satisfaction. "If Captain Hannebrink ever finds out I've got this stuff, he puts me against a wall, the same as he did Alexander," he said. He whistled a couple of bars of "God Save the King," to which the Americans had written their own asinine lyrics. "Well, one fine day Captain Hannebrink *will* find out—and won't he be surprised?"

He laughed then. Contemplating revenge on the U.S. officer who had ar rested his son and later ordered the youth's execution was one of the few things that could take the scowl off his face these days.

He picked up a blasting cap, a couple of sticks of dynamite, and the crimper and carried them over to the workbench. A case waited for them there, one more box made from scrap lumber and carefully varnished and smeared with petroleum jelly to keep moisture from getting in. Before he got to work on loading the explosives into it, he blew on his hands till his fingers were as warm and supple as they could be.

When he was done working, he set the bomb in the hole along with the crimper. He put the board over the top of the hole, then raked and swept dirt and straw onto it till it looked no different from the surrounding ground. With another grunt, he put the old wagon wheel back where it had been. While it was there, no searcher would step on the board and hear the hollow sound a footfall made.

He put on his mittens again, then left the barn. The tracks in the snow he had made coming from the house were still unchanged. He grimaced as he started back. As long as snow lay quiet, he couldn't go out and use any of his toys, not without leaving a trail that would lead Captain Hannebrink and his chums straight back to the farmhouse.

"A blizzard," he whispered hoarsely. "Give me a blizzard, God." If the snow was falling fast and blowing hard, it would hide his tracks almost as

soon as he made them. And, if he did come across a Yankee sentry then, he would have bet on himself in the snow against any Yankee ever born. He'd known Canadian winters all his life—and he'd served his hitch as a conscript soldier, too, half a lifetime before. He knew the tricks of the business.

Business . . . Instead of going straight back to the house, he made a detour to the outhouse. He did his business there as fast as he could. During winter, a man thanked God if he was constipated; the fewer trips you made, the better. The only advantage to winter was that it held down the stink.

He set his clothes to rights in jig time, then started back to the farm house. He was halfway there when he realized he'd forgotten the milk in the barn. Cursing under his breath, he went back and retrieved it. When he went into the farmhouse, the first breath of warm air inside was almost as shocking as going the other way had been. "What took you so long, Pa?" Mary asked.

"I was working," he told his youngest daughter. Mary's gingery eyebrows rose; she knew how long his chores should have taken. He didn't care, not at the moment. Turning to his wife, he asked, "What smells so good?"

"Blackberry pie—our own berries from down by the creek." Maude asked him no questions about why he'd worked so long in the barn. She never asked him any questions about things like that. He didn't think she wanted to know. But she never told him to stop, either.

Along with a good part of Greenville, South Carolina's, population—both white and black—Scipio spent a Sunday afternoon in City Park watching Negro recruits for the Confederate Army practice marching and countermarching over the broad expanse of grass.

"Ho there, Jeroboam!" called one of the colored men who worked at the same textile mill as did Scipio. "How you is?"

"I's middlin'," he answered. "How *you* is, Titus?" Jeroboam was a safer name than his own. As Scipio, he had a price on his head. The government of the Confederate States and the government of South Carolina would both hang him if they caught him. He'd been a leader in the revolutionary Congaree Socialist Republic, one of the many black Socialist republics that had flared to life in the great uprising at the end of 1915—and been crushed, one after another, the following year.

Bayonets glittered on the black recruits' Tredegars. Scipio wondered how many of those soldiers who now wore butternut had

worn the red armband of revolution a year earlier. Without a doubt, some had. Why were they serving the government they had tried to overthrow? To learn what they had not known before, what they would need to know to make their next uprising succeed? Or—

Titus came up alongside Scipio. Like Scipio's, his hair had some gray in it. He said, “Wish I was young enough to jine up my own self. Them sojers, when they gets out, they be as good as white in the eyes of the law.”

¡°De gummint say so,” Scipio answered dubiously. “De gummint need we niggers now. De gummint don’ need we no mo’, what happen den?” His ac cent was thicker and richer than Titus’: the accent of the swamp country down by the Congaree River, south and east of Greenville.

When he chose, he could also speak like an educated white. Before he un willingly became a revolutionary, he’d been the butler at Anne Colleton’s Marshlands plantation. If God was kind, he would never have to talk like a white man again. If God was very kind, he would never see Anne Colleton again.

Titus said, “They git to vote, don’t they, once they’s done bein’ sojers? They git to sit on juries, don’t they, once they’s out o’ the Army?”

¡°De gummint say so,” Scipio repeated. “I hopes de gummint tell de truth. But it de gummint.”

That got through to Titus. “Maybe so, Jeroboam. Maybe so. They make a law today say one thing, they make another one tomorrow, say somethin’ else.” He pointed. “But the law they make today, it give ‘em niggers with guns. Niggers with guns, they ain’t so easy to trifle with.”

Scipio nodded. Titus couldn’t read and signed his name with an X, but he wasn’t stupid. Black men who’d carried rifles and shown they could fight would be harder to cheat after the war was over. Maybe it was only because the Negro had shown he could fight in the Red uprisings that the Confederate government had decided to put him into the line against the United States. If the USA crushed the CSA, the Confederate way of life was wrecked forever. If the Negro helped save the GSA, change would also come, but perhaps less of it.

A white drill sergeant put the black troops through their paces. “By the right flank . . . harch he barked, and they went as one man to the

right. “To the rear ... harch!” The recruits turned back on themselves. “By the left flank . . . harch They changed direction once more. “Eyes ... right!” Their heads swung so that they looked into the crowd as they marched past Scipio and Titus. “Count cadence—count!”

¡˚One! . . . Two! . . Three! . . . Four!” the Negro soldiers shouted in unison, calling out a number at every other step. Then they doubled the pace of the count: “One two three four! One two three four!”

¡˚Companeee—haltl” the drill sergeant shouted. His men might suddenly have turned to stone. He nodded, then looked angry at himself for betraying the slightest hint of approval. “Present—arms!” The Tredegars that had been on the Negroes’ shoulders leaped in front of their faces, held by both hands. “Shoulder arms!” The rifles returned to the men’s shoulders. “For’ard

harch!” Like a well-oiled machine, the company went back into motion.

After a few minutes, Scipio said, “ goin’ on home. See you in de mornin’.” Titus nodded absently. The soldiers seemed to entrance him.

The room Scipio rented was large and cheap. He kept it scrupulously clean. That was a leftover from his days at Marshlands, though he didn’t think of it as such. All he knew was, dirt annoyed him. He bathed more often than most of his fellow boarders, too. He wished he had a bathtub in his own room. The one down at the end of the hail would have to do, though.

He read under the gaslight till six o’clock, then went downstairs to supper. It was a stew of rice and carrots and turnips and okra and a little chicken. A cook at Marshlands who turned out such a stingy supper would have been looking for a new situation the next morning. Scipio ate a big plateful and said not a word. Since the ill-fated black revolt broke out, he’d learned a full belly, however obtained, was nothing at which to sneer.

His cheap alarm clock jangled far too early the next morning. He shaved in cold water at the sink in his room, put on wool pants and a collarless cot ton shirt, threw a cotton jacket over the shirt, and plopped a flat cap on his head. Coffee and rolls were waiting downstairs. The coffee was brewed from about as much chicory as the real bean, but it made his eyes come open, which counted for more. The only word he had for the rolls was delicious.

Thus fortified, he made his way to the mill where he worked. The morning was brisk, but not so chilly as to make walking unpleasant. He fell in with a couple of other Negro men who worked at the same mill. One of his friends told a lewd, improbable, and highly entertaining story about his exploits with several women—just how many kept changing from one minute to another.

Black faces streamed in at the entry gate. Only a few whites put salt among the pepper. Most of the white faces belonged to women, the rest to men either unfit for service or too badly injured to go back into the military.

¡°Befo’ the war,” one of Scipio’s friends said, “niggers couldn’t get these here jobs, ‘cept maybe the dirtiest ones an’ the hardest ones. They was all fo’ the buckra, but nowadays the buckra all off fightin’ the Yankees. If us niggers don’t do the work, the work don’t get did.”

¡°That’s a fac’,” Scipio said. He never expressed an opinion of that sort on his own. To have done so might have drawn attention to him. The more nearly invisible he was, the better. Agreeing with what someone else said, though, seemed safe enough.

He punched the time clock and went to work: throwing heavy bolts of butternut cloth onto a Low cart with tiny wheels and pushing the cart from the enormous room where the cloth was woven to the equally enormous one where it was cut into uniforms. He got three dollars a day, up from the $2.50 the mill had paid when he first hired on. Part of the increase was because wages were rising along with prices, though not so fast. The rest came simply from his staying on the job. A tot of men started, lasted a couple of days or a couple of weeks, and quit. Some got better work elsewhere, while others left the factory for the service.

At forty-four—give or take a year—Scipio was too old to join the service. He wasn't particularly interested in better work, either. The job he had was hard, but not too hard. He had better wind and a slimmer waistline than he'd owned back at Marshlands. He also had work that he did and did well, without anyone giving him orders every other minute.

He hadn't learned what a luxury that was till his first factory job in Columbia, after he'd managed to escape the collapsing Congaree Socialist Republic. Before then, all he'd ever known were Anne Colleton's endless commands, and those of her brothers, and, in

earlier days, those of her father.

Now all he had to do was shove this cart across fifty feet of bumpy floor, unload the bolts of cloth, and then pull the cart back and fill it up again. He had plenty of time to think while he worked, and his natural pace was fast enough to keep the foreman happy. Had the foreman pushed him, he could easily have worked half again as hard; the fellow never would have lasted as an overseer in the Marshlands cotton fields.

At noon, the lunch whistle blew. Scipio clocked out, hurried to one of the many little greasy spoons across the street from the mill, and bought a ham sandwich on fresh-baked bread, with homemade mustard sharp enough to bring tears to his eyes. Then it was back to the mill, and an afternoon just like the morning.

His replacement on the evening shift, a fellow about half his age named Midas, got there a couple of minutes before the shift whistle blew. Scipio was pleasantly surprised; this was the first time in several days Midas had been early. They gossiped till the whistle screeched. Then Scipio said, "See you in de mornin'," and headed for the boardinghouse.

Supper that evening was another starchy, watery stew, this one eked out with bits of salt pork. Scipio wolfed it down as if he never expected to eat again, then took the stairs to his room two at a time. That got him into the bathtub ahead of any of the other four people on his floor. Feeling clean and contented, he went back to his room to read and relax for an hour or two before he had to go to bed.

About half past eight, someone knocked on the door. When he got up and opened it, he found two large white men outside. They did not look friendly. One of them pointed a large, heavy revolver at his chest, which seemed anything but friendly. In a flat voice, the other one said, "You are a nigger named Scipio."

Had Scipio been white, he would have turned pale. "No, suh." He shook his head violently. "I's Jeroboam. Fs had de name all my born days."

"Passbook," the white man holding the revolver said.

Now, were Scipio white, he would have flushed. "Ain't got none," he ad mitted. He put the best face on it he could: "Hell of a lot of niggers ain't got no passbook no mo'. De war, de nasty uprisin'—" Frantically,

he wondered who had recognized him and turned him in. Titus? One of the soldiers who'd marched past him in the park? He doubted he would ever know.

"Liar," the white man with the pistol said. His comrade whispered some thing to him. Reluctantly, he nodded. When he spoke again, his tone was grudging: "We do want to make sure you really are Scipio the Red, so we know we're killin' the right nigger and not letting him run loose to make more mischief. So I ain't gonna get rid of you now, not unless you do somethin' stupid like try and run. So we'll take you to somebody who damn well knows who you are. Once we're certain sure, *then* we stretch your goddamn neck."

"Whoever say I ain't Jeroboam, he a liar," Scipio declared.

"Anne Colleton ain't no *he,"* the white man without the gun said. Scipio had the presence of mind not to betray that he knew the name. That helped now. It wouldn't help for long. The tough guy with the gun gestured. "Come on," the other one growled. Numbly, Scipio came.

Sergeant Chester Martin wrinkled his long, rather beaky nose as he made his way up the muddy zigzag of the communications trench toward the front line. He'd lived with mud and the stink of rotting meat and shit and garbage from the U.S. invasion of the Roanoke valley when the war was new till he got wounded the autumn before. Convalescing in Toledo, he'd almost managed to forget the nature of the stench, but it came back in a hurry.

He rubbed his chin, which was as pointed as his nose. Now the United States were getting ready to invade Virginia again, this time from the north rather than the west. In the early days of the fighting, the CSA had overrun Maryland and southern Pennsylvania before being halted on the line of the Susquehanna. The grinding war since then had driven the Rebels back toward their own border. Now—

Now the United States had bridgeheads south of the Potomac, on Confed erate soil. Martin trudged past a wrecked barrel—a Confederate model, with treads all around the hull—from which Army engineers were scavenging whatever they could.

A shell burst a couple of hundred yards to Martin's left. He didn't bother ducking; going home to heal hadn't made him lose the knack

for knowing when an incoming round was dangerous and when it wasn't. Rifle and machine-gun fire told him he was getting very close to the front. The shooting was sporadic, almost desultory. Neither side was pushing hard here, not right this second.

A grimy, tired-looking fellow with several days' growth of beard was lean ing against the wall of the trench while he smoked a cigarette. Martin paused.

The soldier studied him. He could read the fellow's thoughts. Nearly clean uniform—a point against. New Purple Heart ribbon—a point for, maybe even a point and a half, because it explained the clean uniform. Sergeant's stripes— three points against, without a doubt.

But the stripes also meant the fellow couldn't safely ignore him. Sure enough, after another drag on the hand-rolled cigarette, the soldier asked, "You lookin' for somebody in particular, Sergeant?"

"B Company, 91st Regiment," Martin answered. "They told me back at division HQ it was up this way."

"They gave you the straight goods," the soldier said with a nod. "Matter of fact, I'm in B Company myself. Name's Tilden Russell."

"Chester Martin," Martin said.

Russell looked him over again, this time with more interest. "You don't mind me askin', Sarge, where'd you pick up your grape-jelly ribbon there?"

What kind of soldier are you? the question meant. *What kind of action have you seen? "Roanoke front," Martin answered crisply. "Spent two years there, till I took one in the arm in the Rebs' big counterattack last fall."*

"Two years on the Roanoke front?" Russell's eyebrows rose toward the brim of his helmet. "Come on. I'll take you up to the line myself. God damn, you can play on my team any day of the week."

"Thanks." Martin hid a smile. If he'd come from Arkansas or, say, Sequoyah, Tilden Russell wouldn't have wanted to give him the time of day, let alone escort him up to the forward trenches. Compared to this front, the fighting out west wasn't anything to speak of. The fighting in the Roanoke valley, though, didn't take a back seat to

anything.

"Captain Cremony!" Russell called as he came into the front-line trenches, and then, to a soldier in a green-gray uniform, "You seen the captain, Eddie? This here's our new sergeant—spent two years on the Roanoke front." He sounded as proud of that as if he'd done the fighting himself.

"Yeah?" Eddie looked impressed, too. He pointed to the nearest vertical jog in the horizontal trench. "He ducked into that traverse there, last I saw him."

"Thanks. Come on, Sergeant." Russell led Martin down the firebay toward the traverse. Some of the trench floor was corduroyed with wood. Some was just mud, into which Martin's boots sank with wet, squelching noises. He rounded the corner on Tilden Russell's heels. Russell let out a pleased grunt and said, "Hey, Captain, I found our new sergeant comin' up to the line. His name's Martin, sir—he was on the Roanoke front before he got wounded."

In spite of a fearsomely waxed, upthrusting Kaiser Bill mustache, Captain Cremony couldn't have seen his twenty-fifth birthday. He was skinny and swarthy and looked more like a clerk than a soldier, but clerks didn't commonly have two oak-leaf clusters under their Purple Heart ribbons. "Roanoke, eh?" he said. "You'll know what it's all about, then."

"I hope so, sir," Martin answered.

"You ought to fit in well," the company commander said. "You mark my words, Sergeant—when the weather clears up, this front will see movement like nothing since the early days."

"I hope so, sir," Martin said again. In the early days, the Confederates had been doing all the moving on this front. He was willing to assume that wasn't what Captain Cremony meant.

"About time, too," Cremony said. "We've owed these bastards for two wars and fifty years. Now we're going to get our own back."

"Yes, sir!" Martin's voice took on real warmth. "My grandfather lost a leg in the War of Secession. He died before we got to pay the Rebs back for that and for everything else. Next to what he got, this"—he waggled his arm—"isn't anything worth talking about."

He listened to himself in something close to amazement. After two and a half years of what surely came closer to hell than anything else man had man aged to build on earth, he could still sound like a patriot. If that didn't mean he was crazy, it did mean the United States had owed a hell of a big debt for a hell of a long time: a debt of pain, a debt of humiliation. And if they won this time, they would pay it back in the same coin. Martin didn't look forward to the fighting that lay ahead. But the repayment. . . oh, yes, he looked forward to the repayment.

Captain Cremony said, "Russell, take him down the line to the section he'll be leading. The sooner he fits himself into the scheme of things, the better for everybody."

"Yes, sir," Tilden Russell said. "You come with me, Sergeant. It's not far." As soon as he and Martin were out of earshot of Captain Cremony, he added, "The one you're going to have to watch out for, Sarge, is Corporal Reinholdt. He's been running the section since Sergeant Kelly stopped a Tredegar round with his ear, and he was steamed when they didn't give him his third stripe."

"I'll take care of that," Martin said. He didn't blame Reinholdt for being steamed. If you were doing a three-striper's job, you deserved a third stripe. A file card with Martin's name on it must have popped up in the War Department at just the wrong moment for Reinholdt.

Either that, Martin thought, *or the guy doesn't deserve two stripes, let alone three. He'd have to see about that, too.*

Quietly, Russell said, "Here we are, Sarge." Then he raised his voice: "Heads up, you lugs. This here is Sergeant Martin. He's off convalescent leave—spent the whole damn war till now on the Roanoke front."

One of the men Martin would be leading was stirring a kettle of stew. A couple were on the firing step, though they weren't shooting at the Rebels.

One was dealing from a battered deck of cards for himself and three friends. A couple were cleaning their rifles. One was repairing a tunic, using a needle and thread with what Martin could see at a glance was extraordinary skill. A few were asleep, rolled in blankets.

Everybody who was awake gave Martin a once-over. He was a stranger here, and so an object of suspicion, and in a clean uniform,

and so doubly an object of suspicion. He looked the men over, too. The tailor, or whatever he was in civilian life, was a kid. So were one of the fellows on the firing step, a cardplayer, and one of the men working with gun oil and cleaning rod. The rest, Martin guessed, had been in the fight longer.

He looked around for Corporal Reinholdt, and found him glowering at the cards he was holding. Reinholdt looked like somebody who spent a lot of time glowering. Martin decided to try it the smooth way first: "Corporal, I hope you'll give me a hand getting to know people."

By way of answer, Reinholdt only grunted. His eyes went back to his hand, but kept flicking toward Martin's face. Martin sighed. The smooth way wasn't going to work. Sooner or later, he'd have trouble with the disgruntled corporal. He resolved to make it sooner, and to pick the time himself.

Holding in his temper, Martin spoke to the men of the section: "Tell me who you are. I'll get it wrong for a while, but not for long."

Names washed over him: Willie and Parker and Zeb and Cal and two guys named Joe and one, the fellow with needle and thread, who seemed to be called Hamburger. "That a first name or a last name?" Martin asked, and got a laugh from everybody except Corporal Reinholdt.

"Hey, don't get him mad at you," one of the Joes said. "His sister's a congressman—congresslady—whatever the hell they call her."

"Yeah, and I'm Queen of the May," Martin said.

That got more laughter, but the soldiers said things like, "We're not shit ting you, Sarge." "She really is." "We ain't lyin'."

Martin still didn't believe it. Pointing at the kid named Hamburger — David, his first name turned out to be—he asked, "Listen, if your sister's in Congress, what the hell are you doin' *here}* She don't like you or somethin'?"

"She likes me fine," Hamburger said through more laughter. His swarthy face flushed. "She just doesn't think it's right to use her job to make things soft for her family. That's not why the working people elected her."

Socialist, Martin thought from the way the kid said *working people.* It didn't faze him; about one soldier in three voted that way. "New York City?" he asked.

"Yeah." Hamburger nodded. "You can tell from the way I talk, I bet."

"Right the first time," Martin said. He would have tagged the kid for a dago from his looks, but with that last name he was likelier to be a Jew. "Your old man a peddler?"

"No—he sews for a living, same as me, same as my other two sisters." That explained the deft hand with a needle. "How about you, Sarge?"

"I was a steelworker in Toledo before the war, like my pa still is," Martin answered. "He makes the stuff, and we throw it at the Rebs. That works out pretty good, hey?" David Hamburger nodded again. Martin thought he'd get on here well enough—except he didn't like Corporal Reinholdt's eyes.

II

.Anne Colleton paced back and forth like a caged lioness in the little room she'd rented in St. Matthews, South Carolina. "I will not go any farther from Marshlands," she snapped, as if someone had insisted that she should.

A wisp of dark blond hair escaped from its pin and tickled her cheek. She forced it back into place without breaking her furious stride. The Red uprising of 1915 had sent the Marshlands mansion up in flames; her brother Jacob, an invalid after the damnyankees gassed him, died then, too. She'd been in Charleston when the Negroes rebelled, and, unlike so many white landowners, returned to her plantation after the revolt was quelled. She'd even managed to bring in a cotton crop of sorts. And then—

"God damn you, Cassius," she said softly. In the days before the war, he'd been the chief hunter at Marshlands—and a secret Red, when she'd thought the Negroes there had no secrets from her. In the rebellion, he'd headed the murderous outfit that styled itself the Congaree Socialist Republic. He still led a ragtag band of black brigands who skulked through the swamps, eluding the authorities and calling murder and thievery acts of revolution.

They had friends among the Negroes who'd gone back to work at Marshlands. They had more friends among them than Anne had imagined. A month or so earlier, on Christmas night, 1916, they'd come horrifyingly close to killing her.

"I will have my revenge," she said, as she'd said a hundred times since managing to escape. "I will have—" A knock on the door interrupted her. She stormed over to it and threw it open. "What is it?" she demanded.

Even though the delivery boy for the Confederate Wire Service wore a uniform close in color and cut to that of the Army, he couldn't have been a day above fifteen years old. The sight of a tall, fierce, beautiful blond woman

twice his age glaring at him unstrung him altogether. He tried to stammer out why he had come, but words failed him. After a couple of clucks a hen would have been ashamed to claim, he dropped the

envelope he carried and incontinently fled.

Feeling triumph over so lowly a male would have demeaned Anne. She bent, scooped up the envelope, tore it open, and unfolded the telegram inside.

REGRET NO CONFEDERATE TROOPS AVAILABLE TO AID SOUTH CAROLINA FORCES IN HUNTING DOWN BANDITS. HOPE ALL OTHERWISE WELL. GABRIEL SEMMES, PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES.

She crumpled up the telegram and flung it into the wickerwork waste- basket that had come with the room. "You stingy son of a bitch!" she snarled. "I poured money into your campaign. The niggers burned down Marshlands, and I still twisted arms to help get your bill for Negro troops through Congress. And now you won't—"

She broke off. Some of her rage evaporated. The only reason Semmes had wanted to arm Negroes was that the war, as it was presently being fought, was going so badly. It hadn't gone any better lately. Maybe the president of the CSA really couldn't spare any decent soldiers to help the lame, the halt, and the elderly of South Carolina's militia go after Cassius and his guerrillas.

"If they can't handle the job, I'll damn well have to take care of it myself," she said. Somehow, that didn't surprise her. Cassius had made the fight personal when he burned the mansion where her family had lived for most of a century. He'd made it even more personal when he tried to give her a bullet for Christmas. "If that's how he wants it, that's how he'll have it."

She walked over to the closet, slid the door on its squeaking track, and scowled at the few sorry dresses and skirts and shirtwaists that hung there. She was used to ordering gowns from Paris and London and (in peacetime) New York. What she'd been able to buy in St. Matthews was to her eye one short step up from the burlap feed sacks poor Negroes and shiftless whites used to cover their nakedness.

But, after she'd pushed aside the clothes, she smiled. Against the back wall of the closet leaned a Tredegar her surviving brother, Tom, had sent on learning of her escape. It was a sniper's rifle, with a telescopic sight. She'd been a tomboy as a girl—good training for competing against men as an adult. She knew how to handle guns.

During the Red rebellion, the authorities hadn't let her fight against the Negroes of the Congaree Socialist Republic. Now—

Now she picked up her handbag (which held, among other things, a revolver to replace the one she'd lost when Cassius burned her cabin) and went downstairs. It was cool, not cold; whatever winter might do up in the USA, it rested lightly on Low Country South Carolina. She headed for the haberdasher's.

St. Matthews had been a cotton town before the war. It was still a cotton

town—of sorts. Most of the nearby plantations were either corpses or crippled remnants of their former selves. Most of the white men in town were gone for soldiers or gone to the grave. Most of the black men were gone, too: drafted into labor battalions, fled into revolt, or now wearing butternut themselves. Only a little of the damage done when Confederate forces recaptured the town from the Congaree Socialist Republic had been repaired. No labor for that, and no money, either.

By what sort of luck Anne could scarcely imagine, Rosenblum's Clothes had escaped everything. One of the bricks near the plate-glass window bore a bright bullet scar; other than that, the place was untouched. Inside, Aaron Rosenblum clacked away on a treadle-powered sewing machine, as he'd been doing for as long as Anne could remember.

When the bell above the door jangled, he looked up over the tops of his gold-framed half-glasses. Seeing Anne, he jumped to his feet and gave her a nod that was almost a bow. "Good day to you, Miss Colleton," he said.

"Good day, Mr. Rosenblum." As always, Anne hid the smile that wanted to leap out onto her face whenever she heard him talk. His accent, half Low Country drawl, half guttural Yiddish, was among the strangest she'd ever encountered.

"And what can I do for you today?" Rosenblum asked, running a hand over his bald head. He would never go into the Army; he had to be nearer seventy than fifty.

"I want half a dozen pairs of stout trousers of the sort men use to go hunt ing in the swamps of the Congaree," she answered.

He nodded. "These would be for your brother, after—God willing—he comes home safe from the war? Shall I alter them thinking he will be the same size he was when he went into the Army?"

"I'm sorry," Anne said. "You misunderstand, Mr. Rosenblum. These trousers are for me."

"For—you?" His eyes went wide. The lenses of his spectacles magnified his stare even more. "You are joking with me." Instead of staring, he really looked at her. "No, you are not joking. But—what would a woman want with trousers?"

"To go hunting in the swamps of the Congaree," she repeated patiently. "I can't very well do that in gingham or lace, can I?"

"What would you hunt?" he asked, still not believing.

"Reds." Anne Colleton's voice was flat and determined. "I will want these trousers as soon as you can have them ready. They shouldn't be hard to alter to fit me; I'm as tall as a good many men."

"Well, yes, but—" He blushed to the crown of his head, then blurted, "My wife is visiting our daughter in Columbia. Who will measure you?"

Again, Anne didn't laugh out loud. "Go ahead, Mr. Rosenblum. Being so

careful, you won't take any undue liberties. I'm sure of it." *And if you try, I'll give you such a licking, you won't know yesterday from next week.*

He coughed and muttered, then blushed once more. "If you do this thing, Miss Colleton, will you wear a corset while you are doing it?"

Anne felt like giving herself a licking. She'd defied a lot of conventions, but some she didn't even notice till someone reminded her they were there. She dashed into the dressing room, yanked the curtain shut, and divested herself of boning and elastic. When she came out, she was so comfortable, she wondered why she wore the damn thing. Fashion made a harsh mistress.

Aaron Rosenblum still hawed instead of hemming. In the end, though, he did as she wanted. In the end, almost everyone did as she wanted. He looked a little happier when she set two butternut-colored twenty-dollar bills on his sewing machine, but only a little. "I still do not know if this is decent," he muttered.

"I'll worry about that," she answered, by which she meant she would not worry in the slightest.

The telephone rang a few minutes after she got back to her room. "Hello?" she said into the mouthpiece. "What? . . . Really? . . . Yes, bring him here. We'll see. Greenville, you say? . .. You should have him here by evening. ... Of course I'll pay for train fare. I want to get to the bottom of this, too." She hung the mouthpiece on its hook, then let out a long sigh that was also a name: "Scipio."

After he'd fled Columbia, he'd gone up into the northwestern part of the state, had he? Now he was found out there, too. He knew how to get things done, did Scipio. A butler who didn't know how to get things done wasn't worth having. From things she'd heard, Scipio had been Cassius' right-hand man in the Congaree Socialist Republic, and a big reason it held together as long as it did.

What did she owe him for that? After what the Reds' revolutionary tri bunals had done to so many white landowners, how many times did any official of the Congaree Socialist Republic deserve to die?

Waiting was hard, even though she knew Scipio was coming from more than a hundred miles away. She'd lighted the gas lamps before a knock sounded on her door. She opened it. The two whites who stood in the hall had the look of city policemen: middle-aged, rugged, wary, wearing suits that would have been fashionable about 1910 but were dowdy now. "Miss Colleton?" one of them asked in an Up Country accent. When she nodded, the policeman pointed to the Negro who stood, hands manacled behind his back, between him and his partner. "This boy the Scipio you know, ma'am?"

She carefully studied the black man, then slowly and regretfully shook her head. "I'm sorry, but I'm afraid not. There must be some mistake. I've never set eyes on this man before in my life."

Both white policemen stared at her in astonished dismay. Scipio stared, too, in equal astonishment—though not dismay—but only for an instant. Then, very smoothly, he went back to playing the innocent wronged. "You see?" he shouted to the policemen. "I ain't dat bad nigger. I tol' you I ain't dat bad nigger!"

"Shut up, God damn you," one of them growled. Perfunctorily, he added, "Sorry, ma'am." Then he and his partner put their heads together.

Anne looked at Scipio. He was looking at her. She'd known he would be. *You are mine,* she mouthed silently. *Do you understand me?*

His head moved up and down—only a little, but enough. *You are mine,* she repeated, and watched him nod again.

Major Abner Dowling slogged through freezing Tennessee mud from his tent toward the farmhouse where the general commanding the U.S. First Army made his headquarters. Dowling supposed the mud couldn't have been quite freezing. In that case, it would have been hard. It wasn't.

When the general's adjutant lifted one booted foot out of the muck, pounds of it came up, stuck to the sole and sides. For one of the few times in his life, Dowling wished he were seventy-five pounds lighter. Far more often than not, he'd found, being fat mattered little, and he dearly loved to eat. But his bulk made him sink deeper into the ooze than he would have had he been thin.

Puffing his way up onto the porch, he paused to knock as much mud off his boots as he could. Cornelia, the colored housekeeper the general had hired after First Army's attack on Nashville stalled the winter before, would not be happy if he left filthy tracks in the hall and parlor. Even if she was a mulatto, she was such a good-looking young woman, he didn't want her glaring at him.

Delicious frying odors filled the air when he went inside. He sighed. Not only was Cornelia a fine-looking wench, she could cook with the best of them, too.

Neat in a white shirtwaist and long black skirt, she came sweeping out of the kitchen. "Mornin', Major," she said. "The general and his missus, they still finishin' breakfast. You want to sit yourself down in the parlor, I bring you some coffee while you wait."

He knew he could have gone straight into the kitchen, had he had any thing more urgent than the usual morning briefing. But he also knew the general would not appreciate being disturbed at his ham and eggs and hotcakes, or whatever other delicacies Cornelia had devised. "Coffee will be fine," he said. She made good coffee, too.

The parlor window gave him a good view of a couple of antiaircraft guns sitting out there in the mud, and of the wet, cold, miserable soldiers who

served them. The Rebs had stepped up bombing attacks against First

Army lately. More pursuit aeroplanes were supposed to be coming, but every Army commander screamed for more aeroplanes at the top of his lungs.

Cornelia brought him his coffee, pale with cream and—he sipped—very sweet, just the way he liked it. "Thank you, my dear," he said. She smiled at him, but he was wise enough—which wasn't too far removed from saying *old enough*—to recognize it as a smile of service, not one of invitation.

Dowling had taken only a couple of sips when the general commanding First Army came out of the kitchen and made his slow way into the parlor. His adjutant set the coffee on the arm of the sofa and heaved himself to his feet. Saluting, he said, "Good morning, General Custer."

"Good morning, Major," Lieutenant General George Armstrong Custer said as he returned the salute. For a man of seventy-seven, Custer was in fine fettle—but then, most men of seventy-seven were dead, and had been for years. Locks peroxided a brassy gold spilled out from under the hat Custer habitually wore to hide his bald head. His drooping mustache had also been chemically gilded.

With a wheeze, he sank into a chair, then produced a gold cigar case from a breast pocket of his fancy uniform. Dowling had a match ready to light the cigar he took from it. "Here you are, sir," he said. Custer drew on the cigar, coughed wetly a couple of times, and then settled down to happy puffing.

He blew out a cloud of fragrant smoke—as a general, he could get hold of far finer tobacco than the average U.S. citizen. No sooner had he done so than his wife came into the parlor. "That miserable thing stinks, Autie," Elizabeth Bacon Custer snapped.

"Now, Libbie, it's a fine cigar," Custer said in placating tones. Around his wife, if nowhere else, he took a soft line. Dowling understood that down to the ground. Libbie Custer intimidated him more than the Confederate Army did, too—and he thought she thought well of him.

"Cigars," she said with a scowl on her round face. "Taking the name of the Lord in vain." The scowl got deeper. "Liquor." Now she looked ready to bite nails in half.

" 'Scuse me, Miz Custer, ma'am." Cornelia swept by, round hips

working under the skirt. "Here's that coffee you asked for, General." She laid the cup on the table in front of Custer, then left the room with that rolling stride. Custer's eyes followed her, hungrily. So did Dowling's; he couldn't help it.

And so did Libbie Custer's. When Cornelia was out of sight, Libbie glared at her husband even more fearsomely than she had when she spoke of spirits. She didn't speak now, maybe because she couldn't find a word a lady could say that would express her feelings. Instead, short and plump and determined, she stomped out of the room herself.

Custer sighed. "She *will* come up toward the front," he said. That made it

harder for him to do what he wanted to do with Cornelia. Dowling didn't know if he'd done anything with the housekeeper before Libbie arrived. For that matter, Dowling didn't know if he *could* do anything with the housekeeper, being, after all, seventy-seven.

The only answer the adjutant gave was a shrug. No matter what sort of crimp having Libbie around put in Custer's plans, Dowling didn't mind it a bit. He'd noticed First Army fought better when she cohabited with her husband. The conclusion he'd drawn—that she owned more than half the family's brains—he kept to himself.

Looking around to make sure he was not overseen, Custer drew a flat silver flask from a hip pocket and poured some of its contents into his coffee. Magnanimously, he held it out to Dowling. "Want an eye-opener, Major?"

"Don't mind if I do, sir—just a wee one." Dowling tasted the improved coffee. "Ahh. That's mighty good brandy."

"Isn't it, though?" Custer gulped down half his cup. "Well, let's get down to business, shall we? Soonest begun, soonest done."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said. Custer didn't like minutiae, which made Dowl ing take a certain acerbic pleasure in giving him a bellyful: "Our trench raids by Cotton Town brought in twenty-seven prisoners last night, sir. The Rebs tried to raid us near White House. We beat them back pretty smartly; only lost a couple of men, and machine-gunned a couple of theirs retreating through no-man's-land. They threw some gas shells at us farther west, north of Green-brier. That could be trouble; they've brought fresh troops into the area, and they're liable

to be planning a spoiling attack."

"God damn them to hell," Custer growled, thereby making a clean sweep of Libbie's shibboleths. "God damn the whole Entente to hell. And God damn President Theodore goddamn Roosevelt to hell, too, for sticking me here against the Rebs when he knows I'd sooner pay the limeys and Canadians back for what they did to Tom."

"Yes, sir," Abner Dowling said resignedly. He wondered how many times he'd heard that from the general commanding First Army. Often enough to be sick of it, anyhow. Custer's brother was thirty-five years dead now, slain in Montana Territory during the Second Mexican War. Custer and Roosevelt hadn't got along with each other in the past thirty-five years, either, each suspecting the other of stealing some of his glory. He tried to steer Custer back to the front where he commanded, not the one where he wished he led: "If we could return to planning, sir ..."

"Planning? Faugh!" Custer made a disgusted noise. "Once we smash through this line, Nashville falls, because we'll be able to shell it to kingdom come. One more push—"

"They've stopped all the pushes we've tried so far, sir," Dowling reminded him: a sentence that covered thousands of dead and wounded, and burning

barrels by the score. Custer's favorite strategy, now as always in a career that stretched back to the War of Secession, was the headlong smash.

Now the general commanding First Army looked sly, which alarmed Abner Dowling. "I think I've finally found a way to break through," Custer said.

"Really, sir?" Dowling hoped he kept all expression from his voice because, if he didn't, the expression that would have been there was horror. Generals on both sides in America—and on both sides in Europe, too—had been chasing breakthroughs since the war began, with the same persistence and same success as men dying of thirst chasing mirages in the desert.

Custer beamed, which made his cheeks sag and his jowls wobble. "Yes, by jingo." He leaned forward and set a liver-spotted hand on Dowling's knee, much as he would have liked to do with Cornelia. "And you're going to help me."

"You'll give me a combat assignment, sir?" Dowling asked eagerly. He'd longed for one since the war began. The War Department thought he was more useful as Custer's adjutant. It was a nasty job, but someone had to do it, and Dowling, from long practice, had got good at it. But if Custer himself wanted to put his adjutant into action .. .

Evidently, Custer didn't. He shook his head, which made those lank locks of hair flip back and forth. Dowling coughed a little at the stink of the cinnamon-scented hair oil Custer liked. Nobody else Dowling knew had used the nasty stuff since the turn of the century. "No, no, no," Custer said. "You're going to help me keep things straight with Philadelphia."

"I'll be happy to edit your correspondence, sir," Dowling said. The general's correspondence needed editing—more than it commonly got. Custer was a firm believer in a variation on the Ptolemaic theory: he was convinced the world revolved around him. Anything good that happened anywhere near him had to redound to his credit and no one else's; nothing bad was ever his fault. In that as in few other things, Libbie aided and abetted him.

He was shaking his head again. "No, no, no," he repeated. "I have some thing important in mind, and I don't want those dunderheads with gold and black piping on their caps to get wind of it and tell me I can't do it because it runs against the way they read the Bible."

"Exactly what is it you have in mind, sir?" Dowling asked with a sinking feeling. Gold and black were the branch-of-service colors of the General Staff. Whatever Custer was thinking about, it was something he already knew the War Department brass in the City of Brotherly Love wouldn't love one bit.

"I'll tell you what I have in mind, Major," Custer said. "I have in mind the biggest goddamn barrel roll the world has ever seen, that's what."

Well, I might have guessed, Dowling thought. The tracked, armored, motorized forts called barrels were the best thing anyone had yet found for breaking the deadly stalemate of trench warfare. They could smash barbed wire, clearing paths for infantry, and they could bring machine-gun and cannon fire down on the enemy from point-blank range. They also broke down about every five minutes and, even when they were working, didn't move any faster than a man could walk.

The adjutant chose his words with care: "Sir, doctrine specifically orders that barrels be spread out evenly along the front, to assist infantry attacks wherever they may be carried out."

"And what a lot of poppycock that is, too," Custer declared, as if he were the Pope speaking *ex cathedra.* "The right way to use them is to build a whole great whacking column of them, smash a hole in the Rebs' line you could throw a cow through, and send in the infantry on their heels—a breakthrough. Q.E.D."

"When Brigadier General MacArthur came up with a similar plan, sir, you cited doctrine," Dowling reminded him. "You wouldn't let him do as he'd planned."

"Daniel MacArthur cares for nothing but his own glory," Custer said, which was true but which applied in even greater measure to Custer himself. "He knew the attack was weaker than it should have been, but went ahead anyhow. He deserved to fail, and he did."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said resignedly. Custer had done more than his share to weaken MacArthur's attack because he did not want the youngest division commander in the whole Army getting credit for the victory he might have won.

"Besides," Custer went on, "I aim to launch an army-scale assault, not one on the scale of a division. I intend to concentrate all the barrels in First Army and hurl them like a spear at the Confederate line. It will break, by God."

"Sir, the War Department will never let you get away with flouting doc trine like that," Dowling said. "If you try, they'll confiscate your barrels and ship 'em to other fronts where the commanders are more cooperative."

"I know." The sly look returned to Custer's face. "That's where you come in."

"Me?" Whatever was coming next, Dowling didn't think he'd like it.

He was right. "In the reports First Army sends to Philadelphia," Custer said, "all the barrels will be lined up exactly as the idiots with the high foreheads say they should be. You'll vet corps and divisional reports, too—'in the interest of greater efficiency,' you know. Meanwhile, we shall be readying the blow that will wreck the

Confederate position in Tennessee once and for all."

Abner Dowling stared at him in dismay. "My God, sir, they'll court-martial us both."

"Nonsense, my boy," Custer told him. "You're safe as houses any which way, because you're acting under my direct orders. But even I need fear only if

we lose. If we win, I shall be forgiven no matter what I do. Victory redeems everything. And we *shall* win, Major."

"My God, sir," Dowling said again. But then he paused. He'd dreamt for years of seeing Custer ousted from the command of First Army and replaced by someone competent. Now Custer was greasing the skids of his own downfall. And the general was right—his adjutant would only be obeying orders. Slowly, thoughtfully, Dowling nodded. "All right, sir, let's see what we can do."

"Stout fellow!" Custer exclaimed. He winked at Dowling. "Stout fellow indeed." Dowling forced a smile.

The big White truck rumbled through the streets of Covington, Kentucky, toward the loading area by the Ohio River wharves. Cincinnatus knew the streets of Covington as well as he knew his name. He'd driven a delivery truck through them, back in the days before the war started. Covington had changed since U.S. forces wrested it from its Confederate defenders, but its streets hadn't.

One symbol of the change was the flag flying from the city hall as the Negro drove past it. For the past two and a half years, the Stars and Stripes had fluttered there, not the Stars and Bars. If the USA won the war, the Stars and Stripes would fly there forever. Kentucky—less a few small chunks in the south and southeast still in Confederate hands—had been readmitted to the United States after more than half a century out of the Union.

Guards in green-gray stood guard in sandbagged machine-gun positions in front of the city hall. Not everyone in Kentucky was happy with its separation from the Confederate States. Not even close to everyone in Kentucky was happy with that separation. Cincinnatus sighed. He knew that only too well.

"Damn, I wish I never would've got sucked into all this crazy shit," he muttered as the truck jounced over a pothole and his teeth clicked together. Confederate diehards, black Reds—were Kentucky still in the CSA, they would have been at each other's throats. As things were, they both hated the occupier worse than they hated each other. Cincinnatus cursed his luck and his own generosity for making him part of both groups. If only he hadn't hidden Tom Kennedy when the Yankee soldiers were after his old boss. But he had, and so ...

A soldier playing traffic cop held up a hand. Cincinnatus trod on the brake and shifted the White into neutral. An officer in a chauffer-driven motorcar rolled past. The soldier waved the truck convoy on again.

Cincinnatus drove on up to the riverside, pulled into the loading area, and stopped the truck. The engine ticked as hot metal began to cool. He opened the door and climbed down onto the paving stones. The air was thick with the exhaust of a lot of trucks in a small space. He coughed a couple of times at the harsh stink.

More trucks rolled south on the bridge over the Ohio between Covington and Cincinnati. The Confederates had dropped it into the river as soon as the war began, but it was long since not only rebuilt but widened. A stream of barges crossed the river, too, carrying the sinews of war from U.S. factories toward the fighting front. Negro laborers unloaded the barges and hauled their contents over to the truck-transport unit of which Cincinnatus was a part.

He'd been one of those laborers till the head of the transport unit discov ered he could drive. Since then, he'd made more money for less physical labor, but his hours were longer and more erratic than they had been. Now that the front reached down into Tennessee, it was most of a day's drive from Coving-ton. He didn't like sleeping in a tent away from Elizabeth and their baby boy, Achilles, but nobody cared what he liked.

"Come on!" Lieutenant Straubing shouted. "Get yourselves checked off. You don't get checked off, you don't get paid."

That blunt warning from their boss got the drivers moving into the shed to make sure the payroll sergeant put a tick by their names on his sheet. About half the drivers were white, the other half colored. If a man could do the job, Straubing didn't give a damn what color he was. For a while, Cincinnatus had thought that meant Straubing had a better opinion of blacks than did most whites from

either the USA or the CSA. He doubted that now. More likely, Straubing just grabbed the tools he needed without worrying about the paint job they had.

Even that attitude was an improvement on what most whites in the USA and the CSA thought about blacks.

The line in front of the payroll sergeant formed solely on the basis of who got there first. Cincinnatus fell in behind a white driver named Herk and in front of another white who, because he wore his hair cropped close to his skull, got called Burrhead a lot. They chatted amiably enough as the queue moved forward; black or white, they had work in common.

"God only knows when poor Smitty gonna get in," Cincinnatus said. "Saw him pull off with *another* puncture. That man go through more patches'n a ragpicker."

"He ain't lucky, and that's a fact," Herk said.

"He'd be a hell of a lot luckier if the damn Rebs didn't keep throwin' nails in the road," Burrhead added. "Course, we'd all be a hell of a lot luckier if the damn Rebs didn't keep throwin' nails in the road."

"I'll tell you who's lucky." Herk pointed at Cincinnatus. "Here's the lucky one." Cincinnatus had rarely heard a white man call him that. But Herk went on, "You and me, Burrhead, we'll sleep in the barracks tonight. He's going home to his wife."

"That ain't bad," Burrhead agreed.

Cincinnatus collected five dollars—two days' pay. Herk got the same. Burrhead, who hadn't been in the unit so long, got four and a half. Some of the white drivers had grumbled because experienced blacks got more than they did. Some had tried to do more than grumble. They were spending time at hard labor; Lieutenant Straubing tolerated nothing that got in the way of his unit's doing its job.

A trolley line ran from the wharves to the edge of Covington's Negro dis trict, over by the Licking River on the east side of town. Cincinnatus set a nickel in the fare box without hesitation. When he'd been working on the wharves, making a dollar or a dollar and a half a day, he'd almost always walked to and from his house. By his

standards of comparison, being able to sit down in the colored section at the back of the trolley was affluence.

The trolley ran past the charred ruins of a general store. Cincinnatus wondered if Conroy had been able to rebuild somewhere else. The white storekeeper was one of the stubborn Confederates still working against the U.S. occupiers. If he did get back in business, Cincinnatus expected he'd hear from him. He looked forward to that as much as he did to smallpox.

He might hear from Conroy even if the storekeeper didn't get back into business. He looked forward to that even less than he did to smallpox. The fire that had gutted the store hadn't been an accident.

When he got off the trolley car, he did not immediately hurry home as he'd thought he would. Instead, he paused and sniffed. A delicious, spicy odor hung in the air. Sure enough, around the corner came the horse-drawn delivery wagon from the Kentucky Smoke House, Apicius' barbecue palace. Apicius' son, Lucullus, was driving the wagon. He waved to Cincinnatus. "Sell you some ribs tonight?" he called, white teeth gleaming in his black face.

"No thanks," Cincinnatus answered. "Elizabeth's got some chicken stew waitin' for me when I get home."

Lucullus waved again and drove on. Cincinnatus let out a small sigh of re lief. Had Lucullus asked him if he wanted red-hot ribs, that would have been an instruction to show up at Apicius' place. All sorts of red-hot things went on there, Apicius and his sons being Reds themselves.

But not tonight. Tonight Cincinnatus was free to be simply a man, not a political man. As neighborhoods in the colored part of town went, his was one of the better ones. The clapboard house in which he lived was neat and well kept. As best he could, given his color, he'd been a man on the rise before the war. As best he could, given a great many complications, he remained a man on the rise now.

When he opened the door, he grinned. The chicken stew smelled as good—well, almost as good—as the barbecue Lucullus hadn't called red-hot tonight. In the kitchen, Elizabeth exclaimed, "That's your pa!"

"Dadadadada!" Achilles came toddling out toward him on stiff legs

spread wide. An enormous grin spread over his face, wide enough to show he had four teeth on top and two on the bottom.

Cincinnatus picked him up and swung him around. Achilles squealed with glee, then squawked indignantly when Cincinnatus set him on the floor again. His father swatted him on the bottom, so softly that he laughed instead of crying.

Elizabeth came out, too, and tilted her face up for a kiss. "You look tired," she said. She was still in the shirtwaist and skirt in which she cleaned house for white Covingtonians.

"So do you," he answered. They both laughed—tiredly. "Ain't life bully?" he added. They laughed again. He had a pretty good notion of how the rest of the night would go. They'd eat supper. She'd wash dishes while he played with the baby. They would sit and talk and read for a little while—they both had their letters, unusual for black couples even on what had been the northern edge of the Confederate States. Then they'd get Achilles to bed, and then they'd go to bed themselves. Maybe they would make love. Odds were better they'd fall asleep as soon as their heads hit the pillows, though.

Through the first half of the evening, things went very much as he'd ex pected. The stew was delicious, and Cincinnatus said so. "Your mother gits half the credit—she kept an eye on it and the baby while I was workin'," Elizabeth said. After dinner, Cincinnatus chased Achilles around the house hoping to tire him out so he'd fall asleep in a hurry. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

Elizabeth was just drying the last dish when somebody knocked on the door. "Who's that?" she asked, frowning. "Curfew's comin'."

"I'd better find out." Cincinnatus strode to the door and opened it.

Tom Kennedy stood there, as he had on the horrible night when his mere presence dragged Cincinnatus, all unwilling, into the Confederate resistance against U.S. forces in Kentucky. As his former boss had then, he gasped, "You got to hide me, Cincinnatus! They're right on my heels, the sons of bitches."

"Who?" Cincinnatus demanded. Christ, if Kennedy had led the Yankees to him—

Before the white man could answer, a rifle shot rang out. "My God! I am hit!" Kennedy cried. He clutched at his chest. Before he

could fall—as he surely would have fallen—the rifle cracked again. The left side of his head exploded, spraying Cincinnatus with blood and brains and bits of bone. Behind him, Elizabeth screamed. Tom Kennedy went down now, like a sack of peas. Blood poured from him in a wet, sticky flood over Cincinnatus' front porch.

In the barrel yard behind the U.S. First Army's front in northern Tennessee, mechanics swore sulfurously as they worked in the twin White engines that sent their enormous toys rumbling forward. Other mechanics were on their

knees in the mud, tightening the tracks that let the barrels go down into shell holes and trenches and climb out the other side.

Armorers carried belts of machine-gun ammunition and crates of two- inch shells for the guns of the traveling fortresses. Each one mounted not only a cannon but also half a dozen machine guns on a chassis twenty-five feet long and more than ten feet high. They needed a lot of ammunition to fill them up.

Lieutenant Colonel Irving Morrell walked slowly along a path through the mud corduroyed with fence posts and house timbers and whatever other scraps of wood the folks who had made the path had been able to come up with. He was a lean, fit man in his mid-twenties, with a long face, pale eyes, and sandy hair he wore short. When he wasn't paying attention to the way he walked, he limped a little, a reminder of the leg wound he'd taken not long after the start of the war. Whenever he caught himself doing it, he stopped and made himself walk straight.

The farther he went into the barrel yard, the slower he walked and the more noticeable the limp became. Finally, he stopped altogether, and stood and stared in complete fascination. He might have stood there for quite a while, had a soldier coming up the path with a roll of tent cloth on his shoulder not found him in the way and, in lieu of cursing him, inquired, "May I help you, sir?"

Thus recalled to himself, Morrell said, "Yes, if you please. I'm looking for Colonel Ned Sherrard."

"That tent right over there, sir," the soldier answered, pointing to one erection of green-gray among many. "Now if you'll excuse me—"

More slowly than he should have, Morrell realized he'd been given a hint. "Sorry," he said, and stepped aside. The soldier trudged on. He was shaking his head and muttering under his breath. Morrell had no doubt what sorts of things he was muttering, either.

No corduroyed track ran toward the tent to which the soldier had directed Morrell. Without hesitation, he stepped off the path and tromped through the mud. A couple of mechanics looked up as he squelched past them. He caught a snatch of what one of them said to the other: "—ficer not too proud to get his boots dirty." He had been walking straight before he heard that. He walked straighter afterwards.

As he neared the tent, the flap opened and an officer came out: a medium-tall, wide-shouldered fellow with a graying Kaiser Bill mustache and, Morrell saw, eagles on his shoulder straps. "Colonel Sherrard, sir?" he asked.

"That's right," the other officer answered. "And you'd be Lieutenant Colonel Morrell, eh?"

"Yes, sir." Morrell saluted. "Reporting as ordered, sir." Among the other service ribbons above Sherrard's left breast pocket, he noticed a black-and-gold one showing the colonel had been on the General Staff. Morrell had that same ribbon on his tunic. Sherrard's service badge, though, was not the General Staff's eagle on a star. Instead, he wore a barrel pierced by a lightning bolt.

He was scanning the fruit salad on Morrell's chest as Morrell looked over his. Morrell got the idea that what he saw didn't altogether please him, and had trouble figuring out why. Without false modesty, he knew he had a good record. Along with General Staff service, he'd fought in Sonora (where he was wounded), in eastern Kentucky, and in the Canadian Rockies. He'd distinguished himself in each of the latter two theaters, too. So why did Sherrard look as if he smelled sour milk?

With what looked like a deliberate effort of will, Sherrard made his face altogether blank. "Come inside, Lieutenant Colonel," he said. "Let's get you settled in and see how we can best use you."

"Yes, sir." Morrell ducked through the tent flap ahead of Colonel Sherrard, who introduced him to his adjutant, Captain Wallace, and his clerk-typist, Corporal Norton. Either one of them might have been a power behind the throne. Off his first impression of Sherrard,

Morrell was inclined to doubt that. The colonel to whom he'd been ordered to report seemed to need no one to prop him up.

Morrell accepted a tin cup full of muddy coffee, then sat down with Colonel Sherrard to drink it. Sipping from his own cup, Sherrard asked, "So how did you happen to come down from General Staff headquarters just now?"

The question was so elaborately casual, Morrell knew it held more than met the eye. For the life of him, though, he couldn't figure out what. As he would have anyway, he answered with the simple truth: "The more I've looked at things, sir, the more important barrels have looked to me. I thought I ought to see some action with them. Besides"—his grin made him look even younger than he was—"running down the enemy in something as big as a house sounds like a hell of a lot of fun."

That got him the first smile he'd seen from Sherrard. "As a matter of fact, it is, when the damn things feel like running and when the Rebs don't have a cannon handy and don't chuck a grenade or a whiskey bottle full of burning gasoline through one of your hatches."

"If you knew beforehand who'd win, you wouldn't have to fight the war," Morrell replied with a shrug. "Since you don't, you take your chances."

That got him another smile, a wider one. "You'll have studied barrels some, then, I take it, even if you haven't served in them?" Sherrard said. After Morrell nodded, the older officer asked, "What's your opinion of our current doctrine on barrel deployment?"

"Spreading them out widely along the line, do you mean, sir?" Morrell said. Now he waited for Sherrard to nod. When the colonel did, Morrell went on, "Sir, I don't like it for beans. The barrels give us a big stick. As long as we've got it, we ought to shellack the Rebels with it."

Ned Sherrard set down his cup and folded his arms across his chest. "Lieutenant Colonel, I will have you know that I was one of the people involved in designing barrels, and that I am also one of the people responsible for formulating the doctrine in use for most of the past year. If I ask you that question again, will you give me a different answer?"

"No, sir," Morrell said with a small sigh. "You asked my opinion,

and I gave it to you. If you want to transfer me out of this unit, though .. . well, I won't be happy, but I'll certainly understand." Sometimes he wished he didn't have the habit of saying just what he thought.

Sherrard kept his arms folded, as if he'd forgotten they were. "Isn't that interesting?" he said, more to himself than to Morrell. "Maybe I was wrong."

"Sir?" Morrell said.

"Never mind," Colonel Sherrard told him. "If you don't get it, you don't need to know; if you do get it, you already know and you're sandbagging."

"Sir?" Morrell said again. Now, though, he didn't really expect to get an answer. He had a notion of what he'd stumbled over: an argument among the brass about how best to use barrels. But doctrine was doctrine, and the Army clung to it as tightly as the Catholic Church did.

Sherrard, though, turned out to be more forthcoming than Morrell had thought he would. "You may be interested to learn that you and General Custer have similar views about how barrels should be employed."

"Really, sir?" That *was* interesting. Custer was . . . Morrell didn't know how old he was, but he had to be older than God. Surprising he had any ideas of his own. Off what Morrell had seen in Philadelphia of his performance, he didn't have many. He just went straight at the Rebs and slugged till someone eventually had to take a step back.

"I'll tell you something else you may find funny," Sherrard said. Morrell raised a questioning eyebrow. In a half-shamefaced way, the colonel who'd served on the General Staff went on, "God damn me to hell if I haven't started thinking he's right, too. Which also means I think *you* may be right, Lieutenant Colonel. As you put it, if we've got a big stick, we ought to clout the bastards with it."

"Really, sir?" Morrell knew he was repeating himself again, but couldn't help it. That eyebrow—both eyebrows—went up again, this time in astonishment. "Have you let the War Department know you've changed your mind?"

"I've sent them more memoranda than you can shake a stick at."

Sherrard sighed. "Have you ever dropped a small stone off a tall cliff and waited for the sound it makes when it hits the ground to come back to your ears?"

"Yes, sir," Morrell replied. "The sound never comes back, not if it's small enough and the cliff is high enough." He paused. "Dealing with the War Department can be a lot like that."

"Ain't it the truth?" The colloquialism from Sherrard surprised Morrell yet again. "That's one of the reasons I've stayed in the field since I shepherded

the first barrels down to this front. The cliff isn't so tall here in the field. There's less space between me and the enemy, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes, sir, I know exactly what you mean," Morrell answered. "Some times I think our boys in the field have worse enemies in Philadelphia than they do in Richmond."

Again, he wished he hadn't been so forthright. Again, it was too late. He waited to see how Colonel Sherrard would respond. Sherrard didn't show much; he got the distinct impression Sherrard seldom showed much. After a thoughtful pause, the colonel said, "Well, you were crazy enough to want to serve in barrels, Lieutenant Colonel. Now that you're here, don't you think you ought to go for a ride in one so you can see how big a mistake you made?"

"Yes, sir!" Morrell said enthusiastically. "I hear it's quite something."

"So it is. A kick in the teeth is quite something, too." Sherrard's voice was dry. "General Custer calls it the biggest sockdologer in the history of the world. My father, God rest his soul, used to use that word. I think it fits here. Come on. You will, too."

They left the tent and squelched through the mud to a barrel Sherrard happened to know was in running order. Along the way, the colonel commandeered a driver and a couple of engineers. "In case it doesn't feel like staying in running order," Sherrard explained. "In a real fight, we'd have two men on each machine gun—they're from the infantry—and two artillerymen at the cannon."

With the barrel commander, that made a crew of eighteen, from three dif ferent branches of the Army. "Not efficient," Morrell

remarked.

"I know that, too—now," Sherrard said. "Here we are." He stopped in front of a barrel done up in camouflage paint except for a fierce eagle's head on the side and the name or motto *Remembrance* above it. One of the hatches was open. "Climb on up into the cupola," Sherrard told Morrell. "You will be the commander. Drive around a square and come back here."

Morrell scrambled up into the small metal box atop the barrel. He took the seat forward and to the right, the one unencumbered by controls. The driver sat in the other one. When the engineers shouted that they were ready, the driver stabbed the red button of the electric starter. The engines grumbled, then came to roaring life. The driver yelled something to Morrell. He had no idea what.

The din was terrific, incredible. If the engines had mufflers, they didn't work. Exhaust fumes promptly filled the barrel. Morrell coughed. His eyes smarted. What combat would be like in here, with the machine guns and cannon blazing away, adding their racket and the stink of burnt smokeless powder, he didn't want to think. *Hell* seemed a reasonable first approximation.

After checking to make sure both reverse levers behind his seat were in the

forward position, the driver got the barrel moving by stepping on the clutches to both engines, putting the beast in gear, and opening the throttle on the steering wheel. He knew the course he was supposed to steer. If he hadn't, hand signals would have been the only way to give it to him; he couldn't have heard shouted orders. The barrel rode as if its springs—if it had any—were made out of rocks. Morrell bit his tongue twice and his lower lip once. With the window slits open, he could see a little. With them closed, he could see next to nothing.

A cough. A groan. A wheeze. Silence. Into it, the driver said, "We're back, sir. What do you think?"

Get me the devil out of here sprang to mind. Morrell suppressed it. He had, after all, volunteered for this. He said, "We need better controls and signals in the barrel." The driver nodded agreement. Only a maniac would have disagreed. On the other hand, only a maniac would have wanted to climb into a barrel in the first place.

For the first time since the summer of 1914, the Army of Northern Virginia was fighting in northern Virginia, not in Pennsylvania or Maryland. These days, instead of threatening Philadelphia, the fighting force whose ferocious onslaught had brought the Confederacy more glory than any other was reduced to defending the state for which it was named against the endless grinding pressure of the U.S. Army.

Sergeant Jake Featherston had his battery of the First Richmond Howitzers well positioned just in front of the little town of Round Hill, about fifteen miles south of the Potomac. The hill on which Round Hill sat had looked out on prosperous farming country all around. Prosperous farming country still lay to the south. To the north lay the infernal landscape of war: shell holes and trenches and barbed wire in great thick rusting belts and shattered trees.

A scrawny, fiercely intent man, Featherston stalked from one of the half- dozen quick-firing three-inch guns—copies of the famous French 75s—he commanded. Every other battery commander in the regiment was a lieutenant or captain. As far as Jake knew, every other battery commander in the C.S. Army was a lieutenant or captain. He'd die a sergeant, even if he died at the age of 109.

"Bastards," he muttered under his breath as he relentlessly checked guns and carriages and limbers and stored ammunition and horses and men. "Fucking bastards." He'd warned against Captain Jeb Stuart Ill's Negro body servant. His former superior had protected the colored man, whose main color turned out to be Red. The War Department had never forgiven Jake for being right. Now that Stuart had thrown his life away in battle to atone for the

disgrace, the War Department never would, not when Jeb Stuart, Jr., Jeb Ill's fa ther, sat behind a Richmond desk with a general's wreathed stars on his collar.

Featherston had taken command of the battery when Jeb Stuart III died. He'd kept it because he was obviously better at the job than the officers who led the rest of the batteries in the regiment. But was that enough to get the stripes off his sleeve and a bar, or two, or three, on his collar? He spat in the mud. Not likely.

He went back to his own gun, the one whose crew he'd led since the First Richmond Howitzers got word of the declaration of war and started throwing shells across the Potomac into Washington, D.C. It was the same gun only in the sense that George Washington's axe was

the same axe after four new handles and three new heads: it had gone through several barrels, a new breech block, and even a new elevation screw. He didn't care. It was his.

All the men who served it were new except for him, too. A devastating Yankee barrage up in Pennsylvania had killed or maimed everybody in the original crew but him. Nobody here was green, though, not any more. The loader, the gun layers, the shell heavers had all had plenty of time to get good at what they did—plenty of time and the not so occasional prod of the rough side of Jake's tongue.

Michael Scott, the loader, looked up from a cigarette he was rolling. "How's it going, Sarge?" he asked.

"It ain't ever gonna be what you call great," Featherston answered. Even in his own ears, he sounded harsh and uncultured. That was yet another rea son he hadn't been promoted: he sounded like a man whose father had been an overseer till the CSA manumitted its Negroes. A proper officer, now, had an accent almost as fancy as an Englishman's. *That's what the War Department thinks, anyway.* He scowled. *Far as they're concerned, how a man sounds is more important than how he acts. Bastards.*

Scott got the cigarette rolled and struck a match. He'd been a fresh-faced kid when he came into the battery. He wasn't a fresh-faced kid any more; he had hollow eyes and sallow cheeks and he hadn't shaved for a couple of days. Pointing north, he said, "Looks like the damnyankees are building up for another go at us."

Featherston looked in that direction, too. "I see what you mean," he said slowly. He couldn't see as much as he would have liked, not without the fancy field glasses that were in such chronically short supply in the C.S. Army. But the naked eye was plenty to catch the bubble and stir behind the Yankee lines. Something was going on, sure as hell.

Scott sucked in smoke. The inhalation made him look even more gaunt than he really was. "Heard anything?" he asked.

"Nary a word." Featherston shook his head. "You got to understand, they ain't gonna tell me first no matter what. Only way I hear about it first is if there's shit on the end they give me to grab."

"Yeah, Sarge, I know about that," Scott allowed. The whole battery

knew about that. "Still and all, though, you've got that pal over in Intelligence, so I was just wondering if he'd said anything."

"Nary a word," Jake repeated. "And Major Potter isn't a pal—not ex actly, anyhow." As far as he could see, the only thing he and the bespectacled major had in common was an unbounded contempt for the bluebloods who, because of who their grandfathers had been, got higher rank and a bigger arena in which to display their blunders than they deserved.

"All right." The loader eased off. The whole battery also knew not to get Featherston started, or he was liable to go on for hours. Scott looked around. "What worries me is that it doesn't look like we're building up to match 'em. Sure, the defense has an advantage, but still —"

"Yeah." Featherston's voice was rough. "We kill two damnyankees for every one of us they get, that's bully, but if they send three or four at us for every one we've got holdin' 'em back, sooner or later they run us out of our position."

"That's the truth," Scott said. "They got more o' those damn barrels than we do, too, and they scare the infantry fit to shit themselves."

"Wish I could see some barrels over yonder," Jake said. "If I could see 'em, we could try hittin' 'em, or, if we couldn't reach, we could send word back to division HQ and let the big guns have a go at 'em." He spat again, then asked, "Your gas helmet in good shape?"

"Sure as hell is." Scott slapped the ugly hood of gas-proofed canvas he wore on his left hip. "Yankees fight dirty as the devil, you ask me, throwing gas shells at us when they start a barrage and making us fight while we're wearing these goddamn things."

"I ain't gonna argue with you, on account of I reckon you're right," Jake said. " 'Course, now that they went and thought of it for us, we do the same to them every chance we get. If we had any brains back there in Richmond, we'd've figured it out for our own selves, but you look at the way this here war's been run and you'll see what a sorry hope that is."

He would have gone on—the idiocy of the War Department roused him to repeated furious tirades—but the sound of marching men heading north up the dirt road from Round Hill toward the front made him break off and look back over his shoulder. Michael Scott

looked up toward the crest of the hill, too, relief on his face. "They *are* giving the line some reinforcements," the loader said. "I thank you, Jesus; I'll sing hallelujah come Sunday."

Over the hill and down toward the guns of the battery came the head of the column. Jake started to look away; he'd seen any number of infantry columns moving up toward the battle line. Here, though, his head snapped back toward the oncoming soldiers. He stared and stared.

That the troops were new and raw, that their uniforms were a fresh butternut as yet clean, as yet unfaded and unwrinkled from too many washings

in harsh soap and too many delousings that didn't work—that didn't matter. He'd seen raw troops before, and knew the edges would rub off in a hurry. But these men, all save their officers and noncoms, had skins darker than their uniforms: some coffee with cream, some coffee without, some almost the black of midnight or a black cat.

On they tramped, tin hats on their heads, Tredegars on their shoulders, packs on their backs, gas helmets bouncing against their hipbones. They were big, rugged men, and marched well. A couple of them turned their heads for a better look at Featherston's field gun. Noncoms screamed abuse at them, the same sort of abuse they would have screamed at raw white troops foolish enough to turn their heads without permission.

Only when the whole regiment had marched past could Jake bring himself to speak. Even then, he mustered nothing more than a whisper hoarse with anger and disbelief: "Jesus God, we're going to have nigger infantry in front of us? What in blazes are they gonna do the first time a barrel comes at 'em? Shit on a plate, barrels scare white troops. Niggers'll run so fast, they'll leave their shadows behind, and then there won't be nothin' between the barrels and *us."*

"I don't know, Sarge," Scott said. "I don't reckon they would've put 'em in the line if they didn't reckon they'd get some fighting out of 'em."

"I don't reckon they would've put 'em in the line if they had any white men they could use instead," Jake retorted, to which his loader gave a rueful nod. He went on, "Oh, some of 'em'll fight—I expect you're right about that. Some of 'em, not so long ago, they was fightin' under red flags. So yeah, they'll fight. Only question is, whose side

will they fight on?"

"Do you reckon the Yankees want those black sons of bitches any more'n we do?" Scott asked.

That gave Featherston pause, but not for long. "Anything that'll take us down a peg'll be fine by the Yanks, I expect," he answered. "If we'd known it'd come down to this, we never would've gotten into the war in the first place, I reckon. After it's done, those niggers'll have the right to vote, I tell you. Did you ever imagine, in all your born days, that niggers in the Confederate States of America would have the right to *vote}"*

"No, Sarge, never once," Scott said. "War's torn everything to hell."

"The war," Featherston agreed. "The war, and the boneheads down in Richmond running the war. Oh, and the niggers, too—talk about tearing things to hell, when they rose up, they almost tore the CSA to hell. And now the boneheads in Richmond are putting rifles in their hands and saying, 'Yeah, you're as good as white men. Why the hell not?' Well, there'll be a reckoning for that, too." He sounded eerily certain. "You mark my words—there'll be a reckoning for that, too."

Shivering in a trench outside Jonesboro, Arkansas, a U.S. soldier grumbled, "Where in the goddamn hell did I leave my gloves?"

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain, Groome," Sergeant Gordon McSweeney said sharply.

"Uh, right, Sergeant," Groome answered. "Sorry, Sergeant." He was eighteen, a big, tough, beef-fed kid from the plains of Nebraska. Rank, though, had very little to do with why he backed down from McSweeney.

"You need to make your peace with God, not with me," McSweeney answered, his voice still stern. Groome nodded hastily, placatingly. Had he been a dog, he would have rolled over on his back to expose his throat and belly.

With a grunt, McSweeney went back to making his flamethrower's trigger mechanism more sensitive. That he took a flamethrower into combat was not the reason he got instant, unthinking obedience from the soldiers in his section. That he was the sort of man who carried a flamethrower into battle with not a thought in his mind but the harm he could wreak on his enemies had more to do with it.

He scowled as he worked. His face was made for scowling, being almost entirely vertical lines: a narrow rectangle with a hard chin, a long nose, and a vertical crease between pale eyes that didn't seem to blink as often as they should. His hands, large and knobby-knuckled, manipulated a small screwdriver with surprising delicacy.

A shadow fell on the disassembled trigger mechanism. He looked up with a deeper scowl—who presumed to stand in his light? When he saw Captain Schneider, he relaxed. The company commander could do as he pleased, at least when it came to Gordon McSweeney. "Sir?" McSweeney asked, and started to get to his feet.

"As you were," Schneider said.

McSweeney obediently checked himself. As far as he was concerned, Cap tain Schneider was too lenient with all the men in his company, McSweeney himself included. But the captain had ordered him not to come to attention, and so he did not.

"Division headquarters wants some captured Rebs tonight for interrogation," Schneider said.

"Yes, sir, I'll go," McSweeney said at once.

Captain Schneider frowned. "I didn't mean you in particular, Sergeant," he said. "I meant for you to tell off a party to go into no-man's-land and come back with prisoners."

"Sir, I'll go," McSweeney repeated. "The men Gideon took with him to fight the Midianites chose themselves. I shall do the same. The Lord will protect me—or, if it be His will that I fall here, I shall go on to my glory, for I know in my heart that I am numbered among the elect." He was every bit as uncompromisingly Presbyterian as his features suggested.

Schneider's frown did not go away. "I don't want to lose you, Sergeant," he said. "You're too valuable a fighting man. And your courage is not in question. It hardly could be, with that on your chest."

Even on his combat uniform, McSweeney wore the small, white-starred blue ribbon of the Congressional Medal of Honor. He'd earned it the year before, destroying a Confederate barrel with his flamethrower and then slaying Rebel foot soldiers who'd sought to follow the barrel into the U.S. lines. "Sir," he said now, "snaking out

prisoners is a job I'm better suited for than anyone else in the company. Why endanger somebody else when I can do it right?"

"How many times have you done it, though, Sergeant?" Schneider persisted. "How long can you go on being lucky?"

"As long as God wants me to be," McSweeney answered. He did get to his feet then, so he could look down at the company commander, whom he overtopped by several inches. "Sir, you must understand: I *want* to do this. How better can I help the Lord punish the Confederate States for their iniquities?"

Had Schneider had a good response to that, he would have given it at once. When he didn't, McSweeney smiled at him. McSweeney knew most men did not find his smile delightful. Schneider was no exception; he flinched away from it as from the screech of an incoming Confederate shell. "Have it your way, then, Sergeant," he muttered, and went walking down the trench in a hurry.

McSweeney's smile changed to the somewhat softer one any successfully stubborn soldier might have worn. He squatted down and got back to work on the trigger mechanism. By the time Ben Carlton shouted that he had supper ready, the trigger was nearly as smooth as McSweeney wanted it.

He made a horrible face at his first mouthful of stew. "What is it?" he demanded. "Is it donkey or cat?"

"Dammit, it's beef," Carlton said, offended.

"Don't blaspheme," McSweeney told him. "How is it that you've been a cook since the war started and still do no better than this?"

"Because Paul Mantarakis did it till he got killed last summer, and he was a better cook than I'll be if I live to be ninety-five, which ain't what you'd call likely," Carlton retorted. "Stinkin' shame he's dead, too."

"He was a good man, for a Papist," McSweeney admitted: from him, no small concession.

"He weren't no Cath-o-lic," the company cook said. "He was Greek whatever the devil you call it."

"The Devil has him now, I fear," McSweeney said. Mantarakis had

fid dled with beads, so what else could he have been but a Papist? With grim resolution, McSweeney finished his bowl of stew. With luck, the Confederates he captured would have rations worth taking.

He didn't crawl out over the parapet of the trench till a little before mid night. Before he went, he blacked his face and hands with mud, so that he looked like a performer in some disastrous minstrel show. He had an officer's pistol on his belt, but hoped he wouldn't have to use it; he put more faith in his knife and entrenching tool.

Getting under and through the few strands of barbed wire in front of the U.S. trenches was easier than it should have been. The United States didn't take the war west of the Mississippi so seriously as he thought they should have. The U.S. advance south from the Missouri line had proceeded at a snail's pace because too many resources went into the fighting closer to Philadelphia.

A parachute flare went off overhead, bathing the hellish chaos of no- man's-land with a pure white light that might have come straight from heaven. McSweeney froze. As the light slowly sank and dimmed and reddened, Confederate and U.S. gunners blazed away at what they thought were targets. Bullets whined, and occasionally screamed as they ricocheted from rocks. None came close to him.

McSweeney waited till darkness was complete before moving again. When he did move, he moved fast, or as fast as he could, taking advantage of the little while before men's eyes forgot the light. By the time he flopped down in a shell hole not far from the Confederate wire—which was hardly thicker than that protecting his line—he was filthy and wet. He was also satisfied. He settled down to listen and to wait.

The Rebs were far noisier than he let the men in his charge get. They would have pickets up near the line; he knew about where the foxholes were. If all else failed, he would go in there and bring a couple of those men back through. He didn't want to do that, being cold-bloodedly aware of the risk it entailed. But he'd been ordered out to return with prisoners, and he would.

He waited a while longer. Maybe the Confederates would send out a wiring party—although they had as much trouble getting supplies as did their U.S. opponents, so they might not have any fresh wire to string up. Wiring parties made easy meat; they were so intent on what they were doing, they paid less attention than they should have to whoever might be sneaking close to them.

Above McSweeney, stars slowly spun, now in plain sight, now hidden by scudding clouds. At about half past two, several Rebs crawled northwest toward the U.S. lines. They passed within twenty feet of him, never knowing he was there.

In a thin thread of whisper, one of them told the others, "Remember, we catch ourselves a damnyankee or three, then we get the hell back home. This ain't the mission for foolin' around."

McSweeney's smile was enormous, predatory. *The Lord hath delivered*

them into my hands, he thought. They were very quiet as they slid toward the position he'd left. He was silent as he followed them.

Or so he thought, till their rearmost man hissed, "Hush! What's that?" McSweeney froze, as he had for the parachute flare. After a couple of minutes in which no one seemed to breathe, the Rebel said, "Must have been a rat. Christ, I hate them fat-bellied sons of bitches. I know what they eat." With a faint rustle of cloth, he crawled on. Again, McSweeney followed, trying to be even more quiet than before.

The Confederate raiders took up a position almost identical to the one he'd used in front of their trenches. Before they could scatter along the line, McSweeney spoke in quiet but conversational tones: "Hold it right there, boys. We've got you dead to rights. If you want to keep breathing, throw down your toys, throw up your hands, and go on through the wire."

That *we've* had the desired effect: it made the Rebels think they were outnumbered by their captors instead of outnumbering their captor. One of them started to whirl. Another one grabbed him and said, "No, you goddamn fool!" Weapons clunked and thudded to the ground.

"Coming in with prisoners!" McSweeney called.

Captain Schneider was awake and waiting for him. He stared when he saw the half-dozen men coming in ahead of McSweeney. "God damn me to hell, Sergeant, but you've done it again," he said. McSweeney nodded, though he disapproved of the blasphemous sentiment. When the Confederates found out one man had taken them, their curses were far fouler than Schneider's. Gordon McSweeney smiled.

III

"Do you see?" Lucien Galtier asked his horse as he drove the wagon into the town of Riviere-du-Loup on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence. The Quebecois farmer gestured to the macadamized road along which the wagon traveled. "Had this been an earlier year, you would have labored through ice and mud, and you would have complained even more than you do now."

The horse snorted. A paved road, even a paved road largely free of snow, impressed it very little. One of the reasons the road was largely free of snow was that it was an important highway for the U.S. forces who occupied that part of Quebec south of the St. Lawrence. A big, square, ugly White truck came growling up behind the wagon. The driver squeezed the bulb on his horn. Just enough shoulder—frozen hard here—had been cleared to let Lucien pull off for a moment so the truck and three more in its wake could roll past, kicking up little spatters of ice.

"Hey, Frenchy!" called one of the soldiers huddled under the green-gray - canvas top on the last truck. He waved. After a couple of seconds' hesitation, Galtier touched the brim of the thick wool cap he wore.

He flicked the reins. "Do not think you can rest here all day, you lazy creature," he told the horse, which flicked its ears to let him know it would think whatever it pleased, and needed no advice from the likes of him.

A green-gray ambulance with red crosses on the sides and roof sped south past Galtier. The military hospital to which it was going was built on land that had been his till the Yankees appropriated it because he'd politely declined to collaborate with them. How fury had burned in him at the injustice! And now. . .

"And now the eldest of my daughters assists at the hospital," he said to the horse, "and one of the American doctors, by no means a bad fellow, is most attentive to her. Life can be most peculiar, *n'est-ce pas?"* He patted his own leg. Dr. O'Doull had sewn that up, too, when he'd tried to chop it instead of wood. It had healed well, too, better and faster than he'd thought a wound of twenty-one stitches would.

The breeze shifted so that it came out of the north. It brought to Lucien's ears the rumble of artillery from the other side of the broad driver. The Americans, having forced a crossing in better weather the year before, had bogged down in their drive south and west toward Quebec City.

"Tabernac," Galtier muttered under his breath; Quebecois cursing ran more to holy things than to the obscenity English-speakers used. But he'd learned English-style swearing in his stint as a conscript more than twenty years before, while the Americans here sometimes seemed to go out of their way to curse. Experimentally, he let an English swear word roll off his tongue: "Fuck." He shook his head. It lacked flavor, like rabbit cooked without applejack.

A handful of fresh, muddy craters just outside of Riviere-du-Loup marked a bombing raid the night before by Canadian and British aeroplanes. He didn't see that they'd done any particular damage. They did keep trying, though. Pockmarks in the snow cover showed where other, earlier, bombs had fallen. So did a couple of graveled patches in the paving of the roadway.

In town, Galtier drove the wagon to the market square near the church. He quickly sold the potatoes and chickens he'd brought from the farm, and got better prices than he'd expected.

Angelique, the prettiest barmaid at the Loup-du-Nord, who for once did not have an American soldier on one arm, or on both arms, bought a chicken. His eyes traveled her up and down as they dickered. Marie, his wife, would not have approved, but she hadn't come with him. Because Angelique was so pretty, he might have given her the chicken for a few cents less than someone else would have paid. Marie would not have approved of that, either.

In her breathy little voice, Angelique said, "Have you heard the wonderful news?"

"How can I know until you tell me?" Lucien asked reasonably.

"Father Pascal is to be consecrated Sunday after next!" Angelique exclaimed. "Riviere-du-Loup, after so long, is to be a bishopric, an episcopal see. Is it not marvelous?"

"Yes," Galtier said, though what he meant was, *Yes, it is not marvelous.* Father Pascal was plump and pink and nearly as clever as he thought he was. He had welcomed the Yankee invaders with arms

as open as Angelique's. Had he been a woman, he would no doubt have welcomed them with legs as open as Angelique's.

And here he came now, perhaps drawn by the sight of Angelique (even if a priest, even if a collaborator, he was a man—of sorts) or perhaps by that of poultry. The latter, it proved. He did not haggle so well as his housekeeper; Lucien roundly cheated him. Angelique, bless her, stood by and said never a word.

Feeling mellow with an extra thirty cents in his pocket, Galtier said, "Do I understand you are to be congratulated, Father?"

The priest looked too modest to be quite convincing. "They honor me above my humble deserts."

"How did it happen that you were raised to this dignity?" Lucien asked.

Before Father Pascal answered, his eyes flicked for a moment to the sidewalk close by the market square. Then, still smooth, still modest, he said, "My son, in truth I have no idea. I felt, when I heard the news, as if a thunderbolt had struck me, I was so astonished."

But that brief glance had given him away. Along the sidewalk, his green- gray uniform neat as if it had just been issued, strode Major Jedediah Quigley, who administered Riviere-du-Loup and the surrounding area for the U.S. Army. Somehow or other, Lucien was sure, Quigley had pulled the wires behind Father Pascal's promotion. That might even have involved moving Riviere-du-Loup and the rest of eastern Quebec south of the St. Lawrence out of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the archbishop of Quebec City, who assuredly would never have raised a collaborator to the episcopal dignity.

Major Quigley saw Lucien look toward him. The American officer waved, as if he had not been the man who confiscated the land that had been in Lucien's family for more than two hundred years to build the military hospital on it. "I hope all goes well with you, *Monsieur* Galtier," he called in fluent, Parisian-accented French that seemed almost as out of place in Riviere-du-Loup as English did.

"Assez bien," Galtier answered grudgingly. Quigley waved again and walked on.

"You will excuse me," Father Pascal—soon to be Bishop Pascal—said. Off he went, carrying the chicken by its feet. Angelique went off

with him. Their heads were close together as they chatted. Watching her walk away was more interesting than eyeing Father Pascal's backside, even if she too was a collaborator of sorts—*a horizontal collaborator,* Galtier thought, and smiled at his own wit.

He looked longingly at the Loup-du-Nord. Beer or whiskey or applejack would have helped chase away the cold. But no. The Loup-du-Nord, these days, was an American soldiers' saloon. He might get his drink and get out without trouble. On the other hand, a tableful of drunken Yanks might decide to stomp him into the floor. "When I get home," he told the horse, "I can have a drink."

On his way back to the farmhouse, down the fine paved road the Ameri cans had built, he had to pull off a couple of times to let ambulances race past. Far more than that of the big, stolid trucks, their speed made him wonder what traveling in a motorcar was like. He'd taken train rides, but this seemed as if it would be different—as if he would be riding in a wagon somehow equipped with wings.

When he got to the farm, he drove the emphatically unwinged wagon into the barn. He unharnessed the horse, brushed it down, and fed it before going into the farmhouse. He did not begrudge the delay; it gave him the chance to think of more uncharitable things to say about Father Pascal's elevation.

And then, when he went inside, he found he could not say most of them. Nicole had brought Dr. Leonard O'Doull home for supper. O'Doull, a skinny, sandy-haired man with eyes as green as a cat's, was a good fellow, but he was also, to some degree, an outsider.

"Your leg, it goes well?" he asked Galtier after they shook hands. He spoke Parisian French like Major Quigley; unlike the major, he tried to adapt his tongue to that of the folk among whom he found himself.

"It goes very well, thank you." Lucien walked around to show how well he could move. "I have not even a limp, not unless I am on it for the whole day. When I went into Riviere-du-Loup today, I did not take the stick you gave me, and the leg held me as if it had never been hurt. I am in your debt."

"Not for that," O'Doull said. "It is I who am in your debt for your friendship to me when, after all, my country occupies yours."

"You speak straight," said Galtier's elder son, Charles. "That is

good."

"Of course he does," Nicole said indignantly. Lucien and Marie exchanged an amused look. Nicole defended Dr. O'Doull because of who he was, not because of what he said.

"Dr. O'Doull, you're so wonderful." Georges, Lucien's younger son, spoke first in worshipful tones and then wickedly imitated his sister: "Of course he is." He let out a sigh full of longing and molasses.

He'd been an imp since he was a toddler. That was the only reason Lucien could find for Nicole's letting him live. Even in the ruddy light of the kerosene lamps, O'Doull's flush was easy to see.

"I think supper is about ready," Marie said, which distracted everyone better than anything else might have done. Like Galtier himself, his wife was small and dark and a good deal more clever than she often let on.

Supper was a chicken stew enlivened by dried apples. Over it, Lucien told the story of Father Pascal's promotion. He told it dispassionately, out of good feeling for the American who shared the table with him. His family showed less restraint. "That man knows nothing of shame!" exclaimed Denise, who was only twelve and wore her feelings on her sleeve.

"He comes to the hospital sometimes, to visit the soldiers who are Catholic," Leonard O'Doull said. "Don't much care for him. If he were an American priest in "Vermont, say, and the British occupied it, he'd suck up to them the same way he sucks up to Americans here. Have I reason, or not?"
"Oui, vous avez raison," Galtier said emphatically. "Which side he is on, that matters nothing to Father Pascal. Whether he is on top, that matters a great deal."

O'Doull hefted his glass of applejack. Applejack, especially this homemade stuff Galtier had got from a neighbor, was dangerously deceptive— sweet and mild and with a kick like a mule's. "And you, *Monsieur* Galtier, what of you?" the young doctor asked, as he might not have were he more sober.

Galtier thought about that for a while; he was a few knocks into the applejack himself. "My country has been made not my country," he said, one word at a time. "Should I be happy at that?"

Marie gave him a warning glance. Too late: the words were said. Dr. O'Doull considered them. At last, he replied, "If you think you were free as a chunk of the British Empire, no. If you do not think so, you may wish to see what you become after the war. What do you think, if it does not bother you that I ask?"

"Why should it bother me?" Galtier said lightly. "I need not answer." And the reason he did not answer, not that he would ever have admitted it, was that he was no longer sure what to think.

Nellie Semphroch went outside the coffeehouse in the bitter cold of early morning and flipped the sign on the boards that covered the space where her plate-glass window had been from CLOSED to OPEN. She had connections among the Confederates who occupied Washington, D.C., who could have got her more glass, but saw no point in using them. The next U.S. bombing raid, or the one after that, would only shatter the new window, as three—or was it four?—windows had been shattered already.

"Mornin', Ma," Edna Semphroch said when Nellie went back inside. The two women—one in her early twenties, the other in her early forties—looked very much alike, with long, oval faces and high foreheads that seemed higher because they both wore their hair pulled back. Edna painted her face; Nellie didn't. With a sneer on her red lips, Edna added, "Good morning, Little Nell."

Although Nellie had been cold, her face heated and congealed like an egg left too long on a frying pan. "Don't you ever call me that again," she said in a low, furious voice. "Ever, do you hear me?"

Edna's sneer got wider. "I hear you—" She visibly debated throwing kerosene on the fire, but decided against it. "I hear you."

With grim determination, Nellie took what was left of the previous day's bread off the icebox and started slicing it for the toast and sandwiches she'd be serving. Every stroke of the serrated bread knife made her wish she were drawing it across Bill Reach's throat passed him the gossip she picked up in the coffeehouse in that easygoing, conversational way. He always responded in kind, and then sent the information on so the United States could get some use from it.

"I thought so," she answered now. After a moment, she went on,

"My daughter and that Rebel lieutenant are planning to get married here, a few days after the start of spring."

For one of the rare times since she'd begun letting Hal Jacobs know what she heard, she was looking for information from him. He understood that, and did not look very happy about it. At last, grudgingly, he said, "I do hope their plans won't have to be changed, as could happen."

He wasn't going to say anything more. She could see it in his eyes. He'd told her something, anyhow. She nodded brusque thanks. Then, even more brusquely, she asked, "What do you hear from Bill Reach?"

Jacobs knew Bill Reach. Along with being a humiliating piece of Nellie's past, along with drinking like a fish, he had also been the cobbler's superior among the U.S. spies in Washington. Jacobs said, "Since that unfortunate evening, Widow Semphroch, I have not heard from him at all. Perhaps the Confederates have again jailed him as a thief."

"Perhaps he's frozen to death in a gutter." Nellie's voice was full of fierce hope.

"I never knew what he did to offend you so greatly," Jacobs said.

"Never mind, but he did." Nellie thought Jacobs was lying about his ignorance. If he wasn't, she didn't intend to enlighten him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry because, since you have been angry at him, you have not brought so many pieces of useful information to me—and you must hear a great deal, because your coffeehouse is so popular with the Confederates and those who deal with them."

Jacobs and his friends—about whose identities Nellie had carefully not inquired—had helped keep her coffeehouse in coffee and food, when both were in short supply in occupied Washington. She probably would have gone out of business without their help. "I am sorry, too," she said. "I do pay my debts, or try to. But that man ... I want to pay him back—oh, yes, very much."

The cobbler held up a hand. "I had not finished. I am also sorry because, with you angry at Bill Reach, I don't get to see you as often as I would like. I've missed you, you know."

Nellie's mouth fell open. She wasn't used to having men say such

things to her. Edna's father had been decent enough to marry her when she found herself in a family way. It was one of the few decent things he'd ever done. After he died, she'd been content—more than content—to live as a widow. Now—

"How you do go on, Hal," she said, trying to make light of it.

He didn't want to make light of it. "I meant what I said," he told her, and she could hear the truth in his voice. "You are a fine woman—a finer woman, I think, than even you know. Maybe you have been a widow too long to remember these things, but you must believe me here, for I know what I am talking about."

"Well, good day, Mr. Jacobs," Nellie said. "I really have to get back to the coffeehouse now." She fled from the shoemaker's shop as if a hundred Confederate spycatchers were on her trail. Her heart thudded. A man who said he missed her, a man who thought her a fine woman, was to her a more frightening apparition than all the Confederate spycatchers in the world.

Commander Roger Kimball let out a long, lugubrious sigh as the CSS *Bone-fish* sailed away from Habana. Standing atop the submarine's conning tower, he peered back toward the red tile roofs and brightly painted plaster walls of the capital of the Confederate state of Cuba.

"Damn," he said with all due respect. "That sure as hell is one fine town for a shore leave, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," agreed Senior Lieutenant Tom Brearley, his executive officer. Both men were recently promoted, after their successful raid on New York harbor. The fresh gold stripes on the sleeves of their dark gray uniform coats were easy to tell apart from the duller ones they'd worn for a while. Brearley went on, "I thought I was a whiskey-drinking man, but I expect I could get used to rum." He grinned. "I expect I *did* get used to rum."

"Hot and cold running whores, too," Kimball said with a reminiscent leer. "Black ones, brown ones, white ones—whatever you happen to feel like. Cheap, too. Cuba's a damn sight cheaper than Charleston, and you can have a better time, too—although I had me some pretty fair times in Charleston, now that I think about it."

Anne Colleton naked on a bed had been worth a dozen Habana

whores. His blood heated at the memory. She'd been a tigress between the sheets—and she'd wanted him for himself, not for the money he laid down. And she was a rich lady, an influential lady. To a man who'd gone from a backwoods Arkansas farm to the Confederate Naval Academy at Mobile, a connection like that was worth its weight in rubies. Kimball didn't intend to go back to that miserable farm when his Navy days were over. The only direction he intended to head was up.

"Weather's a lot better here than up in the North Atlantic," Brearley said. "Sea's a lot calmer, too. I'm just as glad they sent us down here."

"Far as the *Bonefish* goes, so am I," Kimball agreed. "Hell of a lot easier, hell of a lot more fun where the sea doesn't try to throw your boat away or tear it in half whenever you're on the surface. But I don't care for what the move south says about the way the war is going."

Brearley shrugged. "If England doesn't get the bread and meat she needs

from Argentina, she's out of the war. If she's out of the war, the Kaiser runs roughshod in Europe and the damnyankees do the same thing in America. If the United States are starting to try and take a bite out of the route from Pernambuco to Dakar, we've got to stop 'em."

Kimball clicked his tongue between his teeth. His exec was a good kid, but you needed to give him the C and the A if he was going to spell CAT. "Yeah, Tom, we've got to stop 'em. But if things were going better farther north, they wouldn't be able to turn ships loose to go after this shipping route."

"Oh, I see what you're saying, sir," Brearley answered. No doubt he did, too; he wasn't stupid, only a little slow. "We've got them beat hollow when it comes to logistics."

"Good thing, too," Kimball said. "Otherwise, this war would be within shouting distance of over. But they'll need coal and fuel oil if they're going to operate for long in those waters from out of Boston or New York or Philadelphia. We want the supply ships as much as we want the warships."

He took his binoculars out of their leather case and scanned the horizon for plumes of smoke. He knew that was foolish. If he spotted

enemy ships less than an hour out of Havana, the war wouldn't just be within shouting distance of the end. It would be history.

"Anything, sir?" Brearley asked. He had to be jumpy, too, if he thought there might be something so close to the Cuban coast.

"Damn all," Kimball told him. He put the binoculars back in the case. "I'm going below."

Tropical sun, calm water, and a mild breeze smelling of the salt sea made the top of the conning tower a pleasant, even a delightful, place to stand and pass the time. Going down into the long steel tube of the *Bonefish* was like descending into another world, perhaps one found in the infernal regions.

Instead of the illimitable confines of the ocean, Roger Kimball found himself in confines as severely limitable as any in the world, confines where space for machinery was a *sine qua non* and space for men a distinct afterthought. He banged his head on a pipe fitting he hit about every other day, and he was not an especially tall man.

Dim orange-tinted electric lamps replaced bright sun. Slowly, slowly, Kim- ball's eyes adjusted. He knew he would squint like a blind thing when he went topside again.

Hardest of all, though, was the transition from fresh sea air to the horrible stuff inside the *Bonefish.* Even with the hatches open, even with a refit in Havana, she stank: an unforgettable mixture of bilgewater and diesel fuel and food and sweat and the reek of the heads. Kimball knew what she would be like when she came back from her cruise: like this, only magnified a hundredfold. A landlubber boarding a submersible just into port was like as not to add vomit to the reek. Kimball didn't like the stink, but held it in wry affection. It was the smell of home.

Ben Coulter had the helm. "Steady on 075, sir," the veteran petty officer said in response to Kimball's unspoken question. "Listen to her. Doesn't she sound good? Those greaser mechanics did a hell of a job."

Kimball cocked his head to one side. The engine *did* sound unusually smooth. "Greasers are loyal," he said. "It's the goddamn niggers you got to watch out for."

"Not in Cuba," Coulter said. "Niggers didn't hardly rise up at all in Cuba, what I hear tell. Never was so many Reds in Cuba like there is

back home." The unlit cigar he clenched between his teeth twitched as he talked.

"Sad state of affairs when the greasers keep their niggers quiet and white men can't do it," Kimball said. "Sad state of affairs when they think they've got to give niggers guns or the whole country goes under, too. Anybody wants to know, President Semmes is out of his goddamn mind."

Ben Coulter nodded. So did most of the other crewmen within ear shot. And then Kimball remembered that Anne Colleton had favored creating Negro military units, and also favored making Negroes Confederate citizens after their service. He thought as much of her brains as he did of her body, which said a great deal. If, after what she'd gone through at the hands of the Reds, she still thought the CSA needed Negro troops . . . *She's still wrong, dammit,* Kimball thought.

The *Bonefish* moved steadily east toward the rectangle on the chart through which the submersible was supposed to sweep till her patrol was done. Kimball drilled the crew hard, regaining whatever edge they'd lost in the fleshpots of Havana. When the boat slid below the surface of the Atlantic in less than thirty seconds, he pronounced himself satisfied—privately, to Tom Brearley. As far as the crew was concerned, he was never satisfied.

Navigating aboard a submersible wasn't easy, but repeated sights and hard work with the tables—much of it by Brearley, who had a fine head for mathematics—brought the *Bonefish* into the box between fifteen and seventeen degrees north latitude, thirty and thirty-three degrees west longitude, her assigned area for this patrol. Kimball chafed at working a set zone instead of hunting freely. Back and forth, back and forth the *Bonefish* prowled, like a shark in a tank.

"This isn't what war is supposed to be about," Kimball grumbled to his executive officer. "This is hide-and-seek, nothing else but."

"Orders," Brearley said placidly. As far as he was concerned, that made everything right. He had more imagination than a fence post, but not a whole lot. If he ever got his own boat, Kimball was sure he would command it competently. He was also sure his exec would never do anything spectacular.

Kimball was frustrated not least because he doubted whether any Yankee

ships would come into his search zone. A patrol with a log book essentially empty of action was not what he had in mind.

He was in his bunk—which, however tiny and cramped, was the only one the *Bonefish* boasted, everyone else sleeping in hammocks or in odd places amongst the gear and machinery in the pressure hull—when the lookout on the conning tower spotted a plume of smoke to westward. Roused by the shouts, he put on his shoes and cap (the only items he'd taken off) and hurried up for a look of his own.

His first order was to bring the *Bonefish* up to fifteen knots so he could approach and get a better idea of what he was hunting. He could do that with little or no risk, because the submersible's diesels produced less exhaust than the coal-burner up ahead. He shouted a course change down to the helmsman, one that would put the *Bonefish* in front of whatever ship had presumed to steam south through the territory he patrolled. Submerged, the boat was slow. He needed to be in front to close for an attack.

He peered through the binoculars, willing himself to get a clear look at the vessel making that smoke. If it was a warship, it was dawdling through the water; it couldn't be making more than eight or nine knots. As he drew near, he made out the dumpy superstructure of a freighter.

Tom Brearley came up alongside him. When he told the exec what he'd found, Brearley asked, "Shall we sink her with the gun, sir?"

Kimball was tempted. The *Bonefish* carried far more three-inch shells than torpedoes. Gunfire was the cheap, easy way to sink enemy shipping. After a moment, though, he shook his head. "No, we'll feed her a couple of fish. She's liable to be one of those gunboat freighters the Yankees fit out to slug it out with submarines on the surface. Why take a chance?"

He shouted the order to dive to periscope depth. Brearley scrambled down the hatch. Kimball was right behind him. The captain of the *Bonefish* dogged it shut. If he'd waited more than a few seconds longer, he would have let the sea in with him.

He raised the periscope and peered through it. One of the prisms had condensation on it; the image was foggy. "Give me five knots," he said, and crawled closer on the electric engines that powered the submarine underwater. The freighter had no idea he was there, or that any submersibles might be nearby. It didn't change speed. It

didn't zigzag. It went on its way, so resolutely normal it made Kimball suspicious as hell.

As he got inside a mile, he and Brearley and Coulter were all working out the torpedo solution: the *Bonefish's* course, the freighter's course, the sub's speed, the freighter's, the torpedo's, and the distance at which he'd shoot all went into calculating the angle at which to shoot. "A couple of degrees to port," he murmured at about 1,200 yards, and then, murmuring no more, "Fire one! Fire two!"

Compressed air hurled the fish out of the forward torpedo tubes. They

took about half a minute to reach the freighter. It tried to turn away from them, but far too late. One struck near the bow, the other near the stern. The rumble of the explosions filled the *Bonefish.*

The crew cheered. Kimball watched the freighter capsize and sink like a stone. The sailors aboard it had no time to launch boats. A couple of heads bobbed in water unnaturally calm. "She's leaking a hell of a lot of oil there," Kimball said. "Likely she was carrying it for the U.S. goddamn Navy. Well, they'll go hungrier now, and have to go home sooner."

"Easiest one we've had in a while," Brearley said. "Just like practice."
"Tom, they won't make us throw it back on account of it was easy," Kimball answered. After a moment, he went on with a grim certainty: "Besides, odds are the next one won't be. Nothing in this goddamn war stays simple long."

Captain Jonathan Moss' unit of fighting scouts was doing what it had done through most of the late fall and winter outside the hamlet of Arthur, Ontario: not much. The weather was too bad for flying about six days out of seven, and marginal the seventh. He'd run up an astonishing bar tab at the officers' club.

Beside him at the table there, First Lieutenant Percy Stone looked down into his whiskey-and-soda. "Nothing in this goddamn war stays simple long. The aeroplanes I trained on are as obsolete as last year's newspaper, and it wasn't that long ago."

Moss had a whiskey-and-soda, too, only the soda being omitted from the recipe. "Next time you want to keep a sense that things do

go on steadily in stead of by jerks, try not to get shot so you have to spend the better part of a year on the sidelines."

"That's good advice. I'll make a note of it." Stone really did make as if to write it down.

"You're a good fellow, Percy," Moss said, laughing. Stone, a photographer in civilian life, had been his observer when he was piloting a reconnaissance aeroplane in 1915. They'd been put together as much because of the way their names matched as for any other reason, but they'd always got on famously—till Stone stopped a machine-gun bullet. For a long time after that, Moss had thought he was dead, but he'd proved to be very much alive, and wearing a pilot's two-winged badge instead of the one wing that marked the observer.

He raised his glass on high. "To hell with the Sopwith Pup!" he declared now.

Everyone who heard him drank with him. Only a handful of the new Brit ish machines had got to this side of the Atlantic, but they made every American who met them wish that handful were none at all.

Having lost friends who flew outmoded Martin one-deckers against Pups

that could outclimb, outdive, outrun, and outmaneuver them, Moss poured down his own drink. He'd flown a Martin one-decker himself, from the day he'd gone from observation aeroplanes to fighting scouts until he came here to train on the new machines that were supposed to be able to contend on even terms with the best the limeys and Canucks had to offer. He got up, walked rather unsteadily to the bar, and bought himself another drink. With the glass of whiskey in his hand, he lifted it and said, "Here's to the new biplanes that'll tie tin cans to the Pups' tails."

That toast drew both cheers and laughs. He went back to the table. When he sat down, Percy Stone's long-jawed, handsome face was thoughtful, even worried. In a low voice, Stone asked, "Do you think they'll really be able to do the job? They're a hell of a lot peppier than anything I ever flew before, but I've been out of circulation for quite a while."

He patted his side. What with the entry and exit wounds of the

bullet that had got him and the incisions the surgeons made to patch him up, he owned as spectacular a collection of scars as anyone could want—a more spectacular collection of scars than anyone in his right mind would want.

"We ought to have a good fighting chance," Moss answered with a ponderous deliberation fueled by both thought and alcohol. "This new two-decker can climb with anything ever made, and it's maneuverable as all get-out. I don't think it's quite as fast a bus on the straightaway as the Pups are, but damn close. How fast you can turn counts for more in a dogfight a lot of times, anyhow."

"That's what everybody's saying, sure enough." Stone nodded. "Now the next interesting question is, will we get a chance to fly our birds before they're obsolete, too, and the War Department decides to train us up on the next new model, whatever that turns out to be?"

"Take that one up with the chaplain, or maybe take it straight to God. Weather's not my department," Moss said. Then he slowly started thinking again. "Wouldn't be surprised if these two-deckers are damn near obsolete in Europe. That's where the real air action is. Our new buses are just copies of the ones Albatros makes for the Germans."

That had been true through most of the war. Maybe because they were in a tougher fight in the air, German manufacturers kept cranking out new and improved models, of which the Albatros biplane was but one. Some of the plans made the journey by submersible to the USA (some got sunk trying to make the journey, too, which was why the new fighting scout was slower getting out of the blocks than it should have been), just as the British did their best to keep the Canadians in aeroplanes and fresh plans.

A lot of fliers wore their pocket watches on wrist straps when in the air; bulky flying clothes made a watch impossible to check otherwise. Like some others Moss knew, Percy Stone had taken to wearing his on his wrist all the

time. Looking at it now, he yawned and said, "I think I'm going to hit the hay. I'll pretend tomorrow will be a bully day for flying, even though I know damn well it'll snow and it'll be colder than a witch's tit."

"Duty," Moss said approvingly. "Responsibility. Remembrance." He looked down into his own glass. "And whiskey. Don't forget whiskey." He made sure the glass had no whiskey left in it to forget, then rose

and accompanied Stone to the tent they shared with the other two men in the flight, Pete Bradley and Hans Oppenheim.

An iron stove glowed red-hot in the middle of the tent. That meant the four cots, all piled high with thick, green-gray wool blankets, were cold to sleep in, but didn't quite feel as if the North Pole had moved down to a couple of miles north of the aerodrome. This was Moss' third winter in Ontario. So far as he knew, nobody in the world could strip down to his drawers and slide under the covers faster than he could.

Reveille came at half-past five, which was, in his opinion, a couple of hours too early. His head pounded. He dry-swallowed a couple of aspirins— American imitations of aspirins, actually. They worked well enough. And, when he poked his head out of the tent, he blinked and whistled in surprise.

It was cold. The breath he exhaled whistling made a little frosty cloud in front of his face. But it was clear. In the east, the sky glowed salmon. Before too long, the sun would rise. In December, it hardly showed its face. Now that February was here, it began to remember it did have some business up in Canada after all.

He stuck his head back inside. "I think we may be able to get some flying in after all."

"That would be good," Oppenheim said seriously. He seldom was anything but serious. "When they sent us up from London after they trained us on these new two-deckers, the idea was that we should fly them. We are, after all, an operational squadron." His parents had come from Germany. He didn't have an accent, but the language he'd spoken around the house as a kid influenced the way he put his sentences together.

The fliers went to the mess tent and shoveled down bacon and eggs and pancakes and bad coffee. The squadron commander, Major Julius Cherney, nodded to them. "Can we go up along the line, sir, and see if the limeys send anyone out against us?" Moss asked.

"Well, why the hell not?" Cherney said. "Meteorology says everything looks good for the next few hours." He grunted. "Yeah—I know—that and five cents buys you a beer." He clapped Moss on the back. "Good hunting."

Men with shovels and horses and mules with scoops made the

airstrips usable. Bigger aerodromes had tractors with blades mounted in front of them to clear snow. Arthur boasted no such amenities.

Moss reveled in the way his aeroplane leaped from the ground. The

streamlined fighting scout from the Wright works in Ohio—a copy of the Albatros D.II—climbed at close to a thousand feet a minute, a hell of a lot faster than his old Martin could have managed.

And all the sky in front of him was empty. He led the flight now, with Percy Stone behind him on the right and Oppenheim and Bradley on the left. They flew east till they came to the trench line that scarred Ontario between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron. West of the trenches, the snow could not hide the devastation of the land the Canadians and their British allies had fought so bitterly to hold. East of them—or, at least, east of artillery range from them— it was simply snowy country in winter. The dazzle of sun off endless miles of white made Moss blink back tears behind his goggles.

Here and there, down in the Canucks' trenches, muzzle flashes showed that soldiers were taking potshots at him and his flightmates. He laughed, and the chilly slipstream blew his mirth away. Rifle and machine-gun fire reached up to about two thousand feet. He was high above that danger.

Then Canadian antiaircraft guns opened up. Black puffs of smoke appeared in the sky, as if by magic. When one burst a couple of hundred yards below Moss' fighting scout, the aeroplane bucked like a restive horse. He began changing his speed and course and altitude more or less at random, so the gunners could not calculate just where to place their shells. The sky, thank heaven, was a big, wide place. He respected antiaircraft fire without fearing it.

He led his flight south and east along the line, in the direction of Toronto, daring enemy aeroplanes to come up and fight. Every so often, he would glance at his fuel gauge and his watch. Like most other fighting scouts, the new Wright machines could stay in the air for about an hour and a half. If he and his comrades found no challengers, they would have to go home.

When more antiaircraft shells burst in the sky south of Moss, they drew his eye toward the aeroplane at which they were aimed: one of the Avro two-seat biplanes the Canadians had been using for reconnaissance work since the beginning of the war.

Moss sped toward the Avro, followed close by his flightmates. The Canuck pilot hadn't changed course despite the Archie bursting around him; he was letting his observer take the photos he needed. Moss knew about that from his work with Stone. Having four U.S. fighting scouts on this tail was a different business for the Avro driver. He corkscrewed away from the Wrights in a spinning dive.

Sometimes speed did matter. Moss and his comrades had better than twenty miles an hour on the Avro. They closed quickly. The observer started shooting at them. They shot back from four directions at once. Four streams of tracers converged on the desperately dodging Avro.

Then it dodged no more, but plunged toward the ground. One of those streams of machine-gun bullets must have found the pilot and left him dead or unconscious. The observer kept firing till the American fighting scouts pulled

away from their stricken foe. A moment later, the Avro slammed into the frozen ground and burst into flame.

We only get to claim a quarter of an aeroplane apiece, Moss thought: *no way to tell whose bullet nailed the Canuck. He didn't care. He needed a moment to get his bearings after the dizzying action. When he knew which way was which, he waggled his wings and pointed northwest, back toward the aerodrome. The flight headed for him. Moss looked back at the burning wreck of the Avro. We've earned our pay today, he thought.*

Confederate soldiers tramped glumly south through the mud that clogged the roads of the state of Sequoyah. The Red River, which marked the boundary between the former Indian Territory and Texas, was only a couple of miles away.

Private First Class Reginald Bartlett pointed. "What's the name of that lit tle town there?" he asked. He was a big, fair fellow with a comic turn of phrase that let him get away with saying outrageous things that would have got other men into trouble or into fights.

"That there's Ryan," Sergeant Pete Hairston answered. The veteran's harsh Georgia drawl was far removed from Bartlett's soft, almost English Richmond accent.

Reggie grinned. "Well, I want to tell you something, Sarge," he said, making his voice as deep and authoritative as he could. "We've got to hold this town. The whole Confederacy is depending on us to hold this town."

Hairston let out a strangled snort of laughter. "You go to hell, Bartlett, you goddamn smartmouth son of a bitch."

"Sarge, why you cussin' out Reggie?" Private Napoleon Dibble asked. "What did he say that was so bad?"

A moment later, First Lieutenant Jerome Nicoll, the company commander, spoke up in deep, authoritative tones of his own: "I want to tell you something, boys—we've got to hold Ryan. The whole Confederacy is depending on us to hold Ryan."

"You *son* of a bitch," Hairston said admiringly, and made as if to throw a punch at Bartlett.

"What did he say, Sarge?" Nap Dibble repeated, his eyes wide and puzzled. "He said the same thing the lieutenant said, so why are you getting steamed at him?"

Hairston and Bartlett shared a moment of silent amusement. Dibble was a pretty good fellow, brave and good-natured, but not a fireball when it came to brains. "Don't worry about it, Nap—everything's fine," Bartlett said. He turned back to Hairston. "We've got to hang on to any chunk of Sequoyah we can, you know. The Germans still don't have all of Belgium."

A moment later, Lieutenant Nicoll delivered the same sentiment in almost

identical words. "See?" Dibble exclaimed. "Reggie said just what the lieu tenant said, so how come you're givin' him a hard time about it?"

"The lieutenant said the same damn thing in front of Duncan, too, an' we got run out of Duncan," Hairston said. "He said the same damn thing in front of Waurika, and we got run out of there. Just on account of we got to do somethin' don't have to mean we *can* do it."

As if to underscore that point, a shell screamed down and burst a few hundred yards off to one side of the road. It threw up a fountain of dirt. A few of the Kiowas and Comanches who'd attached themselves to the C.S. army in its grinding retreat through southern

Sequoyah jumped and exclaimed. Most of them took no more notice of the explosion than did the white soldiers.

"I hear some of these Indian tribes have their own little armies in the field, fighting alongside ours," Reggie said.

Pete Hairston nodded. "That's a fact. But those are the Five Civilized Tribes, and they pretty much run their own affairs any which way. They did, anyhow, till the damnyankees landed on 'em. God knows what's happening to the poor miserable red-skinned bastards now."

"These Indians here seem civilized enough," Bartlett said.

Lieutenant Nicoll overheard that (fortunately, he'd missed Reggie's imper sonation of him). "It's a matter of law, Bartlett. The Creeks, the Choctaws, the Cherokees, and whatnot have legal control over their own internal affairs. The redskins hereabouts don't."

Ryan, when they trudged into it, might have once boasted a thousand people. Then again, it might not have. It certainly didn't have a thousand civilians in it now: most of them had fled across the Red River into Texas. Ryan lay on the edge of the Red River bottomland, with forests of mesquite and tamaracks and swamps with endless little streams winding through them taking the place of the prairie over which Bartlett had been marching for so long.

At Lieutenant Nicoll's shouted order, his company joined the rest of the Confederate soldiers retreating from Waurika in entrenching in front of Ryan. Flinging dirt out behind him, Reggie said, "Wasn't like this on the Roanoke front. There, if you went forward or back a quarter of a mile, that was something to write home about. When we pulled out of Waurika, we had to pull back maybe ten miles."

"Yeah, well, this here's the next town south of Waurika, too. Ain't nothing to speak of between there and here," Hairston said. "The Yankees run us out of the one place, what the hell's the point in stoppin' till you got some-where’s else worth holding on to?"

"Mm, maybe you've got something there," Bartlett admitted. "Lot of built-up land in the Roanoke valley, and what isn't built up is good farm country. Here, there's a lot of land just lying empty, not doing anything in particular. Seems kind of funny, when you're used to the way things are on the other side of the Mississippi."

"Yeah," Hairston agreed. A couple of three-inch field guns came by, pulled through the mud by laboring horses. "And that's our artillery. That's all the artillery we got, for miles and miles. Ain't like that on the Roanoke front, is it?"

"Lord, no," Reggie answered. "There, the Yankees and us'd line 'em up hub to hub and whale away at each other till it didn't seem like there was a live man anywhere the guns could reach."

He wished there were barbed wire to string in front of the entrenchments he and his comrades were digging. Confederate forces had been able to use some farther north in Sequoyah, but had had to abandon it when the Yankees forced them out of their positions. Nothing new had come up from Texas. From what Reggie'd heard, the defenders of Texas had their problems, too.

He was still digging when the U.S. field guns opened up on his position. He had to throw himself down in the mud a couple of times because of near misses. After each one, he got up, brushed himself off, and went back to work.

Joe Mopope, one of the Kiowas who'd been fighting alongside the Confederates since Waurika, asked, "How can you do that? I can fight with a rifle"—he carried a Tredegar now, not the squirrel gun he'd started with— "but it's different when the big guns start shooting. They are too far away for me to shoot back at them, so they make me afraid."

Admitting fear took a kind of nerve of its own. Bartlett studied Mopope's long, straight-nosed, high-cheekboned face. "All what you're used to, Joe," he said at last, more careful of the Indian's pride than he'd thought he might be. "I've been under worse shellfire than this since 1914. I know what it can do and what it can't. First few times, it damn near scared the piss out of me."

"Ah." Mopope was usually a pretty serious fellow. Now he tried out a smile, as if to see whether it would fit his face. "This is good to know. A warrior can learn this kind of fighting, then, the same as any other kind."

"Yeah," Reggie said. Joe Mopope's father might have been a warrior of the traditional Indian sort, sneaking across the U.S. border on raids up into Kansas. That sort of thing had gone on for years after the Second Mexican War, finally petering out not long before the turn of the century.

Bartlett shrugged. He came from a family of warriors, too. Both his grandfathers had served in the War of Secession. His father hadn't fought in the Second Mexican War, but Uncle Jasper sure as hell had —and wouldn't shut up about it, either, not to this day.

From in back of the trenches, the Confederates' field guns opened up. They fired faster than their Yankee counterparts. Joe Mopope's smile got wider. "Ah, we give it back to them. That is good. Hurting them is better than sitting here and letting them hurt us."

"Yes, except for one thing." Reggie set down his entrenching tool and un- slung his rifle. "If we're opening up on the damnyankees, that means they're close enough for the gunners to spot 'em. And if they're close enough for the gunners to spot 'em, we're going to have company before long."

He looked north. Sure enough, here came the men in green-gray. They advanced much more openly than they would have in the Roanoke valley, where any man outside a trench risked immediate annihilation. That aside, the Yankee commander hereabouts seemed to assess danger by how many men the Confederates in front of him knocked over on the approach. Some generals in butternut were like that, too. Bartlett was glad he didn't serve under any of them.

Rifle and machine-gun fire forced the Yankees to go to earth. Dirt flew as the U.S. soldiers dug themselves in. Any man who hoped to live through the war was handy with the spade. Stretcher-bearers carried a few wounded Confederates back into Ryan. On the other side of the line, stretcher-bearers in U.S. uniforms were no doubt doing the same thing with injured damnyankees.

"We stopped 'em!" Napoleon Dibble said happily.

Even Joe Mopope rolled his black eyes at that. As gently as he could, Reg gie said, "We stopped 'em for now, Nap. We stopped 'em for a while at Duncan, and for a while at Waurika, too. Question is, can we stop 'em when they bring up everything they've got?"

"We have to," Dibble answered. "Lieutenant Nicoll said we have to. If we don't, the Yankees get Sequoyah, and they'll fill it up with Germans." He'd made that mistake before; nobody bothered correcting him about it any more.

Dusk fell. Reggie gnawed stale cornbread and opened a tin of

beans and pork. That was enough to quiet the growling in his belly, though it didn't make much of a meal. Cold drizzle started falling. Rifle fire spattered up and down the lines, muzzle flashes looking like lightning bugs.

When Bartlett wanted somebody to dig a trench forward toward a good post for a picket that he'd spotted, he looked around for Joe Mopope, but didn't spot him. He wondered where the hell the Indian had got to. The Kiowas and Comanches were good enough in a fight, but they didn't like the drudgery that went with soldiering for hell.

He set Nap Dibble digging instead. Nap did the job without complaint. He never complained. He probably wasn't smart enough to complain. Because he didn't, he got more than his fair share of jobs nobody else wanted.

Sergeant Pete Hairston launched a fearsome barrage of curses. Reggie hurried over to see what was going on. There stood Joe Mopope, knife in one hand, a couple of objects Bartlett couldn't see well in the other. In tones somewhere between disgust and awe, Hairston said, "This red-skinned son of a bitch just brought us back two Yankee scalps."

Reggie stared. Then he blurted, "No wonder he wasn't around when I needed him to dig."

Very quietly, Joe Mopope laughed.

As she rode the streetcar to her job at a mackerel-canning plant, Sylvia Enos went through the inner pages of the *Boston Globe* with minute care. As far as she was concerned, the paper never talked enough about naval affairs. A battle on land that didn't move the front a quarter of a mile in one direction or the other got page-one coverage. Sometimes she thought ships got mentioned only when they were torpedoed or blown to bits.

She saw nothing about the USS *Ericsson.* Not seeing anything about the destroyer made her let out a silent sigh of relief. It meant—she devoutly hoped it meant—her husband George was all right.

Most of the people on the trolley were women on the way to work, many of them on the way to jobs men had been doing before the war pulled them into the Army or the Navy. Many of them were scanning the newspaper as attentively as Sylvia was doing. Some of the ones who weren't wore mourning black. They no longer had any

need to fear the worst. They'd already met it.

Sylvia left her copy of the *Globe* on the seat when the trolley came to her stop. She wished George were home. She wished he'd never gone to war. And she hoped the *Ericsson* was far out to sea, nowhere near a port. She loved her husband, and she thought he loved her, but she wasn't sure, as she had been once, she could trust him out of her sight.

She walked the short distance to the canning plant, which was no more lovely than it had to be. It wasn't far from the harbor, and stank of fish. A skinny cat looked at her and gave an optimistic meow. She shook her head. "Sorry, pussycat. No handouts from me today." The cat meowed again, piteously this time. Sylvia shook her head again, too, and walked on.

She grabbed her time card and stuck it in the clock. The money wasn't good—it wasn't as if she were a man, after all—but, with it and her monthly allotment from George's pay, she managed well enough.

"Good morning, Mrs. Enos," the foreman said as she hurried toward the machine that stuck bright labels on cans of mackerel.

"Good morning, Mr. Winter," she answered. He nodded and limped on past her: as a young man, he'd taken a bullet in the leg during the Second Mexican War.

A couple of minutes later, Isabella Antonelli took her place on the ma chine next to Sylvia's. She wore black; her husband had been killed fighting in Quebec. She nodded shyly to Sylvia, set down her dinner pail, and made sure her machine was in good working order.

With a rumble of motors and several discordant squeals of fan belts, the line started moving. Sylvia had to pull three levers, taking steps between them, to bring bare, bright cans into her machine, squirt paste on them, and affix the labels—which made the mackerel whose flesh went into the cans look

remarkably like tuna. Being a fisherman's wife, she knew what a lie that was. People who bought the cans in Ohio or Nebraska wouldn't, though.

Some days, stepping and pulling levers could be mesmerizing, so that half the morning would slip by while Sylvia hardly noticed any

time passing. This was one of those mornings. The only time she got jolted out of her routine was when her paste reservoir ran dry and she had to refill it from the big bucket of paste under the machine before she could put on more labels.

As it did sometimes, the lunch whistle startled her, jerking her out of the world in which she was almost as mechanical as the machine she tended. The line groaned to a stop. Sylvia shook herself, as she might have done coming out of the bathtub at the end of the hall in her apartment building. She looked around. There was her dinner pail, of black-painted sheet metal like the one a riveter might have carried to the Boston Navy Yard.

Isabella Antonelli's dinner pail might have been identical to her own. The two women sat on a bench near a wheezing steam radiator. Sylvia had a ham sandwich in her dinner pail, leftovers from the night before. Isabella Antonelli had a tightly covered bowl that also looked to hold leftovers: long noodles that looked like worms, smothered in tomato sauce. She brought them to the factory about three days out of five. Sylvia thought they were disgusting, though she'd never said so for fear of hurting her friend's feelings.

Mr. Winter limped by, a cigar clamped between his teeth. He was carrying his own dinner pail, looking for a place to sit down. His eyes lingered on Isabella as he walked past. "You can go with him, if you'd like," Sylvia said.

"I will sit with you today," the Italian woman said. She smiled, which made her look younger and not so tired. "He should not take me too much for granted, don't you think?"

She and the foreman—a widower for years—had been lovers for a couple of months. They were discreet about it, both at the factory and with their own families. Winter had aimed a few speculative remarks at Sylvia since she'd started working at the canning plant; she was just as well pleased to see him attached to someone else. To his credit, he hadn't aimed any of those remarks at her since taking up with Isabella.

Sylvia said, "Anybody who takes anybody else for granted is a fool."

She didn't realize with how much bitterness she'd freighted the remark till Isabella Antonelli, a worried look on her face, asked, "But all is well with your Giorgio, yes?"

"He's well, yes," Sylvia replied, which was by no means a complete answer. Isabella obviously realized it wasn't a complete answer. She also obviously realized it was all the answer she would get. The rest of the half-hour lunch passed in uneasy silence.

For once, Sylvia was glad to go back to her machine, to lose herself in the routine of pulling and stepping, pulling and stepping, of watching cans bright

with their tinning go into the machine and cans gaudy with their labels stream out. The machine asked no questions she would sooner not have answered. The machine asked no questions at all.

As she had at the lunch whistle, Sylvia started when the quitting whistle screamed. It was dark when she clocked out and walked to the trolley stop, but not quite so dark as it had been earlier in the year. Twilight lingered in the west, a harbinger of spring ahead. It was the only harbinger of spring she could find; the wind cut like a knife.

She had to stand almost all the way back to the stop by her apartment building. Except for lunch, she'd been standing since she got to the plant. Now that she'd returned from that mechanistic world, she felt how tired she was7. Her legs didn't want to hold her up any more. When she finally did get to sit down, she nearly fell asleep before the streetcar got to her stop. She'd done that once, and walked back more than a mile. This time, she didn't, but getting up and getting off the trolley were more mind over matter than anything else.

She checked her mailbox in the entrance hall to the apartment building. No letter from George, which meant he hadn't come to port as of a few days before, which meant he hadn't had the chance to get into trouble in a port. He might have got into trouble on the sea, but that was a different sort of trouble, and one over which she worried in a different sort of way.

Circulars from the Coal Board, the Scrap Metal Collection Agency, the Ration Board, the Victory Over Waste Committee, and the War Savings and Tax Board helped fill the mailbox. So did one from an agency new to her, the Paper Conservation Authority, which informed her in the portentous bureaucratic tones of any government outfit that paper was an important war resource and should not be wasted.

"Then why do I get so much worthless paper every day?" she

muttered, tossing the multicolored sheets into the battered wastebasket there. The answer to that was only too clear: "Because one board writes this and none of the others read it, that's why."

She went upstairs to reclaim her children from Brigid Coneval, who, after her husband was conscripted, had decided to take in the children of other women who got jobs in factories instead of getting a factory job herself. Each flight of stairs seemed to have twice as many as the one before, and each step twice as high.

When she came out into the hallway, she walked down the hall to Mrs. Coneval's flat to get George, Jr., and Mary Jane and take them back to her own apartment, where she would make supper and let them play till they were ready for bed—or, more likely, till she was ready for bed and managed to persuade them that they should lie down, too.

They were getting harder to persuade. George, Jr., was six now, heading

toward seven, and Mary Jane nearly four. Sylvia needed more sleep these days, while they needed less. It hardly seemed fair.

With so many children in Brigid Coneval's flat, shrieks and cries as Sylvia came up were the order of the day. But the shrieks and cries that Sylvia heard now did not come from the throats of children. Fear shot through her, sharp as if she'd seized a live electric wire. She had to will herself to knock, and then had to knock twice to make anyone inside notice her.

The woman who opened the door was not Brigid Coneval, though she looked very much like her. Seeing Sylvia, George, Jr., and Mary Jane came running up and embraced her. Above them, Sylvia asked the question she dreaded, the question that had to be asked: "Is she—? Is it—?"

"It is that." The woman, doubtless Brigid's sister, had a brogue like hers, too. "Less than an hour ago, the telegram came. Down in Virginia he was, poor man, and never coming back from there again."

"That's dreadful. I'm so sorry," Sylvia said, feeling the inadequacy of words. She knew what Brigid Coneval was feeling. She'd twice thought George lost, once when his fishing boat was captured by a Confederate commerce raider and once when his river monitor was blown out of the water. The only thing that had saved him then was

that he hadn't been aboard, but on the riverbank, drunk and about to lie down with a colored strumpet.

She couldn't even say she understood, for Brigid's sister would not believe her. Then she found a new worry, different but in its own way no less urgent: while Brigid Coneval mourned, who would take care of the children when she had to go to work?

IV

Sam Carsten swabbed the deck of the USS *Dakota* with a safety line tied round his waist. The battleship pitched like a toy boat in a rambunctious boy's bathtub, chewing its way over and through waves that put to shame any others he'd ever known.

He shouted to his bunkmate, Vic Crosetti, who plied a mop not far away: "Everything they say about Cape Horn is true!"

"Yeah," Crosetti shouted back, through the howl of the wind. "Only trouble is, they don't say near enough, the tight-mouthed sons of bitches."

There was nothing tight-mouthed about him. He was a voluble Italian, little and swarthy and hairy and ugly as a monkey. Carsten, by contrast, was tall and muscular, with pink skin and hair so blond, it was almost white.

Crosetti leered at him. "You sunburned yet, Sam?"

"Fuck you," Carsten said amiably. He'd burned in San Francisco. Christ, he'd burned in Seattle. Duty in the Sandwich Islands and the tropical Pacific had been a hell of burning and peeling and zinc oxide and half a dozen other ointments that didn't do any good, either. "I finally find weather that suits me, and what do I get? A scrawny dago giving me a hard time."

Had some men called him a scrawny dago, Crosetti would have answered with a kick in the teeth or a knife in the ribs. When Sam did, he grinned. Carsten had a way of being able to talk without ticking people off. He even had trouble starting brawls in waterfront saloons.

Another enormous swell sweeping along from west to east lifted the *Dakota* to its crest. For a moment, Sam could see a hell of a long way. He spotted another battleship from the U.S. force that had set out from Pearl Harbor for Valparaiso, Chile, the autumn before—except autumn meant nothing in the Sandwich Islands and was spring down in Chile. Farther off, he

made out a U.S. armored cruiser and a couple of the destroyers that

guarded the big battlewagons from harm.

He also spied a Chilean armored cruiser. But for the different flag and different paint job—the Chileans preferred a sky blue to the U.S. gray—it looked the same as its American counterpart. It should have; it had come out of the Boston Navy Yard.

Pointing to it, Carsten said, "We sold the Chileans their toys, and England sold the Argentines theirs. Now we get to find out who's a better toymaker."

"Hell with all of 'em," Crosetti said. "If Argentina was on our side, Chile'd be in bed with the limeys. But Argentina's keeping England fed, so Chile ends up playin' on our team. Big deal, you ask me."

"Hey, listen, if Argentina was on our side, we'd be sailing east to west, straight into all these damn waves and this stinking wind instead of riding with 'em. How'd you like that?"

"No thanks," Crosetti said at once.

Carsten got a faraway look in his eyes. "How'd you like to try sailing east to west through here in a ship without an engine—I mean *really* sailing through here?" he said. Crosetti crossed himself. Sam laughed. "Yeah, that's how I feel about it, too."

"They were tough bastards in the old days," Vic Crosetti said. "Stupid bastards, too, to want to come down to such a godforsaken corner of the world."

Before Carsten could answer that, klaxons started hooting, a noise hideous enough to cut through the raging wind. Everyone on deck undid his safety line and ran for his battle station. Sam had no idea whether it was a drill or whether some destroyer up ahead had spotted British or Argentine or maybe even French ships. He knew he had to treat the noise as if shells would start dropping around—or on —the *Dakota* at any moment.

The battleship sank into the trough between waves, plunging her bow steeply downward. Sam's foot skidded on seawater. He flailed his arms wildly, and somehow managed to keep from falling on his face. Then his shoes rang on metal rungs as he went below.

His battle station was loader on the forwardmost starboard five-inch gun. He flung himself into the cramped sponson and waited to

see what would happen next.

There ahead of him—he would have been astonished were it otherwise— was the commander of that five-inch gun, a chief petty officer and gunner's mate named Hiram Kidde and more often than not called "Cap'n." He'd ditched his habitual cigar somewhere on the way to the sponson. He couldn't have been too far from it; he wasn't breathing hard, and he was a roly-poly fellow who'd been in the Navy for years before Sam got his first pair of long pants.

"Is this practice, or for real?" Sam asked.

"Damned if I know," Kidde answered. "Think they tell me anything?" In scrambled the rest of the crew: gun layers and shell jerkers. They were all at their stations when Commander Grady, who was in charge of the starboard secondary armament, stuck his head into the sponson. Grady nodded approval; he was a pretty decent sort. "Well done, men," he said.

Hiram Kidde asked the same question Carsten had: "What's the dope, sir? Is this just another drill, or have we got trouble up ahead?"

"We've got trouble up ahead sure as the sun comes up tomorrow," Grady answered. "Sooner or later, if they don't stop us, we *are* going to be in position to disrupt shipments of wheat and beef from Argentina to England. If we can do that, the limeys starve, so they'll move heaven and earth to keep us away."

"I understand that, sir," Kidde answered patiently. "What I meant was, have we got trouble up ahead right now?" Grady would know. Whether he would tell was liable to be a different question.

He started to answer, but then somebody in the corridor spoke to him. "What?" he said, sounding surprised. He hurried off.

"Damn," said Luke Hoskins, one of the shell haulers. He was the right man for his job, being both taller and thicker through the shoulders than Carsten, who wasn't small himself. Nobody the size of, say, Vic Crosetti could have handled five-inch, sixty-pound shells as if he were about to load them into his shotgun. Also, shell-jerker wasn't the sort of job that called for much in the way of brains.

"I think it's—" Kidde began, just as the klaxons signaled the all-clear.

"You were going to say you thought it was the real thing, weren't you?" Carsten said as they started filing out of the cramped sponson.

He expected Kidde to deny everything, but the gunner's mate nodded. "Hell yes, I did. We should have done this months ago, instead of wasting time in Valparaiso and Conception like we did. Shit, we were ready, but the Chilean Navy ain't what you'd call a fireball."

"How do you say *tomorrow* in Spanish?" Carsten said. *"Mariana,* that's it. I wonder how many times we heard *manana* up there."

"Too damn many, however many it was," Kidde said positively. "Wasted time, wasted time." He shook his head, a slow, mournful gesture. "Seas wouldn't have been near so heavy if we'd got moving in the middle of summer hereabouts instead of waiting till we were heading down toward fall. I still don't trust our steering, either. Wish I did, but I don't."

Carsten's laugh was a noise he made to hold fear at bay. "What's the mat ter, 'Cap'n'? You don't want to do a circle toward the limeys and Argentines, the way we did toward the limeys and Japs in the Battle of the Three Navies?"

Kidde swore loudly and sulfurously for a couple of minutes before calming

down enough to say, "We were lucky once, which is how come we ain't on the bottom of the Pacific. You can't count on being lucky once. You sure as hell can't count on being lucky twice."

"I expect you're right." Carsten went up onto the main deck, made his way back to where he'd been working, and reattached his safety line. He might as well have been starting over from scratch; plenty of seawater had splashed up since he'd dashed to his battle station.

Vic Crosetti resumed his place a minute or so later. They were jawing back and forth when a starched young lieutenant, junior grade, came up and said, "Seaman Carsten?" When Sam admitted he was himself, the officer said, "The force commander will see you in his cabin immediately."

"Sir?" If Sam's heart didn't skip a beat, he couldn't guess why. He hadn't thought Rear Admiral Bradley Fiske knew he existed. Like any other sensible sailor, he'd hoped that pleasant condition would

continue indefinitely. In a choking voice, he asked, "What does he think I've done, sir?"

"Come with me, Carsten," the j.g. answered, and Sam, a lump of ice about the size of the nearby Antarctic continent in his belly, had to obey.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed another officer bringing Vic Crosetti along. *God damn that little dago,* he thought. *What's he done, and how in hell did I get in hot water for it?*

He seldom had occasion to go up into officers' country. He'd never had occasion to visit the force commander's quarters, nor imagined that he would. Sure as hell, Vic Crosetti was heading there, too. Carsten cursed under his breath.

The lieutenant, j.g., went in ahead of him, then came back out and said, "The admiral will see you—both of you—now." As they went in, Crosetti gave Sam a venomous glare. *Christ,* Sam thought, *does he figure he's in trou ble on account of something* I *did? What kind of foul-up have we got here?*

There stood Rear Admiral Fiske, a sturdy man of about sixty, in the mid dle of a cabin that could have held half a dozen three-level bunks. So much space inside the *Dakota* was amazing. Even more amazing was the bottle of medicinal brandy Fiske held, and that he poured three glasses from it, handing one to Sam and one to Crosetti and keeping the third for himself. "Congratulations, you men!" he boomed.

Carsten and Crosetti stared at each other, then at Rear Admiral Fiske. Sam felt as if he'd been up and down too fast on the Coney Island roller coaster. He had to say something. He knew he had to say something. "Sir?" His voice was a hoarse croak.

Fiske looked impatient. He knew what was going on, which struck Carsten as an unfair advantage. "Some time ago, you two men reported your suspicions that a certain native of the Sandwich Islands, one John Liholiho, used his position and good nature to spy for England after the USA took the

said islands from her at the outbreak of the war. Investigation has confirmed those suspicions, I am informed by wireless telegraph. Liholiho has been arrested and sentenced to death."

"Sir?" Sam and Crosetti said it together now, in astonishment. Sam had almost forgotten about the affable, surf-riding Sandwich Islander. He'd long since assumed Liholiho wasn't in fact a spy, because no one had said anything to the contrary.

Fiske was saying that now. He was also saying something else: "You men are both promoted from Seaman First Class to Petty Officer Third Class, effective the date of your report. Back pay in your new rank will also accrue from the said date." He raised his glass in salute. "Well done, both of you!" He drank.

Numbly, Carsten raised his own glass. Numbly, he drank, and discovered the rear admiral got a much better grade of medicine than did the men he commanded. After the stuff went off like a bomb in his stomach, he wasn't numb any more. He tried on a smile for size. It fit his face like a glove.

As Scipio walked down the road toward the swamp, he knew he was a dead man. Oh, his lungs still moved air in and out, his heart still beat, his legs still took step after step. He was a dead man even so. The only questions left were who would kill him, how soon, and how long he'd hurt before he finally died.

He looked back over his shoulder. Somewhere back there, Anne Colleton was liable to have a scope-mounted Tredegar aimed at his spine. She'd had one slung on her back when she sent him out on his way to the swamps by the Congaree. By the way she handled it, she knew just what to do with it, too.

She'd started following him. He didn't know if she still was. He'd caught glimpses of her once or twice, but only once or twice. He got the idea she'd wanted him to get those glimpses, to remind him she was on his trail. When she wanted him not to see her, he didn't. He'd never dreamt she could stalk like that.

Was she good enough to stalk Cassius? Scipio found that hard to believe. Cassius had been Marshlands' chief hunter for years. What he didn't know about the swamps of the Congaree, no one did. He'd been able to keep the raiders who were the hard core of the Congaree Socialist Republic a going concern in the swamp for most of a year after the Socialist Republic was crushed everywhere else.

And Cassius and the rest of the Red holdouts were about as likely

to kill him as Anne Colleton was. If they found out he was acting as her bird dog, they *would* kill him. They might kill him simply for abandoning the cause and trying to live what passed for a normal life in the CSA after the black uprising went down to defeat.

Something rose from the roadside marsh in a thunder of wings. Scipio's heart rose, too, into his throat. But it was only an egret, flapping away from his unwanted company. When he was a boy, the big white birds had been far more common than they were today. The demand for plumes on ladies' hats had all but caused their extermination. Only a shift in fashion let any survive.

Here where—he hoped—no one could hear him, he trotted out the educated white man's voice he'd used while serving as butler at Marshlands: "And what shift in fashion will let *me* survive?" For the life of him—literally, for the life of him—he could think of none.

He looked around. Water, rushes, trees. The road was turning into a muddy track. Everything seemed prosaic enough. Of course, he was only on the edge of the swamp as yet. The Negro field hands back at Marshlands had peopled the wet country with monsters with sharp teeth and glowing yellow eyes.

Those stories were nothing but superstitious twaddle. So claimed the part of him that had been so carefully educated. The little boy who had listened round-eyed to the stories the grannies told wasn't so sure. He looked around again, more nervously this time. Nothing. Only swamp. Of course, that meant cougars and gators and cottonmouths and rattlers and—he slapped—mosquitoes and the no-see-'ems that bit and vanished. He slapped again.

The road forked, and then forked again, and then again. It went in among the trees now, and the oaks and willows and pines made the sun play hide-and-seek. The road divided yet again. Every turn Scipio took was one leading deeper into the swamp.

If he didn't find the men of the Congaree Socialist Republic, he wondered if he'd be able to find his way out. If Cassius didn't kill him, and if Anne Colleton didn't kill him, the swamp was liable to do him in.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than three Negroes with Tredegars stepped silently out into the roadway. They wore red bandannas on their left arms. "Nigger, you ain't got no good reason to be here, you is one dead nigger," one of them said. Two of their rifles

were bayoneted. They wouldn't even have to risk the noise of a gunshot to dispose of him.

He licked his lips. The bayonets looked very long and sharp. "I wants to see Cassius, or maybe Cherry," he answered in the broad patois of the Congaree. "I is on de business o' de Socialist Republic."

None of the three fighting men was from Marshlands or any nearby plantation. They didn't know him by sight, as many of Cassius' men would have. "Who you is?" their spokesman asked.

"I's Scipio," he said.

Their eyes went wide in their dark faces. They knew the name, if not the man who went with it. "Maybe you is, an' maybe you ain't," said the one who had spoken first.

"Take me to Cassius. Take me to Cherry," Scipio said. "You ask they who I is an' who I ain't."

The fighters put their heads together. After a minute of low-voice argument, the one who seemed to lead handed his Tredegar to a comrade, took the bandanna off his arm, and walked up to Scipio. "Maybe you is, an' maybe you ain't," he repeated. "An' maybe you is, an' you is a spy nowadays. You see Cassius an' Cherry, but you don' see how to get to they." He efficiently blindfolded Scipio with the square of red cloth.

"You insults me," Scipio said with as much indignation as he could simu late. Had he been rejoining the forces of the Congaree Socialist Republic in truth, he would have protested being blindfolded. Since he was a spy (and since he was Anne Colleton's spy, which, he suspected, made him more dangerous to Cassius than if he'd merely been a spy for the Confederate government), he had to do his best to seem as if he weren't.

"Come on." The man who covered his eyes grabbed him by the arm. "We takes you."

He had no idea by what route they took him. It might have been the straightest one possible, or they might have spent half their time walking him around in circles. He wondered if Anne Colleton was still following him. He wondered what sort of watchers the survivors of the Congaree Socialist Republic had posted through the swamp. He wondered whether she could get past them if she was still following

him. That he did not know the answer to any of those questions did not keep him from wondering about all of them.

After about an hour, his guide said, "Stop." Scipio obeyed. The man who'd led him for so long took the blindfold off him. Standing side by side in front of him were Cassius and Cherry. She wore a collarless men's shirt and a torn pair of men's trousers. Scipio suppressed a shudder. Anne Colleton had worn men's trousers, too, though hers were elegantly tailored.

Cassius hurried up and clasped Scipio's hand. "Do Jesus, Kip," he ex claimed. "Why fo' you here? Las' I hear, you is up in Greenville, an' de buckra, dey forget you was ever borned."

Scipio was anything but surprised Cassius had kept tabs on where he'd gone. He *had* dropped out of sight of the Confederate authorities, but the Negro grapevine was a different matter altogether. With a sigh, he answered with most of the truth: "Somebody rec'nize me up dere. Dey 'rested me, take me to St. Matthews."

"To Miss Anne." Cherry's voice was flat and full of hate. Scipio nodded, more than a little apprehensively. She went on, "I reckon we done baked dat white debbil bitch las' Christmas, but she git away."

"She good." Cassius spoke with reluctant respect. "She a damn 'pressor, but she good. We cain't kill she, no matter how hard we tries." His rather foxy features grew sharp and intent. "Why fo' she send you in after we? She ask a

truce? I don' trust no truce wid she. She break it like the overseer break de stick on de back o' de field hand fo' to get he to pick de cotton."

"She say, de war 'gainst de United States mo' 'portant than de war 'gainst de Congaree Socialist Republic," Scipio replied, nodding. "She say, if de damnyankees licks de CSA, dey comes an' licks de Congaree Socialist Republic, too. She say, we kin wait till de big war done, and den we fights our own."

Cassius and Cherry and all three men who'd brought Scipio to this place burst out laughing. "She say dat?" Cherry said. With high cheekbones that told of Indian blood, Cherry's face was made for showing scorn. She outdid herself now, tossing her head in magnificent contempt. "She say dat? Mighty fine, mighty fine. We let de 'pressors git rid o' de big war, an' den dey puts all dey gots into de

little war 'gainst we."

"You go back to Miss Anne," Cassius added, "an' you tell she dat when she dead, den we can have a truce wid she. Till den, we fights. She ain't licked we yet, an' she ain't gwine lick we, on account of we gots de dialectic wid we. She go on de rubbish heap o' history, 'long wid de rest o' de 'pressors." Hearing Marxist revolutionary jargon in the dialect of the Congaree never failed to strike Scipio as bizarre.

Cherry's eyes narrowed. "She have somebody follow you?" she de manded. "Dat white debbil, she have bloodhounds wid guns on your trail?"

Scipio spread his hands. "Don' know," he answered, though he had a pretty good idea. "I ain't no huntin' man. Back at Marshlands, I was de butler, you recollects. I ain't hardly been in this swamp befo'."

"Oh, we recollects," Cassius said, grinning like a catamount. He had a flask on his belt. He freed it, swigged, and passed it to Scipio. "See if you recollects dis here." Scipio drank. As butler, he'd sampled fine wines and good whiskey. This was raw corn likker, with a kick like a mule.

When he exhaled, he was amazed he didn't breathe out fire and smoke. He took another pull. There was a roaring in his ears. After a moment, he realized the corn likker hadn't caused it. It was real. It grew rapidly, and turned to a scream in the air. He'd heard that sound in the uprising the year before.

He threw himself flat. He wasn't the first one on the ground, either. Artillery shells rained down. Explosions picked him up and flung him about. Shell fragments and shrapnel balls tore up the landscape. Blast from a near miss yanked at his ears and his lungs. Someone was screaming like a damned soul—the man who'd blindfolded him, his belly laid open like a butchered hog's.

At last, the shelling ended. Scipio thanked the God he still trusted more than Marx that he was still in one piece. Also in one piece, Cassius took the bombardment in stride. "Miss Anne, she do have you followed," he said, brushing mud from his shirt. "You want to go back to she now?" Numbly, Scipio shook his head. Cassius grinned. "Den we welcomes you to de Congaree Socialist Republic agin."

Not having wanted to join the uprising in the first place, Scipio wanted even less to join this sad ghost of it. What possible fate could

he have but being hunted down and killed? After a moment, he realized Anne Colleton couldn't have had anything else in mind. *You are mine,* she'd told him. Now it pleased her to amuse herself with her possession.

As Major Abner Dowling was making his way from his tent to the farmhouse where General Custer and his wife were staying, an enormous Pierce-Arrow limousine came snarling up the road, raising an even more enormous cloud of dust. It pulled to a stop alongside of Major Dowling. "Excuse me, is this First Army headquarters?" the driver asked.

Dowling was about to give him a sarcastic answer—what the devil else would this be?—when he saw who was riding in the back of the limousine. Gold-rimmed spectacles, graying roan mustache, a big grin that showed an alarming number of teeth ... He was so busy staring at President Theodore Roosevelt, he almost forgot to answer the driver's question.

When Custer's adjutant admitted the fellow had brought Roosevelt to the right place, the president said, "And you're Dowling, aren't you?" He got out of the motorcar and pointed at the portly soldier. "You come with me, Major. I'll want to speak with you also."

"Yes, Mr. President." Dowling could scarcely have said anything else when his commander-in-chief gave him a direct order. He did not like the way Roosevelt had shown up unannounced at Custer's headquarters. The likeliest explanation he could think of for Roosevelt's unannounced appearance was one that put Custer in hot water—and himself, as well.

He moved his bulky frame as fast as he could, to get into the farmhouse ahead of the president. He hoped that would look as if he was escorting Roosevelt, not warning General Custer of his arrival.

Custer and Libbie were in the parlor. Instead of studying matters military, they were diligently going over newspapers. Intent on that, neither of them had noticed the Pierce-Arrow outside. Dowling said, "General, President Roosevelt is here to consult with you." That was the best face he could put on the president's arrival.

"Is he?" Custer said with a distinct sneer in his voice. Sure as hell, he and Roosevelt had loathed each other since the Second Mexican

War, each convinced to the bottom of his stubborn soul that the other had nabbed more credit in that mostly sorry fight than he deserved.

"Yes, General, I am here," Roosevelt said, stepping into the farmhouse on Dowling's heels. Awkward with age, Custer got to his feet and saluted his commander-in-chief. In Montana, he'd been a Regular Army brevet brigadier general and Teddy Roosevelt a cavalry colonel of Volunteers. Now their relative ranks were reversed. Dowling knew how much Custer detested that.

"How good to see you, sir," Custer said, looking and sounding like a man with a toothache.

"A pleasure, as always." Roosevelt was manifestly lying, too. He nodded to Libbie. "And a pleasure to see you, Mrs. Custer. I hope you will excuse me for taking your husband away, but I do have some business to discuss with him and with Major Dowling here."

"Of course." Libbie shot him a look full of loathing. Dowling had never seen her so neatly outflanked. Without the tiniest doubt, she wanted to stay, not only to protect General Custer but also because she knew at least as much about what the First Army was doing as he did. But she could not stay, not after Roosevelt's blithe dismissal. Long black skirt flapping about her ankles, she swept out of the parlor.

"Cornelia!" Custer called. When the pretty Negro housekeeper came out of the kitchen, the general went on, "Coffee for me, coffee for Major Dowling—and coffee for the president of the United States." He might not care for Roosevelt, but he was not above using his acquaintance with him to impress Cornelia.

And he did impress her. Her eyes widened. She dropped Roosevelt a curtsy before dashing away for the coffee. The president, affable enough, dipped his head in reply. He sat down in the chair across from the sofa where Custer and his wife had been checking the papers, and waved Dowling to Libbie's place beside the general commanding First Army. Again, Custer's adjutant could only obey.

Roosevelt did not wait for Cornelia to come with the coffee. "Let's get right down to brass tacks," he said—like Custer, he did not have patience as his long suit. "General, the War Department is of the opinion that you have not been entirely candid in the reports you have been submitting in recent weeks. I have asked Major Dowling here to discuss this with us today, as he has prepared many of these

reports under your direction."

Cornelia did come in with the coffee then—Custer's and Dowling's as they liked it, Roosevelt's black with cream and sugar on the side to let him fix it as he would. The brief respite while the president fiddled with the cup did nothing to ease Dowling's mind. *Christ, they've got me cold,* he thought, and wondered if his Army career was about to end here because he'd been so foolish as to obey his superior. Only discipline learned at the poker table kept him from showing his dread.

If Custer knew dread, he didn't show it, either. "The War Department has all sorts of opinions," he said, sneering as he had when Dowling announced that Roosevelt was there. "A few of them bear a discernible relation to the real world—but only a few, mind you."

"Have you, then, or have you not been less than candid in your description of how you are deploying the barrels under your command?" Roosevelt asked.

There it was, the question without a good answer. Sweat broke out on Dowling's forehead, though the parlor was cool verging on chilly. Now Custer would lie, and now Roosevelt would crucify him—and, as small change in the transaction, would crucify Dowling, too.

Custer laughed. "Of course I've been less than candid, Mr. President," he answered, his tone inviting Roosevelt to share a secret with him. "So has Major Dowling, at my direct order. The lads with the thick glasses in Philadelphia must have been more alert than usual, to notice."

"I hope you have some good explanation for your extraordinary statement, General," Roosevelt said. Dowling devoutly hoped Custer had a good explanation, too. From long acquaintance with the general commanding First Army, though, he knew that hope was liable, even likely, to be disappointed.

Not this time. Laughing again, Custer said, "I have reason to believe the Rebels are somehow getting their hands on the reports I forward to the War Department, and so I have been carefully feeding them false information for the past several weeks. I hope they are less astute than our own people, and fail to notice the deception."

Roosevelt rounded on Dowling. "Major, is what General Custer

says true?"

If he wanted to, Dowling could break Custer here. He could not only break him, he could break him and come out, in the short run, smelling like a rose as he did it. The old fool had served himself up with an apple in his mouth, and all Dowling had to do was carve. He'd dreamt of a chance like this for years—and, now that he had it, he discovered he couldn't stick the knife in. That was what it would be: a stab in the back. He might escape Custer with it, but, afterwards, who in the Army would trust an officer who laid his superior low?

"Answer me, Major," Roosevelt said.

"I'm sorry, your Excellency," Dowling said. "General Custer did not tell me why he wanted the reports to appear as if they were disguising the concentration of barrels." That was a lie, but no one could ever prove it was a lie. "I presume, though, that it was for reasons of security."

If Roosevelt felt like seeing for himself how the barrels were deployed, everything could still cave in, like a trench with a mine touched off below it. The president didn't go charging off to do that, not right away, anyhow. Rubbing his chin, he asked, "Why, General, do you believe the Confederates may have been reading your dispatches to Philadelphia?"

"Just by way of example, sir, how could General MacArthur's attack over by Cotton Town have failed last fall if the Rebs had no advance warning of it?" Custer asked—reasonably. "Daniel MacArthur is as fine a brigadier general and division commander as the U.S. Army possesses, but he failed. The Rebs must have prepared in advance to withstand him."

MacArthur's attack had failed, among other reasons, because Custer didn't

give his fine brigadier general the—admittedly extravagant—artillery support and number of barrels he'd requested. Custer didn't want MacArthur gaining glory, any more than he'd wanted Roosevelt gaining glory in the Second Mexican War. Dowling had watched Custer outmaneuver MacArthur. Could he outmaneuver Roosevelt, too?

Maybe he could. The president coughed. "Why have you not

presented these suspicions to the War Department?" he asked, and Dowling realized he was wit nessing something few men had ever seen: Theodore Roosevelt in retreat.

Custer smiled. When he heard that question, he knew he had the game in hand. "Your Excellency, since I have not been able to determine how the Confederates are obtaining their information, I did not wish to run the risk of informing them that I knew they were doing so. Letting them have information that is not true struck me as being more profitable."

"More profitable, you say?" Roosevelt perked up. He set a finger by the side of his nose. "And you have a plan to make them pay, so you can reap the profit?"

"Mr. President, I do," Custer answered, telling the truth, as far as Dowl ing could see, for the first time in the interview.

"Very well, General," Roosevelt said. "Till the mare drops her foal, no one can tell what the creature will look like. I shall judge your plan—and whether you were wise to conceal it not only from the foe but also from your countrymen—by the result." He got to his feet. "I thank you for your time, General. Major Dowling, thank you also for your part in explaining what has occurred here. Good morning, gentlemen." Without waiting for a reply, Roosevelt walked out to the limousine.

Dowling stared out the window, hardly daring to believe the Pierce-Arrow was really rolling away. When it was out of sight, he let out a long, heartfelt sigh of relief. "My God, sir, you got away with it."

Custer looked disgracefully smug. "Of course I did, Major."

"That was an inspired explanation you gave him." Dowling was not used to admiring Custer's wits. Doing so felt strange and wrong, as if he were dab bling in some unnatural vice.

"So it was, if I do say so myself." The vain, pompous old fool looked more smug still. Dowling fought down the urge to retch.

Libbie Custer came downstairs in a rustle of skirts. "I saw him leave," she said. "Did he swallow it, Autie?"

"Every morsel, my dear." Some of the smugness hissed out of Custer, as if he were an observation balloon with a leak. He turned

back to Dowling. "Major, now that the president has gone . . ." Had it been a complete sentence, he would have finished it with something like, *Get the hell out of here yourself.*

"Yes, sir." Dowling left in a hurry. So *Libbie was the one who came up with the second line of defense, he thought. Slowly, he nodded. He should have*

known Custer wouldn't have the brains to do it on his own. He nodded again, his faith in his own sense of how the world worked in large measure restored.

But Custer, even if he hadn't planned the deception, had carried it off. If he could deceive the Confederates, too ... He hadn't had much luck doing that in any of the fighting up till now. But then, he hadn't tried very hard, either. If he did, if he could . . .

It made a man hope. In this war, too much hope was dangerous. "I'll believe it when I see it," Abner Dowling said.

Arthur McGregor rode the wagon toward Rosenfeld. Whenever U.S. trucks came up behind him, he delayed a little before moving off to the shoulder to let them roar past. It was a tiny bit of resistance, but all he could muster. He had to clench the reins tightly to keep from shouting abuse at the Americans. When the time came, he would try to take his revenge. Till then, he had to seem as conquered, as beaten down, as the rest of his countrymen.

Outside Rosenfeld, the occupiers had a checkpoint. They were meticulous in searching the wagon, and even more meticulous in searching his person. They found nothing out of the ordinary. There was nothing out of the ordinary to find. "Pass on," one of them said.

"Thank you, sir," McGregor answered, abject as a kicked dog. He scrambled back up into the seat, flicked the reins, and rolled on toward the little town where he bought what he couldn't raise for himself.

Rosenfeld, Manitoba, these days, was more nearly an American town than a Canadian one. Most of the men on the streets wore green-gray. Most of the talk McGregor heard was in sharp American accents, sour to his ears. Most of the money that changed hands was American

money: boring green banknotes, coins full of eagles and stars and thunderbolts instead of bearing the images of George and Edward and Victoria. Most of the money in McGregor's pocket was American money. He hated that, too.

He had to tie up his wagon on a side street. American motorcars and trucks and wagons and even bicycles dominated Main Street. As he came round the corner, a green-gray Ford whizzed past him.

He had to work hard to keep his face straight, to show none of what he was thinking. Major Hannebrink was at the wheel of that Ford. Unusually, he had none of his Springfield-carrying bully boys with him. *Probably isn't out to murder anyone this morning,* McGregor thought. *Maybe be waits till after lunch to do his murdering.*

The post office was only a few doors away. When McGregor went inside, the familiar spicy smell of Wilfred Rokeby's hair oil greeted his nose. The postmaster used the aromatic stuff to keep his hair pasted down at either side of the precise part that ran back along the middle of his scalp.

"Good day to you, Arthur," Rokeby said, his voice as prim and precise as

that ruler-drawn part. "How are you today?" He asked that question cautiously, as he was in the habit of doing since Alexander's death.

"I've been better, Wilf, and that's the truth, but I've been worse, too," McGregor answered. He sniffed in an exaggerated fashion. "Haven't you run out of that damned grease of yours yet? Sure as hell, the plant that made it must be turning out poison gas these days."

Rokeby glared, then stared, and then chuckled quietly. "First time I've heard you make a joke in a while, Arthur, even if it is aimed at me. What can I do for you this morning?"

"Let me have twenty-five of those stamps the Yanks are making us use," McGregor said.

"Here you are," Rokeby said, "That'll be a dollar even." Letter rate remained two cents, as it had been before the war. But people in occupied Canada also paid a two-cent surcharge for every stamp, the extra money going into a fund for entertainers who amused U.S. soldiers.

McGregor had complained about the surcharge ever since it was initiated. He kept quiet now, save for a low sigh as he set a silver dollar on the table. It was a U.S. coin, and had a bust of Liberty on one side, which struck him as ironic. The other side showed a fierce eagle and the word

REMEMBRANCE.

Rokeby quickly scooped the dollar into the cash box, as if afraid leaving it where McGregor could see it might inflame him. But McGregor seemed unable to rise to inflammation today. "Saw Hannebrink driving out of town when I was walking over here," he remarked.

"Did you?" At the mention of the security officer, Wilfred Rokeby grew wary again. Then his own expression changed—to, of all things, amusement. "Was he heading out by his lonesome, without any wolfhounds along?"

"Matter of fact, he was," McGregor said. He turned and looked out the window. "You see him as he went by?"

Rokeby shook his head. "I did not," he said, and his voice compelled be lief. "But I have heard—don't know for certain, mind you, but they do say it—I have heard, like I was tellin' you, he's got himself a cutie-pie somewheres outside of town."

"Hannebrink?" Arthur McGregor stared. Until this moment, the idea that any Canadian woman might be friendly—might be more than friendly—to the Yank who had murdered Alexander had never entered his mind. But for strumpets, for whom such matters were business arrangements, he hadn't heard of any of his countrywomen showing friendship—or something more than friendship—toward the hated occupiers. That, of course, did not mean such things failed to happen. "You wouldn't know who she is, would you?"

Rokeby quickly shook his head. Silent curses echoed through McGregor's mind. Had he been too obvious? Perhaps not, for the postmaster answered,

"Not sure anybody here in town does. "Whoever the gal is, don't expect it's something she'd want to brag on, you know what I mean?"

"That I do, Wilf," McGregor answered. Pretending he didn't know what Rokeby was talking about would have been an obvious lie, and

so more dangerous than agreeing with him. The farmer picked up the stamps, folded them over themselves, and put them into an overcoat pocket. "Obliged to you. See you again next time I come to town, I expect."

"Take care of yourself," Rokeby said. "Take care of your family." "Was that an oblique warning, of the sort Maude made? McGregor didn't know. He didn't worry about it, either. "With a nod to the postmaster, he left the post office, went back to the wagon for the kerosene tin, and strode down the street to the general store.

Anyone who needed a storekeeper for a vaudeville show could hardly have done better than Henry Gibbon, who looked the part from bald head to leather apron over a belly that remained comfortable despite hard times. Storekeepers shared with farmers the ability to keep themselves fed no matter how hard times got.

"How are you today, Arthur?" Gibbon asked, the same wariness in his voice as had been in Rokeby's.

"Not too bad, not too good," McGregor said: a variation on the reply he'd given the postmaster. He set a couple of cents on the counter. "I'm going to raid your pickle barrel." Gibbon nodded and plucked up the little copper coins. McGregor lifted the lid, picked out a plump pickle, and took a bite. He chewed thoughtfully. "That's not bad, but it doesn't taste quite the same as the ones you usually have in there."

"Can't get those any more," Gibbon answered. "These here pickles, they come up out of Michigan. Like you say, they aren't bad."

McGregor stared at the pickle in his hand as if it had turned on him. He almost threw it down. But, even if it came from the United States, he'd already bought it, and he was a man who hated waste. He ate it and licked the last of the vinegar off his fingers.

"Didn't come to town just for pickles," Gibbon said. "Go on—tell me I'm wrong."

Before McGregor could tell him anything, a couple of soldiers in green-gray walked into the general store and looked around as if they owned the place. They were occupying this part of the province, so in effect they did. McGregor bought another pickle and diligently ate it, finding that preferable to having to talk to the Yanks. One soldier bought a spool of thread—Gibbon had a good-sized display of stuff

that made a fair match for the U.S. uniform. His pal bought a tin-plated potato peeler. Out they went.

"You'll be rich, Henry," McGregor remarked.

"Oh, yeah," the storekeeper said. "I'm going to take this here and retire

on it to the south of France—unless the damn Germans get there first. Now what can I do for you today?"

"Need some beans," McGregor answered, "and my kerosene ration, and white thread for Maude—she ain't got any uniforms to mend—and five yards of calico for her, too, and a new bobbin for the sewing machine."

"Youve's got to give me your ration coupon for the kerosene," Gibbon re minded him. "Never seen people like the Yanks for dotting every *i* and crossing every *t*. If you get the kerosene without I get the coupon, roof falls in on me, near as I can tell. Life's hard enough without that."

"Life's hard enough." McGregor said no more. "Here you are." He pulled the coupon out of his pocket and handed it to Gibbon. "Yanks sold it to me. They're willing to let me have lights in my house this month, long as I haven't got too many."

Chuckling, Gibbon got a funnel and a bucket and filled the kerosene tin from the barrel he kept not far from the ones that held pickles and crackers. "You sound a mite better these days."

"Maybe a mite," the farmer allowed. After a short pause, he went on, "That Hannebrink almost ran me over when I was coming round the corner to the post office. Things must be a mite better for him, too, or more than a mite: Wilf Rokeby said he was in a hurry to get down to Elsie Kravchuk's place and see how bad her bed linen's rumpled." Rokeby hadn't said any such thing. But if anyone in town knew where Major Hannebrink really was going, Henry Gibbon was the man.

And, sure enough, Gibbon looked disgusted. "That damn Rokeby. All I can say is, it's a good thing he ain't got a cold, on account of he'd blow out his brains if he was to bring a hanky up to his nose. It ain't Elsie that Hannebrink's laying pipe for, it's Paulette Tooker, three farms over."

"He seemed pretty sure," McGregor said doubtfully.

"Only holes Wilfred Rokeby knows a goddamn thing about are the ones between his stamps," the storekeeper said. "Christ on His Cross, Arthur, when have you ever known Wilf to have his gossip straight?"

"Well, you're right about that," McGregor said. "Damn shame. I don't know the Tookers what you'd call well, but I never heard anything bad about Paulette till now. I'd still sooner believe it was Elsie. She hasn't been right since her husband went into the prisoner camp."

"Believe what you want." Gibbon's voice showed his indifference.

"What other gossip have you got?" McGregor asked. "Spin it out and let's see how much of it I believe." Gibbon was happy to oblige. He knew something scandalous about almost all the Canadians in town, about half the Canadians on the farms, and about maybe one American in three. Whether what he knew bore any relation to the truth was a different question.

When the storekeeper finally ran down like a phonograph that needed winding, McGregor went out, brought his wagon around to the front of the

store, and loaded his purchases onto it. He was very quiet and thoughtful all the way home. When he was almost there, he smiled.

Dirt fountained up as U.S. artillery pounded a Confederate machine-gun position in front of Jonesboro, Arkansas. "That'll teach the goddamn sons of bitches," Ben Carlton said gleefully as the barrage went on and on.

"Don't blaspheme." Sergeant Gordon McSweeney had lost track of how many times he'd warned the company cook about that. Carlton was as stubborn in sin as he was in reproof.

"Blow 'em to hell and gone," Carlton said. McSweeney did not reprove that sentiment. He agreed with it. He expected Carlton would go to hell, too, but that had nothing to do with his hatred for the Confederates in their nest of sandbags and concrete. They were a good crew and they were brave and they had cost the U.S. troops across from them too many casualties.

At last, the guns fell silent. They'd been going on so long, McSweeney imagined he still heard them roaring for a few seconds after they'd quit. He didn't put his head up over the parapet to see what they'd done to that position. If they hadn't done enough, that was asking for a bullet in the face.

And they hadn't. Defiantly, cockily, the Confederate machine gunners squeezed off a few quick bursts to let their foes know they were still in business at the same old stand.

"Bastards," Ben Carlton snarled. "God damn those bastards to the hottest fire in hell for the next million years, and then think up somethin' really bad to happen to 'em."

"For the million years after that, they could eat your cooking every day," McSweeney said, "for you will surely go down to that place of eternal torment yourself unless you leave off taking the name of the Lord in vain every time you open your mouth."

Carlton glared at him. "Fine. I'm just tickled pink them brave, upstanding Confederate gentlemen lived through everything we flung at 'em. I'm dancin' in the daisies that they get the chance to blow off the tops of some more of our heads. There. You satisfied, Mr. Holier-than-Thou?"

"No," McSweeney said in a flat voice. "I am not satisfied. Bombardment by artillery is the wrong way to put a machine-gun nest out of action. You might as well try to kill a mosquito with a shotgun."

"When the mosquitoes start bitin' around here, we'll kill 'em any which way we can," Carlton said.

"You misunderstand," McSweeney said. Carlton smirked. McSweeney fixed him with a pale-eyed glare that made the smirk drip off his face. "Not only that, you misunderstand on purpose. If that isn't sinful, it is insubordinate. Shall we talk this over with Captain Schneider?"

Carlton visibly considered it. Whatever Schneider did to him was liable to

be milder than what he'd get from McSweeney. Finally, he shook his head and ate crow. "No, Sarge. I'm sorry, Sarge."

He didn't sound sorry. McSweeney reluctantly decided not to press the point. He had other things on his mind anyhow. "Artillery, I tell you, is the wrong tool to use. I know the right tool."

His eyes blazed. That was metaphorical, not literal, but Ben Carlton fol lowed his thoughts even so. "How in ... blazes you going to get close enough to those Confederate . . . bums to toast 'em before they put about a belt's worth of bullets through you and your gaslight there?"

"It would have to be at night." McSweeney thought aloud. "It would have to be at night, and I would need a diversion."

"You need your head examined, that's what you need." Carlton went off down the trench line shaking his head.

McSweeney, on the other hand, went off and found his company commander. "Permission to stage a raid on the enemy's trenches tonight, sir?" he asked. Captain Schneider nodded. McSweeney saluted. Sometimes things were very easy to arrange.

But, to his annoyance, Schneider came up to the forwardmost trench while the men who would take part in the raid were scrambling over the parapet. The company commander frowned. "It's usual for raiders to take along an extra sack of grenades or two," he remarked.

"Yes, sir, so it is," McSweeney agreed. "We have them. You must have seen."

"I saw," Schneider said grimly. He pointed to McSweeney. "It is highly unusual, however, for a man to go on a trench raid festooned with a flamethrower."

"I suppose it may be, sir." When McSweeney shrugged, the heavy tank of jellied gasoline on his back dug into his kidneys. His voice sounded more in nocent than it had any business being. "Of course, there aren't that many flamethrowers in action."

"There aren't that many people crazy enough to want to use the damned things, either," Schneider said. "What the hell have you got lurking at the back of your mind this time, Sergeant?"

"Sir, if we always do the same thing when we fight the Rebels, they'll catch on and lick us. If we do something different every now

and again, that will keep them guessing," McSweeney answered. "If they're guessing, even the same old thing will work better, because they won't be looking for it so much."

Captain Schneider gave him a fishy stare. "If I'd wanted strategy, Sergeant, I'd have talked with the General Staff." He waited to see if that would squeeze any more details out of McSweeney. When it didn't, he grimaced. "Sergeant, if you go and get yourself killed, I shall be annoyed with you."

"I am in God's hands, sir," McSweeney said. "So long as He bears me up,

I shall not fall. I do not believe He is ready to abandon me yet. May I go now? I don't want the rest of them to get too far ahead of me."

"And why is that?" Schneider asked. McSweeney stood mute. The captain raked him with a glance almost as hot as the flame that sprang from the nozzle of his flamethrower. When that failed to have any effect, Schneider said, "Go, then." He turned his back, as if, like Pilate, washing his hands of the whole affair.

McSweeney climbed the sandbag steps out of the trench, scrambled over the parapet, and crawled toward the Confederate lines. He could hear, or thought he could hear, the rest of the raiders ahead. Their course swung a little to the right of being a straight line. His swung a little to the left.

Getting through his own wire was harder with the flamethrower on his back. Being quiet was harder, too. The tank rattled on his shoulders and banged and clanked whenever it hit a rock. He wished he would have thought to wrap it in a blanket before he set out, but he hadn't, and it was too late.

He made his slow, cautious way toward that machine-gun position. As he crawled forward, he chuckled silently. He had plenty of new shell holes in which to conceal himself. That was an advantage, if a small one—the bombardment had revised the landscape so that it didn't look as familiar to the Confederate gunners as it would have before.

Rifle fire erupted, perhaps half a mile to the south: by the sound, the Con federates were raiding U.S. trenches there. Machine guns on both sides opened up. The position toward which McSweeney was advancing fired in the direction of the U.S. line. The muzzle flashes

from the machine guns were stuttering bayonets of flame. Tracers scribed brief orange lines of death through the night.

None of those tracers was aimed in McSweeney's direction. He chuckled again as he scuttled forward. He'd sent out his party to keep the machine gunners from noticing his approach, and now the Rebs' own raiding party was doing part of the job for him.

Slithering under and through the Confederate wire was a longer and tougher piece of work than getting through the sorry entanglements in front of his lines had been. For one thing, the Confederates had a little more wire than his side did. For another, moving silently was much more important here than it had been when he was several hundred yards farther away.

He inched forward. The concrete blockhouse that held the firing slits for the Confederate machine guns was only a hundred yards off ... fifty . . . thirty . . . twenty. He stopped. He could incinerate it from here, but this was not the moment. He wanted some chance of getting back to his own lines again. If God chose not to give him one . . . well, that was God's affair. Meanwhile, McSweeney would wait and hope and pray.

Off to his right, two grenades banged. Several others followed in short or der. Rifles barked, Springfields and, with a slightly different note, Tredegars.

Shouts erupted, and a high shrill scream that had to burst from the throat of a desperately wounded man.

Through the din, McSweeney heard the machine guns scrape against the rims of their firing slits as their crews traversed them. He heard the gunners curse his country. He shook his head. The Lord punished those who did such things. "And I am His instrument," he whispered.

The machine guns opened up. More screams rose. McSweeney hoped Confederates were doing all the screaming, but doubted that was so. He felt sorry that some of the raiders he'd sent out would be hurt or killed, but only so sorry. God had made the world so some things simply could not be done without loss.

He got to his feet, pointed the nozzle of the flamethrower in the direction of the firing slits, and pulled the trigger. The action, after he'd worked on it, was smooth as glass. Flaming gasoline leaped the

gap. The machine guns fell silent. The men who had served them, though, screamed like damned souls.

McSweeney shook his head. Torments of this world were brief, not eternal, and Satan surely had fires hotter than any of mortal devising. The Scotsman dropped back into the shell hole. Bullets creased the air. Half a minute later, he rose again and gave the machine-gun nest another taste of the lash of fire.

Cartridges inside the blockhouse began cooking off. No more screams came from it; the men inside were already cooked. McSweeney dropped down once more. He thought about standing again for a third dose of flame, but in the end thought better of it. The Confederates were howling with fury. Bullets buzzed overhead, thick as bees. He wondered if the Rebs would come out of the trenches after him. They didn't. He smiled his alarming smile. Few men in his section would have been happy about going after a foe with a flamethrower, either.

He made his slow way back across no-man's-land to his own lines, com mending his soul to God all the way. If a bullet chanced to strike the fuel tank on his back—if God willed that a bullet should strike the fuel tank on his back—he would learn what sort of death he dealt out to others.

God did not so will. He scrambled over the parapet and down into his own trenches. Hunting down Captain Schneider, he said, "Sir, I can report that that machine-gun position will not trouble us again for some time to come."

Schneider said nothing at all. He stood there in the dark, shaking his head. Ben Carlton happened to be standing not far away. "Goddamn but you're a crazy son of a bitch, Sergeant," he declared.

"Don't blaspheme," McSweeney answered automatically, and then, when he really heard what the company cook had said, "Thank you."

Till his latest troubles started, Cincinnatus had never set foot in the Coving-ton, Kentucky, city hall. Before the war started, a Negro in the CSA saw the inside of a city hall only if he was in some kind of trouble. Before the war, Cincinnatus had always stayed out of trouble. But he hadn't stayed out since, and now the Yankees were grilling him.

Actually, Luther Bliss wasn't quite a Yankee. He was the chief of the Ken tucky State Police in the readmitted administration—head of the secret police, in other words. "Now, then, boy," he said in a mild voice, "tell me again how that Kennedy son of a bitch happened to get himself shot dead on your doorstep."

The only thing Cincinnatus had going for him was that the authorities didn't really know how much trouble he was in. "I tol' you an' tol' you, suh," he answered, sounding as stupid as he could, "I don't rightly know. I used to work fo' the man, is all."

A muscle in Bliss' right cheek jumped. A scar, as from a knife, cut that cheek, which made the tic more noticeable. "Lots of people used to work for the Rebel son of a bitch," he said, mildly still. "How come he chose *you?"* His eyes, a peculiar pale brown, were very intent.

"I ain't got a clue, suh," Cincinnatus said. "Could I please go back to workin' reg'lar again, suh? If I can't do my job on account o' you folks askin' me questions all the time, things git hard back home fo' my wife an' my little boy an' me."

Bliss steepled his fingers and leaned across the table toward him. "Now let's just talk about your job, shall we? Lieutenant Kennan gives you a good character from the days when you were working on the docks, and Lieutenant Kennan, I happen to know, doesn't hardly give niggers good characters a-tall." His own accent thickened. Was he trying to lull Cincinnatus into thinking him a fool?

If he was, he failed. Cincinnatus could tell how good at his job he was, stubborn as a hound and sneaky as a snake. "I worked hard for the man," Cincinnatus said. "I work hard every place I work."

"That's what Lieutenant Straubing says, too," Bliss agreed with a nod. "He says you work as hard as any man he ever saw. But he also says there've been a hell of a lot of fires and explosions in units his outfit has resupplied. You want to tell me about that?"

"Only thing I know is, a couple times last year the lieutenant said we should all keep an eye on each other on account of trouble like that," Cincinnatus said. "Don't know what ever came of it."

He did know they hadn't found the ingredients for the cigar-shaped firebombs he'd got from Tom Kennedy. As soon as Straubing made worried noises about such things, he'd made sure not to keep them in or near his house. Had the U.S. authorities discovered them,

Luther Bliss wouldn't be asking him questions now. He'd be taking him apart with a hacksaw and pliers and cutting torch.

Bliss kept tiptoeing around the edges of the truth: "Kennedy had a pal,

storekeeper named Conroy. His place burned down last year, too—hell of a fire. Conroy hasn't been seen much since. Folks saw you goin' into that store."

"Yes, suh, I did that, every now and then," Cincinnatus said—no point denying something where the denial could be proved a lie. "It was on the way home from the riverside. But I didn't do it a lot—he had high prices, an' he didn't fancy black folks much."

"Black folks," Bliss said musingly. "It'll be different for niggers now that Kentucky's back in the USA. Not so hard like it was before."

"Hope so, suh," Cincinnatus said. The law probably would be different. But, from what he'd seen, most whites in the USA had little more use for Negroes than did most whites in the CSA. And he didn't see white Kentuckians changing their ways because a new flag flew over them.

Bliss clicked his tongue between his teeth. "Won't be illegal for niggers to be Socialists, even, long as they're peaceable about it." He paused. "Of course, niggers likely won't get to vote right away. It's not like this was New England or somewhere like that."

"No, suh," Cincinnatus said with a sigh. Black Kentuckians wouldn't get to vote till a majority of white Kentuckians decided they should. Cincinnatus didn't plan on holding his breath.

He just hoped that oblique reference meant Luther Bliss was still tiptoeing around his connections with the Reds, too, and not seeing it plain. Bliss glared at him with those disconcerting eyes, as a coon dog might look at a raccoon it had treed in a crowded part of the woods, suddenly realizing the quarry might escape from tree to tree. The secret policeman looked intent. Cincinnatus didn't like his expression. He'd come up with something nasty.

Before he could ask it, the door to the room in which he was questioning Cincinnatus opened. Bliss whirled angrily. "Dammit, I said I wasn't to be disturbed in here," he said.

"Sir," said the man who'd bearded him in his den, "the president is out side, and he wants to talk with you."

Bliss' pale brown eyes widened. Before he could say anything, Theodore Roosevelt strode into the interrogation chamber. That made Cincinnatus' eyes go wide, too. "I don't have time for shilly-shallying and foolishness, Bliss," Roosevelt snapped. "We need to purge this state of Rebs."

"Get the trains, Mr. President," Bliss answered. "Get the trains and ship about two people out of three somewhere else, because that's the only way you're going to purge Kentucky. If we're lucky, we can keep most of the Rebs from raising too much Cain behind our lines till we've won the war. I think I can do that much. The other? Go talk to a preacher, because I'm not in the miracles game."

Cincinnatus knew a certain reluctant respect for Luther Bliss. Telling Teddy Roosevelt he couldn't have all he wanted seemed much the same as

telling a tornado it couldn't go where it wanted. The president of the United States glared at Bliss, who looked back imperturbably.

Roosevelt seemed to respect him, too. "It will have to do," he said, "though I hate half measures." He paid attention to Cincinnatus for the first time. "What's this Negro here gone and done?"

Cincinnatus spoke for himself: "I haven't done anything, sir." Where he'd wanted to impress Bliss as being ignorant and shiftless, he wanted Roosevelt to see him as a bright, intelligent innocent wronged.

The only trouble with that stratagem was Bliss' noticing his shifting style. The secret policeman's hunting-dog eyes widened, just for a moment. To Roosevelt, he said, "Hard to say, your Excellency. Fugitive Confederate underground man named Kennedy got his head blown off on this boy's front porch. Cincinnatus here drove for Kennedy before the war. Been a fair number of suspicious fires clustered around him, too."

Thinking fast, Cincinnatus said, "Mr. President, sir, one of these suspicious fires he's talking about was to Conroy's general store. Mr. Bliss told me Conroy was one of Mr. Kennedy's friends. If I was workin' for Mr. Kennedy, why would I burn out one of his friends?"

"That strikes me as a fair question," Roosevelt said. "How about it, Bliss?"

Bliss had not an ounce of retreat in him. "Mr. President, we're also look ing at his connections with the Reds."

"Have you found any?" Roosevelt demanded.

"Not yet," the secret policeman said stolidly.

"And I'm not a bit surprised, either," Roosevelt said. "How in the blue blazes do you expect a man to be simultaneously aiding the Confederate resistance and the Marxist resistance, when the Marxists came as close to overthrowing the CSA as we've managed ourselves?"

"Sir, this is Kentucky," Bliss said. "Everything's topsy-turvy here."

"Poppycock!" Roosevelt snorted. "Drivel! Things either make logical sense or they don't, and that's as true in Kentucky as it is in New Hampshire. If you're trying to make out that this Negro is a Reb and a Red at the same time, and if you haven't got any solid evidence he's either one, I suggest—no, I don't suggest, I order—that you let him go on about his lawful occasions."

It wasn't poppycock. It wasn't drivel. Cincinnatus knew it wasn't poppy cock or drivel. So did Luther Bliss, who, being a Kentuckian, understood his home state better than Theodore Roosevelt could ever hope to do. But the president of the United States had just given Bliss a direct order. With a sigh, he said, "All right, Cincinnatus, you are free to go. You keep your nose clean and you won't have any more trouble from me."

"Thank you kindly, suh." Cincinnatus didn't think Bliss meant that, but he had said it and could be reminded of it at need. "Suh, could you give me a

letter to Lieutenant Straubing, to let him know I'm in the clear so as I can go back to makin' an honest livin'?"

Bliss plainly didn't want to, but had no choice. "I'll see to it," he said.

"Back pay!" Roosevelt exploded, so vehemently, Cincinnatus jumped. "Pay for all the days this man has not been able to work. "What's your daily rate, Cincinnatus?"

"Two and a half dollars, sir," Cincinnatus answered.

"If that's all you make, and you've missed considerable work because of this folderol, you must be feeling the pinch," Roosevelt said. "Bliss, pay this man one hundred dollars, and pay it out of your own pocket, for harassing someone who's done nothing wrong."

Cincinnatus expected the chief of the Kentucky State Police to do some exploding of his own at that, but Bliss, after another moment of surprise, nodded. He said, "I'll have that and the letter ready for him when he goes. Now if we can send him out so we can talk about a couple of things without him listening—"

To Cincinnatus' disappointment, Roosevelt didn't object to that. A couple of hard-faced guards led Cincinnatus away and put him in what had probably been a small meeting room before the war but now served as a holding cell. They didn't do anything but sit him down. He knew how easily that might have been otherwise.

He waited for what had to be a couple of hours. He wondered what Roosevelt and Luther Bliss were talking about. He wondered if Bliss would wait till Roosevelt was gone and then go back to sweating him. Finally, a guard said, "Come along, you," and led him out to the city-hall steps.

There stood Luther Bliss. "Here's your letter," he said. Cincinnatus checked it. It was what it was supposed to be. "And here's your money." Bliss took his wallet from his hip pocket and peeled off five twenty-dollar bills. Only after Cincinnatus had the money in his own pocket did he wonder who was watching and why they thought he was getting it. And only after that did he realize how clever and dangerous Luther Bliss really was.

V

Flora Hamburger wished she were somewhere, anywhere, else than at Theodore Roosevelt's second inauguration. She wished, most particularly, that she were at the inauguration of President Eugene V. Debs. But Socialist Senator Eugene V. Debs of Indiana felt no qualms about attending the inauguration of the man who had defeated him, so Flora supposed she could get through it, too.

The ceremony was held in an enormous briefing room in one of the many War Department buildings that sprawled through downtown Philadelphia. In a normal year, it would have been outdoors. (In a normal year, of course, it would have been in Washington, D.C., but that was another story.) To keep Confederate bombers from disrupting it now, it was not only indoors but also secret; Flora had found out where to come only the day before.

Someone tapped her on the shoulder. She turned. Sitting behind her was Hosea Blackford of Dakota. "Tell me what kind of bargain we can make to get your vote on that immigration bill," he said.

She shook her head. "Ask me something else. Half the people in my district have relatives in Europe, and that bill would strand them there forever. If I vote for it, they'll throw me out, and I'll deserve it."

He frowned. "The party leadership backs it, you know."

"The party leadership backed the war, too, right from the start," Flora answered. "Were they right then?" Before Blackford could say anything, she waved him to silence. "Here come the president and the chief justice." She smiled down at the floor. Here she was, glad to see Theodore Roosevelt after all.

He wore cutaway, white tie, top hat, and gloves: all the trappings of capitalist power. With him strode Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, his big fierce white mustache a fitting ornament for his proud hawk face. Holmes was only a few days away from his seventy-fifth birthday, but moved like a much younger man. He was, without a doubt, a class enemy; reckoning him an honest man, Flora granted him grudging admiration for that.

He and Roosevelt took their places behind a podium more often

used to let officers know the upcoming plan of attack. After Vice President Kennan took the oath for his second term, Roosevelt did the same in a loud, firm voice.

Once the applause had died down, Justice Holmes stepped away from the podium. President Roosevelt stared out over it at the senators and representatives and other assembled dignitaries. The electric lights flashed off the lenses of his spectacles, giving his face a curiously mechanical appearance, as if a device had taken almost human form and were running the United States.

"Without the fighting edge," he said, "no man and no nation can be really great, for in the really great man, as in the really great nation, there must be both the heart of gold and the temper of steel." His gestures were stiff, adding to the industrial impression those blank, shining disks that seemed to replace his eyes created.

"In 1862 England and France said it was the duty of those two nations to mediate between the United States and the Confederate States, and they asserted that any Americans who in such event refused to accept their mediation and to stop the war would thereby show themselves the enemies of peace.

"Even Abraham Lincoln regarded this as an unfriendly act to the United States, but he had not the strength to withstand it. And in so regarding it, as in few other things, Lincoln was right. Looking back from a distance of more than fifty years, we can clearly see as much. Such mediation *was* a hostile act, not only to the United States but to humanity. The nations that forced that unrighteous peace upon us more than fifty years ago were the enemies of mankind.

"Very many of the men and women who are at times misled into demanding peace, as if it were itself an end instead of being a means of righteousness, are folk of good will and sound intelligence who need only seriously to consider the facts, and who can then be trusted to think aright and act aright. Well-meaning folk who always clamor for peace without regard as to whether peace brings justice or injustice should ponder such facts, and then should still their clamor."

Ponder the facts, and then think my way, Flora thought scornfully. President Roosevelt pounded on: "England and France and the cuckoo's egg they planted in the American nest of freedom humiliated our great nation again a generation later, and have sought to encircle us on our own continent ever since, just as they and the Russian tyrants have sought to encircle our partner, friend, and ally, the

German Empire, on the European continent.

"They have tried. And they have failed." Roosevelt could not go on then; thunderous applause interrupted him. He basked in it before raising his hands to ask for quiet. "I promise you this: my second term will show us the victory we have longed for since those now old were young. The debt we owe is old, too, and has accumulated much interest through the years. We shall repay it in full, and more besides." More applause echoed from the ceiling of the briefing room.

"We must stand absolutely for the righteousness of revenge," Roosevelt finished, "and we must remember that to do so would have been utterly without avail if we had not possessed the strength and tenacity of spirit which back righteousness with deeds and not mere words. Until we complete our vengeance, we must keep ourselves ready, high of heart and undaunted of soul, to back our rights with our strength."

He stepped back from the podium. The torrent of applause that rose up made everything that had gone before seem like a whisper in a distant room. Flora Hamburger joined in the applause, though tepidly and for politeness' sake. She looked around and saw that most of her fellow Socialists and the handful of Republicans still in Congress were doing the same. It mattered little. The Democratic majority made plenty of noise on their own.

Roosevelt took his time leaving the hall. He paused in the aisles to chat with soldiers and politicians and functionaries who came crowding up to him, eager to be recognized. Flora's lip curled at their fawning sycophancy . . . till she saw Senator Debs talking amiably with the president. The cooperation she'd already seen between Socialists and Democrats in Congress had surprised her. This shook her. It was as if a long-familiar picture, turned upside down, yielded another image altogether.

Then Roosevelt caught sight of her. She was easy to spot. The audience held only a handful of women, and she was the youngest by at least fifteen years. The president smiled in her direction. "Miss Hamburger!" he called, and beckoned her to him.

She could either go or, staying in her place, seem rude. What ran through her mind as she approached Theodore Roosevelt was, *My parents will never believe I'm talking with the president of the United States. She might not share his politics, but the USA had never yet*

had a Socialist chief executive. "I'm honored to meet you, Mr. President," she said, honored being true because of his office where pleased would have stretched a point.

"And I am honored to meet you, Miss Hamburger—Congresswoman Hamburger, I should say," Roosevelt answered, and surprised her by sounding as if he meant it. "You showed great pluck in the campaign that won you your seat; I followed it with interest and no little admiration. And, by all accounts, you seem to be shaping well in the House."

"Thank you, Mr. President," she said. "You surprise me, since I am not of

your party and"—she couldn't resist the jab—"I don't see much point to this war, even if I know a good many of the facts about it."

He surprised her again by not getting angry. "The point is that winning it will at last let our country take its rightful place in the sun, a place wrongly denied us since the War of Secession."

"My question is, what price do we pay for our place in the sun?" Flora replied. "How many young men will never see that place in the sun, some because they are blind, most because they are dead? How many young working men will die so the capitalists who own the steel mills and the coal mines and the weapons plants can buy new mansions, new motorcars, new yachts with the profits they make selling munitions to the government?"

Now Roosevelt frowned, but still did not explode. "If the capitalists can afford new toys after the war tax we've slapped on 'em, they've got better bookkeepers and lawyers than I think they do. You have a fine stump speech there, Congresswoman, and I think you are sincere in it, but it doesn't altogether match the way the world works. A pleasure to meet you, as I said. If you'll excuse me—" He shook someone else's hand.

Flora found herself more impressed with him than she'd thought she would be. Part of that was the office he held. Part of it was realizing that what she had taken for political bombast were in fact his true beliefs. And part was the force with which he expressed those beliefs, a force mocked in her own party but, she discovered, not one to be taken lightly.

Hosea Blackford came up to her in Roosevelt's wake. His expression was somewhere between amused and curious. "Well, what do you think of the earthquake that walks like a man now that you've met him in the flesh?" the congressman from Dakota asked.

"He's—formidable," Flora answered. "He's easy to caricature, but I have the idea that taking the caricature for the man would be a mistake."

"A dangerous mistake," Blackford agreed. "Roosevelt has made a lot of people pay for doing that. When he goes charging straight at something, he seems to have no more brains than a bull moose, but anyone who thinks they aren't hiding behind that smirk ends up regretting it."

Flora sighed. "He does argue better than I thought he would."

"He met Lincoln during the Second Mexican War, I gather, the same as I did," Blackford answered. "They quarreled, so he was less impressed than I was."

"There's only one kind of person Roosevelt doesn't quarrel with, as far as I can see," Flora said. The congressman from Dakota raised a questioning eyebrow. She explained: "Someone who already agrees with every word he says."

Hosea Blackford laughed. "You *are* dangerous, aren't you? Did you get your invitation to the inaugural ball at the Powel House?"

She nodded. "Yes, I did. I hate to admit it, but I thought the president was

generous to invite the whole Congress to his residence, Socialists and Republi cans along with the Democrats."

"Stinginess isn't one of Teddy's besetting sins," Blackford said. "He has enough besides that. Are you going?"

"I was thinking of it, yes," Flora said. Only weeks out of the Lower East Side, she knew her fascination with the glamour she was encountering was un-Socialist, but she couldn't help it. "Are you?"

"Oh, no, and I wish you wouldn't, either," he said. Alarm stabbed through her: was she committing some dreadful *faux pas?* Stone-faced as a judge, he went on, "The Socialists should boycott it. That way, if

the Confederate bombers get through and level the place, we'll be ready and waiting to take over the government."

She stared at him, then laughed so loud, Roosevelt looked back over his shoulder to see what was funny. "Let me ask you again," she said, her voice dangerous: "Are you going to the inaugural ball?" A little sheepishly, Black-ford nodded. So did Flora, with the air of having won a victory. "Good. As I said, so am I. I'll see you there."

Sergeant Jake Featherston sat on an upended barrel of flour atop Round Hill, Virginia. He'd bought a Gray Eagle scratchpad in the Round Hill general store, and his pencil scraped over the paper. He knew he wasn't the best writer ever born, or anything close to it. He didn't care. So many things he hadn't been able to say to anybody—so many things he had said that nobody would hear. If he got them down, he would, at least, be able to prove he'd been right all along.

"Got any makings, Sarge?" Michael Scott called as he walked up to Featherston. "My pouch is empty as Teddy Roosevelt's head."

"Yeah, I got some," Jake answered. Before he pulled his own leather tobacco pouch out of a pocket, he slammed the notebook shut and put a hand over the cover. What was in there was *his,* no one else's. Only after he'd made sure it was safe did he toss Scott the pouch.

"Thanks," the loader said, and rolled himself a cigarette. He gave the tobacco back to Featherston. "You been writin' up a storm there, past couple days." He lit a match. His cheeks hollowed as he sucked in smoke.

"Somethin' to pass the time," Featherston said uncomfortably. It was much more than that to him, but he wouldn't admit as much, not to Scott, not to anybody else, barely to himself. He wondered how he'd managed to get through so much of the war without trying it before. If he'd gone much longer without setting down what he thought, what he felt, he was sure he'd have gone crazy.

Scott didn't seem to notice anything out of the ordinary, which eased

Jake's mind. "Yeah, we've had some time to pass lately," Scott said, taking an other drag on the handmade cigarette. "Yankees got down

here into Virginia, and they haven't done a whole hell of a lot since."

"I know it." That didn't make Featherston any happier, though. Nothing made Featherston very happy these days. Every silver lining had its cloud. "Last time they were quiet like this, back in Pennsylvania, they were building for the push that threw us back to where we're at now. If they hit us another lick like that one there, where the hell will we end up?"

"I don't reckon it's that bad, Sarge," Scott said. "Remember how you were all up in arms about the niggers going into line in front of us? They haven't done so bad, and the damnyankees haven't exactly given 'em a big kiss on the cheek to say good morning, neither."

"Rifles," Jake said scornfully, and then, a little less so, "Well, hell, all right, machine guns, too. But they ain't seen real artillery, and they ain't seen gas, and they ain't seen barrels. Till they do, God damn me to hell if I think they'll make anything like proper soldiers."

"You're a stubborn cuss, Sarge," the loader said with a laugh.

"Bet your ass I am," Featherston said. "If I wasn't, I'd have given up long since. But I pay all my bills, and I got a hell of a lot of bills to pay."

"Uh-huh." Scott took a last drag on the cigarette, threw it down, and crushed the butt under his heel. He headed off, perhaps a little faster than he had to.

Featherston sighed with relief to see him go. He opened the tablet and be gan to write again: *—officers are fools because they won't see what's in front of their faces. The country doesn't need officers like that, but what other kind has it got? They can't see that the n—*

"Featherston." The voice was sharp and precise, so much so that it almost seemed a Yankee voice. Jake jumped and slammed the tablet shut.

He whirled, jumped to his feet, and saluted. "Major Potter, sir!" he said. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't hear you come up." He would have had to show respect for any officer. He actually felt some for Clarence Potter.

"At ease, Sergeant," the bespectacled major from Intelligence said. He pointed north, toward the U.S. lines, the lines that still bubbled

and seethed like a pot boiling atop a stove but that, to Featherston's surprise, had not yet boiled over. "What do you make of the quiet?"

"Funny you should ask, sir," Jake said. "My loader and I were just talking about that very same thing. Last time they were this quiet this long was before they hit us that first big lick up in Pennsylvania."

"So it was." Potter rubbed his chin. "That's very well reasoned—reasoned like an officer, I would say, if I didn't think it'd make you pick up that barrel and break it over my head."

"Sir, I reckon your head is harder than this barrel ever dreamed of being,"

Featherston answered, intending it as a compliment. "Reckon your head is as hard as one of the damnyankees' iron barrels with treads."

"Heh," Potter said. "No, those really hard heads are the ones down in the War Department in Richmond. It'd take about an eight-inch gun, maybe a twelve-inch, to blow a hole through one of them and let in some light."

"Yes, sir," Jake said. One of the reasons he thought Potter superior to the general run of officer in the Army of Northern Virginia was the boundless contempt they shared for the hidebound aristocrats who held so many impor tant posts in Richmond.

Potter said, "Now that the colored troops have been in the line for a bit, what do you think of them?"

"Don't like 'em for hell," Featherston said promptly. "Not for hell. They're in the line, yeah, but what happens when they really get hit? We haven't seen it yet. Like I told Scott, I'll believe they can stand it when I see 'em do it."

Potter's jaws worked as if he were chewing tobacco, but he didn't have a plug in one cheek. "Here's another question for you, then, Sergeant—which would you rather have in front of you, those full colored units or white units somewhere between a quarter and half strength? Those are your choices. We've squeezed out about all the white manpower in the CSA there is to squeeze."

"I don't know the answer to that," Jake said. "I just don't know. I have a notion of what understrength white units can do. These niggers—who can guess? Might be better. Might be a hell of a lot

worse."

In musing tones, Major Potter said, "Some white units without the proper experience will break and run the first time they come under truly heavy fire, or the first time they have to face barrels. If the black soldiers don't perform as well as veteran troops, you need to remember it may be because they're raw, not because they're black."

"Yes, sir, I understand what you're telling me," Featherston said. "But then again, it may be because they're niggers, too. Hell of a choice we've got, ain't it, sir? We can lose the war without 'em, or we can put 'em in the line and pray to Jesus they don't turn their guns on us or go over to the damnyankees in droves."

Fussily neat, Potter took out a clasp knife and scraped dirt from under a thumbnail. He said, "You know, the United States have a holiday called Remembrance Day coming up next month. They've been keeping a list of everything we've done to them since we fired on Fort Sumter to start the War of Secession. By now, it's a long list. If they do lick us, they're going to pay it all back and make us start a list of our own."

"You're saying they'd better not lick us," Jake said slowly.

"We won't be happy if they do," Clarence Potter agreed. Behind his

spectacles, his eyes missed very little. He pointed to Featherston's Gray Eagle notebook. "Are you keeping a list of your own, Sergeant?"

Jake's ears got hot. He was indeed keeping a list of his own. If anyone besides him saw it, he'd be lucky to escape hard labor. If Major Potter asked—or demanded—to see it, he didn't know what he'd do. Keeping his voice as light as he could, he answered, "Maybe I'll do me up a book once the war is over. *Over Open Sights,* I'll call it, or somethin' like that. What do you think, sir?"

"Better be a good book," Potter said. "They'll be a drug on the market when the fighting's done—provided anyone's left alive to read them." He had on a tin hat, and tipped it as if it were a real felt derby. "Good morning to you, Sergeant." On down toward the front he went, a businesslike man who might have been a businessman were it not for his helmet and puttees.

Featherston let out a silent sigh of relief. He'd got away with not

having to show what he was writing. Not only that, he'd found a title for what he was setting down in the tablet, OVER OPEN SIGHTS, he printed above the writing on the first page.

He wished he had the War Department over open sights, close enough to blast them all without even having to bother reading the range. He wished he had the Negro troops in front of him over open sights, too. He scowled. If they did run like rabbits, the way he figured they were likely to do, he would have them over open sights. He'd blast them, too.

The only trouble was, that would be too late.

Something buzzed like an early mosquito, but the sound came from farther away than a mosquito's infernal whine. Jake looked up. Tiny as a mosquito in the sky, an aeroplane sauntered along above the defensive line of the Army of Northern Virginia. Featherston knew what that meant: the damn-yankees were taking photographs. When they had all they wanted, when everything was set up the way they wanted, hell would break loose.

No Confederate aeroplanes rose to challenge the Yankee spy. Belatedly, antiaircraft guns over toward Purcellville, east of Round Hill, opened up on the intruder. The hammering of the guns—the only cannon in the Confederate arsenal that were quicker-firing than the three-inchers Jake served—shattered the quiet of the late-winter morning.

Puffs of smoke, round and black as iron soup pots, flecked the sky like smallpox scars on the face of an unvaccinated man. The observation aeroplane flew through them, straight as if it were on rails. From his own observations, Jake knew what that meant: the photographer was taking his pictures.

He knew the exact instant when the photographer was through taking pictures, too. At that instant, the aeroplane stopped behaving like a locomotive on rails and started acting like a staggering drunk, lurching every which way through the air to throw off the aim of the gunners on the ground.

Wearily, Featherston cursed as the U.S. observation aeroplane escaped.

He'd seen too many others escape to be more than a little disgusted. His sole consolation was that the Yankees had every bit as much

trouble hitting C.S. observation aeroplanes.

As if the aeroplane's getaway were some kind of signal, firing from the U.S. trenches, which had been very light, suddenly picked up. Rifles and machine guns hammered away. And then, as Jake was about to call his men to ready themselves for the Yankee onslaught, the small-arms fire slackened again. He let out a sigh of relief and went back to filling pages of the Gray Eagle tablet.

Leading a charging column of barrels would have been more impressive if Lieutenant Colonel Irving Morrell could have seen the column he was leading. He could see next to nothing. The louvered vision slits were shut as tight as they could be and still let any light at all into the interior of the barrel. Had they been open any wider, they would have let in bullets along with the light.

Morrell kept wondering if he'd died and gone to hell. The reek wasn't of fire and brimstone; it was fire and automotive exhaust, which struck him as a reasonable approximation. The two roaring truck engines in the compartment below let out enough bellows and screams and groans for an entire regiment of lost souls. It was hot as hell in the barrel, too. This was March. What the inside of the barrel would be like on a muggy August afternoon was something Morrell did his best not to contemplate.

Nor was he alone, or even close to alone, in his mechanical damnation. Along with the driver and the two engineers who labored to keep the hot metal parts working as they should, he had for company the dozen machine gunners and the two artillerymen at the nose cannon: an apartment building's worth of people jammed into an ugly metal box half the size of a small flat.

He peered ahead. He stuck his nose too close to the louvers, and tried to flatten it against them when the barrel lurched over the scarred and battered ground. He clutched the wounded member, which, fortunately, was neither bleeding nor broken.

He peered again, as closely as before. If his nose got smashed again, it got smashed, that was all. Peering was rewarded. "Shell hole!" he screamed. "Big shell hole! Steer right!"

What with the din of the two engines and the rattle and clanks of the tracks and all the other ancillary racket inside the barrel, the

driver never heard him. He cursed himself for an idiot; he'd found out, the very first time he got into a barrel, that nobody could hear anything inside.

He remembered to use hand signals just as the barrel nosed down into the crater. The driver shifted to his lowest gear. The engines screamed even louder than they had before. Morrell wondered if the barrel's pointed nose would get

stuck in the dirt at the bottom of the shell hole. That was its worst disadvantage when set against its British and Confederate counterparts, which were tracked around their entire rhomboidal hulls: those babies could climb out of anything, and a U.S. barrel couldn't, quite.

This particular U.S. barrel, though, could and did climb out of this particular shell hole. Beyond it stood a fat man waving a large blue flag. Morrell held up his right hand, palm out, to the driver. Obediently, the man hit the brakes, took the barrel out of gear, and turned off the motors. Everyone inside the steel hull who could reach the handle of an escape hatch opened it, to let in air and light—and the rumble of other barrels behind Morrell.

One by one, the rest of the machines in the column also halted. Hatches and louvers also came open on them. More than a few started disgorging their crews, as the men seized the first chance they got to escape.

Irving Morrell wasted very little time in getting out of his barrel, either. He clambered down to the ground. The fat man stabbed the flagpole into the ground. "That wasn't so bad," he said. "Looked like the end of the world, coming straight at me." He stuck a finger in one ear. "Sounded that way, too."

"You had a better view of it than I did, Major Dowling," Morrell answered. He outranked General Custer's adjutant, but treated him as he would have treated a superior officer. His oak leaves might have been silver while Dowling's were gold, but the major more than made up in influence what he lacked in rank. Morrell went on, "It's noisier inside a barrel than outside, though. Far as I can tell, it's noisier inside a barrel than anywhere."

"Yes, I think so, too," Dowling said. "Astounding experience, riding in one of those damn things. Appalling experience, too." He looked over his shoulder. "Here comes the general. Let's see what he

thought of the exercise."

Lieutenant General Custer picked his way through the mud with slow, mincing steps. He wore fancy black cavalry boots, and plainly didn't want to get them dirty. With him came Colonel Ned Sherrard. Sherrard had served for a good while on the General Staff, and General Staff officers were notorious among their counterparts in the field for their aversion to filth. But Sherrard looked to be turning into a real, live field soldier himself, for he took no more notice of the chewed-up terrain than he might have if he'd been in the field since 1914.

"Bully!" Custer said. "This column—or rather, an even grander column than this—will simply pulverize the defenses the Confederates have in front of Nashville. When they do, the infantry goes forward, sweeps up what the barrels have broken loose, and we have ourselves a breakthrough."

"Yes, sir," Morrell said. "I think that's exactly what will happen. I want to be at the sharp end of the wedge."

"I think we'll break through, too," Sherrard said. "I really and truly do." He sounded surprised at himself, as if still unsure how Custer had managed to seduce him away from the doctrine he himself had helped formulate.

"And once the barrels have broken the way," Custer went on, "we can also send in the cavalry, to complete the enemy's demoralization and sweep up his shattered, flying remnants."

Morrell, Dowling, and Sherrard looked at one another. None of them said a word. Every army east of the Mississippi had a division or two of cavalry based a little behind the front, waiting to exploit a breakthrough. The few times the horsemen got into action, they and their mounts died in droves. They were up above the level of the trenches, and their horses made big targets. Morrell didn't think that would be any different even after the barrels went in.

By the looks on their faces, neither did Sherrard nor Dowling. Under his breath, Dowling said, "That'll be a fine plan—when they invent a bulletproof horse."

"They did," Morrell murmured, also *sotto voce.* "It's called a barrel."

"What's that?" Custer said. "What's that? Speak up, dammit. People

around me are always mumbling."

"Sorry, sir," Morrell said. Custer wasn't deaf as a post, but he didn't hear all that well, either, so nothing sounded loud to him. Moreover, Morrell got the idea that people needed to mumble around Custer, to make horrified comments about the outrageous things he said.

Stubborn old fool, Morrell thought. A man like that commonly found himself plowing ahead with bad ideas because, having got them, he was too pigheaded to give them up. Now, for once, Custer had got a good idea—one that fit in with the aggressive way he thought generally. He was too pigheaded to give that one up, too, but he also wanted to hang some of his bad ideas on it.

Major Dowling said, "Sir, of course we will have the cavalry in place, ready to take advantage of whatever opportunities arise for using it."

"Of course we will," Custer said. "Pity so many men these days carry the carbine instead of the saber. I put the saber to good use in the War of Secession. 'Go in, Wolverines!' " he called reminiscently. " 'Give 'em hell!' And we did."

"But, sir, weren't you carrying a carbine yourself during the Second Mexican War?" Dowling asked.

"Well, yes," Custer admitted with a frown. "Even so, gleaming steel terri fies in a way that bullets can't match."

Morrell studied Dowling in open admiration. Custer's adjutant was plainly very good at guiding the general commanding First Army away from courses that held no profit (to say nothing of guiding him out of the nineteenth century) and toward things that needed doing or needed doing in a particular way. Morrell commonly dealt with superior officers who proved difficult by ignoring them as much as he could. Learning other ways of handling the problem could be useful.

"When do we move, sir?" Morrell asked. He was aggressive, too, and wanted to lead the barrels into battle.

"Ground's still damper than I'd like," Colonel Sherrard said. "We'll lose a lot fewer machines to bogging if we wait till the countryside dries out a bit more. That could matter."

"We'll have to move in more artillery support, too," Dowling

added. "That will also get easier as the roads dry out."

"From what I've seen up in Philadelphia, the bombardments that go on for a week or so don't do as much good as everyone thought they would when we started using them," Morrell said. "The Rebs dig in like moles, and the shelling only shows right where we're headed."

"They've come up with something new," Sherrard said. "It's particularly good against enemy artillery. You give them an opening barrage of phosgene gas shells, make them put on their gas helmets. Hell of a lot of fun to try and serve a piece in a gas helmet, you know."

"They've been harassing gunners like that as long as we've had gas shells," Morrell said.

"I know," Ned Sherrard said. "But they've got a new wrinkle on it. After that first round of phosgene, they saturate the area with puke-gas shells; the antigas cartridges that protect against phosgene don't do a thing to stop it. Then, when the Reb gunners yank off their helmets so they can heave, they hit 'em with another phosgene barrage."

Morrell considered. Having considered, he said, "That's . . . devilish, sir. Whoever thought of it was probably the Marquis de Sade's cousin." He paused. "It's also going to tie the Rebs into knots."

"And, a day and a half later, it'll give your artillery fits, because the Rebs will do it to us, too," Abner Dowling said. "That's the way this war has gone, right from the start."

"I don't think we'll be able to move till next month," Sherrard said. "When we do, we'd better hit hard."

"That's true," Dowling agreed. "If we don't break through this time, we'll never get another chance. Everyone will be watching how we do. Teddy Roosevelt said as much. If we don't measure up—" He pointed a thumb at the ground, a gesture straight from a Roman amphitheater.

"We'll smash them." Custer sounded sublimely confident. Had his performance matched his confidence, he would have been in front of Mobile, not Nashville. But confidence was never wasted. "On Remembrance Day, if the weather is good, we'll smash them."

"On Remembrance Day," Morrell repeated. Major Dowling and Colonel Sherrard both nodded. Morrell said it again, softly: "On Remembrance Day."

Nellie Semphroch had seldom felt more out of place than she did on dismounting from a hired carriage in front of St. John's Church. Looking south across Lafayette Square, she could see the White House, still battered and sad-looking from the shell hits it had taken when the Confederate States captured the capital of the USA. Presidents worshiped at St. John's; it was not normally for the likes of her. But these were not normal times.

She turned to Hal Jacobs, who sat beside her on the seat behind the driver. "Well, here we are," she said.

"Let us make the best of it, then," he answered. He looked like what he was: a dignified man without a great deal of wealth. His somber black suit, black derby, and wing collar with four-in-hand tie were correct enough for a wedding, but in no way stylish. Smiling at Nellie, he said, "You look lovely today—but then, I think that of you every day."

"Foosh," she said; his compliments never failed to make her nervous. She ran her hands down the pleated skirt of her peach silk dress.

"Edna was very kind to ask that I be the one to give her away," Jacobs said. "I know it is only because she has no men who are close kin, but it was very kind."

"So it was," Nellie said, and hoped the subject would drop—with a thud. She knew why Edna had asked the favor of Hal Jacobs: her daughter was do ing some heavy-handed matchmaking. She also knew Jacobs had accepted not least for the spying he could do among the Confederate officers who made up the bulk of the wedding party.

They stood around in front of the white-painted church, their dress butter nut uniforms shining with gold braid, their kepis almost as fancy as those French officers would wear, many of them with ceremonial swords belted on their hips. As the driver handed Nellie down from the chariot, she listened to them chatting about the war. No doubt Hal Jacobs was listening, too—intently.

But, as he offered her his arm and she, despite misgivings, had to accept or be rude in public, she knew the chance to spy was not the

only reason he'd so readily accepted Edna's invitation. He was glad of her matchmaking; he wanted a match with Nellie.

No one seemed to care what Nellie herself thought. Nellie could not re member the last time anyone had cared what she thought.

As if to prove that, here came Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid, his uniform as gaudy as a lieutenant's could be, the creases sharp as razors. "Good morning, ma'am," he said, beaming at her. "Isn't it a lovely day?"

"It will do," she answered. If he'd cared what she thought, he would have let her daughter alone. All he cared about, though, was stretching Edna out naked on a bed. He was a man. What point to expecting anything else of him?

He turned to Hal Jacobs. "Sir, when you give her away, you can be sure I'll take her, and you can be sure I'll take good care of her, too."

"That is very good, Lieutenant," Jacobs said. "That is as it should be."

Kincaid pointed into the church. "They must have put Edna inside somewhere when she got here a couple of minutes ago. My pals hustled me off, though, so I don't know for certain: bad luck to see the bride before the wedding, you know."

"Yes," Nellie said. Shabby Washingtonians—and, except for collaborators, there was no other kind of Washingtonians—walking by paused to stare at the wedding party. The Rebs could have public gaiety in the middle of the war. For anyone else, it was a distant memory.

"I hope everything goes as it should," Jacobs said in his deliberate way. "I hope everything goes very well."

"Yes." Nellie sounded abstracted. One of those shabby Washingtonians on the other side of H Street.. . She lowered her voice to the next thing to a whisper: "Mr. Jacobs—Hal. Is that Bill Reach over there?"

"Why—" Jacobs raised his bushy eyebrows. "Why, I believe it is. What can he be doing here? I must go over and—"

Now Nellie took hold of his arm with great firmness. "You must do nothing of the sort. What you must do is come in with me and help me marry my fool of a daughter to this great Rebel oaf she's chosen. If you do anything else"—she played what she devoutly hoped was a trump—"I'll never speak to you again."

"But, Nellie—" He also spoke in low tones, and in a voice full of anguish. "Our beloved country relies upon—"

"It does no such thing," Nellie broke in. "That skunk hasn't had anything to do with you for months, and our beloved country is doing just fine. The war's going better than it has since it started. And if that Reach . . . person makes trouble," she added, "I will kill him."

Still feebly protesting, Jacobs let himself be led into the church. Edna, dressed and veiled in white *(white she doesn't deserve,* Nellie thought, forgetting she'd worn white on her wedding day after a past far more maculate than her daughter's), sat in a waiting room. Behind the veil, her expression was the one the Confederate General Staff would have worn had the Army of Northern Virginia captured Philadelphia.

Grudgingly, trying for peace with her daughter, Nellie said, "I do hope it turns out well, Edna."

"Of course it will, Ma," Edna said with the unselfconscious confidence of youth. "We'll live happily ever after, just like in the fairy tales."

Nellie burst out laughing. She was sorry the moment she did it, but by then it was too late. Edna glared at her in fury burning as vitriol. And then, bless him, Hal Jacobs started laughing, too. He said, "I beg your pardon, Miss Edna, truly I do, but it is not so simple. I wish it were. My own life would have been much easier, believe me."

"We'll do it," Edna said. "You wait and see. We will."

Jacobs did not argue with her. Neither did Nellie. What was the use? If Edna didn't know a human being couldn't go through life without sorrow and anger and fear and boredom and jealousy and bitterness—if she didn't know that, she would find out.

"It's gonna be fine, Ma," Edna said. "Isn't everybody gorgeous out there? What would Pa think if he could see it?"

He'd think you were marrying a damned Rebel. But Nellie didn't say that, either. Again, what point? The die was cast here. "He'd think it was quite a show, so he would," she answered.

"I hope it is a show that goes well," Hal Jacobs said. Nellie looked at him sharply. He knew something. She didn't know what, but he knew something. Before she could find a way to ask him what it was, the organist began to play. The lower notes seemed to resound deep within her; she felt them in her bones rather than hearing them.

Edna got to her feet and smiled at Hal Jacobs. "Let's go," she said, and then turned to Nellie. "Is my veil on straight?" Without waiting for an answer, she adjusted it minutely.

The procession formed up in the back of the church. Like an army, the wedding had a defined order of march. Nicholas Kincaid's eyes lit up when at last he was permitted to see his bride-to-be. *Animal,* Nellie thought, having seen too many men's eyes light up in dingy rooms. *Nothing but a filthy animal.*

Up at the altar, the minister waited, looking almost like a Catholic priest in his vestments. An usher—a lieutenant who was one of Kincaid's friends— spoke in brisk, businesslike tones: "The bride and the gentleman who will be giving her away take the lead."

With a smirk, Edna gave Hal Jacobs her arm. They started up the aisle together. But they had taken only a few steps when Bill Reach burst into the church, shouting, "People had better get the hell out of here, because—"

Nellie outshouted him: "Get this man—this robber, this thief—out of here this instant!" She shrieked straight at Reach: "Haven't you done enough to ruin me, you son of a bitch?"

Words, even words no lady should ever have said, were nowhere near enough to satisfy her. The little handbag she carried did not have much room, but she'd made sure she'd included a stout hatpin, just in case any of the Confederate officers tried putting their hands anywhere they didn't belong on her. She wished she'd brought a knife instead, but the pin would have to do. Snatching it out, she rushed at the man who'd done so much to wreck her life.

Ushers and guests—Confederate officers all—were rushing toward him, too. But they would throw him out, no more. She wanted to hurt him. She wanted to kill him. "He's mine!" she shouted furiously.

"Mine, do you hear?"

They didn't hear, or didn't pay any attention. They had just seized him when the first big shell landed across the street in Lafayette Square. At the scream in the sky, at that ground-shaking roar, half the officers in the church— likely the half that had seen action, as opposed to the half made up of occupying authorities—threw themselves flat between the pews.

Another shell landed somewhere off to one side. Nicholas Kincaid ran down the aisle toward Ednas shouting, "Come on! We've got to get out of here!" More shells were falling. One crashed through the roof of St. John's Church and exploded just behind the altar.

Blast picked Nellie up, flung her through the air, and slammed her down, hard. The hatpin bit into her own leg. She squealed. She couldn't hear herself squeal. She wondered if she would ever hear anything again. She had trouble breathing. When she wiped at her nose, her hand came away bloody. The explosion had tried to tear her lungs out by the roots.

Her dress was rumpled and ripped. The handbag was gone, she had no idea where. She scrambled to her feet. One ankle didn't want to bear her weight. She looked down. It wasn't bleeding. She could move her foot, though that hurt, too. That must have meant it wasn't broken, or so she hoped. She'd walk on it now and worry about it later.

The church looked as if a bomb had gone off inside it, which was true, or near enough. Edna and Hal Jacobs stumbled toward her, both of them bleeding, red smirching the white of the wedding dress. They stepped over a body in the aisle. The body's head lay in the aisle, too, a few feet closer to Nellie. Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid stared up at the ceiling that was starting to smolder. His eyes would never see anything again.

Edna saw the body, saw the great pool of blood that had welled from it, and then saw and recognized the head. Her mouth opened in a scream that was for Nellie silent. Nellie ran to her, took her by both hands, and pulled her out of the church, Jacobs staggering along beside them.

More shells kept falling, each one a small earthquake. Some people in the streets were up and fleeing—fleeing in all directions, for no one path seemed safe. Others were down, some wounded or dead,

others sheltering against fragments and blast. On the far side of Lafayette Square, the White House burned.

Nellie did not see Bill Reach. He must have known this was coming from the U.S. guns, as Hal Jacobs might have. He'd tried to save people. At risk to himself, he'd tried to save people. Nellie wondered if that meant she couldn't hate him any more. Savagely, she shook her head. She owed him too much for that.

Anne Colleton glared at the men who served the three-inch guns she'd managed to pry loose from an armory where they'd been gathering dust. "You haven't got rid of Cassius and his fighters," she said, her voice suggesting that that was a sin incapable of forgiveness. In her mind, it was.

Captain Beauregard Barksdale, the militiaman commanding the little artillery unit, said, "We're doing the best we can, Miss Colleton. We aren't so handy with these here guns as we might be."

She withered him with a glance. "I've seen *that."* Her voice dripped scorn. She was being unfair, and knew it, and couldn't help it. Beauregard Barksdale had undoubtedly been named for the famous Confederate general right after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, and might well be more familiar with the brass Napoleons the Little Napoleon had fired than he was with the modern artillery pieces Anne had obtained for him.

"Ma'am, we are doing what we can," Barksdale repeated stolidly. He took a deep breath, then let it wuffle out through his thick gray mustache. "And I'm still not even slightly sure it's legal for you to be ordering the militia of the sovereign state of South Carolina around in the first place."

Anne's voice was sweet as ant syrup, and no less deadly: "Shall I wire the governor up in Columbia and ask him whether he's sure? Shall I telephone him so he can tell you he's sure?"

She meant it. The militia captain could see she meant it. Behind his bifocal spectacles, his eyes went wide. She stared at him, unblinking and implacable as a hawk. He wilted. She'd been sure he would wilt. "Well, no, ma'am," he said. "I don't reckon you've got to go so far as to do that. We'll take your orders—won't we, boys?" None of the other old men and youths serving the guns dared say no.

"You'd better," Anne said. "I haven't the time to waste going through this nonsense. If I have to go through it twice, I'll be sorry—and so will you. I am going to be perfectly plain with you: yes, I have to squat when I piss. That does not mean I can't blow your heads off with a rifle at a range beyond any at which you could hit me, and it does not mean I know nothing of war and am unfit to give you orders."

If she couldn't get them to obey her any other way, she'd fluster them into doing it. She'd never seen such a collection of red faces in her life. These men and boys had gone through their whole lives never imagining a woman would remind them *that* she pissed, let alone how she went about it.

"If you're going to give orders, just give 'em, for God's sake," Captain Barksdale said, now not daring to meet her eye. "Don't go on about... other things." He shuffled his feet like an embarrassed schoolboy.

"That is what I was trying to do," Anne said briskly. "I have some reason to believe I know where the Red bandits will strike next. You'll have to hit them harder than you did last time to do any good."

"Put us where we can hit 'em and I reckon we'll do it," Barksdale replied. The gunners—many of whom, Anne was convinced, could not have hit the ground if they fell off a horse—nodded.

"I will," Anne said. */ hope,* she added to herself. Scipio was not to be trusted, not any more, not after shells had come crashing down around him.

Had the shells killed Cassius and Cherry, she would have reckoned it worth while. As things were ... as things were, she contemplated Scipio the exacting perfectionist huddled in the swamps, and knew she had a measure of revenge with every breath he took.

Captain Barksdale said, "We'd be even likelier to hit, ma'am, if you could get us some more shells to practice with."

Anne rolled her eyes. "I count myself lucky if I'm able to pry loose enough shells for you to use in combat." That was an understatement. From the start of the war till now, the three-inch field gun had been the workhorse of the Confederate Army. It served on every front, and every front screamed for shells. Detaching any had taken every wire she could pull.

The militia gunners hitched limbers and guns to horses and drove back to St. Matthews. In town, she saw two women on the street in trousers: not so fine as hers, but trousers. She accepted that as no less than her due. She'd been a leader in style and fashion before the war began. It was only natural that she should continue to lead now.

She was about to go up to her room when a messenger boy halted his bi cycle with the heels of his boots. "Telegram for you, ma'am," he said. She took the envelope. He hurried away after pocketing a ten-cent tip.

Ripping apart the flimsy paper was not an adequate substitute for settling Cassius and Cherry for good, but it had to do. When Anne was done reading the wire, she tore it to shreds, threw them in the air, and let the wind blow them away. None of the news from her brokers had been good lately. The markets in Richmond and London and Paris were faltering; the investments that had sustained her even after the ruin of Marshlands faltered, too.

She could not imagine when Marshlands would recover. She had trouble imagining when her investments would recover, either. If they didn't ... If they didn't, she wouldn't be the leader around these parts much longer. She had trouble imagining that, too, but less trouble than she would have had in the spring of 1916 and ever so much less than she would have had in the spring of 1915.

A train pulled into the station a couple of blocks away. The fire engine might not have been replaced after the Red uprising, but labor gangs, some working at gunpoint, had put the railroads back together in a hurry. Those iron rails bound the CSA together as nothing else could.

From the direction of the station, someone called her name. Her head turned. Coming her way was a tall man in a butternut uniform. "Tom!" she yelped in glad surprise, and ran toward her older brother.

Lieutenant Colonel Tom Colleton stared at Anne as she drew near. "Good God, Sis, what *are* you wearing?" he said.

She put her hands on her hips and glared at him. He didn't flinch, as he would have before the war. In a way, that made her proud: he'd gone from an

overage boy, a useless drone, to a man on the battlefield. In another way, it irked her more than ever: even as a man, he thought women

should be useless toys.

With precision that showed how tightly she was holding her temper in check, she replied, "I am wearing the clothes I need to wear to go hunting bandits in the swamps of the Congaree—or did you want that rifle you sent me to gather dust in the closet?"

Tom took a deep breath, then decided not to make a scene. "All right," he said. "You sure as the devil took me by surprise, though. I never would have reckoned the day would come when women showed off their shapes that way."

"Really?" she asked, as if in innocence. "What sort of joints do you go to when you're on leave but you don't come home?" She had the satisfaction of watching a blush climb from his throat to his hairline. Deciding to let him down easy, she asked, "How are things at the front?"

He grimaced, but in an impersonal sort of way. "Not so well. We've lost just about all the ground we took back from the Yankees in the counterattack last fall. We're shoved away from Big Lick and the Roanoke Rivet, back toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. Dammit, it's not that they're better soldiers than we are. The trouble is, there are more of them than there are of us."

"What about the black troops?" Anne asked.

Her brother shrugged. "They're starting to come into the line. They're raw. God only knows how they'll do when push comes to shove. And even with 'em, there are still more damnyankees than there are of us. Defending is cheaper than attacking, thank God. If we're lucky, sooner or later the USA will get tired of throwing away men against us and against the Canucks, and they'll make some kind of peace we can stand."

"And if we're not lucky?" Anne said quietly.

Tom didn't answer for a while. When he did, it was obliquely: "We've made the USA eat a lot of crow since South Carolina stopped flying the Stars and Stripes. I wonder what the bird tastes like, and how they'd serve it up. They remember every morsel, and that's a fact." He dug in his pocket, found a coin, and tossed it to Anne.

It was a U.S. quarter-dollar. On one side, it bore a bust of Daniel Webster, whom Confederate schools vilified for opposing secession.

Anne turned it over. The other side showed arrows and lightning bolts superimposed on a star, with the word REMEMBRANCE stamped across it.

She handed the coin back to her brother. "Till this war, we hadn't fought them for more than thirty years," she said. "Foolish for them to keep on harping on things when the last war was over and done with so long ago—before either one of us was born."

"When you lose, Sis, the last war's never over and done with," Tom

answered, scratching the scar that seamed his cheek. "I've questioned a lot of prisoners. The Yankees remember ever single slight from the day this state seceded all the way up to the day they're captured."

"The thing to do, then, is to make sure they don't have the chance to make us eat crow," Anne said, as if stating an axiom of geometry.

"Yes, that would be the thing to do," Tom Colleton said.

Anne chose to ignore the incompleteness of his agreement. As she would have before the war, she took charge of him. She took him to St. Matthews' only functioning hotel, checked him in, and then led him to the better of the town's cafes. With only two open in St. Matthews, it rated merely the comparative, not the superlative. It wasn't that good, either; a third one likely would have been the best.

With an air of big-brotherly amusement, he let her do all that. He didn't depend on her to do it, though, as he would have before the war. He ordered a beefsteak that proved less tender than it might have, stuck a fork in it, and let out several piercing brays. Anne was chewing a bite, and almost choked from laughing.

He gave her a peck on the cheek after supper, saying, "We'll talk more in the morning, Sis."

They did, and had plenty to talk about: the night was enlivened when the Reds brought a machine gun out of the swamp and fired several belts of ammunition into St. Matthews from long range before melting away under cover of darkness. Anne had a window shot out, and was nicked on the hand by flying glass.

"Is it like this all the time?" Tom asked.

"They haven't done that in a while," Anne said, "but they can, till we hunt down the last of them. We're having trouble with that, though, because so much of everything goes straight to the front."

"We'd have worse trouble yet if it didn't," Tom replied. Anne's mouth twisted in something less than a smile. She had no good answer for that.

Sam Carsten peered out of the narrow vision slit in the sponson that housed his five-inch gun as the USS *Dakota* inched her way forward. What he saw was endless choppy ocean. The South Atlantic swells were slapping against the battleship's full armored length, which made her roll unpleasantly.

As if also noticing the motion, Hiram Kidde said, "Don't nobody puke in here. Anybody pukes in here, he's in big trouble with me. You got that?"

"Aye aye, 'Cap'n,' " the gun crew chorused.

"I wish we'd put some more turns on the engines," Carsten said. "That would help smooth things out."

"Oh, that it would, by Jesus—that it would," the chief of the gun crew answered. "What's the matter with you, Sam? You think you could stash your brains in your bunk once they promoted you to petty officer? That ain't how it works, much as I hate to tell you."

Carsten's ears heated. "Have a heart 'Cap'n.' That's not what I meant, and you know it."

"It's what you *said,* goddammit," Kidde said. "Sure, bend some more turns on the engines. Why the hell not? What the hell we got better to do than charge right into the mine belt the limeys and the Argentines laid between Argentina and the Falklands? What's it cost us so far? Just a cruiser and a destroyer. "Why the hell not put a battleship on the list?"

"Maybe we should have swung wide around the goddamn Falklands." Now Sam's voice was an embarrassed mumble.

Hiram Kidde, having scented blood, wasn't about to let him off the hook. "That'd be good, wouldn't it? Tack an extra six or eight hundred

miles onto the cruise. We don't have that much margin ourselves, and our supply ships have even less. Shit, the Argentines who didn't dare stir out of harbor against us are going to come right after our tenders and their escorts even now."

"Look, 'Cap'n,' why don't you forget I ever said anything?" Sam suggested. *And believe me,* he thought, *it'll be a cold day in hell—a damn sight colder than this—before I open my mouth again.* He retreated from the vision slit and went back toward the breech of the cannon. As long as he stayed at his station and kept his mouth shut, nothing too bad could happen to him—he hoped.

To his relief, Kidde started peering out at the Atlantic. Everybody kept doing that, although there wasn't anything to see but gray-green ocean. The mines hid below the surface. No one would see them till too late.

Luke Hoskins spoke to Sam in a low voice: "Don't let Kidde get you down. We're all edgy these days. We've been torpedoed, and we came through it, and we've been shelled, and we came through that, too. But if we hit a mine, likely we can't do nothin' about it—except sink, I mean."

"Yeah. Except sink," Carsten said sourly. "You do so ease my mind, Luke."

But Hoskins was right. The ship was engaged in hard, slow, dangerous work, work in which the men who served the secondary armament could take no direct part. If all went well, they would live. If not, they would die—and which it would be was not in their hands. No wonder tempers flared.

Kidde turned away from the vision slit. "Things could be worse," he said, perhaps trying to make amends for ripping into Sam. "We could be in one of those destroyers up ahead of us."

"Amen." Everyone in the sponson spoke at the same time, more smoothly than the sailors would have responded to the chaplain of a Sunday morning. Sooner or later, somebody was going to say something more than that. Usually, that somebody would have been Carsten. Not this time. Sam, having been raked once, sulked in his metaphysical tent.

Luke Hoskins said what the whole gun crew had to be thinking: "You've got to be crazy to clear mines in a destroyer."

"Nope." Hiram Kidde shook his head. "All you've got to do is get your orders. Then you say 'Aye aye, sir!' and do as you're told."

"Crazy," Hoskins repeated. "Only way to clear the mines you're supposed to get rid of is to steam past 'em without blowing yourself out of the water."

"You do lose points if that happens, Luke," Kidde agreed. "Can't argue with you there."

"Goddammit, 'Cap'n,' it isn't funny," the shell-jerker said. "That damn weighted cable between the four-stackers is supposed to catch on the mines' mooring cables and yank 'em up to the surface so we can shoot the hell out of 'em. But if they find the mines the hard way, or if they miss 'em ..."

His voice trailed away. Nobody said anything for a while after that. Sam knew what kind of pictures he was seeing inside his own mind. The rest of the crew couldn't have been imagining anything much different.

Turn and turn about: four hours on, four hours off. When the other crew replaced Carsten and his comrades, he hurried to the galley and shoveled down pork and beans and fried potatoes and sauerkraut and lemonade and coffee. He was amazed how much he ate these days, to hold cold and exhaustion at bay. The coffee wouldn't keep him from sleeping. Nothing would keep him from sleeping, not even the highly charged air in the cramped bunkroom after everybody had been messing on pork and beans and sauerkraut.

Climbing out of his bunk was more like an exhumation than anything else. He shook his head in bewilderment. Hadn't he just lain down? He put on his shoes and cap, grabbed the peacoat he'd set on top of his blanket, and staggered blank-faced toward the galley for more coffee to help him remember who he was and what the hell he was supposed to be doing.

He went up on deck to let the chilly breeze clear some more cobwebs from his poor befogged brain. Walking forward, he nodded to the two mine-hunting destroyers that cleared the way for the *Dakota.* So far, they'd done their job perfectly: they hadn't blown up, and neither had the battleship.

That thought had hardly made its slow way through Sam's still-fuzzy thoughts when one of the destroyers did go up, in a great

dreadful gout of smoke and fire. Across half a mile of water, the roar was loud enough to stagger him.

"Oh, sweet Jesus!" he moaned. Half of that was simple horror. The other half was guilt for jinxing the destroyer by thinking how well she'd been doing her job.

She was sinking fast now, going down by the bow, her stern rising higher and higher until, only a couple of minutes after she was hit, she dove for the bottom of the sea. She never had a chance to lower boats. A handful of heads

bobbed in the cold, cold water. In water like that, a man might stay alive for an hour, maybe even a little more if he was very strong.

"Rescue party to the boats!" a lieutenant shouted.

Sam stood not twenty feet from one. He was in it, along with several other men, and dangling his way down toward the surface of the Atlantic less than two minutes later. He plied an oar with a vigor that made him sweat even in that nasty weather. His was not the only boat in the water; the *Dakota* had launched several others, as had the destroyer's partner. They all raced to pick up the scattered survivors.

"Back oars!" Sam called as the boat drew near one feebly paddling man. He dropped his own oar, leaned out, and caught hold of the sailor's hand. The fellow almost pulled him into the water, but a couple of other men in the boat grabbed him around the waist and also helped him pull in the survivor.

"Thank you," the sailor said through chattering teeth. "Christ, I reckoned I was dead."

"I believe you," Sam said. "Saw you go up. Godawful thing. One second you were just going along, and the next one—"

"Felt just like somebody took a two-by-four and hit me in both feet," the sailor said. Grimacing, he went on, "Bet something's busted in there, 'cause they sure as hell hurt. Saw we didn't have a prayer. Everybody was screaming, 'Abandon ship!' Made it to the rail—I was half walking, half crawling. Made it over the side and started swimming hard as I could, on account of I didn't want to get sucked under when she went down. And I didn't, not quite. Figured my ticket was punched, but you've got to keep trying, you know what I mean?"

"Here, pal. Try this." Somebody pressed the bottle of brandy the boat carried—nothing near so fine as what Rear Admiral Fiske drank—into the sailor's hands.

He took a long pull. "Marry me!" he exclaimed blissfully. His rescuers laughed.

He raised the dark bottle to his lips again. "Don't drink it all," Sam warned. "We're going to try and get some of your pals, too." He pointed toward a man floating on his back not far away, then grabbed up his oar and helped pull the boat toward the other sailor.

The man wasn't moving. When they got to him, they saw he was dead. "Poor bastard," somebody said quietly. It was all the memorial service the sailor got.

Sam stood up in the boat to see farther. One of the boats from the other destroyer was already heading toward the last swimming man he spied. The others had either been picked up or had sunk beneath the waves forever.

"Well, we got one," he muttered—a tiny victory, snatched from the jaws of death. He sat on the bench again, then spoke once more to the sailor he'd

pulled out of the South Atlantic: "I take it back, pal. You might as well get drunk."

"God bless you," the man from the destroyer said. Instead of drinking, he stuck out his hand. "You ever need anything, I'm your man. Name's Gus Hardwig."

"Sam Carsten," Carsten said, and shook the proffered hand. "Believe me, I was glad to do it. We were all glad to do it." The men in the boat with him nodded. He pointed back toward the *Dakota.* "Now we'd better take you home."

They rowed over alongside the battleship, whose cranes effortlessly lifted the boat out of the water. Gus Hardwig put a cautious foot on the *Dakota's* deck, then jerked it away as if the steel were red-hot. "Can't make it," he said.

Orderlies whisked him away in a stretcher. Carsten stood on the deck, staring north. Only a few floating bodies and an oil slick showed where the mine-clearing destroyer had gone down. Sam's shiver had

nothing to do with his wet tunic and the sharp breeze. The mine could have blown up the *Dakota* as readily as it had sunk the escort vessel. That could have been him floating in the water as readily as Gus Hardwig, or more likely him going down with the ship. He shivered again.

VI

Going home. Going home. Going home. The rails sang a sweet song in Jef ferson Pinkard's ears as the wheels of the train clicked over them. He'd been away too long, too far. He couldn't wait to see Emily's smiling face now that he'd finally got himself enough leave time to escape the front and travel back to Birmingham for a few days.

He couldn't wait to see all of her, every inch, stretched out bare on their bed. He couldn't wait to feel her underneath him on that bed, or on her hands and knees as they coupled like hunting hounds, or on her knees in front of him, red-gold hair spilling down over her face as she leaned forward and—

He shifted on the hard second-class seat. He was hard himself, and hoped the little old lady reading a sentimental novel next to him didn't notice. He couldn't help getting hard when he thought about Emily. Christ, she loved to do it! So did he, with her. When he'd got short leaves in Texas, he hadn't felt any great urge to visit the whorehouses that did not officially exist. But Emily—Emily was something very special in the line of women.

She'd probably kick his legs out from under him as soon as he walked in the door. She'd gone without as long as he had. From her letters, she might have missed it even more than he did. "Very special," he muttered. The woman beside him looked up from her novel, realized he hadn't been talking to her, and began to read again.

Pinkard had the seat closer to the window. He found the Mississippi countryside more interesting than a book. Here, away from the front, the war seemed forgotten. He'd seen that as soon as the first train he'd boarded got more than an hour's travel away from the trenches. Farmers were plowing in the fields. Actually, more farmers' wives were in the fields than he would have seen before the war. That was a change, but only a small one when set against

the absence of trenches and shell holes and artillery pieces. Everything was so green and fresh-looking, the way a landscape got to be when it wasn't drastically revised every few days or every few

minutes.

When the train rolled through a town, factory smokestacks sent black plumes of smoke into the air. The first time Jeff saw those plumes, he was alarmed; they put him in mind of fires after bombardments. But he quickly stopped worrying about that: industry got to seem normal in a hurry.

Past Columbus, Mississippi, and into Alabama the train rolled. Here and there, Pinkard did note scars on the landscape in this part of the countryside, half-healed ones from the Negro uprisings the year before. This was cotton country, with many Negroes and few whites.

Somebody a couple of rows in front of Pinkard said, "I hear tell the niggers is still shootin' at trains every now and again,"

"Ought to do some shootin’ at them with the biggest guns we got," the stranger's seatmate answered.

Remembering his own train ride into Georgia and the bullets that had slammed into the cars from out of the night, Pinkard understood how that fellow felt. He'd been a new, raw soldier then, his uniform a dark, proper butternut, not faded to the color of coffee with too much cream. The fire from the Red Negroes had seemed intense, deadly, terrifying. He wondered what it would seem like now. Probably not so much of a much.

Darkness fell as the train rattled through the central-Alabama cotton fields. Jeff revised his thinking. If black diehards had fired a couple of belts of ammunition at this train, he would have been terrified all over again. If somebody was shooting at you and you couldn't shoot back, terror made perfect sense.

He leaned back in the hard, uncomfortable seat and closed his eyes. He was only going to relax for a little while. So he told himself, but the next thing he knew, the conductor was shouting, "Birmingham! All out for Birmingham!"

He pushed past the gray-haired woman, who was going on farther east. As soon as he stepped out on the platform, he knew he was home again. The smoky, sulfurous air that poured from the foundries mingled with the fog that so often stole through Jones Valley to yield an atmosphere with density and character: damp and heavy and smelly, a mud bath for the lungs.

Flame poured from the tops of the chimneys of the Sloss Works, out toward the eastern edge of town. Back before the war—back before the Conscription Bureau had dragged him out of the foundry and into the trenches— he'd thought of that sight as hell on earth. Mow that he'd seen war, he knew better, but the memory lingered.

Before he could get off the platform, he showed his papers to a military policeman who had to be counting his blessings at having a post hundreds of miles from the real war. The fellow inspected them, then waved him on. Trol ley lines ran close by the station, taking travelers wherever they needed to go in the city. Pinkard stood at the corner and waited for the Sloss Works car he could ride out to the company housing—yellow cottages for white men and their families, primer-red for Negroes—surrounding the Sloss Works themselves. He yawned. He was still sleepy despite the nap, but figured the sight of Emily would wake him up in short order when he got home.

The trolley driver—who'd leaned crutches behind his seat and had one empty trouser leg—worked the brake and brought the car squealing to a halt at the edge of the company town. He nodded to Jefferson Pinkard as the sol dier got off. Jeff nodded back. He felt the driver's eyes on him as he walked away. Did the fellow hate him for his long, smooth strides? How could anyone blame him if he did?

Everything was quiet as Jeff headed home. Most of the cottages were dark, with men away for the war or working the evening shift or asleep if they worked days or nights. Here and there, lamplight yellow as melted butter spilled out of windows. A couple of dogs barked as Pinkard passed their houses. One of them, chained in the front yard, rushed at him, but the chain kept the big-mouthed, skinny brute from reaching the sidewalk.

Jeff turned onto his little lane. He felt swept back in time to the days before the war. How many times he'd walked this way with Bedford Cunningham, his next-door neighbor and best friend, both of them tired and hot and sweaty in their overalls after a long day's work. Alabama had been dry for a few years, but home-brew beer never got hard to come by. A couple of bottles out of the icebox went down sweet, no doubt about it.

There stood the Cunningham house, dark and still. Pinkard sighed. Bedford had gone to war before he did, and had come back without an arm, as the trolley driver had come back without a leg. A one-armed man could do a lot of things, but going back on the foundry floor probably wasn't one of them. Bedford and Fanny had hard times.

Jeff wondered how long they'd be able to stay in company housing if Bedford wasn't in the Army and couldn't work for the company any more.

Lamplight shone from the curtained window of Pinkard's own house, just past the Cunninghams'. He kicked at the sidewalk in mild disappointment. He'd expected Emily would already be asleep; come morning, she'd have to head downtown toward her munitions-plant job. He'd hoped he could take off his uniform in the front room, slip naked into bed beside her, and startle her awake the best way he knew how.

Even knowing she was awake, he went up the walk on tiptoe. If he couldn't give her the best surprise possible, he'd still give her the biggest surprise he could. His thumb and palm closed on the doorknob. Gently, gently, he turned it. The door swung open without a squeak. He was glad Emily had kept the hinges oiled. In Birmingham, anything that didn't get oiled rusted.

The lamplight glinted off Emily's shining hair. Seeing that before he saw anything else, Jeff began, "Hey, darlin', I'm . . . home." What had started as a glad cry ended as a hiss, like air escaping from a punctured inner tube.

Emily half sat, half knelt on the floor in front of the divan. On the divan, his legs splayed wide, lolled Bedford Cunningham. Neither of them wore any more than they'd been born with. Her face had been in his lap till she pulled away at the sound of Jeff's voice. A thin, bright line of saliva ran down her chin from a corner of her lower lip.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," Cunningham said. "Oh, Jesus Christ. Oh, Jesus Christ." The short stump of his right arm jerked and twisted, as if he'd tried to make a fist with a hand he'd forgotten he didn't have. "Oh, Jesus Christ."

"Close the door, Jeff," Emily said. Her eyes were wide and staring. She sounded eerily self-possessed, like somebody who'd just staggered out of a tram wreck.

Mechanically, Pinkard did. He was stunned, too, and said the first thing that popped into his mind: "You sneak out of Fanny's bed to come over here, Bedford?"

Cunningham shook his head. "She's workin' second shift these days." His face was pale as skimmed milk. Before he was hurt, he'd

been as big and strong and ruddy and bold as Pinkard. Now he looked thinner, older, his face lined as it hadn't been when he was a whole man.

Jeff's wits began to work. "Get your clothes on. Get the hell out of here. I ain't gonna lick a crippled man." He didn't say a word about what he'd do, or wouldn't do, to Emily.

Bedford Cunningham put on drawers and trousers and shirt one-handed with a speed that showed both practice and desperation. He hadn't been wearing shoes. He darted out the door. A few seconds later, the door to his own cottage opened and closed.

"Why?" Jefferson Pinkard asked the age-old question of the husband betrayed.

Naked still, Emily shrugged. Her breasts, firm and pink-tipped, bobbled briefly. She was, Jeff saw, over the jaundice that troubled, some munitions workers who handled cordite too much. "Why?" she echoed, and shrugged again. "You weren't here. I missed you. I missed *it.* Finally, I missed it so much I couldn't stand it any more, and so—" Yet another shrug.

"But Bedford—" *My best friend!* was another husbandly howl as old as time.

Emily got to her feet in a smooth, graceful motion Jeff couldn't possibly have imitated. She walked up to him and took his hands in hers. He knew what she was doing. He could hardly have helped knowing what she was doing. "He was here, that's all, darlin'," she said. "If you'd been here, too, I never would've looked at him. You know that's so. But you was in Georgia

and Texas and all them damn places, and—" She shrugged one more time. Her nipples barely brushed the breast of his tunic.

No, he could hardly have helped knowing what she was doing. That didn't mean it didn't work. His breath caught in his throat. His heart fluttered. He'd missed it, too, but he hadn't realized—he hadn't had the faintest notion—how much till she stood bare before him.

She took a step backwards, still holding his hands. He took a step for ward, after her. She took another step, and another, leading him back to the divan. When he sat, it was where Bedford Cunningham had sat before him. She sprawled beside him. She had two hands to

undo his belt buckle and the buttons of his fly.

She didn't kiss him on the lips. That might have reminded him where her mouth had just been. Instead, she leaned over and lowered her head. He pressed her down on him, his hands tangling in her thick hair. She gagged a little, but did not pull away.

Moments later, he exploded. He let Emily pull back far enough to gulp convulsively. Then, unasked, she returned to what she'd been doing. He stiff ened again, faster than he would have believed he could. When he was hard, she got up on her knees and swung her right leg over him, as if she were mounting a horse. She impaled herself on him and began to ride.

Her cries of joy must have wakened half the neighborhood. Then, throat ily, she added, "1 *never* made noise like that for Bedford." Jeff's hands clutched her meaty buttocks till she whimpered in pain and pleasure mixed. He drove deep into her, again and again. And, as he groaned and shuddered in the most exquisite pleasure he'd ever known, he wished with all his soul he were back in a muddy trench in Texas, under artillery bombardment from the Yankees.

Sweat ran down George Enos' face. The sun stood higher in the sky than it had any business doing at this season of the year, at least to his way of thinking. The USS *Ericsson* was down in the tropics now, nosing around after the submarines making life miserable for the warships and freighters that were trying to strangle the trade route between Argentina and England.

"What do you think?" he asked Carl Sturtevant. "Are we after English boats, or are the Rebs out here giving their pals a hand?"

"Damned if I know," answered the petty officer who ran the depth-charge launcher. "Damned if I care, either. Knowing who they are doesn't change how I do my job. We keep them too busy either going after us or trying to get away from us, they aren't going to be able to do anything else."

"Yeah," Enos said. "Just between you and me, I'd sooner see 'em trying to get away than going after us."

Sturtevant looked him up and down. "Any fool can see you ain't a career Navy man," he said after a brief pause for thought.

"Screw you and the destroyer you rode in on," Enos returned evenly. "I've been captured by a Confederate commerce raider, I've sailed on a fishing boat that was nothing but a decoy for Rebel subs and helped sink one of the bastards, I was on the bank of the Cumberland when my river monitor got blown sky-high, and I was right here when the damn *Snook* damn near torpedoed us. To my way of thinking, I've earned a little peace and quiet."

"Everybody's earned a little peace and quiet, and in the end everybody gets it, too," the petty officer said: "nice plot of ground, about six feet by three feet by six feet under. Till then, I want my time lively as can be."

Enos grunted, then went back to what he'd been doing: watching the ocean for signs of a periscope or anything else suspicious. Everyone who didn't have some other duty specifically assigned came up on deck and stood by the rail, scanning the ocean for the telltale feather of foam following a submersible's periscope.

A shadow on the water—George's pulse raced. Was that the top of an enemy conning tower, hiding down there below the surface of the sea? He relaxed, for the shadow was far too small and far too swift to be any such thing. He raised his gaze from the ocean to the sky. Sure enough, a frigate bird with a wingspan not much smaller than that of an aeroplane glided away. Several sea birds—gulls and terns and more exotic tropical types Enos had had to have named for him—hung with the *Ericsson,* scrounging garbage. They seemed perfectly content hundreds of miles from land in any direction.

George peered and peered. A man could only watch the ocean for a couple of hours at a stretch. After that, his attention started to wander. He saw things that weren't there, which wasn't so bad, and didn't see things that were, which was. Miss a periscope and the sea birds would pick meat from your bones after your corpse floated up to the surface.

What was that, there off the port bow? More likely than not, far more likely than not, it was just a bit of chop. He kept watching it. It wasn't moving in the same direction as the rest of the chop, nor at quite the same speed. He frowned. He'd spent as much time on the ocean as any career Navy man. He knew how far from smooth and uniform it was. Still—

He pointed. "What do you make of that?" he asked Sturtevant.

The petty officer had been looking more nearly amidships. Now his gaze followed Enos' outthrust finger. "Where? Out about a mile?" His pale eyes narrowed; he shielded them from sun and glare with the palm of his right hand.

"Yeah, about that," George answered.

"That's a goddamn periscope, or I'm a Rebel." Sturtevant started pointing, too, and yelling at the top of his lungs. An officer with binoculars came

running. He pointed them in the direction Sturtevant gave him. After a moment, he started yelling like a man possessed.

At his yells, klaxons started hooting. George Enos and Carl Sturtevant sprinted for their battle stations at the stern of the *Ericsson.* The destroyer shuddered under them as the engines suddenly ran up to full emergency power. Great gouts of smoke belched from the stacks.

"Torpedo in the water!" somebody screamed. The *Ericsson* had begun a turn toward the submersible, which meant that George could not see the wake of the torpedo as it sped toward the destroyer. He couldn't have done anything about it had he been able to see it, but being ignorant of whether he would live or die came hard.

Time stretched. The torpedo couldn't have taken more than a minute—a minute and a half at the most—to speed from the submersible to the destroyer. But how long was a minute or a minute and a half? With his heart thudding in his chest, every breath a desperate gasp, Enos had no sure grasp.

Tom Sturtevant pointed, as Enos had when he spotted the periscope. "There it goes, the goddamn son of a bitch!" Sturtevant shouted. Sure enough, the pale wake of the torpedo stretched out across the blue, blue water of the tropical Atlantic. Sturtevant stepped over to George beside his one-pounder and slapped him on the back hard enough to stagger him. "If you hadn't spotted the 'scope, the bastard would've been able to sneak in closer for a better shot. You made him fire it off too quick."

"Good." Enos patted the magazine of nicely heavy shells he'd loaded into the one-pounder. He remembered what they'd done to the conning tower of the *Snook,* and to a couple of Confederate sailors who'd got in the way of them. "Now we've got the ball."

"Yeah," Sturtevant said as the *Ericsson* slowed not far from the point whence the torpedo had been launched. "Now we start dropping ash cans on his head, and see if we can put him out of business for good."

At the side of the depth-charge launcher, Lieutenant Crowder said, "Let's give him a couple, shall we, Mr. Sturtevant? Set them for a hundred and fifty feet."

"A hundred and fifty feet. Aye aye, sir," the petty officer answered. He commanded the rest of the men at the launcher with effortless authority. A depth charge flew through the air and splashed into the Atlantic. A moment later, another followed.

Somewhere down under the ocean, a boatful of men who'd just done their best to sink the *Ericsson* were listening to those splashes. George felt a weird sympathy for the submersible's crew. The only thing a submersible had going for it was stealth. It couldn't fight on the surface against a warship. It couldn't outrun a warship, either. All it could do was sneak close, try for a kill, and then try to sneak away if that didn't work.

Sympathy had nothing whatever to do with whether George hoped the submariners would be able to sneak away after trying to kill him (and, in his own mind incidentally, everyone else on the *Ericsson)*. He didn't. "Come on, you bastards," he said while the depth charges sank. "Come on."

Fifty yards below the surface of the Atlantic, the depth charges went off, one after the other, a few feet apart. Water on the surface bubbled and boiled. After the explosions, though, nothing more happened: no rush of air bubbles proclaiming a ruptured pressure hull, no oil slick telling of other damage, no boat hastily surfacing before it sank forever.

Turning, the *Ericsson* moved slowly to the southeast. "Hydrophone bearing," a sailor called back to Lieutenant Crowder. The underwater listening de vice had two drawbacks. Where along that bearing the submersible lay was anybody's guess. Also, when the destroyer's engines were running, they drowned out most of the noise the submarine was making.

Nevertheless, after a couple of minutes, a messenger hurried back to Crowder from the bridge. The young lieutenant listened, nodded, and spoke to Carl Sturtevant. "Two more depth charges. Set the fuses

for a hundred feet."

"A hundred feet. Aye aye, sir," Sturtevant said. Off flew the charges, two bangs in quick succession. The wait, this time, wasn't so long. The Atlantic bubbled and boiled again. No evidence that the charges had done any good appeared.

"Is the launcher in proper working order?" Crowder. demanded. It had damaged a submersible the last time they used it. Enos thought along with the officer. If it didn't force a boat to the surface this time, something surely had to be wrong with it ... unless the skipper down below was laughing up his sleeve, which struck George as a hell of a lot likelier.

"Yes, sir." Carl Sturtevant gave the distinct impression that he'd talked with a hell of a lot of young officers in his day. No doubt the reason he gave that impression was that he had. He went on, "It's working fine, sir. It's just that there's a hell of a lot of ocean out there, and the ash cans can't tear up but a little bit of it at a time."

"We got good results—damnation, we got outstanding results—the last time we used it," Crowder said fretfully.

"Yes, sir, but life ain't like a Roebuck's catalogue, sir," Sturtevant answered. "It don't come with no money-back guarantee."

That was good sense. As a fisherman, Enos knew exactly how good it was. Lieutenant Crowder pouted, for all the world like George, Jr. "Something must be wrong with the launcher," he said, confirming George's guess.

Sturtevant sent another pair of depth charges flying into the ocean, and another, and another. And, after that last pair, a thick stream of bubbles rose to the surface, as did a considerable quantity of thick black oil that spread

over the blue, blue water of the Atlantic. "That's a hurt boat down there, sir," Carl Sturtevant breathed. "Hurt, or else playing games with us." He turned to the launcher crew. "Now we hammer the son of a bitch." Ash can after ash can splashed into the water.

More air bubbles rose. So did more oil. The boat from which they rose, however, remained submerged. "I wonder how deep the water is down there," Crowder said musingly. "If we've sunk that submersible, we're liable to never, ever know it."

"That's so, sir," Sturtevant agreed. "But if we think we've sunk him and we're wrong, we'll find out like a kick in the balls." George Enos nodded. A fisherman who wasn't a born pessimist hadn't been going to sea long enough.

The *Ericsson* held her position till sundown, lobbing occasional depth charges into the sea. "We'll report this one as a probable sinking," Lieutenant Crowder said. No one argued with him. No one could argue with him. He was the officer.

Commander Roger Kimball's head pounded and ached as if with a hangover, and he hadn't even had the fun of getting drunk. The air inside the *Bonefish* was foul, and getting fouler. In the dim orange glow of the electric lamps, he struck a match. It burned with a fitful blue flame for a few seconds, then went out, adding a sulfurous stink to the astonishing cacophony of stenches already inside the pressure hull.

He checked his watch: two in the morning, a few minutes past. Quietly, he asked, "How much longer can we stay submerged?"

"Three or four hours left in the batteries, sir, provided we don't have to gun the engine," Tom Brearley answered, also quietly, after checking the dials. He inhaled, then grimaced. "Air won't stay good that long, though, I'm afraid."

"And I'm afraid you're right." Kimball shifted his feet, which set up a faint splashing. The pounding the boat had taken had started some new leaks, none of them, fortunately, too severe. "Damnyankee destroyer was throwing around depth charges like they were growin' their own crop on deck."

"Yes, sir," Brearley said. The exec looked up toward the surface. "Next interesting question is—"

"Have they stalked us?" Kimball finished for him. "I'm hoping they think they sank us. We gave 'em enough clues before we slunk away. Only way we could have been more convincing would have been to shoot a couple of dead bodies out the forward tubes, and since we didn't have any handy—"

"Yes, sir," Brearley said, and a couple of sailors nodded. "But if they're anywhere close when we surface, we're done for."

"That's a fact," Kimball agreed. "But it's also a fact that we're done for if

we don't surface pretty damn soon." He came to a sudden, abrupt decision. "We'll bring her up to periscope depth and have a look around."

Even that was risky; if the U.S. destroyer waited close by, bubbles on the surface might betray the *Bonefish.* The submersible rose sluggishly. Kimball had expended a lot of compressed air in feigning her untimely demise. When the periscope went up, he peered through it himself, not trusting anyone else with the job. Slowly, carefully, he went through a complete circuit of the horizon.

Nothing. No angular ship silhouette far off against the sky—nor menacingly close, either. No plume of smoke warning of a ship not very distant. Kimball went through the circuit again, to make sure he hadn't missed anything.

Still nothing. "All hands prepare to surface," he said, adding a moment later, "Bring her up, Mr. Brearley. We'll get fresh air into the boat, we'll fire up the diesels and cruise for a while to recharge the batteries—"

"We'll flush the heads," Ben Coulter said. Everyone in earshot fervently agreed with the petty officer as to the desirability of that. The pigs on the Arkansas farm where Kimball had grown up wouldn't have lived in a sty that smelled half as bad as the *Bonefish.*

After the boat had surfaced, Kimball climbed up to the top of the conning tower to undog the hatch. Ben Coulter climbed up behind him to grab him around the shins and keep him from being blown out the hatch when it was undogged: the air inside the hull was under considerably higher pressure than that on the outside, and had a way of escaping with great vigor.

Out streamed the stinking air, like the spout of a whale. Somehow the stench was worse when mingled with the first fresh, pure breezes from outside. When altogether immersed in it, the nose, mercifully, grew numb. After the first taste of good air, though, the bad got worse.

Still., a few lungfuls of outside air went a long way toward clearing Kim-ball's fuzzy wits. His headache vanished. From below came exclamations of delight and exclamations of disgust as fresh air

began mingling with the nasty stuff inside the *Bonefish.*

The diesels rumbled to life. "All ahead half," Kimball called down; Tom Brearley relayed the command to die engine crew. The wake the *Bonefish* kicked up glowed with a faint, pearly phosphorescence.

Brearley mounted to the top of the conning tower. He looked around and let out a long sigh that was as much a lung-clearer as a sound of relief. "We got away from them, sir," he said.

"I didn't want to get away from them," Roger Kimball growled. "I wanted to sink the Yankee bastards. I would have done it, too, but they must have spotted the periscope. Soon as I saw 'em pick up speed and start that turn, I launched the fish, but the range was still long, and it missed."

"We're still in business," Brearley said.

"We're in the business of sending U.S. ships to the bottom," Kimball answered. "We didn't do it. Now that destroyer's either going to go on south and try to strangle the British lifeline to South America, or else he'll hang around here and try to keep us from going after his pals. Either way, he wouldn't be doing it if we'd sent him to the bottom like we were supposed to."

Kimball kept on fuming. His exec didn't say anything more. The darkness hid Kimball's smile, which was not altogether pleasant. He knew he alarmed Tom Brearley. It didn't bother him. If he didn't alarm the Tom Brearleys of the world, he wasn't doing his job right.

When the sun rose, he halted the boat and allowed the men to come up and bathe in the warm water of the Atlantic, with lines tied round the middles of those who couldn't swim. They put on their old, filthy uniforms again afterwards, but still enjoyed getting off some of the grime.

And then the *Bonefish* went hunting. Kimball had got used to patrolling inside a cage whose bars were lines of latitude and longitude. He supposed a lion would have found cage life tolerable if the keepers introduced a steady stream of bullocks on which it could leap.

Trouble was, he wasn't a lion. Battleships were lions. He was a snake in the grass. He could kill bullocks—freighters. He could kill lions, too. He'd done it, even in their very lair. But if they saw him

slithering along before he got close enough to bite, they could kill him, too, and easily. They could also kill him if he struck and missed, as he had at that nasty hunting dog of a destroyer.

So much of patrol duty was endlessly, mind-numbingly boring. More often than not, Kimball chafed under such boredom. Today, for once, he welcomed it. It gave the crew a chance to recover from the long, tense time they'd spent submerged. It gave the diesels a chance to recharge the batteries in full. If that damned destroyer had stumbled across the boat too soon} she couldn't have gone underwater for long or traveled very far. A submarine that had to try to slug it out on the surface was a dead duck.

A quiet evening followed the quiet day. The crew needed to recharge their batteries, too. A lot of them spent a lot of time in their hammocks or wrapped in the blankets they spread next to or, more often, on top of equipment. The odor of fried fish jockeyed for position among all the other smells inside the pressure hull—Ben Coulter had caught a tuna that had almost ended up dragging him into the Atlantic instead of his being able to pull it out.

"You know what?" Kimball asked his exec. They'd both had big tuna steaks. Kimball wished for a toothpick; he had a shred of fish stuck between a couple of back teeth, and couldn't work it loose with his tongue.

"What's that, sir?" Tom Brearley asked.

"You know the Japs?" Kimball said. "You know what they do? They eat tuna raw sometimes. Either they dip it in horseradish or bean juice or sometimes both of 'em together, or else they just eat it plain. Don't that beat hell?" "You're making that up," Brearley said. "You've told me enough tall tales

to stretch from the bottom of the ocean up to here. I'll be damned if you'll catch me again."

"Solemn fact," Kimball said, and raised his hand as if taking oath. His exec still wouldn't believe him. They both started to get angry, Kimball because he couldn't convince Brearley, the exec because he thought the skipper kept pulling his leg harder and harder. At last, disgusted, Kimball growled, "Oh, the hell with it," and stomped back down to the solitary albeit cramped splendor of his bunk.

He and Brearley were wary with each other the next morning, too,

both of them speaking with military formality usually ignored aboard submersibles in every navy in the world. Then the lookout let out a holler—"Smoke off to the east!"—and they forgot about the argument.

Kimball hurried up to the top of the conning tower. The lookout pointed. Sure enough, not just one trail but several smudged the horizon. Kimball smiled a predatory smile. "Either those are freighters, or else they're warships loafing along without the least little idea we're anywhere around. Any which way, we're going to have some fun." He called down the hatch: "Give me twelve knots, and change course to 135. Let's get in front of the bastards and take a look at what we've got."

The *Bonefish* swung through the turn. Kimball peered through his binoculars. "What are we after?" Brearley asked from below.

"Looks like supply ships," Kimball answered. "Can't be sure they haven't got one of those disguised auxiliary cruisers sneaking along with 'em, though. "Well, I don't give a damn if they do. We've still got plenty of fish on board, and I'm not talking about that damned tuna."

Skippers who paid attention to nothing but what was right in front of their noses did not live to grow old. While Kimball guided the *Bonefish* toward her prey, he kept another lookout up on the conning tower with him to sweep the rest of the horizon.

He jumped when the sailor tapped him on the shoulder. Apologetically, the fellow said, "I hate to tell you, sir, but there's smoke over on the western horizon, and whatever's making it looks to be heading this way in a hell of a hurry."

"Thanks, Caleb." Kimball turned, hoping the sailor was somehow mistaken. But he wasn't. Whatever was making that smoke was heading in the general direction of the *Bonefish,* and heading toward her faster than anything had any business traveling on the ocean. He raised the binoculars to his eyes. Almost as he watched, the ship crawled over the horizon. He counted stacks— one, two, three . .. four. Cursing, he said, "Go below, Caleb," and then bawled down the hatch: "All hands prepare to dive! Take her down to periscope depth."

The *Bonefish* had no trouble escaping the U.S. destroyer. Depth charges

roared, but far in the distance. Tom Brearley said, "We spotted her in good time."

"That's not the point, goddammit," Kimball growled. "The point is, she made us break off the attack on those other Yankee ships. They'll get away clean while we're crawling along down here. She did what she was supposed to do, and she kept us from doing what we're supposed to do. Nobody does that to me." His voice sounded the more menacing for being flat and quiet. *"Nobody* does that to me, do you hear? I hope that destroyer hangs around this part of the ocean, 'cause if she does, I'll sink her."

Sylvia Enos felt like a billiard ball, caroming from one cushion to the next. She got off the trolley not by her house, but by the school a couple of stops away. After Brigid Coneval's husband stopped a bullet with his chest, Sylvia had had to enroll George, Jr., in kindergarten. He was enjoying himself there. That wasn't the problem. Neither was his staying on the school grounds till she got out of work. A lot of boys and girls did that. The school had a banner out front: WE STAY OPEN TO SUPPORT THE WAR EFFORT.

The problem was .. . "Come on, George," Sylvia said, tugging at his hand. "We've still got to pick up your sister."

George didn't want to go. "Benny hit me a while ago, and I haven't hit him back yet. I've got to, Mama."

"Do it tomorrow," Sylvia said. George, Jr., tried to twist free. She whacked him on the bottom, which got enough of his attention to let her drag him out of the schoolroom and back toward the trolley stop.

They missed the trolley anyhow—it clattered away just as they hurried up. Sylvia whacked George, Jr., again. That might have made him feel sorry. Then again, it might not have. It did make Sylvia feel better. Twilight turned into darkness. Mosquitoes began to buzz. Sylvia sighed. Spring was here at last. She slapped, too late.

Fifteen minutes after they missed the trolley, the next car on the route came by. Sylvia threw two nickels in the fare box and rode back in the other direction, to the apartment of the new woman she'd found to watch Mary Jane. "I'm sorry I'm late, Mrs. Dooley," she said.

Rose Dooley was a large woman with a large, square jaw that might have made her formidable in the prize ring. "Try not to be late again, Mrs. Enos, if you please," she said, but then softened enough to admit, "Your daughter wasn't any trouble today."

"I'm glad," Sylvia said. "I am sorry." Blaming George, Jr., wouldn't have done any good. She took Mary Jane's hand. "Let's go home."

"I'm hungry, Mama," Mary Jane said.

"So am I," George, Jr., agreed.

By the time they got back to the apartment building, it was after seven. By then, the children weren't just saying they were hungry. They were shouting it, over and over. "If you hadn't dawdled on your way to the trolley, we've have been home a while ago, and you would be eating by now," Sylvia told George, Jr. That got Mary Jane mad at her big brother, but didn't stop either of the children from complaining.

They both complained some more when Sylvia paused to see if any mail had come. "Mama, we're *starving,"* George, Jr., boomed. Mary Jane added shrill agreement.

"Hush, both of you." Sylvia held up an envelope, feeling vindicated. "Here is a letter from your father. You wouldn't have wanted it to wait, would you?"

That did quiet them, at least until they actually got inside the flat. George Enos had assumed mythic proportions to both of them, especially to Mary Jane, who hardly remembered him at all. One corner of Sylvia's mouth turned down. She wished her husband had mythic proportions in her eyes.

"If you read it to us, Mama, will you make supper right afterwards?" Mary Jane asked. Her brother's bluster hadn't worked; maybe bargaining would.

And it did. "I'll even start the fire in the stove now, so it will be getting hot while I'm reading the letter," Sylvia said. Her children clapped their hands.

She fed coal into the firebox with care; people at the canning plant said the Coal Board was going to cut the ration yet again, apparently intent on making people eat their food raw for the rest of the war. Glancing in the coal bin, she thought she probably had enough to keep cooking till the end of the month.

As soon as she walked back into the front room from the cramped kitchen, George, Jr., and Mary Jane jumped on her like a couple of

football tackles. "Read the letter!" they chanted. "Read the letter!" Some of that was eagerness to hear from their father, more was likely to be eagerness to get her cooking.

She opened the envelope with a strange mixture of happiness and dread. If George had come into port to mail the letter, who could guess what he was doing besides mailing it? As a matter of fact, she could guess perfectly well. The trouble was, she couldn't know.

When she saw a scrawled line at the top of the page, she let out a silent sigh of relief. *A supply ship bound for home came alongside just after I finished this,* George had written, so *it will get to you soon.* That meant he hadn't set foot on dry land. She could relax, at least for a while.

" 'Dear Sylvia,' " Sylvia read aloud, " 'and little George who is getting big and Mary Jane too—' "

"I'm getting big!" Mary Jane said.

"I know you are, and so does your father," Sylvia said. "Shall I go on?" The children. nodded, so she did: " 'I am fine. I hope you are fine. We are down here in the—' "

"Why did you stop, Mama?" George, Jr., asked.

"There's a word that's all scratched out, so I can't read it," Sylvia answered. *Censors,* she thought. *As if I'm going to tell anybody where George's ship is.* She resumed: " 'We are doing everything we can to whip our enemies. A sub tried to torpedo us, but we got away with no trouble at all.' "

"Wow!" George, Jr., said.

Sylvia wondered how much more dangerous that had been than George was making it out to be in his letter. Like any fisherman, he was in the habit of minimizing mishaps, to keep his loved ones from worrying. " 'We went after him and we'—oh, here are more words scratched out," she said. " 'They say we either damaged him or sunk him, and I hope they are right.' "

"What does *damaged* mean?" Mary Jane asked.

"Hurt," Sylvia answered. " 'I have chipped more paint than I ever thought there was in the whole wide world. The chow is not half so

good as yours or what Charlie White used to make on the *Ripple* but there is plenty of it. Tell little George and Mary Jane to be good for me. I hope I see them and you real soon. I love you all and I miss you. George.' "

She set the letter on the table in front of the sofa. "Now make supper!" George, Jr., and Mary Jane yelled together.

"I've got some scrod, and I'll fry potatoes with it," Sylvia said. Even though George was in the Navy, she still had connections among the dealers and fishermen down on T Wharf. The transactions were informal enough that none of the many and various rationing boards knew anything about them. As long as she was content to eat fish—and she would have been a poor excuse for a fisherman's wife if she weren't—she and her family ate pretty well.

Fisherman's children, George, Jr., and Mary Jane ate up the tender young cod as readily as Sylvia did. And they plowed through mountains of potatoes fried in lard and salted with a heavy hand. Sylvia wished she could have given them more milk than half a glass apiece, but she didn't know anybody who had anything to do with milk rationing.

After she washed the supper dishes, she filled a big pitcher from the stove's hot-water reservoir and marched the children down to the end of the hall for their weekly bath. They went with all the delight of Rebel prisoners marching off into captivity in the United States.

They were as obstreperous as Rebel prisoners, too; by the time she had them clean, they had her wet. In dudgeon approaching high, she marched them back to the apartment and changed into a quilted housecoat. They played for a while—Mary Jane was alternately an adjunct and a hindrance to George, Jr.'s, game, which involved storming endless ranks of Confederate

trenches. When he pretended to machine-gun her and made her cry, Sylvia called a halt to the proceedings.

She read to them from *Hiawatha* and put them to bed. But then, it was nearly nine o'clock. She'd have to get up before six to get George, Jr., off to kindergarten and Mary Jane to Mrs. Dooley's. Silently, she cursed Brigid Coneval's husband for getting shot. If he'd had any idea how much trouble his death was causing her, he never would have been so inconvenient.

Twenty minutes—maybe even half an hour—to herself, with no one to tell her what to do, seemed the height of luxury. Had George been here, she knew what he would have wanted to do with that time. And she would have gone along. Not only was it her wifely duty, he pleased her most of the time—or he had.

After a long day at the canning plant, after a long day made longer by missing the trolley when she was trying to retrieve Mary Jane, *wifely duty* didn't have a whole lot of meaning left to it. If she felt like making love, she would make love. If she didn't. ..

"I'll damn well go to bed, that's what," she said, and yawned. "And if George doesn't like it—"

If George didn't like it, he'd go out and find himself some strumpet. And then, one day, he'd drink too much, and he'd let her know. And then—

"Then I'll throw him out on his two-timing ear," she muttered, and yawned again. If she didn't intend to fall asleep on the sofa, which she'd done a couple of times, she needed to get ready for bed.

She made sure she wound and set the alarm clock. If she didn't, she wouldn't wake up on time, not tired as she was. She put on her nightgown, went and brushed her teeth at the sink by the toilet, and then walked into the bedroom, turned off the lamp, and lay down.

Despite weariness, sleep did not want to come. Sylvia worried about what would happen on the sea, and about how much George hadn't told her. She worried about what would happen if he didn't come home. And, almost equally, she worried about what would happen when he did come home. He would expect things to be the same as they had been before he went into the Navy and she went to work, and she didn't see how that was possible. She saw trouble ahead, with no more effort than she needed to see snow ahead in a boiling gray sky in February.

She writhed and stretched and wiggled and, at long last, went to sleep. When the alarm clock exploded into life beside her head, she had to clap a hand over her mouth to keep from screaming. Only after that did she recover enough to turn off the clock.

"Oh, God," she groaned, "another day." She got out of bed.

Lucien Galtier stared at the envelope in some perplexity. It bore no

postage stamp, not even one of the peculiar sort the United States had prepared for occupied Quebec. Where the stamp should have been was a printed phrase in both English and French: UNDER THE PERMIT OF THE U.S. OCCUPYING AU THORITY. PENALTY FOR UNAUTHORIZED USE, $3OO.

Marie had not opened the envelope. Instead, she'd sent Denise to get Charles, and Charles to bring Lucien to the farmhouse from the fields. "What sort of trouble are you in?" his wife demanded, glaring from the envelope to Lucien and back again as if unable to decide which of them she despised more.

"In the name of God, I do not know," he answered. "I have done nothing to make the occupying authorities dislike me, not for some time."

"Then why do they send this to you?" Marie said, confident he had no answer, as indeed he had none. Having reduced him to silence, she snapped, "Well, why do you hesitate? Open it, that we may see what sort of injustice they aim to inflict on us now."

"This I will do," Galtier replied. "Once I open it, at least I will know what the trouble is, and no longer be plagued by wild guesses." Marie ignored that, as beneath her dignity. When Charles, who had accompanied his father, presumed to smile, she froze the expression on his face with a glance.

Muttering under his breath, Galtier tore the envelope open. Inside was a single sheet of paper, again printed in both English and French. Marie snatched it out of his hands and read it aloud: " 'All citizens of this occupation district are cordially invited to gather in the market square of Riviere-du-Loup at two in the afternoon on Sunday, the fifteenth of April, 1917, to hear an important announcement and proclamation. Attendance at this festivity is not required, but will surely prove of interest.' "

"There! Do you see? I am not in difficulty with the authorities for any rea son whatsoever," Lucien said triumphantly. "It is not a letter to me or even about me. It is a general circular, like a patent-medicine flyer."

Marie took no notice of his tone. She'd had more than twenty years' practice taking no notice of his tone when that suited her purposes, as it did now. She said, "For what reason do they send this out? They have never done anything like it before." She regarded the

paper with deep suspicion.

Charles nodded vigorously. "They cordially invite us," he said. "They call this a festivity. They say we do not have to come to it. They have never done anything like this since they overran our country." Galtier's elder son was probably the quietest member of the family, and also the least reconciled to the U.S. occupation.

"It could be," Lucien said, "that Nicole will know more of this, working as she does at the hospital with so many Americans. For now, and until she comes home, I do not intend to worry about it, as I have plenty to do in the fields if we are to put in any sort of crop this year."

"Yes, go on, get out of the house," Marie said. "I also have plenty to do."

"And who called me to the house?" he asked, but he might as well have been talking to the air.

Even as he worked, though, he wondered about the peculiar announce ment from the U.S. occupiers. It was the most nearly civil thing they had done in the nearly three years since they'd invaded Quebec. Up till now, civility had not been their long suit. He wondered why they were changing course. Like Marie, like most Quebecois, he was suspicious of change, as likely being for the worse.

Despite that suspicion of change, he would have been glad if Nicole had brought Dr. O'Doull home for supper. But she returned to the farmhouse by herself, and proved to be as startled by the flyer as the rest of the family.

"How are we to find out what it means?" she asked.

Georges spoke up, as innocent-sounding and sarcastic as usual: "It could be—and I know it is only a foolish notion of mine—we might even stay in town after we go to Mass, and hear this announcement and proclamation for ourselves."

His older sister glared at him. He beamed back, mild as milk, which only made her more furious. Before the row could go any further, Lucien said, "That is exactly what we shall do." Marie gave him a look that was anything but altogether approving. Once he had made his intention so plain, though, not even she saw any chance of getting him to change his mind.

The highway up to Riviere-du-Loup was more crowded than usual that Sunday morning, as many families from the outlying farms came in to the town to go to church and then stay. The big, snorting U.S. trucks always on the road had to use their horns again and again to clear the slow-moving wagons from their path. Many of the men in the wagons took their own sweet time about getting out of the way, too.

Splendid in his new vestments, Bishop Pascal officiated at the Mass. "Please stay for the afternoon's announcements," he urged his flock. "You will find it of interest, I assure you." He said no more than that, which both surprised Lucien and set him scratching his head. The Pascal he knew could hardly open his mouth without falling in. It was another change to mistrust.

When Galtier emerged from the church with his family, he found one more change: the market square had been draped with bunting, some red, white, and blue, some simply white and blue, the colors of Quebec. "What are they going to say?" he asked the air. "What are they going to do? Are they going to say we are now a part of the United States? If they say this, I say to them that we shall be a troubled part of the United States."

"We are here," Marie said. "Let us wait. Let us see. What else can we do?" There, Lucien found nothing with which to disagree.

They waited, and chatted with neighbors and with folk who did not live

close by the farm and whom they saw but seldom. At precisely two o'clock, Major Jedediah Quigley and Bishop Pascal ascended to a bunting-draped platform a squad of U.S. soldiers had set up not far from the church.

An expectant hush fell. Into it, Major Quigley spoke in his elegant —his too-elegant—French: "My friends, I should like to thank all of you for coming here today and becoming a part of this great day in the history of your land. As others are announcing elsewhere at this very same moment, the government of the United States from this time forth recognizes the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Quebec."

"The what?" Lucien frowned. "There is no such thing."

"There is now," someone behind him said. He nodded. He did not

know what to feel: joy, fury, bewilderment? Bewilderment won. Quebecois were a separate people, yes, assuredly. Were they a separate nation? If they were, what sort of separate nation would they be?

Quigley was continuing: "I am pleased to announce that the sovereign and independent Republic of Quebec has already been accorded diplomatic recognition as a nation among the nations of the world by the German Empire, the Empire of Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Bulgaria, the Kingdom of Poland, the Republic of Chile, the Republic of Paraguay, the government of the Republic of Liberia, and the government-in-exile of the Republic of Haiti in Philadelphia. Many other governments, I am certain, will soon recognize your new and thriving nation. From this, citizens of the Republic of Quebec, you can see that your well-deserved independence from the British creation of Canada is popular throughout the world."

From this, Lucien thought, *we can see that the United States and their allies recognize this so-called Republic, and that no one else does.* That left him anything but surprised: the Entente powers would hardly acknowledge that one of their own would be, could be, torn asunder. The Entente powers did not recognize the Poland the Germans had erected on soil taken from Russia, either.

As if on cue—afterwards, but only afterwards, Galtier wondered if it *was* on cue—a soldier came running up to the platform waving a pale yellow telegram. Quigley took it, read it, and stared out at the buzzing crowd. A wide smile spread across his narrow face. He waved the telegram, too. "My friends!" he cried, his voice choked with emotion either genuine or artfully portrayed. "My friends, word has just reached me that the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of the Netherlands have also recognized the Republic of Quebec."

That made the buzzing even louder, and changed its note. Lucien did not buzz, but he did raise an eyebrow. Italy was a member of the Quadruple Alliance with the USA, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, but a backsliding member: she had been neutral since the war began. And the Netherlands,

though bordered on her entire land frontier by Germany and German-occu pied Belgium, still carried on what trade with England she could. She was a true neutral, and she had recognized this republic.

"I am greatly honored to congratulate Quebec on achieving her

indepen dence, even if it was far too many years delayed by British contempt," Major Quigley said, "and I am privileged to offer this salute to you, Quebecois free at last: *vive la Republique de Quebec!"*

"Vive la Republique!" Not everyone in the square shouted it. Not even a majority of the people in the square shouted it. But a surprising number— surprising, at any rate, to Lucien, who kept silent with his family—did shout it. Everyone looked around to see who shouted and who did not. Would feuds start because some had shouted and some had not?

Jedediah Quigley stepped back and Bishop Pascal stepped forward. *"Vive la Republique de Quebec'."* he echoed, not inviting anyone else to shout the phrase but making clear where he himself stood. "I say to you, it is long past time that we should be free, free from the indignities the British have heaped on us for so long. How many of you men, when you were conscripted into the Army of the Canada that was, and when you tried to speak your beautiful French language, were told by some ugly English sergeant, 'Talk white!'?"

He dropped into English for those two words, which doubled their effect. Galtier chuckled uncomfortably. He'd heard sergeants say that, plenty of times. He was not the only man chuckling uncomfortably, either—far from it. Bishop Pascal knew how to flick where it was already raw.

He continued, "How many times have we had our sacred faith mocked by the Protestants in Ottawa, men who would not know piety and holiness if they came knocking on their doors? How many times must we be shown we are not and cannot be the equals of the English before we decide we have had a sufficiency? Soon, I pray, the Republic of Quebec will embrace all the Quebecois of *la belle province de Quebec.* Until that time comes, though, which God hasten, we have begun. Go with God, my friends, and pray with me for the success of *la Republique de Quebec.* Go in peace," he finished, as he had finished the Mass not long before.

"What do we do now, Father?" It was Georges who asked the question, his voice and his expression both unwontedly serious.

"I do not know," Lucien answered, and he could hear that he was far from the only man saying *Je tie sais pas* in the square at that moment. Slowly, he went on, "It is plain to see that this Republic, so-called, is to be nothing but a creature of the United States. But we were not altogether our own men in Canada, either. So I do not

know. We shall have to see what passes."

"It is too soon to tell what this all means." Where Lucien had groped for words, Marie spoke with great finality. They both said the same thing, though. In the end, they usually did. Seeing as much, their children for once forbore to argue.

Remembrance Day soon," Captain Jonathan Moss remarked to Lieutenant Percy Stone as the two fliers rode battered bicycles along a dirt road not far from the aerodrome near Arthur, Ontario. Both men wore .45s on their hips; trouble wasn't likely hereabouts, but it wasn't impossible, either. Ontario remained resentful about occupation.

"It'll be a good one," Stone answered. His breath still steamed when he spoke, though spring, by the calendar, was almost a month old. It didn't steam too much, though; it wasn't the great cloud of frost it would have been at the equinox. Here and there, a few green blades of grass were poking up through the mud, though snow might yet put paid to them.

"A good one? It'll be the best one ever," Moss said. "Everything we've re membered for so long, we're finally paying back."

But Stone shook his head. "The best Remembrance Day ever will be the one after the war is over and we've whipped the Rebs and the Canucks and the limeys. Everything till then is just a buildup."

Moss considered, then nodded. "All right, Percy. You've got me there."

Stone looked around. "This road could use some building up. Come to that, this whole countryside could use some building up."

"Well, you're right about that, too," Moss said. "Of course, you could say the same thing about just about any piece of Ontario we're sitting on. If we haven't ironed it flat to use it for something in particular, it's had the living bejesus shot out of it."

As if to prove his point, he had to swerve sharply to keep from steering his bicycle into a shell hole that scarred the road as smallpox scarred the face. And, as smallpox could scar more than the face, shell holes and bomb craters scarred more than the road; they dotted the whole landscape.

By what had to be a miracle, a twenty-foot stretch of wooden

fence still stood next to the road not much farther on. Moss dug his heels into the dirt to stop his bicycle. He studied the fence with astonished fascination. "How many bullet holes do you suppose that timber's got in it, Percy?" he asked.

"More than I feel like counting, I'll tell you that," Stone answered at once. "We should have brought Hans along. He'd count 'em, and tell you how many were our .30 caliber and how many the .303 the limeys and Canucks were shooting back at us."

"You only think you're joking," Moss said. His friend shook his head. He wasn't joking, and they both knew it. Hans Oppenheim *would* do the counting, and was liable to try to figure out how many men on each side were firing captured weapons, too.

Then Jonathan Moss stopped worrying about bullet holes and, for that matter, about Hans Oppenheim, too. Moving slowly across a battered field by the side of the road was a fair-haired woman of about his own age. She led a

couple of scrawny cows toward a little creek that meandered through the field.

Percy Stone was also eyeing the young woman. He and Moss stopped their bicycles at the same time, as if they had turned their aeroplanes together up above the trench line. "You're a married man," Moss murmured to Stone.

"I know that," his flightmate answered. Then he raised his voice: "Miss! Oh, Miss!"

The woman's head came up, like that of a deer when a hunter steps on a dry twig. She looked back toward the distant farmhouse from which she'd come, then toward the much closer Americans. Plainly, her every urge was to flee, but she didn't quite dare. "What do you want?" she demanded, her voice, like her face, wild and wary and hunted.

And what will Percy say to that? Moss wondered. *Something like, Will you take a couple of dollars for a roll in the hay? Moss didn't think that approach would work. Moss didn't think any approach would work, not with a woman who had trouble even holding still in their presence.*

Percy Stone didn't even smile at her. He said, "If you'd be so kind, could we buy some milk from you?"

"You're a genius," Moss breathed. Stone did smile then, one of his little, self-deprecating grins.

The young woman stared at the cows as if she'd never seen them be fore, as if they betrayed her merely by being there. Visibly gathering her courage, she shook her head. "No," she said. "I haven't anything—not one single thing—that I'd sell to you Yanks."

Moss and Stone looked at each other. That was the reaction the U.S. occupiers got from almost all the Canucks in Ontario. From everything Moss had heard, it wasn't like that everywhere in Canada. If it had been, the USA never could have set up the Republic of Quebec farther east.

"We don't mean you any harm, Miss," he said, "but my friend is right. Some fresh milk would be good, and we'd gladly pay you for it."

"If you don't mean any harm," the woman said, "why don't you get out of my country, go back to yours, and leave us alone?" Her head came up in defiance; if she wasn't going to run away from a couple of Yanks, she'd give them a piece of her mind instead.

"If you want to argue like that, why did England invade my country from Canada during the Second Mexican War?" Moss returned.

"Why did you Yanks try invading us during your Revolution, and again during the War of 1812?" she said. "You can't blame us for not trusting you. You've never given us any reason to trust you, and you've given us plenty of reason not to."

"Did we invade Canada back then?" Moss whispered to Stone.

Stone shrugged. "Don't know. If we did, we didn't win, so you can't ex pect the history books to say much about it."

Moss grunted. "In that case, the history books wouldn't have much to say about anything that's happened since the War of Secession." But it wasn't the same thing, and he knew it. Since the War of Secession, the USA had been put upon. Everybody knew that. If the United States had been trying to do the muscling in the earlier days and had got licked, too, that wasn't just defeat. It was embarrassment, which

was worse.

"You don't even believe me," the young woman jeered. "Your schools have filled you so full of lies, you don't believe the truth when you hear it. If you want to know what I think, that's pretty sad."

"What makes you so sure you're preaching the Gospel?" Moss said, get ting angry in turn. "I never once heard of a Canuck who wouldn't lie."

He didn't care about milk any more. He wanted to wound the young woman. To his surprise, she laughed. "How do I know I'm telling the truth? Because my maiden name is Laura Secord, that's how. I'm named after my four-times-great aunt, who went through twenty miles of woods in the dark to let the British soldiers know you Yanks had invaded. And do you know what else? Laura Secord was born in Massachusetts. Up here, any school child knows about her."

"Like Paul Revere," Stone muttered, and Moss ruefully nodded.

"Maybe you won that time," he said to Laura who had been born Secord, "but we're here to stay now. You may as well learn to like it."

"Go on your way, Yank," she said, tossing her head. "You'll be older than Methuselah before we learn to like it. And don't be too sure you're here to stay, either. We're still in the fight." The slight Scots burr that distinguished the Canadian accent from the American made her sound very determined indeed.

"Where is your husband?" Percy Stone demanded, his voice suddenly harsh, too.

"Where? Where do you think? In the Canadian Army, where he belongs," the young woman answered. "I told you once—now I tell you again, go on your way." She spoke with an odd authority, as if she owned the land and were entitled to give commands on it.

The breeze picked up her yellow hair, which hung uncurled and unconfined, and threw it out behind her like a flag. Her eyes, granite gray, blazed. If her husband was anywhere near as formidable as she, Moss thought, he'd be one dangerous Canuck with a rifle in his hands. Just for a moment, she put the flier in mind of a Viking, and made him wonder, only a little less than seriously, if she'd charge down on him and Stone.

She did take a step toward the two Americans. It was not a charge, though. Her face crumpled; tears ran down her cheeks. Her voice choked, she said, "Go on. Can you not have at least the simple human decency to let me be? Is that too much to ask?"

Without answering her, without looking at Percy Stone, Moss started riding again. A moment later, the former photographer from Ohio joined him.

"Quite a lot of woman there," Stone remarked after a bit. Jonathan Moss nodded. "Quite a lot of lady there, too," he said. "After a while, you forget the difference between the one and the other, till it up and stares you in the face."

Stone nodded. "A woman like that—" He sighed. "She makes you wish she liked the USA better. If we could win over that kind of people, we'd win the war and the peace both."

"I wonder what they do in Canada instead of Remembrance Day," Moss said. "They've been on top so long, they don't know what it's like to be on the bottom. And"—he tried to forestall his friend—"I don't give a damn about what the first Laura Secord did a hundred years ago."

"Why not?" Stone said, not about to be forestalled. "If she hadn't made it through those woods back then, maybe Canada would have been part of the USA the past hundred years, and we wouldn't have to worry about beating the Canucks now."

"If I'm going to play the game of might-have-beens, I'd sooner play it with the War of Secession, thanks. If we'd won that and kept the damn Rebs in the United States with us, maybe—"

"Fat chance," Percy Stone said. "They had England and France on their side, and Lee and Jackson for generals. Jackson licked us again twenty years later, too. And what did we have? President Abraham Lincoln!" His lip curled contemptuously.

Moss sighed and nodded. Might-have-beens was a stupid game, when you got right down to it. Look back on things, and you couldn't help but see they'd come out the way they had to come out.

VII

Everything squelched. That was Private First Class Reginald Bartlett's over whelming impression of the Red River bottomlands. If you put a foot down on the boggy ground, it squelched. If you dug a spade into it, threw away the dirt, and turned your back for a minute, the hole would be half full of water when you turned around again.

"We have to dig in, men," First Lieutenant Jerome Nicoll said, over and over, as he was in the habit of saying things over and over. "We have to hold on to whatever corners of Sequoyah we can, same as the British and the Bel gians are keeping some of Belgium free from the Hun's boot. They're entrenched in the muck of Flanders, same as we are here. We have to hold on."

"Good thing the British and the Belgians are helpin' us keep the Huns out of Sequoyah, ain't it?" Napoleon Dibble said.

"Sure as hell is," Reggie agreed gravely. "And it's just as much a fact— God damn me to hell if it's not—that what we're doing right here, Nap, is keeping the damnyankees from pouring troops into Belgium."

"For true?" Nap Dibble's eyes got big and round. "I didn't know that." He started digging like a man with a mission, dirt flying from his entrenching tool as if from a steam shovel. "Then this here's important business, I reckon."

Sergeant Pete Hairston coughed a couple of times, then pinned Reggie un der his gaze as an entomologist might have pinned a butterfly to his specimen board. "God damn you to hell is right," the veteran grunted in a low voice, so Bartlett would hear and the still furiously digging Dibble wouldn't.

"Have a heart, Sarge," Reggie said, also quietly. "I wasn't telling him any thing that wasn't so, now was I?"

"Maybe not," Sergeant Hairston answered. "But you sure as hell weren't

telling him anything he could use, neither." He slapped at himself and cursed. "I'll tell you what *I* could use. I could use one of those

goddamn flame-throwing gadgets they're starting to issue, that's what."

"You don't want to just shoot the damnyankees?" Reggie asked. "You want to toast 'em instead?"

"Fuck toasting the damnyankees," Hairston answered. "You got to be crazy to want to get up close enough to 'em to use one o' them flamethrowers. Nah, what I want to do is, I want to wave that damn thing around and toast me about a million billion mosquitoes." He slapped again.

"Ah. Now I get you, Sarge." Reggie Bartlett was slapping, too, and not having much luck. "And after you toasted that million billion, there'd only be about a jillion million billion of the sons of bitches left, and that doesn't count the chiggers or the ticks or the leeches."

"Don't remind me." Not only did Hairston slap, he scratched, too. "And fleas and cooties and all the other little bastards."

"Back in Richmond, I was a druggist's helper," Bartlett said wistfully. "Seems like a hundred years ago now. This time of year, we'd sell camphor candles by the dozen, to keep the mosquitoes away, and zinc-oxide ointment, and little bottles of kerosene with perfume in it to kill lice and nits. Some pretty high-class folks would buy that stuff, too."

"Always knew there was a bunch of lousy bastards runnin' things in Rich mond," Hairston said. "Just goes and proves things, don't it?"

Joe Mopope came mooching along. What he was looking to see, Reggie knew, was whether the entrenchments had got big and deep enough for him to scramble down into them without doing any digging of his own. The Kiowa was a hell of a fighting man. He enjoyed fighting. What he didn't enjoy was the work that went into making sure you stayed alive in between fights.

"Hey, Joe," Reggie called, "you got any secret Indian tricks for keeping the mosquitoes and things off you?"

"You got to do two things," the Kiowa answered. His long face was serious to the point of being somber. All the white men in earshot leaned forward to hear his words of wisdom. Seeing that he had everybody's attention, he gave a dramatic pause as good as anything on a vaudeville stage, then went on, "You got to slap like hell, and

you got to scratch like hell."

"And *you* got to go to hell, Joe," Sergeant Hairston said, but he was laughing. Joe Mopope never cracked a smile. Hairston added, "You got us good that time, but I'm gonna get you back. I know just how, too: hop down here, whip out a spade, and set yourself to diggin'."

"Damnyankees wouldn't treat me this way," Mopope said. He did start entrenching, although without much enthusiasm. "Maybe I should have stayed in town and let them come along."

"Oh, yeah." Hairston's nod was venomously sarcastic. "That would have been really great, Joe. The CSA's let you Indians do pretty much like you

please up here in Sequoyah. Ain't been like that in the USA. After we licked 'em in the War of Secession, they took out after the Sioux, and they been takin' out after their redskins ever since. They purely don't fancy your kind of people, and I don't reckon they'd give you a big kiss now."

Joe Mopope exhaled through his nose: not quite a snort, but close. "Oh, yeah. The president in Richmond treats us halfway decent 'cause he likes us. Come on. It's 'cause he can use us against the Yankees, and everybody knows it."

Hairston stared at him. So did Reggie Bartlett. Little by little, the Kiowa was making him realize a red skin didn't mean the fellow wearing it was stupid. Reggie glanced over at Nap Dibble, who was still working away like a machine. A white skin didn't turn somebody into a college professor all by it self, either.

Maybe, if he'd had the chance to think about, he would have wondered what having a black skin meant. He might even have wondered if it meant anything more than a red one or a white one. But, at that moment, rifle fire broke out to the north: U.S. troops, prodding at the Confederate position. He stuck his entrenching tool in his belt, grabbed his Tredegar off his shoulder, and squatted down on the damp ground to see how bad it would get.

The soldiers in green-gray didn't come swarming and rampaging toward him. Only mosquitoes swarmed hereabouts. Machine guns started hammer ing. Reggie watched the Yankees who were on their feet go flat, some wounded, some prudent enough to try to make sure

they wouldn't be. He fired a couple of rounds, but had no idea whether he hit anyone.

One of the U.S. field guns opened up. The shells tore up the swampy bot tom country, but not so badly as they would have had the ground been harder and drier. And much of their explosive force went down into the muck or straight up, rather than out in all directions.

All the things that made Reggie glad when the U.S. troops were shelling the Confederates made him sorry when his own gunners returned the fire. They didn't hurt the damnyankees nearly so much as he thought they should.

But the U.S. soldiers did not press the attack. Instead, they began to dig in where they lay. Maybe that was all they'd intended to do: push their own lines a little farther forward with this attack so they could try pushing the Confederates back with the next one or the one after that.

"If they had a lot of artillery, they'd ruin us or drive us down into Texas," Pete Hairston said gloomily. "They'd shoot up all the river crossings so we couldn't move supplies into Sequoyah any more, and that'd be that. But they haven't got much more in the way of supplies than we do, so we'll hang on a while longer. Damned if I know how to push 'em back, though."

"Mebbe they'll all drown in the mud an' never be seen no more, Sarge," Nap Dibble suggested.

Had anyone else said it, it would have been a joke, and everyone would

have laughed. The trouble was, Nap meant it, and that was painfully plain to his comrades. In a more gentle voice than he would have used to speak to most of his soldiers, Hairston said, "Only trouble with that is, Nap, we're down here in the mud with 'em, and we'd likely drown first."

"Oh, chat's right, Sarge." Dibble nodded brightly. "I wonder how come I didn't think of that."

"Funny thing about that, ain't it?" Hairston said. He wasn't mocking Dibble, not in the least. He got the most he could from a man who was willing without being very bright. Reggie Bartlett

admired the way the sergeant handled Nap. He doubted he would have had the patience to match it.

Lieutenant Nicoll came by, inspecting the part of the line his company was digging. He nodded. "This is how you do it, men. Dig in well and the Yankees can never dislodge you."

"Dig in well, men," Reggie echoed after Nicoll had gone on his way. "Dig in well and they can't drive you out of Waurika. Dig in well and they can't drive you out of Ryan. Dig in well and you'll have your own grave all nice and ready for those damnyankee sons of bitches to plant you in it."

Joe Mopope's grunt was evidently intended for a laugh. "You face this the way one of my people would," he said. "What will be, will be. Whatever it is, you move toward it. You cannot help moving toward it. It is there. It waits for you. You cannot escape it."

"I joined up as soon as the war started," Bartlett answered. "I've spent too damn much time in the trenches since. A lot of time when I wasn't in the trenches, I was in a damnyankee prison camp because the bastards nabbed me when I was up at the front. I've seen enough now that nothing I see from here on out is going to surprise me a whole hell of a lot."

The other soldiers nodded. They were grimy and unshaven and tired and wet and full of bites. Pete Hairston said, "Whatever happens, I reckon I'm ready for it." The soldiers nodded again.

Joe Mopope studied them. "You are warriors, all of you," he said at last. "You are not just soldiers. You are warriors."

"Whatever the hell we are, it isn't worth gettin' into an uproar about it," Bartlett said. More nods. He fished through his pockets and found a scrap of paper that had stayed dry. More fishing revealed a tobacco pouch, but it was empty. "Anybody have some makings? I'm plumb out."

"I got some," Sergeant Hairston said. Reggie held out his hand with the paper in it. Hairston poured tobacco onto the paper. Nodding his thanks, Reggie rolled the cigarette. After a couple of drags, he felt better.

Sergeant Chester Martin envied U.S. Army engineers. They always seemed to know exactly what they were doing. He knew that wasn't always so, but it

was so often enough to leave him impressed. His own part in the war, he strongly felt, he was making up as he went along.

He also envied the engineers because they were cleaner than he was. A lot of them wore boots that almost reached their knees—cavalry boots—which kept their trousers from getting as filthy as his. They worked now with fussy precision, laying out lengths of white tape from one stick to another.

"What's all this about?" David Hamburger asked. "They laying out the route for the Remembrance Day parade?"

"Couple days too early for May Day," Martin said with a grin, needling the private with a Socialist congresswoman for a sister. "Besides, if it was for that, the tape'd be red, and then you'd get up and march along it and get yourself shot."

"Funny, Sarge," the Hamburger kid said. "Funny like a crutch." But he was grinning, even laughing a little. He hadn't seen much action—things had been quiet since Martin crossed the Potomac to join B Company of the 91st— but he fit in as well as if he'd been wearing green-gray since 1914.

Tilden Russell said, "If he was paradin' for May Day, the Rebs wouldn't shoot at him, not with all the colored troops they've got in their trenches. Those smokes are better true-blue Reds than any Socialist from outta New York City, even if he does have his sister in Congress tellin' Teddy Roosevelt how to run things."

"I don't know why you expect Roosevelt to listen to Flora," David Ham burger said. "He hasn't listened to anybody else since he got elected."

Martin laughed. Corporal Reinholdt, on the other hand, scowled. "Shut up," he said in a flat, hostile voice. "Nobody's gonna make fun of the presi dent of the United States while I'm here to kick his ass."

"Hey, take it easy, Bob," Martin said. "Nobody's getting in an uproar about this."

"Oh, now you're gonna undercut me, are you, Sarge?" Reinholdt

growled. "Must be another goddamn Red yourself."

Had he left off the adjective and smiled, he might have got by with it. As things were, Martin couldn't ignore it. He'd been waiting for this moment since he got here. It had held off longer than he'd expected, but it wouldn't hold off any more. His right hand went into a trouser pocket and came out in a fist. "Get up," he snapped at Reinholdt, who was hunkered down over a tin coffeepot.

"Yeah?" the corporal said as he got to his feet. He was shorter and stockier than Chester Martin; they probably weighed within five pounds of each other. By the way Reinholdt leaned forward, he knew the time was here, too. He took a step toward Martin. "Come in here and take the slot that shoulda been mine, will you?" A season's worth of resentment boiled in him. "I ought to—"

"Oh, shove it up your ass, or I'll—" In the middle of the sentence, without warning, Martin threw a left. Reinholdt ducked with a scornful laugh. Martin laughed, too. He hadn't expected much from that left. The arm still wasn't so strong as it should have been, not after the wound he'd taken.

His right, though . .. The uppercut caught Bob Reinholdt square on the point of the chin. Reinholdt didn't fall over; he was made of stern stuff. But the punch he had on the way ran out of steam before it got near Martin, and was hardly more than a pat when it connected with his ribs. Reinholdt's eyes stayed open, but they weren't seeing much.

Martin had the luxury of deciding whether to kick him in the crotch. He kicked him in the belly instead, with precisely measured viciousness. Reinholdt folded up like a sailor's concertina. Martin hit him in the face again for good measure as he was going down.

"He didn't need that last one," Tilden Russell said, sudden respect in his voice over and above that to which Martin's three stripes entitled him. He studied Reinholdt, who lay unmoving. "He wasn't going anywhere anyway."

"Maybe not." Martin shrugged. "You ever get in a saloon brawl, though, one of the first things you learn is, never let the other guy think he could have licked you if you hadn't got lucky."

"Sarge, I don't think you need to worry about that," David Hamburger said.

Martin wondered whether the kid was right. When the real fighting started, would he be able to trust Reinholdt behind his back with a rifle? He'd have to do some thinking there. For now, though, he'd taken care of what needed taking care of. "Throw some water in his face," he told Hamburger. "He's got no business sleeping on the job."

His hand went back into his pocket. The short, fat steel cylinder he stashed there was just about as good as a set of brass knuckles, and a hell of a lot less conspicuous. Such toys were commonplace in the saloon fights among steelworkers in Toledo; Martin gave hardly more thought to having one than he would have to a box of matches.

Reinholdt groaned and spat blood when David Hamburger flipped water on him. After a while, the battered corporal sat up. His eyes still didn't want to focus. He spat again. This time, the red had a couple of white flecks in it. He looked up at Martin. "What the hell you hit me with?"

"This." Martin showed him his right fist. He didn't show him the steel cylinder he'd had in it. He went on in a pleasant tone of voice: "You better pay attention to what I'm telling you now, Bob. You try messing around with me again and one of us is liable to end up dead. I'm going to tell you one other thing, too—it won't be me. Now, you got all that?"

"I got it," Reinholdt said. Maybe he was even convinced. Martin couldn't tell. The battered corporal tried to get to his feet. On the second try, he made

it. His legs were still! wobbly. He rubbed his jaw. "Shit, feels like I got bounced with a rock." He spoke like a man with considerable knowledge of such things.

"Just remember that next time, is all," Martin said.

Reinholdt nodded, then winced. Martin had caught a couple on the buzzer in his time, too; he knew Reinholdt had what felt like the world's worst hangover, without even the fun of getting drunk first. "Oh, yeah," the corporal said. "I'll remember. Shit, tomorrow's Remembrance Day." He turned and walked down the trench. Privates made a point of getting out of his way as fast as they could.

Later that day, Captain Cremony summoned Martin to the dugout where he was filling out ammunition requisition forms. The company

commander looked up from the forms and said, "I hear you and Reinholdt had a little talk about the weather this morning."

"Sir?" Had Martin looked any more innocent, a halo would have sprung into being above his head. "I don't know what you're talking about, sir."

"Of course you don't—and if pigs had wings, we'd all carry umbrellas," Cremony said with heavy irony.

"If pigs had wings, they'd be generals, sir," Martin answered. "And you're right, we'd all carry umbrellas."

Cremony stared at him, then started to laugh. "If you'd said 'captains,' you'd be on your way back to the guardhouse this minute." His eyes narrowed. "But you're not going to distract me with a joke." Since that was what Martin had hoped to do, he stood still, a serious expression on his face, as if the idea had never entered his mind. He'd had plenty of practice looking opaque for officers. Captain Cremony grunted. "Dammit, Martin, I understand why this happened, but the timing was very bad."

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir," Martin said. "I couldn't really take care of that as well as I might have, though. If a fellow wants to talk about the weather right then and there, sometimes you just have to listen to him."

"Sergeant, if there's no more talk of the weather between the two of you, I will forget this discussion," the company commander said. "If there is, I'll have to remember it. After all, tomorrow is Remembrance Day, and we'll have all sorts of things to remember then."

"Oh, yes, sir," Martin said. "I know that, sir. In a way, I'm just as glad Bob and I had this little talk now instead of waiting till later. We might have said sharper things to each other later, if you know what I mean."

"As I said, I'm not remembering any of this. And I'd better not have a rea son to remember it. I'm telling that to you, and I'll tell it to Reinholdt. If I do have reason to remember it, you'll both be sorry. Dismissed, Sergeant."

Martin tromped over boards and through mud back to his section. "When he got there, he found Bob Reinholdt drinking coffee out of the side of his

mouth. He didn't say anything to Reinholdt about Captain Cremony's warn ing; that would have made him into the teacher's pet. He'd seen that Cremony knew what he was doing. The company commander would get the message across.

Reinholdt didn't say anything to him, either. That suited him fine.

An engineer came along the trench. Every so often, he would pause, get up on the firing step, and peer through binoculars south toward Round Hill, Virginia, and the Confederate lines in front of it. Then he'd scribble something in a notebook, go on a little farther, and look south again.

"You don't mind me saying so, sir, that's a hell of a good way to get your self shot," Chester Martin remarked.

"Do tell?" the engineer said, as if the notion had never crossed his mind. "Chance I take, that's all. Have to hope the niggers in those Rebel trenches over yonder can't shoot."

"Haven't seen any sign of that, sir, have to tell you," Martin said. "They don't seem much different than white troops, far as that goes. They throw a lot of lead around, and every so often somebody gets hit. The bullet doesn't care who shot it, only where it's going."

"Chance I take," the engineer repeated, and worked his way down the trench line, not making a fuss, just doing his job. No cries of alarm rose, nor shouts for stretcher-bearers, so Martin supposed he got away with it.

Dusk fell. Martin rolled himself in a blanket, against the chill and against mosquitoes both. He fell asleep right away. He almost always fell asleep right away. He woke up every bit as fast, too, commonly grabbing for a weapon.

Sometime in the middle of the night, a horrible clatter and rumble had him on his feet with his Springfield halfway to his shoulder before he realized that, whatever else it was, it wasn't gunfire. It wasn't C.S. bombing aeroplanes overhead, either. "What the hell?" he said. "What the hell?"

"It's the barrels coming up, Sarge," David Hamburger said in the dark ness. "Remembrance Day today."

"That's right," Martin breathed. "Remembrance Day today."

In Philadelphia, Flora Hamburger discovered she'd had only the vaguest notion of what Remembrance Day meant. Up till then, she'd lived her whole life in New York City. Her home town observed Remembrance Day, of course. How could it be otherwise? April 22, the day marking the end of the Second Mexican War, had been a national day of mourning ever since. But New York City did not observe Remembrance Day the way the rest of the United States did.

Oh, there were always military parades and speeches, the same as there were elsewhere in the country. But there were also always Socialist counter- demonstrations and hecklers in New York City; Flora had been caught up in the Remembrance Day riots of 1915. The Socialist Party was not about to let Remembrance Day steal its May Day thunder.

In Philadelphia, though, the Socialist Party maintained a much smaller presence. Philadelphia was a city of government, and therefore, overwhelmingly, a city of Democrats. It was also, far more than New York, a city of soldiers.

No one mocked here. No one heckled here. People crowded along the parade route to cheer the soldiers and the Soldiers' Circle men of prewar conscription classes—not so many of them left, not with the guns so hungry these past nearly three years—and the graying veterans of the Second Mexican War and the aged veterans of the War of Secession and even, riding along in a motorcar, a pair of ancient veterans of the Mexican War, the last war against a foreign power the United States had won.

Church bells pealed. Flora knew the churches were packed, too, packed with people lamenting past U.S. defeats and praying for future victory. Someone in the crowd on the far side of Chestnut Street from the platform where Flora sat with the rest of Congress and other government dignitaries held up a placard that seemed to sum up the mood as well as anything: IT'S OUR TURN THIS TIME.

Aeroplanes buzzed overhead—U.S. fighting scouts, flying in swarms to make sure the CSA did not interrupt the day's observances. Flora craned her neck to watch them. They put her in mind of dragonflies, and were far more interesting than the endless parade of soldiers and marching bands and veterans.

As he had a way of doing at functions, Hosea Blackford sat close

to her. Seeing her looking up into the sky, he said, "It was even more interesting a couple of years ago, when the Confederates stood on the Susquehanna. Then there were dogfights above the parade, and the C.S. bombers dropped their toys not far from the parade route."

"It was more interesting in New York City, too," Flora said. "I was there for the riots that year."

Blackford frowned. "I wish they had never happened. They did the Party a great deal of damage around the country, damage from which it has not entirely recovered even now."

Flora said, "Nobody knows to this day who threw the bomb that started the riot, whether it was a Socialist or a Mormon who sympathized with the rebellion in Utah."

"That's true," the congressman from Dakota said. "Bun it's also true that Socialists did most of the rioting, no matter how the trouble started."

"What if it is?" Flora said. "What if it is? We were trying to do something to stop this useless, senseless war. It's more than anyone else in the country was doing. It's more than anyone else in the Socialist Party was doing, too," she added pointedly.

"How could anyone stop the war by then?" Hosea Blackford said.
"We

were fighting the Confederate States from the Gulf of California to the Atlantic, against Canada heavily from Winnipeg east and here and there farther west, too, and against England and France and Japan on the high seas. It was too big to stop. It still is."

"It should never have started," Flora said. "A Hapsburg prince wasn't reason enough to throw the world on the fire."

"Maybe you're even right," Blackford said. "But when Roosevelt called on us to vote for war credits, what would have happened if we had said no? I would not be in Congress now, you would not be in Congress now, none of us would be in Congress now."

"My brother would not be in Virginia now," Flora said. "My sister would not be a widow now. My nephew would not be growing up without ever hav ing the chance to know his father now. If you think I would not go back to New York and make that bargain, Mr.

Blackford, you are mistaken."

"You shame me," he said quietly.

"I think the Party needs shaming," Flora answered. "I think the Party— especially outside of New York City—has become too bourgeois for its own good, and forgotten the oppressed workers and peasants of the world. If the Socialist Party in the USA goes to war against the Labour Party in England and the Socialist Party in France, where is the international solidarity of Socialism? I'll tell you where—down in the trenches with a rifle, that's where."

Blackford did not reply. Instead, he made a small production out of lighting a cigar. Before he had to say anything more, a rumbling, clanking rattle and ecstatic shouts from the crowd farther up the parade route made Flora forget about the conversation, at least for a little while. Like everyone else, she was staring at the enormous mechanical contraptions lumbering along Chestnut Street-President Theodore Roosevelt's voice rose above the racket from the snorting monsters. "Bully!" Roosevelt shouted, as enthusiastic as a small boy over a tin motorcar. "By George, what a bully pack of machines they are!"

They were impressive, if size and noise were the criteria for impressiveness. Each had a cannon at the snout and bristled with machine guns. They were the deadliest-looking things Flora had ever seen. The fighting scouts in the sky were killing machines, too, but graceful and elegant killing machines. The barrels were as graceful and elegant as so many rhinoceros.

Each of them had in it a man standing up so that the top half of his body was outside the square cupola in the middle of the machine's roof. Each of those soldiers saluted the platform, and Roosevelt in particular, as his barrel waddled past.

"Now go into the fight!" Roosevelt shouted to one barrel after another. "Now go into the fight, and teach all those who dare trifle with the might of the United States the error and folly of their ways!"

He was indeed like a boy playing with tin motorcars and lead soldiers and aeroplanes carved from balsa wood. But his toys really burned and bled and crashed—and made other, similar toys with different markings and colors burn and bleed and crash. He seemed not to understand that.

Flora wondered how such a blind spot was possible. She turned to Hosea Blackford with a question that had, on the surface, little to do with their previous argument: "Roosevelt fought in war. How can he take it so lightly?"

"Because he is what he seems, I suppose," Blackford answered. "Because he really does believe everything he preaches. And, not least, I suppose, because he enjoyed himself and won glory when he went to war."

"But he's been in the trenches now," Flora persisted. "He knows there is no glory in fighting against cannon and machine guns. My brother's sergeant helped him take cover when the Confederates shelled the part of the line he was visiting—David has written me about it. How can he not see?"

"He sees the country going forward. He doesn't see the suffering he's cre ating to make it go in the direction he wants," Blackford said slowly. "That's the best answer I can give you, and I doubt he could give you a better one."

Flora wondered about that. Roosevelt was a good deal more eloquent than she'd expected him to be. But he was hardly an introspective man, so perhaps Blackford had a point after all.

The clank and rattle and rumble of the barrels faded in the distance. So, more slowly, the noise of the crowd faded, too. A sort of muted thunder remained. Flora had heard it whenever things grew quiet along the parade route. She wondered what it was. It put her in mind of the roar of the sea by the oceanside, but more by its steadiness than by the sound itself.

Up at the front of the platform, President Roosevelt approached a microphone—which was, Flora thought irreverently, like a fat man approaching a chocolate cake, for the president had no more need of the one than the fat fellow did of the other.

"Listen!" Roosevelt called to the crowd. Pointing to the south, he went on, "Do you know what that is?" Flora realized the low reverberations were coming from that direction.

"Tell us!" somebody—probably a paid shill—called from the crowd.

"I will tell you," Roosevelt said. "That is the sound of our heavy

guns, shelling the forces of the Confederate States still on U.S. soil. We are also shelling them on their own territory, and the Canadians and British opposing us in the north. This is a Remembrance Day they shall remember forever, yes, remember with fear and trembling."

How the people cheered! Listening to them sent a chill through Flora. The war was not popular in her home district, nor anything about it. The war itself was probably unpopular in Philadelphia, too. But victory, and what victory would bring—those were popular. Flora's district was full of immigrants,

newcomers to the United States, who didn't bear the full weight of a half century's resentment and hatred and humiliation on their shoulders.

It was different here. The Army of Northern Virginia had occupied Philadelphia at the end of the War of Secession, as it had come so close to doing in this war. The government had fled here in the Second Mexican War and the present struggle. Philadelphians didn't merely want peace—they wanted revenge, wanted it with a brooding desire frightening in its intensity.

Lost in her own thoughts, she'd missed some of what Roosevelt was saying. "And if we have suffered," he thundered now, "our foes have suffered more. If they have overrun some of our sacred soil, we stand in arms on more of theirs. If our cities have suffered from their bombing aeroplanes, their cities have suffered more from our mighty bombers. And we advance, my friends. We advance! Everywhere on the continent of North America, the foe is in retreat.

"So I say to you, stand fast! The enemy's hope is that our resolve will falter. They pray in Richmond, they pray in Canada, that we shall weary of the struggle. They pray that we shall throw in our hand, our winning hand, and give them at the table what they cannot win on the field of battle. Will we fall into their trap, my fellow citizens of the United States?"

"No!" the crowd cried, a great and angry roar.

Hosea Blackford leaned toward Flora. "Now you see the danger of opposing the war effort too strongly."

"No, I don't," she answered. "I only hear a lot of wind."

Blackford shook his head. "It's worse than that. Suppose we do

every thing we can to end the war . . . *and Teddy Roosevelt goes ahead and wins it anyhow?* Who would ever take us seriously again? If Lincoln had somehow won the War of Secession, don't you think the Republicans would have tarred the Democrats with the brush of peace? Don't you think Roosevelt would do the same to us—and enjoy every minute of it?"

That was a larger political calculation than Flora had ever tried to make. "Do you really imagine a victory like that is possible?" she asked as the president reached another rhetorical crescendo.

Through the bellowed applause of the crowd, Congressman Blackford gave an answer that chilled her though the day was warm and sunny: "I begin to think it may be."

Lieutenant Colonel Irving Morel's barrel rumbled and clattered south across no-man's-land toward the Confederate defenses east of White House, Tennessee. It bucked and bounced over the broken ground like a toy boat in a stormy sea, or perhaps more as if Morrell were riding a three-legged horse no one had ever bothered breaking for the saddle.

Now he used hand signals almost as automatically as he breathed. *Right,*

then straight, he ordered the driver, and the ungainly vehicle steered around a shell hole that might have made it bog down.

There just ahead stood the first barbed-wire belt in front of the enemy's trenches: an obstacle as deadly to infantry as flypaper to flies. *Straight,* Morrell signaled, and the barrel crushed the barbed wire under better than thirty tons of metal.

With a noise like heavy hail on a tin roof, machine-gun bullets started slapping the armored front of the barrel. Some of them ricocheted off the cupola, too. None, fortunately, hit the armored vision louvers. Even with those louvers closed down tight, lead splash was dangerous.

There, straight ahead, was the reinforced-concrete box from which the machine gun was spitting death. *Halt,* Morrell signaled to the driver, and the barrel stopped. "Take it out!" Morrell screamed to the two artillerymen at the nose cannon. He didn't know whether they heard him or not. What he wanted, though, was plain enough.

The cannon bellowed. Inside the barrel, the report was hard to hear over the noise of the two White truck engines. The cordite fumes from the explosion made Morrell cough. But, peering through the vision slits, he watched the machine-gun position crumble to rubble. *Straight,* he signaled to the driver, and the barrel crushed another belt of wire.

By hook or by crook, General Custer had managed to assemble a striking column of more than three hundred barrels. Every one of them—every one of them that hadn't broken down or bogged down before it got this far—was chewing a path through the wire for the infantry that was following.

Another, last, belt of wire surmounted, ground down into the mud, and nothing more stood between the barrel and the foremost Confederate trench. Here and there, a few brave men who had withstood the short, fierce preliminary bombardment and who were not overwhelmed by fear of the oncoming barrels popped their heads above the parapet and blazed away with their Tredegars.

Morrell needed to give no orders there. The two machine guns on either side of the barrel started chattering. They could not bear straight ahead, but the nose cannon could. And other barrels were advancing side by side with Morrell's; their machine guns helped sweep out the space in front of his traveling fortress, just as his swept the space in front of them.

As he bore down on the Confederate soldiers, some of them broke and fled. Bullets sent most of those spinning and writhing to the ground. The rest fought on in place till they too were slain.

Over the parapet climbed the barrel. The machine gunners inside pounded enfilading fire up and down the trench, as far as each traverse. The advance had given them a target of which men of their trade could normally but dream.

Then the barrel was over the trench, almost falling into it, crushing the

ground underneath the tracks, helping to level its own way down and forward. Shells had damaged the far wall of the trench. Engines screaming, the barrel climbed over onto the ground between the first trench and the second.

One of the machine gunners was holding a hurt wrist from that

awkward descent. He kept feeding ammunition into the gun for his partner to fire, though. All six machine guns, even the pair in the rear, were blazing away now, making things lively for any Confederate soldiers unlucky enough to be nearby.

"Keep moving!" Morrell shouted to the driver. "We've got to keep moving." The young fellow at the barrel's complicated controls raised both eye brows to show he didn't understand. *Straight,* Morrell signaled resignedly. But he couldn't keep from talking, even if he couldn't hear himself, let alone make anyone else hear: "We've got to keep driving them. If we hit them hard enough now, we can crack this line, and if we crack this line, Nashville isn't worth anything to them any more, because we'll shell it flat."

Left, he signaled the driver, waggling his hand to show he didn't need a whole lot of left. He saw a way over the next trench line, one not quite so drastic as the barrel had used in its first descent. They went down a ways, they came back up, and the machine guns kept hammering.

He wondered how the rest of the barrels were doing, and the U.S. infantry moving forward with and after them. He couldn't tell, not stuck inside the way he was. *Wireless telegraph,* he thought. *We need barrels with wireless telegraph sets inside, so we can keep track of what's going on all over the field.* He shrugged. If it didn't happen in this war, it would in the next, whenever that came along.

Meanwhile, he realized he did have a way to find out what was going on around him. He undogged the roof hatch, threw it open, stood up, and looked ahead and to the rear. "Bully," he said softly. "Oh, bully."

A few of the barrels had bogged down in trenches and shell holes. Others had taken hits from artillery or were otherwise disabled, some pouring pillars of greasy black smoke into the sky to mark their pyres. But most, like his, were still rumbling forward—rumbling forward and driving all before them.

The artillerymen fired the barrel's nose cannon. Out here in the open air, the noise was terrific, like a clap of doom. The high-explosive shell exploded in front of a knot of Confederate soldiers and knocked them flying. Some, Morrell saw, were colored men. That confirmed intelligence reports. The shell didn't care. It did its damage most impartially.

He took another look over his shoulder, and pumped a fist in the air in de light. In the wake of the barrels, and coming up even with the slower ones, were infantrymen in green-gray, swarming forward and out to the flanks to take possession of the ground the barrels cleared.

Not all the Confederate troops, white or Negro, were breaking. Morrell

rapidly discovered that, while standing up so his head and torso were out of the barrel gave him a far better view of the field than he could have had inside the machine, it also made him a far better target. Bullets cracked past his head. Others clanged and ricocheted off the cupola with assorted metallic sounds of fury.

After half a minute or so, he decided he'd be tempting fate if he stayed out there any longer. He ducked back into the infernal gloom and fumes inside the barrel, and slammed the hatch shut after him. The driver and the rest of the crew stared at him as if convinced he'd gone utterly mad. His grin was compounded of excitement and triumph. He stuck up a thumb to show how things were going on the battlefield as a whole, then signaled to the driver. *Straight,* his hands said. The driver, eyes wide, saluted before pressing on.

The crew cheered loud enough to be heard over the roar and rumble of engines, tracks, and guns.

How far had they come? Morrell was sure they'd made better than a mile, maybe even a mile and a half, and noon was—he checked his watch—still more than an hour away. If they could keep it up, they'd have a hole miles wide and three or four miles deep torn in the Confederate line by the time the sun set on this most spectacular Remembrance Day of all time.

"Keep going," he muttered. "We've got to keep going."

Plenty of men in butternut were inclined to disagree with him. The C.S. soldiers defending the line above Nashville understood its importance every bit as well as did the U.S. attackers. The roar off to his left was a barrel taking a direct hit from a shell. Another shell struck in front of his own machine, showering the armored chassis with fragments and lumps of earth.

Speed up, he signaled the driver, and the barrel rattled forward. As if he were in an aeroplane, he went through random right and left

tarns to throw off the enemy gunners' aim. Hitting a moving, dodging target was not something the crews of field pieces practiced. Shells burst near the barrel, but none hit. This was not like shelling infantrymen: a miss, here, was as good as a mile.

One of the two artillerymen at the nose cannon waved to him and pointed. He nodded, then signaled the driver to halt. They fired their gun once, twice in quick succession. Peering through his louvers, Morrell watched men tumble away from the carriage of one of the CSA's nasty three-inch guns. They did not get up again. *Straight,* he signaled the driver.

A moment later, he caught sight of another barrel, a little off to the right and several hundred yards ahead. He snarled something he was glad no one else could hear. He thought he'd been one of the leaders of this assault. How had that other bastard got so far ahead of him? He was green with jealousy, greener than his uniform.

Then he took another, longer, look. Jealousy faded, replaced by hot anticipation. That wasn't a U.S. barrel—it was one of the rhomboids the CSA built,

copying the design from the British. Barrels had seldom met other barrels in combat. His mouth stretched wide in a grin. A new encounter was going onto the list.

He got the driver's attention, then pointed southwest till the fellow spotted the Confederate barrel—*tanks,* the Rebels sometimes called them, which struck Morrell as a silly name. He clenched his fist to show the driver he wanted to engage the enemy machine. The youngster nodded and turned toward it.

The Confederate barrel had spotted him, too, and began making a pon derous turn of its own to bring both its sponson-mounted cannon to bear on him. Since neither machine could move at anything much above a walking pace, the engagement developed with the leisure, though hardly with the grace, of two sailing ships of the line.

Flame burst from the muzzle of one of the Confederate barrel's guns. Use lessly, Morrell braced himself for the impact of the shell. It missed. The artillerymen waved to him. He signaled the driver to halt. They fired. They missed, too. *Straight,* he signaled the driver. *Speed up.*

Perhaps unnerved by his lumbering charge, the crew of the

Confederate barrel's other cannon also missed their shot. His own gunners waved again. The barrel halted. They fired. Smoke and flame spurted from the enemy. "Hit!" Morrell screamed. "We got him!" Hatches on the sides and top of the Confederate machine flew open. The crew began bailing out. Morrell swung his own barrel sideways, so his machine gunners could give them a broadside.

And then the command was *Straight* again. He stood up once more to look around, this time for only a moment. Fewer U.S. barrels were near than before. More had been hit or bogged down or broken down. But the survivors—and there were many—still advanced, and the U.S. infantry with them.

Maybe they would go on all the way to the Cumberland. Maybe the Confederates, with the advantage of moving on unwrecked ground, would patch together some kind of line and halt them short of the river. In a way, it hardly mattered. The big U.S. guns would move forward, miles forward. From their new position, they'd pound Nashville to pieces.

"Breakthrough," Irving Morrell said, and ducked down into the barrel again.

Gas shells didn't sound quite like shrapnel or high explosive. They gurgled as they flew through the air, and burst with a report different from those of other rounds. "Get your gas helmets on!" Sergeant Jake Featherston screamed as the shells began raining down around the guns of his battery.

He threw on his own rubberized-burlap gas helmet and stared through its murky glass windows toward the line above Round Hill, Virginia, the line that

had been quiet for so long but was quiet no more. Here came barrels, a few, widely spaced, rumbling toward and then through the belts of barbed wire in front of the trenches of the Army of Northern Virginia. Yankee machine guns blazed away, making the soldiers in those trenches, black and white, keep their heads down. Men in green-gray swarmed like ants in the barrels' wake, and between them as well.

"Range is 4,500 yards, boys," Featherston shouted, the gas helmet muffling his voice. "Now we make 'em pay their dues."

Normally, the three-inch field guns fired half a dozen rounds a minute. In an emergency, they could triple that for a little while. They could triple it for a little while with the gun crews unencumbered, anyhow. In the stifling gas helmets, they didn't come close. Even keeping up the normal rate of fire was a strain while wearing the helmets. Featherston felt he couldn't breathe. His head pounded. Sweat fogged the glass portholes through which he had to watch the world.

All the guns in the battery were firing, though. Jake got a blurrier view than he wanted, but he shouted with glee to watch shells rain down on the damnyankees now that they'd come out of their trenches. The range was too long for him to be able to see individual U.S. soldiers ripped and torn and thrown aside like rag dolls, but he could watch the shells burst and imagine the butchery they were meting out. He had seen enough battlefields to know all too well what artillery did to soft human flesh.

He could also see that his battery and the rest of the Confederate guns on Round Hill and farther to the rear were not going to be able to keep the damnyankees from going forward. Already, barrels were in among the trenches of the Army of Northern Virginia, lashing them with machine-gun fire at close range. Hitting something as small as a barrel at a range of two and a half miles wasn't a matter of precise aiming. Dumb luck had a lot more to do with it.

Reserves started going forward to help stem the tide. But Yankee artillery was chewing up the ground behind the trenches, too. Reinforcements took casualties long before they got close enough to the front to do any good. Featherston couldn't tell whether they were white troops or colored. Whoever they were, they suffered.

And the U.S. artillery hadn't forgotten about Round Hill, either. Along with the gas shells, the Yankees flung around high explosive and shrapnel as if they'd have to pay for what they didn't use up. One of Jake's shell-jerkers collapsed with a shriek, clutching at his belly.

The leftmost piece of the six-gun battery fell silent. Featherston dashed over to its emplacement to find out why. If a hit had taken out the crew but left the gun intact, he'd yank a man or two off the rest of the guns in the battery and keep all of them in action.

He discovered the crew was down, but so was the gun. The carriage was

wrecked; it had taken a direct hit from what, by the size of the crater, had to be a six- or eight-inch shell. Cursing fate—and the U.S. heavy artillery that overmatched its Confederate counterpart—he dashed back to his own gun.

Stretcher-bearers had carried away the wounded crewman. Jake had to stop and rest before he could do anything else. His heart pounded like a sledgehammer in his chest. He wanted to yank off the gas helmet, but didn't dare; gas shells were still falling, releasing their deadly contents in bursts of oily vapor.

Like furious machines, the gun crews of his battery kept hitting the Yan kees as hard as they could. They shortened the range again and again, as the green-gray infantry forced its way into and past one trench line after another.

"Bastards are going to be coming up the hill at us," Jake snarled, trying to suck enough air into his lungs to satisfy him.

"We'll give 'em shrapnel, Sarge," Michael Scott said, slamming home an other shell. "Hell, we've got a few rounds of case shot. We'll give 'em that." The thin-walled shells of case shot were filled with lead balls. In effect, they converted a field piece to a giant shotgun.

A great roar off to the right meant a Yankee shell had found the limber that carried ammunition for one of the guns there. Jake was a stickler for making sure his crews didn't park the limbers too close to the guns, and also that they built sandbag barricades between the ones and the others. In case the shells went up, such precautions did only so much good.

He hurried over, panting like a dog. The gun remained intact. So did the loader and the assistant gun layer. The rest of the crew was down, dead or wounded. "We've still got enough men to fight this piece, even if we have to haul ammo from the dump." He looked around. "Where's the niggers who take care of the horses and do your cookin'? They can carry shells."

"Titus!" the gun layer shouted. "Sulla!" No black men emerged. He shook his head. "Maybe they got it, too, or maybe they're hidin' somewheres and they ain't comin' out, or else they took off runnin' when the shelling started."

"Worthless bastards," Featherston snarled, ignoring the possibility that the black men might be hurt or dead. He pointed north, toward

the front. "Niggers up there'll run, too. You wait."

He would have elaborated—it was a theme on which he was always ready to elaborate—but more gas shells came in just then. He smelled something horrible. Whatever it was, the absorbent cartridge in his gas helmet did absolutely nothing to keep it out. His guts knotted. He gulped. A moment later, he tore off the gas helmet and was down on his hands and knees heaving as if he'd drunk too much bad whiskey.

He wasn't the only one, either—both the loader and the gun layer from the shattered crew vomited beside him. "Puke gas," the loader moaned between spasms. "Damnyankees are shootin' puke gas at us."

Featherston's reply meant, *Really? I hadn't noticed,* but was rather more pungently phrased.

Another salvo of gas shells burst on Round Hill. Jake spat foul-tasting slime from his mouth, then sucked in a long, painful breath. The breath proved painful not only because he'd just puked his guts up and felt as if he'd heave some more. His lungs burned. He coughed and gagged and started to choke.

"That's phosgene!" he wheezed, and yanked the gas helmet over his head again. But then he did have to vomit again. He couldn't do it inside the gas helmet, so he took it off. If he inhaled enough phosgene to kill him while he was heaving . . . well, he felt like dying, anyhow.

He might have smoked a hundred packs of cigarettes in a minute and a half. He gasped and choked and wondered if he would fall over right there. The gun layer had. His eyes were wide and staring; his face went from purple toward black as he fought for air his lungs couldn't give him.

Jake threw on the gas helmet. He started to puke again, but made himself keep things down even though he thought he would explode. The gas helmet did hold out the phosgene, and the Yankees didn't send over any more shells full of vomiting gas, or none that hit near him.

The loader on the gun with the wrecked limber was also down, choking. He wasn't so bad off as the gun layer, but he was in no shape to fight, either. Slowly, staggering as he walked, Jake went back to his own piece.

A couple of its crewmen were heaving and choking, too, but the rest, no matter what sort of anguish in which they found themselves, kept on fighting the gun. The range had shortened again, too; if the Yankees hadn't gained a mile of ground since the attack started, Featherston would have been astonished.

And they were still coming on, too. Some of their barrels had bogged down. Some were on fire. But the ones that survived still moved like broad-shouldered behemoths among the advancing infantry, hunting out pockets of resistance and blasting them out of existence. U.S. artillery kept on pounding not only Confederate guns but also the ground across which C.S. reserves had to come.

Here and there along the line, men in butternut were moving back, not forward. Flesh and blood could bear only so much. As the Confederate troops retreated, they entered the zone the U.S. artillery was pounding behind the line. They took casualties there. "Serves you right, you bastards," Featherston growled. But the disorder and fear spreading through the retreating soldiers also infected the reserves who had been going forward. Whatever chance there might have been for a counterattack dissolved.

In growing horror and fury, Jake realized the front was not going to hold. The Army of Northern Virginia wouldn't lose a few hundred yards of ground, to be regained later with bayonet and grenade. This was going to be a bad defeat, so bad, probably, that the battery would not be able to stay on Round Hill.

He went over to the two guns that were out of action and removed their sights and breech blocks, which he threw into the limber for his own gun. The Yanks would get no use from the weapons they captured. Then he checked the horses that would have to pull away the four surviving cannon. They'd come through everything better than he'd dared hope. If they'd gone down, he would have had to disable all six field guns in the battery before withdrawing.

Up Round Hill came the Confederates who'd run farthest and fastest. Most of those faces, close enough now for him to see the fright on them, were black. Behind the shield of the gas helmet, his own face twisted into a savage grin. "Canister!" he shouted.

Scott loaded the round into the gun. Jake twisted the elevation screw to lower the piece as far as it would go. He peered over open sights at the men in butternut heading his way.

"What are you doing, Sarge?" Scott asked.

"Fire!" Featherston screamed, and the loader obediently yanked the lan yard- Jake whooped to watch the colored cowards blown to bits. "Another round of the same!" he cried, and then, "Fire!" He shook his fist at the black soldiers still on their feet in front of him. "You won't fight the damnyankees, you shitty coons, you got to deal with me!"

He brought out the four surviving guns from the battery, brought them out and brought them back to the new line the Army of Northern Virginia was piecing together behind Round Hill. As the day ended, he shelled the first Yankees coming over the hill. He set two barrels on fire. The U.S. infantry drew back. When fighting ebbed with the light, he sat by a little fire, too keyed up to sleep, writing and writing in the Gray Eagle notebook.

Lieutenant General George Custer stood at the top of the ridge in front of White House, Tennessee, the ridge the Confederates had defended so long and so tenaciously. Back in the distant days of peace, the ridge had been wooded. Now . . . now God might have intended it as a toothpick and splinter farm. Custer struck dramatic poses as automatically as his heart beat. He struck one now, for the benefit of the military correspondents who hovered close to hear what pearls of wisdom might drop from his lips.

"From here, gentlemen, I can see the waters of the Cumberland, and Nashville across the river from them," he declared bombastically. "From here, gentlemen, I can see—victory."

The correspondents scribbled like men possessed. Major Abner Dowling turned away so no one would have to see his face. *From here, gentlemen,* he thought, */ can see a fat, pompous old fraud who's ever so much luckier than he deserves and who hasn't the faintest inkling how lucky he is.*

He turned back toward the general commanding First Army. He still felt little but scorn for Custer's generalship, but he was having a certain amount of

trouble holding on to that scorn. For the sake of his own peace of mind, he worked at it, but it wasn't easy.

Truth was, Custer had gone far out on a limb—and taken Dowling with him—backing a doctrine directly contrary to the one coming out of the War Department. Truth was, he had won a sizable victory here by going his own way. Truth was, he *could* see Nashville from where he stood, and the guns of First Army could hit Nashville from near where he stood. Truth was, the CSA had left on this side of the Cumberland only battered units falling back toward their crossings.

Truth was, Custer, as he had done in the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War, had somehow managed to make himself into a hero.

"General, we've been using barrels for a year now," a reporter said. "Why haven't they done so well for us up till this latest battle?"

"They are a new thing in the world," Custer answered. "As with any new thing, figuring out how best to employ them took a bit of doing." He strutted and preened, like a rooster displaying before hens. "I came up with the notion of using them as a mass rather than in driblets, tried it out, and the results were as you have seen."

Dowling turned away again. The really infuriating thing was that, in boasting thus, Custer was for once telling the exact and literal truth. From the minute he'd first set eyes on barrels, he'd wanted to line them up in a great column and send them plowing straight into the enemy. Everyone had told him he couldn't do that—doctrine forbade it. He'd gone ahead and done it anyhow—and he'd forced a breakthrough where there had been no such creature in going on three years of war.

There would be considerable wailing and gnashing of teeth in Philadelphia on account of what he'd done. There already had been, in fact. Custer had rubbed the War Department's nose in the fact that it hadn't had the faintest idea what to do with barrels once it got them. The only way a man got away with committing such a sin was to be proved extravagantly right. Custer had done that, too.

Another reporter spoke up: "Having beaten the Rebels once in this way, General, can we lick them again?"

"We *are* licking them," Custer said. "Not only did First Army smash them here in Tennessee, but I understand the fighting also goes well in Virginia, and that our forces may soon regain our nation's capital from the enemy's hands." He struck another pose. "This was a Remembrance Day we and our enemies shall long remember."

Dowling listened to that in something close to amazement. Custer must indeed have had a surfeit of glory if he was willing to share some with generals operating on other fronts. He was, in his own way, a patriot. Maybe that accounted for it. Dowling couldn't think of anything else that would.

"Not quite what I meant, sir," the reporter said. "Can we here in western

Tennessee strike the Confederates another blow as strong as the one we just dealt them?"

"Well, why the devil not?" Custer said grandly. The correspondents laughed and clapped their hands.

Without trying hard, Dowling could come up with half a dozen reasons why the devil not, starting with the need to refit and reinforce the barrels and ending with the geography. Breaking through on the other side of the Cumberland would be anything but easy. It wasn't so great a river as the St. Lawrence, which had bedeviled U.S. strategy throughout the war, but it was by no means inconsiderable, either. Dowling wished Custer wouldn't be so damned blithe and breezy. Custer's adjutant wished any number of things about him, none of which looked like coming true.

With a sigh, Dowling turned away from Custer. In doing so, he bumped into a U.S. officer of less exalted rank. "Beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Didn't see you were there till too late."

"No damage done, Major," Lieutenant Colonel Irving Morrell said. Dowling nodded his thanks. Having led the column of barrels that made the breakthrough, Morrell was in very good odor at First Army headquarters. "I'm glad I found you," he went on now. "I have an idea I want to put to you."

"Yes, sir. I'm listening," Dowling said. Even though Morrell stood per fectly still before him, the man seemed to quiver slightly, as if he were a telegraph wire with a great many messages speeding back and forth on it. Dowling suspected he didn't have *an* idea—odds were he had a whole great flock of them, each struggling against the others to be born.

"Major," Morrell said, "I think I know how we can secure a bridgehead on the far side of the Cumberland."

"You have my attention, sir," Dowling said. That was surely the problem Custer would face when he was done celebrating the victory he'd just achieved. "Tell me how you would go about it." Dowling did not say he would give Morrell Custer's ear if he liked the idea. A man full of so many ideas would be able to figure that out for himself.

And Morrell started to talk. He wasn't a particularly fluent talker, but he was extraordinarily lucid. He had no bluster in him. After years at General Custer's side, that in itself made listening to him a pleasure for Dowling. It was no wonder, the adjutant thought, that *Custer* and *bluster* rhymed.

Morrell also knew what he was talking about. Again, Dowling suppressed any invidious comparisons with the general commanding First Army. Morrell knew what resources First Army had, and what reinforcements it was likely to receive. He knew what part of those could be committed to his scheme, and he had as good a notion as a U.S. soldier could of what the CSA could bring to bear against them.

When he was through, Dowling paid him a high compliment: "This is no humbug." He followed it with one he reckoned even higher: "Anyone would think you were still on the General Staff."

But Morrell pursed his lips and shook his head. "I enjoy serving in the field too much to be happy in Philadelphia, Major."

That he had in common with Custer, at least before Custer had got old and plump and fragile. Dowling had questioned a great many things about Custer, but never his courage. That courage was one of the things that led him to go after the enemy piledriver fashion. It had led Lieutenant Colonel Morrell in a different direction.

Abner Dowling glanced back toward Custer. His illustrious superior had begun to run out of bombast; some of the correspondents were drifting off to write up their stories and wire them to their newspapers or magazines. Dowli ng didn't feel any great compunction about leading Morrell through the knot of men around Custer and saying, "Excuse me, General, but this officer would like your opinion on something."

Custer looked miffed; he hadn't been completely finished. But then he rec ognized the man at Dowling's side. "Ah—Lieutenant Colonel Morrell, who so valiantly headed the column of barrels." Again, he shared glory: no matter how brightly a lieutenant colonel might be burnished, he would never outshine a lieutenant general.

Custer waved to the reporters. "Go on, boys. Business calls. Any time so gallant a soldier as this brave officer seeks my ear, you may rest assured I am pleased to give it to him."

That made the gentlemen of the Fourth Estate pay more attention to Mor rell than they would have otherwise. A photographer snapped his picture. A sketch artist worked on a likeness till Custer waved again, imperiously this time. The fellow closed the notebook and went off with Morrell only half immortalized.

"Now, then," Custer said, "what can I do for you, Lieutenant Colonel? I trust it is a matter of some importance, or Major Dowling would not have interrupted me in the course of my remarks." He gave his adjutant a veiled stare to let him know that was not forgotten.

Dowling had no trouble bearing up under Custer's stares, veiled or not. Sometimes he did have trouble not laughing in Custer's face, but that was a different story. Anyhow, veiled stare notwithstanding, he thought Custer would forget his pique this time. With a nod to Morrell, he said, "Go ahead, sir."

Morrell went ahead. Even more precisely than he had for Dowling, he set forth his idea for Custer. Dowling intently watched the general commanding First Army, wondering how the old boy would take it—it wasn't his usual cup of tea, nor anything close.

Custer didn't show much while Morrell was talking. How many hours on

garrison duty here and there in the West had he spent behind a pile of poker chips? Enough to learn to hold his face still, anyway.

When Morrell was done, Custer stroked his peroxided mustache. "I shall have to give this further consideration, Lieutenant Colonel, but I can say now that you have plainly done some hard thinking here. Some solid thinking, too, unless I am much mistaken."

"Thank you, sir." Morrell had the sense to stop there, not to push Custer for a greater commitment.

"Shall I begin converting this to a plan of operation, sir?" Dowling asked.

"Yes, why not?" Custer said, artfully careless.

VIII

All the news is bad these days," Arthur McGregor complained to his wife over a supper plate of fried chicken and fried potatoes.

"More Yankee lies, I expect," Maude answered. "They don't let any of the truth get loose. Remember how many times their papers have said Toronto has fallen, or Paris to the Germans?"

"I don't think it's like that this time," McGregor said. "Those other stories, you could tell they were made up. What we hear now—that Nashville place getting knocked to bits, and the Americans pushing ahead on the border farther east.. . those are the kinds of things that really do happen in a war. They're the kinds of things you have to believe when you read them."

"But if you do believe them, it means we're losing the war," his daughter Julia said.

"It means our allies are in trouble, anyhow," McGregor said gravely. He bit at the inside of his lower lip before going on, "I don't think we're doing any too well here in Canada, either. You can hardly hear the cannon fire up north toward Winnipeg these days."

Ever since the Yanks had overrun his farm, McGregor had used the sound of the guns to gauge how the fighting was going. When they were far away, the Yankees were making progress. A deep rumble on the northern horizon meant an Anglo-Canadian counteroffensive. He wouldn't have minded in the least had shells fallen on his land; that would have meant the Yanks were pushed most of the way back toward Dakota. But it hadn't happened. He was beginning to wonder if it ever would.

Mary, his younger daughter, spoke with great certainty: "We *can't* lose the war. We're *right.* They invaded us. They had no business doing that." She was only eight years old, and still confused the way things should have been with the way they were.

McGregor and Maude looked at each other. They both knew better. "They can, Mary," her mother said. "We have to hope they don't, that's all."

"No, they can't," Mary repeated. "They shot Alexander. If they win, that means—that means—" She cast about for the worst thing she could think of. "That means God doesn't love us any more."

"God does what He wants, Mary," McGregor said. "He doesn't always do what we want. If He did, your brother would still be here, and the Yanks would be down in the USA where they belong."

"If they win, they'll try to turn us into Americans," Julia said angrily. "They're already trying to turn us into Americans."

With American coins in his pocket, with American stamps on his letters, with American lies in the schools—so many American lies, neither Julia nor Mary went any more—McGregor could hardly disagree with her. Instead, he said, "What we have to do is, we have to remember who we are and what we are, no matter what happens around us. That may be the best we can do."

He felt Maude's eyes on him again. He needed a moment to understand why. When he did, his mouth tightened. Though he'd spoken indirectly, he'd never come so close to admitting Canada and her allies were losing the war.

His wife looked as grim as he did. So did Julia, who now had nearly a woman's years and had been thinking like an adult for a long time, anyhow. If Mary didn't follow—maybe that was just as well. Of them all, McGregor thought she was the fiercest one, even including himself. No matter how old she got, he doubted she would ever slow down to count the cost before she acted. He had to. He hated himself for that, but he had to.

After supper, and after the girls had gone to bed, he said to Maude, "I'm going out to the barn. I've got some work to take care of."

The only question Maude asked was, "Shall I wait up for you?" When he shook his head, she came over and kissed him on the cheek. He blinked; they seldom showed affection for each other outside the bedroom.

He slapped at mosquitoes on the way to the barn. Crickets chirped. Frogs croaked and peeped in ponds and creeks and puddles. Spring was here. He shook his head again. Spring was here, and with it shorter nights. He could have used the long blanket of dark winter gave. But winter also gave a blanket of snow, and snow, unless it was falling hard or unless the wind was howling, meant tracks. He could

not afford tracks. The family had already lost Alexander. He knew how hard a time they would have if they lost him, too.

"Counting the cost," he muttered. He did not fear death, not for himself. He feared it for the sake of those he loved. Mary would not have feared, period. He felt that in his bones. It shamed him. It drove him on.

He did not light a lantern in the garage. The wooden box he sought was hidden, but he knew where. No Yankees on the road would see any light and wonder about it. He had to be careful.

He had to be careful about that road, too. He couldn't travel on it, not

unless he wanted to be challenged. The box under his arm, he approached the road. He didn't approach too closely, not till nobody was coming in either direction. Then he crossed in a hurry.

His neighbors' farm had a path leading to the road, just as his did. His neighbors1 farm also had a path leading southeast toward another road, an east-west one not so frequently traveled by Americans. If the dog stayed quiet, it would not disturb anyone in the dark, quiet farmhouse. The dog was quiet. It had known him for years, and knew him as well as it knew anyone outside its own family. Down that southeastern path he strode, and onto that east-west road.

"East," he muttered. He had the road to himself. Alone with his thoughts: not a safe place to be, not with the thoughts filling his mind. If he set the box down and stomped on it, he would be alone with his thoughts forever. That was tempting, but he was not the sort of man to leave a thing half done.

Whenever he passed a farmhouse, he tensed, making sure it had no lamps burning. He did not want any wakeful soul noting the presence of a lone man on the road. No one could recognize him, not from those houses, but someone might note the time at which he walked by or the direction in which he was going. Either could prove dangerous.

He heard a distant rattle on the road behind him. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw tiny headlamps rapidly getting larger. He stepped into the field by the roadside and lay down. A Ford whizzed past, a Ford painted some light color, not the usual black: a light color like green-gray, for instance.

"Christ, let me be lucky," he whispered. "Let me catch the whore and the murderer both." He waited till the motorcar had gone a good way down the road before getting up and following it. The Americans installed rearview mirrors on most of their motorcars; he did not want whoever was in this one— Major Hannebrink's name burned in his mind—spotting him.

On he walked, gauging time by the wheeling stars. If he could keep on, if he did not flag or falter, he might do what he had come to do.

The next interesting question, and one of whose answer he was not quite sure, was whether the Tooker family owned a dog. He didn't really think so. If he was wrong, the best thing that could happen would be a long walk in the dark for nothing. Possibilities went downhill in a hurry from there.

A lamp went out downstairs. Lamplight showed a moment later in a room upstairs. *A bedroom,* McGregor thought. *Paulette Tooker's bedroom.* That she would do such a thing with an American major was bad enough. That she would do such a thing and watch, or even let him watch, was depravity piled on depravity. What if one of her children woke in the night? Her son, if McGregor remembered rightly, was not far from Julia's age—old enough and to spare to despise what his mother did . . . unless he was a collaborator, too.

Where was her husband? Was he dead? Was he captured? Was he still

fighting for his country farther north ? McGregor didn't know. He wondered if Paulette knew, or cared.

That light would not go out. McGregor muttered under his breath. What the devil was Hannebrink doing in there, driving railroad spikes? McGregor didn't dare approach the house, as he'd intended doing. Hannebrink had parked the Ford a good distance away from the place, though, no doubt for discretion's sake. McGregor wanted the man who'd ordered his son killed far more than he wanted that man's Canadian whore.

Cautious as a man could be, he went up to the motorcar. The night smelled of fresh, damp earth. He took a trowel from his belt and began to dig in the fresh, damp earth in front of the Ford's left front tire. When he'd dug enough, he set the box in the hole, covered it over, and scattered the leftover dirt its volume had displaced. Then he

headed home himself.

He got back just ahead of morning twilight. A light was burning in a room upstairs in his farmhouse, too. When he went in, he found Maude sitting up in bed sewing. Breath gusted from her when she saw him. "Is everything all right?" she demanded sharply.

"Everything is fine," he answered. "You should have slept."

"I tried," she said. "I couldn't." She shrugged. "About time to get up now, anyhow. One way or another, we'll stagger through the day. So long as every thing's all right."

"Yes," he said again. Even as he said it, though, he wondered. He should have been able to hear the explosion, even if the bomb—and the Ford—blew up when he was almost back here. What the hell had Hannebrink and Paulette Tooker been doing back at her house? How long could they keep doing it?

He did get through the day, moving like a man of ice only slightly thawed. When night came, he slept as hard as he had since he was Mary's age.

He wanted to go into Rosenfeld, to learn what, if anything, he'd accom plished. He refrained, not wanting to draw notice to himself. To how many people had Henry Gibbon given the name of Hannebrink's paramour? The more, the better.

Gossip brought word before he couldn't hold back any more and made a trip to town. After supper, while the girls were upstairs playing with dolls, Maude said, "Delia from across the road tells me Lou Tooker stepped on a bomb, and there isn't going to be enough of him left to bury. He was— what?—fifteen, maybe sixteen."

"A bit younger than Alexander." McGregor nodded. "That's going to be hard for Paulette to bear, eh?"

Almost as hard as it was for me, when the Yanks murdered my son, he thought. He wondered how Hannebrink had missed setting off the bomb. Maybe he'd backed the Ford up to get back onto the road. McGregor shrugged. However the U.S. major had escaped, Paulette Tooker wouldn't be

inclined to open her legs for him, not any more she wouldn't. And, sooner or later, McGregor would get another chance at Major

Hannebrink. He was in no hurry. Doing it right counted for more than doing it. No, he was in no hurry at all.

The U.S. bombardment had been short but ferocious. Now, engines bellow ing, several barrels waddled forward toward the barbed wire the men of the Army of Northern Virginia had strung out to protect their positions in front of Aldie, Virginia. The wire shone in the early-morning sun; it was so newly in place, it hadn't even started to rust.

Whistles blew in the U.S. trenches. "Come on, boys!" Captain Cremony shouted. "Time to give the Rebs another dose of medicine." He was the first one out of the trench and heading toward the Confederate lines.

Sergeant Chester Martin nodded approval as he gathered his section by eye and led them up the sandbag staircase, out of the protection of their hole in the ground, and onto the stretch of open country where bullets could easily find them. Cremony hadn't made it sound like fun, and it wouldn't be. But he had made it sound like something that needed doing, and he was leading the way. Hard to ask more than that of an officer.

"Come on!" Martin shouted, echoing the company commander. He pointed to one of the barrels ahead. "Form up behind that bastard. You know the drill. You'd damn well better, by now."

"That's the truth, Sarge," Tilden Russell said. "Wasn't for those big, ugly things, there'd be a hell of a lot fewer of us left after we went over the top in front of Round Hill."

Martin nodded, double-timing despite heavy gear to get as close to the barrel as he could. He'd seen too much hard fighting on the Roanoke front to have any doubts how much barrels were worth. With them, the unit had taken casualties, yes. Casualties were one of the things war was about. Without barrels, though—without them, the advance wouldn't have got a quarter as far, and would have cost four times as much.

Not all the Confederates in those new trenches had been silenced. Rifle bullets whipped past Martin. He wasn't afraid. He didn't know why, but he wasn't. Before he went over the top, yes. When he had a chance to rest, he'd be afraid again. For the time being, he just went on, like most infantrymen. Whatever was going to happen to him

would happen, and that was all there was to it.

Confederate machine guns started yammering, too. The barrels opened up on them with cannon fire and their own machine guns. The C.S. machine guns concentrated most of their fury on the barrels. They always did that, and it was a mistake. They had very little chance of hurting the great armored

machines, and withheld their lire from the soft, vulnerable men they could have harmed.

Barbed wire underfoot—barbed wire crushed into the dirt by the barrel ahead. Since the opening days of the war, since U.S. forces first pushed their way down into the Roanoke valley, Martin had watched friends and comrades—and enemy soldiers, too, in Confederate counterattacks—trap themselves on wire like flies in a spiderweb and writhe and twist till bullets found them . .. and then, briefly and painfully, afterwards. That would not happen here. It would not happen now.

There was the battered parapet, just ahead. A black man with a rifle in his hands popped up onto the firing step, ready to shoot at Martin. Martin shot first, from the hip. It was not an aimed shot, and he did not think it hit. But it did what he wanted it to do: it made the Confederate soldier duck down again without shooting at him from short range.

A moment later, Martin was down in the trench himself. The black man wasn't there. He'd fled from the fire bay into a traverse. Martin did not charge after him. He and who could guess how many pals were waiting, fingers on the triggers of their Tredegars. Charging headlong into a traverse after the enemy was anything but smart.

Martin pulled a potato-masher grenade off his belt, yanked off the cap at the end of the handle, and tugged on the porcelain bead inside. That ignited the fuse. He flung the grenade up over the undug ground and into the traverse.

At the same time as his grenade went into the air, a Reb in the traverse threw one of their egg-shaped models at him and his comrades. Someone behind him yelled in pain. More grenades flew. More shouts rose. He and the men of his section couldn't stay where they were. The attack had to move forward. That meant—

He scowled. Even when it wasn't smart, a headlong charge was

sometimes the only choice left. "Follow me!" he shouted.

His men did. If they hadn't, he would have died in the next minute. As things were, that next minute was an ugly business with rifle and entrenching tool and bayonet and a boot in the belly or the balls. More U.S. soldiers came around the corner than the Rebs in the traverse could withstand. The men in butternut went down. Most of the men in green-gray went on.

Through a zigzagging communications trench they ran, deeper into the Confederate position. Somewhere not far from the far end of that trench, a machine gun stuttered out death. The barrels had taken out a lot of machine-gun positions, but not all of them. The guns that survived could wreak fearful havoc on advancing U.S. soldiers.

With one accord, Martin and his section went hunting that machine gun and its crew. The only soldiers who didn't hate machine guns were those who served them. Martin's lips skinned back from his teeth. There was the infernal

machine, blazing away toward the front from a nest of sandbags. One white man fed belts of ammunition into it, the other tapped the side of the water jacket every little while to change the direction of the stream of bullets.

The sandbags kept the Confederates from bringing the gun to bear on Martin's men, who approached from the side. The gun crew kept firing till the last second at the U.S. soldiers they could reach. Then they threw their hands in the air. "You got us," the trigger man said.

"Sure as hell do," the Reb who'd been feeding ammunition agreed.

Chester Martin shot one of them. Corporal Bob Reinholdt shot the other one at the same instant. As the Confederates crumpled, the two men who despised each other both stared in surprise. Reinholdt found words first: "Those sons of bitches can't quit that easy."

"Sure as hell can't," Martin agreed. Machine-gun crews rarely made it back to prisoner-of-war camps. For some reason, they always seemed to want to fight to the death.

Up ahead, the barrel leading the U.S. infantry exploded into flames and smoke: a shell from a Confederate field gun had struck home. Hatches flew open. Some of the machine gunners tried to bring out their weapons and fight on the ground. Most of them, though,

went down as every C.S. soldier any where nearby turned his rifle on the stricken traveling fortress. The Confederates loved barrel crewmen every bit as much as ordinary infantrymen on both sides loved the men who served machine guns.

After brief but heartfelt curses, Martin said, "Things get tougher now. I wonder where the hell the next barrel is at."

"Not close enough," David Hamburger said. "We should do it like they did in Tennessee, put all the barrels together, smash on through the Rebs' lines, and then let us tear the hole wide open."

"Thank you, General," Tilden Russell said. He was ragging the kid, but not too hard; Hamburger had given a good account of himself since the offensive opened. He didn't have a veteran's bag of tricks, but he was brave and willing and learned in a hurry.

But Russell had left the obvious line unused. Martin used it: "Listen, David, you don't like the way we're doing things, you write your congress-woman and give her an earful." He laughed.

"I am doing that," David Hamburger said. Martin hadn't been serious, but he was. "We've pushed the Rebs back here, but we haven't broken through. If it hadn't been for the river they're hiding behind in Tennessee, they'd be running yet."

Shells started landing around them. They dove for cover. "Jesus," Tilden Russell shouted, holding his helmet on his head with one hand. "God damn Rebs still have soldiers of their own in this part of the trench. What the hell are they doin', shelling us like this here?"

"Trying to kill us, I expect," Martin answered.

"I bet their artillery don't care a fuck if they kill a few of their own foot soldiers," Bob Reinholdt added. "They're all white men back there"—he pointed south, toward the Confederate guns—"but half the bastards up here in the trenches are niggers. Probably just as glad to be rid of 'em. Hell, I would be."

"Makes sense," Martin agreed, after a moment adding, "The other thing to remember is, there's no guarantee those were Rebel shells. They might have been ours, falling short."

Nobody said anything for a few seconds. All the men in filthy green-gray huddled there knew only too well that such things

happened. You were just as dead if a shell fragment from one of your own rounds got you as from Confederate artillery.

Whoever had fired it, the salvo ended. "Come on," Martin said. "Even if the barrel's dead, we've got to keep going."

They had almost reached the far end of the network of trenches when Confederate reserves—black men with white officers and noncoms—brought them to a standstill. Some of the black soldiers in butternut fired wildly and ran. Some—more than would have been true of white troops—threw down their Tredegars and surrendered first chance they got. Counting on either, though, was risky—no, was deadly dangerous. Most of the black Confederates fought as hard as white Confederates.

With the Rebel reinforcements in place, Martin didn't need long to figure out that he and his pals weren't going to push much farther forward today. He got the men busy with their entrenching tools, and got busy with his own, too, turning shell holes and bits of north-facing trench into south-facing trench.

Sighing, he said, "We took a bite out of their line, but we didn't slam on through it."

"We need more barrels," the Hamburger kid said. "They can really smash trenches. What else can?"

"Bodies," Martin answered. "Lots and lots of bodies." Anyone who'd fought on the Roanoke front, whether in green-gray or butternut, would have said the same thing.

"Barrels work better," David Hamburger said, and Martin did not dis agree with him. He'd seen too many piled-up bodies.

Anne Colleton read through the *Columbia Southern Guardian* with careful thoroughness over her morning eggs and coffee. Breakfast wasn't so good as it might have been. She'd made it herself. After having servants cook for her almost her entire life, her own culinary skills were slender. But for the time while she'd languished in a refugee camp during the Red uprising, she'd have owned no culinary skills at all.

She hardly noticed she'd got the eggs rubbery and the coffee

strong

enough to spit in her eye. The *Southern Guardian* took most of her attention. Despite censors' obfuscations and reporters' resolute optimism, the war news was bad. It had been bad ever since the damnyankees opened their spring offensives in Tennessee and Virginia and Maryland.

"Damn them," she whispered. Then she said it out loud: *"Damn* them!" The paper wasn't printing maps of the fighting in Maryland and Virginia any more. Anne had no trouble understanding why: maps would have made obvious how far the Army of Northern Virginia had fallen back. Unless you had an atlas, you couldn't tell where places like Sterling and Arcola and Aldie—which had just fallen after what the *Southern Guardian* called "fierce fighting"—were.

But Anne did have an atlas, used it, and didn't like what she was seeing. What had her brother Tom said? That there were too many damnyankees to hold back? Virginia looked to be the USA's attempt to prove it.

Nashville, though, Nashville had been something different. The paper went on for a column and a half about the horrors the city was suffering under Yankee bombardment. Anne scowled at the small type. What was in there might well be true, but it wasn't relevant. If the line that held U.S. guns out of range of the city hadn't collapsed, it wouldn't *be* under bombardment now.

But that line, which had held even under the heaviest pressure since the autumn before, went down as if made of cardboard when the Yankees hammered it with a horde of their barrels. That hammering worried Anne more than it seemed to worry the Confederate War Department. U.S. forces weren't using their barrels like that anywhere else. But if they did . . .

"If they do, they're liable to break through again, wherever it is," Anne said. She could see that. Why couldn't they see it in Richmond?

Maybe they could see it. Maybe they simply didn't know what to do about it. That possibility also left her unreassured.

She looked at her plate in some surprise, realizing she'd finished the eggs without noticing. She sighed. Another day. She'd never felt so useless in all her life as she did here in St. Matthews now. Were she back at Marshlands, she would be fretting about the year's cotton

crop. But there would be no cotton crop this year. She dared not go back to the plantation that had been in her family for more than a hundred years.

Her back stiffened. No, that wasn't true. She dared to go back, even if she would not have cared to spend the night there. In fact, she *would* go back— with militiamen, and with a Tredegar slung over her shoulder. The plantation was ravaged. It was ruined. But it was hers, and she would not tamely yield it to anyone or anything.

No sooner decided than begun. She did not officially command the St. Matthews militia, but she had enough power in this part of the country— enough power through most of South Carolina, as a matter of fact—that within an hour she and half a dozen militiamen were rattling toward Marshlands in a couple of ramshackle motorcars.

Some of the militiamen wore old gray uniforms, some new butternut. Some of the men were old, too—too old to be called into the Army even during the present crisis at the front. One, a sergeant of her own age named Willie Metcalfe, was a handsome fellow when viewed from the right. The left side of his face was a slagged ruin of scars. He wore a patch over what had been his left eye. Anne wondered why he bothered. In that devastation, who could have said for certain where his eye socket lay? A couple of his comrades were surely less than eighteen, and looked younger than Anne's telegraph delivery boy.

Half a dozen miles made a twenty-minute ride along the rutted dirt road between St. Matthews and Marshlands. It would have been twice that long if one of the motorcars had had a puncture, but they were lucky. When Willie Metcalfe—who, predictably, was driving on the lead automobile, to avoid displaying his wrecked profile for a while—started to pull into the driveway that led to the ruins of the Marshlands mansion, Anne spoke up sharply: "No, wait. Stop the motorcar here and pull off to the side of the road."

"Yes, ma'am." Sergeant Metcalfe's voice was mushy; the inside of his mouth was probably as ravaged as the rest of that side of his face. But he said the words as he would have said *Yes, sir* to a superior officer, and obeyed as promptly, too. The other motorcar followed his lead.

Because she hadn't had to shout at him, as she'd had to shout at so many men in her life, she deigned to explain: "The only motorcars likely to come here will have white people in them—probably white

soldiers in them. What better place to hide a bomb than in the driveway there?"

Metcalfe thought for a moment, then nodded. "That makes sense," he said. "That makes a lot of sense."

Linus Ashworth, who with his white beard looked a little like General Lee and was almost old enough to have fought under him, said, "We ain't likely to be bringing niggers into the militia any time soon, not when we're chasin' 'em, and I don't give a ... hoot what the Army does." He got out of the automobile and spat a stream of tobacco juice into the lush grass. A brown drop slid down that white beard. A yellow streak in it said that sort of thing happened to him all the time.

Anne and the militiamen advanced on the wreckage of the Marshlands mansion in what Metcalfe called a skirmish line. He unobtrusively took the left end. They all had a round in the chamber of their Tredegars. Anne didn't expect any trouble. The Red rebels shouldn't have known she was on the way to Marshlands. She herself hadn't known she would be till not long before she was. But taking chances wasn't a good idea.

Linus Ashworth spat again. "It's a shame, ma'am," he said, "purely a shame. I seen this place when it was like what it's supposed to be, and there wasn't no finer plantation in the state of South Carolina, God strike me dead if I lie."

"Yes," Anne said tightly. Ash worth had seen Marshlands before the war, but she'd lived here. Coming back after the men of the Congaree Socialist Re public were driven back into the riverside swamps had been hard enough. Coming back now .. .

Now the Marshlands plantation wasn't ruined, as it had been then. Now it was dead. The cabin where she'd lived after the mansion burned was itself charred wreckage. The rest of the cabins that had housed the Negro field hands were deserted, glass gone from the windows, doors hanging open because nothing inside was worth stealing. One door had fallen off its hinges and leaned at a drunken angle against the clapboard wall. White bird droppings streaked the door's green paint.

Anne looked out to what had been, and what should have been, broad acres of growing cotton. Weeds choked the fields. No crop this year. No chance of getting a crop this year, even if she could find

hands who would work for her and not for Cassius and Cherry and the rest of the Reds—and good luck with that, too. No money coming in from Marshlands this year. But the money would keep right on bleeding out. War taxes . . . *outrageous* wasn't nearly a strong enough word. Her investments had kept her afloat so far, but they were tottering, too.

"This here is sad, ma'am," Sergeant Willie Metcalfe said. "This here is really sad." Just for a moment, he raised a hand to the black cord that held his patch. "This here place got hurt the same way I did."

"Yes, it did," Anne said. She would not—she *would* not—let him hear the tears in her voice.

And then she forgot about tears, because something moved up ahead. She was on the ground, her rifle aimed, before she knew how she'd got there. A couple of the young militiamen stood gaping for a few seconds. The others, the men who had seen combat of one sort or another, were on their bellies like her, offering targets as small as they could.

"Come out!" Metcalfe shouted. "Come out right now or you're dead!"

Anne wasn't even sure she'd seen a human being. Motion where nothing had any business moving had been plenty to send her diving to the ground. She wondered if they'd have to go hunting through the field hands' cottages. If the Reds had come back for some reason, that might not be any fun at all.

But why would the Reds come back to Marshlands? she thought, trying to reassure herself. It wasn't as if she had any treasure buried on the plantation to tempt them. If she'd had anything like that, she would long since have dug it up herself.

Then anticlimax almost made her burst out laughing. From around the corner of the nearest cabin came a pickaninny, a Negro girl ten or eleven years old. After a moment, Anne recognized her. "What are you doing sneaking around this place, Vipsy?" she demanded. "You almost got shot."

"I's jus' lookin' fo' whatever I kin find," Vipsy answered artlessly—so art lessly, Anne's suspicions kindled.

"Where are you staying these days, Vipsy?" she asked. "There's

nothing for your father and mother to do at Marshlands now."

Vipsy pointed northward, toward the Congaree: "Over yonder where I's at," she answered.

How far over yonder? Anne wondered. *All the way into the swamp? Are your father and mother Reds? If they were .. . She looked down at the ground so the colored girl would not see her smile. "All right, go on your way," she said when she looked up again. "I'm just glad you weren't coming around sniffing after the treasure. If you were, we would have had to shoot you."*

"Don' know nothin' 'bout no treasure," Vipsy said, and strolled off with as much dignity as if she wore a gingham frock rather than a dress cut from a grimy burlap bag.

The next trick, of course, would be convincing the militiamen she had no treasure buried here at Marshlands. If she couldn't do that, half the people in St. Matthews would be out here by day after tomorrow at the latest, all of them armed with picks and shovels. But if she could persuade the militiamen—well, something useful might come from that.

Gordon McSweeney walked up to Captain Schneider. After saluting the com pany commander, he said, "Sir, I wish you wouldn't have done what you did."

Schneider frowned. "I'm sorry, McSweeney, but I don't see that you left me any choice in the matter."

"But—" Except when discussing matters of religion, McSweeney was not a particularly eloquent man. He touched the top of his shoulder, and the new shoulder strap sewn onto his tunic. No insigne marked the strap, but its mere presence disturbed him. "Sir, I don't *want to* be an officer!" he burst out.

"Believe me, second lieutenants barely deserve the name," Captain Schneider answered with a wry chuckle.

"I was comfortable as a sergeant, sir," McSweeney said. "I was—I was happy as a sergeant." It was, as far as he could recall, the first time in his life he'd ever admitted being happy about anything.

"If you go on with this, *Lieutenant* McSweeney"—Schneider bore down on the title—"you will make me angry—but not angry enough to bust you back to sergeant, if that's what's on your mind." He paused to roll a cigarette. Once he'd sucked in smoke, he went on, "God damn it, McSweeney, look at it from my point of view. What the hell am I supposed to do with you?"

"Sir, you could have—you should have—left me where I was," McSweeney answered. "That was all I expected. That was all I wanted."

For some reason he did not fathom, Captain Schneider looked exasperated. Seeing he did not fathom it, Schneider spelled it out in words of one syllable: "You are wearing the ribbon for one Medal of Honor. God knows you deserve an oak-leaf cluster to go with it for what you did to that machine-gun position, but the War Department would think I was shell-shocked if I put you up for it twice, no matter how much you deserve it. Any lesser medal fails to do you justice. What choice did I have but promoting you?"

"I didn't do what I did for glory, sir," McSweeney answered, deeply em barrassed. "I did it because it was my duty."

Schneider studied him. Slowly, slowly, the company commander blew out a long, gray cloud of smoke. "You mean that," he said at last.

"Of course I do." McSweeney was embarrassed again, in a different way. "I always mean what I say."

After another long pause, Captain Schneider said, "You may be the most frightening man I have ever met."

"Only to the enemies of God and the United States of America, sir."

Schneider suddenly snapped his fingers. "I know part of what's troubling you, damn me to hell if I don't." If he kept talking like chat, McSweeney was sure God would damn him to hell. But, however harsh he was to those under him, McSweeney could not and never would reprove his superiors. Schneider continued, "You don't want to give your flamethrower to anybody else."

McSweeney looked down at the muddy ground under his feet. He hadn't thought Captain Schneider would be able to read him so well.

Now it was his turn to hesitate. Finally, he said, "When I carry it, I feel myself to be like the fourth angel of the Lord in Revelations 16, who pours out his bowl on the sun and scorches the wicked with fire."

"Hmm." Schneider scratched his chin. Stubble rasped under his finger nails. "Tell you what, McSweeney. Think of it like this: you're not the only one in this war. We're all scorching the Rebs together, and it doesn't matter whether we've got rifles or .45s or flamethrowers. How's that?"

"Sir, when the Good Book speaks of searing those who curse God's name, I believe it means what it says—no more, no less," McSweeney replied.

"Of course you do," Schneider muttered. He paused to sigh and to stamp the butt of his cigarette into the dirt. "Well, we're going to make it hot for the Rebs, all right. They're going to take us out of the line here and put fresh troops in our place, to hold. We shift to the right, about five miles over."

"And do what, sir?" McSweeney asked.

"There's about a square mile of woods there—it's called Craighead Forest on the map," Schneider answered. "If we can push the Confederates out of it, we outflank 'em and we may be able to shove 'em clean out of Jonesboro."

"So long as we're fighting, sir, it suits me," McSweeney said.

"Well, it doesn't suit me, not for hell it doesn't," the company commander told him. "We haven't got the barrels to go in there and do the dirty work for

us, the way they do on the other side of the Mississippi. We have to take that forest the old way, the hard way, and it's going to be expensive as the devil."

"Where I go, my men will follow, and I will go into that wood," Mc-Sweeney said positively. Schneider looked at him, shook his head, and went off down the trench still shaking it.

Replacements began filing into the line that afternoon, under desultory Confederate shelling. They were clean-faced, neatly shaven men in clean uniforms. They seemed present in preposterous numbers, for action had not thinned their ranks faster than

replacements could refill them. They stared at the lean, grimy veterans whose trenches they were taking over. Gordon Mc-Sweeney was far from the only veteran to stare back in cold contempt.

He led the platoon he did not want down a series of winding tracks shielded—but not too well—from enemy observation. A few shells fell around them. A couple of men were wounded. Stretcher-bearers carried them back toward dressing stations. But for the wounded men, nobody thought it anything out of the ordinary.

Up through the zigzags of communications trenches they went. Mc-Sweeney stared ahead, toward the wood of pine and oak. Fighting there hadn't been heavy, not till now. Most of the trees were still standing, not lying smashed and scattered like a petulant giant's game of pick-up-sticks. Under those trees, men in butternut waited in foxholes and in trenches much like these. Between the U.S. line and the edge of the wood lay a few hundred yards of low grass and bushes, all bright green. Tomorrow morning . ..

"Tomorrow morning, uh, sir," Ben Carlton said to McSweeney, "a lot of us are going to end up dead."

McSweeney gave the cook a cold look, "Take it up with the Lord, not with me. I am going forward. So are you. God will choose who lives and dies." Carl-ton went off muttering to himself. McSweeney checked his rifle, read his Bible, rolled himself in his blanket, and slept the sleep of an innocent man.

The U.S. bombardment blasted him awake a little before dawn. He nodded his approval. Short and sharp—that was the way to do it. A week-long bombardment only gave the Rebs a week to get ready, and didn't kill nearly enough of them to be worth that.

"Whistles blew, up and down the line. "Come on, you lugs!" McSweeney shouted. "Follow me. I'll be the one they shoot at first, I promise you."

"With that encouragement, he led his platoon over the parapet and through the grass toward the edge of the now more battered wood, from which little winking lights—the muzzle flashes of machine guns and Tredegars—began to appear. Bullets clipped leaves from bushes and stirred the tall blades of grass almost as a stick might have done.

"By sections'." McSweeney yelled. "Fire and move!"

Half the men he led went down, though only a few had been shot. The ones on their knees and bellies blazed away to cover the advance of the rest. After a rush, the men ahead hit the dirt and fired while the former laggards rose and dashed past them.

They took casualties. Had it not been for their tactics—and for the ar tillery still falling in the woods, knocking over trees fast enough to make Paul Bunyan jealous—they would have taken more. But the survivors kept going forward in ragged waves. Several bullets cracked past Gordon McSweeney close enough for him to feel the wind of their passage. One brushed at his sleeve, so that he looked over to see if a comrade close by was tugging his arm. Seeing no one close by, he realized what must have happened. "Thank you, Lord, for sparing me," he murmured, and ran on.

Then he was in among the trees. The covering barrage moved deeper into Craighead Forest, leaving it up to the men in green-gray to finish dealing with the men in butternut it had not killed or maimed. The Confederates were there in distressing numbers; they knew, as U.S. soldiers knew, how to lessen the damage artillery did.

That left hard, hot work to do. Many—not all—of the C.S. machine-gun crews stayed at their guns even after U.S. soldiers had got by them on either flank, lingering to do their foes as much harm as they could before they were slain. They were brave men, brave as any in green-gray.

McSweeney knew as much. He'd known as much since the day he crossed the Ohio into Kentucky. "The Egyptians who followed Pharaoh into the opening in the Red Sea after the children of Israel surely were brave men," he muttered. "The Lord let the Red Sea close on them even so, because they were wicked."

Confederates fired from behind and from under trees. Snipers fired from in the trees. The Rebels fought from their trenches. They popped up out of foxholes. Sometimes they hid till several U.S. soldiers had passed them, then turned around and fired at their backs.

McSweeney had blood on his bayonet before he was a hundred yards into the woods. He'd been changing clips when a Confederate soldier lunged at him. How the Reb had screamed when the point went into his belly! He would scream like that forever in hell.

"Schneider's down!" somebody shouted. McSweeney waited for one of the other lieutenants, all of them senior to him, to start

directing the company. None of them did. Maybe they were down, too. He shouted orders, driving the men on. He was loud and sounded sure of what he was doing, the next best thing to being sure of what he was doing.

Forming any firm line in the forest was impossible. The Confederates kept filtering past the U.S. forward positions and raising Cain. They knew the woods better than their foes—some of them had probably hunted squirrels and coons through these trees—and did not mean to lose them.

"Here!" McSweeney threw aside the bodies of two Rebs from the ma chine gun at which they'd fallen. He grabbed a couple of his own men and turned the machine gun around. "If you see any of those miscreants, shoot them down."

"Miscre-whats, sir?" one of them shouted at him.

"Confederates," he answered, which satisfied the soldier. He and his pal wouldn't be so good as a properly trained crew, but they would be better than nothing for as long as their ammunition held out. McSweeney did that several more times, getting firepower any way he could.

U.S. machine guns started coming forward into Craighead Forest, too. By nightfall, most of it was in U.S. hands, though Confederate cannon kept shelling the woods their side had held when day began. Maybe the men in green-gray would be able to mount a flank attack on Jonesboro afterwards, maybe not. McSweeney couldn't tell. He didn't care, not too much. He'd done his job, and done it well.

Scipio squatted on his heels in the mud by the Congaree River, reading a newspaper one of the black fighters of what still called itself the Congaree Socialist Republic had brought back from a Fort Motte park bench. Going into a town was dangerous; actually buying a newspaper from a white man would have been suicidally dangerous.

"Do Jesus!" Scipio said, looking up from the small print that gave him more trouble than it had a few years before. "Sound like the Yankees is kickin' we where it hurt the most."

Cassius was gutting catfish he'd pulled out of the muddy river. When they were fried, they would taste of mud, too. Cassius threw

offal into the river be fore cocking his head to one side and giving Scipio a glance from the corner of his eye. "Them Yankees ain't kickin' we, Kip," he said at last.

Scipio snorted. "Don' tell me you believes we gwine lick they any day now, an' we jus' fallin' back to fool they. De papers prints de lies like that to keep de stupid buckra happy."

"I knows it," Cassius answered calmly. "De lies makes de buckra mo' and mo' stupid, too. But, Kip, you gots to recollect—de Congaree Socialist Repub lic ain't at war wid de United States. The Confederate States, they is at war, but you ain't no Confederate citizen, now is you? Never was, ain't, never gwine be. This here the onliest country you gots, Kip."

Instead of answering, Scipio buried his nose in the newspaper again. He did not trust himself to keep from saying what he really thought if he spoke at all. Since he would surely be shot the moment he did, shot and tossed in the river like catfish guts, he thought silence the wiser course.

A country! A country of mud and weeds and muddy water and stinks and furtive skulking and shells falling out of the sky whenever the militia managed to lay their hands on some ammunition. A country surrounded by a real country intent on wiping it from the face of the earth. A country that existed more in Cassius' imagination than in the real world.

"We is the free mens," Cassius said. "The 'pressors o' de world got no power here." Methodically, he gutted another fish.

Cherry came striding up in her tattered trousers. She moved like a free woman, or perhaps more like a catamount, graceful and dangerous at the same time. Scipio could readily understand how she'd enthralled Jacob Colleton. She didn't just smolder. She blazed.

Now she squatted down beside Cassius and said, "What you think o' dis story Vipsy bring back from Marshlands?"

"Woman, you knows what I thinks," Cassius answered impatiently. "I thinks Miss Anne bait a trap fo' we. I thinks I ain't gwine be foolish enough to put this here head"—he tapped it, almost as if to suggest he had another one stored somewhere not far away—"in de noose."

Cherry's lips skinned back from her white teeth in a hungry smile.

"But if it so, Cass, if it so an' we can git our hands on de treasure—"

"But it ain't, an' you knows it ain't, same as I knows it ain't," Cassius said, his voice still good-natured, but with iron underneath.

"How you know that for a fac'?" Cherry demanded. "You was a hunter. You wasn't into the mansion all de time, no more'n me."

Cassius pointed at Scipio, as Scipio had known he would. "Dis nigger here, he know if anybody do. Kip, you tell Cherry what you done tol' her before. See if maybe she listen dis time, damn stubborn gal."

Scipio found himself longing for the polite, precise formality of the English he'd spoken as Anne Colleton's butler. He could have disagreed without offending much more readily in that dialect than in the speech of the Congaree. "Cassius, he right," he said, as placatingly as he could—he might have been more afraid of Cherry than of Cassius. "Ain't no treasure."

"How you know dat?" Cherry snapped. "How *kin* you know dat? Miss Anne, she one white debbil bit of a 'pressor, but she one *sly* white debbil bitch, too. Couldn't never git away from we las' Christmas, she weren't one sly white debbil bitch."

In the other English, the English he spoke no more, Scipio would have talked about probabilities, and about the impossibility of proving a negative. He could not do that in the dialect of the Congaree. Instead, at last losing his temper, he answered, "I knows Miss Anne's business better'n any other Marshlands nigger, and I says there ain't no treasure. You wants to go lookin' fo' what ain't dere, go on ahead. An' if de buckra wid de guns blows yo' stupid head off 'cause they layin' fo' you like you was a deer, don' you come back here cryin' afterwards."

Cherry's eyes blazed. Her high cheekbones and narrow, delicate chin told of Indian blood; now she looked as if she wanted to take Scipio's scalp. Her voice was deadly: "An' when I comes back wid de money, drag you down an' cut your balls off—or I would, if I reckoned you gots any."

"Easy, gal, *easy,'"* Cassius said. Sometimes Scipio thought Cherry alarmed the hunter who led the Reds, too. Cherry had not an ounce, not a speck, of give anywhere about her splendidly shaped person. Cassius went on, "You make a man 'fraid to tell you de truth, or what

he reckon de truth, sooner o' later you gwine be sorry you done it."

Cherry tossed her head in a gesture of magnificent contempt Scipio had seen from her many times before. Pointing to him, she said, "He don' need me to make he afraid. He wish he was still Miss Anne's house nigger, still Miss Anne's lapdog." She spat on the ground between Scipio's feet.

Scipio violently shook his head, the more violently because she told nothing but the truth. He'd never wanted anything to do with the revolutionary movement, partly because of a suspicion—an accurate suspicion, as things turned out—the Red revolt would fail, partly because he had indeed been comfortable in the life he was living at Marshlands. He'd always assumed that, if anyone in power among the revolutionaries learned as much, he was a dead man.

But then Cassius said, "I knows dat. We all knows dat. De lap dog like de sof pillow an' de fancy meat in de rubber dish. He cain't help it."

Right then, Scipio was glad of his dark, dark sin. No one could see the flush that made him feel he was burning up inside. He schooled his features to the impassivity required of a butler. *Let no one know what you are thinking.* He'd had that beaten into him in his training. It served him in good stead now.

Cassius went on, "But Kip, he keep he mouf shut. He don' never say boo to Miss Anne 'bout we. De proletariat, dey gots nuffing to lose in de revolu tion. Kip, he gots plenty to lose, an' he wid us anyways. If dat don' make he a hero o' de revolution, you tell me what do."

Cherry tossed her head again. "Shit, he jus' too 'fraid to betray we. He know how he pay fo' dat."

She was right again. Fortunately for Scipio, Cassius didn't think so. The hunter said, "He have plenty chances to give we away an' git away clean, an' he never done it. He *wid* us, Cherry."

"He *ain't,"* Cherry said positively. "Miss Anne spread she legs, he come runnin' to lick dat pussy wid de yellow hair, same as he always done."

"Liar!" Scipio shouted now, a mixture of horror, embarrassment, and fury in his voice. Only after that anguished cry passed his lips did he realize she might have been using a metaphor, if a crude one. Part

of the embarrassment, he realized with a different kind of horror, was that Anne Colleton *was* beautiful and desirable. But a black man who was found out looking on a white woman with desire in the CSA was as surely dead as one who betrayed the revolutionary movement.

Even Cassius looked distressed. "Enough, Cherry!" he said sharply. "You gots no cause to rip he to pieces dat way."

"Got plenty cause," Cherry retorted. "An' when I comes back with the treasure, Cass, we see who am de gen'l sec'tary o' de Congaree Socialist Republic after dat." She stalked off.

Cassius sighed. "Dat one hard woman. Ain't nobody gwine stop she— she gwine try an' fin' dat treasure, an' it don't matter if it ain't there. She try anyways."

"She gwine get herself killed," Scipio said. "She gwine get whoever go wid she killed, too."

"I knows it," Cassius said unhappily. "I ain't no fool, an' I weren't borned yesterday. But how is I s'posed to stop she? If I shoot she wid my own gun, she dead, too—an' dat bitch liable to shoot first. I done told her, don' go. But she don' listen to what I say." He sighed again, a leader hard aground on the shoals of leadership. "I brings her up befo' de revolutionary tribunal, they liable to do like she say, not like I say. Dere some stubborn revolutionary niggers on de tribunal. I oughts to know. I put 'em dere my ownself."

"Maybe you jus' let she go, then," Scipio said. "Maybe you jus' let she go an' get herself killed." His voice turned savage. "Maybe dat jus' what she deserve." If he could find a way to get a message to Anne Colleton, letting her know when Cherry was going to try to plunder Marshlands, he would do it, and it would be a true message, too. Letting—helping—one of the women who'd made the past year and a half of his life a nightmare dispose of the other had a sweet ring of poetic justice to it.

But Cassius was watching him with those hunter's eyes. Somebody was watching him all the time. The surviving revolutionaries did not altogether trust him. They had good reason not to trust him. Casually, as if he weren't thinking at all, he took from his belt a tin cup that had once belonged to a Confederate soldier now surely dead. He dipped up water from the river and drank. The water tasted of mud, too. Only because he'd grown up in a slave cabin not far away could he drink it without having his guts turn inside out.

Cherry and half a dozen men went treasure hunting the next day. Cassius watched them go with a scowl on his face. If by some accident Vipsy had been telling the truth, if by some accident Miss Anne had done something of which Scipio was ignorant, Cassius' place at the head of the Congaree Socialist Republic was indeed in danger. Could the Red rebels survive a leadership struggle? Scipio had his doubts.

But Cherry came back after sundown, empty-handed. Scipio had hoped she wouldn't come back at all. The glower she aimed at him almost made her return worthwhile, though. He concentrated on his bowl of stew—turtle and roots and other things he ate and tried not to think about.

"I knows dat treasure there," Cherry said. "I's gwine find it. I ain't done. Don't nobody think I's done." She glared at Scipio, at Cassius, at everyone but the men who'd followed her. Scipio wore his butler's mask. Behind it, he kept on trying to figure out how to get a message to Anne Colleton.

Marie Galtier held out a tray loaded with stewed chicken to Dr. Leonard O'Doull. O'Doull held up both hands, palms out, as if warding off attack. *"Merci,* Mme. Galtier, but mercy, too, I beg you," he said. "One more drumstick and I think I'll grow feathers."

Marie sniffed. "I do not see how you could grow feathers when you do not eat enough to keep a bird alive."

"Mother!" Nicole said reprovingly, and Marie relented.

Dr. O'Doull looked over to Lucien Galtier. "Seeing how she feeds you, it is to me a matter of amazement that you do not weigh three hundred pounds."

"Our father is very light for his weight," Georges said before Lucien could answer.

"In the same way that you, my son, are very foolish for your brains," Galtier said, and managed to feel he had got a draw with his son, if not a win over him.

Serious as usual, Charles Galtier asked, "Is it true, *monsieur le docteur,* that U.S. forces continue their advance against Quebec City?"

"Yes, from what I hear at the hospital, that is true," Dr. O'Doull told Galtier's elder son.

"Is it also true that fighting alongside the forces of the United States is a corps from the *soi-disant* Republic of Quebec?" Charles asked.

"Charles ..." Lucien murmured warningly. Speaking of it as the so-called Republic of Quebec before an American, one of the people who called it that, was something less than the wisest thing his son might have done.

But Leonard O'Doull, fortunately, took no offense. "Not a corps, certainly, for there are not nearly enough volunteers for a Quebecois corps," he replied. "But a regiment, perhaps two regiments of Quebecois from the Republic—yes, I know they are in the line, for I have treated some of their wounded, being called upon to do so because I am lucky enough to speak French."

It was a straightforward, reasonable, matter-of-fact answer. Lucien waited with some anxiety to hear how his son replied to it. If Charles denounced the Republic, life could grow difficult. But Charles said only, "I do not see how Quebecois could volunteer to fight Quebecois."

"In the War of Secession, brother fought brother in the United States— what was the United States," O'Doull said. "It is not an easy time when such things happen."

"But no one outside created the Confederate States, *n'est-ce pas?"* Charles said, doggedly refusing to let go. "They came into being of themselves."

To Lucien's relief, his son once more failed to get a rise out of Dr. O'Doull. "Perhaps at the beginning, yes," the American said, "but England and France have helped prop them up ever since. Now, though, the props begin to totter."

Charles could have said something like, *Just as the United States prop up the Republic of Quebec. But O'Doull made it plain he was likely to agree with a statement like that, not argue with it. That took half—more than half—the fun away from making it. To his father's relief, Charles kept quiet.*

After Marie, Nicole, Susanne, Denise, and Jeanne cleared the

plates away from the supper table, Lucien got out a bottle of the homemade apple brandy that helped keep nights warm in Quebec. "Is it possible, M. Galtier, that I might talk to you alone?" Dr. O'Doull asked, staring at the pale yellow liquid in the glass in front of him as if he had never seen it before.

Lucien's head came up alertly. Charles and Georges looked at each other. "Well, I can tell when I am not wanted," Georges said, and stomped upstairs in exaggerated outrage. Charles said nothing. He simply rose, nodded to O'Doull, and left the dining room.

"And for what purpose is it that you desire to talk to me alone, Dr. O'Doull?" Galtier said, also examining his applejack with a critical eye. He could without much difficulty think of one possible reason.

And that proved to be the reason Dr. Leonard O'Doull had in mind. The American physician took a deep breath, then spoke rapidly: "M. Galtier, I desire to marry your daughter, and I would like your blessing for the match."

Galtier lifted his glass and knocked back the applejack in one long, fiery gulp. No, O'Doull's words were not a surprise, but they were a shock nonetheless. Instead of answering straight out in brusque, American fashion, the farmer returned a question: "You have, I take it, had somewhat to say of this matter with Nicole."

"Oh, yes, I have done that." Dr. O'Doul's voice was dry. "I will tell you, sir, she likes the idea if you will give your approval."

"And why would she not?" Galtier replied. "You are a personable man, you are a reasonable figure of a man, and you are skilled in your profession, as I have reason to know." He patted the leg O'Doull had sewn up. "But even so, before I say yes or no, there are some things I must learn. For example, suppose that you marry her. Where would you live when the war ends? Would you take her back to the United States?"

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking of setting up shop in Riviere-du-Loup," O'Doull answered. "I've been asking around when I go up into town, and you folks here can use a good surgeon. I *am* a good surgeon, M. Galtier; any doctor who works in a military hospital turns into a good surgeon because he has so many chances to practice his trade." He gulped down his own applejack, then muttered in English: "Damn the war."

"You would speak French, then, and mostly forget your own language, except"—Galtier's eyes twinkled—"when you need to swear, perhaps?"

"I would," O'Doull said. "I speak French better than many people who come to the United States speak English. They do well enough in my country. I should be able to do well enough in yours."

"I think you have reason there," Galtier said. "That you can do this, I do not doubt. The question I was asking was whether you were willing to do it, and I see you are. And you are a Catholic man. That I have known for long and long."

"Yes, I am a Catholic man," O'Doull said. "I am not a perfectly pious man, but I am a Catholic."

"The only man I know who believes himself to be perfectly pious is Bishop Pascal," Galtier said. "Bishop Pascal is surely very pious, as he is very clever, but he is neither so pious nor so clever as he believes himself to be."

"There I think *you* have reason, M. Galtier," Leonard O'Doull said, chuckling. He blinked a couple of times; if a man drank apple brandy when he was tired, it hit even harder than usual. After a moment's thought, he went on, "May I now tell you something to help you decide?"

"Speak," Galtier urged. "Say what is in your mind."

"No—what is in my heart," O'Doull replied. "What I want to tell you is that I love your daughter, and I will do everything I can to take care of her and make her as happy as I can."

"Well," Lucien Galtier said, and then again: "Well." He picked up the bottle of applejack and poured a hefty dollop for Dr. O'Doull and another for himself. He raised his glass in salute. "I look forward to my grandchildren."

O'Doull's long face was normally serious almost to somberness. Galtier had not imagined such a wide smile could spread over it as happened when the doctor understood his words. Still smiling that broad smile, Dr. O'Doull reached out and shook his hand. The doctor's skin was soft, uncallused from manual labor, but not smooth—poisons to kill germs had left it rough and red.

"Thank you, my father-in-law to be," O'Doull said. "Thank you."

"Now you make me feel old," Galtier said in mock severity. He raised his glass. "Let us drink, and then let us tell the rest of the family —if Nicole has not already done as much in the kitchen."

Only as the brandy slid warmly down his throat did he reflect on how, af ter the United States had overrun his country, he had been certain—he had been more than certain; he had been resolved—he would hate the invaders forever. And now his daughter was going to marry an American. He had just given permission for his daughter to marry an American. He shook his head. Life proved stranger than anyone could imagine.

When he called, his wife and daughters flew out of the kitchen and his sons came leaping down the stairs like mountain goats. They might not know what he would say, but they knew what he was going to talk about. He got up, walked over to Leonard O'Doull, and set a hand on his shoulder. "We are

going to have in our family a new member," he said simply. "Our friend, *mon sieur le docteur O'Doull, has asked of me permission to marry Nicole, and I have given to him that permission and my blessing."*

He remembered then that O'Doull had not asked for permission, only his blessing. He wondered what would have happened had he refused it. Would O'Doull have done something foolish? Would Nicole? He had no way of finding out now. Perhaps—no, probably—that was just as well.

And then he forgot about might-have-beens, because Nicole squealed with joy and threw herself into his arms, her three little sisters squealed with excitement and started jumping up and down, Charles and Georges went over to O'Doull and pounded him on the back (that Charles did so rather surprising Lucien), and Marie squeezed between them to kiss the American doctor on the cheek.

"Thank you, Papa. Thank you," Nicole said over and over.

He patted her on the back. "Do not thank me now, my little one," he said. "If you thank me ten years from now, if you thank me twenty years from now, if *le bon Dieu* permits me to remain in this world so that you may thank me thirty years from now, that will be very

good."

"If I want to thank you now, I am going to thank you now," Nicole said. "So there!" To prove it, she kissed him.

He glanced over to O'Doull, one eyebrow upraised. "See how disobedient she is," he said. "You should know what you are getting into."

"I'll take my chances," O'Doull said with a laugh.

"And we will at last get our older sister out of the house!" Georges said. If the dance he and Charles danced wasn't one of delight, it made an excellent counterfeit.

Galtier waited for Nicole to explode into fury. It didn't happen. She said, "This is the happiest day of my life, and I am not going to let my two foolish brothers ruin it for me."

The happiest day of my life. When the USA first invaded Quebec, Galtier had never imagined those words in connection with an American. Now Nicole spoke them altogether without self-consciousness. And now he did not explode into fury on hearing them. He poured himself more applejack, to serve as a shield against strangeness.

IX

Well, Edna," Nellie Semphroch said with a groan, "I wish you'd married that Rebel officer and moved away from here, the way you were talking about."

"So do I, Ma," her daughter moaned. "Oh, Jesus Christ, so do I." They were not angry at each other, not for the moment. What sounded like a thunderstorm raged outside.

It was not a thunderstorm. It was worse, much worse. "If you'd gone somewhere far away, you'd be safe now," Nellie said. "You ain't safe here. Nobody's safe in Washington, not any more."

Two candles lit the cellar under the coffeehouse from which Nellie had made so much during the war. Every few seconds, another U.S. shell would crash down, and the candlesticks would shake and the flames jerk. Every so often—far more often than Nellie's frazzled nerves could readily bear—a shell would land close by or a round from a big gun would hit a little farther off. Then the candlesticks would jump, and the flames leap and swoop wildly. A couple of times, Nellie had to move like lightning to keep the candlesticks from falling over and the candles from starting a fire.

If a big shell came down on the coffeehouse ... If a big shell came down on the coffeehouse, it would pierce the roof and then the ceiling of the first story and then the floor, every one of them as if it weren't there at all. Those shells, she'd heard, had special hard noses to smash their way even into concrete installations. If one of them exploded in the cellar—well, she and Edna would never know what hit them, and that, she had seen, was in its own way a mercy.

A heavy shell thudded home. The ground shook, as if in an earthquake (or so Nellie imagined; she'd never felt a real earthquake). Edna started to cry.

"God, God, Ma," she wailed. "This here is the capital of the United States. What the hell is the U.S. Army doing, blowing the capital of their own goddamn country to pieces?"

"If the Rebs would have left, if they would have said Washington was an open city and pulled back over the Potomac into Virginia, this

never would have happened," her mother answered. "But they keep going on about how Washington is theirs, and they built all those forts on the high ground north of town—built 'em or took over the ones we made—and so this is what happens on account of it."

Edna was not inclined to argue politics. She'd wanted to marry Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid for his personal charms, not out of sympathy for the Confederate States of America. Falling in love with him (that was what Edna called it, though to Nellie it had never looked like anything but an itch in the privates) had made her more sympathetic to the CSA, but not all that much more.

One of the candles burned out, making the cellar even gloomier and filling it with the greasy stink of hot tallow. Edna lighted a fresh candle from the one still burning and stuck it in its candlestick. The flickering flames filled her face with shadows, making her look far older than her years. "Ma . . . ?" she began, and then hesitated.

"What is it?" Nellie asked warily. These days, that kind of stuttering led only to trouble.

Sure enough, when Edna resumed, it was to ask, "Ma, why do you sup pose that Bill Reach yelled for everybody to get out of the church just when the Yanks—uh, the Army—were gettin' ready to start shooting at Washington?"

"I don't know." Nellie's voice was tight. "I don't care. I wish I'd never set eyes on Bill Reach, not a long time ago and not now, either."

She waited for her daughter to bait her about the strumpet's life she'd led. But Edna's mind, for once, turned in a different direction. "How do you sup pose he knew, Ma? How could he have known the Army was going to open up on us right then?"

"I couldn't begin to tell you," Nellie answered. That didn't mean she didn't know, as she hoped Edna would think it would. It meant only what it said: that she couldn't tell.

But Edna, despite being wild for life, was not a fool in matters unrelated to large, handsome, empty-headed men. "He *couldn't* have known, Ma," she insisted, "not if he's just a drunken bum. Only thing a drunken bum cares about is his next bottle. Only way he could have known ..." She drew in a sharp, excited breath. "Ma, the only way he could have known is if he's a spy."

Edna had hit the nail on the head. She didn't realize that hitting the nail on the head endangered not only Bill Reach—who, in Nellie's view, deserved all the danger he could find and then some—but also Hal Jacobs and Nellie herself. With a sniff, Nellie said, "Anyone who'd hire that louse to spy for him would have to be pretty hard up, if you want to know what I think."

That was true. Hal Jacobs, now, was sober and sensible—sensible enough to stay sober, too. Nellie could see him as a spy. Why Reach never started babbling about what he knew to everyone around him when he got drunk was beyond her.

Edna said, "But he couldn't be anything else, Ma. He *knew.* Somebody must have told him."

"I wouldn't want to tell Bill Reach anything, except where to head in," Nellie said grimly. "And anybody else who would want to is a fool, like I said before. I don't know what he might have heard while he was laying in the gutter, and I don't want to know, either."

For a wonder, Edna subsided. The bombardment didn't. The U.S. Army seemed intent on killing every Confederate in Washington, D.C. If that meant killing all the U.S. citizens left in the tortured city, too, well, fair enough. For variety's sake, perhaps, bombing aeroplanes roared overhead and dropped long strings of explosives that made the candlesticks quiver as if they were in torment along with everything else in town.

At last, hours later, a lull came. "Let's go up and cook something to eat," Nellie said. "Then, if they haven't started up again by the time we're through, I think I'll scurry across the street and see how Mr. Jacobs is getting along."

"All right, Ma, you go ahead and do that," Edna said, but without the vi- ciousness that would have informed the words before the disaster of her wedding. Losing her fiance on what would have been their wedding day had taken a lot of the starch out of her.

It was dark in the coffeehouse, too: night outside, with a few strips and circles of moonlight sliding through holes shell fragments had punched in the boards that covered the window opening. The gas had gone out as soon as U.S. shelling started, which was sensible of the Confederate authorities but made life no easier. Edna scooped coal into the firebox of the stove and got a fire going.

"I hope this beefsteak is still good," Nellie muttered, sniffing at it as she took it out of the icebox. She sighed. "You may as well cook it up, because it won't be any better tomorrow. God only knows when we'll have the chance to get ice again."

Edna fried it in an iron spider. It tasted a little gamy, but not too bad. But when Edna turned the tap to get water to make coffee, nothing came out. "The Rebs wouldn't have shut off the water," she said. "They couldn't put out any fires if they did."

"A shell must have broken a pipe somewhere not far away," Nellie said. "If the water doesn't come back on soon, we'll have to carry it back from the river in a bucket and boil it. That will be dangerous, if the shelling keeps up like this."

"Oh, well." Edna tried to make the best of things: "If there ain't no water, I can't very well do dishes, now can I?"

"I'm going across the street," Nellie said, and her daughter nodded. When Nellie opened the door and inhaled, she coughed. The air was thick with smoke. A lot of the things that could burn in Washington were burning. Here and there in the near and middle distance, orange flames flickered and leaped.

Nellie was not supposed to be on the street after dusk. A Confederate pa trol that spied her was as likely as not to shoot first and ask questions later. But she didn't think she would be spotted, and she wasn't.

When she opened the door to Hal Jacobs' cobbler's shop, the bell over it jangled, as if cheerily announcing a customer. Jacobs looked up, candlelight exaggerating the surprise on his face. The two men huddled with him also looked startled. One was Lou Pfeiffer, a pigeon fancier who used his birds to carry messages out of Washington. The other, to Nellie's horrified dismay, was Bill Reach.

"I came to check and make sure you were all right, Mr. Jacobs," Nellie said in a voice that might have been carved from ice. "I see you are. Good evening." She turned and started back across the street.

"Widow Semphroch—Nellie—please wait," Jacobs said. "Mr. Reach has something he would like to say to you—don't you, Bill?" He bore down heavily on the last three words.

Reach, for once, wasn't obviously drunk. That did not make his

tone any less raspy and rough when he said, "I'm sorry as he—as anything for all the trouble I caused you, Lit—uh, Nellie, and I sure as—as can be won't do anything like that ever again, honest to God I won't." He took off his battered black derby, revealing a mat of unkempt gray hair beneath.

It wasn't enough. It wasn't nearly enough. But it sufficed to bring Nellie back into the shop. Lou Pfeiffer's round head went up and down on his fat neck. "That's good," he wheezed. "That's very good."

And then the thunder from the north that had died away started up again, not only started up again but was, impossibly, louder and fiercer than ever. Shells began crashing down, some very close by. Fragments whined off brick and stone and bit into and through rough wood. "To the cellar!" Jacobs shouted.

Nellie hesitated. Crossing the street to get back to her own cellar in the middle of the bombardment was nothing but madness. Going down into the cellar here, with a man who, she thought, loved her; a man who had used her; and a man about whom she knew next to nothing . . .

She hesitated, and was lost. "Come on! To the cellar!" Jacobs bawled again. He grabbed her by the arm and half dragged her down the stairs.

Meant for one, his cellar was obscenely crowded for four. Nellie sat in one corner of the tiny, stifling chamber, her skirts pulled in tight around her, willing no one to come near. And no one did. But they all kept looking at her in the flickering light of the candle flame. And they were all men, so she knew— she was sure she knew—what went through their filthy minds.

And then, to her horror, Bill Reach pulled from his pocket a flask and began to drink. She sprang to her feet and was up the stairs and shoving the cellar door open before Hal Jacobs could do anything more than let out a startled bleat. She slammed the door down on top of the three U.S. spies and fled.

When she got back to the cellar under the coffeehouse, she discovered fly ing fragments had sliced her skirt to shreds. Not one of them had touched her flesh. "You all right, Ma?" Edna asked. "I heard you at the cellar door right in the middle of all the guns—before that, I was afraid you were a goner, and then I thought you were nuts, coming out in that."

"With where I was, I'd go out among the shells again in a minute." Nellie spoke with great conviction. "In a second, believe me." Edna shot her a quizzical glance. She shuddered but did not explain.

Far in the distance, off somewhere on the west Texas plains, a coyote howled, a wail full of hunger and loneliness and unrequited lust. Hipolito Rodriguez let out a soft chuckle. "He is not very happy, I don't think. The way he sound, he might as well be a soldier, si?"

Before Jefferson Pinkard could answer, Sergeant Albert Cross said, "Need some men for a raidin' party on the Yankee trenches tonight."

Pinkard stuck up his hand. "I'll go, Sarge."

Cross looked at him without saying anything for a while. Then he remarked, "You don't got to kill all the damnyankees in Texas by your lonesome, Jeff. Leave some for the rest of us."

"I want to go, Sarge," Pinkard answered. He had never been a particu larly eloquent man. Instead of saying more with words, he folded his big hands into fists. "What they done—" He shook his head in frustration. The words clogged in his throat.

In the end, Sergeant Cross shrugged. "Well, hell, you want 'em that bad, reckon you can have 'em. Who else?"

"I go," Hip Rodriguez said quietly.

One by one, Cross got the rest of the volunteers. "That's good," he said. "That's mighty fine. We go out half past midnight. Y'all grab yourselves some shuteye before then. Don't want any sleepy bastard yawnin' out in the middle of no-man's-land an' lettin' the damnyankees know we're comin'. See y'all tomorrow morning'—*early* tomorrow mornin'."

After the sergeant went on his way, Rodriguez said, "Ever since you get back from leave, *amigo,* you want to go on all the raids, on all the attacks. You never used to do nothing like that before."

"What about it?" Pinkard said. "Yankees ain't gonna get out of Texas un less we grab 'em by the scruff of the neck and heave 'em on out. Somebody's got to do it. Might as well be me."

Rodriguez studied him. The little Sonoran farmer's eyes might have been black glass in his swarthy face. "You don't have such a good time like you think when you get back home?" he asked. He didn't push. He didn't raise his voice. He let Pinkard answer without making him feel he had to tell any deep, dark secrets.

But no matter how discreet he was, no matter how little pressure he ap plied, Jefferson Pinkard kept on saying what he'd been saying ever since he returned to the front from Birmingham: "Had a hell of a time back home."

In a certain sense, that was even true. He hadn't screwed so much on his honeymoon down in Mobile. Emily had done everything he wanted. Emily had done more than he'd imagined. He'd wakened one night to her sucking him hard and then pulling him over onto her. She'd been wet and waiting. He'd worn himself out by then, and hadn't thought he could come, but he'd been wrong.

Bedford Cunningham had made himself scarce, too. After that first dreadful moment, Jeff hadn't seen him at all. That suited Jeff fine. If he never saw Bedford again, that would suit him even better.

But now he was back here, somewhere east of Lubbock. Bedford Cun ningham remained in Birmingham, remained next door to Emily. What were they doing now that Jeff was gone? Was she rubbing her breasts in his face? Was she teasing his foreskin with her tongue? Was she groaning and gurgling and urging him on, her legs folded around his back tight as a bear trap's jaws?

Every filthy picture in Pinkard's mind made him wish he were dead, and Cunningham, and Emily. And, at the same time, every filthy picture in his mind made him wish he were back in Birmingham, so Emily could do those things to *him.*

"Yeah, a hell of a time," he repeated. Rodriguez plainly didn't believe him. *Well, too damn bad, Hip,* Jeff thought.

He wrapped himself in his blanket, more to keep the mosquitoes away than for warmth, and did his best to sleep. Images of Emily naked and lewd made him sweat harder than the hot, muggy weather could have done by itself. At last, despite them, he dozed—and dreamt of his wife, naked and lewd. Whether awake or asleep, he could not escape her . . . except when he fought.

Sergeant Cross shook him awake at midnight. For a moment, he

thought the hand on his shoulder was Emily's. When he realized it wasn't, he also realized he was liable to be killed inside the next hour. He scrambled eagerly to his feet. "Let's get moving, Sarge," he said.

"Keep your britches on, Jeff," Cross answered. "Some of our buddies are still sawing wood. We got to wait on the artillery, too. They're gonna lay down a box barrage for us, keep the Yanks from bringing reinforcements into the stretch of trench we hit."

"That sounds pretty good," Pinkard said. "They want us to bring back prisoners, or are we supposed to come back by ourselves?"

"Nobody told me one way or the other," Cross said. "Reckon we'll have to play that one by ear when we get over there." Seeing Pinkard yawn, he went on, "Grab yourself some coffee. Pot on a little fire just down the way."

The coffee was thick and tasted like dirt and was strong enough to strip paint, but it made Pinkard's heart beat faster and his eyes open wide. He gulped it down, swearing as it burned his mouth. Several of his comrades took cups, too. Pretty soon, the pot was empty.

Sergeant Cross passed out burlap sacks of grenades. Jeff took one. The little round bombs—British style, not the potato-mashers the Yanks and the Huns used—were fine for trench fighting. Bayonet and entrenching tool were even better, as far as Pinkard was concerned.

One by one, the men in butternut climbed out of the trench and crawled through the few pathetic lengths of wire that passed for a belt. Cross said, "This here wire reminds me of a bald fellow combin' about the last three strands he's got across his shiny old dome and pretendin' he's got hisself a whole head o' hair. He may be fooled, but ain't nobody else who is."

Several soldiers chuckled in low voices. Pinkard didn't, but he nodded at the aptness of the comparison. Because they had any barbed wire at all, the Confederate commanders in Texas often seemed to think they had great thickets of the stuff, as was true in Virginia and Tennessee—not that, from the news coming west, it had done the CSA a whole lot of good there, either.

A little to the north, a flare rose from the Yankee lines. It burned in the sky, a fierce white point of light. Under its glare, the advancing Confederate soldiers froze. Pinkard pressed his face into the dirt. It smelled of dust and of dead bodies. That stink of rotting flesh never

left his nostrils; even more than cordite and coffee and tobacco, it was the definitive odor of the front, as hot iron was the definitive odor of the Sloss Foundry.

After what felt like forever, the flare finally faded. Jeff crawled on. He skirted shell holes when he could, but was always ready to dive into one if the U.S. soldiers opened up on the raiding party.

Cross muttered discontentedly: "Sure as hell, goddamn artillery's gonna open up too goddamn soon. They ain't gonna figure out we had to wait for the flare. Goddamn artillery can't figure out to grab their asses with both hands, anybody wants to know."

He was right. The Confederate soldiers hadn't reached the Yankee wire— thicker than their own, but not much—when the three-inch guns behind the C.S. line started barking. Shells rained down on the U.S. position, making the sides and back of a box that isolated a stretch of the forward trenches.

Like the rest of the men in the raiding party, Pinkard wore a wire-cutter on his belt. He could crawl under most of the wire the damnyankees had laid, and snipped his way through the few places where he had trouble crawling. Some body in the U.S. trench fired. Jeff didn't think it was an aimed shot. He wanted to thank the Yankee for it; it told him exactly where the trench line was.

He yanked a grenade out of the sack, pulled off the ring, and chucked the bomb into the trench, as close to the Yankee rifleman as he could put it. The report was loud and hard and short. He threw more grenades. So did the rest of the raiders. Then, with a yell, he scrambled forward and leaped down into the U.S. trench.

"Hey there, you—" The words were spoken in a sharp Yankee accent. Jeff didn't reach over his shoulder for his rifle. Faster to yank the entrenching tool off his belt and swing it in a short, flat arc. The shovel blade struck flesh and bit deep. The U.S. soldier went down with a groan. Then Pinkard unslung the Tredegar and ran along the firebay.

A potato-masher grenade hurled from a traverse exploded eight or ten feet in front of him. A fragment bit the back of his hand. Another tore through his tunic without grazing him. He dashed past the place where the grenade had gone off and into the traverse. A Yankee yelled and fired. He missed. Pinkard lunged with the bayonet. He grunted as it penetrated the U.S. soldier's flesh, almost as he

sometimes grunted when he penetrated Emily's flesh.

The damnyankee shrieked and crumpled. Jeff fired and stabbed, stabbed and fired, till three or four more Yankees were down and none left on his feet in the traverse. He grunted again, an oddly sated sound.

Somebody touched him on the shoulder. He whirled, and would have spitted Hip Rodriguez if the Sonoran hadn't beaten the bayonet aside with his own rifle. "We got to go back, Jeff," Rodriguez said. "The sergeant, he blow the whistle. You no hear?"

Consumed in his orgy of killing, Pinkard hadn't heard anything. He shook his head like a man coming out of a dream. "All right, Hip," he said meekly. "I'll come back with you."

Rodriguez looked down the length of the traverse. Muttering, "Ten mil lion demons from hell," he crossed himself. To Jeff, he said, "You fight like a crazy man, *amigo."*

"Yeah," Pinkard said. "Come on. Let's get the hell out of here."

U.S. artillery pumped shells into no-man's-land as the Confederate raiders crawled and scrambled back to their own line. One man took a splinter in the leg. One man hadn't come out of the trench. Even so, Sergeant Cross reported to Captain Connolly with considerable pride: "Sir, we whaled the stuffing out of the sons of bitches. Pinkard here, he was worth a regiment all by hisself."

"Good news, Sergeant," the company commander said. "Well done, Pinkard."

"Thank you, sir," Jeff answered. His voice was dull, far away. The red mist of slaughter had retreated from his mind. He felt spent and empty. Emily cavorted once more behind his eyes.

Four fat freighters slowly steamed south. Watching them from the deck of the USS *Ericsson,* George Enos sighed and said, "I don't know why they bother painting themselves in camouflage colors. A big bull's-eye with SINK ME alongside it in big letters would be more like the straight story."

Carl Sturtevant chuckled. "You aren't looking at the world with

the proper spirit, George," he said, for all the world like a chaplain.

Enos snorted. "And you aren't looking at the world like any petty officer I ever heard of," he retorted. "You're supposed to go 'Goddamn right' when I say something like that."

The chief of the depth-charge projector crew laughed. "I never do what I'm supposed to if I can help it."

"All right." Enos chuckled, too. The ships wallowed along, painted in stripes and patches and gaudy colors that were supposed to make it hard for the skipper of a submersible to gauge either their range or their course. Whether the camouflage job did that or not, George couldn't have said. It made the freighters ugly as sin, though. There he was certain.

Stripes zigzagged jaggedly over the *Ericsson,* too, in an effort to break up her outline and make her seem to be moving in the direction of her own stern. She and a sister ship scurried around the freighter like sheep dogs around sheep, doing their best to keep the flock safe from the wolves that lurked under the surface of the sea.

"What I want to do," Enos said, "is get the bastard who almost torpedoed us a few weeks ago. Lord knows he's still hanging around; he would have chewed up that other bunch of freighters if we hadn't run him off."

Sturtevant raised an ironic eyebrow. "I swear, I don't know what the hell you're talking about. Lieutenant Crowder reported that submersible as probably destroyed, and if you don't think Lieutenant Crowder knows everything in the world, well, shit, just ask him."

"Yeah, and rain makes applesauce," Enos said. They both laughed then; laughing at the pretensions of officers was a sailors' tradition old as time.

"He's not too bad a fellow," Sturtevant allowed in an astonishing display of magnanimity, "as long as you don't take him too serious. Give him a chance, though, and he'd have half of us up in aeroplanes and the other half down under the water in deep-sea diver suits, tryin' to catch torpedoes like they were footballs the Rebs were throwing at us."

"He does like gadgets," Enos agreed. "At least the depth-charge projector is a pretty good gadget."

A veteran seaman, Sturtevant had almost as little use for newfangled de vices as he did for young officers enamored of them. When he said, "Yeah, it's not too bad," he surely meant it as high praise, and that was how George Enos took it.

Enos stared out across the blue, blue water of the tropical Atlantic, look ing for anything that might alert him to the presence of the Confederate submarine that also seemed to make its home in this stretch of ocean. He'd spied the stinking thing once—why not twice?

Ocean, squawking birds, sun standing higher in the sky every day —and far higher now than Enos had ever seen, anyway. Despite that fierce and brilliant light, he didn't spot anything out of the ordinary.

He kept looking ahead of the freighters, ahead and off to one side. If the submersible did prowl in these waters, that was the direction from which it would attack. It couldn't move very fast while submerged; it had to take the lead on the surface, then go under and slowly sneak toward its intended prey.

George did his best to think like the skipper of a submersible. One thing he knew: the skipper of the boat that had almost sunk the *Ericsson* had nerve and brains both. He'd pretended to be sunk well enough to fool Lieutenant Crowder, and then he'd gone after U.S. freighters the first chance he got. That was his job, and he was going to do it come hell or high water—in fact, he'd probably prefer high water.

"There ought to be a better way to find a submersible that's hunting than bare-naked eyeballs," George said. "What we need"—he glanced over at Carl Sturtevant—"is a new kind of gadget."

"Here's what you need." Sturtevant displayed the middle finger of his right hand. "And for God's sake don't say that anyplace where Crowder can hear you. He'll either order you to invent the damn thing yourself—and by day before yesterday, too, or you'll be in Dutch—or else he'll try and do it himself, and that won't work, either."

"Yeah, but—" Enos got no further than that. The lead freighter blew up. It was a spectacular explosion; the ship must have been carrying munitions. The report slapped George in the face across a couple of miles of water. "Jesus!" he exclaimed.

Klaxons started hooting men to their battle stations. The *Ericsson's* deck shuddered under Enos' feet as he ran. The stacks belched smoke.

The destroyer picked up speed.

At the one-pounder by the stern, George peered about. He suspected—he feared—he was likelier to spot a torpedo wake heading straight for the *Ericsson* than a telltale periscope. If he didn't try to spot a periscope, though, noth ing could be more certain than his failure.

A runner came up to Lieutenant Crowder at the depth-charge projector by Enos' gun and said, "Sir, this is where the bastard—uh, the submersible—is hiding. Captain wants you to shake him up to the surface if you can."

"We'll do that," Crowder said. He turned back to Carl Sturtevant, who did the dirty work of running the projector. "We'll shake those Rebel bastards or their limey pals right out of their shoes. Give me four charges, Sturtevant; set the fuses for two hundred feet."

"Aye aye, sir. Four charges. Two hundred feet," the veteran petty officer repeated tonelessly. That tonelessness was itself a dead giveaway that he did not agree with his superior's order. Indeed, as the crew loaded the first two charges onto the projector, he went so far as to ask, "Did I hear that right, sir?" If Crowder said no, he could change the order without losing face by having a man of lower rank correct him.

But Crowder, crisply, said, "Yes. I want them deep. After he sank that freighter, the skipper down there will surely have seen us coming to the attack. He will try to place as much ocean between himself and us as he can. Two hundred feet I said; two hundred feet it shall be."

"Yes, sir," Sturtevant answered, even more woodenly than before. Two by two, the depth charges flew off the *Ericsson's* stern and splashed into the sea.

That *yes, sir* in place of *aye aye, sir* was a telling proof of how strongly Sturtevant disagreed with Lieutenant Crowder. Standing there behind the one-pounder, George Enos found himself on the petty officer's side. Whatever flag the boat somewhere under them flew, its skipper had proved himself a tough, aggressive bastard in earlier attacks. George didn't think a skipper like that would lurk in the depths, either. His guess was that the enemy captain would come up to periscope depth as soon as he could, and try to put a fish right in the *Ericsson's* engine room. In which case, sending depth charges down two hundred feet would be a waste of good explosives.

George's eyes went back and forth, back and forth, looking for the feathery plume of wake that trailed and could give away a periscope. He imagined he saw something a couple of times, but longer looks proved him wrong.

Astern of the *Ericsson,* water boiled and bubbled, the surface mark of the depth charges' explosions. Moments later, oil floated up from far underwater, flattening the waves over which it rode. "Well, dip me in shit and fry me for bacon," Carl Sturtevant said in conversational tones. "Either we've hurt the son of a bitch or else he's trying to make us think we did. Whether it's the one or the other, we didn't miss him by much." He solemnly took off his hat to Lieutenant Crowder. "Beg your pardon, sir. You were right and I was wrong, and I'm man enough to admit it."

"Never mind that." Crowder pointed back to the oil slick. "Let's get over it and pound that boat to death. I'll want half the ash cans we thrown down there fused for a hundred and fifty feet, the other half for two-fifty."

"Aye aye, sir," Sturtevant said, and repeated back the order. No back talk now; his thoughts and Crowder's were running down the same track.

Like any destroyer, the *Ericsson* was an agile vessel. She quickly returned to the floating oil. Into the water splashed the new salvo of depth charges.

Explosions underwater once more roiled the surface of the sea. Enos stood at his gun, ready to pound away at the submarine if she had to surface in a hurry. He was also ready for disappointment; the submersible had tricked the destroyer before. More oil came to the surface, and air bubbles, and bits of wreckage swept up by the bubbles.

The men at the depth-charge projector cheered and beat their fists against its metal sides. "If he's shamming this time, he's a better actor than any Booth ever born," Lieutenant Crowder shouted. "Set some for two-fifty again, Sturtevant, and some for an even hundred. If we've hurt that boat bad enough, it'll have to surface. Hop to it, you men."

Hop to it they did. Depth charges rained into the Atlantic. With a kill so close, Crowder fired them off with reckless abandon. If the *Ericsson* didn't sink the submarine, she'd be all but defenseless against it. George caressed the curved metal of the one-pounder's trigger as if

it were his wife's curved flesh. "Come on," he muttered. "Come on, you son of a whore."

And, like a broaching whale, up the submarine came. She rose bow-first, and was plainly in desperate straits. No sooner had the boat reached the surface than she heeled over onto her side and began *to* sink once more. Though it was more nearly horizontal than vertical, an officer came out of the conning-tower hatch and threw something into the water: the boat's papers in a weighted sack, George supposed.

He fired a ten-round clip of one-pounder shells at the enemy officer. One struck home; the officer's head exploded into red fog. The fellow—he was a Rebel, for he wore dark gray trousers, not Royal Navy blue—tumbled into the sea. A moment later, the submersible sank, this time for good.

Carl Sturtevant pounded George on the back. "Good shooting, snapping turtle," he bawled in Enos' ear. "You see the name on the boat there?"

"Bon-something," George said. "She rolled over too damn fast to get more than just a glimpse."

"Bonefish, had to be," Sturtevant said. "There's swarms of 'em in C.S. waters; no wonder they'd name a boat after 'em."

"We sent it to the boneyard, by God," Enos answered. Solemnly, the two men shook hands.

Cincinnatus wished he were driving his truck. Inside the cab of the rumbling, snorting White machine, nobody was watching him. Here in Covington, he wished he had eyes in the back of his head, and one on each side, too. Did that fellow with the gray mustache waiting for the trolley belong to Luther Bliss' Kentucky State Police? Was that redhead in overalls a member of the Confederate underground that kept on doing its best to disrupt Kentucky's return to the USA? When he got back into the colored part of town, he wondered whether the woman hawking apples reported to Apicius or some other Red cell leader. All those groups were intently interested in keeping an eye on him.

And things weren't simple, either. The colored woman selling apples might have reported to Luther Bliss, or even to the

Confederate diehards. Cincinnatus had worked with them; other Negroes could, too. For that matter, white Reds could work with black Reds. Maybe none of those people, nor any others he passed on the street, was interested in him at all. He hoped none of those people was interested in him at all. He had trouble believing it, though.

Time was when he'd let out a sigh of relief coming up the walk to his house. When he was home with Elizabeth and little Achilles, nothing could bother him. That was what he'd thought then.

Now ... As he went up the wooden steps onto his front porch, his eyes automatically dropped to look at the boards right in front of the door. There was nothing to see. He and Elizabeth had both worked hard to get rid of every trace of Tom Kennedy's blood. No, there was nothing to see. But he knew the blood was there.

What he didn't know was who had blown off a big chunk of Kennedy's head. He had next to no chance of finding out, either, because everyone thought he was in someone else's pocket and so didn't want to give him the time of day. But if he didn't find out who'd murdered the Confederate diehard and why, whoever it was might decide he needed killing, too. Since he didn't know whom in particular to worry about, he had to worry about everybody, which got wearing.

Elizabeth had got home ahead of him. She must have seen him coming, for she opened the door as he was reaching for the knob. Out toddled Achilles, a big smile on his face. "Dada!" he said, grabbing Cincinnatus around the leg. "Dada!"

"Sounds more like a real word now," Cincinnatus said, leaning forward over his son to kiss his wife. "Not jus' babble, babble, babble, way it used to be."

Then Achilles tugged on his trouser leg and spoke imperiously:
"Up!"

Laughing, Cincinnatus lifted him. He was a lot lighter than crated rifles and munitions, and there was only the one of him, not unending loads in the back of the truck. When Cincinnatus remarked on that, Elizabeth snorted. "May only be the one," she said, "but it sure enough seems like there's about a hundred an' ten of him sometimes."

Cincinnatus carried the toddler into the house. He paused in the front hall and sniffed appreciatively. "What smells so good?"

"That beef tongue I bought at the butcher's the other day," his wife an swered. "Your mother threw it in the pot with taters an' onions while she was watching Achilles. And I've got some string beans and salt pork cookin' up in there, too."

"I *knew* I married you for some reason," Cincinnatus said. Elizabeth stuck out her tongue at him. When she turned to go into the kitchen, he swatted her lightly on the backside. They both laughed.

Supper proved to be as good as it smelled, which wasn't easy. Afterwards, happily replete, Cincinnatus played with Achilles while Elizabeth cleaned up in the kitchen. Achilles liked chasing a little rubber football. Whenever he tried to kick it, he fell on his bottom. He thought that was part of the fun.

After a while, he tried something different. Cincinnatus had been tossing the ball for him to chase. He went and got it and did his best to throw it back> It went up in the air and bounced off his head. As far as he was concerned, that was pretty damn funny, too.

While he got the ball and tried again to throw it to Cincinnatus, his father laughed and said, "I wonder if that's how the Yankees got the notion of thro win' the ball forwards when they play football." In the Confederate States, passes toward the other side's goal line were against the rules. Football in the United States, though, permitted forward passes that were hurled from at least five yards behind the line of scrimmage.

When Elizabeth finished the dishes, Cincinnatus lighted a cigar (a lousy cigar—tobacco had gone downhill since Kentucky's forcible separation from the CSA) and read the evening newspaper Elizabeth had—with the white lady's permission—brought home from one of the houses she cleaned. As usual, the paper claimed extravagant U.S., German, and even Austrian victories. Had a quarter of what the papers claimed been true, the forces of the Quadruple Alliance would have conquered the world ten times over.

Someone knocked on the door. Cincinnatus and Elizabeth both looked up in alarm. Not so long before, Tom Kennedy had knocked on the door like that—and died on the doorstep a moment later. Was it a neighbor wanting to borrow some molasses, or was it a ruse to get Cincinnatus to open the door and expose himself to someone crouched in the dark with a rifle?

Only one way to find out. "Who is it?" Cincinnatus asked warily.

Before the war, he would have opened the door without asking. Before the war, the door might well have been open anyhow on a warm spring night, or Elizabeth and he might have been sitting out on the front porch.

A deep voice answered: "It sure as hell ain't the Easter bunny, and it ain't Father Christmas, neither."

Cincinnatus opened the door. There stood Apicius, who was almost cer tainly the best barbecue cook in the USA. He might have been the best barbecue cook in the CSA, too, but the competition was stiffer there. As fit his trade, the big black man was big in all dimensions. Solid muscle lay under his fat. "You better come in," Cincinnatus said. "I don't reckon this is no social call."

"And it ain't," Apicius said, squeezing past him. "I ain't here on my busi ness. I'm here on the business of the workers and peasants of the state of Kentucky." His chuckle was wheezy. "And why ain't you surprised?"

"Can't imagine," Cincinnatus answered, letting the cook precede him down the hall and into the front room. Apicius and Elizabeth greeted each other. Then she took Achilles back to the bedroom. As far as Cincinnatus was concerned, the less she involved herself in affairs of politics and the various undergrounds with which he was entangled, the better.

"You got the fine start to a family here," Apicius said, and nodded at his own words. "Need yourself some more young uns, but that'll come, that'll come."

"You didn't come over here to jaw about my family," Cincinnatus said. "Nothin's gonna pry you away from the barbecue pit if it ain't important."

"That's a fact," Apicius said. "You never was a fool, Cincinnatus."

"Yeah, go on and baste me with that big old long-handled brush o' yours," Cincinnatus said. "Then you put me over the fire an' turn me on the spit."

Apicius laughed, but he quickly sobered. "All right. I won't waste your time. I won't waste my time. What I got to know is this: whose man is you? I can talk with you if you is my man. I can talk with you if you is Tom Kennedy's man. I—"

"You know what happened to him," Cincinnatus broke in, his voice harsh.

"I know what. I dunno who done it, and I wish I did. But he still have folks left on his side." Apicius waved a big, thick-fingered hand, as if to make Cincinnatus' interruption disappear. "I can even talk with you if you is Luther Bliss' man."

Cincinnatus interrupted again: "I ain't, but you'd be a fool to talk with me if I was. You don' know how dangerous that Bliss is."

"Hell I don't," Apicius said. "Ain't no law says the forces of reaction can't have people on their side who know what they's doin'. But I can talk with you if you is Bliss' man. Have to watch what I say, but I can talk. But if I don't know *whose* man you is, Cincinnatus, how can I talk with you? I say some-thin', how do I know who hears it?"

Apicius' point made perfectly good sense. Of all the factions still struggling in Kentucky, Cincinnatus had more sympathy for the Reds than for any other—the Reds were, after all, his own people. But a man who'd been struggling to reach what passed for the upper stratum of black society before the war didn't completely sympathize with the Reds' leveling aspirations, either.

The other side of the coin was that, if Apicius didn't like the answer Cincinnatus gave him, no insurance company in the world would put a nickel on his life. With a sigh, Cincinnatus said, "I never wanted to be nothin' but my own man. If that ain't good enough for you, don't talk with me at all— 'cept to say thanks when I buy me some ribs."

Apicius sighed, too. "You know too goddamn much to be your own man and nobody else's. You is mixed up in this. Can't get yourself unmixed, any more'n you can take the sugar out of the coffee once it's in."

That was probably true, too. Cincinnatus was about to say so when another knock came from the front of the house. Apicius' had been ordinary. This one was brisk, authoritative. Whoever was out there expected to be let in right away, with no backtalk from anybody.

"Who?" Apicius whispered.

"Don't know," Cincinnatus whispered back. Apicius' hand went to

a trouser pocket: a pistol in there, no doubt. Cincinnatus wished he had one, too. For the second time that evening, he went to the door and called, "Who is it?"

"Queen of the May," the man outside answered.

Everyone was giving smart answers tonight. Cincinnatus opened the door for Luther Bliss, wondering if he'd get caught in the cross fire between the chief of the Kentucky State Police and Apicius. A glance over his shoulder told him the Red leader had that pistol out and ready. But then, to his amazement, Apicius lowered it. "Evenin', Luther," he said.

"Evenin', Apicius, you damn Red," Bliss answered amiably. Cincinnatus stared from one of them to the other. They both laughed at him. Pointing to Apicius, Luther Bliss said, "I know who this son of a bitch is. I know what he stands for. Because I know that, he doesn't worry me *too* much. I can handle him—reckon he thinks the same about me. You, though, Cincinnatus—who the hell are you? Who are you really working for?"

Apicius laughed again, louder this time. He pointed to Cincinnatus. "I come over here to find out the same damn thing, Luther—and 1 don't care if you's here or not. He still could be one o' yours."

"Only man I work for is Lieutenant Straubing, who bosses my truck unit," Cincinnatus said. "I ain't nobody's man but my own." He looked from Apicius to Luther Bliss and back again. One thing was obvious: neither of them believed him.

In the mid-Atlantic, Sylvia Enos read in the *Boston Globe* as she rode the trolley to work, *the* USS Ericsson *engaged and sank the* CSS Bonefish, *a submersible that had for some time tormented shipping in the region. The Bonefish had previously torpedoed the SS Teton, a civilian steamship in U.S.service. Our bold Navy has valiantly swept away yet another vicious scourge of the sea.*

That was George's ship. If they'd fought a Confederate submarine, he'd surely been in danger. She folded the paper and leaned back in the uncomfortable seat. He was all right now. And with this *Bonefish* sunk, he'd keep on being all right a while longer. Now that she hadn't seen him for a few months, her anger was cooling. He might have

wanted to be unfaithful, but he hadn't actually gone and done it.

And he was all right. *Thank you, God,* Sylvia thought. Next to that simple fact, the war news on the front page, the mutinies in the French Army and all the rest of it, faded to insignificance. The *Ericsson* had fought again, and nothing had happened to George. The world looked good.

When the trolley came to her stop, Sylvia left the *Globe* on the seat for whoever might want it. She hoped the next person who picked it up would find as much good news as she had, and not a name he recognized in the black-bordered casualty lists.

She had a spring in her step as she went into the canning plant. It was usually missing in the morning—especially these days, when she had to get George, Jr., off to kindergarten and Mary Jane to Mrs. Dooley's before she could come to work.

She was humming a song about coal conservation when she punched in. The words were as stupid as those of most wartime patriotic songs, but she couldn't get the tune out of her mind. *Save your coal for me—Always!/ Says the sailor on the sea—Always! She shook her head in annoyance—not just a stupid song but irritating, too, because it would not leave her alone.*

Mr. Winter, the foreman, followed the war news closely, as befit a veteran wounded in the service of his country. "That's your husband's destroyer that sank that Rebel submersible, isn't it, Mrs. Enos?" he called as she walked to the machine that put labels on cans of mackerel.

"Yes, Mr. Winter, George is on the *Ericsson,* that's right," she answered.

"Thought so," the foreman said, puffing on his cigar. "Well, good for him, by God. I'm glad he came through that safe. Those submersibles are things we didn't have to worry about in my day. I'll tell you something else, too: I'm not sorry to have missed them." He patted his gimpy leg. "I just wish the Rebs had missed me."

"I'm sure of that, Mr. Winter," Sylvia said. When she got to her machine, she checked the paste reservoir, which was full, and the label hopper, which turned out to be almost empty. She quickly filled it. That would have been just what she needed: to get caught by surprise fifteen minutes into her shift, and have to hold up the line

while she fed the hopper. Mr. Winter would have made some not so polite conversation with her about that.

Isabella Antonelli came hurrying up to the machine next door. "I saw in the paper—your husband's ship, it sank a submarine," she said. "This is good news. Better news would be for the *dannata* war to end, but this is good news for you."

Before Sylvia could do anything more than nod, the line, which had shut down for shift changeover, started again with the usual assortment of groans and creaks from the belts and gearing. Into the machine went the first brightly tinned can. Sylvia pulled a lever. Three lines of paste flowed onto the can. She took a step and pulled a second lever. On went the label, with the colorful picture of the improbably tunalike mackerel on it. Another step, a third level, and the can went on its way. She went back and did it again . . . and again .. . and again.

The day went smoothly. She didn't have to think about what she was do ing. The labels didn't jam in the hopper once during the whole shift. That was the machine's Achilles' heel, the most common problem that could shut down the line and bring down the wrath of Mr. Winter.

Not today. Sylvia still felt almost alarmingly fresh as she clocked out and hurried to the trolley stop to catch the next car to George, Jr.'s, school. The streetcar was right on time. A man with a white Kaiser Bill mustache stood up so she could sit down.

Everything was going so well, she wondered what would happen to break the lucky streak. She found out when she got to the school. He wasn't in the kindergarten classroom. "You'll have to get him at the front office," his teacher, Miss Hammaker, told Sylvia.

"What did he do?" she gasped. "Is he all right?"

"You'll have to get him at the office," the dyspeptic-looking spinster repeated. Sylvia snarled at her and hurried away.

When she saw George, Jr., she knew right away what the trouble was. A clerk clacking away at a typewriter spelled it out in two well-chosen words: "Chicken pox." Then she went on, "I'm afraid you're going to have to keep him home until the scabs come off the pox."

"But that will be two weeks from now," Sylvia exclaimed in

horror.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Enos, but we can't very well let him go spreading a contagious disease, now can we?" the clerk said primly.

"But my job!" Sylvia said. "What am I supposed to do about my job?"

"I really don't know what to tell you about that, ma'am," the clerk an swered. "We do have the other children to look out for, too, you know."

Sylvia put a hand on her son's shoulder. "Come on, George," she said wearily. "Let's go get your sister and take the two of you home and then try to figure out what to do next." She had no idea what to do next. Once she got home, she could start worrying about it. The clerk started typing again. Now that George, Jr., was leaving, she didn't have to worry about him any more. Sylvia did.

When she got to Mrs. Dooley's, the woman looked at her with the same disapproval Miss Hammaker had shown. "Mrs. Enos," she said pointedly, "your daughter will not be welcome here—"

"Until she gets over the chicken pox," Sylvia finished for her. Mrs. Doo ley's eyebrows rose. Sylvia said, "Just a wild guess, of course." She kept her arm around George, Jr. The longer he had to stay on his feet, the more pale and sick he looked—and the redder his spots got by comparison.

"I can't have her here till she's better," Mrs. Dooley said. "The other women whose children I mind would have a fit if I let her stay, and I wouldn't blame them one bit." She turned. "Go on, Mary Jane. Go home with your mother. When you're well, you can come back again."

"All right," Mary Jane said meekly. That she offered no mischief or snippy talk was a telling indication she didn't feel right. She too was starting to break out in the red spots that would soon turn into blisters.

Cautiously, Mrs. Dooley asked, "She *is* vaccinated, isn't she?"

"What?" Sylvia needed a moment to understand what the question meant. "Oh. Yes. She and her brother both. It's only chicken pox—it can't be smallpox."

"All right." The older woman nodded. "Most children *are* vaccinated these days, but you never know. Well, that's a relief. You take them home now, Mrs. Enos, and bring your daughter back when she's well."

Nodding, Sylvia turned away and led the children back to the trolley stop. They didn't frisk ahead of her, the way they usually did. She urged them to hurry, but they lacked the energy to do it. She counted herself lucky they didn't make her miss a streetcar.

They had no appetite at supper, which also didn't surprise her. After they were done picking at their food, she gave them aspirins and put them to bed early. "This itches, Mama," George, Jr., said. "It itches a lot."

"Try not to scratch," Sylvia answered. "If you do, it'll leave scars."

"It *itches!"* he said.

Remembering her own bout of chicken pox—she'd been nine or ten—she knew how fiercely they itched. "Do your best," she said. She had a pockmark on the side of her jaw, one between her breasts, several on her arms and legs, and one or two in other places she hadn't known about till her husband found them. That had amused George no end, though she'd been embarrassed.

By the time she finished the supper dishes, the children were asleep. She went down the hall and knocked on Brigid Coneval's door. When the Irishwoman opened it, she was in mourning black. "Mrs. Enos," she said, and stepped aside. "Do come in. What might I do for you today?"

Her apartment looked more battered than Sylvia's, and smelled of cooking grease and cabbage. Her children, three boys ranging from George, Jr.'s, size on down, ran around raising hell. Through their racket, Sylvia said, "I was wondering if I could pay you enough to watch my children, just long enough to let them get over the chicken pox."

Brigid Coneval shook her head. "That I cannot, and that I will not," she answered. "For one thing, I'm taking in other people's wee ones no more, as you know. And for another, Patrick has not had the chicken pox himself, nor has Michael, nor Billy, neither. I'll be just as well pleased without them having 'em, too, sure and I will."

"But what am I going to do?" Sylvia exclaimed. She'd been saying the same thing to anyone who would listen ever since she'd first seen George, Jr., covered with spots. "How am I going to go to work?"

"Well, if you do, you do—and if you don't, you don't," Mrs. Coneval said airily. "Tell 'em you'll not be in while the babes are after being sick, that's all. What else can you do?"

"They'll fire me." Sylvia stated the obvious.

"Will you starve while you miss a couple weeks' pay?" Brigid Coneval asked. Reluctantly, Sylvia shook her head. The new widow went on, "Then be damned to the job. You'll get another soon enough—plenty to be had, with so many men off getting killed. You'll have no trouble at all, at all."

"I've worked there a long time." Sylvia sighed. "But you're right. In the end, you're right. If they fire me for staying home, then they do, that's all. I don't want to leave that job, but I can if I have to. Thank you, Mrs. Coneval. You've made me see things clear."

"Any time at all, dearie," Brigid Coneval said.

Behind Private First Class Reginald Bartlett, artillery thundered: not a lot of artillery, not by the standards of the Roanoke front, but more than he'd heard on the Confederate side of the line here in Sequoyah. "Let the damnyankees keep their heads down for a change," he said.

Pete Hairston nodded. "Only trouble is, once the guns stop, we get to go forward and push 'em out," the veteran sergeant said. He paused and shrugged. "Us and the niggers do. Goddamned if I like that."

Joe Mopope said, "You people are crazy, giving niggers guns. Wouldn't never catch us Kiowas giving niggers guns."

"If those colored regiments hadn't come over the river, we never would have got enough men to attack the Yanks," Reggie said.

Hairston nodded again. "That's a fact. We'd be holding on tooth and toe-nail, same as we have been. Now we got a chance to take back some of this here state. We better see that we don't waste it, on account of I don't reckon we'll ever see another one."

Whistles blew, up and down the reinforced Confederate line. Lieutenant Nicoll shouted, "Come on, boys, now it's our turn!" Out of the trenches came his company. Howling the Rebel yell, they trotted forward. "Go!" Nicoll roared to them. "Go on! They aren't doing so well back East—we've got to show them how to play the game."

"We'll get 'em!" Napoleon Dibble said. "They can't mess with the Belgians, and they can't mess with us."

Reggie said nothing. He didn't waste his breath yelling. Every time he came up above ground, he felt like a turtle coming out of its shell. He was vulnerable up here. His time in the close-quarters fighting of the Roanoke front had taught him how hideously vulnerable a man was when he came up out of his trench.

He wasn't afraid, though, not in the ordinary sense of the word. Whatever was going to happen would happen. It was largely out of his hands. If he let it worry him, he'd be letting his pals down, and he couldn't stand that, not after they'd been through and suffered so much together.

On they came. Some dropped into cover to shoot while others advanced, then leapfrogged past when the other group hit the dirt. The bombardment hadn't taken out all the Yankees; bombardments never did. Rifles and machine guns stuttered to life. Men in butternut began falling not of their own volition.

Some of those men were black, the new units going forward along with the white troops who had been in the field for years. The Negro soldiers charged straight at the U.S. trenches; they weren't skilled in the fire-and-move tactics the veterans had learned by painful experience. And they went down in gruesome numbers. When they screamed, Bartlett couldn't tell their voices from those of white men.

He lay in a shell hole, fired a couple of rounds toward the Yankee line ahead, and then got to his feet and ran by the men he'd been supporting. He dove behind a stump and started shooting again. Once his buddies had dashed past him and found cover, he scrambled up and ran on.

He was about thirty yards from the Yankee trench when a traversing machine gun turned its balefully winking eye upon him.

His first feeling was nothing but surprise. One moment, he'd been sprint ing forward, his eyes fixed on the Yankees in their ugly

cooking-pot helmets who were shooting at him and his countrymen. The next, he slammed to the ground on his face.

Somebody punched me, he thought. *Somebody punched me twice. God damn that Joe Mopope anyhow—this is no time for practical jokes.*

Then he tried to move. What had been impact turned to pain, stunning pain, in his left shoulder and right leg. Someone very close by was screaming at the top of his lungs. Only when Reggie needed to inhale did he realize those cries belonged to him.

Machine-gun and rifle fire kept right on stitching past him. In what was more a roll and a wriggle than a crawl, he made it into a hole in the torn-up ground, pulled out his wound dressing, and wondered what the hell he should bandage first.

Blood was turning the outside of his right trouser leg blackish red. His left arm didn't want to do what he told it to do. Awkwardly, one-handedly, he got a sort of a bandage around his thigh and stuffed a pad of gauze into the hole in his shoulder. The world kept going gray as he worked, but he persevered.

"Stretcher-bearer!" he shouted. "Stretcher-bearer!" His voice was hoarse and raw-edged. No one came. The Yanks didn't usually shoot stretcher-bearers on purpose, any more than the CSA did, but bullets weren't fussy, either.

Reggie got out his canteen and drank it dry. The day was hot and muggy. Before very long, the anguish of thirst joined the agony from his wounds. The sun beat down on him out of a brassy sky. His bandages went from white to red and soggy.

Every so often, when the pain backed off a little, he wondered how the attack was going. He occasionally saw men in butternut going forward. Nobody flopped down in his shell hole. He didn't think that was fair.

More screams rose. This time, they didn't come from Reggie. After a while, those screams stopped. They never started up again. Bartlett got the idea that the fellow who'd been making them wasn't breathing any more.

Up ahead, the firing hesitated, then broke out anew, louder and fiercer than ever. Shells from the damnyankees' field artillery whistled overhead. Some, no doubt aimed to impede the Confederates'

advance, dropped down near Reggie. He halfway—more than halfway—hoped one would land square on him. He'd never know what hit him then. He knew exactly what had hit him now. He moaned through dry lips.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the scorching sun slid across the sky. As it sank toward the western horizon, men in butternut started coming back past the shell hole where Reggie Bartlett lay. He called out to them, but his voice was a dry husk of what it had been. No one heard him. No one saw him reach out imploringly with his good hand. His comrades retreated.

In their wake, the soldiers of the U.S. Army advanced. They fired and moved, as their Confederate counterparts had done during the morning. The sun was going more orange than gold when one of them jumped down into Reggie's hole.

The Yankee had fired twice before he realized the body in there with him was not dead. He had it in his power to change that on the instant. Reggie got a good, long, close look at him: he was in his late twenties or early thirties, dark, in need of a shave, and wearing what the Yanks called a Kaiser Bill mustache. It had a couple of white hairs in it. Reggie thought it looked stupid. Two stripes on the fellow's sleeve: a corporal.

He said, "I ought to blow your fuckin' head off, Reb." Reggie shrugged a one-shouldered shrug. The U.S. corporal suddenly looked thoughtful. "If I bring you in, though," he went on, thinking out loud, "your pals miss a chance to blow my fuckin' head off, and that don't make me even a little bit sorry, I got news for you."

Reggie forced a word out through parched throat: "Water?"

"Yeah," the corporal said, and held a canteen to his lips. The water was warm and stale and tasted ambrosial. Then the Yankee heaved him up onto his back with a bull's strength, ignoring his cries of pain. The U.S. soldier started toward his own line, shouting, "Stretcher-bearers! Got a wounded Reb prisoner here!"

A couple of U.S. soldiers with red crosses on their helmets and on armbands took charge of Bartlett. "How you feelin', Reb?" one of them asked, not unkindly.

"Shitty," he answered.

"Stick him, Louie," the other stretcher-bearer said. "We don't want him yellin' at us all the way to the field hospital."

"Sure as hell don't," Louie agreed, and stuck a needle in Reggie's arm. Reggie sighed as relief washed over him. The pain remained, but now he floated over it instead of being immersed. The relief must have shown on his face, for Louie chuckled. "That morphine's great stuff, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Reggie breathed.

The stretcher-bearers hauled him through zigzagging communications trenches similar to the ones behind his own front line. Then they put his stretcher in the back of an ambulance. "Daniel brought in this here Reb," the one who wasn't Louie told the driver. "Thought he'd be worth patching. Might even be right—he ain't pegged out on us while we were lugging him back here."

"Hate to waste the sawbones' time on a Rebel," the ambulance driver said, "but what the hell?" The ambulance's motor was already turning over. He put the machine in gear and headed back toward the field hospital, whose tents were out of range of artillery from the front.

When Bartlett got there, another pair of stretcher-bearers took him out of the ambulance and laid him on the ground outside a green-gray tent with an enormous Red Cross on it. Most of the men there were U.S. soldiers, but a few others wore butternut. Attendants gave him water and another shot.

Presently, a doctor in a blood-spattered white coat came by and looked him over. "That leg's not too bad," he said after cutting away bandages and trouser leg. He examined the shoulder. "We're going to have to take you into the shop to repair this one, though. What's your name, Reb?" He poised a pencil over a clipboard.

"Reggie Bartlett. I broke out of one Yankee prisoner-of-war camp.

Reckon I can do it again." With two shots of morphine in him, Reggie didn't care what he said.

He didn't impress the Yankee doctor, either. After recording his name, the fellow said, "Son, you're going to be a good long while healing up. I don't care whether you escaped before. By the time you think about flying the coop again, this war'll be over. And we'll have

won it."

Bartlett laughed in his face—the morphine again.

X

Captain Jonathan Moss looked down on the tortured Canadian landscape from on high, as if he were a god. He knew better, of course. If one of the shells the Americans aimed at the Canadian and British troops who had blocked their way for so long happened to strike his Wright two-decker, he would crash. The same, assuredly, was true of the shells the enemy hurled back at the U.S. forces, and of the Archie their antiaircraft guns sent up.

Spring was at last in full spate. The land was green, where shellfire hadn't turned it to mucky brown pulp. All the streams flowed freely; the ice had melted. And the line was beginning to move, too, though it had been frozen longer than any Canadian river.

Below Moss, U.S. troopers advanced behind a large contingent of barrels that battered their way through the defenses the Canucks and limeys had built with such enormous expenditure of labor. The Canadians had barrels, too, though not so many. They dueled with the American machines in a slow, ugly, two-dimensional version of the war Moss and his friends—and his foes as well—fought in the air.

He spied a flight of enemy fighting scouts down near the deck. They were shooting up the advancing Americans, who grew vulnerable when they came up out of their trenches to attack. But the Entente aeroplanes were vulnerable, too. Moss pointed them out to his own flightmates, then took his American copy of a German Albatros into a dive better suited to a stooping falcon. Percy Stone, Hans Oppenheim, and Pete Bradley followed.

Wind screamed in Moss' face. It tried to tear the goggles off his eyes, and peeled lips back from teeth in an involuntary grin. The grin would have been on his face anyhow, though. His gaze flicked back and forth from the unwinding altimeter to the enemy aeroplanes. The British or Canadian pilots were

having such a high old time shooting up American infantry, they made the mistake of not checking the neighborhood often enough. Moss intended to turn it into a fatal mistake if he could.

His thumb came down on the firing button. The twin machine guns roared, spitting bullets between the two wooden blades of the prop. If the interrupter gears didn't function properly, as, every so often, they didn't.. . but contemplating that kind of misfortune gave no better profit than thinking about one's own path intersecting that of a shell.

Tracers let him direct his fire onto the rearmost enemy fighting scout. He must have hit the pilot, for the Sopwith Pup slammed into the ground an instant later and burst into flame.

"That'll teach you, you son of a bitch!" he shouted exultantly. Pups had been machines of terror when set against the Martin one-deckers U.S. pilots had been flying for so long. *So long* was right—that was what you said when you went up against a Pup in a one-decker. But the new Wright machines had helped even the odds.

Another Pup started to burn. The pilot turned for home, but never got there. He didn't have much altitude, and rapidly lost what he had. He tried to land the aeroplane, but rolled into a shell hole and nosed over. Fire raced down the length of the fighting scout. For the pilot's sake, Moss hoped the crash had killed him.

The other two Sopwith Pups twisted away from Moss' flight. On the level, they were slightly faster than the not-quite-Albatroses the Americans flew, and succeeded in making good their escape.

Moss led his comrades up out of that part of the sky where a lucky rifle or machine-gun bullet could put paid to a fighting scout. Climbing was slower work than diving had been. Before he got out of range of small-arms fire from the ground, a couple of bullets went through his wings with about the sound a man would have made by poking a stick through a tightly stretched drumhead.

Hans Oppenheim was the pilot pumping his fist up over his head, so Moss assumed he'd brought down that second Pup. Moss couldn't imagine anything else that would have got the phlegmatic Oppenheim excited enough to show such emotion.

He looked at his watch. They'd been in the air well over an hour. He looked at his fuel gauge. It was getting low. He oriented himself, more from the way the trenches ran than by his unreliable compass, and found northwest. "Time to get back to Arthur," he said, and let the slipstream blow the words back to his comrades.

They couldn't hear him, of course. With their engines roaring, they couldn't hear a damn thing, any more than he could. But they saw his gestures and, in any case, they knew what he was doing and why. They couldn't have had any more gasoline in their tanks than he did in his.

The aerodrome was surprisingly busy when he and the rest of his flight bumped over the rutted fields. It was the kind of activity he hadn't seen for a long time. Everybody was tearing things up by the roots and pitching them into trucks and wagons.

"We're moving up?" Moss asked a groundcrew man after he shut off the Wright's engine and his words were no longer his private property.

"Hell, yes," the mechanic answered as Moss descended from the cockpit and, awkward in his thick flying suit, came down to the ground. "Front is moving forward, so we will, too. Don't want you burning up too much gas getting where you're going."

"That sounds plenty good to me," Moss said.

"Me, too." The groundcrew man pointed to the bullet holes in the fabric covering the fighting scout's wings. "Looks like the natives were restless."

"Ground fire," Moss replied with a shrug. "But I knocked down a Pup that was strafing our boys, and Hans got another one, and we came back without a scratch."

"Bully, sir!" the groundcrew man said. "What's that bring your score to?"

"Six and a quarter," Moss answered.

"I knew you were an ace," the fellow said, nodding.

Moss laughed—at himself. "And I'll tell you something else, too: I was keeping track so well that they were able to give me a surprise party after my fifth victory, because I didn't remember which one it was. Hans gets everybody drunk tonight, though—this was his first."

His flightmates were down from their aeroplanes, too. He went over and thwacked Hans Oppenheim on the back. He hit Oppenheim a solid lick, too, but all the leather and wool his fellow flier had on

armored him as effectively as anything this side of chainmail.

"Major Cherney will not be unhappy with us today," Oppenheim said. He had all his self-possession back, and seemed faintly embarrassed to be the object of Moss' boisterous congratulations.

Percy Stone shook his head. "Cherney won't even notice we're here, ex cept that we give him some more things he has to think about. He's got moving the aerodrome on his mind."

"He doesn't have to worry about moving our aeroplanes—we'll fly 'em," Pete Bradley said. "I just wonder where the hell we're supposed to fly 'em to."

"Don't let 'em promote you past captain," Stone advised Jonathan Moss. "Once you get oak leaves on your shoulders, you have to worry about too many other things to do as much flying as you want."

"That's so," Moss said. He started to add that he would be as happy not to have unfriendly strangers shooting at him up in the sky. Before the words came out of his mouth, he realized they weren't true. He never felt more alive than he did two or three miles above the ground, throwing his aeroplane through turns it wasn't meant to make so he could get on an enemy's tail or shake a Canuck off his own. It was pure, it was clean, and it made everything else in the world—fast motorcars, fast women—seem about as exciting as solitaire.

Women . .. maybe not. After the flight had reported to Major Cherney, the squadron commander said, "Get yourselves packed up, boys. You're scheduled to move out bright and early tomorrow morning. New aerodrome's over by Orangeville, twenty miles up the road. We have made some progress. And well done to you all. Hansie, first drink's on me tonight, for losing your cherry."

"Thank you, sir," Oppenheim said. Moss never would have had the nerve to call him *Hansie,* not in a million years.

Back at the tent the flight shared, Moss looked over his meager belongings and said, "I can throw this stuff in a trunk and a duffel bag in half an hour flat. I think I'm going to take a walk before I pack."

"I know where you're walking," Percy Stone said. Amusement glinted in his eyes. "I've walked that way a time or three. You're wasting your time. She still hates Americans."

"All right, maybe I am wasting my time," Moss said. "At least I'll be wasting it in better-looking company than any of you lugs." He left the tent to the jeers of his flightmates.

When he got to Laura Secord's farm, she was on her hands and knees in the vegetable garden, weeding. When she saw him, she gave him the same greeting she usually did: "Why don't you go away, Yank?"

"That's what I came to tell you," he answered. "I am going away. The whole base is going away. I came to say I'd miss you."

She glared at him, which only made him find her more attractive. "Well, I won't miss you or any other Yank," she answered, gray-blue eyes flashing. Then she softened a little. "Where is the base going?"

"I won't tell you," he answered. "If I did, you'd probably try to imitate your famous ancestor and let the British know where we are. I don't want to wake up one night with bombs falling all over the place."

Laura Secord bit her lip. She must have been thinking about doing just what he'd said. Indeed, she admitted it, saying, "You weren't supposed to see through me. Go on, then. Go wherever you're going. I only wish you—all you Yanks—were going out of my country and never coming back."

"That isn't going to happen," he said. "In fact, I will tell you we're going forward, because you could find that out for yourself."

She looked down at the ground. When she raised her face again, it was wet with tears. "Damn you," she whispered. "Damn all of you, however too many there are."

Moss found himself with little to say after that. It was his usual condition in conversations with Laura Secord. But, for once, he did come up with something: "When the war is finally over, I hope your husband comes back here safe." Most of him even meant it.

"Thank you, Captain Moss," she said. "You make it hard for me to hate you in particular along with the United States."

"That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me," he replied with a smile.

"It's the nicest thing I'm likely to say to you, too," she told him. "Now go your way, wherever it is that you dare not let me know." With unmistakable emphasis, she returned to her weeding.

And Jonathan Moss walked back to the aerodrome and landing strips that would soon be abandoned. He'd never seen any of Laura Secord but her face, her hands, and her ankles. He'd never touched her. He'd rarely had anything but insults from her. He was whistling as he walked. He wondered why he felt so good.

The *Dakota's* seaplane splashed down into the South Atlantic close by the battleship. Sailors on deck, Sam Carsten among them, waved to the pilot. He waved back, delighted as always to come down in one piece.

Carsten turned to Luke Hoskins and said, "I hope to Jesus he's found something worth our while to fight. Otherwise, we're going to have to turn around and head back to Chile."

"Goddamn ocean is a big place," Hoskins said, "and the limeys' convoys are hugging the shore now that they know we're in the neighborhood."

"We've got to hit 'em in Argentine waters, too," Carsten agreed unhappily. "If we sink half a dozen freighters inside Brazilian territory, it's even money whether we scare Dom Pedro IV into coming in on our side or make him so mad, he'll declare for the Entente."

"I don't want to get all that close inshore," Hoskins said. "The limeys have been selling those damn little torpedo boats to Argentina the last twenty years, and everybody and his brother's been selling 'em to the Empire of Brazil. Run up against one of those babies when you're looking in the wrong direction and it's liable to ruin your whole day."

That was more talk from the shell-heaver than Sam had heard for the past week. "Those torpedo boats are one of the reasons we've got the destroyers playing tag with us," he said.

"Come on, Sam, I know that—I didn't ride into town on a load of turnips," Luke Hoskins answered. "Here, let me ask it like this: are you happier knowing your neck is on the line if somebody on one of those

goddamn pipsqueak four-stackers didn't polish his telescope when he should have? Damned if I am, I'll tell you that much."

"Well, hell," Sam said, "when you put it like that, I'm not, either." He stared over toward the nearest destroyer, as if to make certain nobody on deck was asleep at the switch.

Out swung the crane. It plucked the aeroplane out of the water and hoisted it, pilot and all, onto the deck of the *Dakota.* As usual, Sam tried to get close enough to the machine to hear what the pilot was telling the officers who crowded round him. As usual, he failed.

Frustrated, he turned away—and almost ran into Vic Crosetti. "Stickin' your nose in where it don't belong, ain't you, Sam?" Crosetti said.

"Yeah, same as you are," Carsten returned.

Crosetti laughed, altogether unembarrassed. "Hey, everybody can tell I got a big nose, right?" He put a hand on the organ in question, which was indeed of formidable proportions. "You know what they say—big in the nose means big somewhere else, too."

"In the ears, looking at you," Sam said.

"You better watch yourself, Carsten," Crosetti said, clenching a fist in mock anger. "Pretty soon we're going to sail far enough north for the sun to remember its first name, and then they'll stick an apple in your mouth, on account of the rest of you's gonna look like a roast pig that needs a little more time in the oven."

"I'd laugh like a damn loon if only that was a joke," Carsten said, warily eyeing the sky. Here below the equator, fall was heading toward winter. He favored winter, and clouds, and storms.

Before long, the *Dakota* leaned into a long turn that swung her course to the west. The rest of the joint American-Chilean fleet moved with her. Vic Crosetti clicked his tongue between his teeth. "Pilot must have spotted a convoy sneaking along the coast," he said happily. "I guess we'll go leave 'em a calling card."

"I'd say you're likely right," Sam agreed. "Using a battleship to sink freighters is like smashing a fly with an anvil, if anybody wants to know what I think, but nobody seems to."

"I sure as hell don't," Crosetti said, grinning as he planted the barb.

When the hooting horns summoned the crew of the *Dakota* to battle sta tions, Hiram Kidde was grinning from ear to ear as he greeted the sailors who manned the five-inch gun. "Just like shooting fish in a barrel, boys," the gunner's mate said. "Fish in a barrel, sure as hell."

"Fish in a barrel don't shoot back," Carsten said. "Fish in a barrel don't man torpedo boats."

"That's right," Luke Hoskins agreed. "That's just right. Sam and I were talking about that topside."

"It's a risk," "Cap'n" Kidde allowed. "But it ain't a hell of a big risk, I'll tell you that. I'd sooner take my chances against those damn mosquitoes than against a real live battleship any day of the week, and twice on Sunday."

Nobody quarreled with that. Carsten stepped away from the breech of the five-inch gun and peered out of the sponson through the vision slit. He needed a moment to realize the horizon wasn't smooth and unbroken, as it was farther out to sea. It had lumps and bumps on it. "We're within sight of land," he said in surprise.

"Won't be much longer before things start happening, then," Kidde predicted. "If you can see it from here, they've seen it from the observation mast for a while now. I wonder if the skipper aims to get in close enough to use the secondaries to sink the freighters, and save the wear and tear on the big guns."

"That'd be good," Sam said. "You get close enough to use the secondaries against a battleship and you're in more trouble than you really want. We found out everything we wanted to know about that and then some in the Battle of the Three Navies—oh, Lord, didn't we just?"

Heads bobbed up and down as all the men in the gun crew remembered the *Dakota's* wild and undesired ride toward first the British and then the Japanese fleet. Hoskins said, "What I want to do is, I want to hit a torpedo boat with a five-inch shell. God damn me if there'd be anything left of the bastard but matchsticks and kindling." The gun crew nodded again. Carsten liked the picture that made in his mind.

As he usually did, Hiram Kidde thought along with the officers in charge of the *Dakota.* Commander Grady, who was responsible for the starboard secondary armament, stepped into the crowded sponson and said, "Boys, they're going to give us the fun this time. Pick your target, blow it to hell and gone, and then hit the next one. Every time you send a few thousand tons of meat and wheat to the bottom, you push the limeys that much closer to starving."

"Yes, sir!" Kidde said. "It'll be a pleasure, sir."

"Good." Grady hurried away to pass the word to the rest of the five-inch gun crews on his side of the battleship.

Kidde peered down into the rangefinder. "Inside nine thousand yards," he murmured, and worked the elevation screw. To the crew, he added, "Let's get a shell in the gun."

Hoskins jerked one out of the magazine and passed it to Sam Carsten, handling the sixty-pound weight as if it were nothing. Sam slammed it into the breech and slid the block closed.

"Fire!" Kidde shouted.

Carsten jerked the lanyard. The gun roared and bucked. Stinking cordite fumes filled the sponson. The other guns of the secondary armament were roaring, too. Sam worked the breech mechanism. The empty brass shell casing clattered down onto the steel deck. Luke Hoskins handed him another shell. He slammed it home.

"That one was long," Hiram Kidde reported, fiddling with the elevation screw again. When he was satisfied, he let out a grunt and shouted "Fire!" again. He grunted once more when the shell hit. "Short this time. All right— we've got the bastard straddled. Give me another one.""This one should be right on the money," Sam said as he fired the cannon.

"Hit!" Kidde screamed. "That was a hit. Bastard's burning! Pour a couple more into him, Carsten."

"Right, 'Cap'n,' " Sam said. "Feels good to do the shooting instead of getting shot at."

When the first target had taken what Kidde reckoned to be fatal damage, he turned the gun toward another hapless freighter. But before he had the gun laid, he grunted yet again, this time in surprise.

"Somebody's shooting back at us," he said. "I didn't spot any flash or smoke, but a good-sized shell just splashed down forward of the bow."

"Railroad gun somewhere inland?" Carsten asked.

"That'd be sneaky, wouldn't it?" the gunner's mate answered. "You got a nasty head on your shoulders, you know?" He peered through the vision slit. "Still don't see anything, though."

Guns topside started firing: not the titanic main armament, which Sam would have thought the proper response to a big gun mounted on a flatcar, but the one-pounders that had been bolted into place here and there on deck not long before the war began. Luke Hoskins, who had less imagination than any man Carsten knew, was the one who solved the riddle: "That wasn't a shell, 'Cap'n'—bet you anything it was a bomb off an aeroplane."

Everybody in the gun crew stared at him. "Dip me in shit if I don't think you're right," Kidde said. "Jesus! What do we do about that? Only way you knock down an aeroplane is by dumb fucking luck." He shrugged. "They don't pay me to worry about it. They pay me to fight this gun, and that's what I'm going to do." He finished turning it to its new target. "Fire!"

Sam jerked the lanyard. The gun bellowed. A moment later came the bel low of another explosion, this one on deck. It was a big explosion, a frighten-ingly big explosion. Bombs didn't have to survive being shot out of guns the way shells did, Carsten realized. Not needing thick walls, they could carry a hell of a lot of explosive for their size.

Another blast shook the deck under Sam's feet. He kept on loading and firing to Hiram Kidde's commands. As Kidde had said, what else could he do? But then the *Dakota* turned away from the freighters he'd been shelling, away from the Argentine coast, and ran for the open sea. More bombs fell on and around her.

Hiram Kidde stared out the vision slit and then back at his gun crew. His face wore nothing but astonishment. "Aeroplanes!" he said, his voice cracking like a boy's. "Aeroplanes! And they might have sunk us. What the hell is the world coming to?"

Newspapers in Cuba were printed roughly half and half, English and

Span ish. Sipping his morning coffee, puffing on a fine Habana, Roger Kimball suddenly burst out laughing. "What's funny, sir?" Tom Brearley asked.

Kimball pointed. "Look here. The damnyankees say they sank us."

His exec scanned the item. He didn't laugh. He got angry. "Those dirty, lying sons of bitches," he burst out. "You can never trust what a Yankee says—never. My granddad taught me that, and they've proved he was right time after time after time. Hell, they make Jews look honest."

"Don't blow a gasket, Tom," Kimball said. "When we came back here for refit, who took our place in the map box?"

"Hampton Ready's boat," Brearley answered at once. "He was in the class ahead of mine at Mobile."

"Ready's boat, yeah," Kimball said: "the *Bonito."*

Brearley needed a minute to take it in. When he did, he went from angry to grim in the blink of an eye. "You're right," he said. "Sure as hell, you're right. And that means they really did sink him, too. Damn. He was a good sailor, and a good fellow, too."

"Must have made it to the surface just long enough for the Yanks to get a fast look at the name, and then straight down before they could read it all. Christ." Kimball shivered. That was a nasty way to go. There weren't any nice ways to go, not when you jammed yourself down into a tin can and went after real ships. "You all right, Tom? You look green around the gills."

Brearley didn't answer, not directly. "Hamp's wife just had a baby girl maybe six months ago. You know Katie? Little redhead; nice gal."

"I've met her," Kimball said. "Married man shouldn't skipper a submersible. Makes you think too much." But that didn't solve Brearley's problem—or Katie Ready's now. Kimball couldn't do anything about hers. About Brearley's, and, he admitted to himself, his own ... He waved. A swarthy waiter hurried over. "Two *mojitos, pronto."*

"Dos mojitos. Si. Yes, sir," the officers' club waiter said. He hurried away, not seeing anything in the least unusual about a Navy officer ordering drinks with breakfast. Prohibition might have made strides

on the Confederate mainland. It was only a word in Cuba, and a seldom-used word at that.

Rum and mint over crushed ice went enormously well with strong coffee and fine cigars. Tom Brearley drank half of his, looked thoughtful, and slowly nodded. "That was the medicine I needed, all right."

"Steady you down," Kimball agreed. He took a pull from his own *mojito*. "I grew up drinking whiskey, same as everybody else in Arkansas, but I'll tell you, I could get used to rum."

Brearley nodded. "I'm the same way. It's got the kick, no two ways about it." He picked up the newspaper, then threw it down on the table, shaking his head. "Hamp Ready. That does hurt. Damn fine fellow." He poured down the rest of the drink.

Kimball picked up the paper and read further. "Says the boat was sunk by the USS *Ericsson."* He stiffened. "That's the destroyer that's been playing cat and mouse with us, all right. Ready wasn't ready enough, and they got him."

"That box on the map doesn't have a boat in it now," Brearley said. "We were going to go back and take over for the *Bonito* when she finished her tour. What do you want to bet they send us back fast as they can now?"

"You're right, goddammit." Kimball got up, slapped coins on the table, and left. Over his shoulder, he said, "If I don't have much time to enjoy myself, I'm going to make the most of what I've got."

Instead of heading for one of the many sporting houses that catered to Confederate Navy men, he walked down San Isidro Street, away from the harbor, till he came to a telegraph office. He sent a wire to his mother and the man she'd married after his father died. He hoped they'd get it; last he'd heard, the damnyankees had been close to overrunning the farm on which he'd grown up.

He sent another wire to Anne Colleton. Both read the same: I'M NOT AS EASY TO KILL AS THE YANKEES THINK. HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON. LOVE, ROGER.

To his mother, *hope to see you soon* was a polite sentiment, nothing more. With Anne Colleton ... He hoped to see her the very soonest he could, and with the most privacy he could arrange.

Telegrams sent, he hurried back toward the *Bonefish.* A fat commander with the three oak leaves of Supply above the stripes on his sleeve stood on the wharf alongside Kimball's submersible. Longshoremen, some black, some swarthy like the waiter, streamed into and out of the boat. The officer from Supply checked off items on a clipboard.

"Good to see you here, Skipper," he said, nodding to Kimball. "We're stepping things up—as best we can, anyhow. You'll be going back to sea sooner than you might have hoped when you came into port."

"Reckoned as much." Kimball nodded back. "You all will have known about the *Bonito* a while before I worked it out." He donned an exasperated expression, half genuine, half assumed for effect. "You might have been good enough to let me know my boat would be turning around in a hurry."

"Oh, we would have gotten around to it, Commander, never fear," the of ficer from Supply answered breezily. He did indeed have an impressive belly. He was smoking a cigar that made the one Kimball had enjoyed with breakfast seem a stogie made from weeds. Kimball wondered when he'd last set foot in an actual working vessel of the C.S. Navy. Probably when he'd reported to Havana, whenever that was. He didn't come from Cuba; his accent said Alabama or Mississippi.

Fixing him with a gaze he might have sent toward a U.S. cruiser through his periscope, Kimball said, "I am like the fellow whose neighbor has a mean dog. I might put up with one bite, but sure as hell I won't put up with two. If I need to know something, I expect to find out the minute I need to know it, not when somebody gets around to it."

He didn't advance on the commander from Supply. He didn't clench his fist. He didn't even raise his voice. The commander staggered back as if hit in that comfortable, well-upholstered belly even so. "I'm sure you won't have any trouble like that in the future," he said, pasting a wide, placating smile on his face and taking the fancy cigar out of his mouth to make the smile even wider.

"Good." Kimball still didn't raise his voice, but the officer from Supply took another couple of steps back. Kimball strode past him and climbed down into the noisome darkness that was the interior of the *Bonefish.*

Ben Coulter had things well in hand there. After a stretch of time with the crew out and the boat cleaned up as much as it could be, the stench had diminished. It was still enough to make most sailors in the surface Navy turn up their toes, or perhaps heave up their breakfasts. To Kimball, it was the smell of home.

"Long as we can keep things fresh, sir, we'll live like kings," Coulter said. "Plenty of eggs and meat and fish and greens—some of 'em are these funny Cuban vegetables that look like God forgot what he was doin' when He was makin' 'em, but you boil 'em long enough and they all taste the same, sure as hell. Yes, sir, like kings."

"Crowded kings," Kimball remarked, and the veteran first mate nodded. Kimball and Coulter both knew perfectly well that before long they'd be eat ing beans and salt pork and stinking sauerkraut and drinking orange juice and lemon juice to hold scurvy at bay. As a cruise wore along, fresh-caught fish became a luxury. Dwelling on better times was more enjoyable.

"We're full up on shells again, too, sir," Coulter said. "Armorers haven't come with the fish yet, though."

"We'll get 'em. We do most of our work with 'em these days," Kimball said. "Too damn many ships with wireless. We need to sink 'em fast and sneaky."

"Yes, sir." Coulter nodded again. "Damnyankees keep pulling destroyers out of their hats, too, like magicians with rabbits. It's getting so we can't hardly take a shot at a freighter without dodging ash cans for the next week."

"I know. I'm getting damn tired of it, too." Kimball slapped Coulter on the back. "By the way they're going at this resupply business, likely you've guessed we'll be going out sooner than we reckoned when we got into Habana."

Ben Coulter's head went up and down once more. "Sure as hell did, sir. Reckon the Yankees must have done somethin' nasty to the *Bonito."*

"They sank her," Kimball said bluntly, adding, "They thought she was the *Bonefish;* the Yankee papers are reporting us sunk." That jerked a laugh out of the mate. Kimball went on, "The *Ericsson* got her —same destroyer that's given us such a hard time. When we get back into our box on the map, Ben, I'm going to kill that bastard."

"Oh, hell, yes," Coulter said. "Can't let the damnyankees own the whole damn ocean."

"Can't let 'em get past us, either," Kimball said. "If they sit on England's supply line, she's out of the war. If England has to quit, we've lost, too, and so have the froggies."

"Whole crew understands that, sir," Coulter answered. Then he sighed. "Sure are a hell of a lot of Yankees tryin' to get south of us these days when we're cruising out there, though."

Kimball didn't reply. As far as he could see, the war was probably lost even if the U.S. Navy didn't succeed in choking off England's supply line to Argentina. It would take longer to lose if the British stayed in the fight, that was all.

He didn't care. He had a job to do, and he was damn good at it. He had very little modesty, false or otherwise. He knew how good he was. He enjoyed doing what he was doing, too. As long as the CSA stayed in the fight, he'd do it as well as he could. And if the Yankees sank him . . . well, he'd already hurt the USA a lot worse than losing the *Bonefish* would hurt his own country.

When he got back to his quarters, a telegram was waiting. He wasted no time in tearing open the envelope. "If this here is from my ma," he muttered, "I'm going to be disappointed as hell."

But it wasn't. Anne Colleton wrote, GLAD THE YANKS ARE BAD fiSHER MEN. LET ME KNOW NEXT TIME. MAYBE WE'LL MEET HALFWAY. ANNE. NO *love,* NOT FROM HER. NOT EVEN A PROMISE. KIMBALL HAD SEEN SUCH FRIPPERIES WERE NOT HER STYLE. BUT A *maybe* FROM A WOMAN LIKE THAT WAS WORTH A LAY FROM HALF A DOZEN OF THE ORDINARY SORT. KIMBALL CAREFULLY TORE THE TELEGRAM INTO TINY PIECES. HE WAS SMILING AS HE DID IT.

As it happened, Arthur McGregor wasn't far from the farmhouse when two green-gray Fords turned off the road from Rosenfeld and onto the path that led to his home. He decided he wouldn't go out to the fields after all, but turned and walked back.

The motorcars got there before he did. U.S. soldiers with bayoneted rifles piled out of one of them. More soldiers got out of the other. Instead of a Springfield in his hands, one of those men wore a

pistol on his hip. Major Hannebrink was slim and quick-moving and dapper, easy to recognize from a long way off. McGregor scowled, but did not pick up his pace.

When he reached the knot of soldiers, he looked down at the American officer, who was several inches shorter than he. "You must think I'm a dangerous character," he said slowly, "if you need to bring all these bullies along when you come to say hello."

"I don't know whether you're a dangerous character or not," Hannebrink answered coolly, "but I don't believe in taking chances, and I do aim to find out one way or the other." "Barn first, sir, or the house?" one of the soldiers—a sergeant—asked.

McGregor's eyes went to the farmhouse. Maude was watching from the kitchen window, Julia alongside her. Mary wasn't tall enough to see out. If her mother and sister hadn't already told her soldiers were here, though, she'd know soon enough, and then she'd call them everything she knew how to call them, and she knew a surprising amount.

"House," Hannebrink answered. "Get the women out of there. We'll turn it inside out, and then we'll do the barn." He drew the pistol and pointed it at McGregor. "This gentleman won't be going in there to take out anything he doesn't fancy us seeing."

"Wasn't going to do that anyway," McGregor said stolidly. "You bastards have stuck your noses in there before, and you never found a thing, because there's nothing to find. You won't find anything this time, either—still nothing." He'd told that lie so many times, it came out smooth as the truth, though he'd never been a man who lied easily before Alexander was marched up against a wall and shot.

If they found the explosives ... *If they find them, it's over,* he thought. He wasn't ready for it to be over, not yet. He hadn't taken nearly enough revenge yet. But the best way to keep from betraying himself was to act as if whether they found what they were looking for didn't matter.

Out came Maude and Julia and Mary, under the Yanks' guns. Sure enough, his younger daughter, the spitfire, was doing her best to scorch the soldiers. It didn't work so well as she might have hoped; one or two of the Americans, instead of getting angry, were fighting laughter.

A couple of the men in green-gray stayed with Major Hannebrink to stand guard on McGregor and his family. The rest went back into the house. Occasional crashes from within said they were indeed turning the place inside out. Hannebrink might have thought Maude was calm. McGregor knew better. He set a hand on his wife's shoulder to keep her from hurling herself at the American major. Julia looked furious, and made no effort at all to hide it.

After an hour or so, the sergeant came out and said, "Sir, the worst thing they've got in there is kerosene for the lamps."

"It's good for killing lice, too," Mary said, looking right at Hannebrink.

His lips thinned; that got home. But he said only, "We'll have a look in the barn, then." He gestured with the .45 in his hand. "Come on, McGregor. You can watch and make sure we don't steal anything."

"You've already stolen more from me than you can ever give back," he answered. He knew why Major Hannebrink wanted him along: in the hope that he'd give something away.

Hannebrink turned to the women. "You can go clean up now," he said. "That should give you something to do for the rest of the day."

In the barn, the U.S. soldiers methodically went through everything, climbing up into the loft to poke their bayonets into the hay in the hope of finding hidden dynamite and also searching all the animals' stalls. They opened every crate. They dumped the drawers set into McGregor's workbench out onto the ground and pawed over his chisels and drill bits and screwdrivers, his twine and his carpenter's rule.

He wondered if he'd somehow made a mistake, if he'd put one of the bomb-building tools in among the others. The low-voiced curses of the men in green-gray said he hadn't.

He glanced toward the old wagon wheel. There it lay, rust on the iron tire, half covered with straw. One of the soldiers strode around it to get at a box by the far wall. He used a pry bar to open the box, whose lid was nailed shut. Then he turned it upside down. A couple of horseshoes that had worn thin, a broken scythe blade, and some other scrap iron spilled out onto the ground with a series of clanks.

"Thanks," McGregor said. "Forgot I had that junk lying around. I

can do something with it, I expect."

"Go to hell, you damn murdering Canuck," the Yankee soldier snapped. He took a long step over the wagon wheel and glared into McGregor's face.

McGregor neither moved back nor blinked. Evenly, he said, "You're the people who know all about murdering."

Before the soldier could reply, Major Hannebrink broke in: "Enough, Neugebauer." The private in green-gray stiffened to obedient attention. Han nebrink went on, "We don't know that McGregor here is a murderer. We're trying to find out." He turned to the farmer. "So far, we have no evidence, only a man who thinks he has a reason to be angry at us."

"You had no evidence against my son, either," McGregor said. Not lung ing at the U.S. officer was one of the hardest things he'd ever done. "You didn't need any. You shot him without it."

"I had evidence I thought good," Hannebrink said. "I did my duty to my country. I would do it again."

"I believe *that,"* McGregor said. "I don't know why you're bothering with this rigmarole. If you need evidence against me, you can always plant it whenever you please. Then you'll haul me off to jail and shoot me, same as you did with Alexander."

Hannebrink exhaled through his nose. "If I have no evidence against you, I have no quarrel with you. If you aren't the man who's been planting bombs hither and yon through the countryside, I don't want to waste my time on you. I want to catch the son of a bitch who is doing that and make him pay."

He sounded sincere. But then, to be good at his job he needed to sound sincere. McGregor answered, "If I was crazy enough to make bombs, I wouldn't plant 'em hither and yon through the countryside." He pointed to Hannebrink. "I'd go after you."

"One of those bombs almost did kill me," the U.S. major said.

"Really?" McGregor was calm, casual, cool. "Too bad it missed. I'd buy a beer for the fellow who got you, and then I'd hit him over the head with my mug, for doing it before I could."

"You ought to bring him in for sedition, sir," said the private—Neugebauer—who'd stepped over and around McGregor's bomb-making supplies.

Hannebrink shook his head. Raising his voice a little, he asked, "Any thing here even a little out of the ordinary?"

"No, sir," the soldiers answered, almost in chorus.

Hannebrink shook his head again. "Then I've got no reason to bring him in. He does have some reason not to be in love with me. That doesn't worry me. I did what I thought was right, and I'll live with it. Let's go back to town, boys."

When they walked out to their Fords, they discovered that each of them had a punctured inner tube. Cursing, the soldiers set about patching the punctures. McGregor wanted to smile. He didn't. He was too worried. All the soldiers had been back at the barn, and . . .

Major Hannebrink folded his arms across his chest. "If these punctures turn out to be knife cuts, Mr. McGregor, I am not going to be pleased with your family, I warn you."

Oh, Mary, McGregor thought, *what have you done?* But then a soldier at the nearer motorcar said, "Sir, we got a nail in this one."

"Don't know what did this one, sir," said Neugebauer, who was holding the inner tube from the other Ford, "but it looks like a hole, not a cut."

"Anybody see anything?" Hannebrink asked. None of the U.S. soldiers answered. McGregor realized he hadn't been breathing, and sucked in a long, ragged inhalation. The soldiers wouldn't be thinking about a little girl. Even Hannebrink, who was professionally suspicious, wouldn't be thinking about a little girl. Maude, maybe, but not Mary.

Hannebrink pursed his lips. "No evidence," he said. "Maybe we picked up those punctures on the way over here. Maybe. It could have happened. Since I can't prove it didn't happen that way, I'm going to leave it alone. But if it ever happens here again, Mr. McGregor, someone is going to be very unhappy, and it won't be me."

"Why are you barking at me?" McGregor asked. "I was in the barn with you and your hooligans." For once, he was telling the whole

truth. It sounded no different from his lies.

Hannebrink didn't answer. He waited while his men fixed the punctures, which they handled with practiced efficiency. Then all the Yank soldiers piled into the motorcars and drove off.

McGregor waited till they'd left his land. Then he walked into the house.

His wife was furious. "They turned everything upside down and inside out, those dirty—" She hissed like a cat with its fur puffed out, then went on, "I wish I was a man, so I could say what I think."

"Never mind," McGregor said, which made Maude hiss again. Ignoring her, he went over to Mary. He knelt down and kissed her on the forehead. "This is for what you did, and for being clever enough to use a nail and not a knife." Then he spanked her, hard enough to make her yelp in both surprise and pain. "And this is to remind you not to do it again, no matter how much you want to."

His younger daughter stared. "How did you know it was me, Pa? You were inside the barn with the Yankees. You couldn't see it."

"How did I know? Because I'm your father, that's how. This time, I'm proud of you, you little sneak. Some things you can only get away with once, though. This is one of them. Remember it."

"Yes, Pa," Mary said demurely, so demurely that McGregor could only hope she'd paid some attention—a little attention—to what he'd told her.

The big guns rumbled and roared. The bombardment of Nashville itself hadn't stopped since the U.S. guns got close enough to reach the city. Lieutenant Colonel Irving Morrell had long since got used to that rumble from the western horizon.

Closer, but still west of his position on the northern bank of the Cumberland, another bombardment lay its thunder over the more distant rumble. For the past six days, U.S. artillery had been hammering the Confederate positions south of the river with high explosives and gas. Bombing aeroplanes had added the weight of their munitions to the unending gunfire. Fighting scouts swooped low, strafing the Rebel's trenches with their machine guns.

General Custer could hardly have made it more obvious where he in tended to throw First Army across the Cumberland. He had even been rash enough to let them get glimpses of the barrels he was gathering for his frontal blow.

And the Confederates, having such generosity bestowed upon them, were not slow to take advantage of it. Though the U.S. artillery hampered their movements, they brought reinforcements forward. Their own guns pounded away at the force Custer had assembled. Their aeroplanes were outnumbered, but still stung the U.S. soldiers waiting on Custer's order to cross the river.

Irving Morrell looked west with benign approval.

Beside him, Colonel Ned Sherrard pulled out his watch. Morrell imitated the gesture. Together, they said, "Five minutes to go."

Sherrard put his watch back into its pocket. He said, "How does it feel to have the whole First Army moving to a scheme you thought up?"

"Ask me in a few days," Morrell answered. "If it goes the way I hope, it'll feel great. If it doesn't, I'll be so low a deep dugout will look like up to me."

As he watched the second hand of his own watch sweep into its final min utes before the curtain went up, he realized how much he had riding on the next few days. He would soon know the answer to a question so many men ask themselves: *are you really as smart as you think you are?* If he was, he'd be wearing a colonel's eagles himself soon, or maybe even a brigadier general's single stars. If he wasn't, he'd be a lieutenant colonel if he stayed in the Army for the next fifty years, and no one would pay any attention to him during all that time.

Compared to failure, dying on the battlefield had its attractions.

"Fifteen sec—" he started to say, and then the guns behind him, the guns that had stayed hidden under canvas and branches, the guns that had remained silent for so long while their brethren pounded the Confederates to the west, opened up with everything they had against the thinned Rebel line just east of Lakewood, Tennessee. On the far side of the Cumberland, earth leapt and danced and quivered in agony.

A flight of bombers added their explosives to the attack, as they were doing farther west. Under the cover of the bombardment, Army engineers rushed to the bank of the Cumberland and began building half a dozen pontoon bridges across the river. Everything depended on the sappers. If they could get those bridges built fast enough, the rest of Morrell's plan would unfold as he'd designed it. If they failed, he failed with them.

He wanted to stay and watch them work. He knew what was riding on their shoulders. Already a few of them had fallen, from machine-gun fire and from shells falling too near. The rest kept on. That was their job.

Colonel Sherrard reminded him of his job: "Into the barrel, Irv. As soon as those bridges get across, we go." Sherrard shouted at the top of his lungs, right into Morrell's ear. Morrell barely heard him. He thought about pretending he didn't hear him so he could keep on watching the sappers, but knew Sherrard was right. He trotted off toward his barrel.

Like all the others waiting to cross the Cumberland, it had come here by night, to keep prying Rebel observation aeroplanes from spotting it. Like the artillery concentrated by similarly stealthy means, it had hidden under canvas since arriving. Now the canvas was off. The columns of barrels were ready to go forward if they could. And Irving Morrell's would go first.

He nodded to the driver, reached down and slapped the right-side engi neer on the back, and then, unable to bear being cooped up in this great iron box, opened the top hatch and stood up in the cupola. He *had* to watch the engineers at work. He *had* to watch the bridges snake across the Cumberland.

If one was wrecked, he could go with five. If two were wrecked, he could go with four. If three were wrecked, he had orders not to go, but thought he might disobey them. But all six bridges still pushed forward toward the southern bank of the spring-swollen river. General Custer's ostentatious preparation had pulled the Confederate defenders closer to Nashville. Not many men, not many guns, were left to contest what would be the real crossing.

Riflemen and machine-gun crews in green-gray rushed to the ends of the extending bridges as they neared the far bank of the Cumberland. They started blazing away at the Confederates closest to the river, men who already risked their lives thanks to U.S. artillery

fire.

A green flare—one of the bridges had reached the southern bank. A mo ment later, another one burned in the sky. The rest of the engineering crews worked like madmen. The sappers were as fiercely competitive as any soldiers God ever made. A third green flare blazed from the southern bank of the Cumberland.

Morrell ducked down into the cupola. "Fire 'em up!" he shouted. "We're going." The twin White truck engines bellowed to life. The iron deck, patterned to keep feet from slipping, shivered and rattled and shook under his boots. Maybe he was jumping the gun, but he didn't think so. One of those last three bridges would surely succeed in making it across, and even if it didn't... He stood up again, to stare across the Cumberland.

There! The fourth green flare. Now he could go with no reservations whatever. Some of the other barrel commanders were also standing up in their cupolas. He waved to them. They waved back. He'd also detailed a soldier with a hammer to run down each line of barrels and give the side of every machine in it a good, solid clang to signal that action was at hand.

More engines coughed and belched and caught. Even as Morrell stooped down into the cupola once more, the sixth and last green flare rose into the sky. He grinned. So far, everything was perfect. The way to keep it perfect was to push hard, never let the Confederates have a chance to build a defensive line of the sort they'd held so well for so long north of Nashville.

"Off balance," he muttered to himself, not that anyone else in the barrel could have heard him even had he shouted. "Got to keep them off balance." He pointed straight ahead, index finger extended. *Forward.*

Forward the barrel went, adding the clatter and rattle of the tracks to the engines' flatulent roar. Morrell stood up again. The driver had his louvers open. He could see as much as he ever could, which wasn't a great deal. But it was enough to let him get onto the bridge over which he would cross the Cumberland.

The bridge dipped and swayed a little under the weight of the barrel, but held. At the machine's best pace—about that of a trotting soldier in full kit—it waddled over the bridge. Barrels also crossed on two more bridges. On the other three, infantry marched at double

time.

A jolt, and the barrel clattered off the bridge and onto the soft dirt of the southern bank of the Cumberland. For a bad moment, Morrell thought the dirt would be soft enough to make the barrel bog down, but, engines screaming, the machine moved ahead, and onto ground better able to support its weight.

Machine-gun bullets clattered off the barrel's armored carapace. The two left-hand machine guns returned fire. The Confederate gun fell silent. Maybe they'd knocked it out. Maybe its crew had been so busy shooting at the barrel, U.S. infantry were able to rush them. Morrell had seen that before: barrels were machine-gun magnets, attracting fire that might have been more profitably aimed against foot soldiers.

Now Morrell had the vision louvers down to slits. Through those slits, he saw Confederate soldiers moving forward now that the barrage had passed them by to punish targets farther behind the line. *Halt,* he signaled, and reached forward with a length of dowling to tap one of the artillerymen at the nose cannon on the shoulder.

They had no trouble figuring out the target he had in mind. The cannon snarled once, then again. The noise wasn't too much worse than everything else going on inside the barrel. Through the slits, Morrell watched oncoming Rebs get flung aside as if they were paper dolls. The men in butternut who came through unhurt had to dive for cover.

Forward, Morrell signaled again. Forward they went, through the Confed erate defensive system. The Rebs had a lot of trench lines, but not very many men in them. The barrel crews concentrated on wrecking machine-gun positions; those guns could tear the heart from an infantry attack, and had torn the heart from many. One after another, the barrels put them out of action.

Then, quite suddenly—or so it seemed—the barrels had traversed all the Confederate trenches, and reached the level ground behind them. A few C.S. artillery pieces were still firing. More had been pulled back and out of the pits from which they had shelled U.S. forces.

And quite a few were wrecked. MorrelPs traveling fortress rumbled past a quick-firing three-inch gun whose barrel had burst not far from the breech. U.S. shells had wrecked the carriage; most of the

crew lay dead by the piece. At the end of the trail sat one of the gunners, his head in his hands, a picture of despair. His war was over. Soon the infantry advancing with the barrels would scoop him up.

Southwest, Morrell signaled. He stood up in the cupola again, to compare the field to the map he carried inside his head. If anything, what he saw looked better than what he had imagined and presented to General Custer.

"Open country!" he said exultantly. "We've got the Rebs out of their holes at last. They know how to fight from trenches, but now we're playing a different game."

There ahead, a railroad line ran toward Nashville. Along it chugged a train full of soldiers, the engineer blissfully unaware the United States Army had broken through. A cannon shell through the boiler brought him the news. Gleefully, the machine gunners in Morrell's barrel raked the train.

Forward, he signaled again. He intended his thrust to cut off and outflank the Rebs who were defending Nashville from the rest of First Army. "Keep going," he muttered. "We've got to keep going. You don't get what you want by doing things halfway. I don't want to scare these bastards. I want to wreck 'em."

On rumbled the barrel. For the moment, the CSA seemed to have little with which to stop it.

Cassius tossed Scipio a Tredegar. Automatically, Scipio caught it out of the air. Automatically, he checked the chamber. It had a round in it. He pulled off the clip. By its weight, it was full.

"You is one o' we, Kip," Cassius said, and tossed him a couple of more ten-round boxes. "When we fights de feudal 'pressors, you fights wid we."

The men of the Congaree Socialist Republic hadn't trusted him with a rifle in his hands since he'd returned to the swamps by the river that gave the Republic its name. He looked around. "Cherry ain't here," he remarked.

Cassius' expression turned sour. "She still huntin' dat damnfool treasure Miss Anne never hid no kind of way."

"She kin hunt till she git all old an' shriveled up," Scipio said. "If they ain't nothin' there, she ain't gwine find it."

"She keep huntin', she don' live to git all old an' shriveled up," Cassius answered. "Miss Anne, she put de militia round Marshlands. Dey catch Cherry an' de poor fools she got with she."

I hope they do, Cassius thought. *Dear God, I hope they do.* Cherry knew him for the cold heart, for the weak spirit, he was. She knew he had no true revolutionary fire in his belly, knew and despised him for it. If Anne Colleton caught her, Scipio would do nothing but rejoice.

In one pocket of his tattered dungarees, he had a letter addressed to Anne Colleton in St. Matthews. Getting hold of paper and pencil hadn't been too hard. Even laying his hands on an envelope hadn't been too hard. Finding a postage stamp, though . . .

Finally, he'd seen a dice game where one of the raiders was tearing stamps off a sheet a few at a time to cover his losses. Scipio had had almost no money in his own pockets, but he got down on one knee as fast as he could. Luck was with him; he'd rolled a seven his first try out and then made his point—it was four, which made it tougher—so that, before long, several small, red portraits of James Longstreet took up residence alongside his pocket change. One of them was on the envelope now.

Cassius said, "We's gwine up to hit Gadsden a lick tonight. We ain't done no fightin' no'th o' the Congaree in a while. Them fat white bastards up there, they reckons they's safe from de force o' revolutionary justice. I aims to show they that they is mistooken."

"You goes up there, you draws the militia up there after you," Scipio said. "Not so many white sojers around Marshlands after dat. Cherry, she can dig all she like."

"I knows it," Cassius said. "Cain't be helped." He was by no means enamored of Cherry or her search for the treasure both he and Scipio were convinced did not exist. Then Cassius turned his gaze on Scipio. He still had a hunter's eyes—or maybe they were sniper's eyes. He didn't say anything. He didn't need to say anything. His expression spoke more plainly than words. *Yes, you've got a rifle in your hands,* it declared. *You don't dare use it against me or any of the other revolutionary fighters here. You'd have only one shot sent in the wrong direction, and then you'd be mine—because you and I both know that if that one shot is at me, you'll miss. And I won't.*

Scipio sighed. He'd always been a halfhearted Red at best. He wasn't even that any more. He was a man trapped in a nightmare with enemies on all sides and no way out. He saw no way to take Cassius with him when he fell, as he surely would fall. He did have hopes of bringing down Cherry—or, if Cherry got extraordinarily lucky, of bringing down Miss Anne. But Cassius? Cassius was a force of nature.

The force of nature joined Scipio and a couple of other men in a battered rowboat and glided north through the swamps of the Congaree. Several other boats followed. Cassius knew the ways through the maze of twisting channels. Starlight was all he needed. Each of the other boats carried at least one man who knew the swamps almost as well.

Something floated by overhead. Scipio's blood ran cold. The part of his mind that the Colletons had spared no trouble or expense to educate insisted it was only an owl. The part of him that had grown up in one of those clapboard cabins a world away from the Marshlands mansion by which they sat said it was something worse, something ghostly, something that would lure them all into the heart of the swamp and never let them escape.

Then it hooted, and he felt foolish. More often than not, the educated part of his mind did have some notion of what it was talking about. But the other part was older, with roots that went down deeper. Education ruled his brain. His belly, his heart, his balls? No.

"Do Jesus!" one of the oarsmen said, his voice a shaky whisper. "I reck oned that were one o' they bad hants, the kind that don't never let you come out o' the swamp no more." Scipio hadn't been the only one frightened, then.

Cassius said, "Ain't no hant can stand up against dialectical materialism." His new beliefs had overpowered the older ones. Almost, Scipio envied him for that. Almost. Cassius' new beliefs had overpowered his good judgment, too, and these tattered remnants of the Congaree Socialist Republic the Reds had hoped to establish were the proof of that.

Cassius did not, would not, see defeat, only a setback on the inevitable road to revolution. He could no more deny that inevitability than a devout Christian could the inevitability of the Second Coming.

Trees and bushes began to thin out as the boats full of Reds neared

the edge of the swamp. Ahead, across fields once full of tobacco and cotton and rice that now held mostly weeds, the lights of Gadsden shone: a few houses bright with electricity, more showing the softer, yellower light of burning gas. Most of the houses showed no lights at all; most people, like most people all over the world, had to get up and go to work in the morning.

Cassius waved. The men at the oars brought the rowboat up against the bank of the creek that fed into the Congaree. It grounded softly on mud. The other boats came up alongside. Black men with rifles clambered out of them. "Let's go, comrades," Cassius said in a low but penetrating voice. "Time fo' de buckra to learn some more o' de price de 'pressors pay."

He left one man behind to guard the boats. Scipio wished he could have been that man, but knew better than to show it. The revolutionaries did not trust him enough to let him out of their sight. Cassius might have, but he did not try to override the opinion of the others. Since they were right and he wrong, that was as well for their cause, if not for Scipio's.

A motorcar chugged along the road toward town. The driver never saw Cassius and his men, for he led them along paths he knew through the over grown fields. They went past a couple of mansions, both dark and silent and deserted. Few great landowners around the Congaree dared live among the dozens of Negro servants and field hands needed to make a plantation and mansion live, not these days they didn't.

Militiamen—the too old and the too young—stumped along the streets of Gadsden. One of them was rash enough to carry a kerosene lantern. Cassius let out a soft chuckle. "Look at that damnfool buckra goin' roun' like he a night watchman sayin', 'Twelve o'clock, an' all's well!' It ain't no twelve o'clock, an' it ain't well, neither."

He raised his Tredegar to his shoulder in one fluid motion, aimed, and fired. The militiaman dropped the lantern with a shriek. The burning puddle of kerosene set fire to the boards of the sidewalk.

Another militiaman fired at the sound of Cassius' shot, and perhaps at the muzzle flash. His bullet didn't come close. Three Negroes fired at the flash from his rifle. He screamed, too; one of those rounds must have struck home. "Come on!" Cassius said. He advanced on Gadsden in long, loping, ground-eating strides.

Black shadows in the black night, the Reds ran after him. Scipio panted along with the rest, doing his best to keep up. The factory work he'd done had hardened him. He wasn't the swiftest here, nor anywhere close to it, but he wasn't the slowest, either.

A bell began clanging in the center of town: probably a fire alarm turned to a new purpose. Here and there, lights came on in upper stories as people got ready to come out and fight or simply tried to find out what was going on. The raiders fired whenever those lights gave them targets. More screams rose.

Slower than it should have came a cry that made sense: "Niggers! It's the Red niggers!"

Militiamen and whoever else could lay hands on a rifle or shotgun or pis tol started banging away, sometimes at the Negroes who ran through the streets but as often at one another. The townsfolk had not been raided for a while, and so did not put up the kind of energetic, organized defense the whites of St. Matthews, for instance, might have shown.

Scipio darted along Market Street toward the corner of Williams. A white-bearded militiaman dashed from Williams out onto Market just as Sci pio got to the corner. They both stared in horror. Scipio shot first, before the old man's rifle had quite come to bear on him. The militiaman fired as he fell. The bullet cracked past Scipio's head.

Seeing the militiaman still trying to work the bolt on his rifle, Scipio shot him again, in the head. He didn't move after that. He wasn't the first white man Scipio had killed, but Scipio hadn't wanted to shoot him. He'd got in the way; that was all. At the corner of Williams and Market stood a cast-iron mailbox. Scipio threw his note to Anne Colleton into it, then ran on.

The men of the Congaree Socialist Republic shot whomever they could shoot, started half a dozen fires, and then, at Cassius' shouted command, melted away into the night. Some of the younger and more intrepid militiamen and townsfolk tried to pursue, but the Negroes knew where they were going and the whites did not. Escape proved easy enough.

"Don't lose a man, not one!" Cassius exulted when they got back to the boats. "We tears that town to hell and gone"—he pointed back toward the leaping flames—"and we don't lose a man. Is that a great raid, or is it ain't?"

"That a great raid, Cass," Scipio said solemnly. "A great raid."

XI

Nashville is ours, and fairly won!" Lieutenant General George Armstrong Custer exulted, standing in front of the badly damaged State Capitol of Tennessee. Correspondents again hung on his every word, and he had plenty of words to keep them hanging. "We smashed their line north of the Cumberland when no one thought we could. We crossed the Cumberland when no one thought we could. And now, more than half a century after an unjust and ignominious peace forced us to evacuate Nashville, the Stars and Stripes wave over it once more."

As he had on the other side of the Cumberland, Major Abner Dowling lis tened with mixed emotions to the general commanding First Army. Custer's bombast always gave him the pip. But now, by God, Custer had plenty to be bombastic about. He'd gained two smashing victories over the Confederates in the space of a month. People with greater reputations had done less.

"Where do we go from here, General?" one of the scribes asked.

"Forward against the foe," Custer said grandly. Before Dowling could spoil the proceedings by throwing up on his superior's shoes, Custer did something most unusual for him—he gave a sensible reason for one of his rhetorical flights of fancy: "More than that, I am not at liberty to say, lest the Rebels learn in our papers what their spies could not tell them."

"How long can the Rebs stand up under this kind of pounding, sir?" an other reporter said.

"You need to ask that question in Richmond, Jack, not here," Custer said. Chuckling, he added, "As long as the Rebs still own Richmond, anyhow. If they start using barrels back East the way we've taught them here, the Confederate States may not keep their capital very long."

"With Russia in revolution, with France tottering and French soldiers throwing down their guns or turning them on their own officers, with England stretched to the breaking point and the CSA hammered on several fronts, how long can the Entente go on? How long can the war go on?" Jack asked.

"Until the United States and Germany win their rightful places in the sun, and until those places are recognized by all the powers in the world," Custer said. "It could be tomorrow. It could be five years hence. However long it takes, we shall persevere." He struck one of his poses.

"If the Rebs do throw in their hand, General, what sort of peace would you recommend imposing on them?" somebody asked.

Before Custer could get started on that one, Abner Dowling stepped in: "Boys, that's not the sort of question you ask a soldier. That's a question for the president or the secretary of state or for Congress." Part of his job—no small part of his job—was keeping the general commanding First Army from embarrassing not only himself but his country.

Given General Custer's nature, it wasn't an easy job. With a laugh, Custer said, "Don't worry, Major. They know I'm not one of the boys in the morning coats and striped trousers. All they asked was what I would recommend, and I'm happy to tell them that much."

"Sir, I don't really think you—" Dowling began.

It was hopeless. Custer rolled over him like a barrel smashing barbed wire into the mud. "If it were up to me, I would impose upon the Confederate States a peace that would prevent them from ever again threatening the peace and security of the United States. Twice now they have rubbed our faces in the dirt. They came too close to doing it once more in this great war. They should never, ever have another chance."

On the whole, Dowling agreed with him (which made Custer's adjutant want to reexamine his own assumptions). But there were dangers with a punitive peace, too, as one of the correspondents recognized: "What if our terms are so harsh, the Confederates would sooner take their chances on the battlefield than accept them?"

"Bully!" Custer boomed. "So much the better. In that case, I confidently believe the restoration of the Union by force of arms, which unfortunately failed when first attempted under the inept leadership of Abraham Lincoln, would now, in God's good time, at last come to pass."

He did give good copy. The newspapermen jotted phrases in their note books. Abner Dowling was of the opinion that his boss had to be

suffering from a touch of the sun. Crossing the Cumberland had been a splendid feat of arms, no doubt about it. Even so, a hell of a lot of ground lay between Nashville and Mobile.

Dowling said, "I think that's about enough, boys. Remember that you're asking these questions inside Nashville. If that doesn't speak for itself, I don't know what does."

"I don't mind answering questions," Custer said. "I could stand here all day and enjoy every minute of it."

Dowling knew how true that was. Every question Custer answered meant another line, maybe another paragraph, in the papers. Seeing his name in print was meat and drink to the general commanding First Army. But his insistence on his own stamina reminded the correspondents that he had considerably surpassed his Biblical threescore and ten. They drifted away by ones and twos to file their stories.

Custer gave his adjutant a sour look. "I was just warming to the subject, Major. Why did you go and cut me off at the knees?"

"They already know you're a hero, sir," Dowling said. He smiled to himself, watching Custer lap that up like a kitten with a pitcher of cream. After a couple of seconds, though, that inner smile slipped. Custer really *was* a hero, and, Dowling reluctantly admitted to himself, really deserved to be. The portly major went on, "Besides, sir, we truly do have to plan the axis of First Army's next attack."

After lighting a cigar, Custer blew smoke in Dowling's face. "I suppose so, Major," he said with poor grace, "but blast me if I know why we're bothering. The geniuses in Philadelphia will tell us what to do, delivering their orders in a chariot of fire from on high, as if from the hand of God Himself—and it will work as well as their doctrine on barrels, you mark my words."

Having vented steam, he let his adjutant lead him back into the capitol. The southern wing was more nearly intact than the northern; First Army headquarters had been established there. In the map room, an enormous chart of Tennessee was thumbtacked to one wall. Two red arrows projected out from Nashville, one southeast toward Murfreesboro, the other southwest toward Memphis, better than two hundred miles away.

As far as Dowling was concerned, that second line was madness,

an exercise in hubris. But it attracted Custer as much as a pretty housekeeper did. "By pushing in that direction, Major, we can lend aid to the attack on Memphis that's been developing in Arkansas," he insisted.

Keeping Custer connected with reality was Dowling's main assign ment. "Sir, the Tennessee River is in the way," he said, as diplomatically as he could. "Not only that, the attack from Arkansas has been developing since 1915, and it hasn't developed yet."

"Jonesboro has fallen," Custer said.

"Yes—at last," Dowling said, certain the sarcasm would fly over the head of the general commanding First Army, as indeed it did. Stubbornly, Custer's adjutant went on, "Expecting anything from a campaign west of the Mississippi is whistling in the dark, sir. We just don't have the forces over there to do all we want. If the Rebs weren't shy of men west of the river, too, we'd be in worse shape there than we are."

"We'll draw off their defenders," Custer said. "They haven't got enough men on this side of the river, either."

That held just enough truth to make it tempting, but not enough to make it valuable. In thoughtful tones, Dowling said, "Well, you may be right, sir. I've heard Brigadier General MacArthur find some good reasons for the advance in the direction of Memphis."

He'd gauged that about right. Custer's peroxided mustache twitched; he screwed up his mouth as if he'd bitten into a lemon. "The only direction of advance Daniel MacArthur knows anything about is the one in the direction of the newspapers," he sneered.

Takes one to know one, Dowling thought. Brigadier General MacArthur, with his trademark cigarette holder, courted publicity the way stockbrokers courted chorus girls. Did Custer refuse to admit to anyone else that he did the same thing, or did he refuse to admit it to himself, too? Despite his long association with the general commanding First Army, Dowling hadn't ever been able to decide.

Custer said, "I wonder what Lieutenant Colonel—no, Colonel: you did send in that promotion, didn't you?—Morrell's view is?"

"I did send in that promotion, yes, sir," Dowling said.

"Good," Custer said. "Good. I wonder what Morrell thinks, yes I do. Now there is a man with a good head on his shoulders, who thinks of his country first and his own glory second. He's not a grandstander like some people I could name. A very solid man, Morrell."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said. Custer approved of him because his plan had brought Custer fame, but it had brought Custer fame because it worked. Dowling didn't think Morrell so unselfishly patriotic as Custer did, but he didn't mind ambition in a man if it didn't consume him.

"And," Custer muttered, more than half to himself, "I had better find out in which direction Libbie thinks we should go."

"That would be a good idea, sir," Dowling said enthusiastically—so enthu siastically, Custer gave him a dirty look. Dowling didn't care that Libbie kept the general commanding First Army from rumpling serving women. He did care that Libbie had shown herself to be the brains of the Custer family. Whenever she shared living quarters with the general, First Army fought better.

Custer said, "Whether we move against Murfreesboro or Memphis, we have to strike hard."

His adjutant nodded. Custer's one great military virtue was aggressive ness. That aggressiveness had cost the lives of thousands of men, because it meant Custer kept trying to ram his head through the stone walls the CSA kept building against him. But, when barrels finally gave him the means to do some real ramming, he made the most of them, as a more subtle general might have been unable to do.

"We have to strike hard," he repeated. "If we but strike hard, the whole rotten edifice of the Confederate States of America will come tumbling down."

A year earlier, Dowling would have reckoned that the statement of a madman. Six months earlier, he would have thought it the statement of a fool. Now he nodded solemnly and said, "Sir, I think you may be right."

Reggie Bartlett's hospital gown was of a washed-out butternut, not a pale green-gray like those of most of the inmates of the military hospital outside St. Louis. For good measure, the gown had PRISONER

stenciled across the chest in bloodred letters four inches high.

He could get around pretty well with one crutch these days, which was a good thing, because the shoulder that had taken a machine-gun bullet was still too tender to let him use two crutches. The doctors kept insisting the wound infection was clearing up, but it wasn't clearing up anywhere near fast enough to suit him.

He made it to the toilets adjoining the room where he and his companions spent so much time on their backs, eased himself, and slowly returned to his bed. "Took you long enough," one of the Yankees said. "I figured you were trying to escape, the way you keep bragging that you did before."

"Pretty soon, Bob, pretty soon," Reggie answered. "Just not quite yet, is all."

"Shoot, Bob, didn't you know?" said another wounded U.S. soldier, this one named Pete. "Reggie started escaping day before yesterday, but he's so damn slow, this is as far as he's gotten."

"You go to hell, too, Pete," Reggie said. He took care not to sound too angry, though; Pete's left leg was gone above the knee, blown off by a Confederate shell somewhere in Arkansas.

Bartlett sat on the edge of his bed and leaned his crutch against the wall next to it. That was the easy part. What came afterwards wasn't so easy. He used his sound right arm to help drag his wounded right leg up onto the mattress. The leg was getting better, too. But, while it was on the way, it hadn't arrived yet.

Once he was sitting with both legs out before him, he eased himself down flat onto his back. That hurt worse; the shoulder felt as if it had a toothache in there, a dull pain that never went away and sometimes flared to malevolent heights. Sweat sprang out on his forehead at the wound's bite. After he lay still for a while, it dropped back to a level he could bear more easily.

"You all right, Reggie?" Bob asked, tone solicitous as if Bartlett had been from Massachusetts or Michigan himself. Pain was the common foe here.

"Not too bad," Reggie said. "I'll tell you, though, this whole business of war would be a hell of a lot more fun if you didn't get shot."

That drew loud agreement from the Yankees on the other beds in the room. "They made the old fools who ordered this war go out and fight it, it never would've lasted five minutes," Bob said. "Tell me the truth, boys—is that so or isn't it?"

Again, most of the wounded men in the ward agreed. But Pete said, "I don't know about that. Roosevelt fought in the Second Mexican War when he was our age."

"Well, that's a fact—he did," Bob allowed. "He fought one medium-sized battle against the limeys, licked 'em, and they went home. That was plenty to make him a hero back then. We fight the Rebs or the Canucks, do they go home with their tails between their legs on account of we lick 'em once? We all know better'n that, don't we?"

"None of us'd be here if the bastards on the other side ran away quick," Pete said. He grinned. "Well, Reggie would, I reckon, but he don't count anyway."

"You damnyankees don't run, either, the way you did the last couple of times we fought you," Bartlett said, returning verbal fire. "Wish to Jesus you did. I wouldn't have these damn holes in me, and I'll tell you, I liked life a lot better before I got ventilated."

Out in the hallway, a faint squeak of wheels and rattle of crockery announced the coming of the lunch cart. As the wounded soldiers from both sides were united in their struggle against pain, so they were also united in their loathing of what the hospital fed them.

Reggie gagged down yet another meal of medium-boiled egg, beef broth, stewed prunes, and a pudding that tasted as if it were made from four parts library paste and one part sugar. When the nurse took away his dishes, she clicked her tongue between her teeth in reproof. "How do you expect to get better if you don't eat more?"

"Ma'am, if you give me beefsteak, I will eat a slab the size of this mattress and ask you kindly for seconds. If you give me fried chicken, I will build you a new wing to this hospital from the bones. If you give me pork chops, I will gobble them down till I grow a little curly tail. But ma'am, if you feed me slops you wouldn't give the pigs you got the pork chops from, I will waste away and perish."

"That's telling her, Reb!" one of the wounded U.S. soldiers said. Several others clapped their hands.

The nurse looked furious. "You are getting a nourishing meal suited to your digestion, and you ought to be grateful the United States are giving it to you instead of letting you starve the way you deserve."

"We have Yankee prisoners, too, ma'am," Bartlett said. "They get doctors. They get food, same as I do here. If they don't get better food than I do here, why, I'm sorry for 'em, and that's a fact."

He hadn't made a friend. The nurse set hands on hips. "You are getting exactly the same meal as wounded American soldiers," she said coldly.

"I'm an American," Bartlett said. "What do you think I am, a Chinaman?"

"A troublemaker," the nurse answered. By her expression, that was worse than a Chinaman, and by a good distance, too. She rolled the cart away from Reggie's bed. Her back still radiated outrage.

"Don't nobody hook the Reb's pudding tomorrow," Pete said when she was gone, "not unless you want to eat the glass ground up in it, too."

"Only thing ground-up glass would do for that pudding is make it better," Reggie said, and nobody seemed inclined to tell him he was wrong.

The next morning, Bob got promoted to a different ward, one a step closer to eventual release. In his place, an attendant wheeled in another Confederate prisoner—a Negro with a bandaged stump where his left foot should have been. He grunted with pain as he got into Bob's bed.

Nobody knew what to do or what to say. The wounded U.S. soldiers looked in Reggie Bartlett's direction. The U.S. Army still did not allow Negroes to serve, though they'd been able to join the U.S. Navy for years. In the CSA, the very idea of black men in uniform remained strange, though the pressure of fighting a larger, more populous foe had forced it on the ruling whites.

Reggie found one question he could safely ask: "Where did you get hit?" He had trouble figuring out what sort of tone to use. A lifetime's experience had taught him he was superior to any black man ever born. But this Negro was a fellow soldier, and they were both

prisoners of the Yankees: hardly an exalted status.

"Outside o' Jonesboro, Arkansas," the newly arrived black answered. He also spoke cautiously. "How about you?"

"Over in Sequoyah, in the Red River bottomlands." Bartlett hesitated, then gave his name and said, "Who're you?"

"Rehoboam, my ma and pa called me, out o' the Good Book," the Negro said. He was very, very black, with a low, flat nose and small ears. Before he was wounded, he'd probably been strong and muscular; now his skin sagged, as it did on men who'd lost a lot of flesh in a hurry. After another moment's thought, he added, "Had me a stripe on my sleeve 'fore I got shot."

He said it in a way that made Bartlett believe him. It also made Reggie smile. "Can't pull rank on me, Rehoboam," he said. "I had one, too."

"We got the same rank now," Rehoboam said. "We's prisoners."

"Yeah, I was thinking the same thing," Reggie said, nodding. When he'd been in prison camp before, over in West Virginia, the Yankees had used captured Negro laborers to lord it over their white prisoners of war, and to spy on them, too. The blacks there had taken savage pleasure in doing just that, enjoying being on top instead of on the bottom.

Rehoboam didn't seem inclined to act like that. But he didn't act submis sive, either, the way he surely would have back in the CSA. Bartlett didn't know what to make of him. The idea of simple equality with a Negro had never crossed his mind.

"Outside of Jonesboro, eh?" Pete said. "Craighead Forest?"

"Sure as the devil," Rehoboam answered. He looked over toward the U.S. soldier. "You?" After Pete nodded, the Negro went, "This great big old damn- yankee officer was screamin' about God and Jesus an' I don't know what all else, an' he went an' shot me. He was runnin' way the hell out in front of his men—balls like an elephant, I reckon, but he was crazy, you ask me."

"I even think I know about the guy you mean," Pete said. "McSwenson, something like that. From what I've heard about him, you're right—he's nuts. Leastways you know who got you. That's

something. Me, shell went off and the next thing I knew I was shy a pin." He patted his short stump.

One of the other wounded U.S. soldiers asked Rehoboam, "Were you a Red before you put on a Confederate uniform?"

"Maybe I was," Rehoboam answered, "but maybe I wasn't, too." He gave Reggie a sidelong look. "Nobody asked me nothin' about that when I went into the Army, so I don't reckon I got to talk about it now."

"Let's say you were," the Yank persisted. "How could you try and shoot the Rebs one day and then fight for 'em the next?"

"If I was—and I ain't sayin' I was, mind you—I would have been tryin' to make the CSA a better place for me an' black folks to live in either which way," Rehoboam said. "Maybe that's why nobody asked me nothin' about none o' that when I walked into the recruitin' office."

Pete turned to Bartlett. "How about it, Reggie? How do you like havin' a smoke like Rehoboam fightin' on your side once you Rebs ran out of white men you could throw at us?"

"Hey, I'll tell you this much," Reggie said. "I'd sure as hell sooner have him shooting at you damnyankees than at me."

Now Rehoboam gave him a measuring stare. "That's fair," the Negro said. "I ain't got no trouble with that."

He spoke as if his opinion had as much weight as Reggie's. In terms of law in the Confederate States, Reggie realized, Rehoboam's opinion did have as much weight as his, or would. The black man would surely get an honorable discharge when repatriated, and that would make him a citizen of the CSA, not just a resident.

"How you feelin'?" Rehoboam asked Reggie.

"Leg's getting better," he answered. "They say the shoulder is, too, but damned if I can see it. How about you?"

"My damn toes itch," Rehoboam said, pointing to where they would be if still attached to the rest of him. "They ain't there, but they itch anyways."

"Oh, Lord, I know what you mean," Pete said. "I reach down to

scratch sometimes, and I'm scratching air."

As a Negro, Rehoboam might not have fit into the ward. As a wounded man, he fit fine. Reggie Bartlett pondered that. He had a lot of time in which to ponder it, too. He wasn't going anywhere, certainly not very fast.

General Leonard Wood appeared before the House's Transportation Com mittee to testify about the difficulties in civilian railroad transport caused by the enormous demands the Army was putting on the rail system of the United States. As the chief of the U.S. General Staff droned on about millions of man-miles traveled, Flora Hamburger jotted the occasional note. Wood was forceful and intelligent, but she found his subject matter distinctly uninspiring.

She wished the Speaker of the House had assigned her to some other com mittee, but, since she was a Socialist without seniority, nobody—least of all the Speaker—cared about what she wished. But Transportation wasn't the worst committee, because so many types of legislation involved its subject in one way or another. She could have ended up on the Forestry Committee. *That* would have been a choice assignment for a representative from New York's Lower East Side!

Being the most junior member of the committee, and of a minority party to boot, she had to wait a long time for her turn to question General Wood. When at last it came, her first question was different from those the chief of the General Staff had been getting from other congressmen: "Why are the U.S. forces in the East so slow to adopt the mass use of barrels that has proved so effective in Tennessee?"

The chairman rapped loudly for order. "That question is not germane at this time, Miss Hamburger," he said. "It falls under the purview of the Military Affairs Committee, not our own."

"Mr. Taft, the question may not be germane to you, but it is very impor tant to me," Flora answered. "My brother is a private, and he asked me in a letter to ask that question if I ever had that chance. I can introduce the letter into the record, if you like."

William Howard Taft's round, plump face—not at all suited to the up- thrust Kaiser Bill mustache he wore—turned red. Flora hid a smile. If the chairman silenced her now, he would also be silencing a man in uniform, a man whom the Democrats' policies had put into

uniform. That would give the Socialists all sorts of lovely ammunition; Flora could already imagine speeches on how the Democrats, not content with starting the war, were now concealing mistakes in how it was being fought.

Taft had been in Congress almost as long as Flora had been alive; he could figure out the angles, too. He turned to Wood. "If the general pleases, he may answer the question," he said unhappily.

"I will answer," Wood said, scratching at his gray mustache. "They have pioneered a new way of using barrels out in Tennessee. We had formerly employed a different doctrine throughout the Army. Now that the western way has shown itself to give better results, we are extending its use to other fronts. These things do take a certain amount of time, though, ma'am."

"So it would seem," Flora said. "Otherwise, you wouldn't have kept the—is *mistaken* too strong a word?—doctrine for the past year. Can you estimate how many men have died because of it?"

Congressman Taft looked unhappier still that he'd allowed the first question. Having allowed it, though, he could hardly shield Wood from the question. Jowls quivering, he nodded to the chief of the General Staff. "No, I cannot give any firm answer to that, ma'am," Wood said. "I can only tell you that we have, from the beginning, prosecuted this war to the best of our ability. We are but men. We have made mistakes. When we discover a better way of using any equipment, we take advantage of it. I regret the extra casualties we surely suffered because we did not know so much then as we do now. My training was as a physician. I regret any and all human suffering, believe me."

To her surprise, Flora did believe him. His long, mournful face and slow, deep voice made her have a hard time picturing him as a liar. Still, she persisted in her own line of questioning: "How did they happen to be right in Tennessee when all the best thinkers in the War Department were gathered together here in Philadelphia to come up with . . . the wrong answer?"

"Let me give you a comparison I think you'll understand, ma'am," General Wood said. "Suppose you're in a kitchen, and—"

Patronizing Flora Hamburger was not a good idea. "I've spent most of my time in factories and offices," she snapped. "I fear I don't know so much about kitchens." That was stretching a point; she'd

helped her mother every day after getting home from work. But she was not about to let him treat her like a housewife instead of a U.S. Representative. "Please answer the question without kitchen comparisons."

"Yes, ma'am," Wood said crisply. If her pinning his ears back angered him, he didn't show it. "We designed the doctrine at the same time as we were designing the machines themselves. Any time you do something like that, you take the chance of not getting everything perfectly right. General Custer tried something different, it proved to work better than anything we'd done with the doctrine we had before, and we will take advantage of that from now on."

Flora nodded reluctantly. It was a good answer. Wood had spent a lot of time testifying before Congress. Representative Taft beamed with relief. "If the distinguished lady from New York has no further questions, we can—"

"I do have one more," Flora said. Taft sighed. Since members of his own party had droned on and on over matters less consequential than those concerning barrels, he could hardly shut her off without raising howls from the Socialists. He held out his hand to her, palm up, fingers spread, to show she could go on. "Thank you, Mr. Chairman," she told him. "General Wood, if all that you say is so, why did General Custer have to violate War Department orders against using barrels in any way except that prescribed by Philadelphia in order to prove that his ideas were better than yours?"

She hoped he would deny any such orders existed. She knew they did. Not many Socialists worked in the War Department, but the ones who did had a way of keeping their Congressional delegation well informed about the department's inner workings—and its dirty laundry.

But Leonard Wood was too canny to let himself be caught in a lie. He said, "Ma'am, we had done the best we could in Philadelphia. Do please recall, we did win victories with barrels used as we suggested. Maybe we would have done better using them from the start as General Custer did, but there are many other possible ways to use them, too, most of which are likely to have done worse than ours. The main reason we tried to forbid all experimentation with barrels is that, by the very nature of things, most experiments fail. General Custer's happened to succeed, and he deserves the credit for it, as he would deserve the blame had it gone wrong."

By his tone, he thought Custer deserved blame anyhow. But he could have plausibly denied that, and she had no documents to make him out a liar there. "Anything else, Miss Hamburger?" Congressman Taft asked. Flora shook her head. The fat Democrat got in a dig of his own: "Nothing actually pertaining to trains?"

"Mr. Chairman, if the choice is between asking questions that have to do with how crowded trains are and how safe my brother is, I know which ques tions I want to ask," Flora said.

"I hope your brother stays safe, Miss Hamburger," General Wood said. "Despite our gains, the fighting in Virginia has been very hard."

"Thank you," she said. For a moment, she was surprised he knew where David had been sent, but only for a moment. Soldiers who happened to be related to members of Congress no doubt had special files high-ranking officers could check at need.

"Any further questions from anyone?" Taft asked. No one spoke. The chairman of the Transportation Committee asked another question: "Do I hear a motion to adjourn?" He did, and gaveled the session to a close.

Later, in her office, Flora was answering letters from constituents when her secretary came in and said, "General Wood would like to see you for a few minutes, ma'am."

"Send him right in, Bertha," Flora said. "I wonder what he wants." She wondered if she'd struck a nerve with her questions about barrels. If he complained about those, she'd send him away with a flea in his ear.

Into the inner office he strode, erect, soldierly. The first words out of his mouth surprised her: "You did a good job of raking me over the coals there earlier this afternoon. One of these days, we'll sift all the Socialist sneaks out of the War Department, but it isn't likely to be any time soon."

She didn't want to thank him, but he'd succeeded in disarming some of the hostility she felt. "You didn't come here just to tell me that," she said.

"No, I didn't," he answered. "I came here to tell you again that I wish all the best for your brother. The 91st is a good unit, and they've compiled a record that will stand up against anyone's."

"I wish they'd never had to compile that kind of record—or any other kind of record, for that matter," Flora said.

"I understand," General Wood answered. Flora must have raised an eye brow, for he went on, "I do. Soldiers fight wars; they know what goes into them. Glory is what happens afterwards, what civilians make up."

"Not much glory will come out of this war, even afterwards," Flora said. "Hard to squeeze glory out of mud and lice and bullets and shells flying every which way."

Wood surprised her again by nodding. "Maybe that means we won't fight another one for a long time. I hope to heaven it does." He paused, rubbed at his mustache, and finally went on, "Your brother—David, isn't it?—yes, David, has already made more than an honorable contribution to our cause and to our ultimate victory. If he were to request a transfer to, say, a clerical position or one of the supply services, I think that request would be likely to receive favorable attention."

"More favorable than if a seamstress' daughter put in the same request?" Flora asked. The chief of the General Staff did not answer, which was an answer in itself. Almost despairingly, Flora said, "You put me in an impossible position, you know. If I keep him safe, I take unfair advantage of who I am. If I don't, and anything happens to him ... I think you had better go."

General Wood got to his feet. "I am sorry, Miss Hamburger," he said. "I hoped to ease your mind, not to upset you. Good day."

Out he strode, shoulders back, spine straight. Flora stared after him. She didn't believe him. He was too intelligent not to have understood every bit of what he was doing. He'd done it anyhow. Why? Just to upset her? Or to gain whatever advantage he could if she asked him to help David? "Damn you, General Wood," she muttered. "Damn you."

Anne Colleton crouched in the brush that had advanced from the woods toward the ruins of the Marshlands mansion. With her crouched not only a squad of local militiamen but also a machine-gun team from somewhere down by Charleston. She'd almost had to go down on her knees in front of the governor to get them, but they were

here. If he'd asked her to go down on her knees in front of him when they were all alone, she'd have thought about doing that, too. That was how much she wanted to make sure her trap slammed shut hard.

In a back pocket of her mannish trousers, she had a torn, dirty scrap of paper with a few words written in a crisp, elegant hand that did not match its stationery. If what Scipio told her was true . ..

If it wasn't true, she was either wasting her time here or walking into a trap rather than setting one. Just for a moment, her hand fell to the barrel of the scope-sighted Tredegar beside her. Any trap that tried closing on her would take some damage first.

Off on the left of the little line, Sergeant Willie Metcalfe stiffened and let out a low hiss. As if afraid that wouldn't be enough, he turned his head so that he presented the ruined left half of his face to his comrades. "Here they come," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Don't open up too soon," Anne ordered the militiamen. She'd said it before. She would say it again: "Let them get close. Let them get busy. And then . . ." Her voice, still soft, turned savage. "Let them have it."

She stared avidly through the brush, north toward the Congaree. The ground—the ground that should have been covered with cotton instead of overrun by weeds—steamed as the sun rose higher and burned down on it. Through that thin, shimmering mist, she too made out the Negroes heading for the mansion.

They were a ragged lot, ragged and filthy, but they carried themselves like fighting men. Their strides were quick and wary. Their heads never stopped moving. She froze whenever they looked toward her, and hoped her companions had the sense to do the same. The militiamen, she feared, weren't in the same class as the men of the Congaree Socialist Republic. If they kept the advantage of surprise, they wouldn't need to be.

Some of the Negroes carried spades, some rifles, most both. One in par ticular stalked along like a beast of prey in spite of the Tredegar on his shoulder. *His* shoulder? Anne took a longer look at that Red rebel.

"Cherry," she whispered. Her lips drew back from her teeth in a smile so ferocious that Linus Ashforth, who crouched beside her, involuntarily flinched away, as from a wild beast. Anne never noticed

the white-bearded militiaman. Her attention remained altogether focused on the Negro woman who had been first her brother's lover and then, as the Red revolt began, the instrument of Jacob Colleton's death.

She didn't need long to realize that, as she led the militiamen, Cherry bossed the Negroes. She bossed them imperiously, bullying them into doing exactly as she required. *Bitch. Hateful bitch,* Anne thought, never noticing how much Cherry's style resembled her own.

"We done tried over yonder, dat side o' the mansion." Cherry's voice floated across a hundred yards of open ground. "Now we tries on dis side." She led the Reds over toward the side where Anne and the militiamen waited. "Dig, you damn lazy niggers. Dig!" She set down the rifle and grabbed a spade herself.

They dug with her. Few would have been bold enough to argue. Cassius would have, but Cassius wasn't here. Anne let out a silent sigh. Had Scipio handed her Cherry and Cassius both, she might even have thought about forgiving him. But Cherry by herself was no small prize.

"At my signal," Anne whispered to Linus Ashforth and to the man to her left. "Pass it along the line." They did. She picked up her rifle. She didn't aim at Cherry, not yet. The militiamen stirred, picking their own targets.

Cherry was as alert as a beast of prey, too. She caught some tiny motion in the brush and let out a cry of alarm.

At the same instant, Anne shouted, "Now!" She fired at one of the men who'd just thrown down a shovel and was turning to grab for his rifle. The turn only half completed, he slumped bonelessly to the ground, blood pouring from a wound in his flank.

All along the line of militiamen, rifles barked. The machine gun ham mered away like a mad thing. A couple of the Reds managed to fall flat, get hold of their rifles, and fire back. Their fire did not last long. Methodical as factory workers, the machine gunners traversed the muzzle of their weapon back and forth. Nothing on the ground in front of them could stay unhit for long.

Seeing how things were, Cherry turned and ran. Anne had run once, too, when revolution broke out around her in Charleston. She'd escaped. Cherry was not so lucky. Anne peered through the telescopic

sight, which made her target seem even closer than it was—and Cherry would have been an easy shot for someone less handy with a rifle than she was. She exhaled. She pulled the trigger. The Tredegar kicked against her shoulder. Cherry toppled with a shriek.

Anne started to break cover, then hesitated. One or more of the Negroes the militiamen had shot down were liable to be shamming. Beside her, Linus Ashforth did stand up. Sure as hell, a bullet cracked past his head. It could as easily have shattered his skull like a dropped flowerpot. He dove for cover. The machine gun hosed down the Reds. When Willie Metcalfe got to his feet, no one fired at him.

"Let's see what we've got," Anne said coldbloodedly. Now she rose.

"That one ain't finished yet, ma'am." Sergeant Metcalfe pointed in the di rection of Cherry, who was still trying to crawl away with a shattered lower leg. He started to raise his own rifle.

"No!" Anne's voice was sharp. "I want her alive. You men!" She waved to the rest of the squad, then pointed in the direction of the Reds who had been digging. "See to them. If any of them are still breathing, finish them off."

She loped toward Cherry. Behind her, a couple of short, flat cracks rang out. Nodding in satisfaction, she trotted on. She had a round in the chamber of her Tredegar, and was ready and more than ready to fire if the colored woman had a pistol tucked in the pocket or waistband of her tattered dungarees.

Cherry snarled hatred at her, but made no move to reach for a weapon. "White debbil bitch," she said. "They was right all along, damn them. You never was nothin' but a goddamn liar."

"You know all about lies, don't you?" Anne said evenly. "You told enough of them, back before the rebellion."

"I ain't never told lies like you 'pressors tell de niggers and de poor stupid buckra and your ownselves," Cherry retorted. She gathered herself, though blood was puddling around her right calf.

"Don't try it," Anne advised her. "I'm too far away for you to reach me, and I won't shoot you in the head. I'll try for somewhere that hurts more and takes longer. Kidney, maybe, or one in each shoulder."

To her surprise, Cherry nodded. "Ain't a patch on what I do to you,

I had you down shot on de ground."

The longing in the black woman's voice made Anne shiver, though she was the one with the rifle. She said, "After what you did to Marshlands, after what you did to my brother, you've had your turn already."

"Ain't." Cherry shook her head. "Ain't come close. Cain't pay back three hundred years o' 'pression in a day. Done whipped we and 'sploited we and sold we like we was horses and fucked we till we gots so many yaller niggers it's a cryin' shame. No, we ain't come close."

Anne heard the words. She heard the accusations. They didn't register, not in any way that mattered. She shook her head. "You rose up against us," she said. "You stabbed us in the back while we were fighting the damnyankees. And you—you—" When she tried to say what Cherry in particular had done, words failed her for one of the rare times in her life.

Despite the pain from her ruined lower leg, Cherry smiled. "I knows what I done, Miss Anne. I was fuckin' and suckin' your brother, and I was puttin' on airs on account of it. And you knows what else?" The smile got wider. "All the time that goddamn skinny little white dick was in me, Miss Anne, I never feel one thing. Never oncet."

Without conscious thought, ahead of conscious thought, Anne's finger squeezed the trigger. The Tredegar roared. The back of Cherry's head exploded, splashing blood and brains and pulverized bone over her and the ground around her. She twitched and shuddered and lay still. But, below the neat hole in her forehead, her face still held that mocking smile.

"To hell with you," Anne whispered, and two tears ran down her face, half sorry for Jacob, half fury at the black woman and the way she'd duped him and used him. And Cherry had got the last word, too, and goaded Anne into giving her a quick end at the same time. Anne kicked at the dirt. Automatically, she worked the bolt and chambered a fresh round.

Linus Ashforth came up to her. The elderly militiaman spat a stream of to bacco juice into Cherry's puddled blood. "This here was right good, ma'am," he said. "Them murderin' devils done took the bait you left 'em, and there ain't a one of 'em going back to the swamps. Yes, ma'am, this here was pretty blame fine."

"It wasn't good enough," Anne said, as much to herself as to the old man. "It wasn't enough."

"What more could you want?" Ashforth asked reasonably. "Every single nigger stuck his nose out of the swamp is dead now. Can't do much better'n a clean sweep, now can you?"

"But there are still Reds *in* the swamps," Anne answered. "When they're all hunted down and killed, that will be—" She started to say *enough,* but shook her head before the word passed her lips. That wouldn't be enough. Nothing could be enough to repair the damage the Negroes had done to the Confederate cause, the damage they had done to the Confederate States. She ended the sentence in a different way: "That will be a start, anyhow."

Linus Ashforth's whistle was soft and low and wondering. "Ma'am, don't sound to me like you'll ever be satisfied."

"I would have been," Anne said. "I could have been. God, I *was.* But it will be a long time before I'm satisfied again; you're right about that. It will be a long time before this is a country anyone can be satisfied with."

"Jesus God, Miss Anne, I'm sure as the dickens glad you ain't mad with *me."* The militiaman spat again, then wiped his mouth on his sleeve.

"You ought to be," Anne Colleton said. She weighed the words, then nod ded. "Yes, you ought to be, because if I'm angry at something, I'll hunt it down and kill it." She looked north, toward the Congaree. Silently, her lips shaped a name. *Cassius.*

Like so many small, hunted creatures, Nellie Semphroch had learned to stay laired up in her burrow, and to come out at night to forage. The occupying Confederates hardly bothered to patrol Washington, D.C., any more. Hal Jacobs said they'd given up because every man they had, they needed at the front. Nellie didn't know about that. She did know that getting water from the Potomac or firewood from a wrecked building, she worried more about a chance U.S. shell than she did about men in butternut. Even at night, the bombardment from the north did not halt. It only slowed a little.

She was far from the only one prowling the night. If she passed

close enough to Jacobs and a few others to recognize them, she would nod. When she saw others, she shrank back into the shadows, and that though she never ventured forth without a long, sharp kitchen knife. Still others shrank from her. That made her feel oddly strong and fierce.

Sometimes Edna would come out with her, sometimes not. When they needed water, they generally went down to the river together. Stove wood was easier to come by close to home. One of them would usually go out for it, or else the other.

"I wish we could find some coal," Nellie said, not for the first time. "The grate isn't really right for wood, and the stove pipe will get all full of soot and creosote. It's liable to catch on fire."

"If you're going to wish, Ma, don't waste your time wishing for coal, for God's sake," Edna said. "Wish for a couple days without shells falling all the damn time. That'd be somethin' really worth having."

"I think we may get that wish before too long," Nellie said. "How much longer do you suppose the Confederate lines north of town are going to be able to stand the pounding the Army is giving them? They'll have to crack pretty soon, and then the United States will have Washington back again."

"Oh, bully!" Edna loaded her voice with sarcasm. "Even if you're right, Ma, it'll only take 'em a hundred years to build it all back up the way it was. And the Rebs'll fight hard to keep the place, too."

"I know they will—it's about the only part of the line where they're still on our soil instead of the other way round," Nellie said. "But when you look at the way the war is going everywhere else, it's hard to see how they're going to be able to do it."

"Well, what if the United States do come in?" Edna said. "Then the Rebs will pound the city to pieces from the other side of the Potomac. The only difference will be which way the guns are pointed."

Nellie sighed and nodded in the candlelit dimness of the cellar under the coffeehouse. Her daughter's guess held an unpleasant feel of truth.

After it got dark outside as well as down in the cellar, Nellie went out to see what she could find and to discover what the bombardment had knocked flat since the last time she came up above ground. One

of the things that wasn't flat any more was the street down the block from the coffeehouse. A big shell had dug an enormous crater in it. Time was when such wounds had been rare and the Confederates patched them as soon as they were made. Now the Rebs kept a few roads to the front open and forgot the rest.

Half a block farther along the street, another couple of shells had landed, converting several houses and shops to rubble. In among the bricks would be lumber, much of it already broken into convenient lengths. Nellie tossed them into a large canvas duffel bag.

She had the bag nearly ready to drag back to the coffeehouse when Bill Reach's voice spoke from out of the darkness close by: "Evenin', Little Nell."

Ice ran through Nellie, though the night was warm and humid. "You're drunk again," she said quietly. "If you were sober, you'd know better than to call me that." Her head went back and forth, back and forth. Where was he?

He laughed. "Maybe I am. Maybe I would. And maybe I'm not, and maybe I wouldn't. What do you think of that?"

There. Behind that pile of bricks, out of which stuck a couple of legs from an upended cast-iron stove. Her fingers closed around the handle of the kitchen knife. "Go away," she said, still looking around as if she hadn't found him. "Can't you just leave me in peace?"

"I sure as hell would like a piece," he said, and laughed again. "I liked it when I had it before, and I know I'd like it again. Oh, you were a hot number in between the sheets, Little Nell, and I don't figure God ever gave another woman in the whole wide world a nastier mouth. Things you used to do . . ."

If she'd writhed with grunting, sweating customers pounding away atop her, it was only to make them finish faster, get off her, and leave the cheap little room where she worked. She'd always hated sucking on men's privates. It seemed filthy, even when they didn't squirt vile-tasting jism into her mouth— usually after promising they wouldn't.

"Go away," she repeated. "Those days are long gone, thank God. I'm a respectable woman now—or I was till you walked into my coffeehouse, anyways. Go back into the gutter, go back to spying, go wherever you want, just as long as you leave me alone. I don't want anything to do with you, do you hear?"

He stood up. In his black coat and black derby, he was still hard to see. He swayed a little, then brought a bottle to his lips. Oddly, the whiskey seemed to steady him instead of making him keel over. "But I want some-thin' to do with you, Little Nell," he said. "You haven't given it to me, so it looks like I'm just gonna have to go and take it." He smashed the fat end of the bottle on the bricks. A little whiskey spilled out—not much. Jagged edges glittered under the stars. "Just gonna have to go ahead and take it," he repeated.

"Go away," Nellie whispered once more.

"You take what's coming to you, and everything will be fine." Bill Reach waved the bottle around. "You give me any trouble, and you'll be real sorry. Yes, you will. Real sorry. Now get down on the ground and take it. Once it's in there, you'll love it. Hell, you always did."

"No." Nellie held the knife behind her back so Reach wouldn't be able to see it.

The acrid fumes of the whiskey, some from his breath, some from the in side of the bottle, made her nostrils twitch as he came closer. "You ain't run-nin'," he said. "You ain't screamin'. See? You know you want it. I'm the man to give it to you, too. If you're good, I'll even pay you, same as old times."

"No," Nellie said again. Either he didn't hear her or he didn't listen. He took a couple of more steps toward her, then extended his left hand to push her to the ground.

He still held the neck of the bottle, but he didn't think he'd have to do anything with it. He'd surely made a lot of mistakes in his time, but that was the last and the worst. Nellie had no experience as a knife fighter, but Bill Reach couldn't have stopped a two-year-old swinging a wooden spoon right then. The knife went deep into the left side of his chest. Its edge grated against a rib when Nellie yanked it out and rammed it home again.

He let out a brief, bubbling shriek, then toppled. Nellie wiped the knife clean on his coat while he was still feebly kicking. "Once it's in there, you'll love it," she said. Then she grunted as she picked up the duffel full of chunks of wood, slung it over her shoulder, and headed for home.

When she got back, Edna was mixing salt pork into canned soup. "That looks like a good load, Ma," her daughter said. "You were gone a

while longer than I thought you would be, though. You have any trouble out there?"

"Trouble?" Nellie shook her head. "Not a bit. That soup smells good."

"Make you thirsty as all get-out," Edna said.

"I know. It still smells good." Nellie had a big bowl. The soup did make her thirsty, so she drank a glass of boiled river water. She went down to the cellar to sleep, and had a better night than she'd enjoyed in years.

Artillery started thundering before dawn, but didn't wake her right away. Neither she nor anyone else left in Washington would have got any sleep at all if they'd let shellfire unduly disturb them. When she did wake, she gauged the bombardment with a practiced ear. So did Edna, who said, "They're pounding the front line right now."

Half an hour or so later, though, the pattern of the shelling abruptly changed. Rounds began falling inside Washington, along the routes the Confederates used to move reinforcements through the city toward the front. "I wonder if the Army is trying to break through the Rebs' trenches right now," Nellie said.

"Do you really think they can?" Edna asked. "The Confederates have been digging and putting in concrete and wire ever since they got here, and that's going on three years now."

"Would they try if they didn't think they could do it, anyway?" Nellie asked in return. Her daughter only shrugged in return, which was, when you got down to it, a reasonable enough answer. From the perspective of a coffeehouse, who could know what the U.S. General Staff had in mind?

But then, a couple of hours later, Nellie heard a rattle of small-arms fire, rifles and machine guns, off to the north. Edna recognized it for what it was, too. She let out a soft whistle. "Haven't hardly heard that since the Confeder ates drove the USA out of here."

"Sure haven't," Nellie agreed. "As long as we have water and fuel, I think we'd better stay right where we're at. If it was bad outside before, it's going to be worse now, with both sides shelling the city and with bullets flying around along with the shells."

They did sneak out for water one night. Other than that, they stayed inside the coffeehouse all the time for the next several days, and down in the cellar whenever they weren't at the stove. The battle for Washington raged around them. They saw almost none of it, which suited Nellie. If she'd seen the battle, the soldiers fighting it would have seen her, with consequences ranging from unpleasant to lethal.

A couple of times, barrels rumbled up the street. Nellie thought they belonged to the CSA, but she didn't go outside to look. Two days later, somebody—she didn't know who, and again didn't care to find out—set up a machine-gun post just down the street and fired off belt after belt of ammunition, the gun roaring like a demented jackhammer. Then came rifle fire and running, shouting men. After that, the racket of small arms sounded from the south, not the north.

Several hours of relative calm were shattered when somebody pounded on the cellar door with a rifle butt. "You the Semphrochs down there?" a deep voice shouted. "Nellie and, uh, Edna?" He sounded as if he might be reading the names from a list.

"Yes," Nellie said, and went up the stairs and pushed the door open.

She found herself staring down a rifle barrel. The soldier holding the rifle wore a green-gray uniform that was familiar and a pot-shaped helmet that wasn't. "Nellie Semphroch," he said—sure enough, he had a list. "You and your daughter are the ones who had the coffeehouse where the damn Rebs came all the damn time."

"But—" Nellie began.

He talked right through her: "Come out, both of you. You're under arrest. Charges are collaboration and treason."

Come on, men," Gordon McSweeney called as his company trudged wearily down an Arkansas dirt road. "Come on. I will not have you go any place I will not go myself in front of you. What I can do, you can also do. What I can do, you *will* also do—or you will answer to me."

Nobody argued with him. Nobody had argued with him since the day Captain Schneider fell in the Craighead Forest. Schneider, McSweeney feared, had been translated to a clime warmer than this one. That was a warm climate indeed; as both summer and the edge

of the Mississippi delta grew closer with every passing moment, the muggy heat made McSweeney feel as if his uniform tunic and trousers had been pasted to his hide.

He'd remained in command of the company since the fight in the Craig-head Forest. He'd also remained a second lieutenant. A sergeant was com manding one of the other companies in the regiment, and nobody seemed to be making any noise about replacing him, either. Officers didn't grow on trees, especially not west of the Mississippi they didn't.

"Pick 'em up," McSweeney called to the troopers shambling along under the weight of helmet and Springfield and heavy pack and entrenching tool and clodhopper boots and however much mud clung to the boots. "If God grant that we pierce their forces but once more, we can bring Memphis and the Mississippi River under our guns. That would be a great blow to strike, and a sore hurt to the wicked cause of the Confederate States."

"You talk like something right out of the Bible, sir," said a private named Rogers who had not been in the section or platoon McSweeney led before getting the whole company.

"It is the word of God," McSweeney answered. "Is a man not wise to shape his words in the pattern of those of his Father?"

Rogers didn't answer. He just kept marching. That suited Gordon Mc Sweeney fine. Even if he had the words of the Good Book on which to model his own, he was more comfortable doing than talking. Men could easily argue what he said. No one could argue about what he did.

Spatters of gunfire off to the right said the Confederates were trying to slow down the U.S. advance any way they could. The gunfire wasn't close enough for him to swing his men out of their line of march to respond to it, so he kept them going. After U.S. forces finally forced the Rebs out of Jonesboro, the front had grown fluid for a change. The more ground he made his men cover, the closer they would be to Memphis.

Up ahead, one of those Rebel copies of a French 75 started banging away. McSweeney muttered something under his breath that would have been a curse had he permitted himself to take the name of the Lord in vain. Like every U.S. infantryman who had ever advanced against them, he hated those quick-firing field guns. This

one, fortunately, was shooting long, over the heads of his company. Officers who hadn't pushed their men so hard would have to worry about explosives and shrapnel balls and shell fragments.

The road led out of the woods and into a clearing, near the center of which stood a farmhouse. Rifle fire came from the farmhouse. McSweeney's smile was broad and welcoming. "All right, men," he said. "If they want to play, we can play with them. Let's see how they like the game then."

Past that, he needed to give very few orders. The men knew what needed doing, and did it without undue fuss or bother. Fire-and-move tactics that had taken them through the heavily fortified forest were perhaps wasted against a farmhouse with a few diehards in it, but the U.S. soldiers used them even so. Some went left, some went right. Before long, they had worked in close enough to pitch grenades through the windows of the house.

McSweeney wished for his flamethrower. How the faded pine timbers of this place would have burned! Then a fire started anyhow, whether from grenades or bullets he could not tell. A couple of men in butternut burst out the front door. They weren't surrendering; they came out shooting. A fusillade of lead stretched them lifeless in the dust.

One of them was white, the other colored. McSweeney looked down at the Negro's bleeding corpse and shook his head. "If black men will fight for the government that for so long has mistreated their kind, they deserve whatever that government gives them," he said. "When they rose in revolt against their masters, I admired them. If they fight for those masters . .. they will pay the price, as this one has."

After the brief interruption, the company moved on. A few Confederates fired at them from out of the bushes. They hunted the Rebs, though McSweeney, to his disgust, thought a couple of them got away.

Then came an interruption of a different sort. McSweeney had long since grown used to shells from field guns screeching their way through the sky. It had been a long time, though, since he'd heard a roar of cloven air like this one. Altogether without conscious thought, he threw himself flat.

The great shell burst fifty yards off to the left. Even as dirt

thudded down onto his back and fragments hissed malevolently through the air, another shell thundered home, this one striking about twenty-five yards to the right of the road.

Some men were down as McSweeney was, to gain what little shelter they could from those enormous rounds. Others were down and screaming or wailing, clutching arms or legs or bellies. Others were down and not moving at all, nor would they ever move again.

"They aren't supposed to have this kind of firepower way the hell out here!" somebody shouted. "Those have to be eight-inch, maybe ten-inch, shells." Even as he spoke, two more of the big shells thundered in. More screams rose.

Busy with his entrenching tool, McSweeney forgot to reprove the soldier for cursing. Suddenly, the answer blazed in him. "River monitors!" he ex claimed. "They shelled us when we crossed the Ohio. This must be another one. If our own boats could get down as far as Memphis, we wouldn't have been fighting our way through Arkansas all these months."

Another pair of shells burst not far away. "What can we do, sir?" a sol dier cried.

"Pray," McSweeney answered. He would have said that under most circumstances. It seemed particularly fitting here. "What else can we do, when no guns of ours are able to reach those aboard the Confederate river monitor?"

As he spoke, he dug himself deeper into the soft, dark brown soil. The un-wounded men in the company did the same. So did some of the wounded men. After almost three years of war, digging entrenchments was altogether natural. McSweeney had known men safe behind their own lines to dig fox-holes before settling down to sleep for the night. He'd done it himself a couple of times.

Up ahead, a Confederate machine gun started barking. If the river moni tor hadn't halted McSweeney's troops, they would have run into it in short order—and it would have done them about as much damage as the big guns on the Mississippi were doing.

Most company commanders would have sent scouts forward to examine the enemy machine-gun position. That never entered Gordon McSweeney's mind. He scrambled out of the foxhole he had dug just as another pair of shells from the river monitor landed near the

position his company had taken. More dirt rained down on him. Even after he stuck a finger in one ear, it didn't hear so well as it should have.

He wriggled forward. One thing was different now that the U.S. Army had finally pushed the Rebs out of their lines in front of Jonesboro: not so much barbed wire on the ground to hamper movement. Grass and shrubs gave plenty of cover, too, and his muddy green-gray uniform made him hard to spot as he scooted toward the machine gun.

No concrete emplacement here. The Rebs were set up in a nest of sand bags. All the same, McSweeney bit his lip in frustration. Even if he picked off all the gunners, who seemed to have no idea he was anywhere close by, more Confederates would take over the weapon. He shrugged a tiny shrug. That might do. The new Rebels at the machine gun wouldn't be a regular crew, and wouldn't shoot so effectively.

He was just bringing his rifle up to his shoulder when firing off to his right made the Confederates turn the gun in that direction and start blazing away at his countrymen who were trying to advance over there. With the Rebs thus distracted, McSweeney put a bullet through the head of one of them. When the other one, the one who fed belts into the machine gun, half rose to check his friend, McSweeney drilled him, too. Both Confederate soldiers slumped down. He thought they were both dead.

His member throbbed. Save for an annoyed mutter too low to make sense even to himself, he ignored it. He waited for more Confederates to come for ward and take over the gun. They didn't. It sat there, silent. He muttered again, this time intelligibly: "Fools."

He crawled to within sixty or seventy yards of it, where the cover petered out. Then he wasn't crawling. He was running, in great bounding leaps. A couple of startled shouts rose. A few bullets cracked past him. None bit, though. He dove over the wall of sandbags, knocked the Confederate corpses out of the way, and manhandled the machine gun around so that it bore on the surviving Rebs farther east. Grinning from ear to ear, he gave them a taste of their own medicine.

Before long, his own men came hurrying up to support him. "Good to see you," he said, not intentionally ironic.

Ben Carlton shook his head. "When that machine gun turned around, uh, sir," the cook said, "I knew you'd got to it some kind of way. You've done it too damn often for me even to be real surprised about it any more."

"Do not blaspheme," McSweeney said, almost automatically. "I do my duty. And here, if not in your cookery, you have done yours. Let us push on against the foe. With God's help, victory shall indeed be ours at last."

XII

Sergeant Jake Featherston cursed a blue streak. The surviving guns of his bat tery, along with the rest of those belonging to the First Richmond Howitzers, perched on Sudley Mountain, a little east of Centreville, Virginia. From those low hills, they could have wreaked fearful havoc on the Yankees farther west, over near the small stream called Bull Run—if they'd had any ammunition.

A runner came up to Featherston. "Sir, uh, Sergeant, I mean, the wagons will be here in an hour or so, headquarters says."

Could looks have killed, the messenger would have been deader than if a twelve-inch shell from a battleship had gone off under his feet. "They should have been here this morning, God damn it," Featherston ground out. "What the fucking hell happened to them?"

The runner stared. He took a lot of abuse: a big part of his job was telling people of superior rank they couldn't have what they wanted and what they thought they were entitled to. Featherston's words were nothing out of the ordinary. The icy vitriol of the tone was. It might have come from an irate colonel, not a sergeant running a battered battery.

"Sergeant, they got tangled up with a division of infantry on the march, so after that they needed a good long while to get unraveled again."

"Do you think the damnyankees don't care that the Army of Northern Virginia doesn't know what in Christ's name it's doing?" Jake snapped. "Maybe they do care—enough to send us a big thank-you bouquet."

"I've given you the news I have, Sergeant," the runner said, and went on his way. Having other duty let him escape Featherston's fury; it wasn't as if Jake were his commanding officer.

Out came the Gray Eagle scratch pad and *Over Open Sights. The white- bearded fools in Richmond are doing their best to make sure that we lose this war, Featherston wrote, though we had victory straight ahead of us. Now they give the niggers guns to try to put their own*

blundering to rights, even though it was the niggers who helped stick us in this mess in the first place. And white troops would never have let themselves get fouled up with ammunition wagons like that. The messenger hadn't said whether the troopers who'd cause his problem were white or black. He drew his own conclusions.

"When you first started keeping those notes, Sergeant," someone said be hind Featherston, "I never thought you would keep on with them. I seem to have been mistaken."

Automatically, Jake closed the cover of the notebook. What he wrote in there was *his,* nobody else's. "Major Potter, sir," he said now, "I got nothing better to do than write, on account of I can't go pasting the damnyankees the way I want to, on account of God may know where the ammunition is, but I sure don't."

Clarence Potter sighed. "I wish you could paste them, but that you can't may matter less than you think. They are building up for another large push against us. If you have the ammunition you'll need to help stop that, well and good. If not..." He didn't go on.

"If not, we're in too much trouble for anything to matter. That's what you're saying, isn't it, sir?"

"That's what I'm saying." Potter studied him. "I never have figured out exactly how smart you are, Featherston, but you've made it plain you're shrewd enough and to spare. If you hadn't made the fatal mistake of being right at the wrong time, we might have the same rank by now."

Maybe he meant that to console Jake. It didn't; it made him furious. "Best way to save the country I can think of, sir, would be for a Yankee bomber to put three or four heavy ones right on top of the War Department. That might do it. Can't think of anything else that would."

The intelligence officer shook his head. "All things considered, they've done about as well as anyone could have expected."

"God help us if that's so," Featherston said. "We'd better make peace in a hurry, before the damn fools do something even worse than they have already. Don't know what that could be, but I reckon they'd come up with something."

"You *are* shrewd." Behind their metal-rimmed spectacles, Major Potter's eyes widened slightly. "There are people in the Army and people in the gov ernment beginning to say the same thing. If Britain is forced to leave the war, if we have to face not just the whole U.S. Army but the whole U.S. Navy, less whatever part keeps fighting Japan in the Pacific—if that happens, the odds against us grow very long."

"Odds were long during the War of Secession, too," Jake said. "We licked the Yankees twice over by Manassas Gap. We'd lick 'em again if only that damned ammunition would ever get here."

"We had help then," Potter said. "Without it, I think we should have lost."

"One way or another, we'd have licked them." Featherston didn't know whether that was likely to be true or just his own stubbornness talking. "We'd be licking them now if the damn niggers hadn't risen up and stabbed us in the back."

"I wonder," Clarence Potter said. "I do wonder. We'd be better off than we are, no doubt, but would we be winning? The last two times we fought the United States, we won fairly quickly, before they committed everything they had to the struggle. We failed to do that this time, and they are fully committed to the fight—and they have more to commit to it than we do."

As if to underscore his words, a flight of U.S. aeroplanes buzzed by over head. No C.S. fighting scouts rose to answer them. Aeroplanes were mere annoyances, but Jake was sick of being annoyed without having the chance to return the favor. At long last, a couple of antiaircraft guns opened up on the Yankees. They scored no hits. They hardly ever did.

Potter went on, "And speaking of our colored troops, do I hear correctly that you opened up on them with canister during the retreat from Round Hill?"

"Hell, yes, you heard that straight," Featherston said defiantly. "If they ain't more afraid of us than they are of the damnyankees, they won't do us any good, will they? They were running from the enemy, sir, and it was the only way I had to make 'em stop."

"Some of them will never run from the enemy again, that's certain—or toward him, either," Major Potter said. "Some of their white

officers and non-coms sent complaints about what you did to Army of Northern Virginia headquarters. You might have faced a court-martial if others had not spoken out on your behalf."

"Surprised I didn't any which way," Jake said. "There's a big raft of offi cers who don't love me a whole hell of a lot."

"Really?" Potter raised an eyebrow. "I hadn't noticed." Featherston, who didn't know what to make of such understated irony, started to boil till the in telligence officer raised a hand and went on, "That's a joke, Sergeant. I am happy to be able to tell you that I was able to deflect the complaints and make sure none of them went on to Richmond."

"Thank you for that much, sir," Jake said. Potter *was* a decent sort, as far as officers went. But Featherston hated being in anyone's debt. He especially hated being in an officer's debt.

"You've had a few bad turns come your way," Potter said. "Seems only right to even things up as we can."

There he stood, smug and sweatless in the muggy heat. *Yes, you're a lord,* Featherston thought. *You can throw the poor peasant a crust of bread and never miss it.* In that moment, he might have come close to understanding what had driven the Negroes of the CSA to rise up late in 1915. But he never thought—he never would have thought—to compare his situation to theirs.

Before the comparison could have occurred to him, the first ammunition wagon arrived, too late to suit him but still sooner than the runner had said. Forgetting his resentment of Potter, he took out on the wagon driver the older anger he still felt, cursing him up one side and down the other. The driver, a lowly private first class, had to sit there and take it.

Finally having ammunition in his hands, though, let Jake work out resentment with something more than words. In mere minutes, the four guns he had left were banging away at the Yankees. The range was too long to let him see individual U.S. soldiers, but he could make out the boil and stir as shells slammed down among them. A man dropping rocks on a nest of ants below his second-story window could not see any of the individual bugs, either, but he could watch the nest boil and stir.

Clarence Potter, who spent most of the war back at the Army of

Northern Virginia headquarters, also looked on with benign approval. "Make them sting," he told Jake. "The higher the price they pay, the likelier they are to let us have the sort of peace we can live with."

"I don't give a damn about a peace we can live with," Featherston snarled, adjusting the elevation screw on his field gun. "Only thing I give a damn about is killing the sons of bitches." He raised his voice to a shout: "Fire!" Michael Scott jerked the lanyard. The cannon roared. Out flew the shell casing. In went another shell.

A man dropping rocks on a nest of ants did not have to worry that the ants would try to drop rocks on him, too. The guns of Featherston's battery enjoyed no such immunity. Before long, U.S. artillery began replying. Shells did not come in so often as he sent them out, but they came from bigger pieces—four- and six-inch guns—firing from a range he could not hope to match. Since he could not match it, he ignored the fire, and continued to pepper the closer U.S. infantry, whom he could hit.

"You're cool about this business," Major Potter said. For a man unused to coming under shellfire, he was pretty cool himself. He didn't dive for cover at a couple of near misses till the crew of Jake's gun did.

Featherston shrugged. "They can't shoot for hell, sir." That wasn't true, and he knew it damn well. The Yankee artillerymen were no less skilled at their trade than their counterparts in butternut. Since the beginning of the war, they'd enjoyed an edge in heavy guns, too. Sometimes the numbers and quick firing of the Confederates' three-inchers could make up for that. Sometimes, as when trying to cave in deep dugouts, they couldn't.

In a lull, Potter said, "We have to hold them at Bull Run. If we can't hold them here, Richmond itself is threatened."

"Do my damnedest, sir," Jake answered. He didn't know if that would be enough. By the way Potter talked, he didn't think it would. Jake shrugged again. Defeat wouldn't be his fault. As far as he was concerned, the War Department and the niggers could split the blame.

Lucien Galtier had not been expecting a visit from Major Jedediah Quigley. He certainly had not been expecting a warm, cordial visit from Major Quigley. That was what he got, though. The U.S. officer

even brought along a bottle of brandy far smoother and finer than the homemade applejack Galtier had grown used to drinking.

After Marie came in from the kitchen with glasses, Quigley splashed brandy into them with a generous hand. He raised his glass in salute. "To the union of our great peoples!" he declared in his elegant French.

As far as Lucien was concerned, the U.S. major was making too much of the impending marriage between Nicole and Dr. O'Doull, but the Quebecois farmer held his peace. Quigley's job seemed to entail making too much of everything that came to his notice, for ill or for good. This, at least, was for good.

It was also a toast to which Galtier could drink, even if he found it a bit more than the occasion called for. And the brandy *was* good. He hardly felt it going down his throat, but it filled his belly with warmth that quickly spread outward. *"Formidable!"* he murmured, respect in his voice.

"Glad you like it," Quigley said, and sloshed more into his glass. The American poured himself a fresh dollop, too. After sipping, he went on in thoughtful tones: "I will admit to you, M. Galtier, that I never expected to be paying a social call here. When we first came to Quebec, you seemed a man more in love with the past than with the future."

What he meant was, *you didn't act like a collaborator.* Lucien still didn't feel like a collaborator, either. He said, "When young people come to know each other, one cannot always guess ahead of time how these things will turn out."

"There you certainly have reason," Major Quigley said. "Back in New Hampshire, where I come from, my daughter married a young fellow who makes concertinas." He knocked back his brandy. For a moment, thinking about the choice his daughter had made, he looked not at all like an occupying official, but rather than an ordinary man, and a surprised ordinary man to boot.

Galtier found himself surprised, too: surprised Quigley could look and even act like an ordinary man. Politely, the farmer said, "I hope your son-in-law is safe in the war."

"He is well so far, thanks," Quigley answered. "He's out in Sequoyah, where the fighting isn't so heavy as it is east of the Mississippi—nor

so heavy as north of the St. Lawrence or over in Ontario."

"The United States have stubborn neighbors to the south of them," Galtier said. "The United States have also stubborn neighbors to the north of them. I think that, before this war began, you Americans did not altogether understand how stubborn these northern neighbors of yours were."

Some of that was the brandy talking. Here, for once, Quigley had come to his house for some reason other than doing him wrong, and now he was giving the American fresh reason to suspect him. Marie would have some sharp things to say about that. Galtier had some sharp things to say about it, too. He said them, silently but with great vigor, to himself.

But Quigley did not take the comment as he might have. Instead, he nod ded soberly, or perhaps not so soberly: as he spoke, he reached for the bottle of brandy again. "Well, once more you have reason," he said. "When we began the war, we thought it would soon be over. But, as you say, our neighbors were more stubborn than we thought, and also stronger than we thought. The fighting has proved harder than we ever imagined."

He held out the bottle to Lucien, who let him pour. After three big glasses of brandy, the farmer would be slow-moving and achy in the morning, but the morning was a long way away. "I did not think an American would admit any such thing," Galtier said.

Quigley tapped his long, thin nose. He had to shift his hand at the last minute to make it connect. "I admit I've got this here," he said, "and the other is every bit as plain. But that doesn't mean the United States aren't going to win this war. It just means we've had to work much harder than we thought we would. We have done the work, M. Galtier, and we are at last beginning to see the results of it."

"It could be so," Lucien said. By everything he could learn, it was so, but he knew that what he could learn was limited. Both the United States and the new Republic of Quebec made sure of that.

"It *is* so." The brandy was talking through Jedediah Quigley, too. Normally as smooth and polished as a new pair of shoes, he made a fist and thumped it against his thigh to emphasize his words.

He also spoke louder than usual. Marie stuck her head out of the kitchen to make sure no quarrel was brewing. When she'd reassured

herself, she disappeared again. Galtier didn't think Quigley saw her.

The farmer said, "I will be glad when the war is over." He did not think anyone could disagree with that, or with the way he continued: "Everyone will be glad when the war is over."

And, sure enough, the American officer nodded vigorously. "The only people who love a war are those who have never fought in one," he declared, to which Lucien could but incline his head; he had not thought Major Quigley could say anything so wise. And then Quigley spoiled it: "But you, M. Galtier, you will have come out of the war having done pretty well for yourself. Without it, you would not have gained a doctor as a fiancé for your daughter."

Even without brandy in him, Galtier would not have let that go unchal lenged. With brandy in him, he let fly, saying, "Without the war, Major Quigley, I would not have had part of my patrimony . . . alienated"—even with brandy in him, he had sense enough not to say *stolen*—"from me so that the United States Army could build on it a hospital."

Major Quigley coughed a couple of times. The brandy had turned him a little ruddy. Now he went red as a brick. "I will speak frankly," he said. "I already told you that, when the war was new, I did not think you were a man the United States could trust."

"Yes, you said that," Galtier agreed. *And you were right to think what you thought.* He had sense enough to keep that to himself, too.

After coughing once more, Quigley said, "I also told you I seem to have been wrong. I do not deny I chose your land on which to build this hospital in part because I did not believe you were reliable."

"And now you know differently?" Lucien asked. He had to make it a question, not least because he remained unsure of the answer himself.

But Quigley nodded. "Now I know better," he echoed, and coughed yet again. When he went on, he seemed to be talking as much to himself as to Galtier: "Since I know better, it could be that what I did might not have been the wisest thing to do."

"Perhaps, then, you should think about how you might make amends." Galtier stared down at the little bit of brandy left in his glass. Had what he'd drunk really made him bold enough to say that?

Evidently it had. Major Quigley rubbed his nose. He fiddled with a cuff on his green-gray tunic. At last, he said, "Perhaps I should. What would you say a fair rent for the piece of ground on which the hospital was built would be?"

Galtier had all he could do not to ask if he had heard correctly. Quigley still assumed he'd had the right to use the land regardless of whether Lucien approved or not, but an offer to pay back rent was ever so much more than the farmer had expected to hear. He scratched his chin, named the most outrageous amount he could think of—"Fifty dollars a month"—and braced himself for the haggle to come. *If I end up with half that,* he thought, *I shall be well ahead of the game.*

But Major Quigley, instead of haggling, simply said, "Very well, M. Galtier, we have a bargain." He stuck out his hand.

In a daze, Lucien Galtier took it. The daze had nothing to do with the brandy he had drunk. He did not know whether to be delighted Quigley had met his price or disappointed he hadn't tried to gouge the American officer out of more. In the end, he was delighted and disappointed at the same time.

Quigley said, "Here, I will leave the bottle with you. If I drink any more from it tonight, I shall be unable to drive back to Riviere-du-Loup."

"Here is an advantage of a wagon or a buggy over a motorcar," Galtier said. "A horse would be able to get you back to town if only you pointed him in the right direction. A motorcar is not so accommodating."

"C'est vrai, et quelle dommage," the American replied, in tones that made it a truly pitiful pity. He got to his feet and walked—steadily but very slowly— to the doorway. *"Bonsoir, Monsieur Galtier."*

"Bonsoir," Lucien said. Major Quigley went outside and cranked his Ford to life. Lucien stood in the doorway and watched him drive—steadily but, again, very slowly—north toward Riviere-du-Loup.

Marie came out of the kitchen. Nicole followed her. Astonished disbelief filled both their faces. Almost whispering, Marie said, "Did my ears tell me the truth? Can it be that the Americans will pay us rent for the land they stole for their hospital?"

"If they pay rent, we can no longer say they stole the land from us," Galtier replied. "It becomes then a matter of business. And what business!" The full weight of what he'd done began to sink in. "Not only rent, but back rent. Not only back rent, but *fifty dollars a month."*

"We shall be rich!" Nicole exclaimed.

Her mother shook her head, denying even the possibility of such a thing. "No, we shall not be rich. Rich is not for the likes of us. It could be ... it could be that, for a little while, we may have almost enough." Saying even so much took a distinct effort of will from her.

"That would be fine," Lucien said. "Even of itself, that would be very fine." Acid returned to his voice: "It might even let us make up for the robbery the Americans committed against us during the first winter of the war."

In a worried voice, Marie said, "But taking this money ... I pray it shall not be as it was when Judas took his thirty pieces of silver."

"Nonsense," Galtier said. "Judas took silver for betraying our Lord. We shall take this money in exchange for what is rightfully ours, in exchange for the Americans' use of my patrimony."

"Father is right," said Nicole, who had her own reasons to want things to go smoothly between her family and the Americans.

"I suppose so." But Marie still did not sound convinced.

Lucien was not altogether convinced, either, but he had made the offer and Major Quigley accepted it. What could he do now? Like Nicole's engagement to Dr. O'Doull, the rent tied him ever closer to the United States and the interests of the United States. He clicked his tongue between his teeth. In 1914, he never would have, never could have, imagined any such thing.

Night was slowly lifting over northern Virginia. Sergeant Chester Martin hadn't got much in the way of sleep even while darkness hung over the land. Ever since midnight, U.S. machine guns had been hammering away at the Confederate line to the east and south, and the guns of the Army of Northern Virginia hadn't been shy about replying, either. The din had kept most of Martin's section awake, though Corporal Bob Reinholdt still lay wrapped in his blanket,

sleeping the sleep of a man more innocent than he was likely to be.

But the din had also kept the Rebs from noticing the noise of a whole great whacking lot of barrels moving toward the front line—or so the brass hoped. So Chester Martin devoutly hoped, too.

He turned to David Hamburger. "Next time you write to your sister, tell her thanks," he bawled in the kid's ear. "Looks likely they've got a really big force of barrels here, like they've been doing it in Tennessee."

"I don't know how much she had to do with any of that," Hamburger shouted—in effect, whispered—back. "You've got to remember, Sarge, she hates the war and anything that has anything to do with it."

"Hey, she's not the only one," Martin said. "You think I like getting shot, you're crazy. But if we've got to have the goddamn thing, we'd better win it. The only thing worse than having a war is losing one. The United States know all about that."

Before Hamburger could reply, U.S. artillery, which had been pretty quiet, opened up with a thunderous roar. Short and sweet—that was how they did it these days. None of the week-long bombardments that Martin had seen on the Roanoke front, enormous cannonadings that did more to tell the Rebs where the attack was going in than anything else.

Artillery or no artillery, Bob Reinholdt kept right on sleeping. Martin went over and shook him, then had to leap back as Reinholdt lashed out with a trench knife. "Naughty," Martin said; the corporal always woke up at maximum combat alertness. "Show's about to start."

"Yeah?" Reinholdt said. "All right." He grunted, rolled up his blanket, and got to his feet. He hadn't given Martin any trouble since absorbing both fist and steel reinforcement with his chin. Maybe he'd learned his lesson. Maybe he was biding his time. Martin still kept an eye on him, in case he was.

Captain Cremony strode along the trench. "All right, boys," he said. "Now we're driving nails in their coffin. We've cleared 'em out of Washington. We need a buffer, so they can't shell it whenever they choose. Our granddads fought on this ground. They won some fights in Virginia, too, even if they didn't win the war. We get to make up

for what they couldn't quite manage."

"My grandfather didn't fight here," David Hamburger said after Cremony was out of earshot, which didn't take long. "He was still on the other side of the Atlantic, wondering if the Czar would put him in the Russian Army for twenty-five or thirty years. When the Czar said go, he went—here."

"Conscription-dodger, eh?" Martin grinned. "Somewhere down at the roots of my family tree is a poacher who got out of England a short hop ahead of the sheriff. That's what my old man says, anyway. How about you, Bob?"

"Me?" Reinholdt seemed surprised at the question. "I'm a son of a bitch from a long line of sons of bitches. You don't believe me, ask anybody."

Martin wouldn't have argued with him for the world. He didn't get the chance, anyhow. When the barrels' engines went from low power to high, not all the machine-gun fire and artillery in the world could have concealed the racket. The traveling fortresses clanked and rumbled toward the Confederate line, their own machine guns blazing away at the enemy positions ahead.

All along the front lines of the U.S. works, officers blew whistles to urge their men over the top. Cremony tweeted away till his face turned red. U.S. soldiers scrambled up ladders and sandbag stairways and followed the barrels toward the Confederate trenches.

"Stay close!" Captain Cremony shouted.

"Stay close!" Martin echoed. "Those big iron critters may be ugly, but they're our best friends." Even as he spoke, the barrel behind which he ad vanced began smashing its way over and through the wire the Rebels had strung to protect their position. Between the last wire belt and their forward-most trenches, the Confederates' Negro laborers had dug a great ditch, too wide for the barrels to cross and deep enough to be sure to bog them down.

But U.S. observation aeroplanes or balloonists must have spotted the digging, for some of the barrels bore on their forward decks great bundles of sticks and logs bound with chains and ropes. They dumped them into the ditch, then ground their way across over them.

Captain Cremony, who was fond of Shakespeare, shouted out in

high glee: "Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane!"

Martin didn't know about that. He did know the bundles of wood made it easier for him and his men to cross the ditch, too, though some of them used bites the artillery had taken out of its front and rear walls to scramble down and then up. "Stay close to your barrel!" Martin yelled again. "Stay close!"

The barrels were bludgeoning the Army of Northern Virginia into submis sion. These were new positions for the Rebs, hastily run up after the retreat from Aldie. They lacked much of the reinforced concrete of lines built more slowly and held longer. Machine-gun nests of sandbags could not stand up to the barrels' nose cannons. One after another, the barrels cleared them out.

Tilden Russell shouted something into Martin's ear. Martin had trouble making out what he said amidst the rattle of gunfire, the thunder of artillery, and the dyspeptic roar of the barrels. Obligingly, the private shouted it again: "Breakthrough!" He stuffed a cigar into his mouth, got it going with a bronze-cased flint-and-steel lighter, and puffed out happy clouds of smoke.

Was it a breakthrough? Martin wasn't sure, not here, not now, though on the Roanoke front he would have been ecstatic at the ground he and his comrades were gaining. A day's advance here could be measured in miles, not yards. If that wasn't a breakthrough, what was it?

But, if a breakthrough required the Rebs to throw down their rifles and quit in carload lots, that didn't happen. Soldiers in butternut, white and col ored, kept fighting till the barrels and the U.S. infantry rolled over them. If anything, the colored Confederate soldiers fought harder than they had when the U.S. troops broke out of their bridgeheads south of the Potomac. Maybe that was because the whites had given them dire warnings about what would happen to them if they didn't fight. Maybe, too, and more likely, the Negro soldiers were steadier now simply because they'd seen some action.

East of the infantry trenches and the village of Centreville, the ground rose. The Rebel batteries on those hills—maps called them mountains—hadn't given up and gone home, either. Shells from U.S. guns kept falling among them, but they went right on giving the advancing men in green-gray a hell of a hard time. They reserved their chiefest fury for the barrels. The traveling forts were not easy targets, principally because they *could* travel, but every so often a

shell would slam home with the noise of a man beating an iron pot with a pick handle.

Worse noises commonly followed—ammunition cooking off, engines and gas tanks going up in flames, men screaming as they cooked. Barrels' armor plate held out machine-gun bullets, but three-inch shells, when they hit, pierced it like so much pasteboard.

And the CSA had barrels of their own in the field. They were fewer and more widely scattered than those of the USA, but they were there, and some of them gave a good account of themselves. When not fighting for his own life, Martin watched in fascination as barrel battled barrel. The fights put him in mind of the dinosaurs struggling in swamps he'd read about in the Sunday supplements.

One particular Confederate barrel—tanks, the Rebs called them, aping the British as they so often did—was altogether too good at making its U.S. opponents extinct. It set two green-gray barrels afire in quick succession. The second victory let it bear down on Martin and his section.

"Hit the dirt!" he shouted, and dove behind a pile of rubble that had been a Rebel's chimney once upon a time. Machine-gun bullets from the Confederate barrel chewed up the dirt around him and snarled off the bricks in front of him. If the barrel kept coming straight ahead, it would squash him into a redder smear in the red-brown dirt. Shouts and screams from around him said only too plainly that some of his men hadn't been so lucky in finding cover as he had.

Clang! The machine-gun fire from the Confederate barrel abruptly stopped. Wary as a wild animal, Chester Martin raised his head. The barrel was burning. Hatches flew open as crewmen tried to escape. With a fierce glee, Martin and his comrades shot them down. Out of their steel snail shell, they were easy meat.

Martin looked around and grimaced. "Stretcher-bearers!" he shouted, his voice cracking with urgency. "Stretcher-bearers!"

He ran over to David Hamburger, the closest wounded soldier. The kid was clutching his left thigh and howling like a wolf. Martin didn't think he knew he was doing it. Bright red blood trickled out between his fingers. When he saw Martin, he stopped howling and said, "I'm going to write my congresswoman about this." His voice was amazingly calm.

"Yeah, you do that," Martin said. "Let's have a look at what you caught there." Reluctantly, Hamburger took his hands away. The wound was in the middle of the thigh. Martin whistled in a minor key. A bullet to the inside, and the kid would have bled out in short order. This was better news, but it wasn't what you'd call good.

"Here, we'll take him, Sarge." A couple of stretcher-bearers paused beside the wounded man.

"Do your best. He's a good fellow, and his sister's in Congress." With the stretcher-bearers there, Martin couldn't wait around. He awkwardly patted David Hamburger on the shoulder, then hurried past the blazing hulk of the Confederate barrel and on through Centreville.

Confederate artillerymen were made to quit the high ground east of the little Virginia town only with the greatest reluctance. Some of the gun crews stayed till they could fire at the advancing barrels over open sights. They took heavy casualties, though; splinter shields were no match for the firepower bearing down on them.

A Rebel gunner, one of the last on the field, shook his fist at the oncoming U.S. soldiers as his crew limbered up their field piece. He shook it again as they galloped away. Martin shot at him, but missed. He shrugged. One man didn't much matter. The high ground belonged to the USA.

Joe Conroy was about the last man in the world Cincinnatus wanted to see. By the look on the fat, white storekeeper's face, Cincinnatus was about the last man in the world he wanted to see, too. "Come to gloat, I reckon," Conroy said, shifting a plug of tobacco from one cheek to the other.

"Got nothin' to gloat about, suh," Cincinnatus answered. With Kentucky a state in the USA these days, he didn't have to be so deferential to a white man as he would have before the war, when the state still belonged to the CSA. But Conroy was a Confederate diehard. Cincinnatus figured using the old ways was a good idea if he hoped to learn anything.

He might not learn anything anyhow. Conroy sneered at him. "Yeah, a likely story. You go on and tell me you don't know what the hell happened to my store after me and Tom Kennedy, God rest his

soul, taught you how to make those little firebombs that ain't no bigger'n cigars."

"Mr. Conroy, suh, I don't know what the hell happened to your store," Cincinnatus said evenly. "I didn't have nothin' to do with burnin' it down. That there is the truth, and you can take it to the bank."

That there was a lie, and his mother would have boxed his ears for telling a lie had she been here to listen to it. But his mother wasn't anywhere around, and he told the lie with great aplomb. "Huh," Conroy grunted, as if to say he didn't believe it for a minute. But then he went on, "If you don't know about it, who the hell does?"

Cincinnatus shrugged. "Who the hell knows about how Tom Kennedy got hisself killed, suh?"

He didn't think he'd made the question too obvious. Conroy had offered him another question on which to hang it, so he didn't seem to be pulling it in from out of the blue. The storekeeper looked down at the park bench on which they sat at opposite ends before giving an answer more oblique than useful: "Never could figure out what the hell Tom saw in you."

"Swear to Jesus, suh, never did figure out what he was doin' there outside my door," Cincinnatus said.

Conroy's eyes were narrow slits, almost hidden in folds of fat. Cincinna tus still couldn't decide whether he was clever or just sly. Now he said, "They were after him—what do you think?"

Only a lifetime of disguising his feelings toward whites and the stupid things that came out of their mouths let Cincinnatus keep from barking scornful laughter at that. Had nobody been after Kennedy, nobody would have shot him. "Who's 'they,' Mr. Conroy?" he asked. "That's what I'm tryin' to find out."

"Well, now," the storekeeper said slowly, "I don't rightly know. Could have been a whole bunch of different folks."

Cincinnatus wanted to grab him by the neck and shake him till his narrow eyes popped. "You got any notion who?" he asked, as gently as he could. "Been a lot o' different folks comin' round askin' me questions I ain't got no good answers for, 'less I talk way too much."

Unless I tell them who Tom Kennedy's friends are, was what he meant. Would Conroy be bright enough to figure that out, or would he need a more direct hint? The only more direct hint Cincinnatus could think of was a whack in the teeth. That would be satisfying, but.. .

Conroy got what he was talking about. The white man's absurd little rosebud mouth puckered up as if he'd bitten into the world's sourest pickled tomato. "Who?" he repeated, sounding like an unhappy owl. "Could have been one of those Kentucky State Police bastards. Could have been some of the Red niggers, too. You'd know more about that than I would, I reckon."

He gave Cincinnatus a stare that meant, */ can talk, too.* Cincinnatus hid a grimace. Everybody could talk about him to somebody. He said, "From what I seen, Mr. Kennedy and the Reds didn't get on too bad."

"I told him to watch out for 'em just the same," Conroy said. "Can't trust a Red. He'll yell 'Popular Front!' today and kick you in the nuts tomorrow. Tom thought he could handle it. He always thought he could handle everything."

That did sound like the Kennedy Cincinnatus had known. Conroy's charac terization of the Reds wasn't far wrong, either, though Cincinnatus wouldn't have admitted it to the storekeeper.

And Conroy wasn't through, either. He continued, "Could even have been some of our own boys. I've heard this one and that one go on about how Tom was selling us all down the river."

"That a fact?" Cincinnatus pricked up his ears. "You got names for any o' those fellows?"

Conroy looked down at his shoes, which were every bit as scuffed and battered as Cincinnatus'. He didn't say anything. After a while, Cincinnatus realized he wasn't going to say anything. Everybody played his cards close to his vest in this game. Kennedy and Conroy were the only two Confederate holdouts Cincinnatus had ever met. Conroy didn't care to give him the key to more.

In casual tones, Cincinnatus said, "Luther Bliss'd ask a lot more questions than I do, and he'd ask 'em a lot harder, too. I been down to the Covington city hall. I know what I'm talkin' about."

"Yeah, and he gave you money out of his own pocket, the cold-blooded son of a bitch," Conroy snapped.

Cincinnatus sighed. Teddy Roosevelt had done him a good turn, but Bliss had put barbs in it. Still casually, Cincinnatus said, "Maybe he'd listen if I was to tell him somethin', then."

"Maybe he would. And if you was to tell him somethin', maybe some smart nigger who wasn't quite as smart as he reckoned he was would get a bullet through the ear one day when he's drivin' that big ugly old White truck o' his that's plumb full o' shit the damnyankees're shootin' at his countrymen. Or maybe his wife'd have a little accident. Or maybe his kid."

"I ain't the only one accidents can happen to, Conroy." Cincinnatus had to work to hold his voice steady. Plenty of people had threatened him. Threatening his family was an alarming departure.

Conroy leaned back against the park bench, looking like a fat cat with canary feathers on his whiskers. "Reckon I know a bluff when I hear one."

"Reckon you don't," Cincinnatus said. "Got me a little Gray Eagle note book. I been writin' things in it for a long time. Anything happen to me or mine, it'll get to the right place. I've made sure o' that."

The storekeeper stared at him in undisguised loathing. He *was* running a bluff, but he wouldn't be for long; the idea of having such protection was irresistibly appealing. Conroy said, "We was a pack o' damn fools to ever let any niggers learn their letters."

"Maybe so, maybe not," Cincinnatus answered with a shrug. "Too late to worry about it now, one way or the other." The USA had fewer laws against educating Negroes than did the CSA; he hoped Achilles would get more in the way of learning than he'd ever been able to acquire. But it was too early to worry about that now. He fixed Conroy with a stare that had flint in it. "Which of your pals didn't take to Kennedy dealin' with the Reds?"

"None o' your damn business," Conroy ground out. He glared back at Cincinnatus. "You want to talk to Luther Bliss, go talk to Luther goddamn Bliss. We'll see which one of us ends up happier afterwards."

Cincinnatus didn't want to talk to Luther Bliss. He never wanted anything to do with the chief of the Kentucky State Police for the rest

of his life. Getting his wish there, though, struck him as unlikely. He and Conroy had reached an impasse.

He could, he supposed, ask Apicius if he knew the names of some of the other Confederate diehards. But Apicius' Reds were as likely to have killed Tom Kennedy as anyone else. And Apicius would not take kindly to questions from Cincinnatus any which way. The cook would wonder for whom he was asking them, and would never believe he was asking them for himself alone.

Conroy heaved himself to his feet. "I reckon we're done," he said, and Cincinnatus did not disagree. The storekeeper shook his finger in Cincinnatus' face. "Don't you come around there askin' after me no more, neither. I ain't got nothin' more to say to you, and I ain't gonna be—" He shook his head. His jowls wobbled like gelatin. Off he stomped.

I ain't gonna be —what? Cincinnatus wondered. *I ain't gonna be there,* was the likeliest guess. Cincinnatus wouldn't have wanted to live in the dingy roominghouse where Conroy made his home, but didn't expect the storekeeper to head on to much better lodgings. Cincinnatus sighed. He'd got something to think about, but where could he go with it? Nowhere he could see.

With another sigh, he got up and headed toward the nearest trolley stop. Elizabeth would have something sharp to say about his wasting so much of a Sunday afternoon, and she'd be right. But he hadn't known it would be a waste till he'd gone and done it, which was too late.

The trolley stop was across the street from a saloon with a plate-glass window. As Cincinnatus came to the stop and dug in his pocket for a nickel, a man in a black homburg came out of the saloon and strode across the street to the stop. He seemed as certain the motorcars would stop for him as Moses had been that the Red Sea would part for him. The sea had parted; the motorcars did stop.

"Afternoon, Cincinnatus." Luther Bliss' pale brown eyes looked at Cin cinnatus and, the Negro would have sworn, through him as well. "That damn diehard know who parted Tom Kennedy's hair with a .30 caliber slug?"

Cincinnatus was glad he was black. Had he been white, Bliss could have watched him turn pale. "How the devil did you know what we was talking about?" he demanded with almost superstitious awe.

Bliss' laugh didn't quite reach those hunting-hound eyes. "You could have been talking about a lot of things," he answered. "All the others are worse. Let's just hope that was the only one."

"If you know all the people you don't fancy in this here town, Mr. Bliss," Cincinnatus said, "why don't you throw 'em all in jail so you don't have to worry about 'em no more, 'stead of leavin' 'em run loose and raise trouble?"

"I know all the people I don't fancy in this here *state,"* Luther Bliss an swered, "and the reason I don't throw 'em all in jail is simple as hell: there aren't near enough jails to hold the bastards." He laughed again, but Cincinnatus didn't think he was kidding. After a moment, he dug in his pocket, continuing, "You got a hundred dollars from me on account of the president. This here is from me personal, you might say."

He handed Cincinnatus a nickel. Looking down at the coin that sat in the pale palm of his hand, Cincinnatus said, "Sure as hell you won't go broke spendin' your money like this here, Mr. Bliss."

"You're a funny one," Bliss said. "You better get on home now—here comes the trolley. And if I ever figure out how you got to be so funny, I'll come round again and see if you're still that way after I take you to pieces." He tipped his hat and went on his way, smooth as a snake. Cincinnatus threw the nickel in the trolley car's fare box. He didn't want it in his pocket. It might have been listening to him.

The SS *Pocahontas, Arkansas* lay alongside the USS *Ericsson.* Staring at the supply ship, George Enos said, "If that's not the stupidest name for a steamboat I ever saw in all my born days, I don't know what is."

Carl Sturtevant looked sly and smug. "I know why it's got that name."

"All right, I'll bite," George said. "Somebody doesn't know that Pocahon tas ended up marrying a Pilgrim?"

"Hell, till this minute I didn't know she ended up marrying a Pilgrim," Sturtevant answered. "Nah, that hasn't got anything to do with it."

"Come on, then—cough it up," George said.

"Pocahontas, Arkansas, is this little no-account town a few miles south of the U.S. border," the petty officer said. "During the Second Mexican War, the Army took the place and held it for a little while. Outside of Montana, there wasn't much glory for our side in that war. Whatever there was, they pasted onto whatever would take it, and so we've got a freighter named for a Rebel whistle stop."

"All right." Enos waved a hand. "You got me there. I knew about the real Pocahontas, but not about that town down there named for her. I'll tell you something else I know, too." He looked around nervously. "I know I don't like sitting here in the middle of the goddamn Atlantic while we take on supplies. I don't like it for hell."

Sturtevant raised a mocking eyebrow. "You don't like us to have fuel so we can keep on patrolling? You don't like fresh vittles? I don't know about you, but I'm damn sick of kraut and beans. You don't like getting mail? You got a wife, ain't that right?"

"Yeah, I got a wife," George Enos answered. "Mail's fine, but I want to get home to Boston in one piece when the war's finally over, too, and if I'm sitting here not moving, that damn Rebel submarine's going to put a torpedo into our side somewhere right between the number two and number three stacks."

"We sank that damn Rebel submarine," Sturtevant said. "Wasn't one of Lieutenant Crowder's pipe dreams that time, neither. You blew the captain to pieces when he was pitching their secret papers, and then the *Bonefish* went under again, and she ain't never comin' up no more."

Enos exhaled angrily through his nose. "You should have been a lawyer, not a sailor. You figure the Confederate Navy's got only that one submersible in it? They build those bastards by the netful. If there isn't already another one out here to take the place of that boat, there will be in a few days."

Like George, Carl Sturtevant looked older than he was; sun and wind and spray had tanned his skin, turned it leather, and wrinkled it, too. He looked older still as he contemplated Enos' words. "Well, you're right, God damn it," he said at last. "Now I'm going to worry, too."

Sailors hauled sides of beef and hams and sacks of potatoes and endless cans from the *Pocahontas, Arkansas* to the *Ericsson.* They chattered at one another in English and a variety of foreign languages

that seemed to consist mostly of consonants. Fuel oil gurgled through a hose connecting the hold of the *Pocahontas, Arkansas* to the *Ericsson's* engine room.

As Sturtevant had said, it all promised that the destroyer would be able to keep on steaming and keep on feeding the crew for the next couple of weeks— provided she lived through the next couple of hours. Somewhere out there, a submersible—all right, not *the* submersible, but *a* submersible, sure as hell— was cruising along looking for something to send to the bottom. Maybe that sub was fifty miles away. On the other hand, maybe it was somewhere under the surface, trying to sneak in from a mile to half a mile to make sure it sank the *Ericsson,* which was as sitting a duck as had ever been hatched.

You couldn't outrun a torpedo. You couldn't outrun a torpedo at flank speed. A fish had at least ten knots on a destroyer. But, if you were cruising along when one of those bastards tried to shoot you in the back, you did have a chance to dodge.

How in God's name were you supposed to dodge when you weren't even moving? The answer was depressingly simple: you couldn't. Finishing this re-supply depended on not being spotted while it was going on.

George stared out over the tropical Atlantic, looking for a periscope or its wake. Odds were against him. He knew it. Even if he did spot one, it was all too likely to be too late. He knew that, too.

Light chop made the surface dance. In a dead calm sea, the wake from a periscope would have stood out against the background. Here, the background helped hide or mislead, as it did with a camouflaged ship. He wished he were down in the engine room. The only way the black gang found out about a torpedo was when one exploded in their laps.

Finally, after what seemed like forever but couldn't have been more than the couple of hours Carl Sturtevant had talked about, the *Pocahontas, Arkansas* disconnected the hose and reeled it back in, leaving a dark smear of fuel oil across the deck for an officer to have conniptions about any minute now. All the freighter's sailors were back aboard her, too.

The deck began to thrum and vibrate under George's feet. He let out a long, heartfelt sigh of relief no doubt being echoed all over the

Ericsson. They'd got away with it. Danger didn't disappear now—danger, from everything George had seen, never disappeared—but it diminished.

Coal smoke poured from the *Pocahontas, Arkansas'* stack, too, as the freighter's wheezy powerplant also began to work harder. The only way the beamy old ship would go faster than about ten knots, Enos thought, was if someone threw her over a cliff. Sooner or later, though, she'd get where she was going. In the end, that was what mattered.

But the *Pocahontas, Arkansas* did not get where she was going. The no tion that she would had hardly crossed George's mind before her bow blew off right in front of his horrified eyes. A moment later, another torpedo struck her amidships. She might as well have been a bull in a slaughterhouse hit over the head with a sledgehammer. She stopped dead in the water and started to sink.

The *Ericsson* stopped dead in the water, too, or so it seemed to George. Then he wondered if he'd lost his mind: the hulk of the freighter seemed to be moving forward once more.

While Enos was scratching his head, Carl Sturtevant let out an admiring whistle. "Skipper must have been eating his fish lately," he said. "You know— brain food. Slam us over to full power astern and we can keep the *Pocahontas* between us and whoever that son of a bitch out there is. And speaking of which—" He turned and ran toward the depth-charge projector at the stern.

George ran that way, too, toward the one-pounder by the projector.

"Hadn't thought of that," he admitted. "It is pretty sly, I guess. There's only one thing wrong with it that I can think of."

Sturtevant, who wasn't young and wasn't skinny, wheezed to a stop by his post. "Yeah," he said, panting. "We ain't gonna have a shield much longer."

"That's it," George agreed. The *Pocahontas, Arkansas* was sinking fast, going down by the bow. Even as Enos watched, another torpedo hit shook the freighter. He shivered. "That one was meant for us."

"You bet it was," Sturtevant said. The *Pocahontas, Arkansas* rolled over and sank. Only a handful of men from her were bobbing in the

water when she did, and the undertow she generated when she went down pulled a couple of them with her.

"What do we do now?" George asked. "If we hang around here and pick those guys up, that submersible is liable to put the next one into us. But if we don't.. . Hell, I wouldn't want to be one of those poor bastards."

"Me neither," Sturtevant said. He lowered his voice so Lieutenant Crow-der couldn't hear him before continuing, "Every once in a while —times like this, mostly—I'm glad I'm not an officer. Between you, me, and the bulkhead, I don't want to have to play God." Enos nodded without hesitation.

Up on the bridge, the *Ericsson's* skipper made his choice, also without hesitation. Sailors hurled cork life rings toward the men still struggling in the ocean as the destroyer steamed past them. The ship did not stop or even slow to pick up survivors; as Sturtevant had said, the submarine that had torpedoed the *Pocahontas, Arkansas* was sure to be waiting, its own skipper hopefully licking his chops, for any such move.

A runner came back from the bridge to Lieutenant Crowder. "Sir, cap tain's orders are for you to lay down as many depth charges as you can, set for widely different depths, when we reach the position where we reckon the submersible is at. We may not sink the bastard, but we'll make him keep his head down while we pick up the men from the supply ship."

"Aye aye," Crowder said crisply. He turned to the depth-charge crew and started giving orders. Sturtevant ignored some of them as he gave his own in structions to the men who served the projector. When a signal flag waved from the bridge, the crew methodically pumped one depth charge after another into the blue water of the Atlantic. The water soon began boiling and seething from the force of the explosions under the surface.

George Enos eagerly peered astern, looking for leaking oil or a trail of air bubbles that might mark a damaged submersible. He spied nothing of the sort. Neither did anyone else. "We ought to be operating in a flotilla," Lieutenant Crowder grumbled. "If we had three destroyers after that submersible instead of just our one, we'd sink him for sure."

If I had a million dollars . . ., Enos thought.

Abruptly, the *Ericsson* broke off the attack on the submarine and raced back toward the survivors from the *Pocahontas, Arkansas.* After hauling the four or five of them aboard with lines, the destroyer hurried away from the spot where the supply ship had gone down.

Carl Sturtevant sighed. "Well, the limey or the Reb down there under the water won that one, damn him to hell and gone."

"Yeah," Enos said, his Boston accent making the word come out as *Ayuh.* "Didn't get us, though, so I reckon he's not as happy as he might be. A destroyer is worth a hell of a lot of freighters."

"I ain't gonna tell you you're wrong," Sturtevant said, "but the game's not over yet, either. He's still down there. He's trying to get us, we're trying to get him. Wonder if we'll lock horns again."

"How will we even know whether we ever fight the same boat again or some different one?" George asked.

Sturtevant chewed on that for a moment before he shrugged. "What dif ference does it make? Any time one of those bastards shows himself, we'll go after him, whether he's this boat or a different one."

George considered, then nodded. "I won't tell you you're wrong," he said.

Seawater from a new leak dripped down onto Commander Roger Kimball's cap. The electric motors were running on very low power, just enough to keep the prop turning over and give the *Bonefish* steering way. The roars of exploding depth charges, some well removed from the submersible, others terrifyingly close, put Kimball in mind of a summer thunderstorm back home.

Then the rain of depth charges stopped. Kimball pulled out his watch. He let one minute tick by, two, and then, reluctantly, three. When the third quiet minute had passed, he turned to his exec and said, "Take us up to periscope depth, Tom."

"Are you sure, sir?" Lieutenant Brearley said. "God only knows where the damnyankees are up there. They're liable to be waiting around to spot us so they can drop the other shoe."

Kimball growled discontentedly, deep in his throat. Tom Brearley

had a point. But every instinct in Kimball cried out for attack. "I'm blind down here, dammit," he muttered. "Only way to find out where the damnyankees are is to go looking for 'em." He pulled out his watch again. After the small second hand went round its dial twice more, he spoke again, this time in tones that brooked no disagreement: "Periscope depth!"

"Aye aye, sir," Brearley said, though he sent Kimball another reproachful look. The skipper of the *Bonefish* generously failed to let himself notice it. The boat climbed out of the depths in which it had taken shelter from the pounding the Yankee destroyer had given it.

As soon as the periscope lifted above the surface of the Atlantic, Kimball started to curse. "He's hightailing it out of here," he snarled in disgust. "Might have got the lousy bastard if I'd surfaced a little faster." He glowered at his executive officer. "Some people are afraid of their own shadows."

"Sir," Brearley said stiffly, and the fetid atmosphere inside the *Bonefisk* got nasty in a different way.

"Be a cold day in hell before I listen to somebody else's jimjams again, in stead of my own plain good sense," Kimball said. He was growling at Brearley, but was angrier at himself. He hadn't obeyed his own instincts, and had lost a chance to take out the Yankee destroyer.

Trying to spread oil over troubled waters, Ben Coulter said, "That Yankee four-stacker has a right smart skipper. Way he slid behind the freighter we nailed—who would have reckoned he'd be so sneaky? Never came close to giving us a good shot at him."

"All the more reason to wish the son of a bitch was down at the bottom of the ocean," Kimball said. "If that wasn't the *Ericsson,* it was another one from the same class. They still think they sank us. One day soon, I'm going to think I sank them, too. Only difference is, I'm going to be right."

He rotated the periscope through a complete circle. No other Yankee sur face ships besides the destroyer were above the horizon, and she wouldn't be for long, not the way she was scooting. The *Bonefish* would be able to surface soon. Kimball shook his head. He should have surfaced after a double triumph, the freighter and the warship both.

Presently, the *Ericsson* or whoever she was vanished from

periscope view. Kimball stayed submerged a while longer all the same: the destroyer had a higher observation point and therefore a wider horizon than he did. When he judged the U.S. ship could no longer spot him, he grudged a few words toward Tom Brearley: "Bring us to the surface."

"Aye aye, sir," the exec answered. He tried to add a light note: "Time to get some fresh air, anyhow."

Kimball didn't answer. He told off Ben Coulter to hold his legs while he opened the hatch at the top of the conning tower. As always, the pressurized air rushing out seemed particularly foul. Kimball already felt like throwing up, but was too stubborn to do it.

He climbed out onto the conning tower and looked around. Nothing but ocean, as far as the eye could see. No smoke on the horizon; the wind had dispersed the plume from the *Ericsson* or her twin, and no other ship was close enough to be showing. He might have had the whole Atlantic to himself.

And then Tom Brearley came clanking up the steel rungs of the ladder. The executive officer inhaled deeply, then chuckled. "Feels good to breathe in something you can't taste."

Kimball didn't answer. He turned his back so that he stared out at a dif ferent quadrant of the ocean. Behind him, he heard Brearley shift his feet on the conning-tower roof. He pretended he didn't hear. He pretended the exec didn't exist. He wished the pretense were true.

Brearley was young and earnest and lousy at taking hints. Instead of going below, he cleared his throat. Kimball kept right on ignoring him. But when Brearley began, "Sir, I just wanted to say that—" Kimball couldn't ignore him any more.

He whirled, so fast and fierce that he plainly startled the exec, and might have frightened him, too. "You jogged my elbow," he said in a soft, deadly voice. "Because you jogged my elbow, that damn destroyer got away. If you think I am very happy about that, Mr. Brearley, you had better think again."

"But, sir," Brearley said, "if he had been sitting there waiting for us, he could have dropped half a dozen ash cans in our lap."

"Yeah, he could have." Kimball's head jerked up and down in a single short, sharp nod. "But he didn't, on account of he wasn't sitting

there. I didn't think he'd be sitting there. But you got the whimwhams, and you put my back up, too, and so we stayed down longer than we should have, and so the son of a bitch got away. If you reckon I am very happy with you, you're wrong."

Brearley got a stubborn, martyred look on his face. "Sir, it is my duty to advise you on matters concerning the welfare of the boat," he said stiffly. "I would be failing in my duty if I kept silent. If you choose not to take my advice, that is your privilege as captain. If you do take it, though, the responsibility becomes yours, not mine."

He was right. By the book, he was right. By everything Kimball had learned at the Naval Academy at Mobile, he was right. But the way things really worked, especially on a boat as cramped as a submarine, wasn't exactly the way the book said it was. Kimball snarled something sulfurous under his breath. "You think twice before you open your mouth out of turn again," he said aloud. "Do you hear me, Mr. Brearley?"

"Yes, sir," Brearley said in a voice much colder than the weather.

A low buzzing filled Kimball’s ears. For a moment, he thought it was the sound of his own rage. Then he realized it was real, and coming from outside himself. He looked around, as he might have for a mosquito, till he spotted the aeroplane approaching from the northeast. Coming from that direction, it was unlikely to be off a Confederate cruiser or battleship. For as long as he could, he hoped it had been launched from a Royal Navy vessel. That hope vanished when he saw the eagle's heads on the undersides of the wings and on the fuselage.

The aeroplane had spotted the *Bonefish,* too, and came in for a closer look at her. Kimball understood that; he'd come to the surface too recently to have run up a Confederate naval jack on the conning tower or at the stern.

Kimball waved to the pilot. The fellow waved back. He was close enough for Kimball to see—and to distrust—his smile. Kimball smiled, too, as he would have at a poker table. Through that smile, he said, "Mr. Brearley, go below, but don't make a big fuss about doing it. Order the machine-gun crew topside. Tell them to act as friendly toward that goddamn aeroplane as they can—and if he gives them half a chance, even a quarter of a chance, I want them to shoot his ass off."

"Aye aye, sir," Brearley said. "Shall I have some other men come up on deck, too, to gawk at the aeroplane and keep the pilot from paying attention to the gunners?"

"Yeah, do that, Tom." Kimball nodded. Without noticing, he slipped back into the informal address common aboard submersibles. Now that the exec had made a good suggestion, he tacitly forgave him.

Brearley slipped below. If the pilot of that aeroplane didn't like it, all he had to do was turn around and fly away. He didn't. He came around for another pass close by the *Bonefish:* he was still trying to figure out to whose navy she belonged.

Out came the sailors. They pointed at the aeroplane and waved to the pi lot and generally acted as much like damn fools as they could. Some of them were alarmingly good at the role. The pilot waved back. He was spiraling higher into the sky now. Maybe he'd satisfied himself that the *Bonefish* was a U.S. boat. In that case, *he* was a damn fool. Or maybe, like everybody else in this little charade, he was sandbagging.

Nobody had fired the machine gun aft of the conning tower at a real tar get since the *Bonefish* went up the Congaree River to help put down the Red uprising among the Negroes almost a year and a half before. It burst into noisy, staccato life now, tracers drawing hot orange lines in the direction of the U.S. flying machine.

Something fell from between the aeroplane's floats. Kimball yipped with triumphant glee, thinking the gunners had damaged the Yankee aircraft. A couple of his men cheered, too.

But someone yelled "That's a bomb!" an instant before it smashed down into the sea and exploded a few yards in front of the *Bonefish's* bow. A great column of water and spray rose and then fell, drenching the sailors farthest up the hull and even splashing a little water into Kimball's face.

He swiped a sleeve across his eyes, then stared up toward the U.S. aeroplane with a new and startled respect. If it had another bomb ... He was about to shout orders for a crash dive when the aeroplane flew off in the direction from which it had come.

"That son of a bitch," he said indignantly. "That *son* of a bitch. He'd hit us square there, he'd have sunk us." He shook his fist at the

receding aeroplane. "I didn't know the damnyankees were putting bombs aboard those things these days. Can't trust anybody any more."

"I expect we gave him a nasty surprise, too," Tom Brearley said.

"Hope to Jesus we did," Kimball said. "But putting a bomb on one of those scout aeroplanes—war just got a little tougher. Having 'em flying around and spying on us is bad enough. If they can hurt us once they spot us instead of sending for their pals on the wireless—well, hell, if they can do that, how are we supposed to do what we're supposed to do?"

"We need a proper antiaircraft gun, sir, a one-pounder, not just the ma chine gun," Brearley said.

Kimball nodded. That might help. It wasn't the answer, though. For the life of him, he didn't know what the answer was.

XIII

Sylvia Enos was discovering that Brigid Coneval had been right: Boston held plenty of jobs. A lot of them paid better than the one she'd had in the canning plant, too. In the time since she last looked for work, wages had risen sharply. Her own had gone up, too, but not by so much. The more she saw what others were getting, the more she kicked herself as a fool for not quitting sooner.

She also discovered many more jobs were open to women than had been true when she got work after George went into the Navy. She didn't see any women in overalls with pickaxes and sledgehammers on road-paving crews, but that was about the only limitation she found.

"Reason for quitting previous position?" a—female—clerk asked at a shoe factory.

"Both my children came down with chicken pox at the same time," she answered, as she'd answered several times already. She looked for a sympa thetic glance from the clerk, who wore a wedding band, but got nothing but the *Well, where's the rest of it?* expression a bored man might have used. A bit nonplused, she went on, "I didn't have anyone else who could watch them, and the canning plant wouldn't hold the job for me—they could hire someone without any experience and pay her less."

That still rankled. They'd used her, and then they went and threw her away with no more hesitation than if she'd been a torn label. Massachusetts, despite agitation, did not let women vote. If it had, Sylvia would have voted Socialist without a moment's hesitation.

"Except for that, will this plant give you a good character?" The clerk made as if to reach for the telephone on her desk.

"Yes, I think so," Sylvia said.

The clerk did not pick up the earpiece and ask for the operator. Sylvia smiled to herself. The woman had wanted to see if she'd been lying and could be panicked into revealing it. After scribbling a note to herself, the woman said, "You do know how to use a sewing machine?"

"Oh, yes." Sylvia nodded. "I'm like most people, I suppose. I have one at home, and I use it when I have the time. I buy some ready-to-wear, but making clothes for myself and the children saves a lot of money."

She'd done a lot of sewing while she was home with George, Jr., and Mary Jane. She'd sewn, and she'd taken care of the children, and she'd read the books and magazines in the apartment till she could have recited chunks of them from memory. She'd got out very little. She was hard pressed to remember when she'd felt more delight than that which filled her when her children's blisters got crusty and scabbed over and the scabs started falling off.

"Have you ever sewn leather with a sewing machine?" the hiring clerk asked.

Sylvia shook her head. If she lied there, she would be too easily found out. "No, I've never done anything like that," she admitted.

"Well, come try it," the clerk said. "I'm sure we'll be able to find you an empty machine." She got up from her desk. "Follow me, please."

Back in the enormous work area, little old men—too old to be conscripted— sat hunched over about a third of the sewing machines. Women of all ages used the rest. The men, with only a couple of exceptions, ignored Sylvia, so intent were they on their work. Most of the women looked her over, curious as she would have been to see who might be hired next.

"Here," the clerk said, pointing to a machine with no one at it. "Let me find you a couple of leather scraps, and you can see what it's like."

The stool behind the sewing machine had no back and was not very com fortable, but it was an improvement over standing all day, which Sylvia had been doing before. When she stretched out her right leg to set her foot on the treadle, she got a surprise.

"We have electric motors on the machine," the clerk said, seeing what must have been the startled look on her face. "It lets the operators work much faster on thick leather like this than they could with foot-powered machines. You'll see what I mean." She handed Sylvia two pieces of shoe leather. "Join these together with two straight seams about a quarter-inch apart."

"All right," Sylvia said. Sure enough, the sewing machine had a switch near the base. She flicked it, and the motor hummed to life. Before guiding the pieces of leather under the needle, she noted how sturdy it was, and how strong and thick the thread that went through the eye.

As she started to sew, her right foot went up and down, up and down, even though it wasn't on a treadle. The hiring clerk smiled. "A lot of girls do that when they first come here," she said. "Some of them keep right on doing it even after they've worked here for years."

"Do they?" Sylvia hardly noticed answering, because the needle snarled into action. The motor *was* strong as the very devil; she felt as if she were riding a poorly broken horse. The needle seemed to bite its way through the leather with every stitch the machine took. She'd hurt herself once or twice with her own sewing machine—she didn't want to think what this one would do to her hand if she slipped or got careless.

She knew nothing but relief when she turned off the machine and handed the clerk her sample work. The woman examined it, then slowly nodded. "That's very nice," she said. "Even, straight. You can do the work, no doubt about it. Starting pay is fifty cents an hour. You go up to fifty-five after three months."

That was more money than she'd been making at the cannery. "What time does the shift start tomorrow morning?" she asked.

"Eight o'clock," the hiring clerk answered. "Eight o'clock *sharp*. You're docked for every minute you're late, and for every minute you clock out early."

"I didn't expect anything different," Sylvia answered. This place looked to be like all the others. They wanted everything from the people they were generous enough to hire—that was how they'd look at it, anyhow—but what would they give back? What had the canning plant given back? Only a swift good-bye.

Still, at fifty cents an hour—fifty-five if she stayed—she'd soon make up for the time she'd lost taking care of the children. Fifty cents an hour plus the allotment she got from George's pay was pretty good money. It was more money than she'd ever imagined making for herself. It would have been more money still had prices not risen right along with, and sometimes faster than, wages.

She got reminded how prices had gone up when she stopped at the Coal Board offices on the way home from the shoe factory. Being able to go without having the children along was an unusual blessing. The Coal Board was bureaucracy at its most plodding, and George, Jr., and Mary Jane did not take well to waiting in interminable lines.

Neither did Sylvia, not when the petty functionary she finally reached told her next month's ration would be smaller but cost more. "This is the third time this year I've heard that!" she exclaimed in dismay. "It's not right."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the fellow said, sounding not a bit sorry. *Why aren't you in the Army? Sylvia thought resentfully. The Coal Board clerk went on, "I am not responsible for setting policy, you must understand, ma'am, only for seeing that it is carried out. Here, let me stamp your ration tickets"—he did, plying the rubber stamp with might and main—"so you can go over to Line 7C to pay for the coal. Remember, you cannot acquire it without the stamp I just gave and the pay confirmation stamp you will receive in Line 7C."*

"I remember," Sylvia said. "How could I forget?" She went and stood in Line 7C, and stood there, and stood there.

At last, grudgingly, the clerk there accepted her money and added his square red stamp to the other bureaucrat's round black one. "Obtaining coal without a ration coupon showing both authorization and pay confirmation marking is a violation of law punishable by fine or imprisonment or both," he droned.

"Oh, yes, I know." Sylvia could have repeated the rigmarole back at him. She heard it every month.

"We are pleased to have been of service to you," the clerk said, just as if he meant it. Then, while she was still standing in front of him, he forgot Sylvia existed. "Next."

Luxuriating in an afternoon without the children and with a job in hand, Sylvia went out and bought a couple of shirtwaists and a skirt in the new style that daringly left the ankles bare. It was advertised as saving fabric for the war effort. That, she was convinced, had nothing to do with why only a couple were left on the rack. People finally felt victory in the air, and wanted to bust loose and go a little wild.

She took her purchases home before going out again to pick up

the chil dren. That was another small extravagance, but she would have plenty of nickels coming in to make up for the extra one she was spending on trolley fare. Both George, Jr., and Mary Jane looked forlorn, with the marks of the chicken pox still upon them, but they had been certified as noncontagious. Several of George, Jr.'s, classmates were down with the disease, as well as another girl Mrs. Dooley cared for.

After supper, the children were playing and Sylvia washing dishes when someone knocked on the door. "Who's that, Mama?" Mary Jane said.

"I don't know," Sylvia said. "I'm not expecting anyone." Apprehension filled her as she went to the door. Opening it, she breathed a silent sigh of relief to find no Western Union messenger standing there, but rather Isabella Antonelli. "Come in," Sylvia exclaimed. "Have you eaten? Can I make you coffee?"

As the children stared at the woman who was a stranger to them, Mrs. Antonelli said, "Coffee will be fine. I have eaten, yes, thank you. I am not very hungry anyhow."

The two women sat at the kitchen table and chatted. When they didn't pay much attention to George, Jr., and Mary Jane, the children gradually stopped gaping at Isabella Antonelli. Sylvia was sure she hadn't come to talk about the weather or even the high price of coal. Whatever was on her mind, she would get to it when she was ready.

Eventually, she did: "Mr. Winter asked me to marry him the other day."

"That's wonderful!" Sylvia said, at the same time thinking, *Better you than me.* "Have you set a day yet?"

"He wants it to be in about six months," Isabella answered. Slowly, delib erately, she set both hands above her navel. "That is about five months later than I would like." Her meaning was unmistakable. Sylvia's eyes widened. The widow Antonelli nodded, adding, "He does not know this yet. What do I do?"

"Oh." Sylvia understood why Isabella had not gone to her family. Even if she was a widow, they would have pitched a fit. All the Italians she'd ever met were like that. After some thought, she said, "I think you'd better tell him."

Panic filled Isabella Antonelli's face. "And what if he leaves me? I do not know if he wants a child."

"Dear, doesn't he have one whether he wants one or not?" Sylvia asked, to which Isabella gave a miserable nod. *Or you could look for an abortionist,* Sylvia thought. But she had no idea how to go about finding one; she'd never needed to, for which she heartily thanked God. She never would have advised anyone to do anything so flagrantly illegal, anyhow. And Isabella was Catholic, which would have made the suggestion worse than illegal in her eyes.

"That is so," she said now. Her fingers spread, there on her belly.

"He'd better know," Sylvia said. "It is his business, too, after all. I think he'll do what's right." She was by no means sure the canning-plant foreman would, but.. . "If he doesn't, do you want to have him around anyway?"

"With a *bambino* coming, I want someone around," Isabella said in a firm voice. "I think you are right, though. He is a good man. He will do what is right. *Grazie.* Thank you." She rose, kissed Sylvia on the cheek, and was gone before Sylvia could say good-bye—or anything else.

"Why did she come over here, Mama?" George, Jr., asked.

"To talk," Sylvia answered absently. "Why don't you and your sister get ready for bed?" She ignored the howls of protest that brought. *Better you than me, Isabella,* she thought again. *Better you than me.*

Wearily, Jefferson Pinkard and the rest of his regiment marched out of the front lines. Wearily, he groused with his buddies about how criminal it was to leave them at the front for so long without a breather. "What I reckon it is," Sergeant Albert Cross said, "is that Richmond done forgot we was even here, so of course they forgot to send anybody out to take our goddamn place."

A couple of people laughed: relatively recent replacements, most of them, who were innocent enough to think that was meant as a joke. "This Texas prairie sure as hell is the ass end of nowhere," Pinkard muttered. "Wouldn't surprise me one damn bit if everybody forgot about us."

"To me, the country does not look so bad," Hipolito Rodriguez said.

Pinkard grunted; next to the chunk of Sonora Rodriguez had tried to farm, the west Texas prairie was liable to look pretty good, which, when you got down to it, was a frightening thought. The stocky little Sonoran went on, "And the Yankees, Jeff, the Yankees, they don't forget about us."

Pinkard grunted. Nobody could deny that. The U.S. advance wasn't going fast—the United States didn't have as many men in Texas as they needed, either—but it was and remained an advance. Nobody talked about throwing them back on Lubbock any more. The most anybody would talk about was halting their advance, and talk outran reality there, too.

Sergeant Cross said, "Damn me to hell and toast my toes over the fire if it ain't gonna feel good not to get shot at for a while."

"Si, es verdad," Hip Rodriguez said. *"Muy bueno."*

"Yeah," Pinkard said, because Rodriguez expected him to say something like that. He didn't mean it, though. He suspected his pal knew he didn't mean it. Rodriguez had enough tact for any other dozen soldiers Jeff had ever met. Jeff wanted to be in the trenches. He wanted to be in the Yankee trenches, killing Yankees. When he was doing that, he didn't have to think about anything else.

Replacements came forward to fill the trenches Pinkard and his comrades were leaving. It was a black unit, with white noncoms and officers moving the men along. *"Mallates,"* Rodriguez said, shaking his head. "You know, down where I was living, I didn't hardly never see no niggers, not till I come into the Army."

"Isn't like that in Alabama," Jeff said. " 'Bout as many of 'em back home as there are white men." *Didn't have to bring niggers down into Sonora, with greasers there already.* But he didn't say that out loud, and hoped Hip didn't know he thought it. Rodriguez was a good soldier and a good guy—a good friend—even if he was a greaser.

On they trudged, toward the tiny hamlet of Grow, Texas, whose dusty main street, all of two blocks long, made a liar of the cockeyed optimist who'd named the place. Most of the buildings along those two blocks had been turned into saloons. Texas was officially dry. Where soldiers were involved, people looked the other way.

Some of the barmaids—most of the barmaids—sold more than beer and whiskey, too. Up above every saloon were several small rooms in constant frantic use. That sort of thing did not officially exist, either. Jeff had never felt the urge to go upstairs in any place like that, of which he'd seen a good many. A few shots of whiskey, maybe some poker—-that had been plenty.

He didn't know what the hell he'd do now. Along with most of his pals, he went into a saloon that called itself the Gold Nugget. When they got inside, Sergeant Cross said, "They should have named this place the Cow Pie." He didn't walk out, though. None of the other dives in Grow was any different.

Sawdust on the floor, a bouncer with a bludgeon on his belt and a sawed-off shotgun by his chair, the stink of sweat and booze and the barmaids' cheap perfume . . . they all came with saloons in Grow and in any of scores of little towns behind both sides of the line from the Atlantic to the Gulf of California.

Somebody from another unit got out of a chair while Jeff was standing by it. He threw his backside into it before anyone else could. A barmaid wiggled through the crowd of soldiers trying to crowd up to the bar. Their hands roamed freely till she almost decked one of them with a roundhouse slap.

"I ain't apples, boys," she said. "You got to pay before you pinch the merchandise."

She spoke good English, but her accent reminded Pinkard of Hip Rod riguez's. So did her chamois-colored skin and black, black eyes. Most of the barmaids were of Mexican blood. A few were black. Jeff didn't see any white women at the Gold Nugget, though some did work in the other saloons in Grow.

When the barmaid finally got over to him, he ordered a double shot of whiskey and gave her a dollar, which would have been outrageous before the war and was too damned expensive now. Pinkard wasn't one of the ones who groused about that, though—what the hell else did he have to do with his money except spend it on hooch and whatever other pleasures he could find?

He knocked the whiskey back in a hurry after the barmaid—Consuela, some of the guys were calling her—brought it to him. It wasn't the sort of whiskey to sip and savor. It tasted like kerosene and went down his throat as if it were wearing shoes with long, sharp

spikes. But once it got to his stomach, it made him hot and it made him stupid, and that was the point of the exercise.

He waved his empty glass, a signal that he wanted a full one to take its place. Eventually, he got one. He drank it and peered around. The Gold Nugget looked cleaner. The kerosene lamps looked brighter. He wondered what the devil the barkeep was putting in the whiskey.

When he waved the glass again, Consuela brought him another refill. She looked better, too. A moment later, she plopped herself down in his lap. Coyly, she spoke in Spanish: *"Te gustaria chingar?"*

He had a pretty good idea what it meant. *Chinga tu madre* was one of the things Hip Rodriguez yelled at the Yankees when he ran out of English. To leave Jeff in no possible doubt, Consuela wrapped her arms around his neck and gave him a big kiss. He wondered whom else she'd kissed lately— and where. After a few seconds, though, his blood heated and he stopped worrying.

"We go upstairs?" she asked, coming back to English. Then her voice got amazingly pragmatic: "Ten dollars. You have a hell of a good time."

Ten dollars was at least five dollars too much. With three doubles sloshing around inside him, Jefferson Pinkard wasn't inclined to argue. "Upstairs," he agreed, surprised at the way his tongue stumbled inside his mouth. "Ten dollars. Hell of a good time."

Going up the stairs took longer than it would have if he'd been sober. The cubicle to which Consuela led him was cramped and humid and smelled as if someone should have taken a hose to it a long time before. She held out a hand for the money, then shucked out of her clothes with nonchalant aplomb.

He had a little trouble rising to the occasion. "I'll fix," Consuela said, and started to lower her head.

"No!" Jeff exclaimed. She looked up at him in surprise; she probably hadn't had anybody refuse that offer lately. But instead of Consuela's face, Jeff saw Emily's, her eyes glowing, on the night he'd caught her with Bedford Cunningham. She'd lowered her head that same way. The mixture of pleasure and pain was too strong for him to want to repeat it.

He spat on his palm and played with himself instead till he was

stiff enough to go into Consuela. She shrugged and did her best to hurry him along once he was inside her. The second after he spent himself, he wished he hadn't bothered. That was too late, of course.

Hip Rodriguez came out of a little cubicle two doors down from the one he'd used. The little Sonoran looked drunk and sad, too. "Ah, Jeff," he said, "I do this, it feels good, and I still miss my *esposa.* Maybe I miss her more than ever. Where is the sense in this? Can you tell me?" He was drunk, all right, and drunkenly serious.

"Sense?" Jefferson Pinkard shook his head. "Damned if I see any of that anywhere at all." He wondered if he missed Emily. He supposed he did. When an opium fiend couldn't get his pipe, he missed it, didn't he? That was how Jeff missed his wife. He wanted her. He longed for her. And he wanted her and longed for her even though he knew she wasn't good for him.

Downstairs, the bouncer and a couple of military policemen were breaking up a brawl. The military policemen looked like men going about their business. The bouncer looked like someone having a hell of a good time. Pinkard wouldn't have wanted to tangle with him, and he was a big man who'd been a steelworker before going into the Army. He wondered why the bouncer wasn't wearing a uniform himself. Maybe they didn't make one wide enough through the shoulders to fit him. Had a tent had sleeves, that might have worked.

Consuela didn't waste much time upstairs. Pretty soon, she was down on the floor of the saloon again, hustling drinks. And pretty soon again, she was going up the stairs with another soldier.

"Look at that," Jeff said. "Just look at that. If she does that kind of busi ness every day, she'll end up owning half of Texas by the time the war's over."

"Yes, and the Yankees will own the other half," Rodriguez said. "And do you know what else, Jeff? I will not be sorry. Sonorans have no love for Texans. More than anyone else in the CSA, Texans treat Sonorans like niggers. Let the Yankees have Texas. *Hasta la vista. Hasta luego."* He waved derisively. *"Adios."*

"But you're fighting in Texas," Pinkard pointed out. "Never heard you talk like this here before."

"Yes, I am fighting in Texas," Rodriguez agreed sadly. *"Mala suerte* —bad luck. You never hear me talk like this?" His smile was oddly

sweet. "I am not so drunk before, I think, when we talk of Texas."

"I don't give a damn about Texas myself any more," Pinkard said. "Hell, we've lost the damn war. Like you say, the damnyankees are welcome to the place. All I want to do is go back home."

"You no say, 'Go back home to my wife,' like you used to," Rodriguez said. "You didn't used to go up with the *putas,* neither, when they take us out of line."

"Leave it alone, Hip," Jeff said. "Leave it the hell alone. Whatever hap pened back there happened, is all. It ain't anybody's business but mine."

Rodriguez looked at him with large, liquid eyes. He realized he'd never before admitted anything out of the ordinary had happened back in Birming ham. The Sonoran said, "I hope it turns out well for you, whatever it is."

"I got my doubts, but I hope so, too," Jeff said, and fell asleep in his chair.

Even out in the middle of the ocean, Sam Carsten kept a weather eye peeled for aeroplanes whenever he came out on the USS *Dakota's* deck. He was still amazed at how much damage a bomb explosion could do; the one from the Argentine-based aeroplane had caused at least as much harm as a hit from a battleship's secondary armament.

Hastily welded sheets of steel covered the destruction the bomb had wrought; they looked as out of place as bandages covering a wound on a man's body. Because the patches were neither painted nor smooth, they drew the wrath of petty officers merely by existing. Sam laughed when he had that notion—he was a petty officer himself these days, even if he did still think like an ordinary seaman.

Hiram Kidde came up beside him. Kidde had been one of the exalted for a long time now; Carsten waited for some snide comment about the way the *Dakota* looked with a steel plate in her head, or at the least a grumble over the repairs' not having been neater.

He got nothing of the sort. What Kidde said was, "It's a good thing those limey sons of bitches didn't have an armor-piercing nose on that bomb, the way we've got armor-piercing shells. Otherwise, that one

little bastard would've done even worse than it did." Carsten considered that. After a couple of seconds, he nodded. "You're likely right, 'Cap'n,' " he said. "This was only a first try, though. I expect they'll get it right, or we will, or somebody will, pretty damn quick."

Kidde gave him a look that was anything but warm. "You know what you're saying, don't you?" he demanded. "You're saying we might as well melt the *Dakota* and all the other battlewagons in the whole damn Navy down for tin cans right now, on account of by the time the next war rolls around, aeroplanes'll sink 'em before they get within five hundred miles of where they're going."

"Am I saying that?" Sam did some more thinking. "Well, maybe I am. But I tell you what—maybe we don't melt 'em down for cans till after this here war is over, because I don't figure the aeroplanes'll sink too many battleships this time out."

"Real white of you," the gunner's mate said. *"Real* white. You make me feel like a guy in the buggy-whip business, going broke an inch at a time because people are buying Fords instead of buggies these days."

"Hell of a big buggy whip we're sailing on," Sam observed after letting his eye run along the *Dakota* from bow to stern.

"Don't talk stupid," Hiram Kidde snapped. "You know what I'm talking about. You're a squarehead, yeah, but you never were a dumb squarehead."

"Goddamn, 'Cap'n,' you say the sweetest things," Carsten said, and they both laughed. After one more pause for thought, Carsten went on, "Maybe we'll get some use out of battleships in the next war after all." He didn't doubt there would be a next war; there would always be a next war.

Kidde got a cigar going, then held it in his mouth at an angle that made his dubious look even more dubious. "Wait a minute. You're the same guy who was just saying somebody'd have armor-piercing aeroplane bombs long about day after tomorrow, or next week at the latest. Soon as that happens, the jig is up, right?"

"Maybe," Sam said. "Maybe not, too. It's up if the aeroplanes get to drop the bombs on the ships, sure as hell. But if our side has aeroplanes, too, to shoot down the other fellow's bombing aeroplanes, the battleships can get on with the job they're supposed to be doing, right?"

Now Kidde stopped and did some thinking. "That sounds good," he said when he came out of his own study, "but I don't think it works. You squeeze enough, you might be able to mount two or three aeroplanes on a battleship, maybe one or two on a cruiser. That won't be enough to hold off all the aeroplanes the other bastards can throw at you from dry land."

"Mmm," Carsten said—an unhappy grunt. "Yeah, you're right. A fleet'd need a whole ship stuffed full of aeroplanes, and there is no such animal."

"See?" Hiram Kidde said. "You got to keep your head on your shoulders, or else you go flying off every which way." He walked down toward the stern, puffing contentedly on his cigar.

Carsten stuck his thumb in his trouser pockets and slowly mooched after the gunner's mate. His idea had been pretty foolish, when you got down to it. He had a picture of the Navy, whose business was ships, building a ship to take care of aeroplanes. It hung in his mental gallery right alongside the portrait of the first Negro president of the Confederate States.

The *Dakota* swung through a turn toward the west, toward the Argentine coast. Sam knew what that meant: it meant that, aeroplanes or no aeroplanes, the flotilla was going to bore in and see what they could do to the British convoys scuttling along in or near Argentine territorial waters.

He supposed that made sense. It sure as hell made dollars and cents. This attack had surely cost millions to fit out, and as surely hadn't worked near enough devastation to be worthwhile. Rear Admiral Bradley Fiske either had wireless orders from Philadelphia to do something worth doing, or else he was going to try to do something big to keep from getting wireless orders from Philadelphia telling him to sail his command back to Valparaiso and forget about marauding in the South Atlantic. Carsten had no way of knowing which of those was true, but he'd been in the Navy long enough to be pretty sure it was one or the other.

Rear Admiral Fiske was also doing everything he could to keep the *Dakota* and the American and Chilean ships with her from getting a nasty surprise of the sort they'd already had once. Long before klaxons hooted men to their battle stations, he had crews at all the antiaircraft guns on the battleship's deck.

He also sent not only the *Dakota's* aeroplane but the other two the flotilla boasted off to the west ahead of the ships. They wouldn't be able to fight off any bombing aeroplanes, but they could at least warn of their presence. Sam wondered how much good that would do. He shrugged. It couldn't hurt.

The U.S. aeroplanes could and did do one other useful thing: they could spot convoys for the *Dakota* and her companions to attack. Down in the five-inch gun's sponson, Sam attributed a sudden shift in course to the north as likely springing from a wireless report. "Hope they haven't stuck some freighters out there to humbug us into getting too close," Luke Hoskins said.

"Now there's a nice, cheery thought," Carsten said. He turned to Hiram Kidde, who was peering out through the vision slit. "See anything, 'Cap'n'?"

"Smoke trails," the chief of the gun crew answered. "Can't spot the ships that are making 'em, though. Land behind 'em. We—"

A thunderous roar interrupted him. "That's the main armament," Sam said unnecessarily. If it weren't the main armament, it had to be the end of the world.

Kidde looked disgusted. "They must have let the big guns open up as soon as they could take the range up in the crow's nest on the observation mast. Skipper doesn't want to get in close enough to let us do any work."

"After what happened that one time, do you blame him?" Sam asked.

"Blame him? Hell, yes, I blame him. I want to be in on the fun, too, 'stead of sitting around here like some homely girl nobody wants to dance with," Kidde said. He paused. "Now if you ask me whether I think he's smart to do it this way, that's a different question. Yeah, he's smart."

"Listen," Hoskins said from behind Sam, "the best fighting is the fighting you don't have to do." As he spoke, he had both hands on the casing of a shell, ready to pass it to Carsten.

"Nope." Kidde shook his head. "What matters is winning."

"If we can win here easy enough so they don't have to squawk for

the secondaries, that'll be fighting we don't have to do," Sam said. "We, this gun crew, I mean."

"Give the man a big, fat, smelly cigar and put him in the judge advocate's office," Kidde said with a snort. "Sure as hell sounds like a bunkroom lawyer to me."

"I always hated a Rebel accent," Carsten said, "but this one time when I was a kid, I heard a fellow from Louisiana going on and on about lawyers— he'd just lost a lawsuit down in the CSA, I guess—and every time he said the word, it sounded like he was saying *liars.* I liked that. The older I get, the better I like it, too."

"I remember one time I—" Luke Hoskins began. They never found out what he'd done or said or thought one time, because the main armament bel lowed out another broadside. Speech was impossible through that great slab of noise, thought nearly so.

Then Kidde shouted "Hit!"—his voice sounding thin and lost after the guns spoke with twelve-inch throats. Everybody yelled after that. Carsten elbowed his way to the vision slit. Sure enough, out there far away, a British or Argentine or French freighter was burning, sending up more smoke than could ever have come out its stack.

The cruisers with the flotilla were firing, too; their guns had enough range to reach the freighters. The destroyers stayed silent, for the excellent good rea son that their main armament was no match for the five-inch guns of the battleships' secondary weaponry. Battleships were fierce, proud creatures, sure as sure. Nothing that prowled the sea could beat them.

For a moment, that thought made Sam Carsten feel as large and powerful as the ship of which he was a tiny part. Then he remembered submersibles and floating mines and the gnat of an aeroplane that had carried such a nasty sting in its tail. Twenty years earlier, battleships might have been all but invulnerable, save to one another. It wasn't like that any more.

What would it be like for battleships twenty years down the road? He and Hiram Kidde had had that discussion just a little while before. He came up with the same answer as he had then: it would be tough as hell.

That was twenty years down the road, though. Now, here, the battleships and cruisers methodically pounded the convoy of

freighters to bits. No one came out to challenge them: no torpedo boats, no submersibles, no aeroplanes. They had everything their own way, just as they would have in the old days before aeroplanes, before submersibles, when even torpedo boats were hardly to be feared.

Sam should have felt triumphant. In fact, he did feel triumphant, but only in a limited way. We *pounded them to bits* wasn't really what was going through his mind. It was much more on the order of, *Thank you, Jesus. We got away with one this time.*

The Canucks and the limeys were pushed back to their last line in front of Toronto. They'd been working on that line since 1914—probably since before that—and had no doubt worked on it again after barrels entered the picture. If Toronto fell, the war for Ontario was as near over as made no difference. They did not intend to let it fall.

What the Canadians and British intended was not the most urgent thing on Jonathan Moss' mind. He had been a part of the struggle since the day it opened. Thinking back on the Curtiss Super Hudson aeroplane with the pusher prop he'd flown then, he laughed. If either side presumed to put a flimsy old bus like that in the air in this modern day and age, it would last only until the first enemy fighting scout spotted it and shot it down—unless, of course, it fell out of the sky of its own accord, as such antiques had been all too prone to do.

Moss set a gloved hand on the doped-fabric skin of his fast, graceful, streamlined Wright two-decker. Here was a machine to conjure with, nothing like the awkward makeshifts with which both the Quadruple Alliance and the Entente had gone to war.

Archie from the enemy's antiaircraft guns burst a little below Moss' flight. Some of those black puffs came close enough to make his aeroplane jerk from the concussion. He started his game of avoidance, speeding up, slowing down, gaining a little altitude, losing some, swinging his course now a few degrees to one side, now a few to the other.

Along both sides of the line, tethered observation balloons hung in the sky like fat sausages. Some pilots went hunting for them with whole belts of tracer ammunition, hoping the flaming phosphorus that made the rounds visible would set the hydrogen in the balloons afire. Anyone who got forced down on the other side's territory with

that kind of load in his guns was unlikely to survive the experience, even if he landed perfectly.

And some pilots hunted balloons with no more than their usual ammunition. Moss had gone after a few in his time on the front line, but he'd never really worked at being a balloon buster. To him, enemy aeroplanes and enemy troops on the ground seemed more important targets.

Here today, though, one balloon in particular caught his eye. It had to be floating close to a mile in the air, a thousand feet or so higher than the other gas-filled cylinders from which observers watched U.S. troops movements and called artillery down on the Americans' heads.

Moss grunted, a sound of discontent he could not hear over the roar of the engine and the shriek of the wind. That balloon was liable to be a trap. The enemy always had plenty of Archie around his sausages. If they'd run up a balloon there just to lure U.S. aeroplanes, they were liable to have more than plenty. But those extra thousand feet would give an observer a long, long look behind the American lines.

If the observation balloon was a trap, it was—that was all there was to it. Trap or not, it needed taking out. Moss nodded to himself as decision firmed. He swung his aeroplane toward the balloon. Percy Stone, Hans Oppenheim, and Pete Bradley followed without hesitation, though they had to know what they were liable to be getting into.

Sure as hell, heavy antiaircraft fire burst around Moss' two-decker as he approached the balloon. "Told you so," he said to no one in particular. He did settle one thing to his satisfaction, though: it *was* an observation balloon, not just a trap. He could see a man moving in the wicker basket beneath the gas bag.

Often, a balloon's groundcrew would reel it in by its cable when it came under attack. That didn't happen here. Maybe the observer thought the Archie would drive off the U.S. aeroplanes. Maybe he was a patriot. Maybe he was a damn fool. Moss neither knew nor cared. If the fellow stayed up there so temptingly high, he was going to get himself and his balloon shot to bits.

The twin machine guns mounted about the fighting scout's engine started chattering. Moss aimed the stream of bullets first at the

balloon and then at the smaller, more difficult target the wicker basket made.

To his amazement, the enemy observer started shooting back. He was hideously outgunned, but he'd brought a rifle up there to keep him company, and he was taking aimed potshots at Moss and his flightmates. The son of a bitch was a good shot, too. A bullet cracked past Moss' head, close enough to scare him out of a year's growth. He jammed his thumb down on the firing button as hard as he could, trying to blow holes in that crazy Canadian or eccentric Englishman or whatever the hell he was. He'd never live it down if he got shot down by an observer in a balloon basket.

That was a joke, something to laugh at, till Hans Oppenheim's aeroplane pulled out of its run at the balloon and broke back toward the west, toward the American lines. Either the bus or Oppenheim himself was in trouble; Moss saw to his astonished dismay that his flightmate wasn't going to make it back to territory the U.S. Army controlled. Down Hans went, not far from an enemy artillery position.

Canucks and limeys came running from every direction toward Oppen heim's aeroplane. After seeing that, Moss had to look away, because he was around the far side of the balloon, with that infernal observer still blazing away at him and Stone and Bradley. The son of a bitch was a *good* shot. A bullet thrummed through the tight-stretched fabric of the fuselage, about three feet behind Moss' seat.

He whipped the Wright two-decker into a tight turn and bored in on the observation balloon, Stone behind him to the right, Bradley to the left. "There!" he shouted in savage exultation, as the hydrogen in the fabric sausage finally caught fire. "That'll teach you, you bastard."

Maybe nothing would teach the observer. Even as his crew on the ground at last began hauling down the flaming balloon, he calmly climbed over the edge of the wicker basket from which he'd fought so hard and so well and leaped off into space.

His parachute must have been connected to the basket by a static line, for the big silk canopy opened almost at once. Pilots of fighting scouts were not issued parachutes. Moss didn't know whether to be jealous or to despise the device as a sissy affectation.

The latter, he decided, and swung the nose of his aeroplane down a little. A burst from his machine gun, and the observer hung limp and unmoving beneath the 'chute. Maybe Moss wouldn't have done it

had the fellow not shot down his friend. But maybe he would have, too; that Canuck or limey or whoever he was had been too damn good to let him live.

Moss swooped down below the thunderous Archie and streaked toward the spot where Hans Oppenheim's aeroplane went down. His flightmate wasn't inside the bus any more; dead or alive, the enemy soldiers had taken him away. A crowd of men in khaki were gathered around the Wright. Moss machine-gunned them, and whooped with glee to watch them scatter. Some didn't scatter—some crumpled and wouldn't get up again.

Then Moss and Stone and Bradley zoomed past the disabled two-decker and low over the front line. The Canadian and British troops in the trenches gave them a warm sendoff with rifle and machine-gun fire. And then, because they were coming out of the east, half the Americans assumed they had to be hostile and fired at them, too. More bullets pierced Moss' aeroplane.

"Now wouldn't that be bully?" he growled. "Hell of a mission to have to try and explain to Major Cherney: a balloon observer shot down one machine from the flight and our own ground fire made another one crash. He'd love that, yes he would. He'd love it a hell of a lot."

But his two-decker kept flying, and so, he saw to his relief in the rearview mirror, did those of Percy Stone and Pete Bradley. U.S. antiaircraft guns opened up on them, too, but they made it back to the Orangeville aerodrome unscathed.

As Moss had known it would be, "What happened to Lieutenant Oppen- heim?" was the first question the groundcrew asked after he shut off the motor and the sounds of the outside world returned to his ears. After he answered, the silence that fell made him wonder if he'd gone deaf.

"You're joking, ain't you, sir?" asked a fitter who was walking down the length of the fuselage and examining the bullet holes Moss had picked up. "I mean to say, you guys shoot at the balloons. The guys in the balloons don't shoot back—that's Archie's job."

"You know that, Herm, and I know that," Moss said, "but nobody ever told this skunk. One thing, though—he won't ever do it again." The ground-crew man nodded at the grim emphasis he gave the words.

As they walked toward Major Cherney's tent, Stone and Bradley sounded as disbelieving as had Herm. "The nerve of that son of a gun," Bradley said, over and over. "The nerve!"

"Good thing you got him," Stone said to Moss. "If somebody didn't punch his ticket for him, he'd have ended up an ace, and he hasn't even got a motor in that damn thing."

When they told Major Cherney what had happened to Hans Oppenheim, the squadron leader looked at them for a long time without saying anything. At last, he did speak: "You really mean it." Solemnly, Moss, Stone, and Bradley nodded. Cherney shook his head. "You go into a war. You fight it for damn near three years. You think you've heard every single thing that could happen. And then ..." He shook his head again. "Shot down by an observer in a balloon. I will be goddamned. Maybe it's just as well for him that he didn't make it back to our side of the line. Nobody would ever have let him forget it."

"I only hope he's alive *to* try and forget it, sir," Pete Bradley said. "I couldn't tell when we flew over his aeroplane."

"Neither could I," Moss and Stone said together.

"I will be goddamned," Major Cherney repeated. He let out a long, slow sigh. "Maybe the Canucks will let us know. They do sometimes when one of our boys gets forced down on their side, same as we do for them."

Two days later, an enemy aeroplane dropped a note behind the U.S. line in a washed-out jam tin made more noticeable by the small 'chute taken from a parachute flare. It duly made its way back to the Orangeville aerodrome, where Major Cherney called in Moss, Stone, and Bradley. "Hansie died of wounds," he said heavily. "The Canadians buried him with full military honors, for whatever it's worth."

"Thank you, sir," Jonathan Moss said. With one accord, he and his flight- mates headed for the officers' club after they left the squadron commander's tent. After they had the first of what would be many drinks in front of them, Moss turned to the men on whom his life depended—and *vice versa*—and said, "Well, boys, I wonder what sort of bird'll join our flock next."

"Won't be long till we find out," Bradley said. Soberly—for the

time being—Moss nodded.

Time hung heavy in the hospital. Lying there with a rubber drainage tube coming out of the shoulder that still stubbornly refused to heal, Reggie Bartlett had plenty of time to think and very little chance to do anything else.

One of the things he thought about—and disapproved of—was the weather. "You all sure this is really Yankee country?" he asked the wounded U.S. soldiers who filled most of the beds in the big ward. "Richmond doesn't get any hotter and stickier than this."

"St. Louis, sure as hell," Pete reminded him. The one-legged soldier winked. "You ought to feel at home, ain't that right?"

"Doesn't mean I liked the weather," Reggie said. "Anybody who likes summer in the Confederate States is crazy." He turned to his countryman for support. "Isn't that right, Rehoboam?"

The Negro was scratching toes on the foot he no longer had, as he often did. He said, "Don't know nothin' 'bout what it's like in Richmond. Out in the fields down around Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where I's from, it gets powerul hot in the summertime. This ain't a patch on that, I don't reckon."

"From what I've heard about Mississippi, I expect hell would look chilly in the summertime next to it," Reggie said thoughtfully. His shoulder twinged. He grunted and thought some more till the pain faded. Then he added, "Working in the fields down there doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun."

Rehoboam looked at him from across the aisle. "You ain't the stupidest white man I ever did see."

Pete whistled. "You gonna let him talk to you like that, Reggie? I thought a smoke who talked to a white man like that down in the CSA could go and write his will—except you wouldn't let him learn to write and he wouldn't own enough to bother leaving it to anybody."

"You're a natural-born troublemaker," Reggie told him. "If you still had that other leg, I'd tear it off you and beat Rehoboam to death with it. That'd settle both of you. There. Are you satisfied now?"

"Minute I woke up and found out I was shy a pin, I was satisfied and then some, I'll tell you that right now," the amputee answered. "Right then, I knew I'd had all the fighting I was ever going to do."

Reggie only grunted in reply to that. He still wasn't satisfied, not in that sense. If he ever got healed up, he'd try to escape again. He'd done it once; he didn't think doing it again would be so hard. But, while his leg wound bothered him less each day, pus still dripped from that shoulder. It left him sore and weak and feverish. There were lots of things he told himself he should be doing, but he lacked the energy to do any of them. Lying here was what he was up to, and lying here was what he did.

In came the nurse with a tray of suppers. Everyone got an identical slab of chicken breast—or possibly it was baked cardboard—an identical lump of mashed potatoes with gravy that looked and tasted like rust and machine oil, and something that might have been bread pudding or might have been sponge in molasses.

After working his way through the dismal meal, Reggie said, "You Yan kees are winning the damn war—or you say you are—and this is what they give you? God have mercy on you if you were losing, that's all I can tell you."

"If cooking was something they shot out of the barrel of a gun, we'd be good at it," Pete said. "Since it ain't, we haven't much bothered with it since the end of the Second Mexican War. Had more important things to worry about instead."

Rehoboam said, "The kind o' cooking you Yankees do here, y'all ought to shoot it out the barrel of a gun."

"Amen," Reggie said. "But if you shot it at our side, you'd just make the boys fight harder, for fear of having to eat like that all the time."

Pete laughed. So did the rest of the wounded U.S. soldiers. They were no fonder of the grub the military hospital doled out than were their Confederate counterparts. And so did Rehoboam. But his laugh had an edge to it, and his dark face twisted in a way that for once had nothing to do with the pain and phantom itches from his missing foot.

"What's chewing on you?" Reggie called across the aisle.

"What do you reckon?" Rehoboam returned. "When you was

talkin' 'bout what the boys'd do, you didn't mean me. I ain't *the boys* to you, an' I ain't never gwine be *the boys,* neither. I's just a nigger, an' I'd be a nigger without a gun if all the whites in the CSA wasn't worse afeared o' the damn-yankees kickin' 'em in the ass than they was of putting a Tredegar in my hands and callin' me a sojer."

He hadn't spoken in a loud voice, but he hadn't particularly kept it down, either. Everybody in the ward must have heard him. Silence slammed down. Everybody looked toward Reggie Bartlett, to see what he would say.

He hadn't the faintest idea what the devil *to* say. He'd seen for himself that Confederate blacks harbored a deep and abiding loathing for the whites who ruled them. Outside of the prisoner-of-war camp in West Virginia, though, none of them had ever come out and said so to his face.

Rehoboam pressed the point, too: "What you think, Reggie? Is that the truth, or ain't it?"

Bartlett had never had a Negro simply call him by his name before, either.

He said, "Yeah, that's the truth. I was there in Capitol Square in Richmond when President Wilson declared war on the USA, and I cheered and threw away my straw boater, same as every other damn fool in the place. If we could have licked these fellows here"—he waved with his good arm at the men in the green-gray hospital gowns—"without giving black men guns, of course we'd've done it."

"Kept things like they always was, you mean," Rehoboam said.

"Of course," Reggie repeated. Only after the words were out of his mouth did he realize it wasn't necessarily *of course.* White Confederate public opinion was so wedded to the *status quo* that realizing other choices were possible came hard.

Then Pete stuck his oar in the water, saying, "Blacks got guns of their own any which way."

"Don't know much about that, especially not firsthand," Bartlett said. "I got captured over on the Roanoke front before the risings started, and they'd been put down by the time I got loose."

"Bunch of Reds." Pete gleefully stoked the fire.

He got Rehoboam hot, too. "You take a man and you work him like they works niggers in the CSA," the Negro growled, "and if he *don't* turn into no Red, he ain't much in the way of a man. Wasn't for the risings, I don't reckon Congress never would've done nothin' about the Army."

"Wouldn't be surprised if you're right," Reggie said. "But they did do something, you know. I was thinking about that a while ago. When you go back to Mississippi, you'll be a citizen, with all the same rights I've got."

"Mebbe," Rehoboam said through clenched teeth. "Mebbe not, too."

"It's what the law says," Bartlett pointed out.

"Ain't got no black police. Ain't got no black lawyers. Ain't got no black judges. Ain't got no black politicians." Rehoboam rolled his eyes at Reggie's naivete. "How much good you reckon the law gwine do fo' the likes o' me?"

To Reggie, a law was a law, to be obeyed automatically for no better rea son than that it was there. Seeing another side of things made him feel jittery, as if an earthquake had just shaken his bed. Still, he answered, "If there's enough of the likes of you, you'll do all right."

"You reckon the stork brings the babies, too?" Rehoboam asked acidly. "Or do you figure they finds 'em under the cabbage leaves when they wants 'em?"

The ward erupted in laughter, laughter aimed at Reggie. His ears got hot. "No," he said with venom of his own. "The Red party chairman or general secretary assigns 'em. That's how it worked in the Socialist Republics, isn't it?"

"You liable to be too smart for your own good," Rehoboam said after a pause.

"I doubt it, not if I volunteered for the Army," Bartlett replied. "And if you didn't want to be a citizen, and if you didn't think being a citizen was worth anything, what made you put on butternut?"

That made the Negro pause again. "Mebbe I was hopin' more'n I was ex- pectin', you know what I'm sayin'?"

As a white man, as a white man Jiving in a country that had beaten its neighbor two wars in a row, Bartlett had seldom had to worry about hope. His expectations, and those of his white countrymen, were generally fulfilled. He said, "I wonder what the Confederate States will look like after the war's over."

"Smaller," Pete put in.

Both men from the CSA ignored him. Rehoboam said, "We don't get what's comin' to us, we jus' rise up again."

"You'll lose again," Reggie said. "Aren't enough of you, and you still won't have enough guns. And we won't be fighting the damnyankees any more."

"Mebbe they give us a hand," Rehoboam said. "Mebbe they give us guns."

"Not likely." Now Reggie's voice was blunt. "They don't much fancy black folks themselves, you know. If we deal with you, that'd suit them fine."

And Rehoboam, who had answered back as boldly as if he were a man who had known himself to be free and equal to all other men since birth, now fell silent. His eyes flicked from one of the wounded U.S. soldiers with whom he shared the ward to the next. Whatever he saw there did not reassure him. He buried his face in his hands.

Pete said, "I guess you told him."

"I guess I did," said Reggie, who had not expected the Negro to have so strong a reaction over what was to him simply a fact of nature. He called to Rehoboam, "Come on, stick your chin up. It's not that bad."

"Not for you." Rehoboam's voice was muffled by the palms of his hands. "You're white, you goddamn son of a bitch. You got the world by the balls, just on account of the noonday sun kill you dead."

"If I had the world by the balls, none of these damnyankee bastards would have shot me," Bartlett pointed out.

Rehoboam grunted. Finally, he said, "You had the world by the balls when you wasn't in the Army, anyways. It's the rich white bastards who don't never have to fight got the world by the balls all

the time."

"See? I knew you were a Red," Reggie said.

"Maybe he's just a good Socialist," Pete said.

"What the hell's the difference?" Reggie demanded.

Rehoboam and Pete both got offended. They both started to explain the difference. Then they started to argue about the difference, as if one of them were a Methodist preacher and the other a hardshell Baptist. Reggie lay back and enjoyed the show. It was the most entertainment he'd had since he got wounded.

Bertha came back into Flora Hamburger's private office. "Congresswoman, Mr. Wiggins is here to see you. Your two o'clock appointment."

"Thank you," Flora told the secretary. "Send him in."

She put away the Transportation Committee report she'd been reading and wondered again whether she should have made the appointment with Mr. Edward C.L.—he'd insisted on both middle initials—Wiggins. Over the telephone, he hadn't described his reason for wanting to see her as anything more specific than "a matter of possible common interest." Well, if that was a polite way of leading up to offering her a bribe, she'd show him out the door one minute and put the U.S. marshals on his trail the next.

In he came. He proved to be a chunky little man in his late forties, sweating in a wool tweed suit and vest and fanning himself with a straw hat. "Very pleased to make your acquaintance in person, ma'am," he said, giving Flora a nod just short of a bow. His manner was courtly, almost stagily so.

"Pleased to meet you, too," Flora answered, wondering if she was lying. She did not believe in beating around the bush: "Now that we *are* meeting in person, I hope you will tell me what you have in mind."

"I certainly aim to," Edward C.L. Wiggins replied. "I want you to know, I truly do admire the way you've spoken out against the war, both before you got elected to Congress and since. I think it does you

great credit."

Flora had not expected that tack. "Thank you," she said. "But I don't quite see what that has to do with—"

"I'll tell you, then," Wiggins broke in. "You are not the only one who thinks this war was a mistake from the beginning and has gone on far too long already. I do hope your brother is doing well."

"As well as you can with one leg," Flora said tightly. Then she stared at her visitor. "How do you know about David and what happened to him? Are you connected with the War Department, and coming around here to gloat because I wouldn't play along with you?"

"No, ma'am." Edward C.L. Wiggins raised his right hand, as if taking an oath. "I have nothing to do with the U.S. government, nothing whatsoever. The people I have to do with don't want this war to go on any more. They want to end it as soon as may be. That's why I'm here: because you've been bold enough and brave enough and wise enough to want the killing stopped, too."

"Thank you," Flora repeated. "Who *are* the people you have to do with?" He was not a Socialist. She was sure of that. He behaved like a prominent man in his own circle, whatever that was, and it was not hers. Were the remnant Republicans approaching her with some kind of deal? Was he a renegade Democrat? A capitalist who'd grown a conscience?

"You must understand, this is at present highly unofficial, ma'am," Wig gins said. Flora did not reply. In another moment, she was going to ask her visitor to leave. He must have sensed that, for he sighed and went on more quickly than he'd spoken before: "Very well, ma'am; I rely on your discretion. Unofficially, I have to do with President Gabriel Semmes, down in Richmond. The Confederate States are looking to see if there might be an honorable way to put an end to this ghastly war."

Flora Hamburger gaped. That was among the last answers she'd ex pected. "Why me?" she blurted. "If President Semmes wants peace, why not go straight to President Roosevelt, who can give it to him?"

"Because President Roosevelt has made it plain he does not want peace, or peace this side of subjugation," Wiggins replied. "Sooner than accept that, the CSA will go on fighting: I was instructed to be very clear there. But a fair peace, an equitable peace, a peace between

equals, a peace that will let both sides rebuild after this devastation—that, President Semmes will accept, and gladly."

"I see," Flora said slowly. She had no great love for President Gabriel Semmes, reckoning him as much a class enemy of the proletariat as Theodore Roosevelt. His unofficial emissary had approached her in defense of no principle save his country's interest. Still ... "I will take what you have said to President Roosevelt. I can urge him to accept the kind of peace you are talking about, though you have given me no details. Kentucky has rejoined the USA, for instance. How do you stand on that?"

"We would accept the results of plebiscites as binding, there and else where," Wiggins answered. Flora nodded in understanding and some admiration. That not only had a fine democratic ring to it, it was likely to favor the CSA. Edward C.L. Wiggins went on, "We are also ready to negotiate all other matters standing in the way of peace between our two great American nations."

"If President Roosevelt wishes to reach you, how may he do so?" Flora asked.

"I am at the Aldine Hotel, on Chestnut Street," Wiggins said. Flora nod ded again and wrote that down, though she had not taken notes on any other part of the conversation. Wiggins rose, bowed, and departed.

Flora stared down for a long time at the address she'd written. Then she picked up the telephone and told the switchboard operator she wished to be connected with the Powel House. "Congresswoman Hamburger?" President Roosevelt boomed in her ear a couple of minutes later. "To what do I owe the honor of this call?" *Why does a radical Socialist congresswoman want to talk with me?* was what he meant.

She gave him the gist of what Wiggins had told her, finishing, "In my opinion, Mr. President, any chance to end this horrible war is a good one."

Roosevelt was silent for a while, a novelty in itself. Then he said, "Miss Hamburger, your brother-in-law lost his life in the service of his country. Your brother has been wounded in that service, and my heart goes out to him and to you and to your family. I am going to speak plainly to you now. In a fight, if you have a man down, you had better not let him up until you have finished beating him. Otherwise, he will

think he could have beaten you, and he will try to beat you again first chance he sees. If the Confederate States want to say 'Uncle,' they shouldn't come pussyfooting up to you and whisper it. Let them cry 'Uncle!' for the whole wide world to hear."

"Haven't you seen enough fighting yet, Mr. President?" Flora asked.

"As for seeing it, I've seen a great deal more than you have," Roosevelt answered. "I've seen enough that I don't want to see more in a generation's time. And that is why, before I make peace with Confederate States, I aim to lick them till they don't dream about getting up any more, and Canada right along with 'em."

"If the Confederate States are seeking terms of peace, don't you think they've seen enough war?" Flora said.

"If they want peace, Miss Hamburger," Roosevelt told her again, "let them come right out and say so instead of sneaking around behind my back. Can *you* grant them peace, pray tell?"

"Of course not," Flora said, "though I would if I could."

"*I* would not," Roosevelt said, "most especially not if they go about it in this underhanded way. And, since I was comfortably returned as president of the United States, defeating Senator Debs who shares your views, I must conclude that my views on the subject are also the views of the large majority of the American people."

That was probably true. Because of it, Flora did not have a good opinion of the political wisdom of the large majority of the American people. Nationalism kept too many from voting their class interests. She said, "Mr. Wiggins— Mr. Edward C.L. Wiggins—is staying at the Aldine Hotel. I think you should hear him out, to see if the terms Richmond proposes are acceptable to you."

"Not bloody likely," Roosevelt said with a snort. "What did this fellow with the herd of initials have to say about Kentucky, for instance?"

Roosevelt might be a class enemy, but he was no fool. Flora reminded her self of it again: he went straight for the center of things. Reluctantly, she answered, "He spoke of a plebiscite, and—"

"No," Roosevelt broke in. "Kentucky is ours, and stays ours. And I

need hear no more. When the Confederate States are serious, they will let us know. Good day, Miss Hamburger." He hung up.

So did Flora, angrily. Slighted was the least of what she felt. Her first instinct was to call or wire half a dozen good Socialist newspapers and break the story of the president's refusal to negotiate with the CSA. But, before she picked up the telephone once more, she had second thoughts that had nothing to do with Socialism and everything to do with the ghetto from which her family had escaped to the United States. *Don't do anything to make things worse* was the eleventh commandment of the ghetto, at least as important as the original ten.

And so, when she did pick up the telephone, it was not to call the newspapers: not at first, at any rate. Instead, when her call was answered, she said, "May I please speak with Mr. Blackford? This is Miss Hamburger."

"Hello, Flora," Hosea Blackford said a moment later. "To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"

Flora felt her face heat at Blackford's cordial—maybe even more than cordial—tone. As baldly as she could, she told him of the approach from Edward C.L. Wiggins, and of President Roosevelt's response to it. When she was through, she said, "I want to expose Roosevelt for the bloodthirsty rogue he is, but at the same time I don't want to do anything that would hurt the Party."

Blackford was silent even longer than Roosevelt had been when she put Wiggins' proposal to him. She heard him sigh, start to speak, and then stop. At last, he said, "Much as I regret admitting it, I would advise you to keep Mr.—Wiggins', was it?—visit to yourself. You might embarrass Teddy if you thunder what he did from the rooftops. You might, I say, but I wouldn't want to bet on it. You're too much likelier to embarrass us instead."

Flora made automatic protest: "This is a capitalists' war. If we can keep the workers and farmers of one country from slaughtering those of another in the sacred name of profit, how can we hold back?"

"Because the workers and farmers of the United States will be perfectly happy to slaughter those of the Confederacy and Canada as long as they win in the end." Was Blackford mournful or cynical or both at once? Flora couldn't tell. The congressman from Dakota went on, "A year ago, I would have told you to take it to the papers as fast

as you could. A year ago, the war was going nowhere."

"And because it was going nowhere, the Confederate States wouldn't have come to anyone in Congress looking for a way out," Flora said.

"Exactly." Blackford paused for a moment, perhaps to nod. "But if you go to the papers now, with the war on the edge of being won, Roosevelt will crucify us and say we're jogging his elbow—and I'm afraid people will believe him."

"But—" Flora didn't go on right away, either. She sighed instead; it seemed to be her turn. Then she said, "All right, Hosea; thank you. You may be right." Only then did she realize she'd called him by his first name.

"I am right. I wish I weren't, but I am," he said, and changed the subject: "How is your brother doing?"

"He's not going to die," Flora answered. "He's out of the woods, as far as that goes. He's only going to be crippled for life, in this war that Teddy Roosevelt has brought to the edge of being won, this war where we don't dare jog his elbow, this great, grand, glorious, triumphant war." She hung up the telephone and, very quietly, began to cry.

XIV

When Luther Bliss unhappily released him from the Covington, Kentucky, city hall, Cincinnatus had devoutly hoped he would not see the inside of the building again. That hope failed. Here he stood outside the city hall, soon to be inside once more, and, very much to his surprise, he was not filled with panic.

One thing he had seen since the USA drove the CSA from Kentucky: bu reaucrats were far more numerous and far more thorough than their C.S. counterparts. That had a great deal to do with why he was standing in front of the Covington city hall in the middle of a long line of Negroes. He and they laughed and gossiped as the line moved forward. Why not? They were friends and neighbors; the new government of Kentucky had been summoning Covington's Negroes to the city hall a few square blocks at a time.

"I tell you," somebody behind him said, "this here gonna make the pass books we had to put up with look downright puny alongside it. You step out of line now and they kin step on your whole blame family, wherever they be in the USA."

"Ain't doin' nothin' with us the white folks ain't done to themselves," somebody else answered.

"And they reckon they's free," the first speaker said, and shook his head.

"They ain't free," Cincinnatus said. "All the taxes they got to pay, they're powerful expensive. And now we get to be just like them. Ain't that bully?"

Nobody answered, not straight out. A couple of people let their eyes flick toward a white policeman who was standing not far away. Cincinnatus looked his way, too, then nodded ever so slightly. He'd pitched his words about right. The people he wanted to hear had heard, while the cop with his billy club and permanent tough expression hadn't noticed a thing.

As the line snaked forward, the man right behind Cincinnatus murmured, "Don't want to let the white folks know you's a Red."

"Ain't against the law, not like it used to be," Cincinnatus answered, but the fellow had a point. Cincinnatus glanced at the white cop again. He wondered if the bruiser had been a policeman when the CSA ruled Covington, or if he was one of Luther Bliss' men. If he belonged to Bliss' Kentucky State Police, he was liable to be more dangerous than he looked.

Once Cincinnatus got inside the city hall, he found himself face-to-face with white petty officials whose faces said they were disgusted at having to show up for work of a Sunday. That he and his fellow Negroes might also be unhappy at having to come to the city hall on Sunday never seemed to enter their minds. That surprised Cincinnatus not a bit.

"What's your name, boy?" a clerk snapped when he got to the head of the line.

"Cincinnatus, suh," Cincinnatus answered. Kentucky might be part of the USA again, but the clerk, by his accent, had likely served the Confederate States far longer than his new country. Long and sometimes bitter experience warned Cincinnatus to walk soft.

Not soft enough. "Cinci—what?" the clerk demanded, even though Cincinnati was just across the Ohio River. He gnawed at the top of his fountain pen. Toothmarks showed that was a habit of his. "I don't reckon you can spell that for me, can you?"

"Yes, suh, I can," Cincinnatus said, as quietly and submissively as he could. He spoke the letters one by one, slowly enough so that the clerk had no trouble writing them down. Then he gave his address. Reading upside down, he saw that the clerk had misspelled the name of his street. He did not correct the man; being literate gave him a leg up on being thought uppity, and he was already in enough hot water with enough different people.

"Family?" the clerk asked.

"My wife Elizabeth, my son Achilles," Cincinnatus answered. He had to spell *Achilles,* too.

As if taking some small revenge for that, the clerk shook his head. "Not enough, boy. You got any other kin in town, any other kin at all, who haven't been registered yet? Names and addresses both, mind you—you reckon I'm gonna let you waste my time, you can think again."

"My pa's called Seneca. My mother's name is Livia." Cincinnatus gave their address, too.

"*Now* we're gettin' somewhere," the clerk said in sour satisfaction. He gnawed the pen some more, scribbled on the form in front of him, and went on, "All right, boy, what surname are you choosing for this lot of people here?"

Having hashed that out with his family ahead of time, Cincinnatus answered without hesitation: "Driver, suh."

"Driver," the clerk repeated. He seemed to weigh it on some mental scales, which finally came down on the side of approval. "Well, that's not too bad. Anybody would've asked me, I'd've told him letting niggers own surnames was a pack of damnfoolishness, but nobody asked me. Even niggers have surnames in the USA, and we're in the USA, so ..." He shrugged, as if to show he wasn't responsible for the policy he had to carry out.

"Makes it easier to keep tabs on us," Cincinnatus said, not altogether without bitterness.

"Did fine with passbooks for a hell of a long time," the clerk said, but he brightened, if only fractionally. "Maybe you're right." He wrote some more, reading as he wrote. "Cincinnatus Driver. Elizabeth Driver. Achilles Driver. Seneca Driver. Livia Driver. Wherever any of you go in the United States, that there last name goes with you."

When you got right down to it, that was a pretty large thought. "You don't mind me sayin' so, I'd sooner carry around a name than a passbook."

The clerk looked at Cincinnatus as if he emphatically did mind his saying any such thing. "Cards for all you people will be coming in the mail in the next few days. From now on, if it has to do with you, it has to do with Cincinnatus Driver, whatever it is. You got that, boy?"

"Yes, suh," Cincinnatus answered.

"Then get the hell out of here," the clerk said, and Cincinnatus—Cincinnatus Driver—took his leave. Behind him, the clerk called "Next!" and the black man in back of Cincinnatus stepped forward to take his place.

He got out of the Covington city hall as fast as he could; he kept

expecting Luther Bliss to pop out of nowhere and start grilling him. Had the Ken tucky State Police chief known what all Cincinnatus had done instead of merely suspecting him because of the company he kept, he would have been in a different line, a line where his ankles were shackled to those of the prisoners in front of and behind him.

When he got outside, he let out a sigh of relief. He also felt a surge of pride that surprised him. Somebody might actually call him *Mr. Driver* now, a form of address impossible before. In the form of his name—if in very little else—he had become a white man's equal.

He spotted Apicius in the line snaking its way toward the building. The barbecue cook saw him, too, and waved. As he waved back, he wondered what the local Red leader would think of this small measure of equality. Nothing much, he suspected; *mystification* was one of Apicius' favorite words.

Apicius waved again, more urgently this time. With a certain amount of reluctance, Cincinnatus approached. "What are you callin' yourself?" the fat black man asked him.

"Driver," Cincinnatus answered. "How 'bout you? You gonna be Cook?"

"Hell, no." Apicius' jowls wobbled as he scornfully shook his head. "I'm gonna call me an' my boys Wood. You ain't got the right wood in the fire, you ain't got no barbecue."

"Apicius Wood." As the clerk had before, Cincinnatus tested the flavor of the new surname. As the clerk had, he decided he approved. "Sounds pretty good, you want to know what I think."

"Don't care much," the Red answered, "on account of it don't matter a hill of beans any which way. Just one more tool of the oppressors to do a better job of exploitin' us. Hell of a lot easier to keep track of Apicius Wood than it is to keep track of Apicius the barbecue king."

He made no particular effort to keep his voice down. Most Kentucky Negroes, like most down in what was still the CSA, had at least some sympathy for the Marxist line. Cincinnatus felt that way himself. Grinning at Apicius, though, he said, "They ain't gonna have much trouble keepin' track o' you."

Apicius set his hands on his hips, which only made him look wider

than ever. "I ain't sayin' you're wrong, mind you, but I ain't sayin' you're right, neither," he said. "Other thing is, ain't a whole lot o' niggers stand out in a crowd like I do." He snapped his fingers. "In a crowd—that reminds me, goddamn if it don't."

"Reminds you of what?" Cincinnatus asked.

"Reminds me of why Tom Kennedy got his head blown off," Apicius replied.

Cincinnatus stiffened. "I think maybe you better tell me whatever it is you reckon you know."

"Wonder if I ought to," Apicius said thoughtfully. "I still don't know whose game you're playin'."

"I'm playing my own game, goddammit," Cincinnatus replied in a low, furious voice. "And I'll tell you somethin' else, too—I know how to play rough. You don't reckon I'm tellin' you the truth, you remember what happened to Conroy's store and you reckon it up again."

"You come prowlin' round my place, you ain't goin' home again," Api cius told him. "Catfish on the river bottom git hungry this time o' year." Cincinnatus looked back at him and said not a word. The barbecue cook was the first to shift from foot to foot. "Dammit, I do recollect about Conroy's."

"Tell me what you know, then."

"Think about it like this," Apicius said. "Think about how come Kennedy came round your place. Think about how come he didn't go to Conroy or any o' them Confederate diehards."

Cincinnatus duly thought about it. His first thought was the one Apicius no doubt wanted him to have: that Kennedy had fallen foul of the diehards and was trying to escape them. But Cincinnatus' ex-boss could as easily have been fleeing Luther Bliss or the U.S. Army. Or, for that matter, the Reds might have been after him while trying to make him—and Cincinnatus—think someone else was.

Letting Apicius see any of those thoughts but the first one was dangerous. *"Uh-huh,"* Cincinnatus said, as if to tell the Red leader he was with him and had not gone one step beyond him.

A broad, friendly grin spread over Apicius' face. Cincinnatus trusted it no further than he would have trusted a smile from Luther Bliss. Apicius said, "That's the way the money goes."

Pop goes the weasel, Cincinnatus thought. *Popped right between the eyes, most likely. And I'm the weasel. He took up his new surname and carried it off toward his home.*

We've grabbed 'em by the nose!" Lieutenant General George Custer said in the map room of what had been the Tennessee state capitol. "Now we have to kick 'em in the pants."

"Yes, sir," Major Abner Dowling said resignedly. Custer was a great one for mouthing slogans. He was a great one for inspiring his men, too. He'd had a lot of practice at that, having fed so many of them into the meat grinder. But, now that he'd come up with what was admittedly the great military idea of his career, he seemed disinclined to think about any other military ideas.

He had reasons, too, or thought he did. "The War Department is run by morons," he growled, "and expects everyone else to be a moron, too."

"Sir, as I've said before, in my opinion it's just as well that First Army doesn't advance on Memphis," Dowling answered. "We're too distant for the thrust to do much good. Murfreesboro is a better choice all the way around."

Custer muttered something into his gilded mustache. It sounded like, *If the War Department orders it, it must be wrong.* But, since he hadn't said it quite loud enough to compel Dowling to notice it, his adjutant didn't. He made such a point of not noticing, in fact, that Custer had to say something intelligible: "So long as we kick 'em in the pants hard enough, maybe it won't matter which direction we go in."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said, more enthusiastically than before. "We truly may have them on the ropes. All we need to do is finish them off."

Was he really talking like that? He was. Did he really believe what he was saying? He did. That he believed it still astonished him. The

Rebs were fighting hard—nobody had ever accused Confederate soldiers of having any quit in them—but there weren't enough of them, white or black, and they didn't have enough guns or barrels to hold back the United States, not any more.

Custer said, "The Barrel Brigade will put a crimp in the CSA—you wait and see if it doesn't."

"Yes, sir." Abner Dowling didn't know whether to be pleased he was thinking along with the general commanding First Army or appalled Custer was thinking along with him. After momentary hesitation, the latter emotion prevailed.

With a chuckle that struck Dowling's ear as evil, Custer went on, "I'm go ing to make sure the Barrel Brigade doesn't smash the Rebel line anywhere near General MacArthur's division, too. And do you know what else, Major? I'll have MacArthur thank me for doing things that way, too, because I'll extend his men the great privilege of feinting against the Rebels to draw their attention away from the main axis of my attack."

"That's very—clever, sir," Dowling said. No wonder Custer had sounded evil. He might not be a great soldier (on the other hand, despite everything, he might be, a realization that never failed to unsettle Dowling), but more than half a century in the Army had made him a nasty schemer. Daniel MacArthur could no more help putting his heart into any attack he made than a trout could help rising to a fly. But an attack meant as a feint would be foredoomed to failure, and not all his brilliance could change that. *Poor bastard,* Dowling thought—not that he was fond of the arrogant MacArthur, either.

"Colonel Morrell, now, Colonel Morrell is a proper officer," Custer said. "That young fellow will go far."

Since Morrell had made himself so prominent in Custer's eyes, Dowling had done some checking on the officer who led the barrels. Morrell's record *was* impressive; the only thing that could possibly be construed as a blemish was trouble getting along with the General Staff back in Philadelphia. Dowling didn't hold that against a man, and Custer, no doubt, would look on it as virtue rather than vice.

Off in the distance, antiaircraft guns began to pound. First Army had driven the CSA out of artillery range of Nashville, but the Confederates never stopped trying to hit back as best they could.

Their aeroplanes were finishing the job of pounding the town to bits that U.S. artillery north of the Cumberland had begun so well.

Larger explosions started mingling with the barking thunder of the guns. Dowling frowned. "Archie can't hit the broad side of a barn," he complained. "It's a good thing the Rebs aren't any better at it than we are, that's all I have to say."

The explosions came closer to the state capitol as the Confederates' bomb ing aeroplanes penetrated one ring of U.S. antiaircraft guns after another. Dowling wondered how much damage the bombers were liable to do. In the early days of the war, bombing raids had been pinpricks, annoyances. Now more and bigger aeroplanes carried more and bigger bombs. They could hurt.

"Sounds like they're heading right toward us," Custer remarked. He didn't sound afraid, or even particularly concerned, only interested. No one had ever challenged his courage. His good sense, perhaps, but never his courage.

As the antiaircraft fire grew more frantic, the drone of the bombers' mo tors provided a swelling background to it. The ground quivered under Dowling's feet from bombs slamming into Nashville one after another, marching ever closer to the already-battered building in which he stood. His urge was to dive under a table. The only thing he personally could do about the bombers was try to keep them from killing him. Being under fire, so to speak, without being able to do anything about it galled him.

It galled Custer, too, far more. He went to a south-facing window, yanked his pistol from its holster, and blazed away at the Confederate aeroplanes overhead. Abner Dowling knew how utterly futile that was, but sympathized with it nonetheless. And then Custer shouted, "One of them's coming down, by God!"

Dowling stared. Custer couldn't possibly have—

Custer, no doubt, hadn't. The Confederate bomber had to have been in trouble long before the general commanding First Army opened fire on it. Otherwise, it would have crashed beyond the state capitol instead of coming down not far in front of the building Custer was using as his headquarters.

It must have had most of its bomb load still on board, too. The blast sounded like the end of the world. Custer reeled away from the

window, both hands clapped to his ears. One of his elbows caught Dowling in the belly. "Uff!" his adjutant said. They both sat down, hard.

Custer yelled something. Dowling had no idea what it was. He hoped his ears would start working again one of these days. They weren't working for the time being.

Bombs kept falling, too. Dowling heard them, and felt them as well. One of them blew the glass out of the window Custer had thrown open. Dowling yipped as a little fragment bit the back of his neck. He clapped a hand to the wound. His palm came away red, but not too much worse than if he'd cut himself shaving.

"Get up!" Custer screamed in his ear. "We've got to make sure this headquarters is still a going concern."

Grunting, Dowling struggled to his feet. Custer was up ahead of him, even though the general commanding First Army carried twice his years. That shamed Dowling, although every part of his corpulent body—his right ham in particular—seemed one great bruise.

Custer's right trouser leg was out at the knee. He had a cut on his face and another on the back of his hand, each about the same as the small wound Dowling had taken. He seemed to notice none of that. Spry as a new recruit, he ran back to the window and fired some more at the Confederate aeroplanes. Only when his pistol clicked instead of roaring did he bellow what had to be a curse and shove the weapon back into the tooled leather sheath in which it had sat idle for so many years.

Dowling wondered if he would reload. Instead, he ran for the door. Limp ing, his adjutant followed. Dowling had never actually seen Custer under attack till now. Lieutenant generals seldom approached the front: the last time Custer had been there was during the first chlorine gas attack against the CSA, two years before.

Now, all at once, Dowling understood how Custer's shortcomings had failed to keep him from advancing to his present eminence. In combat, the general commanding First Army was a man transformed. Nothing fazed him. He threw open the door and charged down the hall, Dowling in his wake.

"General Custer! General Custer!" Officers and enlisted men yelled Custer's name loud enough to penetrate the cotton wool some

unknown malefactor seemed to have stuffed into Dowling's ears. "What do we do, General Custer?"

"Come with me!" Custer shouted, and they came. They obeyed without question. Dowling was very impressed. He was even more impressed at the stream of orders Custer threw out. Wherever the general saw a fire or a pile of rubble, he set men to attacking it. They went in with a will, too, just as they'd gone in with a will against the Confederates in so many expensive attacks.

Steam pumps played water on the fires closer to the Cumberland, from which they could easily draw a good supply. Other fire engines struggled against those here close by and in the state capitol, but pressure in the mains wasn't all it should have been; Dowling wondered if some of the bombs had damaged the water works. He sighed. The USA had finally got them running again, and now . . .

But Custer, far more than in an office or conferring with his subordinates around a map, took charge. "Don't worry, pal," he called to a soldier whom other men in green-gray were digging out from under bricks and stones. "If you think this is bad, just wait till you see what we do to those Rebel sons of bitches."

"That's bully, sir," the wounded man answered. By the blood soaking his leg and by the way he held it, he wouldn't be doing any more fighting any time soon, but he was smiling as his comrades carried him away. Dowling shook his head in amazement. He wouldn't have been smiling with a broken leg. He would have been screaming his head off. Would listening to Custer have made him shut up? He didn't think so, but it had sure as hell done the job for the wounded soldier.

Custer turned and said, "Major, get on the telegraph to Philadelphia. Let the War Department know I am well and tell them First Army has just begun to fight."

Dowling, whose ears were still stunned, had to get him to repeat that sev eral times before he had it straight. Custer gladly repeated himself: the only thing he liked better than hearing his own voice was seeing his name in the newspapers. But the men he'd been directing listened avidly, no matter how pompous he sounded.

"Sorry, sir," said the telegrapher to whom Dowling brought the message, "but the lines north are all down right now."

"They had better be fixed soon, for the future of the nation may ride on them," Dowling boomed. He was appalled at how much he sounded like Custer. A moment later, he was appalled again, this time by the telegraph operator's fervent apology. It made him blink and scratch his head. Damned if the old boy didn't have something after all.

Barrels crawled north up the road past Arthur McGregor's farm. They chewed the dirt to hell and gone, kicking great clouds of dust into the air. McGregor wouldn't have wanted to be one of the Yankee soldiers marching behind the noisy, smelly barrels. But then, he wouldn't have wanted to be a Yankee soldier under any circumstances.

He looked out across his fields. They were beginning to go from green to gold. He would have a fine crop this year if the weather held —and the only way he would be able to dispose of it was to the U.S. authorities. He grimaced. Almost better to touch a match to the wheat than sell it to the USA.

The barrels passed—*like a kidney stone,* he thought, remembering a tor ment of his father's. More men in green-gray slogged north on foot. Watching them, McGregor thought of ants swarming round spilled molasses. You could smash some, but more kept coming. How many columns of U.S. soldiers had he watched trudging up that road? How many men did the United States hold, anyway? One answer fit both questions: too *many.*

Southbound traffic was sparser. The farm near Rosenfeld was a long way from the front these days; few Americans needed to withdraw this far. Gloomily, McGregor headed for the barn to muck out and to get in a little work on his latest bomb. He thought he had a way to get it into town, but he wasn't sure yet.

Here came a U.S. Ford, painted green-gray as Army motorcars often were. McGregor paused, wondering if it was Major Hannebrink trying to catch him in the act. If so, the Yank would be disappointed. McGregor had nothing out now, and would have nothing out ninety seconds after he stopped work. He did not believe in taking foolish chances with his revenge.

When the Ford stopped just outside the lane that led to his farmhouse and barn, he laughed quietly, sure he'd pegged things aright. "Not today, Major," he murmured. "Not today."

But then the automobile sped up again, rolling south toward the

border. McGregor scratched his head, wondering why it had stopped in the first place. He got his answer a moment later, when a great exultant shout ripped from the throats of the marching American soldiers: "Winnipeg!"

McGregor took two quick steps to the barn and leaned against the tim bers by the door. He didn't think he could have stood up without that support; he felt as punctured, as deflated, as the inner tubes on the motorcars that had come with Hannebrink after Mary got through with them.

"Winnipeg!" the U.S. soldiers cried, again and again. "Winnipeg!" Every repetition felt like a fresh kick in the belly to Arthur McGregor. Since the war began, the city through which passed the railroads linking Canada's east and west had held out against everything the United States threw at it. McGregor knew fresh train lines had been built north of Winnipeg, but if the Yanks had broken into it, could they, would they, not move past it as well?

Slowly, grimly, he walked back toward the farmhouse. The bomb would wait. The bomb would wait a long time. The United States looked to be in Canada to stay.

When he went inside, Julia gave him a severe look and said, "Don't you dare slam the door, Father. Don't you dare stomp around the way you usually do, either. I've got bread in the oven, and I don't want it to fall."

"All right," McGregor said meekly, and shut the door with care. The last time he could remember sounding meek, he'd been about eight years old. He shook his head like a bear bedeviled by dogs and wondered what the devil to do next. He had no idea. With Winnipeg lost, what did anything matter?

His older daughter noticed that he sounded strange. "What's wrong, Father?" she asked.

He cocked his head to one side. With the door closed, with the windows closed, he had trouble hearing the Yankees yelling. If Julia had been busy with the bread, she probably hadn't even noticed them. "Winnipeg's fallen," he said baldly. "I think the Americans mean it this time."

Julia stared at him as if he'd started spouting gibberish. "But it can't have," she said, though she had to know perfectly well it could.

Then she burst into tears and threw herself into his arms. He held her and stroked her hair as if she were a little girl and not turning ever more into a woman day by day.

Hearing Julia start to cry was enough to bring Maude and Mary at a run. McGregor knew what was in his wife's mind, at least—Maude had surely feared the Yanks were seizing him. Seeing him there, she stopped dead. "Dear God in heaven, what is it?" she demanded.

"Winnipeg," he said. The one word was plenty. It made Julia cry harder than ever. Maude turned away, as if she could not bear to hear such news— and if she could not, who could blame her?

Mary's mouth fell open. "God *doesn't* love us," she whispered, no doubt the worst thing she could think of. Then, as a grown man might have done, she gathered herself. Over Julia's shoulder and bent head, McGregor watched the process with nothing but admiration. A word at a time, Mary went on, "I don't care if God loves us or not. I *won't* be a Yankee, and there's nothing they can do that will make me be one."

"I won't be a Yankee, either," Julia said, and stood straighten McGregor affected not to notice the dark tear stains on the front of his denim overalls. "I won't be a Yankee," Julia repeated. But she, more than anyone else in the family, had a way of looking at things over the long haul. "I won't be a Yankee," she said for the third time, and then added, "but what will my children be, if I ever have children? What will *their* children be?"

McGregor, thus prodded, thought of those distant, hypothetical greatgrandchildren he probably wouldn't live to see, since they'd be born around 1950, a year that seemed impossibly distant from mundane 1917. What *would* they be like?

Try as he would, he couldn't see them as much different from himself and his own family. He supposed that was foolish. His great-grandfather, whom he'd never known, would have been astonished at the modern conveniences to be found in Rosenfeld, just a few hours away by wagon. Maybe, when the century had halfway run its course, such conveniences would reach farms, too.

That wasn't really what he wanted to think about. If the United States won this war, as they looked like doing, how would those great-grandchildren think of themselves? Would they be contented Americans, as the Yanks would try to make them?

"They have to remember," he said, more to himself than to anyone else. "They have to remember they're Canadians, and the USA stole their country from them. They have to try to take it back one day."

"Can they do that?" Maude asked the ruthlessly pragmatic question. A farm wife who was anything but ruthlessly pragmatic had a long, hard, rocky road ahead of her.

But McGregor, to his own surprise, had an answer ready: "Look at Que bec. The Frenchies there are still mad that we licked them on the Plains of Abraham a hundred and fifty years ago. As soon as the Yankees gave them their chance, they jumped on the idea of this Republic of theirs, and to the devil with whatever went before it. If somebody gives us the chance, we can do the same."

"Who would give us a chance, with the United States smothering us the way a bad sow smothers her piglets?" Maude said.

"I don't know," McGregor admitted. "But the Quebecers didn't know before the war, either. Sooner or later, something will turn up."

"My bread!" Julia exclaimed. "I forgot the bread!" She fled back into the kitchen. The oven door clanked open. Julia let out a sigh of relief.

"It smelled fine," Maude called after her. "I didn't think you had anything to worry about."

Mary looked at her mother in astonishment. "Don't you think turning into a Yankee is something to worry about?"

"Well, yes," Maude said, "but it isn't something Julia can fix by taking it out of the oven on time." Her younger daughter thought that over. At last, reluctantly, Mary nodded.

McGregor said, "Maybe they can make us stand up in front of the Stars and Stripes. Whatever they do, though, they can't keep us from spitting on it in our hearts, and from staying loyal to the King."

"God save the King!" Mary said, and McGregor and Maude each put a hand on her shoulder. She caught fire, as she had a way of doing. "We'll make it our secret," she breathed. "We'll all make it our secret. I don't mean all of us—I mean all of us Canadians. We'll do what the Yanks tell us, but inside we'll be laughing and laughing, because we'll know what we really think."

Arthur and Maude McGregor looked at each other over their daughter's head. "Some of us will," McGregor said. "Some of us will keep the secret. Some of us will want to. Some of us won't care, though—remember how things were in your school? Some people will believe the Americans' lies."

"We'll make them pay," Mary said fiercely. Her parents looked at each other again. McGregor didn't know how much she knew about his bombs. She did know Major Hannebrink kept coming around—and she knew her father hated him. McGregor might have taken her out of school because the teacher mouthed the Yanks' lies, but Mary knew how to add even so.

"What happens next?" Maude asked.

McGregor blew air out through his lips, making a whuffling noise a horse might have produced. "I don't know. I don't know enough to know. If we can stop them *in* Winnipeg and keep them from getting at the new railroads farther north, the fight goes on a while longer."

He was trying to find the bright side, and that was the most hopeful thing he could say. If the Americans kept driving, if the Canadians and the British were able to stop them no more ... in that case, the fight wouldn't go on a while longer. It would be over in a matter of weeks.

"Whatever happens, *we* have to go on," he said.

"Whatever happens, we have to pay the Americans back," Mary said. "We have to pay them back for Alexander."

"We will," Maude said. "I don't know how, but we will."

"You can count on that, Mary," McGregor added. His daughter nodded. She had confidence in him even if he had none in himself, even if the war was as good as lost. He looked up at the ceiling. He seemed to look right through the ceiling, to look on the naked face of God. The war might be as good as lost, but all his confidence came flooding back.

As she'd done every day she could since the war began, Nellie Semphroch opened the coffeehouse for business. The morning was fine and bright. Before long, it would get impossibly hot and

impossibly muggy, the way it did every summer in Washington. Nellie stood on the sidewalk, enjoying the freshness while it lasted.

She had little else to enjoy. The view was one to inspire horror, not delight, even if a robin did trill from a tree that had been broken only into table legs, not into matchsticks. Most of her own block had come through pretty well, which is to say it hadn't been smashed flat and then burned. Even so, bullet holes pocked storefronts, shells had bitten chunks out of them, and the only glass in sight was not in the windows but drifted in the street to puncture motorcars' inner tubes.

Off to the south, on the far side of the Potomac, artillery boomed. It was U.S. artillery, pounding the Confederates still farther south. Confederate forces had retreated out of artillery range of Washington, driven not so much by the U.S. troops who had retaken the capital as by U.S. successes off to the west, which had left the Rebels afraid of being cut off. Not having to worry about shellfire for the first time in weeks felt good, though C.S. bombers did still make nocturnal appearances overhead.

Hal Jacobs threw wide the boarded-up door across the street to show his cobbler's shop was open, too. He waved and called, "Good morning, Nellie."

"Good morning, Hal," Nellie answered. She didn't like giving Jacobs the encouragement of using his Christian name, but didn't see she had much choice, either. As she did every morning she saw the shoemaker these days, she said, "Thank you for getting me and Edna out of that military jail."

Jacobs waved his hands. "I have told you before, do not thank me for this. It was my duty. It was my pleasure. People saw Confederate officers in your coffeehouse—naturally they thought you were collaborating. They didn't know you were passing what you heard on to me."

"You could have let me rot," Nellie said. *I didn't come across for you, so you didn't have any reason to come across for me. That was how things worked in the world from which she'd escaped, and, for the most part, in the more decorous world she'd managed to enter, too. They didn't seem to work that way for Hal Jacobs, which made Nellie intensely suspicious.*

He waved again, this time in rejection of the idea. "You bravely

served your country. How could I do such a wicked thing? If Bill Reach turns up again—no, I will say *when* Bill Reach turns up again—I know he would— *will*—feel the same."

"That's nice," Nellie answered. She had to make herself not look in the di rection of the wreckage where, she presumed, Bill Reach still lay. Jacobs might talk about his turning up, but she knew he wouldn't turn up again till the Last Trump blew.

With a final wave, Jacobs went back inside and got to work. Nellie went inside, too. While she was opening up, Edna had come downstairs. Her daughter's face bore a look of sullen discontent, as it often did lately. "Jesus, this town is dead nowadays," Edna complained. "We did a hell of a lot better when the Rebs were running things."

"We wouldn't have, if it hadn't been for the help we got from Mr. Jacobs and the rest of the people who worked for the United States," Nellie said.

Edna's discontented look went from sullen to angry. "And you never told me about it, not a word," she said shrilly. "I even said that crazy Bill Reach was a spy, and you went, 'Pooh-pooh! The very idea!' You would have let me marry Nick and then taken my pillow talk straight across the street."

Since that, while unkind, was not altogether untrue, Nellie did not rise to it. She did say, "You know I never wanted you to marry him at all."

"But that wasn't because he was a Reb," Edna said. "That was just be cause he was a man. He could have been on the U.S. General Staff, and you would've felt the same way." That also had a good deal of truth in it. Edna went on, "You just don't want a girl to have any fun, and look at what all you done when you was my age and even younger."

"That's wasn't fun," Nellie replied. "That was hell, is what that was." But Edna didn't believe her. She could see as much in her daughter's eyes. Edna was convinced she was acting like a dog in the manger. What Edna wanted was to screw herself silly, not having a clue how silly she was already. With a sigh, Nellie said, "Get a pot of coffee going, why don't you? I could use a cup, and I bet you could, too."

"Might as well make it for us," Edna said. "Ain't nobody else likely to come in and drink it. Most of the folks left here in town don't have the money, and most of the ones who do still think we was a pack of traitors."

"I know." Nellie sighed again, this time over lost business unlikely to return. "Good thing I put aside as much as I did, or we'd be in worse shape than we are." One more sigh. "Only thing that Rebel scrip we got is good for now is blowing our noses on it, I'm afraid."

"We haven't got that much of it, though," Edna said, lighting the fire in the stove. "The Rebs liked us. Why not? We always had good coffee and good food, so no wonder they liked us and mostly paid us real cash." As she started measuring grounds for the pot, she gave her mother another sour stare. "Now I know how we got all that good stuff. I never did before, on account of you never told me."

Before Nellie could answer, a motorcar stopped outside. She was amazed anyone had even tried to negotiate the shell-pocked, glass-strewn roadway. "Got a puncture, I'll bet," she said.

A moment later, the door opened. Nellie started to say, *See? Told you so,* but the words clogged in her throat. Into the coffeehouse walked Theodore Roosevelt. He pointed a finger at her. "You are Mrs. Nellie Semphroch," he said, as if daring her to disagree.

"Y-Yes, sir," she said, and dropped a curtsy. "And this here is my daughter Edna." She didn't know whether she ought to be introducing Edna to the president of the United States. She didn't know whether she should have admitted her own name, either. If Roosevelt was inclined to believe most of her neighbors and not Hal Jacobs, he was by all accounts capable of ordering her dragged out and shot on the spot.

"Now that our capital is in our own hands once more," he said, "I decided to come down from Philadelphia and see what was left of this city that was once so wonderful. The Rebs haven't left us much, have they?"

"No, sir," Nellie answered. On the stove, the pot began to perk. "Would you care for some coffee, sir?"

"Bully!" Roosevelt said. A couple of hard-faced men in green-gray — bodyguards, by the look of them—came into the coffeehouse after him. "Cups for Roland and Stan, too, if you please. I have something

for you here, Mrs. Semphroch, and also for your lovely daughter."

Edna simpered as she poured the coffee. Nellie wished the cups that had survived the recapture of Washington were all from the same set. She supposed she should have been grateful any cups had survived. One direct hit and they wouldn't have. One direct hit and she might not have, either.

After taking a sip, Roosevelt set down his cup and reached into his pocket. His hand came out not with a derringer but with a dark blue velvet box, the sort of box in which a ring might have come. He opened the box. Nellie gaped at the big golden Maltese cross on a red, white, and blue ribbon. Roosevelt lifted the medal out of the box. The ribbon was long enough to go around Nellie's neck.

"The Order of Remembrance, First Class," Roosevelt boomed. "Highest civilian honor I can give. I argued for a Distinguished Service Cross myself, but the stick-in-the-muds at the War Department started having kittens. This is the best I could do. Congratulations, Mrs. Semphroch: a grateful country thanks you for your brave service."

He slipped the medal over Nellie's head. Dazedly, she watched him put a hand in his pocket again and produce another velvet box. When he opened it, the Maltese cross inside was of silver, with inlaid gold stripes. The ribbon attached to it was also of the colors of the national flag, but not quite so wide as the one on Nellie's medal.

"Order of Remembrance, Second Class," he said, putting the decoration over Edna's head. "For you, Miss Semphroch, for helping your mother gather information from the foe and pass it on to the United States."

Edna gaped. So did Nellie. Maybe Roosevelt didn't know Edna had been on the point of marrying Confederate Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid— would have married him if the U.S. bombardment hadn't turned the ceremony into a bloody shambles. Maybe he did know and didn't care.

No sooner had that thought crossed Nellie's mind than, as if on cue, a photographer strode into the coffeehouse. President Roosevelt put one arm around Nellie, the other around Edna, and Nellie realized the photographer's appearance wasn't *as if on* cue at all. It *was* on cue. The fellow touched off his tray of flash powder. *Foomp!* As a glowing purple smear made hash of Nellie's eyesight, the shutter clicked.

"Can we do one more?" the photographer asked, beginning to set up again.

"I'm standing here with my arms around two lovely ladies, and you ask me a question like that?" Roosevelt said. "By all means, sir, by all means. Take all day if you need to—but make sure you do the job right."

Edna laughed at the president's joke. Had Roosevelt shown any interest in more than her laugh, she probably would have given him that, too. Nellie did not like being touched without having invited it, but she endured it. She'd endured worse in her time, and Roosevelt took no undue liberties.

Of one thing Nellie was very, very sure: he had no more idea than did Hal Jacobs of how Bill Reach had died. Nor did she intend to let either of them ever learn.

Thinking that, she was smiling when the flash powder went *Voom.pl* again. So was Theodore Roosevelt. So was Edna. "Great!" the photographer said. "The newspapers'll eat this one up."

"Bully!" Roosevelt said again. He let the women go and then turned to them. "Now I must depart, I fear. I have to look over this poor tormented town and try to decide how we can set it to rights once more. But now that I have had a cup of your excellent coffee and given you some small portion of the reward you so richly deserve, I do hope any and all slanders against you on the part of your neighbors shall cease forthwith. A very good day to you both."

And he was gone, a human hurricane in a black suit and straw boater. His bodyguards followed him out. So did the photographer, who had the grace to tip his hat. Nellie felt as if she'd survived yet another bombardment.

As soon as that feeling faded even a little, though, she went to a counter and pulled out a can of red paint and a brush. Roosevelt's limousine was still making its slow way around the corner when she painted a message on the boards covering her shattered window: OUR COFFEE IS FINE ENOUGH FOR THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. HOW ABOUT YOU?

"Oh, that's good, Ma," Edna said, the medal still around her neck.

"It's better than good," Nellie said. "It's *bully!"* Mother and daughter smiled, at ease with each other for one of the rare times since the shooting started.

A horse-drawn cab driven by a white man whose right arm ended in a hook carried Anne Colleton across the bridge from the Georgia mainland to Jekyll Island. "I hope the weather at the hotel will be a little nicer than this," she said; down near the Florida border, Georgia could give South Carolina lessons in heat and humidity.

"Which hotel were you at again, ma'am?" the driver asked.

"The Laughing January, it's called," she answered.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, that's on the ocean side. It's always cooler there. Place got the name on account of, before the war, rich Yankees'd come down here to get away from winter. I had to live up in Yankee country and I had the money, reckon I'd do the same thing."

The road did not go directly to the Laughing January, but meandered around the rim of the island. Most of the interior was swamp and salt marsh and, on the rare ground that rose slightly higher, woods of pine and moss-draped oak. Egrets and herons, their wings as broad as a man was tall, rose from the marshes and flew off with ungainly haste. A cardinal perched on a branch outthrust from an oak added a splash of brightness.

It caught the driver's eyes, too. "My blood was about that color when the damnyankees blew up my arm," he remarked, and then, "You got any kin in the war, ma'am?"

"They gassed one of my brothers," Anne answered. "He's dead now. The other one's an officer on the Roanoke front. He was well, last I heard." If the driver had been on the point of making any cracks along the lines of *a rich man's war and a poor man's fight,* that forestalled him. He kept quiet the rest of the way to the hotel.

Not all the rich—Yankee and Confederate—had stayed at hotels. Their villas had crushed-shell driveways leading off from the road. Some of the fancy houses were in fine shape, with servants bustling about. Some looked abandoned, forlorn, weather-beaten: men from the United States had probably wintered in them. And some, these days, were charred ruins like Marshlands. She wondered how bad the

Red risings had been here. She didn't ask. She didn't really want to know.

"Here we are," the cab driver said at last. "The Laughing January." The place seemed more like a village than a hotel, with individual cottages surrounding a larger building to the north, the south, and the east, toward the ocean. The driver had been right about the weather. Even inside the cab, Anne could feel as much. It wasn't cool. It wasn't dry. It was better than it had been.

After hitching the horse, the driver carried her bags into the lobby. He was handy with his hook but used his right arm only for the lighter pieces. Inside, a colored bellhop took charge of them all. *And what were you doing, there toward the end of1915?* Anne thought, looking at him. He was all deference now. Under that deference, who could guess what went through his mind? Anne had once thought she could. She didn't any more.

At the desk, the clerk—a woman—confirmed that her reservation was in order and handed her a shiny brass key with a large 8 stamped onto it. "You'll have a grand sea view from that cabin, ma'am," she said, "and the netting on the porch is fine enough to keep out the mosquitoes and the nasty little no-see-'ems, too."

"That's good," Anne said. She got directions on how to find cabin 8, then headed off down the walk with the colored attendant pushing her bags on a little wheeled cart behind her.

"You jus' here by your lonesome, ma'am?" he asked. "You didn't bring no servants or nothin'?"

"No," she said tightly. After folk who had been her servants tried to kill her, she neither wanted anything to do with them nor wanted to acquire new ones, lest they prove to have similarly unfortunate habits.

She gave the attendant half a dollar once he set the bags down on the floor of the front room of her cottage. It would have been an extravagant tip before the war, and was still a good one; he went back toward the main building whistling and with a spring in his step Anne didn't think was assumed. Would that save her if the Negroes planned another uprising? Her laugh had broken glass in it. She knew better.

She was hanging up a white tennis dress when someone knocked on the frame to the screen door. Maybe it was the bellhop again. Had

she dropped or forgotten something? Or maybe—

A Navy officer in tropical whites stood there, his cap under one arm, a cigar dangling from his mouth at a deliberately rakish angle. "Why, Commander Kimball," Anne drawled, exaggerating her accent to the point of burlesque. "What a pleasant surprise."

To her genuine rather than assumed surprise, Roger Kimball glared at her instead of grinning. "I didn't get interested in you because you were cute and sweet and helpless," he growled. "If I want that, I can buy it on a streetcorner any time I please. I got interested in you because I think you're the only woman I ever met who's every bit as ornery and uppity as I am. You don't like that, I'll head back to Habana."

He meant it. She could see as much. She almost did send him packing; if there was one thing she couldn't stand, it was being upstaged. But he was one of the few men she'd ever met who came close to being as ornery and uppity as she was. She didn't think he matched her, but he did come close.

And so, when she spoke again, it was in tones she might have used with her brother: "All right, Roger. It takes one to know one, I expect. Come in. How long do you have in Georgia?"

"Four days," he answered. "Then back on the train and the boat to Cuba, and then back to sea. No rest for the weary." He stepped past her into the cot tage and closed the door. "You have any whiskey in this place? Plenty in mine if you don't."

"I don't know," Anne said. "I haven't had a chance to look."

Kimball nodded. "Saw you on the way over here, with the coon hauling your bags. I usually like a little water in my whiskey, but not here. Jekyll Is land water tastes like swamp. They say it's safe to drink, but it's nasty."

"Thanks for letting me know," Anne answered as they made their way back toward the little cottage's kitchen—if you came to the Laughing January with a cook and a housekeeper, you could do some very handsome entertaining. "I haven't tried that yet, either."

Kimball stopped, so suddenly that she almost ran into him. Voice lazy and amused, he asked, "What else haven't you tried here?"

Afterwards, she couldn't sort out which of them grabbed the other first.

What followed was as much a brawl as lovemaking. He tore a couple of hooks and eyes from her gauzy summer frock as he got her out of it; she sent one of the gold buttons from his uniform jacket spinning across the room when she yanked it open instead of bothering to undo all the fastenings.

They didn't even look for the bedroom. For the rough coupling they both wanted, the floor seemed better. Kimball's weight pinned Anne half against rug, half against polished hardwood. He slammed himself into her as if he wanted to hurt her and please her at the same time.

And he did, both. Her nails clawed stripes down his back as she bucked under him. "Come on, damn you, come on," she said, her own excitement mounting. She bit his shoulder and tasted blood.

He grunted, drove even deeper into her—she would not have thought it possible—and spent himself. Only a couple of quick heartbeats later, she cried out, too, a noise any cat prowling along a fence would have recognized.

Suddenly, he was heavy upon her. Before she could push him away, he rolled off and to one side. She felt a small pang of regret as he pulled out of her. *"Hell* of a woman," he muttered to himself, and then spoke directly to her: "You don't believe in taking prisoners, do you?" He set a hand where she'd bitten, stared at the red smear on his palm, and shook his head. "I was wondering if I'd come out of that one alive."

Anne rubbed her backside in a fashion no properly refined lady would have used—but then, no properly refined lady would have got rugburn on the area in question by screwing her brains out on the floor. "I thought you were trying to ram me down into the basement," she replied, not without admiration.

"These places don't have basements," Roger Kimball said.

"I knew that," Anne told him. "The way you were going there, I didn't think you cared." Her stretch was an odd blend of satisfied lassitude and abraded posterior.

One appetite for the moment slaked, Kimball remembered

another. "We were coming in here for some whiskey, weren't we?" He got to his feet and searched the cabinets. Curtains covered the windows, but they weren't thick. A dedicated snoop would have had no trouble spotting his nudity. He didn't care. Anne admired him again, this time for brazenness—not that she didn't already know about that. She also admired the red lines on his back . . . and the back itself.

He grunted again, on a different note from when he'd shot his seed into her, and held up a bottle three-quarters full of amber liquid. "If this cottage is like mine, the bedroom should be ... over here," he said, and sure enough, it was.

He bothered with glasses no more than he'd bothered with clothes. Anne followed his lead, something she was unused to doing. He yanked the cork from the bottle with his teeth when it would not yield to his fingers. "What shall we drink to?" Anne asked.

She wondered if he would say *victory*. She thought he started to, but the word did not pass his lips. Instead, he answered, "To doing our jobs the best way we know how while the world goes to hell around us," and took a long pull at the bottle.

"Leave some for me," Anne said. She had to pull it out of his hand. It wasn't the best whiskey she'd ever had, nor anywhere close, but, if she drank enough of it, it would get her drunk. After she'd swallowed and her eyes stopped watering, she said, "We're going to lose, aren't we?"

"Don't see how we can do anything else," Kimball said. "Scuttlebutt is, we've already started sniffing around for terms."

"I hadn't heard that," Anne said. "I'd have thought President Semmes owed me enough to let me know such things, but maybe not." Maybe, with her plantation in ruins and her investments in hardly better shape, she wasn't rich enough to be worth cultivating any more.

"Well, he hasn't told me about it, either. I don't know if the stories are true or not," Kimball said. "Ones I've heard say that damned Roosevelt turned us down flat, so it doesn't matter any which way." He drank again, then stared at the bottle. "What are we supposed to do after we lose the war? How are we supposed to get over that?"

"The damnyankees did. They did it twice," Anne said. "Anything

those people can do, we can do, too. We have to figure out where we went wrong in this fight and make sure we don't go wrong that way again."

"Because there *will* be another round," Kimball said, and Anne nodded. She reached for the whiskey bottle. He handed it to her. She drank till her eyes crossed. Anything, even oblivion, was better than thinking about spending so many lives and so much treasure—and losing anyhow.

She discovered Roger Kimbail's hand high up on her bare thigh. As she stared at it, it moved higher still. She set the bottle on the floor by the side of the bed and clasped Kimball to her. Love, or even fornication, was better than thinking about what might have been, too.

An aeroplane buzzed high over the line east of Lubbock. Jefferson Pinkard stared up at it. He thought about firing a few rounds—by the way it had come, it was plainly a U.S. machine—but decided not to waste the ammunition. It was so high up there, he had no chance of hitting it.

"Why we don't got no aeroplanes to shoot down that *puto?* Hipolito Rodriguez asked. "The Yankees, they got aeroplanes all the time. They look at us like a man peeking at a woman taking a bath in a river."

Jeff thought of Emily. He couldn't help imagining her naked. That was all right, when he didn't imagine Bedford Cunningham naked beside her or on top of her. He answered, "Guess they don't reckon this here front's important enough to send us much in the way of flying machines. Yankees always have had more'n us."

Something fell from the U.S. aeroplane. Pinkard's first reaction was to hit the dirt, but he checked himself—that wasn't a bomb. No: those weren't bombs. They drifted and fluttered in the air like the snowflakes he occasionally saw in Birmingham. Rodriguez stared at them in blank wonderment. Jeff guessed he never saw snow down in Sonora, even if he'd made its acquaintance here this past winter.

"Papers!" Sergeant Albert Cross said. "The bastards are dropping leaflets on us."

"Rather have 'em drop leaflets than bombs any old day, and twice on Sun day," Pinkard said.

"Si." Hip Rodriguez nodded enthusiastic agreement. "With papers, too, I can wipe my ass. This is *muy bueno."*

"Probably be scratchy as hell," Cross said after a judicious pause for thought. "But hey, Hip, you're right—damn sight better'n nothin'. It's a fucking wonder all the flies in Texas don't live in this here trench."

"You mean they don't?" Jeff said, kidding on the square. "Could have fooled me." As if to make him pay for his words, something bit him on the back of the neck. He swatted, but didn't think he got it.

By then, the fluttering papers had nearly reached the ground. A few drifted back toward the Yankees' trenches. Others fell in no-man's-land. Still others came down in and behind the Confederates' forward line.

Had Pinkard stabbed up with his bayoneted Tredegar, he could have spitted one of the descending leaflets. He didn't bother. He just grabbed one out of the air. Cross and Rodriguez crowded close to see what the devil the United States thought it worthwhile to tell their foes.

At the top of the leaflet was a U.S. flag that looked to have too many stars in the canton crossed with another one Pinkard hadn't seen before, a dark banner with the light silhouette of a tough-looking man's profile on it. The headline below explained: THE UNITED STATES WELCOME THE STATE OF HOUS TON INTO THE UNION.

"Wait a minute," Cross said, "Houston's *in* Texas, God damn it. I been through there on the train."

"Here, let me read it," Jeff said, and did: " 'When Texas was admitted to the United States in 1845, it retained for itself the right of forming up to four new states within its boundaries. The people of the state of Houston have availed themselves of the opportunity to break free of the evil and corrupt Richmond regime and found a new political body: in the words of the immortal John Adams, 'a government of laws and not of men.' The new state takes its name from Governor Sam Houston, who so valiantly tried to keep the whole of Texas from joining the Confederate States of America. The United States are delighted at this return to the fold of so many upstanding

citizens who repent of their grandfathers' errors.' "

Pinkard crumpled up the paper and stuck it in his pocket. "It's an ass-wipe, sure as hell." He went down the trench, gathering more leaflets.

Rodriguez and Sergeant Cross also picked up several copies of the an nouncement, no doubt for the same purpose. Rodriguez peered west, toward the enemy lines and what was presumably the territory of the new state of Houston. "How do they do this?" he asked. "Make a new state where there was no state before, I mean."

"Same way they did when they stole part of Virginia from us during the War of Secession and called it West Virginia, I reckon," Pinkard answered with a snort of contempt.

Sergeant Albert Cross added, "Then they went and found themselves enough traitors and collaborators to make themselves a legislature out of, like they done in Kentucky when they went and stole that from us. Wonder how many soldiers they got to use to keep the people from hanging all those bastards from the closest lamp poles."

"Probably enough so that, if we start ourselves a counterattack, the Yankees won't have enough reinforcements left to be able to hold us back," Jeff said.

Sergeant Cross laughed louder than the joke deserved. "That's good, Pinkard, that's right good," he said, but then gave the game away by adding, "Ain't heard you say nothin' that funny in a while now."

"World hasn't been a funny place lately, and that's a fact," Jeff said. "The Yankees have been pushin' us back every place there is to push, and livin' in the trenches wouldn't be my notion of a high old time even if we was winnin'. Other thing is, way it sounds is that everybody else on our side is about to fall over dead, too. Don't know about you, Sarge, but none of that makes me want to do a buck and wing."

Hip Rodriguez looked at Pinkard with his large, dark eyes and didn't say anything. He was still convinced Jeff had more urgent reasons for not making jokes these days. He was right, of course, but also too polite to push it.

Sergeant Cross lacked Sonoran manners. Not only that, he outranked Pinkard, which Hip didn't. He said, "I don't reckon it's fretting over whether we're goin' to lose the damn war that's made you try to get yourself killed every time we sent raiders out the past couple months."

"Haven't been trying to get myself killed," Pinkard protested, which, at least as far as the top part of his mind went, was true. "Want to kill me as many damnyankees as I can, is all."

"You used to have better sense than to volunteer to do it all the damn time," Cross said. "You go across no-man's-land often enough, sooner or later you don't come back."

If he could have shot Emily and Bedford first, Pinkard might have been content to turn his Tredegar on himself. One of the reasons he shook his head now was that he hadn't shot the damned bitch. Give her the satisfaction of outliving him? He shook his head again.

Then, from the other side of no-man's-land, the Yankees started firing trench mortars. The bombs whistled cheerily as they fell. As he'd almost done for the leaflet, Pinkard threw himself flat. *"Hijos del diablo!"* Hip Rodriguez shouted as he dove down to the bottom of the trench, too.

Sons of the devil, that meant, and Pinkard couldn't have agreed more. Mortar bombs flew right down into a trench, as conventional artillery, with its flatter trajectory, often could not. Along the line, somebody shrieked as fragments pierced him.

Machine guns started to rattle, both from the Yankees' entrenchments and from the Confederate line under attack. "They're coming!" someone yelled.

Cursing, Jeff scrambled up. That made him more vulnerable to the mortar bombs, which kept on falling. Lying down and waiting for damnyankees to jump into the trench and shoot him or bayonet him was the worse side of that bargain, though.

Just as he gained his feet, a soldier in green-gray did leap down into the trench. Jeff thought he shot him before the Yankee's feet hit the dirt. As the fellow crumpled, Jeff shot him again. He groaned. His Springfield slipped from fingers that could hold it no longer. Blood poured from the wounds in his chest and from his mouth and nostrils. He was a dead man, even if he didn't quite know it yet.

His pals were intent on making Jefferson Pinkard a dead man, too. Jeff shot another Yankee just before the man could shoot him. The U.S. soldiers shouted to one another in their sharp accents. They seemed dismayed that the Confederates should be so alert and ready to fight. "How the hell we supposed to bring back prisoners like the lieutenant wants?" one of them called to another.

"Shit, I don't know," his friend answered. "I only hope to Jesus I bring myself back in one piece."

Here and there, parties of damnyankees were getting into the Confederate trenches. Then it became a stalking game, rushing out of traverses and into firebays, flinging grenades, and fighting vicious little battles with bayonet and entrenching tool.

Jefferson Pinkard didn't think he was trying to get himself killed. But he was at the fore of the party that swarmed out of a traverse to beat down the last U.S. squad still holding a length of firebay. He swung an entrenching tool with savage abandon, reveling in the resistance the flesh and bones of a Yankee's head gave to the edge of the tool, reveling also in the way the soldier in green-gray moaned and dropped his rifle and clutched at himself and toppled, all in the space of a couple of seconds.

Then the Yankees, those few who hadn't been shot or stabbed or other-wise put out of action, were fleeing over the parapet and back toward their own lines. "Have fun in the state of Houston, boys!" Pinkard shouted, taking a couple of potshots at the retreating U.S. soldiers. He thought he hit one of them; the others kept on running.

A couple of U.S. soldiers still lay groaning and wounded in the trench. Sergeant Albert Cross examined their injuries with experience gained in a lot of war. "They ain't gonna make it back to field hospitals still breathing," he said. "Christ, Pinkard, looks like you took off half this poor bastard's face with that damn shovel of yours."

"He wasn't there to give me a kiss, Sarge," Jeff answered.

"Didn't say he was," Cross replied equably. He pointed down the length of the firebay. "Might as well put these sons of bitches out of their misery."

Nobody moved for a few seconds. There wasn't a Confederate soldier in the trench who didn't hope somebody, regardless of whether friend or foe, would do him that favor if he ever lay in agony, horribly

wounded. That didn't mean many men were eager to do the job. Killing in cold blood, even for the sake of mercy, was different from killing in battle.

"I'll take care of it," Pinkard said at last. He loaded a new clip into his Tredegar and walked slowly down the trench line. Whenever he came across a U.S. soldier who was still breathing, he shot him in the head. One of the Yankees, whose guts spilled out onto the ground from a dreadful bayonet wound, thanked him as he pulled the trigger.

"They didn't buy anything cheap today," Sergeant Cross said.

"No," Jeff answered, "but they're in Texas and we ain't in New Mexico. "What the hell have we bought?" Cross didn't say another word..

XV

Lieutenant Gordon McSweeney peered across the Mississippi from the bushes on the low, swampy Arkansas bank to the bluffs on which sat Memphis, Tennessee. U.S. guns, painfully moved forward over roads that would have had to improve to be reckoned miserable, pounded away at the Confederate bastion.

Nor were the Confederates in the least shy about pounding back. They had a lot of guns in Memphis, and a lot of shells, too. Rail lines up from Mississippi made it easy for them to keep those guns supplied with munitions. Farther east, the course of the Tennessee River shielded Memphis from attack by the U.S. First Army.

And C.S. river gunboats dominated not only the course of the Tennessee but also this stretch of the Mississippi. The mines upstream remained too thick for U.S. monitors to make their way down and challenge the Confederate boats. That meant that, wherever the CSA wanted large-caliber guns to deliver their fire, they could—and they did. They'd hurt U.S. forces on the west bank of the river too many times already.

A U.S. field gun down by the riverbank not far from where McSweeney was standing presumed to fire on one of the river monitors flying the Confederate naval ensign. It hit the monitor square on the turret. The C.S. boat, though, was armored to withstand the shells of others of its kind. A hit from a three-inch gun got its attention but did no damage to speak of—the worst of both worlds.

Ponderously, the turret swung so that the pair of eight-inch guns inside bore on the field piece. Flame and great clouds of gray smoke belched from the muzzles of those eight-inch guns. A couple of seconds later, McSweeney heard the roar as the sound traveled across the water to his ear. An instant after that—or perhaps an instant before—the two shells launched from the guns blew the U.S. field piece and its crew to kingdom come. On steamed the gunboat, smug in its invulnerability.

"God have mercy on their souls," Gordon McSweeney murmured. He said not a word about the bodies of the brave but foolhardy U.S. gun crew. After those shells struck home, the gunners were fit for

burial in jam jars; coffins would have been wasted on their remains.

He'd watched that sort of thing happen too many times before. The United States might have finally reached the bank of the Mississippi, but the Confederate States still ruled this stretch of river. Some U.S. mines had gone into the muddy brown water, but McSweeney hadn't seen them do any good.

"If you want something done properly, do it yourself," he muttered under his breath. He was no expert with the mines both sides used in ocean and river warfare, but that did not worry him. The methods that sprang to his mind for disposing of a river monitor were considerably more direct.

He wished one of them involved his beloved flamethrower. He could not figure out how to use it without destroying himself along with the monitor, though. He sighed. God did not grant anyone everything he wanted.

If he asked permission to attack a Confederate river monitor, his superiors would surely tell him no. Accordingly, he asked nothing of anyone, save only the Lord. And the Lord provided . . . with a certain amount of help from Gordon McSweeney.

He already knew how to swim. He knew how to make a raft, too. After a little thought, he figured out that he would be wise to make the raft well upstream, to ensure that the current did not sweep him past the river monitor in stead of toward it. If he came out of the Mississippi without having done what he intended to do, he would be in trouble with the U.S. Army. If he came out on the wrong bank of the Mississippi, he would be a prisoner of war—unless the Rebs chose to shoot him, for he would certainly be out of uniform.

"Where are you going, sir?" a sentry asked as McSweeney left the com pany perimeter.

"To reconnoiter," he answered, a response that had the virtue of being true and uninformative at the same time.

Another sentry, a man who did not know McSweeney, asked him the same question when he left the battalion perimeter. He gave the same answer, and got by the same way he had with the soldier from his company. The sentry was not inclined to quarrel with an obvious U.S. officer who sounded short-tempered and was armed to the teeth.

McSweeney would have shown just how short-tempered he was had any one come across the raft he'd hidden behind bushes and underbrush. But there it was when he pulled the brush aside. He stripped off his clothes, loaded his weapons aboard the raft, and pushed off into the river. No one paid any attention to the small splashing noises he made.

The Mississippi was warm. The mud it carried didn't keep a couple of fish from finding him and nibbling at him. What he would have done if an alligator or snapping turtle had come up to investigate him was a question he was glad he did not have to answer.

He kicked hard, propelling the raft out toward the middle of the Mississippi. One thing he had not taken into account was his small circle of vision with his eyes only a few inches above the water. If he drifted past the C.S. river monitor without spying it, he would feel worse than just foolish.

There it was! That long, low shape, with almost no freeboard, couldn't be anything else. Someone had described the original *Monitor* as a cheese box on a raft, which also fit its descendants, both U.S. and C.S., to a tee—although the Confederates billed theirs as river gunboats, refusing to name their kind after a U.S. warship.

McSweeney hung onto the raft with his fingertips, letting as little of him self show as he could. His scheme would have been impossible had the C.S. vessel's deck been higher above the waterline. As things were, it was just insanely foolhardy. Gordon McSweeney had been doing insanely foolhardy things since the war began. If God willed that he die doing one of them, die he would, praising His name with his last breath.

He wondered what sort of watch the Confederate sailors kept on deck. He knew they didn't patrol with electric torches. Had they been foolish enough to do so, U.S. sharpshooters on the western bank of the Mississippi would have made them regret it.

He had to kick hard to keep the raft from gliding past the Confederate monitor and down the river. Grabbing the .45 and the sack of rubberized canvas he'd carried on the raft, he scrambled up onto the monitor's deck. His bare feet made not a sound on the riveted iron. Somewhere aft, a sentry was pacing; his shoes clanked on the deck.

And here he came. He moved without any particular urgency, but

as much on his appointed rounds as a postman might have done. McSweeney had no trouble keeping the turret between himself and the man who strode on through the darkness, never expecting trouble could come on his watch when the Confederate States so dominated this stretch of the Mississippi River.

Whether he expected it or not, trouble shared the deck with him. Mc Sweeney undid the sack and drew from it two one-pound blocks of TNT, twenty seconds' worth of fuse for each, and a match safe that had stood up to all the rain and mud nearly three years in the trenches had thrown at it. The matches inside rattled. He glared at them, willing them to be silent, then crimped the fuses to the explosive blocks.

Silent himself, he scuttled round the turret to the openings from which the barrels of the monitors' big guns projected. Once he got there, he reluctantly set down the .45 so he could take a match out of the trusty safe and strike it.

The hiss of the match as it caught was tiny. So was the light that came from it. One or the other, though, alerted the sentry. "Who goes there?" he demanded, his voice suddenly sharp and alert.

"Damnation," McSweeney muttered, and only saved himself from the blasphemy he so despised by hastily adding, "to the enemies of the Lord." He lit the fuses attached to the explosive blocks, tossed them inside the monitor's turret, as far to the back as he could, and snatched up the pistol once more.

"Who goes there?" the sentry repeated. Now his shoes rang on the deck as he hurried to investigate.

McSweeney fired three quick rounds at him. One of them must have hit, for the Reb let out a shriek. McSweeney didn't care, except insofar as the fellow didn't get a chance to shoot at him. He threw away the pistol and dove into the Mississippi. He'd cut things too fine, both metaphorically and, with the fuses, literally as well.

He swam away from the monitor as fast as he could. He tried to go as deep as he could. His ears ached in protest. He ignored them, knowing better than they what was about to happen.

No matter how muddy the Mississippi was, suddenly the surface of the water, high over his head, lit up bright as day, bright as hellfire. The explosion behind him sent him tumbling through the

water, more than half stunned. Why he didn't open his mouth and breathe in half the river, he never knew. Either the Lord watched over him or he was simply too stubborn to drown.

After a while, his lungs told him he had to breathe or die. By then, the chunks of iron—some of them bigger than he was—had stopped raining down out of the sky. When he broke the surface, he was amazed he'd swum so far from the Confederate monitor—till he remembered the explosion had given him a big push.

He'd hoped his explosives would touch off the magazine inside the turret, and had they! Had they ever! *Bombs bursting in air,* he thought as one explosion followed another. God had wanted him to live, and so he lived. Surely no one aboard the monitor did, not now. He struck out for the Arkansas bank of the river. His slow backstroke let him rest whenever he needed.

Alarm tingled through him when he finally splashed up onto the bank of the Mississippi. What if the current had swept him beyond the limits of U.S.-held territory and into land the Rebels still controlled? Then he would have to make his way north, that was all. As long as he was on the right side of the river, being captured never entered his mind.

The sentry who challenged him when he came up onto the land was a pure Yankee, from Maine or New Hampshire. He didn't believe McSweeney's explanation of who he was or why he was naked. Neither did his superior, nor that fellow's superior, either.

Calm as could be, McSweeney kept explaining who he was, what he'd done, and how he'd done it. They gave him clothes. Eventually, they got hold of his service record. That made them argue less and gape more. Then they found out he wasn't with the company where he was supposed to be, which made them begin to wonder if he might not be in front of them after all.

It was mid-morning before they brought Ben Carlton down to identify him. When Carlton did, they stared and stared. "Oak-leaf cluster," they kept muttering. "Medal of Honor with an oak-leaf cluster. Who would dare write up the citation, though? Who would believe it?"

"Can you please send me back to my unit?" McSweeney asked. "I've had a long night, and I'm very tired." Everyone kept right on staring at him.

Scipio wished he were anywhere but trapped in the swamps by the Congaree River. He'd wished that ever since Anne Colleton sent him here. He'd never wished it so intensely as now.

From out on the perimeter, the fighters of the Congaree Socialist Republic kept up a continuous crackle of fire. The Confederate militiamen were not nearly so good, man for man, as the Reds, but they had more men and, finally, what looked to be a determination to press the fight.

Cassius looked worried. Scipio had never before seen Cassius look wor ried, not even when the CSA put down the larger version of the Congaree Socialist Republic, the version that had tried to carry the Red revolution to a wide stretch of South Carolina.

"Damn that Cherry!" he burst out now. "She don' listen to nobody but her ownself, an' she weren't as smart as she reckon she were. An' now she ain't here no more, an' I feels like I's missin' my lef hand."

"Maybe you is," Scipio said, "but maybe you is just as well off without it, too. If she was your left hand, you was always watchin' it to make sure it don't stab you in the back."

"Now I knows that ain't a lie, but I misses she all de same," Cassius answered. "What she do, she do for the sake o' the revolution. Anything gits in the way o' the revolution, she sure as hell push it off to de side." He sighed. "She sure as hell try and push me off to de side, you right about dat. But even so, I misses she. She hate de 'pressors more'n anything in the whole wide world."

Scipio remained not the least bit sorry he'd mailed that letter to Anne Col leton. "Kin hate too much," he said.

"Mebbe." Cassius shrugged. "Sure as hell wish she was shootin' at de damn buckra, though."

"Yeah, she do dat good," Scipio allowed, as if making a great concession. " 'Course, she shoot at anything that strike she fancy. She shoot at de buckra, or else she shoot at you or me or anything else."

"She committed to de revolution," Cassius repeated. "She shoot anybody, she reckon dey gets in de way o' de revolution. She screw anybody, she reckon dat help de revolution. She screw Miss Anne's

gassed brother till he don't know up from Tuesday." He scowled at that. He might have recognized the revolutionary need for it while it was going on, but he hadn't liked it then. He still didn't.

"Marse Jacob, he dead," Scipio said quietly, reminding the leader of the Congaree Socialist Republic. Off in the distance, the crackle of gunfire in creased. "All o' we gwine be dead, too, we don't figure out what the devil we do 'bout they buckra pretty damn quick."

Cassius didn't even disagree with him, not directly. He said, "Even if we's dead, de revolution go on widout we."

Scipio would sooner have gone on without the revolution than the other way round. Saying as much struck him as highly inexpedient. Just then, a series of rending crashes off to the northwest made him peer in that direction. "The militia find some shells for they artillery again," he said, and then, "Do Jesus! Ain't we got a camp over yonder, 'bout where that stuff come down?"

"We does—or maybe we done did." Cassius frowned. "I don't reckon de buckra knowed about dat place. I don't reckon nobody who don't live in de swamps could know about dat place."

Traitors. The word hung in the air as clearly as if the Red leader had spo ken it aloud. Any talk of traitors inevitably became talk of Scipio, too. He knew it. For once, though, he was innocent. He had betrayed Cherry, but not the camp. But somebody was liable to jump to the wrong conclusion in this particular case, which would also put him in trouble.

Before Cassius could so much as turn his eyes toward Scipio in specula tion, both men looked up at a noise in the sky. Scipio, for a wonder, spotted the aeroplane before Cassius did. It was, as far as aeroplanes went, an antique: an ungainly biplane with a pusher propeller, all struts and booms and wires. Against the swift, sleek fighting scouts the USA put in the air these days, the ugly machine wouldn't have survived five minutes. But it was plenty good for spying on the men of the Congaree Socialist Republic.

Cassius figured that out as fast as Scipio did. "Ain't fair!" he shouted furi ously. "Shitfire, Kip, it ain't fair. If the buckra looks down on the swamp like a man look through the cabin window when a pretty woman take off she dress, how we gwine stay hid?"

That was a good question. As far as Scipio could see, that was *the*

good question. He shook his head. No, there was one other. He asked it: "You reckon that pilot got one o' they wireless telegraph machines up there with he?"

"Don't rightly know," Cassius answered. "Do Jesus, though, I hope he don't."

That hope, like so many hopes of the Congaree Socialist Republic, was shortly to be dashed. The aeroplane flew back and forth, back and forth, over the encampment. A few of Cassius' men fired rifles and machine guns at it. It was too high for any of that to damage or even alarm it. Back and forth, back and forth.

Cassius cursed horribly for the next couple of minutes. That did no good, either. He had no more than a couple of minutes to curse. After that, shells started falling on the encampment where he and Scipio had been talking.

The first few explosions were long, and off to Scipio's right. The next couple were short, and off to his left. Sure as hell, the pilot must have had a wireless telegraph in his flying machine, and used it to correct the aim of the gunners firing at the encampment. The first correction had been excessive, but he'd seen where those shells fell, too. After that—

"Do Jesus!" Scipio screeched through the wail of falling shells. "These ones is comin' down right on top o' we!"

Cassius must have said something by way of reply. Whatever it was, though, Scipio didn't hear it. He'd been right and more than right—the shells were coming down on top of him and on top of the biggest encampment the men of the Congaree Socialist Republic had maintained in the swamps by the river that gave them their name.

Scipio threw himself flat. He had seen enough of war to have learned that lesson. Cassius sprawled on the ground a few feet away from him. Mud rained down on them as shell fragments chewed up the landscape all around. Through the explosions, men screamed like lost souls. More shell fragments and shrapnel balls hissed through the air. Something that was not mud fell almost harmlessly on Scipio's back. Almost harmlessly—it was hot enough to burn. With an oath, he knocked away the hunk of brass.

Overhead, the aeroplane kept circling and circling. The pilot could spot exactly how much damage the artillerymen were doing, and let

them know where to send the next few shells. The Confederate States had been doing that sort of thing against the United States since 1914. Now the men of the Congaree Socialist Republic were getting a taste of how effective it could be.

"Scatter!" Cassius shouted. "Git out o' de camp. Git under the trees an' de bushes. Dat buckra pilot up dere cain't see we, he cain't tell de buckra at the guns where to put they shells. Scatter!"

Along with the rest of the Negroes in the encampment, Scipio fled into the forest. He paid no attention to which way he was running, so long as it was away from the unending thunder of the Confederate militia's cannon. A man not twenty feet in front of him was blown to red rags when a shell exploded between his legs. There wasn't enough left of him to scream. Scipio shuddered and kept running. If he'd run faster, that might have been him.

No one paid him any special attention as he blundered through the lush woods and the mud. For the first time since Anne Colleton's machinations had forced him back into the shrunken Congaree Socialist Republic, he was on his own. Running for his life from the bombardment, he needed a while to figure out what that meant. He wasn't thinking so clearly as he might have been had unfriendly strangers not been doing their best to kill him.

Only when he paused to lie panting under a pine did he realize the bombardment gave him an opportunity the likes of which he had not known since entering the swamp. If he was lucky enough, he might escape. If he wasn't lucky and he tried it, he'd end up dead, of course. Sometimes he told himself he would sooner die than go on living in the swamps by the Congaree. Unfortunately, he knew what a liar he was.

Still, if he never tasted scrambled turtle eggs again, he wouldn't shed a tear. Now that he was farther from the artillery bombardment, he noted that the small-arms fire was heavier and closer than it had been. The Confederate militiamen really were doing their best to hammer the Congaree Socialist Republic flat this time. Maybe they would.

If they saw him, he'd be just another Red nigger to them, just another rebel to shoot or bayonet so their vision of what the Confederate States should be could go forward. If they saw him . . . The problem, then, was to make sure they didn't see him.

Had he been the woodsman Cassius was, it would have been easy. Even being the poor excuse for a woodsman he truly was, he'd got beyond most of the firing before a white man snapped, "Halt! Who goes there?"

Scipio peered through the brush that screened him. The militiaman point ing a Tredegar his way might have been handsome once, but some disaster had ruined the left side of his face. He was going to shoot if Scipio didn't satisfy him right away. Scipio tried, using his best butler's tones to say, "Carry on, Sergeant. The sooner we rid these nasty swamps of the God-damned Red niggers who infest them, the better off our beloved country shall be."

Had he laid it on too thick? Sometimes, when he used that voice, he sounded more like an Englishman than an educated white Confederate. But the militiaman with the slagged face was satisfied. "Yes, sir!" he said, and plunged deeper into the swamp. He couldn't possibly have known who Scipio was, but assumed anyone who talked the way he did had to be an officer.

"Thank you, Miss Anne," Scipio whispered as he made his way farther and farther from the Congaree. Teaching him how to talk like an educated white man hadn't been for his benefit—having a butler who could talk like that had given Marshlands more swank. It had also made him a white crow, one who couldn't fully fit in with the rest of the Negroes on the plantation. He'd hated it while it was going on. Now it just might have saved his life.

If he kept going straight away from the swamp, he'd emerge somewhere near the ruins of the Marshlands mansion. He didn't want to do that. Too many people around there were liable to recognize him. He swung to the west, guiding himself by the sun as best he could. He came out in a cotton field that was, like so many others in this part of the country, untended and overrun with weeds. He was filthy and exhausted. He didn't care. He didn't care even a little bit. He'd escaped Anne Colleton and Cassius, too. He was, for the time being, a free man again.

Chester Martin was not the only U.S. sergeant commanding a company in Virginia these days. They might eventually get around to promoting him or bringing in an officer to take over. On the other hand, they might not. They might just keep putting more young privates under him, sending them forward, and seeing what the hell

happened next. Somewhere not far away, there was supposed to be a regiment led by a first lieutenant, the outfit's senior officer who was alive and in one piece.

Even a year before, rank would have worried him more than it did today. Today, all he wanted to do was get on with the attack, however it went in. He had trouble believing he was actually eager to go forward. Nor was he the only one. Corporal Bob Reinholdt, who had been furious at not getting a section but was now commanding one, looked up from the Springfield he was cleaning and said, "One more good push and these bastards are going to roll over and play dead."

"That's about the size of it, I think," Martin agreed. "Never thought I'd say it, but they don't snap back the way they used to."

Tilden Russell remained a private, too, but he was leading a squad in Martin's shrunken company. He might lack rank, but he had experience. He said, "The Rebs are like an inner tube with a little tiny leak. They look fine till you press on 'em, but then they give."

Martin whistled, a low, respectful note. "That's not half bad, Tilden. You ought to think about writing for the newspapers when the war's done."

When the war's done. The words hung in the air. For a long time—from the minute the fighting started up to his own getting shot and beyond—the war had seemed to stretch out forever ahead of Martin. If he wasn't still fighting thirty years from now, his sons or grandsons would be, if he found time to marry and beget any on his infrequent leaves. The only way out he'd seen was getting killed—and he'd seen a lot of that.

Now .. . now it was different. As he rolled himself a cigarette, he thought about how. Reinholdt and Russell had defined the difference as well as he heard it defined. "If we keep pressing on 'em, sooner or later they'll go flat. I'm finally starting to think it'll be sooner."

It hadn't happened yet. Confederate artillery south of Manassas started banging away at the U.S. lines threatening the town. Those lines weren't so deeply entrenched nor so well furnished with dugouts as many of the ones in which Martin had previously served: they were too new to have acquired what he'd come to think of as the amenities of trench life. He threw himself down in the dirt and hoped he wouldn't be like Moses, dying before he entered the promised land of

peace. Of course, no one had promised that land to him.

After a while, the barrage eased. He braced for a Confederate counterattack to follow it, but none came. The Rebs still fought ferociously on defense, but they didn't hit back so hard or so often as they once had—another sign, as Tilden Russell had said, that their inner tube had sprung a leak. Martin wished the Army could have pinned them against the Potomac from the west before they could pull out of Washington. That might have ended the war right there.

As things were, he was glad to get to his feet. He was glad to have feet to get to, and arms, and everything else he'd had before the shelling started. Here and there, wounded men and their pals were shouting for stretcher-bearers. He gauged the cries with practiced ears. The company hadn't been hurt too badly, not as a group. The unlucky soldiers who were the exceptions wouldn't have seen things the same way.

A couple of hours later, as afternoon drifted toward evening, a fellow who looked no older than Martin but who had gold oak leaves on his shoulder straps came down the trench. "I'm looking for the company commander," he called.

"You've found him, sir," Martin said, and jabbed a thumb at his own chest.

The major looked surprised, but only for a moment. "All right, Sergeant. Looks like you got your job the same way I got mine."

"Yes, sir: I'm still breathing," Martin answered.

"Fair enough," the major said with a laugh. "I'm Gideon Adkins. Hap pens that I'm the senior officer still breathing in this regiment, so the 91st is mine till they send somebody to take my place—if they ever get around to that."

"We're in the same boat, all right, sir," Martin said. "Let's get down to business. What do you need from B Company?"

Adkins studied him. He knew what was in the major's mind—the same thing that would be in a brigadier general's mind when he studied Adkins: can this man do the job, or do we need to replace him? If they did replace Martin, he hoped he wouldn't be as resentful as Bob Reinholdt had been when he first joined the company.

Well, Major Adkins couldn't complain about the question he'd asked. Indeed, the young regimental commander said, "That's the spirit, Sergeant..."

"Oh, sorry, sir. I'm Chester Martin."

"Thanks, Sergeant Martin. Wish I didn't have to ask, but I'm still learning the ropes, too, no doubt about it. All right, here's what you need to know: in three days, we go over the top. First objective is Manassas. Second objective is Independent Hill." Adkins drew a much-folded map from his breast pocket and pointed the hill out to Martin.

After he glanced at the scale of miles, Martin raised his eyebrows. "Sir, that looks to be eight or ten miles past Manassas. If they're setting that as an objective for this attack, they do think the Confederate States are ready to throw in the sponge."

"If they aren't, we're going to make them throw it in anyhow," Gideon Adkins declared. "That's what this attack is all about. We'll have plenty of barrels to throw at them, and plenty of aeroplanes, and they'll be bringing forward some new light machine guns that'll do a better job of keeping up with a rapid advance."

"That all sounds good, sir." Martin gave a wry smile. "And there'll be plenty of us old-fashioned, garden-variety infantrymen around, to do whatever the barrels and the aeroplanes and the machine guns can't."

"Infantrymen?" Major Adkins made as if he'd never heard the word. Then he laughed and slapped Martin on the back. "Yes, I expect there'll be something or other for old-fashioned critters like us to do."

Martin spread the word to the other sergeants who commanded the pla toons in his company. They had all seen a lot of fighting. One of them said, "Well, it's been going better lately, but ain't a one of us'd have the job he's doing right now if it'd been going what you'd call good." That summed up the course of the war so well, nobody tried to improve on it.

Barrels came forward under cover of night. They went into position be hind the front line, shielded from snoopy Confederates by canvas when the sun rose. Even so, they were about as hard to hide as a herd of elephants in church. U.S. aeroplanes did their best to keep Rebel observers in the sky from flying over territory the United States

held.

As had the other recent offensives, this one opened with a short, sharp ar tillery barrage, designed more to startle and paralyze than to crush. Nobody had bothered to issue Chester Martin a whistle—even if he was commanding a company, he wasn't an officer. "Come on, boys!" he shouted. "A couple more kicks and the doors fall down."

A lot of soldiers would fall down, too, fall down and never get up again. Martin wondered how many times he'd gone over the top now. The only answer he came up with was, *too many.* As machine-gun and rifle bullets whipped around him, he wondered why the hell he'd done it even once. For the life of him—literally, for the life of him—he came up with no answer.

The barrels behind which the infantry advanced forced their way through the Confederates' forward line. U.S. fighting scouts buzzed low overhead, adding their machine-gun fire to that from the barrels—and that from the light machine guns Major Adkins had talked about. Having along firepower more potent than that which Springfields could provide felt very good to a veteran foot soldier.

Here and there, Rebel machine-gun nests and knots of stubborn soldiers in butternut, some white men, some colored, held up the U.S. advance. Martin's bayonet had blood on it before he got out of the trench system. Rebel artillery, though outgunned, remained scrappy. And the Rebels had barrels of their own, if not so many as those that bore down on them.

Yet, even though resistance was heavy in spots, the Army of Northern Vir ginia yielded its forward positions more readily than Chester Martin had ever seen it do before. As the soldiers in green-gray broke out of the trenches and into open country, he spotted Bob Reinholdt not far away. "This is too damn easy," he called. "The Rebs have to have something up their sleeve."

"Reckon you're right," Reinholdt answered, "but to hell with me if I know what it is. I'm going to enjoy this while it lasts."

"Yeah, me, too," Martin said. He didn't enjoy it long, because the Army of Northern Virginia did have something up its sleeve. It had put fewer men into the forward trenches than usual, its generals perhaps aware that, no matter what they did, they could not withstand the first U.S. blow.

Once the first line was pierced, though . . . The Confederates had machine guns cunningly concealed in every cornfield. They had snipers in every other pine and oak. The ground south of their front line was more stubbornly defended than Martin remembered from earlier fights. He tried to think strategically. In those earlier fights, the Rebs defending open country had been men forced from their trenches. Here, the Confederates had planned from the beginning to fight in the open, and they showed a nasty talent for it.

Martin got to hate cornfields in a hurry. The plants stood taller than a man. You couldn't see more than one row at a time. Anything might be lurking among them. All too often, it was. Machine guns, trip wires, foxholes .. . anything at all.

His company managed to bypass the fighting for Manassas itself, skirting it to the west. Before long, by the sound of things, the town was cut off and surrounded, but the Confederates inside showed no signs of quit: they kept banging away at the U.S. soldiers with whatever they had.

"Come on!" Martin yelled as a Wright two-decker, which could see better than he could, poured fire on the Rebs in a field ahead. The objective lines on Major Adkins' map had seemed insanely optimistic. They were. The soldiers weren't going to reach those set for the first day, even if Manassas would fall soon. Martin rolled himself in a blanket when night came and wearily thanked God he was still breathing.

The next day was another grim blur, as the Rebs brought reinforcements forward and tried to counterattack. The U.S. soldiers, glad to play defense for a little while, took savage pleasure in mowing them down. By that evening, the Confederates couldn't find any more troops who would press home a counterattack. Their raw recruits would make a halfhearted lunge, then fall back in disorder and dismay when rifle and machine-gun bullets began to bite. By noon the next day, a day behind the preordained schedule but far ahead of Chester Martin's fondest dreams, he stood atop Independent Hill—a knob barely deserving the name—and peered south, wondering where the next push would take him.

Somewhere north of Independent Hill, Jake Featherston and what was left of his battery—what was left of the First Richmond Howitzers, what was left of the Army of Northern Virginia—tried to hold back

the tide with bare hands. He was filthy; he couldn't remember the last time he'd had leisure even to splash in a creek. His butternut uniform, aside from being out at the knees and elbows, had enough green splotches on it to make him look halfway like a damnyankee.

The real damnyankees were forcing their way across Cedar Run. He'd ex pected they would be any time now, and had taken the range for his guns. "Let's give it to them, boys," he shouted, and the four surviving guns of the battery began banging away. Peering through field glasses, he watched the explosions a couple of miles to the north. The shells were falling right where he wanted them to: on the leading Yankees and trailing Confederates.

He was the man with the binoculars. The rest of his gun crews couldn't tell exactly where the rounds were coming down. That wasn't their job; it was his. If the Confederate stragglers caught a little hell from their own side, too damn bad. *Odds are they're niggers anyway,* he thought.

Retreating infantry streamed past the battery to either side. Some of the men falling back were indeed colored. Others, to Jake's disgust, were white. "Why don't you fight the goddamn sons of bitches?" he shouted at them.

"Fuck you," one of the infantrymen shouted back. "Got your damn nerve yellin' at us when you lousy bastards ain't never been up in a trench in all your born days. Hope the damnyankees run right over you, give you a taste of what real for-true soldierin' is like."

Featherston's temper went up like an ammunition dump. "Canister!" he shouted, fully intending to turn his gun on the infantryman who'd talked back to him—and on the fellow's pals, too. "Load me a round of canister, damn your eyes. I'll teach that asshole to run his mouth when he don't know what he's talkin' about."

"Sorry, Sarge, don't reckon we got any more canister," Michael Scott said. That was a damn lie, and Featherston knew it was a damn lie. He cussed his loader up one side and down the other. By the time he was through, the offending soldiers were around a stand of trees and out of sight. Scott probably thought that meant they were forgotten, but he underestimated Jake, who never forgot a slight, even when he could do nothing about it.

This was one of those times. Regardless of his shelling, the Yankees kept right on crossing Cedar Run. A few aeroplanes

emblazoned with the Confederate battle flag swooped down on them. But more U.S. fighting scouts raked the soldiers in butternut who were trying to hold them back.

Despite the aeroplanes, despite the Yankees' numbers, Featherston thought for a while that the Army of Northern Virginia would be able to hold them not too far south of Cedar Run. From his own position on slightly higher ground, he was able to watch U.S. assaults crumple in the face of fire from the machine guns the Confederates had posted in cornfields and woods.

"Those fields'll raise a fine crop of dead men," he said with a chuckle, turning the elevation screw to shorten the range on his own field piece.

But the men in green-gray did not give up, despite the casualties they took. In almost three years of war, Jake had come to know the enemy well. The Yan kees made more stolid soldiers than the men alongside of whom he'd gone to war. They weren't quite so quick to exploit advantages as were their Confederate counterparts. That coin had two sides, though, for they kept coming even after losses that might have torn the heart out of a C.S. attack.

As usual these days, they had barrels leading the way, too. Featherston whooped with glee when one of the guns from his battery set a traveling fortress on fire. "Burn now and burn in hell, you sons of bitches!" he shouted. He hoped they did burn. That would hurt the damnyankees, for every barrel carried inside it a couple of squads' worth of men.

For every U.S. barrel Confederate artillery or Confederate tanks—Jake still sneered whenever the term crossed his mind—knocked out, though, two or three more kept waddling forward. And the Yankees' front-line troops seemed to have an ungodly number of machine guns, too. Featherston recognized the muzzle flashes that went on and on as the guns fired burst after burst at the C.S. troops resisting them.

In disgust, he turned to Michael Scott. "There's somethin' else we'll get around to trying in six, eight months—maybe a year—or we would, 'cept the goddamn war'll be lost to hell and gone by then," he said.

"Those can't be regular machine guns," the loader replied. "They're keep ing up with the rest of the damnyankee infantry way too good for that. Yankees must've turned out some lightweight models."

"So why the hell ain't we?" Featherston asked, a good question without a good answer. Not long before, he'd reckoned U.S. soldiers stolid in the way they fought. There was, unfortunately, nothing stolid about their War Department. He spat in disgust. "Those white-bearded fools down in Richmond shouldn't ever have started this here fight if they didn't reckon they could whip the USA."

"They did reckon that." Steady as if he were attacking New York instead of defending Richmond, Scott loaded yet another shell into the breech of the quick-firing three-inch. Featherston made a minute adjustment to the traversing screw, then nodded. Scott yanked the lanyard. The gun bellowed. Scott opened the breech. Out fell the shell casing, to land with a clank on one of the many others the piece had already fired. As he placed the next shell in the breech, the loader went on, "Maybe they weren't quite right this time."

"Yeah—maybe." A rattlesnake might have carried more venom in its mouth than Jake Featherston did, but not much more. He fiddled with the traversing screw again—the Yankee machine gun at which he'd aimed the last shell was still blazing away. When he was satisfied, he yelled, "Fire!" The field gun roared again. He took off his tin hat and waved it in the air when that lightweight gun—Scott had made a shrewd guess there—abruptly fell silent.

Darkness slowed the carnage, but didn't stop it. Featherston slept by his gun, in fitful snatches when the firing died down for a while. Ammunition did come forward to his guns, but U.S. bombing aeroplanes kept thundering by low overhead and dropping their loads deep behind the Confederate line. Troops and munitions would have a harder time moving up in the morning.

When the skirmishing along the front line picked up, he fired a few rounds at where he thought the damnyankees were. Michael Scott wasn't so sure. "Haven't you shortened the range so much, those'll be dropping on our own boys?" he asked.

"Don't reckon so," Jake answered. "Yanks'll likely have moved up a bit since we could see where they were at. And if they haven't, well, what the hell? Odds are I'm just blowing up some coons."

Fighting grew heavy before sunrise. As soon as black turned to gray, the two armies started going at each other—or rather, the U.S. forces started going at the Army of Northern Virginia, which fought desperately to hold back the onslaught. The damnyankees had brought soldiers and supplies forward during the night, too, and

threw everything they had into the fight.

For a couple of hours, in spite of his gibes about the fools in Richmond and his contempt for the Negroes surely manning a large part of the line in front of him, Featherston dared hope that line would hold. The Yankees crept within a couple of thousand yards of his position—close enough that occasional rifle and machine-gun bullets whistled by—and stalled.

But then, no doubt saved for just such an emergency, fifteen or twenty barrels painted green-gray rumbled over pontoon bridges thrown across Cedar Run and straight at the outnumbered, outgunned men in butternut. Jake looked wildly in all directions. Where were the Confederate barrels that could blunt the slow-moving charge of the U.S. machines?

He saw none. There were none to see. He shouted to his gun, to his bat tery: "It's up to us. If we don't stop them fuckers, nobody does."

They did what they could do. Three or four barrels went up in flames, sending pillars of black smoke high into the sky to mark their funeral pyres. But the rest kept coming, through the woods, through the fields, straight at him—and straight through what was left of the Army of Northern Virginia's line.

And the line gave way. He'd seen that up at Round Hill: a sea of panic- stricken men in butternut streaming back toward him. He'd hoped he'd never see anything like it again. But here it was. These soldiers—some white, more colored—had had all the fighting they could stand. The only thing left in their minds was escaping the oncoming foe.

They might have had a better chance if they'd stayed and tried to hold back the U.S. soldiers. Infantrymen in green-gray and barrel crews were not the least bit shy about shooting fleeing Confederates in the back.

Featherston would cheerfully have shot them in the back, too. He didn't have that choice, since they were coming his way. "Fight!" he shouted to the infantrymen. "Turn around and fight, God damn you!" They didn't. They wouldn't. As he had at Round Hill, as he had when the soldier cursed him the day before, he shouted, "Canister! If I can't do it any other way, I'll send 'em back on account of they're more afraid of me than they ever dreamt of being afraid of the damnyankees."

Michael Scott objected again: "Sarge, God only knows how come we didn't get crucified the last time we did that. If we do it again—"

Featherston did not intend to let his loader balk him, not now. He drew his pistol. "I'll load and fire it myself if I have to," he snarled. Then, over open sights, he aimed the gun at the Confederate soldiers heading his way. Scott could have drawn his own weapon. Instead, white-faced, he loaded the round Jake had demanded. Jake pulled the lanyard himself. He shrieked out a Rebel yell when the worthless, cowardly scum in butternut vanished from before the gun as if swept aside by a broom. He might have hit some of the Yankees close on their heels, too.

But the canister rounds—he fired several—did not, could not, stem the rout, any more than they had at Round Hill. The infantry *would* run, and he could not stop them. Save for the ones he killed and maimed, the men in butternut fled past him. Black soldiers and white cried out in amazement that he did not flee, too.

"Cowards!" he shouted at them in turn. "Filthy, stinking, rotten cowards! Stand and fight, damn you all. You're stabbing your country in the back."

And then the Yankees were well within canister range. He gave them sev eral rounds, too, to make them go to ground. That bought him time to limber up his guns and abandon his own position. He could not hold if everything around him fell. All four guns got out.

"Backstabbers," he muttered as he trudged south past Independent Hill. "Nothing but filthy backstabbers. I'll pay them all back one day, every goddamn one of them, so help me Jesus I will."

Sam Carsten shoveled in beans and smoked sausage and sauerkraut alongside dozens of other men in the galley. The USS *Dakota* rolled as he ate, but the tables were mounted on gimbals. The rolling wasn't nearly enough to make his food end up in his lap.

Across the table from him, Vic Crosetti grinned and poured down coffee. "Well, you were right, you lucky son of a bitch—we're still down here and it's turning into winter. You don't toast for a while longer yet."

"Oh, come on," Sam said mildly. "Yeah, it's winter, but it's not

winter, if you know what I mean. Just kind of gray and gloomy, that's all. It's like San Francisco winter, kind of. That's not so bad."

"Yeah, that's not so bad," Crosetti said, with the air of a man granting a great and undeserved favor, "but it ain't so goddamn good, neither. If we was back in the Sandwich Islands now, I'd be laying under a palm tree with one of those what-do-you-call-'em flowers in my hair—"

"Hibiscus?" Carsten said.

"Yeah, one of them," Crosetti agreed. "With a hibiscus flower in my hair and with my arm around a broad. I'd be suckin' up a cold drink, or maybe she'd be suckin' up somethin' else. But no, it's winter out in the goddamn South Atlantic, and you, you son of a bitch, you're *happy* about it."

"You bet I am," Carsten said. "For one thing, back at Pearl Harbor we might get leave once in a while, yeah, but they'd work our tails off the rest of the time, harder'n they're working us now when we aren't fighting. That's one thing, mind you. You know damn well what the other one is."

"Sure as hell do." Crosetti cackled like a hen just delivered of an egg. "Layin' under a palm tree wouldn't do you one single, stinking, solitary bit of good. Everybody'd reckon you were the roast pig they was supposed to eat for supper, 'cept maybe you wouldn't have an apple in your mouth. God help you if you did, though."

"Jesus!" Sam had been swigging coffee himself. He had everything he could do to keep it from coming out his nose. "Don't make me laugh like that again. Especially don't make me laugh like that and want to deck you at the same time." He put down the coffee mug and made a fist—a pale, pale fist.

Vic Crosetti grinned again, no doubt ready with another snappy comeback. *Damn smartmouth wop,* Carsten thought with wry affection, bracing himself to laugh and get furious at the same time again. But instead of sticking the needle in him one more time, Crosetti jumped from his seat and sprang to attention. So did Sam, wondering why the devil Commander Grady was coming into the galley.

"As you were, men," the commander of the starboard secondary arma ment said. "This isn't a snap inspection."

"Then what the hell is it?" Crosetti mumbled as he sat down again. Carsten would have said the same thing if his bunkmate hadn't beaten him to it. Several sailors let out quiet—but not quite quiet enough—sighs of relief.

"I have an announcement to make," Grady said, "an announcement that will affect the *Dakota* and our mission. We have just received word by wireless telegraph that the Empire of Brazil has declared war on the United Kingdom, the Republic of France, the Confederate States of America, and the Republic of Argentina." He grinned now, an expression of pure exultation. "How about that, boys?"

For a few seconds, the big compartment was absolutely still. Then it erupted in bedlam. At any other time, a passing officer would have angrily broken up the disturbance and assigned punishment to every man jack in there. Now Commander Grady, showing his teeth like a chimpanzee in the zoo, pounded on the bulkhead and whooped louder than anybody else.

"Dom Pedro knows whose ship is sinking, and it isn't ours!" Carsten shouted.

"Good-bye, England!" Crosetti yelled, and waved at Sam as if he were King George. "So long, pal! Be seein' you—be seein' you starve."

"Hell of a lot longer run from Buenos Aires to west Africa than it is from Pernambuco," Sam said through the din, as if he were seeing things from Rear Admiral Bradley Fiske's cabin. "And with Brazil in the war on our side, we'll be able to use their ports, and they'll have some ships of their own they'll throw into the pot." As he weighted the sudden, enormous change, his smile got wider and wider. "Near as I can see, the limeys are a lobster in the pot, and the water's starting to boil."

"Near as I can see, you're right." Vic Crosetti nodded emphatically. Then he leered at Carsten. "And you know what else?"

"No, what?" Sam asked.

"Near as I can see, you're a lobster in the pot, and the water's starting to boil, too," Crosetti answered. "If we go up into Brazilian waters, buddy, that might as well be Pearl Harbor." He pantomimed putting on a bib. "Waiter! Some drawn butter, and make it snappy."

"You go to hell," Carsten said, but he was laughing, too.

"Maybe I will," the swarthy Italian sailor answered, "but if we head to Brazil, you'll burn ahead of me, and that's a promise."

He was right. Sam knew only too well how right he was. All at once, the big, fair sailor dug into the unappetizing dinner before him. "I better eat quick," he said with his mouth full, "so I can get to the pharmacist's mate before I have to go back on duty."

"First sensible thing I've heard you say in a long time," Crosetti told him. With Commander Grady still there celebrating along with the sailors, Sam couldn't even think about punching his bunkmate in the nose . . . very much.

The pharmacist's mate behind the dispensary window was a wizened, cadaverous-looking fellow named Morton P. Lewis. On a day like today, even his face wore as much of a smile as it had room for. "Ah, Carsten," he said, nodding rather stiffly at Sam. "Haven't seen you for a while, but I can't say I'm surprised to see you now." His Vermont accent swallowed the *r* in Sam's last name and turned *can't* into something that might have come from an Englishman's mouth.

"Heading up toward sunny weather," Carsten said resignedly. "You want to give me a couple of gallons of that zinc-oxide goop?"

"It's dispensed in two-ounce tubes, as you know perfectly well." Lewis' voice was prim, proper, precise.

"Oh, don't I just," Sam said. "Don't I just." He sighed. "Damned if I know why I bother with the stuff. I burn almost as bad with it as without it."

"Your answer, I would say, boils down to the word *almost,"* the pharma cist's mate replied.

"Yeah." Carsten sighed again. "Well, let me have a tube now, would you? Sooner I start using it—" He broke off and stared at Morton P. Lewis. *"Boils down to is right. You do that on purpose, Mort?"*

"Do what?" said Lewis, a man whose sense of humor, if he'd ever had one, must have been amputated at an early age. His blank look convinced Carsten he hadn't done it on purpose. But, even if humorless, the pharmacist's mate wasn't stupid. "Oh. I see what you're asking about. Heh, heh."

"Listen, can I have the stuff, for God's sake?" Sam asked.

"You don't require a doctor's prescription for zinc-oxide ointment," Lewis said, which Carsten already knew from years at sea. "You don't require authorization from a superior officer, either." Carsten knew that, too. The pharmacist's mate finally came to the point: "You do require the completion of the required paperwork." He didn't notice he'd used the same word twice in one sentence, and Sam didn't point it out to him.

He did say, "Mort, if we get men wounded during an action, I hope you don't make them fill out all their forms before you give 'em what they need."

"Oh, no," Lewis said seriously. "Unnecessary delay in emergency situa tions is forbidden by regulation." He went back in among his medicaments before Carsten could find an answer for that.

When he returned, he was carrying a tinfoil tube and a sheaf of papers. In ordinary situations, delay seemed to be encouraged, not forbidden. Sam checked boxes and signed on lines. What it all boiled down to was that he wouldn't use the zinc oxide for anything illegal or immoral. Since the stuff was too thick and resistant to be any fun if he wanted to jack off with it, he couldn't imagine anything illegal or immoral he *could* use it for.

Wading through the paperwork meant he had to hustle to make it up on deck without getting chewed out. That was the way life in the Navy worked:

you hurried so you could take it easy a few minutes later. It had never made a whole lot of sense to him, but nobody'd asked his opinion. He wasn't holding his breath waiting for anyone to ask, either.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than Hiram Kidde came by, puffing on a fat cigar. He asked Sam's opinion: "How about Dom Pedro, eh?" But he didn't wait for an answer, giving his own instead: "Took the wall-eyed little son of a bitch long enough."

"Yeah," Carsten said; he agreed with that opinion. "But he's gone and done it. He sees the writing on the wall."

"He'd better," the chief gunner's mate said. "Train was almost out of the sta tion before he decided to jump on board." He sneered, an expression that could turn a junior lieutenant's bones to water. "Doesn't cost him anything, either— just his name on four pieces of paper. Not like Brazil's gonna do any fighting."

"Maybe a little against Argentina," Sam said. "But yeah, not much. Jesus, though, closing that coast to England and opening it up to us ... doesn't cost Dom Pedro much, like you say, but it does us a hell of a lot of good."

"Uh-huh." Kidde gave him almost the same leer Vic Crosetti had. "Does us a hell of a lot of good, but you're going to be fried crisp when we head up that way."

Wearily, Sam reached into his pocket and displayed the tube of zinc-oxide ointment. Hiram Kidde laughed so hard, he had to take the cigar out of his mouth. When he started to flick the long, gray ash onto the deck, Carsten said, "Whoever swabs that up ought to swab your shoes, too."

Kidde looked down at his feet. He could have seen himself in the perfectly polished oxfords. Three steps put him by the rail. The ash went into the Atlantic. "There. You happy now?" he asked.

"Sure," Sam answered. "Why not? Way I see things, world's looking pretty decent these days. Yeah, I'm going to burn for a while, but the *Dakota's* home port is San Francisco. War ever ends, I figure we'll go back there for a spell."

"You burn in Frisco, too," Kidde pointed out, "and that ain't easy."

"I know, but I don't burn so bad there," Sam said. "I'll tell you one more thing, too: Brazil jumping into the war may make me burn, but it makes the limeys sweat. You come right down to it, that's a pretty fair bargain."

"Well, *mon vieux,* how is it with you?" Lucien Galtier asked his horse as they made their way up toward Riviere-du-Loup. A U.S. Ford didn't bother to honk for them to pull over, but zoomed around the wagon and shot up toward town at what had to be close to thirty miles an hour. "I wonder why he is in such a hurry," Galtier mused. "I wonder why anyone would be in such a hurry."

The horse did not answer, save for a slight snort that was likelier to be a response to the stink of the motorcar's exhaust than to Galtier's words. But the Ford kicked up hardly any dust from the fine paved road. The Americans had extended it for their own purposes, not for his, but he was taking advantage of it. Jedediah Quigley had told him

he would. Jedediah Quigley had told him quite a few things. A good many more than he'd expected had turned out to be true.

His mind couldn't help doing a little of the arithmetic the good sisters had drilled into him with a ruler coming across his knuckles. If he had a motorcar capable of thirty miles an hour—oh, not today, not tomorrow, but maybe one of these days—he could get to town in ... could it possibly be so few minutes?

"My old," he said to the horse, "I begin to see how it is that the Americans have put so many of your relations out to pasture. I mean no offense, of course."

A flick of the ears meant the horse had heard him. It dropped some horse balls on the fine paved road. Maybe that was its opinion of going out to pasture. Maybe that was just its opinion of the road. Behind him, some chickens made comments of their own. He never paid attention to what the chickens had to say. Their first journey into town was also their last. They did not have the chance to learn from experience.

Outside Riviere-du-Loup, the snouts of antiaircraft guns poked into the sky. The soldiers who manned them wore uniforms of American cut, but of blue-gray cloth rather than green-gray. Galtier cocked his head to one side to listen to them talking back and forth. Sure enough, they spoke French of the same sort as his own. *Soldiers of the Republic of Quebec,* he thought. Dr. O'Doull had said there were such men. Now he saw them in the flesh. They were indeed a marvel.

"What do you think?" he asked the horse. Whatever the horse thought, it revealed nothing. Unlike the chickens, the horse was no fool. It had come into town any number of times. It knew how much trouble you could find by letting someone know what was in your mind.

Lucien drove the wagon into the market square. Newsboys hawked pa pers whose headlines still trumpeted Brazil's entry into the war, though Galtier had heard about it several days before from Nicole, who had heard it from the Americans at the hospital. The newspapers also trumpeted Brazil's recognition of the Republic of Quebec. That was actually news.

He tried to outshout the newsboys and all the other farmers who'd come into the market square to sell goods from their farms. His chickens had a solid reputation. They went quickly. He made good

money. Soon he was down to one last ignorant fowl. He waited for a housewife to carry it off by the feet.

But the chicken was not to go to a housewife and her tinker or clerk or carpenter of a husband and their horde of hungry children. Here came Bishop Pascal, plump enough to look as if he could eat up the whole bird at one sitting. Galtier hid a smile. The bishop was being a good republican— ostentatiously being a good republican— and shopping for himself again, in-stead of letting his housekeeper do the job. How she would scold if she found out how much a rude farmer had overcharged him! Lucien had no compunctions whatever. Bishop Pascal could afford it, and then some.

"Good day, good day, good day," he said now with a broad smile. "How does it go with you, my friend?"

"Not bad," Lucien said. "And yourself?"

"Everything is well. I give thanks to you for asking, and to *le bon Dieu* for making it so." Bishop Pascal crossed himself, then held his right forefinger in the air. "No. Not quite everything is perfectly well." He pointed that finger at Lucien Galtier as if it were a loaded gun. "And it is *your* fault." As best he could with his round smiling face, he glowered. He sounded very severe.

"My fault?" Lucien's voice was a startled squeak, like Georges' when his son was caught in a piece of tomfoolery. "What have I done?" What *had* he done to offend Bishop Pascal? Offending the bishop could be dangerous.

"What have you done? You do not even know?" Bishop Pascal sounded more severe yet. He wagged that forefinger in Lucien's face. "Do I understand correctly that I am not to officiate at the wedding of your lovely Nicole to Dr. O'Doull?"

"I am desolated, your Reverence, but it is so," Galtier replied, doing his best to imply that he was desolated almost to the point of hurling himself into the St. Lawrence. That was not so; he felt nothing but relief. "You must comprehend, this is not my fault, and it is not meant as an insult to you. Dr. O'Doull is the closest of friends with Father Fitzpatrick, the American chaplain at the hospital, and will hear of no one else's performing the ceremony."

Only the truth there. That it delighted Galtier had nothing to do with the price of chickens. He wanted as little to do with Bishop

Pascal as he could; the man had got too cozy with the Americans too fast to suit a lot of people, even those who, like Lucien, had ended up getting closer to the Americans themselves than they'd ever expected.

"One can hardly go against the express wishes of the bridegroom, true. Still—" Bishop Pascal always looked for an angle, as his quick collaboration proved. "I must confess, I do not know Father Fitzpatrick as well as I should. I am certain his Latin must be impeccable, but has he also French?"

"Oh, yes." Galtier most carefully did not smile at the disappointment in the bishop's eyes. "I have spoken with him several times. He is not so fluent as Major Quigley or Dr. O'Doull, but he makes himself understood without trouble. He also understands when we speak to him. I have seen many an English-speaker who can talk but not understand. I have some of the same trouble myself, in fact, when I try to use English."

"Ah, well." Bishop Pascal sighed. "I see there is nothing more to be said in that matter, and I see also, to my great joy, that this choice has not come about because I am diminished in your eyes." Galtier shook his head, denying the possibility with all the more vigor because it was true. Bishop Pascal turned his forefinger and his attention in another direction. "Since this is so, perhaps you will do me the honor of selling me that lovely fowl."

Lucien not only did Bishop Pascal the honor, he did him out of about forty cents for which the bishop, being a man of the cloth, had no urgent need. If Bishop Pascal proved unwise enough to mention to his housekeeper the price he'd paid to Galtier, he would indeed hear about it. He'd hear about it till he was sick of it. Odds were, he'd heard enough of similar follies often enough to try to keep quiet about this one.

"I thank you very much, your Reverence," said Galtier, who could think of several useful purposes to which he might put forty cents or so. He waved at the empty cages behind him. "And now, since that was the last of the birds I brought to town today, I think I shall—"

He did not get the chance to tell Bishop Pascal what he would do. Three newsboys ran into the market square, each from a different direction. They all carried papers with enormous headlines, a different edition from the ones Galtier had glanced at coming into Riviere-du-Loup. They were all shouting the same thing: "France asks for armistice! France asks Germany for armistice!" Over and over, the

words echoed through the square.

"Calisse. Oh, *maudit calisse,"* Lucien Galtier said softly. He needed time to remember that the Germans who were the enemies of France were allied to the United States, the supporters of the Republic of Quebec and, much more to the point, the homeland of his soon to be son-in-law. He wished he had not cursed such news where Bishop Pascal could hear him.

The bishop waved to the newsboys, who raced to get to him. He bought a paper from the one who ran fastest. He blessed them all: some consolation, but probably not much. As they went off, one happy, two disappointed, he turned to Galtier. "I understand how you feel, my friend," he said, "and I, I feel this pain as well. It is the country from which our forefathers came, after all, and we remain proud to be French, as well we should. Is it not so?"

"Yes. It is so," Galtier said. To hear that his homeland had gone down to defeat at the hands of the *Boches* was very hard, even when the *Boches* were friendly to the United States.

But Bishop Pascal said, "The France that is beaten today is not the France that sent our ancestors to this land. The France that was beaten today is a France that has turned its back on the holy mother Catholic Church, a France that embraced the godless Revolution. This is a France of absinthe-drinkers and artists who paint filthy pictures no sensible man can understand or would want to understand, a France of women who care nothing for their reputations, only that they should have reputations. It is not ours. If it is beaten, God has meant for it to be beaten, that it may return to the right and proper path."

"It could be that you are right." Lucien spread his hands. "I am but an ig norant man, and easily confused. Right now I feel torn in two."

"You are a good man—that is what you are. Here, let us see what has hap pened." Bishop Pascal read rapidly through the newspaper, passing sentences to Galtier as he did so: "The Republic of France, unable any longer to withstand the weight of arms of the Empire of Germany, requests a cease-fire.... All English troops to leave France within seven days, or face combat from French forces.... The German High Seas Fleet and the U.S. Navy to have fueling and supply privileges at French ports, the Royal Navy to be denied them.... The new border between France and Germany to be fixed by treaty once the war ends everywhere. Thus the atheists and their mistresses are

humbled and brought low."

No doubt there were some in France who met Bishop Pascal's description. But, since France was a nation of men and women like any other, Lucien was sure it also held a great many more folk who did not. And they too were hum bled and brought low. A meticulous man, Galtier had trouble seeing the justice in that.

Had Germany been conquered instead of conquering, what would have happened to the ordinary Germans? Much the same, he suspected. Did that make it right? Was he God, to know the answers to such questions?

Bishop Pascal said, "How much longer can the war on this side of the Atlantic go on now? How much longer before all of Quebec joins our Republic of Quebec? I assure you, this cannot now long be delayed."

"I think you are likely to be right." Lucien recalled the men in blue-gray uniforms at the antiaircraft guns outside of town.

"The killing shall cease," Bishop Pascal said. "Peace shall be restored, and, God willing, we shall never fight such a great and mad war again."

"I hope we do not," Galtier said. "I shall pray that you are right." But he spent a lot of time talking to his horse on the way home from Riviere-du-Loup. When he got there, he still felt torn in two.

XVI

Colonel Irving Morrell stood up in the cupola of his barrel as it pounded through the rough and hilly country just north of Nolensville, Tennessee. He did that more and more often these days, and more and more of the commanders in the Barrel Brigade were imitating him. Some of them had stopped bullets. The rest were doing a better job of fighting their machines.

He grinned. He had a toy the other fellows didn't, or most of them didn't, anyhow. When First Army infantry got light machine guns to give them extra firepower as they advanced, he'd commandeered one and had a welder mount the tripod in front of the hatch through which he emerged. When the Rebels shot at him now, he shot back.

They were shooting. They'd been shooting, hard, ever since the drive on Murfreesboro opened two days before. But First Army had already come better than ten miles, and the advance wasn't slowing down. If anything, the barrels were doing better today than they had the day before.

A bullet ricocheted off the front of the barrel. Just one round—that meant a rifleman. A moment later, another one snapped past Morrell's head. His lips skinned back from his teeth in a ferocious grin. He'd spotted the muzzle flash from the middle of a clump of bushes. He swung his own—his very own— light machine gun toward the bushes and ripped off a burst. No one shot at the barrel from that direction again.

"We've got them!" he said. Once, playing chess, he'd seen ten moves ahead: a knight's tour that threatened several of his opponent's pieces on the way to forking the fellow's king and rook. It had been an epiphany of sorts, a glimpse into a higher world. He was at best a medium-good player; he'd never known such a moment before or since . . . till now.

He'd had a taste of that feeling when First Army crossed the Cumberland.

This was different, though. This was better. There, the Confederates had been fooled. Here, they were doing everything they could do, as the soldier across the chessboard from him had done everything he

could do—and they were losing anyhow.

They did not have enough men. They did not have enough aeroplanes. No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than a U.S. fighting scout zoomed past the waddling barrel. Morrell waved, though the pilot was gone by then. He almost wished it had been a Confederate aeroplane; he longed to try out the light machine gun as an antiaircraft weapon and give some Reb a nasty surprise.

The Confederate States did not have enough barrels, either, nor fully understand what to do with the ones they had. Every so often, a few of their rhomboids would come forward to challenge the U.S. machines. Individually, theirs were about as good as the one Morrell commanded. But what he and Ned Sherrard and General Custer had grasped and the Confederates had not was that, with barrels, the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. A mass of them all striking together could do things the same number could not do if committed piecemeal.

A shell whine in the air sent Morrell ducking back inside his steel turtle's shell. Even as he ducked, a shell burst close to the barrel. Fragments hissed past him and clattered off its plating. None bit his soft, tender, vulnerable flesh, though.

More shells burst close by. A battery of C.S. three-inchers was doing its best to knock out his barrel and any others close by. Except at very short range, field guns hit barrels only by luck, but the hail of splinters from the barrage forced Morrell to stay inside for a while.

It was like dying and going to hell, except a little hotter and a little stickier. July in Tennessee was not the ideal weather in which to fight in a barrel. The ideal weather, for men if not for engines, would have been January in Labrador. The barrel generated plenty of heat on its own. When its shell trapped still more . . . Morrell was coming to understand how a rib roast felt in the oven.

And the rest of the crew suffered worse than he did. When he stood up, he got a breeze in his face: a hot, muggy breeze, but a breeze even so. They got only the whispers of air that sneaked in through louvered vision slits and the mountings of the cannon and machine guns. The engineers, down below Morrell in the bowels of the barrel, got no air at all, only stinking fumes from the twin truck engines that kept the traveling fortress traveling.

Morrell stood up again. Shells were still falling, but not so close.

There was Nolensville, only a few hundred yards ahead. Infantrymen and machine-gun crews were firing from the houses and from barricades in the street, as they did in every little town. As Morrell watched, a shell from the cannon of another U.S. barrel sent chunks of a barricade flying in all directions. A moment later, that barrel started to burn. Soldiers leaped from it. Morrell hoped they got out all right. He sprayed a few rounds in front of them to make the defenders keep their heads down.

Infantrymen in green-gray and barrels converged on Nolensville. U.S. aeroplanes strafed the Confederates in the town from just above chimney height. Morrell did not order his barrel into Nolensville, where it might easily come to grief moving along any of the narrow, winding streets. He poured machine-gun fire and cannon shells onto the Rebels from just outside, where the barrel could move as freely as ... a barrel could move.

Some of the defenders died in Nolensville. Some, seeing they could not hold the town, broke and ran. Morrell's barrel rumbled past Nolensville. He took potshots at fleeing men in butternut, some white, some colored. Some of them, probably, had been brave for a long time. Under endless hammering, though, even the hardest broke in time.

Another Confederate came out from behind a large, dun-colored rock. Morrell swung the light machine gun toward him. He was on the point of opening fire when he saw the man was holding a flag of truce.

Bullets from one of the barrel's hull machine guns stitched the ground near the Confederate officer's feet. He stood still and let the flag be seen. The machine gun stopped firing. All over the field, firing slowed to a spatter and stopped.

Morrell ducked down into the cupola. *Halt,* he signaled urgently. Then, like a jack-in-the-box, he popped up again. Even before the barrel had fully stopped, he scrambled down off it and ran toward the Confederate with the white flag. "Sir, I am Colonel Irving Morrell, U.S. Army. How may I be of service to you?"

Courteously, the Rebel, an older man, returned the salute. The three stars on each side of his stand collar showed his rank matched Morrell's. "Harley Landis," he said. He said nothing after that for close to half a minute; Morrell saw tears shine in his eyes. Then, gathering himself, he resumed: "Colonel, I— I am ordered to seek from the U.S.

Army the terms you will require for a cease-fire, our own forces having proved unable to offer effectual resistance any longer."

Joy blazed in Morrell. To let his opposite number see it would have been an insult. Sticking to business would not. "How long a cease-fire do you re quest, sir, and on how broad a front?"

"A cease-fire of indefinite duration, along all the front now being de fended by the Army of Kentucky," Landis answered. Again, he seemed to have trouble finding words. At last, he did: "I hope you will forgive me, sir, but I find this duty particularly difficult, as I was born and reared outside Louisville."

"You have my sympathies, for whatever they may be worth to you," Mor- rell said formally. "You must understand, of course, that I lack the authority to grant a cease-fire of any such scope. I will pass you back to First Army headquarters, which will be in touch with our War Department. I can undertake to say that troops under my command will observe the cease-fire for so long as they are not fired upon, and so long as they do not discover C.S. troops improving their positions or reinforcing—or, of course, unless I am ordered to resume combat."

"That is acceptable," Colonel Landis said.

"A question, if I may," Morrell said, and the Confederate officer nodded. Morrell asked, "Are the Confederate States requesting a cease-fire along the whole front, from Virginia to Sonora?"

"As I understand it, no, not at the present time," Harley Landis replied.

Morrell frowned. "I hope you see that the United States may find it diffi cult to cease fighting along one part of the front while continuing in another?"

"Way I learned it, fighting in the War of Secession went on a while longer out here than it did back East, on account of the United States kept trying to hold onto Kentucky," Landis said.

That was true. Whether it made a binding precedent was another ques tion. Morrell shrugged. "Again, that's not for me to say, sir. Let's head back toward Nashville till I can flag down a motorcar and put you in it. The sooner the fighting does stop, the better for both our countries."

"Yes, sir. That's a fact." As Landis stalked past the barrel from which Morrell had emerged, he glowered in its direction. "You Yankees hadn't built these damn things in carload lots, we'd have whipped you again."

"I don't know," Morrell said. "We'd stopped you before we began using them. Breaking your lines would have been a lot harder without them, though; I will say that." Landis didn't answer. He kept on glaring. But he kept on walking, too, north and west toward Nashville and First Army headquarters. The white flag in his hand fluttered in the breeze.

Every soldier in green-gray who saw the Confederate officer inside U.S. lines with a flag of truce stared and stared, then burst into cheers. Off in the distance, gunfire still rattled here and there. It fell silent, one pocket after another. The Rebels had to be sending more men forward under flag of truce to let U.S. forces know they were seeking a cease-fire.

Before Morrell spotted a motorcar, he found something even better: a mo bile field-telephone station, the men still laying down wire after them as their wagon tried to keep up with the advance. "Can you put me through to Nashville?" he demanded of them. They nodded, eyes wide with wonder as they too gaped at Harley Landis and the flag he bore. Morrell said, "Then do it."

They did. In a few minutes, Morrell and General Custer's adjutant were shouting back and forth at each other through the hisses and pops and scratching noises that made field telephones such a trial to use. "They want what, Colonel?" Major Abner Dowling bawled.

"A cease-fire on this front," Morrell shouted back.

"On this front? This front only?" Dowling asked.

"That's what Colonel Landis says," Morrell answered.

"The general commanding won't like that," Dowling predicted. "Neither will the War Department, and neither will the president."

"I think you're right, Major," Morrell said. "Shall I turn him back?" He watched Landis' face. At those words, the Rebel officer looked like a man who'd taken a bayonet in the guts.

At the same time, Dowling was shouting, "Good God, no! Send

him on! If they give so much without being pushed, we'll get more when we squeeze, I wager. And come yourself, too. Only fitting you should be in at the death."

"Thank you, sir," Morrell said, and hung up. He turned to Colonel Harley Landis. "They will be waiting for you, sir. If I had to make a prediction, though, I would say they will not find acceptable a proposal for a ceasefire on one front only."

"Sir, I have my orders, as you have yours," Landis replied, to which Morrell could only nod.

A Ford came picking its way up the battered road toward the front. Morrell gave a peremptory wave. The courier who had been in the automobile soon found himself on shank's mare, while the Ford turned around and carried Landis and Morrell back through the wreckage of war toward Nashville.

Boston was going out of its mind. The trolleyman kept ringing his bell, but inside the trolley Sylvia Enos could hardly hear it through the din of automobile and truck horns, wagon bells, church bells, steam whistles, and shouting, screaming people. The trolley had a devil of a time going forward, for people were literally dancing in the streets.

"Rebs ask for cease-fire!" newsboys shouted at every other streetcorner. They were mobbed. "Rebs ask for peace!" newsboys shouted at the corners where the Rebs weren't shouting for a cease-fire. They were mobbed, too. Sylvia watched a fistfight break out as two men struggled over one paper.

Mostly, though, joy reigned supreme. Only the oldest granddads and grandmas remembered the last time the United States had beaten a foreign foe. Sylvia saw more men and women kissing and hugging in public during that slow streetcar ride to the shoe factory than she had in her life before.

A man got on the trolley drunk as a lord before eight o'clock in the morn ing. He kissed two women who seemed glad to kiss him back, then tried to kiss Sylvia, too. "No," she said angrily, and pushed him away. He might have fallen over, but the trolley was too crowded to let him. "The war's not over yet," Sylvia told him and whoever else might listen. As far as she was concerned, the newsboys shouting

Peace! were out of their minds.

As far as the drunk was concerned, Sylvia was out of her mind. His mouth fell open, giving her another blast of gin fumes. "Of course"—it came out *coursh*—"the war's over," he said. "Rebs're quitting, ain't they?"

She'd already read the *Globe*. She hadn't just listened to the boys yelling their heads off. "No," she answered. "They haven't surrendered, and there's still fighting in places. And the Canadians haven't quit fighting anywhere, and neither has England." And George was out there somewhere in the Atlantic, and no indeed, the Royal Navy had not quit fighting, and nobody'd said anything about the Confederate Navy quitting, either.

"So what?" the drunk said. "We'll lick 'em. We'll lick all them bastards." He paused and leered. "Now how about a kiss?"

Sylvia wondered if she would have to use a knee in most unladylike fashion. Her expression, though, must have been fierce enough to get the message across even to a lush. He turned away, muttering things she was probably lucky not to be able to understand.

She also wondered if she was the only person anywhere in the United States *not* convinced all the shooting was over as of this moment. By all appearances, she was the only person on the streetcar who thought that way. People avoided her and patted the drunk on the back. One of the women he'd kissed now kissed him in turn. She didn't look like a slattern. She looked like a schoolteacher.

At last, after fighting its way through endless traffic jams, the trolley got to Sylvia's stop. Two more men, one drunk, one sober, tried to kiss her before she got to the shoe factory. She dodged the drunk and stepped on the sober man's foot, hard. He hopped and cursed and cursed and hopped. She hurried to work.

She clocked in almost twenty minutes late. When she went in from the front hall where the time clock stood to the great cave of a room where she worked, she expected the foreman to descend on her with fire in his eye. Despite being only an inch or so taller than she was, despite a snowy mustache, Gustav Krafft was not a man to trifle with.

But he only nodded and said a guttural "Good morning" as she went to her sewing machine. A good third of the workers hadn't yet

made it to the factory. Sylvia let out a silent sigh of relief.

Women and more little old men drifted in as the morning wore along. Some of them, like the drunk on the trolley, were visibly the worse for wear. Sylvia would not have wanted to come to work that way, not when she was working at a machine that could bite if she was careless. She sewed pieces of upper together and tossed them into a box. When it got full, a feebleminded young man carried it away to the workers who would join uppers to soles.

Halfway through the morning, one of the men who looked as if he'd been born at his sewing machine let out a horrible yell and held up a hand that poured blood. Gustav Krafft dashed to his aid at a speed that belied the foreman's years. *"Ach,* Max, *Dummkopf!"* he shouted, and then a spate of German Sylvia could not understand at all.

After wrapping his own handkerchief around the wound, Krafft led Max out of the chamber toward first aid. The worker was still yelling, and emitting hot-sounding gutturals of his own between yells.

Sylvia turned to the woman at the sewing machine next to hers and said, "I wouldn't have thought he'd be one who let himself get hurt."

"Neither would I. Max has been here since this place opened up, I hear," replied the other woman, whose name was Emma Kilgore. She was plump, a few years older than Sylvia, and had curly hair two shades darker than a carrot. "It's the war news—everybody's going crazy now that things are over."

"But they *aren't,"* Sylvia protested. "There's still fighting, and plenty of it."

"My husband's down in that Tennessee place," Emma said. "As long as they aren't shooting at Jack, the war's over as far as I'm concerned."

"George is in the Navy, out in the Atlantic," Sylvia said. "It's not over for him, not by a long shot, and that means it's not over for me, either."

"That's a tough one, dearie." Emma's sympathy was real but perfunctory. As she'd said, her own worries were gone. Few people, Sylvia had seen, really cared about the troubles of others unless they

shared them.

Gustav Krafft came back into the cavernous room. Max's blood stained the front and side of his shirt. He looked around, saw how many machines weren't working, and scowled fiercely. "Even if the war is over, the work is not," he said. "The devil loves idle hands. I do not."

"If you loved milk, it'd curdle," Emma Kilgore muttered. Sylvia let out a strangled snort of laughter, but her head was bent over her machine, which was snarling before Krafft's eyes could pick out from whom the sound had come. The foreman's gaze swept on. Sylvia laughed again, this time silently. She felt as if she'd been naughty in class and got away with it.

In a couple of hours, Max came back, his hand wrapped in bandages that had turned red here and there. "He's crazy," Emma Kilgore whispered.

"Maybe he needs the money," Sylvia whispered back.

Emma shook her head, which made those copper curls fly about. "I hear tell he owns an apartment house, and I know for a fact he's got one son who's a cop and another one who's a cabinetmaker. He ain't broke."

As if to offer his own explanation, Max said, "It is not the first time the machine gets its teeth in me. It is probably not the last, either." He sat down and went back to work. Now that he was paying attention to what he was doing, he was more deft with one good hand and one bandaged than Sylvia could dream of being with both of hers. But an absentminded moment had given him a nasty wound.

Krafft came over, thumped Max on his bent back, and said something to him in German. He answered in the same language. The foreman thumped him again, careful not to disturb him while he was guiding leather under the needle. Then Krafft spoke in English: "Max says he is like the United States. He has been hurt many times, but he wins at the last."

Several people clapped their hands: on this day of all days, patriotic sentiment won applause. Sylvia kept right on working, with doggedness similar in kind if not in degree to that which Max showed. Emma muttered, "Christ, he didn't cut his hand off." Her patriotism, plainly, was limited to getting her husband back in one piece. Sylvia

was ready to settle for having George home safe, too.

She clocked out as slowly as she could after the closing whistle blew, to make up a couple of the minutes she'd lost in the morning because the trolley hadn't got her to work on time. It was late coming to pick her up, too. The celebration on the streets of Boston hadn't slowed down since she'd last seen it. If anything, crowds were thicker, louder, and better lubricated than they had been earlier in the day.

When at last she got to George, Jr.'s, school, she found it festooned with red, white, and blue bunting. George, Jr., came pelting over to greet her when she stuck her head into his room. "We won, Ma!" he shouted. "We licked the dirty Rebels, and that means Pa can come home!" He jumped up and down in excitement.

"I wish it was that simple," she answered. "Your father's not home yet, and I don't know when he's going to be. For that matter, we're not home yet, and I don't know when we're going to be, either. We still have to get your sister, and everything's a little crazy today."

"We won!" George, Jr., repeated. He wasn't old enough to know any bet ter. But plenty of people who were old enough to know better were saying the same thing.

Sylvia led George, Jr., up to Mrs. Dooley's to get his little sister more than half an hour late. She resigned herself to another lecture from the woman about tardiness. But Mrs. Dooley opened the door with a smile on her face. She smelled of what Sylvia recognized after a moment as cooking sherry. "Hello, Mrs. Enos," she said. "Isn't it a grand and glorious time to be alive?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," Sylvia said. "I am sorry I'm late. Everyone seems to be in the streets today."

"Nobody will blame anybody for anything today," Mrs. Dooley said. She turned. "Mary Jane, your mother is here." By the noises from within, Mary Jane wasn't the only child whose mother was late today.

When she came around Mrs. Dooley's billowing black skirt, she chirped, "We won the war, Mama!"

"Well, we're certainly winning," Sylvia said. That let her state her own opinion without sounding too much as if she was disagreeing with what seemed to be the whole world but for her. "Now we, the three of us, need to go home." There was an opinion on which she

would put up with no disagreement at all.

They were late getting home, too, of course, which meant they had a late supper. The children were too excited to want to go to bed when they should. Sylvia had known they would be. At last, she got them settled. Then she had to settle herself, too. The trouble she had going to sleep made her wonder whether, down deep, she was exulting over victory, too.

Lieutenant Brearley stowed the code book in the locked drawer and turned the key. "Here's what it means, sir," he said, handing the decoded wireless message to Roger Kimball. "It's—important."

"Give it here," the commander of the *Bonefish* said. "I'll decide how im portant it is." He wished the exec hadn't said anything to draw the crew's attention to the message. Sailors were curious enough without encouragement.

He unfolded the paper, read it, and then read it again to make sure his eyes weren't playing tricks on him. It still said the same thing the second time:

SEEKING CEASE-FIRE ON LAND. END OFFENSIVE ACTIVITY. IF ATTACKED, DE FEND SELF. ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT.

"You're sure you decoded it right?" he demanded of Brearley.

"Yes, sir," the executive officer said. "Here are the groups they sent." He made as if to open the drawer again and get out the code book.

"Never mind," Kimball said wearily. "I believe you. I believe it. We were getting hammered the last time the *Bonefish* went into port. It's just that . . . aah, God damn it to hell." His left hand closed into a fist and struck his left thigh, hard enough to hurt. Then, slowly and deliberately, he tore the message into tiny, indecipherable shreds and threw them away.

"What do we do, sir?" Brearley asked.

"We acknowledge receipt, as ordered," Kimball said. "Then we keep right on with the patrol. We weren't ordered to hold in place. I don't see a surrender order or anything like it, do you?"

"Well, no, sir, not when you put it like that," Brearley admitted. He looked even unhappier than he had already. "I wish they'd have told us more, so we'd have a better idea of what we're supposed to do."

Kimball reveled in commanding a submersible not least because the Navy Department had very few chances to tell him what to do. "The more code groups they send, the better the odds the damnyankees'll figure out what they mean," he answered. "Now, you get clicking on the wireless telegraph and acknowledge that we got that order." He lowered his voice but raised the intensity in it: "And for God's sake keep your mouth shut afterwards. I don't want the crew to hear one word about what kind of shape the country's in. You got that, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," Brearley answered, and then, "Aye aye, sir," to show he not only understood but would willingly obey.

Gloomily, Kendall climbed back up to the conning tower and peered out over the Atlantic. It was a hell of a big place. As far as he could tell, the *Bone- fish* might have been alone in the middle of it. If he spotted no plumes on the horizon, he didn't have to worry about following the order from the Navy Department.

But he *wanted* to spot a smoke plume, there on the edge of visibility. He *wanted* to send more Yankee ships to the bottom, the same way a hunting dog *wanted* to tree a possum or a coon. It was what he'd been trained to do, and it was what he enjoyed doing. And, he knew without false modesty, he was damn good at it.

As he raised the binoculars to his eyes, he knew the secret wouldn't keep forever. It probably wouldn't even keep very long. He wished he could blame Brearley for calling him down from the conning tower to read the decoded message, but he couldn't. It was too important to allow delay. The crew would already be wondering what it was all about, though. One way or another, they'd learn, too. Somehow or other, they always did.

And what would they do then? Would they cause trouble, saying peace was at hand and they didn't want to fight any more? Or would they want to keep fighting no matter what happened on land? *They* hadn't lost the war, regardless of the failures of the fools in butternut.

"Miserable bastards," Kimball muttered, meaning the soldiers, not the crew of the *Bonefish.* But then a long, grim sigh burst from his

lungs, followed by more muttering: "Shit, it doesn't hardly matter anyhow, not with Brazil in the war on the wrong side."

With the Empire of Brazil in the war on the wrong side, all the shipping routes from Argentina that had kept England fed for so long didn't work any more. And with France out of the fight across the Atlantic, the German High Seas Fleet was liable to pick off any freighters the U.S. Navy missed.

In that case, why go on fighting? he wondered. The only answer he could come up with was that the C.S. Navy, though battered, did remain unbeaten. As long as he could strike a blow against the enemies of his country, he would doit.

He scanned the horizon, turning slowly through 360 degrees. Nothing. And then, as he'd learned to do in the past few weeks, he scanned the rest of the heavens, too. Any aeroplane he spotted through his field glasses would belong to the United States.

Experience paid off, as experience has a way of doing. The aeroplane was too far away for him to hear its engine. Without the binoculars, he might not have seen it at all, or might have taken it for a distant soaring albatross. He started to scramble down the hatch and order a quick dive, then made himself watch and wait. If the aeroplane came closer, he would dive before it could drop a bomb on the *Bonefish.* If it didn't, if it turned away .. .

Slowly, he smiled. If it turned away, it would be turning away for a reason, or he hoped it would. Sure enough, a minute later the moving speck swung off toward the north. Looking more satisfied than he had any business being, given the state of the war and the state of his orders, Kimball paced the steel roof of the conning tower. The aeroplane had spotted the *Bonefish.* He was sure of that; it wouldn't have changed course so abruptly if it hadn't. And Kimball didn't think the pilot thought anyone on the *Bonefish* had noticed him. No reason he should. Nothing aboard the submersible had changed while he looked it over.

Kimball kept watching the whole round of the horizon. He would have been a fool to do otherwise, and he had not stayed alive for almost three years in a submarine by being a fool. But he would also have been a fool not to pay particularly close attention to the north. When not one but three smoke plumes came into view, he nodded to himself. He waited till he was sure the ships were destroyers, then waited a little more. Let them think he was a little on the slow side.

Then he did go back down into the fetid steel tube that was the *Bonefish,* the real *Bonefish,* dogging the hatch after him as he did. "Take her down to periscope depth," he called to the crew. "We've got some damnyankees com ing to pay us a call."

They were coming hard, too, in the hopes of sending the *Bonefish* to the bottom. Kimball had loitered on the surface a good deal longer than he would have otherwise, to make them think he'd be easy pickings. He slid toward them at five knots, easing the periscope above the surface every minute or two to keep an eye on them.

Ben Coulter spoke quietly: "Beg your pardon, sir, but we ain't headin' toward those sons of bitches so as we can surrender, are we?"

"Hell, no," Kimball answered, hiding how appalled he was at the speed with which rumor spread. "You ever hear of submerging before you give up?"

"No, sir," the veteran petty officer answered. "I never heard of any such thing, and I'm damn glad of it." He went back to his post.

"Sir, our orders—" Tom Brearley began.

Kimball silenced him with a glare. "I am obeying our orders, Mr. Brear ley," he snapped. "Now you see that you obey mine." Brearley bit his lip and nodded.

One of the trio of destroyers went straight for the spot where they'd seen the *Bonefish.* One went to the southeast of that spot, one to the southwest. Coulter let out a quiet chuckle when Kimball relayed that news. "They reckon we're runnin' away, don't they, sir?"

"That's how it looks to me," Kimball said. He let out a sigh that might have been annoyance. "All these years of fighting somebody, and they don't know him at all. I bet they don't know who's screwing their wives, either." In the dim lamplight, his sailors grinned at him.

Just for a moment, he wondered if anybody was screwing Anne Colleton right now. If anybody was, he'd never find out about it, not unless she wanted him to. There in the middle of the stinking steel tube, he nodded respectfully. Say what you would, that was a woman with balls.

Splash! The sound was very clear inside the pressure hull: a depth charge flying into the Atlantic, followed by several more at short

intervals. They were still splashing into the sea when the first one exploded. As best Kimball could judge, it had been set to burst deep.

He turned to his executive officer. "I'd say we are being attacked," he remarked. Brearley nodded; a depth charge was not the prelude to an invitation to tea. Grinning, Kimball said, "And now, by Jesus, I aim to defend myself."

"Yes, sir," the exec said. Tom wasn't stupid; after a while, he was liable to wonder whether his skipper had dawdled on the surface on purpose, to provoke the damnyankees into attacking the *Bonefish.* But that would be later. For now, they had a fight on their hands.

Kimball crept closer to the nearest destroyer. Watching ash cans flying off her stern, he grinned again. "Yeah, keep it up," he muttered. "Good luck with your damn hydrophones while you're throwing those babies around." He ordered the two forward tubes flooded; an exploding depth charge covered the noise of inrushing water. Then it was just a matter of sliding in to within eight hundred yards and shooting the fish.

The destroyer had barely started an evasive maneuver when the first tor pedo hit her amidships. A moment later, the second struck the stern. With two fish in her, the destroyer shuddered to a stop and began to sink. The other two U.S. warships turned in the direction of their stricken comrade, and in the direction from which the *Bonefish* had launched the torpedoes.

"Dive deep and evade, sir?" Brearley asked.

"Hell, no," Kimball answered. "That's what they'll be looking for me to do. I want an approach at periscope depth—but only at four knots, because I want to save the batteries as much as I can. I don't aim to come up for air till after sunset, when the ships and the aeroplanes can't spy me."

He got a good shot at one of the two Yankee destroyers, but her skipper turned tight into the path of the fish, and it sped past her bow. After that, it was the surface ships' turn. Kimball still refused to dive deep, but staying at periscope depth, where his boat might be spotted from the surface—and from overhead, if that damned aeroplane was buzzing around again—was too foolhardy even for him to contemplate. By the time he'd sneaked far enough away from the depth charges that sent endlessly repeated thunder through the boat to take another look with the periscope, he was too far away to fire

off any more fish.

"Well, we hurt 'em," he said in no small satisfaction. "If they think we're giving up and going home, they can damn well think again."

That had a salutary effect on the sailors. Rumors of a surrender would be a lot harder to believe now. Kimball noticed Tom Brearley watching him, there in the orange-lit, stinking gloom. He grinned at his exec: a tiger's smile, or a hammerhead's. Brearley stayed sober. He was drawing his own conclusions, all right. *Too damn bad,* Kimball thought. *I don't aim to quit till I have to— and maybe not then.*

Captain Jonathan Moss had flown over Lake Ontario in the early days of the war, when the U.S. Army was slowly—so slowly—battering its way through one fortified belt on the Niagara Peninsula after another. Now here he was again, flying down from the northwest instead of up from the south. As it had then, Archie from Canadian guns filled the sky around his aeroplane with puffs of black smoke. The Wright-built Albatros copy bucked in the turbulence of near misses.

Now, though, the antiaircraft fire came from inside Toronto, from the city the United States had confidently thought they would overrun in a few short weeks. Moss' grimace had only a little to do with the wind tearing at his face. "Nothing in this damn campaign has gone the way it should," he muttered.

He'd said the same thing out loud—sometimes drunkenly loud—with his flightmates and in the officers' club. Seeing the slate-blue water of the lake below him brought it to mind again. Nothing in Lake Ontario had gone as it should have, either. Even at the start of the war, a man could probably have walked from shore to shore on the mines laid there. Along with them, the Canucks' submersibles had meant U.S. Great Lakes battleships—they would have been coast-defense ships on the ocean—hadn't done a quarter of what they were supposed to.

Down below him, thunder of a different sort roared, along with huge tongues of fire and clouds of gray smoke. The Canadian Navy still had a couple of Great Lakes battleships in working order behind their mine fields; the ships, these days, were earning their keep by pouring shells from their big guns onto the U.S. infantrymen pushing their way into Toronto.

"Let's see how you like this," Moss said, diving on the behemoth below. Percy Stone, Pete Bradley, and Charley Sprague, who had replaced unlucky Hans Oppenheim on the flight, followed him down.

He wished he were carrying a bomb fixed to his landing gear, so he could hope to do some real damage to the armored warship below, but consoled himself by remembering that real bombers hadn't been able to sink her, either. He'd do what he could, that was all.

Men scurried on the deck of the Great Lakes battleship. It carried its own Archie: guns very much like those used on land. They started hammering away at him. So did machine guns, the long spurts of flame from their muzzles very different from the intermittent flashes from the antiaircraft guns proper.

His thumb came down on the firing button on top of the stick. The twin machine guns atop the engine chattered into life. He raked the deck from bow to stern, buzzing along no higher than the warship's stack. He was past the ship before he could see how much damage he'd done—but not before a couple of machine-gun bullets pierced the fabric covering his fighting scout.

He clawed for altitude; if any enemy aeroplanes had spotted his dive, they'd be stooping on him like so many falcons. As he did, he also swung back toward the Great Lakes battleship for another run. His flightmates formed in line behind him. They'd come safe through the heavy antiaircraft fire, too, then.

Sailors were dragging wounded or dead men to shelter. "Give up, you stupid bastards," Moss growled. "You and the limeys are the only ones left fight ing, and you can't last long."

Strictly speaking, that wasn't true. Out in the Pacific, the Japanese had given as good as they'd got. But that part of the war was a sideshow for the United States. Down below Jonathan Moss, Toronto lay at its bleeding heart.

As he started his second pass at the Canadian warship, he thought of Laura Secord, back on her farm near Arthur. Had her ancestor not imitated Paul Revere, Toronto might have belonged to the USA for the past hundred years and then some. He shook his head. If he got to worry about what might have been, he was liable not to worry enough about what was going on, and to lose the chance to worry about what would go on in the future.

A hail of bullets and shells greeted him when he went into that second dive. He fired back. The sailors on deck were a stationary target, and he wasn't. There were a lot of them, too, and only one of him. They didn't do him any harm. He hoped he hurt them.

The Great Lakes battleship almost shot him down without meaning to. The big guns roared out another broadside, the shells aimed at foot soldiers far away. But blast sent Moss' flying scout flipping through the air. He had only moments to straighten out before he ended up in Lake Ontario. Shouting curses he hardly even noticed, he fought for control and won it just in time.

Anxiously, he looked back for Stone and Bradley and Sprague, wondering if the warship's main armament had accidentally done what the antiaircraft guns could not do on purpose. To his relief, he spied all three of them. He also saw that he was beginning to run low on fuel, and was not in the least sorry to discover it. When he waved back toward the aerodrome by Orangeville, his flightmates followed his lead with what seemed like relief of their own.

They were up above ten thousand feet by the time they crossed the front line just outside of Toronto. That didn't stop the Canucks and limeys from blazing away at them, nor did it keep some overeager idiots on the American side of the line from sending some Archie their way. Fortunately, the U.S. gunners were no better at what they did than their counterparts on the other side.

Moss bumped his fighting scout to a stop on the rutted grass landing strip outside the little Ontario town. As usual, the groundcrew men clucked at the fine assortment of punctures he'd picked up. "The idea, sir, is to fly an aeroplane, not a patchwork quilt," Herm said.

"As long as they don't puncture me or the motor, I'm not going to worry about it," Moss said.

"Well, well." Charley Sprague came up to him as he was descending from the cockpit to the ground. "That's not the sort of instruction you can get in flying school, is it, sir?" Sprague was tall and lean and good-looking, with expressive eyebrows and a Kaiser Bill mustache waxed to a pointed perfection not even the slipstream could ruffle. He had the indefinable manner of coming from a moneyed family.

"Not more than once," Moss answered, which made Sprague break into a wide grin. More seriously, Moss went on, "After that, the War

Department sends your family a wire they'd sooner not have."

"After what?" Percy Stone asked, his goggles pushed up on top of his head. "After you strafe a Great Lakes battleship? I bet they do. The only thing I can think of that was less fun was when I got shot."

"Actually, I was thinking of after you train to strafe a Great Lakes battleship," Moss said.

Stone considered that, then nodded. "You've got something there. I knew about as many people who got killed learning as I did fliers who went down against the enemy. Nobody ever talks about it, but it's true."

Charley Sprague nodded. "You're right about that, sir," he said: even in brief acquaintance, Moss had seen that he punctiliously observed the rules of military courtesy. "I saw half a dozen fellows die while I was learning the game. Some of them were better fliers than I was, but they thought they were better than they were, too, if you know what I mean. And some fell out of the sky for no reason anyone could see." He spread his hands. " 'Time and chance happeneth to them all,' is what the Bible says about that."

Last of the flight, Pete Bradley came up in time to hear Sprague's last cou ple of sentences. "Ain't it the truth?" he said, a sentence unscriptural but most sincere. "When your number's up, it's up, that's all." He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "I thought all our numbers were up when we made the second run at that damn boat."

"Worst of it is, they can go right on mounting more machine guns on it, too," Moss said. "Pretty soon strafing it *will* be suicide, nothing else."

"Have to bomb at high altitude, then," Lieutenant Sprague said. "We'll need better bombsights for that; we couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with the ones we have now. And the bombers will need more guns, to hold off the foe's fighting scouts. Regular flying fortresses, that's what they'll have to be."

Moss looked at him in admiration. "You've got all the angles figured, don't you, Charley? Sounds like you're ready for the next war right now."

"Poppycock!" Sprague said. "What wants doing is plain enough—

plain as the nose on my face, which is saying something." He touched the member in question, which, though long and thin, was not outstandingly so. "How to get from where we are to where we need to be: ay, there's the rub."

"That's Shakespeare," Percy Stone said, and Sprague nodded. Stone slapped him on the back. He stiffened slightly, as at an undue familiarity. Either not noticing that or ignoring it, Stone went on, "Good to have you in the flight, by God. First the Bible, now this—you give us a touch of class we sure don't get from our flight leader here." He jerked a thumb at Jonathan Moss.

Lieutenant Sprague turned toward Moss, and turned pink at the same time. "Sir, I don't want to offend or—"

"Don't worry about it, Charley," Moss said easily. "I was good enough to bring Percy's carcass back home when he got himself a puncture a couple of years ago, and now I'm good enough for him to insult. That's the way the world goes, I guess."

He made sure Stone understood he was kidding. Both Sprague and Bradley looked worried; they weren't sure he meant it for a joke till Stone laughed and said, "Well, it's not like I asked you to do it. I was too busy bleeding for that."

"I know." Thinking about what the observer's cockpit had looked like after he and the groundcrew got Stone out of it made Moss' stomach do a slow loop. He fought the memory with another gibe: "You gave me so much trouble, I figured you'd make yourself a nuisance to the limeys and the Canucks, too."

"Indeed." Charley Sprague trotted out another tag from Shakespeare: " 'But when the blast of war blows in our ears, / Then imitate the action of the tiger.' "

"I can't do that, Charley," Stone said. "I'm not limber enough to lick my own balls."

All four men from the flight laughed like loons, more because they were young and alive when they could easily have died than because Percy Stone had said anything so very funny. "Come on," Jonathan Moss said. "Let's go tell Major Cherney what we did on our summer holiday."

The squadron commander listened to their report, then said, "I'm

glad you're all back in one piece, but don't go sticking your heads in the lion's mouth like that again, and that's an order."

"But, sir—" Moss began.

Cherney held up a hand. "No buts, Captain. Even if that ship had no antiaircraft guns at all, you couldn't sink her or hurt her big guns. Don't waste yourself on targets like that, not with the war so close to won. Do what you *can* do. Fight the enemy's aeroplanes and balloons. Shoot up his men on the ground. If you take on a Great Lakes battleship, you're fighting out of your weight."

"But—" Moss said again. Then he remembered Charley Sprague's words: *some of them were better fliers than I was, but they thought they were better than they were, too.* And they'd ended up dead, and they hadn't helped the war effort a bit. Slowly, reluctantly, Moss nodded. "Yes, sir."

I've been thinking," George Enos said between gulps of air as he stood beside the one-pounder at the stern of the USS *Ericsson* after yet another dash to battle stations, this one a drill.

Beside him, Carl Sturtevant was panting more than a little. "Probably won't do you any lasting harm," he said, and then, presently, "Yeah? What were you thinking about?"

"That son of a bitch who sank the *Cushing* yesterday and almost put a fish into us," Enos answered.

"Yeah, well, I can see how that'd be on your mind," the veteran petty offi cer allowed. "So what about it?"

"Whoever the skipper of that boat is, he fights mean," George answered, to which Sturtevant could only nod. George went on, "He comes at us, and he comes hard, and he doesn't like to dive deep for hell."

"That's all true," Sturtevant agreed. "Like I said, though, so what?"

"He fights like the skipper who almost sank us before we sank the *Bone-fish,"* Enos persisted. "Whoever he is, whether he's a limey or a Reb, I don't think we got him when we got that boat."

Sturtevant screwed up his face as he thought that over. "That other bas tard dove deep and tried to hide after he took a shot at us, didn't he?" He smacked his lips a couple of times, tasting an idea instead of soup. "Maybe you've got something there." He glanced over toward Lieutenant Crowder, who was talking with another officer. Lowering his voice, Sturtevant said, "You ain't gonna make him your bosom buddy if you tell him, though."

"But if I don't tell him, and we go on doing what we've been doing, and he goes on doing what he's been doing, we're all liable to end up dead," Enos said.

Sturtevant didn't answer. His expression made plain what he was think ing: that Lieutenant Crowder wouldn't listen even if he did get told. Crowder was convinced he'd sunk the submersible that had come so close to putting the *Ericsson* on the bottom for good. Telling him otherwise would make him unhappy, which was liable to make George's life miserable.

Not telling him, though, was liable to make George's life short. He went over and positioned himself so Lieutenant Crowder would have to notice him sooner or later. It was later, not sooner, but George had been sure it would be. Eventually, the lieutenant said, "You wanted something, Enos?"

George saluted. "Yes, sir," he said, and proceeded to set out for Crowder the same chain of reasoning as he'd given Carl Sturtevant. As he spoke, he watched Crowder's face. It was not encouraging. He sighed silently. He hadn't expected it to be.

When he was through, the officer shook his head. "I don't believe it for a minute, sailor. That the Rebs or the limeys have put a new boat into this area—that is possible. In fact, it's more than possible. It's certain, as recent events have shown. That it would be the boat we battled before—no. We sent that one to the bottom, and that's where he richly deserves to be."

"But, sir, the way this fellow operates—" Having begun the effort, George thought he ought to see it through.

Crowder did not give him the chance. "Return to your battle station at once, Enos, or I'll put you on report."

"Yes, sir." Stiff and precise as a steam-powered piece of machinery, George did an about-face and strode back to the one-pounder. Once

there, he could look over at Lieutenant Crowder, who'd gone back to talking to the other officer. Enos let out another silent sigh. He really should have known better.

Carl Sturtevant caught his eye. *Told you so,* the petty officer mouthed. George shaped the beginning of an obscene gesture with a hand his body shielded from Lieutenant Crowder. Sturtevant laughed at him. In spite of that laughter, or maybe because of it, Sturtevant was a pretty good fellow. A lot of petty officers were as stuffy as real officers about ordinary seamen giving them a hard time.

After a couple of minutes to let Crowder get involved in his conversation again, Sturtevant said, "Hell, it probably won't matter for beans, anyway. Rebs are on their last legs—they're doing their damnedest to get out of the fight. Pretty soon, it'll just be us and the limeys, and they won't last long, either."

"For all we know, it's a limey boat we're talking about. One we sank belonged to the Confederates, yeah, but that's not the one with the nasty skipper no matter what Lieutenant Crowder thinks."

"Mm, that's true," Sturtevant admitted, "but you've got to figure the odds are whoever was patrolling this stretch probably kept right on doing it. It'd be harder to work if things went back and forth between two different countries."

George thought about that. "All right, you've got something there," he said at last. "Does make sense. If we sank one Rebel boat, that means there's probably another one prowling around—which means it's even more likely this is the same skipper who almost got us before."

"That sounds logical," Sturtevant said. He nodded over toward Lieutenant Crowder. "You feel like taking another shot at convincing *him?"*

"No thanks," Enos answered. "He already knows everything there is to know—and if you don't believe me, just ask him."

Without apparently moving a muscle, Sturtevant made his face into a mask of contempt. "I don't need to ask him. I already know what he knows." By the tiniest twitch of an eyebrow, he got across how little he thought that was.

"Well, then, shouldn't we—?" George began.

"I don't reckon we've got to worry about it, on account of it ain't gonna matter worth a hill of beans anyway." Sturtevant waved out across the Atlantic. "Look. The Rebs won't bother keeping a boat around these parts that much longer anyway, because the shipping route they were guarding went to hell and gone when Dom Pedro finally figured out which side his bread was buttered on."

As if to underscore his words, a flotilla of U.S. cruisers steamed past, heading south. They looked enormous alongside the destroyers that cruised to either side of them, protecting them from submarines as sheepdogs protected their flocks from wolves. Battleships were yet another size up; to George, who was used to going to sea aboard fishing boats, they resembled nothing so much as floating cities.

He said, "Haven't seen so many of our freighters passing through these parts lately, especially northbound."

"Probably won't, either," Sturtevant answered. "They'll come down from the USA to supply our warships, yeah, but for a lot of things they won't have to head back to the States any more. They can load up in one of the Brazilian ports—hell of a lot quicker trip that way."

"Son of a bitch, you're right." Enos shook his head, disgusted with him self. "I should have thought of that."

"Hey, nobody can think of everything." Sturtevant glanced over at Lieutenant Crowder again. Crowder, still chattering away with the other officer, tapped his forefinger against his own chest, so he was talking about his favorite subject: himself. The veteran petty officer rolled his eyes. "Jesus Christ, some people can't think of anything."

Enos snorted. "I'm not going to argue with you about that." He made himself cheer up, almost as if a superior officer had given him an order. "And odds are you're right about the other, too. Once the fellows with the high foreheads back in Philadelphia figure it out, too, they'll probably call us back to port."

Carl Sturtevant laughed in his face. "You fisherman, you! It'd be cheaper to do things that way—sure it would. But do you think the Navy gives a fart in a hurricane about cheap? In a pig's ass they do, especially during a war. We don't go home till the whole Quadruple Entente's waving white flags at us— and maybe we don't go home then, either. Maybe we go around the Horn and teach the Japs they picked the wrong side." He eyed Enos. "You ever been on the other side of the Equator before?"

"You know damn well I haven't," Enos said. "This is further south than I ever figured I'd come before the war started."

"Just a damn polliwog." Sturtevant shook his head and clicked his tongue between his teeth. "Well, old Father Neptune will settle *your* hash."

Enos had heard about those rituals from sailing men who'd gone through them, some in the Navy, some as merchant seamen. They'd shave his head or put him in a dress or maybe both at once, and he and the rest of the polliwogs on the *Ericsson* would have to do whatever Father Neptune told them. Something in the way Sturtevant's eyes gleamed made George ask, "Have you ever been Father Neptune?"

"Who, me? What could have given you that idea?" The petty officer might have been the soul of innocence. Then again, he might not have.

The all-clear sounded then. Lieutenant Crowder kept right on talking with the other officer. As Enos drifted away from his battle station, he quietly asked, "Is *he* a polliwog, by any chance?"

"I don't know," Sturtevant said. "I really don't know. I may have to go and ask a few questions, because that would be worth finding out. An officer polliwog is just another damn polliwog, as far as Father Neptune's concerned." He slapped George on the back. "That could be a lot of fun, couldn't it?"

"Couldn't it, though?" George said dreamily. "It's not that he's dumb— more that he thinks he's so smart."

Chipping paint was easier to take after that, somehow; instead of thinking about himself going through the antics Father Neptune would require of him, he thought about Lieutenant Crowder going through them. When someone else was the victim, the joke got a lot funnier.

The petty officer supervising the never-ending job of stopping rust stared at Enos when he strolled by. "Damn me to hell if you haven't pulled your weight today," he said. "Well done."

When George looked back to see what had impressed the petty officer, he discovered he'd chipped twice as much paint as he usually would have done in so much time. Thinking about Lieutenant

Crowder making an ass of himself in front of the whole crew had been so entrancing, he hadn't kept his work pace to the usual just enough to get by. He shook his head. Now they'd expect him to work this hard all the time—and it was Lieutenant Crowder's fault. Everything was Lieutenant Crowder's fault. "If I get killed, I'll never forgive him," George muttered.

Lieutenant Straubing paced among the big White trucks as colored rousta bouts hauled supplies from the Covington wharves and loaded them into the green-gray machines for the drive south. Straubing spoke to the men, some white, some black, who would be in the cabs of those trucks: "What you've got to remember, boys, is that the war's not over. Yes, there's a cease-fire in Tennessee, and it's still holding pretty well. But the shooting could start up again any day, and there's still fighting in Virginia and out in the West. Besides, God only knows there are Rebel diehards loose in Kentucky. Don't do anything stupid like dropping your guard this late in the war. It'd be a shame to get yourself killed now."

Cincinnatus—Cincinnatus Driver, as he was learning to think of himself these days—turned to the driver nearest him and said, "The lieutenant don't give two whoops in hell if we get ourselves killed. If the cargo don't get through to where it's supposed to go, that's a different story. That ticks him off plenty."

Herk chuckled. "You got that one right." He was as white as Lieutenant Straubing, and Cincinnatus, despite spending a lot of time on the road with him, even getting shot up by some of those diehards with him, still had no idea what his last name was, or even if he owned one. He'd always just been Herk. Now he went on, "The lieutenant treats the cargo like he was paying for it out of his own pocket."

"Yeah," Cincinnatus said. He watched the roustabouts load more trucks. He'd done that work himself, before he'd convinced the U.S. forces to let him drive instead—and to pay him more money for doing it. Despite his own ex perience at their job, he muttered, "I wish they'd move faster, damn it."

Herk didn't make any cracks about lazy niggers. Lieutenant Straubing would have given him seventeen different kinds of hell if he had. Men of one color giving men of another a hard time about it interfered with getting materiel down to the front, so he refused to

tolerate it. What Herk did say was, "You've been itchy to get on the road lately, haven't you? Kid givin' you a hard time at home?"

"Nah, it ain't that so much," Cincinnatus answered. "When I'm movin', though, nobody's botherin' me, you know what I'm sayin'? There's just me and the truck and the road, that's all."

"Yeah, sure—unless somebody's layin' in the bushes with a goddamn ma chine gun like happened before," Herk said.

"Happen inside Covington easy as it can outside," Cincinnatus said. "Had a man shot dead on my own front stoop, remember. Could have been me shot dead out there, easy as that other fella."

When he was on the road, he didn't have to worry about whether every stranger he passed on the sidewalk would carry tales about him to Luther Bliss ... or to Apicius—no, Apicius *Wood*—and his Red friends ... or to Joe Conroy and however many other Confederate diehards still operated in Cov-ington. When he was on the road, he was free. Oh, he had to obey Lieutenant Straubing's orders, but his spirit was free. That counted for more than he'd ever imagined.

At last, the cargo bay in his truck was full. Whistling under his breath, he cranked the White's engine to loud, flatulent life. When it was going, he jumped into the cab and fed it more gas. Other trucks rumbled awake, too. With Lieutenant Straubing in the lead, they headed south.

More of the road down to Tennessee was paved every time Cincinnatus drove it. He suspected that wasn't true only of the road that went through Covington. The United States would need to move supplies down every highway they could. When the war ended, Kentucky would have a pretty fine network of paved roads, or at least the north-south strands of such a network.

A man in the trucking business—a man like Cincinnatus Driver, say— might do well for himself. There were some rich Negroes in the USA: not many, but a few. That put the USA a few up on the CSA. "A chance," Cincinnatus muttered. No one sitting beside him in the cab could have heard the words, but that didn't matter. He knew what he was saying. "All I want is a chance. I ever get it, I'll make the most of it."

He wasn't going to hold his breath hoping he would get it. Laws against blacks weren't so tough as they were in the CSA, though that

varied from state to state. What didn't vary was that most whites in the USA would have been just as well pleased if they could have readmitted Kentucky without its Negroes.

He rolled past a truck by the side of the road, the driver, a black man, out there with a jack and a pump and a patch, repairing the puncture. Cincinnatus hoped it was only one of those things that happened now and again, and that the diehards hadn't gone and strewn the road with nails or broken glass or specially made four-pronged inner-tube biters. That would make a lot of trucks late, and *that* would make Lieutenant Straubing unhappy. Very little else would, but that was guaranteed to do the trick.

Parts of the country were very much as they had been before the war be gan: prosperous farmlands raising wheat and corn and tobacco and horses. More, though, looked as if a mad devil had lost his temper and spent twenty years kicking it to pieces. That wasn't even so far wrong, except that war had done the job faster than any devil could have managed.

Near Covington, almost three years had passed since U.S. forces over ran the countryside. Grass had grown over trenches; rain had softened their outlines; some of the rubble and wrecked buildings had been cleared away; some had even been rebuilt. The farther south Cincinnatus went, the fresher the scars of war got. The Confederate States had fought as hard as they could to keep Kentucky one of their number—the tormented landscape told of their effort. But it spoke even more loudly of their failure.

Cincinnatus' luck held: he got through the day without a puncture. After a stop for fuel for the truck and a bowl of pork and beans from an Army kettle at midday, he rolled on steadily until, toward evening, he crossed from Kentucky into Tennessee. He started passing bands of soldiers heading toward the front. They got off onto the soft shoulder for the truck convoy and smiled and waved as the big, square, clumsy machines passed them. They even smiled and waved at Cincinnatus. They had the world by the tail, and they knew it.

He also steered the truck past columns of men coming away from the front. A few of them, a very few, showed the same high spirits as the soldiers who were replacing them. Most simply trudged along toward the north, putting one foot in front of the other, their faces and no doubt their minds far away. They'd seen so much hell, they didn't yet realize they'd escaped it—or perhaps they'd brought it with them.

They'd converted the White from acetylene lamps to electric ones not too long before; Cincinnatus enjoyed being able to throw light on the dimming road ahead at the turn of a knob, without having to stop and get out. He'd liked it even better the first time he'd done it in the rain.

At last, about nine o'clock, they pulled into the supply depot. "We ex pected you an hour ago," complained an officer with a quartermaster's badge: crossed sword and key over a wheel on which perched an eagle. Cincinnatus had never known a quartermaster with a good word to say to or about the men who fetched him the supplies he then grudgingly disbursed.

"Sorry, sir," Lieutenant Straubing said. "We made the best time we could." He had to give a soft answer: the other man outranked him.

"Likely story," the quartermaster sniffed. "Well, you're here now, so we'll unload you." He made it sound as if he were doing the truck convoy an enor mous favor.

"That's good, sir," Straubing said equably. "I can certainly see you've been ready for us this past hour."

In the cab of his truck, Cincinnatus chuckled. Nobody was waiting to un load the trucks. Plenty of people should have been. Straubing knew just how to place the dart to get the most damage with it. "Lieutenant ..." the other officer began, doing his best to make Straubing wish he'd never been born. But the truth was too obvious for him to bluster his way past it. He seemed to deflate like a punctured observation balloon that hadn't caught fire. Then he started shouting for soldiers to get off their lazy backsides and come unload the trucks.

Lieutenant Straubing, having got what he wanted, turned into the soul of helpfulness, offering all sorts of suggestions so the soldiers could do the job quicker and more efficiently. He seemed to be everywhere at once. When he passed Cincinnatus' truck, he tipped him a wink. Cincinnatus grinned and winked back.

Straubing used the quartermaster's embarrassment to get him to order his men to run up tents in which the drivers from the truck convoy could spend the night. More and more trucks kept rattling into the depot, as those that had had punctures or breakdowns on the road down from Covington caught up with the rest.

Straubing also arranged for bedrolls and hot meals for the men in his charge. Spooning up greasy stew full of meat that might have come from an elderly cow or a fairly tender mule, Herk said, "The lieutenant, he looks out for his people, no two ways about it."

"He does that," Cincinnatus agreed, talking with his mouth full. He'd seen as much before, when Lieutenant Straubing placed under arrest soldier-drivers who tried to refuse to work alongside Negroes from Covington. He didn't mention that to Herk, because he wasn't sure the white driver would take it as supporting his point of view. "I ain't worked for many bosses as good as he is like that. Don't know if I ever worked for any, now as I think about it."

Tom Kennedy had come pretty close. Like Lieutenant Straubing, though not to the same degree, he'd been more interested in the work he could get out of Cincinnatus than in what color he was. For a white citizen of the Confederate States, he'd been as good a boss as a colored resident—not citizen—of the CSA could hope for. If he hadn't been, Cincinnatus would have turned him over to the Yankee soldiers, that night they came looking for him.

His life probably would have been simpler if he had. Too late to worry about that, though. Too late to worry about Tom Kennedy, too, except to wonder who had put a bullet through his head. Shaking his own head, Cincinnatus went back to get more stew and a tin cup full of coffee.

"Come on, boys—eat up and get some sleep," Straubing called, like a father telling a houseful of children what to do. "We're heading back to Covington before it gets light; they'll need us again soon as we can be there. I told you before, the war's not done till the Rebs roll over and play dead along the whole line."

The men in the convoy obeyed as children would obey their father, too. Cincinnatus gulped down his coffee—he was tired enough, he knew it wouldn't keep him awake long—and ducked into one of the tents. He took off his shoes, wrapped himself in a blanket as much to hold bugs at bay as for warmth, and drifted toward sleep.

Outside the tent, the officer from the depot spoke: "Lieutenant, I will say you have yourself a pretty fair batch of men there."

"I've spent a lot of time getting them to where I want them, sir," Lieutenant Straubing answered. "I must say, I'm not altogether displeased with them now myself. By whatever means necessary, they

get the job done. They took a while to learn that from me, but now they've got it down solid. They get the job done, and that's what counts."

XVII

In Augusta, Georgia, Scipio didn't turn around every few seconds, as if afraid his own shadow were about to rise up and stab him in the back. It wasn't that a price didn't remain on his head. It did. It probably would, as long as he lived: certainly as long as Anne Colleton lived. However unenthusiastically, he'd played too big a role in the Congaree Socialist Republic for that to change.

But, with the Confederate States tottering on the brink of losing the war against the USA—actually, the war *was* lost, but the CSA hadn't yet been able to persuade the USA to stop advancing on the fronts where fighting went on— earlier victories over the Socialist Republics were forgotten. Whites on the streets in Augusta went around with stunned, dazed expressions on their faces. They'd never lost a war before. They'd never imagined they *could* lose a war. The Confederacy had gone from one triumph to another. Now the whites here were learning what the United States had learned half a century before: what defeat tasted like. Next to that, chasing Reds was of small import.

The other side of the coin was that Scipio had got to Georgia. Whatever he'd done in South Carolina, he might as well have done in a foreign country. Confederate states often seemed proud of paying no attention to what went on in their neighbors' backyards. Georgia had reward posters up for its own Red Negro rebel fugitives, but none for those from South Carolina. Here, Scipio was just one more anonymous black man looking for work.

He was looking harder than he'd expected, too. Factories weren't hiring the way they had been a year before. "We're already letting people go," a clerk told Scipio. "What's the point of bringing more onto the lines when the war orders are gonna dry up and blow away any minute now?"

"I understands that, suh," Scipio said, "but I gots to eat, too. What is I s'posed to do?"

"Go pick cotton," the white clerk answered. "Reckon that's what you were up to before the war started. Won't hurt you to get on back. When the Army shrinks, the soldiers'll need their own jobs back again."

White men will need their old fobs back again, Scipio thought. *And the Negroes who were doing those jobs? Well, the hell with them. They might have been good enough to help out for a little while, but now they're going to have to learn their place again.*

He'd got rebuffs from every factory he tried. For a while, he'd wondered if he would have to work in the fields. The money he'd earned from odd jobs as he made his way across South Carolina was almost gone. His life at Marshlands had convinced him of one thing: he did not want to be a field hand. But he did not want to starve, either.

And then he passed a little restaurant on Telfair Street with a sign in the window: WAITER WANTED. He started to go in, then shook his head. Reluctantly, he spent a couple of quarters on a shirt and a pair of pants that, if long past their salad days, were not ragged and falling to pieces. Then he went back to his flophouse in the Terry, the Negro district in the southeastern part of town, and bathed in a tin tub that plainly hadn't been used as often as it should have. Only after his clothes and he were as fresh as he could make them did he head back toward the restaurant.

Inside, a colored fellow was setting cheap silverware on a table. "What you want?" he asked in neutral tones as he slowly put down the last couple of pieces.

"I seen the sign in the window," Scipio answered. "I's lookin' for work. I works hard, I does." He wondered if the proprietor had already hired the other man, in which case he'd parted with money he couldn't afford to lose.

But the other Negro just shrugged and asked, "You wait tables befo'?"

"I's done that." Scipio nodded emphatically. He pointed to the place set ting the fellow had just finished laying out. "De soup spoon belong on the udder side o' de teaspoon."

Smiling now, the fellow reversed them. "You *has* waited tables." He raised his voice: "Hey, Mistuh Ogelthorpe! I think we got you a waiter here."

A white man in his late fifties came out of the back room. He walked with the aid of a stick. Scipio wondered if he'd been wounded in this war or the Second Mexican War. More likely the latter, by his

age—or, of course, he might just have been in a train wreck or some other misfortune. He looked Scipio over with gray eyes that were far from foolish. "What's your name, boy?" he asked.

"I's called Xerxes, suh," Scipio replied. He'd been called a lot of different things lately. He was glad he could keep them straight and remember who he was supposed to be at any given moment.

Ogelthorpe turned back to the other waiter. "How come you reckon he's a waiter, Fabius?"

"On account of he knows the difference 'tween a soup spoon and a teaspoon, and where each of 'em goes on the table," the other Negro—Fabius— said.

"That a fact?" Ogelthorpe said, and Fabius nodded. The white man who owned the restaurant turned to Scipio and asked, "Where'd you learn the business, Xerxes?"

"Here an' dere, suh," Scipio answered. "I been doin' factory work since de war start, mostly, but de factories, dey's shuttin' down."

"Here and there?" Ogelthorpe rubbed his chin. "You tell me you got any thing like a passbook, I'm liable to fall over dead from the surprise."

"No, suh," Scipio said. "Times is rough. Lots o' niggers ain't gone none dese days, on account of we's moved around so much."

"Or for other reasons." No, Ogelthorpe wasn't stupid, not even close. A frown twisted his narrow mouth. "Wish you didn't talk like you been pickin' cotton all your born days."

Had Scipio wanted to, he could have talked a great deal more elegantly than Ogelthorpe. He'd used that ability to speak like a polished white man to help escape from the swamps of the Congaree. But, if he didn't speak like a polished white man, speaking like a field hand was all he could do. He'd never before missed his lack of a middle way. Now he did, intently.

"I's powerful sorry, suh," he said. "I tries to do better."

"You read and write and cipher?" Ogelthorpe looked as if anything but a *no* there would have surprised him, too.

But Scipio read the names and prices of the soups and sandwiches and stews and meat dishes on the wall. He found a pencil and a scrap of paper on the counter and wrote his name and Fabius' and Ogelthorpe's in his small, precise script. Then he handed Ogelthorpe the paper and said, "You write any numbers you wants, an' I kin cipher they out fo' you."

He'd wondered if his demonstration would make Ogelthorpe not bother, but the white man scrawled a column of figures—watching, Scipio saw they were the prices of items he served—and thrust back the sheet and the pencil. "Go ahead—add 'em up."

Scipio did, careful not to make any mistakes. "They comes to fo' dollars an' seventeen cents all told," he said when he was done.

Ogelthorpe's expression said that, while they did indeed come to $4.17, he rather wished they didn't. Fabius, on the other hand, laughed out loud. "You got anything else you want to give him a hard time about, boss?"

"Don't reckon so," Ogelthorpe admitted. With a sigh, he turned back to Scipio. "Pay's ten dollars a week, an' tips, an' lunch an' supper every day you're here. You play as good a game as you talk, I'll bump you up a slug or two in a month. What do you say?"

"I says, yes, suh. I says, thank you, suh," Scipio answered. He wouldn't get rich on that kind of money, but he wouldn't starve, especially not when he could feed himself here. And he'd be able to get out of the grim Terry flophouse and into a better room or even a flat.

Ogelthorpe said, "You can tell me I'm crazy if you want, but I got the idea you ain't got a hell of a lot of jack right now. You're clean enough, I'll say that, but I want you to get yourself black trousers an' a white shirt like Fabius is wearin', and I want you to do it fast as you're able. You don't do it fast enough to suit me, back on the street you go."

"I takes care of it," Scipio promised. He thought Fabius was dressed up too fancy for the kind of food the place dished out, but realized his own tastes were on the snobbish side. *One more thing I can blame on Miss Anne,* he thought. Maybe, now that he was outside of South Carolina, she wouldn't be able to track him down. He hoped to Jesus she couldn't.

Outside, a clock started chiming noon. A moment later, two steam whis tles blew. "Here comes the lunch crowd," Ogelthorpe said. "All right, Xerxes, looks like you get baptism by total immersion. Me, I got to get my ass back to the stove." He disappeared into the rear of the restaurant.

Fabius just had time to hand Scipio a Gray Eagle scratch pad before the place filled up. Then Scipio was working like a madman for the next hour and a half, taking orders, hustling them back to Ogelthorpe, carrying plates of food to the customers, taking money and making change, and trading dirty china and silverware for clean with the dishwasher, an ancient black man who hadn't bothered to come out and see whether he'd be hired.

Some of the customers were white, some colored. By their clothes, they all worked at the nearby hash cannery or the ironworks or one of the several factories that made bricks from the fine clay found in abundance around Augusta. Whites and Negroes might come in together, sometimes laughing and joking with one another, but the whites always sat at the tables on one side of the restaurant, the blacks at those on the other.

Scipio wondered if Fabius would wait on the whites and leave the Negroes for him. The whites would undoubtedly have more money to spend. Scipio presumed that would translate into better tips. But the two waiters split the crowd evenly, and Scipio needed less than half an hour to find out his idea wasn't necessarily so. The idea of tipping a colored waiter had never crossed a lot of white men's minds. When they did tip, they left more than their Negro counterparts, but the blacks were more likely to leave something, if often not much. Taken all together, things evened out.

By half past one, after the last lunch shift ended, the place was quiet again, as it had been before noon. Panting like a hound, Fabius said, "Reckon you see why Mistuh Jim hired hisself a new waiter. We got more business'n two can handle, let alone one like I was doin'."

"You one busy nigger 'fore today, sure enough," Scipio said.

"You done pulled your weight," Fabius said. "Never had to hustle you, never had to tell you what to do. You said you know about waitin' on tables, you wasn't lyin'."

"No, I weren't lyin'," Scipio agreed. "We git our ownselves somethin' to eat now? Plumb hard settin' it in front o' other folk wif so

much empty inside o' me."

"I hear what you say." Fabius nodded. "I done et 'fore the rush started, but you go on back there now. Mistuh Ogelthorpe don't feed you good, you take a fryin' pan and whack him upside the head."

Ogelthorpe also nodded when Scipio did head back to the cooking area. "You know what you were doin', sure as hell," he said.

"Yes, suh," Scipio said. Compared to the fancy banquets Anne Colleton had put on, this was crude, rough, fast work, but the principles didn't change.

"Chicken soup in the pot," Ogelthorpe said. "You want a ham sandwich to go along with it?"

"Thank you, suh. That be mighty fine." Scipio had carried a lof of ham sandwiches out to hungry workers. He knew they were thick with meat and spears of garlicky pickle and richly daubed with a mustard whose odor tickled his nose. He'd just ladled out a bowl of soup when Ogelthorpe handed him a sandwich of his own.

The first bite told him why people crowded into the restaurant. Miss Anne would have turned up her nose at such a rough delicacy, but she wasn't here. Scipio was. He took another big bite. With his mouth full, he said, "Suh, I's gwine like this place jus' fine."

Here you are, ma'am," the cabbie said to Flora Hamburger as he pulled to a stop at the corner of Eighth and Pine. "Pennsylvania Hospital."

"Thank you," she answered, and gave him half a dollar, which included a twenty-cent tip. That was enough to make him leap out of the elderly Duryea and hold the door open for her with a show of subservience that made her most uncomfortable. Socialism, to her, meant equality among all workers, no matter what they did.

But she had no time to instruct him, not now. She hurried past the statue of William Penn toward the front entrance to the hospital, whose cornerstone, she saw, bore an inscription dating from the reign of George II.

A soldier walked past her, smiling and nodding as he did so. By

his stick and the rolling gait he had in spite of it, Flora knew he was using an artificial leg. Because of what he'd gone through, she smiled back at him. Without that, she would have ignored him, as she was in the habit of ignoring all the young men who smiled and nodded at her.

She went up the stairs to the second floor. One wing had private rooms; the best doctors gave the patients in them the best care they could. That was an advantage David Hamburger would not have had without his sister's being in Congress. Using it went against every egalitarian instinct she had, but family instincts were older and deeper.

She almost ran into a nurse coming out of her brother's room. The woman in the starched gray and white uniform with the red cross embroidered on the breast gave back a pace. "I'm sorry, Congresswoman," she said. "I didn't realize you were coming in."

"It's all right, Nancy." Flora knew a lot of the nurses who helped take care of David. She came to the Pennsylvania Hospital as often as she could. She felt bad about not coming more often than she did, but sitting in Congress and handling the endless work that went along with sitting in Congress was a trap with huge jaws full of sharp teeth.

David lay quietly in the bed, his face almost as pale as the white linen of sheets and pillowcases—being at war with the CSA and the British Empire had made cotton scarce and hard to come by. Under the covers, the outline of his body seemed unnaturally small—and so it was, with one leg gone above the knee. But the rest of him seemed shrunken, too, as if losing the leg had made him lose some of his spirit. And if it had, would that be so surprising?

He managed a smile. "Hello, Flora," he said. He sounded very tired, even now. Flora was glad he sounded any way at all. Loss of blood and an infection had almost killed him. If the infection had been a little worse . . . How would Flora ever have been able to show her face to her family? She had enough trouble showing her face to her family now. They didn't condemn her. She condemned herself, which was far harder to bear.

"How are you?" she asked, feeling foolish and useless.

"Not too bad," he answered, as he did whenever she asked—which meant she couldn't take the words seriously. He'd lost a lot of flesh; parchmentlike skin stretched tight over the bones of his face. His dark

eyes were enormous. Then he did seem to pick up a little energy, a little life, as he asked, "Are the Rebs really and truly trying to surrender?"

Back in New York City, he'd never called them Rebs; he'd picked that up in the trenches. Flora didn't like it. It made him sound as if he endorsed the war even after what it had done to him. She said, "Pieces of the cease-fire are in place, but Roosevelt won't give them all of it. He's still driving in Virginia and the West. I wish he weren't, but he has the bit between his teeth."

"Bully," David said, as if he were Roosevelt. "After everything it's cost us, we'd better get the most we can out of this war. If we stop too soon, why did we go and fight it in the first place?"

"Because we were mad," Flora replied, staring at her brother with a new kind of horror: he *did* sound like the president, where he'd been growing up a Socialist like everyone else in the family. She asked, "How can you say that, after what happened to you?" Only after she'd spoken the words did she notice she'd slipped from English into Yiddish.

David answered in the same language: "How can I say anything else? Do you want me to lose my leg and the country to have nothing to show for it?"

"I never wanted you to lose your leg at all," Flora said. "I never wanted anyone to lose his leg, or his arm, or his eye, or anything. Even if we win, we have nothing to show for it. We never should have fought at all."

"Nuf" David said. Even raising an eyebrow seemed to cost him no small physical effort. "Maybe you're right, Flora. Maybe we shouldn't have gotten into it. But once we did decide to fight, what can we do but fight as hard as we canto win?"

That dilemma had dogged the Socialist Party from the beginning. Cutting the war short once a treasure of money and an even greater treasure of lives had been spent had proved not just impossible but, worse, unpopular, as the majorities Roosevelt and the Democrats brought in showed.

As David had learned new ways of talking and thinking in the trenches, so Flora had on the floor of Congress. Being without a good answer, she changed the subject: "Have they said anything more

about fitting you with an artificial leg? As I was coming in, I saw a man walking very well with one." She was stretching a point, but not too far.

"They'll have to wait a while longer," he said. "The stump's not healed well enough yet, and the amputation was pretty high." His mouth twisted. "Maybe I'll be a one-crutch cripple instead of a two-crutch cripple." Flora's expression must have betrayed her, for her brother looked contrite. "It's better than being dead, believe me."

Reluctantly, Flora nodded. Her sister's husband, Yossel Reisen, had been killed in Virginia bare days after he married Sophie; he had a son he'd never seen and never would see now.

A doctor came in. "Congresswoman Hamburger," he said, polite but not obsequious: he'd dealt with a lot of important people. "If you'll excuse me—" He advanced on David.

"Maybe you'd better go," David said to Flora. "The stump looks better than it used to, but it's still not pretty."

She was glad of the excuse to leave, and ashamed of herself for being glad. Here was her baby brother—or so she remembered him, at any rate— dreadfully mutilated, and here he was, too, wanting the fighting to go on so others could suffer a like fate or worse. He obviously meant every word he said, but he might as well have started talking Persian for all the sense he made to her.

She went downstairs. A soldier with no legs was moving along in a wheel chair. He was whistling a vaudeville tune of some sort, and seemed happy enough with his world. Flora didn't understand it. Flora couldn't understand it. And, had she asked him, she was sure he would have told her the war had to go on, too. She didn't understand that, either, but she was sure of it.

She went back to her office, but accomplished little that truly resembled work. She'd expected nothing different; seeing David always left her the worse for wear. After a while, realizing she'd read a letter three times without having the faintest idea what it was about, she put it away, got up, and told her secretary, "Bertha, I'm going over to my apartment."

"All right, Miss Hamburger," Bertha answered. "I hope your brother is better. I pray for him every night." She crossed herself.

"Thank you," Flora said. "He's doing as well as he can, I think." She'd said that so many times. It was even true. But *as well as he can* was a long way from *well.* And still he thought the United States should keep on with the war. Flora shook her head till the silk flowers on her hat rustled and rattled. She could live another hundred years without having it make sense to her.

She was standing in front of the Congressional office building waiting to flag a taxi when someone in a Ford called to her: "Where are you going, Flora?"

It was Hosea Blackford. "To my apartment," she answered.

The congressman from Dakota pushed open the passenger-side door. "I'm heading that way myself," he said. "Hop in, if you've a mind to." She did hop in, with a word of thanks. She had very little to say on the short trip back to the apartment building. Blackford glanced over at her. "You've been to see your brother, or I miss my guess. I hope he hasn't taken a turn for the worse?"

"No," Flora said, and then she burst out, "He *still* thinks we have to go on pounding the Confederate States!"

Blackford drove in silence for some little while before finally saying, "If your own brother feels that way after he was wounded, you begin to get an idea of what the Democrats would have done to us if we had tried hard to cut off funds for the war after it began. This country thirsts for revenge the way a drunk thirsts for rotgut whiskey."

"But it's all mystification!" Flora exclaimed. "The capitalists have tricked the workers into going to war against their class interest, and into being thankful while they're getting slaughtered. They've even tricked someone like David, who ought to know better if anyone should." To her dismay, she began to cry.

Congressman Blackford parked the Ford across the street from the apart ment building where they both lived. "Mystification is a notion that sounds more useful than it is," he observed as he got out and went around to open her door for her. "What people believe and what they'll do because they believe it is a big part of what's real, especially in politics."

"It's one of the planks in the platform," Flora said, taking his arm as she got out of the motorcar. "The capitalists and the bourgeoisie

mystify the proletariat into going along with their desires." She raised an eyebrow; he'd shown before that his ideology wasn't so pure as she would have liked.

He shrugged now. "If you run a campaign that doesn't do anything but shout 'They're tricking you!' over and over, you're going to lose. That's one of the things the Socialist Party has proved again and again. The other thing the Democrats have proved for us—or against us, rather—is that, right now, anyhow, nationalism is stronger than class solidarity." He shrugged again. "I'd say the whole world has proved that for us."

"What about the Negroes in the Confederate States?" Flora asked.

"What about them?" Blackford returned. "They rose up and they got smashed. You're still learning the difference between being an agitator and being a politician. Listen to me, Flora." He sounded very earnest. "Compromise is not a dirty word."

"Maybe it should be," she answered, and strode into the apartment build ing ahead of him. She could feel his eyes on her back, but she did not turn around.

Gordon McSweeney prowled along the west bank of the Mississippi, looking for Confederate soldiers to kill. He didn't find any. The United States had this stretch of the riverbank under firm control these days. He felt frustrated, as a lion might feel frustrated looking out of its cage and seeing a cage full of zebras across the walk in the zoo.

Not even the new, shiny captain's bars he wore made him feel any easier about the world. He knew he'd been lucky to wreck one Confederate river monitor. Asking God to let him be that lucky twice was pushing the limits of what He was likely to grant.

Across the Mississippi lay Memphis. It might as well have lain across the Pacific, for all McSweeney could do to it. U.S. artillerymen still pounded the city; the cease-fire did not hold west of the Tennessee River. McSweeney was glad of that. Watching smoke rise from the foe's heartland gave him a certain amount of satisfaction, but only a certain amount. He hadn't caused any of that devastation himself, and acutely felt the lack.

Ben Carlton came up alongside him. Carlton wore new sergeant's

chevrons on his sleeve. He was a sergeant for the same reason McSweeney was a captain: the regiment had gone through the meat grinder taking Craighead Forest, and not nearly enough new officers and noncoms were coming up to replace the dead and wounded. Very few veterans were still privates these days.

"Pretty damn soon, the Rebs'll pack it in here, too, I expect," Carlton said.

"Every blasphemy that passes your lips means a hotter dose of hellfire in the world to come," McSweeney answered.

"I've seen enough hellfire right here on earth," Carlton said. "The kind the preachers go on about don't worry me as much as it used to."

"Oh, but it must!" McSweeney was shocked out of anger into earnestness.

"If you do not repent of your sinful ways, the things you have seen here will be as nothing beside the torments you will suffer there. And those torments shall not pass away, but endure for all eternity."

Instead of giving a direct answer, Carlton asked, "What are you going to do when the war's finally done?"

McSweeney hadn't thought about that, not since the day the United States had joined their allies in the fight against the Confederate States and the rest of the Quadruple Entente. He didn't like thinking about it now. "I work on my old man's farm," he answered reluctantly. "Maybe I'll go back—don't know much else. Or maybe I'll try and stay in the Army. That might be pretty good."

"Well, I'll tell you, sir, you can have my place when they turn me loose," Carlton said. "I've done enough fighting to last me all my days. Don't rightly know what I'll do afterwards—I was sort of odd-jobbing around before I got conscripted—but I'll come up with something, I figure."

"Not cook," McSweeney said. "Anything but cook. When you're good, you're not very good, and when you're bad, even the rats won't touch *it.n*

"Love you, too . . . sir," Carlton said with a sour stare. He looked thoughtful; he might have been a lousy cook, but he knew all the angles. McSweeney cared nothing for angles. He always went straight

ahead. After a few seconds' contemplation, Carlton went on, "You want to stay in the Army, I figure they'll let you do it. You've picked up so many medals, you'd fall forward on your kisser if you tried to pin the whole bunch on at once. If the Army tried to cut you loose and you didn't want to go, you could raise a big stink in the papers."

Raising a stink in the papers had never crossed Gordon McSweeney's mind. He'd seen a newspaper but seldom before he had to do his service; when he read, he read the Good Book. So now it was with genuine curiosity that he asked, "Do you think it might help?"

"Hell, yes," Carlton answered, ignoring McSweeney's fearsome frown. "Can't you see the headlines? 'Hero Forced from Uniform!'—in big black letters, no less. Think the Army wants that kind of headline? Like hell they do. They want everybody proud of 'em, especially now that we've finally gone and licked the Rebs."

It sounded logical. It sounded persuasive. McSweeney knew little of logic. What he knew of persuasion he actively distrusted: it struck him as a tool of Satan. With a sigh, he said, "The Army won't be the same after the war is over."

"That's right," Carlton said. "Most of the time, you'd sleep in a barracks. You'd get your meals regular, from a better cook than me. Nobody would be trying to shoot you or gas you or blow you up."

McSweeney never worried about what the enemy was trying to do to him. His only concern was how he could kick the other fellow in the teeth. How to put that into words? "After the war," he said slowly, "how can anything I do seem better than lukewarm?"

"You're stationed in a nice, cozy barracks, you can go into town and find yourself a pretty girl." Carlton had an answer for everything.

Most of the time, though, it was the wrong answer by Gordon McSweeney's reckoning. "Lewdness and fornication lead to the pangs of hell no less surely than blasphemy," he said, his voice stiff with disapproval.

Carlton rolled his eyes. "All right, Captain," he said, using the rank in a way that reminded McSweeney he'd known him when he had none, "go into town, find yourself a pretty girl, and marry her, then, if that's how you feel about it."

It is better to marry than to burn. So Paul had said in First Corinthians. To hear the same advice from Ben Carlton was jolting; few people struck McSweeney as being less like Paul than did the longtime and stubbornly inept company cook. "Do I tell you how to arrange your life, Carlton?" he demanded.

"Only when you open your mouth," Ben answered. "Sir."

McSweeney gave him a dirty look. "You are godless," he said. "You have made my life a trial since the moment we began serving together. Why God has not called you to Him to judge you for your many sins, I cannot imagine. By failing to call you, He proves Himself a God of mercy."

"Reckon you're right about that, Captain McSweeney, sir," Carlton said, but the gleam in his eyes warned that he did not expect to be taken altogether seriously. "Maybe He figures that, with you riding herd on me, He doesn't have to do any nagging of His own."

"Get out of my sight," McSweeney snarled. Then he held up a hand. "No. Wait. Get down." Carlton was already throwing himself flat. No more slowly than McSweeney, he heard the screech of cloven air and, intermixed with it, the roar of a river monitor's big gun.

The roar of the shell was like the end of the world. Face down in the black, sweet-smelling mud—McSweeney could tell by his nose how rich the soil was—he felt the world shake as the round thudded home. Splinters hissed and squealed past overhead. Dirt pattered down on him and Carlton both. The Rebs hadn't missed them by much. The crash of the shell left his ears stunned, battered.

Dimly, as if from far away, he heard Carlton shouting, "I hate those goddamn fucking monitors—unless they're ours!"

Foul language aside, McSweeney agreed with all his heart. That was why he had sent one of them to its no doubt less than heavenly reward. The U.S. Army still had not brought up guns that could match the monitors' firepower. As a sergeant, he would have guessed about why that was, and only his strong belief would have kept his guesses from being profane. As an officer, he heard official explanations in place of guesses. The only trouble was, the explanations changed from day to day.

Once, he'd been solemnly told that all the really large-caliber cannon were in service east of the Mississippi. A few days later, he

heard that the roads down from Missouri were too bad to let the Army move super-heavy cannon down as far as Memphis. The roads *were* bad. He knew that. Whether they were *that* bad, or whether the other half of the explanation was true, he did not know. He did know the U.S. artillery that had made it down opposite Memphis could not match what the Rebels' river monitors carried.

Another shell came whistling down out of the sky. This one struck even closer than had the first. The force of the explosion sent him tumbling along the ground. He felt something wet on his upper lip. When he raised a hand, he discovered his nose was bleeding. If he'd been breathing in rather than out, he might have had his lungs torn to shreds inside his chest, and died without a mark on his body except blood from his nose. He'd seen that happen. After almost three years, he'd seen everything happen.

Ben Carlton was screaming. Because his ears had taken a beating, Mc- Sweeney needed longer to realize that than he would have otherwise. He crawled toward Carlton, then stopped and grimaced and shook his head. A shell fragment had gutted the company cook like a trout. His innards spilled into the mud. It put McSweeney in mind of the last time he'd butchered a calf.

"Oh, Mother!" Carlton wailed. "Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus fucking Christ!"

That was not the way McSweeney would have called on the Son of God, but he did not criticize, not here, not now. As he took a better look at Carl-ton's wound, he became certain the cook was beyond his criticism, though not beyond that of a higher Judge. Not only were his guts spilled on the ground, they were also gashed and torn. If he didn't die of blood loss or shock, a wound infection would finish him more slowly but no less surely.

He wasn't in shock now, but too horribly aware of what had happened. "Do something, God damn you!" he shrieked at Gordon McSweeney.

McSweeney looked at his contorted face, looked at the wound, and grimaced again. He knew what needed doing. He'd done it before for wounded comrades. It never came easy, not even for him. He drew the trench knife he wore on his belt and showed it to Carlton. The wounded man was awake and aware and deserved the choice.

"Yes," he groaned. "Oh, God, yes. It hurts so bad."

McSweeney got up on his knees, used one hand to tilt up Ben Carlton's chin, and cut his throat. His comrade's eyes held him for a few seconds, then looked through him toward eternity.

Looking at Carlton, McSweeney hardly noted yet another shell screaming in. Had he noticed, it would have mattered little. The shell burst only a couple of feet away. For an instant, everything was gold-glowing light. Then it was dark, darkness absolute. And then Gordon McSweeney found out whether or not everything in which he had so fervently believed was true.

Richmond shocked Anne Colleton. She hadn't been in the capital since the night of the first big U.S. bombing raid, most of a year before. It had taken a beating then; she'd seen as much as she made her way to the train station. But that had been a house gone here, a shop gone there, and a few piles of rubble in the street.

Now, after months of nighttime visits from U.S. bombing aeroplanes, Richmond was a charred skeleton of its former self. Whole blocks had been burnt out. Hardly a building had escaped getting a chunk bitten out of it. Windows with glass in them were rare enough to draw notice. More were boarded over; still more gaped empty.

"Things have been hard, sure enough," the cab driver told her as he pulled up in front of Ford's Hotel. "Last time they were this hard, I was a little boy, and the Yankees were comin' up the James instead of down from the north." He wore a neat white beard, at which he plucked now. "We druv 'em back then, but I'll be switched if I know how we're going to do it this time."

A colored attendant took charge of her bags. When she registered, she smiled to find her room was on the same floor as it had been during her last visit. The smile held a hint of cat's claws; she'd kept Roger Kimball out of her bed then, much to his annoyance.

After she'd unpacked, she telephoned the president's residence. The aide with whom she talked seemed surprised she'd come into Richmond so nearly on time, but said, "Yes, Miss Colleton, the president looks forward to seeing you. You're booked for tomorrow at ten. I trust that will be acceptable."

"I suppose so," she answered. "Or will we have surrendered by then?" The flunky spluttered. Anne said, "Never mind. That will be

fine." She hung up in the middle of an expostulation.

Supper that evening wasn't what it had been the year before, either. "Sorry, ma'am," the Negro waiter said. "Cain't hardly get food like we used to." He lowered his voice. "A couple o' the bes' chefs went an' joined the Army, too."

Anne sighed. "I wish I'd known that before I ordered. I think this so- called beefsteak would neigh if I stuck a fork in it."

"No, ma'am, that really an' truly is beef," the waiter insisted. He dropped his voice to a whisper again: "But if you stick a fork in the rabbit with plum sauce, it'll meow, sure as I'm standin' here. Roof rabbit, nothin' else but." Having thought about ordering the rabbit, Anne let out a sigh of relief.

U.S. bombers pounded Richmond again that night. Anne grabbed a robe and went down to the cellar of the Ford Hotel, where she spent several crowded, uncomfortable, frightened hours. Even in the cellar, she could hear the *crump!* of bursting bombs, the barking roar of the antiaircraft guns, and the seemingly endless buzzing snarl of aeroplanes overhead. She realized how isolated from the war she'd been in South Carolina. It left no one here untouched.

Just after she'd managed to fall asleep in spite of the racket, the all-clear sounded. She went back to her room and lay awake again for a long time before finally dropping off once more.

Ham and eggs the next morning tasted fine. The coffee was muddy and bitter, but strong enough to pry her eyes open, which counted for more. She walked outside, flagged a cab, and went up Shockoe Hill to the presidential residence.

Antiaircraft guns had sprouted on the lawn since her last visit. Holes— actually, they were more like craters—had sprouted in the lawn. Boards took the place of glass here as elsewhere in Richmond. Other than that, the mansion seemed undamaged, for which Anne was glad.

Inside, a flunky of higher grade than the one with whom she'd confirmed her appointment said, "Ma'am, the president will see you as soon as he finishes his meeting with the British minister."

President Semmes stayed closeted with the British minister till nearly noon, too. Had he been with anyone else save perhaps the

secretary of war, the delay would have offended her. But the British Empire and the Confederate States were the last of the Quadruple Entente still in the fight against the USA and Germany (Anne didn't count Japan, and didn't think she should— the Japanese were fighting more in their own interest than as allies of anyone else). It was only natural for them to take counsel together.

When the British minister left Semmes' office and came out through the antechamber where she was sitting, she grimaced. His expression would have had to lighten to seem grim. He hurried past without looking at her. Without false modesty, she knew that any man who did that had a lot on his mind.

"The president will see you now," the flunky said, appearing in the wait ing room as if by magic.

"Thank you," Anne said, and went into the office from which presidents of the Confederate States had led their nation from one success to another for better than half a century. Gabriel Semmes still led; where the success was to come from, however, Anne could not imagine.

Semmes seemed to have aged a decade since Anne had seen him the previ ous year. He was grayer and balder than he had been; his skin hung slack on his face, and dark shadows lay under his eyes. When he said, "Come in, Miss Colleton. Do come in," his voice was an old man's voice.

"Thank you, your Excellency," Anne said, and then, as she sat, "Are things really so bad as that?"

"By no means." President Semmes let out a gallows chuckle. "They are a great deal worse. The British Isles *will* starve—save, perhaps, that part of Ireland that has risen in revolution—and we *are* taking blows not even an elephant could hope to withstand for long."

"But the truce in Tennessee is holding," Anne said. "Why would Roo sevelt let it hold if the United States weren't also at the end of their tether?"

"So he can hammer harder at other fronts," Semmes said. "So he can threaten us with starting up the war again there, too, if we do not lay down our arms on all fronts. If he does ..." Semmes shook his head. "We could not hold the Yankees at the line of the Cumberland. I do wonder if we should be able to hold them at the line of the

Tennessee."

He shook his head again; Anne got the idea he wished he hadn't said so much. "They've licked us, then," she said. "Colored soldiers and all, they've licked us. We might as well not have bothered with them."

"As it turned out, that is true," Semmes said, "though they did buy us some extra time. Had Russia not collapsed, had France held out, our own circumstances would be very different. And then, when the Empire of Brazil stabbed England in the back . .. our Allies are in a bad way, Miss Colleton, even as we are."

"We had better cut our losses, then, and get out of the fight with the best bargain we can make," Anne said.

"For one thing, that would mean casting aside our allies once and for all," the president answered. "For another, but for the cease-fire in Tennessee, I have seen no sign that the United States want to bargain. All they want is to rub our faces into the dirt. The men I have sent forth to treat with them leave me in no doubt as to how much they want to rub our faces in the dirt."

"We did it to them twice," Anne said, "and they've been burning for re venge since the Second Mexican War."

"We've embarrassed them since, too," Semmes said gloomily. "With Britain and France at our backs, we've been too strong for them to challenge, and so, up till now, we have for the most part had our own way."

"Up till now," Anne echoed. *"Can* we yield? Or do they aim to wipe us off the face of the earth? If they do, I already know how to use a rifle. Teaching the rest of the women in the CSA wouldn't take long."

"I admire your spirit, Miss Colleton," the president said. "But we are not in the state we are in because of any want of spirit. We are in our present state because our allies have failed, and because our Negroes rose up against us, and most of all because the United States outweigh us by about two to one. They outweigh us and Canada combined, and they have been able to take advantage of it. I wish I had something more hopeful I could tell you."

"We must never let this happen again," Anne said.

"In principle, I agree with you," Gabriel Semmes replied. "In practice ... in practice, I fear, living up to that principle shall not be so easy. The Yankees will grow as a result of whatever peace they force upon us; we shall shrink correspondingly. They will not make it easy for us to gain redress for the grievances they leave us."

"They waited fifty years and more for their revenge," Anne said. "If we have to, we can do the same. But I hope and pray it will come sooner."

"They also spent a lot of time and money preparing that revenge," Semmes pointed out. "Can we do the same, under their watchful eye?" Just when Anne thought his manhood altogether quenched, he added, "Whether we can or not, I don't know, but we shall have to try."

"Yes," Anne said. "I never understood what drove them to want the re venge so badly. Now I do. Nothing like losing to make you want to take back what you've lost and to get even with the fellow who took it from you."

She thought of Jacob, gassed by the Yankees and murdered when the Negroes raised the red banner of revolution. She'd had some measure of revenge—not enough, but some—on the Reds. How could she avenge herself upon the United States of America?

"I do want to thank you for the support you have shown for my policies since I succeeded President Wilson," Semmes said. "I hope that support will continue as we head toward the end of this war."

I hope you still have some money and some influence left, was what he meant. Anne hoped the same thing. She wished she'd sold Marshlands before the Red uprising—that would have given her more capital to invest. Her investments, at the moment, were disasters, but Marshlands was a catastrophe. Not only was it bringing in no money, the taxes she paid on the land were sucking the life's blood from her veins.

She said, "I'll do what I can. We need to get our strength back as quickly as we're able to."

That wasn't a promise that what she would do would involve supporting Gabriel Semmes, although she would not have been brokenhearted to have him take it as one. And so he did, saying, "I knew I could rely on you. And let me say that, even now, I have some hope that the Army of Northern Virginia will yet halt the Yankees'

inroads, for which they are paying a dreadful price. If we stop them, if we can drive them back, we may yet get terms more nearly acceptable to the national honor."

"I hope we do," Anne said, and meant it. At the same time, though, she still held to the thought she'd had before: if the war was lost, best to escape it as soon as might be. With this war behind them, the Confederate States could start thinking about the next one.

It was, Lucien Galtier thought, a grand day for a wedding. He felt not the least bit sorry to hold the ceremony in the little tin-roofed church of St.-Antonin rather than the grander structure up in Riviere-du-Loup. Father Pierre, the local priest, got on very well with Father Fitzpatrick. Bishop Pascal would have made a fine show of getting along with Dr. O'Doull's friend, and, while making that fine show, would have done everything in his power to undercut him. Lucien had seen Bishop Pascal in action before.

He fiddled with his wing collar and cravat. Marie had gone on and on about how handsome he looked in his somber black suit. Whether he looked handsome or not, he disliked the way the collar grabbed him around the neck. He sniffed at his sleeve, hoping neither the suit nor the white shirt under it smelled too overpoweringly of mothballs. They spent most of their time in a chest in the closet, coming forth for hardly anything but funerals and weddings.

His sons stood around fiddling with their collars, too. He'd had to tie their neckties for them: it was either that or spend half an hour waiting while they botched the job and then do the tying. Neither of them had had much practice at the art. He hadn't had much himself, and hoped the knot in his own cravat was as straight as those he'd tied for Charles and Georges.

Had Nicole been marrying some young man of the vicinity, he too would have worn a black suit of no particular age (and no particular shape), and like as not a cravat his father had tied for him. Dr. Leonard O'Doull, on the other hand, wore a cutaway, white tie, trousers pressed into creases scalpel-sharp, and a stovepipe hat. When Georges saw him in his splendor, he whistled and said, "I thought I was getting a doctor for a brother-in-law, not a Rockefeller."

"And I thought I was getting a troublemaker for a brother-in-law, and I see I was right," Dr. O'Doull returned. He refused to let Georges

get his goat. Lucien reckoned that the best way to handle his younger son, who was indeed a troublemaker.

Father Fitzpatrick came up to them, a little man with a beaky nose and hair the color halfway between rust and a sunset. "We'll do it in just a few minutes, now," he said. He spoke Parisian French with a peculiar lilting accent. When he spoke English with Dr. O'Doull, the lilt remained.

"This is good," Lucien said. "This is very good." He slowed his own speech a little for the priest's benefit. Turning to his daughter's fiance, he asked, "Are you nervous?"

"Of course I'm nervous," O'Doull answered. Georges looked disap pointed; had O'Doull tried to deny it, Lucien's son would have made him pay. The American doctor went on, "Weren't you nervous when you married your wife?"

"Now that I think on it, it could be that I was," Galtier said, and pursed his lips to show he knew he was understating things. He'd been as nervous as a man getting a half-grown lynx out of a tree, and he'd known Marie since they were both children. O'Doull had known Nicole only since they began working together at the hospital. No wonder he was nervous.

Friends and relatives filed into the church. Most of them waved to Lucien; some came over to shake hands with him and O'Doull. A few went inside with rather sour expressions. They were families with young men who might possibly have been matched to Nicole had her father not chosen this outsider. In their shoes, he would have shown a long face, too.

And then it was time to go inside, and for Lucien to lead Nicole down the aisle toward the altar. In her dress all of white, she looked very young and very beautiful. She beamed at him through the veil. He patted the hand she'd set on his arm. If she was happy, he would be happy. And, even if Dr. O'Doull was an American, he struck Galtier as a solidly good fellow.

So did Father Fitzpatrick, though he gave Lucien a start by pronouncing the Latin of his prayers in a most peculiar fashion. Galtier glanced sharply over at Father Pierre. The local priest remained calm. That let Lucien also remain calm. If Father Pierre thought Father Fitzpatrick's pronunciation acceptable, God likely would, too.

After Dr. O'Doull had opened Nicole's veil and kissed her, after he had set a ring on her finger, people headed across the street to the hall Lucien had hired for the reception—the money Major Quigley had paid for back rent for the land on which the hospital stood was proving useful in all sorts of ways. Once there, Lucien got a drink and then found an excuse to get Father Pierre in a corner and ask him about Father Fitzpatrick's Latin.

Father Pierre was also holding a drink. He knocked it back, chuckled, and answered, "You need have no concern over that. English and Irish and American priests are in the habit of pronouncing their Latin as they believe the ancient Romans would have spoken."

"And you, how do you pronounce your Latin?" Lucien asked.

"In the same way as does His Holiness the Pope," Father Pierre said. "I think I have made the better choice, but the other is in no way evil, merely different."

"I also think you have made the better choice," Lucien said. "In your mouth, Latin sounds splendid. In Father Fitzpatrick's mouth, I found it harsh and rather ugly."

"Part of that is because you are not used to it," the priest of St.-Antonin replied. "Their way does have a certain majesty to it—although, as I say, I prefer our own." He rolled his eyes. "Trust English-speakers to pay no attention to what the rest of the world does." Galtier laughed at that.

"Where is the joke, *tnon beau-pere?"* Leonard O'Doull asked. He could properly call Lucien his father-in-law now.

"Yes, Father, where is the joke?" Nicole echoed. Instead of Galtier's arm, she clung with proud possessiveness to her new husband's.

"It is a matter of Latin," Lucien answered. With any luck at all, that would impress and confuse both the newlyweds.

It worked with his daughter, but not with O'Doull. The doctor thumped his forehead with the heel of his free hand. "But of course! I'm an idiot. Fitz learned his Latin the Ciceronian way, same as I did. But you folks here pronounce it as if the Romans had been Italians, don't you? He must have sounded pretty funny to you."

"If our way is good enough for the Holy Father in Rome, it is good enough for me," Galtier said. Behind him, Father Pierre nodded. "And yes, your friend's Latin did sound odd, though I am given to understand it is also good, of its kind."

He wondered if that would insult the American. Instead, he saw that O'Doull was having a hard time not laughing. "Fitz's Latin is certainly better than mine, these days," his son-in-law said. "Who but a priest has the chance to keep his grasp of the language so fresh?"

"You have reason," Father Pierre said. "I speak no English, I am sorry to say, and many priests who do speak English know not a word of French—unlike your friend Father Fitzpatrick, whose French is very good, if, like his Latin, spoken in an interesting way. But with such folk I speak in Latin, and I am understood. Even with the differences in pronunciation, I am understood."

"It's like the difference between the French of Paris and the French of Quebec," O'Doull said.

"Why, so it is!" The priest of St.-Antonin beamed at him, then turned to Lucien and slapped him on the back. "You are a fortunate man, to have a scholar as part of your family."

"I am a fortunate man," Lucien said. "That is enough. And if I owe some of my good fortune to an American—why then, I do, that is all."

Before either Leonard O'Doull or Father Pierre could say anything to that, shouts from the street distracted both of them and Galtier, too. A couple of people near the doorway called out to learn what was going on. Lucien heard the reply very clearly: "The flag of the Republic of Quebec flies over the city of Quebec!"

Several other people who also heard shouted for joy. A moment later, somebody punched one of them in the nose. Half a dozen men jumped on the puncher and threw him out. To Lucien's dismay, he saw the fellow sprawled in the street with his trousers torn was a cousin he'd always liked pretty well.

Before the reception could turn into a free-for-all, he let out a great bellow: "Enough!" He was loud enough to make everyone turn around and no tice him. Still at the top of his lungs, he went on, "This is a wedding, not a political rally. Anyone who wishes to make it a political rally will answer to me." He cocked a fist, leaving no doubt about what he meant.

"And me!" Georges and Charles said in the same breath, standing shoul der to shoulder with their father.

That settled that. People horrified at the victory of the Americans and the Republic of Quebec (very much in that order) over the Canadian and British troops defending the capital of what had been the Canadian province of Que bec kept that horror to themselves. Lucien Galtier felt some, as he watched the world with which he was long familiar crack further. But his manner also persuaded those who were delighted with the success of the Republic to keep their mouths shut. The reception went on.

Marie came up to him and spoke quietly: "You did very well there."

"Did I?" Lucien shrugged. "I do not know. What should I feel? I was torn in two when France lay down her arms to Germany. Now I am torn in two again. What we had is not what we shall have."

"Change." His wife spoke the word as if it were more filthy than *tabernac.* "Why can the world not stay as it has always been?"

Now it was Galtier's turn to whisper: "You ask this at the wedding of your eldest daughter to an American doctor? How many American doctors would have come to the farm a-courting without the war? Not more than six or eight, I am certain."

Marie stuck an elbow in his ribs. "And I am certain you are as much trou ble as Georges, which is saying a good deal. I am also certain Dr. O'Doull is a fine young man, even if he is an American."

"I am certain of this as well, else I should never have allowed him to join the family," Galtier said. "And I am certain we have profited since the Americans came, when everything is taken all in all. But in doing so, we have turned our backs on everything that we knew and taken hold of everything that is new. Do you wonder that I worry on account of it?"

"I wonder that you worry so little on account of it," Marie answered.

"This only shows that, wife of mine as you have been these many years, you do not know every dark place inside my heart," Lucien told her. "I worry—how I worry! But I have got by ... we have got by. And, old or new, we will go on getting by." Now he spoke with great

determination. After a moment, Marie nodded.

Lieutenant General George Custer was in a state, and, for once, his adjutant was damned if he blamed him. "On my front!" Custer shouted. "Roosevelt accepts a cease-fire on *my* front! Does he accept a cease-fire on any other front? In a pig's arse he does! Why my front? Why my front alone?"

"He must have reasons," Major Abner Dowling said, though he'd been hard pressed to find any that made sense to him.

"Oh, he has reasons, all right," Custer snarled. He had no trouble finding them, either: "He wants to rob me of my glory, that's what he wants to do. He always has, damn him. He never let me go to Canada, to lead our soldiers there. And now this is the front where we first broke through the Rebels' lines. This is the front where the U.S. Army learned *how* to break through the Rebels' lines. And this is the front Teddy Roosevelt chose to halt. Do I have to draw you a picture, Major?"

"Sir, you can't mean that," Dowling said.

He might as well not have spoken, for Custer ranted right through him: "That man in the White House has tried to rob me of the credit I deserve for the past thirty-five years. *I* was the one in command when we drove Chinese Gordon out of Montana during the Second Mexican War, but who stole the headlines? Roosevelt and his Unauthorized Regiment, that's who. Tell me to my face, Major, that he's not doing the same thing now. Look at the map and tell me that to my face!"

Dowling obediently looked. The longer he looked, the more he wondered whether the general commanding First Army didn't have a point. If Roosevelt hadn't accepted the cease-fire, how far would U.S. forces have advanced by now?

Custer, inevitably, had his own opinion about that: "Murfreesboro? To hell with Murfreesboro! We'd be pushing on toward Chattanooga by now, damn me to hell if we wouldn't." Fortunately for him, Dowling couldn't do anything of the sort. Chattanooga was a *long* way away.

"I doubt that, General." The voice came from the doorway. Dowling turned. His mouth fell open. There, grinning, stood Theodore

Roosevelt. How much of Custer's tirade had he heard? By the look of that grin, altogether too much. Dowling kissed his own career goodbye.

And Custer wasn't finished. Custer wasn't anywhere close to finished. "How dare you inflict this indignity on First Army, Mr. President? How *dare* you?" he demanded. "Whatever you may think of me, the brave soldiers who have given so much to the cause deserve to be in at the kill."

Many of those soldiers would have agreed with him, too, though being in at the kill might have meant their dying. Dowling knew as much; complaints from the front kept flooding into Nashville.

Roosevelt said, "Either the Confederates will yield on all fronts in a week's time, General, or you will be moving forward again. That I promise you. Maybe you will be able to aim toward Chattanooga after all."

"Why the devil did you halt me in the first place?" Custer said, anything but mollified. "Even more to the point, why did you halt me and no one else? You do not serve your country well by bearing a grudge across so many years."

If that wasn't the pot complaining of the kettle's complexion, Dowling had never heard any such. But Roosevelt didn't rise to the bait. Instead, walking over to the map on the wall, he pointed to the ground First Army had seized south of the Cumberland. "I stopped First Army, General, because you have done something no other U.S. force has accomplished."

"You halted us *because* we did better than any other force you have?" Custer howled. "You admit it?"

"That's not what I said, General," Roosevelt answered sharply. "Your unique achievement is easy to describe: in moving south of the Cumberland, yours is the only force to have captured territory I am willing to return to the Confederate States in exchange for concessions elsewhere. We go from the realm of war into the realm of diplomacy here—do you see?"

"Ahh." That wasn't Custer; it was Abner Dowling. He wasn't sure he agreed with what Roosevelt was doing (not that the president would lose any sleep if he didn't), but he was profoundly relieved Roosevelt was doing it for some other reason besides (or at least in

addition to) pique against Custer.

Custer himself did not give over sputtering and fuming. "Why on earth should we give any land we've taken back to the Rebs? When I was a lad, this was all part of the United States, and so it should be again."

"In principle, General, I agree with you," Roosevelt answered. "In prac tice, the line we occupy—and what we can reasonably hope to take—will not give us a neat, defensible frontier everywhere along it. We'll do some horse trading at the table, and this stretch south of the Cumberland I can trade without a second thought."

"You won't have to do much trading, sir," Dowling said. "We hold the whip."

"That's true, Major, but I can't wipe the Confederate States from the face of the earth, however much I might want to," the president answered. "Kaiser Bill can't make France go away, either. If we weaken them, though, and make them pay, they won't trouble us for a long while."

"Then, by thunder, when we do fight them again, we'll put paid to them once and for all," Custer said. He rubbed his age-gnarled hands together. "Damned if I don't look forward to reuniting the country at last."

He sounded as if he looked forward to commanding U.S. soldiers in the next war against the CSA. If, as Roosevelt hoped, the Confederates would have to lie quiet for a long time, the wait would put him up into his nineties— or beyond. Maybe he didn't think about that. Maybe he thought about it and didn't care: having gone on for so long, he might believe he could go on forever.

Major Dowling asked, "Mr. President, for what land might you want to swap what we've taken south of the Cumberland?"

"What I have in mind getting is the little chunk of southeastern Kentucky the Confederates still hold," Roosevelt answered. "Lord knows it's not worth much as far as land goes, but having the whole state in our hands will make life simpler after the shooting stops. The Confederates won't be able to keep Kentucky in their Congress then, or to go on electing senators and a congressman or two who'll spend all their time speechifying about how the Confederacy needs to take back their home state. I want it gone from their minds, altogether

gone, and that will be that."

"That makes a ... good deal of sense," Dowling said slowly. Because of his bulldog aggressiveness, Roosevelt didn't get the credit he deserved either as a politician or as a statesman. "The Germans had no end of trouble from France when they took part of Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War but let the froggies keep some, too. Better they should have grabbed it all, to make the break clean."

Roosevelt beamed at him. "The very example I had in mind, as a matter of fact, Major." Dowling beamed, too; looking smart in front of your boss never hurt. The president went on, "Our allies will correct that omission in the forthcoming peace, I assure you."

Custer coughed, one of those coughs loosed for no other purpose than to draw attention to oneself. "This is all very well, your Excellency, I have no doubt, but why do it at the expense of what First Army has achieved? If you must trade the Confederates land for land, why not give them back some of the vast worthless stretches we've captured west of the Mississippi, in Arkansas and Sequoyah and Texas and Sonora?"

"Not all that land out there is worthless, General," Roosevelt answered. "The stretch of Arkansas we hold puts Memphis under our guns, which emphatically is worth doing. Sequoyah is full of oil and gas, and we can use them: motorized machines grew ever more important as this war moved along. And as for the land that *is* largely worthless—that being so, why would the CSA want it back?"

"It still strikes me as unjust that my forces should be singled out for this halt," Custer said. "We deserve better than that."

I deserve better than that, he meant. Dowling had no trouble understand ing as much, and neither did Theodore Roosevelt. He blew air out through his mustache before replying, "General, would you not say that, in your long and distinguished military career, you have already been treated better than you deserve?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are referring to, Mr. President," Custer said, bristling, "and I resent the imputation."

"Resent all you like," Roosevelt growled. Abner Dowling did his best to seem a large, corpulent fly on the wall. He listened avidly as Roosevelt continued, "When we were taking our position north of the Teton, you were the one who wanted to move back the Gatling guns

that chopped the British infantry to dogmeat. If we had moved them, the limeys probably would have overrun us. The only reason you ever got to be a hero, you pompous fraud, is that Colonel Welton and I talked you out of it."

"That's a damned lie!" Custer shouted.

"The hell it is!" Roosevelt shouted back. "And if your brother hadn't got himself shot, he would have said the same thing."

"Another lie!" Custer turned a dusky shade of purple that had to, surely had to, portend an apoplexy. "Tom and I were two sides of the same coin."

"Both tails, or maybe blockheads," Roosevelt said.

"Damn you, you know why I always wanted to lead in Canada. You've always known, and you've always ignored my requests for transfer. Is it any wonder I resent that?" Custer said.

Instead of answering, Roosevelt shrugged off his coat. Custer cocked his fist and glared a challenge. The two men, one nearing sixty, the other nearing eighty, looked ready to swing at each other. "Gentlemen, please," Dowling said, reluctantly reminding them of his existence. Even more reluctantly, he stepped between them. "If the two of you quarrel, the only gainers live in Richmond."

Roosevelt recovered his temper as fast as he lost it. He'd always been volcanic, but his eruptions quickly subsided. With a nod—almost a bow— to Dowling, he said, "You're right, of course." He also nodded to Custer. "General, I apologize for my hasty words." As if to prove he meant it, he put the coat back on. "I also assure you that, as I said before, I accepted this cease-fire for reasons of state, ones that have nothing to do with personal animus against you, with the memory of your brother, or with disrespect for the sterling fighting qualities the men of First Army have displayed."

"Slander. Nothing but slander," Custer muttered under his breath. Unlike Roosevelt, he stayed angry a long time. But, when the president affected not to hear him, he muttered something else and then said, "I must accept the assurances of my commander-in-chief." From him, that was an extraordinary concession.

It wasn't what most interested his adjutant, though. For years, Dowl ing had heard whispers about the combat in Montana Territory

that said what Roosevelt had said out loud. It did not strike him as improbable. Where sound military judgment required pushing straight ahead, Custer could be relied upon to exercise such judgment. Where sound military judgment required anything else, Custer could be relied upon to push straight ahead.

"General, we've won the damn war," Roosevelt said. "As your adjutant so wisely put it, Richmond laughs if we disagree among ourselves. I do recognize what you have done here. To prove it, when I get back to Philadelphia I shall propose to Congress your elevation to the rank of full general, and I am confident Congress will confirm that promotion."

Where minutes before Custer had been ready to punch the president, now he bowed as deeply as his years and his paunch permitted. "You honor me beyond my deserts, your Excellency," he said. By his expression, though, he did not for a moment believe he was being too highly honored. Dowling was inclined to agree with the modest self-appraisal Custer gave to Roosevelt, but then wondered if *he* might not be promoted, too. *A rising tide lifts all boats,* he thought, and the U.S. tide rose higher day by day.

XVIII

Chester Martin was no longer in command of B Company, 91st Regiment, and did his best to feel resigned about it. Out of some replacement depot had come Second Lieutenant Joshua Childress, who might possibly have been nineteen years old, but might well not have, too.

"We hit the Rebels one more good lick tomorrow morning," he declared to the weary veterans in the hastily dug trench north of Stafford, Virginia. "That will take us all the way down to the Rappahannock. Won't it be bully?" His voice broke with excitement at the prospect.

Corporal Bob Reinholdt chuckled softly. "Somebody better oil the lieu tenant, Sarge," he whispered to Martin. "He squeaks."

"Yeah," Martin whispered back. "We've got to keep an eye on him. He'll get some good men killed if we don't."

"Ain't that the sad and sorry truth?" Reinholdt said with a nod. If he still resented Chester for taking over his section—and for coldcocking him—he didn't show it. Too much water, to say nothing of blood, had gone under the bridge since.

"We must finish the punishment we have given the Confederate States since 1914," Childress was saying. "We are all heroes in this fight, and we must not fear martyrdom in our country's cause."

Reinholdt and Martin both rolled their eyes. This couldn't be anything but Childress' first combat duty. Firing had been light in the couple of days since he'd come down to the front. People who'd served longer were apt to be less enthusiastic about the prospect of martyrdom when the war was visibly won. People who, like Martin, had won Purple Hearts were apt to be least enthusiastic of all.

"Be bold," Childress said. "Be resolute. Be fearless. Now when the enemy totters is the time to strike the fiercest blows."

"Christ," Reinholdt muttered. "Wish you was still in charge of us, Sarge. That stupid prick is going to have us charging machine-gun nests with our bare hands." He got out a tobacco pouch and began to

roll a cigarette. "Well, one thing—he ain't likely to last long. Then it's your turn again."

"Yeah," Martin said. "If he doesn't get me shot, too. Thank God for barrels, is all I can say. Without 'em, most of us'd be dead about five times over."

"God knows that's true." Reinholdt's big head bobbed up and down. "If I stay in the Army after the Rebs quit, I figure I'm going to try and get into barrels myself. That way, I'll have some iron between me and the fuckers we're fighting."

Martin considered. "Only trouble I can see with that is, the other guys go after barrels with everything they've got. You'll get in the way of a lot more cannon shells than you would if you stayed out in the open."

"Well, yeah," Reinholdt allowed. "The thing of it is, though, you get in the way of even one shell when you're out in the open and it ain't what you call your lucky day." He stuck the handmade cigarette in his mouth and brought it to life with a lighter made from a Springfield cartridge case.

In the background, Lieutenant Childress droned on and on. Some of the men in B Company—replacements, mostly—hung on every word he said. The soldiers who'd been in the trenches for a while either took no notice of him or quietly made fun of him the way Martin and Reinholdt did. They didn't need him to tell them how to fight; had he been willing to listen instead of banging his gums, he might have learned a good deal.

The Army of Northern Virginia had taken a hell of a beating, but it hadn't quit. The Rebs interrupted Childress' disquisition with a mortar barrage. Martin hated mortars; they dropped bombs right down into the trenches, which regular artillery had a lot more trouble doing. He was damned if he could figure out where the valor lay in cowering and hoping a spinning fragment wouldn't turn him from a man into an anatomy lesson.

When the barrage eased, Childress picked up where he'd left off without seeming to miss a word. As Chester Martin got to his feet and tried to brush damp earth from the front of his uniform, he hoped that meant the new company commander had some guts. The other choice was that Childress was so full of himself, he hardly noticed what went on around him. Remembering how he'd been at nineteen or so, Martin

knew that was possible.

U.S. artillery didn't let the Confederates mortar the forward trenches without paying them back. The USA had more guns and bigger guns than the CSA did; the bombardment went on long into the night. That puzzled Martin, who'd grown used to sharp, short barrages. In the middle of the din, Lieutenant Childress exulted: "See how we thrash the stubborn foe!"

"He makes more noise'n the guns do," Bob Reinholdt said disgustedly.

That gave Martin the answer, or he thought it did. He snapped his fingers. "Bet they're making a racket to keep the Rebs from hearing the barrels coming forward."

"Huh," Reinholdt said, a noise that could have meant anything. After a bit, he went on, "Maybe I never should have given you no trouble, Sarge. Sure as hell, you're smarter'n I am. That's got to be it."

"Nothing's got to be anything." Martin spoke with the deep conviction of a man who had seen almost everything. "It's a pretty fair bet, though."

"Yeah." It was too dark for Martin to watch Reinholdt nod, but the pause before the corporal spoke again was about right. "Last time, they kept the machine guns banging all night long. You don't want to do the same thing twice in a row, or the Rebs'U get wise to you."

"I hadn't thought of it that way, but you're right." Martin swatted at a mosquito. He didn't think he got it. Scratching, he continued, "Maybe I'm the dummy." If Reinholdt finally was getting used to having him in charge, he wanted to help that along as much as he could. Ignoring occasional shells from overmatched Confederate batteries trying to reply to the U.S. barrage, he rolled himself in his blanket and went to sleep.

To Lieutenant Childress' credit, he went through the trenches an hour before the attack was set to begin, making sure everybody in the company was awake and alert. When he recognized Martin in the predawn gloom, he said, "Remember, Sergeant, we are to form behind the barrels and follow them toward the enemy's position."

"Yes, sir." Martin hid a smile. "I've done this before, sir." The last big at tack, he'd done it as a company commander. He let out a silent

sigh.

Lieutenant Childress might as well not have heard him. "We have to stay close to the barrels, to take full advantage of what they can do for us." He could have been reciting something he'd learned by rote. He didn't understand what it meant, not really, but at least he had it right.

As he was speaking, U.S. artillery came to life again, making the Confed erates stay under cover in the key minutes just before the attack went in. Through the booming of the guns and of their shells, Martin caught the sound he was listening for: the rumble of truck engines and the rattle and clank of iron tracks. Sure enough, the barrels were moving up to their jumping-off places.

Darkness slowly yielded to morning twilight. Martin got a glimpse of a couple of barrels not far away, the big boxy steel shapes putting him in mind of prehistoric monsters looming out of the mist. But these monsters were friendly to him and his. Only the Confederates would find them horrid.

And then the note of the engines grew harsher, louder. The barrels wad dled forward at their best speed, somewhere between a fast walk and a slow trot, toward the men of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lieutenant Childress' almost beardless cheeks puffed out like a chipmunk's as he blew and blew the whistle that ordered his company forward. He was first out of the trench himself: he would do what he could by personal example.

"Come on, you lazy bastards!" Chester Martin shouted. "If the Rebs shoot you, your family picks up a nice check from Uncle Sam. So you've got nothing to worry about, right?" He suspected that wouldn't hold up if anybody took a long, logical look at it. But so what? It got the men moving, which was what he'd had in mind.

Machine guns winked balefully from the Confederate positions ahead. No, the Army of Northern Virginia hadn't quit, however much Martin wished it would. U.S. machine gunners did their best to make their C.S. counterparts keep their heads down. The barrels began firing on the Confederate machine-gun nests, too. They also began smashing down the wire in front of the Confederate trenches, though those belts weren't nearly so thick as some Martin had seen.

"Forward!" Lieutenant Childress shouted. "Stay close to the barrels!" He trotted on, doing his best to make sure he was applying

what he'd learned in school.

It did him no good. One thing his training hadn't taught him was how to keep from catching three or four machine-gun bullets with his chest. He let out a brief, bubbling wail and crumpled. Martin was only a few feet behind the company commander. He threw himself flat and crawled up to him. Childress' eyes were wide and staring. Blood poured from his wounds and from his mouth and nose. He was still twitching a little and still trying to breathe, but he was a dead man.

That meant B Company belonged to Martin again. He scrambled to his feet. "Come on!" he shouted again. "We can take 'em! Let 'em try and stop us, hard as they want. We can still take 'em."

Talk like that on the Roanoke front in 1915 would have got him laughed at. Taking such talk seriously back then would have got him —and whoever listened to him—killed. Now . . . Now he was right. The Army of Northern Virginia lacked the men and the guns and, most of all, the barrels to halt the vengeful forces of the United States. Each barrel the CSA did get into the fight had to fight off two or three or four U.S. machines.

Also, at last, even the white Confederate soldiers seemed to have de spaired of the fight. Instead of battling in the trenches with bayonet and sharpened spade, more and more of them threw down their rifles and threw up their hands and went into captivity pleased with themselves for having outlasted the war. Here and there, in the trenches and behind them, diehards still fought till they were killed in place, but the tide of war flowed past them and over them and washed them away.

Now, finally, everything was going as the generals and politicians had pre dicted it would go back in 1914. Martin passed through the little town of Stafford—a few homes and shops clustered around a brick courthouse— hardly noticing it till it was behind him. U.S. artillery had reduced most of the buildings to rubble. The Confederates no longer defended every hamlet as if it were land on which Jesus had walked.

"Come on!" he shouted to the men who advanced with him. "Eight miles to the Rappahannock! If we push these bastards, we'll be there by sundown." And if, on the Roanoke front in 1915, he'd heard himself say anything like that, he'd have known he was either shellshocked or just plain crazy.

But only a few Rebs contested the way south of Stafford. Save for those rear guards, most of the Confederates seemed intent on getting to the southern bank of the river, perhaps to make a stand there, perhaps simply to escape. A couple of miles north of the Rappahannock, shells from the far side of the river began landing uncomfortably close to Martin and his men.

Then the shells stopped falling. The rifle and machine-gun fire from the few men in butternut still north of the Rappahannock died away. A Confederate soldier—an officer—came out from behind a ruined building. He was carrying a white flag. "Hold your fire!" Chester Martin shouted to his men. The hair at the back of his neck and on his arms tried to stand on end.

"It's over," the Confederate officer shouted. "It's done. You sons of bitches licked us." Standing there defeated before the soldiers of the United States, he burst into tears.

Jake Featherston had the surviving guns of his battery in the best position he'd found for them since the war began. Back of Fredericksburg, Virginia, up in Marye's Heights, a stone wall protected a sunken road. If the Yankees swung down along the curve of the Rappahannock and tried to force a crossing at Fredericksburg, he could look down on them and slaughter them for as long as his ammunition held out. They would be able to hit him only by luck—by luck or by aeroplane. He kept a wary eye turned toward the sky.

At the moment, he had the guns turned toward the north rather than the east, though—the U.S. soldiers seemed to be heading straight for Falmouth instead of Fredericksburg. That was what he gathered from the beaten men in butternut streaming past, anyhow. He'd given up shooting at Confederate soldiers fleeing the enemy. He couldn't kill them all. He couldn't even make them stop their retreat. And the more rounds he wasted on them, the fewer he'd be able to shoot at the damnyankees.

He climbed up on top of the stone wall and peered north through field glasses. Sure as hell, here came the U.S. soldiers, trailing the barrels that smashed flat or blasted out of existence any strongpoints in their path. U.S. fighting scouts swooped low over the front, further harrying the men of the Army of Northern Virginia.

"Come on, boys," Jake said. "They're inside seven thousand yards.

Let's remind 'em they have to pay for their tickets to get in. God damn me to hell and fry me for bacon if anybody else is going to do the job. Infantrymen?

Christ on His cross, all the good infantry we used to have's been dead the last two years."

The four guns that remained of his battery of the First Richmond Howitzers desperately needed new barrels. They'd sent too many rounds through these; the rifling grooves were worn away to next to nothing. Featherston knew the guns weren't going to get what they needed. *Fat cats in Richmond get what they need,* he thought. *All I'm doing is defending my country. Does that count? Not likely. What do fellows like me get? Hind tit, that's what.*

When the guns began to roar, though, he whooped to see the shells falling among the leading damnyankees. He'd spent the whole war doing his best to hurt them. Even if the guns weren't so accurate as they should have been, he could still do that. He could still enjoy it, too.

An improbably young lieutenant in an improbably clean uniform came up to him and demanded, "Who commands this battery, Sergeant?"

Jake drew himself up with touchy pride, and took pleasure in noting that he was a couple of inches taller than this baby officer. "I do," he growled, "sir."

"Oh." The lieutenant looked as if he were tasting milk that had gone sour. "Very well, Sergeant. I am to inform you that, as of five o'clock P.M., which is to say, about an hour from now, an armistice will go into effect along our entire fighting front with the United States."

Jake had been braced for the news, or thought he had, for the past couple of weeks. Getting it was like a boot in the belly just the same. "We've lost, then," he said slowly. "We're giving up."

"We're whipped," the officer said. Featherston looked at the men who served the guns. Perhaps for the first time, he let himself see how worn they were. Their heads bobbed agreement with the shavetail's words—they *were* whipped. The lieutenant went on, "We've done everything we could do. It wasn't enough."

"What the hell did *you* do?" Jake asked. The lieutenant stared at him, dis believing his ears—how could an enlisted man presume to question *him?* Jake shook his own head. Strangling the pipsqueak would be fun, but what was the use? The CSA grew his sort in carload lots. Ask a question with an answer worth knowing, then: "What are we supposed to do with the guns after five o'clock?"

"Leave them," the young lieutenant said, as if they were unimportant. They were—to him. He went on, "The Yankees will take them as spoils of war, I reckon." That didn't seem important to him, either. Off he went, to give the word to the next battery he found.

"Spoils of war?" Featherston muttered. "Hell they will." He looked at his watch. "We got most of an hour, boys, till the war's over. Let's make those shitheels wish it never got started."

Plainly, his soldiers would just as soon have let the fighting peter out. He didn't shame them into keeping on—he frightened them into it. That he could still frighten them with everything they'd known crashing into ruin around them said a lot about the sort of man he was.

At five o'clock, he himself pulled the lanyard to his field gun one last time. Then he undid the breech block, carried it over to Hazel Run—a couple of hundred yards—and threw it in the water. He did the same with the breech blocks from all the other guns. "Now the damnyankees are welcome to 'em," he said. "Fat lot of good they'll get from 'em, though."

His words seemed to echo and reecho. As the armistice took hold, silence flowed over the countryside. It seemed unnatural, like machine-gun fire on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of Richmond. When the gun crew talked, they talked too loud. For one thing, they were used to shouting over the roar of the three-inchers. For another, they were all a little deaf. Jake suspected he was more than a little deaf. He'd been at the guns longer than any of his men.

Before the sun set, Major Clarence Potter made his way to the battery. Featherston nodded to him as to an old friend; in the Army, Potter was about as close to an old friend as he had. The intelligence officer looked at the field guns, then at Jake. "You're not going to let them have anything they can use, eh?" he said.

Jake spent some little while describing in great detail the uses the damn yankees could make of his guns. Major Potter listened,

appreciating his imagination. Finally, Featherston said, "Goddammit, sir, sure as hell we're going to fight those bastards another round one of these days before too long. Why give 'em anything they can take advantage of?"

"Oh, you get no arguments from me, Sergeant," Potter said. "I wish more men were busy wrecking more weapons we'll have to turn over to the USA." He wore a flask on his hip. He took it in hand, yanked the cork, swigged, and passed it to Featherston. "Here's to the two of us. We were right when the people over us were wrong, and much good it did us."

The whiskey burned its way down to Jake's belly. He wanted to gulp the flask dry, but made himself stop after one long pull and hand it back to Major Potter. "Thank you, sir," he said, for once sincere in showing an officer gratitude. Then he asked the question undoubtedly echoing throughout the beaten Army of Northern Virginia, throughout the beaten Confederate States: "What the devil happens next? We never lost a war before."

"What happens next is up to the Yankees." Potter drank again. "Unless I read them wrong—and I don't think I do—they'll take us down just as far as they can without provoking us into starting up the war." He thrust the flask at Featherston once more. "Here. Finish it."

"Yes, *sir."* Jake was glad to obey that order. Once the reinforcements had landed and spread warmth along his legs and up on his cheeks and nose, he found another question, closely related to the first: "What'll they make us do?"

"I'm not Teddy Roosevelt, thank God, but I can make some guesses," Pot ter said. "First one is, the United States are going to keep whatever they've grabbed in the war. Kentucky's gone, Sequoyah's gone, that chunk of Texas they're calling Houston is gone, the chunk they bit out of Sonora is gone, too."

"Yeah." Jake pointed out north. "Probably hold onto Virginia down to the Rappahannock, too."

"Probably," the intelligence officer agreed. "When the next war comes, that will keep us from shelling Washington the way we have the last couple of times—keep us from doing it for a little while, anyhow."

"The next war," Jake repeated. He assumed there would be a next

one, all right. "How soon do you reckon it'll come?"

"That depends on a lot of things," Major Potter answered. "How much the damnyankees make us cut our Army and Navy, for one: how many men and barrels and aeroplanes and submersibles they let us keep."

"Oh, yeah." Featherston nodded. "And on how many we'll have stashed away without them being any the wiser."

"And on that," Potter agreed. "The other side of the coin is, how soon do the thieves fall out?"

"I don't know what you mean," Jake said with a frown.

"Who won the war?" Major Potter asked patiently. "The USA and Germany, that's who. Oh, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, too, but they hardly count. Roosevelt and the Kaiser are pals now, but how long will that last? When they start squabbling among themselves, that may give us the chance to get some of our own back."

"Ah." Featherston thought that over, then raised an admiring eyebrow. "You come up with all kinds of things, don't you, Major?" That was genuine, ungrudging praise, and drew a smile from Potter. Featherston went on, "I'll tell you who lost the war for us, though."

"I've heard this song before, Sergeant," Potter said.

Jake went on as if he hadn't spoken: "The white-bearded fools in the War Department and the niggers, that's who. Anybody wants to know, we ought to take 'em all out and shoot 'em. Whole lot of good they did us during the war."

"Take all who out and shoot them?" Major Potter asked interestedly. "The white-bearded fools in the War Department or the niggers?"

"Hell, yes." Without his quite noticing it, the whiskey had mounted to Jake's head. "Country'd be better off without 'em, you mark my words."

"Duly marked, Sergeant." But Potter sounded amused, not convinced. "Nice to know someone has all the answers. I'll tell you one thing: a lot of people in Richmond will be looking for answers,

and heads will roll on ac count of it."

"Some, maybe." Savage scorn filled Featherston's voice. "But not enough. You mark my words on that, too. The high mucky-mucks'll find ways to cover for their brothers and cousins and in-laws and pals, and nothing much'll come out of this. And as for the niggers—hellfire, Major, some of those damn coons'll be voting now. Voting! After they stabbed us in the back, voting! Can you imagine it?"

"You are an embittered man," the intelligence officer told Jake. He stud ied him for a long moment, then slowly shook his head. "If you turned to good use the energy you waste in bitterness, who knows what you might be able to do with it?"

"Waste?" Jake shook his head, too. "I'm not wasting it, Major. I'm going to get even. I'm going to get even with everybody who screwed me and my country."

"Forgive me, Sergeant, but I'll believe it when I see it," Potter said.

"You will," Jake said. "Damned if I know how, but you will."

Major Cherney was laying things out for the fliers in his squadron: "All right, boys, this is the last act. The Confederate States are out of the war. It's us against England and Canada now, and we're going to lick them. That's all there is to it. Toronto is going to fall. With the Rebs quitting, we can bring up another million men and another thousand aeroplanes and squash 'em flat."

Jonathan Moss stuck up his hand. When Cherney pointed to him, he said, "Sir, I don't know about you, but I want to finish licking the Canucks *before* all the reinforcements come up from the south. If they do it for us, it's like saying we couldn't handle the job ourselves."

He looked around the tent at the Orangeville aerodrome. Most of the pi lots who nodded with him were men who'd been flying against the Canadians and Englishmen for a long time. Percy Stone agreed with him, for instance. Pete Bradley, like a lot of the newer men, didn't seem to care one way or the other. *As long as Canada goes under,* his shrug might have said, *who cares how?*

But Charley Sprague, among the newest of the new, spoke in support of Moss: "That's right. They'll take all the credit, and what will

they leave us? Not a confounded thing, that's what. After the war is over, everybody will try to pretend we didn't do anything, anything at all. Is that how we want to go down in history?"

"I agree with both of you," Cherney said. "We've been through too much to let those other bastards grab our glory. That means we have to grab it ourselves. Let's go out and do it."

After almost three years of war, Moss hadn't thought a speech could fire him up for combat in the air. But he went out to his Wright two-decker with a grim smile on his face and a spring in his step. He felt ready to whip the whole British Empire singlehanded.

Perhaps seeing that, Percy Stone set a hand on his arm as he was about to climb up into his flying scout. "Steady, there," he said. "When you try to do more than you really can, that's when you get into trouble."

Moss paused with his foot in the mounting stirrup on the side of the fuse lage. "You're right," he said. "I'll remember. Thanks."

"My pleasure," Stone answered. "You brought me home so they could patch me up again. I want you to get home, too." He paused, then looked west. "Or over toward Arthur, if you'd rather do that when the war is over."

Ears burning under his flying helmet, Moss scrambled into the cockpit. Percy Stone went over to his own bus and took his place inside. Moss shook his head. His friend knew how sweet he'd got on Laura Secord, and if doing that wasn't foolish, he didn't know what was. For one thing, she despised Americans. For another, she had a husband. Except for those minor details, she would have made a perfect match.

But he couldn't get her out of his mind. He knew he should, but he couldn't. A groundcrew man spun the fighting scout's prop. Moss checked his instruments. He had plenty of fuel, plenty of oil, and his oil pressure was good. Flying relieved the symptoms of what ailed him. He didn't have time—well, he didn't have much time—to think about it.

He looked to the other pilots. Stone, Bradley, and Sprague waved in turn: they were ready to go. He nodded to the groundcrew man, who pulled the chocks away from his wheels. The two-decker bumped along over the rutted grass of the landing strip till, after one bump, it

didn't come down.

The smoke that marked Toronto's funeral pyre guided him south and east. His flightmates followed. He kept trying to look every which way at once, and wished for eyes on stalks like a snail's to make that easier.

For two or three miles inland from the shore of Lake Ontario, the land that made up the city of Toronto rose smoothly from the water. Then it became steeper, even hilly. British and Canadian artillery used the hills to advantage, posting batteries on them and looking down on the flat country through which U.S. forces were slowly and expensively fighting their way.

Antiaircraft guns protected the pieces that were shelling the Americans. Black puffs of smoke burst around Moss' aeroplane as he dove on an enemy battery. The Wright two-decker bucked in the turbulence from the explosions like a restive horse. A piece of shrapnel tore some fabric from the bus' right upper wing. Moss knew it could as easily have torn through the engine, or through him.

His thumb found the firing button on top of the stick. Below, the gunners swelled from dots to toys to bare-chested men in khaki trousers. Englishmen or Canadians? He didn't know. He didn't see that it made a difference one way or the other. He stabbed at the button with all his strength.

"See how you like that!" he shouted as tracers lanced toward the artillerymen. They scattered. Some of them fell.

Early in the war, when he'd thought the principal function of fliers was observation, he'd felt bad about shooting at the foe. It didn't bother him any more. It hadn't bothered him for a long time. The limeys and Canucks weren't shy about shooting at him. They would have cheered their heads off if he'd crashed in flames. His twin machine guns kept things even.

He zoomed back toward the front at just above treetop height, his flight- mates on his tail. Every time he spotted a concentration of men in khaki, he gave them a burst and sent them flying like ninepins. They shot back, too; rifle bullets hissed past him, some uncomfortably close. An infantryman had to be amazingly lucky to shoot down an aeroplane. If enough infantrymen fired enough rounds, though . . . He'd never liked that thought.

He brought up the Wright's nose to gain altitude for another swoop on the enemy's guns. That let him look down on Toronto once more. U.S. forces had crossed the Etobicoke and the Mimico; there was heavy fighting in a park—High Park: he remembered the name from maps he'd studied—just east of the latter stream. Farther east still, what had been the Parliament building in Queen's Park was now a burnt-out ruin, wrecked by bombs and artillery.

As always, he checked the air around him for enemy machines. Spying none, he began his second dive on the enemy's guns. Something was different this time. The altimeter wound off a thousand feet before he realized what it was: the antiaircraft guns weren't firing any more. He wondered if artillery hits had put them out of action. "Hope so," he said. With luck, the slipstream would blow his words to God's ear.

Down on the ground, the enemy artillerymen were milling around their guns. His thumb found the firing button again. The men were looking up at him and waving scraps of cloth . . . scraps of white cloth.

Behind his goggles, his eyes widened. He took his thumb away from the firing button and pulled out of the dive a little higher than he would have if he'd been shooting up the gunners in khaki. Instead of grabbing rifles to take potshots at him, they kept flying those makeshift white flags. Some of them waved their hands, too, as if he were a comrade and not a hated foe. Tears that had nothing to do with the slipstream blurred his vision.

"It's over," he said, almost in disbelief. "Can it really be over?"

It could. It was. As Moss once more led his flight back toward the American lines, none of the British and Canadian soldiers on the ground fired at their machines. Like the artillerymen, they waved whatever bits of white cloth they could find. U.S. soldiers in green-gray were beginning to come out of their trenches and approach the enemy line. No one shot at them, either.

Jonathan Moss wished the racket from his aeroplane's motor didn't drown out everything else. He would cheerfully have given a month's pay to hear the silence on the ground where only minutes before rifles and machine guns and exploding shells had created hell on earth.

He wanted to find a landing strip and put down, just to be able to savor that silence. He needed all the discipline in him to fly away

from the front where the fighting had finally ceased and back toward the Orangeville aerodrome. If he'd suffered a sudden case of fortuitous engine trouble, he had no doubt Stone's aeroplane—and Bradley's and Sprague's as well—would have come down with similar miseries.

When he finally did land at the aerodrome, the groundcrew men knew far more about what was going on than he did. "Yeah, we got word of the armistice about half an hour after you took off," a mechanic said. "We could have called you back if you'd had a wireless telegraph in your bus."

"Canucks kept fighting up till the last minute, then," Moss said. "They did their best to blow us out of the sky the first time we strafed their artillery."

Charley Sprague asked, "Has England given up the fight, then?"

The groundcrew man shook his head. "Wish the limeys had, but they haven't. The armistice is for land forces in Canada. The Royal Navy's still fighting us and the Germans both."

"They can't win that fight—not a prayer," Sprague said. Had his flight-mate not beaten him to it, Moss would have said the same thing.

"Well, you know that, sir, and I know that, but the limeys haven't figured it out yet," the mechanic answered. "Been a hell of a long time since they lost a war; I guess they don't hardly know how to go about it."

"We've had practice," Moss said. "How many Remembrance Day pa rades have you watched?" That was a rhetorical question; everybody in the USA had seen his share and then some. Moss went on, "About time they threw in the sponge. Quebec—the city, I mean—is gone, Winnipeg's gone, Toronto's going, Montreal's blasted to hell, and we've finally broken out of that box between the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa and the Ridea where they'd penned us up since the start of the war. Another few months and they wouldn't have had much left to surrender."

"Now we've conquered them," Percy Stone said. "What the devil are we supposed to do with them?"

"Sit on 'em," Pete Bradley said. "If they give us a hard time, we'll shoot some of 'em. That'll give the rest the idea."

"Oderint dum metuant," Sprague said. Moss, who'd had Latin, nodded. The groundcrew men stared in blank incomprehension. Sprague condescended to translate: "Let them hate, so long as they fear."

Moss thought of Laura Secord. She hated. He didn't think anything could make her fear. He wondered whether her husband had come through the war in one piece. If he had, he had; that was all there was to that. If he hadn't. . . Moss did intend to make a trip back to Arthur, so he could find out one way or the other. He suddenly smiled. With the fighting done, that trip looked a lot easier to arrange than it had when he took off earlier in the day.

Rosenfeld, Manitoba, blazed with light as the U.S. soldiers occupying the town celebrated their victory over the forces of the British Empire in Canada. Every so often, somebody would fire a Springfield into the air. Every shot set off a fresh round of raucous cheers.

Arthur McGregor crouched behind a bush in the darkness just outside of town. If a patrol caught him here, he was in a lot of trouble. He shook his head. If a patrol caught him here, he was a dead man. He didn't usually take chances like this. But he wouldn't get another chance like this, either. If ever he could catch the Yanks with their guard down, now was the time.

He stiffened. Someone was coming his way along the dirt road that led out from Rosenfeld. A moment later, hearing how erratic the footsteps were, McGregor relaxed. The drunken U.S. soldier, a little gamecock of a man, staggered past him and out into the deeper darkness where night still ruled absolutely.

After ten or fifteen minutes, another couple of soldiers meandered by. Mc Gregor stayed concealed. One of the drunks paused not far away to throw up by the side of the road. Then he stumbled after his friend, who hadn't stopped.

Fifteen or twenty minutes more passed. Out of Rosenfeld came another soldier looking for fresh air, or perhaps only for a quiet place to heave. He was a big, broad-shouldered fellow for whose lurching strides the roadway did not seem wide enough.

As the U.S. soldier passed the bush, McGregor got to his feet. He carried an axe handle, a good, solid chunk of wood. Since he'd had not a drop to drink, his movements were swift and sure. The soldier, his face a mask of surprise, was just starting to turn when the axe

handle slammed into the side of his head. He dropped as if shot—but a shot would have made noise, and McGregor could not chance that.

He dragged the soldier back to his hiding place. Once there, he finished the job of smashing the fellow's skull: he might have been recognized, after all. Then he stripped the dead man of tunic and trousers, puttees and boots. He took off his own clothes and put on the American's. They weren't a perfect fit: the tunic was loose, the trousers and boots tight. But they would do. For what he had in mind, they would do. He opened a wooden box he'd carried from the farm and set the alarm clock inside to ring in two hours' time. Then, carefully, he replaced the lid and used the axe handle to drive in four brads to keep it closed.

That done, he stepped out into the roadway. The dead soldier's brimless service cap lay there, knocked off his head when McGregor hit him. The farmer picked it up and put it on. A lot of soldiers in town would probably not be wearing theirs, but he wanted to look as much like one of them as he could.

Into Rosenfeld he went. He didn't stand out on account of his age: theYanks had conscripted men who looked older than he did. Plenty of them were carrying this or that. One was giving a piggyback ride to a laughing woman waving a whiskey bottle. McGregor knew Rosenfeld's two or three whores by sight. She wasn't any of them; the Americans must have brought her in from some other town.

"Hey, pal, whatcha got in the box there?" a soldier asked.

McGregor had known he might get that question, so he had an answer ready: "Beer for Colonel Alexander." The colonel named for his son was fictitious, but the soldier wouldn't know that.

"Reckon he could spare a bottle or two?" the fellow said.

McGregor shook his head. "He'd skin me alive." The U.S. soldier gri maced, but went off instead of trying any more wheedling. The Americans were more submissive to their officers than McGregor remembered being from his own days in uniform. *Comes of having Germans for teachers,* he thought.

He found a spot opposite the sheriff's station Major Hannebrink was using as his headquarters. Lights were on inside; the Yanks arrested their own men as well as Canadians, and were probably hauling in lots of them tonight.

That thought had hardly crossed his mind before Hannebrink came out to stand on the porch and look around, hands on hips in indignation at the chaos victory was creating. He saw McGregor, but didn't recognize him. After a couple of minutes, he shook his head and went back indoors.

"Now," McGregor muttered to himself. If he couldn't do it now, he'd never do it. He staggered across the street toward the sheriff's station, suddenly acting much drunker than he had before. He got down on hands and knees by the wooden steps leading up to the porch where Hannebrink had stood, as if about to lose whatever he had in his stomach. He knew he wasn't the only man in uniform doing that. When he thought—he hoped—no one was paying him any special notice, he shoved the box under the steps.

He got to his feet. Nobody shouted, *What are you doing?* or, *What's in that box? or even, Wait a second, buddy—you forgot something. After that, he had no trouble walking as if he were drunk. He was drunk, drunk with relief.*

He got out of Rosenfeld and made his way back to the bushes where he'd hidden. Once there, he put the dead American's clothes back on him—an awk ward job—and got into his own shirt and overalls and shoes. He took the man's billfold and stuck it in his pocket. With luck, the Yanks would think one of their soldiers had robbed and murdered another.

He was tying his shoes when another American wobbled up the road past him. Several of them—he didn't know how many—were farther from Rosenfeld than he was. If any of them saw him, he might be in trouble. Instead of getting up and starting along the road, he crawled away over grass and dirt, then got to his feet and made his way north and west across a field: whatever he did, he was not going to leave a trail that led straight back toward his farm.

When he came to a little rill, he threw the American's wallet into it after taking out the banknotes. He stuck those in his pocket and splashed along in the rill for a couple of hundred yards. If they set dogs on his trail, he wouldn't give the beasts an easy time.

Not long after he came out, he kicked a stone. He lifted it and stuck the dead American's paper money under it. With luck, the money would never be found. If the empty wallet was, it would make robbery look more likely.

"Thank you, sweet Jesus," he whispered when he found a road. The wheeling stars gave him the direction he needed to head home. On the hard-packed dirt, he'd make good time. He wouldn't leave much in the way of tracks, either.

He'd been walking almost an hour and a half when a bang louder than any of the sporadic rifle shots came from the direction of Rosenfeld. He made a fist and thumped it against his thigh. He had no way of knowing whether Major Hannebrink was still at his post when the bomb went off. Sooner or later, he'd find out. Even if the major had gone, he'd still hurt the Americans. He could console himself with that—but he didn't care about consolation. He wanted vengeance.

Going down back roads and sneaking across the well-traveled highway east of his fields after a line of trucks rattled past, he got back to the farmhouse as twilight was beginning to stain the eastern horizon. He still had a full day's chores ahead. By the time he finished them, he'd wish he were dead. Right now, he hoped someone else was.

Maude was making coffee in the kitchen when he came inside. "Well?" she asked. It was as close to a direct question about what he did when he went out at night as she'd ever given him.

He came close to giving a direct answer, too: "It worked. I wasn't there, though, so I don't know how well."

"All right." His wife looked him over. "Go change your clothes and bring the ones you have on downstairs. I'll wash them. Set your shoes by the stove first."

He bent down and felt of them. They were still damp. "Good idea," he said. He sighed as he pulled off the shoes. "Feet are tired."

"I'll bet they are," Maude said. "Go on, now. I'll have coffee and eggs waiting when you come down again."

By the time he'd changed and splashed water from the pitcher on the chest of drawers onto his face, Mary and Julia were up, too. Julia sliced bread for him, to go with the fried eggs Maude set out. "You look tired, Pa," she said, which was not a question at all but at the same time was.

"Everything's all right," he replied, an answer that said nothing and at the same time quite a lot.

Mary's face glowed. "Does that mean you—?" she began, and then abruptly stopped, as if she did not want to hear what it meant. Arthur Me Gregor only shrugged. With food and coffee in front of him, he didn't want to think for a while.

He went out to work in the fields. When he looked back toward the farm house, he saw the overalls and shirt and socks and drawers he'd worn the night before out flapping on the line. The breeze was strong. They would dry quickly.

In the middle of the afternoon, a green-gray Ford parked between the farmhouse and the barn. McGregor didn't notice it till the soldiers who got out fired a couple of shots in the air. That brought him in at a shambling trot that told him just how worn he was.

Three privates in green-gray surrounded a tall, skinny U.S. captain Mc Gregor had never seen before. Without preamble, the officer snapped, "Where were you last night?"

"Here at home in bed," he answered. He felt drunk with joy now, and had to work hard to make sure it didn't show on his face. If he'd failed, Major Hannebrink would have been the one to bark questions at him. But sending sullen looks toward the occupiers wasn't hard, not even a little. "Why? What are you going to try and blame on me this time?"

"Somebody set off a bomb in Rosenfeld," the captain said. "A lot of good men died. Somebody's set off a lot of bombs in this part of the country since your son received military justice. A fair number of hostages have died on account of them, too."

"You Yanks have murdered a lot of people in this part of the country be sides my son—including those hostages," McGregor returned. "I don't love you, but I haven't bombed you. Major Hannebrink turned this place upside down trying to show different, but he couldn't show what wasn't there."

"Major Hannebrink is dead," the U.S. captain told him.

"I'll not shed a tear," McGregor said. Again, he had to remind himself not to exult. "I wish I had settled him, but I didn't." That lie came easy. He'd had lots of practice using it. His conscience, which had once sickened at any untruth, troubled him not at all.

"Shall we search the house and barn again, Captain Fielding?" one

of the privates asked.

McGregor waited for the tall officer to say yes. If the Yanks found what he'd hidden under the old wagon wheel, he could die content now. But Field ing shook his head. "No evidence," he said. "Nothing but Hannebrink's suspicions, and I can't see that he had anything more than suspicions to go on. You keep your nose clean, McGregor, and you can help us put this country back together again."

He gestured to his men. They and he got into the Ford and drove away. McGregor stared after them. He'd won his battle, and cherished that: the man who'd ordered his son executed was dead himself. But the Americans had won the war, and still aimed to reshape Canada to suit themselves. If he was going to keep on resisting, he had to get ready for the long haul. Grimly, he resolved to do just that.

Nellie Semphroch came downstairs to start another day at the coffeehouse. She smiled at the plate-glass windows replacing the boards that had fronted on the street. Once word got around that President Roosevelt had given her and Edna medals, people started going out of their way to do them favors, as people had gone out of their way to cut them when they'd thought them collaborators.

Across the street, Hal Jacobs' cobbler's shop still presented boards to the world. Nellie didn't think that was fair. Jacobs had done much more than she had to hurt the Rebels inside Washington. If Roosevelt had given him a medal, Nellie didn't know about it. Maybe he was naturally modest. Maybe being self-effacing went into making a good spy. Whatever the reason, Jacobs had let no one know he'd done anything out of the ordinary during the war.

Nellie unlocked the door and turned the sign in the window so it read OPEN. As she was doing that, Jacobs opened his own door and came out onto the sidewalk. Seeing Nellie through the window, he waved to her.

A little reluctantly, she waved back. She knew how much she owed him. The coffeehouse never would have made a go of it, let alone flourished, without his help. But, very likely, she never would have had to set eyes on Bill Reach again if not for his dealings with Hal Jacobs. As far as she was concerned, that went a long way toward canceling her debt.

Edna came downstairs. "Morning, Ma," she called as she started making the day's first coffee.

"Morning," Nellie answered. Edna had been subdued since Roosevelt put the medal she did not deserve around her neck. Maybe that was because she realized she didn't deserve it, and appreciated the contribution her mother had made toward a U.S. victory. More likely, Nellie judged, Edna missed the handsome young Confederate officers who'd filled the coffeehouse for most of three years. That might not have been charitable, but Nellie reckoned it close to the mark.

A U.S. officer came in. He was neither handsome nor young. When he ordered a fried-egg sandwich and a mug of coffee, though, Nellie looked on him with benevolent eyes. When he left a quarter for a tip on top of his tab, she reckoned him a paragon among men.

Another officer came in a few minutes later. All he wanted was coffee. Nellie served him with the best smile she could muster. Business was better than it had been when people shunned Edna and her, but not what it had been when the Confederates held Washington. She didn't suppose it would ever be that good again, and was glad she'd managed to save some of what she made.

Hal Jacobs walked into the coffeehouse as that second officer was leaving; they did a little dance in the doorway to keep from bumping into each other. Jacobs asked for a cup of coffee, too. When he set a nickel on the table, Nellie shoved it back at him. "Your money's no good here, Hal," she said. "You ought to know that by now."

"This is foolishness," Jacobs said. "You can use this no matter where it comes from."

"Like you can't?" Nellie answered. "I know how many people go in and out of your place every day. It's a wonder you've got any money to spend at all, if you ask me. But even if you had plenty, I wouldn't take it from you."

"You are more generous than I deserve," the shoemaker said. "I was happy to help you and help our country at the same time."

"Well, you did, and now I'm going to help you, too," Nellie said. From behind the counter, Edna gave her a look that meant, *We can use every nickel we get.* She ignored her daughter, as Edna was in the habit of ignoring her.

Jacobs said, "I know how you can help me, Nellie."

"How's that?" Nellie asked cautiously. She thought she knew what kind of thing the shoemaker would say. Sooner or later, every man in the world said that kind of thing. Edna leaned forward so as not to miss a word. By the leer on her face, she thought she knew what kind of thing the shoemaker would say, too. And, by that leer, she wouldn't let her mother forget it after he said it, either.

Then, to Nellie's surprise, Hal Jacobs slipped out of the chair in which he was sitting. To her even greater surprise, he went down on one knee before her and took her hands in his before she could pull away. "Nellie, will you please marry me and make me a happy man for all the rest of my days?" he asked.

Nellie's face heated. She was sure her cheeks had to be red as raw meat. She glanced over at Edna, whose jaw had fallen and whose eyes were wide and staring. Whatever else her daughter might do, Edna wouldn't be able to tease her about getting a lewd proposition.

She'd been ready to deal with—to deal forcefully with—a proposition. A proposal was something else again. A man who wanted her enough to ask to marry her without even trying to sample the merchandise first? She'd never known—indeed, never imagined—such a thing. Her experience had always been that men were a lot longer on sampling than on proposing.

And so, after a silence that stretched longer than it should have, she could only stammer, "Mr. Jacobs, I—I don't know what to say. This is so sudden."

"Not when we have worked side by side for so long," Jacobs said, still on his knees. "I know what I would like. I can only hope and pray you would like it, too."

Before Nellie could find any way to respond to that, Edna hissed, "Say yes, Ma! Where are you going to do better?"

Unlike a good many from her daughter, that was a good question. Nellie looked down at Hal Jacobs. He wasn't too young and he wasn't too handsome, but she knew he had a good heart. She'd never tried living with a man with a good heart. Maybe it would make a difference.

And maybe, on their wedding night, he would show his heart

wasn't so good after all. She had seen how men who outwardly were pillars of respectability could turn into animals, brutes, when they found themselves alone with a woman. If she said yes and Jacobs turned out to be that kind of man, what would she do? What could she do then? Maybe one fine morning he would wake up dead, in as inconspicuous a manner as she could arrange.

Even if he wasn't an animal, did she want him in her bed? No man had been to bed with her in a lot of years, and she hadn't felt that to be a lack: on the contrary, if anything. But, when he'd kissed her the year before back in his shop, she'd been glad to have the kiss—and astonished that she was glad. What, exactly, did that mean? Did she want to take a chance and find out?

If she didn't, what would she do? Stay the way she was and try to keep an eye on Edna till her daughter found another young man and moved away? Knowing Edna, that might happen in a matter of weeks, maybe even days. What then? Spend the rest of her life alone and getting more sour by the day? That didn't sound like such a good bargain, either.

She looked down at Hal Jacobs again. She wished he'd never asked her. By asking her, he was making her think about things she would sooner have ignored. No matter what she did now, no matter what she said now, it would irrevocably change her life. She hated having to make choices that big, and hated having to do it on the spur of the moment even more.

Or perhaps it wasn't exactly on the spur of the moment. Edna said, "Come on, Ma—you've got to tell the poor man *something.'1"*

With a sigh, Nellie realized her daughter was right. With another sigh, a longer and deeper one, she said, "I'll marry you, Hal. Thank you for asking me." She wondered how much she would regret that. More or less than saying no? One way or the other, she'd find out.

Edna let out a cheer that sounded almost like the yells with which Confederate soldiers went into battle. An enormous smile spread over Hal Jacobs' face. He squeezed her hands and said, "Oh, Nellie, thank you so much. You have made me the happiest man in the world."

"Don't be silly," Edna said. She came out to the front of the coffeehouse as Jacobs was getting to his feet. Kissing him on the cheek, she went on, "Teddy Roosevelt's got to be the happiest man in the world now that the Rebs have quit. But if you want to say you're

running second, that's all right."

Jacobs laughed. Edna laughed. After a moment, Nellie laughed, too. She felt giddy and foolish, as if she'd been drinking whiskey, not coffee. Was that happiness? Or was it just surprise at what she'd gone and done? For the life of her, she couldn't tell. A customer came in then, distracting her. He wasn't a military man, and he wasn't one of the locals Nellie knew, either. He wore a black suit, a black cravat, and a black homburg, and carried a black leather briefcase. "Ham and eggs and coffee," he said, like a Confederate plantation owner giving orders to his house niggers. "Eggs over medium, not too hard."

"Yes, sir," Nellie said; some of the Rebel officers who'd frequented the coffeehouse had been that peremptory, too. "Would you like your coffee now, or with the ham and eggs? And would you like toast to go with that? Like the menu says, an extra ten cents."

"Coffee now. No toast. Had I wanted it, I should have requested it." The newcomer looked around. "This is one of the few places I've seen since coming here that we won't have to tear down and start over from the ground up."

A light went on in Nellie's head. "You're from—" she began.

"Philadelphia?" the newcomer broke in. "Of course. You wouldn't think I'd live in Washington, would you?"

"We manage," Nellie said. The Philadelphia—lawyer?—sniffed. People from the *de facto* capital of the United States were in the habit of sneering at those from the legal capital. Nellie got him his coffee as Edna started the ham and eggs. His money would spend as well as anyone else's.

"I am going back to my work, dear Nellie," Jacobs said. "Thank you again. We will talk more of these arrangements as soon as we can." He blew her a kiss as he went out the door.

Over the pleasant hiss and crackle of frying food, Edna spoke to the man from Philadelphia: "Mr. Jacobs there just asked my ma to marry him, and she said yes."

"How nice," the fellow said. "Given the way the tax laws are, it will likely prove an advantageous move for both of them."

Nellie had worried about a lot of things before saying yes. Taxes

weren't one of them. Maybe she didn't need the cold-blooded Philadelphian's money so badly after all. Maybe, on the other hand, he was trying—coldbloodedly— to do her a favor.

Edna gave her the plate of ham and eggs, and she set it in front of the man who was helping decide how to restore, or whether to restore, Washington. She didn't know a whole lot about taxes and how they worked. Maybe she should ask him for more good advice. About one thing she needed no advice whatever. Hal Jacobs, she resolved, would never, ever learn how Bill Reach had died.

Lieutenant Crowder was lecturing the crew of the depth-charge projector, which meant he was also lecturing George Enos, who, standing nearby at the one-pounder, could hardly escape the officer's words. "We must maintain our vigilance," Crowder declared, as if someone had suggested that the whole crew of the USS *Ericsson* should lie down and go to sleep. "The Confederate States may be out of the fight, but the Royal Navy is still in it."

Carl Sturtevant's sigh was visible but not audible. Out of the side of his mouth, he muttered, "Good thing he gives us the news, ain't it, Enos?" George's nod was half amused, half annoyed.

Crowder didn't notice. When he was talking, he didn't notice anything but the sound of his own voice. "And we must remain alert against sub-mersibles from the C.S. Navy even now," he said. "Some of them may have defective wireless gear, and so be ignorant that their government has at last given up its hopeless fight. And others may claim ignorance and seek to strike one last blow against the United States in spite of the armistice now in force."

It was Enos' turn to roll his eyes. Sturtevant's answering snort was almost as quiet as his sigh had been. As far as George was concerned, the lieutenant hadn't a clue about how to keep the men wary. Talking about the Royal Navy was a decent idea, because England was still in the war. Talking about imaginary Confederates who wouldn't surrender, though, made no sense at all. And, if the sailors decided Crowder didn't make sense about one thing, they were apt to decide he didn't make sense about anything, and so not keep an eye peeled for the limeys.

On second thought, George decided it didn't matter so much. Most of the depth-charge projector crew, from everything he could see, had

already concluded Lieutenant Crowder didn't make sense about anything. They'd keep an eye on the Atlantic anyhow, for the sake of their own skins.

After a while, the all-clear sounded. Crowder hurried away from the depth-charge projector as if he had a beautiful blonde waiting under the covers back in his cabin. Thinking about a beautiful blonde made George think about Sylvia. "Christ, I want to go home," he said.

Hearing the longing in this voice, Carl Sturtevant burst out laughing. "You want to kick your wife's feet out from under her, is what you want."

"What the devil's wrong with that?" Enos said. "It's been a hell of a long time."

"Some ships, you could cornhole some pretty sailor if you really felt the lack," Sturtevant said. "The *Ericsson's* pretty good about that, though— pretty careful to make sure it doesn't happen, I mean."

"I should hope so," George said. "I don't want a pretty sailor. Hell, I don't think there is such a thing as a pretty sailor. I want to go to bed with my wife."

"I wouldn't mind—" The petty officer stopped abruptly. He'd probably been about to say something like, *I wouldn't mind going to bed with your wife, either.* He was smart not to have said that. Giving a sailor of higher rank a fat lip would have got George in a lot of trouble, but he would have done it without hesitation. After a couple of seconds, Sturtevant tried again. "I wouldn't mind going to bed with anything female. Like you said, it's been a hell of a longtime."

"Yeah. I know what you mean." Enos remembered that day along the Cumberland when he'd been about to go to bed with a colored whore for no better reason than that he was half drunk and more than half bored. As he'd been going from the ramshackle saloon to the even more ramshackle crib next to it, the Confederates had blown his river monitor out of the water. If he'd been aboard the *Punishment,* odds were he wouldn't be breathing now.

He drew a mop and bucket and started swabbing a stretch of deck. By now, he understood perfectly the pace he had to use to keep passing petty officers happy. Once, when he fell below that pace, one of those worthies barked at him. Even then, he had an answer ready: "Sorry, Chief. I guess I was paying too much attention to the ocean

out there."

"Yeah, well, pay attention to what you're supposed to be doing," the veteran sailor growled.

"Aye aye," George said. But he noted that, as the petty officer paraded down the deck, he made a point of peering out into the Atlantic every few paces. What was he doing, if not trying to spot a periscope? The limeys were still struggling to get freighters from Argentina across the ocean, and their submersibles still prowled: Lieutenant Crowder had been dead right about that. They'd have to quit sooner or later, but they hadn't done it yet.

That evening, attacking corned beef and sauerkraut, the sailors hashed over what they'd do when the war ended. They'd done that a good many times before, but the talk had a different feel to it now. In the midst of the grapple with the enemy, they'd just been blue-skying it, and they'd known as much. Now, when the war would end in days —weeks at the most—life after it seemed much more real, and planning for it much more urgent.

George was one of the lucky ones: he had no doubts. "As soon as they let me out of the Navy, I find me a fishing boat and go back to sea," he said. "Only thing I'll have to worry about is hitting a drifting mine. Otherwise, things'll be just like they were before the war for me."

"Before the war," somebody down the table echoed. "Jesus, I can't hardly remember there ever was such a time."

"Christ, what a load of horse manure, Dave," somebody else said. "You were here on the *Ericsson,* same as me."

Dave was unabashed. "Give me a break, Smitty. All we were doing here before the war was getting ready to fight the damn thing. Wasn't hardly different than what we're doing now, except nobody was trying to kill us back then."

"Nobody but the chiefs, anyways," Smitty said, which got a laugh. He went on, "We stay in the Navy, what the hell you think we'll be doing? Getting ready to fight the next war, that's what."

"Well, what's a Navy for?" Dave returned. "You better be ready to fight if you get into a war. Otherwise, you lose. Our dads and grandpas had their noses rubbed in that one."

"Look at the clever fellow," Smitty said. "He learned about Remembrance Day in school. Give him a hand, boys. Ain't he smart?"

"Ahh, shut up," Dave said. Since he was half again as big as Smitty, the other sailor did.

Changing the subject looked like a good idea. George said, "Wonder how long it'll be till the next war."

"Depends." Dave, it seemed, had opinions about everything. "If we for get what we have an Army and Navy for, probably won't be long at all. That's what we did after the War of Secession, and Jesus, did we pay for it."

"We do that, half of us'll be on the beach," Smitty said, which turned things back toward what the sailors would do after the war.

Then somebody said, "No Democrat would ever be that stupid. We'd have to elect Debs or whoever the Socialists put up three years from now." That touched off a political argument, the Socialist minority loudly insisting they were Americans as good as any others.

"And better than a lot of people I can think of," one of them added. "The first thing some of you want to do after the war ends is put the workers and farmers into another one."

George asked his question again: "All right, Louie, how long do you think we've got till the next one?"

"If we keep electing Democrats, fifteen years—twenty years, tops," the Socialist answered. "We finally get wise and put in some people who under stand what the class structure and international solidarity really mean, maybe it won't happen at all. Maybe this'll be the last war there ever was."

"Yeah, and maybe the Pope's gonna run off with my sister, too," Dave said. "I tell you, Louie, I ain't holding my breath on either one." He got a bigger laugh than Smitty had a couple of minutes before, and preened on account of it.

Fifteen years. Twenty years, tops. Nobody said peace could last longer than that. Well, Louie had, but even he didn't sound as if he believed it. No Socialist had ever even come very close to getting elected president. George didn't see any reason for that to change soon. If war came when people thought it would, his son would get

dragged into it. He didn't like that for beans. Hell, if war came again in fifteen or twenty years, he might get dragged into it, too. He wouldn't be an old man. He liked that even less. Wasn't once enough?

He didn't have any duty after supper, so he wrote a letter to Sylvia. If the *Ericsson* went into port before a supply ship met her, he was liable to get into Boston before the letter did, but that would have to mean England was quitting right away, which didn't look likely. *I sure will be glad to sleep in a bed that doesn't have one on top of it and another one underneath,* he wrote. *If they packed us in oil we might be sardines.*

Some of that was exaggeration for dramatic effect. Arrangements aboard a fishing boat were just as cramped, and those aboard the river monitor on which he'd served had been even more crowded. However ... I *sure will be glad to sleep in a bed that has you in it.*

One of the officers would have to censor the letter before it could leave the destroyer. Most times, George didn't worry about that. Now he wondered if the fellow, whoever he was, would start breathing a little faster if he read something like that. After a moment, George laughed at himself. The *Ericsson* had a war complement of better than 130 men. If the censor hadn't seen anything hotter than what he'd just written, he didn't know anything about horny sailors' imaginations.

He finished the letter, then read it over. He didn't know about the censor, but he was breathing faster by the time he finished. To wake up in a soft bed with his wife beside him ... he couldn't think of anything better than that. He addressed an envelope and put the letter inside, but didn't seal the flap. The censor would take care of that. George carried the letter to a collection box and put it in.

"Hey, Enos, you want to get into a card game?" the Socialist— Louie— called.

George shook his head. "Go suck in some single guy. I got a wife and two kids at home. Gotta save my money."

"You might win," Louie said.

"Yeah, I might," Enos allowed, "but I usually don't, and that's why I don't get into card games much any more."

He went back to the bunkroom. He didn't usually hit the sack till lights- out, but tonight he stripped to his skivvies and lay down. A fan

was doing its best to keep the warm, muggy air moving. Its best wasn't very good; George always woke covered in sweat. But the stuffiness helped him fall asleep fast. He yawned a couple of times and dozed off, smiling as he thought of waking up in bed with Sylvia.

XIX

From the conning tower of the *Bonefish,* Roger Kimball stared gloomily out into the blackness of night on the tropical Atlantic. A million stars hung overhead. The moon's lantern floated low in the east and spilled a long track of pale yellow light across the dark water. It was as beautiful a seascape as God ever made.

He was blind to the beauty. That afternoon, the wireless telegraph had picked up orders directing all Confederate submersibles to return to their home ports, as the Confederate States had been forced to seek an armistice from the United States. Ever so reluctantly, he'd shaped course for Habana.

He'd wondered how the crew would take the news. Most of the sailors had taken it the same way he had: they'd been furious and heartsick at the same time. "God damn it, Skipper, *we* didn't lose the war!" Ben Coulter had cried. "It was those stupid Army bastards who went and lost it. Nobody ever licked us. Why do we have to go and quit?" Several other men had shouted profane agreement.

Since Kimball felt like that, too, he'd had trouble answering. Tom Brearley had done it for him: "If the damnyankees lick us on land, we have to give in. Otherwise, where do we go home?"

"I don't give a fuck," Coulter had answered. "Ain't had a home but for my boat the past twenty years anyways."

Kimball chuckled, remembering the startled expression on his exec's face, as if Coulter had hit him in the side of the head with a sack full of wet sand. The captain of the *Bonefish* agreed with the petty officer. For that matter, he still wasn't sure whether or not the Arkansas farm on which he'd grown up remained in C.S. hands. He hadn't heard from his mother in a long time. And whether it did or not, he didn't want to go back. The Navy was his life these days ... he hoped.

Brearley joined him atop the conning tower. The exec stayed silent for sev eral minutes, accurately guessing Kimball did not care for conversation. But Brearley, as happened sometimes, didn't keep his mouth shut long enough. "Sir, once we get to port, what are they going to do with us?"

"Don't know," Kimball said shortly, hoping the exec would take the hint.

He didn't. "The damnyankees are liable to make us cut way back on sub marines. We've hurt 'em bad; they won't want to give us the chance to do it again."

"Worry about that if it happens." But Kimball had already started worry ing about it. He'd been worrying for weeks, even since word of the first Confederate peace feelers came to his ears. He was liable to end up on the beach, not because of what he wanted but because of what the United States decreed. He enjoyed that idea about as much as the idea of a kick in the balls.

A fragment of a curse floated up through the open hatch: "—it, we fought the bastards to a draw out here. Hell, ain't close to fair we have too—"

Brearley broke into it, as he'd broken into Kimball's silence: "The Yan kees could cripple our Navy for years. They could even—"

"Shut up." Now Kimball spoke in a flat, harsh tone: the voice of com mand. Brearley stared, his face a white oval in the moonlight. He opened his mouth—a dark circle in the white oval. "Shut up, damn you," Kimball snapped. He pointed off toward the east, where a ship was suddenly visible against the moon's track.

He raised binoculars to his eyes. The ship leaped closer. How close? Estimating range at night was as tricky a thing as a submersible skipper could do, but he didn't think it was more than a couple of miles. And that silhouette, seen against sky and moonlit ocean, was all too familiar.

"Take it easy, sir," Brearley said as Kimball stared hungrily toward the ship that steamed along unaware he was anyplace close by. "The war's over for us."

"Shut up," Kimball said again, now almost absently. "You know what ship that is, Tom? It's that fucking destroyer that's given us nothing but trouble since she came out here."

"Is it?" Brearley said. "That's too bad, sir. Shame we didn't spy her last night instead of now."

Kimball went on as if the exec hadn't spoken: "And do you know

what else? I'm going to sink the son of a bitch."

"My God, sir!" Brearley burst out. "You can't do that! If anybody ever found out, they'd hang you. They'd hang all of us."

"No doubt about it," Kimball agreed. "But England's still in the war. The damnyankees'll blame it on a limey boat—as long as we can keep our mouths shut. To hell with me if I'm going home with my tail between my legs. I'm going to hit 'em one more lick, and I'm going to make it the best one I know how."

"You can't, sir," Brearley repeated.

"Go below, Mr. Brearley," Kimball said. "I can and I goddamn well will. If you don't like it, you don't have to play. You can lay on your bunk and suck your thumb, for all I care." He leaned close to the younger man. "And if you ever breathe one word of this to anybody, I don't know what'll happen to me, but you're a dead man. You won't die pretty, either. Have you got that?"

"Yes, sir," Brearley whispered miserably.

"Then go below." Kimball followed the executive officer down into the stinking steel tube that was the *Bonefish's* fighting and living quarters. Brear ley headed toward the stern: he really didn't want any part in what Kimball was about to do. Kimball didn't care. He was going to do it anyway. In conversational tones, he told the rest of the crew, "Boys, we've got the USS *Erics son* a couple miles off to starboard. Load fish into tubes number one and two and open the water-tight doors. I aim to put a couple right in the whore's engine room."

Had the sailors hesitated, they might have made Kimball think twice, too. But they didn't. After brief, incredulous silence, they let loose with yells and howls so loud, Kimball half feared the Yankees on the destroyer would be able to hear them. He made frantic shushing noises. Discipline returned quickly, discipline and a fierce eagerness for the kill much like his own.

He took the helm himself, sending a sailor up to the conning tower to watch the destroyer while he made his attack approach. "Give me fifteen knots," he said. "They're just lollygagging along. I want to get out in front of them and double back for the firing run."

"We're in the dark quarter of the sea," Ben Coulter remarked, as

much to himself as to Kimball. He grunted in satisfaction. "They'll never spot us."

"They'd damned well better not," Kimball answered, to which the petty officer nodded. Kimball went on, "We'll make the firing run coming in at a steep angle, too, so they won't pick up the reflection of the moon from the paint on the conning tower. And we'll be going in with the wind at our back, pushing the waves along to help hide our wake in the water."

"You don't want to make the angle *too* steep, though, Skipper," Coulter said. "Easy to think it's smaller than it is, and to miss with your fish on account of it. Don't want that, not now we don't."

"Not hardly," Kimball agreed with a dry chuckle. From the bow, a sailor waved to let him know the torpedoes were loaded into the forward tubes. He waved back, wishing he could be two places at the same time: he wanted to be at the helm and up on the conning tower both. He peered through the periscope, which at night was like making love wearing a rubber, for it took away a lot of the intimacy he wanted.

Despite that annoyance, everything went smooth as a training run in the Gulf of Mexico outside Mobile Bay. The destroyer, which could have left him far behind, kept lazing through the sea. He pulled ahead of the U.S. ship and swung the *Bonefish* into the tight turn for the firing run. "Bring her down to five knots," he ordered, not wishing to draw attention to the boat as he closed in.

Like any submarine skipper, he would have made a hell of a pool player, for he was always figuring angles. Here, though, players and balls and even the surface of the table were in constant motion.

He took his eyes away from the periscope every so often to check the compass for the *Bonefish's* true course. Gauging things by eye didn't work at night—too easy to be wrong on both range and angle. He swung the submersible's course a couple of degrees more toward the southeast. Ben Coulter had been right: if he was going to do this, he couldn't afford to miss.

The lookout on the conning tower called softly down the hatch: "Sir, I reckon we're inside half a mile of that Yankee bastard."

"Thanks, Davis," Kimball called back. He'd just made the same calcula tion. Having the lookout confirm the range made him feel

good. Inside six hundred yards . . . Inside five hundred . . . Inside four hundred . . . "Fire one!" he shouted. If he couldn't hit the *Ericsson* now, he never would.

Clangs and hisses and the rush of water into the emptied tube announced the torpedo was on its way. Even in moonlight, Kimball had no trouble making out the white track of air bubbles the fish left behind it. Maybe somebody on the destroyer's deck also spotted it. If he did, though, he was too slow to do anything about it. Less than half a minute after the *Bonefish* launched it, the torpedo slammed into the U.S. warship just forward of amidships.

"Hit!" Kimball screamed, and the sailors howled out Rebel yells. The *Ericsson* staggered on her course like a poleaxed steer. Water foamed as it poured into the hole better than two hundred pounds of guncotton had blown in her flank. Already she was listing to port and appreciably lower in the water than she had been a moment before.

Up on the conning tower, Davis the lookout whooped for joy. "We-uns is goin' home, but not them Yankees!"

Taking his time now, Kimball lined up the second shot with painstak ing precision. "Fire two!" he shouted, and the torpedo leaped away. It broke the destroyer's back and almost tore the stricken ship in two. She went to the bottom hardly more than a minute later. Kimball scanned the sea for boats. Spotting none, he grunted in satisfaction. "Resume our course for Habana," he said, and stepped away from the periscope. "We've done our job here."

Ben Coulter spoke earnestly to the sailors: "Remember, boys, this ain't one where you get drunk and brag on it in a saloon. You do that, they're liable to put a rope around your neck. Hell, they're liable to put a rope around all our necks."

"You do want to bear that in mind," Kimball agreed. He wished he could tell Anne Colleton. If she ever heard he'd gone right on killing Yankees even after the armistice, she'd probably drag him down and rape him on the spot. Warmth flowed to his crotch as he thought about that. But then, slowly, regretfully, he shook his head. He didn't think with his crotch, or hoped he didn't. If she found out what he'd done here, it would give her more of a hold on him than he ever wanted anyone to get. He'd have to keep quiet.

The log would have to keep quiet, too. Kimball went back to an earlier at tack and neatly changed a 3 to a 5 on the writeup of the

run. That would make the number of torpedoes listed as expended on this cruise match the number he'd actually launched.

He strode toward the stern. Sure enough, Tom Brearley sat on his bunk, looking glum and furious. He glared up at Kimball. "How does it feel to be a war criminal—sir?" He made the title into one of scorn.

Kimball gravely considered. "You know what, Tom? It feels pretty damn fine."

Sylvia Enos threw a nickel in the trolley-care fare box for herself and another one for George, Jr. Next year, she'd have to spend a nickel for Mary Jane, too. She sighed. Even though she was getting her husband's allotment along with her salary at the shoe factory, she wasn't rich, not anywhere close. Nickels mattered.

She sighed again, seeing she and her children had nowhere to sit during the run from Mrs. Dooley's to her own apartment building. She clung to the overhead rail. George, Jr., and Mary Jane clung to her.

As the trolley squealed to a stop at the corner closest to her building, she sighed yet again. Who could say how long she'd keep the job at the shoe factory? With soldiers coming home from the war, they'd start going back to what they'd done before. Women would get crowded out. It hadn't happened yet, but she could see it coming.

She wondered when the Navy would let George loose. He'd have no trou ble getting a spot on a fishing boat operating out of T Wharf. As long as he was home with her, she wouldn't have to—she didn't think she'd have to— worry about his chasing after other women. They could try getting back to the way things had been before the war, too. Maybe she'd have another baby.

Mary Jane would be heading to kindergarten next year. If Sylvia didn't get pregnant right away, maybe she could look for part-time work then. Extra cash never hurt anybody.

She paused in the front hall of the apartment building to pick up her mail. It was unexciting: a couple of patent-medicine circulars, a flyer announcing a Fishermen's Benevolent League picnic Sunday after next, and a letter to the woman next door that the postman had put in her box by mistake. She set the last one on top of the bank of mailboxes for her neighbor to spot or for the mailman to put in its

proper place and then took the children upstairs.

"What's for supper?" George, Jr., demanded. "I'm starved."

"Pork chops and string beans," Sylvia said. "They'll take a little while to cook, but I don't think you'll starve before they're ready. Why don't you play nicely with your sister till then?" *Why don't you ask for the moon, Sylvia, while you're at it?*

Rebellion came not from George, Jr., but from Mary Jane. "I hate string beans," she said. "I want fried potatoes!"

Sylvia swatted her on the bottom. "You're going to eat string beans tonight, anyhow," she answered. "If you don't feel like eating string beans, you can go to bed right now without any supper."

Mary Jane stuck out her tongue and crossed her eyes. Sylvia swatted her again, harder this time. Sometimes she practically needed to hit her daughter over the head with a brick to get her to behave. Now, though, Mary Jane seemed to get the idea that she'd pushed things too far. She looked so angelic, any real angel who saw her would have been extremely suspicious. Sylvia laughed and shook her head and started cooking.

She'd just set supper on the table and was cutting Mary Jane's pork chops into bite-sized pieces when someone knocked on the door. She muttered something she hoped the children didn't catch, then went to see which neighbor had chosen exactly the wrong moment to want to borrow salt or molasses or a dollar and a half.

But the youth standing there wasn't a neighbor. He wore a green uniform darker than that of the U.S. Army; his brass buttons read WU. "Sylvia Enos?" he asked. When Sylvia nodded, he thrust a pale yellow envelope at her. "Telegram, ma'am." He hurried away before she could say anything.

Scratching her head—delivery boys usually hung around to collect a tip— she opened the envelope. Then she understood. "The Navy Department," she whispered, and ice congealed around her heart.

DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU, read the characterless letters, THAT YOUR

HUSBAND, GEORGE ENOS, WAS AMONG THE CREW ABOARD THE USS ERICSSON, WHICH WAS SUNK LAST NIGHT BY AN ENEMY SUBMERSIBLE. DESPITE DILIGENT SEARCH, NO

TRACE OF SURVIVORS HAS BEEN FOUND OR IS EXPECTED. HE MUST BE PRESUMED DEAD. THE UNITED STATES ARE GRATEFUL FOR HIS VALIANT SER VICE IN THE CAUSE OF REMEMBRANCE AND VICTORY. The printed signature was that of Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy.

"Your pork chops are getting cold, Ma," George, Jr., called from the table.

"If you don't eat your green beans, you have to go to bed right now," Mary Jane added gleefully.

Sylvia kept staring at the words of the telegram, hoping, praying, they would twist into some different shape, some different meaning. Twice now, when George had been captured by a Confederate commerce raider and when he'd survived the sinking of the *Punishment,* she'd feared the worst. This wasn't like those times. She didn't fear the worst now. She knew it. She felt it in her bones.

"What am I going to do?" she said, though no one could answer. "What am I going to do without George?"

"I'm right here, Ma," her son said. "I didn't go nowhere. Your pork chops are still getting cold. They're no good if they get cold. You always say that, Ma. You do."

She turned back to the table. She didn't realize tears had started running down her face till Mary Jane asked, "Why are you crying, Ma?"

"Don't cry, Ma," George, Jr., added. "What's wrong? We'll fix it, what ever it is."

They depended on her. She had to be strong, because they couldn't do it for themselves. And she had to tell them the truth. They needed to know. She swiped her sleeve over her eyes. Then she held up the telegram. "This says—" She had to pause and gulp before she could go on. "This says your father . . . it says your father's ship got sunk and he isn't. . . isn't alive any more. He isn't coming home any more, not ever again."

They took it better than she had imagined possible. Mary Jane, she real ized, hardly remembered George. She'd been very little when he went into the Navy, and he'd come home but seldom since. How could she miss what she hadn't truly known?

George, Jr., understood better, though he plainly didn't want to. "He's . . . dead, Ma?" he asked, his voice trembling. "Like Harry's father at school, the one the dirty Canucks shot?"

"That's right," Sylvia said. "That's . . . sort of what happened."

A noise in the hallway behind her made her turn. There stood Brigid Coneval and several of her other neighbors. Somehow, almost as if by magic, everyone knew when a Western Union messenger brought bad news. Had anyone doubted the news was bad, the look on Sylvia's face would have told the tale.

"Oh, you poor darling," said Mrs. Coneval, who, if anyone, knew what Sylvia was feeling at the moment. "You poor darling. What a black shame it is, with the war so near won and all."

People crowded round her, holding her and telling her they would do what they could to help. Someone pressed a coin into her hand. She thought it was a quarter. When she looked at it through tear-blurred eyes, she discovered it was a gold eagle. She stared in astonishment at the ten-dollar goldpiece. "Who did this?" she demanded. "It's too much. Take it back."

No one said a word. No one made any move to claim the coin.

"God bless you, whoever you are," Sylvia said. She started crying again.

Mary Jane said, "You're going to have to go to bed without any supper, because you aren't eating your pork chops." Small things mattered to her; she didn't understand the difference between what was small and what was not.

Sylvia wished she didn't understand that difference, either. Not under standing it would have made life much simpler and much easier ... for a little while. Life wasn't going to be easy, not ever again. Life probably wouldn't be comfortable, not ever again. If she lost her job at the shoe factory, she'd have to find another one, and right away. If she didn't find another one right away, her children would go hungry, and so would she. Even if she did, money was going to be tight from now on.

What could she do if she lost the factory job? She had no idea. She couldn't think. Her wits felt stunned, strangled. She knew she had to use them, but they didn't want to work.

"Mourning clothes!" she exclaimed suddenly, out of the blue. "I have to fix up some mourning clothes."

Brigid Coneval put an arm around her shoulder and steered her back to the sofa in the front room. When the Irishwoman pushed her down, her legs gave way and she sat. "You wait right here. Don't move, now. Don't even twitch. Back in a flash, I'll be." She hurried out of the apartment.

Sylvia didn't move. She didn't think she could move. George, Jr., and Mary Jane, seeing their mother upset, picked their way through the crowd of neighbors and crawled up into her lap. She did manage to put her arms around them.

"Out of my way, now. Move aside." Brigid Coneval spoke with as much imperious command as General Custer or some other famous war hero might have used. She thrust a tumbler of whiskey at Sylvia. "Drink it off, and be quick about it."

"I don't want it," Sylvia said.

"Drink it," Mrs. Coneval insisted. "He was a good man, your George, sure and he was. Hardly ever a cross word from him did I hear. But he's gone, darling. You may as well drink. What could you do that's better, pray?" She rolled her eyes. "Drink!"

Without much will—without much anything—of her own, Sylvia took the glass and gulped down what it held, choking a little as she did. As far as she could tell, it didn't do anything. Her head was already spinning. "What am I going to do without George?" she asked again, as if one of her neighbors might know.

No one answered. As Mrs. Coneval had, people kept praising her hus band. He would have been a happier man had they said all those nice things about him while he was there to hear them.

Then Sylvia started to cry again as another thought struck through the walls of grief and liquor. "He won't even have a funeral," she said. "He would have hated that." Fishermen dreaded being lost at sea. They ate of its creatures, and did not want those creatures turning the tables.

After a while, even in the midst of disaster, routine reasserted itself. Sylvia had to put the children to bed. After she did that, she went to put the pork chops she hadn't been able to eat into the icebox.

She discovered a couple of silver dollars and a tiny gold dollar on the kitchen table, along with some smaller coins. When she opened the icebox, she found a dressed chicken in there she had not bought, and also a package wrapped in butcher paper that might have been sausage or fish.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank—" She couldn't go on. Brigid Coneval put her to bed, much as she'd taken care of George, Jr., and Mary Jane. She lay awake and stared and stared at the ceiling. *What will I do?* she thought, endlessly, uselessly. *What will I do?*

When his name was called, Jefferson Pinkard marched up to a pair of officers, his Tredegar on his shoulder. "Pinkard, Jefferson Davis," he said, and then his pay number. He tossed the rifle down on a growing pile of weapons.

"Pinkard, Jefferson Davis," echoed a Confederate captain from divisional headquarters. He had a list of the soldiers in Jeff's regiment. After lining through his name, he turned to the other officer and spoke in formal tones: "Jefferson Davis Pinkard has turned in his rifle."

"Jefferson Davis Pinkard has turned in his rifle," the other officer agreed. He was also a captain, but wore a uniform of green-gray, not butternut. He lined through Pinkard's name on his copy of the list.

Yankee officers freely crossed the line between their positions and those of the CSA these days. Confederate soldiers had to obey them as they obeyed their own officers. Confederate officers, even those of higher rank, had to obey them, too. The Yanks didn't sneer or gloat, but they didn't take any nonsense, either.

One by one, in alphabetical order, the soldiers of his regiment surrendered their weapons. Hipolito Rodriguez came only a few men after Pinkard. Once he'd thrown his rifle onto the stack, he came over and stood by the big steel-worker. *"Finito,"* he said.

That was close enough to *finished* for Jeff to understand it. "Yeah, it's done," he said. "It's done, and we got licked. Who the hell would have reckoned on that when we started out?"

Rodriguez shrugged. *"Asi es la vida,"* he said, and then translated that: "Such is life. Now they must send us to our homes once more."

"Bully," Pinkard said in a hollow voice. He hated the west Texas prairie, no doubt about that, but he dreaded going back to Birmingham, too. What had Emily been doing since the leave when he'd walked in at just the wrong moment? Even if she hadn't been doing anything since then (which, knowing her, he found less likely than he would have wanted), could he live with her once he did get home? Or—the other side of the same coin—could he live without her?

And how was he supposed to go on living next door to Bedford Cunningham? That was a smaller question, but not a small one. They'd been best friends and foundry partners for years. But Bedford wouldn't be going back to the Sloss Works, not shy an arm he wouldn't, and how could you be friends with a man when you'd found your wife naked on her knees in front of him?

Hip Rodriguez sighed. "I hope everything goes good for you, *amigo."*

"Thanks," Jeff said. "Same to you." Here, unlike talk about going home, he could speak freely. "I never knew any Sonorans before you. You're a good fellow. You ever get tired of trying to scratch out a living down where you're at, you bring your family on up to Alabama. Plenty of good farm country there. You'd live high on the hog."

"Thanks, *amigo,* but no thanks." Rodriguez's smile was sweet and sad. "I want to go home. I want to talk *espanol,* to see my friends and family. And in Sonora, I am a man. In Alabama, I am a damn greaser." He tapped a brown hand with a brown finger to remind Pinkard of what he meant.

In the trenches, Jeff had long since stopped worrying about their being of different colors. Hip was right, though; it would matter in Alabama. Jeff put the best face on it he could: "It's not like you was a nigger."

"Too close," Rodriguez said positively, and odds were he was right. "You go to your home, and I go to my home, and maybe God lets us both be happy."

The last Tredegar thudded onto the pile. The C.S. captain addressed his U.S. counterpart: "All weapons for this unit are now accounted for."

"All *rifles* for this unit are now accounted for," the U.S. officer

answered sharply. "This regiment still has two machine guns outstanding."

"Destroyed in combat," the Confederate captain said blandly. "Can't give you what we haven't got."

Pinkard wouldn't have believed that from a beaten foe, and neither did the Yankee. "You're holding out on us," he growled. His sharp, quick accent made him sound suspicious even when he wasn't. When he was . . . "That's a violation of the terms of the armistice, and you'll be sorry for it. Weapons *are* to be turned over."

"I can't give you what we haven't got," the C.S. captain repeated. He waved to Jeff Pinkard and his companions. "This here is an infantry company, not a machine-gun outfit. They've turned in *their* weapons. Why don't you let them go and take the other up with division HQ?"

For a long moment, Jeff thought the U.S. officer would hold them up out of sheer cussedness, if for no other reason. In the end, though, he said, "All right, these bastards can go. But I *am* going to take it up with your superiors, Captain, and heads *will* roll. Yours among 'em, unless I miss my guess." His eyes measured the Confederate for a coffin.

What passed between the two captains afterwards, Pinkard never learned. His company was marched away to the paymaster, who gave each man what he was owed—in banknotes, not specie. He also gave a word of advice: "Don't waste your time before you spend it, on account of it won't be worth as much tomorrow as it is today."

"How come?" Jeff asked.

"Government's gonna have a devil of a time payin' its bills, especially in gold," the paymaster answered. "Yankees'll soak us till our eyes pop—you wait and see if I'm wrong. And everybody's gonna wanna buy things, and there won't be a hell of a lot of things to buy. You put that all in the pot and cook it, and you get prices going straight through the roof. Like I say, wait and see. People'll be wiping their asses with dollar banknotes, 'cause they won't be good for anything else."

With that cheery prediction ringing in his ears, Pinkard marched with the men with whom he'd been through so much toward the nearest railhead. It was, he realized, the last time he would ever

march with them. He tried to sort out how he felt about that. He wouldn't miss marching, or the trenches, or the horror that went with war. The men, though, and the comradeship—those he would miss. He wondered if he would ever know their like back in Birmingham.

He kicked at the dirt. He'd thought he had that kind of comradeship with Bedford Cunningham, and what was left there? Dust and ashes, nothing more. After Bedford and Emily had let him down, could he ever trust anybody again? He wasn't going to hold his breath.

He did hold his breath when the company got to the train. Almost all the cars were boxcars stenciled with the words 36 MEN, 8 HORSES. They'd held a lot of horses lately; the stink made that plain. He clambered up into a car and made himself as comfortable as he could on none-too-fresh straw. After all the cars were filled, the train headed east. By the way the engine coughed and wheezed, it, like the boxcars, was what remained after all the better rolling stock had been used in more important places.

Nobody bothered feeding the soldiers or giving them water. Pinkard emp tied his canteen and ate the tortillas and the chunk of sausage he had with him. After that was gone, he got hungrier and hungrier and thirstier and thirstier till, some time in the middle of the night, the train pulled into Fort Worth.

He'd fallen into an uneasy, unpleasant doze by then, and woke with a start. At the station, men shouted through megaphones: "Check the signboards! Find the train heading toward your hometown and get aboard! Men in uniform travel free, this week only!"

Amid handclasps and good-luck wishes and promises to keep in touch, the company broke apart. Jeff found a signboard and discovered, to his surprise, that a train that would stop in Birmingham was leaving early in the morning. He found the right platform after a couple of false starts and settled down to wait.

He hadn't been there more than a couple of minutes before a woman came up to him and snapped, "If you men hadn't been a pack of yellow cowards, you would have whipped those damnyankees." She stomped off before he could answer. It was, he decided, a good thing he'd had to turn in his Tre-degar. Otherwise, he might have answered her with a bullet.

Had he had the rifle, he might have shot eight or ten people,

mostly women, by the time his train pulled up to the station. Everyone who spoke to him seemed to think he was personally responsible for losing the war. He boarded a second-class passenger car with nothing but relief. It didn't end there, though. About half the people on the car were eastbound soldiers like him. The civilians who filled the other half of the seats showered them with abuse.

And the abuse got worse the farther east the train went. Every time a soldier got off and a civilian took his place, the abuse got worse. The farther from the front the train went, the more convinced people were that the war should have been won, and won in short order, too.

One heckler, a man who had plainly never seen the war at first hand, went too far. A soldier got up, knocked him cold with one punch, and said, "We might not've licked the damnyankees, but I sure as hell licked you." After that, the rude remarks diminished, but even then they did not stop.

The train pulled into the Birmingham station just over a day after it set out from Fort Worth. No one sat close to Pinkard when he got on the trolley that would take him out to the factory housing by the Sloss Works. Maybe that was because he still wore his uniform. Maybe, too, it was because he'd had no chance to bathe since coming out of the line.

He walked from the trolley stop toward his house. He felt as if he were heading toward the doctor's, and likely to be diagnosed with a deadly disease. He tried the front door. It was locked. Emily had gone to work, though how long she'd keep her munitions-plant job was anyone's guess. He had a key in his trouser pocket—about the only thing he did have with him from when he'd gone into the Army. He let himself in. (He wouldn't get that diagnosis till she came home.)

Doing nothing much felt strange and good. He took hot water from the stove's reservoir and bathed and put on a shirt and trousers he found in the closet. They hung loosely on him; he'd lost weight. He got cold chicken out of the icebox, then read an old *Richmond Review:* so old, one of the articles talked about how to drive back the Yankees. Laughing bitterly, he tossed the magazine aside.

At last, the front door opened. Emily stared at him. "Jeff!" she exclaimed, and then, "Darling!"

Was there too much hesitation between the one word and the

other? Pinkard didn't get the chance to think much about that. His wife threw herself into his arms. They tightened around her. He'd never stopped wanting her, even though...

He didn't get the chance to think about that, either. Her kiss made him dizzy. "Thank God you're home," she breathed in his ear. "Thank God you're safe. Everything's going to be fine now, just fine." Her voice went low and throaty. "I'll show you how fine." She led him back toward the bedroom. He went willingly, even gladly. That would do for now. Later?

"I'll just have to find out about later, that's all," Jeff muttered.

"What did you say, darling?" Emily was already getting out of her clothes.

"Never mind," he said. "It'll keep. It'll keep till later."

Sam Carsten sighed. The exhalation hurt. His lips were even more sunburned than the rest of him. They cracked and bled at any excuse or none. He'd filled out the forms for every kind of cream alleged to help; the pharmacist's mates were all sick of the sight of him. He was sick of the baked-meat sight of himself. As usual, none of the creams did the slightest good against the onslaughts of the tropic sun.

"God damn Dom Pedro IV to hell and gone," he said. "Stinking son of a bitch should have stayed out of the war."

Vic Crosetti laughed at him. "You're more worried about your hide than you are about licking the limeys."

"Ever since the *Dakota* came up into Brazilian waters, my hide's what's been taking the licking," Carsten said. "And we haven't fought the Royal Navy or even seen more than a couple of British freighters. Waste of time, anybody wants to know what I think of the whole business."

Crosetti laughed harder than ever. "Yeah, I'm sure Admiral Fiske is gonna call you up into officers' country any second now, so he can find out what's on your mind. He couldn't've run the flotilla without you till now, right?"

"Makes sense to me," Sam said. Crosetti grimaced at him. He was

about to go on when his ears caught a distant buzzing. He searched the heavens, then pointed. "That's an aeroplane. Now, God damn it, is it one of ours or one of theirs?"

"Escorts ain't shooting at it, so I guess it's one of ours," Crosetti said. "Hope to Jesus it's one of ours, anyways."

"Me too." Carsten kept watching, squinting, his eyes half shut against the bright sky, till he could make out the eagles and crossed swords under the wings of the aeroplane. He breathed easier then. "Aeroplanes," he said. "Who would have thought, when the war started, they'd matter so much?"

"Bunch of damn nuisances, is what they are," Crosetti said as this one splashed into the tropical Atlantic a few hundred yards from the *Dakota* and taxied across the water toward the battleship.

"They're sure as hell nuisances when they spot us or strafe us," Sam said. "But they couldn't do a quarter of what they're doing now back in 1914.1 bet they keep right on getting better, too."

"I think everybody on the *Dakota* except maybe Admiral Fiske has lis tened to you go on like this," Crosetti said with exaggerated patience. "You like 'em so goddamn much, go and get yourself a pair of wings after the war's done."

"Don't want wings," Carsten said. "I like being a sailor just fine. But I like aeroplanes, too. Look at that, Vic—isn't that bully?" The *Dakota's* crane was hauling the flying machine out of the water and up on deck.

Crosetti yawned. "It's boring, is what it is. I think everything about aeroplanes is boring till they start dropping bombs. Then they scare the shit out of me."

"No, that's not boring," Sam agreed. "Tell you something else, though— I'd sooner be bored."

Later that day, the *Dakota* and the flotilla with her, which had been lazing along at ten or twelve knots, suddenly changed course toward the northeast and put on speed. Carsten grunted, waiting for the klaxons to cry out the orders to battle station. One of the other aeroplanes from the flotilla must have spotted a British convoy. He looked forward to knocking it to pieces.

Then rumors started flying: rumors that it wasn't a convoy after all, but a good-sized chunk of the Royal Navy. Sam didn't like hearing that for beans. He'd fought the Royal Navy before, in the tropical Pacific, and had high respect for what the limeys could do. He'd had a lot more of the U.S. Navy sailing along beside him then, too. If they'd run up against a major British fleet, they would regret it as long as they lived, which might not be long.

When the klaxons did begin to hoot, running toward the forward star board sponson was almost a relief. Once he started slamming shells into the breech of the five-inch gun, he'd be too busy to worry. Whatever happened after that just happened—he couldn't do anything about it.

Hiram Kidde put that same thought into words: "Now we smash 'em—or else it's the other way around."

"Yeah," Sam said. "Well, if they smash us, I hope to God we at least hurt them. We can afford the losses and they can't, not fighting us and Kaiser Bill both."

"I'll die for my country if I have to," Kidde said, "but I'd sooner live for it." He puffed out his chest. "Where the hell else are the United States going to find a better chief gunner's mate?"

"Under any flat rock, I expect," Carsten answered, which won him a glare.

Commander Grady looked into the sponson. "It is the Royal Navy," he announced. "If the flyboy who spotted them had it straight, they've got a force about the same size as ours."

"That's great," Luke Hoskins muttered. "They'll sink all of us, and we'll sink all of them. Last one standing wins."

"Why should this be any different than anything else in the war?" Sam whispered. Hoskins chuckled and shrugged.

Hiram Kidde peered through the sponson's vision slit. "I see smoke," he said, and then, "Jesus, if I see smoke from down here, the fire-control boys up at the top of the mast have been seeing it the past five minutes. And if they can see it, the big guns can hit it. Why the hell aren't they shooting?"

As if to answer his question, the klaxons wailed once more. Sam

dug a fin ger in his ear, wondering if that ear were playing tricks on him. "Was that the all-clear?" he asked, not believing what he'd heard.

"Sure as hell was," Hoskins said.

"Why are they sounding the all-clear, though?" "Cap'n" Kidde demanded. "The enemy's in sight, for Christ's sake." He took off his cap and scratched his head. "And why the hell aren't the limeys shooting at us?"

Somebody ran shouting down the corridor. The shout held no words, only joy. Sam's brother-in-law had shouted like that when his wife, Sam's older sis ter, was delivered of a boy. "What the hell is going on?" he asked, though he didn't think anyone would have the answer.

But someone did. When Commander Grady came into the sponson, he looked as exalted as the other sailor had sounded. "Boys, we just got it on the wireless telegraph from Philadelphia," he said. "England has asked the Kaiser and Teddy Roosevelt for an armistice."

"It's over," Carsten whispered, hardly believing his own words. To help see if they were, if they could have been, true, he repeated them, louder this time: "It's over." Nobody called him a liar. Nobody said he was crazy. Little by little, almost in spite of himself, he began to believe.

"Maybe not quite over," Commander Grady said. "There's still the Japs, out in the Pacific. But hell, you're right, Carsten: that scrap is liable to peter out by itself. We've shot at each other, but they haven't taken anything of ours and we haven't taken anything of theirs. Shouldn't be too hard to patch up a peace."

Sam nodded. "Yes, sir. And they won't have any big reason to fight us any more, either, now that all their allies have thrown in the sponge."

"That's right." Grady nodded, too. "Matter of fact, if I were England and France, I'd worry about Hong Kong and Indochina and maybe Singapore, too. If the Japs want 'em bad enough, they'll fall into their hands like ripe fruit." He brought his mind back to the here-and-now. "And, since we have an armistice, you men are dismissed from your posts here."

"Sir, since we've won, are we going to head back to the States?"

Hiram Kidde asked.

"I don't know the answer to that, not yet," Grady replied. "I hope so, but that's just me talking, not Admiral Fiske or Philadelphia. Go on up topside, boys. Take a look at the limeys we didn't have to fight."

For once, Carsten was glad to go up on deck: the glow of victory, the glow of peace ahead, made him forget about the glow of sunburn. Shading his eyes with a hand, he peered across the Atlantic at the Royal Navy force whose gov ernment had finally had to yield. The longer he looked, the gladder he was that the wireless telegraph had brought word when it had. The enemy force looked large and formidable.

In an odd way, he felt sorry for the Englishmen aboard those warships. They'd been top dogs for a hundred years and then some. Coming back to the pack would hurt them a lot. He wondered who the top dog was now: the United States or Germany? He looked east, toward Europe. Wouldn't that be an interesting fight?

He shrugged. However interesting it was, he didn't think it would happen any time soon. Teddy Roosevelt and the Kaiser had just won a war together. They'd take a while to pick up the pieces afterwards. Maybe they'd even stay friends while they were doing it. He hoped so.

One by one, the Royal Navy ships turned away from the U.S.-Chilean-Brazilian flotilla and steamed off toward the northeast, toward Britain. Sam wondered what would happen to them there. Would the limeys get to keep them, or would they have to surrender them to Germany and the USA? That wasn't for him to decide; the boys in striped trousers would have to sort it out.

A U.S. cruiser with the flotilla launched its aeroplane to shadow the British ships. That must have been allowed under the terms of the armistice, be cause nobody started shooting.

U.S. aeroplanes could have tracked the British ships at the outbreak of the war, too, but neither they nor their wireless sets could have reached as far as they did now. Sam had had that same thought not long before, when he'd spotted the *Dakota's* aeroplane before it landed by the battleship. Now, reminded of it in a different context, he muttered, "I wish that flying machine could follow those bastards all the way back to London."

He didn't notice Commander Grady standing behind him, also

watching the Royal Navy force withdraw. "That would be pretty fine, wouldn't it, Carsten?" the commander of the starboard secondary armament said.

"Huh?" Sam spun around, startled. "Uh, yes, sir." He made himself think straight. "I expect the day is coming when they'll be able to do just that. I ex pect it's coming sooner than most people think, too."

Grady studied him. "I expect you're right. If we don't do it, some other navy will, and they'll do it to us." He rubbed his chin. "Matter of fact, I happen to know we are doing something along those lines. Would you by any chance be interested in becoming part of that?"

"Would I?" Sam said. "Yes, sir! Hell yes, sir! Where do I sign up?"

"You don't, not yet," Grady answered. "But you're a sharp fellow—sharper than you let on sometimes, I think. When we get into port in the United States, you remind me about this. I think the effort could use you."

"Thank you very much, sir," Carsten said. Part of that was real grati tude—he'd been talking about doing something like this. Part of it, too, was prudent calculation. Even if the Navy did shrink after the war, they wouldn't drop him on the beach if he was part of this new project. Having a job he was sure of wasn't the worst thing in the world—no, not even close.

Bartlett, Reginald, Confederate States Army, private first class," Reggie Bartlett said to the paymaster in U.S. green-gray. He rattled off his pay number and the date of his capture.

The paymaster found his name, checked both the pay number and the date of capture against his own records, and lined through them. He gave Reggie a sheaf of green banknotes—bills, the Yankees called them—and some pocket change. "Here is the pay owed you under the Geneva Convention, Private First Class Bartlett," he said. "Frankly, between you, me, and the wall, you're damn lucky to get it in greenbacks instead of your own money. These will still be worth something six months from now. God only knows if the Confederate dollar will."

Reggie grunted. From things he'd heard, the paymaster was likely to be right. He put the money into a pocket of the butternut trousers

the U.S. authorities had given him—along with a matching tunic—to wear on the train ride back to Richmond, where all released Confederate prisoners were being shipped. Neither color nor cut was quite that of a C.S. uniform, but both were close.

His shoulder ached when he bent his arm to put the money in his pocket, but not too badly. A Yankee doctor had given him chloroform and then gone in there and drained an abscess that refused to clear up on its own. Now the wound really was healing. For a long time, he'd wondered if it ever would.

He could walk with only a bare trace of a limp, too, and his leg hardly bothered him at all. Put everything together and the damnyankees had treated him pretty well. Of course, they were also the ones who'd shot him. Given a choice, he would sooner not have been shot. Then he wouldn't have had to worry about how the damnyankees treated him. But who ever gave a soldier a choice?

Here came Rehoboam, on two sticks and an artificial foot. The Negro prisoner made slow but steady progress toward the paymaster. With nothing better to do, Reggie waited till he too got paid off, then asked, "What are you going to do when you get back to Mississippi?"

"I be goddamned if I know," Rehoboam answered. "Ain't no use in the cotton fields no more. Ain't no good on any kind o' farm no more. Reckon I got to go to town, but I be goddamned if I know what the hell I do there, neither."

"You have your letters," Bartlett said. "I've seen that. It's something."

"It ain't much," Rehoboam said with a scornful toss of his head. "Ain't like I'm gonna put on no necktie and sit behind no desk at the bank and loan the white folks money. Ain't gonna be no doctor. Ain't gonna be no lawyer or preacher. Ain't gonna be no newspaperman, neither. So what the hell good my letters do me?"

"If you didn't have 'em, how could you read all the lies the Reds tell?" Reggie asked innocently.

Rehoboam started to give him a straight answer. Then the black man started to get angry. And then, grudgingly, he started to laugh. "You ain't no stupid white man," he said at last. "Wish to Jesus you was."

"Stupid enough to get shot," Reggie said. "You come right down to it, how can anybody get any stupider than that?"

"You in one piece," Rehoboam said. "I ain't gonna see my foot again till Judgment Day, and I don't believe in Judgment Day no more."

"You *are* a damned Red," Bartlett said. He meant *damned* in a more lit eral way than he was in the habit of using it. He didn't think of himself as all that pious, but he'd gone to church on Sunday back in Richmond. Hearing Rehoboam casually deny the Last Judgment rocked him.

"Reckon bein' a Red is more dangerous'n the other," the Negro an swered. "But if the damn gummint ain't cheatin' me, I'm gonna be a citizen, like you been sayin', so I reckon I can think any kind o' damnfool thing I like, an' say so, too. That's what bein' a citizen's about, ain't it?"

"I suppose so." Reggie hadn't thought that much about it. He hadn't needed to think much about it. Citizenship was natural to him as water to a fish, and so he took it altogether for granted. Whatever else Rehoboam did, he wouldn't do that.

A military policeman in green-gray came up. "You Rebs been paid off?" he asked. When they didn't deny it, he jerked a thumb toward a doorway at the end of the hall. "Shake a leg, then. Trucks to take you to the train station are right through there. You think we'll be sorry to get you off our hands, you're crazy."

As the two men from the CSA made their way toward the door—they could hardly shake a leg—Bartlett spoke in a sly voice: "See? He treats you just like me—far as he's concerned, we're both scum."

"I'm used to white folks what reckon I'm scum," Rehoboam said after a moment. "How about you?"

Outside, Reggie proved he wasn't used to it. Thinking to be helpful, he asked a Yankee guard, "Which one of these trucks is for the coloreds?"

"We ain't bothering with any of that shit here," the U.S. soldier answered. "You and Snowball look like you're pals. You can sit together."

Reggie had to help Rehoboam up into the back of the truck. Conscious of the Negro's eye on him, he said not a word as they sat down side by side. None of the other freed prisoners—all of them white—already in the truck said anything, either.

Most places in the USA, Negroes—a relative handful, not close to a third of the population as they were in the CSA—had to take a back seat to whites, as they did in the Confederacy. Bartlett figured the damnyankees were piling one last humiliation on his comrades and him. He also figured he would survive it—and that he would catch hell if he complained about it. That made keeping quiet look like a smart idea.

The Yankees also made no distinction between white and black C.S. pris oners on the train that set out from Missouri toward Richmond. Reggie and Rehoboam ended up sitting side by side in a crowded, beat-up coach. Bartlett resigned himself to that, too, and told himself it wouldn't be so bad. They knew each other, anyhow; after weeks of lying across the aisle from each other, they couldn't help it.

Until it crossed into Virginia, the train stayed in territory that had belonged to the USA before the war began. Reggie stared out through the dirty window glass at countryside Confederate soldiers hadn't been able to reach or damage. Here and there, in Cincinnati and a couple of other towns, he did see craters and wrecked buildings that had taken bomb hits, but not till the train got into central Pennsylvania, more than a day after it set out, did the landscape take on the lunar quality with which he'd grown so unpleasantly familiar.

"We fought like hell here," he remarked to Rehoboam.

"Reckon we did," the Negro answered, "or you white folks did, anyways. Yankees licked you just the same."

Bartlett sighed; he could hardly argue with that. He did say, "We might have done better if you Red niggers hadn't jumped on our backs while we were fighting the USA."

"Mebbe," Rehoboam said. "You might've did better if you didn't go an' make all the black folks in the country hate you like pizen, too."

Since that held only too much truth, Reggie forbore from replying. He kept looking out the window. Maryland seemed just like Pennsylvania, a hell of wreckage and shell craters and forests

smashed to toothpicks. The smell of death was fresher there, and filled the train. And when he rolled through Washington, D.C., he stared and stared. The whole city was a field of rubble, with most of the buildings knocked flat and then pounded to pieces. The stub of the Washington Monument stuck up from the desolation all around like a broken tooth in a mouth otherwise empty.

Rehoboam gaped at what was left of Washington, too. "Didn't see nothin' like this here in Arkansas," he allowed. "This here, this is a hell of a mess."

"Didn't see anything like this in Sequoyah, either," Bartlett said. "But in the Roanoke valley, especially around Big Lick—we saw plenty of it there. Too many men smashed together into too small a space, with no room for anybody to give way, that's what does it. Over across the Mississippi, the fighting didn't get this crowded. The Yankees and us had more room to move."

"When we was fightin' to keep 'em away from Memphis, it got plenty bad, but not like this," Rehoboam said. "No, ain't never seen nothin' like this."

After the train crossed the Potomac on a pontoon bridge and went into Virginia, Reggie expected the devastation to be even worse than it had been in Yankee country. For the most part, it wasn't. It was fresher, but not worse. After a little while, he thought he understood why: by the time the fighting moved down into Virginia, U.S. forces had gained such a preponderance over those of the CSA that the Army of Northern Virginia had to give ground before it and everything around it were pounded completely flat. A war of movement didn't tear up the landscape so badly as one of position.

And then, as soon as the train got south of the reach of U.S. guns, the countryside was the one Reggie had always known, with only an occasional bomb crater to remind him of the war. Coming into Richmond, though, brought it home once more. U.S. aeroplanes had done their worst to the capital of the Confederate States. Richmond was in better shape than "Washington, but it wouldn't win prizes any time soon.

"Check the signboards for trains going toward your home towns!" rail road officials—or perhaps they were government functionaries—shouted.

To his own surprise, Reggie reached out to shake Rehoboam's

hand. The Negro took the offered hand, looking a little surprised himself. "Good luck to you," Reggie said. "I don't care if you *are* a Red, or not too much. Good luck."

"Same to you," Rehoboam said. "You ain't the worst white man I ever run acrost." He made that sound like high praise.

They got off the train together. Rehoboam slowly headed toward a plat form from which a train would leave for Mississippi. He didn't need to hurry; it wasn't scheduled to head out for another six hours, and might well run late. Bartlett left the station. He would have to stay in his parents' home till he found work.

A taxi driver hailed him: "Hey, pal, take you anywhere in town for three beans. Won't find anybody cheaper."

"Three *dollars!"* Reggie stared at him as if he'd started talking Hindus tani. The paymaster back at the hospital had known what he was talking about. Bartlett's hand went into his pocket and closed on a coin. "I'll give you a quarter, U.S."

"Deal," the driver said at once.

Reggie wondered if he'd offered too much. By the way the cabbie bounced out of the motorcar—a Birmingham that had seen better days—and held the door open for him, he probably had. He clicked his tongue between his teeth. No help for it now. He gave the driver his parents' address.

"Hope you didn't get hurt too bad," the cab driver said, evidently recog nizing the kind of clothes Bartlett had on. Reggie only grunted by way of reply. Not a bit put out, the driver asked, "What'U you do now that you're home?"

"Damned if I know," Reggie said. "Try and find my life again, I reckon." By the way the cabbie nodded, he'd heard that answer plenty of times already.

Colonel Irving Morrell scrambled down into the Confederate works that would have defended Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Without soldiers in them, the trenches seemed unreal, unnatural. Before the armistice, Morrell would have had to pay in blood, and pay high, for the privilege of examining them. Now he had Colonel Harley Landis, CSA,

as his personal guide.

Not that Landis was delighted with the job. "If I had my choice, Colonel," he said, "the only excavation of ours I'd show you would be six feet by three feet by six feet deep." He raised an eyebrow. "Nothing personal, of course."

"Of course," Morrell agreed with a dry chuckle. "Believe me, if you were going through our trenches outside Chicago, I'd feel the same way."

"Chicago?" The Confederate officer snorted ruefully. "In my dreams, maybe. You have the stronger power. We aimed at nothing more than defending ourselves."

Now Morrell was the one to arch his brows. "Aimed at Philadelphia, you mean. Aimed at Kansas, too, for that matter, and Missouri. Talk straight, Colonel, if you don't mind. This poor-little-us business wears thin after the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War."

Colonel Landis stared at him. "But surely you can see ..." He checked himself, then shook his head. "Maybe not—who knows? But if you can't, the world must seem a very strange place from the Yankee side of the hill."

"Looking at the world from the other fellow's side of the hill is always a useful exercise." Morrell regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth. Landis was an enemy—Landis was *the* enemy. If he hadn't figured that out for himself, why hand it to him?

Fortunately, his thoughts seemed to be elsewhere. "All we've tried to do is hold you back a little and keep up with you ourselves. You Yankees have got to be the *pushingest* people in the whole wide world."

"Thank you," Morrell said, which made his Confederate counterpart's mouth twist: Landis hadn't meant that as a compliment. Morrell held his smile inside. Too bad.

He took his own advice, climbing up onto a firing step that was already starting to crumble and peering toward the northwest. If he'd been a C.S. officer defending this position against a whole great swarm of barrels, what would he have done? His first thought was, *turn tail and run like hell.*

Say what you would about the Rebels, he could count on the ringers of one hand the times they'd done anything like that. He turned and looked back over his shoulder, studying the earthworks he hadn't yet explored in person. After perhaps half a minute of contemplation, he grunted softly. "You'd have mounted your guns up there," he said, pointing, "and fired at us over open sights, or as near as makes no difference. I don't know how many barrels you had left at the end, but you'd have put them behind that little swell of ground there"—he pointed again—"to keep us from spotting them for as long as you could."

Harley Landis examined him the same way he'd examined the terrain. The C.S. colonel started to say something, stopped, and started again after a pause: "Has anyone ever told you, sir, that you may be too damn smart for your own good?"

"A whole raft of people, Colonel Landis," Morrell answered cheerfully. "Once or twice, they've even been right." He remembered all too well his own temporary eclipse after the Mormon rebels in Utah had hurt in a way he hadn't anticipated the U.S. troops battling to put them down.

"Only once or twice?" Landis was still eyeing him in speculative fashion. "Well, maybe I'm not too surprised." He took a look at the ground, too, then asked, "How do you think we would have done?"

"You'd have hurt us," Morrell said. "No doubt about that, Colonel, not a bit. You'd have hurt us—but we would have got through. You couldn't have had enough barrels to stop us."

He waited for Landis' irate disagreement. But the Confederate colonel had been the man who brought his commander's request for a cease-fire through the U.S. lines. As well as anyone could, he knew how things stood with his army. He looked as if he'd bitten into something sour. "You're likely right, dammit, but how I wish you weren't."

He got out a pack of Raleighs, scraped a match on the sole of his boot, and lit a cigarette. "Can I steal one of those from you?" Morrell asked eagerly. "You wouldn't believe some of the dried horse manure that passes for tobacco in the United States these days."

"Yes, I would," Landis said. "When we'd capture Yankees, the men'd always let 'em keep their smokes. Here, keep the whole pack."

He tossed it to Morrell. The U.S. officer tapped a cigarette against the palm of his hand, then leaned forward to get a light from Landis. He sucked the fragrant smoke deep into his lungs. At last, reluctantly, he exhaled. "Thank you, Colonel. That is the straight goods. You Rebels make better smokes than we do, and that's the truth."

Landis sighed. "I'd trade that for being somewhere up in Illinois right now, the way you said before."

Morrell nodded as he took another drag. "I haven't tasted tobacco like this in years, though. It's bully stuff." He walked rapidly along the firebay till he came to a communications trench. Then, Colonel Landis in his wake, he zigzagged back until he could inspect the gun position he'd spotted from the front line. He nodded to himself. Field guns there would have done some damage, but not enough to stop a major assault.

He found a question for Landis: "What's your opinion of our barrels as compared to your—you usually call them tanks, don't you?"

"These days, we say *barrels* more often, too," Harley Landis answered. "My opinion? My opinion is that you had too damned many of them, no matter what name you care to use." Past that, he declined to say anything. Morrell hadn't expected him to say much, but had hoped.

To prod the Confederate a little more, Morrell said, "We'll probably con fiscate the ones you do have, you know, and do our damnedest to make sure you don't build any more of them."

Colonel Landis muttered something under his breath: "Chicken thieves." Morrell needed a few seconds to understand it. When he did, he thought it wiser to pretend he hadn't.

He did say, "If England and France and Russia had smashed Germany in a hurry and then helped you turn on us, I don't think you'd have given us a big kiss when the war was over."

"No, I reckon not," Landis admitted, which made Morrell like him better, or at least respect him more. He went on, "But that's the way things were supposed to work out, and they didn't." His chuckle had barbs. "I know you're not thinking the same thing I am here."

"No, not quite," Morrell said. They both laughed then, a couple of professionals who understood each other even though they stood on

opposite sides of the hill.

"Ask you something?" Landis said.

"You can ask," Morrell said. "I don't promise to answer."

"Here—I'll ply you with liquor first." Colonel Landis took a flask from his belt. To show Morrell it was safe, he drank first. Morrell took a swig. He'd expected moonshine, or at best its more dignified cousin, bourbon. What he got was a mouthful of damn fine cognac.

"You are a man of parts, sir," he said, bowing a little. "First the cigarettes, now this. Ask away. I'm putty in your hands."

Landis' snort had a skeptical ring. He put the question even so: "Suppose the war had gone on, and you did break through here. What would you have done next?"

"I'm not in command of First Army," Morrell said, which was true but also disingenuous, considering the victories he'd helped design. He took another small sip of Landis' brandy and added, "General Custer was talking about an advance to the Tennessee, though, if you must know." He handed the flask back to the Confederate colonel.

Landis almost dropped it. "To the Tennessee?" His splutters had nothing to do with the second swig of cognac he took. "When were you planning on getting there, 1925? The Tennessee! The very idea! We were down, by God, but we weren't out."

"I think he—we—might have done it," Morrell said. "Not a lot of natural barriers in the way, anyhow. And how many divisions of colored troops did you have in the line when the shooting stopped?"

"If you don't know, Colonel, I'll be damned if I'm going to tell you," Harley Landis answered. "I will tell you this, though: they fought about as well as the new white units we were raising toward the end there."

"Of course you'll tell me that and not the other—it makes you look stronger," Morrell said. Landis nodded, unembarrassed. On the whole, though, the U.S. officer thought his C.S. opposite number was right. From what he'd seen and from reports he'd read, Confederate black units *had* fought about as well as rookie Confederate white units. That surprised him, but a man who couldn't see truth when it tried to shoot him wouldn't live long, and didn't deserve to. He asked, "Now that the

war is over"—politer than saying, *now that you've lost*—"are you folks going to keep on raising Negro troops?"

"I don't know the answer to that," Colonel Landis answered. "We didn't conscript niggers, the way we did with our own people. What we got were volunteers, and probably a better crop than we would have had if we'd scraped the bottom of the barrel." He sent Morrell a hooded glance. "Other side of that coin is, there are so goddamn *many* of you Yankees."

Morrell's smile was bright and friendly—if you didn't look too close. "Maybe you'll think about that a little harder before you decide whether you'll try picking a fight with us."

"Picking a fight with you?" Landis shook his head. "No, sir. Teddy Roo sevelt declared war on us, not the other way around."

"After Wilson declared war on our allies," Morrell said.

"We honored our commitments," Landis said.

"So did we," Morrell returned. They glared at each other. Then Morrell laughed, a sound more of bemusement than anything else. "And look what honoring our commitments got us. Better—no, worse—than a million dead on our side, likely not far from that for you, and even more wounded, and all the wreckage . . . They shouldn't let civilians start wars, Colonel, because they don't know what the hell they're getting into and getting their countries into."

"You may be a damnyankee, but I'm damned if I think you're wrong," Landis said.

"This must never happen again," Irving Morrell said solemnly.
"Never."

"Never," Colonel Landis said. "Never, by God." He took the flask off his belt again. "To peace." He drank and offered it to Morrell.

"Thank you, sir." Morrell drank, too. "To peace."

XX

Jake Featherston slouched down the dirt road toward Richmond at a pace that would have made him scream curses at any soldier using it. No one would scream curses at him, not now. He still wore his uniform, but he wasn't a soldier any more. Along with most of the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia, he'd been mustered out and paid off and sent on his way with a pat on the head.

"Threw me out," he snarled under his breath. "Threw us all out, so the War Department wouldn't have to fret itself about feedin' us or payin' us any more. Payin' us!" He snorted and slapped a pocket. Paper inside crinkled. They'd paid him off in banknotes, not real money. He wondered how far the notes would go when he tried spending them. Not far enough. He was already sure of that.

Dust rose from the pocket when he slapped it. A lot of paid-off soldiers— no, ex-soldiers—were on the road. Every time he took a step, dust kicked up from under his battered boots. Any time any of them took a step, dust kicked up. Thousands of men, millions of steps, a hell of a lot of dust.

"You'd think they'd want to keep a good artilleryman in the Army," he muttered. He'd been plenty good enough to command a battery. But he hadn't been good enough—no, the War Department hadn't thought he was good enough—to get promoted past sergeant, or good enough to keep, either. "Well, to hell with Jeb Stuart, Jr. He can go down there and toast his toes with Jeb Stuart III."

A Negro soldier trudging along the same road turned his head at the sound of Featherston's voice. Jake stared unwinkingly back at him. In the days before things had gone to hell in the CSA, a couple of seconds of that look from a white man would have been plenty to make any black buck lower his eyes. Now the Negro, a big, burly fellow, tried to stare him down.

It didn't work. Featherston might have been on the wiry side, but rage had kept him going during the war, and that rage hadn't got any smaller now that the war was lost. It blazed out of him now, almost tangibly, and the colored soldier flinched away from it. Jake laughed. Instead of trying to start a fight, the Negro flinched again. "Do Jesus!" he said softly, and let Featherston pass.

That night, Featherston slept by the side of the road wrapped in a blanket, as he had slept by a lot of different roads in several blankets during the war. He had turned in his pistol when he was paid off. Again, no: he had turned in *a* pistol when he was paid off. He took *his* pistol out of his pack and set it where he could grab it in a hurry. The precaution proved needless; he slept undisturbed.

When morning woke him, he started walking again. He took the fifty-five miles from Fredericksburg to Richmond in three medium-easy days, not the two harsh ones he would have used if still in the Army. That meant he got into the Confederate capital this side of exhausted but empty as a cave: the men who'd moved faster had got what food there was on the road.

Richmond was full of dirty scarecrows in butternut. The gray-uniformed police seemed to have not a clue about what to do with so many men odds-on to be tougher and shorter-tempered than they were. The best answer they found was, *as little as we possibly can.* That struck Jake as showing better sense than he expected from police.

He went into a saloon to take advantage of its free-lunch spread. The meal—ham and deviled eggs and pickles and salted peanuts and other thirst-inducers—was indeed free, but the mug of beer he had to buy to avail himself of it set him back a dollar, not the prewar five cents. "Christ!" he exclaimed.

"I'll take fifteen cents in silver, if you've got that," the barkeep said. "Hell, I'll take a dime. It's just as well the banknotes are already brown, on account of that's what people will be using them for."

"Don't have enough silver to want to spend it quick," Featherston said. "If a beer is a bean, what do I have to pay for a bed?"

"Paper? Five easy, and the bugs'll carry your mattress in for you, you get anything that cheap," the fat man in the black apron answered. "Why didn't you bastards win the war instead of laying down for the damnyankees? Then they'd have to pay—"

Featherston reached across the bar and grabbed a handful of the white shirt showing above the apron. "You don't ever want to say anything like that again, you hear me?" When the bartender didn't say anything, he shook him, lifting his feet off the floor with no particular effort. "You hear me?"

"I hear you," the fat man wheezed. Jake set him down on the

floor. He went on, "Drink your beer and get the hell out of here."

"I will," Featherston said. "You ain't crowded here. And while I'm drink ing it, you keep both hands where I can see 'em, hear? You try hauling out whatever kind of persuader you got under the bar there, I promise you won't like what happens after that."

He took his time finishing the beer, then turned and walked toward the door. He hadn't gone three paces before the bartender shouted, "Don't even breathe, soldier boy!"

Featherston looked back over his shoulder and found himself staring down the barrels of a sawed-off shotgun. After gas and machine guns and Yankee traveling forts, that was not so much of a much. If the bastard did pull the triggers, it would be over in a hurry, anyway. "Fuck you," Jake said, and kept walking.

No blast of shot tore into his back. He stood on the street for a few sec onds. Five dollars for a flophouse bed? He shook his head and made for Capitol Square. Sleeping in the park was free. Maybe a congressman or a senator would come by and see what the aftermath of war looked like.

He was not the only soldier in Capitol Square—far from it. As evening fell, several campfires started flickering. That was probably against the rules, but no policemen came in to do anything about it. Jake saw them on the sidewalk and clustered around the bomb-scarred Capitol. "Cowardly bastards," he muttered.

"Wish they *would* try and break us up," another ragged veteran said. "Look at 'em there, fat and happy. Nobody who ain't been through what we been through can know what it's like, but we'd give 'em a taste, goddamn if we wouldn't."

"That's right, by Jesus," Featherston said. "Wonder who their pappies were, so they didn't have to put on a real uniform."

"Amen," the other soldier said. "You can sing that in my church any old day." He stuck out a hand. "Name's Ted Weston. I'm in the 22nd North Carolina Infantry—or I was, anyways."

"I'm Jake Featherston, First Richmond Howitzers."

"I've heard of that outfit," Weston said. "Pretty la-de-da, ain't they? You might could have had a pappy of your own, get into a unit

like that."

"Hell I did," Jake growled. "I was good at what I did, is all. Good enough to lead a battery for a year and a half, but not good enough to take the stripes off my sleeve and put a bar or two on my collar. La-de-da, my ass—hadn't been for a la-de-da officer with a fancy pa gettin' hisself killed . . . ahh, the hell with it." He spat in disgust.

Weston eyed him in the dim, flickering light; they weren't close to a fire. "Sounds like you got a powerful load of angry rilin' your belly, Jake."

"Oh, a touch," Featherston allowed. "Just a touch. Don't get me started, or I'll sick it all up." He waited to see if Weston would ask him more—He would have brought it all out; he might even have purged himself of some of it. But the infantryman from North Carolina shrugged and moved away.

Nobody gives a damn, Featherston thought. *Nobody.* He went away himself, to the base of the great statue of Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederacy's chief martyr during the War of Secession. The war now ended had martyrs in plenty, but he didn't think he would see statues to them any time soon. He wrapped himself in his blanket and went to sleep.

When morning came, he found a cheap cafe, the saloons not yet being open. Ham and eggs and biscuits and coffee cost him two dollars he could not afford. He fumed at the price, as he fumed at everything these days. And then he spotted a couple of neatly turned-out sentries in front of a building at the southwestern corner of Capitol Square. Those sentries drew him as a lode-stone draws nails. Sure enough, that was the War Department building, the source, as he saw it, of all his miseries and all his country's miseries as well.

One of the sentries wrinkled his nose as Featherston approached. He turned his head and spoke to his comrade: "Dogs find more rubbish to drag out these days."

Jake didn't think he was meant to hear that, but hear it he did, artillery man's battered ears or not. "You can kiss my ass, too, pal," he said, and started past the spit-and-polish boys into the War Department.

The one who'd spoken swung his rifle down horizontally to block his way. "Where do you think you're going, buddy?" he demanded.

"State your business."

"Kiss my ass," Jake repeated. "I'm a citizen of this country, and I'm a real soldier, too, goddammit. I'd rather smell the way I do than be a perfumed pansy in a uniform that never once saw dirt. Now get the hell out of my way. I aim to have me a word or two to say to the bonehead generals who cost us this war."

"I don't think so, sonny boy," the sentry said. "They've got better things to do with their time than listen to—and smell—the likes of you."

"Like hell they do," Featherston said. "I want to tell you—" Without a single telltale motion or glance, he kicked the sentry in the crotch, then whirled and coldcocked his chum while the other man was just beginning to raise his rifle. The only difference between them was that the first went down with a groan, the second silently.

Whistling, Jake started to walk by them and into the War Department. Then, reluctantly, he checked himself. He'd get caught in there. He was liable to get caught out here; a couple of men were coming across the street toward him.

He did what they must have expected least—he charged straight at them. Neither of them cared to try tackling him. They were middle-aged and pros perous and no doubt thought anyone who did anything out of line would politely wait around for the police afterwards. He taught them otherwise in a hurry. Then he was back in Capitol Square, one discharged soldier among hundreds. How were they supposed to find him after that?

They couldn't. They didn't. They didn't even try, and the sentries, who'd got a better look at him, were in no condition to help. He stopped running and started sauntering, looking like any of the rest of the men in the square who had more time on their hands than they knew what to do with.

At least one of those soldiers had seen what he'd done. As he strolled past, the fellow said, "Damn shame you couldn't give that bastard Semmes a good shot in the nuts, too."

"You'd best believe it's a damn shame," Jake said. "One of these days, though, if this poor, miserable country ever gets back on its feet again, we'll pay back everybody who ever did us wrong—and I mean everybody."

"Hope that day comes soon," the other veteran said. "Can't come soon enough, if anybody wants to know what I think."

"I don't know when," Featherston said. "We'll have to go some to put our own house in order, I reckon. But we'll walk tall again one of these days, and then—and then everybody better look out, that's all." The other soldier clapped his hands.

Not even a funeral. Sylvia Enos thought that was worst of all. When scarlet fever took her mother, when her brother died in a trainwreck, there had been an end to things, dirt thudding down on the lid of a coffin, and then a wake afterwards. Once that was done, people had been able to pick up the threads of their lives and go on.

But fish and crabs and whatever lived at the bottom of the sea in the mid dle of the Atlantic were giving George the only burial he would ever get. Fishermen shuddered when they talked of things like that. Along with all his friends, George had hated the idea of going down at sea. Sylvia knew men who wouldn't eat crab or lobster because of what the shellfish might have been eating.

She stirred the dress she'd thrown in the kettle full of black dye. It would be ready pretty soon. She'd used a good deal of coal heating water to dye clothes for mourning; that was cheaper than buying new black dresses and shirtwaists. She hoped the Coal Board wouldn't cut the ration yet again, though.

Mary Jane came into the kitchen and said, "I want to go out and play."

"Go on, then," Sylvia said with a sigh. Mary Jane wasn't really mourning; how could she mourn a man she scarcely remembered? She knew Sylvia was upset, but had trouble understanding why. George, Jr., had known his father well enough to miss him, but he was also far less wounded than he would have been had George come home every night. School seemed far more real and far more urgent to him than a father long at sea.

Sylvia wished she felt the same way. Now that George was gone, she found herself far more forgiving of his flaws than she had been while he was alive. She even—almost—wished he'd gone to bed with that colored strumpet, to give him one more happy memory to hold on to when the torpedo slammed into the *Ericsson.*

"Not fair," she muttered, stirring again. The Confederacy had already dropped out of the war, and England had been on the point of giving up. Why, how, had a British submersible chosen her husband's ship in those waning moments of the war? Where was the sense in that?

George hadn't even mentioned British submersibles to her. All he'd ever written about were Confederate boats. Why had the Royal Navy decided to move one of theirs into that part of the ocean?

She didn't suppose questions like that had any answers. A minister would have called it God's will. As far as she was concerned, that wasn't any answer, either. Why had God decided to take everybody on board the *Ericsson?* Because her husband had wanted to screw a whore? If God started taking every man who'd ever wanted to do that, men would get thin on the ground mighty quick.

Men *had* got thin on the ground. So many women wore mourning these days, or had worn it and were now returning to less somber wear. Sylvia looked at the alarm clock, which she'd brought out of the bedroom. The dress had been in the kettle long enough. Sylvia carried the kettle over to the sink and poured out the water in which she'd dyed the dress. Then she wrung the dress as dry as she could and set it on a hanger to finish drying. That done, she scrubbed at her hands with floor soap to clean the dye from her knuckles and around and under her nails.

She was just drying her hands—and noting that she hadn't got rid of all the dye—when someone knocked on the door. Her mouth twisted bitterly as she went to open it. She'd already had the worst news she could get. Opening the door held no terror for her now.

Brigid Coneval stood in the hallway. The Irishwoman still wore black for her own dead husband. "And how is it today, Sylvia?" she asked. Where nothing else had, their common loss left them on a first-name basis. They under stood each other in a way no one who had not shared that loss ever could.

"It's .. . about the same as always," Sylvia said. She stepped aside. "Come in, why don't you?"

"Don't mind if I do," Brigid said. She nodded when she saw the big kettle sticking up out of the kitchen sink, which was not very deep, and smelled the acrid odor of the dye still hanging in the air. "Och, I did enough of that and to spare, so I did."

"As long as I'm doing things, I don't have to worry about what hap pened," Sylvia said. "And so I keep finding things to do." She waved a hand. "This place has never been so clean."

"My flat'll never be clean, I'm thinking, but then I'm after having three boys," Brigid Coneval said. "But I do know what you're saying, indeed and I do. In bed of nights, I keep thinking *What if he'd stopped to piss?* or *What if he'd fallen down before that damned bullet came by?* or —or I don't know what, but anything to make it different than it was."

"Anything to make it different," Sylvia echoed. "Oh, Christ, yes. What was that stinking English submarine doing where there hadn't been any English submarines? It had no *business* being in that part of the ocean. The Confederates had already given up, and—"

"It does no good—dwelling on it, I mean," Brigid broke in.

"I know that. Sometimes I can't help it, though," Sylvia said. "Sometimes even when I'm working ... I was thinking about that *damned* submarine"— she brought out the word not casually, as her friend had done, but with savage relish—"even while I was dyeing my dress."

"It does no good," Brigid Coneval repeated. "Well, the truth is, there's not a thing that does any good, but there is a thing, sure and there is, that keeps you from thinking so much about it." She opened her handbag and pulled out a flat pint bottle of whiskey.

Sylvia got up, went over to the cabinet by the kitchen sink, and brought back a couple of glasses. She watched as the coppery liquid gurgled into them. She didn't drink that much or that often, not least because whiskey tasted like medicine to her. But Brigid was right—whiskey *was* medicine here, because it kept her from thinking clearly when clear thought was the last thing she wanted.

"Ahh!" Brigid smacked her lips and poured another shot into her glass. She thrust the pint toward Sylvia, who shook her head. Brigid Coneval shrugged and drank. She wasn't shy about whiskey: on the contrary.

George, Jr., came in. "Hello, Mrs. Coneval," he said.

"And hello to you," she answered with an extravagant gesture that almost sloshed the refill out of her glass. "What a fine, polite boy y'are."

The fine, polite boy had a new bruise on his cheek, very possibly gained by roughhousing with one of Brigid Coneval's sons. He wrinkled his nose and said, "That dye stinks, Ma."

"I know it does," Sylvia answered. "It can't be helped, though." She looked toward the clock. "Go find your sister and tell her to come in. It's later than I thought. I'll feed the two of you and get you ready for bed. I have to go back to work tomorrow, and you're going back to school."

"All right," he said, and hurried away. He liked the idea of going back to school. Sylvia wondered where he came by that. School had always bored her to tears, and George had never been any sort of scholar, either.

"A good boy. A fine boy." The whiskey made Brigid Coneval even more emphatic than she would have been without it. She got to her feet. "You tend to your wee ones, now. I'll have to be laying hold of mine before long, too." Sylvia also rose. The two women hugged each other. Brigid left, heading back to her apartment with great determination.

Mary Jane was mutinous when she came back with her big brother. "Did you really tell him I had to go in?" she demanded of Sylvia, and looked surprised and disappointed when her mother nodded. Not even fried scrod for supper did much to cheer her up; she seemed convinced Sylvia had betrayed her.

Nor was she enthusiastic about going to Mrs. Dooley's the next morning. Once Sylvia warmed her bottom for her, she moved well enough. George, Jr., got off the trolley and bounded toward his school. He'd grown tired of being cooped up at home.

At the shoe factory, everyone greeted Sylvia with a warm show of sympa thy. Gustav Krafft, the foreman, was a man of few words. Even he was kind. "From your fellow workers," he said as he handed her an envelope. It not only crinkled, but also clinked.

"Thank you so much," Sylvia said. "Thank you all so much." Money could do only so much, but she was glad to have it. No one could do much without it. Eventually, she would get a payment from the government, but God only knew how long that would take. If the Coal Board was any indication, it might take forever.

"You poor dear," Emma Kilgore said. "Jack's coming home, thank

the sweet Lord, but I know how you got to feel, Sylvia, sweetheart. If it was me, I'd be out of my mind."

"I feel like I am, sometimes," Sylvia answered. The redheaded woman at the sewing machine next to her did not know how she felt, regardless of whether she thought she did. She was counting the days till her husband came back to Boston from Tennessee. What did Sylvia have to count? Nothing at all.

The work was steady, and demanded enough concentration that Sylvia couldn't let her mind drift, as she often had back at the mackerel-canning plant. Thinking about anything except the pieces of leather in front of her was asking for a punctured hand. She couldn't dwell on losing George, not unless she also wanted to dwell on what the doctor would have to do to repair her.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, the woman who had hired her came into the factory hall and said, "May I see you for a moment, Mrs. Enos?"

"Of course. Let me finish this first, please." Sylvia joined the pieces of leather together and tossed them into the box by the machine. Then she caught Gustav Krafft's eye. Only after he nodded permission did she rise and accompany the hiring clerk. As she did, she said, "I hope nothing's wrong."

"You've done a very good job with us, as a matter of fact," the woman said as they left the factory floor. If she noticed Sylvia was wearing mourning, she didn't mention it. She waved her to a chair: the very chair in which she'd been sitting, in fact, when she was hired.

"Miss, could you please tell me what's going on?" Sylvia asked.

"Yes, I will tell you," the hiring clerk answered. "Like I said, all the reports on your work have been very good, and Krafft isn't easy to please. But our orders have been cut because of peace, and we have men coming back, and you are one of our most recent employees. And so—"

"You're letting me go," Sylvia said dully.

"I am sorry," the woman said. "I do feel bad about it, because you've worked out very well here." That did Sylvia exactly no good. The woman who'd hired her went on, "I wish we could keep you, but

business doesn't allow it. And our brave men in uniform will be returning, looking for the jobs they—"

"My brave man in uniform won't be returning," Sylvia broke in, "and my children and I will be going hungry because of this."

"I *am* sorry," the woman repeated. "I'll be happy to give you the very best of good characters, which will surely help you get a position at a firm that is hiring."

"But firms aren't hiring," Sylvia said. "Firms are letting people go. Firms are letting women like me go so they can hire men, like you said." She sighed. "I'll take that good character. It won't do me any good, but I'll take it." *What am I going to do now?* she asked herself. *What* can *I do now?* The question was far easier to ask than to answer.

Cincinnatus was walking to the trolley stop when someone whistled behind him. He looked back over his shoulder and saw Lucullus, Apicius' son, waving at him. He didn't grimace—not on the outside where Lucullus could see. Instead, he waved. Lucullus came toward him at a heavy trot: he was on his way to putting on his father's massive bulk.

"What you want?" Cincinnatus asked him. "Whatever it is, you better make it snappy, on account of I'm gonna be late for work if I miss this here trolley car."

"Well, ain't you high and mighty?" Lucullus said. He was getting his own man's confidence; he wouldn't have been so sharp with Cincinnatus a year be fore. "My pa says, he got to figure out whether to fish or cut bait with you pretty damn quick, an' you won't like it if he decide he got to cut bait."

"You tell your pa that if anything happens to me, I got myself a little book," Cincinnatus answered. "First thing that happens *after* somethin' happens to me is, that little book goes straight to Luther Bliss." He'd been bluffing when he said that to Joe Conroy. He wasn't bluffing any more. Anyone who tried to bring him down would go down withjiim.

Lucullus screwed up his face. He could see that. He was no fool; Cincinnatus would never have thought Apicius'—Apicius Wood's—son could be a fool. He said, "My pa says you ain't got the right attitude,

Cincinnatus. You is for yourself 'fore you is for the people."

"I take care of myself and I mind my business," Cincinnatus said. "That's all I want to do. That's all I ever wanted to do. Anybody tries to keep me from doin' that, he can get lost, far as I'm concerned. I don't care who he is."

"You *do* got the wrong attitude," Lucullus said reproachfully. "If the pro letariat ain't united against the oppressors, it ain't anything."

"And what about if the party of the proletariat tries oppressin' me?" Cincinnatus returned. Instead of answering, Lucullus made another sour face and strode off. Cincinnatus watched him go, then hurried on to the trolley stop. The Reds wouldn't leave him alone for no better reason than that he asked them to. He knew that only too well.

He threw his nickel in the trolley fare box and went to the back of the car with something approaching relief. While he rode the trolley, as when he was driving a truck, nobody bothered him. He sometimes thought those were the only times when no one bothered him. Oh, every once in a while at home, but that wasn't the same.

New graffiti marked several buildings along the trolley route. Some were blue X's, others three horizontal lines of paint, red-white-red. Only after Cincinnatus had seen several of them did he realize what they were supposed to suggest: the Confederate battle flag and the Stars and Bars. The diehards were busy again, then. Others in Covington were bound to be quicker on the uptake than he was. No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than he saw a work crew splashing whitewash over one of those blue X's. No, the Yankees didn't miss a trick.

Somehow, Cincinnatus was not surprised to find Luther Bliss waiting at the trolley stop where he got off. The chief of the Kentucky State Police didn't get on the trolley, either. He fell into step beside Cincinnatus as the Negro headed toward the shed where Lieutenant Straubing's crew gathered at the start of each new run.

"Mornin', *Mr.* Driver," he said, irony in his voice at addressing a Negro by his surname. "Hope I won't take up too much of your precious time today."

"Mornin' to you, Mr. Bliss," Cincinnatus answered. "I hope you won't, too, suh. I don't know nothin' more'n I did last time we talked,

and the Army gets powerful riled if I'm late to work—it don't matter how come."

Bliss gave him a nasty glare. He'd mentioned the Army on purpose; it was the one institution that had more power in Covington than Bliss' secret police. After a couple of silent strides, the chief said, "I'll make you a deal—you tell me who punched that bastard Kennedy's ticket for him and you'll never see my face again. That's a promise."

Cincinnatus laughed in the aforementioned face. "You don't know who done it, an' the Reds don't know who done it, an' the Confederate diehards don't know who done it, an' you all reckon I know who done it. Only thing I know about Tom Kennedy is that I used to work for the man."

He knew a great deal more than that. He also knew Luther Bliss did not know how much he knew. Had the secret policeman known that, Cincinnatus would not have been heading in to work. He would have been in jail, or more likely dead.

Bliss did know he wasn't telling everything. "You only knew Kennedy be cause you worked for him, what was he doing on your doorstep better than two years later?"

"Damned if I know," Cincinnatus answered. "He got shot before he could tell me anything. Maybe he was running from the Kentucky State Police."

"Not right then, I don't reckon," Bliss said. "If he was running from us, he'd have been stupid to run to you, because he must've known we were keeping an eye on you, too. And whatever else you could say about the goddamn son of a bitch, Tom Kennedy wasn't stupid."

Bliss was undoubtedly right—nobody harassing Cincinnatus was stupid. Cincinnatus didn't say anything about that. The less he said, the better the chance the Kentucky State Police chief would give up—give up for the time being, anyhow—and go away. But Bliss, with his odd eyes the color of a hunting dog's, stuck with him like a hunting dog on a scent. Side by side, they approached the shed where Lieutenant Straubing's drivers gathered.

Straubing was waiting outside. "Good morning, Cincinnatus," he said. "You'll have to tell your friend good-bye here."

"Good-bye, friend," Cincinnatus said at once, smiling in Luther Bliss' direction.

Now Bliss laughed at him. "You don't get rid of me that easy. I have some more questions that need answering."

"Ask them some other time," Lieutenant Straubing said. "Nothing interferes with my men when they're supposed to be working. Nothing. Have you got that?"

"Listen, Junior, I'm Luther Bliss, and I'm looking into a killing," Bliss said. Maybe the Army didn't faze him after all. Maybe nothing fazed him. That wouldn't have surprised Cincinnatus one bit. "Far as I'm concerned, that's a hell of a lot more important than if one nigger hops in a truck on time. Have you got that?"

Straubing wasn't any older than Cincinnatus. He was skinny and on the pale side. And, as far as Cincinnatus could tell, he never backed down from anybody or anything. "Sounds like you're trying to sell me the Brooklyn Bridge," he answered. "Cincinnatus didn't kill anybody. If he had killed somebody, you wouldn't be grilling him here. He'd be in prison. If it's about somebody else doing some killing, I think it can keep—doesn't sound like fresh news, anyhow. Now just who's supposed to be dead, and why do you think Cincinnatus knows the first thing about it?" That was Lieutenant Straubing to the core: methodical, precise, unyielding.

"Why do I reckon he knows something about it?" Bliss asked with a chuckle. "Because the fellow who's dead got his head blown off right on your little darling's front stoop, that's why. Bastard was a Rebel diehard name of Tom Kennedy."

"Oh. Him." Straubing waved a hand in a careless gesture of dismissal. "You may as well leave Cincinnatus alone, if that's what you're exercised over. He doesn't know anything about it."

"And you do?" Luther Bliss asked. Calm as ever, Straubing nodded. Bliss spoke in an exasperated growl: "And how come you know so goddamn much, Lieutenant, *if you* don't mind my asking, of course?"

"It's not very hard, Chief," Straubing answered, still calm. "I shot that Kennedy bastard myself."

"You shot Tom Kennedy?" For once in their lives, Cincinnatus and Luther Bliss said the same thing at the same time with the same

intonation: one of astonished disbelief.

But Lieutenant Straubing only nodded. "I certainly did. He needed shoot ing. Cincinnatus is one of my better men, and Kennedy was distracting him from his work. He might even have managed to get Cincinnatus involved in something subversive if he'd kept pestering him long enough."

Kennedy had got Cincinnatus into several subversive things, but Straub ing didn't know that. Neither did Luther Bliss, who proved it by saying, "We've never pinned anything on Cincinnatus here. But *you* shot Kennedy, Lieutenant? Why in hell didn't you say something about it to somebody?"

"I don't know." Straubing shrugged. "It never seemed that important. I was only doing my job and making sure one of my men could do his. It's not like Kennedy was anything but a Rebel diehard. I didn't think anything more about it than I would have thought about stepping on a cockroach."

Cincinnatus believed that; he'd had a long time to watch Straubing's mind work. After some small pause for thought, Luther Bliss evidently decided he believed it, too. "Lieutenant, you'd have made a lot of people's lives simpler if you didn't play your cards so goddamn close to your chest," he said at last. His eyes flicked to Cincinnatus. "Reckon this fellow'd tell you the same thing."

"That's a fact," Cincinnatus said. "Everybody reckoned I had somethin' to do with it. Folks kept tryin' to cipher out who I done it for. Made my life livelier than I really cared for, believe you me it did."

"How unfortunate." Lieutenant Straubing looked as distressed as he ever did, which wasn't very. "I just thought of him as rubbish who wouldn't be missed. But if that ends Chief Bliss' business with you ..."

"Ends this business, anyway." Bliss touched a finger to the brim of his straw hat. "Obliged to you, Lieutenant. Would have been more obliged if you'd spoken up sooner, but obliged all the same." Off he went, brisk and competent himself. *Ends* this *business,* Cincinnatus thought. That would have to do, though it was far less than he wanted.

Once inside the shed, Lieutenant Straubing wasted no time and no words: "Let's get moving, men. We've got food and munitions heading

down to First Army. One more thing you need to know: with the armistice holding, we'll be laying off our civilian drivers after this run. We're hauling less now, and we'll be doing it with Army personnel only from now on. You civilians have done a good job, and the United States are grateful to you."

"What are we supposed to do now?" one of those drivers, a white man, demanded before Cincinnatus could get the words out of his mouth.

"Find other work, of course," Straubing answered. "I wish you the best of luck, but I'm not your nursemaid."

"Some of us got killed haulin' for you," Cincinnatus said. "Is that all you got to say, Lieutenant—'I ain't your nursemaid'?"

"Their families are taken care of," Straubing said. "If you'd been killed, your family would have been taken care of, too. Since you weren't, you can't expect the government to hold your hand for you now that your labor is no longer required."

He cared about the job. When the job was done, he didn't care any more. When the job was done, nobody cared any more. Cincinnatus wondered where he'd find work now. He whistled softly under his breath. "God damn," he said. "Welcome to the United States."

Secretary of State Robert Lansing had come before the Transportation Com mittee to discuss the integration of the railroads in lands conquered from Canada and the Confederate States into the rail network of the USA. Chairman Taft plainly feared some members' questions might go further afield, but fearing that and being able to do much about it were two different things. "I recognize the distinguished Representative from New York," he said with a strange sort of polite reluctance.

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman," Flora Hamburger said. She knew she had to follow her course with care, lest she be ruled out of order. "Now, Mr. Secretary, will these railroads be brought into our network to make trade easier with the CSA and whatever is left of Canada after peace is finally established?"

"Yes, ma'am." Lansing paused to draw on a cigarette and to run a hand through his fine head of gray hair. "That is one of the principal

purposes of the integration. The other, of course, is to provide for the defense of the United States, railroads being so important to the transport of men and materiel." He spoke with the precision of the longtime lawyer he had been.

"I see." Flora nodded. "And against which parts of Canada does the administration see a need for future defense?"

"Those parts not annexed to the United States or to our ally, the Republic of Quebec," Lansing answered.

"I understand as much, yes," Flora said. "Which parts will those be?"

"We anticipate that the Republic of Quebec will have borders substan tially similar to those of the former province of Quebec," the secretary of state said.

When he said no more, Flora asked, "And the rest of Canada?"

"Areas under military occupation, we anticipate annexing," Lansing said. "Areas not presently occupied are being negotiated with British and Canadian representatives. Whatever we do not annex will naturally fall within our economic sphere of influence, as Holland and Belgium will fall within Germany's and Serbia and Albania within Austria-Hungary's."

He made fewer bones about exploitation than Flora had thought he would. She asked, "And what of the Confederate States?"

"Again, we shall annex such land as we now hold, pending adjustments to create frontiers appropriate to our needs and acceptable to the Confederate States, which may be required to exchange territory for any we yield back to them," Lansing said. "I remind you that this land is different from that of Canada, as it was formerly part of the territory of the United States."

"Did we not abandon our claim of sovereignty over it when we recog nized the CSA?" Flora asked sharply.

"So the Confederates now say," Lansing returned—he might look dry and dusty, but he was dangerous, tarring her with the brush of the beaten enemy. "The view of the president is that recognition of the CSA was granted under duress and maintained by coercion on the part of the Confederates and their allies."

"The peace, then, will be as harsh as you can make it," Flora said.

Congressman Taft looked unhappy, but the question followed logically from others Lansing had answered without hesitation. He answered this one without hesitation, too: "Yes, ma'am. The stronger the peace from our point of view, the better off we shall be and the longer our foes will need to recover from it and menace us again."

"Wouldn't we be better off making them our friends?" Flora asked.

"Perhaps we might be, if they showed any interest in friendship," Lansing said. "The next such interest they do show, however, will be the first."

Democrats up and down the committee table laughed. Some of them even snickered. The chairman rapped loudly for order. Flora felt her face flush. The question, while heartfelt, had sounded naive. "If we do annex Canada, I expect a large influx of Socialist voters," she remarked.

"No one, as yet, is speaking of making U.S. states from Canadian provinces, so the question of voter affiliation in them is moot," Lansing replied. "Again, this differs from our approach to territory formerly under Confederate administration."

"Of course it does," Flora said. "Ex-Confederates are likely to make good Democrats, since they're reactionary to the core."

Taft's gavel came down again. "That is out of order, Miss Hamburger."

"Is it out of order to suggest that the administration will make whatever peace is to its advantage, and will worry about its advantage before it worries about the people's advantage?" Flora asked. "Perhaps the administration is out of order, and I am not."

Bang! Bang! Bang! Taft plied the gavel with such vigor, his beefy face turned red. "We shall have no more such outbursts," he declared.

Flora inclined her head to the committee chairman. "Never ask any questions that might be difficult or inconvenient, is what you mean, isn't it, Mr. Chairman?" she said. "Never ask any questions where the American people really need to know the answers. Never mind the First Amendment. Is that what you mean? If it is, Teddy Roosevelt is a lot more like Kaiser Bill than he thinks, or than he

wants us to think."

A couple of other Socialist congressmen on the Transportation Committee loudly clapped their hands, and the lone Republican with them. William Howard Taft, however, turned redder still: almost the color of a ripe beet. "It is intolerable that you should impugn the administration and the president in this way," he boomed.

"Is it tolerable that the administration and the president should impugn the truth?" Flora returned.

She got no answer. What she got was an early adjournment of the committee. Robert Lansing stuffed papers into his briefcase and scurried away, looking back over his shoulder as if he expected dogs to come after him with teeth bared. His alarmed expression gave Flora some satisfaction, but not enough.

She went back to her office and stared in dismay at the mountain of paperwork awaiting her there. She'd wanted to go visit David at the Pennsylvania Hospital, but she wouldn't have the chance, not today, not if she was going to do the job she'd been elected to do. Duty ran strong in her.

If she couldn't take the time to visit, she could telephone. When the hospi tal operator answered, she said, "This is Congresswoman Hamburger. I'd like to speak to one of the doctors seeing my brother." In this matter, she did not hesitate to use her influence. She could learn from the doctor, but she couldn't make him do anything he wouldn't have otherwise except talk to her.

"Please wait, ma'am," the operator said, as Flora had known she would. Flora impatiently drummed her fingers on the broad oak surface of the desk.

"This is Dr. Hanrahan, Congresswoman," a man's voice said at last. Flora brightened; of all David's doctors, Hanrahan seemed the most open. "We tried fitting a prosthesis on your brother this morning. The stump isn't ready yet, I'm afraid, but he tolerated the padded end of the artificial leg better than he has. Things *are* healing in there, no doubt about it. And it was very good to see David upright, if only for a little while."

Tears stung her eyes. "I wish I could have been there to see that," she said. "How soon will he be walking? How well will he walk?"

"No way to tell how soon," Hanrahan said. "I wish we had some better way to fight infection than we do, but his body will have to win that battle. How well. . . He's always going to have a rolling motion to his stride, ma'am; that's the way the knee joint on the prosthesis works. But I hope he'll be able to get by without even a cane."

"Alevai," Flora said, which surely meant nothing to an Irishman. She re turned to English: "I hope you're right. That would help a lot." She wondered if it would help enough for her brother ever to find a wife.

Maybe Hanrahan was thinking along with her, for he said, "A lot of good men got wounded in this war, Miss Hamburger. People won't hold injuries against them, not nearly so much as they did before the fighting started. You don't mind my saying so, there ought to be a law against people who do dumb things like that, anyhow."

"I am going to write that down, Dr. Hanrahan," Flora said, and she did. The Democrats, no doubt, would scream that such laws were not the federal government's job. The only federal laws they liked readied the country for war. Maybe she could make them think about the aftermath of war, too.

After she got off the telephone with the doctor, she attacked the papers on her desk, only to be interrupted by Bertha, her secretary, who said, "Congressman Blackford would like to see you, Miss Hamburger."

Flora blinked but nodded. Into the inner office came Hosea Blackford, a wide smile on his handsome face. "From everything I hear, Flora, you sent Mr. Lansing home with a tin can tied to his tail. That's not easy; he's a clever fellow."

"Yes, I saw that," Flora said. "But if he insists on treating everyone else like an idiot, he's not as smart as he thinks he is."

"A song one could sing about a great many people, from TR on down," Blackford said. "But what one could do and what one does are often different. One thing you've become since you got here, Flora, is the conscience of the Congress."

Nobody had ever called her anything like that before. She felt herself flush, and hoped Blackford couldn't see her blushing. "Thank you very much," she said at last. "I'm just doing the best I can." Her

smile was wry. "There have been times when you've said I was trying to do too much."

"Not here, not now," the congressman from Dakota answered. "Maybe I was wrong before, too. But certainly not now. You'll have given Lansing and Roosevelt both something to think about." He hesitated, then changed the subject: "Will you let me take you out to supper to celebrate a splendid day of witness grilling?"

Flora hesitated, too. The memory of Herman Bruck's pestering still grated on her. But Blackford was as smooth as Bruck, back in New York City, wished he were. An invitation to supper was not necessarily an invitation to anything else (though it wasn't necessarily *not* such an invitation, either). Well, she always had a hatpin. "All right," she said.

Blackford ate shad at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, not far from city hall. "I never got seafood in Dakota, but I make up for it here," he said. "If only oysters were in season." Flora would never have thought of eating an oyster, no matter how secular she became. She contented herself with a beefsteak that did indeed provoke contentment.

Over supper, she told Blackford of the idea she'd got from Dr. Hanra-han. His eyes glowed. "I think we can pass that," he said. "The Democrats won't want people—people like us, for instance—to say they don't care about cripples."

"No, especially when their war made so many cripples." Flora scowled. "And speaking against it is useless. Everyone says, 'But we won!' You warned me it would be that way. I didn't believe it, but you were right."

"I wish I'd been wrong, but that's the way the world works." Blackford beckoned to the waiter. "Let me have the bill, please."

He drove them back to the apartment building where they both lived. It was natural for them to go upstairs together when their flats were across the hall from each other. "Thank you for a very nice evening," Flora said in the hallway.

"Thank *you* for your excellent ideas—and for your excellent company." Hosea Blackford tipped his hat, then leaned forward and kissed Flora on the mouth. He drew back before she even thought of yanking out a hatpin. Instead of trying to get into her apartment, he went into his own. "Good night," he said, and shut the door.

"Good night," Flora said, slower than she should have. She went into her own apartment, locking the door behind her. Then she sat down on the front-room sofa. Her thoughts whirled. She'd been glad of the kiss. Blackford was twice her age, and a gentile to boot. But she'd been glad of the kiss. She was too honest with herself to deny it. And she was far too surprised and confused to have any idea what it meant. She wished her family's apartment had a telephone, but it didn't. All she could do was go to bed and think and think and think.

After rumbling through Tennessee inside a barrel, Colonel Irving Morrell found Philadelphia mild and dry by comparison. To anyone coming from anywhere else, the *de facto* capital of the United States would have been its usual hot, muggy summer self. For once, Morrell was not sorry to return to the General Staff. With the shooting over, the action, such as it was, would be here.

He sat in a little room with a littler window and an overhead fan doing a desultory job of stirring the air. "Good to see you again, Colonel," General Leonard Wood said. "You being one of our leading experts on barrels, we want your ideas on how thoroughly to restrict the CSA in building and deploying them."

"Sir, my view on that is very simple," Morrell said. "I think we ought to forbid them to have anything to do with barrels, on pain of war. The more of them they have, the more they do with them, the more trouble they'll cause us. Those machines knock everything we thought we knew about defense in war into a cocked hat."

The chief of the U.S. General Staff frowned. "That won't be easy. They have a sizable motorcar industry. A plant that manufactures motorcars won't have any great trouble turning out barrels, too."

"Yes, sir, I understand that," Morrell said. "If I had my way, though, I'd put that in the treaty: no barrels. I expect they'll cheat, or try to cheat. As soon as we catch them at it, I'd take a new bite out of Arkansas or Texas or Tennessee— and make them cough up the barrels, too. Do that once and they aren't so likely to take a chance on our doing it twice."

Brigadier General Mason Patrick, who wore a pilot's wings on his left breast pocket, said, "I told you the same thing in regard to aeroplanes, didn't I, General Wood?" He nodded to Morrell. "Good to see there's someone else with his head on his shoulders. We just

licked these bastards. I want to kick 'em while they're down. If they build up to where they can take another whack at us in ten or fifteen years, we've wasted a lot of lives since 1914."

Leonard Wood sighed. "The other side of the coin is, if they sit tight for ten or fifteen years and then start building barrels and aeroplanes and sub- mersibles and all the other tools of war we don't want them to have, will we have the will to go in and set a foot on their necks, or will we say, 'Look how much trouble we had beating them the last time. They've only got a few of these little toys, so why should we worry about them?' That's what makes me wake up sweating of nights."

"Philadelphia is what makes me wake up sweating of nights," said Gen eral Patrick, who had just come down from Canada.

Morrell stared at Wood in a kind of horror he'd never known on the battlefield. "Sir, as long as Teddy Roosevelt is president—"

"That gives us till March 4,1921," Wood broke in. "March 4,1925, if he decides he wants a third term, and if the people remember to be grateful. After TR isn't president any more . . . what then? We spent a generation twiddling our thumbs after the War of Secession. We could do it again."

"All the more reason to punish the Rebels now, sir," Morrell said. "The farther they have to climb, the harder it'll be for them."

"Bully!" Brigadier General Patrick clapped his hands together. "General Wood, this pup said it better than I could."

"He's a bright lad," Wood said, and Morrell felt as if he'd been given the accolade. But the chief of the General Staff went on, "The harder we hold the Confederates down, the more we make them hate us and want to get their own back."

"I honestly don't see the problem, sir," Morrell said. "They already hate us, the same way we hated them before the war. Somebody licks you, of course you hate him. What we have to do is make sure they can't hurt us no matter how much they hate us."

General Wood sighed again. "I've been in touch with General Ludendorff in Berlin. If it makes you gentlemen feel any better, our friends the Germans are having these same sorts of arguments about how rough they should be on France."

"The CSA will have an easier time cheating than France will, though," Morrell said.

"How's that?" Wood said. "I don't follow."

"France isn't even as big as Texas," Morrell said.

"It is now," General Patrick said. "We carved a good chunk off Texas when we made the state of Houston."

"How much will Germany carve off France?" Morrell gave the man he thought was his ally an annoyed look: this was not the time for nitpicking precision. Having got the glare out of his system, he resumed: "Be that as it may, the Confederate States are a lot larger than France even after they've lost Houston and Sequoyah and Kentucky. They have more room to hide armaments than the frogs do."

"And they could go down into the Empire of Mexico, too," Mason Patrick said. "The only way we'd hear about anything down there is by luck. Hell, half the time the damn greasers don't know what's going on inside their own country, so how are we supposed to?"

"We have more ways than you'd think, as a matter of fact," General Wood said. "But never mind that; I take the point. So you gentlemen agree we should squeeze the Rebels till their eyes pop, do you?"

"Yes, sir," Morrell and Brigadier General Patrick said in the same breath.

"Well, I'm hearing that from the Navy Department, too, I will ad mit," Wood said. "They want to go and bombard Charleston and Habana and New Orleans if the Rebels ever even think of building submersibles again."

"That sounds good to me," Morrell said.

Wood looked grim. "As a matter of fact, it sounds good to me, too. We had a destroyer, the *Ericsson,* torpedoed the night after the CSA quit the war. The Royal Navy swears up and down that they had no boats anywhere near here. If I had to guess, I'd say a Rebel skipper thought he could get away with one—but I can't prove it, mind, and the Confederates deny everything."

"I hadn't heard that before, sir," Morrell said slowly.

"We're keeping it under wraps," the chief of the General Staff said. "Don't see what else to do. Can't prove it, as I say."

"Filthy piece of business." Morrell realized his right hand had folded into a fist. He made it open. "They ever catch that Reb—if it was a Reb—they ought to hang him."

"You get no arguments from me," Wood said. "But back to the matter at hand. In your view, we allow the Rebs enough in the way of guns to keep order inside their borders and put up a halfway decent fight in case Mexico decides to invade them?"

Morrell let out a wry snort. "If Mexico invades them, sir, they can shout for help, as far as I'm concerned."

As he spoke, he worried at the thought General Wood had put in his mind. How long could any country, especially a republic like the USA, keep watch on a neighbor? Sooner or later, the voters would tire of the effort vigilance took. When they did, or maybe even before they did, the one-time enemy would begin to rebuild and become an enemy once more.

"We have to do the best we can," he said at last. "We have to do the best we can for as long as we can. If we drop the ball later on, or if our kids do, that's one thing. But if we drop the ball now, we don't deserve to have won the war."

"That's the way it looks to me, too," Mason Patrick said. "The day the Confederate States start building aeroplanes with machine guns in them again, you'll be able to see the next war from there."

"Very well. Thank you for your thoughts, General, Colonel. They will go into our recommendations to President Roosevelt, I assure you," Wood said. Morrell and Patrick stood up to go. Casually, Wood went on, "Colonel, could you give me another minute or so of your time?"

"Of course," Morrell answered. He waited till the aviation officer had gone, then asked, "What's up, sir?"

"Colonel, President Roosevelt has asked me to give you a choice of assignments, in recognition of your outstanding service to your country," Wood said. "You may, if you like, remain in the field; the

president is keenly aware of how much you enjoy the strenuous life, as he does himself."

"Yes, sir, I do," Morrell said. "I can't imagine a choice that would be pref erable to staying in the field."

"Let me see if I can give you one," Wood said with a smile. "How would you like to have charge of what we might as well call the Barrel Works? It's plain the machines aren't everything they ought to be. It's just as plain nobody has a sounder notion of doctrine for them or more experience with

them in the field than you do. What do you say to a free hand at making them better?"

"What do I say?" Morrell asked the question as much of himself as of Leonard Wood. He glared at the chief of the General Staff. "Sir, with all due respect, I say *damn.* That's a job that needs doing. It's a job I can do. It's a job I should do, because, as you say, I can do it well." He hesitated, grasping at a straw. "Unless you'd rather have Colonel Sherrard?"

"He recommended you," Wood said. "His opinion was that you had a better feel for all the issues involved than he did. He said he never could have conceived, much less brought off, the crossing of the Cumberland. You did, and that makes you the man for the slot."

"He's extraordinarily generous." Morrell scowled; he'd never known this mix of elation and disappointment. When would he ever get away to the woods and the mountains again? "Sir, you're right. It's such an important position that, if you believe I'm the best man to fill it, I don't see how I can possibly decline."

"I was hoping you would say that, Colonel," General Wood replied. "The more work we do on barrels while we're holding the Confederate States down—holding them down as best we can, I should say—the further ahead of them we'll be, and the harder the time they'll have catching up with us."

"Yes, sir," Morrell said enthusiastically. "I've got some ideas I want to try. And if we get far enough ahead of them, maybe they'll never be able to catch up again."

"You're reading my mind," Leonard Wood said. "That's just what I'm hoping for." Solemnly, the two men shook hands.

Every train that pulled into St. Matthews, South Carolina, brought a few more soldiers home, some from Virginia, some from Tennessee, some from the distant battlefields west of the Mississippi. The men in beat-up butternut tunics and trousers got off the trains and looked around the station, looked around the slowly rebuilding town, in worn wonder, as if amazed even so much peace as St. Matthews provided was left in the world.

Anne Colleton saw a lot of the returning soldiers, for she spent much of her time at the station waiting for her brother to get off one of those trains: she didn't trust Tom to wire ahead, letting her know he was coming. And, sure enough, one morning he stopped down from a passenger car looking about as battered, about as bewildered, as any other soldier Anne had seen.

He looked even more bewildered when she threw herself into his arms. "What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded. "I wanted to surprise you."

"Didn't work this time," Anne said. "I wanted to surprise you, and I got what I wanted." She kissed him on the cheek. Some of the whiskers in the scar that seamed it were coming in white.

"You generally do," Tom said after a moment, with more of an edge to his voice than would have been there before the war. Then he sighed and shrugged. "We—the CSA, I mean—generally got what we wanted, too. Not this time."

"Come back to my rooms with me," Anne said. "There's one more thing I want, and you can help me get it."

"Can I?" Her brother shrugged again. "I'll come with you, though. Why not? With Marshlands burned, I haven't got anywhere else to stay."

He walked through the streets of St. Matthews with his shoulders slumped but his eyes darting now here, now there, ever alert, waiting and watching for shooting to start. "It's not that bad," Anne said quietly. "We hit the niggers a good lick not so long ago. One more good lick and they're done, I think."

"Wasn't worrying about Reds," Tom Colleton answered with an embar rassed chuckle. "I was worrying about damnyankees." When they got back to her apartment, Anne poured him some whiskey, hoping to ease him. He drank it down, but still seemed nervous as a cat. Pointing at her, he asked, "What's this other thing you want, Sis?"

"Another good lick against the Reds," Anne said at once. "When we hit them from this side, they go deeper into the swamp, over by Gadsden. The militia on the other side of the Congaree are worthless. The Reds—Cassius and his pals, mind—whip them every time they bump together."

"Get me another drink, will you?" Tom said, and Anne rose. While she was pouring, her brother went on, "How do I help you get it? I figure I do, or you wouldn't have mentioned it to me."

"Why, Lieutenant Colonel Colleton, of course you do," she said, handing him the drink. "And it's because you're Lieutenant Colonel Colleton that you do. I want you to recruit as many veterans as you can, arm them, and take most of them across to the north side of the Congaree. Don't you think they'd be able to clean out the nest of Reds that's been in the swamp the past year and a half?"

"If they can't, the Confederate States are in even more trouble than I reck oned they were." Whiskey hadn't fuzzed Tom's wits; he asked, "What happens to the soldiers I don't take over to Gadsden?"

"They stay on this side of the swamp," Anne answered. "You drive the niggers into them, and they finish off any you don't get."

Tom considered, then slowly nodded. "And who commands the stay-at- homes?"

"I do," his sister told him.

She waited for him to pitch a fit. He didn't. "Odds are you'd be better at the job than any man I can think of," he said slowly. "Are you sure you wouldn't rather have the post you just assigned me?—driving, I mean, instead of catching."

Anne shook her head. "You have much more real combat experience than I do," she answered, "and you'll be leading men who won't know so much about what I've done since the uprising, because they haven't been here to see it. I'll keep a lot of militiamen, too. They're used to doing what I tell them, and it should rub off on the

soldiers."

"You've got it all figured out, don't you?" Tom raised his glass. "Have one yourself, Sis. Seems to me you've earned it."

Anne got a glass of whiskey, too, but stared moodily at it instead of drink ing right away. "The one thing I don't have figured out is how to be sure we kill Cassius. He killed Jacob and he almost killed me—and he wrecked Marshlands. He's kept the Reds a going concern since we drove them back into the swamp, and he knows the place better than anybody. If we don't get him, we'll only have to go back again later on."

"Kill the head and the body dies," Tom said. Anne nodded. She knocked back the whiskey. It snarled its way down her throat. Tom spoke with a certain grim anticipation: "Kill enough of the body and the head won't live, either."

He went about recruiting with both skill and persistence he wouldn't have shown before he'd joined the Army. Nor did he have any trouble gathering followers. The ex-soldiers hardly seemed to think of themselves as ex-; they obeyed his orders as readily as they would have done if still serving under the Stars and Bars. Anne couldn't help noting that with a touch of resentment when she thought of the cajolery she'd had to use to get the militiamen to go along with her ideas even though they'd had none of their own.

A few Negro soldiers came back to St. Matthews, too. Tom Colleton did not recruit them—who could guess which of them had fought for the Congaree Socialist Republic? No one quite knew what to make of them or how to behave toward them. Anne vowed to worry about that later. For now, she hoped none of St. Matthews' blacks was bringing the rebels in the swamp word of the move against them.

She and the militia and some of Tom's recruits headed in the direction of Marshlands (and the swamps beyond) as ostentatiously as they could, hoping to draw as much attention to themselves as they could. Once at the edge of the ruined cotton fields, the veterans automatically began to entrench. She didn't argue; in such matters, she was willing to assume they knew what they were doing.

Some of them laughed at the beat-up old aeroplane buzzing above the swamp. "Jesus, I wish the damnyankees had been flying crates like that," a sergeant said.

"If the other side hasn't got any aeroplanes, ours doesn't have to be up to date," Anne answered coolly. No one, she noted, laughed at the pair of three-inch guns that deployed behind the infantry. One veteran, in fact, respectfully tipped his tin hat to them, as to a couple of old friends.

Veterans and militiamen were still deploying when a brisk crackle of small-arms fire broke out to the north. Although Anne knew she'd chambered a round in her own Tredegar, she checked again to make sure the weapon was ready. The aeroplane flew in the direction of the shooting. A couple of minutes later, the militiamen at the field guns began banging away, presumably at instruction they got from the wireless telegraph the flying machine carried.

Perhaps fifteen minutes after that, a couple of ragged Negroes, a man and a woman, emerged from the swamp a few hundred yards from Anne. Both carried rifles; both looked around to find the best road for escape. They did not look long. They found no escape. A volley from the men in the new trenches knocked them over. The man never moved after he fell. The woman twitched for a little while, then lay still.

Before long, another pair of Negroes, both men this time, came trotting south as if they had not a care in the world. The veterans and militiamen let them approach to near point-blank range before shooting them down. A sav age smile stretched across Anne Colleton's face. The Reds had never met a trap with jaws on both north and south before.

"Come on, Cassius," she crooned quietly. "Come on." Some of the Negro rebels in the swamp, seeing the last bastion of the Congaree Socialist Republic crumbling, would fight to the death defending it. Having known Cassius all her life (not so well as she'd thought she did, but even so), she did not believe he would be one of them. His eye was always on the main chance. As long as he lived, he would figure, the revolution lived, too. That held an unpleasant amount of truth. He would try to escape.

A few more Reds blundered out of the undergrowth and died before the rest realized the sort of trap they were in. That was too late. By then, from the sounds of the gunfire, Tom's men had drawn a good semicircle around them. The only way out lay to the south—and that was no way out, either.

Anne-felt-like-Alexander-the-Great-or-Julius-Caesar or Robert E.

Lee. The

whole design was hers, and it was working. Paint a picture? Write a book? She shook her head. Using men, not paint or words, to create . .. that beat everything.

But the men of the Congaree Socialist Republic had tried to create using men's lives as their canvas, too. Now, realizing what sort of obstruction barred them from breaking free of their pursuers, they tried once more.

In their own way, they were also veterans, and veteran bushwhackers to boot. That made them too wily to charge headlong at their foes' position. But they had to get through it, or they would never go anywhere again. At a shouted word of command—was that Cassius' voice?—they attacked the trench line.

"Damnyankees couldn't have done it better," a veteran said admir ingly, once the shooting was over. The Negroes advanced by rushes, one group firing from cover to let another leapfrog past them, then moving forward in turn.

A man next to Anne staggered back with a gurgling croak, clutching at his throat. She spared him not a glance—she was drawing a bead on a Red. The Tredegar slammed against her shoulder. The back of the black man's head blew out. She worked the bolt and fired again.

For a few minutes, the fighting was very hot. The Red rebels battled for escape with desperate courage. Anne's men had skill, anger, and position on their side. The Negroes got into the trenches even so. That was a worse busi ness than she'd ever imagined, screams and shouts and bullets whipping— several right past her head—and the iron smell of blood and the outhouse stink of guts spilled in the mud.

The Negroes got into the trenches. They did not get past them, not anywhere. The veterans and militiamen outnumbered and outgunned them. A handful of Reds tried to flee back toward the swamp. Anne didn't think any of them made it.

Cautiously, her men began showing themselves. They drew no fire. She went up and down the trenches, inspecting Negro corpses. She did not find Cassius' body. Cursing, she blew out the brains of a black who wasn't quite dead. Had the revolutionary leader slipped

through her net again?

Halfway through the afternoon, the veterans who'd slogged down from Gadsden began coming out of the swamp. They had no prisoners with them. When Tom emerged, so filthy she hardly knew who he was, she cried, "Cassius got away again!"

"Oh, no, he didn't." Her brother grinned at her. "I shot him myself."

All she felt was envy bitter and poisonous as prussic acid. "God damn you!" she shouted. "I should have done it."

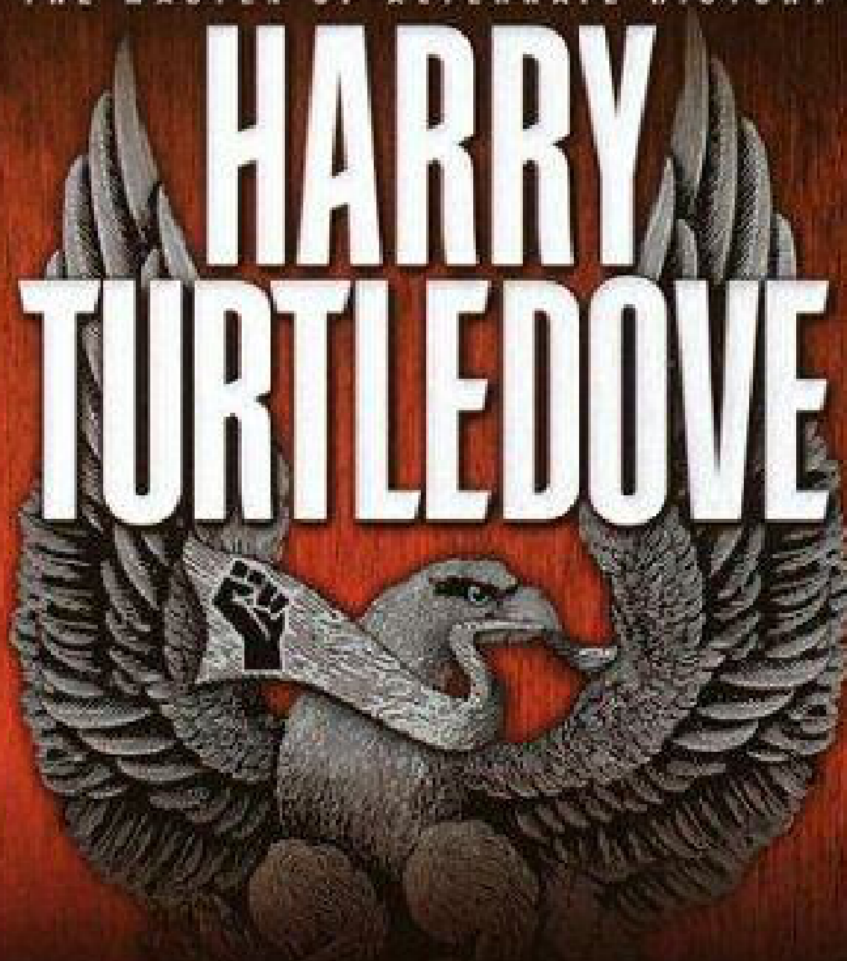
"Jacob was my brother, too, Anne," Tom said quietly, and that brought her back to herself. "Anyhow, you got Cherry," he went on. "Cassius, now, Cassius was sneaky to the last. Instead of coming south, he tried to wait for my men to go on past him. Then he could have headed north and been home free. He'd done it, in fact, or he thought he had. But I kept a few backstops, and I was one because I had to drag myself out of some quicksand. I was behind a cypress when along he came, a big smile on his face 'cause he'd outfoxed us. But not this time. I put two in his chest from inside thirty yards before he knew I was there. He was still smiling when he fell in the water. He won't come out again, Sis."

Anne Colleton heaved a long, long sigh. "It's over, then—the Congaree Socialist Republic, and Cassius, too. I wonder if Scipio's dead in the swamp with him. But I don't care so much about Scipio."

"Cassius was the big fish," Tom agreed. "He's feeding the fish now."
"It's over," Anne repeated. "This whole stretch of South Carolina can start picking up the pieces now. The Confederate States will have to start picking up the pieces now." She looked north, not into the swamp but far beyond. "We've got the damnyankees to catch up with, after all."

THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY

HARRY TURTLEDOVE



AMERICAN EMPIRE:

BLOOD & IRON

Blood Iron
American Empire [1]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:***
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

From Publishers Weekly

Nobody plays the what-if game of alternative history better than Turtledove, especially when he has a large-scale subject and when he's working close enough to the present for readers to appreciate his detailed analyses of how familiar events might have turned out differently. His massive trilogy, The Great War, described how WWI might have been fought on an Earth where the Confederacy was still an independent nation. This follow-up novel begins by showing postwar life. Teddy Roosevelt is president; however, the Socialist Party gives the establishment serious competition, as veterans question the society they fought to save, and Upton Sinclair challenges TR in the election of 1920. Meanwhile, in the humiliated and bankrupt Confederate states, an angry racist with a gift of demagoguery whips up violent mobs and aims them at his enemies. Readers will recognize some of the names, but watching historical processes in action is the novel's real attraction. Knowing what happened in our timeline, readers will want to imagine the results of different choices. Sometimes, luck and willingness to compromise can resolve conflicts. On the other hand, the Southern Hitler may have his way. It depends on how well people make sense of the situations facing them. Turtledove's introduction carries over a cast of 16 varied characters from The Great War. Not all survive, but readers will be curious to see how the rest go on to cope with new challenges. This book begins a panoramic story, a new trilogy at least, that promises to be immensely fascinating. 5-city author tour; on-sale date July 31.

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From

Turtledove's Great War series morphs into the American Empire series. The U.S and imperial Germany have imposed a "blood and iron" peace on Britain, France, Russia, and the Confederacy. On the western front, the Confederacy struggles to overcome defeat,

dissension, and Weimar-level inflation, and the U.S. labors to stay on top of things and prepare for the next round of combat. Indomitable, muddleheaded General Custer has his sails trimmed by the election of Socialist Upton Sinclair as president in 1920, which also makes Turtledove's creation, Flora Hamburger, the wife of the vice-president. In the Confederacy, former artillery sergeant Jake Featherstone founds the Freedom Party. His road to power turns rocky after the crackbrained assassination of President Wade Hampton V, but Ann Colleton escapes the subsequent Freedom Party debacle only slightly damaged and loses her stormy lover when the widow of one of his victims shoots him. Cincinnatus Driver leaves Ohio for the better racial climate of Iowa, and Scipio, married and now named Xerxes, learns that no matter which whites win in the Confederacy, the black man almost always loses. Turtledove's skill at dramatizing historical forces proves magisterial once more. *Roland Green*

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AMERICAN EMPIRE:

BLOOD & IRON

Harry Turtledove

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"The shocks of seeing history and current events in radically altered perspectives are perfect examples of the mind-blowing, mind-expanding capabilities of science fiction. . . . Harry Turtledove is obviously a master of the form"

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AMERICAN EMPIRE:

BLOOD AND IRON

Harry Turtledove

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AMERICAN EMPIRE:

BLOOD AND IRON

Introduction

The Great War is over. After three years of brutal conflict, the United States have defeated the Confederate States and Canada— as, in Europe, the German Empire and Austria-Hungary have defeated France, Britain, and Russia. Now, all across North America, people are trying to pick up their shattered lives.

In Boston, Sylvia Enos mourns the loss of her husband, George, who was killed when his destroyer, the USS *Ericsson,* was sunk by a torpedo during the last moments of the war. As the Confederate States had already asked for an armistice, she be-lieves a British submersible sank the *Ericsson.* She has more ur-gent things to worry about, though: keeping her job when so many men are returning from the war, and bringing up her young son and daughter.

In fact, though, Commander Roger Kimball of the CSS *Bone-fish* sank the *Ericsson,* a last blow against the United States even though he knew the Confederacy had asked for quarter. His ex-ecutive officer, Tom Brearley, tried to talk him out of this, but he ignored Brearley and went ahead. As the USA prohibited the CSA from keeping submarines after the armistice, Kimball is on the beach in Charleston, South Carolina, looking for whatever he can find.

Roger Kimball is Anne Colleton's sometime lover. Her plan-tation, Marshlands, a ruin because of the Red Negro uprising of 1915-16, Anne is now living in St. Matthews, South Carolina, not far from Columbia, the state capital. After the war ended, she and her brother Tom and a militia they recruited have finally suc-ceeded in clearing out the last remnants of the black rebels who called themselves the Congaree Socialist Republic from the swamps along the banks of the Congaree River.

Colonel Irving Morrell is one of the U.S. heroes of the mo-ment. The young officer spearheaded the column of armored traveling forts known as barrels that broke the Confederate de-fenses around Nashville, Tennessee, and allowed the United States to capture the important city.

Pushing south from Nash-ville, he was one of the first officers to receive a Confederate re-quest for a cease-fire.

Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling is adjutant to Colonel Morrell's

commanding officer in the Nashville campaign, George Armstrong Custer.

As the war ended, he was summoned to Philadelphia, the *de facto* capital of the United States, along with Custer, whom Democratic President Theodore Roosevelt has just promoted to full general as a reward for his long, faithful, and—in the end—successful service. Custer's head-long aggressiveness found a perfect match with the use of barrels *en masse.*

In Philadelphia, young Socialist Congresswoman Flora Ham-burger has earned the nickname "the conscience of the Con-gress" for her principled stands on important issues. Her younger brother, David, is also in Philadelphia, at the Pennsyl-vania Hospital—he lost a leg fighting in Virginia not long before the end of the war. To her dismay, David has become a Democrat and supports a hard line against the CSA. Flora has become friendly with Hosea Blackford, the veteran Socialist congress-man from the state of Dakota, who lives in the same block of flats as she does.

Nellie Semphroch, a widow, lives in Washington, D.C., with her grown daughter, Edna. They have run a coffeehouse through-out the Great War in the *de jure* capital of the United States, which was occupied for two and a half years by Confederate sol-diers. Nellie has also gathered information from Confederates in the coffeehouse and passed it on to the cobbler across the street, Hal Jacobs, an important member of a U.S. spy ring.

Nellie and Edna were both decorated by President Roosevelt for their ser-vices, and Nellie has just accepted a proposal of marriage from Jacobs.

Anne Colleton's former butler, Scipio, has found a job waiting tables in Augusta, Georgia. The cultured, educated Negro is glad to have escaped from the ruin of the Congaree Socialist Re-public, and perhaps even gladder to have escaped from his former mistress' vengeance: the Red uprising, of which Scipio had been an unwilling part, had begun at Marshlands with the murder of her brother, Jacob, a fact that helps drive her push for revenge against the Negroes involved. Scipio hopes for nothing more than to live out the rest of his life in obscurity.

In Lexington, Kentucky, another Negro, Cincinnatus Driver, is adjusting to life in the United States. The adjustments aren't easy; Kentucky was forcibly rejoined to the USA after its con-quest in the

Great War. Confederate diehards remain active in the state. So do Red factions consisting mostly of Negroes. Cin-cinnatus has been uncomfortably and unwillingly involved with both groups, and both view him with suspicion—as does Luther Bliss, the head of the Kentucky State (secret) Police. He has been driving a truck for the U.S. Army, but with the end of the war finds himself out of work and looking for a way to support his wife and young son.

On a Canadian farm not far from Rosenfeld, Manitoba, Arthur McGregor has avenged himself on the U.S. occupiers who executed his teenage son, Alexander, for rebellion against their authority. His bomb killed Major Hannebrink, the officer who ordered Alexander up before a firing squad, during a cele-bration of the end of the war. Arthur McGregor has no inten-tion of confining his vengeance to Major Hannebrink alone. This worries

his

wife,

Maude.

His

surviving

daughters,

Julia

and

Mary—especially Mary, the younger—don't precisely know what he is doing, but hope he will do more of it.

Lucien Galtier is also a farmer working land formerly be-longing to the Dominion of Canada. These days, though, his farm near Riviere-du-Loup is part of the Republic of Quebec, a U.S. creation during the Great War.

Galtier at first opposed the U.S. occupation of Quebec, especially after U.S. authorities took part of his farm—part of his patrimony—and built a hospital on the land. Lately, though, his reservations about the United States have faded, not least because his daughter, Nicole, who was working at the hospital, married an American doctor, Leonard O'Doull.

Just returned to the United States from the province of Ontario is Jonathan Moss, who served as a pilot all through the Great War. Moss, who lives in the Chicago area, plans to resume his study of the law. While in Canada, he fell in love with a Canadian woman, Laura Secord. Even though she emphatically does not love him in return—she is descended from a famous Canadian patriot of the same name—he cannot get her out of his mind.

Steelworker Jefferson Pinkard has just returned to Birming-ham, Alabama, after fighting in the Confederate Army in West Texas. He looks forward to returning to his job at the Sloss Works. He is not so sure he looks forward to returning to family life. During the war, his wife, Emily, was unfaithful with his best friend, Bedford Cunningham, who had come home for good after losing an arm in Tennessee.

Steelworker Chester Martin will be returning to Toledo, Ohio. He fought in the Great War from first shot to last, and was lucky enough to be wounded only once. As a sergeant, he had com-manded a company in the closing days of the fighting in Virginia (he was, in fact, David Hamburger's company commander). He is eager to return to the United States to see his parents and his sister, Sue.

Petty Officer Sam Carsten remains in the U.S. Navy. He has seen the effects of aviation on naval warfare off the South American coast, when the USS *Dakota* was bombed by land-based aeroplanes. His superior officer, Commander Grady, has hinted that the U.S. Navy has something new in mind when it comes to naval aviation. Carsten is eager to learn what it is.

Reggie Bartlett, a pharmacist's assistant, has returned home to Richmond, Virginia, capital of the CSA. He has had a hard war. He was captured once in Virginia, but escaped from a U.S. prisoner-of-war camp.

Returning to action, he was badly wounded in Sequoyah and captured again. This time, he remained in a U.S. hospital in St. Louis till the fighting ended. His long talks with Rehoboam, a colored Confederate soldier also at the hos-pital after losing a foot, have made him thoughtful about parts of life in the Confederate States he had always taken for granted before the war.

Sergeant Jake Featherston, former battery commander in the First Richmond Howitzers, has also come home to Richmond. He too fought from first shot to last in the Great War, and never rose above sergeant, not least because the War Department was angry at him for exposing

the shortcomings of his former CO, Captain Jeb Stuart III. Furious and bitter at the War Department in particular and the world in general, Featherston wonders what to do now that he has no place in the Army any more.

I

When the Great War ended, Jake Featherston had thought the si-lence falling over the battlefield as strange and unnatural as machine-gun fire in Richmond on a Sunday afternoon. Now, sit-ting at the bar of a saloon in the Confederate capital a few weeks later, he listened to the distant rattle of a machine gun, nodded to himself, and took another pull at his beer.

"Wonder who they're shooting at this time," the barkeep re-marked before turning away to pour a fresh whiskey for another customer.

"Hope it's the niggers." Jake set a hand on the grip of the ar-tilleryman's pistol he wore on his belt. "Wouldn't mind shooting a few myself, by Jesus."

"They shoot back these days," the bartender said.

Featherston shrugged. People had called him a lot of different things during the war, but nobody had ever called him yellow. The battery of the First Richmond Howitzers he'd commanded had held longer and retreated less than any other guns in the Army of Northern Virginia. "Much good it did me," he mut-tered. "Much good it did anything." He'd still been fighting the damnyankees from a good position back of Fredericksburg, Vir-ginia, when the Confederate States finally threw in the sponge.

He went over to the free-lunch counter and slapped ham and cheese and pickles on a slice of none-too-fresh bread. The bar-tender gave him a pained look; it wasn't the first time he'd raided the counter, nor the second, either. He normally didn't give two whoops in hell what other people thought, but this place was right around the corner from the miserable little room he'd found. He wanted to be able to keep coming here.

Reluctantly, he said, "Give me another beer, too." He pulled a couple of brown dollar banknotes out of his pocket and slid them across the

bar. Beer had only been a dollar a glass when he got into town (or a quarter in specie). Before the war, even through most of the war, it had only been five cents.

As long as he was having another glass, he snagged a couple of hard-boiled eggs from the free-lunch spread to go with his sandwich. He'd eaten a lot of saloon free lunches since coming home to Richmond. They weren't free, but they were the cheap-est way he knew to keep himself fed.

A couple of rifle shots rang out, closer than the machine gun had been.

"Any luck at all, that's the War Department," Jake said, sipping at the new beer. "Lot of damn fools down there nobody'd miss."

"Amen," said the fellow down the bar who was drinking whis-key. Like Featherston, he wore butternut uniform trousers with a shirt that had seen better days (though his, unlike Jake's, did boast a collar). "Plenty of bastards in there who don't deserve anything better than a blindfold and a cigarette, letting us lose the war like that."

"Waste of cigarettes, you ask me, but what the hell." Jake took another pull at his beer. It left him feeling generous. In tones of great concession, he said, "All right, give 'em a smoke. *Then* shoot 'em."

"Plenty of bastards in Congress, too," the bartender put in. He was plump and bald and had a white mustache, so he probably hadn't been in the trenches or just behind them. Even so, he went on in tones of real regret: "If they hadn't fired on the marchers in Capitol Square last week, reckon we might have seen some proper housecleaning."

Featherston shook his head. "Wouldn't matter for beans, I say."

"What do you mean, it wouldn't matter?" the whiskey-drinking veteran demanded. "Stringing a couple dozen Congressmen to lampposts wouldn't matter? Go a long way toward making things better,/think."

"Wouldn't," Jake said stubbornly. "Could hang 'em all, and it wouldn't matter. They'd go and pick new Congressmen after you did, and who would they be? More rich sons of bitches who

never worked a day in their lives or got their hands dirty. Men of good family." He loaded that with scorn. "Same kind of jack-asses they got in the War Department, if you want to hear God's truth."

He was not anyone's notion of a classical orator, with grace-fill, carefully balanced sentences and smooth, elegant gestures: he was skinny and rawboned and awkward, with a sharp nose, a sharper chin, and a harsh voice. But when he got rolling, he spoke with an intensity that made anyone who heard him pay attention.

"What do you reckon ought to happen, then?" the barkeep asked.

"Tear it all down," Jake said in tones that brooked no argu-ment. "Tear it down and start over. Can't see what in God's name else to do, not when the *men of good family9*—he sneered harder than ever—"let the niggers rise up and then let 'em into the Army to run away from the damnyankees and then gave 'em the vote to say thank-you. Christ!" He tossed down the last of the beer and stalked out.

He'd fired canister at retreating Negro troops—and, as the rot spread through the Army of Northern Virginia, at retreating white troops, too. It hadn't helped. Nothing had helped. *We should have licked the damnyankees fast,* he thought. *A long war let them pound on us till we broke.* He glared in the direction of the War Department. *Your fault. Not the soldiers fault. Yours.*

He tripped on a brick and almost fell. Cursing, he kicked it toward the pile of rubble from which it had come. Richmond was full of rubble, rubble and ruins. U.S. bombing aeroplanes had paid repeated nighttime visits over the last year of the war. Even windows with glass in them were exceptions, not the rule.

Negro laborers with shovels cleared bricks and timbers out of the street, where one faction or another that had sprung up since the war effort collapsed had built a barricade. A soldier with a bayoneted Tredegar kept them working. Theoretically, Rich-mond was under martial law. In practice, it was under very little law of any sort. Discharged veterans far outnumbered men still under government command, and paid them no more heed than they had to.

Three other Negroes strode up the street toward Jake. They were not laborers. Like him, they wore a motley mix of uniforms and civilian clothing.

Also like him, they were armed. Two car-ried Tredegars they hadn't turned in at the armistice; the third wore a holstered pistol. They did not look like men who had run from the Yankees. They did not look like men who would run from anything.

Their eyes swept over Jake. He was not a man who ran from anything,

either. He walked through them instead of going around. "Crazy white man,"

one of them said as they walked on. He didn't keep his voice down, but he didn't say anything di-rectly to Jake, either. With his own business on his mind, Jake kept walking.

He passed by Capitol Square. He'd slept under the huge statue of Albert Sidney Johnston the night he got into Richmond. He couldn't do that now: troops in sandbagged machine-gun nests protected the Confederate Capitol from the Confederate people. Neatly printed NO LOITERING signs had sprouted like mush-rooms after a rain. Several bore handwritten addenda: THIS MEANS YOU. Bloodstains on the sidewalk underscored the point.

Posters covered every wall. The most common showed the Stars and Bars and the phrase, PEACE, ORDER, PROSPERITY. That one, Featherston knew, came from the government's printing presses. President Semmes and his flunkies remained convinced that, if they said everything was all right, it would be all right.

Black severed chains on red was another often-repeated theme. The Negroes' Red uprisings of late 1915 had been crushed, but Reds remained, JOIN us! some of the posters shouted—an ap-peal from black to white.

"Not likely," Jake said, and spat at one of those posters. No more than a handful of Confederate whites had joined the revo-lutionaries during the uprisings. No more than a handful would ever join them. Of so much Featherston was morally certain.

Yet another poster showed George Washington and the slo-gan, WE

NEED A NEW REVOLUTION. Jake spotted only a couple of copies of that one, which was put out by the Freedom Party. Till that moment, Jake had never heard of the Freedom Party. He won-dered if it had existed before the war ended.

He studied the poster. Slowly, he nodded. "Sure as hell do need a new revolution," he said. He had no great use for Wash-ington, though.

Washington had been president of the United States. That made him suspect in Jake's eyes.

But in spite of the crude illustration, in spite of the cheap printing, the message struck home, and struck hard. The Free-dom Party sounded

honest, at any rate. The ruling Whigs were trying to heal an amputation with a sticking plaster. The Radi-cal Liberals, as far as he was concerned, played the same song in a different key. As for the Socialists—he spat at another red poster. Niggers and nigger-lovers, every one of them. The bomb-throwing maniacs wanted a revolution, too, but not the kind the country needed.

He peered more closely at the Freedom Party poster. It didn't say where the party headquarters were or how to go about joining. His lip curled.

"Goddamn amateurs," he said. One thing spending his whole adult life in the Army had taught him: the virtue of organization.

With a shrug, he headed back toward his mean little room. If the Freedom Party didn't know how to attract any members, odds were it wasn't worth joining. No matter how good its ideas, they didn't matter if nobody could find out about them. Even the damned Socialists knew that much.

"Too bad," he muttered. "Too stinking bad." Congressional elections were coming this fall. A shame the voters couldn't send the cheaters and thieves in the Capitol the right kind of message.

Back in the room—he'd had plenty of more comfortable biv-ouacs on campaign—he wrote for a while in a Gray Eagle scratch-pad. He'd picked up the habit toward the end of the war. *Over Open Sights,* he called the work in progress. It let him set down some of his anger on paper. Once the words were out, they didn't fester quite so much in his mind. He might have killed some-body if he hadn't had a release like this.

When day came, he went out looking for work. Colored la-borers weren't the only ones clearing rubble in Richmond, not by a long chalk. He hauled bricks and dirt and chunks of broken stone from not long after sunrise to just before sunset. The straw-boss, of course, paid off in paper money, though his own pockets jingled. Knowing the banknotes would be worth less tomorrow than they were today, Jake made a beeline for the local saloon and the free-lunch counter. He'd drawn better rations in the Army, too, but he was too hungry to care. As before, the barkeep gave him a reproachful look for making a pig of himself. As before, he bought a second beer to keep the fellow happy, or not too unhappy.

He was stuffing a pickled tomato into his mouth when the fellow with

whom he'd talked politics the day before came in and ordered himself a shot. Then he made a run at the free lunch, too. They got to talking again; Featherston learned his name was Hubert Slattery. After a while, Jake mentioned the Freedom Party posters he'd seen.

To his surprise, Slattery burst out laughing. "Oh, them!" he said. "My brother took a look at those fellows, but he didn't want any part of 'em. By what Horace told me, there's only four or five of'em, and they run the whole party out of a shoebox."

"But they've got posters and everything," Jake protested, star-tled to find how disappointed he was. "Not *good* posters, mind you, but posters."

"Only reason they do is that one of 'em's a printer," the other veteran told him. "They meet in this little dive on Seventh near Canal, most of the way toward the Tredegar Steel Works. You want to waste your time, pal, go see

'em for yourself."

"Maybe I will," Featherston said. Hubert Slattery laughed again, but that just made him more determined. "By God, maybe I will."

Congresswoman Flora Hamburger clapped her hands together in delight.

Dr. Hanrahan's smile was broader than a lot of those seen at the Pennsylvania Hospital. And David Hamburger, in-tense concentration on his face, brought his cane forward and then took another step on his artificial leg.

"How does it feel?" Flora asked her younger brother.

"Stump's not too sore," he answered, panting a little. "But it's harder work than I thought it would be "

"You haven't been upright since you lost your leg," Dr. Han-rahan reminded him. "Come on. Give me another step. You can do it." David did, and nearly fell. Hanrahan steadied him before Flora could. "You've got to swing the prosthesis out, so the knee joint locks and takes your weight when you straighten up on it," the doctor said. "You don't learn that, the leg won't work. That's why everybody with an amputation above the knee walks like a sailor who hasn't touched land in a couple of years."

"But you *are* walking, David," Flora said. She dropped from English into Yiddish: *"Danken Gott dafahr. Omayn."*

Seeing her brother on his feet—or on one foot of his and one of wood and metal and leather—did a little to ease the guilt that had gnawed at her ever since he was wounded. Nothing would ever do more than a little. After her New York City district sent her to Congress, she'd had the chance to slide David from the trenches to a quiet post behind the lines. He wouldn't have wanted her to do that, but she could have. She'd put Socialist egalitarianism above family ties .. . and this was the result.

Her brother shrugged awkwardly. "I only need one foot to op-erate a sewing-machine treadle. I won't starve when I go home— and I won't have to sponge off your Congresswoman's salary, either" He gave her a wry grin.

As a U.S. Representative, Flora made $7,500 a year, far more than the rest of her family put together. She didn't begrudge sharing the money with her parents and brothers and sisters, and she knew David knew she didn't.

He took a brotherly privilege in teasing her.

He also took a brotherly privilege in picking her brains: "What's the latest on the peace with the Rebs?"

She grimaced for a couple of reasons. For one, he hadn't called the Confederates by that scornful nickname before he went into the Army. For another.. . "President Roosevelt is still being very hard and very stubborn. I can understand keeping some of the territory we won from the CSA, but all he's willing to restore is the stretch of Tennessee south of the Cumberland we took as fighting wound down, and he won't *give* that back: he wants to trade it for the little piece of Kentucky the Confederates still hold."

"Bully for him!" David exclaimed. He had been a good So-cialist before he went off to war. Now, a lot of the time, he sounded like a hidebound Democrat of the Roosevelt stripe. That distressed Flora, too.

She went on, "And he's not going to let them keep any battle-ships or submersibles or military aeroplanes or barrels, and he's demanded that they limit their Army to a hundred machine guns."

"Bully!" This time, her brother and Dr. Hanrahan said it together.

Flora looked from one of them to the other in exasperation. *"And* he won't come a dime below two billion dollars in repara-tions, all of it to be paid in specie or in steel or oil at 1914 prices. That's a crushing burden to lay on the proletariat of the Confed-erate States."

"I hope it crushes them," David said savagely. "Knock on wood, they'll never be able to lift a finger against us again." In-stead of knocking on the door or on a window sill, he used his own artificial leg, which drove home the point.

Flora had given up trying to argue with him. He had his full share of the Hamburger family's stubbornness. Instead, she turned to Dr. Hanrahan and asked, "How much longer will he have to stay here now that he's started to get back on his feet?"

"He should be able to leave in about a month, provided he makes good progress and provided the infection in the stump doesn't decide to flare up again," Hanrahan said. Flora nodded; she'd seen he gave her straight answers. He finished with a brisk nod: "We'll shoot for November first, then."

After giving her brother a careful hug and an enthusiastic kiss, Flora left the Pennsylvania Hospital. Fall was in the air, sure enough; some of the leaves in the trees on the hospital grounds were beginning to turn. She flagged a cab. "The Congressional office building," she told the driver.

"Yes, ma'am." He touched the shiny leather brim of his cap, put the Oldsmobile in gear, and went out to do battle with Phila-delphia traffic. The traffic won, as it often did. Philadelphia had been the *de facto* capital of the USA since the Confederates bombarded Washington during the Second Mexican War, more than thirty-five years before. Starting even before then, a great warren of Federal buildings had gone up in the center of town.

Getting to them was not always for the faint of heart.

"I have a message for you," said Flora's secretary, a plump, middle-aged woman named Bertha. She waved a piece of paper. "Congressman Blackford wants you to call him back."

"Does he?" Flora said, as neutrally as she could. "All right, I'll do that.

Thank you." She went into her inner office and closed the door after her.

She didn't turn around to see whether Bertha was smiling behind her back.

She hoped not, but she didn't really want to know.

Dakota, a solidly Socialist state, had been returning Hosea Blackford to the House since Flora was a girl. He was about twice her age now, a senior figure in the Party, even if on the soft side ideologically as far as she was concerned. And he was a widower whose Philadelphia apartment lay right across the hall from hers. He had left no doubt he was interested in her, though he'd never done anything to tempt her into defending herself with a hatpin. To her own surprise, she found herself interested in return, even if he was both a moderate and a gentile.

"Now," she muttered as she picked up the telephone and waited for the operator to come on the line, "is he calling about Party business or. . .

something else?"

"Hello, Flora," Blackford said when the call went through. "I just wanted to know if you had seen the newspaper stories about strikes in Ohio and Indiana and Illinois."

Party business, then. "I'm afraid I haven't," Flora said. "I just got back from visiting David."

"How is he?" Blackford asked.

"They've fitted the artificial leg, and he was up on it." Flora shook her head, though Blackford couldn't see that. "Even with one leg gone, he talks like a Democrat." She inked a pen and slid a piece of paper in front of her so she could take notes. "Now tell me about these strikes."

"From what I've read, factory owners are trying to hold down wages by pitting workers against each other," he said. "With sol-diers starting to come home from the war, they have more people wanting jobs than there are jobs to give, so they're seeing who will work for the lowest pay."

"That sounds like capitalists," Flora said with a frown. A mo-ment later, she brightened. "It also sounds like a political op-portunity for us. If the factory owners keep doing things like that—and they probably will—they'll radicalize the workers, and they'll do a better job of it than we ever could."

"I happen to know we've urged the strikers to stay as peaceful as they can, unless the bosses turn goons loose on them or their state governments or the U.S. government move troops against them," Blackford said.

"Good." Flora nodded. Blackford couldn't see that, either, but she didn't care. Something he'd said touched off another thought. "Has Roosevelt made any statement about this yet?"

"One of the wire reports quotes him as calling the factory owners a pack of greedy fools," the Congressman from Dakota said, "but it doesn't say he'll do anything to make them stop playing games with people's lives "

"That sounds like him," Flora said. "He talks about a square deal for the workers, but he doesn't deliver. He delivered a war."

"He delivered a victory," Hosea Blackford corrected. "The country was starved for one. The country's been starved for one for more than fifty years. You may not like that, but you can't stick your head in the sand and pretend it isn't so."

"I don't intend to do any such thing," Flora said sharply. "The people *were*

starved for a victory I've seen as much, even with my own brother. But after a while they'll discover they have the victory and they're still starved and still maimed and still or-phaned. And they'll remember Teddy Roosevelt delivered that, too."

Blackford's silence was thoughtful. After a few seconds, he said, "You may very well be right." He did his best to hold down the excitement in his voice, but she heard it. "If you are right, that would give us a fighting chance in the elections of 1918, and maybe even in 1920. A lot of people now are afraid we'll be so badly swamped, the Democrats will have everything their own way everywhere."

"A lot of things can happen between now and the Congres-sional elections," she said. "Even more things can happen be-tween now and 1920."

"That's true, too," Blackford said. "But you've seen how many Socialists are wearing long faces these days. Even Senator Debs is looking gloomy.

Maybe they should cheer up."

"Maybe. The real trouble"—Flora took a deep breath—"is that we've never won a presidential election. We've never had a majority in either house of Congress. Too many people, I think, don't really believe we ever can."

"I've had doubts myself," Blackford admitted. "Being perma-nently in the minority is hard to stomach sometimes, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes," Flora said quietly. "I'm Jewish, if you'll re-member." On the Lower East Side in New York City, Jews were a majority. Everywhere else in the country, everywhere else in the world .. . *permanently in the minority* was as polite a way to put it as she'd ever heard.

She wondered if reminding Blackford she was Jewish would make him decide he wasn't interested in her after all. She won-dered if she wanted him to decide that. In many ways, her life would be simpler if he did. With a large family, though, she'd rarely known a simple life. Would she want it or know what to do with it if she had it?

The only thing Blackford said was, "Of course I remember. It means I have to eat crab cakes and pork chops by myself." His voice held nothing but a smile. "Would you care to have dinner with me tonight? If you like, I won't eat anything that offends you."

"I'm not offended if you eat things I can't," Flora said, "any more than an Irishman or an Italian would be offended if I ate corned beef on Friday. I'd be offended if you tried to get *me* to eat pork, but you'd never do anything like that."

"I should hope not!" Blackford exclaimed. "You still haven't said whether you'll have dinner with me, though."

"I'd like to," Flora said. "Can we wait till after six, though? I've got a shirtwaist manufacturer coming in to see me at five, and I aim to give him a piece of my mind."

"Six-thirty, say, would be fine. Shall I come to your office?"

"All right." Flora smiled. "I'm looking forward to it." She hung up the telephone and went to work feeling better about the world than she had in some time.

Reginald Bartlett was discovering that he did not fit into the Richmond of late 1917 nearly so well as he had in 1914. Fight-ing on the Roanoke Valley front and in Sequoyah, getting captured twice and shot once (shot twice, too, actually: in the leg and the shoulder from

the same machine-gun burst) by the Yan-kees, had left him a different man from the jaunty young fellow who'd gaily gone off to war.

Richmond was different, too. Then it had been bursting with July exuberance and confidence; now the chilly winds of Octo-ber sliding into November fit the city's mood only too well. De-feat and autumn went together.

"Going to rain tomorrow, I reckon," Reggie said to Bill Foster as the two druggist's assistants walked along Seventh Street to-gether. He reached up with his right hand to touch his left shoulder. "Says so right here."

Foster nodded, which set his jowls wobbling. He was short and round and dark, where Bartlett was above average height, on the skinny side (and skinnier after his wound), and blond. He said, "I heard enough people say that in the trenches, and they were right a lot of the time." He'd spent his war in Kentucky and Tennessee, and come home without a scratch.

After touching his shoulder again, Reggie said, "This isn't so much of a much." He'd had a different opinion while the wound stayed hot and full of pus, but he'd been a long way from ob-jective. "Fellow I worked for before the war, man name of Milo Axelrod, he stopped a bullet with his face up in Maryland. He wasn't a bad boss—better than this McNally I'm working for now, anyhow."

"From what you've said about McNally, that wouldn't be hard." Foster might have gone on, but a small crowd had gath-ered at the corner of Seventh and Cary. He pointed. "I wonder what's going on there."

"Shall we find out?" Without waiting for an answer from his friend, Reggie hurried over toward the crowd. Shrugging, Foster followed. "Oh, I see,"

Bartlett said a moment later. "It's a po-litical rally. That figures, with the Congressional election next Tuesday. But what the devil is the Freedom Party? I've never heard of'em before."

"I've seen a couple of their posters," Bill Foster said. "Don't rightly know what they stand for, though."

"Let's get an earful. Maybe it'll be something good." Reggie scowled as his wounded leg gave a twinge, which it hadn't done in a while. "Couldn't be worse than the pap the Radical Liberals and the Whigs are handing out."

"That's about right." Foster nodded. "Everybody who's in is making noise about how he never much cared for the war, and everybody who's out is saying that if he'd been in he never would've voted one thin dime for it."

"And it's all a pack of lies, too," Bartlett said with deep con-tempt. "Why don't they admit they were all screaming their heads off for the war when it started? Do they think we've forgotten? And when Arango ran against Semmes for president two years ago, he said he'd do a better job of fighting the Yankees than the Whigs were. He didn't say anything about getting out of the war, not one word."

The Freedom Party spokesman didn't have a fancy platform or a fancy suit, which proved he belonged to neither of the CSA's major parties. He stood in his shirtsleeves on a box or a barrel of some kind and harangued the couple of dozen people who were listening to him: "—traitors to their country," he was shouting as Reggie and Bill Foster came up. "Traitors and fools, that's what they are!"

"A crackpot," Bartlett whispered. He folded his arms across his chest and got ready to listen. "Let's hang around for a while. He may be funny."

Somebody in the crowd already thought he was funny, call-ing, "By what you're saying there, the whole government is nothing but traitors and fools.

You've got to be a fool yourself, to believe that."

"I do not!" the speaker said. He was an overweight, balding fellow of about fifty-five, whose fringe of gray hair blew wildly in the fall breeze. His name was Anthony Dresser—so said a little sign Reggie needed a while to notice. "I do not. I tell you the plain, unvarnished truth, and nothing else but!" His eyes, enormous behind thick spectacles, stared out at his small audi-ence. "And you, my friends, you hug the viper to your bosom and think it is your friend. Congress is full of traitors, the War Department is full of traitors, the administration—"

Reggie stopped paying much attention to him about then. "And the moon is full of green cheese!" the heckler shouted, drawing a roar of laughter from the crowd.

Dresser sputtered and fumed, the thread of his speech, had it ever had one, now thoroughly lost. Reggie and Foster grinned at each other, enjoying his discomfiture. The speech surely would have been boring.

This was anything but. "Not as easy to get up on the stump as the old boy thought, is it?" Foster said with a chuckle.

"You are all traitors to your country, for not listening to the plain and simple truth!" Dresser shouted furiously.

"And you're a maniac, and they ought to lock you up in the asylum and lose the key!" It wasn't the first heckler, but an-other man.

Dresser looked to be on the point of having a fit. Somebody reached up and tugged at his trousers. He leaned over, cupping a hand behind his ear.

Then, with a fine scornful snort, he jumped down from his perch. "All right,"

he said. "All right! You show them then, if you think you know so much. I can tell you what you will show them—you will show them you do not have any notion of what to say or how to say it."

Up onto the platform scrambled a lean man somewhere in his thirties, in a day laborer's collarless cotton shirt and a pair of uni-form pants. He looked around for a moment, then said, "Tony's right. A blind man should be able to see it, too. The government *is* full of traitors and fools."

Dresser had been argumentative, querulous. The newcomer spoke with absolute conviction, so much so that before he caught himself Reginald Bartlett looked north toward Capitol Square, as if to spy the traitors in the act.

"Yeah? You can't prove it, either, any more than the other jerk could," a heckler yelled.

"You want proof? I'll give you proof, by Jesus," the lean man said. He didn't talk as if he had any great education, but he didn't seem to feel the lack, as did so many self-made men. "Look what happened when the Red niggers rose up, back at the end of' 15. They damn near overran the whole country. Now, why is that, do you reckon? It's on account of nobody in the whole stinking gov-ernment had the least notion they were plotting behind our backs. If that doesn't make everybody from the president on down a damn fool, you tell me what in the hell it does do."

"He's got something, by God," Foster said, staring at the new speaker.

"He's got a lot of nerve, anyhow," Reggie said.

"That's why you ought to vote for Tony Dresser for Congress," the lean man continued: "on account of he can see the plain truth and you can't. Now the next thing you're going to say is, well, they're a pack of fools up there, all right, with their fancy motor-cars and their whores, but they can't be traitors because they fought as long as they could and the Yankees are pretty damn tough.

"Well, this here is what I've got to say about that." The lean man let loose with a rich, ripe raspberry. "I know for a fact that people tried to warn the government the niggers were going to rise, on account of I was one of those people. Did anybody listen? Hell, no!" Contempt dripped from his voice like water from a leaky roof. "Some of those niggers were servants to rich men's sons, important men's sons. And the rich men in the Capitol and the important men in the War Department shoveled everything under the rug. If that doesn't make 'em traitors, what the devil does?"

"He *has* got something," Bill Foster said in an awed voice.

"He's got a big mouth," Bartlett said. "You throw charges like that around, you'd better be able to name names."

Instead of naming names, the newcomer on the stump charged ahead:

"And after that—after that, mind you, after the niggers rose up—what did the government go and do? Come on. You re-member. You're white men.

You're smart men. What did they go and do?" The lean man's voice sank to a dramatic whisper: *"They went and put rifles in those same niggers*

'hands, that's what they did!' He whispered no more, but shouted furiously:

"If *that* doesn't make 'em traitors, what the devil does?"

Reggie remembered Rehoboam, the Negro prisoner of war who'd shared his U.S. hospital ward after losing a foot in Arkansas—and after being a Red rebel in Mississippi. Things weren't so straightforward as this new Freedom Party speaker made them out to be. The older Reggie got, the more compli-cated the world looked. The lean man was older than he, but still saw things in harsh shades of black and white.

And he contrived to make his audience see them the same way. "You want to put Tony Dresser into Congress to give the real people of the Confederate States a voice," he shouted, "the working men, the men who get their hands dirty, the men who went out and fought the war the fools and the traitors and the nigger-lovers got us into. Oh, you can throw your vote away for somebody with a diamond on his pinky"—with alarming effec-tiveness, he mimed a capitalist—"but who's the fool if you do?"

"Why the hell ain't *you* runnin' for Congress instead of that long-winded son of a bitch?" somebody shouted.

"Tony's the chairman of the Freedom Party," the lean man an-swered easily. "You promote the commander of the unit, not a new recruit." He took out his billfold and displayed something Bartlett could not make out. "Here's my membership card— number seven, from back in September."

"Where do we sign up?" Two men asked the question at the same time.

One of them added, "You ain't gonna stay a new recruit long, pal, not the way you talk. Who the hell are you, anyway?"

"My name's Featherston—Jake Featherston," the lean man answered.

"Sergeant, Confederate States Artillery, retired." He scowled. "The fools in the War Department retired damn near the whole Army." With what looked like a deliberate effort of will, he made himself smile. "Party office is a couple blocks down Seventh, toward the Tredegar works. Come on by.

Hope you do, anyways."

"Damned if I'm not tempted to," Bill Foster said as the little rally began to break up. "Damned if I'm not. That fellow Feath-erston, he's got a good way of looking at things."

"He's got a good line, that's for certain," Reggie Bartlett said. "If he were selling can openers door to door, there wouldn't be a closed can in Richmond this time tomorrow. But just because something sounds good doesn't make it so. Come on, Bill. Do you think a stage magician really pulls a Stonewall out of your nose?"

"Wish somebody'd pull one out of somewhere," Foster answered.

Reggie's laugh was rueful, five-dollar goldpieces being in no-tably

short supply in his pockets, too. He said, "The world's not as simple as he makes it out to be."

"Well, what if it isn't?" his friend returned. "I wish it was that simple. Don't reckon I'm the only one who does, either."

"Reckon you're not," Bartlett agreed. "But most folks are the same as you and me: they know the difference between what they wish and what's really out there."

"Yeah?" Foster raised an eyebrow. "How come we just fought this damn war, then?" Reggie thought about that for a while, but found no good answer.

Guided by a pilot intimately familiar with the local minefields, the USS

Dakota made a slow, cautious entrance into New York harbor. Sailors on tugs and freighters waved their caps at the battleship. Steam whistles bellowed and hooted. Fireboats shot streams of water high into the air.

Sam Carsten stood by the port rail, enjoying the show. The late-November day was bleak and gloomy and cold, but that didn't bother the petty officer at all. Anything more clement than clouds and gloom bothered him: he was so blond and pink, he sunburned in less time than he needed to blink. After Brazil en-tered the war on the side of the USA and Germany and their allies, the *Dakota* had gone up into the tropical Atlantic after convoys bound for Britain from Argentina. He was only now re-covering from what the cruel sun had done to him.

Off to the west, on Bedloe Island, stood the great statue of Re-membrance, the sword of vengeance gleaming in her hand. Carsten turned to his bunkmate and said, "Seeing her gives you a whole different feeling now that we've gone and won the war."

"Sure as hell does." Vic Crosetti nodded vigorously. He was as small and swarthy as Carsten was tall and fair. "Every time I seen that statue before, it was like she was saying, 'What the hell you gapin' at me for? Get out there and kick the damn Rebs in the belly.' Now we gone and done it. Can't you see the smile on that bronze broad's kisser?"

Remembrance looked as cold and stern and forbidding as she had since she'd gone up not long after the Second Mexican War. Even so,

Carsten said, "Yeah." He and Crosetti grinned at each other. Victory tasted sweet.

"Carsten!" somebody said behind him.

He turned and stiffened to attention. "Sir!"

"As you were," Commander Grady said, and Sam eased out of his brace.

The commander of the *Dakota's* starboard secondary armament was a pretty good fellow; Sam cranked shells into the forwardmost five-inch gun under his charge. Grady said, "Do you recall that matter we were discussing the day the limeys gave up the fight?"

For a moment, Carsten didn't. Then he nodded. "About aero-planes, you mean, sir?"

"That's right." Grady nodded, too. "Were you serious about what you meant about getting in on the ground floor there?"

"Yes, sir. I sure was, sir," Sam answered. Aeroplanes were the coming thing. Anyone with an eye in his head could see that. Anyone with an eye in his head could also see the Navy wouldn't stay as big as it had been during the war. Since Sam wanted to make sure he didn't end up on the beach, getting involved with aeroplanes looked like a good insurance policy.

Commander Grady said, "All right, then. I have some orders cut for you.

If you'd said no, you'd have stayed here. There wouldn't have been any trouble about that. As things are, though, we both catch the train for Boston tomorrow morning. You'll see why when we get there." His smile made him look years younger.

"You're leaving the *Dakotal"* Vic Crosetti demanded. When Sam nodded, Crosetti clapped a hand to his forehead. "Jesus Christ, who'm I gonna rag on now?"

"I figure you'll find somebody," Carsten said, his voice dry. Crosetti gave him a dirty look that melted into a chuckle, then slapped him on the back.

Sam had a gift for getting in digs with-out making people angry at

him.

"Only problem with this is the train ride," Commander Grady said. "This Spanish influenza that's going around is supposed to be pretty nasty. We might be better staying aboard the *Dakota?*

"Sir, if the limeys couldn't sink us and the Japs couldn't sink us and whoever was flying that damn bombing aeroplane out from Argentina couldn't sink us, I don't figure we need to be afraid of any germs," Sam said.

Grady laughed. "That's the spirit! All right, Carsten. Pick up your new orders, get your paperwork taken care of, and we'll go ashore tomorrow morning—if you can stand an officer for com-pany, that is."

"I'm a tough guy, sir," Carsten answered. "I expect I'll put up with it."

Grady laughed and mimed throwing a punch at him, then went on his way.

"What's this about aeroplanes?" Crosetti asked.

"Don't even know, exactly," Sam said. "I joined the Navy five years before the war started, and here I am, buying a pig in a poke. Maybe I need my head examined, but maybe I'm smart, too. Smart, I mean, besides getting away from you. I hope I am, anyway."

"Good luck. I think you're crazy, but good luck." Crosetti shook Sam's hand, then walked off shaking his own head.

Getting orders was the easy part of getting off the *Dakota.* Carsten filled out endless separation forms. Only after the last of them was signed would the paymaster grudgingly give him greenbacks. With money in his billfold and a duffel bag on his shoulder, he walked down the gangplank from the *Dakota* to the pier with Commander Grady.

Even at the edge of the harbor, New York boiled with life. When Grady flagged a cab for the ride to the New York Central Railroad Depot, three different automobiles almost ran him and Sam down in the zeal for a fare.

The drivers hopped out and screamed abuse at one another in both English and a language that seemed entirely compounded of gutturals.

Grady knew his way through the crowded old depot, which was

fortunate, because Sam didn't. He had to step smartly to keep from being separated from the officer; the only place where he'd felt more crowded was the triple-decked bunkroom of the *Dakota.* Everyone here was moving, intent on his own business. About every third man, woman, and child was sneezing or snif-fling or coughing. Some of them were likely to have influenza. Carsten tried not to inhale. That didn't work very well.

He and Grady got a couple of seats in a second-class car; the Navy saved money on train fares that way. They were the only Navy men there, though soldiers in green-gray occupied a fair number of seats. The civilians ranged from drummers in cheap, flashy suits to little old ladies who might still have been in Russia.

Once Grady and Carsten pulled into Boston, the officer paid for another cab ride, this one over the Charlestown Bridge to the Navy Yard on the north side of the Charles River. Seeing the bat-tleships and cruisers and submersibles and tenders tied up there made Sam's heart swell with pride.

A few ships from the Western Squadron of Germany's High Seas Fleet stood out from their American allies because of their less familiar lines and light gray paint jobs.

Sam followed Commander Grady, each of them with duffel bag bouncing on his back. Then, all at once, Sam stopped in his tracks and stared and stared. Grady walked on for a couple of steps before he noticed he didn't have company any more. He turned and looked back, a grin on his rabbity features. "What's the matter, Carsten?" he asked, sounding like a man trying hard not to laugh out loud.

"Sir," Sam said plaintively, "I've seen every type of ship in the U.S. Navy, and I reckon damn near every type of ship in the High Seas Fleet, too." He pointed ahead. "In all my born days, though, I've never seen anything that looked like *that,* and I hope to God I never do again. What the hell is it supposed to be?"

Now Grady did laugh out loud. "That's the *Remembrance,* Carsten.

That's what you signed up for."

"Jesus," Sam said. "I must have been out of my goddamn mind."

The *Remembrance* looked as if somebody had decided to build a battleship and then, about a third of the way through the job, got sick of it and decided to flatten out most of the deck to hurry things along.

An aeroplane sat on the deck aft of the bridge: not a seaplane that would land in the water and be picked up by the ship's crane but a Wright two-decker fighting scout—a U.S. copy of a German Albatros—with utterly ordinary landing gear and not a trace of a float anywhere. Sam shook his head in disbelief.

Laughing still, Commander Grady clapped him on the back. "Cheer up. It won't be so bad. You'll still mess forward and bunk aft. And a five-inch gun is a five-inch gun." He pointed to the sponson under that unbelievably long, unbelievably level deck. "You'll do your job, and the flyboys will do theirs, and every-body will be happy except the poor enemy bastards who bump into us."

"Yes, sir," Sam said dubiously. "What the devil did she start out to be, anyway? And why didn't she turn out to be whatever that was?"

"They started to build her as a fast, light-armored battle cruiser, to slide in close to the Confederate coast, blast hell out of it, and then scoot before the Rebs could do anything about it—a moni-tor with legs, you might say,"

Grady answered. "But that idea never went anywhere. Some bright boy got to thinking how handy it would be to take aeroplanes along wherever you needed them, and. .. there's the *Remembrancer*

"I thought of that myself, after the *Dakota* got bombed off Argentina,"

Carsten said, "but I never imagined—this." He won-dered if he'd get into fights because sailors on ordinary, re-spectable vessels would call the *Remembrance* the ugliest ship in the Navy. Dammit, she *was* the ugliest ship in the Navy.

"Come on, let's go aboard," Grady said. "She won't look any-where near so strange from the inside."

Even that didn't turn out to be true. The hangars that held nearly three dozen fighting scouts and the supply and mainte-nance areas that went with them took up an ungodly amount of space, leaving the bunkrooms cramped and feeling like after-thoughts. As a petty officer, Carsten did get a bottom bunk, but the middle one in the three-tier metal structure was only a few inches above him. He could stand it, but he didn't love it.

The only place in which he did feel at home was the sponson. The five-inch gun was the same model he'd served on the *Da-kota*ˆ and the

sponson itself might have been transferred bodily from the battleship. The chief gunner's mate in charge of the crew, a burly veteran named Willie Moore, wore a splendid gray Kaiser Bill mustache. He wasn't half brother to his counterpart from the *Dakota*ˆ Hiram Kidde, but Sam couldn't have proved it by the way he acted.

He turned out to know Kidde, which surprised Sam not at all. "If you served with the 'Cap'n,' reckon you'll do for me," he rumbled when Carsten mentioned the name of his former gun commander a couple of days after coming aboard.

"Thanks, Chief. Hope so," Sam said, and punctuated that with a sneeze.

"Damn. I'm coming down with a cold."

He was off his feed at supper that evening, which surprised him: the *Remembrance,* however ugly she was, boasted a first-class galley.

Everything was fresh, too—an advantage of sitting in port. But Sam didn't realize how sick he was till the next morning, when he almost fell out of his bunk. He stood, sway-ing, in front of it.

"You all right?" asked George Moerlein, who slept just above him. Sam didn't answer; he had trouble figuring out what the words meant. Moerlein peered at him, touched his forehead, and then jerked back his hand as if he'd tried picking up a live coal. "We better get this guy to sick bay," he said. "I think he's got the influenza." Sam didn't argue, either. He couldn't.

He let them lead him away.

Arthur McGregor took a certain somber satisfaction in listening to the wind howl around his farmhouse. That was just as well; the wind in Manitoba was going to howl through the winter whether he took any satisfaction in it or not.

"One thing," he said to his wife. "In weather like this, the Yanks stay indoors."

"I wish to heaven they'd stayed in their own country," Maude answered.

She was short and redheaded, a contrast to his rangy inches and dark hair that was beginning to show frost as he edged into his forties.

Her eyes went to the photograph of their son, Alexander, that hung on the wall of the front room. The photograph was all they had of him; the U.S.

troops who occupied Manitoba had exe-cuted him for plotting sabotage a year and a half before.

McGregor's eyes went there, too. He was still paying the Ameri-cans back for what they'd done to Alexander. He would never be done paying them back, as long as he lived. If they ever found out he made bombs, he wouldn't live long. He couldn't drive the Yanks out of Canada singlehanded.

If they were going to try to rule his country, though, he could make their lives miserable.

Julia came in from the kitchen. She also looked toward Alex-ander; these days, the family almost made a ritual of it. McGregor looked at his daughter in what was as close to wonderment as his solid, stolid nature could produce. Some time while he wasn't looking, Julia had turned into a woman.

She'd been eleven when the Americans invaded, and hardly even coltish.

She was four-teen now, and not coltish any more. She looked like her mother, but taller and leaner, as McGregor himself was.

"What are you going to do about that school order, Pa?" she asked.

The wind gusted louder. McGregor could have pretended not to hear her.

His own sigh was gusty, too. "I'm going to pretend I don't know the first thing about it for as long as I can," he answered.

He'd pulled Julia and her younger sister, Mary, out of school a couple of years before. The Americans were using it to teach Canadian children their lies about the way the world worked. Since then, McGregor and Maude had taught reading and ci-phering at home.

Now, though, the occupying authorities had sent out an edict requiring all children between the ages of six and sixteen to at-tend school at least six months out of the year. They didn't intend to miss any chances to tell their stories to people they wanted to grow up to be Americans, not Canadians.

"It'll be all right, Pa," Julia said. "I really think it will. You can send Mary and me, and we won't end up Yanks, truly we won't." She looked toward Alexander's photograph again.

"I know you won't, chick," he said. "But I don't know that Mary would be able to keep from telling the teacher what she really thinks."

At nine, Mary wore her heart on her sleeve, even more than Alexander had. She also hated Americans with a pure, clear ha-tred that made even her father's pale beside it. Letting the Yanks know how she felt struck McGregor as most unwise.

Julia had washed the supper dishes; Mary was drying them. After the last one clattered into the cupboard, she came out to join the rest of the family.

She was sprouting up, too, like wheat after planting. She would, McGregor judged, make a tall woman. But she still kept some of the feline grace she'd had since she was very small, and also some of a cat's self-containment.

McGregor hadn't needed to teach her much about conspiracy. She under-stood it as if by instinct.

Now he said, "Mary, if you have to, do you suppose you can put up with listening to the Yanks' lies in school without telling them off?"

"Why would I have to do that, Pa?" she answered. "Maybe they can make me go to school, but—" She caught herself. Her gray eyes, so like those of her father and her dead brother, widened. "Oh. You mean put up with them so I wouldn't get in trouble—so *we* wouldn't get in trouble."

"That's right." Arthur McGregor nodded. No, no one needed to teach Mary about conspiracy.

She thought it over. "If I have to, I suppose I could," she said at last. "But telling lies is a sin on their heads, isn't it?"

"So it is." McGregor smiled to hear that, but not too much: he'd passed his own stern Presbyterian ethic down to the new generation. "The Yanks have so many other sins on the book against them, though, that lying doesn't look like so much to them."

"Well, it should," Mary said. "It should all count against them, every

bit of it. And it will. God counts *everything"* She spoke with great assurance.

McGregor wished he felt so sure himself. He believed, yes, but he'd lost that simple certainty. If he'd had any left, Alex-ander's death would have burned it out of him, leaving ashes be-hind. He said, "You will go to school, then, and be a good little parrot, so we can show the Americans we're obeying their law?"

His younger daughter sighed. "If I have to," she said again.

"Good," McGregor said. "The more we look like we're doing what they want us to, the more we can do what we want to when they aren't looking."

Julia said, "That's good, Pa. That's very good. That's just what we'll do."

"That's what we'll have to do," Maude said. "That's what everyone will have to do, for however long it takes till we're free again."

"Or till we turn into Americans," Arthur McGregor said bleakly. He held up a work-roughened hand. "No, I don't mean us. Some of our neighbors will turn into Americans, but not us."

"Some of our neighbors have already turned into Americans," Julia said.

"They don't care about what they were, so they don't care what they are.

We know better. We're Canadians. We'll al-ways be Canadians. Always."

McGregor wondered if, with the strongest will in the world, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren would remember they were Canadians. And then, perhaps wondering the same thing, Maude spoke as if to reassure herself: "Germany took Alsace and Lorraine away from France almost fifty years ago, but the people there still remember they're Frenchmen."

Canadians had heard a great deal about their ally's grievances against the Kaiser and his henchmen (till the Americans overran them, after which they'd had to endure lies about Germany's grievances against France).

Now France had more reasons to grieve, for the Germans were biting off more of her land. And McGregor, still in his bleak mood, said, "The Germans settled a lot of their own people in Alsace and Lorraine to help hold them down. If the Americans did that. .."

His wife and daughters stared at him in horror. Mary spoke first: "I wouldn't live next to Americans, Pa! I wouldn't. If they came here, I'd ... I don't know what I'd do, but it'd be pretty bad."

"We won't have to worry about that till next spring at the ear-liest,"

McGregor said. "Won't be any Yanks settling down to farm in the middle of winter, not here in Manitoba there won't." His chuckle was grim. "And the ones who come in the spring, if any do, they're liable to turn up their toes when they find out what winters are like. We've seen that the Americans don't fancy our weather."

"Too bad for them," Julia said.

After the children had gone to sleep, McGregor lay awake be-side his wife in the bed the two of them shared. "What am I going to do, Maude?"

he whispered, his voice barely audible through the whistling wind. "By myself, I can hurt the Ameri-cans, but that's all I can do. They won't leave on account of me."

"You've made them pay," Maude said. He'd never admitted making bombs, not in so many words. She'd never asked, not in so many words.

She knew. He knew she knew. But they formally kept the secret, even from each other.

"Not enough," he said now. "Nothing could ever be enough except driving them out of Canada. But no one man can do that."

"No one man can," Maude said in a musing tone of voice.

He understood where she was going, and shook his head. "One man can keep a secret. Maybe two can. And maybe three can, but only if two of them are dead." That came from the pen of Benjamin Franklin, an American, but McGregor had forgotten where he'd first run across it.

"I suppose you're right," Maude said. "It seems a pity, though."

"If Alexander hadn't hung around with a pack of damnfool kids who didn't have anything better to do than run their mouths and make foolish plots, he'd still be alive today," McGregor said harshly.

Maude caught her breath. "I see what you're saying," she an-swered after a long pause.

"And the strange thing is, if he was still alive, we wouldn't hate the Yanks the way we do," McGregor said. "They caused themselves more harm shooting him than he ever would have given them if they'd let him go."

"They're fools," Maude said. That McGregor agreed with wholeheartedly.

But the American fools ruled Canada today. God must have loved them, for He'd made so very many.

The notion of God loving Americans was so unlikely, McGregor snorted and fell asleep bemused by it. When he woke up, it was still dark; December nights fifty miles south of Winnipeg were long. He groped for a match, scraped it alight, and lit the kero-sene lamp on the nightstand.

He didn't want to get out from under the thick wool blankets: he could see his own breath inside the bedroom. He threw a shirt and overalls over his long Johns and was still shivering. Maude got out of bed, too. She carried the lamp downstairs as soon as she was dressed. He followed her.

She built up the fire in the stove and started a pot of coffee. It wasn't good coffee; if the Americans had any good coffee, they kept it for themselves. But it was hot. He stood by the stove, too, soaking in the warmth radiating from the black iron. Maude melted butter in a frying pan and put in three eggs. McGregor ate them along with bread and butter.

Then he shrugged on a long, heavy coat and donned mittens. Reluctantly, he opened the door and went outside.

It had been cold in the bedroom. As he slogged his way to the barn, he wondered if he would turn into an icicle before he got there. A wry chuckle made a fogbank swirl around his face for a moment, till the fierce wind blew it away. People said there wasn't so much work on a farm in winter. In a way, they were right, for he didn't have to go out

to the fields.

In spring and summer, though, he didn't have to work in weather like this.

The body heat of the livestock kept the barn warmer than the weather outside, but warmer wasn't warm. He fed the horse and cow and pigs and chickens and cleaned up their filth. By the time he was done with that, he was warmer, too.

His eye fell on an old wagon wheel, the sort of junk any barn accumulated. Under it, hidden in a hole beneath a board beneath dirt, lay dynamite and fuses and blasting caps and crimpers and other tools of the bomb-maker's art. McGregor nodded to them. They would come out again.

Rain, some of it freezing, poured down out of a bleak gray sky. A barrel rumbled across the muddy Kansas prairie toward Colonel Irving Morrell.

The cannon projecting from its slightly pro-jecting prow was aimed straight at him. Two machine guns pro-jected from each side of the riveted steel hull; two more covered the rear. A pair of White truck engines powered the traveling fortress. Stinking, steaming exhaust belched from the twin pipes.

The charge would have been more impressive had it been at something brisker than a walking pace. It would have been much more impressive had the barrel not bogged down in a mud puddle that aspired to be a pond when it grew up. The machine's tracks were not very wide, and it weighed almost thirty-three tons. It could have bogged on ground better than that it was traveling.

Morrell snapped his fingers in annoyance at himself for not having brought out a slate and a grease pencil with which he could have taken notes here in the field. He was a lean man, nearing thirty, with a long face, weathered features that bespoke a lot of time out in the sun and wind, and close-cropped sandy hair at the moment hidden under a wool cap and the hood of a rain slicker.

His boots made squelching noises as he slogged through the ooze toward the barrel. The commander of the machine stuck his head out of the central cupola that gave him and his driver a place to perch and a better view than the machine gunners and artillerymen enjoyed (the engineers who tended the two motors had no view, being stuck in the

bowels of the barrel).

"Sorry, sir," he said. "Couldn't spot that one till too late ."

"One of the hazards of the game, Jenkins," Morrell answered. "You can't go forward; that's as plain as the nose on my face. See if you can back out."

"Yes, sir." Lieutenant Jenkins ducked down into the cupola, clanging the hatch shut after himself. The engines changed note as the driver put the barrel into reverse. The barrel moved back a few inches, then bogged down again. Jenkins had spunk. Having shifted position, he tried to charge forward once more and es-cape the grip of the mud. All he succeeded in doing was getting deeper into it.

Morrell waved for him to stop and called, "You keep going that way, you'll need a periscope to see out, just like a submersible."

He doubted Jenkins heard him; with the engines hammering away, nobody inside a barrel could hear the man next to him screaming in his ear.

Even so, the engines fell silent a few sec-onds later. The traveling fortress'

commander could see for him-self that he wasn't going anywhere.

When the young lieutenant popped out through the hatch again, he was grinning. "Well, sir, you said you wanted to test the machine under extreme conditions. I'd say you've got your wish."

"I'd say you're right," Morrell answered. "I'd also say these critters need wider tracks, to carry their weight better."

Lieutenant Jenkins nodded emphatically. "Yes, sir! They could use stronger engines, too, to help us get out of this kind of trouble if we do get into it."

"That's a point." Morrell also nodded. "We used what we had when we designed them: it would have taken forever to make a new engine and work all the teething pains out of it, and we had a war to fight. With the new model, though, we've got the chance to do things right, not just fast."

That was his job: to figure out what *right* would be. He would have a lot to say about what the next generation of barrels looked like. It was

a great opportunity. It was also a great responsibility.

More than anything else, barrels had broken two years of stale-mated struggle in the trenches and made possible the U.S. vic-tory over the CSA.

Having the best machines and knowing what to do with them would be vital if— *no, when,* he thought—the United States and Confederate States squared off again.

For the moment, his concerns were more immediate. "You and your men may as well come out," he told Jenkins. "We've got a couple of miles of muck to go before we get back to Fort Leavenworth"

"Leave the barrel here for now, sir?" the young officer asked.

"It's not going anywhere by itself, that's for sure," Morrell an-swered, with which Jenkins could hardly disagree. "Rebs aren't about to steal it, either.

We'll need a recovery vehicle to pull it loose, but we can't bring one out now because it would bog too." Recovery vehicles mounted no machine guns or cannon, but were equipped with stout towing chains, and sometimes with bulldozer blades.

More hatches opened up as the engineers and machine gun-ners and artillerymen emerged from their steel shell. Even in a Kansas December, it was warm in there. It had been hotter than hell in summertime Tennessee, as Morrell vividly remembered. It had been hot outside there, too. It wasn't hot here. All eighteen men in the barrel crew, Jenkins included, started shivering and complaining. They hadn't brought rain gear—-what point, in the belly of the machine?

Morrell sympathized, but he couldn't do anything about it. "Come on," he said. "You won't melt."

"Listen to him," one of the machine gunners said to his pal. "He's got a raincoat, so what the devil has he got to worry about?"

"Here," Morrell said sharply. The machine gunner looked alarmed; he hadn't intended to be overheard. Morrell stripped off the slicker and threw it at him. "Now you've got the raincoat. Feel better?"

"No, sir." The machine gunner let the coat fall in the mud. "Not fair for

me to have it either, sir. Now nobody does." That was a better answer than Morrell had expected from him.

Lieutenant Jenkins said, "Let's get moving, so we stay as warm as we can. We're all asking for the Spanish influenza."

"That's true," Morrell said. "First thing we do when we get in is soak in hot water, to get the mud off and to warm us up inside. And if thinking about that isn't enough to start you moving, I'll give two dollars to any man who gets back to the fort ahead of me."

That set the crew of the barrel into motion, sure enough. Mor-rell was the oldest man among them by three or four years. They were all veterans.

They were all convinced they were in top shape. Every one of them hustled east, in the direction of the fort. They all thought they would have a little extra money jingling in their pockets before the day was through.

Morrell wondered how much his big mouth was going to cost him. As he picked up his own pace, his right leg started to ache. It lacked the chunk of flesh a Confederate bullet had blown from it in the opening weeks of the war. Morrell had almost lost the leg when the wound festered. He still limped a little, but never let the limp slow him down.

And he got to Fort Leavenworth ahead of any of the barrel men. As soon as he reached the perimeter of the fort, he realized how worn he was: *ridden hard and put away wet* was the phrase that came to mind. He'd ridden himself hard, all right, and he was sure as hell wet, but he hadn't been put away yet. He wanted to fall into the mud to save himself the trouble.

Soaking in a steaming tub afterwards did help. So, even more, did the admiring looks he got from his competitors as they came onto the grounds of the fort in his wake. He savored those. Com-mand was more than a matter of superior rank. If the men saw he deserved that rank, they would obey eagerly, not just out of duty.

That evening, he pored over German accounts of meetings with British and French barrels. The Germans had used only a few of the traveling fortresses, fewer than their foes. They'd won anyhow, with England distracted from the Continent because of the fighting in Canada, and with mutinies spreading through the French Army after Russia collapsed. Morrell was familiar with British barrels; the CSA had copied them. He knew less about the machines the French had built.

When he looked at photographs of some of the French barrels— their equivalent of the rhomboids England and the CSA used— he snickered.

Their tracks were very short compared to the length of their chassis, which meant they easily got stuck trying to tra-verse trenches.

Another French machine, though, made him thoughtful. The Germans had only one example of that model: the text said it was a prototype hastily armed and thrown into the fight in a des-perate effort to stem the decay of the French Army. It was a little barrel (*hardly more than a keg,* Morrell thought with a grin) with only a two-man crew, and mounted a single machine gun in a ro-tating turret like the ones armored cars used.

"Not enough firepower there to do you as much good as you'd like,"

Morrell said into the quiet of his barracks room. Still, the design was interesting. It had room for improvement.

He grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil and started sketch-ing.

Whoever designed the first U.S. barrels had thought of noth-ing past stuffing as many guns as possible inside a steel box and making sure at least one of them could shoot every which way. The price of success was jamming a couple of squads' worth of soldiers into that hellish steel box along with the guns.

If you put the two-inch cannon into that turret instead of a ma-chine gun, you got a gun firing every which way all by itself. You'd still want a machine gun in front. If the cannon were in the turret, the driver would have to go down into the lower front of the machine. Could he handle a machine gun and drive, too?

"Not likely," Morrell muttered. All right: that meant another gunner or two down there with him.

You wouldn't always want to use the turret cannon, though. Sometimes that would be like swatting a fly with an anvil. Mor-rell sketched another machine gun alongside the cannon. It would rotate, too, of course, and the gunners who tended the large gun could also serve it.

That cut the crew from eighteen men down to five or six— you'd likely need an engineer, too, but the machine had better have only

one engine, and one strong enough to move at a decent clip. Morrell shook his head.

"No, six or seven," he said. "Some-body's got to tell everybody else what to do." A boat without a commander would be like a boat—no, a ship; Navy men would laugh at him—without a captain.

He was forgetting something. He stared at the paper, then at the plain whitewashed plaster of the wall. Forcing it wouldn't work; he had to try to think around it. That was as hard as *not* thinking about a steak dinner. He'd had practice, though. Soon it would come to him. Soon. ..

"Wireless telegraph!" he exclaimed, and added an aerial to his sketch.

Maybe that would require another crewman, or maybe the engineer could handle it. If it did, it did. He'd wanted one of those gadgets in his barrel during the war just finished. Control-ling the mechanical behemoths was too hard without them.

He studied the sketch. He liked it better than the machines in which he'd thundered to victory against the CSA. He wondered what the War Department would think. It was different, and a lot of senior officers prided themselves on not having had a new thought in years. He shrugged. He'd send it in and find out.

II

"Miss Colleton"—the broker in Columbia sounded agitated, even over the telephone wire—"I can do only so much. If you ask the impossible of me, you must not be surprised when I do not hand it to you on a silver platter."

Anne Colleton glared at the telephone. She could not exert all her considerable force of personality through it. But she could not leave St.

Matthews, South Carolina, to visit the state capital, either. And so she would have to forgo the impact her blond good looks had on people of the male persuasion. She'd manage with hardheaded common sense—or, if she didn't, she'd find a new broker. She'd done that before, too.

"Mr. Whitson," she said, "are the Confederate dollar, the Brit-ish pound, and the French franc worth more in terms of gold today, January 16, 1918, than they were yesterday, or are they worth less?"

"Less, of course," Whitson admitted, "but even so—"

"Do you expect that these currencies will be worth more in gold tomorrow, or less again?" Anne broke in.

"Less again," Whitson said, "but even so, you are gutting your holdings by—"

She interrupted: "If I convert my holdings in those currencies to gold and U.S. dollars and German marks while the C.S. dollar and the pound and the franc are still worth *something,* Mr. Whit-son, I will have *something* left when the Confederate States get back on their feet. If I wait any longer, I will have nothing. I've waited too long already. Now, sir: will you do as I instruct you, or would you sooner converse with my attorneys?"

"I am trying to save you from yourself, Miss Colleton," Whit-son said peevishly.

"You are my broker, not my pastor," Anne said. "Answer the question I just gave you, if you would be so kind."

Whitson sighed. "Very well. On your head be it." He hung up.

So did Anne, angrily. Her brother, Tom, came into the room. "You look happy with the world," he remarked. His words held less in the way of lighthearted humor and more sardonicism than they would have before the war. He'd gone off, as if to a lark, a captain, and come back a lieutenant-colonel who'd been through all the horrors the Roanoke front had to offer.

"Delighted," Anne returned. She was still sorting out what to make of her brother. In a way, she was pleased he didn't let her do all his thinking for him, as he had before. In another way, that worried her. Having him under her control had been convenient. She went on, "My idiot broker is convinced I'm the maniac. Everything will be rosy day after tomorrow, if you listen to him."

"You're right—he's an idiot," Tom agreed. "You know what I paid for a pair of shoes yesterday? Twenty-three dollars—in paper, of course. I keep my gold and silver in my pocket. *I'm* not an idiot."

"It will get worse," Anne said. "If it goes on for another year, people's life savings won't be worth anything. That's when we really have to start worrying."

"I'll say it is." Her brother nodded. "If the Red niggers had waited to rise up till that happened, half the white folks in the country would have grabbed their squirrel guns and joined in."

"If they hadn't risen up when they did, we might not be in this mess now,"

Anne said grimly. "And they did bad enough when they rose."

Tom nodded. The Marxist Negroes had killed Jacob, his brother and Anne's, who was at the Marshlands plantation because Yankee poison gas left him an invalid. They'd burned the mansion, too; only in the past few months had their remnants been cleared from the swamps by the Congaree River.

"Hmm," Tom said. "We need an idiot to take Marshlands off our hands for us. Maybe we ought to sell it to your broker."

"As a matter of fact, I think we need an imbecile to take Marsh-lands off our hands," Anne said. "God only knows when anyone will be able to raise a crop of cotton on that land: one fieldhand in three is liable to be a Red, and how could you tell till too late? And the taxes—-I haven't seen anyone talking about taking the war taxes off the books, have you?"

"Not likely." Tom snorted. "Government needs every dime it can squeeze. Only good thing about that is, the government has to take paper.

If they don't take the paper they print, nobody else will, either."

"Small favors," Anne said, and her brother nodded again. She went on,

"I'd take just about any kind of offer for Marshlands, and I'd take paper. I'd turn it into gold, but I'd take paper. If that doesn't prove I'm desperate, I don't know what would."

"A hundred years," Tom said. "More than a hundred years— gone." He snapped his fingers. "Like that. Gone." He snapped them again. "Better than fifty years of good times for the whole country. That's gone, too."

"We have to put the pieces back together," Anne said. "We have to make the country strong again, or else the damnyankees will run over us again whenever they decide they're ready. Even if they don't decide to run over us, they can make us their little brown cousins, the way we've done with the Empire of Mexico."

"I'm damned if I'll be anybody's little brown cousin," Tom Colleton ground out. He swore with studied deliberation. He'd never cursed in front of her before he went off to the trenches. He still didn't do it in the absentminded style he'd no doubt used there. But when he felt the need, the words came out.

"I feel the same way," Anne answered. "Anyone with an ounce of sense feels the same way. But the Congressional elections prove nobody knows how to take us from where we are to where we ought to be."

"What?" Her brother raised an eyebrow. "Split as near down the middle between Whigs and Radical Liberals as makes no difference? And a couple of Socialists elected from Chihuahua, and one from Cuba, and even one from New Orleans, for Christ's sake? Sounds to me like they'll have everything all straightened out by day after tomorrow, or week after next at the latest."

Anne smiled at Tom's pungent sarcasm, but the smile had sharp corners.

"Even that mess shouldn't get things too far wrong. We have to do enough of what the Yankees tell us to keep the USA from attacking us while we're flat. Whatever dribs and drabs we happen to have left after that can go to putting us back on our feet. Lean times, yes, but I think we can come through them if we're smart."

"Outside of a couple of panics, we haven't had lean times be-fore," Tom said. "We do need better politicians than the gang we've got. We could use somebody who'd really lead us out of the wilderness instead of stumbling through it for forty years."

"Of the current crop, I'm not going to hold my breath," Anne said.

"I—"The telephone interrupted. She picked it up. "Hello?" Her mouth fell open, just a little, in surprise. "Commander Kim-ball! How good to hear from you. I was hoping you'd come through the war all right. Where are you now?"

"I'm in Charleston," Roger Kimball answered. "And what the hell is this

'Commander Kimball' nonsense? You know me bet-ter than that, baby."

Unlike her brother, Kimball swore whenever he felt like it and didn't care who was listening. He not only had rough edges, he gloried in them. And he was right—she did know him intimately enough, in

every sense of the word, to call him by his Christian name.

That she could, though, didn't mean she had to. She enjoyed keeping men off balance. "In Charleston? How nice," she said. "I hope you can get up to St. Matthews before long. You do know my brother, Lieutenant-Colonel Colleton, is staying with me here in town?" *You do know that, even if you get up to St. Mat-thews, you 're not going to make love with me right now?*

Kimball was brash. He wasn't stupid. Anne couldn't abide stupidity. He understood what she meant without her having to spell it out. Laughing a sour laugh, he answered, "And he'll whale the living turpentine out of me if I put my hands where they don't belong, will he? Sweetheart, I hate to tell you this, but I haven't got the jack for pleasure trips without much pleasure. I'm on the beach, same as every other submarine skipper in the whole god-damn Navy." Where he could banter about passing on a chance to pay a social call that was only a social call, his voice showed raw pain when he told her the Navy had cut him loose.

"I'm very sorry to hear that," she said, and trusted him to understand she understood what grieved him most. "What are you going to do now?"

"Don't know yet," Kimball said. "I may try and make a go of it here, or I may head down to South America. Plenty of navies there that could use somebody who really knows what he's doing when he looks through a periscope."

That was likely to be true. The South American republics had chosen sides in the Great War as the rest of the world had done. Losers would be looking for revenge. Winners would be looking to make sure they didn't get it.

Anne said, "Whatever you decide to do, I wish you the very best."

"But not enough for you to send your brother out to hunt pos-sums or something, eh?" Kimball laughed again. "Never mind. We'll get another chance one of these days, I reckon. Good luck to the lieutenant-colonel, too, the son of a bitch." Before she could answer, he hung up.

So did she, and she laughed, too. She admired the submariner; he was, she judged, almost as thoroughly self-centered as her-self. Tom raised an eyebrow. "Who's this Commander—Kimball, is it?"

"That's right. He captained a submarine," Anne answered. "I got to know him on the train to New Orleans not long after the war started." He'd seduced her in his Pullman berth, too, but she didn't mention that.

"How well do you know him?" Tom asked.

"We're friends," she said. */ was in bed with him down in Charleston when the Red Negro uprising broke out* She didn't mention that, either.

She didn't have to. "Are you more than . . . friends?" her brother demanded.

Before the war, he wouldn't have dared question her that way. "I've never asked what you did while you weren't fighting," she said. "What I did, or didn't do, is none of your business."

Tom set his jaw and looked stubborn. He wouldn't have done that before the war, either. No, she couldn't control him any more, not with certainty. He said, "If you're going to marry the guy, it is. If he's just after your money, I'll send him packing. What you're doing affects me, you know."

Nor would he have had that thought in 1914. "If he were just after my money, don't you think / would have sent him packing?" she asked in return.

"I can take care of myself, you know, with a rifle or any other way."

"All right," Tom said. "People who fall in love are liable to go all soft in the head, though. I wanted to make sure it hadn't hap-pened to you."

"When it does, you can shovel dirt on me, because I'll be dead." Anne spoke with great conviction. Tom came over and kissed her on the cheek.

They both laughed, liking each other very much at that moment.

In the trenches down in Virginia, Chester Martin had heard New Englanders talk about a lazy wind, a wind that didn't bother blowing around a man but went straight through him. The wind coming off Lake Erie this morning while he picketed the Toledo steel mill where he would sooner have been working was just that kind. In spite of coat and long underwear, in spite of hat and ear muffs, he shivered and his teeth chattered as he trudged back and forth in front of the plant.

His sign was stark in its simplicity. It bore but one word, that in letters a foot high: THIEVES! "They want to cut our wages," he said to the fellow in front of him, a stocky man named Albert Bauer. "We went out and got shot at—hell, I got shot—and they stayed home and got rich. No, they got richer; they were already rich. And they want to cut our wages."

Bauer was a solid Socialist. He said, "This is what we get for reelecting that bastard Roosevelt"

"He's not so bad," Martin said. A Democrat himself, he walked the picket line with his more radical coworkers. "He visited my stretch of the front once; hell, I jumped on him when the Rebs started shelling us. Later, when I got wounded, he found out about it and sent me a note."

"Bully!" Bauer said. "Can you eat the note? Can you take it to the bank and turn it into money? Roosevelt will oblige. Feu-dal nobles do. But does he care about whether you starve? Not likely!"

"Hush!' Chester Martin said suddenly. He pointed. "Here come the scabs." The factory owners always had people willing to work for them, no matter how little they paid. They also had the police on their side.

Jeers and curses and all manner of abuse rained down on the heads of the workers taking the places of the men who'd gone on strike. So did a few rocks and bottles, in spite of Socialist calls for calm and in spite of the strong force of blue-uniformed po-licemen escorting them into the steel mill. "Well, now they've gone and done it," Albert Bauer said in disgusted tones. "Now they've given the goddamn cops the goddamn excuse they need to go on and suppress us."

He proved a good prophet. As soon as the police had hustled the scabs into the plant, they turned around and yanked the nightsticks off their belts.

A whistle blew, as if an officer during the war were ordering his men out of the trenches and over the top. Shouting fiercely, the police charged the strikers.

Chester Martin had not been an officer. But, thanks to casual-ties in the ranks above him, he'd briefly commanded a company in Virginia not long before the CSA asked for an armistice. Al-most all the men on the picket line had seen combat, too. "Come on!" he shouted. "We can take these fat sons of bitches! Let's give 'em some bayonet drill."

He tore the cardboard sheet off his picket sign. The stick he was left holding wasn't as good a weapon as a billy club, but it wasn't to be despised, either. All around him, his companions imitated his action.

Here came the cops, a solid phalanx of them. Even so, they were outnumbered. They relied on discipline and on being able to create fear to get their way. After gas and machine guns and artillery and Confederate barrels, Martin found absurd the idea that he should be afraid of conscription-dodgers with clubs. He heard laughter from the men to either side of him, too.

In the instant before the red-faced policemen slammed into the picketers, Martin saw surprise and doubt on the features of a couple of blue-uniformed goons. Then he was at close quarters with them, and had no chance to study their expressions in any detail.

One of them swung a nightstick at his head. As if the cop were a Rebel with a clubbed rifle, Martin ducked. Things seemed to move very slowly, as they had in combat in the trenches. As he would have with a bayoneted rifle, Martin jabbed the end of his stick into the policeman's beefy side. A bayonet would have deflated the fellow for good. As things were, the cop grunted in pain and tried to twist away. Martin kicked him in the belly. He folded up like a concertina, the nightstick flying out of his hand.

Martin wished he could have grabbed the solid club, but it landed on the sidewalk, well out of his reach. He caught another policeman in the throat with the end of what had been the handle for his picket sign. Anyone who'd been in the trenches would have had no trouble blocking that lunge or knocking it aside. The cop let out a gargling shout and went over on his back.

"See?" Martin shouted. "They aren't so goddamn tough—the Rebs'd eat

'em for breakfast. And we can whip 'em, too."

"Rally!" one of the policemen shouted. The cops were taking longer than the strikers to figure out what was going on. Not until something close to half their number had fallen or had their nightsticks taken away did another cry ring out: "Drop back and regroup!"

Yelling in triumph, the men from the picket line surged after them. "Down with the scabs!'" they roared. "Down with the cops!"They trampled underfoot the policemen who couldn't fall back and regroup.

Maybe one of those police officers was first to yank out his pistol and

start shooting at the men who were stomping him. But after one or two sharp cracks rang out, it suddenly seemed as if every cop in Toledo were drawing his revolver and blazing away at the striking steelworkers.

Against gunfire, the strikers had no defense. Some fell scream-ing in pain. Some fell silently, and would not rise again. A few kept trying to advance on the police in spite of everything. Most, though, Chester Martin among them, knew how hopeless that was. He was not ashamed to run.

Bullets zipped past his head. Now that the police had opened fire, they seemed intent on emptying their revolvers and slaying as many strikers as they could. In their shoes, Martin probably would have done the same. After the men from the picket line had come so close to overwhelming the cops altogether, they wanted their own back. If strikers got to thinking they could de-feat the police, no man in blue would be safe.

"Next time," somebody not far away panted, "next time we bring our own guns to the dance, by Jesus!"

"That's right," somebody else said. "They want a war, we'll give 'em a fucking war, see if we don't."

All Martin wanted was to be able to work and to bring home a halfway decent wage. He didn't think that was too much to ask. The men who ran the steel mill—the trust bosses with their top hats and diamond pinky rings, so beloved of editorial cartoonists— evidently thought otherwise. A bullet slapped into the flesh of a man close by. Martin had heard that sound too many times on too many fields to mistake it for anything else. The steelworker crumpled with a groan.

Martin dashed around a corner. After that, he didn't need to worry about getting shot. The people on the street weren't strik-ing; they were going about their ordinary business. If the cops suddenly started spraying lead through their ranks, they—or their survivors—could complain to city hall with some hope of being heard.

It looked to be open season on picketers, though. Martin real-ized he was still holding the stick he'd used against the police to such good effect. As casually as he could, he let it fall to the pavement. Pulling his cap down over his eyes (and wondering how it had managed to stay on his head through the melee), he trudged down the street toward the nearest trolley stop.

Several policemen, pistols drawn, ran past him while he stood waiting.

His eyes widened; maybe he'd been wrong about how much mayhem the cops were willing to dish out to the general public. Since he didn't do anything but stand there, they left him alone. If he'd tried to flee ... He didn't care to think what might have happened then.

When the trolley came clanging up to the stop, he threw a nickel in the fare box and took a seat even though it was heading away from his parents'

flat, where he was staying. He rode for more than a mile, till he'd put the steel mill well behind him. When he did get off, he was only a block or so away from the county courthouse.

Across the street from the building stood a statue of Remem-brance, a smaller replica of the great one in New York harbor. Remembrance had finally brought the United States victory over the CSA. What sort of statue would have to go up before anyone

recognized that the working man deserved his due? How long would it take before he did?

Those were questions that made Martin look at Remem-brance in a new way. His left arm bore a large, ugly scar, a re-minder of what he'd suffered for his country's sake. What was his country willing to do for him?

"Shoot me again, that's what," he muttered. "Is that what I fought for?"

Teddy Roosevelt made noises about caring over what hap-pened to the ordinary working man. Martin's brief meeting with the president in the trenches had made him think Roosevelt was sincere. He wondered what Roosevelt would say about what had happened in Toledo. That would tell whether he meant what he said.

Martin wondered if writing him a letter would do any good. He doubted it.

He knew what happened when a private wrote a general a letter: either nothing, or somebody landed on the private like a ton of bricks. Roosevelt would do what he would do, and Chester Martin's view of the matter wouldn't count for beans.

"That's not right," he said. "That's not fair." But it was, he knew too well, the way the world worked.

After a while, he took a streetcar back to his parents' apart-ment building in Ottawa Hills. His younger sister, Sue, was at work; she'd landed a typist's job after he recovered from his wound and went back to the front. His father was at work, too. That graveled him some; Stephen Douglas Martin had been a steelworker longer than Chester had been alive. He labored down the street from the plant his son was striking. *He* had a good job and a good day's pay; Chester wondered if he himself would have to wait till he was gray and wrinkled to say the same. He wondered if he'd ever be able to say the same.

His mother, Louisa, who looked like an older version of Sue, exclaimed in surprise when he came through the door. "I thought you'd be out there all day," she said. She didn't approve of his striking, but he was her son, and she stayed polite about it.

At the moment, he knew a certain amount of relief he'd made it here ahead of the news of trouble. "It got a little lively when the scabs came in,"

he said, which was technically true but would do for an understatement till a better one came along.

"Were the cops busting heads?" his mother asked. He nodded. She shook her own head, in maternal concern. "That's why I don't want you out there picketing, Chester. You could get hurt."

He started to laugh. He couldn't help it. It wasn't that she was wrong. It was much more that she had no idea how right she was. "If I came through the war, I'm not going to let Toledo goons worry me," he answered.

"You need to worry. You could step in front of a streetcar to-morrow," his mother said. He nodded. She said that a lot. If he was going to worry, trolley cars wouldn't go high on the list. Two other questions topped it. One was, had anyone recognized him while he nerved the strikers to resist the police? The second fol-lowed hard upon the first: would any of those people let the po-lice know who he was?

Jefferson Pinkard kept a wary eye on the crucible as it swung into position to pour its molten contents onto the Sloss Works foundry floor.

The kid handling the crucible had some notion of what he was doing, but only some. Herb Wallace, the best crucible man Jeff had ever known, had gone off to fight the damnyankees— conscription nabbed

him early—but he hadn't come home to Bir-mingham. His bones lay somewhere up in Kentucky.

This time, the pouring went smoothly. Only a tiny, fingerlike rivulet of molten steel broke through the earth and sand walling the mold, and Pinkard and his partner had no trouble stemming it with more earth. Leaning on his rake afterwards, Jeff said, "Wish they were all that easy."

His partner nodded. "Yes, suh, Mistuh Pinkard," Vespasian agreed. The big, bulky Negro—as big and bulky as Pinkard himself—took off his cloth cap and wiped sweat from his fore-head. Winter might rule outside, but it was always summertime in hell on the foundry floor. Vespasian pointed toward the cru-cible operator. "Hope to Jesus Billy up there figure out his job before he kill somebody. Ain't happened yet, but he come too damn close a couple times."

"Yeah—one of 'em was me last month." Pinkard jumped side-ways to show how he'd escaped the misplaced stream of metal.

"You was right lively, that's a fact," Vespasian said.

"Damn well had to be." Pinkard shored up the edge of the mold at another place where it looked as if it might give way. "The floor did run smoother before the war, and that's a fact, too."

Vespasian didn't answer. He hadn't been on the foundry floor before the war. Back then, Negroes had fed the furnaces and done other jobs that took strong backs and no brains, but the better po-sitions had been in white hands. Jeff's partner then had been his next-door neighbor and best friend, Bedford Cunningham.

But the war had sucked white men into the Confederate Army. The CSA had still needed steel—more steel than ever—to fight the damnyankees.

Negroes started filling night-shift jobs once solely the property of white men, then evening-shift, and then, at last, day-shift, too.

Back then, before he got conscripted himself, Jeff hadn't wanted to work alongside a black man. He'd done it, though, for the sake of his country.

Bedford Cunningham had come back to Birmingham without an arm. A lot of other steel men had come back as invalids. A lot more, like

Herb Wallace, hadn't come back at all.

And so even now, with the war over for half a year, Negroes remained in some of the places they had taken during the war: they'd gained experience. Pinkard couldn't argue against experi-ence, not when he'd just been griping about Billy. And Ves-pasian, who was in his forties, didn't get uppity the way a lot of younger blacks did. As far as the work went, he made a good enough partner. Jeff still felt uncomfortable working beside him.

He didn't quit. He'd have felt a lot more uncomfortable unem-ployed.

Steel was all he knew. If he got a job at another foundry, he had no guarantee he wouldn't be working with another Negro, and one harder to get along with than Vespasian. He didn't care to move out of S loss company housing, either (though he wished he didn't live next door to Bedford any more). He endured.

He never once wondered what Vespasian thought of working next to him.

At shift-changing time, the steam whistle blew a blast that cut through the rest of the din on the floor like a hot knife through pork fat. "See you in the mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," Vespasian said.

"Yeah," Jeff answered. "See you."

They clocked out separately, and left the enormous foundry building separately, too. It wasn't the way it had been, when Pinkard and Bedford had sometimes gone home to their side-by-side yellow cottages with their arms draped over each other's shoulders. Vespasian didn't have a yellow cottage. His cabin was painted primer red, which was cheaper.

Some of the white men going home waved to Pinkard, as did a couple coming onto the evening shift. He waved back. He was always glad to see familiar faces. He didn't see that many. Shift changes reminded him how little remained the same as it had been in 1914. Being reminded hurt.

His breath smoked as he hurried home. They'd had snow the week before, which wasn't common in Birmingham. On top of everything else, it had been a hard winter. The grass was yellow-brown and dead. Somebody sneezed not far from Jeff. He hoped it was from a cold, or from a tickling mustache hair. The Spanish influenza was killing men who'd lived through all the bullets the damnyankees aimed at them—

and killing their wives and mothers and children, too.

In spite of the cold, Fanny Cunningham was standing in front of her house, gossiping with the woman who lived on the other side of her from the Pinkards. She waved to Jeff as he walked by. He waved back, calling,

"How's Bedford doing?"

"Right good," she answered. "He's been cheerful the whole day through."

"Glad to hear it," Pinkard said. He was especially glad to hear Fanny had had her husband under her eye the whole day through.

She said, "You don't come over like you used to, Jeff. Bed-ford'd be powerful pleased to see more of you."

Jefferson Pinkard didn't answer that. He waved again, almost— but not quite—as if to say he'd think about it, then headed up the walk to his own cottage. He hesitated before opening the door. He had to do it, though, if he intended to go inside. When at last he did, the savory smell of stewing pork made his mouth water.

"That you, darlin'?" Emily called from the kitchen.

"It's me, all right," Jeff said.

Emily came out, a smile on her face. She had a barmaid's good looks and a barmaid's good buxom figure and hair of a bright shade somewhere between red and gold. Now that she wasn't working in a munitions plant any longer, she was letting it grow out. Now that she was out of the plant, too, the jaundice working with cordite had given her was gone, leaving her rosy and altogether desirable.

Jeff took her in his arms. She pulled his face down to hers. Her lips were greedy against his. She'd always been greedy for loving. When Jeff hadn't been there to give it to her. .. That was when he'd become a less than happy man.

"What did you do today?" he asked her after they broke apart.

"Usual kinds of things," she answered. "Did my cleaning. Did my cooking.

Went out and bought me some cloth to make a dress with." She

nodded toward the sewing machine in a corner of the front room. Then she stuck out a hip, tilted her head a little, and looked at him sidelong. "Thought about you. Thought about you a lot, Jeff."

"Did you?" he said.

Emily nodded, batting her eyelashes. She played the role of seductress to the hilt. That didn't mean Jeff failed to respond to it. The collarless neck of his shirt suddenly felt like a choker. Some evenings, supper turned out to be later than he expected when he walked through the door.

"Did—?" That was the question Jeff knew he shouldn't ask. *Did you see Bedford Cunningham today?* If he wanted to let the poison seep out of their marriage instead of putting more in, he couldn't keep harping on that.

He changed course in midstream: "Did we have any more beer in the icebox?"

Alabama had gone dry not long before the war. What that meant, Pinkard had found, was that you had to know somebody before you could buy beer or whiskey, and that the quality of the stuff you could buy, especially the whiskey, had gone down. He'd evidently managed to ask the question without perceptible pause, for Emily nodded again. "Sure do," she said.

"Couple bottles. Shall we have 'em with the stew? It ought to be just about ready."

"That sounds pretty good," Jeff said. Supper, for the moment, was more on his mind than going back to the bedroom. He found another question that wasn't dangerous, or wasn't dangerous that way: "What did you pay for the cloth?"

Now Emily's blue eyes flashed with fury, not any more tender emotion.

"Dollar and a half a yard. Can you believe it?" she said. "I wasn't buying fancy silk taffeta, Jeff. I know we ain't rich. It wasn't anything but printed cotton dress percale, like I used to get before the war for eleven cents a yard. Wasn't as nice as what I could get then, neither."

He sighed; he'd feared the answer would be something like that. "They haven't bumped my pay in a bit," he said. "Don't know when they'll do it again." His laugh held fury, too. "Here I am, making more money

than I ever reckoned I would in all my born days, and I can't even keep my head above water. That ain't right, Em. That purely ain't right. And hellfire, the little bit we'd stashed away in the bank before the war—what'll it buy us now? Not what we hoped it would, that's certain sure."

His wife didn't argue. Instead, she went into the kitchen, pulled the cork from a bottle of beer, and brought it out to him. "Here," she said. "Won't make things better, but it'll make 'em *look* better for a spell." While Jeff took a long pull, she got the other bottle for herself.

Things did look a little better after some beer. Getting some pork stew under his belt made Pinkard more charitably inclined toward the world, too.

It even made him more charitably inclined toward Emily. He hadn't married her for any other reason than getting her drawers down, but she'd shown him some others in the years since they tied the knot.

While she washed the supper dishes, he read yesterday's news-paper by the light of a kerosene lamp. Kerosene was heading through the roof, too, especially since the Yankees weren't going to let go of Sequoyah, from which the Confederate States had drawn a great part of their oil.

A story caught his eye. "Look here," he said to Emily when she came out of the kitchen, drying her hands on a towel. "They had themselves a riot in Richmond: folks saying we're sell-ing ourselves down the river to the USA.

We're sure as hell selling ourselves down the river to somebody. Dollar and a half a yard for cotton! That kind of thing means we need to get our-selves set to rights, but I'm hanged if I know how."

"I don't want you hanged, Jeff, sweetheart, but I like the way you're hung,"

Emily said. She cared nothing for politics. Sweep-ing the newspaper aside, she sat down on her husband's lap. His arms went around her. One hand closed on her breast. She sighed in his ear, her breath warm and moist. He knew she wanted him. He'd never stopped wanting her, even when. . .. That hand squeezed tight. Emily whimpered a little, but only a little.

Later, in the bedroom, she whimpered in a different way, and gasped

and moaned and thrashed and clawed. Sated, sinking toward sleep, Jeff slowly nodded. She wanted him, all right—no doubt of that. But whom would she want when his back was turned? He drifted off, wondering, wondering.

Nellie Semphroch woke with a start to find a man in her bed: a gray-haired fellow with a bushy mustache. The reason she woke, and woke with a start, was not hard to find, for he was snoring like a sawmill.

As her racing heart slowed toward its normal rhythm, she re-laxed and let out a small sigh. Here she'd been married since be-fore the turn of the year, and she still wasn't used to sleeping with her husband. She wasn't used to thinking of herself by her new name, either. She'd worn the one Edna's father had given her for a good many years—most of them without him, as he'd died when his daughter was little, and Edna wasn't little any more.

"One of the few decent things he ever did," Nellie muttered. Then, softly, she repeated her new name to herself, over and over: "Nellie Jacobs.

Nellie Jacobs. Nellie *Jacobs?* She hadn't had so much trouble the first time she was married. That lay a quarter of a century in the past, though. She was more set in her ways now. "Nellie Jacobs."

Hal Jacobs grunted and rolled over toward her. His eyes opened. Did he look a little confused, too, as if wondering where he was? He'd been a widower for a long time, as she'd been a widow, and had grown used to fending for himself. The room in which he'd lived, above the cobbler's shop across the street from her coffeehouse in Washington, D.C., was aridly neat.

Then, seeing her, he smiled. "Good morning, my dear Nellie," he said, leaning over to kiss her on the cheek. He did that every morning they woke up together.

"Good morning, Hal," Nellie said. Her husband, though far from young, remained very much the enchanted new bridegroom. Nellie wasn't so young as she wished she were, either. For her part, she remained bemused she'd ever agreed to marry him.

His hand slid along under the covers and came to rest on the curve of her hip. "You have made me the happiest man in the world," he declared.

He *was* sweet. Because he was sweet, Nellie had never told him how

much she disliked having a man reach out and touch her like that. He wasn't young. He didn't seek his marital rights all that often. When he did, she had no trouble getting through it. She'd got through far worse back in her own younger days.

He wanted to please her. She let him think he did. Once or twice, he really had come close, which surprised her. She'd thought that part of her dead forever, not that it had ever had much life.

She threw off the wool blankets. She wore a thick flannel nightgown and long underwear beneath it, but she was still cold. She'd been cold for months. "When will this winter end?" she asked, though that was not a question her husband could answer.

Hal Jacobs got out of bed, too. He also had on long Johns under a nightshirt, and he also looked cold. "It has been a hard one," he agreed.

"March and no sign of letup. And it has to be making the influenza epidemic worse."

They both dressed rapidly. Nellie said, "I hate the influenza. It makes people afraid to go out in crowds, and that's bad for business."

"With so much snow on the street, they have trouble getting about anyhow," Hal said. "This will not keep me from enjoy-ing a cup of your wonderful coffee, though, or I hope not, Mrs. Jacobs."

"I think we can probably take care of something like that, Mr. Jacobs,"

Nellie said. She'd always liked his old-fashioned, al-most Old World, sense of courtesy. Now that they were married, she found herself imitating it.

They went downstairs together. Edna, whose room was across the hall, joined them a few minutes later. They all stuck close to the stove, which heated the kitchen area as well as water for coffee.

Sipping at his steaming cup, Hal Jacobs let out a grateful sigh.

He looked from Nellie to Edna and back again. "My beautiful wife and her beautiful daughter," he said, beaming. "Yes, I am a lucky man "

Edna glanced over to her mother. "You better keep him happy, Ma. He sure does talk pretty."

"Foosh," Nellie said. She and Edna did look alike, with long faces, brown hair, and very fair skin. She didn't think she was par-ticularly beautiful. Edna made a pretty young woman. She smiled more than Nellie did, which made her look more pleasant—but then, she was looking for a man. Nellie's opinion was that the joys of having even a good one were overrated, but Edna paid as little attention to Nellie's opinions as she could get away with.

A customer came in and ordered a fried-egg sandwich to go with his coffee. He was young and moderately handsome, with a brown Kaiser Bill mustache whose upthrust points were waxed to formidable perfection.

Edna took care of him before Nellie could. That might have been funny, were it happening for the first time. Having seen it throughout the war, Nellie was sick and tired of it.

She made eggs for herself and her husband, too—after so many years as a widow, she found the idea of having a husband very strange. When Hal had eaten, he said, "I'm going to go across the street and get some things done." He chuckled. "Can't have folks say my wife does all the work in the family, now can I?"

"Not when it isn't true," Nellie said. "Go upstairs and get your overcoat, though, before you set foot outdoors." Jacobs nodded and headed for the stairs.

Edna laughed. "There you go, Ma! You're telling him what to do like you've been married twenty years." Nellie made a face at her, and not a happy one. Jacobs laughed again going upstairs. That was luck, nothing else. He could as easily have grown angry at the idea of being ordered about.

Well bundled, he walked across the snowy street and opened the cobbler's shop. He wouldn't get much business today. He had to know it, too. The shop was part of his routine, though, as run-ning the coffeehouse was part of Nellie's. She was glad he kept his independence and let her keep hers.

A barrel with a bulldozer blade welded to the prow rumbled down the street, pushing snow aside—and up onto the sidewalk, making the drifts higher and making it even harder for people to come into the coffeehouse or the cobbler's shop. The barrel driver cared nothing about that. Having been occupied by the Confederates for more than two and a half years and then devas-tated in the U.S. reconquest,

Washington remained under martial law with the war months over.

Trucks roared by in the barrel's wake: it was for them that the bigger, heavier machine had cleared a path. Rubble filled their beds. Had rubble been gold, Washington would have spawned a rush to make the stampede to California seem as nothing beside it. But it wasn't gold. It was only rubble. It had to be disposed of, not sought out.

When Nellie opened the front door to take a cup of coffee to Hal, she found she couldn't, not without shoveling her way to the street. By the time she and Edna did the shoveling, the coffee was cold. She poured it out, got a fresh one, and took it across the street. Then she discovered she had to shovel her way into her husband's shop. That meant another trip back for coffee that was hot. Some of the things she said about the U.S.

government were less than complimentary.

Her husband was fixing a soldier's boot when she finally came in. The only difference between 1918 and 1916 was that it was a U.S., not a Confederate, boot. "Coffee? How nice. How thought-ful," he said. His eyes twinkled. "And what do you hear in the coffeehouse that might interest an old shoemaker, eh?"

Nellie laughed. He hadn't just been a shoemaker during the war. He'd been part of a spy ring keeping tabs on what the Con-federates did in and around Washington. He'd helped Nellie get coffee and food when they were scarce and hard to come by. Since she had them, her place had been popular among Confed-erate officers and homegrown collaborators. In turn, she'd passed on what she overheard to him.

She had an Order of Remembrance. First Class, straight from the hands of Theodore Roosevelt because of that. Edna had an Order of Remembrance, Second Class, which was richly unde-served: she'd been on the point of marrying a Confederate of-ficer when he died in a U.S.

artillery barrage. So far as Nellie knew, Hal had no decorations of his own.

That struck her as dreadfully unfair, but he'd never once said a word about it where she could hear.

Nor did he now. He drank the coffee quickly, savoring the warmth she'd had to work so hard to get him. Then he remarked, "If you look over there, you'll see they are building the Wash-ington Monument a

little higher now."

She looked out the window. Before the war, she would have been able to see only the tip of the monument over the buildings between it and the shop. Rebel bombardment and U.S. counter-attacks had truncated the white stone obelisk. She could still see more of it now than she'd seen before the war, because the fighting had also leveled most of the buildings formerly in the way.

Hal said, "I hear they're starting to rebuild the White House and the Capitol, too "

"They'll be pretty," Nellie said. "Past that, I don't know why anybody would bother. They'll just get blown up again when the next war comes, and I can't see the president and Congress coming down from Philadelphia, can you?"

"To spend all their time here, the way they used to do?" Hal Jacobs shook his head. "No. Not when we are still so close to Virginia, even though the USA will hold the land down to the Rappahannock. But maybe to come down for ceremonial ses-sions: that, yes. That I could see."

"I suppose you may be right," Nellie said after a little thought. "Teddy Roosevelt *is* the sort to enjoy ruffles and flourishes, no doubt about that.

He'd love to make the Rebs grind their teeth, too. They were going on about how Washington would be theirs forever. Reckon they didn't know everything there is to know."

"They were wrong," her husband agreed. "They will pay the price for being wrong. But we have paid a great price because they were wrong, too.

I hope that will never happen again."

"Oh, I hope so, too," Nellie said. "I hope so with all my heart. But when I said people wouldn't come back to the White House and the Capitol on account of they'd get blown up in the next war, I didn't hear you telling me I was wrong."

"We have fought three wars against the Confederate States," Hal said. "I hope we do not fight a fourth one. I pray we do not fight a fourth one. A man should plan by what he has seen, though, not by what he hopes and prays.

The older I get, the more certain I am this is true ."

Nellie studied him. No, he wasn't handsome. No, he didn't make her heart flutter. And yet, as she had seen during the war and as she saw even more strongly now, he had a core of solid good sense that was altogether admirable. She did admire it, and him.

She hadn't been looking for anyone to make her heart flutter. That was for people Edna's age. Good sense, though—good sense lasted. The older Nellie got herself, the plainer that became.

She smiled at her new husband. It was the most wifely smile she'd ever given him. It was also the smile of someone beginning to realize she'd made a good bargain after all.

John Oglethorpe came up to Scipio as the Negro was clearing dishes off a table a customer had just left. The restaurant owner coughed. Scipio knew what that sort of cough meant: Ogle-thorpe was about to say something he only half wanted to say. Scipio could make a good guess about what it was, too.

His guess wasn't just good. It turned out to be right. After clear-ing his throat a couple more times, Oglethorpe said, "You've done a right good job for me here, Xerxes. I want you to know I mean that."

"I thanks you very much, suh," Scipio answered. Xerxes was the name he'd used since escaping the collapsing Congaree So-cialist Republic and making his way across South Carolina to Augusta, Georgia. In his proper persona, he had a hefty price on his head, though Georgia worried more about its own black Reds on the loose than about those from other states.

"You've been just about as good a waiter as Aurelius, matter of fact,"

Oglethorpe went on. The other Negro had conveniently put himself out of sight and earshot. Oglethorpe coughed yet again. "But him and me, we go back years, and I ain't got enough business to keep two waiters busy any more, not with so much of the war work closed down, I ain't."

"You's lettin' me go," Scipio said. The dialect of the Congaree was slow and thick as molasses. Scipio could speak far better formal English than his boss—years of training to be the perfect butler at Marshlands had forced him to learn—but that wouldn't help now. It was likely to make things worse, in fact.

Oglethorpe nodded. "Hate to do it, like I say, but I've got to keep my own head above water first. You on the trail of another job waitin' tables, you tell whoever's thinking about hiring you to talk to me. You're a brick, and I'll say so."

"That right kind o' you, Mistuh Oglethorpe," Scipio said. "You been a good boss." He was, on the whole, sincere. Ogle-thorpe expected his help to work like mules, but he worked like a mule himself. Scipio had no complaints about that. Fair was fair.

Digging in his wallet, Oglethorpe peeled off brown bank-notes. "It's Wednesday today, but I'm pay in' you till the end of the week. Couple extra days of money never did anybody any harm."

That was more than fair. "Thank you kindly, suh," Scipio said. He counted the money, frowned, and counted it again. He took out a banknote and thrust it at the man who ran the restaurant. "Even if you is payin' till the end o' the week, you done give me twenty dollars too much."

"Keep it." Oglethorpe looked annoyed that he'd noticed. "Ain't like it was twenty dollars before the war. Money was worth somethin' in those days.

Now—hell, look at you. You got all that money in your hand there, and you ain't rich. What kind of world is it when you can be standin' there with all that cash, and you got to worry about—" He checked himself. "No, you don't have to worry about where your next meal is comin' from. You get on back here with me."

Scipio got. His boss hacked off a couple of slices of egg bread, yellow as the sun, then put them around a slab of ham that would have choked a boa constrictor. He added pickles and mustard, gave Scipio the monster sandwich, and stood there with hands on hips till he'd eaten it.

"I gets me a new job, I comes back here to eat," Scipio declared.

"Want another one?" Oglethorpe asked, reaching for the bread again.

Scipio shook his head and, belly bulging, managed to make his escape.

Only when he was out on the streets of Au-gusta did he wish he'd taken the restaurant owner up on his generosity. A sandwich like that kept a man's belly from com-plaining for most of a day

Augusta had a shabby, run-down look to it these days. From things he'd heard, Scipio suspected the whole Confederacy had a shabby, run-down look to it these days. A lot of men, white and black, were walking along not quite aimlessly, looking for any-thing that might be work. As Oglethorpe had said, the factories that had boomed during the war—cotton mills, brickworks, fer-tilizer plants, canneries—were booming no more.

More than a few men remained in their uniforms, though the war had been over since the summer before and spring wasn't far away. Most of the whites who still wore draggled butternut looked to be wearing it because they had nothing better to put on. The Negroes in uniform, though, might have been in business suits. They were advertising that they had served their country, as plainly as if they carried sandwich boards, and were hoping that would help them land work. What sort of place the Confederate States were going to give their black veterans remained to be seen.

Scipio headed east along Telfair toward the Terry, the colored district in Augusta. Somebody was holding a rally in May Park. a couple of blocks south of Telfair; he saw waving flags from the corner of Telfair and Elbert.

He didn't really need to go back to his room: he was, at the moment, a gentleman of leisure. He wan-dered down toward the park to find out what was going on.

The flags were Confederate flags. They flew at the edge of the street to draw people toward the rally—as they'd succeeded in drawing Scipio —and fluttered in a mild breeze on and beside the platform on which the speaker stood. Behind the fellow was a sign that did not look to have been painted by a professional. It read, FREEDOM PARTY.

What was the Freedom Party? Whatever it was, Scipio had never heard of it before. No one at Anne Colleton's elegant dinner parties had ever mentioned it, so far as he recalled. Of course, he hadn't paid that much attention to politics, at least till he'd been dragooned into the leadership of the Congaree So-cialist Republic. Why should he have? He couldn't vote; the Confederate States didn't recognize him as a citizen. Maybe this new outfit would help make things better.

And maybe it wouldn't, too. The skinny fellow up there on the platform was long on complaints: "Aren't our generals pretty in their fancy uniforms?

Wouldn't you have liked it better if they'd had any notion how to fight the goddamn war? Wouldn't you have liked 'em better if they weren't in the damnyankees' pockets?"

Scipio blinked at that. Generals had occasionally visited Marsh-lands. He knew good and well they'd done everything they knew how to do to beat the United States. They hadn't known enough, but they'd tried.

Most of the men in the crowd looked to be either white vet-erans or men who'd had wartime factory jobs and had no jobs now. They'd never seen any generals, except perhaps whizzing by in fancy motorcars. When this loudmouthed madman ranted about traitors in high places in Richmond, they ate it up and shouted for more.

And he gave them more, saying, "And if the goddamn gen-erals weren't traitors and fools, how come they sat there with their thumbs up their asses while the niggers plotted up the biggest goddamn rebellion in the history of the world? Were they blind, or did they shut their eyes on purpose? Either which way, throw 'em on the rubbish heap, every stinking one of'em."

"That's right!" voices in the crowd said. "Tell it!" As far as they were concerned, the speaker might have been one of the colored preachers who went around the plantations testifying to the power of the Lord. These battered white men responded the way colored fieldhands, as oppressed a group as was ever born, did when the preacher started going strong.

"And we'd have whipped the damnyankees— *whipped* 'em, I tell you— if the niggers hadn't risen up," the man from the Freedom Party shouted. He believed every word he was saying; Scipio could hear conviction jangling in his voice. "They stabbed us—they stabbed our country—in the back. Get rid of the traitor niggers and the traitor generals and I'll tell you, we'd have been past Philadelphia and heading for New York City!" He pumped his fist in the air.

His audience pumped their fists in the air, too. Scipio stood only on the outermost fringes of the audience. By the glares coming his way, he suddenly realized even that was much too close to the platform. He made himself scarce before anybody decided pounding him into the ground would be a good way to settle lunch.

Behind him, the crowd erupted in more cheers. He didn't turn around to find out why. He suspected he'd be happier not know-ing. Once he got back inside the Terry—local colored dialect for *Territory*—he felt

better.

Being surrounded by black faces eased the alarm he'd felt at the Freedom Party rally.

Not all white men were like that shouting would-be politician. Scipio patted his hip pocket, where the money John Oglethorpe had given him rested.

Oglethorpe was as good as they came, black or white. Even Anne Colleton didn't scare Scipio the way he'd been scared in May Park. Miss Anne wanted to go on run-ning things, and she wanted revenge on the people who'd killed her brother and gutted Marshlands and almost killed her. That made sense to Scipio, even if it had put him in hot water. The fellow on the platform. ..

"Ain't gwine think about he no more," Scipio muttered. That was easy to say. It wasn't so easy to do.

He stuck his head into every little hole-in-the-wall cafe and cookshop he passed, to see if anybody was looking for help. Even if a waiter didn't get paid a whole lot, he didn't go hungry, not if his boss had so much as a particle of heart. Waiting tables was easier than factory work, too, not that any factory work was out there these days.

He didn't find any restaurant jobs in the Terry, either. He would have been surprised if he had. Half of these joints didn't have any waiters at all: the fellow at the stove did everything else, too. At a lot of the other places, the waiter looked to be the cook's son or brother or cousin. Still, you never could tell. If you didn't bet, how were you going to win?

The Terry had even more places to get a drink than it did places to get food. Scipio was tempted to stick his head into one of them, too, not to look for work but to find somewhere he could kill an afternoon over a mug of beer or two. In the end, he stayed out. Unless a man had silver to spend, beer cost three or four dol-lars a mug even in the dingiest dive. Without a job at the mo-ment, Scipio didn't care to throw his banknotes around like that.

He ended up back at his roominghouse. The landlady gave him a fishy stare. A working man who unexpectedly showed up long before quitting time couldn't figure on anything else. The landlady didn't say anything. She didn't need to. If Scipio was late with his rent, he'd end up on the sidewalk, and everything he owned—not that that

amounted to much—out there with him. He was paid up till the end of the week, and he had plenty for the next week's rent.

He hoped he wouldn't have to worry past then. He'd never be-fore had trouble finding a job. That cheered him, till he remem-bered he hadn't looked for one since the war ended. Everybody was scrambling for work now.

He went upstairs. The furniture in his room was no better than could be expected in a Terry roominghouse, but he kept the place spotlessly clean.

The books on the battered bookshelf were his. He pulled out a beat-up abridgement of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and read with a smile on his face of the Moorish con-quest of the blond Visigoths of Spain.

General George Armstrong Custer was not a happy man. "God damn it to hell and gone, Lieutenant Colonel," he shouted, "I don't want to go back to Philadelphia. I'm perfectly content to stay here in Nashville."

"I'm sorry, sir," Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling said. Custer's adjutant was in fact a good deal less than devastated, but knew better than to show it. "The telegram just now came in. I'm afraid it leaves you little room for discretion."

"I don't want to go back to Philadelphia," Custer repeated. He *had* scant discretion. Once set on a course, he kept on it, and derailing him commonly took the rhetorical equivalent of dy-namite. He'd been stubborn and hard-charging for more than seventy-eight years; no wire from the War Department would make him change his ways. Abner Dowling was convinced noth-ing would make him change his ways.

"Sir," Dowling said, "I suspect they want to honor you. You are, after all, the senior soldier in the United States Army."

"Don't pour the soft soap on me, even if you're shaped like a barrel of it,"

Custer growled. His description of Dowling's phy-sique was, unfortunately, accurate, although he was hardly the dashing young cavalryman himself these days. He tapped at the four stars on the shoulder of his fancy—as fancy as regulations permitted, and then some—uniform. "Took me long enough to make full general, by God. When I think of the fools and whipper-snappers promoted ahead of me ... I could weep, Lieutenant Colonel, I could just weep."

Custer's slow promotion had also meant Dowling's slow pro-motion.

Custer never thought of such things, nor that calling a fat man fat to his face might wound his feelings. Custer thought of Custer, first, last, and always.

Dowling scratched at his mustache, in lieu of reaching out and punching the distinguished general commanding the U.S. First Army right in the nose.

He took a deep breath and said, "Sir, they may have taken a while to recognize your heroism, but they've gone and done it."

In an odd sort of way, he was even telling the truth. As with the rest of his life, Custer knew only one style of fighting: straight-ahead slugging. First Army had paid a gruesome toll for that aggressiveness as it slogged its way south through western Ken-tucky and northern Tennessee.

When Custer saw his first barrel, he'd wanted to mass the trav-eling forts and beat his Confederate opponents over the head with them, too. War Department doctrine dictated otherwise. Custer had ignored War Department doctrine (lying about it along the way, and making Dowling lie, too), assembled his bar-rels exactly as he wanted to, hurled them at the Rebs—and broken through. Other U.S. armies using the same tactics had broken through, too. If that didn't make him a hero, what did?

If he'd failed . . . if he'd failed, he would have been retired. And Dowling?

Dowling would probably be a first lieutenant in charge of all the battleship refueling depots in Montana and Wyoming. He knew what a narrow escape they'd had. Custer didn't even suspect it. He could be very naive.

He could also be very canny. "I know why they're calling me to Philadelphia," he said, leaning toward his adjutant so he could speak in a conspiratorial whisper. "They're going to put me out to pasture, that's what they're going to do."

"Oh, I hope not, sir," Dowling lied loyally. He'd fought the good fight for a lot of years, keeping Custer as close to military reality as he could. If he didn't have to do that any more, the War Department would give him something else to do. Anything this side of latrine duty looked more pleasant.

"I won't let them," Custer said. "I'll go to the newspapers, that's what *I'll* do." Dowling was sure he would, too. Publicity was meat and drink to him.

He might even win his fight. He'd won many of them in his time.

All that was for the moment beside the point, though. "Sir, you are ordered to report in Philadelphia no later than Sunday, twenty-first April.

That's day after tomorrow, sir. They've laid on a special Pullman car for you and Mrs. Custer, with a berth in the next car for me. You don't have to take that particular train, but it would be a comfortable way to get there." Dowling was, and needed to be, skilled at the art of cajolery.

Custer sputtered and fumed through his peroxided mustache. He did know how to take orders—most of the time. "Libbie would like going that way," he said, as if to give himself an ex-cuse for yielding. Dowling nodded, partly from policy, partly from agreement. Custer's wife *would* like going that way, and would also approve of his acquiescence. But then, Elizabeth Bacon Custer, in Dowling's view, had more brains in her finger-nail than her illustrious husband did in his head.

The train proved splendid. Dowling wondered if the Pullmans and dining car had been borrowed from a wealthy capitalist to transport Custer in splendor—and he himself got only a reflec-tion of the splendor Custer had to be enjoying to the fullest. As he ate another bite of beefsteak in port-wine sauce, he reflected that life could have been worse.

A brass band waited on the platform as the locomotive pulled into the Broad Street station—and not just any brass band, but one led by John Philip Sousa. Next to the band stood Theodore Roosevelt. Dowling watched Custer's face when he saw the presi-dent. The two men had been rivals since they'd combined to drive the British out of Montana Territory at the end of the Second Mexican War. Each thought the other had got more credit than he deserved—they'd quarreled about it in Nashville, as the Great War was ending.

Now, though, Roosevelt bared his large and seemingly very numerous teeth in a grin of greeting. "Welcome to Philadelphia, General!" he boomed, and advanced to take Custer's hand as the band blared out "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and photo-graphic flashes went off like

artillery rounds. "I trust you will do me the honor of riding with me at the head of the Remembrance Day parade tomorrow."

Dowling could not remember the last time he had seen George Custer speechless, but Custer was speechless now, speechless for half a minute.

Then, at last, he took Roosevelt's hand in his and huskily whispered, "Thank you, Mr. President." Beside him, Libbie (who thought even less of Roosevelt than he did) dropped the president a curtsy.

And Abner Dowling felt something that might almost have been a tear in his eye. Roosevelt had done Custer honor, not the other way round.

President Blaine had instituted Remem-brance Day at the close of the Second Mexican War as a memo-rial to the humiliation of the United States by their foes. It had always been a day of mourning and lamentation and looking ahead to fights unwon.

And now the fight was over, and it had been won. Instead of lying prostrate in defeat, the United States stood triumphant. With Remembrance Day come round again, the country could see that all the sacrifices its citizens had made for so many years were not in vain. Flags wouldn't fly upside down in distress any more.

Custer asked, "Mr. President, where will you seat my wife? That I have come to this moment is in no small measure due to her."

"Thank you, Autie," Libbie said. Dowling thought Custer dead right in his assessment. He hadn't thought Custer perceptive enough to realize the truth in what he said. Every once in a while, the old boy could be surprising.

Trouble was, so many of the sur-prises proved alarming.

"I had in mind placing her in the motorcar directly behind ours," Roosevelt answered, "and putting your adjutant with her, if that be satisfactory to you all. Lieutenant Colonel Dowling has given his country no small service."

Dowling came to stiff attention and saluted. "Thank you very much, sir!"

His heart felt about to burst with pride.

"The people will want to look at the general and the president, so I am

perfectly content to ride behind," Libbie said. In public, she always put Custer and his career ahead of his own desires. In private, as Dowling had seen, she kept a wary eye on Custer be-cause his own eye, even at his advanced age, had a tendency to wander.

"Good. That's settled." Roosevelt liked having things settled especially his way. "We'll put you folks up for the night, and then tomorrow morning. ..

tomorrow morning, General—"

Custer presumed to interrupt his commander-in-chief: "To-morrow morning, Mr. President, we celebrate our revenge on the world!" It was a typically grandiose Custerian phrase, the one difference being that Custer, this time, was inarguably right. Theo-dore Roosevelt laughed and nodded and clapped his hands with glee. The victory the United States had won looked to be big enough to help heal even this longtime estrangement.

Up until the war, the Hindenburg Hotel had been called the Lafayette.

Whatever you called it, it was luxury beyond any Dow-ling had ever known, surpassing the train on which he'd come to Philadelphia to the same degree the train surpassed a typical wartime billet. He feasted on lobster, drank champagne, bathed in a tub with golden faucets, plucked a fine Habana from a hu-midor on the dresser, and slept on smooth linen and soft down. There were, he reflected as he drifted toward that splendid sleep, people who lived this life all the time. It was enough to make a man wish he were one of the elect—either that, or to make him a Socialist.

The next morning, he was whisked along with the Custers on a whirlwind inspection of the units that would take part in the parade. He endured rather than enjoying most of the inspection: he'd seen his share of soldiers. But some of the barrels and their crews were from the First Army brigade Colonel Morrell had as-sembled and commanded. They greeted Custer and Dowling with lusty cheers.

Dowling thought those cheers lusty, at any rate, till the pa-rade began and he heard the Philadelphians. Their roar was like nothing he had ever imagined. It was as if they were exorcising more than half a century of shame and disgrace and defeat—Lee had occupied Philadelphia at the end of the War of Secession— in this grandest of all grand moments.

Some women in the crowd looked fierce as they waved their flags—thirty-five stars, now that Kentucky was back in the USA, and the new state of Houston would make it thirty-six on the Fourth of July. God only knew what would happen with Sequoyah and with the land conquered from Canada. Abner Dowling didn't, and didn't worry about it.

Other women, he saw, seemed on the point of ecstasy at what their country had finally achieved. Tears streamed down the faces of old men who remembered all the defeats and embarrass-ments, of boys who hadn't been old enough to go and fight, and of men of fighting age who had given of themselves to make this parade what it was. Even a young man wearing a hook in place of his left hand wept unashamed at this Remembrance Day to be remembered forever.

In the motorcar ahead, Custer and Roosevelt took turns rising to accept the plaudits of the crowd. And the crowd did cheer each time one of them rose. But the crowd would have cheered anyhow. More than anything else, it was cheering itself.

Libbie Custer leaned close to Dowling and said, "Lieutenant Colonel, I thank God that He spared me to see this day and re-joice at what we have done."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and then, half to himself, "And what do we do next?"

III

Having been beached, Roger Kimball, like so many of his com-rades, was making the painful discovery that very little he'd learned at the Confederate Naval Academy in Mobile suited him to making a living in the civilian world. He was a first-rate sub-marine skipper, but there were no civilian submarines. The C.S. Navy was no longer allowed to keep submersibles, either; other-wise, he would have stayed in command of the *Bonefish.*

He had a fine understanding of the workings of large Diesel engines.

That also did him very little good. Outside the Navy, there were next to no large Diesel engines, nor small ones, ei-ther. He understood gasoline and steam engines, too, but so did plenty of other people. None of them seemed willing to sacrifice his own position for

Kimball's sake.

"Miserable bastards, every last one of'em," he muttered as he trudged through the streets of Charleston, South Carolina. Then he laughed at himself. Had he had a steady job, he wouldn't have let go of it, either.

Maybe he should have headed down to South America, as he'd told Anne Colleton he might.

A lot of former Navy men were trudging the streets of Charles-ton these days, most of them overqualified for the jobs that turned up—when any jobs turned up, which wasn't often. Kim-ball kept money in his pocket partly because he wasn't too proud for any kind of work that came along—having grown up on a hardscrabble farm in Arkansas, he was no pampered Confed-erate aristocrat—and partly because he was a damn fine poker player.

He walked into a saloon called the Ironclad. "Let me have a beer," he told the barkeep, and laid a ten-dollar banknote on the bar.

He got back a beer and three dollars. Sighing, he laid some briny sardellen on a slice of cornbread from the free-lunch counter and gobbled them down. Pickled in brine, the little minnows were so salty, they couldn't help raising a thirst. He sipped the beer, and had to fight the urge to gulp it down and immediately order another. Provoking just that response was the free lunch's *raison d'etre.*

A couple of men farther down the bar were talking, one of them also nursing a beer, the other with a whiskey in front of him. Kimball paid them only scant attention for a bit, but then began to listen more closely. He emptied his schooner and walked over to the fellow who was drinking whiskey. "You wouldn't by any chance be from the United States, would you?" he asked. His harsh Arkansas drawl made it very plain he was not.

He was looking for a *yes* and a fight. As the man on the bar stool turned to size him up, he realized the fight might not be so easy. He was a little heavier and a little younger than the other man, but the fellow owned a pair of the steeliest gray eyes he'd ever seen. If he got in a brawl, those eyes warned he wouldn't quit till he'd either won or got knocked cold.

And then his friend laughed and said, "Jesus, Clarence, swear to God I'm gonna have to stop taking you out in public if you don't quit talking that way."

"It's the way I talk," the man with the hard eyes—Clarence— said. He turned back to Kimball. "No, whoever the hell you are, I am not a damnyankee. I sound the way I sound because I went to college up at Yale.

Clarence Potter, ex-major, Army of North-ern Virginia, at your service —and if you don't like it, I'll spit in your eye."

Kimball felt foolish. He'd felt foolish before; he expected he'd feel foolish again. He gave his own name, adding, "Ex-commander, C.S. Navy, submersibles," and stuck out his hand.

Potter took it. "That explains why you wanted to wipe the floor with a Yankee, anyhow. Sorry I can't oblige you." He threw a lazy punch in the direction of his friend. "And this creature here is Jack Delamotte. You have to forgive him; he's retarded— only an ex-first lieutenant, Army of Northern Virginia."

"I won't hold it against him," Kimball said. "Pleased to meet the both of you. I'd be happy to buy you fresh drinks." He wouldn't be happy to do it, but it would make amends for mis-taking Potter for someone from north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

"I'm pleased to meet damn near anybody who'll buy me a drink,"

Delamotte said. He was a big, fair-haired fellow who sounded as if he was from Alabama or Mississippi. He kicked the bar stool next to him. "Why don't you set yourself down again, and maybe we'll get around to buying you one, too."

Being closer to Clarence Potter, Kimball sat beside him. The bartender served up two more beers and another whiskey. Kim-ball raised his schooner on high. "To hell with the United god-damn States of America!"

Potter and Delamotte both drank: no Confederate officer cut loose from his country's service in the aftermath of defeat could refuse that toast. The ex-major who talked like a Yankee and looked like a tough professor offered a toast of his own: "To get-ting the Confederate goddamn States of America back on their feet!"

That too was unexceptionable. After drinking to it, Kimball found himself with an empty schooner. He wasn't drunk, not on two beers, but he was intensely and urgently thoughtful. He didn't much care for the tenor of his thoughts, either. "How the hell are we supposed to do that?" he demanded.

"The United States are going to be sitting on our neck for the next hundred years."

"No, they won't." Potter shook his head. "We *will* get the chance."

He sounded positive. Roger Kimball was positive, too: posi-tive his new acquaintance was out of his mind. "They made you butternut boys say uncle," he said, which might have come close to starting another fight.

Confederate Navy men, who'd battled their U.S. counterparts to something close to a draw, resented the Army for having to yield. But now, not intending pugnacity, he went on, "Why do you reckon they'll be fools enough to ever let us do anything again?"

"Same question I've been asking him," Delamotte said.

"And I'll give Commander Kimball the same answer I've given you."

Potter seemed to think like a professor, too; he lined up all his ducks in a row. In rhetorical tones, he asked, "Toward what have the United States been aiming ever since the War of Secession, and especially since the Second Mexican War?"

"Kicking us right square in the nuts," Kimball answered. "And now they've finally gone and done it, the bastards." He'd done some nut-kicking of his own, even after the cease-fire. That last, though, was a secret he intended to take to the grave with him.

"Just so," Clarence Potter agreed, emphasizing the point with a forefinger. "Now they've finally gone and done what they've been pointing toward since 1862. Up till now, they *had* a goal, and they worked toward it.

Christ, were they serious about work-ing toward it; you have no notion how serious they were if you've never seen a Remembrance Day parade.

Scared me to death when I was up in Connecticut, believe you me it did.

But now they don't *have* a goal any more; they've *achieved* their goal. Do you see the difference, Commander?"

Before Kimball could answer, Jack Delamotte said, "What I see is, I'm thirsty, and I bet I'm not the only one, either." He or-dered another

round of drinks, then ate some sardellen and lit a cigar almost as pungent as the fish.

After a pull or two at his beer, Kimball said, "Major, I don't follow you.

Suppose their next goal is wiping us out altogether? How in blazes are we supposed to stop 'em?"

"Goals don't work like that, not usually they don't," Potter said. "Once you got to where you always thought you were go-ing, you like to ease back and relax and smoke a cigar—a good cigar, mind you, not a stinking weed like the one Jack's stuffed into his face—and maybe marry a chorus girl, if that's what you reckoned you would do after you made it big."

"So that's what you figure is going to happen, eh?" Kimball chuckled.

"You figure the United States scrimped and saved for so long, and now they'll buy a fancy motorcar and put a beautiful dame in it? Well, I hope you're right, but I'll tell you this much: it won't happen as long as that goddamn Roosevelt is president of the USA. He hates us too much to care about chorus girls."

"I never said it would happen tomorrow," Potter replied. "I said it would happen. Countries live longer than people do." He knocked back his whiskey with a sharp flick of the wrist and or-dered another round.

While the bored man behind the bar was drawing the beers, Jack Delamotte leaned toward Kimball and said, "Now you're going to hear Clarence go on about how we need to find a goal of our own and stick to it like the damnyankees did."

"It's the truth." Potter looked stubborn—and slightly pie-eyed. "If we don't, we'll be second-raters forever."

"Won't see it with the regular politicians," Kimball said with conviction.

"They got us into the swamp, but I'm damned if I reckon they've got even a clue about how to get us out." Neither Potter nor Delamotte argued with him; he would have been as-tonished if they had. He went on, "I heard this skinny fellow on the stump a week or two ago. The Freedom Party, that was the name of his outfit. He wasn't too bad —sounded like he knew what he wanted and how to get there. His name was Feathers, or something like that."

To his surprise, Clarence Potter, who'd struck him as a sour-puss, threw back his head and guffawed. "Featherston," the ex-major said. "Jake Featherston. He's about as likely a politician as a catfish is on roller skates."

"You sound like you know him," Kimball said.

"He commanded a battery in the First Richmond Howitzers through most of the war," Potter answered. "Good fighting man— should have been an officer. But that battery had belonged to Jeb Stuart III, and Jeb, Jr., blamed Featherston when his son got killed. Since Jeb, Jr.'s, a general.

Featherston wouldn't have got past sergeant if he'd stayed in the Army till he died of old age."

Slowly, Kimball nodded. "No wonder he was ranting and raving about the fools in the War Department, then."

"No wonder at all," Potter agreed. "Not that he's wrong about there being fools in the War Department: there are plenty. I was in intelligence; I worked with some and reported to others. But you need to take what Featherston says with a grain of salt about the size of Texas."

"He's got some good ideas about the niggers, though," Kim-ball said. "If they hadn't risen up, we'd still be fighting, by God." He didn't want a grain of salt, not one the size of Texas nor a tiny one, either. He wanted to believe.

He wanted his country strong again, the sooner the better. He didn't care how.

Clarence Potter shook his head. "I doubt it," he said. "A good big man will lick a good little man—not all the time, but that's the way to bet. Once we didn't knock the USA out of the fight in a hurry—once it turned into a grapple—we were going to be in trouble. As I said, I was in intelligence. I know how much they outweighed us." Even with a good deal of whiskey in him, he was dispassionately analytical like a scholar.

Kimball cared for dispassionate analysis only when calcu-lating a torpedo's track. Even then, it was a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The end was action—blowing up a ship. Feather-ston wanted action,

too.

"You know how I can find out more about this Freedom Party?" he asked.

"They've started up an office here in town, I think," Potter an-swered, distaste on his face. "Jake Featherston calls Richmond home, though, and I think the Party does, too "

"Thanks," Kimball said. "Do me a little poking around, I think." He signaled to the bartender. "Set 'em up again, pal."

Cincinnatus Driver—the Negro was getting more and more used to the surname he'd taken the year before—had hoped the war's end would bring peace to Kentucky, and especially to Cov-ington, where he lived. Now here it was the middle of spring, and Covington still knew no peace.

Every day when he left his house to start up the ramshackle truck he'd bought, his wife would say, "Be careful. Watch yourself."

"I will, Elizabeth," he would promise, not in any perfunctory way but with a deep and abiding sense that he was saying some-thing important. He would crank the truck to noisy, shuddering life, climb into the cabin, put the machine in gear, and drive off to hustle as much in the way of hauling business as he could.

He wished he were inside one of the big, snarling White trucks the Army used to carry its supplies. He'd driven a White during the war, hauling goods that got shipped across the Ohio from Cincinnati through Covington and down to the fighting front. The Whites were powerful, they were sturdy, they were, in fact, everything his antiquated Duryea was not. That included expensive, which was why he drove the Duryea and wished for a White.

As he turned right onto Scott from out of the Negro district and drove up toward the wharves this morning, he kept a wary eye open. A good many U.S. soldiers in green-gray uniforms were on the streets. They also looked wary, and carried bayo-neted Springfields, as if ready to start shooting or stabbing at any moment.

They needed to be wary, too. After more than fifty years in the Confederacy, Kentucky was one of the United States again. It was, however, like none of the other United States, in that a large part of the population remained unreconciled to the switch from Stars and Bars to Stars and Stripes.

The city hall had U.S. machine-gun nests around it. Somebody— odds were, a Confederate diehard—had taken a shot at the mayor a couple of weeks before. Cincinnatus wouldn't have been broken-hearted had the malcontent hit him. The mayor cooperated with U.S. authorities, and tried to placate the locals with rabblerousing speeches against blacks.

Blue St. Andrew's crosses, some of them new, marked build-ings and suggested the Confederate battle flag. Two horizontal red stripes with a white one between similarly suggested the Confederate national flag.

Some of those were new, too. The diehards hadn't given up, not by a long chalk, i AIN'T NO YANKEE, someone had written beside one of those not-quite-flags.

New posters marred walls, too, some of them slapped over the pro-Confederate graffiti. The posters were solid red, with broken chains in black stretched across them. The Red uprising had not got so far among the

Negroes

of

Kentucky

as

among

their

brethren

still

in

Confederate-owned territory at its outbreak. But it had not been brutally suppressed here, either. Being a Red wasn't illegal in the USA, even if it was hazardous to a black man's health.

Red posters and blue crosses were both thick around the water-front.

Cincinnatus wondered if the diehards and the Reds had bumped into each other on their clandestine rounds of pasting and painting. Down in the CSA, they would have been deadly foes. Here in Kentucky, they

sometimes reckoned the U.S. government a common enemy. Cincinnatus whistled softly. They sometimes didn't, too.

Both soldiers and police patrolled the wharves. Confederate policemen had commonly worn gray, like soldiers from the War of Secession. Now that Kentucky belonged to the USA, policemen—sometimes the same policemen—wore dark blue, as their grandfathers might have done had they fought for the Stars and Stripes.

And some policemen wore no uniforms at all. Some of the idlers, some of the roustabouts who strode up and down the piers and along the waterfront, were sure to belong to Luther Bliss' Kentucky State Police, an outfit that made Kentucky the only U.S. state with its own secret police force. Cincinnatus knew Luther Bliss better than he wanted to. Knowing Bliss at all was knowing him better than Cincinnatus wanted to; the chief of the State Police made a formidable foe.

Roustabouts were hauling crates and barrels off a barge. Cin-cinnatus braked to a halt: cautiously, as the Duryea didn't like to stop any more than it liked to start. He hopped out of the cab and hurried over to a discontented-looking fellow holding a clip-board. "Mornin', Mr. Simmons,"

he said. "What you got, where's it got to get to, and how fast does it got to be there?"

"Hello, Cincinnatus," the steamboat clerk answered, pointing to some of the barrels. "Got oatmeal here: five for TwitchelPs general store, and another five for Dalyrimple's, and three for Conroy's. You fit all of them in there?" He pointed to Cincin-natus' truck. "Damn tight squeeze, if you do."

"Mr. Simmons, they'll go in there if I got to make one of 'em drive,"

Cincinnatus said, at which the white man laughed. Cin-cinnatus went on,

"Haifa dollar a barrel for haulage, like usual?"

Simmons looked more discontented than ever. At last, he said, "Wouldn't pay it to any other nigger driving a raggedy old truck, that's for damn sure.

But yeah, fifty cents a barrel. Bring me your receipts and I'll pay you off."

"Got yourself a deal, suh." Cincinnatus beamed. That was good money, and he might have the chance to pick up another load, or maybe even two, before the day ended. Then he hesitated, really hearing the third name Simmons had given him. "That Joe

Conroy?" he asked. "Fat man, used to have hisself a store before it burned down?"

"Let me check." Simmons flipped papers. "Joseph Conroy, that's what it says. I don't know about the other part. How come?"

"Didn't know he was back in business, is all," Cincinnatus replied. It wasn't all, not even close, but he kept that to himself. "Where's his new store at?"

Simmons checked his papers again. "Corner of Emma and Bakewell, it says here. You know where that is? This ain't my town, you know."

"I know where it's at, yeah," Cincinnatus said. "Over on the west side, gettin' out towards the park. Twitchell's over here on Third, and Dalyrimple's on Washington, so I reckon I'll deliver theirs first and then head over to Conroy's." He held out his hand. "Give me the papers I got to get signed."

"Here you go." The steamboat clerk handed them to him. "That's the other reason I pay you like I would a white man, or almost: you read and write good, so things get done proper."

"Thank you," Cincinnatus said, pretending not to hear that *or almost.* He couldn't do anything about it. Stowing the papers in his shirt pocket, he started crowding barrels of oatmeal into the back of the truck. He did end up with one of them on the seat be-side him; Simmons was a keen judge of how much space mer-chandise took up.

The truck rode heavy, the weight in back smoothing out its motion and making it laugh at bumps that would have jolted Cincinnatus had it been empty. He appreciated that. The pon-derous cornering and the greater likelihood of a blowout were something else again. He drove carefully, avoiding the potholes that pocked the street. A puncture would cost him precious time.

His first two stops went smoothly, as he'd thought they would. He'd delivered to both Hank Twitchell and Calvin Dalyrimple before. Twitchell, a big, brawny fellow, even helped him lug bar-rels of oatmeal into his general store. Calvin Dalyrimple didn't; a strong breeze would have blown him away.

They both signed their receipts and sent Cincinnatus on his way in jig time.

He drove out to the west side of town with much more trepida-tion. That didn't shrink when he discovered Conroy's new gen-eral store sat between a saloon and a pawnshop. None of the looks he got from passersby as he stopped the truck in front of the store was friendly, or anything close. Most of them translated to, *What the hell you doing here, nigger?* He hoped the truck would still be there when he got done with his business with Conroy.

He also hoped the storekeeper wouldn't recognize him. When he brought the first barrel into the store, all he said was, "Here's your oatmeal, suh, straight off the docks. Got two more barrels in the truck; fetch 'em right in for you. All you got to do is sign the receipt shows you got 'em, and I be on my way."

Joe Conroy grunted. He was a round, middle-aged white man with narrow, suspicious eyes. He was also a Confederate die-hard, and a friend of Cincinnatus' former boss, Tom Kennedy. Kennedy had involved Cincinnatus with the diehards, too, hav-ing him plant firebombs on cargoes heading down to U.S. forces. Eventually, Cincinnatus had planted one in Conroy's old store, but the white man had never figured that out.

Cincinnatus had never decided how smart Conroy was. Smarter than he let on, was the Negro's guess. He proved smart enough to recognize Cincinnatus, whom he hadn't seen in a year, and who would have been glad never to see him again. "Well, well," he said slowly, the unlit cigar in his mouth jerking up and down. "Look what the cat drug in."

"Mornin', Mistuh Conroy." Cincinnatus hurried out to the truck to haul in the second barrel of oatmeal. As long as he was working, he didn't have to talk.

He wished a customer would come into the cramped, dark general store.

Conroy couldn't af-ford to talk, not where anyone could hear him.

But nobody came in except Cincinnatus. Conroy gave him an appraising stare. "Hear tell it was that damnyankee you was workin' for who shot Tom Kennedy," he said.

"Yes, suh, that's a fact. Hear him say so my ownself," Cincin-natus

agreed. He got in a dig of his own: "Wasn't the Reds, like you told me in the park last year."

"No, it wasn't the Reds," the storekeeper said. "But it was a friend of yours, just the same. We don't forget things like that, no indeed, we don't."

"I saved Tom Kennedy's bacon from the Yankees back when the war was new," Cincinnatus said angrily. "I hadn't done that, I never would've met you—and believe you me, that would've suited me fine."

"We know where you're at." Conroy put menace in his voice.

"And I know where you're at, too," Cincinnatus said. "I get into trouble from you and your pals, Luther Bliss'll know where you're at and what you've been doin'. Don't want no trouble, Conroy." He used the white man's unadorned surname with relish, to shock. "But I get trouble, I give it right back."

"Damn uppity nigger," Conroy growled.

"Yes, *sir"* Cincinnatus went outside and manhandled the last barrel of oatmeal into the store. He thrust the receipt at Joe Conroy. "You want to sign right here, so I can go on about my business."

"Why do I give a damn about that?" Conroy said.

"On account of if you don't sign, I take this here oatmeal back to the docks and you don't get no more shipments." Cincinnatus wondered how much Conroy cared. If the store was nothing but a front for the diehards, he might not care at all. That would make Cincinnatus' life more difficult.

But Conroy grabbed a pencil, scrawled his signature, and all but hurled the paper back at Cincinnatus. "Here, God damn you."

"Much obliged, Mistuh Conroy." Cincinnatus headed for the door. "Got me a lot of work left to do."

"Come on," Sylvia Enos said to her children. "Get moving. I've got to take you over to Mrs. Dooley's so I can go to work."

"I like it better when you're not working, Ma," Mary Jane said. She would be five soon, which Sylvia found hard to be-lieve. "I like it when you stay home with us."

"When she stays home with us, though, it's because she's out of work again, silly." George, Jr., spoke with the world-weary wisdom of his seven years—and wasn't shy about scoring points off his sister, either. "We have to have money."

He had a hard streak of pragmatism in him. His father had been the same way. George, Jr., looked very much like his father, though he was missing the brown Kaiser Bill mustache Sylvia's husband had worn. Seeing her son, Sylvia again cursed the fate

that had put a submersible in the way of the USS *Ericsson* the night after the Confederate States yielded to the USA.

With the CSA out of the war, she thought, *it had to be a British boat.*

George hadn't worried about the Royal Navy. A Confed-erate submarine had almost sunk his destroyer earlier in the war. He'd fought Rebel boats all the way up to the end. To have his ship sunk by the limeys after that... even now, it was hard to take. George hadn't deserved that much bad luck.

"Come on," Sylvia said again. "I can't be late on account of you. I can't be late at all."

That was nothing less than the gospel truth. With men home from the war in droves, jobs for women were harder and harder to come by. She didn't know how long the work at the galoshes factory would last, and she couldn't afford to anger the people over her in any way. She was the sole support for her family as much as any man was for his, but nobody looked at things that way. Men came first. Women had been fine during the war. Now.. .

Now she couldn't even vote for anyone who might better her plight.

Massachusetts had no women's suffrage. Had she been able to cast a ballot, she would have voted Socialist in a heart-beat. The Democrats had been fine when it came to winning the war. What were they good for in peacetime? Only counting their profits, as far as she could see.

She hurried the children out of the apartment and down to the clamorous streets of Boston. With a sigh of regret, she walked past a newsboy hawking the *Globe.* She couldn't justify laying out a couple of cents on it, not when she didn't know if she'd have work next week.

"England signs treaty!" the newsboys shouted, trying to per-suade others to part with pennies. "Limeys give up all claim to Sandwich

Islands and Canada! England signs treaty! Recog-nizes Ireland and Quebec!"

It was, she supposed, good news. The best news, though, as far as she was concerned, would have been for the ocean to swallow England and all her works. And while the ocean was at it, it could swallow the CSA, too.

Mrs. Dooley was an aging widow with wavy hair defiantly hennaed, and with bright spots of rouge on her cheeks. To Sylvia, it looked more like clown makeup than anything alluring, but she would never have said so. The woman took good care of her children and did not charge too much.

After kissing George, Jr., and Mary Jane good-bye, Sylvia went back to the trolley stop, tossed another nickel in the fare box (and soon she would have to start paying Mary Jane's fare, too: one more expense), and headed to the galoshes factory. To her relief, she got there on time.

The place stank of rubber from which the rubber overshoes were made.

Sylvia's post came just after the galoshes emerged from the mold. She painted a red ring around the top of each one. Had the firm been able to train a dog to do the job, it would have. That failing, it grudgingly paid her.

When she'd worked in a mackerel-canning plant, she'd been able to operate the machine that glued gaudy labels to cans al-most without thinking about it; sometimes, when she was lucky, she would hardly notice the time going by between getting to the factory and dinner or between dinner and going home. She hadn't had that luxury at the shoe factory where she'd been working when George was killed. If she didn't pay attention to what she was doing there, the powerful needle on the electric sewing machine would tear up her hand. She'd seen it happen to operators who'd been at the place longer than she'd been alive. A moment's lapse was all it took.

All that could happen with a moment's lapse here was her ending up with red paint on her hand, not red blood. Still, she couldn't let her mind wander, as she'd been able to do in the can-ning plant. What she did here wasn't simple repetitive motion, the way that had been. She had to pay attention to painting the rings precisely. If she didn't, the foreman started barking at her.

Frank Best wasn't a hardened old Tartar like Gustav Krafft, the foreman at the shoe factory where she'd worked, who gave a walking demonstration of why the limeys and frogs thought of Germans as Huns. Best's style was more the sly dig: "Thought you were going to slip that one by me, did you?"

was a favorite remark.

The other difference between the two men was that Krafft had been too old to serve in the Army. Frank Best wore a Soldiers' Circle pin with the year 1904 on it. That being his conscription class, he was only a handful of years older than Sylvia. He was also single, and convinced he was the greatest gift to women God had ever set on the planet.

A lot of women who worked in the galoshes factory were widows, some still wearing mourning, others not. Most of them, like Sylvia, heartily despised the foreman. "Like to put a certain part of him in the mold—the size-two mold," Sarah Wyckoff, one of those widows, said at dinner on a day when Best was being particularly obnoxious. "Wouldn't need nothin'

bigger."

That produced a good set of giggles. Sylvia said, "No, for good-ness'

sake, you don't want him vulcanized *there.* He'd never keep quiet about it then." More giggles rose.

"If so many of us hate him," said May Cavendish, another widow, "why does *he* think he's so bully?"

"He's a man," Sarah Wyckoff said, as if she expected that to cover everything. By the way the other women nodded, it probably did.

May Cavendish tossed her head; her blond curls bounced on her shoulders. "What frosts me is that some of the girls *do* like him."

"I can't imagine that anybody would really *like* him," Sylvia said with a shudder. Her companions nodded. She went on, "But if he says, 'Be nice to me or go look for another job,' some of the girls are going to be nice to him.

Times are hard. Believe me, I know."

"We all know, sweetheart," Sarah said. "If he said anything like that to me, though, I'd break him in half." She was built like a longshoreman; Sylvia didn't think she meant it any way but literally.

"There ought to be a law," Sylvia said. She'd had that thought before, when she lost her job at the canning plant because she'd had to stay home and tend to her children after they came down with the chicken pox.

"There ought to be a lot of things that there ain't," Sarah Wyckoff said with authority. "If I was Teddy Roosevelt—"

"You'd look silly with a mustache, Sarah, and you haven't got enough teeth to be TR," May Cavendish said. She pulled a pack of cigarettes from her handbag, scraped a match on the sole of her shoe, got the cigarette lighted, and blew out a creditable smoke ring. Then she coughed. "Sorry.

I'm still getting the hang of this."

"Doesn't it make people think you're fast?" Sylvia asked.

May shook her head. "Not the way it would have before the war," she said, and drew on the cigarette again. The coal glowed red. She let the smoke go without showing off this time. "It's not like it's a big, smelly cigar or anything. It's not like it was hooch, either. You don't get drunk or anything—you feel better about things for a little while, that's all." She extended the pack toward Sylvia. "Want to try one?"

"Sure. Why not?" Sylvia said. "It's not like they can hurt you or anything."

She took a cigarette. May Cavendish struck an-other match. Sylvia didn't drag deeply on the cigarette, the way May had done. She drew in a cautious mouthful of smoke—or so she thought. When she tried to suck it down into her lungs, she hacked and wheezed and started to choke.

"Very same thing happened to me the first time I tried," May assured her.

"It gets easier, believe me it does. You get used to it."

Sylvia's mouth tasted as if someone had just doused a camp-fire in there.

She stared at the cigarette in dismay. "Why would you want to get used to it?" she asked, and coughed again. But she felt tingly all the way out to her fingers and toes, tingly and light-headed in a strange and pleasant sort of way. Ever so cau-tiously, she took another puff.

It still tasted bad. It made her chest burn. But the tingles and that good feeling in the middle of her brain got stronger.

"Don't do too much the first time," May Cavendish advised her. "You can get sick if you do. Think about whether you like it or not. It's not like cigarettes are expensive, or anything like that."

"That's true," Sylvia said. "They've come down since the war ended, too.

I've noticed that, even if I don't usually buy them."

May nodded. "And the tobacco's better now. It's the one good thing you can say about the Rebs—they grow better tobacco than we do. Some of the stuff they were selling while the war was still on .. . Honey, I swear to Jesus they were sweeping the horseballs off the street and wrapping paper around 'em."

"People kept smoking, though," Sarah Wyckoff said.

"Why not?" Sylvia said. "It's not a bad thing, and May's right—it does make you feel nice for a little bit." Despite saying that, she had no great urge to smoke the rest of the cigarette May Cavendish had given her. She let it fall to the ground and crushed it with her foot. Maybe she'd acquire the habit and maybe she wouldn't. If she did, she'd do it slowly. If she tried to do it in a hurry, she had the feeling she would get sick instead.

"Time to get back to work," Sarah said, "or Frank'll start sweet-talking us again." She rolled her eyes to show how much she looked forward to that.

When Sylvia went back into the plant, it didn't stink so badly of rubber, or so it seemed. After a while, she realized the ciga-rette had numbed her sense of smell. That seemed a good reason to start smoking all by itself.

The line began to move. Sylvia painted red rings on a pair of galoshes.

The machinery sent them down the line to the next worker, who

would trim off extra rubber. Sylvia dipped her brush in the paint can and painted more rings.

Lucien Galtier was the sort to enjoy summer while it lasted. Up here, close to the St. Lawrence, a few miles outside the town of Riviere-du-Loup, it did not last long. The farmer did not hold that against summer. It was what it was. He accepted along with enjoying.

He accepted weeds, too, but he did not enjoy them. At the mo-ment, he was hoeing the potato patch. When he saw a bit of green of the wrong shade and in the wrong place, the hoe lashed out without his conscious direction. The decapitated weed toppled.

"Strike them all dead, *cherpapa,"* Lucien's son, Georges, said from a couple of rows over, seeing the hoe come down. At eigh-teen, Georges overtopped his father by several inches, and was wider through the shoulders, too—Lucien's strength was of the wiry, enduring sort. Georges'

humor was also wider than his fa-ther's; he enjoyed playing the buffoon, while Lucien met the world with irony.

"Strike them all dead, eh?" Lucien said as he got rid of an-other weed.

"One fine day, my son, you will make your country a fine general."

"If the Republic of Quebec needs *me* as a general, it will be in a great deal of trouble," Georges said with conviction. He looked down at the ground. "Come on, you weeds—get out of the po-tato trenches and charge the machine guns! Die, and save me the trouble of grubbing you out."

Beaming at Lucien, he went on, "Perhaps you have reason. I can talk like a general, *n 'est-cepas?"*

His father snorted. "As always, you are a nonpareil." He bent his back to the weeding, not wanting Georges to see any surprise on his face. He'd forgotten, as he sometimes could in the daily routine of farm life, that this was, and had been for the past year and more, the Republic of Quebec, dancing attendance on the United States, and not the province of Quebec, a French-speaking appendage to the British Empire.

He laughed—at himself, as he often did. He'd forgotten the American-fostered Republic of Queb ec, and that with an Ameri-can son-in-law. There was absentmindedness worthy of a pro-fessor or a priest.

When he straightened again, he glanced over in the direction of the hospital the Americans had built on his land to care for their wounded from the fighting north of the St. Lawrence. The hospital remained, but no longer flew the Stars and Stripes. In-stead, the Republic's flag (which had also been the provincial flag) floated above it: a field of blue quartered by a white cross, and in each quadrant a white fleur-de-lys. These days, the hos-pital drew its patients from the people of Quebec.

As the sun went down, he and Georges shouldered their hoes like rifles and trudged back toward the farmhouse. A Ford was parked by the house: not one in a coat of green-gray U.S. official paint, nor the Republic's equivalent blue-gray, but somber civil-ian black. Georges grinned when he saw it. "Ah, good," he said. "My sister is here for me to harass."

"Yes, and her husband is here to give you what you deserve for harassing her, too," Lucien replied, to which his son responded with a magnificent Gallic shrug.

Charles, Georges' older brother, came out of the barn just as Lucien and Georges headed toward it to hang the hoes on the rack Lucien's grandfather had built long years before. Charles looked like Lucien, but was more sobersided—he had to take after his mother there.

Marie greeted her husband and sons on the front porch, as much to make sure they wiped their feet as for any other reason. She was a small, dark, sensible woman, ideally suited to be a farm wife. Her younger daughters, Susanne, Denise, and Jeanne, who ranged in age from sixteen down to eleven, also came out. Susanne sixteen! Galtier shook his head.

She had been a child when the war started. Seeing her ripening figure forcibly re-minded him she was a child no longer.

Lucien waded through his younger daughters to give Nicole a hug. She looked very much the way Marie had as a young wife. She also looked happy, which made her father happy in turn. When she turned Lucien loose, he shook his son-in-law's hand. "And how does it march with you, the distinguished Dr. O'Doull?" he asked.

Dr. Leonard O'Doull looked back over his shoulder, as if to see whether Galtier were speaking to someone behind him. With a chuckle, he answered, "It marches well enough with me, *mon beau-pere.* And with you?"

"Oh, with me?" Galtier said lightly as he got out a jug of the applejack one of his neighbors—most unofficially—cooked up. "It is good of you to ask. It is good of you to deign to visit my home here, instead of returning to the palace in which you dwell in Riviere-du-Loup."

"Father!" Nicole said indignantly.

"Be calm, my sweet," Leonard O'Doull said, laughter in his green eyes.

"He was trying to make you squeak, and he did it." He'd spoken French —Parisian French—before he came up to Quebec. He still spoke Parisian French, but now with a heavy Quebecois overlay. In another few years, he would probably sound like someone who'd grown up here.

Nicole sniffed. "I expected such behavior from my brother, not from my own dear papa." She laid the treacle on with a trowel. Her eyes glowed.

"Why?" Georges asked innocently. "What did you expect Charles to do?"

That set Nicole to spluttering, Charles to glar-ing, and the young ladies of the family to chaffing both their brothers impartially.

In the midst of that racket, Lucien spoke more seriously to Dr. O'Doull: "It is always good to see you." He handed his son-in-law a glass of the apple brandy. "To your health."

"And to yours," O'Doull said. They drank. Galtier gasped a little as the applejack clawed its way down to his belly: this was a rougher batch than most his neighbor made. If it fazed Leonard O'Doull, he didn't let on.

Irishmen were supposed to have well-tempered gullets, and he lived up to that. After another sip, he went on, "Nicole and I finished our work at about the same time, and we thought we would pay you a visit."

"You should have such thoughts more often," Galtier said, but then qualified that by adding, "Are you certain it has been good for Nicole to continue to work instead of keeping house full time?"

"She has become a good nurse," O'Doull answered, "and the hospital would be the poorer if it lost her. And she desires to work, and I, believe me, I am perfectly happy with the way she keeps house "

"So long as a man is happy, everything will march well," Lu-cien said gravely, and his son-in-law nodded. The farmer raised an eyebrow. "Is it for this reason—to boast of your happiness— that you do us the honor of this visit?"

"By no means." O'Doull could match Georges absurdity for absurdity and Lucien dry for dry. "It is because a little bird whis-pered in my ear that Nicole's mother was fixing a great stew of *lapins auxpruneaux."*

"Ah, is that the reason?" Lucien slowly nodded. "Very well. Very well indeed, in fact. The rabbits think I set the cabbages there for them to enjoy.

I, on the other hand, think God put the rabbits there for me to enjoy. After you taste of the stew"— whose hot, meaty odor filled the farmhouse—"you will decide."

"Any rabbit who presumes to taste of your cabbages surely deserves to end up *auxpruneaux"* his son-in-law agreed with a face so perfectly straight that Galtier, well pleased, elbowed him in the ribs as if he were a son of his own flesh and poured him an-other glass of the homemade Calvados.

The meal was a great success. Afterwards, Nicole helped her mother

and sisters with the dishes—with so many hands, the work could not help being light. O'Doull handed fragrant Ha-banas to Lucien and his sons and lit one for himself. Galtier savored the aroma before drawing the first sweet smoke from his own panatela. He whistled. *"Tabernac,"* he said reverently.

"By the tobacco they grow there, Habana must be very close to Paradise."

"Closest part of the Confederate States, anyhow, not that that's saying much," Dr. O'Doull replied.

Charles said nothing, which was not surprising. Georges said nothing, which was an astonishment. Both young men puffed happy clouds. So did Lucien. He could not recall the last time he'd been more content, at least outside the marriage bed.

And then another astonishment took place: Nicole came out of the kitchen, followed by Marie and Susanne and Denise and Jeanne. Galtier did not find that an astonishment of the pleasant sort; custom was that the women let their menfolk linger over liquor and tobacco. He reckoned that a good custom, one in no need of breaking. "What's this?" he asked. "A parade?"

"No, *cher papa,* only something I have to tell you— something I have to tell everyone," Nicole said. "Everyone ex-cept Leonard, that is, for he knows." Even by the ruddy light of kerosene lamps, Lucien could see her blush. He knew then what was coming, knew it before she spoke:

"Cherpapa, cher maman, you will be grandparents next year."

"A grandfather?" Lucien exclaimed. Even knowing what was coming, he found himself surprised. *But I am too young to be a grandfather!* he wanted to cry. Foolishness, of course: if he had a married daughter, he was not too young to be a grandfather. Still, he felt as if he were.

He looked down at his hands, gnarled and scarred and cal-lused by years of farm work, tanned by the sun when there was sun, roughened by the wind and the snow. They were not the hands of a man too young to be a grandfather.

From them, he looked to Marie. She, without any possible doubt, was too young to be a grandmother. But her beaming face said she didn't think so.

It also said she looked forward to the role.

"What of me?" Georges said with fine mock anger. "I will be an uncle next year, but do you say one word about that? No! You leave it to me to figure out for myself. Is that fair? Is that just?"

Nicole said, "What you will be next year is what you are this year and what you have always been: a nuisance."

"Thank you." Georges nodded, as at a great compliment.

"We'll be aunts," Susanne and Denise and Jeanne chorused. Jeanne, who was the youngest of them, added, "I can't wait!"

"You'll have to," Nicole said. "I am not ready to have the baby just yet."

Lucien got up from his chair and embraced his daughter.

"Congratulations," he said. "May all be well. May all be well with you always."

He let her go and shook his son-in-law's hand. "Who would have thought I would have a grandchild named O'Doull?"

The young doctor's eyes twinkled. "See what you get for let-ting your daughter go to work in the American hospital?"

"At the time," Galtier said gravely, "I did not think that a good idea.

Perhaps I was right" Leonard O'Doull just grinned at him. He had to wait for Nicole to let out an irate squawk before he could go on, "Perhaps, too, I was wrong. But only perhaps, mind you." Someone—he did not see who—had filled his glass with applejack again. If it was full, it needed emptying. Before the war, he'd never imagined a half-American grandchild.

Now, though, he discovered he liked the idea.

Jonathan Moss sat in a coffeehouse not far outside the North-western University campus. A breeze from Lake Michigan ruffled his light brown hair. An internal breeze ruffled his thoughts.

"What's the matter, Johnny my boy?" asked his companion at the table, a curly-haired fellow named Fred Sandburg. "You look like you've got bullets whizzing past your head again."

Sandburg had served on the Roanoke front in Virginia, help-ing to take the riverside town of Big Lick and the nearby iron mines away from the Confederate States. That had been some of the worst fighting of the whole war. He knew all about bullets flying past his head. He had a Purple Heart with an oak-leaf cluster to show how much he knew.

He knew more about it than did Jonathan Moss, and Moss would have been the first to admit as much. He'd been a flier up in Ontario through the fighting, and never had been shot. When the war was new, he'd thought of himself as a cavalier, meeting other cavaliers in single combat. Three years of flying had con-vinced him he was as much a gear in a killing machine as an infantryman in the mud. Only the pay and the view and the hours were better.

Moss sipped at his coffee. Conversation buzzed in the back-ground. It was the sort of coffeehouse where vast issues were hashed out and settled every day: the nature of the universe, the effect of the war on the history of the world, whether the waitress would go home with the college kid who'd propositioned her. Vast issues whirled through Moss' head, too.

"I'm trying to sort out whether I really give a damn about studying the law,"

he said.

"Ah," said Sandburg, who was also in law school. "You fin-ished your first year before the war started, same as I did, right?"

"You know I did," Moss answered. "Then, it seemed impor-tant. Now ... I have a tough time caring now. I guess the war made me look at the scale of things differently, if you know what I mean. I mean, in the big picture, what difference does it make whether or not I hang out my shingle and start drafting wills for wheat traders with more money than sense?"

"Maybe it doesn't make any difference in the big picture," his friend said.

"It sure as hell does make a difference in the way your life goes. Don't you care about that? Me, I want to be in a spot where nobody can make me pick up a Springfield for the rest of my days."

"Something to that, no doubt about it," Moss admitted. He fin-ished

his coffee and waved to the waitress for another cup. Had she said she would go home with the student or she wouldn't? Try as he would, Moss couldn't tell. "But I have trouble giving a damn. I have trouble giving a damn about almost everything."

"Aha!' Fred Sandburg stabbed out a forefinger. He would make a formidable attorney: he listened. "Almost everything, eh? All right, Johnny my boy, what do you give a damn about?"

Suddenly, Moss wished the coffee the waitress brought were whiskey. In the officers' clubs during the war, he'd had plenty of high-proof lubrication against the slings and arrows of out-rageous fortune. He'd needed it, too.

He needed it now, needed it and didn't have it. At last, slowly, he said, "Up in Ontario, in Canada, there was this girl, this woman. .." He ran out of steam.

"Oho!" Sandburg laid that forefinger by the side of his nose. "Was she pretty? Was she built?" His hands described an hour-glass in the air.

"Yeah, I guess so," Moss answered, a puzzled tone in his voice: he wasn't really quite sure. "She was ... interesting." He nodded. That was the right word. He repeated it: "Interesting."

"Hell with whether she was interesting," said Sandburg, a re-lentlessly practical man. "Was she interested?"

"In me?" Moss laughed. "Only to spit in my eye. Her name's Laura Secord. She's somehow related to the original who had the same name a hundred years ago, and played Paul Revere against the USA in the War of 1812. She hates Americans. She told me where to head in I don't know how many times. Besides," he added morosely, "she's got a husband."

"Oh, bully." Fred Sandburg made silent, sardonic clapping motions. "You sure know how to pick 'em, don't you?"

"Sure do," Moss said. "Last time I saw her was just after the Canucks surrendered. I drove over from Orangeville, where our last aerodrome was, back to this little town called Arthur, where it had been. She was keeping a farm going there. She didn't know whether her husband was alive or dead.

She hadn't heard from him in a long time—he was in the Canadian

Army.

But everything would be ready for him if he came down the road."

"So if she was keeping the home fires burning for him, what did she say *to you?"* Sandburg asked.

Moss' face heated at the memory. "She told me she never wanted to set eyes on me again. She told me she wished the Canucks had shot me down. She told me she wished her husband had fired the bullet that shot me down. She told me she hoped the train I took back to the USA went off the rails and smashed to bits. After that, she got angry."

Fred Sandburg stared, then started to guffaw. "And you call this broad interesting? Jesus Christ, Johnny my boy, you can go down to New Mexico and marry a rattlesnake and do it cheaper. You'll live happier, too."

"Maybe," Moss said. "Probably, even." His grin lifted up only one corner of his mouth, making it more grimace than smile. "But I can't get her out of my mind."

Sandburg was just warming to his theme: "Or you could take to drinking absinthe to forget, or smoking cigarettes doped with opium or hashish.

Then if she ever saw you again, she'd take pity on you because you were so pale and wasted and decadent-looking, and clutch you to her bosom."

He leaned forward and made as if to clutch Moss to his bosom.

"Funny," Moss said, evading him. "Funny like a crutch." With so many veterans on one crutch or two these days, the cliche had taken on fresh life.

"All right, all right," Sandburg said. "But what are you going to do, moon about this woman the rest of your life? When you have grandchildren, you can talk about her the way fishermen go on: the one that got away. You're probably better off, you know. You're almost sure to be better off."

"Yeah, I know," Moss said. "I've been telling myself the same thing ever since I got back to the States. Trouble is, I can't make myself believe it."

"What are you going to do, then? Head back up to wherever it was in Canada you said she lived?" Sandburg shook his head. "That sounds like an awful lot of trouble to go through to have some girl tell you to go to hell twice." He glanced over toward the waitress, a pert brunette. "She'll probably tell you to go to hell right here. And if she doesn't, what does this Canuck gal have that she's missing? They're all the same when the lamp goes out."

"I never thought so," Moss said. He'd never thought of going back to Arthur, Ontario, again, either, not seriously. In musing tones, he went on,

"Maybe I should. I'd get her out of my system, anyhow."

"That's the spirit." Sandburg raised his coffee mug in salute. "The hell with courses. The hell with examinations. If you can only see this woman who hates your guts one more time, you'll die happy. I expect they'll make a moving picture about it, and every organ player in the country can milk the minor chords for all they're worth."

"Oh, shut up," Moss said. But the more his friend ridiculed the idea, the more it appealed to him. If he felt like going up to Ontario, he could do that, provided the occupation authorities didn't give him any trouble. Had he not come from a family with money, he wouldn't have been studying law at Northwestern in the first place. Leaving for a semester wouldn't be hard.

He wondered what his parents would say. Variations on the theme of *You*

're out of your mind occurred to him. Maybe he'd be wiser just to tell them he was going up to visit someone he'd met during the war, without going into too many details. They might think he meant an Army buddy. He'd have a lot less to ex-plain afterwards if he came home unsuccessful.

He was not a fool. *I'm not a fool except about this,* he thought. No matter how foolish he was when he thought about Laura Secord, he understood the odds weren't in his favor. The odds weren't always in his favor when he played poker, either. Of course, he generally lost money when he played poker, which meant he didn't play it very often.

"Come on," Sandburg said after a look at his pocket watch. "We've got Bricker's lecture on courtroom defense and cross-examination tactics to go to, and he's worth listening to. Besides, he hasn't lost a case in

years, and if that doesn't prove he knows what he's talking about, I don't know what would."

Moss laid a quarter on the table to cover his two cups of coffee. The waitress brought back fifteen cents' change; he left her a nickel tip. As he was heading out the door, he said, "I'm glad we're not down at Clemson or one of those other Confed-erate universities. If we were, we'd be paying five bucks for coffee, not five cents."

"Yeah, but we'd be somewhere close to millionaires—in Con-federate dollars, anyhow," Fred Sandburg said. He shook his head. "Before the war, their dollar was at par with ours. God only knows when it will be again."

"They're giving us their specie and letting the printing presses run for themselves," Moss said. "You let that go on for a while and pretty soon you take five pounds of bills to the grocery store and trade 'em for five pounds of beans."

"Either that or the bills start getting crowded on account of all the extra zeros they have to put on each one," Sandburg agreed. He checked his watch again. "Come on. Shake a leg. We're going to be late "

By shaking a leg, they got to Swift Hall on time. Moss liked the campus, with its buildings scattered among emerald-green lawns and the deeper tone of trees. Lake Michigan beyond could almost have been the sea.

As Fred Sandburg had said, Professor Bricker was an impres-sive lecturer. Not only was he a strikingly handsome man, with broad shoulders and a thick head of black hair, he also had a deep and musical voice and a presence an actor might have en-vied. Moss could see how juries would believe anything he said; no wonder he'd been a burr under the saddle of local district at-torneys for years.

And yet, however fine a lecturer Bricker was, Jonathan Moss had trouble paying attention to him today. His thoughts kept wandering up to Canada, wondering what Laura Secord was doing, wondering what she would say when she saw him again.

He would find out. No doubt that was stupid. He recognized as much. But he was sure—almost sure—he'd do it anyway.

Anne Colleton's broker looked like the very unhappy man he was. "It was good of you to come up to Columbia when I asked," he said. "I do

appreciate it, believe me. I wanted to tell you in person that, as of August first, I shall no longer be able to repre-sent you."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Whitson," Anne said, not altogether truthfully.

"Are you retiring altogether from your profession?" Whitson was not a young man, but not so old as that, either.

"Yes, and not voluntarily," he answered, his voice bitter. "As of that date, I shall be declaring bankruptcy to protect myself from my creditors. I doubt very much whether you or anyone else would have any use for a bankrupt broker."

"I'm sorry to hear of your misfortune." But Anne could not resist getting in a shot of her own: "You might have done better if you'd invested along the lines I chose—the lines about which you had some unkind things to say when I presented them to you."

"Go ahead—rub it in," Whitson muttered. Anne did not dis-like him enough to do any more gloating, so she pretended not to hear. He went on,

"I must admit, your ideas proved sounder than mine. I am, as I say, bankrupt, with holdings in worthless stocks. Your financial position is not as it was before the war—"

"Whose is, in the Confederate States?" Anne asked harshly.

"Not many folks', I'll tell you that," the broker said. "But you are merely poorer than you were. In the CSA, and especially here in South Carolina, that's an impressive accomplishment. Most plantation owners have long since gone belly up. You're still in the fight"

"Who else is?" Anne asked, interested in the competition.

"Importers," Whitson answered. "Steel men. Petroleum men in Texas and Louisiana—they're thriving, because Sequoyah's gone. Some of the Sonoran copper kings: the ones whose mines the Yankees didn't reach.

But anybody who grew anything with Negro labor—cotton, tobacco, rice, sugarcane, indigo—has troubles the way a stray dog has fleas."

"Can't trust 'em, not any more," Anne said. "That's never go-ing to be the same again. That's why I've still got Marshlands like a millstone around my neck. Who would want the place now? What would

anyone do with it if he bought it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," Whitson said, "but I don't know what that proves, either." His mouth tightened to a thin, pale line. "The ideas I have had haven't been good ones."

"The whole country is having a rough time," Anne said with more sympathy than she'd thought she would show. "It's hard for anyone to prosper. We need to put some heart back into our-selves, but I don't know how."

"This inflation is eating us out of house and home," the broker said.

"Before long, everybody will be a millionaire and every-body will be broke."

/ told you so trembled on the edge of being spoken, but Anne held her tongue. She *had* told Whitson so, and he hadn't listened, and now he was paying the price. Because she'd converted her holdings into currencies that still meant something in terms of gold, she'd come through pretty well.

When the upturn finally ar-rived, she would be rich again—if she could wait long enough.

Whitson said, "If you like, Miss Colleton, I can recommend a new broker for you. I know several very able men who—"

Anne got to her feet. "No, thank you. I hope you will forgive me for saying so, but your recommendation does not strike me as the ideal warrant for a man's quality."

Whitson bit his lip. "I deserve that."

"Maybe you'll have better luck in times to come. I hope you do," Anne said, telling more of the truth than not—she had nothing personal against the luckless broker. "I see you have all my papers here. Please give them to me now."

"Very well." Whitson sighed as he handed them to her. "I should have been listening to your investment advice, not the other way round. The world has turned upside down since the end of the war."

"Since the beginning of the war," Anne said. "But you're right. The Confederate States were on top, and now we're on the bot-tom. Some people are going to be content to stay on the bottom, too. Some are

going to try to see how to get back on top again. What will you do, Mr. Whitson?"

She didn't wait for an answer, but swept the papers into her valise and left the broker's office. As she turned around to close the door, she saw him staring after her. She let out a tiny sigh. Whitson was going to be one of the ones who stayed on the bot-tom for a long time.

His office stood only a few blocks away from the Capitol. Anne thought about going over to see the governor, but sighed again. She didn't have the influence she'd enjoyed before the war, ei-ther. Not only had her fortunes suffered, she'd called in too many favors fighting the black Reds who lurked in the swamps by the Congaree long after their revolt was stamped out elsewhere. She'd almost had to seduce the governor to pry a machine gun loose for the militia.

"God damn you, Cassius," she muttered. The former chief hunter at Marshlands had proved a far more stubborn and resourceful foe than she'd imagined any Negro could. She'd underestimated the blacks at Marshlands time and again, underestimated them and let them fool her.

"It won't happen again," she muttered as she hurled the valise into the back seat of her beat-up Ford. Before the Negro up-rising, she'd driven a powerful Vauxhall. When the revolt broke out, she'd driven it up from Charleston toward Marshlands. South of the front—the Negroes of what they called the Con-garee Socialist Republic had been able to hold a regular front for a while—a militia officer had confiscated the Vauxhall for use against the black rebels. She'd never seen it again. She wondered how many bullet holes scarred the fine coachwork these days.

After cranking the Ford's engine to rough, noisy life, she climbed in and drove south down the Robert E. Lee Highway, from which she would eventually turn left to get to St. Matthews. She was about thirty miles away from home: a little more than an hour, if she didn't have a puncture or a breakdown. If she did, the time might double, or it might go up by some much larger factor.

What struck her as she rattled along in the decrepit motorcar was how still and empty the countryside felt. Cotton and tobacco should have been ripening in the fields, and Negro laborers should have been tending both crops. Here and there, they were. But so many fields were a rank tangle of weeds and vines and shrubs, with no one even trying to bring in a crop on them.

It wasn't the way it had been. It would never again be the way it had been.

Tears stung her eyes, so that she had to slow down till they cleared—not that the Ford could go very fast anyhow. The cotton fields at Marshlands looked like this these days.

Colletons had thrived on the plantation since the end of the eighteenth century. Even so, she was ever more tempted to cut her losses on it, quit paying the exorbitant taxes, and let the state of South Carolina take it off her hands. As far as she was con-cerned, the state of South Carolina was welcome to it.

The Lee Highway crossed the Congaree on a steel suspension bridge.

The Red rebels had damaged the bridge, but hadn't man-aged to destroy it. Well before she came to the river and the swamps to either side of it, Anne took a revolver from the valise and laid it on the seat, where she could grab it in a hurry. As a force for rebellion against the government of South Carolina and that of the CSA, the Congaree Socialist Republic was dead.

Not quite all the Negroes had been hunted out of the swamps yet, though.

Some still made a living of sorts as bandits.

If bandits were lurking there, they gave no sign. She spotted a couple of pickaninnies fishing and passed an old black man leading a skinny, swaybacked mule laboring along under some enormous burden tied to its back. She thought about stopping and making the old man show her what the mule carried. How many rifles and pistols had traveled through the CSA in bundles like that before the uprising of 1915? Too many, surely.

In the end, she drove on. She felt bad about it afterwards, but one person could do only so much. If the old man was moving guns or explosives, what was she supposed to do with him? Ar-rest him? Driving with one hand on the wheel and one on the pistol didn't appeal to her. Shoot him on the spot?

That did ap-peal to her, powerfully, but it wasn't so simple as it would have been before the war, either. She would certainly have to go to court about it, which wouldn't have been certain at all before 1914. The number of Negro veterans enrolled on the South Caro-lina voting lists remained tiny. The uprising during the war, though, showed how

dangerous ignoring Negro opinion could be.

When she got into St. Matthews, she smiled. Several women on the street were wearing trousers. She'd started that fashion herself, getting Aaron Rosenblum the tailor to make her several pairs so she could go into the swamps to fight the Reds in cloth-ing more convenient than an ankle-length skirt. These women didn't wear pants because they intended to hunt Reds. They wore them because one of the most prominent women in Calhoun County did.

Tom Colleton chuckled when she remarked on that. "I had no-ticed it myself, as a matter of fact," he said. "Gives a whole new kick to watching a pretty girl."

"Does it?" Anne wasn't sure whether to be angry or amused. She ended up a little of both. "That's not why I got them, you know."

"I never said it was," her brother answered. "That doesn't make what I did say any less true, though." While Anne digested that and finally nodded, Tom went on, "Have we got any money left?"

"All things considered, we're doing well—as well as we can be, anyhow."

With a certain amount of malicious pleasure, she added, "We're doing a lot better than clever Mr. Whitson," and explained how he'd gone bankrupt.

"So the broker's broke, is he?" Tom said.

Anne made a face at him. Then she started to laugh. "That's the sort of thing you would have said back before the war. You're usually more serious these days."

"I can laugh when somebody else falls on his face in the mud," Tom told her. "Laughing when I'm down there myself is harder. Laughing when the whole country's down there is hardest of all. I still don't know how we're going to get back on our feet, Sis."

"Neither do I, not with the damnyankees standing over us with a club,"

Anne said. "Sooner or later, though, they'll ease up. They have troubles of their own, what with all their strikes and trying to hold the Canadians down and Socialists yelling their heads off. When they get too busy at home, that's when we'll find somebody who can help us get moving again." She sighed. "I wish it would happen faster,

though."

IV

Even months after getting over the Spanish influenza, Sam Carsten knew he wasn't quite the man he had been. The disease had done its best to steamroller him into the grave. Something like a dozen sailors aboard the USS *Remembrance* had died. Many more, like him, remained weaker and slower than they were be-fore they got sick.

He could still do his job, though, and do the hundreds of jobs any sailor had to do when he wasn't at his battle station. And, as the *Remembrance* worked with the aeroplanes she carried, learning what they could and couldn't do, he occasionally found time to marvel.

This was one of those times. He stood by the superstructure as the *Remembrance* steamed in the North Atlantic, watching while a Wright two-decker approached the stern. A sailor with sema-phore paddles directed the aeroplane toward the deck. The pilot had to pay more attention to the director than to his own instincts and urges; if he didn't, he'd end up in the drink.

"Come on," Sam muttered. He'd been watching landings for a while now.

Just the same, they made him sweat. If he couldn't take them for granted, what were they like for the fliers? Pilots were the most nonchalant men on the face of the earth, but any-one who was nonchalant through one of these landings would end up dead. "Come on."

On came the aeroplane. Smoke spurted as its wheels slammed the deck of the *Remembrance.* The hook on the bottom of the Wright machine's fuselage missed the first steel cable stretched across the deck to arrest its progress, but caught on the second one. The two-decker jerked to a halt.

"Jesus." Carsten turned to George Moerlein, who'd watched the landing a few feet away from him. "Every time they do that, I think the aeroplane is going to miss the deck—either that or it'll tear in half when the hook grabs it."

His bunkmate nodded. "I know what you mean. It looks im-possible,

even though we've been watching 'em for months."

As the Wright's prop slowed from a blur to a stop, the pilot climbed out of the aeroplane. Sailors with mops and buckets dashed over and started swabbing down the deck. With oil and gasoline spilling all the time, swabbing was a more serious busi-ness than on most ships.

Sam said, "The thing I really fear is one of 'em coming in low and smashing right into the stern. Hasn't happened yet, thank God."

"Yeah, that wouldn't do anybody any good," Moerlein agreed. "Could happen, too, especially if somebody's coming in with his aeroplane shot to hell and gone—or if he just makes a mistake."

"What I hope is, we never come into range of a battleship's big guns,"

Carsten said. "Taking a hit is bad enough any which way—I've done that—but taking a hit here, with all the gasoline we're carrying . .. We'd go straight to the moon, or maybe five miles past it."

"It'd be over in a hurry, anyhow," his bunkmate answered. Be-fore Sam could say he didn't find that reassuring, George Moer-lein went on, "But that's one of the reasons we're carrying all these aeroplanes: to keep battlewagons from getting into gun-nery range in the first place."

Carsten stamped the flight deck, which was timber lain over steel. "We can't be the only Navy working on aeroplane carriers."

"I've heard tell the Japs are," Moerlein said. "Don't know it for a fact, but I've heard it. It wouldn't surprise me."

"Wouldn't surprise me, either, not even a little bit," Sam said. "I was in the Battle of the Three Navies, out west of the Sand-wich Islands. Those little yellow bastards are tougher than any-body ever gave 'em credit for."

Moerlein looked sour. "And they just walked away from the war free and clear, too. The Rebs are paying, England and France are paying, Russia's gone to hell in a handbasket, but Japan said, 'Well, all right, if nobody else on our side's left standing, we're done, too,' and we couldn't do anything but say, 'All right, Charlie—see you again some day.' "

"We will, too," Carsten said. "I was just a kid when they took the Philippines away from Spain right after the turn of the century. And

now we've taken the Sandwich Islands away from England—I was there for that, aboard the *Dakota.* So they're looking our way, and we're looking their way, and nobody's sit-ting between us any more."

"That'd be a fight, all right. All that ocean, aeroplanes whiz-zing around, us bombing them and trying to keep them from bombing us." Moerlein got a faraway look in his eye.

So did Sam. "Hell, if both sides have aeroplane carriers, you could fight a battle without ever seeing the other fellow's ships."

"That would be pretty strange," Moerlein said, "but I guess it could happen."

"Sure it could," Sam said. "And you'd want to sink the other bastard's aeroplane carriers just as fast as you could, because if he didn't have any aeroplanes left, he couldn't stop your battle-ships from doing whatever they wanted to do." He stamped on the flight deck again. "And if the aeroplane carrier is the ship you have to sink first, that makes the *Remembrance* the most im-portant ship in the whole Navy right now."

For a moment, he felt almost like a prophet in the middle of a vision of the future. He also felt pleased with himself for having had the sense to figure out that aeroplanes were the coming thing, and grateful to Commander Grady for having brought him to the *Remembrance,* no matter how ugly she was.

Then something else occurred to him. He hurried away. "Where's the fire at?" George Moerlein called after him. He didn't answer, but hurried down a hatch to go below.

He guessed Grady would be checking one sponson or another and, sure enough, found him in the third one into which he poked his head. The officer was testing the elevation screw on the gun there, and talking about it in a low voice with the gunner's mate who commanded the crew for that sponson. Sam stood at atten-tion and waited to be noticed.

Eventually, Commander Grady said, "You'll want to make sure of the threads there, Reynolds. Good thing we're not likely to be sailing into combat any time soon." He turned to Sam. "What can I do for you, Carsten?"

"I've been thinking, sir," Sam began.

A smile spread across Grady's rabbity features. "Far be it from me to discourage such a habit. And what have you been thinking?"

"We've taken the Confederates' battleships away from them, sir, and we've taken away their submersibles," Carsten said. "What do the agreements we've made with them say about aero-plane carriers?"

"So far as I know, they don't say anything," Commander Grady said.

"Shouldn't they, sir?" Sam asked in some alarm. "What if the Rebs built a whole raft of these ships and—"

Grady held up a hand. "I understand what you're saying. If the *Remembrance* turns out to be as important as we think she is, then you'll be right. If she doesn't, though—" He shrugged. "There are a lot of people in Philadelphia who think we're pouring money down a rathole."

"They're crazy," Sam blurted.

"I think so, too, but how do you go about proving it?" Grady asked. "We need to have something to do to prove what we're worth. In any case, I believe the answer to your question is no, as I said: if the Confederate States want to build aeroplane carriers, they are not forbidden to do so.

When the agreements were framed, no one took this class of ship seriously."

"That's too bad," Carsten said.

"I think so, too," Grady repeated. "Nothing I can do about it, though.

Nothing you can do about it, either."

Carsten looked southwest, in the direction of the Confed-eracy. "Wonder how long it'll be before the Rebels have one of these babies." Then he looked east. "Wonder how long it'll be before England and France do, too."

"It'll take the Rebs a while, and the frogs, too, I expect," Com-mander Grady said. "We're sitting on the CSA, and Kaiser Bill is sitting on France.

England... I don't know about England. They didn't have the war brought home to them, not the way the Con-federates and the French

did. Yeah, they got hungry, and the Royal Navy finally ended up fighting out of its weight, but they weren't *whipped*—you know what I mean?"

"Yes, sir," Sam said.

Grady went on as if he hadn't spoken: "And from Australia through India and Africa, they're still cocks o' the walk. If they decide they want to get even and they find some friends .. ." His laugh was anything but mirthful.

"Sounds like the way we won this last war, doesn't it, Carsten? We decided we were going to get even, and we cozied up to the German Empire. I hope to God it doesn't work for them ten years down the line, or twenty, or thirty."

"Yes, sir," Sam said again. "I guess we just have to do our best to keep ahead of them, that's all." He sighed. "I wonder where all this ends, or if it ever ends."

"Only way I can see it ending is if we ever figure out how to blow a whole country clean off the map," Grady said. He slapped Sam on the back. "I don't figure that'll happen any time soon, if it ever does. We'll have work to do for as long as we want it, the two of us."

"That'd be good, sir," Carsten said equably. "That's the big reason I wanted to transfer to the *Remembrance.* As soon as they bombed us off Argentina, I knew aeroplanes were going to stay important for a long, long time."

"You're a sharp bird, Carsten," Grady said. "I was glad to see you get that promotion at the end of ' 16. You're too sharp to have stayed an able seaman for as long as you did. If you were as pushy as you're sharp, you'd be an officer by now."

"An officer? Me?" Carsten started to laugh, but Commander Grady wasn't the first person who'd told him he thought like one. He shrugged. "I like things the way they are pretty well. I've got enough trouble telling myself what to do, let alone giving other people orders."

Grady chuckled. "There's more to being an officer than giving orders, though I don't suppose it looks that way to the ratings on the receiving end.

I think you've got what it takes, if you want to apply yourself."

"Really, sir?" Sam asked, and Commander Grady nodded. Sam had never aspired to anything more than chief petty officer, not even in his wildest dreams. Now he did. He'd known a few mustangs, officers who'd come up through the ranks. Doing that wasn't impossible, but it wasn't easy, either. How much did he want it? Did he want it at all? "Have to think about that."

Jake Featherston rubbed brilliantine into his hair, then combed a part that might have been scribed with a ruler. He looked at him-self in the tiny mirror above the sink in his room. He wasn't handsome, but he didn't figure he would ever be handsome. He'd do.

He put on a clean shirt and a pair of pants that had been pressed in the not too impossibly distant past. Again, he didn't look as if he were about to speak before the Confederate Congress, but he didn't want to speak before the Confederate Congress, except to tell all the fat cats in there where to go. He grinned. He was going to tell some fat cats where to go today, too, but they weren't so fat as they wanted to be, nor so fat as they thought they were.

He donned a cloth workingman's cap, put his pistol on his belt, and left the room. Fewer people bothered wearing weapons on the streets in Richmond than had been true in the first des-perate weeks after the Great War ended, but he was a long way from the only man sporting a pistol or carrying a Tredegar. No-body could be sure what would happen next, and a good many people didn't care to find out the hard way.

Featherston hurried down Seventh toward the James River. The back room in the saloon where the Freedom Party had met wasn't big enough these days, but a rented hall a couple of doors down still sufficed for their needs. After meetings, the Party vet-erans would repair to the saloon and drink and talk about the good old days when everyone had always stood shoulder to shoulder with everyone else.

Sometimes Jake was part of those gatherings, sometimes he wasn't.

After tonight, either he would be or he wouldn't have anything to do with the Party any more. He saw no middle way— but then, he'd never been a man who looked for the middle way in anything he did.

A small crowd had gathered on the sidewalk in front of the meeting hall: men in caps and straw hats crowding around the doorway, jostling to get in.

They parted like the Red Sea to let Jake by. 'Tell the truth tonight,

Featherston!" somebody called. "Tell everybody the whole truth."

"Don't you worry about that," Jake answered. "I don't know how to do anything else. You wait and see."

Several people clapped their hands. But somebody said, "You don't want to be Party chairman. You want to be king, is what you want."

Whirling to turn on the man, Jake snapped, "That's a god-damn lie, Bill Turley, and you know it goddamn well. What I want is for the Freedom Party to go somewhere. If it wants to go my way, fine. If it doesn't, it'll go however it goes and I'll go somewhere else. No hard feelings."

No matter what he'd said a moment before, that was a thump-ing lie. Hard feelings were what made Jake Featherston what he was. If the Freedom Party rejected him tonight, he would never forget and never forgive. He never forgot and never forgave any slight. And this rejection, if it came, would be far worse than a mere slight.

Inside, people buzzed and pointed as he walked up the aisle toward the long table on the raised stage at the front of the hall. Anthony Dresser already sat up there, along with several other Party officials: Ernie London, the treasurer, who was almost wide enough to need two chairs; Ferdinand Koenig, the secretary, a headbreaker despite his fancy first name; and Bert McWilliams, the vice chairman, a man who could be inconspicuous in almost any company.

Dresser, London, and Mc Williams all wore business suits of varying ages and degrees of shininess. Koenig, like Jake, was in his shirtsleeves.

As Jake sat down at the table, he looked out over the audience. It was a shirtsleeves crowd; he saw only a handful of jackets and cravats and vests.

He smiled, but only to himself. Dresser and his chums no doubt thought they looked impressive. The crowd out there, though, would think they were stuffed shirts.

"And they are," Jake muttered to himself. "God damn me to hell and gone, but they are."

Anthony Dresser rapped a gavel on the tabletop. "This meeting of the Freedom Party will now come to order," he said, and turned to Ferdinand Koenig. "The secretary will read the minutes of last week's

meeting and bring us up to date on correspondence."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman," Koenig said in a rumbling bari-tone. Jake Featherston listened with half an ear as he droned through the minutes, which were approved without amend-ments. "As for correspondence, we've had a good many letters from North and South Carolina and from Georgia concerning joining the Party and forming local chapters, this as a result of Mr. Featherston's speaking tour. We've also had inquiries from Mississippi and Alabama and even one from Texas, these based on newspaper stories about the speaking tour." He displayed a fat sheaf of envelopes.

Dresser gave him a sour look. "Kindly keep yourself to the facts, Mr.

Koenig. Save the editorials for the papers." He nodded to Ernie London.

"Before we proceed to new business, the trea-surer will report on the finances of the Party."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman." London's voice was surprisingly high and thin to be emerging from such a massive man. "As far as money goes, we are not in the worst situation. Our pres-ent balance is $8,541.27, which is an increase of $791.22 over last week. I would like that better if it were in dollars from be-fore 1914: then we would have ourselves a very nice little piece of change. But even now, it is better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick."

"Question!' Jake Featherston said sharply. "Where did all that new money come from?"

Dresser brought the gavel down sharply. "That doesn't matter now. Only thing that matters is how much money we've got." He banged the gavel again. "And now, if nobody else has got any-thing to say, we'll get on with the new business. We—"

"Mr. Chairman, I reckon Jake's got himself a point," Ferdi-nand Koenig said, "especially on account of the new business you've got in mind."

Bang! "No, sir," Dresser said, angry now. "I said it doesn't matter, and my ruling stands, by Jesus."

"Mr. Chairman, I appeal that ruling to a vote from the floor," Jake said. He hated parliamentary procedure, but he'd started learning it anyhow, even if he did think it was only a way to cheat by the numbers.

"Second," Koenig said.

"Never mind," Dresser said in a low, furious voice. He wasn't ready for a floor vote, then. Jake wasn't nearly sure he was ready for a floor vote, either. When one came, he wanted it to be for all the marbles. Dresser said, "Go ahead, Ernie. Tell 'em what they want to know, so we can get on with things."

Reluctantly, London said, "Some came from dues, some came from contributions from people who heard Featherston's speak-ing tour."

"How much came from each?" Jake demanded.

Fat as he was, Ernie London looked as if he wished he were invisible. "I don't have the figures showing the split right here with me," he said at last.

"Hell of a treasurer *you* are," Featherston jeered. "All right, let me ask you an easy one: did I bring in more or less than half the week's take? You tell me you don't recollect, I'll call you a liar to your face. Everybody knows bookkeepers like playing with numbers. They don't forget 'em "

Most unwillingly, London said, "It was more than half."

"Thank you, Ernie." Jake beamed at him, then nodded to An-thony Dresser. "Go on ahead, Tony. It's your show for now." He put a small but unmistakable stress on the last two words.

"All right, then." Dresser looked around the room, no doubt gauging his support. Featherston was doing the same. He didn't know how this would come out. He knew how it would come out if there were any justice in the world, but that had been in short supply for a while now. If there were any justice in the world, wouldn't the CSA have won the war? Maybe the same sorts of thoughts were going through Anthony Dresser's mind as he banged the gavel down once more and announced, "New business."

"Mr. Chairman!" Bert McWilliams' voice was more memo-rable than his face, but not much. When Dresser recognized him, he went on, "Mr.

Chairman, I move that we remove Jake Feath-erston from his position as head of propaganda for the Freedom Party."

"Second!'" Ernie London said at once. Jake had expected London to

bring the motion and McWilliams to second it; other-wise, he was unsurprised.

"It has been moved and seconded to remove Jake Featherston as head of propaganda," Anthony Dresser said. "I'll lead off the discussion." He rapped loudly with the gavel several times. "And we will have order and quiet from the members, unless they have been recognized to speak.

Order!" *Bang! Bang!*

When something not too far from order had been restored, Dresser resumed: "I don't deny Jake has done some good things for the Party—don't get me wrong. But he's done us a good deal of harm, too, and it's not the kind of harm that's easily fixed. He's taken all the great things we stand for and boiled them down to *hang the generals and hang the niggers.* Not that they don't *need* hanging, mind you, but there are so many other things to get the country going again that need doing, too, and he never talks about a one of them. People get the wrong idea about us, you see."

London and McWilliams followed with similar speeches. Out in the hard, uncomfortable seats that filled the hall, the Freedom Party members were silent, listening, judging.

Confidence surged through Featherston. Even here, when they should be doing everything to crush him, his opponents beat around the bush and tried to see all sides of the question. He would never make that mistake.

"Mr. Chairman!" he said. "Can I speak for myself, or are you just going to railroad me altogether?"

Warily, Dresser said, "Go ahead, Jake. Have your say. Then we vote."

"Right," Featherston said tightly. He looked out at the crowd. "Now is the time to fish or cut bait," he said. "The reason I'm head of propaganda is that I'm the only man up here people can listen to without falling asleep." That got him a laugh. Anthony Dresser, sputtering angrily, tried to gavel it down and failed. "I'm the one who brings in the money—Ernie said so himself.

And I'll tell you why—I keep it simple. That's what propaganda is all about. I make people want to support us. I don't say one thing Monday and another thing Tuesday and something else on Wednesday. Like I

say, I keep it simple."

He took a deep breath. "I shake things up. I make the people in high places sweat. That's the other thing propaganda is for, folks—to show people your way is better. So. Here it is: you can go on with me and see how much we can shake loose together, or

you can throw me out and spend your time pounding each other on the back, on account of it'll be a cold day in hell before you see any more new members." He rounded on Anthony Dresser. In tones of contemptuous certainty, he said, "Mr. Chairman, I call the question."

Dresser stared, the scales suddenly fallen from his eyes. "You don't want to be head of propaganda," he stammered. "You— You want to head the Party."

Jake grinned, hiding his own unease where Dresser let his show. "I call the question," he repeated.

Licking his lips, Dresser said, "In favor of removing Jake Featherston?"

Somewhere between a quarter and a third of the men in the hall raised their hands. In a voice like ashes, Dresser said, "Opposed?" The rest of the hands flew high. So did a great shout of triumph. "The motion is not carried," Dresser choked out.

"Mr. Chairman!" Ferdinand Koenig said, and Dresser was rash enough to recognize the Party secretary. Koenig went on, "Mr. Chairman, I move that you step down and we make Jake Feather-ston chairman of the Freedom Party."

Another great shout rose. In it were two dozen cries of,

"Second!"—maybe more. Featherston and Koenig grinned at each other as Anthony Dresser presided over voting himself out of office. In that glorious moment, Jake felt the world turned only because his hands worked its axis.

He had his chance now. He didn't know what he would make of it, not yet, but it was there.

Stephen Douglas Martin looked at his son. "I wish you wouldn't do this,"

he said, worry in his voice.

"I know," Chester Martin answered. "You've got to under-stand, though—you have a place. The way the bosses are acting these days, I'll never have one, not unless I take it for myself."

His father pointed to the bulge of the pistol behind his belt. "You won't get it with that."

"I won't get it any other way," Martin said stubbornly. "I don't aim to shoot first—I'm not that stupid—but I'm not stupid enough to stand around and watch my friends on the picket lines get shot down like dogs, either. If there's no trouble, fine. But if those goons start banging away at me, I'm not going to run like a rabbit, not any more."

His father shook his head, a troubled gesture. "You've been listening to the Socialists again. If I never see another red flag, it'll be too soon."

"You don't get it, Pa," Chester said, impatient with the igno-rance of the older generation. "If it weren't for the Socialists, nobody'd make any kind of decent money—the bosses would have it all." Unending labor strife since he'd come home from the war had eroded his lifelong faith in the Democratic Party.

"You're going to end up on a blacklist," his father said gloomily. "Then you won't have any work at all, no matter how the strikes turn out."

"I won't have any steel work, maybe," Chester said with a shrug. "One way or another, though, I'll get along. There's plenty of things I can do if I have to. One of 'em or another is bound to work out. I'm a white man; I pull my weight."

"Aahhh." Stephen Douglas Martin made a disgusted noise. "You're in it for the glory. I remember the red flags flying back in the '90s, too, and the battles, and the blood in the streets. It was all foolishness, if you ask me."

"Glory?" Chester Martin laughed bitterly. He unbuttoned his left cuff and rolled the sleeve high to show the scar a Confed-erate bullet had left on his upper arm. "There's no such thing as glory, near as I can tell. If the machine guns didn't kill it, the ar-tillery did. Teddy Roosevelt promised us a square deal, but I don't see him delivering. If I have to go out into the streets to get it, I'll do that—and to hell with glory."

"Aahhh," his father repeated. "Well, go on, then, since that's what you're bound and determined to do. I only hope you come back in one piece, that's all. You're playing for keeps out there."

Chester nodded. The thought did not bother him, or not un-duly. He'd been playing for keeps since his first comrade got hung up on Confederate barbed wire and shot just inside the Vir-ginia line back in August 1914. He said, "What was the war about, if it wasn't about having a better life after it was over? I don't see that, not for me I don't, not without this fight. I'm still here in the old room I had before I went into the Army, for heaven's sake."

"I buried one son, Chester, when the scarlet fever took your brother Hank," his father said heavily. "It tore my heart in two, and what it did to your mother. ... If I had to do it twice, I don't know how I'd get by afterwards."

Chester Martin slapped his father on the back. "It'll be all right. I know what I'm doing, and I know why I'm doing it." That wasn't the bravado he might have shown in the days before con-scription pulled him into the Army.

Instead, it was a man's sober assessment of risk and need.

His father said nothing more. His father plainly saw there was nothing more to say. With a last nod, Chester left the flat, went down to the corner, and waited for the trolley that would take him into the heart of Toledo and into the heart of the struggle against the steelmill owners.

The strikers, by now, had their own headquarters, a rented hall a couple of blocks away from the long row of steelworks whose stacks belched clouds of black, sulfurous smoke into the sky. The hall had its own forward guards and then a stronger force of defenders in red armbands closer to it.

Most of the strike's lead-ers had served in the Great War. They understood the need to de-fend a position in depth.

An unusual number of trash cans and kegs and benches lined the street by the hall. If the Toledo police tried to raid the place, the strikers could throw up barricades in a hurry. They'd already done that more than once, when their struggle with the owners heated up. For now, though, motorcars whizzed past the hall.

For now, too, blue-uniformed police made their way past the strikers'

guards. The men in blue strolled along as if they were in full control of the neighborhood. Only a few of them strolled along at any one time, though. A tacit understanding between the leaders of the strike and

city hall let the police keep that illusion of control, provided they did not try to turn it into reality. The agreement was not only tacit but also fragile; when things heated up on the picket lines, the cops drew near at their peril.

"What do you say, Chester?" Albert Bauer called when Mar-tin walked into the hall. The stocky steelworker made a fist. "Here's to the revolution—the one you said we didn't need."

"Ahh, shut up, Al," Martin answered with a sour grin. "Or if you don't want to shut up, tell me you were never wrong in your whole life ."

"Can't do it," Bauer admitted. "But I'll tell you this: I don't think I was ever wrong on anything this important."

"Teach me to be like you, then," Martin said, jeering a little.

"You're learning." Bauer was imperturbable. "You started out mystified by the capitalists, same as so many do, but you're learning. Before too long, you'll see them like they really are— nothing but exploiters who need to be swept onto the ash heap of history so the proletariat can advance."

"I don't know anything about the ash heap of history," Martin said. "I hope some of them get swept away in the elections. They're only a couple of months off. That would send the coun-try the right kind of message "

"So it would," Bauer said. "So it would. That means we have to send the country the right kind of message between now and election day."

"You mean you don't want me to go out and start taking pot-shots at the ugly blue bastards who've been taking potshots at us?" Martin said.

"Something like that, yeah." Bauer's eyes went to the pistol concealed —but not well enough—in the waistband of Martin's trousers.

"We aren't out to start any trouble now. If the police start it, we'll give them as much as they want, but the papers have to be able to say they went after us first."

"All right." That made sense to Martin. He headed over to the neat rows of picket signs. Choosing one that read A SQUARE DEAL MEANS A SQUARE MEAL, he shouldered it as if it were a Spring-field and headed out toward the line the striking steelworkers had thrown up

around the nearest plant.

By then, the scabs who kept the plant running had already gone in. Martin was sure they'd gone in under a hail of curses. Perhaps they hadn't gone in under a hail of rocks and bottles today. That was the sort of thing that touched off battles with the police, and everything seemed quiet for the time being, as it had on the Roanoke front when both sides were gearing up to have a go at each other.

Martin marched along the sidewalk. Toledo police and com-pany guards kept a close eye on the strikers. The police looked hot and bored. Martin was hot and bored, too. Sweat ran off him in rivers; the day was muggy, without a hint of a breeze. He kept a wary eye on the company guards. They looked hot, too, but they also looked like Great Danes quivering on the end of leashes, ever so eager to bite anything that came near.

"Scab-lovers!" the strikers taunted them. "Whores!" "Goons!" "Stinking sons of bitches!"

"Your mothers were whores!" the guards shouted back. "Your fathers were niggers, just like the ones who rose up in the CSA!'

"Shut up!" the cops shouted, over and over. "Shut the hell up, all of you!'1

They didn't want to have to do anything but stand there. Brawling on a day like this was more trouble than it was worth. Chester Martin knew a little sympathy for them, but only a little. He cursed the company guards along with everybody else on the picket line.

Socialist Party workers brought the picketers cheese sand-wiches to eat while they marched. In the middle of the after-noon, a picketer and a cop keeled over from the heat within a few minutes of each other. No company guards keeled over. They had all the food and cold water they wanted.

Shift-changing time neared. Chester Martin tensed. The pick-eters'

shouts, which had grown perfunctory, turned loud and fierce and angry once more as the scabs, escorted by guards and police both, left the steelworks.

"Back away!" a policeman yelled at the strikers. Martin had heard that shout so often, he was sick to death of it. The cop shouted again

anyhow:

"Back away, you men, or you'll be sorry!'"

Sometimes the striking steelworkers would back away. Some-times they would surge forward and attack the scabs regardless of the cops and goons protecting them. Martin had been in sev-eral pitched battles—that was what the newspapers called them, anyway. To a man who'd known real combat, they didn't rate the name. Either the reporters had managed to sit out the war on the sidelines or they cared more about selling papers than telling the truth. Maybe both those things were true at once. It wouldn't have surprised Martin a bit.

Today, nothing untoward happened. The strikers jeered and cursed the scabs and called, "Join us!" More than a few former scabs had quit their jobs and started on the picket lines. No one threw a stone or a horse turd this afternoon, though. No one started shooting, either, although Martin was sure he was a long way from the only striker carrying a pistol.

Having been through more gunfire than he'd ever wanted to imagine, he was anything but sorry not to land in it again. He trudged back to the strikers'

hall, turned in his sign, and dug a nickel out of his pocket for trolley fare. His father and mother would be glad to see him home in one piece. He wondered about his sister. From some of the stories Sue told, her boss exploited her, too.

As he stood on the streetcorner, he shook his head in slow wonder. "The bosses are too stupid to know it," he murmured, "but they're turning a whole bunch of good Democrats into revolutionaries."

Scipio had hoped he would never hear of the Freedom Party again after that one rally in May Park. He hadn't thought such a hope too unreasonable: he'd never heard of it till that rally. With any luck, the so-called party would turn out to be one angry white man going from town to town on the train.

The times were ripe for such cranks.

But, as summer slowly gave way to fall, the Freedom Party opened an office in Augusta. The office was nowhere near the Terry; even had more than a handful of Negroes been eligible to vote, the Freedom Party would not have gone looking for their support. Scipio found out about the office in a one-paragraph story on an inside page of the

Augusta Constitutionalist, He showed the story to his boss, a grizzled Negro named Erasmus who ran a fish market that doubled as a fried-fish cafe. Erasmus, he'd seen, was a shrewd businessman, but read only slowly and haltingly, mumbling the words under his breath. When at last he finished, he looked over the tops of his half-glasses at Scipio. "Ain't such a bad thing, Xerxes, I don't reckon," he said.

"The buckra in this here party hates we," Scipio protested. After close to a year in Augusta, he'd grown as used to his alias as he was to his right name. "They gets anywheres, ain't gwine do we no good."

Erasmus peered at him over those silly little spectacles again. "Most o'

the white folks hates us," he answered matter-of-factly. 'These ones here, at least they's honest about it. Reckon I'd sooner know who can't stand me than have folks tell me lies."

That made a certain amount of sense—but only, Scipio thought, a certain amount. 'The buckra wants to be on top, sure enough," he said. "But these here Freedom Party buckra, they wants to be on top on account o' they wants we in de grave, six feets under de ground."

His boss shook his head. "White folks ain't that stupid. We dead an'

buried, who gwine do their for work them? You answer me dat, an then I'll worry 'bout this here Freedom Party."

"Huh," Scipio said. He thought for a little while, then laughed a bit sheepishly. "Mebbe you's right. Cain't you jus' see de po' buckra out in de cotton fields, wid de overseer yellin' an' cursin' at they to move they lazy white backsides?"

"Lawd have mercy, I wish to Jesus I could see me that," Eras-mus said.

"I pay money to see that. But it ain't gwine happen. White folks ain't about to get their soft hands all blistered an' dirty, an' we's safe enough because o'

that." A Negro in overalls came in and sat down at one of the half dozen rickety little tables in front of the counter where fish lay on ice. Erasmus pointed. "Never mind this stupid stuff we can't do nothin' about anyways.

Get yourself over there an' see what Pythagoras wants to eat."

"Fried catfish an' cornbread," the customer said as Scipio came up to him. "Lemonade on the side."

"I gets it for you," Scipio answered. He turned to see whether Erasmus had heard the order or he'd have to relay it. His boss had already plucked a catfish from the ice; an empty spot showed where it had been. A moment later, hot lard sizzled as the fish, after a quick dip into egg batter, went into the frying pan.

Scipio poured lemonade and cut a chunk from the pan of moist, yellow cornbread Erasmus had baked that morning. He took the lemonade over to Pythagoras. By the time he got back, Erasmus had slapped the fried catfish onto the plate with the cornbread. He also dipped up a ladleful of greens from a cast-iron pot on the back of the stove and plopped them down along-side the fish.

"He don't ask for no greens," Scipio said quietly.

"Once he sees 'em, he decide he wants 'em," Erasmus said. "He been comin' in here better'n ten years. You reckon I don't know what he wants?"

Without another word, Scipio took the plate over to Pytha-goras. He had spent years learning to anticipate Anne Colleton's needs and to minister to them even before she knew she had them. If Erasmus had done the same with his regular customers, how could Scipio argue with him?

And, sure enough, Pythagoras waved to Erasmus and ate the greens with every sign of enjoyment. He ordered a slab of peach pie for dessert. Only after he'd polished that off did he turn a wary eye on Scipio and ask,

"What's all that come to?"

"Thirty-fi' dollars," Scipio answered, and waited for the sky to fall.

Pythagoras only shrugged, sighed, and pulled a fat wad of banknotes from a hip pocket. He peeled off two twenties and set them on the table.

"Don' fret yourself none about no change," he said as he stood up. "Foe the war, I don't reckon I never had thirty-five dollars, not all at the same time. Money come easy now, but Lord! it sure do go easy, too." He lifted his cloth cap in salute to Erasmus, then went back out onto the street.

"Do Jesus!" Scipio said. "He sure enough right about dat." Erasmus was paying him $500 a week after his latest raise, and feeding him dinner every day besides. Despite what would have looked like spectacular wealth in 1914, Scipio remained just one more poor Negro in the Terry.

Erasmus said, "It ain't all bad. Couple weeks ago, I done took me a thousand dollars down to the bank so I could pay off the note on my house.

Should have seen them white bankers fuss an' flop—jus' like a catfish on a hook, they was." His reminiscent grin showed a couple of missing front teeth. "Wasn't nothin' they could do about it, though. Money's money, ain't that right?" He laughed.

So did Scipio. "Money's money," he agreed, and laughed again. These days, the Confederate dollar would scarcely buy what a penny had bought before the war. For anyone in debt, cheap money was a godsend. For those who weren't, it was a disaster, or at best a challenge to make last week's salary pay for this week's groceries.

The eatery got more sit-down trade as afternoon darkened into evening.

More women, though, threw down brown bank-notes for fish they carried away wrapped in newspaper to fry for their husbands and brothers and children. Scipio watched Erasmus throw the story about the Freedom Party around a fat catfish that a fat woman with a bandanna on her head took off under her arm like a loaf of bread.

He wasn't sorry to see the story go. He wished somebody— God, perhaps—would use the Freedom Party itself to wrap fish. Whatever else you said about the skinny man who spoke for the party, he'd been terribly earnest. He'd believed every word of what he was saying. If that didn't make him all the more fright-ening, Scipio didn't know what would.

At last, Erasmus said, "Might as well go on home, Xerxes. Don't reckon we's gwine get much more trade tonight. I see you inthemornin'"

"All right." Scipio left the little market and cafe and headed back to his roominghouse. He kept an eye open as he hurried along. The street lights in the Terry were few and far between; the white men who ran Augusta didn't waste a lot of money on the colored part of town. If anybody was thinking of equal-izing the wealth in an altogether un-Marxist way, Scipio wanted to see him before being seen.

No one troubled him on the way to the roominghouse. No one troubled him when he got there, either. "Evenin', Xerxes," the landlady said when he walked up the stairs and into the front hall. "Not so hot like it has been, is it?"

"No, ma'am," Scipio said. He'd been paying the rent regularly for some time now. He was working steady hours, too, which made him a good bet to be able to go on paying the rent. Under those circumstances, no wonder the landlady sounded friendly.

He went on up to his neat little third-floor room, got out of his white shirt and black pants, and threw on a cheap, flimsy cotton robe over his drawers.

Then, barefoot, he padded down to the bathroom at the end of the hall.

Being butler at Marshlands had left him as fastidious about his person as he was about his sur-roundings, which meant he bathed more often than most of the people who shared the roominghouse with him.

But when he tried the bathroom door, it was locked. A startled splash came from within, and a woman's voice: "Who's there?"

Scipio's ears heated. Had he been white, he would have blushed. "It's Xerxes, Miss Bathsheba, from up the hall," he said. "Fs right sorry to 'sturb you."

"Don't fret yourself none," she said. "I'm just about done." More splashes: he judged she was getting out of the cramped tin tub. He smiled a little, letting his imagination peek through the closed door.

In a couple of minutes, that door opened. Out came Bath-sheba, a pleasant-looking woman in her early thirties. Scipio thought she had a little white blood in her, though not enough to be called a mulatto. She wore a robe with a gaudy print, of the same cheap cotton cloth as his. She didn't hold it closed as well as she might have. At Marshlands, Scipio had mastered the art of looking without seeming to. He got himself a discreet eye-ful now.

"See you later, Xerxes," Bathsheba said, and headed up the hall past him. He turned his head to watch her go. She looked back at him over her shoulder. Her eyes sparkled.

"Well, well," Scipio murmured. He hurried into the bathroom, ran the tub half full, and bathed as fast as he could. He would have bathed in

a hurry anyhow; sitting down in a tub of cold water was a long way from a sensual delight. Now, though, he had an extra incentive, or hoped he did.

He went back to his room almost at a trot, and put on a fresh shirt and a pair of trousers. *Have to take the laundry out soon,* he thought. He started out the door again, then checked himself. When he did leave, he was carrying a flat pint bottle of whiskey. He didn't do a lot of drinking, but there were times... He knocked on the door to Bathsheba's room.

"That you, Xerxes?" she asked. When he admitted it, she opened the door, then shut it after him. She was still wearing that robe, and still not bothering to hold it closed very well. She pointed at the whiskey bottle.

"What you got there?" Her voice was arch; she knew perfectly well what he had—and why, too.

"Wonder if you wants to take a nip with me," Scipio said.

By way of reply, Bathsheba got a couple of mismatched glasses and sat down at one end of a ratty sofa. When Scipio sat down, too, close beside her, he contrived—or maybe she did—to brush his leg against hers. She didn't pull away. He poured a healthy shot of whiskey into each glass.

They drank and talked, neither one of them in a hurry. After a while, Scipio slipped his arm around her. She leaned her head on his shoulder. He set down his glass, turned toward her, and tilted her face up for a kiss. Then his free hand slid inside her robe. He rapidly discovered she was naked under it.

Bathsheba laughed at what must have been his startled ex-pression. "I was hopin' you might stop by," she said.

"Sweet thing, I ain't stopped," Scipio said. "I ain't hardly even started." He lowered his mouth to a dark-nippled breast. She pressed her hand to the back of his head, urging him on. His breath caught in his throat. He needed no urging.

These days, the Lower East Side in New York City felt strange to Flora Hamburger. That it felt strange was strange itself. She'd lived her whole life there, till she'd gone off to Philadelphia to take her seat in Congress at the start of 1917. Now, as October 1918 yielded to November, she was home again, campaigning for a second term.

But, though she'd visited the Lower East Side several times since, this long campaign swing forcibly brought home to her how much she'd been away. Everything seemed shabby and cramped and packed tighter with people than a tin of sardines was stuffed with little fish. Things surely hadn't changed much in less than two years. But she'd taken them for granted before. She didn't any more.

Her posters—red and black, with VOTE SOCIALIST! VOTE HAM-BURGER! in both English and Yiddish—were almost everywhere in the Fourteenth Ward, and especially in the Centre Market, across the street from the Socialist Party headquarters. Her dis-trict was solidly Socialist; the Democratic candidate, an amiable nonentity named Marcus Krauskopf, had for all practical pur-poses thrown in the sponge. The Democrats hadn't been able to win two years before even with an appointed incumbent. Now that Flora held the advantage of incumbency, they looked to be saving their efforts for places where they had a chance to do better.

Flora was not the sort who took anything for granted. She stood on a keg of nails and addressed the people who crowded into the Centre Market, even if many of them were after pickled tomatoes or needles or smoked whitefish, not speeches. "What have we got from our great victory? Dead men, maimed men, men who can't get work because the capitalists care more for their profits than for letting people earn a proper living. That was the war the Democrats gave you. This is the peace the Democrats are giving you. Is it what you want?"

Some people in the market shouted, "No!" About as many, though, went on about their business. Most of them—most who were citizens, at any rate—would vote when the time came. They'd known too much oppression to throw away the chance to have a say in government the United States offered them.

"If you want to help the capitalists, you'll vote for the Demo-crats," Flora went on. "If you want to help yourselves, you'll vote for me. I hope you vote for me."

Her breath smoked as she talked. The day was raw, with ragged gray clouds scudding across the sky. People sneezed and coughed as they went from one market stall to the next. The Spanish in-fluenza wasn't nearly so bad as it had been the winter before, but it hadn't gone away, either.

When Flora stepped down from the keg of nails, Herman Bruck reached out a hand to help steady her. Bruck was dapper in an

overcoat of the very latest cut: not because he was rich, but because he came from a family of master tailors. "Fine speech," he said. "Very fine speech."

He didn't want to let go of her hand. Her being away hadn't made him any less interested in her. It had made her much less interested in him, not that she'd ever been very interested. Next to Hosea Blackford, he was a barely housebroken puppy. Freeing herself, Flora said, "Let's go back to the offices. I want to make sure we'll have all the poll-watchers we'll need out on the fifth." She was confident the Socialists would, but it gave her an excuse to move, and to keep Bruck moving.

The Party offices were above a butcher's shop. Max Fleisch-mann, the butcher, came out of his doorway and spoke in Yid-dish: "I'll vote for you, Miss Hamburger."

"Thank you, Mr. Fleischmann," Flora answered, genuinely touched—the butcher was, or had been, a staunch Democrat. His vote meant a lot to her.

In a slightly different way, it also meant a lot to Herman Bruck. As he went upstairs with Flora, he said, "If people like Fleischmann are voting for you, you'll win in a walk."

"We'll know Tuesday night," Flora said. Inside the office, people greeted her like the old friend she was. A term in Con-gress slipped away, and for a little while she was just the agitator she had been before Congressman Myron Zuckerman's tragic accidental death made her run to fill his shoes and bring the seat back to the Socialist Party.

Everyone cheered when Bruck reported what Max Fleisch-mann had said. Maria Tresca remarked, "If we keep on like this, in 1920 the Democrats won't bother to run anybody at all in this district, any more than the Republicans do now." The secretary was a lone Italian in an office full of Jews, but probably the most ardent Socialist there—and, by now, not the least fluent in Yid-dish, either.

"Maybe in 1920— *alevai* in 1920 .. . the White House," Her-man Bruck said softly. Silence fell while people thought about that. When Teddy Roosevelt rode the crest of the wave after win-ning the Great War, such dreams from a Socialist would have been only dreams, and pipe dreams at that. Now, with the cost of the war clearer, with the strife that followed—maybe the dream could turn real.

Flora did check the roster of poll-watchers, and suggested some changes and additions. *If you want something done right, do it yourself,*

she thought. After everything satisfied her, she headed back to the flat where she'd lived most of her life. The years on the floor of Congress had sharpened her debating: she had no trouble discouraging Bruck from walking along with her.

Coming in through the door reminded her anew of how much her life had changed. The apartment where she lived alone in Philadelphia was far bigger than this one, which housed her par-ents, two brothers, two sisters, and a toddler nephew, and which had housed her as well. It hadn't seemed particularly crowded before she went away: everyone she knew lived the same way, and sometimes took in boarders to help make ends meet. Now she knew there were other possibilities.

Her sisters, Sophie and Esther, helped her mother in the kitchen. The smell of beef-and-barley soup rising from the pot on the stove mingled with the scent of her father's pipe tobacco to make the odor of home. Her brothers, David and Isaac, bent over a chess board at one corner of the dining-room table. All was as it had been there, too, save for the crutch on the floor by David's chair.

David moved a knight and looked smug. Isaac grunted, as if in pain.

Looking up from the board, he consciously noticed Flora for the first time, though she hadn't been particularly quiet. "Hello," he said. "Got my conscription notice today." He was eighteen, two years younger than his brother.

"You knew it was coming," Flora said, and Isaac nodded: everyone put in his two years. Flora quietly thanked the God in Whom her Marxist exterior did not believe that Isaac would serve in peacetime. By the way David's face twisted for a mo-ment, that thought was going through his mind, too.

"How does the leg feel?" she asked him.

He slapped it. The sound it made was nothing like that of flesh: closer to furniture. "Not too bad," he said. "I manage. I only need one leg for a sewing-machine treadle, and it doesn't much matter which." At that, guilt rose up and smote Flora. Seeing it, her brother said, "I didn't mean to give you a hard time. It's just the way things are, that's all."

A fresh puff of smoke rose from behind the *Daily Forward* their father was reading. Abraham Hamburger said, "It's usually not a good idea to say anything that makes you explain yourself afterwards."

"I wish more Congressmen would pay attention to that ad-vice,

Father,"

Flora said, which caused fresh smoke signals to rise from behind the Yiddish newspaper.

Little Yossel Reisen grabbed Flora by the leg and gravely said, "Wowa": the closest he could come to her name. Then he walked on unsteady feet to Sophie and said, "Mama." That he had down solid.

Sophie Reisen stirred the soup, then picked him up. Yossel's father, after whom he was named, had never seen him; he'd been killed in Virginia long before the baby was born. Had he not got Sophie in a family way, they probably wouldn't have been mar-ried before he met a bullet.

When supper reached the table, the tastes of home were as fa-miliar as the smell. Afterwards, Flora helped her mother with the dishes. "You will win again," Sarah Hamburger said with calm assurance.

She would have thought the same had Flora reckoned herself out of the running. As things were, Flora nodded. "Yes, I think I will," she answered, and her mother beamed; Sarah Hamburger had known it all along.

Going to sleep that night was a fresh trial for Flora. She'd got used to dozing off in quiet surroundings, queer as the notion would have struck her before she went to Congress. The racket in the apartment, the sort of noise that had once lulled her, now set her teeth on edge because she wasn't accustomed to it any more. Even having to answer Esther's "Good night"

struck her as an imposition.

She stumped hard through the last few days of the campaign. On Tuesday the fifth, she voted at Public School 130. The So-cialist poll-watcher tipped his cap to her; his Democratic oppo-site number did not raise his expensive black homburg.

Then it was back to Socialist Party headquarters to wait for the polls to close in the district and across the country. As the night lengthened, telephone lines and telephone clickers began bringing in reports. By the third set of numbers from her district, she knew she was going to beat Marcus Krauskopf: her lead was close to two to one.

Well before midnight, Krauskopf read the writing on the wall and telephoned to concede. *"Mazeltov"* he said graciously. "Now that you've

won, go right on being the conscience of the House. They need one there, believe me."

"Thank you very much," she said. "You ran a good race." That wasn't quite true, but matched his graciousness.

"I did what I could." She could almost hear him shrug over the wire. "But you've made a name for yourself, it's a Socialist dis-trict anyhow, and I don't think this is a Democratic year."

As if to underscore that, Maria Tresca exclaimed, "We just elected a Socialist in the twenty-eighth district in Pennsylvania. Where is that, anyhow?"

People looked at maps. After a minute or so, Herman Bruck said, "It's way up in the northwestern part of the state. We've never elected a Socialist Congressman from around there before— too many farmers, not enough miners. Maybe the people really have had enough of the Democratic Party."

"Even if they are finally fed up, it's taken them much too long to get that way," Maria said. As far as she was concerned, the proletarian revolution was welcome to start tomorrow, or even tonight.

The later it got, the more returns came in from the West. The first numbers from Dakota showed Hosea Blackford handily ahead in his district.

"A sound man," Herman Bruck said.

"Sound? Half the time, he sounds like a Democrat," Maria Tresca said darkly.

But even her ideological purity melted in the face of the gains the Socialists were making. A couple of districts in and just out-side Toledo that had never been anything but Democratic were going Socialist tonight. The same thing happened in Illinois and Michigan and, eventually, in distant California, too.

"Is it a majority?" Flora asked, a question she hadn't thought she would need tonight. She'd been optimistic going into the election, but there was a difference between optimism and cock-eyed optimism.

Except, tonight, maybe there wasn't. "I don't know." Herman Bruck sounded like a man doing his best to restrain astonished awe. "A lot of these races are still close. But it could be." He looked toward a map

where he'd been coloring Socialist districts red. "It really could be."

Every time Cincinnatus Driver got downwind of the Kentucky Smoke House, spit gushed into his mouth. He couldn't help it; Apicius Wood ran the best barbecue joint in Kentucky, very pos-sibly the best in the USA.

Negroes from the neighborhood came to the Kentucky Smoke House. So did Covington's whites. And so did the men who'd come down from the other side of the Ohio since the Stars and Stripes replaced the Stars and Bars atop the city hall. Nobody turned up his nose at food like that.

Lucullus—-Lucullus Wood, now that his father Apicius, like Cincinnatus, had taken a surname—was turning a pig's carcass above a pit filled with hickory wood and basting the meat with a sauce an angel had surely brought down from heaven. He nodded to Cincinnatus. "Ain't seen you here for a while," he re-marked. "What you want?"

Cincinnatus stretched out his hands in the direction of the pit. For a moment, he wanted nothing more than to revel in the warmth that came from it: the weather outside held a promise of winter. "I want to talk to your pa," he answered as he began to warm up himself.

Lucullus made a sour face. "Why ain't I surprised?"

"On account of you know me," Cincinnatus said. "I'll be damned if I know how you can look like you done bit into a green persimmon when you're takin' a bath in the best smell in the world."

"Only thing I smell when you come around here is trouble," Lucullus said.

He never missed a beat in turning the carcass or basting it.

With a bitter laugh, Cincinnatus answered, "That'd be funny, except it ain't. I get into trouble around here, it's trouble your pa put me in. Now"—he let his voice roughen—"can I see him, or not?"

Lucullus Wood was harder to lean on than he had been. He was twenty now, or maybe a year past, and had confidence in himself as a man. Even so, a show of determination could still make him back down. He bit his lip, then said, "That room in back I reckon you know

about."

"Yeah, I know about that room." Cincinnatus nodded. "He in there with anybody, or is he by his lonesome?"

"By his lonesome, far as I know," Lucullus said. "Go on, go on. You barged in before. Barge on in again." Had his hands been free, he probably would have made washing motions with them to show that whatever happened next was not his fault. As things were, his expression got the message across.

Ignoring that expression, Cincinnatus went down the hall at the back of the Kentucky Smoke House till he got to the door he knew. He didn't barge in; he knocked instead. "Come in," a voice from within said. Cincinnatus worked the latch. Apicius Wood looked at him with something less than pleasure. "Oh. It's you. Reckoned it might be somebody I was glad to see."

"It's me." Cincinnatus shut the door behind him.

With a grunt, Apicius pointed to a battered chair. The propri-etor of the Kentucky Smoke House looked as if he'd eaten a great deal of his own barbecue. If that was how he'd got so fat, Cincinnatus didn't think he could have picked a better way. "Well," Apicius rumbled, "what we gonna fight about today?"

"Don't want no fight," Cincinnatus said.

Apicius Wood laughed in his face. "Ain't many niggers in this town as stubborn as I am, but you're sure as hell one of 'em. We don't see eye to eye. You know it, an' I know it, too. When we get together, we fight."

Cincinnatus let out a long sigh. "I ain't enough of a Red to suit you, I ain't enough of a diehard to suit Joe Conroy, and I'm too goddamn black to suit Luther Bliss. Where does that leave me?"

"Out on a limb," Apicius answered accurately. "Well, say your say, so I know what we gonna fight about this time."

"What you think of the elections?" Cincinnatus asked.

"What the hell difference it make what I think or even if I think?" Apicius returned. "Ain't like I got to vote. Ain't like you got to vote, neither. Have to wait till after the revolution for that to happen, I reckon."

"Maybe not," Cincinnatus said. "Put 'em together, the Social-ists and the Republicans got more seats in the House than the Democrats do. First time the Democrats lose the House in more'n thirty years. They lost seats in the Senate, too."

"Didn't lose a one here in Kentucky," Apicius said. "'Fore they let somebody here vote, they make damn sure they know who he vote for."

Cincinnatus refused to let the fat cook sidetrack him. "How much you work with the white Socialists before the elections?" he asked.

"Not much," Apicius said. "Ain't much to work with. Don't hardly have no homegrown white Socialists, and every one that come over the Ohio, Bliss and the Kentucky State Police got their eye on him. Don't want them bastards puttin' their eye on me any worse than they done already."

"How hard did you try?" Cincinnatus persisted. "Did you—?"

But Apicius wasn't easy to override, either. Raising a pale-palmed hand, he went on, " 'Sides, them white Socialists ain't hardly Reds. They're nothin'

but Pinks, you know what I mean? They jaw about the class struggle, but they ain't pickin' up guns and doin' anything much."

"What you talkin' about?'* Cincinnatus said. "All these strikes—"

Apicius broke in again: "So what? Ain't much shootin' goin' on, not to speak of. When the niggers in the Confederate States rose up, that was a fight worth talkin' about. We'd have done the same thing here, certain sure, if the Yankees hadn't taken us out of the CSA by then. Did do some of it anyways."

That was true, and Cincinnatus knew it. He also knew some-thing else:

"Yeah, they rose up, sure enough, but they got whipped. Reds rise up in the USA, they get whipped, too. Got to be more to the class struggle than shootin' guns all the blame time, or the folks with most guns always gonna win."

"Not if their soldiers and their police work out whose side they really ought to be on," Apicius said. This time, he spoke quickly, to make sure Cincinnatus couldn't interrupt him: "Yeah, I know, I know, it ain't likely, not the way things is now. I ain't sayin' no different."

"All right, then," Cincinnatus said. "If it ain't all struggle with guns, we —you—ought to be workin' with the white folks, ain't that right?"

"You ain't been enough of a Red your ownself to tell me what I ought to be doin', Cincinnatus," Apicius said heavily.

"You don't fancy it, you don't got to listen," Cincinnatus re-turned. "Other thing you ought to be doin' is, you ought to start workin' to get black folks the vote. Ain't impossible, not in the USA."

"Ain't possible, not in Kentucky," Apicius said. "Some of the sons of bitches in the Legislature remember when they used to own us. You was born after manumission. You don't know how things was. When I was a boy, I was a slave. I don't know how to tell you how bad bein' a slave is."

"My pa was a slave," Cincinnatus said. "My ma, too. There's some states in the USA that let niggers vote. If we can't vote, we might as well still be slaves, on account of we ain't got no say in what happens to us."

"Yeah, and you know what states they are," Apicius said with a toss of the head. "They're states that ain't got more than about a dozen niggers, maybe two dozen tops, so havin' 'em vote don't matter one way or the other.

Kentucky ain't like that. We got to vote here, we'd have us some say. What that means is, we ain't never gettin' the vote here. White folks won't let it happen."

That held an unpleasant ring of truth. Cincinnatus said, "If we can't win a fight and we can't win the vote, what good are we?"

"Damned if I know what good you are, 'cept to drive me crazy," Apicius said. "What I'm good for is, I make some pretty good barbecue."

Cincinnatus exhaled in exasperation. "If you don't try, how the devil you find out what you can do?"

"I go up on the roof at city hall, I don't need to jump off to know I land in the street," Apicius said. "What you want I should do, hand Luther Bliss a petition to ask him to tell the gov'nor to give us the vote? Not likely!" That *not likely* didn't refer to the orders the chief of the Kentucky secret police might give the governor. But Apicius could

never sign such a petition, being unable to read or write.

"This here is one of the United States now," Cincinnatus said stubbornly.

"You and me, we're citizens of the United States. We weren't never citizens of the Confederate States. We can try now. Maybe we don't win, but maybe by the time my Achilles grows up, he be able to vote."

"Don't hold your breath," Apicius advised, "or you end up the bluest damn nigger anybody ever seen."

That also sounded altogether too likely to suit Cincinnatus. But he was not a man to give in to trouble if he could get around it. And, as a U.S. citizen, he had more ways to try to get around it than he'd had as a Confederate resident. "I end up bangin' my head against a stone wall here, I can move to one of them states where they do let black folks vote." He didn't know exactly which states allowed Negro suffrage, but a trip to the library would tell him.

He'd succeeded in startling Apicius. "You'd move up to one of them Yankee states?" The barbecue cook seemed to listen to himself, for he laughed. "Hellfire, this here's a Yankee state these days, ain't it?"

"Yeah, except most of the white folks here ain't figured that out,"

Cincinnatus answered. "So why the hell shouldn't I move? Couldn't be worse'n what I've got now, not in the USA it couldn't"—the Confederate States were a different story alto-gether, and both men knew it—"so what's keepin' me here? Ought to throw my family in the truck and get on the road."

"I seen that truck," Apicius said. "If it ain't one thing keepin' you here, damned if I know what is. You be lucky to get over the river into Ohio, let alone anywheres else."

"Maybe," Cincinnatus said. "It is a shame and a disgrace, ain't it?" But, even though he chuckled at the barb, the idea of packing up and leaving stayed in his mind. The more he thought about it, the better it seemed. He wouldn't have to worry about Luther Bliss, or Apicius and the Reds, or the diehards. He'd seen that white people from the rest of the USA didn't love Negroes—far from it—but white people in Kentucky didn't love Negroes, either.

He wondered what Elizabeth would say if he proposed pulling up stakes.

He wondered what his mother and father would say, too. All of a sudden, finding out didn't seem like the worst idea in the world. He'd never cast a vote in his life. Being able to do that would be worth a lot.

"You got that look in your eye," Apicius said.

"Maybe I do," Cincinnatus answered. "God damn, maybe I do."

V

"There are times when I'm stupid," Jonathan Moss said, "and then there are times when I'm really an idiot."

He looked around. The more he looked, the more this seemed like one of the times when he was really an idiot. Chicago win-ters were bad. He'd known about them. Winters up in Ontario were worse. He'd known about them, too. He'd shivered his way through three of them during the Great War. Hardly anything was more useless than the pilot of a flying scout in the middle of an Ontario winter.

"I can think of one thing, though," he said, and his breath blew out in a great icy cloud, "and that's a man who comes up here in December after a woman who can't stand him—a married woman who can't stand him, mind you."

If he hadn't done it, though, he would have wondered for the rest of his life. Now, one way or the other, he would know. He had his doubts about whether knowing would make him happy. It would make him sure, though, and that counted, too. So he'd told himself, at any rate, when he left law school.

Coming into the battered little town of Arthur now, he won-dered. No town in Ontario through which the front had passed was anything but battered.

The Canucks and the British had fought with dreadful intensity for every square foot of ground they'd held. In the end, that had done them no good at all. But the end came much slower and much, much harder than any Ameri-can had dreamt it would before the war began.

People in heavy coats and fur hats stared at Moss' sturdy Bu-cephalus as he halted the motorcar in front of the general store. If he'd been driving a lightweight Ford, say, he didn't think he'd have been able to

make his way north from Guelph; the road, such as it was, would have defeated him. Here he was, though, and Arthur, Ontario, and Laura Secord would have to make the best of it.

As he got out of the automobile, he wished for the furs and leathers in which he'd flown. He'd lived in them in wintertime. Under canvas, without even a proper roof over his head, they were the only things that had kept him from freezing to death. A cloth coat, even a cloth coat with a for collar, wasn't the same.

Inside the general store, a potbellied stove glowed a cheery red. The storekeeper was shoveling more coal into it as Moss came inside. He went from being too cold to too warm in the twinkling of an eye.

Setting down the coal shovel, the storekeeper said the same thing any small-town storekeeper in the USA might have said: "Help you, stranger?"

Then his eyes narrowed. "No. Wait. You ain't a stranger, or not quite. You were one o' them Yank fliers at the aerodrome outside of town, weren't you?"

"Yes." Moss hadn't expected to be recognized. He didn't know whether that would make things easier or harder. The storekeeper would have been able to tell he was an American before long anyhow. Now the fellow knew which American, or which kind of American, he was. "How are you today, Mr. Peterson?"

"I've been better, but I've been worse, too," the Canuck al-lowed. He fixed Moss with a flinty stare. "Other thing is, I'm mindin' my business in the town where I've lived all my days. You can boil me for tripe before I figure out why the hell a Yank'd want to come back here. You all of a sudden recollect you left a collar stud over at the aerodrome, or what?"

All at once, Jonathan Moss felt very much alone. No Ameri-can occupation forces were within miles. The troops had more important places to occupy than a little town in the middle of nowhere like Arthur. If he had an unfortunate accident here, no-body would ever find out anything about it except what the lo-cals revealed. And if it turned out not to be quite so accidental as it looked... he would be in no position to explain.

Even so, he decided to grasp the nettle. He'd come here to ask this question. He'd planned on doing it a little later, but he'd seen no plan survived contact with the enemy. Straight ahead, then: "Did Laura

Secord's husband come home safe from the war?"

Peterson the storekeeper gave him another long look. "You're *that* crazy Yank," he said at last. "She told me there was one who'd come sniffing around her that was peskier than all the rest. Don't reckon she ever thought you'd be pesky enough to come back here, though."

"You didn't answer my question, Mr. Peterson," Moss said. Peterson went right on not answering it, too. With a sigh, Moss dug in his pocket. He pulled out a twenty-dollar goldpiece. After examining the double eagle for a moment, he let it fall on the counter. It rang sweetly. "You didn't answer my question, Mr. Peterson," he repeated.

The storekeeper studied the coin as if he'd never seen any like it before.

Likely he hadn't; not much U.S. gold would have got up here. The eagle in front of crossed swords on the reverse was close to the emblem with which U.S. aeroplanes flew. The legend below held one word: REMEMBRANCE.

Peterson scooped up the double eagle and stuck it in his pocket. "She never said you were a *rich* fool of a Yank."

"Thanks so much," Moss replied. "Now will you please an-swer what I asked you?"

"Nope," Peterson said. For a moment, Moss thought that meant he wouldn't answer. The American wondered if he could get back his goldpiece without killing the storekeeper. As he was making up his mind to try, Peterson slowly went on, "No, Isaac ain't come back. That should make her fall right straight into your arms, don't you reckon?"

"Nope," Moss said, imitating him. What Laura Secord had said the last time he'd seen her still scorched his memory. What *was* he doing here, anyway? Without another word, he spun on his heel and went back out to his automobile.

Winter slapped him in the face as soon as he opened the door to the general store. The sweat the red-hot stove had brought out on his forehead promptly started to freeze. He got into the Bu-cephalus and stabbed the starter button, silently thanking God he didn't have to stand in the snowy street cranking the engine to life.

He drove out to the aerodrome; it was from there that he knew how to

get to the farm Laura Secord had been running. He had some trouble finding the base from which he and his comrades had flown against the Canadians and British. They'd lived under canvas, and the canvas had moved along with the front. But he'd served in these parts through a winter, and so the ground began to look familiar after a while. One field, plainly rutted despite the snow on it, sent chills through him that had nothing to do with the weather. He'd jounced along there any number of times, taking off on missions and coming back afterwards. Now—how strange!—it was only a field again.

It was the field he needed, though. Instead of casting about, he drove confidently once he'd found it. Five minutes later, he pulled off a road even more rutted than the field and up a narrow lane that led to a farmhouse and barn and a couple of smaller outbuildings. The Bucephalus' brakes reluctantly brought him to a halt not far from a stump with a hatchet driven into it. By that, and by the stains on the wood, he guessed it did duty for a chopping block.

He got out of the motorcar. Before he could head for the farm-house door as he intended, a figure muffled to the eyes walked out of the barn.

"Who's coming to see me in a fancy auto-mobile?" The demand was sharp and curious at the same time.

Hearing Laura Secord's voice for the first time in a year and a half sent a shiver through him, as if he'd taken hold of a live elec-trical wire. The first time he tried to answer, all that came out was a hoarse cough. He felt sixteen years old again, calling on a girl for the first time. His hands and feet couldn't suddenly have grown large and clumsy, but they felt as if they had.

He took a deep breath and spoke again: "It's Jonathan Moss, Miss Secord."

He'd forgotten her married name—done his best to blot it from his mind.

He wondered if she'd forgotten him altogether. He hadn't seen her that many times, and he'd been far from the only American flier who'd seen her.

But her sharp gasp said she remembered. "The mad Yank!" she exclaimed.

"I don't think so," he said, his breath steaming with every word.

"Well, you most certainly are," she said. "Not mad for being a Yank—I don't suppose you can help that—but mad for coming up here again. Why on earth did you? No matter how daft you are, you can't have wanted to see this part of the world again—or can you?"

"No, I didn't come here for that." Moss took another deep breath. He wished he could take a drink, too. "I came up here to see you."

"Oh, dear God," Laura Secord said quietly. She gathered her-self. "Didn't you listen to a word I told you the last time you came here? If that's not madness, I don't know what is. You should have stayed wherever you were and gone on doing what-ever you were doing."

"I did that," Jonathan Moss said. "For more than a year, I did that. When I couldn't do it any more, I came." He hesitated, then went on, "I heard in Arthur that your husband didn't come home. I'm very sorry, for whatever that may be worth to you."

"You decided to come up here without even knowing that?" she said in open astonishment, and he nodded. Maybe he was mad after all. She remarked, "He would have shot you, you know. He was very good with a rifle even before he went into the Army." Moss didn't say anything. He could think of nothing to say. Had she told him to go then, he would have got back into his motorcar and driven away without another word. Instead, she continued, "Come inside and have a cup of tea. I wouldn't turn out a mongrel dog in this weather before he had a cup of tea."

That did not strike him as the warmest commendation of his personal charms, if any, but it was kinder than anything she'd said to him the last time he was here. He followed her up the stairs and into the farmhouse. The stove was going in the kitchen, but not like the one in Peterson's general store. Laura Secord shoveled in more coal, filled the teapot from a bucket, and set it on the stove. As she busied herself in readying cups and tea. she kept shaking her head. Doing his best to make light of things, Moss said, "I really am a harmless fellow."

"If you really were a harmless fellow, you would have been shot down,"

she retorted. Then she pointed to a chair by the table. "Sit, if you care to. I can get you bread and butter." He sat and nodded. She served him, then tended to the tea when the pot started whistling.

No matter what he might have expected, the tea wasn't par-ticularly good.

It *was* hot. He gulped it, savoring the warmth it brought. It helped unfreeze his tongue, too: he said, "I came to tell you that, if there's ever anything you need—anything at all— let me know, and I'll take care of it."

"A knight in shining armor?" Her eyebrows rose.

Moss shook his head. "I thought of myself like that at the start of the war: a knight of the air, I mean. It didn't last, of course. War's a filthy business no matter how you fight it. But I'll do that for you. So help me God, I will.

You're—special to me. I don't know how else to put it." He was more afraid of saying *love* than he had been of facing machine-gun bullets from a Sopwith Pup.

"You'd better go now," Laura Secord said. She wasn't reviling him, as she had the last time he'd come to her, but there was no give in her voice, either. "You mean to be kind; I'm sure you mean to be kind. But I don't see how I can take you up on. .. any part of that generous offer. When I see you, I see your country, too, and your country has destroyed mine. Find yourself an American girl, one who can forgive you for that." She laughed.

"Melodramatic, isn't it? But life is sometimes."

He got to his feet. He'd known from the beginning the odds were against him—to put it mildly. "Here." He pulled a scrap of paper and pencil from his pocket and scrawled down three lines. "This is my address. What I said still goes. If you ever need me, let me know." He turned and left as fast as he could, so he wouldn't have to watch her crumple up the paper and throw it away. Soon he was driving back toward Arthur, and then back past Arthur, toward the life he'd done his best to toss out the window. He kept telling himself he was lucky. He had a devil of a time making himself believe it.

"This feels good," Reggie Bartlett said to Bill Foster as the two of them strolled through Richmond. "We haven't done it as much lately as we used to."

"Time has a way of getting on," Foster said, and Reggie nodded. His friend went on, "And we'd stop in a saloon for a beer afterwards, too. When a beer costs twenty-five dollars instead of five cents, stopping in

a saloon doesn't seem like such a bully idea any more. My pay's gone up, sure, but it hasn't gone up as fast as prices have."

"It never does," Bartlett said with mournful certainty. This time, Bill Foster nodded. Reggie added, "And you've got to watch your money nowadays.

After all, you're going to be a mar-ried man this time next month, and Sally's the sort of girl who deserves the best."

"I only hope I'll be able to give it to her." Foster's voice held worry. "How am I supposed to watch my money? All I can do is watch it go away. A dollar I put in the bank at the start of the year isn't worth a quarter now, even with interest."

"Watching money these days means spending it as soon as you get it,"

Reggie replied. "If you do anything else, you watch it shrink, like you said."

Foster sighed. "Didn't used to be this way. How are we sup-posed to get on with our lives if we can't even save money? The Freedom Party's right, if you ask me—we've got to put a stop to things before the whole country goes down the water closet."

"Yeah, we've got to put a stop to things," Reggie said. "That doesn't mean the Freedom Party is right. We heard those fellows going on and on when they were new as wet paint, remember? I thought they were crazy then, and I still think they're crazy."

They'd come a long way into the northwestern part of town, to the public square at the corner of Moore and Confederate Street (it had been Federal before the War of Secession). In spite of the chilly weather, somebody was holding a rally in the square: Con-federate flags whipped in the breeze, and a gesticulating speaker stood on a platform of fresh yellow pine.

"Is that the Freedom Party again?" Bartlett asked. Then he spotted the signs behind the platform. "No, I see—it's the Radical Liberals. Want to listen, Bill?"

"Sure. Why not?" Foster said. "They have some interesting ideas. If they don't go off the deep end, the way they did when they nominated Arango in

' 15,1 may vote for 'em for president in'21."

"Me, too." Reggie nodded. "That fellow up there, whoever he is, he doesn't look like he's ever gone off the deep end of any-thing in his whole life."

As he got closer, he noticed a placard identifying the speaker as Congressman Baird from Chihuahua. Waistcoated and hom-burged, Baird looked more like a banker than a Congressman. "We have to face the facts," he was saying as Reggie and Foster got close enough to hear. "We are not the top dogs any more. Our friends are not the top dogs any more.

We can stick our heads in the sand and pretend things still are the way they were in 1914, but that won't do us any good. The war has been over for almost a year and a half, and most of the people in this country don't really understand that things have changed."

Bill Foster looked disgusted. "] take back what I said a minute ago. He wants us to go sucking up to the United States, and I'll see him and everybody else in hell before I lick Teddy Roo-sevelt's boots."

"We've got to do something," Reggie answered. "If we don't, it's $500

beer next month, or maybe $5,000 beer. They licked us. You going to tell me they didn't?" As if to remind him, his shoulder twinged.

While they were talking, so was Congressman Baird. Reggie started listening to him again in midsentence: "—whole conti-nent, north and south and west alike, might be better off if we dropped our tariff barriers and the USA did the same. I don't say we ought to do that all at once, but I do say it is something toward which we can work, and something liable to lead to greater pros-perity throughout America. We share a heritage with the United States; in their own way, the Yankees are Americans, too. We fought a revolution against England, but England became the Confederacy's friend.

Even though we have fought wars against the United States, they too may yet become our friends."

"You want to hear any more of this, Reggie?" Foster asked. "If the sign didn't say this fellow was from Chihuahua, I'd reckon he snuck in from California or Connecticut or one of those damn-yankee places."

"Damnyankees aren't as bad as all that. They don't have horns and tails,"

Reggie said. His friend gave him what was plainly meant for a

withering look. He didn't wither, continuing, "They doctored me as well as anybody could, when it would have been easier for them to give up and let me die.

All you did was fight 'em. They had me in their hands."

Foster was plainly unconvinced. But Congressman Baird got a bigger round of applause than Reggie Bartlett had really ex-pected. Foster looked surprised at that, too. Grudgingly, he said, "Some people here think the way you do. I still don't see it, but I'll listen a while longer/1

Buoyed by the cheers, Baird went on, "I don't say for a mo-ment that we should not try to regain as much of our strength as we can. We must be able to defend ourselves. But we must also bear in mind the colossus to our north and west, and that, as I said, our friends have fallen by the wayside. We are on our own, in a world that loves us not. We would be wise to remember as much."

That made good sense to Reggie. The Whigs, who had domi-nated Confederate politics even more thoroughly than the Demo-crats had dominated those of the USA, still seemed stuck in the past without any notion of how to face the future. The Freedom Party and others of its ilk wanted to throw out the baby with the bathwater, although they quarreled over which was which. Baird, at least, had some idea of the direction in which he wanted the CSAtogo.

His supporters in the crowd raised a chant: "Radical Liberals! Radical Liberals!' Whigs would never have done anything so undignified. But the Whigs didn't have to do anything undigni-fied. They often seemed to think they didn't have to do anything at all. That, Reggie thought, was what holding power for half a century did to a party.

And then, from behind, another chant rose, or rather a furious howl:

"Traitors! Filthy, stinking, goddamn traitors!" Reggie spun around. Charging across the yellowed grass were a couple dozen men armed with clubs and bottles and a variety of other improvised weapons. They all wore white shirts and butternut trousers. "Traitors!" they howled again, as they smashed into the rear of Congressman Baird's crowd. They howled something else, too, a word that made Bartlett's hair try to stand on end:

"Freedom!"

The Congressman's voice rose in well-modulated indigna-tion: "What is the meaning of this uncouth interruption?"

No one answered him, not in so many words. But the meaning was obvious even so—the newcomers were breaking up his rally, and breaking the heads of the people who'd been listening to him.

"Fight!" Reggie shouted. "Fight these bastards!"

A club whizzed past his ear, swung by a thick-necked, thick-shouldered chap screaming "Freedom!" at the top of his lungs. Reggie kicked him in the side of the knee as he ran past. Then, as the man started to crumple, he kicked him in the belly. He'd learned to fight fair once upon a time, and had to unlearn it in a hurry when he got to the trenches.

He grabbed the muscular goon's club after the fellow lost in-terest in holding it, then started swinging it at everybody in a white shirt he could reach. Some of the others at the rally were fighting back, too. Most Confederate white men had done a tour in the Army. They'd seen worse fights than this. But the attack force from the Freedom Party had size, ferocity, youth, and sur-prise on their side. They also had a joyful zest for the brawl unlike anything Reggie had encountered in the trenches.

He knocked two or three of them flat even so. But then some-body hit him from behind. He staggered and fell. A couple of people—one of them was Bill Foster, who was trying, with no luck at all, to play peacemaker—stepped on him, someone else kicked him in the ribs, and he decided to stay down, lest some-thing worse happen to him.

The ruffians had just about completed routing the rally when police at last appeared. Haifa dozen men in old-fashioned gray took billy clubs off their belts. Their leader blew a whistle and shouted, "That will be quite enough of that!"

"Freedom!" the goons bawled. All of them still on their feet rushed straight at the cops. They had one other thing Reggie Bartlett noticed only while prone: more than a little discipline. They fought like soldiers after a common goal, not like indi-vidual hellraisers. The startled policemen went down like wheat under the blades of a reaper. Had one of them drawn a pistol.. . Had one of the Radical Liberals drawn a pistol . .. But no one had.

The ruffians, or most of them, got away.

Slowly and painfully, Reggie dragged himself to his feet. He looked around for Bill Foster, and spotted him holding a hand-kerchief to a

bloody nose. A couple of the fallen Freedom Party fighters were also rising.

Reggie stooped to grab the club, though quick movement hurt. But showing he was ready to fight meant he didn't have to. The goons lifted a comrade who couldn't get up on his own and, with his arms draped over their shoulders, left the public square.

From up on the platform, Congressman Baird kept saying "This is an outrage! An outrage, I tell you!" over and over again. Nobody paid much attention to him. He wasn't wrong. That didn't make what he had to say useful.

"They break your nose, Bill?" Reggie asked.

"Don't think so." Foster felt of it. "No, they didn't. I just got hit, not clubbed or stomped."

"Bastards," Reggie said. That didn't seem nearly strong enough. He tried again: "Goddamn fucking sons of bitches." That didn't seem strong enough, either, but it came closer. He looked around for his hat, and discovered it had got squashed during the brawl. Picking it up, he asked,

"Still like what the Freedom Party stands for?"

Foster suggested the Freedom Party do something illegal, im-moral, and anatomically unlikely. His hat, when he found it, was in worse shape than Reggie's. Sadly, he dropped it back onto the grass. Then he said, "The thing is, though, plenty of people *will* like it. Damn hard to stomach anybody saying anything good about the United States. A couple of times, I wouldn't have minded walloping Baird myself"

"Thinking about it's one thing," Bartlett said. "Doing it, though. .." He shook his head. "People won't be able to stomach that. No way in hell will people be able to stomach that." Bill Foster thought it over, then nodded.

"People just aren't so stupid," Reggie said, and his friend nodded again.

Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling sat at his desk—because of his protruding belly, sat some distance behind his desk—clacking away at a typewriter. He would have starved to death in short order had he had to try to make his living as a secretary, but he was a good typist for an Army officer.

He wished he were out in the field instead of banging out a re-port no one would ever read here in a War Department office in Philadelphia. He'd wished he were in the field instead of back of the lines at First Army headquarters all through the Great War. He could have commanded a battalion, maybe a regiment— maybe even a brigade, considering how fast front-line officers

went down. Of course, he might have gone down himself, but that was the chance you took.

"Dowling!" At the howl from behind him, he made a typo-graphical error.

Save that it held the sounds of his name, the howl might have burst from the throat of a trapped wolf.

"Coming, sir." He pushed the chair back far enough to let himself rise, then hurried into the larger, more spacious office behind his own. Sleet beat on the window that gave a blurry view of downtown Philadelphia. Even though it was freezing out there, a steam radiator kept the office warm as toast. Saluting, Dowling asked, "What can I do for you this morning, General Custer?"

Custer stared at him, through him. Dowling had seen that stare before. It meant Custer had been into the bottle he didn't know Dowling knew he had in a desk drawer. No: after a mo-ment, Dowling realized the stare held more than that. Custer's pale, red-tracked eyes roamed the office. Again, he might have been a wild beast in a cage.

"What can I do for you, sir?" his adjutant repeated.

"Do for me?" Custer said slowly; he might have forgotten he'd summoned Dowling in the first place. "You can't do anything for me. No one can do anything for me, no one at all."

Dowling had heard Custer in a great many moods before, but never despairing. "What's wrong, sir?" he asked. "Is there any-thing I can do to help?"

"No, you can't help me, Major—uh, Lieutenant Colonel." Custer's wits weren't particularly swift, but he hadn't started turning forgetful. As the general continued, Dowling realized that was part of the problem: "I entered West Point in July 1857. July 1857, Lieutenant Colonel: sixty-two years ago come this summer. I have served in the United States Army longer than most men have been alive."

"And served with distinction, sir," Dowling said, which in its own strange way was true. "That's why you have four stars on each shoulder strap, sir; that's why you're here now, still serving your country, at an age when most men"— *are dead,* but he wouldn't say that—"are sitting in a rocking chair with pipe and slippers."

"What do you think I'm doing now, Dowling?" General Custer demanded.

"I've been in the army almost sixty-two years, as I say, and in an active command during nearly the whole of that time." He waved a plump, age-spotted hand. "Where is my ac-tive command now, pray tell?"

He *was* feeling trapped, Dowling realized. Custer's adjutant picked his words with care: "Sir, there aren't a lot of active com-mands with the country at peace and our foes beaten. And your assignment here—"

"Is only sound and fury, signifying nothing," Custer broke in. "I have no duties: no duties that matter, at any rate. Evaluate the transmission of orders from corps headquarters to divisions and regiments, they told me.

Jesus Christ, Dowling, it's a job for a beady-eyed captain, not for me!"

He had a point, a good point. To try to cheer him up, his adju-tant had to ignore it. "No doubt they want the benefit of your long experience."

"Oh, poppycock!" Custer snapped. "Nonsense! Drivel! They've put me out to pasture, Lieutenant Colonel, that's what they've done. They don't give two whoops in hell whether I ever write this goddamn evaluation. Even if I do, no one will ever read it. It will sit on a shelf and gather dust. That's what I'm doing now: sitting on a shelf and gathering dust. They got all they could out of me, and now they've put me on the shelf."

"Everyone is grateful for what you did, General," Dowling said. "Would you have headed last year's Remembrance Day pa-rade if that weren't so?"

"So Teddy Roosevelt was generous enough to toss an old dog one last bone," Custer said, a distinct sneer in his voice. "Ha! If he lives long enough, he'll go into the dustbin of the outmoded, too. And if the election returns from last November are any guide, he may get there faster than I have."

Dowling didn't know what to say to that. He judged Custer was likely

to be right. The general formerly commanding First Army did have a makework assignment here in Philadelphia. But what else could he expect? He was going to be eighty at the end of the year. He couldn't very well hope to be entrusted with anything of real importance.

He could. He did. "Barrels!" he said. "That's where I want to be working.

Sure as hell, Lieutenant Colonel, the Rebs are plotting ways to make theirs better even as we speak. I know they're not going to be allowed to have any, but they're plotting just the same. We'll fight another round with them, see if we don't. I may not live till then, but you will, I expect."

"Wouldn't surprise me if you were right, sir," Dowling said. No one in the U.S. Army trusted the Confederate States, no matter how peaceful they tried to make themselves seem.

"They need me on barrels," Custer said. "Those chowder-heads didn't know what to do with what they had till I showed them. They won't know how to make barrels better, either, you mark my words."

"Sir, there I don't really know if you're right or not," Dowling said, by which he meant Custer was talking through his hat. "Colonel Morrell is doing good work out in Kansas. I've seen a couple of the analyses he's sent in. They're first-rate. I was very impressed." He meant that. The more he had to do with Morrell, the more he was convinced the former commander of the Barrel Brigade would wear four stars long before his late seventies.

"Oh, Morrell's a sound lad, no doubt about that," Custer said, by which he meant Morrell had given him the victories he'd craved. "But he's only a colonel, and he's only a lad. Will they read his analyses, or will they just shelve them alongside of mine? They aren't soldiers here, Dowling; they're nothing but a pack of clerks in green-gray."

That held enough truth to be provocative, not enough to be useful.

Dowling said, "Colonel Morrell will make himself no-ticed, one way or another."

Custer's thoughts were running down their own track, as they often did.

He hardly noticed his adjutant's words. "Noth-ing but a pack of clerks in green-gray," he repeated. "And now they're making me a clerk, too.

How am I supposed to turn into a clerk, Dowling, when I've spent the past sixty years as a fight-ing man?"

"Sir, I know this isn't your first tour at the War Department," Dowling said.

"How did you manage before?"

"God only knows," Custer answered gloomily. "I sat behind a desk, the same as I'm sitting behind a desk now. Then, though, I had an Army to help reform. I had wars to look forward to. I had a purpose that helped me forget I was—stuck here. What have I got now? Only the desk, Lieutenant Colonel. Only the desk." His sigh ruffled his bushy mustache.

Exasperation. Fury. Scorn. Occasional astonished admira-tion. Horror.

Those were the emotions Custer usually roused in Abner Dowling. That he should pity the ancient warrior had never crossed his mind till now. Setting Custer to makework was like harnessing an old, worn-out ex-champion thoroughbred to a brewery wagon. He still wanted to run, even if he couldn't any more.

Quietly, Dowling asked, "Can I get you anything, sir? Any-thing at all that might make you more comfortable?" Even if Custer told him he wanted an eighteen-year-old blonde—and Custer's asking for something along those lines would not have unduly surprised his adjutant, for he still fancied himself a ladies' man, especially when Libbie wasn't around—Dowling resolved to do his best to get him one.

But the general asked for nothing of the sort. Instead, he said, "Can you get me the president's ear? We still have soldiers in ac-tion, enforcing our rule on the Canadian backwaters we didn't overrun during the Great War.

Even a command like that would be better than sitting around here waiting to die. And, by God, I still owe the Canucks more than a little. The British bastards who killed my brother Tom rode down out of Canada almost forty years ago. Even so late as this, revenge would be sweet."

Dowling wished he'd kept his mouth shut. He had no great de-sire to go traipsing up into the great American Siberia, no matter what Custer wanted.

But, seeing the desperate hope on the old man's face, he said, "I don't

know whether I can get President Roosevelt's ear or not, sir. Even if he hears me, I don't know whether he'll listen to me, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes." Custer nodded and looked shrewd. "It might be in-teresting to find out whether Teddy would enjoy keeping me here under his eye and useless better than he would knowing he's sent me to the ends of the earth.

Yes, I do wonder how he'd decide there." Reluctantly, Dowling nodded.

Teddy Roosevelt would be making exactly that calculation.

Even more reluctantly, Custer's adjutant telephoned Powel House, the president's Philadelphia residence. He was not im-mediately put through to Theodore Roosevelt. He hadn't expected to be. He left his name—and Custer's name, too—and how to reach him. If the president decided to call back, he would. If he decided not to . . . well, in that case, Dowling had made the effort.

Two days later, the telephone rang. When Dowling answered, a familiar gravelly voice on the other end of the line said, "This is Theodore Roosevelt, Lieutenant Colonel. What can I do for you and what, presumably, can I do for General Custer?"

"Yes, Mr. President, that's why I called," Dowling said, and explained.

A long silence followed. "He *wants* me to send him up there?" Roosevelt sounded as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Yes, sir," Dowling answered. "He feels useless here at the War Department. He'd rather be doing something than vege-tating. And he wants to rule the Canadians with a rod of iron, you might say, because of what happened to his brother during the Second Mexican War." Loyally, Dowling refrained from of-fering his own opinion of a transfer to Canada.

"If Tom Custer hadn't got killed, we probably would have lost the battle by the Teton River, because our Gatling guns would have been wrongly placed," Roosevelt said. "But that's neither here nor there, now, I admit."

The president paused. Dowling could almost hear the wheels going round inside his head. At last, he said, "Well, by jingo, if that's what General Custer wants, that's what he shall have. Let no one ever say I

put my personal differences with him in the way of fulfilling the reasonable de-sires of the most distinguished soldier the United States have known since George Washington."

"Thank you, your Excellency, on General Custer's behalf," Dowling said.

"You have no idea how pleased he'll be at going back under the saddle again."

"Our old warhorse." Roosevelt chuckled, a sound Dowling wasn't sure he liked. "Tell him to pack his long Johns—and you pack yours, too, Lieutenant Colonel."

"Yes, sir." Dowling did his best to sound cheerful. His best, he feared, was far from good enough.

"Lies!" Julia McGregor furiously tossed her head. The flames in the fireplace caught the red highlights of her hair and made it seem about to catch fire, too. "The lies the Americans make the teachers tell!"

"What is it now?" her father asked. Arthur McGregor smiled grimly. The harder the Americans tried to indoctrinate his daughters, the more they shot themselves in the foot.

"They call the Tories traitors! They stayed loyal to their own king when everyone around them was rebelling, and for that the Americans call them traitors!" Julia was furious, all right. "I'd sooner be around people who stay loyal even if it costs them than a pack of fools who blow like weather vanes, whichever way the wind happens to catch them."

Maude looked up from her knitting. "She's your daughter," she remarked to her husband.

"That she is," McGregor said with no small pride. "My daugh-ter, my country's daughter—not any American's daughter."

"I should say not," Julia exclaimed indignantly.

Mary shoved aside a piece of scratch paper on which she was practicing multiplication and division. "Pa, do the Yanks lie about nine times eight being seventy-two, too?" she asked, her voice hopeful. "It would work a lot better if it were seventy-one."

"I'm afraid they're telling the truth there, chick," he answered.

"Numbers don't change, no matter which side of the border they're on "

"Too bad," his younger daughter said. "I thought the Ameri-cans would lie about everything under the sun."

"They lie about everything that happened under the sun," Julia said. "But numbers aren't exactly things that happen under the sun. They're real and true all by themselves, no matter how you look at them."

"How does that make them different than anything else?" Mary asked.

Before Julia could answer, one of the kerosene lamps that helped the fireplace light the front room burned dry. The stink of lamp oil spread through the room. McGregor heaved himself up out of his chair and started over to get some kerosene to refill the lamp.

"Don't waste your time, Arthur," Maude said. "We're as near out as makes no difference."

"That's ... too bad," he said; he did his best not to curse in front of his womenfolk. "Have to ride into town tomorrow and buy some more at Gibbon's general store. Can't go around wan-dering in the dark."

"Why not, Pa?" Mary said with a wicked smile. "The Yanks do it all the time."

"Hush, you," McGregor said, snorting. "Tend to your ci-phering, not your wisecracks." Mary dutifully bent her head to the paper. Five minutes later, or ten, or fifteen, she'd come out with something else outrageous. He was as sure of it as of the sun coming up tomorrow morning.

When he drove out in the wagon the next morning, he was only half convinced the sun had come up. A thick layer of dirty gray clouds lay between it and him. In that murky light, the snow covering the ground also looked gray and dirty, though most of it was freshly fallen. Under the wagon's iron tires, the frozen ground was as hard—though by no means as smooth—as if it were macadamized.

As usual, U.S. soldiers meticulously checked the wagon be-fore letting McGregor go on into Rosenfeld. He had nothing to hide, not here: all his bomb-making paraphernalia remained hidden in his barn. After he'd taken his revenge on Major Hanne-brink, who'd ordered his son executed, the urge to make his deadly toys had eased.

The Yanks hadn't rebuilt the sheriff's station after he bombed it. All they'd done was clear away the wreckage. He smiled as he jounced slowly past the bare, snow-covered stretch of ground. It was not enough. Nothing could ever be enough to make up for losing Alexander. But it was something. It was more than most Canadians had, a lot more.

Rosenfeld was a far cry from the big city. It didn't hold even a thousand people. If two railroad lines hadn't met there, it might not have existed at all.

Throughout the war, though, Ameri-cans had packed it to the bursting point, as it became a staging area and recuperation center for the long, hard campaign against Winnipeg.

Now, with just a small occupation garrison, it seemed much more nearly its old self than it had during the war years. People on the street nodded to McGregor. Why not? No need to bother avoiding his eyes. Alexander was two and a half years dead now: old news, to everyone but his family. No one knew McGregor had had his revenge. Had anyone known, the Yanks would have found out. They would have stood him against a wall, as they'd stood his son, and shot him down, too.

He hitched the horse on the main street in front of the post of-fice. He couldn't have done that during the war; the Yanks had reserved the street for themselves. Digging in his pockets for some change, he went into the post office.

"Hello, Arthur," said Wilfred Rokeby, the postmaster. He was a small, fussily precise man who wore his hair parted in the middle and plastered down to either side with some spicy-smelling oil. "Didn't expect to see you coming into town quite so soon."

"Ran out of kerosene sooner than I thought I would." McGregor set a couple of dimes on the counter. "Long as I'm here, let me have some stamps, too, Wilf."

"I can do that," Rokeby said. He peeled ten red two-cent stamps from a sheet and handed them to McGregor. They were ordinary U.S. stamps, adorned with Benjamin Franklin's fleshy portrait, but had the word MANITOBA overprinted on them in black.

"At least we don't have to pay double any more, to help the singers and dancing girls come up here and perform for the Yankee soldiers,"

McGregor said, pocketing the stamps. "That was nothing but highway robbery."

"Things *are* settling down a mite," the postmaster said. "I hear some fellow's going to come up from Minnesota and start us a new weekly paper when the weather gets better. Been a long time since that bomb in front of Malachi Stubing's place shut down the old *Register T*

That bomb had not been one of McGregor's. He hadn't been in the bombing business back then. He had been in Henry Gib-bon's general store when the bomb went off. The Americans had almost taken him hostage after the blast. Frowning, he said, "One more way for the Yanks to peddle their lies."

"That's so," Rokeby admitted, "but it'll be good to have the town news, too, and all the advertising. We've missed it. You can't say we haven't, Arthur."

"Well, maybe," McGregor said, but then, as if to rebut him-self, he added,

"Minnesota." Shaking his head, he turned and walked out of the post office.

The general store was half a block up the street, and on the other side.

Henry Gibbon was wiping his hands on his apron when McGregor came inside carrying a large sheet-iron can. A hot stove gave relief from the chill outside. "Didn't expect to see you for another week or ten days, Arthur," the storekeeper said. He raised an eyebrow almost to what would have been his hair-line had his hair not long since retreated to higher ground.

"Ran out of kerosene." McGregor set the can on the counter with a clank.

"Want to fill me up again?"

"Sure will," Gibbon said, and did so with a large tin dipper. When he was through, he put the top securely back in place and held out his right hand, palm up. "Five gallons makes sixty-five cents."

"Would only have been half a dollar before the war," McGregor said. The fifty-cent piece and dime he gave Gibbon were U.S. coins, the five-cent piece Canadian. More and more of the money in circulation came from the USA these days.

"During the war, you'd have been out of luck if you didn't have your ration book," Gibbon said with a massive shrug. "It's not as good as it was, but it's not as bad as it was, either."

He hadn't had a son killed. He could afford to say things like that.

McGregor had, and couldn't. He started to head out the door, then checked himself. Gibbon might not know good and bad from the man in the moon, but he heard all the gossip there was to hear in Rosenfeld. "Has Wilf Rokeby got it straight? Is some fellow coming up from the United States to put out a paper here?"

"That's what I've heard, anyway," Gibbon answered. "Be right good to let folks know every week that I'm still alive and still in business."

"But a Yank," McGregor said. The storekeeper shrugged again. The notion didn't bother him. As long as he got his adver-tisements in the newspaper, he couldn't have cared less what else went in.

With a grunt, McGregor picked up the can of kerosene and went back out into the cold. He started across the street. A motorcar's horn blared at him.

He froze like a deer—he hadn't paid the least attention to traffic. If the automobile hadn't been able to stop in time, it would have run him down.

It halted with its front bumper inches from him. It was a big open touring car, with a U.S. soldier who looked very cold driv-ing and two men in buffalo robes and fur hats in the back seat. One of them looked older than God, with a beaky nose pro-jecting from a wrinkled face. "Jesus Christ, I wanted to see what one of these little towns looked like," he said, his voice American-accented. "I didn't aim to kill anybody while I was doing it."

"Sorry, General Custer, sir," the driver said. His greatcoat didn't offer him nearly the protection from the bitter winter chill that a buffalo robe would have done.

"1 think your wife had the right idea, sir," the younger man in back said.

He was a porky fellow, porky enough that his blubber probably helped keep him warm. "You might have done better to stay on the train till we got up to Winnipeg."

"I'm supposed to be in charge of things," the old man said querulously.

"How can I be in charge of things if I don't see for myself what the hell I'm in charge of?" He shook a mittened fist at McGregor. "What are you standing there for, you damn fool? Get out of the way!"

McGregor unfroze and took a few steps forward. The motor-car shot past him with a clash of gears; its tires spat snow up into his face. He stared after it. He'd learned about General Custer in school. During the Second Mexican War, he'd beaten General Gordon's British and Canadian army down in Montana, beaten it after the USA had agreed to a cease-fire.

McGregor had as-sumed he was long dead till his name started cropping up in war news.

And now he was coming to Canada to be in charge of things? And not just to Canada but to Winnipeg, only a couple of days to the north even by wagon? McGregor hurried back to the wagon. Purpose had indeed leaked out of his life after he'd avenged himself on Major Hannebrink. Now, suddenly, it was back. This time, he wouldn't just be avenging himself. He'd be avenging his whole country.

* * *

Nellie Jacobs yawned, right in the middle of business hours. Edna laughed at her. "This is a coffeehouse, Ma," Nellie's daughter said. "If you're sleepy, pour yourself a cup."

"I've been drinking it all day long." Nellie punctuated her reply with another yawn. "I don't want another cup right now." She hesitated and lowered her voice so the couple of customers in the place wouldn't hear: "It hasn't tasted quite right, anyway. Did we get a bad batch of beans?"

"I don't think so," Edna Semphroch answered, also quietly. "Tastes fine to me. Nobody's said anything about it, either, un-less somebody went and complained to you."

"No," Nellie admitted. She yawned again. "Goodness! I can't hold my eyes open. If this keeps up, I'm going to have to go up-stairs and lie down for a while."

Edna said, "Sure, go ahead, Ma. Leave me with all the work." Maybe she was joking. On the other hand, maybe she wasn't.

In the end, Nellie didn't go upstairs. A few more customers had come in, and sticking Edna with all of them didn't seem fair. She got through the day, though by the end of it she felt as if she had a couple of sacks of cement strapped to her shoulders. "Oh, Lord, I'm beat," she said over the ham steaks and string beans and fried potatoes that made up supper.

"You look it," Hal Jacobs said sympathetically. "What have you been doing, to make yourself so tired?" Her husband looked worried. "Do you think it is something you ought to see the doctor about?"

"I haven't been doing anything special," Nellie answered, "but today—no, the past few days—I've felt like I was moving under water."

"Maybe you *should* go to a doctor, Ma," Edna said. "That ain't like you, and you know it ain't. You've always been a go-getter."

"Doctors." Nellie tossed her head. "They're all quacks. Half the time, they can't tell what's wrong with you. The other half, they know what's wrong but they can't do anything about it."

Neither her daughter nor her husband argued with her. If you had a broken arm, a doctor could set it. If you had a boil, a doc-tor could lance it.

If you needed a smallpox vaccination, a doctor could give you one. But if you had the Spanish influenza, a doctor could tell you to stay in bed and take aspirin. And if you had consumption, he could tell you to pack up and move to New Mexico. That might cure you, or it might not. Doctors couldn't, and the honest ones admitted as much.

Nellie found herself yawning yet again. She covered her mouth with her hand. "Gracious!" she said. "I swear to heaven, I haven't felt this wrung out since I was carrying you, Edna."

The words seemed to hang in the air. Hal Jacobs' eyes widened. Edna's mouth fell open. "Ma," she said slowly, "you don't suppose .. . you don't suppose you're in a family way again, do you?"

"What a ridiculous notion!" Nellie exclaimed. But, when she thought about it, maybe it wasn't so ridiculous as all that. Her time of the month should have been . .. Her jaw dropped, too. Her time of the month should have come a couple of weeks be-fore. She'd never

thought of asking Hal to wear a French letter on the infrequent occasions when she yielded him her body.

She hadn't even worried about it. She was far enough past forty that she'd figured having a baby was about as likely as getting struck by lightning.

She glanced cautiously up toward the ceiling. That was fool-ish, and she knew it. If a lightning bolt came crashing through, she'd never know what hit her.

"Are you going to have a child, Nellie?" Hal Jacobs asked in tones of wonder.

"I think—" Try as she would, Nellie had trouble forcing out the words. At last, she managed: "I think maybe I am."

Edna burst out laughing. No matter how tired Nellie felt, she wasn't too tired to glare. A moment later, her daughter looked contrite. "I'm sorry, Ma,"

Edna said. "I was just thinking that, if you had a baby now, it'd be almost like I had a baby now, and—" She dissolved in more giggles.

Hal looked delighted and awed at the same time. Softly, he said, "With my first wife, I had two children, two little girls. Nei-ther one of them lived to be three years old. Now God has given me another chance, when I never thought He would." He bent his head in thanks.

Nellie wasn't nearly so sure she felt thanks. She hadn't figured on taking care of a child again—not unless Edna had misfortune strike her in the shape of a man (and Nellie could think of no more likely shape for misfortune to assume). And then Nellie started to laugh in the same way Edna had. "It *is* funny," she said. "It's funny now, anyways. Won't be so funny when the baby fi-nally comes. I remember that."

"Oh, yes," Hal said. "I remember, too. It is much work. But you, Nellie, we must take the very finest care of you, to make sure everything goes on in exactly the way it should."

What he meant was, she was getting long in the tooth to have a baby.

She couldn't get annoyed about that. For one thing, he'd put it very nicely.

For another, she'd thought she was too long in the tooth herself.

Over a gap of half a lifetime, she remembered what bringing forth Edna had been like. Maybe, this time, she'd go to a hospital and have them stick an ether cone over her face. That was one other thing doctors were good for.

"Ma's a tough bird," Edna said with no small pride. She beamed at Nellie.

Nellie could hardly recall her beaming before. "Aren't you, Ma?"

Before Nellie could answer, Hal said, "A woman in a delicate condition is in a delicate condition, which means she is .. . deli-cate, is what it means."

He'd talked himself twice round a circle, hadn't said a single, solitary thing, and didn't realize it.

"I'll be all right," Nellie said. "This is something God meant women to do."

And if that doesn 'tprove God is a man, I don't know what does. She didn't feel like a tough bird, but she didn't feel deli-cate, either. What she mostly felt was tired.

Edna said, "If you really are in a family way, Ma, why don't you go on upstairs? I'll do the dishes."

"Why, thank you, sweetheart." Nellie cherished every friendly gesture she got from Edna, not least because she didn't get that many of them. That she'd been watching Edna like a hawk for years never once entered her mind.

When she went upstairs and took off her corset, she sighed with relief.

Before too long, she wouldn't be able to wear a corset any more. Her belly would stick out there for all the world to see. But she had a ring on the proper finger—she held up her hand to look at the thin gold circlet—so that was all right.

She sighed again when she lay down on the bed. She felt as if her bones were turning to rubber. She raised an arm and then let it flop limply to the mattress. She wasn't quite ready to fall asleep—though she knew she would be very soon—but she wasn't going anywhere, either.

Her eyes had just started to slide closed when Hal came into the bedroom. "I know we didn't think this would happen, Nellie," he said, "but it will be a blessing in our old age."

"I suppose so," Nellie said, not yet convinced but willing to be. She laughed once more. "I never thought I'd be a mother again at the age I am now."

"And I never expected to be a father," her husband answered. "You made me the happiest man in the world when you said you would be my bride, and you have made me the happiest man in the world since, too."

Every hair in his mustache seemed to quiver with joy.

Nellie was a long way from the happiest woman in the world. A million dollars, a fancy house full of servants, and a rich, handsome husband for Edna would probably have turned the trick. But Hal was doing his best to make her happy, and she'd never had anyone do that before. "You're sweet," she told him. "Everything will be fine." Was she talking to herself as well as to her husband? If she was, who could blame her?

Hal said, "I shall have to get more business from the shop across the street."

"How do you aim do to that?" Nellie asked with genuine curi-osity. The shoe-repair shop brought in a steady, reliable trickle of money. Building that trickle to anything more struck her as unlikely.

"I know what we need," her husband said: "another war and another invasion." He sighed. "Only the Confederates whose boots I made and mended would probably pay me in scrip, the way they did last time. But even with scrip, I made more from them during the war than from my regular customers before or after."

"I'd sooner be poor," Nellie said. Considering how she felt about money, that was no small assertion.

"So would I," Hal Jacobs said. "The United States have spent my entire life working to get even with the Rebels. Now that we have finally done it, I don't ever want them to have another chance to invade our beloved country.

And, of course," he added, "'now that our flag flies down to the Rappahannock, the Confed-erates would have a harder time reaching

and shelling Wash-ington than they did in the last two wars."

"I was just a little girl when they shelled the city during the Second Mexican War," Nellie said. "I thought the end of the world had come." Her expression grew taut. "And then I went through 1914, and I was sure the end of the world had come. And then I went through the shellings and bombings during the last few months of the war, and by the time they were through, I was wish-ing the end of the world would come."

"It was a very hard time," Hal agreed. "But you came through safe, and your lovely Edna, and so did I." He kissed her. "And now this! I never imagined it, but I am ever so glad it has happened."

Nellie wondered how glad he would be when she was bent over a bucket heaving her guts out. She remembered doing that for weeks and weeks when she was carrying Edna. She won-dered how glad he would be when she was big as an elephant and couldn't find a comfortable position in which to sleep and had to get up to use the pot every hour on the hour. She wondered how happy he would be with the baby screaming its head off all night long three or four nights in a row.

She would find out. She glanced over at Hal Jacobs, who was gazing fondly at her. He'd made a better husband than she thought he would. Odds were he'd make a good father, too.

Nellie smiled. "If we have a little girl, you're going to spoil her rotten."

"I hope so!' Hal exclaimed. "And if we have a little boy, I expect to spoil him rotten, too. A son!'" He blinked. Was he blinking back tears? "I never thought I might have a son. Never. Not for many, many years."

"Well, we don't know if you've got him yet," Nellie said. "We've still got a good many months to go before we find out." She yawned once more, enormously this time. "But I've only got a couple of minutes to go before I'm asleep." She closed her eyes, and discovered she didn't have even that long.

Jefferson Pinkard wished he could walk into a saloon and have himself a cold beer. He didn't feel like getting drunk, or so he told himself. He just wanted one schooner of beer, to take the edge off a bad mood. But Alabama had gone dry before the Great War. All the saloons were either padlocked and ankle-deep in dust or long since

converted to some other way of separating a customer from his cash.

That didn't mean a thirsty man had to dry up and blow away. Some beer was sitting back in the icebox in Jeff's cottage. He didn't feel like going back there, though. He'd eyed Emily like a fox eyeing a henhouse ever since he came home from the war. That was more than a year and a half now: heading on toward two years. You couldn't keep watch every livelong minute of every livelong day.

Spring hadn't come to Birmingham yet, but it was on the way. The breezes weren't roaring down out of the freezing USA any more. They might not be very warm yet, but they blew off the Gulf of Mexico, wafting up a hint of Mobile, a hint of the sub-tropical, even though tree branches remained bare of leaves as skeletons were of flesh and all the grass on the lawns and in the parks was yellow and dead. Somewhere under the bark, some-where under the ground, new life lurked, and would soon be bursting forth.

Maybe new life lurked somewhere under the ground for the Confederate States, too. If it did, Jefferson Pinkard couldn't sense it as he could the coming spring. He wanted renewal. The country needed renewal. He had no idea where to find it. No-body else in the CSA seemed to know, either.

Birmingham had been a fine, bustling city before the war. Now it just idled along, like a steam engine running on about a quarter of the pressure it needed. The steel mills remained busy, but most of what they made went north as reparations for the damnyankees. No profit there for the foundry owners. And when they made no profit, the whole town suffered.

Some of the general stores and haberdasheries and furniture stores were recognizable only by the lettering on their windows, being empty, locked shells of their former selves, almost as parched and dead as the deceased saloons with which they shared business blocks. Others still survived. On a Saturday afternoon, though, they shouldn't have been surviving. They should have been thriving, full of steelworkers with money in their pockets to spend on a half-holiday.

Jefferson Pinkard had money in his pockets—more than two hundred dollars. "Hell of a lot of good that does me," he muttered under his breath.

The way things were these days, you couldn't even get good and drunk on two hundred dollars. Maybe it was just as well the saloons

were all deceased.

A man in a pair of denim pants and a shirt with one sleeve pinned up came out of a secondhand clothing store. Pinkard stopped short. Plenty of men in Birmingham these days had an arm gone above the elbow. But, sure enough, it was Bedford Cunningham, Jeff's best friend once upon a time.

"How are you today, Jeff?" Cunningham asked. He was as tall as Pinkard, and had been as burly when they were both down on the floor at the Sloss Works. Since being wounded, he'd lost a lot of flesh.

"All right," Pinkard answered shortly. He still remembered— he could never forget—what Bedford Cunningham and Emily had been doing when he'd walked into his cottage on leave. But if Bedford was here, he couldn't be back there doing anything with Emily now. That made Jeff somewhat better inclined toward him, enough so to ask, "What you doin' now?"

"I was heading over toward Avondale Park," Cunningham an-swered.

"This new Freedom Party is holding a rally. I want to see what they have to say."

"Christ, Bedford, they're just politicians," Jeff said, now cer-tain he had the excuse he needed not to go along. "You've heard one of 'em, you've heard 'em all. You've heard one of 'em, you've heard too many, too."

"These boys are supposed to be different," Bedford said. "They're the ones who've been banging heads up in Richmond, if you've been reading the papers." He essayed a small joke: "They've been banging heads up in Richmond even if you haven't been reading the papers."

As it happened, Jeff had been reading the papers, though not with so much attention as he might have. "Forgot the name of that outfit," he admitted. "I didn't know they got down here to Birmingham, either." He rubbed his chin. Bristles rasped; he needed a shave. "What the hell? I'll come along with you." Curiosity about the new party outweighed dislike and distrust for his old friend.

People—mostly working-class white men like Pinkard or his shabbier, out-of-work counterparts—straggled into the park and toward a wooden platform bedecked with Confederate flags. In front of the platform stood a row of hard-faced men in what might almost have been uniform: white shirts and butternut trousers.

"Don't reckon you want to pick a quarrel with those boys," Bedford Cunningham said.

"You wouldn't want to do it more than once," Jeff agreed. "They've all been through the trenches, I'll lay—they've got that look to 'em."

Cunningham nodded.

On top of the platform prowled a thin man with lank brown hair. He kept looking out at the crowd, as if he wanted to launch into his speech but was making himself wait so more people could hear him. "He's seen the elephant, too," Bedford said. "That's what my grandpappy would call it, anyway."

"Yeah," Pinkard said. "Sure has." Even this long after the war, he usually had little trouble telling a combat veteran from a man who wasn't.

At last, unable to contain himself any more, the skinny man strode to the front edge of the platform. "Aren't you folks proud to be puttin' money in the damnyankees' pockets?" he called in a harsh but compelling voice. "Aren't you glad to be workin' your fingers to the bone so they can put their mistresses in the fancy motorcars they build out of the steel you make?

Aren't you glad the fools and the traitors in Richmond blow kisses to the damnyankees when they send 'em our steel and our oil and our money?

They didn't make those things, so why the devil should they care?"

"He's got something," Bedford Cunningham said.

Pinkard nodded, hardly noticing he was doing it. "Yeah, he does." He waved a hand. "Now hush up, Bedford. I want to hear what he has to say for himself."

"Do they remember, up there in Richmond, up there in the Capitol, up there in that whited sepulcher, do they remember we fought a war with the United States not so long ago?" the skinny man demanded. "Do they?

Doesn't look like it to me, friends. How does it look to you?"

"Hell, no!" Jeff heard himself shout. His was far from the only voice raised from the crowd. Beside him, Cunningham yelled louder than he

did.

He grinned at his old friend, the first time he'd done that since he'd caught him with Emily.

"Up there in Richmond, do they care if we're weak?" the skinny man asked, and answered his own question: "No, they don't care. Why should they care? All they care about is getting elected. Nothing else matters to

'em. So what if the United States kick mud in our face? We were a great country once, before the traitors in Congress and the fools in the War Department stabbed us in the back. We can be great again, if we want to bad enough. Do they care, up there in Richmond? No, they don't care. Do you care, you people in Birmingham?"

He could give the same speech in Chattanooga and just drop in the different place-name and a couple of details. Jeff knew that. Somehow, it didn't matter. It didn't matter at all. He felt the skinny man was speaking to him alone, showing him what was wrong, leading the way toward making it better. "Yes!" he yelled at the top of his lungs, his voice one among hundreds, all crying the same word.

"I don't blame the United States for doing what they're doing to us," the skinny man said. "If I was in Teddy Roosevelt's shoes, I'd try and do the same thing. But I blame those people up in Richmond for letting him get away with it—no, by God, for helping him get away with it. We ought to throw every one of those bastards on the trash heap for that by itself Before we stand tall again, we *have* to throw 'em on the trash heap.

"But we've got more reasons than just that. They sat there sleeping while the niggers plotted and then rose up. And what did they do after that? They said, fine, from here on out niggers are just as good as white men. Tell me, friends, you reckon nig-gers are just as good as white men?"

"No!" roared the crowd, Jefferson Pinkard loud among them. Vespasian wasn't a bad fellow, and he did his job pretty well, but working alongside a white man didn't make him as good as a white man.

"Well, now, you see, you're smarter than they are up in Richmond," the Freedom Party speaker said. "Niggers aren't as good as white men, never were, never will be. Never *can* be, and the liars up in Richmond can't make

'em that way, even if they did give 'em the vote. The vote!" His voice rose to a furious, con-temptuous howl. "I've got a donkey back in Richmond. I can whip him from now till doomsday, and he won't ever win a horse race. You can say a nigger's as good as a white man, but that doesn't make it so.

Never has. Never will. Can't.

"We've got to give those fools up in Richmond the heave-ho and elect some people who can stand up to the United States and stand up for the white man here. That's what the Freedom Party is all about. We've got Congressional elections coming up this fall. I hope you'll remember us. I'm Jake Featherston. I'll be by again if the money holds out. You'll have somebody on the ballot here who thinks the way I do. Get on over to your polling place and vote for him." He waved to show he was done.

While the applause still thundered, a hat came through the crowd, as if to underscore that *if the money holds out.* Jeff pulled a hundred-dollar banknote out of his pocket and stuck it in the hat. He imagined doing such a thing back in 1914, or tried. He couldn't imagine *having* a hundred-dollar banknote in his pocket back then.

"There's a man who knows what we need," Bedford Cun-ningham said as the rally began to break up.

"Sure as hell is. Sure as hell does," Pinkard said. His voice was awed, almost as if he'd gone to church and been born again. He felt born again.

Listening to Featherston made him believe the Confederate States could pull themselves together again. "I'd follow him a long way."

"Me, too," Cunningham said. "If whoever the Freedom Party runs is even a quarter as good on the stump as this Feathersmith—"

"Featherston," Jeff corrected; he'd listened with great atten-tion to every word the skinny man said. "Jake Featherston."

"Featherston," Cunningham said. "If I like who they're running here, I'll vote for him. I've been a Whig a long time, but I'd change."

"So would I," Jefferson Pinkard said. "This Featherston, he knows what he's talking about. You can hear it in every word he says."

VI

For perhaps the first time in his professional life, Colonel Irving Morrell wished he were back in Philadelphia. Fighting argu-ments about barrels by way of letters and telegrams from Leaven-worth, Kansas, was not getting the job done in the way he would have hoped. Letters and wires were all too easy to ignore.

"What can we do, Colonel?" Lieutenant Jenkins asked when the latest unsatisfactory reply came back from the War Depart-ment. "We should have a design ready to build now, and we're not even close."

"Damned if I know, Lije," Morrell answered. He tapped the papers with the tip of his index finger. "I think we would have a design by now, if the budget were what people thought it was going to be when they set up the Barrel Works."

"Miserable Socialists," Jenkins said angrily. "They're trying to take away everything we won on the battlefield."

"They're not making anything easy for us, that's for sure," Morrell said. "I want to make hay while the sun shines, if you know what I mean. You have to figure the Rebs won't stay down forever. The farther ahead of them we are when they do start get-ting back on their feet, the better I'll like it."

"Yes, sir," Jenkins said. "We'd be a lot better off, sir, if they'd listen to you more. If they don't want to listen to you, why did they send you out here in the first place?"

"To get me out of their hair, for one thing," Morrell answered. "To drive me out of my mind, for another. These days, they're so worried about spending money that they're trying to build bar-rels on the cheap. I don't know how many times I've explained and explained and explained that the engines in our machines aren't strong enough to do the job, but what sort of answer do I get? What it boils down to is, 'They did the job in the last war, so of course they'll do the job in the next one, too.' ' He looked disgusted.

So did Lije Jenkins. "With that kind of thinking, we'd have gone into the Great War with single-shot black-powder Springfields."

Morrell nodded. "You understand that, and I understand that. The War Department understands it can get White truck engines— even the ones built in mirror image to pair with the regular model— in carload

lots, cheap as it wants. Coming up with something better won't be anywhere near as cheap. And cheap counts. Right now, cheap counts a lot."

"Are they going to leave our country's safety hanging on nickels and dimes?" Lieutenant Jenkins demanded indignantly. He was still very young, young enough to believe in the tooth fairy, the common sense of Congress, and a great many other unlikelihoods.

"Probably," Morrell said, at which the lieutenant looked as if he'd just watched his puppy run over in the street. Trying not to smile, Morrell went on, "They spent twenty years after the War of Secession tossing the Army nickels and dimes and not much more, remember. They paid for it, too, but that doesn't mean they can't do it again."

"They'd have to be crazy," Jenkins exclaimed.

"No, just shortsighted," Morrell said, shaking his head. "I think it was President Mahan who noted that the biggest trouble republics have is that, over time, the voters are apt to get tired of paying for what their country needs to defend itself. They'd sooner spend the money on bread and circuses, or else not spend it and keep it in their own pockets."

"After everything we've gone through, sir, that would be a crime," Jenkins said.

"You think so, and I think so, and the War Department thinks so, too,"

Morrell replied, this time with a shrug. "The voters don't think so. They've sent a lot of Socialists to Congress this year. We do what we can with what we have, that's all. If we haven't got much, we do what we can with that.

Pharaoh made the Israelites make bricks without straw."

"A crime," Lieutenant Jenkins repeated. He wasn't old enough to recall the cheeseparing the Army had had to put up with dur-ing the dark years after the War of Secession. Neither was Mor-rell, but he'd listened to older soldiers grouse about it ever since he'd put on a green-gray uniform.

General Custer, under whom he'd served in Tennessee, had been through it all.

And now, he'd heard, Custer was up in Canada, in charge of the

soldiers bringing U.S. authority to a land larger than the United States. He didn't know how the old warhorse would shape in that assignment. It didn't seem to call for the slam-bang drive that characterized Custer's fighting style. On the other hand, Morrell would have preferred it to sitting behind a desk in Philadelphia. No doubt Custer did, too.

Morrell dismissed his former commander from his mind. He glanced over at Lije Jenkins, who still looked unhappy with the world. "The only thing we can do is our best," Morrell said. A cuckoo came out of the clock on the wall and announced six o'clock. Morrell grinned. "The other thing we can do now is head over to the mess hall and get supper. And after that, didn't I hear something about a dance in town tonight?"

"Yes, sir." Jenkins' eyes sparkled. "I'm going over there. You feel like cutting a rug, too, sir?" He eyed Morrell with a certain bemused curiosity.

Morrell had all he could do to keep from laughing out loud. "I'm not a great-grandfather ready for the boneyard yet, Lieu-tenant," he said.

"There's still some juice left in here." He set a hand over his chest and grinned wickedly. "After supper, shall we race over to the dance hall?"

"Uh, no, sir," Jenkins said. "You ran me into the mud out on the practice range. I figure you can probably do the same thing on sidewalks." His grin had a wicked touch, too. "But, sir, there'll be girls there, you know."

"I should hope so," Morrell said. "You don't think I'd want to waltz or foxtrot with an ugly customer like you, do you?" As a matter of fact, Lieutenant Jenkins was a handsome young man. That still didn't mean Morrell wanted to dance with him.

Morrell was heading toward thirty now, and had never come close to acquiring a wife. His eye had always been on the war ahead, as the eyes of the United States had been. But now the war was over and won, and single-minded devotion to duty was looking harder and less desirable not only to the country but also to Irving Morrell.

He did not head for the dance with Lieutenant Jenkins seri-ously expecting to find a wife the minute he stepped out onto the floor. That would have been unreasonable in the extreme, and he knew it. But if he did find a young lady, a lady he found attrac-tive, he was ready and more than ready to pursue the matter and see where it led. He

nodded as he left Fort Leavenworth. He'd never had that kind of determination before, not about anything except the battlefield.

Leavenworth, Kansas, was a town of about twenty thousand people. Not all of them served the fort, by any means. Many mined the large coal deposits in the area, while others worked in flour and lumber mills. But, regardless of whether the locals worked for the Army or not, soldiers got solid respect in Leaven-worth. It had been an antislavery settlement back in the days be-fore the War of Secession, when the South tried to make Kansas a slave state. Only the oldest of the old-timers recalled those days now, but the tradition of hatred for the Confederacy ran strong here, as it did in much of Kansas.

Morrell and Jenkins strode past a large bronze statue of John Brown the citizens of Leavenworth had erected after the Second Mexican War. Brown was and always had been a hero to many Kansans. He'd become a national hero during the 1880s, when people in the United States began to see that he'd known what he was doing when he'd attacked the Southerners not only here but also in their own lair down in Virginia.

The dance was at a social hall next to a white-painted Baptist church with a tall steeple, a spare building that might have been transported bodily from New England to the prairie. Sounds of piano and fiddle music drifted out into the night. 'That's not the best playing I've ever heard," Morrell said, which was, if any-thing, a generous assessment, "but they do go right after a tune."

"Yes, sir," Jenkins answered. "Now we just have to hope it's not one of the dances where they've got maybe half a dozen girls and five hundred guys waiting to dance with them. A little bit of that kind goes a long way."

It was chilly outside; a coal stove and the dancers' exertions heated the social hall, so that a blast of warm air greeted Morrell when he opened the door. After looking around, he nodded ap-proval: men did not hopelessly outnumber women. Not all the men were soldiers—close to half wore civilian clothes. Morrell had never feared competition of any sort.

A punch bowl sat on a table at the far end of the hall. He went over to it, got himself a glass, and leaned against the wall, watch-ing couples spin and dip more or less in time to the music. Scouting the terrain before advancing was a good idea in other things besides warfare.

Lije Jenkins, on the other hand, plunged straight into the fray, cutting in on a civilian in a sharp suit. The fellow gave him a sour look as he retired toward the sidelines. Leavenworth might have liked soldiers pretty well, but cutting in like that was liable to start a brawl anywhere.

With a final raucous flourish, the little three-piece band stopped its racket.

People clapped their hands, not so much to applaud the musicians as to show they were having a good time. Men and women headed over to the punch bowl. Morrell quickly drained his own glass and, with the empty glass as an excuse, contrived to get to the bowl at the same time as a woman in a ruffled shirt-waist and maroon wool skirt.

He filled the ladle, then, after catching her eye to make sure the liberty would not be unwelcome, poured punch into her glass before dealing with his own. "Thank you," she said. She was within a couple of years of thirty herself, with hair black as coal, brown eyes, and warm brown skin with a hint of blush beneath it. When she took a longer look at Morrell, one eyebrow rose. "Thank you very much, Colonel."

He was, he suddenly realized, a catch: glancing around, he saw a couple of captains, but no soldiers of higher rank. Men were not the only ones playing this game. Well, on with it: "My pleasure," he said. "If you like, you can pay me back by giving me the next dance."

"I'll do that," she said at once. "My name is Hill, Agnes Hill"

"Very pleased to meet you." Morrell gave his own name. The musicians struck up what was no doubt intended to be a waltz. He guided her out onto the dance floor. He danced with aca-demic precision. His partner didn't, but it mattered little; the floor was so crowded, couples kept bumping into one another. Everyone laughed when it happened: it was expected.

They talked under and through the semimusical racket. "My husband was killed in the first few weeks of the war," Agnes Hill said. "He was up on the Niagara front, and the Canadians had lots of machine guns, and—" She shrugged in MorrelPs arms.

"I'm sorry," he answered. She shrugged again. Morrell said, "I got shot myself about that time, in Sonora. Only reason I'm here is luck."

His dancing partner nodded. "I've thought about luck a lot the past

few years, Colonel. That's all you can do, isn't it?—think, I mean." She whirled on with him for another few steps, then said, "I'm glad you were lucky. I'm glad you are here." As the music ended, Morrell was glad he was there, too.

Lucien Galtier did not converse with his horse while driving up to Riviere-du-Loup, as he usually did. The horse, a heartless beast, seemed to feel no lack. And Galtier had conversation aplenty, for, instead of going up to the town by the St. Lawrence alone, he had along Marie, his two sons, and the three daughters still living at home with them.

"I can't wait to see the baby," Denise said. She'd been saying that since word came from Leonard O'Doull that Nicole had had a baby boy the evening before.

"I want to see Nicole," Marie said. "Not for nothing do they call childbirth labor." She glared at Lucien, as if to say it was his fault Nicole had endured what she'd endured. Or maybe she was just thinking it was the fault of men that women endured what they endured.

Soothingly, Galtier said, "All is well with Nicole, and all is well with the baby, too, for which I give thanks to the holy Mother of God." He crossed himself. "And I also give thanks that Nicole gave birth with a doctor attending her who was so in-timately concerned with her well-being."

"Intimately!" Marie sniffed and slapped him on the leg. Then she sniffed again, on a slightly different note. "A midwife was plenty good for me."

"A midwife is good," Lucien agreed, not wanting to quarrel with his wife.

But he did not abandon his own opinion, either. "A doctor, I believe, is better."

Marie didn't argue with him, for which he was duly grateful. She kept looking around, as if she didn't want to miss anything her sharp eyes might pick up. She didn't get off the farm so often as he did, and wanted to make the most of the excursion in every way. After a bit, she said, "Traveling on a paved road all the way to town is very nice. It is so smooth, the wagon hardly seems to be moving."

"Traveling on a paved road all the way to town is even better when it

rains," Galtier said. The road had not been paved for his benefit. Paving had been extended as far out from Riviere-du-Loup as his farm only because the Americans then occupying Quebec south of the St. Lawrence had built their hospital on land they'd taken from his patrimony, not least because he hadn't cared to collaborate with them.

And now his daughter had collaborated on a half-American child. He shook his head. He had not expected that. He had not expected it, but he welcomed it now that it was here.

Clouds drifted across the sky, hiding the sun more often than they let it show through. Snow still lay on the ground to either side of the road. More might fall at any time in the next month. The calendar said it was April, and therefore spring, but the cal-endar did not understand how far winter could stretch in this part of the world. Lucien and his wife and children were as well muf-fled as they would have been going out in January, and needed to be.

Here and there, bomb craters showed up as dimples under the snow.

British and Canadian aeroplanes had done what they could to harm the Americans after their soldiers were driven north across the river. But now the wounds in the land were healing. The antiaircraft guns that had stood outside of Riviere-du-Loup— guns manned at the end of the war by soldiers in the blue-gray of the new Republic of Quebec —were gone now, stored away heaven only knew where. Lucien hoped they would never come out of storage.

Riviere-du-Loup itself perched on a spur of rock jutting out into the St.

Lawrence. Inside its bounds, a waterfall plunged ninety feet from the small river that gave the town its name into the greater one. In the late seventeenth century, when Riviere-du-Loup was founded, it would have been a formidable defen-sive position. In these days of aeroplanes and giant cannons, Galtier wondered if there were any such thing as a formidable defensive position.

His daughter and son-in-law lived only a couple of blocks from Bishop Pascal's church, not far from the market square. Galtier reckoned that a mixed blessing; the bishop—who had been simply Father Pascal when the war began—had jumped into bed with the Americans so quickly, he had surely endangered his vows of celibacy. There were still times when Lucien had mixed feelings about the way the war had gone. He suspected he would have those times as long as he lived.

The houses on either side pressed close to that of Dr. Leonard O'Doull.

"How cramped things are here in the city," Marie said, and clucked in distress. Lucien was inclined to agree with her. Coming into town on market day was all very well, but he would not have cared to live here.

As he was tying the horse to an apple tree in front of the house, Dr.

O'Doull opened the door and waved. "Come in, all of you," he called in his evermore Quebecois French. "Nicole can't wait to see you, and of course you will want to see little Lucien."

Galtier froze in his tracks. Slowly, he said, "When you sent word, you said nothing of naming the baby after me."

"When I sent word, we had not yet decided what we would name the baby," his son-in-law returned. "But Lucien O'Doull he shall be." He reached into his pocket and held out cigars. "Come on. Smoke with me. It's the custom in the United States when a man has a son."

If the cigars were anything like the ones O'Doull usually had, Galtier would have been glad to smoke one regardless of whether he had a grandson or not. Shaken out of his startled paralysis, he hurried toward the house.

A coal fire in the fireplace held the chill at bay. Nicole sat in a rocking chair in front of the fire. She was nursing the baby, and did not get up when her family came in. She looked as if she'd been through a long spell of trench warfare: pale and bat-tered and worn. Had Galtier not seen Marie look the same way after her children were born, he would have been alarmed. His other children, who did not remember such things so well, were alarmed. Even Georges had no snide comments ready.

Marie spoke in tones of command: "When he is finished there, hand him to me."

"Yes, Mother. It shouldn't be long." Nicole sounded battered and worn, too.

Lucien Galtier stared at Lucien O'Doull as he nursed. The baby looked very red and wrinkled, its head somewhat misshapen from its passage out into the world. His children exclaimed about that, too. He said, "Every one of you looked the same way when you were born."

Georges said, "Surely I was much more handsome."

"What a pity it hasn't lasted, then," Denise said. She and her sisters laughed. So did Charles. Georges looked something less than amused.

Presently, Nicole lifted the baby from her breast to her shoul-der. She patted him on the back. Lucien would have patted harder, but he'd had more practice than his daughter; he realized babies didn't break. After a while, his grandson gave forth with a belch a grown man would not have been ashamed to own.

"Good," Marie said. "Very good. Now he is settled. Now you will give him to me." Nicole held the baby out with great care. Marie took him with an automatic competence she would never lose, supporting his head in her right hand as she shifted him into the crook of her left arm. "He is so small,"

she murmured, as little Lucien flailed his arms at random. "When you have not had one in the house for a while, you forget how small a newborn baby is."

"He's a good-sized fellow," Leonard O'Doull said. "Almost eight pounds."

"He felt like an elephant when I was having him," Nicole added.

Marie ignored them both. "So small," she crooned. "So small."

"Here, give him to me," Lucien said. His wife gave him a dirty look, but passed him the baby after another minute or so. He dis-covered he still knew how to hold an infant, too. His tiny name-sake stared up at him from deep blue eyes. He knew they would get darker over time, but how much darker might prove an interesting question: Leonard O'Doull had green eyes. Galtier mur-mured, "What are you thinking, little one?"

"What can he be thinking but, *Who is this strange man?"* Georges said.

"He could be thinking, *Why is this man about to clout his son in the side of the head?"* Galtier returned. He and Georges were both laughing. Had Lucien tried clouting his son in the side of the head, he suspected Georges could and would have made him regret it.

O'Doull said, "He probably *is* thinking, *Who is this strange man?"* Before Galtier could do more than raise an eyebrow, his son-in-law went on, "He is also thinking, *What is this strange world?* Everything must seem very peculiar to a baby: lights and sounds and smells and touch and all the rest.

He never knew any of that before, not where he was."

Galtier found it indelicate to mention where the baby had been before he was born. By their expressions, so did both his sons. He reminded himself O'Doull was a doctor, and thought differently of such things.

"Let me hold the baby now, Father," Denise said. As Lucien handed his grandson to her, someone knocked on the front door.

"Who's that?" O'Doull said in some annoyance. Then he laughed at himself. "Only one way to find out, *n 'est-ce pas?"* He opened the door.

There stood Bishop Pascal, plump and pink and looking as impressive as a plump, pink man could in miter and cope and cassock. He almost always had a broad smile on his face, and today was no exception. "Did I hear correctly that this house had a blessed event last night?" he asked, and then, seeing little Lu-cien in Denise's arms, he pointed. "Oh, very good.

Very good in-deed. I see that I did hear correctly." His eyes twinkled. "I am glad to know that my sources of information remain good."

What he meant was, *lam glad my spies are on the job.* Lucien understood that perfectly well. If O'Doull didn't, it wasn't be-cause Galtier hadn't told him. But Bishop Pascal was not an overt foe to Galtier these days, and had never been a foe to any American: on the contrary. Dr.

O'Doull said, "Come in, your Grace, come in. Yes, Nicole had a little boy last night." He handed the bishop a cigar.

"How wonderful!" Bishop Pascal exclaimed. He held out his arms. Denise glanced at Galtier, who nodded ever so slightly. She passed the bishop the baby. He proved to know how to hold him. Beaming, he asked, "And how is he called?"

"Lucien," Leonard O'Doull answered.

"Ah, excellent!" No, Bishop Pascal never stopped smiling. He aimed that large mouthful of teeth at Galtier. "Your name goes on." Lucien nodded.

Bishop Pascal turned back to O'Doull. "You should make sure that, as this little fellow grows up, he learns your language as well as the tongue of the Republic of Quebec"

He surely meant it as good advice. It probably was good ad-vice. It made Galtier bristle all the same. Leonard O'Doull an-swered in a mild voice:

"These days, and I expect the rest of my days, the language of the Republic of Quebec *is* my language."

"I meant no offense," Bishop Pascal said quickly. "With the world as it is today, though, knowing English will help a young man throughout his life."

That had been true before the war. It was, as the bishop had said, likely to be even more true now, with Quebec so closely in-volved with the USA.

That didn't mean Lucien had to like it worth a damn, though, and he didn't.

Sylvia Enos lit a cigarette. She sucked smoke down into her lungs, held it there, and blew it out again. Then she took another drag. She didn't feel nearly the exhilaration she had when she'd started the habit, but she did enjoy it. When she couldn't smoke, as on the line at the galoshes factory, she got tense, even jittery. Like so many of the other women working there, she'd taken to sneaking smokes in the restroom. The place always smelledlike a saloon.

Then she had to return to the line. Into the can of paint went her brush.

She painted a red ring around the top of one of the black rubber overshoes sitting there in front of her, then around the other, working fast so the endless belts of the factory line would not carry them away before she could finish.

Another pair of galoshes, still warm from the mold, appeared before her.

She put rings on them, too. Down the line they went. The next girl, armed with knives and shears, trimmed excess rubber from the galoshes. She threw the scraps into a bin under her foot. When the bin filled, the scraps would go back into the hopper along with fresh rubber, to be made into new overshoes. The factory wasted nothing and did everything as cheaply as possible. That was why Sylvia still had a job. Had a man taken it, they would have had to lay out a little more money every week.

After a while, the stink of rubber started to give her a head-ache. That happened every morning by ten o'clock. It also gave her another reason to wish for a cigarette, or maybe a whole pack. What she'd discovered the first day she lit up got truer the more she smoked: tobacco did blunt her sense of smell.

Frank Best headed her way. She groaned silently; the foreman was carrying an overshoe where she'd missed part of the red line around the top. She knew what he'd say before he said it. That didn't stop him:

"Thought you were going to slip this one by, didn't you?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Best," Sylvia said. She didn't want him to have any kind of hold on her. "Here, give it to me. I'll fix it."

He held on to it. "You know, Sylvia, it really is too bad I have to take one out of a pair like this. It holds up the line and delays everybody. I hope I won't have to do it very often from now on."

He was holding up the line, too, by lecturing her. She didn't say so; she knew a lost cause when she saw one. "I'll do my best not to let it happen again," she said. "Please let me fix it."

At last, Best did. As if she were Leonardo working on the *Mona Lisa,* Sylvia completed the red ring. She handed the rubber overshoe back to Best. *Please,* she thought. *Take it back to wherever you spotted it and leave me alone.* Lectures were one thing, and bad enough. The rest of his routine was worse.

That didn't keep him from trotting it out. "You really should pay more attention to what you're doing," he said. "I would be disappointed, and I know you would be, too, if you made mis-takes like this very often. Work is sometimes hard to find these days."

"Mr. Best, I *don't* make mistakes like this very often," Sylvia answered.

"You've said so yourself."

He went on as if she hadn't spoken: "If the people above you are happy with you, though, things are liable to go a lot better for you."

She knew how he wanted to be above her: on a bed in some cheap hotel room. She found the idea more appalling than ap-pealing. Now that George was gone, she did have times when she missed a man, sometimes very much. Frank Best, though, was emphatically not the man she missed.

Not understanding him seemed the safest course here. "I'll be extra careful from now on, Mr. Best. I promise I will."

He gave her a sour look. She wondered if he would make him-self plainer. If he said, *Sleep with me or lose your job,* what would she do?

She'd get up and quit, that was what. Maybe her expression said as much, for he turned and walked away, mut-tering under his breath.

Sylvia got back to work. She took extra care with the rings all morning long. If Best wanted an excuse to bother her, he'd have to invent one; she didn't want to give him any. She felt his eye on her more than once, but pretended not to notice. At last, the lunch whistle blew.

"Was Frank singing his little be-nice-or-else song at you?" Sarah Wyckoff asked, gnawing on a chicken leg probably left over from supper the night before.

"He sure was." Sylvia took a fierce bite of her own sandwich, which was made from day-old bread and sausage that tasted as if it were about half sawdust. For all Sylvia knew, it was. It cost half as much as a better brand.

That mattered.

"He has no shame," May Cavendish said. "None."

"He's a foreman," Sarah said. "Of course he has no shame."

"A foreman at the canning plant where I used to work got one of the girls there in a family way," Sylvia said. Her friends made sad clucking noises and nodded knowingly. "I never found out if he married her

afterwards or not—I got fired because I had to take care of my kids when they caught the chicken pox."

She thought Isabella Antonelli would have come and let her know if everything had turned out all right. She hadn't seen the other woman from the canning plant in a long time. That might have meant Isabella was deliriously happy and didn't need her any more. It was more likely to mean the foreman from the can-ning plant had left her in the lurch. Sylvia wondered if she'd ever find out what had happened. Life didn't tie up every loose end with a neat bow, the way novels did.

"That's just like a man." Sarah Wyckoff studied her own brawny forearm.

"Nobody's going to trifle with me, not and keep his teeth he won't."

May sighed. "Men make it so you don't want to live with them, and they make it so you can't hardly make a living by yourself. You don't make as much as a man would doing the same job, and they don't let you do half the jobs anyhow. You tell me what's fair about that."

"If they didn't pay us less than they would a man, we wouldn't have these jobs we've got here," Sylvia said. The other two women nodded.

"And they won't let us vote here in Massachusetts, either," May said bitterly. "They've got to pass a law that says we can, and who's got to pass it? Men, that's who. You think more than half the men over at the New State House are going to vote for women? Hasn't happened yet, and I'm not going to hold my breath, either."

"There are a lot of states where it did happen." Sylvia's voice was wistful.

"The world didn't end, either."

"You'd figure it did, the way some men carry on," Sarah said. "May's right.

They aren't worth the paper they're printed on."

May ate an apple down to a very skinny core, then took out a pack of cigarettes. She lit one, then blew an elegant smoke ring. "I like a smoke after I eat," she said. "Sort of settles what's in there, if you know what I mean "

"I sure do." Sylvia got out her own cigarettes. The front of the pack showed soldiers in green-gray marching to victory. No-body ever showed the mangled corpses of soldiers in green-gray and sailors in Navy blue who didn't live to see victory. Sylvia never would have thought that way if she hadn't lost George. Now, deliberately, she turned the pack over so she wouldn't have to see those pink-cheeked soldiers. "Thanks for giving me a cigarette that time, May. I like 'em now."

"Good." May Cavendish had been about to put her cigarettes back into her handbag. She stopped and aimed the pack at Sarah. "Want to try'em?"

"No, thanks." Sarah shook her head. "I've smoked a couple of times.

Never liked it enough to keep up with it. Don't expect I would now, either."

"Have it your own way," May said with a shrug. She did put away the pack.

Sylvia smoked her cigarette with determination. She coughed only once.

Her chest was getting used to tobacco smoke, too. And May was right: even without the buzz she'd got when first starting the habit, a smoke after dinner or supper was more en-joyable than just about any other time.

George had liked to smoke after they made love. Sylvia's ears heated as she remembered that. She wondered what taking a deep drag while lazy in the afterglow would be like. *Probably pretty nice,* she thought. Would she ever have the chance to find out?

"There have to be some decent men out there somewhere," she said suddenly.

"A lot of them are dead," Sarah said. "My Martin is." She sighed and looked down at the grimy wood of the floor. "I still can't think about him without wanting to puddle up. I don't even know if I'd ever want to be with anybody else."

"I would, if I could find somebody," May said. "But a lot of the men who are decent are settled down with their wives, on ac-count of that's what decent men do, and a lot of men, whether they're decent or not, don't want anything to do with you if you've got children."

"Oh, there's one thing they want to do with you," Sylvia said. Both her friends laughed at the obvious truth in that. Sylvia went on, "But those aren't the decent ones. Maybe I ought to go to church more often, but Sunday's the only chance I have to rest even a little, not that I can get much with two kids in the house."

"Plenty of men who go to church every livelong Sunday aren't what you'd call decent, either," May said, sounding as if she was speaking with the voice of experience. "They don't go there to pray or to listen to the sermon—they go on account of they're on the prowl."

"That's disgraceful," Sylvia said.

"Sweetheart, there's a whole lot of disgraceful things that go on in this world," Sarah Wyckoff said with authority. "You don't have to look no further than Frank Best if you want to see some."

"Well, heaven knows that's true," Sylvia said with a sigh. "Now that I've told him no, I only hope he leaves me alone and doesn't take it out on me like he said he was liable to."

"All depends," said May, who'd been at the galoshes factory longer than Sylvia. "If he finds somebody who goes along with him before too long, he'll forget about you. If he doesn't, you may not have such a good time for a while."

Sylvia wondered how she ought to feel about hoping some other young woman succumbed to what Best thought of as his fatal charm. It would make her own life easier, no doubt about that. But would she wish the foreman on anyone else? She couldn't imagine disliking anyone enough to hope she suffered such a fate.

When the whistle announcing the end of the lunch hour blew, she headed without enthusiasm back to her position just behind the galoshes molds.

She reminded herself to do the best job she could painting rings on the rubber overshoes, to give Frank Best no reason to bother her.

But would he need an excuse? Here he came. That wasn't blood in his eye. Sylvia recognized the expression. George had often worn it when he'd been away at sea for a long time. Frank Best hadn't been, though she would cheerfully have dropped him off a pier. He wore the expression anyhow. Sylvia sighed. The end of the day seemed years away.

Sometimes, Roger Kimball still wished he'd gone to South America.

Every so often, the Charleston papers gave tantalizing bits of news about the fighting that continued down there even though the Great War was over everywhere else. The local enmi-ties had started long before the war, and weren't about to disap-pear because it did. Everybody but Paraguay and Bolivia needed submarine skippers, and they would have if only they'd had coastlines.

But he'd stayed in Charleston almost two years now, and he'd probably stay a while longer. For one thing, he saw Anne Col-leton every so often: not so often as he would have liked, not quite so seldom as to make him give up in dismay. He under-stood how carefully she rationed their liaisons.

It would have in-furiated him more if he hadn't admired her, too.

And, for another, he'd found, or thought he'd found, a way to help put the Confederate States back on their feet. Clarence Pot-ter, who'd become a friend instead of a barroom acquaintance, thought he was crazy. "I can't believe you've gotten yourself sucked into the Freedom Party," Potter said one evening in Kim-ball's small furnished apartment. "Those people couldn't start a fire if you spotted them a lit torch and kindling."

"I'm one of those people, Clarence," Kimball said, with only a slight edge to his voice, "and 1*11 thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"No, you're not," Potter said. "Your deplorable taste in poli-tics aside, you're an intelligent man. Believe me, that makes you stand out from the common herd in the Freedom Party. It makes you stand out from Jake Featherston, too." He held up a hand. "Don't get me wrong—Featherston's not stupid. But he has no more education than you'd expect, and the only thing he's good at is getting up on the stump and making everyone else as angry as he is."

Jack Delamotte took a pull at his whiskey. "I've heard him talk myself now. He even makes me angry, and I'm usually too damn lazy to get mad about anything."

"We *need* to get angry, dammit," Kimball said. "Too much wrong with this country not to get angry about it. The money's still not worth anything, the damnyankees won't let us have a proper Army and Navy, and half the niggers in the country act like they own it. You can't tell me different. You know damn well it's true."

"Featherston has about as good a chance of solving those problems as the man in the moon," Potter said. "Maybe less."

"Clarence is right," Jack Delamotte said. "He's like one of those nigger preachers. He gets folks all hot and bothered, sure as hell, but you look at what he says and you see he doesn't really say anything at all."

"That's all right," Kimball said placidly. Potter and Delamotte both looked startled. Kimball pointed at the former intelligence officer. "Clarence, the first time we met, you were talking about finding a goal for the CSA and getting people to stick to it. You remember that?"

"Of course I do," Potter said. "It was true then, and it's still true now. It's truer than ever now, because we've drifted longer without a rudder."

Kimball chuckled. "Trying to talk like a Navy man, are you? Well, all right, go ahead. But you know this Featherston char-acter, right?" He waited for Potter to nod, then went on, "Like Jack said, he's awful damn good at riling people up. If he doesn't have any kind of education, so what? So much the better, matter of fact. What do you say we get hold of him and give him the kind of ideas the Confederate States need to get back on their feet?"

"You and me and Clarence, saving the country?" Delamotte didn't just seem dubious; he seemed on the point of laughing out loud.

"Somebody's got to," Roger Kimball answered. He wasn't laughing, not now. "Nobody in Richmond knows how, that's for damn sure. What do you say, Clarence? Will Featherston listen to you?"

Potter rubbed his chin. His gray eyes held uncertainty, some-thing Kimball had rarely seen in them. At last, he said, "I don't know for certain.

He hated officers in general, but he didn't hate me in particular, because I did him some good turns. But does that mean we'd be able to steer him the way we want him to go? I'm not sure. I'm not sure he's in the habit of listening to any-body, either. He's as stubborn as they come."

Jack Delamotte looked down into his glass, which was empty. "Easy enough to get on a tiger's back," he observed. "How do you get off again?"

"Oh, we'd manage that," Potter said confidently. "Any of the three of

us—even you, Jack, no matter how lackadaisical you let yourself get—is a match for Featherston and then some."

"That's settled, then," Kimball said, though it wasn't, not any-where close.

"We'll get hold of Featherston, fill him full of what we figure he ought to say, and get people to pay attention to what really needs doing." He picked up the whiskey bottle from the table, yanked out the cork, and poured fresh drinks for himself and his friends. They solemnly clinked glasses.

As was his way, Kimball wasted no time trying to make what he planned come true. He'd become a familiar fixture at the Freedom Party offices over on King Street, next to the headquarters of the Washington Light Infantry, a unit that, as its name suggested, had fought in the wars of the CSA and the USA since the Revolution. "No, Commander," a fellow there said from behind a typewriter, "I don't know when Sergeant Featherston will be coming into South Carolina again. It shouldn't be too long, though. With Con-gressional elections this fall, he'll be doing a deal of traveling, I reckon.

We aim to send Richmond a message from all across the country."

"That's fine," Kimball said. "That's mighty fine. Thing is, I'd like to send a message to Sergeant Featherston." Having failed to become an officer, the leader of the Freedom Party took an upside-down pride in his noncommissioned rank. Kimball kept his face carefully straight while referring to it. "I just found out a friend of mine served in the Army of Northern Virginia and got to know him pretty well up there. He'd like to have the chance to say hello."

"A lot of people served in the Army of Northern Virginia," the Freedom Party man said. "I did myself, as a matter of fact. And you'd be surprised how many of them say now that they knew Sergeant Featherston then."

"My friend's name is Potter, Clarence Potter," Kimball said patiently. "He told me the name I should mention is Pompey, that Sergeant Featherston would know what it meant." Quite casu-ally, he set a gold dollar, a tiny little coin, on the desk by the typewriter.

The Freedom Party man licked his lips. A gold dollar could buy a couple of thousand dollars' worth of banknotes these days. He made the coin disappear: not hard when it was so small. "I reckon I can arrange a wire up to Richmond. You're right—I know he'd be glad to

hear from an old friend, and especially through Party channels."

Kimball could have sent the telegram himself. But how many telegrams did Jake Featherston get every day? Piles, without a doubt. He'd made himself widely known through the CSA. How many of those telegrams got tossed unread? He'd pay more at-tention to the ones that came from inside his own outfit.

"Thanks, friend," Kimball said, and headed off to a poker game well pleased with himself. He won, too, which left him even more pleased.

When he strolled back into the Freedom Party headquarters a couple of days later, the fellow who'd pocketed the gold dollar held out a pale yellow telegram. Kimball took it with a confidence that evaporated as he read the message: MAJOR POTTER—

IF YOU CARED ABOUT SEEING ME, YOU COULD HAVE DONE IT A LONG

TIME

AGO.

FEATHERSTON,

SGT.,

1ST

RICHMOND

HOWITZERS.

"He knows your friend, I reckon," the Freedom Party man said, "but it doesn't sound like he's real hot to pay him a visit."

"No, it doesn't," Kimball agreed morosely. "Thanks for try-ing, anyhow."

Now that he knew the man took bribes, he might want to pay him off again, which meant not growling at him now.

But what he really wanted to do was get hold of Jake Feather-ston. If Potter's name wasn't the key that fit the lock, he needed one that would. As he left the Freedom Party office, he snapped his fingers. Maybe he knew where to find it.

Since he had no telephone in his flat, he went over to the tele-phone exchange building and placed a call up to St. Matthews. It took a little while to go through. By now, Anne Colleton's brother was used to Kimball calling, even if he didn't quite ac-cept him. But Anne answered the telephone herself. "Hello, Roger!" she said when she found out who was on the other end of the line. "What can I do for you today?"

Kimball had learned to read her tone of voice. It said, *If you 're calling because you want to sleep with me, forget about it.* Under other circumstances, that would have angered him. It still did, a little, but he buried that. "What do you think of the Freedom Party?" he asked.

He took her by surprise. There were several seconds of silence up in St.

Matthews before she answered, "I haven't really thought much about it one way or the other. It certainly has been making a lot of noise lately, though, hasn't it?" Now she might have been a detective whipping out a magnifying glass. "Why do you want to know?"

He explained what he had in mind for the Freedom Party, fin-ishing,

"People are starting to listen to this Featherston. If he says the right things, he might be the one who can haul the coun-try out of the swamp."

"Well," Anne said after another thoughtful pause, "I don't know what I expected you to say when you called, but that wasn't it." She hesitated again. "Why do you think Featherston would listen to me?"

Kimball hadn't wanted Featherston listening to her; he'd wanted the Freedom Party leader listening to what he had to say. Maybe Anne would say the same things he would have, but he had no guarantee about that.

Still, she was waiting for an answer, and he gave her a blunt one: "You've got money. You ever hear of a politician—any sort of politician—who didn't need money?"

She laughed. "You're right about that, heaven knows—and so do I, the hard way. I don't know that I want to spend any of my money on the Freedom Party, but I don't know that I don't, ei-ther. Let me do some checking around and see if it would be money well spent. If I decide it is, I expect I can find a way to let Featherston know I want to have a

talk with him."

She spoke about the Freedom Party as if it were a firm in which she was considering an investment. In a way, that was probably just what it was to her. As far as Roger Kimball was concerned, politics and investments were two separate worlds. Maybe that meant Anne Colleton was the right person to ap-proach Featherston after all. Kimball said, "All right, that's fair enough.

Thanks."

When he didn't say anything more, Anne teased him: "No sweet talk, Roger? Have you gone and found somebody else?"

"After you, anyone else'd be boring," he answered. This time, pleasure filled her laugh. He went on, "I just didn't reckon it'd work today, that's all."

"You're a smart man," she said. Getting such praise from her pleased Kimball much more than getting it from Clarence Potter had done.

Tom Colleton looked quizzically at Anne. He asked, "Are you really sure you want to do this?"

"What, meet with Jake Featherston?" she asked. Her brother nodded.

She exhaled in some exasperation. "Seeing as he's go-ing to be on the train that gets to St. Matthews in half an hour, don't you think it's a little late to worry about that? If I show him up now, I've made an enemy. I'm liable to have made a dan-gerous enemy. I don't care to do that, thank you very much."

"I suppose you're right—you usually are." Tom still looked unhappy. "I can't say I much fancy what I've heard about him, though."

"Hush," Anne said absently as she walked over to the closet. "I want to pick out the hat that goes best with this dress." The dress was of orchid cotton voile, with a new-style square collar and with ruffles at the sleeves, waist, hips, and a few inches above the ankle-length hemline. It managed to be stylish and to suit the formidable South Carolina climate at the same time.

The flowered hat she chose had a downturned brim that was also of the latest mode. She didn't know how much attention Featherston paid to fashion. She'd tried to find out what he thought of women; all she'd

been able to learn was that he was a bachelor. Not being able to find out more left her obscurely irked.

"Are you sure *you* want to come along, Tom?" she asked. "One thing we do know is that he doesn't love officers."

"Next enlisted man I meet who does love officers will be the first." Her brother pulled out his pocket watch. "We'd better get going, if you aim to meet him at the station."

"Do you expect the train to run on time?" Anne asked, but she went with him.

As it happened, the train did run late, but only by twenty min-utes or so: hardly enough time in which to start fuming. It pulled into the battered station—not all the damage from the black up-rising had been repaired—with wheels squealing and sparking as the brakes brought it to a halt and with black smoke and cin-ders belching from the locomotive's stack. Anne brushed soot from her sleeve with a muttered curse that made Tom chuckle and that no one else heard.

Only two people got off the train in St. Matthews. Since one of them was a fat colored woman, figuring out who the other one was did not require brilliance. The lanky white man dressed in butternut trousers, a clean white shirt, and a straw hat looked around for people to greet him, as any traveler might have done.

"Mr. Featherston!" Anne called, and the newcomer alertly swung toward her. His features were pinched and not particu-larly handsome, but when his eyes met hers, she had to brace herself for an instant. Roger Kimball had been right: whatever else he was, Jake Featherston was not a man to take lightly. She stepped toward him. "I'm Anne Colleton, Mr. Featherston.

Pleased to meet you, and thank you for coming down. This is my brother, Tom."

"Right pleased to meet you both," Featherston said, his Vir-ginia accent not bespeaking any great education. When he shook hands with Anne, his grip was so businesslike, it revealed noth-ing. He turned to her brother.

"You were an officer on the Roanoke front, isn't that right?"

"Yes, that's so," Tom said. */ wasn *t the only one doing some checking,* Anne thought. No, Featherston was not a man to be taken lightly, not

even a little bit.

He said, "I'll try not to hold it against you." From the lips of most former noncoms, it would have been a joke. Anne and Tom both started to smile.

Neither let the smile get very big. Anne wasn't at all sure Featherston was kidding. He asked, "You have a motorcar here, to take us wherever we're going?"

Anne shook her head. "I didn't bother. We're only a couple of blocks from my apartment. This isn't a big town—you can see that. It's an easy walk."

"I'll take your carpetbag there, if you like," Tom added, reach-ing out for it.

"Don't bother," Featherston said, and did not hand it over. "I've been taking care of myself a long time now. I can go right on doing it." He nodded to Anne. "Lead the way, Miss Colleton. Sooner we're there, sooner we can get down to business."

He was mostly silent as they walked along: not a man with a large store of small talk. As he walked, he studied St. Matthews with military alertness. He studied Anne the same way. His eyes kept coming back to her, but not in the way of a man who looks on a woman with desire. Anne had seen that often enough to be most familiar with it. No, he was trying to size her up.

That was interesting. Usually, till they realized she had a brain, men were more interested in trying to feel her up.

Back at the apartment, Featherston accepted coffee and a slice of peach pie. He ate like a man stoking a boiler, emptying his plate very fast. Then he said, "What can I do for you, Miss Colleton?"

"I don't quite know," Anne answered. "What I do know is that I don't like the way the Confederate States have been drifting since the end of the war.

I'd like the country to start moving for-ward again. If the Freedom Party can help us do that, maybe I'd like to help the Freedom Party."

"I can tell you what I want for the CSA," Featherston said. "I want revenge. I want revenge on the damnyankees for licking us. I want revenge on the damnfool politicians who got us into the war. I want

revenge on the damnfool generals in the War Depart-ment who botched it. I want revenge on the niggers who rose up and stabbed us in the back. And I aim to get it."

Revenge was a word that struck a chord with Anne. She'd spent most of two years getting even with the blacks of the Con-garee Socialist Republic after they'd torched Marshlands, killed her brother Jacob, and almost killed her. She dearly wanted to get even with the United States, though she didn't see how the Confederate States would be able to manage it any time soon.

Still.. .

"How do you propose to do all that?" she asked.

"You said it yourself: everything in the country seems dead right now,"

Featherston replied. "The Freedom Party is alive and growing. People see that. They're starting to come over to us. We'll elect Congressmen this year—you just wait and see if we don't. Before too long, we'll elect a president."

He had all the confidence in the world, that was certain. Tom remarked,

"You're not running for Congress yourself, are you?"

Featherston shook his head. "That's right—I'm not. Don't want to sit there, for one thing, on account of I can't stand too many who're already in. And for another, I want to be able to go where I want to go when I want to go there. If I had to stay in Richmond too much of the time, I wouldn't be able to do that. So, no, I'm not going to the dance."

"You're going to stay on the sidelines and call the tune," Anne said.

"You might put it that way," Jake Featherston agreed. He had a pretty good poker face, but it wasn't perfect. Anne saw his atten-tion focus on her.

It still wasn't the look a man gave an attractive woman: more like the look a sniper gave a target. *Now he's real-ized I'm no fool,* she thought. */ wonder if I should have let him know so soon. I wonder if I should have let him know at all.*

She also realized Featherston was no fool. Not running for Congress let him pick and choose his issues and what he did about them. It also

protected him from the risk of running and losing. She had no feel yet for how smart he was, but he was plenty shrewd.

"What tune are you going to call?" she asked.

"I already told you," he answered. "I don't hide anything I aim to do; I just come right out and say it." An alarm whistle went off in Anne's head: any man who said something like that was al-most bound to be lying. She kept her face quite still. Feather-ston continued, "Platform's pretty simple, like I said. Pay back the USA as soon as we can. Clean out the House and Senate. Clean out the War Department. Put the niggers back in their place.

Best place for 'em, you ask me, is six feet under, but I'll settle for less for now. Still and all, this is a white man's country, and I aim to keep it that way."

"What do you propose to do about the black men who got the vote by fighting in the Army?" Tom Colleton asked.

"Most of 'em don't deserve it," Featherston said at once. "Most of'em ran instead of fighting. I was there. I saw 'em do it. I fired into 'em, too, to make

'em more afraid of me than they were of the damnyankees."

"Some did run," Tom agreed. "I saw that myself. Toward the end of the war, I saw white troops break and run, too." He waited. Slowly, Featherston nodded, looking unhappy about having to do it. Tom went on, "I saw some niggers fight pretty well. They're the ones I'm talking about. How do you take their vote away?"

"Wouldn't be hard, once we got around to it," Featherston replied with breathtaking and, Anne thought, accurate cynicism. "Most decent white folks can't stand 'em anyway. Besides, chances are the ones who fought hard against the USA learned how by fighting against the Confederate States. Pin that on 'em, call it treason, and hang the lousy bastards."

"What do we do if the United States try to stop us from getting strong again?" Anne asked. "That's my biggest worry."

"We walk small as long as we have to," Featherston said. "I hate it, but I don't know what else to tell you. We build up our strength every chance we get, though, and before too long we get to tell the damnyankees to leave us alone unless they want a sock in the nose."

That made sense to Anne. She couldn't see what else the CSA could do, in fact, except become a supine U.S. puppet. She said "So you want to get the Negroes out of the towns and factories and back to the fields, do you?"

Would keeping Marshlands be worthwhile? No, she judged. Featherston had more on the ball than she'd expected, but the Freedom Party remained very new and raw. It sought power; it wasn't about to lay claim to much yet.

Featherston answered, "That's about right, Miss Colleton." He eyed her again. Did he guess the calculation she was making? She wouldn't have been surprised.

Her gaze flicked over to Tom. That did surprise her; she rarely relied on anyone to help her decide. Her brother shrugged, ever so slightly. He was leaving it up to her. He did that more often than not. She wished he wouldn't have, not here. Featherston waited. He had more patience than she would have thought.

He had more of quite a few things than she'd thought. She wasn't easy to impress, but he'd impressed her. She said, "I think we're traveling in the same direction, Mr. Featherston. I suspect you could use some help along the road, too."

"We sure could," he said. "We sure could. When I joined the Freedom Party, it operated out of a cigar box. We're better off than that now, but not a whole lot." Contempt washed over him, as if poured from a bucket. "Most rich folks don't dare change what made 'em rich. They'll go on sucking up to the Whigs and the Radical Liberals while the country goes down the drain.

Al-ways good to find somebody who zigs when most folks zag."

He couldn't have paid her a compliment she appreciated more if he'd tried for a week. "I think I may be able to help some," she said. "How much depends on any number of things."

Featherston got to his feet, as if getting up on the stump. "Put those niggers back in the fields where they belong!" His voice filled the apartment with a raspy thunder that didn't enter it when he was speaking in ordinary tones. That took Anne by surprise again, and for a moment almost took her breath away. She nodded, recognizing the good bargain she'd made. She held out her hand. Jake Featherston shook it. *You give the speeches,* she thought. *Yes, you call the tune—after I whistle it to you.*

* * *

Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling stared out across the prairie from General Custer's third-story offices in Winnipeg. He'd been there with the general since winter, and the view on a clear day never ceased to astonish him. Today, he managed to put that astonishment into words: "My God, sir, it's flatter than Kansas!'"

"It is, isn't it?" Custer agreed. "You can see forever, or if you can't, it certainly seems as though you can. Makes you think God pressed an iron to the countryside hereabouts, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir." Dowling nodded. "Although, from what I've read, it wasn't an iron at all. It was a great whacking sheet of ice that pressed the land down flat and didn't pull back or melt or what-ever it did till not so very long ago."

"I can believe *that."* Custer shivered melodramatically. "By the way the weather felt when we got to this place, I'd say the gla-cier had been gone about a day and a half—two days, tops."

Dowling laughed. Custer rarely joked. Here, he might well have been kidding on the square. During several days that win-ter, the temperature never had managed to creep above zero, nor even get very close to it.

There was a word for a place more than three hundred miles north of Minneapolis: Siberia.

But people lived here. Before the war, something like 150,000 of them had lived here. In Abner Dowling's considered opinion, they'd been out of their minds. Oh, from May to September the weather was good enough, but that left a lot of time out of the bargain.

Nowhere near so many people were left in Winnipeg now. A lot had fled during the two and a half years in which Canadian and British forces had held the U.S. Army away from the critical rail junctions here. A lot more had fled when they realized the Canucks and limeys could hold the Americans no more. And a lot had died when the city finally fell.

One of the reasons Dowling could see so far was that the build-ing housing Custer's headquarters was one of the few in town to come through the war intact. Had it ever had any taller neigh-bors, they

were rubble now.

Nothing got in the way of the view.

A lot of the new houses that were starting to go up in Win-nipeg these days were made from the wreckage of older struc-tures. One construction outfit even advertised itself as BEST REBUILDERS IN TOWN. The company had plenty of material with which to work.

Custer said, "I feel as though I can see all the way to the Rockies."

"I wish we could see all the way to the Rockies from here, sir," Dowling said. "It would make our jobs a lot easier—and that's where a lot of our problems lie, anyhow."

"The broom didn't sweep clean," Custer said. "That's what the problem is. That's why they sent me up here to set things to rights."

For as long as Dowling had known him, Custer had had a re-markable gift for revising events so they fit neatly into a scheme of things sometimes existing only in his own mind. The first part of his statement, though, was objectively true. The U.S. broom had *not* swept clean, nor even come close. The USA had con-quered Ontario and Quebec, severed eastern Canada from the vast West by—finally—seizing Winnipeg, and struck north into the Rockies to break the rail links with the Pacific. That had been enough to win the war. But it had also left a couple of million square miles unvisited by U.S. troops.

A lot of those square miles, especially in the far north, didn't have enough people on them to make anyone worry. But the cities of the Canadian prairie—Regina and Saskatoon, Calgary and Edmonton—resented having been handed over to the United States when no soldier in green-gray had got anywhere near them during the war. They seethed with rebellion. So did the farms for which they gave markets. So did the logging and mining towns of British Columbia. So did the fishermen of Newfound-land. So, for that matter, did a great many people in the areas the United States had taken by force.

"Confound it, Lieutenant Colonel, how am I supposed to con-trol half a continent without the soldiers I should have lost during one medium-sized battle in the Great War?" Custer de-manded. "Every time there's a new little uprising somewhere, I have to rob Peter of troops to pay Paul so Paul can put it down. And then twenty minutes later Peter needs the men back again

"

"We have kept the railroads hopping, haven't we, sir?" Dowl-ing shook his head at the understatement. "The way the budget's going in Congress, we ought to count ourselves lucky that we still have as many soldiers up here as we do. It won't get any better next year, either."

"Socialists!" As Custer usually did, he turned it into a swear-word. "I tell you, Dowling, the machine gun's most proper use is for shooting down the Socialist blockheads who want to cut our country off at the knees. Blow enough of them to kingdom come and the rest might come to their senses—if they have any sense to come to, which I am inclined to doubt."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said resignedly. He was a rock-solid Demo-crat himself, but not, he thought with a certain amount of pride, a political fossil like his superior.

Custer said, "If things get any worse, we'll have to start bor-rowing soldiers from the Republic of Quebec, damn me to hell if I lie."

Dowling started to laugh: for Custer to make two jokes in one day was well-nigh unprecedented. Then he realized Custer wasn't joking. For a moment, he was inclined to scorn. Then, all at once, he didn't feel scornful any more. Every so often, Custer came up with an interesting notion, sometimes without even realizing he'd done it.

"Do you know, sir, I'd bet the Frenchies over there would lend them to us," Dowling said. "And do you know what else? I'd bet the soldiers from Quebec'd have a high old time clamping down on the Englishmen who sat on them for so long. That really might be worth looking into."

"Take care of it, then," Custer said indifferently. No, he hadn't known that was a good idea. He'd just been talking to hear him-self talk, something he was fond of doing.

Dowling scribbled a note to himself "Have to make Quebec pay for the troops they send, too," he said. "That will make Con-gress happy. It might not make Quebec happy, but I won't lose any sleep over that. If we can't twist Quebec's arm, whose can we twist? If it weren't for the United States, that wouldn't even be a country today." As far as he was concerned, it wasn't much of a country, but nobody in Quebec had gone out looking for his opinion.

"Who cares whether Quebec likes it or not?" Custer said, which meant he'd thought along with Dowling, and which almost set Dowling

wondering if he hadn't miscalculated. If Custer agreed with him, he had a good chance of being wrong.

He said, "I think we have managed to put down the latest flare-up outside of Edmonton. That's something, anyhow."

"Putting down flare-ups doesn't get the job done, Lieutenant Colonel,"

Custer said. "I want to put them down so they don't start again. One of these days, I expect we'll have to raze one of these prairie towns to the ground. It'd serve the bastards right. And after we do that, the other Canucks will get the idea that we mean business."

"Maybe, sir," Dowling said, his tone plainly making that *maybe* a *no*.

Sometimes you couldn't be too plain for Custer, so he went on, "If we do that without good reason, the rest of the world will raise a big stink."

"To hell with the rest of the world," Custer said grandly: the philosophy of a lifetime, boiled down to eight words. Through the whole of his long span, Custer had done very much as he pleased. He'd had a good many breaks along the way, but no one could deny he'd made the most of them.

"Will there be anything more, General?" Dowling asked.

"As a matter of fact, there is one other thing." Custer hesitated, which was most unlike him. At last, he resumed: "I'm afraid Libbie and I have had to let our housekeeper go. Could you ar-range for the hiring of another one?"

"Wouldn't your wife sooner take care of that for you, sir?" Dowling asked warily. When Elizabeth Custer joined her hus-band at a posting, she ran their household with a whim of iron.

Custer coughed a couple of times. "This once, Lieutenant Colonel, I'd like you to take care of it. Libbie is a marvelous woman—God never made a finer—but she does have a habit of hiring sour, dried-up sticks with whom I have a certain amount of trouble getting on well. I was hoping you might find a capable woman of cheerier disposition."

"I see." And Dowling did. Libbie Custer hired housekeepers in whom her husband could have no possible interest. That was only common sense on her part, for Custer did have an eye for a pretty woman.

Whether anything more than an eye still func-tioned at his age, Dowling did not know. He didn't want to find out, either. Now that Custer had a real command again, he didn't need some pretty young popsy distracting him.

And Dowling didn't want to anger Custer's wife. Libbie made a far more vindictive, far more implacable foe than her husband ever dreamt of being.

If Dowling hired Custer a popsy, she would not be pleased with him.

He had his own coughing fit. "Sir," he said, "I really do think that's something best left to Mrs. Custer's judgment."

"Fiddlesticks!" Custer said. "You handled such arrangements for me plenty of times during the war. Once more won't hurt you a bit."

"Whenever your wife was with you, though, sir, she did prefer to keep such matters in her own hands," Dowling said. "I wouldn't care for her to think I was encroaching on her privileges."

"You're not helping, Lieutenant Colonel," Custer said irritably.

Dowling stood mute. If Custer ordered him to choose a house-keeper, he resolved to find the general the homeliest old crone he could. *Let's see you ask me to do something like that again,* he thought.

But Custer gave no such order. Instead, he let out a long, wheezy sigh.

"Here I am, in command of all of Canada," he said, "and I find I'm not even in command of my own household." Dowling wondered how many other famous generals had been defeated by their wives. A good many, was his guess, and he did not think that guess likely to be far wrong.

VII

Scipio was in love, and wondered why in God's name he'd never been in love before. The best answer he could come up with— and he knew it was nowhere near good enough—was that he'd always been too busy. First, he'd had an education forcibly crammed down his throat. Then he'd been butler at Marshlands, which under Anne Colleton was a job to keep any four men hop-ping. And after that, he'd been swept up into the affairs of the Congaree Socialist Republic.

Now . .. Now, as far as anybody in Augusta, Georgia, knew, he was Xerxes the waiter, an ordinary fellow who did his job and didn't give anybody any trouble. And Bathsheba, he was sure, was the most marvelous creature God had seen fit to set on the face of the earth.

He'd never had any trouble finding a woman to bed when he wanted one.

But he'd never understood the difference between making love and being in love, not till now. He stroked Bath-sheba's cheek as they lay side by side on the narrow bed in his furnished room. "I is the most luckiest man in the whole wide world," he said—no originality, but great sincerity.

She leaned over and kissed him. "And you are the kindliest man," she said. No one had ever called Scipio anything like that before. He hadn't had many chances to be kindly, either. Now that he did, he was doing his best to make the most of them.

Bathsheba got out of bed and started to dress for the trip back across the hall to her room. "Don't want you to go," Scipio said.

"I got to," she answered. "Got to go clean for the white folks tomorrow mornin'. The work don't never go away."

He knew that. Among the reasons he loved Bathsheba was the solid core of sense he'd found in her. It wasn't that he wanted to make love with her again that made him want her to stay. Since he'd reached his forties, second rounds didn't seem so urgent as they once had. But he enjoyed talking with her more than with anyone else he'd ever met.

He wished he could recite some of the love poetry he'd learned. The only way he knew it, though, was in the educated white man's accent he'd been made to acquire. Using that accent might—no, would—make her ask questions he couldn't afford to answer.

That was the one fly in the ointment of his happiness: every-thing he said about his past had to be either vague or a lie. Even the name by which she knew him was false. He counted himself lucky that he quickly got used to the aliases under which he pro-tected his real identity. Back in South Carolina, reward posters with his true name on them still hung in post offices and police and sheriff's stations. Some might even have come into Georgia, though he'd never seen one in Augusta.

As if to flick him on that wound of secrecy, Bathsheba said, "One of these days, I'm gonna know all about you—everything there is to know. And do you know what else? I'm gonna like every bit of it, too."

"I already likes everything there is to know 'bout you," Scipio said, and her eyes glowed. As for him, he was glad of the butler's training that let him think one thing and say another without giving any hint of what was going on behind the expressions he donned like convenient masks.

Bathsheba leaned down over the bed and gave him another kiss. "See you tomorrow night," she said, her voice rich with promise. Then she was gone, gently closing the door behind her.

Scipio rose and put on a light cotton nightshirt. In Augusta in early summer, no one wanted anything more. He picked up a fan of woven straw.

He wished the roominghouse had electricity: he would have bought an electric fan and aimed it at the bed as he slept. It got every bit as hot and oppressive here as it did over by the Congaree. He'd heard it got even worse down in Savannah. He found that hard to believe, but you never could tell.

His cheap alarm clock jangled him awake the next morning. He yawned, got out of bed, and started getting dressed. He had his white shirt halfway buttoned before his eyes really came open. Bathsheba's door was closed when he left his room, and everything quiet within her place. She got up earlier than he did, to cram the most work she could into a day.

The fry joint where he worked didn't serve breakfast. He got eggs and grits and coffee at a place that did, and paid for them with a $500 banknote.

"Need another hundred on top o' that," the black man behind the counter said.

With a grimace, Scipio peeled off another banknote and gave it to him.

"Be a thousand tomorrow, I reckons," he said.

After considering, the counterman shook his head. "Not till next week, I don't think," he answered seriously.

Despite those serious tones, it was funny in a macabre way. Every day, Confederate paper dollars bought less and less. Scipio had just put down six hundred of them on a cheap breakfast. If it was a thousand tomorrow, or a thousand next week at the latest, so what? The printing presses would run off more banknotes with more zeros on them, and another cycle would begin.

The good, sweet smell of baking cornbread filled Scipio's nos-trils when he went into Erasmus' fish store and restaurant. The griz-zled Negro who ran the place nodded to him and said "Mornin'."

"Mornin'," Scipio answered. He grabbed a broom and dust-pan and started sweeping the floor. He kept his furnished room as neat as he could, and he did the same here, even though Erasmus had given him no such duty.

Erasmus watched him now as he plied the broom. The cook rarely said anything about it. Maybe he didn't know what to make of it. Maybe he was afraid that, if he said anything, Scipio would quit doing it.

A couple of minutes later, Erasmus took the pan of cornbread out of the oven and set it on the counter to cool. Then he said, "Make sure nobody steal the store, Xerxes. I'm gonna git us fish fo' today. The ice man come before I git back, put it in the trays there like you know how to do."

"I takes care of it," Scipio promised.

Erasmus, by now, had good reason to know his promises were reliable.

He headed out the door. A fat bankroll made a bulge in his hip pocket. The roll would be considerably thinner after he came back from the riverside fish market. He'd get good value for the money he spent, though. Even in these times of runaway prices, he always did.

Off he went. Left behind to his own devices, Scipio went right on cleaning. The ice man did come in. Scipio stuck some of the slabs of ice in the display trays and put the rest in the damp saw-dust underneath those trays so it wouldn't melt before it was needed. Then he got a hammer and an ice pick and began to break up the ice in the trays from slabs to glistening chunks.

By the time he'd finished dealing with the ice, Scipio wasn't hot any more.

His teeth chattered, and he could barely feel his fingers. He wondered if that was what living through a winter up in the USA felt like. He doubted he'd ever find out.

He didn't stay cold for long. Nothing could stay cold very long, not in that weather. He took a little chunk of cracked ice and dropped it down the back of his shirt. It made him squirm and felt good at the same time.

Erasmus came back with a burlap bag slung over his shoulder. He grunted when he saw the ice in the trays. "Come on," he said to Scipio.

"Got to clean us these here fish."

He did most of the cleaning himself. He'd long since seen that Scipio knew how, but he was an artist with the knife; had he had a fancy education, he might have made a surgeon instead of a fry cook. Scipio carried fish and set them on ice. He also carried pink, bloody fish guts out to the alley in back of the shop and flung them into a battered iron trash can. He always hosed the can out right after the refuse collectors emptied it. It still stank of stale fish. Flies buzzed around it. Flies buzzed everywhere in Augusta when the weather was warm.

People knew when Erasmus would be getting back with his fish. Within fifteen minutes of his return, housewives started coming in to buy for their husbands and families. When Scipio first started working there, they'd viewed him with suspicion, as people had a way of viewing anyone or anything new with suspi-cion. By now, they took him for granted.

One woman, carrying away a couple of catfish wrapped in old newspapers, turned back and said to Erasmus, "That Xerxes, he jew me down better'n you ever could, old man."

"It ain't so hard these days, not with money so crazy ain't nobody knows what nothin' supposed to cost," Erasmus answered. The woman took her fish and departed. Scipio glanced over to his boss, wondering if her comments had annoyed him. Erasmus gave no sign of that; catching Scipio's eye, he grinned at him, as if to say the housewife had paid him a compliment.

Business picked up as noon approached. Men started coming in and having their fish fried in the shop for dinner. Erasmus fried potatoes to go with them, too, and a big pot of greens never seemed to go off the stove. A man could leave the table hungry, but it wasn't easy.

And how the money flowed in! Hundred-dollar banknotes, five hundreds, thousands, even a ten-thousand now and then— Scipio felt like a bank cashier as he made change. He would have felt even more like a bank cashier and less like a poor Negro if he hadn't been making $40,000 a week himself. Next week, Eras-mus would probably give him fifty or sixty or seventy. However much it was, it would keep food in his belly and a roof over his head, and it wouldn't go a great deal further than that.

One more reason to marry Bathsheba as soon as he could was that then they'd need only one roof over their two heads, and save the cost of the second—not that anyone could save anything much with prices as mad as they were.

Trouble started about half past twelve. The first hint of it Scipio got was an angry shout from not far away: "Freedom!" A moment later, it came again, from a lot of throats: "Freedom!"

"They's buckra!' Scipio exclaimed. "Why fo' buckra come into de Terry carryin' on like dat?"

"Don't know." Erasmus tucked a knife into his belt. "Don't much fancy the notion, neither. They ain't got no business in this part o'town."

Whether they had business or not, here they came, straight up the street past the cafe: a dozen or so white men, all of them in white shirts and butternut trousers. "Freedom!' they shouted, again and again. As they shouted, they knocked down any Negro in their path, man, woman, or child.

"What we do 'bout dat?" Scipio said. "What *can* we do 'bout dat? I know they's white folks, but they got no call to do nothin' like that. You reckon yellin' fo' the police do any good, Erasmus?"

Erasmus shook his gray head. "Not likely. Two-three of them fellas, they *was* the police." Scipio thought about that for a little while. He thought he'd escaped terror for good when he'd got free from the last wreck of the Congaree Socialist Republic.

Now he discovered he'd been wrong.

"I never thought I'd live to see the day," Sam Carsten said as the USS

Remembrance steamed through St. George's Channel. If he looked to starboard, he could see England—no, Wales. Ireland lay to port.

George Moerlein nodded. "I know what you mean," he said. "Pretty damn crazy, us paying a courtesy call in Dublin harbor."

"Only way a U.S. warship would've been able to get into Dub-lin harbor before the war or during it would've been to kick its way in," Sam agreed.

"Of course, Ireland belonged to the limeys then, and we weren't exactly welcome visitors."

"Well, we are now," Moerlein said. "And if England doesn't like it, let her try and start something. She'll get the idea pretty damn quick after we give her a good boot in the ass."

Despite that bravado, he looked east more than a little ner-vously. The Royal Navy had been beaten in the Great War, but it hadn't been crushed.

England hadn't been crushed, not the way the Confederate States and France had been. He had no doubt the USA and the German Empire could crush her if they had to. He also had no doubt they'd know they'd been in a scrap by the time they were through.

A destroyer flying a green-white-orange flag with a harp in the middle of the white led the way for the *Remembrance.* The destroyer had started life as a U.S. four-stacker; dozens much like her had gone into the water during the Great War. Her crew consisted of Irishmen who'd begun their careers in the Royal Navy. Men like that, thousands of them, formed the basis for the Irish Navy.

"I hope they've got a good pilot up there," Carsten said. A mo-ment later, he added, "I hope he's got good charts, too." A moment later still, he made another addendum: "I hope none of the mines from the fields are drifting loose through the Irish Sea."

He thought that covered everything, but his buddy showed him he was wrong. "As long as you're doing all that hoping, hope the limeys haven't snuck out and planted a few of those little bastards right in our path,"

George Moerlein said.

"That wouldn't be very nice of them, would it?" Sam gri-maced. "And they could always say something like, 'Oh, we're very sorry—we didn't have any notion that one was there.' How would anybody prove anything different?"

"You couldn't," Moerlein said. "You wouldn't have a prayer of doing it. Of course, the good thing is that Teddy Roosevelt wouldn't need any proof. If we come to grief here, he'll make England pay. The limeys have to know it, too. I don't think they'll get gay with us."

"Here's hoping you're right." Carsten glanced up at the sky, which was full of thick gray clouds. "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

Moerlein thought he was being sarcastic. "Yeah, if you're moss on a tree," he answered. "I was hoping we'd get sent down to South America myself, to give Brazil a hand against Ar-gentina. That's my kind of weather."

"No, thanks," Carsten said with a shudder. "I burn like a rib roast in the galley after the cooks forgot about it."

When the *Remembrance* came into Dublin harbor, she got a welcome about the size of the one the *Dakota* had enjoyed coming into New York City after the end of the Great War. New York City boasted more people than the whole country of Ireland, but the ones who lined both sides of the River Liffey cheered loud enough to make up for their lack of numbers. As the *Remem-brance* drew near its assigned wharf, Sam was bemused by the sight of tens of thousands of people, almost all of them as fair-skinned as he was.

"If you towed this place down to Brazil, you'd give everybody here heatstroke in about a day and a half," he said. No one else paid him any attention. If the other sailors on deck contemplated Irishwomen's skins, as they doubtless did, they had different things on their minds. So, for that matter, did Sam.

A couple of light gray German cruisers were berthed only a few piers over from the *Remembrance.* Sailors aboard them waved toward the aeroplane carrier. Sam and his comrades waved back. Here in Dublin, Americans and Germans were both about the business of giving England a black eye. All the same, Sam sent those cruisers an appraising glance, wondering what going into battle against the squareheads would be like.

And officers aboard the German ships were bound to be photographing the *Remem-brance* so their bosses in Berlin could figure out how to fight her and whether to build ships like her.

After she'd been made fast, the lord mayor of Dublin and a redheaded fellow in a fancy naval uniform came aboard to wel-come her to their country. The lord mayor, who wore a green-white-and-orange sash,

made a speech. The admiral studied the *Remembrance* as if wishing he had a dozen of her class under the Irish flag.

"And so," the lord mayor said at last, in an accent that struck Carsten's ear as more nearly British than Irish, "we are proud in-deed to welcome this magnificent warship to our port, a sym-bol of the affection between the United States and Ireland that caused you to aid us in at last regaining our freedom after so many centuries of oppression at the hands of the British Crown."

Along with the rest of the assembled American sailors, Sam dutifully applauded. During the war, the USA would have done anything to help give England a rough time. That, more than af-fection, had prompted U.S. help for the Irish rebellion. The mayor didn't look stupid; he had to know as much. Politicians looked to be the same on both sides of the Atlantic.

Had the world been a perfect place, an Irishman would have commanded the *Remembrance.* Captain Oliver Roland, though, was a swarthy man of French descent. He said, "The United States are delighted to welcome Ireland into the family of na-tions. Along with those of Poland and Quebec, her independence shows how the powers of the Quadruple Alliance respect the na-tional aspirations of peoples whom our late foes for too long kept from the freedom they deserved."

The lord mayor bowed in delight. The Irish admiral clapped his hands.

Beside Sam, Willie Moore let out a rude but quiet snort. The gun-crew chief proceeded to put words to it: "The Poles get to do what the Germans tell

'em, and the froggies in Quebec get to do what we tell 'em, and the micks have never been any god-damn good at doing what anybody tells 'em."

That was cynical. It was also very likely to be true. A chief gunner's mate could say it to a man in his crew. Had Captain Roland said it to the lord mayor of Dublin, it wouldn't have gone over so well. The skipper had to be, or at least had to act like, a politician here.

"We going to get liberty, Chief?" Sam whispered to Moore.

"I hear we are," Moore whispered back. "Other thing I hear is, anybody picks up a dose of the clap, they're going to cut his balls off so he never, ever gets a chance to do it again. You understand what I'm saying?"

"I sure do," Sam answered in a whispered falsetto.

Willie Moore's eyes opened wide for a moment. Then, in lieu of laughing, he started to cough. "Damn you, Carsten, you sly son of a bitch," he wheezed. He coughed again, and gave Sam a dirty look. Sam did his best to assume a mantle of angelic inno-cence. By Moore's expression, his best was none too good.

He did get liberty, but not till three days later: this close to En-gland, Captain Roland wanted to keep as near a full crew aboard the *Remembrance* as possible. Maybe officers toured Dublin's cathedrals and other sights. Sam still thought about trying to become an officer himself. He wasn't interested in cathedrals, though. He went into the first bar—pubs, they called them here—he spotted, only a couple of blocks away from the quay on the River Liffey by which the *Remembrance* lay.

GUINNESS is GOOD FOR YOU! proclaimed a sign in the window. It showed a healthy-looking fellow pouring down a pint of stout. Sam had heard of Guinness, but he'd never drunk any. He couldn't imagine a better place to ease his thirst and improve his education at the same time. In he went.

When he asked for the famous stout, the publican beamed at him.

"Indeed and I'm happy to serve a Yank," he declared, sounding much more like an Irishman than had the lord mayor. "If you haven't changed your money, a quarter of a dollar'll do it."

"I'll bet it will," Sam said, not very happily. Back in the States, he could buy five glasses of beer for a quarter. But he wasn't back in the States, and Guinness was supposed to be something special. He dug in his pocket and set a silver coin on the bar.

The Irishman did give him full measure, filling the pint pot to the brim and then using the last drips from the tap to draw a shamrock in the creamy head. Seeing Sam's eye on him, he smiled shyly. "Just showing off," he murmured.

"Thanks," Sam said, and lifted the glass in salute. "Cheers." He sipped at the Guinness. After a moment's thought, he nodded. It might not have been worth a quarter, but it came close. A lot more was going on in that taste than in the pale, watery beers he bought at home. It put him in mind of drinking pumpernickel bread. It packed a wallop, too. He could see where, after three or four pints, he wouldn't be hungry any more and he wouldn't be able to walk, either.

He wasn't ready to get blind. He had something else on his mind first.

"You happen to know where I could find me a friendly girl?" he asked.

"I do that," the tapman answered. "You go round the corner here"—he pointed—"then knock at the house with the blue door. Tell 'em Sean sent you, and they'll take a wee bit off the price."

They'd give him his cut for sending trade their way, was what he meant.

Sam had got that same answer from a good many bar-tenders in his time. It didn't bother him. They weren't in busi-ness for their health; they wanted to make a buck—no, a pound here—like anybody else.

He drank another pint of Guinness and then, feeling a pleasant buzz, found the house with the blue door. Sean's name got him inside. *"Another* one!" the madam said, seeing his uni-form. "Christ, you Yanks are horny devils."

"We've been at sea a long time, ma'am," Sam answered.

Before long, he was happily settled upstairs with a plump blonde who said he could call her Louise. His first round ended almost before it started, as often happened after a long time without. He laid out some more cash and began again. Things were progressing most enjoyably when some sort of commotion broke out down below.

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American-accented voice bellowed, "Any sailors off the *Remembrance* who ain't back aboard in an hour, you're damn well gonna get stranded!

We're sailing then!" That blue door slammed shut.

"Jesus!" Sam said, and applied himself. He came in a few strokes. That spoiled things for Louise, who, he thought, had been warming up nicely beneath him. But he didn't have time to worry about her, not any more. She gave him an unhappy look as he scrambled into his clothes. He didn't have time to worry about that, either. He was right behind one American leaving the whorehouse, and right in front of another one.

Panting, he hurried up the gangplank to the *Remembrance,* "What the hell's going on?" he asked as he came aboard.

"Uprising in the north," a sailor answered. "They don't want to cut England's apron strings up there. The Irish have asked us to give 'em a hand with our aeroplanes and guns, and we're going to do it."

"Oh. All right." Sam thought for a moment, then chuckled. "Damn good thing they didn't rise up an hour earlier, that's all I've got to say."

Emily Pinkard said, "I swear to Jesus, Jeff, if I didn't know where you was goin' nights, I'd reckon you had yourself another girl on the side."

"Well, I don't." Jefferson Pinkard gave his wife a severe look. She was the one who'd been unfaithful, and now she had the nerve to think he might be? Emily dropped her eyes. She knew what she'd done. Jeff went on,

"The Freedom Party's important, dammit. I don't think there's anything more important in the whole country right now."

What was she doing on nights when he wasn't home? Pinkard worried about that, especially since Bedford Cunningham, how-ever much he'd thought of Jake Featherston's speech, hadn't fol-lowed up by joining the Freedom Party. Jeff had, and kept going to Party meetings. Before he'd signed up, everything had seemed pointless, useless. Now his life had a focus. He'd found a cause.

"It's bigger than I am," he said, trying to make Emily under-stand. "It's more important than I am. But I'm part of it. Things'll get better, and they'll get better partly thanks to me. To me." He jabbed a thumb at his own chest.

Emily sighed. "People carry on too much about politics, I swear they do.

You come right down to it, none of that stuff means anything anyways."

"Weren't for politics, we wouldn't have fought the war." Jeff gave her a perfunctory kiss, then headed out the door. "I ain't got time to argue tonight.

I don't want to be late."

He'd heard that the Freedom Party had started out meeting in a Richmond saloon. Since Alabama was a dry state, the Birmingham Party headquarters couldn't imitate those of the founding chapter. Jeff regretted that; he would have enjoyed sit-ting around with the new friends he'd made and hashing things out over a couple of schooners of beer or shots of whiskey.

He enjoyed sitting around with his new friends anyway, but doing it in a livery stable wasn't the same. Still, the stable owner was a Party member, and the money he got for renting the place out once a week as a meeting hall helped keep him afloat. With so many people going from carriages to motorcars these days, he needed all the help he could get.

The chairman of the Birmingham chapter was a beefy, red-faced fellow named Barney Stevens. He'd been a sergeant dur-ing the war; Pinkard would have bet he'd been a mean one. At eight o'clock on the dot, he said,

"Come on, boys—let's get this show on the road."

Together, they sang "Dixie." The singing wasn't of the best, nor anywhere close. That didn't matter. Roaring out the words to the Confederacy's national hymn reminded Jeff—and everyone else—why they'd banded together. The good times the song talked about could come again. The Freedom Party would make them come again.

After the last notes died, Stevens said, "Boys, the force that will conquer in the end is the fire of our young Confederate man-hood. Today new people who claim power are arising in the Con-federacy, men who've shed their blood for the Confederate States and know their blood flowed in vain, through the fault of the men who ran the government."

Jeff clapped till his hard-palmed hands were sore. He looked around the stable. A handful of the men there were of solid middle years. Most, though, were like him: men in their twenties and early thirties who'd been through the crucible of war and were ready to be poured into some new shape.

"There are too damned many of us for the government to put down by force," Barney Stevens declared, and his audience ap-plauded again. "We have to wreck what needs wrecking, and by God there's plenty of it. We have to be hard and tough. The ab-scess on the body of the country needs cutting out and squeezing till the clear red blood flows. And the blood needs to flow for a good long time before the body is pure again."

"Freedom!" Jeff and the others shouted. The stable, the heavy air inside smelling of hay and horses, echoed to the cry.

"Come this fall," Stevens went on, "you'll need a new chair-man here, on account of the Ninth District is going to send me to Congress." More cheers. Through them, he said, "And when I get to Richmond, I'm going to have me a few things to say about—"

"Freedom!" Pinkard shouted again, along with his comrades. He had a hard-on. It made him laugh. Emily had been unfaithful to him with a man. He was being unfaithful to her with the Party.

Stevens said, "Between now and election day, we're going to make people notice us. This Saturday afternoon, I hear tell, the niggers our damnfool government gave the vote to are gonna hold a rally—like they was really citizens, like they deserve to be citizens " Scorn dripped from his words. He wasn't quite so good as the national chairman, but he wasn't bad, either. He grinned out at the crowd. "How many of you boys want to put on white shirts and butternut pants and pay 'em a call?"

Almost every hand shot into the air. One of the men Stevens picked was Jefferson Pinkard. The chairman of the Birmingham chapter said, "Meet me at the corner of Cotton and Forestdale two o'clock Saturday afternoon.

We'll have ourselves a good old time, damned if we won't."

"What about the cops?" somebody called from the back of the stable.

"What about 'em?" Barney Stevens said contemptuously. "They ain't gonna do nothin' to hold us off a bunch of uppity niggers." He grinned

again. "And besides, a lot of them is us."

Most of the men at the meeting whom Pinkard knew were steelworkers at the Sloss foundries. But there were plenty he didn't know well enough to have learned what they did. He wouldn't have been surprised had some been policemen. Cops needed free-dom like everybody else.

On the way out of the meeting, he threw a $500 banknote into the tin hat one of Barney Stevens' friends was holding. Weekly dues would probably go to $1,000 before long. Money didn't seem real any more. It was dying, along with so much of what he held dear. *I'll make it better,* he thought. *I will.*

Emily was still up when he got home. He'd thought she would have gone to bed. "It's late, Jeff," she said. "You're gonna be walkin' around like you was drunk tomorrow, you'll be so tired."

"Don't start in on me," he growled.

"Somebody needs to start in on you," his wife answered. "Dangerous enough out on the foundry floor when you're awake." Her voice rose, shrill and angry and worried, too. "You go out there half asleep, and —"

"Don't start in on me, I said!" He slapped her. She stared at him, her eyes enormous with shock. He'd never raised a hand to her, not even when he'd walked in on her and Bedford Cun-ningham. *Why the hell not?* he wondered, and found no answer.

He shoved her down the hall toward the bedroom, then picked her up, threw her down, and took her by force. They'd played lots of rough games over the years. This was no game, and they both knew it. Emily fought back as hard as she could. Pinkard was bigger and stronger and, tonight, meaner. After he spent himself and pulled out, she rolled away from him and cried, her face toward the wall. He fell asleep, sated and happy, with her sobs in his ears.

She didn't speak to him the next morning, except to answer things he said to her. But she made him his breakfast and handed him his dinner pail and generally took care not to get him angry. He pecked her on the cheek and walked off to work whistling.

"Mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," Vespasian said when he came onto the manmade hell that was the foundry floor. "Just got here my ownself"

"Good morning, Vespasian," Jeff said cheerfully. Vespasian was the best kind of nigger, sure enough: one who knew his place. Pinkard could hardly wait for Saturday afternoon. He and his buddies would take care of some niggers who didn't know theirs. They'd learn, by God!

He glanced toward Vespasian. In a really proper world, even the best kind of nigger wouldn't be doing any sort of white man's work. He'd be shoveling coal into the furnaces or out in the cotton fields where blacks belonged. Jeff wondered what the Freedom Party would do about that when it got the chance. Something worth doing. He was sure of that.

After he finished his Saturday half-day, he hurried home and changed into a white shirt and trousers the color of the Confed-erate uniform. When he started toward the door, Emily asked, ever so cautiously, "Where are you going?"

"Out," he answered, and did.

He got to the meeting place in good time. Barney Stevens shook his hand. "Good man," Stevens said, and gave him a two-foot length of thick doweling—as formidable a club as any po-liceman carried. "We'll teach the niggers they can't get away with putting on airs like they was as good as white folks."

Some of the Freedom Party men brought their own lead pipes or bottles or other chosen instruments of mayhem. With seventy or eighty of them all together, all dressed pretty much alike, they made a formidable force.

Jeff's spirit soared at being part of something so magnificent. It soared again when a gray-clad po-liceman on horseback waved and tipped his cap to the Freedom Party force.

"Let's go," Barney Stevens said, as if they were about to head out of their trenches and over the top. And so, in a way, they were. "Remember, this is war. Hurt the enemy, help your pals, stay together, obey my orders. If I go down and out, Bill McLana-han's next in line. Now—form column of fours."

The veterans obeyed without fuss. They'd done it before, countless times.

"For'ard— *haarch!"* Stevens barked.

Magnolia Park, where the Negroes were holding their rally, was only a few blocks away. Their speaker stood on a platform on which Confederate flags fluttered. That made Jeff's blood boil, even more than Birmingham summer did. A dozen or so cops sufficed to keep a couple of dozen white hecklers away from the rally. Those white men weren't organized. The com-pany from the Freedom Party was.

Cries of alarm rose from black throats when the Freedom Party men came into sight. "Double line of battle to the left and right," Barney Stevens shouted, and the men performed the evo-lution with practiced ease.

Stevens pointed with his club as if it were a British field marshal's baton.

"Charge!"

"Freedom!" Jeff yelled, along with his friends. A couple of policemen made halfhearted efforts to get between the Freedom Party men and the Negroes. The tough young veterans in white and butternut rolled over them.

Jeff swung his club. It smacked into black flesh. A howl of pain rose. His lips skinned back from his teeth in a savage grin. He swung again and again and again. A few of the black veterans fought back. Far more fled, though.

Some few of them might have gained the vote, but a Negro who fought a white man in the CSA fought not just his foe but also the entire weight of Confed-erate society and history.

Inside five minutes, the rally was broken up, destroyed. Some of the white hecklers had joined the Freedom Party men. None of the cops had made more than a token effort to hold them back. A lot of Negroes were down with broken heads. Jeff felt as if he'd just stormed a Yankee position in west Texas. He stood tall, the sweat of righteous labor streaming down his face. Just for the moment, he and his comrades were masters of all they surveyed.

The Speaker of the House pointed toward Flora Hamburger. "The chair recognizes the honorable Representative from New York," he intoned.

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker," Flora said. That was more than a mere courtesy; Seymour Stedman of Ohio was himself a So-cialist, the first non-Democrat to be Speaker since the first Con-gress of President Blaine's disastrous term at the start of the 1880s. "Mr. Chairman, I

move that the House pass a resolution whose text I have conveyed to the Clerk, deploring and con-demning the assaults against law-abiding Negroes now taking place within the Confederate States."

"Mr. Speaker!" Several Congressmen tried to gain Stedman's attention.

As had been arranged, he recognized Hosea Black-ford. "Second!'"

Blackford said in a loud, clear voice. He and Flora grinned at each other.

"It has been moved and seconded that we adopt the resolution Miss Hamburger has conveyed to the Clerk," Congressman Stedman said. "The Clerk will now read the resolution for debate."

Read the clerk did, in a deadly drone. As soon as he finished stating the resolution Flora had summarized, hands shot up all around the House chamber. Speaker Stedman said, "The chair recognizes his honorable colleague from Ohio."

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker." William Howard Taft rose ponder-ously to his feet, then turned toward Flora. "I should like to in-quire of the distinguished Representative from New York why she does not include in her resolution the disorders currently taking place in China, Russia, South America, France, and Span-ish Morocco, all of those being no less beyond the boundaries of the United States and the purview of the House of Representa-tives than the events condemned in the Confederate States."

Flora glared at Taft, and there was a lot of him at which to glare. With the Socialists and Republicans holding a slim ma-jority in the House, he no longer chaired the Transportation Committee, and could not use his power there to make her life miserable. He seemed to have trouble realizing that; a lot of Democrats did. They took power for granted, even when it wasn't there.

"I would answer the gentleman from Ohio in two ways," she said. "First, what happens in the Confederate States is vitally important to the United States, because the Confederate States are so close and so closely related to us. And second, the at-tacks on the Negroes there are fierce, unjustified, and altogether unprovoked."

"They're only niggers, for Christ's sake," somebody called out without waiting to be recognized. "Who the devil cares what the Rebs do to them?"

"Order!' Speaker Stedman slammed down the gavel. "The chair recognizes the honorable Representative from Dakota."

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker," Hosea Blackford said. "That un-mannerly fellow gives me the chance to quote Donne, and I shall not waste it: 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.' If the Confederates now permit the terror-izing of their Negroes, as appears to be true from the reports reaching us, who can guess what they may permit a year from now, or five years, or ten?"

"I have two questions for the gentleman from Dakota," said the Democrat who rose to reply to Blackford. "The first is, why do you think the Confederate States will pay any attention to a resolution from this House?

The second is, if you Socialists want us to do something the Confederate States *will* pay attention to, why have you taken a meat axe to the War Department budget?"

The second question, in particular, made Flora wince. She'd urged and voted for cutting the military budget, too, and the rea-sons for which she'd done so—chief among them that the country could no longer afford to keep spending as it had—still seemed good to her. But she had to admit that a warning deliv-ered under credible threat of war would have done far more to deter the thugs who called themselves the Freedom Party than any resolution from the House of Representatives.

As debate went on, she also began to see that even the resolu-tion was going to have a hard time passing. A lot of Democrats proclaimed that they did not care to be seen meddling in the in-ternal political affairs of a neighboring sovereign state. Speaker Stedman countered that one with a sardonic gibe: "As we won't meddle in the affairs of the Republic of Quebec? Had we not meddled in those affairs, there would be no Republic of Quebec."

But the Congressman who'd said, "They're only niggers," had spoken for a great many of his colleagues, whether they would come out and admit it or not. Flora had expected little better from the Democrats. But the Republicans, mostly farm-belt Congressmen from the Midwest,

also proved to have little sym-pathy for the colored man's plight. And even one Socialist stood up and said, "This is not an issue that concerns the people of my district."

"The people of your district don't care about pogroms?" Flora shouted angrily, which made Speaker Stedman bang the gavel against her.

When Stedman called the question, Flora's resolution fell eighteen votes short of passage. "As the hour now nears six, I move that we adjourn for the day," the Speaker said. His motion carried by voice vote, without a single dissenter heard. The House floor emptied rapidly.

Still furious, Flora made no effort to hide it. "What will they do when the bell tolls for them?" she demanded of Hosea Blackford.

"Who can guess, till the time comes?" he answered with a wry smile.

"You don't win all the time, Flora. For a lot of years, we hardly won at all. We are on the record, even if the resolu-tion failed. If things go on, we can bring it up again later in the session."

"You take the long view of things," she said slowly.

"I'd better, after all the worthwhile resolutions and bills I've seen die."

Blackford flashed that wry grin again. "For now, what sort of view do you take toward supper?"

"I'm in favor of it," Flora admitted. "With luck, someplace where they know how to serve up crow."

"Oh, I think we can do a little better than that," he said, and took her to a chophouse they'd visited a couple of times be-fore. After mutton chops and red wine, the world did seem a less gloomy place. Brandy afterwards didn't hurt, either. Blackford took out a cigar case. He waited for Flora's nod before choosing and lighting a panatela. Between puffs, he asked, "Shall we go out dancing, or to a vaudeville show?"

Flora thought about it, then shook her head. She wasn't *that* happy. "No, thanks. Not tonight. Why don't you just take me back to my flat?"

"All right, if that's what you want." Blackford rose and es-corted her out to his motorcar. The ride back to the apartment building where

they both lived passed mostly in silence.

They walked upstairs together. The hallway across which their doors faced each other was quiet and dim: dimmer than usual, because one of the small electric light bulbs had burned out. As usual, Blackford walked Flora to her doorway. As usual, he bent to kiss her good-night. The kiss that followed was anything but usual. Maybe Flora was trying to make up for the day's disap-pointment. Maybe it was just the brandy talking through her. She didn't know, or care.

Neither, evidently, did Hosea Blackford. "Whew!" he said when at last they broke apart. "I think you melted all the wax in my mustache."

Flora's laugh was shaky. Her cheeks felt hot, as if in embar-rassment, but she was not embarrassed. Her heart pounded. She turned, wondering if the routine business of unlocking and open-ing her door would still the tumult in her. It didn't. She reached for the light switch by the door, then looked back to Blackford. "Would you like to come inside?" she asked.

"Good—" he began, responding to the *Good night* she'd al-ways given him before. Then he heard what she'd really said. He asked a question of his own: "Are you sure?"

She leaned forward and stood on tiptoe to kiss him on the end of the nose. He'd never pushed her to go further than she wanted to go. Pushing her would have done no good, as a lot of people, in Congress and out, could have told him. But he hadn't needed telling. He wasn't pushing now.

She liked him very much for that.. . and for the feel of his lips pressed against her, his body pressed against her. "Yes," she said firmly.

/ could never have done this back in New York, she thought as they sat side by side on the sofa— *not with everyone who lives in our apartment.*

But even that wasn't true. When Yossel Reisen was about to go off to war, her sister Sophie had found a way to give him a woman's ultimate gift—and he'd given her a gift in re-turn, a gift that now bore his name, a gift he'd never lived to see. If you wanted to badly enough, you could always find a way.

She'd never dreamt she might want to so badly. When, in an experimental way, Blackford slipped an arm around her, she pinned him against the back of the sofa. This kiss went on much longer than

the one in the hallway had, and left her feeling as if she might explode at any moment.

Blackford kissed her eyes, her cheeks; his mouth slid to the side of her neck, then up to her ear. Every time his lips touched her skin, she discovered something new and astonishing and wonderful. He nibbled at her earlobe, murmuring, "You don't know how long I've wanted to do this, darling." She didn't an-swer, not with words, but left no doubt about what she wanted.

But going into her bedroom with him a few minutes later was another long step into the unknown. She didn't turn on any of the lights in there. No matter how much urgency filled her, the idea of undressing in front of a man left her shaking. Even so, she sighed with relief as she slid off her corset.

On a hot, muggy late-summer night, bare skin felt good.

Her bare skin soon felt quite a lot better than good. She was amazed at the sensations Hosea Blackford's hands and lips and tongue evoked from her breasts, and then amazed again when one hand strayed lower. She'd stroked herself now and again, but this was different: every touch, every movement, a startlement. The small, altogether involuntary moan of pleasure she let out took her by surprise.

But that surprise also recalled her partly to herself. She re-membered Sophie's horror and panic out on the balcony of the family flat when her sister told her she was pregnant. "I can't have a baby!" she exclaimed.

Blackford hesitated, studying her in the half-light. Had she made him angry? If he got up and left now, she would die of humiliation—and frustration. But, to her vast relief, he nodded. "One of the reasons I care for you so much is for your good sense," he said. "We'll make sure everything is all right." He bent so that his mouth went where his hand had gone before.

Flora had literally never imagined such a thing. She hadn't imagined how good it felt, either. When pleasure burst over her, it made everything she'd done by herself seem . . . *beside the point* was the best way she found to think of it.

If he'd done that for her, she ought to return the favor, though she didn't quite know how. Awkwardly, she took him in her hand. As she drew near, she saw he looked strange. From inad-vertencies around the family apartment, she knew how a man was made. Hosea

Blackford was made a little differently. *He's not circumcised,* she realized. She'd forgotten that consequence of his being a gentile.

She kissed him and licked him. He needed only a moment to understand she didn't know what she was doing. "Put it in your mouth," he said quietly.

She did, though she hadn't imagined that only minutes before, any more than the other. The sound he made was a masculine version of her moan.

Encouraged, she kept on.

She didn't need to keep on very long. He grunted and jerked and spurted.

It caught her by surprise, and didn't taste very good. She coughed and sputtered and gulped before she could help herself. When she could speak again, she asked, "Was that right?"

He put her hand over his heart, which pounded like a drum. "If it were any more right," he assured her, "I'd be dead." She laughed and lay beside him, still marveling that such pleasure was possible—and ever so relieved that, unlike Sophie, she would not have to worry about consequences nine months later.

"Atlanta!" the conductor called, stepping into the car in which Jake Featherston rode. "All out for Atlanta!" He strode down the aisle, making sure no one could doubt the upcoming stop.

Featherston grabbed his carpetbag and sprang to his feet. His seat had been in the middle of the car, but he was one of the first people off it. He was one of the first people to a taxicab, too. "The Kendall Hotel," he told the driver.

"Sure thing," the fellow answered. The hotel proved to be only a few blocks east of Terminal Station. Brakes squealed as the driver stopped in front of the massive brick building with Moorish-looking turrets and ornaments. "That'll be twelve."

"Here you go." Jake handed him a $1,000 banknote and a $500. "I don't need any change." With the taximan's tip, he would have got back only a hundred dollars, two hundred if he wanted to be a cheapskate. He didn't.

Anyhow, with currency the way it was these days, you had to be crazy

to worry about anything as small as a hundred bucks.

A uniformed Negro porter came up to carry his bag. He gave the black man a hundred dollars. That was what such nearly worthless banknotes were good for. It was also, he thought, what nearly worthless black men were good for.

When Jake gave his name at the front desk, the clerk handed him his key and then said, "I have a message here for you, Mr. Featherston." He plucked an envelope from a pigeonhole and presented it with a flourish.

"Thanks." Featherston pulled out the envelope and unfolded the sheet of paper inside. It read, *Knight got in this morning. If you see this in time, have supper with us at seven tonight in the hotel restaurant Amos MizelL*

He stuck the note in his pocket. "How do I find the restaurant?" he asked the desk clerk.

"Down that corridor—second doorway on your left—first is the bar," the young man answered. Shyly, he went on, "It's an honor to have you in the Kendall, Mr. Featherston. Freedom!"

"Freedom, yeah ." Jake was still getting used to people recog-nizing his name. It was, he found, very easy to get used to.

Another colored porter carried the bag up to his room, and earned another hundred dollars. Jake snorted, imagining a hundred-dollar tip before the war. He unpacked his clothes, then pulled a watch from his pocket and checked the time. It was half past five.

He didn't feel like sitting in the room for an hour and a half like a cabbage, so he went down to the bar and peeled off a $500 banknote for a beer. He nursed the one glass till it was time for supper. The last thing he wanted was to go to this meeting drunk, or even tipsy.

When he left the bar and headed over to the restaurant, a pro-fessionally obsequious waiter led him to a table in a quiet corner: not the best seating in the place for anyone who wanted to show off, but a fine place to sit and eat and talk. Two other men were already sitting and talking. Featherston would have pegged them both for veterans even had he not known they were.

They got to their feet as he approached. "Featherston?" the taller one asked. Jake nodded. In a twanging Texas accent, the fellow went on,

"I'm Willy Knight of the Redemption League, and this here is Amos Mizell, who heads up the Tin Hats."

"Pleased to meet you gents," Jake said, shaking hands with both of them.

He wasn't sure how pleased he was to meet Knight; the Freedom Party was growing only slowly west of the Missis-sippi, not least because the Redemption League spouted similar ideas there. Supper with Amos Mizell was a feather in his cap, though. The Tin Hats were far and away the largest ex-soldiers' organization in the CSA.

Mizell sipped from a whiskey glass in front of him. He was about forty, and missing the little finger on his left hand. He said, "I think all three of us are going in the same direction. I think all three of us want to see the country going in the same direction, too. What we want to do is make sure nobody sidetracks any-body else."

"That's right." Knight nodded. He was blond and handsome and wore an expensive suit, all of which made Jake jealous. 'That's just right," he went on. "If we bang heads, the only ones who win are the damnyankees."

"Fair enough." Jake smiled, as he might have smiled over a bad poker hand. Knight reminded him of an officer, which in his book was another black mark against the Redemption League man. "We might have been smarter not to talk till after the Con-gressional elections, though. Then we'd have a better notion of who's strong and who isn't."

Almost imperceptibly, Willy Knight winced. Featherston grinned at him, the fierce grin of defiance he threw at everyone who got in his way. The Freedom Party was stronger than the Re-demption League, at least for now. It had its base in the more populous eastern part of the Confederate States and was reach-ing west, where only a relative handful of people on this side of the Mississippi belonged to the Redemption League.

Again, Mizell played peacemaker: "One thing certain is, we're stronger together than we are apart." The Tin Hats weren't a political party, so he wasn't a direct rival to either of the men at the table with him. But if he tipped to one or the other of them, his influence would not be small.

They paused when the waiter came up. Knight ordered a beefsteak, Mizell fried chicken, and Jake a ham steak. "I'm shoot-ing for ten

Congressmen next session," he said, though he ex-pected perhaps half that many would win seats. "How about you, Knight?"

"We'll win Dallas—I'm pretty sure of that," the leader of the Redemption League said. "They can see the Yankees up in Se-quoyah and over in that damned new state of Houston from there. We may take a couple of other seats, too. I'll tell you what we will do, though, by God: we'll scare the Radical Liberals clean out of their shoes."

"No arguments there," Amos Mizell said. He raised the drink to his lips again. "I wish more of the new leaders who think along our lines would have joined us here tonight. The Ten-nessee Volunteers, the Knights of the Gray, and the Red-Fighters all have ideas we might find worthwhile, and they aren't the only ones."

"There's plenty of people angry with the way things are going now," Jake allowed. "A couple of years ago, the Freedom Party wasn't anything more than a few people sitting around in a sa-loon grousing." He drew himself up straight with pride. "We've come a long ways since then."

"That you have," Mizell said. Knight nodded once more. Now he looked jealous. The Freedom Party had come further and faster than the Redemption League. Mizell continued, "I know for a fact that a lot of Tin Hats are Freedom Party men, too."

"I never thought we could get away with breaking up the soft parties'

rallies," Will Knight said, and looked jealous again. "But you've gone and done it, and you've gone and gotten away with it, too."

"You bet we have," Jake said. "If you reckon the cops love the Whigs and the Radical Liberals and the niggers, you can damn well think again.

And"—he lowered his voice a little—"if you reckon the soldiers love the traitors in the War Department, you can damn well think again about that, too."

"Some of the things you've said about the War Department have been of concern to me," Amos Mizell said. "I don't care to bring disrepute down on men who served so bravely against the foe. *Traitor* is a hard word."

Featherston fixed him with that savage grin. "Jeb Stuart III was my commanding officer," he said. "Pompey, his nigger ser-vant, was ass-

deep in the rebellion. He shielded that nigger from Army of Northern Virginia Intelligence. His old man, Jeb, Jr., shielded him when it turned out he'd been wrong all the time. If that doesn't make him a traitor to his country, what the hell does it do?"

Before either Mizell or Knight could answer, the waiter re-turned with their suppers. They ate in silence for a while. Knight was the first to break it.

"Suppose what you say is true. If you say it too loud and too often, don't you figure the Army is going to land on your back?"

"I reckon the generals'd love to," Jake answered with his mouth full. "But I don't reckon they'd have an easy time of it, even now, on account of the soldiers who got the orders wouldn't be happy about following 'em. And the longer they wait, the harder it'll be."

"You may be right about the second part of that," Mizell said. "I've got my doubts about the first, I have to tell you. You might be smarter to take a step back every now and then so you can take two forward later on."

"The Freedom Party doesn't back up." Featherston eyed Mizell, but was really speaking more to Knight. "You talk about people who want to straighten out the mess we're in and you talk about us first. Everybody else comes behind us."

"You go on like that, why'd you bother coming down here at all?" Knight asked. "What have we got to talk about?"

That was a good question. Jake did not want to negotiate with the Redemption League. Negotiating implied he reckoned Knight his equal, which he did not care to do. But he did not dare risk antagonizing the Tin Hats. If Amos Mizell started saying harsh things about him and about the Freedom Party, it would hurt. But he was not about to admit that, either.

Picking his words with more care than usual, he replied, "We're on the way up. You want to come with us, Knight, you want to help us climb, that's fine. You want to fight, you'll slow us down. I don't say anything different.

But you won't stop us, and I'll break you in the end." That wasn't party against party. It was man against man. The only thing Featherston knew how to do when threatened was push back harder than ever. Knight was a man of similar sort. He glared across the table at Jake.

"We're here to stop these brawls before they hurt all of us," Amos Mizell said. "If we work things out now, we don't have to air our dirty linen in public and waste force we could aim at our enemies. That's how I see it."

"That's how I see it, too," Jake said. "If the Redemption League was bigger than the Freedom Party, I'd ease back. Since it's the other way round—"

"You're the one who gets to talk that way," Willy Knight said. Jake only smiled. He knew he was lying—he would have done anything to get ahead of a rival—but nobody could prove it.

"It appears to me, things being as they are, that our best course is to use the Freedom Party as the spearhead of our movement and the Redemption League and other organizations as the shaft that helps give the head its striking power," Mizell said. "How does it appear to you, Mr.

Knight?"

Featherston felt like kissing Amos Mizell. He couldn't have put the leader of the Redemption League on the spot like that himself. Knight looked like a man who'd found a worm—no, half a worm—in his apple. Very slowly, he replied, "I think we can work with the Freedom Party, depending on who's stronger in any particular place."

"That's a bargain," Jake answered at once. "We'll pull a couple of our candidates in Arkansas, where you look to have a better chance, and we'll throw our weight behind you. There are some districts in Alabama and Mississippi and one in Tennessee I can think of where I want you to do the same."

Even more slowly, Knight nodded again. If the Freedom Party outperformed the Redemption League in this election, support would swing Featherston's way, leaving Knight in the lurch. He could see that. He couldn't do anything about it, though.

He'd want a high post if the Redemption League got folded into the Freedom Party. Jake could already tell as much. He'd give Knight a good slot, too. That way, he could keep an eye on him. The CSA, he thought, had been stabbed in the back. He didn't intend to let that happen to him.

Jonathan Moss slid out of his Bucephalus and stumbled toward his

Evanston apartment building. He was glad he'd managed to get home without running over anybody. After his last course, he and Fred Sandburg and several other people—he couldn't recall how many right now—had found a friendly saloon and done their best to drink it dry. *Why not?* he thought. It was a Friday night. He wouldn't need his brains again till Monday morning.

His breath smoked. The wind off Lake Michigan blew the smoke away. It was chilly, despite the antifreeze he'd poured into his pipes. "Not as chilly as it would be up in Ontario," Moss said, as if someone had asserted the opposite. He stepped up onto the stairs. "Not half as chilly as Laura Secord's heart."

Fred never had stopped ribbing him about Laura Secord. Even now, after she'd rejected him again, he couldn't get her out of his mind. He'd come home. He'd done well at Northwestern. He hadn't found a girl he cared about, though. He wondered if he ever would. He wondered if he ever could.

He opened the door at the top of the stairs, then quickly shut it behind him. Getting out of the wind felt good. He fumbled for the key to his mailbox. It wasn't easy to find, not when every key on the ring looked like one of twins. He almost gave it up as a bad job and headed for bed. But, figuring he'd probably have trouble finding his apartment key, too, he chose to regard the mailbox key as a test. He made a determined drunk.

"There you are, you sneaky little bastard," he said, capturing the errant key. Making it fit the lock was another struggle, but he won that one, too.

A couple of advertising circulars fell onto the floor. Bend-ing to pick them up made his head spin. He also had a letter from a cousin out in Denver and another envelope with his ad-dress written in a hand he didn't recognize. He'd taken two steps toward the stairs before he remembered to go back and shut and lock the mailbox.

He did have a devil of a time finding the key that opened the apartment door, but by luck he got it into the lock on the first try. He flipped on the electric light and tossed the mail down on the table in front of the sofa. He tossed himself down on the sofa and fell asleep.

Next thing he knew, the sun was streaming in the window. A determined musician pounded on kettle drums inside his head. His mouth tasted the way a slit trench smelled. His bladder was about to

explode. He staggered off to the bathroom, pissed for-ever, brushed his teeth, and dry-swallowed two aspirin tablets. Black coffee would have helped, too, but making it seemed too much like work.

After splashing cold water on his face, he slowly went back out into the front room. He discovered he hadn't thrown out the circulars, so he did that.

Then he read his cousin's letter. It had already started snowing in Denver, and David looked likely to get a promotion at the bank where he worked.

"Bully," Moss muttered. His voice sounded harsh and un-naturally loud in his ears. He let the letter lie where he'd left it. Cousin David was not the most interesting man God ever made.

That left the other envelope, the one with the unfamiliar hand-writing. It bore no return address. Something about the stamp looked funny. When he peered closely, he saw that Ben Frank-lin's portrait had the word ONTARIO

printed over it.

"No," he said hoarsely. He shook his fist at the window, in the general direction of the Northwestern campus. "God damn you to hell for the practical-joking son of a bitch you are, Fred." He found it much easier to believe that his friend had got hold of some occupation stamps than that anyone in Ontario should write to him. He knew only one person in the conquered Cana-dian province, and she wished she didn't know him.

But the envelope carried a postmark from Arthur. Could Fred have arranged to have someone up there put it in the mail? Moss knew Fred could have. His friend would go to great lengths to jerk his chain.

"Only one way to find out," he mumbled, and opened the en-velope with fingers not all of whose shaking sprang from his hangover. The paper inside was coarse and cheap. He unfolded it. The letter—a note, really—was in the hand that had addressed the envelope.

Dear Mr. Moss, it read, *Now you have the chance to pay me back. I daresay it will be sweet for you. I would sooner do any-thing than rely on the word of a man to whom I offered nothing but insult, but I find I have no choice. The harvest this year was very bad, and I have no way to raise the $2001 need to keep from being taxed off my farm. So far as I can tell, all my kin are dead. My friends are as poor as I am. Even if you do find it*

in your heart to send the money, I can make no promise to feel toward you the way you would want me to feel. I would not deceive you by saying anything else. Laura Secord. Her address followed.

Moss stared. The letter couldn't be anything but genuine. He'd told Fred Sandburg some of what he'd said and done up in On-tario, but he'd never mentioned the promise he'd given Laura Secord. He'd known too well how Fred would laugh.

"What do I do now?" he asked the ceiling. The ceiling didn't answer. It was up to him.

If he threw the letter away, he would have his revenge. The trouble was, he didn't much want revenge. He hadn't been angry at Laura Secord when she turned him down. He'd been disap-pointed. He'd been wounded, almost as if by machine-gun fire. But what he'd felt for her hadn't turned to hate, though for the life of him he couldn't have said why.

If he sent her the two hundred dollars, he'd be throwing his money away.

He knew that. Had he not known it, she'd made it very plain. But, that frozen day up in Arthur, he'd told her that if she ever needed him for anything, all she had to do was ask. Now she'd asked. Was he going to break his promise? If he did, what would that make her think of Americans? What would it make her think of him?

He'd never been a man in whom altruism burned with a fine, hot flame. He was well-to-do, but not so well-to-do that spend-ing two hundred dollars wouldn't hurt—it wasn't as if he were playing with Confederate money.

"What do I do?" he said again. The ceiling still wasn't talking.

He went back into the bathroom and stared at himself in the mirror over the sink. He looked like hell: bloodshot eyes, stubble, hair all awry because he hadn't bothered combing it yet. If he threw Laura Secord's letter into the wastebasket, what would he see the next time he looked in a mirror?

"A lying bastard." That wasn't the ceiling talking. That was him. Did he want to go through life thinking of himself as a liar every time he lathered up with his shaving brush? Some people wouldn't care. Some people would figure rejection made their promise null and void.

But he'd given that promise after Laura Secord had rejected him, in spite of her rejecting him. His headache had only a little to do with the hangover.

He sighed, fogging the mirror. That proved he was still alive. He knew what he would do. He'd never tell Fred Sandburg. Fred wouldn't let him live it down if he found out. He'd do it anyway.

It was Saturday morning. The banks would be closed. The post office was open, though. He could send a money order—if he had two hundred dollars in cash. By turning the apartment upside down, he came up with $75.27. He cursed under his breath for a minute, then telephoned Fred Sandburg.

"Hullo?" When Sandburg answered the phone, he sounded as if he'd just been raised from the dead and wished he hadn't been.

"Hello, Fred," Moss said cheerfully—the aspirins were work-ing. "Listen, if I write you a check for a hundred and thirty bucks, can you cash it?"

"Yeah, I think so," his friend answered.

"Good. See you in a few minutes," Moss said. Sandburg started to ask him why he wanted the money right away, but he hung up without answering.

Throwing on some clothes, he drove the few blocks to Sandburg's flat.

"What the hell is this all about?" Sandburg asked. He looked like a poor job of embalming; he'd had more to drink than Moss had. "You eloping with some broad and you need to buy a ladder?"

"Got it the first time," Moss told him. He wrote a check and thrust it at his friend. In return, Sandburg gave him two fifties, a twenty, and a gold eagle.

"Thanks, pal, you're a lifesaver," Moss said. He headed out, leaving Sandburg scratching his head be-hind him.

At the post office, Moss discovered he couldn't buy a money order for two hundred dollars. "Hundred-dollar maximum, sir," the clerk said, "but I can sell you two." Moss nodded. The clerk went on, "That will be $200.60—thirty-cent fee on each order." Moss gave him the money. When he got the money orders back, he put them in an envelope he'd already addressed. For another two cents, the clerk sold him a stamp.

After that, he drove home. Now that the deed was done, he wondered how foolish he'd been. *Two hundred dollars foolish,* he thought— *and sixty cents.* When he asked his parents for money, as he'd eventually need to do, they'd want to know where it had gone. They were liable to suspect he'd spent it on a loose woman. He laughed mirthlessly. If only Laura Secord *were* loose, or even a little looser!

He returned to the study of the law on Monday. Every day when he went home, he checked the mail in hope of finding an-other envelope with an overprinted stamp. Ten days later, he got one. The note inside read simply,

/ see there are decent Yanks after all God bless you. He read it a dozen times, convinced be-yond contradiction that that was the best two hundred dollars he'd ever spent.

VIII

Nellie Jacobs opened her eyes. She was lying on a hard, un-yielding bed, staring up into a bright electric light bulb. When she blinked, the bulb seemed to waver and float. It also seemed much farther away than a self-respecting ceiling lamp had any business being.

Hovering between her and the lamp were her daughter and her husband.

Hal Jacobs asked, "Are you all right, darling?"

"I'm fine." Even to herself, Nellie sounded anything but fine. What she sounded was drunk. She felt drunk, too, at least to the point of not caring what she said: "Don't worry about me. I was born to hang." She coughed.

That hurt. So did talking. Her throat was raw and sore and dry. As she slowly took stock of herself, that was far from the only pain she discovered.

Someone had been using her belly for a punching bag.

"Do you know where you're at, Ma?" Edna Semphroch asked her.

"Of course I do," she answered indignantly. That bought her a few seconds in which to cast about through the misty corridors of her memory and try to find the answer. Somewhat to her own surprise,

she did: "I'm in the Emergency Hospital at the corner of Fifteenth and D, Miss Smarty-Britches." Recalling where she was made her recall why she was there. "Holy suffering Jesus! Did I have a boy or a girl?"

"We have a daughter, Nellie," Hal said. If he was disappointed at not having a son, he didn't show it. "Clara Lucille Jacobs, six pounds fourteen ounces, nineteen and a half inches—and beau-tiful. Just like you."

"How you do go on," Nellie said. A little girl. That was nice. Little girls, thank God, didn't grow up to be men.

Someone new floated into her field of view: a man clad all in white, even to a white cloth cap on his head. *A doctor,* she real-ized, and giggled at being able to realize anything at all. Busi-nesslike as a stockbroker, he asked, "How are you feeling, Mrs. Jacobs?"

"Not too bad," she said. "I had ether, didn't I?" She remem-bered the cone coming down over her face, the funny, choking smell, and then . ..

nothing. The doctor was nodding. Nellie nodded, too, though it made her dizzy, or rather, dizzier. "I had ether, and after that I had the baby." The doctor nodded again. Nellie giggled again. "A lot easier doing it like that than the regular way," she declared. "One hell of a lot easier, believe me."

"Most women say the same thing, Mrs. Jacobs," the doctor answered.

Her cursing didn't bother him. He'd surely heard a lot of patients coming out from under ether. He hadn't even noticed. Edna had, and was smirking.

Nellie went on taking stock. She'd felt a lot of labor pains be-fore Hal and Edna brought her to the hospital, and a lot more be-fore the doctors put her under. But she'd missed the ones at the end of the affair, and those were far and away the worst. And she'd missed the process of, as one of her fallen sisters had put it many years before, trying to shit a watermelon. Sure as sure, this was better.

"Would you like to see your daughter, Mrs. Jacobs?" the doctor asked.

"Would I ever!" Nellie said. Smiling, the doctor turned and beckoned. A nurse brought the baby, wrapped in a pink blanket, up to Nellie. Clara was tiny and bald and pinkish red and wrinkled. Edna had looked the same way just after she was born.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Hal said.

"Of course she is," Nellie answered. Edna looked as if she had a different opinion, but she was smart enough to keep it to herself.

"If you want to give her your breast now, you may," the doc-tor said.

What, right here in front of you? Nellie almost blurted. That was foolish, and she figured it out before the words passed her lips. He'd had his hands on her private parts while delivering Clara. After that, how could she be modest about letting him see her bare breast?

But she was. He must have read it in her face—and, of course, he would have seen the same thing in other women, too. He said, "Mr. Jacobs, why don't you step out into the hall with me? I think your wife might have an easier time of it with just the ladies in here with her."

"Oh. Yes. Of course," Hal said. He followed the doctor out of the room, looking back over his shoulder at Nellie as he went.

"Slide down your gown, dearie, and you can give your wee one something good," the nurse said. She was a powerfully built middle-aged woman with the map of Ireland on her face. After Nellie exposed her breast, she set the baby on it. Clara knew how to root; babies were born knowing that. She didn't need long to find the nipple and start to suck.

"Ow," Nellie said, and made a hissing noise between her teeth. She'd forgotten how tender her breasts were and would be till nursing toughened them up.

"She's getting something, sure enough," the nurse said. Nellie heard the gulping noises the baby was making, too. The nurse went on, "You'll be better off if you go right on nursing her, too. Breast-fed babies don't get the bowel complaints that carry off so many little ones, not nearly as often as them that suck a bottle."

"Cheaper and easier to nurse a baby, too," Nellie said. "Nothing to buy, nothing to measure, nothing to boil. I'll do it as much as I can."

Edna watched in fascination. "They know just what to do, don't they?"

"They do that," the nurse said. "If they didn't, not a one of 'em'd live to grow up, and then where would we be?"

"You were the same way," Nellie told Edna. "I reckon I was the same way, too, and my ma, and her ma, and all the way back to the start of time."

She didn't mention little Clara's father, nor Edna's father, nor her own father, nor any other man. That wasn't be-cause she assumed they were the same way, too. It was because, as far as she was concerned, men weren't worth mentioning.

After about ten minutes, the baby stopped nursing. Nellie handed her to the nurse, who efficiently burped her. Clara cried for a little while, the high, thin wail of a newborn that always put Nellie in mind of a cat on a back fence. Then, abruptly, as if someone had turned a switch on her back, she fell asleep.

Nellie found herself yawning, too. Not only were the rem-nants of the ether coursing through her, but she'd also been through labor and delivery: hard work, even if she hadn't felt most of it.

"Rest now, if you want to," the nurse said. "We'll want to keep you here for a week, maybe ten days, make sure you don't come down with childbed fever or anything else." She cast a specula-tive eye toward Nellie. That *or anything else* no doubt meant *or anything else that's liable to happen to an old coot like you.*

Had Nellie had more energy, she might have resented that. As she was now, without enough get-up-and-go to lick a postage stamp, she simply shrugged. A week or ten days with nothing to do but nurse the baby and eat and sleep looked like heaven to her.

Edna took a different perspective. "A week? Ten days?" she exclaimed in mock anger. "You're going to leave me running things by myself so long, Ma? That's a lot to hand me."

"I've already done a lot," Nellie said. "Besides, the place has to bring in enough to pay for my little holiday here."

It didn't, not really. She and Hal had saved up enough to meet the hospital bill. Hal knew how to sock away money. It wasn't the worst thing in the world. Nellie wished she were better at that. She'd learned some from paying attention to the way her hus-band handled things. Maybe she could learn more.

Edna stopped complaining, even in fun. Nellie thought she recognized the gleam in her daughter's eye. Hal wouldn't be able to watch Edna

the way Nellie had ever since she'd become a woman. Edna wouldn't have a lot of time to get into mischief, but a girl didn't need a lot of time to get into mischief Fifteen minutes would do the job nicely.

And maybe, nine months from now, Edna would have an ether cone clapped over her face and wake up with a baby hardly younger than its aunt.

If she did, Nellie hoped the baby would have a last name.

She yawned again. She was too tired even to worry about that very much.

Whatever Edna did in the next week or so—if she did anything—she would damn well do, and she and Nellie and Hal would deal with the consequences—if there were consequences—later. The only thing Nellie wanted to deal with now was sleep. The light overhead and the hard hospital mattress fazed her not at all.

Before she could sleep, though, her husband came back into the room.

He bent over her and kissed her on the cheek. "Every-thing will be fine," he said. "The doctor tells me you could not have done better. You will be well, and little Clara will be well, and every one of us will be well."

"Bully," Nellie said, and then a new word she'd started hearing in the coffeehouse: "Swell. Hal, you're sweet as anything, but will you please get the hell out of here and let me rest?"

"Of course. Of course." He almost stumbled over his own feet, he went out the door so fast. He paused in the doorway to blow her a kiss, and then he was gone. A moment later, Nellie was gone, too.

They woke her in the middle of the night to nurse the baby again. By then, all the anesthetic had worn off. Not to put too fine a point on it, she felt like hell. The night nurse brought her some aspirin. That was sending a boy to do a man's job. She wondered if she'd be able to go back to sleep once they took Clara away again. She did, which testified less to the tablets'

ef-fectiveness than to her own overwhelming exhaustion.

When she woke in the morning, she was ravenous. She would have yelled at Edna for serving a customer such greasy scram-bled eggs, overcooked bacon, and cold toast. The coffee they gave her with it

might have been brewed from mud. She didn't notice till the whole breakfast was gone. While she was eat-ing, she noticed only that it filled the vast, echoing void in her midsection.

After Clara had had breakfast, too, a nurse escorted Nellie down the hall so she could take a bath. It was the first time she'd had a good look at her body since the baby was born. She didn't care for what she saw, not even a little bit. The skin of her belly hung loose and flabby, having been stretched to accommodate the baby who wasn't in there any more. It would tighten up again; she remembered that from the days following Edna's birth. She'd been a lot younger in those days, though. How much would it tighten now?

If Hal wanted her less after she came home .. . that wouldn't break her heart. It would, if anything, be a relief. She resolved to lay in a supply of safes. Now that she knew she could catch, she didn't intend to do it again. If Hal didn't care to wear them— She grimaced. There were other things they could do, things that car-ried no risk. She hated those things, having had to do them for men who laid coins on the nightstands of cheap hotel rooms, but she hated the notion of getting pregnant again even more.

As it had been on the way to the bathtub, her walk on the way back was not only slow but distinctly bowlegged. She remem-bered that, too. She'd had a baby come through there, all right. Clara was waiting for her when she returned to her bed. Nellie startled herself with a smile. Another baby, no.

This one? "Not so bad," she said, and took her daughter in her arms.

On the night of November 4, Roger Kimball headed over to Freedom Party headquarters on King Street to get the Congres-sional election returns as fast as the telegraph brought them into Charleston. He'd tried to get Clarence Potter and Jake Delamotte to come along with him. They'd both begged off.

"If your madman friends do win some seats, I'll want to go out and get drunk, and I don't mean by way of celebration," Potter had said. "That being so, I may as well go straight to a sa-loon now. The company's apt to be better, anyhow."

"I aim to get drunk no matter what happens," Jack Delamotte had echoed. He'd gone along with Potter.

Summer soldiers, Kimball thought. They'd been willing enough to think

about using Jake Featherston, but hadn't settled down for the long haul of using Featherston's party. A sub-mersible skipper learned patience. Those who didn't learn ended up on the bottom of the ocean.

Smoke filled the Freedom Party offices when Kimball walked in. As soon as the door closed behind him, he held up a gallon jug of whiskey. A raucous cheer went up, and everybody in the place welcomed him like a long-lost brother. His was far from the only restorative there; several men already seemed distinctly elevated. He laughed. Potter and Delamotte could have got

drunk here and saved themselves thousands of dollars—not that thousands of dollars meant much any more.

"We're leading in the fourth district up in Virginia!" some-body at one of the bank of telegraph clickers announced, and more cheers rang out.

People had yelled louder for Kimball and his whiskey, though.

He poured himself a glass and raised it high. "Going to Con-gress!" he shouted, and another burst of happy noise filled the rooms.

It must have spilled out into the street, too, for a gray-uniformed cop poked his head inside to see what the commotion was about. Somebody stuck a cigar in his mouth, as if the Freedom Party had had a baby.

Somebody else asked, "Want a snort, Ed?" Before the policeman could nod or shake his head, he found a glass in his hand. He emptied it in short order.

"First votes in from Alabama—we're winning in the Ninth. That's Birmingham," a red-faced Freedom Party man said.

Applause rang out, and a couple of Rebel yells with it. People raised glasses and bottles on high and poured down the whiskey as if they'd never see it again. "Congress is going to be ours!" somebody howled. That set off more applause.

It made Kimball want to laugh or cry or bang his head against the wall. A couple of seats made people think they'd win a ma-jority, which wouldn't, couldn't, come within nine miles of hap-pening. Maybe Clarence Potter was right: maybe the Freedom Party did attract idiots.

From everything Kimball had heard, even Jake Featherston wasn't predicting more than about ten seats' ending up with Freedom Party Representatives in them. That didn't make up a tenth part of the membership of the House. And if the leader of a party wasn't a professional optimist before an election, who was? Kimball had figured the night would be a success if the Freedom Party elected *anybody.* By that undemanding standard, things already looked to be going well.

"Here we go—First District, South Carolina. That's us. Quiet down, y'all,"

somebody at the bank of telegraph tickers called. People did quiet down—a little. The fellow waited for the num-bers to come in, then said,

"Damn, that Whig bastard is still a couple thousand votes up on Pinky.

We're way out in front of the Radical Liberals, though."

Kimball looked around to see if Pinky Hollister, the Free-dom Party candidate, was in the office. He didn't spot him. That didn't surprise him too much: Hollister actually lived not in Charleston but in Mount Holly, fifteen miles outside of town. He was probably getting the results there.

"Well, we scared the sons of bitches, anyways," a bald man said loudly.

That signaled yet another round of cheers and clapping.

"To hell with scaring the sons of bitches," Kimball said, even more loudly.

"We scared the sons of bitches up in the USA, but in the end they licked us. What I want us to do, God damn it to hell, is I want us to *win"*

Another near silence followed that. After a moment, people started to clap and yell and stomp on the floor. "Freedom!" somebody shouted. The cry filled the room: "Freedom! Free-dom! Freedom!"

Dizziness that had nothing to do with the whiskey he'd drunk or with the tobacco smoke clogging and thickening the air filled Kimball. He'd known something of the same feeling when a tor-pedo he'd launched

slammed into the side of a U.S. warship. Then, though, the pride had been in something he was doing him-self. Now he rejoiced in being part of an entity larger than him-self, but one whose success he'd had a hand in shaping.

"Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" The shout went on and on. It was intoxicating, mesmerizing. Kimball howled out the word along with everybody else. While he was yelling, he didn't have to think. All he had to do was feel. The rhythmic cry filled him full.

The door out onto the street opened. Kimball wondered if an-other cop was going to come in and try to make people quiet down. (He hadn't seen the first policeman leave. There he was, as a matter of fact, drinking like a fish.) A good many people must have had the same thought, for the chant of "Freedom!" came to a ragged halt.

But it wasn't a cop standing there. It was Anne Colleton. Not everybody in the office recognized her. Not everybody who recognized her knew she'd helped the Freedom Party. Most of the people who followed Jake Featherston were poor, or at best middle-class. One of the reasons they followed him was the vit-riol he poured down on the heads of the Confederacy's elite. And here was an obvious member of that elite—Anne could never be anything else—coolly inspecting them, as if they were in the monkey house at the Charleston zoo.

Kimball started to explain who she was and what she'd done for the Party.

Before he could get out more than a couple of words, she took matters into her own hands, as was her habit. "Free-dom!" she said crisply.

At that, the chant resumed, louder than ever. Men surged toward Anne, as men had a way of doing whenever she went out in public. If she'd accepted all the drinks they tried to press on her, she would have gone facedown on the floor in short order. After she took one, though, she was vaccinated against taking any more.

Instead of acting like a chunk of iron in the grip of a magnet, Kimball hung back. Anne took her own attractiveness so much for granted, a man who showed he wasn't completely in her grasp often succeeded in piquing her interest by sheer contrariness.

"Hello, Roger," she said when she did finally notice him in the crowd. "I wondered if I'd find you here."

"Wouldn't miss it," he answered. "Best show in the world— this side of the circus, anyhow." She laughed at that. He said, "I didn't expect to see you here, though. If you got out of St. Mat-thews, I reckoned you'd go on up to Columbia."

"I didn't come down just for the election," Anne said. "I've taken a room at the Charleston Hotel on Meeting Street. The shops in Columbia don't compare to the ones they have here."

"If you say so," Kimball replied.

"I do say so," she answered seriously. "I know what I want, and I aim to get just that, nothing less." She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Some ways, we're very much alike, you and I."

"That's a fact," he said. With a scowl, he went on, "If you're going to tease me, pick another time. I've got a little too much whiskey in me to take kindly to it tonight."

"That's frank enough." She appraised him as frankly. "But I'd already made up my mind that I wasn't gong to tease you if I found you tonight: I was going to invite you up to my room. I just told you, I know what I want, and I aim to get it."

He thought about turning her down to prove she couldn't take him for granted. It might make her respect him more. It might also make her furious. And he didn't want to turn her down. He wanted to throw her down on a big soft bed and take her while she clawed his back to ribbons. If she had something like that in mind, he was ready, willing, and able—he hadn't drunk so much as to leave him in any doubts on that score.

"We're ahead in the Seventh in Tennessee," a man at the tele-graph tickers announced, which produced a new roar of ap-plause. Through it, the fellow went on, "That's around Nashville. They had the damnyankees occupying them—they got them-selves some debts to pay."

Another Freedom Party man was keeping an eye on a dif-ferent telegraphic instrument. "The Redemption League looks like they're gonna win themselves a seat in Texas," he said. "Ain't as good as if we did it, but it's the next best thing."

"How long do you want to stay here?" Anne asked.

"Up to you," Kimball answered. "We've already done about as much as I reckoned we could, and there's a lot of votes out there waiting to be counted. Maybe we really will get ten seats, the way Featherston said we would."

"That would be remarkable," Anne said. She echoed his own thought:

"Most brags before an election turn to wind the second the voting's done."

She slipped her arm into his. "Shall we go celebrate, then? My motorcar's a couple of doors down."

She was still driving the spavined Ford she'd got after the C.S. Army commandeered her Vauxhall. That told Kimball she hadn't come all the way back from the financial reverses she'd taken during the war. But then, who in the Confederate States had? He wondered what would have become of him had he not had more than usual skill with a deck of cards.

The Charleston Hotel was a large building of white stucco with a colonnaded entranceway. An attendant took charge of the Ford as if it had been a Vauxhall. The house detective didn't blink an eye as Kimball got into the elevator with Anne.

Their joining was fierce as usual, as much a struggle for domi-nance as what a lot of people thought of as lovemaking. When it was good, as it was tonight, they both won. Afterwards, they lay side by side, lazily caressing each other and talking .. . politics.

"You were right, Roger," Anne said, the sort of admission she seldom made. "The Freedom Party *is* on the way up, and Jake Featherston *is* someone to reckon with."

"I want to meet him myself," Kimball said. He tweaked her nipple, gently enough to be another caress, sharply enough to be a demand and a warning. "You owe me that, seeing as I was right."

She knocked his hand away and answered with more than a hint of malice: "What makes you think he'd want to meetˆou? You were an officer, after all, and he's not what you'd call keen on officers "

"He's not keen on *rich* officers," Kimball retorted. "You ever saw the farm I grew up on, you'd know I'm not one of those. He'll know it, too."

He saw he'd surprised her by answering seriously. He also saw his answer wasn't something she'd thought of herself. "All right," she said. "I'll see what I can do." She rolled toward him on the broad bed. "And now—"

He took her in his arms. "Now I'll see what I can do "

Cincinnatus Driver wished he didn't keep getting shipments for Joe Conroy's general store. He wished he could stay away from Conroy for the rest of his life. Like so many wishes, that one wasn't granted. He couldn't turn down deliveries to Conroy's. If he started turning down deliveries to one storekeeper, he'd stop getting deliveries to any storekeepers.

He also wished his rattletrap truck had windshield wipers. Since it didn't—he counted himself lucky it had a motor, let alone any fripperies—he drove from the Ohio to the corner of Emma and Blackwell as slowly and carefully as he could, doing his best to peer between the raindrops spattering his windshield. His best was good enough to keep him from hitting anybody, but he clucked to himself at how long he was taking to drive across Covington.

"And when I finally get there, I get to deal with Joe Conroy," he said. He talked to himself a lot while driving, for lack of anyone else with whom to talk. "Won't that just make my day? Sour old—"

But, when he hauled the first keg of molasses into the general store, he found Conroy in a mood not merely good but jubilant. He stared suspiciously at the fat storekeeper; Conroy wasn't sup-posed to act like that. Conroy didn't usually sign the shipping re-ceipt till Cincinnatus had fetched in everything, but he did today. "Ain't it a beautiful mornin'?" he said.

Cincinnatus looked outside, in case the sun had come out and a rainbow appeared in the sky while his back was turned. No: everything remained as gray and dark as it had been a moment before. Nasty cold drizzle was building toward nasty cold rain; he didn't relish the upcoming drive back to the wharves.

"Tell you straight out, Mistuh Conroy, I've seen me a whole hell of a lot of days I liked the looks of better," he answered, and went back out into the wet to fetch some more of what Conroy had ordered. The sooner he got it all into the store, the sooner he could get away.

When he came inside again, Joe Conroy said, "Didn't say it was pretty out. I said it was a beautiful mornin', and it damn well is."

"I ain't got the time to play silly games." Cincinnatus spoke more rudely to Conroy than to any other white man he knew, and enjoyed every minute of it. "Tell me what you're talkin' about or let it go."

Conroy was in the habit of making noises about what an up-pity nigger Cincinnatus was. He didn't even bother with those today. "I'll tell you, by Jesus," he answered. "I sure as hell will tell you. It's a beautiful mornin' on account of the Freedom Party won eleven seats in the Congress down in Richmond, and the Redemption League took four more."

That didn't make it a beautiful morning for Cincinnatus—but then, Cincinnatus, though he'd had to work with the Confed-erate diehards in Kentucky, wasn't one himself. His considered opinion was that a black man would have to be crazy to want the Stars and Bars flying here again. The Stars and Stripes weren't an enormous improvement, but any improvement, no matter how modest, seemed the next thing to a miracle to him.

Then he thumped his forehead with the heel of his hand. He might not be crazy, but maybe he was stupid. *"That's* how come I've seen 'Freedom!'

painted on about every other wall this past couple weeks," he said.

"Sure as hell is," Conroy said. "Those folks is gonna do great things for the country—for *my* country." His narrow little eyes probed at Cincinnatus.

Cincinnatus stared back impassively. He didn't want Conroy to know what he was thinking. The store-keeper grunted and went on, "Reckon there'll be a Freedom Party startin' up in Kentucky any day now."

"How do you figure the USA's gonna let you get away with that?"

Cincinnatus asked in surprise. "They ain't gonna let there be no party that don't really belong to the United States at all."

Joe Conroy looked sly. He might not have been all that smart, but he was one crafty devil: that much Cincinnatus could not help but recognize. "They let Reds operate in the USA, don't they?" he said. "It's a free country, ain't it? Says it is, anyways— says it out loud, bangin' on a big drum. If the Freedom Party, say, wants to try and get the votes to take Kentucky back into the CSA, how can they stop us from doin' that?"

He looked smug, as if certain Cincinnatus could have no an-swer. But Cincinnatus did have an answer, and gave it in two words: "Luther Bliss."

"Huh," Conroy said. "We'll handle him, too, when the time comes."

Cincinnatus didn't argue, not any more. Arguing with a fool had always struck him as a waste of time. And Conroy sure as hell wasn't all that smart if he thought he could handle Luther Bliss. Cincinnatus had his doubts about whether Apicius Wood could handle Bliss if he had to. Apicius, he judged, had the sense not to try, but then Apicius really was pretty smart.

"Let me get the rest of your stuff," Cincinnatus said. If he wasn't face-to-face with Conroy, he couldn't possibly argue with him.

The storekeeper wanted to keep on jawing, but Cincinnatus didn't have to play, not today he didn't. With Conroy's receipt in his pocket, all he had to do was finish the delivery and get out. He did exactly that.

As he drove back up toward the river, he really noticed how many walls and fences had FREEDOM! painted on them. The word had replaced the blue crosses and red-white-red horizontal stripes as the diehards' chosen scribble.

He didn't like what he'd heard about the Freedom Party. That put it mildly.

The local papers said little about the outfit; these days, they did their best to ignore what went on in the Confed-erate States. But word drifted up out of the CSA even so, word spread on the black grapevine that ran alongside and occasion-ally overlapped the one the diehards used. None of that word was good. And now the Freedom Party had done better in the elec-tions than anyone expected. That was not good news, either.

When he got home that evening, he told Elizabeth what he'd heard from Conroy. She nodded. "White lady I clean house for, she was talkin' 'bout the same thing on the telephone. She sound happy as a pig in a strawberry patch."

"I believe it," Cincinnatus said. Kentucky had been taken out of the USA by main force at the end of the War of Secession. It had been dragged back into the United States the same way during the course of the Great War. A lot of Kentuckians—a lot of white Kentuckians—

wished the return had never happened. Cincinnatus went on, "The government ever lets people here vote for the Freedom Party, they ain't gonna like the votes they see."

Elizabeth sighed. Part of the sigh was weariness after a long day. Part of it was weariness after living among and having to work for people who despised her the second they set eyes on her. She said, "Reckon you're right. Wish it wasn't so, but it is."

"Pa's right," Achilles said cheerfully. "Pa's right." He didn't know what Cincinnatus was right about. He didn't care, either. He had confidence that his father was and always would be right.

Cincinnatus wished he had that same confidence. He knew all too well how many mistakes he'd made over the years, how lucky he was to have come through some of them, and how one more could ruin not only his life but those of his wife and little son. Slowly, he said, "Maybe we ought to talk some more about pullin' up stakes, Elizabeth. We can do it. Don't need no pass-book, not any more."

"We got us a lifetime of roots in this place," Elizabeth said. She'd said the same thing when Cincinnatus brought up the idea of leaving Covington earlier in the year.

He hadn't pressed her very hard then. Now he said, "Some-times the only thing roots is good for is gettin' pulled out of the ground. Sometimes, if you don't pull 'em out, they hold you there till somethin' cuts you down."

Instead of answering directly, Elizabeth retreated to the kitchen. Over her shoulder, she said, "Go set yourself down. Smells like the ham is just about ready."

Sit himself down Cincinnatus did, but he didn't abandon the subject, as his wife plainly hoped he would. "I been thinkin' about this," he said. "Been thinkin' about it a lot, even if I ain't said much. If we leave, I know where I'd like us to go. I been lookin' things up, best I can."

"And where's that?" Elizabeth asked, resignation and fear mingling in her voice.

"Des Moines, Iowa," he answered. "It's on a river—the Des Moines runs into the Mississippi—so there'll be haulin' busi-ness off the docks. Iowa lets black folks vote. They let women vote for president, too."

"I reckon they got women there," Elizabeth allowed. "They got any black folks there at all?"

"A few, I reckon," he answered. "There's a few black folks in just about every good-sized town in the USA. Ain't any more than a few very many places, though." He held up a hand before his wife could say anything.

"Maybe that's even for the best. When there ain't very many of us, can't be enough for the white folks to hate us."

"Who says there can't?" Elizabeth spoke with the accumu-lated bitter wisdom of her race. "And Jesus, how far away is this Des Moines place?

It'd be like fallin' off the edge of the world."

"About six hundred miles," Cincinnatus said, as casually as he could.

Elizabeth's eyes filled with horror. He went on, "Reckon the truck'll make it.

They got a lot o' paved roads in the USA." He pursed his lips. "Have to pick the time to leave, make sure everything's all good and dry."

"You aim on bringin' your ma an' pa along?" Elizabeth asked. Her own parents were both dead.

"They want to come, we'll fit 'em in some kind of way," Cincinnatus answered. "They don't—" He shrugged. "They're all grown up. Can't make

'em do nothin' they don't take a shine to."

"I don't take no shine to this myself." Elizabeth stuck out her chin and looked stubborn.

"You take a shine to livin' here in Kentucky if that Freedom Party starts winnin' elections?" Cincinnatus asked. "Somethin' like that happen, you'll be glad we got somewheres else to go "

That hit home. "Maybe," Elizabeth said in a small voice.

Something else occurred to Cincinnatus: if the Freedom Party started winning elections in the Confederate States, what would the Negroes there do? They couldn't run away to Iowa. They'd already tried rising up, tried and failed. What did that leave? For the life of him,

Cincinnatus couldn't see anything.

Stephen Douglas Martin's eyes went from his daughter to his son and back again in something that looked like pleased be-musement. "You don't have to do this on account of me, you know," he said. "If you want to go out and paint the town red, go right on out and do it."

Chester Martin grinned at his father. "You already say I'm too much of a Red. I don't even want to go out and paint the town green"

"We just want to spend New Year's Eve with you and Mother, that's all,"

Sue Martin said, nodding vigorously. Chester's kid sister looked a lot like him, with sharp nose, green eyes, and sandy hair. She thought a lot like him, too, on labor matters and on a lot of other things as well.

"Besides, Pa," he added, "where the devil could I go in Toledo to paint the town red even if I wanted to? This isn't exactly Phila-delphia or New York City." Toledo also didn't boast the multi-tude of saloons and brothels that sprang up behind an army's lines to cater to the needs—or at least the desires—of soldiers briefly free from the trenches.

"Well, you've got me there," his father answered. "Yes, sir, you've got me there. Once upon a time, I used to know where all the hot joints were, but that was a while ago now. Don't look so much to go out and get rowdy, like I used to before I hooked up with your mother and settled down."

From the kitchen, Louisa Martin called, "What are you blam-ing me for now, Stephen?" Dishes rattled as she put them back into the cabinet. "I'm almost finished in here. Whatever you're trying to pin on me, in a minute I'll be out there and you won't be able to do it."

She was as good as her word. Her husband said, "What I was trying to pin on you, dear, was settling me down. If you don't think you've done it, I'll go out and get drunk and leave you home with the kids." His eyes twinkled.

"I'll probably beat you when I get back, too, the way I always do."

"I don't know why you haven't quit yet," Louisa Martin said with a pretty good martyred sigh. "I'm all over bruises, and the police keep dragging you down to the station every other day."

They both started laughing. Sue looked from one of them to the other, as if astonished her parents could act so absurd, and about something that would have been very serious had they been serious themselves. Chester said, "Well, Ma, that's better work for the cops than most of what they do, believe me."

"Hold on there." His father held out his hand like a cop halting traffic. "If we're going to have a happy New Year's Eve, let's see if we can manage not to talk politics. Otherwise, we'll just start arguing."

"I'll try," Chester said, knowing his father was likely to be right. He let out a wry chuckle before going on, "Doesn't leave me much to talk about but my football team, though."

"I wish you wouldn't talk about that, either," his mother said. "It's just as dangerous as going out there on the picket line."

"Not even close." Chester shook his head. "The fellows on the teams we play hardly ever carry guns, the way the cops and the company goons do."

"What did I say a minute ago?" Stephen Douglas Martin asked rhetorically. "If you want to turn out editorials, son, go work for a newspaper."

"All right," Chester said.

His father looked at him in some surprise, evidently not hav-ing expected such an easy victory. The older male Martin arose with a grunt from the chair in which he'd been ensconced since suppertime. He went into the kitchen and came out with a bottle of whiskey and two glasses.

"Well, I like that," Sue said with annoyance only partly af-fected. "Are you going to leave Mother and me thirsty?"

"I only have two hands." Her father set the whiskey and the glasses on the side table by his chair, then held up the members in question. "Count

'em—two." He returned to the kitchen and brought out two more tumblers.

Chester wondered if his father had intended to include Sue and his mother in the drinking. If he hadn't, nobody could prove it now. Whiskey gurgled into four glasses. Chester raised his. "To 1920!" he

said.

"To 1920!" his sister and his parents echoed. They all drank. Chester sighed as the whiskey ran down his throat. It wasn't the smoothest he'd ever drunk, but it wasn't bad, either. Some of the rotgut he'd had in back of the lines—and, every once in a while, in a canteen or jug smuggled up to the forward trenches—had been like drinking liquid barbed wire.

His father stood to propose a toast. "To the 1920s—may they be a better ten years than the ten we've just gone through." Everyone drank to that, too.

Stephen Douglas Martin said, "Now we ought to all pitch our glasses into the fireplace. Only trouble with that is, you go through a lot of glasses."

Sue looked at the clock on the mantel over the fireplace. "Three hours till midnight, less a couple of minutes. Will start-ing a new calendar really make a difference? It'd be nice to think it would."

"We always hope it will," her mother said wistfully. She sighed. "And we usually end up looking back and saying, 'Well, that's another year down.'"

"This wasn't too bad a year," Chester said. "I've had work through most of it, anyway, and that's more than I can say for the rest of the time since I got out of the Army."

He left it at that. Had he said more, he and his father would have got to arguing politics. He was convinced the factory owners had settled with the steelworkers because of the 1918 election returns. Whatever else you might say about them, big capitalists weren't stupid. When handwriting went up on the wall, they could read it. If they didn't come to terms with the people who worked for them, Congress would start passing laws they didn't fancy.

His mother sat down at the tired old upright piano and began to play. Her choice of tunes made him smile. After a little while, he said, "I'm not in the Army any more. You don't have to give me one Sousa march after another."

He stomped up and down the room as if on parade.

"I like playing them, Chester," Louisa Martin said. "They make me want to go marching—except I can't, not while I'm playing." She

swung into a spirited if not technically perfect ren-dition of "Remembrance and Defiance."

"She'll do as she pleases, son," Stephen Douglas Martin said. "If you haven't learned that about her by now, how long is it going to take you?"

"If she's playing them for herself, that's fine," Chester said. "If she's doing them for me, though, she's wasting her time. I never was so glad as the last time I took that uniform off."

"You went through a lot," Sue said. "I remember the hard time you gave that military policeman in the park when you were home on convalescent leave. It was like you'd seen a lot of things he never had, so you didn't think he had any business bothering you."

"That's just what I was thinking, Sis," he answered. "He be-haved like he thought God had sent him down in a puff of smoke. The people who really went through the mill don't act that way."

"I've seen that with the younger fellows I work with," his fa-ther said. "One of 'em won the Medal of Honor, but you'd never hear it from him."

"That's the way it ought to be," Martin said. "We didn't go out there to blow our own horns or to have a good time—not that there were any good times to have in the trenches. We went out there to win the war, and we did that." He tossed down the rest of his whiskey. "And you know what? I wonder if what we bought is worth what we paid for it."

"We licked the Rebs," his father said. "Along with Kaiser Bill, we licked everybody. We've paid people back for everything they ever did to us."

"That's so," Chester said, "but there are—what? a million? something like that—say a million men who won't ever see it. And Lord only knows how many there are on crutches and in wheelchairs and wearing a hook instead of a hand." He touched his own left arm. "I'm one of the lucky ones. All I got was a Purple Heart and some leave time—a hometowner, we called a wound like that. But it was just luck. It wasn't anything else. A few inches to one side and I wouldn't be here now. I wouldn't be anyplace. I was a good soldier, but that's not why I came out in one piece. Nothing but luck."

The Sousa march Louisa Martin was playing came to a ragged halt.

"You've upset your mother," Stephen Douglas Martin said, and then, to

his wife, "It's all right, dear. He *is* here. He's fine. If he weren't here and fine, he wouldn't be spouting such nonsense, would he?"

"No," Chester's mother said in a small voice. "But I don't like to think about. . . about things that might have been."

Chester poured his glass full of whiskey again. He didn't like to think about things that might have been, either. Most of them were worse than the way things had really turned out. Some of them still made him wake up sweating in the night, even though the war had been over for two and a half years. He drank. If he got numb, he wouldn't have to think about them.

His mother got herself another drink, too. He raised an eye-brow at that; she didn't usually take a second glass. Maybe she had things she didn't want to think about, too. Maybe he'd given her some of those things. All at once, he felt ashamed.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

His father got up and clapped him on the shoulder. "You'll make a man yet," he said. "I think that's the first time I ever heard you say you were sorry and sound like you meant it. Kids say it, too, but they don't say it the same way. 'I'm sorry.' " Stephen Douglas Martin did a good imitation of a nine-year-old apolo-gizing lest something worse happen to him.

Sue said, "Here's hoping we don't need to say we're sorry at all—well, not much—next year."

"I'll drink to that," Chester said, and he did.

Every time he looked at the clock on the mantel, it got a bit later. He found that pretty funny, which was a sign he'd taken a little too much whiskey on board. He'd have a headache in the morning. He was glad he wouldn't have to go in to the steel mill. That would have made his head want to fall off.

A few minutes before midnight, firecrackers started going off. They alarmed Chester; they made him think of gunfire. They alarmed all the dogs in the neighborhood, too. Along with bangs and pops, Toledo ushered in 1920 with a chorus of canine howls and frantic barks and yips.

"Happy New Year!" Chester said when both hands on the clock stood straight up. "Happy New Year!" He wondered if it would be. Then he

wondered something else, something perhaps not altogether unrelated: who would be running for president?

Arthur McGregor stood in front of the stove in the kitchen, soaking in warmth as a flower soaked in sunlight. He had no idea why he thought of flowers: they weren't likely to appear in a Manitoba January. He turned so he'd cook on all sides.

Maude said, "When you came inside, you had frost on your eyebrows."

"I believe it," he answered. "If I wore a mustache, I'd have icicles hanging down from it, too. It's that kind of day. But if I don't get out there and take care of the stock, who's going to do it, eh?"

His wife's mouth tightened. Alexander should have been there to help.

But Alexander was gone, except in the picture on the wall. McGregor moved away from the stove for a moment to go over and slip an arm around Maude. Her mouth fell open in surprise. Neither of them was greatly given to open displays of affection.

"I'm not doing as much as I should," he said discontentedly.

"You hush," Maude told him. "You've done plenty. You don't need to worry about not doing more. If you want it to be enough, it can be enough."

"But I don't," he said. "I have to do this, don't you see? I have to—and I can't." Of themselves, his hands folded into fists of frustration.

Maude set a consoling hand on his shoulder. "You went up to Winnipeg, Arthur. You looked around. And then you came home and said the thing couldn't be done." That was as close as she would come to talking out loud about his bombs. "If it can't be done, it can't, that's all."

"Damn the Yanks!" he said fiercely. "They keep too many soldiers around Custer's headquarters, and around the house he's stolen, too."

Looking back on it, blowing up Major Hannebrink had been fairly easy.

The Yanks' euphoria at winning the war had helped; everyone in Rosenfeld that night had been celebrating as if joy would turn illegal the second the sun came up again. And Hanne-brink was only a major,

and not nearly so valuable to the Ameri-cans as their commander for all of Canada.

They knew General Custer would make a target for Canadians, as Archduke Franz Ferdinand had made a target for the Serbs. A Serb bomber had killed Franz Ferdinand and touched off the Great War. The Americans didn't intend to let Custer go the same way. They kept swarms of soldiers around him. McGregor had had no chance whatever to plant a bomb anyplace where it might do any good.

He might have flung one into Custer's motorcar, as the Serbs had flung one into Franz Ferdinand's carriage. The Serbian na-tionalist who flung his bomb had been shot dead a moment later. McGregor wanted to live. Even killing Custer was not revenge enough to satisfy him. He wanted more later, if he ever got the chance.

"Maybe he'll come down here to Rosenfeld again," Maude said.

She sounded consoling, the way she did when one of the girls was sad after breaking a toy. McGregor was sad—and furious, too—because he couldn't break his toy. If you looked at that the right way, it was grimly funny.

"Not likely," he said. "It isn't much of a town, when you get right down to it." He scowled. "There's just no chance for a man working by himself."

Maude asked the question that had stymied him over and over again:

"Who can you trust?"

"Nobody." That was the answer he always reached. "Too many people up here have their hands in the Yanks' pockets. Too many people spy on their neighbors. Too many people would just as soon turn into Yanks—and you can't always tell who they are, not till you find out the hard way you can't"

His wife nodded. "I don't know what you can do, then, except get on with things here."

"I don't, either." McGregor felt like a lone wolf looking to pull down the biggest bull moose in an enormous herd. That was, when you thought about it, a crazy thing to want to do. Part of him knew as much. No: all of him knew as much. It was just that most of him didn't care. Slowly, he said, "The trouble is, there are too many hours in the

day in the middle of winter—too much time to sit around and think."

Farm work was harder and made a man keep longer hours than any town job. There were times, especially around the har-vest, when he wished he could stay awake for a couple of weeks at a stretch so as not to waste any precious time. When snow lay deep on the ground, though, what a man could do diminished. After he tended the stock and made repairs around the house and barn, what was left but coming inside and sitting around and brooding?

Maude had an answer: "You might help me with some of my chores.

They don't go away when the weather gets cold. Just the opposite, as a matter of fact."

He stared at her. Did she think he was going to put on an apron and do women's work? If she did, she had another think coming. He intended to let her know as much, too, in great detail.

Then he saw her eyes sparkle. He'd drawn in his breath for an angry shout. He let it out in a gust of laughter instead. "You're a devil," he said.

"You really are. You had me going there."

"I hope so," his wife answered. "It's good to see you smile, Arthur. I haven't seen it often enough, not since—" She stopped. No one in the family had smiled much since Alexander got shot. Gamely, she went on,

"We can't stay gloomy all the time. Life is too short for that. In spite of everything, life is too short for that."

"I suppose not," he said, nowhere near sure he supposed any-thing of the sort. To keep from having to decide whether he did or not, he pointed toward the ceiling. "What are the girls doing?"

"As much schoolwork as they can, I hope," Maude said. "If it doesn't snow again, they ought to be able to start going again to-morrow or the day after. They want to go back." A smile twisted only one corner of her mouth.

"I hope they can. I won't be sorry to have them out of the house for a while.

They've been snapping at each other a lot the past few days."

"I've noticed." McGregor ruefully shook his head. "I can still heat up Mary's backside, but that doesn't work with Julia any more." His older daughter was a woman, which still bemused him. "Have to talk sense to her, and sometimes she doesn't want to listen to sense."

"And where do you figure she gets that?" his wife murmured. He pretended not to hear. Knowing when not to hear struck him as not the least important part of a happy marriage.

What he did say was, "Fix me up a cup of tea, will you? I think I've warmed up enough so that it won't turn into a lump of ice in my belly now."

He was sipping it when Julia came downstairs dramatically rolling her eyes and demanded, "Who will do something about my nuisance of a little sister?"

McGregor laughed again—twice in one morning. "You re-mind me of Henry II saying 'Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?'—and that was the end of Thomas a Becket," he said.

Julia looked so angry, he thought for a moment she wanted someone to rid her of Mary. But she was angry about something else: "They don't teach the history of England in school any more, except how the mother country was so wicked, the Ameri-cans had to have a revolution to get away."

"I'm not surprised," McGregor said. "I'm not happy, mind you, but I'm not surprised. The Yanks are doing everything they can to make us the same as they are, and they try to pretend they invented everything they borrowed from the mother country. The less youngsters know about England, the easier it is for the Americans to get away with their lies."

"That's right." Julia seemed about to burst into tears. "And there's nothing we can do about it. either, is there?"

Hearing that, McGregor knew he would have to try again to bomb General Custer. Maybe Custer's death would spark an up-rising throughout Canada.

Even if it didn't, it would remind his countrymen that they had a country of their own, that they weren't Yanks who happened to live in a cold climate and speak with a slightly strange accent.

And, with her fury against the United States, Julia had for-gotten to be

furious at her little sister. Or so McGregor thought, till Julia said, "And Mary keeps humming in my ear until it drives me to distraction. She's being annoying on purpose."

"If you'd been born a boy, you'd know how to take care of that,"

McGregor said. "You'd tell her to stop. If she didn't, you'd wallop her. If you want to go back upstairs and pretend you're a boy for a bit, that's all right with me."

Julia went, the light of battle in her eyes. A few minutes later, McGregor heard a thump. He waited for Mary to come down and complain about what a beast Julia was being. Nothing of the sort happened. There were several more thumps, interspersed with shouts and a couple of thuds, as of one body, or perhaps two, suddenly landing on the floor.

He chuckled. "That sounds cheery, doesn't it?"

"I hope they don't hurt each other," Maude said worriedly. "Julia's bigger, but I don't think Mary knows how to quit."

"If she goes up against somebody who's bigger and who means business, she'll learn how to quit after a little while," McGregor said.

His wife looked at him—caught and held his eye—without saying anything. For a moment, he wondered why. Then he real-ized that what he'd said about his younger daughter could apply to Canada's struggle against the United States. His own face showed that realization, but Maude kept staring at him. Again, he wondered why, and started to get angry.

But then he saw that what he'd said about his younger daugh-ter could also apply to his own struggle against the United States. The United States were enormously bigger than he was, and they meant business about holding on to his country. He didn't care whether they meant business or not. He intended to go on fight-ing them.

"They haven't licked me yet, Maude," he said. "I've hit them a few licks, but they haven't licked me."

"All right," was the only thing his wife said. She wanted him to be careful in what he was doing, but she didn't want him to stop. Or, if she did want him to stop, she didn't let him know it, which amounted to the same thing.

Somebody was coming downstairs: Mary, by the sound of the footsteps.

McGregor waited to console her. But, when his younger daughter came into the kitchen, triumph glowed on her face. "Julia got mean," Mary said. "I guess she won't try *that* again in a hurry."

Maude gaped in astonishment. So did McGregor. This time, he caught and held his wife's eye. If Mary could triumph against long odds, why couldn't he? That bomb still lay in the barn, hidden below the old wagon wheel. In spite of everything, he might find the chance to place it. He didn't need to do that right this minute. He had time.

Colonel Irving Morrell stood in the Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, train station, waiting for the special from Pontiac, Michigan, to come in. His green-gray overcoat held the worst of the cold at bay, though he wished he'd put on a fur hat instead of an ordinary service cap. Soot-streaked snow covered the ground. By the look of the mass of dirty-gray clouds building in the northwest, more would be coming before too long.

Beside him, Lieutenant Lije Jenkins stirred restlessly. "Everything's gone slower than it should have, sir, I know," he said, "but we're finally going to get the prototype for the new model."

"No, not the prototype." Morrell shook his head. "Just a test model, to see how some of the ideas we sent the War Department work out. Most of the parts come from the barrels we used in the Great War, so the test model will run maybe half as fast as it ought to." He sighed, blowing out a small cloud of vapor. "Get-ting the real McCoy built will run half as fast as it ought to, too."

"When I think what we could have had—" Jenkins angrily shook his head.

"When I think what we should have had by now—the war will have been over three years this summer, and the new model still isn't anywhere near ready to go into production."

"We're living on borrowed time," Morrell said. "Ask any soldier, and he'll tell you the same thing. You can live on bor-rowed time for a while, but then you have to pay it back—with interest."

Jenkins stared north and east, across the Missouri. He pointed. "Don't I see exhaust there, sir? Time's right for that to be the special."

"So it is," Morrell agreed. "We'll know pretty soon, I expect." He glanced around, then nodded in satisfaction. "Ah, good. The station boys are on the ball. They've got the heavy ramp ready to unload the barrel from its flatcar.

They've helped take barrels off trains before, so they'll know the drill."

Coal smoke billowing from the stack, the special crossed the Missouri, rolled through Leavenworth, and came north again to the Fort Leavenworth station. It was about the shortest train Mor-rell had ever seen, consisting of a locomotive, a tender, and one flatcar, on which perched a large shape covered by green-gray tarpaulins to shield it from the weather and from prying eyes.

When the train stopped, an officer jumped out of the locomo-tive and came up to Morrell. "Colonel Irving Morrell?" he asked. Morrell admitted he was himself. The officer nodded briskly, then saluted. "Very pleased to meet you, sir. I'm Major Wilkinson; I've ridden down with this beast from Pontiac. As soon as I get your John Hancock on about sixty-eleven different forms here, I can put it into your hands and let you start finding out what it can do."

Morrell signed and signed and signed. By the time he was through, the signatures on the forms hardly looked like his any more. After he gave the last sheet of paper back to Major Wilk-inson, he said, "Why don't you take the wrapping off so I can see what's in the package?"

"I'll be glad to, sir. If you and Lieutenant—Jenkins, was it?— will come along with me, you can see just what's in there." Nimble as a monkey, he swung himself up onto the flatcar and untied the ropes that held the tarps in place. Morrell and Jenkins ascended more sedately. They helped him pull away the heavy cloth covering the new barrel.

"Bully," Lije Jenkins said softly when he got his first look. "If that's not a machine for the 1920s, I'll be darned if I know what is. Compared to what we had in the Great War, that's a machine from out of the 1930s, by God."

"Yeah, it's pretty on the outside," Morrell said, "but what it re-minds me of is a homely girl with a lot of paint and powder on." He started to rap the barrel's hull with his knuckles, but checked himself; it was cold enough that he'd lose skin on the metal. He contented himself

with pointing. "That's just mild steel, not armor plate, and it's thin mild steel to boot. That makes the barrel lighter, so the one White engine they threw in there can give it even a halfway decent turn of speed. But you couldn't take it into combat; it's not even proof against rifle fire, let alone anything else."

But even as he spoke, his eyes caressed the test barrel's lines as they did Agnes Hill's whenever he saw her. Here, in metal, was the shape he'd sketched not long after coming to the Barrel Works. The turret cannon and machine gun stared at him. So did the machine gun mounted in the front of the hull.

"It doesn't look as ... as busy as one of our regular barrels," Lieutenant Jenkins said.

"No, I suppose not," Morrell said, "but I hope it'll keep the enemy busier than one of the regular sort. And we won't need to put a whole regiment of soldiers inside here when we go into ac-tion, either." He strode to the rear of the flatcar. "Hurry up with that ramp, if you please, gentlemen."

"We're just about ready, Colonel," one of the soldiers replied. A couple of minutes later, he said, "All right, sir, everything's in place."

"Do you want to back it off the car, Major?" Morrell asked.

"I will if you want me to, sir," Wilkinson answered, "but go right ahead if you'd rather do the honors."

Morrell needed no more urging. He opened the hatch in the top of the hull that led down into the driver's compartment, then wriggled inside. The controls were identical to those of the older barrels. He'd learned the driver's art since coming to the Barrel Works, but had applied himself to it as he applied himself to everything that caught his interest. His finger stabbed the electric-starter button.

Behind him, the White engine grunted, coughed, and came to life. It was loud. It was not, however, deafening, as the engines in old-style barrels were. That wasn't because the test model had only one, where normal machines needed two. It was because, instead of sitting right there in the middle of the barrel's interior, the engine had a compartment of its own, separated from the crew by a steel bulkhead.

He wished he didn't have to back the barrel down the ramp to get it off the flatcar. Even with his head out of the hatch, even with the rearview mirror the manufacturer had thoughtfully pro-vided (a little

bonus that might possibly last thirty seconds in combat), he couldn't see behind himself for beans. That was something he hadn't thought about when he decided on a turret-mounted cannon.

Well, that was what the test model was for: to discover all the things he hadn't thought of, and nobody else had, either. With luck, he'd be able to get rid of them before the new model went into production. He knew perfectly well that he wouldn't find them all; he was human, and therefore fallible. But he'd do the best job he could.

He'd do the best job he could of getting this beast off the flatcar, too. All he had to do was back straight. If he looked ahead, he ought to be able to judge how well he was doing that. And he couldn't keep sitting up here forever. His left foot came down on the clutch. He threw the shift lever into reverse and gave the barrel a little gas.

It was peppier than the ones in which he'd fought the Great War: not peppy like a fancy motorcar, not peppy enough to suit him, but peppier. It went down the ramp faster than he'd ex-pected. Almost before he knew it, he was on the ground. From the flatcar, Major Wilkinson waved and Lieutenant Jenkins gave him a thumbs-up.

"Come on!'" he shouted to Jenkins over the rumble of the engine—which seemed a lot louder with his head out the hatch. The lieutenant jumped down from the train, clambered up the side of the barrel, and scrambled into the turret through a hatch on the roof.

"There's no ammunition in here," he said indignantly. Morrell snorted—as if anyone would be crazy enough to put ammuni-tion in a barrel that would be traveling by train. Accidents didn't happen very often, but who would take the chance on sending an expensive test model up in smoke? Then Jenkins went on, "I wanted to shoot up the landscape as we drove along,"

and Mor-rell snorted again, this time on a different note. His subordinate was just acting like a kid again.

Morrell put the barrel into the lowest of its four forward speeds. It rattled over the railroad tracks and off toward the muddy prairie northwest of Fort Leavenworth. He built up to full speed as fast as he could. If the speedometer wasn't lying, he was doing better than ten miles an hour, more than twice as fast as a Great War barrel could manage on similar ground.

The power-to-weight ratio of the test model was supposed to be the same as that of the eventual production machine. If so, these barrels

would do tricks their ancestors had never imagined. They still weren't fast enough to suit him.

"Hell of a ride!" Jenkins shouted, sounding as exhilarated as a skilled horseman on a half-broken stallion. *"Hell* of a ride! Now we've got the cavalry back again, by Jesus!"

"That's part of the idea," Morrell said. Men on horseback had been poised throughout the Great War, ready to exploit what-ever breakthroughs the infantry could force. But infantry alone hadn't been able to force breakthroughs, and cavalry melted under machine-gun fire like snow in Death Valley summer. The old barrels *had* broken through Confederate lines, but hadn't al-ways been swift enough to exploit to the fullest the breaches they made.

Maybe these machines would, even in their present state. In his mind's eye, Morrell saw barrels clawing at the flank of a foe in retreat, shooting up his soldiers, wrecking his supply lines, keeping reinforcements from reaching the field, pushing the front forward by leaps and bounds, not plodding steps.

It was a heady vision, so heady it almost made Morrell see with his mind's eye to the exclusion of the pair at the front of his head. Had he not paid attention to the gauges in front of him, he would have missed noting how little fuel the test model carried in its tank. Stranding himself out on the prairie was not what he had in mind when it came to getting acquainted with the new machine. Reluctantly, he steered for the muddy field where half a dozen survivors of the Great War sat.

He turned off the engine, climbed out of the hatch, and got down off the test model. Lije Jenkins came down beside him. The youngster looked from the new barrel to the old ones. "It's like stacking the first Duryea up against an Oldsmobile, isn't it, sir?" he said.

"Something like that, anyway," Morrell said. "Of course, there is one other difference: there really are Oldsmobiles, but this baby"—again, he remembered in the nick of time not to rap his knuckles on the hull —"is just pretend, for now."

"I hope we don't take twenty years to get the real ones, sir," Jenkins said.

"So do I, Lieutenant, with all my heart. We may need them sooner than that," Morrell said. He started off toward the bar-racks. Jenkins tagged along after him.

As Morrell walked, he wondered what he could tell Agnes Hill about his new toy. She knew, in a general way, what his du-ties were. Being a soldier's widow, she also knew not to ask too many questions about what exactly he did. But the next time he saw her, he was going to be excited. He wanted to share that ex-citement. He also needed not to talk too much. He was awfully glad he'd gone to that dance with Jenkins. He wanted to go right on being glad. The only place where taking chances was a good idea was on the battlefield.

IX

A fat man with a nasty cough came up to the counter of the drug-store where Reggie Bartlett worked. "Help you?" Reggie asked.

"Hope to God you can/' the man answered, hacking again. "If I don't shake this damn thing, it's going to drive me right up a tree." He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and tapped one in the palm of his hand.

"Here you go." Reggie handed him a box of matches with HARMON'S

DRUGS printed on the top—good advertising. He waited till the man lit up, then went on, "I can give you a cam-phorated salve to rub on your chest and under your nose. And we've got a new cough elixir in. It's got a kind of denatured mor-phine in it—not nearly as strong, and not habit-forming, but it does the job."

"Give me some of the salve, and a bottle of that stuff, too," the sufferer said. He coughed some more and shook his head. "This is killing me. I can't even enjoy my smokes any more."

"Another thing you can do is, you can set a pot of water on the stove to boil, put in some of the salve, and breathe in the steam," Bartlett said.

"That'll help clear out your lungs, too."

"Good idea," the fat man answered. His face took on a kind of apprehension that had nothing to do with his ailment. "Now— what do I owe you?"

"Two thousand for the salve," Reggie said. The customer nodded in some relief. Reggie continued, "The elixir, though, it's new stuff, like I said, and it's expensive: $25,000."

"Could be worse," the fat man said. He took three $10,000 banknotes from his wallet and shoved them across the counter at Bartlett. Reggie gave him three $1,000 banknotes in change. As the fat man tucked them away, he shook his head in wonder. "It's like play money, ain't it? Reckon I'm a millionaire, and a whole hell of a lot of good it's doing me." He coughed again, then picked up the squat blue bottle of salve and the taller one of the elixir. "Much obliged to you, young fellow, and I hope these here give me some relief." As he headed for the door, he called a last word over his shoulder: "Freedom!"

Bartlett started violently. He had all he could do to hold his tongue, and indeed to keep from running after the fat man and screaming curses at him.

"Christ!" he said. His hands were trembling.

Jeremiah Harmon looked up from the tablets he was com-pounding.

"Something troubling you, Reggie?" He was in his late forties, with a brown mustache beginning to go gray, and so quiet Bartlett was always straining to hear him. That wasn't bad, not so far as Reggie was concerned. He'd walked out on McNally, his previous employer, because the man wouldn't stop riding him.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "That fellow who just left used the Freedom Party salute when he went out the door. I don't fancy those people, not even a little I don't."

"Can't say I do, either," Harmon said, "but I doubt they're worth getting very excited about." As far as he was concerned, nothing was worth getting very excited about.

"Lord, I hope you're right, but I just don't know," Bartlett said. "I watched their goons bust up a rally. They almost busted me up, too. That's not the only brawl they've gotten into—not even close. And now Richmond's got a Freedom Party Congressman. Makes me sick to my stomach."

"Bicarbonate of soda will do the trick there," Harmon re-marked; he was a druggist down to the tips of his toes. After a moment, though, he realized Reggie had used a figure of speech. With a shrug, he went on, "My guess is, they're a flash in the pan. Having a few of them in Congress is probably a good thing. Once they show they're nothing but a pack of noisy windbags, people will wise up to them pretty fast."

Bartlett grunted. "I hadn't thought about it like that. Maybe you've got

something there." He didn't take the Freedom Party seriously even now.

When more people had a chance to see it in action, how could they take it seriously, either? "Sometimes the best thing you can do is let a fool prove he is one."

"That's right," Jeremiah Harmon said. A customer came into the store.

Harmon bent to his work again. "Why don't you see to Mrs. Dinwiddie there?"

"All right. Hello, Mrs. Dinwiddie," Reggie said. "What can I get for you today?" He thought he knew, but he might have been wrong.

He was right: Mrs. Dinwiddie answered, "I need a bottle of castor oil. My bowels have been in a terrible state lately, just a terrible state, and if I don't get something to loosen them up, well, I swear to Jesus, I don't know what I'll do. Explode, I reckon."

She went on in that vein for some time. She bought castor oil every other week; the purchases were regular as clockwork, even if her bowels weren't.

Every time she bought it, she gave the same speech. Bartlett was sick of listening to it. So, no doubt, was Jeremiah Harmon. Since Harmon was the boss, he had the privilege of avoiding Mrs. Dinwiddie. Reggie didn't.

By the time she ran down, he was on much more intimate terms with her lower bowel than he'd ever wanted to be. "Well, I won't keep you any more," she said, having already kept him too long. She opened her handbag. "What do I owe you?"

"That's $15,000, ma'am," Reggie answered.

"It was only ten the last time I came in," she said sharply. He shrugged. If she didn't like the way prices jumped, she could take that up with Harmon.

He figured out how much to charge. But, after grumbling under her breath, Mrs. Dinwiddie gave Bartlett a pair of $10,000 banknotes. He returned her change and the bottle of castor oil.

So the day went. It was something less than exciting, but it put money

in his pockets. It put tens of thousands of dollars in his pockets. Those tens of thousands of dollars left him somewhat worse off than he had been before the war started, when he'd been making two dollars a day. Inflation made a bitter joke of everything he'd thought he knew about money.

He supposed that was one reason people voted for the Free-dom Party and other outfits like it. They loudly proclaimed they had the answers to all the problems bedeviling the Confederate States. Proclaiming they had the answers was the easy part. Really having them, and making them work—that looked harder. That looked a hell of a lot harder to him. But some people would buy castles in the air because they were short of beans on the ground.

When six o'clock rolled around, he said, "See you tomorrow, Mr.

Harmon."

The druggist looked up in vague surprise. "Oh, yes, that will be fine." He made no move to leave himself. Reggie was just hired help, and could come and go as he pleased—so long as he pleased to be on time most of the time. The drugstore belonged to Harmon. He worked as long as he thought he had to.

Reggie put on his overcoat and went out into the cold. It wasn't too bad—no snow lay on the ground—but it wasn't any-thing he enjoyed, either.

He walked quickly, his feet clicking along the sidewalk. As long as he kept moving, he didn't feel the chill too badly. And Bill Foster's flat, where he had a supper invi-tation, lay only a few blocks away.

Sally Foster opened the door. "Hello, Reggie," she said. "Come in, get warm, make yourself at home. How are you today?"

"I've been worse," he answered, and heaven only knew that was true.

"Bill, hon," Sally called, "Reggie's here." She was a short, slightly pudgy blonde in her mid-twenties. For reasons Bartlett couldn't quite fathom, she thought well of him. He'd wondered if he would keep Bill Foster as a friend after Bill and Sally got mar-ried: a lot of men gave up their bachelor friends after they stopped being bachelors themselves. But Sally had gone out of her way to be cordial, and so the friendship stayed warm.

"Hello, Reggie," Bill Foster said. Married life plainly agreed with him;

he'd put on ten pounds, easy, since Sally started cook-ing for him. "Can I get you a little something to light a fire inside?"

"Thanks. I wouldn't mind," Reggie answered.

Foster took down a whiskey bottle and a couple of glasses. "Do you want water with that?" he asked. Sometimes Reggie did, sometimes he didn't.

Tonight, he didn't. "Pipes are rusty enough already," he said. Sally laughed. Maybe she hadn't heard it before. It was an old joke in the trenches, though, as Foster's resigned chuckle showed. When Reggie had the glass in his hand, he raised it and said, "Here's to a long walk off a short pier for Jake Featherston."

"Lord knows I'll drink to that," Bill said, and he did. So did Bartlett. Sure enough, the whiskey warmed him nicely. Foster said, "I'll drink to that any day, and twice on Sunday, as a matter of fact. But what made you come out with it just then?'"

Reggie told him about the fat man with the cough who'd called out the Freedom Party's one-word slogan, and finished, "When he walked out, I was standing there wishing I'd given him rat poison instead of his cough elixir."

"I've heard it, too," Bill Foster said. "It makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck, same as the noise of a shell coming in. You'd reckon people had better sense, but a lot of 'em don't."

"The other thing I wondered was whether he was just some-body who voted for the Freedom Party, or if he was one of the tough guys who put on white and butternut and go out looking for heads to break," Bartlett said. "He didn't look like the type, but you never can tell."

"They don't need very many ruffians," Foster said. "As long as folks think the fellows with the clubs are doing the right thing, they won't try and stop

'em. And that worries me more than anything."

It gave Reggie something new to worry about, too: "We can't even write our Congressman and complain. He'd likely send goons right to our door."

"What you can do," Sally said, "is come and sit down and have supper.

Once you get some food in your bellies to go along with the whiskey you're pouring down, the world won't seem like such a rotten place."

Ham and applesauce and canned corn and string beans cooked with a little salt pork might not have changed the world, but Sally was right: they did improve Reggie's opinion of it. Peach pie im-proved it even more. He patted his stomach. He had no trouble understanding how Bill had put on weight. "You don't happen to have a sister, do you?" he asked Sally, knowing she didn't.

He'd pleased her, though; he saw it in her eyes. "You should have got married a long time ago," she told him.

He shrugged. "My mother says the same thing. She wants grandchildren.

I never met a girl I felt like marrying." He shook his head. "No. That's not so.

Before the war, I was sweet on a girl. But she wasn't sweet on me. She wasn't sweet on anybody, not back then she wasn't. I heard she finally married some Navy man after the war. Now, what was his name? I heard it.

It's going to bother me if I can't remember." He paused, thinking hard.

"Brantley? Buckley? No, but something like that.. . Brearley! That's what it was, Brearley. I knew I'd come up with it."

"Now, if you could just come up with a girl," Sally said.

"If I wanted to listen to my mother, I'd have gone to visit my mother,"

Reggie said. Everybody laughed. He held out his glass to Bill Foster. "You want to get me another drink? I know good and well my mother wouldn't."

Everyone laughed again.

Sylvia Enos smoked in short, savage puffs. "That man!" she said.

Neither Sarah Wyckoff nor May Cavendish needed to ask about whom she was talking. "What did Frank do now?" Sarah asked.

"Felt me up," Sylvia snarled. "He hadn't bothered me for weeks, but this morning, all of a sudden, he grew more arms than an octopus. He

came back to where I was working and he felt me up like I was a squash he was buying off a pushcart. I al-most hauled off and belted him."

"You should have," Sarah said. "I would. I'd have knocked him into the middle of next week, too." With her formidable build, she could have done it.

May said, "He's been sniffing around Lillian for a while. He's probably been doing more than sniffing, too; she's a little chippy if I ever saw one."

She sniffed herself, then went on, "But I haven't seen Lillian for the past couple days, and—"

"She quit," Sylvia said. "I heard one of the bookkeepers talking about it.

She's moving out to California. It's good for your lungs out there."

"Well, if she quit, then Frank is going to be on the prowl for somebody new," May said. "We've watched it happen often enough now."

"Often enough to be good and sick of it," Sylvia said. "And I wish to heaven he wouldn't come sniffing around me. If he doesn't know by now that I don't feel like playing games, he's an even bigger fool than I think he is."

"He couldn't be a bigger fool than I think he is," Sarah Wyckoffsaid.

Sylvia took a big bite of her egg-salad sandwich. She wished she were a gigantic carnival geek, biting the head off of Frank Best instead of a chicken. Then she shook her head in bemuse-ment. He really had to be on her nerves, or she would never have come up with such a bizarre mental image.

She said, "I wish I could find another job. But how am I even supposed to look for one when I'm here five and a half days a week? And jobs aren't easy to come by, not like they were during the war."

"It's a nasty bind to be in, dearie," May said. "I hope it turns out all right for you."

"The worst he can do is fire me," Sylvia said. "Then I will have time to look for a new job. When he gets to be like this, I al-most wish he

would fire me. You girls are dears, but I wouldn't mind getting out of this place."

"What makes you think it would be different anywhere else?" May asked.

"You'd still have a man for a boss, and you know what men are like."

"Careful," Sarah said in a low voice. Frank Best strolled past and waved to the women at their dinner break. He doubtless thought his smile was charming. As far as Sylvia was concerned, it was so greasy, it might have been carved from a block of lard.

She lit a new cigarette. The foreman favored her with another oleaginous smile when he returned from wherever he'd gone. "Almost time to get back to the line," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Best." Sylvia looked forward to returning to work about as much as she looked forward to going to the doctor to have a carbuncle lanced.

Sometimes, though, she had to go to the doctor. And, when the whistle blew, she had to go back and paint red rings on galoshes.

Frank Best left her alone for twenty minutes after that, which was about fifteen minutes longer than she'd expected. Then he came back toward her with a pair of rubber overshoes in his hand. The rings on them were perfect.

Sylvia had made a point of painting perfect rings since he'd started bothering her again, to give him as little excuse as she could.

But, being the foreman, he didn't necessarily need an excuse. Sylvia dipped her brush in the can of red paint by the line and painted two more perfect rings on the galoshes in front of her.

"Tried to slip these by on me, did you, Sylvia?" Best asked. He thrust the overshoes in his hand at her.

"I don't see anything wrong with them," Sylvia said.

That turned out to be a mistake—not that she had any right course. "Here.

Take a closer look," Best said, and stepped up right alongside her. He brushed her breast with his arm as he brought the galoshes up and

held them under her nose. That might have been an accident—had he not been bothering her all morning.

She took half a step back—and knocked over the can of red paint so that most of it spilled on his shoes. That might have been an accident—had he not been bothering her all morning.

"Oh, Mr. Best!" she exclaimed. "I'm so very sorry!" *I'm so very sorry Ididn 't think of that a long time ago.*

He jumped and hopped and used language no gentleman would have employed in the presence of a lady. He'd already proved he was no gentleman by treating Sylvia as if she were no lady. "You'd better watch yourself!" he said when something vaguely resembling coherence returned to his speech. "You'd better clean this mess up, and you'd better make sure nothing like it ever happens again, or you'll be out on the sidewalk so fast, it'll make your head spin."

"Yes, Mr. Best. I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Best," Sylvia said. The foreman stomped off, leaving a trail of red footprints.

Sylvia soaked up as much of the red paint in rags as she could. She got some on her hands, but none on her dress or shirtwaist— she was careful about them, where she hadn't cared at all about Best's shoes. She opened another can of paint and went right on giving galoshes red rings, too. If she hadn't done that, Best would have got another reason to come back and have a word with her.

As things worked out, he didn't speak to her for the rest of the day. That suited her fine. Women from all along the production line found excuses to come by and say hello, though. Under their breath, they found considerably more than hello to say, too. She got more congratulations than she'd had on any one day since Mary Jane was born. If any of the women had a good word to say about Frank Best, nobody said it where she could hear.

Sarah Wyckoff said, "That was even better than knocking his teeth down his throat, on account of it made him look like the fool he is."

May Cavendish added, "Now all the girls will be bringing paint to work, Sylvia, and it's your fault, nobody else's."

"Good," Sylvia said. May giggled.

When the closing whistle blew, Sylvia left the galoshes fac-tory with a spring in her step that hadn't been there at quitting time for quite a

while.

She got her children off the school play-ground, and was far from the only mother doing so. The school didn't take care of children in the classrooms after teaching was done for the day, as it had during the war. But it did let kids play in the yard till their parents could pick them up. That was some-thing, if not much.

"I'm frozen, Ma," George, Jr., said.

"Me, too," Mary Jane added. Half the time, she agreed with whatever her big brother said. The other half, she disagreed— violently. Sylvia never knew in advance which tack she would take.

"We'll be home soon," Sylvia said. "We've got the steam ra-diator, and I'll be cooking on the stove, too, so things will be nice and toasty. The more time you spend complaining here, the longer it'll be before you're back."

For a wonder, the kids got the message. In fact, they ran to the trolley stop ahead of her. She might have had a spring in her step, but they were children. They didn't need to spill paint on any-body to feel energetic.

After they all got back to the apartment, Sylvia boiled a lot of cabbage and potatoes and a little corned beef for supper. The vegetables were cheap; the corned beef wasn't. The children loved potatoes and ate cabbage only under protest. Sylvia had been the same way when she was small.

As long as she was boiling water for supper, she also heated some for the bathroom down at the end of the hall. The children were old enough now that she couldn't bathe them together any more. That meant going down the hall first with Mary Jane, then with George, Jr., and last by herself.

By the time she got to use the tub, she could hardly tell any hot water had ever gone into it.

That meant she bathed as fast as she could. Then she got out, threw on a robe, wrapped her wet hair in a towel, and hurried back to her flat. It was just as well that she did; she found the children doing their best to kill each other. Size favored George, Jr., ferocity and long fingernails Mary Jane.

"Can't I leave the two of you alone for five minutes?" Sylvia demanded, despite the answer obviously being *no.* She did her best to get to the bottom of what had started the brawl. The chil-dren told diametrically opposite stories. She might have known they would. She *had* known they would. This time, she couldn't sort out who was lying, or whether they both thought they were telling the truth. With fine impartiality, she whacked both their bottoms.

"I hate you!'" Mary Jane screamed. "I hate you even worse than I hate *him."* She pointed to George, Jr.

Ignoring his sister, he told Sylvia, "I'm never going to speak to you again as long as I live." He'd made that threat before, and once made good on it for a solid half hour: long enough to un-nerve her.

She went into the bedroom and looked at her alarm clock. "It's after eight," she said. "You both need to get ready for bed." That produced more impassioned protests from the children; George, Jr., abandoned silence so he could squawk his head off. It did him no good. In fifteen minutes, he and Mary Jane were both in bed, and asleep very shortly after that.

Sylvia sat down on the couch with a weary sigh. She would have to go to bed pretty soon herself. When she got up, all she had to look forward to was another day at the galoshes factory. Life was supposed to be better than that, wasn't it?

Life would have been better—she was sure of it—had George lived.

Then he would have been going out to sea, true, and com-plaining about the drudgery when he was back on land. But, no matter how hard the work was, he'd liked it. Sylvia wouldn't have liked making galoshes even had Frank Best not bothered her whenever he wasn't bothering someone else.

It was only a job, something she did to keep food on the table. She wished she could quit.

She sighed again. She was trapped. The only difference between her and a mouse in a trap was that her back wasn't broken... yet. "If I had that limey submersible skipper here," she said, "I'd shoot him right between the eyes. What the *hell* was he doing in that part of the Atlantic?" She didn't own a pistol; George hadn't kept one in the flat.

She would gladly have learned to shoot one, though, if she could have avenged herself on that Englishman. She shook her head. For all she

knew, the King of England had pinned a medal on him. If there was any justice in the world, she had a devil of a time seeing where.

A nasty wind blew snow into Lucien Galtier's face. He pulled down his hat and yanked up the collar of his coat as he made his slow way from the farmhouse to the barn. His way had to be slow; because of the snow, he could hardly tell where the barn lay. But his feet knew.

He accepted Quebec winter with the resignation of a man who had never known and scarcely imagined anything different. Moving to a warmer climate had never crossed his mind. Quebec boasted no warmer climates.

Besides, moving would have taken him off the land his family had farmed since the seventeenth century. He was less likely to leave his patrimony than he was to leave his wife, and never once in all the years since the priest joined them together had he had any thought of leaving Marie.

When he got to the barn, he let out a sigh of relief. The horse snorted, hearing him come in. It was not a snort of friendly greeting, in spite of all the hours of conversation that had passed between the two of them as they traveled the roads around the farm. No, the only thing that snort meant was, *Where's my breakfast, and what kept you so long?*

"Compose yourself in patience, greedy beast," Galtier said. The horse snorted again. It was not about to compose itself in patience, or any other way. It wanted hay and it wanted oats and it wanted them right this second.

He fed all the livestock and cleaned up the muck. By the time he was done with that, the muscles in the small of his back were complaining. *Why didn 'tyou send out Georges or Charles?* was what they were complaining.

He did do that a lot of the time, but they were busy elsewhere this morning.

"And," he said, speaking to his muscles as if they were the horse, and therefore incapable of talking back, "I am not in my dotage. If I cannot do this work, what good am I?" But it was not that he couldn't do the work. It was that doing the work exacted its price these days, and the price went up with the years.

He went back out into the cold, back to the farmhouse. Once he got

close to it, he whistled in surprise. Dr. Leonard O'Doull's Ford was parked by the house. Even though his son-in-law worked at the hospital on Galtier land, he didn't come to visit all that often. Lucien picked up his pace, to see why O'Doull had come today.

"Bonjour, mon beau-pere" O'Doull said, rising to shake his hand. Marie had already given the young doctor a cup of coffee and a sweet roll.

"Bonjour" Lucien said. "My daughter and my grandson, I trust they are well?"

"Yes," O'Doull said, and Marie nodded: she must have asked the same question. The American went on, "I have come, as I was beginning to tell your wife before you got here, to ask a favor of you."

"Vraiment?" Lucien said in some surprise. O'Doull was an independent fellow, and the favors he asked few and far be-tween. Galtier waved his arms. "Well, if you came here to do that, you'd better get on with it, don't you think?"

"Yes, certainly." But O'Doull hesitated again before finally continuing, "My mother and father have decided they would like to come up to Quebec to see their first grandson. You know our house, and know that it is not of the largest. Is it—would it be— possible that you might put them up here for a few days' visit? If it cannot be done, you must know I will understand, but it would be good if it could."

Before answering, Galtier glanced toward Marie. The farm-house was her province. He knew there would be disruption, but she was the one to gauge how much. Only after she gave him a tiny nod did he answer in effusive tones: "But of course! They would be most welcome. When would they be traveling up to see you?"

"In a couple of weeks, if that's all right," O'Doull answered. "They're so looking forward to meeting Nicole and seeing little Lucien and to meeting all of you, for your doings have filled the pages of our letters."

"I hope we are not so bad as you will have made us out to be," Galtier said.

While Leonard O'Doull was still figuring out how to take that, Marie asked,

"Is it that your mother and father speak French?"

"My father does, some," O'Doull replied. "He is a doctor himself, and studied French in college. My mother has been trying to learn since I decided to live here, but I do not know how much she has picked up."

"We will get along," Galtier said in his rusty English. Then he had to translate for his wife. Marie nodded, though she had al-most no English of her own.

"I thank you very much," O'Doull said with a nod of his own that was almost a bow. "I will wire them and tell them it is arranged. Truly, they do want to meet you. I will also, naturally, let you know when I hear just when they will arrive in Riviere-du-Loup." With one more nod, he went back to his motorcar and then back to the hospital.

After the door closed behind him, Lucien and Marie looked at each other.

They both raised eyebrows and then both started to laugh. Galtier said,

"Well, this will be something out of the ordi-nary, at the very least."

"Out of the ordinary, yes," Marie agreed. "And the work we will have to do to be ready in time will be out of the ordinary, too." She drew herself up straight with pride. "But we will do it. We will not shame ourselves before Leonard's rich American parents."

Doctors weren't necessarily rich, but Lucien didn't bother contradicting his wife. Contradicting Marie rarely did any good. Besides, she was in essence right. Galtier too wanted to put on the best show he could for his son-in-law's parents.

Over the next couple of weeks, a tornado might have passed through the house. Doing spring cleaning and the laundry that went with spring cleaning while snow lay on the ground wasn't easy, but Marie and her daughters managed, with help from Lu-cien and the two boys whenever they could be roped into it. Denise, who'd had the room she'd once shared with Nicole to herself since her sister's wedding, was bundled off to sleep with Susanne and Jeanne to give the guests a room of their own.

"Why have we no electricity?" Marie moaned. "Why have we no piped water?"

"Why does not matter for these things," Galtier said with a shrug. "We do not have them, and we cannot have them before the O'Doulls

arrive. Save your worries for things we can help."

"They will think we are backwards," Marie said.

"They will think we live on a farm." Galtier looked around. "As best I can see, they will be right." She wrinkled her nose at him. Shrugging again, he added, "I have heard from our son-in-law that it is the same on farms in the United States as it is here."

That quieted Marie for the time being. She got nervous a dozen more times before Leonard O'Doull, having met his par-ents at the train station in Riviere-du-Loup, brought them and Nicole and little Lucien down to the farmhouse. By then, the suits Lucien and Charles and Georges wore had been aired long enough that they no longer smelled of mothballs.

Harvey O'Doull looked like a shorter, older, more weathered version of his son. Rose, his wife, resembled nothing so much as a suet pudding, but her eyes, green like Leonard's, were kind. "I was pleased to meet your lovely daughter at last, and I am pleased to meet all of you," Harvey said, his accent about two-thirds American, one-third Parisian. "I am glad to have you in our family, and to be in yours "

"Moi aussi" his wife said. Her accent was considerably worse than his, but she made the effort to speak at least a little French.

Because she did, Lucien answered in his own creaky English: "And I am glad also to meet you. Please to come inside, where it is more hot."

Harvey O'Doull's eyes had been flicking back and forth around the farm, as if they were a camera taking snapshots. His face showed a good deal of knowledge; how many farms had he seen in the course of his practice? A lot, probably. When he said, "This is a good place," he spoke with authority.

"This is precious!" Rose said in English when they did go in-side. It wasn't quite the word Galtier would have used to describe the house where he lived, but it was meant as praise, and he accepted it in the spirit offered.

Leonard O'Doull carried in suitcases. His father opened one and rummaged through it. "I have here for the baby many toys," he said in his rather strange French, "and one also for you, M. Galtier." With the air of a man performing a conjuring trick, he held up a large bottle of whiskey.

"Since I cannot drink all that by myself—at least not right away—I will share it with anyone who would like some," Galtier said. "Denise, run into the kitchen and fetch glasses, would you?"

There was plenty of whiskey to go around. There would be enough to go around several times. "To Lucien O'Doull!" Harvey O'Doull said loudly.

Everyone drank. It was, Lucien Galtier discovered, not only abundant whiskey but excellent whiskey as well.

Lucien O'Doull, without whom the gathering would not have taken place, drank no whiskey. He kept pulling himself up to a stand, letting go, and falling on his bottom. His cries were much more of indignation than of hurt.

He knew he was supposed to get up there on his hind legs, but he didn't quite know how.

Dinner featured roast chicken and sausage and mashed pota-toes and buttered turnips and Marie's fresh-baked bread. Noth-ing was wrong with either senior O'Doull's appetite, and they both praised the food in two languages. The first awkward mo-ment came when Rose asked in careful French, *"Oil est le W.C.?"*

"II n y a pas de WC." Galtier answered, and then, in English, "No toilet."

With resigned regret, he pointed outside. One small advantage of cold weather was that the outhouse was less ripe than it would have been in summer.

Rose O'Doull blinked, but wrapped herself in her thick wool coat and sallied forth. When she came back, she was, to Lucien's surprise, smiling.

"I haven't been on a two-holer since Hector was a pup," she said in English.

Lucien didn't know exactly what that meant, but he had a pretty fair notion.

Rose also insisted on going back and helping the Galtier women with the dishes. Harvey proved to have brought a box of cigars to go with the fine whiskey. After the menfolk were puffing happy clouds, he said, "I hope. M.

Galtier, we do not put you to too much trouble."

"Not at all," Lucien said. "It is our pleasure."

"All except Denise's," the incorrigible Georges murmured.

Fortunately, Harvey O'Doull either did not hear or did not understand. He went on with his own train of thought: "I know how much work a farm is. I was a child on a farm. To have guests is not easy for a man with much work to do."

"When the guests are the other grandparents of my grandson, they are, in a way, of my own flesh and blood," Galtier replied.

Harvey O'Doull nodded. "You are very much as my son has written of you in his letters. He says you are the finest gentleman he ever met."

The key word was in English, but Galtier understood it. He glared at Leonard O'Doull and spoke fiercely: "See what lies you have been spreading about me!"

Harvey O'Doull started to explain himself, thinking Lucien had misunderstood and really was insulted. Leonard O'Doull, who knew his father-in-law better, wagged a forefinger at him, a thoroughly French gesture for an Irishman to use. "If I had not heard the words come from your lips, I would have thought Georges had spoken them."

"Tabernac!" Galtier exploded. "Now I *am* insulted!'"

"So am I," Georges said. They all laughed. Lucien had not thought his meeting with these Americans would begin so well. But then, he reflected, he had not thought his meetings with any Americans would go so well as they had. Occasionally— *but only occasionally,* the stubborn peasant part of him insisted— surprises were good ones.

Scipio stood in line outside the Augusta, Georgia, city hall with more worry in his heart than he let his face show. The queue of black people stretched for blocks. Every so often, a white pass-ing by would offer a jeer or a curse. Gray-clad policemen kept the whites from doing anything worse, if they'd intended to.

Bathsheba squeezed his hand. "Hope none o' them Freedom Party buckra come to raise a ruction."

He nodded. "Me, too." That was indeed one of the worries he was

doing his best to conceal. As those worries went, though, it was only a small one.

Bathsheba cheerfully went on, "Passbooks won't be *so* bad. Did well enough with 'em before, an' I reckon we can again. Just a nuisance, is all."

"I hopes you's right," Scipio said. He had his doubts. The Freedom Party men in Congress were the ones who'd introduced the law tightening up the passbook system in the CSA, which had fallen to pieces during the Great War. He distrusted anything that had anything to do with the Freedom Party.

But that worry wasn't at the top of his list, either.

The line slowly snaked forward, not toward the front entrance to the city hall—whites wouldn't have stood for blacks' im-peding their progress that way—but toward a side door. Negroes newly issued passbooks went out the back way. Some of them came around to talk with friends still in line.

"Look like a police station in there," one of them said. "They got wanted posters up for every nigger ever spit on the sidewalk."

A couple of blacks, hearing that, suddenly found other things to do than stand in line just then. Scipio felt like finding some-thing else to do, too. But, from what he read in the papers, he was more likely to get in trouble without a passbook later than he was to be recognized now. Maybe a poster with his name—his real name—on it would be hanging there with all the rest.

No-body in Georgia wanted him except Bathsheba, and he was glad she had him. Everything he'd done for the Congaree Socialist Republic had been over in South Carolina. He was perfectly happy to have people beating the bushes for him there; he never intended to set foot in the state again.

Up the worn stone steps leading to the side door he and Bath-sheba went. "Glad we ain't doin' this in the summertime," he said. "We melt jus' as fas' as the ice under the fish over at Eras-mus'place."

"For true," Bathsheba agreed. When they got inside, she looked along the hallway. "That fellow weren't lyin'. Who would have thought there was so many bad niggers in this here town?"

Scipio scanned the wanted posters. Sure as hell, there was a faded one with his name on it. The poster, though, bore no picture. He'd been photographed only a couple of times in his life, and those images had gone up in smoke when Marshlands burned. He'd never had any brushes with the police, as had the men and women whose photos adorned most of the fliers. On the other hand, if caught for his political crimes, he'd face the gal-lows or a firing squad.

At last, he came before a sour-faced white clerk. "Name?" the fellow asked.

"Xerxes," Scipio answered, and then had to spell it for the clerk, who'd started it with a Z instead of anX

Being corrected by a black man made the clerk's face even more sour, but he made the change. "Residence address?" he said, and Scipio gave him the address of the roominghouse over in the Terry. The clerk didn't have any trouble getting that down on paper. Then he asked, "Birthplace?"

"I were borned on a plantation over in South Carolina." Scipio hoped his sudden tension didn't show. He hadn't expected that question.

But the clerk only nodded. "You talk like it," he said, and wrote SOUTH

CAROLINA on the passbook and on the form that would record its new owner. He asked about Scipio's age (on general principles, Scipio lied five years off it), his employer, and his employer's address. After taking all that down, he said, "State the time and reason your previous passbook was lost."

"Suh, it were 1916,1 reckons," Scipio said, "an' I were gettin' the hell out o' where I was at, on account of I didn't want to git kilt. Didn't take nothin' but de clothes on my back."

The clerk grunted. "Another patriotic nigger running away from the Reds,"

he said. "If I had a dime—a real silver dime, I mean—for every time I've heard that one the past couple days, I'd be a hell of a rich man." But he was just blowing off steam in general; he didn't seem to disbelieve Scipio in particular. When Scipio didn't flinch, the clerk grunted again. "Raise your right hand."

Scipio obeyed.

"Do you solemnly swear that the information you have given me in regard to this book is true and complete, so help you God?" the white man droned.

"Yes, suh," Scipio said.

Still droning, the clerk went on, 'The penalty for perjury in regard to this book may be fine or imprisonment or both, as a court of law may determine.

Do you understand?" Scipio nodded. The clerk looked miffed, perhaps at finding a black man who didn't need the word *perjury* explained to him.

Thrusting the new passbook at Scipio, he said, "Keep this book in your possession at all times. It must be shown or surrendered on de-mand of any competent official. If you move or change jobs in Augusta, you must notify city hall or a police station within five days. You must have the proper stamp in the book before you travel outside Richmond County. Penalty for violating those provisions is also fine or imprisonment or both. Do you under-stand all *that?"*

"Yes, suh," Scipio repeated.

"All right, then," the clerk said, as if washing his hands of him. "Go down that hall and into one of the rooms on the left. Get yourself photographed. A copy of the photograph will be sent to you. It must go into your passbook, on the blank page oppo-site your personal information. If you do not receive it within two weeks, come back here to be photographed again.

Next!'

Bathsheba, who'd gone to the clerk next to the one who'd dealt with Scipio, was waiting when he finished. Together, they went to get their pictures taken. The photography room was full of flash-powder smoke, as if soldiers with old-fashioned weapons had fought a battle in there.

Foomp! A photographer set off more flash powder. Scipio's eyes watered at the blast of light. "Do Jesus!" he exclaimed. A blowing green-purple spot danced at the center of his vision be-fore slowly fading.

"That was just like lookin' into the sun," Bathsheba said as the two of

them made their blinking way to the back door and out of the Augusta city hall.

"Sure enough was," Scipio said. He put the passbook in the pocket of his dungarees. If he couldn't leave the county without getting the book stamped, Confederate authorities were tight-ening up with a vengeance.

And yet, oddly, that bothered him only a little. Now he had an official document to prove he was Xerxes of Augusta, Georgia. That made it much harder for Anne Colleton—or anyone else, but he worried most about Miss Anne—to accuse him of ever having been Scipio the blood-thirsty Red.

He spotted Aurelius in the line of men and women waiting to get passbooks, and waved to the waiter with whom he'd worked at John Oglethorpe's restaurant before the white man let him go. Aurelius waved back. "How you is?" Scipio called.

Aurelius waggled his hand back and forth. "Same as always." He looked from Scipio to Bathsheba and back again. "You look like you's doin' pretty good for yourself," he said with a smile.

"This here my intended," Scipio answered proudly. He intro-duced Bathsheba and Aurelius, then asked, "How Mistuh Ogle-thorpe doin'?"

"He don't change," Aurelius said. "Tough as rocks on the outside, sof' as butter underneath."

Scipio nodded. That described his former boss very well. He was about to say so when a shout from farther up Greene Street made him whip his head around. The shout was one he'd heard before: "Freedom!" It seemed to come from a great many throats.

All up and down the queue, Negroes looked at one another and up the street in alarm. No one with a dark skin thought of the Freedom Party with anything but dread. "Freedom!' That great shout was closer now. Scipio glanced at the policemen who'd been keeping the line orderly. He'd always seen the white police as a tool for keeping Negroes in their place. Now he hoped they could protect him and his people.

Past the line of Negroes came the Freedom Party marchers. Scipio stared at them in dismay: hundreds of men tramped along in disciplined ranks. They all wore white shirts and butternut pants. Many of them had steel helmets on their heads. The men in the first rank carried the Stars and Bars and Confederate battle flags. The men

in the second rank bore white banners with FREEDOM printed on them in angry red letters, and others that might have been Confederate battle flags save that they featured a red St. Andrew's cross on blue, not blue on red.

"Freedom!" the marchers roared again. Had they turned on the Negroes in line outside the city hall, the handful of po-licemen could not have hoped to stop them. But they just kept marching and shouting their one-word slogan. That showed dis-cipline, too, and frightened Scipio almost as much as an attack would have done.

He looked from the marchers back to the police. Not only were the policemen outnumbered, they also seemed cowed by the Freedom Party's show of force. It was almost as if the march-ers represented the Confederate government and the police were civilian spectators.

"Them bastards is bad trouble," Aurelius said, speaking in a low voice to make sure he gave the white men no excuse to do anything but march.

"Every time the Freedom Party do something mo' poor buckra join they than the time befo'," Scipio said. "That go on, they gwine end up runnin' this here country one fine day. What they do then?"

"Whatever they please," Bathsheba said. "They do whatever they please."

"Ain't nothin' we can do about it, anyways," Aurelius said.

Scipio suddenly felt the weight of the passbook in his pocket. It might have been the weight of a ball and chain. For the very first time, he truly sympathized with the Red uprising in which he'd played an unwilling part.

This march was what Cassius and Cherry and the other Reds had feared the most.

But their uprising had helped spawn the Freedom Party— Scipio understood the dialectic and how it worked, even if he didn't think of it as revealed truth. And the black uprising had failed, as any black uprising was bound to do: too few blacks, too few weapons. What did that leave for Negroes in the CSA? Nothing he could see.

"We's trapped," he said, hoping Bathsheba or Aurelius would argue with him. Neither of them did, which worried him more than

anything.

Sam Carsten slammed a shell into the breech of the five-inch gun he served aboard the USS *Remembrance.* "Fire!" Willie Moore shouted.

Carsten jerked the lanyard. The cannon roared. The shell casing fell to the deck with a clang of brass on steel. One of the shell-jerkers behind Sam handed him a fresh round. Cough-ing a little from the cordite fumes, he reloaded the gun.

Moore peered out through the sponson's vision slit. "I think we've got to bring it down a couple hundred yards to drop it just where we want it," he said, and fiddled with the elevation screw to achieve the result he wanted.

When he was satisfied, he nodded to Sam. "Give 'em another one."

"Right, Chief." Sam yanked the lanyard again. The gun bel-lowed.

Carsten said, "Christ, by the time we're through with Belfast, there won't be anything left of it."

"Damn stubborn crazy micks," Moore said. "The ones who want to stay part of England, I mean, not the ones who aim to put all of Ireland into one country. They're damn stubborn crazy micks, too, but they're on our side."

Overhead, two aeroplanes roared off the deck of the *Remem-brance*ˆ

one on the other's heels. "They'll give the Belfasters something to think about," Sam said.

"That they will," the commander of the gun crew agreed. "No doubt about it." He peered through the slit again. "Sons of bitches!" he burst out. "The bastards are shooting back. One just splashed into the water a few hundred yards short of us."

One of the shell-jerkers, Joe Gilbert—like most in his slot, a big, muscular fellow—said, "Goddamn limeys must have smug-gled in some more guns."

"Yeah," Carsten said. "And if we call 'em on it, they'll say they never did any such thing—their pet micks must've come up with the guns and the shells under a flat rock somewhere, or else made 'em themselves."

Officially, Britain recognized Ireland's independence. She'd had to; the United States and the German Empire had forced the concession from her.

The Royal Navy never ventured into the Irish Sea to challenge the *Remembrance* or any other U.S., German, or Irish warship.

But hordes of small freighters and fishing boats smuggled arms and ammunition and sometimes fighting men into the loyalist northeastern part of Ireland. The British Foreign Office blandly denied knowing anything about that. However many ships stood between Ireland on the one hand and England and Scotland on the other, the gun runners always found gaps through which they could slip.

Willie Moore said, "The damn micks— *our* damn micks, I mean—had better start doing a better job of patrolling, that's all I've got to tell you. It's their goddamn country. If they can't hang on to it all by their lonesome, I can tell you we ain't gonna hang around forever to pull their chestnuts out of the fire." He ad-justed the elevation screw again. "Let 'em have the next one now."

"Aye aye." Sam fired the five-inch gun again. He had to step smartly to keep the casing from landing on his toes.

Joe Gilbert passed him another shell. He was bending to load it into the breech when a shell from the shore slammed into the sponson. That he was bending saved his life. Most of the shell's force was spent in penetrating the armor that protected the sponson, but a fragment gutted Willie Moore as if he were a muskie pulled from a Minnesota lake. Another one hissed over Sam's head and into Gilbert's neck. The shell-jerker fell with-out a sound, his head almost severed from his body. Moore screamed and screamed and screamed.

Sam could look out through the hole the shell had torn and see the ocean and, beyond it, burning Belfast. He wasted only a tiny fraction of a second on that. What to do when the sponson got hit had been drilled into him during more than ten years in the Navy. No fire—he checked that first.

Inside the sponson, it was just bare metal, with no paint to burn. That didn't always help, but it had this time. The ammunition wouldn't go up.

Next, check the gun crew. Joe Gilbert was beyond help. Blood dripped from Sam's shoes when he picked up his feet. Calvin Wesley, the other shell-hauler, hadn't been scratched. He gaped at Gilbert's twitching

corpse as if he'd never seen one before. He was a veteran—everybody aboard the *Remembrance* was a veteran—so that was hard to imagine, but maybe it was so.

Willie Moore kept shrieking. One glance at what the shell had done told Sam all he needed to know. He opened the aid kit on the wall of the sponson; a shell fragment had scarred the thick metal right beside it. From the kit, he drew two syringes of morphine. One might have been enough, but he wanted to make sure.

He stooped beside Moore. "Here, Chief, I'll take care of you." He gave the gunner's mate all the morphine in both syringes. After a very little while, Moore fell silent.

"That's too much;' Wesley said. "It'll kill him."

"That's the idea," Sam said. He watched Moore's chest. It stopped moving. Like a man waking up from a bad dream, Cars-ten shook himself.

"Come on, God damn it. We've got this gun to fight. You know how to load, right?"

"I better," Wesley answered. "I seen you guys do it often enough."

"All right, then. You load and fire, and I'll aim the damn gun." Sam had seen that done often enough, too, and practiced it him-self when he got the chance during drills. The hit had torn the left side of the sponson too badly for the gun to track all the way in that direction. Otherwise, though, he was still in business. "Fire!"

Calvin Wesley sent on its way the shell Sam had been loading when they were struck. He was setting the next round into the breech when someone out in the passage pounded on the dogged hatch. A shout came through the thick steel: "Anybody alive in there?"

"Fire!" Sam said, and the gun roared. That should have an-swered the question, but the pounding went on. He nodded to Wesley. "Undog it."

"Aye aye." The shell-jerker obeyed.

Half a dozen men spilled into the sponson, Commander Grady among them. "Two dead, sir," Carsten said crisply, "but we can still use the gun."

"So I gather." Grady looked at the bodies. His rabbity features stayed

expressionless; he'd seen his share of bodies before. After a moment's thought, he nodded briskly. "All right, Carsten, this is your gun for the time being. I'll get you shell-heavers. We'll clean up this mess and get on with the job."

Another shell from the shore splashed into the Irish Sea, close enough to the *Remembrance* to send some water through the hole the hit had made in the sponson's armor. Sam said, "Sir, if we can use a couple of aeroplanes to shoot up that gun and its crew, our life will get easier."

Even as he spoke, one of the Wright fighting scouts buzzed off the deck of the aeroplane carrier, followed a moment later by another and then another. Commander Grady said, "You aren't the only one with that idea, you see."

"Never figured I would be," Sam answered, not altogether truthfully. All his time in the Navy had taught him that officers often had trouble seeing things that should have been obvious.

Grady pointed to two of the ratings with him. "Drinkwater, you and Jorgenson stay here and jerk shells. Carsten, can Wesley cut the mustard as a loader?"

"Sir, if we fired with a two-man crew, we'll sure as hell do a lot better with four," Sam answered. Calvin Wesley shot him a grateful glance. Loader would be a step up for Wesley, as crew chief was a step up for Sam. Sam wished he hadn't earned it like this, but, as was the Navy way, nobody paid any attention to what he wished.

Grady pointed to the dead meat that had been Willie Moore and Joe Gilbert. "Get these bodies out of here," he ordered the men he hadn't appointed to the gun crew. "We've already spent too much time here."

As the sailors dragged the corpses out of the sponson, Sam took what had been Willie Moore's spot. The chief of a gun crew had an advantage denied the rest of the men—he could see out whenever he chose: through the vision slit, through the range-finder, and now through the hole that would, when time allowed, no doubt have a steel plate welded over it.

Sam peered southwest, toward the shore half a dozen miles away. The fighting scouts the *Remembrance* had launched were buzzing around something. A flash told Carsten it was the gun that had fired on his ship.

The shell fell astern of the aeroplane carrier.

He twisted the calibration screw on the rangefinder and read out the exact distance to the target: 10,350 yards. Willie Moore had known without having to think how far to elevate the gun for a hit at that distance. Sam didn't. He glanced at a yellowing sheet of paper above the vision slit: a range table.

Checking the eleva-tion, he saw the gun was a little low, and adjusted it.

Then he tra-versed it ever so slightly to the left.

"Fire!r he shouted. He'd given the order before, with only Calvin Wesley in the sponson with him, but it seemed more offi-cial now. If he fought the gun well, it might be his to keep.

Wesley let out a yelp as the shell casing just missed mashing his instep.

But when one of the new shell-heavers handed him the next round, he slammed it home in good style.

"You want to mind your feet," Sam said, traversing the gun a little farther on its track. "You can spend some time on crutches if you don't." He turned the screw another quarter of a revolu-tion. "Fire!"

He spied another flash in the same instant as his own gun spoke. The shell the pro-British rebels launched was a near miss. At the range at which he was fighting, he could not tell whether he'd hit or missed. But the gun on the shore did not fire again. Ei-ther his shell had silenced it, one from a different five-incher had done the trick, or the aeroplanes from the *Remembrance* had ex-terminated the crew.

He didn't waste time worrying over which was so. As long as the Irish rebels couldn't hurt the *Remembrance* any more, he was free to go back to what his gun had been doing before the ship came under fire: pounding Belfast to bits. Sooner or later, the rebels would figure out they couldn't win the war against their more numerous opponents—and against the might of Germany and the United States. If they needed help figuring that out, he would gladly lend a hand.

The shell-heavers were just hired muscle, big men with strong backs.

Calvin Wesley did his new job well enough, though Sam knew he'd done it better himself. He shrugged. Willie Moore would have handled the gun better than he was doing it. Experi-ence counted.

"Only one way to get it," he muttered, and set about the busi-ness of acquiring as much as he could.

Roger Kimball's heart thumped with anticipation as he knocked on the hotel-room door. He'd met Anne Colleton this way when-ever she'd let him.

Once, she'd opened the door and greeted him naked as the day she was born. Her imagination knew no bounds. Neither did his own appetites.

With a slight squeak, the door opened. The figure in the door-way was not naked. It was not Anne Colleton, either. Kimball's heart kept pounding just the same. Vengeance was an appetite. too, as Anne would have agreed in a flash. "Welcome to Charles-ton, Mr. Featherston," Kimball said.

"Thank you kindly, Commander Kimball," Jake Featherston answered.

The words were polite enough, but he didn't sound kindly, not even a little bit. And he bore down on Kimball's title in a way that was anything but admiring. But, after he stood aside to let Kimball come in, his tone warmed a little: "I hear tell I've got you to thank for whispering my name into Miss Col-leton's ear. It's done the Party good, and I won't say anything different."

That was probably why he'd agreed to see Kimball. Did he re-call the dismissive telegram he'd sent down to Charleston? He must have; he had the look of a man who remembered every-thing. Kimball didn't intend to bring it up if Featherston didn't As for whispering Featherston's name into Anne Colleton's ear . . . well, mentioning it on the telephone was one thing, but when Anne let him get close enough to whisper in her ear, he had other things to say.

"Want a drink?" Featherston asked. When Kimball nodded, the leader of the Freedom Party pulled a bottle out of a cabinet and poured two medium-sized belts. After handing Kimball one glass, he raised the other high. "To revenge!"

"To revenge!" Kimball echoed. That was a toast to which he'd always drink. He took a long pull at the whiskey. Warmth spread from his middle.

"Ahh! Thanks. That's fine stuff."

"Not bad, not bad." Jake Featherston pointed to a chair. "Set yourself down, Kimball, and tell me what's on your mind."

"I'll do that." Kimball sat, crossed his legs, and balanced the whiskey glass on his higher knee. Featherston seemed as direct in his private dealings as he was on the stump. Kimball ap-proved; nobody diffident ever commanded a submersible. "I want to know how serious you are about going after the high mucky-mucks in the War Department."

"I've never been more serious about anything in my life." If Featherston was lying, he was damn good at it. "They made a hash of the war, and they don't want to own up to it." Something else joined the anger that filled his narrow features, something Kimball needed a moment to recognize: calculation. "Besides, if the Freedom Party Congressmen keep asking for hearings and the Whigs and the Radical Liberals keep turning us down, who looks good and who looks bad?"

Slowly, Kimball nodded. "Isn't that pretty?" he said. "It keeps the Party's name in the papers, too, same as the passbook bill did."

"That's right." The calculation left Featherston's face. The anger stayed.

Kimball got the idea that the anger never left. "Niggers haven't gotten half of what they deserve, not yet they haven't. And even the nigger-loving Congressmen up in Rich-mond now won't stop us from giving it to 'em."

"Bully." Roger Kimball's voice was savage. "When the up-rising started, they kept my boat, the *Bonefish,* from going out on patrol against the damnyankees. Instead, I had to sail up the Pee Dee and pretend I was a river gunboat so I could fight the stink-ing Reds."

"I knew they were going to rise up," Featherston said. "I knew they were going to try and kick the white race right in the balls. And when I tried to warn people, what did I get? What did the goddamn War Department give me? A pat on the head, that's what. A pat on the head and a set of stripes on my sleeve they might as well have tattooed on my arm, on account of I wouldn't get 'em off till Judgment Day. That's what I got for being right."

His eyes blazed. Roger Kimball was impressed in spite of himself, more impressed than he'd thought he would be. He'd known how Featherston could sway crowds. He'd been swayed in a crowd himself. He'd expected the force of the Freedom Party leader's personality to be less in a personal meeting like this. If anything, though, it was greater. With all his heart, he wanted to believe everything Jake Featherston

said.

Kimball had to gather himself before he could say, "You don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, though. The War Department could do the country some good, once the dead wood got cleared out."

"Yeah, likely tell," Featherston jeered. "Best thing that could happen to the War Department would be blowing it to hell and gone. And anybody who says anything different is just as big a traitor as the lying dogs in there."

"That's shit," Kimball said without raising his voice. Feather-ston's eyes opened very wide. Kimball grinned; he got the idea nobody had spoken that way to Featherston in quite a while. Grinning still, he went on, "Without the War Department, for in-stance, how are we going to get decent barrels built? You'd best believe the damnyankees are working to make theirs tougher, same as they are with aeroplanes. Don't you reckon we ought to do the same?"

"Barrels. Stinking barrels," Featherston muttered under his breath. He'd stopped jeering. Now he watched Kimball as a man might watch a rattlesnake in the shocked instant after its tail began to buzz. No, he hadn't had a supporter talk back to him for a while. It threw him off stride, left him startled and confused. But he rallied quickly. "Well, yes, Christ knows we'll need new barrels when we fight the USA again. But where the hell are they?

Are we working on them? Not that I've ever heard, and I've got ears in all sorts of funny places. We've got people— mercenaries—using some old ones down south of the border, but new ones? Forget it. Proves what I told you, doesn't it?— pack of damn traitors in the War Department."

When we fight the USA again. Featherston's calm acceptance of the next war took Kimball's breath away, or rather made it come fast and hard, as if Anne Colleton had greeted him in the doorway naked. He wanted that next war, too. He hadn't wanted to give up on the last one, but he'd had no choice. Seeing how much Featherston longed for it made him forget their disagree-ment of a moment before.

When he didn't answer back right away, the sparkle returned to Featherston's eye. The Freedom Party leader said, "Reckon you were just sticking up for the officers in Richmond, seeing as you were one yourself."

"Screw the officers in Richmond," Kimball said evenly. "Yes, I was an officer. I fucking earned being an officer when I won an appointment at the Naval Academy in Mobile off a lousy little Arkansas farm. I earned my way through the Academy, too, and I earned every promotion I got once the war started. And if you don't like that, Sarge"—he laced Featherston's chosen title with scorn—"you can go to hell."

He thought he'd have a fight on his hands then and there. He wasn't sure he could win it, either; Jake Featherston had the hard, rangy look of a man who'd cause more than his share of trouble in a brawl. But Featherston surprised him by throwing back his head and laughing. "All right, you were an officer, but you ain't one of those blue-blooded little goddamn pukes like Jeb Stuart III, that worthless sack of horse manure."

"Blue-blooded? Me? Not likely." Kimball laughed, too. "After my pa died, I walked behind the ass end of a mule till I fig-ured out I didn't want to do that for a living any more. I'll tell you something else, too: it didn't take me real long to figure *that* out, either."

"Don't reckon it would have," Featherston said. "All right, Kimball, you were an officer, but you were my kind of officer. When I'm president, reckon I can find you a place up in Rich-mond, if you want it."

When I'm president. He said that as calmly as he'd said, *When we fight the USA again.* He said it as surely, too. His confidence made Kimball gasp again. A little hoarsely, the ex-submersible skipper said, "So you are going to run next year?"

"Hell, yes, I'll run," Featherston answered. "I won't win. The people here aren't ready yet to do the hard things that need doing. But when I run, when I tell 'em what we'll have to do, that'll help make 'em ready. You know what I'm saying, Kim-ball? The road needs building before I can run my motorcar down it."

"Yeah, I know what you're saying." Kimball knew he sounded abstracted.

He couldn't help it. He'd thought about guiding Jake Featherston the way a rider guided a horse. After half an hour's conversation with Featherston, that seemed laughable, absurd, preposterous—he couldn't find a word strong enough. The leader of the Freedom Party knew where he wanted to go, knew with a certainty that made the hair stand up on the back of Kim-ball's neck. Whether he would get there

was another question, but he knew where the road went.

Far more cautiously than he'd spoken before, Kimball said, "I'm not the only officer you could use, you know. You shouldn't be down on all of us.

Take Clarence Potter, for instance. He—"

Featherston cut him off with a sharp chopping gesture. "You and him are pals. I remember that. But I haven't got any real use for him. There's no fire in the man; he thinks too damn much. It's not the fellow who thinks like a professor who gets a pile of ordi-nary working folks all het up. It's somebody who thinks like them. It's somebody who talks like them. He'd just piss and moan about that, on account of he can't do it himself."

Recalling Potter's Yale-flavored, Yankee-sounding accent and his relentless precision, Kimball found himself nodding. He said, "I bet you would have had more use for him, though, if he'd come over to the Party right away."

"Hell and blazes, of course I would," Featherston said. "But I can see him now, lookin' down his nose, peerin' over the tops of his spectacles"—he gave a viciously excellent impression of a man doing just that—"and reckoning I was nothing but a damn fool. Maybe he knows better nowadays, but maybe it's too late."

Kimball didn't say anything at all. Featherston's judgment of Clarence Potter was close to his own. Clarence was a fine fellow—Kimball wouldn't have gone so far in denigrating him as Featherston had—but he did think too much for his own good.

"We're on the way up," Featherston said. "We're on the way up, and nobody's going to stop us. Now that I'm here, I'm damn glad I came down to Charleston. I can use you, Kimball. You're a hungry bastard, just like me.

There aren't enough of us, you know what I'm saying?"

"I sure do." Kimball stuck out his hand. Featherston clasped it. They clung to each other for a moment, locked in the alliance of the mutually useful. The president of the Confederate States, Kimball reflected, was eligible for only one six-year term. If Jake Featherston did win the job, who would take it after him? Roger Kimball hadn't known any such ambition before, but he did now.

X

Excitement built in Chester Martin as winter gave way to spring. Before long, spring would give way to summer. When summer came to Toledo, so would the Socialist Party national convention.

"Not Debs again!" he said to Albert Bauer. "He's run twice, and he's lost twice. We've got to pick somebody new this time, a fresh face. It's not like it was in 1916, or in 1912, either. We've got a real chance to win this year."

"In 1912 and 1916, you were a damn Democrat," Bauer re-turned, stuffing an envelope. "What gives you the right to tell the Party what to do now?"

Martin's wave took in the local headquarters. "That I *am* here now and wouldn't have been caught dead here then. Proves my point, doesn't it?"

His friend grunted. "Maybe you've got something," Bauer said grudgingly.

After a moment, though, he brightened. "This must be how the real old-time Socialists felt when Lincoln brought so many Republicans into the Party after the Second Mexican War. It was nice having more than half a dozen people come to meetings and vote for you, but a lot of the new folks didn't know a hell of a lot about what Socialism was supposed to mean."

"Are you saying I don't know much?" Martin asked, amuse-ment in his voice.

"Tell me about the means of production," Albert Bauer said. "Explain why they don't belong in the hands of the capitalist class."

"I don't have to sit still for examinations: I'm not in school any more, thank God," Martin said. "I don't know much about the means of production, and I don't give a damn, either. What I do know is, the Democrats have jumped into bed with the fat cats. I want a party to jump into bed with me."

"You're voting your class interest," Bauer said. "Well, that's a start. At least you know you have a class interest, which is a devil of a lot more than too many people do. You wouldn't believe how much trouble we've had educating the proletariat to fulfill its proper social role."

"Yeah, and one of the reasons why is that you keep talking so fancy, nobody wants to pay any attention to you," Martin said. "You keep on doing that, the Socialists are going to lose this election, same as they've lost all the others. And God only knows when we'll ever have a better chance."

By the way Bauer winced and grimaced, he knew he'd struck a nerve, maybe even struck it harder than he'd intended. "What do you think?" Bauer asked, shifting the subject a little. "Will TR run for a third term?"

"Nobody ever has before," Martin answered, but that wasn't the question Bauer had asked. At length, he said, "Yeah, I think he will. What's he going to do, dust off his hands and walk away? Go hunt lions and elephants in Africa? You ask me, he likes doing what he's doing. He'll try and keep doing it." He held up a forefinger. "Here's one for you, Al: if Teddy *does* run again, will that make things easier or harder for us?"

"I'm damned if I know," Bauer replied, his voice troubled. "Nobody knows. Maybe people will remember he fought the war and won it. If they do, they'll vote for him. Or maybe they'll remember how many men died and all the trouble we've had since. If they do that, they won't touch him with a ten-foot pole."

"The war will have been over for almost three and a half years by the time the election rolls around," Martin said.

"That's a fact." Albert Bauer sounded glad it was a fact, too. "People don't remember things very long. Of course"—he didn't seem to want to be glad about anything—"the Great War is a big thing to forget."

"Losing two elections in a row is a big thing to forget, too, and that's what Debs has done," Martin said. "If we do run him again, what'll our slogan be?

'Third time's the charm'? I don't think that'll work."

"He walks in and he knows all the answers." Bauer might have been talking to the ceiling; since he spoke of Martin in the third person, he wasn't—quite—talking to him. But then he was once more: "All right, all right, maybe not Debs. But if we don't run him, who do we run? He's the one fellow we've got who has a following across the whole damn country."

"You pick somebody," Chester Martin said. "You're always going on

about how you're the old-time Red, so you have to know all these people.

I'm nothing but a damn recruit. That's what you keep telling me, anyway."

"Go peddle your papers," Bauer said. A little less gruffly, he continued,

"Go on, take the rest of the day off. It's Sunday, for Christ's sake. Don't you have anything better to do with your time?"

"Probably." Martin got up from the table where he and his friend had been preparing fliers for mailing. "But if too many people find better things to do with their time than work for the Party, the work won't get done. Where will we be then?"

"Up the same old creek," Bauer admitted. "But the Rebs won't capture Philadelphia if you have yourself a couple of beers or something."

"Twist my arm," Martin said, and Bauer did, not very hard. Martin groaned anyway. "Aii! There—you made me do it. See you later."

When he stepped outside, spring was in the air. While he'd fought in the Roanoke Valley, it had arrived sooner and more emphatically than it did here by the shore of Lake Erie. That was the one good thing he could say about Virginia. Against it, he set filth and stench and horror and fear and pain and mud and lice. They sent the scales crashing down against the place.

How many veterans would weigh what they'd been through in the same fashion? Was what they'd done worth it? Could any-thing have been worth three years of hell on earth? He didn't think so, especially not when he reckoned in the trouble he'd had after the war was over. Would the rest of the millions who'd worn green-gray—those of them left alive, anyhow—feel as he did? If so, Teddy Roosevelt faced more trouble than he guessed.

Red flags flew above the Socialists' building. Toledo cops still prowled past. Martin no longer carried a pistol in his pocket. Something like peace had returned to the labor scene. He won-dered how long it would last. The answer supplied itself: *till the day after the election.*

One of the policemen in brass-buttoned dark blue flashed Martin a thumbs-up. Martin was so surprised to get it, he tripped on a crack in the sidewalk and almost fell. During the great wave of strikes, that cop

had undoubtedly broken workers' heads along with his goonish chums. Did he think he could turn into a good Socialist with one simple gesture? If he did, he was an even bigger fool than the usual run of cop.

Or maybe he was a straw, blowing in the wind of change. If a cop found it a good idea to show somebody coming out of the Socialist hall that he wasn't hostile, who held the power? Who was liable to hold it after March 4, 1921? Maybe the policeman was hedging his bets.

"Won't do you any good," Martin muttered under his breath. "We'll still remember you bastards. Hell, yes, we will."

He listened to himself. That was when he began to think the party that had wandered so long in the wilderness might have a chance to come home at last. The Democrats had ruled the roost for a long time. They wouldn't be happy about clearing out, not after all these years they wouldn't.

"Too damn bad," Martin said.

Red Socialist posters were plastered on every wall and fence and telegraph pole. They shouted for freedom and justice in big black letters.

For once, more of them were up than their red-white-and-blue Democratic counterparts. Those showed the U.S. eagle flying high over a burning Confederate flag, and bore a one-word message: VICTORY!

As poster art went, the Democrats' handbills were pretty good. The only drawback Chester Martin found in them was that they bragged about old news. As Bauer had said, people forgot things in a hurry.

Martin walked over to the trolley stop and rode back to the apartment building where he and his parents and sister lived. They were playing hearts three-handed. "About time you got home," his father said. "This is a better game when the cards come out even when you deal 'em."

"See what you get for starting without me?" Martin said, drawing up a chair.

"Dad wants to throw in this game because he's losing," his sister said.

But Sue's grin said she didn't mind throwing it in, either.

"My own flesh and blood insult me," Stephen Douglas Martin said. "If I'd told *my* father anything like that—"

"Gramps would have laughed his head off, and you know it," Martin said.

He gathered the cards and fanned them in his hand. "Draw for first deal."

He ended up dealing himself. After gener-ously donating the ace of spades and a couple of hearts to his mother, who sat on his left (and receiving a similar load of trash from his sister, who sat on his right), he called, "All right, where's the deuce?"

Out came the two of clubs. As the hand was played, his father asked,

"Did you get the whole world settled, there at the Socialist meeting hall?"

"Sure as heck did," Martin said cheerfully. "The revolution of the proletariat starts next Wednesday, seven o'clock in the morning sharp.

You'd better step lively, Pop—you don't want to be late." He took a trick with the ace of diamonds, then led the ten of spades. "Let's see where the queen's hiding."

"Ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer," his father said. As Chester's mother had done, he ducked the spade. So did Sue. Stephen Douglas Martin went on, "Do people want it to be that rabblerousing fool of a Debs again?"

"Some people do," Martin answered. "I think we'd have a better chance with somebody else." Since the ten of spades had failed to flush out the queen, he led the nine. "Maybe this'll make her show up."

His mother pained and set out the ace of spades. His father grinned and tucked the king under it. His sister grinned even wider and dropped the queen, sticking his mother with thirteen points she didn't want. "There you go, Ma," Sue said sweetly.

"Thank you so much," Louisa Martin said. She turned to her son. "When the revolution comes, will the queen only be worth one point, to make her equal with all the hearts in the deck?"

"Don't know about that one, Ma," Chester said. "I don't think there's a plank that talks about it in the Socialist Party platform."

"Is there a plank that explains why they think we need any-body but bully old Teddy?" Stephen Douglas Martin inquired.

"I can think of two," his son replied. "First one is, nobody's ever had three terms. If TR decides to run again, he shouldn't, ei-ther. And even if the Democrats run somebody else, they have to explain what we got for all the men who got killed and maimed during the war, and why they've been in the trusts' pocket ever since."

When he was around Albert Bauer, he sounded like a reac-tionary. When he was around his parents—who were, in his view of things, reactionaries—lie sounded as radical as Bauer did. The more he thought about that, the funnier it seemed.

The quitting whistle's scream cut through the din on the floor of the Sloss Works like a wedge splitting a stump. Jefferson Pink-ard leaned on his crowbar. "Another day done," he said. "Another million dollars."

He wasn't making a million dollars a day, but he was making better than a million a week. Next month, probably, he'd be up over a million a day. It didn't matter. What the CSA called money was only a joke, one that kept getting funnier as the bank-notes sprouted more and more zeros. The bottom line was, he'd lived better before the war than he did now. That was so for al-most everybody in the Confederate States.

"See you in the mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," Vespasian said.

"Yeah," Jeff answered. "See you." He didn't make his voice cold on purpose; it just came out that way. The more he went to Freedom Party meetings, the less he cared to work alongside a black man. Vespasian turned away and headed for the time clock to punch out without another word. Pinkard wasn't in the habit of bragging about going out on Freedom Party assault squad-rons, but he wouldn't have been surprised had Vespasian known about it. Blacks had funny ways of finding out things like that.

Too damn bad, Jeff thought. Tired and sweaty, he headed toward the time clock himself.

Going into and out of the Sloss foundry, whites had always hung with whites and Negroes with Negroes. That hadn't changed. What had changed, lately, was how men from one group eyed those from the other.

Blacks seemed warier than they had been during the war. Whites seemed less happy about having so many colored men around, doing jobs they wouldn't have been allowed to do before the war started. Pinkard understood that down to the ground. It was how he felt himself He didn't stop sweating just because he'd stopped working for the day.

Spring had come to Birmingham full of promises about what the summer would be like. If those promises weren't so many lies, summer would be hotter than hell, and twice as muggy. Summer in Birmingham was usually like that, so the promises probably held truth.

When he got close to home, Bedford Cunningham waved to him.

Bedford was sitting on his own front porch, with a glass of something unlikely to be water on the rail in front of him. "Come on over after supper, Jeff," he called. "We'll hoist a few." He hoisted the one sitting on the rail.

"Can't tonight," Pinkard answered. "Got a meeting."

"Man alive." Cunningham shook his head, back and forth, back and forth.

By the way he did it, that one on the rail wasn't the first he'd hoisted. "Never reckoned you'd dive into the Freedom Party like a turtle diving off a rock into a creek."

It was, when you got down to it, a pretty fair figure of speech. Jeff felt a lot happier swimming in the river of the Party than he did out on a rock by his lonesome. He said, "Maybe you ought to come along, give yourself somethin' to do besides gettin' lit up."

"I like getting lit up," Cunningham said. "What the hell better have I got to do, anyhow? Can't hardly work, not shy an arm. I'll vote Freedom, sure as hell I will, but I don't fancy sitting around and listening to people making speeches."

"It's not like that," Jeff protested, but Bedford Cunningham was hoisting his glass again. With a shrug, Pinkard went up the walk and into his own house.

"Hello, dear," Emily said. She tilted up her face for a kiss. He gave her one, rather a perfunctory job. She didn't try to improve it. "I know you got your meeting tonight," she went on when he let her go, "so

supper'll be on the table for you in two shakes of a lamb's tail." She went back into the kitchen to dish it out. She didn't shake her own tail, as she would have not so long before.

Jeff paid no attention to the change. "Good thing you remem-bered," he told her. "Barney Stevens is back in town from Rich-mond, and he's going to let us know what those bastards in Congress are up to. I don't want to be late, not for that."

"You won't be," Emily promised, her voice floating out through the hall.

"Come on and set yourself down."

He did, then shoveled chicken and dumplings into his face with the single-minded dedication a stoker might have shown in shoveling coal into a steam engine's firebox. Then, after be-stowing another absentminded kiss on his wife, he headed over to the closest trolley stop for the ride to the livery stable where the Freedom Party still met.

He felt at home there, more even than he did in the cottage he'd shared with Emily since the days before the war. Almost all the men who'd joined the Party were veterans, as he was; they'd fought the damnyankees in Virginia, in Kentucky, in Arkansas, in Sequoyah, in Texas, in Sonora. And most of them had put on white shirts and butternut pants these past few months and gone charging forth to break up rival parties' rallies and to remind the blacks of Birmingham where in the scheme of things they belonged.

"Freedom!" he said every time he shook somebody's hand or slapped somebody else on the back. And men also reached out to clasp his hand and slap his back and hailed him with the one-word greeting that was also a battle cry. He might have been a Freemason or an Odd Fellow: everyone in the livery stable with him was his brother.

Along with everyone else, he stamped and whistled and clapped when Barney Stevens, massive and impressive in a black suit, strode to the front of

the

open

area.

"Freedom!"

Stevens—now

Congressman

Stevens—called.

"Freedom!" his audience roared back. Jefferson Pinkard felt different when he used the slogan along with his comrades. It took on a power then that it lacked when it was simply a greet-ing. It became a promise, and at the same time a warning: anyone who didn't care for the Freedom Party's ideas needed to get out of the way, and in a hurry, too.

"Boys, we've got a power of work to do, and that's a fact," Barney Stevens said. "Nobody's mucked out that big barn they call the Capitol in a hell of a long time. Most of the folks, they've been there since dirt, or else their pappies were there since dirt, and they're taking over after the old man finally upped and dropped dead. Damn fancy-pants bluebloods." Stevens fluttered his hand on a limp wrist. The Freedom Party men howled laughter.

He went on, "But we're starting to get things moving, to hell with me if we're not. This business with passbooks was just the first shell in the bombardment. Let me tell you some of what I mean..."

After a while, Jeff found himself yawning. Stevens wasn't a bad speaker—far from it. But Jeff hadn't joined the Freedom Party to pay close attention to the nuts and bolts of policy. He'd joined because he'd felt down in his bones that something had gone dreadfully wrong with his country and he thought Jake Featherston could fix it.

Exactly how it got fixed didn't matter so much to him as get-ting together every week with other people who followed Feather-ston and going out with them every so often to bust the heads of people who didn't. That brought back the sense of camaraderie he'd known in the trenches: about the only good thing he'd known in the war.

And so, when Barney Stevens went on and on about hearings and taxes and tariffs and labor legislation, Jeff slipped from the middle of the open area in the livery stable toward the back. "Sorry, Grady," he whispered after stepping on another man's toes. He noticed he wasn't the only fellow moving toward the back of the stable, either. Everybody was glad to have Stevens in Congress, but he'd lost part of his audience tonight. He'd been elected to take care of the details, not to bore everybody with them.

Pinkard wasn't the first one to slide out the door. "My wife's a bit poorly,"

he whispered to the two burly guards as he left. They nodded. Odds were, they knew he was lying. He shrugged. He'd been polite—and he'd thrown half a million dollars into the big bowl by the door. As long as he was both polite and paid up, the guards didn't care if he left early.

Since he was leaving early, Emily would probably still be awake. Maybe they'd make the mattress creak when he got home. For some reason, she'd acted kind of standoffish toward him lately. He'd take care of that, by God. Horning it out of her was the best way he knew —he'd enjoy it, too.

He took the trolley to the edge of Sloss company housing, then walked to his cottage. A few people still sat on their front porches, enjoying the fine night air. He wondered if he'd see Bedford Cunningham on his, drunk or passed out. But Bedford must have gone inside to bed, because he wasn't there.

Pinkard's own house was also dark, so he figured Emily had gone to bed, too. Well, if she had, he'd damn well wake her up. He turned his key in the lock. The door didn't squeak as it swung on its hinges. He'd oiled them after he came home from the war, and quietly kept them oiled ever since. He'd caught Emily cheat-ing on him once, and wanted a fair chance to do it again if she stepped out of line. She hadn't, not that he knew of, but.. . .

The hinges didn't squeak, but something in the house was squeaking, squeaking rhythmically. He knew what that noise was. It came from the bedroom. Rage filled him, the same rage he knew when he put on white and butternut and went off to break heads, but focused now, as if with a burning glass.

"God damn you, Emily, you little whore!" he bellowed, and stomped down the hall toward the bedroom.

Twin cries of horror greeted him, one Emily's, the other a man's. They were closely followed by scrabbling noises, a thump, and the sound of running feet. Whoever'd been in there with Emily hadn't wanted to face Jeff.

As Jeff stormed in, his feet caught on something, then kicked something else: a man's tangled trousers and his shoe. Whoever the

fellow was, he'd de-parted too quickly to bother retrieving his clothes.

"Jeff, honey, listen to me—" Emily spoke in a quick, high, desperate voice.

"Shut up," he said, and she did. She hugged the blanket to her-self. The moonlight sliding in through the window—the window through which her lover had fled—showed her arms pale and bare against the dark blue wool.

He yanked the blanket off her. She was naked under it. He'd known she would be. Breathing hard, he lashed out and slapped her twice, forehand and backhand, fast as a striking snake. She gasped, but made no other sound. If he killed her on the spot, no jury would convict him. She had to know as much.

When he'd caught her the first time, she'd used all her bodily charms to mollify him. It had worked, too, even if he'd felt filthy and used as he traveled back to the front in west Texas. Now he aimed to use his body to take revenge. He undid his trousers, let them fall to the floor, and flung himself upon her.

She endured everything he did without a whimper, without a protest. In other circumstances, he might have admired that. Now he just wanted to break her, as if she were a wild horse. When his imagination and stamina ran out at last, he got up from the bed and lit the gas lamp above it. Having spent himself again and again, he was prepared to go easy—and too worn to do anything else.

Or so he thought, till he saw that the shirt on the floor had the left sleeve pinned up. "Bedford," he whispered in a deadly voice. Emily's face went pale as skimmed milk, which only made the bruises he'd given her look darker.

He pulled up his pants, then yanked her out of the bed and slung her over his shoulder. She squealed then, squealed and kicked. Ignoring everything she did, he carried her out of the cottage and dumped her, still naked, on the walk. Then he went back inside and locked the door behind him.

When she came up crying and wailing, he shouted, "Go to hell. You made your choice. Now you pay for it." He'd made his choice, too. *I'll live with it,* he thought. He went back to the bed-room, lay down, and fell asleep right away.

Arthur McGregor worried every time he left the room he'd taken in the cheap Winnipeg boardinghouse. He worried while he was in the room, too.

That wasn't because inside his trunk sat a wooden box containing the largest, finest bomb he'd ever made. He wor-ried about the bomb when he left the room: he worried that some-one would discover it, and that he wouldn't be able to use it.

When he was in the sparsely furnished room, he worried about the farm.

He worried about whether Maude and Julia and Mary could do everything that needed doing without his being there. He also occasionally worried about whether the story he and his family had put about—that he'd gone to visit cousins back in Ontario—would hold up under close scrutiny. If some bright Yank added two and two and happened to come up with four...

But the Yank likeliest to do that, Major Hannebrink, was dead. McGregor had made sure of that, and he'd got away with it. Now he was going to make sure of General Custer's demise, too, and he thought he could get away with that. And, if he couldn't, he was willing if not eager to pay the price.

"Strike a blow for freedom," he muttered under his breath as he went downstairs for breakfast.

He wasn't used to eating anyone's cooking but Maude's. The eggs here were fried too hard, while the bacon felt rubbery be-tween his teeth.

Morning chatter flowed around him. Apart from a "Good day" or two and a couple of polite nods, he added noth-ing to it.

Off he went, for all the world as if he had a job to which he didn't want to be late. His landlady thought he did have a regular job. He'd made certain she thought that. If she thought anything different, the Yanks were liable to hear about it. That was the last thing he wanted.

Almost three years after the end of the Great War, Winnipeg presented an odd mixture of rubble and shiny new buildings, as if a phoenix had risen halfway from the ashes. In another few years, McGregor thought, it might turn into a handsome city again. The rubble would be forgotten. So would the buildings and the hopes from which that rubble had been made. The new Winnipeg would be an American city, not a Canadian one.

HORNE'S HOUSE PAINTS, said a sign on Donald Street. 37 COLORS

AVAILABLE. If Horne had been in business before 1914, if he wasn't a johnny-come-lately Yank, his sign would have advertised 37 COLOURS

then. Even spelling changed under U.S. rule.

McGregor scowled. To him, COLORS looked clipped, unnatu-ral...

American. He stepped off the curb—and almost got clipped himself, by an American motorcar. An angry blast from the Ford's horn sent him leaping back onto the sidewalk. "Watch out, you goddamn hayseed!" the driver screamed, in an accent unmistak-ably from the USA. "Ain't you never seen an automobile be-fore?" He stepped on the gas and whizzed away before McGregor could say a single word.

"Christ!" McGregor wiped his forehead on his sleeve. "That'd be all I need, stepping out in front of one of those damn things when I'm carrying .

.." He let his voice trail away. He did not intend to mention out loud what he might be carrying. He wouldn't have come so close had he not just come close to get-ting killed.

Had so many motorcars scurried through the streets of Winni-peg before the Great War? McGregor had come up to the city only a couple of times in those days, so he couldn't be sure, but he didn't think so. It might end up prosperous as well as handsome.

He didn't care. He would sooner have been poor under King George than rich under the Stars and Stripes. The Yanks had taken his country away from him. If they expected him to be happy about it, they were in for a disappointment.

As a matter of fact, if they expected him to be happy about it, they were in for a *big* disappointment. He chuckled grimly—so grimly that a fellow in a business suit edged away from him. He didn't notice. He wanted to make sure their disappointment was as big as possible.

He crossed the Donald Street bridge over the Assiniboine and strolled past a three-story building that had somehow come through the war intact.

Soldiers in green-gray with pot-shaped helmets stood guard around

the building in sandbagged machine-gun nests that gave it a formidable defensive perimeter. He didn't linger. The U.S. guards asked pointed—or sometimes blunt— questions of people naive enough to linger around General Cus-ter's headquarters.

They would, without a doubt, ask even more pointed—or perhaps blunt—questions of anyone foolhardy enough to try to leave a wooden box anywhere in the neighborhood. McGregor had seen as much on his last trip to Winnipeg.

There was a park not far away. It didn't even boast children's swings. All it had were grass and a few benches. McGregor sat down on the grass and waited for noon. He'd done that a good many times by now, and come to know the park well. The earth here was not smooth, but full of round depressions of different sizes and depths. A narrow zigzag strip of low ground, partly obliterated by the depressions, ran across the park from east to west. The troops defending Winnipeg had made a stand here. McGregor grunted. They'd failed, damn them.

He wasn't the only one out on this fine, mild day. Boys and girls frolicked where shells had burst and men had bled. An unshaven man in a filthy Canadian Army greatcoat and tattered khaki trousers lifted a bottle to his lips. He set it down slowly and reluctantly, as if its opening were the mouth of his beloved. In a drunken way, that was bound to be so.

McGregor killed time till the bells of the St. Boniface Cathe-dral, across the Red River, chimed twelve. He got up and ambled back by Custer's headquarters. He'd timed it perfectly. He'd just gone past the building when a chauffeur-driven Packard—the motorcar that had almost run him down in Rosenfeld when Cus-ter was on his way up to Winnipeg—pulled away from the front of the place. He kept on walking, hardly looking at the automo-bile, and turned west, away from the Red River.

After a little while, he went up Kennedy. Sure as the devil, there in front of a chophouse called Hy's sat the Packard. The chauffeur remained on the front seat, eating a sandwich. General Custer and his aide, a tubby officer who seemed to accompany him everywhere, had gone inside.

McGregor smiled to himself. Custer dined at Hy's every Mon-day, Wednesday, and Friday. He was reliable as clockwork. He ate his dinner somewhere else—McGregor hadn't been able to find out where —on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So far as McGregor could tell, no

swarm of guards surrounded him here.

Luck had had very little to do with McGregor's discovering his weekday routine, or at least three-fifths of it. The embittered farmer had taken to tramping the streets of Winnipeg during the dinner hour, looking for that Packard. Patience paid, as patience has a way of doing. McGregor walked past the motorcar on the other side of the street. The driver paid him no attention what-ever. Had he suddenly turned around and gone back the way he'd come, that might have drawn the fellow's notice to him.

He couldn't have that, not when he was so close. He made his way back to the park, though he didn't go past Custer's head-quarters this time. "Now they shouldn't see me at all," he said as he sat down on the grass once more. No one heard him. The children were gone. The ex-soldier had passed out. His bottle lay empty beside him.

A little past five, McGregor returned to the boardinghouse. He ate the landlady's frugal supper without complaint. After-wards, he went up to his room and read *Quentin Durward* till he grew sleepy. Then he turned off the electric lamp and, so far as he knew, didn't stir till morning.

Since the next day was Thursday, Custer wouldn't be dining at Hy's.

McGregor walked in, went over to the bar, and ordered himself a Moosehead. As he drank the beer, he studied the place. He couldn't very well plant the bomb among the seats; he had nowhere to conceal it there.

But a lot of tables were close to the bar, and he'd packed a lot of dynamite and a lot of tenpenny nails for shrapnel into the wooden case he'd brought up from the farm. If he could hide it under the bar somewhere, that stood a good chance of doing the trick. The blast might even bring down the whole building. .. if the detonation worked as it should.

He worried about that, too. He'd known from his earlier trip to Winnipeg that he'd have to set this bomb and leave it. To make it go off when he wanted it to, he'd brought up an alarm clock, which he would set while he was planting the bomb. When it rang, the vibrating hammer and bells would set off the blasting caps he'd pack around them, which would in turn set off the dy-namite. So he hoped, at any rate. But he knew the method was less reliable than a tripwire or a fuse.

"It will work," he whispered fiercely. "It *has* to work."

He got out of bed at two the next morning and sneaked out of the boardinghouse. He carried the bomb on his back with straps, as if it were a soldier's pack. In one pocket of his coat were caps, in the other a small electric torch and a pry bar.

Winnipeg remained under curfew. If a patrolling U.S. soldier spotted him, he was liable to be shot then and there. If he got shot, he was liable to go straight to the moon then and there, in fragments of various sizes. He was taking any number of mad chances with this venture, and knew it. He didn't care, not any more. Like a soldier about to go over the top, he was irrevocably committed.

An alley ran behind Hy's. Motion there made his heart spring into his mouth, but it was only a cat leaping out of a garbage can. He wondered if the restaurant had a burglar alarm. He would find out by experiment. He let out a long, happy sigh when the back door yielded to the pry bar almost at once.

Tiptoeing through the kitchen, he came out in back of the bar, as if he were the greasy-haired gent who tended it. Only when he crouched behind it did he turn on the torch. He felt like cheering on seeing not only plenty of room under the bar to stash the bomb but also a burlap bag with which to hide it.

He wound the alarm clock and set it for one, then pried up the lid to the bomb, set the clock in place, and, handling them very carefully, packed the blasting caps by the bells. Then he replaced the lid, covered the box with the burlap sack, and left by the route he'd used to come. He closed the door behind him, risking the torch once more to see if the pry marks were too visible. He grinned: he could hardly see them at all. Odds were, no one else would even notice he'd come and gone.

He reentered the boardinghouse as stealthily as he'd left. Go-ing back to sleep was hard. Getting up to appear to go to work was even harder. When he departed after breakfast, he didn't pass by Custer's headquarters, but used the next street over to head for the park. He settled himself on the grass to wait.

St. Boniface's bells chimed the hours. After they rang twelve times, he began to fidget. Time seemed to crawl on hands and knees. How long till one o'clock? Forever? No. Before the bells chimed one, a far greater and more discordant blast of sound echoed through Winnipeg.

Arthur McGregor sprang to his feet, shouting in delight. He frightened a few pigeons near him. Other than the pigeons, no one paid him the least attention.

Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling eyed General Custer with a sort of sad certainty. The old boy was having altogether too much fun for his own good.

When his wife noticed how much fun he'd been having—and Libbie would; oh yes, she would— she would have some sharp things to say about it.

For the moment, though, Custer was doing the talking. He liked nothing better. 'All in the line of duty," he boomed, like a courting prairie chicken.

"All in the line of duty, my dear."

The reporter's pencil scratched across the notebook page, fill-ing it with shorthand pothooks and squiggles. "Tell me more," Ophelia Clemens said.

"Tell me how you happened to decide the War Department was using barrels the wrong way and how you came up with one that proved more effective."

"I'd be glad to," Custer said with a smile broad enough to show off all the coffee-stained splendor of his store-bought teeth.

I'll bet you would, Dowling thought. He wouldn't have minded having Ophelia Clemens interview him, either. She was a fine-looking woman —somewhere between forty and forty-five, Dowl-ing guessed—with red-gold hair very lightly streaked with gray, and with an hourglass figure that had yielded nothing (well, next to nothing) to time.

Instead of answering her question, as he'd said he would, Cus-ter asked one of his own: "How'd a pretty lady like you get into the newspaper business, anyhow? Most reporters I know have mustaches and smoke cigars."

Miss Clemens—she wore no wedding band—shrugged. "My father was in the business for fifty years, till he died ten years ago. He taught me everything I know. For whatever it may be worth to you, he wore a mustache and smoked cigars. Now, then—" She repeated the question

about barrels.

She s sharp as a tack behind that pretty smile, Abner Dowling judged.

Custer hadn't figured that out yet; the pretty smile was all he noticed. His answer proved as much. He didn't quite say God and a choir of angels had delivered the new doctrine for bar-rels to him from on high, but he certainly implied it.

Ophelia Clemens tapped the unsharpened end of her pencil against the spiral wire that held her notebook together. "Isn't another reason the fact that you've been known for headlong at-tacks straight at the foe ever since the days of the War of Se-cession, and that barrels offered you the chance to do that again, except in a new way?"

Dowling wanted to kiss her for reasons that had nothing to do with the way she looked. She *was* sharp as a tack, by God. Custer had done nothing but go straight at the enemy all through the Great War. First Army had suffered gruesomely, too, sending at-tack after attack straight into the teeth of the Rebs' defensive po-sitions. If not for barrels, Custer would probably still be banging heads with his Confederate opposite numbers down in Tennessee.

Now he said, "What was that, Miss Clemens? My ears aren't quite what they used to be, I'm afraid." Dowling had seen him use that selective deafness before. He wasn't too hard of hearing, not considering how old he was. But he was, and always had been, ever so hard of listening.

Patiently, Ophelia Clemens repeated the question, changing not a single word. As she did so, the bells of St. Boniface's Cathedral, over on the east side of the Red River, announced the noon hour.

Custer had no trouble hearing the bells, even if he managed to miss the question again. He said, "Perhaps you'll take luncheon with my adjutant and me, Miss Ophelia. There's a very fine chophouse not ten minutes away that I visit regularly: in fact, I have a motorcar laid on that should be pulling up in front of this building right about now."

"I'd be delighted," the reporter said, "provided we can keep working through it. That way, my editors won't mind picking up the tab forme."

"Oh, very well," Custer said with poor grace. He'd no doubt wanted to use the luncheon as a breather from her astute ques-tions. But Ophelia

Clemens wasn't half bad at getting her own way, either.

When they boarded the chauffeured Packard, Custer got his way, placing himself between Dowling and Miss Clemens. The seat was crowded for three: both he and his adjutant took up a good deal of space. Had Custer been so tightly squeezed against another officer, he would have had something rude to say about Dowling's girth. As things were, he didn't complain a bit.

"Hy's, Gallwitz," Dowling said, realizing the general was otherwise occupied.

"Yes, sir." The chauffeur put the Packard in gear.

At the chophouse, Custer got himself a double whiskey and tried to press the same on Ophelia Clemens. She contented her-self with a glass of red wine. Dowling ordered a Moosehead. Say whatever else you would about them, the Canucks brewed better beer than they did down in the States.

Custer ordered a mutton chop and then, his glass having some-how emptied itself, another double whiskey. Dowling chose the mutton, too; Hy's did it splendidly. Miss Clemens ordered a small sirloin—likely, Dowling thought, to keep from having to match Custer in any way.

The second double vanished as fast as the first had done. Cus-ter began talking a blue streak. He wasn't always perfectly clear, but he wasn't always perfectly clear sober, either. Even after the food arrived, Ophelia Clemens kept taking notes. "Tell me," she said, "from the viewpoint of the commanding general, what is the hardest thing about occupying Canada?"

"There's too much of it, and I haven't got a quarter of the troops I need,"

Custer answered. Drunk or sober, that was his constant complaint, and one with a good deal of truth to it, too. He cut a big bite off his chop and continued with his mouth full: "Not a chance in . . . blazes of getting the men I need, either, not with the . . . blasted Socialists holding the purse strings in their stingy fists."

"You would favor a third term for TR, then?" Miss Clemens asked: a shrewd jab if she knew of the rivalry between Roosevelt and Custer, as she evidently did.

I'm a soldier, and shouldn 't discuss politics, would have been the discreet answer. But Custer had already started discussing politics, and was discreet only by accident. He'd just put another forkful of mutton into his mouth when he got the question, and bit down hard on it, the meat, and the fork, all at the same time.

He bit down hard literally as well as metaphorically. Too hard, in fact: Dowling heard a snapping noise. Custer exclaimed in dismay: "Oh, fow Jeshush Chwisht'sh shake! I've bwoken my uppuh pwate!" He raised his napkin to his mouth and removed the pieces.

"I'm terribly sorry, General," Ophelia Clemens said. Her green eyes might have sparkled. They definitely didn't twinkle. Dowling admired her self-control.

He went over to the bartender and got the name and address of a nearby dentist. "He'll have you fixed up in jig time, sir," Dowling said, and then, "I'm sorry, Miss Clemens, but it looks like we're going to break up early today."

"That'sh wight," Custer said, nodding. "I'm showwy, too, Mish Ophewia, but I've got to get thish fikshed."

"I understand." Ophelia Clemens kept on taking notes and asking questions. Dowling wondered if Custer's embarrassment would become news from coast to coast. *If so, too bad,* Dowling thought. Custer had always courted publicity. That usually paid handsome dividends. Every once in a while, it took a bite out of him.

When they got out to the automobile, Dowling told Gallwitz where to take Custer. Ophelia Clemens got in, too. No matter how mushy Custer sounded, she wanted to finish the interview. "Yes, sir," the chauffeur said, stolid as always. He started the en-gine; the Packard rolled smoothly down Kennedy Street.

He'd just turned right onto Broadway, where the dentist had his office, when the world blew up behind the motorcar. The roar sounded like the end of the world, that was for sure. Windows shattered on both sides of the street, showering passersby with glass. The Packard's windshield shattered, too. Most of the glass it held, luckily, blew away from the chauffeur. Gallwitz shouted anyway, in surprise and maybe fright as well.

Dowling could hardly blame him.

And Custer shouted, "Shtop the automobiwe! Tu'n awound! Go back!

We've got to shee what happened and what we can do to he'p!" He should have sounded ridiculous—an old man with no teeth, real or false, in his upper jaw, bellowing like a maniac. Somehow, he didn't.

"Yes, sir," Gallwitz said, and spun the motorcar through a U-turn that would have earned him a ticket from any traffic cop in the world.

"My God," Dowling said when he saw the devastation on Kennedy. "My God," he repeated when he saw where the devas-tation centered. "That's Hy's. I mean, that was Hy's." Only rubble remained of the chophouse, rubble from which smoke and flames were beginning to rise.

"A bomb," Ophelia Clemens said crisply. "A bomb undoubt-edly meant for you, General Custer. What do you make of that?" She poised pencil above notebook to record his answer.

"Cowa'd'sh way to fight," he said, as if he'd almost forgotten she was there—most unusual for Custer with a journalist, espe-cially a good-looking female journalist, in range. "Canucksh have awwaysh been cowa'd'sh."

Even now, Custer got in a dig at the country from which the men who'd killed his brother had come. He pounded Gallwitz on the shoulder. "Shtop!"

Gallwitz did, as close as he could get to the shattered Hy's. Custer sprang out of the Packard. "Come on, Dowwing! Let'sh shee if we can weshcue anybody!"

Dowling came. Men and women were spilling out of the shops and houses and offices around Hy's, some bleeding and scream-ing, others looking around for someone to lead them into action. Custer did just that, and people hastened to obey his orders even if his voice did sound mushy or maybe drunk. With a plain problem set right in front of his face, he was a world-beater.

"Buwwy!" he cried when Dowling and a fellow in a barber's white shirt and apron dragged a groaning, smoke-blackened man from the ruins of Hy's.

"Now—have we got a docto'? We need a bucket bwigade to keep the fwamesh down unti' a fiwe engine getsh heah. You, you, and you! Find wunning watuh! We've got to do what we can!"

"He's in his element, isn't he?" Ophelia Clemens said to Dowling.

"Yes, ma'am," Custer's adjutant answered. Loyally, he went on, "You see what a fine commander he is."

"Oh, poppycock," she said. "These are the talents of a captain or a major, not the talents of a four-star general. The evidence that he *has* the talents of a four-star general is moderately thin on the ground, wouldn't you say?"

"No, ma'am," Dowling replied, loyal still, though he thought Miss Clemens had hit the nail right on the head. With someone pointing his battalion at an enemy strongpoint and saying *Take it,* Custer would go right at it, ahead of all his men, and take the position or die trying. During the Great War, an awful lot of his men had died trying, because smashing through was all he'd ever known.

Here, for one brief shining moment, fate—and the luck of a broken dental plate—had put him back in his element. Was he enjoying himself? Looking at him, listening to his insistent com-mands, Dowling could not doubt he was.

A woman stuck a box of arrowroot cough lozenges into her hand-bag.

"Thank you kindly," she told Reggie Bartlett. "Freedom!"

Reggie grimaced, as he did whenever he heard that salutation. "Those people are crazy, and there's more of them every day," he said to his boss.

Jeremiah Harmon shrugged. "Their money spends as good as anybody else's," he said, and then gave a thumbs-down. "Which is to say, not very."

He laughed. So did Reggie. He'd charged the woman a quarter of a million dollars for her lozenges, and wasn't sure whether the drugstore had made or lost money on the transaction.

A tall, rather pale man about his own age came up to the counter and set down ajar of shaving soap. He looked vaguely familiar, though Bartlett couldn't recall where he'd seen him before. "Good to hear somebody who can't stand the Freedom Party lunatics and isn't afraid to come out and say so," he remarked.

When he spoke, Reggie knew him. "You're Tom, uh, Brearley. You

married Maggie Simpkins after she showed me the door."

"So I did, and happy I did it, too," Brearley answered. He looked at Reggie out of the corner of his eye, as if wondering whether the druggist's assistant were about to grab a stove lifter and try to brain him with it.

Reggie harbored no such intentions. He wanted to talk about the Freedom Party, was what he wanted to do. Instead of a stove lifter, he brandished a newspaper at Brearley. "Ten thousand people for a rally down in Charleston the other day, if you can believe it. Ten thousand people!" He opened up the paper and went hunting for the quotation he wanted: " Tarty district man-ager Roger Kimball told the cheering crowd. "This is only the beginning." ' "

"Jesus Christ!" Brearley started violently, then checked him-self. "Doesn't surprise me one damn bit that he ended up in the Freedom Party," he said.

"He would, as a matter of fact. As bloodthirsty a son of a bitch as ever hatched out of his egg."

"You know him?" Reggie asked, as he was surely supposed to.

"I was his executive officer aboard the *Bonefish* for most of the last two years of the war—till the very end." Brearley looked as if he'd started to add something to that, but ended up holding his peace.

"That's a real kick in the head." Bartlett shuffled through the newspaper again. "Other thing it says here is that a gal named Anne Colleton's been pumping money into the Party down in South Carolina. 'We have to put our country back on its feet again,' she says."

He'd surprised Brearley again. "You know Anne Colleton?" the former Navy man asked.

"If I knew a rich lady, would I be working here?" Bartlett asked. From the back of the drugstore, his boss snorted. Brear-ley chuckled. Reggie went on, "On the Roanoke front, though, I had a CO name of Colleton, Tom Colleton. He was from South Carolina, too. Her husband, I bet, or maybe her brother."

"Brother." Brearley's voice held certainty. "She's not married. Roger knows her, any way you want to take the word. Every time he'd come back to the boat after a leave, he'd brag like a fifteen-year-old who just laid his first nigger whore."

"Small world," Reggie said. "You know him, I know her brother, they know each other." He blinked; he hadn't intended to burst into rhyme.

"I wonder how well they know each other," Brearley said in musing tones.

He caught the gleam in Reggie's eye and shook his head. "No, not like that.

But Roger's done some things that don't bear bragging about. You'd best believe he has."

"Oh, yeah?" Reggie set his elbows on the countertop and leaned across it. "What kind of things?"

But Brearley shook his head in a different way. "The less I say, the better off I'll be, and the better off you're liable to be, too. But if I could tell my story to Anne Colleton, that might drive a wedge between 'em, and that couldn't help hurting the Party."

"Anything that hurts the Freedom Party sounds good to me." Reggie leaned forward even more. "How about this? Suppose I write a letter to Tom Colleton? I'll tell him you want to talk to his sister because you know something important."

"He's liable to be in the Freedom Party up to his eyebrows, too," Brearley said.

"If he is, I'm only out a stamp," Bartlett answered. "What's ten grand? Not worth worrying about. But his name isn't in the paper, so maybe he's not."

"All right, go ahead and do it," Brearley said. "But be myste-rious about it, you hear? Don't mention my name. Just say you know somebody. This really could be my neck if these people decide to come after me, and they might."

"I'll be careful," Bartlett promised. He wondered if Brearley was in as much danger as he thought he was, or if he was letting his imagination run away with him. Had Reggie cared more about losing Maggie Simpkins, he might have thought about avenging himself on the ex-Navy man. As a matter of fact, he did think about it, but only idly.

Brearley took out his wallet. "What do I owe you for this?" he asked,

pointing to the almost forgotten shaving soap.

"Four and a quarter," Reggie said. "Good thing you got it now. If you came in here next week, you can bet it'd cost more."

"Yeah, that's not as bad as I thought." Brearley handed Reggie a crisp, new $500,000 banknote. Reggie gave him a $50,000 bank-note, two $10,000 notes, and one valued at a minuscule $5,000. As he made change, he laughed, remembering when—not so very long before—the idea of a $5,000 banknote, let alone one worth half a million dollars, would have been too absurd for words.

"I will write that letter," Reggie said. "I saw this Jake Feather-ston on a stump not long after the war ended—so long ago, you could still buy things for a dollar. I thought he was crazy then, and I haven't seen anything since to make me want to change my mind."

"Roger Kimball's not crazy, but he can be as mean as a badger with a tin can tied to its tail," Brearley said. "Not the sort of fellow you'd want for an enemy, and not the sort of fellow who's got a lot of savory friends."

"Maybe we'll be able to bring both of 'em down, or help, anyway," Reggie said. "Here's hoping." He paused. "If you care to, give my best to Maggie.

If you don't care to, I'll understand, believe me."

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't." Brearley picked up the shaving soap and walked out of the drugstore. Bartlett nodded at his back. He hadn't expected anything much different. Then he nodded again. Anything he could do to sidetrack the Freedom Party struck him as worthwhile.

Jeremiah Harmon came up and set a bottle full of murky brown liquid on the shelf below the counter. "Here's Mr. Madison's purgative," the druggist said. "If this one doesn't shift him, by God, nothing ever will. I reckon he'll be by after he gets off at the bank."

"All right, boss," Bartlett said. "I'll remember it's there "

"That's fine." Harmon hesitated, then went on, "You want to be careful what you get yourself into, Reggie. I heard some of what you and that fellow were talking about. All I've got to say is, when a little man gets in the prize ring with a big tough man, they're going to carry him out kicking no matter how game he is. You understand what I'm telling

you?"

"I sure do." Reggie took a deep breath. "Other side of the coin is this, though: if nobody gets in the ring with a big tough man, he'll go and pick fights on his own." That didn't come out exactly the way he'd wanted it to; he hoped Harmon followed what he'd meant.

Evidently, the druggist did. "All right, son," he said. "It's a free country—more or less, anyway. You can do as you please. I wanted to make sure you didn't do anything before you thought it through."

"Oh, I've done that," Reggie assured him. "My own govern-ment sent me out into the trenches. The damnyankees shot me twice and caught me twice. What can the Freedom Party do to me that's any worse?"

"Nothing, maybe, if you put it like that," Harmon allowed. "All right, then, go ahead—not that you need my permission. And good luck to you. I've got the feeling you're liable to need it." He went back to his station at the rear of the store and began compounding another mixture.

In due course, Mr. Madison did appear. Reggie's opinion was that his bowels would perform better if he lost weight and got some exercise. Like most people, Madison cared nothing for Reggie's opinion. Studying the bottle, he said, "You're sure this one is going to work?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Reggie said. "Mr. Harmon says it's a regular what-do-you-call-it—a depth charge, that's it. Whatever's trou-bling you, it won't be."

"Christ, I hope not." As Mrs. Dinwiddie had done before, as people had a habit of doing, the bank clerk proceeded to tell Bartlett much more about the state of his intestinal tract than Reggie had ever wanted to know. After far too long, Madison laid down his money, picked up the precious purgative, and departed.

Reggie paid less attention to his work the rest of that day than he should have. He knew as much, but couldn't help it. His boss overlooked lapses that would have earned a dressing-down most of the time. Harmon had no great love for the Freedom Party, even if he declined to get very excited about it.

At last, Reggie got to go home. The bare little flat where he lived wasn't anything much. Tonight, it didn't need to be. He found a clean sheet of paper and wrote the letter. Then—another triumph—he found an envelope.

He frowned. How to address it?

After some thought, he settled on *Major Tom Colleton, Marsh-lands Plantation, South Carolina.* He had no idea whether the plantation was still a going concern; he'd been in a Yankee prisoner-of-war camp when the black rebellion broke out in the CSA. With that address, though, the letter ought to get to the right Tom Colleton. He was just glad he'd managed to recall the name of the plantation; he couldn't have heard it more than a couple of times.

He licked a stamp and set it on the envelope. The stamp didn't have a picture of Davis or Lee or Longstreet or Jackson or a scene of Confederate soldiers triumphing over the damnyan-kees, as most issues up through the war had done. It said c.s. POSTAGE at the top. The design, if it deserved such a name, was of many concentric circles. Printed over it in black were the

words TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS.

His important work done, Reggie read the *Richmond Exam-iner* and then a couple of chapters of a war novel written by someone who didn't seem to have come close to the front. Reg-gie liked that sort better than the realistic ones: it gave him something to laugh at. The way things were, he took laughter wherever he could find it.

The next morning, he woke up before the alarm clock did its best to imitate a shell whistling down on his trench. He hadn't done that in a while.

After frying himself some eggs, he carried the letter to the mailbox on the corner and dropped it in. He nodded, well pleased, as he headed toward Harmon's drugstore. If he'd dawdled for a week, the cost of a stamp would probably have gone up to $25,000.

He looked back over his shoulder at the mailbox. "Well," he said, "let's see what that does."

Jonathan Moss turned the key in his mailbox. Since he was sober, he had no trouble choosing the proper key or getting it to fit. Whether the mail would be worth having once he took it out of the box was another question.

The bulk of what he got went straight into the trash.

"There ought to be a law against wasting people's time with so much

nonsense," he said. He knew perfectly well that such a law would violate the First Amendment. Faced with a blizzard of advertising circulars, he had trouble caring about free-speech issues.

Then he saw the envelope franked with a two-cent stamp with an ONTARIO overprint. His heart neither fluttered nor leaped. He let out a resigned sigh. He wouldn't throw that envelope into the wastebasket unopened, as he would a lot of others, but he'd learned better than to get too excited about such things.

When he got up to his apartment, he slit the envelope open. It held just what he'd expected: a postal money order and a note. The money order was for $ 12.50. The note read, *Dear Mr. Moss, With this latest payment I now owe you $41.50.1 hope to get it all to you by the end of the year.*

The crops look pretty good, so I should have the money. God bless you again for helping me. Laura Secord.

She'd been sending him such money orders, now for this amount, now for that, since the middle of winter. He'd written her that it wasn't necessary.

She'd ignored him. The only thing he'd managed to do—and it hadn't been easy—was persuade her she didn't owe him any interest.

"Lord, what a stiff-necked woman," he muttered. He'd real-ized that when he was up in Canada during the war. She hadn't bent an inch in her animosity toward the Americans.

He'd made her bend to the extent of being polite to him. He hadn't made her bend to the extent of wanting to stay obligated to him one instant longer than she had to. As soon as she'd paid off the last of what she owed, she could go back to pretending he didn't exist.

He couldn't even refuse to redeem the money orders. Oh, he could have, but it wouldn't have made things any easier for Laura Secord. She'd already laid out the cash to buy the orders. Not redeeming them would have been cutting off his nose to spite his face.

"Haven't you done enough of that already?" he asked himself. Since he had no good answer, he didn't try to give himself one.

He cooked a little beefsteak on the stove, then put some lard in with the drippings and fried a couple of potatoes to go with it. That didn't make a fancy supper, but it got rid of the empty feel-ing in his belly.

He washed the plate and silverware and scrubbed the frying pan with steel wool. His housekeeping was on the same order as his cooking: functional, efficient, uninspired.

Once he'd taken care of it, he hit the books. Bar examinations would be coming up in the summer. Much as he'd enjoyed most of his time at the Northwestern law school, he didn't care to wait around another semester to retake the exams after failing.

A tome he studied with particular diligence was titled. *Occu-pation Law: Administration and Judicial Proceedings in the New American Colonial Empire.* The field, naturally, had swollen in importance since the end of the Great War. Before the war, it had hardly been part of U.S. jurisprudence at all, as the United States, unlike England, France, and Japan, had owned no colo-nial empire. How things had changed in the few years since!

Oc-cupation law was said to form a large part of the examination nowadays.

Moss told himself that was the only reason he worked so hard with the text. Still, if he decided to hang out his shingle some-where up in Canada, it behooved him to know what he was do-ing, didn't it? He didn't think about hanging out his shingle anywhere near Arthur, Ontario .. . not more than a couple of times, anyway.

He realized he couldn't study all the time, not if he wanted to stay within gibbering distance of sane. The next morning, he met his friend Fred Sandburg at the coffeehouse where they'd whiled away—wasted, if one felt uncharitable about it—so much time since coming to law school.

"You've got that look in your eye again," Sandburg said. Moss knew he was a better legal scholar than his friend, but he wouldn't have wanted to go up against Fred in a courtroom: Sandburg was ever so much better at reading people than he was at reading books. He went on, "How much did she send you this time?"

"Twelve-fifty," Moss answered. He paused to order coffee, then asked,

"How the devil do you do that?"

"All in the wrist, Johnny my boy; all in the wrist." Sandburg cocked his, as if about to loose one of those newfangled for-ward passes on the gridiron.

Moss snorted. His friend said, "No, seriously—I don't think it's something you can explain. Sort of like card sense, if you know what I mean."

"Only by hearing people talk about it," Jonathan Moss con-fessed sheepishly. "When I played cards during the war, I lost all the damn time.

Finally, I quit playing. That's about as close to card sense as I ever got."

"Closer than a lot of people come, believe me," Fred Sand-burg said.

"Some of the guys I played with in the trenches, it'd take inflation like the damn Rebs are having to get them out of the holes they dug for themselves."

Up came the waitress. She set coffee in front of Moss and Sand-burg.

Sandburg patted her on the hip—not quite on the backside, but close —as she turned away. She kept walking, but smiled at him over her shoulder.

Moss was gloomily certain that, had he tried the same thing, he'd have ended up with hot coffee in his lap and a slap planted on his kisser. But Fred had people sense, no two ways about it.

Moss decided to put his pal's people sense to some use and to change the subject, both at the same time: "You think Teddy Roosevelt can win a third term?"

"He's sure running for one, isn't he?" Sandburg said. "I think he may very well, especially if the Socialists throw Debs into the ring again. You'd figure they'd have better sense, but you never can tell, can you? As a matter of fact, I hope Teddy loses. Win-ning would set a bad precedent."

"Why?" Moss asked. "Don't you think he's done enough to deserve to get elected again? If anybody ever did, he's the one."

"I won't argue with you there," Sandburg said. "What bothers me is that, if he wins a third term, somewhere down the line somebody who doesn't deserve it will run, and he'll win, too."

"All right. I see what you're saying," Moss told him, nodding. "How many other people will worry about that, though?"

"I don't know," Sandburg admitted. "I don't see how anybody could know.

But I'll bet the answer is, *more than you'd think.* If it weren't, we'd have elected someone to a third term long before this."

"I suppose so." Moss sipped his coffee. He watched people stroll past the coffeehouse. When a man with only one leg stumped by on a pair of crutches, he sighed and said, "I wonder how the fellows who didn't come through the war would vote now if they had a chance."

"Probably not a whole lot different than the way our gen-eration will end up voting," Sandburg said. Moss nodded; that was likely to be true. His friend continued, "But we're in the Half Generation, Johnny my boy. Every vote we cast will count double, because so many of us haven't even got graves to call our own."

"The Half Generation," Moss repeated slowly. "That's not a bad name for it." He waved for the waitress and ordered a shot of brandy to go with the coffee. Only after he'd knocked back the shot did he ask the question that had come into his mind: "Did you ever feel like you didn't deserve to come back in one piece? Like fellows who were better than you died, but you just kept going?"

"Better fighters? I don't know about that," Fred Sandburg said. "Harder to tell on the ground than it was in the air, I expect. But I figured out a long time ago that it's just fool luck I'm still breathing and the fellow next to me caught a bullet in the neck. I don't guess that's too far from what you're saying."

"It's not," Moss said. For that matter, Sandburg had caught two bullets and was still breathing. No doubt luck had a great deal to do with that. Moss wished there were something more to it. "I feel I ought to be living my own life better than I am, to make up for all the lives that got cut short. Does that make any sense to you?"

"Some, yeah." Sandburg cocked an eyebrow. "That's why you're still mooning over this Canuck gal who sends you rolls of pennies every couple of weeks, is it? Makes sense to me."

"God damn you." But Moss couldn't even work up the energy to sound properly indignant. His buddy had got him fair and square. He defended himself as best he could: "You don't really have much say about who you fall in love with."

"Maybe not," Sandburg said. "But you're not quite ready to be a plaster

saint yet, either, and don't forget it."

"I don't want to be a plaster saint," Moss said. "All I want is to be a better person than I am." This time, he caught the gleam in Fred's eye. "You tell me that wouldn't be hard and I'll give you a kick in the teeth."

"I wasn't going to say anything of the sort," Sandburg an-swered primly.

"And I'll be damned if you can prove anything different."

"You're not in court now, Counselor," Moss said, and they both laughed.

"But what the devil are we going to do—the Half Generation, I mean, not you and me—for the rest of our lives? We'll always be looking over our shoulders, waiting for the other half to come up and give us a hand. And they won't. They can't. They're dead."

"And you were the one who just got through saying Teddy Roosevelt deserved a third term," Sandburg pointed out. "And I was the one who said I couldn't argue with you. God help us both."

"God help us both," Jonathan Moss agreed. "God help the world, because there's hardly a country in it that doesn't have a Half Generation.

With the Canucks, it's more like a Quarter Generation."

"Italy came through all right," Sandburg said. "The Japs didn't get hurt bad, either, damn them."

"Yeah, we'll have to have a heart-to-heart talk with the Japs one day, sure enough," Moss said. "They're like England, only more so: they don't really know they were on the losing side." He thought for a moment. "The only thing worse than going through the Great War, I guess, would have been going through the Great War and losing. Roosevelt saved us from that, anyway."

"So he did." Sandburg's whistle was low and doleful. "Can you imagine what this country would be like if the Rebs had licked us *again?* We'd have had ourselves another revolution, so help me God we would. I don't mean Reds, either. I just mean people who'd have wanted to hang every politician and every general from the nearest lamppost

they could find."

"Like this Freedom Party down in the CSA," Moss said, and Sandburg nodded. Moss went on, "You know, maybe TR really does deserve a third term. Even if he didn't do anything else, he spared us that." His friend nodded again. Moss discovered he still had a couple of drops of brandy in the bottom of the shot glass. He raised it again. "To TR!" he said, and drained them.

XI

"Down with TR! Down with TR! Down with TR!" Along with everyone else in the great hall in Toledo, Flora Hamburger howled out the chant. The air was thick with tobacco smoke. It was also thick with an even headier scent, one never caught before at a Socialist Party national convention: the smell of victory.

"We can do it this time." Flora didn't know how often she'd heard that since coming to Toledo. Whether it was true or not re-mained to be seen.

True or not, though, people believed it. Scarred and grizzled organizers who'd been coming to conven-tions since long before the turn of the century were saying it, and saying it with wonder in their voices and on their faces. They'd never said it before.

"Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!" Haifa dozen people here on the floor clamored for the attention of the august personage on the rostrum.

Bang! The gavel came down. "The chair recognizes the leader of the delegation from the great state of Indiana."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman," that worthy bellowed. The chair-man rapped loudly once more, and kept rapping till something a little quieter than chaos prevailed. The leader of the Indiana delegation spoke into it: "Mr. Chairman, in the interest of vic-tory and unity, the state of Indiana shifts twenty-seven votes from its own great patriot and statesman, Senator Debs, to the next president of the United States of America, Mr. Sinclair! We so act at the specific request of Senator Debs, who understands that the interests of the Party should, indeed must, come ahead of all personal concerns."

Flora had never been on the battlefield. If the roar that went up at that announcement didn't match that of a great cannonading, though,

she would have been astonished. More men, including the chairman of the delegation from New York, waved hands or hats or banners to attract the chairman's attention. After five in-decisive ballots, the Socialists had their presidential nominee. Someone moved that the nomination be made unanimous; the motion passed by overwhelming voice vote. That done, the proud and happy delegates voted to adjourn till the next day.

But they did not want to leave the floor. As if they had already won the election, they milled about in celebration, meeting old friends, making new ones, and having themselves a terrific time.

Being taller than most of the men at the convention, Hosea Blackford was easy for Flora to spot as he made his way from the small Dakota delegation to the large one from New York. "It's done," he said. "The first part of it's done, anyhow, and done well." When he grinned, he shed years. "Ain't it bully, Flora?"

"Yes, I think so," she answered. "And the second part—who knows what the second part may be?" She wanted to take him in her arms. She couldn't, not in public. She couldn't, even in pri-vate, not while the convention was going on: no privacy in To-ledo was private enough. "When you find out the second part, please let me know, whenever it is you happen to hear."

"Whether it goes one way or the other, I will do that," Black-ford promised solemnly. "Shall we have supper now?"

"Why not?" Flora said. They left the hall and went back to the hotel where they were both staying. Neither of them minded being seen in public with the other; their friendship was com-mon knowledge in Philadelphia. That they were anything more than friends, they kept to themselves.

They were working their way through indifferent beef stew when an excited-looking young man in a brightly checked jacket approached the table and said, "Congressman Blackford?"

"That's right," Blackford answered. The young man in the gaudy jacket glanced toward Flora. Understanding that glance, Blackford said, "Do I understand that you come from Mr. Sin-clair?" The newcomer nodded.

"Speak freely," Blackford urged him. "You may rely on Congresswoman Hamburger's discretion no less than my own."

"Very well." The eager youngster tipped his bowler to Flora. "Pleased

to meet you, ma'am." He gave his attention back to Blackford. "Mr. Sinclair says I am to tell you that you are his first choice. It's yours if you want it."

Flora clapped her hands together. "Oh, Hosea, how won-derful!" she exclaimed.

"Is it?" Blackford said, more to himself than to anyone else. "I wonder. If I take it and lose, I go home. If I take it and win, I go into the shadows for four years, maybe for eight. It's not a choice to be made lightly."

"You can't turn it down!" Flora said. "You *can't,* not this year."

"Can't I?" Blackford murmured. She looked alarmed. The young man in the loud jacket didn't. Pointing to him, Blackford smiled and said, "You see?

He knows there are plenty of other fish in the lake." Flora sputtered angrily.

Smiling still, Blackford went on, "But no, I don't suppose I can, not this year.

Yes, sir: if it pleases Mr. Sinclair to have my name placed in nomination for the vice presidency, I shall be honored to run with him and see if we can't tie a tin can to Teddy Roosevelt's tail and send him yap-ping down the street."

"Swell!'" The youngster stuck out his hand. Blackford shook it. "My principal will be delighted, and I already am. This time, by thunder, we're going to lick 'em." He waved and departed.

"We're going to lick them," Blackford repeated. His smile was wide and amused. "Well, by thunder, maybe we are. What I'm afraid of is that tomorrow you're going to have to listen to nominating speeches telling the convention what a saint I am, and you'll laugh so loud, you'll get yourself thrown out of the hall."

"I would never do such a thing!" With a mischievous twinkle in her eye, Flora added, "Not right out loud, I wouldn't."

And, indeed, she sat beaming with pride as speaker after speaker stood up to praise Hosea Blackford the next day. A couple of other names were also placed in nomination, but Blackford won on the first ballot. Flora clapped till her hands were red and sore, and she was far

from the only one who did.

But, even in the nominating convention, the would-be vice president yielded pride of place to the man heading the ticket. A runner went to summon Hosea Blackford (custom had for-bidden him from being in the hall while the nomination pro-ceedings went on). The chairman of the convention said, "And now, my friends"—no *ladies and gentlemen,* not in the Socialist camp—"I have the privilege of presenting to you the next presi-dent of the United States, Mr. Upton Sinclair of New Jersey!'"

More applause followed, louder and more prolonged than that which had announced Hosea Blackford's nomination. Sinclair bounded up to the platform. Both his stride and the white summer-weight suit he wore proclaimed his youthful energy: Flora couldn't remember whether he was forty-one or forty-two. Set against the sixtyish Roosevelt, he seemed boyish, bouncy, full of spit and vinegar.

He knew it, too. "My friends, it's time for a change!" he shouted in a great voice, and cheers went up like thunder. Sinclair held up his hands, asking for quiet. Eventually, he got it. "It's time for a change," he repeated. "It's time for a change in ideas, and it's time for a change in the people who give us our ideas, too." Flora, to whom even Sinclair was not all that young, clapped hard again.

"What this convention has done here in Toledo marks the first step in that great and necessary change," Sinclair said. "This convention has passed the torch to a new generation, a genera-tion born since the War of Secession, tempered by our troubles, disciplined by the harsh peace our neighbors forced upon us, and eager for the freedom and justice and equality of which we have heard so much and seen so little. Tell me, my friends: are you willing to witness or permit the slowing of those freedoms to which this nation has always been committed?"

"No!" Flora shouted, along with everyone else in the hall.

"Neither am I! Neither is the Socialist Party!" Upton Sinclair cried. "And I also tell you this, my friends: if our free country cannot help the men who are poor, it surely cannot—and should not—save the few who are rich!"

Every time Flora thought the next round of applause could be no louder than the last, she found herself mistaken. When silence returned, Sinclair went on, "Now that we have suffered so much in the

struggle against our nation's foes, let us struggle instead against the common enemies of mankind: against oppression, against poverty, and against bloody-handed war itself!"

He went on in that vein for some time. It seemed more an in-augural address than an acceptance speech. No Socialist presi-dential candidate had ever spoken not only to the Party but also to the country with such easy confidence before. Upton Sinclair sounded as if he took it for granted that he might win. Because he took it for granted (or sounded as if he did), would not the rest of the country do the same?

And then, at last, he said, "And now, my friends, I have the pleasure and the honor of introducing to you the next vice presi-dent of the United States, Congressman Hosea Blackford of the great state of Dakota."

Blackford got more than polite applause. Flora's contribution was as raucous as she could make it. As the tumult died away, Blackford said, "I too am of the generation born after the War of Secession, if only just. And I am of the generation that learned of Socialism from its founders: in my case literally, for Abraham Lincoln pointed out to me the need for class justice and eco-nomic justice on a train trip through Montana—the Montana Territory, it was then—and Dakota."

Lincoln's name drew a nervous round of applause, as it always did: half pride in the role he'd played in making the Socialist Party strong, half fear of the contempt that still clung to him be-cause he'd fought—and lost—the War of Secession. Flora hoped that, with victory in the Great War, the country would not dwell on the War of Secession so much as it had in earlier days.

"I stand foursquare behind Mr. Sinclair in his call for freedom and in his call for justice," Blackford said. "The Socialist Party, unlike every other party in the USA, is committed to economic freedom and economic justice for every citizen of the United States. Others may speak of a square deal, but how, my friends, how can there be a square deal for the millions of workers who cannot earn enough to buy a square meal?"

That won him solid cheers, in which Flora joined. Posses-sive pride filled her: that was *her* man up there, perhaps— *no, probably,* she thought, defying a generation and a half of Demo-cratic tenure in the White House—the next vice president, as Upton Sinclair had said. Hard on the heels of pride came loneliness. If Blackford was to

become the next vice president, he'd be crisscrossing the country between now and November 2. They wouldn't have many chances to see each other till the election.

More solid applause followed Blackford's speech: the sort, Flora thought, a vice-presidential candidate should get. Black-ford had spoken ably, but hadn't upstaged Sinclair. "On to vic-tory!' the chairman shouted, dismissing the delegates and formally bringing the convention to a close.

On the street outside the hall, a sandy-haired fellow in the overalls and cloth cap of a steelworker called Flora's name. "Yes? What is it?" she asked.

"I wanted to ask how your brother's getting along, ma'am," the man said.

"I was his sergeant, the day he got hurt. Name's Chester Martin." He took off the cap and dipped his head.

"Oh!" Flora exclaimed. "He spoke well of you in his letters, always. You know he lost the leg?"

"I thought he would—I saw the wound," Martin answered. "Please say hello for me, next time you see him."

"I will," Flora answered. "He's doing as well as he could hope on the artificial leg. With it and a cane, he gets around fairly well. He's working, back in New York City."

"That's all good news, or as good as it can be," Martin said.

"He's a Democrat," Flora added, as if to say all the news wasn't good.

"I used to be, but I'm a Socialist now," Martin said. "It evens out. And I think, with Sinclair running, we may win the election this time, ma'am. I really do."

"So do I," Flora whispered—she didn't want to say it too loudly, for fear Something might hear and put a jinx on it. "So do I."

Anne Colleton gave her brother an annoyed look. "I still don't see exactly why you think I ought to meet this person."

"Because I remember very well the soldier who wrote to me about

him,"

Tom Colleton replied. "If Bartlett says something is important, you can take it to the bank." He looked sheepish. "These days, as a matter of fact, Bartlett's word is a damn sight better than taking something to the bank."

"I think you want me to meet this Brearley because you're still trying to get me out of the Freedom Party," Anne said.

"If the big wheels in the Party aren't just the way you think they are, isn't that something you ought to know?" her brother returned.

If Roger Kimball isn 'tjust the way you think he is, isn 't that a reason to stop your affair with him? That was what Tom meant. Kimball could have been a Baptist preacher, and Tom would have disapproved of the affair.

That Kimball was anything but a Baptist preacher made the disapproval stick out all over, like the quills on a porcupine.

Her brother did have a point, though. Anne was not so blindly devoted to either the Freedom Party or to Roger Kimball as to be blind to that. "He's coming. I can't stop him from coming. I'll hear him out," she said.

"So glad you're pleased." Tom grinned impudently. "Seeing as his train gets into St. Matthews in twenty minutes, I'm going to head over toward the station. Want to come along?"

"No, thank you," Anne answered. "This is your soldier and your soldier's pal. If you want to deal with him, go right ahead. You invited him down without bothering to ask me about it, so you can bring him here on your own, too."

"All right, Sis, I will," Tom said. "See you soon—or maybe not quite so soon, depending on how late the train is today." He grabbed a hat off the rack and went out the door whistling. Anne glared at his back. If he knew she was doing it, he didn't let on.

Anne resolved to be as poor a hostess as rigid notions of Con-federate hospitality allowed. But, when her brother returned with the stranger, her resolution faltered. She hadn't expected the fellow to look like such a puppy. Out came a peach pie whose existence she hadn't intended to admit. She put on a fresh pot of coffee. "Your name is Brearley, isn't that right?" she said, knowing perfectly well it was.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered. "Tom Brearley, ex-C.S. Navy. Through most of the war, I was Roger Kimball's executive of-ficer aboard the *Bonefishr*

"Of course," Anne said. "I knew the name sounded familiar." It hadn't, not really; Kimball had mentioned his exec only a couple of times, and in less than flattering terms. Anne had an excellent memory for names, but Brearley's had slid clean out of her head. He hadn't wanted to give it before coming down, ei-ther; only her and Tom's flat refusal to meet with a mystery man had pried it out of him.

Brearley said, "Up in Richmond, I saw in the papers that you were working for the Freedom Party, and that he is, too."

Tom Colleton raised an eyebrow. Anne ignored it, saying, "Yes, that's right. The war's been over for three years now. That's far past time for us to get back on our feet again, but the only people who want this country to do things and not just sit there with its head in the sand are in the Party, seems to me."

"I don't think that's so, but never mind," Brearley said. "I didn't come down here to argue politics with you. Getting some-body to change politics may be easier than getting him to change his church, but it isn't a whole lot easier."

"Why did you come down here, then?" Anne asked. "In your last letter, you said you knew something important about Roger Kimball, but you didn't say what. I'm not sure why you thought it would matter to me at all, except that both our names hap-pened to end up in the same newspaper story."

Kimball hadn't talked much about Brearley to her. How much had Kimball talked about her to Brearley? Men bragged. That was one of their more odious characteristics, as far as she was concerned. She'd thought Kimball relatively immune to the dis-ease. Maybe she'd been wrong.

She couldn't tell, not from reading Brearley's face. He still looked like a puppy. But he didn't sound like a puppy as he an-swered, "Because if what he did ever came out, it would embar-rass the Freedom Party. For that matter, if what he did ever came out, it would embarrass the Confederate States."

"You don't talk small, do you?" Tom Colleton remarked.

"My granddad would have called it a sockdologer, sure enough,"

Brearley said, "and he'd have been right, too. Let me tell you what happened aboard the *Bonefish* right at the end of the war." He detailed how Kimball, fully aware the war was over and lost, had nonetheless stalked and sunk the USS *Ericsson,* sending her to the bottom without, so far as Brearley knew, a single survivor.

"That's it?" Anne said when her visitor fell silent. Tom Brearley nodded.

"What do you expect me to do about it?" she asked him.

She was asking herself the same question. Kimball had cer-tainly kept this secret from her. She wasn't surprised. The more people who knew about the *Ericsson,* the more dangerous the knowledge got. She made a point of not looking over at her brother. She knew how he was likely to use it: not in any way that would make her comfortable.

Tom Brearley said, "What I do with it doesn't matter. I'm no-body in particular. But you're involved in the Freedom Party, same as Roger Kimball is. How do you feel about working side by side with a cold-blooded murderer?"

Anne gnawed the inside of her lower lip. No, Brearley didn't talk like a puppy. He minced no words at all, as a matter of fact. She decided to match his bluntness: "If you really want to know, Mr. Brearley, it doesn't bother me one bit. If I'd been in position to hit the Yankees one last lick, I'd have done it, and I'd have done it regardless of whether the war was supposed to be over or not. What do you think of that, sir?"

Now Brearley looked like a horrified puppy. He coughed a couple of times before blurting, "No wonder you back the Free-dom Party!"

"The United States worked for fifty years to get their revenge on us,"

Anne said. "I don't know how long I'll have to wait for my turn. I hope it isn't that long. However long it takes, I think it'll come sooner from the Freedom Party than from anybody else out there right now."

Tom Colleton said, "Mr. Brearley's right about one thing, though: if the United States ever get word of what the *Bonefish* did, they can put us in hot water on account of it. If Roosevelt wins a third term, he'll do it, too."

"Then we have to see that the United States don't find out about it,"

Anne said, doing her best to put Brearley in fear with her expression.

It didn't work. She should have realized it wouldn't work, not if he'd gone through the war in a submersible. He said, "If you want to make sure the story gets to the United States, arranging an accident for me is the best way to go about it. I didn't come here without taking the precautions a sensible man would take before he stuck his head in the lion's mouth."

"I didn't threaten you, Mr. Brearley," Anne said: a technical truth that was in fact a great, thumping lie.

"Of course not," Brearley said—another lie.

Anne wondered if she ought to offer to pay him to keep the se-cret of the *Bonefish* from reaching the United States. After some thought, she decided not to. If he wanted money in exchange for silence, let him bring it up. If he wanted Confederate paper money in exchange for silence, he was a bigger fool than he'd shown himself to be.

Her brother said, "Mr. Brearley, you do understand that, what-ever score you may want to settle with Mr. Kimball, you're liable to hurt the whole country if this story gets told too widely." Anne looked at him now, in nothing but admiration. She hadn't been able to come up with anything nearly so smooth.

Brearley nodded. "Of course I do. That's why I've kept quiet for so long.

You may call me a great many things, but I love my country. If you'll forgive me, I love my country too well to want to see it fall into the hands of the Freedom Party."

"I'll forgive you for that," Tom Colleton said. "Whether my sister will is liable to be a different question."

Brearley glanced at Anne. She looked back, bland as new-churned butter. "I don't agree, but Mr. Brearley didn't come down here forme to change his politics, either," she said.

Brearley looked relieved. Anne almost laughed in his face. One thing he plainly didn't understand about the Freedom Party was that so many people joined it because they wanted revenge: revenge against the United States, revenge against the Negroes in the Confederate States, and revenge against the government and Army that had failed

to live up to the CSA's long tradition of victory. Hunger for revenge had led Anne into the Party.

Now she had one more piece of revenge to attend to, as opportunity arose: revenge against Tom Brearley.

He said, "I'll leave it at that, then. I do thank you kindly for hearing me out.

Next train north doesn't come in till tomorrow, does it?"

"No," Tom Colleton said. "St. Matthews isn't the big city. You'll have seen that for yourself, I reckon. If you want to come along with me, we'll see whether the hotel has an empty room." He snorted. "Let's see if the hotel has any rooms that aren't empty besides the one you'll be in. Come on."

As soon as her brother took Tom Brearley out of the flat, Anne tried to get a telephone connection through to Richmond. She didn't want to put anything down in writing, which eliminated both the telegraph and a letter.

Telegraphers weren't supposed to pay any attention to what they sent, but they did, or they could. Letters could go astray, too.

And so could telephone connections. "Sorry, ma'am," the op-erator reported. "Don't look like you can get there from here today." She laughed at her own wit.

Anne didn't. Anne was not—was emphatically not—amused. She snarled something wordless but potent and hung up the tele-phone with a crash.

She hoped it rattled the operator's teeth. Who could guess where the trouble lay? Storms knocking down wires? Squirrels gnawing through insulation and shorting out the line? Anything was possible—anything except getting through to Richmond.

Her brother came in a couple of minutes later. "Well, what do you think of Kimball now?" he asked.

"The

same

as

before,"

Anne

answered,

to

Tom's

evident

disap-pointment. "Like I told that fellow, if I'd been in the *Bonefish,* I'd have torpedoed that destroyer, too."

"My fire-eating sister," Tom said, more admiringly than not.

"That's right," Anne said. "That's exactly right. And anybody who forgets it for even a minute will be sorry the rest of his live-long days."

Cincinnatus Driver looked back at the house in which he'd lived his whole married life. He looked around at the Covington, Ken-tucky, neighborhood in which he'd lived his whole life. There was a last time for everything, and this was it.

He cranked the engine. The shabby old Duryea truck thun-dered into life.

It didn't give half the trouble it usually did, as if it too were glad to shake the dust of Kentucky from its tires. Cin-cinnatus hurried back to the cab.

There sat Elizabeth, Achilles on her lap. "We ready?" Cincin-natus asked as he slid in behind the wheel. In one way, it was a foolish question: everything they owned and aimed to take along was behind them in the bed of the truck. In another way, though, it was *the* question, and Cincinnatus knew it. He still didn't know whether he and his family were ready to abandon every-thing they'd ever known in the hope for a better life.

Ready or not, they were going to do it. Elizabeth nodded. Achilles yelled

"Ready!" at the top of his lungs. Cincinnatus put the truck in gear. He waited for the engine to die or for some-thing else dreadful to happen.

Nothing did.

Smooth as if it were ten years newer, the Duryea began to roll.

As Cincinnatus turned out of Covington's colored district and onto Greenup, Elizabeth said, "I do wish your ma and pa decided to come along with us."

"I do, too," he answered. "But they're set in their ways, like folks can get. I ain't gonna worry about it much. Once we find a place, you wait and see if they don't come after us "

"Maybe they will," his wife said. "I hope they do. Won't be so lonesome if they do, that's for sure."

"Yeah." If Cincinnatus had let his hands drive the truck for him, he would have gone on to the waterfront. He'd been head-ing there, walking or taking the trolley or driving the truck, since the early days of the war. But he wasn't going to head there any more. Instead, he took the suspension bridge north across the Ohio River and over into Cincinnati.

"The United States," Elizabeth said softly.

Cincinnatus nodded. Oh, Kentucky was one of the United States these days, but in many ways Kentucky still seemed as it had when it belonged to the Confederacy. That was the big-gest reason Cincinnatus had decided to better his luck and his family's elsewhere. He wasn't going to wait around holding his breath till he got the vote and other privileges whites in Ken-tucky took for granted.

Back in the days before the war, he'd spent a lot of time look-ing across the Ohio. Negroes didn't have it easy in the USA. He knew that. Had he not known it, he would have got his nose rubbed in it during the war. A lot of men down from the United States thought they had to act like slave drivers to get any kind of work out of Negroes. But not all of them did, and laws restricting what blacks could do were milder in the USA than in the CSA: he didn't have to worry about a passbook any more, for instance.

One reason for such mildness, of course, was that blacks were far thinner on the ground in the United States than in the Con-federate States.

That did worry Cincinnatus. He'd always spent most of his time among his own kind. That would be much harder now. Covington hadn't had

a huge colored community, but what would he do in a town with only a handful of blacks?

Down off the bridge, down into Cincinnati, went the truck. The waterfront on the northern bank of the Ohio didn't look much different from the one with which Cincinnatus was so fa-miliar. But Elizabeth noted one difference right away: "Look at all the white folks doin' roustabouts' work. Wouldn't never seen nothin' like that in Covington. Wouldn't never see nothin' like that nowhere in the CSA. White folks doin' nigger work?" She shook her head.

"This here's what I been tellin' you, honey," Cincinnatus said. "Ain't no such thing as nigger work in the USA, or not hardly. Ain't enough niggers to do all the dirty work that needs doin', so the white folks have to lend a hand.

A lot of 'em is foreigners, I hear tell, but not all of'em, I don't reckon."

"What's a foreigner, Pa?" Achilles asked.

"Somebody who's in a country he wasn't born in," Cincin-natus replied.

His son thought about that, then asked, "How do you tell a for-eigner from somebody who ain't?"

"A lot of times, on account of he'll talk funny—they don't talk English in a lot of them foreign places," Cincinnatus said. By that standard, though, a foreigner's son, somebody who went to school in the USA, would turn into an American indistinguish-able from any other. If Achilles ended up as educated and elo-quent as Teddy Roosevelt, he still wouldn't be an American indistinguishable from any other. That struck Cincinnatus as unfair.

He shrugged. It *was* unfair, no two ways about it. His hope was that Achilles would find things less unfair elsewhere in the USA than in Kentucky.

People were looking at him: people on the sidewalk, people in motorcars, even a couple of men who stopped painting a sign to stare. They were all white. Cincinnati had some Negroes; Cin-cinnatus knew as much. But he saw none on the streets. That was a change, a jolting change, from the way things were back in Covington, over on the other side of the river.

A fat, red-faced policeman held up his hand. Cincinnatus stopped in front of him, as he should have done. He was very pleased at how well the spavined old Duryea was behaving. He'd spent a lot of time getting the truck into the best shape he could, but the only thing that would really have cured its multifarious ills was a new truck, and he knew it.

The expression of distaste on the cop's face was broad enough for him and the truck both. The fellow jerked a thumb toward the curb. "Pull over that wagon," he said in gutturally accented En-glish. "I will with you speak."

"Is he a foreigner, Pa?" Achilles asked excitedly. "He talks funny, like you said."

"Reckon he might be," Cincinnatus answered. "They do say Cincinnati's chock full of Germans."

"Real live Germans?" Achilles' eyes were enormous. The USA's European allies were folk to conjure with, just as Frenchmen had been

in the CSA . . . until the war came, and France lost.

When Cincinnatus stopped the truck by the curb, the police-man strutted over. "You are from where?" he demanded.

"Covington, Kentucky, suh—just the other side of the river," Cincinnatus answered. He wouldn't have got uppity with a Cov-ington cop, and he wasn't so rash as to think the police would be much friendlier on the north side of the Ohio.

"What do you do here?" the policeman asked. "Why don't you stay on the other side of the river where you belong?"

"I ain't plannin' on settling down in Cincinnati, suh," Cin-cinnatus said hastily. "My family and me, we're just passin' through."

"Where are you going to?" the policeman inquired.

"Headin' for Iowa," Cincinnatus told him. "Des Moines, Iowa."

"This is a good long way from Cincinnati," the cop said, as much to himself as to Cincinnatus. "You will the worry of the people in Iowa be, not the worry of the people here. Very well. You may go on." He even condescended to stop traffic and let Cincinnatus pull out once more.

Cincinnatus would have been more grateful had it been less obvious that the policeman was getting rid of him.

"Welcome to the United States," Elizabeth remarked. "Welcome—but not very welcome."

"I was thinking that myself, not very long ago," Cincinnatus said. "Better here than if we'd headed down to Tennessee."

His wife didn't argue about that. He went back to concentrat-ing on his driving. He knew where he was going, but he wasn't completely sure how to get there. Road maps left a lot to be de-sired. He'd studied as many as he could at the Covington library, so he knew how far from perfect they were.

He also mistrusted road signs. Oh, roads in towns had names and numbers; he could rely on that. But he'd seen during the war that roads between towns might change names without warning or might never have had names in the first place. That made traveling more inter-esting for strangers.

He managed to get out of Cincinnati, and congratulated himself on that.

Only after he'd been out of town for a while did he realize he was going due north, not northwest toward Indianapolis.

"Don't fret yourself about it none," Elizabeth said when he cursed himself for fourteen different kinds of a fool. "Sooner or later, you'll come across a road that runs into the one you should have used. Then everything'll be fine again."

"Sure, I'll come across that blame road," Cincinnatus snarled, "but how the devil will I know it's the right one? It won't look no different than any other road, and it won't have no sign on it, nei-ther." He felt harassed.

He felt even more harassed a couple of minutes later, when one of the truck's inner tubes blew out with a bang that would have put him in mind of a gunshot had he not heard more gun-shots than he'd ever wanted to hear the past few years. He guided the limping machine to the side of the road and began the slow, dirty business of repairing the puncture.

Motorcars and trucks kept rolling past him as if he weren't there. Every one of them—every one he noticed, anyhow—had a white face behind the wheel. Most, no doubt, wouldn't have stopped to help a white man, either.

But would all of them have sped past a strange white without more than a single hasty glance? Maybe. On the other hand, maybe not, too.

At last, when he was wrestling the wheel back onto the axle, a Ford did pull up behind the truck. "Give you a hand?" asked the driver, a plump blond fellow in a straw hat and overalls.

"Just about done it now," Cincinnatus said. "Wish you'd come by a half hour ago; I don't mind tellin' you that."

"Believe it," the white man said. "Where you bound for?"

"Des Moines," Cincinnatus answered, and held up a filthy hand. "Yeah, I know I'm on the wrong road. I missed the right one down in Cincinnati. You know how I can get back to it from here?"

"Go up .. . lemme see . .. four crossings and then turn left. That'll put you heading toward the highway to Indiana," the white man said. He

cocked his head to one side. "You got family in Des Moines?"

"No, suh," Cincinnatus said. "Just lookin' for a better place to live than Kentucky." He waited to see how the white man would take that.

"Oh. Good luck." The fellow climbed into his automobile and drove away.

"Thanks for the directions," Cincinnatus called after him. He couldn't tell whether the white man heard. He shrugged. The man had stopped, and had given him some help. He couldn't complain about that—even if, worn as he was, he felt sorely tempted. "Des Moines," he said. He'd be on the road again soon.

"Come on," Sylvia Enos said impatiently to George, Jr., and Mary Jane as they made their way across the Boston Common toward the New State House. "And hold on to my hands, for heaven's sake. If you get lost, how will I find you again in this crowd?"

U.S. flags fluttered from the platform that had gone up in front of the New State House. Red-white-and-blue bunting wreathed it. Although President Roosevelt wasn't scheduled to start speak-ing for another hour, the crowd was already growing rapidly. Most of the people gathering around the platform were men. Why not? They enjoyed the right to vote.

Even though Sylvia didn't, she wanted to hear what Roosevelt had to say for himself. She wanted to see him, too, and to have the children see him.

They'd remember that for the rest of their lives.

Mary Jane, at the moment, had her mind on other things: "The dome sure is shiny, Ma!" she said, pointing. "It's as shiny as the sun, I bet."

"That's because it's gilded, silly," George, Jr., said importantly.

"What's *gilded* mean, Ma?" Mary Jane asked.

"It means *painted with gold paint"* her big brother told her.

"I didn't ask you, Mr. Know-It-All," Mary Jane said. "Be-sides, I bet you're making it up, anyway."

"I am not!" George, Jr., howled. "I ought to pop you a good one, is

what I ought to do."

"I'll pop both of you if you don't behave yourselves," Sylvia said. What ran through her mind was that she'd remember this day for the rest of her life, but not because she'd seen the president.

"You tell Mary Jane that I do so know what *gilded* means," George, Jr., said. "I learned it in school. And there's a wooden codfish inside there somewhere, and it's gilded, too. They call it the Sacred Cod." He frowned.

"I don't know what *sacred* means."

"It means *holy"* Sylvia said. "And your brother's right, Mary Jane. *Gilded* does mean *painted with gold paint.* And I'll thank you not to call him names. You're supposed to know better than that."

"All right, Ma," Mary Jane said in tones of such angelic sweetness, Sylvia didn't believe a word of it. The face Mary Jane made at George, Jr., a moment later said her skepticism had been well founded.

Sylvia worked her way as close to the platform as she could. It wasn't close enough to satisfy her children, who set up a chorus of, "We can't see!"

At the moment, there wasn't anything to see. Sylvia pointed that out, but it did nothing to stem the chorus. She finally said, "When the president starts to speak, I'll pick both of you up so you can see him, all right?"

"Will you pick both of us up at the same time?" Mary Jane sounded as if she liked the idea.

"No!" Sylvia exclaimed. "If I do that, you and your brother can pick me up afterwards and carry me home." She thought that might calm them down.

Instead, it got them jumping around with excitement. George, Jr., did try to pick her up, and kept trying till she had to smack him to get him to quit.

After what seemed like forever, people started coming out of the New State House and going up onto the platform. They had the same look to them: plump men, middle-aged and elderly, many with big drooping mustaches, all of them in somber black suits with waistcoats. Most wore top hats; a few of the younger ones contented themselves

with homburgs.

They might have been rich undertakers. In fact, they were Democratic politicians.

They buried more men in the Great War than undertakers could in a hundred years, Sylvia thought bitterly. One of them stepped forward.

"Hurrah for Governor Coolidge!" somebody shouted, which told her who the fellow was.

"You didn't come here to listen to me today," Coolidge said. "I'm going to step aside for President Roosevelt." With a bow, he did just that. "Mr.

President!"

"Thank you, Governor Coolidge." Theodore Roosevelt matched the rest of the men up there in age and build and dress, but he had enough energy for four of them, maybe six. He bounded to the front of the platform, almost running over the governor of Massachusetts in his eagerness to put himself in the public eye. "Ladies and gentlemen," he cried in a huge voice, "this is the greatest nation in the history of the world, and I am the luckiest man in the history of the world, to have had the privilege of leading her for the past eight years."

"No third term! No third term!" The cry broke out in several places around Sylvia at the same time. She suspected that was not an accident. She also suspected Roosevelt would be hearing the same cry everywhere he went up till election day.

He must have suspected the same thing. He bared his mouth-ful of large, square teeth and growled, "Ah, the Socialists are barking already. If they'd had their way, we would have sat on the sidelines while the greatest struggle the world has ever known was decided without us. I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that a great nation does not let others choose its destiny for it. A great nation makes its own fate: that is the mark of greatness."

He got a round of applause. But the hecklers sent up another chant: "How many dead? How many dead?" That one hit Sylvia hard. Had Roosevelt sat on the sidelines, her husband would have been alive today. Maybe the USA wouldn't have been so strong. Sylvia would have made that trade in a heartbeat, if only she could have, if only someone would have asked her.

"How many would have died had we waited?" Roosevelt re-turned. "How many would have died if we'd let England and France and Russia and the Confederate States gang up on our al-lies? After the Entente powers beat down our friend Kaiser Bill, how long do you think it would have been before our turn came around again? They piled onto us in the War of Secession, didn't they? They piled onto us in the Second Mexican War, didn't they?

Don't you think they would have piled onto us in the Great War, too? By jingo, I do! We're young and virile and up-and-coming, just like the German Empire. The countries that had the power didn't care to share it with the countries that wanted it, the countries that deserved it. Well, if they wouldn't yield us a place in the sun, we had to go and take one. And we did. And I'm proud that we did. And if you're proud, too, you'll vote the Democratic ticket in November."

That earned him more applause, with only a thin scattering of boos mixed in. *How many dead?* still echoed inside Sylvia Enos as she lifted first her son and then her daughter to see Theodore Roosevelt. The president was a master of the big picture; he made her see the whole world turning in her hands. But that still counted for less with her than a husband who had not come home.

And the hecklers hadn't given up, either. "No third term!'" they called again. "No third term!"

Roosevelt stuck out his chin. The sun flashed from the lenses of his spectacles, making him look as much like a mechanism as a man.

"Because George Washington decided he would not seek a third term, is it Holy Writ that every succeeding president must follow suit?" he thundered.

"We are speaking of the United States of America here, ladies and gentlemen, not a hand of auction bridge." He pounded fist into palm. "I refuse to reckon my actions bound by those of a slaveholding Virginian a hundred and twenty years dead. Vote for me or against me, according to whether you think well or ill of me and what I have done in office. This other pernicious nonsense has no place in the campaign."

"Four more years! Four more years!" Roosevelt had friends in the crowd, too: many more friends than foes, by the number of voices urging a third term for the president. With so much sup-port, Sylvia didn't see how he could fail to be reelected. Maybe it wouldn't be so

bad. He probably wouldn't find any excuse to start a new war between now and 1924.

"Capitalist tool! Capitalist tool!'" The Socialists started a new jeer.

Roosevelt had been talking about the vote for women, which, rather to Sylvia's surprise, he professed to favor. "I am the tool of no man!" he shouted, meeting the hecklers as combatively as he had throughout the speech. "I am the tool of no man, and I am the tool of no class. Let me hear Mr. Sinclair say the same thing, and I will have learned something. A dictatorship of the proletariat is no less a dictatorship than any other sort."

George, Jr., tugged at Sylvia's skirt. "What's the pro—prole—prolewatchamacallit, Ma?"

"Proletariat. It means the people who do all the work in facto-ries and on farms," Sylvia answered. "Not the rich people who own the factories."

"Oh." Her son thought about that. "People like us, you mean."

"That's right, people like us." Sylvia smiled. Painting red rings on galoshes was about as proletarian a job as you could get. If she didn't come in tomorrow, the foreman could replace her with just about anyone off the street. And, the day after that, Frank Best would no doubt be trying to get the new ring-painter into bed with him.

Up on the platform, concerned with bigger things, Theodore Roosevelt was winding up his speech: "I love this country. I have served this country all my adult life, and with every fiber of my being. If it please you, the citizens, that I continue to serve the United States, that will be the greatest honor and privilege you have in your power to grant me. I hope it will. I pray it will. Let us go forward together, and make the twentieth century be re-membered forevermore as the American century. I thank you ."

"Is he finished?" Mary Jane asked as the crowd applauded. Sylvia nodded. Her daughter found another question: "Can we go home now?"

"All right, dear." Sylvia didn't quite know how to take the question. She wondered whether Mary Jane really would re-member the day as long as she'd hoped. As they were heading toward the trolley stop, she asked,

"What did you think of the president?"

"He talked for a long time." By the way Mary Jane said it, she didn't mean it as a compliment.

"He had a lot of things to talk about." Sylvia gave credit where it was due, even if she didn't care for all the things Roosevelt had said. "Running the country is a big, complicated job."

"Huh," Mary Jane said. "I bet more people would vote for him if he didn't talk so much." Sylvia tried to figure out how to an-swer that. In the end, she didn't answer at all. Her best guess was that Mary Jane had a point.

Jake Featherston had never imagined he'd end up working out of an office. He had one now, though, paid for with Freedom Party dues. He had a secretary, too, whose pay came from the same source. Without Lulu endlessly tapping away on the typewriter, he wouldn't have got done a quarter of what needed doing. As things were, he got done half of what needed doing, sometimes even more.

Lulu couldn't handle everything by her lonesome. Feather-ston studied the snapshot on his desk. It showed a British- or Confederate-style rhomboidal barrel in the middle of some dry, rough-looking country. The letter that had come with the photo was from a Party member fighting for the Emperor of Mexico against rebels who had Yankee backing.

We're not really here at all, the letter read. *Neither is our friend.* The friend in question was the barrel. *Only a couple of us ever used these critters in the war against the USA. Now we all know how to handle them.*

Some of us are going to try and see if we can't get some stronger engines, too, so they '11 go better. You bet we '11 bring home what we

're learning. Freedom!

Slowly, Featherston nodded to himself. The Confederate States weren't allowed to have barrels of their own. So the United States said, and the United States were strong enough to make their word stick. But Confederate mercenaries in Mexico, in Peru, and in Argentina were getting practice fighting in barrels and in aeroplanes and on the sea, and were figuring out improvements for the machines they used. A lot of those mercenaries belonged to the Freedom Party. Jake figured he knew as much about clan-destine Confederate military affairs as the

War Department did—and the War Department didn't know how much he knew.

Lulu stopped typing. She came into his private office: a thin, gray-haired woman, competent rather than decorative. "Mr. Kimball is here to see you, Mr. Featherston."

"Bring him right on in," Jake said. "We've got some things to talk about, sure enough." His secretary nodded, left, and re-turned a moment later with Kimball. Jake rose and shook his hand. "Good to see you. Glad you could get up to Richmond."

"I hadn't planned to," Roger Kimball answered, "but things have a way of coming up when you don't expect them, eh?"

Featherston nodded. After Lulu went out and started typing again, he said, "Just when you thought you had everything sunk down out of sight for good, you find out you were wrong. That fellow who went and saw Anne Colleton isn't by any chance lying, is he?"

Kimball looked as if he wanted to say yes, but in the end he shook his head. "I sank the Yankee bastard, all right. So the war was over? Too damn bad." He glared at Jake, defying him to make something of it.

"Good," Jake said. Kimball stared. Featherston went on, "I fought the damnyankees up to the very last second I could. You think I care if you waited till the cease-fire went into effect be-fore you gave 'em one last lick?

In a pig's ass, I do. What matters to me is whether it'll make trouble for the Party and trouble for the country. If I decide it will, I'm going to have to cut you loose."

He waited to see how Kimball would take that. The ex-submersible skipper said, "I'll kill that son of a bitch of a Brear-ley if it's the last thing I ever do. I knew he was a weak reed right from the start."

"You will not," Jake Featherston said. "You *will* not, do you hear me?" He waited to see how Kimball would take the flat order.

Kimball took it just the way he'd expected him to: he blew his stack. "The hell I won't," he snarled, going brick red. "I told that bastard I'd murder him if he ever started running his big mouth. He damn well has, and I damn well will."

"Then I damn well will cut you loose right this minute," Featherston

said.

"Forget what I told you down in Charleston. I don't want a man who can't do what he's told in the Freedom Party. I don't want somebody who's liable to blow up behind my back in the Party. If you want to kill Brearley after I told you not to, you can kindly wait till you don't have any connection to me. Do whatever you please on your own hook. Don't embarrass the Party."

He waited again. What would Kimball do? He'd been an of-ficer. Would he get shirty about taking orders from an ex-sergeant? A lot of fellows who'd worn fancy uniforms couldn't stomach anything like that. Or would he remember that, in the Freedom Party, he was still a mid-ranking officer and Jake was commander-in-chief?

Kimball started to blow his stack once more. Featherston could see it begin .. . and, a moment later, could see Kimball ease off again. Jake eyed the former Navy man with respect he hoped he concealed. Not everybody could go into a rage and then clamp down on it. The people who could were apt to be very useful indeed.

Slowly, Roger Kimball said, "All right, Sarge, suppose I let the son of a bitch live for a while? That means you've got a line on giving him what he deserves some other way, right?'"

"Not yet, it doesn't," Featherston answered. Yes, Kimball was worth keeping around, all right—he'd got one step ahead of Jake, which didn't happen every day. "I'm not saying I will yet, either. Have to cipher out how I want to do it, if I decide to do it. Do I want it to look like the Party didn't have anything to do with it? Or do I want the job to say, *You screw around with the Freedom Party and you 7/ end up good and dead?"*

All at once, instead of taking it personally, Kimball started looking at it as a tactical problem. Jake saw the change in his eyes. He smiled to himself, but only to himself—he didn't want Kimball to know he could read him.

"That's a nice question, isn't it?" Kimball said. "I guess the one to ask right afterwards is, If we let the world know the Freedom Party got rid of Brearley, can we do it without having anybody go to jail?"

"There are places we could," Jake answered. "South Caro-lina's one of'em, I reckon: Anne Colleton has big chunks of that state sewed up tight for us."

"I haven't done too bad my own self, you don't mind my saying so,"

Kimball replied. Was that touchiness in his voice?

It was, Jake decided. Was Kimball jealous of Anne Colleton? Damned if he wasn't. *That* was a useful thing to know. Feather-ston filed it away. He couldn't use it now, but that didn't mean he wouldn't be able to somewhere down the line. For the moment, he needed to stick to the business at hand:

"I'm not so sure about Richmond. We've got a lot of cops in the Party here, same as most places, but they've got city hall and the state govern-ment and the Confederate government all sitting over 'em. They might have to go after us, whether they really want to or not."

"I can see that." Kimball raised an eyebrow. He was cool and collected again. Yes, he would have made a formidable subma-rine skipper. Nothing fazed him for long. Jake could easily pic-ture him stalking and sinking that U.S. destroyer after the war ended, and banking on success to keep him out of hot water. He went on, "The Whigs and the Radical Liberals don't fancy the Freedom Party much these days, do they?"

"If they did, I'd reckon I was doing something wrong," Feather-ston said.

"Pack of damn fools, want to keep on doing things the same old way. That's real sly, ain't it? That's how we got into the mess we're in. That's how we'll get into more messes, too, sure as the devil."

"I don't reckon you're wrong there." Kimball leaned forward, Brearley almost forgotten. "What the hell are you going to do about the niggers if we ever get the chance?"

"Smack 'em down and make sure they don't have the chance to get back up on their feet and stab us in the back again," Jake answered: the reply he usually gave. He had more in mind, but he still didn't know if he could do, if anybody could do, everything he really wanted. What he'd told Kimball would suffice for the time being. "Let's get back to this business here.

There's no paper, nothing in your log or anything, that says you sank this Yankee ship too late, right?"

To his relief, Kimball nodded. "I made sure there wouldn't be. Brearley can't prove anything like that. But I didn't sink the *Erics-son* all by

myself, either. If the rest of the crew start blabbing, they could give me a hell of a hard time."

"Would they do that?" Jake asked.

"Most of'em wouldn't, I'm sure of it," Kimball said, again the reply Featherston wanted to hear. "They were howling like a pack of wolves when we sent that damn destroyer to the bottom. But even on a little boat like the *Bonefish,* there's a couple dozen sailors. I can't tell you nobody would chime in with my exec, be-cause I don't know that for a fact."

"All right" Jake scratched his head and thought for a while. "Here's what we're going to do for now: sit tight and see what happens. If Brearley goes to the papers, he damn well does, that's all. I don't reckon it hurts the Party.

You weren't in the Party during the war, on account of there wasn't any Party *to* be in during the war."

"Fair enough," Kimball said: yes, he was ready to take orders. "What do we do if he does go to the papers?"

"You don't do anything," Featherston said, "not to him, any-how. You go back down to South Carolina and stay there. If re-porters start asking questions, tell 'em.. . tell 'em you can't talk about it, that's what you say." He grinned. "You got to remember, Roger, our only *big* worry is getting the USA riled at us when we're not strong enough to hit back. Most of the people in the CSA—hell, in your shoes, they'd've done the same thing."

"By Jesus, they would've. You're right about that. You're dead right about that, Sarge," Kimball said. "HI do just like you say. I'll tell the snoops I can't talk about it. And if they ask why I can't, I'll tell 'em I can't talk about that, either"

"There you go," Jake said, nodding. "Make it sound myste-rious as all get-out. That'll drive the whole raft of reporters crazy, same as a girl who plays hard to get drives the guys crazy. Reporters are used to people who put out. Most folks love to talk—no thin' they love better. You keep your mouth shut and you're a long ways ahead of the game." He studied Kimball.

"You reckon you can do that?"

"I can do it," the ex-Navy man said, and Jake thought he could.

Kimball went on, "Be kind of fun, matter of fact, leading 'em around by the nose."

As far as Jake was concerned, very little was more fun than leading reporters around by the nose. Much more often than not, reporters wrote the stories he wanted them to write about the Freedom Party. They usually thought they were slamming the Party—but they were slamming it the way he wanted them to, a way that let them feel clever about themselves but at the same time made the Party look appealing to a lot of their readers.

He didn't tell Kimball that. Maybe Kimball was smart enough to figure it out for himself. If he was, he also needed to be smart enough to keep it to himself.

"Anything else on your mind?" Jake asked him.

"I don't reckon there is," Kimball said after a little thought. "We've got things squared away here, don't we?"

"Yeah, we do," Featherston said. "I'm right glad you came up—glad we had the chance to talk about a few things." He was even gladder Kimball had proved sensible, but the other man didn't need to know that, either.

Having used the stick before, Jake threw him a carrot now: "Looks to me like you're going places in the Freedom Party. I've said that before, haven't I? Still looks like it's so."

"I aim to," Kimball said. "Yes, sir, I aim to." Jake studied him again. How high did he aim? The trouble with ambitious men was their nasty habit of aiming straight for the top.

But Jake was aiming for the top, too, for a different top, one high above anything to which he thought Roger Kimball could aspire. If everything went perfectly, he'd get there next year. He hadn't imagined he could win even a couple of months before. Now he thought he just might. And if things went wrong, he'd take longer, that was all. Either way, he aimed to do it. "I'm glad we've got you settled," he said, "on account of I don't want any-thing getting in the way of that run for president when 1921 rolls around."

"No, sir!" Kimball said, and his eyes glowed.

* * *

Colonel Irving Morrell and Agnes Hill hurried across Wallman Park toward yet another statue of John Brown—they seemed to be everywhere in Leavenworth. Decked with bunting as this one was, it looked far more festive than the dour old warrior for freedom had ever been in truth.

"Everyone in town will be here today." Agnes Hill pointed to the throngs of people crossing the foot bridges over Threemile Creek.

"Everyone in town *should be* here today," Morrell said. "Up-ton Sinclair drew a good crowd when he spoke a couple of weeks ago. Only right the president should draw a bigger one."

Agnes nodded. They shared a common faith in the Demo-cratic Party.

They shared a lot of things, including a great deal of pleasure in each other's company. Morrell laughed at himself. He'd gone to that dance not intending to fall in love with the first woman he set eyes on, and here he'd gone and done it. And, by all appearances, she'd fallen in love with him, too.

Not only was President Roosevelt a potent magnet for the crowd, but the day itself seemed to be summoning people out-doors. With September running hard toward October, the sum-mer's muggy heat had broken. The sun still shone brightly, and the oaks and elms and chestnuts in the park still carried their full canopies of leaves to give shade to those who wanted it.

The blight spreading among the chestnuts back East hadn't got to Kansas yet; Morrell hoped it never would. The air felt neither warm nor crisp. In fact, he could hardly feel the air at all.

"Perfect," he said, and Agnes Hill nodded again.

A lot of the men in the crowd wore green-gray like Morrell's, Fort Leavenworth lying just north of the town whose name it shared. That helped Agnes and him advance through the crowd: soldiers who spotted his eagles made way for his companion and him. "This is swell!" she exclaimed when they ended up only three or four rows from the rostrum at which Roosevelt would speak.

"It is, isn't it?" Morrell said, and squeezed her hand. They grinned at each other, as happy as if alone together rather than in the middle of the biggest crowd Leavenworth had seen for years (Morrell did hope the crowd was bigger than the one Sinclair had drawn, anyhow).

People whooped like red Indians when President Roosevelt ascended to the rostrum. Off to one side, a brass band blared away at "The Stars and Stripes Forever." Morrell wished the band had picked a different tune; that one rattled around in his head for days whenever he heard it, and it made noisy company.

Roosevelt said, "By jingo, it's always a pleasure for me to come to Kansas. This state was founded by men and women who knew a Southern viper when they saw one, even before the War of Secession." He glanced back at the statue of John Brown. "There is a man who knew who the enemy was, and a man who hit our country's enemies hard even when they still pretended to be friends. For that, I am proud to salute him." He doffed his homburg and half bowed toward the statue.

Morrell clapped till his hands ached. Beside him, Agnes Hill blew Roosevelt a kiss. "Should I be jealous?" Morrell asked her. She stuck out her tongue at him. They both laughed.

"People say—newspapers say—I'm in the fight of my po-litical life,"

Roosevelt went on. "I say, bully!'1 He reveled in the new round of applause washing over him from the friendly crowd. "Maybe they'll drag this old Democratic donkey down," he shouted, "but if they do, I tell you this: they'll know they've been in a fight, too."

"You won the war, Teddy," somebody called. "You can win this fight."

Roosevelt, Morrell happened to know, did not care to be called Teddy.

On the campaign trail, though, he endured it His grin looked friendly, not forced. And then somebody else yelled. "The country needs you, Teddy!"

"I don't know whether the country needs me personally or not," Roosevelt said, "but I do know for a fact that I take enor-mous pride in having served the country. And I also know for a fact that the country needs a Democrat in Powel House or the White House, and I seem to be the one the Democratic Party is putting forward this year.

"Here is something I want you to think about, ladies and gentle-men: in the years since 1852, the Democratic Party has won every presidential election save two. Every schoolchild knows that, but I am going to take a moment of your time to remind you of it once again. In 1860, the voters sent Abraham Lincoln to Washington, and he saddled us with a war, and a losing war to boot. Twenty years later,

having forgotten their lesson, the people elected James G. Blaine, who gave us another war—and another loss.

"When war came around yet again, the United States were ready for it.

Democratic presidents had made this country strong. Democratic presidents had found us allies. And, thanks to the people, we had a Democratic president at the helm of the ship of state." He preened to remind his audience who that Democratic president was.

"We won the Great War, with God's help. We paid back half a century and more of humiliation of the sort no great nation should ever have had to endure. And now, the editorial writers say, now the people are grown tired of the Democratic Party. They say we were good enough to win the war, but aren't good enough to govern in time of peace. They say the Socialists de-serve a turn, a chance."

Roosevelt looked out over the crowd. "Well, let them say whatever they please. It's a free country. Thanks to the Demo-cratic Party, it's stayed a free country—and, I might add, a victo-rious country as well. And now I am going to tell you what I say. Ladies and gentlemen, I say that, if you elect a Socialist presi-dent in 1920, the mischief he will do the United States will make Lincoln and Blaine's mischief look like what a couple of sky-larking boys might do."

"That's right!" Morrell shouted at the top of his lungs. The whole enormous crowd was shouting, but Roosevelt caught Morrell's voice and then caught his eye. They'd met several times in Philadelphia, and had always got on well: two aggres-sive men who both believed in taking the fight to the enemy.

"Here in Leavenworth, you've already seen how the Socialists have gone after the War Department budget with a meat axe," Roosevelt said.

"They've done the same thing to the Navy De-partment, too. If they control the presidency as well as Congress, we'll be lucky to *have* a War Department and a Navy Depart-ment by the time we can vote them out of office. Here in front of me, I see one of our nation's most distinguished soldiers, Colonel Irving Morrell, *the* leading exponent of barrel warfare in this country. I know the pittance on which Colonel Morrell has had to operate since the election of 1918. Like a good pa-triot, he soldiers on as best he can with what he is allotted, but I know, as you must know, he could do far more if only he had more with which to do it. Isn't that the truth, Colonel?"

"Yes, sir, that is the truth," Morrell said loudly. Agnes stared at him with sparkling eyes. She might have imagined a great many things when coming to hear Roosevelt, but surely she hadn't imagined the president would praise Morrell for everyone to hear. Morrell hadn't looked for any such thing himself.

Roosevelt said, "There you have it, ladies and gentlemen, straight from the horse's mouth. If you want to keep the United States strong, vote for me. If you don't care, vote for Sinclair. I thank you."

He got another ovation as he stepped down from the platform. Then, to Morrell's further surprise, Roosevelt beckoned to him. "How's that test model doing, Colonel?" the president asked.

"Sir, it's a great improvement over the barrels we used to fight the war,"

Morrell answered. "It would have been better still if we'd been able to build a real barrel to that design, not a light-weight machine armored in thin, mild steel."

"You will have such a machine, Colonel," Roosevelt boomed. "If I have anything to say after this November about how the War Department spends its money, you will have it."

"That would be wonderful, Mr. President," Morrell said, and then, "Sir, I'd like to introduce to you my fiancee, Agnes Hill."

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Miss Hill." Roosevelt bowed over her hand. "I want you to take good care of this man. The country will need him for a long time to come."

"I'll do my best, your Excellency," she said. "It's a great honor to meet you."

"Fine, fine." The president smiled at her, then turned away to talk to someone else.

Agnes had stars in her eyes. "How about that?" Morrell said, grinning. He hadn't really expected to get a chance to talk with Roosevelt, nor to be able to introduce Agnes to him. Because of his previous acquaintance with the president, he'd hoped some-thing along those lines might happen, but he'd spent enough time playing poker to understand the difference between hope and likelihood. Every so often, though, you got lucky.

"How about that?" Agnes echoed. "I didn't know you were such an important fellow." She studied Morrell. "But even the most important fellows, from everything I've heard, ask a woman if she'd like to be their fiancee before they introduce her that way."

"Oops," Morrell said, which made Agnes burst into laughter. Gulping a little, he went on, "I guess the only way I can make amends is by asking later instead of sooner: *would you* like to be my fiancee, Agnes?"

"Of course I would," she answered. "You've taken your own sweet time getting around to finding out, but I didn't worry about it too much, because I always figured you would."

"Always?" Morrell asked, still nervous but happy, too. "How long is always?"

"Ever since we met at that first dance," Agnes Hill said. "I thought you were a catch, and I figured I ought to be the one who caught you." She raised an eyebrow. "Now what are you snick-ering about?"

"Only that I've had my eye on you since that dance where we met, too,"

he said. "That comes out fair and square, doesn't it?"

"It sure does," Agnes said. "I think everything will work out fine."

"You know what?" Morrell said, and she shook her head. "I do, too," he told her. He meant every word of it. She knew what being a soldier's wife was like, and knew it the best possible way: she'd been one. She'd been through the worst that could happen to a soldier's wife—she'd been through it, she'd come out the other side, and she was willing to try it again. What more could he ask for?

Only after all that went through his mind did he stop to won-der what sort of husband he was liable to make. Agnes might know what she was doing heading into this marriage, but he didn't. He had no clue; marriage wasn't part of the curriculum at West Point. *Maybe it should be,* he thought. It might not produce better officers, but was very likely to produce happier ones.

XII

Lucien Galtier looked up into the heavens. He got a glimpse of the sun, which he rarely did these days. It scurried along, low in the south, and soon ducked behind the thick gray clouds that were the dominant feature of the sky as October gave way to November.

Drizzle started spattering down. Soon, he judged, it would be turning to sleet, and then to snow. "Do your worst," he said. "Do your worst, or even a little worse than that. You did not do it during the harvest, and you cannot hurt me now. Go ahead. I could not care in the least."

"Do you always talk to the clouds, Papa?" asked Georges, who must have come out of the barn while Lucien was mocking the weather for missing its chance.

"Always," Lucien replied solemnly. "It is, I am convinced, my best hope of getting an intelligent answer around these parts."

"Truly?" Georges glanced toward the farmhouse. "Could it be that I should tell my *chere maman* of your view in this matter? I am sure she would be most interested to learn."

"I am sure that, if you breathe even a word of it to her, I will break open your head to see if it is altogether empty or just al-most," Lucien said. "If I had to guess, I would say you have nothing at all in there, but I could be wrong: you might have some rocks. No sense, certainly"

"Mais non, certainementpas" Georges said. "And do I take after you or after my mother in my senselessness?"

"I will take after you in a moment—with a hatchet, by choice," Galtier said.

"Have you done everything with the livestock that wants doing?"

"Oh, no, not at all," his son answered. "I am always in the habit of quitting work when it is but half done."

"What you are in the habit of is driving me mad," Lucien said. Georges bowed, as if at a considerable compliment. Just then, a motorcar came to a halt beside the farmhouse. Lucien laughed. "Look—here is your brother-in-law. See if you can drive him mad. You have not done it yet, and not from lack of trying."

Dr. Leonard O'Doull seemed to unfold like a carpenter's rule as he got out of the Ford. Seeing Lucien and Georges, he waved to them and

came sauntering over. If the cold, nasty drizzle both-ered him, he gave not a sign.

"How does it go?" he called around the cigar in his mouth.

"It goes well," Lucien answered. "And with you, how does it go?"

"Well enough," his son-in-law said. "Today is Saturday, so I have only a half day to put in at the hospital. I thought I would stop by and say good day before I drove up to town, to Nicole and little Lucien."

"And I am glad to give you good day as well," Lucien said. He glanced toward Georges. They both nodded, ever so slightly. No day on the farm was a half day. Leonard O'Doull was a first-rate fellow. The longer Galtier knew him, the more he thought of him. But one thing O'Doull was not and could never be: a farmer. He did not understand —by the nature of things, he could not understand—how hard the folk of his family by marriage worked.

Georges obliquely referred to that: "With but a half-day's work today, how can it go only 'well enough' for you?"

"Well, for one thing, what does the last day of October mean to you?"

O'Doull asked.

Georges scratched his head. So did Lucien Galtier. At last, Lucien said,

"It is the even of All Saints Day: all very well, but not a holiday to speak of alongside Easter or the festival of our Lord's birth."

"The Eve of All Saints Day." O'Doull nodded. "We call it *Halloween* in English. We have a custom of celebrating it with costumes and masks and carved pumpkins and parties—and sometimes pranks, too. It is a jolly time, a time of pretended fright."

"We do not do this here in Quebec," Georges said.

"I know," O'Doull said. "I miss it."

"Halloween." Galtier let the English word roll off his tongue. "I remember, when I was in the Army, the English-speakers had this holiday. But Georges is right: we do not do this in Quebec. I would be amazed if I had thought of it three times in all the years since I came home to my farm."

O'Doull looked unhappy. "Last year, I carved a pumpkin into a jack-o'-

lantern"—another English word—"and put it in the window with a candle inside. I won't do that again. All my neighbors thought I was a pagan.

It's a good thing Bishop Pascal knows about the custom, or there would have been a lot bigger stink than there was."

"You did not tell me about this then," Lucien said. "Nicole did not speak of it, either."

"I think we both felt foolish about it," O'Doull said. "And it was my own fault."

"I know men who go their whole lives without ever saying those words,"

Lucien remarked.

"They aren't doctors." His son-in-law spoke with great assur-ance. "Every doctor in the world knows he has buried patients he should have saved."

"It could be so," Galtier said. "If it is so, why would any man want to become a doctor?"

"Because we also save patients who would be buried without us,"

Leonard O'Doull said. With what sounded like considerable effort, he changed the subject: "And Tuesday is also a day dif-ferent here from what it will be in the United States."

"And why is that?" Lucien's acquaintance with American holi-days had begun only with the U.S. occupation of Quebec. He knew it remained incomplete.

"Because on Tuesday, we will vote for our president" O'Doull replied,

"and, for the first time in longer than I have been alive, I think the election will be very close." He kicked at the dirt. "And here I am, a resident alien in the Republic of Quebec. All I can do is wait to see what my country does."

"How can the Americans not elect Roosevelt again?" Georges asked.

"Behind him, they won the war. Without him, who knows what might have happened?"

"You have reason," O'Doull said. "But the war has been over almost three and a half years now. For me, the war was very for-tunate, for without it I would not have met Nicole—nor any of you other fine Galtiers, I make haste to add. But many were hurt, and many who now can vote lost loved ones in the fighting. And there has been endless labor strife since. People may vote for Roosevelt, certainly. But then again, they may not. And no one has ever won a third term as president of the United States."

"For whom would you vote, if you were back in the United States?" Galtier inquired.

"I am not really sure," O'Doull said slowly. "With Roosevelt, I know exactly what the country would be getting. If the Social-ists had run Debs again, I would also know what we were get-ting. But with Sinclair, it is harder to tell. He has the energy of a young man, and, from what I can tell from up here in Quebec, a lot of people think he would lead the United States in a new di-rection. Maybe that would be good. As I say, it is hard to be sure."

"It will be as it will be," Galtier said with a shrug. "However it is, the United States will still be a large country and the Republic of Quebec a small one. I hope you are not unhappy, having left your country to make your home here."

"Unhappy?" O'Doull shook his head. "It was only a lifetime ago that my ancestors left Ireland for the United States. We have pulled up stakes before, the O'Doulls. I have done it again, that's all."

Galtier scratched his head. His ancestors had lived not merely in Quebec but on the ground on which he stood since the seven-teenth century. Even having his daughter remove to Riviere-du-Loup seemed an uprooting. He could not comprehend how O'Doull talked about one place as if it were good as the next. For him, that would have been a manifest—indeed, an unimaginable— untruth. His son-in-law took it for granted, as a fact of life.

O'Doull said, "Well, I had better head back to town, or Nicole will wonder what has become of me. I hope you get the chance to come up before too long, before the weather gets too bad." He touched the brim of his fedora, then hurried back to his automo-bile. It roared to life. He drove away.

"American politics," Georges said with a shrug. "I care very little for American politics."

"Had you said this in 1910, you might have shown some sense," his father replied. "In 1910,1 knew very little of Ameri-can politics, but they were important to us even then. Saying it now . .. well, I chaffed you before for senselessness. If Ameri-can politics were different, would we have had a war? If American politics were different, would we be living in the Re-public of Quebec? If American politics were different, would you have the nephew you have?"

"If American politics were different, I would still have a father who lectures me more than the schoolmasters ever did," Georges said. Lucien made an exasperated noise, but then started to laugh. Georges was as he was. The right wife might whip him into shape, but, on the other hand, he was liable to stay as he was even married to the most somber girl in the neighborhood.

Not that Lucien and Marie intended saddling Georges with the most somber girl in the neighborhood. For one thing, Bea-trice Rigaud would bring only a small bridal portion with her. And, for another, Lucien did not think it right to do such a thing to his fun-loving younger son. That reason, though, ran in second place behind the other.

Halloween came and went, unremarked, uncelebrated. Galtier wondered whether Dr. Leonard O'Doull carved a pumpkin for his own family. He would not put it in the window this year— he'd made that very plain.

Two days later, the American elections also came and went. They produced no fanfare that reached Galtier's farm. Had Lu-cien not had an American son-in-law, he would not have known on which day they took place. Eventually, he would find out who won: if the news hadn't got to his farm before then, he'd learn when he went into town.

Marie said, "I have heard that not all American women can vote: it is for them, poor dears, as it was for us in the days before the Republic."

"I do not know anything about whether American women can vote,"

Lucien replied. He remained unconvinced that granting the franchise to the women of Quebec had been the best idea in the history of the world. But he'd discovered that saying as much to his wife landed him in hotter water than anything this side of announcing he'd taken a mistress. He knew several men who *had* taken mistresses, none of them rash enough to announce it.

"I hope the Americans elect the Socialist," Marie said. "They will be

calmer if they do."

"I think they will return Roosevelt," Lucien declared. "Even if he is a Protestant, he is a very great man. And Socialists, from everything I have heard, do not believe in *le bon Dieu* at all."

He thought that would change his wife's mind; she cared far more for the trappings of piety than did he. But she said, "Per-haps *le bon Dieu* believes in them," a reply so oracular, Galtier had not the faintest idea how to respond to it.

Hal Jacobs said, "What was that song Lord Cornwallis' band played when he had to surrender to the Americans at Yorktown?"

"I haven't the faintest notion," Nellie Jacobs answered. Her schooling had stopped early. Not only that, Clara was trying to twist out of her arms and land on her head on the bedroom floor. That kept Nellie from thinking as clearly as she might have done.

"Now it will bother me," Hal said. "It is something I used to know, and I am not such an old man that I should be forgetting things." He smiled at Clara.

"If I were such an old man, I would not have a little daughter now."

Nellie had not expected he would have a little daughter now. Even more to the point, she hadn't expected she would have a little daughter now. Had she expected such a thing, she would have taken precautions. She admitted to herself, though, that she did enjoy having Clara around.

Hal snapped his fingers, which made Clara stop wiggling and look to see where the funny noise came from." 'The World Turned Upside Down'!" he exclaimed.

"What, when we had the baby?" Nellie said. "It sure did."

"No, no, no," he answered. "I mean, yes, it did, but no, that is not what I meant." He paused, by all appearances having con-fused himself. After a moment, he went on, "What I meant was, 'The World Turned Upside Down'

is the song Cornwallis' band played at the surrender."

"Oh," Nellie said. "Well, why didn't you say that, if it's what you

meant?

And why are you bothering your head about Corn-what's-his-name in the first place?"

"I wasn't thinking about Cornwallis so much," Hal said. "I was trying to remember the name of the song. You must admit, it fits the news of the last couple of days."

"Oh," Nellie said. "The election." It hardly seemed real to her: she was disenfranchised not because she was a woman but be-cause she lived in Washington, D.C. Hal hadn't voted on Tues-day, either, and couldn't have.

"Yes, the election." He clicked his tongue between his teeth. "When the Democrats lose for the first time since 1880, the world *has* turned upside down. And when the Socialists win for the first time ever, it has *really* turned upside down."

"I suppose it has." Nellie shook her head. "Doesn't seem right, turning President Roosevelt out of a job after he went and won the war for the United States. I can't name anybody else who could have done that."

"Dada," Clara said. She said *mama,* too, and *Eh-uh,* which was intended as the name of her half sister.

"How about it, Hal?" Nellie asked. "Do you think you could have won the war for the United States?" After a moment, she went on, "As a matter of fact, you did go a long way toward win-ning the war for the USA, at least as far as Washington goes."

Hal waved a hand. He was, Nellie had seen, as modest and self-deprecating a man as had ever been born. That had helped keep her from noticing his many good qualities for longer than she should have. He said, "For one thing, I had the very best of help, of which you were no small part."

"Pooh!" Nellie said.

"Pooh!" Clara echoed. She gurgled and laughed, liking the sound she'd just imitated.

"Pooh!" Nellie repeated, which made Clara laugh again. Nellie continued,

"I got a medal I didn't especially deserve, and you deserved one and

never got it."

Hal Jacobs shrugged. "I know what I did. My country knows what I did. I do not need any medals. And besides, if anyone should have won a medal, it was Bill Reach. I was far from the only man who reported to him. He was the one who put every-thing together and got most of it out. I know you did not much like him, but it is very sad that he did not live to see our victory."

"You've said that before," Nellie replied, and dropped it there. She was the only person in the world who knew what had hap-pened to Bill Reach, and she intended to take the secret to the grave with her. As far as she was concerned, he deserved every-thing she'd given him. But Hal still thought well of him, so she'd kept her own remarks to the fewest she could get away with.

"President Upton Sinclair." Hal, to her relief, went back to the world turning upside down. He shrugged again. "It does not sound like a name that belongs to a president. Presidents are named John or Thomas or Andrew or Theodore. Upton?" He shook his head. "It sounds like a name for a butler, not a president."

"Well, so it does," Nellie said. "We've got four years to get used to it, though. By the time 1924 rolls around, it'll seem natural enough."

"I suppose it may," Hal admitted. "By then, I hope the country will be sick of it, and will vote him out of office and put in a good Democrat with a nice, ordinary name."

"Maybe it won't be so bad." Nellie slid a finger under the edge of Clara's diaper. "Oh, good—you're dry." She sat down at the edge of the bed and began to bounce the baby gently up and down. "Come on, sweetheart, time for you to go to sleep."

"Time for you to go to sleep so your mother and father can go to sleep,"

Hal added. He yawned. "I had forgotten how much sleep you lose when a baby is small."

"So had I," Nellie said. "And the other thing is, I need sleep more now than I did when Edna was little. I'm not as young as I used to be, and boy, does Clara let me know it." She glanced warily down at her daughter, whose eyelids were fighting a los-ing battle against sliding shut. "Shh. I think she is going to drop off."

Only after Nellie had put the baby in the cradle that made the bedroom crowded did Hal say, "You are still young and beautiful to me, my dear Nellie. You always will be."

"Pooh!'" Nellie said once more. She knew why men talked that way: to get women to go to bed with them. Any woman who believed such blandishments was almost enough of a fool to de-serve what she would assuredly get. So a hard lifetime of experi-ence had taught Nellie. But living with and listening to Hal were giving her occasional second thoughts.

She was too tired to indulge in second thoughts now, or even first ones.

She let herself collapse onto the bed. Had she lain there for even a couple of minutes, she would have fallen asleep without changing into nightclothes.

She'd done that a couple of times, on days when Clara was teething or sick or just ornery. Falling asleep in a corset was impressive proof of what exhaus-tion could do.

Tonight, though, she decided she wanted to be free of lacing and steel rods. With a weary sigh, she got to her feet, took off her skirt and shirtwaist, and escaped from the corset. A wool flannel nightgown went over her like a friendly, comfortable tent. Hal put on not only a nightshirt only a bit shorter than her gown but also a wool nightcap with a tassel. No cold breezes would take him by surprise.

"Good night," he said as he and Nellie crawled under the covers. "I hope little Clara will let us sleep till morning."

She did. She did more often than not these days, a blessed re-lief from the first few weeks after she'd come home from the hospital. Still, the nights when she didn't were appalling enough to make up for a lot of the ones when she did.

But she woke the next day so smiling and cheerful, Nellie smiled, too, even before she'd had breakfast or, more important, coffee. She gave Clara her breast. The baby was taking cereal these days, and other solid food as well, but still enjoyed starting the day at the same old stand.

Nellie changed her—she emphatically needed it now—slapped powder on her bottom with a puff, and took her downstairs after getting

dressed herself. She let Clara crawl and toddle around while she built up the fire in the stove and got the first pot of coffee going. She and Hal and Edna would split that one; cus-tomers got what came afterwards.

"Quiet night, thank God," Edna said when she came down a few minutes later. Living across the hall from a baby wasn't that much different from living in the same room as one. Edna started toasting bread, and melted butter in a frying pan to do up eggs for herself and her mother and stepfather. In another pan, she fried ham steaks in bacon grease left over from the day be-fore. Hal Jacobs came down in time to eat before anything got cold, but too late to keep Nellie and Edna from teasing him about dawdling.

He was about to go across the street and open up his shoe-maker's establishment when a fancy motorcar pulled to a stop in front of the coffeehouse Nellie ran. The driver hurried to open the door for his passenger, a portly gentlemen of late middle years. The fellow headed for the coffeehouse door.

"Lord, Ma," Edna breathed, "will you look at that? It's the president. He's coming here again."

Nellie snatched up Clara, who howled in outrage at not get-ting the chance to eat the tasty-looking piece of dust she'd picked up. "Hush, you,"

Nellie whispered sternly, which did no good at all.

In came Theodore Roosevelt. "Good morning, Miss Sem-phroch," he said, bowing to Edna. He turned to Nellie. "And good morning to you, Mrs.—Jacobs. Ha! I got it right, by jingo!'" He looked pleased with himself.

"Good morning to you, too, Mr. Jacobs," he told Hal. "You have a lovely daughter here. Congratulations."

"Thank you, your Excellency," Nellie and Hal said together. Hal went on,

"A great shame the election went against you, sir."

"The people have spoken," Roosevelt said. "It's another case of what Austria told Russia after the Russians saved their bacon in 1848: 'We shall astonish the world by our ingratitude.' As-tonish it they did, by not helping the Czar in the Crimean War. Now we have a similar

example on our own side of the Atlantic. But the country will survive it—I have great faith in the United States—and I shall, too."

"What will you do?" Nellie asked.

"I don't precisely know," Roosevelt answered. "Hunt big game, perhaps, or fly an aeroplane—maybe I shall hunt big game *from* an aeroplane. That might be jolly. But it's not why I came here today."

Edna gave him a cup of coffee. "Why did you come today, sir?" she asked.

Today, Roosevelt was without bodyguards. No—Nellie corrected herself.

Today, the guards had not come into the coffee-house. A couple of them paced outside, watchdogs in homburgs and fedoras. Roosevelt reached into his waistcoat and pulled out a small, felt-covered box. "I have here a token of appreciation for the signal service Mr. Jacobs rendered his country during the late war. This is a Distinguished Service Medal—I pulled some strings to get the War Department to issue it, since Mr. Jacobs was not formally in the Army during the war. But they humored me in this matter: one of the few advantages of lame-duckhood I have as yet discovered."

Nellie clapped her hands together in delight. So did Edna. Hal Jacobs turned red. He said, "Mr. President, I thought I made it perfectly clear I wanted no special recognition for any small things I may have done."

"You did," Roosevelt said. "I'm ignoring you. There—another advantage of lame-duckhood: I don't have to listen to anyone if I don't feel like it, not any more. You'll take your medal and you'll be a hero, Mr. Jacobs, and if you don't happen to care for it. too bad. What do you think of that?"

"He thinks it's splendid!" Nellie exclaimed. Hal Jacobs gave her a dirty look. She didn't care. She didn't care a bit. If a wife couldn't speak for a husband when he needed speaking for, what good was she? None at all, as far as Nellie could see.

Arthur McGregor shooed a hen off her nest and grabbed the egg she had laid. The hen's furious squawks and flutterings said she was convinced he'd murdered part of her immediate family. She was right—he had, or would as soon as Maude got around to cooking the egg. McGregor had had a member of his immediate family murdered, too.

It gave him some sympathy for the hen . . . but not enough to keep him from robbing her nest.

He slipped a china egg in there and let the hen return. She kept on fussing for a moment or two. Then she discovered the substi-tute. Her clucks changed from outrage to contentment. She settled down and began to brood an egg that would not hatch even on Judgment Day.

A scowl on his face, McGregor went on to the next nest. No one had given him any kind of substitute for Alexander. He wished he were as stupid as a chicken, so that a photograph might fool him into thinking he still had a son. Unfortunately, he knew better.

All he could hope for was revenge. The scowl grew deeper. "I couldn't even get that," he growled, knocking the next hen out of her nest with a backhand blow that almost broke her fool neck. She had no eggs in the nest, so he might as well have done her in.

"Dentures!" What a word to make into a curse! But if Custer hadn't broken his false teeth, he'd still have been sitting in Hy's when McGregor's bomb went off. As things were, McGregor had killed more than a dozen innocent people without getting the man he really wanted. He felt bad about that, and worse be-cause they were all Canadians, victims of the U.S.

occupation no less than he.

But Alexander had been innocent, and Alexander had been a victim, and nothing would ever bring him back to life. As far as McGregor was concerned, the war against the United States went on. Canadian forces might have surrendered (though re-bellion did still simmer here and there, especially in parts of the Dominion the U.S. Army hadn't reached before the Great War ended). The mother country might have yielded. Arthur McGregor kept fighting, whenever he saw the chance.

He finished gathering the eggs and installing china pacifiers under the hens. As he headed back toward the farmhouse, he thought again how much easier life would have been had the U.S. issued him a china son, and had he been stupid enough to reckon it the same as the real thing.

Winter and reality slapped him in the face as soon as he left the barn.

The wind cut like a knife. The sky was clear and blue, a blue that put him in mind of a bruise. If he stayed outside very long, he'd start turning blue, too.

He'd never met a U.S. soldier who'd taken Manitoba winters in stride. The USA just didn't manufacture weather like this.

"So why the devil did the Yanks want to come up here and take this away from us?" he asked. The snarling wind blew his words away. That didn't matter. The question had no good answer, save that the Americans were as they were.

When he opened the kitchen door, the blast of heat from the stove was a blow hardly less than the one the freezing wind had given him. Where he'd been shivering an instant before, now sweat started out on his forehead. He shed his hat and heavy coat as fast as he could.

Maude looked up from the carrots she was peeling. "How many eggs have you got there?"

"Seven." McGregor looked in the basket. "No, I take it back— eight."

"Not bad," his wife said. He shrugged. He didn't want to look on the bright side of anything right now. Maude went on, "If things keep going the way they have been, we'll come through this winter in better shape than we have since before the war."

"We won't ever be in the kind of shape we were before the war,"

McGregor answered, his voice colder than the weather outside.

Maude bit her lip. "You know what I mean," she said. He did, too. It didn't help. Had Alexander been there with him, a year where he didn't end up broke might not have looked so bad, even under U.S. occupation. As things were, every year showed a loss to him, even if he made money.

"If only—" he began, but he let that hang in the air. He still hadn't exactly told his wife about his bombs. She knew he'd gone to Winnipeg, of course, and she knew what had happened while he was there. But they both still pretended that was nothing but coincidence.

"You know the Culligans are putting on a dance next week if we don't get a blizzard between now and then, and maybe even if we do," Maude said.

"No, I didn't know." McGregor looked at her in some sur-prise. "You want to go dancing?" She hadn't shown any interest in that sort of thing since before the Great War. He shrugged. "If you do, I'll take you. I'll be switched if I think I remember the steps, though."

Maude shook her head. "I don't care one way or the other. But Julia and Ted Culligan have known each other since they were little, you know, and I think she'd enjoy dancing with him more than a bit."

"Do you?" McGregor made automatic protest: "But she's just a—" He stopped, feeling foolish. Julia wasn't just a baby any more. She'd be eighteen in a few weeks. He'd been engaged to Maude when she was eighteen. He coughed a couple of times. "I never paid any attention to Ted Culligan one way or the other. Does he matter that much to Julia?"

"He might," Maude said. "I don't know if she's serious, and I really don't know if he's serious—you men." McGregor only blinked at that blanket condemnation of his half of the human race. When he did nothing more, Maude shrugged and went on, "They could be serious, I think. We have to decide if we want them to be serious. The Culligans aren't bad folks."

"No, they're not. They mind their own business—they're not like any of the people who got Alexander into trouble." McGregor made up his mind. "All right, we'll go to this dance."

Go they did. It was snowing, but not hard. Julia chattered ex-citedly as McGregor drove the wagon toward the Culligans'. Mary chattered even more excitedly; it was her very first dance (actually, it wasn't quite, but she'd been too little to remember going to any of the others).

People had come from miles around, including the families of a couple of the boys who'd named Alexander as their fellow plotter. McGregor held his face still when he saw the McKier-nans and the Klimenkos. He'd been holding his face still for years. Doing it now wasn't that much harder than any other time.

Ted Culligan's ears stuck out. Other than that, he seemed a nice enough kid. He wasn't good enough for Julia; that was ob-vious. But it was also obvious no one else could be good enough for Julia, either.

A handful of American families had come up and taken over deserted farms around Rosenfeld. McGregor had wondered if the Culligans would invite them to the dance. Keeping his face still would have been harder then. But he didn't see them, and didn't hear any American accents, either.

A pair of fiddlers, a fellow with a concertina, and a man who pounded a drum with more enthusiasm than rhythm provided the music. The

tunes were all old ones, and all safe ones. The little band stuck to love songs.

McGregor would have loved to hear some of the regimental ballads he'd learned in the Army, but understood why the musicians fought shy of them; word would surely have got back to the U.S. authorities in town, which would have brought trouble on its heels.

McGregor danced a couple of dances with Maude. She did recall the steps better than he; he was content to let her lead. He noticed he wasn't the only farmer whose wife did the steering, either. That made him laugh, something he rarely did these days.

After those first few dances, McGregor was content to stand on the sidelines and drink punch. His eyebrows rose at the first taste of it. The Culligans hadn't stinted on the whiskey. A cup or two, and a man would think he could stay warm outside without coat and hat. He might even prove right.

He was more likely to freeze to death.

Julia danced with other boys besides Ted Culligan. That helped ease McGregor's mind. His daughter was having a good time, which made him feel good. He danced a dance with Mary, whose head, he realized in surprise, came almost to the top of his shoul-der. When had she grown so big?

There stood Julia, talking with Ted over a cup of the potent punch.

Suddenly, McGregor didn't mind the weather at all. In the summertime, courting couples might slip out to a barn for a while. Doing that now invited frostbite, not romance.

McGregor shook hands with Ted Culligan's father when it was time to go home. He pretended not to see Ted kiss Julia on the cheek. That wasn't easy, not when she turned the color of a red-hot stove.

"I had a wonderful time," she said over and over on the drive back to the farm. "Simply wonderful." She was young enough to forget for a while what had happened to her family and her coun-try, and to enjoy the moment.

McGregor wished he could do the same.

Back at the farmhouse, he lit a lamp in the kitchen. His wife and daughters went yawning upstairs to bed. He brought the lamp outside

and set it on the wagon while he unhitched the horse. Then he picked up the lamp again and carried it in his left hand while leading the horse to the barn.

He put the beast in its stall and started out of the barn again. But he stopped after a couple of steps: stopped and held the lan-tern high, peering around in all directions. No, he wasn't wrong. Someone had been in the barn while the McGregors were at the dance.

Fear and ftiry warred inside him. At first, fear was uppermost. Whoever had pawed through his things hadn't bothered trying to conceal his presence. Tools weren't where they should have been. A couple of drawers under McGregor's work table were open; he knew he'd left them closed, for he always did.

Heart hammering in his throat, he went over to the old wagon wheel beneath which he hid his bomb-making paraphernalia. Holding the lamp close, he tried to see if the snooper had tam-pered with it. As far as he could tell, it was undisturbed. His se-cret remained safe.

When he realized that, fury overtook fear. "God damn those sons of bitches," he said softly. "They do still figure I might be a bomber." He was, if anything, more indignant than if he'd been innocent. The Yanks had paid—no, the Yanks had seemed to pay—no attention to him the past couple of years. He'd thought they'd forgotten about him. He'd been wrong.

But they hadn't found anything. They'd have been waiting here for him if they had. "They're trying to rattle me," he mur-mured. "That's got to be it."

They couldn't prove he'd planted bombs, so they were showing their cards, trying to force him into a mistake. He shook his head. He didn't intend to oblige them.

By the time he went back to the farmhouse and upstairs to his bedroom, Maude was sound asleep. He shrugged. Even if she'd been awake, he wouldn't have said a word. He got ready for bed himself.

Before the presidential election, a lot of firms had put printed messages in their workers' pay envelopes. The one Chester Martin got had read, *If Upton Sinclair is elected on Tuesday, don't bother showing up for work Wednesday morning.* The capi-talists had tried to the very end to keep the proletariat from voting its conscience and its class interest.

They'd tried those games before, too, though not so aggres-sively: up till this election, they hadn't been so worried about losing. Well, they'd lost anyhow. Martin laughed every time he thought about it. Come March 4, it would be out with the old and in with the new, and the United States would have their first So-cialist president. He could hardly wait.

Here it was late December, too, and he hadn't been fired. He didn't expect to be fired any time soon, either, not unless he hauled off and punched his foreman or something of that sort. His foreman was an idiot.

Everyone on the foundry floor knew as much. The foreman's boss didn't, though, and his was the only opinion that mattered. But work went on as usual, in spite of there being a Socialist president-elect.

"Did you really expect anything different?" Albert Bauer asked when Martin remarked on that one day at the Socialist hall near the steelworks.

"I don't know that I *expected* anything different," Martin an-swered. "I will say I wondered."

"Mystification," Bauer said scornfully. "That's all it is— nothing but mystification. The capitalists tried to intimidate us, and tried to make us believe they had the power to get away with intimidating us. It didn't work, and now they'll have to learn how to walk a lot smaller."

"Yeah," Martin said, and then, "How much do you think Sin-clair will be able to do once he gets in?"

"Don't know," Bauer answered. "We've got a majority in the House, and I *think* the Socialists and Republicans and progres-sive Democrats make a majority in the Senate. The courts are full of reactionaries. They'll give us trouble."

"If they give too much trouble, we'll stop listening to them," Martin said.

"Let's see them get their way if everybody ignores them. Or let's see them get their way if the worst reactionaries start having accidents."

Bauer laughed at him. "This from the man who used to be a Democrat?

I've heard people who've been revolutionaries since before you were born who didn't sound half as fierce as you do."

"In for a penny, in for a pound," Chester Martin said, shrug-ging.

"Besides, nobody who's been through the trenches is going to fuss about killing a judge or two. Once you've had practice, killing looks pretty easy."

"Something to that, I shouldn't wonder." Bauer looked thought-ful. "The capitalists might not have realized what they were doing when they started the war, but they helped create oppo-nents who wouldn't back away from meeting force with force when they had to."

Martin nodded. "After artillery and poison gas and machine guns, cops are nothing special," he said, a thought he'd had before. He paused, then asked, "What do you think of this Freedom Party down in the CSA, Al?

They're another bunch that doesn't seem like it's afraid of mixing things up with anybody they don't like."

"Reactionary maniacs," Bauer said with a toss of the head. "They want to turn back the clock to the way things were before the Great War. You can't turn back the clock, and you have to be a fool to think you can."

"That's about what I thought," Martin said. "You believe the papers, though, a lot of people like what they're saying. Stupid damn Rebs."

"Stupid damn Rebs," Bauer agreed. "But if we'd lost the war, imagine how fouled up our politics would be. There'd be a bounty on Socialists now.

You'd better believe there would— they'd be hunting us in the streets. And they'd go on electing Demo-crats president for the next fifty years. So maybe we shouldn't blame the Rebs—too much—for being stupid."

"Hmp," was all Chester Martin said to that. He'd spent three years with the Confederates shooting at him. Hell, they hadn't just shot *at* him—they'd shot him. He had the Purple Heart to prove it, and the note of sympathy signed by Theodore Roo-sevelt, too. Even with the war almost three and a half years be-hind him, he wasn't inclined to feel charitable toward the former enemy.

Bauer slapped him on the back. "Go on, get out of here. Go home. Go Christmas shopping. Go somewhere. I keep having to tell you that. You've got a case of the mopes, looks like to me. You won't do yourself any good till you get over 'em. You won't do the Party any good, either, so go on.

Scram."

Martin didn't argue with him. He buttoned his overcoat and headed out of the Socialist hall. The trolley stop was a couple of blocks away. His breath smoked around him. The one thing he envied the Confederate States was their mild winter weather. Summer in Virginia, on the other hand, was a pretty fair approxi-mation of hell. Of course, summer in Toledo wasn't all that far removed from hell, either.

Shops shiny with tinsel and bright with electric lights beck-oned to people walking past them on the street, BIG SALE! signs in the window shouted.

Some of them might even have meant it. But Martin had gone into more than a few shops, and had yet to see much in the way of price cutting. The signs were just a come-on, like the tinsel and the bright lights.

He would have to get presents for his father and his mother and his sister. He wanted to get something for Albert Bauer, too, though Bauer was the least sentimental man he'd ever known off the battlefield. *Maybe some shaving soap,* he thought. That would be thoughtful and useful at the same time.

"Shaving soap," he said several times. A woman walking past gave him an odd look. He didn't care, or not too much. Saying something out loud helped him remember it.

Coins jingled in his trouser pocket: only a faint noise through the thick wool of his coat. He wasn't broke, as he had been through the labor strife after the war. With a Socialist adminis-tration, maybe there wouldn't be any more labor strife. That had been his hope as he'd made an X in the square beside the names of Upton Sinclair and Hosea Blackford. The capitalists had had everything their way for a long time. *Now,* he thought, *it's labor's turn.*

He unbuttoned his coat long enough to grab a nickel. A bum came up to him while he waited for the trolley. The fellow whined for change. He stank of unwashed hide and stale beer. Martin knew he'd just buy

another mug with a nickel, but tossed him the coin anyway. "Merry Christmas, pal." He dug another five cents out of his pocket.

"God bless you, mister," the bum said. Martin waved impa-tiently, wanting him to get out of there before he regretted his own generosity. The bum had had practice at what he did. He faded away.

Up rattled the trolley, almost fifteen minutes late. Martin grumbled as he threw his nickel in the fare box. He grumbled some more when he saw he'd have to stand for a while: the car was full, with a lot of passengers festooned with packages. He did the best he could, positioning himself next to a pretty girl who also had no place to sit. She glanced over toward him once, a look colder than the weather outside. When she left a few blocks later, he was more relieved than anything else.

He eventually did land a seat for himself; more people got off than on as the trolley rolled up to Ottawa Hills. Not for the first time, he thought about renting a place of his own as he walked to the apartment he shared with his parents and sister. He could afford it—as long as the work stayed steady, he could afford it. But his paycheck helped his folks pay the rent here, and they'd carried him when he was out on strike, carried him even though they'd disagreed with his stand. He didn't have to do anything in a hurry.

When he walked in the front door, his father was draping the Christmas tree with tinsel. A fresh, piney scent fought the usual odors of tobacco smoke and cooking. "That's a good one, Dad," Martin said. "You haven't found such a nice, round, plump one in a long time."

"Haven't gone looking for nice, round, plump ones, not since I married your mother," Stephen Douglas Martin answered. Ig-noring his son's half-scandalized snort, he went on, "I am pretty happy with it, though. Found it at a little lot round the corner; I jewed "em down to four bits for it."

"That's a good price," Martin agreed. "You recall where you hid the star and the other ornaments after last Christmas?"

"I didn't hide them," his father said with dignity. "I put them away safe."

About every other year, he had to turn the apartment upside down because he'd put the decorations away so securely, he hadn't the faintest idea where they were.

This time, though, he came up with them and gave his son a superior look that Chester did his best to ignore. They hung the ornaments together. "Are we going to have candles on the tree this year?" Chester asked.

"Unless you really want 'em, I'd say no," Stephen Douglas Martin answered. "Every year, you read in the paper about some damn fool"—his eyes went toward the kitchen as he made sure Louisa Martin hadn't heard him swear—"who burns down his house and burns up his family on account of those things. I don't aim to be that kind of fool, thank you very much."

"All right," Martin said. After bombs and barrels and shell fragments in the trenches, after cops and goons with pistols and clubs, candles struck him as a silly thing to worry about. But his father wasn't wrong; people and houses did go up in flames every Christmas. Martin supposed that, absent big fears, small ones pushed their way to the fore.

Sue came in while they were still decorating. She scaled her broad-brimmed flowered hat across the room as if it were an aeroplane and said, "I get to put the star on top. After the day I had today, I've earned it."

"What happened today?" Chester asked.

"Everyone wanted everything typed at the same time, and it was all stupid," his sister answered. "And everyone yelled at me because I couldn't do sixteen different things at the same time. If half the people in the office would have thought for even a couple of seconds before they started piling stuff onto me, everything would have been fine. But throwing things at me and then yelling their heads off was easier, so they did that instead."

She took the gilded glass star and impaled it on top of the Christmas tree. Then she glared at her brother and her father, de-fying them to tell her she had no business getting angry. Chester was not about to take his life in his hands. He said "Why don't you go get a bottle of Schmidt's out of the icebox?"

Sue didn't usually drink beer. Tonight, she nodded briskly. "I'll do that.

Thank you, Chester." Off toward the kitchen she went. Chester Martin grinned at Stephen Douglas Martin. He might have been trained as a soldier, but he'd just served the cause of peace.

Scipio seldom saw snow. Because he seldom saw it, he enjoyed it when he did. So did everyone else in Augusta. Pickaninnies made snow angels and threw snowballs. So did their parents. So did their grandparents, some of whom had hair as white as that snow.

Because of the clogged, slippery streets, he got to Erasmus' later than he should have, and with his hat askew on his head. More and more boys played football Yankee-style these days, which meant more of them threw the ball, which meant they had practice they used to good effect with snowballs.

Erasmus' eyes glinted with amusement, but all he said was, "Mornin5, Xerxes. How you be today?"

"Cold," Scipio answered. "This here nothin' but damnyankee weather. Far as I is concerned, it kin stay up there wid they."

"Fish keep longer," Erasmus said. "Don't got to buy so much ice from that thief of an ice man for a couple days. Outside o' dat, I ain't gwine argue with you."

Scipio had just started his morning sweeping when the first breakfast customer came in. Erasmus had found he made money serving breakfast, so he'd started. The customer shouted for hot coffee. Scipio didn't blame him. He had to pry himself away from the nice, warm stove to bring the fellow the steaming cup, and then the fried eggs and grits that followed.

After pouring down several steaming cups and shoveling in his food, the black man got to his feet, stuck a hand in the pocket of his dungarees, and looked a question toward Scipio. Even if it was wordless, Scipio understood it. "A million and a half," he said.

"Was only a million last week," the customer said with a sigh. He gave Scipio two crisp, new $1,000,000 banknotes, with Robert E. Lee's portrait on one side and a picture of Jefferson Davis taking the oath of office as provisional president in Mont-gomery on the other. Scipio handed him five $100,000 bank-notes (older and more worn, because they'd been in circulation longer) for change. As he'd hoped, the customer left a couple of hundred thousand dollars' tip when he went on his way.

"When was the last time you seen silver or gold money?" Erasmus asked, his voice wistful. "I ain't even seen no pennies in a hell of a long time."

"Me neither," Scipio said. "Not since the war jus' over. Some-body put down a dime or a qua'ter, reckon I fall over. Somebody put down a Stonewall, I *knows* I fall over."

"How much paper you reckon a Stonewall buy these days?" Erasmus'

lips moved silently as he made his own calculation. "Somewheres around twenty, twenty-five million, I reckon. What you think?"

"Sound about right," Scipio agreed. Erasmus had no formal education, but he was shrewd with figures. Scipio added, "Ain't bad fo'fi'dollars in gold."

"Sure ain't," Erasmus said, and said no more. Scipio wouldn't have been the least bit surprised to find out his boss had a nice pile of Stonewalls hidden away somewhere. If he needed them, they'd come out. If times ever got better, so that money stopped stretching like India rubber, they'd come out then, too. Scipio wished he had his own pile.

He wondered how many goldpieces Anne Colleton had these days. He was willing to bet she had a good many. She'd always been one to land on her feet. And, if the papers didn't lie, she'd been pumping money into the Freedom Party. That worried Scipio. His former boss didn't back losers.

He'd seen as much, time and again. But if the Freedom Party was a winner, every black man and woman in the CSA lost. What the men in the white shirts and butternut trousers had already done in Augusta made that crystal clear.

If it hadn't been for Bathsheba, he wouldn't have worried so much. He'd always been able to take care of himself. Even after the Congaree Socialist Republic collapsed in blood and fire, he'd taken care of himself. Taking care of somebody else, though, somebody he loved—that was different. It was harder, too: he didn't dare take risks for Bathsheba that he would have cheer-fully taken for himself.

Another Negro came in, asking for flapjacks and eggs. He wore a ribbon on his jacket. After a moment, Scipio recognized what it was: the ribbon for a Purple Heart. Pointing to it, he asked, "Where you git that?"

"Up in Virginia," the man answered. "Some damnyankee shot me in the leg. I was damn lucky, let me tell you. All he did was blow off a chunk o'

meat. Bullet didn't hit no bone or nothin', or I reckon I'd be walkin' around with a peg leg."

Listening to somebody talk about how lucky he'd been to get shot struck Scipio as strange, but he'd heard white veterans go on the same way. He said, "So you fit the war and done every-thing the gummint want?" The customer nodded. Scipio hurried back to get his breakfast and bring it to him, then asked, "And now you is a citizen? Now you kin vote an' do like the buckra all kinds o'ways?"

"Can't marry no white woman." The veteran shrugged. "Don't want to marry no white woman—like the colored gal I got. But yeah," he went on with quiet pride, "I's a citizen." He reached into his pocket and displayed an elaborately printed form at-testing to his service in the war. "I carry this here

'stead of a passbook."

Scipio hadn't thought about the aspect of citizenship. He was deeply and sincerely jealous of the veteran, who enjoyed a lib-erty he was unlikely ever to know. "Freedom Party give you trouble?" he inquired. He didn't know why he asked the ques-tion: was he trying to ease his own mind about what the Freedom Party could do, or was he hoping to make the veteran feel bad in spite of the privilege he'd earned?

The man's mouth tightened. His eyes narrowed. A vertical groove appeared between them, and other lines by the edges of his lips. 'Them bastards," he said quietly. "You know any nig-gers don't get trouble from them?"

"Sure enough don't," Scipio answered. "I was hopin' you did."

"Ain't none." The Negro veteran spoke with assurance. "Ain't nothin' we can do about it, neither, nothin' I can see. Yeah, I'm a citizen. I punch one o'

them sons o' bitches for callin' me names or givin' me some other kind o'

hard time, what happen then? White folks' jury send me to jail for about twenty years. That Freedom Party man kick me in the balls, what happen *then?* White folks'jury say he didn't do nothin' wrong." He didn't try to hide his bitterness.

"But you kin vote against they," Scipio said. "Most black folks can't do nothin' a-tall."

"I can vote." The veteran nodded. "I went an' did it last elec-tion, an' I'll do it again come November. But so what? So what, God damn it? Ain't but one o' me, an' all them Freedom Party white folks. Even if all the niggers in the country could vote, wouldn't be enough of us. White folks can do what they want, near enough. Why shouldn't they let me vote? They can afford it."

He got up, laid two million dollars on the table, and stamped out without waiting for change.

"Hope you didn't ride Antiochus so hard, he don't come back," Erasmus said. "That ain't good business."

"Sorry," Scipio answered, which was true in the business sense if in no other. "You hear what he say?" He waited for Erasmus to nod, then went on,

"You still reckon we ain't got nothin' to fear from no Freedom Party?"

Erasmus nodded again. "I keeps tellin' you an' tellin' you, the white man ain't gwine do the work hisself If he ain't gwine do it hisself, he ain't gwine do us no harm—or no worse'n usual, any-ways. You show me them Freedom Party fellas out in the cotton fields at pickin' time, then I commence to worry. Till then—" He shook his head.

Scipio wished he could take matters in stride the way his boss did.

Rationally, everything Erasmus said made sense. That should have sufficed for Scipio, himself a man rational by incli-nation and education both. It should have, but it didn't.

The past few years had been hard on rationality. If the Negro uprising of 1915 hadn't been an exercise in romanticism, he didn't know what was. The Reds hadn't had a chance, but they'd risen anyhow. He didn't think the Freedom Party had a chance of restoring the *status quo ante bellum,* either. That didn't stop whites from flocking to its banners. Most whites liked the way things had been before the war just fine.

And there were, as the Negro veteran had said, a lot of whites. If they got behind the Freedom Party, Jake Featherston and his pals might win. How far could they turn back the clock? Finding out would be as big a romantic folly as the Red uprising. But nothing had stopped Cassius and the other Red leaders, and likely nothing would stop Featherston, either.

Scipio sighed. "Life ain't easy, and at the end you can't do nothin' but up and die. Don't seem right."

Erasmus busied himself making a fresh pot of coffee. When he was through, he said, "So tell me then, you gwine kiss your lady friend good-bye? You gwine lay in bed by your lonesome, waitin' for to drop dead?"

" 'Course not," Scipio said angrily. Then he stopped and stared at Erasmus. The fry cook had pierced his gloomy pretensions as neatly as any white man with a fancy degree in philosophy might have done— and with a tenth, or more likely a hundredth, as many words. Instead of angry, Scipio felt foolish, to say nothing of sheepish. "Got to get on with your reg'lar 'fairs," he mumbled.

"That there make a deal more sense'n what you was spoutin' a minute ago, don't you reckon?" Erasmus demanded.

"Yes, suh," Scipio said. So far as he could recall, he'd never called a black man *sir* before in his life. Whites got the title be-cause they had the whip hand in the CSA. He gave it to Erasmus because— *because he deserves it,* was the thought that ran through Scipio's mind.

Erasmus noticed, too. His head whipped around sharply. Scipio would have bet several million dollars—maybe even a Stonewall— nobody'd ever called him *sir* before that moment, either. "Just get back to work, will you?"

he said, his voice gruff. He didn't know how to respond to being treated with respect.

Why should he? Scipio thought. *It's altogether likely no one has ever shown him any* With that, Scipio came closer to under-standing why the Reds had rebelled against the Confederate government than he ever had before. Was being treated like a human being worth fighting and dying for?

Maybe it was.

What do I know about being treated like a human being? he thought. */*

was only a butler He didn't think in the dialect of the Congaree, but in the precise, formal English he'd had drilled into him. Sometimes that helped him: it gave him a wider, more de-tailed map for his world than he would have had if he'd gone to the cotton fields. Sometimes it left him neither fish nor fowl. And sometimes it made him angry at

what the Colletons had done to his mind, to his life. They hadn't done it for his sake, ei-ther. They hadn't cared at all about him, except as a thing. They'd done it for their own convenience.

"Just got to get through the day and not worry about nothin' you can't change anyways," Erasmus said. Scipio nodded. The fry cook was pursuing the thought he'd had a little before. But Scipio's thought had veered in a different direction. *How can a black man make life worth living in the Confederate States?* he wondered. The question was easy to ask. Finding an answer, though ...

"Here is the latest report, sir." Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dow-ling set the document on General Custer's desk.

"Well, let's have a look at it." The electric lights in the over-head fixture glittered off Custer's reading glasses as he picked up the report and started to go through it. Abner Dowling waited for the explosion he guessed would not be long in coming. He was right. The commander of U.S. forces in Canada slammed the type-written sheets on the desk. "Poppycock!" he shouted. "Twaddle! Harebrained idiocy! Who was the idiot who produced this nonsense?"

"Sir, Captain Fielding, our operative in Rosenfeld, is one of the best we have anywhere in this country," said Dowling, who had read the report before giving it to Custer. "If he says there's no evidence this McGregor planted the bomb in Hy's chop house, you can rely on it."

"If he says there's no bloody goddamn evidence, he can't see the nose in front of his face," Custer snarled. "Christ on His cross, McGregor blew up this

brilliant

operative's"—Custer's

sarcasm

stung—"predecessor.

Otherwise, this imbecile wouldn't have the job in the first place. Look at McGregor's photograph. Does that shifty-eyed devil look like an honest man to you?"

"There's no evidence for that, either, sir," Dowling said pa-tiently.

"They've searched McGregor's farmhouse and barn and grounds any number of times, and they haven't found a thing to suggest he's the bomber."

"Which only proves he's not an imbecile, very much unlike our own people down there," Custer said with a sneer that dis-played the fine white choppers in his new upper plate. "The chap who was there during the war ordered McGregor's son shot, didn't he?"

"Among a good many other executions, yes," Dowling an-swered with a sigh he barely tried to hide. He'd been certain ahead of time Custer would take this line. Custer was irresistibly attracted to the obvious.

And, sure enough, Custer charged ahead as if he hadn't spoken: "Other bombs around Rosenfeld, too. All of them either had to do with families that got his brat in trouble or with people connected to that other operative down there, the one who got himself blown sky high the night the war ended.

Coincidence? Are you telling me it's coincidence?"

"Sir, *someone's* been making bombs, yes," Dowling said. "But it's no more likely to be McGregor than anyone else down there. Major Hannebrink—the operative who's dead now—had to hold down the countryside during the war, and he didn't use a light hand. No one used a light hand during the war, sir."

Again, Custer might not have heard him. He went right on with his own thoughts, such as they were: "And was this McGregor down on his farm when Hy's was bombed? He was not. You know he was not."

"I know where he was, too: visiting kin in Ontario," Dowling said. "He didn't make a secret of where he was going. His farm was checked after the bombing, and then again a little before Christmas, in the hope he might have gotten careless. I don't think he could have gotten careless, sir, because I don't think he had anything to get careless about."

"Ought to haul him in," Custer said. "Ought to haul him in, give him a blindfold and a cigarette, and stand him up against a wall and give him the same his son got."

"Sir!" Dowling exclaimed in real alarm. "Sir, the country's been pretty quiet lately. Do you want to give the Canucks a martyr? If you execute a man when you can't prove he's done anything, you're asking for

trouble.

Don't you think it's better to let sleeping dogs lie?"

"That dog of a McGregor lies, all right, but he's not asleep," Custer retorted. "He's wide awake and laughing at us, that's what he's doing. And as for asking for trouble . . ." He looked sly, al-ways a dangerous sign. "With the damned Socialists coming into power in another five weeks, I'd love to see the Canucks turn fractious. It might remind the Reds in Philadelphia why we have soldiers up here."

That was devious. Dowling wondered how a soldier who'd gained his reputation by charging straight at the foe—regardless of whether the situation called for it—had acquired such a byzantine sense of politics. It might even be a clever move ... if you didn't stop and think about what it meant to this Arthur McGregor and what was left of his family.

Dowling said, "Sir, this fellow's already lost his son. If you shoot him, you leave a widow and a couple of orphaned daugh-ters. That's pretty hard, sir.

If he were the bomber, he would have conspired with somebody, wouldn't he? There's nothing to show he's done that. I mean nothing at all, sir. No claims, no circum-stantial evidence—zero. He hasn't done it, period."

"Lone wolf," Custer said, but he didn't sound so cocksure as he had a moment before. Lone-wolf mad bombers weren't that easy to believe in, even for Custer.

Pressing his advantage, Dowling went on, "So you see, sir, it really isn't that bad a report. I know it would be more satisfying if they could tie up the bomber with a pretty pink ribbon, but there are millions of Canucks and millions of square miles in this miserable icebox of a country. Catching the stinking bastard isn't easy."

"Bah," Custer said—a sign of weakening. Then, as if it proved something, he added, "He almost blew you up, too."

"Believe me, sir, I know that," Dowling said fervently. No-body cared enough about him personally to want to do him in. But if Custer went, he was liable to go, too. He'd make one line in the fourth paragraph of the newspaper stories. *The com-manding general's adjutant also perished in the blast*—all the obituary he'd ever get.

He sighed. His name and photograph wouldn't make it into the encyclopedias or the history books. If he ever wrote his memoirs, the only reason they might find a publisher would be that people had an endless appetite for stories about Custer. Dowling coughed. He could tell stories about Custer, all right, stories that would curl the hair of anybody with an ounce of sense.

He did not think he was boastful in reckoning himself smarter than the senior soldier in the U.S. Army. Custer had graduated dead last in his West Point class—hardly a shining example, save perhaps of what not to do.

Whenever Custer had been right, all through his enormously long military career, he'd been right for the wrong reasons. The shouting match he'd got into with Teddy Roosevelt about how and why they'd used their Gatling guns in Montana Territory the way they had proved how far back that went.

And yet, for all his failings, Custer was, and deserved to be, famous. He might have been right for the wrong reasons, but he'd been right at the right times. That counted for more. And Custer, whatever else you said about him, never did anything by halves. That counted for a lot, too.

Flaws and all—and Dowling, from long exposure to them, knew how massive they were—Custer would live in the coun-try's memory for generations to come. And, when authors got around to writing historical novels about him, they would have to invent a character to play his adjutant, because no one would remember that perfectly competent but uninspired lieutenant colo-nel, Abner Dowling, whose only measurable defect was measur-able indeed, in his uncommon and ever-increasing girth. It hardly seemed fair.

No doubt it wasn't fair. But then, life wasn't fair. Some people were smarter than others. Some were handsomer than others. Some—Custer sprang to mind—were pushier than others. You did what you could with what you had. And, even if no one would recall the contributions of an obscure officer named Dowling, Custer had done more than he might have otherwise because he'd had that obscure officer at his side and guarding his back.

Testily, Custer said, "Oh, very well, Dowling—have it your way. If you think this McGregor is pure as the driven snow"—a comparison that hardly required a poetic spirit in Winnipeg in January—"we'll leave him alone. On your head be it. And if he sets off another bomb, on

your head it will be."

"You already pointed that out, sir." Dowling sounded on the testy side himself. "I would point out to you in return that this is not merely my opinion.

It is the opinion of the expert on the spot. If we pay no attention to the opinion of the expert on the spot, where are we?"

He'd meant it for a rhetorical question. Custer answered as if it were literal: "In the General Staff offices in Philadelphia." That jerked a startled snort of laughter out of Dowling. Custer went on, "But if we fall down and worship the expert on the spot, where are we then? With the Israelites who fell down and wor-shiped the Golden Calf, that's where."

Dowling thought the second comparison far-fetched. What Custer meant was that he wanted the liberty to do as he damn well pleased. That was all Custer had ever wanted. Since he was eighty-one years old and still hadn't learned the difference between liberty and license, he wasn't likely to gain that knowl-edge in however much time he had left.

"I do think you're doing the right thing by letting this McGregor alone,"

Dowling said. "The whole country has been noticeably calmer lately than it was when you first took over."

"I put the fear of God in the Canucks, that's why, and I had my own good reasons for doing it," Custer said. There might even have been some truth in his words, though Dowling thought the Canadians' despair over a cause obviously lost had more to do with it. "We will make a desert if we have to, and we shall call it peace."

"Yes, sir," his adjutant said resignedly. No use expecting Cus-ter to become a decent Latin scholar at his age, either (more hope that he might become a scholar of indecent Latin). When Tacitus had said the Romans made a desert and called it peace, he was condemning them. Custer took it for praise.

"I don't care if they hate us," Custer added, "as long as they're afraid of us." That was another Latin tag. Custer probably knew as much; having thought of the one, coming up with the other would have been easier for him. But did he remember the phrase came from Caligula's

lips? *Not likely,*

Dowling judged. He glanced over at Custer. Would Caligula have been like this if he'd lasted to eighty-one? Dowling's shiver had nothing to do with the subzero cold outside. He couldn't recall the last time he'd had such a frightening thought.

He said, "Now that they *are* quiet, sir, I really do think it's best not to stir them up."

"So you've said—over and over and over," Custer said. "So everyone says. Well, I have something to say to you, too: you and everyone else had better be right, or the United States are going to end up with egg on their face. And what do you think of that?"

"I think you're right, sir." Dowling didn't see what good pointing out Custer's unfailing gift for the obvious would do.

XIII

Jefferson Pinkard's alarm clock went off with a sound like doom. The steelworker thrashed and writhed and finally managed to turn the bloody thing off. He wished he could thump himself in the head and get rid of his headache the same way. Alabama was a dry state, but that didn't mean he and his Freedom Party bud-dies couldn't lay their hands on some whiskey after meetings when they set their minds to it.

"Ought to know better than to go into work hungover," he said. He did know better. He'd learned better the hard way. He hadn't headed for the Sloss Works hurting in years—not till he threw Emily out of the house after catching her whoring with Bedford Cunningham a second time. Since then ..

. since then, he knew he'd been drinking more than he should, but knowing and stopping were two different critters.

He built up the fire in the stove and got a pot of coffee going. Then he went back to the bathroom and dry-swallowed a couple of aspirins. He lathered his face and shaved. As he was toweling himself dry afterwards, he wondered why he hadn't cut his own throat. It wasn't the first time that question had occurred to him.

After a cup of strong black coffee, after the aspirins started to work,

the world looked a little less gloomy. He ate a big chunk of bread and ham and cut off a piece of last night's partly cremated ham steak to toss into his dinner pail. Since he'd thrown Emily out, he'd discovered just what a lousy cook he was. "Ain't starved yet," he declared, and headed out the door. The place was an unholy mess, but he lacked the time, the energy, and the skill to do anything about it.

He had to walk past Bedford Cunningham's cottage on the way to the foundry. He looked straight ahead. He didn't want to see Bedford, even if he was there. He didn't want to see Fanny Cunningham, either. He blamed her, too. If she'd kept her hus-band happy in bed, he wouldn't have had to go sniffing around Emily.

More steelworkers, white and black, crowded the path lead-ing to the Sloss Works. Greetings filled the air: "Hey, Lefty!" "Mornin', Jeff." "How you is, Nero?" "What's up, Jack?" "Free-dom!" Pinkard heard that a couple-three times before he got to the time clock and stuck in his card to start the day. As the as-pirins and coffee had done, the slogan made him feel better.

He winced only a little when he stepped out onto the foundry floor. Once he was out there, he knew he'd make it through the day. If he could stand the clangor now, he wouldn't even notice it by the time afternoon rolled around.

Vespasian came onto the floor only a minute or so after he did. "Mornin', Mistuh Pinkard," the Negro steelworker said.

"Morning," Pinkard answered. Every time he thought about it these days, the idea of working with a black buck graveled him more. But Vespasian had been out on the foundry floor since 1915, and he wasn't even slightly uppity. He gave Jeff's anger no place to perch. That in itself was infuriating.

They had no time for light conversation, not this morning. The big crucible swung down and poured a fiery load of molten metal down onto the sand of the foundry floor. Steam rose in hissing, stinking clouds. The steel seemed as determined to get free of the mold as any house cat was to get outdoors.

Whatever else Pinkard thought of Vespasian, he had to allow that the big Negro knew his way around steel. Vespasian made as good a partner as Bedford Cunningham ever had, and he wasn't likely to try and sleep with Emily.

Or maybe he is, Jeff thought. *Who the hell knows? Emily's liable to be taking on niggers these days.* He didn't know what the woman he'd married, the woman he'd loved, was doing these days, not for certain. He'd finally let her back into the house so she could put on some clothes and gather up whatever she could carry in her arms. Then he'd thrown her out again. She hadn't come round the place since. He wouldn't have let her in if she had.

Maybe she was working in a factory somewhere downtown. Maybe she was standing on a streetcorner, shaking her ass when-ever a man walked by and hoping he'd give her five or six million dollars for a fast roll in the hay.

"I don't care what she's doing," Pinkard said, quickly, fiercely. Vespasian shouldn't have been able to hear that low-voiced mumble. But the Negro had been on the foundry floor a long time. He'd got as good as anybody could get at hearing under the racket and picking up talk. He knew about Emily. Everybody at the Sloss Works knew about Emily, sure as hell. Just for a second, he looked at Pinkard with pity in his eye.

Jeff glared back, and Vespasian flinched as if from a blow. The last thing in the world Jeff wanted was a black man's pity. "Work, God damn you," he snarled. Vespasian did work, his face as blank of expression now as a just-erased blackboard.

Before Pinkard had been conscripted, he wouldn't have talked to Vespasian that way. He'd thought the Negro a pretty good fellow then. He might not have talked to Vespasian that way be-fore he first heard Jake Featherston speak. He might as well have been blind before. But Featherston had opened his eyes, all right.

"Joining the Freedom Party was the best thing I ever did," he said. If Vespasian heard that, he pretended he didn't.

It was true, though. The Freedom Party gave him a family, a place to go, things to do. If he hadn't been active in the Party, he might have gone clean round the bend when Emily took off her dress for Bedford Cunningham that second time. That Emily might not have done any such thing if he hadn't so immersed himself in the Freedom Party never once entered his mind.

What he did think about was that several of his Party buddies had had their marriages go to hell and gone in the past few months. None of the other blowups had been quite so spectacu-lar as his, but having

pals who understood what he was going through because they were going through the same thing made life easier. None of his friends had been able to figure out why they and their wives had broken up. Trying gave them some-thing to talk about at Party meetings and when they got together betweentimes.

The only place where he didn't think that much about the Freedom Party was out on the foundry floor. If you thought about anything but what you were doing out there, you were asking for a trip to the hospital if you were lucky and a trip to the graveyard if you weren't. He'd learned that early on, and re-learned it when he came back to the Sloss Works after the war.

Work came first. That was a matter of life and death.

At last, work ended for the day. As the screech of the steam whistle faded, Pinkard turned to Vespasian and said, "See you to-morrow.

Freedom!"

Vespasian's lips had started to shape the word *see.* But he didn't say anything at all. He showed expression now: the expression was pain. Jeff had seen it on Yankees' faces as he drove home the bayonet. Vespasian turned away from him and stumbled off to clock out as if he too had taken a couple of feet of sharpened steel in the guts. He might have had a pretty good notion of Jeff's politics beforehand, but now he was left in no possible doubt. Jeff laughed out loud. The future was on his side. He felt it in his bones.

He clocked out and hurried home to his cottage. Fanny Cun-ningham sat out on the front porch of hers next door. Jeff leered at her, wondering if this was how Bedford had looked at Emily. It didn't draw Fanny into his arms.

She fled back into the house. He laughed again. His hot, burning laughter filled the street, as molten steel filled its mold.

He took some sausages out of the icebox and burned them for supper.

His suppers, these days, were of two sorts: burnt and raw. He ate bread with them, and gulped down a glass of homebrew that was no better than it had to be. The dishes sat in the sink, waiting. As far as he was concerned, they could go right on waiting, too. He had a Freedom Party meeting tonight. That was a hell of a lot more important than a pile of goddamn dishes.

"Freedom!' The greeting filled the livery stable. It wasn't a challenge here, nor a shout of defiance: it was what one friend said to another. The men who filled the stable—filled it almost to overflowing; before long, like it or not, the Birmingham chapter would have to find a new place to meet—

were friends, col-leagues, comrades. Those who'd been in the Party longer got a little more respect than johnny-come-latelys, but only a little. Jeff had joined long enough ago to deserve some of that respect himself With Barney Stevens up in Richmond, a skinny little dentist named Caleb Briggs led the meetings and led the Party in Bir-mingham. "Freedom!" he shouted, his voice thin and rasping— he'd been gassed up in Virginia, and wouldn't sound right till they laid him in his grave.

"Freedom!" Pinkard shouted with the rest of the men who'd come together to find, to build, something larger and grander than themselves.

"Boys, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know when I say that Jake Featherston's going to be running for presi-dent this year." Briggs paused to suck more air into his ruined lungs—and to let the Party members cheer till they sounded al-most as hoarse as he always did. Then he went on, "We've done a little bit of brawling every now and again, but it's not a patch on what we're going to be doing, let me tell you that!"

More cheers erupted. Jeff pumped his fist in the air. Brambles and thorns in his throat, Briggs went on, "The Whigs will be holding rallies here in town.

The goddamn Radical Liberals will be holding rallies here in town." He shook his head. Lamplight reflected wetly from his eyes. "That's not right.

Those traitor bastards will try and hold rallies here in town. Are we going to let 'em?"

"No!" Jeff shouted, along with most of the Freedom Party men. The rest were shouting "Hell, no!" and other, coarser, varia-tions on the theme instead.

"That's right." Caleb Briggs nodded now, which made his eye-balls glitter in a different way. Jeff could not have said how it was different, but it was.

Briggs went on, "That's just right, boys. This is a war we're in, same as the one we fought in the trenches. We would have won that one, only we got stabbed in the back. This time, we hit the traitors first."

Jeff applauded till his hard, horny hands were sore. Somebody not far away pulled out a flask of moonshine and passed it around. Pinkard took a swig. "Son of a bitch!" he said reverently, his vocal cords for the moment nearly as charred as Briggs'. He passed the flask along, half sorry to see it go, half relieved it was gone.

Someone started singing "Dixie." Jeff roared out the words, a fiery fury in him that had surprisingly little to do with the whiskey he'd just drunk. The Freedom Party sang "Dixie" at every meeting. Then someone else began

"Louisville Will Be Free." That one dated from just after the Second Mexican War, and recounted the greatest fight of that war. With Louisville forced back into the USA in the Great War, it took on a poignancy now that it hadn't had then.

Tears ran down Jefferson Pinkard's face. They took him by surprise. He wondered if he was weeping for ravaged Louisville or for himself. A great determination filled him. Like his coun-try, he'd paid for doing what he remained convinced was right Sooner or later, everyone else would pay, too.

"Freedom!" he cried at the top of his lungs. "Freedom! Freedom!"

Reggie Bartlett nodded in some surprise when Tom Brearley came into Harmon's drugstore. He hadn't seen much of Brearley since the ex-Navy man went down to South Carolina to talk with Anne Colleton. Reggie had been waiting for fireworks to spring from that meeting. He was still waiting.

Evidently, Brearley was getting tired of waiting. He said, "All right, Mr.

Bartlett, what's your next great idea for blowing the Freedom Party out of the water?"

"I haven't got another one," Reggie admitted. "Wish to heaven I did."

"Well, I've got another one." Brearley looked very determined. Reggie could easily picture him peering through a periscope at a U.S. cruiser.

Oddly, he also looked much younger than he had before sticking out his chin. He said, "If I can't get those bas-tards fighting among themselves, I'll just have to take the story to the newspapers."

"Jesus," Reggie said. "Are you sure you want to do that? I wouldn't, not unless I had my life-insurance premiums all paid up."

"As a matter of fact, I do," Brearley said, doing a determined and pretty good best to sound unconcerned. "I made sure they were before I went down to talk to Tom Colleton's sister, because I wasn't sure I'd be coming back. But by now Kimball has to know I've talked. He has to figure I'll talk more. That means he'll try and kill me sooner or later—likely sooner. I'm kind of surprised he hasn't tried it yet—him or some of the Freedom Party apes up here. I want to make sure the word gets out before he does." He didn't sound unconcerned any more: just matter-of-fact, a man tackling a job he knew was dangerous.

Reggie understood that. He wouldn't have, not before the war. Going through the trenches—coming out of the trenches on command to attack—changed a man forever. He knew he would be afraid again, many times in his life. But fear would never paralyze him, as it might have done before. He had its mea-sure now.

He said, "If you're bound and determined to do it, you'd better think hard about which paper you go to. You don't want to head for the *Sentinel,* because—"

"Don't teach your grandpa to suck eggs," Brearley said with a wry grin.

"Do I look that stupid? Half the time, I reckon Jake Featherston puts that rag out himself. Shame and a disgrace, the garbage it prints."

"Why don't I just shut up?" Reggie said to nobody in particular.

"I don't want you to shut up," Brearley told him. "You go to political rallies for fun. You really think about this stuff, a lot more than I do. So I want your advice: you reckon I should talk to the *Whig* or the *Examiner?"*

"Go with the Whigs or the Radical Liberals?" Reggie stroked his chin.

After a minute or so of silent thought, he said, "That's an interesting one, isn't it? The Freedom Party's probably giving the Whigs a harder time—they were the ones who ran the country during the war. But I think the Radical Liberals are more afraid of Featherston and his gang, don't you?

For one thing, they're farther away from the stand he takes, where some of the right-wing Whigs might as well start yelling 'Freedom!' them-selves. And for another, the Rad Libs are running scared. If they don't get a break, the Freedom Party'll be number two in the country after this fall's election. You give them some dirt, they'll run with it."

Tom Brearley looked at him as if he'd never seen him before. "You're wasting your time shoving pills across a counter, Bart-lett. You should have been a lawyer, something like that. You think straight. You think real straight."

"Maybe I do," Reggie said. "You're the one who's not thinking straight now, I'll tell you that. Where the devil am I going to get the money to study law? Where am I going to get the money to get the education I'd need so I could study law? If I'd had a mil-lion dollars *before* the war, it might have been a different story."

Brearley shrugged. "If you want something bad enough, you can generally find a way to get it. What I want right now is to torpedo the Freedom Party. I tried one way. It didn't work. All right—I'll try something else. The *Examiner* it'll be. Thanks, Bartlett." He sketched a salute and left.

Jeremiah Harmon came up from the back of the drugstore. "I overheard some of that," he said, sounding apologetic— astonishing in a boss. "None of my business, but anybody who goes up against a machine gun without a machine gun of his own is asking for a whole peck of trouble. You ask me, the *Examiner's* a popgun, not a machine gun. Wish I could say different, but I can't."

"Where do you find a machine gun to fight the Freedom Party?" Reggie asked.

"Haven't the foggiest notion," the druggist replied. "Don't know if there is any such animal. But if I didn't have one, I think I'd stay down in my dugout and hope no big shell caved it in."

He hadn't been to the front. He'd passed the war in Richmond, making pills and salves and syrups. He never pretended other-wise. But the vocabulary of the trenches had come to be part of everyone's day-to-day speech in the CSA. An awful lot of men had passed through the fire.

Reggie wasted a moment wondering if expressions from the front line filled the sharp-sounding En-glish of the United States, too.

Harmon went back to whatever he'd been doing when Tom Brearley came into the drugstore. He didn't waste a lot of time banging a drum for what he thought. If you agreed with him or decided he had a point, fine. If you didn't, he wouldn't lose any sleep over it.

And it wasn't just an interesting discussion to Reggie Bartlett. He'd signed his name to the letter that had gone down to Tom Colleton. If Freedom Party thugs came after Tom Brearley, they were liable to come after him, too.

All at once, he wished he'd told Brearley to keep the hell away from newspapers. Part of him wished that, anyhow. The rest realized such worries came far too late. The cat had been out of the bag ever since he touched pen to paper.

He started watching the newspapers, especially the *Richmond Examiner,* like a hawk. Day followed day with no banner head-line about a U.S. destroyer sunk after the Confederate States asked for quarter. Maybe Brearley had got cold feet and hadn't bent a reporter's ear after all. In a way, that disappointed Reggie down to the depths of his soul. In another way, one that left him ashamed, it relieved him. Maybe Brearley had talked, and the re-porter hadn't believed him. Reggie almost hoped that was so. It would have given him the best of both worlds.

And then one day with March approaching, and with it the first inauguration of a Socialist president of the USA, that ban-ner headline did run in the *Examiner,* WAR CRIMINAL HIGH IN FREEDOM PARTY

CIRCLES! For a moment, Reggie hoped the story under the headline would be about some other war criminal; he wouldn't have been surprised to learn the Freedom Party shel-tered battalions of them under its banner.

But it wasn't. The reporter didn't name Tom Brearley—citing concerns for his informant's safety—but he did name Roger Kimball, the *Bonefish,* and the USS *Ericsson.* Reggie hadn't known exactly what kind of secret Brearley was keeping. Now he did. Now everybody did. He nodded to himself. Brearley hadn't been stretching things—it was a big one.

The reporter made it sound as if several members of the sub-mersible's crew had confirmed what Brearley said, too. Maybe that was camouflage, to make the story seem more authoritative and to take some of the heat off Brearley. Maybe he really had checked with other

crewmen, and that was why the story had waited so long to run.

However that worked, the story made the Freedom Party hop-ping mad.

The very next day, a blistering denunciation ran in the *Sentinel.* What it amounted to was that the damnyankees had had it coming, and that anyone betraying a Confederate officer who'd done his duty as he saw it deserved whatever happened to him. It didn't quite declare open season on Tom Brearley, but it didn't miss by much. Reggie was glad he didn't figure in the piece in any way.

Jeremiah Harmon said, "Now your friend gets to find out what sort of whirlwind he reaps."

"He's not my—" Reggie stopped. He'd been about to say that Brearley was no friend of his. The only reason they knew each other was that the ex-Navy man had married an old flame of his. But they shared a common foe: the Freedom Party. That might not make them friends, but it did make them allies.

Harmon noted Reggie's pause, nodded as if his assistant had spoken a complete sentence, and went back to work. A cus-tomer came into the drugstore, marched up to the counter, and demanded a ringworm salve.

Reggie sold him one, knowing the best the store offered were none too good. Doctors and re-searchers had got pretty good at figuring out what caused a lot of ailments. Doing anything worthwhile about them was some-thing else again.

Tom Brearley came by a couple of days later. He grinned a skeletal grin at Reggie. "Still here," he said in sepulchral tones.

Reggie made shooing motions. "Well, get the hell out of *here"* he hissed.

"You think I want to be seen with you?"

His acting was too good; Brearley turned and started to leave. Only the laughter Reggie couldn't contain stopped him. "Damn you," Brearley said without heat. "You had me going there. Free-dom Party's still screaming about traitors. Seems to be the only song they know."

"Anybody give you any real trouble?" Reggie asked.

Brearley shook his head. "Not yet, thank God. The only people in the Freedom Party who know what I look like live down in South Carolina. But they know my name. They can find out where I live." He patted the waistband of his trousers. His coat con-cealed whatever he kept there, but Reggie had no trouble fig-uring out what it was. Brearley said, "They want to try and give me a hard time, I'm ready for 'em."

"Good." Reggie hesitated, then asked, "How's Maggie doing?"

"Pretty well," Brearley answered. "She doesn't take the whole business as seriously as I do. She hasn't paid that much attention to politics, and she doesn't really know what a pack of nasty . . . so-and-so's join the Party."

Reggie wasn't sure he took the whole business as seriously as Brearley did, either. Then he recalled his relief at not getting into the newspaper.

Maybe—evidently—he took things seriously after all.

Unable to stomach his own cooking, he stopped in a greasy spoon for supper. He regretted it shortly thereafter; the colored fellow sweating at the stove knew less about what to do there than he did. When he got home, he gulped bicarbonate of soda. That quelled the internal rebellion, but left him feeling gassy and bloated. He read for a while, found himself yawning, and went to bed.

Bells in the night woke him. He yawned again, enormously, put the pillow over his head, and very soon went back to sleep. When morning came, he was halfway through breakfast before he remembered the disturbance.

"Those were fire bells," he said, and then, "Good thing the fire wasn't next door, I reckon, or I'd be burnt to a crisp right about now."

Somebody had been burnt to a crisp. Newsboys shouted the story as they hawked their papers. "Liar's house goes up in smoke! Read all about it!" a kid selling the *Sentinel* yelled.

A cold chill ran through Reggie Bartlett. He didn't buy the *Sentinel;* that would have been the same as putting fifty thousand dollars in the Freedom Party's coffer. Two streetcorners farther along, he picked up a copy of the *Examiner* and read it as he walked the rest of the way to Harmon's drugstore.

He shivered again as he read. The paper reported that Thomas and Margaret Brearley had died in "a conflagration that swept their home so swiftly and violently that neither had the slightest chance to escape, which leads firemen to suspect that arson may have been involved." It talked about Brearley's naval career in general terms, but did not mention that he'd served aboard the *Bonefish.*

Jeremiah Harmon had a newspaper in his hand when Reggie walked into the drugstore. Reggie didn't need to ask which story he was reading. "You see?" the druggist said in his mild, quiet voice.

"Oh, yes," Reggie answered. "I see. God help me, Mr. Har-mon, I sure do."

Sylvia Enos sank into the trolley seat with a grateful sigh. She didn't often get to sit on her way to the galoshes factory. And, better yet, the seat had a copy of the *Boston Globe* there for the grabbing. She snatched up the paper before anyone else could. Every penny she didn't spend on a newspaper could go to something else, and she needed plenty of other things, with not enough pennies to go around.

Most of the front page was filled with stories about the inau-guration of President Sinclair, which was set for day after to-morrow. Sylvia read all of them with greedy, gloating interest; she might not be able to vote herself, but the prospect of a So-cialist president delighted her. She didn't quite know what Upton Sinclair could do about Frank Best, but she figured he could do something.

Another prominent headline marked the fall of Belfast to the forces of the Republic of Ireland. No wonder that story got prominent play in Boston, with its large Irish population. "Now the whole of the Emerald Isle is free," Irish General Collins was quoted as saying. The folk of Belfast might not agree—surely did not agree, else they wouldn't have fought so grimly—but no one on this side of the Atlantic cared about their opinion.

Sylvia opened the paper to the inside pages. She picked and chose there; the factory was getting close. A headline caught her eye: REBEL

ACCUSER PERISHES IN SUSPICIOUS FIRE. Most of the story was about the death of a man whose name was spelled half the time as Brierley and the other half as Brearley. *He had drawn the wrath of the Freedom Party, a growing force in the CSA,* the *Globe's* reporter wrote, *by claiming that a leading Party official in one of the Carolinas was, while in the C.S.*

Navy, responsible for deliberately sinking the USS Ericsson *although fully aware that the war between the United States and Confederate States had ended. The Freedom Party has denied this charge, and has also denied any role in the deaths of Brierley and his wife.*

The trolley came to Sylvia's stop. It had already started rolling again before she realized she should have got off. When it stopped again, a couple of blocks later, she did get off. She knew she should hurry back to the factory—the implacable time card would dock her for every minute she was late, to say nothing of the hard time Frank Best would give her—but she couldn't make herself move fast, not with the way her mind was whirling.

Not a British boat after all, she thought. *It* was *the Rebs. They were the ones George worried about, and he was right. And they did it after the war was over, and the fellow who did it is still run-ning around loose down there.* She wanted to scream. She wanted to buy a gun and go hunting for the submarine skipper. Why not? He'd gone hunting for her husband.

"Are you all right, dearie?" May Cavendish asked when Sylvia came in and put her card in the time clock. "You look a little peaked."

"I'm—" Sylvia didn't know how she was, or how to put it into words. She felt as if a torpedo had gone off inside her head, sinking everything she thought she'd known since the end of the war and leaving nothing in its place. Stunned and empty, she went into the factory.

Frank Best greeted her, pocket watch in hand. "You're late, Mrs. Enos."

Most days, she would have apologized profusely, hoping in that way to keep him from bothering her too much. Most days, it would have been a forlorn hope, too. Now she just looked at him and nodded. "Yes, I am, aren't I?" She walked past him toward her station near the molds. If he hadn't quickly stepped out of the way, she would have walked over him. He stared after her. She did not look back over her shoulder to see.

After a while, he came up to her carrying a pair of rubber overshoes.

"Thought you could slip these by me, did you?" he said: his usual opening line.

She looked at the galoshes. The red rings around the top looked fine to her, which meant they'd look fine to a customer, too. "They're all

right, Mr.

Best," she said, brushing a wisp of hair back from her eyes with the sleeve of her shirtwaist. "I really don't have time to play games today. I'm sorry."

He stared at her again, in complete astonishment. "I could have you fired," he said. "You could be on the street in fifteen minutes."

"That's true," she said calmly, and bent to paint a couple of overshoes coming down the line at her.

"Have you gone out of your mind?" the foreman sputtered.

"Maybe." Sylvia considered it for a moment. "I don't think so, but I rather wish I would."

"You're kid—" Frank Best began. He studied Sylvia. She wasn't kidding.

That must have been obvious, even to him. He started to say something else. Whatever it was, it never passed his lips. He walked away, shaking his head. He was still carrying the galoshes about which he'd intended to give her a hard time.

So that's the secret, she thought. She'd been drunk only a few times in her life, but she had that same giddy, headlong, anything-can-happen feeling now. *Act a little crazy and Frank will leave you alone.*

But she hadn't been acting. She didn't just feel drunk. She felt crazy. The world had turned sideways while she wasn't looking. Everything she thought she'd known about who'd killed George turned out to be wrong. Now she was going to have to grapple with what that meant.

As she painted red rings on the next pair of overshoes, she suddenly wished Upton Sinclair hadn't won the election after all. Sinclair, when he talked about dealings with other countries, talked about reconciliation and improving relations with former foes. That had sounded good during the campaign. Now—

Now Sylvia wished Teddy Roosevelt were going to be inaugu-rated again come Friday. With TR, you always knew where he stood. Most of the time, Sylvia had thought he stood in the wrong place. But he would have demanded that Confederate submersible skipper's head on a silver platter.

And, if the Rebs hesitated about turning him over, TR would have started blowing things up. He wouldn't have stopped blowing things up till the Confederates did what he told them, either.

Sylvia sighed. *So much for Socialism,* she thought. As soon as she wanted the United States to take a strong line with their neighbors, she automatically thought of the Democrats.

That's why they ran things for so long, she realized. Lots of people had wanted the United States to take a strong line with their neighbors. As soon as people thought they didn't need to worry about the CSA and Canada, England and France, any more, they threw the Democrats out on their ear.

She'd wanted to throw the Democrats out on their ear, too. Maybe she'd been hasty.

How am I going to get revenge with Upton Sinclair in the Powel House or the White House or wherever he decides to live? she wondered. *He won't do it. He's already said he wouldn 't do things like that. Will I have to do it myself?*

She laughed, imagining herself invading the Confederate States singlehanded. What would she wear? A pot helmet over her shirtwaist and skirt? A green-gray uniform with a flowered hat? And how would she get rid of the Reb who'd killed her hus-band? With a hatpin or a carving knife?

Those were the most lethal weapons she owned. She had the feeling they wouldn't be enough to do the job.

She kept on doing her job, as automatically as if she were a machine.

The factory owners hadn't figured out how to make a machine to replace her. The minute they did, she'd be out of work. Millions of people, all over the country, were in that same boat. That was another reason Sinclair had beaten TR.

When the dinner whistle blew, Sylvia jumped. She couldn't decide whether she thought it came too soon or too late. Either way, it shouldn't have come just then. It snapped her out of a haze: not the haze of work, but the haze of a mind far away—in the Confederate States, in the South Atlantic, and back in her apartment with her husband.

Still bemused, she picked up her dinner pail and went out to meet her

friends. "What in the world did you say to Frank?" Sarah Wyckoff demanded. "He's been walking around all morn-ing like he just saw a ghost."

"And the way he's been looking at you," May Cavendish added, taking a bite from a pungent sandwich of summer sau-sage, pickles, and onions.

"Not like he wants to get his hands in-side your clothes, the way he usually does, but more like he's scared of you. Tell us the secret."

"I don't know," Sylvia said vaguely. She remembered talking with the foreman not long after the shift started, but hardly any-thing of what had passed between them. Most of what had gone on since she'd seen that story in the *Boston Globe* was a blur to her.

"You all right, dearie?" May asked.

"I don't know," Sylvia said again. She realized she had to do better than that, and did try: "I'm having a lot of trouble keeping my mind on my work—on much of anything—this morning."

"Well, I know all about *that"* Sarah said. "This isn't the most exciting place they ever built, and that's the Lord's truth." May nodded while lighting a cigarette.

Sylvia lit one, too. The surge of well-being that went with the first couple of puffs penetrated the fog around her wits. In thoughtful tones, she asked,

"May, what would you do if you could find the soldier who killed your husband? I mean *the* sol-dier, the one who fired the machine gun or rifle or whatever it was"

"I don't know," May Cavendish answered. "I never thought about that before. For all I know, he's already dead." Her eyes went flat and hard.

When she spoke again, her voice was cold as sleet: "I hope he's already dead, and I hope he took a long time to die, too, the stinking son of a bitch."

But then, after a savage drag on her cigarette, she sounded much more like her usual self, saying, "But how could you ever tell? With so many bullets fly-ing around, nobody knew who shot people and who didn't. Her-bert always used to talk about that when he came home on leave." Now she sighed and looked sad, remembering.

"I suppose you're right," Sylvia said. She'd forgotten the dif-ferences between the wars the Army and the Navy fought. She knew the name of her husband's killer: Roger Kimball. She knew he lived down in South Carolina and agitated for the Freedom Party. She had no idea whether the Freedom Party was good, bad, or indifferent.

"What would you do, Sylvia?" Sarah asked. "If you knew?"

"Who can say?" Sylvia sounded weary. "I like to think I'd have the gumption to try and kill him, but who can say?" The whistle blew, announcing the end of the dinner break. "I like to think I'd have the gumption to try and kill Frank Best, too, but it hasn't happened yet," Sylvia added.

Chuckling, she and her friends went back to work.

Flora Hamburger remembered the last presidential inauguration she'd attended, four years before. *That long?* She shook her head in wonder. So much had changed since 1917. She'd been brand new in Congress then, unsure of herself, unsure of her place in Philadelphia. Now she was starting her third term. The war had still raged. Now the United States were at peace with the world. And she'd gone to the inauguration of a Democrat then.

Now—

Now half the bunting that decorated Philadelphia was the traditional red, white, and blue. The other half was solid red, symbol of the Socialists who had come into their own at last.

A lot of people in Philadelphia were going around with long faces. Being the home of the federal government since the Second Mexican War, it had also been the home of the Demo-cratic Party since the 1880s. Now President Sinclair would be choosing officials ranging from Cabinet members down to post-masters. A horde of Democrats who'd thought they owned life-time positions were discovering they'd been mistaken and would have to go out and look for real work.

President-elect Sinclair had chosen to hold the inauguration in Franklin Square, to let as large a crowd as possible see him. He'd thought about going down to Washington, D.C., but the *de jure* capital remained too war-battered to host the ceremony. Philadelphia it was. "We are the party of the people," he had said a great many times. "Let them know how they are governed, and they will ensure they are governed well."

Before Sinclair took the presidential oath, Hosea Blackford would take that of the vice president. Flora shook her head again. In March 1917, she'd had a mild friendship with the Con-gressman from Dakota. Now ... *Now I am the mistress of the vice president-elect of the United States.*

The title should have left her feeling sordid and ashamed— and it did, sometimes. What, after all, was *mistress* but a fancy word for *fallen woman?* But she also knew she'd never been so happy as in the time since she and Blackford became lovers. Did that make her depraved? She didn't think so—most of the time, she didn't think so—though no doubt others would if they knew.

Whatever she was, it didn't show on the outside. Dressed in a splendid maroon wool suit (Herman Bruck would have ap-proved) and a new hat, she had one of the best seats for the cere-mony. Why not? She was a Socialist member of Congress. Then she wondered, *Is it a matter of rank? Is this what we get? Will we become part of the ruling class, the way the Democrats did?*

She hoped not. The people had elected Upton Sinclair to pre-vent that kind of thing, not to promote it. Then all her thought about anything but the immediate present blew away. A rising hum from the enormous crowd behind her announced the arrival of the motorcars full of dignitaries who would go through the ceremony that marked the changing of the guard for the United States.

People clapped and cheered to see them. In the lead, behind an honor guard of soldiers and Marines, strode Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. He was a little thinner, a little more stooped, than he had been when Flora first saw him four years before, but he still moved like a much younger man.

Behind him came Vice President McKenna, an amiable non-entity who was almost as fat as Congressman Taft. In white tie and tails, he looked like a penguin that had swallowed a beach ball. And behind McKenna walked Theodore Roosevelt, also in white tie and tails. As he moved toward the raised platform on which President Sinclair would take the oath of office, Senators and Representatives got to their feet and began to applaud him.

Democrats rose sooner than Socialists and Republicans, but soon, regardless of party, members of both houses of Congress stood and cheered the man who had led the United States to vic-tory in the Great War.

Roosevelt did not seem to have expected such a tribute. He doffed his stovepipe hat several times. Once, he took off his spectacles for a moment and rubbed at his eyes. Had he got a cinder in them, or was he wiping away a tear? Flora had trouble believing that of an old Tartar like TR. Then, spotting her among the crowd of nearly identical-looking men, the outgoing presi-dent waved and blew her a kiss. He could hardly have astonished her more if he'd turned a cartwheel.

She stayed on her feet after he passed, as did all the other Socialists, most of the Midwestern corporal's guard of Repub-licans, and the more courteous Democrats—about half. Here came Hosea Blackford, about to make the change from vice president-elect to vice president. He too wore formal attire. He didn't look like a penguin, not to Flora. He looked splendid.

Flora called his name while she was applauding. He smiled at her, but he was smiling at everybody. He hurried after Roosevelt toward the platform.

And behind him—in front of another honor guard, this one of sailors and soldiers—walked the man of the hour, Upton Sin-clair. Craning her neck to look back at him, Flora saw a sea of red flags waving in the crowd. Her heart slammed against her rib cage in excitement and delight. As the dialectic predicted, the people had at last turned to the party that stood for their class interests.

Up on the platform, Theodore Roosevelt shook Sinclair's hand, a formal gesture, and then slapped him lightly on the back, one much less so. The president that was and the president that would be grinned at each other.

Flora remembered how Senator Debs had stayed personally cordial toward TR even after losing two presidential elections to him.

Whatever Roosevelt and Sinclair said to each other, they were too far away from the microphone for it to pick up their words. Chief Justice Holmes stood by it, a Bible in his hand. He beckoned to Hosea Blackford.

When Blackford took the vice-presidential oath, the electric marvel let the whole enormous crowd hear him doit.

Then Justice Holmes summoned the president-elect to the mi-crophone.

His amplified oath filled the vast, echoing silence in Franklin Square: "I, Upton Sinclair, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

"Congratulations, Mr. President," Oliver Wendell Holmes said. As Roosevelt had done, he reached out to shake Sinclair's hand. What had been quiet erupted into a vast roar of noise: the noise of almost forty years of Socialist struggle finally rewarded with victory.

Upton Sinclair lifted up his hands. As if he were a magician, silence returned. Into it, he said, "It's time for a change!"—the same theme he'd used in Toledo, the theme the Socialists had used through the whole campaign. "We've been saying that for a long time, my friends, but now the change is here!"

More fervent applause followed, as did scattered shouts of, "Revolution!"

Sinclair raised his hands again. This time, quiet was slower in coming.

At last, he got it. He said, "We are at peace, and I hope and ex-pect we shall remain at peace throughout my term." That drew more cheers, and a jaundiced look from Theodore Roosevelt Sinclair went on, "And we shall have peace here at home as well, peace with honor, peace with justice, peace at last. We shall have not the peace of the exploiter who rules his laborers by force and fear, but the peace of the proletariat given its rightful place in the world."

The crowd roared its approval. Theodore Roosevelt looked like a thunderstorm about to burst. But all he could do was frown impotently.

Upton Sinclair had the microphone. Upton Sinclair had the country.

He said, "If the capitalists will not give the workers their due, this administration will see to it that the rights and aspirations of the laboring classes are respected. If the capitalists will not heed our warnings, this administration will see to it that they heed our new laws. If the capitalists go on thinking that the means of pro-duction are theirs and theirs alone, this administration will prove to them that those means of production belong in the hands of the people, which is to say, the hands of the government. For too long, the trusts have had friends in high places. Now the people have friends in high places."

The red flags dipped and waved. The crowd in Franklin Square screeched itself hoarse. The Democratic minority in the House and Senate listened to President Sinclair in stony silence. So did Chief Justice Holmes.

Flora noticed that, even if Sinclair did not. Sinclair might propose laws, Congress might pass them . .. and the Supreme Court might strike them down.

But that would be later. Now there was only the headiness of victory.

Flora felt it, too, and applauded loudly when President Sinclair made an eloquent call for equity among nations. *If we d had equity among nations all along,* she thought, *my brother would walk on two legs.*

But even pain and bitterness could not last, not today. After President Sinclair's speech ended, the celebrating began. Every saloon in Philadelphia had to be packed. So did every ballroom. Not every Socialist had proletarian tastes in amusement—far from it.

Flora went to a reception at Powel House for the Socialist Congressional delegation. She met the president and his wife, a vivacious redhead named Enid who was wearing an off-the-shoulder green velvet gown that would have caused multiple heart attacks on the Lower East Side; Flora's district was radical politically but not when it came to women's clothes.

Sinclair was also dashing in the clawhammer coat he still wore. "I want you to go right on being the conscience of the House," he told Flora.

"I'll do my best, Mr. President," she said.

Senator Debs came up then, and shook the president's hand.

"Congratulations, Upton," he said graciously. "You've done what I couldn't do. And now that you have done it, I've got a question for you." He waited till Sinclair nodded, then asked, "What do you propose to do about the claims this Confederate submarine sank one of our ships after the war was over?"

"Examine them. Study them," the new president answered. "Not go off half-cocked, the way TR would. The Confederates are having their own political upheavals. The claims may have more to do with those than with the truth. Once I know what's what, I'll decide what I need to do."

Debs nodded, but said, "That Freedom Party down there could do with some slapping down. It's reaction on the march"—a sen-timent with which Flora agreed completely.

"Once I know what's what, I'll decide what I need to do," President Sinclair repeated. Flora had hoped for more, but had to be content with that.

The reception went on for a very long time. Flora had grown more used to late hours in Philadelphia than she'd ever been in New York City, but she was yawning by the time it got to be half past one. Hosea Blackford—Vice President Hosea Blackford— said, "I'm heading home, Flora. Can I give you a ride?" He grinned. "I get a housing allowance, but no house—shows where the vice president fits into the scheme of things. So why should I move?"

"That would be very kind, your Excellency," Flora said with a smile that made Blackford snort. The vice president's nondescript Ford seemed out of place among the fancy motorcars around Powel House. In companionable silence, he drove Flora back to the apartment house where they both lived.

No matter how tired she was, she invited Blackford into her flat. He cocked an eyebrow. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am." Flora stood on tiptoe to whisper in his ear: "I've never done this with a vice president before "

He laughed out loud, and was still laughing when he stepped inside. After Flora closed the door behind him, he said, "I should hope not! Walter McKenna would have squashed you flat." Flora squeaked in outrage. Then she started to laugh, too. He took her in his arms. She forgot she was tired.

She knew she'd be re-minded in the morning, but for now—she forgot.

Cincinnatus Driver and his family had never lived in an apart-ment house before moving to Iowa. One thing he hadn't been able to investigate at the Covington, Kentucky, public library was how much houses cost in Des Moines. It was a lot more than it had been down in Covington, either to buy or to rent. The two-bedroom flat he'd found was much more in his price range, even if none of the rooms was big enough to swing a cat. But the flat had electricity, which went some way toward making up for that. He'd never lived in a place with

electricity before. He liked it. Elizabeth liked it even better.

The apartment house was in the near northwestern part of town, west of the Des Moines River and north of the Raccoon. It was as close as Des Moines came to having a colored district, al-though only a little more than a thousand Negroes were hardly enough to constitute a real district in a city of over a hundred thousand. The Drivers shared their floor with two other black families and one white; the proprietor of a Chinese laundry lived upstairs.

Nobody was rich, not in that neighborhood. People got by, though. As far as Cincinnatus could tell, they got by rather better than they had in Covington.

"I want to go to school, Pa," Achilles yelled to Cincinnatus when he came home worn from a day's hauling one evening. "Some of my friends go to school. I want to go to school, too."

"You'll go to school in the fall," his father told him. "You turn six then. We'll put you in this kindergarten they have here."

In Covington, white children had kindergartens. Black chil-dren hadn't had any formal schooling till the USA took Ken-tucky away from the CSA.

Cincinnatus was unusual in his generation of Negroes in the Confederate States in being able to read and write; he'd always had a restless itch to know. Having that kind of itch was dangerous in a country where, up until not long before he was born, it had been not merely difficult but il-legal for blacks to learn their letters.

"What can I get for you, dear?" Elizabeth asked, coming out of the kitchen. "How did it go today?"

"Got plenty of hauling business," Cincinnatus answered. "Folks was right—the Des Moines runs high in the springtime, even more so than the Ohio does, and boats get up here that can't any other time of year. Won't have so much to do in the summer-time. Last summer, when we got here, I wondered for a while if we was goin' to starve."

"We made it." Elizabeth's voice was warm with pride.

"Sure enough did," Cincinnatus agreed. "I want to see if we can get ourselves a little bit ahead of things while the river's high. Always good to have some money socked away you don't have to spend right now."

"Amen," Elizabeth said, as if he'd been a preacher making a point in the pulpit.

"Amen," Achilles echoed; he liked going to church of a Sunday morning.

Cincinnatus smiled at his son. Then he looked back to his wife. "What I'd like me right now is a bottle of beer. I knew Iowa was a dry state, but I didn't reckon folks here'd take it so *serious.* Down in Kentucky, folks always preached against the demon rum, but that didn't stop 'em from drinkin'

whiskey. Didn't even hardly slow 'em down none. People round these parts mean it."

"Most of 'em do, uh-huh." Elizabeth nodded. Her eyes sparkled—or maybe it was a trick of the sun-bright electric bulb above her head. She turned and went back into the kitchen. Her skirt swirled around her, giving Cincinnatus a glimpse of her trim ankles. Some of the white women in Des Moines were wearing skirts well above the ankle—scandalously short, as far as he was concerned. He would have something to say if Eliza-beth ever wanted to try that style.

She opened the icebox, then came back into the living room. In her hand was a tall glass of golden liquid with a creamy white head, on her face a look of triumph. Cincinnatus stared at the beer. "Where'd you get that?"

"Chinaman upstairs makes it," Elizabeth answered.

"I'll be." He shook his head in wonder. "I didn't even know Chinamen drank beer, let alone made it." He took the glass from Elizabeth, raised it to his mouth, and cautiously sipped. He smacked his lips, pondering, then nodded. "It ain't great beer, but it's beer, sure enough."

"I know." Now Elizabeth's eyes definitely twinkled. "Had me some before I'd pay the Chinaman for it. Don't drink that all up now—why don't you bring it to the table with you? Beef stew's just about ready."

Spit jumped into Cincinnatus' mouth. "I'll do that." Beef was cheap here, and plentiful, too, compared to what things were like in Kentucky. He ate his fill without worrying about whether he'd go broke on account of such lavish meals. He still ate a lot of pork, but now more because he liked it than because he couldn't afford anything better.

After supper, while Elizabeth washed dishes, Cincinnatus got out a reader and went to work with Achilles. The boy had known for some time the alphabet and the sounds the letters made; up till just a couple of weeks before, he'd had trouble—trouble often to the point of tears—combining the sounds of the letters into words. Cincinnatus, who had learned to read a good many years later in life, vividly remembered that himself.

Now, though, Achilles had the key. "Ban," he read. "Can. Dan. Fan. Man.

Pan. Ran. Tan. Bat. Cat. Fat. Hat. Mat. Pat. Rat. Sat. Den. Fen .. . What's a fen, Pa?"

"Dunno. Let's find out." Cincinnatus had a dictionary. Be-cause of the catch-as-catch-can way he'd become literate, his vocabulary had holes. He used the dictionary to fill them. Rif-fling through it now, he answered, "A fen is like a swamp. Go on, Achilles. You're doin' swell."

"Hen. Men. Pen. Ten. Wen." That one made the dictionary open again, as *dx&yen.* Achilles beamed. "I can *read,* Pa!"

"You're gettin' there," Cincinnatus agreed. "We'll keep at it." He figured Achilles would have to work twice as hard at school to get half the respect he deserved. That was what life handed you along with a black skin. People would call Achilles a damn nigger, sure as the sun would come up tomorrow. But nobody would call Achilles a damn dumb nigger, not if Cincinnatus had anything to do with it.

"I want to read stories like the ones you read to me," Achil-les said.

"You're gettin' there," Cincinnatus said again. "Now let's work on this a little while longer, and then you'll get to bed." Achilles liked learning to read any time. Faced with the choice between trying to read some more and going to bed, he would have read till four in the morning had his father let him. Cincinnatus didn't let him, because he wanted—and needed—to get some sleep himself. Achilles squawked, but was soon breathing heavily; when he did yield to sleep, he yielded deeply and completely.

So did Cincinnatus, because he was very tired. He slept through the alarm clock; Elizabeth had to shake him awake. A couple of cups of coffee and some scrambled eggs got him moving. He jammed a cloth cap onto his head kissed Elizabeth, and went downstairs to fire up the Duryea.

He felt more affection for the truck than he ever had down in Covington. It had run very well since the overhaul he'd given it before moving to Iowa. He wished he'd overhauled it sooner; it would have served him better in Kentucky. He climbed in and drove to the wharves along the Des Moines.

At the high-water season, steamboats were tied up at almost all the piers.

Some of the haulers who took their goods to mer-chants and warehouses were black like him; most were white. Despite his color, he had no trouble getting work. The sheer vol-ume of unloading had something to do with that.

But he'd also established a reputation for dependability. He hoped that would give him a boost when the river went down and jobs grew scarcer.

After hauling dry goods to several general stores, a cargo of plates and bowls to a china shop, and a truckful of reams of paper to the State Capitol over on the east side of the Des Moines, he came back to the wharves to eat his dinner. A couple of other colored drivers, Joe Sims and Pete Dunnett, pulled their trucks up alongside of his within five minutes of each other. They carried their dinner pails over to the bench where he was eating.

"Business is bully," said Sims, a stocky, very black man in his mid-forties.

"Here's hoping it lasts."

Dunnett was thinner, young, and paler; he might have had a quarter portion of white blood in his veins. "That's right," he said. He and Sims both spoke with an accent Cincinnatus found peculiar. It had some of the rhythms of the black speech with which he was familiar, but only some. It was also heavily tinted by the sharp, nasal, almost braying speech of white Iowans. Be-cause the Negroes of Des Moines were such a small minority, the white sea around them diluted their dialect.

Cincinnatus said, "Sure enough would be good if it did. Ain't nothin' wrong with money, nothin' a-tall."

Dunnett and Joe Sims looked at each other. After a moment, Sims said,

"First time we heard you talk, Cincinnatus, we thought you were a dumb nigger, you lay on that *ain 't* stuff so thick. We know better now, but you still talk the way my great-grandpa did."

"I talk like I talk. Can't hardly help it," Cincinnatus said with a shrug. In Covington, his accent had passed for a mild one among Negroes.

Pete Dunnett added, "That fancy handle you've got didn't help, either."

"What's wrong with my name?" Now Cincinnatus really was peeved.

"When I came up here and found out all the U.S. niggers had names like white folks, I reckoned that was like oatmeal without sugar or salt or butter or milk or nothin'."

TVI rather have me a boring name than sound like I was named after a city," Dunnett retorted.

"The city's named after me, not the other way round," Cincin-natus said. "I mean, the city and me both got named for the same fellow from back in ancient days."

"Still sounds funny," Joe Sims said. "And what's your kid's name?"

"Achilles," Cincinnatus said. "He was a hero." He paused a little while in thought, then went on, "You niggers up here in the USA, they let you-all have last names. They let you have plenty of stuff, too—down in Covington, you-all'd be a couple of really rich niggers. When it was the Confederate States down there, most of us hardly had nothin' but our one name. We had to pack everything we could into it."

Sims and Dunnett glanced at each other again. "We've had hard times, too," Dunnett said. He sounded a little defensive. Cincinnatus didn't answer.

Dunnett had reason to sound defen-sive. White men had patrolled the Ohio to keep blacks from the Confederate States out of the USA. Nobody had ever needed to patrol the Ohio to keep blacks from the United States out of the CSA. Blacks in the USA knew perfectly well the distance be-tween the frying pan and the fire.

Sam Carsten would sooner not have had the new stripe on his sleeve that showed he was a petty officer second class. He hadn't lost his ambition—far from it. But he'd earned that stripe by doing a good job as head of his gun crew after Willie Moore got killed. It had blood on

it, as far as he was concerned.

The USS *Remembrance* steamed west across the Atlantic toward Boston harbor. Sam didn't have to worry about taking shellfire here. He didn't have to worry about renegade Confed-erate submersibles, either.

What he'd learned about the C.S. boat that had sunk the U.S. destroyer after the war was over filled him with rage. Under that rage lay terror. A Rebel boat could have stalked his old battleship, the USS *Dakota,* just as readily.

A deck hand jerked the prop on a Wright fighting scout. The two-decker's engine thundered to life. The prop blurred into in-visibility. The *Remembrancers* steam catapult hurled the fighting scout into the sky.

"Bully," Sam said softly. Launching aeroplanes had fasci-nated him even aboard the *Dakota.* The fascination had changed to urgency when land-based aeroplanes bombed his battleship off the Argentine coast. He'd imagined air power on the sea then. He lived it now, and still found it awe-inspiring.

Behind him, a dry voice spoke: "I wonder how long we'll be able to keep them in the air."

Sam turned. If Commander Grady had wanted to stick a KICK ME sign on him, he stood close enough to do it. "What do you mean, sir?" Sam asked, thinking he knew and hoping he was wrong.

"How much longer will we be able to keep them in the air?" the gunnery officer repeated. "You're not stupid, Carsten. You understand what I mean.

Will the Socialists put enough money into the Navy to keep this ship operating? Right now, your guess is as good as mine."

"Yes, sir," Sam said dully. His guess was that the Socialists would shut down as much as they could. Except when the war dragged some into the Navy, Socialists were thinly scattered aboard warships: almost as thinly scattered as colored people in the USA. He didn't know a great deal about what Socialist politicians thought, except that they didn't think much of the Navy or the Army.

He looked at Commander Grady. Grady had always been as proud of the *Remembrance* as if he'd designed her himself. Now, looking from the flight deck to the conning tower, his eyes were dull, all but

hopeless: the eyes of a man who expected a loved one to die. Sighing, he said, "It was a good idea, anyhow. It still is a good idea."

"It sure as hell is, sir," Carsten said hotly. "It's a swell idea, and anybody who can't see that is a damn fool."

"Lot of damn fools running around loose in the world," Grady said. "Some of them wear fancy uniforms. Some of them wear expensive suits and get elected to Congress or elected president. Those fools get to tell the ones in the fancy uniforms what to do."

"And the ones in the fancy uniforms get to tell us what to do." Sam's laugh was harsh as salt spray. "It's the Navy way." He couldn't think of another officer to whom he would have said such a thing. Grady and he had been through a lot together.

"Damn it," Grady said in a low, furious voice, "we proved what this ship can do. We proved it, but will we get any credit for it?"

"No way to tell about that, sir," Carsten answered, "but I wouldn't bet anything I cared to lose on it."

"Neither would I," Grady said. "But I tell you this: we *did* show what the *Remembrance* can do. Congress may not be watching. President Upton goddamn Sinclair may not be watching. You *can* bet, though, the German High Seas Fleet was watching. The Royal Navy was watching. And if the Japs weren't watching, too, I'd be amazed. Plenty of countries are going to have squadrons of aeroplane carriers ten years from now. I hope to God we're one of them." Before Sam could say anything to that, Grady wheeled and rapidly strode away.

Carsten tried to figure out where he'd be ten years down the line.

Likeliest, he supposed, was chief petty officer in charge of a gun crew. He could easily see himself turning into Hiram Kidde or Willie Moore. He'd just have to follow the path of least resistance.

If he wanted anything more, he'd have to work harder for it. Mustangs didn't grow on trees. And, if he aimed at becoming an officer, he'd have to get lucky, too. He wondered how much he really wanted that kind of luck.

What was good for him might turn out to be anything but good for other people. He thought of Moore again, Moore writhing on the floor with his belly torn open.

The steam catapult hissed like a million snakes, hurling an-other fighting scout into the air. The crew of the *Remembrance* kept honing their skills.

They were, at the moment, the best in the world at what they did, whether Congress appreciated it or not. They were also, at the moment, the only ones in the world who did what they did. Sam wondered how long that would last. He remembered the German sailors in Dublin harbor staring and staring at the aeroplane carrier. Kaiser Bill's boys built better aeroplanes than the USA did; the Wright two-deckers were Al-batros copies. Could the Germans build better aeroplane car-riers, too?

One of the Wright machines roared low over the flight deck. Had it shot up the deck, Sam would not have cared to be standing there. On the other hand, the flight deck bristled with machine guns and one-pounders. Had that fighting scout been painted with the Stars and Bars instead of the U.S.

eagle in front of crossed swords, it would have got a warm welcome.

It zoomed above the *Remembrance* again, this time even lower and upside down. A couple of the sailors on deck saluted the pilot with upraised middle fingers. Sam didn't, but he felt like it. He hadn't had a whole lot to do with the pilots aboard the aeroplane carrier: they were officers, and pretty much kept to themselves. But what he had seen made him wonder if their marbles had spilled out of their ears as they flew, because they didn't seem to give two whoops in hell whether they lived or died.

Staring after the fighting scout after it finally rolled back to right side up, Sam decided that made a certain amount of sense. The rickety contraptions the pilots flew had a habit of falling out of the sky by themselves. The pilots had to take them into harm's way, and had to land them on the rolling, pitching deck of a war-ship. You probably needed to be crazy to want to do any of that. And, if you weren't crazy when you started doing it, you'd get that way after a while.

As if to prove the point, the pilot of the other fighting scout dove out of the sky on the *Remembrance* like a sparrowhawk swooping on a field mouse. In an impossibly short time, the aeroplane swelled from buzzing speck to roaring monster. It seemed to be heading straight for Sam. He wanted to dig a hole in the deck, dive in, and then pull the planking and steel over himself: an armored blanket to keep him safe and warm. A couple of sailors started to run. Their comrades screamed

curses at them. He understood why, but had to work to hold his own feet still.

At the last possible instant, the Wright two-decker pulled out of the dive.

Sam couldn't help ducking; he thought one wheel of the landing gear would clip him. It wasn't quite so close as that, but he did have to snatch at his cap to keep it from blowing off his head and perhaps into the sea. Had it gone into the drink, the price of a new one would have come out of his pay.

The two-decker almost went into the drink, too, off to port of the *Remembrance.* Carsten would have sworn its lowest point was lower than the aeroplane carrier's deck. The landing gear didn't quite touch the wavetops, but a flying fish might have leaped into the cockpit. Then the Wright started to gain altitude again, much more slowly than it had shed it.

"That bastard's nuts," somebody said, shaken respect in his voice.

"That bastard's nuts almost got cut off him," somebody else said, which was also true, and made everybody who heard it laugh to boot.

A fellow with bright-colored semaphore paddles strode out near the edge of the deck to guide the aeroplanes in to the con-trolled crash that constituted a landing aboard ship. His wig-wagged signals urged the pilot of the first fighting scout up a little, to starboard, up a little more . .. Sam had learned to read the wigwags, just as he'd picked up Morse as a kid.

Smoke spurted from the solid rubber tires as they slammed against the deck. The hook under the fuselage caught a cable. The aeroplane jerked to a halt. Watching it, Carsten understood why the fighting scouts had needed strengthening before they came aboard the *Remembrance.*

As the pilot took off his goggles and climbed out of the aero-plane, his face bore an enormous grin. What was he thinking? *Lived through it again,*

probably. Sailors hauled the two-decker out of the way so the other fighting scout could land.

Here he came, chasing the aeroplane carrier from astern. As before, the semaphore man stepped out and signaled to the ap-proaching

flying machine. Sam wondered why he bothered. That fellow had pulled out of his dive without help. If he couldn't land the same way...

Up, the man with the paddles signaled, and then *Up* again, more emphatically. The bow of the *Remembrance* slid down into a trough; the stern rose. Sam kept his balance as automatically as he breathed. So did the signalman. He had the paddle raised, urging more altitude, when the aeroplane slammed into the carrier.

The pilot almost got it onto the ship. That made things worse, not better.

He still killed himself, and debris from the aeroplane scythed along the deck, cutting down the fellow with the sema-phore paddles and half the crew waiting to take the aeroplane to the hydraulic lift and stow it belowdecks.

Sam sprinted forward, dodging blazing fuel and oil like a half-back dodging tacklers in the open field. He skidded to a stop be-side a sailor who was down and moaning and clutching his thigh. Blood was soaking his trouser leg and puddling on the deck under him. He couldn't keep losing it that fast for long. Sam un-hooked his belt, yanked it off, and doubled it around the man's leg above the wound for a tourniquet.

"It hurts!" the sailor moaned. "Christ, it hurts!"

"Hang on, pal," Sam said. More sailors came running across the deck, some with stretchers. Sam waved to draw their eyes. The sailor might live.

As for the pilot.. . His head lay about ten feet away, still wearing goggles.

Carsten looked down at the planking. Yeah, flyboys earned the right to be crazy.

XIV

Jake Featherston liked riding the train. When he rode the train. he was getting somewhere. He associated travel on foot with the long, grinding retreat through Pennsylvania and Maryland and Virginia. Then he'd been going where the damnyankees made him go. Now he was—mostly—on his own.

The train rattled through the Mississippi cotton country, bound for New Orleans. Featherston smiled to see Negroes working in the fields. Their hoes rose and fell as they weeded. The red and blue bandannas the women wore added splashes of color to the green, green fields. Jake nodded to himself in his Pullman car. That was where Negroes belonged.

The splendid car was where he belonged. He hadn't known luxury till lately. He figured he was entitled to a little, after so long without. He did wish he weren't going to New Orleans. He brought a fist down on his knee. Even the leader of the Freedom Party couldn't get everything he wanted, not yet.

Amos Mizell of the Tin Hats had strongly urged him to hold the Party's national convention on the banks of the Mississippi, to show it was a party for all the Confederate States. Willy Knight, who headed the Redemption League, said the same thing. Their arguments made sense, especially since Jake wanted to draw the League all the way into the Freedom Party.

He hadn't particularly wanted to hold a convention at all; he knew, and everybody else knew, who the Party's candidate would be. But the notion of having him simply declare his candi-dacy and point a finger at a running mate had horrified everyone around him. So here he was, on his way to a convention, on his way to New Orleans. He slammed his fist down again, this time hard enough to make himself jump and curse.

"Well, where the hell else could I go?" he demanded of the empty air around him. If he brought the convention to the Mis-sissippi, New Orleans was the only logical choice. Little Rock was the middle of nowhere. Going to Dallas would have been asking for trouble from Willy Knight, who wanted to run for vice president; the Redemption League was stronger than the Party in Texas. Chihuahua? Featherston laughed without humor. "The greasers down there would love me, wouldn't they?"

And so, to prove the Freedom Party's national appeal, he'd had to bring the convention to the one Confederate city least friendly to him and his message. New Orleans not only had rich niggers with their own high society, it had a whole great raft of white men who didn't care. The latter offended Jake even more than the former.

He felt better when the train pulled into the station. A com-pany of men in white shirts and butternut trousers stood waiting for him on

the platform.

Some carried Freedom Party flags, others the Confederate battle flag with reversed colors that the Party also used. "Sarge!" they shouted when he left his car. "Sarge! Sarge! Sarge!"

"Good to be here," Jake lied. "Now, on to victory!" The Free-dom Party stalwarts cheered lustily. Some of the other people on the platform, New Orleans natives by the look of them, raised eyebrows and curled lips in Gallic disdain at the raucous display. Featherston hardly noticed. He was among his own again— the dispossessed, the rootless, the angry—and so back where he belonged.

When he got to the hotel, he felt as if part of Richmond had been transplanted to this alien soil. He might have been back at Party headquarters, to judge by the deference he got. That from Party members was

genuine,

that

from

the

hotel

staff—both

white

and

black—professionally perfect. *Whores,* he thought. *Nothing but whores.*

But, like whores, they made him feel good.

He spotted Roger Kimball across the gorgeously rococo lobby. Kimball spotted him, too, and hurried over. He could have done without that. "Good to see you, Sarge," Kimball said, shaking his hand. "Say, are they going to try those fellows they arrested for burning down Tom Brearley's house?"

Brearley and his wife had burned, too; Jake was wryly amused Kimball hadn't mentioned that. He answered, "Reckon they are, yeah." Lowering his voice, he added, "Don't reckon any jury's gonna convict

'em, though. That's how it looks from here, anyway."

"Bully," Kimball said, and then, "I won't keep you. You've got to get settled in, I reckon." He drifted away. That was a smoother performance than Featherston had looked for from him. Thoughtfully, Jake rubbed his chin. If Kimball could be smooth as well as ferocious, he might end up making himself very valuable indeed.

After unpacking, Jake walked the couple of blocks to the con-vention hall, a huge marble wedding cake of a building that had gone up on Esplanade, just outside the French Quarter, a few years before the Great War. He was standing on the rostrum, looking out over the great hall, when Amos Mizell walked down the center aisle toward him. Willy Knight came in a couple of minutes later, before Jake and Mizell could do much more than say hello.

Featherston was irked, but only a little; both men would have had spies in the hotel, and maybe back at the train station, too.

All the greetings were warier than they would have sounded to anyone who didn't know the men involved. At last, Mizell said, "The Tin Hats will throw their weight behind you, Jake. You're what this country needs this year, no two ways about it."

Suddenly, Featherston was awfully damn glad he'd come to New Orleans. He'd met Mizell halfway, and now the head of the veterans'

organization was coming through for him in a big way. Willy Knight looked as if he'd just bitten down hard on the sourest lemon ever picked. He'd been threatening that if Jake didn't tap him for vice president, he'd run for the top spot him-self on an independent Redemption League ticket. That would have hurt, and hurt bad, especially in the West. He could still do it.

But if the Tin Hats were loudly backing the Freedom Party, his bid would look like nothing but an exercise in spite.

Now, still sour, he asked, "You think you have any real chance of winning, Featherston?"

"Don't know for certain," Jake said easily. "The Party would have a better shot if TR had won up in the USA. Everybody down here hates him just as much as he hates us. Those Red bas-tards they've got up there now are bending over backwards so far, it's hard to get people riled up at 'em the way they ought to be."

"You ought to count your blessings, Jake," Mizell said. "If Roosevelt had been president of the United States for longer than a couple of days after the news about your fellow down there in South Carolina broke, he'd have had his head on a plate—either that or he'd have blown Richmond to hell and gone."

"Yeah, I was lucky there," Featherston admitted. Knight sent him another hooded glance, as if to say, *If I were a little luckier, I'd be wearing your shoes now.* He was probably right. It did him no good.

"Picked a running mate yet?" Mizell asked, casual as if won-dering about what Jake intended to have for supper. Maybe he was just idly curious, the way he sounded. And maybe Jake would flap his arms and fly to the moon, too.

"Yeah," he answered, and let it go at that.

"It isn't me." Knight's voice was flat, uninflected.

"No, Willy, it isn't you." Jake looked him over. "And if you want to raise a stink, go right ahead. You can run your own little outfit, do whatever you want. Would you sooner be a general in a little tinpot army or a colonel in a real one?"

He waited. He didn't know how he'd answer that question himself. Knight glared at him, but finally said, "I'll stick." He didn't add, *Damn you,* not quite.

His eyes said it for him.

Jake didn't care. From that moment on, he seemed to hold the world in his hands and turn it as he desired. The convention—the convention he hadn't wanted—went smooth as silk, slick as petroleum jelly. The platform called for ending reparations to the USA, restoring a sound currency, punishing the people who'd botched the war, putting Negroes in their place, and making the Confederate States strong again (by which Jake meant rearming, but he remained too leery of the United States to say so openly).

It passed by thunderous voice vote; Jake hoped it would grab lots of headlines.

The next day was his. People made speeches praising him. He'd helped draft some of them. His nomination went forward as smoothly as the Confederate advance on Philadelphia should have gone at the start of the Great War. No one else's name was raised. He became the Freedom Party's choice on the first ballot.

He let it be known he wanted Ferdinand Koenig to run with him. The Freedom Party secretary had backed him when he needed it most, and deserved his reward. That didn't go quite so smoothly as the first two days of the convention had. Willy Knight let his name be placed in nomination, and his followers made fervent speeches about balancing the ticket geographi-cally. Having made their speeches, they sat down—and got steamrollered. Knight sent Jake a note saying he hadn't known they would do it. It might possibly have been true. Jake wouldn't have bet a postage stamp on it.

On the night after the convention nominated Koenig, Feather-ston stood on the stage at the front of the smoke-filled hall and stared out at the throng of delegates calling his name. The hair at the nape of his neck tried to stand up. Three and a half years be-fore, he'd climbed up on a streetcorner crate to take Anthony Dresser's place because the founder of the Freedom Party wasn't up to speaking to even a couple

of dozen people. Thousands waited for Jake's words now. Millions—he hoped—would vote for him come November.

"We're on the way!" he shouted, and the hall erupted in cheers. He held up his hands. Silence fell, instantly and com-pletely. God must have felt this way after He made the heavens and the earth. "We're on the way!" Jake repeated. "The Freedom Party is on the way—we're on the way to Richmond. The Con-federate States are on the way—they're on the way back. And the white race is on the way—on the way to settling accounts with the coons who stabbed us in the back and kept us from winning the war.

And we should have won the war. You all know that. We should have won the war!"

Not even his upraised hands could keep the Freedom Party delegates from yelling their heads off. He basked in the applause like a rosebush basking in the sun. When he began to speak again, the noise cut off. "The Whigs say vote for them, everything's fine, nothing's wrong, nothing's really changed a bit." Jake's guffaw was coarse as horsehair. "Bet you a million dollars they're wrong." He pulled a $1,000,000 banknote from his pocket, crumpled it up, and threw it away.

Laughter erupted, loud as the cheers had been. Jake went on, "The Rad Libs say everything's fine, and all we need to do is cozy on up to the USA."

He looked out at the crowd. "You-all want to cozy on up to the USA?" The roar of *No!* almost knocked him off his feet.

"And the Socialists— *our* Socialists, not the fools in the United States—say everything will be fine, and all we need to do is cozy on up to the niggers." He paused, then asked the question every-one waited for:

"You-all want to cozy on up to the niggers?" *No!* wasn't a roar this time, but a fierce and savage howl. Into it, through it, he said, "If we'd have gassed ten or fifteen thousand of those nigger Reds at the start of the war and during the war, how many good clean honest white Confederate soldiers would we have saved? Haifa million? A million? Something like that. And the ones who did die, by God, they wouldn't have died for nothing, on account of we'd have won.

"But the dirty cowards in Richmond, the corrupt imbeciles in the War Department, didn't have the nerve to do it. So the nig-gers rose up, and they dragged us down. But like I said before, we're on the way again. This time, nobody stops us—nobody, do you hear me? Not the

Congress. Not the jackasses in the War Department. Not the niggers. Not the USA.

Nobody! Nobody stops us now!"

He suddenly realized he was dripping with sweat. He'd got the crowd all hot and sweaty, too. They were on their feet, scream-ing. He saw a sea of glittering eyes, a sea of open mouths. He had a hard-on. He didn't just want a woman. He wanted the whole country, and he thought he might have it.

Once upon a time, the town had been called Berlin. Then, when the Great War broke out, the Canadians rechristened it Empire, not wanting it to keep the name of an enemy's capital. Jonathan Moss had flown over it then, as the U.S. Army pounded it to pieces and eventually overran it during the long, hard slog toward Toronto. Now it was Berlin again. And now he was back, a brand-new lawyer with a brand-new shingle, specializing in oc-cupation law.

He had himself a brand-new office, too. The Canadians and British had defended Empire as long as the last man who could shoot still had cartridges for his rifle. By the time the Americans forced their way into the town, hardly one stone remained atop another. The Romans could only have dreamt of visiting such destruction on Carthage. All the buildings that stood in Empire were new ones.

Arthur, Ontario, lay about thirty miles to the north. Jonathan Moss told himself over and over that that wasn't why he'd de-cided to set up his practice in Berlin. Sometimes he even be-lieved it. After all, he hadn't hopped into his Bucephalus and driven up to Arthur, had he? Of course he hadn't. That meant he didn't have Laura Secord on his mind, didn't it? It did, at least some of the time.

But when days were slow, he had too much time to sit in his brand-new office and think. On days like that, he welcomed visi-tors not so much for the sake of the business they might bring as for their distraction value.

And so, now, he was happy to set a cigarette in the brass ash-tray on his desk and greet the skinny man in the faded, shiny suit of prewar cut who came through the door and said, "Mr. Moss, is it?"

"That's right." Moss' swivel chair squeaked as he rose from it. He stuck out his hand. "Very pleased to meet you, Mr.—?"

"My name is Smith. John Smith." The skinny man sighed. "Save the question, sir: yes, that really is my name. I can prove it if I have to. There are a lot of Smiths, and my father and his fa-ther were both Johns, so .. ."

He sighed again. "It's almost as much trouble as being named something like Cyrus Mudpuddle, or I think it must be, anyhow."

"You're likely right, Mr. Smith," said Moss, who'd taken his share of ribbing about his name over the years. "Why don't you sit down, have a smoke if you care to, and tell me what you think I can do for you " He glanced at that shabby suit again. "No fee for the first consultation." Smith was hungrier than he.

"Thank you, sir. You're very kind." Smith sat, then made a show of patting his pockets. "Oh, dear, I seem to have left my cigarettes at home."

"Have one of mine." Moss extended the pack. He'd half ex-pected something like this. He lit a match for Smith, wondering whether he'd ever see any money from the man if he undertook to represent him. After the Canadian had taken a couple of drags, Moss repeated, "What can I do for you?"

For a moment, he didn't know if he'd get an answer. John Smith seemed entranced with pleasure at the tobacco smoke. Moss wondered how long he'd gone without. After a few sec-onds, though, Smith seemed to recall he hadn't come into the of-fice just to cadge a smoke. He said, "I wish your assistance, sir, in helping me regain a piece of property taken from me without good reason."

"Very well." A lot of Moss' business was of that sort. He slid a pad toward himself and took a fountain pen from the middle drawer of his desk. "First, the basics: did you serve in the Cana-dian Army during the Great War?"

"No, sir," Smith said. "I am badly ruptured, I'm afraid, and was not fit for duty. I have a doctor's certificate."

"Good enough." Moss scribbled a note. "Next obvious ques-tion: have you taken the oath of loyalty to the occupation authorities?"

"Yes, I did that—did it not long after the war ended, as soon as I had the chance," Smith answered. "I am a peaceable man. I would not tell you a falsehood and say I am glad your country won the war—you *are* an American, I take it?" He waited for Moss to nod, then went on,

"Because I am a peaceable man, all I can do is make the best of things as I find them."

"That's sensible, Mr. Smith." Moss noted he'd taken the oath. "All right. I may be able to help you. If you'd answered *no* to either of those questions, I couldn't possibly, and neither could any lawyer. Some would take your money and tell you they could work miracles, but they'd be lying. I make no promises yet, you understand, but you do meet the minimum criteria for pursuing a claim. Now—what piece of property are we talking about?"

Smith coughed apologetically. "This one, sir."

"What?" Moss stared.

"This one, sir." John Smith looked even more embarrassed. "Before the war, sir, my house stood right about"—he pro-nounced it *aboat,* as a Canadian would—"here, instead of this fine big building where you have your office."

"You want me to help you make me move out of my office?" Moss had judged Smith a man without any nerve. Now he re-vised his opinion. If that wasn't gall, Julius Caesar had never seen any.

With or without nerve, Smith remained a quiet, apologetic fellow. "It's not so much that I want to, sir," he said, "but this property was—is—almost the only thing I own. I've not had an easy time of it since . .. since the war."

Maybe he'd been on the point of saying something on the order of, *Since you Yankee robbers came up here.* But maybe not, too. Maybe he'd just stumbled over a word. He seemed the type to do a good deal of that.

Jonathan Moss started to laugh. He quickly held up a hand. "I'm not laughing at you, Mr. Smith—really, I'm not," he said. "But this is absurd, and I don't think you can argue with me there."

"I wouldn't think of it," Smith said, and Moss believed him. The Canadian got to his feet. "I am sorry to have troubled you."

"Don't go away!" Moss sprang to his feet, too, quick as if he'd been turning his fighting scout onto the tail of a Sopwith Pup. "I didn't say I wouldn't take your case. Let me see your documents. Mr. Smith, and I'll see what I can do for you."

"Really?" John Smith's hangdog expression vanished, to be replaced by astonishment. "But you work here!"

"It's not like I own the building." Moss corrected himself: "It's not like I think I own the building." He wondered what he would have done in his landlord's shoes. Probably thrown Smith out so hard he bounced. But the Canuck could always have found an-other lawyer. Plenty of eager young hotshots had come up from the United States, and some Canadians were also jumping into occupation law.

"I—I don't know what to say," Smith told him. "Thank you very much, sir."

He coughed and looked embarrassed again. "I'm also afraid I'll have some trouble paying you."

One look at his suit had warned Moss that was likely. The way Smith had

"forgotten" his cigarettes warned him it was as near certain as made no difference. He shrugged. "What the hell, Mr. Smith," he said—not proper legal language, but at the moment he didn't care. "We'll see what you can afford. If you can't afford much, I'll do it for a lark. I want to see the look on my landlord's face when I serve him the papers."

"Oh, that's good. That's very good." For a moment, Smith, who had to be close to fifty, looked about fifteen. "What they call a practical joke, isn't it?"

"Isn't it just?" Moss leaned forward in his chair. "Now— let's find out exactly how practical a joke it is. Show me these documents."

"I haven't got everything with me, I'm afraid," Smith said. Moss exhaled through his nose. He hadn't been practicing long, but he'd already seen that unprepared clients were the bane of an attorney's life. Blushing, Smith went on, "I left most of the pa-pers I still have back at my flat, because I didn't really believe you'd be interested in helping me."

"Show me what you've—" Moss stopped. "The papers you still have?" he asked sharply. "What happened to the ones you used to have?"

John Smith showed a touch of temper for the first time. "What do you think happened to them?" he snapped. "You Yanks, that's what. I stayed in Empire—in Berlin—till the shells started fall-ing. When I got

out, it was with the clothes on my back and one carpetbag. You try stuffing your whole life in one carpetbag, sir, and see how well you do."

Before coming to Berlin, Moss hadn't thought much about how civilians on the losing side felt about the war. He was get-ting an education in quiet bitterness. "All right," he said. "What have you got?"

Smith reached into his breast pocket and pulled out the two documents he'd already mentioned. He'd have needed the doc-tor's certificate as he fled the advancing Americans. Without it, the Canadians would have stuck a rifle in his hands and sent him to the trenches, rupture or no rupture. They might have done that anyhow, but he had the paper that said they wouldn't have. He also had the paper that said he'd made his formal peace with the U.S. occupiers. No Canadian could work without that one.

And he had a photograph of himself—a younger version of himself—standing in front of a clapboard house that bore the same address as this big brick office building. A plain woman in a black dress and a frumpy hat stood beside him. "Your wife?" Moss asked.

"That's right." Smith paused, then went on, "Some Yank pilot shot us up as we were leaving—shot up the road, I mean, for the sport of it. He killed my Jane and left me without a scratch—and ever since, I've wished it had been the other way round."

Moss didn't know what to say to that. He'd shot up refugee columns. It was part of war: it disrupted the enemy. He hadn't thought much about the consequences of what he did. He reso-lutely tried not to think about those consequences now.

"Besides this photograph," he managed at last, "what sort of title can you show to this property? Have you got a deed? Have you got bank records?"

"Haven't got a deed," Smith said. "Used to be bank records— in the bank. Isn't any bank any more. I hear tell Yank soldiers blew the vault open and stole everything inside—everything they wanted, anyway."

That wouldn't have surprised Moss. Among other things, armies were enormous robber bands. He said, "You do under-stand, lacking the proper papers will make your claim much harder to establish."

"I should hope I understand that," John Smith said. "If I'd reckoned it would be easy, I'd have tried it myself."

"All right," Moss said. "Go through your effects. Whatever you can bring that's evidence you own this land, I want to see it. No matter how unlikely you think it is, I want to see it. If you know people who can testify they know you owned this land, I want to hear from them. I won't kid you, though.

We've got our work cut out for us."

"I'll do my best," Smith promised.

When Lucien Galtier saw the green-gray motorcar coming down the road from Riviere-du-Loup toward his farmhouse, he took it for granted at first.

He had seen an infinitude of green-gray motorcars and trucks coming down that road, and another infini-tude going up it.

Then, after he'd already started turning away, he spun back and stared at the Ford with eyes that wanted to narrow in suspi-cion and widen in surprise at the same time. He had not seen a green-gray motorcar in some time.

The U.S. Army painted its motorcars that color. But the U.S. Army had not occupied the Republic of Quebec since the end of the war—well, since a little after the end of the war.

The Ford pulled off the road and parked beside the farm-house, as Leonard O'Doull's automobile more commonly did these days. Lucien sighed and walked toward it. "I might have known," he muttered under his breath. "A man may think he has escaped troubles, but troubles never escape a man."

Two men got out of the motorcar. Galtier recognized Bishop Pascal first, more by his vestments than by his own tubby form. His companion, the driver, was whipcord lean and, sure enough, wore U.S. Army uniform.

Seeing Lucien approach, he waved. *"Bon-jour! "* he called in excellent Parisian French. "It is good to see you once more, M. Galtier."

"Bonjour . . ." As Galtier drew near, he saw that Jedediah Quigley wore eagles on his shoulders, not oak leaves of either gold or silver. He'd been a major when Galtier first made his ac-quaintance. Now—*"Bonjour,* Colonel Quigley. You have come up in the world since I saw you last."

"He is the military liaison officer between the United States and the Republic of Quebec," Bishop Pascal said. Hearing the bishop speak ahead of Colonel Quigley surprised Lucien not at all; Pascal had always found the sound of his own voice sweeter and more intoxicating than communion wine.

"An important man indeed," Galtier said. "And how and why does a simple farmer deserve a visit from not only the military liaison officer between the United States and the Republic of Quebec but also the illustrious and holy bishop of Riviere-du-Loup?"

Bishop Pascal had no ear for irony. Colonel Quigley did. One of his eyebrows quirked upward. "It is a matter concerning the hospital," he said.

"What about the hospital?" Galtier demanded, suddenly ap-prehensive.

He saw Marie peering out the kitchen window, no doubt wondering what was going on. He'd been about to ask Quigley and Bishop Pascal to come into the farmhouse so she could serve them tea—or something stronger—and some of the cinnamon buns she'd baked the day before.

Now, he was not nearly so sure they were welcome in his house.

"The hospital, of course, is built on land taken from your patri-mony,"

Bishop Pascal said. The plump bishop always looked out for himself first.

He had embraced the Americans with indecent haste. Galtier would not have cared to turn his back on him for an instant. But he did understand the way a Quebecois farmer's mind worked.

Colonel Quigley, despite having been in Quebec since 1914, didn't. "And we've been paying you a good rent for it, too," he said gruffly.

"It is my land," Galtier replied with dignity. "And"—his own eyebrow rose—"for some long stretch of time, you paid not a cent of rent. You simply took it, because you had men with guns."

"We suspected your loyalty." Quigley was blunt in a way no Quebecois would have been. "Once we didn't any more, we paid what we owed you."

"If you steal land from a man's patrimony, you are liable to make him

disloyal," Galtier said. "Indeed, you are fortunate this did not happen with me." He still marveled that it hadn't. He'd been disloyal after the Americans invaded Quebec. He clearly remembered that. But Nicole had gone to work at the hospital, she and Leonard O'Doull had fallen in love, Quigley had agreed to pay rent, and the Americans had not treated him so badly after all. He'd thrived since they came. Quebec had prospered, too. And he had a half-American grandson. Sure enough, he was at peace with Americans now.

Bishop Pascal said, "Naturally, my son, you can comprehend that it is awkward for this fine hospital to rest on land where, if the owner so desires, he may, at a whim, order it to leave so he might seed the soil with lettuces."

"Lettuces?" Galtier said. "Certainly not. That is wheat land, and wheat land of the first quality, I might add."

Jedediah Quigley seemed to need both hands to hold on to his patience.

"Whatever you raised on it is beside the point," he said. "The point is, the Republic of Quebec wants to buy that land from you, so no troubles of the sort Bishop Pascal is talking about can arise. I'm involved here because I am the one who took that land from you in the first place."

"You wish me to *sell* part of my patrimony?" Galtier knew he sounded as if Colonel Quigley had asked him to sell one of his children. He didn't care.

That was how he felt—even if, at times, he wouldn't have minded getting rid of Georges.

"Money can be part of your patrimony, too," Quigley said, which only proved he did not completely understand the folk of Quebec.

"It would be an act of Christian charity, for the sake of the people of Riviere-du-Loup and the surrounding countryside," Bishop Pascal said.

"And, unlike most acts of charity, my son, it would not only be good for your soul but would bring money into your pocket rather than having it flow out."

"And not just money," Colonel Quigley added. "You know the hospital makes its own electricity. As part of the bargain, we would have the hospital make electricity for this farm as well."

They were eager to make a deal. They were showing how eager they were. Against a canny peasant like Lucien Galtier, they were begging to be skinned. He knew now, he would sell the land. Marie would skin him if he let the chance to get electricity escape. But he intended to make the bishop and the colonel sweat first. "It is my patrimony," he growled. "One day, my grandson's grandson will grow wheat on that land."

Colonel Quigley rolled his eyes. "Damn stubborn frog," he muttered under his breath in English. Galtier smiled. He didn't think he was supposed to hear, or to understand if he did. *Too bad,* he thought. He *was* a damn stubborn frog, and they would have to make the best of it.

"My son, have you not seen in these past few years how things can change, and change unexpectedly and quickly?" Bishop Pascal asked.

"Would you not like to see this change be for the better?"

"By better, your Grace, you mean doing as you wish." Galtier did not want to lose the chance he had here. Gruffly, grudgingly. he said, "Very well. Let us speak of this further, since you insist. Come inside. We may as well sit down."

When he brought them into the farmhouse, Marie fussed over them, as he'd known she would. Once she had them settled with tea and buns, she asked, "How is it that we have such distin-guished visitors?"

Before either visitor could speak, Lucien kept right on growl-ing: "They seek to purchase some of our patrimony. Along with money, they even offer electricity/9 He curled his lip, as if to show how little he cared for electricity. "They do not compre-hend the importance of a man's patrimony."

"Mme. Galtier, I am sure you can make your husband see reason here,"

Colonel Quigley said.

"I leave these matters to him. He is the man, after all," Marie said primly.

A single flashing glance toward Galtier sent quite another message, but neither Quigley nor Bishop Pascal saw it. After that glance, Marie retreated to the kitchen.

In tones of gentle reason, Bishop Pascal said, "You have not even inquired what the Republic and the United States—we will share the

expense, our two countries—might pay for your parcel of land."

"You haven't said what you want for it, either," Quigley said.

"I have not said I would take any amount of money for it," Galtier replied.

"But, if you must, you may name a price." Quig-ley had invited him to set his own price when he'd started getting rent for the land on which the hospital stood. He'd named the highest price he dared, and Quigley had paid without a blink. Lucien knew he could have gone higher, but not how much.

This time ... If Quigley mentioned any sum less than five hundred dollars, maybe he really wouldn't sell the piece of property.

"The United States are prepared to pay you one thousand dol-lars for that tract, M. Galtier," Colonel Quigley said.

"And the Republic of Quebec will add one thousand dollars to that sum,"

Bishop Pascal put in.

Galtier's ears rang. Two thousand dollars? And electricity? "You are not serious," he said, meaning he could not believe they would pay so much.

Thanks to his bold front, Bishop Pascal and Quigley thought he meant they weren't offering enough. The American looked sour, the bishop piously resigned. Colonel Quigley said, "Oh, very well, then. Fifteen hundred from us, another fifteen hun-dred from the Republic, and not a dime more."

Three thousand dollars? Lucien could buy a motorcar. He could buy a tractor. He would be a man to reckon with for miles around. He smiled at his guests. "Two thousand dollars from the United States, another two from the Republic, and not a dime less."

Colonel Quigley and Bishop Pascal both looked alarmed. Galtier felt alarmed—had he pushed it too far? The bishop and Quigley put their heads together. After a couple of minutes, Bishop Pascal said, "In the interest of concord, we will split the difference with you—one thousand seven hundred and fifty dol-lars from Quebec and a like amount from the United States. Is it agreeable to you?"

"And electricity?" Galtier demanded.

"And electricity," Colonel Quigley said. "I told you that beforehand."

"It is better to have everything certain than to leave anything in doubt."

Galtier sighed with reluctance he did not feel. "Very well. Let it be as you say. For one thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars from each of your governments—and electricity—I will sell this land, but only, mind you, in the interest of concord, as the holy bishop says."

"God will surely bless you, my son," Bishop Pascal said, beaming.

"Do you think so?" Lucien said interestedly. "That would be good, too."

Bishop Pascal didn't know what to make of that. He scratched his head.

Colonel Quigley knew exactly what to make of it. He looked even more sour than he had while they were dickering. *Why should he care?* Galtier thought. *It isn 't his money* How-ever sour Quigley looked, the bargain was sealed. The money would be Galtier's—soon, he hoped.

Edna Semphroch came back into the coffeehouse. Nellie Jacobs gave her daughter an unhappy look, even though midafternoon business was slow. Truth to tell, business had never got back to what it was during the war, when Confederate officers from the force occupying Washington had kept the place hopping morn-ing, noon, and night. Nellie didn't miss the Rebs, not even a little bit, but she did miss their cash.

"Took you long enough, didn't it?" Nellie said sourly. "I reckon I could have looked at every skirt between here and St. Louis in the stretch of time you've been gone. And you didn't even buy anything. Can't you make up your mind?" People who joked about women's indecision had never met Nellie.

"Nope, didn't buy anything," Edna agreed. She eyed her mother with an odd mix of amusement and apprehension. "Didn't even go looking at skirts, as a matter of fact."

Nellie had no fancy education. She was, most ways, shrewd rather than really clever. But when Edna said something like that, her mother didn't need a road map to figure out what she'd say next.

"You've been sneaking around behind my back," Nellie said, and could have sounded no more outraged if she'd been reading a philandering husband the riot act.

She would have had an easier time accepting a philander-ing husband.

Men got it where they could. That was part—too large a part, as far as she was concerned—of how they were made. Women, though ... She'd known for a long time that Edna burned hot. Her daughter had seemed calmer the past couple of years, so Nellie had dared hope she'd got it out of her system. No such luck, evidently.

"I've been trying to have a life, Ma," Edna said. "God knows you don't make it easy for a girl." But the unbearably smug look on her face said she'd had her desire fulfilled—and had some-thing else filled full, too, more than likely.

"You little hussy," Nellie hissed. She wished Clara, who was taking a nap upstairs, would pick that moment to wake up. Otherwise, she'd be locked in a fight with her older daughter of the sort they'd had during the war, the sort they hadn't had since Nellie married Hal Jacobs.

Again, no such luck. Edna tossed her head. "Hussy? Huh! Takes one to know one, I guess." Had Nellie had a knife in her hand, she might have used it. Fortunately, she'd been washing cups and saucers. Edna ignored her furious squawk. Edna seemed inclined to ignore just about everything.

She went on, "But none of that matters, anyhow. He asked me to marry him today."

"Did he think about asking you to get an abortion instead?" Wounded, Nellie wanted to hit back any way she could.

Her daughter shook her head. "I ain't in a family way, Ma. And I ought to know, too, I felt so lousy last week." She laughed. 'Turned out you were the one who ended up in a family way. I still think that's the funniest thing in the whole wide world."

If she'd had to find out for sure she wasn't pregnant, she'd been doing things that left doubt in her mind. "At least I was married," Nellie said.

"And I'm going to be," Edna said. "Whether you like it or not, I'm going to be. I ain't getting any younger, you know. I'm sick and tired of you watching me the way Teddy Roosevelt watched the damn Rebs."

Edna *wasn 't* getting any younger, Nellie realized. She was closer to thirty than twenty, as Nellie was closer to fifty than forty. Even better than three years of marriage to Hal Jacobs hadn't come close to making Nellie understand why a woman would marry for the sake of bedroom pleasures; for her, bed-room pleasures were at most rare accidents that brought as much embarrassment as release. But Edna wasn't like that, however much Nellie wished her daughter were.

"Who is this fellow?" After Nellie asked the question, she realized it should have been the first one out of her mouth.

Her daughter seemed surprised she'd asked it at all. In less snippy tones than she'd been using, Edna answered, "His name is Grimes, Ma, Merle Grimes. He's right my age, and he's a clerk for the Reconstruction Authority."

"If he's right your age, how come he hasn't got a wife al-ready?" Nellie asked, wondering if in fact he had one Edna didn't know about.

But Edna said, "He had one, but she died of the Spanish in-fluenza a couple-three years ago. He showed me a snapshot once. I asked him to.

She looked a little like me, I think, only her hair was darker."

That took some of the wind out of Nellie's sails. When she asked "What did you tell him about Lieutenant Kincaid?" she didn't sound mean at all.

"I Ve told him I was engaged during the war, but my fiance got killed,"

Edna said. "I didn't tell Merle he was a Reb, and I'll thank you not to, neither."

"All right," Nellie said, and Edna looked surprised. Nellie guessed Merle Grimes would eventually find out, and there would be trouble on account of it. Too many people knew about the late Nicholas H. Kincaid for the secret to keep. His death at what would have been Edna's wedding had even made the news-papers, though a clerk for the U.S. government wouldn't have been in Washington then.

Bill Reach and me, we can keep a secret, Nellie thought. *If anybody else knew*. .. But no one else did, not Edna, not Hal, no one. No one ever would.

"He's a nice man, Ma," Edna said. "He's a *good* man. You'll like him when you meet him, swear to God you will."

If he was such a nice man, if he was such a good man, what was he doing sticking it into Edna before he put a ring on her finger? Nellie started to ask that very question, but caught her-self. For one thing, it would make Edna mad. For another, this Grimes had offered to put a ring on her finger.

Nellie found a dif-ferent question to ask: "How did you meet him?"

Edna giggled. "The first couple times were right here in the coffeehouse.

I don't reckon you'd recall him"—which was cer-tainly true—"but he was here, all right. He doesn't live too far away. We ran into each other at the greengrocer's one time, and then again a week later. After that, one thing sort of led to another."

I'll bet it did, Nellie thought. But, regardless of whether she thought Edna was a fool, she couldn't deny Edna was also a grown woman. "All right,"

Nellie said again. "If he wants to marry you, if you want to marry him, the only thing I can say is, I hope you don't end up sorry on account of it."

"I don't think we will, Ma," Edna said. A few years before, she'd been unshakably certain she and Confederate Lieutenant Kincaid would live happily ever after. Maybe she really was growing up as well as grown —even if she did have more trouble keeping her legs together than she should have. Edna was thinking about such things, too, but in a different way, for she asked, "Wouldn't you like to have a little grandbaby?"

"With Clara around, it feels like I've already got one," Nellie said. "If you had a baby, the biggest difference would be that I wouldn't have to keep an eye on the kid every single second of the day and night. I hope you'll be happy, Edna. I wish you didn't think you had to sneak around to meet somebody, and to see him."

Edna didn't answer that, which was probably just as well. Nellie had done everything but shove her daughter into a chas-tity belt to keep her from meeting and seeing anybody. Nellie had been sure—was still sure—she'd done the right thing, but Edna cl finally managed to get around her. Now she had to make the best of it.

Her husband was very little help. "High time she gets married, if that is what she wants," Hal said. "If she is unhappy after-wards, she will have no one to blame but herself. But I hope and pray she will not be unhappy."

"So do I," Nellie said. "If she is, though, I bet she blames me."

"We will see what we will see when we meet the young man," Hal said.

"He may turn out to be very nice." Nellie was inclined to doubt that on general principles—hardly any young men, in her estimation, were very nice—and on specifics—had this Merle Grimes been very nice, he wouldn't have yanked Edna's drawers down till after they were married, and not too often then, either. By that standard, Hal Jacobs was very nice.

After Edna's announcement, Nellie didn't want to let her leave the coffeehouse for any reason whatever. With Edna a woman grown, that wasn't easy. It was, in fact, impossible. And one day, about a week after Edna's bombshell, she did go out. When she came back, she came back arm in arm with a man. "Ma," she said proudly, "this here's my intended.

Merle, this is my mother. She's Nellie Jacobs now; like I told you, my pa's been dead a long time."

"I'm very pleased to meet you at last, Mrs. Jacobs," Grimes said.

"Pleased to meet you, too," Nellie said grudgingly. She'd in-tended to limit herself to a simple *hello.* But Grimes wasn't what she'd expected. For one thing, he walked with a cane, and wore the ribbon for the Purple Heart in a buttonhole. For another, he didn't look like a practiced seducer. He seemed serious and quiet; his long, rather horsy face and gold-framed spectacles might have belonged to a lawyer, not a clerk.

Nellie knew that didn't necessarily prove anything. Some of the men she recalled from her own sordid past had seemed ordi-nary enough on the outside. But she didn't hate Grimes on sight, as she'd thought she would.

He said, "I think I'm the luckiest man in the world. Edna may have told you, ma'am, I lost my wife to the influenza. I never thought I'd fall in love with another woman again till I met your daughter. She showed me I was wrong, and I'm ever so glad she did."

Edna looked as if she would have lain down on the floor for him then and there if Nellie hadn't been in the coffeehouse. Nellie did her best to hide her disgust. Grimes *had* asked Edna to marry him. He hadn't got her in a family way, either, as Edna's father had before he married Nellie.

"Where are your people from, Mr. Grimes?" Nellie asked. "What do they do?"

"I was born in New Rumley, Ohio, Mrs. Jacobs," Grimes an-swered, "the same town that saw the birth of the great General Custer. My father runs the weekly newspaper there: the *New Rumley Courier.* His father ran it before him; I reckon my brother Caleb'11 take it on when the time comes."

"Why aren't you still back there yourself?" What Nellie meant was, *If you were still back there, you wouldn 't be rumpl-ing my daughter's clothes.*

Merle Grimes could hardly have missed that, but it didn't faze him. He said, "I wanted steady work. The newspaper business is a lot of things, but it's not steady. You go to work for the U.S. government, you know you've got a paycheck for the rest of your days. I won't get rich, but I won't go hungry, either."

Nellie didn't know what sort of answer she'd thought she would get, but that wasn't it. "You seem a steady enough young fellow," she said, an admission she hadn't looked to make.

"I try to be," Grimes said—steadily.

"Isn't he the bulliest thing in the whole wide world, Ma?" Edna said.

She was thinking with her cunt, a phrase that hadn't come to Nellie's mind since her days in the demimonde. But Merle Grimes did look to be a much better bargain than Nellie had ex-pected. "He may do," she said. "He just may do."

* * *

Engine roaring, the barrel bounded across the Kansas prairie north of Fort Leavenworth. Colonel Irving Morrell stood head and shoulders out of the turret, so he could take in as much of the battlefield as possible. The test model easily outran and out-maneuvered the Great War machines against which it was pitted.

Morrell ducked down into the turret and bawled a command to the driver in the forward compartment: "Halt!" And the driver halted, and it was not divine intervention. With the engine sepa-rated from the barrel's crew by a steel bulkhead, a man could hear a shouted order. In a Great War barrel, one man could not hear another who was screaming into his ear.

At Morrell's order, the gunner traversed the turret till the cannon bore on the barrel he had chosen. The old-style machines were trying to bring their guns to bear on him, too, but they had to point themselves in the right direction, a far slower and clum-sier process than turning the turret.

"Fire!" Morrell yelled. The turret-mounted cannon roared. A shell casing leaped from the breech as flame spurted from the muzzle. It was only a training round, with no projectile, but it made almost as much noise as the real thing, and getting used to the hellish racket of the battlefield was not the least important part of training. The loader passed a new shell to the gunner, who slammed it home.

An umpire raised a red flag and ordered the barrel at which Morrell had fired out of the exercise. Morrell laughed. This was the fifth or sixth lumbering brute to which he'd put paid this afternoon. The Great War barrels hadn't come close to hurting him. Had it been a prizefight, the referee would have stopped it.

But, in the ring or on the battlefield, he who stood still asked to get tagged. Morrell ducked down again and shouted, "Go! Go hard! Let's see how many of them we can wreck before they make us call it a day."

He laughed. This was as close to real combat as he could come. He might have enjoyed going up to Canada with a few companies of barrels, but he knew General Custer didn't really need his services. The Canucks had been pretty quiet lately. The Confederate States were still licking their wounds, too. So he would pretend, as he'd pretended before the Great War, and have a dandy time doing it, too.

The barrel up ahead had the name PEACHES painted on its ar-mored flanks. That made Morrell laugh, too. Since the earliest days of barrels, men had named them for girlfriends and wives and other pretty women.

Peaches belonged to Lieutenant Jen-kins; Morrell could see him standing up in the cupola. He saw Morrell, too, and sent him a gesture

no junior officer should ever have aimed at his superior. Morrell laughed again.

Jenkins tried to keep him off by opening up with his rear and starboard machine guns. They fired blanks, too. Not only was that cheaper, but live ammunition would have torn through the thin steel of the test model's superstructure. This time, Mor-rell's chuckle had a predatory ring. It wouldn't do Jenkins any good. This machine was assumed to be armored against such nuisances.

But an umpire raised a flag and pointed at Morrell. Morrell started to shout a hot protest—sometimes the umpires forgot they were supposed to pretend his barrel was properly armored. But then he realized the officer was pointing not at the barrel but at himself. He could not argue about that.

His own body was vul-nerable to machine-gun fire, even if that of the barrel was sup-posed not to be.

It was, in fact, a nice test of his crew. He bent down into the turret one last time. "I'm dead," he said. "You're on your own. I'll try not to bleed on you."

He started to tell them to nail Jen-kins' barrel, but decided he'd used up enough "dying" words already.

The men made him proud. His gunner, a broad-shouldered sergeant named Michael Pound, said, "If you're dead, sir, get the hell out of the way so I can see what I'm doing." As soon as Mor-rell moved, Pound peered out of the turret and then started giving orders with authority a general might have envied. They were good orders, too, sensible orders. Maybe he couldn't have com-manded an entire brigade of barrels, but he sounded as if he could.

And he went straight after the barrel that had "killed" his commander.

Morrell knew he couldn't have done a better job himself. In short order, Pound shelled Jenkins' machine from the side: fire to which its main armament could not respond. An umpire soon had to raise a flag signaling the Great War barrel destroyed.

"Bully!" Morrell shouted, and smacked Pound on his broad back. "How did you learn to command so well?"

"Sir, I've been listening to you all along," his gunner an-swered, "and keeping an eye on you, too. I copied what you'd do and what you'd

say."

"At least you didn't copy my accent," Morrell said. Pound laughed. His voice had a northern twang to it that made him sound almost like a Canadian. Morrell went on, "It's still your barrel, Sergeant. What are you going to do next?"

Sergeant Pound went barrel hunting as ferociously as Morrell could have wanted. When the umpires finally whistled the exer-cise to a halt, one of them approached the test model. "Colonel, you were supposed to have been killed," he said in the fussily precise tones that failed to endear umpires to ordinary soldiers.

"Captain, on my word of honor, I did and said nothing at all to fight this barrel after your colleague signaled that I'd been hit," Morrell answered. He climbed out onto the top of the turret, then called down into it: "Sergeant Pound, stand up and take a bow." Pound did stand up. When he saw the captain with the umpire's armband, he came to attention and saluted.

As if doing him a favor he didn't deserve, the captain returned the salute.

Then he gave Morrell a fishy stare. "I have a great deal of trouble believing what you just told me, Colonel," he said.

That was the wrong tack to take. "Captain, if you are sug-gesting that I would lie to you on my word of honor, I have a sug-gestion for you in return," Morrell said quietly. "If you like, we can meet in some private place and discuss the matter man to man. I am, I assure you, at your service."

U.S. Army officers hadn't dueled since before the War of Se-cession.

Morrell didn't really have pistols at sunrise in mind. But he would have taken a good deal of pleasure in whaling the stuffing out of the officious captain.

He let that show, too. As he'd expected, the captain wilted. "Sir, I think you may have mis-understood me," he said, looking as if he wished he could sink into the churned-up prairie.

"I hope I did," Morrell said. "I also hope Sergeant Pound's outstanding achievement will be prominently featured in your reports of the action. He deserves that, and I want to see him get it."

"He shall have it," the umpire said. "You may examine the re-port as closely as you like." He wasn't altogether a fool, not if he realized Morrell would be reading that report to make sure he kept his promise. He still came too close to being a perfect fool to make Morrell happy.

Pound said, "Thank you very much, sir," as Morrell climbed down into the turret once more.

"Don't thank me," Morrell said. "You're the one who earned it. And now, let's take this beast back to the barn. We keep show-ing them and showing them that we can run rings around every other barrel in the United States. If that won't make them build more like this one, I don't know what will."

Odds were, nothing would make the Socialists build new, im-proved barrels. The political fight back in Philadelphia at the moment had to do with old-age pensions, not the War Depart-ment. Morrell was convinced he'd have a better chance of living to collect an old-age pension if the Army got better barrels, but he had no friends in high places, not in President Sinclair's administration.

After the barrel returned to the shed that sheltered it from the elements—and

at

whose

expense

the

quartermasters

had

grumbled—Morrell climbed out and headed for the Bachelor Officer Quarters. Then he stopped, did a smart about-face, and went off in the other direction. As he went, he shook his head and laughed at himself. He'd been married only a little more than a month, and the habits he'd acquired over several years died hard.

The cottage toward which he did go resembled nothing so much as the company housing that went up around some facto-ries. It was small and square and looked like the ones all around it. It was also the first

time Irving Morrell had had more than a room to himself since joining the Army more than half a lifetime before.

Agnes Hill—no, Agnes Morrell; the habit of thinking of her by her former name died hard, too—opened the door when he was still coming up the walk. "How did it go today?" she asked.

He kissed her before waggling his hand and answering, "Soso. We blew a bunch of Great War barrels to smithereens, the way we always do, but I got shot in the middle of the exercise ."

To his surprise, Agnes looked stricken. She needed a few sec-onds to realize what he meant. Even when she did, her laugh came shaky. "An umpire decided you got shot," she said, sound-ing as if she needed to reassure herself.

Morrell nodded. "That's right. See? No blood ." He did a neat pirouette.

When he faced Agnes again, she still wasn't smiling. Now he had to pause to figure out why. When he did, he felt stupid, not a feeling he was used to.

Her first husband had died in combat; was it any wonder she didn't find cracks about getting shot very funny? Contritely, Morrell said, "I'm sorry, dear. I'm fine. I really am."

"You'd better be." Agnes' voice was fierce. "And now come on. Supper's just about ready. I've got a beef tongue in the pot, the way you like it —with potatoes and onions and carrots."

"You can spend the rest of the night letting out my trousers, the way you feed me," Morrell said. Agnes laughed at that with real amusement.

However much Morrell ate—and he was a good trencherman—he remained skinny as a lath.

After supper, Morrell stayed in the kitchen while his wife washed dishes.

He enjoyed her company. They chatted while she worked, and then while she read a novel and he waded through reports. And then they went to bed.

Though he'd hardly been a virgin before saying "I do," Mor-rell's

occasional couplings with easy women had not prepared him for the pleasures of the marriage bed. Every time he and his wife made love, it was as if they were getting reacquainted, and at the same time learning things about each other they hadn't known before and might have been a long time finding out any other way. "I love you," he said afterwards, taking his weight on elbows and knees while they lay still joined.

"I love you, too," Agnes answered, raising up a little to kiss him on the cheek. "And I love—this. And I would love you to get off me so I can get up and go to the bathroom, if that's all right."

"I think so," he said. Agnes laughed and poked him in the ribs. When she came back to bed, he was nearly asleep. Agnes laughed again, on a different note. She put on her nightgown and lay down beside him. He heard her breathing slow toward the rhythms of sleep, too. Feeling vaguely triumphant at staying awake long enough to notice that, he drifted off.

Anne Colleton had always fancied that she had a bit of the artist in her.

Back before the war, she'd designed and arranged the ex-hibition of modern art she'd put on at the Marshlands man-sion. Everyone had praised the way the exhibit was laid out. Then the world went into the fire, and people stopped caring about modern art.

Now Anne was working with different materials. This Free-dom Party rally in Columbia would be one of the biggest in South Carolina. She was bound and determined it would also be the best. She'd done her best to get permission to hold the rally on the grounds of the State House, but her best hadn't been good enough. The governor was a staunch Whig, and not about to yield the seat of government even for a moment to Jake Feather-ston's upstarts. She'd hoped for better without really expect-ing it.

Seaboard Park would do well enough. Neither the governor nor the mayor nor the chief of police could ban the rally alto-gether, though they would have loved to. But the Confederate Constitution guaranteed that citizens might peaceably assemble to petition for redress of grievances. The Freedom Party wasn't always perfectly peaceable, but it came close enough to make re-fusal to issue a permit a political disaster.

Tom Colleton touched Anne's arm. "Well, Sis, I've got to hand it to

you.

This is going to be one devil of a bash."

"Nice of you to decide to come up from St. Matthews and watch it," Anne replied coolly. "I didn't expect you to bother."

"It's my country," Tom said. "If you remember, I laid my life on the line for it. I want to see what you and that maniac Feather-ston have in mind for it."

"He's not a maniac." Anne did her best to hold down the anger in her voice. "I don't deal with maniacs—except the ones I'm re-lated to."

"Heh," her brother said. But then he surprised her by nodding. "I suppose you're right—Featherston's not a maniac. He knows what he wants and he knows how to go after it. You ask me, though, that makes him more dangerous, not less."

Anne wondered and worried about the same thing herself. Even so, she said, "When he does win, whether it's this year or not, he'll set the Confederate States to rights. And he'll remem-ber who helped him get to the top." Tom started to say some-thing. She shook her head. "Can't talk now. The show's about to start."

Gasoline-powered generators came to life. Searchlights be-gan to glow all around Seaboard Park. Their beams shot straight up into the air, making the park seem as if it were surrounded by colonnades of bright, pale light.

Anne had come up with that ef-fect herself. She was proud of it. Churches wished they made people feel the awe those glowing shafts inspired.

More electric lights came on inside the park. Tom caught his breath. They showed the whole place packed with people. Most of the crowd consisted of the ordinary working people of Co-lumbia in their overalls and dungarees and cloth caps and straw hats, with a sprinkling of men in black jackets and cravats: doc-tors and lawyers and businessmen, come to hear what the new man in the land had to say.

At the front, though, near the stage a team of carpenters had spent the day running up, stood neat, military-looking ranks of young men in white shirts and butternut trousers. Many of them wore tin hats. If the Whigs and the Radical Liberals tried imi-tating Freedom Party tactics

and assailing the rally, the protec-tion squads would make them regret it.

The foremost rows of Party stalwarts carried flags—some Confederate banners, some C.S. battle flags with colors re-versed, some white banners blazoned with the red word FREE-DOM. The tall backdrop for the flag-draped stage was white, too, with FREEDOM spelled out on it in crimson letters twice as tall as a man.

"You don't need to worry about investing money," Tom said. "You could make billions designing sets for minstrel shows and vaudeville tours. Christ, you might make millions even if Con-federate dollars were really worth anything."

"Thank you, Tom," Anne Colleton said. She wasn't altogether sure whether he offered praise or blame, but took it for the former. "Look—here comes Featherston." Her own vantage point was off to the right, beyond the edge of the crowd, so she could see farther into the left wing than any of the regular audience. She tensed. "If those spotlight men have fallen asleep on the job, God damn them, they'll never work in this state again."

But they hadn't. As soon as Jake advanced far enough to be visible to the crowd, twin spotlight beams speared him. One of the Freedom Party bigwigs from Columbia rushed to the micro-phone and cried, "Let's hear it for the next president of the Con-federate States, Jaaake *Featherstonl"*

"Free-atom! Free-atom! Free-atom!" The rhythmic cry started among the stalwarts in white and butternut. At first, it had to compete with the unorganized cheers and clapping and the scat-tered boos from the larger crowd behind them. But the stalwarts kept right on, as they'd been trained to do. And, little by little, the rest of the crowd took up the chant, till the very earth of Seaboard Park seemed to cry out: "Free-c/om! Free-atom!

Free-c/om!"

The two-syllable beat thudded through Anne. She'd orches-trated this entire performance. Thanks to her, Jake Featherston stood behind the microphone, his hands raised, soaking up the adulation of the crowd.

Knowing what she knew, she should have been immune to what stirred the thousands of fools out there. But, to her own amazement and rather to her dismay, she found she wasn't. She wanted to join the chant, to lose herself in it. The excitement that built in her was hot

and fierce, almost sexual.

She fought it down. The farmers and factory hands out there didn't try.

They didn't even know they might try. They'd come to be stirred, to be roused. The ceremony had started that work. Jake Featherston would finish it.

He dropped his hands. Instantly, the Freedom Party faithful in white and butternut stopped chanting. The cries of "Freedom!" went on for another few seconds. Then the people in the ordinary part—much the bigger part—of the crowd got the idea, too. A little raggedly, the chant ended.

Jake leaned forward, toward the microphone. Anne discovered she too was leaning forward, toward him. Angrily, she straight-ened. "God damn him," she muttered under her breath. Tom gave her a curious look. She didn't explain. She didn't want to admit even to herself, let alone to anyone else, that Jake Feather-ston could get her going like that.

"Columbia," Jake said. "I want you all to know, I'm glad—I'm proud—to set foot in the capital of the first state of the Confed-eracy." He talked in commonplaces. His voice was harsh, his accent none too pleasing.

Somehow, none of that mattered. When he spoke, thousands upon thousands of people hung on his every word. Anne was one of them. She knew she was doing it, but couldn't help herself. Featherston was formidable in a small setting. In front of a crowd, he was much more than merely formidable.

Through cheers, he repeated, "Yes, sir, I'm proud to set foot in the capital of the first state of the Confederacy—because I know South Carolina is going to help me, going to help the Freedom Party, give the Confederate States back to the people who started this country in the first place, the honest, hard-working white men and women who make the CSA go and don't get a dime's worth of credit for it. Y'all remember dimes, right?

That'd be a couple million dollars' worth of credit nowadays, I reckon."

The crowd laughed and cheered. "He's full of crap," Tom said. "The people who started this country were planters and lawyers, just about

top to bottom. Everybody knows that."

"Everybody who's had a good education knows that," Anne said. "How many of those folks out there do you figure went to college?" Before Tom could answer, she shook her head. "Never mind now. I want to hear what he's going to say."

"Now I know the Whigs are running Wade Hampton Y and I know he's from right here in South Carolina," Featherston went on. "I reckon some of you are thinking of voting for him on ac-count of he's from here. You can do that if you want to, no doubt about it. But I'll tell you something else, friends: I thought this here was an election for president, not for king. His Majesty Wade Hampton the Fifth." He stretched out the name and the number that went with it, then shook his head in well-mimed disbelief. "Good Lord, folks, if we vote him in, we'll be right up there with the Englishmen and George V"

"He *is* good," Tom said grudgingly as the crowd exploded into more laughter. Anne nodded. She was leaning forward again.

"Now, Hampton V means well, I don't doubt it for a minute," Jake said.

"The Whigs meant well when Woodrow Wilson got us into the war, too, and they meant well when a War Department full of Thirds and Fourths and Fifths fought it for us, too. And you'd best believe they meant well when they stuck their heads in the sand instead of noticing the niggers were going to stab us in the back. If you like the way the war turned out, if you like paying ten million dollars for breakfast—this week; it'll be more next Wednesday—go right ahead and vote for Wade Hampton V You'll get six more years of what we've been having.

"Or if you want a real change, you can vote for Mr. Layne. The Radical Liberals'll give you change, all right. I'll be . . . switched if they won't. They'll take us back into United States, is what they'll do. Ainsworth Layne went to Harvard, folks—Harvard! Can you believe it? It's true, believe it or not. And the Rad Libs want him to be president of the *CSA1* I'm sorry, friends, but I've seen enough damnyankees come down on us already. I don't need any homegrown ones, thank you kindly."

That drew more laughter and applause than his attack on Wade Hampton had done. The Radical Liberals, though neither very radical nor very liberal, had always been weak in hard-line South Carolina. Were Hampton not a native son, Anne would have thought Jake

Featherston the likely winner here. Even with things as they were, she thought he had a decent chance to take the state.

Featherston went on, "The Whigs and the Rad Libs both say we have to learn from the war, to take what the Yankees dish out on account of we're not strong enough to do anything else. What I say is, we have to learn from the war, all right. We have to learn that when we hit the United States, we have to hit 'em hard and we have to keep on hitting 'em till they fall down!

They've stolen big chunks of what's ours. I give you my word, friends —one fine day, it's going to be ours again!"

The crowd exploded. Anne caught herself shouting at the top of her lungs. She thirsted for revenge against the USA. She glanced over toward her brother. Tom was shouting, too, his fist pumping the air. Whatever he thought of Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party, he wanted vengeance on the United States, too. That yen for revenge brought together people in the CSA who had nothing else in common. With luck, it would bring them together under the Freedom Party banner.

"Free-do/w! *Free-doml* Free-t/om!" The stalwarts began the chant as Jake stepped back from the microphone. It swelled until the whole huge crowd bellowed the word as if it came from a single throat. Anne looked at Tom again. He was shouting it, too. She'd been shouting it till she made a deliberate effort of will and stopped. All of Columbia could hear that furious roar. By the time November came, all of the Confederate States would hear it.

XV

Roger Kimball whistled cheerfully as he tucked his white shirt into a pair of butternut trousers. A lot of Freedom Party leaders didn't care to join in the brawling that had marked the Party's rise. Kimball shrugged. He'd never backed away from a fight, and he'd gone toward a good many. And Ainsworth Layne was speaking in Charleston tonight, or thought he was.

"I need a tin hat," Kimball said, buttoning his fly. A helmet was useless aboard a submersible. It was a handy thing to have with clubs and rocks flying, though.

He picked up his own club and headed for the door. He was about to

open it when somebody knocked. He threw it wide. There stood Clarence Potter. The former intelligence officer eyed him with distaste. "If you don't agree with what I have to say, you could simply tell me so," Potter remarked.

"I don't agree with what you have to say," Kimball snapped. "I don't have time to argue about it now, though. Can't be late."

Potter shook his head. "When we first got to know each other, I thought better of you. You were a man who wanted to build up his country, not a ruffian tearing down the fabric of the republic. We used to talk about riding Jake Featherston. Now he rides you—and you're proud of it."

"He doesn't ride me," Roger Kimball said. "We're both going the same way, that's all."

"Toward riot and mayhem." Potter pointed to the stout blud-geon in Kimball's hand. Then he added, "Toward murder, too, maybe."

"Clarence, I had nothing to do with Tom Brearley going up in smoke,"

Kimball said evenly. "I don't miss him, but I didn't have anything to do with it.

Far as I know"—he carefully hadn't asked Featherston any questions —"the Freedom Party had nothing to do with it, either. The jury found those fellows up in Richmond innocent."

"No, the jury found them not guilty, which isn't close to the same thing,"

Potter answered. "And if the jury had found any-thing different, how many out of those twelve do you suppose would be breathing today?"

"I don't know anything about that. What I do know is, maybe you'd better not come around here any more." Kimball hefted the club.

Potter had very little give in him. Kimball had seen as much when they first met in a saloon. The club didn't frighten him. "You needn't worry about that," he said. Slowly and deliberately, he turned his back and walked away.

Kimball pulled his watch out of his pocket. Good—he wasn't late yet. He frowned, then set the watch on a table by the door. Some of the

Radical Liberals were liable to have clubs, too, and that could be hard on a timepiece.

He passed a policeman on his way to Freedom Party head-quarters. The gray-clad cop inspected him. He wondered if the man would give him trouble. But the cop called "Freedom!" and waved him on his way. Kimball raised the club in salute as he hurried along.

Freedom Party stalwarts spilled out onto the sidewalk and into the street around the headquarters. They'd drawn a few police-men on account of that. "Come on, fellows, you don't want to block traffic," one of the policemen said. The men in white and butternut took no special notice of him. Yes, he had a six-shooter, but there were more than a hundred times six of them, combat veterans all, and some no doubt with pistols of their own tucked into pockets or trouser waistbands.

"Form ranks, boys," Kimball called. The Freedom Party men did. They didn't just spill into the street then: they took it over, in a long, sinewy column that put Kimball in mind of the endless close-order drill he'd gone through down at the Naval Academy in Mobile. The comparison was fitting, because the stalwarts— mostly ex-soldiers, with a handful of Navy men—had surely done their fair share of close-order drill, too.

"You can't do that!" a cop exclaimed. "You haven't got a pa-rade permit!"

"We are doing it," Kimball answered. "We're out for a stroll together—isn't that right, boys?" The men in butternut and white howled approval. Kimball waited to see if the policeman would have the nerve to try arresting him. The cop didn't. Grin-ning, Kimball said, "On to Hampton Park!

Forward—march!'"

The column moved out, the stalwarts raising a rhythmic cry of "Freedom!"

Kimball had all he could do not to break into snick-ers. Here he was, leading Freedom Party men to attack Radical Liberals in a park named for the family of the Whigs' presiden-tial candidate. If that wasn't funny, what was?

Hampton Park lay in the northwestern part of Charleston, across town from Freedom Party headquarters. The column of stalwarts was ten men wide and a hundred yards long; it snarled traffic to a fare-thee-

well. Some automobilists frantically blew their horns at the men who presumed to march past them regard-less of rules of the road. More than a few, though, shouted "Freedom!" and waved and cheered.

"What do you aim to do?" a nervous policeman asked Kim-ball as the stalwarts strode up Ashley toward Hampton Park. By then, a couple of dozen cops were tagging along with the Freedom Party men. Tagging along was all they were doing; they seemed shocked to find themselves such a small, shadowy presence.

In Hampton Park, a couple of searchlights hurled spears of light into the sky. The Rad Libs hadn't adopted the glowing cathedral Anne Colleton had come up with, but they were doing their best to keep pace. Kimball pointed toward the searchlights. "We aim to have a talk with those folks yonder."

The cop splut-tered and fumed. He knew the Freedom Party aimed to do a hell of a lot more than that. But knowing it and being able to prove it were two different critters.

Ainsworth Layne had provided himself with a microphone, too. His amplified voice boomed out from the park. "—And so I say to you, people of the Confederate States, that with goodwill we can be reconciled to those with whom we have known con-flict in the past: with our American brethren in the United States and with the colored men and women in our own country." He sounded earnest and bland.

"Are you listening to that crap, boys?" Roger Kimball asked. "Sounds like treason to me. How about you?" A low rumble of agreement rose from the men marching behind him. He asked another question: "What does this country really need?"

"Freedom!" The thunderous answer put Layne's microphone to shame.

The Freedom Party men advanced into the park.

Dark shapes rushed out of the night to meet them. The Radical Liberals had a cry of their own: "Layne and liberty!"

"Freedom!" Kimball shouted, and swung his club. It struck flesh. A Rad Lib howled like a kicked dog. Kimball laughed. If the other side felt like mixing it up, he and his comrades were ready.

Dozens of searchlights marked Freedom Party rallies these days. The Radical Liberals used only a couple. The Radical Lib-erals incompletely imitated the Freedom Party when it came to assembling

a strong-arm force, too. They'd recruited a few dozen bullyboys: enough to blunt the first charge of the men in white and butternut, but nowhere near enough to halt them or drive them back.

"Layne and liberty!" A Radical Liberal swung at Roger Kim-ball's head.

Kimball got his left arm up in time to block the blow, but let out a yip of anguish all the same. He shook the arm. It didn't hurt any worse when he did that, so he supposed the Rad Lib hadn't broken any bones —not from lack of effort, though. Kimball swung his own club. His foe blocked the blow with an ease that bespoke plenty of bayonet practice. But the Radical Liberal couldn't take on two at once. Another Freedom Party man walloped him from behind. He fell with a groan. Kimball kicked him, hard as he could, then ran on. "Freedom!" he cried.

Ainsworth Layne must have caught the commotion at the back of the park. "And now, I see, the forces of unreason seek to disrupt our peaceable assembly," he boomed through the micro-phone. "They pay no heed to the rights enumerated in the Con-federate Constitution, yet they feel they have the right to govern. We must reject their violence, their radicalism, for we—"

"Freedom!" Kimball shouted again. Only a few of the Radical Liberals'

muscle boys remained on their feet. Kimball smashed one of them down.

Blood ran dark along his club. He guessed he'd fractured a skull or two in the fight. He hoped he had.

"Freedom!" the Party stalwarts roared as they crashed into the rear of the crowd. Some people tried to fight back. Others tried to run. They had a devil of a time doing it, with Layne's partisans so tightly packed together.

Men and women started screaming.

"Freedom!" It was not only a war cry for Kimball and his comrades, it was also a password. They did their best to maim anyone who wasn't yelling their slogan.

They had fury on their side. They had discipline on their side, too. As they'd done in the trenches, they supported one another and fought as parts of a force with a common goal. The men in the crowd of Radical Liberals might have been their matches individually, but never got the

chance to fight as individuals. The Freedom Party men mobbed them, rolled over them, and plunged deep into the heart of the crowd, aiming straight for the platform from which Ainsworth Layne still sent forth unheeded calls for peace.

Kimball stepped on someone. When she cried out, he realized her sex.

He refrained from kicking her while she was down. Thus far his chivalry ran: thus far and no further. Swinging his club, he pressed on toward the platform.

Through the red heat of battle, he wondered what he and the rest of the Freedom Party men ought to do if they actually got there. Pull Layne off it and stomp him to death? A lot of the stal-warts would want to do that. Even with his blood up, Kimball didn't think it would help the Party. Some people would cheer. More would be horrified.

When the shooting started, it sounded like firecrackers on the Fourth of July. Roger Kimball didn't know whether a stalwart or a man in the crowd first pulled out a pistol, aimed it at somebody he didn't like, and squeezed the trigger. No sooner did one gun come out, though, than a dozen or more on each side were bark-ing and spitting furious tongues of fire.

What had been chaos turned to a panicked stampede. All the people in the crowd tried to get away from the Freedom Party men—and from the gunfire—as fast as they could. If they trampled wives, husbands, children . .

. then they did, and they'd worry about it later. The only thing they worried about now was escape.

"Let us have peace!" Ainsworth Layne cried, but there was no peace.

Kimball saw a Freedom Party man taking aim at Layne. "No, dammit!" he shouted, and whacked the revolver out of the stal-wart's hand with his club.

The fellow snarled at him. He snarled back. "We've got to get out of here!"

he yelled. "We've done what we came to do, but every cop in Charleston's going to be heading this way now. Time to go home, boys."

He thought the stalwarts might be able to take on the whole

Charleston police force and have some chance of winning. He didn't want to find out, though. If the Freedom Party won here, the governor would have to call out the militia. Either the citizen-soldiers would slaughter the stalwarts or they'd mutiny and go over to them, in which case South Carolina would have a revolu-tion on its hands less than a month before the election.

Jake Featherston would kill him if that happened. It was no figure of speech, and Kimball knew as much. "Out!" he yelled again. "Away! We've done what we came for!" Discipline held. The Freedom Party men began streaming out of Hampton Park. Even they forgot about Ainsworth Layne.

November 8 dawned chilly and drizzly in Richmond. Reggie Bartlett got out of bed half an hour earlier than he usually would have, so he could vote before going to work at Harmon's drug-store. Yawning in spite of the muddy coffee he'd made, he went downstairs and out into the nasty weather. It wasn't raining quite hard enough for an umbrella. He pulled his hat down and his coat collar up and muttered curses every time a raindrop trickled along the back of his neck.

A big Confederate flag flew in front of the house that served as his polling place. A couple of policemen stood in front of the polling place, too.

He'd seen cops on election duty before. They'd always looked bored. Not this pair. Each of them had a hand on his pistol. After the riots that had ripped through the CSA in the weeks leading up to election day, Bartlett couldn't blame them.

"Freedom! Freedom!'" Four or five men in white shirts and butternut trousers chanted the word over and over again. They held placards with Jake Featherston's name on them, and stood as close to the polling place as the hundred-foot no-electioneering limit allowed. The cops watched them as if they were enemy soldiers.

So did Reggie Bartlett. He carried a snub-nosed .38 revolver in his trouser pocket these days. A jury might have acquitted the Freedom Party goons who'd burned down Tom Brearley's house around him, but Reggie knew—along with the rest of the world—who'd done what, and why. He'd signed his name on the letter that introduced Brearley to Tom Colleton.

That pre-sumably meant the Freedom Party knew it. No one had yet tried to do anything to him on account of it. If anyone did try, Reggie

was determined he'd regret it.

As he walked past the policemen, they gave him a careful once-over. He nodded to them both and went inside. The vot-ing officials waiting in the parlor all looked like veterans of the War of Secession. Reggie nodded to them, too; the next young voting official he saw would be the first.

They satisfied themselves that he was who he said he was and could vote in that precinct. Then one of them, a fellow with splendid white mustaches and a hook where his left hand should have been, gave Bartlett a ballot and said, "Use any vacant vot-ing booth, sir."

Reggie had to wait a couple of minutes, for none of the booths was open.

A lot of men were doing their civic duty before head-ing for work. At last, a fellow in overalls came out of a booth. He nodded to Bartlett and said

"Freedom!" in a friendly way. The voting officials glared at him. So did Reggie. The man didn't even notice.

In the voting booth, Bartlett stared down at the names of the candidates as if they'd lost their meaning. That didn't last long, though. As soon as he saw Featherston's name, he wanted to line through it. *Hampton or Layne?*

he wondered. Wade Hampton surely had the better chance against the Freedom Party, but he liked Ainsworth Layne's ideas better.

In the end, he cast defiant ballots for Layne and the rest of the Radical Liberal ticket. If Jake Featherston took Virginia by one vote, he'd feel bad about it. Otherwise, he'd lose no sleep.

He came out of the voting booth and handed his ballot to the old man with the hook. The precinct official folded it and stuffed it into the ballot box. "Mr.

Bartlett has voted," he intoned, a response as ingrained and ritualistic as any in church. Secular communion done, Reggie left the polling place and hurried to the drugstore.

"Good morning," Jeremiah Harmon said as he came in. "You vote?" He waited for Reggie to nod, then asked, "Have any trouble?"

"Not really," Reggie answered. "Some of those Freedom Party so-and-so's were making noise outside the polling place, but that's all they were doing. I think the cops out front would have shot them if they'd tried anything worse, and I think they'd have enjoyed doing it, too. How about you?"

"About the same," the druggist said. "I wonder if Feather-ston's boys aren't shooting themselves in the foot with all these shenanigans, I truly do.

If they make everyone but a few fanatics afraid of them, they won't elect anybody, let alone the president of the Confederate States."

"Here's hoping you're right," Bartlett said, and then, "You don't mind my asking, boss, who'd you vote for?"

"Wade Hampton," Harmon answered evenly. "He's about as exciting as watching paint dry-ˆyou don't need to tell me that. But if anybody's going to come out on top of Featherston, he's the man to do it. Layne's a lost cause.

He's never been the same since that brawl down in South Carolina, and his party hasn't, ei-ther." He raised a gray eyebrow. "I suppose you're going to tell me you voted for him."

"I sure did," Reggie said with a wry chuckle. "Why should I worry about lost causes? I live in the Confederate States, don't I?"

"That's funny." Harmon actually laughed a little, which he rarely did. "It'd be even funnier if it weren't so true."

"We'll find out tonight—or tomorrow or the next day, I suppose—-just how funny it is," Reggie said. "If Jake Feather-ston gets elected, the joke's on us."

"And isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" his boss replied. "Whoever wins, though, the work has to get done. What do you say we do it? After all, if we don't make a few million dollars today, we'll have to beg for our suppers."

That would have been funnier if it weren't so true, too. Reggie dusted the shelves with a long-handled feather duster. He put out fresh bottles and boxes and tins to replace the ones customers had bought. He kept track of the prescriptions Harmon com-pounded, and set them under the counter to await the arrival of the people for whom the

druggist made them. When customers came in, he rang up their purchases and made change.

Ringing things up wasn't so easy. The cash register, a sturdy and massive chunk of gilded ironmongery, dated from before the Great War. It was a fancier machine than most of that vin-tage, and could handle a five-dollar purchase with the push of but one key. Had Reggie had to do all the pushing he needed to ring up something that cost $ 17,000,000—and a lot of things did this week, give or take a couple of million—he would have been banging that five-dollar key from now till doomsday.

Everyone wanted to talk politics, too. Women couldn't vote, but that didn't stop them from having opinions and being vocif-erous about them. "Isn't Mr. Featherston the handsomest man you ever saw in your life?" asked a lady buying a tube of cream for her piles.

"No, ma'am," Reggie answered. In the back of the drugstore, Jeremiah Harmon raised his head. He didn't want to lose cus-tomers, regardless of Reggie's own politics and opinions. Reg-gie thought fast. "Handsomest man I ever saw was my father," he told the woman. "Pity I don't take after him."

She laughed. Bartlett's boss relaxed. Reggie felt some small triumph.

Even if he'd sugarcoated what he said, he hadn't had to take it back.

He tried to gauge the shape of the election from conversations with customers. That wouldn't prove anything, and he knew it. He kept trying anyhow. From what he saw and heard, Jake Feath-erston had a lot of support. So did Wade Hampton V Only a few people admitted to backing Ainsworth Layne and the Radical Liberals. Reggie hadn't expected anything different. He was dis-appointed just the same.

When six o'clock rolled around, he said, "Boss, I think I'm going to get myself some supper somewhere and then head over to the *Richmond Examiner.* I reckon they'll be posting returns all night long."

"I expect they will," Harmon answered. "While you're there, do try to recall you're supposed to come in to work tomorrow." The druggist's voice was dry; he had a pretty good idea that Reg-gie was liable to be up late.

Supper was greasy fried chicken and greasier fried potatoes, washed down with coffee that had been perking all day. Reggie's stomach told

him in no uncertain terms what it thought of being assaulted in that fashion. He ignored it, shoved a few banknotes with a lot of zeros on them across the counter at the cook, and hurried on down Broad Street to the *Examinees* offices, which were only a few blocks from Capitol Square.

Like the *Whig* and the *Sentinel* and the other Richmond papers—like papers across the CSA—the *Examiner* was in the habit of setting up enormous blackboards on election night and changing returns as the telegraph brought in new ones. When Reggie got there, the blackboards remained pristine: the polls were still open throughout the country. Because of that, only a few people stood around in front of the offices. Reggie got an ex-cellent spot. He knew he might have to defend it with elbows as the night wore along, but that was part of the game, too.

A man came up, loudly unhappy that all the saloons were closed on election day. "Bunch of damn foolishness," he said. "Fools we've got running this year, we need to get drunk be-fore we can stand to vote for any of 'em " By his vehemence, he might already have found liquid sustenance somewhere.

At half past seven, a fellow in shirtsleeves and green celluloid visor came out with a sheaf of telegrams in his hand. He started putting numbers from states on the eastern seaboard in their appropriate boxes. Earliest returns showed Hampton ahead in South Carolina and Virginia, Jake Featherston in North Caro-lina and Florida, and the Radical Liberals—Reggie clapped his hands—in Cuba. The numbers meant hardly more than the blanks they replaced. He was glad to have them anyhow.

More numbers went up as the hour got later. Hardly any of them made the people who awaited them very happy. The *Exam-iner* leaned toward the Radical Liberals, and it soon became abundantly clear that, whatever else happened, Ainsworth Layne would not be the next president of the Confederate States.

That would have disappointed Reggie more had he thought going in that Layne enjoyed any great chance of winning. The Radical Liberals always did best on the fringes of the Confed-eracy; they were liable to win Sonora and Chihuahua, too, when results finally trickled out of the mountains and deserts of the far Southwest.

But the real battle would be decided between Texas and Vir-ginia.

Returns also came in slowly from the Confederate heart-land. They hadn't seemed so slow during the last Congressional election, nor the one before that. Bartlett had been in no position to evaluate how fast the returns for the last presidential election came in, not in November 1915 he hadn't. Back in 1909, he hadn't cared; he hadn't been old enough to vote then.

"Hate to say it, but I'm pulling for Wade Hampton," a man about his own age said not far away. "I've voted Radical Liberal ever since I turned twenty-one, and I'd get into screaming fights with Whigs. But you look around at what the other choice is—" The fellow shivered melodramatically.

"I voted for Layne," Reggie said. "I'm not sorry I did, either. I'm just sorry more people didn't."

Off in the distance, somebody shouted, "Freedom!" But the Freedom Party muscle boys did not wade into the crowd outside the *Examiner* building. They would have paid for any attack they made; Reggie was sure he wasn't the only Radical Liberal pack-ing a revolver in case of trouble from goons.

More and more numbers went up. By midnight or so, they started to blur for Reggie. Strong coffee at supper or not, he couldn't hold his eyes open any more. Things weren't decided, but he headed back toward his flat anyway. He was glad the elec-tion remained up in the air. Only when he'd got very close to home did he realize he should have been sorry Jake Featherston hadn't been knocked out five minutes after the polls closed.

Jake Featherston yawned so wide, his jaw cracked like a knuckle. He hadn't been so tired since the battles of the Great War. It was half past four Wednesday morning, and he'd been up since first light Tuesday. He'd voted early, posed for photographers outside the polling place, and then headed here to the Spottswood Hotel at the corner of Eighth and Main to see what he would see. He'd wanted the Ford Hotel, right across the street from Capitol Square, but the Whigs had booked it first.

He looked down at the glass of whiskey in his hand. Yawning again, he realized he might not have felt so battered if he hadn't kept that glass full through the night. He shrugged. Too late to worry about it now. He wasn't in the habit of looking back at things he'd done, anyway.

Somebody knocked on the door to his room. He opened it. As he'd expected, there stood Ferdinand Koenig, his backer when the Freedom Party was tiny and raw, his vice-presidential candi-date now that the Party was a power in the land .. . but not quite enough of a power. Koenig held the latest batch of telegrams in his left hand. His face might have been a doctor's coming out of a sickroom just before the end.

"It's over, Jake," he said—like Roger Kimball and only a hand-ful of others, he talked straight no matter how bad the news was. "Our goose is cooked. We won't win it this time."

Featherston noticed he was still holding that whiskey. He gulped it down, then hurled the glass against the wall. Shards sprayed every which way, like fragments from a bursting shell. "Son of a bitch," he snarled. *"Son* of a bitch! I really reckoned we might pull it off."

"We scared 'em," Koenig said. "By God, we scared 'em. You Ye still outpolling Ainsworth Layne. We took Florida. We took Ten-nessee. We took Texas. We've got—"

"We've got nothing," Jake said flatly. "God damn it to fucking hell, we've got nothing. During the war, we killed a million Yan-kees. Didn't do us one damn bit of good. We lost. I didn't want to scare Wade Hampton the goddamn Fifth. I wanted to whip the Whigs out of office like the cur dogs they are."

Koenig stared, then shook his head in rueful admiration. "You never did aim to do anything by halves, did you?"

"Why do you think we are where we're at?" Jake returned. "Anybody who settles for what he reckons is good enough de-serves whatever happens to him. I want the whole damn shootin' match. Now I have to wait till 1927 to try again. That's a god-damn long time. What the hell's going to happen to the country from now till then? Christ, we aren't going to hell in a hand-basket, we're already there."

"You can come down off the stump for a few minutes, anyway,"

Ferdinand Koenig said. "The election's over, even if the report-ers are waiting downstairs to hear what you've got to say."

"Goddamn vultures," Featherston muttered. *The election's over* meant nothing to him. His life was a seamless whole; he could not have told anyone, himself included, where Jake Feath-erston the man stopped

and Jake Featherston the Freedom Party leader began. He wished he had another glass to shatter. "All right, I'll go down. Maybe they'll all be passed out drunk by then, and I won't have to make a speech after all."

Koenig was still trying to look on the bright side of things: "We picked up four, maybe five seats in Congress, not counting the Redemption League.

Florida gave us a Senator; looks like we'll pick up the governor's spot in Tennessee, and maybe in Mississippi, too."

"That's all fine and dandy, but it's not enough, either." Even now, worn and half drunk and sorely disappointed, Jake knew he'd be happier in a few days. The Freedom Party had done very well. It just hadn't done well enough to suit him. He'd have to start building on what it had done, and to start looking ahead to see what it could do for 1923. He made a fist and slammed it into his own thigh several times. The pain was oddly welcome.

"The reporters are waiting, eh? Let's go, by Jesus. Let's see how they like it."

Now his running mate looked faintly—no, more than faintly—alarmed. "If you want to get a couple hours' sleep, Jake, those bastards won't care one way or the other. Maybe you should grab the chance to freshen up a touch,"

Koenig said.

"Hell with it," Featherston replied. "Might as well get it over with." He headed for the stairway. Had Koenig not jumped aside, Jake would have pushed him out of the way.

Down in the lobby of the Spottswood, the victory celebration for which the Freedom Party had hoped was a shambles now. A few young men in white shirts and butternut trousers remained on their feet and alert. They'd been detailed to keep order, and keep order they would. The task was easier than Jake had thought it would be when he assigned it. *Six more years of waiting.* The thought was as bitter as yielding to the damnyankees had been.

More Freedom Party men sprawled snoring on couches and chairs and on the floor, too, some with whiskey bottles close at hand, others simply exhausted. A lot of reporters, by the look of things, were already gone.

Watching the Freedom Party lose an election so many thought it might win had been story enough for them. But half a dozen fellows in cheap but snappy suits con-verged on Jake when he showed himself.

"Do you have a statement, Mr. Featherston?" they cried, as if with a single voice.

"Damn straight I have a statement," Featherston answered.

"Jake—" began Ferdinand Koenig, who had followed him downstairs.

"Don't you worry, Ferd. I'll be fine," Jake said over his shoul-der. He turned back to the reporters. "Reckon you boys are wait-ing for me to say something sweet like how, even though I wish I was the one who'd gotten elected, I'm sure Wade Hampton V will make a fine president and I wish him all the best. That about right? Did I leave anything out?"

A couple of the reporters grinned at him. "Don't reckon so, Sarge," one of them said. "That's what we hear from the Radical Liberals every six years."

"To hell with the Radical Liberals," Featherston said. "And to hell with Wade Hampton V, too." The reporters scribbled. Jake warmed to his theme, despite Koenig's dark mutterings in the background: "To hell with Wade Hampton V, and to hell with the Whig Party. They led us off a cliff in 1914, they don't have the slightest scent of a notion of how to turn things around, and now they've got six more years to prove they don't know what the devil they're doing."

"If they're such a pack of bums, why'd you lose the election?" a reporter called.

"Don't you think you ought to ask, 'How'd you do so well the first time you tried to run anybody for president?' " Jake re-turned. No matter how he felt in private, in public he put the best face on things he could. "Christ, boys, in 1915 there was no Freedom Party. We didn't elect anybody to Congress till two years ago. And now, our first time out of the gate, we get more votes than the Radical Liberals, and they've been around for-ever. And what do you ask? 'Why'd you lose?' " He shook his head. "We'll be back. As long as Hampton and the Whigs leave us any kind of country at all, we'll be back.

You wait and see."

"You really have it in for Hampton, don't you?" a man from the

Richmond Whig asked.

Jake bared his teeth in what was not a smile. "You bet I do," he said.

"He's part of the crowd that's been running the Confederate States since the War of Secession: all the fancy planters, and their sons, and *their* sons, too. And he's part of the War Depart-ment crowd, like Jeb Stuart, Jr., and the other smart folks who helped the damnyankees lick us. When I look at Wade Hampton and the Whigs, I look at 'em over open sights."

He'd let his journal by that name slip when the Freedom Party began to climb; the furious energy that had gone into the writing came out in Party work instead. Now, for the first time in a while, he might have some leisure to put his ideas down in paper. *Have to look back over what I did before,* he thought. *Pick up where I left off*

"If you don't work with the other parties, why should they work with you?"

the reporter from the *Whig* asked.

"We'll work with our friends," Jake said. "I don't have any quarrel with folks who want to see this country strong and free. People who want us weak or who try and sell us to the USA had better steer clear, though, or they'll be sorry."

"Sorry how?" Two men asked the question at the same time. The man from the *Richmond Whig* followed it up: "Sorry the way Tom Brearley's sorry?"

Though half loaded himself, Jake knew a loaded question when he heard one. "I don't know any more about what hap-pened to that Brearley than I read in the papers," he answered. That was true; he'd also made a point of not trying to find out any more. "I do know a jury didn't convict the people the police arrested for burning down his house."

"They were all Freedom Party men." This time, three reporters spoke together.

"They were all acquitted," Jake said. The reporters looked dis-appointed.

Jake smiled to himself. Did they think he was stupid enough to carry

ammunition to their guns? Too bad for them if they did. He went on, "A lot of people like the Freedom Party these days—not quite enough to win me the election, but a lot."

"Are you saying you can't be responsible for all the crazy people who follow you?" The fellow from the *Whig* wouldn't give up.

"There's crazy people in every party. Look in the mirror if you don't believe me," Jake replied. "AndFll say it again, on account of you weren't listening: the jury acquitted those fellows from the Freedom Party. I don't know *who* burned Brearley's house, and neither do the cops. No way to tell if it was Freedom Party men or a bunch of riled-up Whigs."

"Not likely," the reporter said.

Privately, Featherston thought he was right. Publicly, the Free-dom Party leader shrugged. "Anything else, boys?" he asked. None of the reporters said anything. Jake shrugged again. "All right, then. We didn't win, but we don't surrender, either. And that's about all I've got to say." The newspapermen stood scrib-bling for a bit, then went off one by one to file their stories.

When the last one was out of earshot, Ferdinand Koenig said, "You handled that real well, Jake."

"Said I would, didn't I?" Jake answered. "Christ, I spent three years under fire. Damn me to hell if I'm going to let some stinking newspapermen rattle me."

"All right," Koenig said. "I was a little worried, and I don't deny it. Hard loss to take, and you are sort of lit up." Again, he told Featherston the truth as he saw it.

"Sort of," Jake allowed. "But hell, you think those fellows with the notebooks are stone cold sober? Not likely! They've been drinking my booze all night long."

Koenig laughed. "That's true, but nobody cares what they say. People do care what you say. What do you say about where we go from here?"

"Same thing I've been saying all along." Jake was surprised the question needed asking. "We go straight ahead, right on down this same road, till we win."

As she did any evening she was at her apartment by herself, Flora Hamburger waited for a knock on the door. All too often, the quiet, discreet knock didn't come. There were times these days—and, especially, these nights—when she felt lonelier than she had when she'd first got to Philadelphia almost five years be-fore. That it was a few days before Christmas only made things worse. The whole city was in a holiday mood, which left her, a Jew, on the outside looking in.

She sat on the sofa, working her way through President Sin-clair's proposed budget for the Post Office Department. It was exactly as exciting as it sounded. Did the president really need to revise the definitions for third- and fourth-class post offices? At the moment, she hadn't the faintest idea. Before long, though, the bill would come to a vote. She owed it to her constituents— she owed it to the country—to make her vote as well informed as she could.

Someone knocked on the door: the knock she'd been waiting for, the knock she'd almost given up expecting.

She sprang to her feet. Pages of the Post Office budget flew every which way. Flora noticed, but didn't care. She hurried to the door and threw it open. There stood Hosea Blackford. "Come in," Flora said, and the vice president of the United States did. She closed the door behind him, closed it and locked it.

Blackford kissed her, then said, "You'd better have something to drink in this place, dear, or I'll have to go across the hall and come back."

"I do," Flora said. "Sit down. Wait. I'll be right back." She went into the kitchen, poured him some whiskey, and then poured herself some, too.

"You are a lifesaver," he said, and gulped it down.

Flora sat down beside him. She drank her whiskey more slowly. "You look tired," she said.

To her surprise, Blackford burst into raucous laughter. "God knows why.

All I do is sit in a corner and gather dust—excuse me, preside over the Senate. There's not much difference be-tween the two, believe me. I've spent most of my life in the mid-dle of the arena. Now ... now I'm a $12,000-a-year hatrack, is what I am."

"You knew this would happen when Sinclair picked you," Flora said.

"Of course I did. But there's a difference between knowing and actually having it happen to you." Blackford sighed. "And I wanted it when he picked me. The first Socialist vice president in the history of the United States! I'll go down in history—as a footnote, but I'll go down." His laugh was rueful.

Flora thought he'd ask for another whiskey, but he didn't. All he said was, "I feel like I've already gone down in history—very ancient history."

"If you have so little to do, why haven't you stopped by here more often?"

Flora's question came out sharper then she'd in-tended. After she'd said it, though, she was just as well pleased she'd said it as she had.

He raised an eyebrow. "Do you really want me here crying on your shoulder every night? I can't believe that."

"Of course I do!" she exclaimed, honestly astonished. And she'd astonished him—she saw as much. She wondered if they really knew each other at all, despite so much time talking, de-spite lying down together in her bedroom.

"Well, well," he said, and then again, in slow wonder: "Well, well." He reached out and brushed the backs of his fingers against her cheek. She didn't know whether to pull away or clutch him to her. Deciding she was lonelier than angry took only a mo-ment. She reached for him at the same time as he reached for her.

Later, in the bedroom, she moaned beneath him, enclosed in the circle of his arms, his mouth hot and moist and urgent on her nipple. His hand helped her along as he drove deep into her. Her pleasure was just beginning to slide down from the very peak when he gasped and shuddered and spent himself.

He kissed her again, then got off her and hurried into the bath-room.

From behind the door came a plop as he tossed the French letter he'd been wearing into the toilet. He was careful not to leave them in the wastebasket for the maid to find. Usually, that wet plop made her laugh.

Tonight, it only reminded her how wary they had to be. She was a

mistress, after all, not a wife.

Usually, she managed not to think about that. Tonight, piled onto everything else, it hit her hard, harder than it ever had be-fore. What had she done to her life, not even realizing she was doing it? While Blackford loosed a long stream into the toilet, she rolled over onto her belly and softly began to cry.

"I've been thinking," he said, and punctuated that by flushing. Flora didn't answer. He opened the door, turned out the light, and stood there for a moment while his eyes got used to dimness again—or maybe his ears caught her quiet sobs first. He hurried over to the bed and set a hand on her back. "What on earth is the matter, dear?"

"Nothing!" Flora shrugged the hand away. She tried to stop crying, but discovered she couldn't.

"I've been thinking," Blackford repeated, and then, this time, went on:

"I've been thinking we ought to figure out where we're going."

"Where *are* we going?" Flora asked bitterly. "Are we going anywhere?"

She didn't want to roll back over. She didn't want to look at him.

"Well, that doesn't just depend on me. That depends on both of us,"

Blackford said. He waited for Flora to reply. When she didn't, he shrugged; she felt the mattress shake. He spoke again: "We can't very well get married, for instance, unless you want to marry me, too."

Flora's head jerked up. She swiped at her eyes with her arm— she didn't want to see Blackford, or what she could see of him in the near darkness, through a haze of tears. Gulping to try to steady her voice, she said,

"Married?"

Hosea Blackford nodded. She both saw and felt him do that. "It seems to be the right thing to do, don't you think?" he said. "Heaven knows we love each other." He waited for Flora again. She knew she had to respond this time, and managed a nod. That seemed to satisfy Blackford, who went on,

"All over the world, you know, when people love each other, they do get married."

"But—" The objections that filled Flora's head proved she'd been in Philadelphia, in Congress, the past five years. "If you marry me, Hosea, what will that do to your career?" She didn't just mean, *If you marry me.*

She also meant, *If you marry a Jew.*

He understood her. One of the reasons she loved him was that he understood her. With another shrug, he answered, "When you're vice president, you haven't got much of a career to look forward to, anyhow. And I don't think the party will ever nomi-nate me for president—Dakota doesn't carry enough electoral votes to make that worthwhile. So after this term, or after next term at the latest, I'm done."

"In that case, you go back to Dakota and take your old seat back," Flora declared. "Or you could, anyhow. Could you do it with a Jewish wife?"

"I don't know that I particularly want my old seat back. It seems in pretty good hands with Torvald Sveinssen, and he'll have had it for a while by the time I'm not vice president any more," Blackford said. He reached out and put his hand on her bare shoulder. This time, she let it stay. He went on, "All you've done is talk about me. What about you, Flora? How will people in New York City like it if you came home with a gentile husband?"

"I don't think it would bother them too much—the Fourteenth Ward is a solidly Socialist district," she answered. "And you wouldn't be just any gentile husband, you know. You're a good Socialist yourself—and you're the vice president."

"It could be," Blackford said. "I can see how it could be that that would do well enough for your district. But I don't have a lot of family back in Dakota.

What will your family think if you go home and tell them you're marrying a gentile?"

Flora rejected the first couple of answers that sprang to mind. Her family might indeed be delighted she was marrying at all, but Hosea didn't have to know that. And her father, an immi-grant tailor, might indeed be so awed she was marrying the vice president that he wouldn't say a word even if her fiance were a Mohammedan—but she doubted that. Abraham Hamburger wasn't so outspoken as either Flora

or her brothers and sisters, but he never had any trouble making his opinions known.

And the question Blackford had asked cut close to the one she was asking herself: *how do I feel about marrying a gentile?* Somehow, she'd hardly given that a thought while they were lovers. She wondered why.

Because being lovers was imperma-nent, something she wouldn't have to worry about forever? She didn't think that was the whole answer, but it was surely part.

She ended up answering the question in her own mind, not the one Blackford had asked: "When we have children, I want to raise them as Jews."

"Children?" Blackford started, then laughed wryly. "I'm get-ting a little long in the tooth to worry about children. But you're not; of course you'll want to have children." Much more to him-self than to Flora, he muttered, "I won't be sorry not to wear a sheath any more, that's for sure." After a few seconds' thought, he spoke to her again: "Your faith has a stronger hold on you than mine does on me; I've been a pretty pallid excuse for an Episcopalian for a long time now. If I'm not shooting blanks after all these years, I suppose it's only fair we bring up the chil-dren your way."

That was as rational an approach to the irrational business of religion as Flora could imagine. She'd seen in Congress that Blackford approached problems in a commonsense way. She'd seen he did the same in his private life, too, but this was an im-portant proof. She said, "I think my father and mother will get along with you just fine."

"Does that mean you'll marry me, then?"

"I think it does." Flora knew she shouldn't sound surprised at a moment like that, but couldn't help herself.

"Bully!" Blackford said softly. He took her in his arms. She felt his manhood stir a little against her flank, and tried her best to revive him. Her best turned out not to be good enough. He made a joke of it, saying, "See?

This is what's liable to happen when you have an old man for a husband."

Under that light tone, though, she could tell he was worried.

"It's all right," she said, but it plainly wasn't all right. She cast about for a way to reassure him, and finally found one, even if it meant coming out with the most risque thing she'd ever said in her life: "Your tongue never gets tired." She was glad the only light came from a single lamp in the front room; he couldn't pos-sibly see her blush.

"Yes, some parts do still work better than others," Blackford said, doing his best not to sound as if he were taking things too seriously. But, however hard saying that had been, Flora was glad she'd done it. She knew she'd eased his mind.

"I didn't really expect—this," she said, and then, "I didn't ex-pect any of this, not when I first came down from New York City. I was green as paint."

"I didn't know what to expect, either, when I met you at the Broad Street station," Blackford answered. "Lord knows I didn't expect this—but then, I didn't expect any of the wonderful things you turned out to be, in Congress or out of it."

Nobody else said things like that about Flora. She didn't know how to take them. "Thank you," she whispered. She said it again, on a slightly different note: "Thank you." The day had been long and boring. The night had been even longer, and lonely. Going to sleep was the most she'd had to look forward to. Now, in the space of an hour, her whole world had changed.

That had hap-pened once before, when she was elected to Congress. She looked forward to these changes even more.

Judge Mahlon Pitney slammed down the gavel. He looked every inch a jurist: a spare, erect, handsome gray-haired man in his early sixties, his gray eyes clear and alert. "Here is my verdict in the action *Smith* v. *Heusinger,"*

he said, with a glance toward the court clerk to make sure that worthy was ready to record the ver-dict. "It is the decision of this court that title to the property at issue in the above-entitled action does rightfully rest with the plaintiff, John Smith, who has shown right of possession suffi-cient to satisfy the court."

Letting out a whoop would have been undignified, unprofes-sional. That very nearly didn't stop Jonathan Moss, who instead reached out

and shook hands with his client. John Smith looked more nearly amazed than delighted.

On the other side of the courtroom in Berlin, Ontario, Paul Heusinger stared daggers at Moss. Well he might have: Moss had just shown Judge Pitney he did not have good title to the land on which he'd built his office building—the building in which Moss had his law office. "You're gone,"

Heusinger mouthed. Moss nodded. He'd known he was gone whichever way the case went. At least he was going out a winner.

John Smith tugged at Moss' sleeve. "Will he appeal?" the mousy little Canadian whispered.

"Can't say for sure now," Moss whispered back. "I'd guess not, though. I think we have a solid case here—and appeals are expensive"

Back in the spectators' seats, a couple of reporters scribbled furiously.

They'd been covering the case since it first showed up on the docket; occasional man-bites-dog stories appeared in the *Berlin Bulletin* and, Moss supposed, some other papers as well. He didn't mind—on the contrary. The stories had already brought him three or four clients much more able to pay his usual fees than John Smith was.

But for the reporters, the spectators' gallery was empty. As far as Moss could tell, Heusinger had not a friend in town. Smith probably had had friends here, but those who weren't dead were scattered. The war had been hard on Berlin.

One of the reporters asked, "Now that you have your property back, Mr.

Smith, what do you aim to do with it?"

Smith looked amazed all over again. "I don't really know. I haven't really thought about it, because I didn't believe the Yanks would play fair and give it back to me. I don't suppose they would have without Mr. Moss here."

"No, that's not true, and I don't want anyone printing it," Moss said.

"Americans respect the law as much as Canadians do. It wasn't a judge who said Mr. Smith has good title to that land. It was the law. And the

law would have said the same thing re-gardless of whether Mr. Smith's attorney came from the United States or Canada "

The reporters took down what he said. If they didn't believe him, they were too businesslike to show it on their faces. John Smith, less disciplined, looked highly dubious. Moss felt dubi-ous himself. One of the things he'd already discovered in his brief practice was that judges were not animate law books in black robes. They were human, sometimes alarmingly so.

After a little more back-and-forth with the reporters, Moss re-claimed his overcoat, hat, and galoshes from the cloakroom. In a pocket of the overcoat were mittens and earmuffs. He put them on before venturing outside. Even so, the cold tore at him. The coat that had been better than good enough for winter in Chicago was just barely good enough for winter in Ontario. He wished for a nosemuff to go with the earmuffs.

He also wished for taller rubber overshoes. As he kicked his way through the new-fallen snow toward his apartment, some of the freezing stuff got over the red-ringed tops of the galoshes and did its best to turn his ankles into icicles. He wished he would have driven his motorcar over to the courthouse. If he had, though, it was only about even money the Bucephalus would have started after sitting so long unprotected in the snow.

The people of Berlin took the weather in stride in a way even Chicagoans didn't. When it stayed this cold this long, people in Chicago complained.

Complaining about the weather was as much Chicago's sport as football was America's. People up here simply went about their business. Moss didn't know whether to admire them for that or to conclude they hadn't the brains to grumble.

He hurled coal into the stove when he got into his flat, then stood in front of the black iron monstrosity till he was evenly done on all sides. He didn't have a whole lot of room to stand anywhere in the apartment. Ever since he'd started the action against his landlord, he'd been moving crates of books out of his office, anticipating that Paul Heusinger or his own client would give him the bum's rush.

"Tomorrow," he said, having picked up the habit of talking to himself down in Chicago, "tomorrow I get to find myself some new digs. Then maybe I'll be able to turn around in this place again."

He took some pork chops out of the icebox, dipped them in egg and then in flour, and fried them in a pan on the hot stove. He fried potatoes in another pan at the same time. Practice had made him a halfway decent cook—or maybe he just thought so because he'd got used to eating what he turned out.

He didn't go office hunting the next day, nor the several days after that, either. The blizzard that roared through Berlin kept even the locals off the streets. It was the sort of blizzard that sent Americans running back over the border. Moss didn't think of leaving—not more than a couple of times, anyhow—but he was damn glad he had plenty of coal in the scuttle.

"Have to start burning books if I run out," he said. He had enough books in the flat for... He looked around. "Eight or ten years, is my guess."

Despite the dreadful weather, he did get some work done. He'd already seen that the Canadians were good at keeping tele-graph and telephone lines up and functioning in the teeth of the worst winter could do. The telephone in his flat rang several times a day. Somehow, the newspapers had gone out, and with them word of his victory for John Smith. Other Canadians with similar problems wanted him to give them a hand, too.

He had just headed for the bathroom to dispose of some used coffee when the telephone jangled yet again. He thought about ignoring it— anyone who really wanted him would call back— but duty defeated his bladder.

Stepping over a crate, he went back to the telephone. "Jonathan Moss, attorney at law."

"Hello, Mr. Moss. I called to congratulate you for getting Mr. Smith what belongs to him."

"Thank you, ma'am." He wondered where the woman was calling from.

The line had more clicks and pops on it than he would have expected from a call placed inside Berlin, but the storm might have had something to do with that, too. He waited for the woman to say more. When she didn't, he asked, "Can I do anything else for you?"

"I don't think so," she answered. "I've already found out that you aren't what I thought you were during the war. No—you may be what I

thought you were, but you're more than that, too."

Moss almost dropped the telephone earpiece. "Laura," he whispered.

He didn't know if Laura Secord would hear him, but she did. "Yes, that's right," she said. "When I found out what you had done, I knew I had to come into Arthur to ring you up and say thank you."

He hadn't stirred out of doors since coming home from win-ning the case.

Did that say she was hardier than he, or just that she was out of her tree?

Moss couldn't make up his mind. What-ever else it said, it said she'd very badly wanted to telephone him. "How are you?" he asked.

"Well enough," she said. "As well as I can be with my country occupied.

I'd heard you'd set up in Empire"—she would be one not to call it Berlin—"but I didn't know what sort of practice you had, and so I didn't think it right to speak to you. From the way you lent me money, I thought you were a decent man, and I am glad to see you proved me right when you had nothing else on your mind."

"Ah," he said. Then he shrugged. She could hardly have helped knowing what he'd felt about her. He'd gone up to Arthur in weather almost this bad—Christ, had it been three years ago?— to tell her so. And she'd told him to get lost.

He noticed how he thought about that as if it were in the past tense. And, he realized, some of it was. He'd been surprised — hell, he'd been flabbergasted—to have her call, but some of what he'd felt, or thought he'd felt, was missing. That flabbergasted him, too. Where did it go? *Into the place where everything that doesn 't work outgoes,* he thought.

Now she'd been waiting for him to say something more, and seemed nonplussed when he didn't. "When the weather gets better, maybe you could come up for a picnic, if you care to," she said. "We haven't seen each other in a long time."

Moss didn't know whether to laugh or to weep. Had she said that in 1919, he would have driven his Bucephalus through fire, never mind ice, to go to her side. But it was 1922. He'd got over some of his

infatuation without quite noticing he was doing it. While he was doing that, had she grown interested in him? So it seemed.

"I'll sec what I can do," he said, which was polite, even friendly sounding, and committed him to nothing.

"All right," Laura Secord said. "I hope to see you. I'd better go now.

Good-bye." She hung up. The line went dead.

Slowly, Moss set the earpiece back on its cradle. He stood staring at the telephone for a long moment before his body re-minded him of what he'd been about to do before the phone rang. He took care of that, then went into the kitchen, which wasn't so overrun with books and crates as the rest of the apartment. To make up for that, it did contain several bottles of whiskey. He picked one, yanked out the cork, and looked around for a glass.

He didn't see one. "Hell with it," he said, and took a long pull straight from the bottle. He coughed a couple of times, drank again—not so much—and set the bottle down. He started to pick it up once more, but changed his mind. Instead, he shoved in the cork and put it back in the cupboard, where it would be out of sight.

"Laura Secord," he said. "My God." He started to giggle, which was surely the whiskey working. "That telephone call would shut Fred Sandburg up forever all by itself."

He didn't need Fred to tell him he'd been foolish to fall so hard. He'd figured it out all by himself. And now, if he wanted to, he had the chance to make his dreams turn real. To how many men was that given? Of them, how many would have the sense to steer clear?

He laughed out of the side of his mouth. He wasn't nearly sure he would have the sense to steer clear, or even that it was sense. As the snowstorm howling through Berlin attested, picnic weather was a long way away. Now his mind would start coming back to Laura Secord, the way his tongue kept coming back to a chipped front tooth. It hardly seemed fair. Just when he'd thought he was over her at last. ..

He'd known Arthur wasn't that far from Berlin when he started his practice here. He'd figured the John Smith case would draw wide notice. Had he hoped Laura Secord would be one of the people who noticed it? Maybe he had. He shook his head. He knew damn well he had, even if he hadn't admitted it to himself.

She'd been in his mind for five years. Now he was in hers. "What the hell am I going to do?" he muttered. "What the *hell* am I going to do?" His tongue found that chipped tooth again. He got very little work done the rest of the day.

Scipio hardly thought of himself by the name he'd been born with these days. His passbook called him Xerxes. His boss called him Xerxes. His friends called him Xerxes. Most impor-tant of all, his wife called him Xerxes.

Bathsheba had no idea he'd ever owned another name.

Bathsheba knew very little about his life before he'd come to Augusta.

One day, she asked him point-blank: "Why don't you never come out an'

say where you was from and what you was doin' when you was there?"

He wondered how she'd react if he answered her in the accent of an educated white, the accent he'd had to use while serving Anne Colleton at Marshlands. He didn't dare find out. He didn't dare tell her of his days on the plantation, or of the blood-soaked time in the Congaree Socialist Republic that had followed. As long as only he knew, he was safe. If anyone else found out— anyone—he was in trouble.

And so he answered as he usually did: "I done what I done, is all. Never done nothin' much." He tried to soften her with a smile. "You is the best thing I ever done."

It worked—to a degree. Eyes glinting, Bathsheba said, "I bet you done ran away from a wife an' about six children."

Solemnly, Scipio shook his head. "No, ma'am. Done run away from three wives an' fo'teen chilluns."

Bathsheba stared. For a moment, she believed him. Then, when he started to laugh, she stuck out her tongue. "You are the most aggravatin'

man in the whole world. Why won't you never give me no straight answers?"

Because if I did, I might end up standing against a wall with a blindfold on my face. I wonder if they would waste a cigarette on a nigger before they shot him. As usual, he heard his thoughts in the educated dialect he'd been made to learn. He sighed. That was a straight answer, but not one he could give Bathsheba. He tried jollying her once more instead. Batting his eyes, he said, "I gots to have some secrets."

His wife snorted and threw her hands in the air. "All right," she said. "All right. I give up. Maybe you done crawled out from under a cabbage leaf, like folks tell the pickaninnies when they're too little to know about screwin'."

"Mebbe so," Scipio said with a chuckle. "My mama never toF me no different, anyways. Don't matter where I comes from, though. Where I's goin' is what count."

Bathsheba snorted again. "And where you goin'?"

"Right now, sweet thing, I believe I's goin' to bed." Scipio yawned.

In bed, in the darkness, Bathsheba grew serious again. "When the Reds rose up, what did you do then?" She asked the question in a tiny whisper.

Unlike so many she'd asked earlier in the eve-ning, she knew that one was dangerous.

But she didn't know how dangerous it was. Scipio answered it seriously without going into much detail: "Same as mos' folks, I reckons. I done my bes' to hide a lot o' the time. When de buckra come with the guns, I make like I was a good nigger for they, an' they don' shoot me. Wish the whole ruction never happen. Do Jesus! I wish the whole ruction never happen."

There he told the complete truth. He set a hand on her shoulder. "What you do?" If she was talking about herself, she couldn't ask about him.

He felt her shrug. "Wasn't so much to do here. A couple-three days when folks done rioted and stole whatever they could git away with, but then the white folks brung so many police and sojers into the Terry, nobody dared stick a nose out the door for a while, or they'd shoot it off you."

"Damn foolishness. Nothin' but damn foolishness," Scipio said.

"Shouldn't never've riz up. The buckra, they's stronger'n we. I hates it, but I ain't blind. If we makes they hate we, we's sunk."

Bathsheba didn't say anything for a while. Then she spoke two words:

"Jake Featherston." She shivered, though the Feb-ruary night was mild.

Scipio took her in his arms, as much to keep himself from being afraid as to make her less so. "Jake Featherston," he echoed quietly. "All the buckra in the Freedom Party hates we. They hates we bad. An' one white man out o' every three, near 'nough, vote fo' Jake Featherston las' year. Six year down de road, he be president o' de Confederate States?"

"Pray to Jesus he ain't," Bathsheba said. Scipio nodded. He'd been able to pray when he was a child; he remembered as much. He wished he still could. Most of the ability had leached out of him during the years he'd served Anne Colleton. The Marxist rhetoric of the Reds with whom he'd associated during the war had taken the rest. Marx's words weren't gospel to him, as they had been to Cassius and Cherry and Island and the rest.

Still, the philosopher had some strong arguments on his side.

Outside, rain started tapping against the bedroom window. That was a good sound, one Scipio heard several times a week. He wished he hadn't been thinking about the Red rebellion and the Freedom Party tonight. He couldn't find any other reason why the raindrops sounded like distant machine-gun fire.

"The Freedom Party ever elect themselves a president, what we do?"

Bathsheba asked. Maybe she was having trouble pray-ing, too.

"Dunno," Scipio answered. "Maybe we gots to rise up again." That was a forlorn hope, and he knew it. All the reasons he'd spelled out for the failure of the last black revolt would hold in the next one, too. "Maybe we gots to run away instead."

"Where we run to?" his wife asked.

"Ain't got but two choices," Scipio said: "the USA an' Mexico." He laughed, not that he'd said anything funny. "An' the Mexicans don't want we, an' the damnyankees *really* don't want we."

"You know all kinds of things," Bathsheba said. "How come you know so many different kinds of things?"

It wasn't what he'd said, which was a commonplace, but the way he'd said it; he had, sometimes, a manner that brooked no contradiction. Butlers were supposed to be infallible. That he could sound infallible even using the Congaree dialect, a dialect of ignorance if ever there was one, spoke well of his own force of character.

"I knows what's so," he said, "an' I knows what ain't." He slid his hand under the hem of Bathsheba's nightgown, which had ridden up a good deal after she got into bed. His palm glided along the soft cotton of her drawers, heading upwards. "An' I knows what I likes, too."

"What's that?" Bathsheba asked, but her legs drifted apart to make it easier for his hand to reach their joining, so she must have had some idea.

Afterwards, lazy and sated and drifting toward sleep, Scipio realized he'd found the best way to keep her from asking too many questions. He wished he were ten years younger, so he might use it more often. Chuckling at the conceit, he dozed off. Bathsheba was already snoring beside him.

The alarm clock gave them both a rude awakening. Scipio made coffee while Bathsheba cooked breakfast. Erasmus trusted Scipio with the coffeepot, but not with anything more. Scipio occasionally resented that; he could cook, in a rough and ready way. But both Erasmus and Bathsheba were better at it than he was.

When he got to Erasmus' fish market and fry joint, he found the gray-haired proprietor uncharacteristically subdued. Eras-mus was never a raucous man; now he seemed to have pulled into himself almost like a turtle pulling its head back into its shell. Not until Scipio pulled out the broom and dustpan for his usual morning sweep-up did his boss speak, and then only to say. "Don't bother."

Scipio blinked. Erasmus had never encouraged him to keep the place tidy, but he'd never told him not to do it, either. "Some-thin' troublin' you?"

Scipio asked, expecting Erasmus to shake his head or come back with one of the wry gibes that proved him clever despite a lack of education.

But the cook and fish dealer nodded instead. "You might say so. Yeah,

you just might say so."

"Kin I do anything to he'p?" Scipio asked. He wondered if his boss had been to a doctor and got bad news.

Now Erasmus shook his head. "Ain't nothin' you can do," he answered, which made Scipio think he'd made a good guess. Erasmus continued,

"You might want to start sniffin' around for a new place to work. I be goddamned if I know how much longer I can keep this here place open "

"Do Jesus!" Scipio exclaimed. "Ain't nothin' a-tall the doctor kin do?"

"What you say?" Erasmus looked puzzled. Then his face cleared. "I ain't sick, Xerxes. Sick an' tired, oh yes. Sick an' dis-gusted, oh my yes. But I ain't sick, not like you mean." He hesi-tated, then added, "Sick o' white folks, is what I is."

"All o' we is sick o' the buckra," Scipio said. "What they do, make you sick this time?"

"After you go home las' night, these four-five white men come in here,"

Erasmus said. "They tell me they's puttin' a special tax on all the niggers what owns business in the Terry here. Now I know the laws. I got to know the laws, else I find even more trouble'n a nigger's supposed to have. An' I tell these fellers, ain't no such thing as no special tax on nigger businesses

"

Scipio had the bad feeling he knew what was coming. He asked, "These here buckra, they Freedom Party men?"

"I don't know yes and I don't know no, not to swear," Erasmus answered.

"But I bet they is. One of 'em smile this mean, chilly smile, an' he say,

'There is now.' Any nigger don't pay this tax, bad things gwine happen to where he work. He still don't pay, bad things gwine happen to him. I seen a deal o' men in my day, Xerxes. Don't reckon this here feller was lyin'."

"What you do?" Scipio said.

Erasmus looked old and beaten. "Can't hardly go to the po-lice, now can I? Nigger complain about white folks, they lock him in jail an' lose the key.

Likely tell they beat him up, too, long as he there. Can't hardly pay this here tax, neither. I ain't gettin' rich here. Bastards want to squeeze a million dollars out of every three million I make. That don't leave no money for me, an' it sure as hell don't leave no money to pay no help. You work good, Lord knows. But I don't reckon I can keep you."

"Maybe you kin go to the police," Scipio said slowly. "Free-dom Party done lose the election."

"Came too close to winning," Erasmus said, the first time he'd ever said anything like that. "An' besides, you know same as I do, half the police, maybe better'n half, spend their days off yellin' 'Freedom!' loud as they can."

It was true. Every word of it was true. Scipio wished he could deny it.

He'd been comfortable for a while, comfortable and happy. As long as he had Bathsheba, he figured he could stay happy. If he lost this job, how long would he need to get com-fortable again? He hoped he wouldn't have to find out.

XVI

Abner Dowling went into General Custer's office. The com-mander of U.S. forces in Canada was scribbling changes on a re-port Dowling had typed. Some of them, Dowling saw, reversed changes he'd made in an earlier report. Usually, that would have infuriated Custer's adjutant—not that Dowling could do any-thing about it. Today, though, he felt uncommon sympathy for his vain, irascible superior.

"Sir?" he said. Custer didn't look up. Maybe he didn't hear. Maybe he didn't want to hear. Dowling could hardly have blamed him were that so. But he had to make Custer notice him. "Sir!"

"Eh?" With surprise perhaps genuine, perhaps well feigned, Custer shoved the papers aside. "What is it, Dowling?"

Either he'd entered his second childhood the night before or he knew perfectly well what it was. Dowling didn't think senility had overcome the old coot as suddenly as that. He said, "Sir, Mr. Thomas is here to

see you. He's from the War Department." He added that last in case Custer *had* gone around the bend in the past twenty-four hours.

Custer sighed, his wrinkled features drooping. He knew what that meant, all right. "No reprieve, eh?" he asked, like a prisoner who would hang in the morning if the governor didn't wire. Dowling shook his head. Custer sighed again. "Very well, Lieu-tenant Colonel. Bring him in. If you care to, you may stay and listen. This will affect you, too."

"Thank you, sir. By your leave, I will do that." Dowling tried to recall the last time Custer had been so considerate. He couldn't. He went out to the anteroom and said, "Mr. Thomas, General Custer will see you now."

"Good." N. Mattoon Thomas got to his feet. He was a tall, long-faced man in his late thirties, and looked more like a preacher than Upton Sinclair's assistant secretary of war. He walked with a slight limp; Dowling knew he'd taken a machine-gun bullet in the leg during the Great War.

When they'd gone down the short hallway to Custer's sanc-tum, Dowling said, "Mr. Thomas, I have the honor to present to you General George Custer. General, the assistant secretary of war." Being one of the civilians overseeing the Army, Thomas took precedence over Custer in the introductions.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," Custer said: a palpable lie. He waved to the chair in front of his desk. "Please—sit down. Make yourself comfortable."

As Thomas did so, Abner Dowling also took a seat. He tried to be unobtrusive, which wasn't easy with his bulk. N. Mattoon Thomas' blue eyes flicked his way, but the assistant secretary of war only nodded, accepting his presence.

Custer would have said something more then, but the words seemed stuck in his throat. He sent Dowling a look of appeal, but it wasn't Dowling's place to speak. He was here only as an over-weight fly on the wall.

Before the silence could grow too awkward, Thomas broke it, saying,

"General, I wish to convey to you at the outset President Sinclair's sincere appreciation for the excellent service you have given your country in this difficult and important post."

"That's kind of him," Custer said. "Very kind of him. I'm honored to have him send someone to deliver such a gener-ous message in person. You came a long way to do it, sir, and I'm grateful."

He was going to be difficult. Dowling would have bet he'd be difficult, but hadn't looked for him to be quite so gracefully diffi-cult. Maybe Libbie had coached him. She was even better at being difficult than her husband.

N. Mattoon Thomas gave him the look of a preacher who'd had the collection plate come back with thirty-seven cents and a subway token on it.

"In view of your long career in the U.S. Army, General, the president feels it is time for you to come home to well-deserved thanks and to rest on your laurels here-after," he said.

"Mr. Thomas, I have no desire to rest on my laurels," Custer replied. "I am as hale and spry as a man of my years can be, and I do not believe those years have adversely affected my ability to reason clearly and to issue appropriate orders. I have been in the saddle a long time. I should like to continue."

"I am afraid I must remind you, General, that you serve at the pleasure of the president of the United States." Thomas was less than half Custer's age. But he had the power in this situation, and also had the ruthlessness that came naturally to many young men given power over their elders.

Dowling saw that, and pitied Custer. Custer saw it, too, and grew angry.

He dropped his polite mask as if he'd never donned it. "Christ, I despise the notion of taking orders from that So-cialist pipsqueak," he growled.

"Which is one reason the president takes a certain pleasure in giving them to you," Thomas replied easily. "Would you prefer to retire, General, or to be sacked? Those are your only choices now."

"Teddy Roosevelt could sack me and not worry about what happened next," Custer said. "He was a soldier himself—not so good a soldier as he thought he was, but a soldier nonetheless. President Sinclair will have a harder time of it: the papers will hound him for months if he dismisses me, for he has not the prestige, the authority—call it what

you like—to do so without reminding people of his own inexperience in such matters."

That all made excellent political sense to Abner Dowling. Cus-ter the political animal had always been far more astute than Custer the soldier.

Dowling glanced toward Thomas, wondering how Upton Sinclair's assistant secretary of war would take such defiance.

It fazed him not at all. He said, "General Custer, the president predicted you would say something to that effect. He told me to assure you he was determined to seek your replacement, and that he would dismiss you out of hand if you offered difficulties. Here is his letter to you, which he instructed me to give you if it proved necessary." Thomas reached into his breast pocket and took out an envelope, which he passed across the desk to Custer. The commandant of U.S. forces in Canada had taken off his reading glasses when Thomas came in. Now he put them back on. He opened the envelope, which was not sealed, and drew forth the letter inside. It must have been what Thomas said it was, for his cheeks flushed with rage as he read.

"Why, the arrogant puppy!" he burst out when he was through. "I saved the country from the limeys when he was still making messes in his drawers, and he has the impudence to write a letter like this? I ought to let him sack me, by jingo! I can't think of anything else likely to do the Socialists more political harm."

"General—" Dowling began. Custer had a large—indeed, an enormous—sense of his own importance. Much of that was justified. Not all of it was, a fact to which he sometimes proved blind.

N. Mattoon Thomas held up a large, long-fingered hand. "Let General Custer decide as he will, Lieutenant Colonel," he said. "If he prefers being ignominiously flung out of the Army he has served so well for so long to being allowed to retire and to cele-brate his achievements as they deserve, that is his privilege."

Dowling sucked in a long breath. President Sinclair had sent the right man up to Winnipeg to do this job. Thomas could be smooth, but under that smoothness he had steel, sharp steel. Dowling had not realized it till that moment. Like so many pro-fessional soldiers, he'd assumed any Socialist had to be soft.

Custer, evidently, had assumed the same thing. Hearing the cool contempt in Thomas' voice, he was discovering he'd made a mistake.

He could hardly have looked more horrified. "Mr. Thomas. .." he began.

"Yes, General?" Once again, Thomas was the picture of urbanity.

"Perhaps I was a mite hasty, Mr. Thomas," Custer said. He'd never willingly retreated in battle, but he was backpedaling now.

"Perhaps you were." The assistant secretary of war let the slightest hint of scorn show in his agreement. Dowling eyed him with respect verging on alarm. He was a formidable piece of work, was N. Mattoon Thomas.

"Could—Could we arrange it so that I need not retire imme-diately?"

Custer asked. Now he was grasping at straws. Soldiers in the USA had political power only when politicians chose to acknowledge it. By refusing to do that, Sinclair and Thomas left Custer nowhere to stand.

And Thomas, now that he'd won, was willing to let Custer have a straw.

"We could indeed," he said. "President Sinclair has instructed me that your retirement may take effect as late as the first of August—provided you give me a letter announcing your intention to retire before I leave this room."

"Damn you," Custer muttered. Thomas pretended not to hear. Dowling knew he was pretending, because he himself had no trouble hearing at all.

The general pulled a piece of paper from a desk drawer and wrote rapidly—and furiously, if the way the pen scratched over the paper gave any clue. When he was done, he thrust the sheet at Thomas. "There!"

The assistant secretary of war read it carefully before nod-ding. "Yes, this appears to be satisfactory," he said. "I will an-nounce it directly on my return to Philadelphia." He folded it and put it into the envelope in which he'd brought President Sin-clair's letter to Custer. "And, now that the retirement is in order, you may, as I said before, mark it in any way you like. If you want to stop at every town between here and the U.S. border and parade through it with a brass band, go right ahead. When you reach Philadelphia, the president will lead the cheers for you."

"Of course he will—it'll make him look good." Now that the deed was done, Custer bounced back fast. He leaned forward across the desk toward N. Mattoon Thomas. "And I'll tell you why he won't let me retire after August first, either—because he knows damn well it'll raise a stink, and he wants to make sure the stink dies down before the Congressional elections this fall"

"It could be," Thomas answered. "I'm not saying it is, mind you, but it could be." He got to his feet. "Whether it is or not, though, is neither here nor there. No, no need to escort me out, Lieutenant Colonel Dowling. Now that I have what I came for, my driver will take me back to the train station, and then I can return to my duties in Philadelphia. A very good day to you both, gentlemen." Away he went, young, confident, powerful.

George Custer let out a long sigh. "Well, Dowling, I think it may at last be just about over. I squeezed a couple of more years of active duty out of Teddy Roosevelt, and got what I really wanted from him, too, but you can't win all the time."

"There can't be many who had a longer run, sir," Dowling an-swered. He did his best to sound consoling while he wondered what his own career would look like once he finally got free of Custer.

He'd said the right thing. Custer nodded. "Only one I can think of is Wilhelm I, Kaiser Bill's grandfather. He fought under Napoleon—imagine it!—and he was still German Kaiser when I licked Gordon in 1881, and for six or seven more years after that, too. He was up over ninety when he finally gave up the ghost."

"That's . . . quite something, sir." Dowling could easily imag-ine Custer up over ninety. He wouldn't go till they came and dragged him away—and neither would Libbie, come to that.

And now Custer was scheming again. "A brass band in every town, that damn Red told me," he said. "I'll take him up on it, too—and if he thinks I aim to head straight south for the border from here, he can damn well think again, and so can Upton god-damn Sinclair. I aim to have the bulliest farewell tour in the his-tory of the world."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said, knowing full well who would have to plan that tour.

"A good morning to you, Arthur," Wilfred Rokeby said as Arthur

McGregor walked into the post office in Rosenfeld, Manitoba.

"Morning to you, too, Wilf," McGregor answered. He thrust a hand into the pocket of his overalls. Coins jingled. "Need to buy a mess of stamps."

"That's what I'm here for," Rokeby said. "This have to do with Julia and Ted Culligan? Congratulations. I expect they'll be happy together."

"Hope so," McGregor said. "The Culligans are nice folks, and Julia's so happy, she thinks she invented Ted. If she still feels that way ten years from now, they'll have done it up right. For now, though, Maude and me, we've got invitations to write."

"You can have some of your kinfolk come out here for a change," Rokeby said, "instead of you going back to Ontario."

"That's right," McGregor said. Since he hadn't been in On-tario as Rokeby thought, that was liable to get awkward, but he figured he could slide through it. And he wasn't about to give the postmaster any hint that he'd actually been in Winnipeg. He didn't think Wilf Rokeby told the Yanks things they didn't need to know, but he didn't want to find out he was wrong the hard way.

He bought a dollar's worth of stamps, about as many as he'd bought at one crack in his life. "Thank you kindly," Wilfred Rokeby said. Maybe because McGregor had been such a good customer, he slid a copy of the *Rosenfeld Register* across the counter to him. "You can have this, too, if you like. I'm done with it."

"Thanks, Wilf. That's nice of you." Because an American was putting out the new *Register,* McGregor didn't like to buy it. He'd read it, though, if he got the chance. As it had in the old days, the *Register* reserved the top right part of the front page for important news from out of town. The headline leaped out at McGregor. He pointed to it. "So Custer's finally going back to the USA, is he? Good riddance." He didn't mind saying that to the postmaster; most Canadians would likely have said worse.

Rokeby nodded so emphatically, a lock of hair flopped down on his forehead despite the spicy-scented oil he used to plaster it down. The smell of that hair oil was to McGregor, as to other folks for miles around Rosenfeld, part of the odor of the post office.

"He's celebrating more triumphs than imperial Caesar while he's doing it, too," Rokeby said. "Just have a look at the story there."

McGregor did. The more he read, the longer his face got. "He'll be parading through every town where his train stops?" he said, shaking his head in wonder. "He doesn't think he's impe-rial Caesar, Wilf. He thinks he's God Almighty."

"He's a vain old man," the postmaster said. "Pretty soon he'll meet God Almighty face-to-face, and I guarantee you'll be able to tell the difference between the two of them."

"That's the truth," McGregor said. Had he had any luck at all, the devil would already be roasting Custer over a slow fire. He wondered if Custer would parade through Rosenfeld on his way back to the United States, and made a silent vow: if the Ameri-can general came into town, he wouldn't go out again.

Wilfred Rokeby sighed. "Wish to Jesus I could go back to selling stamps with the portrait of the King, God bless him, but it doesn't look like it's going to happen. You have to get along the best way the big fish let you if you're only a little fish yourself."

"I suppose you're right," McGregor said. The big fish—the big Yank fish—hadn't let him get along. But he could still bite. He'd show them he could still bite. His features revealed none of that. Nodding to the postmaster, he went on, "Thanks for the stamps, and thanks for the paper, too."

"Any time, Arthur," Rokeby said. "And congratulations again for your daughter. She's a nice gal; I've always thought so. She deserves to be happy."

She d have been a lot happier if the Yanks hadn 't come up over the border. But McGregor kept that to himself. He'd kept a lot of things to himself since Alexander was shot. With a last nod to the postmaster, he headed across the street to Henry Gibbon's gen-eral store.

Snow crunched under his boots. The calendar said it would be spring any day, but the calendar didn't know much about Mani-toba. As he walked, he thought hard. If Custer came to Rosen-feld ... If Custer paraded through Rosenfeld ... If he did, McGregor was going to try to kill him, and that was all there was to it.

He could see only one way to do it: toss a bomb into Custer's motorcar.

That was how the Serbs had touched off the Great War. McGregor

couldn't see doing it and getting away with it. The prospect of not getting away with it had held him back in the past. He looked deep into himself. No, he really didn't care any more. If he paid with his life, he paid with his life. He'd never have the chance to strike another blow like this against the Yanks. The next commandant they appointed would probably be some faceless functionary whose own mother had never heard of him. If someone like that got blown to smithereens, so what? But Custer had been famous for more than forty years. Killing him would mean something. The USA didn't have an Archduke Franz Ferdinand, but Custer came close.

Murder on his mind, McGregor walked right past the general store. He turned around, shaking his head, and went back. Henry Gibbon nodded from behind the counter. "Morning, Arthur," he said. "What can I do for you today?"

"I've got a list here somewhere," McGregor said, and went through his pockets till he found it. Handing it to the store-keeper, he went on, "It's Maude's stuff, mostly: canned goods and sundries and such. We need kerosene, too, and there's a couple of bottles of cattle drench on there for me, but it's mostly for the missus."

Gibbon ran his finger down the list. "Reckon I can take care of just about all of this." He looked up. "Hear tell your daughter's going to tie the knot.

That's a big day, by heaven. Congratulations."

"Thank you, Henry," McGregor said. He pointed to Gibbon. "I bet the Culligans came into town in the last couple of days. Mercy, even Wilf Rokeby's heard the news."

"You know it's all over creation if Wilf's heard it, and that's a fact," Henry Gibbon said with a chuckle. He turned to the shelves behind him. "This'll take a little bit. Why don't you grab a candy cane—or a pickle, if one'd suit you better—and toast yourself by the stove while I rustle up what you need?"

"I don't mind if I do." McGregor reached into the pickle bar-rel and pulled a likely one out of the brine. It crunched when he bit into it, the way a proper pickle should.

"I'm going to give you a crate," Gibbon said. "Bring it back and I '11

knock a dime off your next bill."

"All right. I would have brought one with me this time, only I didn't think."

"I noticed that. It's why I started knocking a dime off the bill," the storekeeper answered. "Plenty of people who won't think about anything else will remember money."

McGregor would have been one of those people before the Great War.

He would have been one of those people up until 1916. Now the only thing he remembered was revenge. "What do I owe you?" he asked when Gibbon set the last can in the crate.

"Well, when you bring in the kerosene can and I fill it, every-thing put all together comes to $8.51," Gibbon said. "You did bring the kerosene can, I reckon?" By his tone, he reckoned no such thing.

"Yeah, I did." McGregor shook his head in dull embarrass-ment. "Lucky I remembered to hitch the horse to the wagon. I'll go get the can."

"You'd have been a mite longer getting here, Arthur, if you'd forgotten about the horse," McGregor called after him as he left.

He didn't answer. He would have walked back to the wagon for the kerosene can before going to the general store had Rokeby not given him a copy of the *Register*. Seeing that Custer was leaving Canada, seeing that Custer was going to celebrate while here, realizing that Custer might come through Rosenfeld, had taken everything else from his mind. He wanted to go back to the farm. He wanted to go back into the barn and get to work on a bomb he could throw.

He would have forgotten the crate of groceries had Henry Gibbon not reminded him of it. The storekeeper laughed as he carried it out toward the wagon. McGregor was glad he didn't own an automobile. He wasn't altogether sure he recalled how to get back to the farmhouse. The horse, thank heaven, would know the way.

When he carried the crate indoors, the *Rosenfeld Register* was stuck on top of the cans and jars. Naturally, Maude grabbed it; new things to read didn't come to the farm often enough. As naturally, McGregor's wife noticed the story about Custer right away. "Is he going to parade through Rosenfeld?" she asked.

"I don't know," McGregor answered.

"If he does parade through Rosenfeld, what will you do?" Sharp fear rode Maude's voice.

"I don't know that, either," McGregor answered.

Maude set a hand on his arm. His eyes widened a little; the two of them seldom touched, except by accident, outside the marriage bed. "I don't want to be a widow, Arthur," she said qui-etly. "I've already lost Alexander. I don't know what I'd do if I lost you, too."

"I've always been careful, haven't I?" he said, coming as close as he ever did to talking about what he did besides farming.

"You go on being careful, do you hear me?" Maude said. "You've done what you had to do. If you do anything more, it's over and above. You don't need to do it, not for me, not for Alexander." She wasn't usually so direct, either.

"I hear you," McGregor said, and said no more. He was the only one who could judge what he had to do. He was the only one who could judge how much revenge was enough for him. Now, he was the only one who could judge how much revenge was enough for Alexander. As far as he was concerned, he might kill every Yank north of the border without it being revenge enough for Alexander.

"Maybe he won't come through Rosenfeld," Maude said. Did she sound hopeful? Without a doubt, she did.

"Maybe he won't," McGregor said. "But maybe he will, too. And even if he doesn't, don't you think the newspapers will print where he's going to be and when he's going to be there? If he's having parades, he'll want people to turn out. I suppose I can go meet him somewhere else if I have to."

"You don't have to," Maude said, as she had done before. "Will you please listen to me? You don't have to, not any more."

"Do you think Mary would say the same thing?" McGregor asked.

Maude's lips shaped two silent words. McGregor thought they were *Damn you.* He'd never heard her curse aloud in all the years he'd known her. He still hadn't, but only by the thinnest of mar-gins. When she did speak aloud, she said, "Mary is a little girl. She doesn't understand that dying is forever."

"She's not so little any more, and if she doesn't understand that after the Yanks murdered Alexander, when do you suppose she will?" McGregor asked.

Maude spun away from him and covered her face with her hands. Her shoulders shook with sobs. McGregor stamped past her, back out into the cold. When he strode into the barn, the horse snorted, as if surprised to see him again so soon.

He didn't pick up the old wagon wheel and get out the bomb-making tools he hid beneath it. Time enough for that later, when he knew exactly what sort of bomb he needed to build and where he'd have to take it. For now, he just stood there and looked. Even that made him feel better. Slowly, he nodded. In a sense more important than the literal, he knew where he was going again.

Colonel Irving Morrell slammed his fist against the steel side of the test-model barrel. "It's not right, God damn it," he ground out. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been in such a temper. When the doctors said his leg wound might keep him from going back to active duty in the early days of the Great War? Maybe not even then.

"What can we do, sir?" Lieutenant Elijah Jenkins said. "We're only soldiers. We haven't got anything to do with deciding which way the country goes."

"And I've always thought that was how things should be, too," Morrell answered. "But when this chowderhead—no, this custardhead—of a Socialist does something like this ... I ask you, Lije, doesn't it stick in your craw, too?"

"Of course it does, sir," Jenkins said. "It's not like I voted for the Red son of a bitch—uh, beg pardon."

"Don't bother," Morrell said savagely. "That's what Upton Sinclair is, all right: a Red son of a bitch." He seldom swore; he was not a man who let his feelings run away with his wits. Today, though, he made an exception. "That he should have the gall to propose canceling the rest of the reparations the Rebs still owe us—"

"That's pretty low, all right, sir," Jenkins agreed, "especially after everything we went through to make the CSA have to cough up."

But he'd put his finger on only part of Morrell's fury. "Giving up the reparations is bad enough by itself," Morrell said. "But he wants to

throw them away—however many millions or billions of dollars that is—and he won't spend the thousands here to build a proper prototype and get the new-model barrel a step closer to production."

"That's pretty damn stupid, all right," Jenkins said. "If the Rebs can start putting money in their own pockets again instead of in ours, they'll be spoiling for a fight faster than you can say Jack Robinson."

"That's the truth," Morrell said. "That's the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God. Why can't Sinclair see it? You can't get along with somebody who's bound and determined not to get along with you." He did his best to look on the bright side of things: "Maybe Congress will say no."

"Socialist majority in each house." Jenkins' voice was gloomy. He kicked at the dirt. "After the Confederates licked us in the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War, they weren't dumb enough to try and make friends with us. They knew damn well we weren't their friends. Why can't we figure out they aren't our friends, either?"

"Why? Because workers all across the world have more in common with other workers than they do with other people in their own country." Morrell wasn't usually so sarcastic, but he wasn't usually so irate, either. "What happened in 1914 sure proved that, didn't it? None of the workers would shoot at any of the other workers, would they? That's why we didn't have a war, isn't it?"

"If we didn't have a war, sir, where'd you get that Purple Heart?" Jenkins asked.

"Must have fallen from the sky," Morrell answered. "Pity it couldn't have fallen where Sinclair could see it and have some idea of what it meant."

"Why don't you send it to him, sir?" Jenkins asked eagerly.

"If I did, I'd have to send it in a chamber pot to show him how I felt,"

Morrell said. "And I'll bet I could fill that chamber pot with medals from men on just this base, too." For a moment, the idea of doing just that held a potent appeal. But then, reluctantly, he shook his head. "It wouldn't do. I'd throw my own career in the pot along with the medal, and somebody has to defend the United States, even if Sinclair isn't up to the job."

"Yes, sir, I suppose so." Jenkins was a bright lad; he could see the

sense in that. He was still not very far from being a lad in the literal sense of the word, though, for his grin had a distinct small-boy quality to it as he went on, "It would have been fun to see the look on his face when he opened it, though."

"Well, maybe it would." Morrell laughed. He knew damn well it would. He slapped Jenkins on the back. "See you in the morn-ing." Jenkins nodded and hurried away toward the officers' club, no doubt to have a drink or two or three before supper. In his bachelor days, Morrell might—probably would—have followed him, even if he would have been sure to stop after the second drink. Now, though, he was more than content to hurry home to Agnes.

She greeted him with a chicken stew and indignation: she'd heard the news about Sinclair's proposal to end reparations down in Leavenworth.

"It's a disgrace," she said, "nothing but a dis-grace. He'll throw money down the drain, but he won't do any-thing to keep the country strong."

"I said the same thing not an hour ago," Morrell said. "One of the reasons I love you is, we think the same way."

"We certainly do: you think you love me, and I think I love you," Agnes said. Morrell snorted. His wife went on, "Would you like some more dumplings?"

"I sure would," he answered, "but I'll have to run them off one day before too long." He still wasn't close to fat—he didn't think he'd ever be fat the way, say, General Custer's adjutant was fat— but now, for the first time in his life, he wondered if he'd stay scrawny forever. Agnes' determination to put meat on his bones was starting to have some effect. He was also past thirty, which meant the meat he put on had an easier time sticking.

"You served under General Custer," Agnes said a little later. With a mouth full of dumpling, Morrell could only nod. His wife continued, "What do you think about him taking a tour through Canada before he finally comes home for good?"

After swallowing, Morrell said, "I don't begrudge it to him, if that's what you mean. He did better up there than I thought he would, and he's the one who really broke the stalemate in the Great War when he saw what barrels could do and rammed it down Philadelphia's throat. He may be a vain old man, but he's earned his vanity."

"When you're as old as he is, you'll have earned the right to be just as vain," Agnes declared.

Morrell tried to imagine himself in the early 1970s. He couldn't do it. The reach was too far; he couldn't guess what that distant future time would be like. He couldn't guess what he'd be like, either. He could see forty ahead, and even fifty. But eighty and beyond? He wondered if anybody in his family had ever lived to be eighty. He couldn't think of anyone except possibly one great-uncle.

He said, "I hope I don't have the chance to get that vain, be-cause I'd need another war, maybe another couple of wars, to come close to doing all the things Custer's done."

"In that case, I don't want you to get old and vain, either," Agnes said at once. "As long as you have the chance to get old, you can stay modest, for all of me."

"I suppose that will do," Morrell answered. Agnes smiled, thinking he'd agreed with her. And so he had ... to a point. Old men, veterans of the War of Secession, talked about seeing the elephant. He'd seen the elephant, and all the horror it left in its wake. It *was* horror; he recognized as much.

But he'd never felt more intensely alive than during those three years of war. The game was most worth playing when his life lay on the line. Nothing felt better than betting it—and winning.

He had a scarred hollow in the flesh of his thigh to remind him how close he'd come to betting it and losing. Agnes had a scarred hollow in her heart: Gregory Hill, her first husband, had laid his life on the life —and lost it.

Morrell knew he ought to pray with all his heart that war never visited the borders of the United States again. He *did* pray that war never visited again.

Well, most of him did, anyhow.

The next morning, he put on a pair of overalls and joined the rest of the crew of the test model in tearing down the barrel's en-gine. They would have done that in the field, too, with less leisure and fewer tools. The better a crew kept a barrel going, the less time the machine spent behind the lines and useless.

Morrell liked tinkering with mechanical things. Unlike the fluid world

of war, repairs had straight answers. If you found what was wrong and fixed it, the machine would work every time. It didn't fight back and try to impose its own will—even if it did seem that way sometimes.

Michael Pound looked at the battered engine and sadly shook his head.

"Ridden hard and put away wet," was the gunner's verdict.

"That's about the size of it, Sergeant," Morrell agreed. "It does a reasonably good job of making a White truck go. Trying to move this baby, though, it's underpowered and overstrained."

"We ought to build something bigger and stronger, then," Pound said.

"Have you got the three-sixteenths wrench, sir?"

"Matter of fact, I do." Morrell passed it to him. He grinned while he did it.

"You always make everything sound so easy, Sergeant—as if there weren't any steps between *we ought to* and doing something."

"Well, there shouldn't be," Pound said matter-of-factly. "If something needs doing, you go ahead and do it. What else?" He stared at Morrell with wide blue eyes. In his world, no steps lay between needing and doing.

Morrell envied him.

Izzy Applebaum, the barrel's driver, laughed at Pound. "Things aren't that simple, Sarge," he said in purest New York. His eyes were narrow and dark and constantly moving, now here, now there, now somewhere else.

"Why ever not?" Pound asked in honest surprise. "Don't you think this barrel needs a stronger engine? If it does, we ought to build one. How complicated is that?" He attacked the crankcase with the wrench. It yielded to his straightforward assault.

Morrell wished all problems yielded to straightforward as-sault. "Some people don't want us to put any money at all in bar-rels," he pointed out, "let alone into better engines for them."

"Those people are fools, sir," Pound answered. "If they're not fools, they're knaves. Hang a few of them and the rest will quiet down soon

enough."

"Tempting, ain't it?" Izzy Applebaum said with another laugh. "Only trouble is, they make lists of people who ought to get hanged, too, and we're on 'em. The company's better on their list than on ours, but none of them lists is any goddamn good. My folks were on the Czar's list before they got the hell out of Poland."

"Down south of us, the Freedom Party is making lists of people to hang,"

Morrell added. "I don't care for it, either."

Michael Pound was unperturbed. "Well, but they're a pack of wild-eyed fanatics, sir," he said. "Go ahead and tell me you don't think there are some people who'd be better off dead."

"It *is* tempting," Morrell admitted. He had his mental list, starting with several leading Socialist politicians. But, as Apple-baum had said, he was on their list, too. "If you ask me, it's just as well nobody hangs anybody till a court says it's the right and proper thing to do."

"Have it your way, sir," Pound said with a broad-shouldered shrug, and then, a moment later, another one. "It's the law of the land, I suppose. But if I were king—"

"If you was king, I'd get the hell out of here faster than my old man got out of Poland," Izzy Abblebaum broke in.

The gunner looked aggrieved. He no doubt thought he'd make a good king. He'd done a fine job of commanding one barrel after Morrell got

"killed." That didn't mean he could run rough-shod over the world leading a brigade of them, even if he thought it did. Checking a gasket, Morrell reflected that nobody could do too much roughshod running in the USA; the Constitution kept such things from happening. If it sometimes left him frus-trated .. . he'd just have to live with it. 'This lifter is shot," he said. "We have a spare part?"

"With this budget?" Applebaum said. "Are you kidding? We're lucky we've got the one that doesn't work." Morrell spent a long time pondering that, and never did straighten it out.

Nellie Jacobs felt harassed. Once Edna got Merle Grimes to pop the question, she hadn't wasted a minute. She'd said, "I do," and moved

out.

That meant Nellie had to try to run the coffeehouse and keep track of Clara—who at two was into everything—all by herself Either one of those would have been a full-time job. Trying to do both at once left her shellshocked.

Every once in a while, when things got more impossible than usual, she'd take Clara across the street to Hal's shop to let her husband keep track of the kid in between half-soling shoes and occasionally making fancy boots.

On those days, she ended up tired and Hal exhausted instead of the other way round.

"Now I know why God fixed it up so that young people have most of the babies," she groaned after one particularly wearing day. "Folks our age don't have the gumption to keep up with 'em."

"I wish I could tell you you were wrong," Hal answered. He looked more like a tired grandfather than a father. He wasn't Nellie's age; he was better than ten years older. Having Clara around seemed to be making both her parents older still at a faster rate than usual.

"Shall I make us some more coffee?" Nellie asked. "It's either that or prop my eyelids up with toothpicks, I reckon."

"Go ahead and make it," Hal said. "You always make good coffee. But I do not think it will keep me awake. I do not think anything will keep me awake, not any more." He sighed. "And she sleeps through the night so well now, too."

"I know." Nellie would have groaned again, but lacked the en-ergy. "If she didn't, I wouldn't just be tired—I'd be dead."

"I do love her—with all my heart I love her," Hal said. "But you are right—she can be a handful. Two handfiils, even. I will be very glad when she stops saying no to everything we tell her."

"You mean they stop saying no?" Nellie exclaimed in surprise more or less mock. "Hard to tell, if you go by Edna."

"Edna is fine," Hal said. "There is nothing wrong with Edna. You worry about her too much."

"I don't think so," Nellie said in a flat voice. "If you knew what I've

been through—if you knew what I've put myself through for her.. ."

"They are not the same thing," Hal said.

"Huh!" was the only answer Nellie gave to that. After a while, she went on,

"Merle's going to find out about Nicholas Kincaid. You wait and see. That kind of thing won't stay under the rug."

Her husband shrugged. "You are probably right. I cannot blame Edna for not wanting to talk about it, though."

"Not fair to tell lies," Nellie said. Then she remembered Bill Reach, almost five years dead now. She remembered how the knife had felt going into him. And she remembered Hal could not, must not, find out how he'd died. The only difference between her case and her daughter's was that she had a better chance of keeping her secret.

"It is not a lie that intends to hurt," Hal said, and Nellie had to nod, for that was true. She let him win the argument, which she didn't always do by any means.

The next morning, the past rose up and bit her. She should have expected such a thing, but somehow she hadn't. A ruddy, handsome fellow in an expensive suit came in, looked around, and said, "Well, you've done the place up right nice, Widow Semphroch. Likely looked like a tornado went through it at the end of the war, but you've done it up right nice." His Confed-erate accent was thick enough to slice—she guessed he hailed from Alabama, or maybe Mississippi.

"Should I know you, sir?" she asked, her voice cool but reso-lutely polite: business wasn't so good that she could afford to anger any customer, even a Rebel.

"Name's Alderford, ma'am—Camp Hill Alderford, major, CSA, retired,"

he answered. "You might not recognize me out of uniform, and I used to wear a little chin beard I've shaved off on account of I've gotten a lot grayer since the war. But I had some of my best times in Washington right here in this coffeehouse, and that's a fact. Now that I'm in town again, I figured I'd stop by and see if you and the place made it through in one piece. Right glad you did."

"Thank you." Nellie didn't remember him at all. A lot of Con-federate officers had spent a lot of time in the coffeehouse. She wondered if

more of them would start paying visits. *If they do, they'd better have U.S. money,*

she thought. Since she didn't want this one to go without spending some cash, she said, "Now that you're back in town, Mr. Alderford, what can I get you?"

"Cup of coffee and a ham sandwich," he answered. He must have been thinking along with her, for he added, "I won't pay in scrip, and I won't pay with Confederate banknotes, either."

"All right." She got him what he'd ordered. While she was serving him, she asked, "What are you doing in Washington now?"

"Selling cottonseed oil, ma'am, cottonseed oil and cottonseed cake,"

Alderford said. "Cottonseed oil brings a dollar a gallon, near enough—a U.S. dollar, I mean, and a U.S. dollar brings enough Confederate dollars to choke a mule. Two mules, even." He bit into his sandwich. "That's good.

That's mighty good. You always had good grub here, even when things were lean."

That was to keep you Rebs coming in so I could spy on you. Nellie almost said it aloud, to see the look on his face. Reluc-tantly, she kept quiet. Word would get around, down in the CSA. If more ex-officers stopped by, she wanted them in a mood to spend money, not to burn down the coffeehouse.

Clara had been amusing herself in what had been a storeroom before Nellie filled it with toys and a cot to keep the toddler either busy or resting.

Camp Hill Alderford smiled to see her. "That your granddaughter, ma'am?"

he asked. "Reckon your pretty daughter found somebody else after what happened to poor Nick. That was a hard day, a powerful hard day."

"Mama," Clara said, and ran to Nellie. She was shy of strang-ers, especially men with their deep voices.

Alderford's eyebrows rose. Nellie nodded. "She's my daughter, too,"

she said. "I got married again after the war." *And I got a surprise not so long after I did.* "And yes, Edna finally did get married, just a few months ago."

She started to add that Merle Grimes was a veteran, too, but didn't bother.

Men of the proper age who weren't veterans were few and far between.

"Well, I'm happy for you," Alderford said. He beckoned to Clara with a crooked index finger. "Come here, sweetheart. I've got a present for you."

"You can go to him, Clara," Nellie said. But Clara didn't want to go anywhere. She clung to Nellie's skirt with one hand. The thumb of the other was in her mouth.

"Here, I'll give it to your mama," Camp Hill Alderford told her. She watched with round eyes as he reached into his hip pocket, pulled out his wallet, and extracted a brown Confederate banknote. "Here y'are, ma'am."

It was beautifully printed: more handsome than U.S. paper money. That wasn't what made Nellie gape. She'd never seen, never imagined, a $50,000,000 bill. Gasping a little, she asked, "What's this worth in real money?"

"About a dime." Alderford shrugged. "Five cents next week, a penny the week after that." He paused. "Maybe we'll be able to start setting our house in order again if we get to stop sending you-all reparations. If we don't, Lord knows what we'll do "

"I haven't got anything to do with that," Nellie said. She hoped Congress wouldn't let President Sinclair cut off Confed-erate reparations. As far as she was concerned, the weaker the Rebs stayed, the better. What was the first thing they were likely to do if they ever got strong again? As far as she could see, *head straight for Washington* was the best bet.

"I know you don't," Camp Hill Alderford answered. He held out his cup. "If you'd fill that up for me, I'd be obliged."

"I sure will," Nellie said, and did, after detaching Clara from her skirt.

Alderford was the only customer in the place; of course she'd get another nickel out of him. She kept looking at all the zeros on the bill he'd given her for Clara. A sigh escaped her. If only it were U.S. green instead of C.S.

brown!

The bell above the door chimed. Nellie looked that way with a smile of greeting on her face—someone else to spend money. But it wasn't: it was her son-in-law. Alarm ran through her. "Merle!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here this time of day? Why aren't you at work?" *Why did you have to come in when this goddamn Reb & here?*

"Edna just telephoned me from the doctor's office," Merle Grimes answered. "Since you don't have a telephone, I figured I'd come over and tell you the news—you're going to be a grandmother."

"Oh," Nellie said, and then, "Oh," again. She would have been more excited about the news if she hadn't been afraid Camp Hill Alderford would start running his mouth. "Won't you get in trouble for leaving your job in the middle of the morning?" she asked, hoping to get Grimes out of the coffeehouse as fast as she could.

But he shook his head. "My boss said it was all right. We're pals—we were in the same company during the war. Small world, isn't it?"

"Isn't it just?" Nellie said tonelessly.

"Congratulations, ma'am," Alderford said. He turned to Merle Grimes.

"And to you, too, sir. Children make everything worthwhile."

"Er—thank you," Grimes said. He couldn't help realizing Alderford was a Confederate—and probably couldn't help won-dering why a Confederate spoke as if he knew Nellie so well.

Nellie decided to take that bull by the horns: "Mr. Alderford was Major Alderford during the war, and used to stop by here a good deal."

"Oh," Grimes said, not in surprise, as Nellie had, but more for the sake of saying something. He had a way of holding his cards close to his chest.

Nellie had trouble telling what he was thinking.

"That's right," Alderford said. Nellie sent him a look of appeal to keep him from saying any more. She hated that; she hated asking any man for anything. And she feared the ex-Rebel of-ficer wouldn't even notice, or would notice and decide to pay back some damnyankees for winning the war.

But Alderford never said an untoward word. He set coins— U.S.

coins—on the table and went on his way. Nellie let out a quiet sigh of relief.

She'd got by with it. But if more Confeder-ates came to visit, could she keep on getting by with it? *One more thing to worry about,* she thought, as if she didn't have enough already.

Lucien Galtier reached out and pressed the starter button on the dashboard of his Chevrolet. He'd bought the automobile in large measure because it had a Frenchman's name on it; a Ford would have been easier to come by.

The engine coughed before coming to noisy life. The motor-car shuddered under him, then settled into a steady vibration different even from the motion of a railroad car, the closest com-parison he could find.

His feet were still clumsy on gas and clutch and brake. Charles and Georges had taken to driving more readily than he, which in-furiated him. "I *will* learn to do this, and to do it well," he mut-tered. He did not talk to the automobile, as he had to the horse. He was talking only to himself. He knew it, and felt the lack.

He stalled the motorcar the first time he tried to shift from neutral up into low gear. Naturally, Georges had taken the mo-ment before to come out of the barn. As naturally, Lucien's younger son laughed at his father's fumbles, and did not even try to keep that laughter to himself. Galtier called the automobile several names he would not have used on the horse even in the worst of moods. Then, still wishing he had not bought the machine, he started it once more and succeeded in driving away.

As he drew near Riviere-du-Loup, he came up behind a horse-drawn wagon—one very much like that which he had driven himself up till a few weeks before. The cursed thing crawled along at a snail's pace. Galtier squeezed the horn bulb again and again. The stupid farmer sitting up there like a cowflop might have been deaf. He refused either

to speed up or to pull over.

At last, seizing an opportunity, Lucien shot around him. *"Mau-vaise calisse!"* he shouted, and eked out the malediction with gestures. The other farmer smiled a smile that, to Galtier, proved his feeblemindedness. "Some people have no consideration," Galtier fumed. "None whatsoever." He never once thought how he had behaved when driving a wagon rather than a motorcar.

Traffic in Riviere-du-Loup was far heavier than he recalled from the days before the war. Automobiles had been rare then, with most people traveling by wagon or carriage or on horse-back. Now everyone seemed to have a motorcar, and to drive it with a Gallic disdain for consequences that matched Galtier's own. He cursed. He shouted. He waved his arms. He blew his horn, and blew it and blew it. He fit right in.

Finding a parking space was another adventure, one made worse because the streets of Riviere-du-Loup had not been de-signed with the automobile in mind. A good many motorcars were parked with two wheels in the road, the other two up on the sidewalks—sidewalks were none too wide, either. At last, Lu-cien imitated that example.

When he got out, money jingled in his pockets. Some of the coins were from the USA, a few from the Canada of before the war, and some from the Republic of Quebec. As they were all minted to the same standard, merchants took one lot as readily as another. A newsboy was hawking papers on a street corner. Galtier gave him a couple of pennies—one, a U.S. coin, said ONE CENT on the reverse; the other, an issue of Quebec, featured the fleur-de-lys and announced its value as UN sou—and took a newspaper.

FRANCE IN CHAOS! shouted the headline. He read the accom-panying story as he walked back to the automobile. Police and soldiers had turned machine guns on rioters in Paris furious about the worthless currency and about the country's forced subservi-ence to the German Empire.

The reporter didn't seem to know what tone to take. Germany was the USA's ally, and so was also the ally of the Republic of Quebec. But the Quebecois sprang from French stock, and noth-ing would ever change that.

The ambiguity made the writer take almost no tone at all, but set forth what he'd learned from the cable as baldly as if it were going down in

a police blotter.

Galtier sighed. He didn't know how to feel about France's troubles, either.

He wished she were not having such troubles. But if the only way for her not to have troubles was for her to have won the war.. . Galtier shook his head.

"Too high a price to pay," he murmured.

He would not have said that during the war. He shrugged. He'd had the same thought many times before, in many different contexts. The world had changed, too. Taken all together, the changes pleased him. He would not have said that during the war, either.

When he knocked on the door to the house where Nicole and Leonard O'Doull lived, his daughter answered almost at once. Tagging along behind her was little Lucien. Staring gravely up at Galtier, he asked, "Candy?"

"No, no candy today, I regret," Galtier answered.

His grandson clouded up and got ready to cry. "You know you aren't supposed to do that," Nicole said, and, for a wonder, little Lucien didn't.

Nicole smiled at Galtier. "And what brings you here today, Papa?"

"Nothing much," he said grandly. "I was just out for a drive in my Chevrolet, and I thought I would stop in." Was that how a gentleman of leisure should sound? He didn't know. He'd never met a gentleman of leisure.

"Ah," Nicole said. "You have the motorcar here, then?"

"Here in Riviere-du-Loup, yes. Here in my pocket"—Galtier peered into it, as if to make sure—"here in my pocket, no."

Nicole wrinkled her nose. "It certainly isn't hard to see some-times where Georges comes by it," she remarked.

"Comes by what?" Galtier demanded. He was perhaps a six-teenth part as annoyed as he pretended to be.

His daughter knew as much. "Will you let me drive your new

motorcar, Papa?" she asked.

"What's this?" Now Galtier's surprise was genuine. "How is it that you, a girl, a woman"—he added that last with the air of a man granting a great concession—"can drive a motorcar?"

"Leonard showed me, Papa," Nicole answered, very much a woman and very much a woman of the new century. "It isn't very hard. I've driven our Ford any number of times. It's a handy thing to know, don't you think?"

"What if you have a puncture, and your husband is not there?" Lucien asked.

"I fix it," she answered calmly. "I've done it once. It's a dirty job, and not an easy job, but I know I can do it again."

"Do you?" Galtier muttered. Nicole hadn't yet mentioned her driving to Marie or to Denise. He knew that for a fact. If she had, his wife and his next eldest daughter would have been nagging him to learn to drive, too. With Charles and Georges always wanting to go courting or just gallivanting around in the ma-chine, where would he ever find time to use it himself if his womenfolk were taking it, too?

"Yes, I do." Nicole answered the question he hadn't quite aimed at her, and answered it with arrogant confidence a man might have envied. "And so, may I drive your automobile?"

Thus directly confronted, Lucien found no choice but to yield. "Very well,"

he said, "but I will thank you to be careful of the delicate machine—and of your delicate father as well."

Nicole laughed, for all the world as if he'd been joking. She reached down and took little Lucien's hand; evidently, she was not afraid to trust his life to what she knew behind the steering wheel. Galtier's heart had not pounded so since the war crossed the St. Lawrence. Nonetheless, he led her to his mechanical pride and joy.

She slid into the driver's seat, but then stopped in consterna-tion.

"Everything is different, Papa!'" she exclaimed. "On the Ford, the spark knob is on the left side of the steering column, the throttle on the right. I have a lever on the floor to my left for the emergency brake and clutch release and the pedals on the floor seem different from

these, too. On the Ford, they are the high- and low-speed clutch, the reverse pedal, and the foot brake."

"Here, they are the clutch, the brake, and the gas pedal," Galtier said gravely. "And this lever here shifts the gears. I did not know motorcars were so different, one from another. I do not think you had better drive the Chevrolet after all."

"I don't, either." Nicole looked so unhappy, he reached out and touched her hand. She went on, "Leonard told me Fords were—*eccentric* was the word he used. I did not know how ec-centric they were." She brightened.

"You must teach me to drive this motorcar, too, so I will be able to use whatever sort there is. I already know how to steer; everything else should be easy enough."

"Should it?" Galtier said. He still found it hard himself; he hadn't got used to it, as he had to managing a horse. But Nicole seemed to have been driving longer than he had. He wondered why she hadn't told him. She probably hadn't wanted him to feel bad when he had no automobile of his own. Maybe she also hadn't wanted him to know she could do anything so unladylike.

They traded places in the Chevrolet; Nicole took charge of little Lucien.

Galtier started the motorcar and bounced it down off the curb and onto the street. "Tell me what you are doing while you do it," Nicole said. She was trying to watch his hand on the gearshift and his feet on the pedals at the same time.

Galtier did explain as he drove. He thought he might have trouble doing that, but he didn't. He'd learned so recently, every-thing was still fresh in his mind, and came bubbling forth like a spring from out of the ground. After a while, he said, "You will want to try for yourself, eh?"

"Of course," Nicole replied.

And it was indeed *of course;* Galtier would have been aston-ished to hear any other answer. He said, "In that case, I will drive out of town before I let you back behind the wheel. Better you should learn where there are fewer targets."

"The idea, Papa, is to *miss* the other automobiles and the wagons,"

Nicole said.

"Oh, yes. I understand. And the people and the walls, also," Lucien said.

"But if you are learning, you do not yet hold the idea firmly in your mind." He almost ran down a pedestrian, proving he did not yet hold the idea firmly in his mind, either. The man jumped back and to one side, then shouted angrily at him.

Nicole said nothing at all. She would have been bound to when she was living back at the farm. *Has marriage taught her restraint?* Galtier wondered. It hadn't done any such thing for Marie ... or had it? Better not to think about that, perhaps.

Once he got out into the countryside again—not a long drive, Riviere-du-Loup being anything but a metropolis—he stopped the Chevrolet, shut off the engine, and got out. Nicole slid slowly and carefully across the front seat to take her place be-hind the wheel, then, when he got in on the passenger side, handed him little Lucien, who had fallen asleep in her lap. The boy stirred and muttered, but did not wake.

"Now—to start I have only to press this button?" Nicole said, and hit the starter. Sure enough, the engine awoke. "This is easier than with the Ford.

Next, I let out the clutch and put the motorcar in gear." Nicole stalled a couple of times before she managed to get the automobile moving, and her shift from low to second was abrupt enough to wake up Galtier's grandson, but Galtier praised her anyhow. Why not? He too had stalled, not long before. And she did know how to steer; once she got going, she piloted the Chevrolet with confidence.

"Very good," Galtier said after she'd churned up dust along several miles of country road. "You were not fooling me after all. You really can drive."

"Of course I can," Nicole said. She was shifting gears a bit more smoothly now, learning to ease off the gas pedal as she came down on the clutch. "And this car is easier in nearly every way than Leonard's Ford. I see no reason at all why Mama and Denise should not also learn."

"Oh, you don't?" Galtier said, and Nicole shook her head, de-fying him to make something of it. She wouldn't have done that when she was living at home, either. Leonard O'Doull, Lucien thought, kept too loose

a rein on her now. But she *had* shown she could drive. If she could, were Marie and Denise too ignorant? They would never let him forget it if he thought so.

With a shrug that made little Lucien giggle, Galtier added, "It could be that you have reason," and then, "It could even be that I will tell them you have reason."

"Oh, Papa," Nicole said fondly, and Galtier was reduced to mumbling.

Tabernac! he thought. *She is a wife now, and so she sees right through me.*

Sylvia Enos didn't go down to T Wharf nearly so often these days as she had in the past. For one thing, her connections with the fishermen and the folk who worked in the fish markets had slipped with the passage of time.

For another, going down to the wharf where George had worked tore open old wounds.

But all her old wounds had been torn open when she found out that that Confederate submersible skipper had fired the torpedo that sank the USS

Ericsson. She knew her husband's killer's name: Roger Kimball. Even though he'd attacked the U.S. destroyer after the war was over, he still walked free down in theCSA.

President Sinclair had done no more than issue a tepid protest. That ate at Sylvia, too. Lots of people still sang the Socialists' praises. Sylvia supposed they had done good things for the workers of the USA. But they hadn't done what she most wanted. Had she had a vote, Upton Sinclair would have lost it.

With the old wounds already bleeding again, going to T Wharf couldn't make them hurt any worse. After Sylvia got off work from her Saturday half day, she gathered up George, Jr., and Mary Jane and took them down by the sea. They enjoyed it; they kept exclaiming over the raucous gulls and over all the fishing boats tied up to the wharf.

"Sure does stink, Ma," Mary Jane said, more admiringly than not.

"It's supposed to smell this way," Sylvia answered. Tar and salt air, horse manure and old fish—without them, T Wharf would have been a different, a lesser, place.

Seeing the boats made Sylvia want to exclaim, too, but for a different reason from that of her children. The fishing fleet had changed while she wasn't looking, so to speak. Before the war, most of the boats had been steamers, with some still relying on sail. Now diesel- and gasoline-powered boats were driving steam from the scene. They changed one element of the wharf's familiar smell, and not to the better in her mind. She far pre-ferred coal smoke to the stink of diesel exhaust.

She walked along the wharf, looking into the boats for men she knew, men from whom she might buy some choice fish be-fore they ever got to market. That sort of business was highly un-official, but went on all the time.

Fishermen needed extra cash in their pockets enough to make them anything but shy about taking it from the pockets of the boat owners.

Sylvia was discovering to her dismay that the fishermen were almost as unfamiliar as the boats they took to sea when, from be-hind her, someone called, "Mrs. Enos!"

She turned. So did her children. George, Jr., asked, "Who's the spook, Ma?"

Fortunately, he kept his voice down. "You hush your mouth," she told him.

"Charlie White isn't a spook; he's a very nice man. He used to be the cook on the *Ripple* when your father sailed in her." She waved to White, who was coming up the wharf toward her. "Hello, Charlie. It's been a long time. You stayed in the Navy, I see."

He brushed a hand across the front of his dark blue uniform tunic. "I surely did, Mrs. Enos. Work's not near as hard, and that's a fact. In the Navy, all I've got to do is cook." His accent was two parts Boston, one part something that put Sylvia in mind of the CSA. He looked at George, Jr., and Mary Jane. "Good God, but they've grown! Fine-looking children, Mrs.

Enos."

"Thank you," Sylvia said, her voice shaky. Seeing an old friend of her husband's—and Charlie had been a friend, even if he was colored—here at this place where George had worked left her close to tears.

White solemnly nodded, perhaps understanding some of what was going through her mind. He said, "I was right sorry when I found out George didn't come home from the war, ma'am."

"Thank you," Sylvia said again, even more softly than before. But then fury filled her, and she asked, "Did you find out George was aboard the *Ericsson?"*

She didn't have to explain that to the Negro cook. No doubt she wouldn't have had to explain it to any Navy man. "No, ma'am," he said. "I didn't know that. I think it's a crying shame we ain't going after the dirty rotten coward who sank that ship a... lot harder than we are."

"So do I," Sylvia said grimly.

"The president is lily-livered," Mary Jane declared. She was just echoing her mother, but Sylvia didn't want her views aired in public. No, on second thought, maybe she did.

"Weren't a lot of people in the Navy who voted for Sinclair," Charlie White said. "Must have been an awful lot of people on dry land who did, though."

"Yes," Sylvia said. Then she remembered her manners. "How's your family, Charlie? Everyone well?"

"Sure are, and praise the Lord for that," the colored man an-swered. "Got me a new little boy since I saw you last, I think. Eddie's going to turn two in a couple weeks."

"Good for you," Sylvia said. She and George might have had more children by now, if only . .. She pulled back from that. "What are you doing on T Wharf now?"

"Same thing you are, I bet," White said: "buying fish. I'm chief cook on the *Fort Benton*—big armored cruiser. Sailors eat like pigs, you know that?"

"They're men," Sylvia said, and Charlie White laughed. Syl-via wasn't sure she'd said anything funny. Men had appetites; women satisfied them. That was the way the world had always worked. Nobody'd ever

bothered asking women what they thought of it. Men had power, too.

"Well, well, what have we got here?" someone said. "Looks like old home week, or I'm a Chinaman."

Sylvia knew that voice. "Hello, Fred," she said, turning. "It's been a while."

Fred Butcher had been first mate aboard the *Ripple.* When Sylvia got a good look at him, she had to fight to keep her face straight. He was up in his fifties now, and his hair and Kaiser Bill mustache had gone snowy white.

He'd put on weight, too, which shocked her even more: he'd always been skinny and quick-moving, like a lizard. Only his eyes, clever and knowing, were as she remembered. Fixing on them let her say, "Good to see you,"

and sound as if she meant it.

"Anything I can do for you folks?" Butcher asked, shaking hands with Charlie White. He'd always known the angles; a first mate who didn't know them couldn't do his job. "You need fish, talk to me. I'm not going to sea any more; I'm a factor with L.B. Godspeed and Company. If I can't get it for you better and cheaper than anybody else on T Wharf, I'll eat my straw boater."

"That would be funny," Mary Jane said, and Butcher took off the hat and made as if to do it. She laughed. So did George, Jr.

"Godspeed's a good outfit," Charlie White said seriously. "They've been in business since not long after the War of Seces-sion, haven't they?"

"That's right—used to be called Marston and Company," Butcher said.

"So what can I do for you, Charlie? Cod? Halibut?"

"Five hundred pounds of each, for delivery to the *Fort Benton* at the Navy Yard," White said. They haggled hard over the price. White gave Butcher no special deference either because of his race or from old association; business was business.

Sylvia's children were fidgeting by the time Fred Butcher said, "All right, Charlie; that's a deal. Jesus, the way you jewed me down, anybody'd reckon you were spending your own money, not Uncle

Sam's."

'Things are tight these days," White answered. "My own boss'll be all over me if I don't watch every dime."

"Well, you've done that, by God," Butcher said. "I'm liable to catch the dickens for giving you such a good deal." Charlie White grinned proudly.

Sylvia didn't believe Butcher for a min-ute; he'd never hurt himself or his firm. Nodding to her, Butcher asked, "How about you, Mrs. E? You want a thousand pounds of fish, too? I'll give you the same deal I gave Charlie."

He winked at her.

"Give me the same price per pound for five pounds of good cod as you gave Charlie for five hundred, then," Sylvia said at once.

Instead of winking, Fred Butcher looked pained. "Come on, Mrs. E, have a heart. He gets a discount for quantity." Then he seemed to listen to what he'd said a moment before. "All right, already. We won't go broke over five pounds of cod. Come on down to Number Sixteen and I'll take care of you.

You want to come, too, Charlie, see what you're getting?"

"You bet I do," the Negro said. "And if what you deliver ain't what I see now, Godspeed'll have some talking to do with the U.S. Navy. Like I say, it's a good company, but things like that can happen. I want to make sure ahead of time they don't."

"I'll make sure of it," Butcher promised. Charlie nodded, as if to say he'd check anyway. His ex-shipmate, unfazed, led him and Sylvia and her children along the wharf to Number 16. Sylvia got first choice, and picked a couple of fine young cod. When she started to open her handbag, Butcher waved for her not to bother. "Now that I think about it, these are on the house."

Sylvia couldn't have been more astonished if he'd burst into song. "You don't have to do that, Fred," she said. "You were doing me a favor when you gave me a good deal. This is too much."

"No, no, no." The quick, decisive way Butcher shook his head reminded Sylvia of the dapper man he'd been only a few years before.

"I just recalled—George was on the *Ericsson,* wasn't he?" He waited for Sylvia to nod, then went on, "Take 'em, then, and don't say another word about it.

Times can't be easy for you."

"They aren't," Sylvia admitted. "God bless you, Fred." She dipped her head to Charlie White. "Remember me to your wife, please." As he promised to do that, she steered her children out of the Godspeed & Co.

shop.

"That was nice of that man, Ma," George, Jr., said.

"He used to sail with your father," Sylvia answered. "Now we'll have some good suppers with this fish." And her budget, which was always tight, would have a little more stretch to it during the coming week. That was as well, because . .. "There's one more thing I want to get while we're out. Come on, you two. We're going to Abie's."

"Hurray!'" Sylvia couldn't tell whether George, Jr., or Mary Jane cheered louder. They both loved going to the pawnshop. Anything in the world—anything from anywhere in the world— was liable to be there. Sylvia remembered seeing a set of false teeth smiling at her from the front window one day. Next to that, who could get excited about something as mundane as a stuffed owl?

Abie Finkelstein, the proprietor of the pawnshop, looked rather like a frog.

"Hello, Mrs. Enos," he said in a thick, not quite German accent. "Vot can I do for you today? If your little chil-dren a piece candy from the bowl there on the counter take, I do not think I even notice." At Sylvia's nod, George, Jr., and Mary Jane helped themselves. Finkelstein looked a question at Sylvia.

"I don't want any candy, thanks." But that wasn't all of what he'd asked, not even close. She pointed to the items hanging on brackets on the wall behind him. "Let me have that one, please."

"All right." He got it down. "Everybody needs these days to be safe."

"Yes," Sylvia said. "Everybody does."

XVII

Cincinnatus Driver pulled into the Des Moines railroad yard well before six in the morning, well before sunup. Most of the year, he'd found, business there was better and steadier than along the riverfront. He missed going over by the river; he'd been doing it for a long time, both down in Covington and since moving to his new home here. But he didn't miss an empty wallet, not even a little he didn't.

Early as he was, several other trucks were already waiting for the Chicago and North Western Railroad Line train to pull into the yard. Three or four others came in while he drank lukewarm coffee from a flask Elizabeth had given him. He sat in the cab of the Duryea and yawned. It wasn't so much that he hadn't got enough sleep the night before: more that he was always busy and always tired.

The train pulled into the yard at 6:35, right on time. Then the drivers scrambled to make deals with the conductor, who did the same job as a steamboat clerk and had the same cold blood in his veins.

For a while, Cincinnatus had had trouble getting any work at all from these hard-eyed gentlemen. That was partly because he'd been new to Des Moines and even more because he had a dark skin. He knew as much.

He'd expected nothing more.

But he was still here. He'd got his foot in the door, he'd proved he was reliable .. . and now he was dickering with a conductor over a load of rolled oats for one of the last few livery stables in town. "Have a heart, Jerry," he said, putting a hand over his own heart. "You wouldn't pay that low if I was white."

Jerry rolled his eyes. "You're a Hebe in blackface, Cincinnatus, that's what you are. You want me to see if I can get some-body else to haul the stuff for that price?"

"Go ahead," Cincinnatus said. "Somebody else wants to lose money on gasoline and wear and tear on his truck, that's his af-fair. You don't pay me another dollar, it ain't worth my time and trouble."

"You *are* a Hebe," the conductor said. "All right, dammit, an-other four bits."

"Six bits," Cincinnatus said. "Six bits and I break even, anyways."

"What a damn liar you are. Tell me you don't sandbag when you play poker." Jerry puffed out his cheeks, then exhaled. "Awright, six bits. The hell with it. Deal?"

"Deal," Cincinnatus said at once, and went to get his hand truck to move the barrels of oats.

When he got to the livery stable, the proprietor, a big, ruddy, white-haired man named Hiram Schacht, said, "Stow the barrels in that corner there." He pointed.

"Will do, Mistuh Schacht," Cincinnatus answered. From every-thing he'd seen, Schacht didn't treat him any worse because he was colored. The stable owner approved of anyone who helped him care for his beloved horses. The trouble was, he had fewer horses to care for every month.

People kept buying automobiles.

As Cincinnatus rolled barrel after barrel past the old man, Schacht sighed and said, "Getting harder and harder to stay in business. Back before the war, I'd have gone through an order this size in a week. Now it'll last me two, maybe three." He scratched at his bushy mustache. "Pretty soon, I won't need to order any oats at all. That'll cut down on my overhead, now won't it?" His laugh held little mirth.

"Well, suh, you don't see me bringin' you these oats in a wagon with a team pullin' it, now do you?" Cincinnatus said. "Auto-mobiles and trucks, they're the coming thing."

"Oh, I know, I know," Schacht said, unoffended; they'd had this conversation before. "But I'm heading toward my three-score and ten, as the Good Book says. Up till a couple years ago, I was sure the stable would last out my lifetime, and I was damn glad of it, too: I'm just flat-out crazy about horses. Motorcars have no soul to 'em, and they smell bad, too.

Anyway, though, I ain't so sure now. I'm lasting longer than I reckoned I would, and more people are getting rid of their horses faster than I reckoned they would."

"Can't blame me for that," Cincinnatus said as he trundled the dolly back out to the Duryea for another barrel of oats. "Never had me a horse—never could afford one—before I got the chance to buy my truck. By then, I figured a truck'd do me more good."

"Do your wallet more good, anyway," Schacht said, and Cincinnatus nodded; that was what he'd meant, all right. The stable owner went on, "A horse'd do your spirit more good, though. You can make friends with a horse—oh, not with all horses; some of 'em are stupid as fenceposts and a hell of a lot meaner, and God knows I know it—but with some horses, any-ways. What can you feel about a truck? When it breaks down, all you want to do is kill it, but you can't even do that, on account of the son of a bitch is already dead."

Having had the urge to murder the Duryea a good many times since buying it, Cincinnatus could only nod. He did say, "Man's got to eat."

"Oh, no doubt about it," Schacht said. "I don't begrudge folks their autos and their trucks—well, not much I don't, anyways. But back when you were a pup, everybody had horses—near enough everybody, I guess I ought to say—and motorcars were toys for rich men. By the time you get as old as I am, it'll be the other way round, I bet: everybody'11 have himself a motorcar, but only rich folks'll be able to keep horses."

"Could be so," Cincinnatus agreed. In fact, he found it very likely, and likely to happen sooner than Schacht had predicted, too. He wouldn't have been surprised to find out that the livery-stable man thought the same thing.

"You take care of yourself, Cincinnatus," Schacht said after he'd brought in the last barrel of oats, "and take care of that rattletrap contraption you drive."

"Thank you kindly, Mistuh Schacht." Cincinnatus touched the brim of his cloth cap in salute. "Hope it's me bringin' your oats next time you need some."

"I wouldn't mind." Schacht scratched at that walrus mustache again; he didn't bother waxing it up into a stylish Kaiser Bill. As Cincinnatus fired up the Duryea, the stable owner added, "By the time you get as old as I am, folks will be trading in their autos for flying machines—but rich folks'11 still keep horses." He shouted to make himself heard over the thunderous roar of the engine.

"Flying machines," Cincinnatus said to himself. All he knew about them was that he didn't want to go up in one; the miserable things were too likely to fall out of the sky, with gruesomely fatal results the newspapers liked to play up. Maybe they'd solve all the problems by the time Achilles was an old man. Maybe they wouldn't, too. Either

way, it would be for his son to worry about.

He picked up another hauling job when he went back to the railroad yard, and then another one. That one took him through his own neighborhood—right past the school where Achilles went. The kindergarten classes were just letting out as he drove by: sure enough, there was Achilles along with his schoolmates, who included blacks, whites, and the daughter of the Chinese laundryman upstairs. In Kentucky, Cincinnatus would never have dreamt that his son would go to a school whites also used. Iowans seemed to take it for granted.

Cincinnatus squeezed the bulb of the Duryea's raucous horn. All the little kids looked his way. "That's my pa!" Achilles squealed, loud enough for Cincinnatus to hear him over the Dur-yea's motor.

"Wow! What a swell truck!" a white boy exclaimed, also loudly.

Cincinnatus laughed, waved, and drove on. Only to a six-year-old would this truck have seemed swell. Had the kid said *funny-looking* or *beat-up*ˆ he would have been closer to the mark. But Cincinnatus had succeeded in impressing one of his son's pals, so swinging by the school had been all to the good.

"Pals." Cincinnatus spoke the word he'd just thought. Could a Negro boy in Des Moines have real white friends? He'd probably have to be able to, if he expected to have more than a handful of friends: there wouldn't be enough other colored boys to go around. But, for a Negro from Covington, it was a strange and troubling notion. Cincinnatus would have been willing to bet it was a strange and troubling notion for a lot of whites from Des Moines, too.

When he got home that evening, Achilles was still bubbling over with pride. "Louie Henderson and Joey Nichols both said that was the swellest truck they ever saw," he reported.

"That's good," Cincinnatus said. He paused and listened again in his mind to what his son had just told him. When he'd been Achilles' age, back before the turn of the century, he would surely have said *they ever seen.*

He still said things like that every now and then, or maybe more often than every now and then. Achilles had said them, too, till he started going to school: he'd listened to his mother and father and, while they were still down in Covington, to his grandmother as well. Now he listened to his teacher and to the boys and girls in class with him.

"Yeah, he's learnin' to talk like a Yankee, all right," Elizabeth said when Cincinnatus remarked on it over supper. "I seen that myself." She didn't notice her own slip. To her, it wasn't a slip: it was just the way she talked. It had been the same for Cincinna-tus, too, but it wasn't any more. The more like a white he talked, the less likely people here—even other Negroes here, he'd seen— were to reckon him a dumb nigger. Not being thought of that way usually worked to his advantage.

After supper, Achilles read aloud from his primer and Cincin-natus read to him from an abridgement *of Robinson Crusoe* he'd picked up for a dime in a secondhand store. The sentences in the primer and the story of the castaway both used white folks' grammar—they used it rather better than a lot of the white folks with whom Cincinnatus did business. The more of those kinds of sentences Achilles read and had read to him, the more natural they would seem, and the more he would likely end up sounding like a white man himself. Up here, that couldn't help but be useful.

After Achilles had gone to bed, Cincinnatus sat on the sofa and read ahead in *Robinson Crusoe;* he was enjoying the tale himself. Elizabeth mended clothes on a chair under the other electric lamp. She'd sew a few stitches along a seam, yawn, and then sew a few more stitches.

Cincinnatus set down his book. "You know," he said, "we've done a lot better for ourselves up here than I figured we would 'fore we left Covington.

Things keep going good a little while longer, maybe we can think about buyin' us a house here." He spoke hesitantly; he wasn't used to getting even a little ahead of the game.

Elizabeth yawned again. "You reckon Achilles asleep yet?" she asked.

Despite the yawn, Cincinnatus thought he knew why she asked that question. "Hope so," he answered, a large, male grin on his face. "Sure do hope so."

His wife would usually make a face of her own in response to that grin.

Tonight, she ignored it. "Didn't want to say nothin' where he can hear it," she told Cincinnatus, "not yet—too soon. But I reckon I'm in the family way again."

"For true?" he said, and Elizabeth nodded. He thought about that, then started to laugh.

His wife's eyes flashed. "What's funny? Don't you want an-other baby?"

"Don't have much choice, do I?" Cincinnatus said, but that wasn't close to the right answer. He tried to improve it: "Just when you think you get up on things, life goes and hands you an-other surprise. This one, though, it sure enough is a nice sur-prise." He waited anxiously, then thought of something better to do: he walked over and kissed Elizabeth. Even without words, that did turn out to be the right answer.

Jefferson Pinkard put on his white shirt and butternut trousers. Both were freshly laundered and pressed. Ever since throwing Emily out of his cottage, he'd grown careless about the shirts and overalls and dungarees he wore to work. When he donned the white and butternut, though, he wasn't just himself: he was part of the Freedom Party. If he didn't look sharp, he let the Party down.

He went into the bathroom, examined himself in the streaky mirror there, and frowned. He rubbed some Pinaud's brilliantine into his hair, washed the greasy stuff off his hands, and combed out a nice, straight part. "That's more like it," he said. He grabbed his club off the sofa in the front room and headed out the door.

Bedford Cunningham sat on his front porch, enjoying the warm June Sunday afternoon. By the glass at his side and by the way he sprawled, he'd been enjoying it for quite a while. Pinkard raised the club as he walked by. His neighbor, his former friend, cringed. That was what he'd wanted to accomplish. He kept walking.

He wasn't the only man in Party regalia who'd come to the trolley stop by the Sloss Works company housing. Three or four of his comrades greeted him as he came up: "Freedom!'

"Freedom!" he answered, and grinned a fierce grin. "Reckon we're going to teach Wade Hampton V a thing or two about sticking his nose in where it's not welcome, ain't we, boys?"

"That's right. That's just right," the other Freedom Party men said, almost in chorus. Jeff was glad to have the reassurance, though he didn't really need it. Hampton might have won the election, but he had a lot of damn nerve to go barnstorm-ing around the country making speeches and trying to pump up the Whigs. Who did he think

he was, Jake Featherston or somebody?

Nobody sat near the men in white and butternut as the trolley rattled through the streets of Birmingham all the way out to the Alabama State Fairgrounds at the west edge of town, where Hampton would speak. When Negroes got on or off, they edged past the Freedom Party men and made their way to or from the back of the trolley car as if afraid they would be set upon at any moment. They had reason to fear; such things had happened before.

"State Fairgrounds! End of the line!'" the trolley driver an-nounced, and loudly clanged his bell.

"End of the line for Wade Hampton, all right," Pinkard said, and the other Freedom Party men laughed wolfishly.

Caleb Briggs, the dentist who headed the Freedom Party in Birmingham, was marshaling his forces at the edge of the fair-grounds. "Won't be easy this time, boys," he rasped in his gas-ruined voice. "Goddamn governor got wind of what we had in mind and called out the goddamn militia. Anything we want, we're going to have to take."

Pinkard looked west across the rolling, grassy countryside to the platform from which President Hampton would speak. Sure enough, there were men in butternut and old-fashioned gray uni-forms along with those in shirtsleeves or black civilian coats. The sun glinted off bayonets. He'd seen that too many times in Texas to mistake it for anything else.

Suddenly, the club in his hand didn't seem such a wonderful weapon at all. He asked, "We move on those sons of bitches, they going to open up on us?"

"I don't know," Briggs answered. "Only one way to find out, though, and that's what we're going to do." He raised his voice: "Anybody who hasn't got the balls to go forward, run along home to mama. The rest of us, we'll see if those summer soldiers mean it or if they'll fold when we come at 'em.

Nobody's stopped us yet. My bet is, nobody can. Let's go."

Everybody advanced. Pinkard's mouth was dry, as it had been when he came up out of the trenches, but he kept going. It wasn't that he lacked fear: far more that he feared letting his comrades know he was afraid. If they didn't feel the same way, he'd have been astonished. On

they came, through the ankle-high grass, past the little groves of shade trees planted here and there on the fairgrounds. The muggy heat accounted for only some of the sweat on Jeff's face.

The militiamen deployed to meet the Freedom Party stal-warts. They were outnumbered, but they had the rifles and the bayonets and the helmets. Pinkard didn't like the way they moved. Their manner said they were not about to give way for anything or anybody.

To applause from the smallish crowd in front of him, Presi-dent Hampton began to speak. Pinkard paid scant heed to his amplified words. Why bother? They'd be full of lies anyhow. The major moving out ahead of the militiamen was more important. The fellow held up a hand. "You men halt right there," he said. "This is your first, last, and only warning."

"Hold up, boys," Caleb Briggs said, and the Freedom Party men obeyed him, not the militia major. He spoke to the officer: "Who are you to tell us we can't protest against the so-called policies of the government in Richmond?"

"You can stay right here," the major answered. "You can shout your fool heads off. I don't give a damn about that. If you take one step forward from where you stand now, I will assume you are attempting to riot, not to protest, and I will order you shot down like dogs. Those are my orders, and I shall carry them out. So will my men. If you think we are bluffing, sir, I invite you to try us."

Jeff didn't think the major was bluffing. The soldiers behind him looked ready, even eager, to open fire. The governor had picked with care the troops he'd activated. Caleb Briggs came to the same conclusion. "You'll pay for this, Major, when the day comes," he hissed.

"If you take that step, sir, you'll pay for it now," the major told him. "Your ruffians have gotten away with too many things for too long. You will not get away with anything today, by God. You may do what the law allows. If you do even a single thing the law does not allow, you will pay for it."

The stalwarts jeered him and hooted at him and cursed him. He seemed to worry about that no more than a man with a good slicker and a broad-brimmed hat worried about going out in the rain. And not one of the Freedom Party men took the step for-ward that would have made the officer issue his fatal order.

"All right, boys," Briggs said. "Maybe we won't give Hamp-ton the tyrant what-for today in person. But we can let him know what we think of him, right? This here country still has freedom of speech."

"Freedom!" was the chant they raised, a loud and mocking chant.

Jefferson Pinkard bellowed out the word as ferociously as he could, doing everything in his power to drown out the presi-dent of the Confederate States. As far as he was concerned, Jake Featherston should have been up on the platform a few hundred yards away. He would have told the truth, not the bland lies Wade Hampton V spewed forth. The bland crowd ate them up, too, and cheered Hampton almost as if they had true spirit.

"Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" All the stalwarts were roar-ing, doing their best to show Hampton and show the world the militia hadn't cowed them. *Maybe next time we'll bring rifles, too,* Pinkard thought. It had almost come to that during the presi-dential campaign. After fighting the damnyankees, he did not shy away from fighting his own government.

"Freedom! Free-dom! Freedom!"

When the first shot rang out from the grove of hackberry trees off to the right of the Freedom Party men, Jeff didn't hear it. But he saw Wade Hampton V stagger on the platform and clutch at his chest. He did hear the second shot. That second bullet must have caught Hampton in the head or the heart, for he stopped staggering and went down as if all his bones had turned to water.

A few of the stalwarts whooped when the president of the Con-federate States fell. Most, though, Pinkard among them, stared in the horrified silence that filled the crowd of Hampton's backers. Men dashed across the platform to the president's side. Jeff didn't think they'd be able to do much for him. He'd seen too many men go down in that boneless way during the Great War. Hardly any of them ever got up again.

From the hackberry grove came a wild, exultant shout: "Freedom!"

"Sergeant Davenport! Sergeant Sullivan!" the militia major rapped out.

"Take your troops in among those trees and bring that man to me. I don't care whether he's breathing or not, but bring him to me."

Two squads of militiamen trotted toward the hackberries. An-other

shot rang out. A man fell. Another shot from the trees— this one a miss, the bullet whining past not far from Pinkard. Without conscious thought, he threw himself flat. A lot of Free-dom Party men and a lot of militiamen did the same. The ad-vancing militiamen opened fire on the grove.

Caleb Briggs stayed on his feet. More than gas roughened his voice as he said, "That man is not one of ours, Major. My God, I—"

One of the dignitaries on the platform walked up to the micro-phone.

"President Hampton is dead." He sounded astonished, disbelieving.

Jeff understood that. He felt stunned and empty himself. He'd been ready—he'd been eager—to fight for the Freedom Party, but this .. . No one had murdered— *assassinated,* he supposed was the proper word—a president in the history of the Confed-erate States, or in the history of the United States before the Con-federacy seceded.

Drawing his pistol, the militia major aimed it at Briggs. More shots came from the hackberries. Another militiaman went down with a shriek. But some of the others were in among the trees. The major ignored that action.

Infinite bitterness filled his voice: "'Not one of yours, you say? He shouts your shout. He uses your methods. Politics was not war till the Freedom Party made it so."

"Now listen here—" Briggs began.

Triumphant cries rang out from the hackberry grove. Through them, the major said, "No, sir. You listen to me. Get your rabble out of here by the count of five, or I will turn my men loose on them and we will have a massacre the likes of which this country has never seen. Maybe it's one we should have had a couple of years ago—then things wouldn't have come to this. One . . . two . .. three—"

"Go home, boys," Caleb Briggs said quickly. His face was gray. "For the love of God, go home. There's been enough blood spilled today."

"Too much," the militia major said. "Far too much. You disap-point me, Mr. Briggs. I would have liked to shoot you down."

Briggs stood silent, letting himself be reviled. As Jefferson Pinkard got to his feet, militiamen came out of the hackberry grove. They were dragging a body by the feet. The corpse wore butternut trousers and a

green shirt, now soaked with blood. The gunman must have been almost invisible in among the trees. Jeff stared at his long, pale, sharp-nosed face. He'd seen that face at Party meetings, not regularly, but every so often. The fellow was named Grady.. . Grady Something-or-other. Jeff knew he'd talked with him.

but couldn't remember his surname.

From the appalled looks on other Party stalwarts' faces, he knew they also recognized the assassin. The militia major saw that, too. "Not one of yours, eh?" he repeated. "Another lie. Get out of my sight before I forget myself"

Briggs went. Jeff stumbled after him, along with his com-rades.

Someone close by was moaning. After a moment, he real-ized it was himself *What do we— what do I— do now?* he wondered. *Sweet suffering Jesus, what do I do now?*

Anne Colleton was frying chicken for supper when her brother came into the kitchen of the large apartment they still shared. She started to greet him, then got a good look at his face. She hadn't seen that kind of dazed, horrified expression since the war. Above the cheerful crackling of the chicken, she asked, "My God, Tom, what's gone wrong?"

By way of answer, he held up the copy of the *Columbia South Carolinian* he carried under his arm. The headline was enor-mous and very, very black:

PRESIDENT MURDERED IN BIRMINGHAM!!!

Under it, a half-page subhead said, FREEDOM PARTY ASSASSIN

SHOT DEAD AT ALABAMA STATE FAIRGROUNDS.

"My God," Anne said again. "Oh, my God." Mechanically, she kept turning the floured chicken in the hot fat.

"I think you'd better do the same with your investments in the Freedom Party as you did with your Confederate investments right after the war,"

Tom told her, "and that's get rid of 'em. This time tomorrow, Jake Featherston's going to be worth less than a Confederate dollar, and

that's saying something."

She shook her head. "Featherston would never order that kind of thing."

"I didn't say he did, though I wouldn't put it past him if he thought he could get away with it," Tom replied. "But that hasn't got anything to do with it. You think what he ordered or didn't order matters? Only thing that matters is, one of his people pulled the trigger. Who's going to vote for a party that blows the head off the president if they don't care what he's up to?"

"No one," Anne said dully. Tom was right. She wasn't so naive as to pretend otherwise. She'd been riding the crest of the Freedom Party wave up and up and up. She'd been sure she could ride it all the way into the president's residence in Rich-mond. And so she could have. She remained certain of that. But now .. . "The son of a bitch," she whispered. "The stupid son of a bitch."

"Who? The late Grady Calkins?" Tom said. "You bet he was a stupid son of a bitch. But who built a whole party out of stupid sons of bitches? Who aimed 'em at the country and fired 'em off, first with bare knuckles and then with clubs and pistols? You know who as well as I do, Sis. Is it any wonder one of'em picked up a Tredegar and decided to go president hunting?"

Anne had never thought, never dreamt, such a thing might happen. That didn't necessarily mean it was any wonder, though, not when you looked at it the way her brother suggested. "What do we do now?" she said. She rarely asked for advice, but her mind remained blank with shock.

Tom didn't have a lot of help to offer. "I don't know," he said. "You burned a lot of bridges when you went with Featherston. How the devil do you propose to get back across them?"

"I don't know, either," Anne said. "Maybe things will straighten out somehow." Even to herself, she didn't sound as if she believed that. Hot lard splashed up and bit the back of her hand. She swore with a fervor that wrung a couple of embar-rassed chuckles from her brother.

The chicken was ready a few minutes later. In the years since Marshlands burned, she'd turned into a pretty fair cook. Before then, she'd have had trouble boiling water. But she took no plea-sure in crispy skin or moist, juicy, flavorsome flesh. She hardly noticed what she ate, as a matter of fact: the chicken was bones and the baked

potato that went with it reduced to its jacket without any apparent passage of time.

After supper, Tom pulled a bottle of whiskey from the shelf where it sat.

That, Anne noticed. "Pour me a slug, too, will you?" she asked.

"I sure will." He did. Anne wanted to drink to the point of oblivion, but refrained. Far more than most in the Confederate States, she appreciated the value of a clear head. But oh, the temptation!

As she drank the one drink she allowed herself, she read the newspaper Tom had brought home. Grady Calkins was an out-of-work veteran who'd belonged to the Freedom Party. Past that, the reporters hadn't found out much about him. That was plenty. That was more than plenty.

"He shouted 'Freedom!' after he shot Hampton down," Tom said, as if to rub salt in the wound.

"Yes, I read that," Anne answered. "It's a disaster. I admit it. I don't see how I can deny it. It's a disaster every way you look at it."

"It sure is," Tom said. "God only knows what kind of presi-dent Burton Mitchel will make."

"I don't think anybody outside of Arkansas knows anything about Burton Mitchel, maybe including God," Anne said. Tom let out a startled snort of laughter. Anne went on, "The Whigs plucked him out of the Senate to balance the ticket; Featherston would have done the same thing if he'd chosen Willy Knight. All Mitchel was supposed to do was sit there for the next six years."

"He'll do more than that now," her brother said. "Christ, a backwoods bumpkin running the country till 1927. Just what we need!"

"Look on the bright side," Anne told him.

"I didn't know there was any bright side *to* look on," Tom answered.

"Of course there is. There always is," Anne said. "The bright side here is: how could things get any worse?"

"That's a point," Tom acknowledged. "The other side of the coin is, now we get to find out how things get worse "

Anne opened the *South Carolinian* to the inside page on which the story of President Hampton's assassination was continued. She read aloud:"

'After taking the oath of office, President Mitchel de-clared a week of national mourning and lamentation. The new president prayed for the aid of almighty God in the difficult times that lie ahead, and said he would do his best to promote in-ternal order, establish good relations with foreign neighbors, and put the currency on a sound basis once more.'" Her lip curled. "And while he's at it, he'll walk across the James River without getting his trouser cuffs wet."

"What's he supposed to say?" her brother asked, and she had no good answer. Tom continued, "Those are the things that need doing, no doubt about it. I haven't any idea whether he can do them, but at least he knows that much. And after this"—Tom took a deep breath—"after this, maybe people will back off and give him room to move in for a while."

"Maybe," Anne said. "I don't know if that will help, but maybe." She shoved the newspaper to one side. "And maybe everything I've done since the end of the war to try to set the CSA to rights went up in smoke with a couple of shots from that maniac's gun. If the militiamen hadn't killed that Calkins, I'd be glad to do it my-self—but I think I'd have to stand in line behind Jake Featherston."

"Probably," Tom agreed. "Calkins may have killed the Free-dom Party along with a Whig president. Featherston has to know that—he isn't stupid.

But he's the one who raised the devil. He's got no business being surprised if it ended up turning on him."

"That isn't fair," Anne said, but even in her own ears her voice lacked conviction. Tom said nothing at all, leaving her with the last word. She'd never been so sorry to have it.

When she walked to the tailor's the next morning, people in the streets of St. Matthews, white and black alike, fell silent and stared at her as she went by. They'd been talking about the assas-sination. They started talking about the assassination again as soon as she passed. While she was close by, they would not talk. Some of them moved away from her, as if they didn't want her shadow to fall on them. She'd been the dominant force in this part of South Carolina for more than a decade. People had always granted her the deference she'd

earned. By the way they acted now, she might have just escaped from a leper colony.

Going into Aaron Rosenblum's shop felt like escaping. *Clack, clack, clack* went the treadle of his sewing machine. The clack-ing stopped when the bell above his door rang. He looked up from the piece of worsted he'd been guiding through the ma-chine. "Good morning, Miss Colleton," he said, polite but no more than polite. He got to his feet. "I have ready the skirt you asked me to make for you."

"Good. I hoped you would." As was often her way, Anne chose to take the bull by the horns. "Terrible about President Hampton yesterday."

"Yes." The little old tailor looked at her over the tops of his half-glasses.

"A very terrible thing. But what can you expect from a party that would sooner fight than think?"

Rosenblum had to know she backed the Freedom Party. She'd made no secret of it—on the contrary. If he thought he could re-buke her like this ... If that was so, the Party was in as much trouble as she'd feared. In a tight voice, she said, "The Freedom Party is trying to make the Confederate States strong again."

"Oh, yes. Of course." The tailor had a peculiar accent, half lazy South Carolina Low Country, the other half Yiddish. "And I, I am a lucky man to live now in the Confederacy. In Russia, where I am from, parties that try to make the country strong again go after the Jews. Here, you go after black people instead, so I am safe. Yes, I am a lucky man."

Anne stared at him. She knew sarcasm when she heard it. And Rosenblum's words held an uncomfortable amount of truth. "That isn't all the Freedom Party does," Anne said. The tailor did not answer. What hung in the air was, *Yes, you also shoot the president* Twice now in two days, she would sooner not have been left with the last word. She attempted briskness: "Let me see the skirt, if you please."

"Yes, ma'am." He gave it to her, then waved her to a changing room. "Try it on. I will alter it if it does not suit you."

Try it on she did. The gray wool skirt fit perfectly around the waist; she might be irked at Rosenblum, but he did good work. And the length was in the new mode, as she'd requested: it showed off not only her ankles but also several inches of shapely calf. Tom would pitch a

fit. Too bad for Tom.

Roger Kimball would approve, though he'd sooner see her naked altogether.

She changed back into the black skirt she'd worn, then paid Rosenblum for the new gray one: a bargain at two billion dollars. "Thank you very much," he said, tucking the banknotes into a drawer.

"You're welcome," she said, and then, "I *am* sorry the presi-dent is dead.

I don't care whether you believe me or not."

"If you didn't care, you wouldn't say you didn't care," Rosen-blum answered. While she was still unraveling that, he went on, "I do believe you, Miss Colleton. But now you believe me, too: a party that shouts and shoots for freedom is not a party that really wants it."

Another paradox. Anne shook her head. "I haven't got time for riddles today. Good morning." The new skirt folded over her arm, she stalked out of the tailor's shop.

Chester Martin sat down in a folding chair at the Socialist Party hall near the Toledo steel mill where he worked. "What did you call the Freedom Party down in the CSA?" he asked Albert Bauer. "Reaction on the march?

Was that it? You hit the nail right on the head."

"Yeah, even for a reactionary party, shooting a reactionary president dead because he's not reactionary enough to suit them takes a lot of doing,"

Bauer allowed. "They'll be sorry, too, you mark my words."

"They're sorry already, I'll bet," Martin said. "It'll be a cold day in hell before they come so close to winning an election again."

"They'll be sorrier, too," Bauer predicted. "They've done something I wouldn't have bet they could: they've made people in the United States feel sorry for the Confederate States."

"They've even made me feel that way, and some Rebel bas-tard shot me," Martin said. "But shooting a president—" He shook his head.

"Nobody's ever done that before, there or here. What is the world coming to?"

"Revolution," Bauer answered. "And the reactionaries in the CSA just gave the progressive forces here a leg up. Before, President Sinclair couldn't have gotten ending reparations through Congress if his life depended on it. Now, though, I think he may just have the votes to pull it off."

"Do you?" Martin wasn't so sure he liked the idea. "As far as I can see, we'd be better off if the Confederates stayed broke and weak."

"Sure we would, in the short run," Bauer said. "But in the long run, if the Confederate States keep going down the drain, who does that help? That Featherston lunatic almost won the election last year because the Rebs were in such bad shape. What hap-pens if they get worse?"

"Well, they aren't going to have a revolution—not a Red one, anyway,"

Martin said. He got up, went over to a coffeepot that sat on top of an iron stove, and poured himself a cup. After he set it down on the table, he lit a cigarette.

Bauer waited patiently till he'd puffed a couple of times, then nodded.

"No, they won't have a Red revolution, not right away. It's a conservative country, and Marxism is tied to the black man there, which means the white man has, or thinks he has, a strong extra reason to hate it. But the Confederates' time is coming, too. Sooner or later, all the capitalist countries will have their revolutions."

He spoke with the certainty of a devout Catholic talking about the miracle of transubstantiation. Chester Martin's faith in So-cialism was newer, more pragmatic, and neither so deep nor so abiding. He said, "Maybe so, Al, but there's liable to be a hell of a long time hiding in that *sooner or later."*

"The dialectic doesn't say how fast things will happen," Bauer answered calmly. "It just says they *will* happen, and that's enough for me."

"Maybe for you," Martin said. "Me, I'd sort of like to know whether a revolution's coming in my time or whether it's some-thing my great-grandchildren will be waiting for—if I ever have any." He wasn't so young as he had been. There were times when he wished he'd found a

girl as soon as he came home from the war, or maybe even before then. But work in the foundry and work for the Socialist Party left little time for courting, or even thinking about courting.

Back when he'd been a Democrat, he'd thought Socialist girls were loose, without a moral to their name. People said it so often, he'd been sure it was true. Now, rather to his regret, he knew better. A lot of the women in the Socialist Party were mar-ried to Socialist men. A lot of the ones who weren't might as well have been married to the Party. That left. .. slim pickings.

Albert Bauer said, "Even if we don't get a revolution in the CSA any time soon, we don't want the reactionaries in charge down there. That would turn the class struggle on its head. As far as I'm concerned, keeping the Freedom Party down is reason enough to let reparations go."

"Well, maybe," Martin said. He wouldn't say any more than *maybe,* no matter how his friend tried to argue him around. He was sorry the Confederates had had their president shot. He wouldn't have wished that even on the CSA. But not wishing anything bad on the Confederate States didn't necessarily mean he wished anything good on them, either.

After he got home that evening, the topic came up again around the supper table. He'd expected it would; the newsboys were hawking papers by shouting about reparations. "What do you think, Chester?" Stephen Douglas Martin asked. "You were the one who was doing the fighting."

"Hard to say, Pa," Martin answered. "I used to think that, if I ever saw a Reb drowning, I'd toss him an anvil. Now—I just don't know."

"Can't we let the war be over at last?" Louisa Martin said. "Haven't both sides been through enough yet? When can we be satisfied?"

"Might as well ask the Mormons out West, Ma," her daughter Sue said.

"They just took some shots at a couple of Army trucks—did you see that in the newspaper? They don't forget we beat them. You can bet the Confederates haven't forgotten we beat them. So why should we forget it?"

"It goes both ways, though," Chester said. "It's not an easy question. If we keep holding the Rebs down, they'll hate us on account of that. They did it to us for years and years, after the War of Secession and

then after the Second Mexican War. Do we want them thinking about nothing but paying us back, the way we worked so hard to get even with them and with England and France?"

"You sound like a Socialist, all right," his father said, laugh-ing. "Pass the peas, will you, you lousy Red?"

Chester laughed, too, and passed the bowl. "Talking to you and Mother, I sound like a Socialist. When I talk to people down at the Socialist hall, I sound like a Democrat half the time. I've noticed that before. I'm stuck in the middle, you might say."

"People who can see both sides of the question usually are," his mother told him. "It's not the worst place in the world to be."

Sue Martin looked curiously at Chester. "With that Purple Heart in your bedroom, I'd think you'd be the last one to want to let the Confederates up off the floor."

He shrugged. "Like Mother says, maybe it's time for the war to be over and done with. Besides, the one thing I don't want to do is have to fight those ... so-and-so's again." Talking about a new war almost made him slip back into the foul language of the trenches. "If they can settle down because they're not paying reparations any more, that might not be too bad."

"You make good sense, son," Stephen Douglas Martin said. His wife nodded. After a moment, so did Sue. Martin's father went on, "Now, what are the odds that anybody in Congress would know common sense if it flew around Philadelphia in an aeroplane?"

"There's a Socialist majority," Martin said. But that didn't prove anything, and he knew it. "We'll just have to wait and see, won't we?"

Out of the blue, Sue asked, "How do you think that Congresswoman you met would vote? You know the one I mean—the one whose brother got wounded while he was in your squad?"

"Flora Hamburger," Martin said. "Yeah, sure, I know who you mean.

That's a good question. She usually does what's right. I don't really know.

We'll have to keep watching the newspapers, I guess."

"Flora Hamburger." Louisa Martin snapped her fingers. "I know where

I saw that name. She's the one who got engaged to the vice president a little while ago." She looked from her son to her daughter and back again, as if to say getting engaged would satisfy her: catching a vice president was unnecessary.

"Mother," Sue said in warning tones.

"She's just giving you a rough time," Martin said. That got his sister and his mother both glaring at him. He forked up some peas, freshly conscious of the dangers peacemakers faced when they stepped between warring factions.

When Chester looked up from the peas, he found his father eyeing him with more than a little amusement. Stephen Douglas Martin had the good sense to stay out of a quarrel he couldn't hope to influence.

Over the next few days, the debate about reparations stayed in the newspapers, along with the reprisals the Army was taking against the perennially rebellious Mormons in Utah. The colli-sion of two aeroplanes carrying mail elbowed both those stories out of the headlines for a little while, but the excitement about the crash died quickly—though not so quickly as the two luck-less pilots had.

When Flora Hamburger came out in favor of ending reprisals, the papers carried the news on the front page. "Conscience of the Congress says yes!" newsboys shouted. "Reparations repeal seen as likely!"

Martin was less impressed with the announcement than he would have been before Congresswoman Hamburger got en-gaged to Vice President Blackford. In a way, that made her part of the administration proposing the new policy. But then again, from what he knew of her, she wasn't so easy to influence. Maybe she was speaking her mind after all.

"I think the bill will pass now. I hope it works out for the best, that's all,"

Martin said when Sue asked him about it that night over oxtail soup. "Can't know till it happens."

"When you do something, you can't know ahead of time what will come of it," his father said. ˆPoliticians will tell you they do. but they don't.

Sometimes, you just go ahead and do things and see where they lead."

"That's how the war happened," Martin said. "Nobody imag-ined it would be so bad when it started. When it started, people cheered. But we locked horns with the Rebs and the Canucks, and for the longest time nobody could go forward or back. I hope this doesn't go wrong the same way, that's all."

"Sometimes being afraid of what could go wrong is a good reason not to do anything," Stephen Douglas Martin observed.

"You're a Democrat, all right," Chester said.

"Well, so I am," his father agreed. "Upton Sinclair's been in for more than a year now, and I'm switched if I can see how he's set the world on fire."

Louisa Martin said, "We already set the world on fire once, not very long ago. Isn't that enough for you, Stephen?"

"Well, maybe it is, when you put it like that," her husband said. "If letting the Confederates off the hook means we don't have to fight another war, I suppose I'm for it. But if they start spending the money they would have given us on guns and such, that'll cause trouble like you wouldn't believe."

He raised his mug of beer. "Here's hoping they've learned their lesson." He sipped the suds.

"Here's hoping," Chester Martin echoed. He drank, too. So did his mother and sister.

Roger Kimball was drunk. He'd been drunk a lot of the time since Grady Calkins shot President Wade Hampton V Staring down into his glass of whiskey, he muttered, "Stupid bastard. Stupid *fucking* bastard." Calkins might as well have taken his Tredegar and shot the Freedom Party right between the eyes.

The whiskey, Kimball decided, was staring back at him. He drank it down so it wouldn't do that any more. *Any old excuse in a storm,* he thought. He poured himself a fresh glass. Maybe this one would be more polite.

Whether it was or not, he'd drink it.

He did a lot of his own pouring these days. Too many people recognized him on the streets and in the saloons of Charleston. A few

weeks before, a lot of those people would have greeted him with a wave and a cheery call of

"Freedom!" Now they glared. Sometimes they cursed. One man had threatened to kill him if he saw him again. Kimball wasn't too alarmed—he knew how to take care of himself—but he spent more time in his flat than he had.

That meant his bankroll shrank with every day's inflation. He didn't get into so many card games as he had, which was too damn bad, because they'd been what kept him afloat. Without them, the millions that paid the rent one week bought a sandwich the next week, a cigar the week after that, and were good only as pretty paper the week after that.

"God *damn* Grady Calkins," he said, and drank some of the polite whiskey. It wasn't fair. The more whiskey he drank, the more obviously it wasn't fair. The Freedom Party still stood for exactly the same things as it had before the madman shot the president. Kimball still thought those things were as important as he had then. A couple of weeks before, people had applauded him and applauded Jake Featherston. Now they wouldn't give the Freedom Party the time of day. Where was the justice in that?

Tears came into his eyes, a drunk's easy tears. One rolled down his cheek—or maybe that was just a drop of sweat. Charleston in the summer, even early in the summer, taught a man everything he needed to know about sweating and then some.

Kimball knocked back the rest of his drink. At last, instead of leaving him furious or maudlin, it did what he wanted it to do: it hit him over the head like a rock. He staggered into the bedroom, took off his shoes, lay down diagonally across the bed, and passed out before he could undress.

Sunlight streaming in through the bedroom window woke him the next morning. It seemed so hot, so bright, so molten, he thought for a moment he'd died and gone to hell. He squinted his eyes down to narrow slits so he could come close to bearing the glare. When he rolled away from it, his head pounded like a sub-mersible's diesel running at full throttle.

His mouth tasted as if too many people had stubbed out too many cigars in there. Greasy sweat bathed his body from aching head to stockinged feet. He thought about getting up and taking a small nip to

ease the worst of the pain, but his stomach did a slow, horrified loop at the mere idea.

Eventually, he did get up. "Only proves I'm a hero," he said, and winced at the sound of his own voice even though he hadn't been so rash as to speak loudly. He staggered into the bathroom, splashed his face with cold water, and used more cold water to wash down some aspirins. His stomach let out another loud shout of protest when they landed, as if it were a submarine under heavy attack from depth charges. He wondered if they'd stay down. He gulped a few times, but they did.

He brushed his teeth, which got rid of the worst of the cigar butts. Then he ran a tub full of cold water, stripped off his sweat-soaked clothes, and gingerly stepped in. It felt dreadful and won-derful at the same time. After he'd toweled himself dry and put on a shirt and trousers that didn't smell as if he'd stolen them from a drunk in the gutter, he felt better. Before too long, he might decide he wanted to live after all.

Showing stern military discipline, he walked past the whiskey bottle on the coffee table in the front room and into the kitchen. Black coffee was almost as painful to get down as the aspirins had been, but made him feel better.

After some thought, he cut a couple of thick slices of bread and ate them.

They sank to his stomach like rocks, but added ballast once there.

He went back into the bathroom and combed his hair in front of the mirror.

Only red tracks across the whites of his eyes and a certain general weariness betrayed his hangover to the world. He would do. Donning a straw hat to help shield his eyes from the slings and arrows of outrageous sunbeams, he left the apart-ment. However much he might have wanted to, he couldn't stay indoors all the time.

Newsboys selling the *Courier* and the *Mercury* both shouted the same headline: "United States end reparations!" The boys with stacks of the *Mercury*\ the Whig outlet, added, "President Mitchel says Confederate currency will recover!"

"I'll believe that when I see it," Kimball sneered: both news-papers cost a million dollars. But, if enough people believed it, it might happen.

The prospect made him less happy than he would have thought possible. The shrinking—hell, the disappearing— Confederate dollar had helped fuel the Freedom Party's rise.

A cop strode up the street toward Kimball, twirling his billy club in a figure-eight. He recognized the ex-Navy man, and aimed the nightstick at him like a Tredegar. "I catch you and your pals going around making trouble like you used to, I'll run y'all in, you hear? Them's the orders I got from city hall."

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Bob," Kimball answered wearily, "tell me you didn't vote for Featherston and I'll call you a liar to your face."

"That don't have nothing to do with nothing." The policeman brushed a bit of lint from the sleeve of his gray tunic. "Word is, we got to be tough on keeping public order. We ain't messin' around with you boys no more, you hear?"

"I hear you," Kimball said, and went on his way. He would have made sure the Freedom Party walked small for a while, anyway—only sensible thing to do. But getting orders from a fair-weather friend rankled.

And, when he opened the door to the Freedom Party's Charles-ton offices, he realized the orders had been unnecessary for a different reason. The way things were right now, he would have had a devil of a time raising trouble even had he wanted to. The headquarters that had bustled all the way through the presiden-tial campaign and afterwards felt more like a tomb now. Only a few people sat at their desks, none of them doing anything much. *Damn that Calkins,* Kimball thought again.

"God damn it," he said loudly, "it isn't the end of the world."

"Might as well be." Three people, one in the front of the of-fice, one in the middle, and one at the back, said the same thing at the same time.

"No! Jesus Christ, no," Kimball said. "If we were right before that miserable son of a bitch of a Hampton got his head blown off, we're still right now. People *will* see it, so help me God they will."

One of the men who'd said *Might as well be* replied, "I had a rock chucked through my front window the other night. Had a note tied round it with a string, just like in the dime novels "

"The dime novels that cost millions nowadays," Kimball broke in.

As if he hadn't spoken, the Freedom Party functionary went on, "Said my neighbors would whale the tar out of me if I ever went out wearing white and butternut again, or else burn my house down." He gave Kimball as hard a look as he could with his round, doughy face.

Kimball glared back. The leftover pain of his hangover made his scowl even fiercer than it would have been otherwise. "God damn you to hell, Bill Ambrose, I didn't have a thing to do with burning down Tom Brearley's house. I don't do things like that. I might have shot the bastard—Lord knows I wanted to—or I might have beat him to death with a two-by-four, but I wouldn't have done that. It's a coward's way out, like throwing a rock through a window. I go straight after what I don't like. You understand me?"

Bill Ambrose muttered something. Kimball took two swift strides toward him. Feeling the way he did, he was ready—more than ready—to brawl.

Ambrose wasn't, though he'd been bold enough when the stalwarts marched. Hastily, he said, "I under-stand you, Roger."

"You'd damn well better," Kimball growled. "We've got to walk small for a while, that's all. Yeah, some of our summer birds have flown south. Yeah, the cops are going to give us a rough time for a bit. But Jake Featherston's still the only man who can save this country. He's still the only man who has a prayer of licking the United States when we tangle with 'em again. All right, getting to the top won't be as easy as we hoped it would. That doesn't mean we can't do it."

He knew what he sounded like: a fellow at a football game when his team was down by two touchdowns more than halfway through the fourth quarter.

If they only tried hard enough, they could still pull it out. If they gave up, they'd get steamrollered.

Looking around the office, he thought a lot of the men still there were on the point of giving up. They'd drift away, go back to being Whigs, and try to pretend their fling with the Freedom Party never happened, as if they'd gone out with a fast woman for a while and then given her up for the homely, familiar girl next door.

"Don't quit," he said earnestly. "That's all I've got to tell you, boys: don't quit. We *are* making this country what it ought to be. We never would have seen passbook laws with teeth if there hadn't been Freedom Party men in Congress. That bastard Layne might have won

the election if it hadn't been for us."

Some of the men looked happier. Kimball knew he wasn't the only true-blue Party man here. But somebody behind him said, "Maybe things'll get better anyhow, now that we're not stuck with reparations any more."

That was Kimball's greatest fear. To fight it, he loaded his voice with scorn: "Ha! I know about Burton Mitchel, by God— I'm from Arkansas, too, remember? Only reason he got into the Senate is that his daddy and granddad were there before him— he's another one of those stinking aristocrats. You ask me, if he does anything but sit there like a bump on a log, it'll be the biggest miracle since Jesus raised Lazarus."

A few people laughed: not enough. Kimball spun on his heel and stalked out of the Freedom Party offices. He'd never been aboard a slowly sinking ship, but now he had a good notion of what it felt like.

And he got no relief out on King Street, either. Up the side-walk toward him came Clarence Potter and Jack Delamotte. Pot-ter's face twisted into a broad, unpleasant smile. "Hello, Roger. Haven't see you for a while," he said, his almost-Yankee accent grating on Kimball's ears. "I expect you're pleased with the pack of ruffians you chose. By all accounts, you fit right in."

Kimball's hands balled into fists. "First time I ever heard your whiny voice, I wanted to lick you. Just so you know, I haven't changed my mind."

Potter didn't back away, not an inch. And Delamotte took a step forward, saying, "You want him, you've got us both."

Joyously, Kimball waded in. The tiny rational part of his mind said he'd probably end up in the hospital. He didn't care. Potter's nose bent under his fist. As long as he got in a few good licks of his own, what happened to him didn't matter at all.

Sam Carsten was sick to death of the Boston Navy Yard. As far as he could see, the USS *Remembrance* might stay tied up here forever. He expected to find cobwebs hanging from the hawsers that moored the aeroplane carrier to its pier.

"There's nothing we can do, Carsten, not one damn thing," Commander Grady said when he complained about it. "The money's

not in the budget for us to do anything but stay in port. We ought to count ourselves lucky they aren't cutting the ship up for scrap."

"They're fools, sir," Sam said. "They're nothing but a pack of fools.

There's enough money in the budget for them to let the goddamn Confederates off the hook. But when it comes to us, when it comes to one of the reasons the Rebs had to pay repara-tions in the first place, a mouse ate a hole in the Socialists' pockets."

"If it makes you feel any better," Grady said, "the Army's feeling the pinch as hard as we are."

"It doesn't make me feel better, sir," Carsten answered. "It makes me feel worse."

"What kind of a Navy man are you, anyway?" the gunnery of-ficer demanded in mock anger. "You're supposed to be happy when the Army takes it on the chin. Besides"—he grew serious once more —"misery loves company, doesn't it?"

"I don't know anything about that," Carsten said. "All I know is, I want us strong and the CSA weak. Whatever we need to do to make sure that happens, I'm for it. If it goes the other way, I'm against it."

"You do have the makings of an officer," Grady said thought-fully. "You see what's essential, and you don't worry about any-thing else."

"Long as we are tied up here, sir, I've been trying to hit the books a little harder, as a matter of fact." Sam scratched his nose. His fingertips came away white and sticky from zinc-oxide oint-ment. A wry grin twisted up one corner of his mouth. "Besides, the more I stay belowdecks, the less chance I get to sunburn."

"Nobody can say you're not a white man," Grady agreed gravely. "With that stuff smeared all over your face, you're about the whitest man around."

"I only wish it did more good," Sam said. "I put it on just like the pharmacist's mate says, or even thicker, but I still toast. Hell, most of the time I look more like a pink man than a white one. I even burned over in Ireland."

"I remember that. It wasn't easy," Grady said. "They should have given you some kind of decoration for it."

"I guess they figured me turning red was decoration enough, even if I didn't think it was real pretty," Carsten said, which wrung a strangled snort from Commander Grady. Sam went on, "Sir, do you think we'd have more to do and more to do it with if Lieutenant Sandes hadn't flown his aeroplane into the stern when we were coming back across the Atlantic?"

"Nope," Grady answered. "We'd had accidents and battle damage before then. This business of flying aeroplanes off ships may be important, but it sure as hell isn't easy. The *Remem-brance* doesn't carry as much armor as a battleship, either."

Remembering the shell that had struck his gun position, Sam nodded.

"All right," he said. "I did wonder."

"I think we could have come through without any damage or accidents and still wound up right here," Grady said. "The prob-lem isn't how we fought, because we fought well. The problem is politics." He made it a swearword.

"Yes, sir," Carsten said resignedly. He raised one of his pale eyebrows.

"Can you think of any troubles that aren't politics, when you get down to it?"

Commander Grady rocked back on his heels and laughed. "No, by God, or not many, anyhow." He slapped Sam on the back, then pulled out a pad and a fountain pen and wrote rapidly. He pulled the top sheet off the pad and handed it to Carsten. "And here's a present for you: twenty-four hours'

liberty. Go on across the river into Boston and have yourself a hell of a time."

"Thank you very much, sir!" Sam exclaimed.

He wanted to charge off the *Remembrance* then and there, but Grady held up a hand. "Just don't come back aboard Sunday afternoon with a dose of the clap, that's all. You do and I'll tear your stupid shortarm off and beat you over the head with it."

"Aye aye, sir," Sam said. "I promise." There were ways to make that unlikely to happen even if he didn't put on a rubber, though not all the girls in any house cared to use their mouths in-stead of doing what they usually did.

If he had to pay a little extra for his fun, he would, that was all. He usually preferred a straight screw himself, but he hadn't expected to get this liberty and sure didn't want to end up in trouble on account of it. And the other was a hell of a lot of fun, too.

Several houses operated on the narrow streets across the Charles from the Navy Yard. *Go where the customers are* was a rule as old as the oldest profession. Sam got what he wanted— got it twice in quick succession, in fact, from an Italian woman about his own age who was as swarthy as he was fair. "Thanks, Isabella," he said, lazy and happy after the second time.

He ran his hand through her hair. "And here's an extra dollar you don't have to tell anybody about."

"I thank you," she said as she got to her feet. "My little girl needs shoes.

It will help." He hadn't thought about whores having children, but supposed it was one of the hazards of the trade.

A lot of the businesses near the south bank of the Charles that weren't brothels were saloons. Sam had himself a couple of schooners of beer. He thought about getting drunk—Commander Grady hadn't told him not to do that. But, after he'd emptied that second glass, he wiped his mouth on his sleeve and walked out of the dingy dive where he'd been drinking. He'd had his ashes hauled, he'd drunk enough to feel it, and nothing in the whole wide world seemed urgent, not even getting lit up. If he felt like doing it later, he would. If he didn't. . . well, he still had most of a day left without anyone to tell him what to do. For a Navy man, that was a pearl of great price.

He sauntered through the streets of Boston, thumbs in the pockets of his bell-bottomed trousers. He wasn't used to saun-tering. When he went somewhere aboard the *Remembrance*, he always went with a purpose in mind, and he almost always had to hurry. Taking it easy was liberty of a sort he rarely got.

Half by accident, half by design, he came out onto the Boston Common: acres and acres of grass intended for nothing but taking it easy. If he wanted to, he could lie down there, put his cap over his eyes, and nap in the sun.

"No, thanks," he said aloud at that thought. If he napped in the sun. he'd roast, sure as pork would in the galley ovens of the *Re-membrance.* But there were trees here and there on the Com-mon.

Napping in the shade might not be so bad.

He headed for a good-sized oak with plenty of drooping, leafy branches to hold the sun at bay. Also heading for it from a different direction were a girl of nine or so, a boy who looked like her older brother, and, behind them, a woman with a picnic basket. Seeing Sam, the girl started to run. When she got to the shade under the oaks, she said, "This is our tree. You can't have it."

"Mary Jane, there's plenty of room for us all," the woman said sternly.

"And don't you dare be rude to a sailor. Remember, your father was a sailor."

"Ma'am, if it's any trouble, I'll find another tree," Sam said.

The woman shook her head. "It's no trouble at all—or it won't be, unless you make some. But if you made a lot of trouble, you wouldn't have said you'd go someplace else like that."

"I'm peaceable," Sam agreed. If he hadn't paid a call on the house where Isabella worked, he might have felt like making some trouble: she was a pretty woman, even if she looked tired. And she'd said the girl's—Mary Jane's—father *was* a sailor, which probably made her a widow. Sometimes widows missed what their husbands weren't there to give them any more.

As things were, though, Sam just sat down on the grass near the tree trunk, in the deepest part of the shade.

In a rustle of wool, the woman sat down, too, and took a blanket from the basket and spread it out on the grass. She started putting bowls of food on the blanket. While she was do-ing that, her son asked Sam, "Sir, did you know anybody who sailed aboard the USS *Ericssonl"*

"Can't say that I did," Carsten answered. Then his eyes nar-rowed as he remembered where he'd heard the name. *"That* ship! Was your father on her, sonny?"

"Yes, sir," the boy said. "And the stinking Rebs sank her after the war was over. That's not right."

"It sure as . . . the dickens isn't," Sam said, inhibited in his choice of language by the presence of the woman and little girl. "I'm awfully sorry to hear that. My ship got torpedoed once, by the Japs out in the Pacific. We didn't sink, but I know we were just lucky."

"And the Confederate skipper who sank the *Ericsson* is still walking around free as a bird down in South Carolina," the woman said. "He murdered my husband and more than a hun-dred other men, and no one cares. Even the president doesn't care."

"If Teddy Roosevelt had won his third term, he'd have done something about it," Carsten said. "If the Rebs didn't hand that.. . fellow over, TR

would have walloped the Confederate States till they did."

"I think so, too," the woman said. "If women had the vote in Massachusetts, I would have voted for Sinclair when he got elected. I've changed my mind since I found out about the *Erics-son* > though."

"I bet you have," Sam said. "One thing you have to give Teddy—he never took any guff from anybody."

"No." The woman pointed to the food. "Would you like some fried chicken and ham and potato salad? I made more than we can eat, even if these two"—she pointed at her children—"do put it away like there's no tomorrow."

"Are you sure, ma'am?" Carsten asked. If she was a widow, things were liable to be as tough for her as for the whore who'd gone down on her knees in front of him—tougher, maybe. But she nodded so emphatically, turning her down would have been rude.

He ate a ham sandwich and a drumstick and homemade po-tato salad and pickled tomatoes, and washed them down with lemonade that made him pucker and smile at the same time. Even though her children did eat like starving Armenians, the woman tried to press more on him.

"Couldn't touch another bite," he said, which wasn't quite true, and,

"Everything was terrific," which was. "Haven't sat down to a spread like that since I was a kid." That was true, too.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," she said, and seemed happy for a moment.

She took a pack of cigarettes from her handbag. He got out a box of matches and lit the smoke for her. But as she drew on it, she frowned.

"He's probably walking around down there in Charleston, puffing a big fat cigar. *Damn* him."

Sam had heard women swear before, but never with that quiet intensity.

He didn't know what to say, so he didn't say anything. He watched the children play for a while, then got to his feet. "Obliged, ma'am—much obliged," he said. "Good luck to you." She nodded, but didn't speak. He went on his way. Only after he'd crossed half the Common did he realize he hadn't learned her name.

XVIII

Arthur McGregor stared down at the copy of the *Rosenfeld Reg-ister* he'd just set on the kitchen table. The headline stared back at him: RETIRING GENERAL CUSTER TO VISIT ROSENFELD NEXT WEEK.

His wife eyed the newspaper, too: eyed it as she might have eyed a rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike. "Please let it go, Arthur," she said.

"Please let him go. The debts are paid, and more than paid. Let it go."

"I'll do what I have to do." McGregor didn't feel like quar-reling, but he knew what that would be.

So did Maude. "Let it go," she said again. "If you won't do it for my sake, do it for the sake of the children you have left."

That hurt. McGregor had to mask his feelings against his wife now, as he'd had to mask them so often against the outside world. When he answered, his voice was steady: "Ted Culligan will take care of Julia, I expect. Shall we ask Mary whether she wants to see George Custer go on breathing?"

Maude bit her lip. Like her husband, her younger daughter had never come close to reconciling herself to what the Ameri-cans had done to Canada or to Alexander. But Maude replied, "Shall we ask Mary whether she wants to see you go on breathing?"

"I'll be tine," McGregor answered easily.

His wife glared at him, her hands on her hips. "I don't see how."

"Well, I will," he said. He even meant it. The bomb he in-tended for Custer had been sitting under the old wagon wheel in the barn since not long after he'd learned the U.S. commander in Canada would

make a last gloating tour of the country he'd held down. With any kind of luck, McGregor thought he could make Custer pay and get away clean.

Instead of arguing any more, McGregor went out into the farmyard. He'd set a large, empty wooden keg in the middle of the yard, not far from the chopping block where hens spent their last unhappy moments on earth. A few feet away from the barrel lay a gray rock. He picked it up and hefted it.

It weighed the same as the bomb he'd made, within an ounce or two. He'd checked them both on Maude's kitchen scale, one night after she went to bed.

He paced off fifteen feet from the keg, tossing the rock up and down as he walked. If he stood at the back of the crowd watching General Custer, that was about how far away he'd be. He'd have no trouble seeing the general in his motorcar; he had several inches on most people. Custer's automobile wouldn't be mov-ing very fast. The U.S. commander wouldn't hold a parade if he didn't want people gaping at him.

McGregor threw the rock. It thudded down into the keg. He strode over, bent down to pick it up, then paced off fifteen feet again. His next throw thudded home, too. He'd been practicing for weeks, and had got to the point where he could drop it in about eight times out of ten. If he could do that with a small-mouthed keg, he'd have no trouble landing a bomb in Custer's motorcar.

He kept practicing for about twenty minutes, making sure each toss was slow and relaxed. He wouldn't need to hurry. He didn't want to hurry. When he finally threw the bomb, time would seem to stretch out, as if he had forever. He didn't want to do anything foolish like heaving too hard. He'd get only one chance. *Do it right,* he told himself. *You 've got to do it right.*

And then, as quietly and inconspicuously as he could, he'd slip away.

When the bomb went off, people wouldn't pay atten-tion to him. They'd pay attention to Custer's funeral pyre. With a little luck, nobody would notice he'd flung the nail-encased sticks of dynamite.

Maude watched him from the kitchen window. Her face was pale and set.

He'd never said a word about why he kept throwing a rock into a keg. She'd never asked him, either; that wasn't her way. But they'd been married a long time. Maude knew him well. She'd understand. He knew her well, too. She was no fool.

Her lips shaped a word the kitchen-window glass made silent. He could read her lips anyhow: "Please," she was saying. He pretended he didn't see her, and turned away. When he looked toward the farmhouse again, she wasn't standing at the window any more.

What if he didn't slip away? What if the Yanks caught him? They'd shoot him or hang him. He could figure that out for him-self. But Julia, married to Ted Culligan, would be all right. Maude had grit and to spare. She'd get by.

And Mary? She was his youngest, his chick, so of course he worried about her. But she was also his firebrand. She'd grieve for him. He wanted her to grieve for him. But she would understand why he had to do this. She would understand it better than Maude seemed able to do.

"Alexander," McGregor said. Were his son at his side, he might have accepted Yankee rule. Not now. Never again. "Not as long as I live," he said.

He went to the barn and did some chores—even though he'd been contemplating his own death, life had to go on in the mean-while. After a bit, he'd done everything that needed doing. He stayed out anyhow; if he went back to the farmhouse, he'd have another row with Maude. He knew he'd be having rows with Maude till Custer, like imperial Caesar, made his triumphal pro-cession through Rosenfeld. After that, one way or another, they'd end.

He looked forward to saying, */ told you so.*

When he finally went back inside, his wife wasn't in the kitchen, but the wonderful smell of baking bread filled it. McGregor smiled before he knew what he was doing. Life still held plea-sure for him. He didn't want to throw it away. But he was ready, if that turned out to be what he had to do.

In the parlor, he found Mary reading the copy of the *Register* he'd brought back from Rosenfeld. She looked up at him, her eyes enormous.

"He's coming here," she said. "He really is."

McGregor didn't have to ask who *he* was. He nodded. "He sure is," he answered.

"He shouldn't," Mary said. "He's got no business doing that. Even if they won the war, do they have to go and brag about it?" "That's how Yanks are,"

McGregor said. "They like to boast and show off." So it seemed by his self-effacing Canadian stan-dards, anyhow.

"They shouldn't," Mary said, as if stating a law of nature. "And *he* shouldn't have a parade through the middle of our town." Something sharp and brittle as broken glass glinted in her pale eyes. "Something ought to happen to him if he does."

She s my daughter, McGregor thought. *Flesh of my flesh, soul of my soul* He almost told her something just might happen to the famous Yank general, George Armstrong Custer. But no. Proud of her though he was, he kept his plans to himself. Custer might be a showy American. McGregor was no American, and glad not to be one. He held his secrets close.

"Something ought to happen to him," Mary repeated, looking straight at McGregor. She knew what he'd done over the years. She had to know even if he'd said far less to her and to Julia than to Maude. So she knew what she was saying now. She wanted Custer blown sky high.

"Your mother thinks there's nothing more to be done," McGregor said, to see how Mary would take that.

His daughter hissed like an angry cat. She said, "Till we're free again, there's always more to be done."

"Well, maybe so," McGregor answered, and said no more. He wondered if Mary knew how risky throwing a bomb at Custer's motorcar was. He couldn't ask her. He couldn't tell her, either. But he'd been right when he told Maude that Mary loved Custer as much as he did. Maybe he'd get to say */ told you so* twice.

Thoughtfully, Mary asked, "What would Alexander do now?"

"Why, he'd—" McGregor broke off. He realized he didn't know what his son would do. Alexander had always denied to the American authorities that he'd had anything to do with the kids who were sabotaging the railroad track. If that was so, the Yanks had shot him

for nothing—but he might agree with Maude when she said, *Enough is enough.* If, on the other hand, he'd been lying, he'd be all for trying to blow up Custer now—but the Americans would have had some reason for standing him against the wall.

The more McGregor thought about it, the more confused he got.

Mary wasn't confused; she had the clear, bright certainty of youth. "He'd want us to be free, too," she said, and her father nodded. That, no doubt, was true.

Day inexorably followed day. When McGregor took care to note time passing, it seemed to crawl on hands and knees. When he didn't note it, when he busied himself with farm chores as he had to do, it sped by.

Faster than he'd looked for it came the day when Custer would parade through Rosenfeld.

At breakfast that morning, Maude said, "Maybe we could all go into town and watch the show." Her smile pasted gaiety over stark fear.

McGregor paused with a bite of home-cured bacon halfway to his mouth.

Tonelessly, he said, "I don't think that would be a good idea."

"Why not?" Maude said, determined to force the issue. "It would be jolly."

She waited for Mary to clamor to be allowed to go into town, as she usually did. But Mary just sat, toying with her breakfast. She looked from her mother to her father and said not a word.

Into the silence, McGregor repeated, "I don't think that would be a good idea." He ate a couple more forkfuls of bacon and eggs, emptying his plate, then got to his feet. "I'm going out to the barn and hitch up the wagon. I don't want to be late, not today."

Mary nodded at that, not looking up at McGregor, still not saying a word.

Before McGregor could get out the door, Maude ran to him and took him in her arms. "Come home," she whis-pered fiercely.

"I intend to," McGregor answered, which was true. He disen-tangled

himself from his wife and went to the door.

The day was mild, not too warm, so the coat with big pockets he wore wouldn't particularly stand out. His one worry was that the U.S. Army might have set up security checkpoints around Rosenfeld, as the Yanks had done during the Great War. He'd built a false bottom to his seat to leave a space in which he could conceal the bomb, but he didn't want to have to rely on it, and it would make life more difficult even if it worked. But the Ameri-cans seemed sure all their Canadian subjects were cowed. He had no trouble getting into Rosenfeld.

He hitched the wagon on a side street well away from the post office and general store; he didn't want Wilf Rokeby or Henry Gibbon spotting him, not today. Then he casually took a place from which he'd be able to see the parade. Before long, people started filling the space in front of him. He didn't mind. He could still see well enough.

Custer's train pulled into Rosenfeld right on time and started disgorging all the trappings of the U.S. commandant's triumphal procession: soldiers, a marching band, and the Packard limou-sine McGregor had seen up in Winnipeg.

And here came the band, blaring out "The Star-Spangled Ban-ner."

Some people were shameless enough to cheer. McGregor's hand went into his pocket. He took out the bomb and held it by his side. No one noticed. He pulled out a match, too, and palmed it.

Here came the limousine behind the band, a gaudily uniformed Custer standing in it to receive the plaudits of the crowd. Nearer, nearer ... Custer's eyes went wide—he recognized McGregor. McGregor smiled back at him.

He hadn't expected this, but it only made things sweeter. He scraped the match on the sole of his shoe and touched it to the bomb's fuse. Smiling still, McGregor threw the bomb. All that practice paid off. The throw, straight for Custer, was perfect.

Down the track toward Rosenfeld rattled the train. In his fancy Pullman car, General George Armstrong Custer whipped a long-barreled Colt revolver out of his holster and pointed it not quite far enough away from Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling.

"Sir, will you please put that . .. thing away?" his adjutant asked. Dowling commended himself for not modifying *thing* with a pungent

adjective, or perhaps even a participle. The pis-tol, he knew, was loaded. Fortunately, the retiring U.S. comman-dant in Canada wasn't.

With a grunt, Custer did set the revolver back in the holster, only to yank it out again a moment later. This time, he did point it at Dowling. His adjutant yelped. "Don't you turn into an old woman on me," Custer said peevishly.

"You never know when an assassin may strike."

Dowling couldn't even tell him that was nonsense, not after the bomb in Winnipeg the summer before, and especially not after Wade Hampton V

had been gunned down only a couple of months earlier. Custer's adjutant did say, "I think you'll be safe enough in a sleepy little town like Rosenfeld, sir."

"Oh, you do, do you?" Custer sneered. "Have you forgotten that blackguard Arthur McGregor makes his home just outside this sleepy little town?"

As a matter of fact, Dowling had forgotten that till Custer re-minded him of it. "Sir," Dowling answered, taking a firm grip on his patience, "there really is no evidence this McGregor is a blackguard, or anything but a farmer. The experts are all con-vinced he's an innocent man "

"Experts?" Custer rolled his rheumy eyes. "The experts were all convinced we should use barrels by dribs and drabs, too. What the devil do experts know, except how to impress other ex-perts?" He holstered the revolver again, then took out the report the experts had compiled on Arthur McGregor and flipped through it till he found a photograph of the man.

"Here!" He thrust it at Dowling. "If this isn't the face of a villain, what is it?"

Relieved that that miserable pistol wasn't aimed at his brisket any more, Dowling studied the photograph of McGregor for the first time in several months. He reached the same conclusion now as he had then. "Sir, he just looks like a farmer to me."

"Bah!" Custer snatched back the report. "All I can say is, you are no judge of the imprint character makes on physiognomy."

All I can say is, you 're an old fraud starting at shadows, Dowl-ing

thought. And he couldn't even say that, not really. Pretty soon, Custer would at last officially step down as the longest-serving soldier in the history of the U.S. Army. And then, perhaps, just perhaps, Abner Dowling would get an assignment where he could use his talents as something other than a nursemaid.

Iron wheels squealed against iron rails as the train began to slow outside of Rosenfeld. Custer pulled out the revolver yet again. He had the fastest draw Dowling had ever seen in an eighty-two-year-old man. Since he was the only eighty-two-year-old man Dowling had ever seen draw a pistol, that proved less than the tubby lieutenant colonel might have liked.

Dowling was convinced that, were an assassin lurking in Rosenfeld, Custer was unlikely to hit him with a pistol shot. The retiring general had a far better chance of nailing an innocent bystander or two, or himself, or Dowling. He had a better chance still of forgetting he wore the revolver. But, since no assassin would be lurking, Dowling didn't have to worry about any of that. .. too much.

Libbie Custer ignored them both. She lay in her Pullman berth, gently snoring. She was down with a bad cold, or maybe the grippe. Combined with the medicine she'd taken for it—like most such nostrums, almost as potent as brandy—the sickness had knocked her for a loop. She would not be parading today.

And now, evidently, Custer had done all the practicing he in-tended to do.

After putting the pistol back into the holster, he clapped on a black felt cocked hat gleaming with gold braid, ad-justed it to a jaunty angle with the help of the mirror atop the walnut sideboard, and then turned back to Dowling to ask, "How do I look?"

"Magnificent," his adjutant answered. Custer was a spectacle, no two ways about it. He'd always worn a uniform as splendid as regulations allowed, and then a little more besides. Now that no one could possibly criticize him for his outfits, he'd stopped even pretending to pay attention to the regulations. He looked some-thing like a South American emperor, something like God on a particularly tasteless afternoon. Dowling found another fancy word: "Refulgent, sir"

"Thank you very much," Custer said, even though Dowling hadn't meant it altogether as a compliment. Dowling glanced out the Pullman car's window.

The sun was going in and out be-hind clouds. With a little luck, the medals and gold cords on Cus-ter's tunic and the gold stripes down each trouser leg wouldn't blind too many of the spectators.

The train pulled into the Rosenfeld station. By this time, the people who formed Custer's procession worked together as smoothly as circus acrobats, and a good deal more smoothly than most of the forces under his command had done during the Great War. "Here comes your motorcar, sir," Dowling said as the limousine descended from the flatcar on which it rode.

"And about time, too," Custer said—nothing ever satisfied him. He looked around. "What a miserable excuse for a town this is. The only reason I can think of for scheduling a parade through it is that it is on the railroad line."

"Do you want to cancel the parade and go on, sir?" Dowling asked. If Custer did that, he'd stop worrying about the bomber who, his adjutant remained sure, was a bomber only in the re-tiring general's mind.

Custer's mind was certainly full of the fellow. "And let McGregor think he's frightened me away?" he demanded haugh-tily. "Never!" He looked around again. "We stopped here once before, didn't we? On the way up to Winnipeg, I mean. We drove through the streets then, too, and almost ran over some yahoo who'd probably never seen a motorcar before in his life."

"Why, so we did, sir." Dowling had forgotten that. Custer was an old man, but his memory hadn't slipped. He still vividly re-called slights he'd suffered during the War of Secession, and had never forgotten his quarrels with Teddy Roosevelt during the Second Mexican War—even if TR didn't remember things the way he did.

"I thought as much." Now Custer sounded complacent. He knew his memory still worked, and delighted in showing off. He pulled from a trouser pocket that photograph of Arthur McGregor, which he'd removed from the report. "And if we run into this fellow, I'll be ready, by thunder."

To Dowling's relief, he didn't demonstrate his fast draw. By then, the members of the marching band were forming up in front of the Packard limousine. They wore uniforms far more or-nate and colorful than those of the platoon of ordinary soldiers who were taking their places behind the automobile, but were moons beside the sun

compared to Custer.

"One good thing," Custer said as his chauffeur got out of the Packard and opened the door so he and Dowling could go up into the back seat: "at least this will be a short procession. Then I'll be able to get back to Libbie."

He really did love her, Dowling realized with some reluc-tance. He wasn't always faithful to her—or, at least, he did his best to be unfaithful when he saw the chance—but she mattered to him. After almost sixty years of marriage, Dowling supposed that was inevitable.

Dowling sat in the motorcar. Custer stood erect and proud. "Are we ready, Captain?" he called to the bandleader.

"Let me see, sir." The young officer checked his watch. "It still lacks a couple of minutes of one, sir."

"Very well," Custer said. "Commence precisely on the hour. Let the people know they can expect absolute certainty from the rule of the United States."

Absolute certainty Custer had— *enough for a regiment, let alone one man,* his adjutant thought. Sometimes that had led to great disasters.

Sometimes it had led to great triumphs. It always made the retiring general hard to deal with.

At one on the dot—or so Dowling assumed, for he did not take his own watch out of his pocket—the bandleader raised his hands. The musicians in his charge struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner." They began to march.

The chauffeur put the limousine in low gear and followed them. Custer's honor guard, in turn, followed the automobile.

Rosenfeld might not have been a big city, but people lined both sides of the short, narrow main street to get a good look at General Custer. Some of them applauded the band. That didn't happen in every Canadian town; sometimes spectators received the U.S. national anthem in stony silence.

Here, though, most of the men and women seemed to accept that they had been conquered and that the United States were here to stay. Dowling saw smiles, he saw waves.. . and then, be-side him, he saw Custer stiffen.

"There!" Custer said, his eyes wide. "Right there. That's McGregor!"

Dowling's head swung to the right. He had a brief moment to recognize the Canadian, an even briefer moment to think that, even if McGregor was here, it meant nothing—and then the Canuck threw something in the direction of the motorcar. *How embarrassing*—he was sure it was his last thought— *the old boy was right all along.*

Custer didn't whip out his pistol, as he'd been practicing. The bomb—Dowling saw the sizzling fuse—flew straight toward him. He caught it as a U.S. footballer might have caught a for-ward pass, then underhanded it back the way it had come.

Very clearly, Dowling saw the astonishment on Arthur McGregor's face.

He lacked the time to feel any astonishment of his own. The bomb landed at McGregor's feet and blew up.

Dowling felt a sudden, sharp pain in his left arm. He looked down and discovered he had a torn sleeve and was bleeding.

So was Custer, from a wound on the outside of his thigh. If he noticed the injury, he gave no sign of it. "Stop the car!" he shouted to the chauffeur, and then, to the soldiers behind him, "See to the wounded." Now he drew his revolver. "And you and I, Dowling, we shall see to Mr. Arthur McGregor."

"I think, sir, you may have done that already." Dowling was astonished at how steady he sounded. He squeezed the fingers of his left hand. They worked. Like Custer, he'd taken only a minor wound. The men and women standing between McGregor and the motorcar had borne the brunt of the bomb and shielded the Americans from the worst.

Some of those people were down and screaming and thrash-ing, blood pouring from them. Blood poured from others, too, men and women who would not get up again. And there, flung against a wall like a bundle of rags, lay Arthur McGregor. His eyes were set and staring, his belly and groin a shredded, gory mass. Custer thrust the pistol back into his holster. "I don't need this—he did it to himself."

"No, sir." Abner Dowling spoke more humbly than he ever had in his life.

"You did it to him. You were ready for anything."

Custer shrugged. "He cut his fuse just a bit too long— otherwise, we'd look like that now." His tone was one of dispas-sionate criticism of another man's work. "He had a good run, but no one man can lick the United States of America. Sooner or later, his luck had to give out. And I've paid Tom back, too, by God—in person."

"Yes, sir." Dowling said what needed saying: "How does it feel to be a hero—again?"

Custer drew himself up as straight as he had stood in the limousine. The dramatic pose he struck came straight out of the nineteenth century.

"Dowling, it feels bully!"

Summer in Ontario wouldn't last much longer. Jonathan Moss knew that very well. Before long, the idea of sitting out on the grass with an attractive woman would have been an absurdity. Better, then, to enjoy such times while they lasted and not to worry about the snow surely only weeks away.

Laura Secord didn't make that easy. In all the time he'd known her, Laura Secord had never made anything easy. Now she said, "I wish that brave man had managed to blow your famous Gen-eral Custer higher than the moon."

"I don't suppose I should be surprised," Moss answered. "If you want to know what I think, though, somebody who hides bombs or throws them and doesn't care if he kills innocent by-standers isn't much of a hero. Pass me that plate of deviled eggs, will you? They're good."

"I'm glad you like them." But, after she'd passed him the eggs, she returned to the argument: "I think anyone who keeps up the struggle against impossible odds is a hero."

"If the odds are impossible, anyone who keeps up the struggle against them is a fool," Moss returned.

"Canada still has a few fools left," Laura Secord said. She leaned forward and picked up a deviled egg herself.

"One fewer now." Law school and his practice had sharpened Moss' wits and made his comebacks quicker than when he'd been here as a pilot.

"We won't just turn into pale copies of Americans and of the United States," Laura said. "We *won't."*

Moss nodded. "That's easy enough to say. I don't know how easy it will be to do. The fellow who threw the bomb at General Custer thought the same way you do. Now he's dead. There's no revolution up here. And you're feeding a Yank a picnic lunch. Have I told you that you make really good pickles?"

She glared at him. "If you keep going on like this, I won't ask you to come back."

"I'm still not sure I should be coming up here at all," Moss an-swered.

"For me, coming to picnics with you is what going to an opium den is for somebody who can't shake the poppy." He spoke lightly, which didn't mean he wasn't telling the truth.

Laura Secord raised an eyebrow. "Is that a compliment or an insult?"

"Probably," he answered, which startled a laugh out of her. Maybe he would have done better to stay down in Berlin and meet some nice girl there. But he hadn't met any girls there—or women, either, as Laura was unquestionably a woman—who'd struck his fancy. And so, still with the fragments of what was, without a doubt, an obsession left over from the Great War, he'd started driving up to Arthur. He didn't know what would come of this. He didn't know if he wanted anything to come of it.

She waved her hand, a wave encompassing the farm she'd stubbornly kept going on her own. "I don't know whether I ought to be inviting you here, either," she said, her voice troubled. "It feels a lot like giving aid and comfort to the enemy. But you were the one who aided me, after all." Was she trying to convince her-self, as Moss tried to convince himself coming here was all right?

He said, "I don't know about aid, but I'm certainly com-forted." He lay back on the grass. A couple of cows grazing twenty or thirty yards away looked at him with their large, dark eyes, then went back to their own lunches. He thumped his belly to show how comforted he was. The waist of his trousers felt pleasantly tight.

"I'm glad of that." Laura reached for a pewter pitcher. "More tea?"

"All right," Moss answered. "One thing I will say for tea: it makes a better cold drink than coffee does."

"It makes a better hot drink than coffee does, too," she said. Moss shrugged. She made as if to pour the pitcher over his head before filling his tumbler. "You Yanks have no taste."

"I suppose not," he said, watching puffy white clouds drift across the blue sky. The weather wouldn't stay good that much longer. He thought about how bad it could get. That made him smile, and then laugh.

"And what's so funny?" Laura Secord asked. "That you Yanks have no taste?"

"As a matter of fact, yes." He sat up and sipped at the tea she'd given him. "I was just thinking about the snowstorm I drove through three years ago to come up here and visit you. If that doesn't prove I've got no taste, I don't know what would."

She made a face at him. "The only thing it proves is that you're mad. I'd already had a pretty fair notion of that from the way you behaved during the war."

"Mad about you," he said, which made her blush and look down at the grass.

Jonathan

Moss

knew—had

known

for

years—that

was

metaphorically true. He'd also wondered a good many times if it was literally true, in the alienist's use of the word *mad.*

"My mad Yank." Laura Secord spoke with a curious mixture of affection and bemusement. "Till you stood up for that poor fellow done out of his property—done out of the property where you had your office—I didn't think I should ever want to see you again."

Maybe it would have been just as well for both of us if you hadn %

Moss thought. Here he was, when he would have been al-most anywhere else with almost anyone else. All his friends from down in Chicago—a lot of his friends from down in Berlin—would have called him a fool. He called himself a fool a lot of the time. He kept coming back here.

"Would you like anything else here?" Laura Secord asked him. He finished the glass of tea she'd given him, then shook his head. "All right,"

she said, and started loading things back into the picnic hamper. As he always did when he came up to her farm, he tried to help. As she always did, she refused to let him. "You'll just make a hash of things."

"Roast-beef hash, by choice," Moss said.

With a snort, Laura got to her feet. Moss stood up, too. As she always did, she consented that he carry the hamper back to the farmhouse. She rubbed that in, too: "I really would have no trouble with it, you know. It's not nearly as heavy as a bale of hay, and I haul those all the time."

"Well, up till you said that, I did feel useful," Moss confessed. "But don't worry about it—you've cured me."

She muttered something under her breath. Moss thought it was *Mad Yank* again, but couldn't be sure. She hurried on ahead of him and opened the kitchen door. He set the picnic basket on the counter next to the tin sink, which was full of water. She put the dirty dishes and bowls and glasses in the water, saying with her back to him, "They'll be frightful to clean if I let them dry."

"All right," he answered; that was also part of her routine.

When the picnic basket was empty, she turned and took a step toward him. He took a step toward her, too, which brought him close enough to put his arms around her. She was reaching for him, too, her face tilted up, her mouth waiting for his.

The first time that had happened, he'd taken her right there on the kitchen floor. They'd both been mad then. He was sure he'd hurt her, ramming home like a pile driver, again and again. She hadn't acted as if it hurt, though. She'd clawed his back to rib-bons and yowled like a cat on a back fence and finally screamed out his name loud enough to rattle the windows.

She'd gone without for a long time, and had done her best to make up for it all at once.

They weren't quite so frantic now, but they were hurrying when they went to her bedroom, hurrying when they undressed, hurrying when they lay down together. His hand closed on her breast. He teased her nipple with his thumb and forefinger. She sighed and pulled his head down to follow his fingers. Her breath sighed out. "Oh, Jonathan," she whispered.

She took him in hand, more roughly than any other woman he'd ever known. "Careful there," he gasped, both because he was afraid she'd hurt him and because he'd spurt his seed out onto her breasts and belly if she didn't ease up.

His own hand slid down to the joining of her legs. She was al-ready wet and wanton, waiting for him. A few picnics hadn't come close to fully sating her, not when she hadn't seen her hus-band since early in the war. He wondered what he would have been like after abstaining for so long. He couldn't imagine. He couldn't come close. He knew women were different, but even so. ..

She pulled him over onto her. It wasn't the wild bucking and plunging of the first time they'd joined, but it was a long way from calm and sedate and gentle. She bit his shoulder hard enough to make him yelp. His hands dug into her backside, shoving her up as he thrust down. She wrapped her legs around him and did her best to squeeze him breathless.

She squeezed him inside her, too. He groaned and gasped and spent himself at the same instant as she cried out, wordlessly this time. "My God,"

he said, like a man waking from the delirium of the Spanish influenza. And he had been in a delirium, though one far more pleasant than the influenza brought.

Laura Secord's face was still slack with pleasure; a pink flush mottled her breasts. She shook her head, as if she too were re-turning to herself.

"Which of us is going to the opium den?" she murmured. Before Moss could answer—if, indeed, he'd been able to find anything to say—she got out of bed and squatted over the chamber pot. A doctor friend of Moss'

had once told him getting rid of the stuff like that did only a little good, be-cause a woman couldn't get rid of all of it, but he supposed—he hoped—it was better than nothing.

Once that was done, she turned modest again, and dressed quickly and with her back to him. He got into his own clothes. "I'd better head back down to Berlin," he said.

"Empire, you mean," Laura Secord told him.

Moss laughed. They disagreed on so many things . . . but when their bodies joined, it wasn't sparks flying, it was thunder and lightning. He'd never known nor imagined anything like it. "I still say it's Berlin, and so does everybody else," he answered, "and if you don't like that, you can let me know about it, and maybe I'll come up here and argue about it."

"Would you like to come up here and argue about it next Sunday?" she asked. "You never can tell when the weather in these parts will change, but it should still be good then."

"Next Sunday?" Moss said. "I can do that." His pulse quick-ened at the thought of it. "As a matter of fact, I can hardly wait."

As the clock in Jeremiah Harmon's drugstore chimed six, Reg-gie Bartlett put on his coat and hat. "Where's the fire?" the drug-gist asked him. "Are you going to leave before you get paid?"

"Not likely, boss," Reggie answered. "My wallet's been whim-pering at me for the last couple of days. Thank heaven it's finally Friday."

"Well, I've got the prescription a whimpering wallet needs," Harmon said.

"Here you are, Reggie." He counted out bank-notes, then added a coin.

"One week's pay: seventeen dollars and fifty cents."

"Thank you." Bartlett put the notes in his wallet and the coin— he saw it was dated 1909—in his pocket. "And do you know what, boss? I'm happier, I'm a hell of a lot happier, to get this than I was when you paid me millions and millions every week a couple of months ago "

"Of course you are—you're a sensible fellow," Harmon said. "When I paid you millions and millions, three days after you got them they'd

be worth even less than they were when I gave them to you. Seventeen-fifty's not a whole lot of money, Lord knows, but it'll still be worth seventeen-fifty next Friday."

"I hope it will, anyhow," Reggie said. "I don't think I'm ready to put any of it in the bank just yet, though. A lot of people who put money in the banks got wiped out after the war."

"And isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" his boss said. "I was lucky, as these things go: I got mine out while it was still worth something, anyhow, and I spent it on whatever I needed then, and ever since I've been living week to week and hand to mouth like everyone else."

"I never had enough in the bank to worry too much about what I lost,"

Reggie said. "If I can keep my head above water for a little while now . . ."

The new money had been in circulation for six weeks, and was still holding its value against the U.S. dollar and the German mark. Maybe it would go on doing that.

"What do you think of President Burton Mitchel these days?" Harmon asked slyly. "Don't you wish you'd voted Whig in the election last fall?"

"Long as I didn't vote for Jake Featherston, who I did vote for doesn't matter a hell of a lot," Bartlett answered. "And Mitchel's had nothing but good luck since he got the job."

"I wouldn't say the way he got it was good luck," Harmon ob-served, his voice dry.

"Not for Wade Hampton V, that's for sure," Reggie agreed. "But good luck for the country? I reckon it is. Those wild men in the Freedom Party even got the damnyankees to feel sorry for us when they shot Hampton.

Now that we aren't sending every dime in the country up to the USA, all the real money that's been hiding can come out again." He reached into his pocket. He hadn't had a half dollar in there for years. "And besides, Mitchel's got Congress eating out of the palm of his hand. Whatever he wants, they give him. Even the Freedom Party Congressmen have quit arguing with him."

"Maybe it's the sign of a guilty conscience, though I wouldn't have bet they were possessed of any such equipment," Harmon said. "I don't

know how long the honeymoon will last, but Mitchel's making the most of it."

"Anything that makes the Freedom Party shut up is good in my book."

Reggie touched a finger to the brim of his hat. With September heading into October, he'd traded in his flat-crowned straw for a fedora. "I'll see you tomorrow morning for my half-day."

"Good night, Reggie," Harmon told him.

Bartlett left the drugstore. Light was draining out of the sky. At this season of the year, nightfall came earlier, perceptibly ear-lier, every day. Street lamps threw little puddles of light down at the feet of the poles they surmounted. With dusk, people hurried wherever they were going, wanting to get there before full dark-ness if they could.

A man Reggie recognized passed him under one of those street lamps.

The fellow came into Harmon's drugstore every so often, and was an outspoken Freedom Party backer. Reggie didn't know whether he was a Freedom Party goon, but he looked as if he might have been.

To stay on the safe side, Reggie stuck his hand in the pocket in which he still carried a pistol. The Freedom Party man knew he didn't have any use for Jake Featherston. If the fellow also knew he'd been the one who helped aim Tom Brearley at Roger Kim-ball, all sorts of fireworks might go off.

Whatever the Freedom Party man knew, he kept walking. His head was down, his face somber and, Reggie thought, a little confiised. Was he looking for the certainty he'd known before Grady Calkins shot the president of the Confederate States, the certainty that Jake Featherston was on the way up and he himself would rise with his leader from whatever miserable job he held now? If he was, he wouldn't find it on the dark, dirty sidewalks of Richmond.

Posters on a board fence shouted HANG FEATHERSTON HIGHER

THAN HAMAN! in big letters. Underneath, in much smaller type, they added, *Radical Liberal Party of the Confederate States.* They'd gone up less than a week after Wade Hampton V got shot, and no one, not even the men of the Freedom Party, had had the nerve to deface them or tear them down. Even the goons in white and butternut might have known some shame at being goons.

Back at his flat, Reggie took a chunk of leftover fried chicken out of the icebox and ate it cold with a couple of slices of bread and a bottle of beer to wash everything down. It was, he knew, a lazy man's supper, but he figured he had the right to be lazy once in a while if he felt like it.

After washing the dishes, he took out the new banknotes he'd got and looked at them. The one-dollar notes bore the image of Jefferson Davis, the five-dollar notes that of Stonewall Jackson: no doubt to remind people of the Stonewall, the five-dollar gold-piece hardly seen since the end of the war. Maybe, now that specie wasn't flowing out of the CSA as reparations, the govern-ment would start minting Stonewalls again.

Reggie walked into the bedroom and got out a banknote he'd kept from the last days before the currency reform: a $1,000,000,000 banknote. It might have been the equivalent of twenty-five or thirty cents of real money.

It showed Jeb Stuart licking the Yan-kees during the Second Mexican War, and was every bit as well printed as the new banknotes, even if all the zeros necessarily made the design look crowded.

"A billion dollars," Reggie said softly. If only it had been worth more than a supper at a greasy spoon or a couple of shots of whiskey at a saloon with sawdust on the floor. But it hadn't; it was nothing more than a symbol of a whole country busy going down the drain. Reggie set it on the table by the sofa. "If I ever have kids," he said, "I'll show this to them. Maybe it will help them understand how hard times were after the war."

He shook his head. They wouldn't understand no matter what, any more than they would understand what life in the trenches was like. Experience brought understanding. Nothing else came close.

When he got to work the next morning, he glanced affection-ately at the cash register. All of a sudden, its keys corresponded to prices once more.

He didn't mentally have to multiply by thousands or millions or billions any more.

A customer came in and bought some aspirins. "That'll be fif-teen cents,"

Bartlett said. The man pulled from his pocket a $1,000,000,000 banknote like the one Reggie had contemplated the night before. Reggie shook his head. "I'm sorry, sir, but I can't take this."

"Why not?" the man said. "It's still worth more'n fifteen cents, I reckon."

"Yes, sir," Bartlett said, "but all these old banknotes have been—what's the word?—demonetized, that's it. You can't spend 'em for anything.

Suppose you took one to a bank and tried to get a billion real dollars for it?"

"I wouldn't do that," the fellow said. He no doubt meant it: he was just a petty chiseler, not a big one. There couldn't be any-body in the Confederate States who didn't know you couldn't use the old money any more, not even for small purchases. Grumbling, the customer put the preposterously inflated bank-note back in his pocket and handed Reggie a real dollar instead.

Reggie rang up the sale and then anxiously checked the till; coins were coming back into circulation more slowly than notes. But he was able to make change, even if he had to use ten pennies to do it. "Here you are, sir."

"Thanks." The man put the little flat tin of tablets in his pocket along with the change. Jingling, he turned away. "See you again sometime. Freedom!"

No one had said that to Reggie for quite a while. He would happily have gone another fifty or a hundred years without hear-ing it again, too. He had to make himself hold still and not go after the customer to beat hell out of him. "Freedom to butcher anybody you don't like, you mean," he ground out, "even if it's the president of the CSA."

He waited for the man to come back hotly at him, whether with words or with fists. That was the Freedom Party's style, and had been since its beginnings in the black days after the war. But the man only tucked his chin down against his chest, as if he were walking into a cold, rainy wind, and hurried out of the drugstore.

At the back of the store, Jeremiah Harmon coughed. "Yeah, I know, boss: I'm not supposed to do things like that," Bartlett said. "I know it's bad for business. But when those white-and-butternut boys come in, I see red. I can't help it. And this one had his nerve, going' Freedom!' after what that Grady Calkins son of a bitch went and did."

"I didn't say anything, Reggie," Harmon answered. "As a mat-ter of fact, I think I'm coming down with a cold." He coughed again. "I don't like to lose business, mind you, but I don't seek business from imbeciles, either. And any man who will call out 'Freedom!' with President Hampton still new in his grave is ei-ther an imbecile or whatever's one step down from there."

"A half-witted cur dog—a son of a bitch, like I said," Reggie suggested.

"It could be so," his boss said.

"When I was in the hospital after the damnyankees shot me and caught me, one of the other people in there was one of our nigger soldiers who'd lost a foot," Reggie said. "You ask me, he had more brains in that missing foot than the whole Freedom Party does in all its heads." He wondered how Rehoboam was doing down in Mississippi. Even if the black man had been a Red, he'd been a pretty good fellow, too.

Harmon chuckled. "Something to that, I shouldn't wonder. But now, if God is kind to us, the Freedom Party dealt itself a blow no one else could have given it, and one it won't get over."

"Amen," Reggie said with all his heart.

Cincinnatus Driver worked like a man possessed, unloading a truckload of filing cabinets he'd brought from the Des Moines railroad yards to the State Capitol on the other side of the river. It was, he admitted to himself, easier to work hard in Iowa in No-vember than it had been in Kentucky in, say, July. But he would have put extra effort into things today even if it had been hotter and muggier than Kentucky ever got.

He finished faster than anyone would have imagined he could. Instead of racing back to the yard to see what other hauling work he could pick up—which was what he usually did when he fin-ished a job—he used the time he'd saved to hurry back to the near northwest, to an Odd Fellows hall not far from his flat. He parked the truck on the street and hurried inside.

Four white men sat behind a long table in the middle of the hall. "Let me have your name, please, and your street address," the one at the end nearest Cincinnatus said to him.

He gave the fellow his particulars. The second man behind the table

checked a list. Cincinnatus had a moment's fear his name would not appear there. But the gray-haired white man ticked it off and pointed to a register in front of him. "If you'll just sign here, Mr. Driver," he said.

"I surely will, suh." Cincinnatus grinned from ear to ear. White men didn't call Negroes *mister* down in Kentucky. They didn't always do it here, either, but he liked it better every time he heard it. He wrote his name in a fine round hand.

The third man at the table handed him a folded sheet of paper. "Choose any voting booth you please, Mr. Driver," he said.

"Yes, suh. Thank you kindly, suh," Cincinnatus said, and then, because he couldn't hold it in any more, "You know some-thin', suh? This here is the first time in my whole life I ever got to vote. Used to live in Kentucky, and I never reckoned I'd get me the chance."

"Well, you've got it," the polling official said. "I'm glad it means something to you, and I hope you use it wisely."

"Thank you," Cincinnatus said. He went to a voting booth—it was before the dinner hour, and he had plenty from which to choose—and pulled the curtain shut after himself. Then he un-folded the ballot, inked the little X-stamper in the booth with great care, and began to vote.

He voted for Democrats for Congress, for the State House of Representatives, and for the State Senate. That would, no doubt, have startled Luther Bliss; the boss of the Kentucky State Police had been convinced he was a Red. Apicius—Apicius Wood, now—had known better.

A Red himself, Apicius could tell Cin-cinnatus wasn't. . . quite.

Cincinnatus finished marking the ballot, folded it again, and left the voting booth. He handed the folded sheet of paper to the fourth white man at the table. That worthy pushed it through the slot of the locked ballot box beside him. "Mr. Driver has voted," he said in a loud voice.

Mr. Driver has voted. As far as Cincinnatus was concerned, the words might have been accompanied by music from a march-ing band: they sounded in horns and drums in his ears. He felt ten feet tall as he strode out to the old Duryea truck, and mar-veled that he still fit inside the cab. But he did, and, having voted, he went off to eat a quick dinner and hunt up more work.

He was still eating on a bench down by the train tracks when Joe Sims sat beside him. "Why are you grinnin' like a fool?" the older black man asked.

"You look like you just tore off a piece your wife doesn't know about."

"I'm happy," Cincinnatus said, "but I ain't happy like that. I went down and voted—first time ever—is what I did."

Sims scratched his head. "I was happy when I voted the first time, too. It meant I was twenty-one. It meant I could buy whis-key, too, back when whiskey was still legal here. But I can't rec-ollect looking like I just tripped over a steamer trunk full of double eagles because I made some X's."

Cincinnatus studied the other Negro, who hadn't the faintest idea how much he took for granted. "You was born here," Cincinnatus said at last.

Sims nodded. Cincinnatus went on, "You knew from the time you was a little fellow you'd be able to vote when you got big."

"Well, sure I did," Joe Sims said, and then, belatedly, got the point.

"Wasn't like that for you, was it?"

"Not hardly." Cincinnatus' voice was dry. "My ma and pa was slaves up till a few years before I was born. Before the USA took Kentucky away from the CSA, wasn't a legal school for niggers in the whole state. I learned my letters anyways, but I was lucky. I wasn't a citizen of the CSA; I was just somebody who lived there, and all the white folks told me what to do. Now, when I vote, I get to tell white folks what to do, and it ain't even against the law. Anybody reckons I ain't wild about that, he's crazy."

Sims took a big bite out of his sandwich. It wasn't ham, but a pungent sausage Cincinnatus hadn't seen much in Covington. Salami, people called it; it was pretty good. After chewing and swallowing, Sims said, "The stories you tell remind me of the ones I heard from my grandpa when I was growing up. I always thought he was making things out to be worse than they really were."

"Only reason you reckoned that is on account of you was born here,"

Cincinnatus said. "Nobody could make it out to be worse than it was—and it wasn't even so bad in Covington, because we was right across

the river from Ohio. But it was bad there, and it got worse the further south you went."

"It ain't so good here, either," Sims said.

Negroes in Des Moines—Negroes in the USA generally— were fond of saying that. They weren't even wrong; Cincinnatus had seen as much.

Nevertheless... "You don't know what you're talkin' about," Cincinnatus said.

"Get down on your knees and praise the Lord on account of you don't, too.

I seen both sides now. This here may not be heaven, but it ain't hell, neither."

"Yeah, you say that every chance you get." Sims breathed pepper and garlic into Cincinnatus' face. "I can't argue with you. I never set foot inside the Confederate States. I do admit, I never heard of any colored fellow leaving the USA to go there."

"It would happen," Cincinnatus said. "About every other year, it would happen. The papers in the CSA would always bang the drum about it, too, to make the niggers there—and the white folks, heaven knows—happy about how things was."

"Happy." Joe Sims chewed on the word as he'd chewed on his salami.

"How could you be happy, when you knew you were ly-ing to each other down there?"

That was a better question than most of the ones about the Confederate States Cincinnatus heard up here. He had to think before he answered,

"Well, the white folks were happy 'cause they were on top. And us niggers?

We *were* happy some of the time. I don't reckon you can get through life without bein' happy some of the time." Cincinnatus crammed the rest of his own sandwich into his mouth. Indistinctly, he said, "Let's see what they got for us to do. With a new young-un in the house any day now, I got to keep busy."

"Got to stay out of there to get some rest once the baby comes," Sims

said with a reminiscent chuckle. "I know all about that, damned if I don't.

What are you and your missus going to call the kid?"

"Seneca if it's a boy—that's my pa's name," Cincinnatus said. "And Elizabeth's ma was called Amanda, so we'll name the baby thatifit'sagirl."

"Those are good names." Sims shut his dinner pail and got to his feet.

"Like you say, we have to keep busy. We don't, every-body goes hungry."

Cincinnatus found enough work to put money in his pocket all through the afternoon. He went back to his apartment well pleased with himself.

Elizabeth greeted him at the door with a kiss. "Did you vote?" she demanded. "Did you really and truly vote?" She wouldn't get her chance till the 1924 election, for Iowa women had only presidential suffrage.

"I really and truly voted," Cincinnatus said, and his wife's eyes shone. Joe Sims might not understand what the franchise meant to him, but Elizabeth did. She waddled back toward the kitchen, her legs so wide apart, the baby she carried might almost have fallen out between them.

Achilles was doing homework at the kitchen table. He had a sheet of paper turned upside down in front of him: his spelling words, which he was supposed to be committing to memory. "Orange," he said. "O-R-A-N-G-E.

Orange."

"That's good, son." Cincinnatus made as if to clap his hands together.

"The better you spell, the smarter folks'll reckon you are. I don't spell near as good as I wish I did, but I know you got that one right."

"It ain't... It's not"—Achilles carefully corrected himself— "that hard once you get the hang of it."

"You won't get any wrong on your test, then, will you?" Cin-cinnatus said.

"Hardly ever do," his son replied. Had that not been the truth, Cincinnatus would have clouted him for his uppity mouth. But Achilles was doing very well in school, which made Cincinnatus proud. The boy's eyes went far away. "Month. M-O-N-T-H. Month."

"Supper," Elizabeth announced. "I ain't gwine try an' spell it, but I done cooked it an' it's ready."

"Smells good," Cincinnatus said. It tasted good, too: roast beef with buttery mashed potatoes and greens on the side. "Turnip greens, ain't they?" Cincinnatus asked, lifting another forkful to his mouth.

"That's right," Elizabeth said. "Can't hardly get no other kind round these parts. Even black folks don't hardly seem to know about collard greens, an'

they're better'n turnip greens any day of the week." She paused, looked down at her swollen belly, and laughed. "Babyjustkickme."

"Pretty soon, the baby will be kicking Achilles," Cincinnatus said. He and Elizabeth both laughed then, at their son's expres-sion. Having a new brother or sister still didn't seem real to Achilles. It would before long.

Elizabeth returned to the earlier subject: "Wish I had me a mess o'

collard greens. You'd reckon everybody in the whole world'd know about collard greens, but it ain't so."

"Turnip greens are fine," Cincinnatus said. Elizabeth shook her head, stubbornly unconvinced. He reached out and patted her hand. "Life ain't perfect, sweetheart, but it's pretty good right now."

Where simple praise hadn't, that reached her. Slowly, she nodded. The baby must have chosen that moment to kick again, because she smiled and put both hands on her belly. "Reckon you may be right."

"Reckon I am," Cincinnatus said. "Buy me a newspaper to-morrow, find out who won the elections. Anybody win by one vote or lose by one vote, /

made the difference. Never would have gotten to vote down in Kentucky.

Didn't make no never mind whether the Stars and Bars or the Stars

and Stripes was flyin' over the Covington city hall, neither—white folks was on top, and aimin' to stay there. Ain't like that here. Ain't quite like that here, anyway."

"This here's a better place," Elizabeth said quietly. Cincin-natus nodded.

It wasn't a perfect place, but he didn't imagine there was any such thing.

And, since he'd come from a worse place, a better one would do just fine.

When Anne Colleton opened the door to her hotel room for him, Roger Kimball took her in his arms. She let him, but only for a moment, and then pushed him away. She was strong, and she'd caught him by surprise to boot. He had to take a quick step back, and knocked the door closed before catching himself. "What's going on?" he asked in no small annoyance.

"I didn't invite you up here for that," Anne answered, her own voice sharp.

He'd seen that grimly determined look in her eye before, but rarely with it aimed at him.

"Well, why did you ask me up, then?" he said: a serious ques-tion, seriously meant. Whatever else hadn't always been smooth with them, their lovemaking was something special. It always had been, ever since he'd seduced her the first night they'd met, on a train rolling down to New Orleans when the war was young.

"Why?" she echoed. "To say good-bye, that's why. I owe you that much, I think."

"Good-bye?" He stared at her, hardly believing he'd heard the word.

"Jesus! What did I do to deserve that?"

Now her eyes softened to sadness. "You still belong to the Freedom Party. You still believe in the Freedom Party," she said, her voice sad, too, sad but firm, like that of a judge passing sen-tence on a likable rogue.

"Of course I do," Kimball answered. "When I join something, I don't

quit when the going gets rough. The damnyankees found out about that." He'd never thought he would be grateful to Tom Brearley for breaking the news of the *Ericsson*ˆ but he was. Now he could talk about it. "And I still say Jake Featherston's the only man who can get this country going again."

"We are going again." Anne walked over to the bed and picked up her handbag. Kimball was glad to watch her; her gray skirt, one of the new short ones, displayed most of the lower half of her calf—and her legs were worth displaying.

As she reached inside the handbag, he asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'll show you." She pulled out a banknote and held it up. "Do you see that?" After Kimball nodded, she drove the point home: "Take a good look at it. It's a one-dollar banknote. You haven't seen anything just like it since just after the war ended, not till this past fall you haven't. And it's still worth a real dollar, too "

"That's not all we need, dammit, not even close," Kimball said furiously.

"We're naked to whatever the United States want to do to us." He wished Anne were naked to whatever he wanted to do to her, but a different urgency filled him fuller. "We've got no submarines, we've got no battleships, we've got no barrels— Christ, they don't even want us to have machine guns in case the niggers rise up again. You see the Whigs fixing any of that? I sure as hell don't."

Anne put the banknote back in her bag. "We will have all those things again," she said. "It may take longer than I'd hoped, but we'll have them. As long as the money stays good, we'll have them. And"—she took a deep breath—"we'll have them without murdering any more presidents to get them."

"You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs," Kimball said. "I've broken plenty of eggs myself—and you've set up plenty to be broken." That got home. Anne bit her lip and looked down at the floor. Kimball laughed.

"You know what you remind me of? Somebody who likes bacon but won't butcher a hog."

"You *are* a bastard," Anne said. "I've known it for a long time, but—"

Roger Kimball loosed another loud, jeering laugh. "Takes one to know

one, I reckon. That's likely the only reason we've put up with each other as long as we have—well, that and the screwing, anyway."

He'd hoped to anger her, but found he'd failed. She also laughed, and seemed to gain strength from it. "Yes, that and the screwing," she said. "I'll miss you. I'll be damned if I won't. But I won't miss the Freedom Party.

Since you're staying in, I have to cut you loose. Grady Calkins showed me once and for all there's no controlling those people."

"I got into it thinking Jake Featherston needed controlling, too," Kimball said. "He doesn't. But the Yankees want to control him, and that's a fact."

"Featherston's clever," Anne admitted. "But he can't do everything himself. And if he can't control his people, he can't do anything at all." By the way she talked, controlling was the be-all and end-all.

Kimball supposed it was natural she thought that way. She'd spent her whole life till the Red uprising controlling a plantation, controlling money, controlling everyone around her. Her ancestors had done the same thing for a hundred years before her time. She was, in fact, one of the aristocrats against whom Jake Featherston had campaigned.

With a shrug, Kimball said, "Well, yeah, a bigger egg than Jake wanted got busted, but you can't blame the whole Freedom Party for Calkins."

"Why can't I? Everyone else does," Anne said. "And there's a lot of truth in it. With all the brawling, with the stalwarts with the clubs, with the riots during the campaign in '21, where else was the Freedom Party going but towards shooting a president?"

Uneasily, Kimball remembered keeping a stalwart in white and butternut from taking a shot at Ainsworth Layne when the Radical Liberal candidate spoke in Hampton Park. Even so, he said, "You're making—the whole country's making—it out to be bigger than it is. Sure, we've lost some folks for now on ac-count of what happened down in Birmingham, but they'll be back."

Anne Colleton shook her head. "I don't think so. And that's the other reason I've gotten out of the Freedom Party—I never back a loser. Never. I think the Party's name will stink all across the CSA for years to come, and I don't want any of that stink sticking to me."

"You're wrong," Kimball told her. "You're dead wrong."

Now she shrugged. "I'll take the chance."

"Nothing fazes you, does it?" he said, and she shook her head again. He stepped toward her. "Last kiss before I go?"

He watched her consider it. Mischief filled her eyes. "Why not?" she said, and held out her arms.

When their lips met, he wondered if she'd bite him instead of kissing. But her malice was subtler than that. She put everything she had into the kiss, reminding him of what he wouldn't be getting any more. She held him tight as if no clothes separated them, grinding her crotch into his.

"Jesus!" he said, his voice hoarse, when he had to take his mouth away from Anne's to breathe. She laughed, delighted with the effect she'd created. His hand cupped her breast. "Last lay before I go, too?"

"No," Anne said deliberately, and knocked the hand away. "Good-bye, Roger."

Rage ripped through him. "Why, you goddamn little tease," he rasped, and shoved her against the bed. She let out a startled squeak as she landed on her back. "I'll give you something to re-member me by—see if I don't." He sprang on her.

Years before, he'd realized trying to take her by force wasn't a good idea.

Since then, he never had tried. He'd never needed or wanted to try. Now ...

If she thought he'd just walk away after that kiss, she could damn well think again. Whatever he'd realized years before was dead as the *Ericsson,* dead as Tom Brearley.

It shouldn't have been, for his fury overpowered not only good sense but also caution. Anne might have been startled when he pushed her onto the bed, but she didn't stay that way longer than a heartbeat. With exquisite timing, her knee came up between his legs and caught him exactly where it did her the most good.

He howled and doubled up and clutched at himself, as any wounded animal might have done. Anne twisted away from him. He couldn't

possibly have stopped her, not for the first few sec-onds there. "Now I think you'd better go," she said coolly.

He didn't want to take her any more. He wanted to kill her. But when he looked up, he discovered she'd had more in her handbag than a one-dollar banknote. She aimed a revolver straight at his head. He hadn't the least doubt she would pull the trigger if he moved in any way that did not suit her.

"Get off the bed," she said. He had to obey, though he still walked doubled over. The pistol tracked him. She'd killed be-fore, helping to put down the Negro rebellion. No, she wouldn't hesitate now. Iron in her voice, she went on, "Go to the door, get out, and never come back."

At the door, he paused. "Can I wait till I can straighten up?" he asked, not wanting to publish his humiliation to the world.

He thought she'd send him out in anguish, but she nodded and let him have a couple of minutes. Then she gave a peremptory gesture with the pistol. Out he went. He still wasn't moving well—he felt like bloody hell—but, if he walked like an old man, he didn't walk like a wounded old man.

He made his slow, painful way back to his flat without meet-ing anyone he knew, for which he thanked God. "That would be just what I need," he muttered as he walked spraddle-legged up the stairs, "to run into Potter and Delamotte again." He grunted. Anne had hurt him worse than they had when he brawled with them—not in so many places, but worse.

He poured himself a tall whiskey, and then ran the bath half full of cold water. He shivered when he sat down in it, but the steam radiator made the apartment tolerably warm and the whiskey made him tolerably warm, so he didn't think he'd come down with pneumonia or the Spanish influenza. And the cold water helped numb his poor, abused balls—or maybe that was the whiskey, too.

At last, he let the water run down the drain. After cautiously drying, he put on the loosest drawers and baggiest trousers he owned. Then he went back to the kitchen and poured out some more whiskey. He didn't want food. The knee Anne had given him still left him faintly nauseated.

He drank from the second glass of whiskey. "Stupid bitch," he said, as if someone in the room might disagree. "Miserable stupid bitch." He

took another big sip from the glass. He wished he'd wrung her neck, back there at the hotel. But he hadn't got the chance. Say what you would about her, Anne Colleton took a back seat to nobody when it came to nerve.

The glass was empty again. He refilled it. *Might as well get drunk,* he thought. *What else have I got to do?* Even if he never saw Anne again, he'd have no trouble getting laid. He knew that. He'd never had any trouble getting laid. Why, then, did he feel like a man whose tongue kept exploring the empty spot where a wisdom tooth had been before the dentist got his forceps on it?

"Dammit, we were two of a kind," he muttered. "We *are* two of a kind.

She's just being stupid about the Party, that's all. She'll come around." He nodded. "She gives me half a chance—hell, she gives me even a quarter of a chance—I'll horn her into coming around." With better than two glasses of whiskey in him, it not only sounded simple, it sounded inevitable.

Someone knocked on the door. Kimball hurried to open it. "There she is already, by God!" he said happily. Of course she wouldn't stay away.

But the woman who stood in the hallway was darker and plainer and tireder than Anne Colleton. "You are Mr. Roger Kimball, the naval officer?"

she asked.

"That's right," he answered. Only after the words were out of his mouth did he realize she had a Yankee accent—she sounded a little like Clarence Potter.

"Oh, good," she said. "I'm so glad I found you." As Anne had before, she reached into her purse. And, as Anne had before, she pulled out a pistol.

Two bullets had slammed into Roger Kim-ball's chest before she said, "My husband was on the *Ericsson.'"* She kept firing till the revolver was empty, but Kimball never heard the last few shots.

XIX

Sylvia Enos sat in a Charleston, South Carolina, jail cell, won-dering

what would happen to her next. Looking back on it, she decided she shouldn't have shot Roger Kimball. Now she would have to pay for what she'd done.

Try as she would, though, she couldn't make herself sorry she'd done it.

She shared the small women's wing of the Charleston city jail with a couple of drunks and a couple of streetwalkers. They all kept sending her awestruck looks because she was locked up on a murder charge. She hadn't imagined anything like that. It was funny, if you looked at it the right way.

A matron with a face like a clenched fist came down the hall and stopped in front of Sylvia's cell. "Your lawyer is here," she said, and unlocked the door. Then she quickly stepped back, as if afraid Sylvia might overpower her and escape. Sylvia found that pretty funny, too.

Her lawyer was a chubby, white-mustached, very pink man named Bishop Polk Magrath. He insisted that she call him Bish. She'd never called anyone Bish in her life, but didn't argue. He sat on one side of a table in a tiny visiting room, she on the other. The matron stood close by to make sure they didn't pass any-thing back and forth.

"I still don't understand why you're helping me," she said. She'd said that before, and hadn't got any kind of answer that made sense to her.

Now she did, after a fashion. Magrath's blue, blue eyes sparkled. "You don't seem to have realized what a *cause celebre* your case has become, ma'am," he said. "I'll draw more notice for de-fending you than I would in ten years of ordinary cases."

"I don't see how you'll draw notice for defending me and losing," Sylvia said. "I did it." She hadn't tried to run after shoot-ing Kimball. She'd given her revolver to the first man who stuck his head out the door of another apartment and waited for the po-lice to come arrest her.

"Let's just put it like this, Mrs. Enos," the lawyer said: "There are a good many people in this town who think Mr. Kimball de-served what you gave him, a good many people who aren't the least bit sorry he's dead. If we can get enough of them on a jury, you might just see Rhode Island again."

"Massachusetts," Sylvia said automatically. She scratched her head. "I

don't follow you at all. Isn't—wasn't—Roger Kimball a hero down here for sinking the *Ericsson?"*

"Oh, he is, ma'am. To some people, he is," Magrath said. By the expression on the matron's face, she might well have been one of those people. The lawyer went on, "But he's not a hero to everybody in the Confederate States, not after what happened last June he's not."

"Oh," Sylvia said softly. At last, a light went on in her head. "Because he was a Freedom Party bigshot, you mean."

"What a clever lady you are, Mrs. Enos." Magrath beamed at her. "That's right. That's just exactly right. There are people in this country—there are people in this town—who would be happy if the same thing that happened to Roger Kimball would happen to the whole Freedom Party."

One of those people, whoever they might be, was without a doubt paying Bishop Polk Magrath's fees. Sylvia certainly wasn't. She'd spent more than she could afford getting a pass-port and a one-way ticket down to Charleston. She hadn't ex-pected she'd be going back to Boston. Maybe she'd been wrong.

"Time's up for this visit," the tough-looking matron said. Syl-via obediently got to her feet. The lawyer started to reach across the table to shake hands with her. A glance from the matron stopped him. He contented himself with tipping his derby in-stead. "Come along," the matron told Sylvia, and Sylvia came.

Halfway back to her cell, she asked, "Will supper be more of that cornmeal mush?" It didn't taste like much of anything, but it filled her stomach.

As if she hadn't spoken, the matron said, "You damnyankees killed my husband and my son. and my brother's got a hook where his hand used to be."

"I'm sorry," Sylvia said. "I haven't got a brother, and my son's too young to be a soldier. But the man I shot snuck up on my hus-band and more than a hundred other sailors after the war was over, and he didn't just kill them—he murdered them like he'd shot them in the back."

The matron said nothing more till they got back to Sylvia's cell. As she locked Sylvia inside once more, she remarked, "Grits for supper again, yes," and went on her way.

"What's your lawyer got to say?" one of the streetwalkers called to Sylvia.

"A lawyer—God almighty." She sounded as if she never expected to enjoy a lawyer's professional services, though a lawyer might enjoy hers.

Two days later, the hard-faced matron marched up to Sylvia's cell and announced, "You've got another visitor." Disapproval congealed on her like fat in a pan cooling on the stove.

"Is it—Bish?" Sylvia still had to work to say that. The matron shook her head. Sylvia frowned in confusion. Now that Kimball was dead, her lawyer was the only person she knew or even knew of in Charleston. "Who is it, then?"

Through tight lips, the matron said, "Just come on." Sylvia came. Sitting in an iron cage staled very quickly.

Waiting for her in the visitors' room was a blond woman about her own age whose sleek good looks, coiffure, and clothes all shouted *Money!*

"Mrs. Enos, my name is Anne Colleton."

That meant nothing to Sylvia—and then, to her dismay, it did. She'd seen the name in a couple of the newspaper stories that talked about Kimball.

"You're one of the people who helped the Freedom Party," she said.

Maybe Bishop Polk Magrath had been talking through that derby of his.

Anne nodded. "I was one of those people, yes, Mrs. Enos. And I was a friend of Roger Kimball's, too—I was, up till his last day on earth."

Sylvia heard, or thought—hoped—she heard, a slight stress on the past tense. "Were you?" she asked, with her own slight stress.

Maybe that was approval in Anne Colleton's eyes. "You listen, don't you?"

the woman from the Confederate States said. "In fact, I'm not telling you any great secret when I say that Roger Kimball and I were more than friends, up till his last day on earth."

Whatever hope Sylvia had went up in smoke. It hadn't been approval after all. It must have been well-bred, well-contained fury. "Have you come here to gloat at me in jail, then?" she asked with gloomy near-certainty.

"What?" Anne Colleton stared, then started to laugh. "You don't understand, then, do you, my dear?" Sylvia shook her head. She only understood that she didn't understand. Anne's voice went cold and harsh.

"I'll spell it out for you, in that case. Not too long before you shot him, Roger Kimball tried to take me by force when I told him I didn't care to be more than his friend any more. He did not succeed, I might add." She spoke proudly. "I might also add that I came very close to shooting him myself before you got the chance."

"Oh," Sylvia whispered. Something more seemed to be called for. She went on, "I'm glad you didn't. It would have meant I'd spent all that money on my passport and train fare for nothing."

"We wouldn't want that, would we?" Anne Colleton said, and sounded as if she meant it. "With any luck at all, Mrs. Enos, the Confederate government or the government of South Carolina will pay your train fare north. Bish Magrath and I will do every-thing we can to see that that's what happens."

"Oh," Sylvia repeated in a different tone of voice. She'd put her children on the train, too, to distant cousins in Connecticut— distant, but closer than any other relatives she had close by. George, Jr., and Mary Jane had thought it would be a short get-acquainted visit. So had her cousins. Maybe, just maybe, if God and Anne Colleton turned out kind, they'd be right.

"Time's up," the matron announced, and even Anne Colleton, who seemed able to outstare the lightning, did not argue with her. Sylvia got to her feet and headed back toward her cell. When she was about halfway there, the matron said, "Some rich folks reckon they can buy their way out of anything."

/ hope this one's right, Sylvia thought. Saying that out loud didn't seem to be the best idea she'd ever had.

Anne Colleton did not visit her again. Bishop Polk Magrath did, a couple of times. He didn't ask many questions; he seemed to come more to cheer her up than for any other reason. She didn't know how cheerful she should be. She'd gathered Anne Colleton was a power in the land, but how big a power? Sylvia couldn't find out till she went to court.

She came before a judge two weeks after Anne Colleton visi-ted her.

Bish Magrath kept beaming like a grandfather with plenty of candy canes in his pockets for his grandchildren to find. The lawyer at the other table in front of the judge—the dis-trict attorney, Sylvia supposed he was—seemed anything but happy. But was that because of the case or because he'd had a fight with his wife before coming here? Sylvia couldn't tell.

"I understand you have a request before we proceed, Mr. Chesterfield?"

the judge asked the district attorney.

"Yes, your Honor, I do," the lawyer—Chesterfield—said. When he glanced over to Sylvia, he looked as if he'd bitten down hard on a lemon.

"May it please the court, your Honor, the state must recognize the extraordinary circumstances that prompted the de-fendant to act as she has admitted acting. In light of the fact that the decedent did cause the death of the defendant's husband not during wartime but after he knew combat had ended, the state is willing"—he looked none too willing himself—"to further the cause of international understanding and amity by not pressing charges in this case, provided that the defendant leave the Con-federate States on the first available transportation north and solemnly swear never to return to our nation again, on pain of re-arrest and the charges' being reinstituted."

"How say you, Mr. Magrath?" the judge inquired.

"I am in complete accord with my learned colleague, your Honor,"

Magrath said placidly. "I should also like to note for the record that the government of the United States has formally re-quested clemency for my client from both the government of the Confederate States and the government of the sovereign state of South Carolina. It now rests in your hands, your Honor."

Things were happening too fast for Sylvia. They weren't just arranged —they were nailed down tight. "How say you, Mrs. Enos?" the judge asked her. "If set at liberty, will you quit the Confederate States of America, never to return?"

Bish Magrath had to nod before she could stammer, "Y-Yes, sir."

Bang! Down came the gavel. "So ordered," the judge declared. "Mrs.

Enos, you will be on a northbound train before the sun sets this evening."

Numbly, Sylvia nodded. She had her life back. Now she would have to figure out what to do with it.

Lieutenant Lije Jenkins sorted through the mail that had come into the barrel unit at Fort Leavenworth. He held out an envelope to Irving

Morrell.

"Letter from Philadelphia for you, Colonel."

"War Department?" Morrell asked, not that he had much doubt. Jenkins nodded. Morrell took the envelope. "Well, let's see what kind of birthday present they have for me today." His birthday still lay a month away, but he thought about it more than he had before he got married, because Agnes'

came only a week afterwards. *Have to get into Leavenworth and do some shopping for her,* he thought, and laughed under his breath. Amazing, the small domestic things in which he took pleasure these days be-cause he was doing them for the woman he loved.

He opened the envelope and unfolded the letter it held. As his eyes went back and forth across the typewritten page, he stiff-ened. *Colonel Morrell,* the letter read, *Having completed work on the test vehicle for a new-model barrel and having also com-pleted evaluation of optimum strategic utilization of barrels ir-regardless of model, you are ordered to terminate the program you now head at Fort Leavenworth and to report to the War De-partment Personnel Office here in Philadelphia no later than I March 1923 for reassignment. Each day earlier than the afore-said date for the closure of the project will be greatly appre-ciated due to reduced expenditures as a result thereof*

Only after he'd gone through the letter twice did he notice who had signed it: Lieutenant Colonel John Abell, the adjutant to General Hunter Liggett, who'd replaced Leonard Wood as U.S. Army Chief of Staff a few months into President Sinclair's administration.

"Well, well," Morrell said softly. A pigeon had come home to roost. He'd spent some time as a General Staff officer during the Great War, and had not got on well with John Abell. Abell was a brilliant man, everything a military administrator should be and then some. Morrell had always made it plain he would sooner have been out in the field fighting. When he'd got out in the field he'd smashed the enemy. And now he was going to pay for it.

"Something wrong, sir?" Lieutenant Jenkins asked.

"No good deed goes unpunished," Morrell answered.

"Sir?" Jenkins said. Morrell handed him the letter. He read it, then stared at his superior. "Close down the Barrel Works? They can't do that!"

"They can. They are. Whether they ought to or not is a dif-ferent question, but not one that's mine to answer," Morrell said. "You see why they're doing it—they need to save money." He saw no point to saying anything about John Abell. If personal ani-mosity had dictated where the savings would come from ... If that had happened, it wouldn't be the first time.

"But you *haven't* finished your work with the test model, sir," Jenkins protested.

"In a way, I have," Morrell told him. "I've done about every-thing I can do with one machine. If they'd coughed up the money for more than one, I could have done a lot more than I did. I just wish they were passing the Barrel Works on to someone else in-stead of closing it down"

"Yes, sir!" Jenkins' face was red with anger. "They might as well be telling us we've wasted all the time and work we put in here." He didn't think about what he would do next himself. In Morrell's book, that made him a good soldier.

"That's probably what they think," Morrell told him. He re-membered how Abell had looked at him during the war when he'd agreed with Custer that the barrel doctrine the General Staff had developed needed changing. He might have been an atheist ripping into Holy Writ.

That he'd been right hadn't made things better. It might have made things worse.

"What are you going to do?" Jenkins asked.

"Obey the order," Morrell said with a sigh. "What else can I do? They have the test model. They have my reports. They can go on from there.

Things won't disappear. They'll just stop for a while." That might prove as bad, but he didn't care to dwell on such gloomy possibilities.

He left the office to break the news to the men who had worked so hard for so long with the test model. The first one he ran into was Sergeant Michael Pound. "What's the matter, sir?" the barrel gunner asked. "You look ready to chew bolts and spit rivets."

"We're out of business, that's what," Morrell said, and went on to explain how and why—or what he understood of why—they were out of business.

Pound frowned. With his thick body, wide shoulders, and broad face, he could easily have looked like a lout. He didn't; his features were clever and expressive. "That's—very shortsighted, isn't it, sir?" he said when Morrell had finished. "The point is to stay ahead of everybody else, after all. How are we going to do that if we drop out of the race?"

"I don't know the answer to that question, Sergeant," Morrell replied. "I do know I've received a legal order to shut down the Barrel Works and report to Philadelphia once I've done it. I have to obey that order."

"Yes, sir, I understand," Pound said. "I hope you raise some hell when you get to Philadelphia, though."

"I intend to try, anyhow," Morrell said. "How much good that will do, God only knows. Now—what about you, Sergeant? Do you have any new assignment in mind? I'll do what I can to help you get it."

"That's very kind of you, sir." Pound scratched his brown mustache as he thought. "I suppose I'd better go back to the regular artillery, sir. Whether we have barrels or not, we'll al-ways need guns."

"That's true. It's a sensible choice," Morrell said. He got the idea that most of Pound's choices were sensible. "I'll see what I can arrange. I hate to say it, but it's liable to be a better choice than staying in barrels, the way things are."

"If we do get in trouble again, we'll wish we'd done more now," Pound said with a massive shrug. "We'll all be running around trying to do what we should have done in years in a few weeks."

That was also likely to be true. Trying not to dwell on how likely it was, Morrell slapped Sergeant Pound on the shoulder and went on to find the rest of the test model's crew. They took the news hard, too. Then he had to break it to the crews of the other barrels, the Great War machines that also tested tactics, and to the mechanics who kept all the big, complex machines running. Little by little, he realized what a mountain of paper-work he'd have to climb by the first of March.

After he'd spread the word to the soldiers it affected, he went to tell the other person who needed to know: his wife. He found Agnes ironing clothes. "What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?" she said in surprise. Something in her smile as he kissed her told him what she hoped he was there for.

But he hadn't come home for that, however much he would have enjoyed it. He told her why he had come home. The expla-nation came out smooth as if he'd rehearsed it. As a matter of fact, he had rehearsed it, going over it again and again with his men.

Agnes pursed her lips. She was an Army wife, and had taken on many of the attitudes of her officer husband (she'd probably had some of those attitudes already, her first husband also being a soldier). She said, "They should be giving you all the tools you need to do the job right, not taking away the ones they did let you have."

"You know I feel the same way about it, honey, but I can't do anything about it except close down the Barrel Works, pack my bags, and hop on the train for Philadelphia. That means you get to hop on the train for Philadelphia, too."

Her eyes widened. "I hadn't thought of that," she said. "I've never been to Philadelphia, even to visit. Now we'll be living there, won't we?"

"Unless they ever really get around to moving the War De-partment back to Washington," Morrell answered. "They've been talking about it ever since the end of the war, but I'll believe it when I see it."

"Philadelphia," Agnes said, her eyes far away. "What's it like, living in Philadelphia?"

"Crowded," he said. "Expensive. The air is full of soot and smoke all the time. It's a big city. I don't much like big cities."

Agnes smiled. "I've noticed."

"I figured you had." Morrell smiled, too, but the smile slid into a grimace.

"Just have to make the best of it, I suppose."

"Philadelphia," Agnes repeated. He wondered if she'd even heard him.

"What will it be like in Philadelphia?"

As she'd come to know him, he'd also come to know her. At least half of what that question meant was, *Will I measure up to the competition?*

Morrell smiled again. He was certain of the an-swer, and gave it:

"Sweetheart, you'll knock 'em dead."

One of his wife's hands flew to her hair, patting it into place or maybe the outward expression of an imagined new style. "You say sweet things," she told him.

"Only when I mean them," he said. "Of course, when I'm talking about you, I mean them all the time."

She stepped up, hugged him, and kissed him. His arms tight-ened around her. One thing might have led to another—except that, with regret, he broke off the embrace. Agnes looked disap-pointed; yes, she'd been ready for more. But she didn't frown for long. "You're going to have a lot of work to do," she said, proving she was indeed an Army wife.

Morrell nodded. "I sure am. I haven't even told the base com-mandant about my orders yet—though I suppose a copy will have gone to him, too."

He hugged Agnes again, briefly now. "You're really being a brick about this, honey."

"I think they're making a big mistake," she answered. "But you've got your orders, and you've got to follow them."

You've got your orders, and you've got to follow them. That was the way the Army worked, all right. Morrell had trouble imagining it working any other way. "Couldn't have put it better myself," he said. He gave Agnes one more kiss, then turned to go. "The work won't do itself, however much I wish it would."

"All right," his wife said. "I'll see you tonight, then."

He smiled at the promise in her voice. He started looking ahead toward Philadelphia, too. Whatever they set him to doing, he'd do it as well as he knew how. He'd do it well, period; he had a good notion of his own ability.

And performing well with im-portant people watching did have certain advantages. With a little luck, he'd be wearing stars on his shoulders instead of eagles before too long.

He wouldn't be so easy to move around like a pawn on a chess board then, not with general's rank he wouldn't. As a matter of fact, he'd be able to do some maneuvering of his own once he had general's rank. Maybe John Abell thought he'd done Mor-rell's career a bad turn. Morrell's smile was predatory. Anyone who thought that about him

had another think coming.

* * *

Jefferson Pinkard walked toward the livery stable. "Freedom!'" he called to other men heading the same way.

"Freedom!" The greeting came back loud and clear as it had before the stalwarts went out to the Alabama State Fairgrounds when President Hampton came to Birmingham. The Freedom Party had raised a lot more hell than anybody—anybody except Grady Calkins, anyhow—expected.

And now the price of that hell was showing. Jeff called "Free-dom!" a couple more times before he went into the stable, but only a couple more times. The building had no trouble holding meetings these days. A lot of people who had been in the Party— people who'd put on white and butternut and banged heads, too—weren't any more. A lot of people who had been in the Party weren't admitting it any more, either.

Fair-weather friends, Pinkard thought scornfully. He still thought most of the same things were wrong with the Confed-erate States now as had been wrong with the country before Wade Hampton V got shot. He had trouble understanding why more people didn't feel the same way.

Up at the front of the stable, Caleb Briggs paced back and forth, pausing every so often to cough. Even by lamplight, the tough little dentist's color wasn't good. Pinkard wondered how long he could last, especially burning himself at both ends as he did. The damnyankees hadn't killed him all at once when they gassed him. They were doing it an inch at a time, giving him years full of hell before they put him in his grave. To Jeff's way of thinking, that was worse.

After a while, Briggs didn't seem able to stand waiting any longer. "Come on, y'all, move up to the front," he rasped. "Talk-ing's hard enough for me; I'll be goddamned if I'm gonna shout when I don't have to. And there's room. Wish to Christ there wasn't, but there is."

A year before, the livery stable would have been packed. Men would have been milling around outside. Now there were more folding chairs and hay bales set out than people to sit on them. Jeff plopped his bottom down onto a chair in the second row. He could have sat in the first row—plenty of chairs to take—but memories of getting called on

in school made him stay less conspicuous.

Caleb Briggs looked over the house. He pursed his lips, coughed again, and began: "Well, we're still here, boys." Maybe he gave a dry chuckle then, or maybe it was just another cough.

"Freedom!' Jefferson Pinkard called, along with his comrades.

"Freedom!" Briggs echoed. It sounded like a dying echo, too, enough so to send a chill through Jeff. But the dentist picked up spirit as he went on,

"We *are* still here, dammit, and we aren't going to go away, either, no matter how much the niggers and the folks in striped trousers and top hats and the generals in the War Department wish we would. We're here for the long haul, and we're going to win."

"Freedom!" The shout was louder this time, stronger. Pinkard felt a little of the jolt of energy he always got from hearing Jake Featherston speak.

He wondered if Caleb Briggs would last long enough to see the Freedom Party win. He had his doubts, even if victory came soon—and it wouldn't, dammit.

But Briggs was undeterred. He'd been a soldier, and pulled his weight like a soldier. "What we have to do now is make it through the hard times,"

he said. "They aren't over yet. They won't be over for a while. It'll be God's own miracle if we don't lose seats in Congress this fall. What we've got to do is try and hold on to as many as we can, so we don't look like we're going down the toilet in front of the whole damn country. And what we've got to do right here in Birmingham is make sure we send Barney Stevens back to Richmond in November."

Jeff clapped his hands. He wanted to see Stevens sent back to Richmond to keep the Freedom Party's seat there. He also wanted Stevens in Richmond because the Congressman was a rough customer whom he didn't particularly want coming home to Birmingham.

"We hang tough," Briggs was saying. "We try not to lose too much here in 1923, and we try to build up toward 1925 and espe-cially 1927, when we vote for president again. Rome wasn't built in a day. The Confederate States won't be rebuilt in a day. either. But we will build

our country back up, we will shove our niggers back down where they belong, and we—the Freedom Party—will be the ones who do that. So help me God, we will."

"Freedom!" Jeff yelled, along with his friends. The cry echoed from the roof, almost as it had in the days when the Party was swelling.

"One more thing, and then I'm through," Briggs said. "We got as far as we did by standing up and fighting for what we know is right. We're going to go right on fighting. Don't you have any doubts about that. We may pick our spots a little tighter than we did before, but we'll put on the white and butternut whenever we see the need."

Pinkard whooped. The chance to get out there and smash a few heads was one of the reasons he'd joined the Freedom Party. A good many other men cheered Caleb Briggs, too. But Jeff couldn't help noticing how many others sat silent.

Then he thought, *Grady Calkins would have cheered.* He shook his head, rejecting the comparison and all it implied. Calkins had been a madman. Every party had some. But Jeff wasn't crazy. Caleb Briggs wasn't crazy. And Jake Featherston sure as hell wasn't crazy.

Still, the idea left him uneasy. He didn't sit around and yarn and drink homemade whiskey, as he usually did after the busi-ness part of a meeting wound down. Instead, glum and oddly dis-satisfied, he headed for the door.

One of the guards there caught his eye. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a dollar, and tossed the banknote into the bucket at the guard's feet.

"Thank you kindly, Jeff," the bruiser said. "Party needs every penny it can get its hands on these days."

"I know, Tim," Pinkard answered. He laughed. "And think— just last year, we had more millions than you can shake a stick at." It wasn't really funny, not for the Freedom Party. A sound currency had done as much to squeeze folks out of the Party as had Wade Hampton's assassination. Real money gave people one less thing to be angry about, and anger was the gasoline that fueled the Party's engine.

It had started to drizzle. Jeff jammed his cap down low on his head and tugged up his coat collar. He was angry, by God— angry about having to wait for the trolley in the rain. The trolley got there late, too, which did nothing to improve his mood. He threw five pennies in

the fare box (bronze coins were return-ing faster than silver) and rode out to the Sloss Works company housing.

A woman was waiting at the trolley stop. Pinkard thought she would get on after he got off. When she didn't, he gave a mental shrug and started off toward his cottage. The trolleyman clanged his bell. The car rattled down the tracks.

"Jeff?" the woman called.

Pinkard stopped—froze, in fact. "Emily," he whispered, and slowly turned.

In the darkness and drizzle, he hadn't recognized her, but he would have known her voice anywhere. His own roughened as he went on, "What the devil are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you," she answered. Her own tone was sharp: "I sure enough knew what you'd be doing this night of the week, didn't I? I just got here myself, though—didn't expect you back quite so soon. Things ain't so lively at the Party nowadays?"

"None of your business—you made sure of *that,* by God," Jeff said.

"What do you want with me, anyway, you . .. tramp?" He could have used a stronger word, and nearly had.

"Wanted to see how you were," Emily answered. "Wanted to see what you were up to." She sighed and shook her head. "Not like you cared enough about me to find out any of that."

"After what you done, why should I care?" he said. "You're lucky I don't kick you down the street." Had he had some whiskey in him, he thought he would have done it.

"I got lonesome," she said. "I got lonesome when you was in the Army, and I got lonesome when you started caring more about the Freedom Party than you did about me. I don't like being lonesome, so I went and did something about it."

She didn't mean *lonesome.* She meant *horny.* Pinkard knew that. She'd been fine as long as he gave her everything she needed. When he stopped, she'd gone out and taken what she needed, as a man with a frigid wife might have done. It would have been all right in a man. In a woman . . .

Pinkard shook his head. No man could put up with what she'd done, not if he wanted to stay a man.

Emily said, "I was almost hoping I wouldn't find you here, on account of that'd mean you were back at the house, not at that stinking livery stable. It'd mean you'd wised up and gotten out of the Freedom Party. But if what happened to President Hampton didn't open your eyes, I reckon nothin'

ever will."

She'd hoped he'd given up the Party? Did that mean she wanted him back, or would have wanted him back? Did he want her back? She was explosive between the sheets. He knew that. But how would he keep from thinking he wasn't the only man she'd taken to bed? How would he keep from thinking she wasn't taking some other man to bed along with him? He shook his head again. He wouldn't. He couldn't.

To keep from thinking about that now, he asked, "What are you doing these days?"

"Working in a textile mill," she answered with a shrug. "It ain't a lot of money, but I don't need a lot, so I get by. I get lone-some sometimes, though."

She meant *horny* again. "Bet you can find plenty of fellows if you do."

Jeff didn't try to keep the scorn from his voice.

"Of course I can. A woman always can." Emily sounded scorn-ful, too, and weary, so weary. "Harder to find anybody who cares about more than that, though."

"Too bad," Jeff said harshly. "Too damn bad."

Emily sighed. "I don't know why I bothered doing this. Just wasted my time. Reckon I was hoping you'd changed—changed back into the fellow I knew before the war."

"He's dead," Pinkard said. "The damnyankees killed him, and the niggers killed him, and you helped kill him, too. The country he lived in is dead along with him. He ain't ever coming back. Maybe the country we had back then will. That's what the Free-dom Party is all about."

"To hell with the Freedom Party!" Emily said furiously. A dis-tant

street lamp showed tears running down her cheeks. "And to hell with you. too.

Jefferson Davis Pinkard."

"Go on, get out of here. Go peddle your tail somewhere else, or I'll give you what I gave you before, only more of it." Jeff made a fist and raised his arm. "I sure as hell don't need you. I don't need anybody, by God. As long as I've got the Party, that's everything I need in the whole wide world."

Emily turned away, her shoulders slumping. She was crying harder now, crying like a little lost child. Jeff headed home, a smile on his face now in spite of the chilly drizzle. Why not? He'd won. He knew damn well he'd won.

Chester Martin liked playing football. He liked it in the snow, and he liked it here in springtime, too. In that, he was very little different from anybody else in the United States. In New En-gland and New York, a few people still enjoyed baseball, a game that had briefly flourished in the couple of decades before the War of Secession. Even there, though, football was king.

He pulled on his leather helmet. Being a burly steelworker, he played in the line on offense and defense. *In the trenches,* people called that these days. The comparison wasn't far-fetched. Plenty of times, he'd wished for a bayoneted rifle to hold off whatever charging rhinoceros the other team aimed at him. And not a game went by when he didn't wish he were wearing a green-gray steel pot on his head instead of mere leather.

Albert Bauer played beside him in the line. Bauer pointed to their opponents, a team of bruisers in dark blue wool shirts. "Here we go, Chester," he said. "Legal revenge for everything the police have given us since the end of the war—and before that, too."

"You don't need to fire me up, Al. I'm ready now." Martin looked down at his own shirt, which was bright red. "We licked 'em in the presidential election, and we licked 'em again in the Congressional election last year, and we've licked 'em a few times on the gridiron, too. I figure we can do it again."

"That's the proletarian spirit," Bauer said. "Don't take them lightly, though.

The enemies of progress fight hard, even if their cause is doomed. They will lose the war. They can win the battles."

On one sideline, steelworkers' friends and families gathered to cheer their gladiators. Sue Martin waved to Chester. He waved back. On the other sideline stood friends and relatives of the cops. A stranger couldn't have guessed which side was which. Seeing how ordinary policemen's families were never ceased to surprise Martin.

The two referees were newspapermen; they'd covered both sides, and both sides trusted, or rather distrusted, them about evenly. They waved the team captains over to them and flipped a silver dollar. The cop let out a happy little grunt; he'd guessed right. "Give us the ball," he said.

"Yeah, give it to 'em in the balls," a steelworker said. He grinned, but it was a sharp-toothed sort of grin.

Martin held the ball upright with his finger as the kicker booted it down the field—the park, actually—toward the cops. Then he was on his feet and running as hard as he could. A policeman ran toward him, yelling in a language that didn't sound like English. Martin lowered a shoulder and knocked him sprawling. The first hit always felt good. He banged into a couple of other policemen before two of his teammates brought down the fellow with the ball.

When he lined up at right tackle, the cop playing opposite him looked familiar. "Have I seen you someplace before?" Martin asked.

Before the cop could answer, the center snapped the ball back to the quarterback, who stood waiting for it. The cop gave Martin a body block that took him out of the play, though the run gained only a yard or two. Then he helped him up. "I dunno. I been playing football for a while, same as most guys."

"I don't think that's it," Martin said. "Where'd you fight in the war?"

Another play intervened. This time, Martin spun past the blocker in dark blue and flattened the fullback behind the line of scrimmage. The fullback accused him of unsavory practices. He laughed.

"I was in Kentucky with the First Army—Custer's men," the cop answered with no small pride as they took their places once more. "Then I got sent to Utah, to put down the Mormon up-rising. After that, I fought in Arkansas.

How about you, bud?"

Before Martin could answer, the ball was snapped again. The quarterback booted it away in a quick kick. It rolled dead deep in the steelworkers'

territory. Now it would be Martin's turn to try to hold the cop away from the ball carrier.

"Me?" he said as he took his stance. "I was in Virginia the whole time —on the Roanoke front till I got wounded, then up in the north."

The cop charged at him. Martin managed to hold his own. Even while he held the policeman at bay, he was puzzled. He was almost sure he'd seen the broken-nosed face in front of him twisted with fury while the policeman aimed a gun at. .. at. ..

He laughed. "What's funny?" the cop asked.

"I'll tell you what's funny," Martin answered. "You tried to shoot me a couple-three years ago, I think."

"Oh." The policeman frowned. Then he also started to laugh. "You should have been wearing a goddamn red shirt then, too. I would have hit what I was aiming at."

The ball flew back to the steelworkers' quarterback. He re-treated till he stood more than five yards behind the line, then let fly with a forward pass.

An end caught it and ran another ten yards before being dragged down from behind.

One more pass a couple of plays later moved the ball deep into the cops' territory. From there, the steelworkers pounded it into the end zone, running straight at their opponents and defying them to bring down the ball carrier. They were, Martin realized as he took the measure of the opposition, a little heavier and bigger and a little younger than their opponents. He smiled, thinking they would have an easy game and punish the policemen who had given them so much trouble on the picket line.

On the try for the point after the touchdown, he knocked the cop across from him over on his back. The steelworkers' kicker drop-kicked the ball through the uprights for the extra point.

"Smash 'em!" Sue yelled as the steelworkers trudged back to their side of the field for the kickoff.

"Of course we'll smash 'em!" Chester Martin yelled back. One of the referees tossed him the ball. He knelt down and held it for the kicker to send it down the field to the policemen. He didn't think he was bragging or doing anything but telling the truth. How could the cops compete against bigger, younger men?

Before long, he found out. One of the halfbacks on the police-men's team was nothing special to look out: a skinny little fellow with a blond Kaiser Bill mustache. But when he got the ball, that scrawny halfback was quick as a lizard and twisty as a snake. He did most of the work on the cops' drive, and capped it by sprint-ing into the end zone on a pretty fifteen-yard run.

Martin's tongue was hanging out from chasing him. "Jesus," he panted as both sides lined up for the cops' try for the point after touchdown. "If I had a gun right now, I wouldn't shoot you." He nodded to the policeman who'd fired during the labor unrest. "I'd shoot that miserable son of a bitch instead. He's trying to give me a heart attack."

"Yeah, Matt's dangerous," the cop agreed. "You try taking a shot at him, I figure it's about even money he dodges the bullet."

"Maybe," Martin said. "Have to bring along a machine gun, then, and see if he can dodge that." The cop chuckled and nodded. They both understood the weapons of war, even if they'd stood on opposite sides of the barricade. The policemen's drop-kick was also good, and knotted the game.

It swayed back and forth all afternoon. The steelworkers had size and youth and a quarterback who threw enough to keep the policemen from doing nothing but storming forward to stop the run. The cops had nothing but Matt. All by himself, he kept them in the game, tackling pass receivers on defense and running like the wind whenever the policemen had the ball.

He never wore down. Martin started to wonder whether he was human or me-chanical. However many times he got smashed to the dirt, he rose again as if nothing had happened. Even his mustache stayed unruffled, which made Chester all the more suspicious.

In the end, the steelworkers won, 27-23. Martin made himself a minor hero, falling on a fumble in the closing moments to en-sure that the cops couldn't come back. After shaking hands with the policemen, he

limped off the field, covered in glory and sweat and mud and bruises. He still had all his front teeth, which made him unusual on the team.

He took off his helmet and ran a hand through his damp, matted hair.

"Whew!" he said. "This is supposed to be fun, they tell me. I feel like I've been slammed by a triphammer a couple dozen times."

His sister gave him a hug. "You were wonderful, Chester." She wrinkled her nose. "You don't smell so wonderful, though."

"If you were out there, you wouldn't smell so wonderful, ei-ther," Martin retorted. He stretched. It hurt.

His father said, "It's a different game nowadays, with all this throwing.

Might as well be baseball, if you ask me. When I was playing, back around the time you were born, we just ran. That was a real man's game, if you ask me."

"Sure it was, Pa," Chester said. "Nobody had helmets then, and—"

"Nobody did," Stephen Douglas Martin broke in.

"Nobody had helmets," Martin repeated, "and the ball was solid steel, and the field was a mile and a half long and half a mile wide and uphill both ways, too, and everybody on the other side was always ten feet tall and weighed seven hundred pounds, and even dead men had to stay in the game—and run the ball, too. That's how they played it in the old days."

"And you are a heartless whippersnapper, and I ought to turn you over my knee and whip you black and blue," his father said, rolling his eyes. "But you're already black and blue, I expect. And you're wrong—dead men didn't have to stay in. They changed that rule in *my* father's day."

Laughing, they helped Sue and Louisa Martin spread out the picnic feast that had come along in a wicker basket. Steel-workers and policemen wandered back and forth, talking about the game and sharing food and beer and other potables. It was as if the two groups had never clashed anywhere save in a friendly game of football.

Chester gnawed a drumstick. When Matt, the fast halfback on the policemen's team, walked by, Martin held up a bottle of beer to get

him to stop. The lure worked as well as a worm would have with a trout. "Thanks,"

Matt said, and sat down beside him. "I'd sure as the devil sooner drink with you than have you jump on my kidneys like you were doing all day long."

"Like heck I was." Martin had finally got used to watching his language again when his mother and sister were around. "Most of the time, I was flat on my fanny watching you run by."

They bantered back and forth, each making the other out to be a better football player than he really was. Then Matt got up and headed off to chin with somebody else, just as if he'd never clubbed a striking steelworker in all his born days. And Martin waved when he went, just as if he'd never kicked a cop. Every-thing in the park was peaceful and friendly. Chester Martin liked that fine.

It couldn 't be plainer that no Negro ever born has got what it takes to be a true citizen of the Confederate States of America. Jake Featherston's pen raced across the page. One of those days, *Over Open Sights* would be done, and everyone in the country would realize he'd been telling the truth all along.

Anyone with half an eye to see can understand the reasons for this.

They are—Before Jake could set down what they were, his secretary came back into his inner office. "What do you want, Lulu?" he growled; like any writer, he hated interruptions.

"Someone to see you, Mr. Featherston," she said.

"Who is it?" he asked. "I don't want to see any reporters right now."

Fewer reporters wanted to see him these days, too. That worried him, but not enough to make him feel friendly right this second.

"It's not a reporter, sir," Lulu answered. "It's General Jeb Stuart, Jr."

"What?" Jake had trouble believing his ears. As far as he was concerned, Jeb Stuart, Jr., was the author of all his troubles. Who else had made sure he would stay a sergeant as long as he stayed in the Army? Jeb Stuart, Jr., blamed him for the death of Jeb Stuart III. Jake blamed Jeb Stuart, Jr., for suppressing an investi-gation that might have given warning of the great Red uprising. And now the general

wanted to see him? Slowly, Jake said,

"Well, I reckon you can bring him on in."

Jeb Stuart, Jr., was in his late fifties. He looked very much like an older version of his handsome son, save that he wore a neat gray chin beard rather than the little strip of hair under the lower lip Jeb Stuart III had affected. After cautious greetings, Stuart said, "You're probably wondering why I've called on you now, after pretending for so long that you and the Freedom Party and all the insults you've thrown at me don't exist."

Jake did his best to sound dry: "I'd be a liar if I said it hadn't crossed my mind—and I'm no liar."

"You say that. I wonder if even you believe it." Stuart looked at him.

No—Stuart looked through him. He'd had upper-crust Confederate officers give him that look a great many times. It showed without words that they relegated him to the outer dark-ness: he wasn't quite a nigger in their eyes, but he might as well have been.

It also made Featherston want to punch those upper-crust Confederates right in the face. "You've got anything to say, say it and then get the hell out," he snapped. "Otherwise, just get the hell out."

"I intend to say it. You needn't worry about that," Jeb Stuart, Jr., replied. "I came to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" Jake echoed. "Why? Are you leaving? If you are, it's about ten years too late, but good riddance anyway. I'm sure as the devil not going anywhere."

To his surprise, Stuart smiled. "I know you're not. You're not going anywhere at all in the Confederate States of America, not in politics, not any more you're not. And so, Sergeant Featherston"—he laced the title with contempt—"good-bye." He waved, a delicate fluttering of the fingers.

Jake laughed in his face. "Go ahead and dream, General." He showed what he thought of Stuart's title, too. "You fancy-pants boys won't be rid of me that easy." He couldn't help a nasty stab of fear, though. Nothing had gone right for him or the Freedom Party since Grady Calkins took a Tredegar out to the Alabama State Fairgrounds and shot down Wade Hampton V

Stuart might have picked his pocket for that very thought. "People know what the Freedom Party is now, Featherston: a pack of murdering ruffians.

They'll run your henchmen out of Congress in a few months, and you'll never, ever be president of the Confederate States. And for that, believe me, I get down on my knees and thank God."

"Go ahead and laugh," Featherston said. "The fellow who laughs last laughs best, or that's what they say. I fought the damnyankees till I couldn't fight any more, and I reckon I'll keep on fighting the traitors here the same way." Not for the life of him would he let Jeb Stuart, Jr., see how closely his words reflected Jake's own nightmares.

"There are no traitors, damn you," Stuart said.

"Hell there aren't," Featherston returned. "I'm sitting across the desk from one. God damn you, that nigger Pompey, your son's body servant, was as Red as he was black. They were going to take him away and grill him, but your precious brat didn't want 'em to, and they didn't. Who stopped 'em?

You stopped 'em, that's who. If that doesn't make you a traitor, what the hell are you?"

"A man who made a mistake," Stuart answered. "I don't sup-pose you've ever made a mistake, Featherston?"

"Not one that big, by Jesus," Jake said.

Stuart startled him again, this time by nodding. "It couldn't have been much bigger, could it? It ended up costing me the life of my only son."

"It cost a lot more than that," Featherston said. "It cost thou-sands dead, by God. If any one thing cost us the war, that was it. And all you do is think about yourself I reckon I ought to be sur-prised, but I ain't."

"You don't know what I think, so don't put words in my mouth," Jeb Stuart, Jr., said. Slowly, sadly, he shook his head. "I blamed you for my son's death, you know."

"I never would have guessed," Jake said with a fine sardonic sneer.

"That's why I spent the next year and however long com-manding a battery and staying a sergeant. I could have been in the Army for the next five wars—hell, the next ten wars—and I never would've had

more than three stripes. Thank you very kindly, General goddamn Stuart, sir."

He wanted to fight with Stuart. He would have loved to spring out of his chair, smash the general to the floor, and stomp him. Every muscle quivered. *Give me an excuse,* he said silently. *Come on, you son of a bitch. Give me even apiece of an excuse.*

But Stuart only looked sad. "And that was the other half of my mistake.

Yes, I blocked your promotion. It seemed the right thing to do at the time, but it turned out wrong, so wrong. If you'd ended the war a lieutenant or a captain, would you ever have done what you did with —and to—the Freedom Party?"

Featherston stared at him. That question had never crossed his mind. He tried to imagine himself without the smoldering re-sentment he'd carried since 1916. For the life of him, he couldn't. That endless burning inside was as much a part of him as his fingers.

He said, "It's a little fucking late to worry about that now, don't you reckon?"

"I do. I certainly do." Stuart got to his feet. "And it's a little fucking late to worry about you, Featherston. You're yesterday's news, and you won't be tomorrow's. You don't need to get up for me." Jake hadn't been about to get up for him, as he must have known. "I can find my own way out."

"Don't come back, either," Jake snarled.

Leaving the inner office, Jeb Stuart, Jr., got the last word: "I wish you the same." He closed the door behind him.

With another snarl, this one wordless, Jake snatched up his pen and began to write furiously. He filled two pages in *Over Open Sights* in something less than half an hour. But even venting his anger through the growing book was not enough to satisfy him. He slammed his pad shut, threw it into his desk, and locked the drawer that held it. Until he was ready for it to see the light of day, it wouldn't.

He sprang up and paced the inner office like a caged wolf. The Party *would* lose ground when elections came, and they were only four months away. He saw no way around it. The trick was going to be

holding as much as he could—and making people think the Freedom Party would be a force to reckon with in elec-tions after 1923. He'd known it wouldn't be easy long before General Stuart stopped by to gloat.

He wished he could talk with Roger Kimball. But Kimball was dead, and the damnyankee woman who'd murdered him had got off scot-free. That was one more on the list he'd already started compiling against President Mitchel. "Go ahead, kiss the USA's ass," he muttered.

He wished he could talk with Anne Colleton, too. He valued her money, he valued her sense of theatrics, and he valued her brains. But she didn't value him or the Freedom Party any more. Of all the defections he'd had to endure over the past year, hers might have hurt most.

Since he couldn't talk with either of them, he telephoned Fer-dinand Koenig. "Jeb Stuart, Jr.?" his former running mate ex-claimed. "Well, isn't that a kick in the head? Stopped by to gloat, you say?"

"That's just what he did," Jake answered. "Said the Party was as good as dead and buried, God damn him to hell."

"Don't take it too much to heart," Koenig said. "If he's as right about that as he was during the war, we're in fine shape."

"Yeah!" Featherston said gratefully; he hadn't thought of it like that.

"You've got a good way of looking at things, Ferd."

"Don't reckon you'll let us down, Sarge," Koenig answered. "I remember where we were back in 1917, and I can see where we are now. Maybe we haven't climbed all the way to the top of the mountain, but we'll get there."

Thousands of Party stalwarts might—would—have said the same thing.

But Jake set no special stock in what stalwarts said. They weren't stalwarts because they were long on brains. They were stalwarts because they were long on muscle and short on temper. Ferdinand Koenig was different. He not only had good sense, he wasn't embarrassed about showing it.

"Of course we'll get there," Jake said, sounding more confi-dent than

he felt. "Just have to come through this November without getting skinned."

"Figure we will?" Koenig asked.

"That's the question, all right," Jake allowed. He let out a long, slow sigh.

"We'll get hurt some. We'll have to put the best face on it we can, and then we'll have to start building toward 1925. We can't afford to waste a minute there. I only hope to God we don't lose so much, people won't take us serious any more." With Kimball dead and Anne Colleton gone, Ferdinand Koenig was the only one to whom he would have said even so much.

Koenig answered, "You never can tell, Sarge. Folks don't think we matter so much now that money doesn't burn a hole in their pockets if they leave it in there more than a minute and a half, but who knows how long that'll last?

Who knows what all's liable to go wrong between now and 1925?"

"That's right," Jake said, smiling for the first time since Jeb Stuart, Jr., had left. "That's just right. With the Whigs running things, they *will* go wrong, sure as the sun comes up tomorrow." He hung up feeling better, but only for a little while. Would any-thing be left of the Freedom Party when a chance to rule came round at last?

"Mama!" Clara Jacobs screeched from what had been the store-room.

"Little Armstrong just tore up the picture I was drawing!'" She was almost four, more than twice the age of her little nephew. But Armstrong Grimes, even as a toddler, gave every sign of being hell on wheels. *He takes after Edna,* Nellie thought. *I bet Merle Grimes was a nice man even when he was a little boy.* She had such a good opinion of almost no one else in the male half of the human race; the more she got to know her son-in-law, the more he impressed her.

Fortunately, the coffeehouse was almost empty. She could hurry back to the old storeroom and mete out punishment. Armstrong hadn't just torn up Clara's picture; he'd made a snowstorm of pieces out of it. He was happily sticking one of those pieces in his mouth when Nellie yanked it away from him, upended him over her knee, and walloped his backside. "No, no!" she shouted. "Mustn't tear up things that don't belong to you!"

Her grandson howled. Since he was wearing a diaper that shielded his bottom, Nellie knew she wasn't hurting him much. The spanking made an impressive amount of noise, though, as did her yelling.

"Now," she said, "are you going to do that any more?"

"No," little Armstrong answered. Nellie wiped his nose, which was dripping yellowish snot. She didn't believe him. For one thing, he was heading toward the age where he said *no* every other time he opened his mouth. For another, a toddler's promise lasted only till he forgot he'd made it, which meant anywhere from two minutes to, in extraordinary circumstances, an hour or so.

"You be good, you hear me?" Nellie said.

"No," Armstrong Grimes answered. That was neither defiance nor ignorance, only the first thing that came out of his mouth.

"I'm good, Mama," Clara said, so virtuously that Nellie ex-pected to be blinded by the halo about to spring into being above her head.

"Of course you are—when you feel like it," Nellie told her own daughter.

"Pick up those scraps, and don't let him eat any more of them. Don't let him eat your crayons, either."

"I won't, Mama." Clara turned to her nephew. "You see? You can't have *anything."* Thus made forcibly aware that he was being deprived, Armstrong started crying again. Nellie had to spend more time soothing him before she could go out front again.

Edna was supposed to come get her son at half past three; she'd left him with Nellie so she could do some unencumbered shopping. She didn't show up till a quarter after four. "Hello, Ma—I'm sorry," she said in a perfunctory way. "How crazy did he drive you?"

"Crazy enough," Nellie replied. "I was thinking he reminds me of you."

Edna laughed, but Nellie wasn't joking. She went on, "Please come get him when you say you will. I've got enough to do keeping up with Clara and the coffeehouse. Put Armstrong in there, too, and I start climbing the walls."

Edna sniffed. "I take care of Clara for you sometimes, and you don't

hear me complaining about it."

"Oh, I do sometimes," Nellie said. "And besides, when you take care of the children, that's all you do. You have Merle to make a living for you. I've got to make my own living, and this place won't run by itself"

Before Edna could answer, Armstrong picked up something from the floor and started chewing on it. He bit Edna when she stuck her finger in his mouth to get it out. She finally did—it was a nasty little clump of hair and dust—and then whacked him a lot harder than Nellie had done. He wasn't crying now because he was angry or frightened; he was crying because his bot-tom hurt.

"You've never been fair with me," Edna said.

And here we go again, Nellie thought. *One more round in the fight that never stops for good.* She said, "You think being fair means doing whatever you want. I've got news for you, dearie— it doesn't work that way."

"I've got news for you, Ma—you never do what I want." Edna glared. "You do as you please, and what pleases you most is doing whatever you think will make me maddest."

"Why, you little liar!" Nellie snapped, as she might have at Clara. But Edna's charge held just enough truth to sting more than it would have had it been made up from whole cloth. "And you were the one who was always sneaking around behind my back. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I had to sneak around behind your back. You wouldn't let me live any kind of life in front of your face," Edna said.

"I don't call living fast and loose any kind of a life." To fore-stall her daughter, Nellie added, "And I ought to know, too. I found out the hard way."

"Yeah, and you've been frozen up ever since on account of it," Edna said, another shot with all too much truth in it. "I got what I was looking for in spite of you, and do you know what else? I like it just fine." She carried her son out of the coffeehouse, slamming the door behind her hard enough to rattle the windows.

"Why is my big sister angry?" Clara asked from the door to her playroom.

"If I slammed a door like that, I'd get a whipping."

"Edna's too big to get a whipping." Under her breath, Nellie mumbled,

"No matter how much she needs one."

That slammed door also drew Hal from across the street. "You had another quarrel with Edna," he said. It was not a question.

"Well, what if I did?" Nellie said. "I don't suppose I would have, if she'd come and gotten her brat when she was sup-posed to."

Exercising her temper proved a mistake. Clara started chant-ing,

"Armstrong is a brat! Armstrong is a brat!"

"Stop that!" Hal Jacobs said sharply, and, for a wonder, Clara stopped it.

She listened to her father more often than to her mother, perhaps because Hal gave her fewer orders than Nel-lie did.

Nellie sighed. "I wish Edna would pay as much attention to you as Clara does." She sighed again. "I wish anyone would pay attention to me."

"I always pay attention to you, my dear," Hal said.

That was true. It was so true, Nellie had come to take it for granted in the years since she and Hal got married. Because she took it for granted, it no longer satisfied her. She said, "I wish Edna would pay attention to me."

"She is a grown woman," Hal said. "With a little luck, she is paying attention to her own husband now."

"It's not the same," Nellie replied in a sulky voice.

"No, I suppose it is not," Hal admitted. "But it is good that she should pay attention to someone, I think. And Merle Grimes is a young man worth paying attention to."

"I know he is. I was thinking the same thing myself earlier today," Nellie said. "But he's not her mother, and I am." She shook her head, discontented with the world and with Edna. "That's probably why she doesn't pay attention to me."

"Yes, it probably is," Hal said. "When I was becoming a man, I paid as little attention to my mother and my father as I could get away with."

Nellie had hardly known her own father. When she'd got away from her mother at an early age, it was to go into the demimonde. Hal didn't need to know any more about that than whatever he'd already found out. Nellie said,

"But Edna isn't becoming a woman. By now, she is one, like you said.

Shouldn't she have figured out that I know what I'm doing by now?"

"Maybe," Hal said. "But maybe not, too." He looked at Nellie with amused affection. "She has a stubborn streak as wide as yours. I wonder where she could have gotten it"

"Not from me," Nellie said automatically. She needed a mo-ment to recognize the expression on her husband's face. Hal Ja-cobs was doing his best not to laugh out loud. Again, Nellie spoke automatically: "I'm not stubborn!" Hal let the words hang, the most devastating thing he could have done. Nellie's face went hot. She said, "I'm not that stubborn, anyway."

"Well, maybe not," Hal said; he should have been a diplomat in striped trousers, not a cobbler and sometimes spy. He went on, "You are my dear wife, and I love you exactly the way you are."

"You're sweet." That was usually another automatic reply. This time, Nellie listened to what she'd just said. "You really are sweet, Hal. I'm glad I married you. I was scared to death when you asked me, but it's worked out pretty well, hasn't it?" If she sounded a little surprised, she could hope her husband didn't notice.

If he did, he was too much a gentleman to show it. "The best five years of my life," he said. "Being here with you, and being here to watch Clara grow up . .." His face softened. "Yes, the best years of my life."

With more than a little surprise, Nellie realized the years since the war had been the best of her life, too. She'd made more money when the Confederates occupied Washington, but she'd been worried and afraid all the time: worried about what Edna would do, afraid Bill Reach would tell the whole world what he knew, worried and afraid the U.S. bombardment would blow her and Edna and the coffeehouse to hell and gone.

Now Edna was married, Bill Reach was dead, and the country was at peace. And living with Hal Jacobs hadn't proved nearly so hard as she'd feared. "I love you, Hal," she exclaimed.

Saying it surprised her: it seemed an afternoon for surprises. And discovering she meant it surprised her even more. Hearing it made her husband's face light up. "I love it when you tell me that," Hal said. "I did not know I could be more happy than I al-ready was, but now I am."

"I'm happy, too," Nellie said. By the way all the stories were written, she should have been in love with her husband before she married him, instead of finding out she was five years later. *Well,* she thought, *it's not like I've lived a storybook life.* She tried to remember if she'd ever told Hal she loved him before. Once or twice, maybe, in a dutiful fashion, as she occasionally gave him her body. But the words hadn't come from her heart, not till today.

Perhaps Hal sensed something of the same thing. He walked up to her and gave her a kiss a good deal warmer than the pecks that usually passed between them. She returned it with more warmth than usual, too. For once, she didn't mind the gleam that came into Hal's eye. The idea of making love while kindled sud-denly struck her as delicious, not disgusting.

But Clara was still playing not far from one of the tables, and a customer chose that moment to come in. *Can't have everything,* Nellie thought as she walked over to ask the man what he wanted. She looked around. No, she couldn't have everything— she wouldn't be rich as long as she lived, for instance. What she had, though, was pretty good.

XX

As Hosea Blackford did whenever he came up to the Lower East Side of New York City, he looked around in astonishment. Turn-ing to his wife, he said, "I can't imagine what growing up here would have been like, with the buildings blocking out the sky and with swarms of people everywhere."

Flora Blackford—after being married for a year, she hardly ever signed her name *Flora Hamburger* any more—shrugged. "It's all what you're used to," she answered. "I couldn't imagine there was so much open space in the whole world, let alone the USA, till I took that train

trip out to Dakota with you this past summer. I felt like a little tiny bug on a great big plate."

Up till 1917, New York City was all she'd ever known. Up till the train trip to Dakota, all she'd known were New York City, Philadelphia, and the ninety-odd built-up miles between them. Endless expanses of grass waving gently in the breeze all the way out to the horizon had not been part of her mental land-scape. They were now, and she felt richer for it.

A boy in short pants ran by carrying a stack of the *Daily For-ward.* "Buy my paper!" he yelled in Yiddish. "Buy my paper!"

"I understood that." Blackford looked pleased with himself. "The German I took in college isn't quite fossilized after all— and being around your family is an education in any number of ways."

"I'll tell my father you said so," Flora said. She walked up the stairs of the apartment house that seemed so familiar and so strange at the same time.

Following her, Blackford said, "Go ahead. He'll take it the right way. He has better sense than half the people in the Cabinet, believe you me he does."

"Considering what goes on in the Cabinet, that's not saying so much," Flora answered. Her husband rewarded her with a gust of laughter. She laughed, too, but a little ruefully: the scent of cook-ing cabbage was very strong. "I don't think this building is ready for the vice president of the United States."

"Don't worry about it," he said, laughing again. "Compared to the farm I grew up on, it's paradise—a crowded paradise, but paradise. It's got running water and flush toilets and electricity. The farm I grew up on sure didn't, not that anybody had elec-tricity back then."

"This building had gas lamps up until a few years ago," Flora said. It did not have an elevator; she and Blackford walked up-stairs hand in hand.

Knocking at the door to the flat where she'd lived so long seemed strange, too, but it also seemed right: she didn't live here any more, and never would again. When the door swung open, David Hamburger was the one with his hand on the latch. His other hand held the cane that helped him get around.

Flora embraced her brother carefully, not wanting to make him topple over. David shook hands with Hosea Blackford, then shuffled through a turn and walked back to the kitchen table. Each slow, rolling step on his artificial leg was a separate effort, each a silent reproach against the war that, though more than six years over, would echo through shattered lives for most of the rest of the century.

Blackford shed his coat; the October evening might have had a nip to it, but the inside of the flat was warm enough and to spare. "Here, I'll take that," Flora's younger sister Esther said, and she did.

"Chess?" David asked. He pulled out the board and pieces even before Blackford could nod.

"I'll take on the winner," Isaac said. The younger of Flora's brothers wore in his lapel a silver Soldiers' Circle pin inscribed *1918*—the year of his conscription class.

She thanked heaven that he, unlike David, hadn't had to go to war. .. and wished to heaven he wouldn't wear that pin. Soldiers' Circle men could be almost as goonish as the Freedom Party's ruffians down in the Confederate States. But he did as he pleased in such things. He was a man now, and let everyone know it on any excuse or none.

"Hello, Aunt Flora!" Yossel Reisen said. Coming home so seldom, Flora was amazed at how much her older sister's son grew in between times. He'd been a baby when she went off to Congress, but he was in school now. He added, "Hello, Uncle Hosea!"

"Hello, Yossel," Hosea Blackford answered absently, most of his attention on the board in front of him. He played well enough to beat David some of the time, but not too often. He'd already gone down a pawn, which meant he probably wouldn't win this game.

Abraham Hamburger came in from the bedroom, puffing on his pipe. He hugged Flora, then glanced at the chess board. Set-ting a hand on Blackford's shoulder, he said, "You're in trouble. But you knew that when you decided to marry my daughter, eh? If you didn't, you should have."

"Papa!' Flora said, indignation mostly but not altogether feigned.

"He's not kidding, dear," Blackford said. "You know he's not." Since Flora did, she subsided. Her husband started a series of trades that wiped the board clear like machine-gun fire smashing a frontal assault. By the time the dust settled, though, he was down two pawns,

not one. Stopping David from promoting one of them cost him his bishop, his last piece other than pawns. He tipped over his king and stood up. "You got me again."

David only grunted. He grunted again when Isaac took Black-ford's place. Before he and his brother could start playing, So-phie stuck her head out of the kitchen and announced, "Supper in a couple of minutes."

"We'd better wait," David said then.

"Ha!" Isaac said. "You're just afraid I'd beat you." But he scooped his pieces off the board and put them in the box. He and David had been giving each other a hard time as long as they'd been alive.

Sophie came out with plates and silverware. Behind her came Sarah Hamburger with a platter on which rested two big boiled beef tongues. While Sophie and Esther and Flora set the table, their mother went back into the kitchen, returning with another platter piled high with boiled potatoes and onions and carrots.

"Looks wonderful," Hosea Blackford said enthusiastically. "Smells wonderful, too."

Isaac gave him a quizzical look. "When I was in the Army, a lot of... fellows who weren't

Jews"—he'd

caught

himself

be-fore

saying

goyim

to

his

brother-in-law—"turned up their noses at the idea of eating tongue."

"All what you're used to, I suppose," Blackford said. "When I was growing up on a farm, we'd have it whenever we butchered a cow—or

a lamb, for that matter, though a lamb's tongue has a skin that's tough to peel and so little meat, it's almost more trouble than it's worth. I hadn't eaten tongue for years before I first came here."

"I knew then you liked," Sarah Hamburger said, "so I make." Her English was the least certain of anyone's there, but she made a special effort for Blackford.

Over supper, Esther said, "What is it like, being vice presi-dent?" She laughed at herself. "I've been asking Flora what it's like being in Congress ever since she got elected, and I still don't really understand it, so I don't know why I should ask you now."

"Being in Congress is complicated, or it can be," Blackford answered. "Being vice president is simple. Imagine you're in a factory, and you have a machine with one very expensive part. If that part breaks, the whole machine shuts down till you can re-place it."

"And you're that part?" Esther asked, her eyes wide.

Blackford laughed and shook his head. "I'm the spare for that part. I sit in the warehouse and gather dust. President Sinclair is the part that's hooked up to the machine, and I hope to heaven that he doesn't break."

"You're joking," David said. He studied Blackford's face. "No, I take it back.

You're not."

"No, I'm not," Blackford said. "Flora has heard me complain about this for as long as I've had the job. I have the potential to be a very important man—but the only way the potential turns real is if something horrible happens, the way something horrible hap-pened to the Confederate president last year. Otherwise, I haven't got much to do."

Abraham Hamburger said, "This Mitchel, down in the Con-federate States, seems to be doing a good job."

"He does indeed," Blackford said. "I'm not telling any secrets when I say President Sinclair is glad, too. If the regular politi-cians in the Confederate States do a good job, the reactionaries don't get the chance to grab the reins."

"A *kholeriyeh* on everybody in the Confederate States," David muttered

in Yiddish. Blackford glanced at Flora, but she didn't translate. She didn't blame her brother for feeling that way. Because of what the Confederates had done to him, she could hardly keep from feeling that way herself.

Her father nodded at what Blackford had said. "These Free-dom Party *mamzrim* remind me of the Black Hundreds in Rus-sia, except they go after Negroes instead of Jews."

"Not enough Jews in the Confederate States for them to go after," Isaac said. "If there were more, they would."

"That's probably true," Flora said, and Blackford nodded. Flora's laugh sounded a little shaky. "Funny to think of anybody going after anyone instead of Jews."

"It is, isn't it?" Isaac said. "People do it here, too, even though there are more Jews than Negroes in the USA. It makes life easier for us than it would be otherwise."

Hosea Blackford looked around the crowded apartment. Flora knew what was in his mind: with so many people in so small a space, Jews still didn't have it easy. She hadn't been able to see how crowded the flat was, how crowded the whole Lower East Side was, till she moved away. Before, they'd been like water to a fish. Only going to Philadelphia had given her a stan-dard for comparison.

But that standard for comparison didn't mean her brother was wrong. *Easier* and *easy* weren't the same thing. She said, "Wher-ever we end up, no matter how hard things are for us, we manage to get by."

"That spirit is what made this country what it is today, no matter who has it,"

Hosea Blackford said. He stopped with a bite of tongue halfway to his mouth and an astonished look on his face. "Will you listen to me. Will you *listen* to me? If you didn't know better, wouldn't you swear that was Teddy Roosevelt talking?"

"He's set his mark on the country for a long time to come," David said. He rapped his own artificial leg, which sounded of wood and metal. "He's set his mark on me for the rest of my life. Having the Socialists running the country has turned out better for the country and better for us"—he grinned at Flora and at Hosea Blackford—"than I thought it would. I admit it. But I still think TR deserved a third term in 1920."

Flora knew her brother's opinion. She had never understood it, and still didn't. But she refused to let him get her goat. "Now we'll see how many terms President Sinclair deserves," she said, which seemed to satisfy everyone. As her husband had, she heard what she'd said with some surprise. *Will you listen to me? Will you* listen *to me? If you didn 't know better, wouldn 't you swear that was a politician talking?*

Someone had plastered two-word posters—VOTE FREEDOM!— on every telegraph pole and blank wall in the Terry. As Scipio walked from his roominghouse to Erasmus' fish store and res-taurant, he wondered if all the Freedom Party men had gone round the bend. Only a handful of Negroes in Augusta, Georgia, were eligible to vote. Even if they'd all been eligible, the Freedom Party wouldn't have picked up more than a handful of their votes.

When Scipio came up to the fish store, Erasmus was scrub-bing a Freedom Party poster off his door. "Mornin', Xerxes," he said. "I don't need me no extra work so early in the mornin'."

"Crazy damnfool buckra," Scipio said. "Ain't nobody here got no use for no Freedom Party."

"Freedom Party?" Erasmus exclaimed. "That whose poster this here is?" He was a clever man, and sharp with figures, but could hardly read or write. At Scipio's nod, he scrubbed and scraped harder than ever. "Mus' be try in' to make us afraid of

'em."

"Mebbe so," Scipio said; that hadn't occurred to him. "I was feared o' they befo', but I ain't now. They shoots theyselves when they shoots de president."

Erasmus didn't answer for a moment; he was busy getting rid of the last bits of the offending poster. "There—that's better." He kicked shreds of wadded-up paper across the sidewalk and into the gutter, then glanced over at Scipio. "Them bastards ain't even collectin' 'taxes' no more. You reckon they's goin' anywheres now?"

"Pray to Jesus they ain't," Scipio answered with all his heart. He still didn't believe prayer helped, but the phrase came auto-matically to his lips.

"Amen," Erasmus said. Then he reached into a pocket of his dungarees and pulled out a one-dollar banknote. "And I reckon this here

hammers some nails in the coffin lid, too. Give 'em one big thing less to bellyache about."

"Yeah." Again, Scipio spoke enthusiastically. The Freedom Party hadn't been alone in bellyaching about the inflation that had squeezed the CSA since the end of the Great War. He'd done plenty of that himself. "Been a year now, near enough, an'

the money still worth what it say. Almost done got to where I starts to trust it."

"Wasn't all bad." Erasmus chuckled. "Still recollect the look on the white-folks banker's face when I paid off what I owed. Thought he was gonna piss his pants.

Money was still worth a little somethin' then, so they couldn't pretend it weren't, like they done later. An' now I got my house free an' clear. Wish more niggers woulda did the same."

Scipio shared that wish. Most of the Negroes in Augusta hadn't been alert enough to the opportunity that had briefly glit-tered for them. "Reckon mos' of the buckra don' think of it till too late, neither," he said.

"You right about that," Erasmus answered. "Some folks is jus' stupid, an' it don't matter none whether they's black or white." Before Scipio could say anything about that, his boss went on, "We done spent enough time chinnin'. Got work to do, an' it don't never go away."

Once inside the fish store and restaurant, Scipio fell to with a will. Erasmus had told a couple of important secrets there. Fools weren't the only ones who came in all colors. So did people who worked hard. One way or another, they got ahead. The ones with black skins didn't get so far ahead and didn't get ahead so fast, but they did better than their brethren who were content to take it easy.

After the lunch crowd thinned out, Scipio said, "You let me go downtown for a little bit, boss? Bathsheba want some fancy but-tons for a shirtwaist she makin', an'

she can't find they nowhere in the Terry. Don't reckon no buckra too proud to take my money."

Erasmus waved him away. "Yeah, go on, go on. Be back quick, though, you hear?" Scipio nodded and left. He could take advan-tage of his boss' good nature every once in a while because he did work hard—

and because he didn't try taking advantage very often.

Fewer Negroes were on the streets of downtown Augusta nowadays than had been there right after the war, when Scipio first came to town. The factory jobs that had brought blacks into town from the fields were gone now, gone or back in white hands. Two cops in the space of a couple of blocks demanded to see Scipio's passbook. He passed both inspections.

"Don't want *no* trouble from nobody, boy. you hear'?" the second policeman said, handing the book back to him.

"Yes, suh," Scipio answered. He might have pointed out that the policeman wasn't stopping any whites to see if they meant trouble. He might have, but he didn't. Had he, it would have meant trouble for him. The cop wouldn't have needed to belong to the Freedom Party to come down hard on an uppity nigger.

The Freedom Party itself wasn't lying down and playing dead. Posters shouting VOTE FREEDOM! covered walls and poles and fences here, as they did over in the Terry. Here, though, they competed with others touting the Whigs and the Radical Lib-erals. The more of those Scipio saw, the happier he was.

He also grew happier when he saw exactly the kind of buttons Bathsheba wanted on a white cardboard card in the front win-dow of a store that called itself Susanna's Notions. When he went inside, the salesgirl—or possibly it was Susanna herself—ignored him till he asked about the buttons. Even then, she made no move to get them, but snapped, "Show me your money."

He displayed a dollar banknote. That got her moving from be-hind the counter.

She took the buttons back there, rang up twenty cents on the cash register, and gave him a quarter, a tiny silver half-dime, and a roll of pennies. By the look on her face, he sus-pected it would prove two or three cents short of the full fifty it should have held. A black man risked his life if he presumed to complain about anything a white woman did. The charges she could level in return.. . Reckoning his own life worth more than two or three cents, he nodded brusquely and left Susanna's No-tions. He wouldn't be back. The woman might have profited from this sale, but she'd never get another one from him.

No sooner had he got out onto the sidewalk than he heard a ca-

cophony of motorcar horns and a cry that still made his blood run cold: "Freedom!" Down the street, blocking traffic, came a column of Freedom Party marchers in white shirts and butternut trousers, men in the front ranks carrying flags, as arrogant as if it were 1921 all over again.

Scipio wanted to duck back into Susanna's Notions once more; he felt as if every Freedom Party ruffian were shouting right at him, and glaring right at him, too. But the woman in there had been as unfriendly in her own way as were the ruffians. He stayed where he was, doing his best to blend into the brick-work like a chameleon on a green leaf.

"Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!'" The shout was as loud and, in Scipio's ears, as hateful as it had been during the presidential campaign two years before.

But more white men shouted back from the sidewalks and from their automobiles:

"Murderers!" "Shut up, you bastards!'" "Get out of the road before I run you over!"

"Liars!" "Sons of bitches!" Scipio had never heard shouts like that during Jake Featherston's run for the Confederate presidency.

And, as if from nowhere, a phalanx of policemen, some with pistols, some carrying rifles, came off a side street to block the marchers' path. "Disperse or face the consequences," one of them growled. Nobody had ever spoken like that to a Freedom Party column during the 1921 campaign, either.

"We have the right to—" one of the men in white and butter-nut began.

"You haven't got the right to block traffic, and if you don't get the hell out of the way, you can see how you like the city jail," the cop said. He and his men looked ready—more than ready—to arrest any Freedom Party stalwart who started to give them a hard time, and to shoot him if he kept it up.

The Freedom Party men saw that, too. By ones and twos, they began melting out of the column and heading back to whatever they'd been doing before they started marching. A couple of the men up front kept arguing with the police. They didn't seem to notice they had fewer and fewer followers. Then one of them looked around. He did a

double take that would have drawn ap-plause on the vaudeville stage. The argument stopped. So did the march.

Scipio's feet hardly seemed to touch the ground as he walked back to the Terry.

When he told Erasmus what he'd seen, his boss said," 'Bout time them bastards gits what's coming to 'em. Way past time, anybody wants to know. But better late than never, like they say."

"Didn't never reckon I live to see the day when the po-lice clamps down on the buckra marchin' 'long the street," Scipio said.

"You never lose your shirt bettin' on white folks to hate nig-gers," Erasmus said.

"You bet on white folks to be stupid all the time, you one broke nigger. They knows they needs us—the smart ones knows, anyways. An' the Freedom Party done come close enough to winnin' to scare the smart ones. Don't reckon they gets free rein no more."

"Here's hopin' you is right," Scipio said. "Do Jesus, here's hopin' you is right."

When he got home, Bathsheba examined the buttons with a critical eye, then nodded. "Them's right nice," she said.

"You's right nice," Scipio said, which made his wife smile. He went on, "I gots somethin' else right nice to tell you," and again described the ignominious end to the Freedom Party march.

That made Bathsheba jump out of her chair and kiss him. "Them white-and-butternut fellers used to scare me to death," she said. "Tell the truth, them white-and-butternut fellers still scare me. But maybe, if you is right, maybe one fine day even us niggers can spit in their eye."

"Mebbe so," Scipio said dreamily. He'd already spit in the white man's eye as a not altogether willing member of the ruling council of the Congaree Socialist Republic. This would be dif-ferent. Echoing Erasmus, he said, "Even some o' the buckra like to see we spit in the Freedom Party's eye."

"I got somethin' else we can do about the Freedom Party," Bathsheba said. Scipio raised a questioning eyebrow. His wife condescended to explain: "Forget there ever was such a thing as that there party."

Now Scipio kissed her. "Amen!" he said. "Best thing is they disappears like a stretch o' bad weather. After the bad weather gone, you comes out in the sunshine an' you forgets about the rain. We done have more rain than we needs. Mebbe now, though, the sun come out to stay." And, in the hope the good weather would last, he kissed Bathsheba again.

Tom Colleton dumped afternoon papers from Charleston and Columbia down on the kitchen table in front of Anne, who was eating a slice of bread spread with orange marmalade and drink-ing coffee fortified with brandy. Headlines on all the newspapers proclaimed thumping Whig victories in the election the day before.

"Got to give you credit, Sis," Tom said. "Looks like you got out of the Freedom Party just in time."

"If you think the bottom is going to fall out of a stock, you sell it right then," Anne answered. "You don't wait for it to go any lower, not unless you want to lose even more."

Her brother had been content to look at the headlines. She studied the stories line by line, knowing headline writers often turned news in the direction their editors said they should. That hadn't happened here; the Whigs would own a larger majority in both the House and Senate of the Thirty-second Confederate Congress than they had in the Thirty-first.

And the Freedom Party had lost enough seats to make Anne's lips skin back from her teeth in a savage smile. They hadn't lost quite so many as she'd hoped, but they'd been hurt. Nine Con-gressmen . .. how did Jake Featherston propose doing anything with nine Congressmen? He couldn't possibly do anything but bellow and paw the air. People weren't so inclined to pay atten-tion to bellowing and pawing the air as they had been before Grady Calkins killed Wade Hampton V

"Yes, I think he is finished," Anne murmured.

"By God, I hope so," Tom said. "Do you know what he re-minded me of?" He waited for Anne to shake her head before continuing, "A wizard, that's what. One of the wicked ones straight out of a fairy tale, I mean. When he started talking, you had to listen: that was part of the spell. He's still talking, but the spell is broken now, so it doesn't matter."

Anne stared at her brother in astonishment, then got up and set the

palm of her hand on his forehead. His oath should have left the smell of lightning in the air. "Oh, hush," Anne said ab-sently. "I was wondering if you had a fever—fancies like that aren't like you. But you don't, and it was a very good figure in-deed, even if you won't come up with another one like it any time soon."

"Thanks a heap, Sis." Tom's grin made him look for a moment like the irresponsible young man who'd gone gaily off to war in 1914 rather than the quenched and tempered veteran who'd re-turned. "He wasn't a wizard, of course, only a man too damn good at making everyone else angry when he was."

"He was angry all the time. He still is. He always will be, I think." Anne said. She'd just spoken of Featherston as finished. Even so, hearing Tom use the past tense in talking about him brought a small jolt with it.

Her brother said, "He sure had you going for a while."

Past tense again, and another jolt with it. But Anne could hardly disagree. "Yes, I reckon he did," she said, her accent less refined than usual. "Looking back on it, maybe he was a wizard. For a while there, I would have done anything he wanted."

Had President Hampton not been assassinated, Anne knew she would have gone on doing whatever Featherston wanted, too. She was honest enough to admit it to herself, if to no one else, not even her brother. Perhaps especially not to Tom, who'd always shown more resistance to Featherston's spell than she had.

Would I have gone to bed with him, if he d wanted that? Anne wondered.

Slowly, reluctantly, she nodded to herself. */ think I would have.* She hadn't been in control of things, not with Jake she hadn't. With every other man she'd ever known—even Roger Kimball after their first encounter—yes. With Featherston? No, and again she was honest enough to admit it to herself.

But he hadn't wanted her. So far as she knew, he hadn't wanted any woman. She didn't think that made him a sodomite. It was more as if he poured all his energy into rage, and had none left for desire.

All that flashed through her mind in a couple of heartbeats: before her brother said, "If I don't see him or hear him again, I won't be sorry."

"As long as the money stays good, you probably won't," Anne said, and Tom nodded. She went on, "And as long as the niggers know their place and stick to it."

Tom nodded again. "Featherston's closest to sound on the nig-gers, no doubt about that. It's still worth a white man's life, sometimes, to get any decent work out of field hands. They'd sooner loll around and sleep in the sun and collect white men's wages for doing it."

"It won't ever be the way it was before the war," Anne said sadly, speaking in part for Marshlands, in part for the entire Con-federacy. The desire to make things again as they had been be-fore the war had won the Freedom Party votes by the thousands, and had helped win her backing, too. But the war was almost six and a half years over, and life did go on, even if in a differ-ent way.

"I want another chance at the United States one day," Tom said. "Featherston was sound about that, too, but he wanted it too soon."

"Yes," Anne said, "but we will have another chance at the United States sooner or later, no matter who's in charge of the CSA. And we'll have a good chance at them, too, as long as the Socialists hold the White House."

"They don't," her brother remarked with no small pride. "We wrecked it during the fight for Washington "

"It's almost rebuilt," Anne said. "I saw that in one of the pa-pers the other day.

We'll have a harder time knocking it down again, too, with the Yankees holding northern Virginia."

"We'll manage," Tom said. "Even if our soldiers don't get that far—and I think they will—we'll have plenty of bombing aero-planes to flatten it—and Philadelphia, and New York City, too, I hope."

"Yes," was all Anne said to that. She would never be ready to live at peace with the United States, not even when she turned old and gray. Turning old and gray was on her mind a good deal these days. Nearer forty than thirty, she knew the time when her looks added to the persuasiveness of her logic would not last much longer.

As Tom was doing more and more often since coming home from the war, he thought along with her. "You really ought to get married one of these days before too long, Sis," he said. "You don't want to end up

an old maid, do you?"

"That depends," Anne Colleton answered. "Compared to what? Compared to ending up with a husband who tells me what to do when he doesn't know what he's talking about? Compared to that, being an old maid looks mighty good, believe me."

"Men aren't like that," her brother protested. "We've got a way of knowing good sense when we hear it."

Anne laughed loud and long. What Tom had said struck her as so ridiculous, she didn't even bother getting angry. "When you finally get married yourself, I'll tell your wife you said that," she remarked. "She won't believe me—I promise she won't believe me—but I'll tell her."

"Why wouldn't she believe that about me?" Tom asked with such a tone of aggrieved innocence, Anne laughed harder than ever.

"Because it'd be lying?" she suggested, but that only made her brother angry.

Changing the subject seemed like a good idea. She did: "When are you going to get married, anyhow? You were bothering me about it, but turnabout's fair play."

Tom shrugged. "When I find a girl who suits me," he replied. "I'm not in any big hurry. It's different for a man, you know."

"I suppose so," Anne said in a voice that supposed nothing of the sort. "People would talk if I married a twenty-year-old when I was fifty. If you do that, all your friends will be jealous."

"How you do go on, Sis!" Tom said, turning red. Anne had in-deed managed to get him to stop thinking about marrying her off. But the dismal truth was, he had a point. It *was* different for men. They often got more handsome as they aged; women, al-most never. And men could go right on siring children even after they went bald and wrinkled and toothless. Anne knew she had only a few childbearing years left. Once they were gone, suitors would want her only for her money, not mostly for it as they did now.

"God must be a man," she said. "If God were a woman, things would work a lot different, and you can take it to the bank."

"I don't know anything about that," Tom said. "If you really reckon it's fun and jolly to go up out of a trench when the ma-chine guns are

hammering, or to hope you've got your gas hel-met good and snug when the chlorine shells start falling, or to sit in a dugout wondering whether the next eight-inch shell is going to cave it in, then you can go on about what a tough row women have to hoe."

"I've fought," Anne said. Her brother only looked at her. She knew what she'd been through. So did he. He'd been through some of it with her, cleaning Red remnants out of the swamps by the Congaree after the war against the USA was lost.

She had some notion of what Tom had experienced on the Roanoke front, but only some. She hadn't done that. By everything she knew, she wouldn't have wanted to do it.

"Never mind," Tom said. "For now, it's over. We don't need to quarrel about it today. Might as well leave that for the generals— all of 'em'll spend the next twenty, thirty years writing books about how they could have won the war single-handed if only the fellows on their flanks and over 'em hadn't been a pack of fools."

He walked over to a cupboard and took out a couple of glasses. Then he yanked the cork from a bottle of whiskey on the counter under the cupboard and poured out two hefty belts. He carried one of them back to Anne and set it on the table by the news-papers. She picked it up. "What shall we drink to?" she asked.

"Drinking to being here and able to drink isn't the worst toast in the world." Tom said. He raised his glass. Anne thought about that, nodded, and raised hers in turn.

The whiskey was smoke in her mouth, flame in her throat, and a nice warm fire in her belly. Before long, the glass was empty.

Anne went over to the counter and refilled it. While she was pouring, Tom came over with his glass, from which the whiskey had also vanished. She gave him another drink, too. "My turn now," she said, as if expecting him to deny it.

He didn't. He bowed instead, as a gentleman would have done before the war. Not so many gentlemen were left these days; ma-chine guns and gas and artillery had put them under the ground by the thousands, along with their ruder countrymen by the tens of thousands.

She raised her glass. "Here's to freedom from the Freedom Party!"

"Well, you know I'll drink to that one." Her brother suited ac-tion to word.

Again, the glasses emptied fast. The whiskey hit—Anne under-stood why the simile was on her mind—like a bursting shell. Everything seemed simple and clear, even things she knew per-fectly well weren't. She weighed Jake Featherston in the balances, as God had weighed Belshazzar in the Bible. And, as God had found Belshazzar wanting, so she found Featherston and the Free-dom Party.

"No, I don't reckon he'll be back. I don't reckon he'll be back at all," she said, and that called for another drink.

Sam Carsten was using his off-duty time the way he usually did now: he sprawled in his bunk aboard the *Remembrance,* study-ing hard. His head felt filled to the bursting point. He had the no-tion that he could have built and outfitted any ship in the Navy and ordered its crew about. He didn't think the secretary of the navy knew as much as he did. God might have; he supposed he was willing to give God the benefit of the doubt.

George Moerlein, his bunkmate, came by to pull something out of his duffel bag.

"Christ, Sam, don't you ever take a break?" he said. He had to repeat himself before Carsten knew he was there.

At last reminded of Moerlein's existence, Sam sheepishly shook his head. "Can't afford to take a break," he said. "Examina-tions are only a week away. They don't make things easy on petty officers who want to kick their way up into real officer country."

Moerlein had been a petty officer a long time, a lot longer than Carsten. He had no desire to become anything else, and saw no reason anyone else should have such a desire, either. "I've known a few mustangs, or more than a few, but I'll be damned if I ever knew a happy one. Real officers treat 'em like you'd treat a nigger in a fancy suit: the clothes may be right, but the guy in-side 'em ain't."

"If I don't pass this examination, it won't matter one way or the other," Sam said pointedly. "And besides, officers can't be any rougher on mustangs than they are on ordinary sailors."

"Only shows how much you know," Moerlein answered. "Well, don't mind me, not that you was." He went on about his busi-ness. Sam

returned to his book. He came across a section on en-gine maintenance he didn't remember quite so well as he should have. From feeling he knew about as much as God, he fearfully sank to thinking he knew less than a retarded ordinary seaman on his first day at sea.

Mess call was something of a relief. Sam stopped worrying about keeping a warship fueled and running and started thinking about stoking his own boiler. With the *Remembrance* still tied up in the Boston Navy Yard, meals remained tasty and varied— none of the beans and sausage and sauerkraut that would have marked a long cruise at sea.

Somebody sitting not far from Sam said, "I'd sooner spend my days belching and my nights farting, long as that meant I was doing something worthwhile."

Heads bobbed up and down in agreement, all along the mess table. "We ought to be thankful they ain't breaking us up for scrap," another optimist said.

Somebody else added, "God damn Upton Sinclair to hell and gone."

That brought more nods, Carsten among them, but a sailor snapped, "God damn you to hell and gone, Tad, you big dumb Polack."

Socialists everywhere, Carsten thought as Tad surged to his feet. A couple of people caught him and slammed him back down. Sam nodded again, this time in approval. "Knock it off," he said. "We don't want any brawls here, not now we don't. Any-thing that makes the *Remembrance* look bad is liable to get her taken out of commission and land the lot of us on the beach. Congress isn't throwing money around like they did during the war."

"Hell, Congress isn't throwing money around like they did before the war, neither," Tad said. "We busted a gut building a Navy that could go out and win, and now we're flushing it right down the head."

"Rebs ain't got a Navy worth anything any more," said the So-cialist sailor who'd called him a Polack. "Limeys ain't, either. No such thing as the Canadian Navy these days. So who the hell we got to worry about?"

"Goddamn Japs, for one." Three men said the same thing at the same time, differing only in the adjective with which they modified *Japs.*

"Kaiser Bill's High Seas Fleet, for two," Sam added. "Yeah, us and the Germans are pals for now, but how long is that going to last? Best way I can think of to keep the Kaiser friendly is to stay too tough to jump on."

That produced a thoughtful silence. At last, somebody down at the far end of the mess table said, "You know, Carsten, when I heard you was studying for officer, I figured you was crazy. Maybe you knew what you was doing after all."

Sam looked around to see who was in earshot. Deciding the coast was clear, he answered, "Maybe you don't have to be crazy to be an officer, but I never heard tell that it hurts."

Amidst laughter, people started telling stories about officers they'd known. Sam pitched in with some of his own. Inside, he was smiling. A book about leadership he'd read had suggested that changing the subject was often the best way to defuse a nasty situation. Unlike some of the things he'd read, that really worked.

After supper, he went back to studying, and kept at it till lights-out. George Moerlein shook his head. "Never reckoned you was one of those fellows with spectacles and a high fore-head," he said.

"You want to get anywhere, you got to work for it," Sam an-swered, more than a little nettled. "Anybody wants to stay in a rut, that's his business. But anybody who doesn't, that's his busi-ness, too, or it damn well ought to be."

"All right. All right. I'll shut up," Moerlein said. "Swear to Jesus, though, I think you're doing this whole thing 'cause you want I should have to salute you."

"Oh, no," Carsten said in a hoarse whisper. "My secret's out." For a moment, his bunkmate believed him. Then Moerlein snorted and cursed and rolled over in his bunk and, a couple of minutes later, started to snore.

Sam ran on coffee and cigarettes and very little sleep till the day of the examinations, which were held in a hall not far from the Rope Walk, the long stone building in which the Navy's great hemp cables were made. Commander Grady slapped Sam on the back as he left the *Remembrance,* "Just remember, you *can* do it," the gunnery officer said.

"Thank you, sir," Sam said, "and, if you please, sir, just re-member, this was your idea in the first place." Grady laughed. Sam hurried past him

and down the gangplank.

Sitting at a table in the examination hall waiting for the lieu-tenant commander at the front of the room to pass out the pile of test booklets on his desk, Sam looked around, studying the com-petition. He saw a roomful of petty officers not a whole lot dif-ferent from himself. Only a few were younger than he; several grizzled veterans had to be well past fifty. He admired their per-sistence and hoped he would outscore them in spite of it.

Then he stopped worrying about anything inessential, for the officer started giving out the booklets. "Men, you will have four hours," he said. "I wish you all the best of luck, and I remind you that, should you not pass, the examination will be offered again in a year's time. Ready? .. . Begin."

How many times had some of those grizzled veterans walked into this hall or others like it? That thought gave Sam a different perspective on persistence. He wondered if he'd keep coming back after failing the examination half a dozen or a dozen times. Hoping he wouldn't have to find out, he opened the booklet and plunged in.

The examination was as bad as he'd feared it would be, as bad as he'd heard it would be. As he worked, he felt as if his brain were being sucked out of his head and down onto the paper by way of his pencil. He couldn't imagine a human mind containing all the knowledge the Navy Department evidently expected its officers to have at their fingertips. Panic threatened to over-whelm him when he came upon the first question he couldn't even begin to answer.

Well, maybe these other bastards can't answer it, either, he thought. That steadied him. He couldn't do anything more than his best.

Sweat soaked his dark uniform long before the examination ended. It had nothing to do with the hall, which was very little warmer than the Boston December outside.

But he noticed he was far from the only man wiping his brow.

After what seemed like forever—and, at the same time, like only a few minutes—the lieutenant commander rapped out, "Pen-cils down! Pass booklets to the left." Sam had been in the middle of a word. That didn't matter. Nothing mattered any more. He joined the weary, shambling throng of sailors filing out of the hall.

"There's always next year," someone said in doleful tones. Carsten

didn't argue with him. Nobody argued with him. Sam couldn't imagine anyone being confident he'd passed that brutal examination. He also couldn't imagine anyone showing confi-dence without getting lynched.

He didn't have any leave coming, so he couldn't even get drunk after the miserable thing was over. He had to return to the *Remembrance* and return to duty. When Commander Grady asked him how he'd done, he rolled his eyes. Grady laughed.

Sam didn't see one thing funny about it.

Day followed day; 1923 gave way to 1924. *Coming up on ten years since the war started,* Sam thought. That seemed unbeliev-able, but he knew it was true. He wished ten years had gone by since the examination. When results were slow in coming, he did his best to forget he'd ever taken the miserable thing. *There's al-ways next year,* he thought—except, by now, this was next year.

Then, one day, the yeoman in charge of mail called out "Car-sten!" and thrust an envelope at him. He took it with some sur-prise; he seldom got mail. But, sure enough, the envelope had his name typed on it, and DEPARTMENT OF THE

NAVY in the upper left-hand corner. He stuck his thumb over that return address, not wanting his buddies to know he'd got news he expected to be bad.

He marched off down a corridor and opened the envelope where no one could watch him do it. The letter inside bore his name and pay number on Navy Department stationery. It read, *You are ordered to report to Commissioning Board 17 at 0800 hours on Wednesday, 6 February 1924, for the purpose of deter-mining your fitness to hold a commission in the United States Navy and.. .*

Sam had to read it twice before he realized what it meant. "Jesus!" he whispered.

"Sweet suffering Jesus! I passed!"

He had to remind himself that he wasn't home free yet. Every-body said commissioning boards did strange things. In this par-ticular case, what everybody said was likely to be true. Standing there in the cramped corridor, he refused to let what everybody said worry him in the least. The worst had to be over, for the simple reason that nothing could have been worse than that ex-amination. The worst was over, and he'd come through it. He was on his way.

These days, Lucien Galtier thought of himself as an accomplished driver. He didn't say he was an accomplished driver, though. The one time he'd done that, Georges had responded, "And what have you accomplished? Not killing anyone?

Bravo, *monperer*

No matter how accomplished he reckoned himself (Georges to the contrary notwithstanding), he wasn't planning on going anywhere today. That he had a fine Chevrolet mattered not at all. He wouldn't have gone out on the fine paved road up to Riviere-du-Loup even in one of the U.S. Army's traveling forts—why the Americans called the infernal machines *barrels* he'd never fig-ured out. The snowstorm howling down from the northwest made the trip from the farmhouse to the barn cold and hard, let alone any longer journey.

When he got inside, the livestock set up the usual infer-nal racket that meant, *Where have you been? We're starving to death.* He ignored all the animals but the horse. To it, he said, "This is ingratitude. Would you sooner be out on the highway in such weather?"

Only another indignant snort answered him as he gave the beast oats for the day.

When it came to food, the horse could be—was—eloquent. On any other subject, Galtier might as well have been talking to himself whenever he went traveling in the wagon. He knew that. He'd known it all along. It hadn't stopped him from having innumerable conversations with the horse over the years.

"I cannot talk with the automobile," he said. "Truly, I saw this from the moment I began to drive it. It is only a machine— although this, I have seen, does not keep Marie from talking with her sewing machine from time to time."

The horse let drop a pile of green-brown dung. It was warmer in the barn than outside, but the dung still steamed. Lucien won-dered whether the horse was offering its opinion of driving a motorcar or of conversing with a sewing machine.

"Do you want to work, old fool?" he asked the horse. The only reply it gave was to gobble the oats. He laughed. "No, all you want to do is eat. I cannot even get you a mare for your amuse-ment. Oh, I could, but you would not be amused. A gelding is not to be amused in that

way, *n 'est-cepas?"*

He'd had the vet geld the horse when it was a yearling. It had never known the joys not being gelded could bring. It never would. Still, he fancied it flicked its ear at him in a resentful way. He nodded to himself. Had anyone done such a thing to him, he would have been more than merely resentful.

"Life is hard," he said. "Even for an animal like yourself, one that does little work these days, life is hard. Believe me, it is no easier for men and women. Most of them, most of the time, have very little, and no hope for more than very little. I get down on my knees and thank the Lord for the bounty He has given me"

Another ear flick might have said, *Careful how you speak, there— lam apart of your bounty, after all* Maybe the horse was exceptionally expressive today. Maybe Galtier's imagination was working harder than usual.

"Truly, I could have been unfortunate as easily as I have been fortunate," Galtier said. The horse did not deny it. Galtier went on, "Had I been unfortunate, you would not be eating so well as you are now. Believe me, you would not."

Maybe the horse believed him. Maybe it didn't. Whether it did or not, it knew it was eating well now. That was what mattered. How could a man reasonably expect a horse to care about might-have-beens?

But Lucien Galtier cared. "Consider," he said. "I might have been driven to try to blow up an American general, as was that anglophone farmer who blew himself up instead, poor fool. For I will not lie: I had no love for the Americans. Yes, that could have been me, had chance driven me in the other direction. But I am here, and I am as I am, and so you have the chance to stand in your stall and get fat and lazy. I wonder if that other farmer had a horse, and how the unlucky animal is doing."

His own horse ate all he had given it and looked around for more, which was not forthcoming. It sent him a hopeful look, rather like that of a beggar who sat in the street with a tin cup be-side him. Galtier rarely gave beggars money; as far as he was concerned, men who could work should. He did not insist that the horse work, not any more, but he knew better than to over-feed it.

After finishing in the barn, he walked through the snow to the farmhouse. The heat of the stove in the kitchen seemed a greater

blessing than any Bishop Pascal could give. As Galtier stood close by it, Marie poured him a cup of steaming hot coffee.

She added a hefty dollop of cream and, for good measure, a slug of applejack, too.

"Drink it before it gets cold," she said in a tone that brooked no argument. "You should be warmed inside and out." And, be-fore he could answer, almost—but not quite—before he could even think, she added, "And do not say what is in your mind, you dreadful brute of a man."

"I?" After sipping the coffee, which was delicious, Galtier said, "I declare to the world that you have wronged me."

"So you do," his wife replied. "You should remember, though, that declaring a thing does not make it true."

She was laughing at him. He could hear it in her voice. She was also laughing because of him, a very different business. He waggled a forefinger at her. "You are a very troublesome woman." he said severely.

"No doubt you have reason," Marie said. "And no doubt I have my reasons for being troublesome. One of those reasons that comes straight to my mind is that I have a very troublesome husband."

"Me?" Lucien shook his head. "By no means. Not at all." He took another sip of fortified coffee. "How could I possibly be troublesome when I am holding here a cup of the elixir of life?" He put down the elixir of life so he could shrug out of his wool plaid coat. It was not quite warm enough in the bitter cold out-side, but much too warm for standing by the stove for very long. As Lucien picked up the coffee cup again, Georges came into the kitchen. Lucien nodded to himself. "If I am troublesome, it could be that I understand why."

"How strange," Marie said. "I just now had this same thought at the same time.

Men and women who have been married a long while do this, they say."

"How strange," Georges said, "I just now had the thought that I have been insulted, and for once I do not even know why."

"Never fear, son," Galtier said. "There are always reasons, and they are

usually good ones."

"Here, then—I will give you a reason," Georges said. He left the kitchen, and flicked the light switch on the way out. The elec-tric bulb in the lamp hanging from the ceiling went dark, plung-ing the room into gloom.

"Scamp!" Galtier called after him. Georges laughed—he was being troublesome, all right. Muttering, Galtier went over and turned on the lamp again. The kitchen shone as if he'd brought the sun indoors. "Truly electricity is a great marvel," he said. "I wonder how we ever got along without it."

"I cannot imagine," Marie said. "It makes everything so much easier—and you were clever enough to squeeze it out of the government."

"And the Americans," Galtier said. "You must not forget the Americans"

"I am not likely to forget the Americans." His wife's voice was tart. "Without the Americans, we would not have the son-in-law we now have, nor the grandson, either.

Believe me, I remember all this very well."

"Without the Americans, we would not be living in the Re-public of Quebec,"

Galtier said, looking at the large picture as well as the small one. "We would still be paying our taxes to Ot-tawa and getting nothing for them, instead of paying them to the city of Quebec .. . and getting nothing for them." Neither inde-pendence nor wealth reconciled him to paying taxes. Wealth, in-deed, left him even less enthusiastic than he had been before, for it meant he had to pay more than he had when he was not doing so well.

"When the Americans came, we thought it was the end of the world," Marie said.

"And we were right," Lucien answered. "It was the end of the world we had always known. We have changed." From a Quebe-cois farmer, that was blasphemy to rank alongside *tabernac* and *calisse.* "We have changed, and we are better for it."

From a Que-becois farmer, that was blasphemy viler than any for which the local French dialect had words.

His wife started to contradict him. He could tell by the way she opened her mouth, by the angle at which her head turned, by any number of other small things he could not have named but did see. Before she could speak, he wagged a finger at her—only that and nothing more. She hesitated. At last, she said *"Peut-etre*—it could be."

That was a greater concession than he'd thought he could get from her. He'd been ready to argue. Instead, all he had to say was, "We are lucky. The whole family is lucky. Things could so easily be worse." He thought again of the farmer out in Manitoba who'd tried to kill General Custer.

"God has been kind to us," Marie said.

"Yes, God has been kind to us," Galtier agreed. "And we have been lucky.

And"—he knew just how to forestall an argument, almost as if he'd read a book on the subject—"this is excellent, truly excellent, coffee. Could you fix me another cup, exactly like this one?" His wife turned to take care of it. Galtier smiled behind her back. He'd had good luck and, wherever he could, he'd made good luck. And here he was, in his middle years and happy. He wondered how many of his neighbors could say that. Not many, unless he missed his guess. With an open smile and a word of thanks, he took the cup from Marie.

Jake Featherston tore open the fat package from the William Byrd Press. *Dear Mr. Featherston,* the letter inside read, *Thank you for showing us the manuscript enclosed herewith. We regret that we must doubt its commercial possibilities at the present time, and must therefore regretfully decline to undertake its pub-lication.*

We hope you will have success in placing it elsewhere.

He cursed. He couldn't place *Over Open Sights* anywhere, and a lot of the letters he got back from Richmond publishers— and even from one down in Mobile—were a lot less polite than this one. "Nobody wants to hear the truth," he growled.

"Nothing you can do about it now, Jake," Ferdinand Koenig said, slapping him on the back in consolation. "Come on. Let's get out of here "

"Stupid bastards," Featherston snarled. "And they're proud of it, damn them.

They want to stay stupid." But he was glad to es-cape the Freedom Party offices.

Even to him, they stank of defeat.

When he went out onto the streets of Richmond, he could have pulled the brim of his hat down low on his forehead or tugged up his collar so it hid part of his face.

He could have grown a chin beard or bushy side whiskers to change his looks. He didn't. He hadn't. He wouldn't. As always, he met the world head-on.

The world was less fond of him than it had been before Grady Calkins murdered Wade Hampton V About every other person on the street recognized him, and about every third person who did recognize him showered him with abuse. He gave as good as he got, very often better.

Koenig shook his head while Jake and a passerby exchanged unpleasantries. After the man finally went on his way, Koenig said, "Christ, sometimes I think you look for trouble."

"No such thing." Featherston shook his head. "But I'll be god-damned if I'll run from it, either. After the damnyankee artillery, fools with big mouths aren't enough to put me off my feed."

"I still think you ought to lay low till it gets closer to the next election, let people forget about things," Koenig said.

He was one of the very few people these days who spoke frankly to Jake instead of telling him what they thought he wanted to hear. That made him a valuable man.

All the same, Jake shook his head again. "No, dammit. I didn't do anything I'm ashamed of. The Party didn't do anything I'm ashamed of. One crazy man went and fouled things up for us, that's all. People need to forget about Calkins, not about me."

"They didn't forget last November," Koenig pointed out.

"We knew that was going to happen," Featherston said. "All right, it happened. It could have been a lot worse. A lot of people reckoned it would be a lot worse."

"You know what you sound like?" Koenig said. "You sound like the

War Department in the last part of 1916, the first part of 1917, when the damnyankees had started hammering us hard. 'We hurt the enemy very badly and contained him more quickly than expected,' they'd say, and all that meant was, we'd lost some more ground."

Featherston grunted. Comparing him to the department he hated hit home.

Stubbornly, he said, "The Freedom Party's going to get the ground back, though.

The War Department never did figure out how to manage that one."

"If you say so, Sarge," Ferdinand Koenig replied. He didn't sound like a man who believed it. He sounded like a man hu-moring a rich lunatic —and he made sure Featherston knew he sounded that way.

"We can come back," Jake insisted. As long as he believed it, he could make other people believe it. If enough other people believed it, it would come true.

He and Koenig turned right from Seventh onto Franklin and walked on toward Capitol Square. Jake's hands folded into fists. After the war was lost— *thrown away,* he thought—discharged soldiers had almost taken the Capitol; only more soldiers with machine guns had held them at bay. A good bloodbath then would have been just what the CSA needed.

And in 1921 he'd come so close to storming his way into power in spite of everything the Whigs and all their Thirds and Fourths and Fifths could do to stop him. Sure as hell, he would have been elected in 1927. He knew he would have been—if not for Grady Calkins.

If even he was thinking about what might have been in-stead of what would be now—if that was so, the Freedom Party was in deep trouble. A man with a limp—

wounded veteran, Jake judged—came toward him along Franklin. Jake nodded to him—he still had plenty of backers left, especially among men who'd fought like him.

"Freedom!" the fellow said by way of reply, but he loaded the word with loathing and made an obscene gesture at Jake.

"You go to hell!" Featherston cried.

"If I do, I'll see you there before me," the man with the limp answered, and went on his way.

"Bastard," Jake muttered on his breath. "Fucking bastard. They're all fucking bastards." Then he saw a crowd on the side-walk ahead and forgot about the heckler. "What the hell's going on here, Ferd?"

"Damned if I know," Koenig answered. "Shall we find out?"

"Yeah." Jake elbowed his way to the front of the crowd, ably assisted by his former running mate. He'd expected a saloon giving away free beer or something of that sort. Instead, men and women were trying to shove their way into ... a furniture store? He couldn't believe it till Ferdinand Koenig pointed to the sign taped in the window: NEWEST MAKES OF WIRELESS RECEIVERS, FROM $399.

"They're all the go nowadays," Koenig said. "Even at those prices, everybody wants one."

"I've heard people talking about them," Featherston admitted. "Haven't heard one myself, I don't think. I'll be damned if I can see what the fuss is about."

"I've listened to 'em," Koenig said. "It's—interesting. Not like anything else you'll ever run across, I'll tell you that."

"Huh." But, having got so close to the store's doorway, Feath-erston decided not to leave without listening to a wireless re-ceiver. More judicious elbowing got him and Koenig inside.

The receivers were all big and boxy. Some cabinets were made of fancier wood than others; that seemed to account for the difference in price. Only one machine was actually operating. From it came tinny noises that, after a bit, Jake recognized as a Negro band playing "In the Good Old Summertime."

"Huh," he said again, and turned to the fellow who was touting the receivers.

"Why would anybody want to listen to this crap, for God's sake?"

"Soon, sir, there will be offerings for every taste," the sales-man answered smoothly. "Even now, people all over Richmond are listening to this and other broadcasts. As more people buy re-ceivers, the number of broadcasts and the number of listeners will naturally increase."

"Not if they keep playing that garbage," Ferdinand Koenig said. He nodded to Featherston. "You were right—this is lousy."

"Yeah." But Jake had listened to the salesman, too. "All over Richmond, you say?"

"Yes, sir." The rabbity-looking fellow nodded enthusiasti-cally. "And the price of receivers has fallen dramatically in the past few months. It will probably keep right on falling, too, as they become more popular."

"People all over Richmond," Jake repeated thoughtfully. "Could you have people all over the CSA listening to the same thing at the same time?"

To his disappointment, the salesman replied, "Not from the same broadcasting facility." But the fellow went on, "I suppose you could send the same signal from several facilities at once. Why, if I might ask?"

Plainly, he didn't recognize Featherston. "Just curious," Jake answered—and, indeed, it was hardly more than that. Behind his hand, he whispered to Koenig:

"Might be cheaper to make a speech on the wireless than hold a bunch of rallies in a bunch of different towns. If we could be sure we were reaching enough people that way—"

One of the other customers in the shop was whispering behind *his* hand to the salesman. "Oh?" the salesman said. "He *is?"* By the tone of voice, Jake knew exactly what the customer had whispered. The salesman said, "Sir, I am going to have to ask you to leave. This is a high-class establishment, and I don't want any trouble here."

"We weren't giving you any trouble." Featherston and Koenig spoke together.

"You're from the Freedom Party," said the customer who'd recognized Jake.

"You don't have to give trouble. You *are* trouble."

Several other men from among those crowding the shop drifted toward the fellow.

A couple of others ranged themselves behind Featherston. "Freedom!" one of them said.

"I am going to call for a policeman if you don't leave," the salesman told Jake. "I do not want this place broken apart."

If breaking the place apart would have brought the Party good publicity, Featherston would have started a fight on the spot. But he knew it wouldn't—just the opposite, in fact. The papers would scream he was only a ruffian leading a pack of ruffians. They hadn't talked about him and the Party like that when he was a rising power in the land, or not so much, anyhow. Now they thought they scented blood.

He wouldn't give them any blood to sniff.

"Come on, Ferd," he said. "If anybody starts trouble, it won't be us."

"Look at the cowards cut and run," jeered the man who'd rec-ognized him. "They talk big, but they don't back it up."

He never knew how close he came to getting his head broken and his nuts kneed.

Jake's instinct was always to hit back at who-ever and whatever struck at him, and to hit harder if he could. Only a harsh understanding that that would bring no advantage held him back.

"One day," he growled once he and Ferdinand Koenig were out on Franklin again,

"one fine day I'm going to pay back every son of a bitch who ever did me wrong, and that loud-mouthed bastard will get his. So help me God, he will."

"Sure, Sarge," Koenig said. But he didn't sound sure. He sounded like a man buttering up his boss after said boss had come out with something really stupid.

Featherston knew flat-tery when he heard it, because he heard it too damn often. He hadn't heard it much from Koenig, though.

Sourly, he studied the man who'd run for vice president with him. He and Koenig went back to the old days together, to the days when the Freedom Party operated out of a cigar box. If Koenig hadn't backed him, odds were the Party would still be a cigar-box outfit. Koenig was as close to a friend as he had on the face of the earth.

And yet.. .

"If you don't fancy the way things are going, Ferd, you can al-ways move on,"

Jake said. "Don't want you to feel like you're wearing a ball and chain."

Koenig turned red. "I don't want to leave, Jake. I've come too far to back out now, same as you. Only. .."

"Only what?" Featherston snapped.

"Only Moses got to the top of the mountain, but God never let him into the Promised Land," Koenig said, going redder still. "Way things are these days, I don't know how we can win an election any time soon."

"We sure as hell won't if people lie down and give up," Jake said. "Long as we don't quit, long as we keep fighting, things will turn our way, sooner or later. It'll take longer now than I reckoned it would in 1921; I'd be a liar if I said anything dif-ferent.

But the time is coming. By God, it *is."*

Koenig grunted. Again, the sound failed to fill Featherston with confidence. If even the man closest to him had doubts, who was he to be sure triumph did lie ahead? He shrugged. He'd kept firing against the damnyankees up to the very last minute. He would struggle against fate the same way.

There ahead lay Capitol Square, with its great statues of George Washington and Albert Sidney Johnston. Pointing, Jake said, "Look at 'em, Ferd. If Washington had given up, we'd still belong to England. And Johnston died so the Confederate States could be free. How can we do anything else and still look at our-selves in the mirror afterwards?"

"I don't know," Koenig said. "But you don't see people build-ing statues to what's-his-name—Cornwallis—or to General Grant, the Yankee who licked Johnston. Damned if I know what happened to Cornwallis. Grant died a drunk. They were both big wheels in their day, Sarge."

"And we'll be big wheels in ours." Jake understood what Koenig was saying, but wouldn't admit it even to himself. Ad-mitting it would

mean he might also have to admit he wasn't sure whether he'd end up among the winners or the losers when the history books got written. He couldn't bear that thought.

"Hope you're right," Koenig said.

"Hell, yes, I'm right." Jake spoke with great assurance, to convince not only his follower but also himself. Ferdinand Koenig nodded. If he wasn't convinced, Featherston couldn't prove it, not from a nod.

And what about you? Jake asked himself. He'd been—the Freedom Party had been— *that* close to seizing power with both hands. Now, with Wade Hampton dead, with the Confederate currency sound again ... He kicked at the sidewalk. The Party should have gone forward again in 1923. Instead, he counted himself lucky, damn lucky, it hadn't gone further back.

Could things turn around? Of course they *could*—that was the wrong question.

How likely were they to turn around? Coldly, as if in a poker game, he reckoned up the odds. Had he been in a poker game, he would have thrown in his cards. But the stakes here were too high for him to quit.

"It'll work out," he said. "Goddammit, it *will* work out." He did his best to sound as if he meant it.

Read on for an excerpt from

American Empire:

THE CENTER

CANNOT HOLD

by

Harry Turtledove

Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling strode into the offices of the U.S. Army General Staff in Philadelphia, escaping the January snow outside. He was a big, beefy man—unkind people, of whom he'd met altogether too many, would have called him fat—and walked with a determination that made other, younger, officers get out of his way, even though his green-gray uniform bore not a trace of the gold-and-black ribbon that marked a Gen-eral Staff man.

He looked around with more than a little curiosity. He hadn't been in General Staff headquarters for many years—not since before the Great War, in fact. He'd spent the past ten years as adjutant to General George Armstrong Custer, and Custer's re-lationship with the General Staff had always been .. . *com-bustible* was the first word that came to mind. The first printable word, anyhow.

But Custer was retired now—retired at last, after more than sixty years of service in the Army—and Dowling needed a new assignment. */ wonder what they 11 give me. What ever it is, it's bound to be a walk in the park after what I've gone through with Custer* Anything this side of standing sentry on the battle-ments of hell would have seemed a walk in the park after ten years with Custer. The man was unquestionably a hero. Dowl-ing would have been the first to admit it. Nevertheless ..

.

He tried not to think of Custer, which was like trying not to think of a red fish.

Then he got lost—General Staff head-quarters had expanded a great deal since his last visit. Having to ask his way did take his mind off his former superior. At last, by turning left down a corridor where he had turned right, he made his way to the office of General Hunter Liggett, chief of the General Staff.

Liggett's adjutant was a sharp-looking lieutenant colonel named John Abell. When Dowling walked into the office, the fellow was talking on the telephone: "—the best we can, with the budget the Socialists are willing to let us have." He looked up and put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Yes, Lieutenant Colonel? May I help you?"

"I'm Abner Dowling. I have a ten o'clock appointment with General Liggett." By the clock on the wall, it was still a couple of minutes before ten. Dowling had built in time for things to go wrong. *Custer never did anything like that. Custer never fig-ured anything would go wrong.* Dowling shook his head. *Don't think about Custer.*

Lieutenant Colonel Abell nodded. "Go right in. He's expect-ing you." He returned to his interrupted telephone conversa-tion: "I know what we should be doing, and I know what we are doing. There will be trouble one day, but they're too sure of themselves to believe it."

However much Dowling wanted to linger and eavesdrop, he went on into General Liggett's inner office and closed the door behind him. Saluting, he said, "Reporting as ordered, sir."

Hunter Liggett returned the salute. He was a jowly man in his mid-sixties, with a penetrating stare and a white Kaiser Bill mustache waxed to pointed perfection. "At ease, Lieutenant Colonel. Sit down. Make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you, sir." Dowling eased his bulk down into a chair.

"What are we going to do with you?" Liggett said. It had to be a rhetorical question; the answer surely already lay there on his desk. He went on, "You've seen a lot these past few years, haven't you? By now, I suspect, you could handle just about anything. Couldn't you, Lieutenant Colonel?"

Dowling didn't like the sound of that. "I hope so, sir," he an-swered cautiously.

Maybe he wouldn't get a walk in the park af-ter all. "Ahh . . . What have you got in mind?"

"Everyone is very pleased with your performance in Canada," General Liggett said. "The assistant secretary of war, Mr. Thomas, spoke highly of you in his report to President Sinclair. He wrote that you did your best to make a difficult and unpleasant situa-tion go more smoothly. Any time a soldier wins praise from the present administration, he must have done very well indeed."

"Thank you, sir." Dowling remembered that Liggett had be-come chief of the General Staff during the present Socialist ad-ministration, replacing General Leonard Wood. That made him watch his tongue. "I'm glad Mr. Thomas was pleased. I didn't really do that much. Mostly, I just sat there and kept my mouth shut." N.

Mattoon Thomas had come up to Winnipeg to force General Custer into retirement.

Custer hadn't wanted to go; Custer never wanted to do anything anyone told him to do, and he thoroughly despised the Socialists. But they'd held the high cards, and he hadn't.

"Well, what ever you did say, Mr. Thomas liked it," Liggett said. "He wrote of your tact and your discretion and your good sense—said if you were a diplomat instead of a soldier, you'd make a splendid ambassador." Liggett chuckled. "Damn me to hell if you're not blushing."

"I'm flattered, sir." Dowling was also embarrassed. Like a lot of fat

men, he flushed easily, and he knew it.

General Liggett went on, "And it just so happens that we have a post where a man with such talents would be very use-fill, very useful indeed."

"Does it? Do you?" Dowling said, and Liggett gave him a genial nod. Dowling had a fair notion of where such a post might be. Hoping he was wrong, he asked, "What have you got in mind, sir?"

Sure enough, Liggett said, "I've had to relieve Colonel Sorenson as military governor of Salt Lake City. He's an able officer, Sorenson is; don't get me wrong.

But he turned out to be a little too . .. unbending for the position. By President Sin-clair's orders, we are *trying* to bring Utah back towards being a normal state in the Union once more. A tactful, diplomatic offi-cer running things in Salt Lake could do us a lot of good there."

"I . .. see," Dowling said slowly. "The only trouble is, sir, I'm not sure I think Utah *ought* to be a normal state in the Union once more." The Mormons in Utah had caused trouble during the Second Mexican War, back at the start of the 1880s—as a result of which, the U.S. Army had landed on them with both feet. Then, in 1915, perhaps aided and abetted by the Confederates and the British from Canada, they'd risen in open rebellion. The Army had had to crush them one town at a time, and had made a peace only in the Tacitean sense of the word, leaving desert behind it.

"Between you and me and the four walls of my office, Lieu-tenant Colonel, I'm not sure I think so, either," Liggett an-swered. "But the Army doesn't make policy.

That's the president's job. All we do is carry it out. And so . . . would you like to be the next military governor of Salt Lake City?"

Maybe I should have been a nasty son of a bitch when I was working for Custer, Dowling thought. But he said what he had to say: "Yes, sir." After a moment, he added, "If I'm being diplomatic . . ."

"Yes?" Liggett asked.

"Well, sir, wouldn't you say the good people of Salt Lake City might see it as an insult to them if a full colonel were re-placed by a lieutenant colonel?" Dowling said.

"Couldn't it lead them to believe the United States Army finds them less im-portant than it once did?"

Amusement glinted in Liggett's eyes. "And how do you pro-pose to make sure the good people of Salt Lake City—if there are any—don't find themselves insulted?"

"I can think of a couple of ways, sir," Dowling replied. "One would be to appoint somebody who's already a bird colonel as military governor there."

"Yes, that stands to reason," Liggett agreed. "And the other?" He leaned back in his swivel chair, which squeaked. He seemed to be enjoying himself, waiting to hear what Dowling would say.

Dowling had hoped the chief of the General Staff would come out and say it for him. When Liggett didn't, he had to speak for himself: "The other way, sir, would be to promote me to the appropriate rank."

"And you think you deserve such a promotion, eh?" Liggett rumbled.

"Yes, sir," Dowling said boldly. *After ten years with Custer, I deserve to be a major general, by God.* And if he said no, he knew he'd never be promoted again.

General Liggett shuffled through papers on his desk. Finding the one he wanted, he shoved it, face down, across the polished expanse of mahogany to Dow\p\pling.

"This may be of some interest to you, then."

"Thank you," Dowling said, wondering if he ought to thank Liggett. He turned the paper over, glanced at it—and stared at his superior. "Thank you very much, sir!" he exclaimed.

"You're welcome, Colonel Dowling," Liggett replied. "Con-gratulations!"

"Thank you very much," Dowling repeated. "Uh, sir ... Would you have given me this if I hadn't asked for it?"

Liggett's smile was as mysterious as the Mona Lisa's, though a good deal less benign. "You'll never know, will you?" His chuckle was not a pleasant sound. He found another sheet of paper, and passed it to Dowling, too. "Here are your orders, Colonel. Your train goes out of Broad Street Station tomorrow morning. I'm sure you'll do a fine job,

and I know for a fact that General Pershing is looking forward to having you under his command."

"Do you?" All of a sudden, Dowling's world seemed less rosy. During the war, Pershing's Second Army had fought side by side with Custer's First in Kentucky and Tennessee. The two armies had been rivals, as neighbors often are, and their two commanders had been rivals, too. Custer was suspicious of his younger colleague, as he was suspicious of any other officer who might steal his glory. Dowling had forgotten Pershing was military governor of Utah these days.

"I think I know what's bothering you, Colonel," Liggett said. If anyone knew about rivalries, the chief of the General Staff would be the man. He went on, "You don't have to worry, not on that score. I meant what I said: General Pershing is eager to have you."

But what will he do with me— to me— once he's got me? Dowling wondered. He couldn't say that. All he could say was, "That's good to hear, sir."

"Which means you don't believe me," Liggett said. "Well, that's your privilege.

You may even be right. I don't think you are, but you may be."

Dowling was by nature a pessimist. If he hadn't been before, ten years under General Custer would have made him one. "I'll do the best I can, sir, that's all," he said. *And what ever Per-shing does to me, by God, I'll have eagles on my shoulder straps. That makes up for a lot.*

General Liggett nodded. "As long as you do that, no one can ask any more of you."

"All right, sir" Dowling started to rise, then checked him-self. "May I ask you one more thing, sir? It's got nothing to do with Mormons."

"Go ahead and ask," Liggett told him. "I don't promise to answer, not till I've heard the question."

"I understand. What I want to know is, are we really cutting back on building new and better barrels? I've heard that, but it strikes me as foolish." Like most professional soldiers, Dowl-ing had no use for the Socialist Party. There, as in few other places, he agreed with the man under whom he'd served for so long. He would have expressed himself a lot more strongly had he been talking with General Leonard Wood, a lifelong Demo-crat and a friend of ex-President Theodore Roosevelt.

But Liggett nodded again, and didn't sound happy as he an-swered, "We aren't just cutting back, as a matter of fact. We're gutting the program. No money in the budget any more. That outfit at Fort Leavenworth called the Barrel Works .. ." He slashed a thumb across his throat. "As our German friends would say, *kaputt"*

"That's—unfortunate, sir." Dowling used the politest word he could. "Barrels won us the last war. They won't count less in the next one."

"Don't be silly, Colonel. There'll never, ever be another war. Just ask President Sinclair." *He's still a soldier first, then,* Dowling thought. *Good.* Both men laughed.

But for the bitter undertone in each one's voice, the joke might have been funny.

Anne Colleton was studying the *Wall Street Journal* when the telephone rang. She muttered something under her breath, put down the five-day-old newspaper, and went to answer the phone. Back in the days when she'd lived on the Marshlands plantation, her butler, Scipio, or one of the other Negro servants would have done that for her and spared her the interruption. These days, though, the Marshlands mansion was a burnt-out ruin, the cot-ton fields around it going back to grass and bushes. Anne lived in town, not that St. Matthews, South Carolina, was much of a town.

"This is Anne Colleton," she said crisply. She was in her mid-thirties. With her sleek blond good looks, she could have lied ten years off her age with no one the wiser—till she spoke. Few people younger than she—few her own age, for that mat-ter, but even fewer younger—could have so quickly made plain they put up with no nonsense at all.

"And a good day to you, Miss Colleton," replied the man on the other end of the line. By the hisses and pops accompanying his voice, he was calling from some distance away. He went on, "My name is Edward C.L. Wiggins, ma'am, and I'm in Richmond."

Long distance, sure enough, Anne thought—he sounded as if he were shouting down a rain barrel. "What is it, Mr. Wig-gins?" she said. "I don't think we've met."

"No, ma'am, I haven't had the pleasure," he agreed, "but the Colleton name is famous all over the Confederate States."

He doubtless meant that as pleasant flattery. Anne Colleton had heard

enough pleasant flattery to last the rest of her life by the time she was sixteen—one consequence of her looks men seldom thought about. "You can come to the point, Mr. Wig-gins," she said pleasantly, "or I'll hang up on you no matter where you are."

"Once upon a time, President Semmes sent me up to Phila-delphia to see if I could dicker a peace with the Yankees, but they wouldn't do it," Wiggins said.

That wasn't coming to the point, or Anne didn't think it was, but it did get her attention. "This would have been fairly early on, before we finally had to quit?" she asked.

"That's right, ma'am," he said.

"I heard rumors about that," she said. "With all the money I gave the Whigs in those days, I would have thought I deserved to hear something more than rumors, but evidently not. So you were representing President Semmes, were you?"

"Yes, ma'am, in an unofficial sort of way."

"And whose representative are you now, in an unofficial sort of way? I'm sure you're somebody's."

Edward C.L. Wiggins chuckled. "I heard you were one clever lady. I guess I heard right."

"Who told you so?" Anne asked sharply.

"Well, now, I was just getting to that. I—"

Anne did hang up then. She wasted not a minute getting back to work. With her finances in the state they were, they needed all the time she could give them. They needed more than that, too: they needed something close to a miracle. She wasn't a pauper, as so many prewar planters were these days. But she wasn't rich enough not to have to worry, either, and she didn't know if she ever would be.

A few minutes later, the phone rang again. Anne picked it up. "Why, Mr. Wiggins.

What a pleasant surprise," she said be-fore whoever was on the other end of the line could speak. If it wasn't Wiggins, she would have to apologize to someone, but she thought the odds were good enough to take the chance.

And it was. "Miss Colleton, if you would let me explain myself—"

She cut him off, though she didn't—quite—hang up on him once more. "I gave you two chances to do that. You didn't. If you think I'm in the habit of wasting my time on strange men who call me out of the blue, you're mistaken—and whoever told you what you think you know about me hasn't got the faintest notion of what he's talking about."

"Oh, I don't know." Wiggins' voice was dry. "He told me you were sharp as a tack but a first-class bitch, and that doesn't seem so far out to me."

"I'm sure he meant it as an insult, but I'll take it for a compliment," Anne said.

"Last chance, Mr. Wiggins—who told you that?"

"Jake Featherston."

Anne had expected almost any other name than that of the Freedom Party leader.

Something she didn't want to call alarm shot through her. She took Jake Featherston very seriously. That didn't mean she wanted anything to do with him. She'd backed him for a while, yes, but she backed winners, and he didn't look like one any more.

Trying to gain time to recover her composure, she asked, "If you used to work for the Whigs, why are you calling me for Featherston now?"

"On account of what I saw when I went to Philadelphia, ma'am," he replied. "The United States don't respect you when you're weak. If you're down, they'll kick you.

But if you're strong, they have got to sit up and take notice. That's a fact."

"I agree with that. I think everyone in the Confederate States agrees with that,"

Anne said.

"Well, there you are," Wiggins said cheerily. "If you agree with that, the Freedom Party is really and truly the only place for you, because —"

"Nonsense." Anne didn't care about his reasons. She had reasons of her own:

"The Freedom Party has about as much chance of electing the next president as I do of getting elected myself. I have no intention of giving Jake Featherston one more dime. Ever since that madman of a Grady Calkins murdered President Hampton, it'd take a special miracle for anyone from the Freedom Party to get himself elected dog catcher, let alone anything more. I don't spend my money where it does me no good."

"I don't think the clouds are as black as you say, ma'am," Wiggins replied. "Yes, we lost a couple of seats in the election last November, but not as many as people said we would. We'll be back—you wait and see if we aren't. Folks don't have much in the way of memory—and besides, ma'am, we're *right"*

"If you can't win an election, whether you're right or not doesn't matter," Anne pointed out.

"We will." Wiggins sounded confident. She got the idea he sounded confident all the time. He went on, "I want to say a couple of other things, and then I'm through.

First one is, Mr. Featherston, he knows who's for him, and he knows who's against him, and he never, ever, forgets the one or the other."

He was, without question, right about that. Featherston was as relentless as a barrel smashing through one line of trenches after another. Anne didn't intimidate easily, but Jake Feather-ston had done the job. That just gave her more reason to harden her voice and say, "I'll take my chances."

Edward C.L. Wiggins chuckled. "He told me you were near as stubborn as he is himself, and I see he's right. One more thing, and then I'm through, and I won't trouble you any more."

"Go ahead," Anne said. "Make it short." *I've already wasted more than enough time on you.*

"Yes, ma'am. Here's what I've got to say: there's only one party in the CSA that's got any notion at all about what the devil to do about the nigger problem in this country, and that's the Freedom Party. And now I'm done. Good-bye." He sur-prised her by hanging up.

Slowly, she put the mouthpiece back on its hook and set down the telephone. She said a word she was unlikely to use in public, one that would have made strong men gasp and women of delicate sensibilities blush and faint. Wiggins had known how to get through to her, after all. No one was likely to forget the Red Negro uprising that had tied the Confederacy in knots late in 1915 and early in 1916. No one knew how much it had helped the USA win the war, but it couldn't have hurt. The Freedom Party stood foursquare for vengeance, and so did Anne Colleton.

And why not? she thought. *One brother dead, my plantation wrecked, me almost murdered .. . Oh, yes, I owe those black bastards just a little. The whole country owes them just a little, whether the Whigs and the Radical Liberals want to admit it or not.*

She repeated that word, louder this time. Behind her, her sur-viving brother burst out laughing. She whirled around. "Con-found it, Tom," she said angrily, "I didn't know you were there."

Tom Colleton laughed harder than ever. "I'll bet you didn't," he answered. "If you had, you would have said something like, 'Confound it,' instead." He was a couple of years younger than Anne, and a little darker, with hair light brown rather than gold.

He'd gone into the war an irresponsible boy and come out of it a lieutenant-colonel and a man, something of which Anne still had to remind herself now and again.

She shrugged now. "I probably would have. But I meant what I did say."

"Who was on the telephone?" he asked.

"A man named Edward C.L. Wiggins," Anne replied. "He wanted money from us for the Freedom Party."

Tom frowned. "Those people don't take no for an answer, do they?"

"They never have," Anne said. "It's their greatest strength— and their greatest weakness."

"Did you find out why he travels with a herd of initials?" her brother asked. She shook her head. Tom went on, "What did you tell him?"

"No, of course," Anne answered. "The way things are now, I'd sooner

cozy up to a cottonmouth than to Jake Featherston."

"Don't blame you a bit," Tom Colleton said. "He's an im-pressive man in a lot of ways, but. . ." He shook his head. "He puts me in mind of a time bomb, wound up and waiting to go off. And when he does, I don't think it'll be pretty."

"There were times when I thought he had all the answers," Anne said. "And there were times when I thought he was a little bit crazy. And there were times when I thought both those things at once. Those were the ones that scared me."

"Scared me, too," Tom agreed, "and we don't scare easy."

"No. We'd be dead by now if we did," Anne said, and Tom nodded. She eyed him. "And speaking of looking pretty, you're fancier than you need to be for staying around here. Is that a necktie?" She thought its gaudy stripes of crimson and gold ex-cessive, but declined to criticize.

Her brother nodded again. "Sure is. Bought it from what's-his-name, the Jew tailor. And I'm going to pay a call on Bertha Talmadge in a little while."

Before the war, Anne would have discouraged such a call— with a bludgeon, if necessary. The Muncies, Bertha's parents, were grocers, and their daughter no fit match for a planter's son. These days .. . Well, grocers never starved. And Bertha Talmadge, though a widow whose husband, like so many oth-ers, had died in the trenches, was reasonably young, reasonably pretty, reasonably bright.

Anne nodded approval. "Have a nice time. You should find yourself a wife, settle down, have yourself some children."

He didn't get angry at her, as he would have before the war. In fact, he nodded again himself. "You're right. I should. And, as a matter of fact, so should you."

"That's different," Anne said quickly.

"How?"

Because he was her brother, she told him: "Because my hus-band would want to try to run everything, because that's what men do. And odds are he wouldn't be as good at it as I am. That's why."

"And even if he was, you wouldn't admit it," Tom said.

That was also true. Anne Colleton, however, had not the slightest intention of admitting it. Giving her brother her most enigmatic smile, she went back to the *Wall Street Journal.*

Mary McGregor was only thirteen years old, but her course in life was already set.

So she told herself, anyhow, and also told her mother and her older sister as they sat down to supper on their farm outside Rosenfeld, Manitoba: "The Yankees killed my brother. They killed my father, too. But I'm going to get even— you see if I don't."

Fright showed on her mother's careworn face. Maude McGre-gor touched the sleeve of her woolen blouse to show Mary she still wore mourning black. "You be careful," she said. "If any-thing happened to you after Alexander and Arthur, I don't think I could bear it."

She didn't tell Mary not to pursue vengeance against the Americans occupying Canada. Plainly, she knew better. That would have been telling the sun not to rise, the snow not to fall. Ever since the Americans arrested her older brother during the war on a charge of sabotage, lined him up against a wall, and shot him, she'd hated them with an altogether unchildlike ferocity.

"Of course I'll be careful," she said now, as if she were the adult and her mother the worried, fussy child. "Pa was careful. He just. .. wasn't lucky at the end. He should have got that.. . blamed General Custer." However much she hated Americans, she wasn't allowed to curse at the supper table.

Her older sister nodded. "Who would have thought Custer would be waiting for Father to throw that bomb and be ready to throw it back?" Julia said. "That *was* bad luck, nothing else but." She sighed. She hadn't only lost her father. Arthur McGre-gor's failure had also cost her an engagement; the Culligans had decided it just wasn't safe to join their son, Ted, to a bomber's family.

"Part of it was," their mother said. "Mary, would you please pass the butter?"

Mayhem and manners lived together under the McGregors' roof.

"Here you are, Ma," Mary said, and her mother buttered her mashed potatoes.

Mary went on, "What do you mean, part of it was bad luck? It *all*

was!"

Her mother shook her head. "No, only part. The Americans suspected your father. They came sniffing around here all the time, remember. If they hadn't suspected, Custer wouldn't have been ready to ... to do what he did."

What he'd done by throwing the bomb back had blown Arthur McGregor to red rags; the family could have buried him in a jam tin. No one still alive wanted to think about that. "I'll be careful," Mary said again. She brushed a wisp of auburn hair back from her face in a gesture her mother might have made. Maude McGregor had reddish hair, too. Julia was darker, as her father had been.

Maude McGregor said, "I just thank God you're only thir-teen, and not likely to get into too much mischief for a while. You know the Yankees will keep an eye on us forever, on ac-count of what the menfolks in our family did."

"Alexander never did anything!" Mary said hotly.

"They thought he did, and that was all that mattered to them," her mother answered. "Your father never would have done any of the things *he* did if that hadn't happened—and we'd all be here together." She stared down at the heavy white earthenware plate in front of her.

"I'm sorry, Mother." Seeing her mother unhappy could still tear Mary to pieces inside. But she wasted little time amending that: "I'm sorry I made you unhappy."

She wasn't sorry she wanted revenge on the Americans. Nothing could make her sorry about that.

"We've been through too much. I don't want us to have to go through any more,"

her mother said. Maude McGregor quickly brought her napkin up to her face.

Pretending to wipe her mouth, she dabbed at her eyes instead. She tried not to let her children catch her crying. Sometimes, try as she would, she failed.

Mary said, "Canada's been through too much. There isn't even a Canada any more. That's what the Americans say, any-how. If they say

it loud enough and often enough, lots of people will start believing it. But I won't."

"I won't, either," Julia said. "I quit the schools when they started teaching American lies. But you're right—plenty of people are still going, and plenty of them will believe what ever they hear. What can we do about it?"

"We've got to do something!" Mary exclaimed, though she didn't know what.

Her mother got up from the table. "What ever we do, we won't do it now. What we will do now is wash the dishes and get ready for bed. We'll have a lot of work tomorrow, and it's not any easier because .. ." She shook her head. "It's not any easier, that's all."

It's not any easier because we haven't got any menfolk left alive to help us. That was what she'd started to say, that or something like it. And things would only get harder when win-ter of 1924 turned to spring and they would have to try to put a crop in the ground by themselves. Like any farm daughter, Mary had worked since she could stand on her own two feet. The idea didn't worry her. Having to do men's work as well as women's . . . How could the three of them manage without wearing down to nubs?

She didn't know that, either. She only knew they had to try. *My father kept trying, and he made the Yankees pay. I will, too, somehow.*

Julia washed dishes and silverware and scrubbed pots till her hands turned red.

Mary dried things and put them away. Yesterday, they'd done it the other way round.

Tomorrow, they would again.

After the last plate went where it belonged, Mary took a candle upstairs. She used it to light the kerosene lamp in her room. The Americans had started talking about bringing electricity out from the towns to the countryside, but all they'd done so far was talk. *More lies,* she thought.

She changed out of her shirtwaist and sweater and skirt into a long wool flannel nightgown. With thick wool blankets and a down comforter on the bed, she didn't fear even a Manitoba winter—and if that wasn't courage, what was? Before she lay down, she knelt beside

the bed and prayed.

"And keep Mother safe and healthy, and keep Julia safe and healthy, and help me pay the Americans back," she whispered, as she did every night. "Please, God. I know You can do it if You try." God *could* do anything. She believed that with all her heart. Getting Him to do it—that was a different, and harder, business.

When Mary's head did hit the pillow, she fell asleep as if clubbed. She woke the next morning in exactly the same posi-tion as when she'd gone to sleep. Maybe she'd shifted back into it during the night. Maybe she hadn't had the energy to roll over.

Once she crawled out of bed, the aromas of tea and frying eggs and potatoes floating up to the bedroom from the kitchen helped get her moving. She put on the same skirt and sweater with a different shirtwaist and hurried downstairs. "Good,"

her mother said when she made her appearance. "Another five min-utes and I'd've sent Julia after you. Here you are." She used a spatula to lift a couple of eggs from the skillet and set them on Mary's plate. Potatoes fried in lard went alongside them.

"Thanks, Ma." Mary put salt on the eggs and potatoes and pepper on the eggs.

She ate like a wolf. Her mother gave her a thick china mug full of tea. Mary poured in milk from a pitcher and added a couple of spoonsful of sugar. She drank the tea as hot as she could bear it.

Julia was already on her second cup. "How do the Ameri-cans stand drinking coffee all the time?" she wondered aloud. "It's so nasty."

"It's disgusting," Mary said. She honestly believed she would have thought that even if the Yankees hadn't done what they'd done. She'd tried coffee a couple of times, and found it astonishingly bitter.

To her surprise, her mother said, "Coffee's not so bad. Oh, I like tea better, but coffee's not so bad. It'll pry your eyes open even better than tea will, and that's nice of a morning."

Hearing Maude McGregor defending something Mary thought of as American and therefore automatically corrupt rocked her. She didn't quarrel, though; she had no time to quar-rel. As soon as she finished breakfast, she put on rubbers and an overcoat that had belonged to

Alexander. It was much too big for her, even though she nearly matched her mother's height, but that didn't matter. Along with earmuffs and mittens, it would keep her warm while she did the chores.

"I'm going out to the barn," she said. Her older sister shut the door behind her.

Instead of heading straight to the barn, Mary paused at the outhouse first. It didn't stink the way it did in warmer weather, but she would almost rather have sat down on a pincushion than on those cold planks. She got out of there as fast as she could.

Several motorcars were coming up the road from the U.S. border toward Rosenfeld. The snow that scrunched under Mary's rubbers sprayed up from their tires. They were all painted green-gray, which marked them as U.S. Army ma-chines.

/ hope something horrible happens to you, Mary thought. But the motorcars cared nothing for her curses. They just kept rolling north.

The railroad line ran to the west of the farm. Coal smoke spewing from the stack, a train rumbled past. The shriek of the whistle, far off in the distance, seemed the loneliest sound in the world. The train was probably full of Yankees, too. More and more these days, the Yankees were tying the Canadian rail-roads to their own.

"Damn them," Mary mouthed, and went into the barn. It was warmer there; the body heat of the horse and the cow and the sheep and the pigs and, she supposed, even the chickens helped keep it that way. And the work she had to do certainly kept her warm. She gathered eggs and fed the animals and shoveled ma-nure that would go on the fields and the vegetable plots when warmer weather came again.

As she worked, she looked around. Somewhere in here, her father had made the bombs that did the Americans so much harm before one of them killed him. U.S.

soldiers had torn the farmhouse and the barn to pieces, looking for his tools and fuses and explosives. They hadn't found them.

Of course they didn't find them, Mary thought. *My father was cleverer than a hundred Yankees put together. He just. .. wasn 't lucky with General Custer, that's all*

She picked up the basket of eggs, which she'd set on an old broken

wagon wheel that had been sitting in the barn as long as she could remember—and probably a lot longer than that. She sighed. She didn't want to go back out into the cold, even to take the eggs back to the farmhouse. Idly, she wondered why her father had never repaired and used the wheel—either that or got a few cents for the iron on the tire and the hub. He hadn't been a man to waste much.

If I had the tools, if I knew how, would I make bombs and keep fighting the Americans? Mary nodded without a moment's hesitation, despite the thought that followed hard on the heels of the other: *if they caught you, they d shoot you.* More than most children her age, she knew and understood how very per-manent death was. Losing Alexander and her father had ago-nizingly driven home that lesson.

"I don't care," she said, as if someone had said she did. "It would be worth it. We have to hit back. We *have* to." *One of these days, I'll learn how. It won't take so long, either. I prom-ise it won *t, Father.* She picked up the basket of eggs from the old wagon wheel and, however little she wanted to, went back out into winter.

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HARRY TURTLEDOVE

AMERICAN EMPIRE

THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD

'The Wizard of Id' — *Chicago Sun-Times*

the stunning new alternate-history series continues

The Center Cannot Hold

American Empire [2]

Harry Turtledove

Rating:***

Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

SUMMARY:
AMERICAN EMPIRE: BOOK TWOIn this spectacular, thought-provoking epic of alternate history, Harry Turtledove has created an unparalleled vision of social upheaval, war, and cutthroat politics in a world very much like our own—but with dramatic differences.It is 1924—a time of rebuilding, from the slow reconstruction of Washington's most honored monuments to the reclamation of devastated cities in Europe and Canada. In the United States, the Socialist Party, led by Hosea Blackford, battles Calvin Coolidge to hold on to the Powell House in Philadelphia. And it seems as if the Socialists can do no wrong, for the stock market soars and America enjoys prosperity unknown in a half century. But as old names like Custer and Roosevelt fade into history, a new generation faces new uncertainties.The Confederate States, victorious in the War of Secession and in the Second Mexican War but at last tasting defeat in the Great War, suffer poverty and natural calamity. The Freedom Party promises new strength and pride. But if its chief seizes the reins of power, he may prove a dangerous enemy for the hated U.S.A. Yet the United States take little note. Sharing world domination with Germany, they consider events in the Confederacy of little consequence.As the 1920s end, calamity casts a pall across the continent. With civil war raging in Mexico, terrorist uprisings threatening U.S. control in Canada, and an explosion of violence in Utah, the United States are rocked by uncertainty. In a world of occupiers and the occupied, of simmering hatreds, shattered lives, and pent-up violence, the center can no longer hold. And for a powerful nation, the ultimate shock will come when a fleet of foreign aircraft rain death and destruction upon one of the great cities of the United States. . . .From the Hardcover edition.

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I

Lieutenant Colonel Abner Dowling strode into the offices of the U.S. Army General Staff in Philadelphia, escaping the January snow outside. He was a big, beefy man—unkind people, of whom he'd met altogether too many, would have called him fat—and walked with a determination that made other, younger officers get out of his way, even though his green-gray uniform bore not a trace of the gold-and-black ribbon that marked a General Staff man.

He looked around with more than a little curiosity. He hadn't been in General Staff headquarters for many years—not since before the Great War, in fact. He'd spent the past ten years as adjutant to General George Armstrong Custer, and Custer's relationship with the General

Staff had always been . . .

combustible was the first word that came to mind. The first printable word, anyhow.

But Custer was retired now—retired at last, after more than sixty years of service in the Army—and Dowling needed a new assignment. *I wonder what they'll give me. What ever it is, it's bound to be a walk in the park after what I've gone through with Custer.* Anything this side of standing sentry on the battlements of hell would have seemed a walk in the park after ten years with Custer. The man was **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

unquestionably a hero. Dowling would have been the first to admit it. Nevertheless . . .

He tried not to think of Custer, which was like trying not to think of a red fish. Then he got lost—General Staff headquarters had expanded a great deal since his last visit. Having to ask his way did take his mind off his former superior. At last, by turning left down a corridor where he had turned right, he made his way to the office of General Hunter Liggett, chief of the General Staff.

Liggett's adjutant was a sharp-looking lieutenant colonel named John Abell. When Dowling walked into the office, the fellow was talking on the telephone: "—the best we can, with the budget the Socialists are willing to let us have." He looked up and put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Yes, Lieutenant Colonel?

May I help you?"

"I'm Abner Dowling. I have a ten o'clock appointment with General Liggett." By the clock on the wall, it was still a couple of minutes before ten. Dowling had built in time for things to go wrong. *Custer never did anything like that. Custer never figured anything would go wrong.* Dowling shook his head.

Don't think about Custer.

Lieutenant Colonel Abell nodded. "Go right in. He's expecting you." He returned to his interrupted telephone conversation: "I know what we should be doing, and I know what we are doing. There will be trouble one day, but they're too sure of themselves to believe it."

However much Dowling wanted to linger and eavesdrop, he went on

into General Liggett's inner office and closed the door behind him. Saluting, he said, "Reporting as ordered, sir."

Hunter Liggett returned the salute. He was a jowly man in his mid-sixties, with a penetrating stare and a white Kaiser Bill mustache waxed to pointed perfection. "At ease, Lieutenant Colonel. Sit down. Make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you, sir." Dowling eased his bulk down into a chair.

"What are we going to do with you?" Liggett said. It had to be a rhetorical question; the answer surely already lay there on his desk. He went on, "You've seen a lot these past few years, haven't you? By now, I suspect, you could handle just about anything. Couldn't you, Lieutenant Colonel?"

Dowling didn't like the sound of that. "I hope so, sir," he answered cautiously. Maybe he wouldn't get a walk in the park after all. "Ahh . . . What have you got in mind?"

"Everyone is very pleased with your performance in Canada," General Liggett said. "The assistant secretary of war, Mr. Thomas, spoke highly of you in his report to President Sinclair. He wrote that you did your best to make a difficult and unpleasant situation go more smoothly. Any time a soldier wins praise from the present administration, he must have done very well indeed."

"Thank you, sir." Dowling remembered that Liggett had become chief of the General Staff during the present Socialist administration, replacing General Leonard Wood. That made him watch his tongue.

"I'm glad Mr. Thomas was pleased. I didn't really do that much. Mostly, I just sat there and kept my mouth shut." N. Mattoon Thomas had come up to Winnipeg to force General Custer into retirement.

Custer hadn't wanted to go; Custer never wanted to do anything anyone told him to do, and he thoroughly despised the Socialists. But they'd held the high cards, and he hadn't.

"Well, what ever you did say, Mr. Thomas liked it," Liggett said. "He wrote of your tact and your discretion and your good sense—said if you were a diplomat instead of a soldier, you'd make a splendid
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ambassador." Liggett chuckled. "Damn me to hell if you're not

blushing."

"I'm flattered, sir." Dowling was also embarrassed. Like a lot of fat men, he flushed easily, and he knew it.

General Liggett went on, "And it just so happens that we have a post where a man with such talents would be very useful, very useful indeed."

"Does it? Do you?" Dowling said, and Liggett gave him a genial nod. Dowling had a fair notion of where such a post might be. Hoping he was wrong, he asked, "What have you got in mind, sir?"

Sure enough, Liggett said, "I've had to relieve Colonel Sorenson as military governor of Salt Lake City.

He's an able officer, Sorenson is; don't get me wrong. But he turned out to be a little too . . . unbending for the position. By President Sinclair's orders, we are *trying* to bring Utah back towards being a normal state in the Union once more. A tactful, diplomatic officer running things in Salt Lake could do us a lot of good there."

"I . . . see," Dowling said slowly. "The only trouble is, sir, I'm not sure I think Utah *ought* to be a normal state in the Union once more." The Mormons in Utah had caused trouble during the Second Mexican War, back at the start of the 1880s—as a result of which, the U.S. Army had landed on them with both feet. Then, in 1915, perhaps aided and abetted by the Confederates and the British from Canada, they'd risen in open rebellion. The Army had had to crush them one town at a time, and had made a peace only in the Tacitean sense of the word, leaving desert behind it.

"Between you and me and the four walls of my office, Lieutenant Colonel, I'm not sure I think so, either," Liggett answered. "But the Army doesn't make policy. That's the president's job. All we do is carry it out. And so . . . would you like to be the next military governor of Salt Lake City?"

Maybe I should have been a nasty son of a bitch when I was working for Custer, Dowling thought.

But he said what he had to say: "Yes, sir." After a moment, he added, "If I'm being diplomatic . . ."

"Yes?" Liggett asked.

“Well, sir, wouldn’t you say the good people of Salt Lake City might see it as an insult to them if a full colonel were replaced by a lieutenant colonel?” Dowling said. “Couldn’t it lead them to believe the United States Army finds them less important than it once did?”

Amusement glinted in Liggett’s eyes. “And how do you propose to make sure the good people of Salt Lake City—if there are any—don’t find themselves insulted?”

“I can think of a couple of ways, sir,” Dowling replied. “One would be to appoint somebody who’s already a bird colonel as military governor there.”

“Yes, that stands to reason,” Liggett agreed. “And the other?” He leaned back in his swivel chair, which squeaked. He seemed to be enjoying himself, waiting to hear what Dowling would say.

Dowling had hoped the chief of the General Staff would come out and say it for him. When Liggett didn’t, he had to speak for himself: “The other way, sir, would be to promote me to the appropriate rank.”

“And you think you deserve such a promotion, eh?” Liggett rumbled.

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“Yes, sir,” Dowling said boldly. *After ten years with Custer, I deserve to be a major general, by God.* And if he said no, he knew he’d never be promoted again.

General Liggett shuffled through papers on his desk. Finding the one he wanted, he shoved it, face down, across the polished expanse of mahogany to Dowling. “This may be of some interest to you, then.”

“Thank you,” Dowling said, wondering if he ought to thank Liggett. He turned the paper over, glanced at it—and stared at his superior. “Thank you very much, sir!” he exclaimed.

“You’re welcome, Colonel Dowling,” Liggett replied. “Congratulations!”

“Thank you very much,” Dowling repeated. “Uh, sir . . . Would you have given me this if I hadn’t asked for it?”

Liggett’s smile was as mysterious as the Mona Lisa’s, though a good

deal less benign. “You’ll never know, will you?” His chuckle was not a pleasant sound. He found another sheet of paper, and passed it to Dowling, too. “Here are your orders, Colonel. Your train goes out of Broad Street Station tomorrow morning. I’m sure you’ll do a fine job, and I know for a fact that General Pershing is looking forward to having you under his command.”

“*Do* you?” All of a sudden, Dowling’s world seemed less rosy. During the war, Pershing’s Second Army had fought side by side with Custer’s First in Kentucky and Tennessee. The two armies had been rivals, as neighbors often are, and their two commanders had been rivals, too. Custer was suspicious of his younger colleague, as he was suspicious of any other officer who might steal his glory. Dowling had forgotten Pershing was military governor of Utah these days.

“I think I know what’s bothering you, Colonel,” Liggett said. If anyone knew about rivalries, the chief of the General Staff would be the man. He went on, “You don’t have to worry, not on that score. I meant what I said: General Pershing is eager to have you.”

But what will he do with me—to me—once he’s got me? Dowling wondered. He couldn’t say that.

All he could say was, “That’s good to hear, sir.”

“Which means you don’t believe me,” Liggett said. “Well, that’s your privilege. You may even be right. I don’t think you are, but you may be.”

Dowling was by nature a pessimist. If he hadn’t been before, ten years under General Custer would have made him one. “I’ll do the best I can, sir, that’s all,” he said. *And what ever Pershing does to me, by God, I’ll have eagles on my shoulder straps. That makes up for a lot.*

General Liggett nodded. “As long as you do that, no one can ask any more of you.”

“All right, sir.” Dowling started to rise, then checked himself. “May I ask you one more thing, sir? It’s got nothing to do with Mormons.”

“Go ahead and ask,” Liggett told him. “I don’t promise to answer, not till I’ve heard the question.”

“I understand. What I want to know is, are we really cutting back on building new and better barrels?

I've heard that, but it strikes me as foolish." Like most professional soldiers, Dowling had no use for the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Socialist Party. There as in few other places, he agreed with the man under whom he'd served for so long. He would have expressed himself a lot more strongly had he been talking with General Leonard Wood, a lifelong Democrat and a friend of ex–President Theodore Roosevelt.

But Liggett nodded again, and didn't sound happy as he answered, "We aren't just cutting back, as a matter of fact. We're gutting the program. No money in the budget any more. That outfit at Fort Leavenworth called the Barrel Works . . ." He slashed a thumb across his throat. "As our German friends would say, *kaputt* ."

"That's—unfortunate, sir." Dowling used the politest word he could. "Barrels won us the last war. They won't count less in the next one."

"Don't be silly, Colonel. There'll never, ever be another war. Just ask President Sinclair." *He's still a soldier first, then,* Dowling thought. *Good.* Both men laughed. But for the bitter undertone in each one's voice, the joke might have been funny.

Anne Colleton was studying the *Wall Street Journal* when the telephone rang. She muttered something under her breath, put down the five-day-old newspaper, and went to answer the phone. Back in the days when she'd lived on the Marshlands plantation, her butler, Scipio, or one of the other Negro servants would have done that for her and spared her the interruption. These days, though, the Marshlands mansion was a burnt-out ruin, the cotton fields around it going back to grass and bushes. Anne lived in town, not that St. Matthews, South Carolina, was much of a town.

"This is Anne Colleton," she said crisply. She was in her mid-thirties. With her sleek blond good looks, she could have lied ten years off her age with no one the wiser—till she spoke. Few people younger than she—few her own age, for that matter, but even fewer younger—could have so quickly made plain they put up with no nonsense at all.

"And a good day to you, Miss Colleton," replied the man on the other end of the line. By the hisses and pops accompanying his voice, he was calling from some distance away. He went on, "My name is Edward C.L. Wiggins, ma'am, and I'm in Richmond."

Long distance, sure enough, Anne thought—he sounded as if he were shouting down a rain barrel.

“What is it, Mr. Wiggins?” she said. “I don’t think we’ve met.”

“No, ma’am, I haven’t had the pleasure,” he agreed, “but the Colleton name is famous all over the Confederate States.”

He doubtless meant that as pleasant flattery. Anne Colleton had heard enough pleasant flattery to last the rest of her life by the time she was sixteen—one consequence of her looks men seldom thought about.

“You can come to the point, Mr. Wiggins,” she said pleasantly, “or I’ll hang up on you no matter where you are.”

“Once upon a time, President Semmes sent me up to Philadelphia to see if I could dicker a peace with the Yankees, but they wouldn’t do it,” Wiggins said.

That wasn’t coming to the point, or Anne didn’t think it was, but it did get her attention. “This would have been fairly early on, before we finally had to quit?” she asked.

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“That’s right, ma’am,” he said.

“I heard rumors about that,” she said. “With all the money I gave the Whigs in those days, I would have thought I deserved to hear something more than rumors, but evidently not. So you were representing President Semmes, were you?”

“Yes, ma’am, in an unofficial sort of way.”

“And whose representative are you now, in an unofficial sort of way? I’m sure you’re somebody’s.”

Edward C.L. Wiggins chuckled. “I heard you were one clever lady. I guess I heard right.”

“Who told you so?” Anne asked sharply.

“Well, now, I was just getting to that. I—”

Anne did hang up then. She wasted not a minute getting back to work. With her finances in the state they were, they needed all the time she could give them. They needed more than that, too: they needed something close to a miracle. She wasn’t a pauper, as so many prewar

planters were these days. But she wasn't rich enough not to have to worry, either, and she didn't know if she ever would be.

A few minutes later, the phone rang again. Anne picked it up. "Why, Mr. Wiggins. What a pleasant surprise," she said before whoever was on the other end of the line could speak. If it wasn't Wiggins, she would have to apologize to someone, but she thought the odds were good enough to take the chance.

And it was. "Miss Colleton, if you would let me explain myself—"

She cut him off, though she didn't—quite—hang up on him once more. "I gave you two chances to do that. You didn't. If you think I'm in the habit of wasting my time on strange men who call me out of the blue, you're mistaken—and whoever told you what you think you know about me hasn't got the faintest notion of what he's talking about."

"Oh, I don't know." Wiggins' voice was dry. "He told me you were sharp as a tack but a first-class bitch, and that doesn't seem so far out to me."

"I'm sure he meant it as an insult, but I'll take it for a compliment," Anne said. "Last chance, Mr.

Wiggins—who told you that?"

"Jake Featherston."

Anne had expected almost any other name than that of the Freedom Party leader. Something she didn't want to call alarm shot through her. She took Jake Featherston very seriously. That didn't mean she wanted anything to do with him. She'd backed him for a while, yes, but she backed winners, and he didn't look like one any more. Trying to gain time to recover her composure, she asked, "If you used to work for the Whigs, why are you calling me for Featherston now?"

"On account of what I saw when I went to Philadelphia, ma'am," he replied. "The United States don't respect you when you're weak. If you're down, they'll kick you. But if you're strong, they have got to sit up and take notice. That's a fact."

"I agree with that. I think everyone in the Confederate States agrees with that," Anne said.

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“Well, there you are,” Wiggins said cheerily. “If you agree with that, the Freedom Party is really and truly the only place for you, because —”

“Nonsense.” Anne didn’t care about his reasons. She had reasons of her own: “The Freedom Party has about as much chance of electing the next president as I do of getting elected myself. I have no intention of giving Jake Featherston one more dime. Every since that madman of a Grady Calkins murdered President Hampton, it’d take a special miracle for anyone from the Freedom Party to get himself elected dog catcher, let alone anything more. I don’t spend my money where it does me no good.”

“I don’t think the clouds are as black as you say, ma’am,” Wiggins replied. “Yes, we lost a couple of seats in the election last November, but not as many as people said we would. We’ll be back—you wait and see if we aren’t. Folks don’t have much in the way of memory—and besides, ma’am, we’re *right* .”

“If you can’t win an election, whether you’re right or not doesn’t matter,” Anne pointed out.

“We will.” Wiggins sounded confident. She got the idea he sounded confident all the time. He went on,

“I want to say a couple of other things, and then I’m through. First one is, Mr. Featherston, he knows who’s for him, and he knows who’s against him, and he never, ever, forgets the one or the other.”

He was, without question, right about that. Featherston was as relentless as a barrel smashing through one line of trenches after another. Anne didn’t intimidate easily, but Jake Featherston had done the job.

That just gave her more reason to harden her voice and say, “I’ll take my chances.”

Edward C.L. Wiggins chuckled. “He told me you were near as stubborn as he is himself, and I see he’s right. One more thing, and then I’m through, and I won’t trouble you any more.”

“Go ahead,” Anne said. “Make it short.” *I’ve already wasted more than enough time on you.*

“Yes, ma’am. Here’s what I’ve got to say: there’s only one party in the CSA that’s got any notion at all about what the devil to do about the nigger problem in this country, and that’s the Freedom Party. And now I’m done. Good-bye.” He surprised her by hanging up.

Slowly, she put the mouthpiece back on its hook and set down the telephone. She said a word she was unlikely to use in public, one that would have made strong men gasp and women of delicate sensibilities blush and faint. Wiggins had known how to get through to her, after all. No one was likely to forget the Red Negro uprising that had tied the Confederacy in knots late in 1915 and early in 1916. No one knew how much it had helped the USA win the war, but it couldn’t have hurt. The Freedom Party stood foursquare for vengeance, and so did Anne Colleton.

And why not? she thought. *One brother dead, my plantation wrecked, me almost murdered . . . Oh, yes, I owe those black bastards just a little. The whole country owes them just a little, whether the Whigs and the Radical Liberals want to admit it or not.*

She repeated that word, louder this time. Behind her, her surviving brother burst out laughing. She whirled around. “Confound it, Tom,” she said angrily, “I didn’t know you were there.”

Tom Colleton laughed harder than ever. “I’ll bet you didn’t,” he answered. “If you had, you would have said something like, ‘Confound it,’ instead.” He was a couple of years younger than Anne, and a little darker, with hair light brown rather than gold. He’d gone into the war an irresponsible boy and come out of it a lieutenant-colonel and a man, something of which Anne still had to remind herself now and again.

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She shrugged now. “I probably would have. But I meant what I did say.”

“Who was on the telephone?” he asked.

“A man named Edward C.L. Wiggins,” Anne replied. “He wanted money from us for the Freedom Party.”

Tom frowned. “Those people don’t take no for an answer, do they?”

“They never have,” Anne said. “It’s their greatest strength—and their greatest weakness.”

“Did you find out why he travels with a herd of initials?” her brother asked. She shook her head. Tom went on, “What did you tell him?”

“No, of course,” Anne answered. “The way things are now, I’d sooner cozy up to a cottonmouth than to Jake Featherston.”

“Don’t blame you a bit,” Tom Colleton said. “He’s an impressive man in a lot of ways, but. . . .” He shook his head. “He puts me in mind of a time bomb, wound up and waiting to go off. And when he does, I don’t think it’ll be pretty.”

“There were times when I thought he had all the answers,” Anne said. “And there were times when I thought he was a little bit crazy. And there were times when I thought both those things at once. Those were the ones that scared me.”

“Scared me, too,” Tom agreed, “and we don’t scare easy.”

“No. We’d be dead by now if we did,” Anne said, and Tom nodded. She eyed him. “And speaking of looking pretty, you’re fancier than you need to be for staying around here. Is that a necktie?” She thought its gaudy stripes of crimson and gold excessive, but declined to criticize.

Her brother nodded again. “Sure is. Bought it from what’s-his-name, the Jew tailor. And I’m going to pay a call on Bertha Talmadge in a little while.”

Before the war, Anne would have discouraged such a call—with a bludgeon, if necessary. The Muncies, Bertha’s parents, were grocers, and their daughter no fit match for a planter’s son. These days . . . Well, grocers never starved. And Bertha Talmadge, though a widow whose husband, like so many others, had died in the trenches, was reasonably young, reasonably pretty, reasonably bright.

Anne nodded approval. “Have a nice time. You should find yourself a wife, settle down, have yourself some children.”

He didn’t get angry at her, as he would have before the war. In fact, he nodded again himself. “You’re right. I should. And, as a matter of fact, so should you.”

“That’s different,” Anne said quickly.

“How?”

Because he was her brother, she told him: “Because my husband would want to try to run everything, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

because that’s what men do. And odds are he wouldn’t be as good at it as I am. That’s why.”

“And even if he was, you wouldn’t admit it,” Tom said.

That was also true. Anne Colleton, however, had not the slightest intention of admitting it. Giving her brother her most enigmatic smile, she went back to the *Wall Street Journal* .

Mary McGregor was only thirteen years old, but her course in life was already set. So she told herself, anyhow, and also told her mother and her older sister as they sat down to supper on their farm outside Rosenfeld, Manitoba: “The Yankees killed my brother. They killed my father, too. But I’m going to get even—you see if I don’t.”

Fright showed on her mother’s careworn face. Maude McGregor touched the sleeve of her woolen blouse to show Mary she still wore mourning black. “You be careful,” she said. “If anything happened to you after Alexander and Arthur, I don’t think I could bear it.”

She didn’t tell Mary not to pursue vengeance against the Americans occupying Canada. Plainly, she knew better. That would have been telling the sun not to rise, the snow not to fall. Ever since the Americans arrested her older brother during the war on a charge of sabotage, lined him up against a wall, and shot him, she’d hated them with an altogether unchildlike ferocity.

“Of course I’ll be careful,” she said now, as if she were the adult and her mother the worried, fussy child. “Pa was careful. He just . . . wasn’t lucky at the end. He should have got that . . . blamed General Custer.” However much she hated Americans, she wasn’t allowed to curse at the supper table.

Her older sister nodded. “Who would have thought Custer would be waiting for Father to throw that bomb and ready to throw it back?” Julia said. “That *was* bad luck, nothing else but.” She sighed. She hadn’t only lost her father. Arthur McGregor’s failure had also cost her an engagement; the Culligans had decided it just wasn’t safe to join their son, Ted, to a bomber’s family.

“Part of it was,” their mother said. “Mary, would you please pass the butter?” Mayhem and manners lived together under the McGregors’ roof.

“Here you are, Ma,” Mary said, and her mother buttered her mashed potatoes. Mary went on, “What do you mean, part of it was bad luck? It *all* was!”

Her mother shook her head. “No, only part. The Americans suspected your father. They came sniffing around here all the time, remember. If they hadn’t suspected, Custer wouldn’t have been ready to . . . to do what he did.”

What he’d done by throwing the bomb back had blown Arthur McGregor to red rags; the family could have buried him in a jam tin. No one still alive wanted to think about that. “I’ll be careful,” Mary said again. She brushed a wisp of auburn hair back from her face in a gesture her mother might have made.

Maude McGregor had reddish hair, too. Julia was darker, as her father had been.

Maude McGregor said, “I just thank God you’re only thirteen, and not likely to get into too much mischief for a while. You know the Yankees will keep an eye on us forever, on account of what the menfolks in our family did.”

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“Alexander never did anything!” Mary said hotly.

“They thought he did, and that was all that mattered to them,” her mother answered. “Your father never would have done any of the things *he* did if that hadn’t happened—and we’d all be here together.” She stared down at the heavy white earthenware plate in front of her.

“I’m sorry, Mother.” Seeing her mother unhappy could still tear Mary to pieces inside. But she wasted little time amending that: “I’m sorry I made you unhappy.” She wasn’t sorry she wanted revenge on the Americans. Nothing could make her sorry about that.

“We’ve been through too much. I don’t want us to have to go through any more,” her mother said.

Maude McGregor quickly brought her napkin up to her face. Pretending to wipe her mouth, she dabbed at her eyes instead. She tried not to let her children catch her crying. Sometimes, try as she would, she failed.

Mary said, “Canada’s been through too much. There isn’t even a Canada any more. That’s what the Americans say, anyhow. If they say it loud enough and often enough, lots of people will start believing it.

But I won’t.”

“I won’t, either,” Julia said. “I quit the schools when they started teaching American lies. But you’re right—plenty of people are still going, and plenty of them will believe what ever they hear. What can we do about it?”

“We’ve got to do something!” Mary exclaimed, though she didn’t know what.

Her mother got up from the table. “What ever we do, we won’t do it now. What we will do now is wash the dishes and get ready for bed. We’ll have a lot of work tomorrow, and it’s not any easier because. . . .” She shook her head. “It’s not any easier, that’s all.”

It’s not any easier because we haven’t got any menfolk left alive to help us. That was what she’d started to say, that or something like it. And things would only get harder when winter of 1924 turned to spring and they would have to try to put a crop in the ground by themselves. Like any farm daughter, Mary had worked since she could stand on her own two feet. The idea didn’t worry her. Having to do men’s work as well as women’s . . . How could the three of them manage without wearing down to nubs?

She didn’t know that, either. She only knew they had to try. *My father kept trying, and he made the Yankees pay. I will, too, somehow.*

Julia washed dishes and silverware and scrubbed pots till her hands turned red. Mary dried things and put them away. Yesterday, they’d done it the other way round. Tomorrow, they would again.

After the last plate went where it belonged, Mary took a candle upstairs. She used it to light the kerosene lamp in her room. The Americans had started talking about bringing electricity out from the towns to the countryside, but all they’d done so far was talk. *More lies,* she thought.

She changed out of her shirtwaist and sweater and skirt into a long wool flannel nightgown. With thick wool blankets and a down comforter on the bed, she didn't fear even a Manitoba winter—and if that wasn't courage, what was? Before she lay down, she knelt beside the bed and prayed.

"And keep Mother safe and healthy, and keep Julia safe and healthy, and help me pay the Americans **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

back," she whispered, as she did every night. "Please, God. I know You can do it if You try." God *could* do anything. She believed that with all her heart. Getting Him to do it—that was a different, and harder, business.

When Mary's head did hit the pillow, she fell asleep as if clubbed. She woke the next morning in exactly the same position as when she'd gone to sleep. Maybe she'd shifted back into it during the night. Maybe she hadn't had the energy to roll over.

Once she crawled out of bed, the aromas of tea and frying eggs and potatoes floating up to the bedroom from the kitchen helped get her moving. She put on the same skirt and sweater with a different shirtwaist and hurried downstairs. "Good," her mother said when she made her appearance. "Another five minutes and I'd've sent Julia after you. Here you are." She used a spatula to lift a couple of eggs from the skillet and set them on Mary's plate. Potatoes fried in lard went alongside them.

"Thanks, Ma." Mary put salt on the eggs and potatoes and pepper on the eggs. She ate like a wolf. Her mother gave her a thick china mug full of tea. Mary poured in milk from a pitcher and added a couple of spoonsful of sugar. She drank the tea as hot as she could bear it.

Julia was already on her second cup. "How do the Americans stand drinking coffee all the time?" she wondered aloud. "It's so nasty."

"It's disgusting," Mary said. She honestly believed she would have thought that even if the Yankees hadn't done what they'd done. She'd tried coffee a couple of times, and found it astonishingly bitter.

To her surprise, her mother said, "Coffee's not so bad. Oh, I like tea better, but coffee's not so bad. It'll pry your eyes open even better than tea will, and that's nice of a morning."

Hearing Maude McGregor defending something Mary thought of as

American and therefore automatically corrupt rocked her. She didn't quarrel, though; she had no time to quarrel. As soon as she finished breakfast, she put on rubbers and an overcoat that had belonged to Alexander. It was much too big for her, even though she'd nearly matched her mother's height, but that didn't matter. Along with earmuffs and mittens, it would keep her warm while she did the chores.

"I'm going out to the barn," she said. Her older sister shut the door behind her.

Instead of heading straight to the barn, Mary paused at the outhouse first. It didn't stink the way it did in warmer weather, but she would almost rather have sat down on a pincushion than on those cold planks.

She got out of there as fast as she could.

Several motorcars were coming up the road from the U.S. border toward Rosenfeld. The snow that scrunched under Mary's rubbers sprayed up from their tires. They were all painted green-gray, which marked them as U.S. Army machines. *I hope something horrible happens to you,* Mary thought. But the motorcars cared nothing for her curses. They just kept rolling north.

The railroad line ran to the west of the farm. Coal smoke spewing from the stack, a train rumbled past.

The shriek of the whistle, far off in the distance, seemed the loneliest sound in the world. The train was probably full of Yankees, too. More and more these days, the Yankees were tying the Canadian railroads to their own.

"Damn them," Mary mouthed, and went into the barn. It was warmer there; the body heat of the horse and the cow and the sheep and the pigs and, she supposed, even the chickens helped keep it that way.

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And the work she had to do certainly kept her warm. She gathered eggs and fed the animals and shoveled manure that would go on the fields and the vegetable plots when warmer weather came again.

As she worked, she looked around. Somewhere in here, her father had

made the bombs that did the Americans so much harm before one of them killed him. U.S. soldiers had torn the farmhouse and the barn to pieces, looking for his tools and fuses and explosives. They hadn't found them.

Of course they didn't find them, Mary thought. *My father was cleverer than a hundred Yankees put together. He just . . . wasn't lucky with General Custer, that's all.*

She picked up the basket of eggs, which she'd set on an old broken wagon wheel that had been sitting in the barn as long as she could remember—and probably a lot longer than that. She sighed. She didn't want to go back out into the cold, even to take the eggs back to the farmhouse. Idly, she wondered why her father had never repaired and used the wheel—either that or got a few cents for the iron on the tire and the hub. He hadn't been a man to waste much.

If I had the tools, if I knew how, would I make bombs and keep fighting the Americans? Mary nodded without a moment's hesitation, despite the thought that followed hard on the heels of the other: *if they caught you, they'd shoot you* . More than most children her age, she knew and understood how very permanent death was. Losing Alexander and her father had agonizingly driven home that lesson.

"I don't care," she said, as if someone had said she did. "It would be worth it. We have to hit back. We *have* to." *One of these days, I'll learn how. It won't take so long, either. I promise it won't, Father.*

She picked up the basket of eggs from the old wagon wheel and, however little she wanted to, went back out into winter.

Flags flying, horns blaring, rails decked in bunting of red, white, and blue, the USS *O'Brien* came into Cork harbor. The Irish had laid on a spectacular welcome for the destroyer with the fortunately Hibernian name, with fireboats shooting streams of water high into the air. On the shore, a brass band in fancy green uniforms blared away. Schoolchildren had the day off. Some of them waved American flags, others the orange, white, and green banner of the Republic of Ireland —which, with U.S. help, had finally gained control over the whole island.

From his station at the forward four-inch gun, Ensign Sam Carsten grinned at the celebration. He'd seen the like before, in Dublin. He was a tall, muscular, very blond man who burned whenever the sun came out, no matter how feebly. A cloudy day in Irish late winter

suited him down to the ground. He didn't have to worry about smearing zinc-oxide ointment and other things that didn't work onto his poor, abused hide, not for a while he didn't.

He turned to the petty officer who was his number two at the gun. "They wouldn't have been so friendly if we'd come in while the limeys were still running this place, eh, Hirskowitz?"

"You're right about that, sir." Nathan Hirskowitz was a dour Jew from New York City, as dark as Carsten was fair. He had swarthy skin, brown eyes, and a blue-black stubble he had to shave twice a day.

Getting called *sir* still bemused Carsten. He was a mustang, up through the ranks; he'd spent going on twenty years working his way up from ordinary seaman. If the officer in charge of the gun he'd served on an aeroplane carrier hadn't encouraged him, he didn't think he would ever have had the nerve to take the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

qualifying examination. He wished he were still aboard the *Remembrance* ; naval aviation fascinated him, even if he was a gunnery man first. But the carrier hadn't had any slots for a new-minted ensign, and so. .

. .

"Matter of fact, they'd've tried to blow our heads off," Sam said. Hirskowitz nodded. Carsten scanned the harbor. Lots of fishing boats, some merchant steamers, a couple of old U.S. destroyers now flying the Irish flag, and . . . He stiffened, then pointed. "We've got company. Nobody told me we were going to have company."

Hirskowitz let out a disdainful sniff. "You think they're going to tell you things you need to know just because you need to know them?"

The *S135* was a German destroyer, a little smaller than the *O'Brien* , mounting three guns rather than four. The German naval ensign fluttered from her stern: a busy banner, with the black Hohenzollern eagle in a white circle at the center of a black cross on a white field. In the canton, where the stars went on an American flag, was a small version of the German national banner: a black Maltese cross on horizontal stripes of black, white, and red. As the *O'Brien* edged toward a quay, the *S135* dipped her flag in salute.

A moment later, the American ship returned the compliment.

“You see? They’re allies,” Nathan Hirskowitz said.

In a different tone of voice, that would have sounded light, cheery, optimistic—all words noticeably not suited to the petty officer’s temper. As things were, Hirskowitz packed a world of doubt and menace into four words.

“Yeah.” Carsten did his best to match him in one. Without a doubt, the United States and the German Empire were the two strongest nations in the world these days. What was in doubt was which of them was stronger. Officially, everything remained as it had been when they joined together to put Britain and France and the CSA in the shade. Unofficially . . .

“If our boys go drinking and their boys go drinking, there’s liable to be trouble,” Carsten said.

“Probably.” Hirskowitz sounded as if he looked forward to it. After making a fist and looking at it in surprise—what was such a thing doing on the end of his arm?—he went on, “If there is trouble, they’ll be sorry for it.”

“Yeah,” Sam Carsten said again. For one thing, the *O’Brien* had a bigger crew than the German destroyer. For another, winning the Great War had made him certain the USA could win any fight. He shook his head in bemusement. That was certainly a new attitude for an American to take. After losing the War of Secession and getting humiliated in the Second Mexican War, Americans had come to have a lot of self-doubt in their character. *Amazing what victory can do,* he thought.

He peered toward the *S135* . By the polished way the sailors over there went about their business, they’d never heard of self-doubt. And why should they have? Under Bismarck and under Kaiser Bill, Germany had gone from triumph to triumph. Victories over Denmark and Austria and France let her unite as a single kingdom. And victory in the Great War left her a colossus bestriding Europe in almost the same way the USA bestrode North America.

Sailors aboard the *O’Brien* threw lines to waiting longshoremen, who made the destroyer fast to the quay. “Welcome!” one of the longshoremen called in a musical brogue. “I’ll be glad to buy some of you boys a pint of Guinness, that I will.”

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“What’s Guinness?” Hirskowitz asked Carsten.

“It’s what they make in Ireland instead of beer,” Sam said helpfully. “It’s black as fuel oil, and almost as thick. Tastes kind of burnt till you get used to it. After that, it’s not so bad.”

“Oh.” Hirskowitz weighed that. “Well, I’ll see. They make real beer, too?”

“Some. And whiskey. Got some good whiskey the last couple of times I was here.”

“When was that, sir?”

“Once during the war,” Carsten answered. “We were running guns to the micks to help ’em give the limeys hell. They paid us back in booze.” He smacked his lips at the memory. “And then again in *Remembrance* afterwards, when we were helping the Republic put down the limeys and their pals up in the north.”

The captain of the *O’Brien* , an improbably young lieutenant commander named Marsden, assembled the crew on the foredeck and said, “I’m pleased to grant you men liberty—this is a friendly port, and everybody has gone out of his way to make sure we’re welcome. I know you’ll want to drink a little and have a good time.”

Sailors nudged one another and grinned. Somebody behind Sam said, “Skipper’s all right, ain’t he?”

Carsten frowned. He knew boys would be boys, too, but that didn’t mean an officer was supposed to encourage them. He wouldn’t have done that as a petty officer, and he wouldn’t do it now.

But then Marsden stiffened and seemed to grow taller. His voice went hard as armor plate as he continued, “Having a good time doesn’t mean brawling. It especially doesn’t mean brawling with the Kaiser’s sailors. We’re on the same side, us and the Germans. Anybody who’s stupid enough to quarrel with them will have the book thrown at him, and that’s a promise. Everybody understand?”

“Yes, sir!” the sailors chorused.

“What do you say, then?”

“Aye aye, sir!”

“Good.” Lieutenant Commander Marsden’s smile showed sharp teeth. “Because you’d better.

Dismissed!”

Sam Carsten didn’t get to go into Cork for a couple of days. He was less than impressed when he did.

It wasn’t a very big city, and it was grimy with coal smoke. And he almost got killed the first two or three times he tried to cross the street. Like their former English overlords, the Irish drove on the wrong side of the road. Looking right didn’t help if a wagon was bearing down on you from the left.

Before long, Carsten discovered he’d given Nathan Hirskowitz at least half a bum steer. Along with the swarms of GUINNESS IS GOOD FOR YOU! signs, pubs hereabouts also extolled the virtues of a local stout called Murphy’s. Sam strolled into one and, in the spirit of experiment, ordered a pint of the local stuff. He’d changed a little money, but the tapman shoved his sixpence back across the bar at him.

“You’re one o’ them Yanks,” he said. “Your money’s no good here.”

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“Thanks very much,” Carsten said.

“My pleasure, sir, that it is.” The fellow left a little more than an inch of creamy head on the pint, and drew a shamrock in the thick froth with the drippings from the tap. Catching Sam’s eye on him, he smiled sheepishly. “Just showing off a bit.” Sam smiled back; he’d seen the same stunt and heard the same line in Dublin. Every tapman in the country probably used it on strangers. This one slid Sam the glass. “Enjoy it, now.”

“I bet I will.” Carsten took a sip. The tapman waited expectantly. Sam smiled and said, “That’s mighty good.” But in truth, he couldn’t have told Murphy’s from Guinness to save his life.

A couple of American sailors came in not long after he did. He nodded to them. They sat down well away from him—he was an officer, after all, even if he sometimes had trouble remembering it—and ordered

drinks of their own. Then a couple of more sailors came in. An Irishman stuck his nose in the door, saw all the blue uniforms, and decided to do his drinking somewhere else.

Carsten raised his finger to order another Murphy's. The tapman was pouring it for him when half a dozen more sailors walked into the pub. They too wore navy blue uniforms, but theirs were of a different cut, and their hats struck Sam's eye as odd. They were off the *S135* , not the *O'Brien* .

They eyed the Americans already there with the same wariness those Americans were showing them.

Sam didn't know German rank markings any too well, but one grizzled German sure had the look of a senior petty officer. The man spoke English, of a sort: "Friends, *ja* ?"

"Yes, friends," Carsten said, before any of the *O'Brien* 's men could say anything like, *No, not friends* .

"Gut, gut," the German said. "England, *Frankreich* —" He shook his head. "No, France . . ." He made it sound more like a man's name—Franz—than a country's, but Carsten nodded to show he got it.

"England, France—so." The squarehead made a thumbs-down gesture that might have come from a Roman amphitheater.

All the Americans got that. "Yeah," one of the sailors said. "To hell with England and France, and the horse they rode in on."

The German plainly didn't know about the horse they rode in on, but the smiles from the Americans encouraged his pals and him to come in and order beers for themselves. Sam noticed the tapman took their money, where he hadn't for any of the Americans. If the Germans noticed that, too, it might cause trouble.

Picking up his pint of Murphy's, he went over and sat down by the German who knew a little English.

"Hello," he said.

"Good day, sir," the veteran said. He didn't come to ramrod attention, the way he would have for one of his own officers—the Germans were devils for discipline, even by the tough standards of the U.S.

Navy—but he wasn't far from it. One of his own officers probably

wouldn't have deigned to talk with him at all.

"We should stay friends, your country and mine, eh?" Sam said.

"Jawohl, mein Herr!" the petty officer said. He translated that for his pals. They all nodded. Sam got out a pack of cigarettes. He offered them to the Germans. The tobacco was as good as prewar, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

imported from the CSA. All the Germans took a cigarette or two except one man who apologetically showed him a clay pipe to explain why he didn't. *"Danke,"* the petty officer said. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Carsten raised his mug. "Let's stay friends."

Again, the petty officer translated. Again, his men solemnly nodded. They all drank with Sam. A couple of the Americans came over. One spoke a little German, about as much as the petty officer spoke English. A couple of hours passed in a friendly enough way—especially since the tapman had the sense to stop charging the Germans. But Sam knew he would have to draft a report when he got back to the *O'Brien* . He suspected the German petty officer would be doing the same thing on the *S135* .

Friends? he thought. *Well, maybe.* He eyed the capable-looking German sailors. The fellow with the clay pipe sent up a cloud of smoke. *Maybe friends, yeah. But rivals? Oh, you bet. Rivals for sure.*

Winter, spring, summer, fall—they didn't matter much in the Sloss Works. It could be snowing outside—not that it snowed very often in Birmingham, Alabama—but it would still be hell on earth on the pouring floor in the steel mill.

Jefferson Pinkard shook his head. Sweat ran down his face. It was hot as hell in here, no doubt about that. But he'd seen hell on earth fighting the Red Negro rebels in Georgia, and again, worse, fighting the damnyankees in the trenches in west Texas. You could hurt yourself—you could kill yourself—right here, but nobody was trying to do it for you.

When the shift-change whistle screamed—a sound that pierced the din of the mill like an armor-tipped shell plowing through shoddy concrete—he nodded to his partner and to the men who'd come to take his crew's place. " 'Night, Fred. 'Night, Calvin. 'Night, Luke. See y'all tomorrow."

He clocked out by himself. Once upon a time, he'd worked side by side with his best friend and next-door neighbor, Bedford Cunningham. But Bedford had got conscripted before he did, and had come back to Birmingham without most of his right arm. Pinkard had stayed at the Sloss Works a while longer, working side by side with black men till he got conscripted, too.

But after he'd put on butternut . . . After he'd put on butternut, Emily had got lonely. She'd been used to getting it regular from him, and she wanted to keep getting it regular regardless of whether he was there or not. He'd come home on leave one night to find her on her knees in front of Bedford Cunningham, neither of them wearing any more than they'd been born with.

Pinkard growled, deep in his throat. "Stinking tramp," he muttered. "It was the war, it was the goddamn war, nothin' else but." Even after he'd come back when the fighting stopped, their marriage hadn't survived. Now he lived in the yellow-painted cottage—company housing—all by himself. It was none too clean these days—nothing like the way it had looked when Emily took care of things—but he didn't care.

He had only himself to please, and he wasn't what anybody would call a tough audience.

He headed back toward the cottage, part of the stream of big, weary men in overalls and dungarees heading home. He walked by himself, as he always did these days. Another, similar, stream was coming in: the swing shift. It had a few more blacks mixed in than the outgoing day shift, but only a few. Blacks had taken a lot of better jobs during the war; now whites had almost all of them back.

"Hey, Jeff!" One of the whites waved to him. "Freedom!"

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"Freedom!" Pinkard echoed. "When you gonna get your ass to another Party meeting, Travis?"

"I be go to hell if I know," the other steel worker answered. "When they take me off swing, I reckon, but God only knows when that is. Remember me to the boys tonight, will you?"

"Sure will," Pinkard said. "That's a promise." He walked on. When he

got to the cottage, he lit a kerosene lamp (there was talk about putting electricity into the company housing, but so far it was nothing but talk), got a fire going in the coal-burning stove, and took a ham out of the icebox. He cut off a big slice and fried it in lard, then did up some potatoes in the same iron frying pan. The beer in the icebox was homebrew—Alabama had been formally dry since before the war—but it washed down supper as well as anything storebought could have.

He put the plate and the frying pan in the sink, atop a teetering mountain of dirty dishes. One day soon he'd have to wash them, because he was running out of clean ones. "Not tonight, Josephine," he muttered; he'd started talking to himself now that he was the only one in the house. "I got important things to do tonight, by God."

He scraped stubble from his chin with a straight razor, splashed on water, and then shed his overalls and work shirt for a clean white shirt and a pair of butternut wool trousers. He wished he had time to shine his shoes, but a glance at the wind-up alarm clock ticking on his nightstand told him he didn't, not if he wanted to get to the meeting on time. And there was nothing in the world he wanted more.

The trolley stopped at the edge of the company housing. Looking back over his shoulder, Jeff saw the mills throwing sparks into the night sky, almost as if it were the Fourth of July. A couple of other men came up to wait for the trolley. They too wore white shirts and khaki trousers. "Freedom!" Jefferson Pinkard said.

"Freedom!" they echoed.

Jeff sighed. Back in the days before Grady Calkins had shot down President Hampton when he came to Birmingham, a lot more men would have come to Party meetings. The Freedom Party had looked like the wave of the future then. Now . . . Only the dedicated, the men who really saw something wrong with the CSA and saw that Jake Featherston knew how to fix it, went to Freedom Party meetings these days.

And even now . . . "Where's Virgil?" Jeff asked.

Both other men shrugged. "Don't rightly know," one of them said. "He was at the foundry, so I don't reckon he's feelin' poorly."

Bell clanging, the trolley came up. Jeff was glad to climb aboard and drop five cents in the fare box so he wouldn't have to think about what Virgil's absence might mean. He was also glad to pay a fare

measured in cents and not in thousands or millions of dollars. After the war, inflation had ripped the guts out of the Confederate States. Its easing had hurt the Freedom Party, too, but that was one bargain Pinkard was willing to make.

Several more men in white shirts and butternut trousers got on the trolley at its next few stops. Jeff liked the uniform look they had. It reminded him of the days when he and a lot of others who were now Freedom Party members had worn Confederate butternut together. They'd been fighting for something important then, just as they were now. They'd lost then. *This time, by Jesus, we won't!*

The Freedom Party men all got out at the same stop. Not far away stood the old livery stable where the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Party met in Birmingham. As a livery stable, the place was a failure, with motorcars and trucks driving more horses off the road every year. As a meeting hall, it was . . . *Tolerable,* Jeff thought.

But he was smiling as he went inside. This was where he belonged. Emily was gone. She was gone, at least in part, because the Freedom Party had come to mean so much to him. Whatever the reason, though, she *was* gone. The Party remained. This *was* such family as he had left.

Party members crowded the floor. The hay bales on which men had once sat weren't there any more.

Folding chairs replaced them. Their odor, though, and that of horses, still lingered in the building. The smells had probably soaked into the pine boards of the wall.

Jeff found a seat near the rostrum at the front. He shook hands with several men sitting close by.

"Freedom!" they said. Pinkard had to be careful to whom he used the Party greeting at the Sloss Works.

Whigs and especially Radical Liberals had no use for it.

Caleb Briggs, the Freedom Party leader in Birmingham, ascended to the rostrum and stood behind the podium, waiting for everyone's attention. The short, scrawny dentist looked very crisp, the next thing to military, even if he'd never be handsome. Party men who'd been standing around chatting slipped into their seats like schoolboys

fearing the paddle.

“Freedom!” Briggs said.

“Freedom!” the members chorused, Jefferson Pinkard’s shout one among many.

“I can’t hear you.” Briggs might have been a preacher heating up his congregation.

“Freedom!” they shouted again, louder—but not loud enough to suit Caleb Briggs, who cupped a hand behind his ear to show he still couldn’t hear. *“FREEDOM!”* they roared. Pinkard’s throat felt raw after that.

“Better,” the leader allowed. Jeff heard him through ringing ears, almost as if after an artillery bombardment. Briggs took a sheet of paper from the breast pocket of his white shirt. “I have a couple of important announcements tonight,” he said. “First one is, we’ll be looking for an assault squad to hit a Whig rally Saturday afternoon.” A host of hands shot into the air. Briggs grinned. “See me after the meeting. You need to know there’ll be cops there, and they’re taking a nastier line with us after the unfortunate incident.” That was what the Party called President Hampton’s assassination.

“I’ll go,” Pinkard muttered. “By God, I want to go.” He hadn’t been a brawler before he got conscripted, but he was now.

“Second thing,” Briggs said briskly. “The damnyankees are backing the Popular Revolutionaries in the civil war down in the Empire of Mexico. Goddamn lickspittle Richmond government isn’t doing anything about that but fussing. We need to do more. The Party’s looking to raise a regiment of volunteers for the Emperor, to show the greasers how it’s supposed to be done. If you’re interested in *that* , see me after the meeting, too.”

Jeff kept fidgeting in his seat through the rest of Briggs’ presentation, and the rest of the meeting, too.

Not even the patriotic songs and the ones from the trenches held his interest. He swarmed forward as soon as he got the chance. “I want to volunteer for both,” he said.

“All right, Pinkard,” Caleb Briggs replied. “Can’t say I’m surprised.” He knew about Emily. “I don’t **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

make any promises on the filibuster into the Mexican Empire, but the other . . . we'll find a way to get you over by city hall."

And they did. Pinkard worked a half day on Saturday. As soon as he got off, he hurried to the trolley and went downtown. He gathered with the other Freedom Party men at a little diner one of them owned.

There he changed from his overalls into the white shirt and butternut trousers he carried in a denim duffel bag. There, too, he picked up a stout wooden bludgeon—two and a half feet of ash wood, so newly turned on the lathe it smelled of sawdust.

Along with the other Freedom Party men, he hurried up Seventh Avenue North toward the city hall.

They naturally fell into column and fell into step. People scrambled off the sidewalk to get out of their way. Jeff made a horrible face at a little pickaninny. The boy wailed in fright and clung to his mother's skirts. She looked as if she might have wanted to say something, but she didn't dare. *You better not,* he thought.

In front of city hall, a Whig speaker with a megaphone was exhorting a crowd that didn't look to be paying too much attention to him. Eight or ten policemen stood around looking bored. "Outstanding!"

Briggs exclaimed. "Nobody gave us away. They'd be a lot readier if they reckoned we were gonna hit

'em." His voice rose to a great roar: "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Jefferson Pinkard bawled, along with his comrades. They charged forward, tough and disciplined as they'd been during the war. Whistles shrilling, the Birmingham policemen tried to get between them and the suddenly shouting and screaming Whigs. If the cops had opened fire, they might have done it. As things were, their billy clubs were no improvement on the Freedom Party bludgeons.

Jeff got one of the men in gray in the side of the head.

Then he was in among the Whigs, yelling, "Freedom!" and "Damnyankee puppets!" at the top of his lungs. His bludgeon rose and fell, rose and fell. Sometimes he hit men, sometimes women. He wasn't fussy. Why fuss? They were all traitors, anyway. A few of them tried to fight back, but they didn't have much luck. The Whig rally smashed, their enemies bloodied, the Freedom Party men withdrew in good order. Jeff had a hard-on all the way back to the diner. *Those*

bastards, he thought. *They got just what they deserved.*

Sylvia Enos wasn't used to being a celebrity. She wished people wouldn't stop her on the streets of Boston and tell her she was a hero. She didn't want to be a hero. She'd never wanted to be one. *All I wanted was to have George back again,* she thought as she hurried back toward her block of flats.

But she'd never see her husband again. George Enos had been aboard the USS *Ericsson* when the CSS

Bonefish torpedoed her—after the Confederate States yielded to the USA. Roger Kimball, the captain of the *Bonefish* , had known the war was over, too. He'd known, but he hadn't cared. He'd sunk the destroyer that carried George and more than a hundred other sailors, and then he'd sailed away.

He'd tried to cover it up, too. No one could prove a British boat hadn't done the deed—till the *Bonefish*

's executive officer, in a political fight with Roger Kimball, broke the story in the papers to discredit him.

The story said Kimball was living in Charleston, South Carolina.

And so Sylvia had taken a train down to Charleston. Customs at the border hadn't searched her luggage. Why should the Confederates have bothered? She looked like what she was: a widow in her thirties. That she also happened to be a widow in her thirties with a pistol in her suitcase had never **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

crossed the Confederates' minds.

But she was. And when she got to Charleston and found out where Kimball lived, she'd knocked on his door and then fired several shots into him. She'd expected to spend the rest of her life in jail, or to hang, or to cook in an electric chair—she hadn't known how South Carolina disposed of murderers.

Instead, thanks to politics and thanks to an extraordinary woman named Anne Colleton, she found herself free and back in Boston. *The CSA couldn't afford to be too hard on someone who killed a war criminal,* she thought. *And why? Because the United States are stronger than they are.* That was heady as whiskey. Till the Great War, the CSA and England and France had called the tune. No more.

But, no matter how strong the United States were, they weren't strong enough to give her back her husband. The hole in her life, the hole in her family, would never heal. She had no choice but to go on from there.

A tall, skinny man in an expensive suit and homburg stopped in front of her, so that she either had to stop, too, or to run into him. "You're Sylvia Enos," he exclaimed. "I've been looking for you. Give me a moment of your time."

He didn't even say please. Sylvia's patience had worn thin. "Why should I?" she asked, and got ready to push past him. She reached up to fiddle with her hat. She had a hat pin with an artificial pearl at one end and a very sharp point at the other. Some men were interested in her for the sake of politics, others for other, murkier, reasons.

But this fellow proved one of the former sort. "Why? For the sake of your country, that's why." He had the map of Ireland on his face; the slightest hint of a brogue lay under his flat New England vowels.

"Look, whoever you are, I haven't got time for anything except my children, so if you'll excuse me—"

She started forward. If he didn't get out of the way, maybe she'd use the hat pin whether he had designs on her person or not.

"My name is Kennedy, Mrs. Enos, Joe Kennedy," he said. "I'm the head of the Democratic Party in your ward."

No hat pin, then, except in an emergency. If she got on the wrong side of a politician, he could make life hard for her, and life was hard enough already. With a sigh, she said, "Speak your piece, then, Mr.

Kennedy—though I don't know why you're bothering with me. After all, women can't vote in Massachusetts."

His answering smile was forced. The Democrats had always been less eager for women's suffrage than either the Socialists or what was left of the Republican Party. But he quickly rallied: "Do you want us weak, too weak to take our proper place in the world? If you do, the Socialist Party's the perfect place for you. They're trying to throw away everything we won in the war."

That did hit home. "What do you want from me, Mr. Kennedy? Tell me quickly, and I'll give you my answer, but I have to get home to my son and daughter."

Something glinted in his eyes. It made Sylvia half reach for the pin again. Kennedy wore a wedding ring, but Sylvia had long since seen how little that meant. Men got it where they could. George, she made herself remember, had been the same way. But all the ward leader said was, “An hour of your time at our **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

next meeting would be very fine, to show you stand with us on the issues of the day.”

He acted as if it were a small request, something where she wouldn’t need to think twice before she said yes. But she shook her head. “You must be rich, to have hours you can throw around. When I’m not working, I’m cooking or minding the children. I’m sorry, but I’ve got no time to spare.”

Kennedy’s mouth tightened. He drummed the fingers of his right hand against his trouser leg. Sylvia got the feeling he wasn’t used to hearing people tell him no. The vapor that steamed from his nostrils as he exhaled added to the impression. It also made him look a little like a demon.

But then, as suddenly as if he’d flipped the switch to an electric light, he gave Sylvia a bright smile. “If you like, my own wife will watch your children while you come. Rose would be glad to do it. She knows how important to the country winning the next election is.”

That couldn’t mean anything but, *My wife will watch your children if I tell her to.* Whatever it meant, it did put Sylvia in an awkward position. She said, “You know how to get what you want, don’t you?”

“I try,” Joe Kennedy said. This time, the smile he gave her had nothing to do with the automatic politician’s version he’d used a moment before. This one was genuine: a little hard, a little predatory, and a little smug, too.

How could anyone marry a man with a smile like that? But that, thank heaven, wasn’t Sylvia’s worry. Kennedy stood there with that hot, fierce smile, waiting for her answer. Now he’d gone out of his way to give her what she’d said she wanted. How could she tell him no? She saw no way, though she still would have liked to.

With a sigh of her own, she told him, “I’ll come to your meeting, if it’s not at a time when I’m working.”

“I hope it isn’t,” he said. The smile got broader—she’d given in. She

might almost have let him take her to bed. He went on, “We hold them Saturday afternoons, so most people can use the half-holiday.”

Sylvia sighed again. “All right, though heaven only knows how I’ll get my shopping done—or why you think your people want to listen to me.”

“Don’t worry about your shopping,” Kennedy said, which had to prove he didn’t do much for himself.

“And people want to hear you because you took action. You saw a wrong and you fixed it. Teddy Roosevelt would be proud of you. Even the Socialists had to take notice of the justice in what you did.

And I’ll be by to pick you up Saturday afternoon at one o’clock, if that’s all right.”

“I suppose so,” Sylvia said, still more than a little dazed. Joe Kennedy tipped his homburg and went on his way. Sylvia checked the mailbox in the lobby of her block of flats, found nothing but advertising circulars, and walked up three flights of stairs to her apartment.

“What took you so long, Mother?” George, Jr., asked. He was thirteen now, which seemed incredible to her, and looked more like his dead father every day. Mary Jane, who was ten, was frying potatoes on the coal stove.

“I ran into a man,” Sylvia answered. “He wants me to talk at the Democratic club’s ward meeting. His wife will keep an eye on you two while I’m gone.” She went to the icebox and got out the halibut steaks she’d fry along with the potatoes. Mary Jane still wasn’t up to main courses.

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“Saturday afternoon? I won’t be here anyway,” George, Jr., said.

“What? Why not?” Sylvia asked.

“Because I got a job carrying fish and ice down on T Wharf, that’s why.” Her son looked ready to burst with pride. “Thirty-five cents an hour, and it lets me get started, Ma.”

Slowly, Sylvia nodded. “Your father started on T Wharf right about

your age, too," she said. People who caught fish in Boston almost always started young. But George, Jr., suddenly didn't seem so young as all that. He was old enough to have convinced someone to hire him, anyhow.

He said, "I'll bring all my money home to you, Ma, every penny. Cross my heart and hope to die if I don't. I won't spend a bit on candy or pop or anything, honest I won't. I know we need it. So did the fellow who hired me. He asked if I was Pa's boy, and when I said yes he gave me the job right there. His name's Fred Butcher."

"Oh, yes. I know him—you've met him, too, you know." Sylvia nodded again. "He used to go out with your father on the *Ripple* . He was first mate in those days, and he's done well for himself since."

"As soon as I can, Ma, *I'll* go out and make money," Mary Jane promised, adding, "I don't much like school anyway."

"You need to keep going a while longer," Sylvia said sternly. She rounded on her son. "And so do you.

If you study hard, maybe you can get a good job, and you won't stay down on T Wharf your whole life."

She might as well have spoken Chinese. Staring at her in perfect incomprehension, George, Jr., said,

"But I *like* it down on T Wharf, Ma."

Sylvia flipped the halibut steaks with a spatula. She thought about explaining why all the backbreaking jobs associated with the fishing weren't necessarily good choices, but she could tell he wouldn't listen.

His father wouldn't have, either. She didn't start a fight she had no hope of winning. Instead, she just said, "Supper will be ready in a couple of minutes. Go wash your hands, both of you."

Joe Kennedy and his wife knocked on the door that Saturday afternoon a few minutes after Sylvia got home. Rose Kennedy was pretty in a bony way, and more refined than Sylvia had expected. She did warm up, a little, to Mary Jane. "You're sweet, dear. Will we be friends?"

Mary Jane considered, then shrugged. Joe Kennedy said, "Come on, Mrs. Enos. My motorcar's out in front of the building. People are looking forward to hearing you; they really are."

That still astonished Sylvia. So did Kennedy's motorcar. She'd expected a plain black Ford, the kind most people drove. But he had an enormous Oldsmobile roadster, painted fire-engine red. He drove as if he owned the only car on the street, too, which in Boston was an invitation to suicide. Somehow, he reached the Democratic Party hall unscathed. Sylvia discovered a belief in miracles.

"Here she is, ladies and gentlemen!" Kennedy introduced her as if she were a vaudeville star. "The brave lady you've been waiting for, Sylvia Enos!"

Looking out at that sea of faces frightened Sylvia. The wave of applause frightened and warmed her at the same time. She stammered a little at first, but gained fluency as she explained what she'd done in South Carolina, and why. She'd told the story before; it got easier each time. She finished, "If we forget **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

about the war, try to pretend it never happened, what did we really win? Nothing!" The applause that came then rang louder still.

II

Jake Featherston drummed his fingers on his desk. Spring was in the air in Richmond; the trees were putting on new leaves, while birdsong gladdened every ear. Or almost every ear—it did very little for Featherston. He'd led a battery of three-inch guns during the war, and much preferred their bellowing to the sweet notes of catbird and sparrow. When the guns roared, at least a man knew he was in a fight.

"And we are, God damn it," Featherston muttered. The leader of the Freedom Party was a lanky man in his mid-thirties, with cheekbones and chin thrusting up under the flesh of his face like rocks under a thin coat of soil on some farm that would always yield more trouble than crops. His eyes . . . Some people were drawn to them, while others flinched away. He knew that. He didn't quite understand it, but he knew it and used it. *I always mean what I say,* he told himself. *And that shows. With all the lying sons of bitches running around loose, you'd better believe it shows.*

If he looked out his window, he could see Capitol Square, and the Confederate Capitol in it. His lip curled in fine contempt. If that wasn't the home of some of the biggest, lyingest sons of bitches in the whole wide world . . . "If it isn't, then I'm a nigger," Featherston declared. He talked to himself a fair amount, hardly noticing he was

doing it. More than three years of serving a gun had taken a good deal of his hearing. People who didn't care for him claimed he was selectively deaf. They had a point, too, though he wasn't about to admit it.

The Capitol shared the square with a large equestrian statue of George Washington—who, being a Virginian, was much more revered in the CSA than in the USA these days—and an even larger one of Albert Sidney Johnston, hero and martyr during the War of Secession. Somewhere between one of those statues and the other, Woodrow Wilson had declared war on the USA almost ten years before.

"We should've licked those Yankee bastards," Featherston said, as if somebody'd claimed otherwise.

"If the niggers hadn't risen up and stabbed us in the back, we *would've* licked those Yankee bastards."

He believed it with every fiber of his being.

And if that jackass down in Birmingham hadn't blown out President Hampton's stinking brains, what there were of them, the Party'd be well on its way towards putting this country back on its feet again. Jake slammed a scarred, callused fist down on the desk. Papers jumped. *I was* so *close, dammit.* He'd come within a whisker—well, two whiskers—of winning the presidential election in 1921.

Looking toward 1927, he'd seen nothing but smooth sailing ahead.

Of course, one of the reasons the Freedom Party had almost won in 1921 was that its members went out there and brawled with anybody rash enough to have a different opinion. If you looked at things from one angle, President Hampton's assassination followed from the Freedom Party's nature almost as inexorably as night followed day.

Jake Featherston was not, had never been, and never would be a man to look at things that way.

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He'd watched the Party lose seats in the 1923 Congressional elections. He'd been glad the losses weren't worse. Other people celebrated because they were as large as they were. Up till that damned unfortunate incident, the Freedom Party had gone from success to

success, each building momentum for the next. Unfortunately, he was finding the process worked the same way for failure.

What do we do if the money doesn't keep coming in? What can *we do if the money doesn't keep coming in?* he wondered. Only one answer occurred to him. *We go under, that's what.* When he'd first joined the Freedom Party in the dark days right after the war, it had been nothing to speak of: a handful of angry men meeting in a saloon, with the membership list and everything else in a cigar box. It could end up that way again, too; he knew as much. Plenty of groups of disgruntled veterans had never got any bigger, and the Party had swallowed up a lot of the ones that had. Some other group could swallow it the same way.

"No, goddammit," Jake snarled. For one thing, he remained convinced he was right. If the rest of the world didn't think so, the rest of the world was wrong. And, for another, he'd got used to leading an important political party. He liked it. Without false modesty—and he was singularly free of modesty, false and otherwise—he knew he was good at it. He didn't want to play second fiddle to anybody else, and he didn't want to go back to being a big fish in a tiny pond.

The telephone on his desk jangled. He picked it up. "Featherston," he barked into the mouthpiece.

"Yes, Mr. Featherston," his secretary said. "I just wanted to remind you that you've got that talk on the wireless coming up in a little more than an hour. You'll want to make sure you're at the studio on time."

"Thank you kindly, Lulu," Featherston answered. He was more polite to Lulu Mattox than to practically anybody else he could think of. Unlike most people, his secretary deserved it. She was a maiden lady, somewhere between forty and seventy. Once upon a time, he'd read or heard—he couldn't remember where or when—that Roman Catholic nuns were the brides of Christ. What he really knew about Catholicism would fit on the head of a pin; he'd been raised a hardshell Baptist, and he didn't get to any church very often these days. But Lulu Mattox, without a doubt, was married to the Freedom Party. She gave it a single-minded devotion that put the enthusiasm of any mere Party man to shame. She had all the files at her fingertips, too, for she was the best-organized person Jake had ever met. He didn't know what he would do without her.

A few minutes later, he went downstairs. Guards outside the building came to attention and saluted.

“Freedom!” they said. The uniforms they wore were similar but not quite identical to those of the Confederate Army. The bayoneted Tredegar rifles they carried were Army issue. Someone might have asked questions about that, but the Freedom Party had gone out of its way to show the world that asking questions about it wasn’t a good idea.

“Freedom!” Jake echoed, returning those salutes as if he were a general himself. Part of him loathed the fat fools with the wreathed stars on their collar tabs who’d done so much to help the CSA lose the war.

The rest of him wished he had that kind of power himself. *I’d do a better job with it than those bastards ever could have.*

A motorcar driven by another uniformed Freedom Party man stopped in front of the building. It was a boxy Birmingham, built in the CSA. Jake Featherston was damned if he’d go around Richmond in a Yankee automobile. “That wireless place,” he told the driver.

“Sure, Sarge,” the man replied. He was a large, burly fellow named Virgil Joyner. He’d been with the Freedom Party almost as long as Featherston had, and he’d been through all of the faction fights and the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

brawls with the Whigs and the Radical Liberals. Not many people could get away with calling Jake anything but “boss,” but he’d earned the right.

The broadcasting studio was in a new brick building on Franklin near Seventh, not far from the house in Richmond where Robert E. Lee and his family had lived for a time after the War of Secession.

Featherston knew that only because he’d grown up in and around Richmond. Nothing remained of the house these days; Yankee bombs and the fires that so often followed them had leveled it.

“Hello, Mr. Featherston!” exclaimed the bright little man who ran the studio and the wireless station of which it was a part. His name was Saul Goldman. Since he was a Jew, Featherston assumed he sounded so cheerful, so friendly, because he was getting paid. He was bound to be a Radical Liberal himself, if not an out-and-out Red. *Long as we give ’em the money, these bastards’ll sell us the rope we use to hang ’em,* Featherston thought scornfully.

But if Goldman acted friendly, he'd play along—for now. "Good to see you," he said, and shook hands polite as a banker. "Everything ready for me?"

"Yes, sir. You're in Studio B this time. Follow me. You have your script?"

"Oh, yeah. You bet I do." Featherston followed Goldman down a narrow, dingy hall to a cramped little studio whose walls and ceiling were covered by what looked like the cardboard bottoms of egg cartons.

The stuff looked funny, but it helped kill echoes. The studio held a table with a microphone on it and a rickety chair. That was all. Jake pointed to the engineer in the next room, whom he could see through a window. "He'll give me the signal when it's time?"

Saul Goldman smiled. "That's right. You know the routine almost like you work here."

"I'd better by now, don't you think?" Featherston sat down in front of the microphone and set his script on the table. He went through it quickly to make sure he had all the pages. Once he'd lost one, and had to ad-lib a bridge to the next one he had. Goldman slid out of the studio, closing the door behind him.

The back of the door had more of those egg-carton sound deadeners glued to it.

After a bit, the engineer flashed two fingers—two minutes to go. Jake nodded to show he got it. The engineer was a professional, a man whose competence Jake respected. One finger—one minute. Then the fellow pointed straight at him at the same time as a red light went on. For half an hour, the airwaves were his.

"Confederates, wake up!" he said harshly. "This is Jake Featherston of the Freedom Party, and I'm here to tell you the truth." He used that phrase to introduce every wireless talk.

He leaned toward the microphone, as he would have leaned toward a crowd. The first few times he'd done this, not having an audience in front of him had thrown him off stride. Now, though, he could imagine the crowd, hear it in his mind shouting for more. And he had more to give it.

"We can be a great country again," he said. "We can, but will we? Not

likely, not with the cowards and idiots we've got running things in Richmond these days. All they want to do is lick the Yankees' . . .

boots." You couldn't say some things on the air. No, you couldn't say them, but sometimes implication worked better anyhow.

"They want to lick the Yankees' boots," Jake repeated. "They're great ones for sucking up to people, the Whigs are. They even suck up to our Negroes, our own Negroes, if you can believe it. And do you **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

know what, folks? They've got reason to do it, may I go to the Devil if I lie." He couldn't say *hell* on the air, either, but he got his message across. "I'll tell you what the reason is. Thanks to the Whigs, some of those niggers are citizens of the Confederate States, just like you and me.

"That's right, friends. This here was supposed to be a white man's country, but do the Whigs care about that? Not likely! Thanks to them, we've got niggers who can vote, niggers who can serve on juries, niggers who don't have to show passbooks to anybody. That'd be bad enough if they'd put the coons in the Army so we could win the war. But they put 'em in, *and we lost anyways* . And then the Whigs went out and won the next election even so. Maybe some of you all see the sense in that. I tell you frankly, I don't."

He went on till the engineer signaled it was time to wind down, and ended as the man drew a finger across his throat. When he walked out of the studio, his shirt was as sweaty as if he'd spoken before a crowd of thousands. Saul Goldman came up and shook his hand. "Very good speech," the Jew said.

"Very good indeed."

"I will be damned," Featherston said. "I think you really mean it. You're not making fun of me."

Goldman nodded. Jake asked the obvious question: "How come?"

"I'll tell you." Goldman had . . . not an accent, but the ghost of one, barely enough to suggest his parents would have spoken differently. "Anywhere else, when things go wrong, what do they do? They blame the Jews. Here, you blame the colored people. I am a Jew, a Jew in a country where things went wrong, and no one wants to kill me on account of it. Shouldn't I be grateful?"

Jake had never been much for seeing the other fellow's point of view, but he did this time. "Well, well,"

he said. "Isn't that interesting?"

Part of Colonel Irving Morrell—and the bigger part, at that—wanted to be back at Fort Leavenworth, making barrels larger and stronger and better. Part of him, but not all. The rest, the part that was a student of war rather than a combat soldier, found a lot to interest it back at the General Staff. Quite a few things crossed his desk that never made it into the newspapers.

He showed one of them to Lieutenant Colonel John Abell, asking, "Is this true?"

"Let me read through it first," Abell said. General Liggett's adjutant was thin and pale and almost sweatless, a pure student of war. Though probably brave enough, he would have been out of place on anything so untidy as a real battlefield. He and Morrell didn't much like each other, but over the years they'd developed a wary respect for each other's abilities. He took his own sweet time reading the report, then gave a judicious nod. "Yes, this ties in with some other things I've seen. I believe it's credible."

"The Turks really are massacring every Armenian they can get their hands on?" Morrell asked. Abell nodded again. Morrell took back the typewritten report, saying, "That's terrible! What can we do about it?"

"We, as in the United States?" Abell asked, precise as usual. Morrell gave him an impatient nod. He said, "As best I can see, Colonel, nothing. What influence can we bring to bear in that part of the world?"

Morrell grimaced and grunted. His colleague was all too likely to be right. He'd had to find Armenia on **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

a map before fully understanding the report he'd received. How many Americans would even have known where to look? The distant land at the edge of the Caucasus might have been lost among the mountains of the moon, as far as most people were concerned. With the best will in the world, the Navy couldn't do a thing. And as for sending soldiers across a Russia whose civil strife looked eternal . . . The idea was absurd, and he knew it.

He tried a different tack: "Can Kaiser Bill do anything? When

Germany spits, the Turks start swimming.

And the Armenians are Christians, after all."

Lieutenant Colonel Abell started to say something, then let out his breath without a word. A moment later, after sending Morrell a thoughtful look, he said, "May I speak frankly, Colonel?"

"When have I ever stopped you?" Morrell asked in turn.

"A point," Abell admitted. "All right, then. There are times when you give the impression of being a man whose only solution to a problem is to hit something, and to keep hitting it till it falls over."

"Teddy Roosevelt spent a lot of time talking about the big stick, Lieutenant Colonel," Morrell said. "As far as I can see, he had a pretty good point."

John Abell looked distinctly pained. Sniffing, he said, "Our former president, however gifted, was *not* a General Staff officer, nor did he think like one. Which brings me back to what I was saying—you often give that same bull-moose impression, and then you turn around and come up with something not only clever but subtle. That might be worth pursuing. It would have to go through the State Department, of course."

Morrell grunted again. "And why should the boys in the cutaways and the striped trousers pay any attention to us green-gray types?"

For once, Abell's answering smile was sympathetic. The United States were one of the two most powerful countries in the world these days, sure enough. Very often, the American diplomatic corps behaved as if the U.S. Army had had nothing to do with that. Such a supercilious attitude infuriated Morrell. Of course, his fury mattered not at all; had people in the State Department known of it, it would more likely have amused them than anything else.

Abell said, "May I make a suggestion?"

"Please."

"If it were I," the brainy lieutenant colonel said, flaunting his grammatical accuracy, "I would draft a memorandum on the subject, send it to General Liggett, and hope he could get it to the secretary of war or one of his assistants. Being civilians, they have a better chance than we of getting the diplomats to notice the paper."

“That’s . . . not bad, Lieutenant Colonel,” Morrell said. Abell hadn’t even tried to steal the idea for himself, and he had Liggett’s ear. Though it wasn’t obvious at first glance, he could be useful. Morrell chuckled. *He probably thinks the same about me.* He went on, “I’ll take care of it right away. Thanks.”

“Always glad to be of service, sir.” Now Abell sounded as coolly ironic as usual.

When Morrell spoke that evening of what he’d done during the day, his wife nodded vigorous approval.

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“I hope something comes of it, Irv,” Agnes Morrell said. “Hasn’t this poor, sorry world seen enough killing these past few years?”

“Well, I think so,” Morrell answered. “You won’t find many soldiers singing the praises of murder, you know.”

“Of course I know that,” Agnes told him, more than a little indignantly. She was in her early thirties, not far from his own age, and had been another soldier’s widow before meeting him at a dance back in Leavenworth. She had brown eyes; her black hair, these days, was cut short in what the fashion magazines called a shingle bob. It was all the rage at the moment. Morrell didn’t think it quite suited his wife, but didn’t intend to tell her so. As far as he could see, such things were her business, not his. She went on, “Supper will be ready in a few minutes.”

“Smells good.” Morrell’s nostrils flared. Compared to some of the things he’d eaten in Sonora and the Canadian Rockies and Kentucky and Tennessee, it smelled very good indeed. “What is it?” Back on the battlefield, there’d been plenty of times he hadn’t wanted to know. Horse? Donkey? Cat? Buzzard? He couldn’t prove it, which meant he didn’t have to think about it . . . too often.

“Chicken stew with dumplings and carrots,” Agnes said. “That’s the way you like it, isn’t it?”

Spit flooded his mouth as he nodded. “I knew I married you for a couple of reasons,” he said.

“A couple of reasons?” Her eyebrows, plucked thin, flew up in mock

surprise. “What on earth could the other one be?”

He walked over to her and let his hand rest lightly on her belly for a moment. “We’ll find out if it’s a boy or a girl sooner than we think.”

“It won’t be tomorrow,” Agnes reminded him. She’d been sure she was in a family way for only a few weeks. There wasn’t much doubt any more; not only had her time of the month twice failed to come, but she was perpetually sleepy. And she had trouble keeping food down. She gave Irving Morrell a much bigger helping than she took for herself, and she ate warily.

When they undressed for bed that night, he used a forefinger to follow the new tracery of blue veins that had sprung out on Agnes’ breasts. She gave him a mischievous smile. “All those veins probably remind you of the rivers on a campaign map.”

“Well, I wouldn’t have thought of it just that way,” Morrell answered, cupping her breast in the palm of her hand. “What sort of campaign did you have in mind, honey?”

“Oh, I expect you’ll think of something,” she answered. He squeezed, gently—but not quite gently enough. The corners of her mouth turned down. “They’re sore. People say you get over that, but I haven’t yet.”

He tried to be more careful, and evidently succeeded, for things went on from there. When they’d progressed a good deal further, Agnes climbed on top of him. The idea had startled him when she first proposed it; he’d always thought a man belonged in the saddle. But she didn’t have his weight on her tender breasts this way—and, he’d discovered, it was fine no matter who went where.

A couple of days later, he got called to General Hunter Liggett’s office. With General Liggett was a tall, long-faced man five or ten years older than Morrell. “Colonel, I’d like to introduce you to Mr. N.

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Mattoon Thomas, the assistant secretary of war.”

“Pleased to meet you, sir.” Morrell lied without hesitation. Thomas was the man who’d gone up to Canada to put General Custer out to pasture. Morrell still didn’t know if Custer was a good general. He had his doubts, in fact. But Custer had turned a whole great assault

column of barrels loose against the CSA, and Morrell had ridden a barrel at the head of that column. Without the breakthroughs they'd won, the Great War might still be going on.

"Likewise, Colonel. I'm very glad to meet you." N. Mattoon Thomas was probably lying, too. In the Army, it was an axiom of faith that the Socialists wanted to get rid of everything that had let the USA win the war. That Thomas had forced George Custer into retirement didn't speak well for him, not in Morrell's eyes.

Hunter Liggett said, "Colonel, I passed your memorandum on the unfortunate situation in Armenia to the assistant secretary here, in the hope that he might send it on to the Department of State."

"A very perceptive document," Thomas said. "I dare hope it will do some good, although one never knows. Very perceptive indeed." He studied Morrell as an entomologist might study a new species of beetle. "I should hardly have expected such a thing from a soldier."

Morrell gave him a smile that was all sharp teeth. "Sorry, sir. We don't gas grandmothers and burn babies all the time."

Silence slammed down in General Liggett's office. The head of the General Staff broke it, saying, "What Colonel Morrell meant, sir, was —"

"I know perfectly well what Colonel Morrell meant," Thomas said, his voice cold as the middle of a meat locker. "He resents my party for telling him he may not play with big iron toys forever and tell the American people, 'Hang the expense! We may need these one day.' I wear his resentment as a badge of honor." He gave Morrell a nod that was almost a bow. "And what have you got to say about that, Colonel? You seem in an outspoken mood today."

"I've never said, 'Hang the expense,' sir," Morrell answered. "But we *may* need better barrels one day, and they *aren't* toys. If your party thinks what we do is play, why not get rid of the Army altogether, and the Navy, too?"

Before Thomas could reply, the telephone on General Liggett's desk rang. He snatched it up.

"Confound it, you know what sort of meeting I'm in," he snapped, from which Morrell concluded he was talking to Lieutenant Colonel Abell in the outer office. But then Liggett said, "What? What's that?" Color drained from his face, leaving it corpse-yellow. "Dear God in

heaven," he whispered, and hung up.

"What is it?" Morrell and N. Mattoon Thomas said the same thing at the same time.

General Liggett stared blindly from one of them to the other. Tears glistened in his eyes. All at once, he looked like an old, old man. "Teddy Roosevelt is dead," he said, sounding as stunned and disbelieving as a shell-shocked soldier. "He was playing a round of golf outside Syracuse, and he fell over, and he didn't get up. Cerebral hemorrhage, they think."

"Oh, my God." Again, Morrell and Thomas spoke together. Thomas might be a Socialist, but Theodore Roosevelt had been a mighty force in the United States for more than forty years. No one, regardless of party, could be indifferent to that.

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So far Morrell thought, and no further. Then what he'd just heard really hit him. To his amazement and shame and dismay, he began to weep. A moment later, blurrily, he saw tears running down the faces of Hunter Liggett and N. Mattoon Thomas, too.

Congresswoman Flora Blackford should have been packing for the trip from Philadelphia to Chicago, for the Socialist Party's nominating convention. President Upton Sinclair would surely get his party's nod for a second term: the Socialists' first president, elected almost forty years after the modern Socialist Party began in Chicago, when in the aftermath of the Second Mexican War Abraham Lincoln led the Republican left wing out of one organization and into another.

Yes, the presidential nomination was a foregone conclusion. The vice presidency? Flora smiled to herself. The vice presidency was a forgone conclusion, too. Nothing in the world, as far as she could see, would keep Hosea Blackford, her husband, from getting the nomination again. And then, in 1928 . . .

He'd once said he didn't expect to get the nod for the top of the ticket then. Maybe, though, maybe he was wrong.

Such things were what she should have been thinking about—what she had been thinking about up till a few days before. Now she put her most somber clothes into a suitcase. She wouldn't be going to

Chicago, not yet, and neither would her husband. She'd always wanted to visit the city where the modern Party was born, and she would—but not yet. Instead, she packed for the short trip down to Washington, D.C., for the funeral of Theodore Roosevelt.

Hosea Blackford came into the bedroom carrying black trousers and a white shirt. As he put them in the suitcase, he shook his head. "I'm almost as old as Teddy Roosevelt, and I still feel as though my father just died."

Both of Flora's parents were still alive, but she nodded. "Everybody in the whole country feels that way, near enough," she answered. "We didn't always like him—"

"If we were Socialists, we practically never liked him," Hosea Blackford said.

Nodding, Flora went on, "But whether we liked him or not, he made us what we are. He raised us. He raised this whole country. It's no wonder we feel lost without him."

"No wonder at all," her husband said over his shoulder as he went back to the hall closet for a black jacket and a black homburg. "He was always sure he knew what was best for us. He wasn't always right, but he was always sure." He chuckled. "Sounds like my pa, I'll tell you that." His flat Great Plains accent was a world away from her Yiddish-flavored New York City speech.

He went back for a black cravat. Flora closed the suitcase. "Are we ready to go?" she asked.

"I expect so." He looked out the window of the flat that had been his alone—across the hall from hers—which they now shared. A motorcar waited in front of the building. Grunting, he picked up the suitcase.

When they went outside, the driver saw him carrying it and rushed to take it from him. Grudgingly, Blackford surrendered it. He gave Flora a wry grin. Ever since she was elected to Congress, she'd wrestled with the problem of the privileges members of government—even Socialist members of **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

government—enjoyed. For all her wrestling, for all her commitment to class struggle, she had yet to come to a conclusion that satisfied her.

She and her husband enjoyed even more privilege on the southbound

train: a fancy Pullman car all to themselves, and food brought to them from the diner. When they got to Washington, another motorcar whisked them to the White House.

The flag in front of the famous building flew at half staff. The White House itself looked much as it had before the Great War. Repairs there had been finished almost a year before. The Washington Monument off to the south, however, remained a truncated stub of its former self. Scaffolding surrounded it; it would rise again to its full majestic height.

“If there’s ever another war, all this work will go to waste,” Flora said.

“One more reason there’d better not be another war,” her husband answered, and she nodded.

President Upton Sinclair met them in the downstairs entry hall. After shaking hands with his vice president and kissing Flora on the cheek, he said, “I would sooner have done this in Philadelphia, but Roosevelt left word he wanted the ceremony here, and I couldn’t very well say no.”

“Hardly,” Hosea Blackford agreed. “What does it feel like?—staying in the White House, I mean.”

“Well, look at the place. I feel as though I were living in a museum.” Sinclair waved. He was a tall, slim man in his mid-forties: the youngest man ever elected president. His youthful vigor had served him well in 1920, when Teddy Roosevelt, even then past sixty, could be seen as a man whose time, however great, had passed him by. The president shook his head. “It’s even worse than living in a museum. It’s the *reproduction* of a museum. They didn’t get a whole lot out of here before the Confederates bombarded the place in 1914. Frankly, I’d rather be in Philadelphia. The Powel House doesn’t make me think I’ll get thrown out if I speak above a whisper.”

Flora found herself nodding. “It is more like the American Museum of Natural History than any place where you’d want to stay, isn’t it?”

“That’s right.” President Sinclair nodded emphatically.

“Strange that *we* should be doing the honors for Roosevelt,” Hosea Blackford observed.

“He was a great man,” Flora said. “A class enemy, but a great man.”

“Easier to admire a foe, especially an able one, after he’s gone,” Sinclair said.

Like a lot of men largely self-taught—Abraham Lincoln had been the same—her husband was fond of quoting Shakespeare: “ ‘Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus; and we petty men walk under his huge legs, and peep about to find ourselves dishonorable graves.’ ”

“An American Caesar.” President Sinclair nodded. “That fits.”

But Flora shook her head. “No. If he’d been Caesar, he never would have given up the presidency when he lost four years ago. He would have called out the troops instead. And if Teddy Roosevelt had called them, they might have marched, too.”

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No one cared to contemplate that. Hosea Blackford said, “Well, he’s gone now, and . . . ‘I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.’ ”

“And we’ll give him a grand funeral, too,” the president added. “We can afford to do that. He’s a lot easier to deal with dead than he was alive.”

Sleeping in the Mahan Bedroom felt strange to Flora; it was as big as the flat in which she and her whole family had lived in New York. The next morning, a colored servant—a reminder that Washington had once been closely aligned with the states now forming the Confederacy—brought her and her husband bacon and eggs and fried potatoes. She ate the eggs and potatoes; her husband demolished her bacon along with his own. “I shouldn’t, I suppose,” he said.

“Don’t worry about it. I don’t,” she answered, which was true most of the time. Only later did she wonder in what the eggs and potatoes had been cooked. Bacon grease? Lard? She was Socialist and secular and very Jewish, all at the same time, and every so often one piece bounced off another and left her unsure of what she ought to feel.

Tens—hundreds—of thousands of people lined the route from the Capitol to the remains of the Washington Monument and then south. She and Hosea Blackford took their places on a reviewing stand near the Monument to watch Theodore Roosevelt’s funeral procession, along with members of Congress and some foreign dignitaries: she

recognized the ambassador from the Confederate States, who stood close by his colleagues from Britain, France, and the Empire of Mexico in a glum knot. No one else came very close to them.

Down among the ordinary spectators near the stand were a middle-aged woman wearing a gaudy medal—the Order of Remembrance, First Class—and a younger one who looked like her with the slightly less flamboyant Order of Remembrance, Second Class, hanging around her neck. They both held young children. The gray-haired man with them, who had a Distinguished Service Medal on his black jacket, said, “If she gets fussy, Nellie, give her to me.”

“I will, Hal,” the older woman answered. Flora wondered what she’d done during the war to earn such an important decoration.

She never found out. Indeed, a moment later, she forgot all about the people in the crowd, for flourishes of muffled drums announced that the procession was approaching. Behind the drummers—one each from the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard—came a riderless black horse led by a soldier. As the animal slowly walked past, Flora saw that it had reversed boots thrust into the stirrups and a sheathed sword lashed to the saddle.

Six white horses, teamed in twos, drew the black caisson carrying Roosevelt’s body in a flag-draped coffin. All six of the horses were saddled. The saddles of the three on the right were empty; a soldier, a sailor, and a Marine rode the three on the left.

President Upton Sinclair, in somber black, marched bareheaded behind the caisson, along with some of Roosevelt’s relatives—including one man of about Flora’s age who had to be pushed along in a wheelchair. She wondered what sort of injury he’d taken in the war that had crippled him so.

The premier of the Republic of Quebec strode along a few paces after Sinclair and the Roosevelt family, accompanied by a couple of Central American heads of state who’d taken a fast liner to reach the USA in time for the funeral. After them came the ambassadors from the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire: the great wartime allies, given pride of place. Envoys from Chile and Paraguay and **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

the Empire of Brazil came next, followed by other emissaries from Europe and the Americas—and the ambassador from the Empire of

Japan, elegant in a black cutaway. Alone of all the Entente nations, Japan hadn't yielded to the Central Powers. She'd just stopped fighting. It wasn't the same thing, and everyone knew it.

After the foreign dignitaries marched a band playing soft, somber music. Another riderless horse brought up the rear of the procession. Flora found that excessive, but nobody'd asked her opinion. And the Socialist Party, being in power, did have an obligation to send the departed Roosevelt to his final rest with as much grandeur as possible, to keep the Democrats from screaming about indifference or worse.

Once the procession had passed the reviewing stand, it turned south, toward the Potomac. The crowds there were just as thick as they had been between the Capitol and the Washington Monument. The sounds of weeping rose above the music of the band. "Say what you will, the people loved him," Hosea Blackford remarked.

"I know." Flora shook her head in wonder. "In spite of the war he led them into, they loved him." That war had cost her brother-in-law his life and her brother a leg. And David voted Democratic despite—or maybe because of—that missing leg, though he'd been a Socialist before.

Her husband said, "Well, he won it, no matter how much it cost. And now he gets his last revenge on the Confederate States." He chuckled in reluctant admiration.

Flora didn't know whether to admire Teddy Roosevelt's final gesture or to be appalled by it. On the southern bank of the Potomac, in what had been Virginia but was now annexed to U.S. West Virginia, Robert E. Lee had had an estate. Since the Great War rolled over it, it had lain in ruins. That hadn't bothered Roosevelt at all. He'd left instructions—and President Sinclair had agreed—that his last resting place should be on the grounds of Arlington.

Clarence Potter paid two cents for a copy of the *Charleston Mercury* . "Thanks very much," he told the boy from whom he bought it.

"You're welcome, sir," the boy said, the thick drawl of the old South Carolina coastal city flavoring his speech. He cocked his head to one side. "You a Yankee, sir? You sure don't talk like you're from hereabouts."

"Not me, son." Potter shook his head. The motion threatened to dislodge his steel-framed spectacles.

He set them more firmly on the bridge of his long, thin nose. “I came to Charleston after the war, though.

I grew up in Virginia.”

“Oh.” The newsboy relaxed. He probably hadn’t gone more than ten miles outside of Charleston in his whole life, and wouldn’t have known a Virginia accent from one from Massachusetts or Minnesota.

Holding his newspaper so he could read as he walked, Potter hurried down Queen Street toward the harbor. He moved like an ex-soldier, head up, shoulders back. And he had been a soldier—he’d served as a major in intelligence in the Army of Northern Virginia during the war. His accent had aroused some talk, and some suspicion, there, too. Even men who knew accents thought he sounded too much like a Yankee for comfort. And so he did; not long before the war, he’d gone to Yale, and the way people spoke in New Haven had rubbed off on him.

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Below the fold on the front page was an account of a speech by Jake Featherston, raising holy hell because Teddy Roosevelt’s bones were resting in the sacred soil of Virginia. Potter clucked and rolled his eyes and made as if to chuck the paper into the first trash can he saw. He would have bet Featherston would make a speech like that. But in the end, he didn’t throw away the *Mercury* . He opened it and read till he’d seen as much of the speech as it reprinted.

He clicked his tongue between his teeth as he refolded the newspaper. Featherston would pick up points for what he’d said. *Damn Teddy Roosevelt and his arrogance,* Potter thought. As far as he was concerned, anything that helped the Freedom Party was bad for the Confederate States of America.

He’d got to know Jake Featherston pretty well during the war. Featherston had made the fatal mistake of being right when he said Jeb Stuart III’s Negro servant, Pompey, was in fact a Red rebel. Young Captain Stuart, not believing it, had got Pompey off the hook, only to have his treason proved when the Negro uprising broke out a little while later. Stuart had gone into action seeking death after that, and, on a Great War battlefield, death was never hard to find.

General Jeb Stuart, Jr., a hero of the Second Mexican War, was a

power in the War Department in Richmond. He'd made sure Jake Featherston, who'd been right about his son's error in judgment, never got promoted above the rank of sergeant no matter how well he fought—and Jake fought very well indeed. For that matter, Potter himself had also been involved in uncovering Jeb Stuart III's mistake, and he'd advanced only one grade in three years himself.

But his failure to get promoted affected only him. Had Jeb Stuart, Jr., relented and given Featherston the officer's rank he deserved, the CSA would have been saved endless grief. Clarence Potter was sure of that. Featherston had been taking out his rage and frustration against Confederate authorities ever since.

I knew even then he was monstrous good at hating, Potter thought. *Did I ever imagine, while the fighting was going on, that he'd turn out to be as good at it as he has?* He shook his head. He was honest enough to admit to himself that he hadn't. He'd thought Jake Featherston would disappear into obscurity once the war ended. Most men—almost all men—would have. The exceptions were the ones who had to be dealt with.

For the time being, it looked as if Featherston *had* been dealt with. Not so long before, his speech would have stood at the top of the front page, not below the fold. He was a falling star these days. With luck, he wouldn't rise again.

When Potter got to the harbor, he stiffened. A U.S. Navy gunboat was tied up at one of the quays.

Seeing the Stars and Stripes here, where the Confederacy was born and the War of Secession began, raised his hackles. The flag stood out; the C.S. Navy used the Confederate battle flag as its ensign, not the Stars and Bars that so closely resembled the U.S. banner. And the U.S. Navy men's dark blue uniforms also contrasted with the dark gray their Confederate counterparts wore.

These days, Clarence Potter made his living as an investigator. He'd been looking into smuggling going through the harbor, and had headed there to report his findings to the harbormaster. But that warship flying the hated Northern flag drew him as a magnet drew iron.

He wasn't the only one, either. Men in both C.S. naval uniform and in civilian clothes converged on the U.S. gunboat. "Yankees, go home!" somebody yelled. Scores of throats roared agreement, Potter's among

them.

“Avast that shouting!” a U.S. officer on the deck of the gunboat bawled through a megaphone. “We’ve **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

got every right to be here under the armistice agreement, and you know it damned well. We’re inspecting to make sure you Confederates aren’t building submersibles in these parts. If you interfere with us while we’re doing our duty, you’ll be sorry, and so will your whole stinking country.”

They love us no better than we love them, Clarence Potter reminded himself. And that lieutenant commander had a point. If he and his men couldn’t make their inspection, the CSA would pay, in humiliation and maybe in gold as well. The Yankees had learned their lessons well; as victors, they were even more intolerable than the Confederates had been.

“Yankees, go home!” the crowd on the quay shouted, over and over.

At a barked order, the sailors on the gunboat swung their forward cannon to bear on the crowd. The gun was only a three-incher—a popgun by naval standards—but it could work a fearful slaughter if turned on soft flesh rather than steel armor. Sudden silence descended.

“That’s better,” the U.S. officer said. “If you think we won’t open fire, you’d goddamn well better think again.”

“You’ll never get out of this harbor if you do,” somebody called.

The U.S. lieutenant commander had spunk. He shrugged. “Maybe we will, maybe we won’t. But if you want to start a brand new war against the United States of America, go right ahead. If you start it, we’ll finish it.”

No one from the United States would have talked like that before the Great War. The Confederate States had been on top of the world then. No more. The Yankees had the whip hand nowadays. And people in Charleston knew it. The crowd in front of the U.S. gunboat dispersed sullenly, but it dispersed.

Some of the men who walked away knuckled their eyes to hold back tears. The Confederates were a proud folk, and choking on that pride came hard.

Potter made his way to the harbormaster's office. That worthy, a plump man named Ambrose Spawforth, fumed about Yankee arrogance. "Those sons of bitches don't own the world, no matter what they think," he said.

"You know that, and I know that, but do the damnyankees know it?" Potter answered. "I'll tell you something else I know: the way that bastard in a blue jacket acted, he just handed the Freedom Party a raft of new votes."

Spawforth was normally a man with a good deal of common sense. When he said, "Well, good," a chill ran through Clarence Potter. The harbormaster went on, "Isn't it about time we start standing up to the USA again?"

"That depends," Potter said judiciously. "Standing up to them isn't such a good idea if they go and knock us down again. Right now, they can do that, you know."

"Don't I just!" Spawforth said. "We're weaklings now. We need to get strong again. We can do it. We *will* do it, too."

"Not behind Jake Featherston." Potter spoke with absolute conviction.

But he didn't impress Spawforth, no matter how certain he sounded. The fat man said, "He'll tell the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Yankees off. He'll tell the niggers off. He'll tell the fools in Richmond off, too. That all needs doing, every bit of it."

One of Potter's eyebrows rose. "Splendid," he said. "And what happens after he tells the Yankees off?"

"Huh?" Plainly, that hadn't occurred to Spawforth.

"The likeliest thing is, they take some more of our land or they make us start paying them reparations again," Potter said. "We aren't strong enough to stop them, you know. Do you want *another* round of inflation to wipe out the currency?"

He was—he always had been—a coldly logical man. That made it easy for him to resist, even to laugh at, Jake Featherston's fervent speechmaking. It also made him have trouble understanding why so many people took Featherston seriously. Ambrose Spawforth was one of those people. "Well, what we need to do is get strong enough so the

USA can't kick us around any more," he said. "The Freedom Party's for that, too."

"Splendid," Potter said again, even more sardonically than before. "We tell the United States we aim to kick them in the teeth as soon as we get the chance. I'm sure they'll just go right ahead and let us."

"You've got the wrong attitude, you know that?" the harbormaster said. "You don't understand the way things work."

What Potter understood was that you couldn't have whatever you wanted just because you wanted it.

Even if you held your breath till you turned blue, that didn't mean you were entitled to it. As far as he could see, the Freedom Party hadn't figured that out and didn't want to.

He also understood getting deeper into an argument with Spawforth would do him no good at all. The man didn't have to hire him to snoop around the harbor. Yes, he'd been in intelligence during the war.

But plenty of beady-eyed, needle-nosed men were at liberty in Charleston these days. A lot of them could do his job, and do it about as well as he did.

And so, however much he wanted to prove to the world at large—and to Ambrose Spawforth in particular—that Spawforth was an ass, an imbecile, an idiot, he restrained himself. Instead of laying into the man, he said only, "Well, I didn't come here to fight about politics with you, Mr. Spawforth. I came to tell you about the fellows who're sneaking dirty moving pictures into the CSA and taking tobacco out."

"Tobacco? So that's what they're getting for that filthy stuff, is it?" Spawforth said, and Potter nodded.

The harbormaster looked shrewd. "If it's tobacco, they're likely Yankees. I would've reckoned 'em some other kind of foreigners—goddamn Germans, maybe—from the girls on the films, but they don't talk or nothin', so I couldn't prove it."

"Yes, the films are coming in from the USA. I'm sure of that." Potter looked at Ambrose Spawforth over the tops of his spectacles. "So you've seen some of these moving pictures, have you?"

The harbormaster turned red. "It was in the line of duty, damn it.

Have to know what's going on, don't I? I'd look like a right chucklehead if I didn't know what all was coming through Charleston harbor."

He had enough of a point to keep Potter from pressing him. And the veteran, in the course of his own duties, had seen some of the films himself. He didn't think the girls looked German. They were certainly

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limber, though. He took some papers from his briefcase. "Here's my report—and my bill."

Jonathan Moss hadn't taken up the law to help Canadians gain justice from the U.S. occupying authorities. Such thoughts, in fact, had been as distant from his mind as the far side of the moon before the Great War started. He'd spent the whole war as an American pilot in Ontario, beginning in observation aircraft and ending in fighting scouts. He'd come through without a scratch and as an ace.

Not many of the men who'd started the war with him were still there at the end. He knew exactly how lucky he was to be here these days, and not to need a cane or a hook or a patch over one eye.

U.S. forces had planned to take Toronto within a few weeks of the war's beginning. But the Canadians and the English had had plans of their own. The U.S. Army had taken three years to get there. Almost every inch of ground around Lake Erie from Niagara Falls to Toronto had seen shells land on it. The city itself . . .

Having spent a lot of time shooting it up from the air, Moss knew what sort of shape Toronto had been in when the fighting finally stopped. It was far from the only Canadian place in such condition, either.

Towns came back to life only little by little. Wrecked buildings got demolished, new ones went up to take their places. But the key words were *little by little* . Canadians, these days, didn't have much money, and the American government was anything but interested in helping them with their troubles.

That meant a lot of people doing the wrecking and the rebuilding weren't Canadians at all, but fast-buck artists up from the States. That was certainly true in Berlin, where Moss had has practice. (The town had briefly been known as Empire during the war, but had reverted to its original name after the Americans finally drove out stubborn

Canadian and British defenders.) Americans in conquered Canada often behaved as if the law were for other people, not for them. Sometimes the military government looked the other way or encouraged them to act like that.

Moss had defended one Canadian's right to reclaim a building he incontrovertibly owned—that it was the building where he'd had his office made the case especially interesting for him. Not only had he taken the case, he'd won it. That got him more such business. These days, most of his clients were Canucks.

Some of his own countrymen accused him of being more Canadian than the Canadians. He took it as praise, though doubting they meant it that way.

And, when Saturday rolled around and the courts closed till the following Monday, he got into his powerful Bucephalus and roared off to the west. The motorcar did more to prove his family had money than to prove he did. The road to the little town of Arthur proved nobody in the province of Ontario had much money to set things to rights.

What had been shell holes in ground torn down to the bone were now ponds or simply grassy dimples in fertile soil. Rain and ice and grass and bushes softened the outlines of the trenches that had furrowed the countryside like scourge marks on a bare back. Even the ugly lumps of concrete that marked machine-gun nests and larger fortifications were beginning to soften with the passage of time, weathering and getting a coating of moss. Though cities were slow in recovering, the farmland in the countryside was back in business. Several trucks hauling broken concrete and rusted barbed wire back toward scrap dealers in Berlin or Toronto passed Moss on the opposite side of the road.

Here and there, fresh barbed wire stayed up: not in the thickets of the stuff used during the war, but single, sometimes double, strands. Signboards showed a skull and crossbones and a two-word warning in big red letters: DANGER! MINES! *How long will those mines stay in the ground?* Moss **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

wondered.

From Berlin over to Arthur was about thirty miles. Even with his powerful automobile, Moss needed almost an hour and a half to get to the little farm outside of Arthur. That wasn't the Bucephalus' fault, but

the road's—especially after rains like the ones they'd had a couple of days earlier, it was truly appalling.

His squadron had been stationed at an aerodrome only a mile or so from this little farm. It had been stationed here for a long time; the front hadn't moved fast enough to make frequent relocations necessary. And so Jonathan Moss, wandering the countryside in search of whatever—and whomever—he might find, had got to know a woman whose maiden name, she'd bragged, was Laura Secord.

She was named for a relative who'd made herself famous during the War of 1812, warning that the Americans were coming in much the same way as Paul Revere had warned that the British were coming during the Revolution. If that hadn't been enough to make her a Canadian patriot, she'd been married to a soldier who was either missing or captured.

She hadn't wanted to look at Jonathan. He'd certainly wanted to look at her. She was tall and blond and shapely and pretty—and she was more of a man than most of the men he knew. She could take care of herself. In fact, she insisted on taking care of herself. He'd come back right after the war ended. Her husband hadn't. She sent him off with a flea in his ear anyhow.

But, when she was desperate for money to keep from being taxed off the farm, she'd written to him while he was in law school. He'd lent it to her. That had helped ease him into her good graces, though she'd paid back every dime. Helping that fellow over in Berlin regain his building had done far more. Any practical-minded American would say what happened mattered more than how it happened. Now . . .

Now, when Moss pulled onto the track that led from the road to her farmhouse and barn, he squeezed the bulb on the motorcar's horn. The raucous noise made a cow look up from the long, green grass it was cropping. The cow didn't act too startled. It had heard that noise before.

So had Laura Secord. Moss stopped the automobile just in front of her house. She came toward him, nodding a greeting. She carried a headless chicken, still dripping blood, by the feet. A hatchet was buried in a red-stained stump that did duty for a chopping block.

"Hello, Yank," she said, and held up the chicken. "Once I settle her, she'll make us a fine stew. Her laying's down, so I don't care about culling her."

“Suits me,” Moss said. “How have you been?”

“Not bad,” she replied.

By a year’s custom, they were decorous with each other as long as they stayed outside, which made Moss want to hurry into the farmhouse. But this . . . Moss frowned. She sounded more—or rather, less—than merely decorous. He asked, “Is something wrong?”

She didn’t answer right away. When she did, all she said was, “We can talk about it a little later, if that’s all right.”

“Sure. Whatever you want.” Moss didn’t see what else he could say. He wondered if he’d done something to put her nose out of joint. He didn’t think so, but how could a mere male—worse, an **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

American male—know for sure?

When they went inside, she gutted the chicken and threw the offal out for the farm cats, which were the wildest beasts Moss had ever known. She plucked the carcass with automatic competence, hardly looking at what her hands were doing. Then she got a fire going in the stove, cut up the bird, threw it in a pot with carrots and onions and potatoes and a cabbage, and put it over the fire to cook.

As soon as she’d got the chicken stew going, he expected her to throw herself into his arms. That was how things had gone since they became lovers. When they got inside the farmhouse, all bets were off.

The first time they’d gone to bed together, they hadn’t gone to bed. He’d taken her on the kitchen floor.

If she hadn’t got splinters in her behind, it wasn’t because he hadn’t rammed her against the floorboards.

Today, though, she shook her head when he took a step toward her. “We need to talk,” she said.

“What about?” Moss asked with a sinking feeling worse than any he’d known while diving to escape an enemy pilot. Whenever a woman said something like that, the first careless joy of two people as a couple was over.

“Come into the parlor,” Laura Secord told him. That surprised him,

too; she hardly ever used the impressive-looking room. He'd walked past it on the way to the stairs that led to her bedroom, but he wasn't sure he'd ever actually been inside it. What could he do now, though, but nod and let her lead the way?

At her gesture, he sat down on the sofa. The upholstery crackled under his weight; the sofa wasn't used to working. On the table in front of the sofa stood a framed photograph of her late husband in Canadian uniform. Moss had resolutely forgotten his surname; thinking of Laura by her maiden name made it easier for him to forget the dead man altogether. But how could you forget someone whose image stared at you out of eyes that looked hard and dangerous?

The chair in which Laura Secord sat also made noises that suggested it wasn't used to having anyone actually sit in it. She looked at Moss, but didn't say anything. "You were the one who wanted to talk," he reminded her. "I asked you once, what about?"

She bit her lip and looked away. Something close to a sob burst from her. *She's going to send me packing,* Moss thought with sudden sick certainty. *She can't stand a damn Yank rumpling her drawers any more, no matter how much she likes it. What do I do then?* he wondered, panic somewhere not far under the surface of his mind. He'd spent years alternately chasing her and trying—always without much luck—to get her out of his mind. Now that he'd finally got her, finally found out just how much woman she was, losing her was the last thing he wanted. But two had to say yes. One was plenty for no.

"What is it?" he said again, like a man bracing himself for the dentist's drill. "After this buildup, don't you think you'd better tell me?"

Laura nodded jerkily. But then, instead of talking, she sprang up to light a kerosene lamp. The yellow glow added enough light to the parlor for him to see how pale she was. Another thought intruded on him— *she's going to have a baby.* He gave a tiny shrug. *We'll deal with that, dammit. Shakespeare's first kid came along seven months after he got married. The world won't end.*

She sat down again, biting her lip. Moss' nostrils twitched—not at the way she was behaving, but because he'd just got the first whiff of the stew. At last she said, so low he had to lean forward to hear
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her (which made the couch rustle again), "There's going to be . . . an

uprising. Here. In Canada. Against .

. . against the United . . .” She didn’t get *States* out. Instead, she buried her face in her hands and wept as if her heart were breaking.

It probably is, Moss realized. “Why are you telling me? I thought you’d be . . .”

“Cheering them on?” Laura asked. He nodded, though *leading them on* was more what he’d had in mind. She said, “Because I don’t want you to get hurt. Because I—” She stopped again.

“Well!” he said, quite taken aback. He didn’t say anything else for close to a minute; what man wouldn’t savor such a compliment? *She cares for me,* he thought dizzily, *and not just for my* . . . He shook his head and asked the other question that needed asking: “How do you know about this?”

Laura looked at him as if he’d been foolish. *And so I have* , he decided. She answered as she might have to a child: “I am who I am—I am what I am—after all.”

“They thought you’d be cheering them on, too,” Moss said. “Cheering them on or helping them, I mean.”

“Yes.” In the one word, Laura Secord unwittingly spoke volumes on how close they’d come to being right. Then she burst into tears. When Moss tried to comfort her, she pushed him away as fiercely as if he were still the enemy she’d thought him for so long.

Lucien Galtier took life a day at a time. As far as he could see, that was a good idea for any man, and an especially good idea for a farmer like himself. Sometimes you got sunshine, sometimes rain or snow or just clouds. Sometimes you got peace. Sometimes, he’d seen, you got war.

Sometimes you got a whole new country. He still had trouble remembering he lived in the Republic of Quebec. The USA had invaded the Canadian province of Quebec and found enough men willing to detach it from its longtime home to make a new nation. *Without the United States, my country would not be,* Galtier thought.

That had been a very strange notion, the first time it crossed his mind. By now, though, he’d realized the United States did as they pleased all through North America. *When they point at this one and say Come! he cometh, and when they point at that one and say Go! he goeth.*

“That’s from the Bible, isn’t it?” his wife asked when he spoke the thought aloud to her.

“I think so, Marie,” he answered, scratching his head as he tried to remember where he’d found the language in which he robed his thought. He wasn’t a tall man, or broad through the shoulders; his strength was of the wiry sort that didn’t show. It was also of the wiry sort that endured after a bigger man’s youthful power faded with the passing years. He’d seen his fiftieth birthday. The only real difference between it and his fortieth was that he’d gone gray over the past ten years. He’d had only a few silver strands among the midnight at forty. Now the black hairs were the ones that were few and far between.

Marie, as far as he could tell, hadn’t aged a day. He marveled at how she’d managed that. She’d lived with him for thirty years now. If that wasn’t enough to give her gray hair, nothing ever would.

She said, “The Romans in our Lord’s day didn’t use their power for good, did they?”

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“I don’t know these things,” Lucien exclaimed. “If you wanted someone who knows about Romans, you shouldn’t have married a farmer.” He raised a sly eyebrow. “Maybe you should have married Bishop Pascal.”

“You’re trying to make me angry,” Marie said. “You’re doing a good job of it, too. It’s not so much that Bishop Pascal can’t marry. It’s thinking I might want to marry him if he could. You could squeeze enough oil out of that man to light a house for a year.”

“But it would be sweet oil,” Galtier said. His wife made a face at him.

Before they could start up again, Georges, their younger son, came into the farmhouse with a newspaper from Rivière-du-Loup in his hand. “They’ve gone and done it!” he said, waving the paper at Lucien and Marie.

“Who has gone and done what?” Lucien Galtier asked. With Georges with newspaper in hand, he might settle on anything. Charles, his older brother, was much more like the elder Galtier, both in looks and character. Georges towered over his father—and also, as he had since he was a boy, delighted in whimsy for its own sake. Had someone

gone and hauled a cow onto a roof? Georges might well make a story like that out to be the end of the world.

Not this time, though. “The Canadians have risen against the United States!” he said, and held the paper still long enough to let his father and mother see the big black headline.

“Calisse!” Galtier muttered. *“Mauvais tabernac!”* Marie clucked at his swearing, but he didn’t care.

He reached for the newspaper. “Oh, the fools! The stupid fools!” He crossed himself.

“They’ll get what’s coming to them,” Georges said. He took the Republic of Quebec for granted. He’d lived the last third of his life in it. To him, as his words showed, Canada was a foreign country.

Things were different for Lucien. Back in the 1890s, he’d been conscripted into the Canadian Army.

He’d soldiered side by side with men who spoke English. He’d learned some himself; its remembered fragments had come in handy in ways he hadn’t expected. He’d also been told, “Talk white!” when he spouted French at the wrong time. Despite that, though, he’d seen that English-speaking Canadians weren’t so very different from their Quebecois counterparts. And memories of when Quebec had been part of something stretching from Atlantic to Pacific remained strong in him.

“Give me the paper,” he said. “I want to see what they say about this.”

Something in his tone warned Georges this would not be a good time to argue or joke. “Here, Papa,” he said, and handed him the newspaper without another word.

Galtier had to hold it out at arm’s length to read it. His sight had lengthened over the past ten years, too.

“Shall I get your reading glasses?” Marie asked. “I know where you left them—on the nightstand by the bed.”

“Never mind,” he answered. “I can manage well enough. . . . Uprisings in Toronto and Ottawa and Winnipeg, in Calgary and Edmonton and Vancouver.”

“The Americans say they are putting them down,” Georges said.

“Of course they say that. What else would you expect them to say?” Galtier replied. “During the war, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

both sides told lies as fast as they could. The Americans must have captured Quebec City and Montreal and Toronto half a dozen times each—and they must have been chased south over the border just as often.”

Georges pointed to a paragraph Lucien was about to read on his own. “The premier of the Republic is sending soldiers to help his American allies—that’s what he calls it, anyhow.”

“ ‘Osti,” Galtier muttered. He wasn’t surprised so much as disgusted. He’d been thinking of the Bible.

The Americans were saying *Come!* —and the Quebecois were duly coming. Or was that fair? Didn’t allies help allies? Weren’t Quebec and the USA allies? Why wouldn’t French-speaking troops in blue-gray help Americans in green-gray?

“Can the Canadians win, do you think?” Georges asked. He certainly thought of his former countrymen as foreigners.

“No.” Galtier shook his head. “The Americans are soft in certain things—they have certainly been softer here in Quebec than they might have been.” Yes, he had to admit that. “But think even of your brother-in-law. Remember what he thinks of the British. The United States will not be kind in Canada.

They will crucify the whole country, and they will laugh while they are doing it.”

“The Canadians are brave,” his son said.

“They’re foolish,” Galtier replied.

“Haven’t we seen enough war? Haven’t we seen too much war?” Marie said. Actually, this part of Quebec had fallen to the Americans fairly fast. It had seen occupation, but not too much true combat.

Near Montreal, near Quebec City, the story was different.

“*They* don’t think so.” Georges sounded excited. *He knows no better,* Galtier thought. War around here hadn’t seemed too bad.

“Listen to this, son,” Galtier said after turning the paper to an inside page so he could see the rest of the story. “Listen carefully. ‘American occupying authorities vow that these uprisings will be put down, and all rebels punished under martial law. This is a rebellion against duly constituted authority, not a war; captured rebels do not have the privileges granted to legitimate prisoners of war.’ Do you know what that means? Do you understand it?”

“I think so, Father.” Georges, for once, sounded serious. He didn’t try to make a joke of it.

Lucien Galtier spelled things out anyhow: “It means the Americans will hang or shoot anyone they catch who rose up against them. They won’t waste time with a lot of questions before they do it, either.”

“And we take money from the Americans for the hospital they built on our patrimony,” Georges said.

“We even have an American in our family.”

“You have a half-American nephew,” Galtier replied. “You have an American brother-in-law, as I have an American son-in-law. And Leonard O’Doull is a good fellow and a good doctor, and you cannot say otherwise.”

“Nooo,” Georges admitted reluctantly. “But if they’re doing these things in Canada—”

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“They’re doing them because the Canadians have risen up,” Galtier said. “If the Canadians had stayed quiet, none of this would have happened. None of it has happened here in Quebec, *n’est-ce pas?* ”

“Oui, tu as raison, Papa,” Georges said. “But even if you are right, is it not that we have made a deal with the Devil, you might say?”

That same thought had crossed Galtier’s mind, too. He did his best to fight it down whenever it did.

Now he said, “No. We are a small man. The United States, they are a large, strong man who carries a gun. Are we foolish because we do not go out of our way to step on his toes? I think not.”

“Maybe,” his son said, more reluctantly still. Then he asked, “What time is it?”

“Am I a clock?” Galtier said. “You can look at one as easily as I.”

Georges did, and then exclaimed in dismay. “Is it half past four already? *Tabernac!* I thought it was earlier.”

“And why does the hour matter so much?” Galtier inquired with a certain ironic curiosity, part of which was about whether his guess was right.

Sure enough, his younger son shuffled his feet a couple of times before answering, “When I was in town, I heard there would be a dance tonight. I thought I might go.”

“Did you?”

“Yes, I did.” Georges attempted defiance. He didn’t do a good job of it. His older brother, Charles, or any of his four sisters could have given him lessons.

Lucien and Marie shared amused looks. They’d met at a dance, somewhere a little more than thirty years before. Nor were they the only couple in the neighborhood who had—far from it. Galtier said, “All right, son. Have a good time.”

Georges started to argue, to protest. Then he really heard what his father had said. He blinked. “It’s all right?” he asked suspiciously.

“I said so, didn’t I?”

Marie added, “There’s plenty of hot water on the stove, if you have time to bathe and shave before you go.”

“Merci, chère Maman. I’ll do that quick as a wink.” Georges still looked as if he didn’t trust his ears.

He went off to the kitchen to take the hot water to the bathroom, still scratching his head.

When he was, or at least might have been, out of earshot, Marie said, “High time he got married. I began to worry about Charles when he waited so long.”

“Madeleine Boileau is a nice girl, and she made him a good match this past winter,” Galtier said. His wife nodded. He went on, “She is a

better match than we could have got without our American doctor son-in-law, or without the money from the Americans for the property on which the hospital stands.”

“I know that,” Marie said. “You must know it, too. Why bring it up now? We’ve had these things for **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

some time.”

“Why bring it up now?” Galtier echoed. “To convince myself what we’ve done is worthwhile, that’s why. Because there are times when I feel our money is like Judas’ thirty pieces of silver, that’s why.

Because I almost envy the Canadians for rising, *that’s* why.”

Marie eyed him. “Would you disown your grandson?”

“No. Never.” Lucien didn’t hesitate. He did laugh. “All right. You have me.”

“I should hope so,” Marie said.

III

Acold, nasty rain poured down on Augusta, Georgia. Had the town been up in the USA, Scipio suspected it would have got snow, even though this was only the end of October. He’d seen snow a few times, here and in South Carolina, where he’d lived most of his life. He didn’t like it a bit.

The rain drummed on his cheap black umbrella. Some of the Negroes in the Terry, Augusta’s black quarter, had no umbrellas. They dashed through the streets on the way to work, water splashing up under their galoshes—when they had galoshes. Scipio did. He was fastidious about his person. Part of that was personal inclination, part habit ingrained in him by more than half a lifetime spent as Anne Colleton’s butler. She’d always insisted on perfection in everything, and she’d known how to get what she wanted.

His foot slipped out from under him. He had to make a mad grab for a lamppost with his free hand. That kept him from falling on his backside, but the desperate embrace left his arm and one side of his chest almost as wet as if he had fallen.

He muttered under his breath all the way to Erasmus' fish market and restaurant. YOU BUY—WE

FRY! was painted on the window in big letters. The front door was unlocked. Scipio gladly ducked inside, closing the umbrella as he did so.

Erasmus, as always, had got there before him. The gray-haired black man was sipping on a steaming cup of coffee almost white with cream—he'd already been to the fish market alongside the Savannah River to get the best of the day's catch and put it on ice here.

"Mornin'," he said to Scipio, and then, "Wet out." He got the most mileage from every word he used.

"Do Jesus, sho' is!" Scipio exclaimed. "I's soaked clean through." His accent was that of the Congaree, thicker and more ignorant-sounding than Erasmus'. He could also use the English of an educated white man—again, Anne Colleton's doing—but he had nothing between the one and the other.

"Can't be helped." Erasmus took another sip of coffee. He pointed to the pot. "Pour yourself some if you got a mind to, Xerxes."

"I do dat," Scipio said. No one in Augusta, not even Bathsheba, his wife, knew his rightful name. He'd **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

used several aliases since escaping from the wreckage of the Congaree Socialist Republic. His passbook said he was Xerxes, and he wasn't about to argue with it. Xerxes was as free as a black man in the Confederate States could be. Scipio still had a large price on his head back in South Carolina.

He poured less cream—the pitcher sat on ice next to some catfish—into his coffee than Erasmus used, but added a couple of teaspoons of sugar. His boss' eyes were on him. Erasmus didn't approve of anyone standing around idle, especially not someone he was paying. Getting a cup of coffee didn't mean lollygagging around for half an hour till Scipio finished it. He took the cup out in front of the display full of ice and fish, grabbed a push broom, and started sweeping up under and around the restaurant tables.

Erasmus said, "You's a pretty good fellow, Xerxes."

"I thanks you," Scipio answered, chivvying small specks of dust to

destruction.

“Yes, suh, you’s a pretty good fellow,” Erasmus said again. “You works.” By the way he spoke, those two traits were intimately connected. He watched Scipio sweep a little longer, then added, “You know what I say? I say you ought to git your own place, work for your own self. I hates to lose you, but you smart if you go.”

Scipio stopped sweeping. Erasmus must have been serious, for he didn’t give his employee a put-upon stare. Slowly, Scipio said, “Ain’t never thought about that none.”

He told the truth. Never in his life had he contemplated being his own master. He’d been born a slave, before the Confederate States manumitted their Negroes in the aftermath of the Second Mexican War.

Even after manumission, he’d always been a house nigger, first in the kitchens at Marshlands, then as butler there. He’d done factory labor and worked as a waiter since. Every single place, he’d had somebody telling him what to do. (Whenever he thought of Anne Colleton, he shivered, even now.

Getting out of South Carolina had put some distance between them, the state border being more important than the miles. Was it enough? He hoped so.)

“Ought to do some thinkin’, then, I reckon,” Erasmus said. “You ain’t stupid. You kin read’n write’n cipher—more’n I kin do my ownself. You works hard, an’ you saves your money. What else you need?”

Maybe he didn’t expect an answer, but Scipio gave him one: “Dunno dat I wants to boss other niggers around. You hear what I sayin’?”

“Yeah, I hears it. But you ain’t real likely to hire no white folks.” Erasmus bared his teeth to show that was meant for a joke. Scipio dutifully smiled back. His boss went on, “I hear what you say. But you gots to have people working’ fo’ you. Job gits too big fo’ one man to do it all by hisself.”

“Don’ want to play de buckra.” Scipio made as if to crack a whip. He might have been driving along a slave coffle in the days before manumission.

“I hear black folks say that every now and again,” Erasmus admitted. “But you tell me true, now—I treat you like white folks treats

niggers?”

“No,” Scipio admitted. “Had one fella, he weren’t too bad, but de rest —” He shook his head.

“Oglethorpe,” Erasmus said. Scipio nodded in surprise; he hadn’t mentioned his earlier boss for quite a while. Erasmus owned a stubborn memory. He continued, “I knows Aurelius a bit. He been waitin’

tables for John Oglethorpe since dirt. He says that there buckra a lot like me, you work for him, he don’t **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

give you no trouble. He could do that, too.”

“Could,” Scipio said. “Mebbe could. Dunno dat I gots it in me to give no orders, though, not no way.”

He hadn’t even liked giving orders as a butler, when Anne Colleton was the ultimate authority behind them. Doing it on his own hook? No, he wasn’t sure about that at all.

“Well, you don’t want to do what you *kin* do, that’s your business,” Erasmus said. “Like I told you, I ain’t sorry you works for me. But you is wastin’ yourself, you wants to know what I think.”

How many Negroes in the Confederate States aren’t *wasting themselves?* Scipio wondered. He’d got himself an education as good as any white man’s. What could he do with it? Sound impressive as the butler at Marshlands during the war. Now, wait tables. If he’d tried to set up as a businessman—not in the sense Erasmus meant, but as an investor, a capitalist—he would have been lucky if whites here only laughed at him. More likely, they would have lynched him.

And most blacks? Besides having whites hate them, most blacks never got the education that would have let them make the most of their abilities—that would have let them discover what abilities they had.

And then whites called them stupid and inferior because they didn’t succeed.

“Sometimes I reckons dem Red niggers, dey knew what dey was doin’,” he said. He’d never dared say anything like that to Erasmus before.

The older man studied him, then slowly shook his head. “Them Reds, they was about tearin’ down, not buildin’ up. Tearin’ down don’t do no good. Never has, never will.” He sounded very certain.

Before Scipio could answer, the day’s first customer came in: a fat black man dripping rain from the brim of his homburg and from the hem of his rubberized-cotton raincoat. “Bacon an’ a couple eggs over medium an’ grits an’ coffee,” he called to Erasmus.

Erasmus already had the eggs and bacon on the stove. “Like I don’t know what you has for breakfast, Sophocles,” he said reproachfully.

Scipio poured coffee for Sophocles and brought it to him. As soon as Erasmus had the rest of the man’s breakfast ready, he carried that over, too. “Half a dollar, all told,” he said.

“Here y’are.” Sophocles slapped down sixty cents. “Things is up a little from last year,” he remarked.

“But only a little,” Scipio said. “Do Jesus, when dey was playin’ games wid de money, breakfas’ cost you fifty million dollars, maybe fifty billion dollars. I’s powerful glad dey fix it—dey pretty much fix it, anyways.”

Sophocles and Erasmus both nodded. Inflation had almost destroyed the CSA. How could anybody do business when money might lose half its value between the morning when you got it and the afternoon when you found a chance to spend it? Prices *were* higher now than they had been when the currency was restored; the C.S. dollar didn’t trade at par with its U.S. counterpart. But it was still close, and didn’t seem to be sinking very fast.

Erasmus said, “The white folks don’t go runnin’ to the Freedom Party fast as their legs can take ’em when their money worth somethin’.”

Sophocles nodded again, chewing a mouthful of bacon. So did Scipio. “De Freedom Party buckra, dey **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

scares me plenty,” he said. “Dey wish we was all dead. Dey he’ps we along, too, case we don’ feel like dyin’.” More nods.

More customers came in. On such a miserable morning, business was slower than usual. Scipio kept hopping even so. When he wasn’t carrying food out to hungry men and women, he was washing dirty dishes or making fresh coffee or stirring the big pot of grits. Erasmus

didn't let him do much real cooking, but did give him jobs like that. He also wrapped fish for people who didn't come in to eat there.

However much he did, he would have felt like a fool complaining about it, for Erasmus did more.

Erasmus worked harder than anybody he'd ever seen, save possibly John Oglethorpe. Maybe their both owning their businesses had something to do with that.

Erasmus certainly worked harder than any other black man Scipio had ever seen. And he'd been born a slave; he'd spent more time in bondage than Scipio had. A lot of Negroes still held to the slave's pace of labor, doing just enough to satisfy an overseer, even though they were free now. Erasmus worked to satisfy an overseer, too, but his lived inside his head. He had a harsher straw boss than any cursing, whip-wielding, tobacco-chewing white man. His boss whipped him on from within.

Could I do that? Scipio wondered. He had his doubts. He *wanted* things done properly, yes; Anne Colleton had made sure to instill that into him. But did he have the driving *need* to get things done, even when he was the only one urging himself on? He'd rarely seen it in himself. He'd rarely had to look for it, either. If he ever got his own place, he'd have to.

After the breakfast rush, such as it was, eased, Erasmus put on a wide-brimmed hat of no known make and a rain slicker. "Mind the store a spell, Xerxes," he said. "I gwine buy some more fish. One of the boats was late, and I reckon I kin git some prime deals, on account of most folks ain't comin' back."

"I do dat," Scipio said. Erasmus hurried out into the rain. *Would I do the same?* Scipio wondered. He was honest enough to admit to himself he didn't know.

The closing whistle shrilled in the Toledo steel mill. Chester Martin pushed his helmet up onto the top of his head. He blinked against the glare as he hurried to clock out. He'd been looking at molten steel through smoked-glass rectangles all day. Now he saw all the light there was to see. It was almost too much to bear.

As he stuck his card in the time clock, he spoke up to anyone who'd listen: "Election day today. Don't forget to vote, dammit. Only way you should forget to vote is if you want the Democrats back in Powel House."

That made most of the men around him grin and wave and call out agreement. Socialists filled the Toledo steel mills, as they filled so many factories. After the postwar strikes, the Socialist Party had gained more ground than at any time since the 1880s.

Funny, Martin thought as he hurried out of the big building to catch a streetcar to his polling place and his home. *I saved Teddy Roosevelt's life when he came into the trenches to see what the war was like.*

Well, maybe I did—I sure made him get down when the Confederates started shelling us. He had a letter from Roosevelt, written after he got wounded. He intended to keep that letter forever. But he was a Socialist all the same.

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A streetcar clanged to a stop. That wasn't his route. Then the right one came. He climbed aboard, throwing five cents in the fare box. A lot of the passengers looked like him: tired, grubby men in overalls and heavy shoes and collarless shirts and cloth caps. He had sandy hair and a pointed nose to distinguish himself from most of the rest. The odor of perspiration filled the streetcar. Even in November, Toledo factory workers had no trouble breaking a sweat.

The American flag flew in front of the elementary school that housed his polling place. The new stars in the canton that represented Kentucky and Houston gave it a pattern he still hadn't got used to. The polling place itself was in the school auditorium, which was full of seats too small for grown-up backsides. Martin smiled, remembering the days when he'd sat in chairs like that. *I'd never killed anybody then,* he thought, and the smile slipped.

He had to wait in line to get his ballot. Lots of men—and women, who could vote in presidential elections in Ohio—lined up to get their ballots. "Here you are," the clerk said when he came to the front of the line. "Take the first available voting booth." He sounded bored. How many times had he said those identical words since the polls opened this morning? Too many, by all the signs.

A pretty woman a few years younger than Chester Martin pushed aside the curtain that kept her ballot secret and came out with the folded paper in her hand. They did a little accidental dance, each trying to get around the other, and were laughing by the time she went past him and he made his way into the booth.

He voted quickly. He put an X by the names of Upton Sinclair and Hosea Blackford, then went on to vote for the other Socialist candidates. He wasn't altogether happy with the way the Party had handled the Canadian uprising; had he been in charge of things, he would have taken an even stronger line than President Sinclair had. *Why did we fight the war, if we coddle the Canucks once it's done?* But the Socialists were his party, he was making good money, and there were plenty of jobs. He wasn't about to abandon the Party over foreign policy. He went down the line, from Congressman to state officials, voting the straight ticket.

After he'd finished, he handed the clerk the ballot. The fellow ceremoniously stuck it in the locked ballot box, declaring, "Chester Martin has voted." Martin felt proud, as if his vote had singlehandedly saved the country. He knew how silly that was, but couldn't help it.

He hurried out of the auditorium, out of the school. His family's flat was only four blocks away. He'd intended to walk it and save himself five cents, but seeing the pretty woman at the streetcar stop made him change his mind. "Did you vote for President Sinclair?" he asked, fumbling in his pocket for a nickel.

"As a matter of fact, I did," she said. That made him grin with relief; he wouldn't have wanted much to do with a staunch Democrat. He didn't think he would, anyhow. She added, "He's the only one I could vote for, of course. I don't think that's right."

"I don't, either," Martin said, more sincerely than otherwise. "My sister gets to vote for the first time today, and that's all she gets to mark: one square. It really doesn't seem fair."

They chatted, waiting for the streetcar. He found out her name was Rita Habicht, and that she was a typist for a company that made galvanized pipe. He gave her his own name just when the trolley clattered up. *Slow down,* he thought as it rattled along the tracks. *Slow down, dammit.* But it didn't. In no time at all, the streetcar got to his stop.

He let it start up again without getting off. "Have you got a telephone?" he asked.

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She hesitated. Then she took a scrap of paper from her handbag, wrote

on it, and gave it to him.

“Here.”

He tucked it into the front pocket of his overalls. “Thanks,” he said. “I’ll call you.” He did leave at the next stop, and had to walk most of a mile back in the direction from which he’d come.

“What took you so long?” his younger sister asked when he finally came through the door. Sue had a sharp nose much like his, but her hair was brown, not sandy. Without waiting for an answer, she went on,

“I got to vote. It took forever, but I got to vote.” She’d been just too young at the last presidential election.

“Good for you, Sis.” Chester gave her a hug. “I remember how that felt —the first time, I mean.”

“What took you so long coming home?” Sue asked again.

“Trolley went past the stop, and I had to walk back,” he answered.

She looked at him. “It must have gone a long way past the stop, for you to be as late as you are.” He could feel himself turning red. His sister started to laugh. “You’re blushing!” she exclaimed, as she might have done when they were both children. She wagged a saucy finger at him. “Was she pretty?”

He looked down at the carpet, and at the woven flowers and birds he’d seen every day for years without really looking at them. “Well . . . yeah,” he mumbled.

Now Sue stared. “You’re not doing that just to drive me crazy,” she said. “You really did meet somebody.”

“I met her at the polling place, matter of fact,” Martin said. “We got to talking, and we seemed to like each other all right, and I got a telephone number from her.”

“Will you call her?” Sue asked.

“I’d be a fool not to, don’t you think?” he answered.

The door opened behind him. His father came into the flat. “What would you be a fool about this time, Chester?” Stephen Douglas Martin asked. He was an older version of his son, also a steelworker,

and a man who'd stubbornly remained a Democrat.

"I'd be a fool to think I could say anything without you making a crack about it," Chester replied.

His sister said, "He met a girl."

"Happens to a lot of people," his father observed. "Well, to a lot of fellows, anyhow." He turned to Chester. "Come on, boy, tell me more. Who is she? What does she do? How did you meet her? Why didn't you tell me about it sooner?"

"How could I tell you about it sooner when it only just now happened?" Martin asked in some irritation.

"Her name's Rita. She's a typist. I met her at the polling place. There. Are you happy now?"

"I don't know." His father looked as surprised as his sister had. "This all sounds pretty sudden."

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"Oh, for heaven's sake," Chester said. "I didn't propose to her. All I did was ask for her telephone number."

"Ask for whose telephone number?" his mother asked. Louisa Martin had heard her husband come in, where she hadn't heard her son. She hurried out from the kitchen to give them both a peck on the cheek.

Chester told the whole story over again for the third time. By then, he'd started to feel as if it had happened to somebody else. His mother exclaimed. So did his father, in chorus with her. They sounded pleased and dubious at the same time.

At the supper table, over a pork roast stuffed with cabbage, his mother said, "It really is about time you settled down, son, and started raising a family of your own."

He rolled his eyes. "I haven't even asked if she wants to go to a picture show with me, and you've already got me married off."

"You shouldn't rush into things with a girl you just met," his father said.

He could have pointed out that he *wasn't* rushing into anything. He could have, but he didn't. What point? Neither his father nor his mother would pay the least attention. He was sure of that. He changed the subject: "I wish we had one of those wireless machines. Then we could find out who's winning the election tonight without waiting for the morning paper."

"They're so expensive," his mother said.

"They're less than they were last year," Chester said.

"Maybe they'll be still less next year, or the year after that," his mother said. "If they are, maybe I'll think about getting one. But I've got better things to do with a few hundred dollars right now than to put them into a cabinet that sits there and makes noise all the time."

"It's not just noise, Mother," Sue said. "It's music and people talking and all sorts of exciting things."

"I think it's nothing but a fad, myself," Stephen Douglas Martin said. "After all, once you've heard a band playing John Philip Sousa marches once, how many more times are you going to want to?"

"You could hear something different the next time," Chester said.

"Yes, but are there enough different new things to put on the wireless every hour of the day, every day of the week, every week of the year?" His father shook his head. "I don't think so."

Since Chester had no idea whether there would be or not—and since he didn't think his father had any idea, either—he didn't argue. He said, "I could go over to the Socialists' hall and find out."

"Well, if you want to," his mother said, her tone suggesting she would sooner he stayed.

In the end, he did stay. He'd already put in a long, hard day, one made longer and harder by voting and by walking back to the flat after he'd met Rita Habicht. He went to sleep in his cramped little bedroom.

Whenever he thought about how crowded things were, he remembered three years of sleeping in the trenches, sometimes under rain or snow. Compared to that, this didn't look so bad.

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In the morning, newsboys hawked papers with big, black headlines: SINCLAIR REELECTED! They shouted out the same thing. Chester felt like cheering; his father, no doubt, would be irate. His father could lump it, for all of him. *Four more years to show the country what we can do,* he thought, and went off to his own dangerous, backbreaking job whistling a cheery tune.

Cincinnatus Driver was sure he was the happiest black man in Des Moines, Iowa. Des Moines didn't have a whole lot of black men in it, happy or otherwise, but he would have bet he led the parade. The reason he was a man with a song in his heart was simple: he'd just found the perfect Christmas present for his son, Achilles.

The tin fire engine was a foot and a half long, with rubber tires, a ladder that went up almost a yard, a bell that made a godawful racket, and half a dozen lead firemen. He was sure Achilles, who was nine, would play with it not just for hours but for weeks. Grinning, he carried it over to the clerk behind the cash register.

"That'll be a dollar and ninety-nine cents," the woman said briskly.

"Here y'are, ma'am." Cincinnatus gave her two dollar bills. His accent was softer than the sharp local English; along with his family, he'd left Covington, Kentucky, not long after the war ended. He'd hoped he'd left his troubles behind him. So far, his hopes looked like coming true.

"Here's your change." The clerk handed him a penny. She smiled. "I hope your little boy enjoys it."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am." Cincinnatus smiled, too. He wouldn't have got so much politeness from a white woman in Covington. He might not have got it here, either. He'd seen that—some places, they wouldn't sell him things till they saw his money. But, on the whole, Negroes didn't have too hard a time in Des Moines. They were thin enough on the ground here to be reckoned a novelty, not a menace.

Still smiling, Cincinnatus took the fire engine out to his truck. The machine was a beat-up White of Great War vintage. Cincinnatus had driven such snorting beasts all through Kentucky and down into Tennessee during the war, in the service of the U.S. Army. Now he worked on his own behalf—and a White made in 1916 or 1917 was, by the end of 1924, something less than it had been.

He didn't care. The truck was a lot better than the spavined Duryea he'd driven from Covington to Des Moines. It held a lot. He was able to make a good many repairs on it himself; he'd had practice. And, when he couldn't fix the truck, he'd found a mechanic who was both cheap and competent: an immigrant from Italy for whom a black man was but one wonder of a wonder-filled America.

He cranked the engine to get it to turn over. *One of these days, I'm going to put a self-starter in this machine.* He'd had that thought before, too. But the motor hadn't had a chance to cool down, so cranking it was easy. He got behind the wheel, trod on the clutch, put the truck in gear, and drove off.

Night fell as he made his way to the northwestern side of town. The White was of recent enough vintage to have electric headlights and not acetylene lamps; he could turn them on from the cabin, and didn't have to get out and fiddle with matches.

The truck wheezed to a stop in front of the apartment building where his family lived. The motor shook and coughed a couple of times after he took out the ignition key, then fell silent. He got out. Wrapping the toy fire engine in some burlap, he carried it into the building.

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In the lobby, Joey Chang, who ran a laundry and whose family lived on the floor above Cincinnatus, nodded to him and said, "Hello."

"Hello, Joey," he answered, doing his best to hide a smile. The Chinaman seemed as exotic to him as a mere Negro did to an Italian immigrant. There might have been a couple of Chinese in Covington back when it was part of the CSA. On the other hand, there might not have, too. He'd never eaten chop suey before coming to Des Moines. He liked Chinese food. It was cheap and good and something out of the ordinary.

As soon as he walked into his own flat, Cincinnatus was glad he'd camouflaged the fire engine, because Achilles sat at the kitchen table doing homework. The boy pointed. "What you got, Pa?"

"None o' your business. Get back to work," Cincinnatus answered. Back in Covington, before the war, there'd been no public schools for Negroes. Finding school not only present but required in Des Moines had made a lot of the hardships in uprooting his family worthwhile.

Wagging a finger at Achilles, he went on, “I had to sneak around to learn my letters. You got help. I expect you to take advantage of it.”

“I am, Pa,” his son said. “But you still haven’t told me what you got there.” Achilles’ accent was an odd mix of Kentucky and Iowa. Cincinnatus knew he would have said *ain’t told me* himself. He also knew that was wrong, but it seemed natural to him in a way it didn’t to the boy.

He went into the kitchen, where Elizabeth had a beef tongue boiling in a pot with potatoes and carrots, and with some cloves that gave the air a spicy smell. She too pointed to the burlap-wrapped toy.

“What’s that?”

Cincinnatus showed her—the fire engine wasn’t for her, after all. Her eyes widened. She nodded. He said, “You got a place in here where we can hide this till the day?”

“Right here.” She opened a cabinet and pointed to a top shelf. He stood on tiptoe to push the fire engine back as far as he could. That done, he gave her a kiss. She smiled, as if to say something might come of that later on.

Then Amanda toddled into the kitchen and wrapped her arms around his shins. “Dada!” she said. Hard to believe she was a year and a half old now. Above her head, Cincinnatus and Elizabeth exchanged wry, tired grins. Something might not come of Elizabeth’s inviting smile, too. Before Amanda was born, Cincinnatus had forgotten, perhaps mercifully, how much of a handful a baby in the house was. She’d reminded him, though.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Elizabeth said. “We got us a letter today.”

“A letter?” Cincinnatus said in surprise. “Who from?” Most—almost all—the mail they got was either bills or advertising circulars. Only a few people they knew, either friends or relatives, could read and write.

For that matter, Elizabeth could hardly read and write herself. Till Achilles started going to school, she hadn’t even known the ABCs. But he’d taught her some of what he’d learned. Now she said, “It came from Covington, I know that. But I can’t make out who sent it, and I didn’t open it up. Didn’t reckon I could cipher it out myself, and I didn’t know if it was anything Achilles ought to see, you know what I mean?”

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“Sure do.” Cincinnatus looked in the icebox and took out a bottle of beer. Iowa was a dry state that took being dry seriously. The beer was unofficial, illegal homebrew, made by Mr. Chang upstairs. Till he came to Des Moines, Cincinnatus hadn’t know that Chinamen drank beer, let alone made it themselves.

As he yanked the cork out of the bottle, he said, “Why don’t you let me have a look at it now?”

“I do that,” she said. When she left the kitchen, her skirt swirled, showing off her ankles and several inches of shapely calf. She’d finally given in to what everyone else was wearing these days. Cincinnatus thought the new styles risqué, but that didn’t keep him from looking. On the contrary. She brought back the envelope. “Here.”

Sure enough, it bore a Covington postmark. Cincinnatus tried to puzzle out the return address, but couldn’t. He took a clasp knife from his pocket and opened the envelope. Looking up from the letter, he asked Elizabeth, “You recollect a fellow name of Hadrian, moved next door to my folks a little after the war ended?”

She thought, then nodded. “Believe I do. Never had nothin’ much to do with him, though. How come?

What’s he say?”

“Says Pa’s sick, mighty sick, maybe fixin’-to-die sick.” Cincinnatus wished he’d never got the letter. He went on, “Says Ma asked him to write me, get me to come back down there ‘fore Pa goes.” Tears blurred his vision. His father wasn’t an old man, but anybody could take sick.

“Mama Livia, she can’t very well write you her own self,” Elizabeth said. That was true; Cincinnatus’

mother and his father, Seneca, were both illiterate. They’d grown up as slaves, back in the days when teaching a Negro his letters was against the law.

“I know.” Cincinnatus took a long pull at the beer bottle, wishing it were something stronger. He read the letter again, as if expecting it to say something different the second time around. That was foolish, but

who wasn't foolish sometimes?

"What you gwine do?" Elizabeth asked.

"I got to go," Cincinnatus said. "We got enough money to pull through if I'm gone a week or two." They had more money than that, even after he'd bought the bigger truck. He'd always salted away as much as he could. Even when Kentucky was still a Confederate state, he'd done his best to get ahead, and his best had been about as good as a Negro's could be in the CSA.

Elizabeth nodded. "All right. You take the truck or you ride a train?"

"Train," he answered. "Hadrian, he say to wire him when I come, an' he'll meet me at the station." He finished his beer in a couple of big gulps. "Wish he would've wired me. I be there by now." He sighed.

"Letter's cheaper, I reckon. What can you do?"

"I say prayers Sunday an' every night for your father," Elizabeth said. "Papa Seneca, he's a nice man."

"Yeah," Cincinnatus said tonelessly. As people will, he'd come to take his father for granted. The idea that the older man might not be there forever—might not be there for very much longer—hit him hard, and all the harder because it caught him by surprise. Everything had been going so well. Everything still was—for him. But with his father sick, that didn't matter any more.

There was a Western Union office in the Des Moines train station. Cincinnatus sent Hadrian a telegram **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

from there. A couple of hours later, he boarded an eastbound train. A crow flying from Des Moines to Covington would have gone about six hundred miles. The train took a longer route, and took its own sweet time getting there. It seemed to stop at every worthless little town along the way, too. Cincinnatus stared out the window, now and then drumming his fingers on his trouser leg in impatience.

On a train in the CSA, the attendants would have been black men. Here, they were almost all foreigners of one sort or another. They muttered things about Cincinnatus that he couldn't understand, but he didn't think any of them were compliments.

The Confederates had dropped the old railroad bridge from Cincinnati

to Covington into the Ohio when the Great War broke out. The train rattled over its replacement in the wee small hours. Cincinnatus yawned and knuckled his eyes. He hadn't slept a wink. He hoped his father was still breathing.

He had no trouble spotting Hadrian: his family's neighbor was the only Negro waiting on the platform.

He didn't look to have slept much, either. "C-come along with me," he said. Cincinnatus didn't remember him stammering. He had a nervous tic under one eye, too.

No sooner had they got off the platform than four big, tough-looking white men in plain clothes surrounded them. "You fuckin' *bastard* !" Cincinnatus exclaimed. He knew he'd been betrayed—he just didn't know to whom yet. Hadrian miserably hung his head. What had these people done or threatened to get him to write that letter?

They all piled into a big Oldsmobile. When it stopped in front of the city hall, Cincinnatus knew who had him. It didn't make him feel any better—worse, in fact. "Come along, boy," one of the whites snapped.

He'd probably been a cop in the days when Covington belonged to the CSA.

However unwillingly, Cincinnatus went. The man waiting for him inside gave him a smile that might have come from a hunting hound. His luminous, yellow-brown eyes strengthened the resemblance. "Howdy, Cincinnatus," Luther Bliss said. "Been a while, hasn't it?" The head of the Kentucky State Police—the Kentucky secret police—didn't wait for an answer. He turned to Cincinnatus' hard-faced escorts and spoke three words: "Lock him up."

Every once in a while, Nellie Jacobs would take her Order of Remembrance out of its velvet box and look at it. She didn't wear it much—where would a woman who ran a coffee shop in Washington, D.C., have occasion to wear the USA's highest civilian decoration? The last time she'd put it on was for Teddy Roosevelt's funeral. Roosevelt had presented the medal to her with his own hands. He'd given Nellie's daughter, Edna, a medal, too, but hers was only second class, not first.

She didn't know she was being a spy, Nellie thought. *Lord, she wouldn't have cared if the Confederates held Washington forever.* It was funny, if you looked at it the right way.

The eagle on the Order of Remembrance stared fiercely back at her. Of course, Roosevelt hadn't known the whole story, any more than Edna had. Roosevelt hadn't known she'd stuck a knife into Bill Reach, the U.S. spymaster in Washington. Nobody knew that, nobody but Nellie. Not even her husband knew, and Hal Jacobs had reported directly to Reach.

"He had it coming, the filthy son of a bitch," Nellie muttered. It wasn't that Bill Reach had been a drunkard, though he had. But he'd also been a lecher and, in his younger days, a man who'd had—and paid for—assignations with Nellie. He'd thought he could keep on having them, too, if he just slapped **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

down the cash.

Nellie's long oval face settled into the lines of disapproval it had worn so often since she'd escaped the demimonde. *Shows how much he knew,* she thought. She'd fought hard for respectability. She hadn't been about to throw it away for a drunken bastard and his red, throbbing prick. One of the things she liked about her husband was that he didn't trouble her in the bedroom very often. *Old men have their advantages.*

Her mouth twisted. *You're no spring chicken yourself,* she thought. She'd turned fifty earlier in the year. She felt every year of her age, too. It wasn't so much that she was going gray, though she was.

That aside, she looked a good deal younger than her years. But keeping up with a four-year-old would have made anybody feel her years.

As if the thought of Clara were enough to make her get into mischief, she called, "Ma! Help me tie my shoe!"

"I'm coming," Nellie said. Her back twinged when she got off her bed. Clara couldn't tie her shoes yet.

Sometimes she insisted on trying anyhow. Four-year-olds were nothing if not independent. That they drove their parents mad never once crossed their minds, of course. That was part of their . . . charm.

"I'm going to go out and play," Clara declared when Nellie hurried into her bedroom.

"Not yet, you're not." Nellie surveyed the damage. "Oh, child, what *have* you gone and done?"

Actually, the damage itself left little room for doubt. Clara had put her shoes on the wrong feet and then tied as many knots as she could in the shoelaces. She couldn't manage a bow, but knots she had no trouble with. The shoes came up well over her ankles; they were almost boots, and fit snugly even before Clara created her knotty problem.

Nellie couldn't even get the shoes off her daughter till she untied some —several—of the knots. Clara didn't want to hold still for the process. Four-year-olds didn't hold still unless they were asleep or coming down with something. Nellie asked her twice not to squirm. That failing, she swatted Clara's bottom. Her daughter squalled, but then did hold still . . . for a little while.

It was, Nellie decided, long enough. It was, at any rate, long enough for her to get the shoes on their proper feet and tie a couple of bows. "Play on the sidewalk in front of the shop here," Nellie warned.

"Don't you go out in the street. I'm going to come downstairs and keep an eye on you. If you even go *near* the street, you'll get a spanking like you'll never forget. No, you'll get two—one from me,

and one from your pa."

"I promise, Ma." Clara solemnly crossed her heart. "Hope to die."

No, it's so you don't die, Nellie thought, but Clara wouldn't have had the faintest idea what she was talking about. "Let's go downstairs," Nellie said. Clara took her favorite toy, a rag doll named Louise, and went down to the ground floor at what Nellie would have reckoned a suicidal pace. Nellie followed more sedately.

Nellie turned away for a moment to get a whisk broom and a dust pan. The coffee shop was closed on Sundays, of course; Washington's blue laws were as strict as any in the USA. But the more cleaning she did now, the less she would have to worry about come Monday morning, when she'd also be busy brewing coffee, frying eggs and ham and bacon and potatoes, toasting bread, and serving her customers.

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Her door might be shut, but she didn't reckon Sunday a day of rest.

Before Nellie had taken more than three steps, brakes screeched out in the street. Metal crumpled.

Glass tinkled musically. It reminded her of artillery bombardments during the war, but wasn't so dramatic.

Or it wouldn't have been . . . "Oh, God in heaven!" Nellie said, and dashed outside. "Clara!" she shouted. "Where are you, Clara?"

No answer. Fear rising in her like the tide, Nellie stared at the accident. A Ford and a Packard had locked horns. The Ford, predictably, was the loser. Steam gushed from its ruptured radiator. Its driver descended to the street holding a handkerchief to his head, which he'd bloodied when he greeted his windshield face first.

"Clara!" Nellie called again. "Dear God, please . . ." The last time she'd prayed had been during the U.S. artillery barrage that nearly leveled Washington before the Confederates finally, sullenly, drew back into Virginia. God must have heard that prayer—she'd come through alive. But everything back then seemed small and unimportant when set against her daughter's safety. *"Clara!"*

The gray-haired man who'd been driving the Packard had to kick at his door before it would open. He didn't seem badly hurt, and started shouting at the other man: "You idiot! You moron! You thumb-fingered baboon!"

"Fuck you, Grandpa," the man with the bloodied face replied. "You drove right into me."

"Liar!"

"Liar yourself!"

Neither one of them said anything about a little girl, and neither one of them paid any attention to Nellie.

"Clara!" she called once more. She didn't want to look closely at the accident, for fear she would see little legs sticking out from under a wheel. *"Clara!"*

"Boo!"

Nellie sprang a foot in the air. There stood her daughter, coming out from behind the stout iron base of a street lamp. "Thank you, Jesus," Nellie whispered. She ran to her little girl and held her tight.

"Fooled you, Mama!" Clara said happily. "I got down there and— *Ow!* " Nellie applied her hand to the part on which her daughter was in the habit of sitting, much harder than she had before they went outside.

Clara started to howl. "What's that for, Mama? I didn't do nothing!"

"Oh, yes, you did," Nellie said, and spanked her again. "You scared me out of a year's growth, that's what you did. I was afraid one of those cars ran over you, do you know that?"

Clara, at the moment, knew nothing except that her fanny hurt. She tried to get away, and had no luck whatsoever. Nellie dragged her back into the coffee shop. "Louise!" Clara wailed.

Although Nellie was tempted to leave the doll out on the sidewalk, that would have cost more tears and hysterics than it was worth. She snarled, "You stay here. Don't move a muscle!" at Clara, and then went back to retrieve Louise. She all but threw the rag doll at her daughter. "Here!"

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“Thank you, Mama,” Clara said in an unwontedly small voice. She *hadn’t* moved a muscle, and evidently had figured out this was no time to say or do anything that might land her in more trouble.

When Nellie’s husband came back from a friend’s later that morning, Nellie told him the whole story.

Clara looked at him in silent appeal; he was often softer than her mother. But not this time. Hal Jacobs sighed, wuffling out his white mustache. “Clara, you must not play games like that,” he said. “Your mother thought you were hurt, maybe even killed.”

“I’m sorry, Pa,” Clara said. Maybe she even meant it. She seemed more inclined to be good for Hal than she was for Nellie. *She takes after her half sister,* Nellie thought sourly. Edna had always done what she wanted, not what Nellie wanted. She’d taken great pleasure in flaunting it, too.

And she’d married well in spite of everything. When she came to visit as the sun was setting, she wore a maroon silk dress that daringly showed her legs halfway to her knees. Nellie, who’d had a really gamy past, had spent more than thirty years trying to live it down. Edna, in keeping with young people everywhere these days—or so it seemed to Nellie—flaunted her fast life.

“Be good, Armstrong,” she told her son. Armstrong Grimes—Edna’s husband, Merle, came from the same town in Michigan as General Custer—was two, only a couple of years younger than Clara, his aunt. Having told him to be good, Edna let him run wild—that seemed to be her idea of how to raise children.

“How are you, dear?” Nellie asked, pouring Edna a cup of coffee.

“Couldn’t be better, Ma,” Edna answered expansively. She looked like a twenty years’ younger version of her mother, but without the pinched, anxious expression Nellie so often wore. She still thought she could beat the game of life. Nellie was convinced nobody could. But Edna had her reasons. She went on,

“Merle just got himself promoted in the Reconstruction Agency. That’s another forty dollars a month, and you’d best believe it’ll come in handy.”

“Bully,” Nellie said, meaning perhaps a third of it. She’d had to fret

and scrape for every dime she ever made—she'd had to do worse things than fret and scrape for some of the dimes she'd made before Edna was born. As far as she could see, her daughter had things easy but didn't begin to guess how lucky she was.

Before Edna could go on bragging, a shriek rose from the direction of the kitchen. "Ma!" Clara squealed. "Armstrong just pulled my hair, Ma!"

Edna laughed. Nellie didn't. "Well, pull his back," she said.

Her older daughter bristled. A moment later, Armstrong Grimes started to cry. Then Clara shrieked again. "Ma! He *bit* me!"

"You going to tell her to bite him back, too?" Edna asked. Nellie glared. Children, whether four or thirty, could drive you right out of your mind.

Reggie Bartlett was a first-rate weather prophet. He looked at his boss and said, "Reckon it'll rain tomorrow."

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Jeremiah Harmon looked up from the pills he was compounding. "Shoulder kicking up again?" the druggist asked.

"Sure is," Bartlett answered. "Leg, too, matter of fact. I took me a couple of aspirins, but they don't shift the ache." He'd spent the end of the war in a U.S. military hospital after catching two bullets from a machine-gun burst and getting captured down in Sequoyah. The wounds had finally healed, but their memory lingered on.

"Wouldn't surprise me if you were right." Harmon added a little water to his mix and put it in a twenty-pill mold. He swung the hinged top of the mold into place. "There we go. These'll make somebody piss like a racehorse."

"I've heard that one a million times. How do racehorses piss?" Reggie asked, and then, before his boss could, he answered his own question: "Pretty damn quick, I bet."

Jeremiah Harmon snorted. "You've always got a snappy comeback, don't you?"

“I do my best,” Bartlett answered. He had an engaging grin, one that let him say things a dour man could never have got away with.

The bell over the front door jangled. A customer came in. “Help you with something, sir?” Reggie asked.

“Yes. Thanks. Chilly out there.” The man came up to the counter. Bartlett wished he hadn’t. His breath was so dreadful, he might not have used a toothbrush since before the Great War. Maybe, if God were kind, he’d ask about one now, or about mouthwash. But no such luck; he said, “What have you got in the way of rat poison?”

You could breathe on them, Reggie thought. *That’d do the job, the way the Yankees’ chlorine killed the rats in the trenches on the Roanoke front.* No matter how engaging his grin, though, he knew he couldn’t get away with that. Life in Richmond was too civilized for such blunt truths. “Here, let me look,”

he said, and pulled up a bright yellow box with an upside-down rat with X’s for eyes on the front of it.

“This ought to do the job.”

“It’ll shift ’em, will it?” the man asked, breathing decay into Reggie’s face.

“Sure will, sir.” Reggie drew back as far as he could, which wasn’t nearly far enough. “Rats, mice, even cockroaches. You put it down, they eat it, and they die.”

“Reckon I can manage that.” The customer dug a hand in his pocket. Coins jingled. “How much?”

“Twenty-two cents,” Bartlett said. The man gave him a quarter. He solemnly returned three pennies.

“Thanks.” The fellow put them in his pocket. He took the box of rat poison and headed out the door.

“Freedom!” Without waiting for an answer, he left the drugstore.

Reggie’s boss looked up from the pills, which he was removing from the mold. “You showed fine patience there,” he said. “I don’t know if I could have done the same. I could smell him all the way over here.”

“You could give a man like that a straight flush in a poker game, and

he'd still find a way to lose,"

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Bartlett said. "No wonder he's a Freedom Party man."

"His money is as good as anyone else's," Harmon said. "In fact, you can gloat if you like, because his money's going into my pocket, and into yours, and neither one of us can stand Jake Featherston."

"We're not fools. I hope to God we're not fools, anyway," Reggie answered. "The only thing Featherston can do is make a speech that sounds good if you're a sorry so-and-so who can't add six and five without taking off your shoes."

"I'm not going to try to tell you you're wrong—you ought to know that." Harmon looked at the clock on the wall. "Just about quitting time. Why don't you knock off a couple of minutes early? Call it a bonus for the way you dealt with that fellow."

"Thank you kindly. I don't mind if I do." Bartlett put on his coat and his fedora. "I'll see you in the morning."

"See you then." Jeremiah Harmon was busy making more pills. Reggie sometimes wondered if he ever went home at night.

The man with slit-trench breath had been right: it was chilly outside. Bartlett wished he'd brought along a pair of earmuffs. As he hurried toward the trolley stop a couple of blocks away, he went past some posters that hadn't been pasted to a half ruinous wall when he walked by it on the way to work that morning.

VOTE FREEDOM IN 1925! they shouted in red letters on a white background. Below that, in smaller type, they added, *Jake Featherston talks straight. Every Wednesday on the wireless. The truth shall set you free.*

"And when will you ever hear the truth from that son of a bitch?" Reggie muttered. He'd heard Jake Featherston on the stump in the very earliest days of the Freedom Party. He hadn't liked what he heard then, and he hadn't liked anything he'd heard from Featherston or the Freedom Party since.

Only difference is, Featherston was a little snake then, and he's a big snake

now, Bartlett thought.

But even a big snake could lose some hide now and then. Reggie hooked his fingernails under the top of one of those posters and yanked. As he'd hoped, most of it tore away. The fellows who'd hung the posters had done a fast job, a cheap job, but not a good one. They hadn't used enough paste to stick them down tight. Whistling "Dixie," he ripped down one poster after another.

He hadn't got all of them, though, before a raucous voice shouted, "Hey, you bastard, what the hell you think you're doing?"

"Taking down lies," Reggie answered calmly.

"Them ain't lies!" the man said. He was about Reggie's age, but shabby, scrawny, still wearing a threadbare butternut uniform tunic that had seen a lot of better years. Veterans down on their luck swelled the ranks of the Freedom Party. This one snarled, "You touch another one o' them posters, and I'll beat the living shit out of you."

"You don't want to try that, buddy," Bartlett said. Down came another poster. The shabby veteran howled with rage and trotted toward him. Thanks to the wounds Reggie had taken in Sequoyah, he wasn't much good either at fisticuffs or running away. He'd had run-ins with Freedom Party men before, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

too.

During the war, a .45 had been an officer's weapon, nothing to speak of when set against the Tredegar rifles most ordinary soldiers carried. These days, the .45 in a hidden holster on Reggie's belt put him in mind of an extra ace up his sleeve. He took it out and pointed it at the onrushing would-be tough guy. His two-handed grip said he knew exactly what to do with it, too.

The Freedom Party man skidded to a stop in the middle of the street, so abruptly that he flailed his arms and rocked back on his heels. The barrel of the .45 had to look the size of a railroad tunnel as Reggie aimed it at his midriff. "I told you, you don't want to try that," Reggie said.

"You'll pay for this," the scruffy veteran said. "Everybody's gonna pay for fucking with us. You're going on a list, you—" He decided not to do any more cussing. Running your mouth at a man with a pistol when you didn't have one of your own wasn't the smartest thing you

could do. Even a Freedom Party muscle man could figure that out.

“Get lost,” Bartlett told him. He gestured with the .45 to emphasize the words. “Go on down to the corner there, turn it, and keep walking. You do anything else, you’ll be holding up a lily.”

Face working with all the things he dared not say, the other man did as he was told. Bartlett finished tearing down the posters, then went on to the trolley stop. His only worry was that the Freedom Party man had a weapon of his own, one he hadn’t had a chance to use. But the fellow had talked about beating him up, not shooting him. And he didn’t reappear.

Up came the trolley, bell clanging. Reggie tossed a dime into the fare box and took a seat. The dime should have been five cents; prices weren’t quite what they had been before the war. But they weren’t what they had been afterwards, either—he wasn’t paying a million dollars, or a billion, for the privilege of riding across town to his flat.

Nobody on the trolley car had the slightest idea who he was or what he’d just done. That suited him fine, too. He had a chance to relax a little and look out the window. Before long, the trolley passed more of those VOTE FREEDOM IN 1925! posters. Reggie’s lip curled. He couldn’t rip them all down, however much he wished he could.

Seven and a half years after the Great War ended, not all the destruction U.S. aeroplanes had visited on Richmond was yet repaired. Plenty of burnt-out and bombed building fronts stared at the street through window frames naked of glass; they might have been so many skulls peering out through empty eye sockets. *The damnyankees made my home town into Golgotha,* Bartlett thought. *One of these days, we’ll have to pay them back. But how?*

He shivered, though the crowded trolley was warm with humanity. That was how the Freedom Party thought, and how it got its members. *Haven’t you had enough of war?* he asked himself. Asked that way, he could hardly say no.

He got off at the shop nearest his flat. For supper, he fried up a ham steak and some potatoes. After he did the dishes—he was a fussy, neat bachelor—he read for a while and went to bed. He wouldn’t have minded a wireless set, so he could listen to music or a football game, but not on the salary of a druggist’s assistant.

The next day did bring a chilly drizzle. Work at the drugstore went much as the previous day had. He didn’t bother telling his boss about

the fuss over the posters. Jeremiah Harmon had no use for the
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Freedom Party, no, but Reggie didn't want him fussing like a mother hen, which was just what he would have done.

"Hey, you!" somebody called to Reggie when he walked to the trolley stop that evening. It was the veteran he'd quarreled with. He wore a disreputable hat to keep the rain off his face.

His hand went to the .45. "Told you I didn't want you bothering me," he said.

"No bother, pal," the fellow said. He pasted on a smile as he came up to Bartlett, and he made sure he kept his hands in plain sight. "We've all got to live and let live, ain't that right?"

Reggie stared. "That's not how you talked yesterday," he said, his voice hard with suspicion. "What's wrong with you now?"

"Not a thing," the Freedom Party man said. "I just got a little hasty, is all. You went through some of the things I did, you'd get hasty, too."

"I went through plenty myself," Bartlett said. "You want to go through it again? That's what that damn Featherston's got in mind."

"No, pal. You don't understand at all," the veteran said. He still had on the same ancient tunic he'd worn the evening before.

Noticing that, Reggie didn't notice the footsteps coming up behind him till they stopped. That made him notice, and made him start to turn, his pistol coming out of the holster. Too late. He heard three shots.

Two slugs hammered him in the chest. The next thing he knew, he was on the ground, reaching for the

.45 that had fallen from his fingers.

The veteran scooped it up. "Nice piece," he said, and then, grinning, "Freedom!" Reggie heard him as if from far away, and further every moment. He didn't hear the man and his friend running away at all, or anything else ever again.

* * *

Three guards came up to Cincinnatus Driver's cell. Two of them stood in the corridor, their pistols aimed at his midsection. The third opened the cell door. "Come along," he said.

"Where you takin' me?" Cincinnatus asked.

"That ain't none o' your business, boy," the guard snapped, for all the world as if Kentucky were still part of the CSA, not the USA. "Come along, you hear?"

"Yes, suh." Cincinnatus got up off his cot and came. He'd quickly learned how far he could go with these guards before they stopped talking and started persuading him by other means. One beating had been plenty to drive the lesson home: not just the beating itself, but how much they enjoyed giving it to him. If they ever decided to beat him to death, they would do it with smiles on their faces.

"Hands behind your back," the guard told him. He obeyed. The guard clicked handcuffs onto his wrists.

They were cruelly tight, but Cincinnatus kept his mouth shut about that, too. Complaining just got them tightened more.

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The guards marched him along the corridor. He recognized some of the men sitting or lying in their cells.

Some, black like him, were Reds. Others, whites, were men who'd been Confederate diehards during the war and probably belonged to the Freedom Party nowadays. Maybe some of the other prisoners recognized him, too. If so, no one gave a sign.

"This way," one of the guards told him. They led him across the exercise yard he normally saw for an hour a week, down another corridor, and into an office. A tall, backless stool sat in front of the desk.

Luther Bliss sat behind it. The guards slammed Cincinnatus down on the stool, hard.

"Here we are again," the head of the Kentucky State Police said.

"Yes, suh," Cincinnatus said. "I want a lawyer, suh." He hadn't tried

that one in a while. The worst the other man could tell him was no.

Bliss' smile never touched his hunting-dog eyes. "If you was still in Des Moines, maybe you could have one," he answered. "But this here's Kentucky, and the rules are different here. This is one of the reclaimed states, and we aren't about to put up with treason or rebellion. You mess around with that stuff and you get caught, we take care of you our own way."

"I wasn't messin' around with nothin' here," Cincinnatus said bitterly. "I was just livin' my life up in Iowa till you got that sorry Hadrian nigger to write that lyin' letter to get me down here in the first place. You call that fair . . . suh?"

"I had you once before," Luther Bliss replied in meditative tones. "I had you, and I was going to squeeze you, and Teddy Roosevelt made me turn you loose. He made me pay you a hundred dollars out of my own pocket, too. I have . . . a long memory for these things, Cincinnatus."

Cincinnatus hadn't forgotten that, either, though Bliss hadn't mentioned it till now. "Do Jesus, Mr. Bliss, you want your hundred dollars back, I'll pay it to you. Just let me wire my wife an'—"

Bliss shook his head. "I get paid back with interest."

"I'll pay you interest. I got the money. I done pretty good for myself up there."

"I don't want your money. I get paid back *my* kind of interest."

He was what he was. His kind of interest involved pain and misery. That was what he dished out. That was what the people who told him what to do wanted him to dish out. If, every once in a while, he dished them out to people who didn't really deserve them, the people who told him what to do probably didn't mind. They might even figure he deserved a little fun on the job.

Like a hunting dog taking a scent, Luther Bliss leaned forward. "Enough chitchat. About time we get down to business, I reckon."

Before Cincinnatus could brace himself, one of the guards slapped him in the face. He tumbled off the stool and also banged his funny bone on the floor as he fell. "Why'd he do that, Mr. Bliss?" he said, slowly climbing to his feet. "I ain't done nothin' to nobody."

“You lie. Everyone lies.” Luther Bliss sounded sad but certain. Policemen got used to people lying to them. Maybe they even got to where they expected it. Secret policemen probably heard and expected
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even more lies than any other kind. Bliss pointed to the stool. “Sit your nigger ass back down, Cincinnatus. You got to tell the truth when I ask my questions.”

“You didn’t ask me no questions,” Cincinnatus said reproachfully. “Joe there, he jus’ hauled off an’ hit me.”

“That’s for all the lies you’ve already told me, and to remind you not to tell me any more,” Luther Bliss answered. Again, his smile never reached his eyes. “You ought to be thankful we’ve gone easy on you so far.”

“Easy!” Cincinnatus exclaimed. “He damn near knocked my head off.” A few months in jail—and years of sparring before then—had given him and the secret policeman an odd sort of camaraderie. He could, up to a point, speak his mind without making Luther Bliss any more likely to do something dreadful to him.

Bliss nodded now. “He just thumped you a bit. Worse we’ve done, we’ve beaten you up. That ain’t so much of a much, Cincinnatus, believe you me it ain’t. It’s a new age we’re livin’ in. Electricity’s everywhere. You take an ordinary car battery and some wires, and you clip ’em to a man’s ears, or to the skin of his belly, or maybe to his privates. . . .”

Cincinnatus didn’t want to show fear. But his mouth went dry at the thought of electricity trickling through his balls. Would he ever be able to get it up again after something like that? *Please, Jesus, don’t let me find out!*

Meditatively, Bliss went on, “Other nice thing about that is, it doesn’t leave any marks. You niggers don’t show bruises as much as a white man would, but even so. . . .” He leaned forward. “I reckon you already told me everything you know about Kennedy and Conroy and the rest of those goddamn diehards.”

“Mr. Bliss, I done sung like a canary ‘bout them bastards.” There Cincinnatus spoke the truth. He owed no loyalty to the white men who’d done all they could to help the Confederate cause in Kentucky. They might have killed him or betrayed him to U.S. authorities, but

they'd had no great hold on his loyalty. As far as he could see, any Negro who backed the Confederates from anything but compulsion was some kind of idiot.

The secret policeman pointed to him. "You're still holding out, though, when it comes to Apicius and the rest of the Reds. Like calls to like. Just like the diehards, you coons stick together."

"Do Jesus, how can I know what they're up to when I moved away years ag—" Cincinnatus got that far before the guard belted him again. This time, he was braced for it, and didn't fall off the stool. He tasted blood in his mouth.

"You don't expect me to believe anything like that, do you?" Luther Bliss sounded sad, like a preacher contemplating sinful mankind. "I ain't stupid, Cincinnatus, no matter what you think."

"I never reckoned you was." Again, Cincinnatus told the exact truth. Fear of Bliss had helped him decide to leave Kentucky, but he'd never thought the other man was dumb. Just the opposite: he didn't care to live under Bliss' magnifying glass for the rest of this days. Living under his thumb, though, was even worse.

"You get letters. You know what's going on here," the secret policeman said.

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"Not hardly," Cincinnatus told him. "Don't hardly know that many folks what can read an' write. You keepin' tabs on me all the time like I reckon you been doin', you know that's true."

For a moment, he thought he'd got through to Bliss. The man's eyes narrowed. He looked thoughtful.

But then, a moment before he spoke, Cincinnatus realized he was playing a part. He was building up hope in his captive only to dash it: "Well, sonny, so what? Long as you're here, you'll pay for everything you done anyways."

Cincinnatus would have been more devastated if he'd had more hope to lose. He wanted to tell Bliss where to head in. A couple of times, back in the days when he was still free, he *had* told Bliss where to head in. He'd enjoyed it mightily then, too. But he was paying for it

now.

“What you got to tell me about them Reds?” Luther Bliss asked now.

“I done told you everything I ever knew,” Cincinnatus answered. It wasn’t quite true, but he didn’t think Bliss knew that.

He did know what was coming next. It came. Joe and the other guards got to work on him. They enjoyed what they did, yes, but not to the point of getting carried away and doing him permanent harm: they were, in their way, professionals. It went on for a very long, painful time.

What hurt most of all, though, was a casual remark Bliss made halfway through the torment: “You might as well sing, by God. It isn’t like anybody on the outside gives a damn about what happens to one miserable nigger in a Kentucky jail.”

At last, the beating stopped. The guards dragged Cincinnatus back to his cell. He probably could have walked. He made himself out to be weaker and hurt worse than he really was. Maybe that made them go a little easier on him than they would have otherwise. On the other hand, maybe it didn’t do a single goddamn thing.

“See you next time, boy,” Joe said as his pal undid the manacles from Cincinnatus’ wrists.

Cincinnatus lay on his cot like a dead man. Had Luther Bliss sent for him more often, he *would* have been a dead man in short order. Maybe Bliss didn’t want to kill him right away. Maybe, on the other hand, the secret policeman was taking so many different vengeances, he wasn’t in a hurry about finishing off any one of them.

It isn’t like anybody on the outside gives a damn about what happens to one miserable nigger in a Kentucky jail. In a way, that was a lie. Cincinnatus knew as much. Elizabeth cared. Achilles cared.

Amanda cared. But what could they do? They were black, too, black in a white man’s country. Nobody who could do anything cared about Cincinnatus. That burned like acid. It would keep on burning long after the pain of this latest beating eased, too.

He ran his tongue over his teeth. So far, the goons had broken only one. He’d taken no new damage there today. They hadn’t done anything to him this time that wouldn’t fade in a couple of weeks. In the meantime . . . *In the meantime, it’s gonna hurt, and ain’t nothin’ you*

can do about it.

A cart squeaked up the corridor: supper trays. Cincinnatus wondered if he'd be able to eat. *You better.*

You got to stay strong. A redheaded white man shoved a tray of something that smelled greasy into Cincinnatus' cell. The fellow wore the same sort of uniform as the guards who'd beaten him.

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In a low voice, the redhead said, "Freedom." Cincinnatus suppressed a groan. Just what he needed—somebody with diehard sympathies mocking him. *I ought to report you, you bastard. Luther Bliss'd make you pay.* But then the fellow went on, "We'll get you out." He pushed the cart away.

Cincinnatus stared after him. Did he mean that? And, if he did, whose side was he really on?

IV

Another trip down to Washington. Flora Blackford preferred Philadelphia, and didn't care who knew it.

But she was willing to excuse the trip to the formal capital of the USA for one reason: so her husband could for the second time take the oath of office as vice president of the United States.

"Now we think about 1928," she told him as the Pullman car rattled south from Philadelphia. Then she shook her head. "No. That's not right. We should have been thinking about 1928 since the minute we won last November."

Hosea Blackford's smile showed amusement—and, she was glad to see, ambition, too. "I don't know about you, Flora," he said, "but I *have* been thinking about it since the minute we won last November, and a while before that, too. When I first saw what the office was, I didn't think I could do much with it or go any further. I've changed my mind, though."

"Good," Flora said. "You should have, and you'd better think about it. You can be president of the United States. You really can."

“That wouldn’t be too bad for a boy off a Dakota farm, would it?” he said. “You always hear talk about such things. ‘Any mother’s son can grow up to be president.’ That’s what people say. Having the chance to make it come true, though . . .”

“Of course, if you thought being president was the most important thing in the world, you never should have married me.” Flora tried to keep her tone light. Other people would be saying the same thing much more pointedly in the years to come. She was as sure of that as she was of her own name. A presidential candidate with a Jew for a wife? Unheard of! How many votes would it cost him?

“That *has* occurred to me,” Hosea Blackford said slowly. “It couldn’t very well *not* have occurred to me.

But then I decided that, if I had to choose between the two, I would rather spend the rest of my life with you than be president. So I’ll take my chances, and the country can take its.”

Flora stared at him. Then she kissed him. One thing led to another. The run from Philadelphia down to Washington wasn’t a very long one, especially not when traveling on President Sinclair’s express. They barely had time to get dressed again and set their clothes to rights before the train came in to Union Station.

“It’s a good thing you don’t have to wrestle with a corset, the way you would have before the war,”

Hosea said, adjusting his necktie in the mirror.

“Don’t speak of such things—you don’t know what you’re talking about,” Flora answered. “The only **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

thing I can think of is, whoever put women in corsets must have hated us. Especially in summertime. A corset on a hot summer day . . .” She shuddered.

“Well, you wouldn’t have had to worry about the heat today.” Her husband looked out the window.

“The snow’s still coming down.”

“March is late in the year for a snowstorm,” Flora said. “I wonder if what people say is true: that the weather’s been peculiar since the Great War, and that it made the weather peculiar.”

Hosea Blackford laughed. “Back in Dakota, I would have said *May* was late for a snowstorm, but nothing sooner than that. If you ask me, the weather’s always peculiar. I have a suspicion it’s peculiar because it’s peculiar, too, and not because we made it that way. I can’t prove that, but it’s what I think.

The weather’s bigger than anything we can do, even the Great War.”

“I hope you’re right,” she said.

On the platform, a military band blared away. Flora didn’t care for that. It wasn’t a proper Socialist symbol, even if it was a symbol of the presidency. But if President Sinclair wanted it—and he did—she could hardly complain. People called her the conscience of the Congress, but this wasn’t a question of conscience—only one of taste.

A limousine whisked the president and his wife to the White House. Another one brought the Blackfords there. The journey took only a few minutes. When Flora saw the Washington Monument, she pointed.

“It’s taller than it was when we came down here for Roosevelt’s funeral. You can really tell.”

Her husband nodded. “Before President Sinclair’s term is up, it’ll be back to its full height. No mark on the sides to show how much of it the Confederates knocked down, either. I think that’s good.”

“So do I,” Flora agreed. “No matter what the Democrats say, there can be such a thing as too much remembrance.”

“Yes.” Hosea sighed. “Some people just can’t see that. Why anyone would want to remember all the horror we went through during the Great War . . . Well, it’s beyond me.”

“Beyond me, too,” Flora said. “Try not to get into an argument with my brother tomorrow.”

“I won’t argue if David doesn’t,” her husband said. “I’ll try not to argue even if he does.” David Hamburger had lost a leg in the last year of the war. In spite of that—or maybe because of it—he’d gone from Socialist to conservative Democrat since. Having paid so much, he couldn’t, wouldn’t, believe that payment hadn’t been worthwhile.

During President Sinclair’s—and Vice President Blackford’s—first inauguration, Flora had been a Congresswoman, yes. But she hadn’t been Blackford’s wife, and hadn’t been fully swept up into the social

whirl surrounding the occasion. Now she went from one reception to another. She found it more wearing than enjoyable.

When she said as much, Hosea Blackford laughed. “Are you sure you’re a New York Jew, and not one of those gloomy Protestants from New England? No matter what they say, there’s nothing in the Bible against having a good time.”

“I didn’t say there was,” Flora answered. “But it all seems so—excessive.”

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“Oh, is that all you’re worrying about?” Hosea laughed again. “Of course it’s excessive. That’s the point of it.”

She gave him a disapproving look. “I’m sure Louis XVI said the same thing just before the French Revolution.”

“Not fair,” Hosea said.

“Maybe not.” Flora didn’t want to argue with her husband, any more than she wanted him quarreling with her brother. But she wasn’t altogether convinced, either.

She found believing him easier when Inauguration Day came. When the Socialists won the election in 1920, electricity had filled the air. The Democrats had dominated U.S. politics since the election of 1884.

Some people had feared proletarian revolution. Some had looked for it.

It hadn’t come. Politics had gone on as usual—the same song, but in a different key. Flora supposed that was a good thing. She still sometimes had a sense of opportunity missed, though.

This second Socialist inauguration seemed different. Now no one acted astonished the day had ever come. People took it for granted, in fact. Flora didn’t know whether that was good or bad, either. She did know that, up on the reviewing stand in front of the White House, she wondered if she’d freeze to death before her husband and President Sinclair took the oaths of office for their second terms.

But having her family up on the stand with her made up for a lot. Her

older sister Sophie's son Yossel was very big now—he was almost ten. He'd never seen his father, who'd been killed in action before he was born. Flora had hardly seen her younger sister Esther's new husband, a clerk named Meyer Katz.

She was also startled at how gray her parents were getting.

She wished her brother David hadn't worn his Soldiers' Circle pin, with a sword through the year of his conscription class. Only reactionaries did. But he wore his Purple Heart next to it. That and the stick he used and the slow, rolling gait of a man who made do with an artificial leg after an above-the-knee amputation meant no one near him said a word about it. His younger brother, Isaac, had gone through his turn in the Army after the Great War. His tour had been quiet, uneventful. He didn't wear a pin on his lapel.

In President Sinclair's second inaugural address, he talked about justice for the working man, old-age pensions, and "getting along with our neighbors on this great continent." The first two drew fierce applause from the crowd, the third rather less.

"Memories of the war are still too fresh," Hosea Blackford said when all the speeches and parades were over. "In another ten years, people will look more kindly on the Confederate States."

"Not everyone will," David Hamburger said. He was only a tailor talking to the vice president of the United States, but he spoke his mind.

His brother-in-law frowned. They were going to argue after all. "Would you want your children to go through what you did? Do you think the Confederates are mad enough to want their children to go through it again?"

"I hope there's never a war again," Flora said.

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"I hope the same thing," David answered. "But hoping there won't be and staying ready in case there is are two different animals."

"We'd do better if we'd made a just peace, not the harsh one Teddy Roosevelt forced the CSA to swallow," Hosea Blackford said. "And we're still trying to figure out what to do with Canada."

“You try giving away anything Roosevelt won and you’ll lose the next election quicker than you ever thought you could,” David said.

“I don’t think so,” Flora said. “If we aren’t a just nation, what are we?”

“A strong one, I hope,” her brother answered. They eyed each other. They both used English, but they didn’t speak the same language.

No one questioned the Socialist Party’s agenda at any of the inaugural banquets and balls that night.

Even the Democratic Congressmen and Senators who made their appearance were smiling and polite.

They wouldn’t show their teeth till Congress went back into session up in Philadelphia.

Flora was just as well pleased to return to the *de facto* capital. Over the past eight years, it had become home to her. Her husband teased her as the train pulled into Broad Street Station: “You’ll be busier than I will. The vice president’s main job is growing moss on his north side.”

“You knew that when you accepted the nomination the first time,” Flora said.

He nodded. “Well, yes. Even so, these past four years have really rammed it home.”

But Flora had trouble charging into the new session as she was used to doing. She found herself sleepy all the time, without the energy she usually took for granted. Before long, she was pretty sure she knew why. When she no longer had room for doubt, she said, “Hosea, I’m going to have a baby.”

His eyes grew very wide. After a moment, he started to laugh. “So much for prophylactics!” he blurted.

Then he gave her a kiss and said, “That’s wonderful news!”

Flora wished he’d said that before the other. “I think so, too,” she said. “The world he’ll see . . .”

“I know. That’s astonishing to think about.” Hosea Blackford ran a hand through his hair. It was thick, but gray. “I only hope I’ll see enough of it with him for him to remember me. This is one of those

times that reminds me I'm not so young as I wish I were."

"You're not *too* old," Flora said slyly. Her husband laughed again. Even so, the moment didn't quite turn out the way she wished it would have.

The McGregors' wagon plodded toward Rosenfeld. The horse's tail switched back and forth, back and forth, flicking at the flies that came to life in the springtime. Mary McGregor felt like a turtle poking its head out of its shell. All through the harsh Manitoba winter, she'd stayed on the farm. Going into town then wasn't for the fainthearted. Her mother had done it, for kerosene and other things they couldn't make for themselves, but she hadn't wanted to take Mary or Julia along.

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A Ford whizzed past them. The horse snorted at the dust the motorcar kicked up. Mary coughed, too.

"Those things are ugly and noisy," she said. This one had been particularly ugly—it was painted barn red, so anyone could see it coming, or going, for miles.

"They go so fast, though," Julia said wistfully. "You can get from here to there in nothing flat. And more and more people have 'em nowadays."

"People who suck up to the Yankees," Mary said.

Her older sister shook her head. "Not all of them. Not any more."

From the seat in front of them, their mother looked back over her shoulder. "We're not getting one any time soon," Maude McGregor said, and brushed a wisp of hair back from her face. Her voice was harsh and flat, as it so often was these days. "Hasn't got anything to do with politics, either. They're expensive, is what they are."

That silenced both Mary and Julia. The farm kept them all fed, but it could do no more than that—or rather, they could make it do no more than that. *If Pa were alive, and Alexander, we'd be fine,* Mary thought. But there was always too much work and not enough time. She didn't know what to do about that. She didn't think anybody could do anything about it.

“We ought to be coming up to the checkpoint outside of town pretty soon,” Julia said.

“We’ve passed it by now,” Maude McGregor said, even more flatly than before. “It’s not up any more.”

Mary felt like bursting into tears. Two or three years before, she would have. Now she faced life with a thoroughly adult bleakness. “The rebellion’s all over, then,” she said, and nothing more lived in her voice than had in her mother’s.

“It never had a chance,” Julia said.

That was enough to rouse Mary, whose red hair did advertise her temper. “It *would* have,” she said, “if so many people hadn’t sat on their hands. And if there hadn’t been so many traitors.”

For some little while, the clopping of the horse’s hooves, the squeak of an axle that was getting on toward needing grease, and the occasional clank as an iron tire ran over a rock in the roadway were the only sounds. *“Traitors” is an ugly word,* Mary thought. But it was the only one that fit. The Americans had known the uprising was coming before it really got started. The *Rosenfeld Register* —the weekly newspaper—had even said a Canadian woman with a name famous for patriotism helped with information about it because she was in love with a Yank. The only famous woman patriot Mary could think of offhand was Laura Secord. Did she have descendants? Mary wouldn’t have been surprised. She didn’t think the uprising would have had much of a chance anyhow. With such handicaps, it had had none. All that was left now was punishing those who’d done their best for their country.

Maude McGregor drove around a muddy crater in the road. This one was new; it didn’t date back to the days of the Great War. Mary hoped it had blown up something large and American.

Before long, Julia pointed ahead and said, “There it is! I see it.”

Mary McGregor saw Rosenfeld, too. Like her sister, she couldn’t help getting excited. Rosenfeld had perhaps a thousand souls. If two railroads hadn’t come together there, the town would have had no

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reason for existing. But there it was. It boasted a post office, a general store, the weekly newspaper, a doctor’s office, and an allegedly

painless dentist. He'd filled a couple of Mary's teeth. It hadn't hurt him a bit. She wished she could say the same.

"I suppose Winnipeg's bigger," Mary said, "but it can't be *much* bigger."

"I wouldn't think so," Julia agreed. Neither of them had ever seen a town bigger than Rosenfeld. Up in front of them, Maude McGregor chuckled quietly. Mary wondered why.

Regardless of whether there were towns bigger than Rosenfeld, it was quite crowded and bustling enough. Wagons and motorcars clogged its main street. Locals in city clothes—white shirts, neckties, jackets with lapels—and U.S. Army men in green-gray shared the sidewalk. Women wore city clothes, too. Julia pointed again. "Will you look at that?" she said, deliciously scandalized. Mary looked—and gaped.

"Disgraceful," her mother said grimly. Maude McGregor's skirt came down to her ankle, as her skirts had done for as long as Mary could remember. But this woman showed off half her legs, or so it seemed.

"If it's the style, Ma—" Julia began, her voice hesitant.

"No." Her mother hesitated not at all. "I don't care what the style is. No decent woman would wear anything like that. No daughter of mine will." Several women in Rosenfeld wore dresses and skirts that short. Were they all scarlet? Mary didn't know, but she wouldn't have been surprised.

Her mother had to pull off the main street to find a place to hitch the wagon. As Maude McGregor got down to give the horse the feed bag, Mary pointed to a signboard plastered to a wall. "Ma, what's a Bijou?" She knew she was probably mispronouncing the unfamiliar word.

"It's a motion-picture house," her mother answered after reading some of the small print under the big name.

"A motion-picture house? In Rosenfeld?" Mary and Julia exclaimed together. Julia went on, "This *is* the big city," while Mary asked, "Can we go see something, Ma? Can we, please?" She knew she sounded like a wheedling little girl, but she couldn't help it.

"I don't know." Here her mother wavered, where she'd been very sure about skirts. "The flyer says it costs a quarter each to get in, and seventy-five cents is a lot of money."

“We’d only do it once, Ma. It’s not like we come here every day,” Mary said, wheedling harder than ever.

Julia added, “It’s a new business in town. It’s not like those start up every day, either.”

“Well—all right,” Maude McGregor said. Mary clapped her hands. “But only this once, understand?

You pester me about it every time we come to town and you’ll find out your backsides aren’t too big to switch.”

“We promise, Ma,” Mary and Julia chorused. They looked at each other and winked. They’d won!

That didn’t happen very often.

A line snaked toward the Bijou’s box office. A lot of the people in the line were American soldiers.

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Mary ignored them. The soldiers ignored her, too, though they plainly noticed her older sister and her mother. Julia and Maude McGregor paid no attention to the men in green-gray.

Three quarters slapped down on the counter. Mary heard her mother sigh. The fellow behind the counter peeled three tickets off an enormous roll and handed them to her mother. Another young man at the door importantly tore the tickets in two. Inside the theater, the smell of buttered popcorn almost drove Mary mad. Along with the popcorn, the girl behind the counter sold lemonade and more different kinds of candy than Henry Gibbon carried in his general store.

Maude McGregor led Mary and Julia past such temptations and into the theater itself. Both her daughters let out pitiful, piteous sighs. She took no notice of them. She was made of stern stuff.

The maroon velvet chairs inside the theater swung down when you put your weight on them. That proved entertaining enough to take Mary’s mind off candy, at least for a little while. A couple of rows in front of her, a little boy bounced up and down, up and down, up and down. She wanted to spank him.

Before too long, his father did.

Without warning, the lights went dim. A man at a piano—a man Mary hadn't noticed up till then—began to play melodramatic music. The curtains slid back from an enormous screen. Some sort of machine behind her began making noise: the projector. Then the screen filled with light, and she forgot everything else.

"It's . . . photographs come to life," she whispered to Julia. Her sister nodded, but never took her eyes away from the screen. Mary didn't, either. Those enormous, moving black-and-white people up there held her mesmerized.

NEWS OF THE WORLD, a headline read, briefly interrupting the motion. Then she saw a man in a silly uniform and an even sillier hat waving to soldiers marching past. KAISER WILHELM REVIEWS

TROOPS RETURNING FROM OCCUPIED PARTS OF FRANCE, another headline explained.

Swarthy men, many of them wearing big black mustaches, fired rifles and machine guns at one another in a country that looked dry and hot. SCENES FROM THE CIVIL WAR IN THE EMPIRE OF

MEXICO, the caption said. Mary stared, entranced. She'd never been farther from the farm than Rosenfeld, but here was the whole world in front of her eyes.

Two men in suits crossed a bridge from opposite sides and shook hands. That was labeled, PRESIDENT OF USA, PREMIER OF QUEBEC MEET IN FRIENDSHIP. All of a sudden, Mary wasn't so sure she wanted the whole world in front of her eyes.

And then she saw ruined city blocks, explosions, diving aeroplanes with machine guns blazing, glum survivors, grim prisoners with hands in the air, overturned motorcars and dead bodies lying in the street, and other bodies swinging from a gallows. SCENES FROM THE REBELLION IN CANADA, the explanatory sign said. She hadn't seen much war. It had swept through Rosenfeld and stayed to the north. And she'd only been a little girl then. She gulped. This was what she wanted, was it?

Not even the main feature, a melodrama with a car chase, a chase through and on top of the cars of a train, and an astonishingly handsome leading man who wed the astonishingly beautiful leading lady and gave her a tender kiss just before the lights came back up,

could take all those images of devastation out of her mind.

“That’s what they’re doing to our country,” she said as she and her mother and sister filed out of the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

theater. “They want us to know it, too.”

“They want us to be afraid,” Julia said.

“They know how to get what they want, too,” Maude McGregor said grimly. “Come on. Let’s buy what we need and get back to the farm.”

They were on their way to Henry Gibbon’s general store when Mary saw a SCENE FROM THE

REBELLION IN CANADA that wasn’t what the Americans who’d made and approved the moving picture had in mind. Through the streets of Rosenfeld came a column of prisoners, on their way to the train station from God only knew where. They were scrawny and hollow-eyed and wore only rags. They must have been some of the last men captured, for most of the rebels had given up weeks, even a couple of months, before. The McGregors bathed once a week or so, like most farm families; Mary was used to strong odors. The stench that came from the prisoners made her stomach want to turn over.

One of the men started to sing “God Save the King.” An American guard in green-gray hit him in the head with a rifle butt. Blood streamed down his face. The guard laughed. The prisoner stumbled on.

Tears stung Mary’s eyes. She didn’t let them fall. She kept her face still and vowed . . . remembrance.

Abner Dowling looked down at what had been a plate of ham and fried potatoes. “By God, that was good,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” said his adjutant, a dapper young captain named Angelo Toricelli. He had only about half of Dowling’s girth, but he’d worked similar execution on a beefsteak and a couple of baked spuds.

“Nothing wrong with the way the Mormons cook,” Dowling said, blotting his lips on his napkin.

“No, sir,” Captain Toricelli agreed.

Having spent a lot of time as an adjutant, Dowling recognized the younger man's resigned tone, though he was resolved not to do so much to deserve resigned agreement as his own cross, General Custer, had done. Thinking of a cross made him suspect he knew what was bothering Toricelli. "Does it bother you that I eat so much, Captain?"

One of Toricelli's eyebrows twitched in surprise. "Not . . . really, sir," he said after a moment. "It's none of my business. I would never ask anyone to be anything he's not."

"Interesting way to put it," Dowling remarked. Then he laughed, which set several of his chins jiggling.

Laugh or not, though, he changed the subject: "How do you like being a gentile in Utah? Me, I think it's pretty funny."

"The Mormons can say we're gentiles," Toricelli answered. "You can go around saying all sorts of things. That doesn't mean they're true."

"I suppose not." Dowling left a silver dollar on the table to cover their meals. He got to his feet. So did Toricelli, who hurried to open the restaurant's front door for him. That was one of the things adjutants were for, as Dowling knew only too well.

"Pretty day," Toricelli remarked as they came out onto the street.

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"It is, isn't it?" Dowling said. Spring was in the air. Snow had retreated up the slopes of the Wasatch Mountains to the east. Sea gulls wheeled overhead, which Dowling never failed to find strange so far inland. And, as always, sounds of building filled the air.

Salt Lake City had surrendered to U.S. forces nine years before. Dowling had seen photographs of it just after the Mormon rebels finally yielded to superior force. They'd fought till they couldn't fight any more. The city had looked more like the mountains of the moon than anything that sprang from human hands and minds. Hardly one stone remained atop another. The Mormons had simmered resentfully under the harsh treatment they'd got from U.S. authorities ever since the Second Mexican War. When they rose during the Great War, they'd done a lot more than simmer.

Now . . . Now, on the outside, everything here seemed calm. Salt Lake

City—and Provo to the south and Ogden to the north—were three of the newest, shiniest towns in the USA. Most of the rubble had been cleared away. Most of the Mormons who'd survived the uprising were getting on with their lives.

On the surface, Utah seemed much like any other state. When Dowling's train first brought him to Salt Lake City, he'd wondered if his presence, if the U.S. Army's presence, was necessary.

He'd been here more than a year now. He no longer wondered. As he and Toricelli walked east along South Temple Street towards Army headquarters, no fewer than three people—two men and a woman—shouted "Murderer!" at them: one from a second-story window, one from behind them, and one from a passing Ford.

Toricelli eyed the motorcar as it sped away, then muttered something pungent that might not have been English under his breath. "I wasn't able to read the license plate," he said. "If I had, we could have tracked that son of a bitch down."

"What difference does it make?" Dowling said. "They all feel that way about us. One more, one less—so what?"

"It makes a lot of difference, sir," his adjutant said earnestly. "Yes, they're going to hate us, but they need to fear us, too. Otherwise, they start up again, and we did all that for nothing." To show what he meant by *that* , he waved across South Temple Street to Temple Square.

No rebuilding there. By order of the military administration, the Mormon Tabernacle and the Temple and the other great buildings of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints remained as they had fallen during the Federal conquest of Salt Lake City: another reminder to the locals of the cost of rising against the United States. Rattlesnakes dwelt among the tumbled stones. They were the least the occupiers had to worry about.

Colonel Dowling murmured a few lines from Shelley:

" 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings.

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'

Nothing besides remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,

The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

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Angelo Toricelli gave him a quizzical look. “I’ve heard other officers recite that poem, sir.”

“Have you? Well, I’m not surprised,” Dowling said. Even fallen, the gray granite Temple inspired awe. A gilded copper statue of the angel Moroni had topped the tallest spire, which the Mormons had used as an observation post till U.S. artillery knocked it down. No American soldiers had ever found a trace of that statue. Persistent rumor said the Mormons had spirited away its wreckage and venerated it as a holy relic, as the Crusaders had venerated pieces of the True Cross. Dowling didn’t know about that. He did know there was an enormous reward for information leading to the capture of the statue, or of any significant part of it. No one had ever collected. No one had ever tried to collect.

At the corner of Temple and Main, Captain Toricelli said, “You want to be careful crossing, sir. For some reason or other, Mormons in motorcars have a devil of a time seeing soldiers.”

“Yes, I’ve noticed that,” Dowling agreed. His hand fell to the grip of the .45 on his hip. Most places, an officer’s pistol was a formality almost as archaic as a sword. Even more than in occupied Canada, Dowling felt the need for a weapon here.

Soldiers in machine-gun emplacements protected by reinforced concrete and barbed wire surrounded U.S. Army headquarters in Salt Lake City. Sentries carefully checked Dowling and Toricelli’s identification cards. They’d discovered the unfortunate consequences of not checking such things. The Mormons had Army uniforms they’d taken during the Great War, and some of them would kill even at the cost of their own lives. Not much news of such assassinations had got out of Utah, but that made them no less real.

“Oh—Colonel Dowling,” a soldier said as Dowling walked down the hall to his office. “General Pershing is looking for you, sir.”

“Is he? Well, he’s just about to find me, then.” Dowling turned to his adjutant. “I’ll see you in a while, Captain.”

“Of course, sir,” Angelo Toricelli said. “I have a couple of reports to

keep me busy."

"If you can't stay busy in Utah, something's wrong with you," Dowling agreed. And off he went to see the commanding general.

John J. Pershing was in his mid-sixties. He didn't look younger than his years so much as tough and well-preserved for them. His jaw jutted. His gray Kaiser Bill mustache—the style was now falling out of favor with younger men—added to his bulldog appearance. His icy blue eyes seized and held Dowling.

"Hello, Colonel. Take a seat. There's coffee in the pot, if you care for some."

"No, thank you, sir. I'm just back from lunch," Dowling answered.

General Custer would have been even money or better to make some snide crack about his weight.

Pershing simply nodded and got down to business: "I'm worried, Colonel Dowling. This place is like a powder keg, and I'm afraid the fuse is lit."

"Really, sir?" Dowling said in surprise. "I know Utah's been a powder keg for more than forty years, but why do you think it'll go off now? If the Mormons were going to rise against us, wouldn't they have tried it when the Canucks did?"

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"Strategically, that makes good sense," Pershing agreed. "But the trouble that may come here hasn't got anything to do with what happened up in Canada. You are of course aware how we hold this state?"

"Yes, sir: by the railroads, and by the fertile belt from Provo up to Ogden," Dowling answered. "Past that, there's a lot of land and not a lot of people, so we don't worry very much."

"Exactly." Pershing nodded. "We just send patrols through the desert now and again to make sure people aren't plotting too openly." He sighed. "Out in the desert, maybe a hundred and seventy-five miles south of here, there's a little no-account village called Teasdale. A troop of cavalry rode through it a couple of weeks ago. The captain in

command discovered several families that were pretty obviously polygamous."

"Uh-oh," Dowling said.

"I couldn't have put it better myself," Pershing replied.

Polygamy had been formally illegal in Utah since the Army occupation during the Second Mexican War.

It hadn't disappeared, though. Dowling wished it had, because, more than anything else, it got people exercised. Fearing he already knew the answer, he asked, "What did the cavalry captain do, sir?"

"He applied the law," Pershing said. "He arrested everyone he could catch, and he burned the offending houses to the ground."

"And he came out of this place alive? I'm impressed."

"Teasdale's a very small town—smaller still, after he seized the polygamists," Pershing replied. "And he is an able young man. Or he would be, if he had any sense to go with his tactical expertise. Naturally, even though this happened in the middle of nowhere, news got out right away. And, just as naturally, even a lot of Mormons who aren't ardent polygamists are up in arms about it."

"Not literally, I hope," Dowling said.

"So do I, Colonel. But we must be ready, just in case," Pershing said. "I've asked Philadelphia to send us some barrels to use against them at need. If the War Department decides to do it instead of reprimanding me for asking for something that costs money, I'm going to put you in charge of them. You became something of an expert on barrels, didn't you, serving under General Custer and with Colonel Morrell during the war?"

I became an expert on not getting myself court-martialed on account of barrels, is what I became, Dowling thought. *Custer wanted to use them against War Department doctrine, and I had to cover for him. Does that make me an expert?* Aloud, he answered, "I'll do whatever I can, sir."

"I'm sure of it," Pershing said. "This may all turn out to be so much moonshine, you understand. The War Department may need a real rising from the Mormons before they send in the weapons that would have overawed them and stopped the rising in its tracks. And the powers that be may not send us anything even in case of rebellion.

They're in a cheese-paring mood back there, sure enough. They've stopped spending *any* money on improving barrels, you know."

"Yes, I do know that," Dowling replied. "I don't like it."

"Who would, with a brain in his head?" Pershing said. "But soldiers don't make policy. We only carry it **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

out, and get blamed when it goes wrong. I wonder how fast and how well the Confederate States are rearming."

"They aren't supposed to be doing anything of the sort, sir," Dowling said.

Pershing tossed his head, like a horse bedeviled by flies. "I know that, Colonel. I wonder anyway."

Abullet cracked past Jefferson Pinkard's head. He ducked, not that that would do him any good if the bullet had his name on it. Somewhere not far off, rebel Mexican machine gunners started firing at something they imagined they saw. A field gun banged away, flinging shells into the uplands town of San Luis Potosí.

Like most Confederates, Pinkard had thought of the Empire of Mexico as his country's feebleminded little brother—when he'd bothered thinking of it at all, which wasn't very often. In the comfortable days before the war, the Empire did as the Confederacy asked. The Confederates, after all, shielded Mexico from the wrath of the USA, which had hated the Empire since its creation during the War of Secession.

The truth, nowadays, was more complicated. The USA backed the rebels against the Empire. The CSA couldn't officially back Maximilian III, but Freedom Party volunteers like Pinkard numbered in the thousands—and the Freedom Party wasn't the only outfit sending volunteers south to fight the Yankees and their proxies.

That all seemed straightforward enough. What Jeff hadn't counted on was that there would have been—hell, there had been—rebels even without U.S. backing. Maximilian III would never land on anybody's list for sainthood.

Pinkard shrugged. "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch, by God," he muttered.

Behind him, another field gun, this one on his side, started answering the rebels' piece. It seemed to be firing as much at random as the enemy gun.

Stupid bastards, he thought, not sure whether he meant the enemy or his own side. None of them would have lasted long during the Great War; he was sure of that. Both sides were brave enough, but neither seemed to know just what it was supposed to do. They lacked the experience C.S. and U.S. forces had so painfully accumulated.

Another machine gun started rattling. Ammunition was tight. Both sides imported most of it. That didn't keep gunners from shooting it off for the hell of it. Who was going to tell 'em they couldn't? They had the weapons, after all.

A Mexican private came up to Jeff. Like Pinkard's, his cotton uniform was dyed a particularly nasty shade of yellow-brown. It looked more like something from a dog with bad digestion than a proper butternut, but all the greasers and the Confederate volunteers wore it, so Jeff could only grouse when he got the chance. He couldn't change a thing. The Mexican said, "*Buenos días*, Sergeant Jeff." It came out of his mouth sounding like *Heff* . "The *teniente* , he wants to see you."

"All right, Manuel. I'm coming." Pinkard pronounced the Spanish name *Man-you-well* . He took that for granted, though what the locals did to his never ceased to annoy him. He walked bent over. The Mexicans built trenches for men of their size, and he overtopped most of them by half a head. The rebel snipers weren't nearly so good as the damnyankees had been up in Texas, but he didn't want to give 'em
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a target. He nodded to Lieutenant Hernando Guitierrez. "What can I do for you, sir? *En qué puedo servirle?* " Again, he made a hash of the Spanish.

It didn't matter, not here. Lieutenant Guitierrez probably spoke better English than Pinkard did. He was every bit as tall, too, though not much more than half as wide through the shoulders. By his looks, he had a lot more Spaniard and a lot less Indian in him than did most of the men he commanded. He said, "I have a job for you, Sergeant."

"That's what I'm here for," Pinkard agreed.

"Er—yes." The Mexican lieutenant drummed his fingers on his thigh. Jeff had a pretty good idea what was eating the fellow. He was only a

sergeant himself (and he'd never risen higher than PFC in the C.S.

Army), but he got more money every month than Guitierrez did. And, although he was only a sergeant, it wasn't always obvious that his rank was inferior to the other man's. Why else were Confederate volunteers down here, if not to show the greasers the way real soldiers did things?

"What can I do for you, Lieutenant?" Jeff asked again, not feeling like pushing things today.

Guitierrez gave him what might have been a grateful look. "You are familiar, Sergeant, with the machines called barrels?"

"Uh . . . yeah." Pinkard was familiar enough to start worrying, even though the clanking monsters had been few and far between in Texas during the Great War—especially on the Confederate side. "What's the matter? The rebels going to start throwing 'em at us? That's real bad news, if they are."

"No, no, no." The Mexican officer shook his head. He had a sort of melancholy pride different from anything Pinkard had known in his own countrymen. "*We* have three, built in Tampico by the sea and coming up here to the highlands by railroad. I want you to lead the infantry when we move forward with them against the peasant rabble who dare to oppose Emperor Maximilian."

"*You people* built barrels?" Once he'd said it, Jeff wished he hadn't sounded quite so astonished. But that was too late, of course.

Lieutenant Guitierrez's lips thinned. "Yes, we did." But then he coughed. He was a proud man, but also an honest man. "I understand the design may have come from the Confederate States—unofficially, of course."

"Ah. I get you." Jeff laid a finger by the side of his nose and winked. The Confederates couldn't build barrels on their own. The Yankees would land on them with both feet if they tried. But what happened south of the border was a different story. "When does the attack go in, and what are we aiming for?"

"We want to drive them from those little hills where they can observe our movements. They are shelling San Luis Potosí from that forward position, too," Guitierrez replied. "If all goes well, this will be a heavy blow against them. As for when, the attack begins the morning after the barrels come into place."

He didn't say when that morning would be. He was probably wise not to. For one thing, Pinkard had already discovered what *mañana* meant. For another, barrels, no matter who built them, broke down if you looked at them sideways. Pinkard grunted. "All right, Lieutenant. Soon as they get here, I'll lead your infantry against the rebels. You'll follow along yourself to see how it's done, right?"

He wasn't calling Guitierrez a coward. He'd seen the other man had courage and to spare. And **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Guitierrez nodded now. "*Claro que sí,* Sergeant. Of course. That is why you are here: to show us how it is done."

Jeff grunted again. In one sense, the Mexican lieutenant was right. In another . . . Pinkard was here because his marriage was as much a casualty of the Great War as a fellow with a hook for a hand. He was here because he had a fierce, restless energy and an urgent desire to kill something, almost anything.

He couldn't satisfy that desire back in Birmingham, not unless he wanted to fry in the electric chair shortly thereafter.

Three days later—not a bad case of *mañana* , all things considered—the barrels came into position, clanking and rattling and belching and farting every inch of the way. Pinkard wasn't surprised to find more than half their crewmen were Confederate volunteers. He *was* surprised when he got a look at the barrels themselves. They weren't the rhomboids with tracks all around that the CSA, following the British lead, had used during the Great War. And they weren't quite the squat, hulking monsters with a cannon in the nose and machine guns bristling on flanks and rear the USA had thrown at the Confederacy.

They did have a conning tower like that of a U.S. barrel—their crewmen called it a turret. It revolved through some sort of gear mechanism, and carried a cannon and a machine gun mounted alongside it.

Two more bow-mounted machine guns completed their armament. "Since the turret spins, we don't need nothin' else," a crewman said. "Means we don't have to try and shoehorn so many men inside, neither."

"Sounds like somebody's been doing a lot of thinking about this business," Pinkard said.

“Reckon so,” the other man agreed. “Now if the same somebody would’ve thunk about the engine, too, we’d all be better off. A good horse can still outrun these miserable iron sons of bitches without breathing hard.”

During the Great War—even the attenuated version of it fought out in Texas—a big artillery barrage would have preceded the barrels’ advance. Neither side in this fight had enough artillery to lay down a big barrage. It didn’t seem to matter. The barrels rolled forward, crushing the enemy’s barbed wire and shooting up his machine-gun nests. “Come on!” Pinkard shouted to the foot soldiers loyal to Maximilian III. “Keep up with ’em! They make the hole, an’ we go through it. Stick tight, and the enemy’ll shoot at the barrels and not at you so much.”

That was how things had worked during the Great War. In English and horrible Spanish, Jeff urged his men forward. Forward they went, too. The only thing he hadn’t counted on was the effect barrels, even a ragged handful of barrels, had on troops who’d never faced them before. The rebels, or the braver men among them, tried shooting at the great machines. When their rifle and machine-gun bullets bounced off the barrels’ armor, they seemed to decide the end of the world was at hand. Some ran away. The barrels’ machine guns scythed them down like wheat at harvest time. Others threw down their rifles, threw up their hands, and surrendered. *“Amigo!”* they shouted hopefully.

Jefferson Pinkard had never had so many strangers call him *friend* in all his born days. In Texas, the Confederates had gone raiding to catch a handful of Yankee prisoners. Here, prisoners were coming out of his ears. “What do we do with ’em, Sergeant?” asked a soldier who spoke English—maybe he’d worked in the CSA once upon a time. “We go —?” The gesture he made wasn’t the throat-cutting one Pinkard would have used, but it meant the same thing.

For once, Jeff’s blood lust was sated. Slaughter in the heat of battle was as fine as taking a woman, maybe finer. Killing prisoners felt like murder. *Maybe I’m still a Christian, after all.* “Nah, they’ve surrendered,” he answered. “We’ll take ’em back with us. We’d better. Till those barrels break down, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

they’re gonna keep bringin’ in plenty more.”

“Sí, es verdad,” the soldier said, and translated Pinkard’s words for the

other Mexicans. They all assumed he knew how to handle a flood of prisoners of war, too—including the prisoners themselves, who swarmed up to him to kiss his hands and even try to kiss his cheeks in gratitude for being spared.

"Cut that out!" he roared. It made him wish he had ordered a massacre. Instead, he led the captured rebels—who were even more ragged and sorry-looking than the Mexican imperialists—back out of the fighting. Once he got them behind the line, he had to figure out what to do with them next. Nobody else seemed to want to do anything that looked like thinking.

He commandeered some barbed wire and some posts to string it from. After he herded the prisoners into the big square he'd made, he told off guards to make sure they didn't head for the high country.

Then he had to yell to make sure they got something—not much, but something—to eat and drink. And he had to go on yelling, to make sure *mañana* didn't foul things up. By the time three or four days went by, all the Mexicans assumed he was in charge of the prisoner-of-war camp. Before very much longer, he started thinking the same thing himself.

Colonel Irving Morrell hated soldiering from behind a desk. He always had. As best he could tell, he always would. And he especially hated it when there was fighting going on and he found himself a thousand miles away. The reports filtering north from the civil war in the Empire of Mexico struck him as particularly maddening—and all the more so because he couldn't get anybody else in the War Department to take them seriously.

"God damn it, the imperialists are cleaning up with these new barrels of theirs," he raged to his superior, a stolid senior colonel named Virgil Donaldson. He waved papers in Donaldson's face. "Has anybody besides me read this material? By what it's saying, they've got just about all the features we put on our fancy prototype at Fort Leavenworth. But we built our prototype and said to hell with it. Those bastards have got a production line going in Tampico."

Colonel Donaldson puffed on his pipe. He had a big red face and a big gray mustache. He looked more like somebody's kindly uncle than a General Staff officer. He sounded like somebody's kindly uncle, too, when he said, "Take an even strain, Colonel Morrell. You'll burst a blood vessel if you don't, and then where will you be?"

“But, sir—!” Morrell waved the papers again.

“Take an even strain,” Donaldson repeated. He liked the phrase. Before Morrell could explode, Donaldson went on, “Who cares what a bunch of goddamn greasers are up to, anyway?”

“But it’s not just greasers, sir,” Morrell said desperately. “These barrels have Confederate mercenaries as crew. They’ve got to have Confederates designing them, too. And the Confederate States aren’t allowed to build barrels. The armistice agreement makes that as plain as the nose on my face.”

A ceiling fan spun lazily. A fly buzzed. Outside Donaldson’s window, summer heat made the air shimmer. The government building across the street from General Staff headquarters might have belonged to some other world, some other universe. Morrell laughed softly. He’d had that feeling about the General Staff before, with no tricks of the eye to start it going.

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Trying to come back to what he was sure was reality, he said, “We ought to protest to Richmond. The Confederate government is turning a blind eye toward what has to be several regiments’ worth of their veterans going south to fight on Maximilian’s side. That may not be against the letter of their agreements with us, but it’s dead against the spirit.”

After another puff on that pipe, Colonel Donaldson said, “Nice idea, but don’t hold your breath.

President Sinclair is looking for good relations with the CSA. He doesn’t want to bother Richmond with trifles, and he thinks anything this side of a Confederate invasion of Kentucky is a trifle.”

Morrell muttered something under his breath. It wasn’t that he thought Donaldson was wrong. No, he feared his superior was right. “Why did we bother to win the war, if we won’t make it count?”

“You’d have to talk to President Sinclair about that, Colonel Morrell,” Donaldson answered. “*Why* isn’t my job, or yours, either. It’s for the civilians. They decide what to do, and they tell us. Doing it is our department.”

“I know, sir.” The lesson had been drilled into Morrell since his West Point days. During the War of Secession, U.S. generals had spoken of overthrowing the republic and becoming military dictator. Then they’d gone out and lost the war, so they’d never had the chance to do more than talk about it. No one had wanted to take the risk of such things since, though it was only now, a lifetime later, that the United States had to deal with the consequences of victory rather than defeat.

“In fairness, we could use some peace and quiet with Richmond right about now,” Donaldson said.

“After all, we’ve got Germany to worry about, too.”

“Well, yes,” Morrell admitted reluctantly. He knew why he was reluctant to admit any such thing, too:

“But if we ever do fight the Kaiser, that’ll be the Navy’s worry, not the Army’s. At least, I have a devil of a time seeing how the Germans could invade us, or how we could land troops in Europe.”

“It wouldn’t be easy, would it?” Donaldson said. “But, of course, a lot depends on who’s friends with whom. The Germans have the same worries about France and England as we do about the CSA. And God only knows what’s going to happen to the Russians, even now. They’re having more trouble putting down their Reds than the Confederates ever did during the war.”

“Not our worry, thank God.” Morrell chuckled. The puff of smoke Donaldson sent up might have been a fragrant question mark. Morrell explained: “The Russian Reds make up the best names for themselves.

I especially like the two who are operating in that town on the Volga —Tsaritsin, that’s the name of the place. The Red general is the Man of Steel, and his second-in-command goes by the Hammer. The Reds in the CSA weren’t so fancy.”

“They were nothing but a bunch of coons,” Donaldson said. “You can’t expect much from them.”

That made Morrell thoughtful. “I wonder,” he said. “I do wonder, sir. When I was in the field, I ran up against Negro regiments a few times. Far as I could tell, they didn’t fight any worse than raw regiments of white Confederate troops.”

“Huh.” The older man sounded deeply skeptical. But then he shrugged. “*That’s* not our worry, either, thank God.”

“No, sir,” Morrell agreed. “Are you sure there’s no point to writing that report about the barrels down in Mexico, sir? I really do think that’s alarming.”

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Donaldson sighed the sigh of a man who’d been a cog in a bureaucratic machine for a long time. “You can write the report, Colonel, if it makes you happy. I’ll even endorse it and send it on. But I can tell you what will happen. The most likely thing is, nothing. It’ll go into a file here along with a million other reports. That’s what happens if you’re lucky.”

“I don’t call that luck,” Morrell said.

“Compared to the other thing that could happen, it’s luck,” Donaldson told him. “Believe you me, it’s luck. Because the other thing that could happen is, somebody reads the report and passes it on to somebody else, somebody outside the General Staff, and it gets into the hands of one of those precious civilians—say, somebody like N. Mattoon Thomas, the assistant secretary of war.”

“But he’s just the man—just the sort of man—who ought to see a report like this one,” Morrell said.

“He thought well of the one I did on the mess in Armenia.”

“Well, maybe. But maybe not, too. Armenia’s a long ways off, you see. The Confederate States are right next door,” Colonel Donaldson said. “If you’re lucky, *he* reads it and then he throws it into a file in the War Department offices. Different file, but that’s all right.” He held up a hand to silence Morrell, then went on, “If you’re not so lucky, he reads it and he thinks, *Who’s this smart-aleck soldier trying to tell me how to do my job?* And if that’s what somebody like N. Mattoon Thomas thinks, pretty soon you’re not here in Philadelphia any more. You’re commanding a garrison in the middle of nowhere: Alberta or Utah or New Mexico, somewhere like that.”

He spoke as if of a fate worse than death. That was probably how he saw it. That was how any soldier who was first of all a cog in a bureaucratic machine and only afterwards a fighting man would have seen it. But Morrell didn’t want to be here in the first place. Getting back out into the field, even somewhere in the back of beyond, sounded pretty good to him.

Yes, it does—to you, he thought then, several beats later than he should have. *What will Agnes think about it? You've got a little girl now, Morrell. Do you want to haul Mildred off to God knows where, just because you couldn't stand to keep your big mouth shut?*

He muttered unhappily. Colonel Donaldson thought he was contemplating the horrors of life outside Philadelphia. "Dismissed," Donaldson said.

Unhappily, Morrell left his superior's office. Even more unhappily, he went back to his own. *Where does your first loyalty lie? To your wife and daughter, or to the United States of America?*

He cursed softly. But he didn't need long to make up his mind. Agnes had been a soldier's widow before she met him, dammit. She knew what the price of duty could be. If they had to go off to Lethbridge or Nehi or Flagstaff, she'd take that in stride. It might even end up better for Mildred.

Morrell nodded to himself. He fed a sheet of paper into the typewriter that squatted on his desk like some heathen god. He typed with his two index fingers—a slower way of doing things than proper touch-typing, but it got the job done well enough. If the powers that be chose to ignore his report, that was their business. But he was going to make sure they saw what he saw.

He did warn his wife what he'd done, and what might happen as a result. To his relief, she only shrugged. "Philadelphia's a nice town," she said. "But I got along well enough in Leavenworth, too."

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He kissed her. "I like the way you think."

"It isn't a question of thinking," Agnes said. "It's a question of doing what you have to do." Mildred Morrell didn't say anything. She just kicked her legs and grinned up at her father from her cradle, showing off her first two brand new baby teeth. Some of her babbles and gurgles had *dada* in them, but she didn't yet associate the sound with him.

"What will you think, if you grow up in Lethbridge or Nehi instead of Philadelphia?" Morrell asked her.

Mildred only laughed. She didn't care one way or the other. "Maybe, just maybe," her father said, "I'm fixing things so you don't have to go through a war when you grow up. I hope I am, anyway."

He was eating lunch the next day when Lieutenant Colonel John Abell came up to him. Without preamble, General Liggett's adjutant said, "You do believe in cooking your own goose, don't you, Colonel?"

"Ah." Morrell smiled. "You've read it, then?"

"Yes, I've read it." The astringently intellectual General Staff officer shook his head in slow wonder.

"Amazing how a man can analyze so brilliantly and be so blind to politics, all at the same time."

After another bite of meat loaf, Morrell said, "You've told me as much before. What am I being blind to today?"

"One and a half million dead men, Colonel, and I'd think even you should notice them," Lieutenant Colonel Abell answered with a certain somber relish. "One and a half million dead men, or a few more than that—all the reasons why there's no stomach in the USA for another war against the Confederate States."

Morrell winced. His smile faded. John Abell was a snob. That didn't mean he was a fool—anything but.

"Don't you believe most people would rather fight a small war now if the Confederates don't back down—which I think they would—than fight a big one ten or twenty years down the road?"

"Some people would. A few people would. But most?" Abell shook his head. "No, sir. Most people don't want to fight any war at all, and they'll do almost anything to keep from fighting. Meaning no offense, sir, but I think you've just cooked your own goose."

With a shrug, Morrell said, "Well, even if I have, I won't mind getting back in the field again." Lieutenant Colonel Abell looked at him as if he'd spoken in Hindustani, or maybe Choctaw. Like Colonel Donaldson, Abell was a creature of the General Staff, and didn't care to contemplate life outside it.

Morrell did, which gave him a certain moral advantage. *And how much good will that do you in Lethbridge when the blizzards come?* he wondered, and wished he hadn't.

Tom Colleton held out a package too well wrapped for him to have done it himself. “Happy birthday, Sis!” he told Anne.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake,” she said in fond exasperation. “You shouldn’t have.” She kissed him on the cheek, but at least half of her meant every word of that. The birthday in question was her thirty-ninth, and the only one she would have felt less like celebrating was her fortieth.

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“Well, whether I should have or not, I damn well did,” her younger brother answered. Tom still had a few years to go before facing middle age—and forty meant less to a man than it did to a woman, anyhow. From forty, a woman could see all too well the approaching end of too many things, beauty among them. *From thirty-nine, too,* Anne thought gloomily. But Tom was grinning at her. “Go on—open it.”

“I will,” she said, and she did, tearing into the wrapping paper as she would have liked to tear into Father Time. “What on earth have you got here?”

“I found it the last time I was in Columbia,” he said. “There. Now you’ve got it. See? It’s—”

“A book of photographs of Marcel Duchamp’s paintings!” Anne exclaimed.

“Seeing as he exhibited at Marshlands, I thought you’d like it,” her brother said. “And take a look at page one seventy-three.”

“Why? What’s he done there?” Anne asked suspiciously. Tom’s grin only got wider and more annoying.

She flipped through the book till she got to page 173. The painting, especially in a black-and-white reproduction, resembled nothing so much as an explosion in a prism factory. That didn’t surprise Anne.

When Duchamp displayed his *Nude Descending a Staircase* at Marshlands just before the Great War broke out, the work had hung upside down for several days before anyone, including the artist, noticed.

But here . . .

Tom looked over her shoulder to make sure she'd got to the right page. "You see?" he said. "You see?"

He pointed to the title below the photograph.

" 'Mademoiselle Anne Colleton of North Carolina, Confederate States of America,' " Anne read. She said something most unladylike, and then, "For God's sake, he doesn't even remember what state he was in! I'm not surprised, I suppose—all he cared about while he was here was getting drunk and laying the nigger serving girls."

"What do you think of the likeness?" her brother asked.

Before the war, Anne had been a champion of everything modern. Life was harder now. She had little time for such fripperies. *And I'm older than I was then,* she thought bleakly. *It's harder to stay up to date, and to stay excited about being up to date.*

She took a longer look at "Mlle. Anne Colleton." It still seemed made up of squares and triangles and rectangles flying in all directions. But lurking among them, cunningly hidden, were features that might have been her own. Slowly, she said, "It's not as bad as you make it out to be."

"No, it's worse," Tom said. "When I was in the trenches, I saw men who got hit by shells and didn't look this bad afterwards." He brought his experience to the abstract painting, just as Anne brought hers.

That was bound to be what Marcel Duchamp had had in mind. Anne might have cared more if he hadn't made such a nuisance of himself while at Marshlands, and if he hadn't been such a coward about recrossing the Atlantic after the war began and both sides' submersibles started prowling.

As things were, she only shrugged and said, "It *is* a compliment of sorts. Whatever he thought of me, he didn't forget me once he got back to France."

"Nobody ever forgets you, Sis," Tom Colleton said. Then he added something he never would have **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

dared say before the war. Going into the Army had made a man of him; he'd been a boy, a comfortable boy, till then. He asked, "How come you never married any of the fellows who sniffed around after you?

There were always enough of ’em.”

Had he presumed to ask such a question before the Great War, she would have slapped him down, hard. Now, though she didn’t like it, she gave it a serious answer: “Some of them wanted to run me and to run my money. Nobody runs me, and I run the money better than most men could. I’ve said that before. And the others, the ones who didn’t care so much about the money . . .” She laughed a hard and bitter laugh. “They were sons of bitches, just about all of them. I recognize the breed. I’d better—takes one to know one, people say.”

Almost fondly, she remembered Roger Kimball. The submarine officer had been a thoroughgoing son of a bitch. He’d also been far and away the best lover she ever had. She didn’t know what that said.

(Actually, she did know, but she didn’t care to dwell on it.) But, in the end, Kimball had chosen the Freedom Party over her. And he was dead now, shot by the widow of a U.S. seaman whose destroyer he’d sunk after the CSA had asked for and been granted an armistice.

She waited for Tom to give her a lecture. But he only asked another question: “Can you go on by yourself for the rest of your days?”

“I don’t know,” Anne admitted. To keep from having to think about it, she tried to change the subject:

“What about you, Tom? You’re as single as I am.”

“Yeah, I know,” he said with a calm that surprised her. “But there are a couple of differences between us. For one thing, I’m a few years younger than you are. For another, I’m starting to look hard, and you’re not.”

“Are you?” she said, surprised. “You didn’t tell me anything about that.”

Tom nodded, almost defiantly. “Well, I am, and yes, I know I haven’t told you anything. No offense, Sis, but you like running people’s lives so much, you don’t like it when they try and run their own.” That held enough truth to make Anne give him a wry nod in return. He dipped his head, acknowledging it, and continued, “There’s one more thing, no offense. A lot of ways, when a man gets married matters a lot less than when a woman does.”

And that was all too true, as well. In a fair, just world it wouldn’t have been, but Anne had never been naive enough to imagine the world

either fair or just. Looks weren't what kept a man, but they were what lured him. She'd used her own blond beauty to advantage more times than she could count. Again, turning thirty-nine reminded her she wouldn't be able to do that forever. If she wanted to have a baby or two, she wouldn't be able to do that forever, either.

She sighed. "Well, Tom, when you're right, you're right, and you're right, dammit. I'm going to have to do something about it."

Her brother blinked. He'd probably been expecting a shouting match, not agreement. "Just like that?" he asked.

Anne nodded briskly. "Yes, just like that, or as close to just like that as I can make it. Or don't you think I can do what I set my mind to doing?" If he said he didn't, he *would* have a shouting match on his hands.

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But he only laughed. "Anybody who thinks that about you is a damn fool, Sis. Now, I may be a damn fool—plenty of people have called me one, and they've had their reasons—but I'm not that particular kind of a damn fool, thank you kindly."

Although Anne laughed, too, she also gave him another nod. "Good. You'd better not be."

She meant what she said. As if to prove it, she drove up to Columbia a couple of days later. She knew the eligible bachelors in little St. Matthews, South Carolina, much too well to have the slightest interest in marrying any of them. He was too old; *he* was too dull; he was too grouchy; *he* couldn't count to twenty-one without dropping his pants. The pickings had to be better, or at least wider, in the state capital.

They would be better still down in Charleston, but Columbia was a lot closer. That made it more convenient both for her and for the battered Ford she drove. Keeping the motorcar alive would probably let the local mechanic send his children to college, but she had to let it keep nibbling her to death a bit at a time. She couldn't afford a new one, however much she wanted one.

Before the war—that phrase again!—and even into it, she'd driven a powerful, comfortable Vauxhall, imported from England. Confederate soldiers had confiscated it at gunpoint during the Red uprising of

1915. *Almost ten years ago now,* she thought with slow wonder. The Ford, now, the Ford was a boneshaker that couldn't get past thirty-five miles an hour unless it went over a cliff. And it was a Yankee machine. But it was what she had, and it ran . . . after a fashion.

She did like driving into Columbia. The town's gracious architecture spoke of the better days of the last century. When the Negroes rebelled here, some houses, some blocks, had gone up in flames, but most of the city remained intact—and the damage, at last, was largely repaired. She couldn't imagine a conflagration big enough to destroy the whole town. Columbia was too big for such disasters.

Charleston had better hotels than Columbia, but the Essex House, only a few blocks from the green bronze dome of the State Capitol, would do. The Essex House also boasted a first-rate switchboard.

She had no trouble keeping up with her investments while away from home. And she could even study day-old copies of the *New Orleans Financial Mercury* and three-day-old editions of the *Wall Street Journal* . Since she kept most of her money in U.S. rather than C.S. markets, the latter did her more good.

But here she was more interested in men who might have investments of their own than in investments themselves. Dinner at the hotel restaurant the first night she got into town made her wonder if she'd waited several years too long to make this particular hunting expedition. Before the war, she couldn't possibly have eaten without shooing away anywhere from two to half a dozen men more interested in other pleasures than in those of the table. Here, she enjoyed—or didn't so much enjoy—some very tasty fried chicken without drawing so much as a single eye.

I might as well be eating crow, she thought as she rose, unhappy, from the table.

A visit to her assemblyman the next day was no more reassuring. Edgar Stow was younger than she was. He wore the ribbon for the Purple Heart in his lapel; the three missing fingers on his left hand explained why. Because of those missing digits, he had what she took to be a wedding band on the surviving index finger. He was polite to Anne, but polite to Anne as if she was an influential constituent (true) rather than a good-looking woman (false?). He also seemed maddeningly unaware of what she was trying to tell him.

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“Parties? Banquets?” He shook his head. “It’s pretty quiet here these days, ma’am. The old-timers, the men who’ve held their seats since before the war, they complain all the time about how dead it is. But we get a lot more business done nowadays than they ever did.”

Stow sounded pleased with himself. He had an ashtray on his desk made from the brass base of a shell casing, with a couple of dimes bent into semicircles and welded to it to hold cigarettes. He’d surely made it, or had it made, while he was in the Army. Anne wanted to pick it up and brain him with it. His blindness stung. But that *ma’am* hurt worse. By the way he said it, he might have been talking to his grandmother.

“So what exactly can I help you with today, ma’am?” he asked, polite, efficient—and stupid.

Anne didn’t tell him. *Why waste my time?* she thought as she left his office. But she had to wonder if she’d already wasted too much time.

V

Sam Carsten smeared zinc-oxide ointment on the bridge of his nose. It wouldn’t do him any good. He was dolefully certain of that. When summer came, he got a sunburn. He’d got sunburned in San Francisco, which wasn’t easy. Hell, he’d got sunburned in Seattle, which was damn near impossible.

The port of Brest, France, toward which the USS *O’Brien* was steaming, lay on the same parallel of latitude as Seattle. Somebody’d told that to Carsten, but he’d had to look it up for himself in an atlas before he would believe it. The bright sunshine dancing off the ocean—and off the green land ahead—seemed almost tropical in comparison to what Seattle usually got.

He patted the breech of the destroyer’s forward four-inch gun. “This here is one more place I figured I’d have to fight my way into,” he remarked.

“Yes, sir,” Nathan Hirskowitz agreed. The petty officer shrugged. “But we’ve got one thing going for us, even on a little courtesy call like this.”

“You bet we do,” Sam said. “We aren’t Germans.”

Hirskowitz nodded. He scratched his chin. Whiskers rasped under his nails, though he'd shaved that morning. "Yes, sir," he said. "That's what I was thinking, all right."

"They just don't like Germans here in France, same as they just don't like Englishmen in Ireland."

Carsten thought for a moment, then went on, "And same as they just don't like *us* in the CSA—what do you want to bet a ship from the Kaiser's High Seas Fleet gets the same sort of big hello in Charleston as we do here?"

"I won't touch that one. You got to be right," Hirskowitz said.

"Damn funny business, though," Sam said. "We were at war with the froggies, too, same as Kaiser Bill was at war with the Confederates."

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"But we didn't lick France, same as the Germans didn't lick the Confederate States. That makes all the difference." Hirskowitz added something in French.

"What the hell's that mean?" Sam asked in surprise.

"Something like, the better you know somebody, the more reasons you can find to despise him," the gunner's mate answered.

"Well, I've known you for a while, and this is the first I knew you spoke any French."

Nathan Hirskowitz surprised Sam again, this time by looking and sounding faintly embarrassed: "It's my old man's fault, sir. He came to the United States out of this little Romanian village in the middle of nowhere—that's what he has to say about it, anyway. But he'd taught himself French and German and English while he was still there."

"That's pretty good," Sam said. "He taught you, too, eh?"

"Yeah, me and my brothers and my sister. German was easy, of course, because we already used Yiddish around the house, and they're pretty close. But he made us learn French, too."

"So what does he do in New York City?" Sam asked. "How come you aren't too rich to think about joining the Navy?"

“How come?” Hirskowitz snorted. “I’ll tell you how come, sir. Pop had a storing and hauling business.

But he liked horses better than trucks, and so that went under. He’s smart, but he’s a stubborn bastard, my old man is. And since his business went under, he hasn’t done much of anything. He sponges off the rest of my relatives, that’s all. You listen to him talk, he’s too smart to work.”

“Oh. One of those.” Carsten nodded; he’d met the type. “Too bad. Any which way, though, I expect I’ll stick with you when we get shore leave. Always handy to have somebody along who knows the lingo.”

“Sir, you’re an officer, remember? You got to find one of your own who speaks French. You can’t go drinking with a no-account gunner’s mate.”

Sam cursed under his breath. Hirskowitz was right, no doubt about it. The trouble was, Carsten didn’t like drinking with officers. That was the bad news about being a mustang. He’d spent close to twenty years as an able seaman and petty officer himself. His rank had changed, but his taste in companions hadn’t. Officers still struck him as a snooty lot. But he would hear about it, and in great detail, if he fraternized—that was the word they’d use—with men of lower rank.

Up to the wharf came the *O’Brien* . The skipper handled that himself, disdaining the help of the tugboats hovering in the harbor. If he made a hash of it, he’d have nobody but himself to blame. But he didn’t.

With all the Frenchmen watching—and, no doubt, with some Germans keeping an eye on the destroyer, too—he came alongside as smoothly as if parking a car.

A French naval officer whose uniform, save for his kepi, didn’t look a whole lot different from American styles, came aboard the *O’Brien* . “Welcome to *la belle France* ,” he said in accented English. “We have been allies before, your country and mine. We are not enemies now. It could be, one day, we shall ally again.”

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He didn’t say against whom he had in mind. He didn’t say—and he didn’t need to say. The *O’Brien* ’s executive officer said something in French. Sam didn’t want to go drinking with the exec. The Frenchman

saluted. The executive officer returned the salute. He said, “We come to France on a peaceful visit, and hope that peace will last forever.”

With a very Gallic shrug, the French officer replied, “What lasts forever? Nothing in this world, *monsieur*

. I need to say one thing to you, a word of— *comment dit-on?* —a word of warning, yes. Your men are welcome to go ashore, but they should use a certain . . . a certain caution, *oui* ?”

Since the Frenchman plainly wanted the *O’Brien* ’s crew to hear that, the exec carried on in English:

“What sort of caution, sir?”

“Political caution,” the local said. “The *Action Française* has no small power here in Brest. You know the *Action Française* ?”

“Mais un petit peu,” the executive officer said, and then, “Only a little.”

“Even a little is too much,” the Frenchman told him. “They are royalist, they are Catholic—very, very Catholic, in a political way—and (forgive me) they oppose those who were the allies of the United States during the . . . the unpleasantness not so long past.”

They hate the Germans’ guts, Carsten thought. *That’s what he means, but he’s too polite to say so.*

The *O’Brien* ’s executive officer nodded and said, “Thanks for the warning. We will be careful.”

“I have done my duty,” the French officer answered. *I wash my hands of the lot of you,* he might have said. With another salute, he went back over the gangplank, up onto the pier, and into Brest.

Carsten wondered if the skipper would keep his crew aboard the ship after a greeting like that, but he didn’t. He did warn the men who got liberty to stick together and not to cause trouble. Sam hoped they would listen, but sailors in port weren’t always inclined to.

He went ashore himself, as much from simple curiosity as from any great desire to paint the town red.

Brest wasn’t the sort of place to which tourists thronged. It was, first and foremost, a navy town. That didn’t faze Sam. The steep, slippery streets were another matter. Brest sat on a ridge above the Penfeld

River, and seemed more suited to mountain goats than to men.

Mountain goats, though, didn't go into bars. Carsten did, the first chance he got. "Whiskey," he told the bartender, figuring that word didn't change much from one language to another.

But the fellow surprised him by speaking English: "The apple brandy is better." Seeing Sam's look of surprise, he explained, "Many times during the Great War—and since—sailors from *Angleterre* come here."

"All right. Thanks. I'll try the stuff." When Sam did, he found he liked it—Calvados was the name on the bottle. He drank some more. Warmth spread through him. A navy town had to have friendly women somewhere not too far from the sea. *After I drink some more, I'll find out about that,* he thought.

Before he could, though, three or four French officers came in. One of them noticed his unfamiliar uniform. "You are—American?" he asked in halting English. "You are from the *contre-torpilleur* new in the harbor?"

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"Yes, from the destroyer," Sam agreed.

"And what think you of Brest?" the fellow asked.

"Nice town," Carsten said; his mother had raised him to be polite. "And this Calvados stuff—this is the cat's meow." The Frenchman looked puzzled. Sam simplified: "It's good. I like it."

"Ah. 'The cat's meow.' " The French officer—a tough-looking fellow in his forties, a few years older than Sam—filed away the phrase. "Would it please you, *monsieur* , to see more of Brest?"

"Thank you, friend. I wouldn't mind that at all," Sam answered, thinking, among other things, that an officer ought to know where the officers' brothels were, and which of them had the liveliest girls. But the Frenchman—his name turned out to be Henri Dimier—took him to the maritime museum housed in a chateau down by the harbor, and then to the cathedral of St. Louis closer to the center of town. Maybe he was an innocent, maybe he thought Sam was, or maybe he was subtly trying to annoy him. If so, he failed; Carsten found both buildings interesting, even if neither was exactly what he'd had in

mind.

When they came out of the cathedral, a whole company of blue-uniformed policemen rushed up the street past them. “What’s going on there?” Sam asked.

“I think it is the *Action Française* ,” Dimier answered, his face hard and grim. “They are to have a—how do you say?—a meeting in the *Place de la Liberté* . It is not far. Would you care to see?”

“Well . . . all right.” It wasn’t what Sam had had in mind. It wouldn’t be much fun. But it might be useful, and that counted, too. *I suppose that counts, too,* he thought mournfully.

The *Place de la Liberté* wasn’t far from the cathedral: only two or three blocks. Even before Carsten and Henri Dimier got there, the sound of singing filled the air. A forest of flags sprouted inside the park.

Some were the familiar French tricolor, others covered with fleurs-de-lys. Pointing, Sam asked, “What are those?”

“That is the old flag, the royal flag, of France,” Dimier replied. “They want to, ah, return to his throne the king.”

“Oh.” Carsten wasn’t sure what to make of that. The mere idea struck him as pretty strange. He tried another question: “What are they singing?”

“I translate for you.” The French officer cocked his head to one side, listening. “Here. Like this:

“The German who has taken all,

Who has robbed Paris of all she owns,

Now says to France:

’You belong to us alone:

Obey! Down on your knees, all of you!’

“And here is the—the refrain—is that the word?

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“No, no, France is astir,

Her eyes flash fire,

No, no,

Enough of treason now.

“Would you hear more, *monsieur* ?”

“Uh—yeah. If you don’t mind.” *I do need to know this. We all need to know it.*

Dimier picked up the song again:

“Insolent German, hold your tongue,

Behold our king approaches,

And our race

Runs ahead of him.

Back to where you belong, German,

Our king will lead us!”

And the refrain:

“One, two, France is astir,

Her eyes flash fire,

One, two,

The French are at home.”

And once more:

“Tomorrow, on our graves,

The wheat will be more beautiful,

Let us close our ranks!

This summer we shall have

Wine from the grapevines

With royalty.

“Do you understand, being an American, what all this means?”

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“I doubt it,” Sam answered. “Do *you* ?”

Before Henri Dimier could answer, the men of the *Action Française* charged the police who were trying to hold them in the square. For a moment, clubs flailing, the police did hold. But then the ralliers—the rioters, now—broke through. With shouts of triumph, they swarmed into the streets of Brest. Sam had a devil of a time getting back to the *O’Brien* . After that, though, he understood, or thought he understood, a good deal that he hadn’t before.

* * *

Clarence Potter was a meticulous man. If he hadn’t been, he couldn’t very well have had a successful career in intelligence work during the war. That habit of precision was one reason why he had no use for the Freedom Party. To his way of thinking, Jake Featherston and his followers only wanted to smash things up, with no idea what would replace them.

He stood in Marion Square in Charleston, listening to a Freedom Party Congressional candidate. The fellow’s name was Ezra Hutchinson. He was a rotund man who put Potter in mind of a hand grenade in a white summer suit. He exploded like a hand grenade, too. Unlike a hand grenade, though, he kept doing it over and over.

“Now hear me, friends!” he thundered, pumping a fist in the air atop the portable platform on which he stood. “Hear me! We’ve turned the other cheek to the USA for too long! It’s high time we took our place in the sun again our own selves. We’re a great country. We ought to start acting like it, by God!”

Some of the people in the little crowd in front of the platform clapped their hands. Ezra Hutchinson didn’t stand up there alone. A dozen Freedom Party hardnoses in white shirts and butternut trousers backed him. They all applauded like machines. Whenever he paused a little longer than usual, they barked out, “Freedom!” in sharp unison.

“Freedom!” echoed several voices from the crowd.

“We’re a great country!” Hutchinson repeated. “But who remembers that, here in the CSA? The Radical Liberals? Hell, no—they’d rather be Yankees. The Whigs? Oh, they say they do, but they’d rather suck up to the Yankees. I tell you the truth, friends: the only party that remembers when the Confederate States had *men* in them is the Freedom Party.”

That gave Clarence Potter the opening he’d been waiting for. He shouted, “The only party that shoots presidents is the Freedom Party!”

People stirred and muttered. Wade Hampton V was only a couple of years dead, but a lot of folks didn’t seem to want to remember how he’d died. The Freedom Party sure as hell didn’t want people to remember how he’d died. It was doing its best to act respectable. As far as Potter was concerned, its best could never be good enough.

Some of the goons on the platform turned their heads his way. More goons were sprinkled through the crowd, some in the Party’s near-uniform, others wearing their ordinary clothes. But Ezra Hutchinson only smiled. “Where were you during the war, pal?” he asked; Freedom Party men often believed they were the only ones who’d done any fighting.

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“I was in the Army of Northern Virginia,” Potter answered, loudly and distinctly. “Where were *you* , you fat tub of goo?”

Hutchinson’s smile disappeared. He’d been a railroad scheduler during the Great War, and never come within a hundred miles of a fighting front. But then he stuck out his chins and tried to make the best of it:

“I served my country! Nobody can say I didn’t serve my country.”

He waited for Potter to make some other gibe so he could give a sharper comeback. But Potter said nothing more. He just let the candidate’s words hang in the air. When Hutchinson did try to go back to his speech, he seemed flat, uninspired.

Several Freedom Party men started working their way back through the crowd toward Potter. He was there by himself. He carried a pistol—he always carried a pistol—but he didn’t want to use it unless he

had to. He slipped away and around the corner before any of the goons got a good look at him. He'd done what he'd set out to do.

But, in a way, the Freedom Party men had done what they'd set out to do, too: they'd made him retreat.

And they would make it hard for other candidates to speak; they weren't shy about attacking their rivals'

gatherings. Jake Featherston, damn him, had turned Confederate politics into war.

Who knows where Featherston would be now if that Grady Calkins hadn't gone and shot President Hampton? Potter thought. But snipers were part of war, too: a part that had upped and bit the Freedom Party.

Potter discovered the real problem at a Whig meeting a few days later. Everything there was stable, orderly, democratic. Speaker yielded politely to speaker. No one raised his voice. No one got excited.

And, Potter was convinced, no one could possibly have hoped to influence the voters or make them give a damn about keeping the Whigs in power in Richmond.

He threw his hand in the air and was, in due course, recognized. "I have a simple question for you, Mr.

Chairman," he said. "Where are our hooligans, to break up Freedom Party rallies the way Featherston's bastards work so hard to break up ours?"

People started buzzing. You didn't often hear such questions at a gathering like this. The chairman's gavel came down, once, twice, three times. Robert E. Washburn was a veteran of the Second Mexican War. He wore a big, bushy white mustache, and both looked and acted as if the nineteenth century had yet to give way to the twentieth. "You are out of order, Mr. Potter," he said now. "I regret to state that I have had to point this out to you at previous gatherings as well."

Heads bobbed up and down in polite agreement with Washburn's ruling. Too many of those heads were gray or balding. The Whigs had dominated Confederate politics for a long time, as the Democrats had in the USA. The Democrats had got themselves a rude awakening. Potter feared the Freedom Party would give the CSA a worse shock than the Socialists had given the United States.

He said, “I am not out of order, Mr. Chairman, and it’s a legitimate question. When the damnyankees started using gas during the war, we had to do the same, or else leave the advantage with them. If we don’t fight Featherston’s fire with fire, what becomes of us now?”

Down came the gavel again. “You *are* out of order, Mr. Potter,” Washburn repeated. “Your zeal for the cause has outrun your respect for the institutions of the Confederate States of America.”

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He seemed to think that was plenty to quell Potter, if not to make him hang his head in shame. But Clarence Potter remained unquelled. “Featherston’s got no respect for our institutions,” he pointed out.

“If we keep too much, we’re liable not to have any institutions left to respect after a while.”

Now heads went back and forth. People didn’t agree with him. He’d run into that before. It drove him wild. He’d seen a plain truth, and he couldn’t get anyone else to see it. Jake Featherston had come much too close to smashing his way to a victory in 1921, and he would be even more dangerous now if that Calkins maniac hadn’t shown up the Freedom Party for what it was. Potter felt like knocking these placidly disagreeing heads together. That brought him up short. *I’m not so different from Featherston after all, am I?*

Robert E. Washburn said, “We rely upon the power of the police to protect us against any further, uh, unfortunate outbursts.”

That was an answer of sorts, but only of sorts. “And how many coppers start yelling, ‘Freedom!’ the minute they take off their gray suits?” Potter asked. “How well do you think they’ll do their job?”

He did make the buzz in the room change tone. A great many policemen favored the Freedom Party.

That was too notorious a truth to need retelling. It had caused problems in 1921 and again in 1923, though the Freedom Party men had been on their best behavior then. How could anybody think it wouldn’t cause problems in the upcoming Congressional election?

The local chairman was evidently of that opinion. “Thank you for expressing your views with your usual vigor, Mr. Potter,” Washburn

said. “If we may now proceed to further items of business. . . ?”

And that was that. They didn’t want to listen to him. And what the Whigs didn’t want to do, they didn’t have to do. More than sixty years of Confederate independence had taught them as much, and confirmed the lesson again and again. *What would teach them otherwise?* he wondered. The answer to that seemed obvious enough: *losing to the Freedom Party.*

As the Charleston Whigs droned on, Potter got to his feet and slipped out of their meeting. Nobody tried to call him back. Everybody seemed glad he was going. They didn’t want to hear their grip on things was endangered. *They deserve to lose, by God,* he thought as he went out into the heat and humidity of a Charleston summer. But then, remembering Jake Featherston’s burning eyes as he’d seen them again and again during the Great War, Potter shook his head. *They almost deserve to lose. No one deserves what those “Freedom!”-shouting yahoos would give us if they won.*

Pigeons strutted along the street, cooing gently. They were slow and stupid and ever so confident nobody would bother them. Why not? They’d proved right again and again and again. This one stranger in their midst wouldn’t prove any different . . . would he?

Clarence Potter laughed. He threw his arms wide. Some of the pigeons scurried back from him. One or two even spread their wings and fluttered away a few feet. Most? Most kept right on strutting and pecking, and paid him no attention whatsoever. “You goddamn dumb sons of bitches,” he told them, laughing though it wasn’t really funny. “You might as well be Whigs.” The birds went right on ignoring him, which proved his point.

He wondered whether the Radical Liberals would take him seriously. Odds were, they would. The Freedom Party, after all, was replacing them as the Whigs’ principal opposition. But then he wondered if it mattered whether the Rad Libs took him seriously. It probably didn’t. No one except a few dreamers had ever thought the Radical Liberals could govern the CSA. They gave the states of the West and
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Southwest a safety valve through which they could blow off steam when Richmond ignored them, as it usually did. Closer to the heart of the CSA, the Radical Liberals let people pretend the country really was a democratic republic—without the risks and complications a real

change of power would have entailed.

Why do I bother? Potter wondered as he strode past the pigeons that, fat and happy and brainless, went on pretending he wasn't there—or, if he was, that he couldn't possibly be dangerous. *Easier just to sit back and let nature take its course.*

But he knew the answer to that. It was simple enough: he knew Jake Featherston. *Ten years now since I walked into the First Richmond Howitzers' encampment. Ten years since he told me Jeb Stuart III's body servant might be a Red, and since Jeb Stuart III, being III of an important family, made sure nothing would happen to the nigger.* Jeb Stuart III was dead, of course. He'd looked for death when he realized he'd made a bad mistake. He'd had plenty of old-fashioned Confederate courage and honor. But he'd taken however many Yankee bullets he took without having the faintest conception of just how bad a mistake he'd made.

"The whole Confederacy is still finding out just how bad a mistake you made, Captain Stuart," Clarence Potter muttered. A young woman coming the other way—a young woman in a shockingly short skirt, one that reached so high, it let him see the bottom of her kneecap—gave him a curious glance as she went by.

Potter was by now used to garnering curious glances. He wasn't nearly so used to women showing that much leg. He looked back over his shoulder at her. For a little while, at least, he forgot all about the Freedom Party.

When the steam whistle announcing shift change blew, Chester Martin let out a sigh of relief. It had been a good day on the steel-mill floor. Everything had gone the way it was supposed to. Nobody'd got hurt.

You couldn't ask for more than that, not in this business.

Instead of heading straight home, he stopped at the Socialist Party hall not far from the mill. A good many men from his mill and others nearby sat and stood there, talking steel and talking politics and winding down from the long, hard weeks they'd just put in. "How's it going, Chester?" somebody called.

Martin mimed falling over in exhaustion, which got a laugh.

Somebody else said, "They don't work us as hard as they worked our fathers."

“Only goes to show what you know, Albert,” Chester retorted. “My old man’s got one of those soft foreman’s jobs. He hardly even has calluses on his hands any more, except from pushing a pencil. They work me a hell of a lot harder than they work him.”

“Sold out to the people who own the means of production, has he?” Albert Bauer said—he was and always had been a Socialist of the old school.

Before Chester could answer that, someone else did it for him: “Oh, put a sock in it, for Christ’s sake.

We’re starting to own the means of production. At least, I’ve bought some shares of stock, and I’ll bet you have, too. Go on, tell me I’m a liar.”

Bauer said not a word. In fact, so many people said not a word that something close to silence fell for a moment. *Have that many of us bought stocks?* Chester wondered. He had a few shares himself, and knew his father had more than a few: Stephen Douglas Martin had been picking up a share here, a share **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

there, ever since he started making good money when he wasn’t conscripted into the Great War.

“Funny,” Martin said. “The Party talks about government owning the means of production, but it never says much about the proletariat buying ’em up one piece at a time.”

“Marx never figured anything like that would happen,” someone said. “Neither did Lincoln. Back when they lived, you couldn’t make enough money to have any left over to invest.”

“As long as Wall Street keeps going up and up, though, you’d have to be a damn fool *not* to throw your money that way,” somebody else said. “It’s like stealing, only it’s legal. And buying on margin makes it even easier.”

Nobody argued with him. Even now, most of the men who left their jobs at the steel mills left only because they were too old or too physically worn or too badly hurt to do them any more. Those were the people for whom the Socialists were trying to push their old-age insurance policy through Congress.

But if you could quit your work at sixty-five, or even sixty, and be

sure you had enough left to live on for the rest of your days thanks to what you'd done for yourself while you were working . . . If you could manage that, the whole country would start looking different in twenty or thirty years.

I'll turn sixty-five in 1957, Martin thought. It didn't seem so impossibly far away—but then, he had just put in that long, long day at the mill.

He rode the trolley home, ate supper with his parents and his sister, and went to bed. When the wind-up alarm clock next to his head clattered the next morning, he just turned it off. He didn't have a moment's sleepy panic, thinking it was some infernal device falling on his trench. *I've been home from the Great War for a while now,* he thought as he put on a clean work shirt and overalls. But he would take a couple of puckered scars on his left arm to the grave. As it had on so many, the war had left its mark on him.

When he went into the kitchen, his father was already there, smoking his first cigar of the day. His mother fried eggs and potatoes in lard. She used a wood-handled iron spatula to flip some onto a plate for him. "Here's your breakfast, dear," she said. "Do you want some coffee?"

"Please," he said, and she poured him a cup.

His father said, "Saturday today—only a half day."

Chester nodded as he doctored the coffee with cream and sugar. "That's right. You know I won't be home very long, though—I'm going out with Rita."

Stephen Douglas Martin nodded. "You already told us, yeah."

His mother gave him an approving smile. "Have a good time, son."

"I think I will." Chester dug into the hash browns and eggs so he wouldn't have to show his amusement.

His folks had decided they approved of Rita Habicht, or at least of his seeing her. They must have started to wonder if he would ever see anybody seriously. But he wasn't the only Great War veteran in no hurry to get on with that particular part of his life. Plenty of men he knew who'd been through the mill (and, as a steelworker, he understood exactly what that phrase meant) were still single, even though they'd climbed into their thirties. It was as if they'd given so much in the trenches, they had little left for the rest of their lives.

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He took the trolley past the half-scale statue of Remembrance—who would have looked fiercer without half a dozen pigeons perched on her sword arm—to the mill, where he put in his four hours. Then he hurried back home, washed up, shaved, and changed from overalls, work shirt, and cloth cap to trousers, white shirt, and straw hat. “I’m off,” he told his mother.

“You look very nice,” Louisa Martin said. He would have been happier if she hadn’t said that every time he went anywhere, but still—you took what you could get.

He rode the trolley again, this time to the block of flats where Rita lived. She had one of her own. She’d got married just before the war started. Her husband had stopped a bullet or a shell in one of the endless battles on the Roanoke front. Martin had fought there, too, till he got wounded. He’d never met Joe Habicht, but that proved exactly nothing. Rita had had a baby, too, and lost it to diphtheria the day after its second birthday. Women fought their own battles, even if not with guns. Through everything, though, she’d managed to hang on to the apartment.

She didn’t keep Chester waiting when he knocked on the door. His heart beat faster as she opened it.

“Hi,” he said, a big, silly grin on his face. “How are you?”

“Fine, thanks.” She patted at her dark blond hair. It was a little damp; she must have washed after getting back from her Saturday half day, too. “It’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to be here,” he said, and leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek. “You look real pretty.”

Rita smiled. “You always tell me that.”

“I always mean it, too.” But Martin started to laugh. When she asked him what was funny, he wouldn’t tell her. *I’ll be damned if I want to admit I sound just like my mother,* he thought. Instead, he said,

“Shall we go on over to the Orpheum?”

“Sure,” she said. “Who’s playing there today?”

“Those four crazy brothers from New York are heading the bill,” he answered.

“Oh, good. They *are* funny,” Rita said. “I was in stitches the last time they came through Toledo.” That had been a couple of years before; she and Chester hadn’t known each other then. He wondered with whom she’d seen the comics. That she had a past independent of him occasionally bothered him, though he’d never stopped to wonder if his independent past bothered her. But neither of them had seen anybody else for several months now. That suited Chester fine, and seemed to suit Rita pretty well, too.

They held hands at the trolley stop. An old lady clucked disapprovingly, but they paid no attention to her. Things were looser now than they had been when she was a young woman. As far as Chester Martin was concerned, that was all to the good, too. He was sorry when the trolley car came clanging up so soon.

He slid a silver dollar to the ticket-taker at the Orpheum, and got back a half dollar and two yellow tickets. He and Rita went up to the first balcony and found some seats. He took her hand there, too. She leaned her head on his shoulder. When the house lights went down, he gave her a quick kiss.

A girl singer and a magician led off the show. As far as Martin was concerned, the magician couldn’t have disappeared fast enough. A trained-dog act ended abruptly when the dog, which could jump and
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fetch and even climb ladders to ring a bell at the top, proved not to be trained in a much more basic way.

He got an enormous laugh, but not one of a sort the fellow in black tie who worked with him had in mind.

The dancer who came on next got another laugh by soft-shoeing out holding his nose.

“I wouldn’t have done that,” Rita said, even though she’d laughed, too. “Now he’ll squabble with the man with the dog all the way to the end of the tour.” Chester wouldn’t have thought of that for himself.

Once she said it, he realized she was bound to be right.

At last, after a couple of other acts Martin knew he wouldn’t

remember ten minutes after he left the Orpheum, the Engels Brothers came out, along with the tall, skinny, dreadfully dignified woman who served as their comic foil. They were all young men, not far from Chester's age, but got their name from the enormous, fuzzy beards they wore. One of the beards was dyed red, one yellow, one blue, and the fourth left black. From the balcony, Martin couldn't tell if the beards were real or fakes. For the comics'

sake, he hoped they were phony.

The Brother with the undyed beard talked enough for any three men. The one with the yellow beard didn't talk at all, but was so limber, he seemed to have no bones. The one with the blue beard tried to slap everybody else into line. The one with the red beard spent all his time chasing the tall, skinny woman, who seemed more bewildered than flattered by his attentions.

At one point, they all started pelting one another with oranges. It might have been trench warfare up there—by the way the Engels Brothers dodged around the prop furniture, they'd been in the trenches—except that the woman kept standing up and getting nailed. By the time they'd finished, the stage was a worse mess, much worse, than it had been after the dog act. But this was a lot funnier, too.

The Engels Brother with the black beard proved the sole survivor. He looked out at the audience and said, "Orange you glad you aren't up here?" The curtain came down.

"That was . . . I don't know exactly what that was, but I don't know when I've laughed so hard, either,"

Rita said as she got up and made her way toward the exit. Since Chester Martin was rubbing at his streaming eyes with his handkerchief, he couldn't very well argue with her.

They had supper at a diner across the street from the Orpheum, then took the trolley back to Rita's block of flats. "I had a wonderful time," she said as she fumbled in her handbag for the key.

"I always have a terrific time with you, Rita." Chester hesitated, then asked, "Can I come in for a minute, please?"

She hesitated, too. She was careful of her reputation. He'd seen that from the first time he took her out.

He liked it. She said, "You're not going to be—you know—difficult,

are you?”

He would have liked nothing better than to be difficult, but he solemnly shook his head. “Cross my heart,” he answered, and did.

“All right.” Rita opened the door and flipped on a light. “The place is a mess.” It was, to Martin’s eye, perfectly neat. Rita sat down on the overstuffed sofa. She patted the upholstery next to her, asking,

“What have you got in mind?”

Instead of sitting there, Chester awkwardly went to one knee in front of her. Her eyes got very big.

Tongue stumbling, heart pounding, he repeated, “I always have a terrific time with you. I don’t think I’d ever want to be with anybody else. Will you—will you marry me, Rita?” He took a velvet jewelry box **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

from his pocket and flipped it open to show her a ring set with a tiny chip of diamond.

She stared at him. “I wondered if you were going to ask me that tonight,” she whispered, and then, “The ring is beautiful.”

“You’re beautiful,” he said. “Will you?”

“Of course I will,” she answered.

Afterwards, he wasn’t quite sure who kissed whom first. When he came up for air, he gasped, “You never kissed me like that before.”

“Well, you never asked me to marry you before, either,” Rita answered.

He laughed. They kissed again. Heart pounding, he asked, “What else don’t I know?”

“You’ll find out,” she said. “After the wedding.”

Scipio paid five cents for a copy of the *Augusta Constitutionalist* . In one way, that struck him as a lot of money to shell out for a newspaper. In another, considering that he would have paid millions if not billions of dollars when the currency went crazy a couple of years before, it wasn’t so bad.

“Thanks, uncle,” said the white man who took his money. He didn’t answer. He just opened up the paper and read it as he hurried towards Erasmus’ fish market and restaurant.

Had he answered, what would he have said? Angry at himself for even wondering, he shook his head as he walked along. White men never called black men *mister* , not in the Confederate States of America they didn’t. If he held his breath till they started to, he’d end up mighty, mighty blue. The fellow with the pile of papers at his feet would just have called him an uppity nigger, or maybe a crazy nigger, if he’d complained.

Maybe the worst of it was, the white man had been trying to be polite. *I can’t win,* Scipio thought. *Why do I bother imagining I could?*

Even more to the point, he wondered why he’d wasted any money on the paper. The headline screamed about a lurid love triangle that had ended in an axe murder. It would have been made to seem a lot more lurid had the parties involved been colored. Or, on the other hand, it might not have made the paper at all in that case. A lot of whites expected Negroes to act that way, and took it for granted when they did.

Much smaller stories talked about Congressional candidates’ latest promises. Scipio wondered why he bothered even glancing at those. It wasn’t as if he could vote. But the remarks of Eldridge P. Dinwiddie, the Freedom Party candidate in Augusta, did make his eyes widen as if he’d just poured down a couple of cups of Erasmus’ strong, chicory-laced coffee.

“Too many Red rebels are still hiding in plain sight,” Dinwiddie was quoted as saying. “The Whigs have forgotten all about them. Going after them would remind people of how badly the party that’s in power bungled the war effort. But if you elect me, I’ll make sure they aren’t forgotten and are brought to justice.

I aim to see all those nigger traitors hang.”

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Mr. Dinwiddie, wrote the reporter who’d listened to him, *received prolonged and vociferous support for his suggestion* .

“Hell wid Mistuh Dinwiddie,” Scipio muttered under his breath. Being

one of those fugitive Reds himself, he didn't care for the notion of getting hunted down and hanged. Here and there, faded posters still offered a reward for his capture.

But that was in another country; and besides, the wench is dead. Every so often, a phrase from the education Anne Colleton had made him acquire floated up out of his memory. This one fit. South Carolina might have been another country. The name on his passbook here in Georgia was Xerxes.

Everyone here, even his wife, knew him by that name and no other.

Anne Colleton, though, wasn't dead. If she ever saw him, he would be, and in short order. Like most late summer days in Augusta, this one was hot and muggy. Scipio shivered even so.

Foreign news got shoved onto page three. There'd been another battle in the endless Mexican civil war.

Imperial forces claimed victory. The rebels weren't calling them liars too loudly, so maybe they'd actually won. Venezuela and Colombia were talking about going to war with each other. The paper said the United States had sent the Kaiser a note warning him against arming or encouraging the Venezuelans, and that he'd denied doing any such thing—and warned the USA against encouraging or arming the Colombians. A party called French Action had caused riots in Paris at the same time as the French government claimed it was two years ahead of schedule in paying reparations in Germany. Japanese aeroplanes had bombed a town somewhere in China.

He was so engrossed in the article about allowing the forward pass in football—some people condemned it as a damnyankee innovation, while others claimed it added excitement to the game—he almost walked past Erasmus' place. "Mornin', Xerxes," his boss said when he came in.

"Mornin'," Scipio answered. "How you is?"

"Tolerable," Erasmus said. "Little better'n tolerable, mebbe. How's your ownself?"

Scipio shrugged. "Not bad. I's gettin' by."

"Can't ask much more'n that, not till Judgment Day, anyways." Erasmus raised a salt-and-pepper eyebrow. "You saved, Xerxes?"

How do I answer that? Scipio wondered. His education had weakened his faith. And, he discovered, so had his time with the Red rebels, all of whom had been as passionate in their disbelief as a lot of Christians were in their belief. He hadn't thought the Marxist ideology had rubbed off on him, but it seemed to have after all. After a moment's thought, he said, "Hope so."

"Should ought to be able to say better'n that," Erasmus said, but then, to Scipio's relief, he let it go.

Pointing to the *Constitutionalist* , he asked, "You done with that?"

"Done wid it now, yeah," Scipio answered: the only thing he could have said. Erasmus didn't put up with reading on the job. That wasn't because he couldn't read a newspaper himself, though he couldn't. It was because, when you worked for Erasmus, you *worked* for Erasmus.

"Throw it on the fish-wrappin' pile, then," Erasmus said.

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As Scipio did, he asked, "What you think 'bout de for'ard pass, boss?"

"Bunch o' damn foolishness, you ask me," Erasmus answered. "Anybody got the time to git all hot and bothered about it gots *too* goddamn much time, an' dat's the Lord's truth. Devil fill up your time just fine, you bet. Forward pass?" He rolled his eyes. "Might as well worry over that other damnfool damnyankee game—what the hell they call it? Baseball, dat's the name."

Scipio had never seen a baseball game, or even a baseball, in his life. Because he was—or rather, had been—widely read, he knew the sport was played in the northeastern part of the United States. But it had never caught on all across the USA, the way football had. And it certainly hadn't caught on in the Confederate States.

Erasmus eyed him. "You got any more ways o' wastin' time 'fore you starts earnin' what I pays you?"

"Only one," Scipio said with a grin. He grabbed a mug and poured it full of coffee from the big pot on the stove, then added cream and sugar. But he didn't sit down to drink it. He carried it with him as he started sweeping and tidying up. Erasmus had a steaming mug at his side, too. As long as Scipio worked hard, the older man didn't mind

coffee or things like that.

The first breakfast customer came in a couple of minutes later. “Mornin’, Aristotle,” Scipio said. “How you is?” By now, he knew dozens of regulars by name and preferences. “You wants de usual?”

“Sure enough do,” Aristotle answered. Scipio turned to Erasmus, who was already doing up a plate of ham and eggs and grits. Erasmus knew his customers even better than Scipio did. They were *his* , after all.

After the breakfast rush petered out, Scipio washed a young mountain of dishes and silverware, then dried them and stacked them neatly to get ready for lunch, which would be even more hectic. Once he’d done that, he helped Erasmus clean catfish and crappie. The proprietor would fry a lot of them during lunch, and even more during dinner. Erasmus was a wizard with a knife. Every cut he made was perfect, and he moved as fast as any slicing machine. Scipio . . .

“You makes me ’shamed,” Scipio said, for Erasmus could clean three fish to his one, and do a neater, better job on them to boot. “Watchin’ you makes me ’shamed.”

“Shouldn’t ought to,” Erasmus answered. “You is doin’ the best you kin. Good Lord don’t want no more’n dat from nobody. I been cuttin’ up fish for a livin’ since I was ten years old. Maybe you went fishin’ couple-three times a year, gutted what you cotched. It make a difference, it surely do.”

“Mebbe.” Scipio would have thought Erasmus was humoring him, but Erasmus had no sense of humor when it came to work, none at all.

And now his boss said, “You’s better’n you was, too, an’ dat’s a good thing. You didn’t get no better, don’t reckon I’d let you mess around with knives no more.”

Scipio looked at his hands. He had a couple of cuts, along with several scars he’d picked up earlier.

Seeing what he was doing, Erasmus held out his own hands. He had more scars than Scipio could count, a maze, a spiderweb, of scars, new, old, short, long, and in between. “Do Jesus!” Scipio said softly.

Erasmus only shrugged. “Ain’t nobody perfect, Xerxes. Ain’t nobody even close to perfect. Yeah, I’s pretty damn good. But I been doin’ this goin’ on fifty years now. Every so often, the knife is gonna slip.”

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“Uh-huh.” Scipio couldn’t take his eyes off those battered hands. He’d noticed them, but he hadn’t really studied them. They repaid study. Like so many who did something supremely well, Erasmus had suffered for his art. Scipio kept looking at them till a fat woman came in and asked Erasmus for three pounds of crawdads.

What have I got that shows what I’ve done with my life? Scipio wondered. Only one thing occurred to him: the way he talked, or could talk if doing so wouldn’t put him in mortal danger. He *felt* smarter when he talked like an educated white man than he did using the thick Congaree River Negro dialect that was his only other way of putting his thoughts out for the world to know. He didn’t suppose he actually *was* smarter, but the illusion was powerful, and it lingered.

Erasmus wrapped the crawdads in the *Augusta Constitutionalist* Scipio had been reading that morning.

The woman paid him, said, “Thank you kindly,” and left.

“I been tellin’ you and tellin’ you,” Erasmus said, “you ought to save your money and git yourself your own place. You end up doin’ a lot better working for your ownself than you do when you works for me.”

“Don’t like tellin’ folks what they gots to do,” Scipio answered, not for the first time. “Reckon I kin”—if he’d run Marshlands for Anne Colleton, he could surely manage a little café for himself—“but I don’t like it none.”

“You gots to have some fire in your belly to do a proper job,” Erasmus agreed. “But you gots to have some fire in your belly to git ahead any which way.”

He eyed Scipio speculatively. Scipio concentrated on cleaning a catfish. He was better at doing what others told him than at telling others what to do. Back at Marshlands, he’d had Anne’s potent authority behind him. If he started his own business, *he’d* be the authority. No, he didn’t care for that. Still feeling Erasmus’ eye on him, he said, “I gits by.”

He sounded defensive, and he knew it. Erasmus said, “Any damn fool can get by. You could do better, an’ you should ought to.”

Scipio didn’t answer. Before too long, the first dinner customers

started coming in. He hurried back and forth from the stove to the tables out front. The sizzle and crackle of fish going into hot oil filled the place.

He served and took money and made change and then did endless dishes, getting ready for the next morning. When he finally left, Erasmus stayed behind, still busy.

And when he got back to his flat, Bathsheba was waiting at the door to give him a kiss. Her eyes glowed. Scipio hoped he knew what she had in mind, and hoped that, after a long, hard day, he could perform. He turned out to be wrong—or, at least, not exactly right. She took his hand and set it just above her navel. “We gonna have us a young ‘un,” she said.

All of a sudden, Scipio discovered he might have fire in his belly after all.

Hipolito Rodriguez knew he should have counted himself a lucky man. For one thing, he’d come through the Great War without a scratch. If that by itself wasn’t enough to make him light candles in the church in the little mining town of Baroyeca, he couldn’t imagine what would be.

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And, for another, Baroyeca lay in the Confederate state of Sonora, not in the Empire of Mexico farther south. It was close enough to the border to hear the echoes of the civil war that convulsed the country of which Sonora had once been a part, but not close enough to have let any of the fighting come near.

Nothing bothered Baroyeca very much. A couple of men hadn’t come home from the war in the north.

A few others had come home, but maimed. Mostly, though, days went on as they always had.

Rodriguez’s farm outside of town yielded no better crops than it ever had, but he managed to keep his wife, three sons, and two daughters fed.

And, every so often, he had enough money left in his pocket to go into town and spend some time at *La Culebra Verde* —the Green Snake—

the cantina across the street from the church where he lit candles to thank God for his salvation. Having been preserved alive, didn't he have the right to enjoy himself every once in a while?

"Why not?" Carlos Ruiz said when he posed the question out loud one day. Carlos was his age, and had fought in Tennessee, where things had been, by all accounts, much worse than his own experience in Texas. Ruiz asked his counterquestion in English, not Spanish.

"*Sí*, why not?" Rodriguez agreed, the last two words also in English. He dropped back into Spanish to continue, "My children speak as much of the new language as of the old. Ten million devils from hell take me if I know whether to be glad or sorry."

"If you want them to stay here and be farmers or marry farmers, Spanish is good enough," Ruiz said—in Spanish. "If you hope they try to make money, English is better."

He was a farmer himself, and wore the ribbon for a Purple Heart on his baggy cotton shirt. Had he been a rich man, or a townsman, or even someone who hadn't also fought in the north, Hipolito Rodriguez might have got angry, especially since he'd been drinking for a while. As things were, he only shrugged and said, "How much good will English do people who look like us, Carlos?" Like Ruiz, like almost everybody in Baroyeca, he was short, with red-brown skin and hair blacker than moonless midnight.

"Even with English, what are we but a couple of damn greasers?" The last five words were in the official language of the Confederacy.

"We may be greasers," Ruiz said, also in English, "but we ain't no niggers. *Mallates,* " he added in Spanish, in case Rodriguez didn't understand him. Then back to English: "In the law, we're the same as anybody else."

That was true. The people of Sonora and Chihuahua were Confederate citizens, not merely residents of the CSA. They could vote. They could run for office. They could—if they were rich enough, which some few were—marry whites from the other states in the Confederacy. They could. And yet . . . Rodriguez sighed and took another pull at the beer in front of him. "The law, it means only so much."

That was also true. If it weren't for Negroes, Sonorans and Chihuahuans would have been at the bottom of the pile. Most Confederates who called themselves white looked down their noses at them. Rodriguez had seen as much during the war, the first time he'd

ever had much to do with ordinary whites.

“When the election comes, who will you vote for?” Ruiz asked.

Rodriguez shrugged. “My *patrón* is a Radical Liberal.” Ever since Sonora and Chihuahua came into the CSA, small farmers like him had voted as the great landowners in the area wanted them to vote. But, like **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

so many things, that wasn’t quite as it had been before the Great War. Rodriguez didn’t want to say as much out loud, though. What he didn’t say couldn’t get back to anyone. He lifted his cup, emptied it, and asked the same question of Carlos Ruiz.

Ruiz gave back the same shrug. “Don Joaquin is a Radical Liberal, too.” Hipolito Rodriguez nodded.

The Radical Liberals had been strong in the Confederate Southwest for years. Voting for them had always been a way to show Richmond the people here weren’t happy with the neglect the Whigs gave them.

“I’d better go home,” Rodriguez said, setting his mug on the table in front of him. “If I go now, Magdalena won’t yell at me . . . so much.” He got to his feet. The room swayed slightly, but only slightly.

I’m not drunk, he thought. *Of course I’m not drunk.*

“Hasta luego, amigo,” Ruiz said. By the way he sat, he wasn’t going anywhere for quite a while.

“Luego,” Rodriguez answered. He walked to the door—steadily enough, all things considered—and left *La Culebra Verde* . The cantina had thick adobe walls that kept out the worst of the heat. When he went out into the street, it smote full force. His broad-brimmed straw hat helped some, but only some.

He sighed as he drew in a lungful of bake-oven air. He’d known it would be like this. It always was.

Baroyeca looked a lot like any other little Sonoran town. The main street was unpaved. Dust hung in the air. Horses and a few motorcars stood in front of shops. Like the cantina, most of the rest of the buildings were of adobe. Some had roofs of half-round red tiles, some of thatch, a few of corrugated tin.

A roadrunner trotted down the street as if it owned it. The bird held a still-wriggling lizard in its beak.

When a stray dog came towards it, it flapped up into the branches of a cottonwood tree and gulped the lizard down. The dog sent a reproachful stare after it, as if to say, *That's not fair.*

"Life's not fair," Rodriguez muttered. Both dog and roadrunner ignored him.

Advertising slogans were painted on the whitewashed fronts of the shops. Here and there, signs and posters added to the urge to sell. Rodriguez remembered his father saying there hadn't been so many of those when he was young.

Posters—well printed in both Spanish and English—extolled the virtues of Horacio Castillo, who was seeking a fourth term in the Confederate Congress. Castillo, his pictures showed, was a plump man with a neat, thin mustache. FOR PROGRESS AND SECURITY, VOTE RADICAL LIBERAL, his posters said.

A few posters also touted the Whig candidate. Vicente Valenzuela wouldn't win, but he'd put up a respectable showing.

And then there were the scrawls on the walls, again in both Spanish and English. ¡LIBERTAD! some said, while others shouted, FREEDOM! Rodriguez eyed them thoughtfully. The Freedom Party had never been strong in Sonora up till this election. It probably wouldn't win now, either. But it was making itself known in ways it hadn't before.

Most of what Rodriguez knew about the Freedom Party was that it wanted another go at the USA and wanted to keep black men in their place. He didn't like the USA, either. And if black men weren't on the bottom in the CSA, he would be, so he wanted them kept down.

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But a Freedom Party man had murdered the president of the Confederacy. Rodriguez scowled. That was no way to behave. He sighed. It was too bad. If people could only forget that . . .

He sighed again, and headed for his farm. A horse-drawn wagon coming into town kicked up more dust, a yellow-gray cloud of it. A couple of men with rifles rode atop the wagon. They gave Rodriguez a

hard, watchful stare as it rattled past. He sighed yet again. He was no *bandido* . And, even if he were a *bandido* , it wasn't as if the silver mines in the hills outside of Baroyeca yielded enough precious metal to be worth stealing. Fewer than half as many miners as before the war went down into those dark shafts. If the mine ever failed altogether, what would become of Baroyeca? He didn't like to think about that, either.

High up in the sky, several vultures wheeled, riding the columns of hot air that rose from the baking ground. If Baroyeca dried up and blew away, even the vultures might not find enough to eat in this valley.

After not quite half an hour, Rodriguez got back to his farm. He raised corn and beans and squashes and chickens and pigs. A sturdy mule, one of the best for miles around, did the plowing and hauling. He raised almost all his own food. *But if Baroyeca fails, what will I do for salt and nails and cotton cloth and coffee and all the other things I can't make for myself?* He clicked his tongue between his teeth.

He had no idea.

A scrawny dog ran toward him, growling and baring its teeth. "*Cállate*, Maximiliano!" Rodriguez shouted. The dog skidded to a stop about ten feet away. It whined and wagged its tail, as if to say, *Well, you might have been someone dangerous, and I was on the job.* Rodriguez wasn't fooled. He'd had Maximiliano for three years now, and had never seen a stupider dog. He'd known exactly what he was doing when he named the beast for the Emperor of Mexico.

On the other side of the border, naming a dog for the Emperor might have got him stood up against a wall and shot for a rebel. All things considered, he was just as glad to be where he was.

His older daughter, Guadalupe, carried a hen by the feet toward the chopping block by the house. Spit flooded into Rodriguez's mouth at the thought of chicken stew or any of the other interesting things Magdalena, his wife, could do with the bird. He waved to Guadalupe. She was eleven now; she'd been born just before he got conscripted. It wouldn't be more than another year or two before she started having a real shape, before boys began sniffing around, and before life began wheeling through a new cycle. The thought made him feel old, though he'd just passed thirty.

In the house, Miguel and Jorge were wrestling. They were less than a

year apart, seven and six, and Jorge, the younger, was big for his age, so the match was pretty even. Susana, who was five, watched them with her thumb in her mouth, probably glad they weren't picking on her. Rodriguez didn't see Pedro, the youngest; he was probably taking a nap.

"Hola," Rodriguez said to Magdalena, who sat patting tortillas into shape. His mouth watered again. As far as he was concerned, she made the best tortillas in the whole valley.

"Hola," she answered, cocking her head to one side to study him. *"Como estás?"*

He recognized that gesture, and straightened up in indignation. "I'm not drunk," he declared.

Magdalena didn't answer right away. After she'd finished studying him, though, she nodded. "No, you're not," she admitted. "Good. And what's new in town?"

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"It's still there," he said, which, given the state of the silver mine, wasn't altogether a joke. He added, "A wagon came into town from the mine while I was walking home."

"Yes, I saw it go by," Magdalena said. "Who was at the cantina? What's the gossip?"

"I was mostly talking with Carlos," he answered. "We were going on about how you hear more and more English these days." He spoke in Spanish; Magdalena was far more comfortable in it than in the other language.

She nodded even so. "The way the older children bring it back from school, I wonder if their children will know any Spanish at all."

"It's good they go to school, in English or Spanish," Rodriguez said. "Maybe then they won't have to break their backs and break their hearts every day, the way a farmer does."

Magdalena raised an eyebrow. Rodriguez felt heat under his swarthy skin. He hadn't broken his back today. He spread his hands, as if to say, *You want too much if you expect me to work hard* every *day* .

His wife didn't say anything. She didn't have to. The eyebrow had already done the job.

Rodriguez said, "And we talked politics."

"Ah." Magdalena perked up. "What will you do?" Here in Sonora, women's suffrage was a distant glow on the horizon, if that. She couldn't vote herself. But that didn't keep her from being interested.

"I don't know yet," Rodriguez answered. "I don't know, but I think I may just vote for the Freedom Party."

Brakes squeaking a little, the Birmingham pulled up in front of the Freedom Party offices in Richmond.

Jake Featherston's guards fanned out and formed a perimeter on the sidewalk. They were well armed and alert; they might have been about to clear the damnyankees out of a stretch of trench. Featherston's enemies inside the CSA weren't so obvious as U.S. soldiers in green-gray, but they probably hated him even more than the Yankees had hated their Confederate foes. Soldiering, sometimes, was just a job.

Jake had also discovered politics was a serious business.

One of the guards nodded and gestured. As Jake came forward from the building, another guard opened the curbside door for him. "Freedom!" the man said as he got into the motorcar.

"Freedom, Henry," Featherston echoed. He settled himself on the padded seat. This beat the hell out of life as an artillery sergeant, any way you looked at it.

"Freedom!" the driver said, putting the Birmingham in gear.

"Freedom, Virgil," Featherston answered. "Everything ready at the other end?"

"Far as I know, Sarge." Virgil Joyner made that sound as if he were addressing a general, not a noncom.

Yes, this was a pretty good life, all right.

They went only a few blocks. When the driver pulled to a stop, Featherston scowled. "What the hell?"

he said angrily. A squad of Freedom Party guards were arguing with

some Richmond policemen in **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

old-fashioned gray uniforms. Several reporters scribbled in notebooks. A photographer's flash immortalized the moment. Featherston got out of the motorcar in a hurry. "What's going on here?" he demanded.

"This is a polling place," one of the cops said. "No electioneering allowed within a hundred feet. Far as I'm concerned, they sure as hell count as electioneering." He pointed to the armed guards.

"We're just here to protect Mr. Featherston," one of the men in not-quite-Confederate uniform insisted.

He sounded ready for business. The policemen looked nervous. Well they might—the Freedom Party guards outgunned them, and had proved to the CSA they weren't shy about mixing it up with the police, or with anyone else they didn't like.

Here, though, Jake judged it a good time to walk soft. "It's all right, boys," he said, as genially as he could. "Don't reckon anybody'll take a shot at me while I go and vote." He walked past the policemen and toward the doorway above which the Stars and Bars fluttered.

The guards didn't look happy. Like watchdogs, they wanted to stay with their master all the time. But, once he'd decided, they didn't argue. The cops didn't bother hiding their relief.

"Who you gonna vote for, Mr. Featherston?" a reporter shouted.

"Freedom—the straight ticket," Jake answered with a wave and a grin.

Despite that cocky grin, he remained alert as he went to the polling place. If anybody wanted to take a shot at him, this was a hell of a good place to do it. If a rifle muzzle came out of that building, where would he jump? Or from that one? Or that one? He hadn't fought in the trenches—the First Richmond Howitzers had been in back of them—but he'd had plenty of bullets whip past his head. He knew everything that needed knowing about diving for cover.

No shots rang out. He strode into the polling place with grin intact. A man coming out of a curtained booth recognized him, did a double take, and grinned a grin of his own, a big, delighted one. "Freedom!"

the fellow blurted.

“Freedom,” Featherston said.

Somber, disapproving coughs from the officials at the polling place, four or five graybeards who might have fought in the Second Mexican War or maybe even the War of Secession, but surely not in the Great War. One of them said, “No electioneering, gentlemen, if you please.”

“Right,” Jake said; he was doing this by the rules. He scrawled his name and address in their registry book, and went into the booth the fellow who’d recognized him had vacated. As he’d told the reporter he would, he put an X by the name of the Freedom candidates for Congress, for the Virginia Assembly and State Senate, and for the Richmond City Council. The last race was nominally nonpartisan, but everybody knew better. With the Whigs and Radical Liberals pretty evenly split in the district, he thought the Freedom Party man had a decent chance of sneaking home a winner, too.

After finishing the ballot, he went out and presented it to the election officials. One of them folded it and put it into the ballot box. “Jacob Featherston has voted,” he intoned solemnly.

“Jacob Featherston is a murdering son of a bitch,” said a man who’d come out of his voting booth a moment after Jake emerged from his.

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More coughs from the old men. “None of that here,” one of them said. Another took the ballot. “Oscar Herbert has voted,” he declared.

A few years earlier, when the Freedom Party was just getting off the ground, Jake Featherston would have mixed it up with Herbert right outside the polling place, or maybe here inside it. He was no less angry now, but he was shrewder than he had been. *Some day soon, pal, somebody’s gonna pay you a little visit,* he thought. *Your name’s Oscar Herbert and you live in this precinct. We’ll find you. You bet we will.*

Herbert went one way, Featherston the other. He walked through the cops and out to his guards. With audible sighs of relief, they closed in around him. Photographers took more flash pictures. He waved to them.

“How many seats do you expect to lose this time?” a reporter called.

“What’s that?” Jake cupped a hand behind his ear as he got into the

Birmingham. “Spent too long in the artillery, and my ears aren’t what they ought to be.” He slammed the car door before the reporter could finish the question again. He *had* lost some hearing during the war, but not so much as that. Still, artilleryman’s ear came in handy for avoiding questions he didn’t want to answer.

“Back to headquarters, Sarge?” the driver asked.

“You bet,” Featherston answered. The car pulled away from the curb.

On the short ride over to Party headquarters, Jake contemplated the question he’d pretended not to hear. He liked none of the answers he came up with. His best guess was that Freedom *would* lose seats in the House of Representatives. He hoped the Party would hold its own, but he didn’t believe it. And if he lost seats—he took everything personally, as he always had—how long would people keep finding him a force to be reckoned with?

“We were so close,” he muttered. “So goddamn close.”

“What’s that?” Virgil Joyner said.

“Nothin’. Not a thing.” Jake lied without hesitation.

When he got back to Freedom Party headquarters, he wished he hadn’t gone and voted so soon. He had nothing to do but sit around and wait and stare at the banks of telegraph clickers and phones and wireless sets that would bring in the election results when there were election results to bring in. That wouldn’t be for a while yet. Polls in Virginia didn’t close till seven P.M., and those farther west would stay open a couple of hours longer than that. Meanwhile . . .

Meanwhile, he did some more scribbling in *Over Open Sights* . He’d fiddled with the—maybe journal was the right name for it—now and again in the days since the Great War, but he’d never quite managed to recapture the heat he’d known while writing it in the odd moments when he wasn’t throwing three-inch shells at the damnyankees.

One of these days, he told himself. *One of these days, I’ll be ready to put it out, and people will be ready to read it. I’ll know when. I’m sure I’ll know when. But the time isn’t ripe yet.* He fiddled with the pile of Gray Eagle scratchpads in lieu of twiddling his thumbs, and accomplished about as much **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

as he would have twiddling them. He changed a word here, took out a couple of words there, added a phrase somewhere else. It all added up to nothing, and he knew that, too.

His secretary stuck her head into the office. “Can I get you something to eat, Mr. Featherston?” she asked, as if she were his mother.

He wouldn’t have taken that from anyone else—certainly not from his real mother, were she still alive.

But he nodded now. “Thank you kindly, Lulu,” he said. “Some fried chicken’d go down mighty nice about now.”

“I’ll take care of it,” she promised, and hurried away. Take care of it she did, as she always did. Jake ate like a wolf. No matter how much he ate, his gaunt form never added an ounce. He ate as much from duty as from hunger. His stomach would pain him no matter what when he watched the returns coming in, but it would pain him less with food in there.

A little before seven, Freedom Party leaders and telegraph operators gathered at the headquarters.

Featherston made himself greet them, made himself shake hands and smile and slap backs, the way he'd made himself eat. It needed doing, so he did it. But it was a distraction he could have done without.

"Polls are closing," said somebody—somebody with a gift for the obvious—as church bells all through Richmond chimed seven times. A minute or so later, the very first returns began coming over the wire.

They meant as little as the changes Jake had made in *Over Open Sights* earlier in the day, but everybody exclaimed over them even so. Featherston did a little exclaiming himself when a Freedom Party candidate jumped into an early lead in a Virginia district he'd been sure was safely Whig.

"Maybe the people are wising up," he said. "I hope they are, God damn it."

In the first days of the Great War, he'd thought the Confederate Army would drive everything before it, too. He'd taken unholy glee in shelling Washington, and he'd delighted in swarming up into Pennsylvania and toward Philadelphia. If the *de facto* capital of the USA had fallen along with the *de jure* one . . . But Philadelphia had held, and, inch by painful inch, the C.S. Army had been driven back through Pennsylvania and Maryland and into Virginia itself.

If the niggers hadn't risen up and stabbed us in the back . . . But he knew they had, however much white men nowadays tried to pretend otherwise.

On one of the competing wireless sets, an announcer said, "If this trend holds up, it looks like the third district in South Carolina will be coming back to the Whigs in the next Congress after staying in Freedom Party hands these past two terms."

Curses ran through the headquarters, Featherston's loud among them. The Party had held that seat in the debacle of 1923; he'd counted on holding it again. Maybe the people weren't wising up after all. Maybe they were an even bigger pack of damned idiots than he'd thought.

A colored waiter, hired for the occasion, brought around a tray of drinks. Featherston took a whiskey.

The Negro nodded respectfully as he did. Jake tossed back the drink. His mouth tightened. *Where were you in the uprising, you sorry black son of a bitch? You didn't have a penguin suit on then, I bet.*

Probably just another goddamn Red. If we'd shot a few thousand bastards like you before you got out of line, we wouldn't have had any trouble like we did. He had some sharp things to say about that in *Over Open Sights*.

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Another Freedom Party seat, this one from Arkansas, went down the drain. Amid more curses, somebody said, "Well, we didn't elect any Senators till 1921, so we don't have to worry about them for another couple o' years."

That was exactly the wrong attitude to take, as far as Jake was concerned. "We're playing this game to win, dammit," he snarled. "We don't play not to lose. We don't play safe. We're playing to win, and we're gonna win. Remember it, damn you all!"

Nobody argued with him, not out loud. But nobody seemed anything close to convinced, either. That meant he got to crow extra loud when, out of a clear blue sky, the Freedom candidate won a tight three-way race for governor of Texas, and then, in the wee small hours of the morning, when a new Freedom Congressman came in from, of all places, southern Sonora.

"See, boys?" Featherston said around a yawn. "We ain't dead yet. Not even close." *I hope not even close, anyhow.*

VI

During the Great War, Nellie Jacobs had heard more aeroplane motors above Washington, D.C., than she'd ever wanted to. Aeroplane motors, back in those days, had always meant trouble. Either observers were over the city taking photographs to guide bombers and artillery, or else the bombers themselves paid calls, raining destruction and death down on the Confederate occupiers. Later, Confederate bombers had tried to slaughter U.S. soldiers in Washington. Neither side cared much about civilians.

Nellie had needed years after the war to stop wanting to duck whenever motors droned overhead.

Now, though, she and her husband stood in the street on the bright, crisp New Year's Day of 1926, staring into the blue sky, pointing, and

exclaiming in excitement like a couple of children. “Look! There it is!” Hal Jacobs said, pointing again.

“I see it!” Nellie answered. “Looks like a big old fat cigar up there in the sky, doesn’t it?”

“It certainly does,” Hal said. “That is just what it looks like, I think.”

Clara tugged at Nellie’s skirt. “Ma, I have to go potty,” she said.

“Well, go on in and go,” Nellie said impatiently. “Your dad and me, we’re going to stay right here and watch the zeppelin a while longer.” Clara made the beginnings of a whimper. “Go on,” Nellie told her.

“Go on, or I’ll warm your fanny for you. You’re going to be six this year. You don’t need me to hold your hand any more when you go tinkle.”

Her daughter ducked into the coffeehouse. Nellie kept staring up at the *Kronprinz Friedrich Wilhelm* as it neared the mooring station that had been set up at the top of the newly refinished Washington Monument. “Can you believe it?” Hal said. “It flew all the way across the Atlantic. All the way across the ocean, without stopping once. What an age we live in!”

“Paper says the crown prince himself is in there.” Nellie tried to point to the little passenger gondola **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

hanging beneath the great cigar-shaped gas bag. “On a state visit to President Sinclair.”

As Clara came back, Hal nodded. His voice was troubled. “We fought side by side with Kaiser Bill all through the Great War. Sad we should squabble with Germany now. I hope Friedrich Wilhelm can patch things up.”

“That’d be good,” Nellie agreed. “Don’t want to worry about little Armstrong going off to war one of these days.” She doted on her grandson, not least because her daughter Edna had to take care of him most of the time. Edna’s half sister Clara, on the other hand, had been a not altogether welcome surprise and was an ungodly amount of work for a woman well into middle age. She would, thank God, be going back to kindergarten in a few more days.

Suddenly, the zeppelin’s engines stopped buzzing. “They’ve got it,”

Hal said, as if he personally had been the one to moor the *Kronprinz Friedrich Wilhelm* to the white stone tower. He sounded delighted to repeat himself: “What an age we live in! When my father was born, there was no telegraph and hardly any railroads. And now we have these wireless sets and—this.” He pointed toward the Washington Monument again.

“It’s something, all right,” Nellie agreed. But then, perhaps incautiously, she went on, “I don’t know that it’s all to the good.”

“Not all to the good?” Her husband looked indignant. “What do you mean? What could be grander than—that?”

“Oh, it’s—swell, the young people say now.” Nellie brought out the slang self-consciously; like anyone of her generation, she was much more used to *bully* . “But when your pa was born, Hal, this here was all one country, too, you know. We’ve spilled an awful lot o’ blood since on account of it ain’t any more.”

“Well, yes, of course,” he said. The two of them, in conquered and reconquered Washington, had seen more spilled blood than most civilians. He sighed and breathed out a big, puffy cloud of steam. “I can’t imagine how things could have been any different, though. You might as well talk about us losing the Revolution and still belonging to England.”

“I suppose you’re right.” Nellie sighed. Hal was the sensible one in the family. He was, as far as she was concerned, sometimes sensible to a fault. Clara came back out. Nellie absentmindedly ruffled her hair.

Then she decided to be sensible, too, and said, “Now we’ve seen it. Let’s go inside. It’s cold out here.”

“Oh, Ma!” Nobody had ever accused Clara of being sensible.

But Hal said, “Your mother is right. If you stay out here too long, you could catch pneumonia, and then where would you be?”

“I’d be out here, having a good time,” Clara answered. Pneumonia was just a word to her, not one of the many diseases that could so easily kill children.

“Come on in,” Nellie said. She knew what pneumonia was, all right. “Edna and Uncle Merle and Cousin Armstrong are coming over in a little while.”

That did get Clara back inside, at the price of continual questions —“When will they come? Why aren’t they here yet?”—till her half sister, Edna’s husband, and their son arrived half an hour later. Armstrong pulled Clara’s hair. She squalled like a cat that had had its tail stepped on, then stamped on his foot hard **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

enough to make him wail even louder.

He got little sympathy from his mother. “Serves you right,” Edna said. “I saw what you did to Clara.”

“Happy New Year,” Merle Grimes said above the wails of the two irate children. Behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, irony glinted in his eyes.

“Well, I do hope the rest of it’ll be happier than this godawful racket,” Nellie said. “Maybe the crown prince will bury the hatchet once and for all.”

“He’d like to bury it in our backs, I think,” Grimes said. “One of these days, we really will have to worry about Germany. The Germans are worrying about us right this minute, and you can bet your bottom dollar on that.”

Hal handed him a whiskey. After they clinked glasses and toasted 1926, Nellie’s husband said, “We’ll have a hard time worrying about Germany when we don’t even worry about the CSA.”

“I know,” Grimes said. “Well, good old Kaiser Bill’s got other worries besides us, too, and that’s not bad.”

Nellie raised her glass for a toast of her own. “Here’s to no more war anywhere,” she said once she’d caught everybody’s eye. “Haven’t we had enough?”

“Amen!” her husband said, and drank.

“I know *I’ve* had enough, enough and then some,” her son-in-law said. He drank, too. “Wasn’t for those

. . . miserable Confederates”—he didn’t swear around women, but he’d come close there—“I wouldn’t limp for the rest of my days.”

Edna also drank. “I hope they never, ever come anywhere near Washington again,” she said. Nellie eyed her daughter. Edna looked back defiantly, but couldn’t help turning red. She’d nearly married a

Confederate officer. In fact, she would have married him if a U.S. shell hadn't killed him on his way to the altar. *Almost ten years ago now,* Nellie thought, amazed, wondering where the time had gone. As far as she knew, Merle Grimes had no idea Nicholas H. Kincaid had ever existed.

That was Edna's worry, not her own. She had secrets in her past, too, secrets she wanted to stay buried till they shoveled dirt over her. Her husband reminded her of those secrets by pouring everyone's glass full and proposing a toast of his own: "Here's to our missing friends, gone but not forgotten."

"Oh, God, yes!" Merle said, and gulped that drink down. His mouth tightened; harsh lines sprang out at its corners. "Too many good fellows dead for no reason: Ernie and Clancy and Bob and Otis and—"

Behind his spectacles, tears glinted.

"And Bill Reach, too." Hal Jacobs sounded as maudlin as his stepdaughter's husband. "He was worth a division, maybe more, in getting the Confederates out of Washington. I wish he'd lived to see this day, with an American empire stretching north to south, east to west. . . ." He sighed. "He should have, too.

Just bad luck."

Now Edna eyed Nellie. Now Nellie flushed and had trouble meeting her daughter's eye. She didn't reckon Bill Reach a missing friend. Reach had mortified her during the war, drunkenly taking her for the strumpet she'd been a long time before. She'd never been able to tell Edna anything since, not hoping to **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

be taken seriously.

But not even Edna knew how Bill Reach had died. No one but Nellie knew that, which was just how she wanted things. She'd been foraging for supplies when he tried to rape her, counting on a broken bottle to intimidate her into cooperating. But she'd carried a butcher knife, and she'd been sober. Bill Reach's body was one of God knew how many hundreds or thousands from the time of the U.S.

bombardment, the time before the Confederate Army finally and sullenly pulled out of the U.S. capital.

So far as she knew, nobody'd ever found it.

I hope nobody ever does, either, she thought savagely. *I hope he rots in the ground and burns in hell forever. It'd serve him right, by God.*

Her husband had said something to her, but she had no idea what. "I'm sorry, Hal," she said. "I must've been woolgathering."

"It's all right, sweetheart," Hal said with a tender smile. He did love her. She knew that. She was absently fond of him, too, not least because, being a long way from young, he didn't try to make love to her very often. She'd had more than enough of that. Now he went on, "I said, I know you feel the same way about poor Bill as I do. He always praised the information you got to the skies. He did like the bottle a bit too much, but he was a fine man, a first-class patriot."

Nellie managed a nod and a glassy smile. They sufficed. Edna made a small noise that might have been the start of a snicker, but did stop at Nellie's glower. And then they all got distracted, for Clara came in shouting, "Ma! Ma! Armstrong went and put somethin' down the potty and then he flushed it, and now there's water all over everything! Come quick!"

"Oh, for God's sake!" Nellie sprang to her feet, as did the other grownups.

Getting out the pair of long johns and mopping up the water didn't take long. For Merle Grimes to wallop Armstrong's backside with a hairbrush didn't take long, either. Armstrong's howls needed some little while to subside. So did Nellie's temper. "He's only a little boy, sweetheart," Hal said.

"Boys!" Nellie snorted, in the tone she usually reserved for, *Men!* "You'd never see a little girl doing something like that."

"You tell 'em, Ma," Edna said. She and Nellie argued whenever they got a chance, but she would back her mother in a quarrel against the other half of the human race.

Except there was no quarrel. Hal Jacobs and Merle Grimes looked at each other, as if wondering who would bell the cat. At last, Hal said, "Well, Nellie, you may be right. If the world held nothing but women, we probably wouldn't have fought the Great War."

Merle chuckled. "Oh, I don't know if I'd go that far. They wouldn't have fought it over Serbia, though—I am sure of that. More likely over which was better, Macy's or Gimbel's."

He laughed. So did Hal. And so did Edna, betraying her sex after all. Nellie glared at her—yes, they would squabble over anything. Defensively, Edna said, “Oh, come on, Ma—it *was* funny.”

“Well, maybe,” Nellie said with the air of one making an enormous concession. She was so obvious about it, her husband and son-in-law started laughing again.

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“Peace,” Merle Grimes said when he could speak at last. “Peace. It’s 1926, and we’ve already drunk to peace. Let’s keep it for as long as we can.” Not even Nellie could find anything to argue with there.

Jonathan Moss got to his feet in the courtroom. “May it please your Honor,” he said wearily, “but I must object to the prosecution’s speaking of my client as ‘the guilty party.’ The purpose of a trial is to find out whether or not he is guilty.”

His Honor was a U.S. Army colonel named Augustus Thorgood. Down came the gavel. “Overruled.”

He nodded to the prosecutor, a U.S. Army major named Sam Lopat. “You may proceed.”

“Thank you, your Honor,” Lopat replied. “As I was saying, Stubbs there is plainly guilty of insurrection against the military government of the United States in the former province of Ontario, as defined in Occupation Administrative Code, section 521, subsection 17.”

Horace Stubbs, Moss’ client, leaned toward him and whispered, “Thanks for trying.”

“We’re not out of it yet,” Moss whispered back. But he was whistling in the dark, and he knew it.

Major Lopat went on, “Before witnesses, the defendant said the United States deserved to be booted out of Canada on their backside. His very words, your Honor!” His voice trembled with indignation.

“Objection.” Moss got to his feet again. “No witnesses have been produced before the court to show my client said any such thing.”

“We have the testimony,” Lopat said smugly.

“But no witnesses,” Moss persisted. “Testimony can come from a man with a personal grudge, or from one out for a profit. How do we know unless we can cross-examine a witness?”

“This is not an ordinary criminal proceeding, Mr. Moss, as you know perfectly well,” Colonel Thorgood said. “Testimony from certified informants may be admitted without their being liable to appear in open court, for fear of reprisal against them from the unreconciled.”

“How can you possibly hope for justice under such conditions?” Moss asked.

“We aim to stamp out rebellion,” the military judge said. “We will, too.”

“Yes, your Honor. No doubt, your Honor.” Moss turned Thorgood’s title of respect into one of reproach. “But, sooner or later, ignoring the needs of justice and caring only for the needs of expedience *will* come back to haunt you. As Ben Franklin said, your Honor, ‘They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.’ ”

He’d pulled that quotation out of his *Bartlett’s* , hoping he wouldn’t have to use it. If he did, his client would be in trouble. Well, Stubbs *was* in trouble, and Moss, like any lawyer worth his pay, used whatever weapons came to hand. And this one struck home. Colonel Thorgood turned red. Major Lopat jumped to his feet. “Now *I* object, your Honor! Incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial.”

“Sustained.” Thorgood thumped the gavel. “The record will be stricken.”

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“Exception!” Moss said. “If you’re going to railroad an innocent man, at least be honest about what you’re doing.”

Bang! The gavel came down again. “This inflammatory speech will also be stricken,” Colonel Thorgood declared. He nodded to Lopat. “Carry on, Major.”

Carry on Lopat did, with soldierly precision. The case against Horace Stubbs was strong—was, in fact, airtight—as long as one believed what informants said about him. Moss was convinced the informants

were lying through their teeth. But he doubted whether Colonel Thorgood cared one way or the other.

Thorgood's job was to keep Canada quiet. If he had to shoot every Canuck in sight to do that job, he would, and go to dinner with a hearty appetite five minutes later.

When Major Lopat finished, the military judge nodded to Moss. "Now, Counselor, you may have your say."

"Thank you, your Honor." Moss fought to keep sarcasm from his voice. He thought he still had some small chance, not of getting his client off—that was plainly hopeless—but of earning him a reduced sentence. Further affronting Colonel Thorgood wouldn't help there. He set forth the evidence as best he could, finishing, "May it please your Honor, the only people who claim Mr. Stubbs was in any way involved with recent unfortunate events in Ontario are those whose testimony is inherently unreliable and who have a vested interest in giving him the appearance of guilt regardless of whether that appearance is in any way justified." He sat down.

From the prosecution's table, Major Lopat muttered something about a "damn Canuck-lover." Moss sent him a hard look. The military prosecutor gave back a stare colder than any Canadian winter. Had he worked in the CSA rather than the USA, he would surely have muttered about a "damn nigger-lover"

instead.

But, to Moss' surprise, Colonel Thorgood's gavel came down again. "That will be quite enough of that, Major," the judge said.

"I beg your pardon, your Honor," Lopat said politely. He didn't beg Moss' pardon, though.

"Very well, Major. Do keep your remarks to the business at hand. Having said as much to Mr. Moss, I can hardly fail to say the same to you." Thorgood looked down at the notes on his desk. He picked up a pen and scribbled something, then said, "Horace Stubbs, rise to hear the verdict of this court."

With a sigh, Stubbs got to his feet. He could see the writing on the wall as plainly as could Moss. He was a small, thin, middle-aged man. On looks alone, he made an unlikely insurrectionist.

"Horace Stubbs," Colonel Thorgood said, "I find you guilty of the

crime of participating in rebellion against the U.S. occupying authorities in the former province of Ontario." Stubbs' shoulders slumped.

The military judge scribbled something else. He continued, "Due to the unusual nature of this case, I sentence you to six months' imprisonment and to a fine of $250: failure to pay the latter will result in a further six months' imprisonment." *Bang!* went the gavel. "This court is adjourned."

A couple of husky U.S. noncoms strode forward to take Horace Stubbs off to jail. "Just a minute," he told them. "Just one damn minute." He grabbed Jonathan Moss' hand, hard enough to hurt. "Thank you, sir," he said. "Everything they told me about you, it was all true, and then some. God bless you."

"You're welcome," Moss said in slightly dazed tones as the noncoms took charge of his client and led **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

him away. He'd hoped Colonel Thorgood would go easy on Stubbs. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined Thorgood would go this easy. Six months and $250? From a military court? That was hardly even a slap on the wrist.

Major Lopat must have felt the same way. As he put papers back into his military-issue briefcase, he sent Moss a sour stare. "Well, Clarence Darrow, you pulled a rabbit out of the hat this time," he said.

"Oh, come on," Moss said—he was damned if he'd admit surprise to the other side. "You didn't have a case, and you know it."

Lopat didn't even bother arguing with him. All the military prosecutor said was, "Yeah? So what? Look where we are."

"Canadians deserve justice, too," Moss said.

"Oh, yeah? Since when? Says who?" Having fired three clichés like an artillery barrage, Major Lopat added, "And a whole fat lot you'd care, too, if you weren't sleeping with a Canuck gal."

That might even have been true. Even so, to Moss it had only one possible answer, and he used it:

"Screw you, Sam." He packed his own papers in his briefcase and left the courtroom, grabbing his overcoat as he went. The calendar said

spring had started three days earlier, but Berlin, Ontario, paid little attention to the calendar. Snow whitened streets and sidewalks, with more falling even as Moss walked along the street.

He paused thoughtfully in front of a sign that said, EMPIRE GROCERIES. Below the words, a large, American-looking eagle was painted. Maybe the storekeeper meant the American empire, the one that stretched from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of California, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But maybe, too, it was meant to call to mind the name Berlin had briefly borne during the Great War, when its citizens decided living in a town named for an enemy capital was unpatriotic.

Moss chuckled. Laura Secord still refused to call the town anything but Empire. As far as she was concerned, the occupying authorities had no right to change back the name. There were no Canadian patriots more fiery than Laura.

And yet she'd warned him the uprising was imminent. He still didn't fully understand that, and she refused to talk about it now. His best guess was that she hadn't thought the revolt had any chance to succeed, and so she wasn't committing treason by talking about it. But that was only a guess, and he knew it.

He stopped at a diner a few doors down from Empire Groceries. A waiter brought him a menu. The man walked with a limp; he'd taken a bullet in the leg trying to hold back the U.S. Army. He knew Moss had flown aeroplanes for the USA, but didn't hold it against him—much. "Case over?" he asked as Moss sat down at an empty table.

"That's right," Moss answered. "Let me have the corned beef on wheat, and coffee to go with it."

As the waiter scribbled on a pad, he asked another question: "They going to let Horace live?"

"Six months in jail and $250," Moss said exultantly.

The waiter dropped his pencil. "Be damned," he said, grunting in pain as he bent to pick it up. He called **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

back to the cook, who was also the owner. "Hey, Eddie! This fast-talking Yank got Horace off easy!"

"What's 'easy'?" Eddie called back. "Twenty years? Ten?"

“Six months,” the waiter answered, sounding as excited as Moss. “And $250.”

“Be damned,” Eddie said, as the waiter had. That impressed him enough to make him come out front.

He had on a cloth cap in lieu of the toque a cook at a fancier place might have worn. He tipped it to Moss. “Lunch on the house, pal.”

“Thanks,” Moss told him.

“You did it,” Eddie said. “Seems like our own barristers haven’t had much luck in Yankee courts.

Maybe it takes one to know one.”

That wasn’t exactly praise, though the cook no doubt meant it as such. It also wasn’t so, or not necessarily. With a sigh, Moss said, “That fellow they said was a bomber, they threw the book at him no matter what I did.”

“Enoch Dupree, you mean?” the waiter said.

Moss nodded. “That’s right.”

The waiter and Eddie looked at each other. After a long pause, Eddie said, “Hate to tell you, but Enoch, he *was* a bomber. I happen to know it for a fact, on account of his brother-in-law’s married to my cousin.

I—”

“I don’t want to hear about it.” Moss held up a hand to show he really meant it. “My job is to give people the best defense they can get, regardless of whether they’re guilty or not.”

“Don’t know I much fancy that,” the waiter said. “Shouldn’t be guilty people running around loose just

‘cause they’ve got smart lawyers.”

“Well, your other choice is to send innocent people to jail,” Moss answered. “How do you like that?”

“I don’t, much,” the Canadian answered. “But I thought it was what you Yanks call justice. Sure has looked like that since you came.”

“You shouldn’t blame him,” Eddie said. “He’s done everything he

could for us, ever since he hung out his shingle here."

"That's so," the waiter admitted, and Moss felt good till the fellow added, "Sure as hell wish he could do a lot more, though."

Lucien Galtier sighed as he and Marie and Georges and Jeanne—the last two children left at home—got into his Chevrolet for the Sunday trip to Rivière-du-Loup. "I'd sooner go to Mass in St.-Antonin or St.-Modèste," he said, "but sometimes there's no help for it."

"Doing this is wise," his wife said. "As long as we come to church every so often and let Bishop Pascal **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

see us, everything should be fine."

"We don't want to give him any reason to complain about us to the Americans, no," Lucien agreed.

"But the Republic of Quebec is free and independent," Georges said. "And if you don't believe me, just ask the first American soldier you see."

Georges always liked to sound as if he were joking. Sometimes he was. Sometimes . . . Lucien had learned an English expression: *kidding on the square.* That summed things up better than anything in Quebecois French.

"You're getting pretty good at this driving business," Georges went on as they rolled up the paved road past the hospital and toward the town on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence. "Anyone would think you'd been doing it all your life." He chuckled. "They'd hardly even invented horses when you were a boy, eh, Papa, let alone motorcars?"

"They hadn't invented such smart alecks, I'll tell you that," Lucien said. His younger son preened, as if at praise.

The Église Saint-Patrice in Rivière-du-Loup was called a cathedral these days, though it was the same building it had always been. Quite a few motorcars parked nearby. Times were . . . Lucien wouldn't say they were good, but he thought it now and again.

As people filed into the church (being the stubborn Quebecois farmer he was, Galtier refused to think of it as a cathedral, no matter what Bishop Pascal declared), some of them talked about the stocks they'd bought, and about how much money they'd made from them. Lucien

felt Marie's eyes on him. Ever so slightly, he shook his head. He'd stayed away from the *bourse* , and intended to go right on staying away from it. It struck him as being much more like gambling than any legitimate way to make money.

Gambling, now, gambling was all very well—so long as you knew you could lose as easily as you could win.

He was almost to the door when he heard the word *scandal* for the first time. Now he and his wife looked at each other. He shrugged. Marie did the same. A moment later, he heard the word again.

Something juicy had happened. *And I've been on the farm minding my own business, and so I haven't the faintest idea what it is,* he thought regretfully.

"Tabernac," he muttered. The look Marie sent him this time was definitely reproachful. He pretended not to notice. It wasn't—quite—as if he'd cursed on holy ground. The other side of the door, it would have been a different business.

No sooner had he gone inside than someone else—a woman—said *scandal* , and immediately started giggling. "What's going on, *mon père* ?" Georges asked. Scandal—especially scandal that might be funny—drew him the way maple syrup drew ants.

A young priest named Father Guillaume stood by the altar in Bishop Pascal's place. As Lucien took his seat in the pews, he asked the fellow next to him, a townsman, "Where's the bishop?"

"Why, with the children, of course," the man answered, and started to laugh. Lucien fumed. He didn't want to admit he didn't know what was going on. That would make him look like a farmer who came to town only to sell things and to hear Mass. Of course, he *was* a farmer who came to town only to sell things and to hear Mass, but he didn't want to remind the world of it.

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His eldest daughter, Nicole; her husband, the American doctor named Leonard O'Doull; and their son, Lucien, sat down behind his family. He started to lean back and ask them what was so delicious, but Father Guillaume began speaking in Latin just then, so he had to compose himself in patience.

He dared hope the priest's sermon would enlighten him, but it only left him more tantalized and titillated than ever. Father Guillaume talked about those without sin casting the first stone. He praised Pascal, and wished him good fortune in whatever he chose to do with the rest of his life.

Lucien wiggled like a man with a dreadful and embarrassing itch. What ever the scandal was, it must have got Bishop Pascal! He'd never cared for Pascal; the man was too pink, too clever, too . . . too expedient, to suit him. But Pascal had always come up smelling like a rose—till now. *And I don't even know what he* did *!* Galtier thought in an agony of frustration.

He went up and took communion from Father Guillaume. He swallowed the wafer as fast as he could; he didn't want to speak of scandal with the Body of Christ still on his tongue. But then he made a beeline for his son-in-law.

"What? You don't know? Oh, for heaven's sake?" Dr. O'Doull exclaimed. He'd come to Quebec during the war, speaking tolerably good Parisian French. After ten years here, his accent remained noticeable, but only a little. He sounded more as if he'd been born in *la belle province—la belle république* , now—every day.

"No, I don't know," Galtier ground out. "Since you are such a font of knowledge, suppose you enlighten me."

"Mais certainement, mon beau-père," O'Doull said, grinning. "Bishop Pascal's lady friend just had twins."

"Twins!" Lucien said. *"Le bon Dieu!"*

"God was indeed good to Bishop Pascal, wouldn't you agree?" his son-in-law said, and laughed out loud. "I should say, to former Bishop Pascal, for he has resigned his see in light of this . . . interesting development. Father Guillaume will serve the spiritual needs of Rivière-du-Loup until the see has a new bishop."

"Twins," Galtier repeated, as if he'd never heard the word before. "Yes, I can see how he would have to resign after that."

No one was surprised when priests had lady friends. They were men of the cloth, yes, but they were also men. A lot of women, down through the years, had sighed over Father, later Bishop, Pascal. Lucien didn't understand it, but he'd never been a woman, either. And few people were astonished if the lady friends of priests sometimes presented

them with offspring. That, too, was just one of those things. Life went on, people looked the other way, and the little bastards were often very well brought up.

"But twins!" Lucien said. "You can't look the other way at twins. By the nature of things, a bishop's twins are a scandal."

"Exactly so, *mon beau-père* ," Leonard O'Doull said. "And that is why Bishop Pascal is Bishop Pascal no more, but plain old Pascal Talon."

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"Pascal Talon!" Galtier exclaimed. "That's right—that is his family. I hadn't thought of his family name in years, though. No one has, I'm sure."

"Of course not, not when he belonged to the Church for all those years," Dr. O'Doull said. "That's what belonging to the Church means. That's what it does. It takes you away from your family and puts you in God's family." He laughed again. "But, now that he's gone and made God's family bigger . . ."

Galtier laughed, too. He asked, "Since you are in town and hear all these things the moment they happen—and since you don't bother telling your poor country cousins about them—could you tell me what M. Pascal Talon plans to do now that he is Bishop Pascal no more?" Whatever it was, he had the nasty feeling the man would make a great success of it.

And, sure enough, his son-in-law said, "I understand he's decided Rivière-du-Loup is too small a place for a man of his many talents. He will be moving to Quebec City, they say, where he can be appreciated for everything he is."

A snake, a sneak, a worm, a collaborator, a philanderer—yes, in the capital of the Republic he should do well for himself, Galtier thought. He found some more questions: "And what of the twins? Are they boys or girls, by the way? And what of their mother? Is Pascal now a married man?"

"They're a boy and a girl. Very pretty babies—I've seen them," O'Doull replied. Being a doctor, he'd seen a lot of babies. If he said they were pretty, Lucien was prepared to believe him. He went on, "I am given to understand that Suzette is now Mme. Talon, yes, but I

don't think she'll be going to Quebec City with her new husband."

Marie heard that and let out a loud sniff. "He made himself a member of God's family. If he cheated on his vows to the Lord, how can anyone think he won't cheat on his vows to a woman? Poor Suzette."

"Yes, very likely Pascal will cheat on her, but she must have known he cheated when she first started her games with him," Lucien said.

"Why do you always blame the woman?" his wife demanded.

"Why do you always blame the man?" he returned, also heatedly.

"Excuse me." Dr. O'Doull made as if to duck. "I'm going somewhere safer—the trenches during the war were probably safer."

"It will be all right," Galtier said. "We've been married this long. We can probably last a little longer."

Marie didn't argue, but her expression was mutinously eloquent. And, as a matter of fact, Galtier wondered why he did take the former Bishop Pascal's side. It wasn't as if he liked the man. He never had. He'd never trusted him, either. Pascal had always been too smooth, too rosy, to be reliable. That was what Lucien had thought, at any rate. Plainly, a lot of people had had a different opinion.

But was Suzette, the new Mme. Talon, such a bargain? Galtier also had his doubts about that. After all, if she'd let Pascal into her bed, what did that say about her taste? Nothing good, certainly.

"Let's go home," he said.

"All right," Marie answered. Her voice had no, *We'll come back to this later,* in it, so he supposed this **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

wouldn't be a fight that clouded things between them for days at a time. They'd had a few of those, but only a few: one reason they still got on so well after thirty years and a bit more besides.

"Why do you dislike Bishop Pascal so much?" Jeanne asked on the way back to the farm.

"Well, just for starters, because he tried to get us to collaborate with the Americans during the war. And when we wouldn't do it, he got them to take away our land and build the hospital on it," Galtier

replied.

“You were just a little girl then, so you wouldn’t remember very well, but he alienated our patrimony.”

“But . . .” His youngest daughter seemed to have trouble putting her thoughts into words. At last, she said, “But my sister married an American. We’re paid rent, and a good one, for the land the hospital sits on.”

Georges laughed. “How do you answer that one, Papa?”

That was a good question. Galtier did the best he could, saying, “At the time, what Father Pascal did seemed wrong. It worked out for the best. I can’t quarrel with that. But just because it worked out for the best doesn’t mean Pascal did what he did for good reasons. He did what he did to grab with both hands.”

“Suppose the Americans had lost the war,” Marie added. “What would have happened to Pascal then?”

“He would have come out ahead of the game, and convinced everyone everything was somebody else’s fault,” Georges replied at once.

He was probably right, even if that wasn’t the answer his mother had been looking for. Lucien sighed.

The farmhouse wasn’t far now. “Quebec City had better watch out,” he said, and drove on.

Sylvia Enos stood in the kitchen of her flat, glaring at her only son. She had to look up to glare at him.

When had George, Jr., become taller than she? Some time when she wasn’t watching, surely. He looked unhappy now, twisting his cloth cap in his hands. “But, Ma,” he said, “it’s the best chance I’ll ever have!”

“Nonsense,” Sylvia told him. “The best chance you’ll ever have is to stay in school and get as much learning as you can.”

His face—achingly like his dead father’s, though he couldn’t raise a mustache and they were falling out of style anyhow—went closed and hard, suddenly a man’s face, and a stubborn man’s at that, not a boy’s. “I don’t care anything about school. I hate it. And I’m no . . . good in it anyhow.” He wouldn’t say *damn* , not in front of his mother. Sylvia

had done her best to raise him right.

“You don’t want to go to sea at sixteen,” Sylvia said.

“Oh, yes, I do,” he said. “There’s nothing I want more.”

Till you meet a girl. Then you’ll find something you want more. But Sylvia didn’t say that. It wouldn’t have helped. What she did say was, “If you go to sea at sixteen, you’ll be doing it the rest of your life.”

“What’s wrong with that?” he asked. “What else am I going to be doing the rest of my life?”

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“That’s why you go to school,” Sylvia said. “To find out what else you could be doing.”

“But I don’t want to do anything else,” George, Jr., said, exactly as his father might have. “I just want to go down to T Wharf and out to sea, the way Pop did.”

All the reasons he wanted to go to sea were all the reasons Sylvia wanted him to stay home. “Look what going to sea got your father in the end,” she said, fighting to hold back tears.

“That was the Navy, Ma.” Now George, Jr., just sounded impatient. “I’m not going into the Navy. I just want to catch fish.”

“Do you think nothing can go wrong when you’re out there in a fishing boat? If you do, you’d better think again, son. Plenty of boats go out from T Wharf and then don’t come home again. Storms, fog, who knows why? But they don’t. Even if they do come home, they don’t always bring back everybody who set out. If you’re tending a line or hauling in a net and a big wave comes by . . . Do you really want the crabs and the lobsters and the flatfish fighting over who gets a taste of you?”

Most fishermen had a horror of a watery death, and of the creatures they caught catching them. But her son only shrugged and answered, “If I’m dead, what difference does it make?” He was sixteen. He didn’t really think he could die. So many sailors had, but *he* wouldn’t. Just listening to him, Sylvia could tell he was sure of it.

With a sigh, she asked, “Well, what is this big chance you’re talking about, son?”

“I ran into Fred Butcher the other day, Ma,” George, Jr., said.

“He’s got fat the last few years, hasn’t he?” Sylvia said.

George Jr., grinned. “He sure has. But he’s got rich the last few years, too. He doesn’t put to sea any more, you know. He hires the men who do.”

“I know that.” Sylvia nodded. “He’s one of the lucky ones. There aren’t very many, you know.” Butcher wasn’t just lucky. He’d always driven himself like a dray horse, and he had a head for figures. Sylvia wished she could have said the same about her son. But, as he’d said himself, he didn’t like school, and he’d never been an outstanding scholar.

“I don’t care. I *want* to go to sea,” he said now. “And Mr. Butcher, he said he’d take me on for the *Cuttlefish* . She’s one of the new ones, Ma, one of the good ones. Diesel engine, electricity on board, a wireless set. A fishing run on a boat like that, it’s almost like staying ashore, it’s so comfy.”

Sylvia laughed in his face. He looked very offended. She didn’t care. “You tell me that after you’ve put to sea, and I’ll take you seriously. Till then . . .” She shook her head and laughed some more.

But she’d yielded ground, and her son took advantage of it. “Let me find out, then. I’ll tell you everything once I get back. Mr. Butcher, he says he’ll pay me like a regular sailor, not a first-timer, on account of he was friends with Pop.”

That *was* generous. Sylvia couldn’t deny it. She wished she could have, for she would. Tears came to her eyes again. She was losing her little boy, and saw no way to escape it. There before her stood someone who wanted to be a man, and who was ever so close to getting what he wanted. She sighed.

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“All right, George. If that’s what you care to do, I don’t suppose I can stop you.”

His jaw dropped. Enough boy lingered in him to make him take his

mother's word very seriously.

"Thank you! Oh, thank you!" he exclaimed, and gave Sylvia a hug that made her feel tiny and short. "I'll work as hard as Pop did, I promise, and save my money, and . . . everything." He ran out of promises and imagination at the same time.

"I hope it works out, George. I pray it works out." When a tear slid down Sylvia's face, her son looked alarmed. She waved him away. "You're not going to get me not to worry, so don't even try. I worried about your father every day he was at sea, and I'll worry about you, too."

"Everything will be fine, Ma." George, Jr., spoke with the certainty inherent in sixteen. Sylvia remembered how she'd been when she was that age. And it was worse with boys. They thought they were stallions, and had to paw the ground with their hooves and neigh and rear and show the world how tough they were.

The world didn't care. Most of them needed years to figure that out. Some never did figure it out. The world rolled over them either way: it ground them down and made them fit into their slots. If they wouldn't grind down and wouldn't fit, it broke them. Sylvia didn't think it intended to. But what it intended and what happened were two different beasts.

It had rammed her into a slot, all right. Here she was, coming up on middle age, living from day to day, wondering how she'd get by, worrying because her only son was quitting school and taking up a dangerous trade. If there weren't ten thousand others just like her in Boston, she'd have been astonished.

But then savage anger and pride shot through her. *I killed the son of a bitch who sank the* Ericsson. *I shot him dead, and I'm walking around free. How many others can say the like? Not a one.*

She'd take that to the grave with her. Most of the time, it wouldn't do her one damn bit of good, not when it came to things like catching a streetcar or dealing with the Coal Board or going to the dentist. But it was hers. Nobody could rob her of it. For one brief moment in her life, she'd stepped out of the ordinary.

George, Jr., brought her back into it, saying, "I'll go right on giving you one dollar out of every three I make, too, Ma. I promise. It'll be the same with this as it's always been with the odd jobs I've been doing. I'll pay my way, honest."

“All right, George,” she said. He was a good boy. (She didn’t think of him as a man. She wondered if she ever would, down deep where it counted. She had her doubts.) He asked, “What do you think Pop would say about what I’m doing?”

That was a good question. After some thought, Sylvia answered, “Well, he always did like going to sea.”

God only knew, that was the truth. Whenever the *Ripple* went out, she’d felt as if she were giving him up to the arms of another woman—the Atlantic had that kind of hold on him. She went on, “I think he’d have wanted you to stay in school, too. But if you got this kind of chance, I don’t think he’d have stood in your way.”

His face lit up. “Thanks!” Almost as fast as it had appeared, that light faded. “I wish I would have known him better. I wish I could have known him longer.”

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“I know, sweetheart. I wish you could have, too. And I wish *I* could have.” On the whole, Sylvia meant that. She’d never quite forgiven her husband for having been about to go to a Tennessee brothel with a colored whore, even if he hadn’t slept with the woman and even if being about to had saved his life. If he hadn’t been on his way to the whorehouse, if he’d gone back aboard his river monitor instead, he would have been on it when Confederate artillery blew it out of the water. But if he’d come home from the war, if he’d been around every day—or half the time, as fishermen usually were—and if he’d kept his nose clean, she supposed she would have.

George, Jr., started for the door. “I’d better go find Mr. Butcher and tell him. I don’t know how long he’ll hold the job for me.”

“Go on, then, dear,” Sylvia said, half of her hoping Fred Butcher *wouldn’t* hold the job. The door opened. It closed. Her son’s footsteps receded in the hallway. Then they were gone.

Sylvia sighed. She muttered something she never would have let anyone else hear. That helped, but not enough. She pulled a whiskey bottle out of a kitchen cabinet. A fair number of states had made alcohol illegal, but Massachusetts wasn’t one of them. She poured some whiskey into a glass, then added water and took a drink. Whiskey had always tasted like medicine to her. She didn’t care, not

now. She was using it for medicine.

She'd medicated herself quite thoroughly when the front door to the flat opened. She hoped it would be George, Jr., coming back all crestfallen to tell her Fred Butcher had given someone else the berth. But it wasn't her son; it was Mary Jane, back from helping her teacher grade younger students' papers.

Sylvia's daughter even got paid a little for doing it. She made a better scholar than her brother. That would have been funny if it hadn't been sad. A boy could do so many more things with an education than a girl could, but Mary Jane seemed to want to learn, while George, Jr., couldn't have cared less.

"Hello, Ma," Mary Jane said now, and then, as she got a better look at Sylvia's face, "Ma, what's wrong?"

"Your brother's going to sea, that's what." Without the whiskey in her, Sylvia might not have been so blunt, but that was the long and short of it.

Mary Jane's eyes got wide. "But that's good news, not bad. It's what he's always wanted to do."

"If he'd always wanted to jump off a cliff, would it be good news that he'd finally gone and done it?"

Sylvia asked.

"But it's not like that, Ma," Mary Jane protested. She didn't understand, any more than George, Jr., did.

"He needs a job, and that's a good one."

"A good job is a shore job, a job where you don't have to worry about getting drowned," Sylvia said.

"If he'd gotten one of those, I'd stand up and cheer. This—" She shook her head. The kitchen spun slightly when she did. Yes, she was medicated, all right.

"He'll be fine." Mary Jane was fourteen. She also thought she was immortal, and everybody else, too.

She hardly remembered her own father, and certainly didn't care to remember he'd died at sea. She went on, "Things are a lot safer than

they used to be. The boats are better, the engines are better, and they just about all have wireless nowadays in case they run into trouble."

Every word of that was true. None of it did anything to reassure Sylvia, who'd seen too many **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

misfortunes down by T Wharf. She said, "I want him to have a job where he doesn't need to worry about running into trouble."

"Where's he going to find one?" Mary Jane asked. "If he goes into building, somebody could drop a brick on his head. If he drives a truck, somebody could run into him. You want him to be a clerk in an insurance office, or something like that. But he'd be lousy at clerking, and he'd hate it, too."

Every word of *that* was true, too. Sylvia wished it weren't. Mary Jane was right. She did want George, Jr., in a white-collar job. But Mary Jane was also right that he wouldn't be good at one, and wouldn't like it. That didn't stop Sylvia from wishing he had one. She knew the sea too well ever to trust it.

When Jefferson Pinkard went down to the Empire of Mexico, he never dreamt he'd stay so long. He never dreamt the civil war would drag on so long. That, he realized now that he understood things here a little better, had been naive on his part. The Mexican civil war had started up not long after the Great War ended. The USA fed the rebels money and guns. The CSA sent money and guns and—unofficially, of course—combat veterans to prop up the imperialists.

Off in the distance, artillery rumbled. Jeff took a sip of strong, black coffee. The coffee had been improved— *corrected*, they said hereabouts—with a shot of strong rum. Alabama was officially dry. The Mexicans laughed at the very idea of prohibition. Some ways, they were pretty damn smart.

He finished the coffee as the artillery barrage went on. The front line ran quite a ways west of San Luis Potosí these days. Mexican-built barrels had driven back the rebels, and the damnyankees didn't seem to be helping *their* pet Mexicans build armored vehicles. Maybe they would one of these days, or maybe they'd just import some from the USA. If they did, a lot more greasers would end up dead, the front line would stabilize or start going back, and the civil war might last forever.

A Mexican soldier in the yellowish shade of butternut they wore down

here politely knocked on Pinkard's open door. "Yeah?" Pinkard said, and then, "*Sí*, Mateo?"

"Todo está listo," Mateo said, and then, in English as rudimentary as Pinkard's Spanish, "Everyt'ing ready, Sergeant Jeff."

"All right, then." Pinkard heaved himself to his feet. He towered over Mateo, as he towered over almost everybody down here. Lieutenant Guitierrez—no, he was Captain Guitierrez these days—was an exception, but Jeff could have broken him over his knee like a stick.

He left the little wooden shack that served him as an office and strode out into sunlight bright and fierce enough to make what he'd got in Birmingham seem as nothing by comparison. Summer down here was really a son of a bitch. It was bad enough to make him understand just how the spirit of *mañana* had been born.

Standing out there in the broiling sun were several hundred rebel prisoners, drawn up in neat rows and columns. They all stiffened to attention when Pinkard came into sight. He nodded, and they relaxed—a little. Some of them wore uniforms of a darker shade than those of Maximilian III's soldiers. More, though, looked like peasants who'd chanced to end up in a place where they didn't want to be—which was exactly what they were.

Pinkard inspected them as if they were men he would have to send into battle, not enemies of whom he **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

was in charge. While they stood out in the open, he strode through their barracks, making sure everything was shipshape and nobody was trying to tunnel out of the camp.

He wished he had a proper fence, not just barbed wire strung on poles, but he made the best of what there was. Guards on rickety towers at each corner of the square manned machine guns. Jeff waved to each of them in turn. "Everything good?" he asked, and then, in what passed for Spanish, *"Todo bueno?"*

He got answering grins and waves and nods. As far as the guards were concerned, everything was fine.

They had easy duty, duty unlikely to get them shot, and they got paid for it—as often as anybody except Confederate mercenaries got paid. The Mexicans didn't stiff the men from the CSA the way they did their own people.

For a while, Jeff had wondered why the devil any Mexican would fight for Maximilian III. Then, from interrogating prisoners, he'd found out the rebels cheated their soldiers every bit as badly as the imperialists cheated theirs. Nobody down here had clean hands. Nobody even came close.

He went back up in front of the prisoners. "Dismissed!" he shouted. Mateo told them the same thing in Spanish. They all saluted. He thought they meant it, too. As long as they did what he told them to, he treated them fairly. Nobody'd ever treated a lot of them fairly before, and they responded to it even from the fellow in charge of a prison camp. If they got out of line, they were liable to earn a kick in the nuts. As far as Pinkard was concerned, that was fair, too.

As the prisoners went back to the barracks to get out of the ferocious sun, Mateo asked, "Sergeant Jeff, how you know so much about—this?" His—orderly, Pinkard supposed the word was—waved around at the camp. "In Confederate States, you *policía* —policeman?"

Jeff laughed like hell. "Me? A cop? Jesus God, no. I was a steelworker, a damn good steelworker, before I came down here."

Getting across what a steelworker was took a little while. When Mateo finally did figure it out, he gave Pinkard a peculiar look. "You do work like that, *mucho dinero,* eh? Why you leave?"

"On account of I couldn't stand it any more," Jeff answered. That plainly made no sense to the Mexican.

Pinkard tried again: "On account of woman troubles." That wasn't the whole story, but it sure was a big part. If Emily hadn't decided she wasn't going to wait for him to come back from the war . . . Well, he didn't know how things would have been, but he sure knew they would have been different.

"Ah." Mateo got that one right away. What man wouldn't have? *"Sí. Mujeres."* He rattled off something in Spanish, then made a stab at translating it: "No can live with, no can live without, neither."

"By God, buddy, you got that one right!" Pinkard burst out. Even now, when he thought about Emily . . .

He did his best *not* to think about Emily, but sometimes his best wasn't good enough.

"You no *policía* , how you know what to do with—?" Mateo waved

again as he came back to what he really wanted to know.

Pinkard answered him with a shrug. “Just another job, God damn it. Somebody had to do it. Remember when we took all those prisoners after the barrels came up from Tampico?” He’d lost his orderly, and backtracked in clumsy, halting Spanish to let the other man catch up. When Mateo nodded, Jeff went on,

“Like I say, somebody had to do it. Otherwise they probably all would’ve died. So I took charge of the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

poor sorry bastards—and I’ve been in charge of prisoners ever since.”

He wasn’t altogether sorry—far from it. The distant mutter of artillery reminded him why he wasn’t sorry. If he weren’t doing this, he’d have been up there at the front, and then some of those shells might have landed on him. He’d seen enough combat in the Great War to be glad he was part of an army, but not part in any immediate danger.

Mateo said, “You do good. Nobody never hear of nothing like how you do with prisoners. Everybody now try do like you. Even rebels now, they try do like you.”

There was praise, if you liked. When the enemy imitated you, you had to be doing something right.

A couple of days later, Pinkard decided to do something right for himself. He grabbed a ride on a supply truck and went north to the village of Ahualulco, where Maximilian III’s army had a supply dump that kept the prisoners eating. Ahualulco wasn’t anything much. It wouldn’t have been anything at all if two roads—well, two dirt tracks—hadn’t crossed there.

Red-white-and-green flags fluttered everywhere. Both sides in the civil war flew those colors, which got as confusing as the Stars and Bars and the Stars and Stripes had during the Great War. For Maximilian’s side, they were also the colors of Austria-Hungary, from which his ancestors had come. Pinkard was damned if he knew why the rebels also flew those colors, but he’d never been curious enough to find out.

The fighting was the biggest thing that had happened to Ahualulco since . . . maybe since forever. A couple of new cantinas had opened, and a whorehouse, and a field hospital. Jeff went into one of the cantinas—which had a picture of the Mexican emperor, cut from some magazine, tacked to the front door—and ordered a beer. Mexican beer

was surprisingly good, even if they didn't believe in keeping it cold. He lit a cigarette, found a table, and settled down to enjoy himself.

He'd just started his second beer when the door flew open. In came a couple of big men talking English.

One of them looked his way, waved, and called, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Jeff echoed. "Who the hell are you boys? Where y'all from?"

One of them, a blond, was named Pete Frazee. The other, who sported a fiery red mustache, called himself Charlie MacCaffrey. They sat down by him. Frazee got a beer. MacCaffrey ordered tequila.

"How do you drink that stuff?" Pinkard asked him. "Tastes like cigar butts, you ask me."

"Yeah, but it'll get me drunk faster'n that horse piss you and Pete got," MacCaffrey answered. He knocked it back and waved for more.

He was from Jackson, Mississippi; Frazee from the country not far outside of Louisville. The Kentuckian said, "They told me I could've gone back after the war, but I was damned if I wanted to live in the United States. I spent three years tryin' to kill those damnyankees. Screw me if I wanted to be one myself."

"Oh, hell, yes," Pinkard said. "How'd you find out about the Party?"

"Heard one of their people talkin' on a street corner in Chattanooga, where I was at," Frazee answered with a reminiscent smile. "Soon as I did, I decided that was for me. Haven't looked back since." He nudged the fellow who'd come in with him. "How about you, Charlie?"

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"I like bustin' heads," MacCaffrey said frankly. "Plenty of heads need bustin' in Mississippi, too. We got as many niggers as white folks, and some o' them bastards even got the vote after they went into the Army. I don't cotton to that—no way, nohow. Whigs and Rad Libs let 'em do it. Soon as I found me a party that didn't like it, I reckoned that was for me."

"How'd you come down here?" Jeff asked.

MacCaffrey made a face. “Ever since that stupid bastard plugged Wade Hampton V, we pulled in our horns like a goddamn snail. Wasn’t hardly any fun any more. I still got more ass-kickin’ in me than that.

How about you?”

Jeff shrugged. “Didn’t like what I was doin’. Didn’t have nothin’ holdin’ me in Birmingham. I thought, *Why the hell not?* —and here I am.”

“You’re the fellow with the prisoners of war, ain’t you?” Pete Frazee said suddenly. Pinkard nodded.

So did Frazee, in a thoughtful way. He went on, “Heard about you. From what everybody says, you’re doing a hell of a job.”

“Thank you. Thank you kindly,” Pinkard answered. He paused till the barmaid got him another beer, then chuckled and said, “Wasn’t what I came down here to do, but it hasn’t worked out too bad.”

He spent most of the afternoon drinking with the other Party men and enjoying the chance to speak his own language. Then, despite a certain stagger, he made his way to the brothel and laid down enough silver for a quiet room and the company of a girl named Maria (not that half the women down here weren’t named Maria), far and away the prettiest one in the place.

He’d drunk enough to have some trouble rising to the occasion. He’d paid enough to have her slide down the bed and start to help him with her mouth. He enjoyed it for perhaps half a minute. Then he remembered Emily’s mouth on him after he’d found her with Bedford Cunningham, who had been his best friend. “No, goddammit,” he growled, and pulled away.

“What?” Maria had no idea what the trouble was.

“No, I said.” He scrambled onto her. She’d got him hard enough so he could manage. He did, and then got back into his clothes and left in a hurry.

Maria shook her head. *“Loco,”* she muttered, and tapped a finger against her temple.

Clarence Potter said, “My trouble is, I want to see the Freedom Party dead and buried, not just weak.”

He sipped at his whiskey in the Charleston saloon. “That makes me as much a fanatic as Jake Featherston, I suppose.”

The Freedom Party was weak nowadays, and weaker in South Carolina than it had been before the previous year’s Congressional election. Even so, in most saloons a comment like that would have been good for starting a fight. Not in the Crow’s Nest, though, not on a Tuesday night. The Whig Party faithful met at the Odd Fellows’ hall across the street, and then a lot of them were in the habit of coming over and hashing things out with the help of the lubricants the saloon provided.

Braxton Donovan was a prominent Charleston lawyer. He was also, at the moment, slightly—but only **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

slightly—drunk. He said, “Only thing that’d put those know-nothing peckerheads into power is a calahamity—a calahamity, I tell you.”

“A calamity, you mean?” Potter asked.

“That’s what I said, isn’t it?” Several of the chins beneath Donovan’s neat gray goatee wobbled.

“As a matter of fact, no,” Potter answered. Relentless precision had brought him into Confederate Army Intelligence, and later into investigative work.

“Well, it’s what I meant—a calahamity is.” The lawyer held up his glass. The colored bartender hastened to refill it. Braxton Donovan nodded regally. “Thank you kindly, Ptolemy.”

“You’re welcome, suh,” Ptolemy said, professionally polite, professionally subservient.

“Tell me, Ptolemy,” Donovan asked in his rolling baritone, “what is your view of the Freedom Party?”

He might have been encouraging a friendly witness on the stand.

“Don’t like ’em for hell, suh,” Ptolemy said at once. “Somebody should ought to do somethin’ about

’em, you wants to know what I thinks.” He polished the top of the bar with a spotless white towel.

“This country is in a bad way when some not so small fraction of the electorate can’t see what’s obvious to a nigger bartender,” Braxton Donovan said. He took a pull at his freshened drink. “Still and all, better a not so small fraction than a large fraction, as was so a few years back.”

“Yes,” Potter agreed. “And I believe Ptolemy here really does have no use for the Freedom Party—it’s in his interest not to, after all, when you think about what Featherston has to say about blacks. But even so . . . Jeb Stuart III had a colored servant whose name, if I remember right, was also Ptolemy. Jake Featherston suspected the fellow was a Red—he was serving under Stuart in the First Richmond Howitzers. He told me about this servant not so long before the uprisings began.”

“And so?” Donovan asked. “Your point is?”

“Jeb Stuart III pulled wires with his father to make sure that Ptolemy didn’t have any trouble.” Clarence Potter finished his whiskey at a gulp. “And he *was* a Red, dammit, as became abundantly clear when the pot boiled over. Young Stuart died in combat—let himself be killed, they say, so he wouldn’t have to face the music. His father’s revenge was to make sure Featherston never rose above the rank of sergeant. Petty, I suppose, but understandable.”

“Why are you telling me this?” the lawyer asked.

“A couple of reasons,” Potter answered. “For one, we can trace the rise of the Freedom Party to such small things. And, for another, a white man’s a fool if he takes a Negro’s word at face value. Look what happened to Jeb Stuart III.” He swung around on the stool so that he faced the bartender. “Ptolemy!”

“Yes, suh? ‘Nother drink, suh?” the black man asked.

“In a minute,” Potter said. “First, tell me something—what were you doing when the rebellion came in 1915?”

“Me, suh?” For all they showed, Ptolemy’s eyes might have been cut from stone. “Nothin’, suh. Stayin’

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home mindin’ my business.”

“Uh- *huh*.” Potter knew what that meant. It meant the bartender was lying through his teeth. Every Negro in the CSA claimed to have stayed at home minding his own business during the Red rebellion. If all the blacks who said they had actually *had* stayed at home, there would have been no rebellion in the first place.

Ptolemy said, “Suh, it was a long time ago nowadays, an’ it’s all over an’ done with. Ain’t no way to change what happened. Onliest thing we can do is pick up the pieces an’ go on.”

“He’s right,” Braxton Donovan said. Potter found himself nodding. The Confederate States, and everybody in them, did have to do that. Saying it, though, was easier than doing it. Donovan took a half dollar out of his pocket and slid it across the bar to Ptolemy. “Here you are. Buy yourself a drink.” A few hundred years before, kings had tossed out largess to peasants with that same sort of offhanded generosity.

“Thank you, suh.” Ptolemy made the coin disappear. He did fix a drink for himself. By its pale amber color, it held a lot more water than whiskey. And the bartender nursed it, raising it to his lips every now and then but not doing much in the way of real drinking. Potter had known very few men who worked behind a bar and did much in the way of pouring down what they served. Too easy, he supposed, for a man who worked around whiskey all the time to come to like it too well.

Having been generous to one beneath him—or so he plainly felt—Braxton Donovan swung his attention back to Potter. “I have a question for you, sir,” he said, “speaking of the Freedom Party.”

“Ask it, then,” Potter answered.

“I’ve heard you knew Roger Kimball while he was still alive,” the lawyer said.

Clarence Potter nodded. “And so I did. That’s the best time to get to know a man—while he’s still alive, I mean.”

“Indeed. And in fact.” Donovan nodded grandly. “Now, sir, the question: while he was still alive, did Kimball ever hint to you that he’d torpedoed the USS *Ericsson* after we’d yielded to the damnyankees?”

“Never once, never in the slightest way,” Potter replied at once. “We were acquaintances, you understand, not friends—he liked Jake Featherston as much as I loathe the man. But I would say he didn’t tell

his friends, either. He was, in my opinion, a first-class son of a bitch, but he knew how to keep a secret—by *keeping* it, at all times and everywhere. If his exec hadn't spilled the beans, I don't think anyone would ever have known."

"Poetic justice, what he got," Donovan said.

"Yes, I think so, too," Potter agreed. "If he hadn't come to a sudden demise, he would have been a sore spot between us and the USA, and we can't afford to give them excuses to kick us around. They're too liable to do it even without excuses, though Sinclair has taken a milder line than Teddy Roosevelt did."

"I quite agree," Donovan said. "I despise the Socialists and all they stand for—they set a bad example for our people, at the very least—but their foreign policy is . . . well, as you said, gentler than Roosevelt's."

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"Now I have a question for you," Potter said. Braxton Donovan looked cautious, but could hardly do anything but nod. Potter asked, "Why are you so interested in the late, unlamented Roger Kimball?"

"Idle curiosity," Donovan answered.

"Shit," Potter said crisply. All of a sudden, his metal-framed spectacles didn't make him seem mild and ineffectual any more. When he went on, "I deserve a straight answer," the implication was that he'd do something unpleasant if he didn't get one.

Braxton Donovan could have bought and sold him. Donovan owned enough property that the disastrous postwar inflation hadn't wiped him out. They both knew it. Most of the time, in the class-conscious Confederate States, it would have mattered a great deal. Now, somehow, it didn't. The lawyer flinched, muttered something under his breath, and gulped his drink. "Fill it up," he told the bartender.

"Yes, suh." Ptolemy did. Ice clinked as he built Donovan a fresh one.

The lawyer sipped from the new whiskey. Clarence Potter waited, patient and implacable as a father waiting up for a son out too late. At last, Donovan said, "You know Anne Colleton?"

“Personally? No,” Potter said. “But I know *of* her. Who doesn’t, in this state? What’s she got to do with anything?”

“She and Kimball were . . . friends during the war, and for a while afterwards,” Braxton Donovan answered, suggesting by the pause that they’d been more than friends. “Any dirt I can get on him will stick to her.”

“Wait a minute.” Potter held up a hand. “Wait just a minute. Didn’t she help get the Yankee woman who punched Kimball’s ticker for him out of jail and back to the USA?”

“Oh, yes.” Donovan’s silver pompadour was so securely in place, it didn’t stir a hair as he nodded.

“They broke up unpleasantly. I think it was over politics—he stayed in the Freedom Party, and she was one of the rats who left the sinking ship.” His lip curled.

“Why tar her, then?” Potter asked. “If she’s back to being a Whig, don’t you want her to keep on being one? If you drive her into Featherston’s arms again, aren’t you just asking for trouble? She’s a high-powered woman, no two ways about it.”

“That’s the point,” Donovan said. “She’s talking like a Whig again, yes, but she’s trying to pull us to the right till you can’t tell us from the yahoos in white shirts and butternut pants who run around yelling,

‘Freedom!’ She wants to have another go at the United States—wants it so bad, she can taste it.”

Potter pondered that. “We’d have to be damn lucky to win it. They beat us and they hurt us. And even if we do lick them, that just sets up *another* war ten, twenty, thirty years further down the line. I wish I could say something else—I fought those bastards from the very first day to the very last, and I’d’ve kept on fighting if we hadn’t folded up. But come on, Donovan. A good big man won’t always lick a good little one, but sure as hell that’s the way to bet. And I don’t think we can afford to lose again.”

“I don’t want to fight them again, either,” Donovan said. “I fought plenty in the last war, too, and I am plumb satisfied. And I don’t want her voice in the Whig Party.”

“There may be something to that,” Potter allowed. “On the other hand, there may not. You want to think **Generated by ABC Amber**

twice about going after her. Maybe you want to think three times.”

“I know what I’m doing.” Braxton Donovan certainly sounded confident. Potter wondered if that was the whiskey talking. He also wondered how Donovan not only didn’t fall over but kept on sounding coherent. The man had to have a sponge in place of a liver. Donovan went on, “She’s not quite the force she used to be, anyhow, on account of she’s ten years older than she used to be, same as the rest of us.

But it hurts women more.” He finished the latest drink. “One more of the same, Ptolemy.”

“Comin’ right up, suh,” the Negro said. As he made the next whiskey, Potter studied him and, covertly, Donovan. He wondered if the lawyer really knew as much as he thought he did. Not too many people came away happy after they bumped up against Anne Colleton.

Which meant . . . Potter finished his own drink. He didn’t ask for a fresh one, not right away. Instead, he did some quiet thinking. He came closer to agreeing with Donovan than with Anne Colleton. Nothing was stupider, though, than backing a loser, which he judged Donovan likely to be. *How much of a deal can I cut?* he wondered. *And should I?*

VII

As far as Cincinnatus Driver was concerned, the worst part of prison was getting used to it. After a while, Luther Bliss stopped interrogating him, which meant he didn’t get beat up very much any more.

Hardly anything happened to him any more, in fact. He sat in his cell with nothing to do, except for the one hour a week when he was led out to exercise, as a beast might have been.

Outside the gray stone walls of the prison, time was passing. What did Elizabeth think, back in Des Moines? What did Achilles think? How big was the boy these days? Cincinnatus struggled to remember his face. Did Amanda remember him at all? He was starting to doubt it.

Only the weather told him the season of the year. He never saw a newspaper, or anything else with print on it. He began to wonder if he still remembered how to read and write. That thought provoked him to bitter laughter. *Read and write? Hell, I’m startin’ to wonder if I still*

recollect how to talk. Days at a time would go by when he never said a word to anyone.

The guards did not encourage conversation, which would do for an understatement till a bigger one came along. When they gave orders, it was always, “Come here, nigger,” “Go there, boy,” or “Stand aside, nigger.” They didn’t want to hear Cincinnatus say, “Yes, suh.” They just wanted him to do as he was told. He did it. He’d tried not doing it a couple of times. The results of that had proved more painful than they were worth.

He’d also tried protesting that he was a citizen of the United States, and nobody, not even Luther Bliss and the Kentucky State Police, had any business holding him like this. The results of *that* had proved even more painful than those of the other.

If I wasn’t colored, they wouldn’t be able to get away with it, no matter what they think I done.

That had run through his mind more times than he could count. He did his best not to dwell on it. Its truth was all too obvious. He’d thought things would be better in the USA than they had been when Kentucky **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

was part of the CSA. Maybe not.

But, in spite of all this, maybe. In the Confederate States, Negroes who made trouble often just stopped living. However much Luther Bliss wanted Cincinnatus on ice, he hadn’t dug a hole and put his body in it.

Sometimes Cincinnatus wondered why not.

On a hot, muggy afternoon in what he reckoned was the middle of summer, three guards came to his cell door. Two of them drew pistols and pointed them at him, while the third turned a key in the lock and opened the cell. Then that fellow jumped back and yanked his pistol from its holster, too. “Come along with us,” one of the guards said.

“Where?” Cincinnatus’ voice creaked with disuse, and with fear. This wasn’t exercise time or mealtime.

Maybe that hole in the ground waited for him after all.

“Don’t give us no back talk, boy, or you’ll be sorry for it,” the guard

snapped. “Get moving.”

Cincinnatus did, thinking, *They can kill me here as easy as anywhere else, and then take my body wherever they need to.* He wanted to run. His legs had that light-as-a-feather feel panic could bring. He was sure he could outrun these three big-bellied white men. But he was also sure it would do him no good. Nobody outran a bullet.

They took him not to the room where they’d questioned him before but to an office in one of the prison’s corner towers. He supposed it was the warden’s office, but the man behind the desk was, inevitably, Luther Bliss. Bliss had light brown eyes, like a hound dog’s. At the moment, those eyes were as sad as a hound dog’s, too.

When Cincinnatus came in, the chief of the Kentucky State Police turned to the other man in the room, an older fellow who sat in a chair off to one side. “See, Mr. Darrow? Here he is, sound as a dollar.”

“Whose dollars are you talking about, Bliss?” the old man—Darrow?—demanded. “The Confederates’, after the war?”

Oh, sweet Jesus, Cincinnatus thought. *Bliss is going to lock him up and throw away the key.* But Bliss didn’t do anything except drum his fingers on the desktop. If he was angry, he didn’t show it past that—which made Cincinnatus take another long look at the man named Darrow.

He had to be close to seventy. His skin was grandfather-pink. His jowls sagged. He combed thinning iron-gray hair over the top of his head to make it cover as much ground as it could. But his gray-blue eyes were some of the sharpest—and some of the nastiest—Cincinnatus had ever seen.

After coughing a couple of times, he pulled his wallet from a vest pocket. He looked down at a photograph in it, then over to Cincinnatus. “You *are* Cincinnatus Driver,” he said, sounding surprised. “I wouldn’t’ve put it past this sneaky son of a bitch”—he pointed to Luther Bliss—“to try to sneak a ringer by me, but I guess he figured I’d spot it.”

Again, the world didn’t end. All Bliss said was, “I resent that, Mr. Darrow.”

“Go right ahead,” the other white man said cheerfully. “I intended that you should.”

Plaintively, Cincinnatus said, “Will somebody please tell me what’s going on?”

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“My pleasure,” said the old man with the ferocious eyes. “I’m Clarence Darrow. I’m a lawyer. I’ve got a writ of *habeas corpus* with your name on it. That means you get out of jail. If you’ve got any brains, it also means you get the hell out of Kentucky.”

“My God.” Cincinnatus understood the words, but he wasn’t sure he believed them. He wasn’t sure he dared believe them. He said, “I didn’t think nobody could get me out of *here* .”

“Sonny, there’s something you have to understand: I’m a *good* lawyer.” Darrow spoke with a calm certainty that compelled belief. “I’m a damn good lawyer, matter of fact. This petty tyrant here”—he pointed at Luther Bliss again, and again Bliss didn’t rise to it—“kept thinking I wasn’t, but he’s not so smart as he thinks he is.”

“I know who’s my country’s friend and who ain’t,” Bliss said. “What do I need to know besides that?”

“How to live by the rules you say you’re protecting,” Clarence Darrow answered. The head of the Kentucky State Police snapped his fingers to show how little he cared about them. Darrow had been blustery before. Now he got angry, really angry. “What’s the point of having a country with laws if you get around ’em any time you happen not to care for ’em, eh? Answer me that.”

But Luther Bliss was not an easy man to quell. “This here’s Kentucky, Mr. Darrow. If we played by the rules all the time, the bastards who don’t would get the jump on us pretty damn quick, and you can bet on that. Half the people in this state are Confederate diehards, and the other half are Reds.”

He exaggerated. From what Cincinnatus remembered of the days before he’d moved north, he didn’t exaggerate by much. Darrow said, “If nobody in this godforsaken place wants to live in the USA, why not give it back to the Confederates?”

Cincinnatus gaped—he’d never heard anyone except a diehard say such a thing. Mildly, Bliss replied,

“You know, Mr. Darrow, advocating return to the CSA is against the law here.”

“Wouldn’t be surprised,” Darrow said. “Wouldn’t be one bit surprised. The law it’s against is unconstitutional, of course, not that you care about the Constitution of the United States.”

“Here’s your nigger, Mr. Darrow.” Bliss’ air of calm frayed at last. “Take him and get the hell out of here. Or don’t you think I could fix up a cell with your name on it right next to his?”

“I’m sure you could,” Darrow said. “And I’m sure you could make it very unpleasant for me. But I’m sure of something else, too—I’m sure I could make it even more unpleasant for you if you did.”

By the sour look on Luther Bliss’ face, he was sure of the same thing. It didn’t make him very happy.

“Get out,” he repeated.

“Come along, Mr. Driver,” Clarence Darrow said. “Let’s get you back to civilization, or what passes for it in the United States these days.” He grunted with effort as he heaved himself to his feet. Cincinnatus needed a heartbeat to remember the surname belonged to him. He hadn’t grown up with it, and people didn’t use it very often. And nobody’d called him by it since he’d landed here. Dazedly, he followed the white lawyer.

Not till they got into the motorcar that had brought Darrow to the prison and the driver was taking them away did Cincinnatus turn to the lawyer and say, “God bless you, suh, for what you done there.”

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“I don’t believe in God, any more than I believe in Mother Goose,” Darrow said. “Foolish notion. But I do believe in justice, and you deserve that. Everyone deserves that.”

Cincinnatus had known some Reds who said they didn’t believe in God. With them, he’d always thought that was a pose, or that they substituted Marx for God. With Clarence Darrow, it was different. The man spoke as if he needed no substitute for the Deity. Cincinnatus sensed that, but couldn’t fully fathom it. He said, “Well, God believes in you, whether you believe in Him or not.”

Darrow gave him an odd look. “You’ve got grit, son, if you can joke after you get out of that place.”

“I wasn’t jokin’, suh,” Cincinnatus said. They eyed each other in perfect mutual incomprehension.

Cincinnatus asked, “How’d you even know I was stuck there, suh, to come and get me out?”

“Your wife finally raised a stink that was big enough for me to notice it,” Darrow answered. “It took her a while, because people in the USA don’t want to notice a colored woman even when she’s screaming her head off. But she kept at it. Remarkable woman. Stubborn as a Missouri mule.”

“Yes, suh,” Cincinnatus said happily. “God bless Elizabeth, too.” Clarence Darrow let out a long, rasping sigh. Cincinnatus took no notice of it. He went on, “But even if you knew I was in trouble, how’d you get Luther Bliss to turn loose o’ me? That’s one ornery man.”

“That’s one first-class son of a bitch, is what that is,” Darrow said. “Even after I got the court order, he kept denying he’d ever heard of you. But I managed to persuade a judge otherwise—and here you are.”

“Here I am,” Cincinnatus agreed. Seeing farms and woods out the window, not stone and concrete and barbed wire, made him feel like a new man. But the new man had old problems. “What do I owe you, suh?” Lawyers didn’t come cheap; he knew that. Even so . . . “Whatever it is, I pays it. May take me a while, you understand, but I pays it.”

Darrow’s grin displayed crooked, tobacco-stained teeth. “Your wife told me you’d say that. You don’t owe me a dime—I did your case *pro bono publico* .” He saw the Latin meant nothing to Cincinnatus, and added, “For the public good.”

“That’s mighty kind of you, suh, but it ain’t right,” Cincinnatus said. “I want to pay you back. I owe you.”

“Your wife said you’d say that, too,” Clarence Darrow told him. “But there’s no need—I’ll make more from publicity than you could pay. If you must, pay the favor forward—do something good for someone else. Bargain?”

“Yes, suh—so help me God,” Cincinnatus said.

“More of that claptrap.” Darrow sighed. “Well, never mind. I hope you know better than to stick your nose back into Kentucky again?”

“Long as my folks ain’t poorly for true, sure,” Cincinnatus answered. “That’s what got me here before. I be more careful ‘bout the message nowadays, but if I reckon it’s so, what choice have I got *but* to come?”

Clarence Darrow gave him a long, measuring stare. The lawyer delivered his verdict in one word:

“Fool.”

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Coal smoke pouring out the stack, the train hurried toward the Salt Lake City station. Sparks flew as the brakes ground its iron wheels against the iron rails that carried it. Colonel Abner Dowling would rather have been somewhere, anywhere, else than on the platform waiting for that train to pull in. By the expression on his mustachioed face, General Pershing felt the same way.

“No help for it, though,” Dowling murmured, more than half to himself.

He hadn’t been quiet enough. But Pershing only nodded and said, “He *has* earned the right to do as he pleases.”

“I know that, sir,” Dowling answered. “I just wish he would have pleased to do something—anything—else.”

“Yes.” Pershing nodded again. “There is that, isn’t there?”

The train stopped right at the platform. Dowling had irrationally hoped against hope that it wouldn’t, but would keep right on going. The leader of the military band gathered on the platform caught Pershing’s eye. Pershing looked as if he wished the fellow hadn’t. At last, reluctantly, he nodded. The band leader either didn’t notice the reluctance or thought it wise to pretend he didn’t. With a proud flourish, he began to wave his baton. The band struck up “The Stars and Stripes Forever.”

No sooner had the vaunting music begun to blare forth than the door

to one of the Pullman cars opened.

Out came a bent ancient whose mustache and what Dowling could see of his hair—he always wore a hat, to keep the world from knowing he was bald—were a peroxided gold, defying time. A woman of about the same years followed him onto the platform.

“Well, Autie,” she sniffed, “they are giving you a proper welcome, anyhow.”

“What’s that, Libbie?” The old man cupped a hand behind his ear.

“I said, they’re giving you a proper welcome,” she repeated, louder this time.

“Can’t hear a thing over that music. At least they’re giving me a proper welcome.”

Colonel Dowling and General Pershing both stepped forward. They both saluted. They chorused,

“Welcome to Utah, General Custer.” Dowling was lying in his teeth. He would have bet Pershing was doing the same.

“Thank you. Thank you both,” Custer said. He stiffly returned the salute, even though, having at last retired from the U.S. Army after more than sixty years of service, he wore a somber black suit and homburg. Three years before, he’d been as vigorous as a man in his eighties could be. Now . . . Dowling found himself surprised, dismayed, and surprised at being dismayed. He’d always thought—sometimes despairingly—that George Armstrong Custer was the one unchanging man on the face of the earth.

Here at last, he saw it wasn’t so. The retired general was visibly slower, visibly more feeble. Some spark had gone out of him since his retirement, and he seemed to know it.

Libbie Custer, by contrast, remained as she always had. “Hello, Colonel Dowling,” she said with a smile **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

that showed white false teeth. “It’s good to see you again. Now that Autie and I are civilians, may I call you Abner?”

“Of course,” Dowling answered, though he’d always hated his Christian name.

Meanwhile, General Pershing was shaking hands with Custer and exchanging polite and, no doubt, insincere compliments. During the Great War, Pershing's command had been just to the east of Custer's.

Pershing's Second Army had captured Louisville and generally pushed south faster than Custer's First—till Custer decided he knew more about barrels than anyone in the War Department . . . and, against all odds, turned out to be right. From things Pershing had said since Abner Dowling came to Utah, he still couldn't figure out how Custer had pulled that off.

At the time, Dowling had been sure Custer's lies to Philadelphia would get the general—and, not so incidentally, himself—court-martialed and sent to Leavenworth to do hard labor for the rest of their lives.

Instead, his superior had ended up the USA's greatest military hero since George Washington, and Dowling, by reflected glory, had ended up a minor hero himself.

Custer said, "Are you keeping the Mormons here on a tight rein, General? I hope to heaven you are, because they *will* cause trouble if they get half a chance."

"Things have been tolerably quiet, anyway," Pershing answered. "They don't shoot at our men any more. Taking hostages worked pretty well for the Germans in Belgium, and for us in Canada and the CSA, and it works here, too. The Mormons may want us dead, but they don't want their friends and neighbors and sweethearts going up against a wall with a blindfold."

"And a cigarette," Custer added automatically, but he shook his head before anyone could correct him.

"No, the Mormons don't even have that to console themselves. Poor devils. Nothing wrong with tobacco."

Libbie sniffed. Custer had been smoking and drinking and cursing ever since the disappointments of the Second Mexican War, and she still hated all three.

"It does work, cigarette or no," Pershing said. "We even quelled trouble with polygamists down in Teasdale by taking several hundred hostages and making it ever so clear we'd do what we had to do if trouble broke out."

Dowling wanted to wipe his forehead with the back of his hand and

go, *Whew!* because of that. He didn't, but he wanted to. Instead, he said, "General, Mrs. Custer, your limousine is waiting just outside the station. If you'd be kind enough to come with me . . ."

They came. They didn't remark upon—perhaps they didn't notice—the sharpshooters on the roof of the station. More riflemen were posted in the buildings across the street. Custer had served as General Pope's right arm in the U.S. occupation of restive Utah during the Second Mexican War. Mormons had long memories, as everyone had found out in their uprising during the Great War. Someone might still want to take a potshot or two at Custer for what he'd done more than forty years before, no matter how many hostages' lives it cost his people.

The limousine carried more armor than an armored car. Even the windows were of glass allegedly bulletproof. That was one more thing Dowling didn't want to have to put to the test.

As they drove along the southern perimeter of Temple Square, Custer pointed to the ruins there and **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

said, "That's a bully sight—their temples to their false gods pulled down around their ears. May they never rise again."

"Er, yes," Dowling answered, wondering when he'd last heard anyone—anyone but Custer, that is—say *bully* . Hardly at all since the Great War ended; he was sure of that. The old slang was dying out with the people who'd used it. Custer still lingered. Now, though, Dowling could see he wouldn't go on forever after all.

As old men will, Custer still dwelt on the past. "Do you know what my greatest regret is?" he asked.

"No, sir," Dowling said, as General Pershing shook his head.

"My greatest regret is that we didn't hang Abe Lincoln alongside the Mormon traitors he was consorting with," Custer said. "He deserved it just as much as they did, and if we'd stretched his skinny neck the Socialists never would have got off the ground—I'm sure of that."

"I suppose we'd have Republicans instead," Pershing said. "They'd be just about as bad, or I miss my guess." He was twenty years younger than Custer, which meant he'd been a young man the last time the Republican Party had amounted to anything much. It was a sad shadow of its former self, and had been ever since Abraham Lincoln took a large part of its membership left into the Socialist camp at the

end of the Second Mexican War.

Custer sniffed and coughed and rolled his eyes. Plainly, he disagreed with General Pershing. For a wonder, though, he didn't come right out and say so. Abner Dowling scratched his head in bemusement.

Had Custer learned tact, or some semblance of it, at the age of eighty-six? There might have been less likely things, but Dowling couldn't think of any offhand.

Odds were that Libbie had poked him in the ribs with her elbow when Dowling didn't notice. As the great man's longtime adjutant, Dowling had long since concluded Libbie Custer was the brains of the outfit. George put on a better show—Libbie, in public, was self-effacing as could be—but she was the one who thought straight.

Outside General Pershing's headquarters, guards meticulously checked the limousine, front to back, top to bottom. At last, one of them told the driver, "You're all right. Go on through."

"Thanks, Jonesy," the driver said, and put the motorcar back into gear.

"Still as bad as that?" Custer asked. "Will they blow us to kingdom come if we give them half a chance?"

"We hope not," Pershing said. "Still and all, we'd rather not find out."

"They don't love us, and that's a fact," Dowling added.

"Good," Custer said. "If they loved us, that would mean we were soft on them, and we'd better not be soft. If we let them up for even a minute, the Mormons will start conspiring with the limeys or the Rebs, same as they did in the last war and same as they did forty-odd years ago, too."

There was another obsolete word. Only men of Custer's generation still called the Confederates Rebels, and men of Custer's generation, these days, were thin on the ground. The armored limousine stopped once more, this time inside the secure compound. A company stood at stiff attention, awaiting Custer's **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

inspection.

The retired general didn't notice them till a soldier held the door for

him and he got out of the automobile. When he did, he tried to straighten up as he made his slow way over to them. He reminded Dowling of a fire horse put out to pasture that heard the alarm bell once more and wanted to pull the engine again. Around soldiers, he came alive.

Most of the men there in the courtyard were conscripts, too young to have served in the Great War.

They still responded to Custer, though, grinning at his bad jokes and telling him their home towns when he asked.

In a low voice, General Pershing said, “He looks like he wishes he were still in uniform.”

“I’m sure he does, sir,” Dowling answered, also quietly. “The Socialists practically had to drag him out of it.” He clicked his tongue between his teeth, remembering. “That was an ugly scene.”

“Those people . . .” Pershing shook his head. “It’s not for us to meddle in politics, and I know that’s a good rule, but there are times when I’m tempted to say exactly what’s on my mind.”

“Yes, sir,” Dowling said.

At the banquet that evening, Custer ate with good appetite and drank perhaps two glasses of white wine too many. Afterwards, Libbie told him, “Time to get to bed, Autie.” She might have been talking to a child that had stayed up too late.

“In a moment, my dear,” Custer answered. Before struggling to his feet once more, he turned to Dowling and said, “Do you know, Major, there are times since they took the uniform off me when I simply feel adrift on the seas of fate. Once upon a time, I mastered the helm. But no more, Major, no more. This is what the years have done.”

Dowling couldn’t blame Custer for forgetting his present rank and using the one he’d had when they served together during the war. “Yes, sir,” he said, and then, “I’m sorry, sir.” To his amazement, tears stung his eyes. Custer had lived too long, and knew it. Could any man suffer a worse fate? Dowling shook his head. He doubted it.

“God bless you, Major,” Custer said. He let his wife, still competent as always, lead him out of the dining hall. One of those tears slid down Dowling’s cheek. He would have been more embarrassed—he would have been mortified—if he hadn’t seen that General Pershing’s face

was wet, too.

In a way, sitting in the Socialist Party offices in New York's Fourteenth Ward took Flora Blackford back to the days when she'd been Flora Hamburger. Waiting for the latest batch of election returns made her remember how nervous she'd been when her name first appeared on the ballot ten years before.

In another way, though, coming back reminded her how much things had changed. She didn't get back from Philadelphia all that often, even though the two cities were only a couple of hours apart by train. She didn't hear Yiddish spoken all that often any more, either; she had to stop and think and listen to understand. What had been her first language was now on the way to becoming foreign to her.

A telephone rang. Herman Bruck picked it up. He'd been sweet on Flora while she still lived in New **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

York City, and maybe his smile had a wistful quality to it when he looked at her now. On the other hand, maybe it didn't. He had a four-year-old of his own, and a two-year-old, and a six-month-old besides.

That was bound to be more than enough to keep anybody busy.

He scribbled something on a pad on his battered old desk. "Latest returns in our district—Hamburger, uh, Blackford, 9,791; Cantorowicz, 6,114." Cheers filled the office. The Democrat, Abraham Cantorowicz, wasn't quite a token candidate, but he hadn't had any great chance of winning, either. The Congressional district whose borders roughly corresponded to those of the Fourteenth Ward had been solidly Socialist since before the turn of the century.

On Flora's lap, Joshua Blackford began to fuss. He was sleepy. At not quite one, he was up well past his bedtime, and in a strange place besides. She was surprised he hadn't started making a racket before this.

The telephone rang again. Again, Herman Bruck picked it up. Then he laid his palm against the mouthpiece and said, "Flora, it's for you. It's Cantorowicz."

More cheers—everyone knew what that had to mean. Flora passed her son to her husband.

"Here—mind him for a few minutes, please," she said.

Hosea Blackford took the toddler. “This is what the vice president is for,” he said with a laugh. “He takes over so somebody else can go do something important.”

That got two waves of laughter—one from those who followed it in English and another after it got translated into Yiddish. Flora made her way to the telephone. “This is Congresswoman Blackford,” she said.

“And you’ll have two more years of being a Congresswoman,” Abraham Cantorowicz told her. “I don’t see how I can catch you, and what’s the point in waiting to make this call after the handwriting goes up on the walls? Another election, another Democrat calling to concede. Congratulations.”

“Thank you very much. That’s gracious of you,” Flora said. “You ran a strong campaign.” He’d run as well as a Democrat in this district could.

“Someone had to be the sacrificial lamb—we weren’t about to let you run unopposed,” Cantorowicz answered. “We will keep fighting for this district, and we’ll win one of these days.”

“Not soon, I don’t think,” Flora answered.

“Maybe sooner than you think,” her defeated opponent answered. “Will you run for reelection when your husband runs for president?”

Flora sent Hosea Blackford a look half startled, half thoughtful. She knew perfectly well he was thinking of running in 1928. Upton Sinclair almost certainly wouldn’t seek a third term. The only president who’d ever run a third time was Theodore Roosevelt. He’d won the Great War, made himself twice a national hero—and lost anyhow. The United States weren’t ready for one man ruling on and on.

“You aren’t saying anything,” Cantorowicz remarked.

“No, I’m not,” Flora told him. “We still have a couple of years to worry about that.”

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“Maybe you should run anyway,” the Democratic candidate said. “If

he loses and you win, you'd still be able to support your family."

"I don't think we'd have to worry there," Flora answered coolly. She wasn't kidding. Hosea Blackford was a talented lawyer with years of government connections. He would have no trouble making his way even if—God forbid!—he lost the election. Flora wasn't sure she liked that in the abstract; whom a man knew shouldn't have mattered so much as what he knew. But that didn't change reality one bit.

When I first went into Congress, I would have tried to change reality. I did *try to change reality, and I even had some luck,* she thought. She took pride in being called the conscience of the House. But ten years there had taught her some things were unlikely to change in her lifetime, or her son's, or his son's, either, if he had a son.

Cantorowicz said, "Well, I hope you have to worry about it. But you don't want to listen to that right now. You want to celebrate, and you've earned the right. Good night."

"Good night," Flora told him. The line went dead. Silence had fallen in the Socialist Party office.

Everyone was looking at her. She put the phone back on the hook and nodded. "He's conceded," she said.

Cheers and whoops shattered the silence. People came up and shook Flora's hand and thumped her on the back, as if she were a man. The racket woke up Joshua, who'd fallen asleep in Hosea's lap. The little boy started to cry. Hosea comforted him. Before long, he fell asleep again, his thumb in his mouth.

Someone knocked on the door. Eventually, one of the men in the office heard the noise and opened it.

There stood Sheldon Fleischmann, who ran the butcher's shop downstairs. He looked a lot like his father, Max. The elder Fleischmann had quietly fallen over behind his counter one day, and never got up again. Like his father, Sheldon was a Democrat. Flora doubted he'd voted for her. Even so, he was carrying a tray of cold cuts, as Max had done more than once on election nights.

"You don't need to do that," Flora scolded him. "You're not even a Socialist."

"I try to be a good neighbor, though," Fleischmann answered. "That's more important than politics."

“If everyone thought that way, we’d hardly need politics,” Hosea Blackford said.

His flat Great Plains accent stood out among the sharp, often Yiddish-flavored, New York voices in the office. Sheldon Fleischmann’s gaze swung to him in momentary surprise. Then the butcher realized who he had to be. “You’re right, Mr. Vice President,” he said, giving Blackford a respectful nod. “But too many people don’t.”

“No, they don’t,” Blackford agreed. “I did say *if* .”

“Yes, you did,” Fleischmann allowed. “*Mazeltov,* Congresswoman.” He chuckled. “I’ve been saying that so long, it starts to sound natural.”

“And why shouldn’t it?” Challenge rang from Flora’s voice.

Had the butcher said something about women having no place in Congress, Flora would have exploded.

She was ready to do it even now. But his answer was mild: “Only because there are a lot of men in Congress, ma’am, and just a couple of women. You do say what you’re used to.”

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Flora couldn’t very well argue there, however much she might have wanted to. She nodded. “All right,”

she said. “I suppose I’ll let you get away with that.”

By the relief on Sheldon Fleischmann’s face, he felt as if he *had* got away with it. “*Mazeltov* again,” he said, and went downstairs once more.

In the office, Herman Bruck was talking with Maria Tresca. Maria was one of the few Italians in the overwhelmingly Jewish Fourteenth Ward. She’d also been a thoroughgoing radical even before her sister was killed in the Remembrance Day riots of 1915. For as long as Flora could remember, Maria had stood foursquare for the proletariat and against the power of big capitalists. Now, though, she listened attentively as Bruck said, “Amalgamated Mills is a very solid firm. They make fine-quality goods, and I think their stock is going to go straight through the roof. I got fifteen shares when it was at thirty-two last month, and it’s already gone up five and a half points.”

When it came to cloth, he knew what he was talking about. He was a master tailor from a family of tailors, and always dressed as if he made five times as much as he really did. Flora wasn't much surprised when Maria Tresca gave back a serious nod. But she *was* surprised when strongly Socialist Maria offered a stock tip of her own: "I just bought five shares of Central Powers Steel in Toledo. They landed that new contract for the Great Lakes fleet, and they may split two for one soon."

"Central Powers Steel, eh?" Herman Bruck's round face grew alert. "I'll have to look into that."

"You're both buying shares in the stock market?" Flora knew she sounded amazed. She managed to keep from calling it speculating, though that was what it was.

Bruck looked faintly embarrassed, but he said, "I've made a lot of money the last year and a half—that's how long I've been in. And you only need to put up ten percent of the money when you buy on margin, so it's a lot cheaper than it seems."

"It's a lot cheaper as long as the market goes up," Flora said. "If it comes down, you need to pay more money or lose your shares."

"It's gone up for a long time now," Bruck replied. "I don't see why it should do anything else all of a sudden."

Flora wasn't sure how to answer that, or even if it had an answer. She turned to Maria Tresca. "*You're* putting money into Wall Street? You, of all people?"

"Yes, some," Maria answered defiantly. "If capitalism can make a secretary rich, let's see it happen. I hope it can. And if it can't"—she shrugged—"I'm not putting in more than I can afford to lose."

"Well, that's good," Flora said. "I can think of a lot of people who aren't being so careful, though."

"What we need is more regulation of the market, to keep cheats and swindlers from having their way with people," Maria Tresca said. "I don't know too much about what goes on in the stock market, but that looks pretty clear to me. Some of those people will yank the shirt off your back and then sell it to you."

Sadly, Flora answered, "I think you're right, but getting the legislation through Congress is a different story. The Democrats are against it,

and so are the Republicans. And more than a few Socialists have
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made so much money in the market, they think it's the goose that lays golden eggs, too."

She looked over at her husband. He held their sleeping son, all his attention, for the time being, resting on the little boy. But Flora knew Hosea also had money invested in Wall Street. She didn't know exactly how much; he'd never talked much with her about that. Socialism in Dakota was altogether a milder thing, a more natively American thing, than it was here in New York City. What was shocking from Herman and Maria would have been nothing out of the ordinary for Hosea Blackford, though he and they belonged to the same party. He'd never cared to rub Flora's nose in the ideological differences between them.

But if even thoroughgoing Socialists were buying and selling stocks, where had those differences gone?

Would you use your own money to try to make a killing in the market? Flora asked herself. She didn't think so, even now, but she admitted to herself that she wasn't sure.

Are you a capitalist? Do you want to be a capitalist? It was like asking herself if she wanted to become a Christian. *Very much like that,* she realized—Socialism was about as much an article of faith with her as was Judaism. And yet . . . *If I can provide for my family, why not?* But that was the question: could she? One thing she'd learned in school still seemed true—what went up had to come down. Herman Bruck didn't seem to believe that any more. For his sake, and the sake of many more like him, Flora hoped the rules had changed since she'd got out of Public School Number 130.

Rain pattered down on Hipolito Rodriguez's farm outside of Baroyeca. Here in the south of Sonora, winter rains were less common than those that came off the Gulf of California in the summertime. Rain at any season came seldom; were it not for the streams and ditches bringing water down from the mountains into the valley near whose edge Baroyeca sat, the town, the farms around it, and the silver mine close by couldn't have survived.

Chickens hopped in surprise when raindrops hit them. They pecked at the puffs of dust the raindrops kicked up. Maybe they thought those

puffs were bugs. Rodriguez wasn't sure what, if anything, went through their minds. He could think along with the rest of the livestock; the mule, though a powerful animal, was as evil as any beast ever born. But trying to think like a hen was more trouble than it was worth. The pigs seemed brilliant next to hens.

Dark gray clouds rolled down from the northwest. The day was chilly, as chilly as it ever got near Baroyeca. Rodriguez was glad to stand close by the fire in the kitchen. His wife patted cornmeal into tortillas. Looking up from her work, Magdalena said, "Do you know what we need, Hipolito?"

"No. What?" Rodriguez answered.

"We need a *stove* ," his wife said. Most of their conversation was in Spanish, but the key word came out in English. She went on, "A good iron stove would cook better than I can with an open fire. It would pay for itself, too, because it would save fuel. It would even keep the kitchen warm on days like this, because less heat would go up the chimney. And I think we can afford one."

"A stove?" Rodriguez also said it in English. He scratched his head. Magdalena had always cooked over an open fire. So had his mother. So had everyone, he supposed, for as long as his ancestors had lived in Baroyeca. But times weren't what they had been back in the old days. He knew that. Cautiously, he asked, "How much would a stove cost?"

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"Twenty-seven dollars and sixty cents," Magdalena said without a moment's hesitation. "I saw just the one I want in the Henderson and Fisk catalogue." Henderson and Fisk was a leading Confederate mail-order house, and had been since before the Great War. Only after the currency stabilized again, though, had its catalogues started coming to places as remote from the concerns of most of the CSA as Baroyeca. Magdalena went on, "It's called the Southern Sunshine cook stove, and it will do everything I need." Again, the name of the stove came out in English.

"A stove," Rodriguez said musingly. "I'd bet a lot of women in Baroyeca itself don't cook on stoves."

Changes filtered down to southern Sonora more slowly than almost anywhere else in the CSA, and the Confederate States had been

founded on the principle that change was a bad idea.

“I’m sure you’re right,” his wife agreed. “But I don’t care. We have the money. We even have the money for the stovepipe to take the smoke outside—another eighty-five cents.”

If she said they had it, they had it. She kept track of finances with an eye that watched every penny.

Even when the money went mad after the Great War, when a billion dollars had been nothing much, Magdalena had stretched things as far as they would go. The *patrón* had never had cause to complain about the Rodriguezes. The *patrón* . . . “Does Don Gustavo’s wife cook on a stove?” Rodriguez asked.

Magdalena let out a dismissive snort. “Doña Elena doesn’t cook at all. They have a cook of their own, as you know perfectly well.” But it was a serious question. If the *patrón* didn’t have an iron stove in his house, what would he think of a peasant family’s getting one? Seeing the worry on Hipolito Rodriguez’s face, Magdalena said, “Don’t worry. I found out. Doña Elena’s cook does use a stove.”

“All right. Good. Very good.” Rodriguez didn’t try to hide his relief. Things weren’t so rigid in the CSA as they were down in the Empire of Mexico, and they weren’t so rigid now as they had been in his father’s day, but he didn’t want to offend Don Gustavo even so. *Better safe than sorry,* he told himself.

To his wife, he said, “Next time I go to town, I’ll send the order to Henderson and Fisk.”

“Good, yes.” Magdalena nodded. “And then the railroad will bring the crate, and then we will have a stove.”

A hamlet like Baroyeca would never have had a railroad connection if not for the mine close by. In plenty of places in Sonora and Chihuahua, the last leg of the journey from merchandiser to customer would have been by rattling wagon (or possibly, these days, by rattling truck). But not here. The trains that took out precious metal could bring in a stove from Birmingham.

The mine also meant Baroyeca boasted a post office, a few doors down from *La Culebra Verde* . The Stars and Bars floated above the whitewashed adobe building. When Rodriguez went in, José Cordero, the postmaster, put aside the newspaper he’d been reading. He was a plump man with a small mustache and with his hair parted on the

right and greased immovably into place. “And what can I do for you today?” he inquired. “Postage stamps?”

“No, *señor* . I have some,” Rodriguez replied politely; by virtue of his office, the postmaster was a person of consequence. “I wish to purchase a postal money order, and to send the money to Henderson and Fisk.” He spoke with a certain amount of pride. Not every farmer could scrape together the cash for such a purchase.

Cordero’s answering nod was grave, for he recognized as much. He made a small ceremony of taking out the book of money orders. “What is the amount?”

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“Thirty-one dollars and seventy-six cents,” Rodriguez said; that included the stove, the stovepipe, and third-class freight. He set banknotes and coins on the counter till he had exactly the right amount.

The postmaster counted the money, then nodded again. “Yes, that is correct for the order itself,” he said. He filled out the money order, then added, “You must also know, of course, there is a fee of thirty-two cents for the use of the order.”

Rodriguez winced. He hadn’t sent a money order in so long, he’d forgotten that one-percent fee. He fished in his pockets. He had some change lurking there; he’d intended to visit *La Culebra Verde* after sending away for the stove. He found a quarter and a dime. José Cordero solemnly gave him back three cents. He sighed. He couldn’t buy a beer for that. Then he found another dime. He brightened. He could go to the cantina after all.

“How long will the stove take to come?” he asked.

“Ah, is that what you’re getting? Good for you,” the postmaster said. “How long?” He looked up at the ceiling as he made mental calculations. “My best guess would be three weeks or a month. You should light a candle for every day sooner than three weeks.”

“Gracias, señor,” Rodriguez said. That was about what he’d thought. Now he could use Cordero’s authority when he told Magdalena.

“El gusto es mio,” Cordero replied. Rodriguez didn’t think the pleasure

really was his, but he always spoke politely. He went on, “I hope your wife gets much use and much enjoyment from it. My own Ana has had a stove now for several years, and she would never go back to cooking over an open fire. The stove is much cleaner, too.”

“I had not thought of that, but I’m sure it would be.” Rodriguez hid a smile. He’d done a little bragging, and the postmaster had responded with some of his own. That was the way life worked.

“It is,” Cordero said positively. “You’ve spent a lot of money, but you won’t be sorry for it.” He sounded as if he were giving a personal guarantee.

“Without doubt, you have reason.” Rodriguez inked a pen, scrawled the name of the mail-order form on the envelope, put in the order form and the money order, and handed Cordero the envelope.

The postmaster looked embarrassed. “Personally, I would gladly send it for nothing. You understand, though, I cannot be my own man in this matter: I am but a servant of the Confederate government. I must ask you for five cents more for the stamp that shows you have paid me postage.”

With a sigh, Rodriguez realized he hadn’t brought a stamp of his own along. He passed Cordero the dime he’d found, but eight cents wouldn’t let him go into the cantina. Before the war, beer had been five cents, but it was a dime nowadays. No help for it, though. He watched the postmaster put the envelope in the bin of mail that would leave Baroyeca. Once it was there, he left the post office.

Standing on the board sidewalk, he sighed again. No point in going into *La Culebra Verde* when he had no money to buy. He thought little of men who sat around in there hoping to cadge drinks from their more prosperous friends and neighbors. He didn’t want to be one of those freeloaders himself. But he didn’t want to turn around and head straight back to the farm, either. What point to that? He didn’t escape from it often enough to care to go home as fast as he could.

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What to do, then? He looked up and down Baroyeca’s main street—*Calle de los Estados Confederados*—wondering which shops he could visit without drawing sneers from the proprietors. A man with eight cents in his pocket couldn’t buy much. He jingled the coins. Because

of the pennies, they did sound like more.

His eyes snapped back to a building at the far end of the street. It had stood empty since the weekly newspaper folded in the middle of the great inflation. Now, he saw, it was empty no more. A couple of bright new words were painted on the front window. From his angle, he couldn't make out what they were. He ambled toward the building, still jingling his few paltry coins.

Before long, he could read the words. He stopped in surprise and pleasure, a grin spreading over his face. FREEDOM! the window shouted, and below that, in slightly smaller letters, ¡LIBERTAD! As he got closer still, he could make out the much smaller words under the big ones: *Freedom Party Headquarters, Baroyeca, Sonora. Everyone Welcome.*

Everyone welcome? Hipolito Rodriguez's grin got wider. He stopped fooling with the coins and went in.

Inside, a blond man with his hair cut short like a soldier's clattered away at a typewriter. Rodriguez didn't scowl, but he felt like it. From what he'd seen in the Army, a lot of white Confederates looked down on Sonorans and Chihuahuans almost as much as they did on Negroes —unless the Sonorans and Chihuahuans had money, of course. He laughed a sour laugh. The eight cents in his pocket didn't qualify.

But this fellow startled him. *"Buenos días. Como está Usted?"* he said in pretty good Spanish. It plainly wasn't his first language, but he managed more than well enough. "*Me llamo* Robert Quinn," he went on,

"Represento el Partido de Libertad en Baroyeca. En qué puedo servirle?"

"Hello, Mr. Quinn," Rodriguez said in English to the man who represented the Freedom Party in Baroyeca. "I do not know what you can do for me. I came in because I saw you were here and I wanted to find out why."

"Bueno. Excelente," Quinn continued in Spanish. *"Como se llama, señor?"*

Rodriguez gave his name. He added, "Why does the Freedom Party have an office here?" He couldn't imagine the Radical Liberals or the Whigs opening a headquarters in Baroyeca. The town simply wasn't big enough.

But Quinn said, *"Para ganar elecciones."*

"Having an office here will help you win elections?" Rodriguez returned to Spanish, since the Freedom Party man seemed comfortable in it. "How?"

"We did well here in 1925—we elected a Congressman from this district," Robert Quinn replied in the same language. "We intend to do better still this year. After all, in 1927 we will elect a president. With God's help—and some from the voters—it will be Jake Featherston."

"I have only eight cents right now," Rodriguez said, not mentioning the thirty-odd dollars he'd just sent to Birmingham. He kept quiet about that on purpose. Was this truly a party that might do a poor man some good? He'd find out. "With eight cents, how can I help you?"

Quinn didn't laugh at him or tell him to go away. Instead, seriously and soberly, he began to explain exactly what Rodriguez could do for the Freedom Party, and what the Party might do for him. He talked
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for about ten minutes. By the time he finished, Rodriguez was sure he would go on voting Freedom as long as he lived. That wasn't all he was sure of, either. He would go out and preach for the Party, too.

He felt like one of the very first Christians in ancient days. He'd met a disciple, and now he was a disciple himself.

Colonel Irving Morrell hadn't heard the garrison in Kamloops, British Columbia, so animated, so excited, since he'd got there from Philadelphia more than a year before. He would have been happier, though, had something military sparked the excitement. But all the gossip centered on Chevrolet's proposed acquisition of the White Motor Company. White, as far as Morrell was concerned, made the best trucks in the world. No one seemed to care about that. What people were talking about was what the acquisition would do to the stock prices of the two companies.

By midafternoon, Morrell had had as much of that as he could take. "God forbid we should have to fight a war on a day when the market goes down," he said.

He was a colonel, which meant he outranked everyone who sat in the mess hall with him. At last, though, a captain named David Smith

said, “Well, sir, you never can tell. It might make us meaner.”

Silence fell. People waited to see how Morrell would take that. Ever since he’d come West from General Staff headquarters, he’d made a name for himself as a man no one sensible would trifle with. But Smith’s line was too good to make him angry. He grinned and said, “Here’s hoping, anyhow.”

The mess hall relaxed. He could almost feel the soft sighs of relief that came from just about everyone. In Philadelphia, a lot of soldiers had spent a lot of time laughing at him. The officers here took him seriously.

His record was too good to ignore, and a colonel’s eagles carried a lot more weight in Kamloops than they had back at General Staff headquarters. That wasn’t why he’d been so eager to get out of Philadelphia; he’d never cared one way or the other about being a big fish in a small pond. All he wanted were a job he liked and the chance to do it without anybody looking over his shoulder. He hadn’t had those in Philadelphia. He did here.

Captain Smith decided to push it a little, adding, “Besides, sir, we’ll never get rich on Army pay. If we’re going to, wouldn’t you rather have us playing the market than knocking over a bank?”

That went too far. Morrell got to his feet. He carried his tray of dishes toward the waiting cooks. Over his shoulder, he answered, “If you want to get rich, you don’t belong in the Army in the first place. And if you’re not in the Army, I don’t give a damn what you’re doing. No one held a gun to your head to make you put on this uniform, Captain. If you want to resign your commission, I’ll be glad to help you with the paperwork.”

Smith turned very red. He said, “No, sir. I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to do that at all.”

Morrell handed the tray to a man in an apron who’d drawn kitchen duty. Everyone eyed him, wondering how he would reply. He didn’t want to get any deeper into the argument, so all he said was, “Remember why you did join, then, Captain.”

As he left the hall, that silence returned. His leg twinged. It hadn’t for a while. He’d been wounded when the Great War was young, and that was . . . *Lord!* he thought in surprise. *That’s heading toward thirteen years ago now. Where’s the time gone?*

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He took his thick wool overcoat from its hanger and wrapped it around himself. Kamloops lay where the north and south branches of the Thompson River came together, in a valley near the foot of the Canadian Rockies. Even in Philadelphia, Morrell would have been glad to have an overcoat on most February days. There were days—and more than a few of them—in Kamloops when he would have been glad to have two of them.

Cold slapped his face when he went outside. He shoved his hands into the overcoat's pockets to keep them from freezing. The rolling country around the town was in summer a near desert of tumbleweed and sagebrush. Snow painted it white at this season of the year, and white it would stay for another couple of months.

Morrell sighed. His breath smoked, as if he'd exhaled after a drag on a cigarette. The flat land would have been ideal for testing barrels. He'd said so, too, in the very first report he sent back to Philadelphia.

He wondered if anybody had read that report, or even bothered to take it out of its envelope. He had his doubts. No one, certainly, had acted on the suggestion, or even acknowledged it.

So far as he knew, no one in the USA was testing barrels anywhere else, either. He kicked at the snow, which flew up from his boots. Down in the Empire of Mexico, the machines the Confederate-backed imperialists used were at least as good as the ones he'd been experimenting with back at Fort Leavenworth before budget cuts shut down the program. The rebels didn't have barrels that could match them, and the rebels, by now, had just about lost the civil war.

He kicked at the snow again. The Ottoman Turks weren't massacring Armenians these days the way they had a few years before, but American intervention had nothing to do with that. Kaiser Wilhelm—who wasn't good old Kaiser Bill any more—had ignored U.S. protests, and so had Abdul Majid, the Ottoman sultan. They'd figured the United States had more urgent things to worry about closer to home, and they'd been right.

They made us look like a bunch of chumps, is what they did, Morrell thought as he walked toward his office. A horse-drawn garbage wagon rattled up the road toward him. He nodded to the men aboard it. The Canadian white wings pretended he didn't exist. They took money

from the American occupiers, but that didn't mean they wanted anything else to do with them. Yes, the U.S. Army had snuffed out the latest uprising a couple of years before, but it didn't seem to matter. The Canucks were going to stay sullen for a long, long time to come.

How do we keep them from causing more trouble, next year or five years from now or fifteen years from now or fifty years from now? Morrell wondered. He wished he could talk to some German officers, even if things between the two greatest powers left in the world weren't so friendly as they had been up till the war ended. The Kaiser's men were occupying a hostile Belgium now, and they'd been occupying a hostile Alsace and Lorraine for more than fifty years. They had lots of practice at ruling territory that didn't want to be ruled.

Seldom had Morrell had a wish so promptly granted. When he got to the office building, his aide-de-camp, a lieutenant named Ike Horwitz, said, "Sir, there's a German officer waiting to see you.

Said you saw action together during the war."

"Captain Guderian, by God!" Morrell exclaimed in delight. "He was an observer with my unit when we were fighting over by Banff, just a couple of hundred miles from here."

"Yes, sir," Horwitz said. "Only he's a lieutenant colonel now, if I remember German rank markings straight. Oh—and he's got an orderly with him, a sergeant."

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Something in Horwitz's voice changed. Morrell needed a second to realize what it was. "You don't like the orderly?"

"No, sir," Horwitz said with more of that same stiffness.

"Why not?" Morrell asked curiously.

"He figured out I was a Jew," Horwitz answered. It probably hadn't taken much figuring; Morrell's aide-de-camp looked very Jewish indeed, with a nose of impressive proportions. "He didn't think I spoke any German—and I don't, not really, but Yiddish is close enough to let me understand it when I hear it."

"Oh," Morrell said. "Well, to hell with him. Guderian's not like that, I

can tell you for a fact. He doesn't care one way or the other."

Lieutenant Horwitz nodded. "He told his orderly to keep quiet and mind his own business. I just sat here and minded mine."

"Good for you, Ike."

"I wanted to punch the bastard right in the nose."

"Don't blame you a bit. But you didn't, and that makes you a good soldier."

Horwitz's snort said he would sooner have been a bad soldier. Morrell went into his office. Heinz Guderian bounded up from a chair to shake his hand. Sure enough, the energetic German had a single gold pip on each fancy shoulder strap—a lieutenant colonel's insignia. His orderly sprang to his feet, too, and gave Morrell a crisp salute. The fellow wore an Iron Cross, First Class. That gave Morrell pause; it hadn't been easy for a noncom to win that medal. Second Class, yes—First, no. The man might be a son of a bitch, but he'd done something special during the war.

He spoke in German: "Excuse me, sir, but I know no English."

"It's all right," Morrell replied in the same language. "I can get along in German." His voice hardened a little. "And so can my aide-de-camp."

Lieutenant Colonel Guderian grimaced. His orderly was unabashed. "So he knows what I think of his kind, does he? Well, too bad. The world would be a better place if we got rid of the lot of them."

"Nonsense," Morrell said sharply. He thought, *Damn fool sounds like Jake Featherston, except he's riding a different hobby horse.*

The sergeant might have replied, but Guderian held up a hand and said, "Enough." His orderly had discipline; he fumed, but he subsided. Then Guderian switched to English: "This is not why I came to talk to you, Colonel Morrell."

"Well, what can I do for you, then?" Morrell asked.

"I was wondering if you could arrange for me a tour of occupied western Canada," the German officer said. "We are interested in the methods you Americans use to control the lands you have won. . . . What **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://**

is so funny, Colonel?”

“I’ll tell you what’s funny,” Morrell answered when he got done laughing. “What’s funny is, I was just wondering how you Germans held on to Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine. What we’ve been doing here hasn’t worked out so well as we’d have liked. The Canadians still hate our guts. We smashed their last uprising, but they’re liable to rebel again any old time. If you know a trick for keeping people quiet, I wouldn’t mind learning it.”

“What does he say, sir?” Guderian’s orderly asked. With the air of a man humoring a subordinate who didn’t really deserve it, Guderian translated. The sergeant made an almost operatic gesture of contempt.

“It’s simple,” he declared. “Kill enough and you’ll frighten the rest into giving in.”

Guderian sighed. *“Später, später,”* he said, and turned back to Morrell. “That’s the only answer he knows—kill everything in sight.”

“You don’t get any arguments that way, anyhow,” Morrell observed.

“No, nor any chance to put things right later,” the German said. “So you Americans have no sure answers for this, either, then?”

“I’m afraid not. I’ll be glad to set up your tour for you, but I don’t think you’ll see anything very exciting,” Morrell answered. *I’ll make damn sure you don’t see anything too very exciting, as a matter of fact,* he thought. *If you’re looking for ideas from us, that means you need ’em badly. And if you don’t get ’em, you’ll have more trouble holding down your subjects if you ever wind up in a scrap with us.*

“Thank you. I should perhaps let you know certain American officers are in Belgium now, trying to learn from us.” Guderian smiled and shrugged. “Between us, your country and mine share the problems of the strong, *nicht wahr* ?”

“Yes,” Morrell said. *And I bet our boys don’t learn one damn thing from you, either, except where the officers’ brothels are.* He wagged a finger at the German. “Nobody’s looking at what you’re doing in the east, in Poland and the Ukraine?”

Heinz Guderian shook his head. “No, Colonel, no one looks there—and it is as well that no one does, too.” His eyes swung toward his

tough-talking orderly. “In the east, *his* methods prevail. Poland pretends to be a kingdom. The Ukraine . . .” He shook his head. “After all, they’re only Slavs.” He might have been a Confederate saying, *After all, they’re only niggers.* Morrell smiled with half his mouth. *Either way, God help the poor bastards on the receiving end.*

* * *

At seventeen, Mary McGregor had got used to being taller than her mother. Her father, after all, had been a big man. She remembered that very well, though these days she had trouble calling up the memory of just what his voice had sounded like.

She also remembered when her mother’s hair had been the color of a bright new penny. Now she couldn’t help noticing how much gray streaked that once-bright hair. She hadn’t noticed it as it spread; one day, it seemed, that gray had simply appeared, as if by magic.

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But magic is supposed to be good, Mary thought, looking out across the fields she and her mother and her sister and whatever hired man they got for the spring would be planting soon. Soon, but not yet: snow, a deeper blanket than usual, still covered those fields. Winter had been hard, even for Manitoba.

Mary clenched her fists so that her nails dug into her palms. This far north, the growing season was short enough anyhow. A late spring could make harvest touch-and-go before frosts came again in early fall. If they didn’t get a good crop . . .

Well, so what? Mary thought, and went out to tend the horse and the cow and the rest of the livestock in the barn. *What if we’ve got no money and they throw us off the farm?* She knew the family had relatives back in Ontario; her father had come west to Manitoba when he was a boy. But the McGregors weren’t close to any of those kin. Mary’d never met a one of them. *Would they take us in?* Times were supposed to be even harder back there than they were here—not only had Ontario been fought over harder than Manitoba, the rebellion there had been worse.

We’re on our own. Nobody cares whether we live or die. Mary shook her head. That wasn’t true.

The Americans hoped the McGregors died. They'd killed her brother, Alexander. They'd killed her father, too. Oh, yes, his own bomb, meant for General Custer, had been the actual means of his death, but he never would have become a bomber in the first place if the stinking Yanks hadn't decided Alexander was plotting against them and stood him against a wall.

Some of those dark thoughts faded away when Mary went into the barn. It was warmer in there, with the walls holding out the wind and holding in the animals' body warmth. Somebody from the city might have wrinkled his nose at the odor. Mary took it for granted; she'd smelled it all her life. And the work distracted her. She gave the horse and cow and sheep hay and put down corn for the chickens. Then she mucked out the stalls. The manure would go on the garden and on as much of the fields as it would cover.

She handled pitchfork and shovel with matter-of-fact skill. Her hands had thick bands of callus across the palms. Her nails were short and blunt and dirty. A dozen scars seamed her fingers and the backs of her hands—anyone who did a lot of work with sharp tools had accidents now and then. Every once in a while, she thought wistfully of a manicure, but how much good would it do? A day after she got it, she'd be back in the barn and out in the fields once more.

Hens squawked and tried to peck as she lifted them off their nests so she could gather eggs. One of them did more than try; the bird's beak drew blood. She gave it a baleful stare. "Chicken and dumplings," she whispered. "Fried chicken. Chicken soup." The bird looked back out of beady little eyes. It was too stupid to be afraid. It was only indignant at having its nest robbed—and, being a hen, would forget about that in short order.

Instead of taking the basket of eggs straight back to the house, Mary sat down for a moment to rest.

She leaned back against an old wagon wheel that had been sitting in the barn ever since she was a little girl. The iron tire on the wheel showed red streaks of rust. The wheel had a couple of broken spokes.

Not for the first time, she wondered why her father had left it there instead of either repairing it or getting what use he could from the wood and the iron. Letting things lie idle wasn't like him.

She shrugged. She'd never get the chance to ask him now. If she ever needed anything that wheel could provide, she wouldn't hesitate to

take it. Or, if she had to, she thought she could fix it. She hadn't tried her hand at carpentry till her father died. As with so much else, she'd had to learn the hard way—several of the scars on her hands came from slips. But she could do things nowadays that would have amazed her a few years before.

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With a sigh, she climbed to her feet again, picked up the basket, and headed back to the farmhouse. She blinked in surprise when she saw a buggy by the house. People didn't visit the McGregors very often.

She walked faster, curious to see who'd broken the unwritten rule.

A couple of Fords sped past on the road that led to Rosenfeld. One was painted green-gray, which meant it belonged to the U.S. Army. The other was the more usual black. All the same, odds were it had a Yank inside. Even now, almost ten years after the war ended, not many Canadians could afford a motorcar. *And most of the ones who can are a bunch of damned collaborators,* Mary thought.

She opened the kitchen door. Her mother sat at a table drinking tea with another woman of about her own age, who was saying, "I tell you, Maude, it's a disgrace. I'm sure she and that Yank—" She broke off and smiled. "Hello, Mary. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Mrs. Marble, thank you." Mary laughed at herself, thinking she should have recognized the buggy.

"Tell me more, Beth," her mother said. "You can be sure Mary won't let it get to the wrong ears."

"Well, I didn't expect she would," Beth Marble answered, sipping her tea. She was a couple of inches shorter than Mary's mother, with shoulder-length brown hair, blue eyes, rather flat features, and a habitual expression of good humor. After picking up a shortbread wafer from the plate on the table, she did go on with her story: one more tale of a Canadian girl who'd lost her virtue to a fast-talking American with a fancy motorcar and with money in his pocket.

Mary listened with only half an ear. She hardly knew this girl, who lived even farther from the McGregors than did the Marbles, and she'd been hearing such stories ever since the days of the Great War. Only the details varied. The American conquest of Canada continued on

many different levels.

Soldiers occupied the land. American men seduced Canadian women. Newspapers printed only what the conquerors wanted the conquered to read. Films pounded home the same messages, as she'd seen at the Bijou. So did the wireless, not that she'd ever heard it. Canadian schools taught the U.S. view of history—a pack of lies, as far as Mary was concerned. Her parents had pulled her and Julia out of school when the Yanks changed the curriculum. Most children, though, had kept on going, and the Americans had been in charge of such things for quite a while now. How long till a whole generation forgot what being Canadian meant?

Mary put the eggs she'd gathered on the counter. She went over to the table. "May I have a wafer, Mother?" she asked, and took one when Maude McGregor nodded.

"Such lovely manners," Beth Marble said, and beamed at Mary's mother. "Both your daughters are so sweet and charming, Maude."

Do you know me at all? Mary wondered as she nibbled at the shortbread. *I don't think so.* In her own mind, she was as much a fighter against the American occupation as her father had been, more of a fighter than her brother had been—even if the Yanks had murdered him for his opposition to their rule.

Sweet? Charming? She felt like pouring a cup of tea and then spilling it on their visitor, even if Mrs.

Marble had meant well, as she surely had.

As much to make a point as because she really wanted it, Mary took another shortbread wafer, this time without asking permission. Mrs. Marble, engrossed in another bit of gossip—she did like to talk—failed to notice. Mary's mother did, and wagged a finger at her. From behind Beth Marble's back, Mary stuck **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

out her tongue.

Her mother raised her teacup to her mouth to hide a smile, but her eyes danced above it. Carrying that second piece of shortbread away as booty, Mary went into the parlor.

Two steps in were more than enough to show her she'd made a mistake. Her older sister sat on the rocking chair in there, and Beth

Marble's son Kenneth on the sofa close by. More plainly than words, Julia's look said the two of them didn't want any company.

Face heating, Mary mumbled, "I . . . I guess I'll go upstairs now. Hello, Kenneth."

"Hello, Mary," Kenneth Marble answered politely, but he kept his eyes on Julia as he spoke. He'd been coming to call for most of a year now, sometimes with his mother, sometimes without. He was the first young man who'd come to call on Julia since Ted Culligan broke off their engagement after her father's death. There were times over the past few months when Julia had got all dreamy and absentminded.

Mary didn't take that for a good sign.

Up the stairs she went, fast as her legs would carry her. When she turned around and looked back, Julia and Kenneth were leaning towards each other. She sighed. She didn't know what Julia saw in him. He was only an inch or two taller than she, and, to Mary's eyes, nothing much to look at. Some actress had got a reputation as the girl with *it* . In Julia's eyes, plainly, Kenneth Marble had *it* . Mary still found *it* more bewildering than exciting.

She flopped down on her bed and started reading a copy of *The Ladies' Home Journal* she'd got the last time she went into Rosenfeld. The magazine showed her a whole different world, and not just because it came from the USA. Skinny girls in short dresses strode city streets, rode in motorcars, listened to the wireless, lived in apartments, used electric lights and telephones, and did all sorts of other things Mary thought herself unlikely ever to do. Even more than what they did, that they took it so completely for granted was daunting.

If it weren't for the recipes and patterns the *Journal* included, Mary's mother probably wouldn't have let it come into the farmhouse. Nothing could have been better calculated to make someone on a farm discontented with her life. This issue even had a story about flying to California for a holiday. Flying! For pleasure! The only aeroplanes Mary had even seen were the fighting scouts and bombers that had buzzed above the farm during the Great War. She couldn't imagine wanting to get into one of those.

The *Journal* also had an article about a journey on an ocean liner. Mary couldn't decide whether she found stranger the idea of a liner or that of the ocean itself. She'd never seen it, and didn't expect she ever would. Before she could read much of the article, a commotion broke

out downstairs: Julia and their mother and Beth Marble sounded even more excited than the hens had when Mary rifled their nests.

She flipped the magazine closed and hurried down to see what had happened. She found her older sister in tears, with their mother and Mrs. Marble both embracing her. Kenneth Marble stood off to one side, a sickly grin on his face. Mary stared at him. Had he tried to . . . ? With his own mother, and Julia's, in the next room? He couldn't have been that stupid. Could he?

Then Mary noticed both her mother and Beth Marble were crying and smiling at the same time. Maude McGregor said, "Kenneth just asked Julia to marry him, and she said yes."

"Oh." Mary couldn't have said anything more if she tried; she felt as if she'd been punched in the pit of the stomach. Even breathing was hard. The first thought that went through her mind was, *How will we do* **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

the work if Julia moves away? Even with all three of them working flat out, it barely got done.

Despite her mother's smile, Maude McGregor looked worried, too. Mrs. Marble seemed oblivious to the glance that went between Mary and her mother. It wasn't *her* trouble, after all.

"This is the happiest day of my life," Julia said. Beth Marble burst into tears again. Mary congratulated her sister. *What a liar I am,* she thought.

VIII

To Anne Colleton's ears, J.B.H. Norris' drawl sounded harsh and ignorant. But the Texas oil man had proved a sharp operator in spite of that backwoods accent. "Hope you'll see fit to invest in our operation here, ma'am," he said, tipping his hat to her. The Stetson, with its high crown and wide brim, also told her she wasn't in South Carolina any more.

She *was* near the banks of the Brazos River, northwest of Fort Worth. And she had questions that went beyond profit and loss. She pointed west. "That new Yankee state of Houston isn't very far away. What happens if there's another war? How are you going to keep U.S. soldiers and aeroplanes from wrecking everything you've got?"

“Ma’am, you’d do better asking Richmond about that than me,” Norris answered. “If they hadn’t given up so much last time, we wouldn’t need to fret about it now.”

“Yes, but they did, and so we do.” Anne slapped at something. The mosquitoes were coming out early this afternoon. It wasn’t quite so muggy as it would have been back home, but it would do.

J.B.H. Norris said, “Don’t quite know what to tell you about that, except I don’t think a war’s coming any time soon.”

“No,” Anne said bleakly. “I don’t, either. We’re too weak.”

“That’s about the size of it,” Norris agreed. “At least President Mitchel has the sense to see it. That Featherston maniac would get us into a fight we can’t hope to win.”

“I used to like him better than I do now, but he hasn’t got any real chance of getting elected, anyway,”

Anne said. “So I’m a Whig again. Some people don’t much like that, but I’ve never much cared for what people like or don’t like.” She changed the subject, but only a little: “What do you think of the Supreme Court ruling that lets Mitchel run again?”

“Well, the Constitution says a president serves the six-year term he’s elected for, and then he’s done.”

Norris shrugged. “President Mitchel didn’t run for the job—he got it when that Calkins bastard—pardon me, ma’am—killed President Hampton. So I suppose it’s only fair to let him try and win it again on his own. And Calkins was one of those Freedom Party fools, so I’m not surprised the Supreme Court gave it to Featherston right between the eyes.”

“Yes, that occurred to me, too. Featherston frightened people—powerful people—a few years ago.

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Now they’re going to make him pay for it.” Anne Colleton’s smile had a certain predatory quality, enough so that J.B.H. Norris flinched when she turned it on him rather than the world at large. She went on, “I do thank you for showing me around. You’ve given me a lot to

think about—more than I expected when I came out to Texas, in fact. I may well put some of my money here once I get home."

Norris beamed. "That'd be wonderful. We can use the capital, and I'm not lyin' when I tell you so." He scratched his cheek with his left hand. Only then did Anne notice his ring finger was just a stump. A war wound? Probably. A lot of men had such small mutilations. He added, "If you're heading back East, you'd better not waste a lot of time. From what the papers say, the flood in the Mississippi Valley just keeps gettin' worse and worse."

"I know." Anne had been reading the papers, too. Anger roiled her voice: "And it's hurt us so much worse than it hit the damnyankees. If they hadn't stolen Kentucky and that piece of Arkansas from us, it wouldn't have hurt them much at all. Cairo, Illinois, got flooded." She rolled her eyes. "Cairo, Illinois, never was any sort of a place to begin with. But we've had Memphis and Little Rock just drowned, and the levees in New Orleans were holding by this much"—she held thumb and forefinger close together—"when I went through Louisiana on my way here."

"May not be so easy gettin' back," Norris warned.

"Why not?" Anne said. "Most of the bridges over the Mississippi are still standing."

"Yes, ma'am." The oil man nodded again. "The bridges over the Mississippi are still good. They're the big, strong ones, and they were built to take whatever the river could throw at 'em. But what about the bridges *on the way to* the Mississippi? An awful lot of them'll go down, I bet. I may be wrong, but that's sure enough how it looks to me."

Anne muttered something under her breath. It wasn't quite far enough under, for J.B.H. Norris' gingery eyebrows leapt upwards. *He'll never think of me as a lady again,* Anne thought, and did her best not to giggle. *Well, fair enough, because I'm damn well not.* Worry wiped out the temptation to laugh.

"You're dead right, Mr. Norris, and I wish I'd thought of that myself. Please take me back to my hotel. I can't afford to waste much time, can I?"

"No, I don't reckon you can," Norris said. "Wish I could see more of you, but I know how things are.

Car's right over there." He pointed to a middle-aged Birmingham outside the shack that did duty for an office.

How does he mean that? Anne wondered. *Spend more time with me, or see me with my clothes off?*

Ten years, even five years, before, she would have had no doubt. But she wasn't so young as she had been. *I'm just as picky as I ever was, though, maybe pickier. That's likely why I haven't got a husband yet. Nobody suits me. Maybe Tom was right. I've been on my own too long.*

The ride back to Fort Worth took close to three hours. A blowout halfway there didn't help. J.B.H.

Norris fixed it with the aplomb of one who'd done it many times before—and what driver hadn't?—but it still cost a half hour Anne wished she could have got back. She checked out of the Dandridge as soon as Norris stopped the motorcar in front of the hotel. Then she hurled her luggage into a cab and made for the train station across town.

Before the war, she would have had a colored servant, or more than one, taking care of her. No more.

And she didn't miss them, either. She'd discovered she was more efficient than anyone whose main aim was to do as little as possible. That had proved oddly liberating, where she would have expected losing **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

servants to do just the opposite.

But the time lost to the blowout rose up to haunt her at the station. "Sorry, ma'am, but the eastbound express pulled out of here about twenty minutes ago," the clerk in the ticket window said. "Next one doesn't leave till ten tonight."

"Damnation," Anne said. "Can I take a local and connect with another express east of here sooner than that? I do want to beat the flood if I can; I have to get back to South Carolina."

"I understand, ma'am. Let's see what I can do." The clerk flipped through schedules so complex, God would have had trouble understanding them. People in line behind Anne surely fumed at the delay. She would have, had she been back there and not at the front. At last, with an unhappy half smile, he shook his head. "Sorry, ma'am,

but no. And I've got to tell you, there's no Pullman berths left on the ten o'clock train. You'll have to take an ordinary seat. I'll refund the difference, of course."

"Damnation," Anne said again, this time with more feeling. She'd be a frazzled wreck by the time she finally got back to St. Matthews. But if she didn't leave as soon as she could, heaven only knew when she *would* get back. "Give me whatever you can, then."

"Sure will." The clerk handed her a ticket and several brown Confederate banknotes. "Your train will be leaving from Platform W. It's over that way." He pointed. "Follow the signs—they'll take you straight to it. Hope everything turns out all right for you."

"Thanks." Anne waved for a porter to handle her suitcases. The colored man put them on a wheeled cart and followed her to Platform W. She bought food there, and a cheap novel to while away the time till the train got in.

It was late. By then, Anne had stopped expecting anything else. It didn't arrive till half past one. She'd put the novel aside an hour earlier, and was trying without much luck to doze in a chair. The car to which she was assigned didn't even have compartments, only row after row of seats bolted to the floor. The man who sat down next to her was so fat, he encroached on her without meaning to. He hadn't had a bath any time recently. She gritted her teeth. Nothing she could do about it, though. As soon as the train pulled out of Fort Worth, the fat man threw back his head, fell asleep, and began snoring like a thunderstorm. That added insult to injury. Anne felt like jabbing him with a pin.

Unable to sleep herself, she stared glumly out the window at the night. Only blackness met her eye, blackness and an occasional handful of lights burning in the small towns at which the express didn't stop.

She almost resented the lights, which put her in mind of fireflies. Blackness suited her mood much better.

The express did stop at Dallas. Anne understood the need, but hated the delay. The fat man beside her scarcely stirred. He didn't wake up. After what seemed forever but was by her watch forty-five minutes, the train rumbled east again. Presently, Anne had to use the toilet. She took more than a little pleasure in waking her seatmate to get by, though she sounded polite. By the time she returned, he was snoring

again. She woke him once more. It did no good to speak of. He fell back to sleep, while she stayed awake.

Marshall was the next stop, near the Louisiana border. By the time the train left, the sky ahead was getting light. Morning had come by the time the express got into Shreveport, on the Red River. The Red was flooding, too, but not enough to delay the train any worse.

Monroe, Louisiana, on the Ouachita, was the next scheduled stop—by then, Anne had the schedule all **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

but memorized. But the express didn't make it to Monroe. First, Anne saw tent cities on high ground, where people who'd escaped the floodwaters were staying till someone did something more for them.

Then, as the ground got lower, mud and water covered more and more of it. The air was thick and humid and full of the stink of decay. At last, the train had to stop, for the simple reason that going forward would have meant going underwater. The tracks were laid on an embankment that raised them above the surrounding countryside, but that finally stopped helping.

"What do we do now?" Anne asked the conductor.

"Don't rightly know, ma'am," he answered. "I reckon we'll back up and try and find a way around—if there is one. Don't rightly know about that, either. Only other thing we can do is wait for the water to go down, and Lord only knows how long that'd take."

Trying to hold in her anger, she snapped, "Why didn't you find out in Shreveport that the way would be flooded?"

"On account of it wasn't when we left Shreveport," the conductor said. "Ma'am, this here is a . . . heck of a bad flood, worst anybody's seen since Hector was a pup. An' it just keeps gettin' worser an'

worser."

He'd fought not to swear in her presence. Now she fought not to swear in his. After what seemed a very long time, the train shuddered into motion—backwards. It crawled that way till at last it came to a cross track. Anne felt like cheering when it started moving ahead once more.

But it didn't go far. Before long, the encroaching floodwaters blocked

its path again. This time, Anne did curse, and didn't care who sent her shocked looks. By the time the train had made three or four false starts, everyone in the car was swearing. It didn't help.

Yet another tent city sprouted like a forest of giant toadstools outside the whistlestop hamlet of Anabell, Louisiana, where the express was balked again. "How are those people going to eat?" someone asked.

"If trains have trouble getting through . . ."

It was a good question. It got an answer even as Anne watched. An aeroplane landed in a field only a couple of hundred yards from the train. The pilot started throwing out sacks of flour and flitches of bacon. A great light blazed in Anne's mind. "Let me off the train!" she told the conductor. "This instant, do you hear me?"

"What about your luggage?" he asked, blinking.

"To hell with my luggage," she said. The conductor tapped the side of his head with his index finger, but did as she asked. She ran over to the aeroplane, waving and calling, "Can you fly me over the Mississippi and past the floods to where I can catch another train east?"

"Maybe I can, lady," the pilot answered, shifting a plug of tobacco in his cheek. "Why the devil should I?"

"I'll pay you three hundred dollars," she said. "Half now, half when we land."

That wad of tobacco shifted again. She wondered if he'd swallow it, but he didn't. "Lemme finish unloading," he said around it. "Then you got yourself a deal." Half an hour later, the biplane bumped across the soggy field and threw itself into the air. Anne Colleton whooped with delight. She'd never **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

flown before, and wondered why not. Three hundred dollars was a small price to pay for this kind of fun—and for the money she hoped to make when she got home.

Floodlights glared into Jake Featherston's face, so that he couldn't see the crowd in the New Orleans auditorium. He didn't care; he'd made enough speeches so that he didn't need to see the people out there to know what they were thinking. "Good to be back here," he said. "This is the town where I was nominated six years ago. We did pretty good

then, we did. And we'll do better this time, you just wait and see if we don't!"

"Freedom!" The roar came from over a thousand throats. Featherston grinned fiercely. That sound hit him harder than a big slug of hooch. Its absence was the one thing he hated most about making speeches on the wireless—it felt as if he were shouting at a bunch of deaf men, and he couldn't tell if he was getting through or not. *This* speech was going out over the wireless, too, and it would go complete with shouts of approval and excitement from the crowd.

This is the way it ought to be, he thought, and resumed: "People say we're gonna have trouble electing me. People say that, but they don't always know what the devil they're talking about. And you tell me, friends—haven't the Confederate States got themselves enough trouble already?"

"Yes!" people shouted, and, "Hell, yes!" and, "You bet!" One woman cried, "Oh, Jake!" as if they were in bed together and he'd just given her the best time she'd ever had in her life.

His grin got wider. Maybe he'd have a flunky look for her after the speech was done. And maybe he wouldn't, too; he couldn't afford to get too much of a reputation as a tomcatting man, not when so many people who went to church every Sunday were likely to vote Freedom. He hated compromise, but that was one he'd had to make.

"Haven't we got ourselves enough trouble?" he said again. "Folks, I tell you, the Whigs have been carrying the ball too long. They've been carrying it too long, and now they've gone and dropped it." He slammed his fist down on the podium.

More applause from the crowd. Cries of, "Tell 'em, Jake!" and, "Give 'em hell!" rang out over the general din. They might have been listening to a preacher on the revival circuit, not an ordinary politician.

Jake Featherston *wasn't* an ordinary politician, which was both his greatest weakness and his greatest strength.

"They've gone and dropped it," he repeated—again, as a preacher might have. "What else would you call it when here in the middle of July, a good month after the flood finally started going down, the Confederate States of America have still got more than half a million people—half a million, I tell you, and I'm not lying; it's what the Confederate Red Cross says—living in tents? If that's not a shame and

a disgrace, you tell me what it is."

A lot of those people, maybe a majority, were colored cotton pickers who worked for white plantation owners in what differed from slavery in little more than name. More often than not, Jake would have gloated at their suffering. But if he could use them as a club with which to beat the present administration, he would.

He went on, "Up in the USA, there's not a soul still stuck in a tent. Oh, I know they didn't get hurt as bad as we did, but it makes a point. When the Yankees need to get things done, they up and do 'em.

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When we need to get things done, what happens?" He threw his arms wide in extravagant disgust. "Not a damn thing, that's what! I tell you, folks, you're just lucky New Orleans didn't go out to sea, on account of the government in Richmond wouldn't've done a thing—not a single, solitary thing—to stop it if it had."

That drew more applause: baying, angry applause. *They know I'm telling the truth,* he thought. Being a Whig meant doing as little as you could to get by.

The line wasn't in the text of his speech, but he used it, adding, "Folks say that works all right. Maybe it did, once upon a time. But this here ain't no fairy tale, and we haven't got no happy ending. People, we need a government in Richmond that'll stand up on its hind legs and *do* things.

"Who stumbled into the war? The Whigs! Who let the niggers stab us in the back without even knowing they were going to? The Whigs! Who went and *lost* the war? The Whigs!" Now the crowd shouted out the name of the CSA's longtime ruling party with him. He rolled on: "Who let the damnyankees steal Kentucky? The Whigs! Who let 'em steal Sequoyah? The Whigs! Who let 'em cut Texas in half? The Whigs! Who let 'em take northern Virginia away from us? The Whigs! I fought in the Army of Northern Virginia, and I'm proud of it, but the Yankees have taken the place away from us. And who let the Yankees tell us what we could do with our Army and Navy? Who left us too weak to fight back when those bastards started throwing their weight around? The Whigs again!"

He slammed his fist down on the podium. The crowd in the hall

roared. They might have been so many coon dogs taking a scent. Featherston took a scent from them, too. If he didn't make a crowd hot and sweaty, he wasn't doing his job. His nose told him he was tonight.

"They've done everything they could to tear this country down," he went on. "Now they had their day once. I give 'em that. Jeff Davis was a great president. Nobody can say different. So was Lee. So was Longstreet. But that was a long time ago. We had friends back then. Where are our friends now? The Frenchmen have the Kaiser on their back. England's trying to keep from starving every year. We're on our own, and the Whigs are too damn dumb to know it. God helps the people who help themselves. And as long as the Whigs hang on in Richmond, God better help us, 'cause we'll need it bad!"

That got him a laugh. He'd known it would. He understood that it should. But it wasn't funny to him. The contempt and hatred he felt for the Whigs—for all the Confederate elite, including the second- and third-generation officers who'd done so much to lose the Great War—were big as the world. They hadn't given him a chance to show what he could do, no matter how right he'd been. In fact, they'd scorned him all the more *because* he'd been right.

Just see what I do if I win this election, you sons of bitches, he thought. *Just you see then.*

Meanwhile, he had this speech to finish: "If you want to go on the way the Confederate States have been going, you vote Whig," he thundered. "If you want your country to go straight down the toilet, that's the way to vote." He got another laugh there, an enormous one. He continued, "The Supreme Court says you can keep on having just what you've had—and aren't you lucky?" Their day would come, too. He'd promised himself that. "But if you want change, if you want strength, if you want pride—if you want to be able to look at yourselves in the mirror and look the USA straight in the eye, y'all vote . . ."

"Freedom!"

The shout from the crowd, more than a thousand voices speaking as one, made his ears ring. He threw up his hands. "That's right, folks. Thank you. And remember—no matter what else you do, *fight hard!* "

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More applause shook the hall as he stepped away from the podium. The house lights came up, so he could see the people he'd been haranguing. He waved to them again. "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!"

they chanted, over and over again. The rhythmic cry rolled through him, rolled under him, and swept him along on its crest. He'd read somewhere that in the Sandwich Islands the natives rode waves lying or even standing up on flat boards. He supposed that was true. If it weren't true, who could make it up? He felt something like that now, buoyed up by the crowd's enthusiasm.

As he went offstage, the bodyguards and other men who'd come west from Virginia with him pumped his hand and told him what a great speech he'd given. "Thanks, boys," he said, and then, "For Christ's sake, somebody get me a drink!"

Louisiana had never surrendered to the siren song of prohibition. He could drink his whiskey here without shame or hypocrisy. It seared his throat and sent warmth exploding out from his middle. As soon as he emptied the glass, somebody got him a fresh one.

He sipped the second drink more slowly. *Got to keep my wits about me,* he thought. Not everybody was going to like the speech as well as his flunkies had.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than a tall, blond, handsome man in a suit that must have cost plenty came up and shook hands with him. "You gave 'em hell out there tonight, Jake," he said, a Texas twang in his voice.

"I thank you kindly, Willy," Featherston answered. Willy Knight had headed up the Redemption League, an outfit with goals much like those of the Freedom Party, till the bigger Party enfolded it. He wasn't the best number-two man around, mostly because he still had thoughts of being number one.

"Damn good speech," agreed Amos Mizell. He led the Tin Hats, the biggest Confederate veterans'

organization. The Tin Hats weren't formally aligned with the Freedom Party, but they shared many of the same ideas.

"Thank you, too," Jake Featherston said. Mizell wore the ribbon for a Purple Heart on his shirt. "You were out there, same as me. You know how the Whigs sold us down the river. You know how they've been selling us down the river ever since."

“Sure do.” Mizell nodded. “What Willy and I aren’t so sure of, though, is whether you’re the fellow who’s going to kick ’em out on the street where they belong.”

“No, huh?” Featherston looked from one of them to the other. “You boys felt like that, how come you didn’t try and keep me from getting the nomination last month?” He wanted his enemies out there in the open where he could see them and smash them, not lurking in dead leaves like a couple of rattlesnakes.

“Wouldn’t’ve been much point to that, on account of we’d’ve lost,” Willy Knight said. “We’ll see how you do come November, and we’ll go from there. You really think you’re going to win?”

Featherston made an impatient, scornful gesture. “That’s to keep the troops happy, and you know it as well as I do. I’m hoping I finish ahead of the damn Rad Libs, and that we hold our ground in Congress. I think we can do that.” He hoped the Freedom Party could do that. Before the great flood, he wouldn’t even have bet on so much. But the flood had shown that the Whigs weren’t so slick as they thought they were, and that they didn’t respond well in emergencies. Some voters, at least, would see the light.

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Knight and Mizell looked at each other. “All right, Jake,” Knight said at last. “That sounds fair. If the Party does that well come fall, we’ll keep on backing your play. But if we take another hammering, the way we did in the last couple of Congressional elections, everybody’s gonna have to do a lot of thinking.”

“I carried the Freedom Party on my back, God damn it,” Jake growled.

“Nobody says you didn’t, so keep your shirt on.” Willy Knight was a bigger man than Featherston, but Jake, in a fury, was a match for anybody. Knight knew it, too. Still speaking placatingly, he went on,

“Moses took the Hebrews out of Egypt, but he wasn’t the one who got ’em into the Promised Land.”

Amos Mizell nodded. “If the Party’s vote slips again, the Tin Hats will have to think about getting what we want some other way.”

Featherston had thought he wanted enemies openly declared. Now he

had them, and wished he didn't.

"And I suppose the two of you will try and screw me over so we don't get what I said we would."

They almost fell over themselves denying it. "As long as we do what you said we'd do, we're still in business," Knight said. "If we fall down now, who knows if there'll be any pieces worth picking up later on? We're still with you."

"You'd better be," Jake said. "Let's see what happens in November, then, and afterwards." Knight and Mizell both nodded. Featherston shook hands with each of them in turn. *And if you bastards think I'll let go without a fight even if things do go wrong, you're a hell of a lot dumber than I think you are.*

* * *

In the Terry, the colored district of Augusta, Georgia, Election Day meant next to nothing. Only a handful of Negro veterans of the Great War were registered to vote. To most people, it was just another Tuesday.

As usual, Erasmus was in his fish store and restaurant when Scipio walked in. Scipio got himself a cup of coffee to drink while sweeping up the place. His boss was setting newly bought fish on ice in the counter.

Scipio said, "What you think? De Whigs gwine win again?"

"Dunno," Erasmus said with a shrug. "Them or the Rad Libs, don't matter one way or t'other. Long as it ain't that goddamn crazy man." He threw a crappie into place with more force than he usually used while handling fish. That Election Day meant next to nothing didn't mean it meant nothing at all.

"Dat Featherston buckra, he ain't gwine do nothin' much," Scipio said.

"Better not," Erasmus answered, and slammed down a gutted catfish. "That son of a bitch win, everything's even tougher for us niggers. And things is tough enough as they is."

Voice sly, Scipio said. "You ain't got it so bad. You owns your house free an' clear—"

“I ain’t stupid,” Erasmus said, and Scipio nodded. His boss had been damn smart there. He’d paid off his mortgage just when inflation was starting to ravage the CSA, when he’d had a pretty easy time accumulating the money he needed but before Confederate dollars became nothing but a joke. The **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

bankers had taken the money, even if they’d been unhappy about it. A few weeks later and they would have refused him. “I ain’t stupid,” he repeated. “I’m smart enough to know I ain’t got it easy long as I’s a nigger in the CSA.”

He was right about that. Scipio didn’t need to be a genius to understand as much. He said, “No, you ain’t got it easy—I takes it back. But you has it worse—all us niggers has it worse—if dat Featherston, he win.” Working for Anne Colleton had given him a feel for the way Confederate politics worked.

Again, though, he didn’t need to be a genius to find the truth in what he’d just said.

“Not so many parades with them goddamn white men in the white shirts an’ the butternut pants yellin’,

‘Freedom!’ this year,” Erasmus observed. “They ain’t been tryin’ to bust up the other parties’ meetin’s, neither, like they done before. They walkin’ sof’ again.”

“Don’ want to remind nobody what that one buckra done,” Scipio said. “But too many folks, dey recollects any which way.”

“Hell, yes,” Erasmus said. “Thing of it is, Freedom Party, they needs the white folks to be stupid, or else to *act* stupid on account of they scared. Now, Lord knows the white folks is stupid—”

“Do Jesus, yes!” Scipio said, as if responding to a preacher’s sermon.

“But they ain’t *that* stupid, not unless they’s scared *bad* ,” Erasmus went on, as if he hadn’t spoken.

“Things ain’t too bad for ’em right now—money’s still worth somethin’, most of ’em’s got jobs—so they ain’t gwine vote for no Jake Featherston, not this year they ain’t. That’s how I sees it, anyways.”

“Way *I* sees it, you should oughta write fo’ de newspapers,” Scipio said, not intending it as any sort of flattery. On the contrary—he’d

read plenty of editorials about what was likely to happen that didn't sum things up anywhere near so neatly as his illiterate but ever so shrewd boss had managed in a couple of sentences.

Erasmus lit a cigarette. He blew out a cloud of smoke, then said, "You bangin' your gums on all this politics so as you kin git out o' workin'—ain't that right, Xerxes?"

"Oh, yassuh, Marse Erasmus, suh." Scipio laid on his Low Country accent even thicker than usual. "Ah ain't nevah done one lick o' work, not since de day you hire me. Ah jus' eats yo' food an' drinks yo'

coffee an' steals yo' smokes." He held out his hand, pale palm up, for a cigarette.

Laughing, Erasmus gave him one, then leaned close so Scipio could get a light from the one he already had in his mouth. He'd just taken his first drag of the morning and coughed a couple of times when the first customer of the day came in, calling for coffee and ham and eggs and, instead of grits, hash browns.

Erasmus got busy at the stove. Scipio got busier doing everything else. They stayed busy all day long.

When Scipio finally went home, Erasmus was still busy. Scipio sometimes wondered whether his boss ever went to bed.

And when Scipio got back to his roominghouse, he heard splashes and squeals from the bathroom at the end of the hall. He also heard Bathsheba's voice, rising in ever-growing exasperation and wrath. He smiled to himself. Antoinette was going on two years old now, and an ever-growing handful to bathe.

A few minutes later, Bathsheba carried the baby into the room. Antoinette, swaddled in a towel, saw Scipio and said, "Dada!" in delight. Scipio's wife looked wetter than the baby did. She also looked a lot less happy.

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"What de matter, sweetheart?" Scipio asked. "Givin' 'Toinette a bath ain't dat hard. I even done it my ownself a time or two." He spoke as if that were some enormous accomplishment. In his mind, it was.

He hadn't heard many fathers talk about giving their children even that much in the way of care.

But Bathsheba's baleful stare made him stop with his mouth half open. "The baby shit in the damn tub,"

she said bleakly.

"Oh," Scipio said. "Aw . . . golly." The first expression of sympathy that came to mind wouldn't have been to Bathsheba's liking, not just then.

Instead of saying anything, Scipio went to a cupboard and pulled out a bottle of moonshine. Georgia was officially dry, but contraband liquor wasn't hard to come by. He poured his wife a stiff drink, and a smaller one for himself. Holding out the glass to Bathsheba, he said, "Here you is. Reckon you done earned dis here."

"Reckon I did." She poured down half of it. Then she puffed out her cheeks and exhaled violently.

"Whew! Dat's nasty stuff." Scipio was inclined to agree. He'd always preferred rum even to good whiskey, and the murky yellowish fluid in his glass bore a closer relationship to paint thinner than it did to good whiskey.

Antoinette saw her parents drinking something, and naturally wanted some, too. Bathsheba fixed her a bottle. Then she started making supper. Since the room had only a hot plate for cooking, everything took a while. Scipio was glad for the chance to sit down and play with his little girl and talk with his wife and drink the moonshine and let it relax him.

"Buckra ladies I was cleanin' for, they all talkin' 'bout the election today," Bathsheba said. "Dunno why.

They can't vote any more'n us black folks kin."

Bills allowing women's suffrage showed up in the Georgia Legislature almost every session. They got tabled or voted down with monotonous regularity. Even so, Scipio asked, "Who dey say dey husbands vote fo'?"

"Whigs, mostly." Bathsheba knew why he was worried, and added, "That Featherston fella, don't reckon he gwine go nowhere much."

“Do Jesus, hope you right,” Scipio answered.

Bathsheba took lamb chops out of the pan and started frying potatoes in the grease they’d left behind.

“Got me somethin’ more important to tell you, anyways.”

“What dat?” Scipio asked as he stuck a little bite of lamb in Antoinette’s mouth. The baby made a face, but ate the morsel. Scipio gave her another one.

Bathsheba pointed at her. “Reckon she gwine have herself a little brother or sister come summertime.”

“I was wonderin’ about dat my ownself,” Scipio said as he got up to give her a hug. “Didn’t t’ink you monthlies, dey come.” Her breasts had been tender lately, too, and she’d started falling asleep early in the evening.

As if to prove he was right, Bathsheba yawned. She laughed a moment later. “Better sleep now. When **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

the new young ‘un come, ain’t never gwine sleep again.”

“We gots to find a bigger place, too,” Scipio said. The room they had was intended for one. It was tolerable for two, provided they got on well—which Scipio and Bathsheba certainly did. With three in it, there wasn’t room to swing a cat. With four . . . Scipio thought about that. With four people in this room, there wouldn’t have been room to bring in a cat, let alone swing it.

“What you reckon Antoinette make o’ the new baby?” Bathsheba asked.

“She ain’t gwine like it,” Scipio answered. “Young chillun, dey don’ never like no new baby in de fambly. But she git over it. She have to. Dey allus does. Jus’ sometimes take longer, is all.”

Bathsheba nodded. “Reckon you’s right.” She yawned again. “I gots to get to sleep. Come here,

‘Toinette. Time we both go to bed.”

The baby didn’t want to. She was convinced she’d miss something. Some evenings she was right, others wrong. Tonight, she fussed and fumed—and then got up the following morning not just ready but eager to play. Scipio was the one who, yawning, went out to face the day.

He paid his five cents for a copy of the *Constitutionalist* on his way to Erasmus' place. Newsboys shouted of Burton Mitchel's victory as president of the Confederate States. "President Mitchel reelected!" they yelled. A Confederate president wasn't supposed to get reelected, but the Supreme Court said this didn't count. No matter what the Supreme Court said, the newsboys knew what was what.

The Whigs had won easily this time, nothing like their razor-thin victory in 1921. The Freedom Party took Tennessee, Mississippi, and Texas, the Radical Liberals Arkansas and Chihuahua. Sonora still looked too close to call. Everywhere else, the people had voted Whig.

Scipio read that with more relief than he'd felt for a long time. Life in the CSA was hard enough for a black man any time. He imagined going to bed one morning and waking up to discover Jake Featherston was president. The mere idea chilled him worse than the cool November morning.

He methodically worked his way through the election stories below the headlines. The Freedom Party hadn't taken quite so many lumps as he would have liked to see. It had lost one Senator, but gained a pair of Congressmen—maybe three, because one of the races in Texas remained very tight.

"I may not be going to the Gray House next March," the *Constitutionalist* quoted Featherston as saying, "but we'll make ourselves heard in Congress, and in state houses all over the country. We aren't about to go away, no matter how much the Whigs wish we would. We're just reloading for the next round of the fight."

He'd lost. He hadn't come close to winning. But he still sounded confident right was on his side, and that he'd win one of these days. He reminded Scipio of nothing so much as Cassius and the other colored Reds who'd formed the ill-fated government of the Congaree Socialist Republic and dragged him into it.

Their faith in the dialectic had kept them going through thick and thin. Jake Featherston sounded like a man with the same kind of faith.

He'd kill me if I could tell him so, Scipio thought. *The Reds would kill me, too—if they weren't already dead themselves.* No, neither side here would see its resemblance to the other. That didn't mean the resemblance wasn't there.

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The Reds had proved wrong—dead wrong—about the dialectic. With any luck, the Freedom Party would prove just as wrong. That thought heartened Scipio. He tossed the *Constitutionalist* into a trash can and hurried to work. Erasmus would skin him if he was late.

The first time Sam Carsten had seen the *Remembrance* —going on ten years ago now, which struck him as very strange—he'd thought her the ugliest, funniest-looking ship in the U.S. Navy, or, for that matter, in anyone else's. She'd started out life intending to be a battle cruiser, but had had her design drastically revised while she was a-building. Back in those distant days not long after the Great War, nobody had seen a ship with a flight deck so she could launch and land aeroplanes.

Now, as Sam returned to the *Remembrance* , she still looked strange. He shook his head as the boat neared the carrier. No, that wasn't right. She looked strange all over again, but for different reasons this time. By now, the Navy had three aeroplane carriers that had been built for the purpose from the keel up.

They were a lot more capable than the *Remembrance* , which looked like the hybrid she was.

She may not be pretty, but she gets the job done, he thought. The boat from the *O'Brien* came alongside. Sailors up on the *Remembrance* lowered a rope ladder. Carsten shouldered his duffel bag.

"Good luck, sir," one of the sailors said. "You're going from a little fish to a big one."

"Thanks, Fritz," Carsten answered. He grabbed the ladder and swarmed up it, as if boarding with intent to take the ship rather than to serve in her. He knew a lot of eyes were watching him. If he acted like a gouty old man on the way up from the boat, they'd treat him with less respect than if he did his best impression of a pirate.

As he scrambled up onto the *Remembrance* 's broad, flat deck, a sailor leaped forward and grabbed the canvas duffel bag. "Let me take that for you, sir," the fellow said. By his tone, Carsten had passed his first test.

A lieutenant commander strolled up at a more leisurely pace. Sam stiffened to attention and saluted.

“Permission to come aboard, sir?” he said formally.

“Granted.” The other officer returned his salute. Then he smiled. “My name is Watkins, Ensign. Michael Watkins. Do I understand this is your second tour aboard the *Remembrance* ?”

“Pleased to meet you, sir. Yes, sir, I’ve spent some time on her before,” Carsten answered. “But that was a while ago—I was just thinking about how long it seems—and I was only a petty officer in those days.”

“Oh, really? I didn’t know that.” Watkins’ voice gave no clue as to what he thought about it, either. “So you’re a mustang, eh? Up through the hawse hole?”

Sam nodded. “That’s me.” Not a whole lot of men jumped from rating to officer. He supposed he should have been proud of himself. Hell, he *was* proud of himself, when he had time to think about it.

“I’m going to ask you one question, Carsten, and I hope you won’t take it the wrong way,” Lieutenant Commander Watkins said. Sam nodded. He had a pretty good idea what the question would be. And, sure enough, Watkins asked, “You do remember you *are* an officer now, I hope?”

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Carsten nodded again. “I do my best, sir.” He’d seen a couple of other mustangs—both of them men fifteen or twenty years older than he was—who’d been promoted during the war for bravery too conspicuous to ignore. Both of them acted as if they were still CPOs. He understood that—they’d got set in their ways long before their promotions—but he didn’t try to imitate it.

He seemed to have satisfied Watkins. “Fair enough, Ensign,” the *Remembrance* ’s officer said. “I’ll take you to your quarters. Dougherty, follow us.”

“Aye aye, sir,” said the sailor who had Sam’s duffel bag. He was redheaded and freckled and very fair.

“Pharmacist’s mate still carry plenty of zinc-oxide ointment and such?” Sam asked him.

Dougherty gauged his pale blond hair, blue eyes, and pink, pink skin. “Well, yes, sir,” he answered.

“Don’t know how much you’ll need it, though, in January off Baltimore.” He jerked his chin toward the gray, cloudy sky.

“You never can tell. I’ll burn damn near anywhere,” Carsten said. The sailor smiled, Sam thought in sympathy. Dougherty certainly looked as if he too would burn under any light brighter than a kerosene lantern’s.

Lieutenant Commander Watkins opened a steel door. “Here you are, Ensign,” he said, flipping on a switch to turn on the lamp inside the cabin. As he stepped back to let Sam see in, he apologetically spread his hands and added, “Sorry it’s so small, but it’s what we’ve got.”

“That’s all right, sir,” Sam said. “It’s a lot more room than I had my last tour aboard her. They still triple-deck the bunks, don’t they?” He waited for Watkins to nod, then went on, “And I served in one of the five-inch gun sponsons, so I didn’t have any room there, either.”

“Ah.” Watkins started to nod and let that go, but then his gaze sharpened. “Were you aboard *Remembrance* when she took fire off Belfast?”

“I sure as hell was, sir,” Carsten answered. “A shell killed two men in my crew. Only dumb luck none of the fragments got me.”

“Well, well,” Lieutenant Commander Watkins said. “I wonder if we have any men still aboard who served with you.”

“Been five years, sir. I haven’t seen any yet, not that that proves anything,” Sam said. “I’d like to say hello if I do, but I don’t suppose I could do much more than that, could I?”

“I wouldn’t think so, Ensign,” Watkins told him. “This is part of what I meant when I asked if you remembered you were an officer.” Sam nodded; he’d figured that out for himself. Watkins stepped back.

“I won’t keep you any more—you’ll want to get settled in, I’m sure. I hope to see you and talk with you more later on.”

“Thank you, sir.” Carsten saluted.

“My pleasure.” Watkins returned the salute. “Come along, Dougherty,” he said, and walked on down the corridor.

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Sam closed and dogged the door to his cabin. He'd been telling the truth when he said it was spacious compared to his previous accommodations on the *Remembrance* . That didn't mean he had much room.

If he stood with arms outstretched, he could touch the gray-painted metal walls with his fingertips. The cabin held a bunk, a steel chest of drawers bolted to the opposite wall, a steel desk, a chair, and a tiny washbasin with a steel mirror above it. All that left him just about enough room to put his feet down, provided he was careful doing it.

Stowing his worldly goods, such as they were, didn't take long. Then he went out on deck once more.

The *O'Brien* , having delivered him, steamed away, smoke pouring from her four stacks. The *Remembrance* pushed south through heavy seas. The rolling and pitching didn't bother Sam. He'd always had good sea legs and a calm stomach; his Achilles' heel was his pale skin.

Back toward the stern, a couple of mechanics worked on an aeroplane. The machine looked sleeker and more powerful than the modified Great War–vintage aeroplanes that had flown off the *Remembrance* during Carsten's last tour aboard her. *I'd better bone up on what the differences are,* he thought.

He didn't get to stand around watching for very long. A respectful petty officer soon came up to him and whisked him over to the office of a gray-haired commander named van der Waal. "What do you know about minimizing damage from torpedo hits?" the other officer demanded.

"Sir, I was aboard the *Dakota* when the Japs put a fish into her off the Sandwich Islands, but I didn't have anything to do with damage control there," Sam answered.

"All right, that's a little something, anyhow," van der Waal said. "You've experienced the problem firsthand, which is good. That's more than a lot of people can say. Does it interest you?"

"No, sir. Not a whole lot," Carsten said honestly. "I served a gun before I was an officer, and I'm interested in aeronautics, too. That's how I came aboard the *Remembrance* during my first tour here."

“Naval aeronautics is important. I’d have a hard time telling you anything different, wouldn’t I, here on an aeroplane carrier?” Commander van der Waal’s craggy face creased in unaccustomed places when he smiled. But he quickly turned serious again. “But so is damage control. The Japs aren’t the only ones who’ve got submersibles, you know.” He looked south and west, in the direction of the CSA.

“The Confederates aren’t supposed to have ’em!” Sam blurted.

“I know that. And I know we send inspectors up and down their coast to make sure they don’t,” van der Waal told him. “But I’d bet they’ve got a few anyhow—and we haven’t been inspecting as hard as we might have the past few years. The budget keeps going down, and President Sinclair wants to get along with everybody. And the British still have some boats, and the French might, and we know perfectly well that the Japanese do. And so does the German High Seas Fleet. And so, Ensign . . .”

“I see your point, sir,” Sam said, knowing he couldn’t very well say anything else. “If that’s what you want me to do, I’ll do it.” He couldn’t very well say anything but that, either. Then he dredged up a childhood expression: “But if I had my druthers, it’s not what I’d do.”

Van der Waal chuckled. “Haven’t heard that one in a while. You gave up your druthers, you know, when you put on the uniform.”

“Really, sir? I never would have noticed.” Some men would have wound up in trouble after talking back to a superior officer that way. Carsten did have a knack for not getting people angry at him.

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Commander van der Waal said, “Well, we’ll see what happens. You’ll start out in my shop, because I do need a man to back me up. If another opportunity comes along and you want to take it, I don’t suppose I’d stand in your way. Fair enough?”

“More than fair enough, sir. It’s damn white of you, matter of fact.” Sam saluted. Most officers would have grabbed him and held on to him, and that would have been that. “Thank you very much!”

“I don’t want a badly disaffected man serving under me. It’s not good for me, it wouldn’t be good for the officer in question, and it’s not

good for the ship." Van der Waal nodded briskly. "For now, you're dismissed."

Sam saluted again and went out on deck. He spied a knot of sailors at the starboard bow. They were all pointing in the direction van der Waal had—toward the Confederate States. Carsten looked that way himself. He had no trouble spotting the Confederate coast-defense ship steaming along between the *Remembrance* and the shore.

Like one of the U.S. Navy's so-called Great Lakes battleships, the Confederate warship was only about half the size of a real battlewagon. She'd carry a battleship's guns, but only half as many of them as, say, the *Dakota* . She wouldn't have the armor or the speed to take on a first-class battleship, either. And she and her three sisters were the biggest warships the C.S. Navy was allowed to have.

What does her skipper think, looking at the Remembrance *?* Carsten wondered. He could sink her if they fought gun to gun; the aeroplane carrier had nothing bigger than five-inchers aboard. But they wouldn't fight gun to gun, not unless something went horribly wrong. And how would that Confederate captain like to try shooting down aeroplanes that could drop bombs on his head or put torpedoes in the water running straight at his ship?

He wouldn't like it for hell, Sam thought. His grin stretched wide as the Atlantic. He liked the idea just fine himself.

Nellie Jacobs was keeping one eye on the coffeehouse and the other on Clara's arithmetic homework when Clara's half sister, Edna Grimes, burst into the place. That Clara was going on eight years old, and so old enough to have homework, surprised Nellie. That Edna should come bursting in astonished her.

Then Nellie got a look at her older daughter's face, and astonishment turned to alarm. "Good heavens, Edna! What's wrong?" she asked. "Are you all right? Are Merle and Armstrong?"

"Armstrong is a brat," Clara declared. Anything might have distracted her from the problems in her workbook. The mention of her nephew—who was only a couple of years younger than she was—more than sufficed.

Only a couple of customers were working on coffee and, in one case, a sandwich. Business would pick up after government offices closed in another forty-five minutes. Nellie hoped it would, anyhow. It had been a slow day—whenever snow fell in Washington, it tied the city in

knots.

Nellie expected Edna to go into one of the back rooms before saying whatever was on her mind. That way, the men wouldn't be able to eavesdrop. But her daughter said, "Oh, Ma, I don't know what to do!

Merle's found out about Nick Kincaid!"

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"Oh," Nellie said, and then, "Oh, Lordy."

"Who's Nick Kincaid, Edna?" Clara asked.

"He was a . . . a fellow I used to know, a soldier," Edna answered. "I was going to marry him, maybe, but he got killed in the war."

That told Clara enough to satisfy her. It didn't say everything there was to say on the subject, not by a long chalk. Edna had certainly been about to marry Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid; she'd been walking down the aisle with him when U.S. artillery fire tore off his head. The other thing she'd neglected to tell her half sister was that Kincaid had been a soldier, all right, but one who fought for the Confederate States.

"Well, dear," Nellie said, as coolly as she could, "you knew this was liable to happen one of these days." She was, if anything, amazed it hadn't happened sooner.

Edna said, "When it didn't happen for so long, I reckoned it never would. And you know how Merle is, how he always put me on a pedestal."

Most men, Nellie was convinced, put women on pedestals so they could look up their skirts. But she found herself nodding. Merle Grimes was different—or had been different. He'd lost his first wife during the great influenza epidemic of 1918. Since meeting Edna and falling in love with her, he'd made as good a husband as any woman could want—better than Edna deserved, Nellie often thought.

Edna never would have gone up on that pedestal if Merle (who had a Purple Heart—a U.S. Purple Heart) had known everything—or even most things—about Nick Kincaid. What he would have thought had he known Kincaid had got Edna into bed . . . Nellie shied away from that.

Sometimes the quiet ones were the worst when they did lose their tempers. Even finding out Edna's former fiancé had worn butternut and not green-gray was liable to be enough.

"What am I gonna *do* , Ma?" Edna wailed.

"How'd he find out?" Nellie asked.

"This fellow from the CSA came into his office for some kind of business or other." Now Edna had the sense to keep her voice down; one of the men drinking coffee had leaned forward to snoop a little too obviously. She went on, "They both wore Purple Heart ribbons, dammit—you know how the Confederates give 'em, too. And they got to talking soldier talk: where'd you fight, how'd you get hurt, that kind of thing."

"And?" Nellie asked.

"And one thing led to another, and they got to liking each other," Edna said. "And Merle said how he'd married a Washington gal, and that was the closest thing you could get to marrying a gal from the Confederate States. And the other fellow said that was funny, on account of his cousin had almost married this Washington gal who worked in a coffeehouse when he was here on occupation duty during the war."

"Uh-oh," Nellie said.

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Edna nodded bitterly. "*Uh-oh* is right. Merle said his wife—me, I mean—was working in a coffeehouse when he met her, too. And they went and talked a little more, and they figured out they were both talking about the same gal. And I got this phone call from Merle, and I didn't like the way he sounded, not for beans I didn't, and so I left Armstrong with Mrs. Parker next door—he was playing with her boy Eddie anyways—and I came over here."

"All right, dear," Nellie said. "I may not be much, but I'm what you've always got, and that's for sure."

Edna nodded, biting her lip and blinking back tears. There had been times when Nellie hoped she would never see her daughter again, not a few of them when Edna was fooling around with the late

Confederate Lieutenant Kincaid. But Edna was what Nellie had, too, and always would be. It wasn't that she didn't love Clara, but her younger daughter often felt more like an afterthought or an accident than flesh of Nellie's flesh. Of course, Edna had been an accident, too, but that was a long time ago now.

"What am I gonna do, Ma?" Edna asked again.

"Just remember, sweetie, your husband ain't the only one in the family who's got himself a medal," Nellie said. "He starts going on about you selling out your country, you hit him over the head with the Order of Remembrance. For heaven's sakes, Teddy Roosevelt put it on you his very own self."

"That's true." Edna brightened a little. "That *is* true." But then she turned pale. She pointed out through the big glass window in front. "Oh, Jesus, Ma, there he is."

"Nothing bad's going to happen," Nellie said, though she knew she couldn't be sure of any such thing.

Edna's husband was a quiet fellow, yes, but. . . .

The bell above the door chimed cheerily as Merle Grimes walked into the coffeehouse. The rubber tip on his cane tapped against the linoleum floor. Behind the lenses of his spectacles, his eyes had a blind, stricken look, as if he'd had too much to drink, but Nellie didn't think he was drunk.

He nodded jerkily to her before swinging his gaze towards Edna. "When you weren't home, I figured I'd find you here," he said. She nodded, too. Grimes gestured with his cane. By the way he aimed it at Edna, Nellie thanked God it wasn't a Springfield. What came out of his mouth, though, was only one more word: "Why?"

Before Edna could say anything, Nellie told Clara, "Go upstairs. Go right now. This is grownup stuff."

Clara didn't argue. Nellie's tone got through. Her younger daughter took her homework and all but fled.

"On account of if I told you I was . . . friendly with a Confederate soldier back in them days I thought I'd lose you, and I didn't want to lose you," Edna answered. "I didn't want to lose you on account of I love you. I always have. I always will."

It was, Nellie thought, about the best answer her daughter could have given. But when her son-in-law said, “You lied to me,” Nellie knew it was liable not to be good enough. “You lied to me,” Merle Grimes repeated. It might have been the very worst thing he could think of to say. “I thought I knew you, and everything I thought I knew . . . I didn’t know.”

One of the customers got up and left. A moment later, more reluctantly, so did the other one. Nellie went to the door behind him. She closed it in the face of a woman who started to come in.

“Sorry—we’re closed,” she told the startled woman. She flipped the sign in the window to CLOSED, too. That was going to cost her money, but it couldn’t be helped.

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When she walked back behind the counter, Edna was saying, “—so sorry. But that was before I knew you, Merle, remember. I’ve never done nothing to make you sorry since, so help me God I haven’t.”

“I’d have believed you yesterday, because I’d’ve been sure you were telling me the truth,” her husband said. “Now . . . How do I know it’s not just another lie?”

“Edna wouldn’t do nothing like that, Merle,” Nellie said. “You think about that, you’ll know it’s true.”

She liked Merle Grimes enough to want to do everything she could to keep him in the family. Even if she had her problems with Edna, her son-in-law was the kind of man who tempted her to forget her low opinion of half the human race.

She didn’t mollify him, though. The look he gave her was colder than the weather outside. “You must have known about this Kincaid fellow, Mother Jacobs—you couldn’t very well not have. And you never said a word about him to me. So why should I believe you, either?”

“We said Edna had a fiancé during the war, and that he got killed,” Nellie said. “Is that the truth or isn’t it?”

“It’s less than half the truth,” Merle Grimes said stubbornly. “That’s the best way I know how to lie—tell the part of the truth that goes your way, and leave out everything else.”

He was right, of course. That was the best way Nellie knew how to lie, too. She said, “The man’s dead, Merle. He’s more than ten years dead now. You can just forget about him. Everybody else has.”

Grimes shook his head. “That’s not the point. What’s more, you know it’s not the point, Mother Jacobs.

The point is that he was a . . . darned Confederate, and that Edna never told me about that. I’ve tried to take care of her and Armstrong. I’ve saved money. I’ve bought stocks. If she had told me, I don’t know what I’d’ve done. Washington was occupied, after all. Those things happened. But trying to sweep ’em under the rug afterwards . . .” He shook his head again. “No.”

Nellie didn’t like the grim finality in his voice. Tears trickled down Edna’s face. *Sweet Jesus, she really thinks she’s going to lose him right here and now,* Nellie thought, fighting against panic of her own.

She may be right, too.

Before she or Edna could say anything, the bell over the door chimed again. In came Hal Jacobs. “I saw you put out the CLOSED sign from across the street,” Nellie’s husband said. “Why so early?”

“We’re having a—a family discussion, that’s why,” Nellie answered.

“I’ve found out about Nicholas Kincaid, Father Jacobs,” Merle Grimes said, sounding even harder than he had before. “I’ve found out *all* about him.”

“Have you?” Hal whuffled out air through his gray mustache—almost entirely white now, in fact. “I doubt that. Yes, sir, I doubt it very much.”

“What do you mean?” Grimes demanded. “I know he was a Confederate officer. I know he was going to marry Edna till he got killed. And I know she never told me what he was. What else do I need to know?”

As far as Nellie could see, that was plenty. But Hal Jacobs said, “The other thing you need to know is what Teddy Roosevelt knew, God rest his soul—Edna and Nellie were both spies during the war, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

working with me and Bill Reach, God rest his soul, too, for I’m sure

he's dead." Nellie was even surer, but her secrets, unlike Edna's, were unlikely to come out. Her husband went on, "Whatever Edna told you—and whatever she didn't, too—she asked me about first, because of what we were doing. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Behind his spectacles, Grimes' eyes widened. "I . . . think I may, sir," he answered. Unconsciously, he straightened towards, if not quite to, attention. But then his gaze swung back to Edna. "Don't you think almost marrying a Confederate went too far?"

Oh, she went further than that, Nellie thought. Wild horses wouldn't have dragged the words from her, though. And Edna did a splendid job of picking up the cue Hal had given her. "I didn't almost marry him on account of I was a spy," she replied. "But Washington was occupied, like you said yourself. And Hal asked me not to talk about anything that went on that had to do with the coffeehouse and spying even a little bit, just to be on the safe side. So I didn't."

Hal had never asked her to do any such thing. He knew that, and so did Nellie, and so did Edna herself.

But Merle Grimes didn't know it, and he was the one who counted here. "All right," he said after a long, long pause. "We'll let it go, then. God knows I do love you, Edna, and I want to be able to love you and trust you the rest of my days."

Edna did the smartest thing she could have: instead of saying even a word, she threw herself into Merle's arms. As the two of them embraced, Nellie caught Hal's eye. *Thank you,* she mouthed silently. Her husband gave a tiny nod and an even tinier shrug, as if to say it wasn't worth getting excited about.

They'd been married for almost ten years. Till that moment, Nellie had never been sure she loved him.

She was now.

Had Lucien Galtier not cut himself, he might not have found out for some little while that his life was about to change. It wasn't a bad wound, like the time when he'd laid his leg open with an axe. But he was sharpening a stake that would support some green beans when spring came, and the knife slipped, and he gashed himself between thumb and forefinger.

" 'Osti," he hissed. *"Calisse de tabernac."* He put down the knife and the stake, pinched the lips of the wound shut, and went to the house to

get a clean bandage. He hoped that would do the job, and that he wouldn't need stitches. If he did, though, he was reasonably sure he could get them for nothing. There were advantages to having a doctor for a son-in-law, even if Leonard O'Doull would tease him for being a clumsy old fool even as he sewed him up. Lucien hurried up the stairs, quietly wiped his boots on the thick, soft mat in front of the kitchen door, and went inside.

Marie was sitting at the kitchen table, one hand on her belly, tears running down her face.

"Marie?" Galtier whispered, his own cut forgotten. His right hand dropped to his side. Blood started dripping on the floor. *"Qu'est-ce que tu as?"*

"It's nothing," she said, springing to her feet with as much dismay and guilt as if he'd caught her in the arms of another man. "Nothing, I tell you. What have you done to yourself? You're bleeding!"

He grabbed a towel and wrapped it around his left hand. "This is truly nothing," he said. "A slip of the knife, that's all. But you . . ."

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Marie might pause during her day's work for a cup of tea. Never, in all the years he'd known her, had she paused because she was in pain. That was literally true; she'd gone on working till ridiculously short stretches of time before she bore her children, and she'd got back to work after each birth much sooner than the midwife said she should. For her to hold herself like that and weep was . . . *The end of the world* was the first thing that occurred to him.

An instant later, he wished he'd thought of a different comparison.

"I think it could be that we both should see our *beau-fils* ," he said.

Marie shook her head. "It's nothing," she insisted. "I'm just . . . tired, that's all."

Hearing her say that frightened him as badly as seeing her sit there crying. He knew she must have been tired at times through their close to thirty-five years of marriage. She was a farm wife, and she'd raised six children. But she'd never admitted it, not in all the time he'd known her, not till now.

“Here.” He went to the closet and got her a coat. “Put this on, my dear. We are going into town, to talk with Leonard O’Doull.”

“I don’t need to see the doctor,” Marie insisted. “And how can you drive the motorcar with your poor hand hurt?”

To keep her from going on about the hand, he let her bandage it, which she did with her usual quick competence. As long as she was taking care of him, she seemed fine. But, once she’d done the job, she argued less than he’d expected when he draped the coat over her shoulders. “Come on,” he said. “Our son-in-law will tell you why you are tired, and he will give you some pills to make you feel like a new woman.”

“It could be that you are the one who feels like a new woman,” his wife retorted. But, that gibe aside, she kept quiet. She let him lead her out to the Chevrolet and head for town. Her acquiescence worried him, too.

Leonard O’Doull’s office was on Rue Frontenac, not far from the Église Saint-Patrice on Rue Lafontaine—the church over which Bishop Pascal no longer presided. Dr. O’Doull’s office assistant exclaimed when she saw the bloody bandage on Lucien’s hand. “He’s vaccinating a little boy right now, *Monsieur* Galtier,” she said. “As soon as he’s done, he’ll see you.”

But Lucien shook his head again. “It’s not me he needs to see. It’s Marie.”

That made the office assistant start to exclaim again. Just in time, she thought better of it. “Sit down, then,” she said. “He’ll see you both soon.”

A howl from the part of the office out of sight of the waiting room told Galtier exactly when the vaccination was completed. A couple of minutes later, a city woman in a fashionably—even shockingly—short dress came out with her wailing toddler in tow. Normally, Lucien would have eyed her legs while she paid the assistant. That Marie was sitting beside him wouldn’t have stopped him. That Marie was sitting beside him not feeling well did.

Their son-in-law stuck his head out into the waiting room as soon as the city woman and her son left.

Like his assistant, he saw Lucien’s bandage and wagged a finger. “What have you gone and done to yourself now?” he asked with mock

severity. “Don’t you think I get tired of patching you?”

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Again, Galtier said, “I didn’t come to see you on account of this scratch. Marie is not well.”

“No?” Dr. O’Doull became very serious very fast. He almost bowed to his mother-in-law. “Come in, please, and tell me about it.” As Marie rose, O’Doull nodded, ever so slightly, to Lucien. “Why don’t you wait here?”

“All right,” Galtier said. He knew what that meant. His son-in-law would have to look at, perhaps even have to touch, parts of Marie only Lucien would normally look at and touch. He could do that much more freely if Lucien weren’t in the room with the two of them. Galtier understood the necessity without liking it.

He buried his nose in a magazine from Montreal. All the articles seemed to talk about ways in which the Republic of Quebec could become more like the United States. Galtier was far from sure he wanted Quebec to become more like the USA. The people writing the magazine articles had no doubt that was what Quebec should do.

Every so often, he noticed he was reading the same sentence over and over. It wasn’t because the sentences sounded so much alike, though they did. But he couldn’t stop worrying about what was going on on the far side of that door.

After the longest half hour in Galtier’s life, Marie came out again. Dr. O’Doull came out with her, saying,

“Please sit here for a moment, if you would.” She nodded and sat down beside Lucien. O’Doull continued, *“Mon beau-père,* I would speak with you for a few minutes. Come in, please.”

“Very well.” Galtier didn’t want to get up. He wanted to stay there beside Marie. But he saw he had no choice. “Is everything as it should be?” he asked his son-in-law.

“Well, that is what I want to talk to you about,” O’Doull answered.

Numbly, Galtier walked to the door. Dr. O’Doull stood aside to let him go through. Galtier had thought he was afraid before. Now his heart

threatened to burst from his chest at every beat. O'Doull waved him into his own personal office. Lucien sat in the chair in front of the desk.

His son-in-law opened a desk drawer. To Galtier's surprise, he pulled out a pint bottle of whiskey.

"Medicinal," O'Doull remarked as he yanked out the cork and took a swig. He held out the bottle to Galtier. "Here. Have some."

"Merci." Lucien drank, too. It wasn't very good whiskey, but it was plenty strong. He coughed once or twice as he set the bottle on the desk. O'Doull corked it. With a smile that might have come straight from the gallows, Galtier asked, "And now, *mon beau-fils,* have you a bullet for me to bite on?" He'd forgotten all about his cut hand.

And so had Leonard O'Doull, which was an even worse sign. "If I did, I'd give it to you," he said.

"Your wife has a . . . a mass right here, in her belly." He put his hand on his own belly, on the spot that corresponded to the one Marie had been holding when Galtier had walked into their kitchen, a little more than an hour before.

"A mass," Galtier echoed. Dr. O'Doull nodded. He had surely used the mildest word he could find to give Lucien the news. Though Galtier hadn't had much schooling, he needed only a moment to figure out what the younger man was talking about. "A tumor, do you mean?"

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"I'm afraid I do," his son-in-law answered, as gently as he could. "She should have an X ray. It is possible she should have a surgical operation."

"Possible? Only possible?" Lucien said. "What does this mean?"

"It depends on what the X ray shows," O'Doull answered. "She told me she first began feeling this pain a year and a half or two years ago, though it was less then. That means it could be—God forbid, but it could be—that there has been some . . . some spread of the mass. If the X ray shows there has . . . In that case, there would be less point to an operation."

In that case, an operation would do no good, because she would die anyway. Again, Lucien didn't need his son-in-law to explain that to him. He forced his mind away from it. "She had this pain for two years?"

"So she told me," Dr. O'Doull replied.

"And she said nothing? She did nothing? In the name of God, *why* ?"

O'Doull sighed, uncorked the whiskey bottle once more, and took another drink. "I've seen this before among you Quebecois. Why? Maybe because you hope the pain will go away by itself and you won't need to go to the doctor. Maybe because you simply refuse to let pain get the better of you. And maybe because you're just too busy to get out of the house and into town to do what needs to be done."

Slowly, Galtier nodded. Any or all of those reasons could have fit Marie. He didn't think he had the nerve to ask her. Even if he did, he doubted he would get a straight answer. "Is it that you can take this X-ray picture?" he asked.

"No. I have no X-ray machine here," O'Doull answered. "She will have to go to Quebec City, to the capital. If she has the operation, she will have to have it there, too."

"All right. We will do that, then." Lucien didn't hesitate, even for a moment. He wondered how much the required treatment would cost. He wished he hadn't bought the Chevrolet. If he had to, though, he could sell it. Marie mattered more than money, and that was all there was to it. He did ask, "This operation, it will cure her?"

His son-in-law's shrug was more weary and worried than Gallic. "Without knowing what the X ray will show, without knowing what the surgeon will find, how can I answer that? Be fair to me, please."

"I'm sorry." Lucien bent his head and rubbed his eyes. "Let me ask you a different question, then. You have been a doctor for a good many years now. From what you see, from what you know, what do you think the chances are?"

Leonard O'Doull's lips skinned back from his teeth in what wasn't a smile. "I wish you hadn't asked me that, because now I have to answer it. From what I have seen, from what I know . . . I wish things were better, *mon beau-père.* That's all I can say. I wish things were better." He made a fist and brought it down on the desk.

“I will pray,” Galtier said. Here lately he’d been thinking he’d got ahead of life. His laugh held only bitterness. No one ever got ahead of life, not for long, and life had just reminded him of it. *Why wasn’t it me?* he wondered. *Dear God, why didn’t You take me instead?* That question had no answer. It never **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

would.

IX

Jonathan Moss nodded to the military judge in front of him. “Sir, no matter what the occupation codes say about collusion and incitement, my client is not guilty. The prosecutor hasn’t introduced a single shred of evidence that Mr. Haynes either conspired against the United States, urged others to conspire or act against them, or, for that matter, acted against them himself in any way, shape, or form.”

The judge, a grim-faced major named Daniel Royce, said, “Didn’t you spend three years fighting against the Canucks?”

“Yes, sir, I did,” Moss answered. “Right around here, as a matter of fact.”

“I thought as much,” Major Royce rumbled. “Why the devil are you defending them now, in that case?”

“To make sure they get a fair shake, sir,” Moss said. “Plenty of people just want to jump on them with both feet now that they’re down. This conspiracy charge against my client is a case in point. It’s utterly groundless, as you can see.”

“It is not!” yelped the military prosecutor, a captain surely too young to have fought in the Great War.

“Look at the evidence, sir, not the allegations, and you’ll see for yourself,” Moss told Major Royce. He hadn’t lied to the judge. He did dislike seeing Americans swarming up into Ontario and ravaging the conquered province like so many locusts. But his reply hadn’t been the whole truth, either. What would Royce have said had he answered, *Because I fell in love with a Canadian woman while my squadron’s aerodrome was up by Arthur?* The major looked to have been a formidable football player in his younger days. He would have drop-kicked Moss clean out of his courtroom.

Scowling still, the military judge shuffled through the papers in front of him. He picked up one sheet and carefully read through it. Even from the back, Moss recognized it. It was a statement he'd got from his client's neighbors, saying they'd never seen anyone visit Haynes' house at a time when the prosecutor claimed he was shaping a plot there against the USA. His hopes leaped.

Bang! went Royce's gavel. Everyone in the courtroom who'd seen combat started; the sudden noise was too much like a gunshot for comfort. "I'm sorry, Captain, but I find myself agreeing with the defense attorney here," the military judge said. "I see no evidence of an offense against occupation regulations.

Greed by people bringing the charges may be another matter. This case is dismissed. Keep your nose clean, Mr. Haynes, as you have been doing. You're a free man." The gavel banged again.

"Thank you very much, your Lordship." Paul Haynes sounded astonished that he wasn't heading for prison.

"I'm not a Lordship. You call me 'your Honor,' " Judge Royce said. "No more Lordships here, and a good thing, too, if you want to know what I think."

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"Thank you, your Honor, then," Haynes said, not contradicting the military judge but not offering his own opinion, either. He turned to Jonathan Moss and stuck out his hand. "And thank *you* very much. I didn't think you could bring it off."

"You're not the only Canadian client I've had who's told me the same thing," Moss answered. "I'll tell you what I've told a lot of them—our courts *will* try you fairly if you give them half a chance."

"I wouldn't have believed it," Haynes said. "I thought they'd lock me up and throw away the key when they brought those treason charges against me."

In a low voice, Moss said, "You'd be smart to follow the judge's advice and not give them any excuse to charge you again. If you come before the court a second time, they're liable to think that where there's smoke, there's fire, even if they did let you off the hook once before." Listening to himself, he wondered how many clichés he could string

together all at once.

“Wasn’t any excuse to charge me this time,” Paul Haynes grumbled. But then he nodded. “All right, Mr.

Moss. I understand what you’re telling me.”

“Good,” Moss said.

They left the courtroom together. Spring had been on the calendar for more than a month. Now, as April gave way to May, it was finally visible in Berlin, Ontario, too. The sky was blue, with only a few puffy white clouds drifting across it. The sun was, if not warm, at least tepid. It got up early and went to bed late. Trees were coming into new leaf. A robin chirped in one of them.

“You’re a good fellow,” Haynes said. He didn’t even add *for a Yank* , as so many Canadians might have done. “I’ll send you the rest of my fee soon as I can scrape the money together. You don’t need to worry about that.”

“I wasn’t worried,” Moss said, which was true. His Canadian clients reliably paid what they said they would when they said they’d do it. He wished the Americans he represented up here were as reliable.

Reporters were seldom allowed in military courts. Censorship still lay heavily on occupied Canada.

Moss understood that without necessarily approving of it. Here in the street, a couple of newspapermen pounced on Paul Haynes. Moss slipped away before they could start grilling him, too. If they wanted him badly enough, they could run him down at his office. Meanwhile . . .

Meanwhile, he aimed to celebrate his victory in his own way. He got into his Bucephalus and pressed the starter button. The engine roared to life. A Bucephalus was a big, powerful motorcar. Owning one went a long way toward saying you were a big, powerful man. Owning a new one went a long way toward saying that, anyhow. Moss had owned this one when it was new. Here in the spring of 1928, it was anything but. One reason the engine roared was that it needed work he hadn’t given it. The automobile’s paint job and upholstery had seen better years. He had put new tires on it recently, but only because he’d got sick of patching the old ones when they blew out.

He put the car in gear and drove west out of Berlin. Roads were better

than they had been when he first hung out his shingle in Ontario. The war, by now, had been over for ten and a half years. The roads the grinding conflict had cratered and pocked with shell holes were smooth once more—smoother than ever, in fact. Paving stretched for miles where only dirt had gone before.

About an hour after leaving Berlin, he drove through the much smaller town of Arthur, thirty miles to the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

west. Arthur hadn't bounced back from the war the way Berlin had. It lay off the beaten track.

Few—hardly any—Americans came here with their money and their energy and their connections with the powers that be in the USA. But for a few more motorcars on the streets than would have been visible in 1914, time might have passed Arthur by.

A couple of people pointed to the Bucephalus as it rolled through town. Jonathan Moss saw one of them nod. They'd seen the motorcar before, many times. They had to know who he was. If a diehard wanted to take a shot at him . . . He shrugged. It hadn't happened yet. He wasn't going to start worrying about it now.

When he got to Laura Secord's farm, he found her where he'd expected to: out in the fields, plowing behind a horse about the size of a half-grown elephant. She must have seen his automobile pull in beside the farmhouse, but she didn't come in right away. The work came first. She'd stubbornly got a crop from the farm every year since the end of the war, and she didn't look like intending 1928 to be an exception.

Only after she'd done what she thought needed doing did she unhitch the enormous horse and lead him back toward the house and the barn. Moss got out of the Bucephalus and waved to her. She nodded back, sober as usual, but her gray eyes danced. "You got Paul Haynes off, didn't you?" she said.

"Sure did. Not just a reduced sentence, either: full acquittal," Moss said proudly. "Don't win one of those every day, not from Major Royce."

"That's . . . swell," she said. The hesitation probably meant she'd almost said *bully* instead; the old slang died hard, especially in out-of-the-way places like this. She led the immense horse into the barn. When she came out, she asked, "And how do you have in mind

celebrating, eh, Yank?”

“I expect we’ll think of something,” he answered.

“What I’m thinking of first is a bath,” she said.

Moss nodded. “Sure, sweetheart. I’ll scrub your back, if you want me to.”

“I’m sure you will,” she told him. And, as a matter of fact, he did. One thing pleasantly led to another.

After a while, they lay naked, side by side, on her bed. Lazy and sated, Moss lit a cigarette. He offered her the pack. She shook her head. That made other things jiggle, too. He watched with interested admiration. Though he didn’t care to remember it, he was a little closer to forty than thirty these days; a second round wasn’t so automatic as it had been a few years before. He thought he could rise to the occasion today, though. Laura Secord watched him watching her. “Did you enjoy your celebration?” she asked.

Had she smiled, that would have been different. As things were, her voice had an edge to it. “What’s the matter, darling?” he asked, and reached out to toy with her left nipple.

She twisted away. “Why should anything be the matter?” she asked. “You come up here when it suits you, you . . . celebrate, and then you drive back down to Empire.” She stubbornly kept using the name the Canadians had tried to hang on Berlin during the war, before the USA took it.

Although Jonathan Moss didn’t have experience with a great many women, he knew trouble when he heard it. “Dammit, Laura, you’d better know by now that I don’t come up here just to have a good time,” he said.

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“I know you didn’t used to,” she answered. “But things have been going on for a while now, and I do start to wonder. Can you blame me? Will you still drive up here every couple of weeks in 1935, or will you have found someone younger and prettier and closer to Empire by then?”

“I’m not looking for anybody else,” Moss said. “I love you, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

“Do you?” Laura Secord asked.

“Of course I do!” he said. She looked at him. She didn’t say what she was obviously thinking: *in that case, what are you going to do about it?* The question was, if anything, more effective left hanging in the air. Jonathan Moss took a deep breath. His response looked pretty obvious, too. “Will you marry me?” he asked. “Will you sell this farm and come over to Berlin—you can even call it Empire if you want—and live with me for the rest of our lives?”

Her nod said that that *was* the right question, sure enough. But it wasn’t a nod of acceptance. She asked a question of her own: “Why didn’t you ask me that a long time ago, Jonathan?”

“Why? Because I know I’m nothing but a lousy American, and I figured you’d tell me no for sure. I’d sooner have gone on the way things were than have that happen. Hearing no to a question like that hurts worse than anything else I can think of.”

“What if I said yes?” she asked quietly.

“I’d throw you into my motorcar, and we’d get back to Berlin in time to find a justice of the peace. If you think I’d let you have the chance to change your mind, you’re nuts.”

Laura Secord gave him the ghost of a smile. “It couldn’t be quite that fast, I’m afraid. I’d have to make arrangements to sell the livestock or to have it taken care of before I leave the farm.”

“*Are* you telling me yes?” Moss demanded. She nodded again. This time, she meant it the way he’d hoped she would. He let out a whoop that probably scared some of her feral farm cats out of a year’s growth. Moss didn’t care. And he did rise again, and they found the best way to inaugurate their engagement.

Afterwards, she said, “I was afraid you didn’t want to buy a cow as long as milk was cheap.”

“Moo, me?” he answered, and startled her again, this time into laughter. If that wasn’t a good omen, he didn’t know what would be.

George Enos, Jr., set cash on the kitchen table—more of it than Sylvia Enos had expected. “Here you go, Ma,” her son said, his voice

breaking with excitement. “We had us a he . . . heck of a run. Cod like you couldn’t believe.” He looked down at his hands, which had acquired the beginnings of the scabs and scars that always marked fishermen’s fingers and palms. “I did more gutting than anybody could think of.

And with the offal over the side, the birds that came, and the sharks—I never imagined anything like it.”

“Your father used to talk the same way,” Sylvia answered. She remembered him sitting up over a mug of coffee in the days when they were first married, telling her about what he’d done and what he’d seen and what it had felt like.

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But this wasn’t quite the same, after all. George Enos had done enough fishing by the time he married her that it had become routine, and wearying routine at that. George, Jr., didn’t seem tired at all. Maybe that was because everything still seemed bright and new to him. Or maybe it was just because, at seventeen, he never got tired at all. His father certainly had, though, and he’d been only a few years older.

“How much is it, Ma?” Mary Jane asked, looking up from the onions she was chopping. She paused to rub her streaming eyes, then let out a yelp—she must have had onion juice on her fingers, and made things worse instead of better.

“Quite a bit,” answered Sylvia, who’d been trained from childhood not to talk about money in any detail.

“It will help a lot.”

“That’s good,” Mary Jane said. “I’m going to look for a shopgirl job again tomorrow. I bet I find something, too. That one I had last summer was swell, but then you went and made me go back to school.” She sent Sylvia as severe a look as a fifteen-year-old girl could give her mother.

Sylvia had no trouble withstanding it; she’d known far worse. “Summer work is one thing,” she said.

“School is something else. You need your schooling.”

George, Jr., glanced at his sister. They both almost—but not quite; no, not quite—invisibly shook their heads. These days, they were old enough to team up on Sylvia, instead of fighting each other as they'd done for so long. Sylvia knew why George, Jr., sneered at school. He was making good money without it.

And Sylvia had a pretty good idea why Mary Jane didn't want to keep going. She was bound to be thinking something like, *Who cares whether I can divide fractions and diagram sentences? What difference will it make? I'm going to get married and have babies, and my husband will make money for me.*

"You never can tell," Sylvia said, half to herself, half to her daughter. "I thought George, Jr.'s, father was going to take care of things forever. But then the war came, and the Confederates captured him, and after that he joined the Navy, and he . . . he didn't come home. And I've had to run like crazy ever since, just trying to make ends meet. If I knew more about spelling and typing and arithmetic, I'd've had better jobs and made more money, and we'd've done better for ourselves. And if you think things like that can't happen to you and the people you love, Mary Jane, you're wrong. I wish you weren't, but you are.

Because you never can tell."

By something surely not far from a miracle, she got through to her daughter. Instead of giving her a snippy answer, Mary Jane nodded and said, "I wish I could've known Pa better."

George, Jr., got up and set a hand on his younger sister's shoulder. "I wish I could have, too." His voice roughened. "But at least Ma paid back the stinking son of a bitch"—had he been out on the trawler instead of in his kitchen, he undoubtedly would have said something much hotter than that—"who sank the *Ericsson* . Everybody I sail with knows Ma's a hero."

Sylvia brushed that aside. "It won't get me any supper," she said, and stood up herself so she could start cooking. She hadn't felt heroic when she'd pumped a revolverful of bullets into Roger Kimball. She had trouble remembering now exactly how she had felt. Frightened and resigned was about as close as she could come to it. She hadn't thought she would ever see her children or Boston again.

But here she was, with all the same problems, all the same worries, she'd had before getting on the train **Generated by ABC Amber LIT**

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for Charleston. Being a hero, she'd rapidly discovered, paid few bills. When she'd come home, she had got back the job she'd left so she could go to the Confederate States. She'd made a few speeches that brought in a little money. By now, though, she was old news. Even in this presidential election year, no one asked her to come out. Joe Kennedy, for instance, had used her and forgotten about her. Every once in a while, she wondered how many women he'd really, rather than metaphorically, seduced and abandoned. More than a few, or she missed her guess.

While washing dishes later that evening, Mary Jane asked, "Who are you going to vote for come November, Ma?"

Women's suffrage had finally come to Massachusetts—and to the rest of the holdout states in the USA—with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. These days, all the men who'd opposed it were busy explaining how they'd never really done any such thing, how they'd always looked out for the country's best interests, and as many other lies as they could find.

Most of those men were Democrats. Even so, Sylvia answered, "I'm going to vote for Governor Coolidge for president, because he's a Democrat and he'd be harder on the Confederates than Vice President Blackford. Coolidge fought in the war, too; he didn't stay back of the lines."

"Do you think Coolidge will win?" Mary Jane asked.

"I don't know," Sylvia said. "That's why they have the election—to find out who wins, I mean. Hardly anybody thought President Sinclair would beat Teddy Roosevelt in 1920, but he did."

"I was still little then," Mary Jane said thoughtfully, scrubbing at a frying pan with steel wool.

To Sylvia, Mary Jane was still little now, and would be the rest of her life. But she put that aside, and went back to the question her daughter had asked a little while before: "I do wish Governor Coolidge would be a little more . . . lively. People don't seem to get very excited about him, and that worries me.

Blackford and his wife can really whip up the crowds. It matters a lot."

The following Sunday, someone knocked at the door to her flat. There stood her neighbor, Brigid Coneval. The Irishwoman said, “Blackford his own self will be after speaking on the Common today at half past two. Now that we can vote and all, I’m for hearing what he has to say for himself. Will you come with me, now?”

Sylvia found herself nodding. “I sure will,” she said. “You’re right—we ought to find out all we can about them.”

“Indeed and we should,” Brigid Coneval agreed. A war widow like Sylvia, she hadn’t had an easy time of it since her husband was shot. She made ends meet by taking care of other people’s children—though her own boys, by now, were also old enough to get jobs of their own and bring in a little money to help.

Through everything, she’d kept an infectious grin. “And besides, it’ll be fun. We can ride the subway over to the Common; there’s a station close by there.”

“Why not?” Sylvia didn’t often do things on impulse, but this would be out of the ordinary, and it wouldn’t cost anything except subway fare.

She didn’t like the subway. It was even more crowded than trolley cars, and noisier, too. Between stations, the tunnel was black as coal. She kept wondering things like, *What would happen if this train broke down?* She knew she shouldn’t. She knew that wasn’t likely. But she couldn’t help it.

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The subway train got to the Common without incident. Sylvia and Brigid Coneval emerged from the bowels of the earth into bright sunshine. It glowed off the gilded dome of the State House, in front of which Vice President Blackford would speak. “Let’s get under one of the trees,” Sylvia said, pointing.

“We’re early. There’s still room under there. We can stay in the shade. It’ll be cooler.”

“Well, aren’t you the clever one, now?” her friend said. They staked out their spot with no trouble at all.

They *were* early. The crowd hadn’t really begun to fill the Boston

Common. Most of the people there so soon were either Blackford's Socialist backers or the Democratic activists who would heckle the vice president when he spoke. The two groups jockeyed for position and traded insults, mostly good-natured.

They'd squared off against each other many times before, and knew they'd often meet again after this afternoon.

One of the men carrying an 8 YEARS IS ENOUGH! sign was Joe Kennedy. Seeing him, Sylvia shrank back farther under the tree. She didn't want him to see her, even though she had every right to be here.

But he did—she got the feeling he missed very little. He saw her, recognized her, and turned his back.

She wanted to call out, *I'm going to vote for Coolidge!* She didn't. She could tell it would do no good.

A big black car pulled up by the platform. A tall, gray-haired man and a short woman, much younger than he, got out and went to the platform. "That's himself's wife," Brigid Coneval said. "A Congresswoman from New York City, she is, and a Christ-killing sheeny besides."

Sylvia didn't care much about Jews one way or the other. She said, "By all they say, she's done a good job in Congress. And look at her! She's been there since the war, and she doesn't look any older than we are."

"Foosh!" said Brigid, who seemed determined to stay unimpressed. "And what's her husband, then?

Sure and he's a dirty old man, for I'd not care to hang since he's seen the sweet side of forty."

Flora Blackford stepped up to the microphone. The Democrats in the crowd immediately started to jeer.

She made as if to urge them on, and then said, "Listen to them, comrades. They won't tell the truth themselves, and they don't want to let anyone else tell it, either. Is that fair? Is that honest? Is that what you want in the Powel House for the next four years?"

"No!" people shouted.

The Congresswoman from New York City made a short, strong speech, giving the Socialists credit for everything that had gone right the past eight years: the booming stock market, laws allowing strikes for higher wages, and on and on.

“What about the revolt in Canada? What about cutting off Confederate reparations?” the Democrats yelled. “What about the bank troubles in Europe?”

“Well, what about them?” Flora retorted, meeting the hecklers head on. “The Canadians lost. And we’re at peace with the Confederate States, and getting along with them well enough. Isn’t it about time this country was at peace with its neighbors? As for the banks in Europe, well, what can we do about them here?”

Most people cheered. The Democrats went right on heckling. Vice President Blackford himself stepped up to the microphone. “We’ve had eight good years!” he said. “Let’s have four more. We’ve got
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prosperity. We’ve got peace. Give us a few more Socialists in the Senate and we’ll have old-age insurance, too. If you want to go back to gearing up for a war every generation, vote for Governor Coolidge. He’ll give you one. If you want to make sure your sons and husbands and brothers live to grow old, vote for me. It’s that simple.”

But it wasn’t, not as far as Sylvia was concerned. She wanted the Confederate States punished for what they’d done to the *Ericsson* , not forgiven their reparations. Hosea Blackford might not want a war, but wouldn’t the Confederates if they ever got strong again? “I’m glad we came,” she told Brigid Coneval on their way back to the subway station. “Now I’m surer than ever I’ll vote for Coolidge.”

“Sure and you can’t mean it!” Brigid exclaimed, and argued with her all the way home even though she’d mocked both Hosea Blackford and his wife. She didn’t change Sylvia’s mind, or even come close.

Over the supper table, Chester Martin grinned at his wife. “Election Day coming up,” he said with a sly smile.

“And so?” Rita answered. But she smiled, too. “Plenty of worse ways to meet than at a polling place.”

“I should say.” Martin had met women at worse places—and that didn’t even count the soldiers’

brothels behind the front during the war, when you'd stand in line outside in the rain for a couple of minutes of what was much more catharsis than rapture. *At least I never got a dose of the clap,* he thought.

"Do you think Blackford can do it?" Rita asked.

"Hope so," Martin said. "I don't see why not. Everybody's making good money. Why should we change when things are going the way they're supposed to?" He spread his hands. "I still don't much like the Socialists' foreign policy—I'd take a stronger line than they do—but that's not enough reason to vote for the Great Stone Face."

Rita laughed at the nickname. "Coolidge doesn't have much to say for himself, does he?"

"I think there's a reason for that, too," Chester replied. "He's never done anything worth talking about."

"Massachusetts is prosperous," Rita said. "He takes credit for that."

After sarcastically clapping his hands a couple of times, Martin said, "He may take it, but who says he deserves it? The whole country's prosperous, and the Socialists deserve credit for *that* ." He'd come late to the Socialists, but had what amounted to a convert's zeal. "Look where we were in 1920, before President Sinclair won, and look where we are now."

"You're preaching to the choir, you know," his wife told him with a smile. "I'm going to vote for Blackford, too."

"I know, but look." Chester felt expansive. He wanted to tell the whole world how well his party had run the country over the past eight years. Since the whole world wasn't sitting across the kitchen table from him and Rita was, she got to listen to him. He went on, "Look how high the stock market's risen. Who would have thought the proletariat could start owning the means of production by buying shares in the big companies? With buying on margin, though, it's awfully easy to do." He laughed. "If *we* can afford to do **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

it, it must be easy to do."

Rita pointed to the newspaper, which lay on a chair. "The Wireless Corporation is splitting its stock again."

Martin nodded. “I saw that. I’m glad I got into Wireless somewhere close to the ground floor. I think it’s going to be the big thing for years and years, and those four shares I managed to buy last summer are sixteen shares now. It’s swell. Everything keeps going up and up and up. It’s like coining money.”

“Did you see that Congresswoman Blackford is coming to town Saturday?” Rita asked.

“No, I missed that,” he answered. “Do you want to go see her?”

“Sure? Why not? It’ll be fun,” Rita said. “And besides, she shows what a woman can do when she puts her mind to it.”

Although Chester wasn’t sure he liked the sound of that, he said, “All right,” anyhow, finding agreement the better part of valor. Then he added, “Did I ever tell you that I—”

“Met Flora Blackford when she was still Flora Hamburger?” Rita cut in. “Had her brother in your company during the war?” She shook her head. Her bobbed dark blond hair flipped back and forth.

“No. You never, ever told me that. I’ve never heard it, not even once. Can’t you tell?”

“I can tell you’re giving me a hard time,” he answered. She grinned. So did he.

Flora Blackford chose to speak near the Toledo city hall, in the shadow of the smaller copy of the great statue of Remembrance that stood on Bedloe Island in New York harbor. Chester found that interesting, even challenging. For more than a generation, remembrance had been the loudest drum the Democrats beat. For a nation twice defeated, twice humiliated, by the CSA and the Confederates’ European allies, it was a drumbeat that had struck deep chords.

But now the Great War was eleven years past. The United States had won it. People still held Remembrance Day parades, but they didn’t march with flags upside down any more. Having won, the United States were no longer in distress. And, ever since the Great War ended, the Democrats hadn’t been able to find any other theme that resonated with the voters as remembrance had.

And now, here stood Flora Blackford under that great statue with the gleaming sword. By the way she stood there, she said Remembrance—

and the Democrats—spoke to yesterday's worries, yesterday's needs. *I'm going to talk about what you need to hear today—and tomorrow,* she said without words, merely by standing there.

"We've come a long way the past eight years," she said, "but we've still got a long way to go. When President Sinclair was elected, you risked losing your job if you went out on strike. Some of you *had* lost your jobs. That can't happen any more, thanks to the laws we've passed."

Chester Martin pounded his palms together. He'd fought company goons, and he'd fought the police who served as the big capitalists' watchdogs and hunting hounds. Next to what he'd been through in the trenches, those brawls hadn't been anything much. And if you weren't willing to fight for what you wanted, did you really deserve to get it? He believed in the class struggle. He believed in it all the way down to his toes.

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When the applause died down a little, Vice President Blackford's wife went on, "You know the Democrats never would have passed a bill like that, or like the one that gives workers the right to take leave without pay if there's a baby in the family or someone takes sick and then get their jobs back. They were in power from 1884 to 1920, and they still behave as though it's 1884."

That drew not only applause but whoops of laughter. It also fit in very well with what Chester had been thinking not long before. Flora Blackford continued, "And we tried to give you old-age insurance, too.

We tried hard. But we couldn't quite manage that, because the Democrats had enough men in the Senate to tie up the bill with a filibuster. We've got to elect more Socialists. Friends, comrades, the presidency is important, but it's not enough, not by itself. We have to fight the forces of reaction wherever we find them. That's what the class struggle is all about."

It wasn't how Martin imagined the class struggle. He took the phrase literally. He'd broken enough heads in his time to have reason to take it literally. He'd taken his lumps, too; the real problem with the class struggle was that the capitalists and their lackeys fought back hard. But the idea of carrying the struggle even to the halls of Congress held a powerful appeal for him.

“We don’t need the enormous Army and Navy we had before the Great War, the Army and Navy that ate up so much money and so much of our industry,” Flora said. “We’ve won the war. Now we can enjoy what we won. Factories can make goods for people, not for killing. We can spend our wealth on what *we* need, not on battleships and machine guns and barrels. We’ve fought our neighbors too many times. We can work toward living at peace with them now.”

That drew more loud cheers. Chester joined in them, but more than a little halfheartedly. This was the part of the Socialist platform that still graveled him. Still, Flora Blackford expressed it well. Maybe the 1920s were so prosperous because less money was going into weapons and fortifications and more into people’s pockets. Maybe.

“Hosea Blackford will take us on toward the middle of the twentieth century,” Flora declared. “Calvin Coolidge will drag us back into the nineteenth century. Which way do you want to go? The choice is yours—it’s in the people’s hands. I ask you not to turn your back on the future! I ask you to vote Socialist, to vote for Hosea Blackford for president and Hiram Johnson for vice president. Let Dakota and California show the rest of the country the way! Thank you!”

More applause—thunderous applause. Rita said, “I can’t *wait* for November.”

“Neither can I,” Chester agreed. That was how a good stump speech was supposed to work. It made the faithful eager. Men and women pushed forward, trying to get a word with Flora Blackford now that she’d come down off the platform. “Come on,” Martin told his wife, and did some pushing himself, wondering if the vice president’s wife would remember him.

He didn’t really expect her to, and she didn’t, not when she looked at him. But when he shouted his name at her, she nodded. “You were David’s sergeant,” she said.

“That’s right, ma’am.” Chester grinned and nodded. “And this is my wife, Rita.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Flora clasped Rita’s hand. “Will you vote for my husband on Election Day?”

“I sure will,” Rita answered. “I was going to even before I heard you talk. But even if I’d been thinking about voting for the Democrats before, you would have made me change my mind.”

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“Thank you very much,” Flora Blackford said. “He needs all the votes he can get, believe me. We can’t take anything for granted. If we do, we’re liable to lose.”

“We’d better not,” Chester Martin said. Before Vice President Blackford’s wife could answer, a fresh surge of people from behind pushed Rita and him away from her. Again, that was no surprise; he felt lucky to have talked with her at all. Turning to Rita, he asked, “What do you think?”

“She’s honest,” Rita said at once. “If she is, it’s a good bet her husband is, too. And she knew who you were as soon as you told her your name. That was something.” She proudly took his arm. “You know important people.”

He laughed. “Stick with me, kiddo, and I’ll take you to the top.”

Rita laughed, too, but only for a moment. Then she sobered. “You really do know important people, Chester. That might turn out to be important one of these days. You never can tell.”

“Maybe.” But Chester didn’t believe it, not down deep. “I don’t think Flora Blackford’s the sort of person you can use to pull strings. She was in Congress, remember, when her brother got conscripted, and she didn’t pull any for him. He could have had some soft, safe job behind the lines—typist or driver or something like that. He could have, but he didn’t. He went into the fighting, and he got shot. If she didn’t help David Hamburger, she’s not likely to help me.”

“That depends on what you’d need to ask her,” Rita answered. “Like I said a minute ago, you never can tell.”

Somebody stepped on Chester’s foot, hard. “Ow!” he said. In the crowd, he couldn’t even tell who’d done it. He pointed toward the trolley stop. “Let’s get out of here and go home before we get trampled.”

“Suits me,” his wife said. “I’m glad we came, though. She made a good speech—and I found out what a special fellow I married.”

Martin started to tell her he was just an ordinary guy. He started to, but he didn’t. If Rita wanted to think he was a special fellow, he didn’t mind a bit.

Flora Blackford had waited out six elections to the House of Representatives. She'd been nervous every single time, though her New York City district was solidly Socialist and she'd had easy races after the first one. Now, for the first time since 1914, she wasn't running for Congress—but she was more nervous than ever.

Worrying about her husband's race proved more wearing than worrying about her own ever had. She hadn't been this anxious in 1924; she was sure of that. In 1924, Hosea Blackford hadn't headed the ticket. It probably hadn't won or lost because of anything he did.

Things were different now. If they went as she hoped, her husband would become president of the United States next March. If they didn't . . . No, she wouldn't think about that.

Telegraph sets clicked in their apartments. Phones jangled. Off in one corner, an announcer on a wireless set spewed out results. Flora and Hosea got any news that came in as fast as they would have at Socialist Party headquarters in Philadelphia. But the same longstanding tradition that kept a presidential **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

nominee away from the convention till he'd been declared the candidate bound a presidential hopeful to find out whether he'd won or lost away from the people who'd done the most to help him.

When Flora complained about that, her husband only shrugged. "It's one of the rules of the game," he said.

"One of the rules of the game used to be that the Democrats won every four years," Flora answered.

"We've changed that. Why not the other?"

Hosea Blackford looked surprised. "I just hadn't thought about it. I did this in 1920. The two of us did it in '24. Maybe we will change things . . . four years from now."

She gave him a kiss. "I like that. You're already starting to think about your second term, are you?"

"I'd better worry about the first one, don't you think?" he said.

The wireless announcer said, "In Massachusetts, Governor Coolidge continues to pull away. He also leads comfortably in Vermont and Tennessee, and early returns from Kentucky show him with a strong

lead there."

"Oy!" Flora said in dismay.

Her husband took the news much more in stride than she did. "Massachusetts is Coolidge's home state," he said. "We've never done well anywhere in New England. And Kentucky is full of reactionaries.

How could it be anything else, when it belonged to the Confederate States till the middle of the war?

Wait till we start getting returns from the places where working people live, where they make things."

She nodded. She knew that as well as he did. Even so . . . "I don't like losing anywhere," she said.

Hosea Blackford smiled. "That's one of the reasons I'm so glad you're on my side."

A man at one of the telephones called out, "Your lead in New York City just went up another twenty thousand votes, Mr. Vice President!" Flora smiled too—then. She finally had something to smile about.

"Vice President Blackford's large lead in New York City looks likely to carry the state for him, in spite of Governor Coolidge's popularity in the upstate regions," the commentator on the wireless declared.

"Pennsylvania will probably be a closer race. The Socialists are strong in Pittsburgh, but Philadelphia is still a Democratic bastion."

"We have to have New York," Flora murmured. "We have to." The state had the biggest bloc of electoral votes in the USA: one out of every seven. Pennsylvania came next, but far behind. The Democrats could count as well as the Socialists. They'd campaigned hard in New York. *Let them fall short.* In Flora's mind, it was more than half a prayer.

"New returns from Ohio," a telegrapher said. "You're up in Toledo, up in Cleveland, holding your own in Columbus, not doing so well in Cincinnati."

"About what we expected," Blackford said. "What do the overall figures in the state look like?"

"You're up by . . . let me see . . . seventeen thousand," the man

answered after some quick work with pencil and paper.

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“Not bad for this early in the night,” Flora said.

“No, not bad,” Hosea Blackford agreed. “Can’t say much more than that without knowing just where all those votes are coming from. But I’d rather be ahead than behind.” Flora nodded.

Little by little, returns began trickling in from farther west. Indiana had long been a Socialist stronghold; Senator Debs had twice lost to Teddy Roosevelt as the Socialist Party’s standard-bearer. Hosea Blackford was well ahead there. Republicans remained strong in Illinois, Michigan, and Iowa—those three-cornered races wouldn’t be settled till the wee small hours. Like Indiana, Wisconsin was solidly in the Socialist camp.

“We’re doing fine,” Flora said, and tried to make herself believe it.

“Maybe I’m glad I’m here after all,” her husband said. “Looks like it’s going to be a long night. This way, I can just go back into the bedroom and sleep whenever I feel like it. And there aren’t any reporters yelling at me, either. I wouldn’t be able to hear myself think over at Party headquarters.”

“I wish it didn’t look like a long night,” Flora said. “I wish we were sweeping the country, and we could declare victory as soon as the polls closed.”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind that myself.” Hosea laughed. “The Democrats did it for one election after another. Maybe we will, too, somewhere down the line But we haven’t got there yet. This one’s going to be close.”

Flora’s fists tightened till her nails bit into the palms of her hands. It wasn’t just that she wanted the Socialists to win Powel House and as many seats in the House and Senate as they could, though she did.

She’d always wanted that, ever since becoming a Party activist before the Great War. But it felt secondary now. With her husband in the race, she wanted his triumph with an intensity that amazed her.

A win tonight would cap a lifetime of service to the Socialist cause

and to the country. Losing . . .

Again, she refused to think about losing.

Hosea Blackford didn't. "If I win, we stay in Philadelphia," he said. "If I lose, we go home. How would you like living way out West for a while?"

"It's beautiful country," Flora answered, and then said the best thing she could for it: "Joshua would like growing up there." Having said that, she went on, "It seems so . . . empty, though, to somebody who's used to New York City or Philadelphia."

She'd enjoyed spending holidays in Dakota with her husband. The wide open spaces awed her, for a while. But towns and trains and civilization in general seemed a distinct afterthought there. She didn't like that, not at all. To someone who'd grown up on the preposterously overcrowded Lower East Side, so many empty miles of prairie, relieved—if at all—only by a long line of telegraph poles shrinking toward an unbelievably distant horizon, felt more alarming than inspiring.

Someone slammed down a telephone and let out a string of curses that ignored her presence in the room. "Kansas is going for Coolidge, God damn it," he said.

That made Flora want to curse, too. Hosea Blackford took it in stride. "Confederate raiders hit Kansas hard during the war," he said. "They don't love Socialists there; they've been Democrats since the
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Second Mexican War."

"Well, they can *geh kak afen yam* ," Flora said.

Her husband chuckled; he knew what that Yiddish unpleasantry meant. "There's no *yam* anywhere close to Kansas for them to *geh kak afen* ," he pointed out.

"I don't care," Flora said. "They can do it anyway."

The new state of Houston, carved from the conquered piece of Texas, went for Calvin Coolidge. So did Montana, which had been a Democratic stronghold ever since Theodore Roosevelt made a hero of himself there during the Second Mexican War. Flora began to worry in

earnest. But a little past midnight, Pennsylvania, which had teetered for a long time, fell into her husband's camp—and Pennsylvania's electoral votes made up for a swarm of Montanas. New Jersey had also stayed close till then, and also ended up going Socialist.

"We may make it," Hosea Blackford said. "We just may."

By then, returns from the West were coming in. Colorado had a strong union tradition, and looked like going Socialist again. Idaho fell to Coolidge, and so did Nevada, but Blackford swept the West Coast, including populous California: Hiram Johnson had delivered his state.

Flora was yawning when one of the telephones rang a little past three in the morning. "Mr. Vice President," called the man who answered it, and then, in a different, awed, tone of voice, "Mr.

President-elect, it's Governor Coolidge, calling from Massachusetts."

That woke Flora better than a big cup of black coffee could have done. She kissed her husband before he could go to the telephone. "Hello, Governor," he said when he picked up the instrument. "Thank you very much, sir. . . . That's very generous. . . . Yes, you did give me quite a scare, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. . . . What's that?" He had been smiling and cordial, but now his expression hardened. "I certainly hope you're wrong, Governor. I think you are. . . . Yes, time will tell. Thank you again. Good night." He hung up, perhaps more forcefully than he had to.

"What did he say that made you angry?" Flora asked.

"He said maybe he was lucky not to win," Hosea Blackford answered. "He said bull markets don't last forever, and this one's gone on so long and risen so high, the crash will be all the worse when it comes back to earth."

"God forbid!" Flora exclaimed.

"I think we've given God some help," Hosea said. "The business cycle's been rising steadily all through both of President Sinclair's terms. I don't see any reason why it shouldn't do the same for me. The Democrats may have enjoyed boom-and-bust capitalism before the war, but we've put that behind us now. We're prosperous, and we'll stay prosperous."

"Alevai, omayn!" Whenever Flora fell back into Yiddish these days, she spoke from heart and belly.

Hosea Blackford smiled. He understood that. “I really do think it’ll be all right, Flora,” he said gently.

“Oh, there’s more farm debt than I care to see out in the West, and the factories almost seem to be making things faster than people can buy them, but all that’s just a drop in the bucket. We’ll do fine.”

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“I’m not going to argue with you, not now—Mr. President.” Flora kissed him again. The telegraphers and men at the phones all cheered.

“Not for another five months,” Hosea reminded her. “Say that to me in front of President Sinclair and he’ll arrest you for treason.”

“Phooey,” Flora said, which wasn’t English or Yiddish, but was exactly what she meant.

Another telephone rang. “Mr. President-elect, it’s the president.”

This time, Flora didn’t try to delay her husband when he went to the telephone. “Hello, Upton,” he said.

“Thank you so very much. . . . Yes, Cal threw in the towel a little while ago. He gave me some sour grapes, too, babbling about a crash. . . . Yes, of course it’s idiocy. When in all the history of the country have things gone so well? And we have you to thank for it. I’ll do my best to follow your footsteps. . . .

Thanks again. Good-bye.”

Flora went in and woke up Joshua. “Your father’s going to be president,” she told him.

“I want to go back to sleep,” he said irritably—he wasn’t quite three, and didn’t care whether his father was president or a garbageman. Flora wanted to go to sleep, too. *Now I won’t have to live in Dakota,* she thought. And if that wasn’t reason enough, all by itself, to be glad Hosea had won, she couldn’t imagine what would be.

The year had turned eight days before. Lucien Galtier didn’t want to be standing out in the open, not with the weather down around zero and a raw wind blowing out of the northwest. Under his overcoat, his tight collar and black cravat felt as if they were choking him.

Charles and Georges stood beside him in the graveyard. His sons' faces were blank and bitter with grief.

So, he suspected, was his own. His daughters—Nicole, Denise, Susanne, and Jeanne—could show their grief more openly, though that wind threatened to freeze the tears on their faces.

It also whipped at Father Guillaume's wool cassock. "Is everyone here?" he asked. Galtier nodded.

Himself, his children, their spouses, his two grandchildren—and Charles' wife big with child, due almost any day—Marie's brother and sister and their spouses and children and grandchildren, some cousins, some friends. The priest raised his voice a little: "Let us pray."

Lucien bowed his head as Father Guillaume offered up sonorous Latin to the Lord. Absurdly, Galtier chose that moment to remember how strange the American priest who'd married Nicole and Leonard O'Doull had sounded while speaking Latin—he'd pronounced it differently from the way Quebecois clergymen did. But even they'd assured him it wasn't wrong, merely not the same.

After the Latin was done, Father Guillaume dropped back into French: "Marie Galtier no longer gives us the boon of her company on this earth. But she is at the right hand of the Father even as I speak these words, as she died in our true and holy Catholic faith. And she will live forever, for she was a good woman, as you show by coming here today to honor and commemorate her passing."

Nicole began to sob. Leonard O'Doull put his arm around her. Lucien wished someone would do the same for him. But he was a man. He had to bear this as a man did, as stoically as he could. His eyes slid
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to the black-draped coffin. He'd thought burying his parents was hard. And it had been. This, though, this felt ten times worse. That was his life going into the hole the gravediggers had hacked from the frozen ground. *How can I go on without Marie?* he wondered. He couldn't imagine finding an answer.

"In a real way, too, Marie Galtier does still live here among us," the priest said. Lucien almost called him a liar and a fool, there in front of everyone. Before he could say the words, Father Guillaume went on,

"She lives in our hearts, in our memories. Whenever we recall her

kindness and her love, she lives again.

And because she gave us so many reasons to do just that, she will live on for a very long time indeed, even if her years among us were fewer than we would have wished. Think of her often, and she will live for you again."

He turned toward the coffin, making the sign of the cross and praying once more in Latin. All the people standing there shivering as they listened to him crossed themselves, too. As Lucien did so, he felt a certain dull amazement. Father Guillaume had been right after all. Lucien could hear his wife's voice inside himself, could see her smile whenever he closed his eyes. A marvel, yes, but a painful marvel.

Seeing her and hearing her that way only reminded him he wouldn't see her or hear her in the flesh any more. Helplessly, he began to cry.

"Here, Papa." Of all people, his foolish son Georges was the one who held him and gave him a handkerchief: Georges, whose always-smiling face was as twisted with sorrow as Lucien's had to be.

"Thank you, my son," Lucien whispered. He felt his eyelids trying to freeze together, and rubbed at them with the handkerchief.

Then he and his sons and Marie's brother and Dr. Leonard O'Doull lifted the coffin and set it in the grave. What struck Lucien was how little it weighed, which had little to do with six men lifting it. After Dr.

O'Doull found the mass in Marie's belly, after the X ray and the operation that only confirmed the worst, the flesh had melted off her day by day, till she was little more than parchment skin wrapped around bones by the time the end finally, mercifully, came. Those were memories of his wife Galtier wished he wouldn't carry into the future with him. No matter what he wished, though, he would have them till his turn to lie in a coffin came. He made himself go over to the priest and say, "*Merci,* Father Guillaume."

The young priest nodded soberly. "You are welcome, and more than welcome. This is a cup I wish had passed from me, and one I wish had passed from your wife as well. I would have hoped she might enjoy many more happy years."

"Yes. I would have hoped for the same." Galtier looked up into the cloudy sky. More snow might start falling any time. "Better God should have taken me. Why did He take her and leave me all alone?"

That thought had been with him since he first found out Marie was ill.

“He knows the answer to that, even if He does not give it to us to know,” Father Guillaume said.

“Marie knows now, too,” Lucien said. “If ever I see God face to face, I intend to ask Him about it, and His explanation had better be a good one.” The priest coughed and turned red. Galtier went on, “And if I don’t see Him face to face, if I meet the Devil instead, as could be, then I intend to find out from him.”

Now Father Guillaume gravely shook his head. “Satan is the Father of Lies. Whatever he might tell you, you would not be able to believe it.”

With Quebecois stubbornness, Lucien said, “I’ll hear what he says, and then I’ll make up my own mind.”

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Charles came up to him and asked, “Do you want me to drive you home, Papa?”

“Why would I?” Galtier asked in honest surprise.

“After this . . . I was not sure how you would be,” his older son answered.

“I am not so very well,” Galtier agreed. “But if I am not so very well after burying my wife, are you so very well after burying your mother? It could be you would make a worse menace on the road than I, *n’est-ce pas* ?”

Charles looked surprised, but nodded. “Yes, it could be, I suppose.” He turned away. “I should have known you were too stubborn to take help from anyone.”

“When I need it, I take it,” Lucien said. “When I don’t, I don’t. Don’t be angry at me, son. I am not angry at you. And the two of us, we’re not so very different, eh?”

He knew that was true. Charles took after him in more than looks. His older son also had a character much like his own. After a moment’s thought, Charles gave him the same sort of grudging nod he would have used himself. “All right, Father. Yes, you’re right—I can be a

stiff-necked nuisance, too. I'll see you there, then?"

"Certainly," Galtier said. "Where else would I go, but to my own house?"

But when he got out of the Chevrolet close by the farmhouse on the land that had been in his family for almost 250 years, he wondered. He didn't want to go back into the house. Going in there had always—not literally always, but more than thirty years came close enough—meant going in to see Marie. Now she wasn't there. She never would be there, not any more. And remembering that she had been there, remembering the life together the two of them had built, the life now forever sundered, forever shattered, was like knives to Lucien. He had to gather himself before he could go inside.

Nicole and Leonard O'Doull were already there. So were Charles and his wife. One by one and in small groups, the rest of his children and his wife's relatives and his friends came in. There was plenty to drink and plenty to eat; the womenfolk in the family had been cooking since Marie died.

"Thank you all," Lucien said. "Thank you all very much for coming. Thank you for caring for Marie." His face twisted into a characteristically wry grin. "For I know you certainly would not have come for my sake."

"Certainly not, *mon beau-père,* " Dr. O'Doull said. "We all hate you."

For a moment, Galtier took him seriously, being too emotionally battered to recognize irony. But then even he saw the smile on his son-in-law's face, and those on the faces of his other loved ones. He wanted to smile, too, but ended up weeping once more instead. He felt mortified all over again, and angrily turned away from Dr. O'Doull.

"It's all right," said the American who'd become part of his family. "No one thinks less of you for it.

Here. Drink this." He gave Lucien a glass of applejack.

The homemade spirits went down Galtier's throat without his even noticing them. He had another glass, and another, all with scant effect. He felt too much already for applejack to make much difference. For **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

the next half hour or so, he thanked everyone who'd come to his

house to say good-bye to Marie.

“What will you do now, Papa?” Georges asked him. “Do you know yet?”

“What *can* I do?” Galtier answered. “I’ll go on as best I can. If I don’t feed the animals tomorrow, who will? If I don’t take care of the farm, who will? The work doesn’t do itself. You always thought it did, but it doesn’t. Someone has to do it. If no one does it, it doesn’t get done.”

“But . . .” His younger son gestured. “How can you do all the farm work, and then do all the housework, too?”

“Electricity helps,” Lucien said. “With electricity, everything is quicker and easier. And I was in the Army a long time ago. I know how to keep things tidy—unlike certain people I could name.”

Georges didn’t rise to that, which proved how solemn an occasion this was. He just asked, “And while you were in the Army, Papa, did they also teach you how to cook?”

“No, but then, who cares?” Galtier answered. “I am the only person I’ll be cooking for. I won’t starve to death. And if supper is particularly bad one night, I can always throw things at the clumsy fool who fixed it.”

He made his son laugh at that, and thought he’d tricked Georges—maybe even tricked himself—into believing everything was, or at least soon would be, all right. A few minutes later, though, Georges sprawled in a chair, hands over his face, weeping with as much heartbreak as Lucien knew himself.

What will *I do?* Galtier wondered. For all his glib talk, he had no idea. At the moment, he didn’t particularly want to go on living himself. Maybe that would change as time passed. He’d heard it did.

He’d heard it, but didn’t particularly believe it. *Why not me?* he wondered, as he had ever since he’d found Marie in the kitchen with tears running down her face.

He’d hoped Father Guillaume would have an answer for that, but no such luck. It would have to wait till he saw God, as Marie was seeing God now. *If He doesn’t have a good answer, I’ll give Him a piece of my mind.*

Nicole came over to him. She looked achingly like her mother, though

she was a few inches taller; Marie had been a little woman, not much over five feet. “She’s gone, Papa,” she said wonderingly. “I can’t believe it, but she’s gone.”

“I know,” Lucien said.

“I love you,” his oldest daughter said.

He hadn’t heard that from her for years. He suspected it meant, *I’m afraid I’ll lose you, too.* “And I love you, my dear,” he said, as if to reply, *I’m not going anywhere.* But that wasn’t really for him to say.

He looked up to, and past, the ceiling. *Don’t You argue with me,* he told God, and dared hope God was listening.

“Another Inauguration Day,” Nellie Jacobs said. “Dear God, where do the years go? First one I can recollect is President Blaine’s, back in 1881. I was just a little girl then, of course.”

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“Well, I hope to heaven Hosea Blackford does a better job than James G. Blaine did,” her husband answered.

“He’d better,” Nellie exclaimed. “A few months after Blaine got elected, the Confederates were shelling Washington. I’ve been through that twice now. It had better not happen again, that’s all I’ve got to say, because I don’t think anybody could be lucky enough to live through it three times.”

“I don’t look for a war any time soon,” Hal Jacobs said. “I don’t see how we could have one. The Confederates aren’t very strong, and we’re prosperous. I still think the stock market is sound, even if the money trouble in Europe has set it hiccoughing.”

“I’m glad it’s hiccoughing,” Nellie said. “It let us buy those shares of the Wireless Corporation for a lot less than they would have cost us a couple of months ago.”

“Buy on the dips,” Hal said wisely. “Buy on the dips, and you can’t go wrong.”

“That’s what they say,” Nellie agreed. “It’s worked out pretty well for us so far. I just wish we’d been able to start out when we were a lot

younger.”

Hal shrugged. “For one thing, we didn’t have the money. For another, the market was a lot riskier in those days—it would crash every few years. And then the war came along, and we were too busy to worry about it for quite a while.”

“Too busy? Well, yes, a little bit,” Nellie said. Hal pinned his Distinguished Service Medal on the breast pocket of his black jacket. With his white shirt, black cravat, and black homburg, the medal’s ribbon gave his outfit the only dash of color it had. Nellie nodded approval. “You look handsome,” she told him, and he did indeed look as handsome as he could.

“Thank you, my dear.” He always seemed to glow a little when she paid him a compliment. And he returned the favor: “You are as lovely as always.”

“Oh, foosh.” Nellie had heard too many compliments from men over the years to trust them or take them seriously. Men complimented women because they wanted something from them—most often one thing in particular. She put on her Order of Remembrance, then turned her back on her husband. “Fasten the ribbon at the back of my neck, would you, Hal?”

“Of course,” he said, and did. Then he kissed the back of her neck, too. She’d more than half expected him to do that, and she let him get away with it. By his relieved expression, he’d wondered if she would.

“Are you ready, Clara?” she called.

“Yes, Ma,” her daughter answered from the room across the hall. “Is it time to go?”

“Just about,” Nellie said. “And don’t forget your coat.”

“Do I have to bring it?” Clara said. “It’s not cold out.”

She was right. The weather was springlike, even though spring still lay two and a half weeks away. But Nellie answered, “Yes, take it. I’m bringing one, too. You never can tell what it’ll do.” Clara grumbled, but she couldn’t complain too hard, not if Nellie was also bringing a coat. And Nellie knew she was right.

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She also had an umbrella, though the sun shone brightly for now. No, you never could tell.

They walked toward the Mall, for the parade of bands and companies of soldiers and—since this was another Socialist administration—gangs of workers who would precede the new President Blackford's inaugural address. They had a spot picked out—right in front of the rebuilt National Museum of Remembrance, and not far from the platform where the new president would speak. Edna and Merle and Armstrong would meet them there if they could fight their way through the crowd.

They wiggled forward till they stood in the second row in front of the museum. Nellie could see the platform, which was already filling with dignitaries. "We made good time," she said.

"Yes, we did," Hal agreed. "We'll be able to see everything, and we won't have any trouble hearing the president talk."

Clara chose that moment to announce, "Mama, I have to go."

"You *always* have to go," Nellie said in no small exasperation. She sighed. "I'll take you into the museum. Hold our places, Hal. Do the best you can." Her husband nodded. She took Clara's hand.

"Come along with me, young lady. Why didn't you go before we left? That's what I want to know."

"I did," Clara answered with a child's self-righteousness. "I have to go *again* ."

The line for the women's powder room at the Museum of Remembrance was as long as Nellie had feared it would be. She and Clara needed twenty minutes to work their way to the front. By then, Clara was fidgeting enough to convince Nellie she hadn't said she needed to go just to be annoying.

Many more people had come to the Mall by the time Nellie and Clara emerged from the museum once more. Nellie had to do some elbowing, and stepped on a couple of feet that didn't get out of the way fast enough to suit her. "Watch where you're going, lady," an angry man said.

"I'm so sorry," Nellie answered, and stepped on him again, not in the

least by accident.

Hal Jacobs wasn't a big man. Nellie began to wonder if she'd ever find him. She was starting to worry when Merle Grimes said, "Hello, Mother Jacobs." He and Edna and Armstrong stood with Hal.

"Hello, Merle," she said. "I'd've gone right past the lot of you if you hadn't spoken up, Lord help me if I wouldn't."

"We're all together now," Hal said. "That's the way things are supposed to be."

"That's right," Edna said, a little louder than she had to. She clung to Merle's hand. They both wore their decorations, too. From what Nellie could see, things between them weren't quite the same as they had been before Merle found out about Nicholas H. Kincaid. They were tolerable, and Edna didn't seem actively discontented, but they weren't so lovey-dovey as before. *Told you so, Edna,* Nellie said, but only to herself.

A band began to play. Nellie stopped worrying about her daughter and son-in-law—and even about her other daughter and her grandson, who got along no better than they ever did—and watched yet another inauguration, yet another passing of the torch from one president to another.

This year, the passing was odd, as outgoing President Sinclair was about fifteen years younger than **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

incoming President Blackford. It was as if the USA were moving backwards in time, something the country didn't do very often. Chief Justice Holmes administered the oath to Hosea Blackford.

Voice aided by a microphone, Blackford repeated the words that made him president of the United States: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

A sigh ran through the crowd. Nellie had heard that oath every four years since 1881—not counting 1916. It made official what had happened five months before. Now the country had a new president.

Now we see what happens next, she thought, as if it were a new chapter in a novel. And so, in a way, it was.

The most immediate thing that happened next was Blackford's inaugural address. Nellie got a good look at him up there on the stand. Behind him, his wife, who was much younger than he, tried to keep a little boy younger than Armstrong quiet. *Robbing the cradle, Mr. President?* Nellie thought.

"I am pleased to tell you how well off our country is today, thanks to the inspired leadership given over the past eight years by my most distinguished predecessor, President Upton Sinclair." Hosea Blackford owned a ringing baritone. Nellie thought she remembered hearing he'd been a lawyer before going to Congress. He certainly had the voice for it. He led the applause for the president leaving office. Sinclair rose one last time from his seat behind the podium to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd.

As the new ex-president sat down again, Blackford went on, "We are at peace on our continent. We extend the hand of friendship to both the Confederate States and the Empire of Mexico. We share a common heritage with the CSA, and I am pleased to note that Confederate President Burton Mitchel, a civilized gentleman, shares this view. May we see no more war in North America, not ever again!"

Nellie clapped as loud as she could. If war came, it would surely come to Washington, would surely come down on her head. She wanted peace for her daughter, peace for her grandson. She'd seen too much of war ever to want to know it again.

"To the north, the Republic of Quebec is our staunch ally," Blackford declared. Even Nellie knew that meant the Quebecois would do as they were told. The president said, "English-speaking Canada continues to recover under our guidance." Even Nellie knew that meant the rest of the Canucks would damn well have to do as they were told. "And Utah, long turbulent, looks toward the day when it shall be a state like any other."

That drew scattered boos even from a mostly friendly crowd. Few people outside of Utah had much sympathy for the Mormons, not after two uprisings.

"Broad oceans protect us from foreign foes," President Blackford said. "The Sandwich Islands serve as a bastion against the Empire of Japan, while the Atlantic shields us against Europe's unending turmoil and danger. And let me note that I am completely confident the panics of the past ten days in Vienna, in Rome, in Paris, and in London will not affect the Empire of Germany in any important way, and that they

cannot possibly cross the Atlantic and endanger our own well-being."

Everyone applauded vigorously there. So far, the Berlin and New York exchanges had avoided most of the jitters afflicting the smaller European markets, though Richmond also seemed nervous. Beside Nellie, Hal murmured, "If we can ride it out for another week, we'll be fine. The Austro-Hungarians cause so much trouble. If they hadn't called for repayment of that Russian loan . . ."

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"Hush," Nellie told him. "I want to hear the president."

Blackford seemed to have said everything he was going to say about foreign affairs. He switched to what he hoped to accomplish within the United States: "We want no man hungry. We want no one able-bodied without work. We want no capitalists exploiting the workers of our great land. We want justice for all, and we intend to get it. We will not let the aged, who have worked hard all their lives, be discarded like so many worn-out cogs in our industrial machine."

Nellie applauded that. She'd worked hard all her life, and looked forward to the day when she wouldn't have to any more. Old-age insurance sounded good to her—better than relying on whatever charity she might get from Merle and Edna, and perhaps from Clara and whomever she ended up marrying.

If Blackford can find a way for me to have enough to live on when I'm old, I'd vote Socialist forever—if I could vote at all. Women's suffrage was here, all over the USA—but not in Washington, D.C. Men were every bit as disenfranchised in the nation's legal capital. Now more than ever, that struck Nellie as monstrously unfair. Men had complained about it for as long as she could remember. It also affected her now, so she noticed it more. Hosea Blackford said not a word about votes for Washington.

X

Clarence Potter had to wait to see his broker. He spent the time in Ulysses Dalby's waiting room drumming his fingers on his thigh. To the outside world, he showed only impatience. He kept the fear and rage he felt bottled up inside. No one would have known from his stolid, impassive face the way his heart pounded or how cold and

damp the palms of his hands were.

At last, the broker's secretary said, "Mr. Dalby will see you now, Mr. Potter."

"Thank you, Betty." Potter strode past her without another word. She was a redhead whose generous contours could usually be counted on to distract male investors from their worries. Today, Potter was too worried to be distracted.

He closed the door behind him as he went into Ulysses Dalby's office. The broker was a few years older than he: a plump, gray-haired man with a jovial manner who wore sharp suits. He extended a well-manicured hand with a glittering pinkie ring for Potter to shake. "Good morning, sir," he said, his Low Country accent sweet and syrupy. "What can I do for you this fine day?"

"Get me out," Clarence Potter said.

Dalby raised an eyebrow. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Get me out," Potter repeated. "Sell every stock I have, fast as you can do it, best price you can get, but sell. Richmond and New York exchanges both. I'll be back for the cash this afternoon."

"Mr. Potter, I hesitate to carry out an order like that," Dalby said. "Are you sure you've considered carefully?"

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"Maybe you'll call me a fool a month from now," Potter answered. "If I'm wrong, I can buy back in.

But I'll have something to buy back in with. My opinion is that there's a fire in the woods. If I don't get out now, it will burn me out."

"Panic selling, sir, will only make the fire worse," Dalby said.

"Sitting around while the woods burn won't do me any good," Potter said. "I'll take my chances on the other. What have you done with *your* portfolio, Mr. Dalby?"

"I've diversified as much as possible," Dalby replied.

"That's fancy talk. It means you're already out of the markets, doesn't

it?" Potter asked. When the broker didn't answer right away, Potter nodded. "I thought so. I'm getting out while the getting is at least tolerable, if not good. Place those sell orders right this minute. I want to make sure you do it. I'll be back for my money this afternoon, mind you, and I expect to have it." He didn't quite say, *I know where you live, Dalby,* but it hung in the air.

Only after the broker made the necessary telephone calls did Clarence Potter leave his office. When he stepped back out onto the streets of Charleston, he still felt panic in the air. A newsboy shouted, "France leaves the gold standard!" Another one called, "London market plunges again! Big selloff in Richmond!"

And yet another cried, "President Mitchel calls for calm! Confederate dollar still sound, he says!"

Potter hoped Burton Mitchel was right about that last. If the currency went out the window as it had right after the war, there'd be hell to pay, but no money for the Devil. *Will I have to buy gold?* Potter wondered. *Is there any gold to buy? I'll worry about that later. First things first. Banknotes. Nice brown banknotes. Let me get a good, fat wad of them and I can laugh at the world for a while.*

When he went back to Ulysses Dalby's office that afternoon, the newspaper hawkers were talking about the beating the Richmond exchange had taken, and about the one the New York exchange had taken, too. He set his teeth and hoped the broker hadn't decamped with his money.

Betty the decorative secretary led him into Dalby's office. Just seeing Dalby made him let out a sigh of relief. He let out another one when Dalby handed him a thick sheaf of brown banknotes. What he let out after counting the money was more on the order of a grunt of pain. "This is all?" he demanded.

"That's all, Mr. Potter. I tried to warn you: you don't get top dollar in a bear market," Ulysses Dalby said. "Here are the transaction records. I'm not cheating you."

"Well, maybe you don't," Potter said after carefully checking the records. He did his best to sound philosophical. "But I would have got a lot less if I'd waited till tomorrow or the day after or next week, wouldn't I?"

Dalby nodded. "I have to say you would have. I'm also going to ask you one thing more: in what bank do you intend to put your money

now that you've got it?"

"Why, the First Secession Bank and Trust," Potter answered. "I've been doing business with them since I came down here after the war. You must know that. How come?"

"Mm . . . It may be nothing. You're a good judge of banks—I think the First Secession is a pretty solid outfit. It may come through all this just fine."

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Clarence Potter stared at him. "It may, you say?" Dalby nodded again. Potter whistled softly. "You think it's going to be as bad as that? Banks going under, the way they did in '88 and '04?"

"Yes, it may be that bad," the broker answered after a little thought. "On the other hand, it may be a good deal worse." Potter started to laugh, thinking Dalby had made a grim sort of joke. But Dalby's face was serious, even somber. "I'm not kidding, Mr. Potter," he said. "I'm not kidding at all. In the last couple of panics, our markets took a beating, and so did Wall Street up in the USA, but the rest of the world went on about its business. It's not like that this time, sir. I wish to heaven it were. This time . . . It won't do much to Africa, I suppose, and maybe not to China, either—the heathen Chinese are already about as bad off as they can be. But I don't believe anyplace else will get off untouched."

Potter whistled again, an even lower, even more mournful note. He might have been tolling the passing of an era. *Maybe I am,* he thought. "My God," he said aloud. "And I thought I was a pessimist."

"I watched the ticker tape all day, Mr. Potter. I watched it get further and further behind the sales it was supposed to be listing," Dalby said. "When I saw you this morning, I still had some hope. I'd say it died about an hour and a half ago. Maybe I'm wrong. I hope I'm wrong. I hope so. But I don't think so, not any more."

He looked shellshocked. That was exactly how he looked, Potter realized. He'd been through too much, like men in the Army of Northern Virginia during the war. They'd got that stunned, beaten look on their faces, too. Half the time after that, they didn't care if they lived or died. Dalby didn't seem to, not right now.

Stowing your money in your mattress was a joke that went at least as far back as money and mattresses.

Potter wondered which of those had come first. Joke or not, he did just that with the banknotes he'd got from Ulysses Dalby. The next morning, he closed out his account at the First Secession Bank and Trust.

The lines at the bank weren't too bad. "I assure you, sir," said the young clerk who gave him his money,

"we are perfectly sound."

"I believe you, son," Potter answered. "That's why I'm doing this now. Who knows how the devil you're going to be in a couple of weeks, though?"

The clerk didn't try to tell him everything would be fine. He found himself wishing the fellow would have.

He went to the Whig Party meeting the following Tuesday more out of morbid curiosity than for any other reason. The stock exchanges hadn't got any better. They'd kept right on sinking, Richmond faster than New York. Lines outside the banks were starting to get longer—and more anxious.

The meeting went very much as Potter expected—very much as he'd feared—it would. It put him in mind of a lot of maiden ladies talking—or rather, trying not to talk—about sex. The lawyers and businessmen circled the building crash like a man circling a rattlesnake in a small room. They couldn't ignore it, but they didn't want to deal with it, either. They kept making noises about "changing conditions"

and "uncertainty" and "a seeming slump in the business cycle."

Clarence Potter stuck up his hand. He needed a while to be recognized. He wasn't surprised; he'd expected they wouldn't want to notice him. He'd proved himself a gadfly, and they didn't like that. But he was, or could be, a patient gadfly. At last, the chairman had no choice but to turn his way and ask,

"Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"Boys," Potter said, "the jig is up."

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Bang! The chairman rapped loudly for order. “Have you anything more germane to say, Mr. Potter, or may we move on to the next order of business?”

“What *is* the next order of business in the middle of a crash?” Potter demanded. “Sending out for more strings so we can fiddle while the market burns?” *Bang!* went the gavel again. Potter ignored it. “Next Congressional elections are only a few months away,” he said harshly. “If this is as bad as it looks, how do we intend to send one single solitary Whig incumbent back to Richmond for the new Congress? We’d better be thinking about that, eh, before we worry about anything else. And we’d better try to keep the country on its feet so it’ll be in some sort of shape to want to vote for us. How are we supposed to go about that?”

Bang! Bang! Bang! “Mr. Potter, you are as thoroughly out of order as it is possible for one man to be,”

the chairman all but shouted.

“You’re right,” Potter agreed. “But the country is a lot further out of order than I can be, and so are the Whigs. I have one last question, gentlemen, and then I’m done: if this turns out to be as bad as it looks right now, how the hell do you propose to keep those Freedom Party yokels from trying to pick up the pieces?”

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! The gavel descended again and again, a veritable fusillade of banging.

That succeeded in silencing Clarence Potter. But, he noticed, no one tried to answer his question. He’d expected nothing different, nothing better. He’d hoped for something better, but he knew too well the difference between hope and expectation. He walked out of the meeting gloomy, but he’d figured he would.

A couple of days later, after watching stocks tumble lower yet, after listening on the wireless to a speech by President Mitchel that was as full of misplaced optimism as any he’d ever heard, he decided to telephone Anne Colleton. He wasn’t even sure she would remember him; a brief acquaintance in a political squabble a couple of years before didn’t necessarily constitute an introduction.

But she said, “Oh, yes, Mr. Potter. I do appreciate the help you gave

me against that fool of a Braxton Donovan. What's on your mind today?"

"I don't know, frankly," he answered. "The main reason I called was to see how you were doing. If anyone could land on her feet in this mess, you're the one."

"I'm not too bad," she said. "As soon as I saw which way the wind was blowing, I sold out as fast as I could. I got hurt. I didn't get wiped out. If I'd stayed in the market a little longer, I would have. How about you, Mr. Potter?"

"About the same," he told her. "I could have done better if I'd left a couple of days sooner, but I'm getting by for the time being. An awful lot of people aren't, though, and it may get worse before it gets better."

"I'm afraid you're right," Anne Colleton said. "Not many people can see that. In a way, it's good to know someone can."

"Belshazzar needed Daniel to read the writing on the wall," Potter said. "I hope someone can do the job for us."

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"I wish there were no job to do," Anne answered.

"Well, so do I," he answered. "But I'm very much afraid this is only the beginning, and not just for the Confederate States. In a way, misery loves company. In another way, if everyone's in trouble, nobody can help anybody else get out of it."

Anne Colleton didn't say anything for perhaps half a minute. At last, she told him, "That makes good sense to me." Another pause. "You seem to make very good sense, Mr. Potter. Maybe we should talk some more if we get the chance."

And what am I letting myself in for if I say yes to that? Potter wondered. But the answer seemed obvious. Trouble. *Only question is, how much trouble?* He too paused, but not for long. "Maybe we should, Miss Colleton. Maybe we should."

When Chester Martin got off his shift at the Toledo steel mill, he went straight to the Socialist Party hall not far from the factory. He could

have had himself a beer there, but opened a bottle of Nesbit's instead.

He wanted to keep his wits about him.

Spotting Albert Bauer, he called, "What do you think of this management notion?"

"Cutting shifts from eight hours to six, you mean?" Bauer answered.

"Yeah, that's what I mean, all right, unless there's another brand-new management notion I haven't heard about yet," Chester said.

Bauer didn't look happy. "Way I see it, we've got two choices," he said. "We can say yes, and let 'em cut our pay by a quarter. Or we can so no, and have 'em fire one out of four of us." *He* was drinking a beer. He drained it, then added, "This is what you call being between the Devil and the deep blue sea."

"I don't trust those management bastards," Martin said. "Like as not, it's a trick to pump up their profits and hurt us at the same time. Instead of hiring goons and scabs, they play these games nowadays."

"I know." But Bauer looked mighty unhappy. "Hate to tell you, Chester, but I don't think so, not this time. I've seen the orders going through the pipeline. They've fallen right off a cliff. Nobody's buying steel, not to speak of. There's no point in making it if nobody's ordering. Less than no point, in fact—a big inventory just drives prices down when orders do start picking up. I don't think the bosses are playing games for the sake of playing games, not this time. I wish they were. I'd strike in a red-hot minute."

"Fine. Wonderful. But somebody'd better tell me how the hell I'm supposed to make ends meet on three-quarters of my proper pay."

"Well, that depends," Bauer said slowly. "Would you rather try to make ends meet on none of your proper pay? The company's trying hard not to get rid of people. I don't like the bosses, and I never will, but I have to give them credit for that."

Martin told him exactly where he'd like to give the bosses credit. Bauer laughed. Martin said, "It's not funny, dammit. If my wife didn't have work, we *wouldn't* make it on three-quarters of a paycheck. I'd sooner take my chances on getting the sack. If I did, I'd look for something else. And if I didn't, I'd be **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

all right."

"So much for the solidarity of the proletariat," Bauer observed, and Martin felt himself flush. Bauer went on, "But if they didn't get you in the first round of firings, how do you know they wouldn't the next time?

Because there will be a next time, Chester, sure as you're standing there."

"A next time." Martin scowled. "Hadn't thought of that. Bet you're right, though. Who would have thought a loan the Russians couldn't—or maybe wouldn't—pay back would cause all this trouble?"

"For want of a nail," Bauer said, and then sighed. "We're all going to be wanting nails before too long."

"Oh, yeah?" Chester said. "If we're all going to be wanting nails, how come they're cutting back on how much steel they're making?"

"Because whether we want them or not, we won't be able to afford them," Bauer answered.

"Of course we won't be able to afford them. They're cutting our hours."

Bauer's smile was full of anything but amusement. "Welcome to the vicious circle."

That circle was anything but welcome to Martin. He hung around the Party hall till he saw no one had any firm notion of how to respond to the bosses' proposal for cutting hours. No one could decide if it was good because it saved jobs or bad because it cut pay. Martin concluded the proposal would probably go forward. Strong opposition from the workers might have stopped it. If they couldn't decide whether it was good or bad, they would find out by experiment—on themselves.

He rode the trolley back to the flat he shared with Rita. His own mood was glum, or worse than glum.

He'd told Albert Bauer the exact truth. If his hours and pay got cut to three-quarters of what he had now, the only thing that would keep him afloat was his wife's salary.

And Rita seemed anything but happy when he came through the door.

After a perfunctory kiss, she said,

“Orders have taken a real tumble since the market started going down. Nobody wants pipe any more—not new pipe, anyway.”

It was spring, a bright spring, the weather full of new-puppy warmth and hope. Ice walked Chester Martin’s back even so. He tried to remember when he’d known fear like this. The Roanoke front? He shook his head. That terror had been different, and far more immediate: fear of death and pain and mutilation. This was something else. Fear of loss, fear of hunger, fear of endless misery without escape.

Fear of bills. Fear of moving back in with his mother and father—if this quiet, creeping horror didn’t lay hold of them, too.

When Martin laughed, he might have been whistling while walking past a graveyard. “It was just a few weeks ago when we figured we could have any old thing we wanted,” he said, and went on to tell Rita about the company’s plan to cut everybody’s hours.

She listened to that, her face getting longer and longer. “I know what I want,” she said. “I want us to keep our jobs, that’s what.”

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “That’s about what it boils down to, isn’t it?”

“It’s hard times when your neighbor’s out of work,” Rita said. “It’s the end of the world when you are.”

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“Maybe if the government really had seized the means of production this wouldn’t have happened,”

Chester said, trying to make himself believe it. He couldn’t. Shaking his head, he went on, “No, they couldn’t’ve done it, I don’t think. It would have meant real class war—and it might not have helped.”

“What are we going to do?” Rita asked. “What *can* we do?”

“Hang on tight,” he said. “We’re still working. We’re going to lose most of the stocks we bought, though. I hated answering the last margin call—felt like throwing money away. And we probably won’t be able to afford to answer the next one.”

“We’ve got each other. We’re healthy.” Rita sounded as if she was trying to reassure herself, and not having much luck.

“It can’t get much worse,” Chester said. “How could stocks go any lower than they have already?

There’s got to be a floor somewhere.”

“Yes, but where?” Rita asked, and he had no answer. He felt less ashamed of that than he might have otherwise—for no one else in the USA—no one else in the whole world, by all the signs—had any answer to it, either. No, he wasn’t ashamed, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t frightened.

He went to work day by day, having nothing else he could do. Before long, his shift did go from eight hours to six. His pay dropped by a quarter, too. He hated that, but he supposed he would have hated being without a paycheck even more. As long as Rita had a job, too, they got by.

The market continued to sink. Reading the papers, Martin took occasional consolation in noticing Richmond stocks had fallen even further than those on Wall Street. Did misery really love company? He didn’t know about that, either. What he did know was that, every day, there seemed to be more misery to go around.

People started telling stories about brokers jumping off bridges and diving out of windows. Nobody could say whether those stories were true. People told them anyhow. One day in the middle of June, Wall Street stopped sinking. It dove. Maybe brokers didn’t, but the market did. The wave of sell orders overwhelmed the ticker tape. It lagged ever further behind the tidal wave of disaster. The last few shares Chester had so proudly held on to went then, on what the papers called Swan-Dive Wednesday. By that time, he’d almost stopped caring. Not till almost four hours after the market closed did the chattering tape finally spit out the last of the day’s losses.

When Thursday dawned, the market didn’t open. An eerie calm prevailed at the steel mill. “Reminds me of the day after a big attack that didn’t work,” Martin said to Albert Bauer as they opened their lunch pails together.

Bauer had been at the front, too. He nodded. “Or maybe it did,” he said, “only we were on the receiving end.” He took a bite out of his cheese sandwich. He’d usually eaten bologna or pastrami before the market tumbled. So had Martin. His sandwich had cheese in it, too.

Cheese was cheaper. Bauer went on, “President Blackford’s got almost four years left in his term, but he’s a lame duck already. Poor sorry son of a bitch.”

“He’s doing everything he can,” Chester said. “I like what he said in the paper this morning. ‘We have nowhere to go but up.’ That’s good. He means it, too—you can tell.”

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“Oh, yeah. I’m not arguing with you,” Bauer answered. “But even if things do go up, what will people remember? They’ll remember how far down we went, and who was in the Powel House when we did.

Come 1932, he’ll have Democrats lined up six deep to run against him.”

Martin thought about that. It made altogether too much sense to be comfortable. “Well, the class struggle takes a step back,” he said. “Or probably takes a step back. You never can tell, not for sure.”

“Want to bet?” Bauer said. “I’m as good a Socialist as any man around, and I’ve got twenty bucks says there’ll be a Democrat in Powel House after the ‘32 elections.”

“You won’t get my twenty,” Martin said. “Wish I could, but Rita’d kill me—and I think I’d lose the dough. Times are tough enough without throwing it away.”

“Of course, by the time ‘32 rolls around, I might have forgotten who I made the bet with,” Bauer said.

“Fat chance,” Martin answered. “It’s not just that you wouldn’t forget between now and then, Al. It’s that you wouldn’t let me forget.”

“Who, me?” Bauer did his best to sound indignant. “Come on. Eat up. We’ve got to get back to it pretty goddamn quick.”

“Right,” Martin said tightly. The company was also cracking down on people who violated its rules. He didn’t want to end up on the street. Six hours’ pay was better than none at all.

When he got home that night, he found Rita crumpled in tears on the sofa. “Oh, Lord!” he said. “What’s the matter, sweetie?” He feared he

knew the answer even without the question he had to ask.

And he was right. “They fired me,” his wife answered. “They told me to clean out my desk and not come back tomorrow—they can’t afford to keep me any more. I’ve been there seven years, and they threw me out like a piece of dirt. Where am I going to go? What am I going to do? What are *we* going to do?”

“I don’t know,” Chester said dazedly. “So help me God, I don’t know.” In a few weeks, they’d gone from having two paychecks to having three-quarters of one. That was bad enough—was worse than bad enough. But what was worse yet, what was really terrifying, was that, compared to an awful lot of people, they were still well off.

In the Terry, times hadn’t been good since the last hectic days of the Great War. Back then, with every white man possible at the front, Augusta’s Negroes had filled factory jobs galore. They’d made less money than the whites they were displacing, but even that added up to more money than they’d ever seen in their lives till that time. Then the whites, those who’d lived, came back, and the factory jobs dried up. People began living hand-to-mouth again.

Erasmus’ place was a case in point. Scipio would have thought a fish market and café in a poor part of town immune from anything so remote as a stock-market panic. After all, the worst had happened in the Terry a dozen years earlier . . . hadn’t it?

He would have thought that, but he would have been wrong. Erasmus’ wrinkled face got longer with each passing day. His grizzled hair got grayer, too, or so it seemed to Scipio.

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One morning, while Scipio washed the pile of breakfast dishes, Erasmus put his discontent into words:

“They ain’t comin’ in.”

“Ain’t that bad, boss,” Scipio said. “They ain’t comin’, where we get all these here dishes?”

“They ain’t comin’,” Erasmus repeated. “ ‘Fore all this panic happen, woulda been twice the dishes.

Woulda been twice the money, too."

He was right, of course. Scipio's denial meant very little. Erasmus' place remained busy. It wasn't packed, not the way it had been before the market plunged. Scipio put the best face on things he could:

"People's bein' careful wid dey money."

Erasmus shook his head. "A month ago, say, people was bein' careful with their money. Ain't like that no more. Now what it's like is, folks who come here, they ain't hardly got no money to be careful with."

"Lotta white folks outta work," Scipio admitted. "Bathsheba, she done lost fo', five cleanin' jobs las'

few weeks. De buckra ain't got the money to give her."

"Here in the Terry, ain't many of us works for our ownselves," Erasmus said. "We mostly works for the buckra, almost like it was still slavery days. If the buckra outta work, *we* outta work, on account of they can't afford to pay us no more. How is I supposed to make money when there ain't no money to make?"

"Dunno," Scipio said. He waved. "Doin' pretty good so far."

"Ain't broke yet," Erasmus said. "Dunno why not, 'specially the way you eats." He wagged a finger at Scipio.

Had Scipio been white, he would have turned red. But taking meals at Erasmus' place was as much a part of what his boss paid him as the banknotes he got every Friday. It saved him money. The way things were going, the way Bathsheba's cleaning jobs were drying up, he needed to save all the money he could.

And Erasmus said not a word when he fixed himself a fried-egg sandwich and a big plate of grits for lunch. He'd just finished when the first lunch customer came in: a cleaning woman whose latest job had been close by the edge of the Terry. "Don't know how long I kin keep comin' here," she said as she took a bite out of a bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwich. "White folks is lettin' people go. Ain't got no money their ownselves, sure ain't got none to spend on cleanin' their houses."

"I seen that, too," Scipio said. "My wife, she done los' half she people."

“World’s a crazy place nowadays,” the woman said. “Lady at the house I was at jus’ now, her husband, he been a Whig forever, an’ his daddy before him, an’ *his* daddy before him. She say he talkin’ ‘bout votin’ Freedom when the ‘lections come round this fall. I didn’t say nothin’. You don’t like to tell the lady what’s payin’ you her husband ain’t got no brains.” She took another bite.

From his station in front of the stove, Erasmus said, “When the white folks see their money goin’ away, some of ’em liable to do some crazy things.”

“How many of ’em do dem crazy things?” Scipio wondered as he fetched the cleaning lady a cup of coffee. “We gwine have buckra in de streets yellin’, ‘Freedom!’ again? Reckoned we was done wid
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dat.”

“God do what He want to do, not what we wants Him to do,” the cleaning woman said. “Thank you kindly, Xerxes,” she added when Scipio set the coffee on the table.

“You’s welcome,” he answered absently.

How many whites were losing their jobs or losing money? He had no way of knowing, not for sure.

More than a few, though; the stories in the *Constitutionalist* made that very clear. So did what was happening to the jobs of Negroes who depended on whites for work. How many of the whites who lost their jobs *would* start voting for Jake Featherston and his party?

Scipio had no way of knowing that, either, not for sure. But he’d just heard of one, and that was one more than he wanted to know about.

The cleaning lady gulped the coffee and got to her feet. She left money on the tabletop and hurried away. Over her shoulder, she said, “Can’t be late gittin’ back. Miz Hutton, I reckon she grab the first excuse she find to put me on the street. Don’t aim to give her none.” Out the door she went, in a hurry because her tip was small.

A man who sold secondhand furniture across the street came in for some fried catfish. As he ate, he remarked, “Had me a couple-three buckra come in the last few days. Ain’t seen none in a hell of a long time ‘fore that.”

“Buy anything?” Scipio asked.

“Sure enough did,” the furniture dealer answered. “Sold me a couple beds and a good chest o’

drawers.”

“Good for you, Athenaeus,” Erasmus said. “ ‘Bout time I hear of somebody doin’ good right now.”

“Fellas sellin’ new furniture, they’s the ones wouldn’t be happy if they knowed,” Athenaeus said. “White folks all say they look at the new stuff first, but they can’t afford it, no way, nohow. So they come to me.”

“Good to hear it,” Scipio echoed; as Erasmus had said, any news of success was welcome. But Athenaeus wasn’t wrong. What would the white furniture dealers whose goods hadn’t sold think?

And it wasn’t just what they would think. What would they do? What could any man do, when he stared at bills and had no money to pay them? Would they put on white shirts and butternut trousers and start shouting, “Freedom!” at the top of their lungs? If they did, could anybody blame them?

Scipio nodded. *I can blame them,* he thought, hearing inside himself the precise English he no longer dared speak loud. *I can blame them, for the Freedom Party will not make their troubles disappear, even if they think it will. And what the Freedom Party will do to me and mine if ever it should come to power . . .*

That fear had spread all through the colored communities of the CSA in the early 1920s, and then receded as the Party’s fortunes ebbed. Now white men were seeing the Confederate States could still know hard times. What would that discovery, that rediscovery, mean for Negroes here? Scipio didn’t know. He feared finding out. Try as he would, though, he saw no escape.

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“What kin we do?” he said aloud, hoping one of the other men in the place would have a better idea than he did. “Can’t go nowheres.”

“Ain’t noplace else wants us,” Erasmus said. “Not the USA.”

“That’s for sure,” Athenaeus agreed. “They don’t like the niggers they got. Ain’t got very many, an’ sure don’t want no more.”

“Stock market in de USA down de sewer, too,” Scipio said. “They ain’t got no money, no spirit, to help nobody else, not when they got trouble helpin’ they ownselves.”

“Good things they’s down, too, you wants to know what I thinks,” Athenaeus said. “If they was up, they be lordin’ it over us. They do that, jus’ git more buckra listenin’ to Jake Featherston on the wireless and gittin’ all hot and bothered afterwards.”

For a long time before the world finally went mad in 1914, respect for each other’s strength had kept the United States and Confederate States from going to war. Scipio had never imagined mutual weakness could do the same, but he couldn’t deny Athenaeus had a point. It wasn’t one he’d thought of, either.

“Empire of Mexico, mebbe,” he said. But neither Erasmus nor Athenaeus paid much attention to that.

Scipio couldn’t take it seriously himself. To a Negro in eastern Georgia, the Empire of Mexico might as well have been on the dark side of the moon. Besides, what were the odds that Mexicans had any more use for Negroes than white men did?

Erasmus asked a more immediately relevant question: “ ‘Fore long, some black folks gwine start runnin’

out o’ money. What happen to ’em?”

“They git hungry,” Athenaeus said.

“Church help some,” Scipio said.

“Church be swamped,” Erasmus said. Scipio nodded. By all the signs, that would come true, and soon.

His boss went on, “Ain’t no use waitin’ fo’ the gummint to do somethin’. Wait till Judgment Day, gummint won’t do nothin’ fo’ no niggers.”

“ ‘Fore long, some white folks starts runnin’ out o’ money and gettin’ hungry, too,” Athenaeus said.

“Plenty po’ buckra, they ain’t hardly better off’n niggers. Gummint

worry ‘bout the buckra first, you wait an’ see.”

“What’s a po’ nigger gwine do?” Erasmus asked. “Starve?”

The word hung in the air. Scipio had known a lot of hungry people; during the war, he’d been hungry himself after the Confederates destroyed the Congaree Socialist Republic. But there was a difference between being hungry and starving. He tried to imagine thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of Negroes (and whites, too) going without because they had no money with which to buy food.

Outside, the sun shone brightly. The day was hot and muggy. It would stay hot and muggy from now all the way till fall. Even so, Scipio felt a chill. This was liable to be a disaster of Biblical proportions.

“What kin we do?” Athenaeus asked mournfully. “What kin anybody do?”

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“Pray,” Erasmus answered. “God done made this happen. He kin make us come through it, too, so long as He take it in His mind He want to do dat.”

“Amen,” Athenaeus said. Scipio made himself nod. He didn’t want to seem out of place—seeming out of place was one of his greatest fears, because it was deadly dangerous. But if God had really wanted to do something about this disaster, couldn’t He have stopped it in the first place?

“More we pray, more He gonna know how much we loves Him,” Erasmus said. Along with being a believer, though, he was a relentlessly practical man. He went on, “ ‘Course, we gots to work hard, too.

God ain’t never gonna pay no heed to nobody who don’t work hard.”

Scipio would have bet he’d say that. Erasmus not only believed in the virtues of hard work, he practiced what he preached. Scipio himself was sure it couldn’t hurt. What he wasn’t sure of was how much it could help.

Something was wrong in Salt Lake City. Colonel Abner Dowling shook his head. Something was always wrong in Salt Lake City. It wouldn’t

have been the place, or the sort of place, it was if something hadn't been wrong all the time. But something now was different. Anything different in Salt Lake City automatically roused Dowling's suspicions. As far as he could tell, *different* and *dangerous* were two sides of the same coin.

"I'll tell you what it is, sir," Captain Angelo Toricelli said.

"Go ahead, Angelo," Dowling urged. "Tell."

"Nobody's building anything, that's what," his adjutant said. "It's quieter than it ought to be."

Slowly, Dowling nodded. "You're right. I'll be damned if you're not right. It isn't on account of they've got everything rebuilt, either. Still plenty of wreckage lying around."

"Yes, sir," Captain Toricelli agreed. "But an awful lot of money that would have paid for more construction all of a sudden isn't there—it's gone."

Dowling nodded again. He gave Toricelli a sidelong glance. Fortunately, his adjutant didn't notice. The way the younger man watched every penny, he might have been a Jew, not an Italian. Dowling didn't want Toricelli to know he was thinking that. He didn't want to insult his adjutant. And everybody had to pay special attention to money these days, because it was so very thin on the ground.

With a sigh, Dowling said, "Not much we can do about it. At least we've got the Army paying our salaries."

"Yes, sir, and I'm damn glad of it, too," Toricelli answered. "I just got a letter from New York, from home. My brother-in-law's out of a job."

"What's he do?" Dowling asked.

"He reads X rays, sir—went to night school to learn the trade," Toricelli said, not without pride. "My sister and he've got five children, and another one on the way. I don't know what they'll do if he doesn't **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

find something quick."

"I hope he does," Dowling said, on the whole sincerely. "Who would

have thought the bottom could drop out of things so fast?”

“Nobody,” Captain Toricelli answered. “But it has.”

He was right about that, too. The Army censored Salt Lake City papers pretty hard. Pain came through their pages even so. Stories of half-done buildings abandoned, of banks going under, of people losing jobs, couldn’t very well be prettied up. And the only way to leave those stories out of the newspapers would have been to have no papers at all.

Captain Toricelli touched a fat document on his desk. “Don’t tell me what that is,” Dowling said. “Let me guess: another normalization petition.”

“Right the first time,” his adjutant said.

“It’s not as though I haven’t seen enough of them,” Dowling said. Every few months, the Mormons of Salt Lake City—and the occasional gentile, too—would circulate petitions asking that Utah finally be treated like any other state in the USA. Dowling had got a couple of dozen since coming to the state capital. With a sigh, he went on, “They still haven’t figured out I’m not the one they ought to send these to, because I have no authority to grant them. They should go to General Pershing—he’s supreme commander of the military district.”

A thoroughly precise man, Toricelli said, “He hasn’t got authority to grant them, either. Only the president and Congress can do that.”

“What do you think the chances are?” Dowling asked.

“Better than decent, if the Mormons can keep their noses clean,” Captain Toricelli answered. “The Socialists seem to want to do it.”

“I know.” Dowling packed a world of meaning into two words. “They think a zebra can change its stripes, the way the one in that Englishman’s fable did. I think . . .” He shook his head. “What I think doesn’t matter. I don’t make policy. I just get stuck with carrying it out.” He picked up the petition. It was a hefty one; it had to weigh a couple of pounds. “I’ll take this to General Pershing’s office, if you like.”

“Oh, you don’t need to do that, sir,” Toricelli said. “It’s not important. I can fetch it next time I go over there.”

“I’m on my way,” Dowling said. “Better Pershing’s adjutant should

have it on his desk than you on yours."

He caught Toricelli's eye. They shared a slightly conspiratorial chuckle. "Thank you very much, sir," the young captain said.

"You're welcome," Abner Dowling answered. "I've got to go over there and talk with the general about his scheme for mounting better guard on Temple Square. We need to do it; every broken rock from the Temple and the Tabernacle counts for a sacred relic with the more radical Mormons these days."

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"Yes, sir," Toricelli said. "But there's a certain problem in shooting anybody who bends to pick up a pebble in the square, too."

"A certain problem, yes," Dowling agreed. "And that's what I've got to talk to General Pershing about.

How do we keep the Mormons from getting symbols of revolt without provoking them and ruining what ever bits of goodwill we've managed to build up since the war ended?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," his adjutant replied. "I hope you and the commanding general can find a way."

"So do I. Can't hope for much in the way of normalization if they're still picking up broken rocks and dreaming of treason." Dowling tucked the petition under his arm and strode down the hall to his superior's office. He took no small pleasure in dropping the document on Pershing's adjutant's desk, and in watching the papers already there jump as it thudded home.

"Thank you so much, sir," Pershing's adjutant, a major named Fred Corson, said with a sickly smile.

"The general is waiting for you." He sounded reluctant to admit even that much to Dowling.

"Hello, Colonel," General Pershing said when Dowling walked in. A grin spread across his bulldog features. "Was that the thump of a normalization petition I heard just then?"

"It certainly was, sir," Dowling answered.

“Well, I’ll forward it to Philadelphia,” the commandant said. “That’s my duty. And there that petition will sit till the end of time, along with all the others.”

“Unless the Socialists decide to grant them all, that is,” Dowling said.

“Yes. Unless. In that case, Colonel, you and I will both need new assignments, because normal states don’t have soldiers occupying them. Part of me won’t be sorry to get away.” Pershing rose from behind his desk and went over to the window not far away. He looked at his fortified headquarters, and at Salt Lake City beyond. “Part of me, though, will regret leaving this state, because I’m convinced that, no matter what this administration may believe, Utah isn’t ready for normalization. As a matter of fact, here we—”

Abner Dowling heard a distant *pop!* It might have been a motorcar backfiring, or a firecracker going off.

It might have been, but it wasn’t. At the same instant as he heard it, or perhaps even a split second before, the window in front of which General Pershing was standing shattered. Pershing made a surprised noise. That was the best way Dowling could have described it. It didn’t hold much pain. Before Dowling fully realized what had happened, the military commandant of the state of Utah crumpled to the carpet in front of him.

“General Pershing?” Dowling whispered. He hurried over to the fallen man. He needed a moment to add two and two together. Only when he saw the neat hole and the spreading bloodstain in the middle of Pershing’s chest did he fully understand what he was seeing. “General Pershing!” he said, sharply this time.

He grabbed for Pershing’s wrist and felt for a pulse. He found none. Aside from that, the sudden sharp stink in the room told him what he needed to know. Pershing had fouled himself when the bullet struck home.

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Thinking of a bullet made Dowling think of the man who’d fired it. He peered out through the shattered window. The U.S. perimeter around the headquarters ran out for several hundred yards. The gunman must have shot from well beyond it, which meant he had to be a brilliant sniper. In war-ravaged Utah, that was anything but impossible, as

Colonel Dowling knew all too well.

Only while Dowling was shouting for Pershing's adjutant did he pause to wonder whether the sniper was still out there, peering through a telescope on his Springfield and waiting for another shot. He was, at the moment, too shocked, too stunned, to worry about it.

Major Corson hurried in. In his outer office, he hadn't even heard the gunshot. Dowling's shouts were what drew him. "Oh, Jesus Christ!" he said, which summed it up as well as anything. "Is he—?" He couldn't bring himself to say the word.

Dowling did: "He's dead, all right. He dropped down like somebody let all the air out of him. He was dead before he hit the rug—never knew what hit him."

Out on the perimeter, soldiers had started shouting and pointing. A couple of them started running.

Dowling noted all that as if from a very great distance. In one sense, whether they caught the sniper mattered a great deal. In another sense, it hardly mattered at all. The damage was done, and more than done.

Pershing's adjutant saw the same thing. He got the truth into four words: "So much for normalization."

"Yeah," Dowling said. "We just went back to square one."

"Sir, you're senior officer in the state right now," Corson said. Dowling nodded; the city commandants in both Provo and Ogden were lieutenant colonels. Pershing's adjutant looked to him with desperate appeal in his eyes. "What are your orders?"

You're in charge of Utah. God help you, you poor, sorry bastard. Dowling tried to pull himself together. "Fetch a doctor. It won't do any good, but fetch him. Send men after that sniper." He feared that wouldn't do any good, either, but he had to try. "Call the president and the War Department, in that order. Let them know what's happened. After that, we close Salt Lake City down. We take hostages.

We do whatever we have to do to let the Mormons know that if they want to play rough, we're going to play ten times rougher. Have you got that?"

"Yes, sir," Major Corson answered. He saluted and hurried away,

leaving Dowling alone with General Pershing's body.

If the Mormons want to play rough, we'll play ten times rougher? Dear God in heaven, had he really said that? He nodded. He had. And, in saying it, he'd sounded a great deal like General George Armstrong Custer. He hadn't wanted to. He hadn't intended to. But he had, all the same. Custer had rubbed off on him after all. And if that wasn't a chilling thought . . .

If that wasn't a chilling thought, maybe it was a reminder that Custer, for all his enormous flaws—and nobody knew them better than Dowling; a general had no more secrets from his adjutant than a man from his valet—had ended up the most successful soldier in the history of the United States.

I won't keep this command long, Dowling thought. *They'll bring in someone with stars on his shoulder straps as fast as they can.* Meanwhile, though, it was his. He had to do the best job he could while it remained his.

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A doctor dashed into Pershing's office, little black bag in hand. "What do you need, Colonel?" he asked.

"Not me, Major," Dowling answered. "It's General Pershing who's dead." *Along with any hope for peace in Utah for God only knows how long.*

Jake Featherston strode through the streets of Richmond, his bodyguards surrounding him front and back, left and right. He moved swiftly and confidently, and with such abrupt decision that his turns would sometimes take even the alert guards by surprise, so they'd have to scramble to stay with him.

Richmond was not the city it had been before the war. By now, ten years after the Confederate States had yielded to the United States, almost all the damage from U.S. bombing aeroplanes had been repaired. Even so, something was missing from the city's heart. Before the Great War, everybody in Richmond had known the CSA sat on top of the world.

Nowadays . . . Nowadays, Richmond felt poor and shabby. Everything looked gray. It all needed cleaning up, hosing down, painting. Nobody

bothered to give it any such thing. And the people seemed as gray and grimy and defeated as the town in which they lived. Jake had thought the same thing even before the stock market submerged, but it was much more noticeable now.

He hurried past a man with shoulders slumped from lugging heavy sample cases to firms that weren't buying, that wouldn't have been buying if he'd been selling gold for the price of lead. That luckless drummer was a dead man walking—till he saw Jake. He straightened up. His eyes got back their spark.

"Freedom, Mr. Featherston!" he called.

"Freedom to you, pal," Featherston answered. "Hang on. Just remember, we'll lick those bastards yet."

"How?" the man asked. "What can we do?"

"Same thing I've been saying all along," Jake told him. "First thing is, we've got to get rid of the stupid bastards who landed us in this mess in the first place. They aren't fit to carry guts to a bear, but they've been running this country—and running it straight into the ground—ever since the War of Secession. That means the politicians *and* the bonehead generals in the War Department."

"Sounds good to me. Sounds mighty damn good to me," the salesman said. "What else?"

"Got to pay back the niggers," Featherston said. "Got to get strong again, so we can look the USA in the eye again. Got to get strong, so we can spit in the USA's eye, too, if we ever have to. How do you like that?"

"Me? I like it fine," the man said. "You go on and give 'em hell."

"Just what I intend to give 'em. But I'll need your help, buddy. Remember, vote Freedom come November. We've got to get this country on its feet again. I've been saying that for years. Now maybe people will start paying attention to me." He walked on, leaving the drummer with a last, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" the fellow echoed.

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Back in the middle of the 1920s, that luckless drummer had probably been comfortable enough to vote Whig. Bad times made the Freedom Party grow. Featherston knew as much. He looked around. He'd seen plenty of bad times right after the war, when the money went down the toilet. This . . . This felt worse. This felt as if the Confederate States were closing down, one store, one factory, at a time, and might never open for business again.

"Freedom!" somebody else called—a woman, her voice high and shrill with worry.

"Freedom, dear," Jake told her. "Everything's going to be just fine." He waved and kept going.

During the war, he'd usually had a pretty good notion of whether the troops in front of him would succeed in an attack—or, later, if they would succeed in holding back the damnyankees when *they* attacked. Now, after years wandering in the wilderness, he felt things in his own country turning his way again.

Shame it took a panic and a crash to do it, he thought. *But that's the way it goes sometimes. If you don't grab with both hands when you get the chance, you deserve what ever happens to you.* He intended to grab what ever the times gave him. He'd had one chance, and seen it go glimmering. *God damn you to hell and gone, Grady Calkins.* That had been the first time. He'd wondered if he would ever see another. Now, here it was again, if he could make it so.

He and his escorting guards rounded a corner. One of them pointed up Grace Street toward Capitol Square. "Look at that, boss," he said. "Isn't it a shame and a disgrace?"

"It's a judgment on the damn Whigs, that's what it is," Jake answered.

Back just after the Great War ended, Capitol Square had been full of soldiers fresh out of the Army.

They'd had nowhere to go and nothing to do, so they'd camped there, many of them still with their weapons—enough to make the police leery of trying to clear them out, anyhow, even though they'd rioted more than once.

Now tents and shanties sprouted in the square once more. Jake didn't know who all was in them. Some veterans, certainly. But some men who weren't, and a lot of women and kids, too. People who'd lost jobs and lost their homes or couldn't pay the rent on a flat any more . . .

where else were they going to go?

Again, the police were going easy on them. Clearing them from the shantytown by force would have made dreadful headlines. Another guard said, “Those people shouldn’t ought to be in a mess like that.

Ain’t their fault, not most of the time. But that ain’t the only shantytown in the country, neither.”

“Damn right it ain’t, Joe,” Featherston agreed. “There’s one outside of every town in the CSA. And you’re right—most of the people in ’em are decent, hardworking folks who’re just down on their luck.”

He slapped Joe on the back, hard enough to stagger him. “And I’ll be go to hell if you didn’t just give me next week’s wireless talk on a silver platter.”

By then, going into the studio was second nature for him. When the red light came on, he rasped out the greeting he’d been using for years: “This is Jake Featherston of the Freedom Party, and I’m here to tell you the truth.”

Inside the glassed-in room next to the studio, the engineers nodded at him—everything was going the way it should. And his words were going out to far more people in the CSA than they had a few years **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

before. A whole web of stations, a nationwide web, was getting this broadcast now. It went everywhere, from Richmond to Miami to deep in Sonora. And stations near the postwar, U.S.-imposed border beamed it up into Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah.

“Truth is,” Jake went on, “all across our country people are losing their jobs. Truth is, all across our country they’re losing their homes. Truth is, all across our country they’re trying to get by in shacks and tents a God-fearing *dog* wouldn’t want to live in. And the truth is, my friends, *the Whig Party doesn’t care.* ”

He banged his fist down on the table, hard enough to make papers jump in front of him—but not hard enough to make them fall off or to tip over the microphone. He’d had practice with that thump. “So help me God, friends, that *is* the truth. I’m ashamed to say it about anybody in these Confederate States, but it is. What are the Whigs doing to help these folks get new jobs? Nothing! What are the Whigs doing to help ’em hang on to their houses? Nothing! What are the Whigs doing

to keep 'em from starving?

Nothing, one more time! 'That's not the government's job,' is what they say.

"Well, friends, I'm going to tell you something. The Whigs proved how useless they were two years ago, when the big floods came. Did they do anything much for the poor, suffering people in Tennessee and Arkansas and Mississippi and Louisiana? Did they? In a pig's ear they did. They patted 'em on the head and said, 'Sure wish you good luck. Y'all'll be just fine.' *Were* they just fine? You know better'n I do.

"I'll tell you something else, too. This here panic, this here crash, is dragging more people under than Mother Nature ever dreamt of doing. And that's happening all over the Confederate States, not just in the Mississippi Valley. God help us all, there's a shantytown in Capitol Square here in Richmond. The fat Whig Congressmen could look out their windows and see the poor hungry folks. They could, but they don't."

On and on he went, finishing, "Two years ago, the Supreme Court—the bought and paid-for Supreme Court—said Burton Mitchel could run for president again. Well, he did, and he got himself elected again, too. And now we're *all* paying for it.

"So if you want things to work again, if you want us to be strong again, if you want to tie a can to the Whigs' tail—and to the Supreme Court's tail, too—if you don't want to have to live in a shack like a nigger cotton-picker, vote Freedom in November. God bless you all, and thank you kindly!"

The lead engineer drew a finger across his throat. The red light in the studio went out. Jake Featherston leaned back in his chair, then gathered up his papers and left the small, soundproofed room.

Saul Goldman, the station managed, waited in the hallway. "That was a strong speech, Mr. Featherston, a very strong speech," he said.

"Let's hope it does some good," Jake answered.

"I've heard a lot of your speeches the past few years, Mr. Featherston," Goldman said. "I think this one will sway people, especially . . . with things the way they are."

"Yeah. Especially," Featherston said. "I think this one'll do some good, too. High time people got the wool pulled away from over their eyes.

High time they see you don't have to be a Whig to run the country. High time they see we'd be better off with people who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty, who aren't afraid to pitch right in and do what needs doing. We've got to fix things. We can't go on like this."

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"No." Goldman shook his head. "Times are very hard." He risked a smile at Jake. "You should be glad you have a job."

"I am," Jake said. "I've had a job ever since the war ended: to see the Confederate States back on top.

It's taken me a long time to start doing that job. But I think my hour's coming round at last."

"I think you may be right," the station manager agreed. "If not now, when will it come?"

If not now, will it ever come? But Jake Featherston pushed that thought to the back of his mind, as he did whenever it cropped up. He couldn't afford to doubt, and so he didn't. "I'm going to tell you something, Mr. Goldman," he said. "This here station and the web you've set up have done the Freedom Party a hell of a lot of good. We don't forget our enemies. Everybody knows that. But we don't forget our friends, either. You'll see."

"Thank you," Goldman said. "That I should be your friend surprises me. We've had that talk before, a long time ago. But thank you. Thank you very much. It has passed over me."

"What's that?" Featherston asked. The Jew only shrugged and changed the subject. Jake didn't push it.

He had other things to worry about. The world wasn't his, as he thought it should be. But now, at least, he had the hope it was going his way.

When Jefferson Pinkard opened his pay envelope at the Sloss Works, he discovered it contained a pink slip along with his salary. His curses were soft and bitter and heartfelt. "I should've stayed in Mexico, by God," he said. "If I'd known the company was going to treat me like a nigger, I would've."

The paymaster, a gray-haired man named Harvey Gordon, had known Pinkard since before the Great War. He shook his head. “You never should have gone to Mexico in the first place. You forfeited all the seniority you had. Now they’re treating you like a new hire. I’m sorry as hell, Jeff, but them’s the rules.”

“Fuck the rules,” Pinkard said. “How am I gonna *eat* ?”

Gordon didn’t answer that. It wasn’t a question that had an answer, except maybe, *God knows.* If God did know, He hadn’t bothered telling Jefferson Davis Pinkard.

“Get moving,” the fellow in line behind him said. “Don’t hold up the works.”

“Fuck you, too,” Jeff answered, hoping for a fight. He didn’t get one, only a stony glare. Muttering under his breath, he strode out of the steel mill. *Won’t be coming back, either,* he thought. *Ain’t that a son of a bitch?*

He wondered where he would live, too. A fired man had two weeks to leave company housing. If he didn’t go after that, they’d pitch his belongings out of his cottage and onto the sidewalk.

At least the yellow clapboard house he had now was a long way from the one he’d shared with Emily back in happier times. *How can I afford a new place if I just got fired?*

It was a good question. Again, he wished he had a good answer for it. He wished he had any answer at all. Inside the cottage, he had a cheap iron bed and a cheap iron stove, an icebox, a rickety table, and one chair. A furnished room would have had more in it. He didn’t want to think about a room. Thinking **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

about one reminded him he didn’t know what he’d do when they threw him out of here.

He made a mess of bacon and eggs for supper. He’d had them for breakfast, too. He was no kind of cook. He never had been. He did a tolerable job on bacon and eggs most of the time. He’d started getting sick of them. But he did so few things well, he didn’t have much choice.

When he went to bed that night, he set the alarm clock, forgetting he wouldn’t need to get up the next morning. The clock was cheap, too.

Its tinny jangle jolted him awake. He was dressed and eating breakfast—bacon and eggs yet again—before he realized he had nowhere to go.

“Shit,” he said, without originality but with great feeling.

That morning was one of the strangest of his life. He sat on the one chair in the cottage and watched men streaming toward the Sloss Works, and others coming off the night shift. He could have been one of them. Up till the day before, he had been one of them. Now he felt as far apart from them as a prisoner of war did from his army. He didn’t go to work there, not any more.

After a while, the two streams of men stopped. Everything grew quiet. Wives came out of the cottages to shop or gossip with the neighbors. Children headed for school. The ones too little to go to school played in front of their houses. All that had gone on for years while he worked at the steel mill, but he’d seen it only when he was too sick to go in. Now he felt fine (except for being sick of bacon and eggs), but he had nowhere to go.

He started to read a magazine, a pulp called *Aeroplane Adventures* . Some of the tales in it were set in the Great War, others afterwards. It was printed in Richmond; all the war stories had Confederate pilots gunning down Yankees, or Englishmen knocking German aeroplanes out of the sky. The later tales were set in the Confederate West or in odd corners of the world.

Aeroplane Adventures had sat on the kitchen table for more than a week without his looking at it. He’d been too tired to read when he came back from the Sloss Works. Now, with nothing else to do, he went through the magazine twice. A young Texan from a town called Cross Plains had written an exciting story about the air war over West Texas, where Jeff had served. The fellow had a few details wrong—he hadn’t been old enough to see combat—but he could tell a tale. The other pieces were much less memorable.

Jeff started the magazine for a third time late that afternoon, but set it aside instead. He wished he had a wireless set, to make time pass more quickly. But then he brightened. “Freedom Party meeting tonight!”

he said: the first words he’d spoken since the morning. As he’d forgotten to leave the alarm alone, he’d almost forgotten the weekly meeting.

When the time came, he put on a white shirt and butternut trousers

and hurried to the trolley stop where he could ride into central Birmingham. Crickets chirped. Lightning bugs winked on and off, on and off.

The trolley stop was crowded. Several men had on the same kind of outfit as Jeff. “Freedom!” one of them said.

“Freedom!” Jeff echoed. “When was the last time you went to a Party meeting, Clem?”

“Been four-five years,” the other steelworker answered. “I didn’t reckon it was on the right track. Now I’m wondering if maybe I was wrong. Won’t hurt none to come and find out.”

“You stopped coming to meetings for a while, too, Jeff,” another man said.

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Pinkard shook his head. “Not me. Not like you mean, anyhow. I never walked away from the Party.

What I did was, I went down to the Empire of Mexico.”

“Oh,” said the fellow who’d brought it up. He said not another word after that. Anybody who’d fought in Mexico took the Freedom Party and its business very seriously indeed. The trolley rolled up then, clanging its bell. The men bound for the Freedom Party meeting climbed aboard with everyone else at the stop. Pinkard threw a dime in the fare box. He hadn’t worried about money since coming back from Mexico, not while he’d had work. But now, without it, those ten cents suddenly seemed to loom as large as ten dollars would have.

And here was the old livery stable again, the smell of horses fainter than ever but still there. Here were the old folding chairs, even more battered than they had been before he'd headed south. Here was the rostrum at one end of the hall, and the Stars and Bars and Confederate battle flag on the wall behind it.

The two flags hadn't changed; they still carried the stars representing Kentucky and Sequoyah, though the states lay under U.S. occupation.

The meeting was crowded. That steelworker wasn't the only man returning after a long absence. And there were faces Jeff had never seen before, some of them belonging to men surely too young to have fought in the Great War. Jeff recognized the way those men bore themselves: stiff with a special, nervous sort of dignity. He carried himself the same way. It was the distinctive posture of men who'd lost their jobs but didn't want the world to know.

Somebody swigged from a bottle of homebrew. Pinkard grinned to see that. Some things hadn't changed. Alabama remained dry. But the police had never come around trying to enforce the temperance laws at a Party meeting. They had to know they would have had a fight on their hands if they'd been so rash.

He found a chair and sat down. He'd sat right about here, he remembered, when he'd got up and pushed past Grady Calkins on his way out of one meeting. People had still sat on hay bales in those days, not folding chairs. He cursed under his breath. Calkins, a Freedom Party man, had done more to hurt the Party by turning assassin than all its enemies put together.

Caleb Briggs stepped up onto the rostrum and took his place behind the podium. The dentist looked out over the crowd and called, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" people shouted back.

Briggs cupped a hand behind one ear. "I can't hear you."

"Freedom!" This time, the yell shook the rafters.

"That's better." Briggs nodded. "Good to see some old familiar faces back with us again. Nice to know y'all have seen the light one more time. And you're welcome. We wish you'd've stayed with us all along, but it's good to have you back. And how many folks are here for the very first time?"

Several men raised their hands. Briggs nodded again. “Good to see new blood, too. We need you. We need everybody. For years and years now, we’ve been telling anyone who’d listen that the Confederate States were going over a cliff. Not enough people did listen, and over we went, dammit. Now we’ve got to get back up again, and we need help. We’ve got to fight for what we believe in. You new men, are you ready to do that?”

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“Yes, sir!” the newcomers chorused. Jeff wondered whether they knew Briggs meant it literally. If they didn’t, they’d find out.

Sure enough, the dentist said, “You’ll have your chance, I promise you. We’ll set this country to rights yet. Maybe people are starting to see what’s wrong in Richmond. About time. And if we have to knock a few heads together, or more than a few, to get things going again, we’ll do it, that’s all. You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.”

“That’s right,” Pinkard said. “You bet that’s right. If you aren’t afraid to get blood on your clothes, you don’t belong here. Remember, the stuff washes out with plenty of cold water.”

“It sure does.” Briggs turned his attention to Pinkard. “Did I hear right that the Sloss Works flung you out?”

“Yes, sir, you did.” Jeff knew a certain amount of pride that the Birmingham head of the Freedom Party kept such close tabs on him. “You know of any other outfit that wants a man who’s been on the casting floor since before the Great War, I’d be much obliged.”

“Nooo,” Briggs said slowly. “But don’t I remember right that when you were down in Mexico, you were the fellow who ran a prisoners’ camp for the rebels Maximilian’s boys caught?”

“Yeah, that was me,” Pinkard answered. “What about it?”

“I’ll tell you what about it. I happen to know the Birmingham city jail’s looking for an assistant jailer. If you want the job, fellow you ought to talk to is named Albert Sidney Griffith, over in city hall. He’s a Party man, too. Let him know who you are and what you did down in Mexico. Tell him to give me a telephone call if he’s got any questions. I’ll set him straight.”

“My Lord,” Jeff whispered. He’d had hope machine-gunned with the pink slip in his pay envelope.

Now, suddenly, it lived again. Tears stung his eyes. “God bless you, sir. Thank you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Caleb Briggs waved that aside. “Don’t you worry about it, Pinkard. Don’t you worry one little bit. This here is the Freedom Party, remember. We aren’t the Whigs or the Radical Liberals. We take care of our own. You’ve been a good Party man for a long time. We owe you for that, and we pay our debts. We pay ’em to our enemies, and we pay ’em to our friends.”

“I’ll see this Griffith fellow first thing in the morning,” Jeff said. With the chance of work ahead of him, he felt like a new man. And the new man was every bit as loyal to the Freedom Party as the old one had been. “This is the best outfit in the *world* !” he exulted.

Briggs smiled and nodded. “Damn right it is.”

XI

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Hipolito Rodriguez had never thought about what a stock-market crash could do to the town of Baroyeca, and to the silver mine in the hills on which the town depended for its existence. Just because he hadn’t thought about such things, though, didn’t mean they weren’t real. The mine shut down in September. A few days later, the railroad stopped coming into Baroyeca.

“A good thing we got the stove when we did,” his wife said when he brought that news home. “It would take a lot longer to come here now.”

“*Sí,* Magdalena,” he said. “Everything will take a lot longer to come here now. The town is liable to dry up and blow away, and then what will become of the farms all around it?”

“We go on and do as we always did,” Magdalena answered. “We stay on our land and mind our own business.”

“But we can’t make *everything* here,” Rodriguez said. “If the general

store closes, life will get very hard."

"How can the general store close?" Magdalena said. "Everyone around here goes to it. *Señor* Diaz is a rich man."

"How rich will he be if he has to ship everything into Baroyeca by wagon or by truck?" Rodriguez asked. "I don't know how much that costs, but I know it costs a lot more than the railroad."

"Now you worry me," Magdalena said. "I think you did that on purpose."

"As a matter of fact, yes," he replied. "I'm worried myself. I didn't want to be the only one."

"Oh." She'd been making tortillas. After rubbing cornmeal off her hands and onto her apron, she gave Hipolito Rodriguez a hug. "Who would have thought it could be this bad?"

"Who, indeed?" he answered. "Up till now, we complained that things that happened in Richmond didn't matter one way or the other here in Sonora, and that nobody back there cared about us." His laugh rang bitter. "Now things that happened in Richmond and in New York City matter very much here, and *Madre de Dios!* but I wish they didn't."

Magdalena nodded. "How do these things work out like this? You go to the meetings of the *Partido de la Libertad* —what do they say there? Do they know? Can they make it better?"

"What can they do now?" he asked in return. "The president is a Whig. Most of the Senators and Congressmen are Whigs. The Freedom Party can only protest what the Whigs do, and the Whigs don't do much. They don't seem to know what to do. They are fools." He'd always thought the Whigs were fools. Even before Sonora started electing men from the Freedom Party to Congress, the state had sent Radical Liberals off to Richmond.

"If the Freedom Party had power, what would it do?" Magdalena asked.

"Put people to work," Rodriguez answered at once. "Make sure they stayed at work. Make the country strong again. Tell the United States to leave us alone, and be strong enough to make sure the United States did it. Take back the states the USA stole from us in the war."

The only time he'd ever seen men from the United States was during

his service in the Confederate **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Army during the Great War. The soldiers from the USA had done their best to kill him, and had come alarmingly close more than once. A lot of the west-Texas prairie where he'd fought was now included in the U.S. state of Houston. It was as if the USA were mocking all his effort, all his courage—yes, and all his fear, too. Anything he could do to pay back the United States of America, he would do, and do gladly.

Nodding—she knew how he felt—Magdalena said, "These things sound wonderful. How will the Freedom Party make them happen?"

"Why . . ." He hesitated, then shrugged. "I don't know, not exactly," he admitted. "I don't think anyone knows. But I do know they will work hard and try everything. And I know they have no hope of helping the country if they aren't in power. The Whigs have made too many mistakes. It's time for them to go."

Robert Quinn, the Freedom Party organizer in Baroyeca, had said that very thing in his accented Spanish. Hipolito Rodriguez didn't mind that he spoke the language like a man whose first language was English. That Quinn spoke Spanish at all mattered to the farmer. It told him the Freedom Party was serious about winning followers in Baroyeca, in all of Sonora. The Whigs never had been. Even the Radical Liberals had worried about the big men, the rich men, first, and had expected them to bring the *campesinos* into line. It had worked for many years, too. But no more.

"When you vote Freedom, you know the Party cares," Rodriguez said. "Nobody else does, not like that."

"But the election is still more than a month away," Magdalena said. "What can the Party do in the meantime? What can anyone do if—the Blessed Virgin forbid it!—the general store closes its doors?"

She crossed herself.

"I don't know," Rodriguez answered. "I don't think anyone knows."

"As long as we have enough water to keep the corn and beans growing and the livestock healthy, we can go on," his wife said. "Life may be hard, but life has been hard before. We will get through till it is better again."

"I hope so," Rodriguez said. He'd got used to being a fairly prosperous

farmer—prosperous by the standards of southern Sonora, at any rate. He'd seen just enough of the rest of the Confederate States to have a suspicion bordering on certainty that prosperity here was something less than it might have been elsewhere in the country.

As a measure of that prosperity, Magdalena had a treadle-powered sewing machine. She'd bought it secondhand, from a woman in Baroyeca who'd got a better machine, but even secondhand it was a status symbol for a farmer's wife. It also let her get more work done faster than she could have managed without it. With six children to be clothed, that was no small matter.

A few days after Rodriguez came back from Baroyeca, the needle in the sewing machine broke. Like any farmer, he was a good handyman. Fixing anything that small and precisely made, though, was beyond him. "You have to go back into town," Magdalena told him. "I have half a dozen pairs of pants to make.

You don't want the boys to run around naked, do you?"

"I'll go," he said. "Give me the broken needle, so I can be sure I'm getting the matching part. There are as many different kinds as there are different sewing machines, and you would have something to say to me if I brought back the wrong one, now wouldn't you?"

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"Maybe not," his wife answered. "Maybe I'd just think you'd spent too much time in *La Culebra Verde* before you tried to buy the right one."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Rodriguez said with dignity. Magdalena laughed so raucously, she distracted Miguel and Jorge enough to make them stop wrestling for a little while.

With that laughter still ringing in his ears, Hipolito Rodriguez set out for Baroyeca the next morning.

When he got there, he made sure he bought the sewing-machine needle first. Magdalena would never have let him live it down if, after all his care, he came back with the wrong one.

The general store remained open. Rodriguez was astonished to discover that a packet of three needles cost only eight cents. The machine, when Magdalena bought it, had come with the one that had

just broken, and no others. “I expected they would be much more,” he told Jaime Diaz as the proprietor took his money.

“Then I will gladly charge you twice as much,” Diaz said. “One way or another, I have to make some money. With the mine closed, I don’t know how I’m going to do it. And the railroad, too! How will I get supplies?”

“I don’t know,” Rodriguez answered in a low voice. “My wife and I were talking about this. If you don’t, how will Baroyeca go on?”

“I have no answers,” the storekeeper said. “Every day, I keep hoping things will get better, and every day they get worse. Be thankful you live on a farm. It’s not so bad for you. For anyone who has to get things from other places every day . . .” He shook his head.

“What can you do?” Rodriguez asked. “What can anyone do?”

“No one can do anything,” Diaz replied. “No one can do anything to make things better, I mean. That’s what makes this whole business so dreadful, my friend. The whole *world* is broken, and no one has the faintest idea how to fix it.”

Hipolito Rodriguez hadn’t thought of the collapse in those terms. He’d thought about what it meant to Baroyeca, to Sonora, and, to some degree, to the Confederate States. The world? That was too much for him to grasp. He said, “*Señor* Diaz, I know the man who can set things right.”

“Who is that, then?” Diaz said. “In the name of God and the Blessed Virgin, tell me. If anyone can make the mine open and the train come back to Baroyeca, I will bless him with all my heart.” In spite of his talk of the world, most of his thoughts stayed close to home, too. Such is life for most men.

“Jake Featherston of the Freedom Party, that’s who,” Rodriguez said. “They can make the country strong again, and if we are strong, how can we help being rich again, too?”

“Rich? I don’t care about rich. All I care about is having the money to go on from day to day,” the storekeeper said. He was polite enough to understate what he had and what he wanted. Rodriguez nodded, polite enough to accept the understatement for what it was. Diaz went on, “I don’t know about the Freedom Party, either.” He drummed his fingers on the countertop behind which he stood. “But the Whigs have no notion what to do. A blind man could see that. And the Radical

Liberals”—he smiled a wry smile—“what have they ever been good for but making faces at the Whigs? So maybe, just maybe, you could be right.”

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“I think so,” Rodriguez said. “When did you ever see the Whigs or even the Radical Liberals with a headquarters here in town? The Freedom Party has one. And Robert Quinn even learned Spanish to get us to join the Party. When have the others cared so much about us?”

“A point,” Diaz admitted. “Quinn buys from me.” Everyone who actually lived in town bought from him; what other choice did people have? Again, he was polite. He continued, “He always pays his bills on time, I will say, and he never treats me like a damn greaser.” The rest of the conversation had been in Spanish. He used English for those two words.

Rodriguez nodded, a sour smile on his face. He’d also heard those English words, more often than he ever wanted to. He said, “You see? They speak English, but they don’t look down their noses at Sonorans. If they can manage that, I think they can manage the whole country.”

“I hadn’t thought of it in that way,” Diaz said. “Maybe you’re right. It could be so.”

“I really think it is,” Rodriguez said. “Look at the mess the other parties have got us into. Doesn’t the Freedom Party deserve the chance to get us out?” The storekeeper didn’t say no. Rodriguez added the clincher: “And the election is coming up soon—only a little more than a month to go.”

Anne Colleton drove a five-year-old Birmingham down toward Charleston. She’d finally sold the ancient Ford she’d acquired during the war after Confederate soldiers confiscated her Vauxhall. She knew she’d kept it longer than she should have, as a reminder of those grim times. But when she weighed sentiment against ever more cranky machinery, sentiment came off second best.

The Robert E. Lee Highway was better going than it had been in those days. It was paved all the way, where long stretches of it had been only rutted dirt. A lot more motorcars traveled up and down it, too.

And nowadays, the bodies of hanged Negro Reds didn’t dangle from

trees by the side of the road.

She'd seen plenty of them, coming back from Charleston to St. Matthews in 1915. She'd been going to see a lover then; she was going to see a lover now.

Back then, regardless of whether Roger Kimball had had a flat in Charleston rather than being on leave from the Navy, not even Anne, radical as she'd reckoned herself, would have dared park her motorcar in front of the building where he lived. That would have meant scandal. They'd always met in hotels: in Charleston, in Richmond, down in Georgia.

Times had changed. Much of what had been radical was now taken for granted. Anne didn't think twice about leaving the Birmingham in front of Clarence Potter's block of flats, or of knocking on his door.

Inside, the clattering of a typewriter abruptly stopped. A man's voice kept on coming out of a wireless set.

Potter opened the door. He gave Anne a quick kiss and said, "Come in. Fix yourself a drink. I'm almost done with this damn report. Pretty soon, we'll find out how good the news is." By his tone, he didn't expect her to take *good* literally.

"A heavy turnout is expected in today's Congressional election," the reporter on the wireless said as Anne went into the kitchen to deal with whiskey and water and ice. "The Whigs remain confident of holding their strong position in the House despite the unfortunate state of the economy, and—"

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The typewriter started clacking again just then, drowning out the rest. Clarence Potter was far and away the most unusual man Anne had ever met. He not only believed she could take care of herself, he encouraged her to do it. He'd never shown any interest what ever in running her life. A thoroughly competent man, he respected competence wherever he found it, and seemed happy he'd found it in her.

Her whole life long, she'd fought against men who either tried to control her or simply assumed they would. Potter hadn't tried. Anne sometimes had trouble figuring out what to make of that.

Drink in hand, she came back into the front room. “Do you want me to fix one for you, too?” she asked.

He didn’t expect her to fix drinks. That, no doubt, was why she was willing to do it.

And he shook his head now. Lamplight glinted from the metal frames of his spectacles. “No, thanks. Not yet. Let me finish up here. I think I’ve figured out who’s been lifting crates from Lucas Williamson’s warehouse, and how he can keep it from happening again.” Concentration on his face, he went back to typing.

“You did remember to vote, didn’t you?” Anne asked.

He nodded. “Oh, yes. I’m not going to give the Freedom Party any help at all. The Whigs have done too much of that lately.” He went back to typing, and might almost have forgotten Anne was in the room with him.

She listened to the wireless. The commentator kept on sounding optimistic about the Whigs’ prospects.

She hoped he was right. Like Clarence Potter, she hoped and believed two different things.

Ten minutes later, Potter took the sheet of paper out of the machine. “There,” he said in his half-Yankee accent, laying it on a neat stack. “Another week’s bills paid. Now I get to remember I’m a human being.”

He went back into the kitchen and fixed a whiskey for himself. Raising it in salute, he added, “It’s damn good to see you, you know that? Always nice to have company on the deck as the ship goes down.”

“It won’t be as bad as that,” Anne said.

“No, indeed. It’ll probably be worse.” Potter looked out the window. Twilight was setting in. “Polls’ll close before long. Then we’ll start getting returns, and then we’ll know how big a mess we’ll have for the next two years. To tell you the truth, I’d almost sooner not find out.”

“Would you rather stay here and stay in bed, then?” Anne asked. “The election will be what it is, regardless of whether we go to Whig headquarters after supper.”

Potter smiled but shook his head. “Plenty of time for that afterwards. I

have this restless itch to *know* , and it needs satisfying as much as any other urge."

"All right." And, to Anne's internal surprise, it *was* all right. She knew Clarence Potter was interested; she'd had plenty of very pleasant proofs of that. If he put business before pleasure . . . well, didn't she, too? *I'm keeping company with a grownup,* she thought. It was, in her experience, a novelty, but one she didn't mind.

When they went out for supper, she ordered a big plate of boiled shrimp. "They don't come fresh to St.

Matthews," she said.

"No, I suppose not," Potter agreed. "When I first moved here, I remember thinking how wonderful all the seafood was." He'd chosen crab cakes for himself. "Now, unless people remind me about it the way **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

you just did, I take it for granted. I shouldn't do that, should I?"

"No," Anne said. "The whole country's taken too many things for granted."

"We're liable to pay the price for it, too," he said. "That goes back a long way now, you know—starting when we took it for granted we'd win the Great War and be home to celebrate by the time the leaves turned red and gold."

The colored waiter brought their suppers. As Anne began to eat, she said, "I took that for granted, and I can't say otherwise. You didn't, did you?"

"No—but remember, I went to Yale. I was there for four Remembrance Days. I had a pretty fair notion of how desperately in earnest those people were. We figured we could whip them. They went out and made damn sure they could whip us." He took a bite of crab cake, nodded, and went on in meditative tones: "We've always figured we could whip the Freedom Party, too. But the damnyankees aren't the only people who are desperately in earnest. That's what worries me."

"We'll find out." Anne feared he might be right, but didn't want to think about it, not just then.

After they finished supper, they walked over to the Whig headquarters. It lay only three or four blocks away. Even in November, bugs still buzzed around street lamps. Something—a bird? a bat?—swooped down, grabbed one of them out of the air, and vanished into darkness again.

When Anne and Clarence Potter came into the headquarters, they got their share, and more than their share, of suspicious looks. Anne had former Freedom Party ties that made people distrust her. Her companion didn't, but he did have the unfortunate habit of saying exactly what he thought, and that regardless of what the received wisdom was.

But then someone called out to them: "Have you heard the news?"

Potter shook his head. Anne said, "No, that's what we came here for. What's the latest?"

"Horatio Standifer out in North Carolina," the man replied. "In Congress since before the war, but a Freedom Party man just did him in."

"Oh, good God," Potter said. "If Standifer lost his seat, nobody's safe tonight. And if nobody's safe tonight, then God help the country tomorrow."

"What's the news here in South Carolina?" Anne asked.

"Not as bad as that," the Whig said. "We're going to lose the seat we picked up two years ago, and maybe one more besides."

Potter pointed at the blackboard on which new results were going up. "Maybe two more besides, looks like to me."

After a second look at the numbers, the other Whig scowled and nodded. "Maybe two more besides,"

he admitted, and went off as if Potter had some sort of contagious disease.

He does, Anne thought. *He tells the truth as he sees it, and he pulls no punches. Such men are dangerous.*

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Returns from Georgia started coming, and then Tennessee and Alabama. The more of them there were, the longer the faces at Whig headquarters got. People started slipping over to the saloon across the street. Some of them came back. Others didn't—they stayed away and began the serious business of drowning their sorrows.

Clarence Potter didn't go. Each new seat lost to the Freedom Party—and those came in one after another, with no possible room for doubt in most of them—brought not howls of dismay from him, but rather a bitter smile. He might have been telling the world, *I knew this was going to happen. Now here it is, and what are you going to do about it?* No one in the Whig headquarters seemed to have the slightest idea what to do about it . . . except for the men who headed across the street to get drunk.

As Anne watched the man she was with, so he watched her, too. After a while, he said, "It's probably not too late for you, you know."

"What do you mean?" she asked, though she had a pretty good idea.

And, sure enough, he said, "Your politics aren't that far from Jake Featherston's. If you want to, you can probably make your peace with him."

She wanted to haul off and slap him. She wanted to, but she couldn't, for the same thought had crossed her mind. He told her the truth as he saw it, too. Still, she said, "I don't know. I turned him down once when he asked for money, years ago. He doesn't forget things like that."

Potter laughed scornfully. "I'll tell you what he won't turn down. He won't turn down money if you give it to him now, that's what."

Anne wondered about that. She decided Potter was probably half right. Jake Featherston might take her money if she offered it to him again. But would he ever trust her, ever let her have any real influence? She had her doubts. Featherston struck her as a man whose memory for slights an elephant would envy.

Casually, Clarence Potter added, "If you do go back to him, we're through. I don't know how much that means to you. I hope it means something. Losing you would mean a lot to me. But I've known Featherston longer than any of the 'Freedom!'-shouting yahoos who go marching for him these days. We aren't on the same side, and we're never going to be."

“What if he gets elected president?” Anne asked.

A muscle jumped in his right cheek, perhaps an inch below his eye. “No one ever went broke underestimating the stupidity of the Confederate people, but I still find that hard to imagine—even harder than it was in 1921, when he came so close. And 1933’s still a long way away. Things are bound to look better by then.” He paused and sighed. “And the way you asked that question makes me wonder if we aren’t through anyhow.”

“Up till now, you never put any conditions on me,” Anne said. “I liked it that you never put any conditions on me.”

“Up till now, I never imagined I needed to,” he answered. “But I can’t put up with the Freedom Party.

I’m sorry, but I can’t.”

“Don’t you want revenge on the USA?” she asked.

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“I don’t want anything that badly,” Potter said.

Anne sighed. “Some things are worth any price.” He shook his head. Now she sighed. “It’s been fun, Clarence,” she said. “But I’ll do what I think I have to do, and not what anyone else tells me to. Not ever.” *No wonder I never got married,* she thought. She walked out of the Whig headquarters and back toward her motorcar.

Kamloops, British Columbia, was a long way from Philadelphia, and a long way from the Confederate States, too. That didn’t keep news from getting there about as fast as it got anywhere else, though, not in this age of telegraph clickers and wireless sets. Colonel Irving Morrell studied the Confederate election returns with a sort of horrified fascination.

“Sweet Jesus Christ!” he said, looking at the newspaper that had set them out in detail.

“Er—yes, sir,” his aide-de-camp said, and chuckled.

“No offense, Lieutenant,” Morrell said hastily. “Just a manner of speaking.”

“Oh, yes, sir. I know that,” Lieutenant Ike Horwitz answered. “You’re not like that damn German sergeant who was tagging along with your buddy from the General Staff over there.”

“I should hope not.” Morrell set the paper on Horwitz’s desk. “But look at this. For heaven’s sake, *look* at this. The Freedom Party went from—what?—nine Congressmen to twenty-nine. They won three governorships down there. They took control of four state legislatures, too, and that means they’ll start electing Senators, because their state legislatures still choose ’em. They didn’t switch to popular vote, the way we did.”

“That’s a big pickup, no doubt about it.” Horwitz leaned forward to study the numbers. He looked up at Morrell. “I’m awful damn glad I’m a Jew in the USA, and not a *shvartzer* in the CSA.”

“A what?” Morrell said, and then he nodded, making the connection from Yiddish to German. “Oh.

Yeah. I bet you are.”

“There’s people here who don’t like Jews—plenty who feel just like that stupid sergeant,” Horwitz said.

“But it isn’t all *that* bad. Hell, even the president’s wife’s Jewish, not that I’ve got any use for her politics or his. If you’re colored in the Confederate States, you’ve got to be shaking in your shoes—if they let you have any shoes.”

He was right. Morrell hadn’t even wondered what the Negroes in the CSA felt about the election returns he’d been dissecting. He rarely thought about Negroes. What white man in the USA did? Maybe Horwitz, being a Jew, was more likely to look at other people who had a hard time in their homeland.

“I’ll tell you what,” Morrell said. “Write me an appreciation of the Confederate Negroes’ likely response to this. Do a good job on it and I’ll forward it to Philadelphia, see if I can get you noticed.”

“Thank you, sir. That’s damn white of you,” his aide-de-camp answered.

Morrell’s own thoughts were on the more immediate. “Any time the Freedom vote goes up, that’s **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

trouble for us, because those bastards want another shot at the USA. And Featherston's boys haven't seen numbers like these since 1921. I hope to heaven the president sits up and takes notice."

"What do you think the odds are?" Lieutenant Horwitz asked.

"Do I look like a Socialist politician to you? I'd better not, that's all I've got to say," Morrell replied.

"They cut off Confederate reparations early, they haven't been checking about rearmament near as hard as they should have, they've cut *our* budget. . . ." He sighed. "They think everybody should just be friends. I wish that would work, I really do."

"People vote for it," Horwitz said. "Nobody wants to go through another war like the last one."

"No, of course not. But both sides have to want peace. You only need one to have a war. And the only thing worse than fighting a war like that is fighting it and losing. Ask the Confederates if you don't believe me."

"I don't need to ask anybody," Horwitz said. "I can see that for myself. Anyone with a brain in his head ought to be able to see that for himself. But what are we going to do?"

"That's the question, all right." Morrell drummed his fingers on the desktop. "I don't know. I just don't know. Half of those people who voted for Featherston's gang of goons probably don't hope for anything but jobs and three square meals a day if he calls the shots. They sure aren't getting 'em with the folks they've got running things now."

His aide-de-camp smiled unhappily. "And isn't that the sad and sorry truth, sir? When I joined the Army, I never thought I'd be glad to be in for the food and for the roof over my head. But that's how it looks nowadays. If I were a civilian, I'd probably be scuffling like everybody else."

"Good point." Morrell nodded. "We're insulated from that, anyhow, thank God."

"I suppose the Socialists *are* doing everything they can there," Ike Horwitz said grudgingly. "Feeding people who are out of work and giving some of 'em makework jobs—it's not great, God knows, but it's better than nothing, you know what I mean?"

“I guess so.” Morrell sighed. “If you give a man something for nothing, though, will he want to stand up on his own two feet again when times get better, or will he keep wanting a handout for the rest of his life?”

“You ask me, sir, most people want to work if you give ’em the chance,” Horwitz answered. “Other thing is, if they do starve, talking about the rest of their lives starts looking pretty silly, doesn’t it? And if they’re afraid they’re going to starve, then what happens? Then they start voting for somebody like Jake Featherston in the USA, right?”

“I suppose so,” Morrell said again. Up till now, his politics had always been firmly Democratic; he’d never had to think about it. He still didn’t, not really. But he’d never been a man to worry about subtleties, either, and now he wondered whether he’d made a mistake. “You’re saying the Socialists are giving us a safety valve, aren’t you?”

“I wouldn’t have put it quite that way, but yes, sir, I guess I am,” Lieutenant Horwitz answered. “If things blow up, what have we got? Trouble, nothing else but.” Like any soldier—and like anyone else with an ounce of sense—he was convinced staying out of trouble was a good idea.

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A couple of days later, Morrell went into the town of Kamloops to do some shopping—Christmas was coming, and he wanted to buy some things for Agnes and Mildred that he couldn’t hope to find at the post exchange. The weather was crisp and chilly, the sun shining bright out of a blue, blue sky but not giving much in the way of warmth even so.

The reception he got in Kamloops gave little in the way of warmth, either. Here a dozen years after the end of the war, the Canucks cared for the green-gray uniforms their occupiers wore no more than they had after the USA finally battered them into submission. People on the streets turned their backs when Morrell walked by.

Most of them did, anyhow. He’d got used to that. What he hadn’t got used to were the ragged-looking men who held out their hands and whined, “Spare change, pal?” And he especially hadn’t got used to the respectable-looking men who held out their hands and said the same thing. One of them added, “Been a long time since my twin boys saw any meat on the table.”

“Why don’t you get a job, then?” Morrell asked.

“Why?” The man glared at him. “I’ll tell you why, even though you’re a damned fool to need telling.

Because there damned well aren’t any jobs to get, that’s why. Lumber companies aren’t hiring—that’s what I got fired from. Farms aren’t taking on hired men, not when they can’t sell half the sheep and cows and wheat they raise. Even here in town, only way you can keep your job is if you’re somebody’s brother—if you’re just a brother-in-law, you’re in trouble. *That’s* why, you stinking Yank.”

Well, I asked him, and he went and told me, Morrell thought. He dug in his pocket and gave the Canadian some coins. “Here, buddy. Good luck to you.”

“I ought to spit in your eye,” the hungry man told him. “Hell of it is, I can’t. I’ve got to tip my hat”—he did—“and say, ‘Thank you, sir,’ on account of I need the money so goddamn bad.”

Never in all his days had Morrell heard *Thank you, sir* sound so much like *Go to hell, you son of a bitch.*

And he discovered the problem that sprang from giving one beggar some money. As soon as he did, all the others became four times as obnoxious, swarming around him and cursing him as foully as they knew how when he pushed past without doing for them what he’d done for one of their fellows. Maybe they hoped they’d make him feel guilty. All they really did was make him mad.

He’d just shaken free of the crowd when a woman sidled up to him. Skirts were longer than they had been a couple of years before, and the day wasn’t warm, but what she wore displayed a lot of her.

“Want a good time, soldier?” she said. “Three dollars.”

She was skinny. Like any town with soldiers in it, Kamloops had its share of easy women, but she didn’t look as if she’d been part of their sorry sisterhood for very long. “What did you used to do?” Morrell asked quietly.

“What difference does it make?” she answered. “Whatever it was, I can’t do it any more. Do you want to go someplace?”

“No, thanks,” he answered. She cursed him, too, with a sort of dreary hopelessness that hit him harder than the anger the male beggars had

shown.

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Even the storekeepers' attitudes seemed different from the way they had before things went sour. He'd never seen men so glad to take money from him. When he remarked on that, the fellow who'd just sold him a doll for Mildred said, "You bet I'm glad. You're only the second customer I've had today.

Anybody with any money at all looks good to me right now. How am I going to pay my bills if nobody buys anything from me? And if I can't pay my bills, what happens then? Do I end up out on the street? I sure hope not."

Later, another shopkeeper said, "Hate to tell you this, but Kamloops'd wither up and die if it wasn't for you Yank soldiers. They still pay you regular, so you still have money in your pockets. Damn few folks do, and you'd better believe that."

A third man was even blunter: "If things don't turn around pretty quick, what the hell's going to happen to us?"

Morrell had to run the gauntlet of beggars once more on the way back to the U.S. Army base. The men cursed him all over again, this time for spending money on himself and not on them. "How would you like it if you were hungry?" one of them called after him—a parting shot, as it were.

It was a good question. He had no good answer. Nobody wanted to be hungry. He remembered that skinny woman. Nobody wanted to have to choose between whoring and starving. But nobody seemed to have much of an idea how to make things better, either. Morrell hurried home, a troubled man.

Jonathan Moss was making a discovery as old as mankind: that not even getting exactly what you thought you'd always wanted guaranteed happiness. When he thought about it—which was as seldom as he could—he suspected Laura Moss, once Laura Secord, was making the same unpleasant discovery.

"I don't like the city," she said one morning over a cup of tea (Jonathan preferred coffee, which he brewed himself).

“I’m sorry,” he answered, not altogether sincerely. “I don’t know how I could practice law from a farm.

. . .” He almost added *in the middle of nowhere* , but let that go at the last possible instant.

He might as well have said it. By her sour expression, Laura heard it even if it remained technically unspoken. “But everybody here loves the Yanks and knuckles under to them,” she complained.

The first part of that wasn’t even close to true, as she had to know. As for the second . . . “Whether you like it or not, dear, the United States won the war,” Moss pointed out.

Laura’s expression got unhappier yet. Out on her farm, and even in Arthur—which was far enough off the beaten path for the American occupiers to pay little attention to it—she’d had an easier time pretending that blunt truth wasn’t real. Here in Berlin, she couldn’t ignore it. U.S. military courts here tried cases under occupation law. Soldiers in green-gray uniforms were always on the streets. “Even the newspapers!” she burst out. “They spell *color* c-o-l-o-r and *labor* l-a-b-o-r, not c-o-l-o-u-r and l-a-b-o-u-r.”

“That’s how we spell them in the States,” Moss said.

“But this isn’t the States! It’s the province of Ontario! Can’t you leave even the King’s English alone?”

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He finished his coffee at a gulp. “The King doesn’t run things around these parts any more. The United States do. Sweetheart, I know you don’t like it, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t so.” Carrying his cup over to the sink, he went on, “I’m going to the office. I’ll see you tonight.”

“All right.” She sounded almost as relieved to have him out of the apartment as he was to go. With a sigh, she added, “I don’t know what I’m going to do around here, though.”

Back on her farm, finding ways to pass the time had never been a worry. Moss knew just enough of farm life to be sure of that. If you weren’t busy every waking moment on a farm, you had to be neglecting something. It wasn’t like that here in the city. To Moss, that was one of the advantages of getting off the farm. He wasn’t sure

Laura saw things the same way.

Before leaving, he put on his overcoat and a fur hat with ear flaps that tied under his chin. Berlin, Ontario, might be under U.S. occupation, but its winters remained thoroughly Canadian. Moss had grown up in Chicago. He'd thought he knew everything there was to know about nasty winter weather.

The war and coming back here afterwards to practice law had taught him otherwise.

Only after he was out the door and going down the stairs to his elderly Bucephalus did he realize he hadn't kissed Laura good-bye. He kept going. His sigh was more glum than bemused. For years, he hadn't been able to get the idea of her out of his mind. Then, when they finally did come together, their lovemaking had been the most spectacular he'd ever known.

And now they were married—and he forgot to kiss her good-bye. *So much for romance,* he thought unhappily. He got into the motorcar and turned the key, hoping the battery held enough charge to start the car. Someone down the street was cranking an old Ford. Most of the time, a self-starter was ever so much more convenient. In weather like this, though . . .

The Bucephalus' engine sputtered, coughed, and then came to noisy life. Moss let out a sigh of relief.

The motorcar would get him to the office, which meant the odds were good it would get him home again, too. And then, once he got home, he would find out what new things Laura had found to complain about.

He put the Bucephalus in gear and pulled onto the street even though the engine hadn't had enough time to warm up. Only after the auto had started to roll did he wonder if he was running away from trouble.

Well, what if you are? he asked himself. *It's not as if you won't go back to it tonight.*

Not many motorcars shared the streets with the Bucephalus. Considering the snow and the state of the machine's brakes, that might have been just as well. Moss saw one traffic accident, with steam pouring from a shattered radiator, and with two men in heavy coats standing there shouting at each other.

Moss thought fewer automobiles were on the streets than had been the winter before. He knew why, too: fewer people in Berlin had jobs to go to than had been so the winter before. That was true all over Canada, all over North America, all over the world. Everyone hated it, but no one seemed to have the faintest idea what to do about it.

Two words painted on the side of a building—YANKS OUT! Before long, somebody would come along and paint over them. The Canucks hadn't given up wanting their own country back. The United States remained determined they wouldn't get it. Since the USA had the muscle, the Canadians faced an uphill fight.

As Moss got out of the Bucephalus, a man in a ragged overcoat who needed a shave came up to him **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

with a gloved hand out and said, "Can you give me just a little money, friend? I've been hungry a long time now."

"Here you are." Moss handed him a quarter. "Buy yourself something to eat."

The man took the coin. He went down the street muttering something about a damned cheapskate Yank. Jonathan Moss sighed. Try as you would, you couldn't win.

He had an electric hot plate in his office. As soon as he got in, he started perking more coffee. Not only would it help keep him awake, it would help keep him warm. Even before the coffee was ready, he got to work on the papers waiting for him on his desk.

He'd won his name among the Canadians of Berlin for keeping the U.S. occupiers off their backs as much as he could. That brought him a fair number of cases to be tried in military courts. It also brought him a lot of much more ordinary legal business. Most of his current case load involved bankruptcies.

So many of those were on his desk right now, in fact, that he thought of adding a slug of whiskey to the coffee he poured for himself. Maybe that would help him face the ruin of other men's hopes with something more like equanimity. *Or maybe it'll turn me into a drunk,* he thought, and left the whiskey bottle—it was only a pint—in his desk drawer.

How many of those bankruptcies would have happened if the Russians had managed to pay their loan to that Austro-Hungarian bank? Moss

didn't know, not exactly. The only sure answer that occurred to him was, *a lot fewer* . Of course, he was lucky he was still in business himself. He'd sold out when the stock market started dropping like a rock, and had escaped before Swan-Dive Wednesday. The longer he'd stayed in, the worse he'd have got hurt.

By ten o'clock, he was starting to come up for air in his paperwork. That was when the door to his office opened and his first appointment of the day came in. "Good morning, Mr. Harrison," Moss said, getting up and leaning forward across the desk to shake hands. "What can I do for you today?"

"You can call me Edgar, for starters," Edgar Harrison answered. He was a short, thin, intense-looking man of about Moss' age. The top half of his left ear was missing: a war wound. Had the bullet that clipped him traveled a couple of inches to the right of its real course, he would have died before he hit the ground. As he sat down in the chair to which Moss waved him, he added, "It's not like we haven't worked together before."

"No, it's not," Moss agreed. Harrison sailed as close to the wind as he could when it came to urging more freedom for the conquered Canadian provinces. He'd spent time in jail not long after the Great War ended. Moss thought he'd been lucky not to get shot, though he'd never said that out loud. "Care for some coffee?" he asked, pointing to the pot on the hot plate.

Edgar Harrison shook his head. "Nasty stuff. Never could stand it. Don't know how you Yanks pour it down the way you do."

"We manage," Moss said dryly, and refilled his cup. "You've got something on your mind—I can tell by your lean and hungry look."

"Such men are dangerous," Harrison said with a laugh. "How would you like to mount a court challenge to the whole rationale for the U.S. occupation of Canada?"

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"How would I like it?" Moss echoed. "Personally, I'd like it fine. I'll tell you straight out, though, you'll lose. Occupation law says the U.S. Army can do whatever it has to in occupied territory, and the Constitution doesn't apply here."

“I know that.” The Canadian’s face clouded. “I don’t see how I could help knowing it. But that’s what I want to challenge: the notion that your fancy, precious Constitution shouldn’t apply in Canada. Don’t we deserve the rule of law, same as you Yanks?”

“What you deserve and what you’re going to get are two different things,” Moss replied. “I’m sorry, Mr.

Harrison—Edgar—but I can’t help you make that case. I don’t see any point to even trying to get a judge to hear it. The law here isn’t any different from the law in Utah, and that’s part of the USA.”

“Yes, and you Yanks were right on the point of letting it go back to being a regular part of the USA, too,” Harrison said.

“We *were* ,” Moss said. “Then that Mormon murdered General Pershing, and now it’ll be another ten years before anybody so much as mentions making Utah a normal state again.”

“Nobody’s murdered a military governor here,” Harrison said.

“That bomber tried, whatever his name was,” Moss answered. “He tried twice, as a matter of fact. And there was the uprising a few years ago.” He felt like fortifying this cup of coffee, too, but he wouldn’t, not with Harrison watching. “I’m sorry. Whether you’re right or wrong, you haven’t got a Chinaman’s chance of making an American court take you seriously.”

Edgar Harrison’s eyes were gray as ice—and, at the moment, every bit as cold. “What will your wife say, Mr. Moss”—he wouldn’t use Jonathan’s first name now—“when she finds out you don’t want to help us toward our freedom?”

“I hope she’ll say I’m the lawyer in the family, and I know what I’m doing,” Moss answered. “That’s what I hope. If she says anything else, well, that’s between her and me, wouldn’t you agree?”

“That depends,” Harrison said. “Yes, indeed—that depends.”

Moss looked at him. “Mr. Harrison, I think we’re done here. Don’t you?”

“Yes, I’m afraid we are,” the Canadian replied. “I’m sorry you turned out to be just another goddamn Yank after all.” He got to his feet. “Well, we have ways of dealing with that, too.”

Stung by the injustice of Harrison's words, Moss exclaimed, "If it weren't for me, half the Canucks in this town would be in jail or dead." The other man paid no attention, but turned on his heel and walked out the door. Only after he was gone did Moss wonder if his words had been more than unjust. He wondered if they'd held a threat.

Cincinnatus Driver didn't like having to start over as he approached middle age. He'd spent the years since moving up to Des Moines getting his hauling business up to the point where it made a pretty good living for him and his family. He'd sold the beat-up old Duryea truck he'd driven to Des Moines from Covington, and bought himself a less beat-up, middle-aged White: a bigger, more powerful machine.

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And then Luther Bliss had lured him back to Kentucky and thrown him into jail. Elizabeth had to sell the White to keep food on the table for his family and a roof over their heads. Cincinnatus had a little celebrity value when he got back. Thanks to that, he'd been able to get a new truck—well, actually, an old truck, a Ford that had seen a lot of better years—on credit. For a Negro, that was something not far from a miracle.

He'd kept up the payments, too. He'd never been afraid of work. If he had to get up before the sun rose and keep driving till long after it set, he would do it without a word of complaint. He had done it without a word of complaint.

And then the bottom fell out of the stock market. All of a sudden, fewer goods came into the railway yard. Fewer riverboats and barges tied up at the docks by the Des Moines River. But just as many hauling companies and independent drivers like Cincinnatus were fighting for less business.

One way to get it, of course, was to charge less for hauling. If, after that, you worked more hours still, you might make ends meet. You might—provided you didn't charge less than fuel and upkeep on your truck cost. Cincinnatus—and everybody else who drove a truck in Des Moines, and elsewhere in the country—collided head-on with that painful limitation.

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked Elizabeth one evening over supper. "What *can* I do? Can't charge less now. Don't make no money

at all if I charge less."

"Don't make *any* money," Achilles said. After so long in Iowa, he'd lost a good part of the Kentucky Negro accent Cincinnatus still kept. And, having entered his teens, he was inclined to look on everything his father did with a critical eye. He went on, "I know you're not ignorant, Pa, but you sure do sound that way sometimes."

In another year or so, he probably would have come right out and called Cincinnatus ignorant.

Cincinnatus knew it, too; he remembered the hell-raiser he'd been at Achilles' age. This was what boys did when they started turning into men. "I can't help it, son," Cincinnatus said now, as mildly as he could.

"I talk the way I've always talked. Don't know no other—"

"Any other," Achilles broke in.

"—way to do it," Cincinnatus finished, as if his son hadn't spoken. "And I'm talkin' about important stuff with your ma, stuff we got to talk about. Maybe your English teacher don't like the way we do it"—this time, he quelled Achilles with a glance—"but we got to hash it out just the same."

"Your pa's right," Elizabeth said. "Things ain't easy." Her accent was thicker than her husband's, but Achilles held his peace. She went on, "I ain't been gettin' so much in the way of housekeeper's work lately, neither. Dunno what we gwine do. Like your pa say, dunno what we *kin* do."

"Government talks about them makework jobs for folks who can't get nothin' else," Cincinnatus said.

Achilles stirred not once but a couple of times, but had the sense to keep his mouth shut. *Maybe he does want to live to grow up,* Cincinnatus thought. Aloud, he went on, "Trouble is, I don't want one o' them.

All I want is to go on doin' what I been doin', go on doin' that and make a living at it."

Elizabeth nodded. "I know," she said. She didn't say she wanted to go on cleaning other people's houses, and Cincinnatus knew she didn't. What she did say made a painful amount of sense: "We got to get the money from somewheres, though."

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“I know,” Cincinnatus said glumly.

“I could look for something,” Achilles said. “Plenty of people hire kids nowadays, because they can pay

’em less than grownups.”

He was, of course, dead right. Cincinnatus shook his head even so. “Ain’t gonna let you do that unless things get a lot worse’n they are now. First thing is, you wouldn’t bring in much money, like you say. And second thing is, I want you to get all the education you can. Down the line, that’ll do you more good than anything else I can think of. We ain’t in the Confederate States no more. No law against you goin’ out and gettin’ any kind o’ work you’re smart enough to do. There’s even colored lawyers and doctors in the USA.”

So there were—a handful of each. Their clients were also colored, almost exclusively. Cincinnatus didn’t dwell on that. He wanted his son ambitious, as he was. He’d done as well as he could himself to have the hauling business. Maybe, one of these days, Achilles would take over for him. But maybe, once the boy became a man, he would want something more—want it and be able to get it. So Cincinnatus hoped, anyway.

Amanda said, “Wish you was—wish you *were* —home more, Pa.” She corrected herself before her older brother could do it for her.

“I wish I was, too, sweetheart,” Cincinnatus answered. After getting out of jail, he’d had to get to know his little girl all over again. By the time he came home, she’d nearly forgotten him. And he’d found there was a great deal to like in her. She had an even sweeter nature than Elizabeth’s, which was saying a lot.

But wishes and the real world had only so much to do with each other. “I don’t work, we don’t eat.

Simple as that. Wish it wasn’t, but it is.”

It had always been as simple as that. Now, though, a new and dreadful simplicity threatened the old: even if he worked as hard as he could, as hard as was humanly possible, they still might not eat. That terrified him.

Snow was falling when he got up the next morning. He fired up the truck and headed for the railroad yard even so. He intended to get there early. Some truckers would let snow make them late. They were the ones who'd get what was left after the more enterprising men won the good assignments—or maybe the latecomers would end up with nothing at all.

When Cincinnatus saw how few trains had come into the yard, he thanked heaven he'd come as fast as he could. He got a choice load, too: he filled the back of the old Ford with canned fish from Boston—the mackerel on the cans looked absurdly cheerful—and set out to deliver it to the several grocery stores run by a fellow named Claude Simmons.

Some of the grocery boys who helped him unload the fish were no older than Achilles. One or two of them looked younger than his son. Down in the CSA, even white kids would have pitched a fit about working alongside a colored man. Nobody here complained. The boys seemed as grateful to have work as Cincinnatus was himself.

At one of the stores, Simmons himself signed off on the paperwork. He nodded to Cincinnatus. "I've seen you delivering things here more than once, haven't I?" he asked.

"That's right, suh," Cincinnatus answered.

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"You drive for yourself?"

"Yes, suh."

The grocery man studied him. "You do that just 'cause it's the way things worked out, or are you one of those people who can't stand taking orders from anybody? People like that, they start going crazy if they have to let somebody else tell 'em what to do, so they end up with a job where they work for themselves—either that or they really do go nuts. I've seen that happen a time or two."

With a shrug, Cincinnatus answered, "I don't reckon I'm like that. You ask somebody else, he might tell you different. But I think I just want to make a living, do the best I can for my family."

"You want a job with me?" Simmons asked. "Delivery driver, twenty-

two fifty a week. You won't get rich, but it's steady." He pointed to the clipboard in Cincinnatus' hand. "What you're doing there, you're liable to starve on."

That held the unpleasant ring of truth. Even so, Cincinnatus didn't need to think very long before he shook his head. "Thank you kindly, suh, but I got to tell you no."

"Do you?" Simmons scowled. Cincinnatus got the idea not many people—and especially not somebody like a colored truck driver—told him no. He went on, "You won't tell me you clear twenty-two fifty a whole lot of weeks these days."

"No, suh." Cincinnatus admitted what he could hardly deny. "But what happens if I take the job with you, and things get worse like they look like they're doin' and *then* you let me go? I'd've been drivin'

one o' your trucks, right?—not my own. Probably sell that. Then I'd really have to start at the bottom. I done that before. Don't want to have to try and do it again."

"Have it your way," the grocery man said with a shrug. "Don't expect me to ask you twice, that's all."

"I don't, suh. Didn't expect you to ask me once. Right decent of you to do it."

Suddenly, Simmons seemed less a boss and more a worried human being: "Do you really think it'll get that much worse? How could it?"

"How? Dunno how, Mr. Simmons," Cincinnatus answered. "But you ever know times that weren't so bad, they couldn't get worse?"

That seemed to strike home. "Go on, get out of here," Claude Simmons said, his tone suddenly harsh.

"Here's hoping you're wrong, but"—he lowered his voice—"I'm afraid you're liable to be right."

Over supper that night, Cincinnatus asked Elizabeth, "Did I do the right thing? Twenty-two fifty steady money, that ain't bad. Ain't great, but it ain't bad."

"You done just right." His wife spoke with great authority. "Couple-three months, he forget why he took you on and he let you go. What kind of mess we in then? Way things is, leastways you know what you

got to do to git by."

"I thought the same thing—the very same thing," Cincinnatus said. "We're in trouble now, but we'd be ruined if I took that job and I lost it. We'll go on the best way we know how, that's all."

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"Can't get worse'n what it was when you was in jail," Elizabeth said.

"Hope to God it can't," Cincinnatus answered. He didn't know exactly how bad it had been for his family. But when he laughed, he didn't feel mirthful. "When I was in jail, I didn't have to worry none about where my next meal was comin' from. I knew I was gonna get fed. Wouldn't be much, an' it wouldn't be good, but I was gonna get fed."

He would have got beaten, too, but he didn't talk about that. It wasn't anything his family needed to know, and it wasn't relevant to the discussion. Elizabeth said, "One way or another, the Lord provide for us."

"That's right," Cincinnatus said. Clarence Darrow might not have believed in God, but he did. The confidence that God was keeping an eye on him even while he went through the worst of times in jail was hard to come by, but it had proved true. So he remained convinced, at any rate.

And, one day about six weeks later, when he went to the railroad yard to see what he could haul, he remarked to the conductor, "I ain't had nothin' for the Simmons stores in a while now."

The white man sent him an odd look. "You wouldn't want that assignment if I gave it to you, Cincinnatus," he answered. "Old man Simmons went bankrupt week before last. Didn't you know?"

"No," Cincinnatus said softly. "I missed that." He looked up toward the heavens. A drop of drizzle hit him in the eye, but he didn't care. "Thank you, Jesus," he whispered. He might not have much, but what he had, he would keep a while longer.

Sylvia Enos had always enjoyed books. Like anyone who'd grown up in the days before wireless sets brought words and music straight into the home, she'd used books to while away a lot of empty hours in her life. That didn't mean she'd ever thought she would end up writing

one herself.

Well, yes, she had a coauthor. He was a real writer. He told her to call him Ernie, so she did. He'd been shot up during the war; he'd served in Quebec, and had written a couple of novels about that. She'd even read one. But times were just as hard for writers these days as they were for everybody else. He'd got himself a thousand-dollar contract for *I Sank Roger Kimball* , by Sylvia Enos, as told to . . . and five hundred dollars of that went into his pocket and the other five hundred into Sylvia's, and five hundred dollars bought a hell of a lot of groceries, so Sylvia was writing a book.

"Tell me how it happened," Ernie would say, sitting in the chair in her front room, smoke curling up from his pipe as he took notes. "Tell me exactly how it happened. Make it very plain. Make it so plain anyone can follow."

"I'll try," Sylvia would say. "I'll do my best." She found herself echoing the direct way in which he spoke. "When I got on the train bound for Charleston, I thought—"

"Wait. Stop." Ernie held up a hand. He was a big man, burly like a prizefighter, and the scars above his eyebrows and on his cheeks argued he'd been in his share of scraps, whether in the ring or just in one saloon or another. "Don't tell me what you thought. Tell me what you did."

"Why don't you want to know what I thought?" Sylvia asked. "That's why I did what I did."

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"Tell me what you did," Ernie insisted. "I'll write that. People will read it. Then they'll know what you did. And they'll know why, too."

Sylvia frowned. "Why will they know that?"

Ernie was a handsome man, but normally one with a slightly sullen expression. When he smiled, it was like the sun coming out. "Why? Because I'm good," he said.

That smile by itself was almost enough to lay Sylvia's doubts to rest. She'd had room in her life for precious few romantic thoughts since the *Ericsson* sank, but Ernie's smile coaxed some out from wherever

they'd been hiding all these years. She knew that was foolishness and nothing else but. How could she help knowing it, when he was five or ten years younger than she was?

He listened. She didn't think she'd ever had anyone listen so closely to what she said. She knew George hadn't when he was still alive. She'd loved him, and she was sure he'd loved her, too. But he hadn't listened like that—nor, as she had to admit to herself, had she listened to him so. Paying such close attention hadn't occurred to either one of them.

Ernie not only listened, he took detailed notes. Sometimes he lugged a portable typewriter to her flat.

The battered leather of its case said he'd lugged it to a lot of different places, most of them worse than Boston not far from the harbor. He typed in quick, short, savage bursts, pausing between them to stare at the ceiling and gnaw on the stem of his pipe.

In one of those pauses between bursts, Sylvia said, "The way the keys clatter, it sounds like a machine gun going off."

The pipe stopped twitching in his mouth. It swung toward her, as if it were a weapon itself. "No," he said, his voice suddenly harsh and flat. "You don't know what you're talking about. Thank God you don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"I drove an ambulance," he said, at least as much to himself as to her. "Sometimes I was up near the front. Sometimes I had to fight myself. I know what machine guns sound like. Oh, yes. I know. But I was on the safe side of the St. Lawrence"—he laughed—"when I got shot. An aeroplane shot up a train full of soldiers. Poor, stupid bastards. They never even found out what it was about before they got shot."

He shrugged. "Maybe that was what it was about, that and nothing more. I went to help them, to take them away. A hospital was close by. Another aeroplane came over. It shot up all of us. I got hit."

Ernie went back to typing then. The next time Sylvia thought of making some unasked-for comment, she kept it to herself instead.

He delivered the finished manuscript on a day when winter finally seemed ready to give way to spring.

Thrusting it at her, he said, "Here. Read this. It is supposed to be

yours. You should know what is in it.”

He flung himself down on the sofa, plainly intending to wait till she read it. It wasn’t very thick. Sylvia sat down in the chair by the sofa and went through it. Even before she got halfway, she looked up at him and said, “I understand why I did what I did better now than I did when I did it.”

She wondered if that made any sense at all. It must have, for he gave her a brusque nod. “I told you,” he said. “I’m good.”

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“Yes.” She nodded back. “You are.” She went back to reading. When she looked up, another forty-five minutes had gone by and she was finished. “You make me sound better and smarter than I am.”

That made him frown. “You should sound the way you are. How do I fix it?”

He was serious. Sylvia laughed and shook her head. “Don’t. I like it.” Ernie still looked discontented.

She laughed again. “I like you, too.” She’d never said that before.

“Thanks,” he said, and put the manuscript back into a tidy pile and imprisoned it with rubber bands. “I enjoyed working with you. I think the book will be all right.” By the way he sounded, the second was more important than the first.

Even so, when he headed for the door Sylvia planted herself in front of him, put her arms around him, and gave him a kiss. It was the first time she’d kissed a man, the first time she’d wanted to kiss a man, since she’d kissed George good-bye for the last time during the war.

Ernie kissed her back, too, hard enough to leave her lips feeling bruised. He squeezed her against him, then all at once shoved her away. “It’s no good,” he said. “It’s no damn good at all.”

“Why not?” Sylvia said. “It’s been so long. . . .” Knowing desire had been a delicious surprise. Knowing it, having it stirred, and now having it thwarted seemed more than she could bear.

“Why not, sweetheart? I’ll tell you why not,” the writer answered. “I

got shot in Quebec. You know that. You don't know where. I got shot right *there* . Not enough left to do a woman any good. Not enough left to do me any good, either."

"Oh," Sylvia said. That didn't seem nearly strong enough. "Oh, *hell* ."

He looked at her and nodded. "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it." The words weren't quite in his usual style. Maybe he was quoting from something, but Sylvia didn't recognize it. He bared his teeth in what seemed more snarl than smile. "I'm sorry, sweetheart."

"*You're* sorry?" Sylvia exclaimed. "You poor man!"

That was the wrong thing to say. She realized it as soon as the words were out of her mouth, which was, of course, too late. Ernie set his jaw and glared. No, he wasn't one to take pity—he'd despise it for weakness, maybe Sylvia's, more likely his own. "Shouldn't have messed with you," he said. "My own stupid fault. I forget every once in a while. Then it tries to wag. Like a goddamn boxer dog wagging his little docked tail. But a boxer can hump your leg. I can't even do that." He kissed her again, even harder and rougher than before. Then he walked straight out the door. Over his shoulder, he threw back a last handful of words: "Take care of yourself, kiddo."

The door slammed. Sylvia burst into tears. "Oh, *hell,* " she said again. "Oh, hell. Oh, hell. Oh, hell." She was sure she would never see him again.

She was sure, but she was wrong. One day a couple of weeks later, he waved to her as she came out of her block of flats. She'd never known she could feel joy and fear in the same heartbeat. "Ernie!" she called. "What is it?"

"You have your money in a bank," he said. That wasn't at all what she'd expected. "Which bank is it?"

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"Plymouth and Boston Bank and Trust," she answered automatically. "Why?"

"I thought I remembered that," Ernie said. "I saw the passbook on your coffee table. Take the money out. Take it all out. Take it out right away. The bank is going to fail. It will fail very soon."

Fear of a different sort shot through her. “God bless you,” she whispered. “You’re sure?”

“No, of course not,” he snapped. “I came here because I was guessing. Why else would I come here?”

Sylvia flushed. “I was going somewhere else, but I’ll head over there right now. Thank you, Ernie.”

His face softened, just for a moment. “You’re welcome. Writers find things out. I know someone who works for the bank. Who worked for the bank, I mean. He saw the writing on the wall. He quit. He said anywhere else in the world was better than to be there right now.” He paused and nodded to Sylvia.

“Nice to think I can do *something* for you, anyhow.” Touching a finger to the brim of his sharp new fedora, Ernie hurried away. The crowd on the street swallowed him up.

Plymouth and Boston Bank and Trust was only a few blocks away: the main reason Sylvia banked there. She ran almost the whole way. The lines didn’t stretch out the door, as she’d seen at other banks in trouble. But she felt panic in the air when she went inside. Everyone was speaking in the low near-whispers people used when they tried to show they weren’t afraid. She filled out a withdrawal slip and worked her way to the front of the line.

How many lines have I stood in? How many hours of my life have I wasted in them? Too many—I know that.

At last she stood before a teller’s cage, with its frosted glass and iron grillwork. The young man looked very unhappy when he saw the slip. “You want to close out your entire account?” he said in that soft, no-I’m-not-afraid voice.

“That’s right,” Sylvia answered firmly. “You *do* have the money to cover it?”

The teller flinched. “Yes, we do. We certainly do. Of course we do.”

“Well, then, kindly give it to me,” Sylvia said.

“Yes, ma’am. Please wait here. I’ll be back with it.” The teller disappeared into the bowels of the bank.

Before he returned, an older man stepped into the cage and said,

“Ma’am, I want to personally assure you, the Plymouth and Boston Bank and Trust is sound.”

“That’s nice,” Sylvia told him. “If it turns out you’re right, maybe I’ll put my money back in. If it turns out you’re wrong, I’ll have the money—if that teller ever gets back. How long is he going to take?”

He chose that moment to return. While the frowning older man looked on, he counted out bills and change for Sylvia. “Here you are, ma’am,” he said. “Every penny that’s owed you.” He sounded as if he were doing her a favor by giving her back the money, and as if she hadn’t done the bank a favor by depositing it there in the first place.

By the time she left, the lines did stretch out the door. “Did you get it?” someone called to her. She **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

didn’t answer; she didn’t want to get mugged when people found out she was carrying cash. She just headed home, as fast as she could.

Plymouth and Boston Bank and Trust closed its doors for good the next day.

XII

Mary McGregor went about her chores with a certain somber joy. That had nothing to do with how hard things were on the Manitoba farm where she’d spent her whole life. It had a great deal to do with how hard the market crash had hit the United States. She hardly cared what happened to her, so long as the United States got hurt.

And, by all the signs, the occupiers did hurt. Fewer green-gray U.S. Army motorcars rattled along the road to Rosenfeld that ran past the edge of the farm. Fewer U.S. soldiers prowled the streets of the local market town. And the *Rosenfeld Register* , published these days by an upstart from Minnesota who used occupation propaganda as filler, kept on weeping about how hard a time people south of the border were having.

None of which made things on the farm any easier, only somewhat easier to bear. Things on the farm were desperately hard, and all the harder because Julia had married Kenneth Marble and gone off to live with him. She came back to visit fairly often, usually bringing Beth Marble, Kenneth’s mother, with her, and Kenneth himself stopped by every so often for a burst of work for which a man’s strength came in

handy. Things weren't the same, though, and Mary and her own mother both knew it.

"One of these days before too long, you'll meet somebody, too," Maude McGregor said over supper after a long, wearing day out in the fields. "You'll meet somebody, get married yourself, and move away.

I'll probably have to sell this place and move in with you or Julia."

"I wouldn't do that!" Mary exclaimed.

Her mother smiled. "Of course you would. You should. That's the way the world works. Young folks do what they need to do, and older ones ride along with it as best they can. I don't see how we'd go on if things worked any different."

"It doesn't seem right. It *isn't* right," Mary said—she'd had that passionate certainty for as long as she'd been alive. After a moment, she went on, "If I ever marry anybody"—and the thought had crossed her mind more and more often since she'd passed her twentieth birthday—"he ought to come and live here and help us work this place. Then our children could go right on working it, years and years from now."

"The trouble with that, you know, is that Julia and Kenneth, and their children when they have them, have an interest in this land, too," her mother said.

"Julia doesn't seem very interested," Mary said. "She went off without so much as a backwards glance."

"Julia doesn't seem very interested *now* ," her mother replied. "How she'll feel about things ten or twenty years from now—or how her husband and her children will feel—well, how can anybody know for

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sure?"

Thinking about what things might be like ten or twenty years from now still didn't seem natural to Mary.

She tried to imagine herself at forty, but no picture formed in her mind. That lay too far in the future to mean anything to her now. She wondered if Julia still felt the same way. Maybe not—with a husband at hand, she had to be looking forward to having children.

How children were begotten was no mystery to Mary, as it could be no mystery to anyone who'd grown up on a farm. Why anyone would want to have anything to do with the process was a different question. To let a man do *that* with her, to her . . . She shook her head. The mere idea was repulsive. But people did it. That was what being married was about. She knew that, too. If people didn't do it, after a while there wouldn't be any more people.

Sometimes that didn't seem such a bad idea.

Her mother went on, "A couple of knotholes have popped out of the wood in the barn. I want you to nail wood over them when you get the chance, so the inside will stay warmer in winter. The sooner you do it, the sooner we don't have to worry about it any more."

"I'll take care of it," Mary promised. "I've noticed 'em, too, especially the one that came out right behind that old wagon wheel."

"Yes, that's the biggest one," Maude McGregor agreed. "A good patch there will keep a lot of warm air from leaking out when the weather turns cold again—and it will."

"I know," Mary said. No one who'd lived in Manitoba any time from September to April could help knowing.

When she went out to the barn the next morning, she took care of the livestock first. That *had* to be done, and done every day. As soon as she'd finished, she went over to her father's work bench. She cut a square off a flat board, then grabbed the wood, a hammer, and some nails and went to get at the knot that had turned into a knothole.

It was right behind that wagon wheel. She had to put down the tools and the patch to wrestle the wheel out of the way. "Miserable thing," she muttered, or perhaps something a little stronger than that. Why the devil hadn't her father got rid of it? Come to that, why hadn't she or her mother in the years since her father died? She had no good answer except that there had always been more important things to do.

Once she'd shifted the wheel, she picked up the square of wood and the hammer and nails and advanced on the knothole. As she took the next to last step, she frowned. It didn't sound right—she'd never known that reverberation anywhere else in the barn. It didn't feel quite right underfoot, either.

Ground had no business giving slightly, as it did here. It almost felt as

if . . .

Mary bent down to look more closely at where she'd been standing. It just looked like dirt, with straw scattered over it. But when she scraped at it with her hand, she didn't have to dig far at all before her fingers found a board—undoubtedly, the board she'd trodden on after moving the broken wagon wheel.

What's that doing there? she wondered. Almost of their own accord, her fingers kept searching till they found the edge of the board. She pulled up. Dirt slid from the board as she raised it.

Under it was a sharp-edged hollow dug into the soil. And in that hollow . . . Mary's eyes got big and **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

round. In that hollow rested sticks of dynamite and blasting caps and lengths of fuse and some highly specialized tools. "At last," she whispered. She'd finally found her father's bomb-making gear.

The first thing she imagined was going into Rosenfeld, as Arthur McGregor had done at the end of the Great War, and blowing as many Americans as she could sky-high. She didn't worry about getting caught. If it meant more revenge on the USA, she would gladly pay the price. The real problem was, she didn't know enough about explosives to make a bomb that had any real chance of doing what she wanted it to do.

I can learn, she thought. *It can't be too hard. I just have to be careful. I'm sure I can figure it out without killing myself while I'm doing it.*

"Thank you, Pa," Mary said. "I'm sorry you had to stop. I'm even sorrier you didn't get General Custer.

But the fight's not done. The fight won't be done till Canada's free again."

She looked toward that old, broken wagon wheel. Suddenly, a wide smile flashed across her face. Now she understood why her father had never repaired it or got rid of it. It perfectly concealed his tools and explosives. Not one of the Yankee soldiers who'd searched this barn—and there had been a lot of them, for they'd suspected much more than they could ever prove—had thought to move it and see what lay underneath. She wouldn't have thought of it, either, if she hadn't had to shift the wheel for an altogether different reason.

She wondered if she could find anyone in the sputtering Canadian resistance movement who could teach her about making bombs. Then, almost as soon as the thought occurred to her, she shook her head. Her father had gone his own way in fighting the Americans, which meant no one had betrayed him. No one could betray him if no one knew what he was doing.

People told a bitter joke: *when three people sit down to conspire, one is a fool and the other two American spies.* That would have been funnier had it not held so painfully much truth. More than once, the *Rosenfeld Register* had exulted about plots that failed because one member or another gave them away to the Yankees.

Mary McGregor nodded to herself. *Whatever I do, I'll do it alone. That's how Pa did it. He'd still be blowing them up if he hadn't had bad luck. It's my turn now. I'll be as careful as he was, or even more so. Nobody will give me away, and I won't give myself away, either.*

Some people said even the big Canadian uprising of a few years before had been betrayed to the Americans before it broke out, that they'd been on the alert because of that. Mary had even heard some people with reputations as patriots had turned traitor because they'd fallen in love with invaders from the south.

She didn't want to believe that. She had trouble imagining any proper Canadian falling in love with a Yankee. The Americans had ravished the country. Wouldn't they be ravishing anyone in it who had anything to do with them? That was how it seemed to Mary. As far as she was concerned, nobody who'd betrayed the uprising deserved to live.

"Yes, that's what I'll do," she said, as if someone had suggested it to her. Getting rid of traitors was the best way she could think of to remind the whole country that going along with the occupation had a price.

She wanted to go out and start planting bombs that very morning. She knew some names. She was sure she could learn others without much trouble. But she checked herself. *You were going to be careful,*
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remember? After nodding, she patched the knothole that had led to her discovery. Then she carefully concealed the hole in the ground once more, replacing the board, covering it with dirt and straw, and putting

the old wagon wheel back where it belonged. When she was done, she looked hard at the ground and did a little more smoothing. Satisfied at last, she nodded and went on to cover up the other knots that had come out of the planking.

“Took you long enough,” her mother said when Mary came into the farmhouse. “I didn’t think it was that hard a job.”

“Sorry, Ma.” Mary had known from the minute she lifted the edge of the board and saw what lay beneath it that she couldn’t tell her mother about it. What would Maude McGregor do? Pitch a fit and tell her to leave the stuff alone. She was as sure of that as she was of her own name. She was also sure she wouldn’t leave the stuff alone, no matter what her mother told her to do.

“Sorry?” Her mother shook her head. “Don’t you think you have enough other things to take care of?

What were you doing, playing with the chicks? You haven’t done that since you were a little girl.”

“I know, but I was looking at them, and they looked so cute—and they turn into stupid, boring old hens so fast. I wanted to have some fun with them while I could. They act so silly.” Mary seized on the explanation with both hands. She didn’t like to lie to her mother, but preferred that to telling the truth here.

“Can’t afford to get sentimental about ’em,” her mother said. “They’ll go into the pot when they stop giving enough eggs to be worth their keep. Nothing like a good chicken stew on a cold winter night.”

“I know that, too, Ma.” Mary didn’t want to say anything to stir her mother up or make her start asking questions. Agreeing with everything Maude McGregor said was also liable to make her mother wonder, but not in any dangerous way.

Or so Mary thought, till her mother asked, “Are you all right, dear?”

Mary thought that over. After a couple of seconds, she nodded. “I’m swell, Ma. I’m the best I’ve been for a long time, matter of fact.” Her mother gave her a quizzical look, but not of the sort to make her worry. No, she didn’t worry at all. Everything was going to be fine now. She could feel it.

The *Remembrance* sailed west through the Straits of Florida, out of Nassau in the Bahamas—the formerly British Bahamas, surrendered to

the USA after the Great War—bound for Puerto Limón on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. The sun stood tropically high in the sky. The day was hot and bright and perfect . . . perfect, that is, for almost everybody aboard the aeroplane carrier except Sam Carsten.

No matter how hot and muggy it got, Sam had to keep his cap on and to jam it down as far down over his eyes as he could. A lot of officers went around in their shirtsleeves. He didn't; he left on his white summer jacket, to protect his arms as well as he could.

His ears, his nose (especially his nose), and the backs of his hands were snowy white with zinc-oxide ointment. Even so, every square inch of flesh he exposed to the sun was red and peeling or blistered. He hated weather like this, hated it where most men reveled in it.

Like most men, Commander Martin van der Waal tanned readily. Oh, he'd burn if he did something **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

stupid, but even that would only last till he stayed out enough to get his hide acclimated to the sun. The torpedo-defense specialist looked at Sam with wry sympathy. "You'd sooner be patrolling somewhere between Greenland and Iceland, wouldn't you?" he said.

"Now that you mention it, sir—yes," Carsten answered.

"Sorry about that," van der Waal said. "They've got somebody else keeping an eye on the Royal Navy up there. We get to show the flag in what used to be a Confederate lake."

"Not *quite* enough little specks of land in the Florida Straits to let the CSA claim this as territorial water and make us go the long way round," Sam said.

"We would have had to before the war," his superior said. "The Confederates thought they were little tin gods then. Now . . . Now I don't care if they build themselves a bridge from Key West to Habana.

We'll sail right under it, by God, and thumb our noses as we go by."

"Yeah." Carsten smiled and nodded, liking the picture.

Down at the *Remembrance* 's stern, a sailor spun an aeroplane's prop. The engine roared to noisy life.

With a push from the steam catapult, the machine taxied along the

carrier's flight deck, descended for a split second as it went off the end, and then gained altitude and buzzed away. Another followed, and another, and another.

Sam said, "Of course it'll be unofficial when they look over what the Confederates are up to in south Florida and Cuba." He winked. "Of course it will."

Commander van der Waal chuckled. "Yeah, and rain makes applesauce."

But two could play at that game. Before long, a biplane came down from Florida and began flying lazy circles above the *Remembrance* . Not caring for the company, the aeroplane carrier's commander ordered a couple of fighting scouts aloft to look over the newcomer and, if need be, to warn him off. Sam happened to be going by the wireless shack when one of the U.S. pilots said, "The Confederate says he's just a civilian. His machine's got *Confederate Citrus Company* painted on the side. He's out for a stroll, you might say."

What the officer inside the wireless center said meant, *Yeah, and rain makes applesauce,* but was a good deal more pungently phrased. The officer went on, "Tell the son of a bitch he can goddamn well go strolling somewhere else, or maybe he'll go swimming instead."

"Yes, sir," the pilot answered. Carsten lingered in the corridor to hear what happened next. After half a minute or so, the pilot came back on the air: "Sir, he says if we want an international incident from shooting down an unarmed civilian pilot in international waters, we can have one."

The officer in the wireless center expended more bad language. At last, he said, "I'd better talk to the old man about that one." He might have wanted to order the Confederate aeroplane knocked out of the sky, but he didn't have the nerve to do it without approval from on high. Carsten wouldn't have, either.

Maybe the skipper of the *Remembrance* used some blue language of his own. Whether he did or not, that CONFEDERATE CITRUS COMPANY aeroplane flew above the carrier for the next hour and a half. Nobody fired a shot at it. The pilot finally ran low on fuel or got bored or found some other reason to fly back off toward the north.

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In the officers' galley at supper that evening, Sam said, "I bet they're developing that bastard's photographs right now."

"Probably," a lieutenant, junior grade, agreed. "Fat lot of good they can do with 'em, though. Maybe they've built a few submersibles without our noticing, and maybe than can keep 'em hidden from us, too—"

"Especially since the Socialists aren't spending the money on inspections that the Democrats did," a lieutenant commander put in.

"Yes, sir," the j.g. said. "But there's no way in hell they could build themselves an aeroplane carrier on the sly. That's too big a secret to keep. Besides, they haven't got the aeroplanes to put aboard it."

"We hope they don't," Sam said. "For all we know, they're all labeled *Confederate Citrus Company* right now."

That produced a few laughs and a few curses. The lieutenant commander said, "That machine had no guns. The pilots checked, first thing."

"Yes, sir," Sam said. "But how long would they need to convert the type to something they could use in combat?"

Nobody had anything resembling an answer for him. The lieutenant commander said, "That's something we ought to find out about. Maybe more of these fruit-company bastards will come look us over before too long. If they do, we'll look them over, too." He sighed. "I don't know how much good that will do us, not the way things are in Philadelphia these days, but we do have to make the effort."

By the next morning, though, they'd left the Straits and even Cuba behind. No more aeroplanes came out from the CSA to inspect them. Carsten was sure that didn't mean nobody was keeping an eye on them. Lots of little fishing boats, some Confederate, others Mexican, bobbed in the Gulf of Mexico. How many of them had wireless sets? How many of those sets were sending reports to, say, the Confederate Naval Academy at Mobile, or to New Orleans? He didn't know, but he had his suspicions.

He also had suspicions of another sort. Whenever he came up onto the flight deck, he kept staring out into the blue, blue waters of the Gulf. "What are you doing?" Commander van der Waal asked. "Looking for periscopes?"

“Yes, sir,” Sam answered, altogether seriously.

Van der Waal stared. “Do you really think the Confederates would try to sink us?”

“No, sir,” Sam said. “I think they’d have to be crazy to try that. But if they’ve got any submersibles, what better way to train their crews than by stalking a real, live aeroplane carrier?”

His superior pondered that, then nodded. “Good point, Carsten. Let’s see what we can do about it.

Maybe we ought to get some training in, too.”

Before long, the *Remembrance* shut down her engines and drifted to a stop. Sam knew what that meant: she was giving her hydrophone operators the best chance she could to pick up the sounds of submarines moving on their electric engines somewhere under the sea.

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What will we do if we hear one? Carsten wondered. The carrier couldn’t start lobbing depth charges into the Gulf of Mexico. That would be an act of war, no less than if one of the hypothetical subs launched a torpedo at her. *We could report it to Philadelphia.* How much good would that do? Sam didn’t know. But the Confederate States couldn’t claim they had no submersibles if the *Remembrance* found one.

Or could they? Maybe they’d claim the boat belonged to the Empire of Mexico. Sam doubted the Mexicans could build such boats on their own, or man them if they did, but how could you know for sure? You couldn’t. Subs under the sea were hard to find and even harder to identify; they didn’t come with license plates, the way motorcars did.

Nobody ever officially said whether the hydrophone operators found anything. Sam did get a letter of commendation in his service jacket for “enhancing the *Remembrance* ’s readiness against surprise attack.” He drew his own conclusions from that. He also kept his mouth shut about them. Sometimes advertising you’d done something smart was a good idea. Sometimes it was anything but.

When they neared the Central American coast, a tiny gunboat flying the blue-and-white Costa Rican flag came out of Puerto Limón to greet the *Remembrance* . An officer at the bow hailed her through a

megaphone. He looked just the way Sam had thought a Costa Rican would look, and spoke English with a Spanish accent. The gunboat, which might have been a toy alongside the aeroplane carrier, got out of the way in a hurry so the elephantine ship could advance.

Puerto Limón itself turned out to be very different from what Carsten had expected. He'd come to ports in Latin America before. He'd figured the people here would be like the officer: swarthy, most of them of mixed white and Indian blood, and Spanish-speaking. Instead, most of them turned out to be Negroes, and they used more English than Spanish. In their mouths, the language had a lilt that put him in mind of what he'd heard in the Bahamas.

A long line of black men carrying huge bunches of bananas came up the pier next to the one where the *Remembrance* tied up. They vanished into the hold of a freighter flying the Confederate flag, then emerged to go back down the pier lugging crates: whatever that freighter had been carrying here to exchange for the golden fruit (actually, the bananas going aboard were green; Sam supposed they would ripen on the way up to the CSA).

White sailors aboard the freighter stared over at the aeroplane carrier. To Commander van der Waal, Carsten remarked, "I wonder how many of those bastards were in the C.S. Navy during the war."

"More than a few, or I miss my guess," the other officer answered. "We've just given them some free intelligence." He shrugged. "That's the way it goes, sometimes."

The Costa Rican officer from the gunboat came aboard a few minutes later. His white uniform was more festooned with gold braid than that of the *Remembrance* 's skipper, but he introduced himself as Lieutenant Commander Garcia. That tickled Sam's funny bone. "I wonder what an *admiral* in the Costa Rican Navy looks like," he remarked.

"You probably can't see the cloth on his uniform at all, on account of the gold and the medals and such."

Commander van der Waal's snicker had a nasty edge to it. "My little girl back in Providence likes to play dress-up the same way. Of course, she's got an excuse—she's only eight years old."

But Lieutenant Commander Garcia said all the right things: "We are pleased to see this great ship in our **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

growing port. We hope it is a sign of friendship between your great republic and our own. Costa Rica and the United States have never been enemies. We do not believe we ever have to be."

Sam wondered whether the sailors aboard the Confederate freighter could hear Garcia's words, and how they liked them if they could. *Hope you don't like 'em for beans,* he thought.

When Abner Dowling went to the train station in Salt Lake City, a police officer patted him down before allowing him inside the building. Another cop, and a military policeman with him, went through Dowling's suitcase. "Sorry about this, sir," the MP said when he got to the bottom of Dowling's belongings. "I do apologize for the inconvenience."

"It's all right," Dowling answered. "Identity cards and uniforms can be faked—we've found that out the hard way. Now you know for a fact I won't be carrying contraband onto the train."

"Thank you for taking it so well, sir," the military policeman said.

"No point getting huffy about it," Dowling said. "You were going to search me any which way."

He was dead right about that. Everyone who left Utah was searched these days, whether at train stations or at checkpoints along the highways. Since assassinating General Pershing, Mormon diehards had set off bombs from San Francisco to Pittsburgh. They were suspected in a couple of murders of prominent men, too, and of bank robberies to finance their operations. And so . . .

And so lines into the railroad station were long and slow. Everyone was searched: men, women, children, even babies in flowing robes. At least once, somebody had tried to smuggle out explosives hidden under baby clothes. Dowling only hoped the diehards hadn't succeeded at that game before the U.S. occupiers got wise to it. Every suitcase got searched, too. Some, the ones suspected of false bottoms, also got X-rayed.

As Dowling took his seat in the fancy Pullman car, he marveled that any ordinary civilians at all got on in Utah. He muttered under his breath, a mutter uncomplimentary to the inhabitants of the state he helped rule. Utah had precious few ordinary civilians, and even fewer who were also Mormons. Up till General Pershing was killed, Dowling had dared believe otherwise. So had the administrators who'd been on the point of relaxing military occupation in Utah.

It could have become a state like any other, Dowling thought as the train began rolling east. *They could have rebuilt the Temple, if they'd wanted to. But some damnfool hotheads made sure that wouldn't happen. I hope they're pleased with themselves. Utah won't get out from under the U.S.*

Army's thumb for the next ten years now.

He suspected the man who'd gunned down General Pershing—a man who'd never been caught—and his pals *were* pleased with themselves. Some people had a vested interest in trouble. If it looked as if calm threatened to break out, people like that would do anything they could to thwart it. And, as they'd shown, they could do plenty.

Colonel Dowling let out a loud, long sigh. He glanced toward the bed in his compartment. If he wanted to, he could take off his shoes—take off his uniform, for that matter—curl up there, and go to sleep. He didn't have to worry about Salt Lake City, or Utah as a whole, for the next several days.

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Unless the Mormons have planted a bomb under the railroad tracks, he thought. He knew that wasn't likely. But he also knew it wasn't impossible.

He shook his head, angry at himself. *I said I wasn't going to worry about it, and what do I do? Start worrying, that's what.*

He looked out the window. An aeroplane flew past, also heading east but easily outpacing the train. It was one of those new three-motored machines that could carry freight or passengers. Suddenly, Dowling wondered what sort of precautions people were taking at landing fields. A bomb aboard an aeroplane would surely kill everybody on it. Muttering again, this time a sharp curse, he scribbled a note to himself.

Maybe the Mormons hadn't thought of trying to bomb aeroplanes, the way they assuredly had thought of bombing trains. Maybe they wouldn't. But maybe they would, too. He wanted to stay one step ahead of them if he could.

When lunchtime came, he made his way back to the dining car. He was about to dig into a big plate of spare ribs when a clever-looking woman with reddish hair going gray came up to his table and said,

“Mind if I join you, Colonel Dowling?”

“I suppose not.” He frowned; she looked familiar, but he couldn’t place the face. “You’re . . .”

“Ophelia Clemens,” she said crisply, holding out her hand man-fashion. “We met in Winnipeg, if you’ll remember.”

“Good God, yes!” Dowling exclaimed as he shook it. “I’m not likely to forget that!” She’d come to occupied Canada to interview General Custer, and she’d just escaped being blown to bits with him—and with Dowling—when Arthur McGregor planted a bomb in the steakhouse where Custer ate lunch. “How are you, Miss Clemens?”

“Tolerable well, thanks,” the newspaperwoman answered. “Are you also heading to Washington for General Custer’s funeral?”

Dowling nodded. “Yes, I am. I would have gone anyway, but Mrs. Custer also sent me a telegram asking me to be there, which I thought was very kind and gracious of her.”

“Do you have any comments on the general’s passing?”

“It’s the end of an era,” Dowling said automatically. That he knew it was a cliché made it no less true.

He went on, “He was an officer in the War of Secession. He was a hero in the Second Mexican War.

He was a hero—probably *the* hero—of the Great War.” *Even though he broke orders to do it. Even though he almost got himself court-martialed—and me with him.* “And he was a hero all over again, when he was coming home to retire, when he threw back the bomb that Canadian tossed at him.” Every word of that was true, too. Dowling knew he would have died if General Custer hadn’t stubbornly, irrationally—correctly—believed McGregor was the man who’d been out to kill him. He added, “He lived to ninety, too. That’s a good run for anybody.”

“It certainly is.” Ophelia Clemens took out a notebook and scrawled in it. A waiter came by. She gave him her order, then turned back to Dowling. “May I ask you something, Colonel?”

“Go ahead,” Dowling replied. “What kind of answer you get depends on what kind of question it is.”

“It always does,” she agreed. “Here’s what I want to know: Teddy Roosevelt and George Custer **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

always told different stories about what happened during the Second Mexican War. They’re both dead now. You can’t hurt either one of them with a straight answer. Do you know who had it right?”

“Do I know for a fact?” Abner Dowling remembered the quarrel he’d listened to in Nashville in 1917, right at the end of the Great War. Roosevelt and Custer had almost come to blows then, though one was in late middle years and the other already an old man. Dowling knew what his opinion was, but that wasn’t what Miss Clemens had asked. “Ma’am, I wasn’t there. I was a little boy during the Second Mexican War. Even if I had been there, odds are I wouldn’t have heard exactly what orders were given, or by whom.”

Ophelia Clemens gave him a sour nod. “I was afraid you were going to say that. I even talked to a couple of the surviving machine gunners—Gatling gunners, they called themselves—but they don’t know or don’t remember who did what when.”

“We’ll probably never know, not for certain,” Dowling said.

“What do you think?” The newspaperwoman poised her pencil over the notebook, ready to take down whatever pearls of wisdom he gave her.

“Not for publication,” he answered at once. The pencil withdrew. He still didn’t say what he thought.

Instead, he added, “Not even as ‘a highly placed source’ or anything like that.”

The look she sent him this time was even more sour. “All right,” she said at last. “You don’t make things easy, do you?”

“Ma’am, Teddy Roosevelt and George Custer are dead, but you won’t find a senior officer who doesn’t have strong views about both of them,” Dowling said.

Ophelia Clemens nodded again. That did seem to make sense to her. “I promise,” she said solemnly.

“And in case you’re wondering, I don’t break promises like that. If I did, no one would trust me when I made them.”

Dowling believed her. She was, from everything he'd seen in Winnipeg and here on the train, a straight shooter. She probably had to be, to get ahead in a normally masculine business like reporting. He remembered she'd told him and Custer her father had been a newspaperman, too. Dowling said, "Strictly off the record, I'd bet on Teddy Roosevelt."

"I thought as much," she said. "Custer was nothing but a phony and a blowhard, wasn't he?"

"Strictly off the record," Dowling repeated, "he *was* a humbug and a blowhard. But if you say he was nothing but a humbug and a blowhard, you're wrong. He always went straight after what he wanted, and he went after it as hard as he could. When he was right—and he was, sometimes—that made him one of the most effective people the world has ever seen. The rest may be true, but don't forget that part of him."

Ophelia Clemens considered that. In the end, a little reluctantly, she nodded. "Yes, I suppose you have something. People need to judge a man by what he did, not just by the way he acted."

"Custer did a lot," Dowling said. "No two ways about that." He might have managed more, he might have managed better, if he hadn't become a self-parody in his later years. But what he *had* done would be remembered as long as the United States endured.

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Dowling told Custer stories all the way from Salt Lake City to Washington, D.C., some on the record, some off. Ophelia Clemens wrote down what she could and either laughed or rolled her eyes at the rest.

Dowling was sorry they went their separate ways after the train rolled into Union Station.

He paid his respects to Libbie Custer, who sat beside the general's body where it lay in state in the Capitol. "Hello, Colonel," Custer's widow said. "We had a fine run, Autie and I. I don't know what in heaven's name I'll do without him."

"I think you'll manage," Dowling said, on the whole truthfully. He'd always reckoned Mrs. Custer the brains of the outfit.

“I suppose I *could* ,” she said now. “But what’s the point? I spent the past sixty-five years taking care of the general. Now that he’s gone, what am I supposed to do with myself? I haven’t much time left, either, you know.”

With no answer for that—how could he contradict an obvious truth? —Dowling murmured, “I’m sorry,”

and made his escape.

He marched in the mourners’ procession behind Custer’s flag-draped coffin. The general’s funeral was modeled on Teddy Roosevelt’s; Dowling found it strangely fitting that the two men, longtime rivals in life, should be equals in death. The only difference he could see was that no foreign dignitaries came to say their farewells to General Custer.

A bespectacled man hoisted a boy onto his shoulders. In the funereal hush, his words carried: “Look, Armstrong. There goes the man you’re named for.”

Custer’s final wishes—or maybe they were Libbie’s wishes—were that his remains be buried at Arlington, across the Potomac from Washington in what was now West Virginia. He would spend eternity with Teddy Roosevelt, and Robert E. Lee, presumably, would spend it gnashing his teeth at having not one but two U.S. heroes take their final rest on his old estate.

“Well, to hell with Robert E. Lee,” Dowling muttered, and he felt sure both Custer and Roosevelt would have agreed with him.

Flora Blackford had spent years speaking in front of crowds of workers. A women’s club in Philadelphia wasn’t the same thing. Speaking as First Lady in front of organizations like this wasn’t even like speaking in the House of Representatives. There’d been plenty of cut-and-thrust in the House. Here, Flora had to be polite whether she wanted to or not.

“I’m sure you’ll agree that we can return to prosperity, and that we *will* return to prosperity,” she told the plump, prosperous women. Even if it was noncontroversial, it was also a campaign speech, with the 1930 Congressional election just around the corner. “The worst is over. From where we are now, we can only go up.”

The women applauded. She’d told them what they wanted to hear, what they wanted to believe. She wanted to believe it herself. She’d

wanted to believe it ever since the stock market crashed right after her husband became president. She'd wanted to, but believing got harder every day.

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"We were the party of prosperity through the 1920s," she insisted. "We don't deserve to be labeled the party of depression."

Even though the women applauded again, Flora knew more than a little depression herself. Her husband had done what only twenty-nine men had done before him—he'd become president. And what had it got him? Only curses and the blame for the worst collapse the United States had known since the bad times after the Confederate States broke away in the War of Secession.

She got through the speech. She'd learned all about getting through speeches despite a heavy heart when she'd had to stand up in Congress after her brother David lost a leg in the Great War. She had to do a good job here. The coming election would be the first chance voters had to say anything about the Blackford administration and the Socialist Party since things went sour.

What would they say when they got the chance? Nothing good, she feared. The Socialists, naturally, had taken credit for everything that had gone right in their first two terms, Upton Sinclair's terms, in Powel House, regardless of whether they'd caused it. Political parties did that. How could they keep from getting the blame for everything that was going wrong now? The Democrats—even the remnants of the Republicans—were certainly doing their best to pin that blame on the party of Marx and Lincoln and Debs.

After the speech, after the coffee and cakes and polite talk that followed, she went back to the presidential residence. Traveling by chauffeured limousine to the Powel House struck her as expensive and wasteful, to say nothing of being the very opposite of egalitarian. But against entrenched presidential custom the Socialists had struggled in vain. The limousine waited for Flora outside the women's club—waited for her and whisked her away.

When she got back to Powel House, she found her husband studying a bill. "Is that the new relief authorization from Congress?" she asked.

Hosea Blackford nodded. "That's what it is," he said. "I'm going to

sign it, too—even makework is better than no work at all, and no work at all is what too many people have these days. But it feels like putting a bandage on a man who's just been shot through the heart. How much good is it going to do?"

He'd been president for only a little more than a year and a half. The pressure of the job, though, had aged him more in that time than all the years he'd spent as vice president. His hair was thinner and grayer, his face more wrinkled and more weary-looking; his clothes hung on him like sacks, for he'd lost weight, too.

Would he look this way if things hadn't gone wrong? Flora wondered. Guilt gnawed at her. She'd encouraged Hosea to run for president. If she hadn't, the country would be blaming someone else for its troubles now. Shantytowns inhabited by men who'd lost their homes wouldn't be called Blackfordburghs. Comics wouldn't tell jokes about him on the vaudeville stage and over the wireless.

Then he said, "It's a good thing I've got this job instead of Calvin Coolidge. If he were sitting here, he'd veto this bill and all the others like it. Things would be a lot worse then—I'm sure of it. We have hungry people now—we'd have starving people then. The class struggle would go straight to the streets."

Tears stung her eyes. She said, "I was just thinking I never should have put you through all this."

"You didn't put me through it," he answered. "I did it myself. I wanted it, too, you know. And, in spite of everything, I think I'm a better man for the job than Coolidge would have been."

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"The country doesn't deserve you," Flora said.

"Oh? Are you saying it does deserve Coolidge?" her husband asked with a wry grin. "I'm not sure even Massachusetts deserves him."

"That's not what I meant, and you know it," Flora said with some asperity.

"Maybe not, sweetheart, but it's what you said," Hosea Blackford answered. Even that wry grin had trouble staying on his face. "If only something we tried would do some real good for the country, so

people would believe we had hope."

"Things would be a lot worse without the relief programs and the dole," Flora insisted. "We'd have men out selling apples on street corners to try to stay alive."

"We might as well, even now," her husband said. "I haven't seen the country so gloomy since . . . since before the Great War."

Flora knew what a hard time he had bringing that out. The Socialists still looked at the war in terms of the lives it had squandered, the lives it had wrecked, the ruin it had wrought. They didn't usually talk about the triumph it had been, as Democrats were in the habit of doing. But before the war, the USA, caught between the CSA and Canada, with England and France always ready to pounce, had a downtrodden feel. Enemies had ganged up on the United States twice. The fear those enemies might do it again had filled the country—and, perhaps, with reason.

No more. Now the United States had their place in the sun. No one had a bigger place, either. Only the Empire of Germany came close. The Kaiser's monarchy was a rival, yes, but not the deadly foes the Confederacy and her allies had seemed in the old days, the days before they were beaten at last.

And, from 1917 to 1929, under Theodore Roosevelt and then under Upton Sinclair, the United States had walked tall, had walked proud. After half a century of furtive skulking, the United States had strutted. But now this. Nobody in all the world was strutting these days. Everyone was trying to figure out how to fix what had gone wrong. No one, though, was having much luck.

"What *are* we going to do?" Flora asked.

"You mean, besides take a drubbing at the polls next Tuesday?" her husband asked in turn. "I don't know, dear. I really don't, and I wish to heaven I did. If I knew what to do, I'd be doing it. You can bet on that." He drummed his fingers on the desk. "Blackfordburghs." He spoke the word as if it were a curse. And so, in a way, it was: a curse on him, and a curse on the party he headed.

"Maybe it won't be so bad," Flora said. "People aren't stupid. The Democrats can't mystify everybody.

What's happened the past year and a half isn't our fault, isn't *your* fault. It would have happened if Coolidge were president, too. It

would be worse then—you said so yourself."

"That's logical. That's rational," Hosea Blackford said. "Politics, unfortunately, is neither. People won't think about what might have been. They'll think about what really happened. And they'll say, 'You were there. It damn well *is* your fault, and you've got to pay for it.' " He pointed to himself.

Flora wanted to tell him he was worrying about nothing. She couldn't. He was worrying about something all too real, and she knew it. She did walk over and give him a hug. "There," she said. "And Joshua loves **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

you, too."

"That's all good," Blackford said. "That's all wonderful, as a matter of fact. In my personal life, I'm as happy and lucky as a man could be. But none of it will buy the Socialists a single extra vote when voting day rolls around."

He was right. Flora wished she could tell him he was wrong. He would only have laughed had she tried, though. He knew better. So did she.

Waiting for the election was like waiting for an old, sick loved one to die. Day followed day without much apparent change, but then, suddenly and somehow unexpectedly, the moment came at last. People went to the polls. Blackford's name wasn't on the ballot, but the election would be a judgment on him even so. He couldn't even vote for his party, nor could Flora; neither of them officially resided in Philadelphia.

Hosea Blackford could have gone over to Socialist Party headquarters to learn of voters' decision—or rather, decisions, for every race here, unlike in a presidential election, was individual, unique to its area.

But he stayed in Powel House instead. Once more, custom triumphed.

Plenty of wireless sets and telegraph clickers brought in the news. And, from the very beginning, it was as bad as Flora and he had feared it would be. If anything, it was worse. Socialist after Socialist went down to defeat. Even the fellow who'd followed Flora to Congress in the Eleventh Ward in New York City found himself in deep trouble against a Democratic candidate of no particular luster.

"What are we going to do?" Flora wailed as the magnitude of the

Socialist disaster grew plain.

“No. The question is, what will the new Congress do?” her husband said glumly. He answered his own question: “Odds are, the Democrats won’t do much, and they won’t let us do much, either. They think we’ve done too much already, and that we’re part of the problem.”

“They don’t know what they’re talking about,” Flora snapped.

“Well, I happen to agree with you, you know,” Hosea Blackford said. “The voters, unfortunately, look to have other ideas.”

“How can they do this to us?” Flora didn’t try to hide her bitterness.

“I’m sure the Democrats felt the same way ten years ago, when we first came to power,” her husband said.

That struck her as cold consolation. “But we’re right,” she said. “They were wrong.”

He managed another of those wry smiles. “Remember your dialectic: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Now the antithesis gets its turn for a while, and we see what comes of that.”

“Nothing good,” Flora predicted darkly. The irony was that she’d always been a much more ideological Socialist than Hosea. His chiding her on basic Party doctrine stung, as he’d no doubt meant it to. She went on, “We have to keep them from doing nothing, the way you say they want to—and of course you’re dead right about that. We have to. Maybe we can get a halfway worthwhile synthesis out of that.”

“We’re going to lose the House,” Hosea said. “I don’t think there’s any doubt about it. The Senate . . .

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well, that depends on how some of the races in the Far West go. If we’re lucky, there may be enough Socialists and Republicans to go with a handful of progressive Democrats and let us do some useful things. We’ll see, that’s all.”

He sounded as if he looked forward to the challenge. That wasn’t how Flora felt about it. As far as she was concerned, the faithless people

had betrayed the Party. She'd always been on the barricades, throwing stones at the oppressors. Now, by their votes, the people thought the Socialists were *among* the oppressors. That hurt. It hurt a lot, and she knew she would be a long time getting over it.

Clarence Potter tried to remember the name of the Englishman who'd written a novel about a man who'd invented a machine that let him travel through time. He hadn't altogether liked the book—parts of it struck him as a Socialist tract about the divisions between capital and labor—but he couldn't deny that it had more than its share of arresting images. The mere idea of a time-traveling machine was one.

On New Year's Eve, 1930, as the year was poised to pass away and usher in 1931, Potter felt as if not just he but all of Charleston were caught in the grip of a time-traveling machine and hurled back almost a decade into the past. The Freedom Party had laid on an enormous rally to mark the changing of the year, and had succeeded, he feared, beyond its wildest dreams.

A strident sea of humanity filled Hampton Park to hear Jake Featherston, who'd come down from Richmond to speak. Dozens of searchlights stabbed up into the sky, creating columns of silvery radiance that seemed to transform the park into an enormous public building. Blocks of Freedom Party bully boys in their white shirts and butternut trousers, along with veterans from the Tin Hats—who wore uniforms even more closely resembling those of the Confederate Army—stood out amid the swarms of ordinary Charlestonians who'd come to the outskirts of the city.

More bully boys in white and butternut, these carrying long truncheons, formed a perimeter around the crowd. The searchlights spread just enough light around to let Potter see how very ready for a brawl they looked.

He touched Braxton Donovan's arm. "We can't try to break this up, not with the men we've got here,"

he said urgently. "They'll slaughter us."

Donovan grimaced, but then reluctantly nodded. "Just our luck," he said. "We try to take a leaf out of the Freedom Party's book, and it doesn't work." They'd brought along seventy-five, maybe even a hundred, stalwart young Whigs armed with a motley assortment of street-fighting weapons. The force would have been plenty to disrupt any ordinary Freedom Party gathering. Attacking this one . . . Potter

shook his head. He would sooner have sent infantrymen charging uphill against machine-gun nests and massed artillery.

Disgust in his voice, he said, “Featherston even has the luck of the weather.” A December night in Charleston could easily have been rainy, could have been freezing, could even have seen snow—though that was unlikely. But the thermometer stood in the upper forties, with a million stars in the sky trying to fight their way through the searchlight beams. The moon and, even lower in the east, Jupiter blazed bright.

“So what do we do now?” Donovan asked. “Just send the boys home? Go on home ourselves? That stinks, you want to know what I think.”

“Getting massacred stinks worse,” Potter answered. “You can go or stay, whichever you want. They **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

can go or stay, whichever they want. Me, I’ll hang around and hear what that Featherston bastard has to say.”

“You thinking of going over to the Freedom Party?” Donovan asked. “You blocked me when I tried to read Anne Colleton out of the Whigs, and now she’s back in bed with dear old Jake. Fat lot of good you did us.”

“I was wrong,” Potter said with a scowl. “You’re lucky—you’ve never been wrong in all your born days, have you?” He still missed Anne. His mind kept exploring how things between them had soured, as a man’s tongue will explore the empty socket that recently held a tooth.

Admitting he was wrong disconcerted Donovan. The lawyer probably didn’t hear it happen often enough to know what to do when it did. “All right, all right,” he said gruffly. “Let’s forget about it, then.”

“I wish I could,” Potter said. The other Whig didn’t know what to make of that, either. *Too bad,* Potter thought.

A white-shirted Freedom Party man came up to them. “You fellas want to move along now,” he said, almost indulgently—he knew he had strength on his side.

Potter looked at him. “What we *want* to do is kick your damn teeth down your throat,” he growled.

“Watch your mouth,” the Freedom Party man said, indulgent no more.

“We can squash y’all flat like a cockroach—and just what you deserve. If I give a yell—”

“If you give a yell, you’re a dead man,” Clarence Potter promised. “Your side might win the fight afterwards, but you won’t be around to enjoy it. I promise.”

The man in white shirt and butternut trousers scowled at him. He stared back, no expression at all on his face. The Freedom Party hooligan was the first to look away. A moment later, he spun and stalked off.

“You told him,” Braxton Donovan said, as if Potter and the Whigs had won some sort of victory.

“He’s going to come back with enough men to squash us flat,” Potter said. “Go on home, and take the boys with you. We’ll get other chances. I’m going to hang around.”

“You’re crazy,” Braxton Donovan declared.

“No, it’s just that I was in intelligence during the war. I want to know what the enemy is up to,” Potter replied with a shrug. “Or maybe I *am* crazy. You never can tell.”

As the Whigs’ outnumbered toughs headed away from Hampton Park and back toward downtown Charleston, Potter mingled with the Freedom Party men and women still streaming in to hear Featherston speak. That mingling came just in time, too. The fellow he’d faced down returned with a lot of men at his back. He looked around and laughed when he didn’t see Potter or any of the other Whigs.

They were leaving anyway, you son of a bitch, Potter thought, *and now I’ve found my way inside.*

By their clothes, most of the men who wanted to hear Jake Featherston were farmers and laborers—most, but far from all. Potter saw druggists and shopkeepers and businessmen and even a few who looked like professional men. Not all the men were Great War veterans, either. More than Potter had expected looked too young to have fought in the war. That surprised and dismayed him. The women

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coming in—perhaps a third of the audience—likewise came from all social groups, with the emphasis on the lower middle class.

Potter pushed forward as far as he could. Even so, the rostrum from which Featherston would speak remained halfway across the park from him, and seemed tiny as a toy. Everyone exclaimed as searchlights, swinging toward the podium, picked out a face behind it. But that wasn't Jake Featherston's lean visage, which Potter knew all too well. Whoever that was, pinned in the glow of the bright lights, he'd never missed a meal and was nobody Potter recognized. Some of the people around Potter grumbled, too.

Then the plump stranger introduced himself as one of the new Freedom Party Congressmen South Carolina had sent up to Richmond in the election of 1929. That was plenty to win him a round of applause from the Party faithful. Clarence Potter had to join it to keep something dreadful from happening to him. He felt like washing his hands the first chance he got.

"And now," the Congressman boomed, "it gives me tremendous pleasure to have the privilege of presenting to you all the leader of our great Freedom Party, Mr. Jaaake *Featherston* !"

The roar of applause and cheers that went up stunned Potter's ears. He opened his mouth, but silently.

He didn't have to shout, and keeping his mouth open helped protect his ears. Featherston, an old artilleryman, likely knew that trick himself.

Through the shouts and clapping from the crowd came disciplined yells from the men in white shirts and butternut trousers: "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" Little by little, more and more people joined that chant, so it began to drown out the noise all around: *"Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!"* The two-syllable word felt as heavy and regular as a heartbeat.

Jake Featherston let the chant build to a deafening crescendo, then raised both hands above his head.

Still disciplined, the blocks of goons fell silent at once. Without their steadying influence, the cries faded away after perhaps fifteen seconds.

Into the ringing quiet that followed, Featherston said, "It's always good to come to Charleston, on account of this here is where the Confederate States of America were born." He couldn't miss getting applause with that line. He couldn't—and he didn't. Again, Clarence Potter had to clap along with everybody else to keep from standing

out. He hated that, but saw no way around it.

Featherston went on, “They say showing’s better than telling, and I guess they’re right. We’ve been telling people what’s wrong with the Confederate States for more than ten years now, and not enough folks wanted to listen. Now the Whigs have gone and shown we were right all along, and all of a sudden everybody’s paying attention to us. I wish to heaven it didn’t have to happen like this, I truly do, but here we are just the same.”

To Clarence Potter, staunch Whig, it wasn’t much of a joke, but people around him laughed.

Featherston said, “I’m warning people right now, it’s not a good idea to think about the Freedom Party like we’re just another bunch of politicians.”

Cries of, “No!” and, “Hell, no!” and, “Better not!” rang from the crowd. Featherston let them spread through Hampton Park, then raised his hands again. This time, silence fell at once.

Into it, he said, “We are the Confederacy’s destiny. We are the Confederacy’s future. We’re giving our dear country a faith and a will again. We have to concentrate all our strength on action, revolutionary **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

action. Because we’re going that way, we’re gathering into our ranks every last member of the Confederate people who still has energy and nerve—that’s you, folks, and I’m glad of it!”

People were even more eager to applaud themselves than they were to applaud Jake Featherston.

Again, Potter had to clap, too. As he did, he reluctantly nodded. *He’s shrewder than he used to be,* he thought. *He doesn’t just think of himself any more.* But that wasn’t right. *No, he lets people think he’s thinking about them. Inside, he’s still the same cold-blooded snake he always was.*

“Burton Mitchel wants to cozy up to the United States. The USA saved his bacon once,” Featherston shouted. “But the United States can’t save his bacon this time around, on account of they haven’t got any bacon of their own. And even if they did, do y’all want to be the USA’s tagalong little brother from now till the end of time?”

Some people shouted, “No!” Others shouted things a good deal more

incendiary. Potter would never have said anything like that where ladies might hear. But then, not ten feet away from him, a woman who looked like a schoolteacher yelled something that would have made a sergeant, a twenty-year veteran, blush.

“We’ve got us a duty: a duty to be strong,” Jake Featherston declared. “We’ve got us a duty to stand up to the United States just as soon as we can. And to do that, we’ve got us a duty to put our own house in order. We’ve got us a duty to put people back to work. We’ve got us a duty to make sure they don’t go hungry. We’ve got us a duty to keep the niggers in their place, and not to let them steal work from white folks. And we’ve got us a duty to remember what the Confederate States of America are all about.

And folks, what we’re about is—”

“Freedom!” The great roar staggered Potter.

“Y’all remember that,” Featherston said. “Remember it every single day. When you see the liars and the cheats getting together, don’t let ’em get away with it. Smash ’em up! How can you have freedom when the rich folks want to take it away from you?”

Does he see the irony there? Potter wondered. *Does he see it and not care, or does it go right by him?* As the crowd roared, as Jake Featherston wished them a happy New Year and exhorted them to vote for the Party in November, Potter wondered which of those possibilities frightened him worse.

When Jake Featherston came through South Carolina on his speaking tour, Anne Colleton tried to see him. She tried, and she failed. Featherston wouldn’t talk to her; a flunky told her he wasn’t available.

She fumed for days afterwards. She wasn’t used to getting brushed off. Her habit, in fact, was to brush off others. Featherston annoyed her enough to make her wonder if she shouldn’t stay a Whig after all. In the end, what made her decide she had to swallow her pride was the thought that staying a Whig meant admitting Clarence Potter had been right all along. If he had, why had she broken up with him over their political differences? Staying a Whig would mean swallowing her pride, too, and swallowing it in front of an old lover. She preferred making up with Jake Featherston to that.

After the papers announced Featherston’s return to Richmond, she sent a telegram to Freedom Party headquarters: SHALL I COME NORTH TO TALK THINGS OVER?

The answer, at least, returned promptly: COME AHEAD. CONVINCE FERD KOENIG. THEN

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WE'LL SEE. FEATHERSTON.

Anne said something extremely unladylike as she crumpled up the telegram and threw it in the trash.

Having to talk with anyone except Jake Featherston himself was galling. But Ferdinand Koenig wasn't a flunky, or not precisely a flunky. He'd been in the Freedom Party even longer than Featherston had, and had twice been his running mate on the Party ticket. The main difference between him and Jake was that he wasn't colorful.

And so, swallowing her pride again, Anne wired, ARRIVE NEXT TUESDAY. LOOKING

FORWARD TO MEETING MR. KOENIG.

As she usually did when coming up to Richmond, she booked a room in Ford's Hotel, just north of Capitol Square. The room she got gave her a fine view of the square. In happier times, it would have been a peaceful, restful, patriotic view. She could have looked out on the grass and on the splendid statues of George Washington and Albert Sidney Johnston.

She could still see the statues. Tents and shanties swallowed almost all the winter-brown grass. Men walked aimlessly from one to another, some smoking, some sipping from whiskey bottles. Here and there, women hung out laundry on lines that ran from tents to trees. Children ran this way and that.

Columbia and Charleston had shantytowns, too. Even St. Matthews had a little one. But Anne had never seen any to match Richmond's. The capital of the Confederate States was a great city. When things went wrong, they went wrong more visibly here than anywhere else.

She asked the house detective, "How bad are things? Will my clothes and suitcases still be in my room when I get back?"

"Likely so, ma'am," he answered. "We work hard at keeping the trash out of the hotel. We had some trouble with that when things first went

sour, but we don't let it happen any more. It's just a matter of taking pains."

Giving pains, too, she thought. The house dick was about six feet three, with shoulders wide as a barn door. He wasn't visibly armed, but she was sure he had brass knucks or a blackjack stashed where he could get at them in a hurry. She wouldn't have wanted to run into him if he found her anywhere she wasn't supposed to be.

When she waited on the street for a taxi, though, beggars hurried across Capitol Street to try to pry money out of her. She knew that, if she gave anything to anybody, none of them would ever leave her at peace. Closing the motorcar door on them was a relief.

"Where to, ma'am?" the cabby asked.

"Freedom Party headquarters," Anne answered. She wondered if she would have to give him the address.

As things turned out, she didn't. The driver nodded. "Take you right over there. It ain't far at all. I'm thinking about voting that way myself come November, matter of fact."

Alert guards armed with bayoneted Tredegars stood outside the headquarters. They wore what was almost but not quite Confederate Army uniform. Their clothes weren't quite the same as what the Tin Hats put on. These men looked somehow more menacing than most members of the big veterans' outfit.

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Anne didn't know whether that was the cut of their uniforms or the expressions on their faces. *Some of each,* she thought.

"You're Mrs. Colleton, come to see Mr. Koenig?" one of them asked.

Anne shook her head. "I'm *Miss* Colleton, and you'd better remember it."

"Sorry," the disconcerted guard muttered, and passed her on into the building.

She had to ask two more people how to find Ferdinand Koenig's office, which struck her as inefficient.

When at last she got there, a pretty secretary led her inside. Koenig looked like a man who'd done time in the trenches. He had fierce eyebrows, a jutting jaw, and a rumbling baritone voice. "Good to see you again, Miss Colleton," he said. "It's been a few years, hasn't it? Sit down. Make yourself at home. Tell me why you've decided the Freedom Party isn't such a bad thing after all."

He looked like a bruiser. He didn't sound like one, though. He'd been Jake Featherston's right-hand man for a long time now. That almost certainly meant he could think as well as break heads. Anne said,

"When I left the Party, you were still tainted by what Grady Calkins did. Our politics have never been that far apart, whether I was formally with you or not."

"You're saying you're a fair-weather friend. You'll back us if we look like winners and dump us if we don't," Koenig said. "Question is, in that case, why should we want to have anything to do with you?"

"Because we're going the same way. Because I can help you get there. You'll know what I did in South Carolina. When I wasn't with you, I was trying to bring the Whigs more into line with what you've been saying all along."

Ferdinand Koenig paused to light a cigarette. After blowing out a cloud of smoke, he said, "And you were doing us a favor by this, you say?"

"No, I don't think so, and that isn't what I said," Anne answered. "But I think I was doing the country a favor. That's what this is really all about, isn't it?—what happens to the Confederate States, I mean."

Another cloud of smoke rose from Koenig. "That's . . . some of what this is about," he said at last. "The rest of it is, why should we trust you now? You walked away once, walked away and left us in the lurch.

Who says you won't do it again?"

"No one at all, if I don't happen to like the way you're going," Anne said. "But as long as we're heading in the same direction, wouldn't you rather have me on your side than against you?"

"Maybe," he answered. "Maybe not, too." His eyes measured her. She didn't care for that gaze; Koenig might have been looking at her over the sights of a rifle. "You don't pull any punches, though, do you?"

“I try not to,” Anne said. “Getting straight to the point saves time.”

“Maybe,” Koenig said again. He didn’t say anything more till he’d finished the cigarette and stubbed it out in an brass ashtray made from the base of a shell casing. Then he went on, “You talk a good game, I will say that for you. I’m not going to tell you yes or no. I’m going to pass you on to the Sarge. He’ll make up his mind, and we’ll go on from there. How does that sound?”

“I came to Richmond to see him,” Anne answered.

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Ferdinand Koenig shook his head. “No, you *came* up here to see me, remember? Now you’ve passed the first test, so you *get* to see him. See the difference?”

“Yes,” Anne said, though she’d always assumed she would pass it.

“Well, come on, then.” Koenig heaved his bulk out of the chair. He led her down the hall, up a flight of stairs, along the corresponding hall on the next floor up, and into an office. The secretary there wasn’t decorative; she was, in fact, severely plain. That probably meant she was very good at what she did.

Koenig nodded to her. “Morning, Lulu. Here’s Miss Colleton, to see the boss.”

Lulu gave Anne the once-over. She sniffed, as if to say, *What can you do?* Anne bristled. The secretary took no notice of that at all. With a small sigh, she said, “Go right in, Miss Collins. He’ll be expecting you.” She wasn’t the sort who’d get names wrong by accident. That meant she’d done it on purpose.

Anne bristled all over again, and again got nothing resembling a rise from Lulu.

When she walked into Jake Featherston’s office, the leader of the Freedom Party rose and leaned across the desk to shake her hand. He wasn’t handsome. Still, those strong, bony features and the energy that sparked from him made mere handsomeness seem insipid. Anne had had that thought before.

“Sit down,” he said, waving her to a chair. “Sit down and tell me why

I should pay any attention to you after you went and left us when we needed you bad."

He hadn't forgotten. Anne doubted he ever forgot anything that went against him. They weren't so far apart there. She answered, "Two reasons: my money and my brains."

He frowned. "If you had any brains, you never would've walked out on us in the first place."

"No." Anne shook her head. "I back winners. If you think you looked like a winner after Calkins killed President Hampton, you're not as smart as you think you are. But times are hard again, and in hard times the Freedom Party shines. So . . . here I am."

How many people gave him such straight talk? Not many, Anne suspected. What would he do when he heard it? Get angry? Yes, by the slow flush that mounted to his cheeks and by the way his eyes flashed.

But he held it in, saying, "You're a cool one, aren't you? You're telling me straight out you'd walk away again if you saw us in trouble."

"No," Anne replied. "What I'm telling you is, this time I expect you to win."

"And you want to come along for the ride," Featherston said.

"Of course I do," Anne answered. "Sooner or later, we're going to have some things to say to the United States. If you don't think I want to be part of that, you don't know me at all. And I *can* help. At your rallies, you're still using tricks I figured out for you ten years ago, and you know it."

"You spent the last few years trying to teach the Whigs new tricks," he said.

"Yes, and they're old dogs—they couldn't learn them," Anne answered. "They've been in power too long. They can't learn anything any more. That's why they've got to go."

"They're dogs, all right, the sons of—" Featherston caught himself. "Well, I have plans for them, too.

You'd best believe that. Way they've stomped on the people of the Confederate States . . . You're dead **Generated by ABC Amber LIT**

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right they've got to go, Miss Colleton. And I aim to get rid of 'em."

Anne wondered how he meant that. Literally? She knew he was ruthless. Was he *that* ruthless? Maybe.

She wouldn't have been astonished, but even the most ruthless man faced a formidable barrier of law.

Anne nodded to herself. Here, that kind of barrier might not be bad at all.

"You come back in, you'll follow the Party line?" Jake Featherston asked.

You'll do as I say? was what he meant. Anne had never been one to do as anybody said. But if she said no, she'd have no place in the Freedom Party, not now, not ever. That was ever so clear. *This is why you came to Richmond,* she reminded herself. *Do you want to go home empty-handed?* Part of her said she did. She ignored it. Nodding to Featherston, she said, "Yes, I'll do that."

He didn't warn her—no, *You'd better,* or anything like that. "Good," he said. "We've got a deal." He didn't ask for her soul, either. But why would he? She'd just handed it to him.

XIII

The alarm clock jangled, bouncing Jefferson Pinkard out of bed at what he reckoned an ungodly early hour. His shift at the Birmingham jail started an hour and a half earlier than he'd gone to the Sloss Works.

He yawned, lurched into the bathroom of his downtown flat—one more thing he was getting used to after so long in company housing—brushed his teeth, lathered his face and slid a straight razor over his cheeks, and then went into the kitchen and made coffee and the inevitable bacon and eggs on the fancy, newfangled gas-burning stove in there.

Thus fortified, he got out of his nightshirt and into the gray jailer's uniform he'd worn since Caleb Briggs found out the Sloss Works had given him the boot. He planted his wide-brimmed hat on his head at a jaunty angle and looked at himself in the mirror. His reflection

happily nodded approval at him. “I’m hot stuff, no two ways about it,” he said, and that reflection did not presume to disagree.

He put his nightstick on his belt and headed out the door. He’d toted longer, heavier bludgeons while breaking up Whig rallies with his Freedom Party pals, but he supposed he understood why jailers didn’t usually carry guns. If something went wrong, that would give prisoners deadly weapons, which was the last thing anybody wanted.

People got out of his way when he walked down the street in that uniform. He liked that. He’d never had it happen before, except when he was in the company of a lot of his pals, all of them in white shirts and butternut pants, all of them ready—even eager—for trouble. Now he strode along by himself, but men and women still made way for him. He lit a cigarette and blew out a cheerful cloud of smoke.

Birmingham City Jail was a squat red-brick building that looked like a fortress. As far as Jeff was concerned, it looked just the way it was supposed to. He tipped his hat to a policeman in an almost identical uniform coming out. “Mornin’, Howard,” he said. “Freedom!”

“Mornin’, Jeff. Same to you,” the cop answered. A lot of policemen in Birmingham belonged to the Freedom Party. Pinkard had seen some of them at meetings. Since becoming a jailer, he’d found out that
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a good many who didn’t go to meetings or knock heads were members just the same. Some policemen felt they shouldn’t flaunt their politics. But that didn’t mean they had none.

Inside the city jail, Jeff stuck his card in a time clock just like the one at the Sloss Works except for being painted gray rather than black. He stuck his head into the cramped little office where he had a battered desk. “Mornin’, Billy,” he said to his night-shift counterpart, who was writing a report at an equally beat-up desk. “What’s new for me?”

“Not a whole hell of a lot,” Billy Fraser answered. He was about Jeff’s age, and like him a veteran—precious few white men of their generation in the CSA hadn’t gone to the front. “A couple of niggers in for drunk and disorderly, and one burglar who was the easiest collar you’d ever want—dumb asshole fell out a second-story window making his getaway and broke his ankle. Yell he let out woke up the whole goddamn block. They were beating on him pretty good. He was probably glad when the cops pulled the citizens off him and hauled

him away."

"Don't reckon we have to worry about him bustin' out for a while," Pinkard said with a chuckle.

"Hell, no," Fraser said. "Like I told you, a quiet night."

Jeff nodded. "Anything else I need to know?"

"Don't reckon so," the other man answered. He threw the report in his Out basket and got to his feet.

"Gonna head on home and catch me some shuteye. See you tomorrow. Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Pinkard echoed. "Get some rest. I don't expect the bastards we've got locked up are going anywhere much."

"They better not," Billy Fraser said. "That'd leave us some pretty tall explaining to do." He grabbed his hat—the twin of Jeff's—from the rack, stuck it on his head, and went out whistling "The Pennsylvania Rag," a tune that had been popular during the early days of the Great War, back when the CSA had held a large part of Pennsylvania.

The first thing Jefferson Pinkard did then was look at the report Fraser had written. It was meant for the warden, not for him, but he didn't care about that. He'd discovered Billy sometimes wrote things down that he forgot to say, things Jeff needed to know. Nothing like that was in there today, but you never could tell. When you were dealing with prisoners, you couldn't be too careful, either. If his experience in the Empire of Mexico had taught him anything, that was it.

After Jeff put the report back where he'd got it, he ambled down to the kitchen and snagged himself a cup of coffee. He snagged a roll, too. One of the colored cooks clucked reproachfully at that, but he was grinning while he did it, a grin that showed several gold teeth. Jeff grinned back. He had no trouble with Negroes, as long as they remembered who the boss was.

After he did that, he prowled through the whole jail, peering into every cell to see who was where. He couldn't take the prisoners out of the cells and line them up for roll call, the way he had down in Mexico.

He'd had all the room in the world down there: he'd built his prison camp on the loneliest stretch of ground he could find. Things were

different in Birmingham, but he wanted to know as much about what was going on as he could.

“I ain’t run away, jailer man,” said a Negro named Ajax, who was doing a year for beating up another man whom he’d caught using loaded dice. The victim was also black. Had he been white, Ajax would **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

have faced a lot more time behind bars. “I’s still here. You don’t got to check on me every mornin’.”

“Morning I don’t check on you is probably the morning you’ll try some damnfool thing or other,”

Pinkard answered. “More I check, harder it is for me to get a nasty surprise.”

Ajax reproachfully clicked his tongue between his teeth. “You ain’t no fun a-tall,” he said.

“You wanted fun, you shoulda thought twice about pounding on that other nigger,” Jeff said.

“That cheatin’ son of a bitch won ten dollars o’ *my* money with them goddamn dice,” Ajax exclaimed, nothing but indignation in his voice. “I see him when I gits out o’ here, I kick his shiftless ass again, teach him not to try none o’ that shit no more.” If jail was supposed to rehabilitate, it wasn’t working with the aggrieved Ajax.

But Jeff didn’t think jail was supposed to rehabilitate. Like the other jailers he was getting to know, he thought it was supposed to keep people who belonged there inside till it was time to let them out again.

He didn’t worry his head about who belonged and who didn’t, either. Figuring that out wasn’t his job. As far as he was concerned, if somebody ended up in the Birmingham City Jail, he damn well belonged there.

By the time his rounds ended, the trusties were going through the corridors serving breakfast to the other prisoners. Jeff didn’t like that, either. He thought using trusties begged for trouble, because they were so likely to be anything but. But the jail didn’t have the money to hire enough guards to do everything inside that needed doing, and so trusties took care of a lot of work. He scowled at them as he headed

back to his office. How much contraband did they smuggle in? They knew. Nobody else did.

He was halfway through a circuit of the jail before lunch when one of the corridor guards waved to him and called, “Hold on there. Warden wants to see you in his office right away.”

“Does he?” Jeff said uselessly. The guard nodded, as if to affirm he hadn’t been kidding. “What the hell does he think I did?” Pinkard muttered. The guard didn’t hear that. A prisoner did, and leered at Jeff. As far as the former steelworker knew, the boss wanted to see you only when you were in trouble. Still cursing under his breath, he walked to the warden’s office.

Ewell McDonald had all to himself more space than Jeff and the other assistant jailers put together. He was a beefy man in his early sixties, with his silver hair greased down and with a bushy gray mustache he’d probably worn since it was dark and stylish back in the 1890s. He heaved himself out of his swivel chair and stuck out a well-manicured hand for Jeff to shake. “Sit down, Pinkard, sit down,” he boomed, sounding more like a politician on the stump than anything else. “Sit down and make yourself comfortable.”

“Uh, thank you kindly, sir,” Jeff replied, wondering when and how and why McDonald was going to lower the boom on him. “What can I do for you?” *Might as well make it short and sweet,* he thought.

Instead of answering right away, McDonald reached into his desk and pulled out a bottle of whiskey.

Pinkard’s eyes widened slightly, or more than slightly. Alabama was a dry state, though there were ways around that. He knew as much. He didn’t expect the warden of the Birmingham City Jail to know it, or at least to show he knew it to a man he was going to bawl out. But Ewell McDonald yanked out the cork, swigged, and then passed the bottle across the wide expanse of his desk to Jeff. “Here you go, Pinkard,”

he said. “Have a snort.”

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“Thank you kindly,” Pinkard said again. He knew he sounded bewildered, but couldn’t help it. After he drank, he whistled appreciatively. That was real whiskey, not something cooked up in a

hurry over an illegal still. He hadn't drunk anything so tasty in quite a while. He passed the bottle back, more worried than ever. McDonald wouldn't waste that kind of whiskey on him if he were in only a little trouble.

But the warden beamed at him. "You know, Pinkard, when I hired you, I reckoned I was stuck with you on account of Freedom Party business," he said. "Happens sometimes; nothing you can do but make the best of it. But I'll be goddamned if you ain't pulled your weight and then some. You weren't lyin'

'bout that prison-camp business down in Mexico, were you?"

"Lying, sir?" Pinkard shook his head. "Hell, no. I did all that stuff."

"I guess maybe you did," McDonald said. "I wouldn't have bet on it when I took you on, I'll tell you that. But you've worked out fine. Hell, son, you're doing better than some of the fellows who've been here ten years." He grabbed the whiskey bottle and tilted it back for another knock.

"Thank you very much, sir," Jeff said, more than a little dazedly. He'd thought the same thing himself, but he'd never dreamt the warden would come out and say so. "Thank you *very* much. I've learned a hell of a lot here, too. Down in Mexico, I was making it up as I went along. You-all really know what you're doing."

"Some of the time, maybe," McDonald said. "But I like the way you prowl the cells. I like that a lot.

Nothing's going to happen unless you know about it first, is it?"

"Well, I hope not," Pinkard answered. "You can never be sure, but I hope not."

"Long as you *know* you can never be sure, you won't do too bad." The warden pushed the bottle across the desk again. "Go ahead. You've earned it."

"Don't mind if I do." As Ewell McDonald had, Jeff took a long pull at the bottle. Smooth fire ran down his throat. "Ahh! That's mighty fine," he said, and then laughed. "Prisoners'll smell it on my breath and say I've been drinking on the job."

McDonald laughed, too. "They don't like it, you tell 'em they can take it up with the warden." He corked the whiskey bottle and stuck it

back in his drawer. “However you did it, I’m glad you found your way here. You’re goddamn good at this business, you hear what I’m telling you?”

“Thanks,” Jeff said once more. Yes, he did feel dazed, and not just on account of unaccustomed morning slugs of whiskey. How long had he been at the Sloss Works without ever hearing anybody tell him anything like that? *Too long,* he thought as he got to his feet. *Much too damn long.*

In the summertime, heat and humidity could make Augusta close to unbearable, especially for Negroes in the crowded quarters of the Terry. When Scipio got the chance, he liked to bring his family up to Allen Park and relax in the fresh air under the shade of the trees that grew thickly there. He and Bathsheba and the children would lie on the grass on a Sunday afternoon and watch people with more energy —and, he was convinced, less sense—play volleyball or throw around a football.

Allen Park was in the white part of town, but close enough to the Terry that Negroes often used it.

Scipio would gladly have gone to a park inside the Terry, but nobody’d bothered leaving any open space **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

for a park there. He wasn’t surprised. How could he have been, when he’d lived in the Confederate States all his life? Whites got whatever they needed and whatever they wanted. If anything happened to be left over after that, Negroes got it. If nothing happened to be left over, well, too bad.

That was how whites saw things, anyhow. And then they’d been shocked when blacks rose up against them in Red revolt during the Great War. Scipio had thought that a damnfool idea, because he’d been all too sure the revolts would fail—as they had. Nothing made the whites fight hard like seeing their privileges threatened. But fearing failure didn’t mean Scipio hadn’t understood the impulse to hit back as hard as his own people could.

One lazy July Sunday, after finishing a picnic lunch, Bathsheba pointed to a sheet of paper stuck to the trunk of an oak not far away. “What’s that say, Xerxes?” she asked.

Scipio took his alias for granted. He also took being asked such questions for granted: Bathsheba couldn’t read or write. “I goes and

looks," he answered, climbing to his feet. Full of fried chicken and yams, he ambled slowly over to the tree, read the paper, and came back to sit down on the grass again.

"Well?" his wife asked.

"Well?" Antoinette echoed. She was six now, which astounded Scipio every time he thought about it.

And Cassius—named, though Scipio had never said so, for the Red rebel in the swamps of the Congaree River—was already three, which astonished him even more.

But he shook his head. "Ain't so well," he said; the thick patois of the Congaree made him sound more ignorant than Bathsheba, whose accent was milder. "Big Freedom Party rally here two weeks from now."

The corners of Bathsheba's wide, generous mouth turned down. "You're right," she said. "That ain't so good. That ain't no good at all. Thought them people was all over and done with, but now they're back."

"Now they's back," Scipio echoed somberly. "Times is hard. De buckra, dey's scared. When dey's scared, dey starts yellin', 'Freedom!' "

"If they want it so bad, how come they don't want to let us have none?" Bathsheba asked.

"Dey does dat, who dey gots to t'ink day's better'n?" Scipio didn't hide his bitterness.

"Ought to tear that sheet o' paper down," Bathsheba said.

"Do Jesus, no!" Scipio exclaimed. "Anybody see me do dat, my life ain't worth a penny. An' dey's bound to be plenty more o' they papers. Don't put up no notice like dat in jus' de one place. Tearin' it down don't do no good."

She didn't argue with him, but she didn't look as if she agreed with him, either. When they walked back to their flat, Scipio saw more Freedom Party notices. He wondered how he'd missed them coming up to Allen Park. Maybe he hadn't wanted to see them, and so had turned his eye aside.

He'd expected to pay no attention to the rally. What else was a Negro supposed to do with anything pertaining to Confederate politics, especially with a part of Confederate politics of which he disapproved? But this rally, very much in the frightening Freedom Party style of ten years before, refused to let Augusta's Negroes ignore it. For one thing, it was enormous. Scipio didn't know exactly how many **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

white men thronged to it, but he could hear great roars of, "Freedom!" coming from the park again and again, though it was blocks away from his family's apartment building.

"Why they yellin' like that, Pa?" Antoinette asked.

Scipio wished he knew what he was supposed to tell her. "On account o' dey don't like what de gummint doin'," he answered at last.

She could have left it there. Scipio wished she would have left it there. Instead, with a child's persistence, she asked the inevitable child's question: "Why?"

"They're some o' the buckra what have it in for black folks," Bathsheba said when Scipio hesitated.

That satisfied their daughter. No Negro, no matter how young, could help knowing plenty of whites in the Confederate States had it in for blacks.

If any Negro from Augusta hadn't known it, the ralliers did their best to drive it home. They swarmed out of the park and into the Terry, shouting, "Freedom!" all the while. A few policemen came with the long, sinewy column, but more to observe it than to check it. Had the Freedom Party men turned on the police, they could have got rid of them in moments and then rampaged through the Terry altogether out of control.

They could have, but they didn't. Scipio didn't even think they beat anybody up. They just marched and yelled and marched and yelled. In a way, that was a relief. In another way, it left Scipio all the more terrified, not least because of the discipline it showed. It was sending a message: this is what our people do when we tell them to do this. If we tell them to do something else . . . Scipio shivered at what the Freedom Party might do then. And would that handful of policemen try to stop them? Could they if they tried? Neither struck him as likely.

He made a point of getting to Erasmus' fish store and restaurant early the next morning. He still didn't get there as early as his boss. "Mornin', Xerxes," Erasmus said when Scipio came through the door.

"How you is?"

"I been better," Scipio answered. "Buckra march underneath my window yesterday. Don't like that none, not even a li'l bit."

Erasmus nodded gloomily. "They go past my front door, too," he said. "No, I don't like that none, neither. They scared. When they scared, they do somethin' stupid."

"Do somethin' big an' stupid," Scipio agreed. "Burn down de Terry, maybe. De *po* lice, dey don't stop

'em if dey tries."

"Reckon not," Erasmus agreed. "Reckon the *po* lice do try—they ain't all bad men. Reckon they try, but I don't reckon they kin do much, neither."

"Where dat leave we?" Scipio answered his own question: "In trouble, dat where."

Erasmus looked at him. "You's a black man in the CSA," he said. "You think you ain't been in trouble since the day you was born?"

"I was borned in slavery days, same as you," Scipio said. "I knows all about dat kind o' trouble. But de Freedom Party, dey worse'n usual."

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He waited to see whether Erasmus would try to argue with him. If his boss did, he intended to argue right back. But Erasmus slowly nodded. "Reckon you's right. Didn't used to think so. I reckoned them crazy buckra'd find somethin' new to git all hot an' bothered about. They been around for more'n ten years now, though. Don't reckon they's goin' noplace."

"Wish they would—wish dey go far away an' never come back no more," Scipio said. "They gwine win plenty o' new seats in the 'lection come fall, too."

"God's will," Erasmus said. "We is a sinful lot, and the good Lord, He

make us pay."

Before Scipio could think about it, he shook his head. "I don't care none how sinful we is," he said. "De Lord can't hate we enough to give we what de Freedom Party want to give we." Would he have had such thoughts before he got mixed up with the Red Negroes who'd led the uprising in 1915? He didn't know for certain, but had his doubts.

"The Lord do what He want to do, not what we wants Him to do," Erasmus said. "Blessed be the name o' the Lord."

"Lord help he what help hisself," Scipio replied. "De Freedom Party git stronger, I reckon maybe niggers gots to help theyselves." Was he really saying that? After watching from the inside the destruction of the Congaree Socialist Republic, could he really be saying that? He could. He was.

"We rise up against the buckra again, we lose again. You knows it, too." Erasmus sounded very sure.

And Scipio *did* know it, too. Blacks in the CSA couldn't hope to beat whites. He'd thought as much before the rising of 1915, and he'd proved right. On the other hand . . . "De Freedom Party git stronger, we lose if we *don't* rise up, too."

Erasmus didn't answer him. Maybe that meant there *was* no answer. He hoped it didn't, but feared it did.

Three days later, he got an answer of sorts. After finishing at Erasmus', he went into the white part of Augusta to visit a couple of toy stores that had a better selection—and better prices—than any in the Terry. Coming home with something new and amusing—it didn't have to be very big or very fancy—was a good way to delight his children. Having been childless for so long, Scipio found he took enormous delight in making them happy now that he had them.

He found a doll for Antoinette, one that closed its eyes when it lay down. It was, of course, white, with golden hair and blue eyes. He'd never seen a doll with dark features like his own. He'd scarcely imagined there might be such a thing. Whites dominated the Confederate States in ways neither they nor the Negro minority quite understood.

No matter what this doll looked like, Scipio knew his little girl would enjoy it. He set money on the counter before asking the clerk for it. To that extent, he did understand how things worked in the CSA.

But the clerk, once he had the price, was polite enough, saying, “Here you are. Have a good evening.”

“Thank you, suh,” Scipio answered. He started for the door, and had just set his hand on the knob when he heard a scuffle outside, and then a man’s shout of pain.

From behind him, the clerk said, “Maybe you don’t want to go out there right now. Freedom Party **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

hasn’t always been nice to colored folks they catch out in the evening.”

Hasn’t always been nice to seemed to translate into *is beating the stuffing out of.* Scipio’s first emotion was raw fear. His next was shame that he couldn’t help the luckless Negro the goons had found.

He felt gratitude toward the clerk, gratitude mixed with resentment. “Ought to call the cops,” he said: as close as he dared come to letting that resentment show.

“I’ve done it before,” the man answered. “They don’t usually come for a call like that. I’m sorry, but they don’t.”

Erasmus had insisted the Augusta police weren’t all bad men. Maybe he was right. Scipio found it harder to believe now. He did nod to the clerk. “Thank you fo’ tryin’, suh,” he said. Not all whites were bad. He was reasonably sure of that.

A little while after the sounds of violence ended, Scipio left the toy store and hurried back to the Terry.

He got home safe. His daughter did love the doll. Everything should have been fine. And it would have been, if only he could have forgotten what had happened in the white part of town. As things were, he got very little sleep that night.

When the train pulled into Abilene, Texas, Jake Featherston knew he was in a different world from the one he’d left. The plains seemed to go on forever. Dust was in the air. This wasn’t the narrow, confined landscape of Virginia. No wonder Texans had a reputation for thinking big.

But Texas itself wasn’t so big as it had been. Not far west of Abilene, Texas abruptly stopped. What the damnyankees called the state of

Houston began. That was why Jake had come all the way out here: to make a speech as close to what he still called occupied territory as he could.

The train stopped. His bodyguards got up, ready to precede him out onto the platform. Looking out there, one of them said, “It’s all right. Willy Knight’s there waitin’ for us.”

“Hell it’s all right, Pete,” another guard said. “What if that Knight bastard’s the one who wants to try and get rid o’ the boss?”

Pete, an innocent soul, looked shocked. Jake wasn’t. Willy Knight’s Redemption League might have swallowed up the Freedom Party instead of the other way round. It hadn’t, though, and Knight couldn’t be happy that he wasn’t the biggest fish in the pond, the way he’d dreamt of being. Still . . . “If he wants to put me six feet under, reckon he can do it,” Featherston said. “This is his part of the country; he can hire more guns than I can bring along. But if you stick your head in the lion’s mouth and get away with it, after that the lion knows who’s number one. That’s what we’re gonna do here.”

When Jake stepped out onto the platform, the band struck up a sprightly version of “Dixie.” People cheered. Jake took off his hat and waved it. Willy Knight stepped forward to shake his hand. As the two Freedom Party leaders met, photographers took pictures. The flashes made Featherston’s eyes water.

“Welcome to Texas, Jake—what’s left of it,” Knight said, a broad smile on his handsome face.

“Thank you kindly, my friend.” Featherston lied through his teeth. “We’ll see what we can do about getting back what the USA stole from us.”

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“How are you going to do that?” a reporter shouted. “The Yankees won’t pay any attention to us.”

“They don’t have to pay any attention to the CSA, not as long as the Whigs hold on to Richmond,” Jake answered. “The Whigs say we lost the war, and so we’re stuck—stuck forever. And we are, too, long as we think that way. But even the Yankees knew better. After we whipped ’em, they set up Remembrance Day so they wouldn’t forget

what happened. The Whigs *want* to forget—they want to pretend all their mistakes never happened at all. And they want the country to forget. Me, I don't intend to."

"That's right." Willy Knight nodded vigorously. "That's just exactly right. Here in Texas, we live with that every day when we look west and see what the United States did to us."

The reporters scribbled. Jake sent Knight a sour look. The Texan wanted to be part of the story, too. *If you wanted to horn in on this, why'd you invite me out here to the middle of nowhere?* Featherston thought. But he knew the answer, knew it all too well. *Because you still want to be top dog, that's why, you son of a bitch.* Most ways, having ambitious men in the Party was wonderful. They worked hard, for their own good as well as its. But having them here meant Jake could never stop watching his back.

"I'm making my main speech at a park west of town, isn't that right?" he asked Knight, though he also knew that answer. "Almost within spitting range of what they call Houston. Spitting's not half what they deserve, either."

"Sure isn't," Knight said. "If the people in occupied Texas ever got the chance to vote, they'd come back to the Confederate States in a red-hot minute."

"Same with Kentucky," Featherston agreed. "Same with Sequoyah." He had mixed feelings about Sequoyah—it was, after all, full of redskins, and he had little more use for them than he had for niggers.

(The USA had even less use for Indians; Sequoyah remained occupied territory, while Houston and Kentucky were full-fledged U.S. states.) But Sequoyah was also full of oil and gas, and cars and trucks and aeroplanes meant the Confederate States needed all the oil and gas they could lay their hands on. If the redskins came along, too, then they did, that was all. At least they'd been loyal during the war, unlike the blacks in the Confederacy.

"Take you to the hotel first, if that suits you," Knight said. "Give you a chance to freshen up, maybe rest a little bit, before you go out and give your speech. You aren't set to start till six, you know."

"Oh, yeah." Jake nodded as they left the platform together. "That way, it's eight o'clock back on the East Coast—a good time for folks on the wireless web to listen in." He laughed. "Who would've reckoned a few years back that we'd have to worry about such things?

Times are changing—if we don't change with 'em, we're in trouble."

"That's what's wrong with the Whigs," Knight said. "They're a bunch of damn dinosaurs, is what they are."

Dinosaurs had been much in the news lately. A team of Japanese scientists in Mongolia had come back with not only spectacular skeletons but also some of the first dinosaur eggs ever seen. They'd sent some of their specimens to the Museum of Natural History in Richmond, where they'd drawn record crowds.

Jake liked the phrase, too; it captured exactly what he felt about the Whigs.

He slapped Willy Knight on the back. "They sure are," he said. "You took the words right out of my **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

mouth, matter of fact—I'm aiming to call 'em that very thing tonight." And so he was, even if he hadn't been a moment before.

"Good," Knight said, not suspecting Featherston was stealing his figure of speech.

Driving through Abilene was depressing. The town had flourished in the years just before the Great War and, like so much of the Confederacy, languished since. Timber buildings looked sun-blasted; brick ones looked old before their time. As he did all over the CSA, Jake saw men sleeping on park benches and in bushes, and others prowling the streets looking for food or work.

The hotel seemed as gloomy as the rest of the place. Ceiling fans spun lazily in the lobby, stirring the air without cooling it much. The carpet was shabby. The walls needed painting. The clerk behind the registration desk seemed pathetically glad to have anybody come in. "Welcome to Abilene, sir," he said as he gave Jake his key.

"Thanks," Jake replied, in lieu of what he really thought. "Freedom!"

"Uh, freedom," the clerk said, but not as if he were a Party man.

Since Featherston was due to speak at six, he and Willy Knight ate an early supper: enormous slabs of steak, a Texas specialty. Texas wasn't dry; they could drink beer without breaking the law. Knight swallowed a big piece of rare meat and then said, "God damn you, Jake. I thought you were buzzard bait, but you turned out to be right

all along. Our time is coming."

"I always said so." Featherston cocked his head to one side. "You reckoned we were going down the drain, and you'd pick up the pieces."

The mixed metaphor didn't faze the former head of the Redemption League. "Damn right I did. This party was drying up and blowing away four years ago." He cut off another chunk of steak. By the way he did it, he would sooner have stuck the knife into Featherston. "Amos Mizell and I, we were ready to get on another horse. The Party did jussst well enough"—he stretched the word into a long hiss—"to keep us on board. But now—"

Jake finished for him: "Now we're back in business."

"We are." Knight nodded. "Hell with me if we're not. I'd take my hat off to you if I was wearing it. All through everything, you said this was going to happen one of these days. You said so, and you were right."

"You bet I was," Featherston said, adding, *You stinking bastard,* to himself. "Come November, we're going to pick up a hell of a lot more seats in the House. We'll pick up some in the Senate, too, from states where we got control of the legislature two years ago. And two years from now . . . Two years from now, by God . . ." Even in the dimly lit steakhouse, a feral glow shone in his eyes.

"Yeah." That same glow lit Willy Knight's face. He and Jake nodded to each other. Both men had been hungry, hungry in the spirit, for a long, long time, and at last they thought they could see satisfaction on the horizon.

Softly, Jake said, "If things go our way two years from now, I'm going to pay back every blue-blooded bastard and every nigger who ever did me wrong. And I'm going to put this poor, sorry country back on its feet again."

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"Yeah," Knight said again. As with Featherston, he sounded more as if he looked forward to revenge than to rebuilding. He added, "We've got the United States to pay back, too."

“I haven’t forgotten,” Jake said. “Don’t you worry about that, Willy. I haven’t forgotten at all. That’s why I came out here—to help everybody remember.”

When he got to the park, it was filling up fast. Bare bulbs bathed the platform from which he would speak, though the sun hadn’t set yet. As he walked up onto the platform and over to the microphone that would send his words across the CSA, a frightening, almost savage, roar went up from the crowd. He hoped the microphone would pick it up. He wanted people to get all hot and bothered when they heard him or thought about him.

“Hello, friends,” he said at six on the dot. “I’m Jake Featherston, and I’m here to tell you the truth. The truth is, the United States are afraid of us. You look across what they call the border, you look into what they call Houston, and you’ll know it’s the truth. If they let people over there vote which country they wanted to belong to, they know what would happen. You know what would happen, too. Texas would be itself again. And so the Yankees don’t let ’em vote.”

Cheers in Abilene had that savage edge, too. Here not far from the border, people feared the United States, whether the United States feared them or not.

Jake went on, “The USA won’t let people in Kentucky vote on that, either, or people in Sequoyah.

They know where the people would go, and they don’t aim to let ’em. Why? They’re scared, that’s why!”

He pointed east, a gesture full of contempt. “And do the Whigs way over there in Richmond, the Whigs who’ve been running this country ever since the War of Secession, do they do anything about it? Do they push the USA to let the folks in Houston— *Houston!* —and Kentucky and Sequoyah vote about who they want to belong to? Do they? *Do they?* Noooo!” He made the word a howl of rage. “They’re nothing but a pack of dinosaurs, is what they are. And you know what you’ve got to do with dinosaurs, don’t you? *Send ’em to the museum!* ”

A vast roar went up. Featherston looked back at Willy Knight, standing there behind him. They grinned at each other. Knight was happy about his own cleverness, even though he thought Featherston had had the idea on his own, too. Jake was happy about how well the line had gone over. He knew he’d stolen it, knew and didn’t care. The point was, it did what he wanted. And nobody else in the whole wide

world knew, or cared, where he'd got it.

Little by little, Party men turned the roar into a chant: "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" The crowd followed along. The chant went on till Jake's head rang with it.

He raised his hands. Quiet slowly returned. Into it, he said, "Come November, you get your chance to send some more Whigs to the museum. I know you'll take care of it, friends. Folks who think they're smart used to say the Freedom Party was dead. We'll show 'em who's dead, see if we don't, and who needs burying, too. We're not dead, by God. We're just getting started!" Another roar went up, one that told him he'd found a brand-new slogan.

"Hasta luego," Hipolito Rodriguez told his wife. "I'm going into Baroyeca. I'll vote, and then I'm going **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

to stay to see how the election turns out."

Magdalena wagged a finger at him. "And in between times you'll sit in *La Culebra Verde* and waste money on *cerveza* ."

"If a man can't have a beer or two with his friends, the world is in a sorry state indeed," Rodriguez said with dignity.

"A beer or two, or four, or six." Magdalena wagged that finger again, but indulgently. "Go on. Have a good time. I will say you've never been one to sit in the *cantina* all the time and come home drunk four days a week. *Libertad!* "

"Libertad!" Rodriguez echoed. He put a serape on over his shirt; the weather was about as chilly as it ever got around Baroyeca. He put on a wide-brimmed straw hat, too. It wasn't raining, but looked as if it might.

The polling place was in one room of the mayor's house. More often than not, Rodriguez still thought of the mayor as the *alcalde* ; even though Sonora had belonged to the CSA longer than he'd been alive, the old Spanish forms died hard, especially here in the south.

He gave his name, signed on the appropriate line in the record book, and took his ballot into a voting booth. He voted for the Freedom Party candidates for Congress, for his state legislature, and for governor of Sonora. When he'd finished, he folded the ballot, gave it to a waiting clerk, and watched till the man put it into a ballot box.

“*Señor* Rodriguez has voted,” the clerk intoned, a formula as full of ritual as any in the Mass.

As Rodriguez left the mayor’s office, Jaime Diaz came towards it. They exchanged greetings. From within, someone called out a warning: “No electioneering within a hundred feet of the polling place.”

That too was ritual. Rodriguez snorted. “Electioneering!” he said. “All I want to do is say hello.”

“I can’t chat anyhow,” Diaz said. “I’ve got Esteban back at the general store, and he can’t count to eleven without looking at his toes, so I have to get back there as fast as I can.”

“We’ll talk some other time, then,” Rodriguez said. *“Adios.”* He didn’t say, *Libertad* . The fellow inside had warned him against electioneering.

When he wandered over to *La Culebra Verde* , he found it crowded. Many of the men sitting and drinking had worked in the silver mines that went belly-up soon after the stock market sank. These days, the miners didn’t have much to do with their time but sit around and drink. Rodriguez wondered where some of them came up with the dimes they used to buy beer, but that wasn’t his worry. A lot of the miners, he suspected, would spend money on *cerveza* before they spent it on their families. That wasn’t the way he would have done it, but they wouldn’t care.

Carlos Ruiz waved to him. He waved back, bought himself a bottle of beer, and joined his friend at a corner table. Ruiz was also a farmer. He might not have a lot of dimes—what farmer ever had a lot of money?—but he did still have some income. “Have you voted?” he asked as Rodriguez sat down across from him.

“Oh, yes. *Libertad!* ” Rodriguez answered. He kept his voice down, though. Some people came into the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

cantina to brawl as well as to drink. Arguments over politics gave them a good excuse. Rodriguez had seen enough fighting during the Great War that he never wanted to see any more.

“Libertad!” Ruiz said, also quietly. “I think we are going to do very well this year.”

“I hope so,” Rodriguez said. “A pity, though, that it takes trouble to show people what they should have been doing all along.”

His friend shrugged. “If you’re fat and happy, do you want to change? Of course not. You keep on doing what you always did. After all, that’s what made you fat and happy, *sí* ? You need a jolt to want to change.”

“Much truth in that,” Rodriguez agreed. “But the whole country got a jolt in 1917. Too many people try to pretend it never happened. Ah,

well— *así es la vida.*" He shrugged, too, and took a pull at the beer.

The question that had occurred to Rodriguez was also on the minds of the out-of-work miners. One of them asked the man behind the bar for another beer, saying, "You know I'll pay you soon, Felipe."

Felipe shook his head. "*Lo siento,* Antonio, but if you pay me soon you'll get your beer soon, too—as soon as you pay me, as a matter of fact. I can't carry people, the way I could when times were better. I hardly make enough money to keep this place open as is."

Rodriguez had his doubts about that. If a *cantina* couldn't make money, what could? Probably nothing.

After all, what did hard times do? They drove men to drink.

"My wife is going to get a job any day now," Antonio whined. "I'll have the money. By God, I will."

Women's jobs in Baroyeca were even harder to come by than those for men. There was, of course, one obvious exception. Somebody behind Antonio—Rodriguez couldn't see who—said, "She'll have a nice, comfortable time of it, too, working on her back."

Rodriguez didn't think the man who made the crack intended Antonio to recognize his voice, either.

Coming from nowhere in particular, a gibe like that might be tolerated. But Antonio whirled, shouted,

"Chinga tu madre!" and threw himself at another miner. They rolled on the floor, cursing and clawing and pounding at each other.

Felipe kept a club under the bar. Rodriguez had seen him take it out before, mostly to brandish it for effect. He'd never seen a sawed-off shotgun come out from under there before. Men dove away from the two battling miners.

"Enough!" Felipe yelled. Antonio and his foe both froze. The bartender gestured with the shotgun. "Take it outside. Don't come back, either—and that goes for both of you. Out—or else I blow holes in you."

Out they went. Rodriguez realized he was holding his beer bottle by the neck, ready to use it as a club or break it against the table for a nastier weapon. He'd also scooted back his chair so he could dive under the table if he had to. Across from him, Ruiz was just as ready

to fight or take cover. Very slowly and carefully, Rodriguez set down the bottle. “Some of the things we learned in the war don’t want to go away,” he remarked sadly.

“You’re right,” Ruiz said. “It’s terrible that we should remember all the best ways to kill the other fellow and keep him from killing us.”

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As Felipe made the shotgun disappear, Rodriguez nodded. “Of course, most of the men who didn’t learn those ways are dead now,” he said. “And a lot of the ones who did learn are dead, too. A shell from the *yanquis* didn’t care who it killed.”

“Oh, yes.” His friend nodded. “Oh, yes, indeed.” Ruiz’s face twisted, as at some memory that wouldn’t go away. Rodriguez didn’t ask him about it. He had memories of his own. Every once in a while—not so often as right after the war, when it would happen every week or two—he would wake up from a dream shuddering and drenched with sweat. Sometimes he would remember what he’d seen in his sleep.

Sometimes the details would be gone, but the horror would remain. He didn’t scream very often any more. That made him glad and Magdalena, no doubt, gladder.

Not wanting to think about such things, he got up, bought himself another beer, and got one for Carlos Ruiz as well.

“Muchas gracias, amigo,” Ruiz said when he brought it back.

“De nada,” Rodriguez answered. He sipped from the beer, then asked the bartender, *“Qué hora es?”*

Felipe wore a big brass pocket watch on a chain. It could have been a conductor’s watch—a thought Rodriguez wished he wouldn’t have had, since the railroad came to Baroyeca no more. The bartender made a small ceremony out of pulling it out and checking it. *“Son las cuatro y media,”* he answered, and made another ceremony of returning the watch to his pocket.

Half past four. Rodriguez nodded. *“Gracias,”* he said. Sure enough, by the lengthening shadows outside, the sun was getting low in the west.

Ruiz said, “Pretty soon we can go over to Freedom Party headquarters.

The trains may stay away, but the telegraph still comes. We can find out what's happening in the elections, especially since the polls in the east of *los Estados Confederados* close earlier than they do here. Let me buy you a beer to pay you back for the one you so kindly got me, and then we'll see what we see, eh?"

Rodriguez was glad to let his friend buy him a beer. He was a little elevated—not drunk, but a little elevated—as he and Ruiz walked down the street to the shopfront that said FREEDOM! and

¡LIBERTAD!

A couple of men were already there. *"Hola, amigos,"* Robert Quinn said in his accented Spanish as Rodriguez and Ruiz came in. Three more men followed right behind them. Quinn went on, "*Libertad!* I wish we had a wireless set here. This town needs electricity, *por Dios* ."

"If the mines had stayed open . . ." Rodriguez began, and then shrugged, as if to say, *What can anyone do?*

But Quinn didn't have that attitude. "Let the Party come into power, and we'll do something about the mines. We'll do something about all sorts of things. That's why you're here, right? You believe in doing things, not in sitting around and waiting for them to happen."

Is that why I'm here? Rodriguez wondered. He thought he was here mostly because he couldn't stand the United States and wanted revenge on them. But if that required doing other things, then it did, that was all.

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A messenger from the telegraph office came in with a sheaf of flimsy yellow papers. *"Gracias,"* Quinn told him, and gave him a dime. He went through the telegrams in a hurry. Then he let out a banshee whoop of a sort Rodriguez hadn't heard since his days in the trenches. Some of the men there had called the battle cry a Rebel yell. "We're winning," Quinn said. "Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida—wherever I have returns, we're picking up seats in Congress and in the state legislatures. And our men running for governor are ahead in South Carolina and Florida, and the race in Virginia is still very close. *Libertad!* "

“Libertad!” the Freedom Party men shouted. Rodriguez couldn’t wait for results to start coming in from states closer to Sonora.

To while away the time, Quinn pulled a whiskey bottle out of a desk drawer. He took a pull himself, then passed it around. Rodriguez had always thought whiskey tasted nasty. He still did, but that didn’t keep him from swigging when the bottle got to him. “Ahh!” he said. The stuff might taste bad, but he liked what it did.

More telegrams came in. So did more people. The Freedom Party didn’t look as if it would win the governorship of Virginia after all, but it gained a Senator from Mississippi and another from Tennessee.

Before long, it also picked up two more Congressmen in Alabama, a Senator from Arkansas, and several Congressmen from eastern Texas. “Will we have a majority?” Rodriguez asked. Even a few weeks before, the question would have seemed unimaginable. Now . . .

Now, to his disappointment, Robert Quinn shook his head. “No, I don’t think so,” he answered. “But we’re still doing better than anybody thought we could.” He pulled out a fresh bottle of whiskey and led the Party men in a new shout of, *“Libertad!”*

An hour or so later, returns from Chihuahua started arriving. The Freedom Party men in Baroyeca cheered: their candidate for governor there was well ahead of the Radical Liberal incumbent. And in Sonora itself, two more Congressional districts swung to the Party. As Rodriguez had known he would be, he was very late getting home that night. But he hadn’t known—he’d had no idea—how happy he would be making that long walk in the dark.

Lucien Galtier parked his motorcar in front of the house where his daughter Nicole lived with Dr.

Leonard O’Doull. Nicole opened the door at his knock and gave him a hug. “Hello, Papa,” she said.

“It’s always good to see you.”

“Is it?” Galtier said. “I don’t want to make a nuisance of myself.” Since Marie died, he’d started visiting his children as often as he could. For one thing, he was lonely. For another, he was sure he was the world’s worst cook. Any evening where he didn’t have to eat what he turned out was an evening gained.

Nicole made a face at him. “Don’t be silly. You know you’re welcome

here.”

As if to underscore that, little Lucien came running up shouting, *“Grandpère!”* When Galtier picked up his namesake, the boy threw his arms around his neck and gave him a big, sloppy kiss.

“You’re growing up,” Galtier told him. “You’re heavier every time I try to lift you.” He turned to his daughter. “It must be that you keep feeding him.”

She snorted. “You sound like Georges. He must get his foolishness from you. Now come in, for **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

heaven’s sake. Sit down. Relax.”

“This is a strange word for a farmer to hear.” But Galtier wasn’t sorry to sit down on the sofa. Leonard O’Doull walked in a moment later, with glasses of applejack and fine Habana cigars.

“I thank you very much,” Galtier said, accepting the brandy and the tobacco. He raised his glass in salute. “To your good health!”

“And to yours,” his son-in-law answered. They both drank, as did Nicole. The applejack went down soft and sweet as a first kiss. Little Lucien ran off to play. O’Doull asked, “And how are you, *mon beau-père* ?”

Lucien shrugged. “As well as I can be, I suppose. It is not easy.” That was as much as he would say. It would also do for an understatement till he found a bigger one, which might come along . . . oh, a hundred years from now.

Dr. O’Doull looked sly. “But of course you have all the pretty ladies for miles around looking in your direction now that, however unfortunately, you are a single man once more.”

He probably meant it for a joke. In fact, Galtier was almost sure he meant it for a joke. But that didn’t mean it held no truth. He’d been amazed how many widows and maiden ladies had come to call on him, to say how sorry they were that Marie was gone . . . and, sometimes quite openly, to size him up. He’d been even more amazed that a couple of farmers, both in the most casual, offhand way imaginable, had brought up their marriageable daughters with him. True, he wasn’t an old man—he wouldn’t see sixty for a few years yet—but what would he do with an eighteen- or twenty-year-old girl?

Oh, there was one obvious answer, but he couldn't even do *that* so often as he had when he was younger. And, if he were to have a wife younger than his youngest daughter, wouldn't making love to her feel like molesting a child? Some men his age, no doubt, would have thought themselves lucky to get offers like those. He didn't.

Making a production out of lighting his cigar meant he didn't have to answer his son-in-law. Once he had it going, once he'd savored the fine, mild smoke, he asked, "And how is it with you here?"

"Not too bad," O'Doull answered. Nicole nodded. Galtier did, too, in approval. The American sounded more like a Quebecois with each passing year. It wasn't just his accent, though the years had also meant that Rivière-du-Loup supplanted Paris in his French. But Americans, from everything Galtier had seen, liked to brag. *Not too bad* was about as much as a man from this part of the world was ever likely to say.

Dr. O'Doull went on, "I wish I could do more about influenza and rheumatic fever and a dozen other sicknesses, but I don't know of any other doctors anywhere else in the world who wouldn't say the same thing."

"Your glass is empty, Papa," Nicole said, and then did something to correct that.

"Pour me full of applejack, yes, and how will I go home?" Galtier asked, not that he didn't want the freshened glass. "The one advantage a horse has over an automobile is that the horse knows the way."

"You can sleep here. You know you're welcome," his daughter said.

He smiled. He did know that. He'd even done it once or twice, on nights when he'd been too drunk to find the door, let alone to fit the Chevrolet's key into the ignition. He might even have slept better here than at home, and that wasn't because he'd been drunk. Trying to sleep alone in a bed where he'd had **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Marie beside him for so long . . . He grimaced and took a quick nip from the brandy. No, that wasn't easy at all.

To keep from brooding about that empty bed back at the farmhouse, he asked his son-in-law, "What do you think of the state of the world?"

That was a question usually good for a long, fruitful discussion. Galtier got one this time, too, but not of the sort he'd expected. The corners of Dr. O'Doull's normally smiling mouth turned down. He said,

"Right this minute, *mon beau-père,* I like the state of the world not at all."

"And why not?" Galtier leaned forward, ready to argue with what ever O'Doull said.

"Because I read the newspapers. Because I listen to what they say on the wireless," O'Doull replied.

"How could anyone like it when the Freedom Party doubles its vote in the Confederate States? They hold more than a third of the seats in the Confederate Congress now, and heaven only knows what they'll do next."

With a shrug, Lucien said, "This, to me, is not so much of a much. The Confederate States are a long, long way from Rivière-du-Loup."

His son-in-law looked startled. "Yes, that's true," he said after a momentary hesitation. "I still think of myself as an American some ways, I suppose. I've been here more than fifteen years now, so it could be that I shouldn't, but I do."

"It is not so bad that you do," Galtier said. "A man should know where he springs from. If he does not know what he was, how can he know what he is?"

"You sound like a Quebecois, all right." Leonard O'Doull smiled.

"And why should I not?" Lucien replied. "By the good God, I know what *I* am. But tell me, *mon beau-fils,* why is this Freedom Party so bad for the United States?"

"Because it is the Confederate party for all those who don't want to live at peace with the United States," O'Doull replied. "If it comes to power, there will be trouble. Trouble is what its leader, this man Featherston, stands for."

"I see." Galtier rubbed his chin. "You say it is like the *Action Française* in France, then? Or that other party, the one whose name I always forget, in England?"

“The Silver Shirts.” O’Doull nodded. “Yes, just like them.” He cocked his head to one side, studying Galtier. “And what do you think of the *Action Française* ?”

Lucien Galtier clicked his tongue between his teeth. “That is not an easy question for me to answer,” he said slowly. As if to lubricate his wits, his son-in-law poured him more apple brandy. “Thank you,” he murmured, and drank. The applejack might not have made him any smarter, but it tasted good. He went on, “I would not be sorry to see France strong again. She is the mother country, after all. And even if the Republic of Quebec is a friend of the United States, and so a friend of Germany, which is not a friend of France . . .” He could feel himself getting tangled up in his sentence, and blamed the applejack—certainly easier than blaming himself. He tried again: “Regardless of politics, I care about what happens in France, and I wish her well.”

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“Moi aussi,” Nicole said softly.

Dr. O’Doull nodded. “All right. That’s certainly fair enough. But let me ask you something else—do you think the *Action Française* will do well for France if they take power there? If France goes to war with Germany, for instance, do you think she can win?”

“My heart says yes. My head says no.” Galtier let out a long, sad sigh. “I fear my head is right.”

“I think so, too,” his son-in-law agreed.

“But let me ask you something in return,” Lucien said. “If the Confederate States were to go to war with the United States, do you think they could win?”

“Wouldn’t be easy,” O’Doull said. Then he shook his head. “No. They couldn’t. Not a chance, not now.”

“Well, then, why worry about this Freedom Party?” Lucien asked.

Before O’Doull answered, he poured his own glass of brandy full again. “Because I fear Featherston would start a war if he got the chance, regardless of whether he could win it or not. Because a war is a disaster whether you win or you lose—it’s only a worse disaster if you lose. I’m a doctor; I ought to know. And because”—he took a long

pull at the applejack—“who knows what might happen five years from now, or ten, or twenty?”

“Who knows, indeed?” Galtier wasn’t thinking about countries growing stronger or weaker. He was remembering Marie, remembering her well, and then in pain, and then, so soon, gone forever. He gulped down his own glass of apple brandy, then reached for the bottle to fill it again.

Nicole reached out and set her hand on his own work-roughened one. Maybe she was remembering Marie, too. She said, “Hard times mean trouble, no matter where they land. And when they land everywhere . . .” She sighed, shook her head, and got to her feet. “I’m going to see how supper’s doing.”

By the odor of roast chicken floating out of the kitchen, supper was doing very well indeed. For a moment, Lucien kept thinking about his wife. Then he realized Nicole meant the hard times that made it easy for him to hire help with the planting and harvest; with so many out of work in Rivière-du-Loup, he could pick and choose his workers. Some of them had never done farm labor before, but they were pathetically grateful for a paying job of any sort, and often worked harder than more experienced men might have done.

To Leonard O’Doull, he said, “It seems to me, *mon beau-fils,* that you and I are lucky in what we do.

People will always need something to eat, and, God knows, they will always fall sick. No matter what sort of troubles the world has, that will always be true. And so the two of us will always have work to keep us busy.”

“No doubt you are right,” Dr. O’Doull said. “I think you are also lucky you own your farm free and clear and don’t owe much on your machinery. There are too many stories these days of men losing their land because they cannot pay the mortgage, and of losing their tractors and such because they cannot keep up the payments.”

“I’ve heard these stories, too.” Lucien shivered, though the inside of his son-in-law’s house was toasty **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

warm. “To be robbed of one’s patrimony . . . that would be a hard thing to bear.”

“It *is* a hard thing to bear,” O’Doull said. “That fellow in Dakota a

couple of weeks ago who shot his wife and children, shot the sheriff and three of his deputies when they came to take him off the farm he'd lost, and then shot himself . . . Before all this started, who could have imagined such a thing?"

Galtier crossed himself. He'd seen that in the papers, too, and heard about it on the wireless, and he still wished he hadn't. "God have mercy on that poor man's soul," he said. "And on his family, and on the sheriff and his men. That farmer worked a great evil there."

He let it go at that. He'd told nothing but the truth. If he also said he understood how the desperate American had felt when he knew he must lose his patrimony, Nicole would understand if she was listening from the kitchen, but would Dr. Leonard O'Doull? Lucien doubted it, and so kept quiet.

Then Dr. O'Doull said, "Of all the sins in this world, which is more unforgivable than the sin of not having enough money? None I can think of." Galtier realized he'd underestimated his son-in-law.

"Well, well." Colonel Irving Morrell stared at the report on his desk. "Isn't that interesting?" He whistled tunelessly, then looked back at his aide-de-camp. "There's no doubt of this?"

"Doesn't seem to be, sir," answered Captain Ike Horwitz, who'd gone through the report before giving it to Morrell.

"It makes an unpleasant amount of sense," Morrell said, "especially from the Japs' point of view. I wonder how long it's been going on." He flipped through the document till he found what he was looking for. "We never would have found out about it at all if that fellow in Vancouver hadn't had a traffic accident while his trunk was full of Japanese gold."

"Tokyo's denying everything, of course," Horwitz said.

"Of course." Morrell laced agreement with sarcasm. "But what makes more sense for Japan than keeping us busy with rebellion up here? The busier we are here, the less attention we'll pay to what goes on across the Pacific. Hell, we did the same thing during the war, when we helped the Irish rise up against England so the limeys would have more trouble getting help across the Atlantic from Canada."

"A lot of coastline in British Columbia," his aide-de-camp observed.

"Isn't there just?" Morrell said. "I wouldn't be surprised if the Japs are

operating out of Russian Alaska, too. The Russians have to be afraid we'll take their icebox away from them one day."

"Why would anybody want it?" Horwitz asked.

"There's gold in the Yukon," Morrell answered. "Maybe there's gold in Alaska, too. Who knows? The Russians don't; that's for sure. They've never tried very hard to find out, or to do much else with the place."

"They tried to sell it to us after the War of Secession—I read that somewhere, a long time ago," his aide-de-camp said. "I forget what they wanted for it; seven million dollars is the number that sticks in my mind, but I wouldn't swear that's right. What ever it was, though, we turned them down because we **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

didn't have the money."

"From what the old-timers say, we didn't have a pot to piss in after the War of Secession," Morrell said, and Horwitz nodded. Morrell went on, "But that's neither here nor there. The question is, what do we do—what can we do—about the damned Japanese?"

"At least now we know we've got to do something about them," Horwitz replied.

"Anybody with half an eye to see has known that since the Great War ended. No, since before it ended," Morrell said. "We didn't beat 'em; they fought us to a draw in the Pacific, and then they said,

'All right, that's enough. We'll have another go a few years from now.' And they're stronger than they used to be. They took Indochina away from the French and the Dutch East Indies away from Holland—oh, paid 'em a little something to salve their pride, but they would've gone to war if the frogs and the Dutchmen hadn't said yes, and everybody knows it."

"Who could have stopped them?" Horwitz said. "England before the war, yes—but not any more. She's got to be glad the Japs didn't take Hong Kong and Malaya and Singapore the same way and head for India. The Kaiser doesn't have the kind of Navy or the bases to let him fight the Japs in the Pacific. And *we'd* have to get past the Japanese Philippines to do anything. So . . ."

"Yeah. So," Morrell agreed sourly. "What they do six thousand miles away is one thing, though. What they do right here in our own back

yard—that's a whole different kettle of fish. If they don't know as much, we'd better show 'em pretty damn quick." He'd been aggressive leading infantrymen. He'd been aggressive leading barrels. Now, with a vision that suddenly stretched to the Pacific a few hundred miles to the west, he wanted to be aggressive again.

"What have you got in mind, sir?" Horwitz asked.

"We ought to be flying patrols up and down the coastline," Morrell answered. "They couldn't sneak their spies ashore so easily then. And if they have a destroyer or something lying out to sea, we damn well ought to sink it."

"In international waters?"

"Hell, yes, in international waters, if they're using it as a base to subvert our hold on British Columbia.

All we'd need is to spot a boat and the destroyer. That'd be all the excuse I needed, anyhow."

Horwitz frowned. "You might start a war that way."

"Better to start it when we want to than when they want to, wouldn't you say?" Morrell returned.

"Sooner or later, we *will* be fighting 'em; you can see that coming like a rash. Why wait till they're ready for us?"

"I don't think President Blackford wants a war with Japan," his aide-de-camp said.

"I don't, either." But Morrell only shrugged. "But I also don't think Blackford has a Chinaman's chance of getting reelected this November. Come next March—"

Horwitz shook his head. "No, they've amended the Constitution, remember? The new president takes over on the first of February from now on. With trains and aeroplanes and the wireless, he doesn't need so long to get ready to do the job."

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"That's right. I'd forgotten. Thanks. Come February first, then, we'll have a Democrat in the White House—or Powel House, take your pick

—again. Maybe he'll have better sense. Here's hoping, anyhow." Morrell rubbed his chin. "It would be a funny kind of war, wouldn't it? Not much room for chaps like us: all ships and aeroplanes and maybe Marines."

"It would be good practice for a war with the Kaiser, if we ever had to fight one of those," Horwitz said.

"Yes, it would, wouldn't it?" Morrell grinned at his aide-de-camp. "There's another report for you, if you feel like writing it—tell the people back in the War Department what you just told me. Back it up with maps and force breakdowns and distance charts and all the other little goodies you can think of."

Captain Horwitz's expression was less than overjoyed. "You've really got it in for me, don't you, sir?"

he said, about half in jest.

And, about half in jest, Morrell nodded. "Damn right I do. I want to get you promoted again so I don't have to deal with you any more. If you don't want to be a major, don't write the report. I think the last one helped make you a captain."

"I'll write it," his aide-de-camp said. "Anything to escape you." They both grinned.

But Morrell wasn't grinning after Horwitz left his office. "The Japs!" he said softly. "*Son* of a bitch." As he'd told Horwitz, meddling in Canada did make good logical sense from their point of view. A USA distracted by troubles close to home would be less inclined to look or reach out across the Pacific. But now that Tokyo had got caught with its hand in the cookie jar, the United States would likely . . . do what?

Sure enough, that was what a popular wireless show called the ninety-nine dollar question. For the life of him, Morrell didn't know why that show didn't give winners a full hundred bucks, but it didn't. *He* took Japanese interference in British Columbia very seriously indeed. But how serious would it look to War Department functionaries back in Philadelphia? That wasn't so easy to see. He sometimes thought that, if it weren't for the Sandwich Islands the Navy had captured from the British at the start of the Great War, the War Department would have forgotten the Pacific Ocean and the West Coast existed.

Maybe this would make a useful wakeup call. Maybe it would remind those easterners that the United States did have two coastlines, and

that they had unfriendly countries to the west as well as to the east.

Maybe. He dared hope.

And maybe, just maybe, having an unfriendly power making a public nuisance of itself would remind even the Socialists of why the United States needed an Army and a Navy in the first place. They'd gone out of their way to conciliate the Confederates. (And the Confederates, to be sure, had gone out of their way to conciliate the USA. They were smart enough to remember they were weak, and not to get into trouble they couldn't get out of. They were under the Whigs, anyhow. The Freedom Party worried Morrell more than ever, not least because now it looked as if it might come to power one day.) *I wonder if I ought to write my own report.* He laughed and shook his head. What point to that? He wouldn't have been posted to Kamloops if bureaucrats in Philadelphia were likely to pay attention to anything he said. For some people, a report from him might be an argument to do the opposite of what ever he suggested.

Besides, Horwitz might win promotion to major, in which case he *would* escape Morrell's perhaps

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stifling influence on his career. No report would get Morrell the brigadier general's stars he craved.

Promotion during the war had been swift. Promotion after the war . . . Even men in good odor in Philadelphia languished. Promotion for someone who wasn't might never come.

And if you retire a colonel? Morrell shrugged. He'd done his part to win one war for his country. No one could take that away from him. If they wanted him to count jackrabbits and pine trees out here in Kamloops, he would do it till they wouldn't let him do it any more. *One of these days, they may decide they need someone who knows something about barrels again. You never can tell.*

He laughed a bitter laugh. He knew he did a good enough job here in Kamloops, but what he did had nothing to do with the specialized knowledge he'd acquired during the war. Any reasonably competent military bureaucrat could have taken his place and done about as well. That even applied to his proposed solution to Japanese meddling in British Columbia, though he might have wanted to push harder

than most uniformed drones would.

He laughed again, this time with something approaching real amusement. Reasonably competent military bureaucrats shuddered at the prospect of ending up in a place like this. They intrigued and pulled wires to stay in Philadelphia, or to go on inspection tours of places like New Orleans. That meant Kamloops and other such garrisons in the middle of nowhere attracted drunks, fools, dullards . . . *and people like me,* Morrell thought.

When he went home after finishing the day's stint, he didn't walk. He couldn't, not when the last blizzard had left a foot and a half of snow on the ground, snow that piled into drifts higher than a man. Instead, he buckled on the pair of long wooden skis leaning against the wall of the entry hall.

Captain Horwitz came out while Morrell was making sure he'd got everything tight. His aide-de-camp shook his head. "You wouldn't get me on those things, sir."

"I know. I've tried," Morrell answered. "I keep telling you—you don't know what you're missing. It's the next best thing to flying with your own wings."

"I know what I'm missing," Horwitz said stubbornly. "A broken ankle, a broken leg, a dislocated knee, a broken arm, a broken neck . . . And if I go flying, I'll do it in an aeroplane, thanks."

"O ye of little faith." Holding both ski poles in one hand, Morrell opened the door, then quickly closed it behind him.

Cold smote. He skied down the steps—there was enough snow on them to make it easy—and pushed off for home. Darkness had already fallen. He relished the wind in his face, the play of his muscles as he glided along over the smoothly undulating snow. A shimmer of motion in the sky caught his eye. He stopped, staring up in awe. White and golden and red, the northern lights danced overhead.

He didn't know how long he simply stood there staring. At last, he got moving again, though he kept looking up to the heavens. Warmth and home and family had their place, no doubt—he was always delighted to get back to Agnes and Mildred. But there were so many who, like Captain Horwitz, closed their souls to this chill magnificence.

"God, I'm sorry for them," he said, and skied on.

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XIV

Another Friday. Another payday. It wouldn't be much of a check; Chester Martin knew as much. He'd been working six hours a day instead of eight for quite a while now, and not working at all on Saturdays.

He should have enjoyed the extra time off. He would have enjoyed it a lot more if he'd had the money to do more things. As it was, fifty cents for a couple of cinema tickets once or twice a month made him and Rita worry. The evening out would mean beans for supper instead of liver and tripe—or, the way things were these days, it might mean potatoes and cabbage instead of beans.

I've still got a job, he thought as he inched toward the clerk who would give him his pay envelope. The clerk still had a job, too, and still had the faintly supercilious air he'd worn when times were good.

Petty-bourgeois bastard looking down his nose at the proletariat, Martin thought sourly. *Do you really believe the bosses can't replace you, too?*

Later on, he remembered that that had gone through his mind just before he got to the clerk and gave him his name and pay number. The clerk checked him off a long, long list, handed him the envelope, and all of a sudden didn't seem so snotty any more. "Here you are, Martin," he said, as if speaking in a sickroom.

What's eating him? Chester wondered. He didn't open the envelope till he got to the front door of the steel mill. A couple of galvanized iron trash cans stood there, to hold just such refuse. Martin pulled out the check and put it into the breast pocket of his overalls. He started to throw away the envelope when he noticed another piece of paper inside.

This one was pink.

Martin stood there staring at it, altogether unmoving, for at least half a minute. He'd known the same mix of numbness, disbelief, and swelling pain when he got wounded on the Roanoke front—never before, and surely never since.

He pulled out the second sheet of paper, hoping against hope it might

be something else. It wasn't.

Come Monday, he didn't have a job any more.

Other paydays, he'd seen stunned men holding pink slips here. You didn't say anything. You didn't look at them. Maybe that was cruel. Maybe it had a touch of, *There but for the grace of God go I.* But maybe it held a sort of rough kindness, too. If you didn't look at your fellow workers who all at once weren't working beside you, they could say anything, do anything, they chose, and not have to worry about losing face.

The only trouble with that was, Chester had no idea what to do with the license he had. What could he possibly say? Nothing would make any difference. He was gone, and the steel mill would go on without him.

At last, one thing did occur to him. "Fuck," he said softly. He tore up the pink slip, dropped the pieces into a trash can, and walked out. He might as well have torn himself up and thrown himself away instead.

After all, what was he but a disposable proletarian the capitalists who ran the mill had just disposed of?

That thought made him look up the street toward the Socialist Party hall. He almost started over there. If **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

anybody knew what to do, if anybody could help him, he'd find what he needed there. But he shook his head before taking his first step in that direction. The hall could wait. It was only a trolley ride away (but, with no money coming in, was it *only* a trolley ride?), and Rita deserved to know first.

When the trolley rattled past the statue of Remembrance across from the city hall, Martin had to look away. He'd remembered. He'd helped the United States get their honor back. He'd paid in blood and pain doing it, too. But now, it seemed, the whole world had forgotten him—him and how many hundreds of thousands, how many millions, of others just like him?

He almost missed his stop, and had to scramble off at the last minute. The motorman, who'd started rolling, sent him a sour look as he braked again. Most of the time, Martin would have apologized. Now he hardly even noticed. He trudged off toward his apartment building, his feet scuffing through snow.

A man in a ragged overcoat came toward him from an alley. “Spare change?” the fellow said, and coughed. He’d probably been hatchet-faced when he was eating well. Now a man could wound himself on the sharp angles of cheeks and nose and chin.

Martin had always given what he could, even though he hadn’t had much. Tonight, he shook his head.

“Sorry, buddy,” he said. “I just lost my job, too.”

“Just?” The hatchet-faced man’s scorn said there were degrees in misery, too, degrees Martin hadn’t yet imagined. “It’s been two years for me. I used to have a house and a motorcar. Hell, I used to have a wife. Enjoy it. You’re only a beginner.” He tipped his battered hat and walked away.

Shivering from more than the cold, Martin hurried into his building. He half feared another beggar would find him before he got up the steps, but none did. *How long can we keep this place?* he wondered as he turned the key in the lock. *Is the next stop a Blackfordburgh?*

Rita came to the door and gave him a quick, wifely peck on the lips. “How did it . . . ?” she began. Her voice trailed away as she got a real look at his face. Slowly, the blood drained from hers. “Oh, no,” she said. “You didn’t . . .” She stopped again.

“I sure as hell did,” Chester said. “Yes, I sure as hell did, and God only knows what happens now.

Have we got anything to drink in this place?”

He knew they did. He took a bottle of bourbon—KENTUCKY PRIDE, NOW MADE IN THE USA, it said—from a cupboard and poured himself a glass. Very much as an afterthought, he added a couple of ice cubes.

When he started to put the bottle away, Rita said, “Wait a minute.” She made a drink for herself, too, though she added water as well as ice to the whiskey.

Martin raised his glass. “Cheers,” he said—the very opposite of what he meant. He drank. A good many steelworkers celebrated payday by going out and getting drunk. He’d never fallen into that habit.

Tonight, though, he felt like killing the bottle, and whatever other bottles they had in the place. *Why not?*

he thought. *Why the hell not? It's not like I've got to get up in the morning. Who knows when I'll have to get up in the morning again?*

"What are we going to do?" Rita said in a thin, frightened voice.

"Maybe one of us'll find a job," Chester answered. He didn't mean that, either. He took another sip and **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

shook his head. It wasn't so much that he didn't mean it as that he didn't believe it. Rita had been looking ever since she lost her job, and hadn't had any luck landing a new one. She hadn't just searched for typist positions, either. Nobody seemed to be hiring anyone, even as a waitress or a salesgirl.

As for him . . . He wanted to laugh, but he hurt too much inside. He wondered if he even ought to bother trying other steel mills. They were all laying people off, not hiring. He couldn't remember the last time he'd seen a new face on the foundry floor.

Rita said, "What do we do if . . . if we can't find a job? Neither one of us, I mean."

"Why do you think I'm drinking?" he said, which seemed as complete a reply as anything else. A couple of swallows of bourbon later, he added, "My pop's still working. We've got a place to stay, if we have to."

He couldn't imagine a worse humiliation than moving back in with his folks as he neared his own fortieth birthday—and bringing his wife with him. His father and mother would take them in. He was sure of that.

But having to crawl back to them was the last thing he wanted.

He shook his head again. The *last* thing he wanted was to have nowhere at all to go, and to end up in a Blackfordburgh. Next to that, the prospect of trying to fit himself and Rita into the room that had been cramped for him alone didn't seem so bad.

Rita said, "Maybe you can find something in some other line: construction or something like that."

Even she sounded doubtful. Chester wanted to laugh again. Again, the pain was too much to let him. As gently as he could, he asked, "Hon, why would they want me when they've got real carpenters and

whatnot coming out their ears?”

He didn’t expect his wife to have an answer for him, but she did: “Why? I’ll tell you why. Because you’d work cheaper.”

“Oh.” He winced. It wasn’t because she was wrong. It was because she was right. *And so much for Socialist solidarity among workers,* he thought. If times got bad enough, if people got desperate enough, Socialist solidarity went straight out the window. A job now, no matter what the pay, counted for more than the damage taking that job did to labor’s ability to get better wages later.

His glass was empty. He filled it again. Again, he started to put away the bottle. Again, Rita wouldn’t let him. She poured herself another drink, too. After she’d taken a swallow, she said, “At least your father’s still got work.”

“Yeah,” Chester said. Rita’s father had worked in a cement plant for more than thirty years, except when he’d done his time in the Army during the Great War. That hadn’t stopped him from losing his job a few months before. He hadn’t been fired, or not exactly; the company had gone belly-up. He’d been able to land only odd jobs since, and worried about losing his house.

“How much exactly have we got in the bank?” Rita asked.

Their bank was still sound, where so many had gone under. If this mess had any sort of silver lining, that was it. “We can get by for a month or two, anyhow,” Martin answered. “We’d be better off if we’d never bought any stocks at all, dammit.”

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“We were suckers,” his wife said. “Lots of people were suckers.”

“Don’t I know it,” he said bitterly. “Buy when the market was near the top, throw money away on margin calls when it went sour. And you’re right, honey—we aren’t the only ones.”

“Election’s coming up this year,” she said. “I don’t see how Hosea Blackford has a prayer of getting a second term.”

“I almost went to the Socialist Party hall before I came home,” Martin said. And then, proving the depths of his own despair, he asked, “Why

the devil should anyone who's out of work vote Socialist, though?"

"It wasn't the Democrats who passed the relief bills," Rita said. "They voted against most of them."

"I know. But they say the crash never would have happened in the first place if they'd been running things." Martin sighed. "Maybe they're even right. Who knows?" Rita looked shocked. He held up a defensive hand. "I used to be a Democrat till after the war. My old man still is—you know that. I changed my mind when the bosses sicced the cops on us when we struck for higher wages. We needed worker solidarity then, and we needed the Socialists, too."

"We still do." Rita's family had always voted Socialist.

Chester wasn't so sure. Chester wasn't so sure of anything just then, except that the bourbon was hitting him hard. "They've had twelve years," he said. "Blackford's had his whole term to get us back on our feet, and he hasn't done it. Maybe the other side deserves a shot. How could it be worse?"

"You'd really vote for Calvin Coolidge?" his wife asked. The governor of Massachusetts again looked to be his party's likely candidate for president.

"Right now, I don't know what the hell I'd do," Martin answered. "All I know is, I wish I still had my job. I wish I did, but I don't. And God only knows what we're going to do on account of that." He waited to see if Rita would argue some more. He hoped she would—that might mean she'd seen a ray of hope he hadn't. But she said not a word.

Rounding the Horn in the USS *Remembrance* felt like old times to Sam Carsten. "I came the other way, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, in the *Dakota* during the war," he said as waves lifted and dropped the aeroplane carrier again and again.

"It's easier going that way," Lieutenant Commander Michael Watkins said. "The waves are coming with you instead of hitting you head-on."

"Yes, sir," Sam agreed. "I still don't know how they ever got around this place against the wind in sailing ships."

"It wasn't easy—I know that," Watkins said, snatching up his mug of coffee from the galley table as the *Remembrance* plunged into another trough. Sam did the same. The table was mounted on gimbals, but the pitching in the strait was more than it was designed to handle.

After another couple of rises and falls, Sam said, “I pity the poor fellows whose stomachs can’t take **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

this.”

“That’s no joke,” Watkins said, and took another sip of coffee.

“I didn’t think it was, sir,” Carsten said. “Have you seen the sick-bay lists? It’s a good thing we don’t have to do any fighting in these latitudes, that’s all I’ve got to say.” He checked himself. “No, I take that back. Anybody else who tried to fight down here would have just as many seasick cases as we do.”

“True enough.” The other officer sent him a sly look. “But I’ll bet you don’t mind the weather a bit.”

“Who, me?” Sam tried to look innocent. Lieutenant Commander Watkins snickered, so he couldn’t have pulled it off. He went on, “Rounding the Horn in April—autumn down here, heading toward winter?

No, sir, I don’t mind it one little bit. It’s the kind of weather I was made for. I can go on deck without smearing goop all over my face and my hands. I’m not burned. I’m not blistered. And we’re heading for the Sandwich Islands. I’m going to toast up there. I’ve been there before, and I know I’ll toast. So I’ll enjoy this while it lasts.”

He hadn’t intended to get so worked up, but he didn’t enjoy, never had enjoyed, owning a hide that scorched if the sun looked at it sideways. Watkins held up a hand. “All right. I believe you. Do you think we’re going to have to fight when we do get up there?”

“Me, sir?” Sam shrugged. “I’m no crystal-ball reader. No, we’re talking about the Japs, so I guess I should say I’m no tea-leaf reader.” Watkins made a face at him. He grinned, but then quickly became serious once more. “One thing I’ll tell you, though, is that a scrap with them won’t be any fun at all. I was aboard the *Dakota* when they suckered her out of Honolulu harbor and torpedoed her, and for the Battle of the Three Navies in the Pacific. They’re tougher than most Americans think, and that’s the truth.”

“We can whip ’em.” Lieutenant Commander Watkins sounded confident. “We can whip anybody, except maybe the High Seas Fleet—and the Kaiser’s got more things on his plate than us right now.

What do you know about these *Action Française* people?”

“Sir, when I was on the *O’Brien* , we put in at Brest. I went into town to have a few drinks and look around, and I saw an *Action Française* riot. What they remind me of most is the Freedom Party in the CSA. They remember how things were back before the war, and they want to turn back the clock so they’re that way again.”

“Good luck,” Watkins said. “The Kaiser won’t let them get away with that, and we won’t let the damned Confederates get away with it, either. We’d better not, anyhow.”

“Yes, sir,” Carsten said. “But hard times mean parties like that get more votes, seems like. I don’t know what anybody can do about it. I don’t know if anybody can do anything.”

He was sorry when the *Remembrance* rounded Cape Horn and made her way up the west coast of South America to Valparaiso, where she refueled. He’d been there briefly in the *Dakota* during the war.

Chile was a staunch U.S. ally, not least because Argentina, her rival, had close ties to England and the other great alliance system. Argentina outweighed Chile, but the peace held because the Argentines didn’t outweigh the United States and didn’t want to give them any excuse to meddle in South American affairs.

Valparaiso had grown in the years since Sam was last there. He saw no signs of damage from the great earthquake of 1906. The weather was mild, which meant he got sunburned. Then the *Remembrance*
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started north and west again, toward the Sandwich Islands. He sighed, went to the pharmacist’s mate, and drew himself yet another tube of zinc-oxide ointment.

“You don’t happen to carry this stuff in five-gallon tubs, do you?” he asked, not altogether in jest.

“Sorry, no.” Like most in his post, the pharmacist’s mate had no sense of humor.

A few days out of Valparaiso, the *Remembrance* changed course, swinging more nearly toward the north. “Change of plan,” Commander Martin van der Waal told Carsten. “Keep it under your hat for a bit, though, because the men won’t like it. You can forget

about Honolulu. No bright lights. No booze.

No fast women, not any time soon. We're bound for patrol duty off the coast of British Columbia."

Sam had fond memories of some of the fast women in Honolulu. Even so, he said, "That's the best news I've had in months, sir. You ever eat one of those whole roasted pigs they cook in a pit in the Sandwich Islands? That's what I look like when I'm stationed there—cooked meat, nothing else but. The coast of British Columbia . . . That's not so bad." He'd sunburned in Seattle, too, but only a little.

Van der Waal looked him over, then nodded to himself. "No, you wouldn't be one to complain about going way north, would you? You've got your reasons."

"You bet I do, sir." Sam nodded. "But what's the scuttlebutt about the change in plans? What's going on off British Columbia?"

"We'll be flying combat air patrol, keeping an eye out for the Japs and giving 'em hell if we catch any of

'em in the neighborhood," Commander van der Waal replied. "I don't know this for a fact, but I hear they've been trying to stir up the Canucks, get 'em to rebel again."

"Bastards," Carsten said without much rancor. Having gone to Ireland during the Great War, he knew that was how you played the game. But, frowning, he asked, "Why us, sir? They've got to have other aeroplane carriers closer to Canada than we were when we set out. Why not use one of them? We're going the long way round, seems like."

"Yes, there are other carriers closer," van der Waal agreed. "They're purpose-built ships, not a converted battle cruiser like the *Remembrance* . They carry more aeroplanes than we do. And *they're* all going to the Sandwich Islands. So is a lot of the rest of the fleet—whatever we don't leave behind in the Atlantic to keep an eye on the Confederates and the limeys."

And the Germans, Sam thought. He lit a cigarette. "If they want the first team in Honolulu," he said slowly, "then they think there really might be trouble with the Japs."

"That's the way it looks to me, too," van der Waal said. "And that means we're going to have to pay special attention to torpedo-damage

drills on our way north. Nobody knows what the Japs have operating off the Canadian coast. It may be nothing. It may be a destroyer or two. Or it may be more, including submersibles. And destroyers can launch torpedoes, too—that's their best hope against bigger ships, in fact."

"Yes, sir." Sam hoped he didn't sound too resigned. It wasn't that torpedo-damage control wasn't important. He knew it was. He'd seen how important it was aboard the *Dakota* . Important or not, though, it wasn't what he wanted to be doing. He'd come to the carrier hoping to work with aeroplanes or, that failing, to stay in gunnery, his specialty as a petty officer before he got promoted. Of course, what he wanted to do and what the Navy wanted him to do were two different beasts.

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Van der Waal knew he was reluctant. He said, "This duty is vital to the ship's security, Ensign—vital, I tell you."

"Yes, sir," Carsten said again. "I know that, sir." He stifled a sigh. "I'll do what ever you need, sir."

"I'm sure you will. I appreciate it," van der Waal said. "You make a solid officer, Carsten, and I'm pleased to have you under me. If you'd gone to Annapolis instead of taking the mustang's route, I wouldn't be surprised if you'd made captain by now."

"Thank you very much, sir," Sam said. "I do appreciate that, believe you me I do." A lot of what he was doing these days amounted to showing people what he might have done if he'd had better chances when he was younger. He shrugged. Those were the breaks. He hadn't even thought about becoming an officer till years after the war. *But I passed my exams very first try,* he thought proudly. Some veteran CPOs had been trying for years, with no luck at all.

He went out on deck. This wasn't Cape Horn, not any more. The air was warm. The sea was blue and calm. The sun shone bright. Sam sighed. You couldn't have everything. He reached for the zinc-oxide ointment.

Berlin, Ontario, didn't boast a whole lot of fancy saloons. The best one, as far as Jonathan Moss was concerned, was the Pig and Whistle, not far from the courthouse. He found himself having a couple of

drinks with Major Sam Lopat, the military prosecutor. They weren't sparring with each other in court today. They'd both ducked in to get warm; though the calendar declared it was April, a new blizzard had just left Berlin eight more inches of snow.

Hoisting a glass, Moss said, "Mud in your eye."

"Same to you," the U.S. officer said, and drank. "Of course, all the mud around here's frozen into a cheap grade of cement."

"Isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" Moss drank, too. "Nobody in his right mind would come here for the weather, that's for sure."

"Nope. Nobody in his right mind would come here at all." But then Lopat paused and shook his head. "I take that back, damned if I don't. You're here for a reason—you can't very well practice occupation law in the USA. Two reasons, matter of fact, because you married that Canadian gal, too."

"Yeah." Moss didn't mention that he'd gone into occupation law not least because even then he hadn't been able to get Laura Secord out of his mind.

Lopat's train of thought went down a different track, which was probably just as well. He said, "And everything's going to hell all over the world, but you're a civilian with a steady job. That's nothing to sneeze at, either, not these days it's not."

"Ain't it the truth?" Moss said, without grammar but with great sincerity. "I don't know when it's going to turn around. I don't know if it's ever going to turn around."

"Tell you one thing." The military prosecutor spoke with a glee unfueled as yet by whiskey. "Come **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

November, old man Blackford can head back to Dakota, and nobody'll miss him a bit. And with a Democrat in Powel House, things here in Canada will tighten up—and about time, too. You see if they don't, Jonathan my boy."

"If they tighten up any more, you won't bother trying Canucks at all," Moss said. "You'll just give 'em a blindfold and a cigarette, the way it worked during the war."

"What a liar!" Lopat said. "Some of the fast ones you've pulled off in

military court, and you're boo-hooing for the Canucks? Give me a break, for crying out loud!"

"Your trouble, Major, is that you think people spell *prosecute* and *convict* the same way," Moss said.

"That's not how it works. Even in military court, a defendant's entitled to a fair shake."

"Most of the ones who come up before the court deserve to be shaken, all right," Lopat said. "One of these days, you're going to be sorry for getting so many of 'em off. You may be turning another Arthur McGregor loose on the world."

"McGregor never went to court," Moss snapped. "And there's not a lawyer in the world who doesn't have some clients he wishes he didn't. But what can you do, for Christ's sake? If you don't give everybody as good a defense as you can, everybody's rights go down the drain."

"Some people deserve to be locked up, and to have the jailer lose the key," Lopat insisted. "Or worse.

How many people did McGregor end up killing? And a lot of 'em were just Canucks in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"McGregor deserved whatever happened to him—after he had his day in court," Moss said. "Till you have a trial, you just don't know. You people have tried to railroad a few Canadians in your time, and don't try to tell me any different."

Lopat snorted. "You'd say that, wouldn't you? I've got news for you, though. Just because you say it doesn't make it so." He picked up his glass of whiskey, poured it down, and signaled for a refill.

"If you don't admit that . . ." Moss threw his hands in the air. Of course Sam Lopat wouldn't admit it.

He was a lawyer, too. Expecting a lawyer to admit anything damaging to the point of view he was presenting was like wishing the Easter Bunny would hop across your lawn. You could do it, but it wouldn't do you any good, and you'd spend a long time waiting.

Lopat underscored the point, grinning and saying, "I don't admit one damn thing, Counselor. Not one damned thing."

Moss finished his own drink, then got to his feet. “Fine. Don’t admit anything. I’m still going to whale the stuffing out of you when we go back to court tomorrow morning. For now, I’m heading home. See you in the morning.” He plucked his hat off the rack, stuck it on his head, and strode out of the Pig and Whistle in more than a little annoyance. How could you have a civilized discussion with a man who wouldn’t admit one damned thing and was proud of it?

That Lopat might think the same of him never crossed his mind.

His Bucephalus started reluctantly. He let out a sigh of relief when it did start. The battery was going, no doubt about it. Pretty soon he’d have to get a new one. Pretty soon he’d have to get a new, or at least a newer, auto, too. Too many things on the Bucephalus were breaking down. And the company had gone **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

out of business in 1929, so parts were hard to come by and ever more expensive.

He parked it outside his block of flats and hoped it would fire up again in the morning. If it didn’t . . . *If it doesn’t, I’ll walk in,* he thought, and reminded himself to set the alarm clock half an hour earlier than usual to give him time to walk if he had to.

His key turned in the lock. “I’m home!” he called as he stepped in the door. He wondered how glad Laura would be to see him. She’d been happy enough to marry him, but neither of them had been particularly happy since. Moss listened. Silence. “I’m home, honey,” he said again, wondering what sort of trouble he was in.

But it turned out not to be *that* kind of silence. A moment later, noise came from the bathroom: the unmistakable sound of someone being sick. A moment after that, the water closet flushed.

Laura came out a minute or so afterwards. She looked distinctly green. “What happened, hon?” Moss asked. “Are you all right?”

“Better now,” she said, and made a face, probably at the nasty taste in her mouth. “In about eight months, we’ll know if it’s a boy or a girl.”

For a moment, that seemed a complete *non sequitur* . Then Moss’ jaw dropped. “You mean we’re—?”

She nodded. “Doesn’t seem to be much room for doubt any more. I’ve missed a month, and I’ve got morning sickness, even if it isn’t morning

right now. We're going to have a baby, sure enough."

"That's . . . wonderful," Moss said. A good attorney was never supposed to be caught speechless. He went on, "But . . . how did it happen?"

His wife's mouth quirked in a wry grin. "Very much in the usual way, I'm sure. It hasn't happened any other way since the days of our Lord."

He made a face at her. "I didn't mean *that* . What I meant was, it's a surprise." He couldn't think of the last time he hadn't worn a safe when they made love.

"Those things aren't perfect," Laura said.

"Evidently not." Moss shrugged and laughed. "If it's a boy, we can call him Broken Rubber Moss. That has a ring to it, don't you think? Or how about Prophylactina for a girl?"

"What I think—" Laura Moss didn't, couldn't, go on. What ever she'd been about to say, a giggle swallowed it. She tried again: "What I think, Jonathan, is that you're dangerously insane."

He bowed. "Your servant, ma'am. You've known that for a long time, I'm sure."

"I certainly have." She nodded. "There I was, with this mad Yank who kept coming to the farm. I didn't want any mad Yanks coming to the farm."

"I should hope not," Moss said gravely. "You get into all sorts of trouble if you let those people anywhere near you. You might even end up married to one of them if you're not careful, and after that anything can happen. Obviously."

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"Obviously," Laura echoed. She set one hand on her belly, though the pregnancy didn't show and wouldn't for months. "This was as much a surprise to me as it was to you, you know. I didn't much want a child. Now . . . Now we'll just have to make the best of it, won't we?"

"I don't know what else we can do." Moss kissed her on the cheek.

When he tried to kiss her on the mouth, too, she pulled away, saying, “You don’t want to do that. I haven’t properly cleaned my teeth yet.”

“Oh.” Jonathan nodded. “Well, why don’t you, then?” While Laura went back to the bathroom, he hurried to the kitchen. The occasion really called for champagne, but they didn’t have any. Whiskey over ice would do the job well enough. He had the drinks ready by the time Laura came out again.

She took one. They solemnly clinked glasses and drank. Then Moss did kiss her. Her mouth tasted of liquor and toothpaste. She said, “I hope this won’t make me sick again.” After seeming to listen to something internal, she shook her head in relief. “No, I think it will be all right.” As if to prove it, she took another sip. “That’s good.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Jonathan drank some more, too. He raised his glass. “Here’s to us, and to . . . whom it may concern.”

“That’s pretty good. I like it a lot better than . . . what you said before.” Laura wouldn’t dignify it by repeating it.

“All right.” Moss made his drink disappear in a hurry. Along with what he’d had at the Pig and Whistle, it left him owlishly serious. He took his wife’s hands in his and said, “I do love you, you know. I always have.”

“You always called it love, anyhow,” she said. “I think for a long time it was just what any man feels when he’s been away from women for too long.”

Since she was bound to be right, he didn’t dignify that with a direct reply. Instead, he said, “Well, you can’t very well accuse me of that now.” As if to prove as much, he kissed her again. His hands resting on the swell of her hips, he continued, “And, since you can’t accuse me of that . . .” He kissed her once more, his lips hard against hers. One of his hands slid to her behind, to press her to him. Her own arms tightened around his back. As the kiss went on, she made a little wordless sound, almost a growl, in the back of her throat.

He lifted her off her feet. She let out a startled squawk: “Put me down! You’ll hurt your back!” She had a reasonable chance of being right; she wasn’t a small woman, and he was pushing forty. He ignored her all the same, carrying her off to the bedroom. “What *are* you doing?” she demanded.

“What do you think?” He set her on the bed and got down beside her.

His hand slid under her skirt and up her thigh to the joining of her legs. He rubbed there. Her legs slid apart to make it easier for him. He hiked her skirt up and pulled her underpants down, then went back to what he'd been doing.

She laughed. "I think you're going to take advantage of me."

"Damn right I am." Jonathan unbuttoned his own fly. He was also going to take advantage of her being pregnant: if he didn't have to worry about putting on a rubber, he didn't intend to. He certainly liked it better without.

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They both still wore most of their clothes when he went into her. She wasn't quite so wet as he would have wanted, but having to force his way in added to his excitement. She wrapped her legs around him and bucked hard. "Come on!" she said as he squeezed and fondled her breasts through the thin cotton fabric of her blouse. As she kindled, she said a good deal more than that. She was the very model of a lady . . . except in the bedroom, when she was well and truly roused. Then anything could happen, and anything could come out of her mouth.

It hadn't lately. The two of them had started taking each other for granted since they'd got married.

Today, though . . . Today they thrashed on the bed and clawed at each other as they hadn't done since he would drive up to Arthur and they'd picnic and then fornicate at her farmhouse outside the little town.

His own building pleasure driving him on, Moss rammed at her, not caring in the heat of the moment if he hurt her a little, too. By the way Laura yowled, she didn't care, either. Suddenly, she arched her back, threw back her head, and let out a long, shuddering moan. At the same time, she squeezed him inside her, so tight that he couldn't help but erupt.

"You're rumpling me," Laura said a moment later, pushing at him.

He shook his head and replied with lawyerly precision: "No, sweetheart, I just rumpled you." She made a face when he gave her a kiss. He laughed, his weight still on her. "If I remember right, that has something to do with why we got married."

“You think so, do you?” She pushed at him again, harder this time. He flopped out of her, which reminded him that, despite the fierce lovemaking they’d just enjoyed, he didn’t burn so hot as he had back in his twenties. Then he’d have been ready for a second round as soon as the first was over. Now .

. . Now he’d wait for tomorrow, or maybe the day after. Laura gave him another shove, and twisted under him, too. “Let me up. Let me set myself to rights.”

“Oh, I suppose so,” he said. But he couldn’t keep wonder from his voice as he went on, “A baby. How about that?”

“Yes. How about that?” His wife’s voice softened, too. “It isn’t what I expected, but I’m glad it’s happened.”

“So am I.” He wondered if he meant it. He decided he did. “About time we put down some roots here.”

“*I’ve* already got roots here,” Laura said pointedly. She nodded, too, though. “It’s about time we were a family.”

“A baby,” Moss said again. “I wonder what *he’ll* see by the time he grows up.” The baby would be his age in the early 1970s. What would the world be like then?

Acreek ran through the farm on which Mary McGregor and her mother lived. Scrubby oaks and willows grew alongside it. They got some firewood there, which was all to the good. Ducks sometimes nested along it, too, which gave Mary practice with a shotgun and gave her mother and her a tasty dinner every so often. And she would pull trout out of it once in a while, though she seldom had the time to sit and fish.

The creek and the trees by it also came in handy in other ways. Mary lit a fuse and ducked down behind **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

an oak to wait for the explosion. It came just when she thought it would—a harsh, flat *crack!* Mallards leaped into the air with a thunder of wings. A couple of crows in a willow flapped away, cawing in alarm.

Moments later, quiet returned.

Mary stepped out from behind the tree trunk to see what the dynamite

had done. She nodded to herself.

The stump she'd blown up had landed in the creek, just as she'd thought it would. The hole in the ground it left was about the size she'd expected, too.

She hadn't done anything particularly useful—a stump here wasn't the nuisance it would have been out in the middle of a field. But she'd learned a little more about explosives and fuses, which was knowledge that wouldn't go to waste, either on the farm or. . . .

Or anywhere else, she thought. She was, after all, Arthur McGregor's daughter. She wondered what had gone through her father's mind while he waged his long one-man war against the Americans who occupied Canada. He'd never talked about it much—but then, he'd never been one to talk about anything much. What *had* he thought? Her guess was that he'd tried *not* to think about it except while he was actually busy at it. That would have made it harder for him to give himself away when the Yanks came snooping around, which they had again and again.

Not thinking about it would also have made it easier for him to go on thinking of them as *the enemy* , as abstractions, not as human beings. Killing the enemy was what you did when you went to war. Blowing up men—people—who were just like you, who fell in love and drank beer and got sore backs and dug splinters out of their hands and played checkers . . . That was a different business. It had to be a different business. Mary couldn't see how anybody would want, or would even be able, to do that.

Had Major Hannebrink, the American officer who'd ordered her brother Alexander shot during the war, ever imagined him as a human being? Or had Alexander simply been *the enemy* to him? For a moment, Mary came close to understanding how the American could have done what he did, came close to understanding without hating.

For a moment, and for a moment only. She shoved that understanding away with all the force of the hate she'd nursed ever since the USA invaded her country in 1914. *She* saw Americans as *the enemy* , not as human beings at all. She saw them so, and intended to go right on seeing them so.

When she got back to the farmhouse, her mother sat at the kitchen table drinking a cup of tea. "I heard the boom," Maude McGregor said.

Mary nodded. "I took out a stump," she said. "I'm getting the hang of

it, I think."

"Are you?" Her mother's voice held no expression what ever. "And what will you do with it once you've got it?"

"It'll come in handy around the farm, Ma," Mary answered. "You know it will."

"Yes—as long as you only use it around the farm," her mother said. "That's what worries me. I know you too well."

I don't know what you're talking about would have been a lie, an obvious lie. "I don't intend to use it anywhere else," Mary said. That was a lie, too, but maybe not so obvious. Maybe.

Maude McGregor looked at her for a long time. "I hope not," she said at last, and then, "Would you like **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

a cup of tea?"

"Yes, please," Mary said. Her mother fixed her one. She added milk and sugar herself, and sat down to drink it across the table from her mother. Neither of them said another word till the tea was done—or, for that matter, for several hours afterwards. When they did start speaking to each other again, it was quietly, cautiously, as if they'd had a knockdown, drag-out fight that might pick up again if they weren't careful.

That's silly, Mary thought. *We didn't. Not even close. All we did was talk about that stump.* To her mother, that stump seemed plenty. And Mary herself wasn't inclined to change her mind. Maybe that was what worried her mother.

They were still wary around each other a few days later, when they had to go into Rosenfeld to shop.

Mary remembered checkpoints outside of town, where the Americans would carefully examine wagons and goods for explosives before letting them go on. Not now. The Yanks seemed to think her countrymen weren't dangerous any more. One day, she hoped to show them they were wrong. That too, though, would have to wait for another day.

Many more motorcars were on the road now than had been there when Mary first started going into Rosenfeld. They whizzed past the

wagon, one after another. Some of the drivers, angry because they had to slow down to keep from hitting it, honked as they went by.

“I wish I were a man,” Mary said. “I’d tell them what I think of them.”

Her mother nodded. “Yes, I’m sure you would,” she said. It did not sound like praise. Mary muttered to herself, but didn’t rise to it.

When they got into Rosenfeld, her mother tied the horse to a lamppost. “Hardly any hitching rails left,”

Mary said.

“I know.” Maude McGregor nodded again. “Automobiles don’t need them. You go to the post office and get some stamps. I’ll be in Henry Gibbon’s store.”

“All right.” Mary hesitated, then plunged: “Do you want to go to the cinema afterwards? We haven’t been in an awfully long time.”

“Maybe,” her mother answered. “We’ll see how much I have to spend at the general store, that’s all.”

Mary wished she could argue more, but knew she couldn’t, not when the argument involved money.

Even the half a dollar two tickets would cost was a lot, considering how little the farm brought in.

Wilfred Rokeby stood behind the counter at the post office, as he had for as long as Mary could remember. She noticed with surprise that he’d gone gray. When had that happened? It must have sneaked up when she wasn’t looking. He still parted his hair in the middle and slicked it down with some old-fashioned, sweet-smelling oil whose spicy odor she indelibly associated with the post office.

Only one other customer was ahead of her: a young man close to her own age, who had a huge swarm of parcels. The postmaster had to weigh each one individually and calculate the proper postage for it, then stick on stamps and write down the sum so he could get a grand total when he finally finished.

Seeing Mary, the young man waved her forward. “If you want to take care of what you need, go **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

ahead," he told her. "I'll be here for a while any which way."

She shook her head. "It's all right. You were here first. I can wait."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Positive," she said. "Where are you sending all those boxes, anyway?"

"Winnipeg. My brother just moved up there, and he figured out this was the cheapest way to get his stuff up there with him. Of course, that means *I* have to stand here and go through this, but why should Bob care?" He grinned.

To her surprise, Mary found herself grinning, too. "Brothers and sisters are like that," she said, speaking from experience. "You might as well be a pack mule, as far as they're concerned."

"That's right. That's *just* right." Bob's brother—Mary still had no better name for him—nodded enthusiastically. "They always say they'll pay you back, and then they never do, or not enough." He paused to stoop and hand Wilfred Rokeby another package.

"Thank you, Mort," the postmaster said.

As if hearing his name reminded him Mary didn't know it, he said, "That's me—Mort Pomeroy, at your service." He touched the brim of his hat.

"Oh!" Mary said. She hadn't seen him before, or at least hadn't noticed him, but now she knew who his family was. "Your father runs the diner down the street from Gibbon's general store." With money so tight, she couldn't recall the last time she'd eaten there.

"That's me," he said again, and handed another package, a big, heavy one, to Rokeby. Then he turned back to her. "That's me, all right, but who are you?" He looked at her as if he were an explorer who'd just sighted a new and unimagined continent.

"I'm Mary McGregor." She waited.

"Oh," Mort Pomeroy said, in a tone very different from hers. He couldn't go on with something bright and chipper, as she had, something on the order of, *Your father blew up Yanks. Then he blew himself up, too.* He couldn't say anything like that, but his face told her he knew who her father was, sure enough. Who in and around

Rosenfeld didn't know who Arthur McGregor was?

Too bad, she thought. *Now he won't want to have anything to do with me, and he seems nice.*

But, after giving Wilfred Rokeby yet another parcel—the next to last one—he managed to put the smile back on his face and say, "Well, that was a long time ago now, and it certainly didn't have anything to do with you."

He wasn't quite right. The only thing Mary regretted was that her father hadn't had more luck. But Pomeroy wouldn't know that, of course. And a lot of people in Rosenfeld still stared and pointed whenever she went by, and probably would for years to come. Someone trying to treat her kindly made a very pleasant novelty, especially when the someone in question was a good-looking young man.

"Thank you," she whispered.

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"For what?" He sounded honestly puzzled as he gave the postmaster the last package. That made her like him more, not less.

Rokeby went to work with pencil and paper. "Comes to nine dollars and sixteen cents, all told," he said.

"For *postage* ? Can you imagine that?" Mort Pomeroy said, genially astonished, as he paid Rokeby. "I'll take it out of Bob's hide—if he ever finds a job, I will."

"Times are hard," Mary agreed. "Let me have seventy-five cents' worth of stamps, Mr. Rokeby, if you would."

"I can do that," he said, and gave her twenty-five stamps—postage had recently gone up from two cents to three. He put the three quarters she handed him into his cash box. She sighed. The extra twenty-five cents she had to spend on stamps would have paid her way into the theater. Now the money was gone—and gone into the Americans' pockets. *One more reason to hate them,* she thought.

"Are you in town by yourself?" Pomeroy sounded hopeful.

“I have to meet my mother at the general store,” Mary said with much more regret than she’d expected to feel.

His face fell. “Oh. Too bad.” He hesitated, then asked, “If I was to come calling on you one day before too long, would that be all right? Maybe you’d like to see a moving-picture show with me?”

“Maybe I would.” Mary realized she ought to say more than that. “Yes, I’m sure I would.”

“Swell!” Now the grin came back enormously. “I’ve got an auto. Can I pick you up Saturday night?

We’ll go to a film, see what else there is to do after that—a dance at the church, or something.”

“All . . . all right.” Mary sounded dazed, even to herself. No one had ever shown this kind of interest in her. Her past left her damaged goods. That had always suited her fine—up till this minute. She was ever so glad Mort Pomeroy didn’t seem to care who her father was or what he’d done. “Saturday night,” she whispered, and hurried out of the post office. Pomeroy and Wilfred Rokeby both stared after her.

Cincinnatus Driver used a hand truck to haul crates of oatmeal boxes from his Ford to the market that had ordered them. “This here’s the last load, Mr. Marlowe,” he said, panting a little.

Oscar Marlowe nodded. “Yes, I’ve been keeping track of everything you’ve brought in,” he answered.

Cincinnatus believed him: the storekeeper was a thin, fussily precise man with a little hairline mustache so very narrow it might have been drawn on with a mascara pencil. He said, “I do appreciate how hard you’ve worked bringing it all in.”

“It’s my job, Mr. Marlowe,” said Cincinnatus, who knew he would feel it in his back and shoulders tonight. Work that had seemed effortlessly easy in his twenties didn’t now that he’d passed forty. He added, “Way things are these days, I got to do everything I can.”

”Oh, yes.” Marlowe nodded. He ran a pink tongue over that scrawny little excuse for a mustache. “I understand you completely—and agree with you completely, I might add. Even now, though, too many people don’t seem to have figured that out. I’m always glad to see someone who has. Let me have your **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

paperwork. The sooner I sign off, the sooner you can be on your way. I don't want to waste your time."

"Got it right here." Scipio handed him the clipboard.

"I expected you would." Marlowe scribbled his name on the forms, making sure he signed in all four necessary spaces. He and Cincinnatus leaned toward each other in mutual sympathy as he wrote. Their both being hardworking men counted for more than one's being white, the other black. The storekeeper said, "Here you are," and returned the clipboard to Cincinnatus.

"Thank you kindly, suh." Cincinnatus turned to leave.

He'd taken only a step or two before Marlowe said, "Here, wait a second." He went behind the counter where he kept his meat on ice, wrapped a package in butcher paper, and thrust it at Cincinnatus. "Take this home to your missus, why don't you? Marrow bones and a little meat—make you a good soup or a stew."

Cincinnatus wanted to say he couldn't possibly, but common sense won over pride. "Thank you kindly,"

he repeated, and touched the brim of his hap. "You didn't have to do nothin' like that, Mr. Marlowe."

"I didn't do it because I had to. I did it because I wanted to." The storekeeper sounded impatient. "If you work hard, you ought to know other people notice. And I do. I'm always glad to see you bringing me loads from the docks and the railroad yard."

"Much obliged." Cincinnatus touched his brim again, then took the package—it was nice and heavy—out to the truck and set it on the front seat beside him. He had one more delivery to make before he could go home with it.

His last stop wasn't at a grocery store, but at the offices of the *Des Moines Register and Remembrance*

. The crates he unloaded there were large and heavy. "What is this thing?" he asked the man who took delivery.

"New typesetting machine," the fellow answered. "We'll get the paper out faster than ever."

"That's nice," Cincinnatus said obligingly.

“And we won’t need so many compositors,” the newspaperman added. Seeing that the word meant nothing to Cincinnatus, he chose a simpler one: “Typesetters.”

“Oh.” Cincinnatus hesitated, then asked, “What happens to the ones you don’t need no— *any*—more?

They lose their jobs?”

“That isn’t settled yet.” The newspaperman sounded uncomfortable now. He sounded so uncomfortable, Cincinnatus was sure he was lying. He went on, “Even if we do let some people go, we’ll try to make sure they latch on somewhere else.”

“Uh- *huh*,” Cincinnatus said. How were they supposed to manage that, with jobs so hard to come by?

He figured it for another lie, right up there with old favorites like *The check is in the mail* .

His skepticism must have shown in his voice; the man from the *Register and Remembrance* turned red.

He said, “We’ll try, goddammit. We will. What else can we do? We’ve got to save money wherever we can, because we sure as hell aren’t making much.”

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For that, Cincinnatus had no good answer. He got his paperwork signed and went back to the truck.

Outside the *Register and Remembrance* building, a couple of men were hanging a banner over the doorway. WIN WITH COOLIDGE IN ‘32! it said, and then, in smaller letters, A RETURN TO

PROSPERITY! The *Register and Remembrance* was the Democratic paper in Des Moines. Its Socialist counterpart, the *Workers’ Gazette* , had its offices across the street and down the block. Even though this was a presidential-election year, the *Workers’ Gazette* displayed no banners extolling the virtues of Hosea Blackford. The paper seemed to want to forget about him.

It was only May. There was, as yet, no guarantee Calvin Coolidge

would be nominated for a second run at the Powel House. It certainly looked likely, though; no other Democratic hopeful roused much excitement. Cincinnatus snorted when that thought crossed his mind. Coolidge was about as exciting as a pitcher of warm spit. But everyone thought he could win when November rolled around. To the Democrats, locked out of Powel House the past twelve years, that was plenty to make the governor of Massachusetts seem exciting.

Nobody, by all the signs, thought President Blackford had much chance to win a second term. But the Socialists had made no move to dump him from their ticket. For one thing, not even they were radical enough to jettison a sitting president. For another, no one else from the Socialist Party looked like a winner this year, either. Blackford wouldn't run again, win or lose. If things went as they looked like going, he could perform one last duty for the Party by serving as sacrificial lamb. That way, defeat would taint no one else.

Cincinnatus shrugged. Whom the Socialists ran was all one to him. He intended to vote Democratic; the Democrats took a harder line about the Confederate States than the Socialists did. He couldn't imagine any Negro in the United States voting any other way—which didn't mean some wouldn't.

When he got back to the family apartment, Elizabeth greeted him with, "How did it go today?" *How much money did you make?* was what she meant, of course.

Some of the tension slid out of her face when he answered, "Pretty well, thanks. How about you, sweetheart?"

"Ordinary kind o' day," his wife said with a weary shrug. "Got me two dollars and a quarter. Every little bit helps, I reckon."

Achilles looked up from the kitchen table, where he was writing a high-school composition. He said,

"Classes let out next month. Then I'll be able to look for work without you pitching fits, Dad."

He itched to do more than he was doing. Cincinnatus knew as much. He said, "Workin' summers is one thing. Workin' instead o' schoolin' is somethin' else. You're sixteen—you got two years to go 'fore you get your diploma. I want you to have it, by God. It's somethin' nobody can't never taken away from you."

By Achilles' expression, he'd made a mess of his grammar. But then, at

sixteen (and where had the years since he was born gone?) Achilles wore that look of scorn around him a lot of the time. Cincinnatus remembered wearing it around his own father when he was that age. Boys turning into young men banged heads with their fathers. That was the way things worked.

“If we need the money—” Achilles began.

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“We don’t need it *that* bad,” Cincinnatus said. “This is the rest of your life we’re talkin’ about, remember.” To his relief, his son didn’t choose to push it tonight. Cincinnatus knew he’d be smart not to push the boy too hard about staying in school. Achilles liked school, and did pretty well. But if his father urged him to stay in and do well, that might be enough to turn him against it.

Amanda came in and gave Cincinnatus a hug. She was still young enough to love without reservation.

She said, “I got all my words right on my spelling test today.”

“That’s good, sweetheart. That’s mighty fine,” Cincinnatus said enthusiastically. “Can’t hardly do no better than perfect.”

“How can you do better than perfect at all?” Amanda asked.

“You can’t. I was just jokin’ a little,” Cincinnatus answered.

“Oh.” Amanda wrinkled her nose. “That’s silly, Daddy.” Her accent held even more Midwest, even less Kentucky, than Achilles’. She’d been born here, after all. Everyone she’d ever heard, except for her parents, had that harsh, precise way of talking, with sharp vowels and every letter of every word pronounced. It still sounded strange and ugly to Cincinnatus, although he’d been here for going on ten years (not counting time in Luther Bliss’ jail).

A delicious odor reached Cincinnatus’ nose. “What smells good?” he asked.

“I’m stewing giblets with potatoes and tomatoes and onions,” Elizabeth answered. “Butcher shop had

’em cheap.”

“Cheap?” Cincinnatus said, thumping himself on the forehead with the heel of his hand. He hurried down to the truck and returned with the butcher-paper package he’d left on the front seat. “Soup bones. Oscar Marlowe gave ’em to me for nothin’. Reckon I’d forget my head if it wasn’t on tight.”

“Soup bones? That’s wonderful! I’ll do ’em up tomorrow.” Elizabeth hurried to put the package in the icebox.

“Giblets. Soup bones.” Achilles made a face that looked remarkably like the one his little sister had just made. “Not many people eat that kind of stuff.”

Cincinnatus had grown up eating chicken gizzards and beef tongues and lungs and other cuts richer people thought of as offal. He took them for granted, as he always had. When times here in Des Moines were good, Elizabeth hadn’t bought them so often, so Achilles noticed them more now than he would have otherwise. But Cincinnatus wagged a finger at his son. “Happens that ain’t so,” he said. “Plenty of people who was eatin’ roast beef’s eatin’ giblets now, and glad to have ’em. I ain’t just talkin’ ‘bout colored folks, neither. It’s the same way with whites. I seen enough to know that for a fact. Reckon it’s the same with the Chinaman upstairs, too. When times are hard, you’re smart to be glad o’ what you’ve got, not sorry for what you ain’t.”

Achilles said, “Somebody at school told me Chinamen cut up dogs and cats and use them for meat. Is that true, Dad?”

“I don’t know,” Cincinnatus answered. “I never heard it before, I’ll tell you. Tell you somethin’ else, too—don’t you go asking the Changs about it, neither. They’re nice folks, and I don’t want you embarrassing ’em none, you hear?”

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“I wouldn’t do that!” Achilles sounded uncommonly sincere. A moment later, he explained why: “Grace Chang is in a couple of my classes. I think she’s a cute girl.”

That made Cincinnatus and Elizabeth exchange glances. Even if Cincinnatus had felt such a thing about a white woman in Kentucky, he never would have said so. But the Drivers weren’t in Kentucky any more, and Grace wasn’t white. What were the rules for Negroes and Chinese? Were there any?

Of course, just because Achilles thought Grace was cute, that didn't mean he was going to ask her to marry him, or even to ask her to go to a film with him. Just the same, a sensible father—a father who didn't want his boy beaten up or lynched—started worrying about these things as far ahead of time as he could. By Elizabeth's expression, she was worrying about them, too.

Before Cincinnatus could say anything about any of that, Achilles changed the subject: "Who are you going to vote for for president, Dad?"

"Whoever the Democrats run—looks like Coolidge now," Cincinnatus answered. Elizabeth nodded agreement. "Got to keep an eye on them Confederates." His wife nodded again.

Not Achilles. "If I could vote, I'd vote for the Socialists," he declared. "They don't care if you're black or white or yellow or red. They just want to know what you can do." And that declaration of political independence started a whole new argument, one that made Cincinnatus forget Grace Chang for the rest of the night.

"Pass the salt, Ma," Edna Grimes said, and Nellie Jacobs did. Her daughter sprinkled it on a drumstick.

"This is awful good fried chicken." She took a big bite.

"Sure is, Mother Jacobs," Merle Grimes agreed. He turned to Edna. "You all right, honey? Everything staying down?"

Edna nodded. "Couldn't be better, Merle. Stomach isn't bothering me at all this time around." She yawned. "I still get sleepy a lot, though." She was three months pregnant; the baby would be born somewhere around New Year's Day, 1933. Suddenly, she pointed at her son. "For God's sake, Armstrong, I'm not too sleepy to miss you stuffing half a pound of mashed potatoes into your face all at once. Show some manners, or you'll find out you're not too big to paddle. Ten years old, and you eat like that? Jesus!"

"Sorry, Ma," Armstrong said, most indistinctly—maybe it hadn't been half a pound of mashed potatoes, but it hadn't missed by much. Across the table from him, Clara smirked. Aunt and nephew (which seemed silly, when only two years separated them) had never got along, not even when they were tiny.

Merle Grimes raised his glass of beer. "Here's hoping Cal sweeps the Socialists out of Powel House,"

he said. The Democrats wouldn't hold their convention for another month—they'd scheduled it for the Fourth of July—but Governor Coolidge's nomination now looked like a foregone conclusion.

"Amen," Nellie said, and drank. So did Edna. So did Hal Jacobs. Armstrong Grimes raised his glass of milk in imitation of the grownups. Clara made a face at him.

"That will be enough of that, young lady," Nellie said. Clara subsided. Armstrong laughed.

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Edna said, "We're all Democrats, and it doesn't do us or Coolidge a bit of good. Hardly seems fair."

"It *isn't* fair," her husband said. "This is what we get for living in Washington, D.C. We're not a state, so we don't get to vote. Most of the government's been in Philadelphia for the past fifty years, but they can vote for president there and we still can't. There ought to be a law."

"It's been this way forever." Hal Jacobs paused to cough.

"You've lived here all your life," Merle said. "You're used to not voting. I grew up in Ohio. I like having my voice count for something. Losing my vote was the hardest thing about coming to live here."

"A lot of places, Ma and me wouldn't have had a vote up till a few years ago anyway." Edna had to raise her voice, because Hal coughed again. "Summer cold?" she asked sympathetically.

He shrugged. "I do not know." He lit a cigarette, took a drag, and coughed yet again. "I am having trouble shaking it, though, what ever it is."

Merle lit up, too. He blew a smoke ring, which made Clara and Armstrong laugh. Despite what he was doing, he said, "Maybe you ought to cut back, Father Jacobs. I always cough worse if I smoke a lot while I've got a cold—I know that."

Hal blew a smoke ring, too. With another shrug, he said, "I have been smoking since before the Second Mexican War—more than fifty years now. Cutting back is not that . . . easy." The interruption was for more

coughs yet.

Merle Grimes' laugh was rueful. "Oh, I know. I always feel like I've been steamrollered if I don't smoke my usual ration."

"You're cross as a bear, too," Edna said.

"Blow another smoke ring, Pa," Clara said. He needed two tries before he could; a cough in the middle ruined the first one.

"You *have* been coughing a lot lately," Nellie said. "Maybe you ought to see a doctor, get yourself looked at."

"What will he tell me, dear?" her husband replied, taking a last drag at the cigarette and then stubbing it out. "He will tell me I am not so young as I used to be. I already know this, thank you very much. I do not need to pay a doctor money to find out what I already know."

Even at the start of the Great War— *eighteen years ago now,* Nellie realized with no small surprise; where had the time gone?—Hal's hair and mustache had been gray, his face lined. He hadn't seemed to change much in all the time since. Now, though, Nellie tried to see him as if she were just meeting him.

He was close to seventy, and looked every year of it. His skin sagged on his face. He was a sallow color he shouldn't have been.

She actually blinked, wondering if she was seeing things that weren't there. But she wasn't. She looked at her husband again. It wasn't just that the changes had sneaked up gradually and she hadn't noticed.

She was sure it wasn't. They'd come on lately. She didn't care for any of the thoughts following from that.

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"Hal," she said, "I think maybe you really ought to see a doctor."

"Nonsense," he told her, and sounded very firm. He seldom talked back to her; in that (as in most ways, she had to admit), he made a most satisfactory husband. She decided not to push it, especially not at the supper table. Maybe it was just a summer cold, and he would get better.

But he didn't. The cough went on. He lost more flesh, and he'd never

had that much to spare. His appetite dwindled. A couple of times, Nellie started to tell him to go to a doctor's office. Each time, she held back. She didn't want to be a nag, especially where he'd dug in his heels.

Then, just before the Fourth of July, he had another coughing fit, and she saw red on his handkerchief.

"That does it, Hal," she declared, trying her best not to show how alarmed she was. "You get yourself to the doctor right this minute, do you hear me?"

If he'd argued, she would have dragged him by the heels. But he didn't. He only sighed and nodded and said, "Yes, maybe you are right. All the pep has oozed right out of me the past few months, feels like."

He made the appointment. Nellie made sure he kept it. When he got back, she said, "Well? What did he tell you?"

"Nothing yet, not really," he answered. "He took an X ray of my chest. I have to go back in a couple of days, after he gets the photograph developed. He will not charge me anything extra for the second visit."

"He'd better not, not when it's his fault," Nellie said, and then, anxiously, "Do you want me to come along with you, dear?" She didn't use endearments with Hal very often; that she did now showed how worried she was.

"Thank you, Nellie. You are very sweet." He was, as usual, polite—almost courtly—but he shook his head without hesitation. "I hope I am by now a grown man. Whatever the news may be, you can trust me to bring it home to you."

"You know I trust you," Nellie said. And that was true. She could rely on him absolutely. That was the rock on which they'd built the past going on fifteen years. Some people had passion at the bottom of their marriage. Nellie was pretty sure Edna and Merle did—and yet that marriage had almost come apart when Merle found out the soldier Edna had nearly married before him wore C.S. butternut, not U.S.

green-gray. Trust mattered in any marriage.

What if Hal knew I killed Bill Reach? Nellie shoved that question down, as she always did. *The only way two can keep a secret is if one of them is dead.* That fit her and Hal's former spy boss—her former client in her

much, much younger days in the demimonde—to a T. Edna's secret had got out, as Nellie had thought it would sooner or later. She would take her own to the grave with her.

Considering Hal's cough, she wished she hadn't thought of it like that.

When the day for the new doctor's appointment came, he put a CLOSED sign in the window of the cobbler's shop where he'd worked so long and walked on over: it was only three or four blocks to the office. Across the street in the coffeehouse where *she'd* worked so long (though not as long as Hal), Nellie watched him go. Her eyes kept coming back to the CLOSED sign. She didn't like the look of it.

And she kept missing customers' orders, either not hearing what they wanted or bringing them the wrong thing even though she'd written down the right one.

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Hal came back about an hour and a quarter after he'd left. He took down the CLOSED sign and went back to work. Maybe that meant everything was fine. Maybe it just meant he had a lot to do. Nellie didn't think he would come across the street right away and tell her if the news was bad. He wasn't like that. And she couldn't go ask him right away, because she was busy herself. *If I keep making mistakes like I'm doing, though, I'll lose so many customers, I'll never be this busy again,* she thought.

At last, she had a moment when nobody was in the coffeehouse. She hung up her own CLOSED sign, waited for a break in the traffic, and crossed the street. The bell over Hal's door jingled. He looked up from a new heel he was putting on. Spitting a mouthful of brads into the palm of his hand, he said, "Hello, Nellie."

She couldn't tell anything from his face or voice. She had to ask it: "What did the doctor say? What did the X ray say?"

"I have something unusual." He laughed, as if proud of himself. "The doctor said he has only seen it a few times in all the years he has been practicing."

"What is it?" Nellie didn't scream at him. She never knew why or how she didn't, but she didn't. She waited, taut as a fiddle string.

“It is called carcinoma of the lungs.” Hal pronounced the unfamiliar word with care. He pulled out his cigarettes and lit one.

When he offered the pack to Nellie, she shook her head. “Not now. What the devil does that mean, anyway?”

“Well, it is like a—a growth in there,” he said.

“A growth? What kind of a growth? What can they do about it?” The questions flew quick and sharp, like machine-gun fire.

Hal sighed. “It is a cancer, Nellie. They can aim more X rays at it, the doctor said. That will slow it down for a while.”

“Slow it down . . . for a while,” Nellie echoed. Her husband nodded. She knew what that meant, knew what it had to mean, but grasped for a straw anyhow: “Can they stop it?”

“It is a cancer,” he repeated. “We can hope for a miracle, but. . . .” A shrug. “Who knows why cancers happen? Just bad luck, the doctor said.” He blew a smoke ring at the ceiling, as he had for Clara and Armstrong. Then, stubbing out the cigarette, he said, “I am not afraid of death, darling. I am afraid of dying, a little, because I do not think it will be easy, but I am not afraid of death. Death will bring me peace. The only thing I am sorry for is that it will take me away from you and Clara. I do not think many men have the last years of their lives be the happiest one, but I have. I feel like the luckiest man in the world, even now.”

“Oh, Hal.” Nellie hardly noticed the tears running down her face. “What are we going to do without you? What *can* we do without you? I love you. It took me a long time to figure that out—longer than it should have, you being the finest man I ever knew—but I do, and who knows? Maybe there’ll be a miracle with the X rays.” She grabbed for that straw again.

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Hal’s smile was gentle. “Yes, maybe there will,” he said, meaning, *not a chance* . He brushed her lips with his. “With you and Clara, I have already had two miracles.” Nellie shivered. She wasn’t, couldn’t be, ready for this. But who ever could? Ready or not, it always came.

XV

“**H**ere you are, George,” Sylvia Enos said, setting a plate of bacon and eggs in front of her son. When his fishing boat was in port, she liked to stuff him. She was convinced the cook on the *Whitecap* was trying to starve him. Logic told her that was silly, especially since he’d grown into a strapping man, almost six feet tall and broad as a bull through the shoulders. Logic, sometimes, had nothing to do with anything.

“Thanks, Ma.” He slathered on salt and pepper and started to eat. With his mouth full, he went on, “You know what? When I went out to the Banks, I took along a copy of *I Sank Roger Kimball* . That’s a good book—that’s a really good book. You and that writer fellow did a . . . heck of a job.” The brief pause there surely meant he was changing what he might have said on the deck of the *Whitecap* . Sylvia smiled. She’d raised him right. He didn’t cuss in front of her—well, not much, anyhow.

“Thank you,” she said now. “You ought to thank Ernie, too. He did the real work. And he’s a brick, too—if it hadn’t been for him, we’d’ve lost our money when the bank went under. He didn’t have to come back and warn me about that, but he did.”

She turned away so her son wouldn’t see the look on her face. She didn’t know what her expression was, exactly, but she did know it wasn’t one she wanted George, Jr., seeing. She would have gone to bed with Ernie. She’d *wanted* to go to bed with him. *And a whole fat lot of good that did me,* she thought. *Just my damned luck, the first time I really want a man since George got killed, to fix on one who couldn’t do me any good—or himself, either, poor fellow.*

George, Jr., got up and poured himself more coffee—and Sylvia, too, when she pushed her cup toward him. He added cream and sugar, sipped, and said, “There’s a lot of stuff in there I never knew before.”

“I’m not surprised,” Sylvia answered. “That was nine years ago now. You were still a boy then.”

“When you put me and Mary Jane on the train to Connecticut, did you really think you’d never see us again?”

“Yes, I thought that. It was the hardest thing about what I did,” Sylvia said. “But no one was going to make that man pay for what he did to the *Ericsson* at the end of the war, and he deserved to.”

“But you would have paid, too.”

“I didn’t even think about what would happen to me. When I found out he was running around loose, I didn’t think about much of anything.”

“That must have been . . . very strange,” George, Jr., said. “A couple of fellows on the boat were in the Army during the war—they got conscripted before they could join the Navy, or else they weren’t sailors yet: I don’t know which. Where was I? Oh, yeah. Sometimes they tell stories. They talk about how they **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

were going up against Confederate machine guns and they didn’t think they’d come back alive. It must have been like that for you, too.”

“Maybe.” Sylvia wasn’t so sure. If a man charged a machine gun, he had a chance of living—maybe not much of a chance, but a chance. Once she’d shot Roger Kimball, she was in the hands of the law, and she didn’t think she had any chance of escape at all. She hadn’t counted on having Confederate politics come to her rescue.

Her son said, “You have a book signing this morning?”

“That’s right. Every time I sign one, that’s fourteen and three-quarter cents in my pocket,” Sylvia answered. She couldn’t have figured that out herself from the murky language of the book contract she’d signed; Ernie had explained the way things worked.

“Call it fifteen cents.” George, Jr.’s, face got a faraway look. He’d always been good in school. Sylvia wished he would have liked it more, would have got his high-school diploma instead of going to work on T Wharf. Years too late to worry about that, though. He went on, “If you sign twenty of them, then, that’s three dollars. That’s not a bad day’s wage.”

“I don’t know if I’ll sign that many of them,” Sylvia said, “but they’re buying the book—or I hope they are—from here to San Diego. We’ll see what it does, that’s all. The reviews have been pretty good.”

That was Ernie’s doing, of course; the actual words on paper were his. *But the story’s mine,* Sylvia reminded herself. *He couldn’t have written it if not for me. My name deserves to be on the cover, too.*

“Might be just as well they took a while getting it into print,” her son said. “With the Freedom Party coming up again in the CSA, people here are liable to be more interested in what happened to one of its

bigwigs back then."

Sylvia blinked. That was true, and she hadn't thought of it herself. George, Jr., had a man's shrewdness.

Well, fair enough—he *was* a man; he'd be old enough to vote in November. *Has it really been more than twenty-one years since he was born?* Sylvia didn't want to believe that, but couldn't very well help it.

The bookstore, Burke's, wasn't far from Faneuil Hall. No line stretched around the block waiting for her when she arrived. They did have a sign in the window saying she'd be there. That was good. She'd signed at two or three stores that hadn't let anyone know she'd be there. As a result, she hadn't signed much.

She took her place at a table near the door. The table held a dozen copies of *I Sank Roger Kimball* and a neat hand-lettered sign: MEET THE AUTHOR. A man in a suit that had seen better days came up to her and asked, "Excuse me, ma'am, but where's the bathroom?"

"I'm sorry. I don't work here," Sylvia said. She'd already seen people paid no attention to signs. The man muttered something and went away.

Another man came up. He took a book from the pile for her to sign. "I was in the Navy," he said. "You did everybody on the *Ericsson* a good turn."

"Thank you," Sylvia said.

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A woman picked up a copy of the book. She said, "My brother would like this, and his birthday is coming up. Would you sign it 'To Pete,' please?"

" 'To Pete,' " Sylvia echoed, and wrote the man's name and hers on the title page. That was where Ernie had said the autograph was supposed to go. He knew such things, or Sylvia was willing to believe he did.

A plump woman in a flowered housedress approached. "Where are your cookbooks, dear?" she asked.

“I’m sorry. I don’t work here,” Sylvia said again. She held up a copy of *I Sank Roger Kimball* . “Would you like to buy *my* book? I’ll be glad to sign it for you if you do.” *Of course I will. It makes me money.*

The woman shook her head. “Not unless it’s got good recipes for beans and cabbage in it.” That, Sylvia couldn’t claim. The other woman wandered off, in search of cookbooks.

Over the next two hours, four more people asked Sylvia questions whose answers only someone who worked at Burke’s could have known. She sent them off to the clerk behind the cash register. She also did get another nine people to buy copies of the book, most by simply sitting there and having them come up, a couple by waving the book as they walked into the store. The first time she’d signed, she hadn’t done that—she’d been too shy. But the manager of that bookstore gave her a tip she took to heart: “If you don’t toot your own horn, lady, who’s gonna do it for you?”

She was getting ready to go home when the bell over Burke’s front door jangled again. In walked a lean Irishman with a lot of teeth. He tipped his fedora to her. “Good day to you, Mrs. Enos.” Striding up to the table, he took a copy of her book and opened it to the title page. Most people, left to themselves, chose the half-title page or the blank sheet in front of it, but he knew the ropes. “If you’d be so kind . . .

?”

“Of course, Mr. Kennedy.” She wrote, *For Joseph Kennedy—Best wishes, Sylvia Enos,* and gave the book back to him. *Another fourteen and three-quarter cents,* she thought, *but I didn’t expect he’d want anything to do with me.*

Kennedy took the book over to the clerk, paid for it, and then came back to Sylvia’s table. “I hope this means you’ve come to your senses, politically speaking,” he remarked, though the way he looked at her didn’t seem political at all.

She said, “I’ve always been a Democrat.” That wasn’t strictly true. She’d favored the Socialists till she saw Upton Sinclair do no more than protest to the Confederate States when it came out that Roger Kimball had torpedoed the USS *Ericsson* after the Confederates were supposed to have stopped fighting. But she’d voted Democratic for as long as she’d had the suffrage.

“You sometimes picked odd ways to show it.” No, Kennedy hadn’t forgotten seeing her at a Socialist rally on the Boston Common.

Knowing he hadn't forgotten, she asked him, "What do you want with me?"

The way his eyes flashed told her one thing he wanted. He knew she knew he was married; his wife had watched her children when she spoke at a Democratic function. He didn't care if she knew. He wanted what he wanted. But he made himself remember he wanted something else, too: "I hear you're doing well with your book. I look forward to reading it."

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"Thank you," Sylvia Enos said.

Kennedy hefted his copy of *I Sank Roger Kimball* . "This has put you in the public eye, you know. We have a campaign to run, Mrs. Enos. Would you help Governor Coolidge—help the Democratic Party—take Powel House back from the Socialists? They were lucky at first, but what's happened to the country in President Blackford's term shows their true colors."

That wasn't even close to fair, and Sylvia knew it. But she'd already seen that political campaigns weren't designed to be fair. They were designed to convince, by whatever means possible. She said, "I'd like to help, Mr. Kennedy, but I don't know if I can. Times are hard."

"Don't you worry about that," Joseph Kennedy said. "Don't you worry about that a bit. We'll take care of you." That glint showed again in his eyes. "How does a hundred dollars a month sound, from now till the election? Plus expenses, of course."

For a moment, it sounded too good to be true. But then Sylvia remembered Ernie talking about his dicker with their publisher, and about first offers' being meant to snag people who didn't have the nerve the stand up for what they were really worth. Her spine stiffened. She said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Kennedy, but I've got so many things planned, that isn't really enough to pull me away."

Joseph Kennedy eyed her again, this time in a very different way. Plainly, he'd expected her not just to say yes but to swoon with gratitude. After a long moment, he nodded, perhaps seeing her for the first time as a person and not just as a tool or a nicely shaped piece of meat. "More to you than meets the eye, isn't there?" he said, more to himself than to her. He grew brisk. "Well, business is business, and

you'll do us some good. How does two hundred a month sound, then?"

Sylvia didn't gasp, but she came close. The way things were, that was a lot of money. "And expenses?

And full pay for November, too?" she asked.

Kennedy bared his teeth. "You sure you're not a sheeny, Mrs. Enos?" he said. She didn't answer. She just waited. He gave her a sour nod. "And expenses. And full pay for November, too," he promised, and stuck out his hand. "Bargain?"

She was oddly reluctant to touch him. She didn't see how she could avoid it, though. When they shook on the deal, his hand felt like . . . a hand. Somehow, she hadn't expected his flesh to seem so ordinary.

"Bargain," she said. The wolf wouldn't come round her door again till the end of the year—longer, if she salted some money away, as she planned to. That made it a fine bargain indeed, as far as she was concerned.

Aeroplanes roared off the *Remembrance* 's flight deck, one after another. Even with a push from the catapult to speed them on their way, they almost dropped into the gray-green water of the northern Pacific till they gained altitude and buzzed away, some to the north, others to the south.

Sam Carsten scratched his nose. His fingertip came away white with zinc-oxide ointment. Even here, off the west coast of Canada, he needed shielding from the summer sun. But, though he might burn in these waters, he wouldn't scorch.

He turned to George Moerlein. Back when they were both petty officers, they'd bunked together. But Moerlein was even newer on the *Remembrance* than he was now, having rejoined her crew during a

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fueling stop in Seattle. Carsten said, "Feels good to see us in business again."

"Yeah—uh, yes, sir," Moerlein said. "Sorry, sir."

"Don't worry about it," Sam answered. His old bunkmate had forgotten for a moment he was an officer these days. He went on, "I'm

just glad this ship isn't tied up at the Boston Navy Yard any more."

"Me, too, sir." Moerlein got it right this time. "That was what finally made me put in for a transfer—I wondered if she'd ever go to sea again. For a hell of a long time, sure didn't look like it." He pulled out a cigar, then sheepishly put it back in his pocket. The smoking lamp was out on the flight deck during takeoffs and landings, for excellent good reasons. The petty officer shook his head. "I've been away too damn long. I shouldn't even have started to do that."

"Well, you saved me the trouble of barking at you," Sam answered.

Moerlein gave him a wry grin, then said, "What the hell do we do if we catch the Japs with their finger in the cookie jar? They're in international waters, same as we are. What *can* we do?"

"Damned if I know," Carsten said. "But if they're sending people into Canada to try to get the Canucks to rise up against us, we can't let 'em get away with that, can we?"

"Beats me," Moerlein told him. "But if we do find 'em and we do clobber 'em, don't you figure it's about even money we're doing it on account of President Blackford needs votes and wants to look tough?"

Sam scowled. "I'd hate to think that." He drummed his fingers on his trouser leg. "Of course, just because I'd hate to think it doesn't mean it's wrong."

An hour later, another flight of aeroplanes took off from the *Remembrance* , while a flight that had gone out before landed on the deck. The carrier kept aeroplanes in the sky all the time. If the Japs really were trying to sneak something past her, they wouldn't have an easy time of it.

As far as Sam could prove, the *Remembrance* was just going through the motions. Her air patrols had spotted nothing out of the ordinary: fishing boats and merchantmen, none of them flying the Rising Sun.

Whether they stumbled upon any actual Jap warships or not, though, the training the whole crew—and especially the pilots—got was priceless, as far as he was concerned. George Moerlein had it dead right: anything was better than sitting in the Navy Yard.

When klaxons started howling a couple of days later, Sam sprinted to his battle station figuring it was just another drill. He certainly hoped so; going to the bowels of the ship on antitorpedo duty wasn't, never

had been, and never would be his favorite choice. By now, though, he'd spent more than twenty years in the Navy. He knew how things worked. The Navy did what it wanted, not what he wanted.

Commander van der Waal was down there ahead of him, at the head of a damage-control party. The other officer's face was thoroughly grim. "What's up, sir?" Sam panted. "They tell you anything?"

"Yes," van der Waal said. "Our aeroplanes spotted a high-powered motorboat pulling away from what looked like an ordinary freighter. Ordinary freighters don't carry speedboats, though."

"Son of a bitch," Sam said softly, and then, louder, "They sure don't. What flag is the freighter flying?"

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"Argentine," van der Waal answered. "But the aeroplane buzzed her at smokestack height, and the sailors don't look like they're from Argentina. She doesn't respond to wireless signals, either."

The throb of the *Remembrance* 's engine grew louder and deeper as the great ship picked up speed. "

Son of a bitch," Sam said again. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Freighter's only about sixty miles north of us," van der Waal said. "Seems like we're going up for a look-see of our own."

"What about that speedboat?" Carsten asked.

"It won't outrun an aeroplane—probably a swarm of aeroplanes by now," Commander van der Waal said. "But if we find that freighter's full of Japs sailing under cover of a false flag . . . Well, I don't know what we'll do then."

"Argentine flag's handy for them—Argentina doesn't love us, either," Sam said. During the Great War, Argentina had fought Chile and Paraguay, both of them U.S. allies, because she'd been making money hand over fist sending grain and meat to Britain and France. Sam's old ship had been part of the American-Chilean fleet that sailed round the Horn to try to cut off that trade: not altogether successfully, not till the Empire of Brazil finally entered the war on the side of the USA and Germany, forcing Argentine and British ships out of her territorial

waters.

“We may be only a couple of hours from war, Ensign,” van der Waal said.

“Yes, sir,” Sam answered. “Well, if we are, I hope we kick the Japs around the block, but good.”

In fact, he wondered how much damage the USA and Japan could do to each other. An awful lot of ocean separated the two countries. The United States—the American Empire, counting Canada—had more resources. Could they bring them all to bear, though, with a long frontier facing a Confederacy that hated them and might be tempted to throw in with the Japs? Of course, the Japanese had to worry about the Russians sitting over their holdings in Manchuria.

After a while, a sailor brought word from the wireless room: “We’ve ordered them to stop for inspection, and they say they don’t have to, not in international waters. They sure as hell don’t talk like Argentines.”

Technically, whoever was aboard that freighter was right. Technically, a man who stepped out into the street with a traffic light was also right. If a truck ran the light and killed him, he ended up just as dead as if he’d been wrong. Another half an hour passed. Then one of the five-inch guns Sam knew so well bellowed.

“Shot across her bow,” van der Waal said. Carsten nodded.

And then, quite suddenly, the *Remembrance* ’s engines roared with emergency power. The great ship turned hard to port. Van der Waal and Carsten stared at each other. Sam said, “They must’ve—”

He got no further than that, because a torpedo slammed into the aeroplane carrier and knocked him off his feet. The lights flickered, but stayed on. “Starboard hit, felt like back toward the stern,” van der Waal said. He was on his wallet. When he tried to get to his feet, he fell back with a groan and a curse. “I think the burst broke my ankle. I can’t move on it. Are you sound, Carsten?”

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Sam was already upright again. “Yes, sir.”

“You’re in charge of damage control, then,” the other officer said, biting his lip against the pain. “I know it’s not the job you wanted, but you’ve got to do it. We’re taking on water, sure as hell.”

“Yes, sir, I can feel it,” Carsten agreed. Astonishing how small a list his sense of balance could detect.

But this wasn’t a time to marvel about such things, not if he wanted to have the chance to marvel later.

He nodded to van der Waal. “I’ll take care of it, sir, you bet. Come on, boys—let’s get moving.”

Even as he led the men of the damage-control party back toward the wound in the ship, he wondered if the next torpedo would slam into her amidships and flood the engine room. If she lost power, the lights and the pumps would fail, and then the *Remembrance* might well go down.

That damn Jap ship must’ve had a submersible tagging along, in case we found her, he thought unhappily. *And we’re out here all by our lonesome, without any destroyers along. The Navy Department didn’t really believe we’d come up with anything, so they decided to do this on the cheap. Now it’s liable to kill us all.*

One of the sailors said, “Fuel storage for the aeroplanes is back here. We’re lucky the gasoline didn’t blow up and send us right to the moon.”

“Gurk,” Sam said. He hadn’t thought of that.

All the watertight doors were closed. That was something. But how many doors, how many watertight compartments, had the blast shattered? That was what they had to find out. Whether the *Remembrance* lived or died would turn on the answer.

Water in the corridor told them they were nearing the hit. “Do we open that door, sir?” a sailor asked, pointing to the twisted portal, no longer tight, under which the seawater was leaking.

“You bet we do,” Sam answered. “Likely men still alive on the other side. Now we fan out, too, cover as much ground as we can, start sealing off what we have to and getting out sailors. Let’s go. This is what we’ve trained for, and it’s what we’ve got to do.” *I sound just like Commander van der Waal,* he thought. *Damned if he wasn’t right all along, even if I didn’t feel like admitting it.*

They found sailors closer to the damage who were already doing what they could to stem the tide of water pouring into the *Remembrance* : stuffing mattresses and whatever else they could find into sprung seams between doors and hatchways and such. Carsten took charge of them, too. He kicked aside a floating severed hand that still trailed blood.

Before long, he was sure the hit the aeroplane carrier had taken wouldn't sink her. Most of her compartments were holding against the flood. Both his sense of balance and a level he had with him insisted that her list had stabilized. Her pumps never faltered. Most important of all, the second torpedo, the one he'd dreaded so much, never came.

In spare moments, when he wasn't too busy sloshing through seawater eventually up past his waist, he wondered why the Japanese submersible hadn't put another fish, or two or three more, into the *Remembrance* . Word eventually trickled down from above. "Sir, we sank the fucker," a messenger said. "She launched two at us. One missed. The other one nailed us. We had some aeroplanes with bombs underneath 'em in the air by then, to help sink the Jap freighter and the speedboat. One of 'em spotted the submersible as she launched, and he put a bomb right on the bastard's conning tower. That
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sub sank, and it ain't coming up again."

"Bully!" Every once in a while, especially when he didn't think, Sam still used the slang he'd grown up with. The messenger was a fresh-faced kid who'd surely been pissing in his diapers when the Great War started, and looked at him as if at the Pyramids of Egypt or any other antiquity. He didn't care. If the kid wanted to say *swell* , that was fine. Most of the time, Sam said *swell* himself. But *bully* , even if it did smack of the days before the war, said what he wanted to say, too. The United States had found themselves a new fight. They'd need the *Remembrance* . And Sam, old-fashioned or not, was glad not to be among its first casualties.

Headlines in the *Rosenfeld Register* shrieked of war: VICIOUS JAP ATTACK ON USS

REMEMBRANCE! A subhead said, *Ship badly damaged but stays afloat!* Another headline warned, BEWARE THE YELLOW PERIL!

Mary McGregor had never seen a Japanese in her life. Except for

pictures in books, she'd never seen a Negro, either. She imagined Japanese almost as yellow as sunflowers, with slit eyes set in their faces at a forty-five-degree angle. It wasn't a pretty picture. She didn't care. The Japs were fighting the United States. As far as she was concerned, nothing else mattered. If they were fighting the USA, she was all for them.

The Yellow Peril story in the *Register* warned anyone who spotted a Jap to report him at once to U.S.

occupation authorities. She pointed that out to her mother. "Pretty funny, isn't it?" she said. "Can't you just see a Jap walking down the main street in Rosenfeld and stopping in at Gibbon's general store to buy a pickle and some thumbtacks?"

"That story must be going out all over Canada," her mother said. "Maybe there are places where you really might run into Japanese people—Vancouver, somewhere like that. I know they've got Chinamen in Vancouver. Why not Japs, too?"

"Maybe," Mary said. "That would make some sense—as much sense as the Yanks ever make, anyway.

But why put that kind of notice in the *Register* ? It's just stupid here, really, really stupid." She held up a hand before her mother could answer. "I know why. Some Yank in a swivel chair probably said, 'Stick this order in every paper in Canada, from British Columbia to Nova Scotia. And stick it in every paper in Newfoundland, too, while you're about it.' Who cares whether it makes sense if you're sitting in a swivel chair?"

Maude McGregor smiled. "You're probably right. The Americans do things like that. They like giving *big* orders, if you know what I mean. It's part of what makes them the kind of people they are."

Had Mary been a man among men and not a young woman talking with her mother, she would have expressed her detailed opinion about what sort of people Americans were. Her eyes must have sparked in a way that got her opinion across without words, for her mother's smile got wider. Then Maude McGregor said, "Next time you go to the cinema with Mort Pomeroy, make sure there aren't any Japs under the front seat in his motorcar."

"I'll do that," Mary said, laughing.

Her mother's smile changed. She said, "Your face just lit up. You think

he's special, don't you?"

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"Yes." Mary nodded without hesitation. "I've never felt like this about a boy before." She hadn't had much chance to feel anything special about boys up till now. Most of them stayed away from the McGregor house as if she had a dangerous disease. And, in occupied Canada, what disease could be more dangerous than not only descending from someone who'd fought the Yanks to his last breath but also being proud of it?

"I'm glad he makes you happy," her mother said. "I hope he keeps making you happy for years and years, if that's what you both end up wanting."

"I think maybe it is," Mary said slowly, a certain wonder in her voice. "He hasn't asked me or anything, but I think I'll say yes if he does. The only thing I don't know about yet is how he feels about the USA."

"Would you let that stand between the two of you if you really love each other?" her mother asked.

"I don't think I could *really* love anybody who sucks up to the Americans," Mary answered. "I just couldn't stand it. So I'll have to find out about that. Then I'll make up my mind."

Maude McGregor sighed. "All right, dear. I'm not going to try to tell you any different. You're old enough to know your own mind. But I am going to tell you this: I'm afraid you won't have too many chances, so you'd be smart to think twice before you waste any of them."

"I never expected to have any," Mary said. "We'll see what happens, that's all. I'm going out to the barn now. I want to give the cow a bottle of that drench we got from the vet."

"I don't know how much good it will do," her mother said.

"Neither do I." Mary shrugged. "But it won't do any good if the cow doesn't drink it, so I'd better try."

The trick in getting medicine into a cow, she knew, was making sure she thrust the bottle almost down its throat. Otherwise, the drench would slop out the other side of the beast's mouth. It probably tasted

nasty—it stank of ammonia, and she wouldn't have wanted to drink it herself. She poured it down the cow, though, and had the satisfaction of pulling the empty bottle from the beast's mouth and seeing only a few drops on the dirt and straw in the stall.

However satisfied Mary was, the cow was anything but. It drank from the trough, no doubt to get rid of the taste of the drench. Mary left the stall. She paused and sat down by the old wagon wheel. She hadn't given up. She didn't intend to give up. She still burned to pay back the Yanks—and the Canadians who collaborated with them.

"I'll take care of it, Father," she whispered. "Don't you worry about a thing. I'll take care of it."

And what would Mort Pomeroy think of that? He hadn't run away from her when he found out she was Arthur McGregor's daughter. That surely meant he had some interest in her—and that he liked the Yanks none too well. What else could it possibly mean?

Cold as Manitoba winter, she answered her silent rhetorical question. *It could mean he's head over heels for you and doesn't care about politics one way or the other—or, if he does care, he'll forget about that for the time being because he's head over heels for you.*

Or—colder yet— *it could mean he's really a collaborator himself, but he's pretending not to be so he can trap you.* Mary shook her head. It wasn't so much that she believed Mort incapable of such an **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

outrage, though she did. It was much more that she didn't think the Yanks could be interested in her. Her father, after all, was almost nine years dead. She'd been a girl when he blew himself up. Since then, she hadn't done anything overt against the Americans. Oh, they were bound to know she didn't love them.

But if they got rid of every Canadian who didn't love them, this would be a wide and ever so empty land.

She took her weekly bath earlier than usual that Saturday, and dressed in her best calico. Her mother smiled. "What time is Mort coming for you?" she asked.

"Between six and six-thirty," Mary answered. "Do I look all right?" She anxiously patted at her hair.

“You look wonderful,” her mother answered. “I’m sure you’ll have a good time. Talking pictures! Who would have thought of such a thing?”

Mary sniffed. “They’ve had them in the USA and the CSA for a couple of years now. We’re only the poor relations. We have to wait our turn.”

“That may be part of it, but Rosenfeld’s not the big city, either,” Maude McGregor said. “I’ll bet they’ve had them in places like Winnipeg and Toronto for a while now.”

With another sniff, Mary said, “Maybe.” She didn’t want to give the Americans the benefit of any doubt.

Mort Pomeroy pulled up in his Oldsmobile at six on the dot. Mary didn’t, couldn’t, hold his driving an American auto against him. After the U.S. conquest, the Canadian automobile industry no longer existed.

“Hello, Mary,” Mort said when she came to the door. “You look very pretty tonight. Hello, Mrs.

McGregor,” he added to her mother, who stood behind her.

“Hello, Mort,” Maude McGregor answered gravely.

“Shall we go?” Mary didn’t sound grave—she was eager.

“Have a nice time,” her mother said. She didn’t tack on, *Don’t stay out too late,* as she had on Mort’s first few visits to the farmhouse.

Riding in a motorcar was something Mary hadn’t done very often before she got to know Mort Pomeroy, though she tried not to let on. It was ever so much faster and smoother than traveling by wagon. Almost before she knew it, they were back in Rosenfeld.

Mort laid down two quarters at the cinema as if he’d never had to worry about money in his life. That Mary doubted; his father might make a living from his diner, but nobody got rich running a business in Rosenfeld.

Inside the theater, he bought them a tub of popcorn and some sweet, fizzy stuff called Yankee Cola. The bubbles tickled as they went up Mary’s nose. She laughed in spite of the fizzy water’s name. Music blared from the screen as the newsreel started. Then there were

pictures of a damaged warship that, with its flat deck and asymmetrical smokestack and superstructure, was as funny-looking as anything Mary had every imagined. “Jap treachery almost sank the USS *Remembrance* ,” the announcer boomed, “but quick work by her damage-control team saved her.”

On the screen, a very fair officer looked out at the audience. “We got her back to port,” he said. “She’ll be in action again before long, and then the enemy’s going to pay.”

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Mary leaned toward Mort Pomeroy. “Too bad the Japs didn’t sink her,” she whispered, and waited to see how he’d respond.

He nodded. He didn’t make a fuss about it or get excited, but he nodded. Mary didn’t think she could have stood it if he’d said he would rather see the USA win than Japan. As things were, she smiled and leaned her head on his shoulder in the dark theater and enjoyed the film. Sound did add to the story: more than it did to the newsreel, where most of it had been martial music and an announcer reading what would have been shown before in print on the screen. Hearing characters talk and sing made her feel as if she lived in New York City with them—and made her feel as if she wanted to, which was even more startling.

Afterwards, Mort drove her back toward the farmhouse. Voice elaborately casual, he said, “We could stop for a little while.”

There were only the two of them, and the motorcar, and the vast Canadian prairie. Who would know if they did stop for a little while? No one at all. “Yes,” Mary said, also casually, “we could.”

He parked on the soft shoulder and turned off the engine and the headlights. It was very quiet and very dark. They slid towards each other on the front seat. His arms went around her. They kissed for a long time. He squeezed her breasts through the thin cotton fabric of her dress. The heat that filled her had nothing to do with the warm summer evening. But when he set a hand high on her thigh and tried to slide it higher yet, she twisted away. “I’m not *that* kind of girl, Mort,” she said, and hoped her breathless voice didn’t give away her lie.

Evidently not. He just nodded and said, “Kiss me again, then,

sweetheart, and I'll take you home." She did, happily. He fired up the Oldsmobile's engine and put the auto in gear. Off toward the farm it went.

Mary didn't know when she'd been so happy. Looking at Mort Pomeroy there beside her, she was almost sorry she wasn't that kind of girl.

"**O**ccupation duty!" Colonel Abner Dowling made the words into a curse. "My country's at war, and what do I get? *Occupation* duty. There's no justice in the world, none at all."

"As General Custer's adjutant, sir, you were right at the heart of things during the Great War," Captain Toricelli said.

"I wanted to be at the front, not at First Army headquarters," Dowling said. That was nothing but the truth. It wasn't the whole truth, of course. The whole truth was, he would have sold his soul for seventeen cents to escape the company of General Custer, provided the Devil or anyone else had offered him the spare change for it.

And yet Custer unquestionably was a hero, a hero many times over. How did that square with the other?

Dowling cast a suspicious eye in the direction of Captain Toricelli. What did Toricelli think of *him* ? Some things, perhaps, were better left unknown.

"If you must do occupation duty, sir," his adjutant persisted, "there are worse places than Salt Lake City. If the Mormons rise up again with all their might, they don't just tie down men we might use fighting the Japs—"

"Not likely they could," Dowling said. "Damned few battleships and cruisers and submersibles in the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Great Salt Lake."

"Er—yes, sir," Captain Toricelli said. "But the railroads still run through Utah. An uprising could keep manufactured goods from getting to the West Coast and oil from getting to the East. That would make everything much harder."

"I should say it would," Dowling agreed. "And fighting Japan will be hard enough as is. The little yellow men have been getting ready for

this ever since the Great War. And what have we been doing the past twelve years? Not enough, Captain. I'm very much afraid we haven't done enough."

"Do you know what worries me more than anything else, sir?" Toricelli said.

"Tell me, Captain," Dowling urged. "I can always use something new to worry about. I may not be able to find enough things on my own."

"Er—yes," Toricelli said again; Abner Dowling in a sportive mood disconcerted him. Gathering himself, he went on, "I'm afraid President Blackford will pick up a lot of votes because we're at war."

"Oh." Dowling scowled. That made entirely too much sense for him to like it. "I do hope you're wrong.

With luck, people will see a Democrat in Powel House is the best hope we have of winning this war.

We've been in two with Republicans, and we lost both of those. And we're not off to a good start with a Socialist running one. I'll trade you —do you want to know what worries *me* more than anything else?"

"Tell me, sir," Angelo Toricelli replied. He didn't actually say he *wanted* to know, but he came close enough. He was an adjutant, after all; part of his job was listening to his superior.

Dowling knew more about that side of being an adjutant than he cared to. But the shoe was on the other foot now. He didn't have to listen to General Custer's maunderings any more. And he didn't intend to maunder here. He said, "I'm afraid the Japs will take the Sandwich Islands away from us, the way we took them away from England in 1914. That would be very bad. Without the Sandwich Islands, we'd be fighting this war out of San Diego and San Francisco and Seattle. The logistics couldn't get much worse than that."

"Well, no, sir," Captain Toricelli said. "But we caught the British by surprise when the Great War broke out. I can't imagine the Japanese pulling off a surprise attack against Pearl Harbor."

"I hope not, by God," Dowling said. "Still, who would have thought they could have pulled off a sneak attack on the *Remembrance* ? That was a pretty slick piece of work."

"It cost them, too," his adjutant said. "They lost their freighter and

their speedboat and their submersible."

"A good thing they did," Dowling said. "If that sub could have launched a second spread of torpedoes, we'd have lost our aeroplane carrier. By everything people say, we almost lost her anyhow." He shook his head. His jowls wobbled. "As far as you can in a situation like that, we got lucky."

Toricelli nodded. "And Canada's quiet—for the time being, anyhow. And President Mitchel's keeping the CSA quiet, too. He can't possibly strike at us—the Confederates are no more ready for a big war than we are: less, if anything. And the *Action Française* is busy puffing out its chest and making faces at the Kaiser. So it's just us and the Japs."

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"And thousands of miles of water," Dowling added.

"Yes, sir—and several thousand miles of water," Captain Toricelli agreed.

Those thousands of miles of water, of course, were the main reason Abner Dowling would almost surely stay in Utah for as long as the war lasted. The United States had needed an enormous Army to take on the Confederate States along the land frontier the two American republics shared—had needed it, got it, and won with it. But what good was an enormous Army out in the Pacific, where most of the islands were small and where the only way to get to them was by ship? None Dowling could see.

He surged to his feet, saying, "I'm going to take a bit of a constitutional." Every doctor he'd ever seen told him he'd be better off if he lost weight. Trouble was, he had no great interest in losing it. He'd always been heavy. He felt good. And he liked nothing in the whole wide world better than eating.

By the time he got to the entrance to Army headquarters in Salt Lake City, a squad of armed guards waited to escort him on his stroll: his adjutant must have telephoned ahead. Dowling fumed a little; he didn't want to go for a walk surrounded by soldiers. But he could hardly claim he didn't need guards, not after he'd been in General Pershing's office when that still uncaught assassin gunned down the military governor of Utah.

If anybody in a third-story window had a rifle, or maybe just a grenade, all the guards wouldn't do him a hell of a lot of good. He knew that—knew it and refused to dwell on it. "Let's go, boys," he said.

"Yes, sir," they chorused. The privates among them were young men, conscripts. The sergeant who led the squad was in his thirties, a Great War veteran with ribbons for the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star among the fruit salad on his chest.

The wind blew out of the west. It tasted of alkali. Dowling thought tumbleweeds should have been blowing down dusty streets with a wind like that. The streets in Salt Lake City weren't dusty, though.

They were well paved. Everything in the city—with the inevitable exception of the ruins of the Temple and Tabernacle—was shiny and new. Everything from before the Great War had been knocked flat during the Mormon uprising.

Sea gulls spiraled overhead. Seeing them always bemused Dowling. Staying within the borders of the United States, you couldn't get much farther from the sea than Salt Lake City. The gulls didn't care. They ate bugs and garbage and anything else they could scrounge. Farmers liked them. Dowling pulled down his hat, hoping the gulls wouldn't make any untoward bombing runs.

He strolled past the sandbagged perimeter around the headquarters. Soldiers in machine-gun nests saluted as he went by. He returned the salutes. Leaving headquarters wasn't so hard. To return, he knew he'd have to show his identification. The Mormons hadn't tried anything lately. That didn't mean they wouldn't.

People on the street looked like . . . people. Women tugged at their skirts to keep them from flipping up in the breeze. Boys in short pants ran and shouted. A long line of men waited patiently in front of a soup kitchen. Dowling could have seen the like in any medium-sized city in the USA. And yet . . .

Nobody said anything to him. He hadn't expected anyone would, not with soldiers tramping along beside him with bayonets glittering on their Springfields. No one even gave him a dirty look. But he still had the feeling of being in the middle of a deep freeze. The locals hated him, and they'd go right on hating him, too.

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After a bit, he noticed one difference between Salt Lake City and other medium-sized towns in the USA. No election posters shouted from walls and fences. No billboards praised Hosea Blackford and Calvin Coolidge. Being under martial law, Utah didn't enjoy the franchise. Lawsuits to let the locals vote had gone all the way to the Supreme Court—and had been rejected every time. Ever since the War of Secession, the Supreme Court had taken a much friendlier line toward the federal government's authority than toward any competing principle.

And it's paid off, by God, Dowling thought. *We finally licked the damned Confederates. We're the strongest country in America. We're one of the two or three strongest countries in the world. We did what we had to do.*

He turned a corner . . . turned it and frowned. Half a dozen posters were plastered on a wall there: simple, wordless things showing a gold-and-black bee on a white background. The bee, symbol of industry, was also the symbol of Deseret, the name the Mormons had given to the would-be state the U.S. Army crushed.

Dowling turned to the sergeant who headed the bodyguards. "Note this address," he said. "If those posters aren't down tomorrow, we'll have to fine the property owner."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant said crisply.

Martial law meant no antigovernment propaganda. The Mormons and the government hadn't liked or trusted each other since the 1850s. They'd despised each other since the 1880s, and hated each other since 1915. That didn't look like changing any time soon. The government—and the Army—held the whip hand. If the posters didn't come down, the man on whose property they were displayed would be reckoned disloyal, and would have to pay for that disloyalty.

Of course he's disloyal, Dowling thought. *The only people in Utah who aren't disloyal are the ones who aren't Mormons—and we can't trust all of them, either. The Army didn't stop to ask a whole lot of questions about who was who back in 1915. We landed on everybody with both feet. So some of the gentiles haven't got any use for us, either. Well, too bad for them.*

As he walked down the block, he saw more bee posters. He nodded to the sergeant, who took down more addresses. One man was already out in front of his house with a bucket of hot water and a scraper,

taking down the posters on his front fence. Dowling nodded to the noncom again, this time in a different way. That address didn't get taken.

But when Dowling asked the man scraping away at the posters if he knew who'd put them up, the fellow just shook his head. "Didn't see a thing," he answered.

He likely would have said the same thing if he'd given cups of coffee to the subversives who'd put the posters on his fence—not that pious Mormons would have either offered or accepted coffee. Even the locals who outwardly cooperated with U.S. authority weren't reliable, or anything close to it.

With a sigh, Abner Dowling went on his way. He wasn't in the front lines against the Japanese. He probably never would be. But whenever he went out into Salt Lake City, he got reminded he was at war.

"**N**o, Mister—uh—Martin. Sorry, sir." The clerk in the hiring office shook her head. "We aren't looking **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

for anyone right now. Good luck somewhere else."

"Thanks," Chester Martin said savagely. The clerk blushed and ran a sheet of paper into her typewriter so she wouldn't have to look at him.

Jamming the brim of his cloth cap down almost to his eyes, Martin stalked out of the office. He didn't even slam the door behind him. He might come back to this steel mill again, and he didn't want them remembering him the wrong way.

He wanted work. He wanted it so bad, he could taste it. But wanting and having weren't the same.

Somewhere around one man in four in Toledo was out of a job. It was the same all over the country.

He hadn't really expected to find work here, but he had to keep going through the motions. He'd been to every steel mill in town at least four times, with never the trace of a nibble. He'd been other places, too. He'd been to every kind of outfit that might need a strong back and a set of muscles. He'd had just as much luck at the plate-glass and cut-glass works, at the docks, at the grain mills, and even at the clover-seed market as he had in his proper line of work. Zero equaled zero. He didn't remember much of what he'd learned in school, but

that was pretty obvious.

A man in a colorless cloth cap shabbier than his own came up to him and held out a hand. Voice a sour whine, the man said, “Got a dime you can spare, pal?”

Chester shook his head. “I don’t have a job, either.”

The other man eyed him—here, plainly, was another fellow who’d lost his job early in the collapse.

“You haven’t been out of work all that long,” he said. “You still think you’ll get one pretty soon.” The day was hot and muggy, but his laugh might have come from the middle of winter.

“I have to,” Martin said simply.

“That’s what I said,” the other unemployed man replied. “That’s just what I said. After a while, though, you find a Blackfordburgh isn’t such a bad place. You just wait, buddy. You’ll see.” He tipped his shabby cap and walked on.

With a shudder as if a goose had walked over his grave, Martin went on his way, too. He and Rita were still hanging on to their apartment, thanks to money borrowed from his folks. But he didn’t know how long his father and mother would be able to go on helping them. If his father lost *his* job . . . Chester didn’t even want to think about that. How could he help it, though, with so many men pounding the pavement looking for work? *Guys just like me,* he thought as his own feet slapped up and down, up and down, on the sidewalk.

He had a long walk home. He didn’t care. A long walk beat paying a nickel trolley fare. One of these days soon, though, he’d have to shell out some money to let the little old Armenian cobbler down the street repair his shoes. Walking wore on the soles as much as being out of work wore on the soul.

Somebody on a soapbox—actually, on what looked like a beer barrel—was making a speech under the statue of Remembrance across from city hall. A couple of dozen men and a handful of women listened impassively as the fellow bawled, “We’ve got to hang all the damn Reds! They aren’t real Americans—they never have been! And the Democrats are just as bad. No, worse, by thunder! They pretend they want us strong, but all they really aim to do is keep us weak! Half of ’em are in the Japs’

pockets right this minute, so help me God they are!”

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He paused for applause. He didn’t get much. Chester Martin kept walking. He supposed it was inevitable that hard times would spawn reaction, but this fellow seemed no threat to imitate what the Freedom Party was doing in the CSA. *Just a noisy nut,* Chester thought. *It’s not like we haven’t got enough of those.*

VOTE SOCIALIST! posters a little farther on proclaimed. TOGETHER, WE HAVE POWER! they showed a brawny factory worker swinging a hammer under a bare electric bulb. Nowhere did they mention Hosea Blackford’s name. It was as if they wanted to forget he was there while hoping he got reelected anyhow.

COOLIDGE! The Democrats’ posters weren’t shy about naming their man. HE’LL FIX THINGS! they promised, and showed the governor of Massachusetts as a confident-looking physician at the bedside of a wan U.S. eagle. That wasn’t fair, but it was liable to be effective. And the Democrats seemed not only willing but proud to tell the world who their presidential candidate was. They even had his running mate, a native Iowan with slicked-down hair, at his side handing him a stethoscope.

Martin muttered under his breath. The depths to which the United States had fallen in the past three years and more truly made him wonder whether he’d done the right thing in turning Socialist after the Great War. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. He laughed, though it wasn’t funny. For how many mistakes was that an excuse? About half the ones in the world, if he was any judge.

But it had. With the big capitalists clamping down tight on labor in the rough days right after the war, voting Socialist had seemed the only way to hold his own. And it had worked. For ten years and more, the country stayed prosperous. But when prosperity died, it died painfully.

Would the Democrats have let things get this bad? Chester pondered that as he tramped toward his apartment. He still had the letter Teddy Roosevelt had sent him after he was wounded. He’d met Roosevelt in the trenches during the war—had, in fact, jumped on the president and knocked him flat when the Confederates started shelling his position on the Roanoke front. Roosevelt hadn’t forgotten him.

TR's concern hadn't been based on class, as the Socialists' was. It had been personal. The Socialists sneered at such ties, saying they were like those of an old-time baron and his feudal retainers.

Maybe the Socialists were right. Chester had no reason to believe they were wrong. Right or wrong, though, they'd done none too well themselves. Maybe personal ties really did count for more than those of class.

"Damned if I know," Martin muttered. "Damned if I know anything any more, except that things are fouled up all to hell and gone."

A woman coming the other way gave him an odd look. She didn't say anything. She just kept walking.

The way things were nowadays, plenty of people went around talking to themselves.

Martin opened the door to his apartment without having found any answers. He doubted anybody in the whole country had any answers. If anybody did have them, he would have been using them by now.

Wouldn't he?

Rita's voice floated out of the kitchen: "Hello, honey. How did it go?"

"N.G.," Chester answered. The two slangy initials summed up the way things were in the USA these days. The United States were no good, no good at all. He went on, "They aren't hiring. Big surprise,
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huh?"

His wife came out of the kitchen, an apron around her waist. She gave him a hug and a kiss. "You've got to keep trying," she said. "We've both got to keep trying. Something's bound to turn up sooner or later."

"Yeah." Martin hoped his voice didn't sound too hollow. He remembered the fellow who'd tried to panhandle from him, the one who'd said he was living in the local Blackfordburgh. With a shiver, Martin made himself shove that thought down out of sight. He tried to sound bright and cheerful as he asked,

"What smells good?" He meant that; something sure did. They hadn't

had any meat for a few days, but the aroma said they would this evening.

“It’s a beef heart.” Rita did her best to sound bright and cheerful, too. “Mr. Gabrieli had ’em on special for practically nothing. I know they’re tough, but if you stew ’em long enough they do get tender—well, more tender, anyhow. And I could afford it.”

“All right,” Chester said. “It *does* smell good.” Since he’d lost his job, he’d found out about tripe and giblets and head cheese and other things he hadn’t eaten before. Some of them turned out to be pretty good—giblets, for instance. He wouldn’t get a taste for tripe if he lived to be a hundred. He ate it, because sometimes it was that or no meat at all. Sometimes—a lot of the time—it *was* no meat at all.

Maybe the beef heart *would* prove tasty.

It proved . . . not too bad. No matter how long Rita cooked it, it remained chewy, with a faintly bitter taste. But it satisfied in ways cabbage and potatoes and noodles couldn’t. “Here’s hoping Mr. Gabrieli has it on special again before too long,” Chester said. Rita nodded. Unspoken was the painful truth that, if even a cheap cut like beef heart wasn’t on sale, they couldn’t afford it.

When morning came, Martin went out looking for work again. He actually found some: hauling bricks from trucks to a construction site. It was harder work than any on a foundry floor, and didn’t pay nearly so well. For a full day of it, he made two and a half dollars. But coming home with any money at all in his pocket felt wonderful—good enough to let him forget how weary he was.

And, when he set the coins and bills in front of his wife, she was delighted, too. “Will there be more tomorrow?” she asked hopefully.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “But you can bet I’m going to go back and find out.”

He made sure he got to the construction site early. He didn’t get there early enough, though. By the time he came up, a couple of hundred men already clamored for work. Toledo cops did their best to keep order. Chester had played football against one of the policemen. “How about a break, pal?” he said.

“Let me slide up toward the front? I could really use the job.”

The cop shook his head. “Can’t do it,” he said. “Everybody else here is

hungry, too. Playing favorites'd be worth my neck."

He was probably right. That made Martin no less bitter. Knowing he had no chance for work there, he went off to look for it somewhere else. He had no luck, not even when he offered to help a truck driver bring crates of vegetables into a store for a quarter.

"No, thanks. I'll do it myself," the driver said. "If I give you a quarter, I lose money on the haulage." He stacked more crates—all of them with fancy labels glued to one side—on a dolly and wheeled them into
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the grocery. When he came out again, he said, "You that hungry?"

"Hell, yes," Martin said without hesitation. "I'd do damn near anything for a real job again."

"You ought to go to California, then," the driver said. "That's where this stuff comes from, and they grow so goddamn much out there, they're always looking for pickers and such. Weather's a damn sight better than it is here, too."

"Probably doesn't pay anything," Chester said. "If it sounds so good, why aren't you on your way yourself?"

"Believe me, buddy, I'm thinking about it," the truck driver said. "There are times when I don't want to see another snowflake as long as I live, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah," Martin admitted. "I do. But California? It's a hell of a long way, and who knows what things are really like out there?"

"Only one way to find out." The driver set more crates on the dolly. The spicy odors of oranges and lemons filled the air. They were, in their own way, better arguments than anything he could have said.

"California," Chester muttered as he went off to see what else he could scrounge in Toledo. Pickings were slim. Pickings, in fact, couldn't have been any slimmer. Would they be any better on the far side of the country? He shrugged. Maybe that was the wrong question. Maybe the right question was, how could they be worse?

Up till now, Flora Blackford had never been to the West Coast. When she got off the train in Los Angeles, she was surprised to find it was ninety degrees in the second week of October. She was even more

surprised to discover that ninety-degree weather could be pleasant, not the humid hell it would have been in New York City or Philadelphia or Washington—or Dakota, for that matter.

She joined her husband on the platform at the station. President Blackford was smiling and shaking hands with well-wishers. “Four more years!” people chanted. Patriotic red-white-and-blue bunting was draped everywhere Socialist red bunting wasn’t.

Vice President Hiram Johnson said, “Welcome to the Golden State, Mr. President. We’re doing everything we can to make sure we deliver the goods three weeks from now.”

“Thanks very much, Hiram,” Hosea Blackford replied with a gracious smile. The two Socialist stalwarts stood side by side as photographers snapped pictures. Flora wondered what the captions to those pictures would say; the *Los Angeles Times* didn’t love the Socialist Party.

“Your limousine is waiting, Mr. President—Mrs. Blackford.” Johnson suddenly seemed to remember that Flora existed.

Escorted by police cars with wailing sirens, the limousine made its slow way from Remembrance Station to the Custer Hotel. The bright sunshine, the clear blue sky, and the palm trees made everything seem wonderful at first glance. The grinding despair of the business downturn might have been on the other side of the world, or at least on the other side of the United States.

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It might have been, but it wasn’t. Even in the couple of miles from the station to the hotel, Flora saw a soup kitchen, a bread line, and a lot of men in worn clothes aimlessly wandering the streets. Thanks to the mild weather, getting by without a roof over their heads was far easier in Los Angeles than in, say, Chicago.

Recognizing the president in the open motorcar, one of those men who looked to have nowhere to go shouted, “Coolidge!”

“Ignore him,” Vice President Johnson said quickly.

“It’s a free country,” Blackford said with a smile. “He can speak up for whichever candidate he pleases.

Certainly is a pretty day. I can see why so many people are coming here. We don't have Octobers like this in Dakota, believe you me we don't."

Another man, this one wearing a tweed jacket out at the elbows, pointed at the limousine and yelled,

"Shame!"

This time, Hiram Johnson tried to pass off the heckling with an uneasy chuckle. Hosea Blackford said, "I have nothing to feel ashamed about. I've done everything I could from the moment this crisis began to try to repair it. I defy any citizen of either major party—or any Republican, either, for that matter—to show me anything I might have done and have not."

Flora reached out and set her hand on top of her husband's. She knew he was telling the truth. She also knew the toll the business collapse had taken on him. He'd aged cruelly in the three and a half years since taking the oath of office. She sometimes wished Coolidge had won the election in 1928. Then all of this would have come down on his head, and Hosea would have been spared the torment of fighting a disaster plainly too big for any one man to overcome.

At the Custer Hotel, a woman reporter called, "Why aren't we doing more in the war against the Japanese?"

"We're doing everything we can, Miss Clemens, I assure you," Blackford answered. "This is a war of maneuver, you must understand. It isn't a matter of huge masses slamming together, as the Great War was."

"Why weren't we ready to fight a war like that?" Ophelia Clemens persisted.

"We'll win it," he said. "That's what counts."

He and Flora managed to get to their suite without too many more questions. She tipped the swarthy porter—he spoke with a Spanish accent, and might have been born in the Empire of Mexico. As soon as the fellow left, Hosea Blackford collapsed on the bed. "For the love of God, fix me a drink," he said.

"As soon as I find where they're hiding the liquor, I will," she said. "And I'm going to make myself one, too." She held up the whiskey bottle in triumph when she pulled it out of a cabinet. Her husband

clapped his hands. The ice bucket was right out in plain sight. So were glasses. Whiskey over ice didn't take long.

"Thank you, dear." Hosea sat up and downed half his drink at a gulp. He let out a long, weary sigh, then spoke two words: "We're screwed."

"What?" Flora choked on her whiskey. She hoped she'd heard wrong. She hoped so, but she didn't **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

think so. "What did you say?" she asked, on the off chance she really had been wrong.

"I said, we're screwed," the president of the United States replied. "Calvin Coolidge is going to mop the floor with me. Calvin goddamn Coolidge." He spoke in sour, disgusted wonder. "Half the time, no one's even sure if he has a pulse, and he's going to clean my clock. Isn't this a swell old world?" He finished the drink and held out the glass. "Make me another one, will you?"

"You've got a speech in a couple of hours, you know," Flora warned.

"Yes, and I'll be all right," her husband said. "Not that it would make a dime's worth of difference if I strode in there drunk as a lord. How could things be any worse than they are already?"

He'd never shown despair till that moment. He hadn't had much hope, but he'd always put the best face he could on it. No more. As Flora poured whiskey into the glass, she said, "You can still turn things around."

"Fat chance," he said. "I couldn't win this one if they caught Coolidge *in flagrante delicto* with a chorus girl. Probably not even if they caught him *in flagrante* with a chorus *boy* , for heaven's sake.

Blackfordburghs." He spat the name out in disgust. "How can I win when my name's gone into the dictionary as the definition for everything that's wrong with the whole country?"

"It's not fair," Flora insisted. "It's not right." She sipped her own drink. The whiskey burned on the way down, but not nearly so much as her husband's acceptance of defeat.

When she was a little girl, she'd watched her grandmother die. Everyone had known the old woman was going to go, but nobody'd said a word. Up till now, the Socialists' presidential campaign had

been like that. In public, she supposed it still would be. But she could see her husband had told the truth, no matter how little she liked it.

Hosea Blackford said, “We knew it was going to happen if I couldn’t turn things around. I did everything I knew how to do—everything Congress would let me do—and none of it worked. Now they’re going to give the Democrats a chance.” He took a big swig from the new drink. “Hell, if I’d lost my job and my house, I wouldn’t vote Socialist, either.”

“It’ll only be worse under the Democrats,” Flora said.

“But people don’t know that. They don’t believe it. They don’t see how it *could* be worse. They only see that it’s bad now, and that there was a Socialist administration while it got this way. I’m the scapegoat.”

“You did everything you could do. You did everything anybody could do,” Flora said. “If they don’t see that, they’re fools.”

“It wasn’t enough,” her husband answered. “They don’t have any trouble seeing that. And so—” He finished the drink at a gulp. “And so, sweetheart, I’m going to be a one-term president.” He laughed. “In a way, it’s liberating, you know what I mean? For the rest of the campaign I can say whatever I please. It won’t make any difference anyhow.”

Before very long, an aide knocked on the door and said, “We’re ready to take you to your speaking engagement, Mr. President, ma’am.”

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“We’re ready,” Blackford declared. Flora anxiously studied him, but he looked and sounded fine as he went to the door. More than a little relieved, she followed him out to the limousine.

He spoke at the University of Southern California, just north of Agricultural Park. The USA had touted the park and the football stadium there as a venue for the 1928 Olympic Games, but had lost out to Kaiser Wilhelm’s Berlin. People were talking about another bid in 1936, but the Confederates were also trumpeting the possibility of holding the Games in Richmond that year. The international decision would come in 1933.

President Blackford got a warm welcome on the university campus.

The Socialist Party still attracted plenty of students, though Flora wondered how many of them were twenty-one. A handful of signs saying COOLIDGE! waved as the limousine went by. “Reactionaries,” Flora muttered.

Friendly applause greeted the president when he strode into the lecture hall where he would speak. A young man did shout Coolidge’s name, but guards hustled him from the hall. The Democrats didn’t try in any organized way to disrupt Blackford’s address. *They probably don’t think they need to bother,* Flora thought bitterly. *They’re probably right, too. My own husband doesn’t think they need to bother, either.*

Behind the podium, Hosea Blackford waited for the applause to die away. “We’ve done a lot for the country the past twelve years,” he said. “The Democrats will say we’ve done a lot *to* the country the past twelve years, but that’s because they’re part of the problem, not part of the solution. If they hadn’t played obstructionist games in Congress, we’ve have an old-age pension in place today. We’d have stronger minimum-wage laws. We’d have stronger legal support for the proletariat against their fat-cat capitalist oppressors. We would, but we don’t. The Democrats are glad we don’t. We Socialists wish we did. That’s the difference between the two parties, right there. It’s as plain as the nose on your face.

If you want the proletariat to advance, vote Socialist. If you don’t, vote for Calvin Coolidge. It’s really just as simple as that, friends.”

He got another round of applause. Sitting in the front row, Flora clapped till her palms were sore. Not all the Coolidge backers had left the hall, though. Two or three of them raised a chant: “Bread lines!

Blackfordburghs! Bread lines! Blackfordburghs!”

Hosea Blackford met that head on. “Yes, times are hard,” he said. “You know it, I know it, the whole country knows it. But answer me this: if my opponent had been elected in 1928, wouldn’t we be talking about Coolidgevilles today? The Democrats would not have made things better. In my considered opinion, they would have made things worse.”

“That’s right!” Flora shouted. People in the hall gave her husband a warm hand. The only trouble was, making political speeches to an already friendly crowd was like preaching to the choir. These people (except for that handful of noisy Democrats) hadn’t turned out to disagree with the president. And his words weren’t likely to sway

anybody who'd already decided to vote against him. Nothing was. Flora knew as much, even if she hated the knowledge.

Her husband pounded away at the Democrats, at Coolidge, at Coolidge's engineer of a running mate.

He got round after round of applause. By the noise in the hall, he would have been swept back into office.

But then, just as Flora's spirits rose and even Hosea Blackford, buoyed by the reception, looked as if he too felt he wasn't just going through the motions, distant explosions made people sit up and look around and ask one another what the noise was. Then, suddenly, some of the explosions weren't so distant.

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They rattled the windows in the hall. Through them, Flora thought she heard aeroplane engines overhead.

She frowned. That was crazy, to say nothing of impossible . . . wasn't it? She looked up at her husband.

No—she looked up at the president of the United States. "I don't know what's going on, my friends," he told the crowd, "but I think we ought to sit tight here till we find out."

He got his answer sooner than he expected. A man bleeding from a scalp wound burst into the hall and shouted, "The Japs! The goddamn Japs are bombing Los Angeles!" As if to underscore his words, a cannon somewhere in the distance began shooting at the aeroplanes. Flora wondered if it had any chance at all of bringing them down. She had her doubts.

The crowd, the crowd that had been so warm, so full of support, cried out in horror and dismay. A guard tapped Flora on the shoulder. "Come with me, ma'am," he said. "We're going to get the president and you out of here. If the roof comes down . . ."

Helplessly, she went with him. He and his comrades hustled the Blackfords into the limousine and drove off as fast as they could go. As they zoomed away from the University of Southern California, Flora saw fires flickering in front of the huts and tents of a huge Blackfordburgh in Agricultural Park. And she saw other fires burning

farther away, fires Japanese bombs must have set. She put her face in her hands and began to cry. Now, for certain, there was no hope at all.

XVI

Colonel Irving Morrell kissed his wife good-bye and headed in to the U.S. Army base at Kamloops.

“Election Day at last,” he said. “It can’t come any later than this, but it’s finally here. November the eighth, 1932—time we throw the rascals out.” He checked himself and sighed. “They aren’t even rascals.

I’ve met enough of them—I know they aren’t. But they aren’t what we need, either.”

“I should say not!” Indignation filled Agnes’ voice. “After what they let the . . . Japs do to Los Angeles .

. .” By the pause there, she’d almost added some pungent modifier to the enemy’s name.

“That was a nice piece of work. We haven’t been so humiliated since the end of the Second Mexican War, more than fifty years ago now. It was just a pinprick, but what a pinprick!” Morrell reluctantly gave credit to a very sharp operation. “Two aeroplane carriers, a tanker to keep ’em fueled—and one great big embarrassment for the USA. They got away clean as a whistle, too, except for the one aeroplane we shot down and the two that collided with each other over the beach.”

“Disgraceful.” Agnes was, if anything, more militant than Morrell himself.

“Well, if President Blackford’s goose wasn’t cooked before L.A., Hirohito’s boys put it in the oven and turned up the fire,” he said.

“That’s true.” His wife brightened. “Maybe some good will come of it after all, then. Calvin Coolidge wouldn’t let himself get caught napping like that.”

“I hope not,” Morrell said, though he didn’t know what the governor of Massachusetts could have **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

ordered done that President Blackford hadn’t. He kissed Agnes again. As far as he was concerned, that was always worth doing. “I’ve got to

go. I wish I could do something more useful than guarding a Canadian town that isn't likely to rise up, but that's what they say they need me for, so that's what I'll do."

"If they ordered you to do something else, you'd do that, too," Agnes said. "And you'd do a bang-up job at it, too, whatever it happened to be."

"Thanks, sweetie." Morrell would have been happy to stay there and listen to his wife say nice things about him. Instead, he left.

Snow had fallen the week before, but it was gone now. He couldn't ski to the office. Sentries came to attention and saluted as he went past. He returned the salutes with careful courtesy.

When he got in, his adjutant said, "Sir, you have a despatch from the War Department in Philadelphia—from the General Staff, no less."

"You're kidding," Morrell said. Captain Horwitz shook his head. So did Irving Morrell, in bemusement.

"What the devil do they want with me? I thought they'd long since forgotten I even existed. I hoped they had, to tell you the truth."

"I just put it on your desk, sir," Horwitz replied. "It got here about fifteen minutes ago. If you like, you can probably catch up with the courier and ask him questions."

"Let's see what the order is first," Morrell said. "One way or another, it'll probably tell me everything I need to know."

He went into his office. As an afterthought, he closed the door behind him. That might miff his adjutant. If it did, too bad. He'd find a way to make amends later. Meanwhile, he wanted privacy. If the General Staff—specifically, if Lieutenant Colonel John Abell—was taking some more vengeance, he wanted to be able to pull himself together before he faced the world.

There lay the envelope, as Horwitz had said. Morrell approached it like a sapper approaching an unexploded bomb. It wouldn't blow up if he opened it. He had to remind himself of that, though, before he could make himself take the folded paper out of the envelope and read the typewritten order.

The more he read, the wider his eyes got. He sank down into his seat. The swivel chair creaked under his weight. When he'd neither come

out nor said anything for several minutes, Captain Horwitz cautiously called, “Are you all right, sir?”

“Nine years,” Morrell answered.

Horwitz opened the door. “Sir?”

“Nine years,” Morrell repeated. He looked down at the order again. “Nine miserable, stinking years thrown away. Wasted. Wiped off the map. Gone.”

He could have gone on cranking out synonyms for a long time, but his adjutant broke in: “I don’t understand, sir.”

Morrell blinked. It was all perfectly clear in his mind. He realized Horwitz hadn’t read the order. Feeling **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

foolish, he said, “They’re sending me back to Fort Leavenworth, Captain.”

“Oh?” For a second, that didn’t register with Horwitz. But only for a moment—he was sharp as the business end of a bayonet. Then he leaned forward, like a hunting dog taking the scent. “To work on barrels, sir?”

“That’s right. To work on barrels.” Morrell didn’t even try to hide his bitterness. “The very same project they took me off of—the very same project they closed down—almost nine years ago.”

“Well . . .” His adjutant put the best face on it he could: “It’s a good thing they are starting up again, wouldn’t you say?”

That was true. Morrell couldn’t begin to deny it. But he also couldn’t help asking, “Where would we be if we hadn’t stopped?”

Nine years before, they’d had a prototype of what a barrel should be. It was a machine much more agile, much less cumbersome, than the lumbering armored behemoths of the Great War. It carried its cannon in a turret that rotated 360 degrees, not in a mount with limited traverse at the front of the vehicle.

It had a machine gun in the turret, too, and one at the bow, not half a dozen of them all around the machine. It took a crew of half a dozen, not a dozen and a half. It ran and shot rings around the old models.

But the prototype was powered by one truck engine. It could be, because it was made of thin mild steel, not armor plate. No one had wanted to spend the money to go any further with it. Manufacturing real barrels would undoubtedly reveal a host of flaws the prototype hadn’t. For that matter, Morrell didn’t even know if the prototype still existed. The way things were during the 1920s, it might have been cut up and sold for scrap metal. He wouldn’t have been surprised.

Had the USA gone on building and developing barrels instead of letting them languish, it would have had the best machines in the

world nowadays. As things were, the Confederates' Mexican stooges had built barrels at least as good as the prototype during the long civil war between Maximilian III and the U.S.-backed republican rebels. They hadn't only made prototypes, either. They'd had real fighting machines.

What they'd had, the CSA either had already or could have in short order. Morrell knew the same thing wasn't true—wasn't even close to true—in his own country. "Well," he said, "I've got a lot of work to do, don't I?"

"Yes, sir," Captain Horwitz said. "Congratulations, sir."

"Thanks, Ike." Morrell laughed, though it wasn't really funny. "I bet I know what finally got the Socialists off the dime."

"What's that, sir?" his adjutant asked.

"The Japs bombing Los Angeles—what else? And the sad part is, no matter what I do with barrels, even if I get it all done day after tomorrow, it won't matter much. How could it? Where are we going to use barrels fighting the Japanese?"

"Beats me, sir."

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"Beats me, too." Morrell tapped the order with his fingernail. "I've got to let the base commandant know I've been transferred. And I've got to let my wife know."

"What will she think?" Horwitz asked.

"I hope she'll be pleased," Morrell answered. "We met in Leavenworth, Agnes and I. She was living in town, and I was stationed at the fort. I wonder how much it's changed since we left."

Captain Horwitz looked sly. "One thing, sir—you can leave your skis behind. No mountains in Kansas."

"Well, no," Irving Morrell agreed. "But I think I'll take 'em—they do get enough snow for cross-country skiing." He got to his feet, tucking the order into the breast pocket of his tunic. "And now I'd better tell Brigadier General Peterson he's going to have to live without me."

Brigadier General Lemuel Peterson was a lean, lantern-jawed New Englander. He said,

“Congratulations, Colonel. I was wondering if you’d end up in command here when they sent me somewhere else. But you’re the one who gets to go away instead, and you’re actually going to do something useful.”

“I hope so, anyhow,” Morrell said. “If they give me twenty-nine cents for a budget and expect me to put barrels together out of railroad iron and paper clips, though . . .”

“You never can tell with those cheapskates in the War Department,” Peterson said. If Morrell reported that to the powers that be, he might blight his superior’s career. He intended no such thing—he agreed with Brigadier General Peterson. The commandant at Kamloops went on, “Maybe we’ll see a little sense from now on, because it looks like the Democrats are going to win this election.”

“Yes, sir.” Colonel Morrell nodded. “Here’s hoping, sir.”

Lemuel Peterson could have used that against him—except few officers would have quarreled with the sentiments he expressed. “Why don’t you go on home for the rest of the day?” Peterson said. “You’re ordered out of here within a week—you’ll be as busy as a one-armed paper hanger with hives. You should let your family know. What will your wife have to say?” As he had with his adjutant, Morrell explained how he’d met Agnes in Kansas. Peterson nodded. “That’s a point for you. Go on, then. Do you have a wireless set?”

“Yes, sir,” Morrell answered. “One more thing to pack.”

“True, but that’s not what I was thinking of,” Brigadier General Peterson said. “You can listen to election returns tonight.”

“Oh.” Morrell nodded. “Yes, sir. We will do that, I expect.”

Agnes exclaimed in surprise when he showed up at the front door. She exclaimed in delight when he told her about the order. “I don’t care about Kansas one way or the other,” she said, “but this is wonderful.

You’ll be doing something important again, not just makework.”

“I know.” He kissed her. “That’s what I’m really looking forward to.” He kissed her again. “And I knew you’d understand.”

“I’ve got a couple of steaks in the icebox, and some good Canadian beer, too.” Agnes raised an **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

eyebrow. “After that, who knows what might happen?”

“The wench grows bold.” He patted her on the bottom. “Good. I like it.”

What happened after dinner was that he played with Mildred on the living-room floor while the wireless blared out endless streams of numbers. Every so often, his little girl would complain because his mind wasn’t fully on their game. “You’re listening to that silly stuff,” she said.

“You’re right,” he said. “I’m sorry.” He was sorry to disrupt the game. He wasn’t sorry, not in the least, about what he was hearing. What everyone had thought would happen was happening: Calvin Coolidge was trouncing Hosea Blackford. Even as he listened, Coolidge’s lead in Ohio went up to a quarter of a million votes.

“And Coolidge is also ahead in Indiana, which last went Democratic in the election of 1908,” the announcer said. Morrell clapped his hands in not quite childish glee. Mildred gave him a severe look a schoolmarm would have envied. He apologized again.

His daughter eventually went to bed. Morrell and Agnes stayed up a while longer, to let her fall asleep and to hear some more returns. Coolidge kept capturing state after state. By the time they went to bed, too, they had a lot to celebrate—and they did.

Cincinnatus Driver knew a certain amount of local pride. “The new vice president, he was borned in Iowa,” he said. “How ‘bout that?”

His son sent him a jaundiced glance. “And he moved away as fast as he could go, too,” Achilles retorted. “He moved as far as he could go, too—all the way out to California. What does that say about this place?”

“I don’t know what it says, but I’ll tell you what *I* say,” Cincinnatus answered, giving back a jaundiced glance of his own: Achilles was getting altogether too mouthy these days. “What I say is, you can complain as much as you please, but you don’t recollect enough about Kentucky to know when you’s well off.”

Elizabeth nodded. She used her fork to pull a clove out of her slice of

beef tongue. “Your father, he right,” she said, and took a bite.

At seventeen, Achilles was ready to lock horns with anybody over anything. “What do you two know about it?” he said. “Way you talk, it doesn’t sound like you know anything.” His own accent was ever more like a white Iowan’s these days.

Cincinnatus said, “You’re right.” That startled Achilles; his father didn’t say it very often. Cincinnatus went on, “You know *why* we talk like we do? You ever wonder ‘bout that? Don’t reckon so. It’s on account of there weren’t no schools for black folks there, on account of my ma and pa, and your mother’s, too, they was slaves when they was little. Never had no chance to learn like you got here. I’m lucky I had my letters at all. You know that?”

“I better know it,” Achilles said sullenly. “You go on about it all the time.”

“Mebbe I do. But you better pay some attention, son. You go complainin’ ‘bout Iowa, you don’t know **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

when you’s well off.”

Achilles got up from the table even though he hadn’t finished supper. He stormed away. Amanda stared after him. She was still young enough to be convinced her parents had all the answers, not to be dedicated to proving they didn’t. “Oh, my,” she said softly.

“Mebbe you laid it on too thick,” Elizabeth said.

“Mebbe I did,” Cincinnatus answered with a shrug. “Mebbe—but I don’t think so. He got to see he don’t know everything there is to know jus’ yet.”

His wife smiled. “When you was his age, didn’t you reckon you knowed everything, too, jus’ like him?”

“ ‘Course I did,” Cincinnatus said. “My pa thrashed it out o’ me. I don’t like hittin’ a boy that size—he ain’t far from a man, even if he ain’t as close as he thinks. I don’t like it . . . but if I got to, I got to.”

Deliberately, he made himself take a bite of tongue. He usually liked it; it had been a treat when he was growing up. But anger spoiled the flavor.

“You got his goat, but he got yours, too,” Elizabeth said.

He started to deny it, then realized he couldn’t. He let out a long sigh. “Yeah, he done did.” He raised his voice: “Come on back an’ eat your supper, Achilles. I won’t talk no more ‘bout politics if you don’t.”

That was as far as he was willing to go.

From the long silence that followed, he wondered if it was far enough to satisfy his son. At last, though, Achilles said, “All right, Pa. That’s fair enough.” He returned to the table.

“Probably ain’t even had time yet to get cold,” Elizabeth said.

“No, Ma. It’s fine.” As if to prove as much, Achilles made tongue and potatoes and carrots disappear.

“Mighty good,” he said. “May I have some more, please?” He had manners when he remembered to use them.

“I’ll get it for you,” Elizabeth said. She turned to Cincinnatus as soon as she’d picked up Achilles’ plate.

“He sure do like his food.”

“That’s true.” Cincinnatus wasn’t sure it was a compliment, especially during hard times, but he could hardly deny it.

After supper, Achilles went off to do his homework. He’d never lost his liking for school. That pleased Cincinnatus—pleased him all the more because, even though Achilles seemed to want to disagree with everything he said, his son hadn’t rejected the idea that education was a good thing.

The next morning, Cincinnatus scrambled into his Ford truck and hurried out to the railroad yards. He got there before the sun came up, but he wasn’t the first man there looking for whatever hauling business he could get. These days, cargo wasn’t always the only thing that traveled in boxcars. As a freight train pulled into the yard, a couple of men in tattered clothes leaped down even before it had completely stopped. They started running.

They didn’t disappear quite fast enough. “Come back here, you sons of bitches!” a railway dick shouted. He had a nightstick and a .45 on his belt. Feet pounding on gravel, he lumbered after the fleeing

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freeloaders.

“Gotta be crazy to ride the rails like that,” Cincinnatus said to the conductor with whom he was dickering over the price of hauling a load of office furniture to the State Capitol.

“Gotta be desperate, anyway,” the conductor answered. “Why the hell anybody who was ridin’ would want to get off in Des Moines . . .” He shrugged. “I don’t know about crazy, but you sure gotta be stupid.”

As he had with Achilles, Cincinnatus said, “This ain’t a bad town, suh. Beats Covington, Kentucky, all hollow, and that’s the truth.”

“Well, sure, if that’s what you’re comparing it to,” the other man said with a laugh. “But you run it up against Los Angeles or San Francisco or Portland or Seattle or Denver or Albuquerque or . . . You get the idea what I’m saying, buddy? I’ve seen all them places. I know what I’m talking about.”

Cincinnatus knew his standards of comparison were limited. He was familiar with Des Moines, and with Covington, and with very little else. He knew Cincinnati a little, as it lay right across the Ohio from Covington. But San Francisco might have been on the far side of the moon, for all he knew of it. The newspaper had talked about building a bridge across the Golden Gate one day. That didn’t mean much to Cincinnatus, either. He knew rivers, and bridges over rivers. The Pacific Ocean? He’d never even seen a lake—not a big one, anyhow.

He got back to the business at hand: “I may not know nothin’ ‘bout them places, Mistuh Gideon, but I knows haulin’, and I knows I got to have another dollar to make this here trip worthwhile.”

He ended up with another four bits. That was less than he’d hoped for, more than enough to make the journey worth his while. He stacked desks and swivel chairs and oak file cabinets in the back of the Ford till it wouldn’t hold any more and the springs wouldn’t bear much more. For good measure, he squeezed two more swivel chairs into the cabin with him.

The conductor nodded approval. “One thing I always got to give you, Cincinnatus—you work like a bastard.”

“Thank you kindly.” To Cincinnatus, that was high praise.

Getting to the Capitol took only a few minutes; it lay not far south of the railroad yards—like them, on the east side of the Des Moines River, across the river from Cincinnatus' apartment building. The gilded dome atop the ornate building was a landmark visible all over town. For that matter, since the Iowa countryside was so flat, the dome was visible from quite a ways outside of town, too.

Men in fancy suits, bright silk neckties, and expensive homburgs—legislators, lawyers, lobbyists—climbed the stairs to the Capitol's front entrance. Times might be hard, but men of that stripe seldom suffered. They were, of course, uniformly white. Cincinnatus, with his black skin, dungarees, wool sweater, and soft cloth cap, drove past the front entrance with hardly a glance. He pulled up at the freight entrance and backed his truck up to the loading dock.

A white man in an outfit almost identical to his own came over to the truck, clipboard in hand. "How you doin', Cincinnatus?" he said.

"Not too bad, Lou." Even after most of a decade in Des Moines, calling a white man by his first name **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

still wasn't something Cincinnatus did casually. His upbringing in Confederate Kentucky ran deep.

"How's yourself?"

"Damn cold weather makes my wound ache." Lou set a hand on his haunch. "If I'd known getting shot in the ass would stick with me so long, I wouldn't've left it up there for them Confederate sons of bitches to aim at. I'd've stuck my head up instead—ain't like I got the brains to worry about gettin' 'em blown out." He pointed to the truck. "So what the hell you got for us this time?"

"Office furniture," Cincinnatus told him.

" 'Bout time that shit started gettin' here," Lou declared. "All them fancy-pants bastards in there who waste our money been bellyachin' like you wouldn't believe about how their goddamn desk drawers squeak and they can't screw their secretaries on the old swivel chairs." Lou respected nothing and nobody, least of all the elected and appointed officials of the great state of Iowa.

Cincinnatus, on the whole a straitlaced man, hadn't thought about screwing in a chair, swivel or otherwise. Now that he did, he liked the idea—provided he and Elizabeth could both be home at the same time

while their children weren't, which might not prove easy to arrange. He got out of the truck with a clipboard of his own. "I got papers for you to sign off on."

Lou laughed and flourished his clipboard, which made the papers on it flutter. "Listen, pal, this here is state business. I got more papers'n you do, and you can take that to the bank. Ain't nobody in the goddamn world got more papers'n you need to do state business, unless maybe it's them cocksuckers in Philly."

Again, Cincinnatus knew nothing about the habits, sexual or bureaucratic, of Philadelphians. From other trips to the State Capitol, he did know how many papers he'd have to sign before his delivery was official. "Let's get on with it," he said resignedly, and signed and signed and signed. Lou went through the relative handful of papers on Cincinnatus' clipboard in nothing flat.

Once Cincinnatus had got to the bottom of Lou's pile of paperwork, he asked, "What do they *do* with all these here forms?"

"Let the mice chew 'em up—what the hell you think?" Lou answered. He raised his voice to a full-throated bellow: "Ivan! Paddy! Luigi! Get your asses over here, and get this crap outa my buddy's truck! You think he's got all day?" The workmen descended on the truck. Lou pulled a flask from his hip pocket—the opposite side from his war wound. "Want a snort?"

Iowa was a dry state that took being dry very, very seriously. That didn't stop liquor from getting made there or smuggled in. Cincinnatus' experience was that it did keep *good* liquor from entering the state.

The nip he took from Lou's flask did nothing to change his mind. "Do Jesus!" he said when he recovered the power of speech. "Tastes like paint thinner an' possum piss."

"I'm gonna tell that to my brother-in-law," Lou said, laughing. "He cooked up the shit."

"He don't like you in particular, or he don't like nobody?" Cincinnatus asked, still trying to get his breath back. Lou laughed again, and aimed a lazy mock punch at him. As lazily, he ducked. He tried to imagine himself sassing a white man like that back in Kentucky—tried and felt himself failing.

Lou asked, "You got the whole kit and caboodle here, or is there more

of this shit back on the train?”

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“There’s more, plenty more. Some o’ them fellers should be bringin’ it any time. Soon as you get me unloaded, I’m goin’ back, see if I can get me another load.”

“I’ll give you another slug of this stuff when you get back.” Lou patted the pocket with the flask.

“Damn good reason to stay away,” Cincinnatus said. Lou laughed yet again, for all the world as if he’d been joking.

Jonathan Moss wasn’t used to getting shaken awake at two in the morning. “Wuzzat?” he said muzzily.

He wasn’t used to waking up under any circumstances without a steaming cup of coffee or three at his elbow to make the transition easier.

Laura’s voice, however, turned out to do the job well enough: “Jonathan, you’d better take me to the hospital now, because the pains are only four minutes apart, and they’re getting stronger.”

“Jesus!” Moss sat bolt upright. “Why didn’t you tell me a while ago?”

His wife shrugged. “I’ve watched plenty of cows and sows and ewes give birth. I know what happens, as well as you can till it happens to you. I wasn’t going anywhere much. Now I am—and so we’d better get moving.”

“Right,” he said. They’d packed a bag for her a couple of days earlier. He had clothes draped over the chair, ready to throw on. As he got out of bed, he gave her a kiss. “Congratulations, sweetheart. You’re saving us some money.”

“I’m not doing it on purpose, believe me,” Laura said.

“I know.” The lawyerly part of Moss’ mind operated automatically. “But if Junior’d waited another week and a half, it would’ve been 1933, and then we couldn’t write him off this year’s taxes.”

Having doffed her long wool nightgown, Laura was putting on a long wool maternity dress. A tent would have had no more material and

been no less stylish. She draped a coat over the dress; it was snowing outside. “Somehow or other, taxes aren’t my biggest worry right this minute,” she said, her voice as chilly as the weather.

Moss lit a cigarette and patted her on the bottom. “Really, babe? Why is that, do you think?” She did her best to make her glare withering. He did his best not to wither.

Going downstairs was another adventure. He carried the case in one hand and held his wife’s hand with the other. She had to pause on the stairs while a labor pain passed. He didn’t want to think about what would happen if she fell. He didn’t want to, and so he didn’t. He did, however, let out a loud sigh of relief after they made it to the lobby, went down a few more stairs, and reached the sidewalk.

His breath would have smoked without the cigarette. When he inhaled, the air cut like knives. In conversational tones, Laura remarked, “The auto had better start, don’t you think?”

“What, you don’t want to hang around waiting for a cab?” Moss said, which earned him another glare.

He opened the Bucephalus’ door and carefully handed her in, then flung the overnight bag onto the back seat.

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He slid behind the wheel and slammed his door shut. That got him out of the icy wind. When he turned the key, he uttered something between a prayer and a curse. Past two on a cold winter night . . . *Would* the engine turn over?

The starter made a grinding noise. The engine didn’t start. He tried again. Still no luck. “Come on, you goddamn fucking son of a bitch,” he growled, wishing for a groundcrew man to spin the prop.

Laura looked down at her swollen stomach. “Don’t listen to him,” she advised the baby. “Hold your hands over your ears. He’s just a barbarous Yank, and he doesn’t know any better.”

“I don’t know any better than to keep driving this miserable old rattletrap,” Moss said, and twisted the key once more, with savage force.

Grind . . . Grind . . . Grind . . . He was about to throw up his hands in despair when the engine belched like a man after three quick beers. He came down hard on the gas, hoping, hoping. . . . Another belch, and then a full-throated roar. Steam and smoke poured from the tailpipe.

“There *is* a God!” Moss shouted.

“I should hope so,” Laura said, “and I doubt He’s very amused at what you said a minute ago.”

“Too darn bad,” Moss said; now that the Bucephalus had started, he was willing to make his language less incandescent. But he didn’t back down: “I wasn’t very amused with Him a few minutes ago, either.”

“Jonathan, I think—” What ever his wife thought was lost as another labor pain seized her. When she could speak again, she said, “I think you’d better get me to the hospital as fast as you can.”

“I will,” he promised. “I want to make sure the engine warms up before I put it in gear, though. If it quits on me, that would be . . . not so good.” Laura nodded. They might argue about a good many things, but she wasn’t going to disagree with that.

Even though the streets of Berlin were almost deserted, he drove with great care. Skidding on snow would have been bad any time. Skidding on snow while his wife was in labor was one more thing he didn’t care to contemplate.

Beside him, Laura let out a sharp hiss. She couldn’t say anything more for most of a minute. At last, she managed, “I won’t be sorry for the ether cone or what ever it is they give you to make the pain go away.”

“We’re almost there,” he said. Nothing in Berlin was too far from anything else. He could have driven for quite a while longer in Chicago. Of course, Chicago also boasted more hospitals than Berlin’s one.

As he took Laura toward the door, another auto pulled up behind his: a flivver even more spavined than his Bucephalus. The woman who got out was as extremely pregnant as Laura. Her husband said, “They can’t pick two in the afternoon to do this, eh?”

“Doesn’t seem that way,” Moss agreed.

Nurses took the two women off to the maternity ward. Moss and the

other man stayed behind to cope with the inevitable paperwork. After they'd dotted the last *i* and crossed the last *t* , another nurse guided
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them to the waiting room, which boasted a fine selection of magazines from 1931. Moss sat down on a chair, the other fellow on the leatherette sofa. They both reached for cigarettes, noticed the big, red NO

SMOKING! FIRE HAZARD! signs at the same time, and put their packs away with identical sighs.

"Nothing to do but wait," the other man said. He was in his mid-twenties—too young to have fought in the Great War. More and more men these days were too young to have fought in the war. Moss felt time marching on him—felt it all the more acutely because so many of his contemporaries had gone off to fight but hadn't come home again.

Nodding now, he said, "I wonder how long it'll be."

"You never can tell," his companion said. "Our first one took forever, but the second one came pretty quick."

"This *is* our first one," Moss said.

"Congratulations," the other man said.

"Thanks." Moss yawned enormously. "I wish they had a coffeepot in here." Then he looked at the NO

SMOKING! FIRE HAZARD! signs again. "Well, maybe not, not unless you want cold coffee."

"I wonder why it's a fire hazard," the Canadian said.

"Ether, maybe," Moss answered, remembering what Laura had said just before they got to the hospital.

He sniffed. All he smelled was a hospital odor: strong soap, disinfectant, and a faintest hint of something nasty underneath.

They waited. Moss looked at the clock. The younger Canadian man did the same. After a while, he said, "You're a Yank, aren't you?"

"That's right," Jonathan admitted, wondering if he should have tried to lie. But his accent had probably given him away. American and

Canadian intonations were close, but not identical.

Another pause. Then the Canadian asked, “Is your wife a Yank, too?”

Moss laughed. “No, she’s about as Canadian as can be. Her first husband was a Canadian soldier, but he didn’t come back from the war.”

“Oh,” the younger man said, and then shrugged. “None of my business, really.”

Most Americans would have kept on peppering Moss with questions. Canadians usually showed more reserve, as this one had. Of course, some Canadians still wanted to throw all the Americans in their country back south of the border once more. Moss knew his own wife was one of them. If they hadn’t been lovers, if she hadn’t warned him of the rebellion a few years before, that might have been worse. He might have got caught in it, too, instead of coming through unscathed.

With another yawn, he picked up a magazine. The lead article wondered how many seats in the Confederate Congress the Freedom Party would gain in the 1931 elections. Not very many, the writer predicted. “Shows how much *you* know,” Moss muttered, and closed the magazine in disgust.

He shut his eyes and tried to doze. He didn’t think he had a prayer. He was worrying about what would **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

happen in the delivery room, and the chair was stiff and uncomfortable. But the next time he looked at the clock, an hour and a half had gone by. He blinked in astonishment. His companion in the waiting room had slumped onto one arm of the sofa. He snored softly.

Daybreak came late, as it always did in Canadian winter. Moss wished for coffee again, and, when his stomach growled, for breakfast. The Canadian man slept on and on. Moss slipped out to use the men’s room down the hall. He disturbed the other fellow not a bit.

A nurse came in at a little past ten. “Mr. Ferguson?” she said. Moss pointed at his sleeping comrade.

“Mr. Ferguson?” she said again, louder this time. The Canadian man opened his eyes. He needed a moment to figure out where he was. As he straightened, the nurse said, “Congratulations, Mr. Ferguson.

You have a baby boy, and your wife is fine."

"What'll you call him?" Moss asked, sticking out his hand.

Ferguson shook it. "Bruce," he answered, "after my wife's uncle." He asked the nurse, "Can I see Elspeth now? And the baby?"

"Just for a little while. Come with me," the nurse said.

As she turned to go, Jonathan asked her, "Excuse me, but how is Mrs. Moss doing?"

"She's getting there," the nurse answered. "Some time this afternoon for her, I expect."

"This afternoon?" Moss said in dismay. The nurse only nodded and led Mr. Ferguson out of the waiting room to see his wife and his son, who hadn't waited around before coming out to see the world.

It was half past four, as a matter of fact, with night falling fast and itchy stubble rasping on Moss' cheeks and chin, before another nurse came in and said, "Mr. Moss?"

"That's me." He jumped to his feet. "Is Laura all right?"

The nurse not only nodded, she cracked a smile; he'd thought that was against hospital regulations.

"Yes, she's fine. You have a little girl. Not so little, in fact—eight pounds, two ounces."

"Dorothy," Moss whispered. A boy would have been Peter. "Can I see her, uh, them?"

"Come along," the nurse said. "Your wife is still woozy from the anesthetic."

Laura didn't just look woozy; she looked drunk out of her mind. "The peaches are spoiled," she announced, fixing Jonathan with a stare that said it was his fault.

"It's all right, honey," he said, and bent down and kissed her on her sweaty forehead. "Look—we've got a daughter!" The nurse holding the baby in a pink blanket lifted her up a little so both Mosses could get a look at her. She was about the size of a cat but much less finished-looking. Her skin was as thin and prone to crumple as finest parchment, and bright, bright pink. She screwed up her face. A thin,

furious yowl burst from her lips.

“She’s beautiful,” Laura whispered.

At first, Jonathan Moss thought that was still the ether talking. Dorothy’s head was a funny shape and **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

much too big for her body, her skin was a weird color, she made her tiny, squashed features even stranger when she cried, and the noise that filled the maternity room put him in mind of a dog with its tail stuck in a door.

Those doubts lasted a good three or four seconds. Then he took another look at his new daughter.

“You’re right,” he said, and he was whispering, too. “She *is* beautiful. She’s the most beautiful baby in the world.”

Five days into a new year. Nellie Jacobs couldn’t make herself care. Her husband wouldn’t see the end of 1933. Hal probably wouldn’t see the end of January. He might not see the end of the week, and this was Thursday. He lay in the veterans’ ward of Remembrance Hospital, not far from the White House. If it weren’t for his Distinguished Service Medal, they wouldn’t have admitted him, for he hadn’t formally been a soldier. And if it weren’t for the oxygen they gave him, he would have been dead weeks before.

Nellie wasn’t sure they were doing him any favors by keeping him alive. But they also gave him morphine, so he wasn’t in much pain.

She got dressed and went downstairs and made breakfast for herself and Clara. She’d just sent her younger daughter off to school when her older one came in. “Hello, Edna,” Nellie said. “Thank you very much.” She didn’t like being beholden to Edna—or to anyone else—but here she had no choice.

And Edna didn’t say anything but, “It’s all right, Ma. Go on down to the hospital. Spend all the time you can with him. I know there’s not much left. I’ll mind the shop for you. It ain’t like I never done it before.”

Nellie couldn’t resist a jab: “No handsome Confederate officers coming in nowadays.”

“That’s all right, too,” Edna answered. “I made my catch, and I’m glad

I did.” After a small hesitation, she went on, “I won’t say I’m not glad to get out of the house every once in a while myself. No, I won’t say that.”

Balked because her daughter hadn’t sniped back, Nellie set a hat on her head, picked up her handbag, and said, “I’ll be back before you have to go take care of Armstrong.”

“Sure, Ma.” Edna nodded. “Be careful when you’re going down to the trolley stop, though. It’s cold out there, and the sidewalks are icy. You don’t want to fall.”

“I’m not an old lady yet,” Nellie said sharply, though she was, when she stopped to think about it, closer to sixty than fifty. Shaking her head—she didn’t like thinking about that—she hurried out of the coffeehouse. The bell over the door jingled behind her.

Her breath fogged out around her as she hurried up the street. A man in an ancient ragged Army greatcoat stepped out of a doorway and whined, “Got any spare change, lady?” Nellie walked past him as if he didn’t exist. He didn’t bother cursing her; he must have been ignored a thousand times before. He just shrank back into the doorway and waited for someone else to come along.

Three men and a woman were waiting for the trolley when Nellie got to the stop. “Any minute now,” one of the men said. He carried a dinner pail, which probably meant he had a job.

“Thank you,” Nellie said—not, *Good,* or anything of the sort. She would have given anything she had not to be making this trip, the one she’d made every day she could while Hal lay dying in the hospital. How **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

much it tormented her measured how much she’d come to love him.

Sure enough, the trolley clanged up to the corner a couple of minutes later. Nellie threw her nickel in the fare box. The car was already crowded. A middle-aged man with a scar on his cheek stood up to offer her his seat. “Here you go, ma’am,” he said.

“Thank you,” Nellie said again, this time in real astonishment. She couldn’t remember the last time that had happened. *Who would have thought any gentlemen were left in the world?* she thought, and then, *Who would have thought there were ever any gentlemen in the world?* Except for her husband, her son-in-law, and her grandson, she still had

no use for the male half of the race—and she knew her grandson was an unruly brat, even if he was blood kin. *Well, Merle can always take Armstrong to the woodshed a little more often, that's all.*

Her stop was only a few minutes away from the coffeehouse. "President-elect Coolidge in Washington to meet with Cabinet picks!" a newsboy shouted, waving a paper at Nellie. She shook her head and hurried on to Remembrance Hospital.

Built after the end of the war, the hospital was an immense, brutally modern building that resembled nothing so much as a great block of granite with windows. The stairs leading up to the front entrance were too wide for Nellie to take them in one step, too narrow for her to take them in two. The hitching strides she had to make annoyed her every morning. By the expressions some of the other people going up and down those steps wore, they didn't like them, either—or maybe they had other worries of their own, as Nellie did.

The only happy people she saw coming out of the place were a young couple, the man carrying a crying baby. *Maternity wards are different,* Nellie thought as she went past them. *I bet they're the only place in a hospital where people win instead of losing.*

She knew the way to the veterans' ward. By now, she'd come often enough to be a regular. A nurse in the corridor nodded to her as she walked past. A couple of the nurses had even dropped in at the coffeehouse when they came off their shifts.

Two long rows of metal-framed beds, facing each other, stretched the length of the ward. Hal lay in the sixth bed on the left-hand side as Nellie came in. Just beyond him lay a younger man, a fellow about forty, whose lungs were killing him faster than Hal's. He'd been gassed in Tennessee in 1917, and had been dying by inches ever since. Nellie had never seen anyone come to visit him. He nodded to her, his lips a little bluer than they had been the day before. Like Hal, he had a rubber attachment that fit over his nose to feed him oxygen.

"Hello, darling," Hal said, his voice rasping and weak. His lungs weren't all that was troubling him, not any more. The flesh had melted from his bones over the past few months. His skull seemed to push out through the skin of his face, as if to announce the death that lay not far ahead.

"How are you feeling?" As Nellie always did, she fought to hold worry and pain from her voice. Hal didn't need her reminders to know what

was happening to him.

“How am I?” He wheezed laughter. “One day closer, that’s all.” He paused to fight a little more air into the lungs that didn’t want to hold it any more. “We’re always one day closer, but usually . . . usually we don’t think about it. How’s Clara?”

“She’s fine,” Nellie said. “I’ll bring her Saturday. She wants to see you, but what with school and all **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

now that New Year’s is gone. . . .”

“School is important,” Hal said. “What could be more important than school?” He stopped to gather breath again. “Maybe it’s better . . . she doesn’t see me . . . like this. Let her . . . remember me . . . like I was when I was stronger.”

“Oh, Hal.” Nellie had to turn away. She didn’t want her husband to see the tears stinging her eyes. All she cared about was making sure he stayed as happy and comfortable as he could till the end finally came.

A man in the row of beds facing Hal’s lit a cigarette. Hal said, “Do you know what I wish?” Nellie shook her head. He lifted a bony hand and pointed with a forefinger that still showed a yellowish stain. “I wish I had one of those, that’s what. They won’t let me smoke . . . on account of this oxygen gear. . . .

Fire, you know.”

“That’s terrible.” Nellie rose. “I’m going to see if I can’t get ’em to change their minds.” As far as she was concerned, cigarettes were more important for Hal than oxygen right now. The oxygen helped keep him alive, yes, but so what? Cigarettes would make him happy as he went, for he was going to go.

Out at the nursing station, a starched woman of about Edna’s age, shook her head at Nellie. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Jacobs,” she said, not sounding sorry in the least, “but I can’t deviate from the attending physician’s instructions.” Nellie might have asked her to commit an unnatural act.

“Well, who is the attending physician, and where the devil do I find him?” Nellie asked.

“His name is Dr. Baumgartner, and his office is in room 127, near the

front entrance," the nurse answered reluctantly. "I don't know if he's in. Even if he is, I don't think you can get him to change his mind."

"We'll see about *that* ," Nellie snapped. She hurried off to room 127 with determined strides. Dr.

Baumgartner was in, writing notes on one of his patients. He was in his late thirties, and wore the ribbon for a Purple Heart. Above his collar, the side of his neck was scarred. Nellie wondered how far down the scar ran and how bad it was. Shoving that aside, she told him what she wanted.

He heard her out, then shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Jacobs, but I don't see how I can do that. They don't call cigarettes coffin nails for nothing."

"What difference does that make?" Nellie asked bluntly. "He's dying anyhow."

"I know he is, ma'am," Baumgartner answered. "But my job is to keep him alive as long as I can and to keep him as comfortable as I can. That's what the oxygen is for."

"That's what the cigarettes are for," Nellie said: "the comfortable part, I mean."

Before Dr. Baumgartner could answer, an ambulance came clanging up to the front door of the hospital.

The physician jumped to his feet and grabbed a black bag that sat on a corner of his desk. "You have to excuse me, ma'am," he said. "There might be something I can do to help there."

"We aren't done with this argument—not by a long shot we're not," Nellie said, and followed him as he hurried out of the office.

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To her surprise, policemen rushed in through the entrance ahead of the men getting a stretcher out of the back of the ambulance. Some of them had drawn their pistols. Most people shrank away from them in alarm. Dr. Baumgartner eyed the pistols with the air of a man who'd known worse. "What the hell's going on?" he demanded.

“Come quick, Doc,” one of the policemen told him. “Do what ever you can. He’d gotten out of the bathtub, they tell me, and he was shaving when he keeled over.”

“Who’s *he* ?” Baumgartner asked. “And since when does an ambulance need a squad of motorcycle cops for escort?”

“Since it’s got Calvin Coolidge in it, is since when,” the policeman answered. “He keeled over, like I say, and nobody’s been able to get a rise out of him since.”

“Oh, dear God,” Nellie said. Nobody paid any attention to her. The stretcher-bearers brought their burden into the hospital. Sure enough, the president-elect lay on the stretcher, his face pale and still.

Dr. Baumgartner knelt beside him. The doctor’s hand found Coolidge’s wrist. “He has no pulse,”

Baumgartner said. He peeled back an eyelid. “His pupil doesn’t respond to light.” He took his hand away from Coolidge’s face. The president-elect stared up with one eye open, the other closed. Nellie could see what Dr. Baumgartner was going to say before he said it: “He’s dead.” Baumgartner’s expression and voice were stunned.

“Can’t you do anything for him, Doc?” a cop asked. “That’s why we brung him here.”

“You’d need the Lord. He can raise the dead. I can’t,” Dr. Baumgartner answered, still in that dazed voice. “If I’d been standing next to him the minute it happened, I don’t think I could have done anything.

Coronary thrombosis or a stroke, I’d say, although I can’t begin to know which without an autopsy.”

“Coro—what?” The policeman scratched his head. “What’s that in English?”

“Heart attack,” Baumgartner said patiently. “That’d be my guess. Without a postmortem, though, it’s only a guess.”

“What happens next?” Nellie asked. “He was president. I mean, he was going to be president. Now . .

.” She looked down at the body, then quickly turned away. “Close his eye, please.”

While Baumgartner did that, the policeman said, “Yeah, what the hell —’scuse me, lady—do we do now? We never had nothin’ like this happen before. That damn Blackford—’scuse me again—better not get to be president on account of he finished second. That wouldn’t be right, not after Cal here kicked his

. . . tail.”

“No, no, no. It doesn’t work like that.” Dr. Baumgartner shook his head. “The electoral college met yesterday, so the results are official. The vice president–elect becomes president-elect, and then he becomes president on the first of February.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” the cop said. “Thanks, Doc.”

And Nellie might have been the first one to taste the name and title the whole United States would know before the day was up: “President Herbert Hoover.” She paused in thought, then slowly nodded and repeated the words. “President Herbert Hoover.” She paused again. “I like the sound of it.”

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Along with her daughter, Mary Jane, Sylvia Enos crunched through snow to stand on the Boston Common and pay her last respects to Calvin Coolidge. George, Jr., would have come with them, too—Sylvia was sure of that—but his fishing boat was bringing in cod out on Georges Bank. For a moment, she wondered if he even knew. Then she shook her head, feeling foolish. The *Whitecap* had a wireless set aboard, so he was bound to.

Like her and Mary Jane, most of the people in the square wore black. It seemed all the more somber against the snow. Up on a rickety wooden platform, a newsreel photographer swung his camera over the crowd.

“It doesn’t seem fair,” Sylvia said. “He wasn’t an old man—he was only sixty.” Mary Jane gave her an odd look. But then, Mary Jane was only twenty, and to twenty sixty was one with the Pyramids of Egypt.

Sylvia knew better, and wished she didn’t. She went on, “And it doesn’t seem fair he died before he could be president, especially when we’ve been stuck with Socialists the past twelve years.”

“Hoover is a Democrat, too,” Mary Jane said. But then, before Sylvia could, she added, “But he’s not from Massachusetts.”

“He certainly isn’t,” Sylvia said. “Born in Iowa, then on to California . . .” She sighed. “He’s from about as far from Massachusetts as he can be and stay in the USA.”

“He’s—” Mary Jane broke off as heads swung toward a string of black autos approaching the State House behind a phalanx of motorcycle policemen. “Here comes the funeral procession.”

A hearse carrying Coolidge’s mortal remains led the cortege. Behind it came an open limousine in which sat President-elect Hoover. Behind his autos were a stream of others, all full of dignitaries civilian and military. When the hearse halted, an honor guard of soldiers, sailors, and Marines lifted Coolidge’s flag-draped casket from it and set the coffin on a temporary bier whose black cloth cover was half hidden by red-white-and-blue bunting.

“I wish Pa could have got a funeral,” Mary Jane said suddenly. “Not a fancy one like this, but any kind of funeral at all.”

“You were a little girl when the Confederates torpedoed his ship,” Sylvia said. “And he was away at sea so much before that. Do you remember him at all?”

“Not very much,” her daughter answered. “But I do remember one time when he was home on leave and he kept telling my brother and me to go to bed. I didn’t much like that then, so I guess it stuck with me.”

Sylvia’s face heated despite the chilly weather. A sailor home on leave wanted his children to go to bed so he could, too—with his wife. Sylvia’s own life had been empty that way since George was killed. She sighed, exhaling a cloud of fog. When she had wanted a man, poor Ernie hadn’t been able to do anything about it. That seemed so horribly unfair, it made her want to cry from sheer frustration. She couldn’t do that now. Instead, she lit a cigarette. It helped take the edge off what ever bothered her.

“Look.” Mary Jane pointed. “Hoover’s going to make a speech.” Sure enough, the new president-elect get out of his limousine and, black top hat on his head, made his way towards a podium set up beside the

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catafalque on which Calvin Coolidge's remains rested.

Wires ran from the podium back into the State House. Microphones sprouted from it: one to amplify Hoover's words for the crowd actually there, the rest to send those words across the United States by wireless. An announcer (who also wore a somber black suit) waited behind the podium to introduce him.

The man reached out and shook Hoover's hand. They spoke for a moment, too far away for the microphones to let anyone hear their words. Then the announcer stepped up to the podium and said,

"Ladies and gentlemen, the new president-elect of the United States, Mr. Hoobert Heever."

Did I hear that? Sylvia wondered. Beside her, Mary Jane let out a small, startled giggle. Others rose from the crowd, too, so Sylvia supposed her ears hadn't tricked her after all.

If Herbert Hoover noticed his name being butchered, he gave no sign of it. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, people of the United States, I would give anything I own not to stand here before you today in this capacity. I wish with all my heart that Governor Coolidge were still the president-elect, and that he, not I, would take the oath of office as president on February first of this year."

A polite round of applause followed. Sylvia joined it. She didn't see what else Hoover could say. With his round, blunt-featured face and strong chin, he looked very determined—he put her in mind of a bulldog ready to sink its teeth into something and not let go no matter what.

He continued, "Since fate has thrust me into the highest office in the land, I pledge to you today that I will to the best of my ability continue the policies on which Governor Coolidge campaigned and which the American people overwhelmingly chose in the election two months ago. We shall go forward!"

More applause. Again, Sylvia clapped along with everybody else. Again, she didn't see how Hoover could say anything else, but he said what needed saying well.

"Ever since this crisis struck our country almost four years ago," he went on, "the Socialist administration has tried every quack nostrum under the sun to set things right, but not a single treatment has worked. To our sorrow, we have seen that only too clearly. Governor

Coolidge campaigned on the Democrats'

fundamental belief that business has seen altogether too much regulation these past twelve years and that, if left to itself, it would find its own way out of the mire in which it finds itself. I believe this with all my heart, and it will be the guiding principle of my administration."

Again, people clapped their hands. Again, Sylvia was one of those people. She had no great love of businesses; they'd treated her like dirt in the years after the war. But whatever the Socialists had done hadn't worked. The whole country could see that—the whole country had seen that. Maybe what Coolidge had proposed and what Hoover now promised would be better. Sylvia didn't see how it could be much worse.

Hoover plugged ahead with his speech: "We are currently engaged in an unfortunate war. By now, the Empire of Japan has plainly seen it cannot subvert the United States of America's hold on the territories we conquered at such cost during the Great War. Japan has also seen that we are ready to respond strongly to any challenge facing us. Any time the Japanese are ready to seek an honorable peace, I shall listen to their proposals with great attentiveness."

"What does that mean?" Mary Jane whispered.

"I don't know," Sylvia whispered back. The war had cost both sides some ships. After hitting Los Angeles, Japanese bombing aeroplanes had attacked the Sandwich Islands from carriers, but they were

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spotted on the way in, did little damage, and took losses from U.S. fighters based near Pearl Harbor. If neither side could hurt the other much, why go on fighting? Maybe Hoover hoped the Japs would figure that out for themselves.

The president-elect stuck out his formidable jaw. "Regardless of that, our first goal is restoring prosperity at home. Conditions are fundamentally sound. The fundamental strength of the nation's economy is unimpaired." Hoover shook his head; maybe he hadn't meant to use variants of the same word in back-to-back sentences. He gathered himself. "Thanks to the American system of rugged individualism, we shall certainly prevail over any and all obstacles.

"Governor Coolidge epitomized that system. I promise you here today

that I shall do everything I can to walk in his footsteps. With God's help, we *will* triumph over adversity. And if it does not defeat us, it will make us stronger in the end. We are a great nation. The burden that has fallen on my shoulders leaves me awed and humbled. I know Governor Coolidge would have succeeded. All I can do is my best. With God's help again, that will suffice. Thank you, and may He bless the United States of America."

He stepped away from the podium and walked over to the catafalque. There, very solemnly, he took off his top hat and bowed to Coolidge's casket. The soldiers and sailors and Marines who'd borne the coffin from the hearse saluted. Hoover returned the salute; he'd done his two years as a conscript well before the turn of the century, and had been a major in engineering during the war.

The wireless announcer introduced the new governor of Massachusetts —and, incidentally, got his name right. More praise for Calvin Coolidge came forth, this time in the familiar accents of home, not Hoover's flat Midwestern speech. Sylvia listened with half an ear. Mary Jane began to fidget. When the lieutenant governor came to the podium and began saying everything for the third time, Sylvia asked, "Shall we go?" Her daughter nodded.

They began making their way toward the back edge of the crowd. It wasn't so hard as Sylvia had feared, not least because they weren't the only ones slipping away from the Boston Common. The newsreel photographer, up there on his platform, wasn't taking pictures of the crowd shrinking.

"Good day, Mrs. Enos." There stood Joe Kennedy, with his sharp-faced wife beside him. He wasn't going anywhere, not till the last speech was made. Even the way he stood was an effort to make Sylvia feel guilty about leaving.

It didn't work. He wasn't paying her now that the campaign was done. Behind them, the lieutenant governor's empty words kept blaring forth through the microphone. "Good day, Mr. Kennedy," she answered. "We've got to be getting home, and after a while everything sounds the same."

That made Rose Kennedy smile. When she did, her face lit up. She looked like a whole different person.

Her husband, though, frowned. He didn't look like a different person; Sylvia had seem him frowning plenty of times. Voice stiff with

disapproval, he said, “We should all take notice of the praise for Governor Coolidge. He would have made a fine president, and he would have done a lot of good for the state. Now . . .” He shrugged. “Now a lot of that will go somewhere else.”

He thought like a politician. Sylvia didn’t know why she was surprised. In fact, after she thought about it for a moment she wasn’t surprised any more. She said, “If you’ll excuse us—”

“Of course.” Joe Kennedy was barely polite to her. His whole manner changed when his gaze swung to Mary Jane. “The last time I saw your daughter, Mrs. Enos, she was a little girl. She’s not a little girl now.”

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“No, she’s not,” Sylvia said shortly. Kennedy was practically undressing Mary Jane with his eyes, there right in front of his wife. Didn’t she notice? Didn’t she care? Or had she seen it too many times before to make a fuss about it? If George had looked at another woman like that, Sylvia knew she wouldn’t have kept quiet. She touched Mary Jane’s arm. “Come on. We have to go.”

“If there’s ever anything I can do for either one of you charming ladies, don’t be shy,” Kennedy said.

Sylvia nodded. All she wanted to do was get away. As she and Mary Jane descended into the subway entrance, her daughter said, “He’s an interesting man. I didn’t think he would be, not from the way you talk about him.”

“I’ll tell you what he’s interested in—he’s interested in getting you someplace quiet and getting your knickers down,” Sylvia said. “And I’ll tell you something else, too: any man who’ll run around *for* you will run around *on* you, any chance he gets.”

Mary Jane laughed. “I wasn’t going to do anything with him, Mother.”

“I should hope not,” Sylvia said. She and Mary Jane lined up to trade nickels for tokens for the ride back to the flat by T Wharf.

The red light in the studio went on. The engineer behind the glass pointed to Jake Featherston, as if to say he was on. He nodded and got down to business: “I’m Jake Featherston, and I’m here to tell you the truth.”

All across the Confederate States, from the Atlantic to the Gulf of California, people would be leaning forward to listen to him. The wireless web knit the CSA together in a way nothing else ever had before.

All the parties used the wireless these days, but he'd been doing it longer than anybody else, and he thought he did it better than anybody else. He wasn't the only one who thought so, either. By the way Whig newspapers flabbled about their party's ineffective speakers, they too knew he scored points every time he sat down in front of a microphone here.

"I'm here to tell you the truth," he repeated. "I've been trying to do that for a long time. Some of you kind folks out there didn't much want to believe me, on account of what I have to say isn't the sugar-coated pap you'll hear from the usual run of stuffed shirts in Richmond. No, it isn't sweet and it isn't pretty, but it's true.

"Up in the USA, they've got themselves a brand-new president—not the one they elected, but another Democrat just the same. Herbert Hoover." He spoke the name with sardonic relish. "He got famous up there for helping out in the big flood back in 1927. Of course, that hurt us a lot more than it did the Yankees. But even so, they voted for him up there because of the good he did. What did we do here, where it was so much worse? I'll tell you what. We voted for the people who let it louse up the country, that's what. And if that's not a judgment on us, I don't know what is. Before that, who ever had a platform that says, 'Throw the rascals *in* '?"

That made the engineer laugh, which convinced Jake it was a good line. The man was a staunch Whig.

He was also a good engineer, and conscientious enough to make sure he gave his best to whoever was using the wireless. Featherston wished the Freedom Party attracted more men like that. *When we win, we will,* he thought, *and this time, by God, we're going to win.*

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"They say the sky will fall if the Whigs lose an election," he went on aloud. "We've been our own country the past seventy years, and they've won every time. And I tell you something else, friends—we've paid for it. We've paid through the nose. What have they given us lately? A losing war.

Two states stolen, and chunks carved out of three more. Money you took to the grocery store in a wheelbarrow. The worst flood since Noah's, with nobody doing much to clean up the mess. And now this here little—'business turndown,' they call it." He snorted. "If business turned down any more, it'd turn dead. And they say everything'll be fine in the morning. But then the morning comes, and we're still in the middle of it.

"I say it's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work. I say it's time to build dams to keep the Mississippi from kicking us like that again. I say we can use the jobs building those dams'll give us, and I say we can use the electricity we'll get from 'em, too. I say it's time to stand on our own two feet in the world, and to weed out all the traitors who want to see us stay weak and worthless. And I say *seventy years is too long.* The Whigs have had their chance. They've had it, and they fouled it up. I'm not telling you any secrets, friends. You know it, I know it, the whole country knows it. It's time to give somebody else the ball. Give it to the Freedom Party in November. Give it to us and watch us run. That's it for tonight." He had fifteen seconds left. "Remember, we won't let you down. The Whigs already have."

The engineer swiped a finger across his throat. The red light went out. By now, after going on ten years of sending his voice over the wireless web, Featherston could time a broadcast almost to the second. He gathered up his papers and left the studio. He'd be back in a week, pounding his message home. The country should have been ready to listen to him in 1927. He still thought it would have been if Grady Calkins hadn't murdered President Hampton.

"Son of a bitch had it coming," Jake muttered, but even he couldn't help adding, "Not like that, dammit."

Saul Goldman was waiting in the hallway, as usual. Featherston was glad he didn't seem to have heard those mutters. In the years since Jake started coming to the studio, the little Jew had put on weight, lost hair, and gone gray. Jake was glad time didn't show so much on his own rawboned frame and lean, harsh features. Goldman said, "Another fine broadcast, Mr. Featherston."

"Thank you kindly, Saul," Jake answered. "You've done the Party a lot of good, you know. When the day comes, you'll find we don't forget. We don't forget enemies, and we don't forget friends, either."

"That is not why I did it, you know," the wireless man said.

Jake slapped him on the back, hard enough to stagger him. “Yeah, I know, pal,” he said. “You get extra points in my book for that. You don’t lose any. When the time comes, how’d you like to be running all our broadcasts all over the country?”

“Do you mean all the broadcasts of the Freedom Party or all the broadcasts of the Confederate government?” Goldman asked.

“Six of one, half a dozen of the other,” Jake replied. “Before very long, we’ll *be* the government, you know. And when we get our hands on it, we’ll have a lot of cleaning up to do. We’ll do it, too, by God.”

Goldman didn’t say anything. He didn’t back the Freedom Party because he was wild for revenge against the USA, or because he wanted to punish the blacks who’d risen up and stabbed the Confederacy in the back. He was just relieved the Party kept quiet about Jews. Jake had never seen the need to get hot and bothered over Jews. There weren’t enough of them in the CSA to matter. Negroes, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

now . . .

Saul Goldman had never hidden his reasons for riding along on the Freedom Party’s coattails.

Featherston gave him credit for that. The Jew said, “If the time comes, I’ll do what I can for you.”

“Swell!” Featherston staggered him again with another swat on the back. “You’re a man of your word, Saul. I’ve seen that. And so am I. Wait till we win. Your telephone’ll ring. Job’ll pay good, too. You’ll get rich.” What more could a Jew want?

But all Goldman said was, “We’ll worry about that when the time comes.”

Shrugging, Jake went out to his automobile. The guards who accompanied him everywhere in public these days came to attention. His chauffeur bounced out of the motorcar and held the door open for him.

Across the street, a man in an overcoat with a couple of missing buttons waved and yelled, “Freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jake called, and waved back. He ducked down into the

Birmingham.

Virgil Joyner closed the door behind him and got back into the auto himself. As he settled in behind the wheel, he asked, “Straight back to Party headquarters, Sarge?”

“Yes,” Jake said, and then, in the same breath, “No.” He laughed at himself; he didn’t usually change his mind like that. He went on, “Take me around Capitol Square first. I want to have a good, long look at the Mitcheltown there.”

In the USA, they called shantytowns like this one Blackfordburghs. Featherston wondered if they would change the names of such places to Hoovervilles now that they had a new president. He doubted it.

They’d been saying *Blackfordburgh* for almost four years. That was plenty of time for the word to grow roots. Here in the CSA, Burton Mitchel got the blame.

Well, by God, when I take over, nobody’s going to call a shantytown Fort Featherston or any damn stupid thing like that, Jake thought. *Anybody tries it, he’ll be sorry as long as he lives—and the son of a bitch won’t live long.*

Joyner put the motorcar in gear. The guards piled into two more autos and followed. They didn’t take any chances with Featherston’s health. He wondered if the Party could win without him. Maybe—with times as hard as they were now, people were panting to throw the Whigs out on their ear. But he didn’t want anybody to have to find out. He’d waited too long. Now his hour was come round at last. He intended to stay right here and enjoy it.

Huts and tents huddled in the shadows of the statues of George Washington and Albert Sidney Johnston. They would have lapped up against the Confederate Capitol, too, had a barbed-wire perimeter patrolled by soldiers not held them at bay. Men in wrinkled, colorless clothes smoked pipes and cigarettes. Women gossiped or hung up washing on lines that stretched from one makeshift dwelling place to another. Children scampered here and there. In a football game, a boy threw a forward pass.

That was a Yankee innovation, but it had conquered the Confederate States.

Joyner ignored the football. “Shame and a disgrace when you’ve got to use wire to keep the people away from the politicians,” he said. “I

saw thinner belts than that when I was in the trenches."

"I know. I was thinking the same thing," Featherston said. "Well, we'll set that to rights, too. A little more than a year before the next Inauguration Day." The United States had moved up the date from

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March 4; the Confederate States, always more conservative, hadn't. Jake didn't care one way or the other. He had good guards. He figured he would last.

"Where now, Sarge?" the chauffeur asked him when they'd gone around the square.

"Now back to headquarters," Jake answered. "I hope Ferd's still there. I've got something I need to talk to him about." One of the reasons he hadn't wanted to go straight back was that he didn't want to talk with Ferdinand Koenig. He had to. He knew it. But he didn't want to. He'd known Koenig since 1917. The other man had backed every play he made, backed it to the hilt. Without Ferdinand Koenig, the Freedom Party probably would have been stillborn. This wasn't going to be easy.

Koenig was not only there, he was waiting in the entranceway when Featherston came in. "Good speech, Jake," he said. "It's getting ripe, isn't it? You can feel it there, ready for you to reach out and pick it."

"Yeah," Jake said. "Come on up to my office, will you? We need to chin for a few minutes."

"What's up?" Koenig sounded surprised and curious. Jake only went upstairs. He didn't want to do this in public. He didn't *want* to do it at all, but he saw the need, and need came first. Lulu still clattered away at a typewriter in the outer office. She looked surprised—and miffed—when Jake didn't explain anything to her. He knew he'd have to make it up to her later. That would be later. Now . . . Now he poured a shot for Koenig and another for himself. Ferd sipped the whiskey, lit a cigar, and asked his question again: "What's up?"

Give it to him straight, Jake thought. *Give it to him straight, then pick up the pieces.* "Made up my mind about something," he said. "When I run this summer, I'm going to put Willy Knight in the number-two slot to make sure we take Texas and some of the other states west of the Mississippi."

Ferdinand Koenig slowly turned red. “You goddamn son of a bitch,” he said in a low, deadly voice. “So I’m not good enough for you all of a sudden? Is that it? I’ll kick your stinking ass around the block. You don’t think I can, let’s go outside and find out.”

“Easy, easy, easy.” Featherston had known it would be bad. He hadn’t known it would be this bad. He hurried on: “Vice president isn’t worth a pitcher of warm spit anyhow. Let Willy-boy have it. He’ll think it’s great—till he figures out he hasn’t really got anything. Give him the slot, if he wants it so bad. But I’ll give you something that’s really worth having.”

“What is it?” Koenig’s voice remained hard with suspicion.

“Well, now, I’ll tell you.” Featherston proceeded to do just that. He hadn’t had such a tough audience since the early meeting that had left him master of the Party. And Ferd had been on his side then. Now he had to talk an old friend, an old comrade, around. At last, he asked, “Is it all right?”

Koenig stuck out his hand. “Yeah, Jake. It *is* all right. Don’t worry about it.” Featherston’s clasp was full of relief.

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XVII

“Here, Papa. Let me show you how it’s done.” Georges Galtier dug his pitchfork into a bale of hay and flung food to the livestock in the barn. When he got to the horse’s stall, he said, “I don’t know why you don’t turn this miserable animal into glue and food for pampered poodles in Montreal.”

“Tabernac!” Lucien Galtier said, and shook his head at his younger son. “I could never do that.”

“What does he do but eat?” Georges persisted. “He doesn’t take you into Rivière-du-Loup any more.

He doesn’t pull a plow. What good is he?”

“He listened to me. For years, he listened to me,” Lucien answered. “Whenever I would hitch up the wagon, I would talk to him. He

knows every thought I had.”

“All the more reason to get rid of him,” Georges said, absurd as usual. “Dead horses tell no tales.” But even as he mocked the old beast, he gave it more hay than Lucien was in the habit of doing.

“With help like yours . . .” Lucien shook his head. “The trouble with you is, you think I can do nothing for myself any more.”

“The trouble with *you* is, you think you can still do everything for yourself,” Georges said.

“By the good God, I can!” Lucien said hotly. “I’m not sixty yet, and even sixty doesn’t mean one foot in the grave.” He grimaced, wishing he hadn’t put it like that. Poor Marie had never seen sixty.

His son said, “Papa, you are a formidable man.” Georges’ praise alarmed him more than anything else he could think of. The younger Galtier continued, “Even so, will you tell me you are as formidable as you were when you were my age? Will you say that?”

“Well . . . no.” Lucien wanted to say yes, but it would have been a lie. He knew it as well as Georges did—better. His joints were stiff, he got tired more easily than he had, his wind wasn’t what it had been. .

. .

“Even for a young man, farm work isn’t easy,” Georges said. “I ought to know. There are times when I wish I were still in my twenties.”

Twenties! Lucien laughed at that. For him, the twenties seemed as long gone as Caesar’s conquest of Gaul. He wished he were in his forties. That would no doubt have horrified Georges, who had yet to see them. Lucien said, “Thanks to you and your brother and my sons-in-law, I do not have to do everything by myself. I am not ready to walk away from the farm. Did you think I would?”

“No, not really,” Georges replied. “But one day, you know, it could be that you might need to. If you think about it now, you will be readier when the time comes.”

“Mauvais tabernac!” Lucien said, which summed up what he thought about that. *“ ‘Osti!”* he added for good measure. “I will worry about such things when the time comes, and not until then. Meanwhile, let’s get this work done here—or would you rather stand around and gab? You always were a lazy one.”

“Nonsense,” Georges said with dignity. “I am merely . . . efficient.”

“You are the most efficient I have ever seen at getting out of work,” Lucien said. But, between them, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

they quickly finished off the rest of what needed doing.

Cold smote when they left the barn. As always, the land around Rivière-du-Loup laughed at the calendar, which insisted spring was only a couple of weeks away. Snow blanketed the ground. More danced in the air. Lucien took it altogether for granted—and then, all at once, he didn’t. How would one explain something so curious to someone from, say, the Confederate state of Cuba, or the U.S. state of California, or someplace else where it didn’t snow? It wasn’t like rain, which simply fell, splat. It fluttered on the breeze, it swirled, it twisted. Would a stranger who didn’t know about it take your word when you described it?

“I wouldn’t believe it myself,” Lucien muttered, stamping up the stairs toward the kitchen door.

Georges, on his heels, asked, “Wouldn’t believe what?”

“I wouldn’t believe what a nosy son I have.” Lucien opened the door. “But come in anyhow, and I’ll see what I can find for you to eat. I know you’ll waste away if I don’t.” Charles, his older son, was small and lean like him and Marie. Georges, somehow, had grown up a great strapping man, most of a head taller than Lucien and broad through the shoulders. His appetite—all his appetites—seemed in proportion.

He sighed as he followed Lucien out of the snow. “Every time I come in here, I keep thinking—I keep hoping—I’ll see *chère Maman* at the stove, baking something good.”

“I know.” Lucien sighed, too. “I feel the same. But it will not happen, not this side of heaven—which means a couple of sinners like us had better mend our ways.”

“This is a better reason to be good than most others I can think of,” Georges said. “And what do we have?”

“Cold chicken in the icebox,” Lucien answered. “Bread on the counter there—all the ladies for miles around give me bread, for they know I am no baker—and a good jug of applejack in the pantry. Even for a

walking steam shovel like you, it should be enough, *n'est-ce pas?* "

"Steam shovel? I believe I've been insulted," Georges said. "Do you know, Papa, I permit only two people in all the world to insult me—you and Sophie."

"You do not need to permit your wife to insult you," Lucien said, pouring two glasses of applejack. "It will happen whether you permit it or not—of this you may be sure." He handed one glass to his younger son, then raised the other. "Your good health."

"And yours." Georges knocked back the drink. "Whew!" He whistled respectfully. "A good thing I didn't have a cigarette in my mouth, or I think my lungs would have caught fire. That's strong stuff."

Lucien sipped. The applejack, like most of what he drank, didn't conform to the Republic of Quebec's tedious rules about licenses and taxes. A nearby farmer cooked it up from the harvest of his orchard. As a result, quality varied widely from one batch to the next. As Georges had said, this jug was on the potent side.

"Here," Lucien said. "Slice the bread and get some butter for it. I'll cut up the chicken. If you want it hot, I can build up the fire in the stove."

"Don't bother," Georges told him. "If the stove were electric like everything else here, so it was easy . . .

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But now, cold is fine."

"All right. Cold it will be, then." As Lucien got out the chicken and a knife, he felt Marie's ghost hovering there. He could almost hear her telling him he was making a clumsy botch of things, that he didn't keep the kitchen clean enough to suit her. No matter what he did, he knew he couldn't hope to match her standards. He tried as hard as he could, though. He wanted her to know he was making the effort.

Georges sighed as he dug in. "I ate a lot of suppers in this house," he said. "No matter where I live, this will always be what I think of as home."

"It is your patrimony," Lucien said simply.

“It is where I grew up,” Georges said, which wasn’t quite the same thing but wasn’t far removed from it, either. He sighed again. “It was another time.”

“When you were a boy, it was another country,” Lucien said.

“I don’t think about Canada much any more,” Georges said. “Considering what’s happened to the rest of it, we’re lucky to be where we are.”

“Yes. Considering.” Lucien Galtier could hardly disagree with that. He poured himself some more apple brandy. “You were young when the change happened—not so hard for you to get used to it. I was a grown man. There were times when I felt torn in two, especially when the Americans treated us so badly in the first part of their occupation. I did all the small things a man can do to resist—all the small things, but none of the large. I had not the courage for that, not with six children, and four of them girls.”

“And now you have an American son-in-law, and a half-American grandson,” Georges said. “And what do you think of that?”

“Leonard O’Doull is a fine man. Even you will not deny he is a fine man,” Lucien said, and Georges didn’t. Lucien went on, “And the boy who bears my name . . . He is as fine a boy as a grandfather could want. I wish he had brothers and sisters, but that is in the hands of *le bon Dieu* .”

He suspected it was in Dr. O’Doull’s hands at least as much as in God’s. Contraception was of course illegal in staunchly Catholic, staunchly conservative Quebec. If anyone could get around such laws, though, a doctor could. And his son-in-law, while a good Catholic, was also a man who thought his own thoughts. A priest probably would not hear everything he might have to confess.

“Well, Charles has three, Susanne has three, Denise has four, my Sophie’s expecting her third, and even Jeanne is going to have her second in a few weeks,” Georges said. “Lucien may lack for brothers and sisters, but he doesn’t lack for cousins.”

“This is good. This is all good,” Galtier said. Repeating himself—was the applejack hitting so hard? Was he getting old, so he couldn’t hold his liquor? Or was he getting old, so he talked too much whether he was drunk or not? He was getting old. However much he’d been at pains to deny it to Georges, he knew better than to deny it to himself.

Georges said, “Sure enough, we Galtiers will end up taking over Quebec before we’re through.”

“And why not?” Lucien said. “After all, someone has to. And if we don’t, it’s liable to be people like Bishop Pascal’s—excuse me, Pascal Talon’s—twins.”

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His son laughed. “Not all children can have such a distinguished father.”

“He was always out for whatever he could get. Always,” Lucien said. “He served God so he could help himself. He served the Americans so he could help himself. And if the Americans had lost, if the English-speaking Canadians and the British had won instead, he would have wormed his way back into their good graces, too.”

“He certainly wormed his way into his lady friend’s good graces,” Georges said. “Twins!”

“That’s what I said at the time,” Lucien agreed. “A priest—even a bishop—is also a man. This is true, beyond a doubt. But twins are excessive.”

“Excessive. There’s a good word.” Georges nodded. This time, he was the one who filled the glasses with apple brandy. “Tell me, Papa—do you not think it is also excessive to begin sending our young men from Quebec to help the Americans hold down the parts of Canada they occupy?”

“They have asked us to do this for a long time,” Galtier said slowly. “Up till now, we have always managed to get around it.”

“Now they say that, because they are fighting this war with Japan, they need our help more than ever,”

Georges said. “I don’t see how we can get around it any more. So what do you think?”

“What I always thought. When the Americans recognized the Republic of Quebec, they didn’t do it for us Quebecois. They did it for themselves. They are the big brother, the rich brother; we are the little brother, the poor relation, and we have to do what they say. That is

how they see it, anyhow.”

“How do *you* see it?”

Before answering, Lucien drained the glass Georges had poured for him. “How do I see? Blurrily . . .

But that is not what you asked. The United States *are* very large. They *are* very rich. They *are* the ones who made us a country they say is free. But if we truly *are* free, we can tell them no if we like.”

“And suppose they don’t like it after that?”

“Will they go to war with us because they don’t like it? I have my doubts. Whether our politicians in Quebec City have the wit to see this . . . *Malheureusement* , that is another question. We will probably end up doing what the Americans want without even thinking about whether we should. What do *you* think?”

“I think you’re right. I think it’s too bad. And I think nobody cares what either one of us thinks,”

Georges answered.

Lucien reached for the jug of applejack. “I think that calls for another drink,” he said.

Clarence Potter smelled trouble as soon as he walked into Whig headquarters in Charleston. The first thing he did was go over to a neat rank of bottles set against one wall and pour himself a whiskey. Thus armed, he buttonholed Braxton Donovan, who, by his red face, had started drinking quite a while before.

Donovan was typical of the men in the hall: more than whiskey, which he held well, made him look as if **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

he’d been hit in the head with a club. A speechless lawyer was a novelty Potter had thought he would relish, but he turned out to be wrong.

“God damn it, snap out of this funk,” Potter said crisply.

“Why?” Donovan answered, breathing whiskey fumes into his face. “I don’t even know why I’m going through the motions. It’s only March, but you can already see how the Freedom Party is going to kick our

ass come November. What's the use of pretending anything different?"

"Of course those know-nothing bastards will win—if nobody stands up and tries to stop 'em," Potter said. "That's what we're here for, isn't it?"

"What can we do? What can anybody do?" Donovan said. "Who's going to vote for us, with one white man in four out of work? Christ, if I'd lost my job I wouldn't vote Whig, either."

"Yes, I believe that." Withering scorn filled Potter's voice. "You'd be out there yelling, 'Freedom!' and wondering how to spell it."

The lawyer glared. "Fuck you, Clarence."

Potter beamed. "Now you're talking!" Donovan stared at him. He nodded emphatically and repeated himself: "Now you're talking, I say. If you can get pissed off about me, you can get pissed off about the Freedom Party, too. And you'd better—if you don't, the Confederate States are going right down the drain."

But Braxton Donovan, no matter how angry at Potter he might be, couldn't or wouldn't turn that anger where it might do some good. He said, "I can deal with you. How are we supposed to deal with Featherston? Grady Calkins' way?"

"If you want to know the truth, I've heard ideas I liked less," Potter answered. "The Freedom Party without Jake Featherston is like a locomotive without a boiler. Odds are it wouldn't go anywhere, and it wouldn't take the country with it."

"Fine sort of republic you want," Donovan said. "Anybody disagrees with you, off with his head."

"Oh, rubbish," Potter said. "I've got no quarrel with the Radical Liberals. I think they're wrong, but the world wouldn't end if they got elected. And you know why, too: they play by the same rules we do. But the only thing the Freedom Party cares about when it comes to the republic is using the rules to take it over. If Featherston wins the election, look out."

"What can he do?" Donovan asked. "We've got the Constitution. If he does get in, he has to play by the rules, too."

He had a point—of sorts. It was enough of a point to make Potter draw back from more direct argument. He said, "I hope you're right,"

and let it go at that.

“Of course I am,” Donovan said, which made Potter regret being conciliatory. The lawyer fixed himself another drink, then added, “The regular meeting’s going to start in a few minutes. If you intend to fortify yourself before it does, you’d better do it now.”

“God forbid I should face it sober.” Potter built himself a tall one.

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After the minutes and other routine business, the meeting might have been a reaction against the Freedom Party. People talked about more effective campaigning on the wireless. They talked about recruiting tough young men to protect Whig street rallies and even to try to break up the Freedom Party’s. They talked about getting the Whig message out to disaffected voters.

That made Potter raise a hand. With the look of a man doing something against his better judgment, Robert E. Washburn recognized him. “Mr. Chairman, what *is* our message?” Potter asked. “ ‘Sorry you’re out of work, and we’ll see if we can do better next time’? That didn’t do the Socialists up in the USA much good.”

Bang! went the gavel. “Mr. Potter, you are out of order—again,” Washburn said.

“Not me—I’m fine,” Potter insisted. “The country’s out of order. We’re supposed to be trying to make it better.”

“I was under the impression that was what we were doing,” the chairman said. “Forgive me if I’m wrong.”

“What’s our message?” Potter asked for the second time. “Why should anybody vote for us? If you ask me, the only chance we’ve got is to make Jake Featherston look like a dangerous lunatic. That shouldn’t be too hard, because the son of a bitch really *is* a dangerous lunatic. But we aren’t working hard enough to make him out to be one.”

Bang! went the gavel again. “I repeat, you’re out of order, Mr. Potter.”

“Hang on.” That was Braxton Donovan. “Clarence has a point, by God. We can’t campaign on what we did this past presidential term, that’s for damn sure. And if we can’t make ourselves look good, we’d better

try to make the Freedom Party look bad. Otherwise, we are stone, cold dead."

"I'll be damned," Clarence Potter muttered. Somebody had listened to him. He wasn't used to that.

Even the clients who paid him pretty decent money to find out this, that, or the other thing often ignored what he learned when it didn't gibe with what they thought they already knew.

Donovan went on, "We ought to pass that notion on to the national party in Richmond. They may not have thought of it for themselves." He made a sour face. "Who knows how well they're thinking up there these days?"

Reluctantly, Washburn nodded. "Let it be noted in the minutes," he said. He was a good man. He'd been a good man for a long time—he had to be seventy, near enough. Potter wondered if the Freedom Party had any city chairmen that old. He would have bet money against it.

As far as he was concerned, nothing else of any importance happened during the meeting. Since he hadn't expected anything at all important to happen, he left feeling ahead of the game: not easy, not for anyone who cared about the Whig Party in 1933. Maybe, just maybe, the Whigs could keep Jake Featherston out of power one more time by making him look like a raving maniac. Potter felt like Horatius at the bridge, doing everything he could to keep the enemy from breaking into the city.

He started back toward his neat little flat. Behind him, Donovan called, "Wait a second, Potter. I had an idea."

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Clarence stopped. "Congratulations."

"Smarty-britches. Your pa should have walloped you more when you were little." But the lawyer spoke without heat. He went on, "You ever see Anne Colleton these days?"

"No," Potter said shortly. That he didn't still pained him. They'd got on very well; in a lot of ways, they were two of a kind. But they hadn't come close to seeing eye to eye about politics, and they both took politics too seriously to let them stay together. *So much for bedfellows,*

strange or otherwise, he thought.

“Maybe you ought to try again,” Donovan said. “If you can convince her that Featherston needs a straitjacket and a rubber room, you’ll hurt the Freedom Party.”

“I would,” Potter said, “but I don’t think she’s likely to pay any attention to me.”

“What have you got to lose?” Donovan asked. “If you haven’t got the price of a long-distance telephone call, I can pay for it.” He reached for his hip pocket.

“I’ve got it, I’ve got it.” Potter waved for him to stop, and he did. *What have you got to lose?* It was a good question. How would he be worse off if Anne hung up on him or told him to go peddle his papers?

Oh, his self-respect would take a beating, but that didn’t have anything to do with the Whigs and their hopes, such as those were. He nodded to Braxton Donovan. “All right, I’ll take a shot at it. Don’t say I never did the Party a good turn.”

“Heaven forbid such a thought from ever crossing my mind.” Donovan sounded pious as a preacher.

Such fine phrases meant exactly nothing, as Potter knew perfectly well. Maybe Donovan would remember them, maybe he wouldn’t. Potter also knew which way he would guess.

Being in the line of work he was, he had a telephone back at his flat. As he took the mouthpiece off the hook, a black excitement filled him. “Operator, I’d like to make a long-distance call, please,” he said, and gave the telephone number he’d never scratched out of his address book.

“One moment, sir, while I place the call,” the operator replied. “And whom shall I say is the calling party?” Potter gave her his name. The call took longer than the promised moment to complete. He listened to clicks and pops on the line and a couple of faint, almost unintelligible, conversations between operators.

Then a telephone rang. He heard that quite plainly. “Hello?” There was Anne Colleton’s voice, almost as clear as if she were down the block instead of halfway across the state. Telephones had come a long way since the Great War. The operator announced the long-distance call and gave her Potter’s name. “Yes, I’ll speak to him,” Anne said at

once, and then, “How are you, Clarence? What’s this all about?”

“I’m fine,” he answered. “How have you been? Haven’t talked to you in a while.”

“No—you chose your party, and I chose mine,” Anne said. “When November rolls around, we’ll see who chose better.”

Clarence knew then his call was hopeless. He went ahead anyway: “That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. You’ve met Jake Featherston. You must know as well as I do, he’s got a few screws loose up there. Lord knows we’re sinners here in the CSA, Anne, but do we really deserve Jake for president?

What ever we may have done to make God angry at us, it’s not *that* bad.”

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Anne laughed. “What does he say that’s wrong? That we need to get back on our feet? We do. That the niggers rose up and stabbed us in the back? They did. That the War Department didn’t know what was going on till way too late? It didn’t. That we ought to stand up to the United States? We should. If any of that’s crazy, then I’m crazy, too.”

“Wherever you want to go, there are lots of ways to get there,” Potter said stubbornly. As long as they were talking, he’d give it his best try even if he was sure it wasn’t good enough. “Featherston’s going over the rocks and through the swamp. You ask me, he’s more likely to put us on our backs than on our feet.”

“I didn’t ask you, Clarence,” Anne said. “You made this call.”

“I’m trying to tell you the man’s dangerous.”

“I know he is—to everybody who wants to keep us down.”

“No, to us,” Potter insisted. “Is he going to pay the niggers back or scare them into another uprising?

Wasn’t one bad enough?”

“If they try it twice, they’ll never try it three times.” Anne sounded almost as if she looked forward to crushing another Negro revolt.

Even so, Potter went on, “If he cleans out the War Department, who goes in instead? His drinking buddies? Will they be any better?”

“How could they be any worse?” Anne returned.

“I don’t know. I don’t want to find out, either. And do you really want us to fight the United States again and lose?”

“No. I want us to fight those goddamn sons of bitches again and *win* ,” Anne said. “And so does Jake Featherston, and I think we will.”

“How?” Potter demanded. “Think straight, Anne. I know you can if you want to. They’re bigger than we are. They’re stronger than we are. They would be even if they hadn’t stolen two of our states and pieces of others. Whatever we *want* to do to them—and I don’t love them, either; believe me, I don’t—what chance have we got to actually *do* it?”

“We haven’t got any chance if we don’t try,” Anne said. “Good-bye, Clarence.” She hung up. Potter wondered if he ought to call her again and try to make her see reason. Slowly, he shook his head. She wouldn’t do it. That seemed only too plain. With a soft curse, he set the mouthpiece back in its cradle.

Like most Confederate veterans, Jefferson Pinkard belonged to the Tin Hats. They weren’t nearly so important in his life as the Freedom Party. He paid his dues every year, and that was about it. Still, when Amos Mizell, the longtime head of the Tin Hats, came to Birmingham to make a speech on a bright spring Sunday, Jeff went over to Avondale Park to hear what he had to say.

Taking the trolley to the east side of town, just past the Sloss Works, made him mutter to himself. He **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

hadn’t gone that way very often since losing his job at the steel mill. Even the air here tasted different: full of sulfur and iron. The first good lungful made him cough. The second one made him smile. He’d lived with that taste, that smell, for most of his adult life. He hadn’t even known he missed it till he found it again.

He wore a clean white shirt and butternut trousers, the not-quite-uniform of the Freedom Party. Most of the people on the trolley car were men about his age, and many of them had on the same kind of outfit he did. He didn’t see anybody with a bludgeon. This wasn’t supposed to be that kind of meeting. You could belong to the Tin Hats

without being a Freedom Party man, and some people did.

When the trolley stopped at the Sloss Works, half a dozen more men got on. He recognized two or three of them. They nodded to one another. “Good to see you,” one of them said. “How are you doing?”

“Not too bad, Tony,” Pinkard answered. “No, not too bad. Party found me a job after I got canned, so I’m eating. And things look mighty good when the election rolls around.”

“Sure do,” Tony said. “About time, too.”

The trolley stopped, brakes screeching. The motorman clanged his bell. “Avondale Park!” he said loudly. By the time men finished getting off the car, it was almost empty.

Under that warm, hopeful sun, Jeff walked toward the rostrum from which Amos Mizell would speak.

Confederate flags and Tin Hat banners fluttered in the breeze. Here and there in the swelling crowd, men waved Freedom Party flags: the Confederate battle flag with colors reversed, red St. Andrew’s cross on blue. Those, though, were unofficial.

Or were they? Up there on the rostrum, chatting with Mizell, stood Caleb Briggs, the head of the Freedom Party in Birmingham. The leader of the Tin Hats leaned closer to hear what Briggs had to say.

Even nowadays, Briggs couldn’t talk above a rasping whisper; the damnyankees had gassed him during the Great War.

Somebody yelled, “Freedom!” In an instant, the cry was deafening. Jefferson Pinkard shouted it out at the top of his lungs. The Freedom Party was the most important thing in his life these days. If it weren’t for the Party, he hardly would have had a life.

Caleb Briggs grinned out at the crowd. His teeth were white and straight. A good thing, too—he was a dentist by trade. If he’d had a couple of missing choppers, he wouldn’t have made much of an advertisement for his own work. He waved. The cries of, “Freedom!” redoubled.

Amos Mizell grinned and waved, too. A few people started singing “The Bonnie Blue Flag,” the song the Tin Hats had taken for their own. Only a few, though—“The Bonnie Blue Flag” was hard to make out among the shouts of, “Freedom!” Mizell’s grin slipped, although

he kept waving. As at the rally, so across the CSA: these days, the Freedom Party spoke with a louder voice than the Tin Hats. That hadn't always been so. Had things gone a little differently, Mizell might have been standing in Jake Featherston's shoes. He had to be thinking about what might have been.

Then Caleb Briggs stepped up to the microphone. In his ruined voice, he said, "This is a Tin Hats rally, boys, not one of ours," and he started singing "The Bonnie Blue Flag." That tipped the balance.

Following his lead, the Freedom Party men in the crowd sang the Tin Hats' anthem. Amos Mizell tipped his hat to Briggs. He still didn't look perfectly happy, though. The men weren't singing "The Bonnie Blue Flag" because they'd thought of it themselves, but because a Freedom Party big wig had asked them to.

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That had to sting.

Jeff pushed and elbowed his way toward the front of the crowd, trying to get as close to the platform as he could. A lot of other determined men were doing the same thing. He didn't get quite so close as he would have liked. Still, he was taller than most, and he could see well enough.

When the loud chorus of "The Bonnie Blue Flag" ended, Caleb Briggs walked up to the microphone again. He raised both hands in the air, asking for quiet. Little by little, he got it. "Let's give a big hello to a man who's done a lot for the cause of freedom in the Confederate States," he said, and paused to draw in a wheezing breath. He sounded as if he'd smoked a hundred packs of cigarettes all at once. "Friends, here's Mr. Amos Mizell."

Mizell towered over Briggs. He held up both hands, too. He was missing his left little finger—one more man who'd spilled his blood for the Confederate States. The fat cats had got the CSA into the war, Pinkard thought, and then they'd sat back in Richmond, miles away from the trenches, and let other people do the fighting. Well, their time was coming. His smile had nothing to do with mirth. Yes, their time was coming fast.

"We've been through it," Mizell said. "We've all been through it, and we wonder why the devil we went.

By the time we were done, the Confederate States were worse off than when we started, and that's not how things were supposed to work. We were patriots. They told us we were going to teach the damnyankees another lesson. And then what happened?

"I'll tell you what, my friends. *They left us in the lurch.* We had to stand up to gas before we could give it back. We had to face barrels before we had any barrels of our own. We were fighting the USA, but we had to fight our own civil war, too, on account of they were asleep at the switch and didn't know the niggers were going to rise up and kick us in the . . . the slats. I see some ladies here."

The veterans who made up most of the audience snickered. They knew what Mizell would have said if he were, say, sitting in a saloon with a whiskey in his hand. The few women surely knew, too, but he *hadn't* said it, so their honor was satisfied.

He went on, "And then, after we did everything we could do, we lost anyway. I don't reckon we would have if the niggers had stayed and done their work, but we did. And what about the folks who sent us out to die? They kept on getting rich. They let the money go down the drain, but you didn't see them missing any meals."

"That's right," Jeff growled, and his was far from the only angry, baying voice in the crowd. He turned to a man beside him and said, "We should have strung those bastards up a long time ago."

"Oh, hell, yes," the other man said, as if the idea that anyone could disagree was unimaginable. He slammed a hand against the side of his thigh. "*Hell,* yes."

Mizell was continuing, "—no chance the Whigs will fix their own house. They've been in power too long. All they know about is hanging on to what they've already got. And the Radical Liberals?" He made a scornful gesture. "Losers. They've always been losers. They'll never be anything but losers. No.

If we're going to set our own house in order, what we need is . . ." His voice trailed away. He waited expectantly.

He didn't have to wait long. The cry of, *"Freedom!"* roared from almost every throat. After that first great yell, it settled down into a steady chant: "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" Pinkard shouted it along

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with all the others, his fist pumping the air.

Amos Mizell raised his hands once more. Slowly, reluctantly, silence came. Mizell said, “That’s right, friends. The Tin Hats know what this country needs. We need a new broom, a broom that will sweep all the old fools out of Richmond. We reckon the Freedom Party is the right one for the job. That’s why I want all the Tin Hats in the country, regardless of whether they’re registered in the Freedom Party or not, to vote for Jake Featherston. I tell you, we need to do everything we can to make that man president of the Confederate States of America. We’ll throw everything we’ve got behind him, on account of he’ll make this a country we can be proud to live in again.”

He paused. “Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!” The chant rang out again. And then, a little at a time, another chant began to supplant it: “Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!” The heavy, thudding stress on the last syllable was almost hypnotic.

“Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!” Jefferson Pinkard shouted it, too. He’d been a Freedom Party man ever since the first time he heard Jake Featherston speak, not long after the war ended. He’d come this far with Jake; he wanted to go further. And now it looked as if he could, as if the whole CSA could.

As he looked around the crowd, he saw knots of men in white and butternut from whom the chant of,

“Feather *ston*!” came loudest. He smiled to himself. No, Caleb Briggs didn’t miss a trick. He must have given some of the boys special instructions. The only thing that surprised Pinkard was that the local Party boss hadn’t recruited *him* to help change the chant. He shrugged. Briggs did as Briggs pleased.

“Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!” Mizell seemed startled to hear the Freedom Party leader’s name. The cry of, “Freedom!” he’d undoubtedly expected. This? No.

Well, too bad, Jeff thought. *You back the Freedom Party, you’ve got to back Jake Featherston, too.*

No way around that, even if you wish there were.

By his manner up there on the rostrum, maybe the head of the Tin Hats wished exactly that. No matter how he wished things had turned out, his outfit was in second place, not first. Hearing Jake’s name roared in his face at his own rally had to show him he would never

run first.

Caleb Briggs stepped up to the microphone. It helped his harsh near-whisper carry: “We’re all in this together, friends: Freedom Party, Tin Hats, the Redemption League out West, all the people who see what’s wrong and who’ve got what it takes to stand up and fix it. When Jake Featherston wins this fall, we all win—every single one of us, and every single group. That’s what we’ve got to take away from this rally today. Just like we were in the trenches, we’re all in this together. Only difference is, this time, by God, we’re going to *win* !”

No chant rose this time, just a great roar of agreement. Jeff pumped his fist in the air again, and his was far from the only one raised high. Up on the rostrum, Briggs put a hand on Amos Mizell’s shoulder. He was smaller than the man who led the Tin Hats, but still somehow had the air of a father consoling a son.

After a moment, Mizell straightened—almost to attention, as if he were back in the Army again. He went to the microphone and said, “Dr. Briggs is right. When Jake Featherston’s president, we all win. And we *will* win come November!”

He got his own round of applause then. Somebody in the crowd started singing “Dixie.” Maybe it was one of the men with instructions from Briggs, maybe someone who’d had a good idea on his own. Either **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

way, in the blink of an eye everyone sang it. Along with the rest of the men and women in Avondale Park, Pinkard bawled out the words. Tears stung his eyes. *This* was what mattered, this feeling of being part of something bigger, more important, than himself.

When the last raucous chorus ended, Briggs went over to the microphone. “Remember this, folks,” he said. “Remember it good. What we’ve got here today, the whole country gets when we win.”

Only a smattering of applause answered him. No more than a handful of people understood what he was talking about. But Jefferson Pinkard was one of those few. He beat his palms together till they were red and sore. That was what he wanted—the whole country like a Freedom Party rally. What could be better? Nothing he could think of.

The way things looked, the whole country wouldn’t be able to think of anything better, either. That seemed very fine indeed to Jeff.

* * *

Something tickled Anne Colleton's memory when she checked into the Excelsior Hotel in Charleston. It tickled harder when she got into her room. The tickling wasn't of the pleasant sort. After she looked around the room, she realized why. Roger Kimball had tried to rape her here, almost ten years ago now.

She'd given him a knee between his legs, aimed a pistol at him, and sent him on his way. In short order, he was dead, shot by that woman from Boston.

Anne sighed. Kimball had been loyal to Jake Featherston come hell or high water. Anne was loyal to nobody but herself, not like that. She'd thought Featherston was a loser, and she'd broken her ties to the Freedom Party. That was the biggest reason she and Roger had broken up, the biggest reason she hadn't given herself to him, the biggest reason he'd tried to take her by force.

And now here she was, back in Charleston, back in the Freedom Party. She tasted the irony there. Had Roger been right all along? Anne shook her head. She didn't care to admit that, even to herself. After she'd walked away from Featherston, the country had changed. That was what had brought her back.

Still, she granted herself the luxury of another sigh. It *was* too bad. She'd never found anybody who could match Roger Kimball in bed.

A glance in the mirror on the dresser told her she probably never would. A good start on a double chin, lines on her face no powder could hide, the harshness of dye to hold gray at bay . . . She wasn't a young beauty any more. Now she had to get her way with brains, which wasn't so easy and took longer.

"What can't be cured . . ." she said, and deliberately turned away from the mirror. The only alternative to getting older was *not* getting older. The Yankees had gassed her younger brother, Jacob. They'd gassed him, and the Negroes on the Marshlands plantation had murdered him in the uprising of 1915.

He'd never had a chance. She'd taken some revenge on them after the war. More still waited. She'd never disagreed with the Freedom Party about that.

She unpacked her own suitcase. Once upon a time, she'd have had a

colored maid to do it for her. The last one she'd had came much too close to murdering *her* in the long aftermath of the uprising. No more.

Once everything was put away, she went downstairs. A man sitting on an overstuffed chair in the lobby, a chair whose upholstery had seen better days, got to his feet and took off his hat. "Evening, Miss
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Colleton!" he said. "Freedom!"

"Good evening, Mr. Henderson," Anne answered. A beat slower than she should have, she added,

"Freedom!" herself. The Party greeting still struck her as foolish. But she'd made the bargain, and she had to go through with it.

"Hope you had a pleasant drive down," James Henderson said. He held out his hand. She briskly shook it. His eyes widened slightly. He hadn't expected so firm a grip. He was a few years younger than Anne — *everyone is a few years younger than I am these days,* she thought unhappily—lean as a lath, with a face so bony, it might have come off the label of an iodine bottle. He wore the ribbon for the Purple Heart on his lapel.

"It was all right," Anne said. "Some people drive for the sport of it. I drive to get where I'm going."

"Sensible," Henderson said. Men said that to her a lot these days, as they'd once said, *Beautiful.* She missed the other. This would have to do. Beauty didn't last. Brains did. She'd realized that a long time ago. She'd had brains even then, though men had done their best not to notice. Henderson went on,

"Shall we eat some supper? We can talk then, and figure out where to go from there."

"All right," Anne said. Not so many years earlier, he would have wanted to go back to her room and take her to bed. Now he probably didn't. That made doing business simpler. Most of the time, she appreciated it because it did. Every once in a while, she found herself pining for days gone by.

"Hotel restaurant suit you, or would you rather go somewhere else?" Henderson was doing his best to be polite. A fair number of Freedom Party men either didn't bother or didn't know how.

“The hotel restaurant is fine,” she answered.

She ordered crab cakes; she took advantage of Charleston seafood whenever she came down to the coast. Henderson chose fried chicken. They both ordered cocktails. The colored waiter who took their orders went back to the kitchen without writing them down; odds were he couldn’t write. James Henderson’s eyes followed him. “Wonder where he was in 1915, and what he did.”

“He looks too young to have done anything much,” Anne said. “Of course, you never can tell.”

“Sure can’t.” Henderson scowled. He needed a visible effort to draw himself back to the business at hand. “Let’s talk about Congress and the Legislature.”

“Right,” Anne said briskly. Henderson might be skinny enough to dive through a soda straw without hitting the sides, but he came to the point. She liked that. She went on, “We can figure that Jake Featherston is probably going to win this state.”

“Doesn’t mean we won’t campaign for him here,” Henderson said.

“No, of course not,” Anne agreed. “We don’t want any nasty surprises. But the rest of the ticket has to run well, too. Freedom Party Congressmen will help Jake get his laws through. The state legislators need to back us, too—and they’re the ones who choose C.S. Senators. We’re still weak in the Senate, because we didn’t start getting a lot of people elected to state legislatures till 1929.”

James Henderson nodded. He began to say something more, but the waiter came back with drinks, and then with dinner. The fellow started to give Anne the chicken; she pointed to her companion to show **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

where it should go. “Sorry, ma’am,” the colored man said. He set things right, then withdrew.

Henderson looked around to make sure he was out of earshot before resuming. “Can’t trust ’em,” the Freedom Party man said. Anne couldn’t quarrel with him there. Henderson continued, “Anything they hear, the Rad Libs know tomorrow and the Whigs the day after.”

Anne wasn’t so sure about that, but didn’t care to argue with it, either. All she said was, “They know they have to try to stop us any way they

can. They know, but I don't think they can do it."

"Have to make sure they don't. We have to make sure any way we need to." Henderson let her draw her own pictures.

She had no trouble doing just that. "We don't want to go too far," she said. "If we do, it'll only hurt us, cost us votes. The average law-abiding Confederate has to think we're the right answer, not the wrong one. We've shot ourselves in the foot before when we pushed too hard. We need to pick our spots."

The skeletal man across the table from her nodded. "See who's really dangerous," he said, and bared a lot of teeth in a grin. "Won't be so dangerous once we run over 'em with barrels a few times."

Anne thought that was a figure of speech. She wasn't quite sure, though, and didn't care to ask.

Theoretically, the armistice with the USA banned barrels from the CSA. The government had never admitted to having any—nor could it, without risking Yankee wrath. If a couple of them should suddenly clatter down a street with Freedom Party men inside . . . If that happened, Anne wouldn't have been astonished.

She said, "Looks to me like we're thinking along the same lines, Mr. Henderson . . . Do you want to get some more chicken?" He'd reduced half a bird to bones in nothing flat.

"Don't mind if I do." Henderson waved for the waiter. As the Negro took the request back to the kitchen, Henderson gave a half apologetic smile. "Always been scrawny, no matter how much I eat."

"I wish I could say that." Corsets had been out of fashion for a good many years now, but Anne was tempted to get back into one to help her remind the world she did still have a waist. She wished she could wear a corset under her jaw, too, to fight the sagging flesh there. In fact, there were such things, intended to be put on at night. Three different doctors, though, had assured her they did no good.

The waiter returned with another whole chicken leg. Henderson devoured it. He patted his pale lips with his napkin. "Hit the spot."

"Good." Even if she envied him at the same time, Anne couldn't help liking a man who put away his food like that. She went on, "We have to hit the spot in November, too. We *have* to. If we lose this time, I don't think we'll ever get another chance."

After Grady Calkins assassinated President Hampton, after the Confederate currency stabilized when the USA eased back on reparations, the Freedom Party had sunk like a stone, and had stayed down though almost all the 1920s. If it failed again, she was sure it wouldn't revive. She couldn't stand the idea of trying to make peace with the Whigs once more. This run had to reach the top.

"Don't you worry about that, ma'am," James Henderson said. "Jake Featherston, he isn't about to lose." So, four hundred years before, a Spanish soldier seeing the might and wealth of the Inca Empire might have spoken of Pizarro. The Spaniard would have been right. Anne thought the Freedom Party **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

man was, too, even if that *ma'am* rankled. Henderson wasn't so very much younger than she was.

She said, "It's not just Jake, remember. We want to grab with both hands."

"Think you're right," Henderson said. "Legislators, Congressmen—every place where we can win, we'll fight like the devil."

"That's right. Mayors and county commissioners and sheriffs, too. Some of those people can appoint judges, and the more judges on our side, the better. Same with sheriffs. A lot of them—and city policemen, too—have been on our side for a long time."

"Better be," Henderson said, nodding. The waiter came up with a coffeepot. After he'd filled cups for Anne and Henderson, he retreated once more. Henderson waited, poured in lots of cream and sugar, tasted, added more sugar yet, and then continued, "By the time we're done, we'll have this state sewed up tight, you bet."

"Oh, yes," Anne said softly. "And not just South Carolina, either. By the time we're done, we'll have the whole country sewn up tight."

"That's the idea," Henderson said.

Anne wondered if Jake Featherston had thought he could come within arm's reach of ruling the Confederate States when he first joined the Freedom Party. What would he say if she asked him? And would what he said be true? Would he really recall here in 1933 what he'd thought and hoped and dreamt back in 1917? Even if he did, would he admit it? She had her doubts.

The waiter returned again. “Dessert, folks? Apple pie is mighty fine today, or we’ve got cherry or lemon meringue or pecan, too.”

“Apple,” Henderson said at once. “Slap some ice cream on top, too.”

“Yes, suh.” The waiter looked to Anne. “Anything for you, ma’am?”

She shook her head. “I couldn’t possibly.”

James Henderson could, and did. He had a second cup of coffee to go with the pie à la mode, too, and doctored it as thoroughly as he had the first. With a sigh of regret, he pushed away the empty plate.

“Yeah, that hit the spot.”

“If we do as well in November as you did at the supper table here, the Whigs are in even more trouble than I thought,” Anne said.

He grinned. “We’ll clean ’em up and wash ’em down the drain. Just what they’ve got coming.” Anne nodded. She felt victory in the air, too.

* * *

When Scipio walked into Erasmus’ fish store and café, he knew right away something was wrong. His boss looked like a man whose best friend had just died. Without preamble, Erasmus said, “I gwine shut her down, Xerxes.”

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“Do Jesus!” Scipio said. He’d spent a lot of time here; he’d thought the place would go on forever—or at least as long as Erasmus did, which had looked as if it might be the same thing. “Why for you do dat?”

he demanded.

“You recollect how once upon a time them Freedom Party bastards come by here?” Erasmus said.

“They was gonna take money from me so nothin’ happen to the store.”

“I recollects, uh-huh,” Scipio said. “Then the Freedom Party go down de drain, an’ dey don’t come back no mo’.”

“They’s back.” All of a sudden, Erasmus looked old. He looked beaten. And he looked afraid. “Can’t rightly tell if they’s the same bastards as all them years ago, but they’s the same *kind* o’ bastards, an’

that’s what counts. They say I don’t pay ’em what they want, I git bad luck like you don’t believe. I ain’t no fool, Xerxes. You don’t got to draw me no pictures. I know what that means.”

“How much they want?” Scipio asked.

“Too much,” his boss answered. “Too damn much. Cut my profit down to nothin’. Down to less’n nothin’. I try an’ tell ’em that. Way they look at me, it’s *That’s your worry, nigger. We don’t care, long as we gits ours.* So I’s shuttin’ down, like I say. Sell this place, live off what I gits. I’m an old man now.

Reckon the money’ll last me.”

“This here’s blackmail,” Scipio said. “You ought to go to the *po* lice.”

Erasmus shook his head. “Ain’t no use. It’s like it was back the las’ time. Some o’ these fuckers, they *is* the *po* lice.”

Scipio had never heard the older man use an obscenity like that. “Got to be somebody kin he’p you.”

“If I was white . . .” But Erasmus shook his head. “Mebbe even that don’t do no good, not now. These Freedom Party buckra, it’s like they got everything goin’ their way, and nobody else got the nerve to stand up to ’em. They win the ‘lection, they’s top dogs for six years, an’ everybody reckon they gwine win.”

“I knows it. I’s scared, and dat de trut’,” Scipio said. “What kin a nigger do? Can’t do nothin’. Can’t even vote. Can’t run, neither—ain’t nowhere to run to. USA don’t want nothin’ to do wid we. An’ if we fights—”

“We loses,” Erasmus finished for him. “Dumb Reds done showed dat durin’ the war. Never shoulda riz up then, on account of they shoulda knowed they lose.”

I thought the same thing. I told Cassius the same thing. He wouldn’t listen to me. He was sure the revolution would carry everything before it. He was sure, and he was wrong, and now he’s dead.

Scipio couldn’t say a word of that. He had a new name here. He had a

new life here. Remembering things he'd done long ago, in another state and in another state of mind . . . What point to it? None he could see, especially since time-yellowed, creased wanted posters still proclaimed his other self fugitive from what South Carolina called justice.

Erasmus went on, "Sorry I got to let you go like this here. I know it ain't right. Times is hard, an' you gots young 'uns. But I can't help it, Xerxes. Can't stay in business no more. You hook on somewheres

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else, mebbe."

"Mebbe." Scipio didn't really believe it. How many places were hiring waiters? Even asking the question of himself made him want to laugh.

But it wasn't funny. It was anything but funny, as a matter of fact. Bathsheba's housekeeping work brought in some money, but not enough. He would have to find something to do, and find it fast.

I could be the best butler Augusta, Georgia's, ever seen. If he'd passed muster for Anne Colleton, he could pass muster here. True, he had no references, but he was good enough to show what he could do even without them. And rich people always had money. People like that were always looking for good help. When he opened his mouth and showed he could talk like an educated white man . . .

He shook his head and shivered, as if coming down with the influenza. *When I show that, I put a noose around my neck.* He knew what a good servant he made. If he started playing the butler again, word would spread among the rich whites of Augusta. *Old So-and-So's got himself a crackerjack new nigger, best damn butler you ever saw.* Word wouldn't spread only in Augusta, either. St. Matthews, South Carolina, wasn't that far away. Anne Colleton would hear before too long. And when she did, he was dead.

She'd gone back to helping the Freedom Party. He'd seen that in the newspapers. She wouldn't have forgotten him. So far as he knew, she hadn't tried very hard to find him after he'd escaped South Carolina for Georgia. But if he did anything to bring himself to her notice, he deserved to die for stupidity's sake.

Erasmus reached into the cash box and took out two brown twenty-dollar banknotes. He thrust them at Scipio. "Here you is," he said. "Wish it could be more, but I druther give it to you than to them

Freedom Party trash.”

Pride told Scipio to refuse. He had no room in his life for pride. “Thank you kindly,” he said, and took the money. “God bless you.”

“He done bless me plenty,” Erasmus said. “Hope He watch out for you, too.”

Someone else had pressed money on Scipio when he lost a job waiting tables. He snapped his fingers.

“Reckon I go see me Mistuh John Oglethorpe. Anybody in this here town got work, reckon he know

‘bout it.”

“Good idea.” Erasmus nodded. “Not all white folks is Freedom Party bastards.”

These days, Scipio ventured out of the Terry only with trepidation. He didn’t like the way white men looked at him when he walked along the streets outside the colored district. They looked at him the way they had to look at possums and squirrels and raccoons when they hunted for the pot.

Freedom Party posters and banners and emblems were everywhere. He saw several white men with little enamelwork Freedom Party pins —those reversed-color Confederate battle flags—on their lapels.

More than anybody else, they glared at him as if he had no right to exist. He kept his eyes down on the sidewalk. Giving back look for look was the worst thing he could do. If one of those pin-wearing fellows decided he was an uppity nigger, he might not get back to the Terry alive.

When he walked into Oglethorpe’s restaurant, Aurelius was taking care of the breakfast crowd. Whites **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

sat on one side of the room, Negroes on the other. They’d always done that. It wasn’t law, but it was unbreakable custom. Scipio perched at a small table. Aurelius nodded when he recognized him.

“Ain’t seen you in a long time,” he said. “What kin I git you?”

“Bacon and eggs over easy and grits and a cup o’ coffee,” Scipio

answered. “I see Mistuh Oglethorpe when things slows down?”

“I tell him you’s here,” Aurelius said. “How come you ain’t at Erasmus’ place?”

“He shuttin’ down,” Scipio said, and the other man’s eyes widened in astonishment. In a voice not much above a whisper, Scipio explained, “They wants too much money for he to stay open.” He didn’t explain who *they* were. Aurelius would know.

“Hey, Aurelius!” a white man called. “I need some more coffee over here.”

“Comin’, Mr. Benson.” Aurelius hurried off to take care of the customer, and then another one, and then another one after that.

He didn’t get back to Scipio’s table till he set plate and coffee cup in front of him. “Thank you kindly,”

Scipio said, and dug in. John Oglethorpe was in no way a fancy cook, but few of his kind could match him. The breakfast was easily as good as any Erasmus made: high praise indeed. Scipio hadn’t eaten grits in his days as Anne Colleton’s privileged servant; he’d thought of them as fieldhands’ food. He’d remade their acquaintance since, and found he liked them.

With Aurelius filling his cup every time it got low, he hung around in the restaurant till the rush thinned out. John Oglethorpe emerged from the kitchen then. His hair had gone gray and pulled back at the temples. He wore thick bifocals he hadn’t had before, and was thinner and more stooped than Scipio remembered.

“What’s this nonsense I hear about Erasmus goin’ out of business?” he demanded. “He can’t do that.

He’s been cooking even longer than I have.”

“No mo’,” Scipio said. “Freedom Party fellas, they wants too much money from he.”

“Oh. Those people.” The white man’s voice went flat and hard. “I’ve always been a Whig, and so was my pappy, and so was *his* pappy—well, he was a Democrat before the War of Secession, but that doesn’t count. Some people, though—some people think yelling something loud enough makes it so.”

“Free *dom*!” Aurelius didn’t yell it, but the scorn in his voice ran deep.

Scipio blinked. The cook and the waiter had worked together for God only knew how many years.

Even so . . . As far as Scipio could remember, this was the first time—outside the brief, chaotic madness of the Congaree Socialist Republic—he’d ever heard a Negro mock a Confederate political party where a white could hear.

“Yellin’ ain’t all them Freedom Party fellas does,” Scipio said. “Erasmus reckon somethin’ bad happen to he if he don’t pay, so he done quit.”

“That’s a shame and a disgrace,” Oglethorpe said. “That is nothing but a shame and a disgrace. This town needs hardworking folks like Erasmus a hell of a lot more than it needs blowhards like those
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Freedom Party yahoos.”

Did he know *Gulliver’s Travels* ? Or was he using the word as a general term of contempt? Scipio didn’t see how he could ask. That might involve trying to explain how *he* knew *Gulliver’s Travels* . He kept trying to bury his past, but it lived on inside him.

All he said was, “Yes, suh.” And then he got down to the business that had brought him out of the Terry:

“Mistuh Oglethorpe, I gots me a family to feed. I been workin’ fo’ Erasmus a good long time now. Ain’t like you an’ Aurelius, but a long time. You know somebody lookin’ for a waiter? I does janitor work, too, an’ I cooks some. Ain’t as good as you an’ Erasmus, but I ain’t bad, neither.”

Oglethorpe frowned. “I was afraid you were gonna ask me that. Why else would you come up here?”

Scipio’s face heated. The restaurant owner only shrugged. “I don’t mind. If you know somebody, you better ask him. Only trouble is, I can’t think of anyone who’s short of help right now. What about you, Aurelius? You know the Terry a damn sight better than I do.”

“I ought to, boss, don’t you reckon?” But Aurelius’ smile didn’t stick on his face. “No, I don’t know nobody, neither. Wish to heaven I did.”

“Damn.” Scipio spoke quietly, but with great feeling.

“May not be so bad,” Oglethorpe said. “This isn’t like some businesses—slots do open up now and again. You pound the pavement—you’ll find something. You can use my name, too. Don’t reckon you’ll need to, though. You tell people you worked for Erasmus all these years, they’ll know you’re the straight goods.”

“Hope so. Do Jesus, I hope so.” Scipio drummed his fingers on the tabletop. “Hope somethin’ come up pretty damn quick. Don’t wanna end up in no Mitcheltown.”

As soon as he said the word, he wished he hadn’t. It wasn’t that he didn’t feel that fear. He did. But the shantytowns named after the Confederate president were a judgment on the Whigs. Calling them by that name—even thinking of them by that name—only helped the Freedom Party. Trouble was, everyone in the Confederate States called them Mitcheltowns, just as they were Blackfordburghs in the United States. Whoever chanced to be in power when the disaster struck got the blame.

“Good luck, Xerxes,” John Oglethorpe said. “Wish to God I could do something more for you.”

“Thank you kindly, suh,” Scipio answered. “I thanks you very kindly. An’ I wishes you could, too.”

As Hipolito Rodriguez had seen when he went up north to fight in Texas, spring could be a wonderful time of year, a time when the land renewed itself after the chill and gloom of winter. It wasn’t like that in Sonora. Here, it was the time when the rains petered out. The weather got warmer, yes, but it had never really turned cold. He’d seen snow in the trenches of Texas. The memory still appalled him.

He eyed the streams coming down from the mountains. If they dried up, his crops would dry up with them. They seemed all right. He worried anyhow. He’d never known a farmer who didn’t worry. Even the white men beside whom he’d fought had worried about what was happening to their farms while they went to war.

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He’d plowed. He’d planted his corn and beans and squashes. Now he and the rest of his family watched them grow—and weeded to make

sure they *would* grow. Work on a farm was never done.

Even so, he sent his children into Baroyeca for schooling as often as they could go. He wanted them to have a chance at a life that wasn't work, work, work every minute of every day. He didn't know how much of a chance they would have, but any chance was better than none.

Teachers taught in English, of course. Rodriguez worried about that only every now and again—would the children forget their heritage? More often, he thought it good that they learn as much of the dominant language of the CSA as they could.

Magdalena knew very little English. With his wife, Rodriguez stuck to Spanish. Because of that, his sons and daughters—especially his sons—thought he understood less English than he really did. They started using it among themselves to say things they didn't want him to follow.

"Silly old fool," Miguel called him one day, smiling as if it were a compliment.

Rodriguez boxed his son's ears. He smiled, too, though he doubted whether Miguel appreciated it. "Silly young fool," he said, also in English.

After that, his children were a lot more careful when they had something to say either to him or about him. He went on about his business, more amused than otherwise. Life taught all sorts of lessons, and only some of them came from school.

No matter how tired he was at the end of a day, he tried to go into Baroyeca one evening a week for the Freedom Party meeting. Magdalena had given up complaining about that when she saw he came back neither drunk nor smelling of a *puta* 's cheap perfume.

As far as Rodriguez was concerned, the scent of victory in the air was headier than liquor, sweeter than the dubious charms of Baroyeca's handful of women of easy virtue. (With the closing of the silver mines, a lot of the whores had moved to other towns, towns where they hoped to do better for themselves. The business collapse had had all sorts of unexpected, unfortunate consequences.) Robert Quinn did his best to fan that scent all over the countryside. Baroyeca still had no electricity.

Quinn couldn't call people together to listen to Jake Featherston's

weekly speeches on the wireless. He did the next best thing: he got the text of the speeches by telegram and translated them into Spanish himself. Even though it wasn't his native tongue, he spoke well, and plainly believed every word he said.

Those speeches gave Hipolito Rodriguez a window on a wider world, a world beyond Baroyeca. After one of them, he said, "*Señor* Quinn, you are a traveled man. Is it true what *Señor* Featherston says, that these politicians in Richmond are nothing but criminals?"

"If Jake Featherston says it, you can take it to the bank," Quinn answered—he would sometimes translate English idioms literally into Spanish. Considering the sad state of banking in the CSA these days, this one lost something in the translation. Even so, Rodriguez understood it. Quinn went on, "How can you trust the Party if you don't trust what Jake Featherston says? You can't. It's as simple as that. You *do* trust the Party, don't you?"

"Of course I do," Rodriguez answered quickly; he knew a dangerous question when he heard one. That didn't mean he wasn't telling the truth, though. "Without the Party, what would we be?"

"Bad off, that's what," Quinn replied. "But as long as we follow what Jake says, we'll be fine. He's the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

leader. He knows what's what. All we have to do is back him up. That's our job. *Comprende?* "

"Sí, señor," Rodriguez said as the other men at the meeting nodded.

"Bueno." Quinn grinned. "If Jake was wrong, he couldn't have come as far as he has, now could he?

He couldn't see what all was wrong with *los Estados Confederados* , either, eh? We've got a lot of work to do to win this election, and we'll have even more to do *after* we win it."

Carlos Ruiz asked a question that had also been in Rodriguez's mind: "After *Señor* Featherston wins the election, what will the Confederate States be like?"

"That's easy, Carlos," Robert Quinn answered. "That's real easy, to tell you the truth. Once Jake Featherston gets to be president, we will fix everything that's wrong with the Confederate States of America. Everything, by God. And once we fix everything that's wrong inside

the country, then we start thinking about getting even with *los Estados Unidos* , too. How does that sound?"

"I like it," Ruiz said simply. Rodriguez nodded. So did the rest of the local men at the Freedom Party headquarters. How could anyone not like such a program? The United States were a long way off, yes, but they deserved vengeance. The room was full of veterans. They'd all fought the USA during the war.

Someone behind Rodriguez said, "I don't want to go back into the Army, but I will if I have to." That drew more nods. To his own surprise, Rodriguez found himself contributing one. He'd had all the war he wanted, and then some. But if it was a matter of turning the tables on the USA, he knew he would redon the color the Confederates called butternut.

"You are all good, patriotic men. I knew you were," Quinn said in his deliberate Spanish. "But I have a question for you. I know your *patrón* is not such a big man as he was in your grandfather's day. How many of you, though, have a *patrón* who tries to keep you from voting for the Freedom Party?"

Two or three men raised their hands. Carlos Ruiz was one of them. He said, "Don Joaquin says the Freedom Party is nothing but a pack of *bandidos* , and must be stopped."

"Does he? Well, well, well." Robert Quinn grinned again, a grin that was all sharp teeth. "We have a saying in English: who will bell the cat? Does Don Joaquin think he can put the bell on the *Partido de la Libertad* ?"

"I don't know what you mean, *Señor* Quinn," Ruiz answered. "He thinks he can tell people how to vote.

Of that I am certain."

"And you do not think he ought to?" Quinn asked. Ruiz shook his head. The local Freedom Party leader said, "Perhaps he should change his mind."

"Don Joaquin is a stubborn man," Ruiz warned. Quinn showed his teeth again, but didn't say a word, not then.

As the meeting was breaking up, he asked Ruiz and Rodriguez and three or four other men to stay behind. "It would be a shame if anything happened to Don Joaquin's barn," he remarked. "It would be

an even bigger shame if anything happened to his house.”

“He has guards,” Carlos said. “They carry pistols.”

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Quinn opened a closet. Inside were neatly stacked Tredegar rifles. “Do you think the guards would listen to reason?” he asked. “If they decide not to listen to reason, do you think you could persuade them?”

The locals looked at one another. No, a *patrón* wasn’t what his grandfather had been. Still, the idea of attacking his grounds, of attacking his buildings, hadn’t crossed their minds up till now. “If we do this,”

Hipolito Rodriguez said slowly, “we have to win, and *Señor* Featherston has to win in November. If either of those things fails, we are dead men. You understand this, I hope.”

“Oh, yes.” Quinn nodded. “This is not the Army. This is not even the way it is in some of the other Confederate states. I am not going to give you orders. But if you want to teach this fellow a lesson, I can help you.” He pointed to the Tredegars. “The question is, how badly do you want to be free?”

A few nights later, Rodriguez slid quietly through the darkness, a military rifle in his hands. He hadn’t carried a Tredegar since 1917, but the weight felt familiar. So did the crouch in which he moved.

A dog barked. Somebody called, “Who’s there?” Silence, except for the barking. A moment later, a yelp punctuated it, along with the sound of a kick. “Stupid dog,” Don Joaquin’s sentry muttered.

Rodriguez waited. One of his friends was going forward.

The brief sound of a scuffle. No shouts—only bodies thrashing. A fresh voice called, “Come on.” The Freedom Party men hurried past a body.

There stood Don Joaquin’s house. The grandee had only two sons and a daughter, but his dwelling was four or five times the size of Hipolito Rodriguez’s. And the stable and barn not far away were even bigger. How much livestock did he have? How much did any one man need? A guard paced around the barn. He paced, yes, but he wasn’t looking

for trouble. It found him all the same. Silent as a serpent, a raider sneaked up behind him and clapped a hand over his mouth. He let out only a brief, horrified gurgle as the knife went home.

When the raider let the body sag to the ground, another man ran forward with gasoline. He splashed it on the wooden doors and the wall of the barn, then stepped back, lit a cigarette, and flipped it into the pool of gas that had run down from the doors. Yet another Freedom Party man gave the stables the same treatment.

Flames leaped and roared. Through their growing din, Rodriguez heard horses and mules and cattle and sheep neighing and braying and bellowing in terror. He also heard Don Joaquin's guards shouting in alarm. Their booted feet pounded on gravel and dirt as they ran to see what they could do.

He'd been waiting for that, waiting behind a boulder that gave him splendid cover. Almost of itself, the Tredegar leaped to his shoulder. He hadn't fired one in a long time, but he still knew what to do. The range was ridiculously short, and the flames lit up his targets for him. *If only things were so easy during the Great War,* he thought, and squeezed the trigger.

One of the targets fell. He tried to think of them like that, as he had during the war. He wasn't the only Freedom Party man shooting. Another guard toppled, and another, and another. The guards had fought against the USA, too. They dove for whatever hiding places they could find, and started shooting back.

The cracks of their pistols seemed feeble beside the Tredegars' roars. But, when one of their bullets pinged off the stone behind which Rodriguez crouched, he reminded himself any gun could kill.

"Away!" Carlos Ruiz called. No shouts of *Freedom!* here. Don Joaquin might suspect who'd done this, but what could he do, what would he dare do, without proof? He had to know the raiders could as easily
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have burned his house, with him and his family in it.

Rodriguez slipped back to another sheltering boulder, and then to one behind that. Then he was far enough from the blazing buildings to stop worrying about the flames giving him away. Before too long, people would be scouring the countryside, looking for him and his friends. He intended to be back in bed by then. Magdalena and his

children would say he'd been there all night. And Don Joaquin would know better than to tell people with guns of their own how to vote.

XVIII

Spring in Dakota was a riot of burgeoning green and of glorious birdsong. It was one of the most beautiful things Flora Blackford had ever seen. She would have given a great deal not to be seeing it now. If Hosea had won the election . . . But he hadn't. He'd got trounced. How badly he'd got trounced still ate at Flora.

The shock of President-elect Coolidge's death, less than a month before he was to take office, had jolted her no less than the rest of the American political world. After that, though, the pain returned. Her husband had to go down to Washington to hand over the reins of power to a man who hadn't even beaten him in November—one more humiliation piled on all the rest.

As soon as Herbert Hoover took the oath of office, the Blackfords had gone on what the papers called an extended holiday. The papers, for once, were polite. Hosea Blackford had gone back to his home state to lick his wounds, and taken his family with him.

Flora turned away from the farm window that showed Great Plains spring to such good advantage.

"When do you think we should go back East?" she asked.

Her husband set down his coffee cup. He managed a crooked smile. "Are the wide open spaces starting to get on your nerves?"

"Yes!" Flora's vehemence startled even her. Hosea had put it better than she'd managed to, even in her own mind. "I grew up in New York City, remember, on the Lower East Side. Even Philadelphia seems roomy."

"I'm so sorry for you." Hosea Blackford sighed. "And I'm sorry, but I really don't feel like going back yet. People here leave me alone. Nobody in Philadelphia or Washington leaves you alone. I think it's against the law there."

"But the country's in trouble. We need to do something," Flora said.

He sighed again. "I spent the last four years doing everything I knew how to do. None of it seemed to help much. I'm willing to let someone

else worry about it for a while—especially since the people have shown they aren't willing to let me worry about it any more."

He sounded tired. Worse, he sounded old. Flora had seen how cruelly he'd aged in four hard years in Powel House. He was, she reminded herself, past his seventieth birthday. When they'd married, his being **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

close to twice her age hadn't bothered her. It still didn't, not in most ways. But this loss of vigor, of resiliency, troubled her. She was sure that when she'd first come to know him, when she'd first fallen in love with him, he would have bounced back stronger and faster.

On the other hand, nobody who'd spent three years in the trenches during the Great War came out afterwards the same man he'd been when he went in. Hosea had spent four years in the presidential trenches, and he'd lost the war. She didn't suppose expecting him to stay unchanged was fair.

"When we do go back," she said, "I wonder if I ought to take a flat in the Fourteenth Ward."

"Aha!" her husband said, and smiled. "Something makes me think you want to go back to Congress."

"I'm thinking about it," Flora said. "I don't like seeing my old district in the hands of a Democrat. I don't like seeing a lot of our districts in the hands of Democrats."

"Neither do I." Hosea Blackford's smile was sour. "I don't think any of our candidates will ask me to hit the campaign trail for them next year, though. They'd probably want me on the stump for their opponents instead."

"It's not that bad," Flora insisted.

"No—odds are it's worse," Hosea answered. "I can't think of anything less welcome in a political party than a president who's just lost an election. After a while, I'll get to be an elder statesman, but right now I'm nothing but a nuisance." With a mournful shake of the head, he added, "By the the time I get to be an elder statesman, I'll probably be so elder, I'm dead."

"God forbid!" Flora exclaimed. No one in her family, no one among the immigrant Jews of the Lower East Side, spoke of death straight on

like that. Words had power; to speak of something was to help bring it into being. The rational part of her mind knew that was nonsense, but the rational part of her mind went only so deep. Down underneath it, superstition still flourished.

“It’s true,” her husband said. “We both know it’s true, even if you don’t want to talk about it. I don’t need to take out pencil and paper to know how old I am. I get reminded whenever I look in the mirror.

I’d like to stay around long enough to see Joshua grow up, but how likely is that? I’ve already beaten the odds by lasting as long as I have.”

“That’s nothing but—” Flora began.

“The truth,” Hosea finished for her. “You know it as well as I do, too. And if you don’t, ask the next insurance salesman you happen to run into. He’ll tell you what the actuarial tables say.”

Flora wanted to tell him that was nonsense. She couldn’t, and she knew it. The best she could do was change the subject: “Let’s talk about something else.”

“Fine.” Now her husband’s grin showed real amusement. “Do you think this new professional football federation’s going to last?”

That wasn’t what she’d had in mind. “I don’t care,” she said tartly. “What I think is, it’s disgraceful to pay men so much to run around with a football when so many people can’t find work at all. Talk about a waste of money!”

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“It’s an amusement, the same as an orchestra is an amusement,” her husband said. “Nothing wrong with them. We need them. Especially in hard times, we need them.”

“An orchestra is worthwhile,” Flora said. “A football game?” She shook her head.

“A lot more people go to watch the Philadelphia Barrels than to the Philadelphia Symphony,” Hosea said.

Since that was true, Flora could only stick out her chin and say, “Even

so."

"Amusement is where you find it," Hosea said. "I'm not going to be elitist and look down my nose at anything."

To a good Socialist, *elitist* was a dirty word. Flora tried to turn it back on her husband: "When the top football players make more than the president of the United States—and some of them do—they're the elitists."

"They asked one of them about that two or three years ago. Did you happen to see what he said?"

Hosea Blackford asked. Flora shook her head. She paid as little attention to sports as she could. One of her husband's eyebrows rose. "What he told the reporter was, 'I had a better year than he did.' All things considered, how could anyone tell Mr. Gehrig he was wrong?"

"A *choleriyeh* on Mr. Gehrig!" Flora said furiously. "Nothing that happened was your fault."

That eyebrow lifted again. "The Party told that to the voters. We told them and told them and told them.

And Herbert Hoover is president of the United States today, and here I am in Dakota. If you're there, it's your fault."

"It isn't fair," Flora said.

Hosea laughed out loud, which only made her angrier. "Joshua might try to use an argument like that, but you shouldn't," he said. "It's the way politics works. 'What have you done for me lately?' is the question voters always ask—and maybe it's the question they *should* always ask. Teddy Roosevelt won the Great War. They didn't give him a third term, though, because of all the strikes and unrest that came afterwards. That's how Upton got to be president—and how I got to be vice president, if you remember."

"I'm not likely to forget," she answered. "I was so proud of you. And I'm still proud of you, and I still think you ought to be president, not that . . . that *lump* of a Hoover."

"As a matter of fact, I agree with you. I think you're sweet, too," he added. "Unfortunately, fifty-seven percent of the voters in the United States had a different opinion, and theirs counts for more than ours."

He sighed. “It was even worse in the Electoral College, of course.”

“Not right,” Flora muttered.

“What’s not right, Mama?” That was Joshua, still in his flannel pajamas. He was yawning. From somewhere on one side of the family or the other, he’d found a taste for sleeping late. On the Lower East Side—or, for that matter, on a Dakota farm—he would have had to get up early whether he wanted to or not. As the son of a man first vice president and then president, he could usually sleep as late as he wanted to. *Privilege is everywhere,* Flora thought.

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But she had to answer him: “It’s not right that your father lost the election.”

“Oh.” Joshua tried to frown, but a yawn ruined it. “Why not? The other guys got more votes, didn’t they?”

Hosea laughed. “That’s it in a nutshell, Josh. The other guys got more votes.”

Josh. Flora didn’t like the one-syllable abridgement of a perfectly good name. Joshua Blackford was rolling, majestic. Josh Blackford sounded like someone who wore overalls and a straw hat. *And if that’s elitist, too bad,* she thought. Hosea didn’t see the problem.

“The point is, the other guys”—she used her son’s phrase as if it had quotation marks around it—“shouldn’t have got more votes.”

Joshua muttered something under his breath. Flora thought she heard, “Stinking Japs.” Without a doubt, the Japanese bombing of Los Angeles had been the last straw—or rather, the last nail in the coffin. If Joshua wanted to think his father would have won without that, he could. Flora wanted to think the very same thing. The only problem was, she knew better. Looking at the last nail in the coffin meant ignoring all the others, and there were a lot of them.

“You’ll win again in four years, though, won’t you, Father?” Joshua had a boy’s boundless confidence in his father. He also had a boy’s strange notions about the way time worked.

Neither of his parents said anything. Hosea Blackford would be too

old to nominate in 1936, even if he'd never lost an election in his life. Since he'd lost the way he had, the Socialists would be trying their best to forget he'd ever existed.

"Won't you?" Joshua asked again.

"I like to think I would win against Mr. Hoover," Hosea said slowly. "He doesn't seem to me as if he's moving things in the right direction. But I don't know if I would want to run again, and I don't know if the Socialist Party would nominate me if I did. We would have to see how things look in 1936 before we could know."

Flora added, "The next election for president is almost four years from now. That's a long time."

"Especially in politics," her husband added.

Joshua nodded. He'd just turned seven; to him, four years were a very long time indeed. He said, "*I* think you still ought to be president."

"Thank you, son," Hosea Blackford said.

"I think the very same thing," Flora said, and ruffled Joshua's hair. He was dark like her, but otherwise looked more like his father, with a long face, prominent cheekbones, and a straight, pointed nose. He also had more of his father's temperament: he was steadier than Flora, and not given to sudden enthusiasms that took control of him for days or weeks at a time.

"Who do the Socialists have that could be any better than you, Dad?" he asked. He couldn't imagine anyone better. Flora ruffled his hair again. Neither could she. But she knew the practical politicians in the
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Socialist Party would have a different opinion—and Hosea really would be too old to run again in 1936.

He probably would have been too old to run in 1932 if he hadn't been the incumbent.

"One way or another, everything will work out fine," she said. Joshua believed her. He was still only a little boy.

The *Remembrance* steamed west across the Pacific, accompanied by three destroyers, a light cruiser, a heavy cruiser, and two battleships.

Sam Carsten wished one of the battlewagons would have been the *Dakota* , but no such luck. His old ship was off doing something else; he had no idea what.

Repairs in Seattle had been as quick as the Navy yard there could make them. He did his best not to worry about that. Back during the Great War, the *Dakota* had been hastily repaired after battle damage—and her steering had never been reliable again. Her steering probably still wasn't reliable. So far as Sam knew, the Japanese torpedo hadn't damaged the *Remembrance* 's steering—but what *had* it damaged that hasty repairs might not discover? He hoped he—and the ship—wouldn't find out the hard way.

Commander van der Waal wasn't aboard. Broken ankles healed at their own pace; you couldn't hurry them. A new damage-control officer, a lieutenant commander named Hiram Pottinger, was nominally in charge of antitorpedo work. But Pottinger's previous service had been in cruisers. Sam knew the *Remembrance* backwards and forwards and inside out—literally inside out, after the torpedo hit off the Canadian coast. Most of the burden fell on his shoulders.

He'd led the sailors in the damage-control parties when things looked black. That had earned him respect he could have got no other way. It had also earned him thin new gold stripes on his cuffs; he'd been promoted to lieutenant, junior grade, for what he'd done. Glad as he was of the promotion, he could have done without some of the respect. He feared he would end up trapped in an assignment he'd never wanted.

Martin van der Waal had always insisted it was an important assignment. Even had Sam been inclined to argue, the experience of getting torpedoed would have changed his mind. But he agreed with his injured superior. Important, antitorpedo work definitely was. That still didn't mean he cared to make a career of it.

He spent as much time as he could on deck. That meant more tinfoil tubes of zinc-oxide ointment, but he did it anyhow. Watching aeroplanes take off and land never failed to fascinate him. He got plenty of chances to watch, for the *Remembrance* flew a continuous air patrol. The Japanese Navy had ships out here, too, and who found whom first would have a lot to do with how any fight turned out. The way the arrester hook caught the cables stretched across the deck and brought a landing aeroplane to an abrupt halt still fascinated him.

One perfect morning, he was taking the air on the flight deck after

breakfast when alarms began to sound. Klaxons hooting in his ears, he ran for his battle station, wishing it weren't deep in the bowels of the aeroplane carrier. He wanted to be able to see what was going on. As usual, the Navy cared not at all for what he wanted.

"What's the word, sir?" he panted as he came up to Lieutenant Commander Pottinger.

"Nothing good," his superior answered. "One of our machines spotted a whole flight of aeroplanes with **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

meatballs on their wings heading this way."

"There's no Jap base within a couple of thousand miles of where we're at," Sam said. The light went on in his head before Pottinger needed to enlighten him: "We've found a Japanese aeroplane carrier or two."

The other damage-control officer shook his head. "Not quite. Their aeroplanes have found us, but we haven't found them yet."

"Heading back along their bearing would be a pretty good bet," Carsten said.

Lieutenant Commander Pottinger nodded. He was a tall, lean man with a weathered face, hollow cheeks, a long, narrow jaw, and a pointed nose. He looked like a New Englander, but had a Midwestern accent. "I expect you're right," he said. "This is liable to be a damn funny kind of naval battle, you know?

We're not even in sight of the enemy's fleet, but our aeroplanes are going to slug it out with his."

As if to underline his words, one machine after another roared into the sky, the noise of the straining engines loud even several decks below the one from which the aeroplanes were taking off. "Long-range artillery, that's what they've turned into," Sam said. "They can hit when our battleships can't."

Pottinger nodded again. "That's right. Battleships are probably obsolete, though plenty of men will try and run you out of the Navy if you say so out loud." He made a disdainful noise. "Plenty of men likely tried to run people out of the Navy if they spoke up for steam engines and ironclads, too."

"I wouldn't be surprised." Sam had known more than a few officers

who never stopped pining for the good old days.

Something burst in the water not far from the *Remembrance* . He felt the carrier heel into the sharpest turn she could make, and then, a moment later, into another one in the opposite direction. More bombs burst around her.

Hiram Pottinger might have been talking things over back on shore, for all the excitement he showed.

“Zigzags,” he said approvingly. “That’s what you do against submersibles, and that’s what you do against aeroplanes, too.”

“Well, yes, sir,” Carsten said. “That’s what you do, and then you hope like hell it works. You get hit by a bomb, that could put a little crimp in your morning.” He did his best to imitate his superior’s nonchalance.

One-pounders and other antiaircraft guns on the deck started banging away at the attacking aeroplanes.

So did the five-inch guns in the sponsons under the flight deck. The noise was terrific. They could reach a lot farther than the smaller weapons, but couldn’t fire nearly so fast.

“I wonder what’s going on up there,” Sam said. “I wonder how nasty it is.”

“It’s no walk in the park,” Pottinger said.

“I didn’t figure it was, sir,” Sam said, a little reproachfully. He’d seen plenty of nasty action—it didn’t come much nastier than what he’d been through in the Battle of the Three Navies. A moment later, he realized Pottinger, if he’d ever been in a battle before, had probably gone through it down here.

Maybe this was harder. Carsten wouldn’t have believed it beforehand, but it might have been true.

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When he was fighting a gun, he had some idea, even if only a small one, of what was going on. Here . . .

Here it might have been happening in a distant room. The only

difference was, what happened in that distant room might kill him.

Later, he wished he hadn't had that thought at that moment. The *Remembrance* shuddered when a bomb burst on her flight deck. Lieutenant Commander Pottinger said, "Oh, shit," which summed up Sam's feelings perfectly. Then Pottinger added, "Well, time for us to go to work."

"Yes, sir," Carsten agreed.

That was how he got up to the flight deck in the midst of combat. He wanted to be there, but not under those circumstances. The flight crew were already doing what they had to do: manhandling steel plates across the hole the bomb had torn in the deck and doing everything they could to flatten out the torn lips of steel.

"Well done," Pottinger shouted. "We have to be able to land aeroplanes and get them in the air again."

"Yes, sir," Sam said again. His boss might be new to carrier duty, but he'd just proved he understood the essence of it. Sam went on, "They could have done a lot worse if they'd fused the bomb differently."

"What do you mean?" Lieutenant Commander Pottinger asked.

"If they'd given it an armor-piercing tip and a delayed fuse, it would have gone through before it blew up," Sam answered. "Then we'd really be in the soup."

"Urk," Pottinger said, which again matched Sam's thought.

Sam said, "They're like us: they're still learning what all they can do with aeroplanes and carriers, too."

An aeroplane with the red Rising Sun of Japan painted on wings and fuselage roared overhead, machine guns in the wings blazing. The engine was even louder than the guns; the fighter couldn't have been more than fifty feet above the deck. Bullets struck sparks from the new steel plates. Others smacked flesh with wet thuds. Men shrieked or crumpled silently. Streams of tracers from the *Remembrance* 's antiaircraft guns converged on the Japanese machine. For a dreadful moment, Sam thought it would get away in spite of all the gunfire. But then flames and smoke licked back from the engine cowling toward the cockpit. The fighter slammed into the sea.

"Scratch one fucker!" Sam shouted exultantly.

A sailor next to him was down and groaning, clutching his leg. Red spread over his trousers. “It hurts!”

he groaned. “It hurts bad!”

“George!” Sam’s exultation turned to dismay in the space of a heartbeat. He’d known George Moerlein ever since first coming aboard the *Remembrance* . Seeing him down with a nasty wound made Sam’s stomach turn over. By the way the petty officer was bleeding, he needed help right away. Sam tore off his belt and wrapped it around Moerlein’s thigh above the bullet wound, tight as he could. “Give me a hand over here!” he yelled.

“Let’s get him down to sick bay, sir,” a sailor said. He helped Carsten haul George Moerlein up.

Moerlein moaned and then, mercifully, passed out. As they hauled the petty officer towards a passageway, another Japanese fighter strafed the *Remembrance* . Bullets cracked past Sam and clattered **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

off the flight deck. He breathed a sigh of relief when he had steel between him and the deadly chaos overhead.

As soon as he saw a sailor, though, he said, “Here, take over for me. Get this man below. I’ve got duty topside.” He hurried back up to put his life on the line again, though he did his best not to think of it like that.

Off to starboard, one of the American destroyers was on fire from bow to stern and sinking fast. Boats and men in life jackets bobbed around her. Even as Sam watched, the destroyer rolled over and went to the bottom. In these waters, the bottom was a long, long way down. Sam shivered at how far down it was.

A bomb burst in the sea not far from the *Remembrance* , drenching Carsten and most of the others on deck. Even so, a sailor with wigwag signals guided an aeroplane to a landing. Maintenance men fueled it.

Its prop started spinning again. Down the flight deck it rolled, bumping over the hasty repairs, and up into the air again.

“Didn’t think we could do that,” Sam said to Lieutenant Commander Pottinger.

“He must have been flying on fumes, or he never would have tried coming in,” Pottinger agreed. “Lucky the Japs have let up a little.”

“I wonder what we’re doing to them,” Sam said. “Worse than this, I hope. We’d better be, by God.”

“Yes, we’d better be. But how can we know?” Pottinger said. “They’re over the horizon. The only ones who have any real idea how the fight’s going are our pilots.”

“No, sir—not even them,” Sam said. His superior raised an eyebrow. He explained: “They don’t know what the Jap pilots are doing to us, just like the Japs can’t be sure what we’re doing to them. Maybe the fellows in the wireless shacks—ours and theirs—have the big picture. Maybe nobody does. Wouldn’t that be a hell of a thing?”

Lieutenant Commander Pottinger laughed. “We won’t know who won till day after tomorrow, when we read it in the newspapers.”

“Yeah.” It wasn’t exactly funny, but Carsten laughed, too. “As long as we live through it, we’ve come out all right.” A Japanese aeroplane and an American machine both splashed into the Pacific within a quarter of a mile of the *Remembrance* . Sam hoped *somebody* would live through the fight.

The *Kansas City Star* was the daily published closest to Leavenworth that was actually worth reading.

Irving Morrell had discovered that during his last stay in Kansas. Now, of course, the wireless supplemented the paper. Back then, wireless had only started passing from Morse code to voice. Even now, the newspaper gave him a far more detailed picture than the quick reports on the wireless could.

“I don’t think anybody knows who won this stupid battle, Agnes,” he said two days after reports about the sea fight north of the Sandwich Islands started coming in. “I really don’t. If you look at our claims, we sank the whole Jap fleet and didn’t take a scratch. If you look at theirs, they did it to us.”

His wife shrugged and poured him another cup of coffee. “My bet is, both sides are lying as hard as they **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

can.”

“My bet is, you’re right,” Morrell answered. “I suppose we’ll sort it out in time for Mildred’s children to study about it in school.”

Hearing her name made his daughter look up from her scrambled eggs. “Study what in school?” she asked.

“A big naval battle in the Pacific,” her father said.

She rolled her eyes. “For heaven’s sake, who cares?”

Agnes laughed. “If everybody felt that way, we wouldn’t have to fight any more wars. That wouldn’t be so bad, would it?”

“That would be wonderful,” Morrell said with the deep conviction of a man who’d seen—who’d taken part in—the worst man could do to his fellow man. He gulped the scalding coffee. “That would be wonderful, but it’s not going to happen any time soon, no matter how much I wish it would. Speaking of which, I’m off to the Barrel Works.”

“All right, dear.” Agnes got up, too, and came over to give him a kiss. “I’ll see you when you get back.

Some more things should be out of boxes by then.”

“Good.” Morrell was convinced he could no more escape from boxes than a bug could get out of a spiderweb. He wondered how many times he’d moved in the course of his military career. He didn’t try to count them all up. That way lay madness.

Barbed wire enclosed a field in which sat the experimental barrel he’d been working with ten years earlier. The machine hadn’t been in the field all those years; it would have been a rusted, useless hulk if it had. Even though the Socialists had stopped work on new barrels for so long, the Army had carefully greased this one and stored it in a garage, in case it was ever wanted again. Morrell gave the General Staff—not his favorite outfit—reluctant credit for that. He didn’t know what he would have done if he’d had to start altogether from scratch.

Sentries at the gate saluted. “Good morning, Colonel,” they chorused.

“Morning, boys.” Morrell pointed into the field. “Who’s working on the barrel?”

“Sergeant Pound, sir,” one of the sentries answered.

“I might have known.” Morrell opened the gate and went inside. One

of the sentries closed it after him.

As he hurried toward the barrel, he called, “You’re up early today, Sergeant.”

“Oh, hello, sir.” Sergeant Michael Pound was a broad-shouldered, muscular man with close-cropped brown hair and a neat mustache showing the first silver threads. “The carburetor still isn’t what it ought to be, you know.”

“I’m not surprised, seeing how long the whole vehicle’s been sitting there doing nothing,” Morrell answered. “How are you going to get it clean?”

Sergeant Pound held up a coffee can. “There’s this new solvent called carbon tetrachloride. It gets **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

grease off of anything,” he said enthusiastically. He was wild for any new invention; that was what had drawn him into barrels in the first place. “It’s wonderful stuff—nonflammable, a really excellent cleaner.

Only one drawback.” He plopped the carburetor into the can.

“What’s that?” Morrell asked, as he was surely supposed to.

“If you use it indoors, it’s liable to asphyxiate you,” Pound replied. “Some people are fools, of course.

Congressmen get excited about that sort of thing. They want to ban the stuff. If you ask me, anyone who’s dumb enough not to read the label deserves whatever happens to him.” He had no patience with incompetent people, no doubt because he was so all-around competent himself.

Morrell slapped him on the back. “It’s damn good to see you again, Sergeant, to hell with me if it’s not.”

“Thank you very much, sir,” Michael Pound replied. “I felt I was wasting my time these past few years in the artillery. Of course, the Army would have thrown me out on my ear if I’d tried to stay in barrels, but the men in charge of things aren’t exactly the smartest ones we’ve got, are they?”

“I believe I’ll plead the Fifth on that one,” Morrell said, laughing. “Do you think you could do a better job of it?”

“Sir, I’m sure I could.” Pound wasn’t joking. Because he did so many things well, he thought he could do anything. Sometimes he turned out to be right. Sometimes he was disastrously wrong. Occasional disasters did nothing to damage his self-confidence.

“How *did* you put up with going back to the artillery after the Barrel Works closed down?” Morrell asked.

“Well, for one thing, sir, like I said, if I hadn’t they would have found something else even worse for me to do—or they would have thrown me out altogether, and that wouldn’t have been good, not when the collapse came,” Pound said. “And besides, I always thought the politicians would eventually come to their senses. I just never imagined they’d take so long.”

“Who did?” Morrell said. He’d asked for Sergeant Pound by name when he came back to Leavenworth. The man was worth his weight in gold—which, considering his massive frame, was no mean statement. If he occasionally suffered delusions of omnipotence . . . well, nobody was perfect.

“Knaves. Fools and knaves,” he said now: one of his favorite phrases.

“You’d better be careful,” Morrell warned him. “You’re starting to sound like you belong in the Freedom Party.”

“Oh, no, sir. I didn’t say they were a pack of traitors who need to be lined up against a wall and shot.”

Pound had no trouble imitating the Freedom Party’s impassioned rhetoric. He added, “Besides, that Featherston is a dangerous lunatic. If he gets elected this fall, he’s liable to show just how dangerous he is.”

“I wish I could tell you you were wrong,” Morrell said.

“He’s liable to prove as troublesome to us as those *Action Française* people are to the Kaiser,” Pound said. “What can you do about a government that hates you if a majority voted it into office?”

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“Get ready to fight,” Morrell answered. “That’s what we’re doing here.”

“How soon before we have a real barrel with specifications based on the experimental model here?”

Sergeant Pound asked, taking the carburetor out of the carbon tetrachloride and setting it down on a rag.

“They’re saying six or eight months in Pontiac,” Morrell replied. “That’s what they’re saying, but I’ll believe it when I see it. Bet on a year, maybe longer.”

“Disgraceful,” Pound said. “So much time not even frittered away—*thrown* away, for heaven’s sake.”

He rubbed the carburetor with the rag, then passed it to Morrell. “This thing is better, though. I think it’s really clean now, clean enough to work the way it’s supposed to.”

“I hope you’re right,” Morrell said. “Put it back in the engine, Sergeant. We’ll gas up the beast and see if it runs.”

“Right, sir.” Pound opened the louvers on the engine compartment—one improvement over Great War barrels the experimental model did boast was a separate engine compartment, which drastically reduced noise and noxious fumes for the crew. As Pound turned a wrench, he went on, “You know, we really ought to have a diesel engine in here, not one fueled by gasoline. A fire starts, gasoline goes up like a bomb. Diesel fuel just burns quietly. The men in the fighting compartment have a much better chance to get away.”

“That’s a good idea,” Morrell said. Pound was full of ideas, good, bad, and indifferent. “Model after next, we ought to think about incorporating it.” He pulled a notebook from his breast pocket and scribbled a few lines so the idea wouldn’t be lost.

“Why waste time, sir?” Sergeant Pound asked. “Why not put it right into the model they’re working on now? That way, we’d have it.”

“We’d have it—eventually,” Morrell answered. “How many plans would they have to change to put a new engine in that compartment? How many dies and stamps and castings would they have to revise? I don’t know the exact number, but it’s bound to be a big one.”

“We ought to do this right,” Pound insisted.

“We will—eventually.” Morrell used that word again. “Right now, that we’re doing it at all is miracle enough, if you ask me. Just remember, I

was in Kamloops a few weeks ago, and you were an artilleryman. Let's get something finished, and then we can set about improving it."

"Everything ought to be right the first time," Pound muttered.

"Not everything is. That's why they put erasers on pencils," Morrell said. "Or are you one of those people who fill out crossword puzzles in ink?" He was fond of those puzzles himself. Their popularity had exploded since the collapse. They gave people something interesting to do, and you could buy a book of them for a dime.

Michael Pound looked puzzled. "Of course, sir. Doesn't everybody?" He sounded altogether innocent.

Was that sarcasm, or did he really believe people were so generally capable? Morrell suspected he did.

Like most men, he judged others by his own standards, and those standards were pretty high. After bending to get a better look at the connection he was making, he said, "I've got a question for you, sir."

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“Go ahead,” Morrell told him.

“Where do you suppose we could be if we hadn’t spent all this time lying fallow, and how big a price will we pay because we did?”

“We’d be a lot further along than we are now, and we’ll have to find out. There. Aren’t I profound?”

“That’s hardly the word I’d use, sir,” Michael Pound replied.

He didn’t say what word he *would* use, which might have been just as well. Morrell said, “Shall we see if this miserable thing actually runs now?”

“It had better,” Pound said.

He was properly a gunner by trade, but he could drive. He slid down through the turret—an innovation when the experimental model was new, but a commonplace in barrel design nowadays—and into the driver’s seat at the left front of the vehicle, next to the bow machine gun. When he stabbed the starter button, the engine wasted no time roaring to life.

“You see, sir?” he said in his best *I-told-you-so* tones.

“I see,” Morrell answered. “All right, shut it down for now. We’re not ready to go anywhere, not with a two-man crew.”

“We could if we were at war,” Pound said.

“We could if we were but we aren’t so we won’t.” Morrell had to listen to himself to make sure that came out right. “Actually, we *are* at war, but barrels won’t do much against the Japs. Now we have to revive some more of the old machines, to have opponents to practice against.” He wished real barrels, modern barrels, would be so easy to face.

These days, nobody around Baroyeca was likely to tell anybody how to vote. Hipolito Rodriguez hadn’t been sure things would work out that way, but they had. The unfortunate accidents that happened to Don Joaquin’s barn and stable—to say nothing of the even more unfortunate accidents that happened to Don Joaquin’s guards—had

quickly persuaded the prominent men in this part of Sonora not to push too hard against the Freedom Party.

“You understand what it is,” Robert Quinn said at a Freedom Party meeting a couple of weeks after those unfortunate things happened. “It has been a very long time since anyone told a *patrón* , ‘No, *señor,* you may not do this.’ They needed a lesson. Now they have had one. I do not think they will need any more.”

“What could we have done if they had come after us with everything they have?” Rodriguez asked.

Quinn looked steadily back at him. “It is like this. The rich men around Baroyeca have so much. The Freedom Party has *so* much.” He held his hands first close together, then wide apart. “If you put them in a fight, who do you think is going to win?”

“But suppose they talked to the governor,” Rodriguez said stubbornly. “Suppose they said, ‘Call out the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

state militia. We have to put down these Freedom Party men with guns.’ ”

“*Muy bien*—suppose they did that.” The Freedom Party organizer sounded agreeable. “Suppose they did exactly that. How many *soldados* in this state, *Señor* Rodriguez, do you suppose are Freedom Party men?”

“Ahh,” Rodriguez said, and his voice was just one in a small, delighted chorus of oohs and ahhs that filled Freedom Party headquarters. He went on, “You mean they cannot trust their own soldiers?”

“Did I say that?” Quinn shook his head. “I did not say that. Would I say anything that would go against the state government? Of course not.”

“Of course not,” Carlos Ruiz agreed in sly tones. “We don’t want to go against the state government.

We want to take it over.”

“Ahh,” Hipolito Rodriguez said again. He found winning a national election easier to imagine than toppling the state government. Richmond was far away, and wouldn’t matter so immediately. A Freedom Party administration in Hermosillo would send shock waves

rippling through Sonora.

Of course, a Freedom Party defeat in November would send shock waves of a different sort rippling through the state. Quinn said, “Remember, we have to win, or the lesson Don Joaquin learned goes for nothing.”

He didn’t say who had taught Carlos Ruiz’s *patrón* that lesson. He certainly didn’t say the men who’d taught that lesson had got their rifles and ammunition from him. Some things were better unadmitted.

Quietly Hipolito Rodriguez said, “That lesson had better not go for nothing, whether we win or lose. If they push us too hard, we can still fight.”

“You are a brave man, a bold man,” Quinn said. “You are the sort of man we want, the sort of man we need, in the Freedom Party.”

Rodriguez shrugged. “If a *patrón* wants to stay a Radical Liberal, that is all right with me. I used to be a Radical Liberal myself. I changed my mind. They have no business telling me I may not change my mind.

I would never try to tell them any such thing.”

“Yes. You have reason. That is how it should be,” Ruiz said. Several other men nodded.

But Robert Quinn said, “Once we win, well, other parties will just have to get used to that. The difference between the Freedom Party and the other parties in the Confederate States is that we have reason and they do not. If they are wrong, why should we let them pretend they are right?”

“They are political parties, too,” Ruiz said. “One of these days, they will win an election.”

“I do not think so,” Quinn said. “I do not think one of them will win an election for a very, very long time once we take over.”

“What do you mean?” Ruiz asked. “Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. That is how politics works.”

“Not always,” Rodriguez said. “How many times in a row have Whigs been presidents of the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Confederate States? Every single time, that's how many. If the Freedom Party is good enough to win, it will win just as many elections. That's what you meant, isn't it, *Señor* Quinn?"

"Sure it is, *Señor* Rodriguez," Quinn said easily, with a small laugh. "That is exactly what I meant."

Rodriguez wondered why he laughed. Because he hadn't meant exactly that? If he hadn't, what had he meant? What could he have meant? Rodriguez shrugged. Whatever it was, he didn't think he needed to worry about it very much.

Someone asked, "*Señor* Quinn, how do we make certain the Freedom Party wins in Sonora this November?"

"That is a good question. That is a very good question." Now Robert Quinn sounded not only serious but altogether sincere. "We ourselves here can only make sure we win in Baroyeca." He waited for nods to show everyone understood that, then went on, "We have to do a few things. We have to let people know what the Party will do for them once it wins. We have to let them know what it will do for the country once it wins. We have to show them the other parties cannot do the things they promise, and that most of what they promise is not good anyway. And we have to do everything we can to keep them from having the chance to tell their lies."

Hipolito Rodriguez understood all of that but the last. "What do you mean, *Señor* Quinn?" he asked.

"How do we keep them from doing that?"

"However we have to," the Freedom Party man said bluntly. "However we need to. Don Joaquin had a sad accident, *verdad* ?" Again, he waited for nods. Again, he got them. Everybody here knew what kind of accident Don Joaquin had had. Nobody much felt like talking about details—better safe than sorry.

Quinn continued, "When they come here to make speeches and stir up their followers, we do not let them. We shout, we heckle, we make enough of a disturbance to keep them from talking to an audience.

If they cannot talk, they cannot get their message out, eh?"

"Sí, señor." Several men said it together. Rodriguez wasn't one of them, but he nodded. If the Freedom Party got to talk and no one else did, that was surely a large advantage. But . . .

He held up his hand. Quinn pointed his way. “*Señor*, how do we keep them from talking on the wireless?” he inquired.

“Ah, *Señor* Rodriguez, you do ask interesting questions.” As always, Quinn was scrupulously polite. He treated the men who’d joined the Freedom Party as if they were dons. Most white men thought of Sonorans and Chihuahuans as nothing but greasers. If Quinn did, he kept it to himself. That was another reason his following grew and grew. He continued, “We cannot stop that, not altogether—not yet. But it does not matter so much here in Sonora, because fewer places here have electricity than is true in most of the Confederate States.”

Carlos Ruiz clicked his tongue between his teeth. “That is not fair. That is not right.”

“I agree with you, *Señor* Ruiz,” Quinn said. “It is one of the things the Freedom Party will fix once we have power. But, whether we like it or not, it is true, and we have to take it into account.” He paused and looked around the room. “Are there any more questions? No? All right, then. This meeting is adjourned.”

Rodriguez was the first one to start out of the Freedom Party headquarters. From across the street, a **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

shot rang out. Whoever held that gun didn’t really know what to do with it. The bullet cracked past Rodriguez’s head and thudded into the planking of the building behind him. Automatic reflex made him throw himself flat. Another bullet sang through the air where he’d stood a moment before. Glass shattered. Chunks rained down on him.

He rolled back into the building. “Blow out the lamps!” he cried. The headquarters plunged into darkness.

“Here.” Someone pressed a Tredegar into his hands. “If they want to play such games . . .”

He crawled up to the shot-out window. One of the men who’d fired at him was running across the street, straight toward the headquarters, a lighted kerosene lantern in hand. That made the fellow an even easier target than he would have been otherwise. He wanted to fight fire with fire, did he? The rifle leaped to Rodriguez’s shoulder. He squeezed the trigger. The man with the lantern shrieked, whirled, and crumpled, clutching his belly. The lantern fell on his chest. Burning kerosene poured out and made him into a torch.

Never shoot twice in a row from the same place unless the cover is very good—one more lesson Rodriguez had absorbed during the Great War. Staying low, he wriggled over to the other side of the window. Another Tredegar banged, this one at the back of Party headquarters. No cry of anguish from outside, but a triumphant yell from inside the building: Robert Quinn shouting, in English, "Take that, you fucking son of a bitch!" For good measure, he added, *"Chinga tu madre!"*

Bang! Bang! Bang! Somebody emptied a pistol into the headquarters as fast as he could shoot. Behind Rodriguez, a man yowled. At least one of those bullets had struck home. Rodriguez fired at the muzzle flashes. He worked the bolt, fired again, and then rolled away from that spot. He didn't know whether he'd hit the enemy, but no more shooting came from that direction, so he hoped he had.

Running feet in the street, these from the direction of the *alcalde's* house. A sharp cry of *"Vámonos!"*

came from behind Freedom Party headquarters. Rodriguez heard more running feet, these running away.

Quinn's Tredegar barked again. The Freedom Party leader whooped again, the high, shrill cry English-speaking Confederates called the Rebel yell.

"Madre de Dios." An officer of the *guardia civil* —a policeman, in other words—stared at the burning corpse in the middle of the street. He crossed himself, not bothering to take the heavy pistol from his hand first. Then, pulling himself together, he strode up to Freedom Party headquarters. In a loud voice, he demanded, "What happened here?"

"I will handle this," Robert Quinn declared. To the policeman, he said, "They tried to murder us. They tried to burn down our building and roast us inside of it. They wounded one of our men—I do not know how badly poor Carlos is hurt. All we did was defend ourselves."

"Some defense," the officer muttered. "If you'd done any more defending, nothing would be left of Baroyeca. Come out here now, with your hands up, all of you." He sounded nervous, as well he might have. If the Freedom Party men felt like fighting instead of obeying, the *alcalde* —the mayor—probably didn't have enough force to make them follow orders.

But Quinn said, "We are law-abiding citizens. The Freedom Party is the party of law and order. And I told you, we have a wounded man. We will come out." In a low voice, he added, "Hip, stay behind and

cover us in case this *pendejo* is not to be trusted."

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"Sí, señor," Rodriguez whispered. The other Freedom Party men strode past him and out into the street. Carlos Ruiz walked unsteadily, his right hand pressed tight to his left shoulder.

A couple of more men from the *guardia civil* came up. They spoke with Quinn and the rest of the Freedom Party men in low voices, then led them away. Nobody made any move to shoot anyone, not now. Hipolito Rodriguez set down his Tredegar. As quietly as he could, he crawled to the back door and left. No one waited for him there—no one living, anyhow. Two bodies lay in the alley behind the headquarters. Magdalena wouldn't be happy with him. He was happy just to be breathing. He expected he could deal with his wife. She argued much less than a bullet.

Early summer in Nashville made a good practice ground for hell. Of course, that was true through most of the Confederate States. Jake Featherston had brought the Freedom Party nominating convention to the capital of Tennessee for a couple of reasons. Moving it off the Atlantic coast reminded people the Party was a national outfit. And looking just a little north into stolen Kentucky reminded them what was at stake.

Flash bulbs popped when Jake got off the train from Richmond. Purple and iridescent green spots danced before his eyes. Supporters on the platform shouted, "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" Others called his name, again and again: "Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!" The two cries merged and blended in his ears. Together, they felt sweeter than wine, stronger than whiskey. Despite those spots before his eyes, he waved to the crowd.

Despite those shouts, his bodyguards formed up around him, protecting his flesh with their own. One bastard with a rifle had gunned down a Confederate president and sent the Freedom Party on a ten-year journey through hell. Another one now could wreck things again. If they put Willy Knight in the top spot instead of number two, could the Party win in November? *Probably,* Jake thought. *This year, probably.*

But it wouldn't be the same. He was sure of that. Willy Knight had a handsome face and handled himself pretty well on the stump. Jake . . .

Jake had plans.

Maybe, just maybe, Knight had plans, too. Maybe, just maybe, those plans involved a hero's funeral for Jake Featherston. That was another reason the bodyguards in their almost-Confederate uniforms didn't leave an assassin a clear shot.

"What will you do if you're elected, Mr. Featherston?" a reporter shouted through the din.

"Put this country back on its feet," Jake answered, as he had so many times before. "Settle accounts with everybody who's done us wrong."

"Who would that be?" the eager beaver asked.

"You know who. You know what we stand for. Traitors better run for the hills. Niggers better behave themselves. The Confederate States have been too soft for too long. We won't be soft any more."

"Would you—?" The reporter never got to finish the question. The phalanx of guards, with Featherston at its core, pushed off the platform and through the station towards a waiting limousine. Freedom Party men and women waving Confederate and Party flags surrounded them, hands reaching between the bodyguards to touch Jake, if only for an instant. He shook some of them. When he squeezed one woman's soft, plump fingers, she moaned as if she were coming right where she stood. He almost laughed out loud. He'd seen that before, and heard it, too.

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The limousine took him to the Heritage Hotel. The lobby was full of painted scenes of Confederate victory in the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War; a plaque said they came from the brush of Gilbert Gaul. There were no scenes from the Great War, perhaps because Gaul died in 1919, but more likely because there were no victories to record.

The Hermitage Hotel had come through the war without much damage. Most of Nashville hadn't been so lucky when Custer's First Army seized it from the Confederate defenders in 1917. The Memorial Auditorium, across the street from the hotel, was a postwar building. What ever had stood there before wasn't standing when the damnyankees grudgingly gave the land south of the Cumberland back

to the CSA in exchange for the bit of Kentucky they hadn't overrun. Jake reluctantly acknowledged that that was smart—with all of Kentucky in U.S. hands, no Confederate Senators and Representatives from the rump of the state could fulminate in Congress about how it needed to be redeemed.

His suite looked out at the Memorial Auditorium. Confederate flags and Freedom Party banners flew above it. Inside, delegates would be going through the motions of a political convention. Going through the motions was all they'd be doing. Unlike Whig and Radical Liberal conventions, this one was sewn up tight as a drum.

And I know who did the sewing. Featherston peered into a mirror with a gilt frame of rococo extravagance. His lean, leathery features suddenly lit up in a grin. "Me," he said aloud, and pointed at his own reflection.

He'd just fixed himself a drink when someone knocked on the door. He had guards in the hallway. They wouldn't let anyone dangerous past. He opened the door without hesitation. There stood Ferdinand Koenig, who'd come west from Richmond with him. "Come on in, Ferd," he said.

"Willy here yet?" Koenig asked as he stepped into the suite.

Featherston shook his head. But then another door down the hall opened. Out stepped Knight, dapper in a gray pinstriped suit with sword-sharp lapels. He waved and walked down the hall toward the two longtime Freedom Party men. "Pat him down, boss?" one of the guards asked out of the side of his mouth.

"No, it's all right," Jake whispered back. "Nothing to worry about." The guard looked dubious. So did Koenig. They both played it Jake's way, though. *Everybody plays it my way from now on,* he thought, and smiled. *Everybody.*

Maybe Willy Knight thought the smile was meant for him. He grinned back and stuck out his hand. Jake took it. The clasp turned into a quiet trial of strength. Knight was a little taller and a lot wider through the shoulders, but Featherston's rawboned frame carried more muscle than it seemed to. When the two men let go, Knight was the one who opened and closed his hand several times to ease the pain and bring it back to life.

"Come on in," Jake said genially. "Have a drink."

"Don't have to ask me twice." In spite of the hand that was surely

throbbing, Willy Knight managed another grin. “You barely have to ask me once.”

They all went into Jake’s hotel room. He closed the door behind them. The guards looked even less happy. He still wasn’t worried. Knight wouldn’t plug him himself. That wouldn’t just take Jake off the
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ticket—it would take him off, too. He didn’t want that. He wanted to be number one, but he’d settle for number two.

Jake made himself another drink. Ferdinand Koenig and Willy Knight fixed whiskeys for themselves, too. He raised his glass in salute first to Knight, then to Koenig. “Mr. Vice President,” he said. “Mr.

Attorney General.”

“Mr. President,” the other two men said together. All three drank.

“It’s going our way,” Featherston said. “We’ve got what it takes, and the country finally knows it. What we have to do now is make sure the Rad Libs and especially the Whigs are whipped dogs long before November rolls around. I like what’s happening down in Sonora—somebody hits you in the cheek, hit him back so goddamn hard, you knock his head off.”

Koenig chuckled. “That’s not quite what Jesus said.”

“Yeah, and look what happened to him,” Jake answered.

“Maybe we don’t want to come on *too* strong,” Willy Knight said. “We’ve spent the last ten years trying to live down that Grady Calkins son of a bitch.”

“But now we’ve done it,” Featherston said. “I want people to know—they’ll be sorry if they even think about going the wrong way. We backed down ten years ago. We had to. We don’t have to any more.

We’re going to win in November. You can take it to the bank. But even if we don’t, by God, we’re going into Richmond anyways.”

Knight’s bright blue eyes widened. “That’s treason!” he said, and finished his drink with a gulp.

“It’s only treason if you don’t bring it off,” Jake said calmly. “If we

have to grab it, we'll win. We're getting things ready, all nice and quiet-like. Like I told you, I don't reckon we'll need it."

"We'd better not," Willy Knight said, still jolted. "Christ, you're talking civil war."

"Jeff Davis wasn't afraid of it. We shouldn't be, either," Jake answered. "I keep telling you and telling you, this is just in case. You've got to cover everybody who can carry the ball, and that's what I intend to do."

He almost hoped he would have to try to seize power by force. Storming the War Department would be as sweet as marching into Philadelphia would have been during the Great War.

"Once we're in, however we're in, we'll make everything legal," Koenig said. "If you're in, you make the rules, and that's just what we'll do."

Knight managed a sheepish smile, as if realizing he'd shown weakness. "You don't think small, do you, Jake?"

"Never have. Never will," Featherston replied. "As long as you can imagine something, you can make it real. That's what the Freedom Party's all about. We know the Confederate States can be great again.

We know we can pay back all the bastards who held us while the damnyankees sucker-punched us. We can do it, and we're gonna do it. Right?"

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"Right!" Willy Knight said. Jake was watching him. He seemed as hearty as he should have. Maybe he'd just had cold feet for a moment. Featherston shrugged. How much did it really matter? As vice president, all Willy'd do was make speeches, and Jake intended to make sure of what was in them before they came out of the handsome puppet's mouth. Knight still hadn't figured out he'd been condemned to oblivion. That only proved he wasn't so smart as he thought he was.

Jake and Ferdinand Koenig looked at each other. Koenig nodded, ever so slightly. The more he'd thought about it, the more he'd liked escaping the worthless number-two slot and being promised one

where he could actually do things. Featherston had plans for the attorney general's office. *Once I'm elected . . .*

Three days later, he took another step toward the Gray House in Richmond. When he strode up onto the speakers' platform at the Memorial Auditorium to accept the Freedom Party nomination, the roar from the assembled delegates left his ears as stunned and battered as any artillery barrage ever had. The klieg lights blazing on him put the sun to shame. A thicket of microphones in front of him amplified his voice for the delegates, for people listening on the wireless web, and for the newsreels that would soon show his image all over the Confederate States.

"Hello, friends," Jake said to all the millions who would see and listen to him. "You know me. You know what I stand for. I've been up here in front of you before. I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you —"

"The truth!" the Freedom Party men bellowed.

Featherston nodded. "That's right. I'm here to tell you the truth. I've been doing that for a long time now. I think you're finally ready to listen. The truth is, this country needs to put people—white people, decent people—back to work, and we will. The truth is, this country needs to put the niggers who stabbed us in the back in their place, and we will. The truth is, Kentucky and Sequoyah and that joke the USA calls Houston still belong to the Confederate States. We ought to get 'em back—and we will."

He had to stop then; the applause was too loud and too long to let him continue. When at last it ebbed, he went on, "The truth is, the Whigs have had seventy years to run this country, and they've run it into the ground. Somebody else needs to do it, and do it right— *and we will.*" Another great roar. He held up his hands. Silence fell, completely and at once. Into it, he said, "If you like the way things have gone the past few years, vote Whig. But if you want to tell those people what you really think of 'em, vote—"

"Freedom!" That cry outdid all that had gone before. And then the delegates began to chant, "Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!" Jake stood tall on the platform, waving to the crowd, waving to the country, glorying in what he had and reaching out for what he wanted.

Bouncing around South Carolina, from Charleston to Columbia to

Greenville and to the smaller towns in between, Anne Colleton felt more than a little like a table-tennis ball. When she got out of her Birmingham in St. Matthews, her brother greeted her with, “Hello. Didn’t I know you once upon a time?”

“Funny, Tom,” she answered, meaning anything but. “Very funny. For God’s sake, fix me a drink.” Her own flat looked unfamiliar to her. Maybe her brother hadn’t been joking after all.

He mixed whiskey and a little water for her and plopped in a couple of ice cubes. After he’d made himself a drink, too, he said, “Well, you’ve got Jake Featherston, and it looks like he’s going to win. Are
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you happy?”

“You bet I am.” She would have said more, but a long pull at the whiskey came first. “Thank you. That’s a lifesaver.”

“I ought to go places with a little cask around my neck, like those St. Bernard dogs in the Alps,” Tom Colleton said.

“I’d be glad to see you, that’s for sure.” Anne took another sip. “Yes, I’m happy. I’ve waited for this day ever since the end of the war, even though I didn’t know what I was waiting for at first.”

“You walked away from Featherston once,” Tom said.

“I made a mistake,” Anne said. “Aren’t you glad you never made a mistake in all your born days?”

“Now that you mention it, yes.” Tom was irrepressible. Anne snorted. Her brother went on, “I’ll tell you one mistake I didn’t make: once I got out of politics, I didn’t get back in.”

“You wouldn’t have talked that way before you got married,” Anne said. *It made you soft,* was what she meant. To anyone else, she would have said that, said it without a moment’s hesitation. With Tom, she hesitated.

He understood what she meant whether she said it or not. With a shrug, he answered, “Maybe you wouldn’t talk the way you talk if you had. Nothing to cure the fire in your belly like a little boy.”

“Maybe,” Anne said tonelessly. Some small part of her wished she had

settled down with Roger Kimball or Clarence Potter or that Texas oil man or one of her other lovers. A husband, a child to carry on after her . . . Those weren't the worst things in the world. But they weren't for her, and never would be. "I'm on my own, Tom. Too late to change it now."

Her brother eyed her. "And heaven help anybody who gets in your way?" he said.

Anne nodded. "Of course."

"What happens if Featherston decides you're in his way?"

She wished he hadn't asked that particular question. For a long time, she'd been a big fish in the small pond of South Carolina politics, and not the smallest fish in the much bigger pond of Confederate politics.

Going from the Whigs to the Freedom Party, back to the Whigs and now back to Freedom had cut her influence down to size. So had getting older, as she was all too ruefully aware.

What if Jake Featherston decided she was in the way? What if *President* Jake Featherston decided she was in the way? She saw only one answer, and gave it to her brother: "In that case, I'd better move, don't you think?"

"You say that? You?" Tom looked and sounded as if he couldn't believe his ears. "You don't move for anybody."

"If it's a question of move or get squashed, I'll move," Anne said. "And Jake has more clout than I do.

Jake has more clout than anybody does." She spoke with a certain somber pride. She might have been saying, *Yeah, I got licked, but the fellow who licked me was the toughest one of the bunch* . She **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

shook her head. Might have? No. She *was* saying exactly that.

Tom shook his head, too, in wonder. "What's going to happen to the country, if a fellow who can make *you* pull in your horns starts running things?"

"We'll all go in the same direction, and it'll be the right direction," Anne said. "We've owed a lot of debts for a long time. Don't you want

to pay them back? I know I do.”

“Well, yes, but not if I have to go bust to do it.”

“We won’t,” Anne said positively. “He’ll do what needs doing, instead of fumbling around the way Burton Mitchel has ever since things went sour.”

“Maybe. I hope so,” her brother said. “Hell, I’ll probably even vote for him myself. But that’s all I intend to do. You can go running around the state if you want to. Me, I’ll stay home and tend my garden.”

Had he read *Candide* ? She doubted it; she couldn’t imagine a book that seemed less her brother’s cup of tea. She said, “The whole Confederacy is my garden.”

“You’re welcome to it,” Tom replied. “It’s too big for me to get my arms around. South Carolina’s too big. I think even St. Matthews is too big, but I can try that. My wife and my little baby boy, now— *that* I understand just fine.”

He’d gone into the war a captain, and a boy himself. He’d come out a lieutenant-colonel, and a man.

Now he was a family man, but that seemed a pulling-in, not a growing-out. It made Anne sad. “You’ve got a lot of time left,” she said. “I hope you do, anyway. You can do whatever you want with it. What I’m going to do with mine is, I’m going to put this country back on its feet.”

“I hope so.” Tom got up and kissed her on the cheek. “What I’m going to do is, I’m going home to my family. Take care of yourself, Sis. I worry about you.” He went out the door, taking her chance for the last word with him.

I’m going home to my family. Ever since they’d lost their parents when they were small, *she’d* been his family, she and their brother Jacob, who was dead. He didn’t think that way any more. He didn’t care about the country any more, either. Anne made herself another whiskey. Tom might have his wife and a little boy. She had a cause, and a cause on its way to victory.

She slept in her own bed that night. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d slept there. It had been weeks, she knew. Her own mattress felt as unfamiliar as any of the hotel beds where she’d lain down lately.

When morning came, she was on her way again, driving down to Charleston. Featherston was coming into town in a couple of days for a rally that should finish sewing up South Carolina for the Freedom Party. She hurled herself into the work of making sure everything went off the way it was supposed to.

Things were more complicated than they had been when she first started planning rallies. Making sure the wireless web and the newsreels were taken care of kept her busy up until an hour and a half before Featherston's speech began. Saul Goldman did a lot of work with them—more than she did, in fact. She wondered if the head of the Freedom Party knew just what a smart little Jew he had running that part of his operation.

"Hello, there," Featherston said, coming up behind her as she peered out from the wings to make sure **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

the lighting arrangements were the way she wanted them.

She jumped. She wasn't the sort of person who jumped when someone came up behind her, but Jake Featherston wasn't the ordinary sort of person coming up behind her. "Oh. Hello." She hated herself for how callow she sounded. No one had any business making her feel so unsure, so . . . *weak* was the only word that seemed to fit. No one had any business doing it, but Jake did.

He eyed the hall with the knowing gaze of a man who'd given speeches in a lot of different places.

"Good to have you back in the Party," he said, his attention returning to her. "I wasn't even close to sure it would be, in spite of the pretty speeches you made me. But it is. You've given me a lot of help here, and I do appreciate it."

"Happy to do anything I can," Anne said: a great thumping lie. She knew she was doing things *for* Featherston, doing them as a subordinate. She wasn't used to being a subordinate, wasn't used to it and despised it. Once, she and Roger Kimball had thought they would guide Jake Featherston to power and then enjoy it themselves, with him in the role of puppet. The only small consolation she had was that they weren't the only ones who'd underestimated him. At one time or another, almost everybody in the CSA had underestimated Featherston.

He said, "There's a lot of people I owe, and I'm going to pay every

single one of them back. But you, you owe me—you owe me plenty for walking out on me when I really needed a hand.”

He hadn’t forgotten. He never forgot a slight, no matter how small. Anne knew as much. And hers hadn’t been small, not at all. She said, “I know. I’m trying to pay you back.” Her gesture encompassed the hall where he’d speak.

The answer seemed to catch him by surprise. Slowly, thoughtfully, he nodded. “Well, you’re doing better than a lot of folks I can think of,” he said.

“Good.” Anne didn’t like the way he looked at her. He’d been an artilleryman during the war, not a sniper, but he eyed her as she thought a sniper would: all cold, deadly concentration. She was used to intimidating, not being intimidated. Being on the receiving end of a glance like that chilled her.

But Featherston sounded warm and lively when he went into his speech. “I never had a fancy name,” he declared. “I was only one more Confederate soldier, with a stamped tin identity disk around my neck.

But every great idea draws men to it. Every idea steps out before the nation. It has to win from the nation the fighters it needs, so one day it’s strong enough to turn the course of destiny. Our day is here!”

The hall erupted. Anne found herself clapping as hard as anyone else in the building. When she listened to Jake on the stump, she always believed what he said while he was saying it. She might not believe it later, when she thought about it, but at the time. . . . She shivered, though she also went on clapping. She hadn’t met many people who frightened her. He did.

He thundered on: “Lots of people in the Confederate States think the Freedom Party can’t do the job if we get in. They’re fooling themselves! Today our movement can’t be destroyed. It’s here. People have to reckon with it, whether they like it or not. We recognize three principles—responsibility, command, and obedience. We’ve built a party—a party of millions, mind—based on one thing: achievement. And if you don’t like it, we say, ‘We’ll fight today! We’ll fight tomorrow! And if you don’t fancy our rally today, we’ll hold another one next week, even bigger!’ ”

He slammed his fist down on the podium. More applause interrupted him. Anne looked down at her **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

carefully tended, carefully manicured hands. Her palms were red and sore. She'd broken a nail without even noticing.

"I'm not just here to ask you for your vote, or to ask you to do this or that for the Party," Featherston said. "I'm here to tell you the truth, and what I aim to do. What I've got to give is the only thing that can pull our country back on its feet again. If all you Confederates had the same faith in your country that our Freedom Party stalwarts do, we wouldn't be in the mess we're in. We *will* pull ourselves together. We're on the way, and I know you'll help."

I'm already helping, Anne thought proudly. Not being in charge didn't bother her so much any more—not as long as she was listening to Jake, anyhow.

XIX

In an odd way, Colonel Abner Dowling was glad to have something to worry about that didn't involve keeping the Mormons in Salt Lake City from erupting. The desultory war with Japan hadn't done the job. He'd wanted to go fight, and the War Department hadn't let him. That brought nothing but frustration.

Looking with alarm at events south of the border, though, did a fine job of distracting him. He rounded on his adjutant one morning, growling, "What the devil are we going to do if that Featherston maniac really does get elected in the CSA come November?"

"I don't know, sir," Captain Toricelli answered. "What *can* we do if he wins the election? We can't very well tell the Confederates to go back and vote again."

"No, but I wish we could," Dowling said. "That man is nothing but trouble waiting to happen. He wants another go at us. He hardly even bothers hiding it any more."

"I don't see how we can stop a politician from making speeches, sir," Angelo Toricelli said. "If he gets to be president and then starts building up the C.S. Army and violating the terms of the armistice the Confederates signed, we can do something about him. Till then . . ." He shrugged.

"But *will* President Hoover do anything?" Dowling said. "He certainly hasn't done much since he landed in Powel House six months ago."

Toricelli gave him a sly smile. “Would you rather we still had President Blackford?”

“Good God, no!” Dowling exclaimed; he’d always been a solid Democrat. “But I would like to see Hoover doing a little more. If things are any better than they were when Blackford went home to Dakota, I haven’t seen it.”

“It won’t happen overnight, sir.” His adjutant was a Democrat, too. Most officers were.

“Obviously,” Dowling said. “I do wish it would show some signs of happening at all, though.”

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“The whole world has troubles,” Toricelli said, and Dowling nodded, for that was obviously true.

“Utah probably has more troubles than the rest of the world.” Abner Dowling corrected himself: “Utah certainly has worse troubles than the rest of the world. Maybe that’s why we’re not seeing things looking better here.” He spoke as if trying to convince himself, hoping he could convince himself. But he remained incompletely convinced. He said, “If more people here had jobs, we wouldn’t need to worry . .

. quite . . . so much about this place going up in smoke.”

“Yes, sir,” Captain Toricelli agreed; his adjutant was nothing if not polite. But Toricelli was also stubborn. He went on, “If you know how to arrange that, sir, you should have run for president last year.”

General Custer had always claimed he’d had a shot at the presidency in 1884. There were any number of ways in which Dowling didn’t want to imitate the officer under whom he’d served for so long. He couldn’t imagine any job he wanted less than that of the president, especially in these thankless times.

And yet . . . He snapped his fingers. “You know, Captain, we could put a lot of people to work if we cleared Temple Square of the rubble that’s been sitting there for almost twenty years now.”

Toricelli frowned. “Yes, sir, we *could* . But isn’t the point of keeping the rubble there to remind the Mormons we gave them a licking?

There's not going to be a new Temple in Salt Lake City, any more than there's going to be one in Jerusalem."

Dowling muttered under his breath. Not only was Captain Toricelli polite and stubborn, he was also smart. But Dowling still liked the idea, or part of it. "All right, suppose we cordon off the part of the square that held the Temple and get rid of the rest of the rubbish?" he said. "The Tabernacle and the other buildings weren't holy ground."

He waited, wondering what his adjutant would make of that. Toricelli spent close to a minute thinking it over. Then he said, "Shall I draft a telegram for you to send to the War Department?"

"Yes, Captain, if you'd be so kind." Dowling beamed. He suspected Captain Toricelli made a tougher audience than any he'd face back in Philadelphia.

The wire went out two days later. The afternoon it did, Dowling got a wire from the War Department: WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS IN UTAH DESIRABLE. YOUR IDEA FORWARDED TO

SECRETARY OF WAR FOR APPROVAL. The printed signature on the sheet of yellow paper belonged to Lieutenant General Sam Sturgis, chief of the General Staff.

He heard from the Secretary of War the next day. PRESIDENT HOOVER PERSONALLY

CONTROLS ALL DECISIONS ON UTAH, the wire said. I HAVE PASSED THIS PROPOSAL TO

HIM RECOMMENDING APPROVAL, WHICH IS EXPECTED. Dowling understood that this Cabinet official, a distant relative of the last Democratic president before Hoover, remained in the service of his country despite being confined to a wheelchair by some rare, debilitating disease.

Though Captain Toricelli already knew what was in the telegram, Dowling set it on his desk anyhow. "If the chief of the General Staff says yes, and if the Secretary of War says yes, how can the president say no?" he exulted.

"I don't know, sir," his adjutant replied. "I hope we don't find out."

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But they did. The very next day, the telephone in Dowling's office rang. He picked it up. "Abner Dowling speaking."

"Colonel Dowling, this is Herbert Hoover." And it was. Dowling had heard his voice on the wireless and in newsreels too many times to have any doubt.

He stiffened to attention in his chair. "It's a privilege to speak with you, sir."

"Maybe you won't think so when I'm done," the president said. "Your proposal for makework for the people of Utah is *not* to go forward. Do you understand me?"

"It is not to go forward," Dowling repeated. "I hear you, and I will obey, of course, but I have to say I do not understand."

"We have had too much of Socialist-style, individualism-sapping false nostrums the past twelve years,"

Hoover said. "Paternalism and state socialism have done a great deal of harm to the country. They stifle initiative. They cramp and cripple the mental and spiritual energies of the people. And I will not have them under my administration."

Well, that's that, Dowling thought. But he couldn't help asking, "Sir, don't you think Utah is a special case?"

"Every case has partisans who insist it is special," Hoover answered. "I recognize none of them. I believe none of them. The same principles must apply throughout the United States."

Quickly, Dowling said, "I meant no harm, Mr. President." He'd never heard Hoover sound so vehement, not in any of his speeches. He hadn't imagined the new president *could* sound so vehement.

"I believe you, Colonel. I am not angry at you," President Hoover said, which made Dowling feel a little—though only a little—better. Hoover went on, "I'm sure the Socialists meant no harm, either. But you know which road is paved with good intentions."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said.

"All right, then," the president said. "We'll say no more about it. But

my decision is final. I do not want this issue raised again."

"Yes, sir," Dowling repeated.

"Good." Hoover hung up.

Dowling emerged from his office feeling like a man who'd survived a bomb going off much too close.

Thanks to the Confederates during the war and that damned Canuck afterwards, he knew more about bombs going off too close than he'd ever wanted to learn. What he felt must not have shown on his face, though, for Captain Toricelli said, "I heard you talking to the president, sir. May we go ahead?"

His voice said he was confident of the answer. Well, Abner Dowling had been confident of the answer, too. Much good his confidence had done him. He shook his head. His jowls wobbled back and forth.

"No, Captain. In fact, we're ordered *not* to go ahead, and so we won't."

Toricelli gaped. "But . . . why, sir?"

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"The president feels the scheme smacks of socialism. He says we've had enough government programs trying to get us over the hump, and he doesn't want another one."

"But . . ." his adjutant said again.

"He's the president. What he says goes," Dowling said. "And he and Coolidge did campaign against government interference, and they did get elected. If I look at it that way, maybe I'm not so surprised."

"But . . ." Toricelli said once more. After a moment, he gathered himself and managed something else:

"We're not competing against any private firm clearing Temple Square. There *is* no private firm clearing Temple Square."

"If you care to call Powel House, Captain, go right ahead," Dowling said. "As for me, I'm sure I know what the president wants done and what he doesn't. And he doesn't want us giving the Mormons even a dime to haul rocks out of Temple Square."

“A few days ago, we were saying he didn’t seem to want to do much of anything,” his adjutant observed. “Don’t you think this goes too far, though?”

“What I think is, he’s the president of the United States. If you set my opinion next to his, I know whose comes out on top. We’ve been ordered not to proceed. That being so, we won’t proceed.”

“I can’t argue with you there, sir,” Toricelli said.

“Good,” Dowling said. “I’m glad. For your sake, I’m glad. It’s a free country. You can disagree with the president. Nobody will say a word. But when he gives an order, we follow it.”

“Of course, sir,” Captain Toricelli replied, as any officer in the Army would have done.

A few days later, Dowling received Heber Young in his office. Young, a handsome man in his early thirties, was a grandson of Brigham Young. Given the number of wives and children Brigham had had, that was hardly a unique distinction in Utah these days. This particular Young came as close to being an official leader as the Mormons had. Since, under martial law, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was proscribed, he couldn’t be very official. But he wasn’t exactly unofficial, either.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Young?” Dowling asked after greetings that were what diplomats called

“correct”: polite and chilly.

“People here need work, Colonel,” Heber Young replied.

“People all over the country need work, sir,” Dowling said.

“Will you tell me the problem is not worse here?” Young asked.

“If it is, whose fault is that?” Dowling said. “I was with General Pershing when a Mormon fanatic murdered him—a Mormon fanatic we’ve never caught, for other Mormon fanatics have sheltered him for all the years since.”

“I don’t know how you can say that, Colonel, when the U.S. government insists again and again that there is no such thing as the Mormon Church in Utah these days.” Young spoke with surprisingly mild **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://**

irony.

It was still enough to raise a flush on Dowling's plump cheeks. "Funny, Mr. Young. Very funny. Come to the point, if you'd be so kind."

"All right. I will." Young looked serious to the point of solemnity. "We could use—we desperately need—a public-works program to give men jobs, help them support their families, and, most important of all, give them hope."

Dowling sighed. "As it happens, I have discussed that very notion with President Hoover in the past few days. He opposes such programs not only here but anywhere in the USA. Don't expect them. Don't hope for them. You will be disappointed."

Heber Young proved he could quote the Old Testament as well as the Book of Mormon, murmuring, " '

Mene, mene, tekel upharsin. Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.' As God said to Belshazzar, so I say to Hoover." And he walked out of Abner Dowling's office without a backward glance.

Scipio hadn't got so dressed up since his days as Anne Colleton's butler. The Huntsman's Lodge was as fine a restaurant as Augusta boasted, and expected its waiters to look the part. (It paid no better than any other restaurant, and worse than some. It expected the men who served food to make most of their money from tips. The customers tipped no better there than anywhere else. One reason they'd got rich enough to afford to eat at the Huntsman's Lodge was their reluctance to part unnecessarily with even a penny.)

Walking to the restaurant in boiled shirt, black tie, and tails was torture for Scipio in the sodden heat of late August. If he hadn't needed work of any sort so badly . . . But he did, and he was glad to have any at all. So many men in Augusta, Negro and white, didn't.

Walking to the Huntsman's Lodge in formal attire was, or could be, torture in more ways than one. It exposed him to the wit, such as that was, of the white citizens of Augusta. He could usually see trouble coming before it struck. That did him no good what ever, of course.

"Looky what we got here!" a fellow in straw hat and bib overalls whooped, pointing at Scipio. "We got us a nigger all tricked out like a

penguin! Ain't that somethin'?"

Other whites coming down Marbury Street smiled. One or two laughed. Three or four stopped to see what would happen next. Scipio hoped nothing would happen next. Sometimes one joke was enough to get the meanness out of a white man's system. Smiling what was probably a sickly smile, Scipio tried to walk on by.

As he came closer to the man in overalls, he saw a Freedom Party pin glittering on one overalls strap.

His heart sank. That was likely to mean worse trouble than he would have got from somebody else. And, sure as hell, the white man stepped into his path and said, "What the hell's a nigger doin' dressed up like he's King Shit?"

When Scipio tried to walk around him, the man blocked his way again. He had to answer. He did, as meekly as he could: "I's a waiter, suh. I gots to wear dis git-up."

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He should have known—he *had* known—nothing he said would do him any good. Scowling, the white man demanded, "How come you got a job when I ain't, God damn you? Where's the justice in that?"

Scipio tried to escape with a shrug. It didn't work. The man shouted, "Answer me, you goddamn motherfucking son of a bitch!"

Because I have a brain, and you haven't. Because my mouth isn't hooked up to the toilet. Because I've had more baths this week than you have this year. If Scipio said any of that, he was a dead man.

He looked down at the sidewalk, the picture of a submissive Negro. Softly, he said, "Suh, I been waitin'

table forty year now. I's right good at it." *What are* you *good at, besides causing trouble? Not much, I'll bet.* One more thing he dared not say.

"You know how many white folks is hungry, and you're marchin' off to work in your goddamn fancy penguin suit?" the man in overalls snarled. "I ought to kick your black ass around the block a few times, teach you respect for your betters."

He drew back his foot as if to do just that. All Scipio could do was take it or try to run. He intended to run—he didn't want his outfit damaged. Getting it repaired or, worse, having to buy a new one would cost him money he didn't have. But then one of the other white men said, "Hell, let him go. Ain't his fault he has to dress up like a damn fool to go to work."

"Thank you, suh," Scipio whispered. "I thanks you from de bottom of my heart."

The white man with the Freedom Party pin glanced around at the little crowd. Most people nodded at what the other fellow had said. Scowling, the Freedom Party man said, "All right. All right for now, goddammit. But when Jake Featherston gets elected, we'll put every damn nigger in his place, not just the ones in the fancy suits." He strutted down the street as if he were a mover and shaker, not a man with no more than a fifty-fifty chance of being able to write his own name.

"Thank you," Scipio said once more.

"I didn't do it for you," said the man who'd urged he be left alone. "I did it on account of I purely can't stand the Freedom Party." He laughed bitterly. "And I wonder how long I'll be allowed to say that in public if Featherston *does* win."

Somebody's not blind, anyhow, Scipio thought as he hurried up the street toward the Huntsman's Lodge. *But if Featherston wins, this fellow can change his mind. He can say he was for the Freedom Party all along, and he'll get on fine. I'm black. I didn't choose that, and I can't change it.*

As far as he could see, he had no choices at all if the Freedom Party won.

Getting to the restaurant was a relief. For one thing, he did make it on time. If he got in trouble for any reason, he could be back pounding the pavement looking for work. He knew that all too well—how could he help knowing? For another, the rhythms and rituals of work kept him too busy to worry . . .

much.

He was obsequious to the prosperous white men and their sleek female companions who dined at the Lodge, but that bothered him much less than having to be obsequious to whites on the street. A white waiter in New York City would act subservient on the job.

Acting subservient was part of a waiter's job—which went a long way towards explaining why there were so few white waiters in the Confederate States, where whites thought subservience the province of blacks alone. But that waiter in New York **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

City became his customers' equal as soon as he left his job. Scipio didn't, and never would.

A portly, middle-aged man eating pheasant looked up from his meal and said, "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

With a small thrill of horror, Scipio realized the man had danced attendance upon Anne Colleton at Marshlands before the war. Had his own past come back to haunt him after all these years? He shook his head and put on his thickest accent to answer, "Ah don' reckon so, suh."

The customer shrugged. "You must be right. The boy I knew spoke better than I do myself."

Boy. Even then, Scipio had been in his thirties. Whites in the CSA refused to take Negroes seriously. He supposed that was why the Red uprising during the war had got as far as it had. Not even clever whites like Miss Anne had imagined Negroes could conceive of grievances serious enough to make them take up arms for redress.

All that went through his head in a flash. To reassure the white man—he was Tony Somebody, and Anne Colleton had thought him a pompous ass—he said, "Ah talks lahk I talks, suh. Dis heah de onliest way Ah knows how." He wondered if he *could* speak like an educated white man any more. Or would that dialect of English have disappeared from his tongue like a foreign language seldom used?

"All right. Never mind," the customer said, and went back to his pheasant. When he walked out, he left a fifty-cent tip, as if to apologize for bothering Scipio. *Noblesse oblige,* Scipio thought, and made the silver coin disappear. These days, there were men desperate enough to kill for half a dollar.

It was after ten when the Huntsman's Lodge closed. Scipio worried less about being on the street in black tie and tails than he had during the day. Fewer whites would be out there to see him than during the day—and, with Augusta's bad street lighting, whoever was there wouldn't be able to get that good a look at him anyhow.

But as soon as he opened the door, he closed it again in a hurry and ducked back into the restaurant.

“What’s the matter with you, Xerxes?” demanded his manager, a skinny, energetic young white man named Jerry Dover. “Go on home. Get the hell out of here.”

“Marse Jerry, I reckons I waits a while,” Scipio answered. “Dem Freedom Party white folks”—he almost said *buckra* , but caught himself before using that word in front of a white—“is marchin’ down de street. Don’t want them seein’ me, you don’t mind too much.”

He had no idea what Dover’s politics were. Talking politics with a white man could only be futile and dangerous. But whatever else Dover might have been, he was no fool. The other three colored waiters in the place showed no eagerness to leave. “All right,” the manager said. “Don’t worry about it. Stay as long as you need to. Sooner or later, those folks out there’ll be done, and then y’all can go on about your business.”

But, staring out through the small panes of glass set into the door of the Huntsman’s Lodge at eye level, Scipio wondered if Jerry Dover knew what he was talking about. Block after well-organized block of men and women—mostly men—paraded past on Marbury Street. Some carried Confederate flags.

Some carried Freedom Party flags. Some carried torches, to make the rest easier to see and the gathering as a whole more impressive.

A lot of the men marched in step. Most of the ones who did wore the white shirts and butternut trousers **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

of Freedom Party stalwarts. Some few of the disciplined marchers, though, were in what was almost but not quite Confederate uniform. They carried Tredegars whose bayonets gleamed bloody in the torchlight.

“Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!” The endless chant came close to making Scipio long for the old cry of, *Freedom!* That had been a frustrated shout, the cry of men who didn’t fully understand what they wanted or how to go about getting it. This . . . This promised trouble right around the corner, and said just what kind of trouble it was, too.

And the parade went on and on and on. Scipio wouldn’t have believed

that Augusta held so many people, let alone that it held so many Freedom Party backers. Jake Featherston wasn't in town. Neither was Willy Knight. These people had nothing special to lure them out of their houses. But they came.

Maybe that was the scariest thing of all.

At last, after half an hour, the procession ended. Jerry Dover hadn't gone outside, either. He had pushed Scipio and the other blacks out of the way a few times to look at things for himself. "Well, well, well," he said when it was over and the raucous cries of *Featherston!* at last ebbed away. "I always wondered, but now I know. Those bastards really *are* crazy."

Scipio and the other waiters exchanged glances. Dover didn't need to say that. What white man in the CSA needed to make Negroes like him? The question was so ridiculous, it might not even have occurred to Scipio without the goad of something as massive as the Freedom Party procession.

The sheer scope of it got through to Dover, too. He spoke again: "Crazy or not, though, there's a hell of a lot of 'em, ain't there? Don't see how they're going to lose the election. Wish to God I did." He made pushing motions at the waiters. "They're gone. You can disappear, too."

Searchlights blazed from Allen Park, not far off to the west. With the door open, the rhythmic shouting of Jake Featherston's name grew louder and more frightening. Scipio scuttled back toward the Terry, a black dust mote adrift on that dreadful sea of sound.

Jefferson Pinkard came to the Freedom Party meeting in his jailer's uniform. No time to go back to his apartment and put on the usual white shirt and butternut trousers, not if he wanted to be sure of having a place to sit down when he got to the old livery stable. Party meetings had never been so crowded. He saw faces he hadn't seen for years, and he saw plenty of faces he'd never seen before—more at every meeting, it seemed.

Now people want to hop on the train—when it looks like it's just about to get to the station, he thought, eyeing with no small scorn the strangers who suddenly called themselves Freedom Party men.

He'd been with the Party train every inch of the way, through ups and downs and derailments. Hell, he'd been at the Alabama State Fairgrounds out at the west end of town when Grady Calkins

murdered President Hampton. He hadn't given up even then, even when things looked blackest.

He sent the Johnny-come-latelies another sour stare. Would they have stuck with Jake Featherston when the going got rough? Not likely, not most of them. They were here because they wanted to ride a winner's coattails, not because they *believed* . You could use people like that, but could you ever really trust them? He had his doubts.

Caleb Briggs strode briskly up onto the rostrum. He had a microphone up there these days, to help his gas-ruined voice fill the meeting hall despite the buzz from the big crowd. In the row behind Pinkard, a

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man who'd been in the party for a while explained to a couple of new fish who Briggs was. Jeff muttered something incredulous under his breath. Didn't they know *anything* ? Evidently not.

Behind the dentist who headed up the Freedom Party in Birmingham stood Confederate and Party flags.

He crisply saluted each of them in turn, then stepped up to that microphone and said, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" The roar from the crowd made Pinkard's head spin. The new Party men were good for something, anyhow—they had big mouths.

Briggs' smile showed white teeth. "Good to see y'all here," he rasped, "old friends and new." A few of the longtime Freedom Party men, Jeff among them, laughed softly. Caleb knew what was what, same as anybody else who'd seen the light a while ago. Smiling still, Briggs went on, "A month to go, boys, and then we get to the Promised Land. We've been in the wilderness a long time now, but we're almost there."

Pinkard whooped. "Freedom!" he shouted, as if he were a Negro responding to a preacher's sermon.

He wasn't the only one, either. Far from it.

But when Briggs held up a hand, silence fell, just like that. By God, the Freedom Party had discipline.

"The one thing we've got to do now," he said, and paused to draw

more air into his ravaged lungs, “is make sure we don’t stumble and fall. We’ve come too far for that. This time, we *win* .”

More shouts of, “Freedom!” rang out. So did a chorus of, “Feather *ston*!” Pinkard tried to imagine waking up the morning after Election Day and finding out Jake Featherston had lost again. He didn’t think the Party could survive it. He wasn’t sure he could.

“We’ve got to make *sure* we win,” Briggs went on. “We’ve been doing plenty, but we’ve got to do more. Just for instance, Hugo Black is coming to town Saturday.”

A low murmur ran through the crowd. The Whig vice-presidential candidate was good on the stump—not so good as Featherston or Willy Knight, not as far as Pinkard was concerned, but still a formidable speaker.

Caleb Briggs grinned a sly, conspiratorial grin. “I’m sure we’ll give him a nice, warm Birmingham welcome when he pays us a call.” He waited for the grins and sniggers to stop, then held up a hand. “It may not be so easy. The Whigs aren’t ashamed to steal our tricks. They’ll have their own tough boys at Black’s rally, you can bet on that.”

“We’ll lick ’em!” Jeff roared, before anybody else could. Somebody behind him clapped him on the back.

“We’d better lick ’em,” Briggs said. “We need to make damn sure we do. I want a show of hands for volunteers.”

Every man in the place raised his hand. Some men held up both hands at once to look more prominent.

Pinkard thought about doing that, but didn’t. One hand was plenty. He didn’t need to show off.

Up on the platform, Caleb Briggs grinned. “I knew I could count on you. Be here Saturday at half past twelve. Black’s speaking at two. He reckons he is, anyways.”

Half past twelve was a good time to gather. The men who still worked Saturday mornings would have **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

time to put in their half days. A lot of businesses had cut back to five days a week. Men who worked for them wouldn’t have any problems showing up, either. And, of course, the men who were out of work

could come whenever the Party needed them, as long as they could scrape up trolley fare.

Jeff was scheduled to work all day that Saturday. He traded shifts with another jailer, a man who despised politics of all sorts almost as much as he despised prisoners of all sorts. He got to Freedom Party headquarters fifteen minutes early. His shirt was so white, it gleamed like polished marble. His pants were the exact color of the uniform he'd worn during the war. He'd put on a pair of steel-toed shoes he hadn't worn since leaving the Sloss Works. They weren't a required part of a stalwart's outfit, but they let him kick like a mule.

Across the street from the headquarters, a couple of Whigs were arguing with a gray-clad policeman.

"They're preparing for a riot in there!" one of them said loudly. "You've got to do something to stop them."

The cop shrugged broad shoulders. "I can't arrest anybody till he commits a crime," he said. "It's still a free country, you know." As the Whigs started to expostulate, he smiled and sank his barb: "Freedom!"

They jerked as if stung. The loud one cried, "Why, you miserable, stinking—"

"Shut up, buddy, or I'll run you in." The policeman set a hand on his nightstick.

"I thought you couldn't arrest anyone till he committed a crime."

"Disturbing the peace is a crime."

"What do you think the Freedom Party's going to do?" the Whig demanded.

"That's a political demonstration. That's different."

Into the old livery stable Pinkard went. When he came out again, a stout bludgeon in his hand, the Whigs were still yelling at the cop. They withdrew—hell, they ran for their lives—as soon as the Freedom Party started coming out. Jeers chased them down the street.

The day Grady Calkins killed Wade Hampton V, Tredegar-carrying state militiamen had held the stalwarts away from the president of the CSA. Nobody had called out the militia this time—so Caleb Briggs insisted. Back in the early 1920s, people had thought they could

suppress the Freedom Party. The governor of Alabama wouldn't dare try it now. The legislature might not impeach him, convict him, and throw him out on his ear if he did. On the other hand, it might.

Down the street toward the park marched the Freedom Party stalwarts, several hundred strong. People on the sidewalk either cheered or had the sense to keep their mouths shut. People in autos drove away in a hurry. The ones who didn't got their windscreens and windows smashed. Pinkard supposed, if the Whigs had been ruthless enough, they could have sent cars smashing through the ranks of Freedom Party men. Featherston's followers would have done it to the Whigs in a minute if they thought it would help.

The Whigs didn't try it.

Jeff was up in the fifth or sixth row of marchers. The leaders let out whoops when they turned the last corner and saw Ingram Park, near city hall, dead ahead. Shouts followed the whoops a heartbeat later, as the Whig stalwarts charged them. The Whigs aimed to fight in the narrow confines of the street and not let the Freedom Party men into the park at all.

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That probably means we have *got more men than they do,* Jeff thought. Then the first Whig swung a club at him, and he stopped thinking. He blocked the blow and aimed one of his own at the Whig's head.

They stood there smashing at each other for a few seconds. Then someone tripped the Whig. Jeff hit him in the face with his bludgeon, kicked him in the ribs with those steel-toed shoes, and strode forward, looking for a new foe.

He and another man in white shirt and butternut trousers teamed up on a Whig. They both stomped the fellow once he was down. Shouting "Freedom!" they pressed forward, shoulder to shoulder. "Freedom!"

Jeff yelled again. "Featherston and freedom!"

"Longstreet!" the Whigs yelled back. "Longstreet and liberty!" Samuel Longstreet, a grandson of the famous James, was a Senator from Virginia. He wasn't bad on the stump, either. "Longstreet and Black!" a rash Whig shouted.

That gave the Freedom Party men an opening. “Longstreet the nigger-lover!” they yelled, and pushed forward harder than ever.

Pinkard’s left arm ached where a club had got home. Another one had laid his forehead open above his left eyebrow. He kept shaking his head like a restive horse, trying to keep the blood out of his eyes. Step by bitter step, the Freedom Party men forced the Whigs back toward the end of the street. If they broke out into the crowd, they’d win the day, rampaging through the crowd and wrecking Hugo Black’s rally.

A pistol barked. Jeff saw the muzzle flash rather than hearing the report; that was lost in the din of battle.

The Freedom Party man next to him grunted and clutched his belly and folded up like a concertina.

As soon as the first shot was fired, pistols came out on both sides. Freedom Party men and Whigs blazed away at one another from point-blank range. The Whigs had fired first—Pinkard thought they had, anyhow—but the Freedom Party men had more firepower and more determination, or maybe just more combat experience. They kept going forward, smashing down or shooting the last few Whigs who stood against them.

“Freedom!” Pinkard bawled as he ran across the grass toward the people who’d thought they were going to hear the Whig vice-presidential candidate speak. “Freedom!” his fellow stalwarts howled at his side and behind him. This had to be what a breakthrough felt like, what the damnyankees had known when they smashed the Confederate lines in Tennessee and Virginia during the war.

He whooped with delight when more Freedom Party men burst out from another street and charged the assembled Whigs. Then the stalwarts were in among the crowd, some clubbing, some kicking, some shooting. A few of the men in the crowd tried to fight back. Most of the tough ones, though, had tried to hold the Freedom Party men out and were already down.

From the podium, Hugo Black cried out, “This is madness!”

He was right, not that it did him any good. Madness it was, madness engulfing his party, madness engulfing his country. After the third bullet cracked past him, after the Birmingham police did nothing to slow down the Freedom Party stalwarts, he leaped down and made his escape.

Pinkard's club broke when he hit a rich-looking man in the head. The Whig's skull broke, too; Jeff could feel it. He waded on through the fray with fists and heavy shoes. "Freedom!" he yelled exultantly.

"Featherston and freedom!"

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Whig headquarters in Charleston a week before the election reminded Clarence Potter of Army of Northern Virginia headquarters a week before the Confederate States had asked the United States for an armistice. He was among the walking wounded: two fingers of his left hand were splinted, he sported a shiner and wore a new pair of glasses he couldn't afford, and he was all over bruises. And, all things considered, he was one of the lucky ones.

Braxton Donovan had a bandage wrapped around his head. He'd needed an X ray to make sure he didn't have a fractured skull. His nod held a graveyard quality. "Almost over now," he said.

"Everything's almost over now," Potter said gloomily. "We showed those bastards we could fight, too, by God."

The lawyer nodded, then grimaced and reached into his jacket pocket for a vial of pills. He washed down two of them with a sip from his drink. "Wonderful stuff, codeine," he remarked. "It's especially good with whiskey. Doesn't quite make the headache go away, but it sure makes you stop caring. Yeah, we showed the yahoos we could fight, too. Fat lot of good it's done us. How many dead?"

"A couple of dozen here in Charleston." Even before Potter went into intelligence, he'd always had figures at his fingertips. "Over a hundred in the state. All over the country? Who knows? More than a thousand, or I miss my guess. Close to fifty men killed in that one shootout in Birmingham all by itself.

Hugo Black is lucky to be alive, if you want to call it luck."

"Ha. Funny." Donovan drained the whiskey. He scowled. "I hope those pills hurry up. My head feels like it wants to fall off. If that bastard had hit me just a little harder, you'd be counting one more dead man here."

"I know." Potter held up his left hand. "I got these broken keeping

another one of those stinking stalwarts from caving in my skull. We have made them pay, though. Even if they do win, they know they've been in a brawl."

"If they win, it doesn't matter," Braxton Donovan said. "Do you know what I wish?"

"Hell, yes, I know what you wish. You wish the same thing I do," Potter said. "You wish the Radical Liberals would drop out of the race and throw whatever weight they've got left behind Longstreet and Black. And you know what?"

"What?"

For once, Potter let a full, rich drawl come into his voice as he answered, "It ain't a-gonna happen, that's what."

"It should, by God," Donovan said. "The Rad Libs have just as much to lose if Jake Featherston wins as we do."

"You know that, and I know that, but Hull and Long don't know that," Clarence Potter said. "All they know is, we've been kicking their tails every six years as long as there've been Confederate States of America. If we were in hell—"

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"What do you mean, 'if'?" Donovan said. "With Jake Featherston president . . ."

"If we were in hell and screaming for water, they'd throw us a big jar of gasoline to drink." Potter was damned if he'd let the lawyer step on a good line.

"What are we going to do?" Braxton Donovan said. "What *can* we do? Only thing left is to go down swinging."

"Far as I'm concerned, we battle 'em all the way up till next Tuesday," Potter replied. "The more Congressmen and legislators we elect, the more trouble Featherston and his goons will have getting their laws through. And the bastard can't run again in 1939, so this too shall pass."

"Like a kidney stone," Donovan said morosely. By the way he set one

hand on the small of his back for a moment, he spoke from experience. But then he managed a smile and gently touched his bandaged head. “Codeine *is* starting to work.”

“Good,” Potter said. People were setting down drinks and taking seats on the folding chairs at the front of the hall. “Looks like the meeting’s going to come to order. Let’s see how exciting it is, shall we?”

It was about as bad as he’d expected. The speakers insisted on staying optimistic long after the time for optimism had passed. When Potter heard, “Sam Longstreet will make a *great* president of the Confederate States!” for the fourth time, he stopped listening. He didn’t think Longstreet was a bad man at all—on the contrary. But as long as the Whigs kept running sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of the men who’d won the War of Secession, they gave Jake Featherston an easy target.

He thought about getting to his feet and saying so. In the end, he didn’t. Time enough for that at the postmortem; the death wasn’t official yet. The meeting was less quarrelsome than a lot he’d been to. He doubted he was the only one saving recriminations for after the election.

Quarrels did go on, though, through the streets of Charleston and across the Confederate States. Potter did his share. He didn’t need his left hand to swing a blackjack. He dented a couple of Freedom Party crania—and had his new pair of spectacles broken. Only afterwards did he realize he hadn’t had to wear them into the brawl. Hindsight was twenty-twenty. He, unfortunately, wasn’t, and now he had to pay twice for the privilege of seeing straight. He was pretty sure the stalwarts he’d clobbered couldn’t see straight now, either. That was something.

Tuesday, November 7, 1933, dawned chilly and drizzly. Polls opened at eight in the morning. Jamming a broad-brimmed fedora down low on his forehead to keep water out of his eyes, Potter made his myopic way to the polling place around the corner from his apartment building. Election officials had chalked on the sidewalk a hundred-foot semicircle with the polling place as its center. Inside that circle, electioneering was forbidden. Outside it, Freedom Party men chanted Jake Featherston’s name.

Potter smiled at them. “Go ahead, boys. Make yourselves as obnoxious as you can. The more votes you cost your man, the better.”

As he walked into the charmed circle, one of the men in white and butternut asked, “Who’s that smart-mouthed son of a bitch?”

“Name’s Potter,” another answered. “Lives around the block. You don’t need to write him down. He’s already on the list.”

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Already on the list, am I? Potter thought. *An honor I could do without.* Behind him, the Freedom Party men resumed their chant. *Where are our men, shouting for Longstreet and Black?* he wondered.

He knew the Whigs had men outside some polling places. Not this one. The business collapse wasn’t the only reason the Freedom Party looked like winning today. How-ever much Potter hated to admit it, even to himself, the opposition was better organized than his own party. He would have bet every Freedom Party man—and woman, in states where women could vote—would get to the polls today. He wished he could have made the same bet about Whig backers. How many of them would sit on their hands? Too many. Any at all would be too many.

He cast his own ballot, then walked back the way he’d come. He didn’t think the Freedom Party men would set on him so close to the polling place, where people could see them for what they were. They didn’t . . . quite. They shouted, “Nigger-lover!” and, “You’ll get yours!” at him, but they didn’t try to give it to him. He was almost disappointed. For this trip, he had a pistol in his pocket, not a blackjack.

Having voted, he went to work. It was less than interesting today: a husband wanted evidence his wife was cheating, but the wife, busy with shopping and the couple’s two small children, gave none. Potter thought the husband was inventing things to worry about, but he kept his opinions to himself. For one thing, clients seldom paid attention to opinions contradicting their own. For another, the man paid well. If he wanted to throw away his money . . . well, it was a free country, wasn’t it?

It is till that Featherston bastard takes over, Potter thought.

On the trolley ride back to his flat after knocking off for the day, he passed another polling place. Police cars were parked in front of it. Blood stained the sidewalk and nearby walls. Freedom Party men

waving their reversed-color Confederate battle flags still stood on the street. “Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!” Even through the trolley’s closed windows, the chant lacerated Clarence Potter’s ears. The police didn’t try to run the stalwarts off. If Whigs had been here, they were no longer. This skirmish belonged to the Freedom Party.

After pan-frying a pork chop and some potatoes and washing them down with a stiff whiskey, Potter went over to Whig headquarters to hear . . . whatever he heard. Dance music blared from the wireless sets: the polls hadn’t closed yet. He pulled out his pocket watch. It was a little past seven-thirty—less than half an hour to go.

That gave him plenty of time for another drink, or two, or three. He nodded to Braxton Donovan, who also had a whiskey in his hand, and said, “The condemned man drank a hearty meal.”

“Funny,” the lawyer said. “Funny like a crutch.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean you,” Potter said. “If you think I meant you, I apologize. I meant the country. Before they execute a man, they give him a blindfold and a cigarette. What do we do when the Confederate States of America go up against the wall?”

Donovan studied him. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard you say you were sorry before. You must mean it.

You don’t waste time being polite.”

I try not to waste time at all, Potter thought. But he had nothing to do but stand there banging his gums till clocks in Charleston started striking eight. “All along the eastern seaboard of the Confederate States, the polls have closed,” an announcer on the wireless declared. “We’ll bring you the latest results from the presidential, Congressional, state, and local elections—but first, a word from our sponsor.” A chorus of young women started singing about the wonders of a soap made from pure palm oil. Potter wondered **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

what could be going through their minds as they trilled the inane lyrics. Probably something like, *We’re getting paid* . Times were hard indeed.

Then the numbers started coming in. Somebody posted each new installment on a big blackboard at the front of the room. That meant the Whigs could go on chattering and still keep up. As soon as Clarence Potter saw the early results from North Carolina, he knew

what kind of night it would be. North Carolina was a solid, sensible, foursquare Whig state. The collapse hadn't hit it so hard as a lot of other places.

Jake Featherston led there. He led by more every time the fellow at the board erased old numbers and put up new ones. And he had coattails. Freedom Party Congressional candidates were winning in districts where they'd never come close before. And it looked as bad everywhere else.

Braxton Donovan stared owlishly at the returns. He fixed himself another drink, then came back to stand by Potter and stare some more. He didn't say anything for a long, long time. At last, he did: "Jesus Christ. It's like watching a train wreck, isn't it?"

Potter shook his head. "No, Braxton. It's like being *in* a train wreck." Donovan thought that over, then slowly nodded.

And it got no better, not from a Whig point of view, as the polls closed in states farther west. Back in 1921, Tennessee had decided the election when it finally went Whig. This year, it went for Featherston and the Freedom Party. So did Mississippi and Alabama. Potter hadn't expected anything different there, but he would have loved to be proved wrong. The Whigs led in Arkansas, but Arkansas wasn't big enough to matter.

"My God," somebody behind Potter said. "What *is* the world coming to?"

He didn't need to ask the question, not when he could see the answer. Jake Featherston was going to be president. He would have a majority—a big majority—in the House. The Senate, whose members were chosen by state legislatures rather than popular vote, wasn't so obvious. Even so, it all added up to the same thing: after seventy years in the saddle, the Whigs were going into the minority.

"The minority?" the man in back of Potter said when he spoke that thought aloud. "That's crazy." He still seemed unbelieving.

"If you don't get it, think like a nigger," Potter said. "It'll come to you then, believe me."

Along with news of a corruption scandal in the Iowa legislature, newsboys in Des Moines shouted about Jake Featherston's victory down in the Confederate States. More of them yelled about the scandal, which was right there in town. The election news hit

Cincinnatus Driver a lot harder. He got out of his truck on the way to the railroad yards and bought a paper, something he hardly ever did: getting there a minute late might cost him a good cargo. But today he spread the *Register and Remembrance* on the seat beside him and read a paragraph or two whenever he had to stop.

He was still shaking his head when he got out of the Ford at the yards and started dickering with a conductor over a load of beds and dressers and nightstands. “What’s the big deal?” asked the conductor, a white man too young to have fought in the Great War. “Who cares what happens down in the Confederate States?”

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“I cares.” Cincinnatus knew that was bad grammar even without Achilles telling him so. “I grew up in Kentucky when it was part of the CSA. Glad it ain’t no more. I got out of there once the USA took it over. This here’s a better place if you’re colored.”

The conductor was not only white, he was a blond who couldn’t have got any whiter if somebody’d thrown him into a tub of bleach. He said, “I don’t know nothin’ about that. All I know is, you may be colored, but you haggle like a damn kike.”

If he’d been talking about Cincinnatus to a Jew, he probably would have called him a damn nigger.

Cincinnatus took such names in stride; he’d heard them all, especially the one applying to his own race, too often to get excited about them. He said, “I tell you, Mr. Andersen, I don’t reckon it’s against the law to try an’ git me enough money to make the job worth my while. I ain’t no charity.”

“Well, I’m a penny-pinching squarehead myself, and I won’t tell you anything different,” Andersen said.

Cincinnatus liked him better after that; if he could insult himself as casually as he insulted everybody else, odds were none of those insults meant much.

Cincinnatus got fairly close to the price he wanted for hauling the load of bedroom furniture, too. He drove it over to a furniture store on Woodland Street on the west side of town, only a little north of the bend of the Raccoon River. After growing up by the bank of the Ohio,

Cincinnatus didn't think either the Raccoon or the Des Moines was anything special.

Olaf Thorstein, who ran the furniture store, was even paler than Andersen. Cincinnatus had trouble believing anybody this side of a ghost could be. Thorstein was a tall, thin man of stern rectitude, the sort who would skin you in a deal if he could but would walk across town in the snow to give back a penny—or a hundred-dollar bill—you accidentally left in his store. With a similar streak in his own character, Cincinnatus had no trouble getting along with him.

Thorstein said, "Way you talk, you used to live in the Confederate States." He was not far from Cincinnatus' age, which meant he'd likely fought in the Great War.

"Yes, suh, that's a fact." Cincinnatus nodded. "Came to Des Moines ten years ago. Ain't been sorry, neither. This here's a lot better'n Kentucky." He remembered Luther Bliss and shivered in spite of himself.

"Well, what do you think of what's going on down there now?" the white man asked.

"Don't reckon you'll hear no black man sayin' nothin' good about the Freedom Party," Cincinnatus answered. "What do *you* think, Mr. Thorstein?" A surprising—or maybe a depressing—number of whites weren't the least bit shy about saying what they thought of people who didn't look like them. Had the USA had more Negroes, it probably would have had something like the Freedom Party, too.

"Me? I don't know much. I have not been there, except in the Army," Thorstein said, confirming Cincinnatus' guess. The furniture-seller went on, "I tell you this, though: I think that man Featherston will bring trouble. He lies. How can you trust a man who lies? You cannot. And any man who comes on the wireless and says, 'I am going to tell you the truth'—well, what else can he be except a liar?" Behind bifocals, his ice-blue eyes flashed. Plainly, he was condemning Jake Featherston to some chilly hell.

Cincinnatus wished getting rid of the man were that simple. But he nodded to Thorstein. Hating dishonesty of any sort, the Swede might also hate injustice of any sort. "I got me no quarrel with any o'

that," Cincinnatus said.

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“How could anyone quarrel with it?” Olaf Thorstein sounded genuinely bewildered. “Is it not as plain as the nose on a man’s face? And yet how could the people in the Confederate States have voted for the man if they saw it? They must not have seen it. This I do not understand.”

“Sometimes folk don’t want to see,” Cincinnatus said. “I reckon that had a lot to do with it.”

“But why would anyone blind himself on purpose?” Thorstein asked, seeming more bewildered still.

Cincinnatus had asked himself the same question, more than once. He said, “Seems to me they got a choice. They can look square in the mirror and see how ugly they are, or they can be blind. Looks like they done picked what they aim to do.”

“Uh- *huh*.” Olaf Thorstein chewed on that. At last, he asked, “And what would a Freedom Party man say about what you just said?”

“Oh, that one’s easy.” Cincinnatus laughed. “Reckon he’d say I was an uppity nigger, a crazy nigger.

Reckon he’d be right. When I used to live in the CSA, I wouldn’t never’ve said nothin’ like that. Colored fella livin’ in the CSA got to be crazy to talk that way. But I been in the USA since 1914 now. This ain’t no great place for black folks—don’t reckon there’s anywhere that’s a great place for black folks—but you take it all in all an’ it’s a lot better than the Confederate States ever was. I got me a chance here—not a good one, maybe, but a chance. Down there?” He shook his head. “No way, nohow, not before the Freedom Party, an’ not now, neither.”

Again, Thorstein thought before he spoke. “I have never heard a Negro talk so freely of these things,” he said, and then shrugged. “How many Negroes are there in Des Moines for me to talk to?”

“Not many. We’re thin on the ground here. We’re thin on the ground all over the USA,” Cincinnatus said. *And maybe that’s why things are a little easier for us here,* he thought. *White folks in the USA don’t like us much, but they ain’t afraid of us like in the Confederate States. Not enough of us here to be afraid of.*

“I hope I have not delayed you too much,” the furniture-store owner said. “I know you need as much work as you can get. Who does not, the way things are these days?”

“It’s all right, Mr. Thorstein. Don’t you worry about it none,” Cincinnatus said, for Thorstein really did sound concerned. “When I seen in the paper that that Featherston fella won, I was so upset, I didn’t know what to do. Times gonna be hard for colored folks down in the CSA—gonna be real hard. Glad I got me a chance to talk about it some.”

He was less glad when he got back to the railroad yard just in time to see another driver go off with a choice load that might have been his had he returned five minutes earlier. But he got a load for himself half an hour after that, when a train full of canned salmon from the Northwest puffed to a stop. Several groceries were waiting for their fish, and he took them a lot of it.

He was tired but happy—he’d made good money that day—when he got back to his apartment building and parked the truck in front of it. Joey Chang, the Chinaman who lived upstairs, was checking his mailbox when Cincinnatus walked into the lobby. “Hello,” Cincinnatus said, affably enough. He got on well with Chang, who brewed good beer in a dry state.

“Hello,” Chang answered, his English flavored with an accent unlike any other Cincinnatus had heard.

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“We talk a few minutes?”

“Sure,” Cincinnatus said in some surprise. “What’s on your mind?”

“Your son Achilles ask my daughter Grace to go to the cinema with him,” Chang replied. “What you think of this?”

“*Did* he?” Cincinnatus said, and the other man solemnly nodded. Achilles had said he thought Grace Chang was cute. As Olaf Thorstein had remarked, there weren’t that many Negroes in Des Moines. If Achilles found somebody he might like who wasn’t a Negro . . . Well, if he did, what then? “What do *you* think of that, Mr. Chang?” Cincinnatus asked.

“Don’t know what to think,” Chang said, which struck Cincinnatus as basically honest. He went on,

“Your Achilles good boy. I don’t say he not good boy, you understand? But he not Chinese.”

Cincinnatus nodded. He had similar reservations about Grace. He asked, “What’s your daughter think?”

“She is modern. She wants to be modern.” Mr. Chang made it sound like a curse. “She says, what difference it make? But it makes a difference, oh yes.”

“Sure does,” Cincinnatus said. The laundryman gave him a surprised look. Perhaps Chang hadn’t thought a Negro might mind if his son wanted to take a Chinese girl to the cinema. After scratching his head, Cincinnatus went on, “Maybe we just ought to let ’em go out and not say anything about it. Going to the moving pictures together ain’t like gettin’ married. And if we tell ’em no, that’ll only make ’em want to do it more to rile us up. Leastways, Achilles is like that. Dunno ‘bout your Grace.”

“Her, too,” Chang said morosely. “The more I do not like, the more she does. Modern.” He made the word sound even worse than he had before. Now he screwed up his face. “Yes, maybe we do this. I talk to my wife, see what she say.” By his tone, whatever Mrs. Chang decided would prevail.

“Fair enough,” Cincinnatus said. “I’ll talk to Elizabeth, too—and to Achilles.”

His wife wasn’t home yet. Neither was his son. After graduating from high school, Achilles was doing odd jobs and looking—along with so many others—for something more permanent. He got home before Elizabeth did, and set two dollars on the kitchen table, where Amanda sat doing homework. He *was* a good kid; he brought his pay home every day he worked.

As casually as Cincinnatus could, he said, “Hear you’re goin’ to the pictures with Grace Chang.”

Amanda dropped her pencil.

Achilles glared defiance. “That’s right. What about it? I think some of the money I make ought to be mine to have some fun with. Don’t you?”

Having fun with the money wasn't the point. Having fun with Grace Chang was. But all Cincinnatus said was, "Reckon I do. It's all right with me. Just wish I'd've heard about it from you and not from Grace's pa."

Set for a fight, Achilles didn't seem to know what to do when he didn't get one. "Oh," he said, and left his mouth hanging open. After a long moment, he added, "I figured you'd have a fit." Another pause, even longer. "Maybe I was wrong."

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"Maybe you was," Cincinnatus agreed. "No matter what you think, son, I ain't quite one o' them dinosaur things. Not *quite* ." He waited out one more pause. At last, Achilles nodded. His agreement made Cincinnatus feel he'd done a few things right after all.

Thanksgiving was supposed to be one of the happiest days of the year. When Chester Martin and Rita went to his parents' apartment for dinner, that was in the back of his mind. In the front of his mind was the chance to stuff himself till he was about ready to burst at the seams. The money his father had given him let his wife and him keep their own apartment and keep eating. It didn't let them keep eating well. He was sick of cabbage and potatoes and boiled noodles and day-old brown bread.

"Turkey," he said dreamily as he and Rita got off the trolley and walked toward the block of flats where he'd lived so long. The weather was sunny but crisp—a perfect late November afternoon. "*Roast* turkey.

Stuffing with giblet gravy." He'd eaten a lot of giblets since losing his job, but they *belonged* in gravy.

"Mashed potatoes. Sweet potatoes. Rolls and butter. Pumpkin pie. Apple pie, too. Whipped cream."

"Stop it, Chester," Rita said. "I'm going to drool on my shoes." A motorcar went by. Somebody inside waved. The Chevrolet parked in front of the apartment building. "There's your sister and her husband and little Pete."

"I see 'em." Chester waved back. His brother-in-law, Otis Blake, worked in a plate-glass plant and still had a job. He'd never given

Chester a hard time about losing his. He couldn't very well, not when his own brother was out of work.

"Uncle Chester! Aunt Rita!" Pete Blake, who was five, hit Chester in the knees with a tackle harder than a good many he'd met on the gridiron.

"Careful there, tiger." Martin ruffled his hair. "You almost knocked me on my can. You gonna be a tough guy when you grow up?"

"Tough guy!" Pete yelled. Then he gave Rita a kiss. Either he wasn't so tough yet, or he knew a pretty girl when he saw one.

Chester hugged Sue and shook hands with her husband. Otis Blake had his blond hair permanently parted in the middle by a scar from a scalp wound during the war. An inch lower and he wouldn't have been standing there. "How are you?" he asked now.

With a shrug, Martin answered, "I'm still here. They haven't knocked me out yet."

"Good," Blake said. "That's good."

"Come on. Let's go up to the place," Sue said. She turned to Pete. "You want to see Gramps and Grandma, don't you?"

"Gramps! Grandma!" Pete was enthusiastic about everything. Chances were he'd never heard of a business collapse. If he had, it meant nothing to him. Chester wished he could say the same.

Wonderful smells filled his nose as soon as he walked through the door. When he saw his mother's face a moment later, he knew something was wrong no matter how good the odors wafting out of the kitchen were. She looked as if she'd been wounded and didn't want to admit it even to herself. After the hugs, **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

after the kisses, Martin asked, "What is it, Ma? And don't tell me it's nothing, on account of I know that's not so."

Sue and Otis exchanged glances. Whatever it was, they already knew. Louisa Martin spoke in a low voice, as if in a sickroom: "Your father's been laid off."

Five words. Five words that changed—ruined—not just one life but at least two, maybe four. "Oh,"

Chester said, a soft, pained exhalation—he might have been punched in the stomach. Rita's lips skinned back from her teeth. Like her mother-in-law, she was trying to find out how much it hurt.

Laid off. It hurt bad. Martin didn't need to find out how much. What, after all, was the difference between bad and worse? Not enough to matter.

A toilet flushed. Out came Stephen Douglas Martin, rubbing his hands together. One look at Chester's face told him everything he needed to know. "So you heard already, did you?"

"Yeah," Chester said harshly. "I heard. What are you going to *do* , Pa?"

"Darn good question," his father replied. "Wish I had a darn good answer to go with it. Almost forty years at that place, and then—" He snapped his fingers. "I'm scrap metal. That's what I am now, scrap metal. Yesterday was my last day. But I tell you one thing: I'm going to have the best darn Thanksgiving anybody ever had, and you can take that to the bank." If Louisa and Sue and Rita hadn't been there, and especially if Pete hadn't, he might have expressed himself more pungently.

"This is a fancy spread." Chester wouldn't say any more than that. Lurking behind the bland statement was a not-so-bland worry. *If you're out of work, how can you afford it?*

Casually, Louisa Martin said, "Otis and Sue gave us a little help. Not much, just a little." Chester nodded. Otis was still working. The older Martins must have told him so they could make sure they got whatever help they needed for a proper holiday dinner.

Knowing what Chester knew took some of the enjoyment away from the feast: it seemed too much like sharing a condemned man's last meal. But that didn't stop him from eating till he was groaningly full.

When would his next chance to gorge himself on meat come? He had no idea. Like a savage in the jungle, he made the most of the chance he did have.

About ten o'clock, Pete started getting sleepy and fussy. Sue and Otis took their son and some leftovers and headed back to their place. Chester had waited for that; he needed to speak to his parents without his sister and brother-in-law listening. He started, "Pa, the bosses had no business—"

“No business?” Stephen Douglas Martin said. “Ha! Business is all they had, the . . . so-and-so’s.” Yes, he had trouble swearing in front of women.

“What I meant was, we’ll figure out something now that . . .” Chester’s voice trailed away. He thought his father would know what he meant any which way. Now that the elder Martins had no money coming in, how could they afford to give anyone else a hand? They had to worry about keeping their own place.

“Yes, we’ll manage. One way or another, we’ll manage,” Rita said. She had the same stubborn pride as anyone born a Martin.

Stephen Douglas Martin said, “I hear you two were talking about California.”

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“Yes, that’s true,” Chester said. “There’s no work in Toledo, or none to speak of. If you have a job, you’re all right. If you lose one, though, you haven’t got a prayer of finding anything new.”

“Thanks so much,” his father said. “That’s just what I wanted to hear.”

“I’m sorry, Pa. I’m sorry as . . . the devil. But that doesn’t mean I wasn’t telling the truth.”

“I know,” his father said. “I sure wish it did, though.”

“What about California?” Rita kept her mind on business.

“I’ll tell you what,” Chester’s father said. “Louisa and I have some money set aside. They aren’t going to throw us in the poorhouse right away, so you don’t need to worry your heads about that. I know this is a hard place to find work, on account of you’ve both done everything you could, but you haven’t had any luck. If I stake you two train tickets out West and enough money to keep you going a couple of months .

. . well, what do you think about that?”

“We’ll pay you back,” Chester said without even looking at Rita. “As soon as one of us gets something, we’ll pay you back, a little bit at a time till it’s all done.”

“You don’t need to say that, Chester,” his father said with a small smile. “If I wasn’t sure of it, you think I’d offer?”

“I don’t know,” Chester answered. “Depends on how bad you and Ma want to get rid of us, I guess.”

“Chester!” his mother said reproachfully.

“California.” Rita murmured the word. “Things are supposed to be good there, or as good as they are anywhere. They’ve got the farms, and they’ve got the moving pictures, and they’ve got all the people building houses for the people moving there for the other things.”

“And the weather,” Chester said. “If we go to Los Angeles, we can kiss snow good-bye. I wouldn’t miss it a bit, and that’s the truth.”

“You ready to tear everything up by the roots?” Stephen Douglas Martin asked. “If you do this, I can’t give you much more help till I’m back on my own feet.” *If I ever am* hung unspoken in the air. He went on, “Don’t want you winding up in a Blackfordburgh out there, even if you did vote for the fellow.”

“I voted for Coolidge and Hoover this time around,” Chester said. Rita made a face at him. He made a face right back, and went on, “I held my nose, but I did it. But I don’t think Hoover’s exactly a ball of fire.”

“He’s a ball of . . .” Now Rita seemed hampered in her choice of language. “*I* didn’t vote for Coolidge,”

she added.

“He’s had most of a year to make things better. He hasn’t done it,” Louisa Martin said. “He hasn’t done much of anything, not as far as I can see.”

“President Blackford did everything under the sun for four years in a row,” Stephen Douglas Martin said. “He didn’t make things better, either.” Chester’s father was a rock-ribbed—Chester sometimes
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thought a rock-headed—Democrat. He continued, “Look how the war with the Japs is winding down now.”

“Neither side ever wanted to fight that one all out, though,” Chester said. “That’s why it’s winding down.

It's not anything special Hoover's done."

"They haven't dropped any bombs on his head, the way they did on Blackford's," his father retorted.

He wagged a finger at Chester. "Still want to go to Los Angeles after that?"

"Yes!" This time, Rita spoke up before Chester could. She sounded even hungrier for California than he was.

"Thank you, Pa, from the bottom of my heart," Chester said.

"If you get work, I may come out there myself," his father said. "Anybody who thinks I'd miss snow is crazy."

"California," Rita said again, as if she expected to pan for gold and pull nuggets the size of eggs from a clear, cold mountain stream.

"California," Chester echoed, as if he expected to go to Los Angeles and wind up a motion-picture leading man the day after he got there. He went on, "There are people who hop a freight for a chance like this." He had, every now and then, thought of being one of them. "I *will* pay you back, Pa. So help me God, I will."

"I told you once, I wouldn't stake you if I didn't think you were good for it," Stephen Douglas Martin answered. "Only thing I worry about is how many people will be going out there, looking for whatever they can find."

"At least there are things to find in California," Chester said. "This town is dying on its feet. I've lived here all my life, except for when I was in the Army, but I won't be sorry to say good-bye." He laughed.

Sorry? He hadn't been so glad since the day the guns stopped and he realized he'd made it through the Great War alive.

XX

At three in the morning on an early December day when the sun wouldn't be up for hours and hours in Berlin, Ontario, Jonathan Moss thought wistfully of California or the Sandwich Islands or Florida or some other place with a halfway civilized climate. It was snowing outside. It had been snowing for a month. It would go on snowing till April, maybe May. He twisted in bed, trying to go back to sleep. *Trust*

me to move out of Chicago for a place with worse *weather,* he thought. Most of the time, such musings carried wry amusement. Every so often, as tonight, they felt too much like kidding on the square.

“There,” Laura said from the other bedroom. “Isn’t that better?”

“Mama,” Dorothy said. At not quite a year, she could say a couple of dozen words. That made her **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

advanced for her age. She wasn’t nearly advanced enough to keep from needing her diaper changed, though.

“Now lie down and go back to sleep,” Laura said. The crib creaked as she put the baby back into it.

“Mama!” Dorothy wailed as her mother left her bedroom and came back to the one she shared with Jonathan. That desperate appeal failing, Dorothy started crying and screaming and making as much racket as she could.

All the books said you were supposed to let children cry themselves out when you put them to bed.

After a while, they would get used to the idea that they could settle down by themselves. What the books didn’t say was how you were supposed to keep from going crazy while the baby had conniptions.

Earplugs might have helped, except that Jonathan had never found any good enough to keep out the noise.

His wife lay down beside him. “What are we going to do?” she said.

“How is she going to learn to go to sleep by herself if you go in there and pick her up?” he asked.

“How are we ever going to go to sleep if she screams her head off for the next two hours?” Laura returned.

Jonathan didn’t have a good answer for that, because it had happened. It had happened more than once, as a matter of fact. The books said it wasn’t supposed to. Dorothy hadn’t read the books. She wasn’t advanced enough to know how to read, either.

The next-door neighbors pounded on the wall, which meant the baby’s racket had woken them up.

“That does it,” Laura said, and got out of bed. “I don’t care what the books say. I don’t want the Boardmans hating us. I’m going to rock her.”

“All right.” Moss didn’t want to argue. He wanted to go back to sleep. And he did, as soon as the screaming stopped.

When the alarm went off a few hours later, Moss thought it was Dorothy crying again. “Turn it off, for Christ’s sake!” Laura snarled. Muzzily, he did. His wife started snoring again before he left the room. He made his own coffee in the kitchen, and scrambled some eggs to go with it. Then he put on his overcoat and went downstairs to see if the Bucephalus would start.

It did. A new battery helped. As he piloted the auto to the office, he imagined he was piloting one of the fighting scouts he’d flown during the war. Aeroplanes were faster these days. One-deckers were replacing two-deckers—but then, he’d flown a one-decker, a U.S. copy of the German Fokker, through a long stretch of the war. He figured he could do it again if he ever had to.

An old Ford ran a red light and shot across his path. That was moronic any time, and all the more so with snow on the ground, when stopping was as much a matter of luck as anything else. Fortunately for Moss and the other guy, the Bucephalus *did* stop. Even so, he wished its headlights were twin machine guns. Then he could have given the fool in the Ford just what he deserved.

That was funny, in a way. He chuckled about it till he got to the office. But the world didn’t feel so comfortable as it had a couple of years before. The sputtering war with Japan was only one sign of that.

With the *Action Française* in the saddle in France, with Charles XI on the throne there and sounding **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

fiercer every day, with the Mosley thugs a noisy minority in the British Parliament, both the German Empire and the United States, he thought, had reason to worry.

And with the Freedom Party set to take over the Confederate States, the USA had another reason to be anxious, one much closer to home. “Idiots,” Moss muttered, cautiously applying the brakes at another light. “How *could* they have voted for that crazy blowhard?”

Actually, he knew how, or thought he did. The Confederates didn’t

just want to put their own house in order. Like the French, they wanted revenge for what had happened to them during the Great War. Of course, the French had friends. Little by little, Russia was shaking off the trauma of the war and the endless Red uprising afterwards—an uprising that made the Red revolt in the CSA seem a walk in the park by comparison. And England wanted another crack at Kaiser Bill . . . and, no doubt, at the United States as well.

A patrol of men wearing green-gray and carrying Springfields tramped past Moss' building as he parked the Bucephalus. That reminded him he was in a land—not a country any more—that also despised his nation. His very shingle reminded him of the same thing. JONATHAN MOSS, it said. OCCUPATION

LAW.

He got out of the auto. He was laughing again as he went into the office, not that it was any too funny.

Not a day went by when his marriage didn't remind him he was in a land that despised his nation.

At least we're occupying a place without all that many people, he thought. *The Germans would have needed to put half their men in France to keep an eye on all the frogs who hate them* . That was probably why they'd let the *Action Française* get off the ground: till too late, they hadn't seen it as a real threat. *And now King Charles is talking about rearming. I'm sure the Kaiser loves that. But would he start another war to stop it? He's an old man now* .

President-elect Featherston also made loud noises about rearming. Moss wished he hadn't remembered that, not least since no one in the USA seemed much inclined to stop him.

Moss turned the key in his door, turned on the lamp in his office, and turned the knob on the steam radiator to make the place feel as if it was at least a little south of the Arctic Circle. That done, he plugged in a hot plate and got a pot of coffee perking. It would be black, oily sludge by this afternoon.

He knew that. He knew he'd go on drinking it anyway, too.

A letter from a military prosecutor lay on his desk. He'd left it there when he went home the morning before. Major Lopat's secretary had neatly typed, *We are not obligated to turn over this evidence to you prior to its production in court. Rules of discovery applicable in civilian cases do*

not apply here, as you are doubtless perfectly well aware. If I can be of further assistance to you, do not hesitate to call on me. Then Lopat had signed it—in red ink, for good measure.

“Well, screw you, Sam,” Moss muttered. What the military prosecutor didn’t know was that he already had back-channels photostats of the documents in question. They’d come in the same mail delivery as the snotty letter.

He was gloating about the surprise he had planned for the prosecutor when the telephone rang. He was his own secretary. Picking up the telephone, he said, “Jonathan Moss.”

A man’s voice on the other end of the line: “You’re the Yank barrister, aren’t you?”

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“That’s right,” Moss answered. “Who are you? What can I do for you?”

“If I was you, I wouldn’t start my motorcar no more,” the voice said. A click followed. The line went dead.

Moss looked out the window. There sat the Bucephalus, right where he’d left it. Had someone done something to it there on the street, brazen as could be? Or was somebody just trying to rattle his cage?

That wasn’t the biggest question, he realized. The biggest question was, did he feel like finding out the hard way?

He didn’t. He called the local garrison and reported what had just happened. The sergeant with whom he spoke knew who he was. The noncom thought the call highly amusing. “You’re worth more to the Canucks than a dozen of their own kind,” he said. “They ought to give you a medal, not blow you up.”

“Funny. Ha, ha,” Moss said. “Will you send your bomb squad out to go over my auto?”

“Yes,” the sergeant answered. “I’ll do that. The squad may take a while to get there, though. Yours is the fifth call we’ve had this morning.”

“A hoaxer, then,” Moss said. “He must want to make people run

around in circles and waste time.”

“We thought so, too,” the sergeant told him. “The first two times we sent out the bomb squad, nothing.

The third time, there was a bomb. They’re still playing with it. If you hear a bang and your windows rattle, you can bet the squad will be late to your place.” He laughed again.

Moss remembered such humor from his own days in the Army. It had seemed funny then. It didn’t now—not to him, anyhow. The sergeant enjoyed it. “You ought to be trying to find out who your practical joker is,” Moss said. “We could have another Arthur McGregor on our hands.”

“Don’t worry about it, Mr. Moss,” the sergeant said. “When we do catch this son of a bitch, whoever he turns out to be, you can get him off the hook. So long. The bomb squad will be along sooner or later.”

He hung up.

That shows what my own people think of me, Moss thought unhappily. *I’m not doing anything against the law—I’m working strictly within it. This is the thanks I get* .

He wondered whether the bomb squad would show up at all, or whether he would get to find out if his car was wired by going out to it and turning the key. He heard no sudden and dreadful boom, though he worked with his ears peeled all day. Toward evening, a squad of men whose heavy armor made them look like a cross between modern soldiers and medieval knights showed up and went over his car. After twenty minutes or so, one of them waddled into the building.

By the time he got to Moss’ door, he was sweating despite the chilly weather. How much did that protective clothing weigh? If a bomb went off, how much good would it do? Even had Moss intended to ask those questions aloud, he didn’t get the chance. The man from the bomb squad asked if he was Jonathan Moss. When he nodded, the fellow said, “No bomb. Just that asshole running us from pillar to post.” Without waiting for an answer, he waddled away.

“Thanks,” Moss called after him. He raised a gauntleted hand and kept on walking.

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Who would want to blow me up, or at least to scare me spitless? Moss wondered. The U.S.

sergeant was right. He had done a lot of good for the Canucks. They shouldn't have wanted to hurt him.

They should have wanted to coat him in bulletproof glass.

Do they hate me just because I'm a Yank? He shook his head in slow wonder. Who could be that stupid?

M*ary Pomeroy. Mary Pomeroy. Mary Pomeroy.* No matter how often she wrote her new name, trying to get used to it, she still thought of herself as Mary McGregor. She'd been married only a couple of months. The change in her name sometimes seemed the smallest of the changes that had swept over her.

She'd known they would be there when she said yes after Mort got down on one knee in front of her.

She'd known they would be there, but she hadn't had any idea how overwhelming they would prove.

How could living in Rosenfeld, for instance, be so very different from living on a farm not *that* far outside of town? So she'd asked herself before going from the farmhouse where she'd spent her whole life to rooms across the street from the diner where her new husband worked with his father. So she'd asked herself, and she'd found out.

Electricity, for instance. She'd never had it at the farm, so she'd never known what she was missing.

Now she felt as if she'd spent her life in the Dark Ages. That was literally true; kerosene lamps didn't come close to matching light bulbs for brilliance or convenience. But there was so much more. A refrigerator beat an icebox all hollow. A vacuum cleaner was ever so much easier to use and more effective than a carpet sweeper. An electric toaster knocked the stuffing out of the wire grid that went over the fire. An electric alarm clock didn't stop running if she forgot to wind it.

An electric phonograph also didn't run down, unlike the windup machine the McGregors had had on the farm. And a wireless set—a

wedding present from Mort's father—offered a window on the world Mary had never imagined. Music, dramas, comedies—all in the apartment, all at the twist of a dial? If that wasn't a miracle, what was? She had to keep reminding herself the news that came from the machine on the hour was only what the Yanks wanted her to hear.

The apartment had a telephone, too. That didn't impress Mary so much. None of the few people who might have wanted to call her had telephones of their own, so they couldn't. Whenever it rang, it was for Mort. She suspected that would change as time went by. The Pomeroys were still a very new couple. Bit by bit, they would fit themselves into Rosenfeld's jigsaw puzzle of class and sociability.

That thought had hardly crossed her mind before the other half of the Pomeroys came out of the bedroom pulling his overcoat tight around himself. "I'm off to the diner," he said, and paused to give Mary a kiss.

"Oh, Mort," she said. Her arms tightened around him. The kiss took longer and got hotter than he'd probably expected. He didn't seem disappointed, though, when they finally broke apart.

"I'll see you tonight," he said huskily.

Mary nodded. Some of the other things that went with marriage and a move to town were even more startling, even more exciting, than electricity. Although if it wasn't electricity that set her pulse racing now, what was it? She knew what it was, all right. "Tonight," she said.

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Mort looked as if he had to remind himself he was supposed to go out the door, down the stairs, and across the street to the diner. Mary watched him from the window. He hurried across when no motorcars were coming in either direction. Snow flew up from his overshoes as he crossed the street.

Rosenfeld would have a white Christmas in a couple of weeks. More snow started falling even as Mary watched.

Mort opened the front door to the diner, ducked inside, and closed it after him. With a regretful sigh, Mary turned away. *What shall I do with the rest of my day?* she wondered. Oh, she had work to do keeping the place clean and getting supper ready for tonight. But that was

work for a few hours, not work that would devour a day. She had no livestock to look after but a cat, and Mouser, like any of his kind, looked after himself perfectly well.

Mary laughed. “I never thought I would miss shoveling manure,” she said. It wasn’t that she missed it, exactly, but she didn’t have certainty in her routine any more.

Once she was done with what she had to do, she could go out and explore Rosenfeld. She’d done that a lot after coming back from her honeymoon at the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. She hadn’t wanted to set foot in New York, and Mort hadn’t argued with her. She didn’t go out into Rosenfeld so often as she had on first coming home. She hadn’t needed long to figure out there was only so much to see and do here. Compared to a farm, Rosenfeld was a metropolis. Compared to a real metropolis, Rosenfeld . . .

might as well have been a farm.

When she finished her chores today, she sat down and turned on the wireless. The tubes inside glowed to life. She waited for sound to start coming out of the machine. *This is what it’s for,* she realized. *It fills up the spaces when you’re not working* . She hadn’t had to worry about many spaces like that on the farm, for she was almost always working or eating or sleeping. But town life was different.

She could make herself a cup of tea, sit down in a rocking chair and read a book or a magazine, and listen to the wireless, and nobody would call her lazy or worthless. And she wasn’t, either; she’d done everything that needed doing except for making supper, and that could—should—wait till the afternoon.

The book she had was called *I Sank Roger Kimball* . She didn’t remember Kimball’s death; she’d been a lot younger then, and the Confederate States had seemed farther away than the mountains of the moon.

Come to that, they still did. Her honeymoon train ride was the first time she’d ever left Manitoba, and even then she’d gone only one province away.

But Sylvia Enos’ travels weren’t what leaped out of the sparsely written book at her. The American woman’s revenge was. She’d found out what had happened to her husband, and she’d paid back the man who did it. Her government had seemed powerless to do any such thing, but she’d pulled it off. Not only that, she’d got off scot free—

and people all across the United States acclaimed her as a heroine.

Part of Mary applauded that. But it infuriated more of her. This Enos woman had struck back for her country, and politicians in the USA praised her to the sky. Mary's own father had struck back at the USA for Canada, and he'd been hounded and hunted and ended up dying fighting the Americans.

They'd murdered her brother, Alexander, who'd also been a patriot: murdered him under the disguise of law. Where was the justice in that?

And I haven't done anything—not a single, solitary thing—to pay the Yanks back for what they did to Alexander and to my pa. Shame burned Mary's cheeks. Her father's bomb-making tools remained hidden in the barn back at the farm. *How am I supposed to bring them here? One day I'll have the chance, I suppose, but it hasn't happened yet. How old will I have to be before I can* do **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

something? To twenty-three, even twenty-five looked far away.

She went through *I Sank Roger Kimball* at a feverish pace. *She did it* , she thought again and again. *She did it, and she got away with it* .

I haven't done anything. When will I do something? Will I ever do anything? She went to the window and looked outside. As if on cue, a green-gray U.S. Army truck rolled slowly up the street. The Americans had been in Rosenfeld for going on twenty years now. The most she'd ever done to them was flatten a Model T's tires with a nail, and she'd been a little girl then.

Most Canadians, these days, found it easier just to . . . get along with the Yanks. Even people who'd called themselves patriots during and after the war were in bed with the Americans these days, sometimes literally. She despised them even more than she despised the Yanks. Americans were wrong, but at least they served their own country. What could you say about a Canadian who did the bidding of the United States? Mary didn't know any words vile enough for such people.

She'd had thoughts like that before, had them and done nothing about them. But *I Sank Roger Kimball* fired her all over again. Her father hadn't feared to pay the price. Did she?

She shook her head. It wasn't that. Life had got in the way. She'd

never expected to fall in love, to get married, to leave the farm. She didn't see how anyone could do that sort of thing and keep fighting the Americans.

That was all right—as long as she eventually got on with the war. As far as she was concerned, it hadn't ended in 1917. It would never end till the Yanks left Canada and her country got its freedom back.

She salted and peppered a pork roast and put it in the oven with dried apples—the potatoes could wait till later. Buying meat at the butcher's shop instead of doing the slaughtering herself was one more thing she'd had to get used to. It was much more convenient, even if she couldn't always get the cuts exactly the way she wanted them.

Mort came home carrying a copy of the *Rosenfeld Register* . "Here's something funny from Ontario," he said, pointing to a story on an inside page. "Somebody threatened to bomb an American barrister's auto in Berlin."

"Just threatened?" Mary said. "Shame he didn't do it."

Mort Pomeroy nodded. He didn't love the Yanks, either; Mary couldn't have loved him if he had. But then he said, "He's not an ordinary barrister, though. Have you heard of Jonathan Moss? He defends Canadians in trouble with the occupation government, and he gets a lot of them off."

"No, I hadn't heard of him," Mary said. "Why does he do that, if he's an American? He must have some kind of angle."

"I don't think so," her husband said. "He *is* married to the woman whose maiden name was Laura Secord, but he was doing the same thing before he married her. And she wouldn't have anything to do with the ordinary run of Yank, would she?"

Mary didn't want to argue with Mort, even about something like this —which proved she was a newlywed, and very much in love. "I wouldn't think so," she said, and then, "Supper should be ready.

Let me go make sure."

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"Smells good," Mort said, and Mary smiled.

But she wasn't smiling on the inside. She remembered Laura Secord's name from the failed Canadian uprising of the mid-1920s. Wasn't the woman supposed to have warned her American lover about it?

And wasn't it likely that that lover was this Moss fellow?

If that was so, the fellow who'd threatened to bomb the motorcar really should have done it, but with Moss' wife in the machine. Mary remembered her scorn—no, her hatred—for collaborating Canadians when the rebellion fizzled. She'd vowed revenge on them then. She'd vowed, and then she'd ignored her vow.

She took the pork roast out of the oven. Savory steam filled the kitchen. Mort exclaimed again. Mary hardly heard him. As she plunged her carving knife deep into the roast, she knew what she had to do.

"And I will," she murmured.

"Will what?" Mort asked.

"Get some butter for the potatoes," Mary answered smoothly. She took the butter out of the refrigerator. She'd bought it. She hadn't had to churn it: one more change from farm to town. But that wasn't what she'd meant. No, that wasn't what she'd meant at all.

When the door to your flat opens at three in the morning and you wake up at the noise and you smile and murmur, "Oh, thank God," odds are you are a fisherman's relative. Raising her voice slightly from that relieved murmur, Sylvia Enos called, "Is that you, George?"

"It's me, Ma," he answered, also in a soft voice: Mary Jane lay sleeping in the bedroom she now shared with her mother. "I'm sorry I woke you up."

"Don't worry about it. I'm glad you're here," Sylvia said. Mary Jane muttered, rolled over, and started to snore again. Sylvia went on, "Four days after New Year's and I've got my Christmas present. What time did your boat get in?"

"Last night, about five," George, Jr., said.

"What?" Sylvia couldn't believe her ears. She jumped out of bed and angrily hurried to her son. She wanted to shake him, but he was too big to shake. "And what were you doing between then and now?

Drinking away your pay with a pack of worthless sailormen, I'll bet—that or worse." She sniffed, but she didn't smell beer or whiskey on her son's breath. She didn't smell cheap perfume, either, so maybe he hadn't been doing worse.

"Ma, I'm not drunk," George, Jr., said, and Sylvia had to nod, for she could tell that was true. He went on, "I didn't do . . . anything else, either. Not like that. Not what you meant."

Reluctantly, Sylvia nodded again. She didn't think he would lie to her straight out. "What *did* you do, then?" she asked. "Why didn't you come home?"

George, Jr., took a deep breath. "Ma, I didn't come home because I paid a call on Constance **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

McGillicuddy and her folks. I asked her to marry me, Ma, and she said yes."

"Oh." The word took all the breath out of Sylvia. She stared up at her tall, broad-shouldered son in the gloom inside the flat. To her, he would always be a little boy. "Oh," Sylvia said again. Yes, she'd had to inhale first. Little boys didn't give her news like that.

"I love Connie, Ma," her son said. "She loves me, too. We'll be happy together. And she's got a waitressing job that looks like it's good and steady. We'll be able to make it, with a little luck."

In times like these, how much luck was out there? Sylvia didn't know. Times were hard when you had to worry about what your wife-to-be could bring in. She did know that. But George, Jr., was sensible enough to make the calculation instead of ignoring it. *I did something right,* Sylvia told herself.

Aloud, she said, "I haven't even met this girl, or her family. What do they do?"

She could barely make out her son's smile in the darkness. "Her father's a fisherman—what else? He knew Pa a little. I don't think they ever sailed together, though. He was in a destroyer during the war, too. He even got torpedoed, but he made it to a boat and got picked up."

"He didn't get torpedoed after the damn war was over." Sylvia's voice stayed soft, but she could hear the savagery in it. Even after more than

sixteen years, what Roger Kimball had done still felt filthy to her.

She remembered the weight of the pistol in her hand, remembered the way it had bucked when she pulled the trigger, remembered the deafening report, remembered Kimball falling with a look of absurd surprise on his face and blood spreading over the front of his shirt. *If I had it to do over again, would I?*

she wondered.

She didn't wonder long. *Hell, yes! I'd do it in a red-hot minute!*

Coming back to here and now took a distinct effort of will. "McGillicuddy," she said. "She'll be Irish, then. Catholic."

"Does it bother you?" her son asked. "It doesn't bother me a bit, honest to God it doesn't." He laughed at his own choice of words.

Sylvia had to think about how much it bothered her. Some, yes, but how much? It wasn't as if she went to church every Sunday herself. She'd known plenty of Catholics who were perfectly nice, perfectly good people. How much did it really matter if her grandchildren grew up as mackerel-snappers? Less than she'd expected it to before she looked things over inside herself. "I guess it's all right," she said, and then nodded, firming up her acquiescence. "Yes, it *is* all right."

"That's taken care of, then," George, Jr., said. "They don't mind too much that I'm not." That side of the coin hadn't occurred to Sylvia. Her son went on, "It's the United States. Who you are counts for more than who your folks were. President Blackford's wife was Jewish, and nobody made a big fuss about that."

"I suppose," Sylvia said. "I'm still glad he lost. The Socialists just don't know what to do about the Confederate States."

"With this new Freedom Party taking over, who does?" George, Jr., said.

"I know." Sylvia hesitated, then went on, "That Roger Kimball was a grand high panjandrum in the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

Freedom Party. If he hadn't been, I never would have found out about him. That's the kind of people that party draws, and it's the best reason I can think of to figure they're up to no good."

“We licked the CSA once,” her son said. “If we ever have to, we can lick ’em again.”

He remembered only the last war. Unlike people born in the nineteenth century, he didn’t think of the repeated humiliations the United States had suffered at the hands of the Confederacy, Britain, and France before the Great War. And, though his own father was part of the cost of licking the Confederate States, he didn’t think about that, either.

Well, why would he? went through Sylvia’s mind. *He hardly remembers his father. How do you miss what you didn’t even know you had?*

She stood on tiptoe to kiss George, Jr., on the cheek. “Go to bed now. It’s late. It’s so late, it’s getting early.” He laughed at that, though Sylvia knew perfectly well what she’d meant. She went on, “I’m happy for you.”

“Connie’s the most wonderful girl in the world.” He spoke with absolute conviction.

Did she already let him into her bed, to make him that happy? Sylvia shrugged. It hardly mattered, not if they were getting married soon. The worst that could happen was a baby, and most people looked the other way if a first baby came seven or eight months after the wedding instead of the usual nine. “All right, son. Sleep tight tonight, and we’ll talk more in the morning.”

In the morning, though, George, Jr., was still asleep when Mary Jane’s alarm clock went off. He didn’t wake up, either; in fact, his breathing didn’t even change. Mary Jane got dressed while Sylvia made coffee for both of them. Her daughter had landed a typist’s job. Neither of them knew how long it would last. They both knew she couldn’t afford to be late. She’d got the job when the girl who had it before was late three times in two weeks.

Along with the coffee and eggs over hard, Sylvia gave Mary Jane the news. “That’s wonderful!” Mary Jane squealed. She hugged Sylvia. “Wonderful!”

“Have you met the girl?” Sylvia asked. “I haven’t.”

“Once,” her daughter answered. “We were at a dance together. We’d come separately, but we were both there at the same time. She’s blond—green eyes. Pretty enough, I guess.” Mary Jane shrugged, as if to say what men saw in women was largely a closed book to her.

It was to Sylvia, too, but she said, “George certainly seems to think so. Do you care that she’s Catholic?”

“Not me,” Mary Jane said at once. “As long as she gets along with George, that’s what matters.”

“That’s what I think, too. We’re going to have to meet her and her folks, you know. I wonder what they’ll be like.” Sylvia sighed. “I wonder if they have a telephone. If they do, I could go to a booth and call them up and arrange it. But Lord only knows how many McGillicuddys there are in Boston.”

“If they have a telephone, George will know the number.” Mary Jane was bound to be right about that.

She gulped down the last of the coffee, rose from the table, and put on hat and overcoat against the cold, nasty weather outside. She hurried to the door, then turned back. “I’ll see you tonight. Gotta run now, or
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I’ll miss the trolley.”

Sylvia had been laid off from a job in a canning plant not long before, just as she had after the Great War ended. She wasn’t hurting yet, not with Mary Jane working and with the money she’d made in the 1932

presidential campaign, some of which she still had. Not going out to look for work one morning didn’t worry her.

George, Jr., emerged from bed, still yawning, a little before nine. “They want to meet you, too, Ma, and Mary Jane,” he said when Sylvia asked him about the McGillicuddys. “They haven’t got a telephone, though. I’ll set it up when I see Connie.”

Sylvia and Mary Jane went to the McGillicuddys’ house—it was a house, not a flat—near T Wharf two days later, on Sunday afternoon. Constance’s father, Patrick, was a redhead, going gray; her mother, Margaret, had hair whose defiant gold had to come from a dye bottle. George, Jr.’s, intended also had three strapping brothers and a kid sister who couldn’t have been much above ten. A big black dog named Nemo barked and wagged his tail and generally considered the house to be his, with the McGillicuddys tolerated guests whose purpose in life was to keep him full of horsemeat.

“You’ve got a fine boy there,” Patrick McGillicuddy said, squeezing

Sylvia's hand as she stood in the front hall. "We're glad to have him in the family." He didn't particularly talk like an Irishman. Looking Mary Jane up and down, he went on, "And I think Connor and Larry and Paul will be glad to have his sister in the family." His sons grinned.

"I'm glad to have her in the family, too," said Constance's sister, whose name was Liz.

"Good for you, dear," her father said, "but I don't think you're glad the way your brothers are." The young men's grins grew wider. Liz look confused. Whatever the McGillicuddys were going to tell her about the birds and bees, they didn't seem to have told her yet.

The way Connie looked at George, Jr., and the way she clung to him whenever she got the chance, told Sylvia everything she needed to know on that score. Her eyes met Margaret McGillicuddy's. The two women shared a moment of perfect understanding. *Enjoy it while it lasts,* their faces both said, *because it doesn't usually last long* .

"One of these days, I'm going to read your book," Patrick McGillicuddy told Sylvia. She nodded politely; she'd heard that a good many times. He went on, "You made a lot of people proud when you went down to the CSA and did what you did. Could have been me you were paying that sub skipper back for, easy as not."

She could tell he spoke from the heart. "Thank you," she said. "That means a lot to me, especially since George tells me you were in the Navy, too."

"Only luck I'm still here." He suddenly seemed to remember he had a drink in his hand. Raising it, he said, "And we've got luck right here in the room with us. To Connie and George!" He drank. So did Sylvia. So did everyone else.

Another lonely winter night. Lucien Galtier took some fried chicken off the stove. He would never make a good cook, but he'd got to the point where he didn't mind eating what he made. After he finished supper, he washed dishes and tidied up as meticulously as he could. Marie would have expected it of **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

him, and he didn't want to let her down. It wasn't as good a job as she would have done, but he hoped she would give him credit for making the effort.

After he put the last plate in the drainer—no matter what his wife had

done, he couldn't make himself waste time drying dishes—he left the kitchen and went out to the parlor: the living room, people were calling it these days. He turned on the wireless and waited for sound to start coming out of it.

As music began to play, Lucien tapped the cabinet. "This is a marvelous machine," he said, talking to himself as he often did while alone. "It makes me feel I have company, even when I have none."

The music stopped. The people on the wireless began to try to sell him laundry soap. He listened to the pitch with half an ear while he lit a cigarette. Not all the company was welcome. Another little skit proclaimed the virtues of a brand of tobacco different from the one he smoked. He shrugged and took another puff.

More music came out of the speaker—a concertina solo. He grinned. "Welcome to *Voyageurs* ," the announcer said. Lucien settled down to listen. All of Quebec settled down to listen at half past seven on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. The comedy about fur traders and Indians was the most popular show in the country.

One of the Indians started complaining the *voyageur* had cheated him. That was a running gag on the show—in fact, the Indian got the better of the *voyageur* every time. He also spoke French not like an Indian but like a Jewish peddler, which made things funnier and made them funny in a different way.

As usual, everything turned out all right—and turned out absurd—within the appointed half hour. After the show was done, Lucien turned to a station that played music, poured himself some apple brandy, and settled down with a French translation of an American story: a woman who'd gone down into the Confederate States to avenge her husband.

It was a strange kind of French, extraordinarily terse and to the point. He wondered if the English was the same. Then he wondered if he could make enough sense out of written English to find out. He doubted it.

"But I can ask my son-in-law," he said. He had to remind himself Dr. Leonard O'Doull was a born anglophone. Whenever the two of them talked together, they spoke French. O'Doull sounded more like a Quebecois every year, too, losing bit by bit the Parisian accent with which he'd originally learned his second language.

At about a quarter to nine, someone knocked on the door. Wondering

who could be mad enough to pay him a call at this hour, Lucien put down the book and went to find out. It wasn't snowing at the moment, but it had been and it would be, and it probably was below zero outside.

When he opened the door, his younger son waited there. "Oh, hello, Georges," Lucien said. "I might have known it would be you. What are you doing here so late?"

"Well, you wouldn't expect me to leave my house before *Voyageurs* was done, would you?" Georges asked reasonably. He stepped into the farmhouse where he'd been born and grown up. Lucien closed the door behind him to stop letting out precious heat. He went on, "I am not a rich man, to have a wireless set in my automobile. I am lucky to have an automobile."

"I've got the applejack out, to settle me before I go to bed," Lucien said. "Would you like some?"

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"Yes, thank you, *mon père* . It will warm me up after the chilly drive over, the motorcar also lacking a heater. Ah, *merci* ." Georges accepted the glass and took a cautious sip—with bootleg applejack, you never knew what you were getting till you got it. He nodded. "This is a good batch. Strong enough to feel, but not strong enough to burn off the roof of your mouth."

"Yes, I thought the same," Lucien agreed. "Is that why you came over—to drink my brandy, I mean?"

"As good a reason as any, eh? And better than most, I think." Georges looked around. He lit a cigarette, then sighed and shook his head. "Whenever I come here, I keep expecting *chère Maman* to come out of the kitchen and say hello."

That made Lucien pour his own glass full again. "Whenever I come in the house, son, I expect the same thing. But what I expect and what I get"—he sighed—"they are not the same."

"Calisse," Georges said—almost more of an invocation of the holiness of the chalice than the usual Quebecois curse. He saw the book Lucien had been reading. "I went through that. A brave woman."

“I remember something about it in the papers when it happened,” Lucien said. “Not much, though, and of course there was no wireless then. Strange how we’ve come to take it for granted in just a few years’

time.”

“My next-door neighbor visited me last fall,” Georges said. “It was a Wednesday night, and he listened to *Voyageurs* . He had no electricity on his farm till then, did Philippe, though he does well for himself. He never saw the need. A week after that, he went out and got it so he could have a wireless set for himself.

A wireless show decided him.”

“I believe you,” Lucien said. “Is this why you came, then? You wanted to tell me about your neighbor and the wireless and electricity?”

“I came because I wanted to visit my father,” Georges replied. “Sour as you are, it could be that you find this hard to believe. If so . . . well, too bad. My neighbor Philippe cannot visit his father, for he has no father to visit. I am lucky, and I take advantage of my luck.” He hefted his glass. “And if I get a knock of applejack in the side, this is not so bad, either.”

Lucien looked down into the pale yellow liquid filling his own glass. Slowly, he said, “I am going to tell you something I thought I would never say to you in all my days. You are a scamp, you know, and a rogue, and a fellow who gets away with everything he possibly can and then with one thing more.”

“You never thought you would say this to me?” Georges raised an eyebrow and made a comical face. “

Mon cher papa, you have been telling me this ever since I could stand up, and probably before that, too.”

“Yes, before that, too,” the elder Galtier agreed. “But that is not what I intended to say. What I intended to say is, you are a good son, Georges. It pains me to say it, and it must pain you to hear it, but there it is.

You *are* a good son.”

Georges didn’t say anything for close to a minute. When he did speak, his words were slow and thoughtful: “This means a very great deal to

me, *mon père* .” He paused again, then went on, “What it means is, you are obviously senile, and suffering from softening of the brain. I am sure my esteemed brother-in-law, Dr. O’Doull, would have a fancier name for it, but that is what it is.”

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“Thank you,” Lucien said, and sounded enough as if he meant it to make his younger son give him a puzzled look. He explained: “Thank you for showing me you really are the ungrateful wretch I thought you were, and not the caring fellow I believed I saw before. I don’t recognize him, and wouldn’t know what to do with him if I saw him again.”

“Oh, good.” Georges’ voice held nothing but relief. “Now we are insulting each other again. I know how to do this. I know why I should, too. We understand each other this way. The other?” He shook his head. “What could we do if we talked to each other like that all the time?”

Lucien thought it over. “Lord knows.”

His son got up and poured their glasses full of applejack again. “We can always get drunk. We know how to do that, too. How much work have you got in the morning?”

“The usual.” Lucien shrugged. “How much have *you* got?”

“The usual.” Georges shrugged, too. “But I have help, and you don’t.”

With another shrug, Lucien said, “It’s winter. I have to feed the animals and muck out. Past that, things can wait. It’s not like plowing or harvest time. If you want to get drunk, we can get drunk. Too bad Charles and Leonard are not here to do it with us.”

“Winter does not make the brilliant and talented Dr. O’Doull’s work lighter, as it does ours,” Georges said. “If anything, it makes his work worse.”

“We’ll just have to drink by ourselves, then,” Lucien said. “What shall we drink to?”

“How about drinking to being a small country where not much happens?” his son suggested. “The way the world seems to be going

these days, we may be luckier than we know."

"I confess, I pay less attention to the world now than I did when we were part of Canada," Lucien Galtier said. "In those days, we had to worry about the United States, because the United States used to worry about us. Now the United States don't care much about us one way or the other."

"We don't bother them any more. We *can't* bother them any more," Georges replied. He paused, sipped, and then asked, "What do you think of *Action Française* ?"

"It is good to see France feeling strong again. What ever else we are, we are still French, eh?" Lucien said, and his son nodded. He continued, "But to be strong, France has to get ready for war. I do not think this is good, not since I have seen war with my own eyes."

"Most Frenchmen have also seen war with their own eyes," his son said. "Those who have will not be eager to fight again, even if England goes the same way as France, which seems more likely every day."

"An eighteen-year-old in France will no more remember the Great War than an eighteen-year-old here,"

Lucien replied. "It is 1934 now. Come this summer, the war will have been over for seventeen years."

He sipped at his applejack, wondering how that was possible.

But then Georges said, "Half a lifetime for me—oh, not exactly, but close enough. That truly seems unbelievable, but it is so. All the time of my manhood, I have lived since the war in the Republic of
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Quebec."

"So you have." Lucien also had trouble believing that, though it too was so. To keep from thinking about the passage of the years, he thought some more about how things were across the ocean. "England," he said musingly. "I don't love England—what Quebecois who grew up in Canada before the turn of the century could? But I don't hate her, either, not quite."

"Why not?" Georges asked. "I know plenty of men your age who do."

“Because I always feel that, bad as she was, she could have been much worse,” Lucien replied after some thought. “She could have been like the Belgians in Africa, and made her name a stench among the nations. She didn’t, and so I give her . . . some . . . credit.”

“Ah, but would you rather be on her side or on the side of the United States?” Georges asked slyly.

“I would rather be on the side of Quebec, and of Quebec alone,” Lucien said. But his son hadn’t give him that choice, and he knew it.

For some reason Nellie Jacobs couldn’t fathom, her coffeehouse was full of men from the Confederate States one chilly February afternoon. Three or four of them had served in Washington during the war. By the cheerful way they reminisced, the CSA might have won the fight instead of losing it.

The fellow who’d led them here was a genial, middle-aged man named Robert E. Kent. He’d not only been in Washington, but insisted he’d been a regular at the coffeehouse. Nellie didn’t remember him; she did her best not to remember men. But he remembered her and her doings altogether too well. “What ever happened to that pretty daughter of yours?” he asked. “You know, the one who was going to marry our officer.”

“After the war, she married a U.S. veteran,” Nellie said coolly. “Their son, Armstrong, will be twelve this year. They’ve got a little girl, too.” Kent was named for a C.S. hero, her own grandson for one from the USA. She used Custer’s middle name as a weapon against the genial Confederate.

Another man from south of the border said, “I saw a girl, maybe thirteen or fourteen, in here a while ago.

Is that your daughter’s daughter?”

“No,” Nellie said. “Clara’s *my* daughter. I married Hal Jacobs, who ran the cobbler’s shop across the street. He died last year.” She looked down at the counter as she said that. It still hurt. A young Italian fellow had bought the cobbler’s shop. He looked to be running it into the ground. Watching that hurt, too.

“Sorry to hear it, ma’am,” Robert E. Kent said politely. “He fixed my boots once or twice. He was right good at it.”

He gave Hal the sort of impersonal praise he might have given a

whore who'd pleased him. Maybe thinking of that particular comparison was what made Nellie ask, "Do you know what else he was good at?"

"No, ma'am," Kent said. Confederates *were* polite, sometimes even when Nellie wished they weren't.

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She said, "He was good at finding out what you people were up to, that's what. He was a big part of the U.S. spy ring in Washington during the war—and so was I."

That proud announcement spawned a considerable silence from the Confederates. At last, Kent said,

"Well, ma'am, you helped your country, same as we helped ours."

He was, to Nellie's way of thinking, too polite by half. She'd hoped to get a bigger rise out of him and his countrymen. What good was gloating if the people you were gloating over refused to acknowledge you were gloating? To cover her feelings, she poured herself a cup of coffee.

One of the other Confederates said, "Ma'am, your country won the last war, no doubt about it. That's one for you, and we can't deny it." His compatriots nodded. He went on, "You've got to remember, though, when Jake Featherston gets to be president of the CSA in a couple of weeks . . . well, tomorrow belongs to us."

Almost all of the Confederates, Robert E. Kent among them, nodded again. One man looked sour as vinegar. Nellie would have bet he hadn't voted for Featherston. The others, though . . . The others looked as if they were talking not about ordinary earthly politics, but about the Second Coming. Kent said, "He'll put us back on our feet, by heaven."

"And he'll put the niggers in their place," another man said. "If there's anything worse than an uppity nigger, I don't know what it is."

Still more nods. Nellie had the feeling she ought to listen carefully, then take what she heard across the street to Hal, just as she had during the Great War. But Hal wasn't there, never would be there any more. The Italian fellow who had the place now would think she was

crazy if she burst in and started babbling about what the Confederates were saying in her coffeehouse. He might be right, too.

“You Yankees waited a long time before you finally whipped us,” Robert E. Kent said. “You needed to build yourselves up, and you went and did it. Now we’re the ones who have to do that.”

“Why?” Nellie asked, as if she were still a spy trying to ease important information out of people and not simply a proprietor trying to get her customers to hang around and order more coffee and sandwiches.

“What difference does it make? If we’re going to stay at peace, who cares whether one side’s built up and the other one isn’t?”

Kent said, “Ma’am, I think there’s two different kinds of peace. One’s where this fellow’s strong and that fellow’s weak, and when *this* fellow says, ‘This is how we’ll do things,’ they do ’em that way, on account of *that* fellow’s got no choice. That there is what we’ve got nowadays. The other kind is where both fellows are strong, and neither one pushes the other one around because he knows he’ll get pushed back. That there is what Jake Featherston is after, and I reckon he can get it.”

They all nodded again. Even the one who plainly hated Featherston and the Freedom Party nodded.

Nellie wondered what that meant. Probably that he might not have much use for the president-elect of the CSA, but that he despised the United States still more. Nellie had never known any Confederates who had much use for the USA, not even when they came up here to do business.

“Let me have another cup of coffee, ma’am, if you’d be so kind,” Robert E. Kent said, “and if you could get me a ham and cheese sandwich to go with it, that’d be good.” Three or four of the others ordered more food and drink, too. They had plenty of money—U.S. coins and greenbacks, not the scrip and brown Confederate banknotes they’d used during the war. Nellie was glad to take it from them, and they **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

tipped generously. All in all, it was the best business day she’d had in weeks.

Even so, she wasn’t sorry when they finally left. She wanted Confederates to know their country was weaker than the United

States. She wanted them afraid of the USA. When she found them cocky instead, she worried. She'd seen the CSA bombard Washington in the Second Mexican War as a child and in the Great War when she was in the prime of life. She didn't want it to happen again when she was an old woman.

Edna came by at closing time, as she often did now that Hal was dead. "How are you, Ma?" she said.

"How was your day?"

"Fair. No, better than fair," Nellie answered, and told her about the Confederates.

Her daughter sighed, probably thinking of Confederate Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kincaid and what might have been. *Another world,* Nellie thought, and laughed a little. If she was going to think of other worlds, why not one where the United States won the War of Secession and there never was any such thing as the Confederate States of America? With Virginia still in the USA, Washington wouldn't have been shelled. It would still be the capital in more than name, too. And who would ever have heard of Jake Featherston? Nobody at all, odds were.

"What are you smiling about?" Edna asked. When Nellie told her, she said, "Wouldn't that be something? You ought to write a book, Ma, like that gal from Boston did—you know, the one who shot the Confederate submersible skipper. You could get rich."

"Maybe I could get rich—if I could write a book. And if pigs could fly, we'd all carry umbrellas," Nellie said.

"You wouldn't have to do it all by your lonesome," Edna said. "That other gal had somebody else, a real writer, do most of the work. You could split the money and still have plenty."

"I haven't got enough ideas for a book," Nellie said firmly. "The only other thing I'm sure of is that we wouldn't have had this stinking collapse if we were one big country, and anybody can see that. It's not worth writing about."

"I suppose." Her daughter didn't want to give up the idea. "I know what you could do, then. Write about your life story. That's exciting enough for anybody, what with the spy stuff during the war and the .

. . the other stuff back before the turn of the century."

By *the other stuff* , of course, she meant Nellie's time in the demimonde. "I don't want to write about that!" Nellie exclaimed. "I wish to heaven none of that ever happened. I spent all these years getting to be halfway respectable, and now you want me to write about . . . that? Forget it, Edna."

"Too bad," Edna said. "It'd be exciting. People'd pay money to read about it."

"It wasn't exciting. It was just nasty." Nellie couldn't imagine how anybody who'd actually been in the demimonde could think it was exciting. She hadn't come close to warming up to a man more than a couple of times in all the years since she'd left. And how much would people want to read about *that* ?

She expected Edna to go on harping about it. Her daughter refused to believe how foul it had been, how foul it had made Nellie feel after a man put gold on the dresser, got undressed, and then did what he wanted—and had her do what he wanted. But Edna didn't nag, or not exactly. Instead, she said, "You **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

remember that Bill Reach, the fellow who Hal said ran the whole spy show?"

The fellow who made me out to be a whore in front of a coffeehouse full of Confederates, Nellie thought grimly. "I remember him," she said, and not another word.

"I wonder what ever happened to him," Edna said. "If you know that, you could stick it in the book, too."

I know what happened to him. I killed the drunken son of a bitch when he tried to rape me. She almost told that to Edna, just to shut her daughter up. How much could it matter now that Hal, who'd idolized Bill Reach for no good reason Nellie could ever see, was dead? But she swallowed the words.

She'd promised herself she would take that secret to her own grave, and she aimed to do it.

"If I had to guess," she said after an all but imperceptible pause, "he got killed when the United States bombarded Washington before they took it back. An awful lot of people did."

"No story in that, though," Edna said.

“I don’t care,” Nellie said. “That’s what I’m telling you. There *was* no story.”

“Ma, you’re a stick.”

“Well, maybe I am. I don’t care. I worked too hard for too long to tell a bunch of fancy lies now that I’m on the edge of turning into an old lady. What would Hal say if I did?”

“Tell the truth, then,” Edna said.

“I have been telling the truth,” Nellie lied.

Her daughter threw her hands in the air. “What am I supposed to do with you, Ma?” she said, half affectionate, half exasperated.

“You could just leave me alone. That’s what you told me and told me, and then I finally went and did it.”

Nellie came as close as she ever had to admitting she might have meddled too much and too long in Edna’s life. “Now maybe I get to tell you the same thing.”

“Why do you think I’ll listen any better than you ever did?” Edna asked. Nellie had no answer to that, and not having one frightened her. A child outgrew a parent’s efforts at care, but a parent wasn’t likely to outgrow a child’s.

March 4, 1934, was a Sunday. Church bells rang in Richmond. Some of them summoned the faithful to worship. Others, later, proclaimed the imminent inauguration of a new president of the Confederate States of America.

At Freedom Party headquarters, Lulu fussed over Jake Featherston, fiddling with his collar as if she were his mother and not his secretary. He put up with it for as long as he could. Then he stepped away and said, “I’m fine. You don’t need to fool with it any more.”

“I want it to be perfect,” Lulu said, for about the fifth time that day.

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“Come two o’clock this afternoon, the chief justice of the Supreme Court is going to swear me in,” Jake said. “Nothing in the world—in the *world* , you hear me?—could be more perfect than that.” He shook

his head. “No, I take it back. Burton Mitchel, that . . . so-and-so”—he was careful of his language around Lulu—“has to stand there and watch me do it and shake my hand before I do it—and afterwards, too. That’s even better than all the rest.”

“I mean, I want you to *look* perfect.” His longtime secretary had said that five or six times, too.

“I’m fine,” Jake answered. And he was fine, too, as far as he was concerned. No clawhammer coat for him, no white tie and stiff-fronted white shirt, no top hat. The butternut outfit he had on was almost identical to what he’d worn during the three years of the war. He even had three stripes on his sleeve, though these were also of butternut, not artilleryman’s red. The War Department had left him a sergeant, had it? Well, all right. Now the whole country had a sergeant heading it up. He wasn’t ashamed of that.

He was proud of it, by God.

Willy Knight strode into his office. The vice president–elect also wore a quasi-uniform, one a good deal fancier than Featherston’s. Some European armies had a grade one step up from general. They usually called it field marshal. Had the CSA used that rank, the men who held it would have worn uniforms a hell of a lot like Knight’s.

“Whoa!” Jake shielded his eyes against the glare of gold lace and brass buttons. “You look like the nigger doorman at an expensive hotel, you know that?”

“Go to hell,” Knight said, and grinned enormously. He stuck out his hand. Featherston shook it. No furtive trial of strength today. For once, they both had all the strength they needed. “We did it!” Knight’s grin got wider. Jake hadn’t thought it could. “We really did it!”

“You bet we did,” Featherston said, “and this is only the first day. What you got to remember, Willy, is that getting here’s just the start. Now we’ve got to do what we set out to do with the Party—”

“And with the Redemption League,” Willy Knight added.

“Yeah—and with the Redemption League,” Jake allowed generously. “We’re in. We keep going right on forward.” That was where he had the edge on Knight and everybody else. He kept thinking about the next step, the step to take after the one he was on now. He looked at his pocket watch. “Where’s Ferd?”

“I’m here.” Ferdinand Koenig stepped into the office. He wore a plain business suit that seemed all the plainer next to the uniforms.

“Then let’s get on with it,” Jake said.

They went downstairs. Two identical limousines waited there. Featherston and Koenig got into one, Knight into the other. As they drove the short distance to Capitol Square, they traded places in the motorcade several times. An assassin wouldn’t have an easy time figuring out who was who, not in the welter of escorting motorcycle cops and government bodyguards and Freedom Party bodyguards—who regarded one another like two rival packs of mean dogs. That instant rivalry suited Jake fine; the more everybody stayed on his toes, the better.

At his request, the platform where he would take the oath of office had gone up on the south side of the **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

square, near the statue of Albert Sidney Johnston and near Bank Street. Congressmen and Freedom Party bigwigs and other important people packed the platform and nearby wooden bleachers. Party stalwarts in white and butternut and Party guards in not-quite-Confederate uniform kept order in the square. Featherston hadn’t requested that. He’d insisted on it.

Among the important people on the platform and in the bleachers were a dozen or so men, most of them elderly, in perfectly genuine Confederate uniforms: the highest-ranking officers from the War Department.

Jake chuckled as the limousine stopped near the platform. He pointed to the generals. “I hope those bastards are shaking in their boots.”

“If they’re not, they’re even dumber than you always said they were,” Koenig answered.

Jake got out of the motorcar. The stalwarts sprang to attention. The guards presented arms. “Freedom!”

they shouted as one. Congressmen who weren’t Party members—a minority, now—flinched. They’d never watched Party rallies up close. They’d stayed away on purpose, in fact. They had some lessons to learn, and Featherston looked forward to teaching them.

His boots thumped on the wooden stairs as he ascended to the

platform, Knight and Koenig trailing him.

Waiting to greet him were President Burton Mitchel and Chief Justice James McReynolds. Mitchel extended his hand. Featherston shook it. They'd had the four months since the election to get to know each other as Mitchel prepared to leave office and Featherston to take over. Getting to know each other hadn't meant getting to like each other; on the contrary.

"May I give you one last bit of advice?" Mitchel asked formally.

With newsreel cameras turning, Jake couldn't say no without looking ungracious. "Go ahead," he answered.

Mitchel looked weary unto death. He'd become president after a Freedom Party man murdered his predecessor. Now he handed his office over to the head of the Freedom Party. *And how do you feel about that, Burton old boy?* Jake wondered. The outgoing president said, "I believe, Mr.

President-elect, that you and your followers will find it has been easier to criticize than it will be to govern."

"Do you?" Jake said. Mitchel nodded stiffly. For the benefit of the cameras, Featherston smiled and clapped him on the back. "Well, Mr. President," he went on quietly, smiling still, "I reckon some folks'll believe anything, won't they?"

He stood well away from the microphones. He didn't think they would pick that up. If by some mischance they did . . . Well, that bit of film could always end up on the cutting-room floor. Burton Mitchel winced as if bayoneted. Willy Knight laughed.

Chief Justice McReynolds was a handsome man with a long face, a jutting chin, and white hair that had receded just enough to give him a high, high forehead. He had frowned when Jake delivered his cut, but made himself rally. "Are you ready to take the oath, Mr. President-elect?"

Jake looked out over Capitol Square, over the crowd filling it (after the local Mitcheltown had been bulldozed to let a crowd fill it), and the throngs of people on the sidewalks of Bank Street. "Am I ready?" he echoed. "You bet I'm ready."

"Very well, sir. Raise your right hand and repeat after me. . . ."

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“I, Jake Featherston . . . do solemnly swear . . . that I will faithfully execute . . . the office of President . .

. of the Confederate States, and will . . . to the best of my ability . . . preserve, protect, and defend . . .

the Constitution thereof.”

There. It was official. When Featherston lowered his hand, he did so as president of the Confederate States of America. Chief Justice McReynolds shook hands with him. “Congratulations, Mr. President,”

he said. “I am the first one to have the privilege of addressing you thus.”

“You sure are,” Jake agreed. He even smiled. *But if you think I’ve forgotten your Supreme Court let this Mitchel bastard run again in 1927, you’d better think again. I haven’t forgotten one goddamn thing, not me. And I know how to settle* your *hash when the time comes. You may not think so, you fancy-pants son of a bitch, but I do.*

The time hadn’t come yet, though. For now, he had to show everybody what a smooth fellow he was.

He shook hands with Burton Mitchel again, then stepped to the microphones. “Friends, I’m Jake Featherston, and I’m *still* here to tell you the truth.”

“Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*! Feather *ston*!” The rhythmic chant from the crowd in Capitol Square and across the street rolled over him. He drank it in. He liked his whiskey as well as the next fellow, but the intoxication of a crowd took him higher and didn’t leave him with a headache the next morning.

He held up his hands. Not everybody who was cheering had Party discipline; the noise took longer than it should have to die away. When it did, he went on, “The truth is, we’re going to make this country work again, and we’re going to make it work better than it ever did before. We’re going to dam the big rivers and keep them from flooding the way they did seven years ago. We’re going to use the electricity from the dams for people’s houses—the houses of honest people, working people, white people—and for factories that will make all the things we need, and make ’em cheap enough so folks can

afford 'em."

More applause. Again, it faded more slowly than it might have. Once it did, he continued, "And it's high time we show the USA that the Confederate States are a country that works, too. It's time we stand up straight again and look the United States in the eye and say, 'We've got a few things to talk about.' We haven't been able to do that yet, even though the war's been over for a long time. We haven't been strong enough. We will be, though."

This time, the rapturous shouts from the crowd were the older Party cry: "Freedom! Freedom!

Freedom!" They were deeper and fiercer than those that had gone before, with more men and fewer women joining in. Even the generals in their gleaming uniforms looked intrigued. *What's this, boys? You think I'll put my toys in your hands?* In the quiet of his own mind, Jake laughed out loud. *You're fools, too. You're worse fools than that stinking McReynolds, only you're too dumb to know it.*

He kept the inaugural address short and sweet. That was best for the wireless web and for the crowd there in person. After the speech came the parade, for the crowd and for the newsreel cameras. An Army marching band began it. Behind the band strutted a crack regiment in dress uniform.

And behind that one regiment came formation after formation of Freedom Party men from every state in the CSA: stalwarts in white shirts and butternut trousers, smaller units of guards in those almost military uniforms. Some bands of stalwarts simply marched. Some carried truncheons. Like the Army regiment, the Freedom Party guards carried rifles, and they plainly knew what to do with them.

"Look at the generals," Jake whispered to Ferdinand Koenig. "Now they're seeing what we've got, and **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html**

and they want it for themselves."

Scorn filled Koenig's voice: "Not likely."

"Oh, hell no," Featherston said. "All that there"—he pointed to the parade—"that's ours. *We* made it, and *we'll* use it. I know just how, too. By God, you'd better believe I do."

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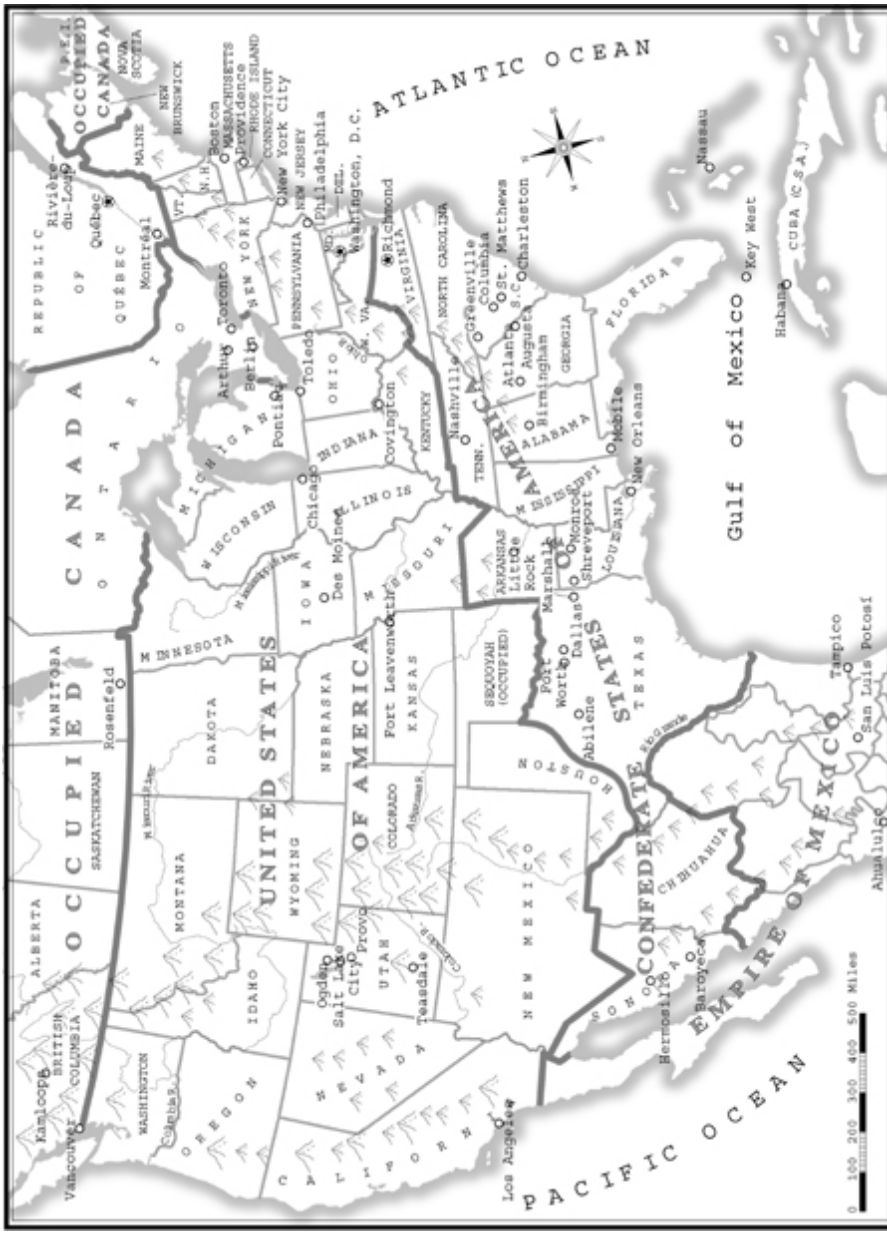

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HARRY TURTLEDOVE

AMERICAN EMPIRE: THE

CENTER CANNOT HOLD

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BALLANTINE BOOKS

NEW YORK

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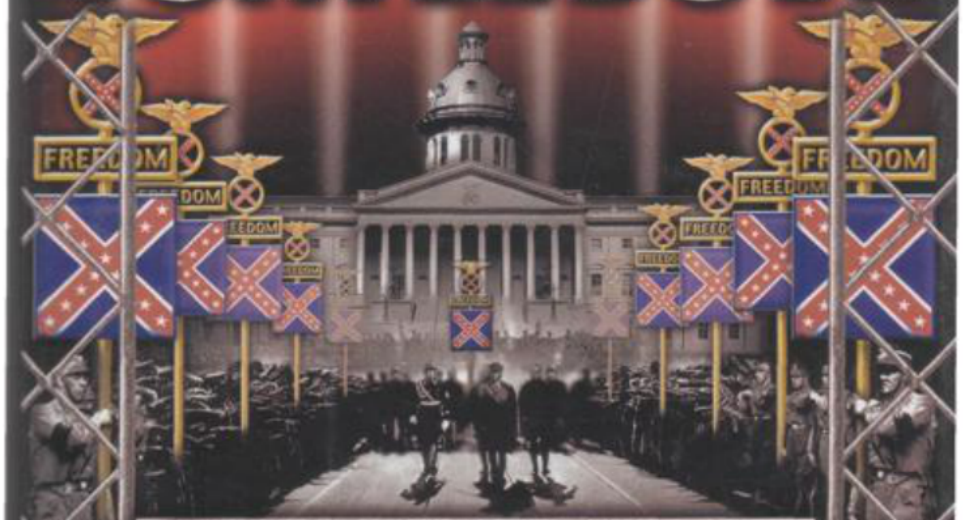
THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY

HARRY TURTLEDOVE



AMERICAN EMPIRE: THE VICTORIOUS OPPOSITION

The Victorious Opposition
American Empire [3]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:***
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

From Publishers Weekly

The latest volume in Turtledove's colossal and brilliant saga of an alternate (and disunited) United States may be the strongest and most compelling since the opener, How Few Remain (1997). Juxtaposing historical dilemmas and universal human ones, the novel explores weird twists of history at both levels. Jake Featherston leads an independent Confederacy toward war, with his propaganda chief a scrawny undersized Jew. Anne Colleton attends the Richmond Olympics of 1936, still dynamic but worried about losing her sex appeal. George Enos has lost his mother, accidentally shot by her drunken lover Ernie, and is now following in his late father's footsteps as a commercial fisherman out of Boston. Cincinnatus Driver and Scipio are on a collision course with the Holocaust that the Confederacy is preparing for African-Americans in Alabama, but Cincinnatus has also borne the burden of making peace with the parents of his Chinese daughter-in-law. Jonathan Moss is climbing back into the cockpit of an alternate P-40, ready to wield it like a sword of vengeance against Canadian terrorists who killed his wife and daughter. And one does wonder what will come of a WWII with France and Britain under quasi-Fascist regimes. Readers will not have long to wait, as the WWII trilogy is only a couple of years from seeing the light of print-which many fans will find far too long.
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From

Starred Review The conclusion to American Empire, part of Turtledove's magisterial saga of an alternate America that also includes the trilogy The Great War, is the most powerful volume in it since the post-Civil War novel that launched it all, *How Few Remain* (1997). It demonstrates Turtledove's continuing mastery of historical fiction on the macrocosmic and the microcosmic levels. On the grand scale, there is Confederate president Jake Featherstone (the Confederacy won the Civil War, you see) shouting, "I'm here to tell you

the truth," while he does nothing of the sort; the Olympics of 1936 unfolding in Richmond, Virginia; a France ruled by the Action Francaise and upholding a king, Charles XI; and the death of Kaiser Wilhelm II precipitating the next world war. On the smaller scale, three old friends from previous saga volumes are lost: Sylvia Enos to her drunken lover Ernie, the widowed Lucien Gautier to a heart attack while with a new lady-love, and Clara Jacobs to old-fashioned blood-poisoning. Cincinnatus Driver is torn between obligations to his old Red comrades, his family in Iowa, and his parents in a Kentucky that, having voted itself into the Confederacy, is preparing a Holocaust of its black population. Farther south, Scipio has no hope of refuge if Anne Colleton comes after him, while up north Jonathan Moss leaves Canada to return to a fighter cockpit after his wife and daughter are killed by a letter bomb. Busy, to be sure, but almost impossible to praise too highly. *Roland Green*

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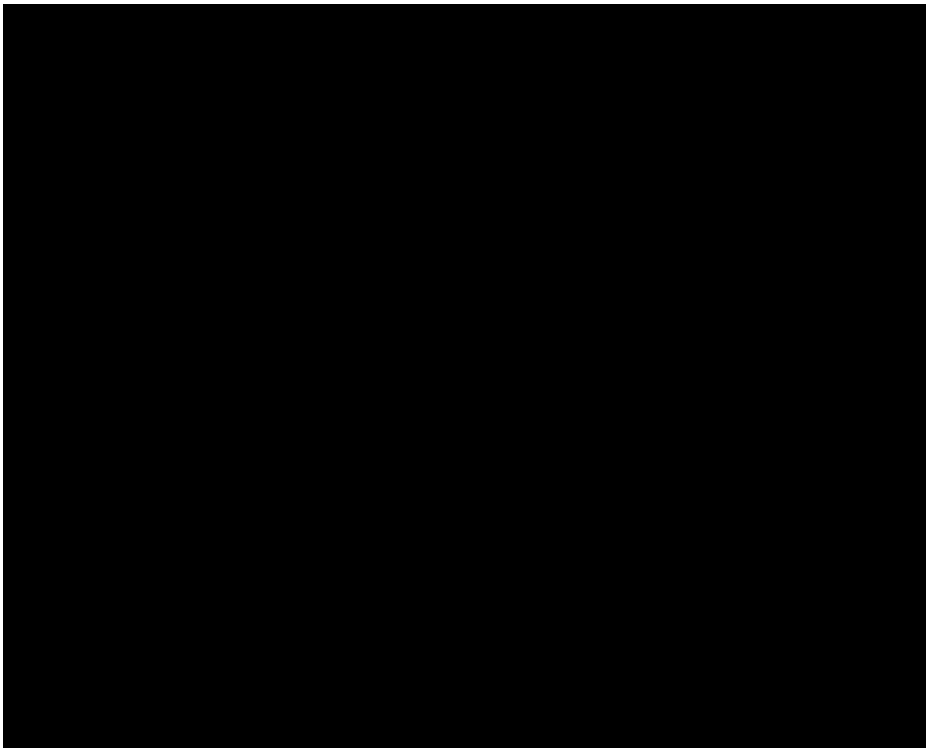
[redacted]

Manichaeism, *n.,* The ancient Persian doctrine of an incessant warfare between Good and Evil. When Good gave up the fight the Persians joined the victorious Opposition.

—Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*



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CUBA (C.S.A.)

I

Clarence Potter walked through the streets of Charleston, South Carolina, like a man caught in a city occupied by the enemy. That was exactly how he felt. It was March 5, 1934—a Monday. The day before, Jake Featherston of the Freedom Party had taken the oath of office as president of the Confederate States of America.

"I've known that son of a bitch was a son of a bitch longer than anybody," Potter muttered. He was a tall, well-made man in his late forties, whose spectacles made him look milder than he really was. Behind those lenses—these days, to his disgust, bifocals—his gray eyes were hard and cold and watchful.

He'd first met Featherston when they both served in the Army of Northern Virginia, himself as an intelligence officer and the future president of the CSA as an artillery sergeant in the First Richmond Howitzers. He'd seen even then that Featherston was an angry, embittered man.

Jake had had plenty to be bitter about, too; his service rated promotion to officer's rank, but he hadn't got it. He'd been right in saying his superior, Captain Jeb Stuart III, had had a Negro body servant who was also a Red rebel. After the revolt broke out, Stuart had let himself be killed in battle rather than face a court-martial for protecting the black man. His father, General Jeb Stuart, Jr., was a power in the War Department. He'd made sure Featherston never saw a promotion for the rest of the war.

You got your revenge on him, Potter thought, *and now he's getting his — on the whole country.*

He turned the corner onto Montague Street, a boulevard of expensive shops. A lot of them had flags flying to celebrate yesterday's inauguration. Most of those that did flew not only the Stars and Bars but also the Freedom Party flag, a Confederate battle flag with colors reversed: a star-belted red St. Andrew's cross on a blue field. Few people wanted to risk the Party's wrath. Freedom Party stalwarts had broken plenty of heads in their fifteen-year drive to power. What would they do now that they had it?

The fellow who ran Donovan's Luggage—presumably Donovan—was finding out the hard way. He stood on the sidewalk, arguing with a couple of beefy young men in white shirts and butternut trousers: Party stalwarts, sure enough.

"What's the matter with you, you sack of shit?" one of them yelled. "Don't you love your country?"

"I can show how I love it any way I please," Donovan answered. That took guts, since he was small and skinny and close to sixty, and faced two men half his age, each carrying a long, stout bludgeon.

One of them brandished his club. "You don't show it the right way, we'll knock your teeth down your stinking throat."

A gray-uniformed policeman strolled up the street. "Officer!" the man from the luggage shop called, holding out his hands in appeal.

But he got no help from the cop. The fellow wore an enamelwork Party flag pin on his left lapel. He nodded to the stalwarts, said, "Freedom!" and went on his way.

"You see, you dumb bastard?" said the stalwart with the upraised club. "This is how things are. You better go along, or you'll be real sorry. Now, are you gonna buy yourself a flag and put it up, or are you gonna be real sorry?"

Clarence Potter trotted across Montague Street, dodging past a couple of Fords from the United States and a Confederate-built Birmingham. "Why don't you boys pick on somebody your own size?" he said pleasantly, stowing his glasses in the inside pocket of his tweed jacket. He'd had a couple of pairs broken in brawls before the election. He didn't want to lose another.

The stalwarts stared as if he'd flown down from Mars. Finally, one of them said, "Why don't you keep your nose out of other people's business, buddy? You won't get it busted that way."

In normal times, in civilized times, a swarm of people would have gathered to back Potter against the ruffians. But they were ruffians whose party had just won the election. He stood alone with Donovan. Other men on the street hurried by with heads down and eyes averted. Whatever happened, they wanted no part of it.

When Potter showed no sign of disappearing, the second ruffian

raised his club, too. "All right, asshole, you asked for it, and I'm gonna give it to you," he said.

He and his friend were bruisers. Potter didn't doubt they were brave enough. During the presidential campaign, they'd have tangled with tougher foes than an aging man who ran a luggage store. But they knew only what bruisers knew. They weren't old enough to have fought in the war.

He had. He'd learned from experts. Without warning, without tipping off what he was going to do by glance or waste motion, he lashed out and kicked the closer one in the crotch. The other one shouted and swung his bludgeon. It hissed over Potter's head. He hit the stalwart in the pit of the stomach. Wind knocked out of him, the man folded up like his friend. The only difference was, he clutched a different part of himself.

Potter didn't believe in wasting a fair fight on Freedom Party men. They wouldn't have done it for him. He kicked each of them in the face. One still had a little fight left, and tried to grab his leg. He stomped on the fellow's hand. Finger bones crunched under his sole. The stalwart howled like a wolf. Potter kicked him in the face again, for good measure.

Then he picked up his fedora, which had fallen off in the fight, and put it back on his head. He took his spectacles out of the inside pocket. The world regained sharp edges when he set them on his nose again.

He tipped the fedora to Donovan, who stared at him out of enormous eyes. "You ought to sweep this garbage into the gutter," he said, pointing to the Freedom Party men. The one he'd kicked twice lay still. His nose would never be the same. The other one writhed and moaned and held on to himself in a way that would have been obscene if it weren't so obviously filled with pain.

"Who the dickens are you?" Donovan had to try twice before any words came out.

"You don't need to know that." Serving in Intelligence had taught Potter not to say more than he had to. You never could tell when opening your big mouth would come back to haunt you. Working as a private investigator, which he'd done since the war, only drove the lesson home.

"But..." The older man still gaped. "You handled them punks like they was nothing."

"They *are* nothing, the worst kind of nothing." Potter touched the brim of his hat again. "See you." He walked off at a brisk pace. That cop was liable to come back. Even if he didn't, more stalwarts might come along. A lot of them carried pistols. Potter had one, too, but he didn't want anything to do with a shootout. You couldn't hope to outsmart a bullet.

He turned several corners in quick succession, going right or left at random. After five minutes or so, he decided he was out of trouble and slowed down *to* look around and see where he was. Going a few blocks had taken him several rungs down the social ladder. This was a neighborhood of saloons and secondhand shops, of grocery stores with torn screen doors and blocks of flats that had been nice places back around the turn of the century.

It was also a neighborhood where Freedom Party flags flew without urging or coercion from anybody. This was the sort of neighborhood stalwarts came from; the Party offered them an escape from the despair and uselessness that might otherwise eat their lives. It was, in Clarence Potter's considered opinion, a neighborhood full of damn fools.

He left in a hurry, making his way east toward the harbor. He was supposed to meet a police detective there; the fellow had news about warehouse pilferage he would pass on—for a price. Potter had also fed him a thing or two over the years; such balances, useful to both sides, had a way of evening out.

"Clarence!" The shout made Potter stop and turn back.

"Jack Delamotte!" he exclaimed in pleasure all the greater for being so unexpected. "How are you? I haven't seen you in years. I wondered if you were dead. What have you been doing with yourself?"

Delamotte hurried up the street toward him, his hand outstretched and a broad smile on his face. He was a big, blond, good-looking man of about Potter's age. His belly was bigger now, and his hair grayer and thinner at the temples than it had been when he and Potter hung around together. "Not too much," he answered. "I'm in the textile business these days. Got married six years ago—no, seven now. Betsy and I have a boy and a girl. How about you?"

"Still single," Potter said with a shrug. "Still poking my nose into other people's affairs—sometimes literally. I don't change a whole lot. If you're..." His voice trailed off. Delamotte wore a handsome checked suit. On his left lapel, a Freedom Party pin shone in the sunlight. "I didn't expect you of all people to go over to the other side, Jack. You used to cuss out Jake Featherston just as much as I did."

"If you don't bend with the breeze, it'll break you." Delamotte shrugged, too. "They've been coming up for a long time, and now they're in. Shall I pretend the Whigs won the election?" He snorted. "Not likely!"

Put that way, it sounded reasonable enough. Potter said, "I just saw a couple of Freedom Party stalwarts getting ready to beat up a shopkeeper because he didn't want to fly their flag. How do you like that?" He kept quiet about what he'd done to the stalwarts.

"Can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," Delamotte answered. "I really do think they'll put us back on our feet. Nobody else will.... Where are you going? I want to get your address, talk about old times."

"I'm in the phone book," said Potter, who wasn't. "Sorry, Jack. I'm late." He hurried away, hoping Delamotte wouldn't trot after him. To his vast relief, the other man didn't. Clarence wanted to puke. His friend—no, his former friend—no doubt thought of himself as a practical man. Potter thought of him, and of all the other "practical" men sucking up to Featherston's pals now that they were in power, as a pack of sons of bitches.

He met the detective in a harborside saloon where sailors with a dozen different accents got drunk as fast as they could. Caldwell Tubbs was a roly-poly little man with the coldest black eyes Potter had ever seen. "Jesus Christ, I shouldn't even be here," he said when Potter sat down on a stool beside him. "I can't tell you nothin'. Worth my ass if I do."

He'd sung that song before. Potter showed him some brown banknotes— cautiously, so nobody else saw them. "I can be persuasive," he murmured, as if trying to seduce a pretty girl and not an ugly cop.

But Tubbs shook his head. "Not even for that."

"What?" Now Potter was genuinely astonished. "Why not,

goddammit?"

"On account of it's worth my badge if I even get caught talkin' to you, that's why. This is good-bye, buddy, and I mean it. You try to get hold of me from now on, I never heard of you. You're on a list, Potter, and it's the shit list. I were you, I'd cut my throat now, save everybody else the trouble." He jammed his hat back onto his bald head and waddled out of the saloon.

Clarence Potter stared after him. He knew the Freedom Party knew how hard he'd fought it, and for how long. And he knew the Party was taking its revenge on opponents. But he'd never expected it to be so fast, or so thorough. He ordered a whiskey, wondering how he'd crack that pilferage case now.

After a lifetime of living in Toledo, Chester Martin remained disbelieving despite several months in Los Angeles. It wasn't just the weather, though that helped a lot. He and Rita had gone through a winter without snow. They'd gone through a winter where they hardly ever needed anything heavier than a sweater, and where they'd stayed in shirtsleeves half the time.

But that was only part of it. Toledo was what it was. It had been what it was for all of Chester's forty-odd years, and for fifteen or twenty years before that. It would go right on being the same old thing, too.

Not Los Angeles. This place was in a constant process of *becoming*. Before the war, it hadn't been anything much. But a new aqueduct and the rise of motion pictures and a good port had brought people flooding in. The people who worked in the cinema and at the port and in the factories the aqueduct permitted needed places to live and people to sell them things. More people came in to build them houses and sell them groceries and autos and bookcases and washing machines. Then *they* needed...

Chester had to walk close to half a mile to get to the nearest trolley stop. He didn't like that, though it was less inconvenient here than it would have been in a Toledo blizzard. He could see why things worked as they did, though. Los Angeles *sprawled* in a way no Eastern city did. The trolley grid had to be either coarse or enormously

expensive. Nobody seemed willing to pay for a tight grid, so people made do with a coarse one.

A mockingbird sang up in a palm tree. Martin blew a smoke ring at it. It flew away, white wing bars flashing. A jay on a rooftop jeered. It wasn't a blue jay like the ones he'd always known; it had no crest, and its feathers were a paler blue. People called the birds, scrub jays. They were as curious and clever as any jays he'd known back East. A hummingbird with a bright red head hung in midair, scolding the jay: *chip-chip-chip.* Hummingbirds lived here all year round. If that didn't make a place seem tropical, what did?

Hurrying on toward the trolley stop, Martin ground out the cigarette with his shoe. A motion caught from the corner of his eye made him turn his head and look back over his shoulder. A man in filthy, shabby clothes had darted out from a doorway to cadge the butt. Things might be better here than they were a lot of places, but that didn't make them perfect, or even very good.

Some of the eight or ten people waiting at the trolley stop were going to work. Some were looking for work. Chester didn't know how he could tell who was who, but he thought he could. A couple, like him, carried tool chests. The others? Something in the way they stood, something in their eyes ... He knew how an unemployed man stood. He'd spent months out of work after the steel mill let him go, and he was one of the lucky ones. More than a few people had been looking for a job since 1929.

The trolley clanged up. It was painted a sunny yellow, unlike the dull green ones he'd ridden in Toledo. By the way they looked; they might almost have been Army issue. Not this one. When you got on an L.A. trolley, you felt you were going in style. His nickel and two pennies rattled into the fare box. "Transfer, please," he said, and the trolleyman gave him a long, narrow strip of paper with printing on it. He stuck it in the breast pocket of his overalls.

He rode the trolley south down Central to Mahan Avenue, then used the transfer to board another for the trip west to a suburb called Gardena. Like a lot of Los Angeles suburbs, it was half a farming town. Fig orchards and plots of strawberries and the inevitable orange trees alternated with blocks of houses. He got off at Western, then went south to 147th Street on shank's mare.

Houses were going up there, in what had been a fig orchard. The fig trees had been knocked down in a tearing hurry. Chester suspected

more than a few of them would come up again, and their roots would get into pipes and keep plumbers away from soup kitchens for years to come. That wasn't his worry. Getting the houses up was.

He waved to his foreman. "Morning, Mordechai."

"Morning, Chester." The foreman waved back. It was an odd wave; he'd lost a couple of fingers from his right hand in a childhood farm accident. But he could do more with tools with three fingers than most men could with five. He'd spent years in the Navy before returning to the civilian world. He had to be close to sixty now, but he had the vigor of a much younger man.

"Hey, Joe. Morning, Fred. What's up, Jose? How are you, Virgil?" Martin nodded to the other builders, who were just getting started on the day's work.

"How's it going, Chester?" Fred said, and then, "Look out—here comes Dushan. Get busy quick, so he can't suck you into a card game."

"What do you say, Dushan?" Chester called.

Dushan nodded back. "How you is?" he said in throatily accented English. He came from some Slavic corner of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; his last name consisted almost entirely of consonants. And Fred's warning was the straight goods. Dushan made only a so-so builder (he liked the sauce more than he might have, and didn't bother keeping it a secret), but what he couldn't persuade a deck of cards to do, nobody could. Chester would have bet he picked up more money gambling than he did with a hammer and saw and screwdriver.

"Come on, boys. Enough jibber-jabber," Mordechai said. "Time to earn what they pay us."

He wasn't the kind of foreman who sat on his hind end drinking coffee and yelling at people who did stuff he didn't like. He worked as hard as any of the men he bossed—probably harder. If you couldn't work for Mordechai, you probably couldn't work for anybody.

Nailing rafters to the ridgepole, Chester turned to Jose, who was doing the same thing on the other side. "You know what Mordechai reminds me of?" he said.

"Tell me," Jose said. His English was only a little better than Dushan's. He'd been born in Baja California, down in the Empire of

Mexico, and had come north looking for work sometime in the 1920s. Chester didn't know whether he'd bothered with legal formalities. Either way, he'd managed to keep eating after things fell apart in '29.

"You fight in the war?" Martin asked him.

"Oh, *sí,"* he answered, and laughed a little. "Not on the same side as you, I don't think."

"Doesn't matter, not for this. Had to be the same on both sides. If you had a good lieutenant or captain, one who said, 'Follow me!'—hell, you could do damn near anything. If you had the other kind..." Martin jabbed his right thumb down toward the ground. "Mordechai's like one of those good officers. He works like a son of a bitch himself, and you don't want to let him down."

The other builder thought about that for a little while, then nodded. *"Es verdad,"* he said, and then, "You right." He laughed again. "And now we talk, and we don't do no work."

"Nobody works *all* the damn time," Chester said, but he started driving nails again. It wasn't just that he didn't want to let Mordechai down. He didn't want to get in trouble, either. Plenty of men wanted the job he had. He was every bit as much a part of the urban proletariat here as he had been at the steel mill back in Toledo.

After a couple of nails went in, he shook his head. He was more a part of the proletariat here than he had been in Toledo. The steel mill was a union shop; he'd been part of the bloody strikes after the war that made it one. No such thing as a construction union here. If the bosses didn't like anything about you, you were history. Ancient history.

We *ought to do something about that,* he thought, and suddenly regretted voting Democratic instead of Socialist in the last election. He held the next nail to the board, tapped it two or three times to seat it firmly, and drove it home. Another election was coming up in a little more than six months. He could always go back to the Socialists.

Rita had packed him a ham sandwich, some homemade oatmeal cookies, and an apple in his dinner pail. Sure as hell, Dushan riffled a deck of cards at lunch. Sure as hell, he found some suckers to play against him. Chester shook his head when Dushan looked his way. He knew when he was fighting out of his weight. Two lessons had been plenty for him. If he'd had any real sense, one should have done the

job.

"Back to it," Mordechai said after a precise half hour. Again, he was the first one going up a ladder.

At the end of the day, all the workers from the whole tract lined up to get their pay in cash. A fellow with a .45 stood behind the paymaster's table to discourage redistribution of the wealth. The paymaster handed Chester four heavy silver dollars. They gave his overalls a nice, solid weight when he stuck them in his pocket. Cartwheels were in much more common use out here than they had been back East.

He walked to the trolley stop, paid his fare and collected a transfer, and made the return trip to the little house he and Rita were renting east of downtown. The neighborhood was full of Eastern European Jews, with a few Mexicans like Jose for leavening.

On his way back to the house, a skinny fellow about his age wearing an old green-gray Army trenchcoat coming apart at the seams held out a dirty hand and said, "Spare a dime, pal?"

Chester had rarely done that before losing his own job in Toledo. Now he understood how the other half lived. And, now that he was working again, he had dimes in his pocket he could actually spare. "Here you go, buddy," he said, and gave the skinny man one. "You know carpentry? They're hiring builders down in Gardena."

"I can drive a nail. I can saw a board," the other fellow answered.

"I couldn't do much more than that when I started," Martin answered.

"Maybe I'll get down there," the skinny man said.

"Good luck." Chester went on his way. He'd keep his eye open the next couple of days, see if this fellow showed up and tried to land a job. If he didn't, Martin was damned if he'd give him another handout. Plenty of people were down on their luck, yes. But if you didn't *try* to get back on your feet, you were holding yourself down, too.

"Hello, sweetheart!" Chester called. "What smells good?"

"Pot roast," Rita answered. She came out of the kitchen to give him a kiss. She was a pretty brunette—prettier these days, Chester

thought, because she'd quit bobbing her hair and let it grow out—who carried a few extra pounds around the hips. She went on, "Sure is good to be able to afford meat more often."

"I know." Chester put a hand in his pocket. The silver dollars and his other change clanked sweetly. "We'll be able to send my father another money order before long." Stephen Douglas Martin had lent Chester and Rita the money to come to California, even though he'd lost his job at the steel mill, too. Chester was paying him back a little at a time. It wasn't a patch on all the help his father had given him when he was out of work, but it was what he could do.

"One day at a time," Rita said, and Chester nodded.

"Richmond!" the conductor bawled as the train pulled into the station. "All out for Richmond! Capital of the Confederate States of America, and next home of the Olympic Games! *Richmond!"*

Anne Colleton grabbed a carpetbag and a small light suitcase from the rack above the seats. She was set for the three days she expected to be here. Once upon a time, she'd traveled in style, with enough luggage to keep an army in clothes (provided it wanted to wear the latest Paris styles) and with a couple of colored maids to keep everything straight.

No more, not after one of those colored maids had come unpleasantly close to murdering her on the Marshlands plantation. These days, with Marshlands still a ruin down by St. Matthews, South Carolina, Anne traveled alone.

On the train, and through life, she thought. Aloud, the way she said, "Excuse me," couldn't mean anything but, *Get the hell out of my way.* That would have done well enough for her motto. She was a tall, blond woman with a man's determined stride. If any gray streaked the yellow—she was, after all, nearer fifty than forty—the peroxide bottle didn't let it show. She looked younger than her years, but not enough to suit her. In her twenties, even in her thirties, she'd been strikingly beautiful, and made the most of it. Now *handsome* would have fit her better, except she despised that word when applied to a woman.

"Excuse me," she said again, and all but walked up the back of a

man who, by his clothes, was a drummer who hadn't drummed up much lately. He turned and gave her a dirty look. The answering frozen contempt she aimed like an arrow from her blue eyes made him look away in a hurry, muttering to himself and shaking his head.

Most of the passengers had to go back to the baggage car to reclaim their suitcases. Anne had all her chattels with her. She hurried out of the station to the cab stand in front of it. "Ford's Hotel," she told the driver whose auto, a Birmingham with a dented left fender, was first in line at the stand.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, touching a finger to the patent-leather brim of his peaked cap. "Let me put your bags in the trunk, and we'll go."

Ford's Hotel was a great white pile of a building, just across Capitol Street from Capitol Square. Anne tried to figure out how many times she'd stayed there. She couldn't; she only knew the number was large. "Afternoon, ma'am," said the colored doorman. He wore a uniform gaudier and more magnificent than any the War Department issued.

Anne checked in, went to her room, and unpacked. She went downstairs and had an early supper—Virginia ham and applesauce and fried potatoes, with pecan pie for dessert—then returned to her room, read a novel till she got sleepy (it wasn't very good, so she got sleepy fast), and went to bed. It was earlier than she would have fallen asleep back home. That meant she woke up at half past five the next morning. She was annoyed, but not too annoyed: it gave her a chance to bathe and to get her hair the way she wanted it before going down to breakfast.

After breakfast, she went to the lobby, picked up one of the papers on a table, and settled down to read it. She hadn't been reading long before a man in what was almost but not quite Confederate uniform strode in. Anne put down the newspaper and got to her feet.

"Miss Colleton?" asked the man in the butternut uniform.

She nodded. "That's right."

"Freedom!" the man said, and then, "Come with me, please."

When they went out the door, the doorman—a different Negro from the one who'd been there the day before, but wearing identical fancy dress— flinched away from the Freedom Party man in the plain tan outfit. The Party man, smiling a little, led Anne to a waiting

motorcar. He almost forgot to hold the door open for her, but remembered at the last minute. Then he slid in behind the wheel and drove off.

The Gray House—U.S. papers still sometimes called it the Confederate White House—lay near the top of Shockoe Hill, north and east of Capitol Square. The grounds were full of men in butternut uniforms or white shirts and butternut trousers: Freedom Party guards and stalwarts. Anne supposed there were also some official Confederate guards, but she didn't see any.

"This here's Miss Colleton," her driver said when they went inside.

A receptionist—male, uniformed—checked her name off a list. "She's scheduled to see the president at nine. Why don't you take her straight to the waiting room? It's only half an hour."

"Right," the Freedom Party guard said. "Come this way, ma'am."

"I know the way to the waiting room. I've been here before." Anne wished she didn't have to try to impress a man of no particular importance. She also wished that, since she had tried to impress him, she would have succeeded. But his dour shrug said he didn't care whether she'd lived here up till day before yesterday. Freedom Party men could be daunting in their single-mindedness.

She had the room outside the president's office to herself. *Too bad,* she thought; she'd met some interesting people there. A few minutes before nine, the door to the office opened. A skinny little Jewish-looking fellow came out. Jake Featherston's voice pursued him: "You'll make sure we get that story out our way, right, Saul?"

"Of course, Mr. Feath—uh, Mr. President," the man answered. "We'll take care of it. Don't you worry about a thing."

"With you in charge, I don't," Featherston answered.

The man tipped his straw hat to Anne as he walked out. "Go on in," he told her. "You're next."

"Thanks," Anne said, and did. Seeing Jake Featherston behind a desk that had had only Whigs sitting at it up till now was a jolt. She stuck out her hand, man-fashion. "Congratulations, Mr. President."

Featherston shook hands with her, a single brisk pump, enough to

show he had strength he wasn't using. "Thank you kindly, Miss Colleton," he answered. Almost everyone in the CSA knew his voice from the wireless and newsreels. It packed extra punch in person, even with just a handful of words. He pointed to a chair. "Sit down. Make yourself at home."

Anne did sit, and crossed her ankles. Her figure was still trim. Featherston's eyes went to her legs, but only for a moment. He wasn't a skirt-chaser. He'd chased power instead of women. Now he had it. Along with the rest of the country, she wondered what he'd do with it.

"I expect you want to know why I asked you to come up here," he said, a lopsided grin on his long, rawboned face. He wasn't handsome, not in any ordinary sense of the word, but the fire burning inside him showed plainly enough. If he'd wanted women, he could have had droves of them.

Anne nodded. "I do, yes. But I'll find out, won't I? I don't think you'll send me back to South Carolina without telling me."

"Nope. Matter of fact, I don't intend to send you back to South Carolina at all," Featherston said.

"What... do you intend to do with me, then?" Anne almost said, *to me.* Once upon a time, she'd imagined she could control him, dominate him, serve as a puppet master while he danced to her tune. A lot of people had made the same mistake: a small consolation, but the only one she had. Now he was the one who held the strings, who held all the strings in the Confederate States. Anne hated moving to any will but her own. She hated it, but she saw no way around it.

She tried not to show the nasty little stab of fear that shot through her. She'd abandoned the Freedom Party once, when its hopes were at a low ebb. If Jake Featherston wanted revenge, he could take it.

His smile got wider, which meant she hadn't hidden that nasty little stab well enough. He *did* take revenge. He took it on everyone who he thought had ever wronged him. He took pride and pleasure in taking it, too. But, after he let her sweat for a few seconds, what he said was, *"Parlez-vous français?"*

"Oui. Certainement," Anne answered automatically, even though, by the way Featherston pronounced the words, he didn't speak French himself. She returned to English to ask, "Why do you want to know that?"

"How would you like to take a trip to gay Paree?" Featherston asked in return. No, he didn't speak French at all. She hadn't thought he did. He wasn't an educated man. Shrewd? Yes. Clever? Oh, yes. Educated? No.

"Paris? I hate the idea," Anne said crisply.

Featherston's gingery eyebrows leaped. That wasn't the answer he'd expected. Then he realized she was joking. He barked laughter. "Cute," he said. "Cute as hell. Now tell me straight—will you go to Paris for me? I've got a job that needs doing, and you're the one I can think of who's best suited to do it."

"Tell me what it is," she said. "And tell me why. You're not naming me ambassador to the court of King Charles XI, I gather."

"No, I'm not doing that. You'll go as a private citizen. But I'd rather trust you with a dicker than the damned striped-pants diplomats at the embassy there. They're nothing but a pack of Whigs, and they want me to fall on my ass. You know what's good for the country, and you know what's good for the Party, too."

"I ... see." Anne nodded again, slowly and thoughtfully. "You want me to start sounding out *Action Française* about an alliance, then?"

She saw she'd surprised him again. Then he laughed once more. "I already knew you were smart," he said. "Don't know why I ought to jump when you go and show me. Yeah, that's pretty much what I've got in mind. *Alliance* likely goes too far. *Working arrangement* is more what I figure we can do. Probably all the froggies can do, too. They've got to worry about the Kaiser same way as we've got to worry about the USA."

"I won't be bringing back a treaty or anything of the sort, will I?" Anne said. "This is all unofficial?"

"Unofficial as can be," Featherston agreed. "There's a time to shout and yell and carry on, and there's a time to keep quiet. This here is one of those last times. No point to getting the United States all hot and bothered, not as far as I can tell. So will you take care of this for me?"

Anne nodded. "Yes. I'd be glad to. I haven't been to Europe since before the war, and I'd love to go again. And this has one more advantage for you, doesn't it?"

"What's that?" the president asked.

"Why, it gets me out of the country for a while," Anne answered.

"Yes. I don't mind that. I'm not ashamed to admit it to you, either," Jake Featherston said. "I will be damned if I know what to make of you, or what I ought to do about you." Again, he sounded as if he meant, *what I ought to do to you.* "If you can do something that's useful to the country, and do it where you can't get into much mischief, that works out fine for me. Works out fine for both of us, as a matter of fact."

Again, Anne read between the lines: *if you're on the other side of the Atlantic, I don't have to wonder about whether I ought to dispose of you.* "Fair enough," she said. All things considered, going into what wasn't quite exile was as much as she could have hoped for. One thing Featherston had never learned was how to forgive.

Colonel Irving Morrell watched from the turret of the experimental model as barrels chewed hell out of the Kansas prairie. Fortunately, Fort Leavenworth had a lot of prairie on its grounds to chew up. Once upon a time, it had occurred to Morrell that the traveling forts might find it useful to make their own smoke: that way, enemy gunners would have a harder time spotting them. When they traveled over dry ground, though, barrels kicked up enough dust to make the question of smoke moot.

Most of these barrels were the slow, lumbering brutes that had finally forced breakthroughs in the Confederate lines during the Great War. They moved at not much above a walking pace, they had a crew of eighteen, they had cannon at the front rather than inside a revolving turret, the bellowing engines were in the same compartment as the crew—and they had other disadvantages as well. The only advantage they had was that they existed. Crews could learn how to handle a barrel by getting inside them.

The experimental model had been a world-beater when Morrell designed it early in the 1920s. Rotating turret, separate engine compartment, wireless set, reduced crew ... In 1922, no other barrel in the world touched this design.

But it wasn't 1922 any more. The design was a dozen years older now. So was Irving Morrell. He didn't show his years very much. He was still lean and strong in his early forties, and his close-cropped, light brown hair held only a few threads of gray. If his face was lined and tanned and weathered ... well, it had been lined and tanned and weathered in the early 1920s, too. Hard service and a love for the outdoors had taken their toll there.

A Model T Ford in military green-gray bounced across the prairie toward the experimental model. One of the soldiers inside the motorcar waved to Morrell. When he waved back, showing he'd seen, the man held up a hand to get him to stop.

He waved again, then ducked down into the turret. "Stop!" he bawled into the speaking tube that led to the driver's seat at the front of the barrel.

"Stopping, yes, sir." The answer was tinny but understandable. The barrel clanked to a halt.

"What's up, sir?" Sergeant Michael Pound, the barrel's gunner, was insatiably curious—more than was good for him, Morrell often thought. His wide face might have been that of a three-year-old seeing his first aeroplane.

"I don't know," Morrell answered. "They've just sent out an auto to stop the maneuvers."

Sergeant Pound's wide shoulders moved up and down in a shrug. "Maybe the powers that be have gone off the deep end. Wouldn't surprise me a bit." Spending his whole adult life in the Army had left him endlessly cynical—not that he didn't seem to have had a good running start beforehand. But then his green-blue eyes widened. "Or do you suppose—?"

That same thought had been in Morrell's mind, too. "It would be sooner than I expected if it is, Sergeant. When was the last time those people up in Pontiac ever turned something out sooner than anyone expected?"

"I'm afraid that's much too good a question, sir." Pound pointed to the hatchway in the top of the commander's cupola. "Pop your head out and see, though, why don't you?" He made *out* sound almost like *oat,* as a Canadian would have; he came from somewhere up near the border. *What used to be the border,* Morrell reminded himself.

No matter what he sounded like, he'd given good advice. Morrell did stand up again in the turret. Any barrel commander worth his salt liked to stick his head out of the machine whenever he could. You could see so much more of the field that way. Of course, everybody on the field could also see you—and shoot at you. During the Great War, Morrell had often been forced back into the hell that was the interior of an old-style barrel by machine-gun fire that would have killed him in moments if he'd kept on looking around.

By the time he did emerge from the experimental model, the old Ford had come up alongside his barrel. The soldier who'd waved to him—a young lieutenant named Walt Cressy—called, "Sir, you might want to take your machine back to the farm."

"Oh? How come?" Morrell asked.

Lieutenant Cressy grinned. "Just because, sir."

That made Morrell grin, too. Maybe they really had been working overtime up in Pontiac. Maybe the combination of war with Japan—not that it was an all-out, no-holds-barred war on either side—and a Democratic administration had got engineers and workers to go at it harder than they were used to doing. "All right, Lieutenant," Morrell said. "I'll do that."

Sergeant Pound whooped with glee when Morrell gave the order to break off from maneuvers and go back to the farm. "It has to be!" he said. "By God, it has to be."

"Nothing *has* to be anything, Sergeant," Morrell said. "If we haven't seen that over the past ten years and more of this business..."

That made even Pound nod thoughtfully. Barrels had probably been *the* war-winning weapon during the Great War. After the war, they'd been the weapon most cut by budget trimmers in two successive Socialist administrations. No one had wanted to spend the money to improve them, to give them a chance to be the war-winning weapon of the next war. No one wanted to think there might be another big war. Morrell didn't like contemplating that possibility, either, but not thinking about it wouldn't make it go away.

The experimental model easily outdistanced the leftovers from the Great War, though they carried two truck engines apiece and it had only one. It was made from thin, mild steel, enough to give an idea of how it performed but not enough to stand up to bullets. It had plainly

outdone everything else in the arsenal, and by a wide margin, too. For more than ten years, nobody'd given a damn. Now...

Now Morrell's heart beat faster. It he was right, if the powers that be were waking up at last... Sergeant Michael Pound said, "Maybe seeing Jake Featherston snorting and stomping the ground down in Richmond put the fear of God into some people, too."

"It could be," Morrell said. "I'll tell you something, Sergeant: he sure as hell puts the fear of God into me."

"He's a madman." As usual, everything looked simple to Pound.

"Maybe. If he is, he's a clever one," Morrell said. "And if you put a clever madman in charge of a country that has good reason to hate the United States ... Well, I don't like the combination."

"If we have to, we'll squash him." Pound was confident, too. Morrell wished he shared that confidence.

Then the experimental model got to the field where the barrels stayed now that they were back in service. Sure enough, a new machine squatted on the track-torn turf. The closer Morrell got, the better it looked. If he'd admired a woman as openly as he ogled that barrel, his wife, Agnes, would have had something sharp to say to him.

He climbed out through the hatch in the cupola and descended from the experimental model before it stopped moving. Sergeant Pound let out a piteous howl from inside the barrel. "Don't eat your heart out, Sergeant," Morrell said. "You can come have a look, too."

He didn't wait for Pound *to* emerge, though. He hurried over *to the* new barrel. His leg twinged under him. He'd been shot in the early days of the Great War. He still had a slight limp almost twenty years later. The leg did what he needed, though. If it pained him now and again ... then it did, that was all.

"Bully," he said softly as he came up to the new barrel. That marked him as an old-fashioned man; people who'd grown up after the Great War commonly said *swell* at such times. He knew exactly what he meant, though. He looked from the new machine to the experimental model and back again. A broad grin found room on his narrow face. It was like seeing a child and the man he had become there side by side.

The experimental model was soft-skinned, thin-skinned. One truck engine powered it, because it wasn't very heavy. The cannon in its turret was a one-pounder, a popgun that couldn't damage anything tougher than a truck.

Here, though, here was the machine of which its predecessor had been the model. Morrell set a hand on its green-gray flank. Armor plate felt no different from mild steel under his palm. He knew the difference was there, though. Up at the bow and on the front of the turret, two inches of hardened steel warded the barrel's vitals. The armor on the sides and back was thinner, but it was there.

A long-barreled two-inch gun jutted from the turret, a machine gun beside it. He knew of no barrel anywhere in the world with a better main armament. The suspension was beefed up. So was the engine at the rear. It was supposed to push this barrel along even faster than the experimental model could do.

Sergeant Pound came up behind him. So did the other crewmen from the experimental model: the loader, the bow machine-gunner, the wireless operator, and the driver. Pound said, "It's quite something, sir. It's a good thing we've got it. It would have been even better if we'd had it ten years ago."

"Yes." Morrell wished the sergeant hadn't pointed that out, no matter how obvious a truth it was. "If we'd built this ten years ago, what would we have now? That's what eats at me."

"I don't blame you a bit, sir," Pound said. "What happened to the barrel program was a shame, a disgrace, and an embarrassment. And if the Japs hadn't gone and embarrassed us, too, it never would have started up again."

"I know." Morrell couldn't wait any more. He climbed up onto the new barrel, opened the hatch at the top of the commander's cupola, and slid down into the turret.

It didn't smell right. He noticed that first. All it smelled of was paint and leather and gasoline: fresh smells, new smells. It might have been a Chevrolet in a showroom. The old machines and the experimental model stank of cordite fumes and sweat, odors Morrell had taken for granted till he found himself in a barrel without them. He sat down in the commander's seat. Before long, this beast would smell the way it was supposed to.

Clankings from up above said somebody else wanted to investigate the new barrel, too. Michael Pound's voice came in through the open hatch: "If you don't get out of the way, I'm going to squash you ... sir." Morrell moved. Pound slithered down—his stocky frame barely fit through the opening—and settled himself behind the gun. He peered through the sights, then nodded. "Not bad. Not bad at all."

"No, not bad at all," Morrell agreed. "They're going to name the production model after General Custer."

"That's fitting. It's a pity they fiddled around too long to let him see them," Pound said, and Morrell nodded. The gunner asked, "How many are they going to make?"

"I don't know that yet," Morrell answered. "What they think they can afford, I suppose. That's how it usually works." He scowled.

So did Sergeant Pound. "They'd better make lots if they name them after Custer. He believed in great swarms of barrels. Anyone with sense does, of course." Having served with Custer, Morrell knew he'd often been anything but sensible. He also knew Pound meant *anyone who agrees with me* by *anyone with sense.* Even so, he nodded again.

Colonel Abner Dowling opened the *Salt Lake City Bee.* The Army published the paper. It put out what the U.S. authorities occupying Utah wanted the people there to see. As commander of the occupying authorities in Salt Lake City, Dowling knew that did only so much good. The locals got plenty of news the paper didn't print and the town wireless outlets didn't broadcast. Still, if you didn't try to keep a lid on things, what was the point of occupying at all?

On page three was a picture of a very modern-looking barrel—certainly one that seemed ready to blow any number of hulking Great War machines to hell and gone. new custer barrel put through paces in Kansas, the headline read. The story below praised the new model to the skies.

"Custer," Dowling muttered—half prayer, half curse. He'd been Custer's adjutant for a long time—and it had often seemed much longer. Naming a machine intended to smash straight through everything in its path after George Armstrong Custer did seem to fit.

Dowling couldn't deny that.

He went through the rest of the paper in a hurry—there wasn't much real news in it, as he had reason to know. Then he pushed his swivel chair back from his desk and strode out of the office. He was a hulking machine himself, and built rather like the desk. Custer had been in the habit of twitting him about his heft. Custer hadn't been skinny himself, but Dowling hadn't lost any weight since they finally forced the old boy into retirement. On the contrary.

It's good, healthy flesh, he told himself. Plenty of people had worse vices than getting up from the supper table a little later than they might have. Take Custer, for instance. Dowling's jowls wobbled as he shook his head. He'd escaped Custer more than ten years before, but couldn't get him out of his mind.

That's how people will remember me a hundred years from now, he thought, not for the first time. *In biographies of Custer, I'll have half a dozen index entries as his adjutant. Immortality—the tradesman's entrance.*

But that wasn't necessarily so, as he knew too well. People might remember him forever—if Utah blew up in his face. Even back as far as the trouble it caused in the Second Mexican War in the early 1880s, Custer had wanted to lay it waste. Abner Dowling shook his head. *Enough of Custer.*

These days, Dowling had an adjutant of his own, a bright young captain called Isidore Lefkowitz. He looked up from his desk in the outer office as Dowling emerged from his sanctum. "What can I do for you, sir?" he asked, his accent purest New York.

"Mr. Young is due here in ten minutes, isn't that right?" Dowling said.

"Yes, sir, at three o'clock sharp," Lefkowitz replied. "I expect him to be right on time, too. You could set your watch by him."

Dowling's nod also made his chins dance. "Oh, yes." Heber Young was a man of thoroughgoing rectitude. Mischief in his eye, he asked, "How does it feel, Captain, to be a gentile in Utah?"

Captain Lefkowitz rolled his eyes. "I should care what these Mormon *mamzrim* think." He didn't translate the word. Even so, Dowling had no trouble figuring out it was less than complimentary.

He said, "The Mormons are convinced they're persecuted the way Jews used to be in the old days."

"What do you mean, used to be?" Lefkowitz said. "Tsar Michael turned the Black Hundreds loose on us just a couple of years ago. If the peasants and workers go after Jews, they don't have to worry about whether they might have done better throwing out Michael's brother Nicholas and going Red. There are pogroms in the Kingdom of Poland, too."

"People over there use Jews for whipping boys, the same way the Confederates use their Negroes," Dowling said.

Lefkowitz started to answer, stopped, and gave Dowling an odd look. "That's ... very perceptive, sir," he said, as if Dowling had no business being any such thing. "I never thought I had much in common with a *shvartzer"*— another untranslated word Dowling had little trouble figuring out—"but maybe I was wrong."

Before Dowling could answer, he heard footsteps coming down the hall. A soldier led a tall, handsome man in somber civilian clothes into the outer office. "Here's Heber Young, sir," the man in green-gray said. "He's been searched."

Dowling didn't think Brigham Young's grandson was personally dangerous to him. He didn't think so, but he hadn't rescinded the order that all Mormons be searched before entering U.S. military headquarters. He'd been in the office with General Pershing when the then-commander of occupation forces was assassinated. The sniper had never been caught, either.

Officially, of course, the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints remained forbidden in Utah. Officially, Heber Young had no special status whatever. But, as often happened, the official and the real had only a nodding acquaintance with each other. "Come in, Mr. Young," Dowling said, gesturing toward his own office. "Can we get you some lemonade?" He couldn't very well ask a pious (if unofficial) Mormon if he wanted a drink, or even a cup of coffee.

"No, thank you," Young said, accompanying him into the private office. Dowling closed the door behind them. He waved Young to a seat. With a murmured, "Thank you, Colonel," the local sat down.

So did Abner Dowling. "What can I do for you today, Mr. Young?" he inquired. He was always scrupulously polite to the man who

headed a church that did not officially exist. Despite half a century of government persecution and almost twenty years of outright suppression, that church still counted for more than anything else in Utah.

"You will remember, Colonel, that I spoke to you this past fall about the possibility of programs that would give work to some of the men here who need it so badly." Young was painfully polite to him, too. The diplomats called this sort of atmosphere "correct," which meant two sides hated each other but neither showed what it was feeling.

"Yes, sir, I do remember," Dowling replied. "And, I trust, you will recall I told you President Hoover disapproved of such programs. The president's views have not changed. That means my hands are tied."

"The problem is worse here than it was last fall," Heber Young said. "Some people grow impatient. Their impatience could prove a problem."

"Are you threatening me with an uprising, Mr. Young?" Dowling didn't shout it. He didn't bluster. He simply asked, as he had asked if Young wanted lemonade.

And the Mormons' unofficial leader shook his head. "Of course not, Colonel. That would be seditious, and I am loyal to the government of the United States."

Dowling didn't laugh in his face, a measure of the respect he had for him. But he didn't believe that bold assertion, either. "Are you also loyal to the state of Deseret?" he asked.

"How can I be, when there is no state of Deseret?" Young asked calmly. "What happened here during the Great War made that plain."

"A thing may be very plain, and yet people will not want to believe it," Dowling said.

"True," Heber Young agreed. "May I give you an example?"

"Please do," Dowling said, as he was no doubt supposed to.

"Thank you." Yes, Young was nothing if not courteous. "That many people in Utah were not happy with the repression and persecution they received at the hands of the government of the United States

must have been obvious to anyone who looked at the matter, and yet the rebellion that broke out here in 1915 seems to have come as a complete and utter shock to that government. If you despise people on account of what they are, can you be surprised when they in turn fail to love you?"

"I was in Kentucky at the time. I was certainly surprised, Mr. Young," Dowling answered. Custer had been more than surprised. He'd been furious. A couple of divisions had been detached from First Army and sent west to deal with the Mormon revolt. That had scotched an offensive he'd planned. The offensive probably would have failed, and certainly would have caused a gruesome casualty list. Of course, fighting the Mormons had caused a gruesome casualty list, too.

Young said, "My grandfather came to Utah to go beyond the reach of the United States. All we ever asked was to be left alone."

"That was Jefferson Davis' war cry, too," Dowling said. "Things are never so simple as slogans make them sound. If you live at the heart of the continent, you cannot pretend that no one will notice you are here. For better or worse, Utah is part of the United States. It will go on being part of the United States. People who live here had better get used to it."

"Then treat us like any other part of the United States," Young said. "Send your soldiers home. Open the borders. Let us practice our religion."

How many wives did Brigham Young have? Which one of them was your grandmother? Dowling wondered. Aloud, he said, "Mr. Young, I am a soldier. I do not make policy. I only carry it out. In my opinion, though, your people were well on the way to getting what you ask for ... until that assassin murdered General Pershing. After your revolt in 1881, after the uprising in 1915, that set back your cause more than I can say."

"I understand as much," Young said. "Do you understand the desperation that made that assassin pick up a rifle?"

"I don't know." Dowling had no interest in understanding the assassin. He suddenly shook his head. That wasn't quite true. Understanding the Mormon might make him easier to catch, and might make other murderers easier to thwart. Dowling doubted that was what Heber Young had in mind.

The Mormon leader said, "The worse the conditions in this state get, the more widespread that desperation becomes. We may see another explosion, Colonel."

"You are in a poor position to threaten me, Mr. Young," Dowling said.

"I am not threatening you. I am trying to warn you," Young said earnestly. "I do not want another uprising. It would be a disaster beyond compare. But if the people of Utah see no hope, what can you expect? They are all too likely to lash out at what they feel to be the cause of their troubles."

"If they do, they will only bring more trouble down on their heads. They had better understand that," Dowling said.

"I think they do understand it," Heber Young replied. "What I wonder about is how much they care. If all choices are bad, the worst one no longer seems so very dreadful. I beg you, Colonel—do what you can to show there are better choices than pointless revolt."

With genuine regret, Dowling said, "You credit me with more power than I have."

"I credit you with goodwill," Young said. "If you can find something to do for us, something you may do for us, I think you will."

"The things you've asked for are not things I may do," Dowling said.

Impasse. They looked at each other in silent near-sympathy. Young got to his feet. So did Dowling. Dowling put out his hand. Young shook it. He also shook his head. And, shaking it, he strode out of Abner Dowling's office without looking back.

"Come on, Mort!" Mary Pomeroy exclaimed, sounding as excitable as her red hair said she ought to be. "Do you want to make us late?"

Her husband laughed. "For one thing, we won't be late. For another thing, your mother will be so glad to see us, she won't care anyhow."

He was right. Mary knew as much, but she didn't care. "Come on!"

she said again, tugging at his arm. "We'll all be there at the farm—Ma and Julia and Ken and their children and Beth—that's Ken's ma—"

"I know who Beth Marble is," Mort broke in. "Hasn't she been coming to the diner for years whenever she's in Rosenfeld to buy things?"

"And us," Mary finished, as if he hadn't spoken. "And us." They'd been married less than a year. A lot of the glow was still left on her—left on both of them, which made life much more pleasant. She gave him a playful shove. "Let's go."

"All right. All right. See? I'm not arguing with you." He put on a straw boater—a city fellow's hat, almost too much of a city fellow's hat for a town as small as Rosenfeld, Manitoba—and went downstairs. He carried the picnic basket, though Mary had cooked the food inside. They went downstairs together.

Their apartment stood across the street from the diner Mort ran with his father. Mort's rather elderly Oldsmobile waited at the curb in front of the building. Mary wished he didn't drive an American auto, but there were no Canadian autos, and hadn't been since before the Great War. As he opened the trunk to put the picnic basket inside, a couple of occupiers—U.S. soldiers in green-gray uniforms—went into the diner. They both eyed Mary before the door closed behind them.

She slammed down the trunk lid with needless violence. All she said, though, was, "I wish Pa and Alexander could come to the picnic, too."

"I know, honey," Mort said gently. "I wish they could, too."

The Yanks had shot Alexander McGregor—her older brother—in 1916, claiming he'd been a saboteur. Mary still didn't believe that. Her father, Arthur McGregor, hadn't believed it, either. He'd carried on a one-man bombing campaign against the Americans for years, till a bomb he'd intended for General George Custer blew him up instead.

One of these days ... Mary clamped down on that thought, hard. Smiling, she turned to her husband and said, "Let me drive, please."

"All right." He'd taught her after they got married. Before that, she'd never driven anything but a wagon. Mort grinned. "Try to have a little mercy on the clutch, will you?"

"I'm doing the best I can," Mary said.

"I know you are, sweetie." Her husband handed her the keys.

She *did* clash the gears shifting from first up to second. Before Mort could even wince, she said, "See? You made me nervous." He just shrugged. She drove smoothly the rest of the way out to the farm where she'd grown up. She turned down the lane that led to the farmhouse, stopped alongside of Kenneth Marble's Model T (which made the Olds seem factory-new by comparison), and shut off the motor. "See?" Triumph in her voice, she took the key from the ignition and stuck the key ring in her handbag.

"You did fine," Mort said. "But you put the keys away too soon. We've got to get the hamper out of the trunk."

"Oh." Mary felt foolish. "You're right."

Mort carried it up onto the porch. She remembered how he'd stood there the first time he came to take her out. But then she'd seen him from inside the house, and as a near stranger. Now she stood beside him, and the house in which she'd lived most of her life seemed the strange place.

Her mother opened the door. "Hello, my dear—my dears!" Maude McGregor said, smiling. Mary had got her red hair from her mother; Maude's, these days, was mostly gray. She looked tired, too. But then, what woman on a farm didn't?

Mary knew she'd had no idea how much work she did every day till she went from the farm into Rosenfeld. Keeping an apartment clean and cooking were as nothing beside what she'd done here. With her father and brother dead, she'd worked even harder than most women had to. But in town ... There, keeping up would have been easy even without electricity. With it, she felt as if she lived in the lap of luxury.

Now, coming back, she might have fallen into the nineteenth century, or maybe even the fifteenth. She shook her head. That last wasn't right. Kerosene lamps gave light here, and her mother cooked on a coal-burning stove. They hadn't had those in the Middle Ages. But water came from a well, and an outhouse added its pungency to the barn's. Mary hadn't needed any time at all to get used to the delights of running water and indoor plumbing.

Even so, she had no trouble saying, "It's so good to be back!" after

hugging her mother. She meant it, too. No matter how hard things had been here, the farm was the standard by which she would measure everything else for the rest of her life.

As soon as she stepped inside, two tornadoes hit her, both shouting, "Aunt Mary!" Her sister Julia's son Anthony was five; her daughter Priscilla, three. Mary picked each of them up in turn, which made them squeal. Picking up Anth—that was what they called him, for no reason Mary could make out—made her grunt. He was a big boy, and gave the promise of growing into a big man.

Julia was taller than Mary, and Ken Marble was a good-sized man, though stocky and thick through the chest rather than tall. "Glad to see you," he said gravely. Both he and Julia were quiet people, though their children made up for it. He might have been talking about the weather when he went on, "We've got number three on the way. First part of next year, looks like."

"That's wonderful!" Mary hurried to her sister and squeezed her. Julia looked even more weary than their mother. As a farm wife with two small children, she had every right to look that way. "How do you feel?" Mary asked her.

She shrugged. "Like I'm going to have a baby. I'm sleepy all the time. One day, food will stay down. The next, it won't. When are *you* going to have a baby, Mary?"

People had started asking her that after she'd been married for about two weeks. "I don't know exactly," she answered in a low voice, "but I don't think it'll take real long."

Julia's mother-in-law, Beth Marble, said, "What's the news from in town, kids?" She was a pleasant woman with shoulder-length brown hair going gray, rather flat features, and a wide, friendly smile.

"Tell you what I heard late last night at the diner," Mort said. "There's talk Henry Gibbon's going to sell the general store."

"You didn't even tell me that when you came home!" Mary said indignantly.

Her husband looked shamefaced. "It must've slipped my mind."

Mary wondered if he'd saved the news so it would make a bigger splash at the gather. He liked being the center of attention. It was big

—no doubt about that. She said, "Gibbon's general store's been in Rosenfeld for as long as I can remember."

"For as long as I can remember, too, pretty much," her mother said.

"That's likely why he's selling—if he *is* selling, and it's not just talk," Mort said. "He's not a young man any more."

When Mary thought of the storekeeper, she thought of his bald head, and of the white apron he always wore over his chest and the formidable expanse of his belly. But sure enough, the little fringe of hair he had was white these days. "Won't seem the same without him," she said, and everybody nodded. She added, "I hope to heaven a Yank doesn't buy him out. That'd be awful."

More nods. Julia hated the Americans as much as Mary did, though she wasn't so open about it. The Marbles had no reason to love them, either, even if they hadn't suffered so much at U.S. hands. The only Canadians Mary could think of who did love Americans were collaborators, of whom there were altogether too many.

"Let's go take the baskets out to the field and have our picnic," Maude McGregor said, which was not only a good idea but changed the subject.

Sprawled on a blanket under the warm summer sun and gnawing on a fried drumstick, Mary found it easy enough not to think about the Americans. She listened to gossip from town and from the surrounding farms. The Americans did come into that, but only briefly: a farmer's daughter was going to marry a U.S. soldier. It wasn't the first such marriage around Rosenfeld, and probably wouldn't be the last. Mary did her best to pretend it wasn't happening.

Far easier, far more pleasant, to talk about other things. She said, "These deviled eggs you made sure are good, Ma."

Her husband nodded. "Can I get the recipe from you, Mother McGregor? They beat the ones we fix in the diner all hollow."

"I don't know about that," Maude McGregor said. "If other people use it, it won't be mine any more."

"Of course it will," Mort said. "It'll just let other people enjoy what you were smart enough to figure out."

"He's a smooth talker, isn't he?" Julia murmured. Mary smiled and nodded.

In a low, confidential voice, Mort went on, "I'm not just talking to hear myself talk, Mother McGregor. That recipe's worth money to my father and me. If we were buying it from someone else in the business, we'd probably pay"—he screwed up his face as he figured it out—"oh, fifty dollars, easy."

The farm barely made ends meet for Mary's mother. Mary doubted the Pomeroys would pay anywhere near that much for a recipe—they'd be more likely to swap one of their own—but the diner was doing well, and Mort had a generous heart. After blinking once or twice to make sure he was serious, Maude McGregor said, "When we get back to the house, I'll write it down." Everyone beamed.

When they got back to the house, Mary said, "I'm going out to the barn, Mort, and get us some fresh eggs. I wonder if I remember how to get a hen off the nest."

"You don't need to take the big picnic basket with you, just for some eggs," Mort said.

"It's all right. I've got a smaller one inside," Mary said. That display of feminine logic flummoxed her husband. He shrugged and watched her go, then turned back to her mother, who was putting the deviled-egg recipe on paper.

In the barn, Mary quickly gathered a dozen eggs. She put them, as she'd said she would, in the smaller basket inside the big one, cushioning them with straw. She didn't go back to the house right after that. Instead, she walked over to an old iron-tired wagon wheel that had been lying there since the Great War, maybe even since before it started. The iron, by now, was red and rough with rust. It rasped against her palms—which were softer than they had been—as she shoved the wheel aside.

Mary scraped aside the dirt under it, and lifted a board under the dirt. The board concealed a hole in the ground her father had dug. In it lay his bomb-making tools, the tools the Yanks had never found. She scooped up sticks of dynamite, blasting caps, fuses, crimpers, needle-nosed pliers, and other bits of specialized ironmongery, and put them in the basket.

She was just replacing the wheel over the now-empty hole when

her nephew Anthony charged into the barn. "What you doing, Aunt Mary?" he asked.

"I was squashing a spider that had a web under there," she lied smoothly. Anth made a horrible face. She made as if to clop him with the picnic basket. He fled, giggling. She went out to the car and put the basket in the trunk.

Saul Goldman was a fussy little fellow, but good at what he did. "Everything's ready now, Mr. President," he said. "Newsreel photographers, newspaper photographers, and the wireless web connection. By this time tomorrow, everyone in the Confederate States will know you've signed this bill."

"Thanks, Saul," Jake Featherston said with a warm smile, and the little Jew blossomed under the praise. Jake knew Goldman was exaggerating. But he wasn't exaggerating by much. The people who *needed* to know he was signing the bill would hear about it, and that was what mattered.

At a gesture from the communications chief, klieg lights came on in the main office of the Gray House. Featherston smiled at the camera. "Hello, friends," he said into the microphone in front of him. "I'm Jake Featherston. Just like always, I'm here to tell you the truth. And the truth is, this bill I'm signing today is one of the most important laws we've ever made in the Confederate States of America."

He inked a pen and signed on the waiting line. Flashbulbs popped as the photographers did their job. Jake looked up at the newsreel camera again. "We've had too many floods on our big rivers," he said. "The one in 1927 came close to drowning the middle of the country. Enough is enough, I say. We're going to build dams and levees and make sure it doesn't happen again. We'll use the electricity from the dams, too, for factories and for people. We've needed a law like this for years, and now, thanks to the Freedom Party, we've got it."

"Mr. President?" A carefully prompted reporter from a Party paper stuck his hand in the air. "Ask you a question, Mr. President?"

"Go right ahead, Delmer." Featherston was calm, casual, at his ease.

"Thank you, sir," Delmer said. "What about Article One, Section Eight, Part Three of the Constitution, sir? You know, the part that says you can't make internal improvements on rivers unless you aid navigation? Dams don't do that, do they?"

"Well, no, but they do lots of other things the country needs," Jake answered.

"But won't the Supreme Court say this law is unconstitutional?" the reporter asked.

Featherston looked into the cameras as if looking at a target over open sights. He had a long, lean face, a face people remembered if not one conventionally handsome. "Tell you what, Delmer," he said. "If the Supreme Court wants to put splitting hairs ahead of what's good for the country, it can go right ahead. But if it does, I won't be the one who's sorry in the end. Those fools in black robes will be, and you can count on that."

He took no other questions. He'd said everything he had to say. The microphones went off. The bright lights faded. He leaned back in his swivel chair. It creaked. Saul Goldman came back into the room. Before Jake could ask, his head of communications said, "I think that went very well, Mr. President."

"Good." Featherston nodded. "Me, too. Now they know what I think of 'em. Let's see how much nerve they've got."

Ferdinand Koenig walked into the office. The attorney general was one of Featherston's oldest comrades, and as close to a friend as he had these days. "You told 'em, Jake," he said. "Now we find out how smart they are."

"They're a pack of damn fools, Ferd," Jake said scornfully. "You watch. The people who've been running this country *are* damn fools. All we need to do is give 'em the chance to prove it."

Koenig had got to the office faster than Vice President Willy Knight. Knight was tall and blond and good-looking and very much aware of how good-looking he was. He'd headed up the Redemption League till the Freedom Party swallowed it. One look at his face and you could see he still wished things had gone the other way. *Too bad,* Jake thought. Knight wasn't so smart as he thought he was, either. He never would have taken the vice-presidential nomination if he were. The vice president of the Confederate States couldn't even fart till he got permission from the president.

Four months on the job, and Knight still hadn't figured that out. He went right on laboring under the delusion that he amounted to something. "For God's sake, Jake!" he burst out now. "What the hell

did you go and rile the Supreme Court for?" A Texas twang filled his voice. "They'll throw out the river bill for sure on account of that, just so as they can get their own back at you."

"Gosh, Willy, do you think so?" Jake sounded concerned. He watched Koenig hide a smile.

Willy Knight, full of himself as usual, never noticed. "Think so? I'm sure of it. You did everything but wave a red cloth in their face."

Featherston shrugged. "It's done now. We'll just have to make the best of it. It may turn out all right."

"How can it?" Knight demanded. "Sure as the sun comes up tomorrow, somebody's gonna sue. You can already hear the Whigs licking their chops, slobbering over the chance to make us look bad. Whatever district court gets the law'll say it's no goddamn good."

"Then we'll take it to the Supreme Court," Ferdinand Koenig said.

"They'll tell you it's unconstitutional, too, just like that reporter fellow said they would," Willy Knight predicted. "They're looking for a chance to pin our ears back. Once they get those black robes on, Supreme Court justices think they're little tin gods. And there's not a Freedom Party man among 'em."

"I'm not too worried, Willy," Jake said. "This here's a popular bill. Not even the Whigs left in Congress voted against it. The country needs it bad. Folks won't be happy if the court tosses it in the ashcan."

"I tell you, those fuckers don't care," the vice president insisted. "Why should they? They're in there for life...." He paused. His blue eyes widened. "Or are you saying they won't live long if they try and smother this bill?"

Featherston shook his head. "I didn't say anything like that. I *won't* say anything like that. We could get away with it if that damn Grady Calkins hadn't shot President Wade goddamn Hampton V. Not now. We don't want to get the name for a pack of lousy murderers." *We've done plenty of murdering on the way up, and we'll do as much more as we have to, but looks count. The Supreme Court justices aren't the right targets for stalwarts. We've got other ways to deal with them.*

"If I were in your shoes, I'd put the fear of God in those sons of bitches," Knight insisted.

Jake Featherston spoke softly, but with unmistakable emphasis: "Willy, you aren't in my shoes. You try and put yourself in my shoes, you're just measuring yourself for a coffin. You got that?"

Knight was not a coward. He'd fought, and fought well, in the trenches during the Great War. But Featherston intimidated him, as Featherston intimidated almost everyone. "Yeah, Jake. Sure, Jake," he mumbled, and left the Confederate president's office in a hurry.

Laughing, Featherston said, "He doesn't get it, Ferd. And he's gonna be as surprised as a ten-year-old when the magician pulls the rabbit out of his hat when we give those justices what they deserve."

"The difference is, this way we'll kill 'em dead, and everybody'll stand up and cheer when we do it," Koenig said. "He doesn't see that." He hesitated, then asked, "You're sure you want one of our people filing suit against the law?"

"Hell, yes, as long as nobody can trace him back to us," Jake answered without hesitation. "Whigs'd take weeks to get around to it, and I want this to happen just as fast as it can."

"I'll take care of it, long as you know your own mind," the attorney general said. "You know I've always backed your play. I always will, too."

"You're a good fellow, Ferd." Featherston meant every word of it. "Man on the way up needs somebody like you to guard his back. And once he gets where he's going, he needs somebody like you more than ever."

"When we started out, they ran the Freedom Party out of a cigar box in the back of a saloon," Koenig said reminiscently. "Did you ever figure, back in those days, that we'd end up *here?"* His wave encompassed the Confederate presidential mansion.

"Hell, yes," Jake replied without hesitation. "That's *why* I joined: to pay back the bastards who lost us the war—all the bastards: coons and our own damn generals and the Yankees—and to get to the top so I could. Didn't you?" He asked it in genuine perplexity. He could judge others only by what he did himself.

Koenig shrugged broad shoulders. He was beefy fat, with a hard core of muscle underneath. "Who remembers now? For all I know, I went to that saloon and not some other place on account of the beer

was good there."

"It was horse piss," Jake said. "I remember that."

"Now that I think back on it, you may be right," Koenig admitted. He looked around as if he couldn't believe the office where they sat. "But hell, we were all just a bunch of saloon cranks in those days. Nobody thought we'd amount to anything."

"I did," Featherston said.

His longtime comrade laughed. "You must've been the only one. Those first few months after the war, a thousand different parties sprang up, and every goddamn one of 'em said it'd set the Confederate States to rights."

"Somebody had to have it straight. We did." Jake Featherston had never lacked for confidence. He'd never doubted. And his confidence had fed the Party. During the dark years after Calkins gunned down President Hampton, his confidence had been all that kept the Party alive. *That and the wireless,* he thought. *I figured out the wireless a couple of jumps ahead of the Whigs and the Radical Liberals. They ran after me, but they never caught up. They never will, now.*

"We've got some old bills to pay, you know," he told Koenig. "We've got a lot of old bills to pay, matter of fact. About time we started doing that, don't you think? We've looked meek and mild too long already. That isn't our proper style."

"Had to get this bill through Congress," the attorney general said. "One thing at a time."

"Oh, yes." Featherston nodded. "It's been one thing at a time ever since we didn't quite win in 1921. That's a hell of a long time now. I'm going to be fifty in a few years. I haven't got all the time in the world any more. I want the whole pie, not just slices. I want it, and I'm going to get it."

"Sure thing, Sarge," Ferdinand Koenig said soothingly. "I know who you want to pay back first. I'll start setting it up. By the time we do it, everything'll go just as slick as boiled okra. You can count on that."

"I do. You'd best believe I do," Jake said. "Pretty soon now, we have some things to tell the USA, too. Not quite yet. We've got to put our own house in some kind of order first. But pretty soon."

"First we take care of this other stuff." Koenig was not a fiery man. He never had been. But he kept things straight. Jake needed somebody like that. He was shrewd enough to know it. He nodded. Koenig went on, "Besides, the next step puts the whole country behind us, not just the people who vote our way."

"Yeah." Featherston nodded again. A wolfish grin spread across his face. "Not only that, it'll be a hell of a lot of fun."

Sylvia Enos looked out at the crowd of fishermen and merchant sailors and shopgirls (and probably, in a hall near the wharves, a streetwalker or two— you couldn't always tell by looking). By now, she'd been up on the stump often enough that it didn't terrify her the way it had at first. It was just something she did every other year, when the election campaigns started heating up.

Joe Kennedy went to the microphone to introduce her: "Folks, here's a lady who can tell you just why you'd have to be seventeen different kinds of fool to vote for anybody but a Democrat for Congress—the famous author and patriot, Mrs. Sylvia *Enos!"*

He always laid the introductions on too thick. He didn't do it to impress the crowd. He did it because he wanted to impress Sylvia, impress her enough to get her into bed with him. And there was his own wife sitting in the front row of the crowd. Was she oblivious or simply resigned? She must have seen him chase—must have seen him catch—plenty of other women by now.

"Thank you, Mr. Kennedy." Sylvia took her place behind the microphone. "I do think it's important to reelect Congressman Sanderson in November." With Boston sweltering in August, November was hard to think about. She looked forward to cooler fall weather. "He'll help President Hoover keep the United States strong. We need that. We need it more than ever, with what's going on down in the Confederate States."

Joe Kennedy applauded vigorously. So did his wife. She never showed that anything was wrong between them. The crowd clapped, too. That was what the Democrats needed from Sylvia. That was why, when she finished her speech, he gave her a crisp new fifty-dollar bill, with Teddy Roosevelt's bulldog features and swarm of teeth on one

side and a barrel crushing Confederate entrenchments on the other.

"Thank you, Mr. Kennedy," Sylvia said again—she didn't want to bite the hand that fed her.

"My pleasure," he answered. "May I take you out to get a bite to eat now?" He didn't mean a bite with him and his wife. Rose would stay wherever Rose stayed while Joe did as he pleased. And no, supper wasn't all he had in mind.

She wondered what he saw in her. She was in her mid-forties, her brown hair going gray, fine lines not so fine any more, her figure distinctly dumpy. Maybe he didn't believe anybody could say no to him and mean it. Maybe her saying no was what kept him after her. If she ever did give in to him, she was sure he would forget all about her after one encounter.

"No, thanks, Mr. Kennedy," she said now, politely but firmly. "I have to get home." She didn't. With her son newly married and her daughter working, she had less need than ever to go home. But the lie was polite, too. She wanted to make a lot more speeches before Election Day, and she wanted to get paid for each and every one of them.

Kennedy bared his teeth; he seemed to have almost as many as TR. "Maybe another time," he said.

Shrugging, Sylvia got down from the stage. As soon as her back was to him, she let out a long sigh of relief. Every time she got away from Joe Kennedy, she felt like Houdini getting out of the handcuffs in the straitjacket in the tub of water.

She hadn't gone far before another man fell into step with her. "You made a good speech," he said. "You told them what they needed to hear. Then, when you were done, you shut up. Too many people never know when to shut up."

"Ernie!" Sylvia exclaimed. She gave the writer a hug. If Joe Kennedy happened to be watching, too damn bad. "What are you doing back in Boston? Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

He shrugged. He had broad shoulders, almost a prizefighter's shoulders, and dark, ruggedly handsome features. He looked more like a bouncer, a mean bouncer, than the man who'd put Sylvia's words on paper in *I Sank Roger Kimball.* Considering the wound he'd taken

driving an ambulance up in Quebec during the war, he had more right than most men to seem, to be, mean.

When he saw she wouldn't be content with that shrug, he raised one eyebrow in a world-weary way that made him look older than she was for a moment, though he had to be ten years younger. He said, "I am looking for work. Why does anyone go anywhere these days? Maybe I will find something to write about. Maybe I will find something someone will pay me to write about. The first is easy. The second is hard these days."

"Are you hungry?" Sylvia asked. Ernie didn't answer. He had more pride than two or three ordinary men. Pride was a luxury Sylvia had long since derided she couldn't afford. She said, "Come on. I'll buy you supper." Before he could speak, she held up a hand. "I've got the money. Don't worry about that. And I owe you." She found herself talking as he did, in short, choppy sentences. "Not just for the book. You warned me my bank would fail. I got my money out in time."

"Good I could do something," he said, and scowled. He'd wanted her. She'd wanted him, too, the first time she'd really wanted a man since her husband was killed at—after—the end of the Great War. Considering his wound, that surge of desire had been nothing but one more cruel irony.

"Come on," she said again.

Ernie didn't tell her no, a likely measure of how hard up he was. She took him to an oyster house. He ate with a single-minded voracity she hadn't seen since her son was growing into a man.

She put money on the table for both of them. He frowned. "I still hate to have a woman pick up the tab for me."

"It's all right," Sylvia said. "Don't worry about it. It's the least I can do. I told you that already. And I bet I can afford it a lot better than you can."

His pain-filled bark of laughter made people all over the place stare at him. "You are right about that. You must be right about that. I do need to land a writing job. I need to do it right away. If I do not, I will wind up in a Blackford-burgh."

"You could do something else," she said.

"Oh, yes." Ernie nodded. "I could step into the ring and get my block knocked off. I have done that a couple of times. It pays even worse than writing, and it is not so much fun. Or I could carry a hod. I have done that, too. The same objections apply. I am glad to see you doing so well for yourself."

"I've been lucky," Sylvia said. "I feel lucky, seeing you again."

"Me?" Another sour laugh. "Not likely. I have tried to write books that show how things were in the war. People do not want to read them. No one wants to publish them any more. Everyone wants to forget we ever had a war."

"They haven't forgotten down in the Confederate States," Sylvia said.

"Sweet Jesus Christ. I *am* lucky. I have found someone who can see past the end of her nose. Do you know how hard that is to do these days?"

The praise warmed Sylvia. It wasn't smarmy, the way Joe Kennedy's always seemed. Ernie wasn't one to waste his time with false praise. He said what he meant. Sylvia tried to match him: "Jake Featherston hasn't exactly been hiding what he thinks about us."

"No. He is a real son of a bitch, that one, a rattler buzzing in the bushes by the road," Ernie said. "One of these days, we are going to have to settle his hash."

"I say things like that on the stump, and people look at me like I'm crazy," Sylvia said. "Sometimes I start to wonder myself, you know what I mean?"

He leaned forward and, with startling gentleness, let his hand rest softly on hers. "You have more sense than anybody I have seen for a hell of a long time, Sylvia," he said. "If anyone tries to tell you any different, belt the silly bastard right in the chops."

That had to be the oddest romantic speech Sylvia had ever heard. But, where most of the so-called romantic speeches she'd heard either made her want to laugh or made her want to kill the man who was making them, this one filled her with heat. That in itself felt strange and unnatural. She'd known desire only a handful of times since her husband didn't come back from the war.

"Let's go to my flat," she murmured. "My son's married and on his own, and my daughter works the evening shift."

Ernie jerked his hand away as if she were on fire. "Did you forget?" he asked harshly. "I am no good for that. I am no damn good for that at all."

He'd told her the same thing once before. It had balked her then. Now ... "There are other things we could do. If you wanted to." She looked down at the tabletop. She felt the heat of embarrassment, too. She didn't think she'd ever said anything so risqué.

"I will be damned," Ernie muttered, and then, "You will not be disappointed?"

"Never," she promised.

"Christ," he said again, only this time it sounded more like a prayer than a curse. He got to his feet. "Maybe you are lying to me. Maybe you are lying to yourself. I am asking to get wounded again. I know goddamn well I am. But if you do not change your mind in one hell of a hurry—"

"Not me," Sylvia said, and she got up, too.

Closing the door to the apartment behind them, locking it afterwards, seemed oddly final, oddly irrevocable. Going into the bedroom once she'd done that might almost have been anticlimax. Sylvia wished it could happen without undressing in front of a near stranger. She knew too well she'd never been anything out of the ordinary for looks or for build.

Ernie treated her as if she were, though. By the way he touched her and stroked her and kissed her, she might have been a moving-picture actress, not a fisherman's widow. He did know what to do to please a woman when he was no longer equipped to do one thing in particular. Sylvia rediscovered just how lonely taking care of herself was by comparison.

Only a little at a time did she realize how much courage he'd needed to bare himself for her. His body was hard and well-muscled. His mutilation, though ... "I'll do what I can," Sylvia said.

"I'll tell you a couple of things that sometimes can help, if you don't mind," Ernie said.

"Why would I mind?" Sylvia said. "This is what we came here for."

He told her. She tried them, George had liked one of them. The other was something new for her. It wouldn't have been high on her list of favorite things to do, but it did seem to help. Ernie growled like some large, fierce cat when he finally succeeded.

"Lord," he said, and bent down to pull a pack of cigarettes from a pocket of the trousers that lay crumpled by the bed. Lighting one, he went on, "There is nothing like that in all the world. Nothing else even comes close. Sometimes I forget, which is a small mercy. Once in a while, everything goes right. That is a large mercy. Thank you, sweetheart." He kissed her. His lips tasted of sweat and tobacco.

"You're welcome," Sylvia said.

"Damn right I am," he told her.

She laughed. Then she said, "Give me a smoke, too, will you?" He did. She leaned close to him to get a light from his. He set a hand companionably on her bare shoulder. She liked the solid feel of him. He would have to go before Mary Jane came home. Scandalizing her daughter wouldn't do. But for now ... For now, everything was just fine.

Scipio wasn't a young man. He'd been a little boy when the Confederate States manumitted their slaves in the aftermath of the Second Mexican War. He'd lived in Augusta, Georgia, since not long after the end of the Great War. Everyone here, even Bathsheba, his wife, knew him as Xerxes. For a Negro who'd played a role, however unenthusiastic, in the running of one of the Red republics during the wartime revolt, a new name was a better investment than any he could have made on the bourse.

He'd seen a lot in those mad, hectic weeks before the Congaree Socialist Republic went down in blood and fire. In all the years since, he'd hoped he would never see anything like that again. And, up till now, he never had.

Up till now.

White rioters roared through the Terry, the colored district in Augusta. Some of them shouted, "Freedom!" Some were too drunk to shout anything that made sense. But they weren't too drunk to burn anything that would burn, to steal anything that wasn't nailed down, and to smash any Negroes who tried to stop them.

In the early stages of the riot, what passed for Augusta's black leaders—a double handful of preachers and merchants—had rushed to the police to get help against the hurricane overwhelming their community. Scipio had happened to be looking out the window of his flat when they came back into the Terry. Most of them, by their expressions, might have just scrambled out of a derailed train. A couple looked grim but unsurprised. Scipio would have guessed those men had seen some action of their own in 1915 and 1916.

"What'll they do for us?" somebody shouted from another window.

"Won't do nothin'," one of the leaders answered. *"Nothin'.* Said we deserves every hit of it, an' mo' besides."

After that, a few Negroes had tried to fight back against the rampaging mob. They were outnumbered and outgunned. Dark bodies hung from lamp posts, silhouetted against the roaring, leaping flames.

From behind Scipio, Bathsheba said, "Maybe we ought to run."

He shook his head. "Where we run to?" he asked bluntly. "The buckra catch we, we hangs on de lamp posts, too. Dis buildin' don' burn, we don' go nowhere."

He sounded altogether sure of himself. He had that gift, even using the slurred dialect of a Negro from the swamps of the Congaree. Back in the days when he'd been Anne Colleton's butler, she'd also made him learn to talk like an educated white man: *like an educated white man with a poker up his ass,* he thought. He'd seemed even more authoritative then. He hadn't always been right. He knew that, as any man must. But he'd always *sounded* right. That also counted.

Raucous, baying laughter floated up from the street. Along with those never-ending shouts of, "Freedom!" somebody yelled, "Kill the niggers!" In an instant, as if the words crystallized what they'd come into the Terry to do, the rioters took up the cry: "Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers! *Kill the niggers!"*

Scipio turned to his wife. "You still wants to run?"

Biting her lip, she got out the word, "No." She was a mulatto, her skin several shades lighter than his. She was light enough to go paler still; at the moment, she was almost pale enough to pass for white.

"Why they hate us like that, Pa?" Antoinette, their daughter, was nine: a good age for asking awkward questions.

In the Confederate States, few questions were more awkward than that one. And the brute fact was so much taken for granted, few people above the age of nine ever bothered asking why. Scipio answered, "Dey is white an' we is black. Dey don' need no mo'n dat."

With the relentless logic of childhood, his son, Cassius, who was six, turned the response on its head: "If we is black an' they is white, shouldn't we ought to hate them, too?"

He didn't know what to say to that. Bathsheba said, "Yes, but it don't do us no good, sweetheart, on account of they's stronger'n we is."

That *yes* had led directly to the Red uprisings during the Great War. The rest of her sentence had led just as directly to their failure. *What do we do?* Scipio wondered. *What* can *we do?* He'd wondered that ever since he'd seen his first Freedom Party rally, a small thing at a park here in Augusta. He'd hoped he wouldn't have to worry about it. That hope, like so many others, lay shattered tonight.

"Kill the niggers!" The cry rang out again, louder and fiercer than ever. Screams said the rioters were turning words into deeds, too.

Gunfire rang out from the building across the street from Scipio's: a black man emptying a pistol into the mob. Some of the screams that followed burst from white throats. *Good!* Savage exultation blazed through Scipio. *See how you like it, you sons of bitches! Wasn't keeping us cooped up in this poor, miserable place enough for you?*

But the white men didn't and wouldn't think that way, of course. *Cet animal est méchant. On l'attaque, il se defende.* That was how Voltaire had put it, anyhow. *This animal is treacherous. If it is attacked, it defends itself.* Thanks to Miss Anne (though she'd done it for herself, not for him), Scipio knew Voltaire well. How many of the rioters did? How many had even heard of him?

A fusillade of fire, from pistols, rifles, and what sounded like a machine gun, tore into the building from which the Negro had shot. More than a few bullets slammed into the building in which Scipio

and his family lived, too. Then some whites chucked a whiskey bottle full of gasoline with a burning cloth wick into the entryway of the building across the street. The bottle shattered. Fire splashed outward.

The white men whooped and hollered and slapped one another on the back with glee. "Burn, baby, burn!" one of them shouted. Soon they were all yelling it, along with, "Kill the niggers!"

"Xerxes, they gwine burn this here place next," Bathsheba said urgently. "We gots to git out while we still kin."

He wished he could tell her she was wrong. Instead, he nodded. "We gits de chillun. We gits de money. An' we *gits*—out de back way to de alley, on account o' we don' las' a minute if we goes out de front."

Maybe the building wouldn't burn. Maybe the white men rampaging through the Terry would go on to some other crime instead. But if the rooming-house did catch fire, his family was doomed. Better to take their chances on the streets than to try to get out of a building ablaze.

Herding Antoinette and Cassius along in front of them, he and Bathsheba raced toward the stairway. A door flew open on the far side of the hall. "You crazy?" a woman in that flat said. "We safer in here than we is out there."

"Ain't so," Scipio answered. "Dey likely fixin' to burn dis place." The woman's eyes opened so wide, he could see white all around the iris. She slammed the door, but he didn't think she'd stay in there long.

He and his family weren't the only people going down the stairs as fast as they could. Some of the Negroes trying to escape the roominghouse dashed for the front entrance. Maybe they didn't know about the back way. Maybe, in their blind panic, they forgot it. Or maybe they were just stupid. Blacks suffered from that disease no less than whites. Whatever the reason, they paid for their mistake. Gunshots echoed. Screams followed. So did hoarse bellows of triumph from the mob.

They've just shot down people who never did—never could do—them any harm, Scipio thought as he scuttled toward the back door. *Why are they so proud of it?* He'd seen blacks exulting over what they meted out to whites during the Red revolt. But that exultation had 250 years of reasons behind it. This? This made no sense at all to him.

Out the door. Down the rickety stairs. Pray no white men prowled the alley. The stinks of rotting garbage and smoke and fear filled Scipio's nostrils. Away, away, away! "Where we run to, Pa?" Antoinette asked as he shoved her on ahead of him.

"Go where it darkest," Scipio answered. "Whatever you does, don' let no buckra see you."

Easy to say. Hard to do. Most nights in the Terry were black as pitch, black as coal, blacker than the residents. The city fathers of Augusta weren't about to waste money on street lighting for Negroes. But the fires burning here, there, everywhere didn't just burn people they trapped. They also helped betray others by showing them as they tried to get away.

Down the alley, into another. Scipio stepped in something nasty. He didn't know what it was, didn't care to find out. As long as he and his family got away, nothing else mattered. Into a side street that would take them to the edge of town, take them out of the center of the storm.

The side street was dark—no fires close by. It looked deserted. But as Scipio and his kin ran up it, a sharp challenge came from up ahead: "Who are you? Answer right this second or you're dead, whoever the hell you are."

Scipio hadn't used his white man's voice since not long after the war ended. He'd sometimes wondered if it still worked. Now it burst from him as if it were his everyday speech: "Go on about your business. None of those damned niggers around here."

Yes, it still held all the punch he'd ever been able to pack into it. "Thank you, sir," said the white man who'd challenged him, and then, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Scipio echoed gravely. He dropped back into the dialect of the Congaree to whisper, "Come on!" to Bathsheba and the children. They said not a word. They just hurried up the street. No one shot at them.

Nor did anyone else challenge them before they reached a stand of pine woods on the outskirts of Augusta. Scipio didn't know what he would do come morning. He would worry about that then. For now, he was alive, and likely to stay that way till the sun came up.

"Do Jesus!" All his weariness and strain came out in the two words.

Then Bathsheba asked him the question he'd known she would: "Where you learn to talk dat way? Ain't never heard you talk dat way before."

"Reckoned I better," Scipio said: an answer that was not an answer.

It didn't distract his wife. He'd hoped it would, but hadn't expected it to. Bathsheba said, "I never knew you could talk like that. You didn't jus' pull it out of the air, neither. Ain't nobody could. You been able to talk dat way all along. You got to've been able to talk dat way all along. So where you learn?"

"Long time gone, when I was livin' in South Carolina," he said. That much was true. "Never did like to use it much. Nigger git in bad trouble, he talk like white folks." That was also true.

True or not, it didn't satisfy Bathsheba. "You got more 'splainin' to do than that. What other kind o' strange stuff you gwine come out with all of a sudden?"

"I dunno," he answered. Bathsheba put her hands on her hips. Scipio grimaced. Her curiosity promised to be harder to escape than the race riot still wracking the Terry.

New York City. The Lower East Side. Tall tenements blocking out the sun. Iron fire escapes red with rust. Poor, shabbily dressed people in the crowd, chattering to one another in a mixture of English and Yiddish and Russian and Polish and Romanian. Red Socialist posters on the walls and fences, some of them put up where Democratic posters had been torn down. A soapbox that wasn't even a soapbox but a beer barrel.

Flora Blackford hadn't felt so much at home for years.

She'd been a Socialist agitator in the Fourteenth Ward twenty years before, at the outbreak of the Great War. She'd argued against voting the money for the war. Her party had disagreed. She still wondered whether they'd made a mistake, whether international proletarian solidarity would have been better. She would never know now. What

she did know was that the war had cost her brother-in-law his life, that her nephew had become a young man without ever seeing his father, that her brother David had only one leg.

And she knew she couldn't talk about the war today, not to this crowd. She'd represented this district for years before marrying Hosea Blackford, before becoming first the vice president's wife and then the First Lady. Now her husband was a private citizen again, trounced by the Democrats when Wall Street collapsed and dragged everything else down with it. Now she wanted her old seat back, and hoped she could take it from the reactionary who'd held it for the past four years.

She pointed out to the crowd, as she had from a different beer barrel twenty years before. "You voted for Democrats because you thought doing nothing was better than doing something. Do you still think so?"

"No!" they shouted, all except for a few heckling Democrats who yelled, "Yes!"

Hecklers Mora could take in stride. "Herbert Hoover has been president for almost two years now. He's spent all that time sitting on his hands. Are we better off on account of it? Are the lines at the soup kitchens shorter? Are the Hoovervilles any smaller?" She refused to call the shantytowns where down-and-outers lived *Blackford-burghs* after her husband, though everybody else did. "Are there more jobs? Is there less misery? Tell me the truth, comrades!"

"No!" the crowd shouted again. This time, it drowned out the hecklers.

"That's right," Flora said. "No. You know the truth when you hear it. You're not blind. You're not stupid. You've got eyes to see and brains to think with. If you're happy with what the Democrats are doing to the United States, vote for my opponent. If you're not, vote for me. Thank you."

"Hamburger! Hamburger! Hamburger!" They remembered her maiden name well enough to chant it. She took that as a good sign. She'd long since learned, though, that you couldn't tell much from crowds. They came out because they wanted to hear you. They were already on your side. The rest of the voters might not be.

Herman Bruck held up a hand to help her descend from her little platform. "Good speech, Flora," he said. Did he hang on to her hand a

little too long? Back in the old days, he'd been sweet on her. He was married himself now, with children of his own. Of course, who could say for sure how much that meant?

"Thank you," she answered.

"My pleasure." He tipped his fedora. As always, he was perfectly turned out, today in a snappy double-breasted gray pinstripe suit with lapels sharp enough to cut yourself on them. "I think you'll win in three weeks."

"I hope so, that's all," Flora said. "We'll find out about how people feel about Hoover—and about Congressman Lipshitz. If I win, I go back to Philadelphia. If I lose..." She shrugged. "If I lose, I have to find something else to do with the rest of my life."

"Come back to Party headquarters," Bruck urged. "A lot of the old-timers will be glad to see you, and you're a legend to the people who've come in since you represented this district."

"A legend? *Gottenyu!* I don't want to be a legend," Flora said in real alarm. "A legend is somebody who's forgotten things she needs to know. I want people to think I can do good things for them now, not that I'm somebody who used to do good things for them once upon a time."

"All right." Herman Bruck made a placating gesture. "I should have put it better. I'm sorry. People still want to see you. Can you come?"

"Tomorrow," she answered. "Tell everyone I'm sorry, but I don't think I ought to go over there today. Heaven knows when I'd get home, and I want to go back to the flat and see how Hosea is doing. This cold doesn't seem to want to go away." She hoped she didn't show how worried she was. The difference in their ages hadn't seemed to matter when she married him, but now, while she remained in vigorous middle age, he was heading toward his seventy-fourth birthday. Illnesses he would have shrugged off even a few years before hung on and on. One of these days ... Flora resolutely refused to think about that.

Bruck nodded. "Sure. Everybody will understand that. Give him our best, then, and we hope we'll see you tomorrow. I'll drive you back to your block of flats."

She eyed him. Would he cause trouble in the auto? No. He had

better sense than that. "Thanks," she said again. He hurried off to get the motorcar from a side street. The De Soto bespoke prosperity but not riches.

New York City traffic was even crazier than Flora remembered: more motorcars and trucks on the street, more drivers seeming not to care whether they lived or died. *This in spite of the subways,* she thought, and shuddered. Earlier in the year, she and Hosea and Joshua had been living in Dakota. New York City had five or six times as many people as the big state, and by all appearances had fifty or sixty times as many automobiles.

She let out a sigh of relief at escaping the De Soto. The doorman tipped his cap when she went into the block of flats. The building where she'd lived with her parents and brothers and sisters hadn't boasted a doorman. It hadn't boasted an elevator operator—or an elevator—either. Not having to walk up four flights of stairs whenever she went to the flat was pleasant.

Hosea Blackford greeted her with a sneeze. His nose was red. His face, always bony, had lost more flesh. His white hair lay thin and dry across his skull. This wasn't death's door—little by little, he was getting well—but the way he looked still alarmed her. After another sneeze, he peered at her over the tops of his reading glasses and brandished the *New York Times* like a weapon. *"Another* round of riots down in the Confederate States," he said. "If that's not reactionary madness on the march down there, I've never seen nor heard of it."

"Has anyone protested yet?" Flora asked.

Her husband shook his head. "Not a word. The Confederates are saying it's an internal matter, and our State Department is taking the same line."

She sighed. "We'd sing a different song if the Freedom Party were going after white men and not Negroes. The injustice, the hypocrisy, are so obvious— but nobody seems to care."

"A lot of whites in the Confederate States despise Negroes and come right out and say so," Hosea Blackford said. "A lot of whites in the United States despise Negroes, too. They keep their mouths shut about it, and so they seem tolerant when you look at them alongside the Confederates. They seem tolerant—but they aren't."

"I know. I saw that when we were both still in Congress," Flora

said. "It's not just Democrats, either. Too many Socialists wouldn't cross the street to do anything for a black man. I don't know what to do about it. I don't know if we can do anything about it."

Hosea nodded. "Even Lincoln said the War of Secession was about trying to preserve the Union, not about the Negro or about slavery. He couldn't have made anybody march behind his banner if he'd said the other—and even as things were, he failed." He coughed again. "I wish I would have asked him about that when I met him on the train. I wish we would have talked about all kinds of things we never got to touch."

"I know," Flora said. That chance meeting had changed his life. He talked about it often, and ever more so as he got older.

Now he laughed a bitter laugh. "We're two peas in a pod, Lincoln and I: the two biggest failures as president of the United States."

"Don't talk like that!" Flora said.

"Why not? It's the truth. I'm not a blind man, Flora, and I hope I'm not a fool," Hosea Blackford said, words that might have come right from her speech. "I had my chance. I didn't deliver. The voters chose Coolidge instead— and then got Hoover when Cal dropped dead. I don't know what we did to deserve *that.* God must have a nasty sense of humor."

Flora didn't think of God as having a sense of humor at all. She also didn't care to be sidetracked. "We can't just turn our backs on the Negroes in the CSA," she said.

"That's true," Hosea said. "But you'd be a fool if you said so in your next speech, because sure as anything it would make people vote for Lipshitz."

She winced. That was bound to be true, no matter how little she liked it. Turning away from him, she said, "I'd better get to work on that next speech. The election's another day closer."

The speech went as well as such things could. After it was done, she went to the Socialist Party headquarters across the street from the Centre Market and above Fleischmann's kosher butcher shop (now run by the son of the original proprietor). Some of the workers in the headquarters looked implausibly young. Others were implausibly familiar. There sat Maria Tresca, typing away as if the past ten years

hadn't happened. She almost certainly spoke better Yiddish than any other Italian woman in New York City. She was also as thoroughgoing a Socialist as anyone in the Party, and had paid a heavy price for holding on to her beliefs: her sister had been killed by police in the Remembrance Day riots of 1915. Flora had been with them when it happened. The bullet could have struck her as easily as Angelina Tresca.

"How does it feel to come back?" Maria asked.

"Coming back here feels wonderful," Flora said, which brought smiles all around. "I hope I can come back to Congress in November. With you people helping me, I'm sure I can." That brought more smiles.

On the night of November 6, she and Hosea and Joshua came back to Party headquarters to find out if she had won. Her husband was still coughing and sneezing, but he had got better. Her parents were there, too, and her brothers and sisters and their families. Yossel Reisen, her sister Sophie's son, was nineteen years old and six feet tall. In the next election, he'd be able to vote himself. That seemed impossible.

These days, a blaring wireless set brought results faster than telegrams had the last time she'd waited out a Congressional election. The more returns that came in, the better things looked, not just here in the Fourteenth Ward but all across the country. Hoover remained in office, of course, but he would have to deal with a Socialist Congress for the next two years.

At a quarter past eleven, the telephone rang. Herman Bruck answered it. A big grin on his face, he ceremoniously held out the mouthpiece to Flora. "It's Lipshitz," he said.

"Hello, Congressman," Flora said.

"Hello, Congresswoman." The Democrat sounded worn, weary, wounded. "Congratulations on a fine campaign. May you serve the district well."

"Thank you. Thank you very much." Politely, Flora tried to hold excitement from her voice. She was going back to Philadelphia!

The tinny ring of a cheap alarm clock bounced Jefferson Pinkard out of bed. He lurched into the bathroom and took a long leak to get rid of the homebrew he'd poured down the night before. Alabama was a dry state, but a man who wanted a beer or three could find what he was looking for.

Bloodshot eyes stared at Jeff from the mirror over the sink. He was a ruddy, beefy man in his early forties, his light brown hair pulling back at the temples, his chin a forward-thrusting rock whose strong outline extra flesh was starting to obscure. "Do I need a shave?" he asked out loud. He lived alone—he was divorced—and had fallen into the habit of talking to himself.

Deciding he did, he lathered up, then scraped his face with a formidable straight razor. He muttered curses when he nicked himself just under his lower lip. A styptic pencil stopped the bleeding, but stung like fire. He didn't mutter the next set of curses.

When he put on his gray jailer's uniform, the high, stiff collar bit into his neck and made his face redder than ever. After two cups of snarling coffee and three eggs fried harder than he cared for—he'd always been a lousy cook—he left his apartment and started for the Birmingham jail.

Newsboys hawked the *Birmingham Confederate* and the *Register-Herald* at almost every street corner. No matter which paper they waved, they shouted the same thing: "Supreme Court turns thumbs down on damming our rivers! Read all about it!"

"Screw the Supreme Court," Pinkard muttered as he paid five cents for a copy of the *Confederate.* That was the Freedom Party paper in Birmingham. He wouldn't waste his money on the *Register-Herald.* One of these days before too long, he suspected something unfortunate would happen to the building where it was written and printed.

The *Confederate* quoted President Featherston as saying, "Those seven old fools in black robes think they can stop us from doing what the Confederate people elected us to do. This is a slap in the face at every honest, hardworking citizen of our country. If the Supreme Court wants to play politics, they'll find out that floods can wash away more than towns."

"Damn right," Jeff said, and chucked the paper into an ashcan. He

didn't know what the president could do about the Supreme Court, but he figured Jake Featherston would come up with something. He always did.

Two cops on the steps of the Birmingham city jail nodded to him as he climbed those steps and went into the building. One of them wore a Party pin on his lapel. The other one, though, was the one who said, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Pinkard echoed. He had a Party pin on his lapel, too. Not long after the war ended, he'd heard Jake Featherston speak in a Birmingham park. He'd been a Freedom Party man ever since.

In the jail, he had a desk in a cramped office he shared with several other jailers. The one he was following onto duty looked up from his own desk, where he was filling out some of the nine million forms without which the jail could not have survived a day. "Mornin', Jeff," Stubby Winthrop said. "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Pinkard said again. "What's new?"

"Not a hell of a lot," Winthrop answered. As his nickname implied, he looked like a fireplug with hairy ears. "Couple-three niggers in the drunk tank, white kid in a cell for stabbing his lady friend when he found out she was this other fella's lady friend, too. Oh, I almost forgot—they finally caught that bastard who's been stealing everything that ain't nailed down on the south side of town."

"Yeah? Swell!" Pinkard said, adding, "About time, goddammit." Like a lot of jailers, he was convinced the police who hunted down criminals couldn't find a skunk if it was spraying their leg. Unlike a lot of men in his line of work, he wasn't shy about saying so. His years at the Sloss Foundry had left him with the strength to back up talk with action if he ever had to. He asked the question Stubby Winthrop hadn't answered: "What about the politicals?"

"Well, of course." Winthrop looked at him as if at an idiot. "They drug in another twelve, fifteen o' them bastards, too." He poked at the papers with a short, blunt finger. "I can tell you exactly how many if you want to know."

"Don't worry about it now," Jeff said. "I can find out myself before I do my morning walk-through—long as the paperwork's there."

"It is, it is," Stubby assured him. "Think I want the warden reaming

out my ass on account of messed-up papers? Not likely!"

"Cool down. I didn't mean anything by it. Twelve or fifteen, you say?" Jeff asked. Winthrop nodded. Jeff let out a pleased grunt. "We *are* starting to clean up this town, aren't we?"

"Bet your butt," Winthrop said. "Anybody forgets who won the goddamn election, we teach the fucker a little lesson. Ain't no such thing as a fit night out for Whigs or Radical Republicans, not any more there ain't."

Belonging to a political party other than the Freedom Party wasn't against the law. Pinkard thought it ought to be, but it wasn't. But anybody who raised his voice against the Party regretted it, and in a hurry. Disturbing the peace, resisting arrest, criminal trespass, inciting to riot, and possession of alcoholic beverages were plenty to get a man into jail. And, once he was in, he might be—he probably would be—a long time coming out again. Most judges, like anybody else, knew which side their bread was buttered on and went along with Freedom Party instructions. A couple of holdouts in Birmingham had already suffered mysterious and most deplorable accidents. Their replacements were more cooperative. So were the other judges. A few mysterious and most deplorable accidents could make anybody thoughtful.

Pinkard said, "Hell with me if I know what we're going to do with all these stinking politicals. We've stuffed so many of 'em into cells, we don't hardly have room for real crooks any more."

"Ain't my worry," Stubby said. "And you know somethin' else? There's a fuck of a lot of worse problems to have." Pinkard nodded again. He couldn't very well argue with that. Winthrop went on, "Matter of fact, this whole goddamn jail is your baby for the next eight hours. I'm gonna get outa here, grab myself some shuteye. Freedom!" He headed out the door.

"Freedom!" Jeff called after him. Among Party men—and more and more widely through the CSA these days—the word replaced *hello* and *good-bye.*

The heavy armored door crashed shut behind Stubby Winthrop. Pinkard looked at the clock on the wall. The prisoners would just be getting breakfast. He had time to find out precisely what he needed to know about changes since yesterday before making his first walk-through of the day. He didn't love paperwork, but he did recognize the

need for it. He was conscientious about keeping up with it, too, which put him a jump ahead of several of his fellow jailers.

He'd just finished seeing what was what when the door to the office opened. The prisoner who came in had a trustie's green armband on the left sleeve of his striped shirt. "What's up, Mike?" Pinkard asked, frowning; this wasn't a scheduled time for a trustie to show up.

But Mike had an answer for him: "Warden wants to see you, sir, right away." His voice, like those of a lot of trusties, held a particular kind of whine. It put Pinkard in mind of the yelp of a dog that had been kicked too many times.

Whine or not, though, a summons from the warden was like a summons from God. Pinkard did his best not to evade but to delay, saying, "Can't I take my morning walk-through first, anyways?"

"You're a jailer—you can do whatever you please," Mike said, which only proved he'd never been a jailer. Then he added, "But I don't reckon the warden'd be mighty pleased," which proved he had a good idea of how things worked anyhow. Pinkard grunted and decided the walk-through would have to wait.

Warden Ewell McDonald was a heavyset man with a mustache that looked like a gray moth on his upper lip. He was close to retirement age, and didn't much care whose cage he rattled. "Come in, Pinkard," he said, staring at Jeff over the tops of the half-glasses he used for reading.

"What's up, sir?" Jeff asked warily.

"Come in," the warden repeated. "Sit down. You ain't in trouble—swear to God you ain't." Still cautious, Pinkard obeyed. McDonald went on, "That stuff on your record, how you set up that prisoner-of-war camp down in Mexico during their last civil war, that's the straight goods?"

"Hell, yes," Pinkard answered without hesitation. He was telling the truth, too, and knew other Confederate veterans—Freedom Party men—who'd gone down to the Empire of Mexico to fight for Maximilian III against the Yankee-backed republican rebels and could back him up. "Anybody says I didn't, tell me who he is and I'll kill the son of a bitch."

"Keep your shirt on," McDonald said. "I just wanted to make sure, is

all. Reason I'm asking is, we've got more politicals in jail these days than you can shake a stick at."

"That's a fact," Jeff agreed. "Stubby and me, we were just talking about that a little while ago, matter of fact."

"It's not just Birmingham, either—it's all over Alabama. All over the country, too, but Alabama's what counts for you and me. We've got to keep those bastards locked up, but they're a big pain in the ass here in town," McDonald said. "So what we've got orders to do is, we've got orders to make a camp out in the country and stow the politicals in it. We save the jail for the real bad guys, you know what I mean?"

Jefferson Pinkard nodded. "Sure do. Sounds like a good idea, anybody wants to know what I think."

McDonald inked an old-fashioned dip pen and wrote something on the sheet of paper in front of him. "Good. I was hoping you were going to say that, on account of I aim to send you out there to help get it rolling. Your rank will be assistant warden. That's good for another forty-five dollars a month in your pocket."

It wasn't the sort of promotion Jeff had expected, but a promotion it definitely was. "Thank you, sir," he said, gathering himself. "You don't mind my asking, though, why me? You got a bunch of guys with more seniority than I have."

"More seniority *in the jail,* yeah," McDonald answered. "But a camp out in the open? That's a different business. Only fellow here who's done anything like that is you. You'll be there from the start, like I said, and you'll have a lot of say about how it goes. We'll get the barbed wire, we'll get the lumber for the barracks, we'll get the ordinary guards, and you help set it up so it works.... What's so goddamn funny?"

"Down in Mexico, I had to scrounge every damn thing I used," Pinkard answered. "I cut enough corners to build me a whole new street. You get me everything I need like that, it's almost too easy to stand." He held up his hand. "Not that I'm complaining, mind you." In Mexico, he'd been glad to land that job riding herd on prisoners because it meant nobody was shooting at him any more. He'd never dreamt then how much good it would do him once he came home to the CSA.

Without a doubt, Sam Carsten was the oldest lieutenant, junior grade, on the USS *Remembrance.* That was what he got for being a mustang. He'd spent close to twenty years in the Navy before making officer's rank. No one could tell if he had gray hair, though, not when it had started out platinum blond. He was the next thing to an albino, with blue eyes and transparent pink skin that would sunburn in the light of a candle flame.

The North Pacific in December wasn't a bad place for a man with a complexion like that. Even here, he'd smeared zinc-oxide ointment on his nose and the backs of his hands before coming out onto the ship's flight deck. It wouldn't help much. Nothing ever helped much.

He shifted his weight to the motion of the aeroplane carrier without noticing he was doing it. Most of the crew stood on the deck with him. Only the black gang down in the engine room and the men at the antiaircraft guns weren't drawn up at attention, all in neat ranks, to hear what Captain Stein had to say.

"Gentlemen, it is official at last," the captain said into a microphone that not only amplified his words for the sailors on deck but also carried them to the crewmen still at their posts. "We have received word by wireless from Philadelphia that the United States of American and the Empire of Japan are at peace once more."

Sam kicked at the flight deck. He was standing only a few feet from a big patch in the deck, a patch that repaired the damage a Japanese bomb had done. He couldn't help wondering whether the fight had been worthwhile.

Captain Stein went on, "The terms of the peace are simple. Everything goes back to what the diplomats call the *status quo ante bellum.* That just means the way things were before the shooting started. We don't give anything to the Japs, and they don't give us anything, either."

Behind Carsten, a sailor muttered, "Why'd we fight the goddamn war, then?"

In one way, the answer to that was obvious. The Japanese had been feeding men and money into British Columbia, trying to touch off another Canadian uprising against the USA, and the *Remembrance* had caught them at it. That was when the shooting started. If a torpedo

from one of their submersibles hadn't been a dud, the carrier might not have come through it.

In another sense, though, the sailor had a point. The U.S. and Japanese navies had slugged at each other in the Pacific. The Japanese had tried to attack the American Navy base in the Sandwich Islands (more than twenty years ago now, Sam had been in the fleet that took Pearl Harbor away from the British Empire and brought it under U.S. control). Aeroplanes from a couple of their carriers had bombed Los Angeles. All in all, though, Japan had lost more ships than the USA had—or Sam thought so, anyhow.

He'd missed a few words of Stein's speech. The captain was saying, "—at battle stations for the next few days, to make sure this message has also reached ships of the Imperial Japanese Navy. We will continue flying combat air patrol, but we will not fire unless fired upon, or unless attack against the *Remembrance* is clearly intended."

Somewhere out here in the Pacific, a Japanese skipper was probably reading a similar announcement to his crew. *Wonder what the Japs think of it,* went through Carsten's mind. He didn't know what to think of it himself. There was a lingering sense of ... unfinished business.

"That's the story from Philadelphia," Captain Stein said. "Before I turn you boys loose, I have a few words of my own. Here's what I have to say: we did everything we could to teach the Japs a lesson, and I suppose they did all they could to teach us one. I don't believe anybody learned a hell of a lot. This war is over. My guess is, the fight isn't. From now on, we stay extra alert in these waters, because you never can tell when it's going to boil over again. Remember the surprise attack they used against Spain when they took away the Philippines." He looked out over the crew. So did Carsten. Here and there, heads bobbed up and down as men nodded. Stein's point had got home. Seeing as much, the skipper gave one brisk nod himself. "That's all. Dismissed."

Chattering among themselves, the sailors hurried back to their stations. Sam didn't much want to go to his. His post was in damage control, deep down in the bowels of the ship. He'd done good work there, good enough to win promotion from ensign to j.g. All the same, it wasn't what he wanted to do. He'd come aboard the carrier as a petty officer when she was new because he thought aviation was the coming thing. He'd wanted to serve with the ship's fighting scouts or, that failing, in his old specialty, gunnery.

As often happened, what he wanted and what the Navy wanted were two different beasts. As always happened, what the Navy wanted prevailed. Down into the bowels of the *Remembrance* he went.

Lieutenant Commander Hiram Pottinger, his nominal boss, got to their station at the same time he did, coming down the passageway he was coming up. In fact, Sam knew a lot more about the way damage control worked aboard the *Remembrance* than Pottinger did. His superior, who'd replaced a wounded officer, had spent his whole career up till the past few months in cruisers. Sam, on the other hand, had had two long tours on the carrier. He automatically thought of things like protecting the aeroplanes' fuel supply. Pottinger thought of such things, too, but he took longer to do it. In combat, a few seconds could mean the difference between safety and a fireball.

Quite a few of the sailors in the damage-control party wore the ribbon for the Purple Heart above their left breast pockets. Several of them had won other decorations, too. The *Remembrance* had seen a lot of hard action—and taken more damage than Carsten would have wished.

A rat-faced Irishman named Fitzpatrick asked, "Sir, you really think them goddamn Japs is gonna leave us alone from now on?"

He'd aimed the question at Sam. Instead of answering, Sam looked to Lieutenant Commander Pottinger. The senior officer had first call. That was how things worked. Pottinger said, "Well, I expect we're all right for now."

Several sailors stirred. Carsten didn't much like the answer himself. He didn't and wouldn't trust the Japanese. So far, their trials of strength with the USA had been inconclusive: both in the Great War, where they'd been the only Entente power that hadn't got whipped, and in this latest fight, which had been anything but great.

But then Pottinger went on, "Of course, God only knows how long the quiet will last. The Japs keep bargains for as long as they think it's a good idea, and not thirty seconds longer. The skipper said as much —remember the Philippines."

Sam relaxed. So did the ordinary sailors. Lieutenant Commander Pottinger wasn't altogether naive after all.

Everybody stared at corridors painted in Navy gray, at bulkheads and hatchways, at hoses that shot high-pressure salt water, at the

overhead pipes that meant a tall man had to crouch when he ran unless he wanted to bang the top of his head, at bare light bulbs inside steel cages: the world in which they operated. Most of the *Remembrance* lay above them. They might have been moles scurrying through underground tunnels. Every once in a while, a claustrophobe got assigned to damage control. Such men didn't last long. They started feeling the whole weight of the ship pressing down on their heads.

Not without pride, one of the sailors said, "We could do our job in the dark."

"Could, my nuts," Fitzpatrick said. "We've fuckin' well *done* our job in the dark. You don't need to see to know where you're at. The way noise comes back at you, where you bump up against fittings, the smells ... Difference between us and the rest of the poor sorry bastards on this floating madhouse is, we really know what we're doing."

Almost in unison, the other men from the damage-control party nodded. The fighting had given them a fierce *esprit de corps.* Carsten's head wanted to go up and down, too. And it would have, had he not known that every other unit on the ship was just as proud of itself and just as convinced the *Remembrance* would instantly founder if it didn't do what it was supposed to. Nothing wrong with that. It was good for morale.

Pottinger said, "Here's hoping we don't have to do what we do for a hell of a long time."

More nods. Sam said, "Long as we're hoping, let's hope we head back to Seattle and get some leave."

That drew not only nods but laughter. Pottinger gave Carsten a hard look, but he ended up laughing, too. Sam had always been able to get away with saying things that would have landed someone who said them in a different tone of voice in a lot of trouble. He could smile his way out of bar scenes that usually would have brought out broken bottles.

Seaman Fitzpatrick, on the other hand, was deadly serious. "How long before we need to start worrying about Confederate submersibles again?" he asked.

"We've already worried about Confederate subs," Sam said. "Remember that passage between Florida and Cuba we took on the

way to Costa Rica? We didn't spot anything, but God only knows what those bastards had laying for us there."

"That's their own waters, though," Fitzpatrick protested. "That isn't what I meant. What I did mean was, how long before we have to worry about them out here in the Pacific? And out in the Atlantic, too—don't want to leave out the other ocean."

This time, Carsten didn't answer. He looked to Lieutenant Commander Pottinger again. The commander of the damage-control party said, "We've already got Jap subs here in the Pacific, and maybe British boats coming up from Australia and New Zealand toward the Sandwich Islands. We've got British boats and German boats and French ones, too, in the Atlantic. Enough of those sons of bitches running around loose already. What the hell difference do a few Confederate subs make?"

Now he got a laugh. Sam joined it, even though he didn't think Pottinger had been kidding. "Back when I started out in the Navy, all we worried about was surface ships," he said. "Nobody'd ever heard that aeroplanes were dangerous, and submarines were still half toys. Nobody had any idea what they could do. It's a different world nowadays, and that's the truth."

"You betcha," Seaman Fitzpatrick said. "Nobody ever thought of a funny-looking thing called an aeroplane carrier, neither."

"Damage control is damage control," Pottinger said. "Something hurts the ship, we patch it up. That's what we're here for."

Sailors nodded once more. Carsten didn't argue with his superior, not out loud. But it was more complicated than that. Shells did one kind of damage, torpedoes another, and bombs a third. Bombs had the potential to be the most destructive, he thought. Unlike shells and torpedoes, they weren't limited in how much explosive they could carry. And explosive was what delivered the punch. Everything else was just the bus driver to get the cordite to where it did its job.

Sam didn't care for that line of reasoning. If bombs could sink ships so easily, what point to having any surface Navy at all? He'd first wondered about that during the war, when an aeroplane flying out from Argentina had bombed the battleship he was on. The damage was light—the bombs were small—but he thought he'd seen the handwriting on the wall.

Maybe a carrier's aeroplanes could hold off the enemy's. But maybe they couldn't, too. Down in the warm, humid belly of the *Remembrance,* Sam shivered.

Jonathan Moss was an American. He had a Canadian wife. After studying occupation law, he'd made his living in Berlin, Ontario, by helping Canucks struggling in the toils of what the U.S. Army insisted on calling justice. Without false modesty, he knew he was one of the best in the business.

And what was his reward for doing everything he could to give the Canadians a hand? He stared down at the sheet of paper on his desk. He'd just taken it out of an envelope and unfolded it. In block capitals, it said, yank SWINE, YOU WILL DIE!

He supposed he ought to turn it over to the occupying authorities. Maybe they could find fingerprints on it and track down whoever had stuck it in the mail. Instead, Moss crumpled up the paper and chucked it into the waste-basket. For one thing, odds were anyone who sent a charming missive of this sort had the elementary common sense to wear gloves while he was doing it. And, for another, taking a crank like this seriously gave him power over you.

During the war, Moss had flown observation aeroplanes and fighting scouts. He'd gone through all three years without getting badly hurt, and ended up an ace. After the real terror of aerial combat, a cowardly little anonymous threat didn't get him very excited.

He methodically went through the rest of his mail. The Bar Association reminded him his dues were payable before December 31. That gave him two and a half weeks. His landlord served notice that, as of next February 1, his office rent would go up five dollars a month. "Happy day," he said.

He opened another nondescript envelope. This one also held a single sheet of paper. Its message, also in untraceable block capitals, was, your wife and LITTLE GIRL WILL DIE, YANK SWINE!

Seeing that, Moss abruptly changed his mind about the letter he'd thrown away. He fished it from the trash can and flattened it out as best he could. The letters in both were about the same size and in about the same style. Moss rummaged for the envelope in which the

first threat had come. He set it next to the one he'd just now opened.

"Well, well," he murmured. "Isn't that interesting?" He was no detective with a microscope, but he didn't need to be to see that his address on the two envelopes had been typed with two different machines. Not only that, one U.S. stamp bore a Manitoba overprint, while the other had one from Ontario. The notes, as near as he could see, were identical. The envelopes not only weren't but had been mailed from different provinces. (He checked to see if the postmarks confirmed what the stamps said. They did. One came from Toronto, the other from a town south of Winnipeg.) What did that mean?

Two possibilities occurred to him. One was that somebody didn't like him and had got his bother-in-law or someone of that sort to help show how much. Somebody like that was a pest. The other possibility was that he'd fallen foul of a real organization dedicated to—What? To making *his* life miserable, certainly, and, odds were, to making Canada's American occupiers unhappy *en masse.*

He'd hoped time would reconcile Canada to having lost the Great War. The longer he stayed here, the more naive and forlorn that hope looked. English-speaking Canada had risen once on its own, in the 1920s. More recently, the Empire of Japan had tried to ignite it again. Great Britain wouldn't have minded helping its one-time dominion make the Yanks miserable, either.

With a sigh, Moss put both sheets of paper and both envelopes in a buff manila folder. With a longer, louder sigh, he donned his overcoat, earmuffs, hat, and mittens. Then he closed the door to the law office—as an afterthought, he locked it, too—and left the building for the two-block walk to occupation headquarters in Berlin.

Had he been in a tearing hurry, he could have left off the earmuffs and mittens. It was above zero, and no new snow had fallen since the middle of the night. Moss had grown up around Chicago, a city that knew rugged weather. Even so, his wartime service in Ontario and the years he'd lived here since had taught him some things about cold he'd never learned down in the States.

He saw three new yanks out! graffiti between the building where he worked and the red-brick fortress that housed the occupation authority. Two shopkeepers were already out getting rid of them. He suspected the third would in short order. Leaving anti-American messages up on your property was an offense punishable by fine. *Occupation Code, Section 227.3,* he thought.

The sentries in front of occupation headquarters jeered at him as he came up the steps: "Look! It's the Canuck from Chicago!" He wasn't in the Army— indeed, most of his practice involved opposing military lawyers—so they didn't bother wasting politeness on him.

"Funny boys," he said, at which they jeered harder than ever. He went on into the building, or started to. Just inside the entrance, a sergeant and a couple of privates stopped him. "They've beefed up security, sir," the sergeant said. "Orders are to pat down all civilians. Sorry, sir." He didn't sound sorry at all.

Moss shed his overcoat and held his arms out wide, as if he were being crucified. After he passed the inspection, he went on to the office of Major Sam Lopat, a prosecutor with whom he'd locked horns more than a few times. "Ah, Mr. Moss," Lopat said. "And what sort of fancy lies have you got waiting for me next time we go at each other?"

"Here." Moss set the manila folder on the major's desk. "Tell me what you think of these."

Lopat raised one eyebrow when Moss failed to come back with a gibe. He raised the other when he saw what the folder held. "Oh," he said in a different tone of voice. "More of these babies."

"More of them, you say?" Moss didn't know whether to feel alarmed or relieved. "Other people have got 'em, too?"

"Hell, yes," the military prosecutor answered. "What, did you think you were the only one?" He didn't wait for Moss' reply, but threw back his head and laughed. "You civilian lawyers think you're the most important guys in the world, and nothing is real unless it happens to you. Well, I've got news for you: you aren't the cream in God's coffee."

"And you *are*—" But Jonathan Moss checked himself. He wanted information from Lopat, not a quarrel. "All right, I'm not the only one, you say? Tell me more. Who else has got 'em? Who sends 'em? Have you had any luck catching the bastards? I guess not, or I wouldn't have got these."

"Not as much as we'd like," Lopat said, which was pretty obvious. "We've torn apart the towns where they're postmarked, but not much luck. You can see for yourself—all the Canucks need is a typewriter and a pen, and they could do without the typewriter in a pinch. If it makes you feel better, there's never been a follow-up on one of these. Nobody's got shot or blown up the day after one of these little love

notes came."

"I'm not sorry to hear that," Moss admitted. "You didn't say who else got a—love note." He nodded to Lopat, acknowledging the phrase.

"I don't have the whole list. Investigation isn't my department, you know. I go into court once they're caught—and then you do your damnedest to get 'em off the hook." The military prosecutor leered at Moss, who stonily stared back. With a shrug, Lopat went on, "Far as I know, the other people these have come to have all been part of the occupation apparatus one way or another. You're the first outside shyster to get one, or I think you are. Doesn't that make you proud?"

"At least," Moss said dryly, and Lopat laughed. Moss tapped one of the notes with a fingernail. "Prints?"

"We'll check, but the next ones we find'll be the first."

"Yeah, I figured as much. You would have landed on these fellows like a bomb if you knew who they were," Moss said. Lopat nodded. Something else occurred to Moss. "You think this has anything to do with that telephone threat I got last year, where the guy told me not to start my auto or I'd be sorry?"

The military prosecutor frowned. "I'd forgotten about that. I don't know what to tell you. Pretty damn funny, you know? You're the best friend—best American friend—the Canucks have got. You're married to one of theirs, and I know what she thinks of most Yanks, me included. You're the best occupation lawyer between Calgary and Toronto, anyway. Makes sense they'd want to get rid of me. I don't like it, but it makes sense. But why you? Seems to me they ought to put a bounty on anybody who even messes up your hair."

"I've wondered about that, too. Maybe they're angrier at Laura for marrying me than they are at me for marrying her."

"Maybe." But Lopat didn't sound convinced. "In that case, why aren't they trying to blow her up instead of you?"

"7 don't know," Moss answered. "As long as this isn't too much of a much, though, I won't lose any sleep over it." He redonned his cold-weather gear. "I'll see you in court, Major, and I'll whip you, too."

"Ha!" Lopat said. "You been smoking doped cigarettes, to get so cocky?"

After a few more good-natured insults, Moss left occupation headquarters. By then, a wan sun had come out. His long shadow stretched out to the northwest as he walked back to the building where he practiced.

He'd just set one foot on the steps leading up the sidewalk when the bomb went off behind him. Had he had an infantryman's reflexes, he would have thrown himself flat. Instead, he stood there frozen while glass blew out of windows all around and fell clinking and clattering to the ground like sharp-edged, glittering snowflakes.

Already, a great cloud of black smoke was rising into the sky. Looking over his shoulder, Moss realized it came from the direction of the building he'd just left. He started running, back in the direction from which he'd come. At every step, his shoes crunched on shattered glass. He bumped into a bleeding man running the other way. "Sorry!" they both gasped. Each one kept going.

When Moss rounded the last corner, he came on a scene whose like he hadn't met since the days of the war. Occupation headquarters had had plenty of guards, but someone, somehow, had sneaked a bomb past them. The red brick building had fallen in on itself. Flames shot up from it. Bodies and pieces of bodies lay all around. Moss stepped on an arm that stopped abruptly, halfway between elbow and wrist. It still had on shirt sleeve and wristwatch. Blood dribbled from the end. His stomach lurched.

Here and there, survivors were staggering or pulling themselves out of the building. "My God!" one of them—a woman secretary—said, over and over. "My God! My God!" Maybe she was too stunned to say anything else. Maybe she couldn't find anything else that fit. She cradled a broken arm in her other hand, but hardly seemed to know she was hurt.

A hand sticking out from under bricks opened and closed. Moss dashed over and started clawing at the rubble. The soldier he pulled out was badly battered, but didn't seem to have any broken bones. "God bless you, pal," he said.

Fire engines roared up, sirens screaming. They began playing water on the wreckage. Moss looked for more signs of life under it. As he threw bricks in all directions, he wondered if the people who'd planted this bomb were the same ones who'd written him his notes. If they were, Sam Lopat had been wrong about them—not that he was likely to know that any more.

Down in southern Sonora, winter was the rainy season. Hipolito Rodriguez had planted his fields of corn and beans when the rains started, plowing behind his trusty mule. Now, with 1934 giving way to 1935, he tramped through them hoe in hand, weeding and cultivating. A farmer's work was never done.

These days, he wasn't the only one tramping through the fields. His two older sons, Miguel and Jorge, were big enough to give him real help: one was seventeen, the other sixteen. Before many more years—maybe before many more months—had passed, they would discover women. Once they found wives, they'd go off and farm on their own. Then Rodriguez would have to work his plot by himself again. No—by then Pedro would be old enough to pitch in. Now he enjoyed the extra help.

When the day's work was done—earlier than it would have been without his sons' help—he stood at the sink working the pump handle to get water to wash the sweat from his round brown face. That done, he dried himself on a towel prickly with embroidery from his wife and his mother-in-law.

"Magdalena, you know I am going into Baroyeca tonight," he said.

His wife sighed but nodded. *"Sí,"* she said. The two of them, Magdalena especially, spoke more Spanish than English. Most Sonorans, especially of their generation, did, even though Sonora and Chihuahua had belonged to the Confederate States ten years longer than either one of them had been alive. Their children, educated in the school in town, used the two languages interchangeably. Schools taught exclusively in English. What the Rodriguezes' children's children would speak was something Hipolito wondered from time to time, but not something he could do anything about.

He said, "There's nothing to worry about now. We have had no trouble holding Freedom Party meetings since *Señor* Featherston won the election."

Magdalena crossed herself. "I pray to God you are right. And I still say you have not told me all you could about these times you were shooting at people."

Since she was right, Rodriguez didn't answer. He ate his supper—beans and cheese wrapped in tortillas—then walked to Baroyeca, about three miles away. He got to town just as the sun was setting.

Baroyeca had never been a big place. A lot of the shops on the main street were shuttered these days, and had been ever since the silver mines in the mountains to the north closed down a few years earlier. If Jaime Diaz's general store ever shut down, Rodriguez didn't know how the town would survive.

Except for the general store and the *Culebra Verde,* the local cantina, Freedom Party headquarters was the only business in Baroyeca that bothered lighting itself up after sundown. The lamps burned kerosene. Electricity had never appeared here. FREEDOM! the sign on the front window said, and below it, in slightly smaller letters, ¡libertad!

No matter what Rodriguez had told his wife, an armed guard with bandoleers crisscrossing his chest stood in front of the door. He nodded and stood aside to let Rodriguez go in. *"Hola,* Pablo," Rodriguez said. "*¿Todo está bien?"*

"Yes, everything's fine," Pablo Sandoval answered in English. "Nobody gonna do nothin' to us now." Peeking out from under one of the bandoleers was his Purple Heart ribbon. Like Rodriguez, like most of the men now entering middle age in Baroyeca, he'd gone north to fight for the *Estados Confederados* and against the *Estados Unidos* in the Great War. He'd stayed in the English-speaking part of the CSA for several years before coming home, which went a long way toward explaining why he often used that language.

The Party organizer who'd come down to Baroyeca a few years before, on the other hand, was a native speaker of English but greeted Rodriguez in fluent Spanish: *"Hola, señor. ¿Como está Usted?"*

"Estoy bien. Gracias, Señor Quinn. ¿Y Usted?"

"I am also well, thank you," Robert Quinn replied in Spanish. He was and always had been scrupulously polite to the men he'd recruited into the Freedom Party. That in itself set him apart from a lot of English-speaking Confederates, who treated men of Mexican blood as only a short step better than Negroes. Rodriguez hadn't needed long in the Confederate Army to figure out that *greaser* was no term of endearment. Good manners alone had been plenty to gain Quinn several new Party members. *"¡Libertad!"* he added now.

"¡Libertad!" Rodriguez echoed. He nodded to his friends as he took a seat. They'd been in combat together, fighting against the dons who didn't want to see the Freedom Party taking over Baroyeca and all of Sonora.

Continuing in his good if accented Spanish, Robert Quinn said, "Gentlemen, I have a couple of announcements to make. First, I am glad I see before me men with many sons. President Featherston is beginning a Freedom Youth Corps for boys fourteen to eighteen years old. They will work where work is needed, and they will learn order and discipline. The Party and the state of Sonora will join together in paying the costs of uniforms. Those will not cost any Party member even one cent."

A pleased buzz ran through the room. Rodriguez's friend, Carlos Ruiz, put up his hand. Quinn nodded to him. He said, *"Señor,* what if boys who come from families where there are no Party members want to join this Freedom Youth Corps?"

"This is a good question, *Señor* Ruiz." Quinn's smile was not altogether pleasant. He said, "In English, we say *johnny-come-latelies* for those who try to jump on the caboose when the train is rolling away. These boys will be able to join, but their families *will* have to pay for the uniforms. This seems only fair, or do you think differently?"

"No, *Señor* Quinn. I like this very much," Ruiz replied. Rodriguez liked it very much, too. For as long as his family had lived in these parts, they'd had to make do with the dirty end of the stick. This time, though, he'd actually backed a winner. Not only that, backing a winner was proving to have its rewards. By the smiles on the faces of the other Freedom Party men, their thoughts were running along the same lines.

"Some of you already know about our next item of business," Quinn said. "You saw, when the *pendejos* who fought for Don Joaquin shot up our headquarters here last year, that we could not rely on the *guardía civil* to keep such troublemakers away from us. The present members of the *guardía civil* have ... resigned. Their replacements will be Freedom Party men."

"Bueno," Rodriguez said. His wasn't the only voice raised in approval, either. Putting Freedom Party men in those places did a couple of things. It made sure the people who enforced the law would do that the way the Party wanted, as for so many years they'd done it

the way the local mine owners and big landowners wanted. And, unless Rodriguez missed his guess, it would also make sure several Freedom Party men now down on their luck had jobs that paid enough to live on. Indeed, what point belonging to the winning side if you couldn't reap any benefits from it?

Knowing smiles around the room said he wasn't the only man to have figured that out, either. *It's good to know,* he thought. *One thing you could say about an old* patron: *when trouble came, he looked out for the men who backed him. Now we see the Freedom Party does the same thing. We can rely on these people. They won't use us and then walk away.*

Underscoring that very point, Robert Quinn said, "Baroyeca is our town now. Sonora is our state. We have to make sure nobody takes them away from us, and we have to show people who haven't joined the Freedom Party yet that they'd be smart if they did."

Several men stirred at that. Carlos Ruiz put their worries into words: "Why do we want all these—what did you call them in English—johnnies-come-lately in the Party? What good are they? They would only be followers. They never fought for the Party. They never shed their blood for it. Who needs them?"

"You will always be special to the Freedom Party," Quinn promised. He tapped the pin he wore in his lapel. "You men who were Party members before President Featherston was inaugurated will be able to wear pins like this one. They will show you followed the Freedom Party before that was the popular thing to do. The others, the latecomers, will have a black border on the pins they wear."

"Not bad," Hipolito Rodriguez murmured. Most of the other Party men nodded. We *deserve to be singled out,* Rodriguez thought. *Carlos is right. We paid our Party dues in blood.*

But Quinn went on, "Still, the Freedom Party has room for more than just us. The Freedom Party is for everyone in the *Estados Confederados.* Everyone, do you hear me? The Party is here to help all the people. It is here for all the people. And it is here to make sure all the people do all they can to make the *Estados Confederados* a better country, a stronger country. We will need all our strength. All of you who are old enough fought in the war. We were stabbed in the back then. If we ever have to fight again, we will win."

Rodriguez hadn't hated the United States before the Great War. He'd rarely thought about the USA before the war. Down here in

southern Sonora, the United States had seemed too far away to worry about. Even Confederate states like Alabama and South Carolina had seemed too far away to worry about.

Things were different now. Men from the United States had spent a couple of years doing their level best to kill him. He knew he'd survived the war at least as much by luck as because he made a good soldier. Then, when the fighting finally ended, the men from the United States had taken away his rifle, as if he and his country had no more right to defend themselves.

Was he supposed to love the USA after that? Not likely!

"We'll all be in step together," Quinn said. "We're marching into the future side by side. One country, one party—all together, on to ... victory."

One country ... one party? Not so long ago, in this very room, Carlos had asked what would happen when the Freedom Party lost an election after gaining power. Robert Quinn had thought that was very funny. Hipolito hadn't understood why, not at the time. Now ... Now maybe he did.

"¿Hay otro más?" Quinn asked. Nobody said anything. Quinn nodded briskly—an English-speaker's nod. "All right. If there is no other business, *amigos,* this meeting is adjourned. *Hasta luego."*

Stars shone down brightly when Rodriguez and the other Freedom Party men left Party headquarters. The wind blew off the mountains to the northeast. It was as chilly a wind as Baroyeca ever knew, though up in Texas during the war Rodriguez had discovered things about winter he'd never wanted to know. He wished he'd brought along a poncho; the walk back to the farm would be less than delightful. Of course, the walking itself would help keep him warm.

Some of the Freedom Party men headed for *La Culebra Verde,* from which light and the sounds of a guitar and raucous singing emerged, "Come on, *amigo,"* Carlos Ruiz called. "One won't hurt you, or even two or three." "Too much work tomorrow," Rodriguez said. His friends laughed at him. They probably thought that, while a beer or a tequila, or even two or three, wouldn't hurt him, Magdalena would. And, though he had no intention of admitting it to them, they were probably right.

Cincinnatus Driver pulled over to the curb, hopped out of his elderly Ford truck with the motor still running, and trotted to the corner to buy a copy of the *Des Moines Herald-Express* from the deaf-mute selling them there. The fellow tipped his cap and smiled as Cincinnatus gave him a nickel, and smiled wider when the Negro hurried back to the truck without waiting for his change.

He flipped the paper open to the inside pages and read whenever he had to stop for a sign or a traffic cop or one of the red lights that had sprung up like toadstools the past few years. The stories that concerned him most didn't make it to the front page. That was full of the anti-U.S. riots convulsing Houston, the United State carved from west Texas at the end of the Great War. What Cincinnatus wanted to know more about weren't world-shaking events, and they didn't have anything directly to do with Des Moines, either. Sometimes several days would go by without one of the stories that worried him turning up.

Today, though, he found one. The headline—it wasn't a big headline, not on page five—read, party of 25 negroes turned back at border. The story told how the blacks—men, women, and children, it said—had tried to cross from Confederate Tennessee into U.S. Kentucky, and how Border Patrol and National Guard units had forced them to go back into the CSA. *They claimed intolerable persecution in their own country,* the reporter wrote, *but, as their entrance into the United States would have been both illegal and undesirable, the officers of the Border Patrol rejected their pleas, as is longstanding U.S. policy.*

He'd made plenty of deliveries to the *Herald-Express.* If he'd had that reporter in front of him, he would have punched the man—a white man, of course—right in the nose. He came down on the clutch so clumsily, he stalled his truck and had to fire it up again. That made him realize how furious he was. He hadn't done anything like that since he was learning how to drive back before the Great War.

But, as he rolled north toward the railroad yards, he realized he shouldn't be mad at the reporter alone. The fellow hadn't done anything but clearly state what U.S. government policy was and always had been. Back when the border between the USA and the CSA ran along the Ohio River, U.S. patrols had shot Negroes who were trying to flee to the United States while they were in the water. The USA had only a handful of blacks, and wanted no more. A lot of people here would have been happier without the ones they already

had.

Cincinnatus' laughter had a sour edge. "They was stuck with me and the ones like me, on account of they couldn't no way get Kentucky without us," he said. He was glad to live under U.S. rather than C.S. rule, especially now that the Freedom Party called the shots down in the Confederacy.

The race riots sweeping through the CSA were the main reason Negroes were trying to get out, of course. Jews had run away from Russian pogroms to the USA. Irishmen had escaped famines and English landlords. Germans had fled a failed revolution. Poles and Italians and Frenchmen had done their best to get away from hunger and poverty. They'd all found places in the United States.

Negroes from the Confederate States? Men and women who had desperately urgent reasons to leave their homes, who already spoke English, and who were ready to work like the slaves their parents and grandparents (and some of *them,* as youths) had been? Could they make homes for themselves here?

No.

He supposed he should have been glad U.S. military authorities hadn't chased Negroes south into Confederate territory as they advanced during the war. For a moment, he wondered why they hadn't. But he could see reasons. The Confederates could have got good use from the labor of colored refugees. And if anything could have made Negroes loyal to the CSA, getting thrown out of the USA would have been it. U.S. officials, for a wonder, had been smart enough to figure that out, and so it hadn't happened.

Here were the railroad yards, a warren of tracks and switches and trains and fragments of trains scattered here and there over them, apparently—but not really—at random. A couple of railroad dicks, billy clubs in their hands, pistols on their hips, recognized Cincinnatus and his truck and waved him forward. "Mornin', Lou. Mornin', Steve," he called to them. They waved again. He'd been coming here a long time now.

As he bumped over railroad crossings toward a train, he watched the two dicks in his rear-view mirror. They were chasing a ragged white man who'd been riding the rails and was either switching trains or getting off for good. Cincinnatus would have bet the fellow was bound for somewhere else, probably somewhere out West. Not many

folks wanted to stay in Des Moines. Even if this poor bastard had had that in mind, he wouldn't by the time Steve and Lou got through with him.

There stood the conductor, as important a man on a freight train as the supercargo was on a steamboat. Cincinnatus hit the brakes, jumped out of his truck, and ran over to the man with the clipboard in his hand. "Ain't seen you in a while, Mr. Navin," he said, touching the brim of his soft cloth cap. "What you got for me to haul today?"

"Hello, Cincinnatus," Wesley Navin said. Cincinnatus wondered how many conductors came through Des Monies. However many it was, he knew just about all of them. By now, they knew him, too. They knew how reliable he was. Only a handful of them refused to give him business because he was colored. Navin wasn't one of those. He pointed down the train to a couple of boxcars. "How you fixed for blankets and padding? I've got a shipment of flowerpots here, should be enough for this town for about the next hundred years."

"Got me plenty," Cincinnatus answered. "How many stops I got to make on this here run?"

"Let me have a look here...." Navin consulted the all-important clipboard. "Six."

"Where they at?" Cincinnatus asked. The conductor read off the addresses. Cincinnatus spread his hands, pale palms up. "You runnin' me all over creation. I got to ask four dollars. Oughta say five—I might not make it back here to git me another load today."

"Pay you three and a quarter," Navin said.

"My mama didn't raise no fools," Cincinnatus said. "I get my ass over to the riverside. I get honest pay for honest work there."

"You're the blackest damn Jew I ever seen," Navin said. Cincinnatus only grinned; that wasn't the first time people had said such things about him. Still grumbling, the conductor said, "Well, hell, three-fifty. Since it's you."

"Don't do me no favors like that," Cincinnatus told him. "I ain't goin' nowhere till I don't lose money on the way, and you ain't got there yet."

They settled at $3.75. A few years earlier, that wouldn't have been

enough to keep Cincinnatus in the black. But he was more efficient now than he had been—and prices on everything had come down since money got so tight.

He loaded what seemed like nine million flowerpots into the back of the Ford, using ratty old blankets to keep one stack from bumping another. Anything he broke, of course, he was stuck with. He winced every time the truck jounced over a pothole. He'd done a little thinking before leaving the railroad yard with the flowerpots. The couple of minutes he spent probably saved him an hour of travel time, for he worked out the best route to take to get to all six nurseries and department stores. That was part of what being efficient was all about.

It let him get back to the railroad yard just past two in the afternoon: plenty of time to get more cargo and deliver it before sundown. With the sun setting as he finished the second load, he drove home, parking the truck in front of his apartment building. When he walked into the apartment, his daughter Amanda was doing homework at the kitchen table, while Elizabeth, his wife, fried ham steaks in a big iron spider on the stove.

Cincinnatus gave Elizabeth a quick kiss, then said, "Where's Achilles at? He in his room?"

She shook her head. She was cooking in the maid's clothes she'd worn to work. "He blew in a little before you got home, stayed just long enough to change his clothes, and then he done blew out again," she said.

"Why'd he bother changin'?" Cincinnatus asked. "What he does, he don't need to." Thanks not least to Cincinnatus' insistence—sometimes delivered with a two-by-four—his son had earned his high-school diploma. Then he'd amazed everyone—including, very likely, himself—by landing a clerk's job at an insurance company. He wasn't likely to work up much of a sweat filing papers or adding up columns of numbers.

But Elizabeth said, "Why you think? He takin' Grace out to the movin' pictures again."

"Oh." Cincinnatus didn't know how to go on from there. Grace Chang lived in the apartment right upstairs from his own. Her father ran a laundry and brewed excellent beer (a very handy talent in a state as thoroughly dry as Iowa). Cincinnatus couldn't deny that Grace was a sweet girl, or that she was a pretty girl. No one at all could deny

that she was a Chinese girl.

She'd been going out with Achilles for more than a year now. It made Cincinnatus acutely nervous. These weren't the Confederate States, and Grace wasn't white, but even so.... Having the two of them go out together also made Mr. Chang nervous. He liked Achilles well enough—he'd known him since he was a little boy—but there was no denying Achilles wasn't Chinese.

"Ain't nothin' good gonna come o' this," Cincinnatus said heavily.

Elizabeth didn't answer right away. She flipped the ham steaks over with a long-handled spatula. "Never can tell," she said when they were sizzling again. "No, never can tell. Mebbe grandkids come o' this."

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus exclaimed. "You reckon he wants to marry her?"

His wife used the spatula on a mess of potatoes frying in a smaller pan. Then she said, "Don't reckon he go with a gal for more'n a year unless he thinkin' 'bout that. Don't reckon she go with him unless she thinkin' 'bout it, too."

"What do we do, he ends up marryin' the Chinaman's daughter?" Cincinnatus asked.

Elizabeth turned more potatoes before answering, "Upstairs right about now, I reckon Mr. Chang sayin' to his missus, 'What we do, they git married?' " Her effort to reproduce a singsong Chinese accent was one of the funnier things Cincinnatus had heard lately.

But that bad accent wasn't the only reason he started laughing. Even though Achilles and Grace had been going out for more than a year, nobody outside their families had said a word to either one of them about their choice of partner. It was as if white Des Moines—the vast majority of the town— couldn't get excited about what either a Negro or a Chinese did, so long as it didn't involve any whites.

Supper was fine. Cincinnatus wanted to stay up and wait for Achilles, but the day he'd put in caught up with him. He went to bed, where he dreamt he was trying to sneak into the USA in his truck so he could take Grace Chang to the moving pictures, but people kept throwing flowerpots at him, so he couldn't get in.

A snore came from behind Achilles' door when Cincinnatus got up.

His son didn't have to be at the office till nine o'clock, so he got to sleep late. That meant Cincinnatus had to head out before Achilles got up. It also meant Cincinnatus couldn't talk to him about Grace. He had told Achilles an education would come in handy all sorts of ways. Now, to his chagrin, he discovered just how right he was.

Lucien Galtier got into his motorcar for the drive up to Rivière-du-Loup. The Chevrolet started when Galtier turned the key. One thing any Quebecois with an auto soon learned was the importance of keeping the battery strongly charged in winter—and, up there by the St. Lawrence, winter lasted a long time.

"Here we go," Galtier said. He was a small, trim man who'd just turned sixty. He looked it—a life outdoors had left his skin wrinkled and leathery— but he was still vigorous, his hair no lighter than iron gray. When he drove a wagon up into town, he'd had endless philosophical discussions with the horse. The motorcar made a less satisfying partner for such things than the horse had, but enjoyed certain advantages the beast lacked. No horse yet had ever come with a heater.

The highway was a black asphalt line scribed on the whiteness of fresh snow. By now, with so many years of weathering behind them, the shell holes from the Great War were hard to spy with snow on the ground. Oh, here and there a pockmark gave a clue, but little by little the earth was healing itself.

Healing, however, was not the same as healed. Every so often, the cycle of freeze and thaw brought to the surface long-buried shells, often rotten with corrosion. Demolition experts in the blue-gray uniforms of the Republic of Quebec disposed of most of those. The spring before, though, Henri Beauchamp had found one with his plow while tilling the ground. His son Jean-Marie now had that farm, a couple of miles from Galtier's, and there hadn't been enough left of poor luckless Henri to bury. Lucien didn't know what to do about that danger. If he didn't plow, he wouldn't eat.

Rivière-du-Loup sat on the bluffs from which the river that gave it its name plunged down into the St. Lawrence. It was a market town, a river port, and a railroad stop. It was the biggest town Galtier had ever seen, except for a few brief visits to Toronto while he was in the

Canadian Army more than forty years before. How it measured up in the larger scheme of things he really didn't know. He really didn't care, either. At his age, he wasn't going anywhere else.

On this crisp, chilly Sunday morning, Rivière-du-Loup seemed even larger than it was. Plenty of farm families from the countryside had come in to hear Mass at the Eglise Saint-Patrice on Rue Lafontaine. As he usually did, Galtier parked on a side street and walked to the church. More and more motorcars clogged Rivière-du-Loup's narrow streets, which had been built before anyone thought of motorcars. On Sunday mornings, a lot of horse-drawn wagons kept them company. Seeing a wagon much like the one he'd driven threw Lucien into a fit of nostalgia.

He came to the church at the same time as his oldest daughter, Nicole; her husband, Dr. Leonard O'Doull; and their son, Lucien, whose size astonished his grandfather every time he saw his namesake. "What is it that you feed this one?" he demanded of the boy's parents.

Leonard O'Doull looked puzzled. "You mean we're supposed to *feed* him?" he said. "I knew we'd been forgetting something." He spoke very good Quebecois French; his American accent and his Parisian accent had both faded in the seventeen years since he'd been married to Nicole.

"How are you, *mon père?"* Nicole asked.

"Pas pire," he answered, which, like the English *not bad,* would do for everything between agony and ecstasy. He'd known his share of agony a few years before, when his wife died. Ecstasy? Getting new grandchildren came as close as anything he was likely to find at his age.

Pointing, Nicole said, "There's Charles," at the same time as her husband said, "There's Georges." Galtier waved to his older and younger sons and their families in turn. His second daughter, Denise, and her husband and children came up as he was greeting his sons. Maybe his other two girls were already in church, or maybe they hadn't come into town this Sunday.

"Come on." Georges, who would always take the bull by the horns, led the way in. "The world had better look out, because here come the Galtiers." He towered over both Lucien and Charles, who took after his father. With Georges in the lead, maybe the world *did* need to look out

for the Galtiers.

They weren't the only large clan going into the church. Quebecois ran to lots of children and to close family ties, so plenty of brothers and sisters and cousins paraded in as units for their friends and neighbors to admire. Filling a couple of rows of pews was by no means an unusual accomplishment.

Bishop Guillaume presided over Mass. No breath of scandal attached itself to him, as it had to his predecessor in the see, Bishop Pascal. Pascal had been— no doubt still was—pink and plump and clever. He'd been too quick by half to attach himself to the Americans during the war. Galtier still thought he'd used their influence to get Rivière-du-Loup named an episcopal see—and that he'd done it more for himself than for the town. He'd left the bishopric—and Rivière-du-Loup—in something of a blaze of glory, when his lady friend presented him with twins.

Galtier found it highly unlikely that Bishop Guillaume would ever father twins. He was well up into his sixties, and ugly as a mud fence. He had a wart on his chin and another on his nose; his eyes, pouched below, were those of a mournful hound; his ears made people think of an auto going down the street with its doors open. He was a *good* man. Lucien didn't doubt that a bit. Who would give him the chance to be bad?

He was also a pious man. Lucien didn't doubt that, either, where he'd always wondered about Bishop Pascal—and, evidently, had excellent good reason to wonder. Guillaume preached sermons that were thoughtful, Scriptural, well organized ... and just a little dull.

After this one, and after receiving Holy Communion, Lucien said, "Sermons are the one thing I miss about Pascal. You'd always get something worth hearing from him. It might not have anything to do with the church, but it was always interesting."

"Pascal's favorite subject was always Pascal," Georges said.

Leonard O'Doull raised an eyebrow. His long, fair face marked him as someone out of the ordinary in this crowd of dark, Gallic Quebecois. "And how is he so different from you, then?" he asked mildly.

Georges' brother and sisters laughed. Lucien chuckled. As for Georges ... well, nothing fazed Georges. "How is he different from

me?" he echoed. "Don't be silly, my dear brother-in-law. *My* favorite subject was never Pascal."

His family, or those among them old enough to understand the joke, groaned in unison. "Someone must have dropped you on your head when you were a baby," Lucien said. "Otherwise, how could you have turned out the way you are?"

"What's this you say?" Georges asked in mock astonishment. "Don't you think I take after you?"

That was absurd enough to draw another round of groans from his kin. Charles, who really did resemble Lucien in temperament as well as looks, said, "You should count yourself lucky Papa didn't take after you—with a hatchet."

Incorrigible Georges did an impersonation of a chicken after it met the hatchet and before it decided it was dead and lay still. He staggered all over the sidewalk, scattering relatives—and a few neighbors—in his wake. He managed to run into Charles twice, which surprised Lucien very little. When they were younger, Charles had dominated his brother till Georges grew too big for him to get away with it any more. Georges had been getting even ever since.

"Come back to my house, everyone," Dr. O'Doull urged, as he did on most Sundays. "We can eat and drink and talk, and the children can take turns getting in trouble."

"So can the grownups," Nicole said, with a sidelong look at Georges.

O'Doull was doing well for himself; he was probably the most popular doctor in Rivière-du-Loup. He had a good-sized house. But it could have been as big as the Fraser Manor—the biggest house in town by a long shot—and still seemed crowded when Galtiers filled it.

Lucien found himself with a glass of whiskey in his hand. He stared at it in mild wonder. He was much more used to drinking beer or locally made applejack that didn't bother with tedious government formalities about taxes. He sipped. He'd had applejack that was stronger; he'd had applejack where, if you breathed towards an open flame after a swig, your lungs would catch fire. He sipped again. "What gives it that flavor?"

"It comes from the charred barrels they use to age the whiskey," his

son-in-law answered.

"So we are drinking ... burnt wood?" Galtier said.

"So we are," Leonard O'Doull agreed. He sipped his own whiskey, with appreciation. "Tasty, *n'est-ce pas?"*

"I don't know." Lucien took another sip. Fire ran down his throat. "It will make a man drunk, *certainement.* But if I have a choice between drinking something that tastes of apples and something that tastes of burnt wood, I know which I would choose most of the time."

"If you want it, I have some real Calvados, not the bootleg hooch you pour down," O'Doull said.

"Maybe later," Galtier replied. "I did tell you, most of the time. For now, for a change, the whiskey is fine." He took another sip. Smacking his lips thoughtfully, he said, "I wonder how people came to savor the taste of burnt wood in the first place."

Dr. O'Doull said, "I don't know for certain, but I can guess. Once you distill whiskey, you have to put it somewhere unless you drink it right away. Where do you put it? In a barrel, especially back in the days before glass was cheap or easy to come by. And sometimes, *peut-être,* it stayed in the barrel long enough to take on the taste of the wood before anyone drank it. If someone decided he liked it when it tasted that way, the flavor would have been easy enough to make on purpose. I don't know this is true, mind you, but I think it makes pretty good sense. And you, *mon beau-père,* what do you think?"

"I think you have reason—it does make good sense. I think you think like a man born of French blood." Galtier could find no higher praise. Most Americans, from what he'd seen, were chronically woolly thinkers. Not his son-in-law. Leonard O'Doull came straight to the point.

He also recognized what a compliment Galtier had paid him. "You do me too much honor," he murmured. Lucien shook his head. "Oh, but you do," Dr. O'Doull insisted. "I am more lucky than I can say to have lived so long among you wonderful Quebecois, who actually—when you feel like it—respect the power of rational thought."

"You phrase that oddly," Lucien said. Maybe the whiskey made him notice fine shades of meaning he might otherwise have missed. "Why would you not live among us for the rest of your days?"

"I would like nothing better," Leonard O'Doull replied. "But a man does not always get what he would like."

"What would keep you from having this?" Galtier asked.

"The state of the world," O'Doull answered sadly. "Nothing here, *mon beau-père.* I love Rivière-du-Loup. I love the people here—and not just you mad Galtiers. But it could be—and I fear it may be—that one day there will again be places that need doctors much, much more than Rivière-du-Loup."

"What do you—?" Lucien Galtier broke off. He knew perfectly well how the American had come to town. He'd been one of the doctors working at the military hospital they'd built during the Great War. Thinking of that, Galtier gulped his whiskey down very fast and held out his glass for a refill.

"Hurry up with that coffee here!" The Confederate drawl set Nellie Jacobs' teeth on edge. Her coffeehouse had had plenty of Confederate customers ever since the days of the Great War. Even now, with much of northern Virginia annexed to the USA, the border wasn't far to the south. And Confederates were always coming to Washington for one reason or another: occupation during the war, business now.

"I'm coming, sir," she said, and grabbed the pot off the stove. Her hip twinged as she carried the coffeepot to the customer's table. *Sixty soon,* she thought. On long afternoons like this one, she felt the weight of all her years.

"Thank you kindly," he said when she'd poured. She wondered if he would tell her he'd been a regular at the coffeehouse during the war. She didn't recognize him, but how much did that prove? A man could easily lose his hair and gain a belly in twenty years. She wasn't the same as she'd been in 1915, either. Her hair was gray, her long face wrinkled, the flesh under her chin flabby. Men didn't look at her any more, not that way. To her, that was a relief. The Confederate sipped his coffee, then remarked, "Quiet around here."

"Times are hard," Nellie said. If this drummer or whatever he was couldn't see that for himself, he was a bigger fool than she thought—which would have taken some doing.

"Yes, times are hard," he said, and slammed his hand down on the table-top hard enough to make her jump. Some coffee sloshed out of the cup and into the saucer on which it sat. "So why the ... dickens aren't you people doing anything about it?"

"Nobody seems to know what *to* do—here or anywhere else." Nellie let a little sharpness come into her voice. "It's not like the collapse only happened in the United States." *You've got troubles of your own, buddy. Don't get too sniffy about ours.*

The Confederate nodded, conceding the point. He lit a cigar. When he did, Nellie took out a cigarette and put it in her mouth. She smoked only when her customers did. He struck another match and lit it for her. As she nodded, too, in thanks, he said, "But you-all don't even look like you're trying up here. Down in *my* country"—his chest swelled with pride till it almost stuck out farther than his gut—"since the Freedom Party took over, we've got jobs for people who were out of work. They're building roads and fences and factories and digging canals and I don't know what all, and pretty soon they'll start taming the rivers that give us so much trouble."

"Wait a minute. Didn't your Supreme Court say you couldn't do that?" Nellie asked. "That's what the papers were talking about a while ago, if I remember right."

"You do," the fellow said. "But didn't you hear President Featherston on the wireless the other day?"

"Can't say that I did," Nellie admitted. "The Confederate States aren't my country." *And a good thing, too,* she thought. But politeness made her ask, "What did he say?"

"I'll tell you what he said, ma'am. What he said was, he said, 'James McReynolds has made his decision, now let him enforce it!' " The Confederate looked as proud as if he'd defied the Supreme Court in Richmond himself. He went on, "That's what a leader does. He *leads.* And if anybody gets in his way, he knocks the ... so-and-so for a loop, and goes on and does what needs doing. That's Jake Featherston for you! And people are cheering, too, all the way from Sonora to Virginia."

Nellie was cynical enough to wonder how much people were encouraged to cheer. But that wasn't what really took her by surprise. She said, "You couldn't get away with thumbing your nose at the Supreme Court like that here in the USA."

"Well, ma'am, I'm going to tell you the truth, and the truth is, you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs." The Confederate beamed and puffed on his cigar as if he'd come up with a profound and original truth. He continued, "Take the niggers, for instance. We're still settlin' with them, on account of they got uppity beyond their station since they rose up during the war. They got to learn where they belong, and we'll teach 'em, too. You got to go on towards where you're headed no matter what, on account of otherwise you'll never get there."

Although Nellie had no particular use for colored people, she said, "I'm sure I don't know what burning down people's houses has got to do with the Supreme Court."

"Oh, it's all part of the same thing," her customer said earnestly. "That's the truth. It is." He might have been talking about the Holy Ghost. "Whatever you have to do, you go ahead and you *do* that, and you don't let anything stop you. If you think you can be stopped, you're in trouble. But if you *know* you can win, you will."

"I'm not so sure about that," Nellie said. "You people were sure you were going to win the Great War, but you didn't."

"You can say that if you want to," the Confederate answered. "You can say it, but that doesn't make it so. Truth is, we were stabbed in the back. It hadn't been for the niggers risin' up, we would've whipped you-all. Sure as I'm standing here before you, that's the gospel truth. Like I said before, they need paying back for that. Now they're starting to get it. Serves 'em right, if you care about what I think."

Since Nellie didn't, she retreated behind the counter. She hoped this noisy fellow would go away, and she hoped more customers would come in so she'd have an excuse to ignore him. He did eventually get up and leave. He'd put down a dime tip on a bill of half a dollar for a sandwich and coffee, so Nellie forgave him his noise.

Clara, Nellie's daughter, came home from school a few minutes later. Nellie stared at her in bemusement, as she often did. Part of her wondered how Clara had got to be fifteen years old, a high-school freshman with a woman's shape. And part of her simply marveled that Clara was there at all. Nellie had never intended to have a baby by Hal Jacobs. She hadn't always worried about rubbers simply because she'd thought she didn't need to worry about catching, either. That proved wrong. And here was Clara, only a couple of years older than her nephew Armstrong Grimes, the son of Clara's half sister, Edna.

"Hello, dear," Nellie said. "What did you learn today?" She always asked. With little book learning herself, she hoped getting more would mean Clara wouldn't have to work so hard as she had, or have to worry about making some of the mistakes she'd made—and she'd made some humdingers.

"Quadratic equations in algebra." Clara made a horrible face. "Diagramming sentences in English." She made another one. "And in government, how a bill becomes a law." Instead of a grimace, a yawn. Then she brightened. Her face, like Hal's, was rounder than Nellie's, and lit up when she smiled. "And Walter Johansen asked me if I could go to the moving pictures with him this Saturday. Can I, Ma? Please? Wally's so cute."

Nellie's first impulse was to scream, *No! All he wants to do is get your undies down!* As she knew—oh, how she knew!—that was true of most men most of the time. But if she made a big fuss about it, she would just make Clara more eager to taste forbidden fruit. She'd found that out raising Edna, and she also remembered as much from her own stormy journey into womanhood a million years before—that was what it felt like, anyhow.

And so, instead of screaming, she asked, "Which one is Walter? Is he the skinny blond kid with the cowlick?"

"No, Ma." Clara clucked, annoyed her mother couldn't keep her friends straight. "That's Eddie Fullmer. Walter's the football player, the one with the blue, blue eyes and the big dimple in his chin." She sighed.

That sigh did almost make Nellie yell, *No!* By the sound of things, it was a word Clara wouldn't even think about using to Mr. Football Hero. But Nellie made herself think twice. "I suppose you can go with him," she said, "if he brings you straight back here after the film. You have to promise."

"I do! I will! He will! Oh, Ma, you're swell!" Clara did a pirouette. Skirts were long again, for which Nellie thanked heaven. She wouldn't have wanted a girl Clara's age wearing them at the knee or higher, the way they'd been in the 1920s. That was asking for trouble, and girls between fifteen and twenty had an easy enough time finding it without asking. As things were, the skirt swirled out when Clara turned, showing off shapely calves and trim ankles.

Do I want to be swell? Nellie had her doubts. "I wish your pa would

have seen you so grown-up," she said.

That sobered Clara. "So do I," she said quietly. Hal Jacobs had died a couple of years before, of a rare disease: carcinoma of the lung.

Nellie absently lit a fresh cigarette, and then had to stub it out in a hurry when a customer came in. Clara served him the coffee he ordered. She could handle the coffeehouse at least as well as Nellie, and why not? She'd been helping out here since she was tall enough to see over the top of the stove.

A few minutes after the customer left, Edna walked into the coffeehouse. Her son Armstrong accompanied her, which he didn't usually do. Nellie was very fond of Armstrong's father, Merle Grimes: fonder of him than she'd been of any other man she could think of except perhaps Hal. She was positive she liked Edna's husband much more than she'd ever liked Edna's father. If he hadn't got her pregnant, she wouldn't have wanted to see him again, let alone marry him.

Armstrong, on the other hand ... Yes, he was her grandson. Yes, she loved him on account of that. But he was a handful, no two ways about it, and Nellie was glad he was Edna's chief worry and not her own.

Clara reacted to Armstrong the way a cat reacts to a dog that has just galumphed into its house. They'd never got along, not since the days when baby Armstrong pulled toddler Clara's hair. Now, at thirteen, Armstrong was as tall as she was, and starting to shoot up like a weed.

"Behave yourself," Edna told Armstrong—she did know he was a handful, where some mothers remained curiously blind to such things. "I want to talk to your grandma."

"I didn't do anything," Armstrong said.

"Yet," Clara put in, not quite *sotto* enough *voce.*

"That'll be enough of that, Clara," Nellie said; fair was fair. She gave her attention back to her older daughter. "What's going on, Edna?"

"With me?" Edna Grimes shrugged and pulled out a pack of Raleighs. "Not much. I'm just going along, one day at a time." She lit the cigarette, sucked in smoke, and blew it out. "You can say what you want about the Confederates, Ma, but they make better cigarettes than

we do." Nellie nodded; that was true. Her daughter went on, "No, I just want to make sure you're all right."

"I'm fine," Nellie answered, "or I will be if you give me one of those." Edna did, then leaned close so Nellie could get a light from hers. After a couple of drags, Nellie said, "I keep telling you, I'm not an old lady yet." Edna didn't say anything. Nellie knew what that meant. *Not yet. But soon.* She drew on the cigarette again. No matter how smooth the smoke was, it gave scant comfort.

Jake Featherston turned to Ferdinand Koenig. A nasty gleam of amusement sparkled in the Confederate president's eye. "Think we've let him stew long enough, Ferd?" he asked.

"Should be about right," the attorney general answered. "Twenty minutes in the waiting room is enough to tick him off, but not enough to where it's an out-and-out insult."

"Heh," Jake said. "We've already taken care of that." He thumbed the intercom on his desk. "All right, Lulu. You can let Chief Justice McReynolds come in now."

The door to the president's private office opened. Featherston got only the briefest glimpse of his secretary before James McReynolds swept into the room, slamming the door behind him. He wore his black robes. They added authority to his entrance, but he would have had plenty on his own. Though a few years past seventy, he moved like a much younger man. He'd lost his hair in front, which made his forehead even higher than it would have otherwise. His long face was red with fury.

"Featherston," he said without preamble, "you *are* a son of a bitch."

"Takes one to know one," Jake said equably. "Have a seat."

McReynolds shook his head. "No. I don't even want to be in the same room with you, let alone sit down with you. How dare you, Featherston? How *dare* you?"

With a smile, Koenig said, "I think he's seen the new budget, Mr. President."

"You shut up, you—you stinking Party hack," McReynolds snarled. "I'm here to talk to the head goon. How *dare* you abolish the Supreme Court?"

Before answering, Jake chose a fine Habana from the humidor on his desk. He made a production of clipping the end and lighting the cigar. "You torpedoed my river bill," he said. "No telling how much more trouble you'll make for me down the line. And so..." He shrugged. "Good-bye. I don't fool around with people who make trouble for me, Mr. Chief Justice. I kill 'em."

"But you can't get rid of the Supreme Court of the Confederate States just like *that!"* McReynolds snapped his fingers.

"Hell I can't. Just like *that* is right." Jake snapped his fingers, too. Then he turned to Ferdinand Koenig. "Tell him how, Ferd. You've got all the details straight."

Actually, the lawyers who worked under the attorney general were the ones who'd got everything straight. But Koenig could keep things straight once the lawyers had set them out for him—and he had notes to help him along. Glancing down at them, he said, "Here's the first sentence of Article Three of the Confederate Constitution, Mr. Chief Justice. It says—"

"I know what Article Three of the Constitution says, God damn you!" James McReynolds burst out.

Koenig shrugged. He had the whip hand, and he knew it. "I'll quote it anyway, so we keep things straight like the president said. It goes, 'The judicial power of the Confederate States shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.' "

"Yes!" McReynolds stabbed out a furious finger. "And that means you can do whatever you please with or to the district courts, but you have to keep your cotton-pickin' mitts off the Supreme Court."

"No, sir." The attorney general shook his head. Jake Featherston leaned back in his chair and blew a perfect smoke ring, enjoying the show. Koenig went on, "That's not what it means, and I can prove it. There *was* no Supreme Court when the Confederate States started out. None at all. In 1863, just after we finished licking the damnyankees in the War of Secession, Jeff Davis backed a bill setting up a Supreme Court, but it didn't pass. He was wrangling with Congress the way he

usually did, and so the CSA didn't get a Supreme Court till"—he checked his notes for the exact date—"till May 27, 1866."

"But we haven't been without one since," James McReynolds insisted. "No one has ever dreamt that we *could* be without one. It's ... unimaginable, is what it is."

"No it's not, on account of I imagined it." Jake tapped the fine gray ash from his Habana into an ashtray made out of the sawed-off base of a shell casing. "And what I imagine, I do. Ever since I got into the Freedom Party, people have said to me, 'You don't dare do this. You don't dare do that. You don't dare do the other thing.' They're wrong every goddamn time, but they keep saying it. You think you're so high and mighty in your fancy black robe, you can tell me what I can do and what I can't. But you better listen to me. Nobody tells Jake Featherston what to do. *Nobody*. You got that?"

McReynolds stared at him. "We have Congressional elections coming up this fall, Mr. Featherston. The Whigs and the Radical Liberals will make you pay for your high-handedness."

"Think so, do you?" Jake's grin was predatory. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a five-dollar goldpiece, and let it ring sweetly off the desktop. Thomas Jackson's bearded countenance stared up at him. "Here's a Stonewall says we'll have more men in the next Congress than we do in this one."

"You're on." McReynolds leaned forward and thrust out his hand. Featherston took it. For an old man, the Supreme Court justice had a strong grip, and he squeezed as if he wished he could break Featherston's fingers. "The people will know you and your party for what you are."

"Who do you think sent us here to do their business?" Jake answered. "We set out to do it, and then you seven sour bastards wouldn't let us. And now you've got the nerve to blame me and the Freedom Party for what you went and did?"

"That law plainly violated the Constitution," McReynolds said stubbornly. "If you violate it from now on, who's going to stand up to you and call you to account?"

That was the key question. The answer, of course, was *nobody*. Featherston didn't say it. If McReynolds couldn't see it for himself, the president didn't want to point it out to him. No matter how true it

was, better to keep it quiet.

"You do see, though, Mr. Chief Justice, what we're doing here is legal as can be?" Ferdinand Koenig said. "You may not like it, but we've got the right to do it."

"You're breaking every precedent this country knows," McReynolds thundered. In the tradition-minded Confederate States, that was an even more serious charge than it might have been in other lands. "You're not politicians at all. You're crooks and pirates, that's what you are."

"We're the folks who won the election, that's what we are. You forgot it, and you're going to pay for it," Jake Featherston said. "And the attorney general asked you a question. I think you'd better answer it."

"And if I don't?" James McReynolds asked.

With no expression at all in his voice, Featherston answered, "Then you're a dead man."

McReynolds started to laugh. Then he took a second look at the president of the Confederate States. The laughter died unborn. The chief justice's face went a blotchy yellow-white. "You mean that," he whispered.

"You bet I do." Featherston had a .45 in his desk drawer. No one around the office would fuss if it went off. And he could always persuade a doctor to say McReynolds had died of heart failure. "Mr. McReynolds, I always mean what I say. Some folks don't want to believe me, but I do. I told you you'd be sorry if you messed with our good laws, and I reckon you are. Now ... Ferd there asked you a question. He asked if you thought getting rid of you black-robed buzzards was legal. You going to answer him, or do I have to *show* you I mean what I say? It's the last lesson you'll ever get, and you won't have a hell of a lot of time to cipher it out."

The jurist licked his lips. Jake didn't think he was a coward. But how often did a man meet someone who showed in the most matter-of-fact way possible that he would not only kill him but enjoy doing it? Jake smiled in anticipation. Later, he thought that smile, more than anything else, was what broke McReynolds. Spitting out the words, and coming very close to spitting outright, the chief justice of a court going out of business snarled, "Yes, God damn you, it's legal.

Technically. It's also a disgrace, and so are both of you."

He stormed from the president's office. As he opened the door, though, he nervously looked back over his shoulder. Was he wondering if Jake would shoot him in the back? *I would if I had to,* Jake thought. Not now, though. Now McReynolds had backed down. No point to killing a man who'd yielded. The ones who wouldn't quit—they were the ones who needed killing.

Koenig said, "Now we find out how much of a stink the Whigs and the Rad Libs kick up about this in the papers and on the wireless."

"Won't be too much. That's what Saul says, and I expect he's right," Featherston answered. "They're like McReynolds—they're starting to see bad things happen to folks who don't go along with us. How many papers and wireless stations have burned down the past few months?"

"Been a few," the attorney general allowed. "Funny how the cops don't have a hell of a lot of luck tracking down the boys who did it." He and Jake both laughed. Koenig raised a forefinger. "They did catch—or they said they caught—those fellows in New Orleans. Too bad for the D.A. down there that the jury wouldn't convict."

"We had to work on that," Jake said. "Harder than we should have, too. That Long who ran for vice president on the Rad Lib ticket, he's a first-class bastard, no two ways about it. Trouble, and nothing else but. If we hadn't beat him to the punch, he'd've made the Whigs sweat himself. Now he reckons he can make us sweat instead."

"Bad mistake," Koenig said thoughtfully. "Might be the last one he ever makes."

"That's something we don't want traced back to us, though," Featherston said. "All the little ones—those are what make people afraid. We can use as many of them as we need. This—this'd be a little too raw just now. We've got to nail the lid down tighter. After the elections things'll be easier—we'll be able to get away with whatever we need. 'Course, I don't suppose we'll need so much then."

"McReynolds thinks we'll lose," the attorney general observed.

They both laughed. Jake couldn't think of the last time he'd heard anything so funny. "That reminds me," he said. "How are we doing with the politicals?"

He already knew, in broad terms. But Ferdinand Koenig was the man with the details. "Jails are filling up all over the country," he answered. "Several states—Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia—have dragged in so many of those fuckers, the jails won't hold 'em any more. They're building camps out in the country for the overflow."

"That's good. That's damn good," Jake said. "We've got a lot of things left to do in this country, and we'll need people for hard work. Nobody's going to say boo if a bunch of prisoners go sweat all day in the hot sun, eh?"

"Not likely." Koenig, who was a big, blocky man, contrived to make himself look not just fat but bonelessly fat. "Render all the lard out of those porky Whig bastards who never did any honest work in their lives."

Featherston nodded emphatically. "You bet. And getting those camps built now'll come in handy, too. We'll have plenty of uses for places like that." He nodded again. "Yes, sir. *Plenty* of uses." He saw a piece of paper sticking out of a pile on his desk, pulled it free, and grinned. "Oh, good. I was afraid I'd lost this one. I'd've felt like a damn fool asking the secretary of agriculture to send me another copy."

"What is it?" Koenig asked.

"Report on the agricultural-machinery construction project," Featherston answered. "Won't be long before we've got tractors and harvesters and combines coming out of our ears. Gives us practice making big motor vehicles, you know?" He and Koenig chuckled again. "Helps farming along, too—don't need near so many people on the land with those machines doing most of the work."

The attorney general smiled a peculiar smile. "Yeah," he said.

Colonel Irving Morrell was elbow-deep in the engine compartment of the new barrel when somebody shouted his name. "Hang on for a second," he yelled back without looking up. To Sergeant Michael Pound, he said, "What do you think of this carburetor?"

"Whoever designed it ought to be staked out in the hot sun, with a trail of honey running up to his mouth for the ants to follow," Pound answered at once. "Maybe another honey trail, too—lower down."

"Whew!" Morrell shuddered. "I've got to hand it to you, Sergeant: I may come up with nasty ideas, but you have worse ones."

Someone yelled his name again, adding, "You're ordered to report to the base commandant immediately, Colonel! Immediately!"

That made Morrell look up from what he was doing. It also made him look down at himself—in dismay. He wore a mechanic's green-gray coveralls whose front was liberally smeared and spattered with grease. He'd rolled up the coveralls' sleeves, but that only meant his hands and forearms had got filthy instead. He wiped them on a rag, but that was hardly more than a token effort.

"Can't I clean up a little first?" he asked.

The messenger—a sergeant—shook his head. "Sir, I wouldn't if I were you. When Brigadier General Ballou said *immediately,* he meant it. It's got to do with the mess down in Houston."

Sergeant Pound, who'd kept on guddling inside the engine compartment, poked his head up at that. "You'd better go, sir," he said.

He had no business butting into Morrell's affairs, which didn't mean he was wrong. After the war, the USA had made a United State out of the chunk of Texas they conquered from the CSA. Houston had always been the most reluctant of the United States, even more so than Kentucky, and looked longingly across the border toward the country from which it had been torn. Since the Freedom Party triumphed in the Confederacy, Houston hadn't been reluctant— it had been

downright insurrectionary. It had a Freedom Party of its own, which had swept local elections in 1934 and sent a Congressman to Philadelphia. Every day seemed to bring a new riot.

Tossing the rag to the ground, Morrell nodded to the messenger. "Take me to him. If it's got to do with Houston, it won't wait."

Brigadier General Charles Ballou, the commandant at Fort Leavenworth, was a round little man with a round face and an old-fashioned gray Kaiser Bill mustache. Morrell saluted on coming into his office. "Reporting as ordered, sir," he said. "I apologize for the mess I'm in."

"It's all right, Colonel," Ballou said. "I wanted you here as fast as possible, and here you are. I believe you know Brigadier General MacArthur?"

"Yes, sir." Morrell turned to the other officer in the room and saluted once more. "Good to see you again, sir. It's been a while."

"So it has." Daniel MacArthur returned the salute, then sucked in smoke from a cigarette he kept in a long holder. He made an odd contrast to Ballou, for he was very long, very lean, and very craggy. He'd commanded a division under Custer during the war, which was where he and Morrell had come to know each other. He'd had a star on each shoulder even then; he was only a handful of years older than Morrell, and had been the youngest division commander and one of the youngest general officers in the U.S. Army. Since then, perhaps not least because he always said what he thought regardless of consequences, his career hadn't flourished.

Brigadier General Ballou said, "MacArthur has just been assigned as military commandant of Houston."

"That's right." Daniel MacArthur thrust out a granite jaw. "And I want a sizable force of barrels to accompany me there. Nothing like armor, I would say, for discouraging rebels against the United States. Who better than yourself, Colonel, to command such a force?"

His voice had a certain edge to it. He'd tried to break through Confederate lines with infantry and artillery alone. He'd failed, repeatedly. With barrels, Morrell had succeeded. *Does he want me to fail now?* Morrell wondered. But he could answer only one way, and he did: "Sir, I am altogether at your service. I wish I had more modern barrels to place at your disposal, but even the obsolete ones will serve

against anything but other barrels."

MacArthur nodded brusquely. He stubbed out the cigarette, then put another one in the holder and lit it. "Just so," he said. "How many barrels and crews can you have ready to board trains and move south by this time three days from now? We are going to put the fear of the Lord and of the United States Army in the state of Houston."

"Yes, sir." Morrell thought for a bit, then said, "Sir, I can have thirty ready in that time. The limit isn't barrels; it's crews. The modern ones need only a third as many men as the old-fashioned machines."

"Thirty will do," MacArthur said. "I'd expected you to say twenty, or perhaps fifteen. Now I expect you to live up to your promise. You may go, Colonel." He'd always had the sweetness and charm of an alligator snapper turtle. But, if you needed someone to bite off a hand, he was the man for the job.

Fuming, Morrell left Brigadier General Ballou's office. Fuming still, he had thirty-two barrels ready to load onto flatcars at the required time. Daniel Mac-Arthur's cigarette and holder twitched in his mouth when he counted the machines. He said not a word.

The trains left on time. People started shooting at them as soon as they passed from Kansas to Sequoyah, which had also belonged to the CSA before the war. Sequoyah had been a Confederate state; it was not a state in the USA. It was occupied territory. The United States did not want it, and the feeling was mutual.

Before long, Morrell put men back in the barrels as the train rattled south and west. They could use the machine guns to shoot back. More shots came their way in the east, where the Five Civilized Tribes had dominated life in Confederate times. The United States weren't soft on Indians, as the Confederate States had been—especially not on Indians who'd looked to Richmond rather than Philadelphia.

But, bad as Sequoyah was, it didn't prepare anybody for Houston. The train was two days late getting into Lubbock because of repeated sabotage to the tracks. Signs screamed out warnings: saboteurs will be shot without trial! "Maybe they can't read here," Sergeant Pound suggested after one long, long delay.

Then they passed a trackside gallows with three bodies dangling from it. One of the bodies had a Confederate battle flag draped over it. That was what Morrell thought at first, anyhow. Then he realized the

colors were reversed, which made it a Freedom Party flag, not one from the CSA.

He'd seen plenty of yanks out! graffiti when he was stationed up in Kamloops, British Columbia. Those were as nothing next to the ones he saw as the train slowed to a stop coming into the Lubbock railroad yard. leave us alone! was a common favorite. csa! was quick and easy to write. So were the red-white-red stripes and the blue X's that suggested Confederate flags. let us go back to our country! was long, and so less common; the same held true for Houston was a traitor! But the one word seemingly everywhere was freedom!

"Good Lord, sir!" Sergeant Pound said, eyeing the graffiti with much less equanimity than he'd shown rolling past the hanged Houstonians. "What *have* we got ourselves into?"

"Trouble," Morrell answered. That was the only word that came to mind.

"We will advance into downtown Lubbock," Brigadier General MacArthur declared as the barrels came down off their flatcars. "I have declared full martial law in this state. That declaration is now being published in newspapers and broadcast over the wireless. The citizens of Houston are responsible for their own behavior, and have been warned of this. If anyone hinders your progress towards or through the city in any way, shoot to kill. Do not allow yourselves to be endangered. Is that clear?"

No one denied it. Daniel MacArthur climbed up onto the turret of one of the modern barrels (to Morrell's relief, MacArthur didn't choose his). He struck a dramatic pose, saying, *Forward!* without words. The barrels rumbled south, toward central Lubbock.

They couldn't advance at much above a walking pace, because most of them were slow, flatulent leftovers from the Great War. Morrell knew the handful of modern machines could have got there in a third the time. Whether that would have done them any good was another question.

Lubbock didn't look like a town that had seen rioting. It looked like a town that had seen war. Blocks weren't just burnt out. They were shattered, either by artillery fire or bombardment from the air. The twin stenches of sour smoke and old death lingered, now weaker, now stronger, but never absent.

Not many people were on the streets. The eyes of the ones who were ... In Canada, plenty of people had hated and resented American soldiers for occupying the country. Morrell had thought he was used to it. But, as with the graffiti, what was on the faces of the people here put Canada in the shade. These people didn't just want him gone. They didn't even just want him dead. They wanted him to suffer a long time before he died. If he ever fell into their hands, he would, too.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than a shot rang out from an apartment building that hadn't been wrecked. A bullet sparked off the barrel Daniel MacArthur was riding, about a foot from his leg.

At the sound of the shot, all the men and women on the street automatically threw themselves flat. They knew what was coming. And it came. Half a dozen barrels opened fire on that building, the old ones with their side-mounted machine guns, the new with turret cannon and coaxial machine guns. Windows vanished. So did a couple of big stretches of brick wall between the windows as cannon shells struck home. Glass and fragments of brick flew in all directions. People on the street crawled out of the way; they knew better than to get up and expose themselves to the gunfire.

Through it all, Daniel MacArthur never moved a muscle. He had nerve and he had style. Based on what Morrell remembered from the Great War, none of that surprised him. Did MacArthur have brains? Morrell wasn't so sure there.

Only after the front of the apartment building was wrecked did the brigadier general wave the barrels forward once more. *They make a desert and they call it peace,* Morrell thought. But no one fired any more shots before the armored detachment reached its perimeter in the center of town.

Once they got there, MacArthur summoned reporters from the *Gazette* and the *Statesman,* the two local newspapers. He said, "Gentlemen, here is something your readers need to know: if they interfere with the U.S. Army or disobey military authority, they will end up dead. And, having died, they will be buried in the soil of the United States, for they cannot and will not detach this state from this country. All they can do is spill their own blood to no purpose. Take that back to your plants and print it."

They did. The same message went out over the wireless, and in the

papers in El Paso and other towns in Houston. Contingents of Morrell's barrels, along with infantrymen and state police, reinforced it. The rioting eased. Morrell was as pleased as he was surprised. Maybe Brigadier General MacArthur was pretty smart after all. Or maybe someone on the other side of the border had decided the rioting *should* ease for the time being. Morrell wished like hell that hadn't occurred to him.

Miguel and Jorge Rodriguez stood side by side in the farmhouse kitchen. They both looked very proud. They wore identical broad-brimmed cloth hats, short-sleeved cotton shirts, sturdy denim shorts, socks, and stout shoes. They also wore identical proud smiles.

Hats, shirts, and shorts were of the light brown color the Confederate Army, for no reason Hipolito Rodriguez had ever been able to understand, called butternut. On the pocket above the left breast of each shirt was sewn a Confederate battle flag with colors reversed: the emblem of the Freedom Party.

"I will miss your work," Rodriguez told his two older sons. "I will miss it, but the country needs it."

"That's right, Father," Jorge said. "And they'll pay us money—not a lot of money, but some—to do the work."

"I'll help you, Father," Pedro—the youngest son—said. He wasn't old enough to join the Freedom Youth Corps yet, and had been sick-jealous of his brothers ever since they did. Being useful on the farm wasn't much consolation, but it was what he had, and he made the most of it.

"I know you will." Rodriguez set a hand on his shoulder. "You're a good boy. All of you are good boys."

"Sí," his wife said. She probably hadn't followed the whole conversation, most of which was in English, but she got that. In Spanish, she went on, "I'll miss you while you are gone." The tears in her eyes spoke a universal language.

"Father was right," Miguel said importantly. "The country *does* need us, so you shouldn't cry. We'll do big things for Sonora, big things for

Baroyeca. I hear"—his voice dropped to an excited whisper—"I hear we are going to put in the poles to carry the wires to bring electricity down from Buenavista. Electricity!"

Instead of being impressed, Magdalena Rodriguez, was practical: "We already have poles to bring the telegraph. Why not use those?"

Miguel and Jorge looked at each other. Plainly, neither one of them knew the answer. Just as plainly, neither one wanted to admit it. At last, Jorge said, "Because these poles are *special,* Mother." He might not even have noticed switching back to Spanish to talk to Magdalena.

"Come on, boys," Hipolito said. "Let's go into town." His sons had grumbled that they were almost grown men, that they were going off to do men's work, and that they didn't need their father escorting them to Baroyeca. He'd explained he was proud of them and wanted to show them off. He'd also explained he would wallop them if they grumbled any more. They'd stopped.

Before they left, he made sure his own Freedom Party pin was on his shirt. They trooped out of the farmhouse together. Neither the crow that fluttered up from the roof nor the two lizards that scuttled into a hole seemed much impressed. Before long, Rodriguez's sons were less delighted, too. "My feet hurt," Miguel complained. Jorge nodded.

"This happened to me when I went into the Army," Rodriguez said. "Shoes pinch. Up till then, I hadn't worn anything but sandals." He looked down at his feet. He wore sandals now. They were more comfortable than shoes any day. But comfort wasn't always the only question. "For some of what you do, for working in the mountains, sandals won't protect your feet. Good shoes like those will."

"They'll give us blisters," Jorge said. Now Miguel was the one who nodded in agreement.

"For a little while, yes," Rodriguez answered. "Then your feet will toughen up, and you'll be fine." He could afford to say that. His feet weren't the ones suffering.

When they came to Baroyeca—Jorge limping a little and trying not to show it, for his shoes pinched tighter than Miguel's—Rodriguez led them to the town square between the *alcalde's* house and the church, as he'd been instructed to do. There he found most of the boys in the area, all standing solemnly in ranks that weren't so neat as they should

have been. One of the new members of the *guardía civil,* a man who'd been a sergeant during the war, was in charge of them.

"¡Libertad, Hipolito!" he called. "These are your boys?"

"My older ones, Felipe," Rodriguez answered. *"¡Libertad!"*

"They'll do fine," Felipe Rojas said. "They won't have too much nonsense to knock out of them. Some of these little brats..." He shook his head. "Well, you can guess which ones."

"A lot of them will be ones whose fathers don't belong to the Party," Rodriguez predicted. Felipe Rojas nodded. Rodriguez eyed the youths. He couldn't tell by the uniforms; those were all the same. But the stance gave away who was who a lot of the time, that and whether a boy looked eager or frightened.

The bell in the church struck nine. Rodriguez let out a sigh of relief. He'd been told to get here before the hour. He hadn't realized he'd cut it so close.

A few minutes later, another boy tried to join the ranks in the square. Rojas ran him off, shouting, "You don't deserve to be here! You can't even obey orders about when to come. You're a disgrace to your uniform. Get out! *Get out!"*

"But, *señor*—" protested his father, who was not a Party man.

"No!" Rojas said. "He had his orders. He disobeyed them. You helped, no doubt. But anyone who doesn't understand from the start that the Freedom Youth Corps is about obedience and discipline doesn't deserve to be in it. Get him out of here, and you can go to the devil with him." The boy slunk away, his face a mask of misery. His father followed, hands clenched into impotent fists. He was not the least important man in Baroyeca, but he'd been treated as if he were.

Robert Quinn came into the square, pushing a wheelbarrow full of shovels. "Hello, boys," he said. *"¡Libertad!"*

"¡Libertad!" they echoed raggedly. Some of them were still looking after the youngster who'd been sent away.

"These are your spades," Quinn said in his accented but fluent Spanish. "You will have the privilege of using them to make Sonora a better place." Most of them smiled at that, liking the idea.

"These are your spades," Felipe Rojas echoed. "You will have the privilege of taking care of them, of keeping them sharp, of keeping them shiny, of keeping their handles polished. You will take them everywhere you go in the Freedom Youth Corps. You will *sleep* with them, *por Dios.* And you will *enjoy* sleeping with them, more than you would with a woman. Do you hear me? *Do you hear me?* Answer when I talk to you!"

"Sí, señor," they chorused in alarm.

Now Hipolito Rodriguez smiled, and he wasn't the only man his age who did. Rojas' rant sounded much like what sergeants had said at the training camp during the war, except they'd been talking about rifles, not spades. Rojas took a shovel from the wagon and tossed it, iron blade up, to the closest youth. The boy awkwardly caught it. Another shovel flew, and another, till every boy had one.

"Attention!" Rojas shouted. They came to what they imagined attention to be. There were as many versions as there were boys. Rodriguez smiled again. So did the rest of the fathers and other men in the square. They'd been through the mill. They knew what attention was, even if their sons didn't.

Felipe Rojas took a shovel from a youngster and showed the boys of the Freedom Youth Corps how to stand at attention, the tool lightly gripped in his right hand. More or less clumsily, the boys imitated him. He tossed the shovel back to the youth, who also came to attention.

Another sharp command (all of these were in English): "Shoulder—spades!" Again, the boys made a hash of it. One of them almost brained the youngster beside him. Hipolito Rodriguez didn't laugh at that. He remembered what a deadly weapon an entrenching tool could be.

Again, Rojas took the shovel from the boy. He stood at attention with it, then smoothly brought it up over his shoulder. After demonstrating once more, he returned it.

"Now you try," he told the youths. "Shoulder—spades!" They did their best. Rojas winced. "That was terrible," he said. "I've seen burros that could do a better job. But you'll improve. We'll practice it till your right shoulders grow calluses. You'll find out." His voice, like the voice of any proper drill sergeant making a promise like that, was full of gloating anticipation.

He showed them left face, right face, and about-face. He marched them, raggedly, across the square. No one hit anyone else with a shovel as they turned and countermarched. *Why* nobody hit anybody else Rodriguez couldn't have said. He thought he ought to go light a candle in the church to show his gratitude to the Virgin for the miracle.

"I have one last piece of advice for you," Felipe Rojas said when the boys had got to their starting place without casualties. "Here it is. You've been fooling your fathers and talking back to your mothers ever since you found out you could get away with it. Don't try it with me, or with any other Freedom Youth Corps man. You'll be sorry if you do. You have no idea how sorry you'll be. But some of you will find out. Boys your age are damn fools. We'll get rid of some of that, though. You see if we don't."

Some of them—most of them—didn't believe him. No boys of that age believed they were fools. They thought they knew everything there was to know—certainly more than the idiot fathers they had the misfortune to be saddled with. They'd find out. And, in the Freedom Youth Corps, they wouldn't have to bang heads with their fathers while they were finding out. That might make the Corps worthwhile all by itself.

Robert Quinn drifted over to Rodriguez. "Two boys going in, eh, *señor?* Good for you, and good for them. They're likely-looking young men."

"They aren't young men yet," Rodriguez said. "They just think they are. That's why the Freedom Youth Corps will be good for them, I think."

"I think you are right, *Señor* Rodriguez," the Freedom Party organizer said. "This will teach them many of the things they will need to know if, for example, they are called into the Army."

Rodriguez looked at the English-speaker who'd come from the north. "How can they be called into the Army, *Señor* Quinn? There has been no conscription in *los Estados Confederados* since the end of the Great War."

"This is true," Quinn said. "Still, the Freedom Party aims to change many things. We want the country strong again. If we are not allowed to call up our own young men to serve the colors, are we strong or are we weak?"

"Weak, *señor,* without a doubt," Hipolito Rodriguez replied. "But *los Estados Unidos* are strong now. What will they do if we begin conscription once more?"

"This is not for you to worry about. It is not for me to worry about, either," Quinn said. "It is for Jake Featherston to take care of. And he will, *Señor* Rodriguez. You may rely on that." He spoke as certainly as the priests did of Resurrection.

And Rodriguez said, "Oh, I do." He meant it, too. Like so many others in the CSA, he wouldn't have joined the Freedom Party if he hadn't.

"Well, well," Colonel Abner Dowling said, studying the *Salt Lake City Bee.* "Who would have thought it, Captain?"

"What's that, sir?" Angelo Toricelli asked.

Dowling tapped the story on page three with his fingernail. "The riots in Houston," he told his adjutant. "They just go on and on, now up, now down, world without end, amen." He was not a man immune to the pleasure of watching someone else struggle through a tough time. Serving under General George Custer, he'd had plenty of tough times of his own. He'd come to savor those that happened to other people, not least because they sometimes ended up getting him off the hook.

Captain Toricelli said, "Of course they go on and on. The Freedom Party in the CSA keeps stirring things up there. If we could seal off the border between Houston and Texas, we'd be able to put a lid on things there."

"I wish that were true, but I don't think it is," Dowling said. Toricelli looked miffed. Dowling remembered looking miffed plenty of times when General Custer said something particularly idiotic. Now the shoe was on the other foot. He'd been stuck then. His adjutant was now. And he didn't think he was being an idiot. He explained why: "The way things are these days, Captain, don't you believe the Confederates could pull strings just as well by wireless?"

"Pretty hard to smuggle rifles in by wireless," Toricelli remarked.

"If not from Texas, Houston could get them from Chihuahua," Dowling said. "To stop the traffic, we'd really need to seal our whole border with the Confederate States. I'd love to, but don't hold your breath. There's too much land, and not enough people to cover it. I wish things were different, but I don't think they are."

Toricelli pondered that. At last, reluctantly, he nodded. "I suppose you're right, sir," he said with a sigh. "If we can't seal off Utah, we probably won't be able to seal off Houston, either."

That stung. Dowling wished the USA would have been able to keep contraband out of the state where he was stationed. While he was at it, he wished for the moon. The Mormons had their caches of rifles. The reason they didn't use them was simple: enough soldiers held down Utah to make any uprising a slaughter. Even the locals understood that. However much they hated the U.S. Army, they knew what it could do.

"May I see the story, sir?" Captain Toricelli asked, and Dowling passed him the *Bee.* He zipped through; he read very fast. When he was done, he looked up and said, "They've got plenty of barrels down there, and it sounds like they're doing a good job. I wish we had some."

Dowling's experience with barrels during the Great War had not been altogether happy. Wanting to mass them against War Department orders, Custer had had him falsify reports that went in to Philadelphia. Custer had succeeded, and made himself into a hero and Dowling into a hero's adjutant. Custer had never thought about the price of failure. Dowling had. If things had gone wrong, they'd have been court-martialed side by side.

Maybe not thinking about the price of failure was what marked a hero. On the other hand, maybe it just marked a damn fool.

Still, despite Dowling's mixed feelings about barrels, Toricelli had a point. "We *could* use some here," Dowling admitted. "I'll take it up with Philadelphia. I wonder if they have any to spare, or if they're using them all in Houston."

"They'd better not be!" his adjutant exclaimed. That didn't mean they weren't, and both Dowling and Toricelli knew it.

That afternoon, Heber Young came to call on the commandant of Salt Lake City. The unofficial head of the proscribed Mormon church

looked grave. "Colonel, have you provocateurs among the ... believers of this state?" he asked, not naming the faith to which he couldn't legally belong.

"I have agents among them, certainly. I'd be derelict in my duty if I didn't," Dowling replied. "But provocateurs? No, sir. Why do you ask?"

"Because ... certain individuals ... have been urging a ... more assertive course on us in our efforts to ... regain our freedom of conscience." Young picked his words with enormous, and obvious, care. "It occurred to me that, if we become more assertive, the occupying authorities might use that as justification for more oppression."

If we get out of line even a little, you'll squash us. That was what he meant. Being a scrupulously polite man, he didn't quite come out and say it. Abner Dowling's jowls wobbled as he shook his head. "No, sir. I give you my word of honor: I have not done any such thing. My desire—and it is also my government's desire—is for peace and quiet in the state of Utah. I do not wish to do anything—anything at all—to disturb what peace and quiet we already have."

Heber Young eyed him. "I believe I believe you," he said at last, and Dowling couldn't help smiling at the scrupulous precision of his phrasing. Young continued, "One way to insure peace and quiet, of course, would be to grant us the liberties the citizens of the rest of the United States enjoy."

"There are certain difficulties involved with that, you know," Dowling said. "Your people's conduct during the Second Mexican War, the Mormon revolt of 1915, the assassination of General Pershing ... How long do you suppose it would be, Mr. Young, before Utah made Houston seem a walk in the park by comparison?"

"I recognize the possibility, Colonel," Young replied, which was as much as he'd ever admitted. "But if you do not grant us our due liberties, would you not agree we will always be vulnerable to provocateurs? And I will take the liberty of asking you one other question before I go: if these men are not yours, who *does* give them their orders? For I am quite sure someone does. Good day." He got to his feet, set his somber homburg on his head, and departed.

Had Young been any other Mormon, Dowling would have called him back and demanded to know more. Dowling would have felt no compunctions about squeezing him if he'd denied knowing more,

either. But Heber Young? No. His ... *goodwill* was too strong a word. His tolerance toward the occupiers went a long way toward keeping the lid on Utah. Dowling didn't want to squander it.

And so Young left occupation headquarters in Salt Lake City undisturbed. But the question he'd asked before leaving lingered, and it disturbed Colonel Dowling more than a little. He hadn't been lying to Young when he said he had agents among the Mormons. The best of them, a man almost completely invisible, was a dusty little bookkeeper named Winthrop W. Webb. He seemed to know everything in the Mormon community, sometimes before it happened. If a rumor or an answer was floating in the air, he would find it and contrive to get it back to Dowling.

Getting hold of him, necessarily, was a roundabout business. Setting up a meeting was even more roundabout. Were Webb to be seen with Dowling, his usefulness—to say nothing of his life expectancy—would plummet. In due course, Dowling paid a discreet visit to a sporting house to which he was in the occasional habit of paying a discreet visit. Waiting for him in one of the upstairs bedrooms, instead of a perfumed blonde in frills and lace, was dusty little Winthrop W. Webb.

After they shook hands, Dowling sighed. "The sacrifices I make for my country."

"Don't worry, Colonel," Webb said with a small smile. "It'll be Betty again next time."

"Yes, I suppose—" Dowling broke off. How the devil did Webb know who his favorite was? Better not to ask, maybe. Maybe. Profoundly uneasy, Dowling told the spy what he'd heard from Heber Young.

Winthrop Webb nodded. "Yes, I know the people he's talking about — know of them, I should say. They're good at standing up at gatherings and popping off, and even better at disappearing afterwards. He's right. Somebody's backing them. I don't know who. No hard evidence. Like I say, they're good."

"Any guesses?" Dowling asked.

"I'm here to tell you the truth—I really don't know," Webb answered, deadpan.

For a moment, Dowling took him literally. Then he snorted and scowled and pointed south. "You think the Confederates are behind them?"

"Who gets helped if Utah goes up in smoke?" the agent said. "That's what I asked myself. If it's not Jake Featherston, I'll be damned if I know who it is."

"You think these Mormon hotheads Heber Young was talking about are getting their orders from Richmond, then?" Dowling leaned forward in excitement. "If they are—if we can show they are and make it stick—that'll *make* the president and the War Department move."

"Ha, says I," Winthrop Webb told him. *"Everybody* knows the Freedom Party's turned up the heat in Houston, and are we doing anything about it? Not that I can see."

"Houston's different, though." Dowling had played devil's advocate for Custer many times. Now he was doing it for himself. "It used to be part of Texas, part of Confederate territory. You can see why the CSA would think it still belongs to them and want it back. Same with Kentucky and Sequoyah, especially for the redskins in Sequoyah. You may not like it, but you can see it. It makes sense. But the Confederates have no business meddling in Utah. None. Zero. Zip. Utah's always belonged to the USA."

"Not the way the Mormons tell it," Webb said dryly. "But anyway, it's not that simple. These people who speak up and start trouble, they aren't from Richmond. They don't go back to some dingy sporting-house room"—he winked—"and report to somebody from Richmond. Whoever's behind this knows what he's doing. There are lots of links in the chain. The hotheads— hell, half of them never even *heard* of the goddamn Confederate States of America."

Dowling laughed, not that it was funny. "All right. I see what you're saying. What *can* we do, then, if we can't prove the Confederates are back of these fools?" He drummed his fingers on his thigh. "Not like there isn't a new hothead born every minute here. Maybe more often than that—Mormons have big families."

"They aren't supposed to drink, they aren't supposed to smoke, they aren't even supposed to have coffee. What the hell else have they got to do but screw?" Winthrop W. Webb said, which jerked more startled laughter from Dowling. The spy went on, "I don't know what we can do except hold the lid down tight and hope the bastards on the other

side make a mistake. Sooner or later, everybody does."

"Mm." Dowling didn't much care for that, but no better ideas occurred to him, either. And then, as he was getting up to leave, one did: "I'll warn Heber Young some of the hotheads—provocateurs, he called them—are liable to be Confederate sympathizers."

"You think he'll believe you?" Webb asked, real curiosity in his voice. "Or will he just think you're looking for another excuse to sit on that church of his—you know, the one that officially doesn't exist?"

"I... don't know," Abner Dowling admitted after a pause. He and Young had a certain mutual respect. He thought he could rely on Young's honesty. But did the Mormon leader feel the same about him? Or was he, in Young's eyes, just the local head of the government that had spent the past fifty years and more oppressing Utah? "I've got to try, though, any which way."

When he went downstairs, the madam smiled as if he'd spent his time with Betty. Why not? He'd paid her as if he had. The girls in the parlor looked up from their hands of poker and bridge and fluttered their fingers at him as he left. But he'd never gone out the door of the sporting house less satisfied.

Everything in the white part of Augusta, Georgia, seemed normal. Autos and trucks chugged along the streets. A sign painter was putting a big sale! sign in a shoe store's front window. A man came out of a saloon, took two steps, and then turned around and went back in. A workman with a bucket of cement carefully smoothed a square of sidewalk.

None of the white people on the sidewalk—or those who dodged into the street for a moment to avoid the wet cement—paid Scipio or the other Negroes among them any special attention. The riots that had leveled half the Terry were over, and the whites had put them out of their minds.

Scipio wished he could. His family was still sleeping in a church, and he knew how lucky he was. He still *had* a family. Nobody'd been killed. Nobody'd been worse than scratched. They'd even got their money out of the apartment before the building burned.

Luck.

Scipio walked past a wall plastered with election posters. snow for congress! they said. vote freedom! Still four months to November, but Ed Snow's posters, featuring his plump, smiling face and a Freedom Party flag, were everywhere. A few Whig posters had gone up at about the same time. They'd come right down again, too. No new ones had gone up to take their place. Scipio had never seen any Radical Liberal posters this year.

Maybe nobody from the Rad Libs wanted to run against the Freedom Party. Maybe nobody dared run against it.

A cop coming down the street gave Scipio a hard stare. "You, nigger!" he snapped. "Let me see your passbook."

"Yes, suh." Scipio handed it over. For a while after the end of the Great War, nobody'd much worried about whether a black man had a passbook. Things had tightened up again before too long, though, and they'd got even worse after Jake Featherston won the presidency.

The cop made sure Scipio's photo matched his face. "Xerxes." He made a mess of the alias, but Scipio didn't presume to correct him. He looked Scipio up and down. "Why the hell you wearin' that damn penguin suit, boy, when the weather's like this?" His own gray uniform had darker gray sweat stains under the arms and at the collar.

"Suh, I waits tables at de Huntsman's Lodge," Scipio answered. Getting called *boy* by a man half his age rankled, too. He didn't let it show. Negroes who did let such resentment show often didn't live to grow old.

Grudgingly, a little frustrated that Scipio hadn't given him any excuse to raise hell, the policeman thrust the passbook back at him. "All right. Go on, then. Stay out of trouble," he said, adding, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Scipio echoed, sounding as hearty as he could. Satisfied, the cop walked on. So did Scipio, heart pounding and guts churning with everything he had to hold in. A colored man who didn't give back that *Freedom!* was also in trouble, sometimes deadly trouble. *A colored man born in the CSA is* born *in trouble,* Scipio thought. He'd always known that. He hadn't imagined how *much* trouble a colored man could be born into, though, not till the Freedom Party came to power.

The Huntsman's Lodge was probably the best restaurant in Augusta. It was certainly the fanciest and most expensive. "Hey there, Xerxes." The manager was a short, brisk fellow named Jerry Dover. "How are you?"

"Gettin' by." Scipio shrugged. "I thanks de Lord Jesus I's doin' dat much."

"Bunch of damn foolishness, not that anybody cares what I think," Dover said. "Bad for business."

He was a decent man, within the limits imposed on whites in the Confederate States. *Bad for business* and *damn foolishness* were as far as he would go in saying anything about the riots, but Scipio couldn't imagine him rampaging down into the Terry to rip up and destroy what little the Negroes of Augusta had.

Now he jerked a thumb in the direction of the kitchen. "You aren't on for half an hour. Get yourself some supper."

"Thank you kindly, suh," Scipio said. Waiters always ate where they worked. Even a white cook would feed them, and as for his colored assistants ... In a place like this, though, the manager often tried to hold back the tide, not wanting to waste expensive food on the help. Not Dover. Scipio liked not having to sneak.

He liked the trout and brussels sprouts and delicate mashed potatoes he got, too. Bathsheba and the children were eating either soup-kitchen food or what they could find at the handful of cafes still open in the Terry. Part of Scipio felt guilty about getting meals like this. The rest reminded him it was food he didn't have to pay for. That counted, too.

He was at the tables the minute his shift started. Back and forth to the kitchen he went, bringing orders, taking food. To the customers, he was part of the furniture. He couldn't help wondering if any of them had gone down to the Terry to take from his people what small store of happiness they had. Maybe not. These men had too much money to need to feel the Negro as a threat. On the other hand ... On the other hand, you never could tell.

He worked his shift. He made pretty good tip money. Everyone knew him as Xerxes. Nobody thought he was an educated fellow. The customer who'd seen him when he was Anne Colleton's butler had scared him half to death. And now he'd had to use that fancy accent

again, had to use it with Bathsheba listening. The echoes from that hadn't even come close to dying down.

When midnight came, Scipio told Jerry Dover, "I see you tomorrow, suh."

"See you tomorrow," the white man echoed. "Be careful on the way home, you hear? Plenty of drunks out looking for trouble this time of night."

Spotting a black man would give them the excuse to start some, too. Scipio couldn't help saying, "Can't very well be careful goin' home, Mistuh Dover, on account of I ain't got no home. White folks done burn it down."

"I knew that," his boss said. "Telling you I'm sorry doesn't do you a hell of a lot of good, does it? Go on. Get out of here. Go back to your family."

That Scipio could do. He slipped out the kitchen door to the Huntsman's Lodge and down the alley behind the place. That made him harder to spot than if he'd gone right out onto the sidewalk. He took back streets and alleys south and east into the Terry. Telling when he got there wasn't hard. It wouldn't have been hard even before the riots: the edge of the Terry was where the street lights stopped.

He didn't dare relax once he got into the Negro district, either. Whites might have beaten him or shot him for the sport of it. Blacks would do the same to find out how much money he carried. The destruction of the riots had left plenty of people desperate—and some had been robbers before the riots, too.

No one troubled Scipio tonight. He made it back to the Godliness Baptist Church with nothing more dangerous than a stray cat (and not even a black one) crossing his path. Most of the people in the church were already asleep, on cots or on blankets spread over the pews.

Because a few men worked odd hours, the pastor had put up more blankets to give them a sheltered place to change. Scipio shed his formal clothes there and put on a nightshirt that fell down to his ankles. A cot by the one where his wife lay was empty. When he lay down, a sigh of relief escaped him. He'd been on his feet a long time. The cot was hard and lumpy, but weariness made it feel like a featherbed. He drifted toward sleep amidst the snores and occasional groans of several dozen people.

And then Bathsheba's voice, a thin thread of whisper, penetrated the rhythmic noise of heavy breathing: "How'd it go?"

He thought about pretending to have drifted off, but knew he couldn't get away with it. "Not bad," he whispered back.

The iron frame of Bathsheba's cot creaked as she shifted her weight. "Any trouble?" she asked.

He couldn't pretend he didn't know what she meant. Shaking his head, he answered, "Not today. Policeman check my passbook, but dat's all. I pass. I's legal."

"Legal." His wife laughed softly. "Is you?"

"Xerxes, he legal," Scipio said, not liking the way this was going. "An' I ain't nobody but Xerxes. If I ain't Xerxes, who is?"

Bathsheba stopped laughing. "That ain't the right question. Right question is, if you ain't Xerxes, who *you* is?"

"I done tol' you everything." Scipio didn't like lying to Bathsheba. He lied here anyhow, and without hesitation. He liked talking about his years at Marshlands and his brief, hectic weeks in the Red Congaree Socialist Republic even less. He'd told her as little as he possibly could.

Trouble was, she knew it. Her bed creaked again, this time because she shook her head. "All them years we been together, and I never knew you could talk that way. I never *imagined* it. I lived with you. I had your babies. And you done hid that from me. You hid all the things that ... that made it possible for you to talk that way." She didn't usually speak with such precision herself, but then, she didn't usually have to get across such a difficult idea, either. She was far from stupid—only ignorant. She went on, "It's like I never really knew you at all. Somebody you're in love with, that ain't right."

"I's sorry." He'd said that before, a great many times. It had done him exactly no good. He said something else he'd said before: "Don't much want to talk about none o' this on account of all dat ol' stuff still mighty dangerous. Anybody know too much..." He made a rattling noise deep in his throat, the sort of noise a man might make after the noose didn't break his neck and he hung, slowly strangling, on the gallows. "Dat why."

Bathsheba let out a small, exasperated hiss. "I ain't no sheriff. I ain't no police. I ain't no *goddamn* Freedom Party stalwart." She invested the swear word with infinite bitterness. "I love you. I love what I know of you, anyways. Turns out that ain't near as much as I reckoned it was, an' I don't quite know what to do about that. But do Jesus, Xerxes!" Scipio still hadn't told her his real name. That shamed him, but he didn't intend to do it, not even when Bathsheba added, "You know I never do nothin' to hurt you."

He did know that. He was as sure of it as he was of his own name—and he hoped no one else was sure of his name. Even so, he said, "Some things, dey too dangerous to say to anybody. Some things, you gits used to keepin' quiet. Dat's what I done." *That's what I'll keep on doing, as much as I can.*

Before Bathsheba could reply, an old man rose with a low groan from his cot and shuffled slowly and painfully toward the outhouses in back of the church. Their pungent reek filled the neighborhood. After a while, the old man came back. He groaned again when he lay down. A couple of minutes later, someone else got up. That reminded Bathsheba they weren't alone. They hadn't been alone together for more than a few minutes at a time since the riots. Scipio wasn't so young as he had been, but enough time had gone by since then to leave him acutely aware of that.

Bathsheba said, "All right. We don't finish now. But this ain't done, an' don't you think it is." She rolled over on her side, facing away from him. By her breathing, she soon slept. Scipio didn't, not for a long, long time.

Chester Martin and the skinny man who cadged handouts near his apartment looked at each other. The other man turned away. He hadn't shown up at the building site Martin suggested, and Martin hadn't given him a dime since it became clear he wouldn't show up. Martin saved his money for people who at least tried to help themselves.

The summer sun beat down on him as he walked on to the trolley stop. By late August, the worst heat was usually over in Toledo. Here in Los Angeles, he'd discovered, it was only beginning. It could stay ungodly hot—though not muggy—all the way into October.

He nodded to the other regulars at the trolley stop. This was a different crowd; he was getting up earlier than he had before, because his work these days was farther away. Go thirty miles in Toledo and you were almost to Sandusky. Go thirty miles from your apartment here and you hadn't even got out of the city limits.

Clang! Up came the trolley. Chester paid his fare and got two transfers. The first line took him west, past downtown. The second took him north, into Hollywood. And the last one carried him up over the Cahuenga Pass, into the San Fernando Valley.

The Valley, as people called it, was full of orange and walnut groves, wheat fields, and truck gardens. It wasn't full of houses. The farmland was so fine, Martin had trouble seeing why anybody would want to build houses on it. That, however, wasn't his worry, any more than grand strategy had been in the Army. Here, as there, he got his orders and did what he was told.

A couple of long streets sliced their way from east to west across the floor of the Valley: Ventura Boulevard near the southern mountains and Custer Way two or three miles farther north. Ventura Boulevard was the shopping district, such as it was. More and more houses with clapboard sides were going up near Custer Way. Martin had to lug his toolbox most of a mile from the last trolley stop to get to the tract where he worked.

"Morning, Chester," said Mordechai, the foreman. He looked at his watch. "Five minutes early."

"You didn't expect me to be late, did you?" Chester said. "Not me, not when you looked me up to let you know you had work for me."

After pausing to light a cigarette, the foreman blew a meditative smoke ring. It didn't last long, not with a little breeze stirring the air. "Well, that's *why* I got hold of you," Mordechai said. "I thought you were somebody I could count on. Some of these fellows..." He shook his head. "It's like they're doing you a favor if you tell 'em there's work."

Martin had some strong feelings about that. Not all of them, he suspected, were feelings Mordechai wanted him to have. He wished labor unions in the building trades were stronger. For that matter, he wished they existed at all. Bosses held absolute sway over who worked and who didn't, over how many hours and for how much money. As far as Chester was concerned, that was wrong as wrong could be. He'd

accommodated himself to it because he *was* working. But that didn't mean it was right or fair.

And yet he had to admit that coin did have two sides. There *were* men who acted as Mordechai said. He could see why a boss wouldn't want them around. Where did you draw the line? Who decided? How? Those were all good questions—all political questions, to Chester's way of thinking. Again, he didn't suppose Mordechai would see them that way.

But he didn't figure he'd change the world this morning—and probably not tomorrow, either. Mordechai pointed him to the nearest house. "You know what needs doing. Take care of it."

"Right." Martin liked a foreman who said things like that. Some of them told him which nail to pound first, for heaven's sake. If he'd had his druthers, he would have pounded a nail—no, by God, a railroad spike—right up...

He chuckled. He would have liked to swing a sledgehammer that particular way. Dushan looked over at him. "What is funny?" he asked in his clotted accent.

"Nothing, really," Chester answered. He started driving nails in a way that didn't bother Mordechai. By the pained look on Dushan's face, it did bother him. Had he stayed out too late the night before and had a few drinks too many? It wouldn't have been the first time since Chester got to know him.

The Croat or whatever he was had revived somewhat by lunchtime: enough to lure a few suckers into a card game and likely pick up more money than he made in formal wages. To nobody in particular, Mordechai said, "When I was in the Navy, we'd have guys on the gun crew come in hung over on days where we were shooting. I don't ever recollect anybody dumb enough to do it more than once, though."

"I believe that, by God," Chester said. "Christ, it'd feel like blowing your head oft, wouldn't it?"

"Now that you mention it, yes," the foreman said, in a way that suggested he knew exactly what he was talking about, and wished he didn't.

At the end of the day, Martin lined up in front of the paymaster, who handed him a five-dollar bill. As always, John Adams looked

constipated. Chester didn't care. As long as the bill bought him five dollars' worth of whatever he needed, he wouldn't complain.

He sat through the long trolley ride without complaining, too, though the sun was low in the west when he finally got off near his apartment. Maybe that made it cooler here. He didn't think that was all, though—the Valley seemed hotter than the rest of Los Angeles.

As soon as he came in the door, he knew something was wrong: Rita never had been able to hide what she was thinking. Chester asked, "What is it, sweetheart? And don't tell me it's nothing, because I can see it's something."

"It's something." She took a letter from the cut-glass bowl on the hutch and handed it to him. "It's from your sister."

"What's Sue up to?" Martin asked, and then, before she could answer, "It's not my folks, is it?"

"No, thank God," his wife answered. "But your brother-in-law's lost his job."

"Oh, hell." Chester took the letter before adding, "Excuse me, sweetie." He tried hard not to talk like somebody who'd just escaped from the trenches. He read through the letter and shook his head. "That's rough. I thought the plate-glass plant would keep Otis forever. And they've got little Pete to worry-about. Damn, damn, damn." He excused himself again.

"We've got to do whatever we can for them," Rita said.

Chester put down the letter and gave her a kiss. Sue and Pete and Otis Blake weren't kin of hers at all, except through him. He would have hesitated a little before saying what she'd just said, because money was still tight for them, too. "You're a brick, Rita," he told her.

She shrugged. "They helped out when your dad lost his job. What goes around ought to come around. And we can afford ... some."

"Some, yeah. We've paid off what we owe Pa for the train tickets and all, anyhow. But there's still all the money he and my ma gave us to help us keep a roof over our heads when we were both out of work. Be a long time before we pay all that off—they carried us for a long time."

"They probably don't expect us to ever pay all that back," Rita said.

He nodded. "I know. But I don't always do what people expect, even when the people are my own folks. I don't really believe I'm back on my feet till I don't owe anybody anything."

His wife smiled at him. "I know how stubborn you are. If I don't, who would? You get all over town. Have you seen any plate-glass places that are looking for people? Have you seen any plate-glass places at all?"

"Not very many." He frowned, trying to remember. "No, not very many at all. It isn't a big thing here, the way it is back in Toledo. How come?" He read the letter again. "Oh. I missed that. They're thinking of coming out here." He clicked his tongue between his teeth. "No, I haven't seen much along those lines. I'm not saying there isn't anything, 'cause I haven't looked. But nothing's jumped out at me, either. I wonder what else Otis can do." *I wonder if I'll have to carry him till he finds out.* He didn't say that. Saying it might make it likelier to come true. *Don't give it a canary,* some guys in the Army had said. He didn't want to.

Rita said, "It would be funny, somebody owing us money instead of the other way around." That was an indirect way, a safe way, of getting at what Chester hadn't wanted to come right out and say. No canaries—*why canaries?* Martin wondered—flew.

After supper, they played double solitaire and slapped each other's hands grabbing the cards. A lot of the fellows at work didn't talk about anything but what they'd heard on the wireless the night before. Chester would have liked to have a wireless set himself. They were a lot cheaper than they had been only a few years before. If he kept working steadily, he could start saving for one— if that money didn't have to go to his brother-in-law instead.

How do you get ahead? he wondered. *Christ, how do you even stay where you are?* Socialists talked about capitalism pushing the bourgeoisie down into the proletariat. He'd never been bourgeois (a steelworker in Toledo? not likely!), but he knew what being declassed was all about just the same. It had frightened him into abandoning Socialism and voting Democratic—once. He didn't think he would do that again.

Rita started yawning before nine-thirty. That disappointed Chester, who'd hoped to persuade her to play something more exciting than

double solitaire. She gave back a rather wan smile when he slipped an arm around her waist. Still, despite another yawn, she didn't say no. But she did yelp when he started playing with her breasts. "Careful," she said. "They've been awfully sore lately."

"Sorry, hon," he said. "I know they get that way sometimes when it's right before your...." He paused and thought back. "When *was* your last time of the month?" He didn't always keep close track, but he did think she hadn't had to mess with pads for quite a while now.

Sure enough, she said, "Early last month—I'm late. I didn't want to say anything till I was sure, but I'm pretty sure now."

"A baby?" That squeak in Chester's voice was fear, all right. On top of everything else, how were they supposed to feed a baby? He wasn't even sure this apartment building allowed them. "How did that happen?"

"The usual way, I'm pretty sure," Rita answered. "We can call him Broken Rubber Martin." Chester laughed. He hadn't thought he could. And he almost forgot about other things till Rita said, "Aren't you going to go on? It feels nice, as long as you don't squeeze too hard."

"Does it?" Chester did go on. By the small sounds his wife made, it did feel nice. Before too long, he started to reach into the nightstand drawer for a safe. That made him laugh again. Why lock the barn door if the horse was long gone? He went ahead without one. And that felt mighty nice, too. No matter how good it felt, though, he started worrying again the second they finished. Rita fell asleep right away. He worried for a long time.

Clarence Potter looked into the mirror over the sink in his apartment. He thought he looked pretty sharp: polka-dot bow tie, white shirt with blue pinstripes, cream-colored linen jacket to fight the summer heat and humidity of Charleston, straw boater cocked at a jaunty angle. Then he let out a sour laugh. How he looked wouldn't matter a dime's worth when he got to the Whig meeting tonight. Nobody there would listen to him. Nobody there ever did.

He sometimes wondered why he kept going. Pigheadedness, he supposed. No, more than pigheadedness these days. He also had the

feeling that somebody had to do something about the Freedom Party. If the Whigs didn't, if they couldn't, he didn't see anyone else who could.

That cool linen jacket also concealed a shoulder holster. Nobody had tried to give him a hard time yet. But he knew he was on a Freedom Party list. The Party was thorough, if not always swift. Some people had already disappeared. Potter didn't intend to go quietly. If the stalwarts wanted him, they would have to pay the price for him.

Out the door he went, whistling. No one lurked at the bottom of the stairs or, when he checked, out on the street. He nodded to himself. They were less likely to drop on him away from his flat, because they had more trouble knowing exactly where he was then. If they didn't want him now, they likely wouldn't for the rest of the day. Whistling still, he walked on toward Whig headquarters.

A couple of blocks from the headquarters, he ran into Braxton Donovan, who was heading in the same direction. The lawyer nodded. He had more patience with Potter than most local Whigs did.

"How goes it, shyster?" Potter asked. "They still haven't decided to call you a political and run you in?"

"Not yet," Donovan answered. He was a ruddy, fleshy man with an impressive pompadour. "Of course, now that the Supreme Court is gone, they're liable to get rid of all the others next, and then where will I be?"

"Up the creek," Potter answered, and Braxton Donovan ruefully nodded. Potter went on, "Why couldn't people see it's a damnfool thing to do, electing a party that said ahead of time it wouldn't play by the rules once it got in?"

"Because too many people don't care," Donovan said. He pulled out his pocket watch. Carrying one made him on the old-fashioned side—a typical attitude for a Whig. Potter, following postwar fashion, preferred a wristwatch. Donovan said, "We're early. You want to stop at the saloon across the street and hoist a couple?"

"Twist my arm," Potter said, holding it out. Donovan did, not too hard. "I give up," Potter announced at once. "Let's hoist a couple."

But when they turned the corner, they found a line of gray-uniformed policemen and Freedom Party stalwarts in white and

butternut, the cops with drawn pistols—a couple of them had submachine guns instead—and the stalwarts with bludgeons, stretched in front of the entrance to the Whig meeting hall. Angry Whigs milled about on the sidewalk and in the street, but nobody was going inside.

"What the hell's going on?" Potter said. Against a dozen policemen and twice that many stalwarts, the pistol under his left arm suddenly seemed a lot less important.

"I don't know, but I intend to find out." Braxton Donovan strode forward. In his fullest, roundest, plummiest courtroom voice, he demanded, "What is the meaning of this?"

One of the cops pointed a submachine gun at the lawyer's belly. Donovan stopped, most abruptly. A burst from a weapon like that could cut him in half. The policeman said, "No more political meetings. That there's our orders, and that there's what we're gonna make sure of."

"But you can't do that," Donovan protested. "It's against every law on the books."

"Braxton..." Potter said urgently. He took his friend's arm.

Donovan shook him off. "You want to listen to this other feller here," the cop said. This time, he didn't point the submachine gun—he aimed it. "By order of the governor in the interest of public safely, all political meetings except for the Freedom Party's are banned till after the election."

One of the stalwarts added, "And for as long as we feel like after that, too." Several of his buddies laughed.

Potter wondered whether Donovan would have a stroke right there on the spot. "Good God, are you people nuts?" the lawyer said. "I can go to Judge Shipley and get an injunction to stop this nonsense in thirty seconds flat. And *then* I file the lawsuits."

He was plainly convinced he had the big battalions on his side. The policeman, just as plainly, was convinced he didn't. So were the stalwarts. With a nasty grin, the one who'd spoken before said, "Judge Shipley resigned last night. Reasons of health." He leered.

What was going on had got through to Clarence Potter a little while before. The old rules didn't hold any more. In the new ones, the

Freedom Party held—had grabbed—all the high cards. He watched Braxton Donovan figure that out. Donovan had been red, almost purple. Now he went deathly pale. "You wait till after the election," he whispered. "The people won't stand for this. They'll throw you out on your ear."

The policeman's finger twitched on the trigger of the submachine gun. Donovan flinched. The cop laughed. So did the Freedom Party stalwarts, in their crisp not-quite-uniforms. One of them said, "You don't get it, do you, pal? We *are* the people."

"I am going to declare this here an illegal assembly," the policeman said. "If you folks don't disperse, we *will* arrest you. Jails are crowded places these days. A lot of you big talkers end up in 'em for a lot longer than y'all expect. Run along now, or you'll be sorry."

Across the street and into the saloon counted as dispersing. Potter ordered a double gin and tonic, Braxton Donovan a double whiskey. "They can't do that," he said, tossing back the drink.

"They just did," Clarence Potter observed. "Question is, what can we do about it?"

Another Whig who'd taken refuge in the saloon said, "We've got to fight back."

"Not here," the bartender said. "You start talking politics in here, I get in trouble. I don't want no trouble. I don't want no trouble with nobody. Neither does the owner. You keep quiet about that stuff or I got to throw y'all out."

"This is how it goes," Potter said.

"How what goes?" Donovan asked.

"How the country goes—down the drain," Potter said. "The Freedom Party is doing its best to make sure we don't have elections any more—or, if we do, they don't mean anything. Its best is pretty goddamn good, too." He spoke in a low voice, in deference to the harassed-looking barkeep. Even that was an accommodation to what the Freedom Party had already accomplished.

Donovan snorted. "They won't get away with it. And when they do lose an election, there won't be enough jails to hold all of them, not even at the rate they're building."

"I hope you're right. I hope so, but I wouldn't count on it," Potter said. "Jake Featherston worries me. He's a son of a bitch, but he's a shrewd son of a bitch. The way he went after the Supreme Court ... People will be studying that one for the next fifty years. Pass a law that's popular but unconstitutional, make the Court make the first move, and then land on it with both feet. Nobody much has complained since, not that I've heard."

"Who would dare, with the stalwarts ready to beat you if you try?"

But Potter shook his head. "It's more than that. If he'd really riled people when he did it, they would scream. They'd do more than scream. They'd stand up on their hind legs and tell him to go to hell. But they don't. Going ahead with that river project has given thousands of people jobs. It's given millions of people hope—hope for electricity, hope the rivers won't wash away their farms and their houses. They care more about that than they do about whether the bill's constitutional."

"Nonsense," Braxton Donovan said. "What could be more important than that?"

"You're a lawyer, Braxton," Potter answered patiently. "Think of ordinary people, farmers and factory hands. You ask them, they'd say staying dry and getting electric lights count for more. There are lots of them. And they vote Freedom."

"Even assuming you're right—which I don't, but assuming—what are we supposed to do about it?" Donovan asked. "You've got all the answers, so of course you've got that one, too, right?"

Potter stared down at his drink as if he'd never seen it before. He gulped the glass dry, then waved to the bartender for a refill. Only after he'd got it did he say, "Damn you, Braxton."

"Well, I love you, too," Donovan replied. "You didn't answer my question, you know."

"Yes, I do know that," Potter said gloomily. "I also know I don't have any answers for you. Nobody in the country has any answers for you."

"All right. As long as we understand each other." Donovan finished his second drink, then got to his feet. "I don't want another one after this. I just want to go home. That's about what we have left to us these

days—our homes, I mean. They're still our castles ... for the time being." He slipped out the door. It had grown dark outside, but not nearly so dark as Potter's mood.

What do we do? What can we do? The questions buzzed against his mind like trapped flies buzzing against a windowpane. Like the flies, he saw no way out. Even fighting the Freedom Party looked like a bad idea. Featherston's followers had been fighters from the start. They were better at it than the Whigs, much better at it than the Radical Liberals.

If we can't fight them, and if they do whatever they please, no matter how illegal it is, to get what they want, what's left for us? Buzz, buzz, buzz: another good question with no good answer visible.

"Maybe he'll go too far," Potter muttered. "Maybe he'll land us in a war with the United States. That'd fix him."

He despised the USA as much as any man in the CSA. That he could imagine the United States in the role of savior to the Confederate States said a lot about how he felt about the Freedom Party. None of what it said was good.

Two tall gins were plenty to make him feel wobbly on his pins when he rose from the barstool. A fellow in overalls came in just then and sat down at the bar. He ordered a beer. As the bartender drew it for him, he said, " 'Bout time they're shutting down those goddamn Whigs. Mess they got the country into, they ought to thank their lucky stars they aren't all hangin' from lamp posts."

That was a political opinion, too, but the barkeep didn't tell him to keep quiet. It was, of course, a political opinion favorable to the Freedom Party. In the CSA these days, who could get in trouble for an opinion like that?

If Potter had had another gin in him, he would have called the bartender on it. If he'd had another couple of gins in him, he would have started a fight. But if he fought with every idiot he met in a saloon, he'd end up dead before too long. He went home instead. The cops didn't arrest him. The stalwarts didn't pound on him. In the CSA these days, that counted for freedom.

Sylvia Enos and Ernie lay side by side on her bed. He was as rigid as he would have been some hours after death. By the look on his face, he wished he were dead. "It is no good," he said, glaring straight up at the ceiling. "It is no goddamn good at all."

"Not tonight, sweetheart," Sylvia said. "But sometimes it is. Things don't always work perfect for a woman every time, either, you know."

"But I am a man. Sort of a man. A piece of a man." He raised up on one elbow to look down at himself. "A missing piece of a man. Times like this, I want to blow my brains out. One of these days..."

"You stop that." Sylvia put a hand over his mouth. Then, as if fearing that wasn't enough to drive such thoughts from his mind, she took the hand away and kissed him instead. "Don't be stupid, you hear me?"

"Is it stupid to want to be a man? Is it stupid to want to do what men can do?" He answered his own question by shaking his head. "I do not think so."

"It's stupid to talk that way. This ... this is just one of those things, like ... I don't know, like a bad leg, maybe. You have to make the best of it and do what you can to live your life. Sometimes things *are* all right, you know."

"Not often enough," he said. "It is not you, sweetheart. You do everything you know how to do. But it is no damn use. I might as well try to drive a nail with half the handle of a hammer. A wound like this is not like a leg. It goes to the heart of a man, to what *makes* him a man. And if it is not, *he* is not."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't want to know what you're talking about, either," Sylvia said. "All I know is, you're scaring me." George had never scared her. Infuriated her, yes, when he wanted other women after being away from her too long. But she could understand that, no matter how mad it made her. It was ... Her mind groped till she found the word. It was normal, was what it was.

It had none of the darkness that made Ernie's furious gloom so frightening.

Naked, he got to his feet and headed for the kitchen. "Christ, but I need a drink."

"Fix me one, too," Sylvia said.

"All right. I need my pipe, too. Cigarettes are not the same." Ernie never smoked the pipe in Sylvia's apartment. Cigarettes were all right, because she smoked, too. But pipe tobacco would have made the place smell funny to Mary Jane when she got home.

"Thanks," Sylvia said when he brought her whiskey over ice.

He gulped his, still in that black mood. "For a long time after I got wounded, I could not do anything with a woman," he said, his voice hard and flat. "Not anything. A dead man could do more. I wanted to. Oh, how I wanted to! But I could not."

"Ernie," she said nervously, "wouldn't it be better *not* to think about... about the bad times?"

She might as well have saved her breath. He went on as if she hadn't spoken: "I bought a rifle. I went hunting. I hunted and hunted. I shot more kinds of animals than you can think of. Sometimes, if you cannot love, killing will do."

"I told you once to cut that out," Sylvia said. "I'm going to tell you again. I don't like it when you talk that way. I don't like it a bit."

"Do you think I like what happened to me? Do you think I like what does not happen with me?" Ernie laughed a strange, harsh laugh. "If you do, you had better think again. Why this is hell, nor am I out of it."

That sounded like poetry, not quite like the way he usually talked. But Sylvia didn't know what it was from, and she was damned if she would ask him. She said, "You're the first man I've cared about since the Confederates killed my husband. If you think I'm going to let you get away, *you'd* better think again."

"If I decide to go, nobody will stop me." Somber pride rang in Ernie's voice. "Not you, not anybody. Do you know something?"

"What?" she asked warily.

"I am jealous of you. I am more jealous of you than I know how to say."

"Of me? How come?"

"You had your revenge. You went to the Confederate States. You knocked on Roger Kimball's door. When he opened it, you shot him. Your husband can rest easy."

You were never a seaman, Sylvia thought. Like most sailors, George Enos had had a horror of dying at sea, of having his body end up food for fish and crabs. He'd had the horror, and then it had happened to him. Yes, she'd avenged herself, but poor George would never rest easy.

Ernie added, "I can never have my revenge. I do not know which English pilot shot me. He may not know he shot me. It was war, and I was a target. He went on his way afterwards. I hope he got shot down. I hope he burned all the way. But even then, it would be over for him. I go on, a quarter of a man."

"You're more of a man than you think you are." Sylvia pressed herself against him. "Do you think I'd want you to stay with me if you didn't make me happy?"

"Carpet munching," he muttered. "A bull dyke could do it better than I can.

"But that's not what I want," Sylvia said. "What I want is you, and you're plenty of man for me." If he really believed it, maybe he wouldn't be quite so ready to blow his brains out.

He was mule-stubborn, though. "I am not plenty of man for *me,* sweetheart." He finished the drink, got out of bed, got dressed, and left her apartment without another word and without a backwards glance. She wondered why that didn't infuriate her, as it would have if some different man had done it. She couldn't say. All she knew was, it didn't.

As things turned out, she was glad Ernie left, because she got a knock on the door about fifteen minutes later. She was in a housecoat by then, washing out the glasses that had held whiskey so she could put them away and so Mary Jane wouldn't notice they'd been out.

She'd already dumped Ernie's cigarette butts down to the bottom of the wastepaper basket.

"Who is it?" she called, wondering if a neighbor wanted to chat or to borrow something. It was a little late for that, but not impossibly so.

"It's me—George." The voice was eerily like her dead husband's. She'd thought so ever since George Jr. went from a boy to a man.

She hurried to open the door. "What are you doing here?" she asked. "Why aren't you with Connie? Did you get drunk when your boat came back to T Wharf, and think you still live here instead of with your wife?"

"No, Ma. I just had a couple of drinks," he said, breathing whiskey fumes at her. *Good,* she thought. *He's less likely to notice the booze on my breath.* He went on, "I know where I live and all just fine. I'll go back there soon enough, too. But I wanted to stop by and say hello. You raised me, after all."

He was a big man, bigger than Ernie, wide-shouldered and solid and not at all inclined to talk frightening nonsense. How had he got so big? Hadn't he been a little boy raising hell in the Coal Board offices just a few months ago? So it seemed to her, anyhow. Slowly, she answered, "I must have done something right back then. I couldn't ask for a better son."

"Aw, Ma." Now she'd embarrassed him—easier when whiskey helped make him maudlin. He paused for a moment, then went on, "I want you to be happy. Mary Jane and I both want you to be happy."

"You both make me happy," Sylvia said. "You make me very happy."

"That's good, Ma." George Jr. hesitated again. "If... if you was to meet a fella who made you happy, neither one of us'd mind or anything. We talked it over one time. If he was a nice fella, I mean."

How much did they know about Ernie? Did they know anything? Sylvia thought Mary Jane might. Her daughter had never caught him here (though she'd come close a couple of times), but Sylvia wouldn't have been surprised if the neighbors gossiped. What were neighbors good for besides gossiping?

And how to answer George Jr.? Carefully, that was how. Sylvia said, "Well, that's sweet of both of you. If I find somebody like that, I'll remember what you said." She shook her head. She needed to tell him a little more: "You know, I'm a grownup myself. If I want to look for a fellow, I don't really need anybody's permission to go ahead and do it."

"Oh, no. I know that. I didn't mean you did. I just meant... you know. That we aren't upset or anything."

Not *that we wouldn't be upset.* They did know, then. Or they knew something, anyhow. Sylvia doubted they knew some of the things she'd been doing not too long before. Children always had trouble imagining their parents doing anything like that. And they wouldn't know how Ernie was mutilated and some of the makeshifts Sylvia and he had to use.

"As long as you're happy, that's what matters," George Jr. said.

"I am, dear," she answered. *Most of the time I am, anyhow. When Ernie starts talking about guns—that's a different story.*

"All right, Ma." Her son stooped and kissed her on the cheek. "I'm going to go on home. I hope they give me a little time before I have to head out again, but you never can tell." He touched the brim of his low, flat cap and ducked out of the apartment where he'd grown up, the apartment that would never be his home again.

The next morning, Sylvia left Mary Jane, who'd come in late, in bed asleep and went down to T Wharf to see what she could get in the way of seafood. With her husband and her son both fishermen, she had connections ordinary people could only envy. She bought some lovely scrod at a price that would have turned an ordinary housewife green, and, better yet, got the young cod without any jokes about the pluperfect subjunctive. She didn't know how many times she'd heard those from fish dealers and fishermen. She did know it was too many.

She was on her way back to the flat when someone called her name. She turned. "Oh," she said. "Hello, Mr. Kennedy."

"Good morning to you, Mrs. Enos." As always, Joseph Kennedy's smile displayed too many teeth. It was not a friendly smile; it looked more like a threat. "So you prefer a hack writer to me, do you?"

"Ernie's no hack!" Sylvia said indignantly.

"Anyone who writes an 'as-told-to' book is a hack," Kennedy said, still smiling. He wanted to wound with those teeth; he wanted to bite. That Sylvia had said no to him was bearable as long as she said no to everyone else, too. That she'd said no to him and yes to somebody else ... that irked him.

"He's a fine writer," Sylvia said. "Times are hard. Everybody's got to eat."

"Yes." Kennedy made the word into a hiss. "Everybody does. The campaign will start early next year, since President Hoover's going to run for reelection. You would have had a part in it, but...." He shrugged. "You'd sooner have half a man."

Sylvia wanted to slap him in the face with a scrod. Instead, in a deadly voice, she answered, "Half of him makes a better man, and a bigger man, than all of you."

He went fishbelly pale under the brim of his boater. Sylvia hadn't bothered keeping quiet. Several people sniggered. A woman pointed at Kennedy. He fled. Sylvia knew she'd pay later, but oh, triumph was sweet for now.

The Alabama Correctional Camp (P) lay in the Black Belt, the cotton-growing part of the state, forty miles south of Montgomery and a hundred forty south of Birmingham. Except for his time in the Confederate Army and his stint down in the Empire of Mexico, Jefferson Pinkard had never been so far from home. The camp lay between cotton fields and pecan groves not far from a town of about a thousand people called Fort Deposit. Once upon a time, the fort had protected settlers from Indians. Now only the name was left to commemorate the stockade that had once stood there.

Fort Deposit did boast a train station, a little clapboard building with a roof that hung out over the track so people could board and leave a train when it was raining. And raining it was when Pinkard stood on the rickety platform by the track waiting for the northbound Louisville and Nashville Railroad train to take him up to Birmingham. He wore his warden's uniform, his Freedom Party pin on proud display on his left lapel. He kept hoping someone would want to argue politics, but nobody did.

Up chugged the train. It wheezed to a halt, iron wheels squealing against iron rails. Most of the people who got off and boarded were Negroes with work-weary faces and cardboard luggage. A couple of cars up at the front of the train were for whites, though. Jeff climbed in and sat down in one of those. A few minutes later, the train rattled north again.

Five hours later, the train came into the Louisville and Nashville station in Birmingham. The station was at Twentieth and Morris, only a few blocks west of the Sloss Works, where Pinkard had worked for so long. He took a cab back to his apartment closer to the center of town. The Freedom Party was picking up a good part of the tab for the place.

He didn't stay there long—only long enough to get out of uniform and into the white shirt and butternut trousers of a Freedom Party stalwart. He wasn't the only one wearing that almost-uniform who converged on Birmingham Party headquarters. Oh, no—far from it.

Inside Caleb Briggs had already started talking, warming up the men for what they would be doing. "Tomorrow is election day," rasped the dentist who headed the Party in Birmingham. His voice was only a ruin of its former self; he'd been gassed in the war, and he'd never recovered. "We got to make sure the fellows who get elected vote our way. *All* of 'em, y'all hear me?"

"Freedom!" the men roared, Pinkard loud among them.

Briggs nodded. "That's right. Freedom. We've already got the House in Richmond, and we'll keep it. But we got to get the Senate, too, and that's tougher, on account of the state legislatures pick the Senators. So we have to take care of those. Y'all reckon we can do it?"

"Yes!" the stalwarts shouted, and, "Hell, yes!" and a great many other things besides. The louder they yelled, the more excited they got.

"Good." Caleb Briggs grinned a wide, crooked grin. "Not so many Whig and Rad Lib gatherings as there used to be. But the Whigs are holding one tonight in Capitol Park, smack in the middle of town. We got to make sure they don't go through with it, and that they don't do any voting tomorrow. Make sure you grab your clubs and whatnot, and we aren't going there to take prisoners."

As the men assembled for the march on the park, they told stories

of other elections, other brawls. A lot of them talked about 1933, when Jake Featherston won the presidency. Pinkard was one of the smaller number who could talk about 1921, when Featherston almost won. Nobody talked about the presidential election of 1927; the Party had wandered in the wilderness then. Even Jeff, a stalwart among stalwarts, had wondered if it would ever emerge.

Policemen tipped their hats to the advancing stalwarts. The dustup in the park that followed came almost as an anticlimax. The Whigs weren't what they had been two years earlier. They'd been fighting for their lives then, and known it. Now ... Now it was as if they sensed it was all over but the shouting. A few stubborn men fought hard to hold back the Freedom Party avalanche, but only a few. The rest fled. So did the Whig candidate for governor, and just in time. The stalwarts would surely have beaten him had they caught him, and they might have strung him up.

"That'll teach those sons of bitches," somebody not far from Pinkard said.

"Yeah." Jeff nodded. "Not like it was in the old days, when the governor used to sic the National Guard on us to keep us from kicking up our heels."

"Folks know which side their bread is buttered on nowadays," the other stalwart said. "And what the hell? We're holding most of the bread now."

"That's right." Pinkard nodded again, emphatically. "And we're going to get the rest of it, too."

He wished he could go to a saloon and have a few drinks with his comrades, but Alabama remained stubbornly dry. Instead, he went home and slept in his own bed for the first time in months. He'd got used to the hard military cot down at the Alabama Correctional Camp (P). His mattress seemed squashy by comparison, and he woke up with a stiff back. Grumbling, he made a cup of coffee—just about all he had in the place—and got into the stalwarts' almost-uniform again.

When he went back to Freedom Party headquarters, Caleb Briggs sent him to a polling place a few blocks away. "I don't expect the police'll enforce the electioneering limits," Briggs rasped. "Case they do, don't pick a fight with 'em. Here." He handed Jeff and the other party men a sheet of newspaper-style photos of men's faces. "See if y'all can keep these bastards from getting to the booth. They're

nothing but trouble-making trash."

Jeff grinned at the men with him. They were grinning, too. "You bet," he said, and took a cudgel from among those stuffed into a sheet-metal trash can. He thwacked the bludgeon into the palm of his left hand. This was the enjoyable part of the job. He pulled a quarter from his pocket, too. "Gonna buy some doughnuts before we get there," he said. "I'm empty inside."

The Confederate flag flew in front of an elementary-school auditorium. Sure enough, no one said a word, no policemen appeared, when the Freedom Party men stationed themselves right outside the door. Quite a few of the men going in to vote displayed Party pins, some without the black border that showed a new member, more with. They nodded and tipped their hats to the stalwarts as they went by. The call of "Freedom!" rang out again and again.

About half past eight, Pinkard nudged the stalwart nearest him. "There's one of the fuckers we're supposed to stop."

"Right," the other fellow said, and stepped into the would-be voter's path. "You better get the hell out of here, buddy, you know what's good for you."

"Are you saying I'm not allowed to exercise my Constitutional right to vote?" the man asked. He was bald, skinny, middle-aged, and wore a suit; he looked like a lawyer or somebody else too smart for his own good.

"He said you better get lost," Pinkard answered. "And you better, too, or you'll be real sorry."

"I will—as soon as I vote." The clever-looking guy started forward again.

Maybe he had guts. Maybe he was too stupid to know what was coming. All four stalwarts set on him, bludgeons rising and falling. "Freedom!" they shouted as the blows thudded home. Pinkard added, "You should've listened, you dumb asshole. You gonna vote now?" The bald man's wails rose above the thumps of the clubs and the stalwarts' battle cries.

At last, they let him go. He staggered away, face and scalp bloodied. He didn't try to go into the polling place, which proved they hadn't beaten *all* the brains out of him.

They beat up three or four other men from their sheet of photos; several more abruptly discovered urgent business elsewhere on seeing them waiting. The stalwarts saluted one another with their blood-spattered bludgeons each time that happened. Schoolchildren watched one beating. They laughed and cheered the stalwarts on. No policemen came to bother them. Pinkard hadn't expected that any would; the Party had been strong in police and fire departments across the CSA for years.

When the polls closed, a couple of Jeff's comrades headed home. He went back to Party headquarters. As he'd known they would, they had wireless sets blaring out election returns. They also had sandwiches and homebrew.

Results from the Confederate states on the East Coast had a good start on those in Alabama and farther west. "Looks like the Freedom Party landslide that started two years ago is still rolling downhill, folks," the announcer said. He sounded delighted with the news. People who didn't sound delighted the Freedom Party was doing well didn't last on the wireless. This fellow went on, "North Carolina's going to have a new governor, a Freedom Party man. Same with Georgia. And Party candidates are picking up seat after seat in the legislatures in the Carolinas and Florida. That makes races for the Senate likely to go Freedom, too."

Jefferson Pinkard turned to the closest stalwart and raised his glass of beer. "Here's to us, by Jesus! We've gone and done it. We sure as hell have."

"Looks like it," the other Party man agreed. He sported a mouse under one eye. He must have run into a Whig with more gumption than most. Pinkard hadn't.

After a while, Alabama returns and others from the western part of the Confederacy started coming in along with those from the Eastern seaboard. The only state where the Freedom Party didn't seem to be doing well was Louisiana, where the Radical Liberal governor had a solid organization of his own. Somebody not far from Jeff said, "He can laugh now, but that son of a bitch'll pay before long. You can count on it." Heads solemnly bobbed up and down, Pinkard's among them.

With restive Kentucky on its border, Tennessee went Freedom in a big way, and probably would have even without stalwarts outside polling places. With even more restless Sequoyah and stolen Houston

on *its* borders, Texas voted Freedom more spectacularly still. Jeff went back to his apartment and to bed before many returns came in from Chihuahua and Sonora. For one thing, he was confident they'd turn out for the Party, too. For another, they were mostly greasers down there anyhow, and he'd had his fill of greasers fighting in the Empire of Mexico.

He got on the train again the next day, to go back to the Alabama Correctional Camp (P). Newsboys shouted election results. "Freedom Party claims vetoproof majority in both houses of Congress!" was one cry.

Conscious of a job well done, Jeff bought a paper. He read it as the train rumbled south from Birmingham. Then he let it fall to the floor and dozed: no, he didn't sleep well in his own bed any more.

He got rudely awakened just before the train pulled into Montgomery. He came within inches of getting killed. A bullet blew out the window by his seat, cracking past his head and spraying him with broken glass. More bullets stitched along the length of the car.

"Down! Get down, goddammit!" he shouted, and dove between his seat and the one in front. Quite a few of the men in the car—likely the ones who'd seen combat during the war—did the same thing. Like him, they knew machine-gun fire when they heard it. Screams and wails said some of the bullets hadn't missed—and that civilians were panicking. Before long, Pinkard's hands and knees were wet and sticky with someone's blood.

The last time anybody'd shot up a train in which he was riding, it had been Negro rebels when he was a private on his way to put down one of the Socialist republics the blacks had proclaimed in Georgia. Who was it this time? The country between Birmingham and Montgomery was full of farms and plantations ... and the plantations were full of Negroes.

Coincidence? Or the start of a new uprising? Jeff didn't know—he had no way of knowing—but he muttered under his breath.

Flora Blackford didn't realize how much she'd missed the floor of Congress till she came back to Philadelphia. "Is it any wonder there is

armed struggle against the Freedom Party in the Confederate States?" she demanded. "Is it any wonder at all, after the farce that went by the name of an election in that country two weeks ago?"

A Congressman—a Freedom Party Congressman—from Houston sprang to his feet. "How is that there election different from most of the ones y'all put on in what you call my state?"

He didn't want to be in the U.S. Congress at all. He would sooner have served in Richmond. "Excuse me, Mr. Mahon, but I have the floor," Flora said with icy courtesy. "May I go on?"

"That's right. Ride roughshod over me. You've been riding roughshod over my state—what you call my state—ever since you tore us bleeding from Texas and made us join the USA."

"Tell the lady, George!" That was another Freedom Party man from Houston. Two more Congressmen, these from Kentucky, began singing "Dixie." Neither they nor their constituents wanted to belong to the United States, either.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Congressman La Follette of Wisconsin, the speaker of the House, plied his gavel with gusto. "The gentlemen are out of order," he declared. "The gentlemen will observe the rules of the House. Mrs. Blackford has the floor."

"This body is out of order!" George Mahon shouted. "This whole damn *country* is out of order!" The Kentucky Congressmen sang louder than ever.

Bang! Bang! Bang! "That will be quite enough!" Charles La Follette declared. "The sergeant-at-arms will eject from this chamber any individual flouting the rules of the House. Is that clear?"

"It's clear, all right," Mahon said. "It's clear that even though our own people elected us, you don't want to let us tell you what they want." But he sat down after that, and the rowdy singing stopped. The Freedom Party Congressmen knew La Follette meant what he said. He'd ejected them before. Flora wasn't sure how much good that did, though. Getting thrown out of Congress only made them bigger heroes back home.

"You may continue, Mrs. Blackford," La Follette said wearily. "Without further interruption, I very much hope."

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker," Flora said. "I rose to call upon the administration to take stronger action against the Confederate States than it has done up until this time. President Hoover stayed silent in the wake of the riots—I might even say, the pogrom—aimed against the black residents of the CSA and does not appear to recognize their legitimate right to rise against oppression and brutality. He—"

"The distinguished Congresswoman from New York worries more about the Negroes of the Confederate States not because they are black but because they are Red," another Congressman broke in. "Most people in the United States worry very little about them for any reason."

He wasn't a Freedom Party man. He was a rock-ribbed Democrat from Maine. Speaker La Follette gaveled him to silence, too, but not with the vehemence he'd used against the Freedom Party buffoons. And, to her dismay, Flora saw heads nodding in agreement with what the New Englander had said. The United States had only a handful of Negroes. Border patrols stayed busy keeping would-be colored refugees out. The USA wanted no more blacks; if anything, most people would have been happier with none at all.

Stubbornly, she said, "They are human beings, too, Congressman, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among those being life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Jefferson was a damned Virginian," the man from Maine sneered. "Give me Adams and Hamilton any day." More nods, these from all around the big room. Founding Fathers from states no longer in the USA had a low reputation north of the Mason-Dixon line these days, and had ever since the War of Secession.

"Do you deny, sir, that they are human beings?" Flora asked. "Do you deny that they possess those rights I named?"

"They are in a foreign country," the Congressman from Maine replied. "I deny that they are any business of the USA."

He got more nods, from fellow Democrats, from the handful of Republicans and Freedom Party men, and even from a few Socialists. To her dismay, Flora had seen that before. Socialists spoke on behalf of racial equality, but couldn't get too far ahead of the people who voted them into office. That was how they rationalized it, anyhow.

"Congressman Moran, would you say the same if these persecuted

people were Irish?" Flora asked sweetly.

"Since they aren't Irish, the question does not apply." Moran was too smart to answer that one the way she asked it.

Because he was, she waited for Speaker La Follette to gavel down his interruption and then introduced her motion of censure against the Confederate States. She knew it would fail; the next motion passed censuring the Confederate States for the way they treated their Negroes would be the first. But she had to make the effort. It wasn't as if Jews didn't know pogroms, too. News out of Russia and the Kingdom of Poland (which bore about the same relationship to Germany as the Republic of Quebec did to the USA) wasn't good.

After the House adjourned, she went across the street to her office. A newsboy waving the *Philadelphia Inquirer* shouted, "Confederates ask to enlarge their army! Read all about it!"

"I certainly do want to read about that!" Flora exclaimed, and gave him a nickel. He handed her a paper, and smiled broadly when she didn't wait for change.

She spread the *Inquirer* out on her desk. That was the lead headline, all right. She zoomed through the story. President Featherston, apparently, had requested permission to boost the Confederate Army to a size significantly larger than that allowed by the treaty ending the Great War. Featherston was quoted as saying, "These soldiers will be used only for internal defense. We have uprisings against the lawful authority of our government in several states, and need the extra manpower to put them down."

Hoover hadn't said yes and hadn't said no. A Powel House spokesman had said the president of the United States would give the request serious consideration. Flora wondered what he would do. As a Democrat, he would normally favor a hard line against the CSA. But, as a Democrat, he would also normally favor putting down uprisings of the proletariat, no matter how justified they might be.

Flora wondered how she ought to feel about the request herself. Up till Jake Featherston became president of the Confederate States, the Socialists had favored a softer line with the CSA, easing the country's return to the family of nations. Some still did. How could the Confederacy become a normal country with a rebellion sputtering in its heartland? But how could one keep from sympathizing with the rebels, considering what they'd been through before picking up rifles

(or, as Featherston claimed, cleaning the grease off the ones they'd hidden away in 1916)?

That last made up her mind. She dialed Powel House, wondering how long it would be before these newfangled telephones sent operators into extinction along with the passenger pigeon and the American bison. She worked her way through three secretaries before finally securing an appointment with President Hoover.

When she told her husband that evening what she'd done, Hosea Blackford made a sour face. "He won't listen to you. You're my wife. That's plenty of reason right there for him not to listen to you."

"This is foreign policy," Flora answered. "Foreign policy should be bipartisan. You said so yourself, often enough."

"This is Hoover." To put it mildly, Blackford did not care for his successor. "You'd do better to recommend the opposite of what you really want. You might have some chance of getting it then."

Powel House, on Third Street, was a three-story structure of red brick, with wide steps leading up to the broad porch and its wrought-iron railings. Philadelphia's last pre-Revolutionary mayor had lived there. Since the Second Mexican War, it had also replaced the White House in Washington as the chief presidential residence.

The reception hall onto which the street door opened was large and impressive, with highly polished mahogany wainscoting gleaming a mellow red-brown. The banister leading up to President Hoover's second-floor office was also of mahogany, the spindles fine examples of fancy lathework. When she'd lived here, Flora had often admired them. Now, worried as she was, she hardly gave them a glance.

Hoover's bulldog features twisted into a smile when she came in. "Good to see you, Mrs. Blackford," He waved her to a chair. "Please sit down. Make yourself comfortable." He didn't say, *Make yourself at home.* She'd been at home here. Had the election of 1932 turned out differently, she and Hosea would still be at home here. Hoover went on, "What can I do for you, Congresswoman?"

"Thank you for your time." Perhaps because she didn't like President Hoover, Flora took care to be especially polite. "I've come to ask you to tell President Featherston you do *not* approve of his proposed expansion of the Confederate Army. He will use it for nothing but the oppression of his own people."

"I agree. That is how he will use it," Hoover said, and astonished hope flamed in Flora. The president continued, "That is why I am disposed to permit the expansion."

Flora stared. "I don't understand ... Mr. President."

"If I thought President Featherston intended to use his increased Army against the United States, I would oppose his enlargement of it with every fiber of my being. But I do believe he will use it only for the purpose he says he intends: putting down the Negro uprisings troubling several of his states. Any nation, whether friendly to the United States or not, is entitled to internal peace, stability, and security. If some ill-advised individuals disturb its tranquility, it has the right to use force to put them down."

"But, Mr. President, one of the reasons the Negroes are in arms against the CSA is that the white majority will not give them—how did you phrase it?—peace, stability, and tranquility," Flora answered. "The Confederate States made their bed through oppression. Shouldn't they have to lie in it?"

"Radical elements have controlled blacks in the Confederate States for too long," Hoover said. "This is not their first rising, if you recall."

"Oh, yes. Their last one went a long way toward winning us the war," Flora replied. "Don't we owe them a debt of gratitude for that?"

The president thrust out his chin. "We owe no foreigners any debts," he said proudly. "We are at peace with the world. Even the Japanese." That was a dig at her husband, in whose presidency the war with Japan had broken out.

It was also an infallible sign she wouldn't get what she wanted. "I hope you will not regret this decision, Mr. President," she said, rising to her feet.

"My conscience is clear," Hoover said.

"Which is not the same as being right." Since she wouldn't get what she wanted, she did take the last word.

Grunting, Cincinnatus Driver eased the last sofa off his dolly and down to the floor of the furniture shop's storeroom. "Here you go, Mr. Averill. It's pretty furniture. I hope it sells good."

"Oh, Lord, so do I," the shopowner replied. He signed off on the paperwork Cincinnatus had given him, then handed back the clipboard.

"Obliged." Cincinnatus wheeled the dolly outside. Even though he'd been taking sofas and chairs and hassocks and chests of drawers off the truck for the past half hour and so was good and warm, the cold air flayed his face. Breathing it was like breathing knives. Snow crunched under his shoes. The winter looked to be as nasty as any he'd known since moving to Iowa.

He hoped the Ford would start, and breathed a sigh of relief when it did. He let the engine warm up before putting it in gear. That gave him a chance to pick up the folded copy of the *Des Moines Herald-Express* that lay on the seat. confederate stalwarts flock to army, the headline read.

Cincinnatus muttered under his breath. That had nothing to do with Kentucky, but it had everything to do with blacks in the CSA. The new recruits would land on the Negro revolt with both feet. That would surely make more Negroes try to flee north. He wondered how many would make it into the USA.

Not many, he thought, throwing the paper down in disgust. *Not near enough.* A Jew or an Irishman could be welcome here. Even a Chinaman could, sometimes. But a Negro? Only the conquest of Kentucky had made Cincinnatus a U.S. citizen. And a Jew or an Irishman (though not a Chinaman) could easily pretend to be something he wasn't. A Negro? Cincinnatus shook his head. A black man *was* black, and nothing he could do would make him anything else.

Back in Kentucky, of course, Cincinnatus had known men called black who had blue eyes, and girls called black with freckles. They hadn't bought their features from the Sears, Roebuck catalogue or any of its smaller Confederate competitors. Nobody talked much about how they *had* come by them, but everybody knew.

Another story read, hoover plans reelection bid. Cincinnatus didn't bother reading that one. He'd voted Democratic ever since he'd been able to vote. He wanted the USA to keep the CSA down. As far as he

was concerned, everything else ran second to that. And now Hoover had gone and betrayed his trust. Did that make it worth his while to vote Socialist later this year? He shrugged. He still had months and months to go before he needed to make up his mind.

He drove up to the railroad yards, got out of the truck and sat down on a bench with his pail to eat lunch. A couple of railroad dicks nodded to him as they went by; he was an accepted part of the landscape. One of the white men even tipped his cap. Cincinnatus made haste to return the gesture. No white in Kentucky would have done that with a black.

Half a dozen white truck drivers ate about fifty yards away. They didn't invite Cincinnatus over, and he didn't presume to join them without an invitation, though another white man did. Some things worked differently here from the way they did down in Kentucky, but others hadn't changed a bit.

Cincinnatus wasn't the only colored driver picking up cargo at the Des Moines yards, but the others seemed to be out hauling. It happened. He'd eaten a lot of lunches by himself. He took a big bite of his ham sandwich.

Shoeleather scrunched on gravel only a few feet away. Cincinnatus looked up. The black man coming toward him wasn't one of the usual drivers. That was the first thing Cincinnatus realized. The second thing was that he knew him anyway, though he hadn't seen him since moving away from Covington. "Lucullus!" he said in amazement. "What the hell you doin' here?"

"I been lookin' for you. Done found you now, too." Lucullus Wood stuck out his hand. Automatically, Cincinnatus shook it. When he'd come to Iowa, Lucullus had been on the cusp between boy and man: where Achilles was now. Today, Lucullus had a man's full and formidable presence. He'd also grown into a good deal of his father Apicius' heft.

"Lookin' for *me*? What for? I been gone from Covington a long time now. Don't want to go back, neither," Cincinnatus said.

The railroad dicks ambled past again, coming the other way. They gave Lucullus a hard stare. But, seeing that Cincinnatus knew him, they let him alone.

"Ain't just me. It's my old man," Lucullus said.

"What's Apicius want with me?" Cincinnatus asked in surprise and more than a little alarm. Lucullus' father wasn't just the best barbecue man between the Carolinas and Kansas City. He was also one of the leading Reds in Kentucky. During and after the war, he'd played a dangerous game with Confederate diehards and with Luther Bliss, the head of the Kentucky State Police. Having spent more time than he cared to in one of Luther Bliss' jails, Cincinnatus wanted nothing to do with him now. He pointed a finger at Lucullus. "Why'd old Apicius send you, anyways? Why don't he wire or write hisself a letter to me?"

"You know Pa ain't got his letters," Lucullus said, which was true but not fully responsive. Seeing Cincinnatus' impatience, the younger man went on, "He send me so I kin talk you into doin' what needs doin'."

"So you kin talk me into doin' what Apicius wants, you mean," Cincinnatus said, and Lucullus didn't deny it. "Well?" Cincinnatus asked. "Tell me what he wants an' why he wants *me.* Tell me quick, so I kin say no an' go on about my business."

"He wants you on account of you's a nigger with balls, and you's a nigger with a truck," Lucullus said. "Plenty o' black folks, they tryin' to get up to the USA from the CSA. You hear tell 'bout dat?"

"I hear tell," Cincinnatus admitted.

"You know 'bout the Underground Railroad back before the War o' Secession?" Lucullus asked. "Run slaves up into free country so they turn free themselves. That's what we do now. We run niggers up into the USA. An' we needs your help."

"You want me to go down there an' sneak black folks from the CSA up into the USA?" Cincinnatus asked.

Lucullus nodded. "That's right. What you say?"

Cincinnatus looked at him. He knew what Lucullus and Apicius were counting on: his urge to protect his own. But he had his own right here— Elizabeth, Achilles, and Amanda. He looked Lucullus straight in the eye and said, "No."

Lucullus' jaw dropped. "What?"

"No," Cincinnatus repeated. "That means I ain't gonna do it. Sorry you come all this way, but no anyhow. Tell your pa he should find

hisself another nigger, one with rocks where his brains ought to be."

Now Lucullus started to get angry. "Why not?" he demanded.

"On account of whoever does this, he gonna get caught," Cincinnatus replied. "On account of I already been in Luther Bliss' jail once, and ain't nothin' or nobody make me mess with that man again. On account of I do anything you goddamn Reds don't like, I end up dead an' wishin' I was in Luther Bliss' goddamn jail. No. *Hell,* no."

He waited for Lucullus to remind him his mother and father still lived in Covington and bad things might happen to them if he didn't go along. He waited, but Lucullus said nothing of the kind. Maybe he knew it would do no good. He did say, "My pa, he ain't gonna be real happy with you."

"I ain't real happy with him, or with you, neither," Cincinnatus said. "You got a lot o' goddamn nerve, comin' up here an' tryin' to drag me back into that shit. I done gone away a long time ago, an' I ain't *never* goin' back." He was almost shouting. If he'd been any angrier, he would have hurled himself at Lucullus.

The younger man held out both hands, pale palms up, in a placating gesture. "All right. All right. I hears you. I tells my pa what you say." He left the railroad yard in a hurry.

"Who was that colored fella?" one of the railroad dicks asked Cincinnatus after Lucullus went away. Not *that other colored fella,* Cincinnatus noticed: they took him so much for granted, they almost forgot what color he was. *That* never would have happened in Kentucky, either. People there always paid attention to who was who. They were sometimes less overt about noticing than they were here in Iowa, but they always did.

"I used to know him when I was livin' down in Kentucky," Cincinnatus answered. "Ain't seen him for years till now."

"What did he want?"

"Tryin' to talk me into goin' back there. He had some kind o' business deal." Cincinnatus shrugged. "I ain't goin'. He's a fly-by-night."

"You must be rich, if he came all this way from Kentucky to try and take your money," the dick said. "He'll have a long, empty time going back. Thought he could play you for a sucker, did he?"

"Anybody reckon's I'm rich, he ain't never seen all the moths fly outa my wallet when I open it." Cincinnatus hesitated to admit even to himself that he was doing well.

Both railroad dicks laughed. "Yeah, well, I know that song," said the one who did most of the talking. "Don't I just, goddammit." He and his partner both strode off to prowl around trains.

Cincinnatus bolted the rest of his lunch. Then he went after work for the rest of the day. He got less than he wanted; wasting time with Lucullus had put him behind the other drivers. He muttered and fumed all afternoon. Not only had Lucullus bothered him, he'd cost him money. That hurt more.

When he got back to his apartment building at the end of that long, frustrating day, he found not only Elizabeth but also Mr. and Mrs. Chang from upstairs waiting in the lobby. Mrs. Chang spoke next to no English, but started yelling at him in Chinese the minute he walked in the door.

"Your foolish boy!" Mr. Chang shouted. "Foolish, foolish boy! What he think he do? He—" He broke down and started to cry.

Cincinnatus looked a question to Elizabeth. All this excitement was likely to mean only one thing. Sure enough, his wife nodded. "Achilles and Grace, they run off to get married," she said.

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus said softly. He didn't think that was a good idea— which put it mildly. But he didn't know what he—or the Changs—could do about it. His son and their daughter were of legal age. If they wanted to tie the knot, they could. Whether they would live happily ever after was liable to be a different story, but they weren't likely to worry about that now.

He held out his hand to Grace Chang's—no, to Grace Driver's—father. "Welcome to the family," he said. "I reckon either we make the best o' this or else we spend all our time fighting from here on out."

Mr. Chang looked at the hand for close to half a minute before finally taking it. "I got nothing against you. You good man," he said at last. "Your boy—against your boy I got plenty. But you, me—we no fight."

"That's about as much as I can ask for right now," Cincinnatus said. "Somehow or other, we'll get through it." The Changs didn't look as if

they believed him. For that matter, neither did Elizabeth. And he hadn't said a word about Lucullus' visit yet.

Mort Pomeroy gave Mary a kiss on the cheek. He was bundled into an overcoat, with mittens and fur hat with earflaps. He was only going across the street to the diner, but in the middle of a blizzard all the clothes he could put on were none too many. "I'll see you tonight, sweetheart," he said.

"So long," Mary answered. "I've got plenty to keep me busy."

Her husband nodded, though that wouldn't have been true at the McGregor farm. Mort didn't realize how much harder life had been there. However much she loved him, Mary didn't intend to tell him, either. She didn't like keeping secrets from him, but thought she had no choice here.

He kissed her again and went out the door. She went to the window so she could watch him cross the street. She always did that. He knew it, too. He looked up, waving through the snow that blurred his outline. She waved back, and blew him another kiss. He jerked his head to show he'd got it.

As soon as Mort went into the diner, Mary washed the breakfast dishes. She put them in the drainer; she saw no point to drying them herself. Once she'd done that, she looked out the window again. An auto painted U.S. Army green-gray made its slow way up the street in Rosenfeld. Whoever was in it paid no attention to the Canadian woman looking down on him from the apartment building.

"One of these days, I'll *make* you pay attention," she muttered. "You see if I don't." She started to fix herself a fresh cup of tea, but stopped and shrugged instead. The cup she'd had with breakfast hadn't sat so well as she would have liked. Maybe the next one ought to wait till later.

Even without the tea, her heart beat faster when she got out the bomb-making gear she'd taken from the barn at the farm a year and a half before. After all this time, Mort had no idea the tools and explosives were here. He was busy in the diner's kitchen, but the kitchen pantries in the apartment were her place, and he left them

alone.

She thought she knew as much as she needed to know about this business. Only the experiment, of course, would prove that one way or the other. She hadn't made the experiment yet.

A clock chimed the hour: eight o'clock. Not far away, the general store would be opening for business. It wasn't Henry Gibbon's store any more. Peter Karamanlides, the new owner, was a big-nosed Greek from Rochester, New York. His selection of merchandise was almost identical to what Gibbon's had been. His prices were, if anything, microscopically lower. Mary disliked him just the same, though she bought from him. A lot of things had to come from the general store, because nobody else in Rosenfeld carried them.

Karamanlides seemed decent enough. But here he was, one more Yank yankifying Canada. Mary wished there were Canadians buying general stores in Rochester instead, but there weren't, or she'd never heard of any.

She gave her attention back to the business at hand. Her father's bombs had always had wooden cases. Hers fit into a cardboard box. She could have made the same sort of case as Arthur McGregor had, but she'd decided not to. She didn't want investigators reminded of her father's work. That might make them look her way.

For the same reason, she didn't use the big tenpenny nails her father had. Thumbtacks would do the job well enough. She wound and carefully set an alarm clock, then even more carefully lowered it into the cardboard box. If she dropped it, if the impact made its bells clack against each other ... *Pa never made a stupid mistake like that,* she told herself fiercely. *I won't, either.*

And she didn't, though a drop of sweat trickled down her forehead and between her eyes and fell from the tip of her nose onto the glass face of the clock. She wiped it away with a forefinger. Then she poured the thumbtacks into the box, put on the lid, and tied it shut with brown twine.

She yawned as she put on a heavy coat and a scarf to cover her red hair. Now she wished she'd had that second cup of tea after all. Well, no help for it. The coat was big and bulky. She had no trouble concealing the box under it. Out the door and down the stairs she went.

The general store was around the corner and two blocks away. Her heart pounded harder and harder as she walked towards it. Again, she spoke sternly to herself: *Father did this lots of times. You can, too. And you will.*

Hardly anyone was on the street yet. That was good. That was how she wanted things. The fewer people who saw her, the better. There was the post office. Wilf Rokeby would be getting ready to open up there, as he had for as long as she could remember. And here was the general store.

She jumped when the bell above the door jingled as she went in. "Good day to you, Mrs. Pomeroy," Karamanlides said from behind the counter. "What can I get for you today?" He chuckled. "So early, and I'm all yours."

She'd counted on being the only customer in the place. She hadn't counted on how hot it was inside. He had the potbellied stove going full blast. The sweat on her face now had nothing to do with nerves. She gave him her list, finishing, "And a pair of the strongest reading glasses you've got. I'll give them to my mother for her birthday." Her mother's birthday was indeed coming up in a few weeks.

Karamanlides piled goods on the counter, then said, "Excuse me. The glasses I keep in the back room." He disappeared.

Mary set the cardboard box on a bottom shelf. It didn't look much different from the boxes of epsom salts already sitting there. She left her coat open afterwards. That was all to the good. If she'd kept it closed much longer, the storekeeper would have started wondering why.

He came back with the spectacles. "I have a couple styles here. Which ones you like better? The lenses are the same in both." His accent wasn't just American; a faint trace of his native country lingered in it, too.

"Let me have the pair with the bronze frames," Mary answered. "What does it all come to?"

As Henry Gibbon would have, Karamanlides scribbled figures on a scrap of paper and added them up. "Three dollars and nineteen cents," he said after checking everything twice.

She gave him four dollar bills and checked to make sure the change

was right. Then she took what she'd bought back to the apartment building. She put everything away. She didn't want Mort noticing she'd been to the general store this morning. She didn't think anyone but Karamanlides had seen her go in or come out.

She fell back into housework, but then broke off with a gasp. What would she do if the U.S. authorities decided to search the apartment just because she was her father's daughter? Stowing bomb-making tools in the kitchen was enough to keep Mort from knowing they were there. Hard-eyed men in green-gray uniforms? Probably—no, certainly—not. Having a really good hiding place didn't matter ... so long as she didn't use the tools. But now she had.

Everything went into another cardboard box, this one considerably larger than the one waiting with the epsom salts. Then she took the box downstairs. Everybody in the building stashed things in the basement. It wasn't such a good hiding place as her father had found in the barn, but it would have to do for now. The Yanks would have trouble proving those tools were hers even if they did find them. She hoped they would, anyhow.

Halfway back up the stairs, Mary paused and yawned and yawned and yawned. She shook her head in amazement when she finally stopped. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt this tired in the middle of the day. Finishing the climb felt like going up Mount Everest, which had recently killed a couple of German climbers who'd wanted to be the first to the summit.

When she returned to the apartment, she thought about fixing that cup of tea to perk herself up. But the last one had been so bitter, she just didn't feel like another. Her stomach lurched at the mere thought.

What's wrong with me? she thought, although she had at least the beginnings of a suspicion. She hadn't finished the morning dusting when she started yawning again. She sat down in the nearest chair, closed her eyes, and tilted her head back. *I'll just rest for a little....* She didn't even finish the thought before sleep claimed her.

She woke with a start an hour and a half later, blinking and confused. Had it? Hadn't it? Had she slept through it if it had? She didn't think she could have, and yet.... A glance at a clock went some way toward reassuring her. It shouldn't have, not unless she'd done something wrong.

Feeling guilty about dozing off in the middle of the day, she got

back to work. She should have been refreshed, but she kept wanting to start yawning again. Excitement that had nothing to do with waiting built in her. This wasn't her imagination; she couldn't remember the last time she'd taken a nap in the middle of the morning.

When the *bang!* came at last, it sounded less impressive than she'd expected. She'd heard a bomb go off once before, back during the war. She'd been a little girl then, and remembered the noise as seeming like the end of the world. This—was just a bang. The windows rattled briefly, and that was that. She was farther away now than she had been then. Maybe her bomb was smaller, too.

Before long, the town fire engine's siren screamed to life. Mary looked out the window. Some people, Mort among them, came out of the diner across the street to see what had happened. One of them pointed in the direction of the general store. Mary wondered if Mort would look up at her, but he didn't. In a way, she was sorry; in another way, relieved. He didn't automatically think of her as a bomber, then. If he didn't, maybe the U.S. occupiers wouldn't, either.

No one knocked on her door till her husband got home. She didn't need to ask him about the news. He was full of it: "Somebody blew Gibbon's general store—of course, it's not Gibbon's any more—to hell and gone. We haven't seen anything like this since—er, in a long time." *Since your father's day,* he'd started to say.

"I heard a boom. I didn't know what it was," Mary said.

"A bomb," her husband said solemnly. "The store went up in smoke. Big fire. If what's-his-name, the Greek, hadn't been in the back room, he would have gone up with it. As is, he got a nail or something right here." He patted his own left buttock. "He'll sit on a slant for weeks, I bet."

Mary laughed. She wasn't too sorry Karamanlides hadn't got badly hurt. She wondered whether she had the stomach to go on fighting the USA. *Pa wouldn't've cared who got hurt. They were just the enemy to him.*

"I have news, too," she said.

"What is it?" Mort sounded indulgent: what could be interesting or important after the bomb?

But Mary had an answer for him: "I'm going to have a baby."

His eyes went wide, wider, widest. "Are you sure?" he asked, a question men uncounted regret the moment it passes their lips.

But Mary, a good part of her mind on other things, let him down easy. All she said was, "Yes, very sure." Even if the U.S. occupiers didn't catch her, she doubted she would be doing much with the bomb-making tools for a while now.

When Jonathan Moss left his apartment these days, his hand was always on the stock of the pistol he carried. If anybody wanted to fight, he was ready. He took threats a lot more seriously than he had before. Major Sam Lopat had thought they were a pack of nonsense. Then occupation headquarters went up in smoke. The military prosecutor's opinions were no longer relevant.

Berlin, Ontario, had been quiet since the blast. Even new yanks out! graffiti were harder to come by than they had been before the bomb went off. American soldiers had gone back to shooting first and asking questions later. The lawyer in Moss deplored that. The American in Canada in him thought it made him more likely to live to a ripe old age.

An armored car rattled down the street. The machine would have been hopelessly obsolete in time of war. But it was ideal for making terrorists and would-be revolutionaries think twice. A couple of the soldiers inside the machine jeered at Moss. Everybody around here knew who he was, Canucks and Americans alike.

Again, part of him savored that recognition and part of him could have done without it. He slid behind the wheel of his Model D Ford. He'd finally got rid of the Bucephalus, not only because it was old but also because it was distinctive. So far as he knew, it had been the only Bucephalus in Berlin, while there were four or five Model D's on this block alone.

In obscurity there is strength, he thought, and turned the key. Not only did the Ford start more readily than the Bucephalus had been in the habit of doing, he thought it less likely to have explosives waiting under the hood on any given day. He hadn't really worried about that, either, not till after occupation headquarters blew up.

He laughed as he put the motorcar in gear, not that it was really funny. Nothing like a bomb going off to concentrate the mind. When he got to the building that held his office, he didn't park the Ford in front of it, as he'd been in the habit of doing. Instead, he went on to a lot a couple of blocks away, a lot surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by armed guards. secure parking, said the sign above the entrance. Moss gave the attendant twenty cents and drove in.

The sign might as well have read, parking for Americans. The only Canadians who used it were a handful of collaborators. They were, of course, doubtless the ones who felt they needed it most.

Moss felt he needed it. That he felt he needed it infuriated him. Dammit, couldn't the Canucks see he was on their side? Evidently not. They only saw he was a Yank. If he came from south of the forty-ninth parallel, he had to be an enemy.

Most of the buildings in downtown Berlin had had their glass replaced since the bomb went off. Here and there, though, plywood sheets still covered those openings. Some people couldn't afford to reglaze. Some buildings simply stood empty; the business collapse had been no less savage here than anywhere else.

When he got to his office, he plugged in the hot plate and got some coffee going. The pot would be good in the morning, tolerable around noon, and battery acid towards evening. He knew he'd go right on drinking it anyway. How could anybody function without coffee? He yawned. Life was hard enough with it.

As soon as he'd poured the coffee, he started going through paperwork. Like a lot of busy men who worked for themselves, he was chronically behind. He had a better excuse than most, though. Since the bombing in Berlin, he'd had to try cases in Galt, in Guelph, in London, even in Toronto. That did nothing to make him more efficient. He was pleased with the record he'd managed to ring up despite the added difficulty of travel.

His first client came in at precisely nine o'clock. "Good morning, Mr. Jamieson." Moss rose to shake hands with him. "How are you today?"

"Tolerable, Mr. Moss." Lou Jamieson was a middle-aged man who walked with a limp. He had a very pale face that always bore a slight sheen of sweat or oil. His meat market was the biggest in Berlin. The occupying authorities kept accusing him of paying kickbacks to U.S.

inspectors. Moss wouldn't have bet that he didn't, though of course lawyers didn't ask questions like that. Much of the evidence they'd had against him went up in smoke in the bombing. That hadn't kept them from going after him again; his trial, in London, was set to open the following week.

"What do you think they've got on me?" he asked now, lighting a cigarette.

"Well, that's a problem, you know," Moss answered. "This isn't an ordinary criminal proceeding. There's no pretrial discovery under occupation law. The military prosecutor can spring whatever surprises he wants in front of the judge."

Jamieson gestured with his right hand, leaving a trail of smoke from the cigarette. "Teach your granny to suck eggs, why don't you?" he said in a raspy baritone. "This ain't the first time they've had me up, you know. I've beaten this crap before. So what have they got on me?"

He expected Moss to know regardless of whether the Army told him. And Moss did. Even over in London—hell, even over in Toronto—he knew people who could tell him interesting things. Finding out cost him money, but that was one of the expenses of running a practice. "There's a lieutenant named Szymanski from the Inspectorate who's going to testify that you paid him off. He's going to name dates and amounts and what you wanted him not to see each time."

"Is he?" Jamieson's laugh had a wheezy sound to it. "You know Lucille Cheever?"

"Personally? No," Moss said, and Lou Jamieson laughed again. Dryly, Moss went on, "I know who she is, though." She ran the leading sporting house in Berlin, and had for years.

"That'll do." Jamieson stubbed out the cigarette and lit another one. "Ask her about Lieutenant Szymanski and Yolanda. She can name dates and amounts and what the damn Polack got each time. He has a wife and twins down in Pennsylvania. You hit him with that, what you want to bet he loses his memory?"

"Yolanda?" Moss echoed.

Jamieson nodded. "Yolanda. Big blond gal." His hands shaped an hourglass. "Big jugs, too. Gotta be better than what he was getting at home. 'Course, he's no bargain himself. He knows we know about

Yolanda, he'll shut up."

"I'll take care of it." Moss didn't write down Lucille Cheever's name. He knew he would remember it—and the less in writing when he went on the shady side of the street, the better.

"What else they got?" Jamieson inquired.

"Unless somebody's pulling a fast one on me, he's their heavy artillery."

Jamieson snorted contemptuously. "Dumb assholes." Moss knew what that was likely to mean. He hadn't studied occupation law to help real crooks wiggle off the hook. But you couldn't turn down clients because you thought they were guilty. Jamieson went on, "If Szymanski's all they've got, we'll kick their asses. See you over in London." He fired up another cigarette and swaggered out of the office.

And how do I explain talking to Lucille Cheever to Laura? Moss wondered. He knew he would have to tell her. If he didn't and she found out later, that would be worse. He sighed. Northwestern Law School hadn't covered all the points of legal ethics it might have.

The telephone rang. "Jonathan Moss," he said crisply. It was occupation headquarters in Galt, announcing a delay in a case there: the prosecutor was in the hospital with a case of boils. "How ... biblical," Moss murmured. The officer on the other end of the line hung up on him.

Chuckling, he went back to work. His next client came in fifteen minutes later. Clementine Schmidt was embroiled in what looked to be a permanent property dispute with the occupation authorities. Appeals over what was and what wasn't acceptable documentation that she owned the property she claimed to own dragged on and on. Since the war ended, military judges had changed their minds at least four times. All in all, it was not the USA's finest hour in handling Canadian affairs.

Miss Schmidt (Moss couldn't blame men for fighting shy of marrying such a disputatious woman) brandished a letter. In a voice ringing with triumph, she declared, "I have found my cousin, Maximilian."

"Have you?" Moss blinked. She'd been talking about Maximilian for

years. He'd always assumed her cousin had died in the war.

But she nodded. "Yes, I have," she said triumphantly. "He fought in the Rockies and was badly wounded there. That is why he never came home." *It had nothing to do with you? Amazing,* Moss thought. His client went on, "He settled in a town called Kamloops, in British Columbia. And he remembers very well the situation of the property." She thrust the letter at him.

He rapidly read through it. When he'd finished, he nodded. "We'll definitely show this to the appellate judge when the time comes," he said. Miss Schmidt beamed. The letter was in fact a lot less ironclad that she seemed to think. Cousin Maximilian recalled that the family had owned the property in question once upon a time. He had no new documentation to prove that. If he'd lived out in Kamloops since being wounded, it wasn't likely that he would.

Clementine Schmidt was still elated that she'd found good old Cousin Max. Moss let her chortle, then eased her out of the office. He poured himself more coffee once she finally left. He was still drinking it when the postman knocked on the door. "Here you are, Mr. Moss," the fellow said, and dumped a pile of envelopes on what had been a nearly clean desk.

"Thanks." Moss surveyed the pile with something less than joy unalloyed. He sorted through the day's mail, separating it into piles: papers related to cases, advertisements, payments (only a couple of those—and why was he not surprised?), and things he couldn't readily classify.

He opened a plain envelope in that miscellaneous pile, then unfolded the sheet of paper inside it. Neatly printed on it in large letters were the words, we HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT YOU, YOU YANK SON OF A BITCH. WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT YOUR WHORE OR HER BRAT, EITHER.

He stared in dismay. Since the bombing of occupation headquarters, he hadn't had a missive like this. He'd hoped he wouldn't. Considering what had happened to occupation headquarters, he couldn't very well ignore it. Whoever was behind this had proved he was playing for keeps.

His hand trembled as he reached for the telephone and rang up Galt. As bad luck would have it, he was connected to the officer with whom he'd cracked wise about the military prosecutor's boils. "You're

not so goddamn funny when you need the Army, are you?" the other American said.

"Well, maybe not," Moss admitted. "I'm no fonder of being blown up than anybody else."

"Shows how much gratitude your clients have," the officer said.

"I doubt my clients are behind this," Moss said stiffly. The gibe stung all the same. He didn't know why Canadians wanted him dead, either. He'd spent his whole career fighting their legal battles—and winning quite a few of them. And this was the thanks he got?

"Bring in the paper," the man in Galt said. "We'll run it through the lab. I doubt they'll come up with anything, but you never know till you try."

"I'll do it," Moss said. Doing it right away meant canceling a meeting. He canceled it. Whoever was doing this, Moss wanted him caught. He didn't like living in fear. Somebody out there, though, didn't care what he liked.

Spring and snow went together in Quebec. Lucien Galtier drove with exaggerated care. He knew the Chevrolet would skid if he did anything heroic— which was to say, stupid or abrupt—on an icy road. The point of going to a dance, after all, was getting there in one piece. He wondered if he would have thought the same as a young buck courting Marie. Of course, back in those days before the turn of the century, only a few millionaires had had motorcars. It was hard to do anything too spectacularly idiotic in a carriage.

Marie ... His hands tightened on the steering wheel. She was seven years dead, and half the time it felt as if she were just around the corner visiting neighbors and would be back any minute. The other half, Galtier knew she was gone, all right, and the knowledge was knives in his soul. Those were the black days. He'd heard time was supposed to heal such wounds. Maybe it did. The knives, now, didn't seem to have serrated edges.

A right turn, a left, and yes, there was the path leading to François Berlinguet's farmhouse and, even more to the point, to the barn nearby. Plenty of other autos and carriages and wagons sat by the house. Lucien found a vacant spot. He turned off his headlights and got out of the Chevrolet. Snow crunched under his shoes.

Lamplight spilled out of the barn door. So did the sweet strains of fiddle music. Then, suddenly, a whole band joined in. Galtier shook his head in bemusement. Back in his courting days, nobody had owned a phonograph, either. Music meant real, live musicians. It still could—those fiddlers were real, live human beings. But it didn't have to, not any more.

The band stopped. People in the barn laughed and clapped their hands. Then the music started up again—someone must have turned the record over or put a new one on the phonograph. The live fiddlers joined in.

Lucien blinked against the bright lights inside the barn. He'd got used to the darkness driving over. Couples dipped and swirled in the cleared space in the middle. Men and women watched from the edges

of the action. Some perched on chairs; others leaned against the wall. Quite a few of them were holding mugs of cider or beer or applejack. Galtier sidled toward a table not far from the fiddlers and the phonograph. Berlinguet's wife, Madeleine, a smiling woman of about forty-five, gave him a mug. He sipped. It was cider, cider with a stronger kick than beer.

"Merci," he said. She nodded.

When the next tune ended, François Berlinguet, who was a few years older than Madeleine, pointed toward Lucien. "And here we have the most eligible bachelor in all of the county of Temiscouata, *Monsieur* Lucien Galtier!" His red face and raucous voice said he'd been drinking a lot of that potent cider.

The drunker the people were, the louder they cheered and clapped their hands. "God knows what a liar you are, François, and so do I," Lucien said. Berlinguet bowed, as if at a compliment. Galtier got a laugh. His host got a bigger one.

Trouble was, it hadn't been altogether a lie. Ever since he'd lost Marie, widows had been throwing themselves at Galtier. So had the daughters and granddaughters of friends, acquaintances, and optimistic strangers. He felt no urgent need for a second wife. He'd done his best to make that plain. No one seemed to want to listen to him.

Even though the phonograph was quiet, the fiddlers struck up a tune. People began to dance again. What Lucien noticed was how harsh and ragged the music seemed. When he was young, people had enjoyed whatever music their neighbors made. Some was better, some not quite so good, but what difference did it make?

It made a difference now. People measured neighbors' music not by the standards of other neighbors' music, but against the professionals who made records. What would have been fine a couple of generations before was anything but now. *We're spoiled,* Lucien thought. That hadn't occurred to him before, which made it no less true.

Berlinguet came over to him. "Will you be a wallflower?" he teased.

"If I want to," Galtier answered. "I can do just about anything I want to, it seems to me. I have the years for it."

"But you will break the hearts of all the pretty girls here," his host said. "How can they dance with you if you will not dance?"

"Now that, my friend, that is a truly interesting question," Lucien said. "And now I have another question for you as well: is it that they wish to dance with me, or is it that they wish to dance with my farm and my electricity and my Chevrolet?"

François Berlinguet did him the courtesy of taking him seriously. "It could be that some of them do wish to dance with the farm and the other things. But, you know, it could also be that some of them wish to dance with *you.* Will you take away their chance along with that of the others?"

"I do not know." Galtier shrugged a Gallic shrug. "Truly, I do not. The trouble is, how do I tell with a certainty the ones from the others?"

Before Berlinguet could answer, Dr. Leonard O'Doull and Galtier's daughter, Nicole, walked into the barn. With his long, angular body and fair, Irish-looking face, O'Doull always looked like a stranger in a crowd of Quebecois. But he wasn't a stranger here. He must have treated at least half the people in the barn. Men and women swarmed up to him. Some wanted to talk about their aches and pains. More, though, wanted to talk politics or gossip. Even if he did still sound a little—and only a little—like the American he was, he'd made a place for himself in and around Rivière-du-Loup.

Eventually, he and Nicole came over to Galtier. As François Berlinguet had, O'Doull said, "You're not dancing, *mon beau-père.* Do you think you will wear out all the sweet young things?"

"It could be," Lucien answered. "It could also be that I think they will wear me out. When I want to dance, I will dance. And if I do not care to ... well, who will make me?"

Nicole grabbed his left hand. When she did, her husband plucked the mug of cider out of his right hand. "*I* will make you," she said, and dragged him out toward the middle of the floor. "You don't need to wonder why I want to dance with you, either." She understood him very well.

He wagged a finger at her. "Yes, I know why you want to dance with me. You want to make me look like a fool in front of the entire neighborhood. How is it that you have come down here from town?"

"I talked with Madeleine Berlinguet when she came up to sell some chickens, and she invited us," Nicole answered. "Before too long, you know, little Lucien will want to start coming to dances, too."

The idea that his grandson would soon be old enough to want to dance with girls rocked Galtier back on his heels. Had it really been so many years since little Lucien was born? It had, sure enough.

When the music started—fiddlers playing along with the phonograph—he had to remember where his feet went. Nicole didn't lead too obviously, for which he was grateful. And, once he'd been dancing a little while, he discovered he was having a good time. He didn't intend to admit that, but it was true.

After the song (an import from the USA, with lyrics translated into French) ended, Leonard O'Doull came out and tapped Galtier on the shoulder. "Excuse me, *mon beau-père,* but I am going to dance this next dance with my wife."

"You think so, do you?" Galtier asked in mock anger. "Then what am I to do? Return to wallflowerdom?"

"Is that a word?" His son-in-law looked dubious. "You can go back if you like, or you can find some other lady and dance with her."

"Such choices you give me. I am not worthy," Galtier said, and Leonard O'Doull snorted. Now Lucien did feel like dancing. He touched a woman on the shoulder. He smiled. "Hello, Éloise. May I have this dance?"

"Mais certainement, Lucien." Éloise Granche was a widow of about Nicole's age. She'd lost her husband in a train wreck a little before Lucien lost Marie. If he hadn't known her before, he would have thought that was what gave her an air of calm perhaps too firmly held. In fact, she'd always been like that. Philippe Granche had drunk like a fish; maybe that had more to do with it.

The music started again. Galtier took her in his arms. She was two or three inches shorter than Marie had been, and plumper, too, but not so much that she didn't make a pleasant armful. She danced well. Lucien had to remind himself he needed to say such things.

"And you," she told him when he did. After a moment, she asked, "Is this your first time since...?"

She let that hang, but Galtier understood perfectly well what she meant. "No, not quite," he answered, "but it still seems very strange. How long have you been dancing now?"

"A couple of years," Éloise said. "Yes, it is strange, isn't it? With Philippe, I always knew just what he would do. Other people are surprises, one after another."

"Yes!" He nodded. "They certainly seem to be. And not only on the dance floor, either. The world is a different place now."

"It certainly is for me," she said. "I wasn't so sure it would be for a man."

"Oh, yes. For this man, anyhow." Galtier didn't think he'd ever spoken of his love for Marie outside the bosom of his family. He didn't intend to start now. Even saying so much was more than he'd thought he would do.

Éloise Granche seemed to know what he meant even when he didn't say it. She said, "You have to go on. It's very hard at first, but you have to."

He nodded again. "So I've seen. It *was* hard at first." He hadn't spoken of that even with his family. There had been weeks—months—when he hadn't wanted to get out of bed, let alone get on with his life.

The music stopped. "Thank you for asking me," Éloise said. "That was very pleasant."

"I thought so, too." Lucien hesitated. He hadn't talked with anyone who knew what he was talking about before. She'd traveled down the same road as he. After the hesitation, he plunged: "Shall we also dance the next one?"

"I'd like to," she said briskly. "We've both made the same journey, haven't we?"

"I was just thinking that very thing!" he said in surprise. When he and Marie had the same thought at the same time, he'd taken it for granted. Why not? They'd spent forty years living in each other's pockets. When he did it with a near stranger ... That was a surprise.

Éloise's shrug said it astonished her less than him. "It springs from what we were talking about, I think." The fiddlers began to play. She

swayed forward. They started dancing again, this time without words.

Galtier wondered what Marie would say. Probably something like, *Try not to step on her toes, the way you always did on mine.* Éloise's eyes were closed as they spun around the barn. Her expression said she might have been listening to someone who wasn't there, too. But she was also very much with Lucien.

When the music stopped this time, they both walked over to the table to get some cider. They stood by the wall, talking of this and that, through the next dance—and the next. But Galtier didn't feel like a wallflower any more.

The USS *Remembrance* steamed south, accompanied by a couple of destroyers and a heavy cruiser. Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Sam Carsten smeared zinc-oxide ointment on his nose and the backs of his hands. He knew he would burn anyhow, but he wouldn't burn so badly this way.

Off to the east rose the bleak, almost lunar landscape of Baja California. The *Remembrance* and her companions sailed outside the three-mile limit the Empire of Mexico claimed, but not very far outside it. Their guns and the carrier's aeroplanes could have smashed up that coast or whatever little gunboats the Mexicans sent out to challenge them.

But the Mexicans sent out nothing. Cabo San Lucas wasn't much of a port. No, actually, that wasn't true. It had the makings of a fine harbor—or it would have, if only there were any fresh water close by. Since there wasn't, the protected bay went to waste except for an old gunboat or two and a few fishing trawlers.

Sam turned to Lieutenant Commander Harrison, the assistant officer of the deck. "Sir, may I make a suggestion?"

"Go ahead, Carsten," Roosevelt Harrison replied. The Annapolis ring on the younger officer's finger explained why he was where he was and Sam was where *he* was.

"Thank you, sir," replied Sam, who'd never expected to become an officer at all when he joined the Navy a few years before the Great

War started. "The Confederates have a naval base at Guaymas, sir. Where we are and where we're headed, they might want to use us to give their submersible skippers some practice."

"They aren't supposed to have any submersibles," the assistant OOD said.

"Yes, sir. I know that, sir," Carsten said, and said no more.

Harrison considered. After a few seconds, he said, "You may have a point. I wouldn't trust those bastards as far as I could throw 'em." He cupped his hands in front of his mouth and raised his voice to a shout: "Attention on deck! All hands be alert for submarines in the neighborhood." Sailors hurried to the edge of the deck and peered in all directions, shielding their eyes from the glare of the sun with their palms. Lieutenant Commander Harrison gave his attention back to Sam. "A good thought. I don't believe they'd try anything even if they do have boats in the water, but you're right—stalking us would give them good practice."

"What happens if somebody does spot a periscope?" Carsten asked. "Do we drop ashcans on the submersible?"

"That's a damn good question, and I'm glad the skipper's the one who's got to answer it," Harrison said. "My guess would be no. The Confederates aren't allowed to have any submersibles, but how do we know whatever we spot isn't flying Maximilian's flag?" He and Sam exchanged wry grins; the Empire of Mexico could no more build submarines than it could aeroplane carriers. But where a boat was built had nothing to do with whose flag she flew.

"I don't suppose we can tell, sir," Sam allowed. "Still, if it looks like a boat's getting ready to fire something..."

"Then we're liable to have a war on our hands." The assistant OOD shivered, though the day was fine and warm. "Till I see a wake in the water, I won't order an attack on any submarine we spot. If the skipper has a different notion, that'll be up to him."

Sometimes not having rank was a comfort. Sam knew that from his days as a petty officer. If you weren't important enough to give any really important orders, you couldn't get into really big trouble. When he was a petty officer, he would have figured a lieutenant commander had the clout to screw up in a big way. From Harrison's point of view, though, that exalted status belonged only to the skipper.

Of course, Harrison wasn't thinking small. He was talking about starting a war. Back in Sam's petty-officer days, he couldn't have imagined a decision with that much riding on it. Even though he'd clawed his way up to officer's rank, carrying *that* much responsibility still didn't seem real to him.

It must have to Lieutenant Commander Harrison, though. A little later, Sam saw him talking on a telephone line that led straight to the bridge. And, not too long after that, elevators started lifting aeroplanes from the hangars belowdecks. Pilots raced to the aeroplanes, some of them putting on goggles as they ran. The *Remembrance* turned into the wind, what there was of it. One after another, the aeroplanes roared off the flight deck.

Were they hunting submersibles, too? Carsten couldn't think of anything else they might have in mind. Maybe Captain Stein thought that, if the Confederates were getting in some training, he might as well do the same thing. Or maybe the skipper just believed in wearing both suspenders and belt. In his place, Sam knew he would have.

He wished he could hang around the wireless shack and find out what the aeroplanes were seeing, but the skipper chose that moment to sound general quarters. Maybe it was a drill. Undoubtedly, most of the crew would figure it was. But maybe, too, one of the pilots had spotted something that made him jumpy. The *Remembrance* had been a nervous ship going through the Straits of Florida a few years before, and for many of the reasons also relevant today.

Sam's general-quarters station was deep in the bowels of the ship. He sighed as he hurried down to it. He still wished he had another post besides damage control. He'd been stuck with it for years now, but that didn't mean he liked it. He wished he could see, could be part of, what the ship was doing against its enemies. Cleaning up the mess after the guns and aeroplanes had failed to stop trouble was a lot less appealing.

It was to him, anyhow. Some people wouldn't have done anything else. Some people fancied sauerkraut, too—no accounting for taste. Lieutenant Commander Pottinger found damage control fascinating. He probably liked sauerkraut, too, though Carsten had never asked him about that.

By now, Hiram Pottinger had had more than a year to learn the ropes around the *Remembrance.* He really led the damage-control party, which he hadn't when he first boarded the carrier. Part of Sam

chafed at losing the responsibility that had been his. The rest insisted he'd never wanted that particular responsibility in the first place.

"Do you know anything, Carsten?" Pottinger asked. "Have any idea why the captain called us to general quarters? You like to hang around on the flight deck." By the way he said it, that was a faintly— or maybe more than faintly— reprehensible habit for a damage-control man to have. Sam told what he'd seen and heard. Pottinger frowned. "Do you think it's the real McCoy?"

"Sir, I don't know for sure one way or the other," Carsten answered. "All I know is, it *could* be the McCoy."

"Yes." Pottinger nodded emphatically. "Of course, that's the way we have to treat every general-quarters call—something to remember."

He spoke now to the seamen and petty officers in the party, not to Sam. *Their* nods held varying degrees of impatience. They knew the truth of that better than he did. Most of them had served on the *Remembrance* when the war with Japan broke out. Pottinger hadn't. As far as Sam knew, he hadn't seen combat.

The damage-control party waited, down there in what they knew could easily become their tomb. A torpedo hit in the engine room, and the light bulbs that were the only illumination in this world of narrow steel corridors smelling of paint and oil and sweat would go out, trapping them in the darkness while, all too probably, the sea surged in around them.

Maybe my trouble is too much imagination, Sam thought unhappily. *Damage control's no place for somebody who sees all the things that can go wrong before they do.*

But that thought had hardly crossed his mind before the all-clear sounded. As always, sighs of relief accompanied it. If they seemed more heartfelt than usual this time ... well, they did, that was all.

Reprehensible habit or not, Sam made a beeline for the flight deck as soon as he could leave his station. He soon found out the call to general quarters had been a drill, and hadn't sprung from sighting a submersible or anything else that could have been hostile. That was all to the good.

On steamed the *Remembrance,* into the Gulf of California. She was scrupulous about staying outside the territorial waters of both the

Empire of Mexico and the Confederate States. Legally speaking, she was as much on the high seas as she would have been halfway out from San Francisco to the Sandwich Islands. Somehow, though, neither the Mexicans nor the Confederates seemed to feel that way.

A rusty gunboat flying the Mexican flag chugged out from La Paz to look her over. A Confederate coast-defense battleship, a much more serious threat, steamed into the Gulf from Guaymas. On the open sea, the *Remembrance* could easily have outrun her. Here in these narrow waters, the slow but heavily armored and armed ship had no trouble sticking close.

And, as they had in the Straits of Florida, aeroplanes flew over the *Remembrance.* Her own machines leaped into the air to warn off the intruders. The Confederacy was supposed to have no military aeroplanes, but.... Carsten waited for another general-quarters call. In his time as a seaman and petty officer, he'd served the carrier's five-inch guns. These days, they fired at aeroplanes as well as aiming at targets on land and sea.

When the alarm didn't come, Sam drifted over to the wireless shack. He let out a snort when he found out the strange aeroplanes overhead were labeled confederate citrus company. "What's so funny, sir?" asked a wireless operator, a youngster who hadn't been aboard on that earlier cruise.

"That's the same outfit that eyeballed us when we sailed between Florida and Cuba," Carsten answered. "Do the Confederates even grow citrus over by Guaymas?"

"Damned if I know, uh, sir," the operator said. Sam didn't know, either. He did know the land there would have to be more fertile than the sorry, sunbaked soil of Baja California to give anybody even half a chance.

He didn't know the Confederate Citrus Company was a smoke screen to get around the military restrictions the armistice had imposed on the CSA. He didn't know, but he'd wondered even back in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Here in the Gulf of California, he went from wondering to down-right suspicion.

The wireless operator said, "Sir, shall we remind the skipper the name's the same now as it was then?"

"He's bound to remember," Sam said, but then, "Yes, go ahead and

remind him. It can't hurt, and it might do some good."

He went back out to the flight deck. The aeroplanes from the Confederate Citrus Company seemed about as swift and maneuverable as the ones that had sprung into the air from the *Remembrance's* flight deck. Why would an outfit that dealt with oranges and lemons and limes need machines like that? Carsten didn't know, but he got more suspicious.

About twenty minutes later, the aeroplanes that had flown out from the coast of Sonora suddenly went back the way they'd come. Rumor, which flew faster than any aeroplane, said Captain Stein had warned them he would have his pilots shoot them down if they lingered.

Sam didn't know if the rumor was true. If it was, he didn't know if it was connected to the reminder. But, when he got the news, he said only one word: "Good."

Through the coffeehouse's front window, Nellie Jacobs watched a tweedy man come out of the cobbler's shop across the street. The fellow's long, lean face bore an unhappy expression. She wasn't surprised; the shop had gone to the dogs in the more than three years since her husband, who'd had charge of it from not long after the turn of the century, passed away.

The tweedy man crossed the street, heading her way. He almost walked in front of an auto; the horn's angry bray pierced the plate glass. Nellie wasn't sure the man even realized the horn had been aimed at him. Once safe on the sidewalk again, he took a notebook out of a jacket pocket, consulted it, and then headed for her door.

She brightened. Business hadn't been brisk this morning. Business hadn't been brisk a lot of mornings lately, or afternoons, either. The man pulled at the door when he should have pushed. Realizing his mistake, he tried again. The bell over the door rang.

"What can I get you, sir?" Nellie asked from behind the counter.

"Oh." By the surprise in his voice, he hadn't thought of ordering anything. Then he nodded to himself, deciding he would. "A ... a cup of coffee, please." He set a dime in front of Nellie. Tiny and shiny in

silver, Theodore Roosevelt's toothy grin stared up at her.

"Here you are." She gave him the cup. "Cream and sugar right there." She didn't bother pointing them out to most people, but he might not have noticed without help.

"Thank you," he said, and used them. After a sudden, pleased smile at the coffee, he asked, "Excuse me, but were you acquainted with the gentleman who used to run the cobbler's shop across the street, Mr., uh"—he paused to check that little notebook again—"Harold Jacobs?"

"Was I *acquainted* with him?" Nellie echoed, scorn in her voice. "I should hope I was! Aren't I the mother of his daughter?"

"Oh!" The tweedy man brightened. "Is that why he wasn't there, then? Is he here? May I speak with him, please?"

She eyed him with even more scorn than she'd used while speaking. "Good luck, pal. I wish *I* could. He died in 1933. Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"My name is Maynard G. Ferguson, Mrs. Jacobs." Ferguson used the title with some hesitation, as if unsure she deserved it. She gave him a dirty look. He hurried on: "I am a professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh. I'm studying the way the United States gathered intelligence in Confederate-occupied Washington. Would you know anything about that?"

"I hope I would," Nellie answered. "Haven't I got my own Order of Remembrance, First Class, put on me by Teddy Roosevelt his own self, for the help I gave Hal during the war? What do you need to know?"

"Order of Remembrance, First Class?" Out came the notebook again. After peering into it, Maynard Ferguson said, "Then you would be ... Nellie Semphroch?"

"Not now," she said, as if to an idiot. "You said it yourself—I'm Nellie Jacobs."

"Yes. Of course." Ferguson scribbled in the little book. "Then you would know how information was smuggled out of the city and over to the U.S. lines?"

"I know pigeons were a part of it," Nellie said. "There was a fellow named ... Oh, what was his name? Lou Pfeiffer, that was it! A fellow

named Lou Pfeiffer who used to keep them. You could ask him about the details."

"Mr. Pfeiffer, unfortunately, is deceased. He died in...." Professor Ferguson flipped through the pages of the notebook. "In 1927. In any case, I am not chiefly concerned with the pigeons. I am interested in the man to whom Mr. Jacobs—and every other man in the Washington spy ring—reported, a Mr. William Reach. Were you by any chance acquainted with *him?"*

Ice ran through Nellie. "With Bill Reach?" she said, through lips suddenly numb. "I knew him a little bit, but only a little bit." *And you can't prove anything else, God damn it, not now you can't.* "Why do you want to know about him in particular?"

"Primarily because he's such a man of mystery," Maynard Ferguson replied. "He conducted such an important intelligence campaign throughout the occupation, then disappeared without a trace just before U.S. soldiers retook Washington, D.C. I've been on the trail of that mystery for more than ten years now, ever since I started doing research on this topic, and I'm still hoping to get to the bottom of it."

Well, you won't, not from me. You've just come to the end of the trail. Nellie could have told what she knew, or at least some of it. It was safe enough now, with Hal dead. But she'd been keeping the secret so long, hugging it so tightly to herself, that letting go of it never once crossed her mind. She said, "My best guess is, he was killed in the shelling. An awful lot of people were."

Ferguson looked disappointed. "It could be, I suppose. Somehow, though, I want to believe he had a more dramatic end, and that someone still living knows what it was. He doesn't strike me as the type who would have gone quietly."

A more dramatic end? He did. Nellie still remembered the feel of the knife as she drove it into Bill Reach's chest. *And somebody does know, sure enough. But* you *never will.*

"If you don't know what happened to him, could you at least speak to what he was like?" the man from Pittsburgh asked.

"I didn't like him. He wasn't a gentleman, and he drank too much," Nellie said, and every word of that was true. "I have no idea how he got to be a spy. He was a reporter, wasn't he, back in the days before the war?"

"Yes, that's correct, with the *Star-News,'"* Ferguson said. "How did you know? You are the first person with whom I have spoken who did."

"I ... used to know him back then," Nellie answered unwillingly. "I've lived in Washington all my life. I was here—I think I was five, or maybe seven—when the Confederates shelled us during the Second Mexican War."

"It was in 1881," Maynard Ferguson said. Maybe he was expecting her to tell him how old she'd been then, from which he could figure out exactly how old she was now. She wondered if he'd ever had anything to do with women before. After a moment, realizing she wasn't going to do anything of the sort, he asked, "Were you ... romantically involved with Mr. Reach?"

"No," Nellie said at once, with great firmness. There hadn't been anything romantic about what passed between them in one hotel room or another. He'd laid his money on the dresser, and then she'd done what he paid for. Later, during the war, he'd decided that meant there was something between the two of them. Nellie knew better. She added, "He drank too much even way back then."

"Did he? How interesting!" By the way Professor Ferguson said it, the news really did interest him. "Impressive how he ran and organized a sophisticate spy ring while at the same time battling his drunkenness."

"I don't know what's so impressive about it," Nellie said with a sniff. "I saw him sitting right where you are when he was too drunk to know who I was even though he'd ... known me before." She didn't want to put that pause there, but couldn't help herself. "You can't make me believe that was good for what he was doing."

"But information from Washington kept right on getting to Philadelphia even so," the professor said.

"Yes, and it kept right on getting to Philadelphia even when your precious Bill Reach spent time in jail on account of he stole something or other, or at least the Confederates thought he did," Nellie said.

Ferguson scribbled furiously. "That's fascinating," he said. "It's something else I hadn't heard of, too. I wonder if Confederate records survive to confirm your statement. Hard to guess; much was destroyed in the bombardment, and Reach also might have used an alias with

them. But it's another avenue to explore. How do you suppose the ring continued to function with Reach in custody?"

"I'll tell you how—through my Hal, that's how," Nellie answered proudly. "You know TR gave him a Distinguished Service Cross, I expect. He didn't win that for playing tiddlywinks."

"I'm sure he didn't," Ferguson said. "I wish he were alive today so I could ask him about this entire important period."

"I wish he was alive today because I loved him and I miss him." When she first said she'd marry Hal, there at the end of the Great War, she hadn't dreamt how true that would be. What occasionally passed in their bedroom had next to nothing to do with it—with the large exception of causing Clara, who was the biggest surprise (and one of the most pleasant) Nellie had ever got. What made it true was that Hal had been a *good* man, and even Nellie, who had no use for the male half of the human race, couldn't possibly have had a different opinion.

"I'm sorry," the professor said. He was just being polite, though; Nellie could tell. He asked, "Is there anyone else who could possibly shed light on the way William Reach met his end in 1917, if that is what happened to him?"

"I can't think of anybody else," Nellie answered, which, again, was nothing but the truth. No one had been anywhere close by when Reach tried to rape her and she killed him.

But Professor Ferguson had ideas of his own. "What about your daughter, Edna"—flip, flip, flip went the notebook pages —"Semphroch?"

Even with his fancy research, he still got things wrong. "She's been Edna Grimes for a long time now," Nellie said, "and I guarantee she doesn't know anything about that." She did know about Nellie's scandalous background, though. Would she tell some professor what she knew? Nellie didn't think so, but wasn't a hundred percent sure. Edna had a mean streak in her that came out now and again.

"Didn't she receive a"—flip, flip, flip—"an Order of Remembrance, Second Class, at the same time as you were given your decoration?" Ferguson asked. "How can she be ignorant with that background?"

Nellie laughed in his face. "Easy as pie, that's how. She worked here with me, and sometimes I'd pass on things she told me, things she

heard and I didn't. That's what she got her medal for. She would've married a Confederate officer, you know, if an artillery bombardment hadn't killed him on the way to the altar."

"Oh." Ferguson sounded faintly disappointed—and more than faintly revolted. He was old enough to have fought in the Great War. Like most men who were, he had no love for the Confederate States. He also seemed to have little understanding for what the people of Washington, who'd lived under Confederate occupation for more than two years, had gone through during that time. Nellie wasn't surprised. Few who hadn't lived here then *did* understand.

"You see?" Any which way, Nellie didn't want Ferguson talking to Edna. "Nobody knows nothing about Bill Reach."

Maynard Ferguson sighed. "I suppose not. I hope you realize how frustrating this is for me."

"I'm sorry," said Nellie, who was anything but. "Nothing I can do about it, though." *Nothing I will do about it, anyway.*

The professor left the coffeehouse, head down, shoulders slumped. Nellie put his cup in the sink. She'd never dreamt anybody would come poking after Bill Reach. But it didn't matter. In the end, it truly didn't. Only she knew the answer—only she knew, literally enough, where the body was buried—and she wasn't talking. Not now, not ever.

An aeroplane buzzed over the *Charles XI* as the French liner approached the Confederate coast. Anne Colleton glanced up at the machine, which roared past low enough for her to make out the words confederate citrus company painted on the fuselage in big, bright orange letters. The lines of the aeroplane suggested falcon much more than grouse. She wondered why a citrus company needed such a swift, deadly-looking aircraft.

Beside her, Colonel Jean-Henri Jusserand watched the aeroplane speed back toward the Virginia coast. The Frenchman said, "I suspect it would not be too very difficult to fit this aeroplane with weapons. Would you not agree, *Mademoiselle* Colleton?"

"I would agree that am I an idiot," Anne replied, also in French. "I should have seen that for myself." She kicked at the decking, angry at missing something so obvious.

"But—" Colonel Jusserand stopped, just in time. Anne sent him a sour look. He'd been about to say something like, *But you are only a woman, Mademoiselle Colleton, so how could you be expected to notice such a thing?* Then, fortunately, he'd remembered Anne had spent the last two years in Paris, dickering with some of the more prominent people in *Action Française*—not always the people with fancy titles, but those who could promise results and mean it.

With wry amusement, Anne thought, *But you are only a boy, Colonel Jusserand, so how could you be expected to know anything?* Jusserand was in his mid-thirties, as young as he could be and still have fought in the Great War. He paid attention to Anne as a negotiator, but never once to her as a woman. She had fifteen years on him, give or take a couple. Most of the officers with whom she'd dealt were close contemporaries of the boyish colonel. *Action Française* had, so far, done a better job of pruning deadwood from the French Army than the Freedom Party had of purging the Confederate Army.

The *Charles XI* pressed on toward Norfolk. More aeroplanes buzzed by to examine the liner. All of them said confederate citrus company. They shared the same sleek, dangerous look.

Colonel Jusserand asked, "Will there be an open display of these machines at the Olympic Games?"

"I don't know," Anne said. "I'm a stranger here myself." That held more truth than she felt comfortable admitting. She'd enjoyed her two years in France. She thought she'd helped her country while she was there. But, with Virginia in sight once more, she had to remember what she'd worked so hard to forget: that her time out of the CSA had also been an exile of sorts.

July in Norfolk brought memory flooding back. Though she was close to two hundred miles north of St. Matthews, the heat and humidity reminded her all too much of home. She'd never known weather like this in Paris. She wouldn't have been sorry not to renew acquaintance, either.

When the customs men saw her passport and Colonel Jusserand's, they very quickly became very respectful. "You're on our list, sir, ma'am," one of them said, touching the brim of his cap. He wore a

snappier uniform than he would have when she left the Confederate States, one that made him look like a soldier rather than a functionary. "Our good list, I mean—we've got train tickets to Richmond waiting for both of you, and we'll get you to the station fast as we can."

He kept his promise, too. Anne wondered what sort of treatment she would have got had her name been on a different sort of list. She was just as glad not to have to find out.

Sweating in his brown wool uniform, Colonel Jusserand let out a sigh of relief when their railroad car proved air-conditioned. Anne found herself less delighted; too cold seemed as unpleasant as too hot. But she could add clothes for more warmth. She couldn't take them off outside, not if she wanted to stay decent.

With a cloud of coal smoke erupting from the stack, the locomotive began to roll. Jusserand stared at the countryside, which he was seeing for the first time. "How very many tractors and other farm machines there are," he remarked.

Anne nodded. "More than I remember seeing before I went to France," she said. "A lot more, as a matter of fact. Then there would have been nothing but sharecroppers working the land." *Sharecroppers* had come out in English. She thought for a moment before coming up with a French equivalent: "Tenant farmers."

"With so many machines, who needs men?" Colonel Jusserand said. "Where do you suppose the tenant farmers have gone?"

That was a good question. Anne answered it with no more than a shrug, for she didn't know, either. She did know most of the displaced sharecroppers were colored. Was it like this all over the CSA, or just in this stretch of Virginia? She couldn't guess. If this went on nationwide, what *would* the Confederacy do with all the displaced Negroes? One more question she couldn't answer. But, remembering what Negroes had done to the Marshlands plantation, remembering what they'd almost done to her, she hoped they got everything they deserved.

Night was falling when the train pulled into Richmond from the south. As soon as Anne descended to the platform, someone called her name. All she had to do was answer. As before, uniformed men whisked her and Colonel Jusserand away. She barely had time to note how many people in the station spoke with Yankee accents—men and women down from the USA to see the Olympic Games—before she

and the Frenchman were in a motorcar bound for the Gray House.

No waiting in the waiting room this time, either. Jake Featherston saw them right away. "Congratulations," he told Anne. "I've read every report you sent. You did a first-rate job over there. First-rate, I tell you." He stuck out his hand and gave Colonel Jusserand a big, friendly smile. "And I'm damned pleased to meet you, Colonel. *Action Française"*—he didn't butcher the French too badly—"is doing the same thing for your country that the Freedom Party is for this one."

"Yes, I think so, too." Jusserand spoke good English, though Anne's French was even better. "*Revenge* is a sweet word, is it not?"

He couldn't have said anything better calculated to hit the Confederate president where he lived. "Oh, yes," Featherston said softly. "Oh, yes, indeed. None sweeter. So we *will* be able to count on France when the day comes?"

"That depends," Jusserand answered. "Can *we* count on the CSA if we first find that day?"

Here was something Anne hadn't seen before: someone hustling Jake Featherston. "Like you said, that depends." The president spoke carefully. "You start a fight with the Germans tomorrow afternoon, we'll have to sit out—we aren't ready yet. You give us the chance to get ready, we'll back you all the way."

In Paris, Anne and the Frenchmen with whom she'd dealt had gone round and round over that. The Kaiser's government watched the French as carefully as the United States watched the Confederate States, maybe more carefully. Colonel Jusserand thought so. He said, "You have the advantage over us. You are a large country, with more room to hide what you do not want your neighbors to see. With us, *les Boches* could be anywhere at any time."

"Since we've been good little boys, I don't know what you're talking about," Featherston answered. Even his grin didn't make those long, bony features handsome. But a smiling Jake Featherston made handsomer men seem insipid. Anne had thought so since the first time she met him, back in the days when she thought she could control him. She wasn't wrong very often. When she was, she wasn't wrong in a small way.

"How fortunate you are to have these Olympic Games," Jusserand murmured. "You show your own people and the world the

Confederate States are once more a nation to be reckoned with."

"That's right. That's just exactly right," Featherston said. "You're a pretty sharp fellow, aren't you, Colonel?" The French officer did his best to look modest. His best, as Anne had seen, was unconvincing.

She asked, "How serious are the Negro uprisings, Mr. President? Some of the stories I heard in Paris played them down. The others made it sound as bad as 1915."

"That's crap. It's nothing like 1915—nothing, you hear?" Featherston's voice was hard and cold. "More than a nuisance, less than real trouble, you know what I mean? Bad enough so the USA couldn't say no when we asked to beef up the Army a bit—and we may beef it up a bit more than the damnyankees know about."

He sounds ... pleased the blacks are trying to hit back, Anne realized. *He expected them to, and he was ready to take advantage of it.* She eyed the Confederate president with respect no less genuine for being reluctant. He always seemed to see a move or two further than anybody else.

Featherston went on, "But the hell with that for now." Colonel Jusserand looked shocked; he'd never have sworn in front of a woman. Featherston said, "You're here in Richmond when we've got the Olympics. You want to enjoy yourselves, right? Here." He scribbled on a couple of sheets of paper from a pad on his desk, then handed one to Anne, the other to the Frenchman. "Passes to whatever you want to see. Go on over to the ticket bureau and exchange 'em. Anybody gives you a hard time about it, let me know. I'll make the son of a bitch pay."

No one gave Anne anything close to a hard time. She found that instructive; people in the CSA took Featherston's orders seriously—or at least they'd learned they would be sorry if they didn't. Anne rode a bus to the enormous Olympic stadium on the northern outskirts of town. It hadn't existed when she'd left the country two years earlier. Now the great bowl of marble and concrete, Confederate and Party flags aflutter all around the rim, dominated the skyline in that part of Richmond. Other Olympic buildings and the village where the athletes lived surrounded the stadium.

In the stands near her, Anne heard American accents from both CSA and USA, clipped British tones, Irish brogues, and people speaking French, German, Spanish, Italian, and several languages she

didn't recognize. For that matter, she had trouble following some of the French she heard. When the couple with the odd accent cheered the athletes from the Republic of Quebec, she understood why.

Black men from Haiti and Liberia competed along with everyone else. When a Haitian sprinter won a bronze medal, Jake Featherston looked as if he'd swallowed a big swig of lemon juice. In France, Anne had heard he'd had to accept the Negroes' participation on equal terms, like it or not: otherwise the Games would have gone elsewhere. She wondered how furious Featherston was, and whether he could extract any sort of revenge on the International Olympic Committee.

But that was a question only a handful of insiders would know about. To most citizens of the Confederate States, to most of the swarms of visitors from abroad, all that mattered was whether the Olympics came off well. By that standard, Featherston and the CSA were doing fine.

A Confederate runner narrowly beat a man from the USA in the 800-meter run. The crowd went wild. Anne clapped and yelled as loud as anyone else. She would never be behindhand in cheering for Confederate victories over the damnyankees. She wished there were more of them, and on fields different from the track. *One of these days,* she thought. *Maybe one of these days before too long.*

With a grunt, Clarence Potter rose from the seat he'd been occupying for what seemed like forever. He hadn't wanted to pay for a Pullman berth from Charleston up to the Confederate capital. Now he was paying in a different way: with a sore back, and with eyes gritty from lack of sleep. His seat had reclined, but not far enough. He'd managed to doze a bit on the way north, but he hadn't got nearly enough rest.

As he stood and grabbed his carpetbag from the rack above his head, the weight of the pistol in the shoulder holster reminded him of the weapon's presence. He wondered if Freedom Party goons would be waiting for him when he got off the train. If they were, they'd be sorry.

But no one troubled him on the platform or in the station. He hurried through the cavernous building, and got to the cab stand

outside ahead of most of the other passengers, who'd had to go to the baggage car to retrieve their suitcases.

"Where to, pal?" asked the driver of the frontmost cab when Potter got in. The fellow added, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Potter echoed, hating the word. He felt the weight of the pistol again. "Ford's Hotel, across from Capitol Square."

"Right you are." The cabby put his auto—a middle-aged Ford imported from the USA—into gear, waiting for an opening in the traffic. "You here for the Olympics?"

"That's right." *Among other things,* Clarence Potter thought. "I know they started a couple of days ago, but I couldn't get away from work till now. These days, you hold on tight to a job if you've got one." He'd had more flexibility than he let on, but the driver didn't need to know that.

The fellow nodded. "Ain't it the truth?" he said. "Even this lousy job—I couldn't very well leave, could I? Not if I want my kids to eat, I couldn't. Business was crummy till the Games started, too—you'd best believe that."

"Oh, I do," Potter said solemnly. "Times aren't easy anywhere."

"Yeah." The driver pulled away from the curb. Behind him, the next cab moved up to wait for a passenger.

Richmond had changed since Potter last saw it. Of course, that had been during the dark days at the end of the Great War, when U.S. bombers were methodically knocking the Confederate capital flat. Now it seemed so fresh and clean, someone might have rubbed the buildings and even the sidewalks with soap and water. And maybe someone had, to give visitors the impression Jake Featherston wanted them to have. Potter wouldn't have been surprised.

Freedom Party stalwarts stood on every other corner. They weren't wearing their usual bludgeons, and were giving strangers directions. How long would they stay on their best behavior? Till the Olympics were over, no doubt, and not a minute longer.

In Capitol Square, a Mitcheltown—what the damnyankees called a Blackford-burgh: a shantytown full of people who'd lost their jobs and lost their homes—had flourished for years. It was gone now, with no

sign it had ever existed. Where were those people? Were they all working? Potter laughed under his breath. Not likely. But they were out of sight, which was what mattered to the present masters of the CSA.

Ford's Hotel was a great white pile of a building, with Confederate flags flying everywhere on it. The cab wheezed to a stop in front of the entrance. Potter gave the driver half a dollar, which included a dime tip. He carried his bag up the low stairs leading into the hotel and past the doorman, an immensely tall, immensely fat Negro in a uniform gaudier than any the C.S. Army issued. Potter recalled the getup from his wartime visits to Richmond, though he didn't think this was the same man wearing it.

He checked in, got his room key, and put his clothes on hangers and into drawers, as if he were an ordinary traveler. Then he went downstairs again and spent five cents for a copy of the *Richmond Whig,* which gave him a schedule of Olympic events.

President Featherston will watch the swimming competition tomorrow, one story said, *to cheer on Richmond's own Peter Dawson, who will be aiming for the gold medal in the 400 and 800 meters.* Potter nodded slowly to himself. The swimming stadium would be a good place to try: much smaller than the great bowl where the athletes competed in track and field.

Every story in the paper seemed to glorify Featherston, the Freedom Party, the Olympics, Richmond, or all four at once. What made that particularly disgusting, as far as Potter was concerned, was that, up until the Freedom Party took power, the paper, as its name showed, had been strong for the Whigs. No more. Not many papers in the CSA persisted—or were still able to persist—in opposing the Freedom Party and the president.

"Which is why someone has to do something," Potter murmured. *And who better than me? I should have seen this coming before anybody else. Hell, I did see it coming, but I couldn't take Featherston seriously. My only consolation is, nobody else did, either.*

Without Jake Featherston, what would happen to the Freedom Party? Nothing good. Potter was sure of that. Featherston was the glue that held it together. Take him away, and the pieces would fly apart. They would have to ... wouldn't they?

Potter ate a big steak and a mess of fries in the hotel restaurant.

Then he went up to his room and turned on the wireless. It was full of stories about— what else?—Jake Featherston, the Freedom Party, the Olympics, Richmond, or all four at once. The wireless stories were very smooth, smoother than those in the paper. Whoever had put them together knew what he was doing.

The next morning, Potter ordered a plate of ham and eggs. *The condemned man ate a hearty meal. Well, why not?*

He got another taxi and took it to the swimming stadium. Tickets were three dollars apiece—not the worst daily wage for a working man. Potter set three brown banknotes on the counter, took his ticket, and went inside.

For a tense moment, the smell of chlorine rising from the huge swimming pool put him in mind of Great War gas attacks. He had to fight down panic— had to and did. Then he worked his way toward the presidential box. He couldn't get as close as he would have liked. Freedom Party guards in their almost-Army uniforms surrounded Jake Featherston. Potter sighed. He'd expected nothing different. He would have to wait for his chance, if it ever came.

He settled into his seat, right by an aisle that gave him at least the illusion of a chance to get away. He drummed his fingers on his thigh. How long would Featherston watch? Would he go do something else before Potter found a chance? *You'll find out,* Potter told himself. *Wait. See what happens.*

While he waited, he watched the swimmers. He cheered "Richmond's own Peter Dawson" as loudly as any of the men around him with their Freedom Party pins. He'd always thought of himself as a patriot. The difference was that, to him, Confederate patriotism didn't start and stop with the Party.

Dawson didn't win the gold in the 400 meters; a swimmer from Sweden did, by several lengths. But the hometown hero did win a silver medal. Better yet, he outkicked a man from the USA to do it. Cheers rang through the swimming stadium. After shaking the Swede's hand, Dawson pulled himself from the pool and waved to the crowd.

"Frankfurters! Git your frankfurters! Twenty-five cents! Frankfurters!" The colored vendor roamed up and down the aisles, hawking the sausages. Clarence Potter handed the man—whose graying hair said they were about of an age—a quarter. He got back a frankfurter on a bun wrapped in waxed paper. As Potter unwrapped it

and began to eat, the Negro hurried up the aisle once more. "Frankfurters! Git your frankfurters!"

The medalists got up onto the victory stand. A pretty girl put the medals— gold, silver, bronze—around their necks. They all grinned and shook hands with one another. A band blared out what Potter presumed to be the Swedish national anthem, though he didn't recognize it. Up went the Swedish flag, yellow cross on blue. The Stars and Bars and the Stars and Stripes rose on flagpoles to its right and left.

When the anthem ended, the three young men descended from the platform. They were still chattering excitedly. Peter Dawson and the swimmer from the USA might have been friends. Maybe they were. Potter wondered how often they'd raced against each other, how well they knew each other.

"Frankfurters! Twenty-five cents! Git your frankfurters!" Here came the vendor again, distracting Potter—and everyone around him—from the joy of the moment. Back in the Roman days, vendors at the Colosseum selling dormice in honey had probably made people miss the best moments of lions devouring Christians.

The Negro paused by Potter, taking another frankfurter from the enameled metal box he wore at his waist. A sweat-stained canvas strap that went around his neck supported the box, leaving his hands free. He handed the sausage to a woman across the aisle, got back a dollar banknote, and gave her three quarters in change.

"Frankfurters! Git your frankfurters here!" The vendor stopped again, two or three steps farther down. For a moment, that meant nothing to Clarence Potter. Then he realized no one there had called or waved for a frankfurter. The Negro reached into the box just the same. What he pulled out this time wasn't a bun wrapped in waxed paper. It was a submachine gun with the stock sawed off short to make it easier to hide. With a wordless shout of fury and hate, he aimed it in Jake Featherston's direction and started shooting.

Guards toppled, wounded or dead. People screamed. The president of the CSA went down, too. Did he dive for cover, or was he hit? Potter didn't know. He *did* know the surviving guards were going to fill the Negro full of lead ... and probably everyone around the fellow, including himself. With hardly any conscious thought, his own pistol sprang into his hand. He shot the Negro in the back of the head.

The colored man crumpled as if all his bones had turned to mush. He was surely dead before he hit the stairs. By sheer luck, the submachine gun didn't spray any more bullets when it clattered off the concrete. *You poor damned fool,* Potter thought. *If you'd only waited a little longer, I would have tried to do it for you. Now—sweet Jesus, maybe I've gone and saved Jake Featherston's worthless life.*

"Drop it!" Four Freedom Party guards screamed the words at the same time. They pointed Tredegars and submachine guns of their own at Potter. Very slowly and carefully, he laid down the pistol.

"Don't shoot him!" somebody close by called. "He just killed that goddamn nigger—and where the hell were *you?"*

"That's right!" someone else said, voice cracking with excitement. "He's a hero! He just saved President Featherston!"

Those rifle barrels didn't waver, but the guards held their fire. *Maybe I didn't save him,* Potter thought hopefully. *Maybe he got one right between the eyes. Maybe...*

But no. Jake Featherston stuck his head up. He had a pistol in his hand. He wouldn't have been easy meat for anyone. *With a little luck, he won't recognize me,* Potter thought. He *hasn't seen me for years, after all.*

Featherston's eyes widened. He recognized Potter, all right. Then one of his guards—who didn't—said, "This guy killed the nigger who was shootin' at you, sir." Other people called Potter a hero, too. Hero, here, was the last thing he wanted to be. But he was stuck with it—and so was Jake Featherston.

Back in the Gray House, Jake Featherston gulped down a whiskey and set the glass on the presidential desk. Across the desk from him, Clarence Potter, annoyingly calm, sipped from a drink of his own. Jake said, "So you were sitting right there close to me, and you just happened to have a pistol in a shoulder holster."

"I didn't just happen to have it." Potter sounded annoyingly calm, too. "I'm an investigator. Some of the things I investigate are pretty unsavory. I always have a pistol where I can grab it in a hurry."

"And you never once thought of plugging me?" Featherston said.

"Of course not," Potter answered. His face said, *If I did, do you think I'm dumb enough to admit it?*

A silent aide set a piece of paper on Featherston's desk. His gaze flicked down it. When he was done, he eyed Potter again. "You've been a busy boy down in Charleston, haven't you? It's a wonder you're still running around loose."

"You come right out and admit that?" Potter said.

"Admit what?" Jake's smile was all teeth and no mirth. "You say I said it—you say I said it and you get anybody to print what you say—and I'll call you a liar to your face. How are you going to prove anything different?"

Potter took another sip from his drink. "A point." He wasn't just a cool customer. He was a cold fish.

"So what the hell am I going to do with you?" Jake wondered aloud. "You hate my guts, but you shot that nigger before any of my guards could."

He'd had bullets whistle past his ear before. The frankfurter seller who'd tried to do him in couldn't shoot worth a damn. The first couple of rounds had been near misses, but then the submachine gun had pulled up and to the right, as such weapons did all too often. Ten or twelve people were hurt, some of them badly, but not Jake. And, by failing, the Negro had handed the Freedom Party a whole new club with which to beat his race.

That could wait—for a little while, anyhow. "What *am* I going to do with you?" Featherston repeated.

With a shrug, Clarence Potter said, "Give me a medal and send me home."

Featherston shook his head. "Nope. You'd be back. And who knows? You might not miss. If I send you home, you'd have to have an accident pretty damn quick."

"You don't care what you say, do you?" Potter remarked. "You never did."

"I already told you, you're not going to make a liar out of me," Jake said. "Tell you what I'll do, though, since I owe you for this, and since you were damn near the only officer I knew during the war who had any sense at all." He leaned forward. "How'd you like to go back in the Army ... Colonel Potter?"

In spite of Potter's calm façade, his eyes widened. "You mean that," he said slowly.

"Damn right I do. I can get some use out of you, and so can the country. About time we had some intelligence in Intelligence, goddammit. And I can keep an eye on you that way, too. What do you say?"

"If I tell you no, I wind up dead," Potter answered. "What do you think I'm going to say?"

You can end up just as dead in a butternut uniform as you can in slacks and a jacket, Jake thought. But he wasn't sorry Potter had said yes. The other man was a prim son of a bitch, but he had brains and he had nerve. He'd proved that during the war, in the swimming stadium, and—Jake's eyes again traveled down the list of some of the things Potter had done in Charleston—in between times, too, even if he'd been on the wrong side then. He could do the CSA a lot of good if he wanted to.

"All right, Colonel," Featherston said. "We'll go from there, then." He stuck out his hand. Potter didn't hesitate more than a heartbeat before shaking it.

Watching Potter walk out the door with a flunky reminded Jake of something else, a piece of business he wondered why he'd left unfinished. He picked up the telephone and spoke into the mouthpiece. He'd taken too many orders in his time. He liked giving them a lot better.

He had to wait a while before this order was carried out. Normally, he didn't like waiting. Here, though, he composed himself in patience and went through some of the endless paperwork on his desk. *If I'd known how much paperwork went with the job, I might've let Willy Knight he president of the Confederate States.* But he shook his head. That might be funny, but it wasn't true. The paperwork didn't just go with the job; in large measure, the paperwork *was* the job.

His secretary poked her head into the office. "General Stuart is here

to see you, Mr. President."

"Thanks, Lulu." Jake's smile was large and predatory. "You send him right on in."

In marched Jeb Stuart Jr., his back as stiff as an old man could make it. He was a year or two past seventy, his chin beard and hair white, his uniform hanging slightly loose on a frame that had begun to shrink. He looked at Featherston with gray-blue eyes full of hate. His salute might have come from a rickety machine. "Mr. President," he said tonelessly.

"Hello, General," Featherston said, that fierce grin still on his face. "We meet again." He waved to a chair. "Sit down."

"I prefer to stand."

"Sit down, I said," Jake snapped, and Stuart, startled, sank into the chair. Featherston nodded. "Remember the last time you paid a call on me, General? You were gloating, on account of I was down. You reckoned I was down for good. You weren't quite as smart as you reckoned, were you?"

"No, sir." Jeb Stuart Jr.'s voice remained stubbornly wooden.

"Do you recollect Clarence Potter, General Stuart?" Featherston asked. Doing his best to remain impassive, Stuart nodded. Featherston went on, "I just brought him back into the Army—rank of colonel."

"That is your privilege, Mr. President." Stuart did his best not to make things easy.

His best wasn't going to be good enough. Jake had the whip hand now. "Yeah," he said. "It is. You screwed his career over just as hard as you screwed mine. And for what? I'll tell you for what, God damn you. On account of we were right, that's what."

Jeb Stuart Jr. didn't answer. During the war, Jake had served in a battery commanded by Jeb Stuart III, his son. He'd suspected Pompey, the younger Stuart's colored servant, of being a Red. He'd said as much to Potter. Jeb Stuart III had used his family influence, and his father's, to get Pompey off the hook. The only trouble was, Pompey *had* been a Red. When that proved unmistakably clear, Jeb Stuart III had thrown his life away in combat rather than face the music. And Jeb Stuart Jr. had made sure neither Featherston nor Potter saw

another promotion through the rest of the war.

"Did you reckon I'd forget, General Stuart?" Jake asked softly. "I never forget that kind of thing. Never, you hear me?"

"I hear you, Mr. President," Stuart said. "The high respect I hold for your office precludes my saying more."

"For my office, eh? Not for me?" Featherston waited. Again, Jeb Stuart Jr. didn't answer. Jake shrugged. He knew the older man blamed him for Jeb Stuart III's death. *Too damn had,* he thought. In spite of his campaign promises, he'd walked softly around the Army up till now. He hadn't been quite ready to clean house. All of a sudden, he was—and surviving an assassination attempt would do wonders for his popularity, cushion whatever anger there might have been. "I accept your resignation, General."

That struck home. Stuart glared. He'd spent fifty-five years in the Confederate Army; he'd been a boy hero in the Second Mexican War, and had never known or wanted any other life. "You don't have it, you ... you damned upstart! " he burst out.

Upstart? Jake knew he was one. The difference between him and Stuart— between him and all the swarms of Juniors and IIIs and IVs and Vs in the CSA—was that he was proud of it. "No resignation?" he said. Jeb Stuart Jr. shook his head. Featherston shrugged. "All right with me. In that case, you're fired. Don't bother cleaning out your desk. Don't bother about your pension, either. You're finished, as of now."

"I demand a court-martial," Stuart said furiously. "What are the charges against me, damn you? I've been in the Army and risking my life for my country since before you were a gleam in your white-trash father's eye. And not even the president of the Confederate States of America has the power to drum me out without my day in court."

"White trash, is it?" Featherston whispered. Jeb Stuart Jr. nodded defiantly. "All right, Mr. Blueblood. All right," Jake said. "You want charges, you stinking son of a bitch? I'll give you charges, by Christ!" His voice rose and went harsh and rough as a rasp: "Yeah, I'll give you charges. Charges are aiding and abetting your inbred idiot son, Captain Jeb fucking Stuart III, in hiding that his prissy little nigger called Pompey was really a goddamn Red. I'll take you down, cocksucker, and I'll take your stinking brat down with you. There won't be a place in the CSA you can hide in by the time I'm done with

you two, you'll stink so bad. And so will he."

The color drained from Jeb Stuart Jr.'s face. It wasn't just that no one had talked to him like that in all his life. But no one had ever gone for the jugular against him with such fiendish gusto. He was white as typing paper when he found his voice, choking out, "You—You wouldn't. Not even you would stoop so low."

Jake smiled savagely. "Try me. You want a court, that's what you'll get."

"G-Give me a pen, God damn you," Stuart said. Featherston did, and paper to go with it. The officer's hand shook as he wrote. He shoved the paper back across the desk. *I resign from the Army of the Confederate States, effective immediately,* he'd written, and a scrawled signature below the words. "Does that satisfy you?"

"Damn right it does. I've been waiting for it for twenty years," Jake answered. "Now get the hell out of here. You start feeling unhappy, just remember you're getting off easy."

Jeb Stuart Jr. stormed from the office. He slammed the door as he went. Jake laughed. He'd heard a lot of slams since becoming president. This one didn't measure up to some of the others.

After a moment, Jake called, "Lulu?"

"Yes, Mr. President?" his secretary said.

"Give Saul Goldman a buzz for me, will you?" Featherston was always polite to Lulu, if to nobody else. "Tell him I want to talk with him right away."

When he said *right away* to Goldman, the skinny little Jew, who got the Freedom Party's message out to the country and the world, took him literally. He got to Jake's office within five minutes. "What can I do for you, Mr. President?"

"General Jeb Stuart Jr. just resigned." Featherston flourished the sheet of paper with the one-line message. "I'm going to tell you why he resigned, too." He gave Goldman the story of Jeb Stuart III and Pompey.

Goldman blinked. "You want me to announce that to the country? Are you sure?"

"Damn right I do. Damn right I am." Jake nodded emphatically. "Let people know why he left. Let 'em know we'll be cleaning out more useless time-servers soon, too. That's the angle I want you to take. Reckon you can handle it?"

"If that's what you want, Mr. President, that's what you'll get," Goldman said.

"That's what I want," Jake Featherston declared. And sure as hell, what he wanted, he got.

Jefferson Pinkard stood in line at the Odeum, waiting to buy a ticket. When he got up to the window, he shoved a quarter at the fellow behind it. He took the ticket and walked inside. After a pause at the concession stand, he went into the darkness of the theater, popcorn and a Dr. Hopper in hand.

He sat in the middle of a row, so people going by wouldn't make him spill the popcorn or the soda. As soon as he was settled, he started methodically munching away. No one else sat very close to him, maybe because of the noise. He didn't care. He wasn't there for company. He was there to kill a couple of hours.

The maroon velvet curtains slid back to either side of the stage, revealing the screen. In the back of the theater, the projector began to hum and whir. SMOKING IS PROHIBITED IN THIS AUDITORIUM appeared on the screen, then vanished.

Most of the people in the Odeum came from Fort Deposit. They leaned forward almost in unison, knowing the newsreel was coming up next. Pinkard leaned forward with them. Since coming to work at the Alabama Correctional Camp (P), he'd felt far more cut off from the world around him than he ever had up in Birmingham. If not for wireless and moving pictures, the outside world would hardly have touched this little Alabama town.

"In Richmond, the Olympic Games came to a magnificent conclusion!" the announcer blared. "The Confederate States have shown the world they are on the move again, thanks to President Featherston and the Freedom Party."

"Freedom!" somebody in the auditorium called, and the chant rang out. Jeff was glad to join it, but it didn't last; people couldn't chant and hear what the announcer was saying at the same time.

Confederate athletes with the C.S. battle flag on their shirtfronts ran and jumped and swam and flung javelins. Smiling, they posed with medals draped around their necks. President Featherston posed with them, shaking their hands in congratulations. He turned to face

the camera and said, "We're a match for anybody—more than a match for anybody. And nothing's going to stop us from getting where we're going."

Suddenly, the camera cut away from the athletes. It lingered on the crumpled corpse of a black man, and on the submachine gun half visible under his body. "This stinking, worthless nigger tried to assassinate our beloved president, who sat watching the athletic competition," the announcer declared. "Thanks to the heroism of a Great War veteran, he paid the price for his murderous folly."

Another camera cut. The bespectacled white man standing beside Jake Featherston didn't look like a veteran; he put Pinkard more in mind of a professor. Featherston spoke again: "Those damn blacks—beg your pardon, folks—stabbed us in the back during the war. They're trying to do it again. This time, though, we're good and ready for 'em, and we won't let 'em get away with it."

Murmurs of agreement ran through the Odeum. Fort Deposit was in the Black Belt, but no black faces had been visible in the theater before the lights went down. Indeed, armed guards outside and on the roof made sure no marauding Negroes would cause trouble while the motion picture played.

At the Olympic closing ceremonies, smartly turned-out Confederate soldiers ringed the stadium, protecting it as the guards protected the theater here. Aeroplanes with the words confederate citrus company painted in big letters on their sides streaked low above the stadium. They flew wingtip to wingtip, in formations only professional pilots who were also daredevils would have tried.

They could fight if they had to, Pinkard realized. He wondered if they were Great War veterans, or if they'd picked up their experience flying for Maximilian in the Mexican civil war. That didn't matter. Wherever they'd got it, they had the right stuff. So did the machines they flew: sleek low-winged metal monoplanes that made the slow, sputtering canvas-and-wire contraptions of the Great War seem like antiques by comparison.

After a moment's pause, the newsreel shifted subjects. veteran steps down, a card said. "Jeb Stuart Jr., who first came to prominence in the Second Mexican War more than fifty years ago, has left the Confederate General Staff after revelations about his unfortunate role in failing to prevent the Red uprising of 1915," the announcer said. On the screen, Stuart looked ancient indeed, ancient and doddering.

"President Featherston will soon name a younger, more vigorous replacement."

Other newsreel snippets showed dams rising in the Tennessee River valley, tractors plowing, and other machines harvesting. "Agriculture makes great strides," the announcer said proudly. "Each machine does the work of from six to six hundred lazy, shiftless sharecroppers." The camera panned across shabbily dressed colored men and women standing in front of shanties.

"And in lands stolen from the CSA after the war, in Sequoyah and the part of occupied Texas miscalled Houston..." The announcer fell silent. The pictures of dust in dunes, in drifts, in blowing, choking curtains, spoke for themselves. Leaning forward against a strong wind, a man lurched through drifted dust towards a farmhouse with a sagging roof. His slow, effortful journey seemed all but hopeless. So did the wail of a baby on the lap of a scrawny woman in a print dress. She sat on the front porch of a house whose fields lay dust-choked and baking under a merciless sky.

Gloating, the announcer said, "This is how the United States care for the lands they took from their rightful owners."

"Damnyankees," a woman behind Pinkard whispered.

After those grim scenes, the serial that followed came as something of a relief. It portrayed a pair of Confederate bunglers who'd ended up in the Army during the war and had escape after unlikely escape. Jeff knew it was ridiculous, but couldn't help laughing himself silly.

The main feature was more serious. It was a love story almost thwarted by a colored furniture dealer who kept casting lustful looks toward the perky blond heroine. Pinkard wanted to kick the Negro right in the teeth. That the people who'd made the motion picture might want him to react just like that never once crossed his mind.

He rose and stretched when the picture ended, well pleased that the black man had got what was coming to him. Then he left the theater and walked over to the bus that would take him back to the Alabama Correctional Camp (P). The bus was heavily armored, with thick wire grating over the windows. Pinkard wasn't the only white passenger who drew a pistol before boarding. Here at the edge of the Black Belt, rebellion still sizzled. He wanted to be able to fight back if the Negroes shot up the bus. His heart thudded in his chest when the machine got rolling.

It reached the Alabama Correctional Camp (P) without taking fire. Jeff breathed a sigh of relief when he got off. Two sandbagged machine-gun nests guarded the front entrance. They were new. Black raiders hadn't been shy about shooting into the camp, and didn't seem to care whether they hit guards or prisoners. New belts of barbed wire ringed the place, too. They were as much to keep marauders out as they were to keep inmates in.

Jeff's white skin was enough to get him past the machine-gun nests unchallenged. At what had been the entrance, another guard carefully scrutinized both him and his identity card. "Oh, for Christ's sake, Toby," he fumed, "you know goddamn well who I am."

"Yeah, I do," the lower-ranking guard said, "but I gotta be careful. There was that camp in Mississippi where one of the prisoners managed to sneak out with a phony card."

"You ever hear of anybody sneaking *in* with a phony card?" Jeff demanded. Toby only shrugged. Pinkard let it go. He couldn't complain too hard, not when the camp needed solid security.

A mosquito bit him on the back of the neck. He swatted and missed. Its buzz as it flew away sounded as if it were laughing at him. The camp lay quiet in the summer night. Snores floated out the windows of the prisoners' barracks. Men who'd proved too enthusiastic about being Whigs or Rad Libs weren't going anywhere—except for hasty trips to the latrines.

"What do you say, Jeff?" a guard called as Pinkard headed toward his much more comfortable barracks. "How was the picture?"

"Pretty good, Charlie," he answered. "Got to do something about those damn niggers, though. That one who took a shot at the president..." He caught himself yawning and didn't go on. Instead, he just said, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Charlie echoed. It was a handy word when you wanted to say something without bothering with a real conversation.

Pinkard's mattress creaked when he lay down. In the warm, muggy darkness, he was some little while falling asleep. He'd laid out the camp with room to grow. The expanded security perimeter had come from that extra room, which was fine. The land was there, for whatever reason. If it hadn't been, that would have caused a problem. As things were ... As things were, he rolled over and slept.

Reveille woke him. He got out of bed, put on a fresh uniform, washed his face and shaved, and went out to look at morning roll call and inspection. The politicals were lined up in neat rows. They wore striped uniforms like any convicts, with a big white P stenciled on the chest and back of each shirt and the seat of each pair of trousers.

Guards counted them off and compared the tally to the number expected. When Pinkard saw the count start over again, he knew the numbers didn't match. The politicals groaned; they didn't get fed till everything checked out the way it was supposed to. One of them said, "Take off your shoes this time, goddammit!"

Without even pausing, a guard walking by backhanded the talky prisoner across the face. The political clapped his hands to his nose and mouth, whereupon the guard kicked him in the belly. He fell to the ground, writhing.

Jeff ate breakfast with assistant wardens not involved in the count. Ham and eggs and grits and good hot coffee filled him up nicely. When the count finally satisfied the guards making it, the prisoners got the very same breakfast—except for the ham and eggs and coffee.

One of the assistant wardens said, "I hear we've got some new fish coming in today."

"Yeah?" Jeff pricked his ears up. "What kind of new fish?"

"Blackfish," the other man answered.

"Niggers?" Pinkard said, and the other fellow nodded. Jeff swore. "How the hell are we going to keep 'em separate? Nobody said nothin' about niggers when we were laying out this place."

"What the devil difference does it make?" the other fellow said. "Half the bastards we've got in here—shit, more than half—they're already nigger-lovers. Let 'em stick together with their pals." He laughed.

To Jeff, it wasn't a laughing matter. "They'll make trouble," he said dolefully. He didn't want trouble—he didn't want trouble the prisoners started, anyhow. He wanted things to go smoothly. That made him look good.

With a shrug, the other assistant warden said, "They won't bust out, and that's all that matters. And how much trouble can they make?

We've got the guns. Let 'em write the governor if they don't like it." He guffawed again. So did Pinkard—that was funny.

Sure enough, the colored prisoners came in a little before noon. Some of them were wounded, and went into the meager infirmary. The rest ... The rest reminded Jeff of the Red rebels he'd fought just after he got conscripted into the C.S. Army. With them inside it, this camp would need more guards. He was morally certain of that. What, after all, did these skinny, somber Negroes have left to lose?

"Yankees go home! Yankees go home! Yankees go home!"

The endless chant worried Irving Morrell. He stood up in the cupola of his barrel, watching the crowd in the park in Lubbock. Trouble was in the air. He could feel it. It made the hair on his arms and at the back of his neck want to stand up, the way lightning did before it struck. Not enough men here, in the restless—hell, the rebellious—state of Houston; not enough barrels, either. They hadn't been able to clamp down on things here and make them stay quiet.

What do you expect? he asked himself. *We've got that long, long border with Confederate Texas, and agitators keep slipping over it. They keep sneaking guns across it, too, not that there weren't plenty here already.*

As if on cue—and it probably was—the crowd in the park changed their cry: "Plebiscite! Plebiscite! Plebiscite!" Morrell's worry eased, ever so slightly. Maybe they were less likely to do anything drastic if they were shouting for a chance to vote themselves back into the CSA.

From the gunner's seat, Sergeant Michael Pound said, "By God, sir, we ought to let Featherston have these bastards back. They'd be just as unruly for him as they are for us."

"I'm not going to tell you you're wrong, Sergeant, but that's not what our orders are," Morrell answered. "We're supposed to hold Houston, and so we will."

"Yes, sir." By his tone, Pound would sooner have dropped the place. Morrell had trouble blaming him. As far as he was concerned, the Confederates were welcome to what had been western Texas. But he

didn't give orders like that. He only carried them out, or tried.

When trouble started, it started very quickly. The crowd was still chanting, "Plebiscite! Plebiscite!" Morrell barely heard the pop of a pistol over the chant and over the rumble of the barrel's engine. But he realized what was going on when a soldier in U.S. green-gray slumped to the ground, clutching at his belly.

The rest of the soldiers raised their rifles to their shoulders. The crowd, like most hostile crowds in Houston, had nerve. It surged forward, not back. Rocks and bottles started flying. The soldiers opened fire. So did people in the crowd who'd held back up till then.

Morrell ducked down into the turret. "It's going to hell," he told Pound. "Do what you have to do with the machine gun."

"Yes, sir," the gunner answered. "A couple of rounds of case shot from the main armament, too?"

Before Morrell could answer, three or four bullets spanged off the barrel's armor plate. "Whatever you think best," he said. "But we're going to dismiss this crowd if we have to kill everybody in it."

"Yes, sir," Michael Pound said crisply; that was an order he could appreciate. "Case shot!" he told the loader, and case shot he got. He had never been a man to do things by halves.

Despite the gunfire, Morrell stood up in the cupola again. He wanted to see what was going on. A bullet cracked past his ear. The turret traversed through a few degrees, bringing the main armament to bear on the heart of the crowd. The cannon bellowed at point-blank range. Barrels carried only a few rounds of case shot, for gunners seldom got the chance to use it. Sergeant Pound might have fired an enormous shotgun at the rioting Houstonians. The results weren't pretty, and another round hard on the heels of the first made them even more grisly.

People ran then. Not even trained troops could stand up to that kind of fire. Sergeant Pound and the bow gunner encouraged them with a series of short bursts from their machine guns. The other barrel in the park was firing its machine guns, too, and the soldiers were pouring volley after volley into the dissolving crowd. Such treatment might not make the Houstonians love the U.S. government, but would make them pay attention to it.

They had nerve, even if they had no brains to speak of. Some men lay down behind corpses and kept shooting at the U.S. soldiers. And a whiskey bottle with a smoking wick arced through the air and smashed on the front decking of Morrell's barrel.

It smashed, spilling flaming gasoline across the front of the machine. "God damn it!" Morrell shouted in furious but futile rage. What soldiers here in Houston called Featherston fizzes had proved surprisingly dangerous to barrels. Flames spread over paint and grease and dripped through every opening, no matter how tiny, in the fighting compartment. "Out!" Morrell yelled. "Everybody out!" He ducked back into the turret to scream the same message into the speaking tube, to make sure the driver and bow gunner heard him.

Then he scrambled out the cupola and down the side of the barrel. Escape hatches at the bow and on either side of the turret flew open. The rest of the crew got out through them, closely followed by growing clouds of black smoke. "Move away!" Sergeant Pound shouted. "When the ammo starts cooking off—"

Morrell needed no more encouragement. Neither did any of the other crewmen. They put as much ground between them and the doomed machine as they could. Morrell looked back over his shoulder. Smoke was pouring out of the cupola now, too. A moment later, the most spectacular fireworks display this side of the Fourth of July in Philadelphia finished the barrel.

"Do you know what we need, sir?" Pound said. "We need a good fire extinguisher in there. Could make a lot of difference."

"I'm not going to tell you you're wrong, because you're—" Morrell knew he was repeating himself. A bullet thudded into a tree trunk behind his head. He threw himself flat. So did the rest of the barrel crew. Lying on his belly, he finished with such aplomb as he could muster: "—not. But do you think you could remind me about it when I haven't got other things to worry about, like getting my ass shot off?"

"That was your ass, sir?" Michael Pound asked innocently, and Morrell snorted. Pound said, "I will, sir; I promise." Morrell believed him; he wouldn't forget something like that. The sergeant went on, "It did cross my mind just now for some reason or other."

"Really? Can't imagine why." Still prone, Morrell watched another Houstonian get ready to fling a Featherston fizz at the second barrel in the park. A U.S. soldier shot him in the arm before he could let fly.

The incendiary dropped at his feet, broke, and engulfed him in flames. A shrieking torch, he ran every which way until at last, mercifully, he fell and did not rise.

"Serves him right," Sergeant Pound said savagely. Morrell would have been hard pressed to argue, and so didn't try.

What happened to the fizz-flinger sufficed to scare even the Houstonians. Still shouting, "Freedom!" they fled the park. Soldiers in green-gray moved among the wounded. They weren't helping them; they were methodically finishing them off, with single gunshots or with the bayonet.

"Grim work," Pound said, getting to his feet, "but necessary. Those people won't see reason, and so we might as well be rid of them."

"You kill everybody who doesn't want to see reason, people will get mighty thin on the ground mighty fast," Morrell remarked as he too got up and brushed off his coveralls.

"Oh, yes, sir," the sergeant agreed. "But if I kill everybody who won't see reason and who's trying to kill me, I'll sleep better of nights and I'm a lot likelier to live to get old and gray."

Sometimes perfect bloodthirstiness made perfect sense. This did seem to be one of those times. Morrell mournfully eyed the burning barrel, which still sent a thick column of black, stinking smoke up into the brassy sky.

Sergeant Pound looked toward the barrel, too. His thoughts, as usual, were completely practical: "I wonder how long they'll take to ship a replacement machine down here."

"Depends," Morrell said judiciously. "If Hoover wins the election come November, it'll be business as usual. But if it's Al Smith, and the Socialists get back in..." He shrugged.

Sergeant Pound made a sour face. So did the rest of the barrel crew. Pound said, "I'm going to vote for Hoover, too. What sane man wouldn't? And yet, you know, it's a funny thing. Charlie La Follette makes a ten times better vice president than what's-his-name running with Hoover—Borah, that's it."

"Bill Borah's got no brains to speak of. I won't argue that," Morrell said. "Still, you have to vote the party, and the man at the top of the

ticket. Odds two presidents in a row would drop dead are pretty slim."

"Oh, yes, sir. Certainly. I said the same thing." Pound wasn't currying favor. Morrell didn't think such a ploy had ever occurred to the gunner. If it had, he would have become an officer years ago. He *had* said that, and was just reminding Morrell of it.

A lieutenant with a .45 still in his hand strode up to the barrel crew. Seeing Morrell's eagles, he started to come to attention. Morrell waved for him not to bother. "Aren't you glad we're in the USA, sir?" the young officer said. "If we're not careful, though, they'll send us to a country where the people don't like us."

Morrell clamped down hard on a laugh. If he started, he wasn't sure he could stop. "I've served in Canada, Lieutenant," he said carefully. "It's nothing like this. The Canucks don't like us, but even the ones who shoot at us aren't... wild men like these."

"Oh, good." Real relief showed in the lieutenant's voice. "I thought it was just me. I couldn't imagine how they held their ground so long with the punishment they took."

He might still have been making messes in his drawers when the Great War ended. Wearily, Morrell said, "People will do all kinds of mad things when their blood is up, son." He hadn't intended to add that last word, but the lieutenant had to be young enough to suit it, and hadn't seen a quarter of the things Morrell had. Only after a couple of seconds did Morrell realize that made the other man lucky, not unlucky.

The lieutenant had seen enough to keep a firm grip on fundamentals: "A lot of those bastards won't get their blood up again, on account of it's *out."*

"I know," Morrell said. "That's the way it's supposed to work."

"Yeah." Shaking his head, the lieutenant went away. His feet were unsteady, as if he'd had too much to drink. Morrell knew he hadn't. He'd simply seen too much. That could produce a hangover of its own, and one more painful than any that sprang from rotgut.

Sergeant Pound said, "We're alive and they're dead, and that's how I like it."

Ammunition was still cooking off inside the burning barrel. The

flames had caught in the dry grass under it. Had the grass been less sparse, the fire would have spread farther and been more dangerous. Beyond the barrel lay the dead men—and a few women, too—who'd wanted to drag the state of Houston back into the CSA.

Morrell took a pack of cigarettes—Raleighs, from the Confederate States— out of the breast pocket of his coveralls and lit one. A moment later, he stubbed it out in the dirt. The smoke seemed to taste as greasy and nasty as the thick black stuff pouring from the barrel. He wondered if he'd ever want another cigarette again.

"It's all right, Ernie." Sylvia Enos heard the fright in her own voice, heard it and hated it. "It really is. That sort of thing can happen to anybody, not just to—" She broke off. She hadn't helped. Her hands folded into fists, nails biting the flesh of her palms.

"Not just to someone who got his dick shot off," Ernie finished for her, *his* voice flat and deadly. "Maybe it can. But there is a difference. For me, it happens all the goddamn time." He glared at her as if it were her fault. Half the time, these days, he seemed to think it was.

Sylvia twisted away from him on the narrow bed in his flat. She almost wished they hadn't succeeded so often when they were first starting out. Ernie had begun to think he could whenever he wanted to. He'd begun taking it— and her—for granted. Then, when he'd started failing again...

He reached down, plucked a bottle of whiskey off the floor, and took a big swig. "That won't help," Sylvia said. "It'll only make things worse." Drunk, he was always hopeless in bed. And when he proved hopeless, that made him meaner.

He laughed now. "Depends on what you mean by 'things.' " He took another long pull at the bottle. "I do not know why I go on. There does not seem to be much point." He reached into the drawer of the nightstand by the bed and pulled out a .45. He held it about a foot from his face, staring at it as if it were the most beautiful thing in the world.

"Ernie!" Sylvia wasn't frightened any more. She was terrified. She snatched the pistol out of his hand. "Leave this damned *thing* alone, do

you hear me?"

He let her take it. She shuddered with relief. He didn't always, and he was much stronger than she was. When the black mood seized him ... But now he smiled with a wounded tenderness that pierced and melted her heart even through her fear. "You never stop trying to make me into an angel, do you?" he said. "I am not an angel. I am from the other place."

"You're talking nonsense, is what you're doing." Sylvia got out of bed and started to dress. "What you need is sleep."

"What I need..." Ernie cupped what he had with one hand.

Sylvia thought about taking the .45 with her when she left. The only reason she didn't was that Ernie's apartment was a young arsenal. She couldn't carry off all the guns he owned.

She'd been standing on the corner waiting for a trolley at least five minutes before she realized her knees were shaking. When the streetcar came up, she staggered as she boarded it. She threw a nickel in the fare box, then all but fell into the closest seat. She looked down at her hands. They were shaking, too.

Her daughter Mary Jane was sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee when she walked into the apartment. "Hi, Ma," Mary Jane said cheerfully, and then, her smile fading and her jaw dropping, "My God, what happened to you? You're white as a sheet."

"Ernie." Sylvia poured herself coffee, put in cream and sugar, and then poured in a good slug of whiskey, too.

"Ma, that guy is nothing but trouble." Mary Jane spoke with the air of someone who knew what she was talking about. No doubt she did; at twenty-four she probably had more practical experience with men than did Sylvia, who'd found George, stuck with him, and then done very little till the writer came back into her life. Her daughter went on, "I know you've got a soft spot for him because he helped you with the book about Dad, but he's a little bit nuts, you know what I mean? Maybe he was good for you once, but he isn't any more."

Before answering, Sylvia took a big gulp of the improved coffee. It wasn't improved enough to suit her, so she put some more hooch in it. With a sigh, she said, "Chances are you're right. But—"

"Wait." Mary Jane held up a hand. "Stop. No buts. If he's trouble, if you *know* he's trouble, you don't walk to the nearest exit. You run."

"It's not that simple." Sylvia drank more of the coffee. She could feel the whiskey calming her. "You don't understand, honey. When he's right—and he is, most of the time—he's the sweetest man I ever knew, the sweetest man I ever imagined." That was true. Saying it, she almost forgot the cold weight of the .45 she'd wrenched from Ernie's hand.

"I don't know anything about that," Mary Jane admitted. "But I'll tell you what I do know. If he makes you come home looking like you just saw a ghost when he *isn't* right, you don't want anything to do with him."

"He's coping with more than most men ever have to. He's got this war wound...." Sylvia had never gone into detail about Ernie's injury. She'd never even admitted they were lovers, though she was sure Mary Jane and George Jr. knew. Now shock and the potent coffee loosened her tongue. She explained what the wound was.

"Poor guy," Mary Jane said when she finished. "I'm sorry about that. It's terrible, and he can't do anything about it. Fine. Now I understand better why he's the way he is. But you're not the Red Cross, Ma. You can't go on giving like this when all you get back is grief. What if he decides to use you for a punching bag one of these days?"

"He wouldn't do that." But Sylvia was uncomfortably aware that she spoke without conviction.

Her daughter noticed, too. "How many times have you told me not to be dumb?"

"Lots." Sylvia managed a wry grin. "How many times have you listened?"

"A few, maybe." Mary Jane grinned, too. "But you're my mother. You're supposed to have good sense for both of us, right? Don't be dumb, Ma. You want to find somebody? Swell. Find somebody who doesn't scare you to death."

"I'll... think about it." Sylvia hadn't expected to say even that much. But she found herself continuing, "He's working on a book about how he got wounded, about driving an ambulance up in Quebec. He's let

me see some of it. It's really good—and when he's writing, things go better." *Sometimes. Not tonight, but sometimes.*

Mary Jane threw her hands in the air. "Honest to God, Ma, I swear you didn't hear a word I said."

Sylvia shook her head and lit a cigarette. Mary Jane held out a hand. Sylvia passed her the pack. She leaned close to get a light from her mother. Sylvia said, "I heard you. But I'll do what I think I ought to, not what you think."

"All right, all right, all right." Mary Jane's smile had a wry twist to it. "I can't make you do anything. After all, *I'm* not *your* mother."

Sylvia laughed. She hadn't dreamt she'd be able to. But she did. Her daughter's company and some strongly fortified coffee made the terror she'd felt not long before seem distant and unreal.

A few days later, she had a visitor who surprised her. Joseph Kennedy simply showed up, assuming she'd be glad to see him. "Good day, Mrs. Enos," he said, and tipped his hat to her. "I hope we can rely on you to help get out the vote for Hoover and Borah."

"I didn't think I'd ever see you again after our ... quarrel last year," Sylvia said. *And I hoped I wouldn't.*

He shrugged. "State Democratic headquarters reminded me how useful you've been. The Party comes first." By his face, he wished it didn't.

"I wondered whose side you'd be on this year," she remarked.

"Why?" Kennedy asked, in real surprise now. Then he laughed. "You mean because Al Smith is a Catholic, and so am I?" Sylvia nodded. Kennedy laughed again, louder this time. "My dear lady, the Pope is infallible. I believe that. Al Smith? If Al Smith were the Pope, I'd kiss his ring. Since he's not, I'm going to do my best to kick his ... fanny."

Knowing it would be useless, Sylvia said, "Mr. Kennedy, I'm not your 'dear lady,' and I don't want to be."

"Well, Mrs. Enos, that's as may be," the Democratic organizer said. "I'll tell you this, though: I have no idea what you see in that miserable hack of yours."

He'd made that crack before. "I told you, Ernie's no hack," Sylvia said. "He's a *writer!"*

Kennedy shrugged again. "If you say so." His dismissive tone said he wasn't about to change his mind. But he went on, "Never mind bedfellows, then. We'll keep this to politics. You've been helping the Democrats for a long time. Do you want another Socialist president now?"

"Well, no," Sylvia admitted. "You'll pay the same as you have the past couple of elections?"

"Of course," Kennedy answered, as if insulted she needed to ask. "I told you you'd been good. We pay for what we get."

If state headquarters tells us to, she thought. Still, the money was better than she could get any other way. Royalties from *I Sank Roger Kimball* were skimpy these days. There'd been talk of putting it out as one of the newfangled paperbound pocket books, but that hadn't happened yet, and she didn't know if it would. "It's a deal—as long as you keep your hands to yourself."

Joe Kennedy sighed. "You drive a hard bargain, Mrs. Enos, but yes, that's a deal." He held out his hand. Warily, Sylvia took it. She knew the only reason he stayed interested in her was that she stayed uninterested in him. But she couldn't stomach giving in to get him out of her hair.

The Democrats trotted her out at a rally near T Wharf a few days later. Party faithful listened as she told them this was no time to let a Socialist, someone who was bound to be soft on the Confederate States, take up residence in Powel House. The crowd clapped in all the right places. Because they did, Sylvia needed longer than she would have otherwise to realize her speech was falling flat.

Four years earlier, the Democrats, who'd lost three presidential elections in a row, had been hungry—more than hungry; desperate—to reclaim Powel House. And they'd done it, even if Calvin Coolidge had dropped dead before he could take the oath of office. But Hoover hadn't proved any better at fixing the collapse than Socialist Hosea Blackford had before him. And he was about as exciting as oatmeal without sugar. He was earnest. He worked hard. It wasn't enough.

Even before the last round of applause faded, Sylvia thought, *The Democrats are going to lose this time.* The feeling—no, the certainty—

was irrational, but no less real for that.

Her eyes met those of Joe Kennedy, who stood on the platform with her. He was still clapping, but his smile seemed held on his face by force of will alone. *He knows,* she realized. *He's slimy, but he's not stupid. Yes, he knows.*

He gave back a shrug, as if to say, *This is my job, and I'm going to do it as well as I can no matter what happens.* Sylvia nodded in reply; that was something she understood. She could respect Kennedy the political operator, no matter what she thought about Kennedy the man.

As she stepped down from the platform, a new realization came to her. The election still lay a couple of months ahead. She was going to have to be a professional herself all through that time, going up on platforms and saying what needed to be said in spite of what she thought would happen in November. That wouldn't be easy. It might be harder than anything she'd ever tried before.

Her back stiffened. *I don't care whether it's easy or not. If Joe Kennedy can do it, so can I.*

Carl Martin was just starting to creep. Every minute or so, he'd forget how to move and flop down like a jellyfish. At six months, that didn't bother him. He thought it was funny. He'd try again after a while, when he remembered how to make his elbows work, and try to find something on the floor and stick it in his mouth. "Bwee!" he said proudly.

"You tell 'em, kid," Chester Martin agreed. He was pretty proud of his son, though he sometimes wondered how any baby ever lived to grow up. Some of the things Carl did, and of course did without thinking about them.... You had to watch him not just every minute, but every single second.

As if to prove the point, the junior member of the Martin family headed for a book of matches that shouldn't have been on the floor in the first place. Carl didn't want a cigarette. He wanted to find out what matches tasted like. Chester grabbed them before his son could. Carl clouded up and started to cry.

"You can't eat matches," Chester said. "They aren't good for you."

Telling something like that to a six-month-old, naturally, did no good at all. Carl kept on crying. And, because he was crying, he forgot to hold his head up. When it came down, he banged it on the floor. That really gave him something to cry about.

"What now?" Rita called from the kitchen.

Chester explained, as best he could over his son's din. He picked up the boy and cuddled him. The crying subsided. Chester pulled out his hankie and wiped snot off Carl's face. Carl didn't like that. He never did.

To distract him, Chester turned on the wireless. They'd bought the set not long after the baby was born. They couldn't quite afford it, but Rita had wanted it badly. Feeding the baby meant being up in the middle of the night a lot. She wanted it to stay dark then, to keep Carl from waking up. Listening to music or news or a comedy show was better than sitting there all alone in the quiet.

Somebody knocked on the door. "There's Sue and Otis and Pete," Chester said.

"Oh, God, they're early!" Rita said. "Well, let 'em in. The fried chicken'll be done in about fifteen minutes."

When Chester's sister and brother-in-law and nephew came in, Sue exclaimed over the baby: "How big he's getting!"

"He's still tiny," said Pete, who at nine seemed to be shooting up like a weed himself, all shins and forearms and long skinny neck.

Otis Blake pointed to him. "I think this one's going to be a giraffe when he grows up."

Sue shook her head. "No, he won't. Giraffes eat vegetables." Pete made a horrible face at the very idea.

Having company over made Carl forget he'd been crying and stare about wide-eyed. Chester wondered, not for the first time, what babies made of the world. It had to be confusing as hell. He put his son down, went into the kitchen, and pulled four bottles of Burgermeister out of the icebox. He set one on the counter by Rita, who was turning chicken pieces, and brought the others out for himself and Sue and

Otis.

His brother-in-law raised his beer in salute. "Here's to California," he said.

"I'll drink to that, by God," Chester said, and did. "This place has saved my life. Back in Toledo, I'd still be out of work."

"Oh, yes." Blake nodded vigorously. "Back in Toledo, I was out of work, too. I'm not making as much as I did back there when I had a job—"

"Unions here aren't what they were in Toledo," Chester broke in.

"I've seen that," Otis Blake agreed. "It'll come, I think. But I'm working, and I'm not broke or on the dole. The way things have been since the stock market went south, I can't complain."

"That's what years of hard times have done to us," Chester said. "They've made us satisfied with less than we used to have. It's not right."

"What can we do about it, though?" his sister asked.

Before Chester could answer, Rita called, "Supper's ready!" He felt like a prizefighter saved by the bell, because he didn't know. He remembered the years when he'd eaten chicken gizzards and hearts because he couldn't afford anything better. He'd even started to like them. Too often, though, he couldn't afford them or beef heart or tripe or any of the other cheap meats. He remembered plate after plate of noodles or potatoes and cabbage, too.

Now, though, he grabbed himself a drumstick. The crispy skin burned his fingers. "Ow!" he said. Along with green beans and fried potatoes, it made a tasty meal—and he could leave the gizzard and heart and neck to Pete, who, since he'd started eating them as a kid, remained convinced they were treats. Later, when Chester saw everybody else had plenty, he also snagged a thigh. After juicy dark meat, giblets weren't worth talking about, let alone eating.

Rita put Carl in his high chair and gave him small bits of food along with his bottle. He wound up wearing as much as he ate. He usually did. Pete watched in fascination. Sue said, "You used to eat that way, too." The boy shook his head, denying even the possibility.

After apple pie, Rita made coffee for the grownups. Carl got fussy. She changed him and put him to bed. Otis Blake lit a cigarette. "Who are you two going to vote for when the election gets here?" he asked.

"Hoover hasn't done anything much," Chester said.

"Hoover hasn't done anything, period," Rita said. *"I'm* voting for Al Smith. I don't know about him." She pointed at her husband. She still hadn't fully forgiven him for backing away from the Socialist camp in 1932.

He said, "I expect I'll vote for Smith, too. The only thing that bothers me about him is that he's never looked outside New York before now. I'm not sure he's tough enough to spit in Jake Featherston's eye if he has to."

His brother-in-law scratched his head. He had a wide, perfect, permanent part in the middle of his scalp; had the bullet that made it been even a fraction of an inch lower, Sue would never have got the chance to meet him after the war. He said, "Don't you think we need to worry about the USA more than we do about the CSA?"

"Not if another war's brewing," Chester said.

"Featherston fought in the last one," Blake said. "He couldn't be crazy enough to want to do that again. Besides, he's firing generals. Remember? That was in the paper this past summer."

"That's true. It was," Chester admitted. "I said I'd probably vote for Smith. I probably will."

"Me, too," Sue said. "Our folks are the only Democrats left in the family."

Otis Blake snorted. "Yeah, they're still Democrats even though your dad hasn't got a job and can't get one." He and Chester had both sent Stephen Douglas Martin money whenever they could afford to.

The Blakes didn't stay late. It was a Sunday night, with school ahead for Pete and work for Otis. After they left, Rita washed the dishes. Chester, who also had work in the morning, turned on the wireless before getting ready for bed. He found a news show.

"President Hoover vowed today to keep Houston in the United States regardless of Confederate pressure in the state," the announcer

said. "He also accused Governor Smith of having too soft a policy on the Confederate States. 'Such well-meaning foolishness got the United States into trouble in the past two Socialist administrations,' Hoover said. 'I don't intend to go down that mistaken road. We must be strong first. Everything else springs from that.' "

Chester grunted. Foreign policy was the only area where he favored the Democrats' platform over the Socialists'. He shrugged. When you got right down to it, what happened in the USA counted for more than what happened outside. He'd voted against his class interest four years ago, and he'd spent most of the time since regretting it. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

The newscaster went on, "When asked for comment on the president's remarks, Governor Smith said, 'It's hard to keep people in a country where they don't want to stay. You would think the United States had learned that lesson after the War of Secession, but the present administration seems as thickheaded there as it does everywhere else.' "

Take that, Martin thought. He wasn't sure he agreed with Al Smith, but he liked the way the governor of New York came back swinging hard when Hoover attacked him. The announcer went on to talk about the dust storms that were picking up the soil of drought-ridden Kansas and Sequoyah and Houston and blowing it east, so the dust came down in New York City and even on the decks of ships out of sight of land in the Atlantic. The winds blew from west to east, so the dust storms didn't directly affect Los Angeles, but Martin had seen in newsreels how dreadful they were.

And farmers from the afflicted states were giving up any hope of bringing in a crop on their bone-dry farms. A lot of them were coming west by train or in rattletrap motorcars, looking for whatever work they could find. Two or three men who spoke with a twang had joined Chester's construction crew. They worked hard enough to satisfy even the exacting Mordechai, who thought anybody who didn't go home limp with exhaustion every night was a lazy son of a bitch.

Rita came out of the kitchen in the middle of the football scores. Since moving west himself, Chester had become passionately devoted to the fortunes of the Los Angeles Dons, the local franchise in the West Coast Football League. The Seattle Sharks, unfortunately, had smashed the hometown heroes, 31-10.

With an enormous yawn, Rita said, "I'm going to bed myself. He's

been so fussy the past few nights. He must be cutting a tooth, but I can't find it yet. If he wakes up and he isn't hungry, I wish you'd take him tonight."

"All right." Chester did rock Carl back to sleep every once in a while.

When the alarm clock went off the next morning, he woke up happy. He hadn't heard a thing in the night, which meant the baby must have slept straight through. Or so he thought, till he got a look at Rita's wan, sleepy face. Reproachfully, she said, "You told me you'd take him, but you just lay there while he cried, till finally I got up and got him. He didn't want to go back to bed after that, either."

"I'm sorry," Martin said. "I never even heard him." That was nothing but the truth. Because he didn't usually get up when the baby cried, the noise Carl made didn't rouse him, though he'd shut off the alarm clock as soon as it rang.

His wife looked as if she had trouble believing him. "I don't see how you could have missed him. Half the neighbors must have heard," she said. But he kept protesting his innocence, and finally persuaded her. She rubbed bloodshot eyes. "I wish *I* could sleep through a racket like that."

Chester had slept through worse in the Great War. Bursting shells hadn't fazed him then, not unless they landed very close. A man could get used to anything. Absently, Chester scratched along the seam of his pajama bottoms. He'd got used to being lousy, too, and the vermin hid and laid their eggs in seams.

After strong coffee, scrambled eggs, and toast, he grabbed his tool kit and headed for the trolley stop. A man who had work clung to it. He didn't give anyone the chance to take it away. Martin knew what he had to do. He aimed to do it. One day, he wanted to have the money to buy a house. His father had never owned one, living in apartments all his days. *I can do better than that,* Martin thought—a great American war cry. *I can, and, by God, I will.*

Polite as usual, Heber Young nodded to Abner Dowling. "I am afraid, Colonel, that this is our final meeting," said the unofficial

leader of the even more unofficial Mormon movement.

Dowling blinked "What's that you say, Mr. Young?" His mouth fell open. Several chins wobbled.

"I am very sorry, but I have concluded that the United States are not serious about negotiating with the people of Utah," Young said. "This being so, my continued presence no longer serves any useful purpose. I have better things to do with my time, to do with my life, than try to turn back the tide."

That was some sort of legend. Dowling knew as much, though he couldn't recall the details. He said, "I hope you'll reconsider, Mr. Young. I know you to be a man of good will and a man of good sense. Your people will be the losers if you walk away."

"So I have told myself many times—I am no less vain than any other man," Heber Young replied gravely. "Telling myself such fables has kept me coming here to your headquarters these past several years, even though I know President Hoover has tied your hands. I believe you would be more liberal if not constrained by orders from Philadelphia. After so many futile discussions, though, I find I no longer have the heart for any more."

"If you were any man but yourself, I would say the Confederate hotheads had got to you." Dowling didn't hide his anger and disappointment. "If you leave the scene, they *will* get to your people, and the results will not be happy." He didn't need Winthrop W. Webb's prediction to see that, but the spy's judgment here matched his own all too well.

"I shall have to take that chance," Young said. "I am still not altogether convinced these men serve the CSA and not the USA." He held up a hasty hand. "Please understand me, Colonel—I do not claim you are lying when you deny planting provocateurs among us. I believe you—you personally, that is. But whether someone else in the U.S. government is using such men ... of that, I am less certain."

Abner Dowling grunted. He wasn't a hundred percent certain no U.S. officials were using provocateurs here in Utah, either. He wished he were, but he wasn't. Since he wasn't, he thought it wiser not to talk any more about that. Instead, he said, "You tell me you're unhappy with the orders I get from back East? I admit I haven't been happy about all of them myself."

"Because you are honest enough to admit such things, I've kept coming back to talk with you," Young said. "But no more. I am sorry, Colonel—I am very sorry, in fact—but enough is enough." He started to get to his feet and walk out of Dowling's office.

"Wait!" Dowling exclaimed.

"Why?" The Mormon was still polite, but implacable.

"Why? For the results of the election, that's why," the commandant of Salt Lake City answered. "If Smith beats Hoover, isn't it likely I'll have new orders after the first of next February?"

"Hmm." Heber Young had already taken his dark homburg by the brim. Now he hesitated: perhaps the first time Dowling had ever seen him indecisive. He set the hat back on the tree and returned to the chair across the desk from Dowling. "Now that is interesting, Colonel. That is very interesting. You *would* follow more liberal orders if you received them?"

"I am a soldier, sir. I am obliged to follow all legitimate orders I receive." Dowling didn't tell the Mormon leader he intended to vote for Hoover, or that he hoped the incumbent would trounce Al Smith. Young likely knew as much. But he had told the truth. As if to prove it, he said, "Didn't I try to get public-works jobs for Utah just after Hoover took over?" The president had forbidden the scheme, but Young couldn't say he hadn't tried.

"You did," Young admitted. He rubbed his square chin. Then, abruptly, he nodded; once he had made up his mind, he didn't hesitate. "All right, Colonel Dowling. I will wait and see what happens in the election. If Hoover wins a second term, that will be the end of that. If Smith wins ... If Smith wins, I will see what happens next. Good day." Now he did take his hat. Tipping it, he left.

Dowling allowed himself a sigh of relief. If Heber Young walked away from talks with the occupying authorities, that in itself might have been enough to ignite Utah. Dowling's career wasn't where it would have been if he hadn't spent so many years as George Custer's adjutant, but he still had hopes for it. With a Utah uprising on his record, he would have been dead in the water as far as hopes of getting stars on his shoulders one day went.

The telephone in the outer office rang. His own adjutant answered it. A moment Liter, the telephone on Dowling's desk rang. "Abner

Dowling," he said crisply into the mouthpiece. He listened and nodded, though no one was there to see it. "That's very good news. Thanks for passing it on." He hung up.

Captain Toricelli came into the inner office, his face alight. "Barrels!" he said. "They're really going to give them to us!"

"I only started shouting for them a year or so ago," Dowling said. "The way things work back in Philadelphia, they're on the dead run."

"We could all have been dead by the time they got here," Captain Toricelli said.

"If we *had* died, that's the one thing I can think of that would have got them here faster," Dowling said. His adjutant laughed. He wondered why. He hadn't been kidding.

Being promised the machines didn't mean getting them right away. When they did arrive, he was grievously disappointed. He'd been hoping for new barrels, and what he got were Great War retreads. They must have come from Houston; most of them still showed fresh bullet scars and other combat-related damage to their armor.

"I can move faster than one of these things," Dowling said scornfully. Since he was built like a rolltop desk, that was unlikely to be true. But it wasn't *very* false, either. A man in good shape *could* outrun one of these snorting monsters. Dowling eyed the crewmen, duffel bags on their shoulders, who dismounted from passenger cars. "They take a couple of squads' worth of men apiece, too," he grumbled; he remembered that very well from Great War days.

"Yes, sir," Captain Toricelli answered. "But they're better than nothing."

"I suppose so," Dowling said unwillingly. Then he brightened, a little. "I suppose new barrels are coming off the line. They'd have to be, eh? They must be going straight to Houston—and to Kentucky now, too."

"That makes sense to me." Toricelli sounded faintly aggrieved. What was the world coming to when a superior started making sense?

Three days later, a pair of barrels rumbled up Temple Street and took up positions in Temple Square. Dowling thought that would be the least inflammatory way he could use them. Temple Square had

been under guard ever since the U.S. Army leveled the Mormon Temple and killed the last stubborn defenders there. Bits of granite from the Temple were potent relics to Mormons who opposed the government. That struck Dowling as medieval, which made it no less true. Soldiers had always had orders to shoot to kill whenever anyone tried to abscond with a fragment.

Dowling wasn't particularly surprised when Heber Young paid him a call a few days later. He did his best to pretend he was, saying, "And to what do I owe the pleasure of your company this time, Mr. Young?"

"Those ... horrible machines." Young was furious, and making only the barest effort to hide it. "How dare you pollute Temple Square with their presence?"

"For one thing, we've had soldiers in the square for years. The barrels just reinforce them," Dowling answered. "For another, I want people here to know we have them, and that we'll use them if we need to. It might—prevent rashness, I guess you'd say."

Heber Young shook his head. "More likely to provoke than to prevent."

"No." Dowling shook his head. "I am very sorry, sir, but I cannot agree. To my mind, the safety of my men and the protection of U.S. interests in Utah must come first."

"Those infernal machines promote neither," the Mormon leader insisted.

They looked at each other. Not for the first time, they found they were both using English but speaking two altogether different languages. "I would be derelict in my duties if I did not use barrels," Dowling said.

"Using them is what makes you derelict." Young eyed him, then sighed. "I see I do not persuade you. I don't suppose I should have expected to. Yet hope does spring eternal in the human breast. I tell you, Colonel, no good will come from your using these machines."

"Do you threaten me, Mr. Young?"

"Colonel, if I tell you the sun will come up tomorrow, is that a threat? I would not say so. I would call it a prediction based on what I know of past events. I would call this the same thing." He stood up,

politely challenging Dowling to arrest him for sedition after he'd come and put his head in the lion's jaws. Dowling couldn't, and he knew it. The word that Heber Young languished in a U.S. prison would touch off insurrection, regardless of whether the barrels in Temple Square did. As Young turned to go, he added, "If the government were generous enough to grant me the franchise, you may rest assured I would vote for Al Smith, in the hope that such discussions as this one would become unnecessary. Good day, Colonel Dowling." Out he went, a man whose moral force somehow made him worth battalions.

Four days later, one of the barrels caught fire on the way from the U.S. base to its turn at Temple Square. All eighteen crewmen escaped, and nobody shot at them as they burst from the doomed machine's hatches. Word came to Dowling almost at once. Cursing, he left the base in an auto and zoomed down Temple toward the blazing barrel.

By the time he got there, the fire had already started touching off ammunition. The fireworks display was spectacular, with red tracer rounds zooming in all directions. A fire engine roared up not long after Dowling arrived. It started spraying water on the barrel from as far away as the stream from the hose would reach. That struck him as being about as futile as offering last rites to a man smashed by a speeding locomotive, but he didn't think it could do any harm, so he kept quiet about it.

"How did this happen?" he demanded of the barrel's commander, a captain named Witherspoon.

"Sir, I don't know." Witherspoon nursed a burned hand.

He'll live, Dowling thought savagely. "Was it sabotage?" he asked.

"Sir, I don't know," Captain Witherspoon repeated. "It could have been, but...." He shrugged. "This machine has to be almost twenty years old. Plenty of things can go wrong with it any which way. A leak in a fuel line, a leak in an oil line..." Another shrug. He pointed toward the burning barrel, from which a thick cloud of black smoke rose. "We'll never know now, that's for damn sure."

"Yes. It is," Dowling said unhappily. Were people in Salt Lake City laughing because they'd got away with one? Worse, were people in Richmond laughing because *they'd* got away with one?

Kaplan's, on the Lower East Side, was a delicatessen Flora Blackford hadn't visited for years. That got driven home the minute she walked in the door. She remembered the foxy-red hair of Lou Kaplan, the proprietor; it made you want to warm your hands over it. Kaplan was still behind the counter. These days, though, his hair was white.

These days, Flora's hair had more than a little gray in it, too. She saw her brother at a table in the corner. She waved. David Hamburger nodded. She hurried over to him. Her little brother had a double chin, tired eyes, and gray in his own hair. *The things time does to us!* Flora thought, sudden tears stinging her eyes. She blinked them away. "It's good to see you, David," she said. "It's been too long."

He shrugged. "I get by. I like being a tailor. I like it better than being a Congressman's brother, and a lot better than being a First Lady's brother. You can't say I ever bothered you for anything, the way important people's relatives do."

"Bothered me?" Flora shook her head. "I wish you would have. Most of the time, you wouldn't even talk to me. You don't visit...."

"I don't get out much." David tapped the cane leaning against his chair. He'd lost a leg in the war, not far below the hip. He could walk with a prosthesis, but only painfully. As if to emphasize that, he pointed to the chair across from him and said, "Sit down, for heaven's sake. You know why I'm not going to get up till I have to."

Flora did sit. A waitress came over to her and David. They both ordered. The pause meant she didn't have to call him on what she knew to be an evasion. He was, after all, here at Kaplan's. He could have come to Socialist Party headquarters once in a while, too. He could have, but he hadn't.

Politics estranged them. Flora had never thought that could happen in her family, but it had. Her brother had come out of the war a staunch Democrat. It was as if, having been crippled, he didn't want his wound to have been in vain, and so joined the party that was hardest on the CSA.

Flora reached into the jar across the table, pulled out a pickled tomato, and bit into it. She smiled; the taste and the vinegar tang in the air and the crunch took her back to her childhood. "Can't get things like this in Dakota, or even down in Philadelphia," she said.

That won her a grudging smile from David. "No, I don't suppose you would," he said, and then fell silent again as the waitress brought his pastrami sandwich and Flora's corned beef on rye. He sipped from an egg cream, which had neither egg nor cream in it. Flora's drink was a seltzer with a shpritz of raspberry syrup on top, something else unmatchable outside of New York City.

"Is your family well?" Flora asked.

"Well enough," he answered. "Amazing how fast children grow."

She nodded; Joshua had taught her that. She said, "I'm glad—" and then broke off, hoping he would think she'd intended it for a complete sentence. David had feared no one would ever want to marry a one-legged man. She'd started to say she was glad he'd been wrong about that, but hadn't known how he would take it.

By his tight-lipped smile, he knew where she'd been going. But then he shrugged, visibly setting aside annoyance. He said, "These past couple of years, I see you've finally started to understand what nice people the Confederates really are. Better late than never, that's all I've got to say."

"It's not the Confederate people. It's the Freedom Party," Flora said. "Reactionaries have seized control of the apparatus of the state, the same as they have in France."

David Hamburger rolled his eyes. "I don't suppose that would have happened if the people hadn't voted them in, now would it?"

"Well..." Flora winced. Her brother's comment was painfully pungent, but that didn't mean it was wrong.

"Yes. Well," he said. "Listen, if it comes to a fight we'd better be ready. That's the big thing I wanted to tell you. We've got to, you hear me? Otherwise, this"—he made a fist and hit his artificial leg, which gave back a sound like knocking on a door—"was for nothing, and I don't think I could stand that."

"It won't come to war," Flora said in genuine alarm. "Not even Hoover thinks it'll come to war."

"Hoover's one of the best men we've ever had for getting things done," David said, "and one of the worst for figuring out what to do. That's how it looks to me, anyhow. Of course, I'm no political bigwig.

Nu, am I right or am I *meshuggeh?"*

"You're a lot of things, but you're not *meshuggeh,"* Flora answered. He'd summed up Hoover better than most editorial columnists she'd seen. "I still think you worry too much about the CSA, though. They have more *tsuris* than we do."

"Just because you have *tsuris* doesn't mean you can't give it." David finished his sandwich. He used one hand to help lever himself upright. Taking hold of the cane, he said, "They'll send you back to Congress in a couple of days. I'm not telling you to listen to me—when did you ever? But keep your eyes open."

"I always do," Flora insisted. Her brother didn't argue. He just walked out of Kaplan's, with a slow, rolling gait like a drunken sailor's. That let the knee joint in the artificial leg lock each time he took a step, and kept it from buckling under him. Flora wanted to go after him, but what was the point? They hadn't had anything in common for years. A sad lunch talking politics proved as much, as if it needed proof.

That evening, she made a speech in a union hall, and got cheered till her ears rang. More loud cheers greeted her after her two speeches the day before the election. She shook hands till her own was swollen and sore—and she knew how to minimize the damage while she did it.

She expected she would win reelection, too. Her district was solidly Socialist; it had gone Democratic for a little while in the despair following the collapse, but then repented of its folly. What she didn't know—what nobody knew—was whether the country would have its revenge on Herbert Hoover, as it had had its revenge on her husband four years earlier.

Tuesday, November 3, was cold and rainy. Flora went out and voted early, so the reporters and photographers who waited at her polling place could get their stories and pictures into the papers before the polls closed. She knew her Democratic opponent was doing the same thing. This way, their appearances canceled each other out. If she hadn't come early, he would have grabbed an edge—a small one, but an edge nonetheless.

"I think Smith will whip him," Hosea Blackford said when Flora came back to their apartment after voting: he was still registered in Dakota, and had cast an absentee ballot. He'd stayed on the sidelines

during the campaign. For one thing, his own reputation wouldn't help either Flora or the Socialist Party. For another, he was getting ever more fragile. He still managed pretty well as long as he stuck close to home. Out in crowds these days, though, he seemed not only frail but also slightly baffled. That worried Flora.

She took her son with her to Socialist Party headquarters for the Fourteenth Ward, then, but not her husband. Most of her family was there, too, although her nephew, Yossel, was serving out his time as a conscript on occupation duty in Canada, and David, as usual, gave the Socialists a wide berth.

Flora was glad Yossel had been sent north rather than down to Houston. That was a running sore that would not heal. Hoover had made a mess of things there, but Flora had no idea what a Socialist president might have done to make things better.

When she came in, Herman Bruck boomed, "Let's all welcome Congress-woman Hamburger!" He turned red as a bonfire. "Congresswoman Blackford!" he said, blushing still. "But I knew her when she *was* Congresswoman Hamburger."

He had, too. It was twenty years now—and where had the time gone?— since she'd beaten him for the nomination to this seat when Myron Zuckerman, the longtime incumbent, fell down a flight of stairs and broke his neck. If that hadn't happened...

With a shake of her head, Flora tried to drive that thought out of her mind. It wasn't easy. The past couple of years, there'd been a spate of what people called "worlds of if" novels. If the USA had won the War of Secession or the Second Mexican War, if the Negro uprising had succeeded in the CSA, if the Red uprising had succeeded in Russia ... If, if, if. Dealing with the world as it was was hard enough for most people. Flora didn't think the "worlds of if" fad would last.

Bruck turned on a wireless set. He got loud music, and then, as he turned the dial, a quiz show. A couple of young women perked up at that, but he kept changing stations till he found one that was giving election returns. "With the polls just closing in New York..." the announcer said. A burst of static squelched him.

Another station farther down the dial came in better. It was announcing early returns from Massachusetts. Cheers rang out in the Socialist headquarters when the broadcaster said Smith was leading Hoover three to two. The station switched to an interview with a

Boston Democratic leader. "Doesn't look good for us heah," the man said in a gravelly, New England-accented voice. "Have to hope Smith and Borah don't drag the local candidates down too fah."

"Thank you, Mr. Kennedy," the interviewer said.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Kennedy!" Maria Tresca said. She and Flora grinned at each other. The two of them had been friends for more than twenty years, too. It was partly a matter of living in a largely Jewish district, partly sheer luck, that Flora and not Maria had succeeded in politics.

As soon as Flora heard Al Smith was ahead in Massachusetts, she knew the night would belong to the Socialists. And so it proved. She handily won her own race; her Democratic opponent called before eleven o'clock to throw in the towel. That brought more cheers in the headquarters, though by then everyone was starting to get hoarse. The air was blue with cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoke, which helped make throats raw.

President Hoover's spokesman kept issuing statements along the lines of, "The current trend cannot be overlooked, but the president will not concede the election before he is sure his victory is impossible."

Herman Bruck pulled out a bottle of champagne, an upper-class touch for the party of the proletariat. He brought Flora a glass—not a fancy flute, but an ordinary water glass. "Here's to Hoover! His victory is impossible!" he said.

"Alevai, omayn!" Flora drank. The bubbles tickled her nose.

Bruck had a glass, too. "Did you ever imagine, when we first started here, we would win Powel House, lose it, and win it back?" he asked. "Did you ever imagine you would be First Lady?"

"Don't be silly." She shook her head. "How could I? How could anyone?"

He leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. People all around them cheered. Flora laughed. She wasn't so sure Herman had done it just to congratulate her. He'd been sweet on her before she won her first election and went to Philadelphia, even if she hadn't been sweet on him. Now they'd both been married to other people for years. But he just smiled when she wagged a finger at him, and everyone else

laughed and cheered some more. On a night full of victory, she didn't push it.

"Happy New Year, darlin'!" Scipio said to Bathsheba. "Do Jesus! I was borned in slavery days, I don't never reckon I lives to see 1937."

His wife sighed. "Better be a happy year," she said darkly. "Last couple-three sure ain't."

"We is on our feets," Scipio said. "We gots a place again." The flat wasn't much worse than the one they'd lived in before white rioters torched so much of the Terry, and they weren't paying much more for it. Compared to so many people who were still living in churches or in tents, they were amazingly lucky. That they'd managed to bring their money out with them had helped a lot. Money usually did.

Bathsheba refused to look on the bright side of things. "What happens the next time the buckra decide they gots to go after all the niggers in town? Where we stay then?"

"Ain't been bad"—Scipio correct himself—"ain't been *too* bad since."

"Bully!" In Bathsheba's mouth, the old-fashioned white man's slang sounded poisonously sarcastic.

"We gots to go on. We gots to do what we kin." Scipio knew he was trying to convince himself as well as her.

"Wish we could go somewheres else," his wife said.

"Like where?" Scipio asked. She had no answer. He knew she wouldn't. The United States had made it very plain they didn't want any Negroes from the Confederate States, no matter what happened to blacks in the CSA. The Empire of Mexico was farther away and even less welcoming. "We is stuck where we's at."

"Gots to be some way." Like most people, Bathsheba saw what she wanted to see, regardless of whether it was really there.

He didn't try to argue with her. They'd argued too much lately. She still hadn't stopped nagging him about who he was and who and what

he had been. He gave short answers, knowing that the more he said, the more dangerous it was for him. Short answers didn't satisfy her. She wanted to know— she was convinced she had the right to know— where and how and why and when he'd learned to talk like an educated white man. As far as he was concerned, the less said, the better. Secrecy had become deeply ingrained in him since he came to Augusta. Only by keeping his past secret did he, could he, survive.

Neither of them stayed up long after midnight. They had planned to get out with the children on New Year's Day, but a cold, nasty rainstorm rolling down from the north put paid to that. Instead, they spent the day cooped up in the flat. They were all on edge, Scipio's son and daughter from disappointment at an outing spoiled, himself and his wife over worry about what the new year might bring.

It was still raining the next day: the sort of steady, sullen rain that promised to hang around for days. January second was a Saturday. The Huntsman's Lodge, which had been closed for New Year's, reopened. Scipio put on his formal clothes, then put a raincoat of rubberized cloth on over them. With that and an umbrella, he left the block of flats full of a relief he dared not show.

He had no trouble getting to the Lodge. Because of the rain, only people who had to be out and about were, and no one seemed in the mood to harass a Negro. Also, the raincoat concealed the fancy jacket, wing-collared boiled shirt, and satin-striped trousers he wore beneath it. Not standing out in the crowd undoubtedly helped.

Jerry Dover greeted him when he came in the door: "How are you, Xerxes? Happy New Year!"

"I thanks you, suh. De same to you," Scipio answered. With Dover, the work came first. If you could do it well, nothing else mattered. If you couldn't, nothing else mattered, either, and he would send you packing. But if you could do it, he would stand by you. Scipio respected that, and responded to it.

Today, though, Dover didn't seem happy. "Got a few words to say when the whole crew comes in," he told Scipio. "Won't take long."

Anything that broke routine was worrisome. "What de trouble be?" Scipio asked.

His boss shook his head. "I'll tell you soon. I don't want to have to do this more than once. You'll hear, I promise."

That convinced Scipio the news, whatever it was, wouldn't be good. He couldn't do anything about it but wait. Naturally, one of the other waiters chose that day to show up late. When he finally did come in, he was so hung over, he could barely see. "New Year's Eve night befo' last," somebody told him. He managed a sheepish grin, then took two aspirins from his pocket and dry-swallowed them.

"Listen, people, anybody see a paper the past couple days or listen to news on the wireless?" Jerry Dover asked.

None of the waiters and assistant cooks and dishwashers and janitors said anything. Scipio might have bought a *Constitutionalist* if rain hadn't kept newsboys off the street. He wasn't sure how many of the other Negroes in the crew could read. Wireless? Sets were cheap these days, but nobody here got rich at his job.

"No?" Dover shrugged. "All right. I suppose you heard about the colored fellow who took a shot at President Featherston at the Olympics." Again, nobody said anything. *Too bad he missed,* was what Scipio was thinking. His boss went on, "There's an order from the president that colored folks—all colored folks—have got to pay a fine to the government on account of that. And there's an order that anybody who's got colored folks working for him has to take twenty dollars out of their pay and send it to Richmond to make sure that fine gets paid. So that's what'll happen. I'm sorry, but I can't do a thing about it."

"Twenty dollars?" The pained echo rose from the throats of all the men there. Twenty dollars was a lot of money—a week's wages for the ones who made the most, two weeks' for the rest. Scipio cursed softly under his breath. A twenty-dollar hole in his budget wouldn't be easy to fill. Somebody asked, "How is we supposed to git by without that money?"

Jerry Dover spread his hands. "I can't answer that. All I can tell you is, I don't dare try to duck this, not with what they'll do to me if I get caught."

From a lot of men, that would have been a polite lie. Scipio believed the manager of the Hunstman's Lodge; Dover treated the black men who worked for him like human beings. "Mistuh Dover, suh!" he called.

"What is it, Xerxes?"

"Kin you dock we a dollar, two dollars, a week, so it don't hurt so bad?"

"Yeah!" Several other men spoke up. Others nodded. One of the assistant cooks said, "I buys everything on the installment plan. I should oughta pay this here fine the same way."

But Dover shook his head. "I would if I could, but I can't. The order says it's got to come out of your next pay. It's *supposed* to hurt. That's why they're doing it. I'm sorry, Xerxes. It was a good idea."

Dully, Scipio nodded. *It's supposed to hurt.* He'd known that from the minute the Freedom Party won in 1933. No, he'd known it from the moment he first heard Jake Featherston speak in a park here in Augusta, back when the Party was young and small. He asked, "Mistuh Dover, suh, what keep de gum-mint from takin' away anudder twenty dollar from we whenever dey please?"

Jerry Dover looked startled. He was, within his limits, a decent man. Plainly, that hadn't occurred to him. It hadn't occurred to some of Scipio's fellow workers, either, not by their horrified exclamations. And Dover proved his honesty, for he answered, "I'll be damned if I know."

The Huntsman's Lodge was a glum place that night. Some of the men who came to dine there wore Freedom Party pins on their lapels. Somehow or other, waiters contrived to spill hot or greasy food on several of them, or on their wives or girlfriends. The whites were furious. The Negroes were apologetic. So was Jerry Dover. "I'm sure it was an accident, sir," he said repeatedly. "We have a very fine staff here, but they are human."

Freedom Party men don't want to believe that, Scipio thought. He'd taken his tiny revenge on a man with one of those enamel pins on his tuxedo jacket. Cleaning the jacket wouldn't come cheap, but it wouldn't come to twenty dollars, either.

By contrast, two or three waiters found themselves with unusually large tips. The men who gave them might have been silently saying they didn't approve of collective fines. You could always tell when a man got an unexpected tip. He would straighten and smile in delighted surprise before he could catch himself. Scipio kept hoping he would find a sympathetic customer like that. He kept hoping, and he kept being disappointed.

When he left the Lodge at half past twelve, the rain was still coming down. He didn't mind. Fewer troublemakers, white or black, were on the streets in weather like this. So he thought, anyhow. And, indeed, no one troubled him. But he was going up the front steps of his apartment building when he heard gunfire from the white part of town. It wasn't just a pistol shot; it was a regular fusillade from several Tredegars. Back during the brief and bloody history of the Congaree Socialist Republic, he'd come to know the sound of military rifles much better than he ever wanted to. Some things you didn't forget, no matter how much you wished you could.

"What was that?" Bathsheba asked worriedly when he went inside.

"Dunno," he answered. That was technically true, but he had his suspicions—his fears.

So did his wife. "You reckon some niggers doin' somethin' stupid?" She sounded frightened, too. And she didn't know about the fine the government was levying.

"Wouldn't be surprised. We all be sorry if they is. That one nigger, he shoot at the president...." He told her of the fine.

"Twenty dollars!" Bathsheba's anguish was painful to hear. She knew how much that was, how badly it would hurt their finances.

"Ain't nothin' I kin do about it," Scipio said. More gunfire burst out in the white part of Augusta: Tredegars again, and then the smaller answering pops of pistols. Black attackers and roused whites fighting back with whatever weapons they had handy, Scipio judged.

A moment later, a hard hammering made him shiver, even though it wasn't close. Somebody had a machine gun. He'd seen what such reaping machines of death could do. By the way the rifle fire suddenly slacked off, the machine gun didn't belong to the raiders.

Bathsheba's face was a mask of pain. She had to be thinking the same thing. "Them poor boys," she whispered. "Them poor boys gettin' all shot up."

Scipio nodded heavily. But his pain wasn't just for the raiders who'd bitten off more than they could chew. *Bitter as wormwood,* Revelations said. He understood that now, where he never had before. "Them damn fools give de buckra de excuse to come down on we even harder'n ever."

"How they come down on us harder'n they already doin'?" his wife asked.

"Suppose Georgia fine de niggers in de state? Suppose Augusta fine de niggers in de city? Richmond do it. Dey reckons dey kin do it, too, mebbe," Scipio said. Bathsheba flinched as if he'd hit her, then reluctantly nodded. With the Freedom Party in the saddle, anything was possible, anything at all. That was a big part of what made it so frightening.

Another Inauguration Day. Nellie Jacobs wondered how many she'd seen. She hadn't gone to all of them. Work, indifference, and war had kept her away at one time or another. This year, though, February first fell on a fine, bright Monday. The temperature got up close to fifty. It might almost have been spring. She decided to close the coffeehouse and go hear what Al Smith had to say.

She took Clara with her: the high school closed for the day. That her younger daughter, her accidental daughter, should be in high school still struck her as amazing, to say nothing of unnatural. Hadn't Clara been born just a few weeks ago? That was how it seemed to Nellie. But Clara was taller than she was. She'd grown up while Nellie wasn't looking.

She'd grown snippy while Nellie wasn't looking, too. "Do we have to go with Edna and Merle and Armstrong?" she said.

The last name was the problem. Clara and Armstrong Grimes had never got along, not since she was a toddler and he was a baby. She didn't want to have anything to do with him, and she wasn't shy about letting the world know as much, either.

"He's my only grandson, and Edna's my daughter just as much as you are, Miss Smarty-Britches, and Merle Grimes is a good man—and I don't say that about many men," Nellie answered. "So you'll come along and act polite, or you'll find out you're not too big for me to warm your backside."

One of these days, that kind of argument wouldn't work. She'd have a fight on her hands if she tried it. She remembered that from dealing—trying to deal—with Edna. She got by with it today, though. Clara

might be snippy, but she wasn't ready to fight back hard yet.

Merle Grimes wore his Purple Heart. Edna had on her Order of Remembrance, Second Class. Nellie wished she'd worn her medal. She'd earned it, where Edna hadn't come close to deserving hers.

They got pretty good bleacher seats on the Mall in front of the Washington Monument. Nellie remembered when it had been blasted down to a stump. Now it stood tall again. All it needed were hieroglyphics carved on the sides to make it seem perfectly Egyptian.

Nellie endured the parade of soldiers and workers and bands. They weren't what she'd come to see or hear, though they entranced both Clara and Edna, and Merle tapped the tip of his cane up and down between his feet in time to the music. Armstrong also seemed bored with parades and bands, but Armstrong made a habit of seeming bored with everything, so Nellie wasn't sure what that meant.

She leaned forward when the big black limousine carrying Hoover and Smith and La Follette pulled up to the platform on which the new president and vice president would take the oath of office. She hadn't voted for Smith, but she wanted to hear what he had to say for himself.

Chief Justice Cicero Pittman probably hadn't voted for Al Smith, either. He was a Hoover appointee, replacing at last the fierce and venerable Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was a veteran of the War of Secession: he'd outlasted even George Custer in public life. Pittman was round and benign-looking, unlike the hawk-faced, piratically mustached Holmes.

Charlie La Follette took the vice-presidential oath first. No outgoing vice president congratulated him, for Hoover, having been elected as vice president himself, had no replacement when propelled to the presidency on Calvin Coolidge's death. Hoover did rise to shake Al Smith's hand. The atmosphere on the platform was what diplomats called correct: people who despised one another did their best to behave as if they didn't.

After Chief Justice Pittman administered the oath of office to President Smith, the jurist sat down. Smith stayed behind the forest of microphones that would send his words to the crowd and take them across the country by wireless. His unruly shock of black hair tried to deny that he was in his early sixties, but his jowls affirmed it.

"Workers and people of the United States, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for bringing me here today." Al Smith's voice was raspy and full of New York City. "I have a lot of work to do, and I am going to do it. It is the people's work, and none is more important." Applause washed over him. He seemed to grow a couple of inches taller when it did. Nellie had seen that before with other politicians; Teddy Roosevelt and Upton Sinclair had both been the same way.

"Some folks said that because I am a Catholic, that was the kiss of death for my chances." As was his way, Smith met the issue head-on. Scorn in his voice, he continued, "They used to say the same thing about any Socialist's chances. What *I* say is, no matter how thin you slice it, it's still baloney."

Nellie joined the startled laughter. Up on the platform, Al Smith grinned. They didn't call him the Happy Warrior for nothing. "And what I say is, you've heard a lot of baloney about what I'll do and what I won't, especially about our newest states." President—no, former President—Hoover squirmed in his seat. Smith went on, "Let's look at the record. The record shows we won the war and we took Houston and Kentucky away from our Confederate neighbors at gunpoint. We didn't ask the people who were living there what they thought. We just went ahead and grabbed with both hands. Now we're paying the piper on account of that."

Merle Grimes started tapping his cane again—this time, Nellie judged, in anger. She needed a moment to realize Smith hadn't said a word about Sequoyah. But it was full of Indians, so what difference did that make?

"We have to find some way to straighten things out there," Smith said. "I don't know yet what that will be, but I intend to work with President Featherston to learn. If I need to, I will go to Richmond to seek it out."

For a moment, that didn't get applause. It got nothing but astonished silence. No president of the United States had ever said anything like it, not in all the years since the Confederate States rammed secession down the USA's throat. The cheers it did get after that long, amazed beat were all the more fervent because of the preceding surprise.

Nellie didn't join in them. She had her own ideas about Confederates, and cozying up to them wasn't one of those ideas. From then on, she stopped listening. Armstrong said to Edna, "Granny's

falling asleep," but that wasn't true. She just wasn't interested any more. She almost told him so—she almost told the obnoxious brat where to go and how to get there—but it didn't seem worth the effort.

Next thing she remembered, loud clapping made her jump, so maybe her grandson hadn't been as wrong as she'd thought. Smith was done. *Armstrong's still obnoxious, though,* she thought, looking around furtively to make sure no one had paid too much attention to her lapse. Her voice was louder and cheerier than it had to be when she said, "Well, let's go back to my place."

"All right, Ma." Edna, by contrast, sounded oddly gentle.

"Are you all right, Ma?" Clara asked.

"I'm fine," Nellie declared. Then she stood up too quickly, and felt dizzy for a moment. *Oh, for God's sake,* she thought, mortified. *They're all going to think I'm nothing but a little old lady.*

Merle Grimes steadied her with a strong hand on her elbow. "Don't worry, Mother Jacobs," he said. "We'll get you home just fine."

"Thank you, Merle," Nellie said. "You're a good son-in-law." Merle smiled. Armstrong made a face. Merle was good and strict with him, and didn't put up with any guff, the way Edna sometimes did.

When they went back to the coffeehouse above which Nellie had lived for so many years, Edna and Clara both crowded into the kitchen with her as she took a big frying chicken out of the icebox. "Why don't you let us give you a hand, Ma?" Clara said. Edna nodded.

"You can stick me in a rest home the day I don't know how to cut up a chicken and put it in hot fat," Nellie said tartly. Her daughters looked at each other and both started to laugh. With identical shrugs, they retreated.

And then, with almost the first cut she made, Nellie got her own hand on the web between thumb and forefinger. She said something she hadn't said since her days as a working girl. Armstrong was sitting closest to her. His head came up in astonishment. She glared at him, defying him to make something of it or even to believe he'd heard what he thought he had. He looked away in a hurry.

Satisfied, Nellie went back to work. She didn't even bother washing her hands, not that it would have done much good when she was still

messing with chicken pieces. Once the chicken was dredged in cornmeal and sizzling in the fat, she did rinse off. The wound hadn't bled much. She forgot about it.

Everyone said the chicken was the best she'd ever made. She thought so, too. It turned out crisp and juicy and not a bit greasy. Clara and Edna insisted that they wash the dishes. Triumphantly full, Nellie let them.

When she woke up a couple of days later with a sore hand, she had trouble even remembering what she'd done to it. Only when she looked down and saw how red and angry the cut looked did she nod to herself and think, *Oh, that's right—the chicken.* Then she went on about her business, favoring the hand as much as she could.

Clara noticed when she came home from school. "You ought to take that to a doctor, Ma," she said. "It doesn't look so good."

"Oh, don't be silly," Nellie said. "It'll get better. Besides, who can afford doctors?"

But the hand didn't get better, and the next day she started feeling weak and hot and run-down. Real alarm in her voice, Clara said, "I'm going to get the doctor over here right now." Nellie started to tell her not to bother, but then didn't. She didn't feel up to it—and besides, Clara was already out the door.

The doctor looked Nellie over, listened to her heart, took her pulse, and took her temperature. "What is it?" Nellie asked, though she was too miserable to care much about the answer.

"It's 104.4, Mrs. Jacobs," he said reluctantly. "You have blood poisoning, I'm afraid. It could be ... serious. Do you understand me?"

When Nellie nodded, the room spun. Even so, she said, "Of course I do." After a moment, she added, "And the coffee, and the raspberries..." Even she had no idea what that meant. She tried to laugh, but didn't seem to have the strength.

"What do we do?" Clara asked from a million miles away.

"Keep her comfortable. Aspirin, to fight the fever. Soup, water, juice— whatever she can keep down," the doctor answered, his voice even more distant. "If she beats the infection, she'll be fine." He didn't say what would happen if she didn't. Clara didn't ask. Neither did

Nellie. She knew. Her body knew, even if the fever clouded her mind.

She remembered very little of the next few days—and less and less as the time went on. In that same dim way, that way beneath consciousness, she knew she was fading, but she'd already faded so far that she had trouble caring. Above her, people seemed to appear and disappear as she drifted in and out of the real world: Clara, Edna, Merle, Armstrong. She would blink, and one would turn to another. It might have been magic.

Once, though, when she saw Edna, she knew there was something she had to say. After a struggle, she found it: "Bill Reach." Forcing out the name took all the strength she had.

"What is it, Ma?" Tears glinted off Edna's cheeks.

"Bill Reach," Nellie repeated, and Edna nodded, so she'd understood. Fighting for every word, Nellie went on, "Killed him. Stuck him. *Fuck* him."

"What's she saying?" asked someone off to the side: Armstrong.

"She's delirious," Edna said. "There was this crazy man during the war— he was a spy, or something. Hal would've known for sure. But she thinks she killed him."

"Did," Nellie said, or tried to say, but no one seemed to pay her any mind. *Isn't that the way it goes?* she thought as lucidity ebbed for the last time. *Isn't that* just *the way it goes? You tell the truth, and no one believes you.*

She felt burning hot, and then cold as the South Pole, and then ... nothing at all.

"Where do you have to go today?" Laura asked as Jonathan Moss threw on his overcoat and jammed a wool hat down low on his head. As usual, April in Berlin, Ontario, was spring by the calendar but not by what it was doing outside. The sun shone brightly, but it shone on drifted snow from the storm that had just blown through—and another snowstorm or two might yet follow on the heels of this one.

"London," he answered, gulping the hot tea she'd set in front of him. Whatever warmth he could seize now would be welcome.

Dorothy's eyes got big and round. "You're driving all the way to England, Daddy?" his daughter asked. She was four, an age that seemed startling but not necessarily impossible.

Moss laughed. "No, sweetie—just over to London, here in Ontario. If the roads aren't clear, though, it'll seem like it's as far as England." He kissed Dorothy and Laura and headed for the door.

"London," his wife said behind him. "That's where I used to go when I needed something they didn't have in Arthur."

To someone who'd grown up in Chicago, the idea of London, Ontario, as the big city was pretty funny. Jonathan Moss didn't say so. He knew the things that were likely to spark quarrels with his wife, and tried to steer clear of them. Too many quarrels started out of a clear blue sky for him to want to look for more. Instead, with a wave, he ducked out the door and was gone.

Snow plows had gone over the road that ran west from Berlin. Moss didn't care to think about what the rock salt the road crews had put down was doing to his undercarriage and his fenders, and so, resolutely, he didn't. He drove past the military airstrip outside of London and let out a nostalgic sigh. He hadn't flown an aeroplane since coming home from the Great War. Unlike a lot of fliers, he'd never had the urge. Now, though, it tugged at him.

Tug or no, though, meeting the urge would have to wait. He had a trial scheduled at occupation headquarters in London.

His client, one Morris Metcalfe, was accused of bribing the occupying authorities to look the other way while he did some black-market liquor dealing. Metcalfe was a cadaverous man with none of the bounce and energy Lou Jamieson displayed. Moss suspected he was guilty, but the military prosecutor didn't have a strong case against him.

Moss made that plain at every turn. At last, the prosecutor, a captain named Gus Landels, complained to the judge: "How can I show he's guilty if all his lawyer has to do is say he's innocent?"

"How can I show he's innocent if all you have to do is say he's guilty?" Moss retorted, and thought the shot went home.

In the middle of the afternoon, the judge, a lieutenant colonel who looked as if he'd seen far too many cases, pronounced Metcalfe not guilty. Captain Landels looked disgusted. The judge pointed a finger at Morris Metcalfe. He said, "My personal opinion is that there's more here than meets the eye. I can't prove that, and you're probably lucky I can't. But I won't be surprised if I see you in this court again, and if you don't get off so easy."

Metcalfe looked back out of dead-fish eyes. "I resent that, your Honor," he said—he'd spent enough time in U.S. courts to know and use the proper form of address.

"I won't lose any sleep over it," the judge replied. "Case dismissed—for now."

After a limp handshake, Metcalfe disappeared with hardly a word of thanks for Moss. Captain Landels, noting that, let out a derisive snort. Moss shrugged. His only worry was extracting the balance of his fee from Metcalfe. But he thought he could do it. Like the judge, he believed the other man would need his services again before too long.

He went out to reclaim his Ford from the secure lot where he'd parked it—like Berlin, London had one. He was starting back to his home town when a flight of five fighting scouts—just plain fighters, they were calling them nowadays—zoomed down to land at the field outside of London.

He almost drove off the road. A block later, he *did* drive off the road— down a side street, toward the airstrip. Those lean, low-winged shapes drew him as a lodestone draws nails. They were as different from the machines he'd flown in the Great War as a thoroughbred was from a donkey. He tried to imagine what one of them would have done to a squadron of his kites. It would have knocked down the whole squadron without getting scratched; he was sure of that.

The rifle-toting guards at the airstrip weren't inclined to let him enter. His U.S. identification card finally persuaded them, though one rode along to escort him to the commandant's office. He caught a break there. The man in charge of the field, Major Rex Finley, had served in Ontario during the war. "I remember you," Finley said. "I was at the party after you made ace. You'd forgotten it was your fifth kill."

"That's me," Moss agreed cheerfully. "I'd forget my own head if my wife didn't nail it on me every morning."

Finley chuckled. "I know the feeling. Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Moss?" He bore down on Moss' civilian title.

"I saw the new fighters coming in for a landing," Moss said. "They're ... quite something."

"The new Wright 27s? I should say so." Finley rubbed at his mustache, a thin strip of dark hair clinging tight to his upper lip. "And?"

"Could I sit in one?" The naked longing in Moss' voice startled even him. He hadn't felt anything like that since he'd fallen for Laura Secord long before she fell for him. "Please?"

Major Finley frowned. "I shouldn't. It's against about half a pound of regulations, and you know it as well as I do." Moss didn't say anything. He'd done all the pleading he could do if he wanted to keep his self-respect. The field commandant made a fist and smacked it into his other hand. "Come on. Officially, you know, you don't exist. You were never here. Got it?"

"Who, me?" Moss said. Finley laughed.

They walked out to the airstrip together. Major Finley said, "I've heard you spend your time getting Canucks off the hook."

To Moss' relief, he sounded curious, not hostile. "I do try," the lawyer answered. "It needs doing. Even if you lost the war, you need decent representation. Maybe you especially need it if you lost the war."

Sandbagged machine-gun nests protected the field. The soldiers in them looked very alert. Pointing to one of those nests, Finley said, "I'd be happier about having somebody representing the damn Canucks if all of 'em were convinced they *had* lost the damn war. But we both know it isn't so. That bomb over in Manitoba, and the big one in your town a couple of years ago..."

"Oh, yeah," Moss said. "That one almost caught me. Still, don't you think things would be worse if the Canadians decided the whole system was rigged against them?"

Shrugging, Finley answered, "Damned if I know. But then, they don't pay me to worry about politics—which is all to the good, far as I'm concerned."

Moss only half heard him. By then, they'd come up to the closest Wright 27. The air above the engine mount still shimmered with released heat. Two machine guns on this side of the mount fired through the prop; Moss assumed there were two more on the far side. He'd never flown an aeroplane that carried more than two machine guns. With four, he would have felt like the Grim Reaper in the sky. And yet he knew the armament was nothing out of the ordinary these days.

"You never piloted a machine that wasn't canvas and wire, did you?" Rex Finley asked, setting an affectionate hand on the blue-painted aluminum skin of the wing.

"Nope," Moss answered. "Started out in a Curtiss Super Hudson pusher, ended up in our copy of Kaiser Bill's Albatros. This is all new to me. Looks like a shark with wings. All you'd need to do would be to paint eyes and a mouth full of teeth on the front end."

"Not a half bad idea," Finley said. "Well, go on up."

The fighter, Moss discovered, had a mounting stirrup just in front of the left wing. He used the stirrup to climb up onto the wing. The aeroplane rocked under his weight. If he'd climbed onto the wing of one of the aeroplanes he'd flown in the Great War, though, odds were he would have stuck his foot straight through the doped fabric. The Wright 27 had a closed cockpit, for better streamlining and because the wind at the high speeds at which it flew would have played havoc with a pilot's vision, goggles or no. After some fumbling, Moss found the latch and slid back the canopy.

"Good thing I haven't got fat, or I'd never fit in here," he remarked as he settled himself in the seat.

Major Finley slammed the canopy shut above him. The cockpit smelled of leather and sweat and oil. Its being closed made it feel even more cramped than it really was. The instrument panel bristled with dials. Along with the altimeter, compass, airspeed indicator, inclinometer, and fuel gauge he was used to, instruments monitored engine performance in a dozen different ways, ammunition supply, propellor pitch, and the electrical system. The machine also boasted a wireless set, which had its own profusion of dials. *You'd need to go to college all over again to understand what half this stuff does,* Moss thought dizzily.

But the essentials hadn't changed. There was the stick, and there

was the firing button on top of it. His right thumb found that button with unconscious ease. The gunsight in the fighter made what he'd used during the Great War seem a ten-cent toy by comparison.

He jerked when Finley rapped on the thick—armored?—glass with his knuckles. The base commandant gestured to show he should get out. With an odd reluctance, he nodded. Finley pushed back the canopy. Moss felt like a sardine getting out of its can as he extracted himself.

"What do you think?" Finley asked.

"That's ... the cat's meow, all right." Moss hesitated, then plunged: "Any chance I could ... fly it?"

"When was the last time you flew?" the officer inquired.

Moss wished he could lie, but judged that would make things worse, not better. With a sigh, he told the truth: "Not long after the Great War ended."

Rex Finley nodded. "About what I figured—and I would have kicked you off my field if you'd tried to tell me it was week before last. If you're going to take another stab at it, I want you to put in some time on trainers before you smash up a Wright machine. Even a trainer nowadays is a hotter crate than anything you've ever flown."

"I'll do that," Moss said at once. "Jesus, you bet I will. I figured you'd say you didn't want anything to do with me."

"Nope. You were an ace. You knew what you were doing up there," Finley said. "With any luck at all, you can find it again. And you know what? One of these days, we're liable to need more people like you again. Or do you think I'm wrong?" Moss wished he could have said yes, but that too would have been a lie.

After her time in Paris and Richmond—especially after her time in Paris— Anne Colleton found St. Matthews, South Carolina, much too small and confining. She did what she could to fight the feeling by making forays into Columbia and Charleston, but that helped only so much. She had to come back to the flat where she'd lived since Red

Negroes almost killed her on the Marshlands plantation.

The Confederate government—or maybe it was the Freedom Party—had paid the rent on the flat while she was abroad. She hadn't had to put her worldly goods into storage and then exhume them when she took up her life in St. Matthews again. That was something, anyhow. Something ... but not enough.

In Paris, she'd haggled over alliances and foreign affairs in her fluent French. In St. Matthews, people talked about the weather and crops and what they'd heard on the wireless the night before. But for the talk about the wireless, Anne had grown up on such conversation. It seemed all the more stifling now.

When her brother came over to visit one warm, muggy afternoon in late May, she burst out, "If I hear one more word about tractors and combines and harvesters, the loudmouth who says that word is going to be awfully sorry."

Tom Colleton shrugged. "Sorry, Sis," he said. "That stuff is important here. It's important all over the CSA."

"It's *boring,"* Anne replied with great sincerity. "All the yahoos bragging about the fancy equipment they've got ... They don't get that excited about the equipment in their drawers, for Christ's sake."

Her brother turned red. "You can't talk like that around here," he said, and then, before she could further scandalize him by asking why not, he went on, "Besides, tractors and such-like *are* important. You notice how many niggers have been coming through town lately?"

"I should say I have," Anne answered. "One more reason to keep guns where I can get at them in a hurry."

"Yeah, I know. Theft is up. That's a problem," Tom said. "But those niggers are sharecroppers who don't have work any more because the machinery's doing it instead of them. We don't need nearly so many people tied down to the land as we did when the Great War started."

Anne started to say, *And so?* Then she remembered that pushing hard for farm machinery was part of Featherston's program.

Before she could remark on that, Tom said, "I don't know what the towns'll do if all the niggers from the countryside stream into them at once. Do you know? Does the president?"

"If he does, he isn't telling me," Anne said.

"No? Too bad. He'd make a lot of friends if he came out and said what he has in mind. This is liable to hurt him when elections come around this fall."

That made Anne smile. She couldn't help herself. "Do you think anything will get in the way of the Freedom Party at election time? Anything at all?"

Her brother's face was a study in astonishment. "But there've always been elections," he said.

"The Freedom Party is in." Anne might have been an adult reproving a child's naïveté. "It's going to stay in till it gets where it's going and the Confederate States get where they're going."

"Christ!" Tom said. "I don't think I much care for that."

"Tom..." Now Anne spoke urgently, warning him against disaster. "Do you realize how big a chance you're taking saying that even to me? If you say it to somebody else—and it could be somebody you trust—you're liable to end up in more trouble than you've ever imagined."

Tom Colleton started to say something else. Very visibly, he changed his mind. But he couldn't let it go. He asked, "And you work with these people? You work for these people?" By the way he looked at her, he might have been seeing her for the first time.

But Anne didn't hesitate before she nodded. "I sure do," she said. "Because they're going to take the CSA where I want us to go—right back up to the top."

"I'd sooner—" Her brother caught himself again. His face twisted. "All right, Sis. I'll shut up. If I talk too goddamn much, I'm liable to end up in a camp with a big P stenciled on the back of my shirt. Isn't that right?"

She winced. "Not if you're talking to me."

"That isn't what you said a minute ago."

"I just wanted to remind you that you need to be careful. And you do."

"Because if I'm not careful, I *will* end up in a camp." That was statement, not question. Tom paused to light a cigarette. After a couple of long, angry puffs, he added, "If that's where the Freedom Party is taking the country, to hell with me if I want to go along. Am I a nigger? Or am I a white man who can stand up on his hind legs and speak his mind if he wants to?"

"We've all got to give up something if we're going to get revenge on the USA," Anne said soothingly. "The Yankees put up with keeping quiet and doing what they were told and standing in line for rationed goods for thirty years so they could get even with us."

The coal on that cigarette glowed a fierce, fiery red when Tom took another drag. Smoke fumed from him as he replied, "They didn't give up elections, did they? They didn't stop talking when they felt like talking. Even during the war, the Socialists were telling the Democrats to go to the devil. You should've heard some of the mouthy prisoners we caught up in Virginia."

"Yes, they had elections," Anne said. "They had them, but how much did they matter? From the Second Mexican War up till they licked us in the Great War, the Democrats won every single time. So they had them. They kept people happy with them. But the elections didn't really *count.* Maybe the Freedom Party will keep on doing that, so people will stay happy. I don't know. The Whigs here did."

"And when the Whigs lost, they got out of office and handed things over to Featherston, the way they were supposed to." Tom stubbed out the cigarette, then lit another one. "If the Freedom Party loses, will it do the same?"

No, Anne thought. She decided she didn't want to be that blunt, so she answered, "I don't see the Freedom Party losing any time soon. People have work where they didn't before. I was in Richmond for the Olympics. I saw what a hit they were. People are proud again. They *want* to vote Freedom."

Before the war, Tom had been content, even eager, for her to do his thinking for him. He wasn't any more. He was his own man now. Through the haze of tobacco smoke around him—he might have been putting up a smoke screen— he said, "You didn't answer my question."

I know I didn't. You weren't supposed to notice. Anne said, "I don't think the Freedom Party will lose an election for quite a while—not one that's really important to it, anyway—except maybe in Louisiana,

and that hardly counts."

It still wasn't a direct answer. It seemed to come close enough. Tom said, "All Featherston needs is a crown, like the one the Emperor of Mexico wears."

"Think whatever you want," Anne said wearily. "You care about your family, though. Be careful where you shoot off your mouth. Please."

"Why? Don't you have dear old Jake wrapped around your finger?"

Anne's lips skinned back from her teeth in what was anything but a smile. At that, the question could have been worse; at least he'd asked about her finger and not some other part of her anatomy. She had to hide a small shiver as she answered, "Don't be stupid, Tom. Anybody who's ever tried to get Jake Featherston to do what he wants—or what she wants—has ended up either sorry or dead. And before you ask, I think it's more luck than anything else that I'm still here."

More than her words, she thought, her tone got through to Tom. His eyes, blue as her own, went wide. He blurted, "Sweet Jesus Christ, Anne, you're scared to death of him!"

"Anybody who's met him and who isn't is a fool," she said. "Standing up against him is like standing up to a hurricane. You can yell and scream and fight and carry on, but he'll blow you over just the same."

He laughed. She'd known he would, and she'd known why. Sure enough, he said, "That's how people talk about you, you know."

"Oh, yes." She waved the words aside for now; she'd assess the hurt later. For the time being, she wanted to make sure she was understood: "But he's ... he's *serious* about things. He's serious *all* the time. And what he wants, happens. I don't always know how it does, but it does. Think about it. The Whigs had run things here for as long as the Confederate States were a country. If *they* couldn't stop Jake Featherston—and they damned well couldn't—what can? Nothing. Nobody."

Tom Colleton shook his head in disbelief. "You talk about him like he really is a hurricane. He's just a man, Sis."

Anne shook her head, too. "Oh, he's a man, all right. He sleeps. He

eats. He goes to the toilet." That jerked a startled laugh out of her brother. She went on, "He'll die one of these days. If that nigger had shot him at the Olympics, he'd've died right then. But as long as he's alive, he's not *just* a man. For a long time, I thought he was, too. So did a lot of people. Look what's happened since. We were wrong, every single one of us."

Another cigarette out of the pack. The scrape and flare of another match. The harsh stink of sulfur before the mellower smell of tobacco smoke. Tom blew a smoke ring up toward the ceiling, maybe to give himself time to think. He said, "I never reckoned anybody could make you talk like that."

"Did you think I did?" she flared. "But Jake *does* make me talk that way. And you'd better be careful how you talk, too. If you do anything stupid, I can't protect you. Have you got that? *I can't.* Featherston and the stalwarts will do whatever they want. Oh, he might listen to me if I beg hard enough. He might. I've done some useful things for him, and he might throw me a bone. But I walked away from the Freedom Party once, remember? I thought he was finished, and I went back to the Whigs. He never forgets something like that. He might use you to pay me back, too. Don't give him the chance. Please."

Had she ever said *please* to him before? Oh, she'd said it. She must have. Everybody did, for politeness' sake. But had she ever meant it the way she had twice in the past five minutes? She didn't think so. Children meant *please,* especially when they got into trouble. Usually, grownups didn't have to.

Her desperate urgency must have got through to her brother. He put out the latest cigarette—by now, the ashtray was full of butts—and got to his feet. "All right," he said. "I'll keep quiet. But it's not for your sake. It's for Bertha and the kids."

"I don't care why. Just do it," Anne said. He left the flat without another word. She thought he'd slam the door, but he didn't. The restraint was worse. It felt like a slap in the face. She wondered if they would ever have anything to say to each other again.

Lucien Galtier looked up at the sky. The sun was sliding down toward the northwest, but it wouldn't set for a long time yet. When

summer days came to the country by Rivière-du-Loup, they lasted. Long days meant short nights. He'd always thought that was good. It let him get more work done and spend more time with his family. Now ... Now, suddenly, he wondered.

Oh, the work went on. He couldn't imagine the work stopping altogether. If the work stopped, wasn't that a sure sign he was dead? He could still do the work, too. He took a certain somber pride in that. True, he wasn't young any more. But he was still strong. Thinking about that made him laugh.

He was walking back from weeding the potato plot, hoe on his shoulder like a soldier's rifle, when an auto came up the track from the road toward his farmhouse. He picked up the pace, like a soldier going from ordinary march to double time. That machine belonged to the O'Doulls.

Sure enough, his son-in-law got out of the motorcar and stood there waiting for him. "A good day to you!" Galtier called to Dr. Leonard O'Doull. "And what brings you here?"

"What brings me here?" O'Doull patted the iron flank of the motorcar. "My automobile, what else?"

"Thank you so much." Lucien unshouldered the hoe and made as if to swing it, like a soldier starting bayonet drill. "Let me ask the question another way, then: why have you come here?"

"Oh! Why?" What he meant might not have occurred to Dr. O'Doull before. Galtier didn't believe that for a moment, but his son-in-law played the role of a suddenly enlightened one well. "I had some business at the hospital"— he pointed to the big building the U.S. Army had run up on Galtier's land during the war—"and I thought I would stop by as long as I was so close."

"Good. I'm glad you did. Come inside, if you like,. We can have a little something to drink, smoke a cigar—with an afternoon's weeding behind me, I could use a cigar, and I could truly use a drink."

His son-in-law laughed. "Motion carried by acclamation, without a dissenting voice."

Lucien stowed the hoe in the barn. He and Leonard O'Doull went into the house through the door that led to the kitchen. Galtier knew the place wasn't so clean and neat as it had been when Marie was

alive. All he could do was hope she wouldn't have been too displeased with the way he kept it up. He busied himself pouring a couple of glasses of applejack, and handed one to the American who'd married Nicole.

"Merci beaucoup." Dr. O'Doull reached into a jacket pocket and took out two cigars. He gave one to Galtier. "Here you are. I delivered a baby boy yesterday. These are part of the reward from the father."

"I thank you. I thank him. Come—let's go into the front room." When they'd sat down, when they had the cigars going, Lucien raised his glass of homemade Calvados. *"Salut!"* he said, and drank.

So did O'Doull. After a good swig, he whistled softly. "Son of a bitch," he said in English, a tongue he used these days only when taken by surprise. He sipped again, more cautiously, and returned to French: "Potent stuff."

"Yes, a strong batch," Lucien agreed. Quality varied wildly from one jug to the next, as was only to be expected when people made the stuff in small stills with no tedious government regulations or even more tedious taxes. "Strong, but good. So ... How wags your world?"

"Well enough, if I didn't set fire to my liver there," Leonard O'Doull replied. "For myself, for Nicole and little Lucien, all is well, as I hope it is for you."

"As you say, well enough." Galtier puffed on the cigar. He'd had better. Whoever the new father was, he was a cheapskate. He paused. "All is well for your family, you say, which is good. All is not so well somewhere else?" He wasn't sure he'd heard that in the doctor's voice, but thought he had.

And O'Doull nodded. "I am not nearly so sure I like the direction in which I see the world headed."

Galtier tried to make sense of that. "What man ever does?"

"Non, mon beau-père, not like that," O'Doull said. "Not the little thoughts that make a man wonder if he is all he should be. When I say the world, I mean ... the world." His expansive gesture not only took in the whole world, it nearly knocked over a lamp on the table next to the sofa where he sat. Maybe the applejack was hitting hard and fast. Maybe, too, he did have something big on his mind.

"And what of the world?" Lucien Galtier asked. "Most of it goes its way far from here. When I remember how things were when that was not so, I think this is not so bad. I can do without soldiers and bombs and such things on my doorstep. That ambulance driver I saw, poor fellow, wounded in his very manhood..." He shuddered and sipped again from his own drink.

"If you will recall, though, helping the wounded is why I first came to Quebec." O'Doull picked up his glass. Instead of drinking, he stared at the pale yellow apple brandy. "I have been comfortable here for many years, forgetting the world and by the world forgot. But I fear one day I may have to go back to my proper craft, healing the wounded once more."

"Here? In Quebec?" Lucien shook his head. "I do not believe it."

"Nor I," O'Doull replied with a sweet, sad smile. "But the world, poor thing, is wider than Quebec, and wilder, too, worse luck. And I am a doctor, and I am an American, and if my country should ever need me in another war—"

"God forbid!" Galtier broke in, and crossed himself.

"Yes. God forbid." Leonard O'Doull nodded. "So the world said in 1914. But God did not forbid. And so, if He should happen to be watching a football match again..." Lucien laughed at the delicious blasphemy. His son-in-law was not in a laughing mood. O'Doull went on, "If that happens, how could I stay quiet here, attending to cases of measles and rheumatism? That would be a waste of everything for which I trained."

The worst part of it was, what he said made sense to Galtier. Soberly—in spite of the applejack—the farmer said, "All I can tell you is, may this not come to pass."

"Yes. May it not, indeed." O'Doull knocked back the rest of his drink. After he got over the coughing fit that followed—the stuff was too strong for such cavalier treatment—he said, "Thank you for letting me share my darkness with you."

"C'est rien," Lucien replied. "And it is nothing because who but you saw *my* darkness not so long ago?" *Who but you caused it?* he thought. But that wasn't fair, and he knew as much. O'Doull had only diagnosed the trouble Marie already had.

"Between the *Action Française* and the Freedom Party and the Silver Shirts in England, the world is a nastier place than it was ten years ago," O'Doull said. "And in Russia, the Tsar seems to think the Jews cause all his problems, and no one seems to want to stay in Austria-Hungary except the Austrians and the Hungarians, and even the Hungarians are not so sure. And the Turks treat the Armenians as the Russians treat the Jews, and—"

"And you Americans hold down English-speaking Canada." Galtier hadn't expected to say that. It just popped out. He wondered if his son-in-law would be offended.

But Leonard O'Doull only nodded. "Yes. And that. Small next to some of the others, I believe, but no less real even so." He got to his feet. "And now I had better leave. If you ask me to have another drink, I'll say yes, and then I'll be too drunk to go back to Rivière-du-Loup, and Nicole will be unhappy with me—and with you." He gave a curiously old-fashioned bow, then made his way to the door, and to his motorcar.

Galtier wasn't going anywhere that night. He made himself another drink, and poured it all down. Maybe it helped him go to sleep. After O'Doull's dark fantasies, he needed all the help he could get.

When Sunday came, he drove into Rivière-du-Loup to hear Mass. As he'd got into the habit of doing the past few months, he stopped at Éloise Granche's house to give her a ride into town. *"Bonjour,* Lucien," she said as he opened the passenger-side door of the Chevrolet for her. "You look very handsome today."

"I thank you ... for not buying new spectacles any time lately," he replied. She laughed. He went on, "Now, I do not need spectacles of any sort to know what a pretty woman I am lucky enough to have with me."

"How you do go on," she said, but indulgently.

When they got to the church, Éloise saw some lady friends and went to chat with them. Lucien sat in the bosom of his family. Nothing could have been more decorous. Nicole said, "How nice that you were able to bring Mme. Granche again." Lucien nodded. The service started a moment later.

After taking communion, Galtier led Éloise Granche back to his auto. As they'd driven north, so they went south. When he stopped by

the house, she said, "Would you care to come in for a cup of tea?"

"Thank you. I'd like that. I can't stay long, though," he replied.

They went inside. Everything was quiet and peaceful—and dark, for Éloise had no electricity. She turned. Lucien took her in his arms. A moment later, they were holding each other and kissing and murmuring endearments, for all the world as if they were a couple of youngsters discovering love for the very first time.

Laughing, exulting in his strength, Lucien lifted her into his arms and carried her upstairs to the bedroom. "Be careful!" Éloise exclaimed. "You'll hurt yourself." He laughed some more. She said that every time. He hadn't hurt himself yet, and didn't seem likely to. And the soft feel of her made the way his heart pounded till he gently set her on the bed seem altogether worthwhile.

Before too long, his heart was pounding again, from an even more pleasurable exertion. "Oh, Lucien!" Éloise gasped, urging him on. Her nails dug into his back. "So sweet," she murmured, eyes half closed. *"So* sweet."

Afterwards, he gave her a kiss as he lay beside her. His heart was still drumming, harder than it would have when he was a younger man. He had more trouble catching his breath, too, than he would have when he and Marie were newlyweds.

"One of these days," he said, "we should have Father Guillaume say the words over us."

Women were supposed to be the ones who wanted such things, but Éloise shook her head, as she had several times before. "Not necessary," she said. "Better if he doesn't, in fact. It would only complicate matters with both our families. If we marry, it turns into a question of patrimonies. If we don't, then this is ... what it is, that's all. I like it better this way."

Lucien set a hand on his chest and mimed complete exhaustion. "I don't think I could like it better than this," he said. Éloise laughed again. They laughed a lot when they were alone together. Neither one of them had done much laughing for a long time before. And that, to Lucien, mattered almost as much as the other.

Cincinnatus Driver wasn't an old man. No one—except his son, of course— could have accused him of being an old man. He was strong. His hair was— mostly—dark. He remained three years on the good side of fifty. None of that, though, had kept him from turning into a grandfather.

Karen Driver wiggled in his arms. He was getting used to holding a baby all over again. Karen weighed no more than a big cat, which is to say, nothing to speak of. He was getting used to the way she looked, too. Her skin was lighter than his, but not quite the coffee-with-cream color of Negroes with a fair amount of white blood. She had her mother's narrow eyes with the folds of skin at the inner corners, too.

"She's going to be beautiful," Cincinnatus said. "She's *already* beautiful."

"Thank you," Grace Driver said softly. Cincinnatus and Elizabeth had accepted her more readily than her folks accepted Achilles. The child helped and hurt at the same time. The Changs did love the baby, but Grace's mother blamed her for not having a boy ... among other things.

Karen stopped wiggling, screwed up her little face, and grunted. Cincinnatus laughed. He had no trouble remembering what that meant. He handed her to her mother. "She done made a mess in her drawers," he said. He was just Karen's granddad. He didn't have to clean her up himself.

"I'll take care of her," Grace said, and changed the baby's diaper.

Cincinnatus turned to his son. "How you doin'?" he asked.

"I'm all right," Achilles answered, more of Iowa than of Kentucky in his accent. Cincinnatus knew his son would have said the same thing if he were living on the street and eating what he could fish out of garbage cans. Achilles had his own full measure of the family's stubbornness. But he wasn't on the street; he continued, "That clerking job of mine isn't what you'd call exciting, but I can pay my bills. I won't get rich, but I'm doing fine."

"Good. That's good." Cincinnatus had been on his own when he was younger than Achilles was now, but he hadn't had to worry about a

family then. And a young black in Confederate Kentucky hadn't had the hopes and dreams of one in U.S. Iowa. Cincinnatus had been brutally sure he wouldn't, couldn't, get very far ahead of the game. Achilles could aspire to more. He might not get it, but if he didn't he'd have to blame himself as well as the system under which he lived. Down in the CSA, the system gave any Negro an easy excuse for failure.

"Let me have my grandbaby," Elizabeth said, and reached for Karen. Elizabeth took to being a grandmother with none of the doubts about age and the like that troubled Cincinnatus. And Karen fascinated Amanda, who at fourteen was plenty old enough to help take care of her niece.

"How you doin' with your folks these days?" Cincinnatus asked Grace.

Before she could answer, Achilles said, "Well, her daddy hasn't called me a nigger, but he sure has come close."

"I didn't ask how *you* was doin' with Mr. Chang," Cincinnatus said sharply. "I asked how Grace was."

"It is still hard," she answered. "It is still very hard, like Achilles said. My father and especially my mother are not modern people. They think of China all the time. They don't think we are all Americans. They don't think we are all the same."

Achilles stirred at that. "Pa doesn't think we're all the same, either. He thinks colored people are down at the bottom of the pile."

"That ain't so," Cincinnatus said.

"The ... heck it isn't," Achilles retorted.

"No." Cincinnatus shook his head. "I never said that, and I don't believe it. What I say is, white folks reckon black folks is on the bottom o' the pile. An' that's the Lord's truth. If you was old enough to recollect what it was like livin' in Kentucky when it belonged to the Confederate States, you'd know it, too."

"But we aren't in the Confederate States any more," Achilles pointed out.

"But white folks is still white folks." That wasn't Cincinnatus; it was

Elizabeth. The two older people thought as one on this question. If anything, Elizabeth was more cautious about rocking the boat than her husband.

Grace's smile was sad. She held up a hand to stop Achilles when he would have come back with a hot answer. That hand *did* stop him, too, as Cincinnatus noted with surprise and more than a little respect. She said, "My parents sound the same about this. But times have changed. If times hadn't changed, would Achilles and I be together?"

"Times has changed—some," Cincinnatus said. "They ain't changed enough. You look at the black folks runnin' away from the Confederate States. You look at how the USA don't let 'em cross the border. President Hoover, President Smith, that don't matter—it don't change. The USA don't want nothin' to do with us, an' that's how come I say things ain't changed enough."

He waited to see how Grace would respond to that. She shrugged and said, "Maybe." He wondered what that was supposed to mean. Probably that he hadn't convinced her, but she was too polite to say so. She didn't always come out and say what she thought. Cincinnatus had already noticed that.

He asked, "You going to visit your folks while you're here? Only one flight up."

Grace shook her head. "Not much point. They don't want to see us."

"Don't they want to see their grandbaby?" Cincinnatus pointed to Karen.

His son answered: "I'm not Chinese. I'm just a spook." His voice was harsh and cold.

"That's not quite fair," Grace said. "They wouldn't like it if you were white, either."

"Well, maybe not," Achilles admitted. "They don't quite hate me, the way I've seen some white men do. They can make themselves be polite. I even used to think they were pretty nice, till the two of us started getting serious. But they sure don't want you to be married to me, and the baby hasn't made 'em change their minds about that."

His wife sighed. "I know. It's sad. They came to America to find a better life than they could have had in China. They got one, too. But

they're still Chinese first and American afterwards."

"We came here to Iowa to get a better life, too," Cincinnatus said. "I'm glad I'm livin' in the United States and not in the Confederate States no more— 'specially nowadays. God help the poor niggers in the CSA nowadays."

Achilles and Grace left a little later. Cincinnatus walked to the stairway with them, hoping they would change their mind and go upstairs to visit the Changs after all. But they didn't. They went down to the street, carrying the baby with them. He sighed and went back to the apartment. Elizabeth's raised eyebrows asked a question. Cincinnatus shook his head.

His wife sighed. "That's so sad, they cut off from half their family. Don't seem right. Don't seem right at all. You ain't got family, you ain't got nothin'."

"And the baby's so *cute,"* Amanda said. "How can you not love a little baby?"

Cincinnatus smiled. "You love everybody, honey." That was true. Amanda was a sweet-natured child. Because she liked almost everyone, she thought everybody should like everybody else. And if all the people in the world had been like her, everybody would have. Sooner or later, though, she would have to realize not everyone worked the way she did. Cincinnatus hoped she wouldn't get hurt too badly finding that out.

Elizabeth said, "I reckon Grace's folks love the baby, all right. The one they got trouble with is your brother."

Not even Amanda believed everybody ought to love Achilles. *She* loved him, yes, but sometimes even she had to work at it. Especially when she was smaller, he'd sometimes made her life miserable, as an older brother was only too likely to do with a younger sister.

The next morning, Cincinnatus gulped an extra cup of coffee before he hit the road. He stopped on the way to the railroad yards to buy a copy of the *Herald-Express.* As usual, he read the paper in snatches at stop signs and traffic lights, and not for the front-page stories but for the ones on the inside pages, the stories the editors—and most people in Des Moines—didn't think were so important.

Who in Des Moines, for instance, got excited about a page-three

story whose headline said Kentucky state police disbanded? Kentucky had rejoined the USA before Houston had, and had been much less troublesome. But the Freedom Party had done very well in the last elections there, and this was the result.

How many comfortable Iowans knew the Kentucky State Police might better have been called the Kentucky Secret Police? The Kentucky State Police had been the instrument the USA used to make sure the state stayed loyal to Philadelphia. Cincinnatus knew Luther Bliss, the head of the outfit, all too well. Just thinking of Bliss' light brown eyes, the color of a hunting dog's, was enough to make him break out in a cold sweat. He'd spent a couple of years in prison on account of the Kentucky State Police.

And now they were disbanding? Cincinnatus whistled softly. "Do Jesus!" he muttered. "Who hold that state down?" And what would happen to their longtime head, who'd spent a generation stomping on everything the Freedom Party stood for? Would the new winners in Kentucky hang him from a lamp post?

Cincinnatus got his answer to that in the very next paragraph. *State Police Chief Luther Bliss,* the story said, *is on a fact-finding trip to Pennsylvania, and was unavailable for comment.* When Cincinnatus saw that, he chuckled grimly. Bliss was either lucky or—giving him credit no less real for being reluctant—sly to have escaped Kentucky when his foes grabbed hold of the reins.

President Smith is conferring with the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Interior about the present situation in Kentucky, the story continued. *A statement from Philadelphia is expected within the next few days.*

Would the U.S. government send more troops to Kentucky to force the state to rescind what it had done? Or would it send enough soldiers to hold things down without the Kentucky State Police? The only thing Cincinnatus couldn't imagine the administration doing was nothing. After all, Kentucky's southern border was also the USA's southern border these days.

Behind Cincinnatus, a horn blared. He jumped and put the truck in gear. He'd been reading and woolgathering while traffic piled up. He would have honked, too, if someone else did something like that.

He didn't get to finish the story, then, till he stopped at another red light. When he did, ice ran through him, for the last sentence read,

Governor Ruby Laffoon pledges to make good on a campaign promise to explore a plebiscite on whether Kentucky should belong to the United States or to the Confederate States.

"They can't do that!" Cincinnatus exclaimed. He hoped they couldn't, anyhow. His father and mother still lived in Covington. If the Stars and Bars replaced the Stars and Stripes ... He shivered, though the day was warm and muggy, even so early in the morning. "Got to git them out o' there." For Negroes, what nightmare could be worse than returning to the CSA with the Freedom Party in the saddle?

The Manitoba prairie seemed to roll on forever. Above, puffy white clouds drifted across the blue sky. Mary Pomeroy watched a hawk circle in lazy spirals high overhead. The hawk would be watching, too, for rabbits or gophers. To it, a picnic on a farm wouldn't mean a thing.

Mary couldn't watch the hawk for long. She had to watch her own son like a hawk. Alexander Arthur Pomeroy's first birthday was the occasion for the picnic. He'd just figured out how to put one foot in front of him without falling down, which made him all the more dangerous to himself. Alexander didn't know that, of course. To him, walking was the most wonderful thing in the world.

Something went into his mouth. Mary tossed the drumstick she'd been gnawing onto a plate and grabbed her son. "What have you got there?" she said sharply.

"Mama!" Alexander said. Then, as her forefinger snaked into his mouth, he let out an indignant wail. *Something* there ... She fished it out—a blade of grass. *Not so bad,* she thought, wiping her hand on her checked skirt. She'd taken a used match and a dead fly out of his mouth at one time or another. She didn't want to think about the things he might have swallowed. None of them seemed to have done him any harm, anyhow.

Maude McGregor watched her daughter with a faint smile on her face. "I don't know how many times I had to do that with you," she said. "Then there was the pearl button I found in your diaper."

"Was there?" Mary said, and her mother nodded. Mary glanced toward her husband. Mort Pomeroy was doing his polite best to pretend he hadn't heard, but he turned red all the same. Of course, he'd grown up in town, not on a farm. Mary had dealt with droppings of one kind or another ever since she learned how to walk: talking about them didn't faze her.

Her older sister, who still lived on a farm, was the same way. "I've had a surprise or two changing my kids, too," Julia Marble said. She lay on a blanket on her side, propped up on one elbow. Her belly

bulged; another chip off the Marble block was due in about six weeks. Her husband, Kenneth, and mother-in-law rode herd on her children. She couldn't move fast enough now to do it herself.

Mary remembered that beached-whale feeling from her own pregnancy. "Don't you wish it was over?" she asked Julia.

"Oh, Lord, yes," her sister answered. Their mother nodded at that, too, and so did Beth Marble, Kenneth's mother.

"Hand me another beer, would you, dear?" Mary said to her husband. Mort pulled a Moosehead from the picnic hamper. He opened it with a church key and gave it to her. "Thanks," she told him. Nothing went better with fried chicken than the intense hoppiness of beer. She smiled. "That's nice."

He nodded. "It is, isn't it? We get some Hamm's at the diner, too, because Yanks will order it when they eat, but I wouldn't bring it here."

"I hope not," Kenneth Marble said. "I've had Yank beer. They strain it through the kidneys of a sick horse and then bottle it, eh?"

Mort started to nod again, then blinked and made a peculiar noise, half snort, half giggle. Beth Marble laughed out loud. So did Mary, who was always ready to say or hear unkind things about the USA. So did her mother, which surprised and pleased her; Maude McGregor didn't find a whole lot to laugh about these days.

Fried chicken. Homemade potato salad. Deviled eggs. Fresh-baked bread. Apple pie. Mary made a pig of herself, and enjoyed doing it, too. She changed Alexander's soggy diaper and cuddled him, then set him down on the blanket when he fell asleep.

After a while, the picnickers headed back to Maude McGregor's house. Mort carried Alexander. Mary carried the hamper, which was much lighter than it had been when they put it in the motorcar back in Rosenfeld. Julia said, "Mary and I will take care of the dishes."

"That's all right," Mary said. "I can do them. You should stay off your feet."

"I don't mind, even if I have to run to the outhouse all the time now," her sister said. "We can talk while we do them. We don't get the chance much any more, not the way we used to when we both lived

here."

"That's sweet," Beth Marble said. "I was going to tell you I'd help, but now I won't. I'll be lazy instead." She laughed at that. So did Julia. Her mother-in-law was one of the least lazy people around.

Before Mary got married, she'd taken working the pump handle every so often while she did dishes for granted. Now she had to remind herself to do it, and it made her shoulder ache. "Running water's spoiled me," she said sheepishly.

"Well, you're living in town now," Julia said. "We always knew it was different."

"It sure is. We didn't know how much," Mary said. "Electricity ... It beats kerosene all hollow."

"I bet it does," Julia said. "Like I said, a lot of things are different in town. I know that." She lowered her voice and added, "But I'm afraid some things haven't changed at all."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mary asked, scrubbing at a frying pan. The breading and chicken skin at the bottom didn't want to come off. She used more elbow grease.

In that same quiet voice, Julia answered, "I think you know. I almost died when I heard somebody put a bomb in the general store. I think Ma probably did, too. If anything happened to you, I don't think we could stand it, not after Alexander and Pa."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Mary, who knew perfectly well. "Besides, that was a year and a half ago now—more than a year and a half ago. Nobody ever thought I had anything to do with it till now."

Her sister set a glass in the dish drainer. In the front room, Mort was telling a joke. Mary recognized his tone, though she couldn't make out the words. That ought to mean nobody in the front room could make out what she and Julia were saying. "You're lucky," Julia told her. "And like I said before, the two of us don't get the chance to talk like we used to."

"If you're going to talk about things like this..." Mary said.

Julia's smile was anything but amused. "I know you. So does Ma.

You've hated the Yanks since you were this high." She set a hand where her waist had been. "And you know what Pa did. The Americans never found his tools. Did you?"

"Even if I had, I wouldn't say anything," Mary answered. "People who know things can tell them. That's how the last uprising got betrayed. Some folks blabbed, and they're rich and happy. And other folks hanged on account of it."

"Do you think I would do anything like that?" Julia asked indignantly.

"No, dear. Hand me that platter, would you?" Mary scrubbed at it. "But it doesn't matter, because I haven't told you anything. There isn't anything *to* tell. Nobody knows where Pa hid his tools. If the Yanks couldn't find them, you don't think I could, do you?"

After that, they worked together in tense silence for some little while. Julia said, "I never thought the day would come when my own sister lied to me."

That hurt. Mary scrubbed away, her head down. "I didn't lie," she said in a low, furious voice. "I told you there was nothing to talk about, and there isn't. And if you call me a liar, there *won't* be anything to talk about, not ever."

"Tell me you didn't put that bomb in the general store, then," Julia said.

"I didn't put it there," Mary said. Julia's jaw dropped. Mary added, "And if you don't believe me, you can go to the devil."

She lied without hesitation. Her family was and always had been sternly Presbyterian. Here, though, she had no compunctions. She'd seen her father, a man of somber rectitude if ever there was one, lie the same way. Some things were too important to trust to anyone but yourself. Other people, even a sister you loved, could let you down. Better not to give them the chance.

And the lie worked. Julia put her arms around Mary. Because of her bulging belly, the embrace was awkward, but Julia plainly meant it. "I'm so sorry, dear," she said. "I *did* think you had something to do with it, and it left me petrified. Ma, too. We've talked about it, though I don't think she'd ever get up the nerve to say so."

Mary didn't think so, either. When her father was making bombs, her mother had never asked him about it. She'd known. She'd known full well. But she'd kept quiet. That had always been her way. As the older sister, though, Julia had always thought she could poke her nose into Mary's business whenever she felt like it. That was how it seemed to Mary, anyhow. She never stopped to wonder if it looked any different to Julia.

They finished the dishes. When they went into the living room, Mort asked, "What were you two gossiping about in there?"

"Men," Mary answered.

In the same breath, Julia said, "Horses."

"How to tell the difference between them," Mary said. That got a laugh from Julia and their mother and Beth Marble. Mort and Kenneth Marble didn't seem to think it was quite so funny.

On the drive back to Rosenfeld, Mary held Alexander on her lap. He put up with that for a while, but then started to fuss. He wanted to crawl around in the auto. No matter what he wanted, Mary didn't let him. Who could guess what kinds of fascinating things he'd find to stick in his mouth down there?

"It's a different world, your mother's farm," Mort remarked as he pulled to a stop in front of their apartment building.

"I've thought the same thing," Mary said. "No running water, no electricity ... I didn't know what they were like till I married you."

"No indoor plumbing, either. And that privy..." Her husband held his nose. Alexander thought that was funny. He tried to hold his little button of a nose, and almost stuck a finger in his eye.

"I didn't even think about it when I lived there," Mary said. She'd had to use the privy while she was there, though. The stink was enough to make her eyes cross. It wasn't so bad in the wintertime—but during the winter, you didn't want to expose any part of your anatomy to the cold.

"What we've got here is better," Mort said. "A lot better."

"Of course it is," Mary said. "We've got each other." That made Mort smile, which was what she'd had in mind. She didn't talk about what

Canada didn't have: freedom, independence, its own laws, its own people running its shops, its own police in the streets, its own soldiers guarding the frontiers.

Mort knew his country lacked all those things, too. But Mary didn't want to remind him about them, lest he wonder if she'd put the bomb in the general store. It wasn't that she didn't trust him. If she hadn't trusted him, she never would have married him. But some burdens, she remained convinced, had to be borne alone. This was one of them.

She carried Alexander Arthur Pomeroy up the stairs. Her brother's name went on. So did her father's. And so did the quiet war they'd waged against the USA.

Election Day brought Hipolito Rodriguez into Baroyeca to vote. It also brought him in to make sure things went the way they were supposed to. He thought people had learned their lessons during the election of 1933, when Jake Featherston became president of the CSA, and from the revenge on the Freedom Party's foes that followed. But 1933 was four years gone by now. Sometimes people forgot lessons ... or needed to be reminded.

Rodriguez's trip into town this year was different from the ones that had gone before. With him strode Miguel and Jorge. Both of his older sons had finished their time in the Freedom Youth Corps. Now they were strong young men, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, hard-muscled, both of them several inches taller than their father. They weren't old enough to vote yet, but they were old enough and tough enough to knock heads if heads needed knocking.

A new set of poles marched down from the mountains, parallel to the ones that had brought the telegraph into Baroyeca for generations. Those were spindly and sun-faded; they leaned now this way, now that. The new poles, by contrast, were perfectly spaced. They were thicker than the poles that held the telegraph wire, and every one stood perfectly straight. Even the wire on them, wrapped in its heavy coat of black insulation, seemed altogether stronger and tougher than the wire for the telegraph.

Pointing to the line of new poles, Miguel said, "We did that." Pride rang in his voice.

"I know you did," Hipolito Rodriguez answered. "And I'm proud of you. Who would have thought Baroyeca would have its own electricity?"

A falcon spiraled down and perched on a power pole a couple of hundred yards away. It didn't stay long. As the Rodriguezes drew near, it flew off again, screeching shrilly. It landed on a telegraph pole, but flew up at once when the pole shifted under its weight.

Jorge said, "Somebody's going to have to take care of those telegraph poles one of these days before too long."

His father had a pretty good idea who those somebodies might be. The Freedom Youth Corps was made for projects like that. It always had plenty of eager, active bodies, and it didn't pay any of them very well. When he got into Baroyeca, he saw boys from the Youth Corps, working under the direction of a master mason from another town, laying bricks for a new town hall and jail. They labored like men possessed, with a rhythm alien to Sonora, where things generally found their own pace. Not here; this was a breath of businesslike Virginia or North Carolina set down at the far end of the Confederate States.

Miguel and Jorge watched the youths with a mixture of scorn for those younger than themselves and respect for what they were doing. Miguel said, "They may be clumsy, but they aren't lazy." He spoke in English. It was the language of the Youth Corps, and seemed to be the language he and Jorge always used these days to think and talk about work.

The two of them weren't lazy now that they'd come back to the farm. They pitched into chores with an enthusiasm Hipolito Rodriguez found almost frightening. They ate them up and went looking for more. His own natural pace was slower. He used *mañana* to mean one of these days, when he got around to it. They used the word scornfully, to mean something that would never get done. He stopped using the word so much. The Youth Corps attitude began rubbing off on him.

This year, the polling place was in the *alcalde's* front room. Several Freedom Party stalwarts stood just outside. They waved to Hipolito as he came up. Carlos Ruiz had a list in his hand. Pointing to it, Rodriguez asked, "Did any of those fellows try to vote this time?"

"Only one," Ruiz answered. "We gave him a set of lumps and sent

him home."

Rodriguez walked inside to cast his ballot. He voted the straight Freedom Party ticket. The way the ballot was printed, that was easy. Voting for the Whigs or the Radical Liberals was much harder. He put the completed ballot in the box. "Hipolito Rodriguez has voted," intoned the clerk in charge of the box. Hearing his name spoken so seriously always made him feel important. Another clerk wrote a line through his name on the registration roster so he couldn't vote twice.

He wondered how much difference that made. The people who would count the ballots were Freedom Party men. Back in the days when Sonora had been in the Radical Liberals' pockets, Rodriguez had often wondered how much announced counts had to do with real ones. He still did. The Freedom Party seized advantages whenever and however it could.

After voting, he took his sons to Freedom Party headquarters. Robert Quinn had seen them before, but not lately. *"Por Dios, Señor* Rodriguez, you did not tell me you were raising football players," he said in his deliberate Spanish. "Where did you get these enormous young men?"

Miguel and Jorge both stood even taller and threw back their shoulders to make them look wider. They liked the idea of being football players. The new U.S.-style game, with forward passing, had really caught on in Sonora since the Great War. Some open ground, goal posts, and a ball were all you needed.

Miguel said, "All the good food we got in the Freedom Youth Corps helped us finish growing." He'd said the same thing to Rodriguez not long after coming home, and in the same—English—words. Rodriguez guessed he'd heard it a lot in the Corps. Hastily, though, Miguel added, "We eat well at home, too," and Jorge nodded. Their mother had been hurt when they praised the food they'd eaten in the Freedom Youth Corps.

Quinn nodded now. "I'm sure you do," he said, still in Spanish. He bent over backwards not to seem to be ramming English down anyone's throat. In that, he and other Freedom Party men in Sonora were the opposite of a lot of English-speakers Rodriguez had known. The Freedom Youth Corps operated mostly in English, but the younger generation was already more at home in the language of most of the Confederate States. Quinn went on, "And what will you do now that you've been discharged from the Corps?"

"Help Father on the farm for now, sir," Jorge said.

"I wish we could do something more for the country, though," Miguel said.

"It could be the day will come when you can," Quinn answered smoothly.

Miguel wants to be conscripted. That's what he's saying, though he doesn't even know it. The realization struck Rodriguez like a thunderbolt. And Jorge was nodding. *I'll talk with them,* their father thought. *He* hadn't wanted to be conscripted. But when his time came, during the war, the government was shooting young men in Sonora who refused to report. He'd gone in and taken his chances with Yankee lead. He was still here, so he supposed he'd done the right thing.

Robert Quinn went on, "Meanwhile, of course, doing things for the *Partido de Libertad* is almost the same as doing things for *los Estados Confederados.* Your father is a good man, a patriotic man. You'll follow in his footsteps, eh?"

Miguel and Jorge both nodded then. Rodriguez said, "I will tell you what I am. I am a man who is lucky in his sons."

"There is no luck better than that," Quinn said. "Do you want to grab a club and take the afternoon shift on watching the polling place? Bring your boys along; let them see how it's done. Then come back here. Now that we have electricity, I've got a wireless set to let us hear returns." He pointed to the box on his desk.

"Good," Rodriguez said, nodding to the wireless almost as if it were a person. "We will see you here, then, after the polls close. Come on, boys."

Out they went, and back to the *alcalde's* house. When Miguel and Jorge saw that one of the men outside the polling place with their father was Felipe Rojas, who'd shown them the ropes when they joined the Freedom Youth Corps, they were very impressed. When they saw that Rojas didn't roar at their father like the wrath of God, but treated him as an equal and a friend, they were even more impressed. Rodriguez carefully concealed his amusement.

And then his amusement dried up and blew away, for here came Don Gustavo, his old *patron,* straight for the polling place. Don

Gustavo's name was on the list Felipe Rojas held. He came up to the Freedom Party men as if he were still a great power in the land, the power he'd been before 1933. His white shirt and string tie, his sharply creased black trousers and wide-brimmed black felt hat, his silver belt buckle and patent-leather shoes, all declared that he was no peasant, but a person of consequence. So did his thin little mustache and his prominent belly.

"Buenos días," he said, affably enough. "Excuse me, please, for I am going to vote." He had nerve. He'd come without bodyguards. More than once, the men loyal to him had come up against those who followed the Freedom Party. They'd come off second best every time, and paid a heavy price in blood. Now Don Gustavo was doing his bold best to pretend none of that had ever happened.

No matter how bold that best was, it wasn't going to get him into the polling place. "Freedom!" Felipe Rojas said in English. "You would do better, *señor,* to go home and stay there in peace."

Don Gustavo's nostrils flared angrily. "You speak of freedom, and yet you say I am not free to vote?" *He* stuck to Spanish, and Spanish of almost Castilian purity. His face was fiery red. Scorn came off him in waves. His hand slid toward his pocket. By the way the pocket sagged, a small pistol hid there.

Hipolito Rodriguez tightened his grip on his club. "Don't do that, *señor,"* he said. "You may shoot us. You may even march in there and vote. But if you do, you are a dead man. Your family will die with you. The *Partido de Liber-tad* knows how to take revenge. Do you doubt it?"

He waited. Slowly, the high color faded from Don Gustavo's cheeks and forehead, leaving him almost corpse-pale. He'd seen how the Freedom Party struck back. "Damn you," he said. The Party men answered not a word. Don Gustavo's shoulders sagged. He turned and walked away.

"¡Bueno, papa!" Jorge said softly. Hipolito Rodriguez was only a peasant doing his best to make a living from a farm that could have been bigger and could have been on better land, but for the moment he felt ten feet tall.

Felipe Rojas took a pencil from a trouser pocket and checked Don Gustavo's name off on the list of those who weren't going to vote. The tiny sound the pencil point made on the paper was the sound of a

system centuries old, a system that had endured under the flag of Spain, the flag of Mexico, and the flag of the Confederate States, falling to ruin.

"He backed down, did he?" Quinn said when the Freedom Party men returned to Party headquarters. "He's not a hundred percent stupid, then, is he? He knows things have changed in Sonora, and changed for the better, too."

The sound of the wireless set was another sound of change. The announcer, who spoke mostly English, but an English larded with Spanish words and turns of phrase, told of one Freedom Party victory after another in Congressional races and in state and local elections. The whole Confederacy lined up behind President Featherston and the party he'd built.

Well, almost the whole Confederacy. Rodriguez said, "He does not talk about the elections in Louisiana."

Robert Quinn frowned, as if he wished Rodriguez hadn't noticed. "Louisiana is ... a problem," he admitted. "But the Freedom Party solves problems. You can count on that."

The *Remembrance* was a great ship. Her displacement matched that of any battleship in the U.S. Navy. All the same, the storm in the Atlantic flung the aeroplane carrier around like a toy boat in a bathtub also inhabited by a rambunctious four-year-old. Sam Carsten was glad he had a strong stomach. Plenty of sailors didn't; the air in the ship's corridors carried a faint but constant reek of vomit.

Somewhere off to the east lay the coast of North Carolina. The *Remembrance* and her aeroplanes were supposed to be keeping an eye on what the Confederates were up to. In weather and seas like this, she could neither launch aeroplanes nor land them once launched. About all she could do was pick up this, that, and the other thing in the wireless shack.

When Carsten wasn't on duty, he spent a fair amount of time hanging around in the shack finding out whatever he could. A lot of the wireless traffic coming out of the CSA was in Morse, which he understood only haltingly. A lot of it was in code, which not even the

sailors taking it down understood. But every now and then they tuned in to stations from Wilmington or Elizabeth City or Norfolk up in Virginia. Those fascinated him. Up until about the time his father was born, the USA and the CSA had been one country. Half an hour of listening to Confederate wireless was plenty to show him they'd gone their separate ways since the War of Secession.

Oh, the music the Confederates played wasn't that much different from what he would have heard on a U.S. station. Even there, though, the Confederates' tunes often had wilder rhythms to them than any band in the USA would have used. Carsten had heard people say that was because a lot of musicians in the CSA were Negroes. He didn't know if it was true, but he'd heard it.

In between songs, the advertisements were all but identical to their U.S. equivalents. That made perfect sense to him. People trying to separate other people from their money probably sounded the same regardless of whether they were speaking English or Italian or Japanese or Hindustani. A hustler was a hustler, no matter where he lived.

But when the news came on, Sam knew he was hearing voices from another country. For one thing, all the stations carried the same stories, word for word. Sam had thought so, and the men in the wireless shack confirmed his impression. The broadcasters were all getting their scripts from the same place. And, by the way things sounded, that place was a Freedom Party office somewhere in Richmond.

As far as the wireless was concerned, the Freedom Party could do no wrong. Jesus might have walked on water, but, if you listened to the smooth-voiced men in the wireless web, Freedom Party officials from President Featherston down to Homer Duffy, the dogcatcher in Pig Scratch, South Carolina, walked on air, and choirs of angels burst into song behind them whenever they deigned to open their mouths and let the masses benefit from their godlike wisdom.

That especially held true when the announcers introduced a speech by Jake Featherston. To listen to them, Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai to enlighten an undeserving and sinful people. It wasn't just an act, either, or Carsten didn't think it was. They meant it, and they expected everybody listening to feel the same way.

"I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth," the Confederate president would say in his harsh accent, and then he'd

spew out lies and hate. If he spoke in front of an audience, people would go nuts, whooping and hollering and cheering to beat the band. If he was by himself for a talk, the broadcaster would sugarcoat it afterwards.

"Do the Confederates really believe the crap that guy puts out?" Sam asked after a particularly virulent tirade from Featherston about colored terrorists.

One of the yeomen in the wireless shack shrugged. "If they say they don't, sir, they end up slightly dead," he answered. "Or more than slightly."

"Besides," the other yeoman added, "they can't say anything against the government, not in public they can't."

"Is it a country or a jail?" Carsten asked.

"Near as I can tell, sir," the second yeoman said, "it's a jail."

The more time Sam spent in the wireless shack, the more he was inclined to agree with the man who monitored signals coming out of the CSA. The other thing he noticed was that everybody on the wireless sounded happy about being in jail. If people in the Confederate States were unhappy about anything that was going on in their country, they didn't say so where any large number of other people had the chance to hear them.

When Carsten remarked on that, one of the yeomen said, "You're close, sir, but you're not quite right. When you hear 'em talk about Louisiana, you'll think the devil lives there."

Little by little, Sam discovered the man was right. It took a while. The men who read the news didn't like talking about Louisiana, any more than Sam's mother had liked talking about the facts of life. Sometimes, though, they couldn't help it. They sounded as if they were gloating when they noted how the state militia there was having trouble putting down Negro uprisings within its borders. Whenever Governor Long made a speech the broadcasters couldn't ignore, they went out of their way to heap scorn on it. They even seemed to celebrate when the New Orleans Tigers, the number-one football team in the state, lost to elevens from Atlanta or Richmond.

"Why do the rest of the Confederate States hate Louisiana?" Carsten asked in the officers' mess one day at suppertime.

"You've noticed that, have you, Lieutenant?" Commander Dan Cressy said.

"Uh, yes, sir," Sam replied, more than a little nervously: Cressy was the *Remembrance's* executive officer, answerable to no one aboard the carrier except Captain Stein. Attracting his attention could be good or could be anything but, depending on why you attracted it.

"Anyone else here notice it?" Cressy inquired, sipping his coffee. He had a long, thin, pale, highly intelligent face, and a pair of the coldest gray eyes Sam had ever seen. Like any good exec, he acted like a son of a bitch so the skipper didn't have to. A lot of people said he wasn't acting. Rumor had it that he translated Latin poetry in his quarters. Carsten had no idea if that particular rumor was true. Commander Cressy waited, but none of the other officers in the mess said anything. He set down the thick white china mug and nodded to Sam. "Very good, Lieutenant. You're dead right, of course; Louisiana is the pariah of the CSA. How did you come to realize that?"

Why didn't the rest of you notice that? bubbled just below the surface of his voice. Three or four officers sent Sam resentful looks. He was the least senior man in the mess except an ensign just out of Annapolis —and that smooth-cheeked ensign had a much brighter future in the Navy than a middle-aged mustang. Picking his words with care, Sam answered, "That sure is the way it sounds on the wireless, sir."

He wondered whether Commander Cressy would land on him like a ton of bricks for listening to the wireless. But Cressy didn't. His eyes stayed cold— Carsten didn't think they *could* warm up—but the light in them was undoubtedly approval. "Good," he said. "The more ways you can find out about the enemy, the better." Formally, of course, the Confederate States weren't the enemy. But among the fruit salad on Cressy's chest was the ribbon for a Purple Heart. He'd got a broken ankle aboard a U.S. destroyer torpedoed by a C.S. submersible in 1916. After another sip of coffee, he went on, "But you asked why, didn't you?"

"Uh, yes, sir," Carsten said.

The exec nodded again. "That's always the right question, because everything else comes out of it. Not what. Not how. Why. Know why, and what and how and often when and where and who take care of themselves. This time, why is pretty easy. Louisiana is the only Confederate state the Freedom Party doesn't own lock, stock, and barrel. Long, the governor there, is a Radical Liberal, and he's pulled

off the same kind of coup inside the state as the Freedom Party has in the rest of the CSA. Outside of Louisiana, what Jake Featherston says, goes. Inside Louisiana, it's what Governor Long says."

Carsten nodded. That told him what he needed to know, all right. It also raised another question: "Can he get away with it?"

Before Commander Cressy could answer that, the general-quarters klaxon started hooting. Cressy and Carsten and all the other officers sprang to their feet. The exec said, "We'll take this up another time, if you like. Meanwhile..." Meanwhile, he was the first one out the door, trotting toward his station on the bridge.

Sam was only a step behind Cressy. As he hurried to his own post down in the bowels of the *Remembrance,* he wondered how many times he'd gone to general quarters, either as a drill or during real combat. He wouldn't have cared to give a precise number, but it had to be up in the hundreds.

He also wondered whether this was a drill or the real thing. You always did, if you had any sense. He heard sailors asking one another the same question as they clattered up and down iron staircases and rushed along corridors. Nobody seemed to have an answer, which was par for the course.

He was panting a little when he got to his own post. *Too goddamn many cigarettes,* he thought. *They're hell on the wind.* Thinking of them made him want one. But the smoking lamp went out during general quarters. The pack stayed in his pocket.

"What's up, sir?" asked one of the sailors in the damage-control party.

"Beats me," Sam answered. "Here's Lieutenant Commander Pottinger, though. Maybe he knows." He turned to the officer who headed the damage-control party. "You know what's going on, sir?"

"I think so," Hiram Pottinger said. "Don't know for a fact, but the scuttlebutt is, somebody spotted a periscope off to port."

That produced excited chatter from the sailors in the party. One of them, an enormous redhead named Charlie Fitzpatrick, asked the cogent question: "Whose?"

"Subs don't usually fly flags on top of their periscopes," Pottinger

said dryly. "In these waters, though, that boat isn't awfully goddamn likely to be Japanese."

The sailors laughed. But then somebody said, "The Confederates aren't supposed to have any submersibles," and the laughter stopped. Everybody in the U.S. Navy was convinced the CSA had quite a few things the armistice at the end of the war forbade. Carsten remembered those sleek aeroplanes with confederate citrus company painted on their sides. They hadn't been armed—he didn't think they had, anyhow—but they'd looked mighty ready to take guns.

"No way to know the submarine *is* Confederate," Pottinger said. "It could be British or French, too."

That didn't make Sam any happier. The British, who'd been beaten but not crushed, had been allowed a few submarines after the war. The French hadn't. But Kaiser Bill's Germany wasn't pushing them about that. For one thing, the Kaiser was an old, old man these days. For another, the *Action Française* regime, like the Freedom Party in the CSA, wanted to do some pushing of its own. And, for a third, Germany kept looking anxiously toward the Balkans, where restive South Slavs were making Austria-Hungary totter the same way they had a quarter of a century before.

Fifteen minutes later, the all-clear sounded. Carsten warily accepted it. But, as he headed up to the flight deck, he couldn't help wondering how long things would stay all clear.

The southbound train hurried through the night. Anne Colleton had done a lot of traveling, and a lot of sleeping in Pullman cars. She had trouble sleeping now. Here in Mississippi, she couldn't help wondering if machine-gun fire would stitch its way along the side of the train, or if a charge of dynamite buried in the roadbed would blow the engine off the tracks. The Confederate Army was doing its best to put down the simmering Negro uprising, but guerrillas weren't easy to quell. As soon as they hid their guns, they looked like any other sharecroppers. And plenty of blacks who wouldn't go out bushwhacking themselves would lie for and conceal the ones who did.

This wasn't a revolt like the one in 1915. That one had hoped to topple the Confederacy, and had come too close to success. This was

more like a sore that didn't want to heal. Anne feared Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party had pushed blacks too hard after taking power—pushed them too hard without being able to crush them if they did rise up. Now the country had to pay for that lack of foresight.

Eventually, she did doze off. When she woke, the sky was getting light. Nobody had shot up the train. She yawned enormously, trying to drive away sleep. A few minutes later, a colored steward came by with a pot of coffee. She all but mugged him to get her hands on a cup. Even as she drank it, though, she wondered if the man had any connection to the guerrillas. You never could tell. She'd found that out the hard way.

She knew to the minute when the train passed from Mississippi down into Louisiana. Billboards with Jake Featherston's picture and Freedom Party slogans disappeared, to be replaced by those with Governor Long's picture and his slogans. Long called himself a Radical Liberal, but in fact he was just as much a strongman in Louisiana as Featherston was in the CSA as a whole. He'd learned a lot from the way the Freedom Party had risen, learned and applied the knowledge in his own state.

Fortified by that cup of coffee, Anne got dressed and went to the dining car for breakfast. She was just finishing when the conductor came through, calling, "Baton Rouge! Next stop is Baton Rouge!"

She went back to her compartment, threw her nightclothes into a suitcase, and waited for the train to stop. A porter came to collect the luggage: another Negro, and so another man to wonder about, no matter how fulsomely he thanked her for the tip she gave him.

Flashbulbs burst in a startling fusillade when she got down onto the platform from the Pullman car. "Welcome to Louisiana, Miss Colleton!" boomed a pudgy, dark-haired man in his mid-forties: Governor Huey Long. He swarmed forward, first to shake her hand, then to plant a kiss on her cheek. More flashbulbs popped. The papers in Louisiana were as much in his pocket as those in the rest of the Confederacy were in Jake Featherston's.

"Thank you very much," Anne answered, slightly dazed. "I hadn't expected such a fancy reception." She'd expected to be met by a driver and possibly bodyguards, and to be whisked from the station to the state Capitol.

But Huey Long didn't operate that way. "Anything worth doing is worth overdoing," he declared, and turned to play to the crowd on the platform. "Ain't that right, folks?"

People burst into noisy applause. "You tell 'em, Kingfish!" a woman called, as if to a preacher. Long lacked some of President Featherston's fiery intensity, but he seemed a more likable, more *human* figure. They both got what they wanted—people did as they told them to—but by different roads. That *ain't* was a nice touch. Huey Long had a law degree; such language wasn't part of the way he usually talked. But he brought it out naturally, using it to connect with the crowd.

"Come on," he told Anne. "Let's get on over to the statehouse and talk." She nodded. That was what Jake Featherston had sent her to Louisiana to do.

The governor's limousine was a Bentley with a hood as long as a battleship. Featherston would never have set foot in such a flashy motorcar. He had, so to speak, risen from the ranks, and didn't want to lose the common touch. Governor Long, by contrast, reveled in luxury.

Motorcycles ridden by state troopers preceded and followed the limousine. So did police cars with red lights flashing and sirens blaring. Long turned the short trip from the station to the Capitol into a procession. More photographers were waiting for him and Anne as they went up the steps into the impressively domed building.

Hard-faced guards surrounded them going up those steps. More guards waited at the entranceway. Still more patrolled the corridors. However much Huey Long posed as a friend of the people, he didn't trust them very far. A horde of sweepers also patrolled the hallways, and kept them spotlessly clean.

"If I'm rushing you, just sing out," Long told Anne. "You want to go to a hotel and freshen up, maybe even take a day to rest, it's all right by me."

"Thank you, but I'm fine," she said. "I'm here now. We may as well talk now, don't you think?"

"However you want it, that's how it'll be," he said grandly. "Suppose you go on and tell me *why* you're here."

"That's simple, Governor: I'm here to deliver a message for President Featherston," Anne answered. "You must understand that, or

you wouldn't have given me such a ... splendid reception."

"Well, now, I want you to know it was my pleasure," Long said, and then, as if relishing the phrase, repeated it: "My pleasure. I'll be glad to listen to this here message, whatever it is, even though I have trouble seeing what sort of a message the president of the CSA would want to send to me. I'm just minding my business here in Louisiana, and I reckon he ought to do the same outside my state."

"That's ... part of what the message is about," Anne replied, much more nervous here than she'd ever been while dealing with *Action Française.* If Governor Long didn't like what she had to say, she might not get home to South Carolina.

He nodded now, though, all graciousness. "Go on, then," he told her.

"You understand that this is unofficial," Anne said. "If you quote me, the president will either call you a liar or say I wasn't speaking for him." Long nodded impatiently. He'd trumpet what came next anyhow, and Featherston would disown it. But now the formalities of things unofficial had been observed, so Anne went on, "You could call this a warning, Governor. If you don't bring Louisiana into line with the rest of the CSA, you'll be sorry."

Huey Long scowled. "Bring it into line, you say? What's that supposed to mean? Knuckle under to the Freedom Party? Pardon my French, Miss Colleton, but I'll be damned if I'll do that."

You'll be damned if you don't, Anne thought. Aloud, she said, "The president is concerned about the direction you're taking Louisiana in."

"I'm not doing anything he hasn't done," Long said.

He was right, of course. But he'd started later, and had only a state to work in. That wasn't enough, not when he was up against the rest of the country. If he didn't see that... If he didn't see that, maybe he was too full of himself to see it. Anne said, "You'd do better not to get all stiff-necked about this, Governor. The president is very determined."

"What's he going to do? Invade my state?" Long snorted, ridiculing the mere idea. "If he does, we'll fight, by God. I'm just as good a Confederate patriot as he is any day of the week."

Despite his threat, he didn't take the idea seriously. Anne did. One thing she was sure of: Jake Featherston would tolerate no threats to his own authority. She said, "I don't know what he'll do. Whatever it is, do you really think you could stop it? This is only one state, after all."

"I'll take my chances," said the governor of Louisiana. "We haven't seen much freedom since the Freedom Party took over. But Featherston can't run again in 1939; it's against the Confederate Constitution. I think maybe I can whip anybody else in the Party. Willy Knight?" He gave a contemptuous shrug. "If he hadn't climbed onto Featherston's coattails, he'd still be a loudmouthed Texas nobody."

He wasn't wrong about that, either, or about the single six-year term to which the Confederate president was limited. More than once, Anne had wondered what Jake Featherston intended to do about that. What *could* he do? She didn't know. To Huey Long, she said, "That's all, then. I've told you what I came here to tell you. I have a reservation at the Excelsior. May I go there?" It wasn't an idle question; Long might want to hold her hostage. "Just so you know, the president won't pay ransom or anything like that to get me back."

"Oh, yes. I know. Run along," Long said. "You're not a big enough centipede in my shoe to get excited about."

That stung. Of all the things Anne least wanted to be called, *small-time* ranked high on the list. Smiling as if he knew as much, Long escorted her to the limousine. The driver put the car into gear without asking where she was going. Five minutes later, he pulled up in front of the Excelsior. "Here you are, ma'am."

"Thank you." She tipped him. A colored bellboy put her suitcases on a cart and wheeled them into the hotel. Anne went to the front desk. After fuming while she waited in line, she gave her name to the clerk.

"Oh, yes, Miss Colleton. Of course. And how are you this lovely afternoon?"

Anne hesitated a split second before answering. She'd expected to hear that precise question, but not so soon. "Tired," she told him. If she'd *said, Just fine,* the world would have been a different place. She didn't know how, not for certain, but one response meant one thing, the other something else.

The clerk's face showed none of that. With a sympathetic smile, he said, "You take it easy here. We've got fine rooms, and the best restaurant in town, too."

"All right. I'll try it." She collected her room key and went upstairs, the bellboy trailing along behind her. She tipped him and the elevator operator, then unpacked and indulged in the luxury of a bath before going down to the best restaurant in town. It lived up to the desk clerk's description. She soon saw why: a lot of the plump, prosperous men who ate there were Louisiana legislators. Talk of power and of business filled the air.

The restaurant gave a view of Roselawn, the street that led north to the Capitol. Anne was about halfway through an excellent plate of lamb chops when chaos suddenly erupted outside. Sirens screaming and red lights blazing, police cars and ambulances raced toward the statehouse.

Several of the important men in the restaurant wondered what was going on, some of them loudly and profanely. A telephone in the corridor that led to the place jangled. A waiter hurried from the corridor to one of the tables full of prominent people. A handsome, gray-haired man went back with him.

A moment later, curses as explosive as any Anne had ever heard filled the air. The gray-haired man rushed back into the room, crying, "Governor Long's been shot! Shot, I tell you! Nigger janitor was carrying a gun! Goddamn nigger's dead, but Governor Long, he's hurt bad!"

Pandemonium filled the restaurant. Men sprang to their feet shouting frightful oaths. Women screamed. A few men screamed, too. Anne went right on eating her lamb chops. She was supposed to get out of town tomorrow, and hoped the state authorities would let her leave. If they started wondering what connection she had to a desk clerk and a desperate janitor ... All she knew about was one code phrase. No. She knew one other thing. When Jake Featherston gave her this assignment, she'd known better than to ask too many questions.

"You can't do this to me," the silver-haired lawyer insisted. "It

violates every tenet of the Constitution of the Confederate States of America."

Jefferson Pinkard shrugged broad shoulders. "If I had the time, I could tell you there's martial law in Louisiana, and so whatever the Constitution's got to say doesn't matter worth a hill of beans. If I had time, I could do that. But I don't have time. And so—" He slapped the lawyer in the face, then backhanded him with a return stroke. Then he punched the silver-haired fellow in the pit of the stomach. The man tried to double up, but the guards who had hold of him wouldn't let him. In friendly tones, Pinkard asked, "See what I mean?"

He wondered if the lawyer would say something stupid and need another dose. Some of these people did. They'd run things in Louisiana for a long time, and had trouble figuring out they weren't in charge any more. They ran their mouths off, and they paid for it. Oh, yes, they paid plenty.

This one, though, seemed smarter than most. He also needed half a minute or so to catch his breath before he could say anything at all. "I get it," he choked out, his face gray with pain.

A little disappointed, Jeff jerked a thumb toward the interior of the camp. "Take him away," he said, and the guards did. Jeff laughed. He wondered if the men who'd voted to build camps in Louisiana ever imagined they'd wind up in them. He doubted it; people didn't work that way.

But, whether people believed it or not, things changed mighty easily. Huey Long had imitated in miniature Jake Featherston's system of running up prison camps to hold people who might cause trouble for him. With Long dead, with the president declaring martial law in Louisiana "to deal with the vile terrorism of black insurrection," the Freedom Party and all its apparatus had swooped down on the state like a hawk swooping down on a plump chicken. Men who'd defied the Freedom Party since long before 1933 were finally getting what was coming to them.

The swoop came so hard and fast, state officials hadn't had any chance to resist. President Featherston declared martial law the minute he heard Governor Long was dead. Soldiers and Freedom Party guards and stalwarts swarmed into Louisiana from north, east, and west. So many of them had been in Texas and Mississippi and Arkansas, so very close to the border, that Pinkard wondered if they hadn't waited there for Long's assassination. He wondered, but he kept

quiet. Men who shot off their mouths about things like that didn't run prison camps; they got locked up in them. And besides, Jeff was more inclined to see this whole operation as good planning than as an invasion.

Long's wardens had used a little more imagination on the names of their prisons than the Freedom Party bothered with. This one, just outside Alexandria, was called Camp Dependable. That amused Jeff, not least because the fellow who had been in charge of this place was now an inmate here.

So was one of Huey Long's brothers. The other had suffered an unfortunate accident shortly after the forces necessary for martial law began entering Louisiana. Jeff had heard—unofficially, of course—that the "accident" involved a burst of machine-gun fire. That wasn't in the papers or on the wireless. He couldn't prove it was true. But he wouldn't have been surprised, either.

He went out to the perimeter of Camp Dependable. Freedom Party stalwarts were strengthening it with more barbed wire. It already had more machine-gun emplacements than Long's people had been able to afford. Martial law had been declared to put down the Negro insurrection in Louisiana. That insurrection still simmered, and still needed defending against. Somehow, though, just about all the inmates in the prison camp were white men who'd backed Huey Long to the hilt.

"Everything tight?" Pinkard asked a helmeted Freedom Party guard who manned a machine gun.

"You bet, Warden," the man answered. "Tight as a fifty-dollar whore's snatch."

Pinkard laughed. "That's the way it's supposed to be," he said, and continued on his rounds. "Freedom!" he added over his shoulder.

"Freedom!" the machine gunner echoed. That greeting hadn't been heard much here since Huey Long seized the reins. With martial law in place, though, with Louisiana being brought into line with the rest of the Confederate States, *Freedom!* here now had the importance it deserved.

A few hundred yards away, motorcars rolled along the highway that ran down to New Orleans. Governor Long had done a lot for the roads in the state. Building roads meant lots of jobs. Out in the rest of

the CSA, President Featherston's dam-building program did the same thing.

Only after he'd trumped the entire perimeter did Pinkard relax a little. He'd got into the habit down in the Empire of Mexico. There, he hadn't been able to rely on the guards as much as he would have liked. If he didn't see things with his own eyes, he couldn't know for sure how they were going. He still remained convinced he had a better chance of heading off trouble if he kept an eye on everything himself.

With a couple of guards, he also strode through the interior of Camp Dependable. Having an escort was part of regulations. Where he didn't make the rules, he followed them. Making people follow the rules was the point of a prison camp, after all. But, rules or no rules, he didn't much worry about being taken hostage. New prisoners had tried that once with another warden, a couple of days after Governor Long died. The ensuing massacre showed what they could expect if they tried it again.

"Hey, Warden!" somebody called. "Can we get better food?"

"You'll get what the regulations say you get," Pinkard answered. "And you'll be sorry if you whine about it. You understand?"

The prisoner didn't answer. He wore his striped uniform—regulation in Louisiana—with an odd sort of pride. He'd sounded like an educated man when he asked the question. Jeff wondered what he'd been before Huey Long's rule collapsed. A lawyer? A professor? A writer? Whatever he'd been, he was only a prisoner now. And he hadn't really figured out how to be a prisoner, or he wouldn't have kept quiet when the warden asked him a question. Pinkard nodded to the guards. He needed to do no more than that. They fell on the man and beat him up. He howled, which helped him not at all. The other prisoners nearby watched, wide-eyed. None of them said a word or tried to interfere. They were learning.

When the beating ended, the guards stepped back. They weren't even mussed. Slowly, painfully, blood running down his face, the prisoner struggled to his feet. "You understand?" Jeff asked him again.

"Yes, Warden," he choked out.

"Stand at attention when you speak to the warden, you worthless sack of shit," a guard growled.

The prisoner did his best. It wasn't very good, since he could hardly stand upright at all. Here, though, making the effort counted. "Yes, Warden," he repeated, and then, warily, he added, "Sorry, Warden."

"Sorry doesn't cut the mustard," Pinkard snapped. "What are you?"

"What—?" The prisoner frowned. One of the guards snarled in hungry eagerness. He snarled a little too soon, though, and gave the man a hint. "I'm a worthless sack of shit, Warden!" he blurted.

Pinkard answered with a brusque nod and a handful of words: "Grits and water—ten days."

He waited. If the prisoner protested, if he even blinked, he would be a lot sorrier than he was already. But he only stayed at attention and tried to look as if he'd got good news. Pinkard nodded again and walked on. He would have less trouble from here on out with everybody who'd watched and listened.

No one gave him any more lip till he got to the infirmary. Then it came not from a prisoner but from a white-coated doctor. "Warden, if these men keep getting rations of hominy grits and a little fatback and nothing else, you'll see more cases of pellagra than you can shake a stick at."

"What else am I supposed to feed them?" Jeff asked.

"Vegetables. Fruits. Wheat flour," the doctor said. "They haven't been here very long, but some of them are already starting to show symptoms."

"Feeding 'em that other stuff'd cost more money, wouldn't it?" Pinkard asked.

"Well, yes," the man in the white coat admitted. "But pellagra's no joke. It will kill. It's only the past few years we've found out that something missing from the diet causes it. Do you want to burden yourself with a lot of disease you can easily prevent?"

Jeff shrugged. "I don't know about that. What I do know is, these people are enemies of the Confederate States. They don't deserve anything fancy. We'll go on the way we have been, thank you very much."

He waited. He couldn't punish the doctor the way he'd punished

the prisoner. The doctor was only trying to do his job. He was supposed to be politically sound. He took a look at the guards standing behind Pinkard and visibly wilted. "All right," he said. "But I did want to keep you informed."

"Fine," Pinkard said. "I'm informed. Freedom!" This time, the handy word meant, *Shut up and stop bothering me.*

"Freedom!" the doctor echoed. He couldn't say anything else.

Barbed wire separated the warden's office and quarters and the guards' quarters from the prisoners' barracks. Pinkard nodded to himself when he passed out of the area where the prisoners lived. They were nothing but trouble. That was even more true here than it had been in Alabama. There, Whigs and Rad Libs had guessed for a long time what would happen to them once the Freedom Party came out on top. Not here in Louisiana, not after Long got in. The Rad Libs here had thought they'd stay on top forever.

As Pinkard went up the stairs of the mess hall to grab himself a snack (*he* had a lot more choices than grits and fatback), a flight of aeroplanes buzzed by overhead. They were painted in bright colors. Instead of the C.S. battle flag, they had confederate citrus company painted on wings and fuselage. But they meant business. When Confederate forces entered Louisiana after Governor Long was gunned down, a few state policemen and militiamen had tried to resist. They didn't try for long, not after those confederate citrus company machines bombed and machine-gunned them from the sky. And the aeroplanes had been useful since, too, pounding Negro guerrillas who hid in swamps and bays inaccessible except from above.

The Confederate States weren't supposed to have aeroplanes that carried bombs and machine Runs. That was what the United States had been saying since 1917, anyhow. President Smith had sent President Featherston a note about it. Jeff remembered hearing about that on the wireless set in his quarters. And President Featherston had written back, too, saying they were armed only for internal-security reasons, and that the CSA would take the weapons off as soon as things calmed down again.

So far, the USA hadn't said anything more. It had been two or three weeks now since the first protest. As far as Jeff could see, that meant his country had got away with it. He grinned as he went into the mess hall. The damnyankees had been kicking the Confederate States around for more than twenty years, but their day was ending. The

CSA could walk proud again. Could ... and would.

A colored cook fixed him a big, meaty roast-beef sandwich with all the trimmings. He got himself a cup of coffee, rich and pale with cream and full of sugar. Mayonnaise ran down his chin when he took a big bite of the sandwich. Life wasn't bad. No, sir, not bad at all.

Every time Clarence Potter put on his uniform, he looked in the mirror to see if he was dreaming. No dream: butternut tunic, a colonel's three stars on each collar patch. The cut of the tunic was slightly different from what he'd worn in the Great War. It was looser, less binding under the arms, and the collar didn't try to choke him every time he turned his head. Whoever'd redesigned it had realized a man might have to move and fight while he had it on.

Going to the War Department offices in Richmond seemed a dream, too, although he'd been doing it for a year and a half now. The sentries outside the building stiffened to attention and saluted when he went by. He returned the salutes as if he'd done it every day since the war ended. The first few times he'd saluted, though, he'd been painfully, embarrassingly, rusty.

More visitors to the War Department walked up the stairs near the entrance or paused to ask the sergeant sitting at a desk with an information sign where they needed to go. The sergeant was plump and friendly and helpful. Few people went down the corridor past his desk. Another sign marked it:

AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY.

The friendly sergeant nodded to Potter as he strode by. He went halfway down the corridor with the intimidating sign, then opened a door labeled supplies & requisitions. With careful, even fussy, precision, he closed the door behind him.

Three more guards stood on the other side of that door. Instead of bayoneted Tredegars, two of them carried submachine guns: short, ugly weapons good for nothing but turning men into hamburger at close range. The third guard had a .45 instead. He said, "Your identification, Colonel?"

As always, Potter produced the card with his photograph on it. As always, the guard gave it a once-over to make sure photo matched face. Satisfied, the man with the .45—who'd been careful not to get in his comrades' line of fire—stepped back. He pointed to the log sheet on a table past the guards. Potter put the card back in his wallet, then logged himself in. He looked at his watch before adding the time: 0642. He'd had to get used to military hours again, too.

Stairs led down from the door marked supplies & requisitions. The room where Potter worked was in a subbasement, several stories below street level. Down here, fans whirred to keep air circulating. It felt musty anyhow. In the summer, it was air-conditioned like a fancy cinema house; it would have been unbearable otherwise.

Potter sat down at his desk and started going through U.S. newspapers, most of them a day, or two, or three, out of date. *Know your enemy* had to be the oldest rule in intelligence work. Papers in the USA talked too much. They talked about all sorts of things the government would have been happier to see unsaid: movements of soldiers, of barrels, of aeroplanes, of ships; stories of what was made where, and how much, and *for* how much; railroad schedules; pieces about how the bureaucracy worked and, often, how it failed to work. Papers in the CSA had been the same way before the Freedom Party took over. They offered much less to would-be spies now.

Every so often, Clarence Potter remembered he'd come up to Richmond to assassinate President Featherston. He knew why he'd come up here to do it, too. He still believed just about everything he had during the 1936 Olympics. But he wasn't interested in shooting Featherston any more. He had too many other things going on.

He'd known Featherston was shrewd. But he hadn't realized just *how* clever the president of the CSA was, not till he saw from the inside the way Featherston operated. After shooting the Negro who'd opened fire on Featherston before he could himself, Potter could have been patted on the back and then suffered a dreadful accident. Instead, Featherston had done something even nastier: he'd given Potter a job he really wanted to do, a job he could do well, and a job where who his boss was didn't matter a bit.

"Oh, yes," Potter murmured when that thought crossed his mind. "I'd want revenge on the USA no matter who the president was."

Featherston hadn't used him in the subjugation of Louisiana. Potter hadn't even known that was in the works till it happened—which was,

all by itself, a sign of good security. There were all sorts of things he didn't need to know and would be better off not knowing. The people who'd planned and brought off the Louisiana operation didn't know what he was up to, either. He hoped like hell they didn't, anyhow.

He was banging away at a typewriter, putting together a report on U.S. Navy movements out of New York harbor, when his nine o'clock appointment showed up ten minutes early. Randolph Davidson's collar tabs bore the two bars of a first lieutenant. He was in his late twenties, blond, blue-eyed, with very red cheeks and a little wisp of a mustache. Saluting, he said, "Reporting as ordered, Colonel Potter."

Potter cocked his head to one side, listening intently, weighing, judging. "Not bad," he said in judicious tones. "How did you come to sound so much like a damnyankee?" He sounded a lot like one himself; the intonations he'd picked up at Yale before the war had stuck.

"After the war, sir, my father did a lot of business in Ohio and Indiana," Davidson answered. "The whole family lived up there, and I went to school there."

"You'd certainly convince anyone on this side of the border," Potter said.

The younger man looked unhappy. "I know *that,* sir. People don't trust me on account of the way I talk. I swear I'd be a captain now if I sounded like I came from Mississippi."

"I understand. I've had some trouble along those lines myself," Potter said in sympathy. "Now the next question is, could you pass for a damnyankee on the *other* side of the border?"

Davidson didn't answer right away. Those blue eyes of his widened, and became even bluer in the process. "So *that's* what this is all about," he breathed.

"That's right." Potter spoke like one of his Yale professors: "This is what happens when two countries that don't like each other use the same language. You can usually tell somebody from Mississippi apart from somebody from Michigan without much trouble. Usually. But, with the right set of documents, somebody who sounds like a damnyankee can go up north and *be* a damnyankee—and do all sorts of other interesting things besides. What do you think of that, Lieutenant?"

"When do I start?" Davidson said.

"It's not quite so simple," Clarence Potter said with a smile. "You've got some training to do." *And we've got some more checks to do.* "But you look good. You *sound* good."

"Thank you very much, sir," Davidson said, where most Confederate citizens would have answered, *Thank you kindly.* Potter nodded approval. The younger man's grin said he knew what Potter was approving.

"I will be in touch with you, Lieutenant," Potter said. "You can count on that."

"Yes, sir!" Davidson also knew dismissal when he heard it. He got to his feet and saluted. "Freedom!"

That word still rankled. It reminded Clarence Potter of what he had been. He didn't care to think about how the man who'd redonned Confederate uniform had come to Richmond with a pistol in his pocket. He wanted to pretend he hadn't heard the word. He wanted to, but he couldn't. Lieutenant Davidson was definitely a man who spoke with a Yankee accent. That didn't mean he wasn't also a Freedom Party spy checking on the loyalty of a suspect officer.

I'm old news now, Potter thought. *If anything happens to me, it won't even show up in the papers. I can't afford to make people worry about me.* The calculation—one he'd gone through before—took less than a heartbeat. "Freedom!" he echoed, not with the enthusiasm of a stalwart but in a crisp, businesslike, military way.

Davidson left the underground office. Potter scribbled a couple of notes to himself. They both had to do with the background checks he'd have to make on the officer who'd gone to school in Ohio and Indiana. Some of those checks might show whether Davidson was reporting back to the Freedom Party. Others might show whether he was reporting back to U.S. Army Intelligence headquarters in Philadelphia.

Potter muttered under his breath. That was the chance he took when running this kind of operation. Somebody who sounded like a damnyankee was liable to *be* a damnyankee. The CSA spied on the USA, but the USA also spied on the CSA. If the United States could slide a spy into Confederate Intelligence, that could be worth a corps of ordinary soldiers when a second round of fighting broke out. Facing

a foe who spoke your language was a two-edged sword, and could cut both ways. Anyone who didn't realize that was a fool.

"I hope I'm not a fool," Potter muttered as he went back to plugging away at his paperwork. "I hope I'm not that kind of fool, anyhow."

How could you know, though? How could you be sure? During the Great War, Potter had worried more about the tactical level than the strategic. This new job was more complex, less well defined. Here, he couldn't write something along the lines of, *Interrogation of U.S. prisoners indicates an attack in map sector A-17 will commence at 0530 day after tomorrow.* What he was looking for was subtler, more evanescent—and when he thought he saw it, he had to make sure he wasn't just seeing something his U.S. opposite number (for he surely had one) wanted him to see.

"Damn you," he said under his breath. That was aimed at Jake Featherston, but Potter knew better than to name names. Someone might be—someone almost certainly was—listening to him.

The trouble was, Featherston had known exactly what made Potter tick. *I solve puzzles. I'm good at it. Point me at something and I* will *get to the bottom of it. Tell me it helps my country—no, let me see with my own eyes that it helps my country—and I'll dig four times as hard to get to the bottom of it.*

Above Potter's head, the fans in the ventilation system went on whirring. The sound got to be part of him after a while. If it ever stopped, he'd probably exclaim, "What was that?" The vibration had made his fillings ache when he first came here. No more. Now it seemed as basic, as essential, as the endless swirl of blood through his veins.

A major walked past him. "After twelve," the man said. "You going to work through lunch, Colonel?"

Potter looked at his watch in amazement. Where had the morning gone? He'd done more plugging than he thought. "Not me," he said, and got to his feet. Intelligence had its own mess hall—*the secret lunchroom,* he thought with wry amusement—so men who dealt in hidden things could talk shop with no one else the wiser.

He got himself a pastrami sandwich—a taste he'd acquired in Connecticut, and not one widely shared in the CSA—and a glass of Dr. Hopper, then sat down at a table. He had it to himself. Even after a

year and a half, he was still new here, still not really one of the gang. A lot of the officers in Intelligence, the elite in the C.S. Army, had served through the lean and hungry times after the Great War. They had their own cliques, and didn't readily invite johnny-come-latelies to join. They were still deciding what to make of him, too. Some of them despised Jake Featherston. Others thought him the Second Coming. With one foot in both those camps, Potter didn't fit either.

And so, instead of gabbing, he listened. *You learn more that way,* he told himself. A Yankee spy would have learned a lot, especially hearing the way names like Kentucky and Houston got thrown around. Potter had suspected that much even before he came back to Intelligence. As anyone would, he liked finding out he was right.

Snow swirled through the air. Colonel Abner Dowling stood at stiff attention, ignoring the raw weather. Even when a flake hit him in the eye, he didn't— he wouldn't—blink. *I'll be damned if I let Salt Lake City get the best of me now,* he thought stubbornly. A military band struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner." Beside Dowling, his adjutant drew himself up even straighter than he had been.

When the last notes of the National Anthem died away, Dowling moved: he marched forward half a dozen paces to face the newly elected governor of Utah, who stood waiting in a black suit an undertaker might have worn. A mechanism might have given Dowling's salute. "Governor Young," he said.

Heber Young returned a nod at least as precisely machined. "Colonel Dowling," he replied, his tone as cool and formal as the officer's.

Flashbulbs popped, recording the moment for posterity. Purple and green spots filled Dowling's vision. He did his best not to blink on account of the flashbulbs, either. "Governor Young," he said, "at the order of President Smith, Utah is now taking its place as a state like any other in the United States, its long military occupation coming to an end. I wish you and your fellow citizens good fortune in years to come, and hope with all my heart that the peace and tranquility established here may long continue."

"Thank you very much, Colonel Dowling," Governor Young replied, and more flashbulbs popped. "We of Utah have waited a long time for this moment. Now that our government is in our own hands once more, you may rest assured that we will be diligent and careful in serving the public good."

He's as big a liar as I am, Dowling thought. Utah wasn't a land of peace and tranquility, and the new civilian government—the new Mormon government, since Latter-Day Saints held all the elected offices in the executive and solid majorities in both houses of the Legislature—would do whatever it damn well pleased.

Young went on, "For more than half a century now, the United States have persisted in believing that the people of Utah are different from others who call the USA home. At last, we will have the opportunity to show the country—to show the entire world—that that is not so. We are our own masters once more, and we will make the most of it."

Dowling listened politely, which took effort. Young hadn't mentioned a few things. Polygamy was one. Disloyalty was another. After an attempted secession during the Second Mexican War, an armed rebellion during the Great War, and an assassination in front of Dowling's own eyes, were the people of Utah really no different from others who called the USA home? Dowling had his doubts.

But President Smith evidently didn't, and Smith's opinion carried a lot more weight than Dowling's (even if Dowling himself carried a lot more weight than Smith). Removing the U.S. garrison from Utah would save millions of dollars that might be better spent elsewhere—provided the state didn't go up in flames and cost more money, not less. *We'll find out,* Dowling thought.

"I will work closely with the government of the United States to make sure peace prevails," Heber Young said. "Utah has been born again. With God's help, our liberty will long endure."

He nodded once more to Dowling. What did that mean? *Get out, you son of a bitch, and don't come back?* Probably, though Young, a thorough gentleman, would never have said such a thing.

Dowling gave him another salute, to show that civilian authority in the United States was superior to military. Then the commandant—now the former commandant—of Salt Lake City did a smart about-face and marched back to his men. The ceremony was over. Civilian rule had returned to Utah for the first time in more than fifty years.

Trucks waited to take the soldiers to the train station. Dowling and Captain Toricelli went in a green-gray automobile instead. Toricelli said, "Five minutes after we leave the state, the Mormon Temple will start going up again."

"What makes you think they'll wait that long?" Dowling asked, and his adjutant laughed, though he hadn't been joking. He went on, "How much do you want to bet that gilded statue of the angel Moroni will go on top of the new Temple, too?"

"Sorry, sir, but I won't touch that one," Captain Toricelli answered. The gilded copper statue that had surmounted the old Mormon Temple had disappeared before U.S. artillery and aerial bombs brought the building down in 1916. The occupying authorities had put up a huge reward for information leading to its discovery. In more than twenty years, no one had ever claimed that reward, and the statue remained undiscovered.

"I wonder what the Mormons will do now that they're legal again," Dowling said in musing tones.

"Young had to promise they wouldn't bring back polygamy," Toricelli said. "The president did squeeze that much out of him."

"Bully," Dowling replied, at which his adjutant, a much younger man, looked at him as if amazed anyone could say such a thing. Dowling's ears heated. His taste in slang had crystallized before the Great War. If he sounded old-fashioned ... then he did, that was all.

No one shot at the auto or the trucks on the way to the station. Dowling had wondered if his men would have to fight their way out of Salt Lake City, but the withdrawal hadn't had any trouble. Maybe the Mormons didn't want to do anything to give Al Smith an excuse for changing his mind. Dowling wouldn't have, either, not in their shoes, but you never could tell with fanatics.

The Mormons did find ways to make their feelings known. Pictures and banners with beehives—their symbol of industry and the emblem of the Republic of Deseret they'd tried to set up—were everywhere. And Dowling saw the word freedom! painted on more than a few walls and fences. Maybe that just meant the locals were glad to be getting out from under U.S. military occupation. But maybe it meant some of them really were as cozy with Jake Featherston's party and the Confederate States as Winthrop W. Webb had feared.

Dowling hoped the skinny little spy was safe. As far as he knew, no one had ever figured out that Webb worked for the occupying authorities. But, again, you never could tell.

At the station, most of the soldiers filed into ordinary second-class passenger cars. They would sleep—if they slept—in seats that didn't recline. Dowling and Toricelli shared a Pullman car. Dowling remembered train rides with General Custer. He didn't think he was as big a nuisance as Custer had been.

No matter what he thought, he'd never broached the subject to Captain Toricelli. Custer was a great hero to the USA, but not to Abner Dowling. As Dowling knew too well, no man was a hero to his adjutant, any more than he was to his valet. Toricelli stayed polite. That sufficed.

With a squeal of the whistle and a series of jerks, the train began to move. Toricelli said, "I won't be sorry to get out of Utah, sir, and that's the Lord's truth."

"Neither will I," Dowling allowed. "I wonder what the big brains in Philadelphia will do with me now."

He had to wait and see. He'd spent ten years as Custer's adjutant (and if that wasn't cruel and unusual punishment, he didn't know what would be) and all the time since in Utah. What next? He'd proved he could put up with cranky old men and religious fanatics. What else did that suit him for? He himself couldn't have said. Maybe the General Staff back in the *de facto* capital would have some idea.

Military engineers kept the train tracks in Utah free of mines. Dowling hoped they were on the job as the Army garrison left the state. He also hoped trains wouldn't start blowing up once the engineers stopped patrolling the tracks.

When the train passed from Utah to Colorado, Dowling let out a silent sigh of relief. Or maybe it wasn't so silent, for Captain Toricelli said, "By God, it really is good to get out, isn't it?"

"I spent fourteen years in the middle of Mormon country," Dowling answered. "After that, Captain, wouldn't *you* be glad to get away?"

His adjutant thought it over, but only for a moment. "Hell, yes!" he said. "I've been there too damn long myself."

The farther east the train got, the more Dowling wondered what sort of orders would wait for him in Philadelphia. All he knew was that he was ordered to the War Department. That could mean anything or nothing. He wondered if he still had any sort of career ahead of him, or if they would assign him to the shore defense of Nebraska or something of the sort. The farther east the train got, the more he worried, too. He was an outspoken Democrat, who'd been adjutant to one of the most outspoken Democrats of all time, and he was coming home in the middle of a Socialist administration. He'd met omens he liked better.

Captain Toricelli seemed immune to such worries. But Toricelli was only a captain. Dowling was a colonel. He'd been a colonel a long time. If he didn't get stars on his shoulders pretty soon, he never would. And a superannuated colonel was as pathetic as any other unloved old maid.

On the way to Philadelphia, the train went through Illinois and Indiana and Ohio, not through Kentucky. Going through Kentucky was less dangerous than going through Houston, but only a little. Freedom Party men, whether homegrown or imported from the CSA, made life there a pretty fair approximation of hell. Long military occupation and memories of a lost uprising had helped cow the Mormons. Nothing seemed to cow the militants in the states taken from the Confederacy.

"Think of it this way, sir," Captain Toricelli said when Dowling remarked on that. "When we put them down, our men are getting real combat training."

Dowling was tempted to go, *Bully!* again, but feared his adjutant wouldn't understand. Instead, he said, "Well, so we are, but the Confederates get it, too."

"Yes, sir. That's true." Toricelli might have bitten into a lemon at the prospect. Then he brightened. "They don't if we kill all of them."

"Right," Dowling said. There was bloodthirstiness the irascible George Armstrong Custer himself would have approved of.

Even a luxurious Pullman car palled after a few days. Dowling began to wish he'd taken an airliner from Salt Lake City. More and more people were flying these days. Still, he doubted the government would have held still for the added expense.

The train was going through Pittsburgh when he saw flags flying at half staff. Alarm shot through him. "What's gone wrong?" he asked Captain Toricelli, but his adjutant, of course, had no better way of knowing than he did. No one else on the train seemed to have any idea, either. All he could do was sit there and fret till it pulled into the station in downtown Philadelphia.

He hurried off, intending to ask the first man he saw what had happened. But a General Staff lieutenant colonel was waiting on the platform, and greeted him with, "Welcome to Philadelphia, Brigadier General Dowling. I'm John Abell." He saluted, then stuck out his hand.

In a crimson daze of delight, Dowling shook it. He heard Captain Toricelli's congratulations with half an ear. Lieutenant Colonel Abell led him to a waiting motorcar. *They think I've done something worthwhile with my time after all,* he thought. He'd wondered, as any man might.

Not for hours afterwards did he think about the flags again. It hadn't been a disaster after all, he learned: only a sign of mourning for the passing of former President Hosea Blackford.

Flora Blackford felt empty inside, empty and stunned. The rational part of her mind insisted that she shouldn't have. Hosea had been getting frail for years, failing for months, dying for weeks. He'd lived a long, full life, fuller than he could ever have imagined it before he chanced to meet Abraham Lincoln on a train ride through Dakota Territory. He'd risen from nothing to president of the United States, and he'd died peacefully, without much pain.

And Flora had loved him, and being without him felt like being without part of herself. That made the emptiness. No matter what the rational part of her mind told her, she felt as if she'd just walked in front of a train.

Joshua took it harder yet. Her son wasn't quite fourteen. He didn't have even the defenses and rationalizations Flora could throw up against what had happened. She knew Joshua was a child born late in the autumn of Hosea's life, that her husband had been lucky to see their son grow up as far as he had. All Joshua knew was that he'd just lost his father. To a boy heading toward manhood, losing a parent was more a betrayal than anything else. Your mother and father were supposed to be there for you, and be there for you forever.

In their New York apartment, Flora said, "Think of Cousin Yossel. He never got to see his father at all, because his father got killed before Yossel was born. You knew your father your whole life up till now, and you'll remember him and be proud of him as long as you live."

"That's why I miss him so much!" Joshua said, his voice cracking between the treble it had been and the baritone it would be. Tears ran down his face. He fought each spasm of sobs, fought and lost. A few

years younger, and crying would still have seemed natural to him; he would have done it without self-consciousness. Now, though, he was near enough a man to take tears hard.

Flora held him. "I know, dear. I know," she said. "So do I." Joshua let himself be soothed for a little while, then broke free of her with a man's sudden heedless strength and bolted for his bedroom. He slammed the door behind him, but it couldn't muffle the pain-filled sound of fresh sobs. Flora started to go after him, but checked herself. What good would it do? He was entitled to his grief.

The telephone rang. Flora stared at it with something close to hatred. Hosea was only one day dead, and she'd already lost track of how many reporters and wireless interviewers she'd hung up on. She'd put out a statement summing up her husband's accomplishments and her own sorrow, but did that satisfy them? Not even close. The more she had to deal with them, the more convinced she grew that they were all a pack of ghouls.

Staring at the telephone didn't make it shut up. Muttering under her breath, she went over to it and picked it up. "Hello?"

"Flora, dear, this is Al Smith." That rough New York voice couldn't have belonged to anybody else. "I just wanted to call and let you know how sorry I am."

"Thank you very much, Mr. President." Flora mentally apologized to the telephone. "Thank you *very* much. I appreciate that, believe me."

"He was a good man. He did everything he could. The collapse wasn't his fault, and fixing it isn't easy." The president sighed. "Hoover found that out, and I'm doing the same damn thing. Not fair he should be stuck with the memory of it."

"I know," Flora answered. "I've been saying the same thing since 1929. The next person who pays attention will be the first."

"I'm paying attention," Smith said. "The services will be out West?"

"That's right. He wanted to be buried in Dakota. That was home for him. I'll do what he would have wanted."

"Good. That's good." Across the miles, Flora could all but see the president nod. "You have any trouble dealing with a *goyishe* preacher?"

In spite of everything, she laughed. The USA was a special country, all right, and New York a special state—where else would a Catholic leader come out with a perfectly fitting bit of Yiddish? "Everything seems all right so far," she answered.

"Fine," Smith said. "He gives you any *tsuris,* though, you tell him to talk to me. *I'll* fix him—you see if I don't."

"Thank you," Flora said. That made quite a picture, too: a Catholic president offering to browbeat a Methodist minister. She went on, "Joshua and I are going to fly back to Dakota this afternoon. We'll finish making arrangements on the spot, and we'll be ready when ... when Hosea gets there." Her husband's body was coming by special train.

"Charlie will come out to the funeral," Smith said.

Now Flora found herself nodding. When Hosea was vice president, one of his duties had been going to important people's funerals, too. La Follette would only follow a long tradition there. And Al Smith himself didn't want to seem too closely associated with Hosea Blackford even in death: people still blamed Blackford for the business collapse, and Smith didn't want that to rub off on him no matter how unfair it was. Flora said, "President Sinclair has already left for Dakota."

"He can afford to," Smith answered. "He's not going to run again year after next." Yes, they were both thinking along the same lines.

"And Hoover asked if he was welcome," she added.

"What did you tell *him?"* the president asked. "He's not going to run again, either, not after the way I kicked his *tukhus."* More Yiddish, jut as fitting.

"I said yes," Flora replied. "I don't agree with a lot of the things he did— Hosea couldn't stand a lot of the things he did—but he's an honest man. You have to respect that."

"If you ask me, he's a stiff-necked, sour prig," Smith said, "but have it your own way." Flora didn't think that verdict was wrong. Maybe she had a bit of stiff-necked prig in herself, too, though, even if she did hope she wasn't sour. The president went on, "If there's anything I can do, you let me know, you hear? Don't be shy about it."

"I won't," she promised. They said their good-byes. As soon as she hung up the telephone, she started running around again. Too many things to do before she had to leave for the airport, not enough time to do them.

The airport itself was in Newark. New York City had a major airport under construction—largesse from a hometown president, and many, many jobs for local workers, all paid with federal money—but it wouldn't be done for another couple of years. The aeroplane was a twin-engined Curtiss Skymaster. It carried thirty-two people in reasonable comfort west to Omaha. Flora and Joshua spent the night in a hotel there, then boarded a smaller Ford trimotor for the trip north to Bismarck.

That flight was like falling back through time. The Ford was smaller, with corrugated-metal skin rather than smooth aluminum. The seats inside were smaller, too, and more cramped. When the aeroplane took off, it was noisier, too. It didn't fly so high, either, which meant the ride was bumpier. They flew around a storm on the prairie. Even the rough air on the outskirts was plenty to make Flora glad the airline provided airsickness bags. She turned out not to need hers, and neither did Joshua, but some of the other passengers weren't so lucky. The rest of the flight was unpleasant even with the bags. Without them ... Well, without them it would have been worse.

A black limousine waited at the field on the outskirts of Bismarck. It took her down to the little town of Frankfort, on the James River. Hosea Blackford's nephew, William, owned a farm just outside of Frankfort; the former president would lie in the churchyard there. William Blackford and Flora weren't far from the same age. The farmer and the Congresswoman from New York City were about as different as two Americans could be, but they had an odd sort of liking. And the farm fascinated Joshua. So did William's daughter, Katie, who was blond and blue-eyed and very pretty. Flora watched that with more than a little amusement.

William Blackford did, too. "Maybe you'll have to bring the boy out some other time," he said, his voice dry.

"Maybe I will." Flora couldn't keep herself from smiling. "Or maybe you could visit New York or Philadelphia."

Her husband's nephew shook his head. "No, thanks. For one thing, you don't mean me. And I've seen Philadelphia. I don't care to go back. More people on the sidewalks, I think, than there are in all of Dakota."

He wasn't far wrong, and Flora knew it. He went on, "I grew up with elbow room. I don't know what to do without it."

Flora had grown up with none whatsoever. Her family had crowded a cold-water flat, and they'd taken in boarders besides to help make ends meet. She took people and noise as much for granted as William Blackford took wide open spaces and peace and quiet. "The first time Hosea brought me to Dakota, I felt like a bug on a plate," she said. "There was too much country, too much sky, and not enough me."

"I've heard folks from back East say that before," her host replied, nodding. "I reckon it's heads to my tails, but—" He broke off, alarm on his face. "Here, let me get you a handkerchief."

"I have one." Flora reached into her handbag, pulled out a square of linen, and dabbed at her eyes. "Sometimes it catches me by surprise, that's all. I remember the good times I had with Hosea, the things he showed me, and then I remember we won't have any more, and ... this happens." She blew her nose.

William Blackford nodded. "I know how that goes, sure enough. I lost a brother in the war. Now and again, I'll still think about going trout fishing with Ted, just like it was day before yesterday when we did it last. And I'll be ... darned if I don't still puddle up every once in a while, too."

Three days later, dignitaries and reporters crowded Frankfort's tiny white clapboard church. The building might have come straight from New England. The enormous sweep of the horizon beyond it, though, could only have belonged to the West. Waiting had torn at Flora. Now she sympathized more than ever with the Jewish custom of holding the funeral as quickly as possible after death. These days in between were nothing but a torment.

The Reverend Albert Talbot had a face like a fish, with pale skin, big blue eyes, and a perpetually pursed mouth. His eulogy, to Flora's ears, was purely conventional, and caught little of what Hosea Blackford had stood for, little of what he had *been.* She started to get angry, wondering if she should have sicced President Smith on him after all.

But she didn't need long to decide the answer was no. Everyone else in the church, including Joshua, seemed satisfied with, even moved by, those ordinary phrases. That was what really mattered. As

long as the minister's audience went away pleased with what they heard, nothing else counted for much.

And the vice president and two former presidents of the United States served as pallbearers, helping Joshua and William Blackford and a more distant relative carry the coffin out to the graveyard under that vast sky.

"He was a good man—a fine man," Upton Sinclair said.

"He was indeed," Herbert Hoover agreed. They nodded to each other, and to Flora. Socialist and Democrat, they agreed on very little, but they would not quarrel about that. Flora nodded, too, though more tears stung her eyes. Here, they were both right.

Brigadier General Daniel MacArthur was not a happy man. Colonel Irving Morrell had trouble blaming his superior. MacArthur's cigarette holder jerked in his mouth. By all appearances, the U.S. commandant in Houston was having trouble not biting right on through the holder.

"Ridiculous!" he burst out. "Absolutely ridiculous! How are we supposed to keep this state in the USA if we go easy on all the rebels and traitors inside it?"

Morrell gave him the only answer he could: "Sir, I'll be damned if I know."

"May Houston and everybody in it be damned!" MacArthur growled. "That would be just what it—and they—deserve. It's a running sore. We ought to cauterize it with hot metal."

He meant hot lead, from rifles and machine guns. Morrell didn't disagree— on the contrary. He said, "It's hard to operate where everybody in the country where you're stationed wants you to go to the devil and does his best to send you there. I thought Canada was bad. Next to this, Canada was a walk in the park."

"Next to this, hell is a walk in the park, Colonel." MacArthur gestured to the officers' club bartender. "Another one, Aristotle."

"Yes, suh, General, suh." Aristotle did the honors, then slid the

whiskey across the bar to MacArthur. *Well,* he's *loyal, anyway,* Morrell thought. Any Negro who preferred Jake Featherston to Al Smith wasn't just a traitor—he was certifiably insane. Morrell wished Houston held more Negroes; they would have made a useful counterweight to all the pro-Confederate fanatics. But they were thin on the ground here.

After a sip—no, a gulp—from the new drink, Daniel MacArthur went on, "By God, Colonel, there were stretches of the front during the Great War where a man was safer than he is in Houston today. During the war, only cowards got shot in the back. Here, it can happen to anybody at any hour of the day or night."

"Yes, sir," Morrell agreed mournfully. "Taking hostages after someone does get shot hasn't worked so well as I wish it would have."

MacArthur looked disgusted—not with him, but with Houston, and perhaps with the world. "Some of these sons of bitches seem *glad* to die. It's not that I'm not glad to see them dead, either, but...."

"Yes, sir. But." Morrell turned the word into a complete, and gloomy, sentence. He went on, "I think we're doing a better job of making martyrs for the Freedom Party than we are of making people decide not to take shots at us."

"Unfortunately, you are correct. Even more unfortunately, I don't know what to do about it." MacArthur stubbed out the cigarette. He stuck another one in the holder, lit it, and puffed moodily. Then he looked at the pack. " 'Finest quality tobacco from the Confederate States of America,' " he read, and made as if to throw it away. Reluctantly, he checked himself. "God damn it to hell and gone, they *do* have the best tobacco."

"Yes, sir," Morrell agreed. "When they asked for a cease-fire in 1917, the officer who came into our lines with a white flag gave me one of his smokes. After three years of the chopped hay and horse turds we called cigarettes, it was like going to heaven."

"I'd like to send half this state to heaven, assuming anybody here would go in that direction," MacArthur growled. "But even that wouldn't do much good." He finished the whiskey with another gulp. Instead of asking for another refill, he sprang to his feet and stalked out of the officers' club, trailing smoke from his cigarette. He was hot enough, he might have trailed smoke without it.

"Your glass is empty, suh," Aristotle said to Morrell. "You want I should get you another one?"

"No, thanks," he answered. "You've lived here a good long time, haven't you?" He waited for the bartender to nod, then said, "All right. Fine. What would *you* do to keep Houston in the USA?"

The black man's eyes widened. "Me, suh?" He needed a moment to realize Morrell meant the question seriously—after the time Morrell had had in Houston, he would have meant it seriously if he'd asked it of an alley cat. Aristotle said, "I reckon the first thing you do is, you blow off that Jake Featherston's head."

"I reckon you're absolutely, one hundred percent right," Morrell said. The real Greek philosopher couldn't have solved the problem better. If anything would do the job, that was it. Unfortunately ... "Suppose we can't?"

"In that case, suh, I dunno," Aristotle said. "But I know one thing. You Yankees ever decide you leavin' this here state, you take me with you, you hear?"

"I hear you." What Morrell heard was naked terror in the man's voice. He soothed him as he would have soothed a frightened horse: "Don't you worry. We've been here twenty years. We aren't going anywhere."

"Not even if they have one o' them plebi—whatever the hell you call them things?" Aristotle asked.

"I don't think you need to fret about that," Colonel Morrell told him. "We paid for Houston in blood. I don't expect we'll give it back at the ballot box."

That seemed to get through to the bartender. He pulled out a rag from under the bar and ran it over the already gleaming polished wood. Though Aristotle seemed happier, Morrell was anything but. The colored man probably didn't pay much attention to what Al Smith said. Because of the nature of Morrell's duties, he had to. He didn't like what he'd heard. Talk of democracy and self-determination sounded very noble. He'd had some things to say on the subject himself, when the Ottoman Turks were persecuting Armenians. But when democracy and self-determination ran up against a country's need to defend itself...

Morrell supposed the United States could lose Houston without hurting themselves too badly, though losing the oil found in the 1920s would be a nuisance—and seeing it fall into Confederate hands would be a bigger one. The same applied to Sequoyah, where the Indians most cordially despised the U.S. occupiers, who hadn't even deigned to let the state enter the USA. Losing Kentucky, though, wouldn't be a nuisance. Losing Kentucky would be a disaster. During the War of Secession, Lincoln had said he hoped to have God on his side but he had to have Kentucky. Losing the war and the state, he'd proved to have neither.

"I take it back. Let me have another drink," Morrell said suddenly.

Aristotle fixed it for him. "On the house, suh," he said. "You done set my mind at ease, and I'm right grateful."

"Thanks." Morrell felt guilty about taking the free drink, but couldn't insist on paying without making the barkeep worry again. Morrell was worried himself. If the northern border of the Confederate States returned to the Ohio River, why had so many soldiers from the United States died to push that frontier south? What had they died for? Anything at all? Morrell couldn't see it.

But if President Smith let a plebiscite go forward, Houston, Sequoyah, and Kentucky would all vote to return to the CSA. Morrell was sure of that. And if Smith didn't let the plebiscite go forward, Jake Featherston could cuss him up one side and down the other for trampling on those wonderful things, democracy and self-determination.

Featherston had done some trampling on them himself, but not that much. He might; well have won a completely honest election, and Morrell was painfully aware of it. (That Featherston had triumphed in elections with a third of his country's population disenfranchised never once crossed Morrell's mind. Negroes were politically invisible to him, as they were to most whites in the USA.)

Morrell swallowed his guilt and his worries along with the free drink. Then he left the officers' club. Fences and sandbags guarded against snipers as he made his way to Bachelor Officers' Quarters. He was sick of BOQ, but he didn't intend to bring Agnes and Mildred down from Fort Leavenworth. He got paid to risk his life for his country. The people he loved didn't.

More sandbags and barbed wire and machine-gun emplacements

protected the barrels outside of Lubbock. Morrell went out to them early the next morning. A few enthusiastic Houstonians had tried to sneak in and sabotage them in spite of the defenses. The locals' next of kin were surely most unhappy. The would-be saboteurs themselves no longer cared one way or the other. But no one had ever caught the enterprising fellows who'd lobbed mortar rounds into the U.S. encampment from somewhere inside Lubbock. Large rewards for their capture had been highly publicized, but nobody in Houston seemed interested in collecting that kind of reward.

Crewmen started showing up only a couple of minutes after Morrell got to the barrel park. "Good morning, sir," Sergeant Michael Pound said. "I thought I'd beat you here."

Sometimes he did, which annoyed Morrell. "Not today," he answered. "I spent too much of last night thinking about the way things look."

Pound shook his head. "You're braver than I am, sir. That's a dangerous thing to do these days."

"What would you do if you were king?" Morrell asked, interested to see what the sergeant would come up with.

"Abdicate," Pound said at once, which jerked a laugh out of him. The underofficer went on, "It's a lousy time to be a king, sir. All these damned democrats around—small-d, of course. But if I had my druthers, I'd smash the Confederate States now, before Jake Featherston uses our own better instincts to steal territory from us that we really ought to keep ... and before he starts building barrels the way he's building tractors these days."

That marched much too well with what Morrell was thinking—right down to the remark about tractors. A factory that turned out engines or caterpillar treads for one type of vehicle wouldn't have much trouble converting to make parts for another type.

Before long, a squad of three barrels was rumbling through the streets of Lubbock. Yankees go home! was amongst the mildest of the graffiti on the walls these days. So was freedom! A lot of messages told what the scribblers wanted to do with everyone in the state government of Houston who didn't belong to the Freedom Party. Morrell had seen a good deal in his time. Some of those suggestions sickened him.

Freedom Party banners flew everywhere. The reversed-color C.S. battle flag was legal, being the symbol of a political party like the Socialists' red flag and the Democrats' donkey. Morrell thought Socialist Al Smith was a donkey to let that inflammatory flag fly here, but Smith did. *Featherston uses our own better instincts to steal from us.* Michael Pound's words came back uncomfortably.

And then a middle-aged man on the street pulled out a pistol and fired at Morrell, who as usual rode with his head and shoulders and upper torso out of the cupola so he could get a better look at what was going on. The bullet clanged off the barrel's armor plate. Morrell ducked. The turret machine gun of the barrel behind him chattered. When Morrell stood straight again a moment later, he had his own .45 out and ready.

No need. The shooter was down in a pool of blood, the pistol still in his outstretched hand. A man and a woman who'd been near him were down, too, the man writhing and howling, the woman very still, her skirt flipped up carelessly over one gartered thigh. Plainly, she wouldn't rise again.

Screams filled the air after the gunfire stopped. People who'd thrown themselves flat when it started now cautiously got to their feet. A woman looked from the corpse of the man who'd tried to plug Morrell to him, then back again. She pointed a red-nailed finger at the U.S. officer in the barrel and shrieked one word: "Murderer!"

Jonathan Moss pushed the stick forward. The nose of the Wright 27 went down. He opened the throttle. The fighter dove like a stooping hawk—dove faster than any hawk dreamt of flying. Acceleration shoved him back in the seat. He eyed the airspeed indicator with something like awe—320, now 330! That was easily three times as fast as a Great War fighting scout could have flown, and he wasn't giving the aeroplane everything it had.

He watched the altimeter unwind at an awesome rate, too. *If I don't pull up pretty soon, I'm going to make a big hole in the ground. Major Finley won't be very happy with me if I do that. Neither will Laura.*

Reluctantly, he pulled back on the stick. He did it a little at a time, not all at once. He had a good notion of the fighter's limits. Even so,

the wings groaned at the force they had to withstand. Pulling out of a dive like this would have torn the wings right off a machine built of wood and canvas. His vision grayed for a couple of seconds as blood poured down out of his brain, but then color returned.

"Jesus!" he said hoarsely when he was flying level once more. He caressed the curved side of the cockpit as if it were the curve of a lover. He'd never known, never imagined, an aeroplane that could do things like this.

He looked around, wondering where the hell he was. Puffy cloud shadows dappled the green and gold geometry of Ontario fields and woodlots. Then he spotted the Thames. The river naturally led his eye back to London. The Labatt's brewery was much the biggest building in town. Once he spied it, he also knew where the airfield outside would be.

As he flew back toward the field, the wireless set in the cockpit crackled to life: "A-47, this is A-49. Do you read me? Over."

A-49 was another fighter. Moss peered here and there till he spotted him at ten o'clock high. "I read you loud and clear, A-49. Go ahead. Over." He had to make himself remember to thumb the transmit button. He'd never had to worry about wireless chatter in the Great War.

"Up for a dogfight, old-timer?" the pilot of A-49 asked. *Punk kid,* Moss thought scornfully. The younger man went on, "Loser buys the beer at the officers' club. Over."

"You're on, sonny boy. Over and out," Moss snapped. With altitude, the other pilot had the edge. Moss pulled back on the stick to climb. He gave the fighter all the gas he had so he wouldn't lose too much airspeed. His opponent zoomed toward him. He spun away, heading for one of those pretty little clouds. He beat the other fighter to it, then snapped sharply to his left, still climbing for all the Wright was worth.

A moment later, he whooped like a wild man. The guy in A-49 had done just what Moss thought he would: flown straight through the cloud and looked around for him. That wasn't good enough, not anywhere close. Moss dove on his foe from behind. Of itself, his thumb went to the firing button atop the stick. He pulled his nose up and fired past the other aeroplane.

A startled squawk came from the wireless set at the sight of tracer rounds streaking by. Laughing exultantly, Moss said, "Sonny boy, you are dead as shoe leather. That beer's going to taste mighty good. Over."

"How did you do that?" The pilot of A-49 had to remember to say, "Over."

"I was playing these games when you were a gleam in your old man's eye," Moss answered. "The aeroplanes change. The tricks don't, or not much. Shall we go on in now?"

"Yeah." The young fighter pilot, like any good flier, had thought he was the hottest thing in the sky. Chagrin filled his voice when he discovered he wasn't, or at least not today.

Moss had to find the Thames and London and the airstrip all over again. He was slower doing that than the kid in A-49, and wasn't ashamed to follow the other fighter in. He had to remind himself to lower his landing gear, too; that was one more thing he hadn't had to worry about during the Great War.

He jounced the landing, hard enough to make his teeth click. But A-47 came to a stop before the end of the runway. The prop spun down to immobility. Moss pulled back the canopy and got out of the fighter. Only then, with the breeze on him, did he realize he was drenched in sweat. The dogfight had squeezed it out of him. *He'd* known it wasn't real, but his body hadn't.

Major Rex Finley came trotting up. "Those were your tracers?" he demanded. Moss nodded. Finley put hands on hips. "I wouldn't have been very happy if you'd shot Jimmy down. Neither would he, as a matter of fact."

"Sorry," said Moss, who was anything but. "He challenged me. He called me an old man. I whipped him, and I wanted to make damn sure he knew it." He waved to the other pilot, who walked toward him shaking his head. "Who's buying that beer?"

"Looks like I am," Jimmy said ruefully. Sweat plastered his dark-blond hair to his head and glistened on his face. His body had thought it was the real thing, too. He caught Major Finley's eye. "He got me good, sir. He knows what he's doing up there."

"Well, we've had to scrape some rust off," Finley remarked. Moss

nodded. He couldn't argue with that. He hadn't flown for twenty years, and the state of the art had changed. But Finley nodded. "I've seen worse."

"Thanks," Moss said. "I don't know why I gave this up. It's more fun than ... damn near anything I can think of. I guess when the war ended I just wanted to get back to what I was doing beforehand."

Major Finley nodded. "A lot of people did." He'd stayed in uniform himself, of course, doing his job so most people in the USA could get back to what they'd been doing beforehand. Moss knew as much. Finley had to know he knew, but none of that showed in the officer's voice as he went on, "Of course, having fun isn't the only reason you're doing this. Not a whole lot of folks get to have fun with the taxpayer footing the bill."

"Congressmen—that's about it," Moss agreed. Finley and Jimmy both laughed.

Laughing or not, though, Finley said, "That's about the size of it, yeah. So all right—you've proved you can still play on the first team. I'm not talking about conscripting you. But if we run into trouble, can we count on you?"

Jonathan Moss let out a long breath before he answered. "Yes," he said at last. "But if you try to put me in the air to shoot up Canucks in another rising ... well, I'm not the best man for that job, and you or whoever else I serve under had better know it ahead of time."

"The Army knows who your wife is and what you've been doing since you moved up to Canada," Finley said dryly. "We do sometimes have to break parts in our machine. We try not to put parts into places where they're bound to break."

Thinking back to his own flying days, Moss decided Finley was probably right. Not certainly—nothing that had to do with the Army was certain—but probably. He said, "How about that beer now? It'll taste twice as good with somebody else buying." The grin Jimmy gave him was half sheepish, half *I'll get you next time.* Jonathan's grin said only one thing. *Oh, no, you won't.*

But Moss wasn't grinning when he drove back to Berlin. He understood why Major Finley worried about where his pilots would come from. The USA had been holding Canada down for more than twenty years now. The Canucks showed no sign of wanting to become

Americans, none at all, despite a generation's worth of schooling and propaganda. But the United States couldn't just turn them loose and wave good-bye. If they did, the British would be back twenty minutes later. And then ... "Encirclement," Moss muttered. That had been the U.S. strategic nightmare from the end of the War of Secession to the end of the Great War. With the Confederate States feeling their oats again, encirclement would be a disaster.

The way the world looked wasn't the only reason Moss' grin slipped on the way home. "Daddy!" Dorothy squealed when he walked in the door, and did her best to tackle him. That best was pretty good; it would have drawn a penalty on any football field from Edmonton down to Hermosillo.

"Hi, sweetie." Moss squeezed his daughter, too, though not with intent to maim. "Where's your mom?"

"I'm here," Laura called from the kitchen. "Where else would I be?"

After disentangling himself from Dorothy, Moss went into the kitchen and gave his wife a kiss. She kissed him back, but not with any great enthusiasm. "What smells good?" he asked, pretending he didn't notice.

"Roast pork," she said, and then, "Did you have a good time shooting up the countryside?"

Her voice had an edge to it. "I didn't shoot up the countryside," Moss answered steadily. "I would have shot down one American half my age if this were the real thing."

He'd hoped the prospect of a Yank going down in flames would cheer Laura, but it didn't. She said, "If anything really happened, the two of you would fly on the same side—and you'd fly against Canada. Are you going to tell me I'm wrong?"

"They wouldn't do that to me," Moss said. "I was talking about it with Major Finley."

"Ha!" she said. "If fighting started, they'd do whatever they pleased."

She could have been right. But Jonathan shook his head. "No, I don't think so. They know what I've been doing since I came to Canada. They want people they can trust to carry out their orders, and

I don't think I qualify."

"Are you sure? Isn't it likely they just want Yanks who know how to fly?"

That paralleled Moss' own worries too closely for comfort. Angry because it did, he snapped, "You sound like those Canadians who want to murder me because I was born in the United States, no matter what I've tried to do up here."

Laura turned red. "There are Canadians who want to murder me, too, because you were born in the United States. Me!" She sounded furious. She was descended from, and named for, the first Laura Secord, who in the War of 1812 had done for the Canadians what Paul Revere had for the Americans in the Revolution: warned of oncoming enemy soldiers and saved the day. Laura was proud of her ancestry, and was as much a Canadian patriot as her ancestor had been.

"Yes, I know that," Moss said. "If you think it doesn't worry me, you're crazy."

Hostages to fortune, he thought unhappily. "If anything happened to you and Dorothy, I'd—"

"You'd what?" Laura broke in. "Hop in an aeroplane and machine-gun my people from the sky for revenge? That's not the right answer, you know."

Maybe it wasn't. It was exactly what Moss had been thinking. He knew he couldn't say that to his wife. He kissed her again instead. She looked as if she would rather have gone on arguing. To his relief, she didn't.

Hipolito Rodriguez hadn't been on a train for a long time: not since he laid down his rifle at the end of the Great War and came home to Baroyeca from west Texas. Then he'd had the taste of defeat in his mouth, sour as vomit after too much beer. Now, as the car rattled and jounced toward Hermosillo along the twisting track, he was having the time of his life.

Why not? Many of his friends from Baroyeca rode with him: among

others, Carlos Ruiz and Felipe Rojas and Robert Quinn, who'd brought the Freedom Party to his home town. And better yet, Jorge and Miguel rode with him, too. What could be better than going into action with your own sons at your side? Nothing he could think of.

Everybody in the car seemed to feel the same way. Men chattered and sang snatches of Freedom Party songs and passed bottles of tequila and whiskey back and forth. Nobody got drunk, but a lot of people got happy. Rodriguez knew he was happy.

He kept an eye on his boys. He didn't want them making fools of themselves and embarrassing him in front of his comrades. But they did fine. They mostly stared out the window, watching the landscape change. Even in the Freedom Youth Corps, they hadn't gone so far from home.

As the crow flew, Hermosillo was about 150 miles northwest of Baroyeca. The railroad line from the little mining town to the capital of Sonora was no crow. It went west from Baroyeca to Buenavista, south to Terim, west to Guaymas on the coast, and then, at last, north to Hermosillo. That made the journey take twice as long as it would have by a more direct route, but Rodriguez didn't mind. No, he didn't mind at all.

He nodded to Robert Quinn. "Gracias*, muchas gracias, señor,* for arranging to have the Freedom Party pay for our fares. We never would have been able to come otherwise."

"El gusto es mio," Quinn answered with a smile. "The pleasure is also that of the *Partido de Libertad.* This is important business we are going to tend to in Hermosillo. We need all the help we can get. We need it, and we are going to have it. No one can stop us. No one at all."

Hipolito Rodriguez nodded again. "No. Of course not." Hadn't he seen Don Gustavo, his one-time *patron,* turned away from the polling place in Baroyeca? Hadn't he helped turn him away? Yes, indeed, nothing could stop the Freedom Party.

They got into Hermosillo late that afternoon. It was as big a city as Rodriguez had ever seen—big enough to make his sons' eyes bug out of their heads. The train station stood a couple of miles north of downtown. Rodriguez wondered whether they would have to march down to the Plaza Zaragoza, the square where they would go into action, but buses draped with partido de libertad banners waited for them. The men from Baroyeca weren't the only Freedom Party

members who'd come to Hermosillo on the train. By the time everybody filed aboard the buses, there weren't many empty seats.

The ridge line of the Cerro de la Campaña rose higher in the southern sky as the buses rolled down toward the Plaza Zaragoza. Rodriguez noted the hill only peripherally. He was used to mountains. The profusion of houses and shops and restaurants and motorcars was something else again. More than half the signs, he noted, were in English, which had a stronger hold in the city than in the Sonoran countryside.

Hermosillo's two grandest monuments stood on either side of the Plaza Zaragoza. To the west was the Catedral de la Asunción, to the east the Palacio de Gobierno. A cathedral had stood next to the plaza since the eighteenth century. When Sonora passed from the Empire of Mexico to the Confederate States in the early 1880s, the original adobe building had been crumbling into ruin. The replacement, not completed till the early years of the twentieth century, dwarfed its predecessor in size and splendor. With its two great bell towers and elaborate ornamentation, it put Rodriguez in mind of a gigantic white wedding cake.

It dwarfed the Palacio de Gobierno on the other side of the square, though that brick-and-adobe structure was impressive in its own right. And, since the Palacio de Gobierno housed the governor and legislature of the state of Sonora, it was of more immediate concern to the Freedom Party than the cathedral. God could take care of Himself. Secular affairs needed a nudge in the right direction.

Freedom Party men already jammed the Plaza Zaragoza. They greeted the latest set of newcomers with calls of, "Freedom!" and "*¡Libertad!*" and handed out signs, some in Spanish, others in English. Rodriguez looked up at the one he got. In English, it said, repeal the seven words!

Robert Quinn translated for him, knowing he didn't have much written English: *"Abrogan las siete palabras."* The Freedom Party man went on, "You understand what that means?"

"Oh, *sí, sí,"* Rodriguez said. "The Constitution."

"That's right." Quinn nodded. "The way it is now, it says"—he switched from Spanish to English—" 'The Executive power shall be vested in a President of the Confederate States of America. He and the Vice-President shall hold their offices for the term of six years; but the

President shall not be reeligible.' "

"But if we take out the last seven words, President Featherston can run again next year," Rodriguez said.

"Exactamente," Quinn agreed. "That's what the Constitutional amendment the legislature is debating will do. South Carolina and Mississippi demanded that the Congress in Richmond call a Constitutional convention, so it did, and the convention reported out this amendment. As soon as two-thirds of the states in the CSA ratify it, it becomes the new law."

"It *will* become law, won't it?" Rodriguez asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes. *Absolutamente."* Quinn grinned. "The *Partido de Libertad* has a big majority in both houses of the legislature here in Sonora, and in all the other states it needs to pass the amendment. This demonstration is mostly for show. But show is an important part of politics, too, eh?"

"Yes." Rodriguez's time in the Freedom Party had left him sure of that. "If people see many other people want the change made, they will all be happy with it."

"Just so. You are a clever fellow, Señor Rodriguez." Quinn hesitated, then asked, "Have you ever thought of doing anything but farming?"

"Not for myself. It's what I know, and I am not ready to move to the big city to try something else," Rodriguez answered. "For my sons, though—well, who knows?"

The sun sank toward the western horizon. Rodriguez's belly growled and rumbled. He wondered what he would eat, and if he would eat anything. Quinn hadn't told him to bring food along. He wished the Freedom Party man would have; even a few tortillas would have helped hold emptiness at bay.

But he started worrying too soon. Here and there, fires began to burn in the Plaza Zaragoza. The savory smell of cooking meat rose from them. "Form lines!" somebody shouted. "Form lines to the nearest fires! Form lines, and you'll all be fed!"

A lot of the Freedom Party followers were veterans. They knew how to queue up. Some of the younger fellows in the plaza milled

about at first, but not for long. Shouts and elbows got them into place.

A woman whose features said she had more Spanish blood than Indian handed Rodriguez two rolled tortillas filled with *carne asada* when he got to the head of the line. *"Gracias, señora,"* he said.

"De nada," she answered. *"¡Libertad!"*

"¡Libertad!" he echoed, and then got out of the way so she could feed the man behind him. He took a big bite from one of the tortillas. *Carne asada* was a Sonoran specialty; the grilled, spicy beef came with chilies that made him long for a cold beer to put out the fire in his mouth.

He looked around hopefully, but didn't see anybody passing out bottles of beer. After a while, though, he did hear someone calling, *"¡Agua! Agua fresca aquí."* He got into another line, eating as he snaked forward. A dipperful of fresh water gave him most of what he wanted, though he still would rather have had beer.

He wondered if anyone would pass out blankets. Nobody did. He hadn't slept on bare ground since the Great War ended. He also wondered if his sons would complain, but they didn't. He supposed they'd spent their fair share of time sleeping outdoors in the Freedom Youth Corps. They knew enough to close up with him and several other men. The night got chilly, but all that body warmth kept anyone from having too bad a time.

Rodriguez woke before sunup. He didn't remember getting so stiff and sore in the trenches in Texas. Of course, that had been half a lifetime earlier. When Miguel and Jorge climbed to their feet, they seemed fresh enough. More lines formed, these for tortillas for breakfast and for strong coffee partly tamed with lots of cream.

More Freedom Party men came into the square in the early morning hours. They dressed like townsfolk, not peasants. Rodriguez guessed they were native Hermosillans. They didn't need feeding, but they got their signs on the edge of the *plaza.* Things had to look right.

And things had to sound right. When the real demonstration got under way a little past nine, the chants had been carefully organized. *"¡Abrogan las siete palabras!"* the Freedom Party men roared in rhythmic unison, and then, in English, "Repeal the seven words!" After that came choruses of, "Featherston!" and *"¡Libertad!"* and "Freedom!" Then the cycle began again.

Newsreel cameras filmed the crowd in the Plaza Zaragoza. Rodriguez wondered how many state capitals had chanting crowds putting pressure on legislators and governors. Enough. He was sure of that. The Freedom Party would make sure the Constitutional amendment took effect well before next year's elections.

Not everything that happened in the Plaza Zaragoza was official and planned in advance. Somebody behind Rodriguez tapped him on the shoulder. When he looked around, a man with a big black mustache passed him a flask. He swigged, expecting tequila. Good brandy ran down his throat instead. *"¡Madre de Dios!"* he said reverently, and handed the flask to Jorge, who stood next to him. His son gulped, coughed, and then grinned.

The bells in the cathedral had just struck twelve when a man in a somber black suit came out of the Palacio de Gobierno. He held up his hands. Little by little, the demonstrators stopped their choruses. "I am pleased to inform you," he called in English, "that the amendment to our dear Confederate Constitution has passed both houses of the legislature of Sonora. We have voted to repeal the seven words! Freedom!" Then he said the same thing in Spanish.

The Plaza Zaragoza went wild. Men threw hats in the air. Others threw their signs in the air. Still others cursed when those came down —they were heavy enough to hurt. "Freedom!" some shouted. Others yelled, *"¡Libertad!"*

Rodriguez shouted in Spanish, then in English, and then in Spanish again. Which language he used didn't seem to matter. The Freedom Party had won. Jake Featherston had won. That made him feel as if he'd won, too.

Someone started a new chant: "Nothing can stop us!" He gladly joined in. How could he not believe that, when it was so obviously true?

Armstrong Grimes didn't want to get out of bed. He mumbled and tried to stick his head under the pillow when his mother shook him awake. "Get up!" Edna Grimes said sharply. "Annie's already eating breakfast. You don't want your father coming in here, do you? You'd better not, that's all I've got to tell you."

He didn't. With a last resentful mutter, he got to his feet and went into the bathroom to take a leak and brush his teeth and splash cold water on his face. He looked at himself in the mirror, trying to decide whether he needed to shave. He had his mother's long, oval face, but his coloring was darker, more like his father's. "Hell with it," he said to his reflection. He'd shaved the day before, and at sixteen he didn't have much more than peach fuzz to begin with. He also had pimples, which made shaving even less fun than it would have been otherwise.

Back to his room. He put on a checked shirt and a pair of slacks. He would rather have worn blue jeans, but his father wouldn't let him get away with it, not when he was going to high school. Some of his friends wore dungarees all the time. He'd pointed that out to his old man—pointed it out in loud, shrill, piercing tones. It hadn't done him any good at all. Merle Grimes wasn't a man to bellow and carry on. But once he said no, he wasn't a man to change his mind, either.

With a martyred sigh, Armstrong carried his three-ring binder and the books he'd brought home the night before out to the kitchen. Annie, who was four, was making a mess of a bowl of oatmeal. Armstrong's mother had a plate of scrambled eggs and toast and a glass of milk waiting for him. His father was digging into a similar breakfast, except he had coffee instead of milk. "Morning," he said.

"Morning, Pa," Armstrong answered. Breakfast resigned him to being up.

Then his father had to go and ask, "Did you get all your homework done?"

"Yes, Pa," Armstrong said. *As much of it as I understood, anyhow,* he added, but only to himself. His junior year, which had started two weeks earlier, hadn't been much fun so far. If algebra wasn't something Satan had invented to torment indifferent students, he couldn't imagine what it was.

"You'd better keep your grades up, then," Merle Grimes said. *He* could do algebra. Armstrong gave him a resentful look. His father could do algebra with effortless ease. What he couldn't do was show Armstrong how he did it. *Because this is how it works,* he'd say, and wave his hands and cast a spell (that was how it looked to Armstrong, anyway) and come up with the right answer. And when Armstrong tried waving *his* hands ... he'd add when he should have subtracted, or he'd forget what to do with a negative number, or he'd just stare at a problem in helpless horror, with no idea how to start it, let alone

finish.

His father got his pipe going and worked his way through the newspaper. He didn't have to get to the office till half past eight, so he could take his time. Armstrong had to be at Roosevelt High at eight o'clock sharp, or else the truant officer would start sniffing around. That meant he had to gobble his breakfast—no great hardship for a sixteen-year-old boy, but he didn't like getting up from the table while his old man lingered.

Annie waved good-bye. His mother called, "So long, son," as he went out the front door. His only answer was a grunt. As soon as he got around the corner, he lit a cigarette. The first drag made him cough. He felt woozy and lightheaded and a little sick; he was just learning to smoke. Then his heart beat harder and he felt more alert. He enjoyed that feeling, even if it wasn't the main reason he'd started smoking. People he liked smoked. So did people he wanted to be like. That counted for more.

He smoked two cigarettes on the way to Roosevelt, but made sure the pack was out of sight before he got to the campus. Smoking there was against the rules. The principal had a big paddle in his office, and he wasn't shy about using it.

"Morning, Armstrong," a boy called.

"Hey, Joe," Armstrong answered. "Can I get some answers to the algebra from you?"

Joe shook his head. "I don't know how they do that stuff. I'm gonna flunk, and my old man's gonna beat hell out of me."

"Me, too," Armstrong said dolefully. He still had a couple of periods to go before he had to turn in the math homework, such as it was. He didn't look forward to English literature, which he had first, with any great enthusiasm, either. Memorizing chunks of *The Canterbury Tales* in the original incomprehensible Middle English wasn't his idea of fun. But getting walloped because he didn't do it also wasn't his idea of fun, so he tried.

English Lit did have one compensation. He sat next to Lucy Houlihan, a redhead who had to be one of the three or four prettiest girls at Roosevelt High. That would have been even better had Lucy had the slightest idea he existed. But she didn't. She had a boyfriend: Frankie Sprague, the star tailback on the Regiment. Still, she couldn't

shoot Armstrong for looking at her, as long as he didn't drool too much while he was doing it.

The textbook, naturally, didn't include "The Miller's Tale." Herb Rosen, one of the class brains, had found out about it, and started whispering. By the time the whispers got to Armstrong, they were pretty distorted, but the piece still sounded juicier than anything the class *was* studying. He wondered why they couldn't read the good stuff instead of boring crap about sweet showers.

A trail of sniggers ran through the class. "The Miller's Tale" would do that. "And what is so funny?" Miss Loomis inquired. She was a tall, muscular spinster with a baritone voice. She didn't use a paddle. She wielded a ruler instead, with deadly effect. Nobody said anything. The sniggers didn't stop, but they did ease. Miss Loomis looked at the students over the tops of her half-glasses. "That will be quite enough of that," she declared, and got on with the lesson.

As soon as Miss Loomis turned back to the blackboard, Lucy asked Armstrong, "Why *is* everybody laughing?" She hadn't heard, then. Well, some guys would be shy about saying such things to a girl.

Armstrong wasn't shy about anything—and having Lucy notice him for any reason at all was a reasonable facsimile of heaven. He gleefully told her everything he'd heard about "The Miller's Tale." Odds were, Chaucer wouldn't have recognized it. It was still plenty to make Lucy turn pink. Armstrong watched the blush in fascination—so much fascination that he didn't notice Miss Loomis bearing down on him.

Whack! The ruler scorched his knuckles. He jumped and yelped in pain. Miss Loomis fixed him with a glare that would have paralyzed Jake Featherston. "That will be enough of that," she said, and marched back up to the front of the classroom.

Lucy, damn her, didn't even say she was sorry.

He was glad to flee English Lit for government, even though Miss Thornton, who taught it, was almost as big a battle-axe as Miss Loomis. She didn't look so formidable, being round rather than tall, with a bosom about the size of the USS *Remembrance.* But she was a stickler for detail. And, naturally, she picked on him. "Why is the new Confederate Constitutional amendment so important?" she demanded.

"Uh," he said, and said no more. He remembered his father saying

something about the amendment, but couldn't remember what to save his life—or his grade.

"Zero," Miss Thornton said crisply, and wrote it in the roll book. She asked Herb Rosen. Herb didn't just read Chaucer for fun; he even read textbooks for fun.

"Because now their president can be elected for lots of terms, not just one," he answered. "It looks like the Freedom Party is setting things up for him to be president for life."

A girl stuck up her hand. Miss Thornton nodded to her. She said, "I don't think that's true. Our presidents can be elected more than once, and nobody's ever been president for life."

"That's because we've got a custom of stopping after two terms. Even Teddy Roosevelt lost when he tried for a third one," Herb said. That touched off a discussion about the role of unwritten custom in government.

Armstrong Grimes listened with no more than half an ear. Somebody was going to be on top, and somebody else was going to get it in the neck. That was how things worked, as far as he could see, and nobody could do anything much about it. The most you could do was try to be the fellow who came out on top.

Miss Thornton left him alone for the rest of the period. But when the class ended, he had to go on to algebra, and he got it in the neck. Mr. Marr, the algebra teacher, had lost his right arm during the war. He'd had to teach himself to write and eat lefthanded. He'd done it, too, and come away convinced that anybody could teach himself to do anything. But Armstrong hadn't been able to teach himself to do algebra.

He had to go up to the board to try a problem. He butchered it. Mr. Marr glared at him. "If you multiplied one side of the equation by six, why didn't you multiply the other side by six, too?" he snapped.

"Uh, I don't know," Armstrong answered helplessly.

"Well, *that's* obvious," Mr. Marr said. "Sit down." He did the problem himself. When he did it, it looked easy. Multiply, subtract, and what do you know? X equals seven. Armstrong knew he wouldn't be able to do it himself, not if he lived to be a hundred.

"Not your day today," somebody said when the bell rang and they escaped to lunch: a period's worth of freedom.

"No kidding," Armstrong said. "They can't teach for beans, and I'm the one who gets in trouble on account of it." That a lot of the other students in his classes were having no trouble at all didn't occur to him. Far easier to blame his teachers than himself.

After lunch came chemistry. He'd had hopes for chemistry. If they'd shown him how to make things that blew up, he would have worked hard. But learning that lithium was always $+1$, oxygen was always -2, and carbon was ± 4 left him cold. He staggered through a quiz, and hoped he got a C.

Wood shop went better. His hands had some skill in them, even if he'd never make a big brain. He was making a spice rack for the kitchen, and everything was going about as well as it could. Mr. Walsh stopped and watched him work with a file and sandpaper. The shop teacher nodded. "Not bad, Grimes," he said. "You keep it up, and you'll have no trouble finding a job when you get out of high school."

The only reason Armstrong intended to graduate was that he knew his old man would murder him if he didn't. He didn't tell that to Mr. Walsh. If the teacher hadn't heard it a million times before, he would have been amazed.

At last PE, and Armstrong came into his own. He was stronger and faster than most of the other boys in his class, and he reveled in it. And from PE he went straight to football practice. He was only a second-string defensive end, but he threw himself into every play as if his life depended on it. The harder he practiced, the more playing time he'd get when the game came Friday night.

And there across from him, taking snaps in the single wing, was Frankie goddamn Sprague. *Think you're going to get your hand under Lucy Houlihan's blouse, do you?* Armstrong spun past the tackle trying to block him, steamrollered the fullback, and knocked Frankie Sprague right on his ass.

"I'm off." Chester Martin blew Rita a kiss and Carl another one. His wife and their son sent kisses through the air back toward him, too. He was glad to get them as he went out the door and headed for the bus stop.

It had rained the day before, the first rain of the season in Los Angeles. The sky was a brilliant blue now, as if the rain had washed it clean. Even late in October, the weather would get up into the seventies. Chester remembered Toledo with a fondness that diminished every year he stayed in California. You couldn't beat this weather no matter how hard you tried.

A bum slept in a doorway, a blanket wrapped around him. Living here without money was easier than it was in the eastern USA, because people didn't have to worry so much about shelter. Idly, Martin wondered if Florida and Cuba had more than their share of out-of-work people in the CSA for the same reason.

He needed a southbound trolley today. He was heading down *to* Hawthorne, a suburb south of the airport and not far from the beach. Mordechai's crew was running up a pair of apartment buildings. People with jobs kept moving to Southern California, too, and they all needed places to live.

When the trolley rolled up, Martin threw his nickel in the fare box, paid two cents more for a transfer, and then sat down with his toolbox in his lap. Even though that toolbox was a sign he had work to go to, he didn't stop worrying. The way things were these days, who could? He wondered if he would be able to go on working after Mordechai retired. The foreman with the missing fingers on his right hand had to be past sixty. Whoever replaced him might have new favorites who needed jobs. In a trade without a union, that sort of thing was always a worry.

Posters praising candidates for the upcoming Congressional elections sprouted like toadstools on walls and fences and telephone poles: Democratic red, white, and blue against Socialist red and, here and there, Republican green. Trying to guess who'd win by seeing who

had the most posters up was a mug's game, which didn't mean people didn't play it all the time. By the way things looked here, the two big parties were running neck and neck. Outside of a few states in the Midwest, Republicans had a hard time getting elected. Their ideas were stuck between those of the Democrats and the Socialists, and old-timers still associated them with the nineteenth-century disasters the USA had suffered under Lincoln and Blaine.

Martin changed lines on El Segundo. He got off the trolley at Hawthorne Boulevard and walked two blocks south and three blocks east. Mordechai waved to him when he came up, calling, "Morning, Chester."

"Morning," Martin answered. About half the crew—who lived all over the Los Angeles area—were already there. It was still only a quarter to eight. Chester didn't expect many people to show up after eight o'clock. You did that more than once—twice if you were lucky—and some hungry son of a bitch would grab your job with both hands.

This morning, only Dushan came in late. He was plainly hung over. Mordechai said something to him. He nodded in a gingerly way, then got to work. He depended on construction work less than most of the other men, for he could make cards and dice behave the way he wanted them to. That let him—or he thought that let him—get away with showing up late every once in a while.

He buckled down willingly enough, even if the banging of hammers made him turn pale. The fellow working alongside Chester, a big Pole named Stan, said, "Goddamn if Dushan don't look like a vampire left out in the sun."

The past few years, there'd been a lot of films about vampires and werewolves and other things that should have been dead but weren't. That probably put the comparison in Stan's mind. It was good enough to make Martin nod. All the same, he said, "Don't let Dushan hear that. He's from the old country, and he's liable to take it the wrong way."

"Let him. I ain't afraid," Stan said. He was bigger and younger than Dushan, so he had reason to be confident. Still...

"Don't push it." Now Chester sounded a plain warning. "Why start trouble?"

"You're not my grandma," Stan said. But, to Martin's relief, he went back to driving nails and let Dushan alone.

It didn't last. Chester might have known it wouldn't. Something in him *had* known it wouldn't. But he couldn't do anything but watch when the trouble started. He was two stories up, nailing rafters to the roof pole, when Stan got in front of Dushan down on the ground and made as if to drive a stake through his heart.

Dushan looked at him for half a second. Then, his cold face revealing nothing of what he intended, he kicked Stan in the crotch. Had his booted foot gone home as he intended, there wouldn't have been a fight, because Stan wouldn't have been able to give him one. But, maybe because of his hangover, the kick got Stan in the hipbone rather than somewhere more intimate.

Stan roared with pain. But he didn't fall over clutching at himself, which was what Dushan had had in mind. Instead, he surged forward and grappled with the other man. They fell to the ground, slugging and gouging and spitting out a couple of different flavors of guttural, consonant-filled Slavic curses.

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Chester descended as fast as he could. He was cursing, too, almost as angry at himself as he was at Stan and Dushan. He'd seen trouble coming, but he hadn't been able to stop it.

"Fight! Fight!" The shout brought construction workers running, just as it would have brought kids running on a high-school campus. Most of the workers only stood around and watched without trying to break it up. It was entertainment, something to liven up the day, something to talk about over the supper table tonight.

"Come on, let's get 'em apart," Chester said. Still enjoying the show, the men at his side looked at him as if he were crazy—till Mordechai got there a few seconds later.

Not much made Mordechai mad. Anything that slowed down work and threatened the job would do the trick, though. Swearing like the veteran Navy man he was, he shoved through the crowd of workers, most of whom were twice his size and half his age. Seeing that, Chester did some pushing and shoving of his own. The two of them grabbed Dushan and Stan and pulled them apart. Once they actually started doing that, they got some belated help from the other men.

Dushan twisted in Chester's grasp, trying to wade back into the scrap. That might have been more for form's sake than anything else. He hadn't been getting the better of it. He had a bloody nose and a black eye and a scraped cheek. He'd hung a pretty good mouse on

Stan, too, but the Pole hadn't taken anywhere near so much damage as he had.

"What the hell happened here?" Mordechai couldn't have sounded more disgusted if he'd tried for a week.

Dushan and Stan both gave highly colored versions of recent events. Some of the builders who'd been watching supported one of them, some the other, and some gave versions of their own that had very little to do with anything that had really gone on—that was how it seemed to Chester, anyhow.

Mordechai listened for a little while, then threw up his hands. "Enough!" he said. "Too goddamn much." He used his mutilated right hand to point first to Stan, then to Dushan. Somehow, his two missing fingers made the gesture seem even more contemptuous than it would have otherwise. "You're fired, and you're fired, too. Get the fuck out of here, both of you. I don't want to see either one of your goddamn ugly mugs again, either. And you both blow all of today's pay."

A sigh went through the workers. Nobody'd expected anything different. Dushan never changed expression. Stan said, "Fuck you, asshole," but his bravado rang hollow. Word would get around, and get around quick. He'd have a tough time landing construction work from here on out. He was just an ordinary worker, easily replaceable by another ordinary worker.

If Mordechai had stopped there, nothing more would have come of it. But he was furious, and he held the whip hand. "And the rest of you pussies," he said, glaring at the men around him, "the rest of you pussies lose half a day's pay for standing around while all this shit was going on."

"That's not fair!" Chester Martin exclaimed. Several other men muttered and grumbled, but he was the one who spoke out loud.

Mordechai glowered. "You don't like it, you know what you can do about it."

He meant, *nothing*. But Martin wasn't a veteran of union strife in Toledo for nothing, or to take nothing lying down. "Yeah," he said stonily. "I know what I can do about it."

As soon as people went back to work, he started doing it. He hadn't done any union agitating for years, but he still knew how. Some of the

men didn't want to listen to him. "You're gonna get your ass fired, and everybody else's, too," was something he heard more than once.

But others were ready to go along. Mordechai had hit too hard when he punished workers for something they hadn't done. And a lot of the men who'd come to California to find jobs had belonged to unions back East. They remembered the gains they'd made, gains they'd had to throw away to find any work at all out here.

"We've got to spread the word," Chester warned. "If we just strike at this site, they'll crush us. But if we strike at *all* the building sites around Los Angeles, the bosses will have to deal with us." He hoped they would, anyhow. And if they didn't... well, he'd gone on strike before.

When he got his pay at the end of the day—half a day's pay for a whole day's hard work—he said, "I'm taking this under protest."

The paymaster shrugged. "Take it and like it or take it and stick it up your ass." He had a couple of bully boys with pistols behind him to make sure the payroll stayed safe. He could afford to talk tough—or thought he could, anyhow.

Martin thought he was playing into the workers' hands. Several other men said, "I'm taking this under protest," too. The paymaster went right on shrugging. He didn't see the resentment he was raising—either that or, secure in his power, he just didn't care.

That evening, when Chester told Rita what had happened, she looked at him for a long time before asking, "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" He knew what she meant; now that he had a child, he'd given fortune a hostage.

He sighed. "Do you want me to knuckle under?"

His wife bit her lip. After half a minute's silence, she said, "No. They'll own you if you do." He kissed her. He'd thought—he'd hoped—she would say that. She was a stronger Socialist than he was.

He spent the next few weeks working his shift during the day and agitating during his free time. He talked with workers. He talked with Socialist Party officials. The Socialists gained seats in the House and Senate—and in the California legislature—in the off-year elections. That strengthened his hand. He hoped it did, anyhow.

One morning early in December, he got to the construction site at the same time as a pickup truck. Instead of going in to work, he grabbed a sign from the back of the truck. He wasn't the only one who did. Inside of two minutes, three dozen unfair! signs went up in a picket line. Picketers were hitting other sites all over town, too. "On strike!" Chester and the other men shouted. "Join us!" They cursed a worker who crossed the picket line. Another worker thought better of it.

"You sons of bitches!" Mordechai shouted. "You'll pay for this!"

"We've paid too much for too long already," Chester answered, wondering how much he would have to pay from here on out.

As soon as the engineer waved and the red light in the studio came on, Jake Featherston leaned toward the microphone like a lover toward his beloved. "I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth." He wondered how many times he'd said that over the years. He always believed it, at least while he was talking.

"Truth is, for the past twenty years and more, the United States of America have been holding on to what doesn't belong to them. At the end of the war, the USA stole Kentucky and Sequoyah and what they call Houston. The people in those states don't want to belong to the USA. They've made it plain every way they know how that they don't want to belong to the USA, but the United States government doesn't want to listen to them."

He paused to let that sink in, then went on, "If they held fair and honest elections in those places, the people there would show what they wanted. They would show they want to come home to the Confederate States of America. President Smith knows that as well as I do. He's a clever man, and I reckon he's an honest man."

He didn't think Smith was anything close to clever, and couldn't have cared less whether he was honest. He did want to butter up the president of the United States. He had his reasons: "I challenge President Smith to allow plebiscites in Kentucky and Sequoyah and what they call Houston. I challenge him to abide by the results of those plebiscites. I challenge him, after the Confederate States win those plebiscites, to let those states come home."

Featherston banged his fist down on the table. The microphone jumped a little. He loved sound effects like that. They made people pay attention to what he was saying. "President Smith has talked big about what he'd do to restore peace in the stolen states. He's talked big, but he hasn't done anything much. He's even said he'd come to Richmond to hash things out. He's said that, but he hasn't done it. I tell him he's welcome here, and I'd like to talk to him.

"And I tell him one more thing, something he'd better listen to. Back during the war, the USA helped our niggers when they rose up against us. Well, that was wartime, and maybe we can let bygones be bygones on account of it was. But the blacks still don't know their proper place, and the United States are still sneaking weapons down across the border to 'em. That has got to stop. It's cost us a lot of lives and it's cost us a lot of money to keep the niggers in check. We've had to bump up the size of the Army. We've even had to put guns and bombs on our aeroplanes. It's been expensive. We could have done better things with that money. We could have, but we didn't get the chance. And that's the USA's fault."

Inside, he was laughing. Here he was, blaming the United States for what he'd most wanted to do anyhow. The black guerrillas had given him the perfect excuse for rearming. Even the USA hadn't squawked much about it. Had the guerrillas been white, he thought the USA would have. But the United States loved Negroes hardly more than the Confederate States did. They'd made it very plain they didn't want the ones who tried to flee to the north.

He didn't know whether the United States were arming the guerrillas. He knew he would have if he were in charge in Philadelphia. But coming up with U.S.-made weapons and putting them in the hands of dead Negroes so photographers could snap pictures of them was the easiest thing in the world.

"President Smith says the United States want peace. They act like they want trouble. We would rather have peace, too. But if they think we can't handle trouble, they had better think again."

That was a bluff, nothing else but. If the United States pushed hard against the Confederate States, he hadn't a prayer of resisting. But the USA had seemed ever more reluctant to hang on to their conquests. If they couldn't even manage that, they weren't very likely to do anything more.

In the control room, the engineer held up a hand, fingers spread:

five minutes. Jake nodded to show he'd seen the signal. He'd had a good notion of what the time was, but he wanted to make sure everything ran smoothly. "North America is a big place," he said. "We're not all crowded together, the way they are in Europe. There's room on this continent for two great countries—maybe even for three, if the United States ever bother to recollect what they've done up in the north." A smile that was half snarl flitted across his face. He enjoyed nothing more than sticking a needle in the USA. "If the United States think the Confederate States can't be great again, if they think we *shouldn't* be great again, then they had better think again about that, too.

"All we really want is for them to take their noses out of our affairs, to take them out and to keep them out. That's what good neighbors do. Bad neighbors get doors slammed in their faces, and they deserve it, too. But I don't really expect we'll have any trouble. If they're just reasonable, we'll get on fine."

To Featherston, *if they're just reasonable* meant *if they do what I want.* That the phrase could mean anything else never occurred to him. He'd just said the last word when the engineer drew a finger across his throat and the red light went out. Jake got to his feet and stretched. As usual, Saul Goldman waited for him right outside the studio door. Goldman's title—director of communications—didn't sound like much, any more than the little Jew looked like much. But it meant that Goldman was in charge of the way the Freedom Party and the Confederate States presented themselves to the world.

"Good job, Mr. President," he said now.

"Thank you kindly, Saul," Jake answered. He spent more politeness on Goldman than on most people, a recognition of how valuable he thought the other man was. The Party and the CSA could get by without a lot of fellows who brought only fanaticism. Losing somebody with brains would have hurt much more. Brains were harder to come by.

Goldman said, "You do remember you've got the rally tonight? That's going to be the speech about agriculture and about the dams and electricity."

"I remember," Jake said indulgently. "Got to talk about what's going on inside the country. That's what most folks worry about first. Wouldn't want anything to go wrong with my reelection." He laughed. Nothing would go wrong. But saying the word felt good. Up till now,

no elected Confederate president had, or could have, been reelected. Now that the amendment had repealed those seven nasty words, though, Jake could go on about his business without worrying about leaving office after only six years. He clapped Goldman on the back. "You did real good with the campaign for the amendment, too."

"Thank you, Mr. President," Goldman said. "You're the one who will have to make it worthwhile."

"And I intend to," Featherston said.

He was feeling pretty cocky as he strode out of the studio and got into his armored limousine. "Back to the Gray House?" the driver asked.

"That's right, Virgil," Jake answered. Virgil Joyner had been driving him for years—ever since the Party struggled for survival after Grady Calkins assassinated President Hampton. Featherston trusted him as far as he trusted anybody.

Outriders on motorcycles pulled away from the curb before the limousine got going. Featherston didn't believe in taking chances he didn't have to. He wanted to make sure he got to enjoy his second term.

The limousine glided past Capitol Square. Everything there was clean and tidy and orderly. No more shantytown right at the heart of the CSA. All the hungry squatters had been cleared away well before the Olympics, and they hadn't come back. Freedom Party stalwarts made damn sure they didn't come back.

But instead of turning left to go up Shockoe Hill to the presidential residence, the driver hit the brakes. "What the hell?" Jake said.

"There's a wreck up ahead," Joyner answered. "We'll have to go around."

Sure enough, not just two but three autos had tangled at the corner of Twelfth and Capitol. Steam jetted from smashed radiators. Drivers and passengers stood by the wreckage arguing about who'd done what to whom.

Joyner blew his horn, which did no good at all. Featherston's outriders descended from the motorcycles to push the wreckage out of the way, which was a lot more practical.

Another big motorcar raced down Twelfth Street. It screeched to a stop on the far side of the accident. Three men in the white shirts and butternut trousers of Freedom Party stalwarts got out. Jake didn't think anything about that till they raised submachine guns and started shooting.

"Get the hell out of here!" he shouted as his guards started falling. The men who were dressed like stalwarts—or, worse, really *were* stalwarts—ran forward, shooting as they ran. One of them fell, which meant they hadn't picked off all the outriders, but the others came on.

Virgil Joyner put the limousine in reverse, but it could only limp—the assassins had shot out the two front tires. Their bullets starred the windscreen. Pretty soon, they'd punch through; even bulletproof glass could take only so much. Rifle rounds would have smashed through the glass right away.

Featherston and his driver both had .45s—not the best weapons to use against submachine guns, but a hell of a lot better than nothing. A heartbeat before the windscreen finally blew in and sprayed fragments of glass all over the passenger compartment, Jake threw himself flat in the back seat. Bullets thudded into the upholstery just above his head.

And then the stream of bullets punishing the limousine stopped. That meant at least one of the bastards out there had gone through a whole magazine's worth of ammunition and needed to reload. Featherston popped up and fired out through the hole the assassins had shot in the windscreen. With a pistol, you had to aim. You couldn't just spray bullets around and hope some of them would hit something. One of the gunmen started to grab for his face. He never finished the motion. Instead, he crumpled to the ground, the back of his head blown to red ruin as the round that killed him tore out.

The limousine's horn blared. That was Joyner's body slumping forward onto the button—the assassins' fire had struck home after all. *One son of a bitch left,* Jake thought: *one son of a bitch and me. And I'm the meanest s.o.b. this country ever saw.*

If he'd been out there, he would have jumped up on the hood, stuck the submachine gun through the now-shattered windscreen, and finished the job. The last surviving assassin didn't. Maybe losing two of his buddies had unnerved him. *Must be a kid,* went through Featherston's mind. *He's never seen action before, and he doesn't quite know what to do.*

What the assassin did was go around to the side of the motorcar where Jake had been sitting. He grabbed for the door handle, intending to yank the door open and shoot through the gap.

What he intended wasn't what he got. Featherston kicked the door from the inside with both feet, using all his strength. It caught the assassin in the midsection. With a startled squawk, he went down on his wallet. He hung on to the submachine gun, but he was still trying to swing it back toward the limousine when Jake shot him in the belly. He was trying to shoot him in the balls, but didn't quite get what he wanted. The assassin's shriek was satisfying enough as things were. Featherston's next shot, more carefully aimed, blew off the bottom half of his face.

Ears ringing, Jake looked around for more trouble. He didn't see any, only cops and ordinary people running toward the limousine to find out what the hell had happened. All of a sudden, he regretted that last vengeful shot. With just a bullet in the gut, the last assassin might have lived long enough to tell him a lot about what the hell had happened. As things were, he was dying fast and couldn't talk even if he wanted to.

"But I'll find out anyhow," Jake said, and nodded slowly to show how much he meant it. "Oh, yes. You just bet I will."

Even now, the Negroes of Augusta managed to snatch fun where they could. The joint called the Ten of Clubs was a case in point. Its sign showed the card for which it was named: lots of black spots on a white background. Scipio got the joke. He was sure everybody who lived in the Terry got it. So far, no white man seemed to have figured it out, which only made it more delicious.

He and Bathsheba paid fifty cents each at the door. Drinks weren't cheap, either. But the best bands came to the Ten of Clubs. If you wanted to cut a rug in the Terry, this was *the* place to do it.

Scipio slipped the headwaiter another half dollar for a tiny table by the dance floor. He pulled out one of the chairs so Bathsheba could sit down. "You spoil me," she said, smiling.

"Hope so," Scipio answered. His butler's training back at

Marshlands made such politesse automatic in him. His wife still didn't know about that, and she'd pretty much given up nagging him to explain how he could pull a different way of speaking out of the woodwork just when they needed it most.

He ordered a bottle of beer, Bathsheba a whiskey. The air was thick with cigarette smoke, cheap perfume, and sweat. People wore what finery they had. Jewelry flashed on the women. Most of it was cheap costume jewelry, but in the dim light of the Ten of Clubs rhinestones did duty for diamonds, colored glass for rubies and sapphires.

A comic in white tie and tails several sizes too big for him came out and stood behind the microphone. Surveying the audience, he sadly shook his head. "You ain't here for me. You is here for the band. You don't make my life no easier, you know."

He was right, of course. People in the shabby little night spot *were* waiting for the band, which was on a tour that took it to colored districts of major towns all over the Confederate States. A heckler called, "Why don't you shut up and go away?"

How many hecklers had the funny man faced, and faced down, during his own years on the road? Hundreds, surely. "You ain't gonna git rid o' me that easy," he answered now. " 'Sides, ain't it sweet how the white folks loves the president just as much as we does?"

That brought not only giggles but a few horrified gasps from the crowd. The papers had been full of Jake Featherston's latest escape from assassination. These assailants had been white. From everything Scipio could gather, they'd been Freedom Party men unhappy with Featherston for seeking a second term. Nobody in public said much about who might have been behind them. Nobody said anything at all about imposing a fine on the white community like the one that had been taken from the CSA's Negroes after that frankfurter-seller tried to ventilate the president at the Olympics. That surprised Scipio not a bit.

Bathsheba leaned forward and said, "He got nerve."

"He gots more nerve'n he gots sense," Scipio replied. Even in a place like this—maybe especially in a place like this—informers were bound to be listening. Plenty of Negroes would betray their own people for a little money or simply for the privilege of being left alone by Freedom Party goons. Scipio thought they were fools. Whatever tiny advantages they got wouldn't last long. But a lot of men—and women—couldn't

see past the end of their noses.

"When I heard they was shootin' at the president, I prayed," the comic said. "I tell you, I got down on my knees an' prayed. I prayed, God keep Mistuh Featherston ... a long ways away from me."

More giggles. More gasps, too. Scipio wondered again whether the comic had more nerve than sense. He skated awfully close to the line. In fact, he likely skated right over the line. In how many towns, in how many rooms full of strangers, had he told jokes like that and got away with them?

Then Scipio had another thought, one that chilled him worse than the December weather outside. Maybe the funny man wasn't worried about informers. Maybe he was an informer himself. Maybe he was trying to smoke out rebellious Negroes in the audience. They would come to him because he said what they were thinking, and then ... then they'd be sorry.

Scipio shivered again. He didn't know that was true. That it could even occur to him was a measure of the time he lived in.

"Reckon you heard Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces is from New Orleans," the comic went on with a sly leer. "But I reckon you don't know why they is *from* New Orleans an' not *in* New Orleans." He paused, setting up his punch line: "The Freedom Party gits in there, they gits *outa* there."

It might even have been true. A lot of bands from New Orleans *had* started touring when Huey Long met an assassin who, unlike those who'd tried for Jake Featherston, had known how to shoot straight. Had Long been easier on Negroes than the Freedom Party? He couldn't have been much tougher. And any which way, a joke about the Party was bound to draw a laugh from this crowd.

That only made Scipio wonder again whether the funny man was a stalking horse for the people he pretended to mock. No way to know, not for sure, but even the question spoiled his enjoyment of the comic's lines. He ordered another overpriced beer.

After what seemed a very long time, the comic retreated and Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces came out. The trumpeter who led the band was an engagingly ugly fellow with a froglike bass voice. When he raised the horn to his lips and began to play, Scipio's eyes went wide, not only at the sounds he produced but also at the way his

cheeks swelled up. He looked like a frog, too: like a spring peeper calling from a tree.

But the way he played made Scipio and everybody else forget about the way he looked. In his hands, that trumpet didn't just speak. It laughed and it moaned and it wept. And when it did, everyone who heard it wanted to do the same.

The Rhythm Aces—fiddler, sax man, bass man, drummer—couldn't have backed him better. And the music that poured from the band sent people hurrying from their seats and onto the dance floor. Now and again, in the Huntsman's Lodge, Scipio had heard rich white men sneering about nigger music. But the wilder, freer rhythms blacks enjoyed had also infected whites' music in the Confederate States. You could hardly find a song or a record on the wireless that didn't sound as if the musicians, no matter how white, had been listening to what came out of New Orleans and Mobile and Atlanta and other towns with a lively colored music scene. Sometimes they didn't seem to know it themselves. But the alert ear could always tell, especially when a song from the USA got played for comparison. Music from north of the border wasn't necessarily bad, but it was *different:* more staid, less surprising.

Even in the Confederate States, though, white musicians borrowed only some of the trimmings from what blacks played for themselves and among themselves. Any white band that played like Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces— assuming a white band could do any such thing, which struck Scipio as unlikely—would have been booed off the stage ... or, just possibly, idolized.

Before Scipio could decide which, Bathsheba reached out and tapped him on the arm. "Why you sittin' there?" she demanded. "Let's us dance!"

"All right. We do dat." He got to his feet. He wasn't the most enthusiastic dancer God ever made, but you didn't come to the Ten of Clubs if you didn't want to get out on the floor.

He wasn't the most athletic dancer God ever made, either. He never had been; he'd always owned too much of a sense of his own dignity to let loose as fully as a lot of people, and he wasn't so young as he had been, either. He did his best, knowing Bathsheba's was better—and, as he watched some of the youngsters cavort, knowing there were things he hadn't even imagined. Some of the moves they made were as far beyond him as Satchmo's music was beyond a bored Army

bugler.

He shrugged—and found himself trying to do it so it fit the beat. He must have managed; Bathsheba didn't seen too exasperated. All the same, he felt like a sparrow among hummingbirds that could hover and fly backwards and zoom straight up and do a million other things no ordinary bird could ever hope to manage.

Satchmo seemed ready to play all night. Eyes bugging out of his head, trumpet aimed at the sky as if to let God and the angels hear, he wailed on and on. Scipio wasn't ready to dance all night, though his wife might have been. But when he mimed exhaustion, she went back to the table with him so he could catch his breath. He realized that while out on the floor he hadn't once thought about Jake Featherston or the sorry plight of Negroes in the CSA. The music had driven all his worries clean out of his head. He might almost have been making love. He laughed. Some of the young couples out there might almost have been making love while they danced. For all he knew, maybe some of them had.

At two in the morning, the manager said, "We gots to close. We git in trouble with the police if we don't. I's right sorry, but I don't want no trouble with the police, not the way things is."

A few people grumbled, but nobody really raised a fuss. The way things were these days, a black man had to be crazy to court trouble with the police in Augusta or anywhere else. Scipio and Bathsheba got their coats and hats from the girl who'd checked them and walked out into the night.

The Terry was quiet—almost deserted but for the people leaving the Ten of Clubs. A chilly drizzle had begun to fall. The crowd scattered quickly. The Negro district remained technically under curfew, though the cops hadn't bothered enforcing it lately. Still, nobody wanted to get caught and beaten up or shaken down.

Bathsheba hoisted an umbrella. Scipio, who didn't have one, pulled his hat low on his forehead and looked down toward the ground to keep the rain out of his eyes. "Lord, I'm so glad tomorrow's Sunday," his wife said.

He shook his head. *"Today* Sunday. It be Sunday coupla hours now. Do Jesus, I thanks de Lawd we ain't got to work." Most Sundays, he would have gone to church to thank the Lord. Bathsheba believed, even if he had trouble. This morning, though, it looked as if they

would both sleep in, and so would the children.

He turned a corner, then stopped short. Men were moving up ahead. He couldn't see much—street lights in the Terry hadn't worked for years. But if those weren't rifles being passed back and forth ... If they weren't, he'd never seen any. He turned around and, without a word, signed for Bathsheba to back away, raising a finger to his lips to show she needed to be quiet while she did it.

For a wonder, she didn't argue. For a bigger wonder, none of those men with rifles came after them. Maybe they'd been so intent on their own business, they hadn't noticed the people who'd spotted them. Maybe the drizzle had helped, too.

Whatever the reason, Scipio knew he was lucky to get away in one piece. He and Bathsheba took a different street home. As they made their escape, a snatch of whistled music pursued them. It wasn't any tune Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces played, but he'd heard it before just the same. It was the "Internationale."

Reds had come—come back—to the Terry. They'd come back, and they had guns.

"Holy Jesus!" One of the yeomen in the USS *Remembrance's* wireless shack yanked off his earphones and stared at his pal. "You hear that, Zach?"

"Sure as hell did," Zach answered, scribbling furiously on the pad in front of him.

"What's up?" Sam Carsten asked. As usual when not on duty, he was killing time in the wireless shack. It was warm—the aeroplane carrier cruised between Florida and the U.S.-occupied Bahamas—but at least he was out of the sun. He wished the yeomen weren't wearing earphones. That way, he could have heard whatever it was, too. But they liked to get rid of distractions from the outside world—nosy officers, for instance—when they listened to Morse.

Zach finished writing, then dropped the pencil. "Signal going out in clear to the Confederate Army and Navy, sir," he answered. "Their vice president— Willy Knight, his name is—has resigned, and he's under

arrest."

"Christ!" Sam said. The other yeoman—his name was Freddy—was on the phone to the bridge with the news. Carsten heard a startled squawk on the other end of the line when it went through. He felt like squawking himself. Instead, he asked, "How come, for the love of Mike?"

"Story they're giving out is, he was the fellow behind the stalwarts who tried to take out Featherston a couple weeks ago," Zach said.

"Christ!" Carsten repeated, louder and with more emphasis this time. "That's the kind of crap that happens in Argentina or Nicaragua or one of those places, not up here."

"Yes, sir." The yeoman nodded. He knew better than to come right out and contradict an officer, no matter how stupid that officer had just been. He got his barb in, all right, but politely: "Except it just did."

"Well, what do they do now?" Sam asked. "They arrested Knight, you say? They going to give him a blindfold and a cigarette and stand him up against a wall?"

"No report on that, sir," Zach answered. "Only an alert. He has resigned. He has been arrested. No orders issued in his name are to be obeyed."

Sam wondered exactly what that meant, too. Had Willy Knight tried to get the Army, or some of it, to move against Jake Featherston? If he had, it didn't sound as if he'd had much luck. Luck or not, though, nobody in either the USA or the CSA had ever tried to play that particular game before.

"He wanted to put on a Napoleon suit, but it turned out to be three sizes too big," Sam judged. Both yeomen in the wireless shack nodded this time.

He hung around the wireless shack, hoping for more details, but no more seemed forthcoming. About ten minutes later, the klaxons began to hoot, ordering the crew to general quarters. He thought it was a drill. He hoped it was a drill. He got down to his station in the bowels of the *Remembrance* in jig time even so.

"What the hell's going on, sir?" a sailor in the damage-control party asked. "They ain't sprung one of these on us in a while."

"I'm not sure," said Sam, who had a pretty good idea. "Maybe Lieutenant Commander Pottinger knows more about it than I do."

But when Pottinger got there half a minute later, he said, "Now what?" in tones mightily aggrieved. He proceeded to explain himself: "I was in the head, God damn it, when the hooters started screeching."

A couple of sailors smiled. Nobody laughed. That had happened to every man who'd been in the Navy more than a few months. Carsten said, "Well, sir, I don't know for certain, but...." He told what he'd heard about Willy Knight.

"Shit." Pottinger didn't usually talk that way; maybe his recent misadventure preyed on his mind. He gathered himself and went on, "What the hell are the Confederates going to do now?"

"Beats me, sir," Sam answered. "But I expect it explains the general-quarters call: they want to make damn sure they don't go and do it to us."

"Makes sense," Pottinger agreed. He shifted uncomfortably. "If they keep us here too long, though, I'm going to need a honey bucket." Again, nobody laughed. Carsten approved of an officer who wouldn't abandon his post even in the face of what would ordinarily have been an urgent need.

The all-clear sounded before Lieutenant Commander Pottinger was reduced to such indignities. The officer in charge of the damage-control party left with dignified haste.

Carsten headed back to the wireless shack. He found the door closed against snoopy interlopers like himself. Somebody on the *Remembrance* was taking the news out of the CSA very seriously indeed. Sam's suspicions fell on Commander Cressy. Taking things seriously was how the exec earned his pay.

Balked from getting more news, Sam went out on the flight deck. By the rumors flying among the sailors there, the powers that be had shut the door to the wireless shack too late. Somebody claimed Willy Knight had already been shot. Somebody else said he was still in jail, awaiting trial as a U.S. spy. A grizzled bosun insisted Knight had been trying to flee up into Maryland when he was caught. Other claims seemed to spring from thin air.

Some of them were probably true. Sam had no idea which, though.

He listened to them all, admiring the ones he found most impressive. He might have done the same thing watching girls on a street corner in a liberty port.

The *Remembrance* pitched a little as she steamed south, but the sea was a lot calmer here than it would have been in the open waters of the North Atlantic at this time of year. The sun shone down out of a sky mostly blue. In these latitudes, even the winter sun could burn Sam's tender hide. Sea birds scudded along the breeze or dove into the ocean after fish.

But that buzz Carsten heard didn't come from gulls or petrels. Those were aeroplane motors—and they weren't the motors of the machines aboard the *Remembrance.* This was a different note. Peering west, Sam saw several brightly painted aeroplanes nearing the carrier. They zoomed past low enough for him to read the words confederate citrus company on their sides.

A sailor saluted the machines from the CSA with his middle finger. Another man said, "I hear those bastards all have guns in 'em these days."

Sam had heard the same thing. As with the news about Willy Knight, he didn't know how much to believe, but there was probably a fire somewhere under all that smoke. A petty officer said, "We ought to splash a couple of 'em, fish 'em out of the drink, and damn well see for ourselves."

That took things right to the edge, because a lot of sailors were nodding. Sam felt he had to draw back a step or two, and he did: "We don't shoot at them unless they shoot first, or unless we get orders from the skipper, which means orders from the Navy Department back in Philadelphia."

That petty officer muttered something Carsten decided he didn't have to notice in any official way. Just as well, too, for it wasn't a compliment. The fellow knew he was a mustang, and wondered why he took the attitudes of ordinary officers. That was what it amounted to, anyhow; the way the petty officer put it, it would have knocked down one of those confederate citrus company machines without bothering about the carrier's antiaircraft guns.

Both the flyby and the news out of the CSA got kicked around in the officers' mess that evening. The foulmouthed petty officer might have been surprised, for a lot of the officers he'd sneered at agreed

with him. "Those Confederate bastards are just poking at us, seeing how much they can get away with," was a common sentiment. "We ought to break their fingers for 'em, remind 'em who won the last war."

"Maybe this business with Knight means they'll start fighting among themselves and leave us alone for a while," a lieutenant said.

"Don't bet on it." Commander Cressy entered the fray with his usual authority. "If they'd got rid of Featherston, then, maybe. The way things are, he just gets the excuse to clamp down harder."

"Wonder if Knight really was spying for us," a lieutenant commander said.

In your dreams, Carsten thought. He didn't say that, not to an officer two grades senior to him, but he held the opinion very strongly.

And he wasn't the only one, for the executive officer snorted and said, "Not likely. He's done us too much harm over the years to make it easy to believe he was on our side all along. But we can deny it till we're blue in the face, and that won't do us any good."

"Wonder what excuse Knight had for getting rid of him," someone said. "Whatever it was, too bad it didn't work."

"Featherston is going to run again, and Knight didn't think he should," Sam said. "Knight figured *he* was going to get elected this coming November, but their Constitutional amendment screwed his chances."

"Could be," Commander Cressy said. "Could be, but we don't know for sure. The Confederates are saying Knight was the guy behind those fellows who tried to shoot Featherston, but how do we know that's true? Far as I can see, we don't. Featherston might be using the assassination attempt as an excuse to get rid of Knight, regardless of whether he really had anything to do with it."

That cynical assessment stopped talk in its tracks. At last, Lieutenant Commander Pottinger whistled in reluctant admiration. "You don't believe in anything, do you, sir?" he said.

"Not without evidence," Cressy answered at once. "We haven't got any, except for what the Confederate wireless says. And the Confederate wireless lies. It lies like a drunk telling his wife what

happened to the grocery money. Are you going to trust it just because it says something you might want to hear?"

Again, no one spoke for a little while. Sam eyed the exec with real respect. He *had* believed the wireless reports from the CSA. They were the only news he had, so why not believe them? He hadn't found any reason not to, but Commander Cressy had—and a damn good reason, too.

"Makes it harder to figure out what the Confederates are up to if we can't believe anything they say," he remarked.

"That's not our worry," Cressy said. "The way I look at things is, we don't believe any of it till we either have evidence of our own that we should or until our superiors tell us what's true and what isn't. You can bet they've got spies inside the CSA finding out what the straight dope is."

I hope they do. They'd be damn fools if they didn't, Carsten thought. That cheered him, but not for long. A lifetime in the Navy had convinced him that a lot of his superiors *were* damn fools, and the only thing he could do about it was try to keep them from causing as much harm as possible.

He did say, "I wonder how many spies the Confederates have in the USA."

Nobody answered the question, which produced a chilly silence in the wardroom. He might have started talking about whorehouses he'd known at a women's club meeting. The *Remembrance's* officers were willing enough to think about their own spies, but not about the other fellow's.

Commander Cressy looked thoughtful, though he didn't say anything. But then, Commander Cressy always looked thoughtful, so Sam wasn't sure how much that proved, or whether it proved anything at all.

Every once in a while, Boston cast up a mild, springlike day, even if the calendar said it was early February. If it was a Saturday, too, well, all the better. People who'd stayed indoors as much as they could

since winter slammed down emerged from their nests, blinking at the watery sunshine and the pale blue sky. They might almost have been animals coming out of hibernation.

Sylvia Enos certainly felt that way. With the mercury in the high forties— one reckless weatherman on the wireless even talked about the fifties—she wanted to be out and doing things. She didn't need to worry about long johns or overcoat or mittens or thick wool muffler. All she had to do was throw a sweater on over her blouse and go outside. And, gratefully, she did.

Mary Jane didn't even bother with a sweater, perhaps because her blouse was wool, perhaps because she wanted to show off while she had the chance. Sylvia minded that impulse less than she'd thought she would in a daughter. Mary Jane was heading from her mid-toward her late twenties, and hadn't snagged a husband yet. She didn't seem unduly worried about it, either. As far as Sylvia was concerned, a little display might be in order.

They went to Quincy Market, next to Faneuil Hall. The grasshopper on the weather vane atop Faneuil Hall showed the wind coming out of the south. Pointing to it, Sylvia said, "That's the only good thing from the Confederate States: the weather, I mean." She paused to light a cigarette, then shook her head. "No, I take it back. Their tobacco's nice, too. The rest? Forget it."

"Let me have one of those, will you?" Mary Jane said. Sylvia handed her the pack, then leaned close to give her a light. Mary Jane sucked in smoke. She blew it out and nodded. "That's pretty good, all right."

A sailor on leave whistled at her. She ignored him. Sylvia would have ignored him, too. He was a little bowlegged fellow with a face like a ferret's. Ten seconds later, he whistled at another woman. She didn't pay any attention to him, either.

Mary Jane said, "How's Ernie? Or don't I want to know?"

"He's not that bad," Sylvia said defensively. "He's been ... sweet lately. His writing is going better. That always helps." Ernie said it helped him starve slow instead of fast. As long as Sylvia had known him, though, he'd always managed to make at least some kind of living from his typewriter.

"Hurrah," Mary Jane said. "Hasn't pulled a gun on you lately?"

"Not lately," Sylvia agreed.

"I don't care how sweet he is. He's trouble," her daughter said.

She was probably right. No—she *was* right, and Sylvia knew it. That didn't mean she wanted to dump Ernie. If she'd wanted to, she would have long since. The whiff of danger he brought to things excited her. (Actually, it was a good deal more than a whiff, but Sylvia refused to dwell on that.) And, if anything, his ... shortcoming posed a challenge. When she pleased him, she knew she'd accomplished something.

How to put that into words? "He may be trouble, but he's never dull."

"He may not be dull, but he's trouble," her daughter said.

Again, Sylvia didn't argue. She just kept walking past the stalls and shops of Quincy Market. People sold everything from home-canned chowder and oyster stew to books to frying pans to furniture to jewelry to hats. Mary Jane admired sterling-silver cups that aped ones made by Paul Revere. Sylvia admired the cups, too, but not their prices. Those horrified her. "They're for rich tourists," she said.

"I know," Mary Jane answered. "But they are pretty."

Someone—not a tourist, by his accent, which was purest Boston—took a silver gravy boat up to the shopkeeper and peeled green bills out of his wallet. Sylvia sighed. "It must be fun to be able to afford nice things," she said.

Mary Jane pointed to a new stall across the way. "Those look nice," she said, "and they might not be too expensive."

Sylvia read the sign: " 'Clogston's Quilts.' " She shivered, knowing winter wasn't over in spite of this mild day. "Some of the blankets are getting pretty ratty, all right. Let's go have a look."

The quilts on display made a rainbow under a roof of waterproof canvas. They were carefully laid out with an eye to which colors went with others, and that only made the display more enticing. Some duplicated colonial patterns, while others were brightly modern.

"Hello, ladies," said the proprietor, a pleasant woman in her early forties with a wide smile and very white teeth. "Help you with

something?"

"Do you make all these?" Mary Jane blurted.

"I sure do. Chris Clogston, at your service." She dipped her head in the same brisk way a man running a shop might have used. "When you don't see me here, you'll find me at the sewing machine."

"When do you sleep, Mrs.—uh, Miss—Clogston?" Sylvia asked, awkwardly changing the question when she noticed the other woman wore no ring.

"Sleep? What's that? I just hang myself in a corner now and then to get the wrinkles out." Chris Clogston laughed. It was a good laugh, a laugh that invited anyone who heard it to share the joke. She went on, "I *do* stay busy, but I like making quilts, picking out the colors and making sure everything is strong and will last. It doesn't seem like work. And it beats the stuffing"—she laughed again—"out of going to a factory every day."

"Oh, yes." Sylvia had done her share of that and more. "What sort of living do you make, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I'm still here," the shopkeeper answered. "Actually, I'm new *here,* new in Quincy Market. The rent for this space is twice what I paid where I was before, but I get a lot more customers, so it's worth it." Her gray eyes widened a little. "And what can I interest you in?"

"That one's pretty." Sylvia pointed.

Chris Clogston nodded, seeming pleased. "I'm glad you like it. That pattern's been in the family for I don't know how long—since before the Revolution, anyhow. I'm a ninth-generation Clogston in America. John, the first one we know about, came to Boston before 1740, out of Belfast."

"Wow," Mary Jane said.

"Wow is right," Sylvia said. "I can't trace my pedigree back past my great-grandfather, and I don't know much about him."

"My granny was mad for family history, and she gave me some of the bug," Chris Clogston said. She picked up the quilt. "Now, this particular one is stuffed with cotton. I also make it stuffed with goose down if you want it extra warm. That will cost you more, though."

"How much is this one, and how much would it be with the down?" Sylvia asked.

"This one's $4.45," the quiltmaker answered. "It's nice and toasty, too— don't get me wrong. If you want it with goose down, though, it goes up to $7.75."

Sylvia didn't need to think about whether she could afford the down-stuffed quilt; she knew she couldn't. The cotton ... Even the cotton was a reach, but she said, "I'll take it."

"You won't be sorry," Chris Clogston said. "It'll last you a lifetime."

Mary Jane pointed to a small quilt in pink and blue. "Let's get that one, too, for George and Connie's baby." Sylvia hesitated, not because she didn't like the quilt but because she couldn't afford to spend the money. Mary Jane said, "Don't worry, Ma. I'll spring for it. It'll use up some overtime I got last week." She grinned. "Easy come, easy go."

The small quilt cost $2.25. Mary Jane did pay, and didn't blink. Sylvia hadn't known about the overtime. She wondered if it was mythical. She didn't quarrel with her daughter, though. George and Connie would be happy to have the quilt for their little boy.

"Thank you very much, ladies," Chris Clogston called as Sylvia and Mary Jane left the stall.

"Thank *you,"* Sylvia answered, well pleased with the quilt she'd bought. She looked up at the blue sky and the bravely shining sun. "I wonder how long this weather will hold."

"As long as it does," Mary Jane said. "We just have to enjoy it till it's gone."

"I intend to," Sylvia said, and then, after a few steps through the crowded Quincy Market, "It's like that with Ernie and me, too, you know."

Mary Jane only shrugged. "I can't talk sense into your head about that. I've tried, and it doesn't work. But I still don't think he's good for you."

"Good for me?" Sylvia hadn't worried about that. "He's ... interesting. Things happen when he's around, and you never know beforehand what they'll be."

"Maybe," Mary Jane said, "but some of the time I bet you wish you did."

She was right. Sylvia knew it. Ernie had frightened her in ways no one else had matched, or even approached. She sometimes—often—thought he was most in earnest when his mood turned blackest. Even so ... "Never a dull moment," she said. "That counts for something, too."

"Pa would have said the same thing, wouldn't he, after his destroyer dodged a torpedo?" Mary Jane replied. "But one day the destroyer didn't dodge, and that's how come I hardly remember my own father."

"Yes, that's right," Sylvia said. "I paid him back, though." Roger Kimball was dead, sure enough. But that didn't, wouldn't, couldn't, bring George Enos, Senior, back to life. Mary Jane would never have the memories she was missing. All Sylvia had left were her memories.

Mary Jane changed the subject as abruptly as anyone could: "Let's go over to the Union Oyster House for an early supper. I can't remember the last time I was there."

"Why not?" Sylvia said, thinking *in for a penny, in for a pound.* They'd already spent a lot of money today; after that, what was a little more? The Union Oyster House was only a couple of blocks from the market square. The building in which it operated had stood on the same spot since the early eighteenth century. The restaurant itself had been there for more than a hundred years. People said Daniel Webster had drunk at the cramped little bar.

Almost everything about the Union Oyster House was cramped and little, from the stairs people descended to get down to the main level to the panes of glass in the windows to the tiny wooden booths into which diners squeezed. Sylvia and Mary Jane snagged a booth with no trouble—they got in ahead of the evening rush.

The one place where the restaurant didn't stint was on the portions. The plates of fried oysters and fried potatoes a harried-looking waiter set in front of the two women would have fed a couple of lumberjacks, or possibly a couple of football teams. "How am I going to eat all that?" Sylvia asked. Then she did. Mary Jane cleaned her plate, too.

Going home happily full, carrying things they'd wanted to buy, made a good end to a good day. And two men on the trolley car stood

up to give Sylvia and her daughter their seats. That didn't happen all the time, either.

Spread on the bed, the quilt looked even finer than it had in Chris Clogston's stall. It promised to be warm, too. Sylvia wanted to burrow under it right then and there.

"How about that, Ma?" Mary Jane said.

Sylvia nodded. "Yes. How about that?" She wondered what Ernie would say when he saw the quilt. *Probably something sarcastic,* she thought. *Well, if he does, too bad for him.*

Lucien Galtier cleaned the farmhouse as if his life depended on it. He was not the sort of slob a lot of men living by themselves would have been. Marie wouldn't have liked that, and he took his wife's opinions more seriously now that she was gone than he had while she was there to enforce them. But he knew he couldn't hope to match the standard she set, and he hadn't tried. He'd set his own, less strict, standard and lived up to that.

Now, though, he tried to match what Marie would have done. That meant a lot of extra scrubbing and dusting. It meant cleaning out corners where dirt lingered—though he still didn't attack the corners with needles, as Marie might have done. It meant putting things in closets and deciding what was too far gone even to linger in a closet any more. It meant a lot of extra work.

He did the extra work not merely from a sense of duty but from a sense of pride. He was going to bring Éloise Granche here, and he wanted everything perfect. If she thought he lived like a pig in a sty ... *Well, so what?* some part of him jeered. *She doesn't want to marry you anyhow.*

He ignored the internal scoffing. He didn't so much think it wrong as think it irrelevant. Seeing a clean house wouldn't make Éloise change her mind and want to live here. When she spoke of patrimony and the problems marriage would cause both families, she was firm, she was decisive—and, as far as Lucien could see, she was dead right.

That wasn't why he worked till his lungs burned and his heart

pounded and his chest ached: worked harder than he did on the farm at any time of the year but harvest. He worked himself into a panting tizzy for one of the oldest reasons in the world: he wanted to impress the woman he cared about. They were already lovers; impressing her wouldn't get him anything but a smile and perhaps a quick, offhand compliment. He knew that. His mother hadn't raised a fool. Hoping to see that smile kept him slaving away with a smile on his own face.

After he couldn't find anything else left to clean, he cleaned himself. He made lavish, even extravagant, use of water he heated on the stove. On a warmer day, he could have luxuriated in the steaming tub for a long time, letting the hot water soak the kinks out of his back. But water didn't stay hot forever, not in winter in Quebec it didn't. When it started to cool off, which it did all too soon, he got out and dried off in a hurry.

He thought about putting on his black wool suit when he went to get Éloise: thought about it and discarded the notion in the next breath. She would think someone had died, and he was on his way to the funeral. And besides, the suit smelled so strongly of mothballs, it would have made her eyes water. It stayed in the closet. He put on the clothes he would have worn to a dance—work clothes, but the best he had, and also impeccably clean. If he wouldn't go to Éloise's reeking of mothballs, he wouldn't go reeking of stale sweat, either.

He'd just set a warm wool cap on his head and was putting on his overcoat when someone knocked on the door. *"Tabernac!"* he snarled. Who the devil would come bothering him now, when he had more important things to worry about than a neighbor who'd run out of chicken feed?

Before he went to the door, he shrugged on his overcoat. *I was just going out* would cut any visit short. With dramatic suddenness, he threw the door open. Whoever was out there, Lucien intended to make him feel guilty.

Dr. Leonard O'Doull stared at him, surprised but not visibly afflicted with guilt.

"What have we here?" Galtier's son-in-law asked. "Is it that you are so eager to escape my company?"

Yes, Galtier thought, but he couldn't say that. "I was about to go out for a drive," he replied.

"In this?" O'Doull waved at the swirling snow. Now he sounded more than surprised; he sounded astonished. "Me, I had to come down to the hospital today, and from the hospital it is but a short hop here. But why would you go out for a drive if you don't have to?"

"To visit a friend," Lucien replied, which was part of the truth, though he was careful to say *un ami* and not *une amie:* he didn't want O'Doull knowing his friend was of the feminine persuasion. Realizing his son-in-law wouldn't disappear in the wind, he stepped aside. "Come in. No point letting the heat out of the house."

"No, certainly not." O'Doull did come in, and stamped snow all over the tidy entry hall. Lucien did his best not to wince. Slowly, he shed his own coat and cap. Leonard O'Doull slithered out of his overcoat with a sigh of relief. He went on, "I won't keep you long, since it's plain you have such important business elsewhere."

Galtier pretended not to notice the sarcasm. "Unfortunately, I do," he said, which made O'Doull raise a gingery eyebrow. Lucien waved him to the couch. "But sit down. What sort of gossip have you heard at the hospital?"

"At the hospital? Nothing much." O'Doull stretched his long legs out in front of him. To Galtier's relief, he didn't put his feet up on the table, as he'd sometimes been known to do. "Still, though, gossip does come to a doctor's office."

"Does it?" Lucien said tonelessly.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact, it does," his son-in-law replied. "And it could even be that the gossip that comes is true, though I did not think so before I knocked on your door."

"Since you have not told me what this gossip is, I have no idea whether it is true or not," Lucien said. "Should I care?" Were people starting to talk about Éloise and him?

Leonard O'Doull didn't directly answer that. Instead, he asked, *"Mon beau-père, are* you a happy man?"

That question took Galtier by surprise. He thought for a moment, then answered, "Most of the time, I am too busy working even to wonder."

"All right. Never mind." Dr. O'Doull smiled. "I hope, when you do

have time away from your work, I hope you are happy, however you get to be that way. I hope so, and so does Nicole. And I have talked with Charles and Georges and Denise. They all feel the same way. I have not talked with your other two daughters, but I am sure they would agree."

"Are you? Would they?" Lucien said. "And why is everyone so intimately concerned with my happiness?" That didn't quite take the bull by the horns, but it came close.

O'Doull smiled at him. "Because of the gossip, as I said."

"Well? And what is this gossip? And why are you acting like an old woman and listening to it?" There. Now Lucien would find out whatever there was to find out.

So he thought, anyhow. But O'Doull only smiled and said, "That it could be you have some reason for happiness."

"Well, if I do, that reason is not a *beau-fils* who comes around snooping after what I am doing," Lucien said pointedly.

This time, Leonard O'Doull laughed out loud. "As if you never did any snooping of your own," he said. The only comeback Galtier found for that was dignified silence, so he used it. But even silence made his son-in-law laugh at him. O'Doull got to his feet.

"Well, *mon beau-père,* I won't keep you any more. I hope you find happiness wherever you can."

He didn't even wait for an answer. He just put on his hat and overcoat and left. Through the howl of the wind, Lucien heard his son-in-law's old Ford roar to flatulent life. The motorcar sputtered up the path from the farmhouse to the road. Then its noise faded away.

As soon as quiet returned, Lucien put on his own warm clothes again. He hoped the Chevrolet would start. It did. The battery might be going, but it wasn't quite gone. He let the engine get good and warm, then put the auto in gear and drove off to Éloise Granche's.

"What kept you?" she said when he knocked on the door. "I expected you half an hour ago."

"My son-in-law paid me a call," he answered with a shrug. "From what Leonard says, there may be some gossip about us. Do you mind?

Does it bother you?"

"No, not at all," Éloise said with a shrug of her own. "I've always expected it. We should be grateful it's taken this long to show up."

"Who knows whether it has?" Lucien said. "It's taken this long for one of us to hear about it, yes. But that's different. Who knows how long people have been mumbling this, that, or the other thing?"

Éloise looked thoughtful. Slowly, she nodded. "Yes, it could be that you are right. Still, it is a small thing. Shall we go?"

"Certainly," Lucien replied. He held the passenger door of the Chevrolet open for her, then went around to the driver's side. Again, the motorcar started. Lucien surreptitiously patted the steering wheel. The machine might be less reliable than a horse, but it was doing what it was supposed to do.

Hardly any traffic was on the road as he drove back to his own farmhouse. The autos and trucks that did appear seemed to come out of nowhere, loom enormously for a moment through the swirling snow, and then disappear as abruptly as they'd come into view. "Everything goes by so fast," Éloise murmured.

"Tu as raison," Galtier said. "That was what gave me the hardest time when I learned to drive after the war." Up till then, he hadn't had a prayer of affording a motorcar. Only a bargain with the Americans for the land they'd taken from his farm for their hospital had let him do it. He went on, "In a buggy or a wagon, you have time to look away from the road and back again. In a motorcar? No. *Mon Dieu,* no. If you do not pay attention every moment, you will have a wreck."

He got back to his house without having a wreck. He was anxious even so as he handed Éloise out of the Chevrolet. The anxiety grew on the short walk to the front door. *He* thought the place was reasonably tidy. But what did he know? What did he really know? He was only a man, after all.

When he opened the door, he distracted Éloise for a moment by flipping the switch and turning on a lamp across the room. "Electricity," she said, and nodded to herself. "Yes, I knew you had it. It's so much brighter and finer than kerosene."

A moment later, Lucien wondered whether that fine, bright light was what he wanted. It would let her see every flaw in his

housekeeping. Mercifully, though, she didn't seem inclined to be critical. She let him guide her through the house, every so often nodding again.

"Very nice," she said when the tour was done. "Very nice indeed. I am glad you're comfortable. I have worried about you living here by yourself." She raised an eyebrow. "Somehow, though, I doubt everything is *quite* so neat when you are not having company over."

Lucien looked back at her, nothing but innocence on his face. "Why, my sweet, what can you possibly mean by that?"

Éloise started to explain exactly what she meant. Then she caught the glint in his eye and started to laugh instead. "You!" she said fondly. "You are a devil, aren't you?"

"If I am, it is because you make me one," Galtier answered. He took her in his arms to show just what kind of devil she made him. Her lips were sweet against his. She didn't kiss quite like Marie—but she was probably thinking he didn't kiss like her dead husband. And so what, either way? They were kissing each other, and nothing else mattered, not right then.

Cincinnatus Driver wasn't happy about walking upstairs from his apartment. He knew he should have been happy. Knowing that only made him more unhappy yet. He sighed and muttered something under his breath. The more you looked at it, the more you lived it, the more complicated life got.

He knocked on the door of the apartment just above his. The wireless was on inside, pretty loud. He had to knock twice before anybody in there heard him. Suddenly, the wireless got softer. A few seconds later, the door opened.

"Evenin', Mr. Chang," Cincinnatus said. "How are you today?"

"Oh. Hello, Mr. Driver," said the father of Cincinnatus' daughter-in-law. Joey Chang was polite. He'd always stayed polite with Cincinnatus, even if he didn't much care to have Achilles in his family. He hesitated, then brightened. "I just make new batch of beer. You want some?" If Cincinnatus had come up about homebrew, then maybe they wouldn't have to talk about ... other things.

And Cincinnatus smiled and nodded and said, "I'd love to have some, for true." He meant every word of it. Iowa was a dry state, with liquor of any kind hard to come by. And Chang made damn good beer. But that wasn't why Cincinnatus had come upstairs. "I got some news you need to know."

"News?" Mr. Chang asked, and Cincinnatus nodded again. The Chinaman sighed, much as Cincinnatus had while climbing the stairs. He stepped aside. "You come in, you tell me news."

"Thank you kindly," Cincinnatus said. "Evenin', Mrs. Chang," he called to the woman sitting close by the wireless set. It was playing a comedy about a trolley driver and his friend who worked in a sewer. Cincinnatus wondered how much Mrs. Chang followed; her English wasn't as good as her husband's.

As if to underscore that, Joey Chang spoke to her in Chinese. She answered in the same language. Cincinnatus understood not a word,

but she didn't sound happy. Mr. Chang sighed again, on exactly the same note. He lit a cigarette, then offered Cincinnatus one. Once they were both smoking, he said, "What is this news?"

"Achilles and Grace, they gonna have themselves another baby toward the end of the year," Cincinnatus answered.

"Baby?" Mrs. Chang said sharply. She might not have a whole lot of English, but she sure understood that.

"Yes, ma'am. That's right," Cincinnatus said.

"This is good news. Here, you wait." Joey Chang went into the kitchen. He came back half a minute later with three small glasses. He gave one to his wife, one to Cincinnatus, and kept the third for himself. "A baby. *Kampai!"* he said, and knocked back his glass.

"Mud in your eye." Cincinnatus followed suit. This wasn't beer. It scorched his gullet all the way down, and exploded like a bomb when it hit his stomach. "Whew!" He eyed the empty glass with respect. "You make that yourself?"

"Not me." Chang shook his head. "This place too small for proper still. Beer easy. Can make beer anywhere. But need more room for still, need place where neighbors no smell ... smoke." He scowled; that wasn't the word he wanted. After a moment, he found the right one: "Fumes. Neighbors no smell fumes. For this, I trade plenty beer with fellow I know. You want more?"

"If you've got it to spare, I wouldn't mind another one. Don't want to put you to no trouble, though."

"No trouble." Mr. Chang took Cincinnatus' glass and disappeared into the kitchen again. When he returned, he had a refill, too. This time, Cincinnatus sipped cautiously instead of sending the hooch down the hatch. It was some kind of brandy, not whiskey, and strong enough to grow hair on his chest—or on Joey Chang's chest, which was a bigger challenge. "Another baby," Chang murmured, his eyes for a few seconds soft and far away. "Grandfather again."

"Yeah," Cincinnatus said dreamily. Then he pointed at Mr. Chang. "You'd like it a lot better if you saw the new baby when it comes—and if you saw the grandbaby you already got once in a while."

"I know. I know." Chang stared down into the glass he held. "But

Grace, she run off, she get married when we say no. She not do what her mother, her father say. She marry fellow who is not Chinese. Things hard on account of that."

He was a little man, more than a head shorter than Cincinnatus. But he spoke with enormous pride. *Reckon he'd say the same thing if I was white, too,* Cincinnatus thought, bemused. He hadn't imagined a Chinaman could also look down his nose at whites. The mere idea broadened his mental horizon.

Mrs. Chang spoke, a sharp, singsong rattle of Chinese. Her husband answered in the same language, then returned to English for Cincinnatus' benefit: "She say, we not angry because your boy colored fellow. We angry because Grace disobey us. For Chinese, this is very bad. Hard to forgive."

"Don't know nothin' about that," said Cincinnatus, who suspected Chang was lying some for politeness' sake, but wasn't quite sure. He went on, "I do know you ain't just missin' out on Grace, though. You missin' out on your grandbaby. You gonna be missin' out on *two* grandbabies. Your pride worth all that?"

Now Mr. Chang spoke in Chinese—translating the question, Cincinnatus figured. Mrs. Chang answered right away. Again, her tone said everything Cincinnatus needed to know. *You bet your life pride is worth it.* That was what she'd told him, all right. Cincinnatus wondered whether Mr. Chang would show any backbone. From everything the Negro had seen, Mrs. Chang was the one who said, *Jump, frog!* Her husband asked, *How high?* on the way up.

But he said something more, and then something more, and then something more again. After his last sally, Mrs. Chang burst into tears. Embarrassed, Cincinnatus turned away. "I better go," he mumbled.

"All right, you go," Mr. Chang said. "But you see Achilles and Grace, you say they can come by here. We be glad to see them. This go on too long." Mrs. Chang protested again. Her husband, for a wonder, overrode her. They were still arguing when Cincinnatus slipped out the door and went downstairs.

"Well?" Elizabeth asked when he walked into their apartment.

"Mr. Chang say they can come visit," Cincinnatus answered, and his wife's face lit up. He raised a warning hand. "Mrs. Chang ain't very happy about it. Pretty fair chance she make him change his mind."

Elizabeth sighed. "They's powerful proud folks," she said. Cincinnatus walked over and gave her a kiss. She eyed him with as much suspicion as pleasure. "What's that for?"

"On account of that's the very same word the Changs used when they was talkin' about themselves," he said, "and only a clever lady like you would figure it out all on her lonesome."

"That a fact?" Elizabeth said. Cincinnatus solemnly nodded. She wagged a finger at him. "I tell you a fact: you only talk so sweet to me when you want something—an' I generally know what it is you want."

If she hadn't been smiling, the words would have flayed. As things were, Cincinnatus laughed. "Sure enough, you got what I want," he said. Elizabeth snorted. Cincinnatus laughed again. But, though he might have been trying to butter her up, he hadn't been lying. He hoped she felt the same way. She'd never given him any signs she didn't.

When he came home two or three days later, Elizabeth pointed to an envelope on the kitchen table. "You got a letter from Covington," she said. She hadn't opened it. She'd acquired her letters only after they came to Iowa, and still didn't read fluently. They also had a family rule that mail belonged to the person whose name was on the envelope, and to nobody else.

Cincinnatus eyed the envelope with a mixture of pleasure and apprehension. His father and mother still lived in Kentucky, and they did write to him every so often—or rather, they had a literate neighbor do it, for they couldn't read or write. He was always glad to hear from them, and always suspicious when he did. Back in the 1920s, the Kentucky State Police had used a false message from them to lure him to Covington, and flung him into jail for sedition as soon as he got off the train.

He opened the envelope and took out the sheet of paper inside. He was frowning when he put it down. "What's it say?" Elizabeth asked.

"He says Ma's startin' to forget things, act like she was a little child again." Cincinnatus scowled at the letter. Up till now, Livia had always been the rock at which the family anchored. Seneca's health had been shaky now and again, but hardly ever hers. Tears stung Cincinnatus' eyes. This wasn't anything a doctor could fix, either; he knew that too well.

"That's hard to bear, sweetheart. That's right hard to bear," Elizabeth said. Both her parents, though, were long dead, so her sympathy went only so far. Sudden anxiety sharpened her voice as she asked, "He don't want you to go down there? He better not, after all you went through."

"No, no." Cincinnatus shook his head. "He say my pa's managin' for now." But then he shook his head in a different, more thoughtful way. "Reckon maybe I could, though. Ain't no more Kentucky State Police to fling me in jail."

"Sure ain't." But that wasn't agreement from his wife. It was sarcasm. "And there ain't on account o' the Freedom Party's runnin' things in Kentucky nowadays. Freedom Party fellers, they love to have another nigger come down to their state an' commence to raisin' trouble."

"I wouldn't raise no trouble," Cincinnatus said. "All I'd be doin' was seein' my own mother while she's still on this earth."

Elizabeth shook her finger at him as if he were a naughty little boy. "You stay right here where you belong."

"Ain't goin' nowhere. Already told you that. But things ain't as bad as you think in Kentucky, and that's the truth. Yeah, they got them Freedom Party fellers runnin' things now, but they can't do like they done down in the Confederate States—can't beat up all the folks who don't like 'em and keep them folks from votin'. They lose the next election, they's gone."

"You goes down there, you's gone," Elizabeth said. " 'Sides, you goes down there, what's Amanda an' me supposed to do for money? It don't grow on trees—or if it do, I ain't found the nursery what sells it."

"Even if I was to go, I wouldn't be gone long," Cincinnatus said. "It'd be to see my ma, say good-bye to her while she still know who I am. That kind of forgettin', it just gits worse an' worse. Somebody live long enough, he don't even know who he is, let alone anybody else."

Elizabeth softened slightly. "That's so," she admitted, and hugged Cincinnatus. "All right. We take it like it comes, see how she do. If you got to go, then you got to go, and that's all there is to it."

She started to let go of Cincinnatus, but now he squeezed her. "I love you," he said. "You're the best thing ever happen to me."

"I better be," Elizabeth said, "on account of you don't know how to stay out of trouble on your own." Cincinnatus wanted to resent that or get angry about it. He wanted to, but found he couldn't.

"No," Alexander Arthur Pomeroy declared, like a tycoon declining a merger offer. Mary had just asked him if he wanted a nap. At two and a half, he was liable to mean that no, too, and to be fussy and cranky at night because he hadn't had it. One of these days before too long, he'd stop taking naps for good, and then Mary wouldn't get any rest from dawn till dusk, either. She looked forward to that day with something less than delight. Most of Alec's milestones had delighted her: first tooth, first step, first word. Last nap, though, last nap was different.

Of course, Alec might also have been saying no just for the sake of saying no. He did that a lot. From what other mothers said, every two-year-old went through the same maddening phase. Maddening though it was, it could also be funny. Slyly pitching her voice the same way as she had when asking him if he wanted a nap, Mary said, "Alec, do you want a cookie?"

"No," he said again, a pint-sized captain of industry. Then he realized he'd made a dreadful mistake. The horror on his face matched anything in the moving pictures. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "Cookie! Want cookie!" He started to cry.

Mary gave him a vanilla wafer. He calmed down. The way he'd wailed, though, said he needed a nap whether he wanted one or not. She didn't ask again, but scooped him up, sat down in the rocking chair, and started reading a story. She kept her tone deliberately bland. After about ten minutes, Alec's eyes sagged shut. She rocked a little longer, then carried him to his crib.

She put him down with care; sometimes his head would bob up if she wasn't gentle. But not today. Mary let out a sigh of relief. Now she had anywhere from half an hour to an hour and a half to herself. Time had been a luxury more precious than ermine, more precious than rubies, ever since Alec was born.

"Coffee!" Mary said, and headed for the kitchen. She'd always liked tea better. Come to that, she still did like tea better. But coffee had

one unquestionable advantage: it was stronger. With a baby—now a toddler—in the house, strength counted. She'd long since given up trying to figure out how far behind on sleep she was.

A gently steaming cup beside her, she sat down in the rocking chair again, this time by herself. She unfolded the *Rosenfeld Register* and prepared to make the most of her free time. The *Register* was just a weekly, and so didn't bother with much news from abroad, but it did have one foreign story on the front page: CONFEDERATE STATES RESUME CONSCRIPTION Featherston of the CSA said he was doing it because of the continuing national emergency in the country, and blamed rebellious blacks. President Smith of the USA hadn't said anything by the time the *Register* went to press.

Mary glanced over to the wireless set. She couldn't remember anything Smith had said since the *Register* went to press, either. She thought about turning on the set and listening to some news, but she didn't have the energy to get up. Whatever the president of the USA said, she'd find out sooner or later.

Regardless of what President Smith said, Mary knew what she thought. If the Confederates weren't getting ready to spit in their northern neighbor's eye, she would have been surprised. She hoped they spat good and hard.

During the war, Canada and the Confederates had been on the same side. She'd wondered about that then; the Confederate States hadn't hung out a lamp of liberty for all the world to see. They still didn't, by all appearances. But, whether they did or not, one ancient rule had still applied: the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

These days, Mary would gladly have allied with the Devil against the United States. Only trouble was, Old Scratch appeared uninterested in the deal—or maybe he'd taken up residence in Philadelphia. As for her country, it remained subjugated. She saw no grand uprising on the horizon. The Canadians had tried that once: tried, failed, and seemed to decide not to repeat the experiment.

That left Mary furious. She wanted to be part of something bigger than herself, something more than a rebellion of one. Other people made bombs, too, and made more of them; she read and heard about the bangs every so often, and had the feeling the papers and wireless didn't talk about all of them. The others attacked real soldiers and administrators, too, the way her father had. They didn't limit themselves to a Greek who'd come up to Canada to run a general

store.

Mary looked up toward the heavens and asked God, or perhaps her father, *Well, what else could I do?* Other parts of life had got in the way of her thirst for revenge. One of those other parts was working in the diner across the street. Another was sleeping in the crib. She knew next to nothing about the people who planted other bombs, but she would have bet they didn't have babies to worry about.

Local stories filled most of the *Register's* pages: local stories and local advertising. The wedding announcements and obituaries were as stylized as the serials that ran ahead of main features on the cinema screen. If you'd seen one, you'd seen them all; only names and dates changed.

As for the ads, many of those were even more formulaic than the announcements. Peter Karamanlides bought space to plug his store every week So did Dr. Shipley, the painless dentist. Mary often wondered why, when they had the only general store and dentist's office for miles around. The same applied to the laundry and the haberdasher and to the newspaper itself. If you didn't use their services, whose would you use?

Advertisements from farmers often followed formulas, too. Those for stud services did: *offspring to stand and walk* was the stock phrase. If the offspring did, fine; if not, the stud fee had to be refunded. But some of those ads were different. There was no standard format, for instance, for selling a piano.

There was no formula for the little stories speckled through the inner pages of the *Rosenfeld Register,* either. The editor, no doubt, would have called them "human interest" pieces. Mary sometimes wondered about the sanity of any human being who was interested in stories about a two-headed calf nursed by two different cows or a man who pulled a boxcar with his teeth—and false teeth, at that.

But she looked at the filler pieces herself. A story about a mother cat nursing an orphaned puppy could make her smile. So could one about two former sweethearts who'd both moved away from the small town where they grew up, then didn't see each other for twenty-five years till they were standing in line at the same Toronto cinema. One had never married; the other was a widower. They'd fallen in love all over again.

Some of those "human interest" stories made Mary grit her teeth,

because propaganda poisoned them. The one about the Yank flier who'd requalified as a fighter pilot after twenty years away from aeroplanes was particularly sappy; she had to resist the impulse to crumple up the *Register* and throw it across the living room. The last paragraph said, *Our bold hero, now also a successful barrister specializing in occupation affairs, is married to the former Laura Secord, a descendant of the "Paul Revere of Canada," who had the same name. They have one daughter. Thus we see that the two lands are becoming ever more closely intertwined.*

Mary saw nothing of the sort. What she saw was a traitor living high on the hog because she'd married a Yank. And hadn't Laura Secord been one of the people who'd betrayed the uprising in the 1920s? Mary nodded to herself. She was sure she remembered that. She wouldn't forget the name, not when she'd learned it in school before the Yanks started changing what was taught. Had the woman been intertwined with this Yank flier even then? The lewd image was enough to make Mary's cheeks heat.

She'd promised herself vengeance on the people who'd made the uprising fail. She'd promised, and then she hadn't delivered. Her father would have been ashamed of her. Up there in heaven, Arthur McGregor probably *was* ashamed of her.

"I'll take care of it," she whispered. "I'll take care of it if it's the last thing I ever do."

Then she had to take care of something else, because Alec woke up with a yell: "Pooping potty!" That was his signal that he needed to use the toilet—or, sometimes, that he'd just gone. Mary rushed in to lift him out of the crib and see which it was this time.

"You're dry!" she exclaimed in glad surprise after a hasty check—he did have accidents in his sleep.

"Dry as a fly," he answered, echoing one of the things she said to him.

"What a good boy!" Mary took him out of the crib, gave him a kiss, and stood him on a stool in front of the toilet. He did his business, and almost all of it went where it was supposed to go. Mary cleaned up the rest with toilet paper. "What a good boy!" she said again. Another woman in the block of flats insisted babies didn't turn into people till they were toilet-trained. Mary thought that went too far ... most of the time.

His clothes set to rights, Alec went off to play. Mary went off to keep at least one eye on him while he was playing, to make sure he didn't knock over a table or pull a lamp down on his head or try to swallow a big mouthful of dust or stick his finger in an electric socket or do any of the other interesting and creative things small children did in their unending effort not to live to grow up.

This afternoon, he made a beeline for the ashtray. "Oh, no, you don't!" Mary said, and got there first. He'd tried that before. Once, he'd managed to swallow one of Mort's cigarette butts, as he'd proved by puking it up. Keeping an eye on her son, Mary understood how her mother had come to have gray hair.

Every so often, she cast a longing glance across the street at the diner. When Mort got back, she'd have another pair of eyes in the flat to keep watch on Alec. One toddler left two parents only slightly outnumbered. Dealing with Alec by herself, Mary often felt not just outnumbered but overwhelmed.

But when Mort did come home, he sank down into the rocking chair with a bottle of Moosehead and complained about how busy he'd been all day at the diner. "Lord, it's good to get off my feet," he said.

"I have the same feeling when Alec takes a nap," Mary said pointedly.

Her husband didn't take the point. "It was a madhouse over there today," he said. "We made good money, but they kept us hopping."

"Alec always keeps me hopping," Mary said.

"This little fellow? This little fellow here?" Mort grabbed Alec and stuck him on his lap. Alec squealed with glee and cuddled up. *If I tried that, he'd pitch a fit. Either that or he'd just jump off ten seconds later,* Mary thought. Mort ruffled the toddler's fine sandy hair. "You're not so tough, are you?"

"Tough!" Alec yelled gleefully. "Tough!"

"You're not so tough," Mort said again, and turned him upside down. Alec squealed in delight. Mary hid a sigh by turning away. Mort could do things with their son that she couldn't. She'd seen that very early on. He could get Alec to pay attention and do what he was told when she couldn't. Maybe it was just that he had a deep, rumbling

man's voice. Maybe it was that he was gone more and Alec wanted to please him while he was around. Whatever it was, it was unquestionably real.

So was Laura Secord's treason. *Alec has his father,* Mary thought. *I made a promise to mine a long time ago. I haven't kept it yet, but that doesn't mean I won't. Oh, no. It doesn't mean that at all.* She nodded to herself. Then she smiled. She wasn't annoyed at Mort any more, not even a little bit.

Conscripts were filling out the ranks of the Confederate Army. It got stronger week by week. Confederate aeroplanes carried guns and bombs. The fastest Confederate fighters could go up against anything the USA built. And the United States, while they'd grumbled, hadn't done anything *but* grumble. As far as Clarence Potter was concerned, that would do for a miracle till a bigger one came along.

Jake Featherston had thought it would work like this. If it hadn't, whether Featherston got—extorted—the right to run for a second term wouldn't have mattered a hill of beans' worth. The country would have thrown him out on his ear if the USA didn't take care of the job.

The Confederate States were ever so much stronger than they had been. Potter knew just how strong they were—and how strong the United States were. A fight would have been no contest. But no fight came. Featherston had been sure none would. And he'd been right.

"By God, he's earned a second term for that," Potter muttered at his desk down below the War Department building.

He shook his head in something halfway between bemusement and horror. *Did I say that? Did* I *say that?* he wondered. *By God, I did. I meant it, too.* He'd spent more than fifteen years as one of Jake Featherston's sincerest enemies—sincerest, because he'd known Featherston longer and better than any of the other people who couldn't stand him. And now he had to admit Jake had known what he was doing after all.

Potter wouldn't have dreamt the USA would sit quiet and let the CSA rearm. He would have thought—hell, he *had* thought—you'd have to be crazy to take a chance like that. Featherston had taken the

chance, and he'd got away with it.

So what did that make him? A crazy man saw things nobody else could see. But what about someone who saw things nobody else could see—but that turned out to be there after all? There was a word for people like that, too. The word was *genius.* Potter didn't like using that word about Jake Featherston. He still remembered the weight of the revolver he'd carried up to the Olympic swimming stadium, intending to get rid of Jake once for all.

But he hadn't. He'd got rid of the colored would-be assassin instead, and the whole world was different on account of it. He looked down at his butternut uniform. He wouldn't have put that on again, not in a million years.

Here he sat, analyzing reports from Confederates in the USA who talked as if they'd grown up there. The reports, of course, weren't addressed war department, Richmond, Virginia, csa. Somehow, that might have made even the sleepy United States open eyes wide and perhaps raise an eyebrow. Instead, the letters and telegrams had come to a variety of businesses scattered all over the Confederate States. They were all coded, too, so they didn't talk directly about barrels or aeroplanes. Not all the codes were particularly subtle, but they'd defeat casual snoopers.

Potter wished the reports could come straight to him. As things were, he got them anywhere from several hours to several days after they reached the CSA. As long as the United States and Confederate States stayed at peace, the delay didn't matter too much. If they ever went to war...

He laughed at himself. If the USA and the CSA went to war again, the only way letters and telegrams crossed the border would be through the International Red Cross. He suspected—no, he knew—they would be a lot slower than they were now.

He drummed his fingers on the desk, took off his spectacles and carefully polished them, replaced them on his nose, and then did some more drumming. However much he despised the USA, he hoped another war wouldn't come. The Confederacy would be fighting out of its weight, and all the more so because the United States had no second front against Canada this time.

Did Jake Featherston see that? It seemed pretty plain to Potter. As far as he could tell from cautious conversations, it seemed pretty plain

to most of the officers in the War Department. The trouble was, of course, that Featherston wasn't an officer, and never had been one. He was a jumped-up sergeant, remarkably shrewd, but not trained to look at the big picture. How much would that matter? If it really came to another fight, the president would surely be shrewd enough to let trained commanders take charge of things.

Potter's musings were interrupted when a uniformed officer—not a soldier, he realized after a moment, but a Freedom Party guard—strode up to his desk, saluted, and barked out, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Potter echoed in more crisply military tones. "And what can I do for you, ah, Chief Assault Leader?" The other officer wore a captain's three bars on either side of his collar, but Party guards had their own titles of rank. Potter didn't know if they thought the Army's weren't good enough for them, or if they thought those were too good. It wasn't the sort of question he could ask, not if he wanted to keep wearing his uniform and not one with a big P stenciled on the back.

"Sir, I am ordered to bring you to the president at once," the chief assault leader answered.

"Ordered, are you? Well, then, you'd better do it, eh?" Potter said, pushing back his chair and stowing papers in a drawer that locked. The Freedom Party guard nodded seriously. Clarence Potter didn't smile. He'd been pretty sure a man who became a Party guard wouldn't recognize irony if it piddled on his shiny black boots. He asked, "Do you know what this is about?"

"No, sir," the officer said. "I have my orders. A motorcar is waiting outside." He turned and marched, machinelike, toward the stairs. Potter followed at a more human amble.

The motorcar was a Birmingham painted butternut. It flew a Freedom Party flag, though, not the Confederate battle flag an Army vehicle would have sported. Potter and the stone-faced chief assault leader got in. The driver, also a Freedom Party guard, whisked them away from the War Department and up Shockoe Hill to the presidential residence.

A bodyguard there relieved Potter of his pistol. That was routine these days. If the guard knew Potter had once carried a pistol intending to use it on the president, he gave no sign.

"Reporting as ordered, sir," Potter said when the captain—no, the

chief assault leader—took him into Featherston's office. Formality helped. If he spoke to the president of the CSA, he wouldn't have to think—so much—about the fiery, foul-mouthed artillery sergeant he'd known during the war, wouldn't have to think that the sergeant and the president were one and the same.

"Good to see you, Colonel. Sit down," Jake Featherston replied, returning the salute. Maybe he was using formality to suppress memory, too. As soon as Potter was in the chair, Featherston waved to the Party officer. "That'll be all, Randy. You just run along. Close the door on your way out." Randy looked unhappy, but he did what everybody seemed to do around Featherston: he obeyed. The president turned back to Clarence Potter and got straight to business: "I need more from your people in Kentucky."

"Sir?" Potter needed a moment to shift gears.

Featherston's scowl made him look like an angry, hungry wolf. "Kentucky," he repeated impatiently. "Things are heating up there, and I'm going to want to know more about what's going on. I'm going to want to be able to make things happen there, too."

"I haven't got but a handful of men in Kentucky, Mr. President," Potter said. "My specialty is people who talk like Yankees, and that's not what we mostly use there, because the accent is closer to our own. Men from Tennessee don't stand out in Kentucky the way they would in Pennsylvania or Kansas."

"I know what you've got in Kentucky." Featherston reeled off the names and positions of almost all of Potter's men in the state. He wasn't looking at a list. He knew them, knew them by heart. Those names and supporting details had surely gone to him in one report or another, but that he'd remembered them.... Clarence Potter was more nearly flabbergasted than impressed at that grasp of detail. *I didn't know he had it in him,* he thought. The president went on, "The point is, three or four of your people are in slots with the state government or a city government where they can be useful to us *because* everybody reckons they're Yankees."

"They can do *some* of that," Potter said cautiously, "but not too much. If they don't act like what they're supposed to be, they'll make the real Yankees wonder why they don't. That wouldn't be good. The last thing we want is to make the United States suspicious."

This time, Featherston's scowl was of a different sort. Potter had no

trouble identifying it, though: it was the scowl of a man who wasn't used to people telling him anything he didn't want to hear. *Well, too damn bad,* the intelligence officer thought. *You're the one who brought me back into the Army. Now you have to take the consequences. I'm not one of your Party hacks, and you'd better remember it.*

"You telling me you can't do what I need?" The president's voice was harsh and dangerous.

Potter shook his head. "No, sir. That's not what I said at all. But I am asking you to make sure in your own mind that what you get now is worth the risk of losing a lot later on. If the damnyankees start looking hard for Confederate spies, they're bound to find some. And if they find some, they'll look for more, and...."

"All right." Featherston held up a hand. "I see what you're saying. But what's the point of having all these goddamn spies in place if we can't get any use out of 'em?"

"We *do* get use out of them," Potter said; for all his grasp of detail, Jake Featherston *was* missing the big picture here. "We get information. Without it, we're blind. That's really what they're there for, as far as we're concerned. If they step out of their roles, they may give themselves away."

Featherston grunted. His eyes showed his own hard suspicion. Regardless of whether his guards did, he remembered the pistol in Clarence Potter's pocket, and he had to know why Potter had had it there. "If we can't use our people to nudge things along there, how the hell do we do it?" he snapped.

"We can use our people. The ones I run just aren't the right set of tools for the job," Potter answered. "Demonstrations, riots, stories in the papers, wireless shows ... We can do all that. About the most my men can do is pretend they haven't seen telegrams, things like that. If they try to do much more, the fellows they work for will start giving them fishy stares. Do you see what I'm saying?"

He waited for Jake Featherston to blow. As long as he'd known him, Featherston had had a short fuse. Now the president of the CSA didn't have anybody set above him to make him pull back. If he wanted to lose his temper, he could, and who would say boo?

But Potter had been as cool and dispassionate as he could, and the president seemed to respond well to that, or at least not to take it as a

threat. "All right, then," he said. "We'll try that, and see how it works. I do want to leave your people in place, on account of we're not done with Kentucky. Oh, no. We're not done, not by a long shot. That state is *ours,* and I aim to get it back."

Clarence Potter could have found any number of things about which to disagree with the president of the Confederate States. Not about getting Kentucky back, though. He stood, came to attention, and saluted. "Yes, sir!" he said.

Flora Blackford remembered when going out on the floor of Congress had been a thrill. It wasn't any more. Not these days. The Freedom Party Congressmen from Houston and Kentucky made sure of that. They weren't there to do the nation's business. They were there to disrupt it, and they were good at that. The pair of Representatives Utah had elected after the end of the military occupation weren't much better. They seemed more interested in complaining about what had happened over the past twenty—sometimes, over the past sixty—years than in trying to make the next two better.

Congressman Nephi Pratt was complaining even as Flora took her seat. "I accept your correction with all due humility, Mr. Speaker," he was saying. "I would have been more fully abreast of these matters had the government not labored so long and hard to suppress my creed and oppress my state, thereby depriving me of the opportunity to participate in the decisions made by this august body since the end of the war."

Up jumped a young pepperpot Democrat from New Mexico. "Perhaps the distinguished gentleman will state on the record in which direction he pointed a gun during the war: at the foes of the United States or at her soldiers."

Pratt was a portly man with a mane of white hair. He tossed it angrily now. "I need not answer that—"

"You just did, seems to me," the Democrat shot back.

"Mr. Speaker, I resent the imputation," Pratt said.

"Mr. Speaker, I resent having to share the chamber with a damned

traitor," the Congressman from New Mexico said.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The Speaker's gavel descended like the crack of doom. "Mr. Pratt, Mr. Goldwater, you are both out of order," he said. "Any further outbursts from either of you, and I will have the sergeant-at-arms remove you from the floor."

"The United States hanged my grandfather," Nephi Pratt said. "I see things have not changed much since."

"He had it coming, by God," Congressman Goldwater snapped.

Bang! Bang! Bang! "Sergeant-at-arms!" Congressman Cannon of Missouri said. The Speaker looked thoroughly disgusted as he continued, "You and your assistants are to escort the two contentious gentlemen to separate waiting rooms, in which places they shall remain until they see fit to comport themselves in civilized fashion."

Congressman Pratt left the room with majestic dignity. Congressman Goldwater shouted, "Defense of the truth is no vice! I should not be removed." He scuffled with the men who tried to take him away, and landed one solid blow before they did.

All the Freedom Party men stood up and cheered at the chaos they, for once, had not created. That made Flora signal to the Speaker, a fellow Socialist. He pointed back, intoning, "The chair recognizes the distinguished Congresswoman from New York, Mrs. Blackford."

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker." She waited till the din died down a little, then said, "In my opinion, the Freedom Party has been the source of most of the problems and most of the bad manners in both houses of Congress, even if members of other parties have caught the disease from it. The Freedom Party—"

She couldn't go on, not right away, for the House chamber echoed with angry shouts from the Freedom Party Congressmen and cries of "Hear! Hear!" from Socialists, Republicans, and even a good many Democrats. Speaker Cannon again plied the gavel with might and main. At last, something like quiet returned.

Flora resumed: "The Freedom Party, as I was saying before its Congressmen so neatly proved my point, differs from other parties in the United States in one particular: that its members do not truly wish to take part in the serious business of making this country a better place."

To her surprise—indeed, to her amazement—Congressman Mahon of Houston sprang to his feet, crying, "Mr. Speaker! Mr. Speaker! If the distinguished Congresswoman from New York will yield..."

The sight of a Freedom Party man following proper parliamentary procedure must have astonished Congressman Cannon as much as it did Flora. "Mrs. Blackford?" the Speaker asked.

"I will yield for a brief statement or question," Flora said. "Not for a harangue."

Even that didn't upset Mahon. "I will be brief," he promised. Flora nodded. The Speaker pointed to the Houstonian. Mahon said, "I would like to note that the Freedom Party Representatives do not wish to serve our states here in Philadelphia or in Washington. We—"

This time, shouts of, "Shame!" drowned him out. The Speaker of the House rapped furiously for order. With some reluctance, he said, "The gentleman from Houston has the floor. He may continue."

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker," Mahon said, willing to be courteous since the presiding officer of the House had ruled in his favor. "We don't care to be here, I say, because we would rather represent our states in Richmond, since they rightfully belong to the Confederate States of America!"

"Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" his fellow Freedom Party members chanted, and, "Plebiscite! Plebiscite! Plebiscite!"

Roars of, "Treason!" and, "Never!" came from Democrats, Republicans, and some Socialists. Again, Speaker Cannon had to ply his gavel with might and main to restore quiet—or at least lower the noise. He might have done better by firing a pistol round into the ceiling. But if he'd had a pistol, other Congressman would have, too, and they might have aimed them at one another. The Speaker said, "Mrs. Blackford has the floor. You may go on, Mrs. Blackford."

"Thank you, Mr. Speaker," Flora said. "However much pleasure most of us would take from no longer having the company of the members from the Freedom Party, I am also certain more than a few of us would not care to give them the satisfaction of gaining anything they want, simply because they have made themselves so obnoxious to us."

That brought jeers from the Congressmen from Houston and

Kentucky, jeers largely drowned out by a storm of applause from Representatives of other parties. Flora wasn't particularly proud of herself despite the applause. She knew she'd sunk to the Freedom Party's level in condemning it.

Hosea wouldn't have done that, she thought. When he'd been a Congressman, Hosea Blackford had got on well with everyone—he'd got on better with reactionary Democrats than Flora ever had. But the men from the Freedom Party weren't just reactionaries. They were reactionaries on the march, in the same way as the Reds in the failed uprisings in the CSA and Russia had been radicals on the march. Up till the past few years, the world hadn't had to worry about revolutionary reaction. It did now.

Wearily, Speaker Cannon fought yet again for order. When he finally got it, he spoke in wistful tones: "Do you suppose we could possibly return to discussion of the trade bill before us at the moment?"

They did go on. In due course, the Speaker let Congressman Pratt and Congressman Goldwater return to the floor. They started sniping at each other again, but within—sometimes narrowly within—the rules of House decorum. The Freedom Party Congressmen from Houston and Kentucky went back to ignoring the rules, as they usually did. They cared nothing for them, and admitted as much. They didn't want to be here in the first place, and seemed to operate on the theory that, if they made all the colleagues hate and despise them, their states became more likely to leave the USA for the CSA. What worried Flora was that they might well prove right.

Thanks to their unending shenanigans—and thanks to the basically uninspiring nature of trade bills—the day crawled past on hands and knees. Speaker Cannon didn't look for a motion to adjourn till well past six that evening. When he did, a throng of Representatives tried to make it and another throng tried to second it. Wearily, the members left the floor.

Competition for cabs outside was as fierce as anything that had gone on within the hallowed hall. Flora, normally polite and gentle, brawled with the best of them. She wanted to get home to Joshua as fast as she could. Thanks to a judicious elbow, she quickly won a ride.

Her son looked up from his homework in surprise when she came through the door. "Hello," he said, his voice at fifteen as deep as a man's. "I didn't expect you back so soon. Weren't you going to do some

office work before you came here?"

"The session ran long, so I came..." Flora's voice trailed away, also in surprise—not at what he'd said but at what she smelled. "That's cigarette smoke. When did you start smoking cigarettes?"

"Last year, not long after Father died," Joshua answered, resolutely nonchalant. "Everybody at school does it, and it doesn't hurt anything."

"It hurts me that you've been sneaking cigarettes behind my back," Flora said. "If you thought I wouldn't mind, why didn't you come out and tell me?"

"Well..." Her son looked uncomfortable, but he finally said, "Mostly because you're so old-fashioned about some things."

"Old-fashioned?" Flora yelped. If that wasn't the most unkind cut of all for someone who'd always prided herself on her radicalism, she couldn't imagine what would be. "I am not!"

"Oh, yeah?" Joshua said, a colloquialism that made his mother incline more toward reaction than radicalism. He went on, "If you weren't old-fashioned, you wouldn't flabble about cigarettes." As fifteen-year-old boys are wont to do, he acted monstrously proud of his own logic.

Flora blinked at the slang, then figured out what it had to mean. "I don't flabble about cigarettes—for grownups," she said. Instead of seeming pleased that she'd understood him, Joshua merely looked scornful that she was trying to speak his language. She might have guessed he would. Suppressing a sigh, she forged ahead: "No matter what you think, you're not a grownup yet."

"Father was smoking cigarettes when he was fifteen," Joshua said.

He was right about that, however much Flora wished he weren't. "Your father grew up on a farm in the middle of nowhere," she answered. "When he was fifteen, he was going to the bathroom in a privy, bathing once a month, and eating food his folks had cooked over buffalo chips. Do you want to imitate him there, too?"

For a moment, she thought he would say bathing once a month didn't sound so bad. But he visibly changed his mind and changed the subject: "If cigarettes are so terrible, how come everybody smokes

them?"

"Not everybody does."

"Just about!" Joshua said, by which he doubtless meant three or four people he liked did.

This time, Flora didn't suppress her sigh. She knew a losing fight when she saw one, and she saw one here. Whether she liked it or not, Joshua was going to smoke. She said, "From now on, you don't need to sneak any more." That made him happy. She wished it would have made her happy, too.

Sylvia Enos came out of the moving-picture theater with Ernie. She looked happy—she'd liked the film. He didn't, and hadn't. "What was wrong with it?" she asked. "It was exciting, and it had a good love story."

"What was wrong with it?" he echoed. "I will tell you what was wrong. The men who made it never saw war. They were boys in 1914. They had to be. Either that or they were cowards. Half the things in the film could not have happened. Soldiers would have gone to the guardhouse for the other half."

"It's only a story," Sylvia said. "It's not supposed to be true."

"But it pretends to be true," Ernie said. "That offends me."

She didn't want him angry. When he got angry, he got angry at the whole world, not just at what had bothered him in the first place. She said, "Let's go somewhere, and we'll have a couple of drinks, and we'll forget about it."

"All right," he said. "That film deserves forgetting."

They ended up having more than a couple of drinks—considerably more, in Ernie's case. Then they went back to Sylvia's apartment. Mary Jane was out with friends, and wouldn't be back till late. They had the place to themselves. Sober or drunk, Ernie made a conscientious lover. He did what he needed to do to make Sylvia happy. Then she tried to do the same for him. She'd had pretty good luck with that lately. Not

tonight, though. Try as she would, nothing happened.

She did her best to make light of it, saying, "See what those last couple of cocktails will do to you?"

"My cock has more wrong with it than cocktails," Ernie answered, which was unfortunately true. "Half-cocked," he muttered. That was what Sylvia thought she heard, anyhow. He shook his head. "It is no good. It is no goddamn good at all."

"That's not true," Sylvia exclaimed. "It was fine just last week."

He didn't want to listen. "No good at all," he said again. "Sometimes I wonder why the hell I bother. What is the use? There is no use. I know that. I know that much too well."

"Don't be silly," Sylvia told him. "It can happen to anybody at all, not just to you."

"It does not happen to a real man," Ernie said. "That is what it means to be a real man. And what am I?" His laugh told what he thought he was. "A leftover. Something from the scrap heap. I ought to go to Spain. I could fight there." A Nationalist uprising backed by Trance and Britain had half the country up in arms against King Alfonso XIII. Kaiser Wilhelm had belatedly sent the Monarchists weapons to resist their would-be overthrowers, but things didn't look good for them even so.

Sylvia shook her head. "What does shooting people have to do with —this?" She set her hand on the part, or part of a part, that hadn't quite worked.

Ernie twisted away, kicking the quilt she'd got from Chris Clogston down onto the floor. "You do not understand. I knew you would not understand. Damn you anyway." He all but jumped out of the bed they'd shared and started putting on his clothes.

"Maybe I would understand, if you'd talk sense once in a while," Sylvia said.

"You are only a woman. What do you know?" Ernie stormed out of the apartment, slamming the door behind him. Sylvia sighed as she picked up the quilt and put on a nightgown. This sort of thing had happened before. It would probably happen again. She sighed once more, went into the bathroom to brush her teeth, and then came back

and fell asleep. Whatever time Mary Jane came in, Sylvia never heard it.

George Jr., his wife, Connie, and their children came over for supper the next evening. Sylvia enjoyed spoiling her grandchildren. Bill, the baby boy for whom Mary Jane had bought another quilt, was toddling now. Sylvia also enjoyed listening to her son's stories about life on a fishing boat. They took her back to the days when her husband had told the same kind of stories. Hard to believe George was more than twenty years dead. Hard to believe, but true.

"And how are you, Ma?" George Jr. asked. "How's Ernie? Sis said you went to the cinema with him last night."

He sounded earnest himself. The pun made Sylvia laugh a little. *He wants me to be happy,* she thought. *He really does. That's sweet.* But she had to answer. "He's been better," she said slowly. "But he's been worse, too."

Her son's sigh had an indulgent quality, one that made her wonder who'd raised whom. "You really ought to—" he began.

Sylvia held up a hand and cut him off. "I really ought to do whatever *I* think is the best thing for me to do. And *you* really ought to"—she enjoyed turning George Jr.'s phrase back on him—"mind your own beeswax."

"Give up, George," Connie said. "You don't let her tell you what to do. How can you blame her if she doesn't want to let you tell her?"

"That's right." Sylvia beamed at her daughter-in-law.

"Fine. I give up. Here—I'm throwing in the towel." George Jr. took his napkin off his lap and tossed it into the middle of the table. "But I'm going to tell you one more thing before I shut up."

"I know what you're going to say." Sylvia held up her hand again, like a cop stopping traffic. "I don't want to hear it."

"I don't care. I'm going to say it anyway." George Jr. stuck out his chin and looked stubborn. "That guy is bad news, Ma. There. I'm done."

"About time, too." Sylvia knew her son was right. Ernie was, or could be, bad news. She would have known even if Mary Jane hadn't

told her the same thing. The feel of danger—within limits—was part of what made him attractive. Whether he would ever break those limits ... But he hadn't—quite—in all the time Sylvia had known him. And he had reasons for being the way he was. Sylvia didn't think George Jr. knew about those. She couldn't very well talk about such things with a man, and especially not with her son.

She wondered whether George Jr. could keep from bringing up Ernie again for the rest of the evening. She would have bet against it, but he managed. That made time pass a lot more pleasantly. Only when he and his family were leaving did he say, "Take care of yourself, Ma."

"And haven't I been doing that since before you were born?" Sylvia said. "A fisherman's wife who can't take care of herself is in a pretty sorry state, that's all I've got to tell you." She looked to Connie. "Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Oh, you're right, all right," her daughter-in-law said.

"You bet I am." Sylvia spoke with great certainty. Fishermen were away at sea so much, their wives had to do things on their own behalf. If the wives didn't, nobody would or could. And Sylvia had gone from fisherman's wife to fisherman's widow. Nobody gave a widow a helping hand. She'd discovered that the hard way.

For that matter, no elves emerged from the walls to help her with the dishes. She did them herself, the way she always had. She couldn't go to bed without being angry at herself till they were done. Her hard-earned, hard-learned self-reliance ran deep.

And when Ernie showed up at her door with flowers two days later to ask her out the next Saturday, she didn't say no. She didn't even ask him if he would behave himself. A question like that would just have made him angry and all the more determined to act up. She couldn't blame him for that, not when she felt the same way herself.

When Saturday came, he took her to the Union Oyster House. She smiled, remembering her last visit there with Mary Jane. Unlike Mary Jane, though, Ernie washed down his fried oysters with several stiff drinks. "Are you sure you want to do that?" Sylvia picked her words with care. He did have more trouble in the bedroom when he was drunk—and he had plenty when he was sober. And when he was drunk, he had a harder time coping with the trouble he had.

But he didn't want to listen to her tonight, any more than she'd wanted to listen to George Jr. earlier in the week. "I am fine. Just fine," he said loudly. The way he said it proved he was nothing of the sort, but also proved he would pay no attention if she tried to tell him so.

If you can't lick 'em, join 'em, she thought, and waved to the waiter for another drink of her own. After another one, and then another one yet, she stopped worrying—at any rate, she stopped curing—about how many Ernie had had, though he kept pouring them down, too. She took him by the arm. "Where shall we go?" she asked, laughing at how bold and brassy she sounded.

"We will go back to my place," he answered. "And when we get there, we will see what comes up." That made Sylvia laugh, too, though Ernie wasn't joking the way another man might have. In fact, he seemed to be trying to persuade himself something *would* come up. Under his leer, or perhaps stirred into it, was enough desperation to give Sylvia pause, though she was a long way from sober herself.

"Maybe we ought to have some coffee or something first," she said.

Ernie took her arm. "Come on," he said, and effortlessly hauled her up out of the booth. He was very strong, even if he didn't show it all the time. She went along with him, thinking, *The walk will sober him up. It may even sober me up, too.*

Her head still buzzed when they got to Ernie's apartment. She didn't want to think about what it would feel like in the morning. But the morning seemed a million miles away. Ernie closed the door behind them, then took her in his arms and kissed her, hard. He tasted of whiskey and pipe tobacco. He picked her up and carried her into the cramped little bedroom and half set, half dropped her on the bed.

"Come on," he said again, and started taking off his clothes.

Sylvia did the same, quickly. His strength and the whiskey in her and the taste and smell of him all combined to excite her. If he'd been any other man, he would have thrown himself on her and done what he wanted to do. But he couldn't. He hadn't been able to do anything like that for more than twenty years. If he was going anywhere, she would have to get him there. She sat up and leaned forward and took what there was of him in her mouth as he stood by the side of the bed.

And nothing happened. He groaned again and again, but always in

frustration, not release. Try as she would, it was no use. She did everything she knew how to do. Nothing helped. Sweat ran down his face, down his chest. "Damn you," he muttered, and then, "Damn me."

She looked up at him. "What do you want?" she asked. "I'll do anything you think will do you good. You know I will."

She'd turned on the lamp by the bed a little while before. Sometimes watching helped him. Not tonight. He looked at her, looked through her. His eyes might have belonged to a dead man. His voice sounded as if it came from the other side of the grave, too: "It makes no difference, not any more."

"What do you mean?" she said. "Of course it does. Next time, we'll —" She broke off. "What are you doing?"

The blued metal of the pistol he took out of the nightstand gleamed dully in the lamplight. "Nothing matters any more," he said, and pointed it at the side of his own head.

"No!" He'd played such games before. This time, Sylvia didn't think he was playing. She grabbed for the pistol. Ernie cursed and hit her. She tried to knee him in the crotch. He twisted away. They wrestled, both of them shouting, both of them swearing, there on the bedroom floor.

Loud as the end of the world, the pistol went off. She never knew whether he'd intended to shoot her. It made no difference. It didn't matter. The bullet tore into her chest, and the world was nothing but pain and darkness.

As if from very far away, Ernie shouted, "Sylvia! Don't die! Damn you, I love you!" She tried to say something, but blood filled her mouth. From even further away, she heard another shot, and the thump of a falling body, and then nothing, nothing at all.

Jefferson Pinkard was not a happy man. He'd come to Louisiana to help run a camp for political prisoners, and what had they gone and done? They'd taken out most of the politicals and filled the camp full of colored guerrillas. The politicals had been sober, civilized, middle-aged men who did as they were told. The Negroes, on the other

hand...

Though Pinkard didn't want to admit it, even to himself, the captured Negroes scared him to death. They had taken up arms against the Confederate States not in hope of victory—as the colored Reds had a generation earlier— but because they simply couldn't stand the way things were. Now that they'd been taken prisoner, they expected nothing from the men into whose hands they'd fallen. They expected nothing—and they were seldom disappointed.

Camp Dependable was a rougher place now than it had been when inoffensive politicals filled it. These days, guards always carried submachine guns. They carried the weapons with safeties off, and they always traveled in pairs in areas where prisoners went. So far, the blacks hadn't managed to steal a submachine gun from a guard. Jeff hoped that record would last. He wondered if it could.

He had other worries, too, though not of the life-and-death sort. Just keeping track of the prisoners was a record-keeper's worst nightmare. They didn't come into the camp with passbooks in the pockets of their dungarees. He assumed most of the names they gave were false. Even had those names been genuine, they wouldn't have helped much. Negroes in the CSA had never been allowed to take surnames, as they were in the USA. With passbooks, the powers that be didn't have too much trouble sorting out who was who. Without them...

The camp had an underofficer who specialized in taking fingerprints and forwarding them to Baton Rouge and to Richmond for identification. If the people in Baton Rouge and Richmond had cared as much as Pinkard did about matching those fingerprints to the ones in their files, he would have been happier. As things were, he wasn't sure who most of his prisoners were. The only thing he was sure of was that they had good reason for concealing their identity.

"We've got to be careful, dammit," he would tell the guards every morning. "These nigger bastards don't want to argue with us like the politicals did. They want to kill us. That's why they're here. Thing we can't do is give 'em the chance."

Work parties that left the barbed-wire perimeter of the camp made him especially nervous. The blacks who went out on road-building details and other hard labor were chained to one another. They wore balls and chains on their left ankles. They couldn't possibly run. So Jeff told himself. He worried even so.

And it was all his baby. When the politicals had gone off to another camp, the warden at Camp Dependable had gone with them. "You made this place a going concern," he told Pinkard before he went away. "You know it best, and that makes you best suited to keeping these black devils in line here."

Maybe he'd even been right. Regardless of whether he had, Jeff didn't love him and never would. The then-warden had had a choice between an easy job and a hard one. He'd taken the easy one himself and left the hard one to somebody else. If he'd fought in the war, he would have sent patrols forward while he stayed in a nice, safe dugout in his own trench line. Jeff had known officers like that. He'd despised them, too.

Higher rank. Fancier emblems on his collar tabs. A bigger paycheck every month. Pinkard approved of all those things. But he didn't approve of the way he'd got them.

He checked the clock in his office. Half past five. About time for the working party to come back. Pinkard heaved himself out of the swivel chair, which creaked under his weight. He headed for the front gate. He always liked to watch the gangs come in. If he could get a report on the spot, he didn't give the guards a chance to come up with any lies. He knew such things happened. He'd done the like himself, and didn't want it done to him.

His timing was good. He got to the gate two or three minutes before the work party returned. The Negroes clanked along, slowed by their chains and the weights attached to their ankles—and slowed also by doing work they didn't want to do and coming back to a place where they didn't want to be.

"How did it go?" Jeff called to the chief guard, a stocky, hard-faced man named Mercer Scott.

"Another day," Scott answered with a shrug. He shifted a plug of tobacco and spat a stream of brown juice on the ground. "Three niggers keeled over. Two of 'em croaked, and we flung 'em in the swamp. The other one got back up on his feet when we thumped him a couple times. Lazy bastard just wanted a break. I'll break his black ass, he tries that kind of shit with me." He spat again.

"Who died?" Pinkard asked. "I've got to try and keep the records straight, you know."

"Yeah, yeah." Mercer Scott screwed his face into a parody of deep thought. "One was that mincing little faggot named Dionysus. He's been poorly since that big buck beat him up last month. And the other one ... Hell, who was the other one?" He turned to another guard. "Who was the other nigger we pitched in the swamp, Bob?"

"The skinny bastard," Bob answered. "Cicero, that's his name."

"Oh, yeah. That's right. I couldn't recollect if he was today or yesterday." Scott turned to Jeff. "That's who it was, all right. Dionysus and Cicero. No loss, either one of 'em."

Pinkard nodded and scribbled a note to himself. The camp held several Ciceros, but only one of them was in this work gang, so he wouldn't have any trouble with that. He said, "Good enough. Make sure the count matches, then bring 'em on inside." A mosquito lit on the back of his wrist. He smashed it Hell might have more mosquitoes than Louisiana, but he wasn't sure anyplace else did.

One by one, the Negroes counted off. The reek of their unwashed bodies was harsh in Pinkard's nostrils. The guards smelled nearly as ripe. In this heat and humidity, everybody stank.

One of Pinkard's aides pounded on the door to his quarters at half past twelve that night. He woke up grabbing for his pistol. Nobody would bother him at that time of night for anything but trouble. As far as he was concerned, trouble came in two flavors: escape and uprising. "What the hell?" he demanded, throwing the door open in just his pajamas.

"Warden, they need you at the front gate right away," the aide said.

Jeff shoved his feet into slippers and jammed his hat down onto his head so people would have some idea of who he was. "I'm coming," he said. "What am I walking into?"

"I don't exactly know," the aide answered, and Jeff wanted to clobber him with the pistol. He went on, "There's folks from Richmond there. Reckon they'll tell you what you need to know."

"From Richmond?" Pinkard's mind raced. Was he in trouble? What kind of trouble could he be in? He couldn't think of anything he'd screwed up. He'd done his job here. He'd done it back in Alabama, too. He'd been a good Freedom Party man since the days just after the war, and he'd stayed in the Party through the hard times after Grady

Calkins shot President Hampton. Hell, he'd broken up with his wife because Emily was fooling around on him on nights when he went to meetings. "Get out of my way, goddammit." He pushed past the aide and hustled to the gate.

None of the guards said a word about what he had on. He could deal with them later, when he was in proper uniform. The men at the gate wore the regalia of Freedom Party guards, high-ranking ones. Their cold, hard faces would have scared the bejesus out of even a thoroughgoing son of a bitch like Mercer Scott. "You are Jefferson Pinkard?" one of them asked. He didn't say anything about how Pinkard was dressed, either.

"That's right," Jeff answered. "Who the—devil are you?"

"Chief Assault Band Leader Ben Chapman." The accent wasn't Virginia; it was Alabama, much like Pinkard's own. "I have a prisoner to deliver to this camp. You are to acknowledge receipt."

"You do? I am?" Pinkard said. The Party officer nodded. "Well, who the hell is he?" Jeff asked testily. "And what are you doing bringing him here in the middle of the goddamn night?"

"Orders," Chapman said, as if orders were the most important thing in the world. Well, maybe he had a point there. "And the prisoner is"—he lowered his voice so Pinkard could hear but the guards at the front gate couldn't— "a fellow by the name of Willy Knight."

"Holy Jesus!" Jeff exploded. Having the vice president of the CSA—well, the former vice president, after his resignation and imprisonment (to say nothing of his impeachment and conviction)—in his prison camp was the last thing he wanted. The responsibility if something went wrong ... and things were only too likely to go wrong. "Didn't anybody tell you this here camp is full of niggers?"

Chief Assault Band Leader Chapman shrugged. He had an athlete's grace, and an athlete's watchful eyes, too. "Goddamn spooks deserve whatever happens to 'em," he said. "And the goddamn son of a bitch we brought down here deserves whatever happens to him, too. Nobody will say a word if he comes out of this place feet first."

That took a load off Pinkard's mind. But, still cautious, he asked, "Will you put that in writing?"

"Nothing about this business goes down in writing," Chief Assault

Band Leader Chapman said scornfully. "Nothing except your name on the form that says we got Knight here in one piece."

"I might have known," Jeff muttered, and Chapman nodded, as if to say, *Yes, you might have.* With a sigh, the warden nodded, too. "I'll sign—as soon as I see him, so I can make sure he *is* in one piece."

"Right." Ben Chapman turned to his henchmen. "Bring him on up." The door to a motorcar at the edge of Camp Dependable's lights opened and then slammed shut. More Freedom Party guards hustled someone forward. Chapman pointed. "See for yourself," he told Pinkard.

It was Willy Knight. Jeff had seen him in Birmingham on the campaign trail. He was still tall and blond and still, in a way, handsome. But, where he had been full of piss and vinegar, he was thin to the point of gauntness, and suffering haunted his face—especially the eyes. "Go ahead and laugh," he said to Pinkard. "One of these days, the son of a bitch will turn on you, too."

"Shut up, you bastard," Chief Assault Band Leader Chapman told him. Chapman thrust a clipboard and a pen at Jeff. "You've seen him. Sign." Jeff did. His men took charge of the fallen Confederate hero and led him into the camp.

Hipolito Rodriguez had never been a rich man. He was reasonably confident he would never be a rich man. But he was and always had been a proud man. The Confederate States were and always had been a proud nation. And Sonora and Chihuahua were and always had been states where pride counted for even more than it did elsewhere in the CSA. A poor man who could hold his head up often gathered more respect than a rich man who could not meet his neighbors' eyes.

When Rodriguez brought his youngest son into Baroyeca, he strode along with pride unusual even for him. Pedro seemed a good deal more diffident than his father—or maybe his feet hurt. He had on the sturdy shoes he'd got from the Freedom Youth Corps. He hadn't worn them much since getting out of the Corps a few months earlier; sandals were plenty good for farm work. But he didn't want to seem like a peasant when he came into town.

"They will make a man of you," Rodriguez said as he and Pedro started up the main street toward the *alcalde's* residence.

"I thought the Freedom Youth Corps already did that," his son replied. He was taller than Hipolito Rodriguez, and wider through the shoulders, too. Like his brothers, he spoke more English than Spanish these days—except, sometimes, with his mother.

"I have nothing bad to say about the Freedom Youth Corps," Rodriguez told him. "But it is what its name says it is: it is a thing for youths. The Army of the Confederate States of America is a thing for men."

He hadn't thought about it that way when he was conscripted. He remembered as much, remembered very clearly. But times had changed. He'd gone into the Confederate Army in the middle of the Great War and been thrown straight into action, first against Red Negroes in Georgia and then against the USA in west Texas. His son would serve in peacetime. With luck, he would get his hitch out of the way and come back to the farm without ever firing a shot in anger. Rodriguez hoped so, anyhow. When you were shooting in anger, the people on the other side had a nasty habit of shooting back. He didn't

know how he'd come through the war unwounded. Luck, no doubt, luck and the Virgin watching over him.

Out of Jaime Diaz's general store came Felipe Rojas. When Pedro saw the Freedom Youth Corps drillmaster, he automatically stiffened to attention right there in the middle of the street. Rojas' smile showed several gold teeth. "You don't need to do that today, Pedro," he said. "I don't give you orders any more."

"Just as well that he stay in practice," Hipolito Rodriguez said. "I've brought him into town to report, because he's been conscripted."

"Has he?" Rojas' eyes widened. "How the years do get on. He would be old enough, of course, but still, it hardly seems possible. Not so long since we had rifles in our own hands, is it?"

"No, indeed. I was just thinking that," Rodriguez said. Of course, they'd both had Tredegars in their hands a lot more recently than they'd been mustered out of the Army. They'd shown the big landowners who'd run things in Sonora for so long that the Freedom Party was the new power in the land, and that anyone who thought otherwise had better think again.

"A soldier." Rojas slapped Rodriguez's son on the back with a big, hard hand. "He'll do well. What we showed him in the Youth Corps will help him, and he's a fine young man. Yes, I'm sure he'll do very well indeed."

"We'd better go on to the *alcalde's* residence," Rodriguez said. "I wouldn't want him to get in trouble for reporting late."

"No, that wouldn't be the right way to start," Felipe Rojas agreed. He clapped Pedro on the back again. "Go with God, and God go with you. You'll be fine. I know you will. Show them what we taught you. They'll build on that."

"Sí, señor. Gracias, señor," Pedro said proudly.

Another youth and his father were also at the *alcalde's* residence. He and Pedro started chattering. They'd gone to school together and served in the Freedom Youth Corps together, and now they were going into the Army together. Rodriguez shook his head. *It hardly seems possible,* Rojas had said, and wasn't that the truth? No matter how it seemed, though, it was the truth. The years had a way of piling on whether you looked at them or not.

His son had to fill out most of the inevitable paperwork, but there was plenty for Hipolito, too, because Pedro was of course under twenty-one. He signed his name a dozen times, mostly without bothering to look at what he was signing. More than half the forms were in English, anyhow, and he read it less well than he spoke it.

At last, it was done. Essentially, he'd deeded his son to the Confederate States. He hugged Pedro and kissed him on both cheeks. "Be strong," he said. "Do what they tell you and be strong." Then he left the *alcalde's* residence in a hurry, so neither the clerk there nor his son would see him cry.

He headed for *La Culebra Verde.* If he wasn't entitled to drown some sorrows after giving his son to the Army, when could he? Not even Magdalena would complain about that... he hoped.

Before he got to the Green Snake, though, a couple of young men he'd never seen before came up to him. They were both dirty and ragged and weary-looking. One was barefoot; the other wore a pair of sandals that had more patches than original shoe leather. *"Buenos días, señor,"* the barefoot man said in Spanish. "Do you by any chance need someone to help you with your work?"

"No, for I have three strong sons, thank God," Rodriguez answered in the same tongue. Out of curiosity, he switched to English: "Do you know this language?"

"No, señor. Lo siento mucho," the stranger said. *"Solamente español."*

Rodriguez had expected nothing different. Dropping back into Spanish himself, he asked, "From which province in the Empire of Mexico do you come?"

Both newcomers in Baroyeca looked alarmed. The man with the patched sandals, who was older and stockier than his friend, replied, "You have made a mistake, *señor.* Like you, we are citizens of *los Estados Confederados."*

"Bullshit," Rodriguez said in English. They couldn't even understand that, and he couldn't imagine a Sonoran or Chihuahuan who didn't. He returned to Spanish: "Don't tell me lies. Do you think I'm too stupid to know the difference? Times are hard here, but I know they're worse south of the border."

The ragged men sighed in equally ragged unison. That older fellow

said, "Very well, *señor. Usted tiene razón.* We have come from near Mocorito in Sinaloa province." Rodriguez nodded, unsurprised; Sinaloa lay just south of Sonora. The other man went on, "We have to have work, or we will starve. So will our families, if we cannot send them money."

"It is as I told you—I have no work for you to do," Rodriguez said. "If you keep looking, though, maybe you will find someone who does."

He waited to see what would happen next. If the Sinaloans were hungry enough, desperate enough, or maybe just stupid enough, they might try to get his money without working. If they did, he aimed to fight back. But their shoulders slumped and they went on down the street. As they went, they exclaimed about how fine and fancy everything was. If that didn't prove they weren't from the CSA, Rodriguez couldn't think of what would.

He wondered if they would find someone who'd pay them. They weren't the first men from the Empire of Mexico he'd seen passing through Baroyeca. He was sure they wouldn't be the last. Even though the town now boasted electricity, it was a backwater in Sonora, and Sonora was a backwater in the CSA. By the standards prevailing farther south, though, even a Confederate backwater seemed rich and bustling.

I have a dollar in my pocket, he thought. *To those fellows, that makes me a rich man. God help them, poor devils.*

He walked into *La Culebra Verde.* Robert Quinn sat at the bar, drinking a bottle of beer. *"Hola, Señor* Rodriguez," he said. "What brings you to Baroyeca this morning?"

"Pedro reports to the Confederate Army today," Rodriguez answered. "I came in with him to fill out papers and to say good-bye."

"Congratulations to you and congratulations to him," Quinn said in his deliberate Spanish. "This is a good time to be a young man in the Confederate States. We aren't going to be pushed around any more."

Rodriguez wasn't so sure whether that made this a good time or a bad one. He almost said as much. Then he remembered the two men from Sinaloa who thought times in the CSA were better than those in the Empire of Mexico. He spoke of them instead, meanwhile sitting down beside the Freedom Party man and ordering a beer for himself.

Quinn nodded. "More and more men keep coming north," he said. "Enough of them do find work to encourage others. We are trying to tighten things at the border, but"—he shrugged—"it is not an easy job."

"If they do work no one else will or no one else can, I do not suppose it is so very bad," Rodriguez said, sipping his beer. "But if they take jobs away from Confederates ... That would not be good at all."

"We have to take care of ourselves first," Quinn agreed. After another pull at his beer, Hipolito Rodriguez began to laugh. Quinn cocked his head to one side, a quizzical look on his face. "What is the joke?"

"In other parts of the Confederate States, people worry the same way about Sonorans and Chihuahuans taking their jobs."

"Yes, they do, some. Not so much as they used to, I do not think," Quinn answered seriously. "They have seen that people who come from these parts are good and loyal and work hard. And they have seen that *los mallates* are the worst enemies the Confederate States have."

"Yes." Rodriguez said the same thing in English—"Niggers"—just to show he knew it. "In this country, *los mallates* are nothing but trouble. They have never been anything but trouble. *Los Estados Confederados* would be better off without them."

Quinn waved to the bartender. "Another beer for me, Rafael, and another for my friend here as well." He turned back to Rodriguez. "It is because you understand this that you are a member of the *Partido de Libertad."*

"Is it?" After thinking that over, Rodriguez shook his head. "No. I am sorry, but no. That is not the reason."

The bartender set the beers in front of his customers. Robert Quinn gave him a quarter and waved away his five cents' change. After a sip that left foam on his upper lip, he asked, "Why, then?"

"I'll tell you why." Rodriguez drank from his beer, too. "I joined the Freedom Party because it was the only one in Sonora that didn't take me for granted. You really wanted to have me for a member. And you want vengeance against *los Estados Unidos.* Men from *los Estados Unidos* tried to kill me. I have not forgotten. I want vengeance against

them, too." *But if Pedro fights them, they will shoot back.* He took a big sip from his new beer. Life wasn't simple, dammit.

"Ah, yes, the United States," Quinn said, as if reminded of the existence of a nation he'd forgotten—and been glad to forget. "Well, my friend, you are right about that. Every dog has its day, but theirs has gone on for too long."

"If we fight, can we beat them?" Rodriguez asked.

"I am no general," the Freedom Party man replied. "But I will tell you this: if Jake Featherston says we can beat them, then we can."

Somewhere up ahead—somewhere not very far up ahead—the state of Houston and the USA ended, and the state of Texas and the CSA began. Colonel Irving Morrell bounced along in a command car. *Bounced* was the operative word, too, for the command car's springs had seen better years, while the roads in these parts went from bad to worse.

However bad its springs might have been, though, its pintle-mounted machine gun was in excellent working order. Morrell had carefully checked it before setting out. If it hadn't been in excellent working order, he wouldn't have got into the command car in the first place.

Above the growl of the engine, the driver, a weather-beaten private named Charlie Satcher, said, "Looks quiet enough."

"It always looks quiet enough," Morrell answered. "Then they start shooting at us."

Satcher nodded. "Big country," he remarked.

"Really? I hadn't noticed," Morrell said, deadpan. The driver started to say something, caught himself, and grunted out a little laughter instead.

It was a very big country indeed. The horizon seemed to stretch for ever and ever. The sun beat down out of a great blue bowl of a sky. The only motion in the landscape was the tan trail of dust the

command car had kicked up, slowly dispersing in the breeze, that and — Morrell suddenly swung the machine gun to the right, and as suddenly took his hands off the triggers. That was only a roadrunner, loping through the dry brush with a lizard's tail hanging out of the side of its mouth.

"Nothing but miles and miles of miles and miles," Charlie Satcher said, as if he were the first one ever to bring out the line.

"Not quite nothing," Morrell answered. "Somewhere out there, those Freedom Party fanatics are bringing guns and ammo into Houston."

Calling them fanatics made him feel better. If he could paint them as villains, even if only in his own mind, he could do a better job of trying to deal with them. When he wasn't thinking of them as fanatics, he had to think of them as tough, clever foes. Not all of them belonged to the Freedom Party. Nobody in the Confederate States had much liked losing Houston, and not many people in Houston liked being part of the USA, either. The people who did like it kept quiet. If they didn't keep quiet, their neighbors made them pay.

"Miles and miles of miles and miles." Satcher liked to hear himself talk.

Again, he wasn't wrong. The Confederates put up a few border checkpoints between Texas and Houston, but only a few, and they mostly cared about things passing into Texas, not things leaving it. As far as they were concerned, things passing from Texas into Houston didn't really cross a border. If the United States felt otherwise, then it was up to the United States to do something about it.

And the United States hadn't. Even with all the unrest—hell, the out-and-out rebellion—in Houston, the United States hadn't. Morrell understood why. It would have cost too much, in money and in men. The USA would have had to put up barbed-wire emplacements the whole length of the border, and would have had to man them with an army. It would have been almost like a trench line from the Great War. No government, Democrat or Socialist, had been willing to do the work or deploy the manpower. And so the border remained porous, and so rebellion went right on simmering.

All that unhappy musing flew out of Morrell's head the moment he spotted a plume of dust not much different from the one his command car was kicking up. This one, though, was coming from the east and

heading west: heading straight into Houston. He had every reason to be where he was and doing what he was doing. Did that other auto? *Fat chance,* he thought.

He tapped Charlie Satcher on the shoulder. "You see that?" he said, pointing.

The driver nodded. "Sure as hell do, Colonel. What do you want to do about it?"

"Stop the son of a bitch," Morrell answered.

"He may not want to stop," Satcher observed.

"I know." Morrell reached for the machine-gun triggers. "We have to persuade him he does want to after all—he just doesn't know it quite yet."

"Persuade him." The driver's grin showed a broken front tooth. "Right you are, sir." He turned toward the motorcar that was raising the other dust trail.

Excitement flowered in Morrell. He was going into action, all on his own. He'd seen plenty of action in Houston, much of it brutal and unpleasant. Armored warfare against people who flung Featherston fizzes couldn't very well be anything but brutal and unpleasant. This, though, this seemed different. This was fox and hound, cat and mouse. It was out in the open, too. Nobody could fling a bottle of flaming gasoline from a window and then disappear.

Before long, whoever was in the other motorcar spotted the one that held Morrell and his driver. Whoever he was, he kept on coming. Maybe that meant he was an innocent, though what an innocent would be doing sneaking over the border was beyond Morrell. More likely, it meant he hadn't recognized the command car for what it was.

As the two machines got closer, Morrell's driver said, "They've got a lot of people in there—and what's that one bastard sticking out the window?"

A muzzle flash said it was a rifle. Nothing hit the command car—not for lack of effort, Morrell was sure. "Which side of the border is he on, do you think?" he asked.

"If he's shooting at me, he's on the side where I can shoot back,"

Satcher answered without hesitation.

"I like the way you think," Morrell said. The fellow with the rifle in the other motorcar fired again. This time, a bullet slammed into the command car. It must not have hit anything vital, because the machine kept running, and no steam or smoke or flame burst from its innards.

Morrell squeezed the machine gun's triggers. Brass cartridge cases flew from the breech and clattered down around his feet. Tracers guided the stream of bullets towards and then into the other motorcar. Smoke immediately poured from its engine compartment. It skidded to a stop. The doors on the far side flew open. Several men got out and ran. A bullet knocked one of them down. Another man shot at Morrell from behind the automobile. Morrell hosed bullets back at him. The motorcar caught fire. The rifleman had to pull away from it. That made him an easier target. Down he went, too.

And once the auto started burning, it didn't want to stop. As soon as the flames reached the passenger compartment, ammunition started cooking off. Some of the rounds were tracers. They gave the fire a Fourth of July feel.

"Ha!" Charlie Satcher said. "They *were* running guns."

"Did you expect anything different?" Morrell asked. The driver shook his head.

A bullet cracked past Morrell's head. That wasn't one from the fireworks display in the motorcar—it had been deliberately aimed. He ducked, not that that would have done him any good had the round been on target. He'd known only a handful of men who could go through a fire fight without that involuntary reaction. It wasn't cowardice, just human nature.

He tapped the driver on the back and pointed. "Go around there and give me a better shot at that fellow."

"Right." Satcher steered the car in the direction Morrell indicated. The rifleman from the auto coming out of Texas scrambled away, trying to keep the burning vehicle between the command car and himself.

That scramble proved his undoing. He was behind the trunk when either the fire or one of the rounds going off in the passenger

compartment reached what the men from Texas had been carrying there. The explosion sent flaming chunks of motorcar flying in all directions. One slammed down about a hundred feet in front of the command car; Satcher almost rolled it steering clear.

No more aimed shots came, though Morrell needed a little while to be sure of that, because rounds did keep cooking off every now and then with a *pop-pop-pop* that would have been merry if he hadn't known what caused it. He got a look at the Texan who'd been shooting at him, and wished he hadn't. The rear bumper had torn off the man's head and his left arm.

The grim sight didn't unduly upset his driver. "For all I care, they can bury the bastard in a jam tin," Satcher said, "either that or leave him out for the buzzards. If I was a buzzard, I'd sooner eat skunk any day of the week."

His words seemed to come from a long way off. Firing the machine gun left Morrell's ears temporarily stunned. He hoped the stunning was temporary, anyhow. Some of it probably wasn't. He knew he didn't hear as well as he had when he was younger. Would he go altogether deaf in another ten or twenty years? He shrugged. Not much he could do about that. It wasn't the rarest ailment among soldiers.

"Sir?" Charlie Satcher said.

"What is it?" Morrell's own voice seemed distant, too.

"I heard you had balls," the driver answered. "The guy who told me, though, he didn't know the half of it."

Morrell shrugged. The motion told him how tense his shoulders had got in the fire fight. He didn't think of himself as particularly brave. When the shooting started, he didn't think much at all. Reaction took over. "They started it, Charlie," he answered.

"Yeah," Satcher said admiringly. "And you sure as hell finished it."

"I wonder which side of the border we're on." Morrell shrugged again. "Doesn't matter much, not when their auto went up like that. Nobody can say they weren't running guns into Houston."

"Damn well better not try," the driver said. "Me, I thought I was gonna shit myself when that goddamn back seat landed in front of us."

"Back seat? Is that what it was?" Morrell said. Charlie Satcher nodded. Morrell managed a laugh. "I've got to tell you, I didn't notice. I was busy just then. You did a hell of a job getting around it. I noticed that."

"Neither one of us would've been real happy if I hit it," Satcher said. Morrell couldn't very well argue with that. The driver asked, "Shall we head on back to Lubbock, sir?"

"I think we'd better," Morrell replied. "I want to report to General MacArthur, and he'll want to report to the War Department. I suppose *they'll* report to the president, or maybe to the State Department. Somebody will have to figure out how loud we squawk."

"Squawk, hell," Satcher said. "We don't scream our heads off, they deserve to roll like that last Confederate fucker's."

Morrell only shrugged. "I won't tell you you're wrong, but the people in Philly are liable to. Because I can tell you what Richmond's going to say. Richmond's going to say they didn't know anything about these fellows, they didn't have anything to do with them, and they aren't responsible for them."

"My ass," Charlie Satcher said succinctly.

"Now that you mention it, yes," Morrell agreed, and the driver laughed. But Morrell went on, "You know it's crap, I know it's crap, and Jake goddamn Featherston knows it's crap, too, but how do you go about proving it's crap?"

"Screw proving it," Satcher said. "Blow the bastards to hell and gone anyway."

"I *do* like the way you think," Morrell said.

Brigadier General Abner Dowling remembered George Armstrong Custer. There had been times—a great many times—when Dowling's dearest wish would have been to forget entirely the officer whose adjutant he'd been for so long. Things didn't seem to work that way, though. All those years with Custer had marked him for life. Scarred him for life, he would have been inclined to say in his less charitable

moments. This was one of those days.

When Dowling thought of Custer nowadays, he thought of the general after the Great War, when Custer had come back to Philadelphia to fill an office and count corks and write elaborate reports on the best deployment of paper clips in the U.S. Army. With nothing real, nothing important, to do, Custer had wanted to jump out of a window. Dowling often thought the only thing that stopped him was his office's being on the ground floor.

And now Dowling knew exactly how his superior had felt. Since coming back from Salt Lake City after the occupation of Utah ended, he'd filled an office and written elaborate reports on the best way to transport rubber bands to combat units. That was how it seemed, anyhow. He was on the shelf, and he was damned if he knew how to get off again.

If he was going to be stuck in Philadelphia, he'd hoped the War Department might at least channel reports of what was going on in Utah through him. He'd spent a lot of years—a lot of thankless years—in the state. He wondered if Winthrop W. Webb was still in business, or if the Mormons had figured out who Webb's real bosses were and arranged an accident for him.

Try as Dowling would, he couldn't find out. Somebody in the War Department was surely tending to affairs in Utah. Whoever it was, it wasn't Dowling. He couldn't even find out who it was. The only thing his efforts to find out got him was a visit from Lieutenant Colonel John Abell.

The more Dowling saw the General Staff officer, the less he liked him, even though Abell had been the one who'd told him he'd made general-officer grade. The man was slim and pale—downright bloodless, in fact. Had the U.S. Army been made up of ghosts rather than men, he would have been one of the handsomest ones in it. As things were, he made Dowling want to turn up the heat in the office even though the day was warm.

"Sir, you have been poking your nose into matters that do not concern you," Abell said. "We discourage that."

We? You have a tapeworm? Dowling wondered. He remembered Irving Morrell talking about Abell during the war. At the time, he'd been sure Morrell was exaggerating. Now he found the other man had been speaking the gospel truth. He eyed the General Staff lieutenant

colonel's lean, pallid countenance and picked his words with care: "I don't believe Utah's affairs can fail to concern me, not when I was there so long."

"If the War Department feels otherwise, why should you disagree?" Lieutenant Colonel Abell inquired.

"Because if I had anything to do with Utah, I could be useful to the Department," Dowling answered. "With what people have me doing now—I mean, not doing now—I'm useless. Useful is better."

"Don't you trust the judgment of your superiors as to what is useful and what is not?" Abell asked silkily.

By the way spoke, he might have been one of those superiors, even if Dowling outranked him. *General Staff officers,* Dowling thought scornfully, and tried not to let his annoyance show. Even if Abell had a lower grade, he enjoyed much better connections. And so, still speaking carefully, Dowling said, "A quartermaster sergeant could do most of what I've been doing since I came back here, whereas I've got some specialized knowledge no sergeant can match. Using me without using that knowledge is inefficient."

"Possibly," Abell said, which meant he wasn't about to admit it. "A pleasure talking to you." He got to his feet and started for the door. With a hand on the knob, he turned back. "You know Colonel Morrell, don't you?"

"Oh, yes." Dowling nodded. "We worked together on the breakthrough that took Nashville." That might have been impolitic, since the breakthrough had violated War Department doctrine on how to use barrels. Dowling didn't much care, since it had also gone a long way toward making the Confederates throw in the towel.

"How interesting," Lieutenant Colonel Abell said with a smile that displayed a lot of expensive dentistry. And then, silent as a specter, he was gone. Dowling wondered if he ought to have his office exorcised.

He'd hoped Abell's questions would lead to something better in the way of work. For the next couple of weeks, his hopes were disappointed. He read about Irving Morrell's encounter with gun runners on the border between Texas and Houston in the newspapers. Nobody in the War Department asked him about it in any official way. He wondered why Abell had bothered confirming that they were acquainted. *The better to blackball me,* he thought.

But, somewhat to his surprise, he did see the General Staff officer again. When John Abell next appeared—materialized?—in his office, the lieutenant colonel's face bore a smile that seemed less than perfectly friendly. "So you are friends with Colonel Morrell, are you?" Abell said, a note of challenge in his voice. "And you've done the same sort of work, have you?"

Dowling hadn't said he was friends with Morrell. He admired Morrell's talent; what Morrell thought of him he wasn't nearly so sure. But, sensing that a yes would annoy Lieutenant Colonel Abell more than a no, he nodded defiantly and said, "That's right."

"Very well, Brigadier General Dowling. In that case, I have some orders for you." Abell spoke as if washing his hands of him.

To Dowling, anything would have been better than what he was doing now. "And those orders are...?" he asked eagerly.

Abell heard that eagerness. It made him blink. By the fruit salad on his chest, he'd stayed in Philadelphia through the Great War. He no doubt thought his role more important than those of soldiers who actually went out and fought the enemy, too. He might even have been right, but Dowling didn't care to dwell on that. "Sir, you will be sent to Kentucky," he said now. "Your duty there will be similar to Colonel Morrell's in Houston: you will help control agitation against the government of the United States. This *does* also relate to your experience in Utah, would you not agree?"

"Yes, I'd say that's true," Dowling answered cautiously. "You're coming as close as you can without a real war to sending me into combat, aren't you?"

"Isn't that what you wanted?" Abell asked with sardonic satisfaction.

But that satisfaction slipped when Dowling gave him another yes instead of a no, saying, "You bet it is. I've wanted to get into the field for years. They wouldn't take me away from Utah when we fought the Japs, dammit."

"Well, you're going to get your wish." Lieutenant Colonel Abell plainly thought he was out of his mind.

"When do I leave?" Dowling asked. "Where exactly do I go? All over Kentucky, or somewhere in particular?"

"I don't have the precise details yet," Abell said. "I assure you, they will be passed on in good time. In the meanwhile, you are to continue with the duties you have already been assigned."

"Thank you so much," Dowling said sourly. The General Staff officer took no notice of his tone, which might have been just as well. Abell departed with a salute that mocked military courtesy instead of reinforcing it. Now Dowling was the one who ignored the slight. He would have ignored not only a slight but a large if that meant escaping from Philadelphia.

Knowing the speed at which the War Department moved, he expected *in good time* to mean a month or six weeks. In reality, he got his orders eleven days after Lieutenant Colonel Abell's visit. On reflection, he was less surprised than at first glance. The military bureaucrats in War Department headquarters were probably as glad to see him gone as he was to go. He'd been General Custer's right-hand man, after all, and Custer and the War Department had got along like rattlesnake and roadrunner—and who'd ended up eating whom was anybody's guess.

He was on a train the next day, bound for Kentucky. He could have left Philadelphia even sooner if he'd wanted to take an airliner. He was content to stay on the ground. When he was a boy, there'd been no such things as airliners. When he was a boy, there'd been no such things as aeroplanes (or airplanes, as he saw the word spelled more and more often in newspapers and magazines). If one of them could carry two dozen people in reasonable comfort three or four times as fast as a train or a motorcar ran ... *That's nice,* Dowling thought. In an emergency, he would have flown. Without an emergency, no.

For one thing, trains boasted dining cars. Nothing he'd heard about food on airliners tempted him to sample it. The meals aboard the Pennsylvania Railroad's *Cincinnati Limited,* on the other hand, fully measured up to Dowling's exacting standards. He was sorry to have to leave the train and cross the Ohio into Kentucky.

It was late afternoon when a driver took him from Cincinnati over the bridges across the river and into Covington. A long line of northbound autos waited to cross the bridge. "What's their trouble?" Dowling asked.

"They have to be searched, sir," the driver answered. "You're new here, aren't you? We don't want those Freedom Party bastards running guns and explosives up into the real United States."

The real United States. Those four words spoke volumes. Dowling had ordered such precautions himself in Utah. He hadn't thought they would be necessary here, but maybe he'd been naive. *You're new here, aren't you?* That spoke volumes, too. This game was being played for keeps.

No one fired at his motorcar on the way to the local Army encampment. No one fired, but he got plenty of hints he was in hostile country just the same. The graffiti shouted freedom! or csa! They showed either a blue or a red St. Andrew's cross: quick takes on the Confederate battle flag and the Freedom Party banner based on it.

In Utah, the occupation authorities would have cracked down on people who scribbled such things. In Utah, though, the occupation authorities had been the only formal power in the land. Here ... Here there was also the state government—and that was in the hands of the Freedom Party. The Army faced an uphill fight it hadn't had to worry about farther west.

"You want to hear something funny, sir?" the driver said as the green-gray Ford pulled up in front of BOQ.

"I," Dowling answered most sincerely, "would love to hear something funny."

"You know who our biggest backers here are?" the soldier asked.

"From everything I saw, I wondered if we *had* any backers here," Dowling said.

"Oh, we do, sir. There's one bunch of folks in this town—one bunch of folks in this whole goddamn state—who'd do anything in the world for us, anything at all. That's the niggers. They don't want one goddamn thing to do with the Confederate States, and can you blame 'em?"

"Not me," Dowling admitted, but he couldn't see how they'd help much, either.

A chilly, nasty rain fell on Augusta, Georgia. Scipio didn't like the rain. He had to put on a long coat and rubber overshoes and to carry

an umbrella to protect the tuxedo he had to wear at the Huntsman's Lodge. Newsboys hawking their papers doubtless liked the rain even less. They got their copies of the *Constitutionalist* wrapped in yellow wax paper, but it didn't always keep them dry. Customers who bought a newspaper with the consistency of bread soaked in milk were apt to say unkind things—and to demand a fresh copy without forking over another five cents.

"Election today!" the newsboys shouted from under their umbrellas. "President Featherston seeking second term!"

Scipio didn't buy a paper. Why would he want a *Constitutionalist* when Jake Featherston was violating everything the Confederate Constitution had stood for since before the first shot was fired in the War of Secession? Oh, Featherston had rammed through the amendment that let him run again, but so what? Even a blind man could see that was a put-up job.

And even a blind man could see the election was a put-up job, too. Yes, the Whigs and the Radical Liberals had nominated candidates, but they had only a slightly better chance of winning than Scipio would have if he'd run against the incumbent president. The Freedom Party dominated the wireless web and the newspapers; the other candidates got only brief and unflattering mention. Despite the rain, Freedom Party stalwarts prowled outside polling places. Freedom Party officials would count most of the votes. Jake Featherston wouldn't lose.

With a snort, Scipio walked past another newsboy. As if elections applied to him or the likes of him anyway! He'd never had any choice in who ruled the Confederate States, and he never would. He wondered how many of the black men who'd earned the franchise fighting for the CSA in the Great War still had the nerve to try to use it. He also wondered how many of those who tried succeeded.

Not many and even fewer, unless he missed his guess.

As usual, he got to the Huntsman's Lodge in good time. He shed the coat and galoshes with sighs of relief, and hung the umbrella on a peg so it dripped down onto the rug in a hallway. Then he went into the kitchen to remind himself of the day's specials. At least this was Tuesday, not Monday. They wouldn't be making specials out of whatever hadn't moved over the weekend.

"Evening, Xerxes," Jerry Dover said. "How are you?"

"Tolerable, suh," Scipio told the manager. "I's tolerable. How you is?"

"Not bad," Dover answered. "Can we talk a little?"

"Yes, suh. What you want?" Scipio did his best not to sound too alarmed. Whenever a boss said something like that, it usually meant trouble.

Dover said, "You're a hell of a good worker, Xerxes, don't get me wrong. You read and write and cipher better than most white men I know. What I want to ask you is, do you have to talk the way you do?"

"This heah onliest way I knows how to talk," Scipio answered. That, of course, wasn't true, as Bathsheba could have testified. If he hadn't been able to sound like an educated white man, they and their children would have died in the riots after the Freedom Party took power.

But if he talked that way without direst need, some white man or other who heard him would connect his voice with the Marshlands plantation and Anne Colleton—whereupon, very shortly, he would be dead.

"Would you be willing to take lessons?" Jerry Dover asked, not knowing he could have given them instead.

"Once upon a time, I try dat," Scipio lied. "It don't do no good. I still sounds like dis."

"I could make it worth your while," Dover said. "Menander the head-waiter's going to retire before too long—he's been sickly for a while now, you know. You'd be the perfect fellow to take his place—if you didn't talk like such a nigger. Everything else? I know you can do it. But you got to sound better."

Scipio wondered if he could fake the lessons and end up sounding a little better than he did now, but not a lot. He had his doubts. Dover wasn't wrong: unless he sounded like a college-trained white (which the restaurant manager didn't know he could do at all), he sounded like someone who'd come straight from the swamps by the Congaree. That wouldn't do for a headwaiter. Compromise between the two dialects? He saw none. He also saw danger in sounding even a little like the way he had at Marshlands. He couldn't afford to be recognized, not after he'd been a spokesman for the Congaree Socialist

Republic. He'd been coerced into playing that role, but who would care? No one at all.

And so, not without regret, he said, "Reckon I better stay where I is."

Dover exhaled angrily. "Dammit, where's your get-up-and-go? And if you tell me it got up and went, I'll kick your ass, so help me Hannah."

He might have meant it literally. Scipio shrugged. "Sorry, Mistuh Dover, suh. You is a good boss." He meant that. "But you gots to see, I never want to be nobody's boss a-tall."

"All right. All right, dammit. Why didn't you say that sooner?" Jerry Dover remained disgusted, but he wasn't furious any more—now he faced something he understood, or at any rate something he thought he did. "I've seen it before. You don't want to play the white man over your own people, is that it?"

"Yes, suh," Scipio said gratefully. "Dat just it." There was even some truth in what he said. He hadn't wanted to open up his own cafe in the Terry for exactly that reason. He'd told other Negroes what to do for years in his role as butler at Marshlands, and hadn't cared for it a bit. It was less important to him than his other reason for turning the manager down, but it was there.

Dover said, "If you want to know what I think, I think you're a damn fool. Somebody's got to do it. Why not you instead of somebody else? Especially why not you if you feel that way? Wouldn't you make a better boss than some other buck who did it just to show what a slave driver he could be?"

He was shrewd. He was very shrewd, in fact, to use that last argument and to contrast Scipio, who remembered slave drivers, with one. If not wanting to boss other blacks had been the only thing troubling Scipio, the restaurant manager might have persuaded him. As it was, he shrugged again and said, "Mebbe"—disagreeing too openly with a white man wasn't smart, either.

His boss knew what that *mebbe* meant. Dover waved him away. "Go on. Go to work, then. I'd fire some people for telling me no, but you're too good to lose. If you don't want the extra money, I won't pay you."

With a sigh of relief, Scipio went into the dining room. Tonight, he

felt much better about dealing with customers than with his own boss. The Huntsman's Lodge was not the sort of place that kept a wireless set blaring away while people ate, but he got his share of the news anyway. Sure enough, Jake Featherston was easily winning a second term. All the whites in the restaurant seemed happy about it. Every so often, somebody at one table or another would call out, "Freedom!" and glasses would go high in salute. No one asked Scipio's opinion. He didn't offer it, and wouldn't have if asked. He did pocket some larger tips than usual, as often happened when people were happy.

The rain had stopped by the time he headed for home: a little past twelve. He'd gone about half a block from the restaurant when a rattling, wheezing Birmingham pulled up to the curb alongside of him. A young black man got out. He and Scipio eyed each other for a moment. Scipio's heart thudded in his chest. All too often, Negroes stole from other Negroes, not least because whites cared little about that kind of crime.

But then the youngster grinned disarmingly. "You ain't never seen me, grandpa. You know what I'm sayin'? You ain't never seen this here motorcar, neither."

Was he fooling around with someone else's woman? That was the first thing that occurred to Scipio: no, the second, for that *grandpa* rankled. Still, if the required price was no higher, he could meet it. "Ain't never seen who?" he said, peering around as if someone invisible had spoken.

He got another grin for that. "In the groove, grandpa."

"Somebody talkin' to me?" Again, Scipio pretended not to see the man right in front of him. Then he started back down the street toward the Terry. Behind him, the young Negro laughed. He walked warily even so, ready to run in case the other fellow came after him. But nothing happened. The man who'd parked the Birmingham might have forgotten all about him.

By the time he woke up the next morning, he'd just about forgotten the young man. Bathsheba, who had to go to her cleaning job much earlier than he needed to leave for the Huntsman's Lodge, was heading out the door when an explosion tore through the morning air.

"Do Jesus!" Scipio exclaimed. The windows rattled and shook. He thought they might break, but they didn't.

"What was that?" Antoinette asked.

"That was somethin' blowin' up," Scipio said heavily. "Mebbe it was an accident. But mebbe it was a bomb, too."

"Oh, sweet Jesus, who'd want to blow things up?" Bathsheba burst out. "Ain't we seen enough sufferin'?" Out she went, shaking her head.

When Scipio headed for work later that day, he had to take a detour to get to the Huntsman's Lodge. He got a glimpse of the street where the bomb had gone off. The building closest to where it went off had fallen down. Windows or pieces of façade were missing from several others. It wasn't till he looked down the street from above the Huntsman's Lodge that he realized just where the explosion had taken place. *You ain't never seen me,* that grinning young Negro had said. *You ain't never seen this here motorcar, neither.* Nobody would ever see it again. Scipio was sure of that. *How* much dynamite had it held?

Enough. More than enough. Even here, a good long block from where the bomb had gone off, there were bloodstains under Scipio's shoes. How many dead? How many hurt? Plenty. He could see that. "Do Jesus!" he said again.

Only shards of glass jagged as knives remained in the windows of the Huntsman's Lodge. The door had a jagged hole in it. As Scipio started to go in, a policeman barked, "Let me see your passbook, boy." He handed it over. The policeman matched the photograph and his face, then gave it back. "You work here?"

"Yes, suh," Scipio said. "I's a waiter. You kin go ask Mistuh Dover, suh."

"Never mind," the gray-uniformed cop said impatiently. "You see anything funny when you went home last night? Anything at all that wasn't regular?"

Scipio looked at him. He wore a Freedom Party pin next to his badge. "No, suh," the black man answered. "I didn't seen nothin'. I didn't see nobody. Jus' go home an' mind my business."

The policeman snarled in frustration. *"Somebody* must have, dammit. We catch the son of a bitch who did this, he'll be begging to die before we're through."

"Yes, suh," Scipio repeated in studiously neutral tones. "Kin I go to

work, suh?" The cop didn't say no. Scipio walked into the Huntsman's Lodge without another word.

With their third Socialist president in office, with a Socialist working majority in both houses of Congress, the United States should have been a country where labor had the advantage on capital. They should have been. As Chester Martin had bitterly discovered, they weren't—and nowhere was that truer than in Los Angeles.

When construction workers picketed a site, goons often came out in force to break up their picket lines. The cops backed the goons. So did the newspapers. As far as the *Los Angeles Times* was concerned, strikers were Red revolutionaries who deserved hanging—shooting was too good for them.

Chester remembered the days of the steel-mill strikes in Toledo. Next to this, those had been good times. That, to him, was a genuinely frightening thought. But it was also true. Back in Toledo, he'd had a feeling of solidarity with his fellow strikers, a feeling that their hour was come round at last. They'd been doing something epoch-making: winning strikes that had always been lost before, paving the way for Socialist victories at the polls that had never been seen before.

What was another strike nowadays? Just another strike. Some were won; more were lost. Nobody except the immediate parties—and the *Times*—got very excited about most of them, and even the immediate parties didn't always bother. The strikes put Chester in mind of some of the later battles on the Roanoke River front during the Great War. They would tear up the landscape and cause a lot of damage and pain to both sides, but things wouldn't change much no matter who won. Either way, the next fight on the same ground would loom around the corner.

When he said as much to Rita one morning before heading out to the latest picket line, she frowned. "That wasn't what you told me when you first led the construction workers out on strike," she said. "Then you thought you were doing something worth doing, something important."

"I know." He tried to recapture the feeling of outrage, the feeling of urgency, he'd had then. It wasn't easy. It was, after more than a year,

next to impossible. "Too much has happened since, and not much of it good. Have we got enough money for groceries this week?"

His wife nodded. "And for the rent when the first rolls around. You're making as much as an agitator as you ever did building houses."

"Swell," he said. "When I build a house, though, I've got something to show for it, something I can see, something people can live in. Same when I was making steel. Once I was done, it was there. It was real. I don't even know that I'm doing any good by agitating. Plenty of people *aren't* making as much money now as they were before we started striking."

"They will, though. They'll make a lot more if you get your just demands." A solid Socialist—more solid than Chester—Rita assumed the demands were just. He'd been sure of that at the beginning of the strikes. He wasn't sure of anything any more.

He shook his head. He was sure of one thing: he had to get out the door to get to the picket line by the time the construction crew got to the site. Some of the workers were leery of crossing picket lines, and the ones who were were usually the real builders, the men who knew what they were doing. Half the time, the scabs the contractors hired to take strikers' places couldn't tell a chisel from a brace-and-bit. Chester wouldn't have wanted to live in a house put up by such half-trained workers.

The sun hadn't risen. December days in Los Angeles were longer than they were in Toledo, but sunrise still came late. And, by Los Angeles standards, it was cold: it had dropped down into the forties. Chester Martin found the idea that that could be chilly laughable. He wore a denim jacket over a cotton shirt and a pair of dungarees. He might have put on the same outfit in April in Toledo. In December, he would have frozen to death with it. But his real cold-weather gear had sat at the back of the closet for years. He'd finally given most of his winter-weight coats and heavy wool mufflers to the Salvation Army. He didn't think he would ever need to wear that kind of outfit again.

He had to watch where he was going as he made his way down to the trolley stop. One thing where Toledo beat Los Angeles hollow was street lights. They were few and far between here. Whole neighborhoods—his, for instance—did without them altogether. Long winter nights made that especially noticeable.

Street lights or not, the southbound trolley came on time. Chester tossed his nickel in the fare box and bought a couple of transfers, too. He rode down toward the suburbs, where most of the building was going on right now. Dawn came as he rattled along. It was a leaden dawn, the sky full of gray clouds. He wondered if it would rain. That would shut things down *better* than any picket line. Probably not, though. Even by Los Angeles standards, 1939 had been a dry year.

Torrance, where he got off, reminded him of Gardena, the little town to the north of it where he'd started building houses after coming to California. Groves of figs and walnuts and oranges and lemons and alligator pears still flourished. Truck gardens, many of them run by farmers from Japan, shipped strawberries and lettuce and carrots and other produce to half the country, thanks to refrigerated freight cars. And, here and there, clusters of houses with clapboard sides mostly painted white sprouted among the greenery.

At the site where the picket line went up, the houses were still sawdust-smelling wooden skeletons. Strike headquarters was a big tent on a vacant lot two blocks away. Four or five burly men guarded the tent day and night. Contractors had tried to get the police to remove it, but the man who owned the lot was a good Socialist, and wouldn't swear out a trespassing complaint.

One of the guards tipped his battered fedora to Chester. "Mornin'," he said. "Pot of coffee's going inside, you want a cup."

"Good deal," Chester said. "Any trouble?"

All the guards shook their heads. "Not a bit," answered the one who'd spoken before. "Bastards don't bother anybody they figure he'll fight back." This time, all of his friends nodded.

That wasn't true. The class enemies and their lackeys weren't cowards. They defended their interests no less earnestly than proletarians. Things would have been easier if they hadn't. Chester said nothing about that. Why hurt the guards' morale?

He just ducked into the tent. Sure enough, a coffeepot perked above the blue flame on some canned heat. Several not very clean cups sat on a card table nearby. He'd drunk from far worse during the war. There was a sugar bowl, but no cream. Sugar would do. He poured himself a cup, quickly drained it, and took a picket sign. It said, shame! and unfair to workers!, so it could be used in almost any strike. The handle was a good, solid piece of wood. Tear off the sign,

and it turned into a formidable bludgeon.

Shouldering the sign, Martin went back outside. Another picket was walking across the lot toward the tent. "Morning, John," Chester called.

"Morning," John answered. "Chilly today."

"You say so." Chester smiled. No, he didn't think he'd ever get used to Los Angeles notions about weather.

He had a good picket line in place around the houses under construction before many workers started showing up. Some turned away, as if glad for an excuse not to go to work. Others squared their shoulders and crossed the line. The pickets showered them with abuse. They had to watch what they said; some of the scabs could have been plainclothes cops. General curses and insults were all right. Threats like, *We know where you live,* or, *Wait till you get off work,* could land a man in jail on an assault charge. Lawyers were expensive. Using them drained a strike fund in a hurry.

Around and around and around. In a field across the street, crows and Brewer's blackbirds with golden eyes pecked for worms and bugs and seeds. Hammers started banging at the construction site. The pickets cursed. "Scabs!" they shouted. Around and around and around.

Halfway through the morning, a white-haired, sun-browned man in a windbreaker fell into step with Chester. The man was missing most of two fingers from his right hand. "What the hell you want, Mordechai?" Martin asked.

"To talk with you, if you care to talk," the foreman answered. "Some of this mess is my fault. Maybe I can help fix it. Decent chop-suey joint around the corner and a block and a half down. I'll buy you lunch, if you'll let me."

Chester considered. The ex-Navy man was a pretty good guy, even if he had sold out to the exploiters. "I'll eat with you," Chester said. "I won't let you buy for me."

"Deal," Mordechai said at once.

"And no sneaking in more scabs at lunchtime, the way you guys have done before," Martin said. Mordechai nodded. Chester studied him. If he was a liar, he was a fine one. Chester nodded, too. "All

right. We'll do that."

At noon, they walked to the chop-suey place together. It wasn't bad. Martin had certainly had worse. He ate without saying much. If Mordechai wanted to talk, *he* could talk. After a while, he did: "How can we settle this? I flew off the handle, and people have paid for it all over town. You can have your job back. No trouble there. Same with most of the people on your side."

"If you would've said that then, I'd've slobbered all over you, I'd've been so happy. Now?" Chester shook his head. "If I give in now, I sell out my pals. I can't do that. The people you work for have got to recognize that the union's come to Los Angeles. We don't want the moon, but they've got to bargain with us, and they've got to do it in good faith."

Mordechai frowned. He ate another forkful of strange vegetables and bits of fried meat. "If you think they'll recognize the union, that's wanting the moon, and the stars to boot."

With a shrug, Chester answered, "I figured you'd say that. So what the hell have we got to talk about? We'll go on with the class struggle and see how this round comes out."

"Oh, don't give me that Socialist crap," Mordechai said impatiently.

"It isn't crap." Chester set his jaw. "It works. If it worked in the steel mills in Toledo, it'll work here, too. How do you like being a scab?"

Mordechai's weathered features darkened with anger. "Don't you call me that."

"Well, what else are you?"

"I'm a foreman. And I'm a damn good one, too, by God." Pride rang in Mordechai's voice.

"I never said you weren't," Chester answered. "You're a damn fine foreman—most of the time. But that doesn't mean you—or some prick who's a foreman, too—can act like Jesus Christ on roller skates whenever you want. *That's* why we need a union."

Despite his mutilated hand, Mordechai ate faster than Chester did. He finished lunch and pushed his chair back from the table. "Afraid you were right," he said. "This was just a waste of time. You're not

going to win this strike, though, you know. You can't."

"They said that in Toledo, too. They were wrong there. And you're wrong now. Sooner or later, a construction outfit will decide they'd rather not have all this trouble, and they'll give us a contract we can live with."

"Don't hold your breath," Mordechai advised. He tossed down a quarter. The silver coin rang sweetly. He walked out. Chester set his own quarter beside it and also headed back to the half-built tract. The strike would go on.

January in the North Atlantic tested a ship's construction. The endless storms and enormous seas tested a man's construction, too. The USS *Remembrance* handsomely passed the test. Sam Carsten wasn't so sure about his own innards. He had a good stomach, but the endless rolling and pitching started to make him feel as if he were riding a horse that hadn't been broken. And he had to strap himself to his bed every night to keep from winding up on the deck. He always hated that.

It needed doing, though. One sailor who slept in a top bunk forgot the strap and broke his arm when he fell out. To add insult to injury—in the most literal sense of the words—the captain busted him to ordinary seaman, too. Sam didn't suppose he'd lose officer's rank if he pulled a rock like that, but he didn't care to find out, either.

He was up and about when general quarters came. Getting to his station in the bowels of the *Remembrance* without breaking his neck was an adventure in this kind of weather, but he did it. He cussed most of the way there, though. The skipper had to be in an especially nasty mood to order general quarters in seas like this. It was bound to be just a drill, too. The United States weren't at war with anybody.

Besides, at the moment the carrier wasn't anything more than an oversized light cruiser, anyhow. No way in hell she could launch her airplanes in seas like this. That left her with guns to defend herself, and she didn't pack a whole lot of firepower—not that kind of firepower.

Lieutenant Commander Pottinger arrived at their station at the

same time as Sam did. Panting, he asked, "Do you think it's true, Lieutenant?"

"Do I think what's true, sir?" Sam asked in turn. He was panting, too. He'd been in the Navy thirty years now. These mad dashes weren't so easy as they had been once upon a time.

"Why the captain called the general quarters," Pottinger answered.

"I can't begin to tell you, sir," Sam said. "I just heard the hooter and ran like hell. What do you know?"

"I ran like hell, too," the head of the damage-control party said. "Some men heading the other way said we'd spotted a Royal Navy ship, or maybe a Royal Navy squadron."

"I heard the same thing, sir," a sailor named Szczerbiakowicz said. "Damned if I know whether it's true, but I heard it."

"Did you, Eyechart?" Carsten used Szczerbiakowicz's universal nickname; nobody but another Pole could have hoped to pronounce his real one. Sam turned to Lieutenant Commander Pottinger. "If that's so, sir, you think the limeys mean trouble?"

"I couldn't begin to tell you," Pottinger replied. "But I think maybe the skipper thinks they might."

"Yes, sir. Does seem that way, doesn't it?" Sam looked at all the faces in the damage-control party. He realized he was the only one there old enough to have been at sea during the Great War. Even more than the way his heart pounded after the run to general quarters, that told him how many years he was carrying. He said, "The Royal Navy's a damn good outfit. They were still on their feet in 1917. We never did knock 'em flat; we starved England into quitting when we finally shut down the grain and beef imports from Argentina."

The *Remembrance* rolled steeply. Everybody grabbed for a handhold to steady himself. The ship straightened, then rolled back the other way. Eyechart Szczerbiakowicz said, "I don't care how good they are, sir. What can they do to us in seas like this?"

"Damned if I know," Sam said, talking like the petty officer he had been rather than the officer he was. "I'll tell you this, though: I sure as hell don't want to find out the hard way."

Nobody disagreed with him. Nobody wanted to see anything happen to the *Remembrance.* The men might not remember the Great War, but most of them had been through the inconclusive scrap against the Japanese. They knew too well how vulnerable to disaster even the mightiest warship could be. Huddling down here far below the main deck, away from fresh air and natural light, only served as a reminder. No one would do this if he didn't have to.

When the all-clear sounded, Sam let out a sigh of relief. Maybe the seas were too high to let the limeys launch torpedoes or to allow for accurate gunnery, but he didn't want to have to see by experiment.

As he left his station, he laughed at himself. For one thing, as he'd thought before, the United States were at peace with Britain, even if the two countries were a long way from friendly with each other. For another, he didn't know for a fact that there were any Royal Navy ships within a hundred miles of the *Remembrance.* Along with everybody else in the damage-control party, he'd been building castles in the air.

Sailors coming from other stations were also buzzing about the limeys. If they were wrong, they were all wrong the same way. Carsten shrugged. If he'd had a dollar for every time he'd seen unanimous rumor prove mistaken, he could have quit the Navy and lived ashore in style.

He headed for the officers' mess, both to grab a sandwich and some coffee and to find out what was going on from some people who might actually know. When he got there, he discovered that most of the other officers were as much in the dark as he was.

Before too long, though, Commander Cressy came into the mess. Every head swung toward the executive officer. Sam was far too junior to ask the question about which he was so curious, but that didn't matter, because a lieutenant commander from engineering did it for him: "Did we really bump into the limeys, sir?"

The exec paused to time the ship's roll and put cream in his coffee with the least likelihood of spilling it all over the deck. That done, he nodded. "We sure as hell did. Oh, not literally, but in dirty weather like this we have to worry about that, too: can't spot anything till it's right on top of you."

"They're patrolling farther west than they have for a while," another officer said.

"I know." Commander Cressy nodded again, not very happily. "We have no agreement with them that says they can't, but they haven't up till now. They still have a long reach, damn them."

"Think they could link up with the Confederates, sir?" Sam asked.

"Now isn't that an interesting question?" Cressy said. "You have a way of asking interesting questions, Carsten." Almost shyly, Sam dipped his head at the praise—if that was what it was. The exec went on, "The short answer is, I don't know. For that matter, the long answer is I don't know, too. We haven't spotted the Confederates doing a whole lot to build up their surface fleet— some destroyers and cruisers, but no new battleships, no carriers. They would have a devil of a time building those without our noticing. Submersibles ... Submersibles are a different story, I'm afraid."

The officer who'd first asked about the Royal Navy was a flame-haired Irishman named George Toohey. He said, "They started building those fuckers— pardon my French, sir—years before that Featherston bastard grabbed the reins. You can bet they haven't stopped since."

"We should have made 'em say uncle the second we caught 'em at it," another lieutenant commander said. "It would have saved us a lot of grief. Their boats gave us fits in the last war. They're liable to do worse than that if we ever have to tangle with them again."

Nobody said he was wrong. Nobody in the Navy—nobody Sam Carsten had ever heard, anyhow—would have said he was wrong. But Commander Cressy only shrugged. "No use crying over spilt milk," he said crisply. "We're stuck with the world we've got, not the one that might have been. For better or worse, the political will to clamp down tight wasn't there. If we ever do have another war, God forbid, I think we'll see Royal Navy subs—and French ones, too—refitting in Confederate harbors, and C.S. boats doing the same thing on the other side of the Atlantic." His smile bared sharp white teeth. "Makes our job a little more interesting, doesn't it, gentlemen?"

"They won't be using Bermuda or the Bahamas or Canada as bases against us, anyway," Lieutenant Commander Toohey said. "Not this time around, they won't."

"Or Newfoundland, either." Commander Cressy was relentlessly precise.

"If the Confederate States have a lot of submarines, holding on to the Bahamas could get expensive," Sam remarked. "Long haul down from Philadelphia and New York City, and every mile of it right past their coast."

A very young ensign said, "Baltimore's closer."

Cressy withered him with a glance. "A look at the map would remind you that Baltimore also lies within Chesapeake Bay. One assumes the mouth of the bay will be thoroughly mined. One also assumes the Confederates in Norfolk will not sleep through the commencement of hostilities." The ensign turned pink. He left the mess in a hurry. The exec was imperturbable. "Shall we go on discussing reasonable possibilities?"

"Even if the Confederates don't have carriers, how many land-based bombers have they got?" a lieutenant asked.

That struck Sam as a possibility altogether too reasonable. He said, "I was aboard the *Dakota* in 1917, when British bombers attacked her from the Argentine mainland. That wasn't much fun—and the airplanes now are a lot better than they used to be."

Commander Cressy nodded. "One reason we have carriers is to keep land-based aircraft off our fleets. Even so, though, the days of operating battleships in coastal waters may be gone for good."

The lieutenant who'd asked about land-based bombers said, "In that case, sir, why do we keep building them?"

"I am not the right person to whom to direct that particular question, Mr. Hutton," the exec replied. "I suggest you ask your Congressman, your Senators, and the Secretary of the Navy. You may be sure, I have done so." His smile was cynical. "You may also be sure, my letters have done just as much good as you would expect."

Carsten had been in the Navy his entire adult life. He understood how the top brass thought. "We got some use out of battleships in the last war," he said, "so of course we'll need them in the next one."

"Yes. Of course." But that wasn't agreement from the executive officer. It was raw sarcasm. "By that way of thinking, it's a miracle we have any carriers at all these days." Another of those frightening smiles. "But of course we know everything is exactly the way it should be in this best of all possible worlds. Don't we, gentlemen?"

No one in the officers' mess quite knew how to answer that. Sam hoped somebody in the Navy Department did.

If it had been up to Armstrong Grimes, he would have dropped out of high school as soon as he could and gone to work. He wanted everything work could give him: money, money, and, well, money. He didn't think his mother would have minded. She and Aunt Clara were keeping Granny's coffeehouse going to bring in extra cash.

Armstrong snickered and cursed at the same time. He'd never liked his aunt, and it was mutual. They were only a couple of years apart, but these days the gap seemed wide as the Grand Canyon. Clara had escaped from school, while Armstrong was still stuck in it.

Not matter what he thought, his old man was bound and determined that he get his high-school diploma. Armstrong quarreled with his father, but he'd never had the nerve to take things too far. Merle Grimes walked with a permanent limp, yes, but that was no sign of weakness. It as much as said, *Don't mess with me, punk. The Confederates shot me and I kept going, so why the devil should I be afraid of you?*

And so Armstrong had to endure another six months of Theodore Roosevelt High School before he could escape into the real world. He said as much one night, resentfully, over supper.

His father laughed. "Once you do graduate, you'll probably be conscripted. Two years in the Army will show you what's real, all right."

"They don't conscript everybody in a whole year-class, the way they did in your day," Armstrong said. "I've got a pretty good chance of just being able to get on with my life."

"Your country is part of your life," Merle Grimes said. "If you don't help it, why should it help you?"

"I would if we go to war or something," Armstrong said. "But now...?" He spread his hands, as if that would tell his father what he wanted instead of a green-gray uniform. Heading the list were his own apartment, his own auto, and a good-looking girlfriend the first two

items would impress.

"The peacetime Army is a steady place," his father said. "The way things are these days, that counts for a lot. Who knows what'll be out there? If your grades were better..." He gave his son a dirty look.

"So I'm no greasy grind," Armstrong said, returning it with interest. "I do good enough to get by."

"Good enough to get by isn't good enough," his father insisted. As far as Armstrong was concerned, he might have been speaking Chinese.

On the way to school the next morning, Armstrong lit his first cigarette of the day. He didn't smoke all that much, because his father didn't like him doing it around the house. The first drag he took made him a little sick and gave him a little buzz, both at the same time.

He didn't pay much attention in class. He *would* get by, and he knew it. The teachers couldn't do anything to make him study harder, not when he would escape their clutches for good in a few months. A lot of the seniors, especially the boys, acted the same way.

More because he was a senior than for anything in particular he'd done— his football career had been decent, but no more than decent —he found himself a big man on campus. The younger kids all looked up to him. He'd had that happen before, when he'd worked his way up from first grade all the way to eighth in elementary school. As an eighth-grader, he'd been a big shot. Then, all of a sudden, he'd been nothing but a freshman at Roosevelt, and freshmen were nobodies. He'd spent the rest of his time here getting back on top.

He was on his way from math to U.S. government when he stopped so suddenly, the kid behind him bumped into him. He hardly even noticed. He'd just had a very nasty thought. Once he got out of high school, he'd fall right down to the bottom of the totem pole again. He wouldn't be a big man on campus. He'd be a kid, fighting for a break against men twice his age. How long before he got back on top again? Twenty years? Ever?

Armstrong tried to imagine twenty years. He couldn't—it was longer than he'd been alive. In twenty years, he'd be close to forty, and if forty wasn't old, what was? He'd intended to sneak another smoke in the boys' room on the way to government, but he didn't. Worrying about falling to the bottom of the totem pole had slowed him down,

and he didn't want to be tardy. They still handed out swats to kids who came in late, even to seniors.

Mr. Wiedemann, the government teacher, walked with a limp almost identical to that of Armstrong's father. He wore the ribbon for a Purple Heart on his lapel, so he'd been hurt during the war, too. "We don't look at secession the way we did before 1863," he said. "Can anyone tell me why we don't?" Several hands shot into the air. Armstrong's wasn't one of them, but Wiedemann pointed at him anyway. "Grimes!"

He didn't need to be one of the big brains to figure that out. "On account of the Confederate States," he said.

"Very good." Mr. Wiedemann had a wide sarcastic streak. As long as he wasn't aiming it at you, it made him pretty funny to listen to. "And from 1863 to the Great War, what happened to the border between the USA and the CSA?" He cupped a hand behind his ear. "Don't everybody talk at once."

"Nothing," a girl said without raising her hand.

She would have got in trouble if she were wrong, but Wiedemann nodded. "Very good. For a long time, people thought that border would never change. Were they right?"

Herb Rosen, the greasiest grind in the whole class, stuck up his hand. Everyone said he would end up at Harvard if he could make it into the quota for Jews there. The government teacher pointed to him. Herb said, "Maybe they were."

That made Armstrong sit up a little straighter. He knew the United States had taken land away from the Confederate States. The way his father went on, he would have needed to be dead not to know it. It wasn't the answer Mr. Wiedemann had expected, either. The teacher said, "Suppose you explain yourself." He didn't come right out and call Herb a blockhead. When it came to splitting hairs, Herb could hold his own with anybody, and he'd won a couple of arguments with Wiedemann in class. No one else could claim that.

Now Herb said, "The way things are going, Kentucky and Houston will end up back in the CSA, and maybe Sequoyah, too."

"God help us if you're right," Mr. Wiedemann said. "Why did we spend so much money and so much blood and so much pain to win

them if we're going to give them back to the Confederate States?" He tapped the end of his walking stick against the floor as he spoke. Armstrong didn't think he knew he was doing it.

Like Armstrong, Herb Rosen hadn't been born while the Great War was going on. For him, it was as much ancient history as the reign of Caesar Augustus. Unlike the teacher, who'd done his own bleeding and hurting, Herb could think and talk about that time dispassionately. "That's the point I'm trying to make, Mr. Wiedemann. We took them, but did we really win them? Wouldn't most of the people in those states sooner live in the CSA than the USA? Isn't that why we've never let them have a plebiscite to decide?"

Mr. Wiedemann turned a blotchy purplish color. "What are you saying?" he asked, his voice shaking. "Are you saying we were wrong to take the spoils of victory? Are you saying we should have left the Confederates on the banks of the Ohio—and in easy artillery range of this very classroom?"

That last got home to Armstrong. His mother and grandmother had had plenty of stories of what Washington was like under bombardment. Most of them had to do with the long U.S. barrage that had preceded the reconquest of the city, but they'd talked about the Confederate shelling before the occupation, too. His mother didn't go on about those things the way she had when he was younger, but she still talked about them every now and again.

Herb, plainly, had struck a nerve. Armstrong wondered if he would back down. Kids who got too far under the skin of grownups usually regretted it. They might be clever, but grownups were the ones with the clout.

"I'm saying things have changed since the War of Secession." Herb sounded brash as ever. "Back then, states were more important than countries. Didn't you say Kentucky even declared itself neutral after the war started, and for a long time the USA and the CSA both had to honor that?"

"Yes, I did say that," Mr. Wiedemann admitted, "but I don't see what—"

Herb charged ahead: "Can you imagine a state trying to be neutral during the Great War? Things were different. Countries counted most. You thought, *I live in the United States,* or, *I'm a Confederate.* You didn't think, *I'm a New Yorker* first, or *I'm from Georgia.* And so when we took

Kentucky and Houston away from the CSA, the people there didn't stop thinking they were Confederates, the way their grandfathers might have. I'm saying that's why we've had so much trouble. The Germans have, too, haven't they, in Alsace and Lorraine?"

Before the government teacher could answer, the bell rang. Wiedemann looked like a prizefighter who'd been saved by it. "Dismissed," he croaked, and sat down behind his desk.

Armstrong didn't usually have much to do with Herb Rosen. In the tightly tribal world of high school, they traveled in different packs. As they left the classroom, though, he made a point of going up to Herb. "Boy, you tied him in knots," he said admiringly.

Herb shrugged skinny shoulders. "I like to try to get to the bottom of things. It's interesting, you know what I mean?"

"Till just now, I didn't think government class *could* be interesting," Armstrong said. And, had he been coming out of math or science or literature, he would have said the same thing.

Herb blinked behind thick glasses. He looked just like what he was: a smart little sheeny. Armstrong realized he'd taken him by surprise, first by speaking to him at all and then by what he'd said. After another blink, Herb said, "It's like putting a puzzle together for me. I want to see where all the pieces go."

Only once in a while, as today, did Armstrong get the feeling there was a bigger puzzle that held pieces in a pattern. Keeping track of one piece at a time seemed plenty hard enough to him. He said, "You see more of them than old man Wiedemann does."

"I hope so," Herb Rosen answered. "He doesn't know all that much."

He surprised Armstrong again. Teachers knew more about what they taught than Armstrong did himself, so he'd always been willing to believe they knew a lot. Believing anything else hadn't even occurred to him. Now it did. He suddenly saw teachers as people like store clerks or truck drivers or trombone players: all doing their jobs, some good at them, some not so good. They weren't little tin gods, even if they wanted kids to think they were.

"You're all right, you know?" Armstrong said.

Herb blinked again, then beamed. He'd probably been wondering if

he was going to get the snot knocked out of him. "You, too," he said, and hurried off to his next class. Armstrong went off to his, too, in what was, for him, an unusually thoughtful state of mind.

Cincinnatus Driver sighed as he pulled his truck over to the curb in front of his apartment building. He was angry at himself when he got out of the truck. It was a big, growling Studebaker, only two years old. The hauling business had been good lately. It would have been better yet if he could have got Achilles to throw in with him. He could have afforded a second truck—and if they'd had two, they would have had more before very long. Cincinnatus could see himself as somebody in charge of a real trucking outfit.

Trouble was, Achilles didn't want to drive a truck. He would have made more money than he did clerking, but he didn't want to come home to Grace and his children dog-tired every night, with beat-up hands and an aching back. Part of Cincinnatus scorned his son for being soft. Another part, though, admired Achilles for getting by on brains instead of brawn.

Cincinnatus went into the lobby of the apartment building and checked his mail. He sighed again once he had, this time in relief: no letter from his parents' neighbor in Covington. That meant no more news about his slowly failing mother. But even the relief held sorrow. It didn't mean his mother was getting better. She wasn't. She wouldn't. Once you went into your second childhood, you didn't come out again.

He trudged up the stairs to his flat. How tired he really was washed over him then. His back felt as if he'd been carrying an elephant up a mountain ever since he got up in the morning. He looked forward to a long soak in a hot tub. That would get some of the kinks out. When he went upstairs, he also understood exactly why his son wanted no part of the business he'd spent so long building up. If Achilles didn't have to, why would he want to feel like this?

And what happens if you throw your back out? Cincinnatus didn't want to think about that, but sometimes—especially when things in there ached more than usual—he couldn't help it. He knew what would happen. He'd be in trouble, and so would his whole family.

The key went into the lock. He opened the door. Amanda sat at the dining-room table doing homework. Her face was set in concentration. Her tongue stuck out of the corner of her mouth. Cincinnatus smiled. His daughter never noticed when she did that. *Both my children gonna graduate high school,* he thought, and the smile got wider. That wasn't bad at all, not for a black man who hadn't been allowed to go to school at all growing up in Confederate Kentucky. He'd learned to read catch as catch can, and he'd had to be careful about letting white people know he could do it. Iowa wasn't paradise—far from it—but it was better than what he'd known when he was small.

"Hello, sweetheart," he said.

Amanda jumped. "I didn't hear you open the door."

"I know. You was—*were*—thinkin' about your schoolwork."

"Test tomorrow," she said, and sank down into that sea of study.

Cincinnatus went into the kitchen. Elizabeth was wrapping spiced ground beef in cabbage leaves. Cincinnatus' mouth watered; he loved pigs in blankets. His wife looked over her shoulder. He gave her a quick kiss. "How's things?" she asked.

"Not bad," he answered. "Busy day. I'm tired."

"Sore, too, I bet," Elizabeth said. "I can see it, way you move." He nodded. She wasn't wrong. She went on, "Why don't you take your bath now an' soak for a while? These ain't gonna be ready for at least half an hour."

"All right, I do that," Cincinnatus said. "I was thinkin' comin' up the stairs, hot water feel good. Maybe I put the wireless set in the hall so I can listen to it in there, too. That way, I don't have to turn it on so loud, it'll bother Amanda."

"Well, go on, then," Elizabeth told him. "Longer you stand here talkin', less time you got to git clean and git warm."

When they moved in, it had been a cold-water flat. They'd been happy enough because it had electricity, which they'd done without in Covington. Heating water on the stove hadn't seemed like much. These past few years, though, the building had changed hands, and the new owner had put a water heater in the basement along with the furnace. The rent had gone up a few dollars a month to pay for it, but

Cincinnatus didn't know a single tenant who was inclined to complain. All the hot water you wanted, without having to heat it and carry it... If that wasn't a bargain, he didn't know what was.

He put the wireless on the floor in the hall, and ran it back to a plug in the bedroom with an extension cord. If he left the door open a couple of inches, he could hear just fine. He picked the station that would carry the football game in a little while. The Tri-State Association wasn't a top league, but the Des Moines Hawks were one of the two or three best teams—and they were playing Keokuk, a doormat, tonight.

"Dutch will be along at half past the hour with the game," the announcer said earnestly. "First, though, here is the news."

Soaking in a steaming tub, Cincinnatus was inclined to be tolerant. "Go on, then. Tell me," he said.

The announcer did, starting with the latest scandal at the State House. It sounded as if some Socialist legislators were going to spend some time in quarters less fancy than their present offices, but you never could tell. More than a few politicians here had managed to wiggle off the hook.

Farm news came next. Most of Iowa was farm country. They took prices for grain and hogs and cattle seriously here. They had to; an awful lot of people either made a decent living or didn't, depending on whether those prices went up or down.

Only after the local and state news did the announcer bother to admit a wider world was out there. President Smith remained optimistic, or said he did, that an old-age pension bill would finally fight its way through Congress. The Socialists had been saying that for years. The Democrats had been filibustering for years. Smith was quoted as saying, "If they vote against it, they'll pay at the polls next November, and they'll deserve to." Cincinnatus had long since decided he would believe in the pension when he saw his first check.

Someone in Houston had taken a shot at the U.S. commandant there. He'd missed, and been killed by the officer's guards for his trouble. Someone in Sequoyah had blown up an oil well. "A spectacular fireball," the announcer said, "and damage in the hundreds of thousands of dollars." He sounded almost gleeful about having such exciting news to read.

"And in Kentucky," he went on, "a plot to wreck the bridges crossing from Covington to Cincinnati was foiled by the vigilance of soldiers commanded by Brigadier General Abner Dowling. Dowling is quoted as saying Kentucky will stay in the USA as long as he is in charge there, and radicals and agitators had better get used to the idea." Cincinnatus was sure the man on the wireless would have been more cheerful if he'd got to talk about the bridges falling into the Ohio River.

In the CSA, an auto bomb had gone off in Montgomery, killing four — three whites and a Negro—and wounding seventeen. The newsman said, "Like most of the recent rash of auto bombs, this is surely the work of Negro guerrillas, although no one has claimed responsibility for it. In Richmond, President Featherston has vowed vengeance for the attack, and has stated that, if necessary, he will hold the entire colored community responsible for the actions of the bombers, who, in his words, 'are cowards destroying innocent lives but afraid to come out and fight like men.' "

Cincinnatus snorted. If you fought somebody stronger than you were, you had to be a fool to meet him face to face. Cincinnatus despised the idea of blowing up innocent bystanders. But he also despised what the Freedom Party was doing to blacks in the Confederacy. How could he blame them for hitting back with whatever weapons they found?

"In South America, talks between Venezuela and the Empire of Brazil on their latest border dispute are said to have made some progress," the announcer said. "However, Argentina and Chile have recalled their ambassadors from each other's capitals. They are said to be closer to war with each other than at any time since 1917." Cincinnatus remembered that one of the South American countries had been on the USA's side in the Great War, the other on the CSA's. Sprawling there in the nice, warm tub, he couldn't have said which was which. They were both too far away.

"King Charles of France has demanded a plebiscite in Alsace and Lorraine, much as President Featherston has demanded a similar vote in Kentucky and Houston," the announcer declared. "No immediate reply is expected from Kaiser Wilhelm's government, not least because of the Kaiser's failing health. In Britain, Prime Minister Churchill announced his support for the French demand, saying, 'The Germans have decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent.' "

From what Cincinnatus had seen in the papers, this Churchill was a reactionary. The only reason he was prime minister was that the Conservatives had named him to the post to keep the Silver Shirts from eating their party the way the Socialists had eaten the Republicans in the USA. He was an old man, and cartoonists liked to show him with jowls like a bulldog's. But he could turn a phrase.

"Churchill has also introduced a bill instituting conscription in Britain," the newsman went on. "In his speech in the House of Commons, he said, 'Come on now, all you young men, all over the kingdom. You are needed more than ever now to fill the gap of a generation shorn by the war. You must take your place in life's fighting line. Raise the glorious flags again; advance them upon the new enemies.' He pointed to the achievements of the British Unicorn Legion in Spain, and its role in helping the Nationalists seize Madrid from the German-backed Monarchists. 'Surely Wellington would have praised their pluck,' he said, amidst loud applause."

Who was Wellington? Cincinnatus supposed the British knew. Achilles and Amanda might have known, too. He had no idea himself.

He didn't much care, either. After giving the day's stock-market figures (dismal, as usual) and the weather forecast (not much better), the newsman went away. The excited background mutter from a packed football stadium came out of the wireless speaker. "Hello, Hawks fans. A very pleasant good evening to you, wherever you may be," the sportscaster said. "This is your pal Dutch, bringing you tonight's game between Des Moines and the Keokuk Colonels. Des Moines has to be the favorite, but you've got to watch out for Keokuk because they're coming off a win against Waterloo, and..."

"Ahhh." Cincinnatus knew he would enjoy hearing the game regardless of whether the Hawks won or lost. Even if it was 49-7 at the half, Dutch would find a way to keep the broadcast exciting till the final gun sounded. Dutch could read the telephone book and make it interesting. If there ever was a great communicator, he was the man.

And then, with the Hawks driving ("There they go again!" Dutch said after yet another gain), Elizabeth spoiled things by yelling, "Supper's ready!" Cincinnatus didn't want to get out of the tub, but he did.

Jonathan Moss was chewing a piece of roast beef when Dorothy looked across the table at him and asked, "Daddy, why are you a damned Yank?"

He didn't choke. It took an effort, but he didn't. After carefully swallowing, he looked not at his little girl but at his wife. Laura shook her head. "I've never called you that, Jonathan—well, never where Dorothy could hear."

He believed her. She was straightforward in what she thought and said; he couldn't imagine her lying about it to his face. Turning back to Dorothy, he asked, "Who called me that, dear?"

"Some of the kids at school," she answered. "They said Mommy was a collabo-something. I don't know what that means."

Laura turned red. She bit her lip. She knew what it meant, too well. Quickly, Jonathan said, "It means those kids don't know what they're talking about, that's what."

"Oh," Dorothy said. "All right." She went back to her supper.

But it wasn't all right, and Jonathan knew it. He read stories to Dorothy while Laura did the dishes. They all listened to the wireless for a while. Dorothy changed into a long flannel nightgown, brushed her teeth, and came out clutching her favorite doll for good-night kisses.

After she'd gone to bed, Laura looked at Jonathan and said, "Hello, you damned Yank."

He didn't say, *Hello, you collaborator,* or even, *Hello, you collabo-something.* That would only have made things worse. He just shook his head and said, "Kids."

"She'll know what a collaborator is soon enough," Laura said bitterly. He wouldn't be able to escape the word by not mentioning it, then. He hadn't really thought he would, though he had hoped. His wife went on, "The schoolchildren will make sure of that."

"She'll know you're not a collaborator, too," Moss said. "You still can't stand Yanks, even though you married one. And there are plenty of Yanks who'd say I'm the collaborator—collaborator with Canucks, I

mean."

"Not as many as there used to be," Laura said. "Not since you started flying again."

"Ha! Shows what you know," Moss told her. "You should hear the way the fellows at the airdrome outside of London needle me."

"I don't want to hear them. I don't want anything to do with them," she answered. "If I did, I really would be a collaborator." She glared at him, daring him to tell her she was wrong.

He didn't want to argue about it. They argued enough—they argued too much—without looking for reasons to lock horns. He said, "I want to review those papers I brought home. I'm going to have to put in a lot of work on that appeal when I get to the office tomorrow."

A military judge had sentenced one of his clients to five years for lying about his past in the Canadian military when applying for a liquor-store license. Moss was convinced the judge had ignored the evidence. He thought he had a decent chance of getting the verdict overturned; the military courts in occupied Canada weren't nearly so bad nowadays as they had been shortly after the war.

But he also wanted to remind Laura of what he did for a living—what he'd been doing for years. To his relief, she nodded. "All right," she said. "Will it bother you if the wireless stays on? I like the music program that's coming up next."

"I don't mind a bit," he said. "I won't even notice it."

As he headed out the door the next morning, he wondered if he should have asked Dorothy which children at the local elementary school were calling Laura and him names. That probably said something about how their parents felt about the U.S. occupiers. He shook his head. He didn't want to know.

The sun shone on soot-streaked snow. As usual in early March, Berlin was a gloomy, frozen place. Moss warily looked around before getting into his auto. He saw nothing out of the ordinary. Relieved but not reassured, he got in and started the motor. The day seemed just like any other. All the same, he didn't go to his law office by the route he'd used the day before. He'd had too many threats to care to make things easy for anyone who might want him dead. And, while the bomb that had blown up occupation headquarters hadn't been aimed

at him in particular, it would have killed him just the same if he'd been there when it went off. He came by his caution honestly.

Getting out of the Ford and walking half a block to the office building was another small, thoughtful stretch of time. No matter how he went from his block of flats to the office, he got there in the end. Somebody could be waiting.

Nobody was, not today, not outside, not in the lobby, not on the stairs, not in the office. Moss nodded to himself. Now he could get on with business. He lit a cigarette, plugged in the hot plate, and got a pot of coffee going. The first cup would be good. He prepared to enjoy it. By the end of the day, the pot would be mud and battery acid. He knew he'd go right on pouring more from it.

He was his own secretary. He could have afforded to hire a typist, but the idea had never once crossed his mind. He started pounding away on a typewriter not much younger and not much lighter than he was. The letters that appeared on the sheet of paper were grayer than he would have liked. When he looked in the desk drawer to see if he had a new ribbon, he found he didn't. He muttered under his breath; he thought he'd bought two the last time he needed them. Either he hadn't, or this was the second and not the first. Before long, he would have to go shopping again. Ribbons for this ancient model were getting hard to come by.

He'd dealt with some ordinary correspondence and was working on the appeal when his first client of the day came in. "Mr. Godfrey, isn't it?" Moss said, turning the swivel chair away from the typewriter stand and toward the front of the office. "How are you today, sir?"

"I'll do, Mr. Moss, thank you." Toby Godfrey did not look like the plump, red-faced English squire his name might have suggested. He was skinny and sallow and wore a perpetually worried expression. Since the occupation authorities were taking a long and pointed look at his affairs, he had reason to wear that kind of look, but Moss suspected he'd had it long before the Great War started.

"Let me check your file, Mr. Godfrey." Jonathan got up and pulled it out of a steel four-drawer cabinet. Looking at what was there reminded him of what wasn't. "You were going to get me your certificate of discharge and your certificate of acceptance." A Canadian man who'd fought in the Great War and couldn't prove he had accepted U.S. authority after the surrender in 1917 had a very hard time of it indeed if he ever came to the notice of a military court.

Godfrey coughed: a wet sound, half embarrassed; half, perhaps, tubercular. "I have the certificate of discharge," he said. "As for the other..." He coughed again. "I would, of course, be happy to sign a certificate of acceptance now. That would be better than nothing, wouldn't it?"

"A little," Moss said glumly. A military prosecutor would claim Godfrey had signed the certificate only because of his dispute with the occupying authorities. He would also claim everything Godfrey had done over the past twenty-odd years was illegal because he'd done it without having a certificate on file. A military judge would be inclined to listen to that kind of argument, too, because occupation law presumed the worst about men who'd tried to kill U.S. soldiers.

"I'm sure you'll do your best," Godfrey said.

"If you can't find that certificate, I'm making bricks without straw," Moss warned. "You'd do better trying to settle—if they will."

"But I've lived a quiet, peaceable life since 1917. No one can say otherwise," Toby Godfrey protested. "That must count for something!"

"A little," Moss said again, even more glumly than before.

Godfrey seemed not to hear that glumness—seemed to refuse to hear it, in fact. Clients were often like that: full of their own hopes and fears, they became deaf and blind to anything that ran against whatever they already had in their minds. The Canadian said, "I'm sure you'll do your very best, Mr. Moss."

Moss nodded. "I will. But I tell you frankly, I've taken a lot of cases where I liked the odds better. If you can arrange a compromise with the occupying authorities..."

Godfrey wouldn't hear of it. He must have thought it was a way of asking for more money, for he set ten crisp, new ten-dollar bills on the desk. "Your very, very best, Mr. Moss." He didn't even wait for a reply. He got up and stuck out his hand. Moss took it. His client left the office.

Moss scooped up the money. *I'll have to mail him a receipt,* he thought, sighing. He would do his best. If you were fighting a foe too much bigger and stronger than you were, sometimes your best wasn't good enough. The Canadians had found out all about that during the Great War, and Jonathan Moss had been one of the men who taught

them the lesson.

He turned the swivel chair back to the typewriter stand and started banging away again. He'd just got up a good head of steam when somebody knocked on the door. "Come in," he called. *Who the devil?* went though his mind. Clients didn't usually knock, and he had no one scheduled till the afternoon. The mailman didn't knock, either. Besides, the mail wouldn't get here for at least another hour. Just in case, Moss' hand found the pistol he'd taken to keeping in a desk drawer.

In walked Major Rex Finley. Moss pulled his hand out of the drawer. "Hello, Major," he said. "This is a surprise. What brings you here?"

"A government-issue Chevy, and I hope it'll bring me back to London, too," answered the officer who commanded the airdrome there.

Laughing, Jonathan pointed to the chair across from his desk and said, "Well, sit down and tell me what I can do for you."

"I've come to say good-bye," Finley said. "I've been transferred to Wright Field, outside of Dayton, Ohio. Captain Trotter will be in charge of things here from now on. You'll be able to keep flying. Don't worry about that. Before too long, we may want every trained man we can find." His voice had an edge to it.

"Dayton," Moss said musingly. "That's down toward the border, isn't it?"

Major Finley nodded. "It sure is, and it'll be even closer if there's a plebiscite in Kentucky and we lose." Neither of them said anything after that for a little while. If there was a plebiscite, the USA would lose. Everything Moss knew about Kentucky told him as much. By Finley's expression, he had the same opinion.

At last, Moss asked, "Do you really think it will come to ... that?"

"I don't know," Finley replied. "I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised."

"Well, well." Moss whistled tunelessly. "Do you want to go out and get drunk?"

"Too early in the day for me," Finley said with genuine regret. "And, like I said, I have to be able to drive back to London. But don't let me stop you."

"I've got work to do myself." Jonathan looked for a silver lining: "Maybe we're wrong. Here's hoping we're wrong."

Major Finley nodded. "Yes. Here's hoping." But he didn't sound as if he believed it.

Mary Pomeroy cut up pieces of fried pork chop and put them on Alec's plate along with some string beans. Her son ate string beans only under protest. He would eat them, though, and only rarely required threats of imminent bodily harm. Not even threats of imminent bodily harm would make him eat spinach. Bodily harm itself wouldn't; Mary and Mort had both made the experiment, which had left everyone in the family unhappy.

Mort dug in. "That's good," he said.

"Thanks," Mary answered. "What's the news at the diner?"

"Not a whole lot," her husband said. "Two different tables of Yank soldiers talking about whether there'll be a whatchamacallit down south."

"A plebiscite?" Mary asked.

Mort nodded. "That's it. I hear it a dozen times a day, and I never remember it."

"If there is one, the people down there will vote to leave the United States. They'll vote to be Confederates again," Mary said.

"I suppose so." Mort lit a cigarette. He didn't care one way or the other.

That he didn't care disappointed Mary. She did her best not to let it infuriate her. "What do you suppose would happen if we had one of those plebiscites here in Canada?" she asked.

Mort didn't answer right away. He was blowing smoke rings for Alec. He was good at it; he could send them out one after another. His son watched in goggle-eyed fascination. Only when Mort ran out of smoke did he shrug and say, "I don't know."

"Don't you think we'd vote to be Canadians again, to be free again?" Mary blazed. "Don't you think we'd vote to send the Yanks packing?"

"I suppose so." But Mort still didn't sound very excited. "But we're not going to get to vote, you know."

"Why not?" Mary said. "If the people in those states ever get to, we should, too. I don't want to be a Yank any more than somebody in Houston does."

After another virtuoso set of smoke rings, Mort said, "I'll tell you why not. Because those other places have the Confederate States shouting for 'em all the time. Who's going to shout for us? We can't even shout for ourselves."

Canadians didn't shout, or not very much. One surefire way to tell Yanks in Canada was by how much noise they made. Mary didn't just want to shout. She wanted to scream. "We ought to be shouting for ourselves. We're just as much a country as the United States are."

"I suppose we could be, if—" Mort began.

Alec interrupted: "More smoke rings, Daddy!"

But Mort stubbed out the cigarette in an ashtray. "Next time I light up, sport," he told the little boy, and turned back to Mary. "I suppose we could be, if they let us," he said, picking up where he'd left off. "But they aren't going to let us, and there's nobody who can make them let us. We're stuck. We might as well get used to it. If we do, maybe they'll ease up on us a little more."

Mary had never imagined hating her husband. She came unpleasantly close to it now. Mort wasn't a collaborator. Mary never would have had anything to do with him if he were, no matter how he stirred her. But he was— what would you call somebody like him?— an accommodator, that was it. He knew he was a Canadian. He even liked being a Canadian, and was proud of it. He didn't think staying a Canadian was worth a big fight, though. All he wanted to do was get along from one day to the next.

More and more Canadians seemed to be accommodators these days. That made Mary want to scream, too. Accommodate enough, accommodate long enough, and you weren't a Canadian any more, were you? Not as far as she could see. Didn't you turn into a pale imitation of a Yank instead?

"You want to go to the cinema Saturday night?" Mort asked. "The new film about Roosevelt's Unauthorized Regiment is supposed to be good. And they say Marion Morrison makes a first-rate TR."

"I don't think so," Mary said tightly, fighting hard against despair. Mort already sounded like a pale imitation of a Yank. He would have denied it if she'd called him on it. She didn't. She didn't want a fight. Life was too short, wasn't it?

If you don't fight, aren't you giving up, too? she asked herself. She supposed that was partly true, but only partly. She still cared about the wrongs the Americans had committed in occupying her country. She didn't, she wouldn't, forget.

"Oh," Mort said. "Almost slipped my mind."

"What?" Mary asked.

"You know Freddy Halliday?" Mort said. That was a silly question; Rosenfeld wasn't such a big town that everybody didn't know everybody else. Mary nodded impatiently. Her husband went on, "He says the public library really will open in two weeks. He says, 'Cross my heart and hope to die.' "

"Do you think it will happen?" Mary asked. Freddy Halliday had been trying to bring a public library to Rosenfeld for years. He hadn't had much luck till lately. Now he actually had a building a few doors down from the general store. He had it because the pharmacist who was supposed to come up from Minneapolis had got cold feet, but he did have it. Whether he had anything besides the building was a subject of much speculation in town.

"He *says* he has a permit from the occupying authorities in Winnipeg and a budget and books," Mort answered. "I don't know if he really does. If he doesn't, we ought to ride him out of town on a rail, to teach him not to get our hopes up."

"My hopes are up," Mary said. "You can have as much fun in a library as you can at the cinema, and it doesn't cost you anything." She

turned to Alec. "I wonder if it'll have any children's books for you."

"Read me a story?" Alec asked, cued by the word *books.*

"After supper," Mary said. That made Alec shovel food into his mouth like a stoker fueling a fast freight. Mary hoped most stokers had better aim than her little boy did.

It began to look as if Freddy Halliday had all the things he claimed he had. A brass plaque that said rosenfeld public library went up above the door to the forsaken pharmacy. A formidably stout maiden lady, a Miss Montague, moved into a ground-floor flat in the Pomeroys' block of flats and began spending all her waking hours in the building. A large truck brought crates of something to the place. If those crates didn't hold books, what *was* in them?

The promised opening day came ... and went. Everybody in town joked about it—everybody except Freddy Halliday, who remained resolutely upbeat. A week later, the Rosenfeld Public Library did in fact open its doors.

Mary wasn't there for the opening. Alec came down with a cold, which meant he had to stay home, which meant she had to stay home, too. She didn't get to the library for another week. It was a bright spring day, the sky a deep, almost painful, blue overhead. The few white clouds dappling it only made the glorious color deeper. Out on the farms beyond the edge of town, people would be taking advantage of this glorious weather to plant. Mary could just enjoy it. Walking along with Alec's little hand in hers, she felt guilty about not doing more.

In the library, Miss Montague sat behind a large wooden desk and under an almost equally large quiet, please! sign. She did smile at Alec, and pointed to, sure enough, the children's section. She didn't even breathe fire when Alec whooped with delight at finding books he hadn't seen before.

Mary arranged to get a library card for herself and one for Mort. She stole brief glimpses of novels and nonfiction books, encyclopedias and magazines and newspapers. "Look at all the telephone books," she said, trying to keep Alec interested so she could go on looking around. "You can find out the telephone number of anybody in Canada or the United States." She refused even to name the Republic of Quebec, stolen from her country as Kentucky and Houston had been stolen from the CSA.

"Why?" Alec asked her.

"So you can call them if you want to."

"But we don't got a telephone."

"Don't *have* a telephone. But if we did, we could."

"Why?" Alec asked again.

That string of questions could go on all day. Knowing as much, Mary said, "And here's a book of maps of the whole world." The big, colorful atlas distracted Alec.

It also distracted Mary, but only for a little while. *If I could call anybody, who would it be? What would I say?* The thought was enough to make her dizzy. She'd used a telephone only a handful of times in her life. The diner had one, but the flat didn't, and of course there hadn't been one on the farm. If she had a telephone, and if the farm had one, too, she supposed she would talk to her mother whenever she got the chance. She couldn't think of anyone else except her sister Julia she wanted to call. The people she knew in Rosenfeld she could visit whenever she pleased, while no telephone would ever let her talk with her brother or her father.

But even if she didn't have a telephone, lots of people in Canada and even more in the USA did. The telephone book for Toronto, for instance, had to be an inch and a half thick. Mary pulled it off the shelf—she didn't care even to open a telephone book from the United States. The first name she looked for was McGregor, the one she'd been born with. She found almost a page of McGregors, each name with not only a telephone number but also an address beside it. *That must be handy,* she thought, *especially in a big city where you don't know where everybody else lives.* After the McGregors, she checked the Pomeroys. There weren't so many of them—only a little more than a column's worth. She smiled at the obvious superiority of her own birth name. But then, when she saw the seven pages of Smiths, she decided quantity didn't make quality.

Alec got impatient watching his mother flip pages back and forth. "Want to go home," he said.

"Hush," Mary told him. "Don't talk loud in the library."

"Want to go *home."* Alec didn't care where he was, and knew where

he wanted to be.

"All right," Mary said. She was ready to go, too. But then, as they were on their way out, she suddenly stopped. Alec tugged at the pleats of her skirt. "Wait a second," she told him, and went over to the librarian's desk. "Excuse me, Miss Montague, but could I borrow a pencil and a little piece of paper?"

"Why, of course." The librarian gave them to her.

Alec's face clouded up when she went back. "It'll only be a minute," she said. "I want to see something." He didn't burst into tears on the spot, which was something. If he had, she would have had to take him home—and she would have warmed his fanny, too.

As things were, she found what she was looking for inside of two minutes. She wrote down what she needed to know, gave the pencil back to Miss Montague with a nod of thanks, and walked out of the library. Alec behaved on the way back. Why not? He was getting what he wanted. As Mary walked past the building that housed the *Rosenfeld Register,* she gave the newspaper a nod of thanks, too.

Lucien Galtier started up his motorcar. The Chevrolet roared to life right away. He'd finally had to replace the battery. The new one was much stronger than the old one had been, but he still grumbled at the expense. When he was driving a horse, he hadn't had to buy new pieces for it every so often.

Once the motor warmed up, he put the auto in gear and drove up toward Rivière-du-Loup. Today was his sixty-somethingeth birthday (he didn't care to contemplate the exact number), and Nicole and Dr. Leonard O'Doull had invited him to their house for supper to celebrate.

Part of him wondered why people celebrated getting older. Another part, the part that still ached for Marie, told him the answer: because the alternative was *not* getting older, and that was dreadfully final.

It had been a quarter of a century now since war's clawed hand raked across the countryside. Young men said you couldn't see the scars any more. Lucien knew better. Time had softened those wounds,

but they were still there if you knew where to look. And shells still lay buried in the ground. Every so often, they worked their way to the surface. Most of the time, *démineurs* took them away and disposed of them. Once in a while, one of them went off when a plowshare struck it or it suffered some other mischance of that sort. The Great War was still killing people, and would go on killing for years to come.

He drove past the post office. The Republic of Quebec's fleur-de-lys flag fluttered in the breeze in front of it. He was used to that flag now, but it still didn't feel like the flag of his country. He didn't suppose it ever would, not when he'd spent his first forty years in the province of Quebec rather than the Republic. Were things better now? Worse? Or just different? For the life of him, he had trouble saying.

There was the house where Nicole lived with Leonard O'Doull. He parked in front of the walk that led to the front porch. The grass on the lawn was green again. When he got out of the auto, he took the key with him. On the farm, he left it in the ignition half the time. That probably wouldn't do here in town, where a stranger might hop in and decide to go for a spin.

The door opened before he could knock. There stood his oldest grandson. By what magic had Lucien O'Doull grown taller than the man for whom he was named? "Happy birthday, *mon grandpère,"* he said. "Come in." That same magic, whatever it was, had given him a man-deep voice, too.

"Merci," Lucien Galtier said, and then, after an appreciative sniff, "What smells so good?" An instant later, he held up a hand. "No, don't tell me. I'll find out."

He followed his grandson down the short entry hall to the living room. As soon as he got there, a flashbulb went off in his face. What sounded like a million people shouted, *"Surprise!"*

" 'Osti," Lucien muttered, flinching with what was indeed surprise—shock probably came closer. With a large purplish-green spot swimming in front of his eyes, he needed a moment to see how jammed with people the living room was. He'd expected Nicole and Leonard and little Lucien, and they were there, but so were Denise and Charles and Georges and Susanne and Jeanne and their spouses and their children. And, he realized after another startled heartbeat, so was Éloise Granche.

"Surprise!" they all shouted again, even louder than before. Nicole

wriggled through the crowd and kissed Galtier on the cheek. "Happy birthday, *cher papa!"* Her husband raised the camera again. Another flashbulb froze the moment.

Lucien was at least partly braced for the second blast of light. He wagged a finger at his offspring. "You are a pack of devils, every one of you," he said. "You did your best to make this the last surprise I would ever have, this side of the Pearly Gates." He mimed clutching his breast and falling over dead.

His children and grandchildren laughed and cheered. Éloise Granche said, "If they are a pack of devils, where do you suppose they get it?" That brought more laughter yet. Éloise rose from the sofa and threaded her way past children and out to Lucien. As Nicole had, she said, "Happy birthday," and kissed Galtier. Leonard O'Doull took yet another photograph.

"Well, well," Lucien said. "I suspect you have all been plotting this for a very long time."

"Oh, no, Papa." Georges shook his head. "Your American son-in-law drove round to our houses a couple of hours ago, and since we weren't doing anything special tonight...."

"Nonsense," Galtier said. If there hadn't been so many women and children there, he would have said something more colorful than that. But *nonsense* would do. His younger son's head had always been full of it. Most of the grownups had glasses close by them, some full, some empty. Plaintively, Galtier asked, "Could it be that I might get something to drink?"

"Well, seeing that it *is* your birthday," Leonard O'Doull said with the air of a man granting a great concession. "And it could also be that I should prescribe something for that green-around-the-gills look you have. Would you like whiskey or apple brandy?"

"Yes," Galtier said: a reply worthy of Georges.

His son-in-law made a face at him. "Which, you cantankerous creature?"

"Apple brandy, by choice," Lucien answered. He would drink whiskey readily enough, but he wasn't wild about it. He turned to Éloise. "And what are you doing here?"

"Why, wishing you a happy birthday, of course," she answered demurely. "I hope it is a happy birthday?"

"It seems to be, so far," he answered; coming right out and admitting he was happy struck him as a show of weakness. He turned to Leonard O'Doull. "You see? You have been listening to gossip again."

"And what if I have?" O'Doull replied. "Are you complaining?"

"Me? Not at all. I am glad I am here. I am glad everyone is here," Galtier said. "And I do mean everyone." He smiled at Éloise. He wanted to kiss her again, but he wouldn't do that, not in front of his children and grandchildren. They might—most of the ones old enough to understand surely did—know he and Éloise were more than friends, but there was a difference between knowing and showing. One little kiss had been all right. Two would have been excessive. The difference mattered to him. That it might matter much less to his offspring never once crossed his mind.

Nicole disappeared into the kitchen. When she came out, it was with some of the most arresting words in any language: "Supper's ready!"

Fried chicken, lamb fragrant with garlic, rabbits stewed with plums, fresh spinach and peas, stewed turnips, endless snowy mounds of mashed potatoes, plenty of whiskey and applejack and beer to wash them down ... Any man who couldn't be happy after a feast like that wasn't trying hard enough. Lucien ate till he wanted to curl up on his chair and go to sleep. Nor was he the only one who went above and beyond the call of duty; Georges could easily have built a whole new chicken from the mound of bones on his plate.

Everyone groaned with horrified pleasure when Nicole brought out an enormous birthday cake. A single large candle topped it. Leonard O'Doull grinned evilly at Lucien. "We did not want to put a candle for each year," he said, "for fear you would burn the house down when you tried to blow them out."

"An old man hasn't got enough wind to blow out that many candles anyhow," Georges put in.

"I gave you the strap when you were little," Lucien told his younger son, "but not enough of it, I see. Well, *le bon Dieu* is still listening. I did not know 'Dishonor thy father and mother' was one of the

commandments."

"Don't be silly. I wouldn't think of saying a word against *maman."* Georges' face was the picture of innocence. Galtier snorted.

Charles struck a match and lit the candle. "Blow it out, Papa, so we can eat the cake," he said sensibly. Unlike Georges, he had no wildness in him, but he made a good, solid man.

Blow it out Lucien did. Everybody cheered. Nicole cut the cake. She gave her father the first piece. He had no idea how he found room for it, but he did. His children and their spouses groaned as they ate. His grandchildren might have been a swarm of locusts. Lucien marveled that they left any of the cake undevoured.

"Now," Nicole said briskly, "presents."

Galtier tried to wave them away. "That I am here with my family is enough—more than enough," he said. Nobody listened to him. He hadn't thought anyone would. Now that he'd made the protest, he could enjoy his gifts and not be thought greedy.

From Charles, he got a soft tweed jacket better suited to a gentleman of leisure than to a working farmer. That was how it seemed to him, anyhow. But Éloise said, "It's perfect to wear to a dance." He hadn't thought of that. Once she said it, though, he saw she was right.

Georges gave him a fancy pipe and some even fancier tobacco. When he opened the tin, the rich fragrance filled the room. *"Calisse,"* he said reverently. "That smells so good, I won't even have to smoke it... And what's this?"

This came from Nicole and Leonard O'Doull. It was a big bottle of real Calvados, not the imitations turned out by local craftsmen who didn't care for the Republic of Quebec's tedious excise-tax regulations. " 'This fine brandy is patronized by his Majesty, King Charles XI, King of France,' " Galtier read from the label.

"Mais certainement," his son-in-law said. "I personally wrestled this very bottle from King Charles' own hands."

"You certainly are a muttonhead," Lucien said.

Éloise Granche gave him a maroon wool sweater. Everyone said it

was very handsome. Again, Lucien thought it finer than what he usually wore, but it was thick and warm. It would do nicely in spring and fall and, under a coat, in wintertime, too. "I hope you like it," Éloise said.

"I do, very much," he said. "It is always pleasant when a friend thinks of me." He spoke with a straight face. Éloise nodded. So did Galtier's children and their spouses. Most of his grandchildren were too young to care one way or the other. Decorum was preserved.

Later, when he was carrying booty out to the Chevrolet, Éloise said, "Could you give me a ride back to my house, *cher* Lucien? I would not care to impose on Dr. O'Doull to drive me both ways."

"It would be no trouble at all," Leonard O'Doull said politely.

"No, no, don't put yourself to the trouble," Galtier said. "Everyone has done so much for me today. It would be my pleasure to do this." His son-in-law let himself be persuaded.

"I hope you had a happy birthday," Éloise said as they rolled out of Rivière-du-Loup and into the countryside.

"Very happy." Now Lucien could admit it. He chuckled. "I have not had a surprise party since I was eight years old."

When they pulled up in front of her house, she smiled and asked, "And is there anything else you might like for your birthday?"

"It could be," he said. "Yes, it could be." They went inside together.

Except from the roof of the U.S. embassy, the Stars and Stripes had not flown in Richmond for almost eighty years. Only a handful of ancient men and women remembered the days when Virginia was one of the United States. Now, though, as Jake Featherston waited in the June heat inside the railroad station to receive the special train southbound from Washington, U.S. and C.S. flags flew side by side throughout the Confederate capital. No president of the United States had ever made an official visit to Richmond ... till now.

Featherston wore the uniform of a Freedom Party guard, almost

identical in cut and color to that of the Confederate Army. The summer-weight cotton cloth was cooler and more comfortable than a suit would have been. With Jake's rangy height, the uniform was also much more impressive on him.

Photographers snapped away. Newsreel cameras ground out footage. Reporters waited for quotes. Jake reminded himself that he had to be extra careful about what he did and said in public. The Confederate press crews would make him look and sound the way he and Saul Goldman thought he should. The crews from the USA were a different story, though. Half—more than half—of them were here hoping to see him look and sound like a fool. And he couldn't keep them out of the CSA, not when President Smith was coming. *Just have to be smarter than they are,* he thought, and smiled a little nastily. *Shouldn't be hard.*

A stalwart in white shirt and butternut trousers put down a telephone and hurried over to him. "The train's about two minutes away, boss," he said.

"Thanks, Ozzie," Jake answered. The stalwart drew back. *Are you loyal?* Featherston wondered. *Are you really loyal?* Ever since Willy Knight tried to do him in, he'd wondered about almost everyone around him—everyone except Ferd Koenig and Saul Goldman and a handful of other old campaigners. He'd chosen his new vice president, a senator from Tennessee named Donald Partridge, not least because Don was an amiable nonentity who couldn't hope to threaten him.

Here came Al Smith's train. Schoolchildren on the platform started waving the Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars. A military band struck up "The Battle Cry of Freedom," a tune both sides had used—with different lyrics—during the War of Secession.

The train came to a stop. A colored attendant brought up the little stepped platform people used to descend to the station. Freedom Party guards—not stalwarts, who were less likely to be trustworthy—with submachine guns fanned out to make sure there were no unfortunate international incidents. The door to Smith's Pullman car opened. The first men out were the U.S. president's bodyguards. They wore civilian suits, not butternut uniforms, but otherwise were stamped from the same hard-faced mold as the Freedom Party men.

When President Smith himself emerged, the band began to play "The Star-Spangled Banner," a tune heard as seldom in Richmond as the Stars and Stripes were seen. Under a jaunty fedora, Smith's hair

was snow white. He looked older and wearier than Jake Featherston had expected. But he managed a smile for the swarm of cameramen and reporters, and walked up to Jake with a friendly nod. "Pleased t'meetcha, Mr. President," he said.

"Right pleased to meet you, too, Mr. President," Jake answered. Flash photographs and the newsreel cameras recorded their handshake for posterity. Jake had heard Al Smith on the wireless and in newsreels. He'd found the other president's New York City accent hard to follow then. It proved no easier in person. Smith highlighted sounds anyone from the Confederate States would have swallowed, and chopped up what a Confederate would have stretched out.

"Looking forward to hashing things out wit' you," Smith said.

"Welcome to Richmond," Featherston said. "About time we did sit down and talk face to face. Best way to settle things." *Best way for you to give me what I want.*

"You betcha," Smith said. Jake took that to be agreement. The military band switched from the U.S. national anthem to "Dixie." President Smith took off his hat and stood at attention.

Also at attention beside him, Jake Featherston admitted to himself it was a nice touch. When the Confederate anthem ended, Jake said, "Shall we go on to the Gray House and do a little horse-trading?"

"That's a deal," Al Smith said.

Surrounded by bodyguards from both countries—who eyed one another almost as warily as they examined bystanders—the two presidents went out to Featherston's new limousine. The previous motorcar had been armored. This one could have been a barrel, except it didn't have a turret. Anyone who tried to murder the president of the CSA while he was in it was wasting his time.

Unfortunately, with the thick windows rolled up, traveling in the limousine was about as hot as traveling in a barrel. Al Smith promptly rolled his down a few inches. "They want to take a shot at me, they can take a shot at me," he said. "At least I won't roast."

"Suits me." Jake did his best to stay nonchalant. His guards and Smith's were probably all having conniptions. *Well, too damn bad,* he thought.

The parade route from the station to the Gray House jogged once. That way, Smith—and the reporters with him—didn't see the damage from an auto bomb Red Negroes had set off two days before. Featherston hated the black man who'd come up with that tactic. It did a lot of damage, it spread even more fear, and it was damned hard to defend against. Too many Negroes, too many motorcars—how could you check them all? You couldn't, worse luck.

If President Smith noticed the jog, he was too polite to say so. He smiled out at the flag-waving children and adults lining the route. "Nice crowd," he said, with no trace of irony Featherston could hear. Did that mean he didn't realize they'd been specially brought out for the occasion? Jake hoped so.

When they got to the Gray House, Smith stared at it with interest. *Comparing it to the White House,* Jake thought, *or to that place in Philadelphia.*

They posed for more pictures in the downstairs reception hall, and then in Jake's office. Then they shooed the photographers out of the room. "Care for a drink before we get down to business?" Featherston asked. He'd heard Al Smith could put it away pretty good, and he wasn't so bad himself.

"Sure. Why not?" the president of the USA said.

A colored servant brought a bottle of hundred-proof bourbon, some ice cubes, and two glasses. Jake did the honors himself. He raised his glass to Al Smith. "Mud in your eye," he said. They both drank.

"Ah!" Smith said. "That's the straight goods." He took another sip. Anyone that whiskey didn't faze had seen the bottom of more than one glass in his day, sure as hell.

After Featherston poured refills, he said, "You know what I want, Mr. President. You know what's right, too, by God." As far as he was concerned, the two were one and the same. "Let the people choose. We'll take our chances with that."

"And in the meantime, you'll keep murdering anybody in Kentucky and Houston who doesn't go along," Smith said.

"We haven't got anything to do with that." Jake lied without compunction.

The president of the USA let out a laugh that was half a cough. "My ass."

Featherston blinked. Nobody'd come right out and called him a liar for a long time. He said, "You're just afraid of a plebiscite on account of you know what'll happen."

"If I was afraid of a plebiscite, I wouldn't be here," Al Smith answered. "But if we go that way, I've got some conditions of my own."

"Let's hear 'em," Jake said. Maybe he wouldn't be able to grab everything on the table. If he got it served to him course by course, though, that would do.

"First thing is, no bloodshed in the time before the plebiscite," Smith said. "If people are going to vote, let 'em vote without being afraid."

"If you call a plebiscite, I expect the folks in the occupied states will be happy enough to go along with that," Featherston said at once. He could rein in most of his people, and say the ones he didn't rein in weren't his fault. Besides, everybody knew by now what the Freedom Party could do. It wouldn't have to add much more in the runup to a plebiscite to keep the message fresh.

"All right. Number two, then," Al Smith said. "You want the people to vote, the people should vote. All the people—everybody over twenty-one in Houston and Kentucky and Sequoyah."

"I've been saying that all along," Jake answered. Despite his thunderings, he didn't know if he would win in Sequoyah. Settlers from the USA had flooded into it since the war. Before, the Confederates had kept white settlement slow out of deference to the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians, who'd helped so much in the War of Secession. The United States had always been hard on Indians, which was why the Creeks and the Cherokees and the rest were so loyal to the CSA.

But President Smith shook his head. "I don't think you get it. When I say everybody, I mean *everybody*. Whites and Negroes."

"Whites *and* Negroes?" Jake was genuinely shocked. That hadn't even occurred to him. "Niggers've never been able to vote in the CSA. They sure as hell won't vote once they come back, either. Hell, they

can't vote in those states now."

"They'll vote in the plebiscite," Smith said. "They've got surnames these days. We can keep track of 'em, make sure it's fair and honest. They aren't slaves any more. In the USA, they're citizens, even if they don't vote. If they're going to change countries, they have to be able to help make the choice."

Jake considered. Smith had neatly turned the tables on him. He'd been yelling, *Let the people vote!* Now Smith said, *Let* all *the people vote!* How could he say no to that without looking like a fool? He couldn't, and he knew it. "All right, goddammit," he ground out. That made Sequoyah even iffier, but he didn't think it would hurt—except as far as precedent went—in Kentucky or Houston.

Smith seemed a little surprised he'd accepted, even if grudgingly. He gave his next condition: "Any state that changes hands stays demilitarized for twenty-five years."

"That's a bargain." Jake didn't hesitate for even a moment there. He knew he would break the deal inside of twenty-five days. He could always manufacture incidents to give him an excuse—or maybe, if the blacks got uppity, he wouldn't have to manufacture any. "What else?"

"These have to be your *last* demands as far as territorial changes go," Smith said. That would leave the United States with part of Virginia, part of Arkansas, part of Sonora—maybe enough to claim they'd still made a profit on the war.

"Well, of course," Featherston said, again without hesitation. *If I get that much, I'll get the rest, too—you bet I will.* "Anything else?"

"Yes—one more thing," the U.S. president said. "We can announce an agreement now, but I don't think the vote itself oughta come before 1941. We should have a proper campaign—let both sides be heard."

"What?" Featherston frowned, wondering what sort of fast one Smith was trying to pull there. Then, suddenly, he laughed. Al Smith would run for reelection in November. He wanted to be able to say he'd made peace with the Confederate States, but he didn't want to have to hand over any territory to them before Election Day. Afterwards, he'd have plenty of time to repair the damage. *He thinks so, anyway.* "All right, Mr. President," Jake said. "You've got yourself a deal."

Anne Colleton had heard that people danced in the streets in Richmond when Woodrow Wilson declared war on the United States. Now the newsboys here shouted, "Plebiscite!"—and people danced in the street. Maybe that was because they thought there wouldn't be a war now. But maybe—and, odds were, more likely—it was because they thought the Confederate States would finally get back what they'd lost in the war.

She thought as much herself. She felt proud of herself for backing the right horse. Before the Freedom Party came to power, who would have believed the United States would ever even think of turning loose the lands they'd stolen from the CSA? But the stolen states had grown too hot to hold on to; the United States kept burning their fingers. And if that wasn't Jake Featherston's doing, whose was it? *The right horse, sure enough,* Anne thought smugly.

Celebrations in Capitol Square, across the street from Ford's Hotel, were noisy enough to keep her awake at night. She hadn't thought of that when she checked in. There were, of course, plenty of worse problems to have, even if she needed her sleep more regularly than she had when she was younger.

She was in Richmond to pay a call on the French embassy. Some of the men with whom she'd conferred in Paris years before had risen in prominence since. She could talk with one of them informally but still leave him certain he understood where the Confederate government stood. She hadn't had much chance to speak French lately, but she expected her accent wouldn't be too barbarous.

Across from the French embassy east of Capitol Square stood the much bigger building housing the U.S. embassy. A man-high fence of pointed iron palings protected the neoclassical white marble pile above which flew the Stars and Stripes. Anne understood why the U.S. embassy needed that kind of protection. How many times had her countrymen wanted to give it what they thought it deserved?

But not today. Today people cheered the U.S. military guards in their green-gray uniforms. The guards stood impassive at the entrance

to the embassy. Their faces showed nothing of what they were thinking. All the same, Anne wondered what that would be. How happy did the prospect of a plebiscite in the annexed states make them?

Not very, I hope.

Colonel Jean-Henri Jusserand had been French military attaché in the Confederate States since sailing across the Atlantic with Anne aboard the *Charles XL* "So good to see you again, *Mademoiselle* Colleton," he said, bowing over her hand. "It has been too long a time."

"Yes, I think so, too," she said. "I hope you are well?"

"I must confess, the weather here in summer is a trial," Jusserand replied. "Other than that, though, yes, thank you. And I must also say that I am full of admiration for the extraordinary achievement of your government. *C'est formidable!"*

"Merci beaucoup," Anne said. "I hope that France will soon have similar good fortune with respect to Alsace and Lorraine."

Colonel Jusserand's narrow, intelligent face twisted. "Who can say? The Germans delay and delay. They delay endlessly. And we cannot even tax them for it overmuch, for the Kaiser delays dying. He delays and delays, delays— almost—endlessly. And while he is dying, what can be decided? Why, nothing, of course."

"There are ways to make them decide," Anne murmured.

"To go to war, do you mean?" the military attaché asked. Anne nodded. Jusserand sighed. "It is not so simple. I wish it were, but it is not. We have to know what the English will do, and the Russians, and the Italians. Until we are sure, how can we move? The *Boches* have beaten us twice in a lifetime. If we lose for a third time, we are ruined forever."

"When we came across the Atlantic from France to the Confederate States a few years ago, your country was ahead of mine," Anne said. "You poked and prodded at the Germans, while we could not do much with the United States. Things are different now. *C'est dommage."*

The Frenchman's eyes flashed. "Yes, it is a pity," he agreed. "You will understand, I hope, that there are those who wish to move faster.

And we wish to be certain that if we do move, we shall not move alone. If the United States are not distracted, if they land on our back while we face the German Empire..."

Anne had gone to the French embassy to pass along a message. Now she saw she was getting one in return. "I do not believe, my dear Colonel, that you need concern yourself on that score."

"Ah? *Vraiment?*" Colonel Jusserand looked alert. "May I pass this interesting news on to my superiors—unofficially, of course?"

"Yes—as long as it is unofficially," Anne answered.

He nodded. They understood each other. After some small talk, she stood to go. He bowed over her hand. He even kissed it. But it was politeness, and politeness only. No spark leaped. Anne could tell. That politeness felt like a little death. *Twenty years ago, he would have drunk champagne front my slipper,* she thought bitterly as she left the embassy. She hated the calendar, hated the mirror and what it showed her every morning. *A handsome woman, that's what you are.* She would almost rather have been ugly. Then she wouldn't have to remember the beauty she had been not so long ago.

She had walked to the French embassy. It was only three blocks from her hotel. She thought hard about taking a taxi back. All the heat and humidity had manifested themselves while she talked with Colonel Jusserand. The sun beat down from a sky like enameled brass. The air was thick as porridge. Sweat rivered off her and had nowhere to go. Every step felt enervating.

Stubbornly, she kept on. The hotel bar was air-conditioned. Just then, she would have crawled through broken glass to get out of the heat. Not many whites were on the sidewalks, though plenty drove past. But most of the pedestrians were Negroes.

By their clothes, a lot of them hadn't been in Richmond long. She had no trouble recognizing sharecroppers thrown off the land as farming grew increasingly mechanized. She'd seen plenty of them in St. Matthews. Some of them turned to odd jobs in town, others to petty theft. The big farms, the farms that raised cotton and tobacco and grain, seemed to get on fine without them. Tractors and harvesters could do the work of scores, even hundreds, of men.

" 'Scuse me, ma'am, but could you spare me a quarter?" a gaunt colored man asked, touching the brim of his straw hat. "I's powerful

hungry."

Anne walked past him as if he didn't exist. She heard him sigh behind her. How many times had whites pretended not to see him? She didn't care if he thought she was heartless. He'd been old enough to carry a rifle in the uprisings during the war. As far as she was concerned, that meant she couldn't trust him. She was glad a good number of policemen and Freedom Party stalwarts tramped along the streets.

She walked past three or four more black beggars before getting back to Ford's Hotel. One of them cursed softly when she went by without taking notice of him. He couldn't have been in Richmond long, or he would have got used to being ignored. At the hotel, the colored doorman in his magnificent uniform smiled and bowed as he held the door open for her. Before the war, she would have taken that subservience as no less than her due. Now she wondered what lay behind it—wondered and had no trouble coming up with a nasty answer.

When she strode into the bar, she let out a sigh of relief. The cold air gushing from the vents seemed a blessing from on high. She ordered a gin and tonic and took the drink back to a small table. Five minutes later, she was fighting not to shiver. She'd never imagined that air conditioning could be too effective, but it was here. She felt as if she'd gone from subtropical Richmond to somewhere just north of the Arctic Circle.

A bespectacled officer—a colonel, she saw by the three stars on his collar tabs—sitting at the bar picked up his drink and carried it over to her table. "May I join you?" he asked, his accent sounding more like a Yankee's than that of a man from the CSA.

"Clarence!" she said, and sprang to her feet to give him a hug. "Wonderful to see you again—it's been years. I remember when you got your name in the papers at the Olympics, but I'd forgotten they put you back in uniform."

"Had to find something to do with me," Clarence Potter answered lightly, but with a hint of bitterness underneath. "How have you been, Anne? You still look damn good."

She couldn't remember the last time a man told her something like that and sounded as if he meant it. When she and Clarence had briefly been lovers down in South Carolina, nothing personal drove them

apart, but she'd backed the Freedom Party while he despised Jake Featherston. Despite the saying, politics had unmade them as bedfellows.

"I'm—well enough," she said. She and Potter both sat down. She couldn't help asking, "What do you think of the plebiscites?"

"I'm amazed," he said simply. "If you'd told me five years ago that we could annoy the United States into calling elections they're bound to lose, if you'd told me we could get Kentucky back without going to war, I would have said you were out of your ever-loving mind. That's what I would have said, but I would have been wrong."

Not many men, as Anne knew too well, ever admitted they were wrong for any reason. All the same, she couldn't help asking, "And what do you think of the president now? He's sharper than you figured."

"I never figured he wasn't sharp. I figured he was crazy." Potter didn't hold his voice down. He'd never been shy about saying what he thought, and he'd never worried much about what might come after that. After a sip at his own drink—another gin and tonic, Anne saw—he went on, "If he is crazy, though, he's crazy like a fox, so maybe I'm the one who was crazy all along. You can't argue with what he's accomplished."

She noticed he still separated the accomplishments from the man. In the CSA these days, people were encouraged—to put it mildly—to think of Jake Featherston and his accomplishments as going together. No, Clarence had never been one to join the common herd. Anne didn't mind that; neither had she. "What are you doing in the Army these days?" she asked.

"Intelligence, same as before," he answered, and then not another word. Given the four he had used, that wasn't surprising. After a moment, he asked a question of his own: "Why did you come up to Richmond?"

"Parce que je peut parler français bien," she said.

It didn't faze him. He nodded as if she'd given him a puzzle piece he needed. He hesitated again, then asked, "How long are you going to be here?"

"Another few days." She looked him in the eye. "Shall we make the

most of it?" She'd never been coy, and the older she got, the less point to it she saw.

That didn't faze him, either. He nodded again. "Why not?" he said.

Colonel Irving Morrell didn't think he'd ever seen people dance in the streets before, not outside of a bad musical comedy on the cinema screen. Here in Lubbock, people were dancing in the streets, dancing and singing, "Plebiscite!" and, "Yanks out!" and whatever other lovely lyrics they could make up.

The people of the state of Houston had been his fellow citizens ever since it joined the USA after the Great War. If he'd been carrying a machine gun instead of the .45 on his belt, he would have gunned down every single one of them he saw, and he would have smiled while he did it, too.

Sergeant Michael Pound, who strode down the sidewalk with him, was every bit as appalled as he was. "What are they going to do with us, sir, once we have to get out of this state?" the gunner asked.

"I don't know," Morrell said tightly. He'd tried not to think about that. He couldn't help thinking about it, but he'd done his best not to.

Sergeant Pound, on the other hand, seemed to take a perverse pleasure in analyzing what had just happened. *He probably enjoys picking scabs off to watch things bleed, too,* Morrell thought. "This is a defeat, sir—nothing but a defeat," Pound said. "How many divisions would those Confederate sons of bitches have needed to run us out of here? More than they've got, by God— I'll tell you that."

"Democracy," Morrell answered. "Will of the people. President Smith says so."

Before Sergeant Pound could reply—could say something that might perhaps have been prejudicial to good discipline—one of the local revelers whirled up to the U.S. soldiers and jeered, "Now you damnyankee bastards can get your asses out of Texas and go to hell where you belong."

Colonel Morrell did not pause to discuss the niceties of the

situation with him. He punched him in the nose instead. Sergeant Pound kicked the reveler on the way down. He didn't get up again.

"Anybody else?" Morrell asked. The .45 had left its holster and appeared in his right hand with almost magical speed.

Before President Smith and President Featherston agreed on the plebiscite, the U.S. officer would have touched off a riot by slugging a Houstonian. Now the rest of the dancers left him and Sergeant Pound alone. They'd already got most of what they wanted, and Morrell knew they would get the rest as soon as the votes from the plebiscite were counted. And most of them didn't want to give the U.S. Army big, overt provocations any more. Those could jeopardize what they'd been screaming for.

Sergeant Pound must have been thinking along with Morrell, for he said, "Freedom Party goons will probably thump that big-mouthed son of a bitch harder than we ever did."

"Good," Morrell said, and said no more.

A woman—a genteel-looking, middle-aged woman—said something inflammatory about U.S. soldiers and their affections for their mothers. Morrell still held the .45 in his hand. Ever so slightly, his index finger tightened on the trigger. He willed it to relax. After a few seconds, the rebellious digit obeyed his will.

An Army truck took Morrell and Pound out of Lubbock and back to the Army base outside of town. As far as Morrell could tell, Army bases and colored districts were the only parts of Houston where anybody still gave a damn about the USA.

A young lieutenant waylaid Morrell as soon as he jumped down from the truck. "Sir, Brigadier General MacArthur wants to see you in his office right away."

"Thank you," Morrell said, in lieu of something more pungent. Sergeant Pound went on his way, a free man. Morrell sighed. The guards outside Mac-Arthur's office glowered at him despite his uniform as he approached, but relaxed and passed him through when they recognized him and decided he wasn't an assassin in disguise. He saluted Daniel MacArthur. "Reporting as ordered, sir."

The lantern-jawed U.S. commander in Houston returned the salute, then waved Morrell to a chair. "Easier to fiddle sitting down while

Rome burns, eh, Colonel?"

"Sir, I just had the pleasure of coldcocking one of those goddamn Houstonian bastards." Morrell explained exactly what he'd done on the streets of Lubbock, and why. The only thing he didn't do was name Michael Pound. The responsibility was his, not the sergeant's.

MacArthur heard him out. "I have two things to say about that," the general said when he was done. "The first is, by this time tomorrow Jake Featherston's pet wireless stations will be baying about another damnyankee atrocity in the occupied lands."

Morrell's opinion about where the president of the CSA could stick his wireless stations was anatomically improbable, but no less heartfelt on account of that. "Sideways," he added.

"Indeed." Daniel MacArthur stuck a cigarette into the long, long holder he affected. He lit it and blew out a cloud of smoke. "The second thing I have to say, Colonel, is that I'm jealous. You have no idea how jealous I am. You keep managing to hit back, while I've had to turn the other cheek again and again and again. It's enough to make me wonder about Christianity; it truly is."

"Er, yes, sir," Morrell said, not knowing how else to respond to that. "On the whole, though, things have been a lot quieter since President Smith agreed to the plebiscite."

"Of *course* they have!" Brigadier General MacArthur exploded. "The miserable fool has given the Confederate States exactly what they've always wanted. Is it any wonder that they're willing to take it?"

"No wonder at all," Morrell agreed. "Sir, if Smith had told Featherston to go jump in a lake, do you think the Confederates would have gone to war with us over Houston and Kentucky and Sequoyah?"

"I would have liked to see them try," MacArthur answered with a contemptuous snort. "I don't care how fast they're rearming. There is such a thing as fighting out of your weight. That's what infuriates me so: they'll likely win with the ballot box what they couldn't on the battlefield."

Morrell wondered about that. Hadn't Houston and Kentucky and Sequoyah *been* battlefields for the past several years? That was the way it seemed to him. The Confederates' sympathizers had taken a lot more casualties than they'd inflicted on the U.S. Army and U.S.

sympathizers in the disputed states, but they hadn't cared. They'd thought it was all worthwhile. The United States hadn't held the same opinion about the losses they'd suffered. In the end, that made all the difference.

Daniel MacArthur saw things the same way. "We have sustained a total, unmitigated defeat," he said. Michael Pound had said the same thing, without the fancy adjectives. Being a general entitled MacArthur to use them. In fine rhetorical fettle, he went on, "Do not let us blind ourselves. The road to the Ohio, the road that points to Pittsburgh and the Great Lakes, has been broken. Throughout these days, the president has believed in addressing Mr. Featherston with the language of sweet reasonableness. I have always believed he was more open to the language of the mailed fist."

"Yes, sir," Morrell said. "I wish I could have punched him instead of that fanatic a little while ago."

"Punched whom?" MacArthur asked. "Smith or Featherston?"

That was an interesting question—to say nothing of inflammatory. It was so interesting, Morrell pretended he hadn't heard it. He asked a question of his own: "If things really have quieted down around here, sir, what do we do till they finally hold the plebiscite?"

"We get ready to leave," MacArthur said bluntly. "Or do you think the USA will win the vote?"

"If we were going to win this vote, sir, they wouldn't need the Army to hold the lid on here," Morrell said.

MacArthur nodded. "That's how I see it, too. The other thing we'll do is make sure all the eligible niggers in Houston come out and vote in the plebiscite."

"It won't help," Morrell said. "We'll still lose."

"I am aware of that, thank you." Daniel MacArthur might have been talking to the village idiot. Colonel Morrell's ears heated. His superior went on, "Nevertheless, the more independence those people show, the more trouble they'll cause the Confederate State after we lose the election."

"Well, yes, sir," Morrell allowed. "But they won't cause all *that* much trouble, on account of there aren't enough of them in Houston. And

the Confederates have never been shy about shooting Negroes whenever they thought they needed to. With Featherston in the saddle, they don't even think twice."

"Have you any other observations to make?" MacArthur asked icily.

"No, sir." Morrell knew he couldn't very well observe that Brigadier General MacArthur had a thin skin and couldn't stand having anybody disagree with him. It was true enough—MacArthur's chagrin just now showed how true it was—but the other officer would only get angrier if he said so.

Sure enough, MacArthur imperiously—and imperially—pointed toward the door with the cigarette holder. "In that case, Colonel, you are dismissed."

Morrell gave him a salute extravagant in its adoration. His about-face would have won praise from a drill sergeant on a West Point parade ground. As he marched out of the brigadier general's office, though, he reflected that he was probably wasting irony. MacArthur would accept the gestures as no less than his due. Back during the war, General Custer had shown the same sort of blindness.

Come to think of it, MacArthur had served under Custer during the war. Had he learned that sort of arrogance from the past master? Possible, Morrell decided, but not likely. Odds were MacArthur would have been a cocksure son of a bitch even if he'd never met George Armstrong Custer.

The guards outside the office saluted Morrell. He returned their salutes in proper casual style. They hadn't done anything to raise his blood pressure. No, that distinction belonged to the U.S. commandant in Houston—and to all the Houstonians who didn't want to belong to the United States. He blamed them less than he blamed Daniel MacArthur. He and MacArthur were supposed to be on the same side.

Instead of going back to BOQ and getting drunk at the bar or brooding in his hot, airless little cubicle, Morrell headed over to the barrel park. The big, lumbering machines were always breaking down. Even when they weren't broken down, they needed constant maintenance to keep running the way they were supposed to. Getting his hands and his uniform dirty was at least as good a way of blowing off steam as getting a snootful of whiskey—and he wouldn't have a thick head in the morning, either.

He wasn't surprised to find Michael Pound in the barrel park fiddling with a carburetor. "Hello, sir," the sergeant said. "And how is the Grand High Panjandrum today?"

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that," Morrell said, sternly suppressing the urge to snicker. "And you're goddamn lucky I'm going to pretend I didn't hear it, too."

"Yes, sir," Sergeant Pound said innocently. "Well, in that case, how is Brigadier General MacArthur?" He sounded no more respectful than he had a moment earlier.

Since Irving Morrell wasn't feeling particularly respectful toward the commandant, he overlooked the sergeant's tone this time. "Brigadier General MacArthur doubts that the USA can win the upcoming plebiscite," Morrell said. "He is unhappy about returning Houston to the CSA." That was like canned rations—it kept the substance and lost the flavor. And was there any U.S. soldier in Houston happy about returning Houston to the Confederacy? If there was, Morrell hadn't met him.

Sergeant Pound asked, "Does he suggest anything we can actually do about it?"

"Such as?" Morrell said. "President Smith has the right to do what he wants here. If he thinks a plebiscite is a good idea, he can order one."

"If he thinks a plebiscite is a good idea, he's an idiot," Pound said. "We'll pay for it down the road. Probably not very far down the road, either."

Once more, Morrell wished he thought the sergeant was wrong.

Colonel Clarence Potter was about as happy as a naturally dour man could be. Part of his somber joy came from the upcoming plebiscite. For more than twenty years, he'd wanted to see the stolen states brought back into the Confederacy, and now it seemed they would be. He gave Jake Featherston all the credit in the world for that. He gave it reluctantly, but not insincerely. He'd thought Jake was out of his mind. Maybe Jake was, but he'd read Al Smith like a book.

And part of Potter's present happiness had very little to do with Jake Featherston—at least directly. He'd never been a man who had extraordinary luck with women. He'd never married, and he'd never come particularly close to marrying. Like a fisherman, he had sometimes talked about the one that got away. For him, that had been Anne Colleton.

They'd always got on well down in South Carolina. But he hadn't been able to stand the Freedom Party, and she'd ended up backing it. That had been plenty to keep the two of them from staying together. Potter had thought he would never see her again, except possibly over gunsights—and he hadn't been sure which of them would be aiming the gun.

Now ... Now, lazy in the afterglow, he sprawled on the bed in Ford's Hotel. "You see?" he said. "You just wanted me to tell you I was wrong."

"Well, of course," Anne answered, and poked him in the ribs. "What else does a woman want to hear from a man?"

"How about, 'I love you'? How about, 'You're beautiful'?" Potter suggested.

"Those are nice, too," she agreed with a smile. "As far as I'm concerned, though, nothing's better than, 'You were right.' "

He believed her. He didn't tell her so. She was too likely to take it the wrong way, to think he meant she was tough and bossy. And, as a matter of fact, he *did* think she was tough and bossy. To his way of thinking, though, that was a compliment. He had as little use for a woman who couldn't take care of herself as for a man who couldn't take care of himself.

"You *are* beautiful, you know," he said.

The smile didn't just fade. It blew out like a candle flame. "I used to be," she said bleakly. "You don't need to butter me up, Clarence. I know what's there when I look in the mirror."

"You're not young any more. So what?" Potter shrugged. The motion made the mattress shake beneath him. "I'm no spring chicken these days, either. And have you looked at *all* of you in a mirror lately?" He ran a hand along the length of her. "You've got nothing to worry about."

"Like hell I don't," Anne said. "My tits sag, I'm thick in the middle, and I'm spread in the butt."

"You're not young any more. So what?" he said again. "You still look damn good. I might lie, but do you think *he* would? He's either sincere or he doesn't work at all, especially at my age."

Anne laughed. A moment later, though, she rolled over onto her stomach and started sobbing into her pillow. Startled, Potter put a hand on her shoulder. She shook it off.

"What's the matter?" he asked, honestly bewildered.

"You son of a bitch," she said, her voice muffled. "I don't remember the last time a man made me cry. I didn't think anybody could any more. And then you went and did it."

"I didn't mean to," he said.

"I know." She sat up, a wry smile on her tear-streaked face. "If you'd been trying, you couldn't have done it in a million years. You caught me off-guard—and look what happened."

"No, no, no." Potter shook his head. "That's what the United States are supposed to say to us one of these days."

Anne laughed, but she nodded, too. "Oh, yes." She leaned forward. He'd caught her interest in a different way—which was probably just as well, since he wasn't good for more than one round a day himself any more. She asked, "How likely is it? How soon?"

He shrugged again. "All I know is what I read in the newspapers, like that comic from Sequoyah says."

Anne Colleton laughed again, this time at him. "Tell me another one, *Colonel* Potter. If you can't tell me, who can?"

"The president, most likely," Potter answered. "But believe me, he doesn't confide in colonels." That wasn't altogether true. From things Potter had heard, and from others that had crossed his desk, he could make what he thought were some pretty good guesses about how things might go. He didn't tell her what they were. With another woman, he would have been joking about the president. But Anne knew Jake Featherston. Could Jake put her up to finding out whether one Clarence Potter, colonel in Intelligence, ran off at the mouth?

Potter didn't think so, but he wasn't a hundred percent sure.

She pointed an accusing, red-tipped fingernail at him. "So you won't talk, eh?"

"Not me. Not a word. Nothing but name, rank, and pay number." He rattled them off. "Wild horses couldn't pull more out of me."

"Who said anything about wild horses?" Anne's voice went soft and breathy. A mischievous glint sparked in her eyes. "Wild horses went out with the covered wagons. What we do these days is..." She started doing it.

After a while, Potter discovered there were still days when he was good for more than one round—with sufficient encouragement, that is. Panting, his heart pounding, he said, "My goodness. Torture's certainly come up in the world since the last time I ran into it."

"I should hope so. This is a high-class outfit here." As if to prove as much, Anne pulled up the sheet and daintily dabbed at her chin. Then she assumed what she fondly imagined to be a U.S. accent and said, "So tell me the score, Colonel."

"If it's all the same to you, I think I'd rather hold out for more torture," he said.

She poked him in the ribs again, hard enough to come closer to torture than he'd looked for. "Monster!" she said. He made as if to salute. She made as if to poke him one more time. Instead, she aimed that forefinger at him once more, this time as if it were the barrel of a Tredegar. "All right, you ... you impossible person. Be that way. Don't tell me what you know. Tell me what you think. You can't get in trouble for thinking."

As seriously as he could, Potter answered, "I think that, if I tell you what I think, I'll get in trouble for telling you what I think." She started to get angry. So did he. He went on, "Dammit, Anne, what do you think my job is? Finding out secrets and keeping them, that's what. How long do you think I could do it if I ran my mouth like a heavy freight tearing downhill with the brakes gone?"

Every once in a while, when she heard the plain truth, it would disarm her completely. Clarence remembered that from the days of their unhappy affair in South Carolina. It was one of the things he'd liked most about her then. Now he saw it again. "I hadn't looked at it

like that," she admitted in a small voice. "Never mind."

He sat up in bed, put on his glasses, and swung his feet down to the carpet, still wondering whether he'd passed his own test, hers, or Jake Featherston's. Through the gauzy curtains on the window, he could see people bustling along the paths in Capitol Square and others lying on the grass in the shade of the trees, doing their best to fight the oppressive weather.

On the sidewalk down below the window, a Negro said, "Spare some change for a hungry man? ... Spare some change for a hungry man? ... Spare some change for—? Oh, God bless you, ma'am!"

"I wouldn't give a nigger a dime," Anne said coldly. "I wouldn't give a nigger a penny, by God. If they can't find work, to hell with them. Let 'em starve."

Clarence judiciously pursed his lips. "A lot more of them looking for work these days, you know, with tractors and farm machinery driving sharecroppers off the land."

"Yes, I've seen that. So what?" she said. "If they can't figure out some way or another to make themselves useful, who needs them? The whole country would be better off without them."

"Would it? I wonder. Who'd do the nigger work without niggers?"

"Machines could do a lot of it, the way they do on a farm," Anne answered.

"Some of it, anyway," Clarence admitted. "But where are you going to get a machine that waits on tables or cuts somebody's hair? If we didn't have niggers, whites would need to do things like that." He started getting dressed.

"It could happen," Anne said stubbornly. "I do all sorts of things for myself I used to have servants do back before the war."

"I suppose so," Potter said. "Nigger work must get done in the USA, too, and they don't have that many niggers to do it. But things are different here. An awful lots of whites here say, 'I may be poor and stupid, but by God I'm white, and I'm better off than those niggers, and I don't have to do the things they do.' " Slyly, he added, "An awful lot of them vote Freedom, too."

Anne Colleton didn't rise to the bait. She just nodded. "I know they do. But if they didn't have any choice, they'd do what needs doing. If we had another war, we could even make them feel patriotic about doing what needs doing."

At first, Potter thought that was one of the most monstrously cynical things he'd ever heard, and he'd heard some doozies. Then he realized that, no matter how cynical it was, it probably wasn't wrong. He leaned over and kissed her. "Do you want to write that down and pass it on to the president, or do you want me to do it?" he asked.

"Whichever you please," she answered. "But what do you want to bet he's already thought of it himself?"

Clarence thought it over. He didn't need to think very long. "I won't touch that one," he said. "You're bound to be right." Featherston was plenty cynical enough to use patriotism to get people to do what he wanted—and plenty good enough at leading to get them to follow.

"One of us ought to do it," Anne said, "just on the off chance it hasn't occurred to him."

"I'll take care of it, then," Potter said, knotting his butternut tie. "Unless you really want to, I mean."

"No, it's all right. Go ahead." Anne laughed. "The funny thing is, here we are, both trying to give him good advice, and he doesn't trust either one of us as far as he can throw us."

"We've known him too long, and we've known him too well, and at one point or another we've both stood up and told him no," Potter said. "That doesn't happen to him very often, and he doesn't much like it."

"True." Anne laughed again, on a lower, less amused, note. "And now we're both following his orders even so. Everybody follows his orders these days."

"He's the president." Potter set his shiny-peaked officer's cap on his head. "He's the president, and he's been right. How do you lick a combination like that? As far as I can see, you're better off joining him."

Would he have said that before Jake Featherston brought him back into the Army? He knew he wouldn't. But that was almost four years

ago now. And in serving Featherston, he also served his country. His country counted most. So he told himself, and told himself, and....

George Enos carefully coiled the last line that had held *Sweet Sue* to T Wharf. The fishing boat's diesel rumbled under his feet. Pungent exhaust poured from the stack. The *Sweet Sue* began to move, although for the first few seconds it seemed more as if the boat were standing still and the wharf sliding away from it. But then there could be no doubt. The fishing boat was leaving Boston and Boston harbor behind. George let out a slightly hung-over sigh of relief.

He'd been putting to sea for his entire adult life, almost half of his thirty years, but he'd never been so glad to watch his home town slide below the horizon as he had this past year and a little more. If he didn't have to look at Boston, he didn't have to be reminded—so much—of the place where that writer son of a bitch had shot his mother and then shot himself. He'd told her Ernie was no goddamn good for her, told her and told her. His sister had told her the same thing. Fat lot of good it did.

I shouldn't have just talked, he thought for the thousandth time. *I should have kicked the crap out of that bastard.* His fists clenched, his jaw knotted. His teeth ground. He hadn't done it, and it was too late now. It would always be too late.

He was so lost in his own gloom, he jumped when somebody clapped him on the back. "How you doin' Junior?" Johnny O'Shea asked.

"I'm all right, Johnny," George answered. It wasn't really true, but the older man couldn't do anything about what ailed him. Nobody could, not even himself.

"You looked a little green there," O'Shea said, fiddling with one upturned end of his old-fashioned gray Kaiser Bill mustache. He was a wiry little fellow whose strength and endurance belied his sixty years. He and a few other old-timers who'd known George's father were the only ones who called him Junior. George didn't mind. Anything that helped him connect to his old man was welcome. George had only vague memories of him. He'd been just seven when that Confederate submersible sank the USS *Ericsson.* Before that, his father had been in

the Navy or on a fishing boat most of the time.

If the Sweet Sue *sinks tomorrow, my kids won't remember me at all. They're too little.* That was a hell of a cheerful thought with which to put to sea.

He realized he hadn't answered Johnny. "A little too much beer last night, that's all," he said. "I'll be all right." Talking about the other would have shown weakness. He refused.

O'Shea's laugh showed missing teeth, a few stubs stained almost the color of tobacco juice, and a plug of chewing tobacco big enough to choke a Clydesdale. "A little too much beer?" he said. "A little? Sweet Jesus Christ, what a milk-and-cookies lot we've raised up to take our places when we're gone. When I was your age and I'd be going out to sea the next morning, I'd drink till I couldn't see and fuck till I couldn't get it up for a month afterwards and let the skipper worry about having me on board when we got going. If you're gonna do these things, for God's sake do 'em right."

George had made sure Connie had something to remember him by, too. That was one of the reasons he hadn't drunk too much to excess. If you didn't know who you were, your John Henry wouldn't know who he was, either.

He was damned if he felt like talking about what he'd done in the bedroom, though. Instead, his voice sly, he asked, "How about last night for you, then?"

"Oh, I got drunk," O'Shea said. "Take enough aspirins, drink enough coffee, and that ain't so bad the next day. And I found me a girl, too. But I'll tell you something, Junior, and it's a goddamn fact. Enough fucking so you can't get it up for the next month is a hell of a lot less when you're my age than it is when you're yours." He spat a stream of tobacco juice into the sea.

A lot of men would have sounded bitter saying something like that. Johnny O'Shea thought it was funny. He slapped George on the back and went off to chin with one of the other fishermen.

He got even less in the way of response from Carlo Lombardi than he had from George. Aspirins and coffee might have been enough to beat Johnny's hangover, but Carlo looked as if he'd been ridden hard and put away wet. Under his perennial five-o'-clock shadow, his face was fishbelly pale. He had a hat jammed down low over his eyes to

shield them from the sun, and they were nothing but bloodshot slits. He answered O'Shea in monosyllables, and then stopped answering him at all. Johnny thought that was funny, too. George didn't. He'd been where Carlo was a few times—well, maybe more than a few times—and he hadn't enjoyed it a bit.

A couple of the other fishermen looked as much the worse for wear as Lombardi. By the time they got out to the Grand Bank, they'd be sober enough. The only liquor aboard the *Sweet Sue* was a bottle of medicinal brandy under lock and key in the galley. Every so often, Captain Albert would dole out a nip as a reward for a job well done. Davey Hatton, whose territory the galley was, had also been known to pour out a little brandy every now and then, but that was unofficial, even if the skipper winked at it.

Back in George's father's day, most fishing boats leaving T Wharf had made for Georges Bank, about five hundred miles offshore. Some still did, but Georges Bank had been fished so hard for so long, it didn't yield what it had. The Grand Bank, though, out by Newfoundland, seemed inexhaustible. Some people said Basque fishermen had been taking cod and tuna there since before Columbus discovered America. George Enos didn't know anything about that one way or the other. He did know there were a hell of a lot of fish left.

Boston sank below the edge of the sea. He wasn't sorry to see it go, or all the little islands that marked the way into the harbor. A couple of miles off to port, a U.S. Navy minesweeper—not a very big warship, but a giant when measured against fishing boats—opened up with its guns. A few seconds later, a big column of water rose from the Atlantic. The flat, harsh crack of the explosion took ten or twelve seconds to reach the *Sweet Sue.* When it did, Carlo Lombardi looked as if he wished his head would fall off, or maybe as if it just had.

George felt the blast in his teeth and sinuses, too. Even so, he nodded in satisfaction. "There's one mine we won't have to worry about any more," he muttered. During the war, the USA had mined the approaches to Boston harbor to a faretheewell, to make sure Confederate and British raiders and submarines couldn't sneak in and raise hell. And the Confederates had sown mines to give U.S. shipping a hard time.

Some of those mines still floated in place. Some of the ones that had been moored came loose with the passage of years and drifted free, a menace to navigation. Fishing boats and the occasional freighter blew up and sank with all hands. Finding mines and

disposing of them had kept the Navy hopping since the end of the war.

And how long would it be before the Navy stopped sweeping for mines and started laying them again? George didn't like the headlines coming out of the states that had changed hands between the CSA and the USA. President Smith was loudly declaring he'd removed the last reasons for war on the North American continent. George hoped he was right. As far as he could see, everybody hoped the president was right.

Gulls glided along overhead. They always followed fishing boats, hoping for handouts from the garbage and offal that went over the side. They did better when the boats were farther out to sea and actually fishing, but that didn't keep them from being optimistic whenever they saw fishermen.

George stopped in the cramped little galley for a mug of coffee. He took it up to the *Sweet Sue's* bow and drank it there. The hot, sweet, creamy brew and the fresh breeze from the fishing boat's passage helped submerge the last of his headache. His cure wasn't so drastic as Johnny O'Shea's, but he hadn't hurt himself so badly the night before, either.

Going out to the Grand Bank was a long haul. Once the ocean surrounded the *Sweet Sue* on all sides, she might not have been moving at all. No landscape changed to prove she was. Every so often, she would pass an inbound fishing boat. Captain Albert would get on the wireless then, doing his best to find out exactly where the fish were biting best.

When my old man went to sea, his boat didn't even have wireless, George thought. He remembered his mother saying his father hadn't know that crazy Serb had blown up the Austrian archduke till he got back to T Wharf after a fishing trip. And when a Confederate commerce raider captured him and sank his boat, his skipper back then hadn't been able to yell for help. He'd been interned in North Carolina for months before the Confederates finally let him go.

On George's first night in the tiny, cramped bunk up at the bow, he tossed and turned and slept very badly. He always did his first night at sea. He'd got used to a bed that didn't shift under him, to one where he could roll over without falling out, to one where he could sit up suddenly without banging his head—hell, to one with Connie in it, sweet and warm and mostly willing. He knew he'd be all right

tomorrow, but tonight was tough.

More coffee persuaded his eyes they really did want to stay open the next morning. He poured in the cream as if there were no tomorrow. So did everybody else. Even on ice, it wouldn't stay fresh through the cruise, so they enjoyed it while they could. By the same token, Davey Hatton did up enormous plates of scrambled eggs for the fishermen.

"By God, Cookie, yesterday I'd've puked these up," Johnny O'Shea said. "This morning, they're goddamn good." He shoveled another forkful into his face.

Hatton was a round, red-faced man with a barbed wit. "If somebody'd lit a match under your nose yesterday, he could've used your breath for a blowtorch," he replied. "Today you're on your way to remembering your name."

"Fuck you," Johnny said sweetly.

The cook nodded. "There—you see? I knew that was it." The men in the crowded galley laughed. Even Johnny laughed—he knew he'd lost that round.

When the *Sweet Sue* finally got out to the Grand Bank, there was little more time for laughter. Boats from the USA, the CSA, the Republic of Quebec, occupied Canada and Newfoundland, Britain, Ireland, France, and Portugal bobbed here and there on the ocean. Captain Albert found a place at the edge of one pack of boats and started fishing.

George lost track of how many big hooks he baited with frozen squid. The process was as automatic as breathing for him. If he'd thought about it, he probably would have stuck himself. Every so often, somebody did. Then it was the nasty business of pushing the barb through and snipping it off, the even nastier business of iodine, and, if a man hadn't had one in a while, a tetanus shot from the first-aid kit. And, with his hand bandaged, he'd go back to fixing hooks.

But when the lines came in ... when the lines came in, work really started. Gaffing a wriggling tuna that weighed as much as a man, gutting it, kicking the offal over the side, and getting the fish into the ice in the hold went on hour after hour. Sometimes it wouldn't be a tuna—it would be a tuna head, proof that a shark had found the fish first. Off the hook, over the side. Sometimes a shark would be on the

hook. Gaff him, gut him so he stayed dead, and pitch him overboard.

The endless fishing went on for the next three weeks. By then, the *Sweet Sue* had more than twenty tons of tuna in her hold and rode noticeably lower in the water than she had when she set out from T Wharf. George still didn't know how good a trip it was. He wouldn't till the skipper sold the tuna. But he knew he was finally ready to head back to Boston. After all, he had to remind his kids who he was.

Brigadier General Abner Dowling was not a happy man. He felt betrayed not only by the War Department—which would have been nothing tremendously unusual—but also by the entire government of the United States. Having the whole government gang up on him didn't happen every day.

But Dowling certainly felt it had happened here. He'd come to Covington to help keep Kentucky in the United States. He'd got a good start on doing just that, too. And then Al Smith had jerked the rug out from under him by going to Richmond and agreeing to a plebiscite. The only way the USA could win that plebiscite would be for Jesus Christ to appear in Louisville and curse Jake Featherston with words that glowed like burning coals—and even then it would be close.

Now, ironically, what Dowling was watching over was the presidential election campaign. Up till Al Smith said there would be a plebiscite after all, he couldn't have got elected dog catcher in Kentucky. Now Red Socialist posters were everywhere in Covington. They showed Smith's face and the slogan, the happy warrior—he's kept us out of war. More went up all the time, too.

The Democrats were running Senator Bob Taft—son of longtime Congressman William Howard Taft—from across the river in Ohio. In a normal year, he would have scored well in conservative Kentucky. This wasn't a normal year, nor was Kentucky a normal state. The Freedom Party had ambushed the local Democrats from the right, and the Freedom Party, taking its cue from Richmond, was loudly for Smith.

Besides, Taft had denounced the plebiscite. Like most Democrats, he remained in favor of holding on to the gains the USA had made in the Great War. That would have doomed him here anyway.

"Isn't it grand?" Dowling said at supper one evening. "Kentucky will vote Socialist in February, and then it'll vote Freedom in January. Tell me how that makes sense."

All the officers with whom he was eating were junior to him, of course. None of them ventured to claim that it didn't make sense, or that he was worrying too much. A major did say, "At least the Freedom Party is on its best behavior from now until January."

"Bully!" Dowling exploded, which made the younger officers look at one another. He caught the looks, and knew why they made them. They didn't say *bully,* and they thought only dinosaurs—anyone who remembered the nineteenth century certainly qualified—did. Dowling was too exercised to care. He went on, "Of course those bastards will be on their best behavior. They don't have to blow things up any more to get what they want. All they have to do is wait. Wouldn't you be on your best behavior, too?"

"Uh, yes, sir," the major replied. "The only trouble is, their being quiet goes a long way toward making our presence here irrelevant, wouldn't you say?"

"Like hell I would," Dowling growled. "If we weren't here, if we weren't doing the job we're supposed to do, how much worse would things be?"

The major, being only a major, did not presume to contradict. That helped ease Dowling's mind—a little. He kept up a bold front not least for the sake of the men he commanded. He wasn't about to admit he thought his presence in Kentucky was irrelevant. He wouldn't admit it to anyone but himself, anyhow.

When he looked at the name of the man with whom he had his first appointment the next morning, it rang a bell. He went through some files and nodded to himself. The homework he'd done before taking command in Covington had paid off. "Good morning, Mr. Wood," he said when the man strode into his office. "And what can I do for you today?"

Lucullus Wood held out his hand. Dowling reached out and shook it with, he hoped, no noticeable hesitation, even if he wasn't used to treating a Negro as his social equal. Wood was in his early or mid-thirties: a wide-shouldered man, blocky rather than fat, with high cheekbones and an arched nose that argued he might have a little Indian blood in him. Without preamble, he said, "Kentucky got

troubles, General."

"Yes, indeed." Dowling's voice was dry. "Do you aim to stop them or cause more?"

Before answering, Wood sat down across from Dowling. Dowling hadn't invited him to, but he didn't say anything. When the black man smiled, he looked like a predatory beast. "Depends on for who you mean," he answered, adding, "Reckon you know who I am, then."

"When I got here, they told me you made the best barbecue in town," Dowling said. "I've tried it. They were right."

"Hell they was." Lucullus Wood sounded affronted. "I make the best barbecue in the whole goddamn state. So did my old man."

Dowling looked down at the notes he'd taken. "Your father was ... Apicius Wood. I hope I'm saying that right." He waited for the Negro to nod, then went on, "And one after the other, you and he have been the two biggest Reds in town. Or are you the two biggest Reds in the whole goddamn state?"

Woods blinked at that. After a moment, he decided to laugh. "Maybe he was. Maybe I is. Maybe we ain't never been," he said. "Folks who talk about that stuff, they don't always do it. Folks who do it, they don't always talk about it."

"Well, if you don't do it, if you've never done it, why am I wasting my time talking to you?" Dowling asked. "Tell me what you've got on your mind, and we'll see if we can do some business."

Lucullus Wood blinked again. "You ain't what I reckoned you would be," he said slowly.

Abner Dowling's shrug made his chins quiver. "Life is full of surprises. Now come on, Mr. Wood. Piss or get off the pot."

"Come January, a lot of colored folks is gonna want to git the hell out of Kentucky," Wood said. "Reckon you got some notion why."

"We won't stop them," Dowling answered. "They're U.S. citizens. We will respect that. Some whites will want to leave the state, too."

"Some. A few." Wood spoke with dismissive scorn. "Some colored folks, though, some colored folks is gonna stay. Dunno how many, but

some will. Some damn fools in every crowd, I suppose."

"If I were a Negro, I wouldn't stay in Kentucky," Dowling said.

Wood's eyes went to the shiny silver star on the right shoulderboard of Dowling's green-gray uniform. "Don't suppose they lets no damn fools turn into generals," he remarked.

As far as Dowling was concerned, that only proved the colored man didn't know as much about the U.S. Army as he thought he did. Custer, for instance, had worn four stars, not just one. But Custer, while doubtless often a fool, had been a very peculiar kind of fool, and so.... With an effort, Dowling tore his thoughts away from the man he'd served for so long. "Fair enough," he said to Lucullus Wood. "I'm sure you're right about what will happen. Some Negroes will stay here. Some people don't know to get out of a burning building till too late, either. But if the U.S. Army has to leave Kentucky after the plebiscite, what concern to us are they?"

"If we was white folks, you wouldn't talk like that about us." Wood didn't try to hide his scorn. Dowling wondered if a Negro had ever reproached him like that before. He didn't think so. He hadn't dealt with a whole lot of Negroes—not many people in the USA had—and the ones he had dealt with were all in subordinate positions. After a deep, angry exhalation, Wood went on, "You reckon the niggers in Kentucky gonna like all them damn white bastards runnin' around yellin', 'Freedom!' all the goddamn time?"

"I wouldn't," Dowling answered. If *he'd* called Negroes niggers, Lucullus Wood might have tried to murder him. Being one himself, Wood could use the label. But then that thought slipped away and another took its place: "What do you suppose they'll want to do about it?"

Anger dropped away from Wood like a discarded cloak. "No, General, you ain't no damn fool. You got to understand, I ain't in love with the USA. Revolution comin' to y'all, too. But we gots to make a popular front with whoever's on our side even a little when it comes to them Freedom Party cocksuckers."

"How much of a nuisance do you think your people can be, and how much help do you want from the United States?" Dowling asked. "The more we can set up before the plebiscite, the better off we'll be."

"More we kin set up before the plebiscite, better off the USA'll be,"

Wood said cynically. "Ain't gonna be no more good times for the niggers here after that. But I figure we kin raise some kind of trouble for the Confederates when they comes marchin' back in here."

"It would be nice if you could arrange as much for them as the Freedom Party fanatics did for us here and in Houston," Dowling said.

"Be nice for y'all, yeah, but don't hold your breath, on account of it ain't gonna happen," Wood said. "Lots mo' white folks here and down there than there is niggers. Revolutionary, he got to swim like a fish in the school of the people. Us blackfish, we is a smaller school."

He didn't sound like an educated man. But when it came to the business of revolution, he spoke with an expert's authority. Abner Dowling found himself nodding. "I suppose you're right," he said regretfully. "But if you people just happened to find some wireless sets and rifles and explosives lying around, you might figure out what to do with them, eh?"

"We might." Lucullus Wood nodded, too. "Yes, suh, General, we just might cipher out what they's for."

I ought to get War Department authorization for this, Dowling thought. He rejected the notion the minute it occurred to him. The War Department might not want to get officially involved in resisting Confederate occupation. Then again, some of the people in the War Department might just get cold feet. *I'm here. They put me in charge. I'll take care of things, God damn it.*

"All right, then," he said. "We'll see to that. And I know you're not doing us any special favors. But what works against the CSA works for the USA. That's how things are."

Wood nodded again. "That's how things is," he agreed. "We is fellow travelers on this here road for a while, even if we's goin' different places."

"Fellow travelers." Brigadier General Dowling tasted the phrase. "Yes, I can live with that."

"You been fair to me, General, so I be fair to you," Wood said. "Come the revolution, we go different ways. Come the revolution, I reckon I try an' kill you. Nothin' personal, you understand, but you is one o' the 'pressors, and you got to go to the wall."

"Fair is fair," Dowling said, "so I'll tell you something, too. You want to be careful about threatening a man with a weapon in his hand. He has a nasty habit of shooting back." With a sour smile, he too added, "Nothing personal."

"Sure enough," the Negro said imperturbably. "Them Freedom Party fellas, they done found that out down further south. Reckon mebbe we teach 'em some new lessons here in Kentucky. Is that a bargain?"

"That's a bargain." Dowling heaved himself to his feet and held out his right hand once more. Lucullus Wood took it. The Negro dipped his head and sauntered out of Dowling's office. Dowling looked down at his own right palm. Had he ever shaken a colored man's hand before today? He didn't think so. Kentucky was proving educational in all sorts of ways.

"Sorry, kid." The man who shook his head at Armstrong Grimes didn't sound sorry at all. He sounded as if he'd said the same thing a million times before. He doubtless sounded that way because he had. "I can't use you. I want somebody with experience."

Armstrong had heard that a million times since finally escaping high school. His temper, which had never been long, snapped. "How the hell am I supposed to get experience if nobody'll hire me on account of I don't have any?"

"Life's tough," the man in the hiring office answered, which meant, To *hell with you, Jack. I've got mine.* He lit a cigarette, but didn't quite blow smoke in Armstrong's face. Maybe his first long drag made him feel a little more like a human being, because he unbent enough to say, "One way to do it is to odd-job for a while. Sometimes you can get hired by the day even if somebody doesn't want you for keeps."

"Yeah, I've tried some of that," Armstrong said. "But it's a day on and a week off. It'll take me forever to do enough of anything to get the experience to make anybody want to take me on for good, and I'll starve to death in the meantime."

The man looked him over. "Other thing you could do is join the Army. You're a big, strong fellow. They'll take you unless you just got out of jail— maybe even if you just got out of jail, the way things are

nowadays. You can sure as hell learn a trade in there."

"Maybe," Armstrong said. His father had made the same suggestion — made it loudly and pointedly, in fact. That would have prejudiced him against the idea even if he'd liked it to begin with. "They don't pay you anything much in the Army, and you're stuck there for three years if you volunteer."

"Have it your way, pal. You think I give a rat's ass about what you do, you've got another think coming." The clerk behind the desk looked up at the line of poor, hungry men desperate for work. "Next!"

Seething, Armstrong stormed out of the hiring office. If he hadn't thought the clerk would sic the cops on him, he would have whaled the stuffing out of the bastard. Sitting there like a little tin Jesus, who the hell did he think he was? But the answer to that was mournfully obvious. *He thinks he's a man who's got a job, and the son of a bitch is right.*

Armstrong inquired at a furniture factory, a trucking company, and a joint that made Polish sausages before heading for home. No luck anywhere. His old man wanted him out there trying—insisted on it, as a matter of fact. If he didn't pound the pavement, he wouldn't get fed. Merle Grimes had been most painfully clear about that. Armstrong wished he thought his father were bluffing. Since he didn't...

When he got home, he found his mother in tears. He hadn't seen that since Granny died. "What happened?" he exclaimed.

Without a word, she held out an envelope to him. His name was typed on it. The return address was printed in an old-fashioned, hard-to-read typeface:

[redacted]

Another, smaller line below that said:

[redacted]

"Oh," he said. It felt like a punch in the breadbasket. He'd known it was possible, of course, but he hadn't thought it was likely. "Oh, shit."

Edna Grimes nodded. "That's what I said, too, Armstrong, when I saw the damn thing. But there's nothing you can do about it. If they conscript you and you pass the physical, you've got to go."

"Yeah." Armstrong nodded glumly. From some of the things he'd heard, the only way to flunk the physical was not to have a pulse, too. He did his best to look on the bright side of things: "If they conscript me, it's only for two years. That's a year less than I'd spend if I joined up on my own."

"I know. But still..." His mother gave him a hug of the sort he hadn't had from her in years. "You're my baby, Armstrong. I don't want you going off to be a soldier. What if we have another war?"

Being his mother's baby didn't appeal to Armstrong. Fighting a war did— if you were going to be a soldier, what point was there to being one when nothing was happening? None he could see. That he might get hurt or killed never crossed his mind. He was, after all, only eighteen. But he was smart enough to know that, if he told his mother what he really thought, she'd pitch a fit. So, as soothingly as he could, he said, "There won't be any war, Ma. We're giving the Confederates those pleb-whatchamacallits, so they've got nothing left to fight about."

"Jesus, I hope you're right," his mother said. "Some people, though, if you give 'em an inch, they'll want to take a mile. The way the Freedom Party carries on, I'm afraid they're like that."

Armstrong's little sister met the news that he was going to go off and be a soldier with complete equanimity. "So long," Annie said. "When do you leave?"

"Not tonight, you little brat," he said. She stuck out her tongue at him. He wanted to belt her a good one, but he knew he couldn't. She'd just go yelling to their mother, and then he'd end up in trouble. Annie was almost as big a pest as Aunt Clara, who would no doubt hope he never came back when he went off to wherever they'd ship him for training.

When his father got home and found out, though, he slapped

Armstrong on the back and poured him a good-sized slug of whiskey, something he'd never done before. "Congratulations, son!" Merle Grimes said. "They'll make a man out of you."

Since Armstrong was already convinced he was a man, that impressed him less than it might have. To show what tough stuff he was, he took a big gulp of the whiskey. He hadn't done a lot of drinking. The hooch felt like battery acid going down the pipe, and exploded like a bomb in his stomach. "That's good," he wheezed in a voice that sounded like a ghost of its former self.

"Glad you like it," his father answered gravely. If he knew that Armstrong had just injured himself, he was polite enough not to let on. That was more discretion than he was in the habit of showing. He took a smaller sip from his own glass and asked, "When do you go in for your preinduction physical?"

"Next Wednesday," Armstrong said. "I can hardly wait."

He meant that ironically, but Merle Grimes took it seriously. "Good," he said. "That's real good. You ought to be eager to do something for your country. It's been taking care of you all along."

"Right," Armstrong said tightly. He could have done without his father sounding like a goddamn recruiting poster.

Next Wednesday, naturally, rain poured down in buckets. Armstrong had to walk three blocks from the trolley stop to the building where the government doctors waited to get their hands on him. He was half soaked by the time he made it inside. Seeing several other guys his own age who were just as bedraggled as he was made him feel a little better. More fellows with wet hair and pimples came in the door after him, too.

A pair of clerks marched into the room. At the same time as one was saying, "Line up in alphabetical order by last name," the other declared, "Line up according to height."

After some confusion, alphabetical order won. Armstrong would have ended up about the same place either way. As a G, he was fairly close to the head of the line but not right at it. He was also taller than most of the young men there for their physicals, but not a real beanpole, either. He had a chance to look things over before the system got to work on him.

First came the paperwork. He would have bet money on that. His old man made a living pushing papers around for the government, and had plenty to do. Armstrong filled out about a million forms and carried them with him to the eye chart, which came next. The fellow in front of him had some trouble. "I can see the little bastards just fine," he told the guy in the white coat in charge of the test. "Only thing is, I can't no way read 'em."

"Let me see your paperwork," the man in the white coat said. Armstrong got a glimpse of a couple of pages, too. Just about everything was blank. The man in charge of the test frowned. "You're illiterate?" Seeing the puzzled look on the young man's face, he tried again: "You can't read and write?"

" 'Fraid not," the youth said. "I can sign my name. That's about the size of it."

"Didn't you go to school?"

"A couple years. I never was much good, though. I been workin' ever since."

"Well, uh, Slaughter, no matter how good a name you've got for a soldier, you need to be able to read and write to enter the Army. You're not even in the right place in line. You'll be excused from conscription. I don't know if your exclusion will be permanent or if they'll class you as fit for service in an emergency. But we won't take you now." He glanced towards Armstrong Grimes. "Next!"

Armstrong thought about pretending he couldn't read, too. Too late, though—he'd already filled out his paperwork and done it right. He stepped up to the line and went down the chart as far as he could, switching eyes when the man in the white coat told him to.

"Give me your papers," the man said, then nodded. "You've passed here. Proceed to the next station."

He saw even more guys in white coats than he had at the Polish sausage works where he'd tried to get a job. They measured and weighed him. One of them listened to his heart. Another one took his blood pressure. Another one— this one with a brand new pair of rubber gloves—told him to drop his pants, turn his head to one side, and cough. As he did, the man grabbed him in some highly intimate places. "No rupture," he said, and wrote on Armstrong's papers. "Now bend over and grab your ankles."

"What?" Armstrong said in alarm. "You're not going to—"

But the man in the white coat was already doing it. That was a lot less pleasant than being told to turn his head and cough. "Prostate gland normal," the man said. He took off the gloves and tossed them into a corrugated-iron trash can. Then he wrote on the papers again. As soon as he gave them back, he started putting on a fresh pair of gloves.

"You must go through a lot of those," Armstrong said. He pulled up his pants in a hurry, still stinging a little.

"You bet I do, sonny," the man in the white coat agreed. "All things considered, would you rather I didn't?" Armstrong hastily shook his head. "Well, neither would I," the man said. "Go on to the next station."

They drew blood there. A big, strapping fellow passed out just as Armstrong arrived. The fellow with the hypodermic syringe put it down in a hurry and managed to keep the big young man from banging his head on the floor. He dragged him off to one side and glared at Armstrong. *"You're* not going to faint on me, are you? This guy was the third one today. Roll up your sleeve."

"I don't think I am," Armstrong said. "What do you need to do this for, anyway?"

"See if you're anemic. See if you've got a social disease. See what your blood group is for transfusions. Hold still, now." The man swabbed the inside of his elbow with alcohol. The needle bit. Armstrong looked away as the syringe filled with blood. He felt a little queasy, but only a little. The man yanked out the needle, stuck a piece of cotton fluff on the puncture, and slapped adhesive tape over it. He wrote on Armstrong's papers. "That's it. You're done."

"Did I pass?" Armstrong asked.

"Unless you're anemic as hell or you've got syphilis, you did," the man replied. "You're healthy as a horse. You'll make a hell of a soldier."

"Oh, boy," Armstrong said.

"He's kept us out of war." Flora Blackford repeated the Socialist Party slogan to a street-corner crowd in her district. "He's kept us out of war, and he's done everything he could to keep food on the working man's table. If you want to see what the Democrats will do about that, look at what Herbert Hoover did. Nothing, that's what."

People in the mostly proletarian crowd clapped their hands. A sprinkling of hecklers at the back started a chant: "Taft! Taft! Robert Taft!"

Flora pointed at them. "I served in Congress with Senator Taft's father. William Howard Taft was an honorable man. So is Robert Taft. I don't say any differently. But I do say this: Senator Taft would be horrified at the way his supporters are bringing Freedom Party tactics into this campaign."

That got more applause. Next to nobody in this strongly Socialist district had a good word to say about Jake Featherston's gang. But one of the hecklers yelled, "Al Smith's the one who's in bed with the Freedom Party!"

"Al Smith is against war. I am against war. I had a brother-in-law killed and a brother badly wounded in the Great War," Flora said. "If you are going to tell me you are for war—if you are going to tell me Senator Taft is for war—you will have a hard time selling that to the people of this district."

"Taft is for keeping Kentucky and Houston," the heckler called.

"How can you keep a state in the country when its own people don't want to be here?" Flora asked. "That was the lesson of the War of Secession—you can't. Some things you can buy at too high a price."

The crowd applauded again, but less enthusiastically than before. Flora understood why: they wanted to have their cake and eat it, too; to have peace and to hold on to Kentucky and Houston. She wanted the same thing. She understood the people who said the USA had sacrificed too much even to think about giving back the two states. At

least half the time, she felt that way herself. She would have liked the idea much better if it didn't involve giving them back to Jake Featherston.

"I don't love the Freedom Party," she said. "But it is in power in the Confederate States, and we can't very well pretend it isn't and hope it will go away. What can we do if we don't try to deal with it?" She was trying to convince herself as well as her audience, and she knew it.

"I'd sock it in the nose!" that iron-lunged heckler yelled. "Taft will sock it in the nose!"

"No, he won't." Flora shook her head. "If he does, he'll have a war on his hands, and I can't believe he wants one. He may talk tough, but his foreign policy won't look much different from President Smith's. And his domestic policy..." She rolled her eyes. "He grows like an onion—with his head in the ground." She said it in English. Some of the people her age and older in the crowd echoed it in Yiddish.

She managed to get through the rest of her speech without too much harassment. She had a pretty good idea why, too: the Democrats didn't think they could beat her. She'd never lost an election in this district. The Democrats had elected a candidate here while she was First Lady, but she'd trounced him as soon as she returned to the hustings.

At the end, she said, "If you're in favor of what President Smith has done, you'll vote for him again, and you'll vote for me. If you're not, you'll vote for Taft. It's about that simple, my friends. Forward with Smith or back with Taft?"

She stepped down from the platform with applause ringing in her ears. When she'd started agitating for the Socialists, she hadn't had a platform—not a real one. She'd made her first few speeches standing on crates or beer barrels. She was right around the corner from the Croton Brewery, where she'd spoken at the outbreak of the Great War. She'd opposed war then; she still did. In 1914, her party hadn't gone along with her. This year, it did.

Why aren't I happier, then? she wondered.

In 1914, the Confederate States hadn't been that different from the United States. Most of the oppressed proletariat in the CSA had been black, but capitalists had oppressed workers almost as savagely in the USA. Now ... Things were different now.

A middle-aged man in a homburg limped up to her, leaning on a stick. "Good speech," he said. A Soldiers' Circle pin showing a sword through his conscription year in a silver circle sparkled on his lapel.

"Thank you, David," Flora said with a sigh. That her own brother could belong to a reactionary organization like the Soldiers' Circle—and not only belong but wear the pin that showed he was proud to belong—had always dismayed her. The Soldiers' Circle wasn't the Freedom Party, but some of its higher-ups wished it were.

"Good speech," David Hamburger repeated, "but I'm still going to vote for Taft."

"I hadn't expected anything different," she said. David had gone into the Great War a Socialist like the rest of the family. He'd come out a conservative Democrat. He'd also come out with one leg gone above the knee. Flora had no doubt the two were related.

She asked, "And will you vote for Chaim Cohen, too?" Cohen was the latest Democrat to try to unseat her.

Her brother turned red. "No," he said. "I don't like all of your ideas—I don't like most of your ideas—but I know you're honest. And you're family. I don't let family down."

"Being family isn't reason enough to vote for me," she said.

"I think it is." David laughed. "And you may not like my politics, but at least I care about things. Did you see your sisters or your other brother or Mother and Father at your speech?"

Now Flora was the one who had to say, "No." Sophie and Esther and Isaac had their own lives, and lived them. They were proud when she won reelection, but they didn't even come to Socialist Party headquarters any more. As for her parents ... "Mother and Father don't get out as much as they did."

"I know. They're getting old." David shook his head. "They've *got* old. *Bis hindert und tzvantzik yuhr."*

"Omayn," Flora said automatically, though she know her mother and father wouldn't live to 120 years. People didn't, however much you wished they would. A stab of loss and longing for Hosea pierced her. She was grateful her parents had lived to grow old. So many people didn't, even in the modern world.

"Have you got plans for tonight, or can you go to dinner with your reactionary tailor of a little brother?" David asked.

"I can go," Flora said. "And it's on me. I know I make more money than you do." She knew she made a lot more money than he did, but she didn't want to say so out loud.

With his usual touchy pride, David said, "I'm doing all right." He'd never asked her or anybody else for a dime, so she supposed he was. With a wry grin, though, he went on, "I'll let you buy. Don't think I won't. How does that go? 'From each according to her abilities, to each according to his needs'? Something like that, anyhow."

"I never heard anybody quote—I mean misquote—Marx to figure out who's getting dinner before," Flora said, and she couldn't help laughing. "Since I'm buying, how does Kornblatt's sound?"

"Let's go," her brother said, so the delicatessen must have sounded good.

When they got there, he ordered brisket and a schooner of beer. Flora chose stuffed cabbage, which just wasn't the same in Philadelphia. What she got at Kornblatt's wasn't the same as what she'd helped her mother make when she lived on the Lower East Side all the time, but it came closer.

David attacked the brisket as if he hadn't eaten in weeks. He'd devoured almost all of it before he looked up and said, "You really think we ought to give back what we won in the war? Give it back to those 'Freedom'-yelling *mamzrim?"*

"If the people who live there don't want to be part of the country, how can we keep them?" Flora asked.

"They were pretty quiet till Featherston started stirring them up," David said, which was true, or at least close to true. He speared his last bite of meat, chewed it, swallowed, and went on, "If we're not doing the same thing with the *shvartzers* in the CSA, we're missing a hell of a chance."

"I don't know anything about that," Flora said.

"Somebody ought to," her brother said, and somebody probably did. If the United States weren't trying to use Negroes in the Confederate States to make life difficult for the government there,

then the War Department was indeed falling down on the job. Flora disliked a lot of the people and policies in the War Department, but she did not think the men at the top there were fools. Over almost a quarter of a century of public life, she'd learned the difference between someone who couldn't do his job and someone who simply disagreed with her about what the job should be.

"Say what you want," she told David, "but we'd just have endless trouble if we tried to keep those states."

David didn't reply with words, not right away. Instead, he rapped his artificial leg with his knuckles. By the sound that came from it, he might almost have been knocking on a door; it was made of wood and canvas and leather and metal. "You know how many men like me there are in the USA—men without legs, men without arms, men without eyes, men without faces? If we don't keep what we won, why did we get shot and blown up and gassed? Answer me that one, and then I'll say good-bye to Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah."

"There is no answer," Flora said. "Sometimes something looks like a good idea when you do it but turns out not to be later on. Or haven't you ever had that happen?"

"Oh, yes. I've seen that. Who hasn't? But this one is kind of large to treat that way. And what do we do if giving back those states turns out to be that same kind of mistake? Taking them again would get expensive."

"I don't know," Flora said.

"Well, that's honest, anyhow. I said you were," her brother replied. "Does Al Smith know? Does anybody in the whole wide world know?"

"How can anybody know?" Flora asked, as reasonably as she could. "We'll just have to see how things turn out, that's all."

David paused to light a cigarette. He blew smoke up toward the ceiling, then said, "Seems to me that's a better reason for not doing something than for doing it. But I'm no politician, so what do I know?"

"It's going to happen." Flora knew she sounded uncomfortable. She couldn't help it. She went on, "If it makes you that unhappy, the thing to do *is* to vote for Taft. I think it will work out all right. I hope it does."

"I hope it does, too. But I don't think so. The Confederates on the banks of the Ohio again?" David Hamburger shook his head. "We had to worry about that for years, and then we didn't, and now we will again."

"When they were on the Ohio, they didn't cross it in the last war," Flora said.

"They didn't have barrels then. They didn't have bombers then, either," her brother said.

"Even if they do get it back, they've promised to leave it demilitarized afterwards," Flora said.

"Oh, yes. They've promised." David nodded. "So tell me—how far do you trust Jake Featherston's promises?"

Flora wished he hadn't asked that. She'd deplored Featherston in the U.S. Congress long before he was elected. She liked him no better, trusted him no further, now that he was president of the CSA. As she had on the stump, she said, "He's there. We have to deal with him." Her brother let the words fall flat, which left them sounding much worse than if he'd tried to answer them.

Chester Martin faced Election Day with all the enthusiasm of a man going to a doctor to have a painful boil lanced. His efforts to build a construction workers' union in antilabor Los Angeles had got strong backing from the Socialist Party. How could he forget that? He couldn't. But he couldn't make himself like the upcoming plebiscite, either.

His wife had no doubts. "I don't want another war," Rita said. "I lost my first husband in the last one." She hardly ever spoke of him, but now she went on, "Why should anybody else have to go through what I did? If we don't have to fight, that's good news to me."

But Chester answered, "Who says we won't?"

"Al Smith does, that's who." Rita sent him an exasperated stare. "Or are you going to vote for a Democrat for president again? Look how well that turned out the last time."

"I don't know. I'm thinking about it," Chester said. Rita looked even more exasperated. She'd always been a Socialist. He'd been a Democrat through the Great War, but the only time he'd voted for a Democratic presidential candidate was in 1932, when he'd chosen Calvin Coolidge over Hosea Blackford. Blackford had had three and a half years to end the business collapse, and hadn't done it. Coolidge, of course, dropped dead three weeks before taking office, and Herbert Hoover, his running mate, hadn't done it, either. For that matter, neither had Smith. Chester went on, "Giving back so much of what we fought for sticks in my craw."

"Giving the country back to the Democrats sticks in my craw," Rita said. "Do you think Taft cares about what you're trying to do here? If you do, you're nuts. His father didn't stand with the producers, and neither does he."

That had an unpleasant ring of truth. Plenty of people would think local issues were the most important ones in the election. Half the time, Chester did. But, the other half of the time, he didn't. He said, "If the Confederates want Houston and Kentucky back and then they're done, that's one thing."

"They say that's all," Rita reminded him.

He nodded. "I know what they say. But Jake Featherston says all sorts of things. If he gets them back and starts putting soldiers into them, that's a different story. If he does that, we've got trouble on our hands."

"Even if he does, we can beat the Confederates again if we have to," Rita said. "If we tell them to pull back, they'd have to back down, wouldn't they?"

"Who knows? The point is, we shouldn't have to find out." Chester muttered unhappily to himself. He wanted a party with a strong foreign policy, and he also wanted a party with a strong domestic policy. Trouble was, the Democrats offered the one and the Socialists the other. He couldn't have both. "Maybe I ought to vote for the Republicans. Then I'd have the worst of both worlds."

"Funny. Funny like a crutch," his wife said. "Well, I can't tell you what to do, but I know what I'm going to."

Chester didn't. He went through October and into November unsure and unhappy. Autumn in Los Angeles was nothing like what it had

been in Toledo. It was the one season of the year where he might have preferred his old home town. Trees didn't blaze with color here. Most of them didn't even lose their leaves. The air didn't turn crisp and clean, either. It rained once, toward the end of October. That was the only real way to tell summer was gone for good. The Sunday before the election, it was back up to eighty-one. That wouldn't have happened in Toledo, but there was nothing wrong with sixty-one, either. Forty-one and twenty-one were different, to say nothing of one. Los Angeles might see forty-one as a low. Twenty-one? One? Never.

Picketing was a lot easier when you weren't freezing while you carried a sign. Chester and his fellow construction workers kept on getting help from the local Socialist Party. He did grumble about the plebiscite with Party men, but never very loudly. Like most people, he was shy about biting the hand that fed him. The Socialists probably wouldn't have dropped support for his young, struggling union if they knew he might vote for Taft, but why take chances?

Houses and apartment buildings and factories and shops went up all over Los Angeles and the surrounding suburbs, but not many went up without pickets around the construction sites. The *Los Angeles Times* kept screaming that the pickets were nothing but a bunch of dirty Reds who ought to be burned alive because hanging was too good for them. But the *Times* screamed that about everything it didn't like, and it didn't like much. Strikers and cops began to learn to get along, if not to love one another. Even the insults and cries of, "Scab!" as men crossed the picket line came to have a certain ritualistic quality to them.

November 5 dawned bright and clear, though the day plainly wouldn't reach the eighties. "What are you going to do?" Rita asked at breakfast.

"Vote." Martin reached for the pepper shaker and spread pungent black flakes over his fried eggs.

Rita made an irritated noise. "How?"

"Oh, about like this." He mimed picking up a stamp and making an X on a ballot with it.

"Thank you so much." Somehow, no sarcasm flayed like a spouse's. His wife asked a question he couldn't evade: "Who are you going to vote for?"

"To tell you the truth, honey, I won't know till I get inside the voting booth," Chester answered.

"If you don't vote for Al Smith, you'll end up sorry," Rita said. "You were when you didn't vote for Blackford eight years ago."

"I know I was. I think Coolidge might have been better than Hoover, but we'll never know about that, will we?" He spread butter and grape jam on a piece of toast, then started to throw out the empty jam jar.

"Don't do that," Rita said. "I'll wash it out and use it for a glass. Jelly glasses are better for Carl—they don't hold as much as real ones, and they're thick, so they don't break as easy if he drops them."

"All right," Martin said with his mouth full. He put the jam jar back on the table. When he finished the toast, he gave Rita a quick, greasy kiss, stuck a cloth cap on his head, and hurried out the door. Rita took a deep breath, as if to call something after him, but she didn't. She must have realized it wouldn't change his mind.

The polling place was in the auditorium of an elementary school three or four blocks from the apartment. Chester got there as it opened. As always, the child-sized chairs made him smile. Once upon a time, he'd fit into seats like those. No more, no more. He gave his name and address to the white-mustached man in charge of the list. The man matched it against the entry, then handed him a ballot. "Take any empty voting booth," he droned. How many times had he said that, and in how many elections? How many more would he say it today?

There it was, the big question, right at the top of the ballot. Smith or Taft? Taft or Smith? Chester ignored the Republicans' candidate. Not many people outside of his native Indiana cared about the businessman they'd nominated, which meant they weren't about to win with Willkie. Besides, how could a Wendell hope to prevail against the brute simplicity of Al and Bob? Smith or Taft? Taft or Smith?

Chester stamped the X by Taft's name, hoping he was doing the right thing. Had he voted for Smith, he would have had the same hope, and would have been just as unsure of himself. *It's done, anyhow,* he thought, and went down the rest of the ballot in a hurry. Most of the candidates he voted for were Socialists. That salved his conscience, at least a little.

He carried the finished ballot back to the table where he'd got it. Another old man took it, folded it, and thrust it through the slot in the ballot box. "Mr. Martin has voted," he intoned, the words as formal and unchanging as any this side of the Mass.

Having voted, Chester Martin hurried to the trolley stop. He rode across town to Westwood, not far from the Pacific and even closer to the southern campus of the University of California. Orange groves were going down, houses were going up, and union labor, as usual in Los Angeles, was being ignored.

"Hey, Chester!" another organizer called as he came up. "You *vote* yet?"

"Sure did, before I came here," Martin answered. Westwood wasn't bright and sunny. Fog lingered here, and probably wouldn't burn off till mid-morning. "How about you, Ralph?"

"I'll take care of it on the way home," Ralph answered. "Who'd you vote for?" He winked and laughed uproariously. He was sure he already knew, which meant Chester didn't have to tell him. Under the circumstances, that came as something of a relief.

The strikers carried their picket signs around and around the construction site. They stayed on the sidewalk. Once, at a different site, a man had stumbled and gone onto what would be a lawn. The cops nabbed him for trespassing. Not here, not today.

"Scabs!" the picketers shouted—along with other things, even less complimentary—when workers crossed the picket line and went into the construction site. They had to watch what they said, too. The police had been known to run strikers in for public obscenity. Still, endearments like "You stinking sack of manure!" got the message across.

Most of the strikebreakers went in with their heads down. Watching them cross the picket line was one thing that made Chester glad he'd chosen this side. He had yet to see a scab who didn't act as if his conscience bothered him. A man might go and decide he had to eat any way he could, but he seldom seemed happy about it.

One of the scabs here, a big man on whom the picketers had showered a lot of abuse, finally got fed up and shouted back: "Wait till the Pinkertons get into town, you bastards! They'll kick your asses but good!"

Not one but two foremen ran up to the strikebreaker. They both started cussing him up one side and down the other. The cops didn't jug them for the language they used, any more than they'd arrested the scab.

Chester didn't stop marching or yelling. But he sure as hell did prick up his ears. If the bosses were bringing in Pinkerton men, they were going to try breaking the union. The more notice he had about that, the better he could fight back, because the Pinkertons, notorious union-busters, fought dirty, really dirty. If he'd been one of those foremen, he would have cussed out that scab, too, for tipping the other side's hand.

At lunch, Ralph came up to him and said, "Pinkertons, is it? Well, there'll be a hot time in the old town tonight."

"You bet there will," Chester said. "We can lick 'em, though. They're bastards, sure as hell, but we can lick 'em. And if we do, what have the bosses got left to throw at us? Soldiers? Whose side would they be on?"

"Pinkertons." Ralph made a disgusted face. "I fought those fuckers years ago, in Pittsburgh. Never thought I'd see their ugly mugs again."

Martin nodded. "Same with me in Toledo. They're goons, all right. You think we're going to back down, though? I sure as hell don't. I've got brass knucks, and I can always get a .45 if it looks like I need one."

The other union man looked worried. "You gotta be careful with that, though. You pull it, the cops have the perfect excuse to blow you to kingdom come."

"I know. I know. Like I said, I did this before," Chester said. "But I know something else, too—if they get us on the run, we're in trouble. I don't aim to let that happen."

Cincinnatus Driver refused to buy a paper as he steered his truck toward the railroad yard. He was too disgusted to want to hear anything more about Al Smith's reelection than he had the night before on the wireless. He'd stayed up till the West Coast returns came in, and poured down three cups of coffee to try to make up for not

enough sleep. Taft, behind in the race, had needed to sweep the Coast to win enough electoral votes to overtake the president. He'd won in California, but lost Oregon and Washington—and the election.

They're gonna hold the plebiscite, Cincinnatus thought dolefully. *They're gonna hold it, and the Confederate States are gonna win.* That meant he had to get his mother and father out of Kentucky before it left the USA and returned to the CSA. He knew what being a Negro in the Confederate States was like—and it was bound to be even worse now, under Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party, than it had been before the Great War.

He wished his mother were in better shape than she was. He could have sent his father and her train fare, and they would have ended up in Des Moines not long afterwards. As things were, with her sinking ever deeper into her second childhood, he knew he would have to go down to Covington to help his father bring her out. Elizabeth wouldn't like it—he didn't like it himself—but he saw no way around it.

He pulled into the railroad yard at a quarter to seven, yawning despite all the coffee. When he jumped out of his trunk and hurried over to see what cargoes he could pick up, first one railroad dick and then another waved to him. He was accepted here. He belonged. He never remembered In-longing in Covington—certainly not in any part of it where he bumped up against white men. The first conductor whose train he approached greeted him with, "Hey, Cincinnatus. How you doing?"

"Not bad, Jack," he answered. He never would have called a white man in Covington by his first name. "What you got?"

But Jack felt like gabbing. "Four more years of Smith," he said. "I'm happy. My son got conscripted not long ago, and I don't want him getting shot at. I saw too goddamn much of that myself twenty-five years ago."

That gave Cincinnatus a new slant on things. He'd been shot at during the Great War, too, if only as a truck driver behind the lines. But he didn't have to worry about Achilles getting conscripted. The USA didn't conscript Negroes, any more than the CSA did. If war came, Achilles would be as safe as anybody. Even so, Cincinnatus said, "You won't find anybody colored who wants to go back to livin' in the Confederate States."

By the way Jack blinked, he'd no more thought about that than

Cincinnatus had worried about conscription. The white man said, "I don't suppose there's enough colored folks to change the vote, though."

Cincinnatus grimaced. That was painfully true. Not wanting to dwell on the likely fate of Kentucky (and Houston, and perhaps Sequoyah, but Kentucky mattered most to him), he asked again, "What you got here?"

"Furniture," Jack said, and Cincinnatus' eyes lit up. He and Jack haggled for a while, but not too long. He loaded the truck as full as he could, then roared off for the shops taking delivery. If he got rid of everything in a hurry, he thought he could be back for another equally profitable load by lunchtime.

He was, too. Plenty of things held back a colored man: fewer in the USA than in the CSA, but still plenty. Adding laziness on top of everything else would only have made matters worse. Cincinnatus was a lot of different things. Whatever he was, though, he'd never been afraid of hard work.

His back ached when he pulled up to the apartment building that night, but the money in the pocket of his overalls made the ache seem worthwhile. He opened the mailbox in the lobby, crumpled up the advertising circulars, and winced when he saw a letter with a Covington postmark and the sprawling handwriting of his father's neighbor. News from Covington was unlikely to be good. Because he wished he didn't have to find out what the letter said, he carried it upstairs without opening it.

When he walked in, Amanda was doing homework. He smiled at her. *Gonna have me two high-school graduates soon,* he thought proudly. *That ain't bad for a Kentucky nigger who never went to school at all.*

From the kitchen came the crackle and the mouth-watering smell of frying chicken. Cincinnatus went in to say hello to Elizabeth, who was turning pieces with long-handled tongs. After a quick kiss, she asked, "What you got there?"

"Letter from Covington."

"Oh." She understood his hesitation, but asked the next question anyhow: "What's it say?"

"Don't know yet. Ain't opened it," he said. The look his wife sent

him was sympathetic and impatient at the same time. He tore off the end of the envelope, took out the letter, unfolded it, and read. By the time he got to the end, his face was as long as the train from which he'd taken off furniture.

"What is it?" Elizabeth asked.

"I got to git down there. Got to do it quick," Cincinnatus said heavily. "Neighbor says my mama, she start wanderin' off every chance she get. Pa turn his back on her half a minute, she out the door an' lookin' for the house where she growed up. Can't have that. She liable to git lost for good, or git run over on account of she go out in the street and don't look where she goin'." Stress and the thought of Covington made his accent thicken.

Elizabeth sighed. Then hot fat spattered, and she yipped and jerked back her hand. She said, "I reckon maybe you do, but, Lord, I wish you didn't."

"So do I, on account of Ma and on account of I don't want to go back to Kentucky, neither," Cincinnatus said. "But it ain't always what you want to do. Sometimes it's what you got to do." He waited. Elizabeth sighed again, then reluctantly nodded.

He bought a round-trip train ticket, knowing he would have to get oneway fares for his parents in Covington. He sent the neighbor down there a wire to let him know when he'd be getting into town. Then he stuffed a few days' clothes and sundries into a beat-up suitcase and went to the railroad station to catch the eastbound train.

It pulled into Covington at eleven that night. The neighbor, Menander Pershing, stood on the platform with his father. Cincinnatus' father looked older and smaller and wearier than Cincinnatus had dreamt he would. After embracing him, Cincinnatus looked nervously across the brightly lit platform.

"Ain't none o' them Kentucky State Police this time," Seneca Driver said. He'd been born a slave, and still talked like it. After so long hearing the accents of the white Midwest, Cincinnatus found his father's way of speaking strange and ignorant-sounding, even though he'd sounded like that himself when he was a boy. His father hadn't even had a surname (and neither had he) till they'd all taken the same one after Kentucky returned to the USA in the Great War.

Cincinnatus couldn't help looking around some more. As far as he

could tell, nobody was paying any attention to him. Little by little, he began to relax. "Freedom Party don't give you no trouble?" he asked.

"Don't want trouble from nobody," his father said. "I minds my business, an' I don't git none."

"Ain't too bad," Menander Pershing added. He was about Cincinnatus' age, lean, with a few threads of gray in his close-cropped hair. He fixed autos for a living, and wore a mechanic's greasy overalls. "They reckon they win come January, so they bein' quiet till then." He jerked a thumb toward the exit. "Come on. I got my motorcar out in the lot."

U.S. soldiers were searching some passengers' bags as they left the station. The men in green-gray waved Seneca and his companions through without bothering. It might have been the first time in his life when being colored made things easier for him. The soldiers didn't think Negroes would back the Freedom Party no matter what. They were likely to be right, too.

Menander Pershing's auto was an elderly Oldsmobile, but its motor purred when he started it. Getting in, Cincinnatus asked, "How's Ma?"

"Well, she sleepin' now. That's how I come away," his father answered. "You see in the mornin', that's all." He wouldn't say anything more.

Even by moonlight, the house where Cincinnatus' parents lived was smaller and shabbier than he remembered. He lay down on the rickety sofa in the front room and got what sleep he could.

In the morning, heartbreak began. His father had to introduce him to his mother; she didn't recognize him on her own. After she came out of the kitchen with a cup of coffee in her hand, she looked at him and said, "Who are you?"

"I'm Cincinnatus, Ma," he said quietly, and felt the sting of tears.

As long as they stayed in the room together, she seemed to know who he was. When she left to go to the outhouse, though, she came back and looked at him as if she'd never seen him before in her life. As far as she knew, she hadn't. Fighting the stab at his heart, he introduced himself again.

"She like that," Cincinnatus' father said sadly. "She still know me all

the time. She better, after all these years. But she don't know nobody else, not so it stick."

Cincinnatus pounded a fist into his thigh. "Damn!"

"Don't you talk like that, young man! I switch you if you cuss in the house!" For two sentences, his mother sounded just the way she had when he was thirteen. Hearing that *damn* might have flipped a switch in her head. Old things seemed more familiar to her than new ones. But then her eyes went vague again. She forgot her own annoyance. Seeing her forget might have been harder to bear than anything.

Or so Cincinnatus thought, till he too went out back to use the outhouse— a fixture he hadn't had to worry about for many years— and returned to find his father rushing out to get him. "She run off!" Seneca cried. "I go back in the kitchen for a minute, and she run off!"

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus exclaimed. "We got to find her." He and his father hurried out to the front yard. Cincinnatus looked left and right. No sign of her. "You go this way," he told his father. "I'll go that way. She ain't gone real far."

Off he went, quick as he could. When he got to a corner, he hesitated. Up or down? Either way might prove a dreadful mistake— and he had the chance for another one at every corner he came to. Swearing under his breath, he dog-trotted along the street. Each time he came to a corner, his curses got louder.

But luck was with him. He rounded one last corner and there she was, on the far side of the street, strolling along as if she knew just where she was going. "Ma!" Cincinnatus yelled. "Ma!" She paid no attention to him. Maybe she didn't hear. Maybe she'd forgotten a grown man could call her his mother.

Cincinnatus ran out into the street after her—and his luck abruptly changed. He remembered a squeal of brakes, a shout, and an impact ... and then, nothing.

When he woke, he wanted that nothing back. One leg was on fire. Someone was taking a sledgehammer to his head. He opened his eyes a crack. Everything was white. For a moment, he thought it was heaven. Then, blearily, he realized it had to be a hospital.

He made a noise. A nurse appeared, as if by magic. He tried to talk. At last, after some effort, he succeeded: "Wha' happen?"

"Fractured tibia and fibula," she said briskly. "Fractured skull, too. When they brought you in a week ago, they didn't think you'd make it. You must have a hard head. You had to be nuts, running out there like that. The guy in the auto never had a chance to stop. And how are you going to pay your bills?"

That was the least of his worries. His wits didn't want to work. The injury? Drugs? Whatever it was, he tried to fight it. "Ma?" he asked. The nurse only shrugged. "Got to get out of here," he said.

She shook her head. "Not till you're better. And you aren't going anywhere for quite a while, believe you me you're not."

"Plebiscite," he said in dismay. The nurse shrugged again. Cincinnatus drifted back into unconsciousness. If he whimpered, it might have been pain and not fear. Pain was what the nurse took it for, anyhow. She gave him another shot of morphine.

Winter in Covington, Kentucky, was of positively Yankee fury. Anne Colleton didn't care for it a bit. But she didn't complain, either. She'd pulled every wire she could reach to get to be a Confederate election inspector. Now that she was here, she intended to make the most of it.

Disapproval stuck out like spines from the fat brigadier general who commanded the local U.S. garrison. He knew what was going to happen when the votes were cast on Tuesday. He knew, but he couldn't do one damned thing about it.

Anne disliked the idea of Negroes voting in the plebiscite as much as Brigadier General Rowling (she thought that was his name, but wasn't quite sure—he wasn't worth remembering, anyhow) disliked the idea of the plebiscite itself. She had grumbled about that.

Brigadier General—Rowling?—wouldn't listen. He said, "Your president agreed to it, so you're stuck with it."

She had no answer for that. What Jake Featherston said, went. "Let them enjoy it while they can, then," she said, "because they sure won't be doing any voting after Kentucky comes back where it belongs."

The U.S. officer scowled. She'd hoped he would. He said, "Maybe you'd like to go into the colored district yourself on Tuesday so you can see everything is on the up and up?"

"I'm not afraid, if that's what you mean," she said.

"Bully for you," said the fat man from the United States. Anne couldn't remember the last time she'd heard anyone say *bully,* even sardonically.

January 7, 1941, dawned clear and cold. Anne Colleton got up to see the sun rise to make sure she missed none of the plebiscite. Polls opened at seven. Polling places were officially marked by the Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars flying in front of them—and unofficially by the armed U.S. soldiers who stood outside each one to make sure there was no trouble. Jake Featherston had offered to send Confederate soldiers into Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah to help with that, but President Smith had told him no, and he hadn't pushed it. For the moment, they remained U.S. territory.

For the moment, Anne thought with a ferocious smile.

Both the USA and the CSA had poll watchers at every polling place. They checked the men and women who came in to vote against the lists of those who were eligible. Every now and then, they would argue. Both sides kept lists of contested voters. If the plebiscite turned out to be close, those lists would turn into weapons. In Kentucky and Houston, at least, Anne didn't think the vote would be close.

She did go into the colored part of Covington. Her motorcar flew the Stars and Bars from the wireless aerial. In most of Covington, people had cheered when they saw it. In the colored district... Anne wished she'd thought to take down the flag.

Some of the U.S. poll watchers in the colored part of town were Negroes: young men who'd grown up and got an education while Kentucky belonged to the USA. Because the voting rolls for Negroes were new and imperfect, they bickered constantly with their C.S. counterparts, and argued with them as if they believed they were just as good as whites. In the Confederate States, that would have been a death sentence.

One of the Confederate poll watchers said as much: "When this here state goes back where it belongs, you better recollect what happens to uppity niggers, Lucullus."

The Negro—Lucullus—looked steadily back at him. "You better recollect what happens when you push folks too far," he answered. "You push 'em so far they don't care if they lives or dies, why should they care if *you* lives or dies?"

"Talk is cheap," the white man fleered. Lucullus said not a word. Anne feared he'd won the exchange.

When she came out of the polling place—a little storefront church—she discovered her auto had a smashed windscreen (though they said *windshield* in the USA). Her driver was out of the motorcar, hopping mad and yelling at a U.S. soldier: "Why the hell didn't you stop that goddamn nigger? He flung a brick right in front of your nose, and you just stood there."

"I'm sorry, sir." The green-gray-clad soldier sounded anything but sorry. By his accent, he was from nowhere near Kentucky. "I didn't see a thing."

"What is your name?" Anne demanded. "I'm going to report you to your commanding officer."

"Jenkins, ma'am. Rudy Jenkins," the soldier answered. "And you can report as much as you please, but I won't lose any sleep over it."

She thought about telling him where to go and how to get there in the sort of language he would use himself—thought about it and decided it would do no good. Oh, she intended to give his name to that stuffed pork chop in a brigadier general's uniform, but she was sure that would do her no good, either. Jenkins might get a public slap on the wrist, but he was bound to get some private congratulations along with it.

She turned to the driver. "Just take us on to the next stop. This fellow can laugh as much as he pleases, but he'll be leaving soon, and we're going to stay."

The driver fumed. But Rudy Jenkins fumed even more. Anne nodded to herself. She'd done that right.

Before she left the colored district, the auto picked up a couple of more dents. The driver plainly wanted to curse some more; her presence in the motorcar inhibited him. "To hell with these goddamn bastards," she said, her voice crisp. "From now on, no one will give a shit what they think. Right?"

"Uh, yes, ma'am." He sounded scandalized. She smiled; she'd heard a lot of men sound that way. On they went, to a new polling place in the white part of town. There, Freedom Party stalwarts waving Party flags paraded just outside the hundred-foot electioneering limit. The U.S. soldiers by the polling place looked as if they wanted to shoot the men in white shirts and butternut trousers. The stalwarts were careful not to give them an excuse.

Anne went from one polling place to another till the polls closed at eight o'clock. Then the driver took her to the Covington city hall, where the votes would be counted. As at the polling places, both the USA and the CSA had observers present to make sure the count went straight.

Watching it progress, Anne found more people in Covington voting to stay in the United States than she would have liked: certainly more than the Negro vote—and what a mad notion that was!—accounted for. Some of the whites who'd grown up in the USA must have been too lazy to want a change. Even so, returning to the Confederacy took an early lead in Covington, and never lost it.

Wireless sets blared in the white-painted, windowless, smoke-filled room where the ballots were tallied. They let the counters and the observers keep track of what was going on in the rest of Kentucky and in the other states where there were plebiscites. Return to the CSA held the same sort of lead in Kentucky as a whole as it did in Covington—less than Anne would have liked, but plenty to win. Houston was going for the CSA in a rout: better than three to one. Sequoyah ... Sequoyah gave the damnyankees something to smile about, because the people there seemed to be choosing to stay in the United States.

The tally in Covington finished about half past one. By then, Anne's driver had fallen asleep in a folding chair. She eyed him in some admiration; she didn't think she could have done that in a quiet room, let alone in the noisy chaos at city hall. He jerked and almost fell out of the chair when she shook him awake again. She was sorry about that, but not sorry enough to keep from doing it.

Noisy chaos roiled through the rest of Covington, too, as she saw on the short trip back to her hotel. Freedom Party stalwarts and others who backed the CSA danced in the streets, waving Party flags, the Stars and Bars, and the Confederate battle flag. A lot of them were drunk. They cheered the Confederate flag on the aerial of Anne's battered auto. Somehow, the cheers turned into a rousing chorus of

"Dixie."

Anne wondered if the celebrants would go into the colored district and take their revenge on Covington's Negroes for voting to stay in the USA—or for having the nerve to vote at all. Maybe the U.S. soldiers who still patrolled the town would keep them from doing that. But any Negroes who stayed in Covington after Kentucky changed hands wouldn't have a happy time of it. Anne supposed a lot of them would go while the going was good. *The United States are welcome to them,* she thought.

She snatched a few hours' sleep. When she came downstairs for breakfast, she got a copy of the *Covington Chronicle.* The banner headline summed things up:

[redacted]

A smaller subhead below gave the details:

[redacted]

[redacted]

After bacon and eggs and lots of coffee, Anne paid a call on the U.S. commandant in Covington. "The people have spoken, Brigadier General," she said—and if she was gloating, she thought she had good reason to.

A cup of coffee steamed on the fat officer's desk. He looked to have had even less sleep than she had. "The people are a bunch of damned fools," he said. "They elected Featherston, didn't they?"

"I don't talk about your president that way," she said.

"Why not? I do." The commandant swigged from the coffee cup. He got down to business: "Under the agreement, we have thirty days to withdraw our men. Yours are not to follow. Kentucky will stay

demilitarized. U.S. citizens wishing to leave the state may do so until it passes under Confederate sovereignty. A lot of them, I expect, will already have made plans to do so."

"Collaborators and niggers," Anne said scornfully. "You can have 'em."

"They'll do all right for themselves in the United States," the U.S. general predicted. "And I'll give you—and your president—some free advice, too."

"Free advice?" Anne didn't laugh in his face, but she came close. "I'm sure it's worth every penny you charge for it."

She hoped that would make him angry. If it did, he didn't show it. He just nodded, setting his chins in motion, and said, "Oh, no doubt. Well, I'll give it to you anyway, mostly 'cause I know you won't listen to it."

Anne could simply have turned her back and walked out the door. Instead, with ill-concealed impatience, she said, "Go ahead, then. Get it over with."

"Thanks a lot." The U.S. officer wasn't bad at sarcasm, either, even if he was built like a zeppelin. "If you people are smart, you won't land on this state too hard. You won the plebiscite, yes. But you didn't win it by as much as you thought you would, and you can't tell me any different. If you come down on Kentucky with both feet, you'll have about as much fun holding it down as we have since the last war."

That made more sense than Anne wished it did—enough that she decided to mention it in her report to President Featherston. She wouldn't suggest that he follow the fat man's advice; she knew better. But noting it as an item of intelligence wouldn't hurt.

She also decided she would note the way—Rowling? she had to check that—had spoken of the last war. Unless she altogether misread his tone, he was already thinking about the next one.

As had been his habit since the days of the Mexican civil war, Jefferson Pinkard prowled the barracks in the prison camp he ran in

Louisiana. Camp Dependable wouldn't boil over while his back was turned.

It might boil over anyway. He knew that. The black prisoners in the camp had little to lose. They'd been captured in arms against the Confederate States. Nothing good was going to happen to them. They only thing that kept them in line was the certain knowledge that they would die if they rose up against the guards. Jeff's endless prowling was designed not least to make sure they stayed certain of that.

Whenever he stepped into a barracks, he had a pistol in his hand and half a squad of guards with submachine guns at his back. The Negro captives jumped down from their bunks and sprang to attention as soon as he came in. They were certain of what would happen if they didn't show him that courtesy, too.

"You, boy!" Pinkard pointed to one of them, a big, muscular buck. "Give me your name and number and where you were captured."

"I's Plutarch, suh," the Negro replied. He rattled off the camp number, finishing, "I was cotched up in Franklin Parish, suh. Some damn nigger sell me out. I ever find out who, dat one dead coon."

A lot of prisoners here had similar complaints. Some Negroes didn't want guerrilla war in their back yards. The ones who didn't had to be careful with what they did and said, though. A lot of them had ended up gruesomely dead when the men they were trying to betray took vengeance.

"Any complaints?" Pinkard asked.

Plutarch nodded. "I ain't got enough to eat, I ain't got enough to wear, an' I's *here*. 'Side from that, everything fine."

"Funny nigger," growled one of the guards behind Pinkard. "You'll laugh outa the other side of your face pretty damn quick, funny nigger."

Several of the other blacks in the barracks had smiled and nodded at what Plutarch had to say. None had been rash enough to laugh out loud. Now even the men who'd smiled tried to pretend they hadn't. Pinkard said, "You get the same rations and same clothes as everybody else. And if you didn't want to be here, you never should have picked up a gun."

"Huh!" Plutarch said. "White folks rise up against what they don't like, they's heroes. Black folks do the same, we's goddamn niggers."

"Bet your ass you are, boy," that guard said.

"There's a difference," Pinkard said.

Plutarch nodded. "Sure enough is. Y'all won. We lost. Ain't no bigger difference'n dat." That wasn't the difference Jeff had had in mind, which didn't mean the prisoner was wrong. Pinkard poked through the barracks. He knew how things were supposed to be, and carefully checked out everything that didn't match the pattern. Nothing looked like the start of an escape attempt, but you couldn't be sure without a thorough inspection.

On to the next barracks. As before, prisoners tumbled out of their bunks and stood at stiff attention. There was one difference here, though: Willy Knight dwelt in Barracks Six. The tall, blond, former vice president stood out from the black men all around him like a snowball in a coal field.

He was not the man he had been when Freedom Party guards brought him to Camp Dependable. He was scrawnier; camp rations weren't enough to let anybody keep the weight he'd come in with. He was dirtier, too—water for washing was in short supply. And, in an odd way, he was tougher than he had been. That he'd been tough enough to stay alive surprised Jeff Pinkard, who wouldn't have given him the chance of a snowball: a snowball in hell.

Hell this might well have been. But none of the Negro inhabitants here had taken advantage of the chance to get rid of a Freedom Party big shot. That surprised Pinkard, too—it did, but then again, it didn't. The blacks might have suspected Knight was in here as much as bait as for any other reason. Anybody who harmed him was liable to pay the price.

They might not have been wrong, either. For the moment, Jeff's orders were to look the other way if anything happened to Willy Knight. But one telegram could change that, and could change it days or weeks or months after something nasty happened to the ex-vice president.

Almost as if Knight were any other prisoner, Pinkard pointed at him and snapped, "You! Give me your name and number!" He couldn't make himself call another white *boy*.

Knight repeated his name and camp number, then added, "I was captured in Richmond, Virginia, trying to save the country."

"I want something from you, I'll ask for it," Jeff said.

The guard who'd growled at Plutarch growled at Willy Knight, too: "You really want to catch hell, just go on runnin' your mouth."

Knight shut up. The first time someone had said something like that to him, he'd asked what could be worse than coming to the camp to begin with. The guards had spent the next couple of weeks showing him what could be worse. Another way he was different now was that he didn't have any front teeth. He'd learned something, but not everything, about keeping quiet.

Pinkard didn't ask him if he had any complaints. Even if Knight did, nobody was going to do anything about them. That being so, why waste time and breath?

The warden did inspect Barracks Six with care unusual even for him. If some of the colored prisoners escaped, that would be a misfortune. He'd get called on the carpet. If Willy Knight escaped, that would be a catastrophe. Somebody's head would have to roll, and he knew whose. He might end up in one of these hard, narrow bunks himself—or they might simply shoot him and get it over with. Nobody, but nobody, was going to escape from Barracks Six.

Everything seemed shipshape. Pinkard didn't trust the way things seemed. He had no reason not to. He just didn't. He took out a little book and scribbled a note to himself. Half the men in here would get cleared out before the day was done, to be replaced by prisoners from other barracks. If plots were stirring, that would slow them down. People would have to figure out who could be trusted and who couldn't. *I better stick a new informer or two in here, too,* Jeff thought. The less that went on without his knowing it, the better the camp ran.

He was heading for the next barracks when a guard came up to him with a yellow envelope. "This here wire just came in, boss," the man said, and thrust it at him.

"What the hell?" Pinkard took the envelope, opened it, and extracted the telegram inside. "What the *hell?"* he said again, this time in tones of deep dismay.

"What's the matter?" the guard asked.

"What's the matter?" Jeff would echo anybody, not just himself. "I'll tell you what's the matter. We're going to get a new shipment of prisoners, that's what—a big new shipment of prisoners. Nice of 'em to let us know, wasn't it? They're supposed to start comin' in this afternoon."

"A new shipment of prisoners?" The guard proved he could repeat what he'd just heard, too. Then he exploded, much as Jeff wanted to do. "Jesus H. Christ! Where the hell we gonna put 'em? We already got niggers swingin' from the rafters. Shit, we got niggers comin' out our assholes, is what we got."

"You know that, Wes, and I know that, and anybody who knows one goddamn thing about this here camp knows it, too," Pinkard said. "But you know what else? The folks in Richmond don't know it. Either that or they just don't give a fuck." He looked around more than a little frantically. "Where am I gonna put all them nigger bastards? How am I gonna stop 'em from runnin' away? Christ! How are we gonna feed 'em? This here don't say word one about extra rations."

Wes frowned. Then he shrugged. "Split up what you get with as many mouths as we got inside. What the hell else can you do?"

"Damfino." Jefferson Pinkard shook his head in deep discontent. "Prisoners we got are already hungry as can be on what we're feeding 'em. Nothin' left to scrounge off the countryside. If they got to make do with three-quarters as much—or maybe only half as much: how can I guess?—they're gonna start starving to death in jigtime."

"You don't need to get your bowels in an uproar about it, boss," Wes said. "They're only niggers, for Chrissake. Ain't like you was starvin' Uncle Henry and Aunt Daisy."

"Oh, hell, I know that," Pinkard said. "But this is all just a bunch of crap." His sense of order, of propriety, was offended. "If they send us extra men, they oughta send us the extra rations to go with 'em. Ain't fair if they don't. It's like in the Bible where old what's-his-name—Pharaoh—made the Jews make bricks without straw." He wanted things to work the way they were supposed to.

"Reckon the sheenies had it coming to 'em, same as the coons do now," Wes said.

But Pinkard shook his head. "No. You give somebody something to do, you got to give him the chance to do it, too. And Richmond *ain't."*

"Send 'em a wire back," the guard suggested.

"Maybe I will." But Jeff doubted he would. If the big boys got the idea he couldn't handle whatever they threw at him, they'd toss him out on his ear and put in somebody who wouldn't say shit if he had a mouthful.

As promised—threatened?—the new shipment of colored prisoners did come in that afternoon. Pinkard had his clerks as ready as they could be. They got swamped anyway. It would have been worse if they hadn't been braced. That was the most Jeff could say for it. The shipment was even larger than he'd expected. For a little while, he feared he wouldn't be able to shoehorn everybody inside the barbed-wire perimeter.

He did manage that, though he had prisoners curled up on bare ground between barracks without a blanket to call their own. The cooks served out the supper ration, share and share alike. The new prisoners ate like starving wolves. Pinkard wondered how long they'd gone with even less, or with nothing. By their gaunt faces and hollow cheeks, some of them had gone quite a while. The men already inside Camp Dependable grumbled at what they got. They didn't grumble too loud, though; if they had, they would have offended people who'd been through worse.

About midnight, a thunderstorm loosed an artillery barrage of rain on the prison camp. The new prisoners struggled to get into the barracks: it was either that or sink into what rapidly became a bottomless gumbo of mud. Not all of them could. The buildings simply would not hold so many men.

We'll see pneumonia in a few days, Jeff thought, lying in bed while lightning raved. *They'll die like flies, especially if nobody ups the ration.*

He shrugged. His initial panic had receded. What could he do about this? Nothing he could see, except ride herd on things the best way he knew how. It wasn't as if the prisoners hadn't done plenty of things that made them deserve to be here. Anybody who came here deserved to be here, by the very nature of things. Jake Featherston had got Kentucky and Houston back for the Confederate States. If that didn't prove he knew what was what, nothing could. Nodding to himself—*figured that one out*—Pinkard rolled over and went back to sleep.

Hipolito Rodriguez had always been better at saving money than most of his neighbors. That Magdalena had the same sort of thrifty temperament certainly helped. Some of the people around Baroyeca thought of him as a damned *judio.* He didn't lose any sleep about those people's opinions. In general, he didn't think much of them, either.

He did believe that working hard and hanging on to as much cash as he could paid off sooner or later. *Sooner or later* often simply meant *later.* He wasn't rich. He wasn't about to get rich any time soon. But he didn't mind living more comfortably when the chance came along.

And it was coming. He could see it coming, in the most literal sense of the words: a row of poles stretching nut along the road from Baroyeca that ran alongside his farm. Every day, the Freedom Youth Corps planted more of them, as if they were some crop that would grow.

Electricity had come to the town a few years earlier. That it should come to the farms outside of town ... Rodriguez hadn't been sure he would live to see the day, but here it was, and he was going to take advantage of it. He'd had the money to pay an electrician to wire the house before the poles reached it. He'd had enough to buy electric lamps and the bulbs that went with them, too. And he'd had enough for a surprise for Magdalena. The surprise waited in the barn. (He also dreamt of buying an automobile, and a tractor to take the place of the mule. He knew that was and would stay a dream, but savored it anyhow.)

The day came when the poles reached and marched past his house. That turned out to be something of an anticlimax, for the wires that made the poles anything more than dead trees hadn't yet come so far. Still, looking out at the long shadows the poles cast in the low January sun, he nodded to himself. Those poles were the visible harbingers of a new way of life.

Three days later, the electrical wires arrived. Freedom Youth Corps boys strung them from pole to pole under the supervision of a foul-mouthed electrician from Hermosillo. Even Rodriguez, who'd done his time in the Army, heard some things he'd never run into before. For the boys from the Freedom Youth Corps, this had to be part of their training that they hadn't expected.

Baroyeca's electrician was a moon-faced man named César

Calderon. He never swore. The day after the wires passed the farmhouse, he came out on a mule that made the one Rodriguez owned seem like a thoroughbred by comparison. He ran a wire from the closest power pole to the fuse box he'd installed on the side of the house. He tested the circuits with a device that glowed when the current was flowing. Seeing it light up made Rodriguez swell with pride.

"¿Todo está bien?" he asked.

Calderon nodded. "Oh, yes. Everything is fine, exactly how it should be. If you like, you can plug in a lamp and turn it on."

Fingers trembling, Rodriguez did. He pushed the little knob below the light bulb. The motion felt strange, unnatural, unpracticed. The knob clicked into the new position. The light came on. It was even brighter than Rodriguez had expected.

Magdalena crossed herself. *"Madre de Dios,"* she whispered. "It's like having the sun in the house."

Rodriguez solemnly shook hands with the electrician. *"Muchas gracias."*

"De nada," Calderon replied. But it wasn't nothing, and they both knew it. Calderon packed up his tools, climbed onto the mule, and rode away. Rodriguez turned off the lamp and turned it on again. Yes, the electricity stayed even after the electrician went away. Rodriguez had thought it would, but he hadn't been quite sure. When he lit a kerosene lamp, he understood what was going on: the flame from the match made the wick and the kerosene that soaked up through it burn. But what really happened when he pushed that little knob? The light came on. How? Why? He couldn't have said.

But even if he didn't know how it worked, he knew that it worked. And knowing that it worked was plenty. He turned out the lamp again—they didn't really need it right this minute—and headed out to the barn, telling Magdalena, "I'll be back," over his shoulder.

The crate was large, heavy, and unwieldy. He'd brought it to the farm from Baroyeca in the wagon. Now it rested on a sledge. He'd been warned to keep it upright; bad things would happen, he was told, if it went over on its side. He didn't want bad things to happen, not after the money he'd spent. He dragged the crate out of the barn and toward the farmhouse.

Magdalena came outside. "What have you got there?" she asked.

Hipolito Rodriguez smiled. He'd made a point of coming back from town after sundown, so she wouldn't see what was in the wagon. "It's —a box," he said.

"Muchas gracias," Magdalena replied with icy sarcasm. "And what is in the box?"

"Why, another box, of course," he replied, which won him a glare from his wife. By then, he'd hauled the crate to the base of the steps. He went back to the barn for a hammer, which he used to pull up the nails holding the crate closed. "You don't believe me? Here, I'll show you."

"Show me what?" Magdalena demanded. But then she gave a little gasp, for, just as Rodriguez had planned, the front panel of the crate fell away. She stared at him. "Is that—?"

He nodded. *"Sí,* sweetheart. It's a refrigerator."

She crossed herself again. She did that several times a day. It was nothing out of the ordinary. Then she started to cry. That made him hurry up the stairs and take her in his arms, because she hardly ever did it. She sobbed on his shoulder for a few seconds. At last, pulling away, she said, "I never thought we would have electricity. Even when we got electricity, I never thought we would have one of these. And I wanted one. I wanted one so much." She suddenly looked anxious. "But can we afford it?"

"It wasn't as much as I thought it would be," he answered. "And it isn't supposed to use that much electricity. Look." He wrestled off the rest of the crate. That done, he opened the refrigerator door. "In the freezer compartment, it even makes its own ice in little trays."

"What will they think of next?" Magdalena whispered. "A few years ago, I don't think there was any ice in all of Baroyeca. Who in the whole town had ever seen ice?"

"Anyone who'd gone north to fight *los Estados Unidos."* Rodriguez shivered at the memory. And he'd only been in Texas. The men who'd fought in Kentucky and Tennessee had had it worse. "I have seen ice, *por Dios,* and I wish I hadn't."

"You'd seen God make ice," Magdalena said with a snort. "Had you

ever seen people making ice?"

"Even the people had it up there," he said. "They're richer than we are. But we're gaining. I know we are. I didn't used to think so, not before the Freedom Party won. Now I'm sure of it."

"Electricity," his wife said, as if the one word proved everything that needed proving. As far as Rodriguez was concerned, it did.

He went back and closed the refrigerator's door. Then, grunting with effort, he picked up the machine and carried it up the stairs. It wasn't any taller than his navel, but it was plenty heavy. He'd found that out getting the crate into the wagon in the first place. When he set it down on the porch, the boards groaned under the weight. "Open the door for me, please," he said, and Magdalena did.

The kitchen wasn't far. *A good thing, too,* Rodriguez thought. He set the refrigerator against the wall near an outlet and plugged it in. It started to hum: not loudly, but noticeably. He hadn't known it would do that. He cocked his head to one side, listening and wondering how annoying it would be. Would he get used to it, or would it start to drive him crazy? He didn't know, but he expected he'd find out.

Magdalena came in to stare at the new arrival in the kitchen. "Is it cold yet?"

"I don't know." Rodriguez opened the door and stuck his hand inside. "It feels cooler, anyhow, I think." He took out the ice-cube trays. "Fill these with water. We'll see how long they take to freeze."

"All right." Magdalena did. Carefully, she put the trays back into the freezer compartment, closed its door, and closed the refrigerator door. The hum, which had got louder with the door open, quieted down again. "Not too bad," Magdalena murmured, and Hipolito nodded; he'd been thinking the same thing. She went on, "We have lamps. We have this wonderful refrigerator." She pronounced the unfamiliar word with care. "Do you know what I would like next, when we can afford it?"

"No. What?" Rodriguez hadn't begun to think about what might come after the refrigerator.

But Magdalena had. "A wireless set," she said at once. "That has to be the most wonderful invention in the whole world. Music and people talking here inside our own house whenever we want them—

what could be more marvelous?"

"I don't know." Rodriguez hadn't heard the wireless all that often himself. It had brought returns from the last election to Freedom Party headquarters. The cantina had a set, too, one that usually played love songs. He shrugged. "If you want one, I suppose we can do that one of these days. They aren't too expensive."

"I *do* want one," Magdalena said emphatically. "If we have a wireless set, we can hear everything that happens as soon as it happens. We wouldn't be on a farm outside a little town in a state most of *los Estados Confederados* don't care about. We would be in New Orleans or Richmond itself."

Rodriguez laughed. "Now I understand," he said. "You want the wireless set so you can catch up on gossip all over the world."

His wife poked him in the ribs. He squirmed. He wasn't usually ticklish, but she'd found a sensitive spot. She said, "And you never gossip at all when you visit *La Culebra Verde."*

"That's different," he declared. Magdalena didn't say anything, which made him wonder how it was different. He tried his best: "Men talk about important things."

Magdalena laughed in his face. Evidently his best wasn't good enough. But she let him down easy, asking, "Is it ice yet?"

"Let's find out." He opened the refrigerator door. The air that came out was definitely chilly now. The water in the ice-cube trays was still water, though. He touched it with a fingertip. "It's getting colder."

Magdalena touched it, too. She nodded and closed the door. They stood there in front of the refrigerator, listening to the soft hum of the future.

In the officers' mess on the USS *Remembrance,* Commander Dan Cressy nodded to Sam Carsten. "Well, Lieutenant, you called that one," the exec said.

"Called which one, sir?" Sam asked. The carrier was rolling, but not too badly. He had no trouble staying in his chair.

"There are reports of Confederate soldiers assembling near the borders of Kentucky and Houston," Cressy answered. "What do you want to bet they'll be marching in as soon as we finish pulling out, just the way you said they would?"

"Sir, if you think I'm happy to be right, you're wrong," Sam said. "What happens if they do go in?"

Commander Cressy shrugged. "I don't know. I hope President Smith does. He'd better. Somebody had better, anyhow."

"If they go in, won't it take a war to get them out?" That was Lieutenant Commander Hiram Pottinger, Carsten's superior on the damage-control party.

Nobody in the officers' mess said anything for some little while after that. They knew what war meant. Not many of them besides Sam had served in the Great War, but they'd all been through the inconclusive Pacific War against Japan.

"A lot will depend on what happens in Europe," Commander Cressy said.

"France is starting to whoop and holler about Alsace and Lorraine," Sam said meditatively. "I saw an *Action Française* riot before those boys came to power. I don't think they'll take no for an answer. They're just as sure they've got God on their side as Jake Featherston is."

"And the Russians are squawking about Poland, and they're starting to squawk about the Ukraine, too," Cressy said. "And the limeys are

growling at the micks, and ain't we got fun?"

Sam sighed. He wished for a cigarette, but the smoking lamp was out. "We're going to hell in a handbasket all over again," he said. "Didn't anybody learn anything the last time around?"

"I'll tell you one thing we didn't learn," the *Remembrance's* exec said. "We didn't learn to make sure the sons of bitches who lost took so many lumps, they couldn't get back up on their feet and have another try. And I'm afraid we're going to have to pay for it."

Lieutenant Commander Pottinger said, "They've learned something in South America, anyhow. Argentina and the Empire of Brazil are cuddling up, even if Argentina and Chile are yelling again."

"Sir, that's good news for Britain, not for us," Carsten said. "If there is a war, it means Brazil will let Argentina ship food through its territorial waters and then make the short hop across the Atlantic to French West Africa, same as happened the last time."

"How do you know so much about that?" Commander Cressy asked, as if to say, *You're a mustang, so you're not supposed to know much of anything.*

"Sir, I was there, in the *Dakota*," Sam answered. Cressy was a young hotshot. He had more book learning and learned faster than anyone Sam had ever seen. If war did come, he would likely have flag rank by the time it was done, assuming he lived. But he did sometimes forget that people could also learn by good, old-fashioned experience.

The other side of the coin was, Sam had only been a petty officer then. Officers also had the unfortunate habit of believing that men who weren't didn't know anything. (Petty officers, of course, were just as sure that officers' heads either had nothing in them or were full of rocks.)

"We can lick the Confederates," Pottinger said. "We did it before, and this time we won't have to take on Canada, too."

Everyone in the mess nodded. Somebody—Sam didn't see who—said, "Goddamn Japs'll try and sucker punch us in the Pacific when we're busy close to home."

More nods. Sam said, "They did that in the last war—the last big war, I mean. I was there for that, too."

Something in his tone made Commander Cressy's gaze sharpen. "The *Dakota* was the ship that went on that wild circle through the Battle of the Three Navies, wasn't she?"

"Yes, sir," Carsten said. "One of the hits we took jammed our steering, so all we could do *was* circle—either that or stand still, and the Japs or the limeys would have blown us out of the water if we had."

"You've had an ... interesting career, haven't you?" the exec said.

"Sir, I've been lucky," Sam answered. "Closest I came to buying a plot was from the Spanish influenza after the war. That almost did me in. Otherwise, hardly a scratch."

"They tried taking the Sandwich Islands away from us in the Pacific War." Hiram Pottinger went on with the main argument: "Odds are the bastards will try it again. And if they do, the Pacific coast had better look out."

Nobody argued with him. After the wake-up call the Japanese had given Los Angeles in 1932, nobody could. They'd built their Navy to fight far out into the Pacific, and so had the United States. If the two countries ever went at each other with everything they had...

"If we go at the Japs full bore, instead of doing a half-assed job of it the way we did the last time, we'll lick 'em," Sam said.

Commander Cressy nodded. "If we could do that, we would," he said. "But if we're at war with Japan any time soon, we're also likely to be at war with the Confederate States. And if we're at war with the CSA, we aren't going to be able to hit the Japs with everything we've got. And they've built up a tidy little empire for themselves since the last war."

That was true enough. Japan had owned Chosen, Formosa, and the Philippines going into the Great War. Since then, she'd gained a lot of influence in China and quietly acquired Indochina from France and the oil-rich East Indies from Holland. In the aftermath of defeat, Britain hadn't been able to do anything but grumble and hope she could hold on to Malaya and Singapore if she ever got on Japan's bad side. But, since the limeys and the Japs both worried about the USA, they put up with each other.

"If they hit us again, those sons of bitches are going to put a rock in

their fist," somebody predicted gloomily.

"Well, gentlemen, that's why we wear the uniform." Commander Cressy got to his feet. He was always sharply turned out. Sam envied him the knife-edged creases in his trousers. His own clothes were clean, but they weren't what you'd call pressed. Neither were those of anybody else in the officers' mess—except the exec's. Cressy nodded to the other men and left, ignoring the ship's motion with the air of a man who'd known worse.

Sam stayed long enough to drink another cup of coffee. Then he left the mess, too. As often happened, the officers' bull session went aimless and foolish without Cressy's sharp wit to steer it along. The exec also had the rank to make that wit felt. Sam thought he might have done some steering, too, but he was junior in grade, too damn old, and a mustang to boot. Nobody would take him seriously.

More than a little wistfully, he went up to the flight deck. He wished he had more to do with sending airplanes off into battle. That was why he'd wanted to serve on the *Remembrance* in the first place. He'd done good work, useful work, in damage control since returning to the ship as an officer. He knew that. He was even proud of it. But it still wasn't what he wanted to be doing.

Mechanics in coveralls had the cowl off a fighter's engine. They were puttering with a fuel line, puttering and muttering and now and then swearing like sailors. *Funny how that works,* Carsten thought, smiling at the bad language that flavored the conversation the way pepper flavored scrambled eggs.

The fighter itself was a far cry from the wire-and-canvas two-deckers that had flown off the *Remembrance* when Sam first came aboard her. It was a sleek, aluminum-skinned one-decker with folding wings, so the belowdecks hangar could hold more of its kind. Because of the strengthening it needed to cope with being sent forth with a kick from a catapult and landing with an arrester hook, it was a little heavier and a little slower than a top land-based fighter—a little, but not much.

Carsten looked out to sea. As always, destroyers shepherded the *Remembrance* on all sides. The way things were these days, you just couldn't tell. If the Confederates or the limeys wanted to use a submersible to get in a quick knee in the nuts, those destroyers were the ones that would have to make sure they couldn't. He'd served aboard a ship not much different from them. Compared to the

Remembrance, they were insanely crowded. They were also much more vulnerable to weather and the sea. But they did a job no other kind of vessel could do.

For that matter, so did the *Remembrance* herself. With her aircraft, she could project U.S. power farther than any battleship's big guns. All by herself, she could make the Royal Navy thoughtful about poking its nose into the western Atlantic. Because of that, Sam was surprised when, half an hour later, the carrier suddenly picked up speed—the flight deck throbbed under his feet as the engines began working harder—and swung toward the west. Like any good sheepdogs, the destroyers stayed with her.

"What's going on, sir?" Sam called to the officer of the deck.

"Beats me," that worthy replied.

She kept on steaming west all the rest of that day and into the night. By the time the sun came up astern of her the next morning, rumor had already declared that she was bound for Boston or Providence or New York or Philadelphia or Baltimore to be scrapped or refitted or to have the captain court-martialed or because she was running low on beans. Sam didn't believe the skipper had done anything to deserve a court-martial. Past that, he kept an open mind.

She turned out to be heading for the Boston Naval Yard. The powers that be admitted as much before she'd been steaming west for a day. They remained close-mouthed about why she'd been called in to port early in her cruise. Maybe she really was running low on beans. Sam couldn't have proved she wasn't. Sailors hoped for shore leave while she stayed in port.

When she came in, a tugboat guided her into Boston harbor. By the way the tug dodged and zigged, Carsten suspected the minelayers had been busy. That saddened him, but didn't surprise him very much.

More tugs nudged the *Remembrance* up against a quay. It was snowing hard, the temperature down close to zero. That didn't keep a swarm of electrician's mates and machinist's mates led by several officers from coming aboard and going straight to work. By all appearances, the refit rumor had been true. But what were the technicians fitting? Sam couldn't figure it out on his own, and nobody seemed willing to talk. Whatever it was, it involved some funny-looking revolving installations atop the island, and a bunch of new gear inside the armored command center. After a little while, Sam

stopped asking questions. Whenever he did, people looked at him as if he were a traitor. He went on about his own business and watched from the corner of his eye. Sooner or later, he figured, he'd find out.

Lucien Galtier stretched uncomfortably as he shooed another hen off the nest to see if she'd laid. She hadn't; his fingers found no new egg. The hen clucked at the indignity. Galtier went on to the next nest. He grunted when he reached into it. The grunt was part satisfaction, for he found an egg there, and part unhappiness, for he still couldn't get rid of the tightness in his chest.

No help for it. Even if he had pulled something in there, the work didn't go away. He finished gathering eggs, fed the animals and mucked out their stalls, and did everything else in the barn that needed doing. Then he picked up the basket of eggs, pulled his hat down on his forehead, lowered the ear-flaps and tied them under his chin, pulled the thick wool muffler Nicole had knitted up to cover his mouth and nose, and left the barn.

That first breath of outside air was as bad as he'd known it would be. He might have inhaled a lungful of daggers. It was cold inside the barn with the animals' body heat and an oil heater warming things up and with the wooden walls keeping out wind and snow. Outside, in the space between the barn and the farmhouse, it was a good deal worse than merely cold.

Snow blew horizontally out of the northwest. It had a good running start by the time it got to his farm. It stung his eyes and tried to freeze them shut. Despite hat and muffler and heavy coat and sweater and stout dungarees and woolen, itchy long johns, the wind started sucking heat from his body the instant it touched him.

In the swirling white, he could hardly see the house ahead. He'd known worse blizzards, but not many. If he missed the house, he'd freeze out here. That happened to a luckless farmer or two every winter in Quebec.

Lucien didn't miss. He staggered up the stairs, opened the kitchen door, lurched inside, and slammed it shut behind him. *"Calisse!"* he muttered. He shook himself like a dog. Snow flew everywhere. The stove was already hot, but he built up the fire in it and stood in front

of it, gratefully soaking up the warmth.

Only after he'd done that did he worry about the clumps of melting snow on the floor. He cleaned up as best he could. Then he went back to the stove and made himself a pot of coffee. He gulped it down as hot as he could stand it. He wanted to be warm inside and out.

Outside, the wind kept howling. He watched the blowing, swirling whiteness and sent it some thoughts that weren't compliments. There was supposed to be a dance tomorrow night. If the blizzard went on roaring, how would anybody get to it?

He turned on the wireless set in the front room. The wireless was a splendid companion for a man who lived by himself. It made interesting noise, and he didn't have to respond unless he wanted to. Music poured out of the speaker. Right now, though, he didn't care for music. He changed the station. He wanted to find out whether they were going to get another foot and a half of snow before tomorrow night.

But the wireless stations blathered on about what they were interested in, not about what he was interested in. That was the drawback of the marvelous machine. He didn't have to respond to it unless he wanted to, but it didn't have to respond to him at all.

He went from station to station for the next twenty minutes, until the top of the hour, and not one of them seemed the least bit interested in the weather outside. For all they cared, it could have been summer out there, with blue sky and warm sun. It could have been, but he knew it wasn't.

At the top of the hour, every station gave forth with five minutes of news. It was as if they suddenly remembered they were part of the wider world after all. Lucien listened impatiently to accounts of riots in the Ukraine and Austria-Hungary and celebrations on the border between the United States and the Confederate States. All he wanted was a simple weather report, and nobody seemed willing to give him one.

Finally, at the very tail end of one of the newscasts, an announcer grudgingly said, "Our storm is expected to blow itself out by this afternoon. Snow will end before nightfall, and tomorrow will be clear and a little warmer." Two sentences, and then the music resumed.

In January in Quebec, *a little warmer* didn't mean *warm.* Lucien

knew that all too well. He also knew the weather forecasters lied in their teeth about one time in three. Even so, he had reason to hope. Without hope, what was a man? Nothing worth mentioning.

Sure enough, that afternoon the wind dropped and the snow stopped falling. The sun came out and peeped around, as if surprised at everything that had happened since the last time it showed its face. It might have been embarrassed at what it saw, for it set half an hour later.

The night was long and cold, as January nights were. Lucien woke when it was still dark. He threw on his clothes and went out to the outhouse. The sky was brilliantly clear. Ribbons and curtains of aurora blazed in the north. He yawned and nodded, acknowledging that they were there. Then he trudged back to the farmhouse.

He was eating fried eggs when a snowplow grumbled by. The main road would be clear, then. Who could guess whether the little side roads to Éloise Granche's house would be, though, and the ones from there to the dance?

"Well," he said, "I will just have to find out."

Before he could find out, he had to do some shoveling to let his auto get to the main road. That was hard work, and would have been for a man half his age. His heart was pounding before he finished, but finish he did. Under all those layers of warm clothes, sweat ran down his sides. He went back in and heated water for a bath. That helped soak out some of the kinks in his back, though others refused to disappear.

When evening came, he used a little more hot water, this time for a shave. He scraped his chin and cheeks with a straight razor he'd been using since before the turn of the century. None of these newfangled safety razors and blades for him. He stropped the razor on a thick, smooth piece of leather before it touched his face. If his shave wasn't smooth, he had only himself to blame, not some factory down in the United States.

He dressed in clothes he might have worn to town: dark trousers, clean white shirt, and his least disreputable hat. The overcoat he put on had seen better days, but overcoats always got a lot of use in Quebec. Whistling a tune he'd heard on the wireless, he went out to the Chevrolet.

"I want no trouble from you," he told the auto, as if it were the horse with which he'd had so many philosophical discussions over the years. The Chevrolet was old, but it knew better than to argue with him. It started right up.

Despite the snowplow and the rock salt it had laid down, the roads would still be icy. Galtier drove with care, and made sure he kept plenty of room between himself and other motorists—not that many others were out and about. He didn't miss the traffic. He knew he wouldn't be able to stop in a hurry.

He left the paved road and bumped along rutted dirt lanes till he came to the farm where Éloise Granche lived. The dim, buttery light of kerosene lamps poured out through her windows; she still had no electricity. He stopped the engine, wagged a finger at the Chevrolet to remind it to start up again, and went up the steps and knocked on the door.

"Hello," she said with a smile. Then she was in his arms and they kissed hungrily for a long time.

Still holding her, he said, "When we do that, I want to forget all about the dance."

"We can, if you want to," she answered. "Would you rather just stay here?"

Regretfully, Galtier shook his head. "That would be a lot of staying for not much staying power, I'm afraid. If I were half my age, I would say yes."

"If you were half your age, I wouldn't want anything to do with you—not for that, anyhow," Éloise said. "We'll go to the dance, then, and we'll come back, and who knows what will happen after that?"

"Who indeed?" Lucien kissed her again, then led her out to the motorcar.

That wagged finger did its job. The auto started up again without any fuss. The dance was at Pierre Turcot's, not far from the little town of St. Modèste. A rowdy sprawl of motorcars and wagons and buggies surrounded Turcot's barn when the Chevrolet pulled up. Lucien handed Éloise out of the motorcar. They went in side by side.

People waved and called their names and hurried up to greet them.

By now, they'd been together long enough that all their neighbors took them for granted. They might almost have been a married couple. Lucien's son Georges was already out on the floor dancing. He waved to Lucien and blew Éloise a kiss.

"Georges can be very foolish," Éloise remarked. She eyed Galtier. "I wonder where he gets it."

"I haven't the faintest idea," he answered with such dignity as he could muster.

The fiddlers and drummer and accordion player took a break. Pierre Turcot wound up a phonograph and put a record on it. The dancing went on. The musicians on the record played and sang better than the homegrown talent. Lucien had noticed that before. He wondered if the problem would kill off homegrown talent after a while. But once he started whirling Éloise around the floor, he stopped worrying about it.

They danced. They snacked and drank some of the potent punch Pierre had set out and danced some more. People talked about politics in the city of Quebec and the price of potatoes and who was fooling around with whom. Lucien didn't think he and Éloise were high on the gossip list these days. Why get excited about old news?

Somewhere between ten and eleven, Éloise turned to him and said, "Shall we go?"

He smiled. "Yes, let's."

They went back to her house in companionable silence. When they got there, he got out first so he could open the door on her side. "Such a gentleman," she said. "Would you like to come in for a little while?"

"Why not?"

They drank some applejack. One of Éloise's neighbors had cooked it up. It was a good batch, almost as good as if it weren't bootleg. And then, as they had a good many times before, they went upstairs to her bedroom.

Everything was dark in there, but Lucien knew where the bed was. He sat down on one side of it and got out of his clothes. When he was naked, he reached out. His hand found Éloise's bare, warm flesh.

They kissed and caressed each other. Lucien's heart pounded with excitement. Heart still pounding, he rolled onto his back. Éloise straddled him. She liked riding him, and he found it easier than the other way round.

"Oh, Lucien," she whispered.

He didn't answer. As his delight mounted, so did the thudding in his chest. He could hardly breathe. He'd never felt anything like this, not in all his years, not with Marie, not with Éloise, not with anyone. Pleasure shot through him. So did pain, pain in his chest, pain stabbing up his arm. Pain ... He groaned and clutched at Éloise. In an instant, the darkness in the bedroom became darkness absolute.

"Lucien?" Éloise exclaimed. He never heard her scream, or anything else, ever again.

Scipio might have known it would happen one of these days. Hell, he *had* known it might happen one of these days. The Huntsman's Lodge was the best restaurant in Augusta. No other place even compared. If Anne Colleton ever came to town, this was where she'd have dinner.

And there she sat, at a table against the far wall, talking animatedly with several local big shots. Scipio hadn't seen her for twenty years or so, but he had not the slightest doubt. She'd aged very well, even if he wouldn't have called her beautiful any more. And she still sounded as terrifyingly self-assured as she ever had, maybe even more so.

As befit its status as a fancy place to eat, the Huntsman's Lodge was dimly lit. Scipio didn't think she recognized him. He was just another colored waiter, not one serving her table. He thanked heaven he hadn't let Jerry Dover talk him into taking the headwaiter's post. Then he would have had to escort her party to the table, and she would have been bound to notice him.

Even now, he wasn't sure she hadn't. She always held her cards close to her chest. He didn't want to go anywhere near that table. He didn't want to speak, for fear she would know his voice. He spent as much time as he could in the kitchens. The cooks gave him quizzical looks; he didn't get paid for roasting prime rib or doing exotic things

with lobster tails.

His boss knew it, too. "What the hell you doing hiding in there, Xerxes?" Jerry Dover demanded indignantly. "Get your ass out and wait tables."

"I's sorry, suh," Scipio answered. "But I gots to tell you, I's feelin' right poorly tonight."

Dover didn't say anything for a little while. His eyes raked Scipio. "You know," he remarked at last, "there's niggers I'd fire on the spot, they tried to use that kind of line on me."

"Yes, suh," Scipio said stolidly. Firing was the least of his worries right now.

"You ain't one of 'em, though. You never tried shirking on me before," the restaurant manager said. He astonished Scipio by reaching out to put a palm on his forehead. "You don't have a fever. At least it isn't the grippe. You need to go home? Go on, then, if you've a mind to."

"I thanks you kindly, suh." As he had years before with John Oglethorpe, Scipio needed to remind himself that white men could be decent. He found it especially remarkable now, with the Freedom Party in the saddle for the past seven years. Things were set up to give whites every excuse to be bastards, and a lot of them didn't need much excuse. "Somehow or other, I finds a way to pay you back." He felt like the mouse talking to the lion in the fable. But the mouse actually had found a way to do it. How could he?

Dover only shrugged. He wasn't worrying about it. "Get the hell out of here," he said. "You got your reasons, whatever they are. I've known you for a while now. You don't fuck around with me. So get."

Scipio got. He wasn't used to being out on the street so early. He made a beeline for the Terry. The sooner he got into his own part of town, the safer he'd feel.

Then he heard a gunshot down an unlit alleyway, a scream, and the sound of running feet. Maybe he wasn't so safe in the Terry after all. Whites preyed on blacks, but blacks also preyed on one another. He wondered why. His own people had so little. Why not try to rob whites, who enjoyed so much more? Unfortunately, an answer occurred to him almost at once. If a Negro robbed a white, the police

moved heaven and earth to catch him. If he robbed another Negro, they yawned and went about their business.

"Hey, nigger!" A woman's voice, all rum and honey, called from the darkness. "You in your fancy clothes, I show you a good time like you ain't never seen." Scipio didn't even turn to look. He just kept walking. "Cocksuckin' faggot!" the woman yelled after him, all the sweetness gone.

Bathsheba stared when Scipio came into the apartment so early. "What you doin' here?" she demanded. "I jus' put the chillun to bed."

He'd been trying to figure out what to tell her ever since he left the Huntsman's Lodge. "Once upon a time, you asked me how I came to be able to speak like this," he answered in soft, precise, educated white man's English. Bathsheba's eyes went wide. The only time he'd ever spoken like that in her hearing was to save their lives in the rioting not long after the Freedom Party took over. Now he had to tell the truth, or some of it. In that same dialect, he went on, "A long time ago, I was in the upper ranks of one of the Socialist Republics we tried to set up. Someone came into the restaurant tonight who knew me in those days. I'm not certain whether she recognized me, but she might have. She's ... very sharp." Seeing Anne Colleton forcibly reminded him how sharp she was.

"You learn to talk like dat on account of you was a Red?" Bathsheba asked.

Scipio shook his head. "No. I was useful to the Reds because I could already talk like this. I ... I was a butler, a rich person's butler in South Carolina." There. Now she knew—knew enough, anyhow.

He waited for her to shout at him for not telling his secret years before. But she didn't. "If you was a big Red, no wonder you don't say nothin'," she told him. "What we do now?"

"Dunno." He fell back into the slurred speech of the Congaree Negro. Talking in that other voice took him off to a world that had died in fire and blood and hate—but also a world where he'd grown to manhood. The contrasts terrified him. "Mebbe nuttin'. Mebbe run fas' as we kin."

"How?" Bathsheba asked, and he didn't have a good answer for her. Passbooks were checked these days as they'd never been before the war. Any black without a good reason for being where he was—and

without the papers to back up that reason—was in trouble. People talked about camps. No one knew much about them, though; they were easy to get into, much harder to leave.

Even so, he said, "Better we takes de chance. They catches me..." He didn't go on. If they caught him and realized who he was, he wouldn't last ten minutes. No trial. No procedure. They'd just shoot him.

Bathsheba was still staring at him. His wife clucked sadly, a sound of reproach: self-reproach, he realized when she said, "I shoulda pussected what you was." He needed a heartbeat or two to figure out that she meant *suspected.* She went on, "If you was a Red, you had to hide out. And you was smart, gettin' out o' the state where you was at."

"I weren't no Red, not down deep, not for real an' for true," Scipio said. "But dey suck me in. I don't go 'long wid dey, dey shoots me jus' like de buckra shoots me." That was the truth. Cassius and Cherry and the rest of the Reds on the Marshlands plantation had been in deadly earnest. Confidence in their doctrine had sustained them—till rifles and what little else they got from the USA ran up against the whole panoply of modern war, and till they discovered their oppressors wouldn't vanish simply because they were called reactionaries.

Bathsheba's mind went in a different direction. Suddenly, she said, "I bet Xerxes ain't even your right name."

"Is now. Has been fo' years."

"What your mama call you?"

"Scipio," he said, and wondered how long it had been since he'd spoken his own name. More than twenty years; he was sure of that.

"Scipio." Bathsheba tasted it, then slowly shook her head. "Reckon I like Xerxes better. I's used to it." She sent him an anxious look. "You ain't mad?"

"Do Jesus, no!" he exclaimed. "You go an' forget you ever hear de other one. Dat name get around, de buckra after we fo' sure. Dey still remembers me in South Carolina." Was that pride in his voice? After all these years, after all that terror, after being sure at the time that he was walking into a disaster (and after proving righter than even he'd imagined), was that pride? God help him, it was.

His wife gave him a kiss. "Good." She was proud of him, too, proud of him for what had to be the stupidest thing he'd ever done in his life. Madness. It had to be madness. There was no sensible explanation for it. But no sooner had that thought crossed his mind than Bathsheba said, "Every once in a while—Lord, more'n every once in a while—them white folks *deserves* a whack in the chops, they truly does."

And that did make sense. When things were bad, you tried your best to make them better. How didn't matter much. "Let's go to bed," he said.

"How you mean dat?" Bathsheba asked.

Now he kissed her. "However you wants, sweetheart."

He went up to the Huntsman's Lodge the next day with a certain amount of apprehension. He checked the autos parked near the restaurant with special care. None of them looked as if it belonged to either the police or Freedom Party goons. He had to go to work. If he didn't, he wouldn't eat, and neither would his family. In he went.

Jerry Dover met him just inside the door. "Go home," the manager said bluntly. "Get the hell out of here. You're still sick. You'll be sick another couple of days, too."

Scipio blinked. "What you say?"

"Go home," Dover repeated. "Damn Freedom Party woman asking all kinds of questions about you."

Ice congealed in Scipio's belly. He might have known Anne Colleton would spot him. Did she ever miss a trick? "What you say to she?" he asked, already hearing hounds baying on his trail.

"I told her you ain't who she thinks you are. I told her you been working here since 1911," Jerry Dover answered. His eyes twinkled.

"God bless you, Mistuh Dover, but when she catch you in de lie—"

"She ain't gonna catch me." Dover grinned at him. "I showed her papers from back then to prove it."

"How you do dat?" Now Scipio was all at sea.

Still grinning, the manager said, " 'Cause a nigger named Xerxes did

work here then. He was only here a couple months, but those were the papers I showed her. Bastard stole like a son of a bitch. That's why they canned his ass. I heard one of the owners bitching about it not too long after we hired you. The name stuck in my head, and so I watched you close after that, but old Oglethorpe was right—you're first-rate. Anyway, this here gal like to shit, I'll tell you. You don't ever want to tell that one she's wrong. She ain't got no wedding ring, and I can see why."

That made a perfect thumbnail sketch of the Anne Colleton Scipio had known. She would have thought she had him at last—and then she would have seen her hope snatched away. No, she wouldn't be happy, not even a little bit. "God bless you, Mistuh Dover," Scipio said again.

"Go home," Jerry Dover repeated once more. "She may come back and try to raise some more trouble for you. I don't want that. I need you here too bad. And don't get your bowels in an uproar. I'll pay your wages."

Home Scipio went, in a happy daze. Safe—really safe—from Anne Colleton at last! He was back in the Terry before he realized this wonderful silver lining had a cloud. Maybe he was free of Anne Colleton. But now Jerry Dover had a hold on him. Miss Anne had been far away. Dover was right here in town. If he ever decided to go to the police ... Scipio shivered, but he kept on walking.

"I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth," the president of the Confederate States said into the microphone as soon as the engineer behind the glass wall gave him the high sign. "And the truth is, folks, that Kentucky is ours again and Texas is whole again and our country is a long way back towards being what it's supposed to be again.

"The people spoke, and the Yankees had to listen. The people said they were sick and tired of being stuck in the USA. They came back where they belonged. The Stars and Bars are flying in Lubbock and San Antonio and Frankfort and Louisville. We took back what was ours, because that was how the people wanted it."

He didn't say anything about losing the plebiscite in Sequoyah. The

papers and the wireless in the CSA hadn't said much about it, either. People got the news he wanted them to have, slanted the way he wanted it to go. Oh, his coverage wasn't perfect. By the nature of things, it couldn't be. Too many people could also pick up wireless stations from across the U.S. border. But not a lot of them did. Confederates and Yankees had disliked and distrusted one another for a long time now.

"Here and there along the border, the Yankees are still holding on to what's ours: in Sonora, in Arizona, in Arkansas, and right here in Virginia," Jake continued. "Al Smith tried to make me promise I wouldn't talk about those things if we had the elections last month, but I don't call that an honest kind of promise. No, sir, folks, I don't call it honest at all, not even a little bit. He was saying, 'I'll give you back some of what's yours if you forget about the rest of what's yours.' Now you tell me, friends—is that fair? Is that right?"

Bang! He slammed his fist down on the table, a favorite trick of his. "I tell you it's not fair! I tell you it's not right! And I tell you that the Confederate States of America deserve to be whole again! The CSA *will* be whole again! This here that we've done now is only the beginning. We don't want trouble with the United States. We don't want trouble with anybody. But we want what's ours, and we're going to get it!"

He ended just as the light went red. This wasn't one of his long speeches, only a little one to remind people that he'd got back two of the states the Whigs had lost. He stood up, stretched, and left the studio.

As always, Saul Goldman waited for him outside in the hallway. "Good speech, Mr. President," the director of communications said. "I don't think you can make a bad one."

"Thanks, Saul," Featherston answered. "We have a lot of things to take care of over the next few weeks. You've got the incident simmering?"

"Oh, yes." The little Jew nodded. "We'll have something worked up if they don't take care of things for us. They're liable to, you know."

Jake nodded. "Hell, of course I know. But we'll be able to get the story out the way we want it if it's our incident to begin with."

Bodyguards came up alongside of Saul Goldman. Goldman nodded to them in an absent-minded way. He didn't take security as seriously

as he should have. Of course, nobody was gunning for him, either. Featherston didn't have the luxury of making that assumption. He nodded to the men in the butternut uniforms. They carried submachine guns at an identical angle. Their expressions were also identical: tough and watchful. Jake was watchful, too, though he tried not to let it show. Party stalwarts had tried to bump him off once. Could he really trust Party guards? If he couldn't, could he trust anybody in the whole wide world?

The guards led him out into the street. They spread out before he got into his new armored limousine. With Virgil Joyner shot dead, his driver was new, too. He missed Virgil. He missed anybody who'd known him in the old days and stuck with him through thick and thin. Harold Stowe, the new man, was probably a better driver than Joyner had been. Jake didn't care. The man was—and acted like—a servant, not a drinking buddy.

"Back to the Gray House, Harold," Featherston said. Harold. He sighed to himself. Stowe didn't even go by Hal or Hank or anything interesting.

"Right, Mr. President," the driver said, and put the limousine in gear. Jake sighed again, a little louder this time. Virgil Joyner had called him *Sarge.* He'd had the right, too. Not many people did, not any more.

Climbing Shockoe Hill was hard work for the heavy limousine. There'd been an ice storm the night before. Despite rock salt on the road, the going was still slippery. They crawled to the top in first gear.

When he strode back into the presidential residence, his secretary met him just inside the door. "You know you're scheduled to meet with Lieutenant General Forrest in ten minutes, don't you, sir?" she said, as if sure he'd forgotten.

"Yes, Lulu, I do know that," he said. "Let me go to the office and look at a couple of things, and I'll be ready for him."

An officer named Nathan Bedford Forrest III should have raised Featherston's hackles. He'd campaigned against all the Juniors and IIIs and even VIs who clung to power in the CSA by virtue of what their ancestors had done, and who hadn't done anything much on their own. But, for one thing, the first Nathan Bedford Forrest had been as much of a self-made son of a bitch as Jake was, and he'd been proud of it, too. And, for another, his great-grandson wasn't a Great War

General Staff relic. He'd been too young even to fight in the trenches from 1914 to 1917. He was a hell of a soldier now, though, with notions of how to use barrels as radical as his illustrious ancestor's ideas about horses. Featherston liked the way he thought.

At the moment, though, Forrest looked worried. "Sir, if the Yankees decide to jump us for moving troops into Kentucky and west Texas"—he wouldn't call it Houston, refusing to recognize the validity of the name—"they'll whip us. They can do it. If you don't see that, you'll land the country in a hell of a mess."

"I never said they couldn't," Featherston answered. "But they won't."

Nathan Bedford Forrest III looked exasperated. The first officer to bear the name had been a rawboned man who looked a bit like Jake Featherston. His descendant had a rounder face, though he kept his great-grandfather's dangerous eyes. They looked all the more dangerous when he glowered. "Why won't they? You've promised to keep those states demilitarized, and you're going back on your solemn word. What better excuse do they need?"

"If they attack me for moving my men into my states, they've got a war on their hands," Jake said calmly. "I'm telling you, General, they don't have the stomach for it."

"And I'm telling you, Mr. President, you'll take the country down in ruins if you're wrong." The first Nathan Bedford Forrest had had a reputation for speaking his mind. His great-grandson took after him.

"To hell with the country," Featherston said. Nathan Bedford Forrest III gasped. Jake went on, "I've got twenty dollars of my own money against twenty dollars of yours, General. The damnyankees won't move."

Forrest frowned. "You sound mighty damn sure of yourself, Mr. President."

"I am mighty damn sure of myself," Jake Featherston answered. "That's my job. Suppose you let me tend to it while you tend to yours."

"I *am* tending to my job," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said. "If I didn't point out to you that we're liable to have a problem here, I wouldn't be tending to it. The damnyankees outweigh us. They're always going to outweigh us. Remember how much trouble the Germans had against the Tsar's armies in the Great War? That wasn't because one

Russian was as good a soldier as one German. It was because there were a hell of a lot of Russians. There are a hell of a lot of soldiers in the USA, too."

Jake Featherston nodded. "They'll be able to outnumber us, like you said. That means we'll just have to outquick 'em. You going to tell me we can't do that?" His voice developed a hard and ugly rasp. If General Forrest was going to tell him something along those lines, he'd be sorry.

"No, sir." Forrest didn't try. "We've got the airplanes, and we've got the barrels, and we've got the trucks, too. We'll run 'em ragged." Like Jake, like most of the Confederates who were really involved with them, he called barrels by the name they had in the USA. Some of the men who'd done their service well away from the trenches still used the British name instead: tanks. Featherston found that a useless affectation. But the general wasn't through, for he added, "If there is a war, sir, we'd better win it pretty damn fast. If we don't, we've got troubles. They're bigger than we are, like I say, and they can take more punishment. We don't want to get into a slugging match with them. Do you hear what I'm saying?"

"I hear you," Jake said coldly. "You make yourself very plain."

"Good. That's good. I want you to understand me," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said. "If I have a choice, I'd just as soon see us not have a war at all. Three years of the last one should have been enough to satisfy us for the rest of our days."

Three years of war hadn't been enough to satisfy Jake Featherston. He'd fought with undiminished hatred from beginning to end. Some of that hatred had been aimed at the Yankees, the rest at his own side. He'd had plenty to go around. He still did. "General, I don't need to explain my policies to you. I just need you to carry them out," he said. "Is that plain enough for you, or shall I draw you a picture?"

Nathan Bedford Forrest III looked back at him. "Oh, that's plain enough," he answered. "But if you're being a damn fool, sir, don't you think somebody has the duty to come out and tell you so?"

"People told me that before I got Kentucky and Houston back," Jake said in a low, furious voice. "Was I right, or were they? People told me that when I brought dams and electricity into the Tennessee Valley. Was I right, or were they? People told me that when I made damn sure the farms in this country had the mechanical gear they needed, so

we wouldn't get stuck relying on niggers we can't trust. Was I right, or were they?"

"Damned if I know about that last one," Forrest said. "Now we've got those niggers robbing houses in town instead." Featherston waited. The general nodded. "All right, sir. I get your point. But you'd better be able to take my twenty dollars. That's all I've got to say."

"Look here, General—I hope there won't be a war, too," Featherston said. "But one way or the other, the Confederate States are going to get what we want. We deserve it, it's our right to have it, and we're going to get it. Is *that* plain enough for you? Thanks to the Whigs, we've been waiting for almost twenty-five years. That's too damn long. We can't wait forever."

"Yes, sir. Whatever you decide needs doing, we'll try our best to give it to you," Forrest said. "Doing that is our job. Figuring out what we need—that's yours." He got to his feet, saluted, and left.

Jake looked after him. As the door closed, he said, "I know what needs doing," though Nathan Bedford Forrest III could not hear him. "And by God, I aim to do it."

Mary Pomeroy paused with a forkful of scrambled eggs halfway to her mouth. "It's not fair!" she said. "The Yanks let Kentucky and Houston vote on where they wanted to go, and now they're back in the CSA. It they let *us* vote, the Americans would be gone from here so fast, it would make your head swim."

Mort Pomeroy chewed up a mouthful of bacon—Canadian bacon, not the skinny strips that went by the name in the USA—before saying, "They let that Sequoyah place vote, too, and it voted to stay in the United States."

Red curls flew as Mary tossed her head. "At least it had a choice. The Yanks don't give us any."

"I can't do anything about that." Mort ate another chunk of bacon. He might have been chewing on his words, too. After swallowing the bacon, he spat out the words: "And neither can you."

She bridled. The Yanks had shot her brother for trying to do something about the occupation. Her father had fought a one-man war against the USA till his own bomb blew him up instead of General Custer, for whom it was intended. Mort braced himself, regretting what he'd said and getting ready for an argument. Before she could answer him, Alec spoke from his high chair: "More bacon?" He was wild for bacon and ham and sausage—anything salty, in fact.

"Sure, sweetheart," Mary told him, and gave him some. While she cut it up for him, she wondered what to say to her husband. In the end, all that came out was, "Maybe you're right. Maybe I can't."

Mort blinked, plainly thinking he'd got off easy. He waited for her to come out with something else. When she didn't, he decided to count his blessings. He finished his bacon and eggs, his toast and jam, and his tea. Then he got into his overcoat, hat, and earmuffs for the trip across the street to the diner. It was warmer today than it had been lately; the high might get up into double digits. On the other hand, it might not, too.

Mary also finished her breakfast. Then she let Alec chase little pieces of bacon around his plate with his fork as long as he ate one every so often. When it stopped being breakfast and turned into playtime, she extracted him from the high chair and carried him over to the sink so she could wash his greasy face. He liked that no better than he ever did, and he was getting big enough to put up a pretty good fight. But she was still bigger, and so, whether he liked it or not, the grease came off.

She read to him for a while. He liked *Queen Zixi of Ix,* even if a Yank had written it. She didn't suppose L. Frank Baum had particularly disliked Canada. The book gave no sign that he'd ever heard of it—or of the United States, either. Hard to go wrong with a world so thoroughly imaginary.

When Alec started to fidget in her lap, she let him down to play. She didn't have to watch him quite every second these days; he was old enough not to stick everything into his mouth the instant he saw it. That let Mary go into the kitchen and play with something of her own.

Alec wandered in to watch. "Whatcha doing?" he asked.

"Fixing something," Mary answered.

"Is it busted?" he asked. "It don't look busted."

"Doesn't," Mary said. "It doesn't look busted."

"If it doesn't look busted, how come you're fixing it?"

Conversations with children could be surreal. By now, Mary had got used to that, or as used to the unpredictable as you could get. She said, "I'm not fixing it like that. I'm fixing it up."

"Are you making it fancy-like?"

She shook her head. "No, I'm just taking care of what needs taking care of." That didn't mean much to Alec. It didn't mean much to her, either. She didn't care. It kept him from asking too many more questions, which was what she'd had in mind. She worked on it for a while, then put it away. Before too long, it would be done.

"Can we go out and play?" Alec asked.

"No. It's too cold."

"Can we throw snowballs? I'll bop you in the nose with one."

"No. It's even too cold to throw snowballs."

"How can it be too cold to throw snowballs?" Alec was disbelieving. "It's not too cold to snow."

"It's too cold for people to go out there unless they have to."

"Daddy went out there."

"He just went across the street to the diner. And he didn't stop to throw snowballs at anybody." Mary still wondered how Mort had come to be *daddy* to Alec. Her own father had always been *pa* to her. She hadn't looked for anything like that to change. But change it had.

"Sometimes Daddy throws snowballs," Alec said.

Mary couldn't very well deny that. They'd had a memorable snowball fight only a few weeks before. But she said, "He doesn't do it on days like this. On days like this, he stays inside where it's warm as much as he can."

Alec went to a window and looked out. "There's people out there."

"I know there are people out there. Sometimes you have to go to the general store or to the dentist. Sometimes you have to deliver letters and things, the way the postman does." The Yanks called him the mailman. Mary refused to. She'd been calling him the postman since she learned to talk, and she wasn't about to change now. She still called the last letter of the alphabet *zed,* too. She wondered if Alec would after he started going to school. Yanks said *zee,* which struck her as insufferably ... American.

"Do you have to go to the general store, Mommy?" Alec asked hopefully.

"No. I've got everything I need right here," Mary answered. She wasn't *ma,* either. She wondered why not. How had the language changed while she wasn't looking? She couldn't have said, but it had.

Cleaning and dusting here took only a fraction of the time they would have back on the farm. She didn't have any livestock to worry about, either. How many times had she gone out to the barn no matter what the weather was like, to feed the animals and collect eggs and muck out? She didn't have a number, but she knew it would have been a large one. Animals needed tending, rain or shine or blizzard. Back on the farm, if she had a moment to relax, it probably meant she'd forgotten something that needed doing. Here, she could sit down and smoke a cigarette and read a book or listen to the wireless without feeling guilty about leaving work undone.

Except for electric lights, the wireless was the best thing about electricity she'd found. And there were replacements of sorts for electric lights: gas lamps, or even the kerosene lanterns her mother still used out on the farm. What could replace the wireless, for immediacy or for entertainment? Nothing she could imagine.

No sooner had that thought crossed her mind, though, than she remembered a story the *Rosenfeld Register* had run not so long before. People were starting to figure out how to send moving pictures the same way they sent wireless signals. Apparently they'd broadcast pictures of a football game in New York City. But the sets cost more than a thousand dollars. Mary didn't suppose they'd ever come down to where an ordinary person could afford them.

During the middle of the afternoon, she started boiling a beef tongue in a big iron pot. Tongue was one of her favorite foods. Alec

liked it, too. So did Mort, but he preferred it with cloves stuck in it. Back on the farm, they'd always done it simply with carrots and onions and potatoes and whatever other vegetables they happened to have. Today she made it the way her husband liked.

He sniffed when he got back from the diner. "I know what that is!" he exclaimed.

"That's nice," Mary said with a smile.

"That's very nice," Mort said. "We don't serve tongue at the diner. We can't get enough of it, and not enough people would order it if we did."

"Well, here it is," Mary told him. "Sit down, make yourself at home, and it'll be ready in a minute." The way things turned out, making himself at home kept him from sitting down for a while, because Alec tried to tackle him. Any football referee would have thrown a penalty flag. Mort only laughed.

"And Mommy fixed something up in the kitchen," Alec said, trying to tell Mort about the day.

"I know she did, sport," his father answered. "And now we're going to have it for supper."

"No, something else. Something this morning," Alec insisted. Mary wondered if Mort would ask more questions. He didn't. Instead, he got Alec in a half nelson and tickled him with his free hand. Alec squealed and wiggled and kicked. Mary hoped he wouldn't have an accident. That sort of treatment was asking for trouble.

But Alec didn't. He was growing up. He'd start school pretty soon. Part of Mary reacted to that with surprise and horror, and not just because school would teach what the Yanks wanted taught. Where had the time gone? But part of her looked forward to getting him out of the apartment during the day. He really was starting to notice too much of what went on around him.

"Yum," Mort said when he dug into dinner. Mary liked it, too, although she would have preferred the tender meat without cloves. To her, they distracted from the flavor; they didn't improve it. And Alec made supper exciting when he bit into one and yelled that it was burning his tongue off. A swig of milk helped put out the fire.

The next morning, the sun shone brilliantly. The mercury shot all the way up into the twenties. Mary wrapped the box she'd been working on in brown paper and binder twine. "Come on," she told Alec. "Let's get you dressed up nice and warm. We have to take this to the post office."

"What is it?"

"Something for your cousins, over in Ontario."

Getting to the post office took a while, even if it was only three blocks away. Alec threw snowballs and made snow angels and generally had more fun than should have been legal. He had snow all over his front when they went in. It promptly started to melt, because "Wilf Rokeby always kept his potbellied stove well fed with coal. The smell of his hair oil was part of the smell of the post office. He wore his hair parted right down the middle, the way he had when Mary was a little girl. It had been dark then. It was white now.

"What have we got here?" he asked when Mary set the box on the counter.

"Present for my cousins," she answered, as she had with Alec.

Like any small-town postmaster, Rokeby knew a lot about what went on in his customers' lives. "You don't have a lot to do with 'em," he remarked, "nor the rest of your family, either. Been years since I sent anything from you folks to Ontario."

"I got a wire from them," Mary said. "Laura had a baby."

His face softened. "A baby. That's nice." He put the package on the scale, then looked at a chart. "Well, you owe me sixty-one cents for this." She gave him three quarters, got her change, and took Alec back out into the snow.

Jonathan Moss got up from the table. He put on his overcoat and hat. "I'm going to head for the office," he said.

Laura nodded. "I thought you would." She gave him a quick, perfunctory kiss. "Do you really have to go in on a Saturday morning,

though?"

"I've got to be in court Monday morning, and I'm not ready," Moss answered. "If I don't want to get slaughtered, I'd better know what I'm doing. Say good morning to Dorothy for me when she finally gets up."

"I will." A faint smile crossed Laura's face. "I wonder where she gets it." Their daughter loved to sleep late, a habit neither of them had.

"Don't know. Wherever it comes from, I wish I could catch it. Well, I'm off." Out the door Moss went. As soon as he closed it behind him, he dropped his right hand into the coat pocket where he carried his pistol. He didn't do that where Laura could see him. It made her nervous. But not doing it once he was out in the hallway made him nervous.

No one lay in wait there. No one troubled Jonathan on the stairs. No one bothered him on the way to his Ford, which he didn't park right in front of the apartment building. He examined the auto before getting in. It looked all right. Nothing blew up when he started the engine.

Maybe this is all so much moonshine, he thought as he drove to the office. But he couldn't afford to take the chance. What had happened to occupation headquarters in Berlin proved that. He might have laughed off threatening letters. Nobody but an idiot laughed off a bomb.

As usual, he chose a route to the office different from the one he'd used the day before. He didn't park right in front of the building where he worked, either: he used the guarded lot nearby. All the same, the ends of his daily trips to and from work made him nervous. If anyone was gunning for him, those were the places where danger was worst, because he always had to be there. So far, he'd had no trouble. Maybe all his precautions were snapping his fingers to keep the elephants away. Then again, maybe they weren't. The only way to find out was to stop taking them, and even that might not prove anything. He preferred not to run the risk.

Up the steps and into the building. No assassin lurking in the lobby. Up the stairs to his office, wary every time he turned. No crazed Canuck stalking the stairway. He opened the door, flipped on the light switch, and peered inside. Everything was exactly as he'd left it.

He closed and locked the door. Then he took care of the morning

housekeeping: he made a pot of coffee and put it on the hot plate. Even though he'd had a cup with breakfast, waiting for it to get ready was a lonely vigil.

Meanwhile, the case ahead. Somebody—under occupation regulations, the military prosecutor didn't have to say who—claimed his client had played an active role in the Canadian uprising in the mid-1920s. Why whoever this was hadn't come forward years earlier was a question Moss intended to raise as loudly as the judge would let him. He'd been trying to find out who had a grudge against Allen Peterhoff. Somebody who stood to gain from Peterhoff's troubles was the likeliest to cause those troubles.

So far, Moss had had no luck finding anyone like that. As far as he could tell, Peterhoff was a pillar of the community. As for what he'd been doing in 1925 and 1926, nobody seemed to have a lot of hard evidence one way or the other. Of course, in cases like this, hard evidence didn't always matter. Hearsay counted for just as much, and often for more.

"Got to be some bastard after his money," Moss muttered to himself. He hadn't seen a case as blatant as this for a long time. It really belonged to the harsh years right after the revolt, not to 1941. But here it was, and the occupying authorities were taking it very seriously indeed. That worried Moss. Why were they flabbling about Peterhoff if they didn't have a case?

Moss had just poured himself his second cup of coffee from the pot when the telephone rang. His hand jerked, but not enough to make him spill the coffee. He set down the cup and picked up the telephone. "Jonathan Moss speaking."

"Hello, Mr. Moss." That cigarette-roughened baritone could only belong to Lou Jamieson. Moss' one-time client was not a pillar of the community, except perhaps for certain disreputable parts of it. He went on, "I think maybe I found what you were looking for."

"Did you, by God?" That perked Moss up better than coffee. "Tell me about it, Mr. Jamieson, if you'd be so kind."

Tell him about it Jamieson did. If the man with dubious connections was telling the truth—always an interesting proposition where he was concerned— then a couple of Peterhoff's business associates stood to make a bundle if he vanished from the scene for ten or twenty years. It wasn't anything showy or obvious, but it was

there.

"By God!" Moss said again. His pen raced across a yellow legal pad as he jotted down notes. The more he heard, the happier he got. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart!" he exclaimed when Jamieson finally finished. "You've just saved an innocent man a hell of a lot of trouble. Even a military court will have to sit up and take notice when I use this."

"That's nice, Mr. Moss," Jamieson said affably. "You done me a good turn a while ago with the goddamn Yanks. Figured this was the least I could do for you." He couldn't have cared less whether Allen Peterhoff was guilty or innocent. What mattered was that he owed Moss a favor. If he hadn't, Peterhoff would have been welcome to rot in jail, as far as he was concerned.

His sometime client's amoral cynicism would have bothered Moss much more if Jamieson hadn't proved so valuable. As things were, Moss threw the notes in his briefcase, thanked Jamieson again, and got ready to go home early. *Dorothy will be glad to see me,* he thought, *and I hope Laura will, too.*

He made sure he turned off the hot plate. He didn't want to burn down the building by accident. Then he went out to his auto. His hand stayed in the overcoat pocket with the pistol, but he wasn't very worried. Nobody could reasonably expect him to leave at this hour. He might even be back before the mailman got to the apartment building where he lived.

As usual, he parked around the corner from the building. Even though he didn't expect trouble, it was one of those days where he would almost have welcomed it. He felt as if he were trouble's master. He remembered that for a very long time. The thought filled his mind as he turned the corner. That was when the explosion knocked him off his feet.

"Holy Jesus!" he said. Bright shards of glass glittered in the snow, blown out of nearby windows. He picked himself up and ran toward the sound of the blast. If anyone needed help, he'd do what he could.

He hadn't gone more than a few steps before he realized his building was the one that had suffered. The hole in the front wall gaped from his floor. And...

"No," Moss whispered. But that was his apartment. Or rather, that

had been his apartment. Not much seemed left of it. Not a whole lot seemed left of the ones to either side, either. Smoke started pouring out of the hole as broken gas lines or wires set things ablaze.

"Call the police!" someone shouted. "Call the fire department!" somebody else yelled. Jonathan Moss heard them as if from very far away. He ran toward the front steps of the building where he'd lived for so long. Try as he would, though, he couldn't go up them, because all the people who'd lived in the apartment building were flooding out. Some of them were bloodied and limping. Others just had panic on their faces.

"Laura!" Moss shouted. "Dorothy!"

He didn't see them anywhere. He hadn't really thought he would. But hope died hard. Hope, sometimes, died harder than people. People, as he knew too well, could be awfully easy to kill.

A man who lived on the same floor as he did pushed him away. "You don't want to try to go in, Mr. Moss," he said. "The whole goddamn building's liable to fall down."

"My wife! My little girl!"

"Wasn't that your place where it happened?" his neighbor asked. Helplessly, he nodded. The other man said, "Then there's nothing you can do for 'em now, and that's the Lord's truth. If they come out, they come out. If they don't..." He spread his hands.

More people pushed out of the building. More bricks fell off it. Some landed in the snow. One hit a man in the shoulder. He howled like a wolf. Moss tried again to go into the building. Again, he failed. People took hold of him and dragged him back by main force.

Sirens screamed in the distance, rapidly drawing closer. Screams bubbled in Moss' throat. Why they didn't burst out, he had no idea. Everything he cared about had been in that flat. Now the flat was gone, and twenty-five years of his dreams and hopes with it.

He tried to think, though his stunned wits made it next to impossible. He'd been getting threats for a long time. He hadn't taken them too seriously till the bomb went off in the occupation center. After that, he realized disaster really could happen to him. And now it had.

"Who?" he muttered. Who would have wanted to blow up a woman and a child? For if this was a bomb, as seemed horribly likely, whoever had sent it must have addressed it to Laura or Dorothy. Had it had his name on it, they would have left it alone. He would have opened it. And it would have blown up in his face.

Fire engines howled to a stop. The police came right behind them. And soldiers in green-gray helped clear people away from the building. "Move it!" they shouted. "The whole thing may collapse!"

"Get out of the way!" the firemen shouted. They began playing streams of water on the spreading flames. A lot of the water splashed down onto the people who had lived in the building. That moved them away faster than the soldiers could have.

A major called, "Whose place was it that went up?"

"Mine," Moss said dully.

"You weren't inside there." The officer stated the obvious. "You'd be hamburger if you were."

"Hamburger." My *wife is hamburger. My little girl is hamburger.* Moss managed to shake his head. "No. I was doing some work at the office. I had just got out of my auto when ... when it happened. Laura ... Dorothy..." He began to weep.

"Christ! You're Jonathan Moss." Recognizing him, the major suddenly put two and two together. "This wasn't a gas leak, or anything like that. This was a bomb, or it probably was a bomb, anyway."

Now Moss' head moved up and down as mechanically as it had gone back and forth. "Yes. I think you're right. Somebody killed them." He could say it. It didn't sound as if it meant anything. He was still deep in shock. But part of him knew it would mean something before long. The major seemed to sense it was too soon for questions. He led Moss down the street. Docile as a child, Moss went with him. Behind them, the building fell in on itself.

XVIII

"Alec!" Mary Pomeroy called. "Don't you dare pull the cat's tail. If he scratches you or bites you, it's your own fault."

Mouser was, on the whole, a patient cat. Little boys, though, were liable to drive even patient cats past the limits of what they'd put up with. Mouser had bitten Alec only a couple of times, but he scratched whenever he thought he had to. Alec was still learning what would annoy him enough to bring out the claws. Sometimes his experiments seemed deliberately hair-raising.

Mary turned on the wireless just ahead of the hour to catch the news. The lead story was a bomb that had blown up a police station in Frankfort, Kentucky. Seventeen policemen were dead, another two dozen wounded. A group called the American Patriots—a group, the newscaster said sarcastically, that no one had ever heard of till they committed this outrage—was claiming responsibility.

And the president of the Confederate States was all but foaming at the mouth. Jake Featherston claimed the bombing proved Kentucky was full of pro-U.S. fanatics who refused to accept the results of the plebiscite. The newscaster poured more scorn on that idea. Mary was willing to believe it, simply because this smooth-voiced stooge for the Yanks didn't.

"In another bombing case," the broadcaster went on, "investigators continue to probe the ruins of a Berlin, Ontario, apartment building, seeking clues to the perpetrator of the atrocity. A mother and child, Laura and Dorothy Moss, are confirmed dead. Several other persons were injured in the blast, and three remain missing...."

A mother and a child. That wasn't how Mary had thought of them. A traitor and her half-American brat was more what she had in mind. That way, she didn't have to remind herself that the woman who'd been born Laura Secord—born with the name of a great Canadian patriot—had been a person as well as a political symbol. She didn't want to think of the late Laura Moss as a person. If she did, she had to think about what she'd done.

She couldn't remember the last time she'd physically hurt anyone, aside from spanking Alec when he needed it. Maybe when she was little, in a fight with her older sister. But Julia had several years on her, so she might not have managed it even then.

Well, she'd managed it now. She'd blown a woman and her little girl to kingdom come, and she'd hurt some other people with them. Not bad for a package she'd mailed from Wilf Rokeby's post office. Not bad? Or not good?

This is war, she told herself. *Look what the Americans did to my family. Why should I care what happens to them, or to the people who collaborate with them?*

Had the Americans blown up women and children? Mary nodded defiantly. Of course they had, with their bombs and their artillery. She didn't feel guilty. She paused, too honest to go on with that. The trouble was, she did feel guilty. Unlike the Yanks—or so she insisted to herself—she had a working conscience. At the moment, it was working overtime.

"No one has claimed to be responsible for the murderous attack in Berlin," the newsman continued. "Attention is, however, focusing on several known subversive groups. When the truth is known, severe punishment will be meted out."

Mary laughed at that. The Yanks were liable to grab somebody, say he was guilty, and shoot him just to make themselves look good. She remained certain that was what they'd done with her brother, Alexander, Alec's namesake. Her conscience twinged again. Did she want them to punish someone else, someone who hadn't done anything, for what she'd done?

She wanted them to get out of Canada. Past that, she didn't—or tried not to—care.

"Ironically, the victims' husband and father, barrister Jonathan Moss, though a U.S. aviation ace during the Great War, was well known in Ontario for his work on behalf of Canadians involved in disputes with the occupying authorities," the man on the wireless said. "Only desperate madmen who hate Americans simply because they are Americans would have—"

Click! "Why'd you turn it off, Mommy?" Alec asked.

"Because he was spouting a lot of drivel," Mary answered.

Alec laughed. "That's a funny word. What does it mean?"

"Nonsense. Hooey. Rubbish."

"Drivel!" Alec yelled, alarming Mouser. "Hooey!" He liked that one, too. The cat didn't, at least not yelled in its ears. It fled. Alec ran after it, screeching, "Drivel! Hooey! Hooey! Drivel!"

"Enough," Mary said. He didn't listen to her. "Enough!" she said again. Still no luck. *"Enough!"* Now she was yelling, too. Short of clouting Alec with a rock, yelling at him was the only way to get his attention.

She didn't usually turn off the wireless in the middle of the news. She found she missed it, and turned it back on, hoping it would be done talking about what had happened in Berlin. It was. The newscaster said, "King Charles XI of France has declared that the German Empire is using Kaiser Wilhelm's illness as an excuse for delay on consideration of returning Alsace-Lorraine to France. 'If strong measures prove necessary, we are not afraid to take them,' he added. Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain voiced his support for the French. In a speech before Parliament, he said, 'High time the Germans go.' "

Music blared from the speaker. A chorus of women with squeaky voices praised laundry soap to the skies. When Mary first listened to the wireless, she wanted to go out and buy everything she heard advertised on it. She was vaccinated against that nonsense these days. She did sometimes wonder why a singer with a voice good enough to make money would choose to sing about laundry soap. Because she couldn't make money with her voice any other way? Sometimes that didn't seem reason enough.

I killed two people, one of them a little girl who never did anybody any harm. The thought didn't want to go away; even if she hadn't watched them die, they were as dead as if she'd taken them to a chopping block and whacked off their heads with a hatchet, the way she had with so many chickens on her mother's farm. *Laura Secord betrayed her country.* Mary had no doubt of that. *But who appointed you her executioner?* she asked herself.

Her back stiffened. She was damned if she'd let herself feel guilty for long. *Who appointed me her executioner? The Yanks did.* If they

hadn't shot Alexander, her father never would have felt the need to go on the war path against them. She was entitled to revenge for that. She was entitled to it, and she'd taken it.

She nodded to herself. Nothing was going to make her feel sorry about ridding the world of Laura Secord. Every so often, though, she couldn't help feeling bad about Dorothy Moss. She wished she'd blown up the girl's father instead. Yes, the newsman went on and on about how he struggled for Canadians' rights, but that overlooked several little details. First and foremost, no Yank should have had any business saying what rights a Canadian had or didn't have. And Jonathan Moss had been one of the Yanks who'd beaten Canada down during the Great War. *And* he was still a combat flier; she remembered the newspaper stories about him. Yes, better the bomb should have got him.

She was cutting up a chicken for stew in the kitchen when two trucks pulled to a stop in front of the diner. They looked like the sort of trucks in which U.S. Army soldiers rode, but they were painted a bluish gray, not the green-gray she'd known and loathed since she was a little girl. The men who piled out of the back of the trucks were in uniforms cut about the same as those U.S. soldiers wore—but, again, of bluish gray and not the familiar color. Mary wondered if the Yanks had decided to change their uniforms after keeping them pretty much the same for so long. Why would they do that?

The soldiers all tramped into the diner. *That will make Mort happy,* Mary thought. Soldiers ate like starving wolves. These days, they also paid their bills. The occupation was more orderly than it had been during the war and just afterwards. That made it very little better, not as far as Mary was concerned.

Forty-five minutes later, the soldiers came out and climbed into the trucks again. The engines started up with twin roars. Away the trucks went, beyond what Mary could see from the window. She reminded herself to ask Mort about the men when he came back to the flat, and hoped she wouldn't forget.

As things turned out, she needn't have worried about that. When her husband got home, he was angrier than she'd ever seen him. "What's the matter?" she asked; he hardly ever lost his temper.

"What's the matter?" he repeated. "Did you see those trucks a couple of hours ago? The trucks, and the soldiers in them?"

Mary nodded. "I wanted to ask you—"

He talked right through her: "Do you know who those soldiers were? Do you? No, of course you don't." He wasn't going to let her get a word in edgewise. "I'll tell you who they were, by God. They were a pack of Frenchies, that's who."

"Frenchies? From Quebec?" The news made Mary no happier than it had Mort. She was damned if she would call their home the Republic of Quebec, though, even if it had been torn away from Canada for twenty-five years now.

"That's right," Mort answered. "And do you know what else? They're going to be part of the garrison here. At least the United States beat us in the war. What did the Frenchies do? Nothing. Not one single thing. They don't even talk English, most of 'em. I swear to God, honey, I'd sooner have a pack of niggers watching over us than those people."

"What's even worse is, they're Canadians, too," Mary said. Her husband gave her a look. "Well, they are." Even to herself, she sounded defensive. "They used to be, anyhow."

"Maybe," Mort said. "They sure don't act like Canadians now, though. They sat there in the diner jabbering back and forth in French like a bunch of monkeys. The only one who spoke enough English to order anything for them was a sergeant who'd been in the Canadian Army once upon a time. And he sounded like the devil, too."

"That's terrible," Mary said, and Mort nodded. She asked him, "Why are there Frenchies here? Did you find out? Would they say?"

"Oh, yes. They aren't shy about talking, even if they don't do it very well," he answered. "Reason they're here is, some of the U.S. soldiers who've been on garrison duty are going back to the States."

"That doesn't explain anything," Mary said. "Why would the Yanks want to do a thing like that after all these years?" The USA had occupied Rosenfeld since she was a little girl. No matter how much she hated that, it was in a way part of the natural order of things by now.

"I don't know for sure. The Frenchies didn't say anything about that," Mort replied. "But I know what my guess would be—that the Yanks are starting to worry about that Featherston fellow down in the

Confederate States."

"You think they're moving men to stop him?" Mary asked. Her husband nodded again. Excitement blazed through her. "If you're right, we've got a chance to be free!" *And maybe this has been a war all along, and I don't have to think I'm a murderer. Maybe. Please, God.*

Cincinnatus Driver watched a spectacle he had hoped he would never see, a spectacle he'd gone to Kentucky to keep from seeing: Confederate troops marching into Covington. He was, by then, just starting to get up on crutches and move around. He supposed he was lucky. The auto that hit him could easily have killed him. There were times, when he'd lain in the hospital and then back at his parents' house, that he wished it would have.

His mother took care of him as if he were a little boy. She plainly thought he was. All the years that had gone by since might as well not have happened. She didn't even realize anything was wrong. That, to Cincinnatus, was the cruelest part of her long, slow slide into senility.

And his father took care of both of them, with as much dignity as he could muster and without much hope. Some of the neighbors helped, as they found the chance. His mother wandered off a couple of times, but she didn't get far. People watched her more closely than they had till Cincinnatus got hit. That was funny, in a bitter way.

Getting out of the house for a little while felt good to Cincinnatus. He'd stared at the cracked, water-stained plaster of the ceiling for too long. He was weak as a kitten and he still got dreadful headaches that aspirin did nothing to knock down, but he was alive and he was upright. When a little more strength returned, he would figure out how to get himself and his father and mother back to the USA. Meanwhile...

Meanwhile, he stumped along the neglected sidewalks of the colored district of Covington toward the parade route. The whole district seemed even more rundown than it had when he came back to Covington. It also seemed half deserted, and so it was. A lot of Negroes had already fled to the United States.

He glanced over to his father, who walked beside him, ready to

steady him if he stumbled. "You sure Ma be all right while we're gone?"

"I ain't sure o' nothin," Seneca Driver answered, "but I reckon so." He walked on for a few paces, then said, "One thing I ain't sure of is how come you wants to see these bastards comin' back."

Cincinnatus wasn't altogether sure of that himself. After a little thought, he said, "I got to remind myself why I want to git back to Iowa so bad, maybe."

"Maybe." His father sounded deeply skeptical.

Seneca had reason to sound that way, too. Only a handful of blacks headed for the parade route. Most of the people who came out to see this underscoring of the return of Confederate sovereignty were white men with Freedom Party pins in their lapels—or, if they didn't wear lapels, as many didn't, on the front of denim jackets or wool sweaters. Cincinnatus hadn't been the target of looks like the ones they gave him for many years. People in Des Moines thought Negroes curious beasts, not dangerous ones.

One of the blacks on the street was a familiar face: Lucullus Wood. He'd visited Cincinnatus at the hospital, and several times at his parents' house. As far as a Negro could be, Lucullus was a man to reckon with in Covington. A generation earlier, his father had been, too.

Seeing Cincinnatus and Seneca, Lucullus came across the street to say hello. "Ain't this a fine day?" he said. A Freedom Party man might have used the same words. A Freedom Party man might even have used the same tone of voice. But the words and the tone would have had a very different meaning in a Freedom Party man's mouth. Lucullus understood irony—blacks who'd been born in the CSA understood irony from the moment they could talk— and no Party stalwart ever would.

"Never thought I'd see it," Cincinnatus agreed.

None of the plump, eager white men in earshot could have taken exception to his words or tone, either. In fact, one of them turned to another and said, "You see? Even the niggers is glad to have the damnyankees gone."

"They know they was well off before," his friend replied.

Cincinnatus didn't look at Lucullus. Neither of them looked at Seneca. He didn't look at them. None of them had any trouble knowing what the other two were thinking. Remarking on it would have been a waste of breath.

Off to the south, Cincinnatus heard a peculiar noise: partly musical, partly a low, mechanical rumble. Both pieces of the noise got louder as it came closer. Before too long, Cincinnatus recognized the music. A marching band was blaring out "Dixie," playing the tune for all it was worth.

"That there song used to be against the law here," Lucullus said. By the way he said it, he thought it was too bad "Dixie" had been illegal. Cincinnatus knew better. A casual listener—a white listener—wouldn't have.

"Wonder what ever happened to that Luther Bliss," Cincinnatus said. "Reckon he ain't never gonna show his face here no more. Don't miss him one damn bit." Since the former head of the Kentucky State Police had thrown him in jail, most of him meant that. The rest, though, couldn't help remembering how hard and how well Bliss had fought Confederate diehards—and anyone else he didn't care for.

"Reckon you's right," Lucullus answered. Cincinnatus sent him a sharp look. A casual listener wouldn't have heard anything wrong with his words there, either. Cincinnatus wondered if he knew more than he was letting on.

Here came the band. The Freedom Party men—and the smaller number of women with them—burst into applause. A lot of them began to sing. Cincinnatus couldn't applaud, not with his hands on the crutches. His father and Lucullus did. He couldn't blame them. Better safe than sorry.

Behind the band marched several companies of Confederate soldiers. Their uniforms didn't look much different from the ones C.S. troops had worn during the Great War, but there were changes. Most of them had to do with comfort and protection. The collars on these tunics were open at the neck. The cut was looser, less restrictive. Their helmets came down farther over the ears and the back of the neck than the Great War models had. They weren't the steel pots U.S. soldiers wore, but they weren't much different from them.

The rifles they carried ... "Funny-lookin' guns," Cincinnatus said to Lucullus in a low voice.

"Gas-operated. Don't need to work the bolt to chamber a round after the first one in the clip." Lucullus spoke with authority. "They's new. Not everybody's got 'em. They is very bad news, though."

Not even all the parading soldiers carried the new rifles. Some had submachine guns instead. Cincinnatus didn't see any with ordinary, Great War-vintage Tredegars. The Confederate States couldn't arm as many men as the United States. They seemed to want to make sure the men they did have would put a lot of lead in the air.

The barrels that grumbled and clanked up the street were different from the ones Cincinnatus remembered from the Great War, too. They carried their cannon in a turret on top of the hull. They also looked as if they could go a lot faster than the walking pace that had been their top speed a generation earlier.

Trucks towed artillery pieces. Fighters and bombers with the C.S. battle flag on wings and tail roared low overhead. More marching soldiers finished the parade.

"Wonder what they think o' this on the other side of the Ohio," Cincinnatus said. The city that was nearly his namesake lay right across the river from Covington.

"If they's happy, they's crazy," Lucullus said after looking around to make sure no white was paying undue attention. "Jake Featherston, he promised there wouldn't be no Confederate soldiers in Kentucky for twenty-five years. He jump the gun just a little bit, I reckon."

Cincinnatus' father looked around, too. "We done seen the parade," he said. "What I reckon is, we better git back to our own part o' town."

He was bound to be right. Even Negroes who weren't doing anything to anybody were liable to be fair game in Covington. Moving on his crutches made Cincinnatus sweat with effort and pain in spite of the chilly day, but he moved anyhow. Once back inside the colored district, he said, "We got to get out of here. Ain't easy no more, now that this here is a Confederate state, but we got to."

"Best thing you kin do is jus' walk right across the bridge to Cincinnati," Lucullus said. "Ain't quite legal like it was, but the U.S. soldiers don't bother niggers much."

Since neither Cincinnatus nor his mother was up to much in the way of walking, he and his parents took a taxi to the nearest bridge

two days later. His mother stared out the window as if she'd never been in an auto in her life. As far as she could remember, she hadn't.

They didn't get across. No one got across. To protest the Confederates' military occupation of Kentucky, the USA had sealed the border between the two countries. Cincinnatus thought of getting a boat and crossing the Ohio any way he could. He thought of it, but not for long. He remembered too many stories about Negroes trying to cross into the USA getting turned back at gunpoint or sometimes just shot. He couldn't take the chance, especially since his mother, with her wits wandering, was liable to give them away.

When U.S. forces pulled out of Kentucky, a consulate had opened in Covington. Hoping the official there might help, Cincinnatus visited the place. That turned out to be another wasted trip. A large sign on the window said, CLOSED INDEFINITELY DUE TO ILLEGAL CONFEDERATE ACTION. Frustrated and frightened, Cincinnatus went back to his parents' house.

"Dammit, I'm a citizen of the USA. I live in Iowa," he raged. "How come I can't get home?"

"Be thankful it ain't worse," his father said: the philosophy of a man who'd spent the early years of his life as a piece of property. No matter how bad things were, he could easily imagine them worse.

Not so Cincinnatus. "Bein' stuck here in Covington is as bad as it gits," he said.

But Seneca was right. A few days later, the *Covington Courier* ran what it called, A NOTIFICATION TO THE COLORED RESIDENTS OF THE CONFEDERATE state of Kentucky. It told them they had to be photographed for passbooks, "as is the accepted and required practice for Negroes throughout the Confederate States of America."

Seneca took the order in stride. "Had to do this afore the war, I recollects," he said.

That was so. Cincinnatus remembered his own passbook. But he said, "I done without one o' them things the last twenty-five years. Don't you recollect what it's like to be free?"

"I recollects the trouble you finds if you don't got one," his father answered.

"I ain't no Confederate nigger. I ain't gonna be no Confederate nigger, neither," Cincinnatus said. "I'm a citizen of the United States. What the hell I need a passbook for?"

"You don't want to get in trouble with them Freedom Party fellas, you better have one," his father answered.

That was all too likely to be true. Cincinnatus raged against it anyhow. Raging against it did him exactly no good. For the time being, he was stuck here in Kentucky. Sooner or later, he expected things to get back to normal and the border between the CSA and the USA to open up again. He also expected to get the cast off his leg and to learn to walk without crutches once more. And he expected to take his father and mother back to Des Moines with him. He always had been an optimist.

For a long time, Dr. Leonard O'Doull had been satisfied—no, more than satisfied, happy—to live in a place like Rivière-du-Loup. *The world forgetting, by the world forgot.* He couldn't remember where he'd seen that line of poetry, but it suited the town very well. And it had suited him, too.

But, however much he sometimes wanted to, he couldn't quite forget that he was an American, that he came from a wider world than the one in which he chose to live. Reading about the gathering storm far to the south—even reading about it in French, which made it seem all the farther away—brought that home to him. In an odd way, so did the passing of his father-in-law.

To Leonard O'Doull, Lucien Galtier had stood for everything he admired about Quebec: a curious mix of adaptability and a deeper stubbornness. Now that the older man was gone, O'Doull felt as if he'd lost an anchor that had been mooring him to *la belle République.*

His wife, of course, had other feelings about the way her father had died: one part shock, O'Doull judged, to about three parts mortification. "Did it have to be *there?"* she would say, over and over again. "Did he have to be doing *that?"*

"Coronary thrombosis comes when it comes," O'Doull would reply, as patiently and sympathetically as he could. "The exertion, the

excitement— they could, without a doubt, help bring it on."

Patience and sympathy took him only so far. About then, Nicole would usually explode: "But people will never let us live it down!"

Knowing how places like Rivière-du-Loup and the surrounding farms worked, O'Doull suspected she was right. Even so, he said, "You worry too much. Many of the people I've talked to say they're jealous of such an end."

"Men!" Nicole snarled. *"Tabernac!* What do you know?" That was unfair to half the human race, not that she cared. Then she went on, "And what of poor Éloise Granche? Is she jealous of such an end?"

That, unfortunately, wasn't unfair, and was very much to the point. Éloise wasn't jealous. She was horror-stricken, and who could blame her? To have to watch someone die at such a moment ... How would she ever forget that? How could she ever want to get close to another man as long as she lived?

O'Doull said, "Your father didn't leave us ... unappreciated." He needed to pause there to pick the right word. After another moment, he went on, "Would you rather it had happened while he was mucking out the barn?"

"I'd rather it didn't happen at all," Nicole answered. But that wasn't what he'd asked, and she knew it. Now she hesitated. At last, she said, "Maybe I would. It would have been more, more dignified."

"Death is never dignified." O'Doull spoke with a doctor's certainty. "Never. Dignity in death is something we invent afterwards to make the living feel better."

"I would have felt better if it had happened while Papa was in the barn," Nicole said. "Whether he—" She broke off, not soon enough, and burst into tears. " *'Osti!* Do you see? Even I'm starting to make jokes about it. And if I do, what's everyone else doing?"

"The same thing, probably," O'Doull said. "People are like that."

"It's not right!" Nicole said. "He wouldn't have wanted to be remembered— this way." She cried harder than ever.

Although Leonard held her and patted her and did his best to comfort her, he was far from sure she was right. He'd known his

father-in-law for a quarter of a century. Wouldn't Lucien Galtier have taken a certain wry pride in the reputation that grew out of his end? Lucien might even have taken a pride that wasn't so ordinary. Any number of ways to go. To how many, though, was it given to go like a *man?*

Which brought him back to the question Nicole had asked. What about Éloise? She was wounded, no doubt about it, and Lucien wouldn't have wanted that. He'd cared for her, even if he hadn't necessarily loved her. But would things have been any easier for her if he'd dropped dead while they were dancing, not after they'd gone back to her farmhouse? Maybe a little. Maybe a little, yes, but not much.

One of these days, O'Doull told himself, *yes, one of these days, I'll have to pour a few drinks into Georges and find out what* he *really thinks about this.* The time wasn't ripe yet. He knew that. But it would come. A lot of things for which the time hadn't been ripe looked to be coming. Most of them were a lot less appetizing than lying down with a nice woman and being unlucky enough not to get up again.

That evening, the newscaster on the wireless gave an account of a speech President Smith had made at Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. "The president of the United States spoke with just anger regarding the Confederate States' violation of their pledge not to send soldiers into Kentucky and the state formerly known as Houston." The French-speaker made heavy going of the place names. He continued, "The president of the United States also reminded the president of the Confederate States that he had pledged himself to ask for no more territorial changes on the continent of North America. If he ignores this solemn undertaking, President Smith said, he cannot seriously expect the United States to return to him the portions of Virginia, Arkansas, and Sonora to which he has referred." He had trouble pronouncing *Arkansas,* too. And why not? Arkansas was a long, long way from the Republic of Quebec.

Al Smith finally seemed to have decided he couldn't trust Jake Featherston. As far as O'Doull could see, the U.S. president had taken longer than he might have to figure that out. He had it down now, though. More than what he'd said, where he'd made the speech spoke volumes. Almost eighty years ago now, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had crushed McClellan's Army of the Potomac at Camp Hill, ensuring that the Confederate States would triumph in the War of Secession. No president of the United States would have

anything to do with the place these days unless he wanted to tell his own people, *We're in trouble again.*

Nicole didn't understand any of that. Neither did little Lucien, who was anything but little these days. O'Doull found himself envying his wife and son for being so thoroughly Quebecois. He also found himself reminded that, no matter how long he'd lived here, he was at bottom an American. He'd sometimes wondered about that. He didn't any more.

When he went to his office the next morning, newsboys were hawking papers by shouting about President Smith's speech. Papers in Quebec always seemed to back the USA to the hilt: more royalist than the king, more Catholic than the Pope. Again, why not? The Great War had touched lightly here, which it hadn't anywhere else between Alaska and the Empire of Mexico.

O'Doull's receptionist was already at the office when he got there. She smiled at him and said, *"Bonjour, monsieur.* Ça *va?"*

"Pas pire, merci," he answered, which made her smile. Nobody who spoke Parisian French would have said, *Not bad, thanks,* like that. O'Doull had put down deep roots here, and he knew it. He went on, "When is the first appointment?"

"Half an hour, Doctor," she said.

"Good. I'll see what I can catch up on till then." He went into his private office to skim through medical journals. He wished he had time to do more than skim. He had never known—had never imagined—such an exciting age in medicine. Back when he was a boy, immunization and sanitation had begun to cut into death rates, which had kept on falling ever since. Now, though, some of the new drugs on the market were doing what quack nostrums had promised since the beginning of time: they really were curing diseases that could easily have been fatal. How many times had he watched someone die of infection after surgery that would have succeeded without it? More than he cared to recall, certainly. Now, with luck, he—and his patients—wouldn't have to go through that particular hell any more.

And here was an article about some new medicine that was said to be-even more effective than the sulfonamides, which had been the last word for the past year or two. Drugs that killed germs without poisoning people were, to him, far more exciting than fighters that flew twenty miles an hour faster and five thousand feet higher than

previous models.

Not everybody thought so, though, which meant new models of fighters came out more often and got more fanfare than new drugs did. They were liable to be used, too, which worried him.

"Madness," he muttered, and went back to reading about this fungus with what seemed a miraculous ability to murder microbes.

His first patient was a pregnant woman due in about six weeks. He'd always liked working with women who were going to have babies. Their condition was obvious, and usually had a happy outcome. He only wished the rest of what he did were as easy and rewarding.

Then he saw a child with mumps. He couldn't do anything about that despite the new drugs in the medical journal. The little boy was very unhappy, but he would get better in a few days.

A man with a bad back came in next. "I'm sorry, *Monsieur* Papineau," he said, "but aspirins and liniment and rest are the most I have to offer you."

"Tabernac!" Papineau said. "Can't you cure it? If you could put me under the knife for it, I would go in a minute. I can't pick up my children or make love to my wife without feeling I'm breaking in two."

Dr. O'Doull considered. Papineau was younger than he was, and might not be shocked at a suggestion. On the other hand, he might. Rivière-du-Loup was a straitlaced place in a lot of ways. Still, worth a try ... "Since you mention it, *monsieur,* it could be that you might have less pain during intimacy if your wife were to assume the, ah, superior position."

There. That sounded properly medical. Was it too medical for Papineau to understand? Evidently not, for he turned red. "What? You mean her on top? *Calisse!"*

"I didn't mean to offend," O'Doull said hastily. "I offered the suggestion only for reasons of health and comfort. You were the one who mentioned the, ah, difficulty, after all."

"Well, so I did." His patient looked thoughtful. "For reasons of health, maybe. I wonder what Louise would say." Papineau left the office rubbing his chin. O'Doull managed to hold in a snort of laughter

till he was gone. Then it came out.

He was still smiling when his next patient, a little old lady with arthritis, came in. "What's funny, Doctor?" she asked suspiciously.

"Nothing to do with you, *Madame* Villehardouin," he assured her. "I was just... remembering a joke I heard last night." She gave him a fishy stare, but couldn't prove he was lying. He had only aspirins and liniment to offer her, too. As far as things had come in the past few years, they still had at least as far to go.

A few days later, he ran into Papineau in a grocery. As usual, the man moved in a gingerly way, but he greeted O'Doull with a smile. "That was a wonderful prescription you gave me, Doctor," he said. "Wonderful!"

"Well, I'm glad it did you some good," O'Doull said. Papineau nodded enthusiastically. O'Doull *was* pleased at helping him, and his pleasure diminished only a little when he reflected that Hippocrates could have given the same advice. Yes, medicine still had a long way to go.

The ground unrolled beneath Jonathan Moss. His fighter dove like a falcon— dove, in fact, far faster than any falcon could dream of diving. He was coming out of the sun. The young hotshot calmly tooling along in the other fighter had no idea he was there—till he zoomed past. Had it been a dogfight, his opponent never would have known what hit him.

His wireless set let out a burst of static, and then a startled squawk: "Son of a bitch! How the hell did you do that? Uh, over."

Moss started to make a joke, to say something like, *Clean living.* But the smile and the words died unspoken. He thumbed his own wireless and answered, "Son, I did that because I wanted it more than you." He thought he'd stopped, but his mouth kept going: "I want it more than anybody does." A long, long pause followed before he remembered to add, "Over."

Wasn't all that the Lord's bitter truth? He *did* want it more than anybody else, and what he'd known since the war *was* over. Ever since

he got his law degree, he'd done everything he could to make things better, make them more tolerable, for Canadians. He'd married a Canadian patriot. He'd had himself a half-Canadian little girl.

And what thanks had he got? Some other Canadian, someone who no doubt thought of himself as a patriot, had blown up everything in the world that mattered to him. Wherever that other Canadian lived, he was bound to be laughing and cheering these days. He'd settled his score with a Yank, all right. He sure had.

I *wasted twenty years of my life.* The only thing Moss wanted more than sitting in this fighter was to be able to pilot the biggest bomber the United States had. He wanted to fly it at random over some good-sized Canadian town, open the bomb-bay doors, and pour out a couple of tons of death, the way that Canadian had sent Laura and Dorothy death through the mail. He wanted that so badly, he could all but taste it. He could practically feel the bomber jump and get livelier as its heavy load of explosives fell away. Hallucination? Of course. It seemed very real just the same.

Maybe the bombs had been meant for him. Maybe, but he didn't think so. People in his family didn't open mail unless it was addressed to them. Had the bomb had his name on it, his wife and daughter would have left it alone. *And they might still be alive, and I wouldn't.* He'd had that thought the day the bomb went off.

Why would anyone want to kill a woman and a little girl? That ate at Moss. Could somebody have been angry enough at Laura for marrying an American to want to see her dead? Moss knew some of the people who wanted Canada free once more were a fanatical lot, but that fanatical? It seemed excessive, even for them. And most of them were willing to admit he'd done a few useful things in his time there. He'd had some threats, but they'd never amounted to anything —not till now.

What he'd done here didn't matter any more. He'd had his life rearranged for him. The sooner he got out of Canada now, the happier he'd be.

The wireless crackled again. The other fighter pilot said, "I'm going back to the airstrip now, Major. Over."

"I'll follow you," Moss answered. "Over and out." He'd put the uniform back on as soon as he'd buried Laura and Dorothy. He hadn't asked for the promotion from the rank he'd held in the Great War.

They'd seemed eager to give it to him, though, and acted afraid he wouldn't come back to flying. The way things were looking along the border with the CSA and out in the Pacific, they were anxious to grab all the warm bodies they could.

He wondered what he would have done had Laura lived. Chucking his practice to fly for the USA might have meant chucking his marriage, too. Well, he didn't have to worry about that now.

There was the airstrip, with the snow bulldozed off it. Some airplanes here landed on skis instead of wheels during the winter, but his didn't have them. He lowered his landing gear and bumped to a stop.

Groundcrew men came up to take charge of the fighter. Wearily, Moss pushed back the canopy and got out. The fur and leather of his flying gear kept him warm on the ground in wintertime. He remembered the way that had worked from the days of the Great War. Ever since he'd lost Laura and Dorothy, those days seemed more real, more vivid, more *present* in his mind than much of what had happened since.

A young lieutenant emerged from one of the buildings flanking the airstrip and struggled through the snow till he got to the cleared runway. Then he could hurry, as young lieutenants were supposed to do. Saluting, he told Moss, "The base commandant's compliments, sir, and he'd like to see you in his office right away."

"Well, then, I'd better get over there, hadn't I?" Moss said.

Ambiguity permeated his relations with Captain Oscar Trotter. He'd got on fine with Major Finley, Trotter's predecessor. They'd both been Great War veterans, and understood each other. The new commandant was a younger man. He'd never seen combat, never drunk himself blind three or four nights in a row so he wouldn't have to think about friends going down in flames three or four dreadful days in a row, never drunk himself blind so he wouldn't have to think about going down in flames himself. And, of course, Trotter was only a captain. Even though he was in charge of the field outside of London, he had trouble giving Moss orders now that Moss had put the uniform back on and wore golden oak leaves on his shoulder straps.

Moss saw no point in making things worse than they were already. "Reporting as ordered," he said when he walked into Trotter's office. That let the commandant know he was willing to take his orders, even

if he didn't call him *sir* or salute first.

Trotter nodded. He didn't salute, either. "Have a seat, Major," he said, acknowledging Moss' rank that way so he also didn't have to say *sir*. He waved the older man into the chair in front of his desk. It creaked when Moss sat down in it. It always did.

"What's up?" Moss asked.

Trotter lit a cigarette before he answered. He shoved the pack of Raleighs across the desk so Moss could have one, too. As Moss lit up, the commandant pushed a sheet of paper across the desk after the Raleighs. "Your orders have come through."

Was that relief in his voice? Moss wouldn't have been surprised. Base commandants didn't like ambiguity, and with reason: it weakened their authority. If Trotter got Moss out of his hair, he could go back to being senior officer here in every sense of the term.

The cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth, Moss reached for the paper. It bore the embossed eagle in front of crossed swords that had symbolized the USA since the revival after the Second Mexican War. He read through the orders, then looked up at Captain Trotter. "You have an atlas of the United States here, sir? Where the hell is Mount Vernon, Illinois?"

"I thought you were from Illinois," Trotter answered, pulling a book off a shelf behind his chair.

"I'm from Chicago," Moss replied with dignity. "Downstate is all the back of beyond, as far as I'm concerned." He might have been talking about darkest Africa.

Captain Trotter opened the atlas, then pointed. "Here it is." He turned the book around so Moss could see, too. "Right in the middle of the pointy end that goes down to where the Ohio and the Mississippi meet."

"Uh-*huh,"* Moss said. "Hell of a nice place to fly missions into Kentucky from, looks like to me."

"Or to defend if the Confederates start flying missions out of Kentucky," Trotter agreed.

"I don't want to defend. To hell with defending," Moss said

savagely. "If those bastards think they can start a new war, I want to go out and tear 'em a new asshole so they'll goddamn well think twice."

That made Captain Trotter grin. "No wonder you're still a good pilot. You've got the killer instinct, all right."

Moss knew he should have smiled, too. Try as he would, he couldn't. Yes, he had a killer instinct. He'd been thinking about that while he was up in the fighter. But he hadn't thought about it in terms of the Confederates then. He'd thought about Canadians, people he'd been dealing with—hell, people he'd liked, people he'd loved—for more than twenty years.

Trotter might have picked that out of his head. "Maybe getting away from these parts will do you good," he said.

"Will it? I have my doubts," Moss answered. "It won't bring Laura and Dorothy back to life. It won't make me stop wanting to blow Canada to hell and gone."

The commandant shifted uneasily in his swivel chair. He didn't seem to know what to make of that. Moss could hardly blame him. He hadn't known what an explosive mixture grief and rage and hate could be till it overwhelmed him. For a moment, he wondered if the damned Canuck who'd sent Laura the bomb had had that same hot, furious blend blazing in him. Only for a moment. Then Moss shoved the thought aside. To hell with what the damned Canuck had been thinking. *If I knew who it was* ... Regretfully, Moss shoved that thought aside, too. He didn't know. From what U.S. investigators said, it wasn't likely he ever would.

"Well," Trotter said, "any which way, you will be going back to the States. Your orders say, 'as quickly as practicable.' How soon can you be on a train?"

If Moss hadn't had tragedy strike him, he knew he wouldn't have got that much consideration. The other officer would have said, *Be on the train at seven tomorrow morning,* and off he would have gone. Here, though, even if he didn't think getting away would do much for him, he was far from sorry to put Canada behind him. "I don't have much left to do here," he said. "I've been settling affairs ever since ... since it happened. After my apartment got blown to hell, it's not like I've got much left to throw in a suitcase. If it wasn't for your kindness, I wouldn't have a suitcase to throw my stuff in, either."

"I'd say we owe you more than a suitcase, Major Moss," Trotter told him. "I've taken the liberty of checking the train schedules...." He paused to see if that would annoy Moss. It didn't; he knew the commandant was only doing his job. When he nodded, Trotter continued, "Next train from Toronto to Chicago gets into London at 4:34 this afternoon."

"That's what the schedule says, anyway," Moss observed dryly. If the train was within half an hour of that, it would be doing all right.

Trotter nodded. "Yeah, that's what it says. And a train from Chicago to Mount Vernon goes out at half past nine tomorrow night. You'll have to kill some time in Chicago, but if you're from there it shouldn't be too bad."

"Maybe," Moss said. He didn't want to see his family. He'd had enough trouble with them at the funeral. But Captain Trotter didn't need to know about his difficulties there. His family had thought he was crazy to marry Laura Secord, and they'd seemed offended when the union didn't fall apart in short order. But he could find ways to spend time in Chicago without having anything to do with them. He could, and he intended to.

"Good luck," Trotter said.

Moss didn't laugh in his face. For the life of him, he couldn't figure out why. If he'd had anything remotely approaching good luck, his wife and daughter would still be alive, and he wouldn't be wearing U.S. uniform again. But he hadn't, they weren't, and he was. "Thanks, Captain," he said, very much as if he meant it.

When Hipolito Rodriguez walked into Freedom Party headquarters in Baroyeca, the first thing he saw was a new map on the wall. It showed the Confederate States as they were now, with Kentucky and what had been called Houston back in the fold. The lands the United States had seized in the Great War and not yet returned—chunks of Virginia, Arkansas, and Sonora—had a new label: *Unredeemed Territory*. That same label was applied to Sequoyah, even though the plebiscite there had gone against the CSA.

Part of Rodriguez—the part that had hated *los Estados Unidos* ever

since their soldiers tried to kill him during the Great War—rejoiced to see that label on Sequoyah. A lingering sense of fairness made him wonder about it, though. Pointing to the map, and to Sequoyah in particular, he asked Robert Quinn, "Is that truly the way it should be?"

"Sí, Señor Rodriguez. *Absolutamente,"* the local Freedom Party leader answered. "The election in Sequoyah was a shame and a sham. Since the war, *los Estados Unidos* sent so many settlers into that state that the result of the vote could not possibly be just. Since they had no business occupying the land in the first place, they had no business settling it, either."

"Is this what *Señor* Featherston says?" Rodriguez asked.

Quinn nodded. "It certainly is. And it is something more than that. It is the truth." A priest celebrating the Mass could have sounded no more sure of himself.

Rodriguez eyed the map again. Slowly, he nodded. But he could not help saying, "If *Señor* Featherston tells this to the United States, they will not be happy. They thought the plebiscite settled everything."

"Are you going to lie awake at night flabbling about what the United States think?" Quinn dropped the English slang into the middle of a Spanish sentence, which only strengthened its meaning.

But Hipolito Rodriguez gave back a shrug. "It could be that I am, *señor,"* he said. "Please remember, I have a son who is in the Army. I have two more sons who could easily be conscripted." Since he was only in his mid-forties himself, he was not too old to put the butternut uniform on again, but he said nothing about that. He was not afraid for himself in the same way as he was afraid for his boys.

"How long have you wanted revenge against the United States?" Quinn asked softly.

"A long time," Rodriguez admitted. "Oh, *sí, señor,* a very long time indeed. But now it occurs to me, as it did not before, that some things may be bought at too high a price. And is it not possible that what is true for me may also be true for the whole country?"

"Jake Featherston won't let anything go wrong." Quinn spoke with utmost confidence. "He's been right before. He'll keep on being right. We'll have our place in the sun, and we'll get it without much trouble,

too. You wait and see."

Rodriguez let that certainty persuade him, too—certainty, after all, was a big part of what he'd been looking for when he joined the Freedom Party. *"Bueno,"* he said. "I hope very much that you are right."

"Sure I am," Quinn said easily. "Why don't you just sit down and relax, and we'll go ahead with the meeting."

Falling back into that weekly routine did help ease Rodriguez's mind. Robert Quinn went through the usual announcements. There were more of those than there had been in the old days, for the Party had more members in Baroyeca now. Rodriguez and the other veterans of the hard times couldn't help looking down their noses a little at the men who had joined because joining suddenly looked like the way to get ahead. No denying, though, that some of the newcomers had proved useful.

Once the announcements were done, the Party men sang patriotic songs, mostly in Spanish, a few in English. As they always did, they finished with "Dixie." Then Quinn said, "Now there is something I want you men to think about when you go home tonight. It is possible—not likely, mind you, but possible—that *los Estados Unidos* will give us a hard time about our rightful demands against them. If that does happen, we may have to take a very firm line with them. If we do, they'll be sorry. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. And you can bet *los Estados Confederados* won't back down again."

Applause filled the crowded room. Rodriguez joined it, even though that wasn't exactly what Quinn had told him before the formal meeting started. Then he'd sounded as if he didn't think the United States would fight. Of course, he was a politician, and politicians had a habit of telling people what they wanted to hear. But Rodriguez hadn't thought Freedom Party men did that sort of thing.

Then Quinn said, "I'll tell you something else, too, friends. During the last war, the *mallates* stabbed us in the back. We would have licked *los Estados Unidos* then if those black bastards hadn't betrayed us. Well, that isn't going to happen this time, *por Dios.* Jake Featherston will clamp down on them good and hard to make sure it doesn't."

He got another round of applause, a louder one this time. Rodriguez pounded his callused palms together till they hurt. He didn't care what happened to the Confederacy's Negroes, as long as it

was nothing good. He'd got his baptism by fire against the black rebels in Georgia in 1916, before his division went to fight the damnyankees in Texas. He'd hardly seen a Negro since he got out of the Army. If he never saw another one, that wouldn't break his heart.

"As long as we stand behind Jake Featherston a hundred percent, nothing can go wrong," Quinn said. "He knows what's what. This country will be great again—great, I tell you! And every one of you, every one of us, will help."

More applause. Again, Hipolito Rodriguez joined it. Why not? Seeing the Confederate States back on their feet was another reason he'd joined the Freedom Party. One more was that Robert Quinn had never treated him like a damn greaser, an English phrase he knew much too well. The Party had nothing against men from Sonora and Chihuahua. It saved all its venom for the *mallates.*

Why shouldn't it? Rodriguez thought. *They deserve it. We never tried to hurt the country. We've been loyal.* He scorned the men from the Empire of Mexico who sneaked into the CSA trying to find work, too. If any people deserved to be called greasers, they were the ones.

Robert Quinn held up a hand. "Before we call it a night and go home, I've got one more announcement to make. I've been trying to push this through for a long time, but I haven't had any luck till now. I heard from the state Party chairman the other day. Now it's certain: the silver mine in the hills outside of town is going to open up again next month. And, even though this part isn't so sure, it does look like the railroad will be coming back to Baroyeca." He grinned at the Freedom Party men. "Remember, you heard it here first."

This time, he got something better than applause. He got delighted silence, followed by a low, excited buzz. The mine had been closed ever since the collapse, and the railroad had stopped coming to Baroyeca not much later. Rodriguez wondered what had made the authorities change their minds after so long.

Two men sitting in the next row back answered the question for him. One of them remarked, "Need plenty of *plata* to fight a war."

"Sí, sí," the other agreed. "And where there's a little silver, there's always a lot of lead. Need plenty of lead to fight a war, too."

"Ahh," Rodriguez murmured to himself. He liked seeing how things worked. He always had. Maybe the authorities hadn't decided to

reopen the mine from the goodness of their hearts alone. Maybe they'd seen that they would need silver and especially lead.

Well, what if they had? It would still do the town a lot of good. If the railroad came back, prices at Diaz's general store would drop like a rock. Shipping goods in by truck on bad roads naturally made everything cost more. After the train line shut down, the storekeeper had been lucky to stay in business at all. Plenty of other places in town hadn't.

"Three cheers for *Señor* Quinn!" somebody shouted. The cheers rang out. Quinn stood there, looking suitably modest, as if the news hadn't been his doing at all. Maybe it really hadn't, not altogether. But he deserved some credit for it.

When the Party meeting did end, several men headed over to *La Culebra Verde* to celebrate. Rodriguez thought of what Magdalena would say if he came home drunk. Sometimes, after he had that thought, he had another one: *I don't care.* Then he would go off to the Green Snake and see how much *cerveza* or, more rarely, tequila, he could pour down. When he did that, Magdalena had some very pointed things to say the next morning, things a headache often did not improve.

Tonight, he just started out into the countryside beyond Baroyeca. The new line of poles supporting the wires that carried electricity made sure he couldn't get lost even if he were drunk. The sky was black velvet scattered with diamonds. A lot of stars seemed to be out tonight.

One of them, a bright red one, startled him by moving. Then he heard the faint buzz of a motor overhead. *"Un avion,"* he muttered in surprise. He couldn't remember the last time he'd seen an airplane above Baroyeca. It was flying south. He wondered where it was going. Off to scout the border with the Empire of Mexico? That seemed most likely. But wouldn't it do better to scout the border with the USA?

Maybe other airplanes were doing that. Rodriguez hoped so. When he fought up in west Texas, the only airplanes he'd seen had belonged to the United States. The Confederate States, stretched too thin, hadn't been able to deploy many on that distant, less than vital front.

Would things be any different in a new war? Yes, *los Estados Confederados* had Kentucky and Houston back again, so that Texas was whole once more. Maybe they'd even get back the other territory they

had lost in the Great War. But that map on the wall of Freedom Party headquarters still said *los Estados Unidos* were bigger, and bigger still meant stronger in a long, drawn-out fight.

Maybe Jake Featherston knew something he didn't. He hoped so. He couldn't see what it might be, though. With one son in the Army, with two more likely to be called up, he also couldn't help worrying.

When he got back to the farmhouse, he smiled at the fine white electric light shining out through the windows. Magdalena had left a lamp burning— no, not burning: she'd left a lamp *on*—for him. She'd waited up for him, too. He didn't say anything about the growing threat of war. Instead, he talked about the silver mine's reopening and the likely return of the railroad to Baroyeca.

His wife smiled. She nodded. And then she said, "This is all very good, but I still hope there will be peace with *los Estados Unidos."*

Rodriguez realized he wasn't the only one worrying.

Chester Martin passed a newsboy on his way to the trolley stop. The kid had a stack of the Los *Angeles Times* in front of him as tall as the bottoms of his knickers. He waved a paper at Chester and shouted out the morning's headline: "Smith says no!"

Usually, Chester walked right past newsboys. That was enough to stop him, though. "Oh, he does, does he? Says no to what, exactly?"

The newsboy couldn't tell him. They'd told the kid what to yell before they turned him loose, and that was it. He yelled it again, louder this time. "Smith says no!" For good measure, he added, "Read all about it!"

"Give me one." Chester parted with a nickel. The newsboy handed him a paper. He carried it to the stop. As soon as he got there, he unfolded it and read the headline and the lead story. Al Smith had said no to Jake Featherston. The Confederates weren't going to get back the pieces of Sonora and Arkansas and Virginia they'd lost in the war—or Sequoyah, either.

Smith was quoted as saying, "The president of the Confederate

States personally promised me that he would make no more territorial demands on the North American continent. He has taken less than a year to break his solemn word. No matter what he may feel about his promise, however, I am resolved to hold him to it. These territories will remain under the administration and sovereignty of the United States."

"About time!" Martin said, and turned the paper over to read more.

Just then, though, the trolley came clanging up. Chester threw another nickel in the fare box and found a seat. His was far from the only open copy of the *Times* as the streetcar rattled away.

A man of about Martin's age sitting across the aisle from him folded his newspaper and put it in his lap with an air of finality. "There's going to be trouble," he said gloomily.

The woman sitting behind him said, "There'd be worse trouble if we gave that Featherston so-and-so what he wants. How soon would he be back trying to squeeze something else out of us?"

"Lady, I spent three stinking years in the trenches," the man answered. "There isn't any trouble worse than that." He looked over at Chester for support. "Aren't I right? Were you there?"

"Yeah, I was there," Martin said. "I don't know what to tell you, though. Looks to me like that guy is spoiling for a fight. The longer we keep ducking, the harder he's going to hit us when he finally does."

"Yikes!" The man jerked in surprise. He sent Martin a betrayed look. "Who cares about those lousy little chunks of land?"

"Well, I don't, not much," Chester admitted. "But suppose we give them back to him and *then* he jumps on us anyway? We'd look like a bunch of boobs, and we'd be that much worse off, too."

"Why would he jump on us if he's got everything he wants?" the man demanded.

Before Chester could say anything, the woman who'd been arguing beat him to it: "Because somebody like that *never* has everything he wants. As soon as you give him something, he wants something else. When you see a little kid like that, you spank him so he behaves himself from then on."

"How do you spank somebody who'll shoot back if you try?" the man asked.

"If we don't spank him, he'll shoot first," Chester said. The woman in back of the other man nodded emphatically. They all kept on wrangling about it till first the woman and then the other man got off at their stops.

Chester kept on going down into the South Bay. The area was growing fast; builders wanted to run up lots of new houses. The construction workers' union was doing its best to stop them till they met its terms. This tract in Torrance had been carved from an orange grove. The trees had gone down. The houses weren't going up, or not very fast, anyway.

When Martin walked into the union tent across from the construction site, the organizer who kept an eye on things during the night, a tough little guy named Pete Mazzini, wore a worried expression. "What's up?" Chester asked, grabbing the coffee pot that perked lazily over the blue flame of canned heat.

"I hear they really are gonna sic the goddamn Pinkertons on us today," Mazzini said.

"Shit," Chester said, and the other man nodded. "Pinkertons are bad news." Mazzini nodded again. Martin hadn't seen Pinkerton goons since the steel-mill strikes in Toledo after the Great War. In a way, fighting them was even worse than fighting cops. A fair number of cops were fundamentally decent guys. Anybody who'd sign up to use a club or a blackjack or a pistol for the Pinkertons had to be a son of a bitch.

"At least I found out." Mazzini jerked a thumb toward the building site. "Dumb night watchmen over there don't think about how voices carry once everything quiets down."

"Good." Martin had never got more than three stripes on his sleeve during the war, but he'd commanded a company for a while. Now he had to think not like a captain, but like a general. "We've got to let the pickets know as soon as they start showing up. They'll be ready, because we've had word the builders might pull this. We've got to bring in as many weapons as we can. Not just sticks for the signs, either. We'll need knives. Guns, too, if we can get 'em in a hurry."

"We start shooting, that gives the cops all the excuse they need to

land on us with both feet," Mazzini said.

He wasn't wrong. All the same, Chester answered, "If we let the goons break us, we're screwed, too. If they break us, we might as well pack it in. You want that?"

"Hell, no," Mazzini said. "I just wanted to make sure you were thinking about it."

"Oh, I am. Bet your ass I am." Martin scratched his chin. "I'm going to call somebody from the *Daily Breeze.* Torrance papers aren't down on unions the way the goddamn *Times* is. We ought to have an honest witness here. I think I'll talk to the Torrance cops, too. The builders don't have them in their pocket, like in L.A. If they know the Pinkertons are going to raise hell ahead of time, maybe they can step on 'em."

Pete Mazzini looked as if he would have laughed in anybody else's face. "Good luck," he said. His shrug declared that he washed his hands of dealing with all police anywhere. "I don't suppose it can make things any worse."

Yawning, he agreed to hang around and warn the incoming pickets of the trouble ahead while Chester went to talk with the man from the *Daily Breeze* and the police and make other arrangements. When Chester got back, he said, "Thanks, Pete. You can go home and get your forty winks now."

Mazzini gave him a look. "Hell, no. If there's gonna be a brawl, I want in on it. Those bastards aren't going to lick us as easy as they think they are." He yawned again, and fixed himself what had to be his millionth cup of coffee.

The reporter from the *Daily Breeze* showed up an hour or so later. He had a photographer with him, which gladdened Chester's heart. Meanwhile, union backers came up to the men on the picket line, slipped them this or that, and then went on their way. Martin and Mazzini exchanged knowing glances. Neither said a word.

At twenty past eleven, half a dozen autos with Torrance cops in them pulled up by the building site. Martin wondered if they'd known what would go on before he told them. When a reporter from the *Times* showed up five minutes later, he stopped wondering. They had.

At twenty to twelve, two buses that had seen a lot of better years

pulled up around the corner. "Here we go," Chester said softly. It had been a long, long time—half a lifetime—since he'd shot at anybody, but he knew he could. Nobody who'd been through the Great War was likely to forget what gunplay was all about.

Here came the Pinkerton men. They looked like goons: drunks and toughs and guys down on their luck who'd take anybody's money and do anything because they hadn't had any real work for such a long time. They carried a motley assortment of iron bars and wooden clubs. One guy even had what Martin belatedly recognized as a baseball bat, something far, far from its New England home. Others, grim purpose on their faces, kept one hand out of sight. *Knife men and shooters,* Martin thought, and made sure he could get at his own pistol in a hurry.

"We don't want any trouble, now," said a Torrance policeman with the map of Ireland on his face. He and his pals formed a thin line between the advancing goons and the picketers, who were shaping a line of their own: a skirmish line. Chester warily watched the scabs on the site. If they took his men from behind while the Pinkertons hit them from the front ... He grimaced. That wouldn't be good at all.

As if reading his mind, Mazzini said, "I told a couple of our guys to start shooting at the scabs if they even take a step towards us. Some bullets go past their heads, I don't think they've got the balls to keep coming."

Chester laid a hand on his shoulder for a moment. "Good. Thanks."

A short, scrawny, ferret-faced man in a loud, snappy suit seemed to be the Pinkertons' commander. "Time to teach these damn Reds a lesson," he said in a voice that carried. Low growls rose from his men, as if from a pack of angry dogs. He pointed. "Go get 'em!"

Instead of growling, the goons roared and charged. Some of the Torrance cops swung their billy clubs. Most of them let the Pinkertons go by. The union men roared, too. They were outnumbered, but not too badly. Some of them ran forward to meet the goons head on. A few others hung back, watching the scabs.

"Here we go!" Chester said, an odd note of exultation in his voice. He snatched up a club and waded into the brawl. He didn't want to start shooting first, but he had nothing at all against breaking a few heads.

He almost got his broken as soon as he started fighting. A goon carrying an iron bar with a chunk of concrete on the end swung it for all he was worth. It hummed past Chester's ear. He clobbered the Pinkerton before the fellow could take another swing at him.

That scrawny guy in the sharp suit didn't mix it up along with the strikebreakers he'd brought. He stayed out of the fight and yelled orders. Martin pointed at the man with his club. "Get him!" he yelled to one of the Torrance cops, who'd managed to whack his way clear and was standing on the sidewalk as if it were the sideline of a football game. The cop paid him no attention.

But when the union men started getting the better of the strikebreakers, their boss was the one who first pulled a pistol out of his pocket. Chester tried to shift his club to his left hand so he could grab his own gun, but a goon had hold of his left arm. In desperation, he threw the club instead. He got lucky. It caught the fellow in the sharp suit right in the bridge of the nose.

He let out a howl that pierced the shouts and curses of the brawling men in front of him, dropped the pistol, and clapped both hands to his face. When he took them away a moment later, he had a mustache made of blood.

He bent for the pistol. But the *Daily Breeze* photographer, not content to stay neutral, dashed up and grabbed it. Screaming, "You fucker!" the Pinkertons' boss jumped on him. They had their own private brawl till the reporter from the local paper weighed in on the photographer's side. Then the little guy with the gaudy clothes took his lumps.

So did his goons. Thanks to Martin and that photographer, nobody started shooting. Chester knew how lucky that was. The union men drove the toughs back to their buses in headlong retreat. A rock smashed the windshield on one of the buses. Both drivers got out of there a lot faster than they'd come.

The next morning, the *Times* called it "a savage labor riot." The *Daily Breeze* knew better. So did Chester. He also knew the union had won a round. They wouldn't see the Pinkertons for a while—but when they did, the other side would be loaded for bear.

XIX

The *Sweet Sue* jounced west across the rough waters of the Atlantic, back toward Boston harbor. George Enos Jr. stood near the bow of the fishing boat, thinking about things that had changed and things that hadn't. He turned to Carlo Lombardi, who was smoking a cigarette beside him. "Back in 1914," George said, "my old man was coming home from a fishing run. He didn't have a wireless set on his ship. When he got back into port, he found out that goddamn Serb had blown up the Austrian archduke and his wife, and everything was going to hell."

Lombardi paused to take another drag before he answered, "We're lucky. We can find out everything's going to hell before we get into port. Ain't life grand nowadays?"

"Yeah. Grand." George tried to look every which way at once. "Of course, it's liable not to be the wireless that tells us."

"How do you mean?" the other fisherman asked, scratching his head.

"If a war starts, you've got to bet the Confederates'll have their submarines up here ahead of time. Only stands to reason, right?" George said. "If they do, first thing we'll know about it is—*wham!"*

"Fuck," Lombardi said, and pitched his cigarette into the green water. He eyed George sourly. "You bastard. Now you're going to have me looking around for a periscope or a goddamn torpedo all the way till we tie up at T Wharf."

"Yeah, well, I've been doing that ever since we started back from the Grand Bank," George said. "That sneaky Confederate son of a bitch torpedoed my father after the last war was done. It'd be just like one of those bastards to nail me before this one even starts."

"Fuck," Lombardi said again, and gave George an even more jaundiced once-over. "You better not be a goddamn Jonah, that's all I've got to say."

"My old man was the one with the bad luck," George said. The other man thought that over, then slowly nodded. If he didn't believe it, he kept it to himself. George went on, "Maybe there won't be a war this time around. Maybe. I keep on hoping there won't, anyway."

"I hope for free pussy, too, when I go to a whorehouse," Lombardi said, lighting another cigarette. "I hope for it, but that ain't how things work." He sucked in smoke. "Better not be another war. If there is, the tobacco'll all be shitty. My pa used to bitch about that all the goddamn time, how lousy the smokes were 'cause we couldn't get no Confederate tobacco."

George didn't remember whether his father had complained about bad tobacco. He'd been too little when George Enos Senior got killed, and his father had been away at sea too much while alive to leave behind a lot of memories. George did recall one night when his father kept asking if he and Mary Jane were ready to go to bed yet. He hadn't been ready, and his indignation still rankled across a quarter of a century.

All of a sudden, out of a clear blue sky, he started laughing like hell. "What's so goddamn funny?" Lombardi asked.

"Nothing, not really," George answered. The other fisherman gave him a particularly fishy stare. He didn't care. It wasn't the sort of joke he could explain. Just the same, he suddenly understood *why* his father had kept wanting him to go to bed, which he hadn't when he was a little boy. He was liable to use that same impatient tone of voice to find out if his own boys were ready to go to sleep so he could be alone with Connie. As a matter of fact, he knew damn well he'd used that tone of voice with them before.

And if a new war does start, and if your boat goes to the bottom, is that what you want them to remember you for? he wondered. Had the same question ever occurred to his father? Probably not. But then, his father hadn't known anything about a big war before he found himself in the middle of the biggest one of all time. People living in the USA nowadays didn't have that excuse.

Neither did people living in the CSA. The Great War had hurt them even worse. They, or at least Jake Featherston, seemed ready—hell, seemed eager— for another round. George wondered why.

He found an answer, too, the same way as he'd found an answer when he thought about his old man. *The Confederates lost. That means*

they want revenge. The USA had lost two wars in a row to the CSA. That had made people here twice as serious about getting their own back. Now, after a win, people here thought everything was square. South of the border, they didn't.

Will there ever be an end? Will both sides ever be satisfied at the same time? He thought that one over, too. Unlike the other questions, it didn't have an answer that leaped into sight.

No Confederate submersible or commerce raider challenged the *Sweet Sue.* No dive bomber dropped explosives on her from the sky. She sailed back into Boston harbor as if pulling fish from the sea were the hardest, most dangerous thing to do men had ever invented. In peacetime, it came close. Peacetime, though, felt like summertime. Even as you enjoyed it, you knew it wouldn't last.

When the *Sweet Sue* tied up at T Wharf, the first officer made the best deal he could with the buyers. Normally, George would have stuck around to find out how good the deal was. His own share of the pie depended on how big a pie he was looking at. Today, though, he drew fifty dollars against whatever the total would be and headed for the apartment where he spent rather less time than he did at sea.

He had to get past all the harborside attractions that tried to separate fishermen from their money and make them forget about their wives. Football games and raucous music blared from wireless sets in saloons. A drunk reeled out of a tavern. He almost ran into George. "Easy, pal," George said, and dodged.

Music with more of a thump and pound to it, music played by real live musicians, poured out of strip joints. Hearing that kind of music made you think about the girls who'd dance to it, and about what they would—or wouldn't—be wearing. You could get drinks in those joints, too, but they'd cost twice as much.

If you didn't want to drink, if you didn't want to watch, if you wanted to get down to business ... A swarthy, tired-looking woman about George's age leaned out of a second-story window and beckoned to him. She wasn't wearing anything from the waist up. Her breasts drooped. They seemed tired, too. She tried to sound alluring when she called, "How about it, big boy?"

George kept walking. The whore swore at him. Even her curses sounded tired.

His block of flats stood only a couple of streets farther on. He hurried to it. Unlike the one where he'd lived with his mother, it had an elevator. Most of the time, he took that as proof he'd come up in the world. When he stepped into the lobby now, though, the cage was empty. The car was on some upper floor. He didn't have the patience to wait for it. He went up four flights of stairs, taking them two at a time till his knees got tired.

The key to his apartment was brass. A good thing, too; with all the time he spent out on the ocean, an iron key would have rusted on the chain. He put the key in the lock and turned it.

Connie's startled voice came from the kitchen: "Who's there?" And then, realizing only one person besides her had a key, she went on, "Is that you, George?"

"Well, it's not the tooth fairy and it's not the Easter Bunny and it's not Santa Claus," he answered.

She came rocketing out of the kitchen and into his arms. He squeezed her till she squeaked. She felt wonderful. He didn't stop to think that he'd been at sea so long, the Wicked Witch of the North would have felt good to him. He kissed her. Things might have—no, things would have—gone straight on from there if Bill and Pat hadn't charged him and tried tackling him in ways that would have got flags thrown on any gridiron in the country. Fortunately, they weren't big enough to do any serious damage.

"Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" they squealed. If they went on after that, it was in voices only dogs could hear.

He let go of Connie and hugged the boys. They were also good to come home to, in a different way. His wife asked, "How long will you be here this time?"

"Don't know. Didn't hang around to find out," he said. "I just drew part of my pay and headed on over here. When they want me again, they'll come after me."

"Well, at least they won't have to scour the saloons to find you," Connie said. "Some of those people..."

George didn't say anything to that. He just tried to look virtuous. He didn't know how good a job he did. For one thing, he intended to take a drink or three while he had the chance. For another, Connie's

father had seen the inside of a tavern and the bottom of a glass more than a few times in his day.

But George didn't want to think about that right this minute, either. He asked, "How are things here?"

"Pretty good," Connie answered. "They've been good boys. They haven't tried to pull the ears off the cat or flush the Sears, Roebuck catalogue down the toilet." They had committed the felony with the catalogue, one crumpled page and then more than one crumpled page at a time, till a flood and two spankings resulted. They hadn't messed with the cat's ears, at least not where their parents could catch them. But then Whiskers, unlike the hapless catalogue, could take care of himself.

The cat strolled up to see what the commotion was about. He gave George a leisurely glance, then yawned, showing needle teeth. *Oh, it's you,* he might have said. He remembered George between trips just well enough to tolerate being petted. And, of course, George smelled of fish, which made him interesting.

"How was the run?" Connie did her best not to sound anxious. Her best could have been better. If the run wasn't good, things got tight. She had to make ends meet on whatever George brought home.

"Pretty good. We brought back a lot of tuna," he answered. "Only question now is how much it'll bring."

"News hasn't been good," Connie said, and he nodded. She went on, "That might drive prices up."

"Maybe. I can hope." He sniffed. "What smells good?"

"I was stewing a chicken," she told him. "We were going to have it for two nights, maybe three, but who cares? I've got to show you I'm a better cook than the Cookie, don't I?"

"You're a lot cuter than Davey, anyhow," he said, which made her squawk. He went on, "I just hope Bill and Pat get sleepy pretty soon." Both boys let out indignant howls. If he'd listened to them, he would have believed they would never fall asleep again. Fortunately, he knew better.

Connie turned red. "My father used to say things like that when he came home from a fishing run."

"So did mine," George said. "I never understood why till not very long ago. I don't remember much about my pa, but that sticks in my mind."

"How come, Daddy?" Bill asked.

"I don't know. It just does," George answered. "It's the sort of thing a fisherman would say, that's for sure." Bill asked why again. George didn't say, not in words. He kissed Connie again instead. As far as he was concerned, that was the best answer he could give.

Jefferson Pinkard looked around at his kingdom and found it... not so good. He turned to Mercer Scott, the guard chief at Camp Dependable. "For Chris-sake, Mercer," he said, "what the hell are we gonna do when those goddamn sons of bitches in Richmond send us another shipment of niggers? This camp'll go boom, on account of there just ain't no room for any more spooks in here. Do they care? Do they give a shit? Don't make me laugh."

Scott shifted a chaw of Red Man from his left cheek to his right. He spat a stream of tobacco juice onto the ground. "You sure as hell ain't wrong," he said. "We got us coons hangin' from their heels like they was bats. Dunno where else we can put 'em. On the roofs, maybe?" He laughed to show that was a joke.

Jeff laughed, too, though it was anything but funny. If he could have put bunks on the roofs of the prisoner barracks, he would have done it. He didn't know where else to put them, that was for sure. "Bastards don't send us enough in the way of rations, neither. We got pellagra, we got hookworm, we got plain old-fashioned starvation. Wouldn't take a whole lot more food to make all that stuff a hell of a lot better."

"Damned if I can see why you're gettin' your ass in an uproar about *that,"* Scott said. "They're only niggers. No, they ain't *only* niggers. They're a bunch of goddamn Reds, too. So who gives a shit if they die? Ain't nobody gonna miss 'em."

"It's not..." Pinkard frowned, looking for the word that summed up how he felt about it. "It's not *orderly,* dammit. If they give me so many prisoners, they're supposed to give me enough food for that many, too.

That's just the way things work."

As a matter of fact, that wasn't the way things worked. They'd worked that way in the prisoner camps down in the Empire of Mexico, not least because Jeff had made sure they did. And they'd worked that way in the Birmingham jail, because it was longstanding policy that they work so. There was no longstanding policy for camps housing political prisoners and Negroes taken in rebellion. Every day that passed saw such policy made.

Scott seemed to understand instinctively the root of that policy. It was, *Who gives a shit if they die?* Pinkard could see that for himself. A hell of a lot of prisoners left Camp Dependable feet first. He didn't like it. He scavenged across the countryside for more rations than he was officially issued. No doubt that did some good. Against the kind of overcrowding he was facing, it didn't do much.

A guard trotted up to him, heavy belly bouncing above his belt. "Telephone call for you, boss," the man said. He hadn't missed any meals. None of the guards had. Neither had Pinkard himself.

"Thanks, Eddie," he said, though he didn't know why he was thanking the guard. Telephone calls weren't likely to be good news. He tramped back to the office and picked up the phone. "Pinkard speaking."

"Hello, Pinkard." The clicks and pops on the line said it was a longdistance call. "This is Ferdinand Koenig, calling from Richmond."

"Yes, sir!" The attorney general was Jake Featherston's right-hand man. "Freedom!"

"Freedom! I've heard you aren't happy because you haven't been getting enough advance notice of prisoner shipments," Koenig said, as if he'd just finished listening to Jeff bitching to Mercer Scott.

"Uh, yes, sir. That's true," Jeff said. Meanwhile, he was thinking, *Goddammit, some son of a bitch here is telling stories about me back in Richmond. Have to find out who the bastard is.* He didn't suppose he should have been surprised that Koenig—as attorney general or as Freedom Party big wig?— had spies in Camp Dependable. All the same, he wanted to be rid of them.

The attorney general didn't sound too angry as he said, "Don't suppose I can blame you for that. Here's your news then: you've got

about fifteen hundred niggers—maybe two thousand—heading your way. They ought to be there in three, four days."

"Jesus Christ!" It wasn't a scream, but it came close. Pinkard went on, "Sir, no way in hell this camp will hold that many more people. We're overflowing already."

"That's why I'm telling you now." Koenig spoke with what sounded like exaggerated patience. "You have the time to get ready for those black bastards."

"I don't suppose we'll get the rations we need to feed 'em," Jeff said. Only silence answered him. He hadn't really expected anything else. Reproachfully, he continued, "Sir, you know I'm a good Party man. I don't mean any disrespect or anything like that. But what the hell am I supposed to do to get my camp ready for a shipment that big?"

"Whatever you have to do." Ferdinand Koenig paused. Pinkard didn't think he would say anything more, but he did, repeating, "Whatever you have to do. Is that plain enough, or do I have to draw you a picture? I'd better not have to draw you a picture. I heard you were a pretty smart fellow."

Maybe he had just drawn a picture. "Jesus Christ!" Jeff said again, not much liking what he thought he saw. "You mean—?"

Koenig cut him off. "Whatever you have to do," he said for the third time. "You can take care of it, or I'll find somebody else who will. Your choice, Pinkard. Which would you rather?"

Jeff thought it over. It didn't take long. He *was* a good Party man. The Party mattered more to him than anything else. The ruins of his marriage proved that. And, where Emily had screwed around, the Party had always been faithful. Without it, God only knew what he would have done when he lost his job at the Sloss Works. Didn't loyalty demand loyalty in return? "I'll take care of it, Mr. Attorney General. Don't you worry about a thing."

"I wasn't worried," Koenig said. "Like I told you, if you didn't, somebody else would. But I'm glad it's you. I know you've put in a lot of time for us. And I know you'll do a good job here, too. You won't screw it up and leave a bunch of loose ends or anything like that." *You'd better not,* was what he meant.

"Hell, no," Jeff said quickly. "When I do somethin', I do it right and

proper."

"Good," Koenig said, and the line went dead.

Pinkard stared at the telephone for close to half a minute. "Fuck," he muttered, and finally hung it up. He trudged out of the office.

"What's up?" Mercer Scott called to him.

Are you the spy? I wouldn't be surprised. I've run my mouth around you. Well, no more, goddammit. But Scott had to know about this. Jeff said, "In three or four days, we're getting another fifteen hundred, two thousand niggers."

Scott stared. "Holy shit!" he said. "They can't do that! This place won't hold 'em."

"Oh, yes, it will," Pinkard said.

"How?" Scott demanded. "You were just now telling me it wouldn't hold the niggers we've got, and you were right. You know damn well you were right."

"I'll tell you how." And Pinkard did.

"Holy shit," Scott said again, this time in an altogether different tone of voice. "You sure you know what you're talking about? You sure you know what you're doing?" Under other circumstances, the questions would have infuriated Jeff. Not now.

He nodded uneasily. "I know, all right. Get the guards we need—you'll know the ones we can count on. Then pull out the niggers."

"All at once?" Scott asked.

After a moment, Jeff shook his head. "No. That'd be asking for trouble. Take out a couple hundred. Less chance of anything going wrong."

"Yeah." The guard chief eyed him. "How come I'm the lucky one? What are you gonna be doing? Sittin' in your office pouring down a cold beer?"

Had things been different, that would have infuriated Jeff, too. The way things were, Mercer Scott had the right to ask. Pinkard shook his

head. "You stay here and get the next bunch ready. I'm going out with the first ones, and I won't come back till the job's done."

"All right." Scott nodded. "That's fair. I can't tell you it ain't." He stuck out his hand. Pinkard shook it. He was grateful for any sort of reassurance he could get.

Along with fifteen guards, he led two hundred Negroes away from Camp Dependable. The black men came willingly enough. As far as they knew, it was just another work detail. When they'd gone two or three miles from the camp, he ordered them to dig a long, deep trench. "This here ain't nothing but a waste o' time," one of them said. But he was only complaining, the way people did when they had to do work they didn't care for.

Pinkard didn't argue with him. When the ditch was dug, he ordered the Negroes to lie down in it. That drew more complaints. "You gots to put us on top of each other?" a man said. "We ain't no goddamn fairies."

The guards stepped up onto a parapet made from the dirt the Negroes had dug out. Even when they aimed their submachine guns at the men in the trench, the blacks didn't seem to believe what was happening. *This is my camp,* Jeff thought miserably. *I'm responsible for what goes on here.* He nodded to the guards. The order was his to give, and he gave it: "Fire!"

They did. As soon as they started shooting, it was as if the ground convulsed. The submachine guns roared and stuttered and spat flame. The guards slapped in magazine after magazine. Pinkard was appalled at how much ammunition his men needed to kill the prisoners. The stenches of blood and shit filled the humid air. At last, the screaming stopped. Only the groans of the dying were left.

More than one guard vomited into the trench. Jeff felt like heaving up his guts, too, but sternly refrained. "Scrape dirt over 'em," he told the guards. "We've got more work to do." The guards grumbled, but not too much. They seemed too stunned to do a whole lot in the way of grumbling.

And it got harder after that. The Negroes at the camp had to have understood what was going on when the guards came back and the men they'd been guarding didn't. But Mercer Scott was no fool. The first gang of blacks had gone off willingly enough, yes. He made sure the next bunch were shackled. That way, nobody tried to run off into

the woods and swamp.

Over the course of the next three days, Pinkard reduced the population of Camp Dependable by two thousand men. That was how he referred to it in his reports. That was how he tried to think about it, too. If he thought about reducing population, he didn't have to dwell on shooting helpless prisoners.

A few of the guards were exhilarated after the job was done. They were the ones who thought Negroes had it coming to them. Most of the men were very subdued, though. They didn't mind jailing blacks or starving them. Shooting them in cold blood seemed to be something else again.

One shot rang out in the middle of the night: a guard blowing his brains out. He got buried, too, with almost as little fuss as if he were one of the blacks so casually disposed of.

When the promised—the threatened—new shipment of Negro prisoners arrived, Camp Dependable was able to take them. Pinkard wondered if he would get a congratulatory call from Ferd Koenig. He didn't. Maybe that made sense, too. After all, he'd only done what the attorney general needed him to do.

Scipio wished to God he could get out of Augusta. But it wasn't so easy as it would have been a few years before. Things had tightened up. Everywhere a black man went, it was, "Show me your passbook, boy." If he started working in, say, Atlanta, he would have to produce the document that proved he was himself—or proved he was Xerxes, which amounted to the same thing. And if he did that, he would be vulnerable to either Anne Colleton or Jerry Dover.

He didn't think his boss at the Huntsman's Lodge had anything in particular against him. He knew damned well his former boss at the former Marshlands plantation did. But he didn't like the idea of being vulnerable to Dover much better than he liked being vulnerable to Miss Anne. Being vulnerable to anybody white terrified him.

At the restaurant, the rich white men who ate there talked more and more of war. So did the newspapers. Jake Featherston was thumping his chest and foaming at the mouth because Al Smith

wouldn't give him what he'd promised not to ask for the year before. Scipio remembered too well what a catastrophe the last war had been for the Confederate States. Under other circumstances, the prospect of a new one would have appalled him.

Under other circumstances ... As things were, he more than half hoped the CSA did start fighting the USA gain. All eyes, all thoughts, would turn toward the front. They would turn away from a town in the middle of nowhere like Augusta. And he had heard some of the things bombing airplanes could do nowadays. That made him all the gladder Augusta was a long, long way from the border.

What made life harder was that whites weren't all he had to worry about in Augusta. The Terry was full of sharecroppers displaced from the land by the tractors and harvesters and combines that had revolutionized farming in the CSA since the Freedom Party came to power. The Terry, in fact, held far more people than it held jobs. A man who wasn't careful could easily get knocked over the head for half a dollar—especially a man who wasn't young and who had to wear a penguin suit to and from work, so he looked as if he had money.

Scipio made a point of being careful.

Coming home was worse than going up to the Huntsman's Lodge. Going to work, he had to face harassment from whites who fancied themselves wits. Most of them overestimated by a factor of two. He had to give soft answers. He'd been doing that all his life. He managed.

He came home in the middle of the night. Darkness gave predators cover— and the Augusta police rarely wasted their time looking into crimes blacks committed against each other. Every street corner on the way to his apartment building was an adventure.

Most of the time, of course, the corners were adventures only in his own imagination. He could—and did—imagine horrors whether they were there or not. Every once in a while, they were. He walked as quietly as he could. He always paused in the blackest shadows he could find before exposing himself by crossing a street. Nobody had worried about street lights in the Terry even before the rise of the Freedom Party. These days, the idea of anyone worrying about anything that had to do with blacks was a painful joke.

Voices from a side street made Scipio decide he would do better to

stay where he was for a little while. One black man said, "Ain't seen Nero for a while."

"You won't, neither," another answered. "Goddamn ofays cotched him with a pistol in his pocket."

"Do Jesus!" the first man exclaimed. "Nero always the unluckiest son of a bitch you ever seen. What they do with him?"

"Ship him out West, one o' them camps," his friend said.

"Do Jesus!" the first man said again. "You go into one o' them places, you don't come out no more."

"Oh, mebbe you do," the other man said. "Mebbe you do—but it don't help you none."

"Huh!" the first man said—a noise half grunt, half the most cynical laugh Scipio had ever heard. "You got dat right. They throws you in a hole in the ground, or else they throws you in the river fo' the gators and the snappers to finish off."

"I hear the same thing," his friend agreed. "Gator sausage mighty tasty. I ain't gonna eat it no mo'. Never can tell who dat gator knowed." He laughed, too. The black men walked on. They had no idea Scipio had been listening.

He waited till their footsteps faded before he went on to his apartment. The Huntsman's Lodge served a fair amount of wild game: venison, raccoon, bear every once in a while, and alligator. Scipio had been fond of garlicky alligator sausage himself. He didn't think he would ever touch it again.

Three days later, he was walking to work when police and Freedom Party stalwarts with submachine guns swept into the Terry. They weren't trying to solve any specific crime. Instead, they were checking passbooks. Anybody whose papers didn't measure up or who didn't have papers, they seized.

"Let me have a look at that there passbook, boy," a cop growled at Scipio.

"Yes, suh." Scipio was old enough to be the policeman's father, but to most whites in the CSA he would always be a boy. He didn't argue. He just handed over the document. Arguing with a bad-tempered man

with a submachine gun was apt to be hazardous to your life expectancy.

The cop took a brief look at his papers, then gave them back. "Hell, I know who you are," he said. "You been paradin' around in them fancy duds for years. Go on, get your black ass outa here."

"Yes, suh. Thank you kindly, suh." Scipio had taken a lot of abuse from whites for going to work in a tuxedo. Here, for once, it looked to have paid off. He got out of there in a hurry. That was unheroic. He knew it. It gnawed at him. But what could he do against dozens of trigger-happy whites? Not one damned thing, and he knew that, too.

He'd gone only a few blocks when gunfire rang out behind him: first a single shot, then a regular fusillade. He didn't know what had happened, and he wasn't crazy or suicidal enough to go back and find out, but he thought he could make a pretty good guess. Somebody must have figured his chances shooting it out were better than they would have been if he'd gone wherever the cops and the stalwarts were taking people they grabbed.

The fellow who'd started shooting was probably—almost certainly—dead now. Even so, who could say for sure he was wrong? He'd died quickly, and hadn't suffered much. Scipio thought of alligators, and wished he hadn't.

One of the waiters, a skinny young man named Nestor, didn't show up at the Huntsman's Lodge. Jerry Dover muttered and fumed. Scipio told him about the dragnet in the Terry. The manager eyed him. "You reckon they picked up Nestor for something or other?"

"Dunno, Mistuh Dover," Scipio said. "Reckon mebbe they could've, though."

"What do you suppose he did?" Dover asked. "He's never given anybody any trouble here."

"Dunno," Scipio said again. "Dunno if he done anything. Them police, I don't reckon they was fussy." They were standing right outside the kitchen, in a nice, warm corridor. He wanted to shiver even so. Nestor would have been wearing a tuxedo, too. Fat lot of good it had done him.

Jerry Dover rubbed his chin. "He's a pretty fair worker. Let me make a call or two, see what I can find out."

What would he have done if Nestor were a lazy good-for-nothing? Washed his hands like Pilate? Scipio wouldn't have been surprised. He didn't dwell on it. With the crew shorthanded because Nestor wasn't there, he stayed hopping.

And Nestor didn't show up, either. Dover wore a tight-lipped expression, one that discouraged questions. Scipio and the rest of the crew got through the evening. When he went back the next day, the missing waiter still wasn't there. That nerved him to go up to the manager and ask, "Nestor, he come back?"

"Doubt it." Dover sounded as if he had to pay for every word that passed his lips. "Time for a new hire. He won't know his ass from Richmond, either."

"Nestor, what he do?" Scipio persisted. "You find out?"

"He got himself arrested, that's what." Jerry Dover sounded angry at Scipio—or possibly angry at the world. "He picked the wrong goddamn time to do it, too."

"What you mean?" Scipio asked. "Ain't no right time to git arrested."

Dover nodded. "Well, that's so. There's no right time. But there's sure as hell a wrong time. What the cops told me yesterday was, the city jail's full. So those niggers they caught in the Terry—you know about that?"

"Oh, yes, suh," Scipio said softly. "I tol' you, remember? They almost 'rests me, too."

"That's right, you did. Well, I'm damn glad they didn't, because I'd be down two waiters if they had." If the restaurant manager was glad for any other reason that they hadn't arrested Scipio, he didn't show it. He went on, "Jail's full up, like I said. So they went and shipped these here niggers off to one of those camps they've started."

"Lord he'p Nestor, then," Scipio said. "Somebody go into one of them places, I hear tell he don't come out no mo', not breathin', anyways." He'd heard it as gossip between two men he'd never seen, but that didn't mean he didn't believe it. It had the horrid feel of truth.

Jerry Dover shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot. What had *he* heard? Back in the days when Scipio worked at Marshlands, he'd been convinced the Colletons couldn't keep a secret for more than a few

minutes before the blacks on the plantation also knew it. Here at the Huntsman's Lodge, the colored cooks and waiters and cleaners quickly found out whatever their white bosses knew. Or did they? Just as blacks kept secrets from whites out of necessity, so whites might also find it wise to keep certain things from blacks.

But if Dover had *that* kind of knowledge, it didn't show on his face. Scipio thought it would. Dover did what he had to do to get along in the world in which he found himself. Who didn't, except crazy people and saints? But the manager was pretty honest, pretty decent. He was no "Freedom!"-yelling stalwart without two brain cells to rub against each other.

He said, "You want to watch yourself on the street, then, don't you? You know I've got some pull. But it doesn't look like I can do anything about one of those places."

"I watches myself real good, suh," Scipio answered. "You say de city jail full up?" Jerry Dover nodded. Scipio asked him, "They 'rest white folks now, de white folks go to dese camps, too?"

His boss looked at him as if he'd asked whether the stork brought mothers their babies. "Don't be stupid," Dover said.

That was good advice, too. It always was. What worried Scipio was, it might not be enough. He'd escaped the last dragnet as much by luck as by anything else. You could tell a man not to be stupid, and maybe —if he wasn't stupid to begin with—he'd listen. But how the devil could you tell a man not to be unlucky?

Five-thirty in the morning. Reveille blared. Armstrong Grimes groaned. He had time for that one involuntary protest before he rolled out of his cot and his feet hit the floor of the barracks hall at Fort Custer outside of Columbus, Ohio. Then he started functioning, at least well enough. He threw on his green-gray uniform, made up the cot, and dashed outside to his place in the roll call—all in the space of five minutes.

What happened to men who were late had long since convinced him being late was a bad idea. Back home, his mother had made the bed for him most of the time. He'd been sloppy at it when he first got

here. Now a dime bounced off his blanket, and bounced high. The drill sergeant didn't have cause to complain about him or even notice him—the two often being synonymous.

He stood there trying not to shiver in the chilly dawn. When the time came, he sang out to announce his presence. Other than that, he kept quiet. Everybody else did the same. For once, the drill sergeants seemed in a merciful mood. They let the assembled soldiers march off to breakfast after only a minimum of growling and cursing.

Everybody marched everywhere at Fort Custer. Armstrong had begun to think *Thou shalt march* was in the Bible somewhere right below *Thou shalt not kill* and *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain*—two commandments he was learning more about violating every day.

He took a tray and a plate and a mug and silverware, then advanced on the food. A cook's helper loaded the plate with scrambled eggs and hash browns and greasy, overdone bacon. Another one poured the mug full of coffee almost strong enough to eat through the bottom. Armstrong grabbed a seat at a long, long table. He put enough cream and sugar in the coffee to tame it a little, threw salt on the eggs and potatoes and pepper on the eggs, and then started shoveling in chow.

Nobody talked much at breakfast. Nobody had time. The drill here was simple: feed your face as fast as you could. Armstrong had never much cared for manners. He didn't have to worry about them here. Compared to the way some of the guys ate, he might have come from the upper crust. Every once in a while, he thought that was pretty funny. More often than not, he didn't have time to worry about it one way or the other.

As soon as he finished, he shoved his tray and dirty dishes at the poor slobs who'd drawn KP duty. Then he hustled out to the exercise yard. He wasn't the first one there, but he was a long way from the last. Bad things happened to the guys who brought up the rear.

Of course, bad things happened to everybody right after breakfast. Violent calisthenics and a three-mile run weren't the way Armstrong would have used to settle his stomach. The drill sergeants didn't care about his opinion. They had their own goals. His conscription class, like any other, had had some fat guys, some weak guys. He remembered who they'd been. But the fat guys weren't fat any more, and the weak guys weren't weak any more. Oh, a few had washed out,

simply unable to stand the strain. People said one fellow had died trying, but Armstrong didn't know if he believed that. Most of the recruits, no matter what kind of shape they'd been in to start with, had toughened up since.

After the run, the conscripts "relaxed" with close-order drill. "Left ... ! Left... ! Left, right, left!" the drill sergeant bawled. "To the rear ... *haarch!"* He screamed at somebody who couldn't keep the rhythm if his life depended on it. Armstrong's company had a couple of those unfortunates, who drew more than their fair share of abuse. He'd never figured out why the Army still needed close-order drill. Doing it where the enemy could see you was a recipe for getting massacred. But he didn't have any trouble telling one foot from the other, or turning right and not left when he heard, "To the right flank ... *haarch!"*

Lunch that day was creamed chipped beef on toast, otherwise creamed chipped beast or, more often, shit on a shingle. Armstrong didn't care what people called it. He didn't care what he got, either, as long as there was plenty of it. He would have eaten a horse and chased the driver—and, considering how fast he could pound out the three miles, he probably would have caught him.

After lunch came dirty fighting and rifle practice. Like any reasonably tough kid who got out of high school, Armstrong had thought he knew something about dirty fighting. The drill sergeant who'd mercilessly thumped him in the first day's lesson taught him otherwise. He'd been amazed to discover what all you could do with elbows, knees, feet, and bent fingers. If you happened to have a knife...

"Any civilian who fucks with me better have his funeral paid for," he said.

The drill sergeant shook his head. "He may have been through the mill, too. Or he may have a gun. You can't kick a gun in the nuts. Remember that, or you'll end up dead."

That struck Armstrong as good advice. A lot of what the drill sergeants said struck him as good advice. Whether he would take it was another question. He was no more interested than any other male his age in getting answers from someone else. He thought he had everything figured out for himself.

After the fighting drill, he and his company marched off to the rifle

range. That did help reinforce what the sergeant had said. If you had a Springfield in your hand, you could put a hole in a man—or a man-shaped target—from a hell of a lot farther away than a man could put a boot in your belly. And Armstrong was a good shot.

"A lot of you guys think you're hot stuff," another drill sergeant said. This one had a fine collection of Sharpshooter and Expert medals jingling on his chest. "Listen to me, though. There's one big difference between doing it on the range here and doing it in the field. In the field, the other son of a bitch shoots back. And if you think that doesn't matter, you're dreaming."

Armstrong only grunted. He was sure it didn't matter. He could do it here. As far as he was concerned, that meant he could do it, period.

The drill sergeant said, "Some of you think I'm kidding. Some of you think I'm talking with my head up my ass. Well, you'll find out. It's different in the field. A hell of a lot of guys get out there and they don't shoot at all. There's plenty of others who don't aim first. They just point their piece somewhere—in the air, probably—and start banging away."

"What a bunch of fools," Armstrong whispered to the recruit next to him. He wanted to laugh out loud, but he didn't. That would have drawn the drill sergeant's eye to him, which he didn't want at all.

As things were, the sergeant sent a scowl in his general direction, but it didn't light on him personally. The veteran noncom went on, "There's just one thing you're lucky about. The other side will have as many fuckups as we do. That may keep some of you alive longer than you deserve. On the other hand, it may not, too. A machine gun isn't awful goddamn choosy about who it picks out." His face clouded. "I ought to know." He wore the ribbon for a Purple Heart, too.

"Question, Sergeant?" somebody called.

"Yeah, go ahead."

"Is it true the Confederates are giving their soldiers lots and lots of submachine guns?" the youngster asked.

"Yeah, that's supposed to be true," the sergeant said. "I don't think all that much of the idea myself. Submachine gun only fires a pistol round. It doesn't have a lot of stopping power, and the effective range is pretty short." He stopped and rubbed his chin. It was blue with

stubble, though he'd surely scraped it smooth that morning. "Of course, submachine guns do put a hell of a lot of lead in the air. And the goddamn Confederates can hold their breath till they turn blue, but they're never gonna have as many men as we do. I expect that's why they're trying it."

Another recruit piped up: "Why hasn't somebody made an automatic rifle, if a submachine gun isn't good enough?"

"The Confederates are supposed to be trying that, too, but there are problems," the sergeant said. "Recoil, wear on the mechanism, overheating, having the weapon pull up when you fire it on full automatic, keeping it clean in the field—those are some of the things you've got to worry about. I wouldn't fall over dead with surprise if we start using something like that, too, one of these days, but don't hold *your* breath, either. And the Springfield is a goddamn good weapon. We won a war with it. We can win another one if we have to."

He waited. Sure enough, that drew another question: "Are we going to fight another war with the Confederate States?"

"Beats me," the drill sergeant answered. "I've done my share of fighting, and I am plumb satisfied. But if that Featherston son of a bitch isn't ... You need two for peace, but one can start a war. If he does start it, it's up to us— it'll be up to *you*—to finish it."

Armstrong Grimes had no complaints. If he had to be in the Army, he wanted to be there while it was in action. What point to it otherwise? He didn't think about getting hurt. He especially didn't think about getting killed. That kind of stuff happened to other people. It couldn't possibly happen to him. He was going to live forever.

The sergeant said, "And if he does start another war, you *will* finish it, right? You'll kick the CSA's mangy ass around the block, right?"

"Yes, Sergeant!" the young men shouted. They were all as convinced of their own immortality as Armstrong Grimes.

"I can't hear you." The sergeant cupped a hand behind one ear.

"Yes, Sergeant!" The recruits might have been at a football game. Armstrong yelled as loud as anybody else.

"That's better," the drill sergeant allowed. "Not good, but better."

Hardly anything anybody did in basic training was good. You might be perfect, but you still weren't good enough. They wanted you to try till you keeled over. People did, too.

Supper was fried chicken and canned corn and spinach, with apple pie a la mode for dessert. It wasn't great fried chicken, but you could eat as much as you wanted, which made up for a lot. Armstrong used food to pay his body back for the sleep it wasn't getting.

After supper, he had a couple of hours to himself—the only time during the day when he wasn't either unconscious or being run ragged. He could write home—which he didn't do often enough to suit his mother—or read a book or get into a poker game or shoot the breeze with other recruits winding down from an exhausting day or do what he usually did: lie on his cot smoking cigarette after cigarette. People said they were bad for your wind. He didn't care. He got through his three miles without any trouble, and the smokes helped him relax.

"You think there's going to be a war?" somebody asked. The question had been coming up more and more often lately.

"If there is, the goddamn Confederates'll be sorry," somebody else answered.

"Damn right," Armstrong said in the midst of a general rumble of agreement.

"We can lick 'em," someone said, and then added what might have been the young man's creed: "If our fathers did it, hell, we can do it easy."

"Damn right," Armstrong said again. Two hours after he sacked out, they had a simulated night attack. He bounced out of bed to repel imaginary enemies. He didn't miss the sleep. Why would he? He was already too far behind for a little more to matter.

Colonel Clarence Potter imagined a man he had never seen. He didn't know if the man lived in Dallas or Mobile or Nashville or Charleston or Richmond. Wherever he lived, he fit right in. He sounded like the people around him. He looked like them, too, and

acted like them. When the time came to shout, "Freedom!" he yelled as loud as anybody. When he had a few beers in a saloon, he grumbled about what the damnyankee innovation of the forward pass had done to the great game of football.

And when he was by himself, this man Potter had never seen would write innocent-looking letters or send innocent-sounding wires up to the United States. He would be doing business with or for some firm or other based north of the Mason-Dixon line. And some of his messages really would be innocent, and some of them would go straight to the U.S. War Department in Philadelphia.

The man Potter had never met—would never meet—was the mirror image of the spies he ran in the USA. He'd had the idea. He had to assume his opposite number up in the United States had had it, too. He didn't like that, but he had to believe it. He kept wondering how much damage that imaginary U.S. spy could do.

Trouble was, the bastard almost certainly wasn't imaginary. A German had trouble sounding like a Frenchman, and vice versa. But a Yankee and a Confederate were too close to begin with. Differences in accent were small things. If you came from the USA, you had to remember to say things like note or banknote instead of bill. People would follow you if you used your own word, but they'd know you were a foreigner. But if you were careful, you could get by.

Something else worried Clarence Potter. He ran spies. The probable counterpart of one of the fellows he ran would also be a spy. If you had people in place as spies, though, wouldn't you also have them in place as provocateurs? As saboteurs?

He didn't know whether the Confederates had provocateurs and saboteurs lurking in the USA. He didn't know because it was none of his business. What he didn't know, he couldn't tell. In philosophy up at Yale, though, he'd learned about what Plato called true opinions. He was pretty damn sure he had one of those about this question. He also had some strong opinions about where he'd put provocateurs and saboteurs.

He sat down in front of his typewriter to bang out a memorandum. In it he said not a word about spies, provocateurs, and saboteurs in the United States. He did mention the possibility that their U.S. equivalents were operating in the Confederate States. *It would be unfortunate,* he wrote, *if the USA were able to take advantage of similarities between the two countries in language, custom, and dress, and*

it is to be hoped that steps to prevent such dangerous developments are currently being taken.

When he reread the sentence, the corners of his mouth turned down in distaste. He didn't like writing that way; it set his teeth on edge. He would rather have come straight to the point. But he knew the officers who would see the memorandum. They wrote gobbledygook. They expected to read it, too. Active verbs would only scare them. They were none too active themselves.

As soon as he fired the memorandum up the chain of command, he stopped worrying about it. He judged he probably wouldn't get an answer. If the Army or the Freedom Party or somebody was watching out for suspicious characters, he wouldn't. Nobody would bother patting a busybody colonel on the hand and saying, "There, there. No need to worry, dear."

A few days later, he was writing a note when the telephone on his desk rang. His hand jerked a little—just enough to spoil a word. He scratched it out before picking up the handset. "Clarence Potter." He didn't say he was in Intelligence. Anyone who didn't already know had the wrong number.

"Hello, Potter. You *are* a sneaky son of a bitch, aren't you?"

"Hello, Mr. President," Potter answered cautiously. "Is that a compliment or not? In my line of work, I'm supposed to be."

"Hell, yes, it's a compliment," Jake Featherston answered. "It's also a judgment on us. We've been thinking a lot about what we can do to the damnyankees. We ain't worried near enough about what them bastards can do to us."

When his grammar slipped that far, he was genuinely irate. He'd also told Potter what the call was about. "You've read the memorandum, then?"

"Damn right I've read it. Those two whistle-ass peckerheads above you kicked it up to me. They were going, 'What do you want to do about this here?' "

Clarence Potter had a hard time swallowing a snort. Featherston might be president of the CSA, but he still talked like a foul-mouthed sergeant, especially when he took aim at officers. Potter asked, "What *do* you want to do about it, Mr. President?"

"You asked the questions. I want somebody to get me some answers. I sure as shit don't have enough of 'em right now. How would you like to do it? I'll make you a brigadier general on the spot."

Only two promotions really mattered: the one up from buck private and the one to general's rank. All the same, Potter said, "Sir, if I have a choice, I'd rather work on our assets there than their assets here. I want to *hit* those people when the time comes."

"Even if it costs you the promotion?" Featherston could only mean, *How serious are you?*

"Even if it does," Potter said firmly. "I didn't expect to come back into the Army anyway. I didn't do it for a wreath around my stars. I did it for the country." *And to keep from giving you an excuse for getting rid of me.* He didn't say that. Why remind Featherston?

"All right, then. You've got it—and the promotion," the president said. "That's your baby now, General Potter."

It *did* feel good. It felt damn good, as a matter of fact. And it felt all the better because Potter hadn't expected he would ever get it. When he said, "Thank you, Mr. President!" he sounded much more sincere than he'd thought he would while talking to Jake Featherston.

"I reckon you've earned it," Featherston answered. "I reckon you'll do a good job with it, too. You wait half an hour, and then you go right on into Brigadier General McGillivray's office and get to work. From here on out, it's yours."

"Yes, sir," Potter said, but he was talking to a dead line. He wondered briefly why the president wanted him to wait, but only briefly. He'd known Jake Featherston more than twenty-five years. He could guess what Jake would be doing with that half hour.

And his guess proved good. When he walked into his superior's—no, his former superior's—office, Brigadier General Stanley McGillivray was white and trembling. "I gather you are to replace me?" he choked out when he saw Potter.

"I gather I am." Potter had ripped into a good many incompetent officers in his time, but he didn't have the heart to say anything snide to McGillivray. The other Intelligence officer was a broken man if ever he'd seen one. He was so terribly broken, in fact, that Potter, for once, was moved more to sympathy than to sarcasm. "I hope the president

wasn't too hard on you?"

"That, Colonel Potter—excuse me: *General* Potter—is what they call a forlorn hope," McGillivray answered bitterly. "I think you will find everything in order here. I think you will find it in better condition than I have been given credit for. Good day. Good luck." By the way he stumbled out of the office, he might almost have been a blind man.

"Poor bastard," Potter muttered. Anyone who ran into the cutting torch of Jake Featherston's fury was going to get charred. He'd seen that for himself, more often than he cared to remember.

And then he put Stanley McGillivray out of his mind. He was familiar with only about a third of the work that this desk did. He had to learn the rest of it ... and he had the strong feeling he had to learn it in a tearing hurry. Featherston sure as hell wouldn't wait for him. Featherston had never been in the habit of waiting for anybody.

Potter went through the manila folders on the desk one by one. Some of them held things he'd expected to find. A few held surprises. He'd hoped they would. If he'd been able to figure out everything McGillivray was doing, wouldn't the damnyankees have done the same thing?

Some of the surprises were surprises indeed. The Confederates had been running people in Philadelphia since before the Great War. They'd recruited young men who needed this or that—and some who needed to make sure this or that never became public. Not all those young men had lasted. Some had died in the war. Some hadn't had the careers they'd hoped they would, and so proved useless as sources. But a handful of them, by now, were in position to know some very interesting things, and to pass them on.

The assets farther west were interesting, too. Most of Potter's notions of where they were proved right. Again, he got some surprises about who they were. That didn't matter so much. As long as he could use them...

He also checked the procedures Brigadier General McGillivray had in place for staying in touch with his people in the USA in case normal communications channels broke down—in plain English, in case there was a war. They weren't bad. He hoped he could find a way to make them better. The real problem he saw was how slow they were. He understood why that was so, but he didn't like it. "There's got to be a better way," he muttered, not sure if he was right.

Late that afternoon, the telephone in the new office rang. When he picked it up, Anne Colleton was on the other end of the line. "Congratulations, General Potter," she purred in his ear.

"Jesus Christ!" Potter sat bolt upright in his new swivel chair. It was a different make from the one he'd used before; he wasn't used to it yet. Its squeak sounded funny, too. "How did you know that?"

"I had to talk with the president about something," she answered. "He told me he'd promoted you."

"Oh." Potter's alarm evaporated. If she'd heard it from Jake Featherston, it was hardly a security breach. "All right."

"He told me some of why he promoted you, too," Anne said. "Do you really think the damnyankees are going to raise hell here if we go to war?"

"Well, I can't know, not for sure. But I would, if I were in their shoes. I do know they gave our niggers guns during the last war. If there's another one, they'd be fools not to do it again. They're bastards. They aren't fools. We thought they were in 1914. We've been paying for it ever since."

"Can we track down the people they've got here?" Anne asked.

"Of course we can," Potter answered, thinking, No *way in hell.* More truthfully, he went on, "The harder we go after them, the more careful they'll have to be, too."

*"*Uh-*huh,"* Anne said in thoughtful tones.

She was, dammit, plenty smart enough to see the contradictions between the two things he'd said. He changed the subject: "What were you talking about with the president?"

"The timing of a propaganda campaign here in South Carolina," she said. Potter wondered just what that meant. He didn't want to go into details with her. God only knew how secure this line was. But the likeliest explanation he could come up with on his own was, *We were talking about when the war will start.*

Abner Dowling raised field glasses to his eyes and looked across the Ohio River into Kentucky. The mere act of observing Kentucky from afar made him so angry, he wanted to swell up like a bullfrog. As far as he was concerned, he shouldn't have been looking into a foreign country when he eyed Kentucky. He should have been in the state, getting ready to defend it against the Confederates. If they wanted to take it away from him, they would have been welcome to try. He could have promised them a warm reception.

Now ... Now he had to figure out how to defend Ohio instead. The General Staff had generously sent him some plans prepared before the Great War. They would have been just what he needed, except that they ignored airplanes and barrels and barely acknowledged the existence of trucks. Things had changed since 1914. Dowling knew that. He hoped to God the General Staff did, too.

Some of what the old plans suggested was still sound. All the bridges across the Ohio had demolition charges in place. Artillery covered the bridges and other possible crossing points. Antiaircraft guns poked their noses up among the camouflaged cannons. If the Confederates were going to try to bomb his guns to silence, they wouldn't have an easy time of it.

He kept his main force farther back in Ohio than the old plans recommended. Again, the airplane was the main reason why. He also wanted to get some notion of what the Confederates were doing before he committed his men.

Custer would have charged right at them, wherever they first showed themselves, he thought. The way he rolled his eyes showed his opinion of that. Custer would have charged, sure as the devil. Maybe he would have smashed everything in his way. Maybe he would have blundered straight into an ambush. But he could no more keep from charging than a bull could when a matador waved his cape. *Sword? What sword?* Custer would have thought, bullishly.

For better or worse—for better *and* worse—Dowling was more cautious. If the Confederate Army crossed into the USA, he wanted to slow it down. The way he looked at things, if the Confederates didn't win quick victories, they'd be in trouble. In a long, drawn-out grapple, the USA had the edge. Dowling didn't think that had changed since the Great War.

He raised the field glasses again. Kentucky seemed to leap toward him. Jake Featherston had lied about keeping soldiers out of the state.

He'd lied about not asking for more land. How was anybody in the United States supposed to trust him now? You couldn't. It was as simple as that.

Even Al Smith had seen the light. The president of the USA had said he would fight back if the CSA tried to take land by force. Dowling was all for that. But so much more could have been done. It could have, but it hadn't. Everybody'd known the Confederates were rearming. If the USA had been serious about showing Featherston who was boss, the country could have done it quickly and easily in 1935. Nothing would be quick or easy now.

And the United States weren't so ready as they should have been. Dowling thought about all the time wasted in the 1920s. The Confederates had been on the ropes then, either on the ropes or smiling and saying how friendly they were. Why build better barrels when you'd never have to use them? As happened too often in politics, *never* turned out not to be so very long after all.

"Sir?" said an aide at Dowling's elbow. "Sir?"

Dowling had been lost in his own gloom. He wondered how long the younger man had been trying to draw his notice. However long it was, he'd finally succeeded. "Yes, Major Chandler? What is it?"

"Sir, Captain Litvinoff from the Special Weapons Section in Philadelphia has come down from Columbus to confer with you," Chandler answered.

"Has he?" Dowling was damned if he wanted to confer with anybody from what was euphemistically called the Special Weapons Section. Regardless of what he wanted, he had little choice. "All right. Let's get it over with." He might have been talking about a trip to the dentist.

"Max Litvinoff, sir," the captain said, saluting.

Dowling returned the salute. "Pleased to meet you," he lied. Litvinoff looked even more like a brain than he'd expected. The captain with the cobalt blue and golden yellow arm-of-service piping on his collar couldn't have been more than thirty. He was about five feet four, skinny, and homely, with thick steel-rimmed glasses and a thin, dark mustache that looked as if he'd drawn it on with a burnt match for an amateur theatrical.

However he looked, he was all business. "This will be good terrain for the application of our special agents," he said briskly.

He might have been talking about spies. He might have been, but he wasn't. Dowling knew too well what he *was* talking about. Dowling also had a pretty good idea why Litvinoff didn't come right out and say what he meant. People who ended up in the Special Weapons Section often didn't. It was magic of a sort: if they didn't say the real name, they didn't have to think about what they were doing.

"You're talking about poison gas." Dowling had no such inhibitions.

Max Litvinoff coughed. His sallow cheeks turned red. "Well... yes, sir," he mumbled. He was only a captain. He couldn't reprove a man with a star on each shoulder. Every line of his body, though, shouted out that he wanted to.

Too bad, Dowling thought. He'd been up at the front with General Custer the first time the USA turned chlorine loose on the Confederates in 1915. "Gas is a filthy business," he said, and Captain Litvinoff's cheeks got redder yet. "We use it, the Confederates use it, some soldiers on both sides end up dead, and nobody's much better off. What's the point?"

"The point, sir, is very simple," Litvinoff answered stiffly. "If the enemy uses the special agent"—he still wouldn't say *gas*—"and we don't, then our men end up dead and his don't. Therefore..."

What Dowling wanted to do was yell, *Fuck you!* and kick the captain in the ass. Unfortunately, he couldn't. Litvinoff was right. Handing the CSA an edge like that would be stupid, maybe suicidal. "Go on," Dowling growled.

"Yes, sir. You will be familiar with the agents utilized in the last war?" Captain Litvinoff sounded as if he didn't believe it. When Dowling nodded, Litvinoff shrugged. He went on, "You may perhaps be less familiar with those developed at the close of hostilities and subsequently."

So I am, Dowling thought. *And thank God for small favors.* But he couldn't say that to Litvinoff. He was, heaven help him, going to have to work with the man. What he did say was, "I'm all ears."

"Good." Captain Litvinoff looked pleased. He liked talking about his toys, showing them off, explaining—in bloodless-seeming terms—

what they could do. If that wasn't a measure of his damnation, Dowling couldn't imagine what would be. Litvinoff continued, "First, there's nitrogen mustard. We did use some of this in 1917. It's a vesicant."

"A what?" Dowling asked. The Special Weapons Section man might have his vocabulary of euphemisms, but that didn't even sound like a proper English word.

Reluctantly, Litvinoff translated: "A blistering agent. Mucus membranes and skin. It does not have to be inhaled to be effective, thought it will produce more and more severe casualties if the lungs are involved. And it is a persistent agent. In the absence of strong direct sunlight or rain, it can remain in place and active for months. An excellent way to deny access to an area to the enemy."

"And to us," Dowling said.

Captain Litvinoff looked wounded. "By no means, sir. Troops with proper protective gear and an awareness the agent is in the area can function quite well."

"All right," Dowling said, though it was anything but. "What other little toys have you got?"

"Walk with me, sir, if you'd be so kind," Litvinoff said, and led him away from the officers and men in his entourage. When the young captain was sure they were out of earshot, he went on, "We also have what we are terming nerve agents. They are a step up in lethality from other agents we have been utilizing."

Dowling needed a second or two to figure out what lethality meant. When he did, he wished he hadn't. "Nerve agents?" he echoed queasily.

"That's right." Litvinoff nodded. "Again, these are effective both by inhalation and through cutaneous contact. They prevent nerve impulses from initiating muscular activity." That didn't sound like anything much. But his next sentence told what it meant: "Lethality occurs through cardiopulmonary failure. Onset is quite rapid, and the amount of agent required to induce it is astonishingly small."

"How nice," Dowling said. Captain Litvinoff beamed. Dowling muttered, "I wonder why we bother with bullets any more."

"So do I, sir. So do I." Litvinoff was dead serious—under the circumstances, the exact right phrase. But then, as grudging as a spinster talking about the facts of life, he admitted, "These nerve agents do have an antidote. But it must be administered by injection, and if it is administered in error, it is in itself toxic."

"This is all wonderful news," Dowling said—another thumping lie. He had been looking forward to lunch. He usually did. Now, though, his appetite had vanished. And a new and important question occurred to him: "Good to know we have these things available. But tell me, Captain, what are the Confederates likely to throw at us if the war starts?"

Max Litvinoff blinked behind his spectacles. "I am more familiar with our own program...."

"Dammit, Captain, I'm not just going to shoot these things at the enemy. I'll be on the receiving end, too. What am I going to receive? What can I do about it?"

"Respirators are current issue. Protective clothing is rather less widely available, and does tend to restrict mobility in warm, humid climates," Litvinoff said. Dowling tried to imagine running around in a rubberized suit in Ohio or Kentucky in July. The thought did not bring reassurance with it. The Special Weapons Section officer went on, "The Confederate States are likely to be familiar with nitrogen mustard. Whether they know of nerve agents, and of which sorts, I am less prepared to state."

"Does somebody in the War Department have any idea? Can you tell me who would?" Dowling asked. "It might be important, you know."

"Well, yes, I can see how it might," Litvinoff said. "Unfortunately, however, defenses against these agents are not my area of expertise."

"Yes, I gathered that. I'm trying to find out from you whose area of expertise they are."

"Knowing that does not fall within my area of expertise, either."

Dowling looked at him. "Captain, why the hell did you come out here in the first place?"

"Why, to give you information, sir."

He meant it. Dowling could see as much. Seeing as much didn't make him very happy—or give him much information, either.

XX

Flora Blackford had been to a lot of Remembrance Day parades, in New York and in Philadelphia. This year's parade in New York City took her back to the days before the Great War, when the holiday had truly been a day of national mourning. People had commemorated the loss of the War of Secession and of the Second Mexican War, and had pledged not to fail again. Flags had flown upside down on Remembrance Day, symbolizing the country's distress.

Since the Great War, Remembrance Day had faded some in the nation's consciousness. People had a triumph to remember now, not just a pair of scalding defeats. The custom of flying flags upside down had fallen into disuse. Teddy Roosevelt had been the first to abandon it, in the Philadelphia parade in 1918, the year after the war ended.

This year, the custom was back. Anyone who cared to look could see war clouds looming up from the south, bigger and blacker with each passing day. If that wasn't cause for distress, Flora didn't know what would be.

In the limousine just ahead of hers rode Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht, the ambassador from the German Empire, and his Austro-Hungarian opposite number, whose name Flora never could recall. Schacht was a much more memorable character. He spoke fluent English, as well he might, given his two middle names. He was a financial wizard, even in hard times. Nobody knew how much money he had, or exactly how he'd got it.

In 1915, riots had marred the Remembrance Day parade here. Even now, no one knew if Socialists or Mormons had started the fighting. Then, Flora had been in the crowd lining Fifth Avenue. She remembered the then ambassadors from Germany and Austria-Hungary going past. She'd never imagined that she might be taking part in the parade herself one day.

Socialists wouldn't protest or disrupt the parade this year, not with Al Smith in Powel House. What heckling there was came from Democrats. Flora heard shouts like, "We should have cleaned house a long time ago!" and, *"Now* you Red bastards say you're patriots!" That

infuriated her and stung at the same time, for she knew it held a little truth. In politics as in life, the best slams often held a little truth.

There might have been more rude shouts than she heard. Her open car rolled along in front of a marching band that blared out martial music. The conductor wasn't John Philip Sousa, whom she'd seen in 1915, but he thought he was.

Behind the band rolled another limousine. This one carried two ancient veterans of the War of Secession. More limousines carried survivors from the Second Mexican War. A handful of veterans from that war were still spry enough to march down the street on their own, too.

After them came what seemed like an endless stream of Great War veterans, organized by the year of their conscription class. They were the solid, middle-aged men who shaped opinion and ran the country these days. The way they marched said they knew it, too.

More limousines followed them. They carried Great War veterans who wanted to parade but had been too badly wounded to march. Her brother rode in one of them. David Hamburger hadn't asked Flora to keep him out of the Army. He'd come out of the war with only one leg. He'd never asked Flora to pull strings for him since ... till this Remembrance Day parade. She'd done it, and gladly. If he was a stubborn Democrat—so what? The Democrats turned out to have been closer to right about Jake Featherston than the Socialists had. Flora didn't admit that in public, but she knew it was true.

Few cheers came from the crowds that lined the streets. Remembrance Day wasn't a holiday for cheers. But the crowds were thicker than on any Remembrance Day that Flora remembered since the euphoric one after the end of the Great War.

The parade rolled along Fifth Avenue: limousines, marching bands, veterans, clanking military hardware, and all. More people filled Central Park, where it ended. Spring made the air taste sweet and green. Wherever people weren't standing, robins and starlings hopped on the grass, digging up worms.

Strangely, the cheery birds made Flora sad. *There are liable to be plenty of fat worms soon,* she thought, *because the bodies of our young men will feed them.*

A temporary speaker's platform stood in the middle of a meadow

now packed with people. Policemen—one tough Irish mug after another—kept a lane clear for the limousines. They pulled up behind the platform. Dignitaries got out and ascended. Flora took her place with the rest. The other women on the platform were there because they were wives. Flora had her place because of what she did, and she was proud of it.

Governor LaGuardia, a peppery little Socialist in an outsized fedora, called the German ambassador to the microphone. Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht spoke better, more elegant English than the governor. "We have been rivals, your country and mine, because we are both strong," he said. "The strong notice each other. They also draw the jealousy of the weak. Like you, we have neighbors who would like to bite our ankles." That patrician scorn drew a laugh. Schacht went on, "So long as we stand together, though, nothing can overcome us both." He got another big hand, and sat down.

The Austro-Hungarian envoy—his name was Schussnigg, Governor LaGuardia said—delivered a thickly accented speech that sounded ferocious but didn't make much sense. When he stepped away from the microphone, the applause he got seemed more relieved than anything else.

LaGuardia himself made a speech that called down fire and brimstone on the Democratic Party and the Confederate States in equal measure. Then he introduced the mayor of New York City, who was just as Italian as he was, and who ripped the Socialists and the Confederate States up one side and down the other. The two men glared at each other. Flora couldn't help laughing.

More speeches followed, some very partisan, others less so. Then Governor LaGuardia said, "And now, the former First Lady of the United States, New York City's favorite daughter, Congresswoman Flora Blackford!"

Flora stood up and strode to the microphone. A few cries of, "Blackford-burghs!" floated out of the crowd, but only a few. She hadn't expected not to hear them. If anything, she got less heckling than she'd looked for.

"I don't want to talk about political parties today," she said, and enough applause erupted to drown out the jeers. "I want to talk about what's facing the United States. It will be trouble. I don't see how it can be anything but trouble. The government now ruling the Confederate States does not respect the rights of its own people. That

being so, how can we hope it will respect the rights of its neighbors?"

That got a big hand. She went on, "Many of you came to the United States or had parents who came to the United States to escape pogroms in Europe. And now we see pogroms in North America. Is a man any less a man because he has a dark skin? Jake Featherston thinks so. Is he right?"

This time, the applause was sparser, less comfortable. Again, Flora had thought it would be. She'd seen again and again that the plight of Negroes in the Confederate States did not get people in the United States hot and bothered. When people in the USA thought about Negroes, it was generally with relief that the vast majority of them were the CSA's worry.

That wasn't right. Flora drove the point home: "A lot of you have ancestors who came here because someone was persecuting them in Europe. Someone is persecuting the Negroes in the Confederate States right now, and we won't let them in. We turn them back. We shoot them if we have to. But we keep them out. And don't you see? That's wrong."

Now she got almost no applause. She would have been more disappointed if she were more surprised. "A lot of you don't care," she said. "You think, *They're only niggers,* and you go on about your business. And do you know what? That sound you hear from Richmond is Jake Featherston, laughing. If you don't care about a wrong to people in his country, he thinks you won't care about a wrong to people in your country, either. Is that so?"

"No!" She got the answer she wanted, but from perhaps a third of the throats that should have shouted it.

"I'm going to say one more thing, and then I'm through," she told the crowd. "If you say that oppression of anybody anywhere is all right, you say that oppression of everybody everywhere is all right. I don't think that's what the United States are all about. Do you?"

"No!" This time, the shout was louder. A lot of people clapped and cheered as she went back to her seat.

Governor LaGuardia introduced another member of Congress. The man, a Democrat, harangued the crowd about how good they were and how wicked the Confederates were. He said not a word about the Negroes in the Confederate States. To him, the Confederates were

wicked for no other reason than that they presumed to challenge the people of the United States of America.

He told the people in Central Park what they wanted to hear. They ate it up. The park rang with cheers. Flora had done her best to tell the people the truth. They hadn't liked that nearly so well.

The dignitary sitting next to her leaned over and said, "I see why they call you the conscience of the Congress."

"Thank you," she whispered. Someone, at least, had understood.

Then he went on, "But really! To get excited about a bunch of niggers? Those black bastards—pardon my French, ma'am—aren't worth it. We'd all be better off if they were back in Africa swinging through the trees."

He was, she remembered with something approaching horror, a judge. "What do you do if one of them comes into your court?" she asked.

"Oh, I try to be fair," he answered. "You have to. But they're usually guilty. That's just how things go."

He didn't see anything wrong with what he said. The only way Flora could have let sense into his head would have been to bash it open with a rock. She knew that. She'd met the type before. If she did it here at a Remembrance Day rally, people would talk. Even telling him off was useless. He'd just get offended. She could talk till Doomsday without persuading him.

Sitting there quietly felt as much like a compromise with evil to her as letting the Confederates do what they wanted to the Negroes in their country. She made herself remember there were degrees of wickedness, as there were with anything else. If you couldn't tell the difference between one and another, how were you supposed to make choices?

You couldn't. She knew that, however distasteful she found it. The Confederates were worse than the judge. *That still doesn't mean he's good,* she thought defiantly. At the microphone, the Democratic Congressman kept on laying into the CSA. The crowd ate up every word.

When Jake Featherston told the people who protected him that he was going to make a speech in Louisville, they started having conniptions. They screamed about black men with guns. They screamed about white men with guns who didn't want to live in the CSA. They screamed about damnyankees with mortars on the other side of the Ohio River. For the USA to try to bump him off would be an act of war, but it wouldn't be a war he got to run if they went ahead and did it.

That last comment worried him, because he didn't think anyone else in the Confederacy had the driving will and energy to do what needed doing when the war started. But he stuck out his chin and told the Freedom Party guards, "I'm going, goddammit. You keep the people in Louisville from shooting me. That's your job. I'll worry about the rest. That's mine."

Even Ferdinand Koenig flabbled about the trip. "You're the one man we can't replace, Jake," he said.

These days, he was almost the one man who could call Jake by his Christian name. Featherston looked across his desk at the attorney general. "It's worth the risk," he said. "The Party guards'll keep me safe from niggers and nigger-loving bastards who wish they were Yankees. And Al Smith is too nice a fellow to turn his artillery loose while we're at peace."

Al Smith was a damned fool, as far as Jake was concerned. Had the USA had a dangerous leader—say, another Teddy Roosevelt—Jake would have done everything he could to get rid of the man. People like that were worth an army corps of soldiers, likely more.

But Ferd Koenig had another worry. Quietly, he asked, "And who's going to keep you safe from the guards?"

Featherston glared at him. He'd already lived through two assassination tries—three if you counted Clarence Potter, who hadn't come to Richmond to play checkers. The stalwarts who'd backed Willy Knight against him still shook him to the core. But he said, "If I can't trust the Party guards, I can't trust anybody, and I might as well cash in my chips. And if I can't trust them, they can try and do me in right here in Richmond as easy as they can in Louisville."

By the look on Koenig's heavy-featured, jowly face, he might have

just bitten down on a lemon. "You're bound and determined to do this, aren't you?"

"You bet I am," Jake answered. "You take over a place, you need to let the people there get a look at you." He'd been reading *The Prince*. He couldn't pronounce Machiavelli's name to save his life, and if he wrote it down he wouldn't have spelled it the same way twice running. All the same, he knew good sense when he ran into it, and that was one hell of a sly dago.

He went to Louisville. He'd decided he would, and his deciding was what made things so. And when he went, he went in style. He didn't just fly in, make a speech, and fly out again. He took a train up from Nashville, and at every whistle stop all the way north across Kentucky he stood on a platform at the back of his Pullman and made a speech.

The Pullman had armor plating and bulletproof glass. Nothing short of a direct hit by an artillery shell would make it say uncle. The lectern on the platform was armored, too. But from the chest up and from the sides, he was vulnerable. The Freedom Party guards told him so, over and over. He went right on ignoring them.

Nobody shot him. Nobody shot at him. People swarmed to the train stations to hear him. They waved Confederate and Freedom Party flags. They shouted, "Freedom!" and, "Featherston!"—sometimes both at once. Women screamed. Men held up little boys so they'd see him and remember for the rest of their lives. The Party had organized some of the crowds, but a lot of the response was genuine and unplanned. That made it all the more gratifying.

He didn't see any black faces in the crowds. He would have been surprised and alarmed if he had. If he never saw any black faces anywhere in the CSA, that wouldn't have broken his heart.

"You folks helped us take back what's ours," he told the crowds at the whistle stops. "We got part of the job done, but the damnyankees won't make the rest of it right. They're nothing but a pack of thieves, and how are you supposed to live with a thief next door?"

People cheered. People howled. People shook their fists toward the north, as if Al Smith could see them. They'd been back in the Confederate States not even a handful of months, but they were ready to fight for them.

Jake tasted their jubilation. It was different from the cold lust for

revenge he felt in the rest of the CSA. People here had spent a generation under Yankee rule. They'd had their men conscripted into the U.S. Army. They knew what they'd abandoned, and they were glad to be back where they belonged.

Or most of them were: enough to have voted Kentucky back into the CSA, even with Negroes given the franchise to try to queer the deal. But there were white men—white men!—who looked north with longing, not with hate. If they knew what was good for them, they'd be lying low right now. If they didn't know what was good for them, Confederate officials and Party stalwarts would give them lessons on the subject.

He got into Louisville a little before six in the evening. People waving flags lined the route from the train station to the Galt House, the hotel where he would spend the night. He didn't stop there for long now—just enough time to grab a bite to eat and run a comb through his hair. Then it was on to the Memorial Auditorium a few blocks away for his speech.

The auditorium was a postwar building, of reinforced concrete that could have gone into a fortress. Most of Louisville was new. The city had been destroyed twice in the past sixty years. The USA had tried to take it in the Second Mexican War—tried and got a bloody nose. In the Great War, General Pershing's Second Army had driven the Confederates out, but not till the defenders, fighting from house to house, made the Yankees wreck the city to be rid of them.

Before the Second Mexican War, and to a degree after it, Louisville had been an un-Confederate sort of place. Because it did so much business with the United States, it had looked north as well as south. But once it got taken into the USA, it wasn't a booming border town any more. Even before the collapse of 1929, business was slow here. That made people all the more glad to return to the Confederacy.

A rhythmic cry of, "Feather*ston*! Feather*ston*! Feather*ston*!" greeted Jake as he strode up to the lectern. The bright lights glaring into his face kept him from getting a good look at the blocks of stalwarts who kept the chant strong, but he knew they were there. They weren't the only ones shouting, though— far from it. When he held up his hands for quiet, they fell silent at once. The rest of the crowd, less disciplined, took longer.

When he had enough quiet to suit him, he said, "I *am* Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth." That brought him a

fresh eruption of cheers. They knew his catch phrase, and had known it for years. Wireless stations from northern Tennessee had beamed his speeches up into Kentucky long before it returned to the Confederate States. He went on, "Here's what the truth is. The truth is, the Yankees don't want peace in North America. Oh, Al Smith says he does, but he's lying through his teeth."

Boos and hisses rose when he named the president of the United States. One loudmouthed fellow yelled, "We didn't vote for him!" That drew a laugh. Jake scowled. Nobody was supposed to get laughs at his speeches but him.

He said, "It's been almost twenty-five years since the United States stole our land from us. They coughed up a couple of pieces, and now they think they ought to get a pat on the head and a dish of ice cream on account of it. Well, folks, they're wrong. No two ways about it. They are *wrong*.

"And they think that might makes right. They aren't *so* wrong about that. But they think it gives 'em the right to hold on to things. They may think it does, but I'm here to tell you it isn't so. We've got the right to take back what's ours, and we'll do it if we have to.

"I want peace. Anybody who's seen a war and wants another one has to have a screw loose somewhere." Jake got a hand when he said that. He'd known he would, which was why he put it in the speech. He didn't believe it, though. He'd never felt more alive than when he was blasting Yankees to hell and gone in the First Richmond Howitzers. By contrast, peacetime was *boring*. He went on, "But if you back away from a war now, a lot of the time that just means you'll have to fight it later, when it costs you more. If the people in the United States reckon we're afraid to fight, they'd better think twice."

He got another hand for that, a bigger one. He'd hoped it would. It meant people were ready. They might not be eager, but they were ready. And ready was all that really counted.

Shaking his fist toward the country across the Ohio, he rolled on: "And if the damnyankees reckon they can get our own niggers to stab us in the back again, they'd better think twice about that, too." A great roar of applause went up then. Louisville had been in U.S. hands when the Negroes in the CSA rebelled in 1915, but the white folks here were just as leery of blacks as if they'd never left the Confederacy. Negroes had never got the right to vote in Kentucky, not till the plebiscite earlier this year. There wouldn't be a next time for them, either. Jake

went on, "We've got our niggers under control now, by God. Oh, there's still some trouble from 'em—I won't try to tell you any different—but we're teaching 'em who's boss."

More thunderous applause. Jake hoped that, if he killed enough rebellious blacks, the rest of them *would* learn who held the whip hand. As an overseer's son, he took that literally. And if the Negroes didn't care to learn from their lessons ... He shrugged. He'd go on teaching. Sooner or later, they would get it.

He knew damn well the United States *were* helping blacks resist the Confederate government. His people had already seized more than one arms shipment right here in Kentucky. His mouth opened in a predatory grin. Two could play at that game.

"Here's the last thing I've got to say to you, folks," he cried. "Kentucky is Confederate again. As God is my witness, Kentucky will always be Confederate from here on out. And I promise you, I won't take off this uniform till we've got everything back that belongs to us. We don't retreat. We go forward!"

He slammed his fist down on the podium. The Memorial Auditorium went wild. He couldn't make out individual cheers amid the din. He might have been in the middle of artillery barrages louder than this, but he wasn't sure. After a while, it all got to be more than the ears could handle.

He looked north toward the United States again. He was ready. Were they? He didn't think so. They'd started rearming a lot more slowly than he had. *They're soft. They're rotten. They're just waiting for somebody to kick the door in.*

"Feather*ston*! Feather*ston*! Feather*ston*!" Little by little, the chant emerged from chaos. Jake waved to the crowd. The cheers redoubled. *The Yanks are waiting for somebody to kick the door in, and I'm the man to do it.*

Anne Colleton muttered a mild obscenity when someone knocked on the door to her St. Matthews apartment. She hadn't been home for long, and she'd head out on the road again soon. She wanted to enjoy what time she had here, and her idea of enjoyment didn't include

gabbing with the neighbors.

She took a pistol to the door, as she usually did when someone unexpected knocked. The Congaree Socialist Republic was dead, but Negro unrest in these parts had never quite subsided. If a black man wanted to try to do her in, she aimed to shoot first.

But it wasn't a homicidal Red. It was a middle-aged white man in a lieutenant-colonel's uniform, two stars on each collar tab. That was all she saw at first. Then she did a double take. "Tom!" she exclaimed.

"Hello, Sis," her younger brother said. "I came to say good-bye. I've been called up, and I'm on my way out to report to my unit."

"My God," Anne said. "But you're married. You've got a family. What will Bertha do with the kids?"

"The best she can," Tom Colleton answered, which didn't leave much room for argument. "You're right—I didn't have to go. But I couldn't have looked at myself in a mirror if I hadn't. The Yankees have got more men than we do. If we don't use everybody we can get our hands on, we're in a hell of a lot of trouble."

She knew perfectly well that he was right. The USA had always outweighed the CSA two to one. If the United States could bring their full strength to bear, the Confederate States would face the same squeeze as they had a generation earlier. The USA hadn't managed that in the War of Secession, and had failed spectacularly in the Second Mexican War. In the Great War, they'd succeeded, and they'd won. Keeping them from succeeding again would be essential if the Confederacy was to have a chance.

All of which passed through Anne's mind in a space of a second and a half and then blew away. "For God's sake come in and have a drink," she said. "You've got time for that, don't you?"

"The day I don't have time for a drink is the day they bury me," Tom Colleton answered with a trace of the boyish good nature he'd largely submerged over the past few years.

Anne was all for revenge. She was all for teaching the United States a lesson. When it came to putting her only living brother's life on the line, she was much less enthusiastic. She poured him an enormous whiskey, and one just as potent for herself. "Here's to you," she said. Half of hers sizzled down her throat.

Tom drank, too. He stared at the glass, or maybe at the butternut cuff of his sleeve. "Christ, I did a lot of drinking in this uniform," he said. He might have been talking about somebody else. In a way, he was. He'd been in his early twenties, not fifty. He'd been sure the bullet that could hurt him hadn't been made. Men were at that age, which went a long way toward making war possible. By the time you reached middle age—if you did—you knew better. *Ask not for whom the bell tolls....*

"How's Bertha doing?" Anne asked. She'd always thought her brother had married below his station, but she couldn't deny that he and his wife loved each other.

He shook his head now. "She's not very happy. I don't reckon I can blame her for that. But I have to go." He finished the whiskey and held out the glass. "Pour me another one. Then I've got to head for the station and catch the northbound train."

"All right." Anne poured herself another drink, too, even though the first one was already making her head swim. It loosened her tongue, too. Without it, she never would have asked, "What do you think our chances are?"

Tom only shrugged. "Damned if I can tell you. Last time I went off to war, I was sure we'd lick the Yankees in six weeks and be home in time for the cotton harvest. One whole hell of a lot I knew about that, wasn't it? This time, I've got no idea. We'll find out."

"Maybe there won't be a war." Anne knew she was trying to talk herself into believing what she suddenly wanted with all her heart to believe, but she went on, "Maybe the damnyankees will back down and give us what we're asking for."

"Not a chance," Tom said. "I thought they were a pack of cowards last time. I know better now. They're as tough as we are. And even if they did, how much difference would it make?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. If the damnyankees back down tomorrow, what'll Jake Featherston do the day after? Ask 'em for something else, that's what. And he'll keep right on doing it till they say no and have to fight. Because whether you want a war or I want a war, Featherston damn well does, and he's got the only vote that counts. You going to tell me I'm wrong?"

Part of Anne—most of Anne—wanted to, but she knew she couldn't. She shook her head. "No, you're not wrong. But the time is ripe, too, and you know it. Things are going to blow up in Europe any day. The old Kaiser can't possibly last much longer, and his son's going to spit in France's eye. What'll happen then?"

"Boom," Tom said solemnly. "I'm surprised the French have waited as long as they have, but *Action Française* doesn't seem to have one clear voice at the top, the way the Freedom Party does."

"No, they don't," Anne agreed. "But if they and the British and the Russians can put Germany in her place and give us even a little help against the USA, we'll do all right. If you don't think so, why are you wearing the uniform again?"

"It's not for the Freedom Party. You can tell that to Jake Featherston's face next time you see him. I don't care," Tom said. "It's for the country. I'd fight for my country no matter who was in charge."

Anne had no intention of telling the president any such thing, regardless of what Tom said. It wouldn't do her brother any good, and might do him a lot of harm. Tom didn't seem to understand how thoroughly politics had twined themselves around everything else in the CSA these days. If you said uncomplimentary things about the Freedom Party, you'd probably be thought disloyal to the Confederate States, too.

Anne wondered if she ought to warn him. The only thing that held her back was the near certainty he wouldn't listen to her. Maybe he'd learn better when he got back on active duty. Or maybe he wouldn't, and he'd run his mouth once too often, and get cashiered and sent home.

He was her kid brother. Having him safe back here in South Carolina wouldn't break her heart. Oh, no, not at all.

"Be careful," was all she did tell him.

He nodded. "You know what they say: old soldiers and bold soldiers, but no old bold soldiers. I'm going out there to do a job, Anne. I'm not going out there looking to get shot. I've got too much to come home to."

"All right, Tom." Was it? Anne wondered. She never liked it when somebody whose life she'd run for a long time slipped away from her

control. She'd made more allowances for Tom than she did for most because they were flesh and blood. And now here he was, leaving not only her control but his wife's as well, heading off into the brutal, masculine world of war.

Clarence Potter was going the same way. He actively despised the regime. He was ready to put his life on the line for it just the same, and for the same reason: it was in charge of the country, and the country mattered to him.

"Be careful," she said again, and reminded herself to say the same thing to Clarence as soon as she could.

"You, too," Tom said then.

"Me?" She laughed. "I won't be up at the front, and you probably will." That *probably* was her hope against hope. She knew damn well he would. She took another sip of whiskey. However much she drank, though, the most she could do was blur that knowledge. She couldn't make it leave.

But her brother was serious, even if he'd taken on enough in the way of whiskey to speak with owlish intensity: "How much difference do you think being at the front will make? Bombers have a long reach these days. In this war, everybody's going to catch hell, not just the poor bastards in uniform."

That had an unpleasant feel of truth to it. Anne said, "Bite your tongue."

He took her literally. He stuck it out and clamped his teeth down on it so she could see. She laughed; she'd had enough that things like that were funny. But she couldn't help asking, "You think they'll bomb civilians, then?"

"Look what they did to Richmond last time," he said. "And it's not like our hands are clean. They had more airplanes, that's all."

Anne had been in Richmond for one of the U.S. air raids. She still remembered the helpless terror it had roused in her. "Well, we'd better have more this time, that's all," she said. "Let them find out what they did to us."

"I hope so," Tom said. "I expect so, as a matter of fact. But God help us if it turns out they give us another dose."

He got to his feet. Anne stood up, too. They hugged. "You be careful," she said for a third time.

"I promise," he answered. She didn't believe him for a minute. He would do what he would do. The only reason he hadn't got killed in the last war was dumb luck. She wished him more of that. It might serve where promises didn't.

Tom went out the door and off to the train station. Anne watched him from the window. He wobbled as he walked; she'd poured a lot of whiskey into him. That was all right. He'd sober up before he got to wherever he needed to go. She realized he hadn't said where that was. Military security had fallen between them like a blanket.

She muttered a curse against military security. She muttered another curse against war. That second one was halfhearted, and she knew it. She wanted all the horrors of war to come down on the damnyankees' heads. She just didn't want anything to happen to Tom or to Clarence or to the people of the Confederate States. That wasn't fair, of course. She couldn't have cared less.

Tom turned a corner and was gone. No. Anne shook her head. He wasn't gone. She just couldn't see him any more. There was a difference. "Of course there's a difference," she said aloud, as if someone had told her there wasn't.

Another drink didn't seem likely to let her know what the difference was. She fixed one for herself anyway. She'd thought Tom would have the sense to stay home with his wife and children. She'd thought so, but she'd been wrong. She hated being wrong.

And she even saw how she'd been wrong. Jake Featherston had spent years building up the passion for war in the Confederate States. He'd needed to, to get the revenge on the United States he wanted. Anne also wanted that revenge, and so she'd helped him. What could be more natural, then, than that the passion took someone who otherwise would have stayed home?

What indeed? Anne gulped the new drink in a hurry. Somehow, seeing where she'd been wrong didn't help a bit.

Even in late spring, the North Atlantic pitched and tossed. The USS *Remembrance* was a big ship, but the waves flung her about even so. Sam Carsten thanked heaven for his strong stomach and for the cloudy skies that kept his fair, fair skin from burning. Other than that, he had little for which to be thankful.

To put it mildly, things did not look good. The *Remembrance* and the cruisers and destroyers surrounding her were on full war alert. Everyone seemed sure it was coming. The only questions left were about when and where and how.

Maybe the clouds in the sky didn't matter so much. Sam spent almost all of his time belowdecks, either at his battle station in damage control or in the officers' mess or sacked out in his tiny cabin. On his schedule, a vampire would have had trouble getting a sunburn.

He might as well have been married to Lieutenant Commander Hiram Pottinger. He saw his superior nearly every waking moment. The two of them prowled through the bowels of the ship, looking for trouble they could eliminate before it got the chance to eliminate them. Every once in a while, they would find something and turn their sailors loose on it. Then they would pause and nod and sometimes shake hands. That was what they were supposed to do, and by now they were both damn good at the job.

Sam still remembered that he wanted to get in on the aviation side of things. He remembered, but nostalgically, as if thinking of a long-lost love. Years of doing the duty he was in had shaped him and scraped him till he wasn't a square peg in a round hole any more. By now, he fit the slot in which the Navy had put him. That was how things worked.

He kept right on going up to the wireless shack whenever he found the chance. Maybe that proved he was a mustang; he still had a rating's insatiable appetite for scuttlebutt. The yeomen who kept the *Remembrance* in touch with the wider world grinned whenever he poked his head in. They teased him about it, as much as they could tease a superior officer.

"Going to tell the limeys everything you know, sir?" one of them asked.

"Hell, no." Sam shook his head. "I'm going to save it till we get over to the Pacific. Then I'll tell it to the Japs."

They all laughed. The only thing Sam wanted to tell the Japanese was where to head in. He would gladly have helped guide them on the way, too. They'd shelled a ship he was on once and torpedoed him twice. If they hadn't sunk him, it sure as hell wasn't for lack of effort.

Before any of the yeomen could say something else slyly rude, loud, mournful music started coming out of the wireless set. "Something's up," Sam said. "What station is that?"

"German Imperial Wireless, sir," answered the man who'd been teasing him. The yeomen and Carsten looked at one another. Wilhelm II had been failing for a long time now. If he'd finally gone and failed...

A torrent of German poured from the speaker. "You picking that up, Gunther?" another yeoman asked.

"I will if you don't jog my elbow," Gunther answered. He was a big blond kid, not so fair as Sam but fair enough. Another Midwestern farm boy who'd decided to go to sea instead of spending the rest of his life walking behind a couple of horses' asses. (These days, he'd probably ride a tractor. That still wasn't Sam's idea of fun.)

"Is it the Kaiser?" Sam asked.

"Yeah. Uh, yes, sir." Gunther corrected himself. "It's him, all right. Blood clot on the lung, the wireless says. Went into a coma last night, died this morning." More music replaced the announcer's voice. This time, Sam recognized the tune: *Deutschland über Alles.* When the German anthem ended, the announcer came back on the air. "He's hailing the accession of Friedrich Wilhelm—King Friedrich Wilhelm V of Prussia and Kaiser Friedrich I of Germany," Gunther reported.

"Kaiser Bill had a hell of a run: better than fifty years," Sam said. His son and heir wouldn't match that; Friedrich Wilhelm, who'd lived so long in his father's shadow, was already close to sixty.

More German came out of the wireless. This was a different voice. Gunther said, "Uh-oh. This is the new Kaiser's mouthpiece. He says Friedrich Wilhelm's first act is to declare that he can't possibly give up anything his father won."

"Uh-oh is right," Sam said. "That means trouble with France and England and probably Russia, too." He whistled softly. "Big trouble, I think. I wonder what the hell we do now."

"Well, sir, we're already on battle alert," Gunther said practically.

"Yeah," Sam said: not the ideal reply, perhaps, for an officer and a gentleman, but one both accurate and concise.

Gunther got on the telephone to the bridge. Sam ambled out of the wireless shack, whistling tunelessly to himself. For the next little while, he would know something the skipper didn't. Of course, knowing did him no good. He couldn't bring the *Remembrance,* or even the damage-control parties, to a higher state of alert than they were already in.

British airplane carriers, he thought unhappily. *British battleships, if they can get in close enough. British and French submersibles. French destroyers, too, I suppose. What a joy.* Would Britain and France declare war on the USA, too, once they went to war with Germany, which they sure looked as if they'd do? The frogs might not. They were taking dead aim at their next-door neighbors.

The limeys? Carsten worried more about them. They owed the USA a kick in the teeth. The United States had booted them out of Canada, Newfoundland, Bermuda, and the Bahamas. Sam couldn't see them mounting an invasion to take back Toronto. The islands out in the Atlantic? They were a different story. And to get to the islands, the British would have to get past the U.S. Navy.

With a spatter of static, the *Remembrance's* intercom came to life. Sam blinked. The squawkboxes didn't get used very often. "This is the captain speaking." Sam blinked again. When the intercom did come on, Captain Stein hardly ever spoke himself. That was usually the exec's job. But the skipper continued, "Men, you need to know that the German Empire has just announced that Kaiser Wilhelm II has passed away. His son, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, has just become the new German Kaiser.

"Friedrich Wilhelm has formally rejected the demands France has made for the return of territory lost in the Great War. The international situation will grow more dangerous as a result of this. For the moment, we are not at war with France or Britain or anyone else." That could only mean the CSA. Sam shook his head. No, it could mean Japan and even Russia, too. Captain Stein went on, "However, we must not let ourselves be caught off guard by a sneak attack. Be more alert than ever. If in doubt about anything, let a superior know. You may save your ship. That is all." With another spatter of static, the intercom went dead.

Later, after Sam had gone back on duty, Lieutenant Commander Pottinger said, "The French and the English won't declare war on us, will they, Carsten?"

"Damned if I know, sir," Sam answered. He wondered why the devil Pottinger was asking him. The other officer had two grades on him and wore an Annapolis ring to boot. If anybody knew the answers, Pottinger should have been the man. On the other hand, though, Sam had twenty years on his superior officer. Maybe Pottinger thought that counted for something.

"We'll just have to lick 'em if they do," Pottinger said. He hadn't been old enough to see action in the Great War, but he'd seen his share in the Pacific War against the Japanese. He'd be all right.

Even though the Atlantic was rough, airplanes roared off the *Remembrance's* flight deck. Having a combat air patrol up could save the ship if the British or French or Confederates decided to declare war by attacking, the way the Japs had.

No doubt the cruisers in the squadron were launching their seaplanes, too. Those would range farther afield. With luck, they would spot the enemy before he got close enough to launch an airborne strike force.

Unlike Pottinger, Carsten wasn't usually the sort who borrowed trouble. Even so, he wished he hadn't decided to contemplate the meaning of the phrase *with luck*. It reminded him too vividly of what could happen without luck.

Day followed day. An oiler came alongside to refuel the *Remembrance*. Sam remembered an oiler refueling the USS *Dakota* just before the USA attacked Pearl Harbor and took the Sandwich Islands away from Britain. Back then, most ships had been coal-fired. Even the Dakota had burned both oil and coal. Things had changed since. He didn't think any front-line ships burned coal any more.

He was in the officers' wardroom fueling up himself—on coffee—when Commander Cressy came in looking thoroughly grim. "Oh, boy," said one of the other officers in there.

"Oh boy is about the size of it," the exec agreed. "France has declared war on Germany and sent soldiers and barrels into Alsace and Lorraine. Britain has joined in the declaration. Her airplanes are bombing several cities in northern Germany. The Tsar has recalled his

ambassadors from Berlin and Vienna and Constantinople. It can't be more than a matter of days before Russia joins in."

"Here we go again," somebody said, which summed up exactly what Sam was thinking.

"That wasn't all," Cressy said. "Latest word is that Jake Featherston's declared war on Germany."

Several sharp exclamations rang out. "On Germany?" Sam said. "Not on us?"

"Not yet, anyhow," Commander Cressy replied. "Declaring war on Germany sounds good and doesn't cost him anything. It's almost like the Ottoman Empire declaring war on the CSA. Even if they do it, so what? They can't reach each other."

"We're still formally allied to Germany, and we've got a bunch of the same enemies," Sam said. "If the Confederates declared war on the Kaiser, does that mean we have to declare war on them?"

"You do ask interesting questions, Carsten," the exec said. "I don't think we have to do anything. There was that stretch in the twenties when it looked like we might square off against Kaiser Bill, and the alliance pretty much lapsed. But then the old snakes stuck their heads up again, so we never duked it out with Germany. Anyway, though, my guess is that Al Smith will sprout wings and fly before he goes and declares war on his own hook."

A lot of men with stripes on their sleeves nodded at that. Most officers were Democrats. That made sense: they defended the status quo, which was what the Democratic Party stood for.

Sam supposed he was a Democrat himself. But whether he defended the status quo or not, he feared it was going to get a hell of a kicking around.

Colonel Irving Morrell saluted. "Reporting as ordered, sir," he said, and then, smiling, "Good to see you again, sir, too. It's been too long."

"It has, hasn't it?" Brigadier General Abner Dowling replied.

The last time they'd been together, Morrell had outranked Dowling. He tried not to resent the fat officer's promotions. They weren't Dowling's fault: how could anybody blame him for grabbing with both hands? Instead, they— and Morrell's own long, long freeze in rank— spoke volumes about the War Department's peacetime opinion of barrels.

"We're going to be doing something different here," Dowling remarked. "The other side's got the ball, and they'll try to run with it."

"And we have to tackle them," Morrell said.

"That's about the size of it," Dowling agreed.

Morrell whistled tunelessly between his teeth. "We're not going to be able to keep them from crossing the river," he said.

"Oh, good," the fat brigadier general said. Morrell looked at him in some surprise. Dowling went on, "I'm glad somebody besides me can see that. Officially, my orders are to throw them back into Kentucky right away."

"Sir, you'd bust me down to second lieutenant if I told you what I thought of the War Department," Morrell said.

Abner Dowling surprised him again, this time by laughing till his jowls quivered like the gelatin on a cold ham. "Colonel, I spent more than ten years of my life listening to General George Armstrong Custer. If you think *you* can shock me, go ahead. Take your best shot. And good luck."

That made Morrell laugh, too, but not for long. "If we were fighting the Confederate Army of 1914, we'd kick the crap out of it," he said. "That's a lot of what the big brains in Philadelphia have us ready to do."

The laughter drained out of Dowling's face, too. "Custer would have been louder about it, but I don't know if he could have been much ruder. We've got plenty of men, we've got plenty of artillery; our air forces are about even, I think. Our special weapons—gas, I should say; call a spade a spade—will match theirs atrocity for atrocity. Have you met Captain Litvinoff ?"

"Yes, sir." When Morrell thought about Captain Litvinoff, he didn't feel like laughing at all any more. "I get the feeling he's very good at

what he does." He could say that and mean it. It was as much praise as he could give the skinny little officer with the hairline mustache.

It was June. It was already warm and muggy. It would only get worse. He didn't like to think about being buttoned up in a barrel. He especially didn't like to think about being buttoned up in a barrel while wearing a gas mask. When he thought about Litvinoff, he couldn't help it.

Thinking about being buttoned up in a barrel made him think about barrels in general, something else he wasn't eager to do. "Sir, if we are going to play defense, we don't just need gas. We need more barrels than we've got."

"I am aware of that, thank you," Dowling replied. "Philadelphia may be in the process of becoming aware of it. On the other hand, Philadelphia may not, too. You never can tell with Philadelphia."

"But if we're going to stop them—" Morrell began.

His superior held up a hand. "If we're going to stop them, we've got to have some notion of what they'll try. We'd better, anyhow. What's your best estimate of that, Colonel?"

"Have you got a map, sir?" Morrell asked. "Always easier to talk with a map."

"Right here." Dowling took one from his breast pocket and unfolded it. It was printed on silk, which could be folded or crumpled any number of times without coming to pieces and which didn't turn to mush if it got wet. Morrell drew a line with his fingers. Dowling's eyebrows leaped. "You think they'll do that?"

"It's what I'd do, if I were Jake Featherston," Morrell answered. "Can you think of a better way to cripple us?"

"The War Department thinks they'll strike in the East, the same as they did in the last war," Dowling said. Morrell said nothing. Dowling studied the line he had drawn. "That could be ... unpleasant."

"Yes, sir," Morrell said. "I don't know that they have the men and the machines to bring it off. But I don't know that they don't, either."

Dowling traced the same path with his finger. It seemed to exert a horrid fascination. "That could be very unpleasant. I'm going to get on

the telephone to the War Department about it. If you're right..."

"They won't take you seriously," Morrell predicted. "They'll say, 'All the way out there? Don't be silly.' " He tried to sound like an effete, almost effeminate General Staff officer.

"I have to make the effort," Dowling said. "Otherwise, it's my fault, not theirs."

Morrell could see the logic in that. He changed the subject, asking, "Have we got sabotage under control?"

"I hope so," Dowling said, which wasn't what he wanted to hear. The general went on, "Sabotage and espionage are a nightmare anyway. We aren't like Germans and Russians. We all speak the same language. And downstate Ohio and Indiana were settled by people whose ancestors came up from what are the Confederate States now. Most of 'em—almost all, in fact—are loyal, but they still have some of the accent. That makes spies even harder to spot. My one consolation is, the Confederates have the same worry."

"Happy day," Morrell said.

His superior laughed. So did he, not that it was really funny. Not being sure who was on your side made any war more difficult. Neither the CSA nor the USA had done all they could with that truth in the Great War. Morrell had the feeling both would make up for it if and when they met again.

Abner Dowling asked, seemingly out of the blue, "Did you ever serve in Utah, Colonel?"

"No, sir," Morrell answered. "Can't say I ever had that pleasure. I helped draw up the plan that involved outflanking the rebels there, but I was never stationed there myself."

"You know we still have colored friends down south of what's the border now," Dowling said—he seemed to be all over the conversational map.

"I don't know that for a fact, or I didn't till now, but it doesn't surprise me," Morrell said. "We'd be damned fools if we didn't."

"Hasn't stopped us before," Dowling observed. Morrell blinked. He hadn't thought the older man had that kind of cynicism in him. Of

course, he'd known Dowling when the latter served under Cluster, whose own personality tended to overwhelm those of the people around him. Custer had even managed to keep Daniel MacArthur in check, which couldn't possibly have been easy. While Morrell contemplated the rampant ego of his recent CO., Dowling went on, "I don't think the Confederates are damned fools, either. I wish they were; it would make our lives easier. They were sniffing around in Salt Lake City when I commanded there the same way we are with niggers in the CSA. Only edge we've got is that there are more niggers in the Confederate States than Mormons here, thank God."

"Ah." Morrell nodded. Brigadier General Dowling hadn't been talking at random, then. He'd actually been going somewhere, and now Morrell could see where. "So you think the Mormons are going to try and stick a knife in our backs?"

"Colonel, they hate our guts," Dowling said. "They've hated our guts for sixty years now. I won't deny we've given them some reason to hate us."

"Not like they haven't given us reason to sit on them," Morrell said.

"Oh, there's plenty of injustice to go around," Dowling agreed. "And if another war starts, there'll be more. But I wish to high heaven President Smith hadn't lifted military occupation."

"Don't you think he's got people watching the Mormons?" Morrell asked.

"Oh, I'm sure he does," Dowling replied. "But it's not the same. If we see the Mormons gathering arms, say, it's not so easy to send troops back into Utah to take away the rifles or whatever they've got. That might touch off the explosion we're trying to stop."

"The police—" Morrell began.

Dowling's laugh might have burst from the throat of the proverbial jolly fat man—except he didn't look jolly. "The police are Mormons, too, or most of them are. They'll look the other way. Either that or they'll be the ones with the weapons in the first place. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?"*

"You *are* cheerful today, sir," Morrell said. "Who *will* watch the watchmen?"

"I suppose Al Smith will, or his people. He means well. I've never said he doesn't. He's doing the best he can. I only wish he weren't quite so trusting. He kept us out of war—till after the election. Me, I'd sooner have trusted a rattlesnake than Jake Featherston."

"You mean there's a difference?" Morrell asked. Dowling shook his head. His chins danced. But there was a difference, and Morrell knew it. Featherston was likely to prove more deadly than any rattler ever hatched.

An orderly poked his nose into Dowling's office. He brightened when he spotted Morrell. "Sir, I'm supposed to tell you a new shipment of barrels just came in at the Columbus train station."

Morrell bounced to his feet. The thigh where he'd been wounded in the opening days of the Great War twinged. It would remind him the rest of his life of what had happened down there in Sonora. No help for it, though, so he ignored it. The leg still worked. What else mattered? He saluted Brigadier General Dowling. "If you'll excuse me, sir..."

"Of course," Dowling said. "The sooner the barrels get off their flatcars and into units, the better off we'll be."

The orderly had a command car. It was no different from the one Morrell had used on the border between Houston and Texas. He didn't mind sitting behind a machine gun at all. If the Confederates didn't have saboteurs and assassins in Columbus, he would have been amazed.

When he got to the station, he discovered how eager the factory in Pontiac had been to ship those barrels. They were all bright metal; they hadn't even been painted. He hoped his own men would have the time to slap green and brown paint on them before the shooting started. If they did, fine. If they didn't... Well, if they didn't, the barrels were still here, and not back at the factory in Michigan. He would throw them into the fight. He would lose more of them than if they were harder to see at a distance, but they would take out a good many Confederate barrels, too.

How many barrels did the Confederates have? How many could they afford to lose? Those were both interesting questions—the most interesting questions in the world for the U.S. officer in charge of armored operations along the central Ohio. And Morrell didn't have good answers. The U.S. might have had plenty of saboteurs on the

other side of the border. Spies who could count and report back? Evidently not.

Morrell looked south. *I'll find out. Soon, I think.*

The U.S. ambassador to the Confederate States was a bright young Californian named Jerry Voorhis. He was, of course, a Socialist like Al Smith. As far as Jake Featherston was concerned, that made him a custardhead right from the start. He didn't look or sound like a custardhead at the moment, though.

"No," he said. He didn't bother sitting down in the presidential office. He stood across the desk from Featherston, looking dapper and cool in a white linen suit despite the stifling blanket of June heat and humidity.

"No, what?" Jake rasped.

"No to all your demands," Voorhis answered. "President Smith has made his position very clear. He does not intend to change it. The United States will not return any further territory ceded to us by the CSA. You agreed to abide by plebiscites and to make no more demands. You have broken your agreement. The president does not consider you trustworthy enough for more negotiations, and he will yield no more land. That is final."

"Oh, it is, is it?" Jake said.

"Yes, it is." The U.S. ambassador stuck out his chin and gave back a stony glare.

Featherston only shrugged. "Well, he'll be sorry for that. As for you, Ambassador, I'm going to give you your walking papers. As of right now, you are what they call *persona non grata* here. You have twenty-four hours to get the hell out of my country, or I'll throw you out on your ear."

Voorhis started to say something, then checked himself. After a moment's pause for thought, he resumed: "I was going to tell you you couldn't do me a bigger favor than sending me back to the United States. But I'm afraid you're doing no favors to millions of young men

in your country and mine who may be shooting at each other very soon."

"That's not my fault," Jake said in a flat, hard voice. "If President Smith was ready to be reasonable about what I want—"

"My ass," Jerry Voorhis said, which was not the usual diplomatic language. Maybe he thought the rules changed for expelled ambassadors. Maybe he was right. His bluntness made Jake blink. And he went on, "If the president gave you everything you say you want, you'd just say you wanted something else. That's how you are." He didn't bother hiding his bitterness.

And he was right. Featherston knew it perfectly well. Knowing it and admitting it were two different beasts. He pointed toward the door. "Get out."

"My pleasure." As Voorhis turned to go, he added, "You can start a war whenever you please. If you think you can end one whenever you please, you're making a big mistake."

Jake thought about saying something like, *We'll see about that.* He didn't. The damnyankee could have the last word here. Who got the last word once the balloon went up—that would be a different story.

An hour later, the telephone rang in his office. "Featherston," he snapped.

"Mr. President, the ambassador to the USA is on the line," his secretary said. "He sounds upset."

"Put him through, Lulu." Jake could guess what the ambassador was calling about.

The Confederate ambassador to the United States was a Georgian named Russell. Jake never remembered his Christian name. All he remembered was that the man was reasonably smart and a solid Freedom Party backer. When he heard Featherston's voice on the line, he blurted, "Mr. President, the damnyankees are throwing me out of the country."

"Don't you worry about it," Jake answered. "Don't you worry about it one little bit, on account of I just heaved Jerry Voorhis out of Richmond."

"Oh." Russell sounded relieved, at least for one word. But then he said, "Holy Jesus, Mr. President, is there gonna be another war?"

"Not if we get what we want," Featherston said. "Get what's ours by rights, I ought to say." As far as he was concerned, there was no difference between the one and the other.

"All right, then, Mr. President. I'll see you back there soon," Russell said. "I sure as hell hope everything goes the way you want it to."

"It will." Jake never had any doubts. *Why should I?* he thought. *Everything's always gone good up till now. It won't change.* He spent a few more minutes calming the ambassador down, then hung up the phone on him.

No sooner had he done that than Lulu poked her head into his office and said, "General Potter is here to see you, sir."

"Is he?" Jake grinned. "Well, send him right on in."

"Good morning, Mr. President," Clarence Potter said, saluting. He carried a manila folder under his left arm. Tossing it onto Featherston's desk, he went on, "Here are some of the latest photographs we've got."

"Out-fucking-standing!" Jake said, which produced an audible sniff from Lulu in the outer office. "These are what I want to see, all right. If you have to, you'll walk me through some of them."

Some of the pictures that Potter brought him were aerial photos. Getting reconnaissance airplanes up over the USA wasn't that hard. Every so often, Featherston wondered how many flying spies the United States had above his own country. Too many, probably. The photographs Potter brought him were neatly labeled, each one showing exactly where and when it had been taken.

"Doesn't look like there's a whole lot of change," Jake remarked. "Everything still seems out in the open."

"Yes, sir," Potter answered.

Something in his tone made Jake's head come up. He might have been a wolf taking a scent. "All right," he said. "What's different in the stuff they don't want us to see?"

He almost laughed at the way Potter looked at him. The Intelligence officer didn't want to respect him, but couldn't help it. *Yeah, sonny boy, I run this country for a reason,* Jake thought. Potter said, "If you'll look at some of these ground shots, Mr. President, you'll see the Yankees are starting to move up into concealed forward positions. They should have done it sooner, but they are starting."

"How did we get these ground photos back here so fast?" Featherston asked. "Some of 'em are from yesterday morning."

"Sir, we're still at peace with the USA," Potter replied. "If a drummer or a tourist crosses back into Kentucky from Illinois or Indiana or Ohio, who's to say what kind of prints are on his Brownie? They're only just now starting to wake up to the idea that we might really mean this." He couldn't resist adding, "It might have been better if we'd left them even more in the dark."

Nobody criticized Jake Featherston to his face and got away with it. "Listen, Potter," he snapped, "the damnyankees'll get more surprises from me than a fellow does from his doctor after he lays a fifty-cent whore." The other man guffawed in surprise. Jake went on, "You don't know all my business, so don't go making like you do."

He waited to see if Potter would get angry or get sniffy. The other man didn't. Instead, he nodded. "All right. That makes sense. Does anybody know all your secrets? Besides you, I mean?"

"Hell, no," Jake answered automatically. "There are things I could brag about—but I won't." If he hadn't checked himself, he might have started boasting about what was going on down in Louisiana, for instance. But the whole point of knowing things other people didn't was to be able to use what you knew against them and to keep them from using what they knew against you.

Clarence Potter, he saw, got that. Well, Potter was in Intelligence. If anybody could see the point of secrets, he was the man. And he nodded now. "When I first got to know you, you would have run your mouth," he said. "There's more to you than there used to be. That's why I'm here, I expect."

"Instead of still being a goddamn stubborn Whig and wanting to blow my head off, you mean?" Featherston asked.

Potter nodded. He smiled a crooked smile. "Yeah. Instead of that." The smile got wider. Now he was waiting—waiting to find out if Jake

would send him off to a camp for admitting it.

And Jake wanted to. But Potter, damn him, had made himself too useful to be jugged like a hare. And from now on he'd be too busy to worry about blowing the head off of anybody who wasn't wearing a green-gray uniform. Jake jerked a thumb at the door. "All right. Get the hell out of here, and take all your pictures of naked women with you."

"Yes, sir." Chuckling, Potter scooped up the folder of reconnaissance photos and started out. He paused with his hand on the doorknob. "Good luck," he said. "You've done everything you could to get us ready, but we'll still need it."

"I'll put in a fresh requisition with the Quartermaster Corps," Jake said. Potter nodded and left. Jake shook his head in bemusement. He might have made stupid jokes like that with Ferd Koenig and a couple of other old-time Party buddies, but not with anybody else. So why make them with Potter?

But he didn't need long to find the answer. He'd known Potter longer than he'd known Koenig or any of the other Party men. They'd both hung tough when the Army of Northern Virginia was falling to pieces all around them. If the president of the greatest country in North America—no, in the *world!*— couldn't joke around with the one man who'd known him when he was just a sergeant, with whom could he joke? Nobody. Nobody at all.

If the Confederate States were going to become the greatest country in the world, they had to go through the United States first. *Bastards beat us once, when the niggers stabbed us in the back,* Jake thought. *This time, I'll sit on the niggers but good, right from the start. Let's see those damnyankee fuckers do it again, especially when we're ready—when* I'm *ready—and they aren't quite.* The photos Potter had shown him proved that.

Lulu made most of his telephone calls. He made this one himself, on a special line that didn't pass through her desk. It went straight from his office to the War Department. Men checked twice a day to make sure the damnyankees didn't tap it. It rang only once before the Chief of the General Staff picked it up. "Forrest speaking."

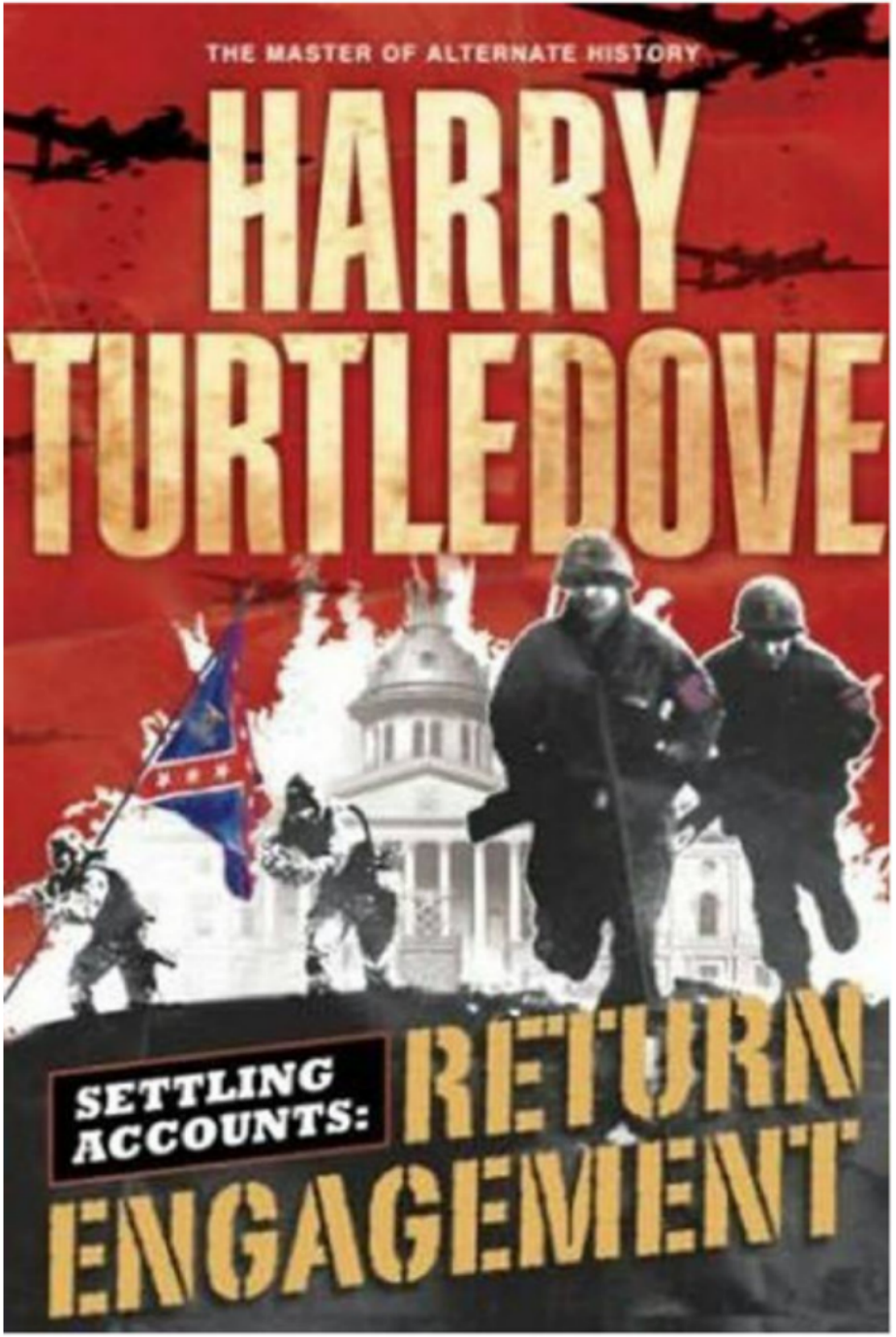
"Featherston," Jake said, and then, "Blackbeard." He hung up.

There. It was done. The die was cast. Whatever was going to

happen would happen ... starting tomorrow morning, *early* tomorrow morning.

Summer had just come in. Jake worked through the rest of June 21. He ate supper, and then went right on working through the night. Lulu brought him cup after cup of coffee. After a while, yawning, she went home to bed. He worked on, behind blackout curtains that kept light from leaking out of the Gray House and showing where it was from the air.

June 21 passed into June 22. All that coffee made Jake's heart thud and soured his stomach. He gulped a Bromo-Seltzer and went on. At a quarter past three, the drone of airplane engines and the thunder of distant artillery—not distant enough; damn those Yankee robbers!—made him whoop for sheer glee. He'd waited so long. Now his day was here.


THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY
HARRY TURTLEDOVE
SETTLING ACCOUNTS:
RETURN ENGAGEMENT

Return Engagement
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Review

“Turtledove [is] the standard-bearer for alternate history.”
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Product Description

Harry Turtledove’s remarkable alternative history novels brilliantly remind us of how fragile the thread of time can be, and offer us a world of “what if.” Drawing on a magnificent cast of characters that includes soldiers, generals, lovers, spies, and demagogues, Turtledove returns to an epic tale that only he could tell–the story of a North American continent, separated into two bitterly opposed nations, that stands on the verge of exploding once again.

In 1914 they called it The Great War, and few could imagine anything worse. For nearly three decades a peace forged in blood and fatigue has held sway in North America. Now, Japan dominates the Pacific, the Russian Tsar rules Alaska, and England, under Winston Churchill, chafes for a return to its former glory. But behind the façade of world order, America is a bomb waiting to go off. Jake Featherston, the megalomaniacal leader of the Confederate States of America, is just the man to light the fuse.

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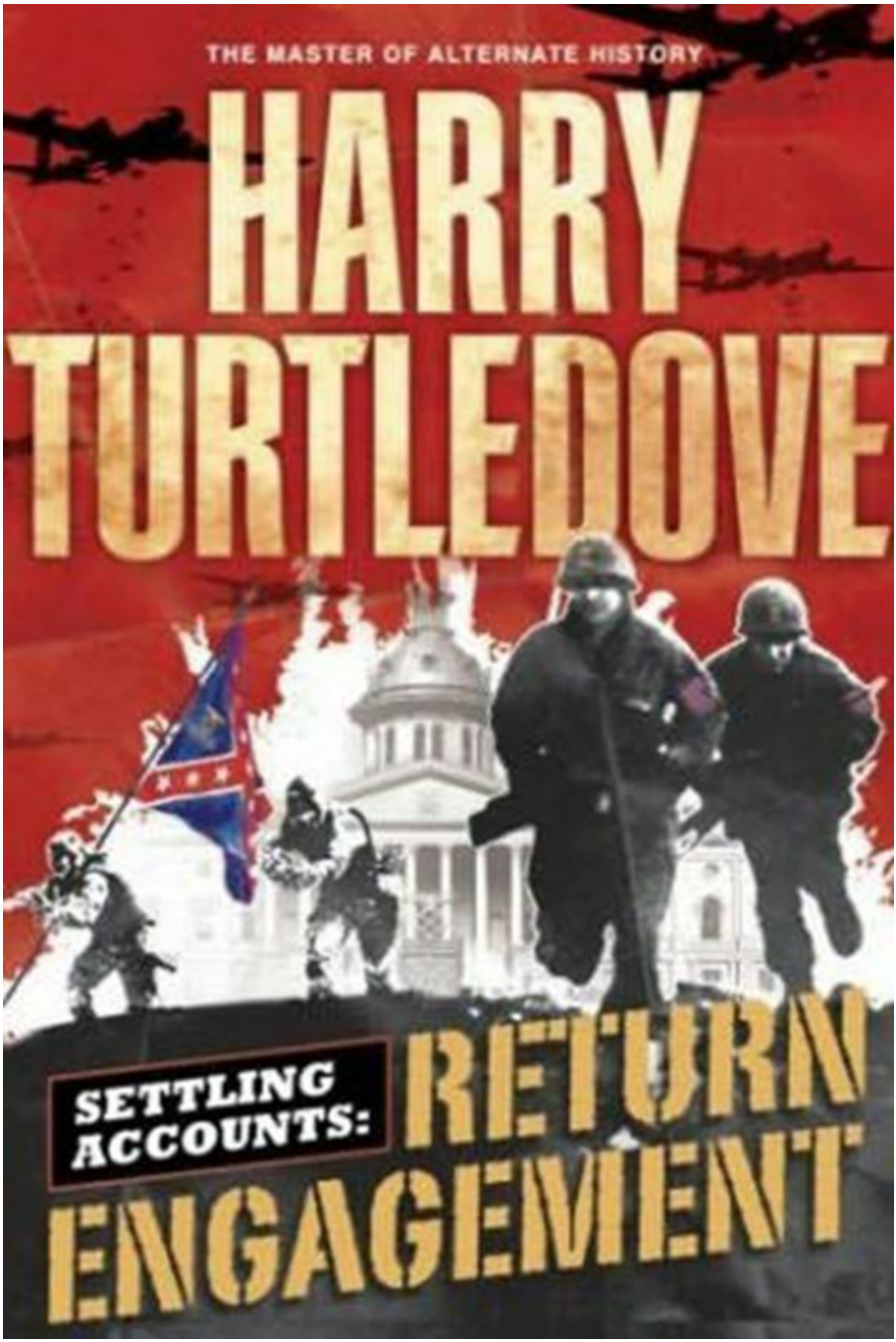
Featherston’s planes attack Philadelphia without warning. The U.S.A. lashes back blindly at Charleston. And a terrible second coming is at hand. When the CSA blitzkrieg is launched, the U.S.A. is caught flat-

footed. Before long, the gray Army reaches Lake Erie. But in its wake the war machine is spinning a vortex of destruction, betrayal, and fury that no one, not even Jake Featherston himself, can control.

Now, President Smith faces a Herculean task, while an obscure assistant secretary of war named Roosevelt rises in his ranks. For the U.S.A., the darkest days still lay ahead. Across the globe, a new era of war has just begun. And in the hands of the incomparable Harry Turtledove, readers are treated to a masterful vision of what might have been. An enduring portrait of history, nations, and human nature in its many manifestations, *Return Engagement* is a monumental journey into the second half of the twentieth century.

From the Hardcover edition.


THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY
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This one is for Al and Craig

I

Flora Blackford woke from nightmare to nightmare. She'd dreamt she was trapped in a burning building, with fire alarms and sirens screaming all around her. When her eyes opened, she thought for a dreadful moment that she was still dreaming, for sirens were wailing outside. Then reason returned along with consciousness, and the Congresswoman fromNew York groaned. Those were air-raid sirens, which could only mean the war had started at last.

Or maybe it's a drill, Flora thought, snatching desperately at hope, though a drill at--she looked at the alarm clock on the nightstand--four in the morning struck her as madness. Of course, a new round of war between theUnited States and theConfederateStates struck her as madness, too.

Antiaircraft guns in the defense ring aroundPhiladelphia began to pound. That sound banished the last vestiges of doubt. Guns inside the de facto capital of theUSA opened up a moment later. Through the gunfire and the sirens, she heard a deep, distant throbbing that rapidly grew louder. Those were Confederate bombers overhead.

She sprang out of bed and threw a housecoat on over the thin cotton nightgown she'd worn against the muggy heat of the first days of summer inPhiladelphia . She had one arm in the quilted housecoat and one arm out when she suddenly stopped in outrage that seemed ridiculous only later. "That bastard!" she exclaimed. "He didn't even declare war!"

A new sound joined the cacophony outside: the thin whistle of falling bombs. As the first explosions made the windows of her flat rattle and shake, she realized President Jake Featherston of the CSA wouldn't have to send Al Smith, hisU.S. counterpart, any formal messages now.

Fear joined outrage. She could die here. So could her son. She ran to his bedroom and threw open the door. "Joshua! Get up!" she shouted. "We've got to get down to the basement! The war is here!"

Only a snore answered her. At sixteen, Joshua could sleep through anything, and he'd proved it. Sirens?

Antiaircraft guns? Droning bombers? Bombs? Probing searchlights? His mother yelling? They were all one to him, and likewise all nothing to him.

"Get up!" Flora shouted again. Still no response. She went over to the bed and shook him. "Get up!"

That did the job. Joshua Blackford sat up and muttered for a moment. He didn't doubt what was going on around him the way his mother had. "They really went and did it!" he said.

"Yes, they really did," Flora agreed grimly. Bombs were bursting closer now, underscoring her words.

"Come on. Get moving. Put on a bathrobe or something and get downstairs with me. We don't have time to dawdle."

Later, she would discover that putting on a bathrobe when you were already wearing pajamas was dawdling, too. But that would be later. In the wee small hours of June 22, 1941, she was doing as well as she could.

Someone pounded on the door. "Get out! Get downstairs!" a hoarse male voice yelled.

"We're coming!" Flora shouted back. Joshua flew into a terry-cloth robe. Flora grabbed a key and locked the door behind her when she and her son left the apartment. Those niceties would also go by the board later on.

Down the stairs they scurried, along with the other members of Congress and bureaucrats and businessmen and their families who rented here. For the moment, everybody was equal: equal in fear and equal in fury. In the darkness of the stairwell, people said exactly what they thought of Jake Featherston, the Freedom Party, and theConfederateStates ofAmerica . Flora heard some things she'd never heard before. No one cared if women were within earshot. Some of the most inflammatory things came from the mouths of women, as a matter of fact.

The basement was dark, too, dark and crowded and hot and stuffy. Someone lit a match to start a cigarette. The brief flare of light might have been a bomb itself. Flora wished she hadn't thought of that comparison. If a bomb did hit this building . . .

"Sh'ma yisroayl, adonai elohaynu, adonai ekhod," she murmured, just in case.

More bombs burst, some of them very close. The basement shook, as if at an earthquake. Plaster pattered down from the ceiling. A woman screamed. A man groaned. Beside Flora, Joshua whispered,

"Wow!"

She wanted to hit him and kiss him at the same time. He was reacting to the spectacle, to what people were doing all around him. Fear? He knew nothing of fear because at his age he didn't really believe anything could happen to him. Flora was heading into her mid-fifties. She knew perfectly well that disaster could knock on the door.

A rending crash came from outside, different from the sharp, staccato roars of the exploding bombs.

"We got one of the fuckers, anyway," a man said in tones of ferocious satisfaction.

A bomber. That was what that had to be. A Confederate bomber had smashed to earth somewhere not far away. How many young men had been aboard it? How many had managed to get clear and parachute away before it went into its last fatal dive? And how many Philadelphians had they killed before they were shot down? If you were going to ask the other questions, you had to ask that one, too.

The raid lasted a little more than an hour. Little by little, bombs came at longer intervals. The drone of engines overhead faded. The antiaircraft guns kept ravening away for several minutes after the bombers were gone. Some of them went on shooting even after the continuous all-clear note replaced the warbling rise and fall of the air-raid alarm.

"Well, that was fun," somebody behind Flora said. Along with half a dozen other people, she laughed--probably louder than the joke deserved. But it cut the tension, and there had been enough tension in the air to need a lot of cutting.

"What do we do now, Mom?" Joshua asked.

"We go back up to the flat and see what happened to it," Flora answered. "Then I have to go in to Congress. Featherston may not have bothered with a declaration of war, but President Smith will, and they'll need me to vote for it."

Back in 1914, as a Socialist agitator inNew York City , she'd urged her party not to vote for the credits that financed the opening act of the Great War. She remained a Socialist. These days, though, the country had a Socialist President (which would have seemed unimaginable in 1914) and had been wantonly attacked by the Confederate States

(which wouldn't have seemed surprising at all).

As they left the basement, morning twilight was brightening toward dawn. "That's why the Confederate bombers went home," Joshua said as they climbed stairs. "They didn't want to hang around when our gunners and fighter pilots could get a good look at them."

"I didn't know I had a son on the General Staff," Flora said. Joshua snorted but looked immensely proud of himself.

When they went back into the apartment, they found glass everywhere: on the floors, on the beds, some glittering shards driven deep into the plaster of the far wall. The windows were gone, every single one of them. Flora eyed the shards with a fresh horror. What would those flying fragments of glass have done to people whose soft flesh happened to get in the way? Butchered them. That was the only word Flora could think of.

Joshua was staring out at the city. His head slowly swung from left to right, taking it all in like a panning newsreel camera. Flora joined him. There were bomb craters half a block down the street. A little farther away, a black, greasy pillar of smoke rose into the sky. Was that the bomber's pyre? She thought so.

More columns of smoke rose all overPhiladelphia . Most of them came from the center of town, where government buildings had gone up ever since the 1880s. Most, but not all. The Confederates had dropped bombs all over the city. Bad aim? Deliberate terror? Who could guess?

Fire engine sirens screeched as the sun came up over the horizon. When Flora tried to turn on the bathroom lamp, she discovered the power had gone out. "Don't leave the icebox open very long--it lets the cold out," she called to Joshua as she dressed. They had an electric refrigerator, but she was used to the older word. "I'm going to Congress." She hurried out the door and down the stairs.

Two Representatives and a Senator were already at the curb trying to flag a taxi. Flora got one by walking out in the street in front of it. The driver didn't--quite--run over her. All the elected officials piled in. "To Congress!" they bawled.

The neoclassical mountain of a building where the Senate and House met had escaped damage, though firemen were fighting flames in the office building across the street and dragging bodies out of it. "Joint session!" Flora didn't even know where she first heard it, but it was everywhere as soon as she got into the rotunda. "President Smith will

address a joint session."

A joint session meant shoehorning the Senate into the far larger House chamber along with the Representatives. Today, there were still some empty seats after that: members of Congress who couldn't get to the session or who were injured or dead. A joint session also meant the risk of a lucky bomb taking out the whole legislative branch and the President. Flora wished she hadn't thought of that.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the President of theUnited States !" the Speaker of the House boomed out. The wave of applause that greeted Al Smith was fierce and savage.

Smith himself looked like hell. People had called him the Happy Warrior, but he seemed anything but happy as he mounted the podium. He had aged years in the months since his acceptance of a U.S.-C.S.

plebiscite inKentucky andHouston (now westTexas again) and Sequoyah proved such a spectacularly bad idea. His hands shook as he gathered the pages of his speech.

But his voice--even more strongly New York–flavored than Flora's--rang out strong and true. A thicket of microphones picked it up and carried it across theUSA by wireless: "I have to tell you now that this country is at war with the Confederate States ofAmerica . At the close of my address, I shall ask the Congress to make the official declaration, a formality the Confederate States have forgotten." Another furious round of applause said he would get what he asked for.

He went on, "You can imagine what a bitter blow it is for me that all my long struggle to win peace has failed. Yet I cannot believe that there is anything more or anything different that I could have done and that would have been more successful. Up to the very last it would have been quite possible to have arranged a peaceful and honorable settlement between the CSA and theUSA , but Featherston would not have it. He had evidently made up his mind to attack us whatever happened, and although he may claim he put forward reasonable proposals which we rejected, that is not a true statement.

"His action shows convincingly that there is no chance of expecting that this man will ever give up his practice of using force to gain his will. He can only be stopped by force. We have a clear conscience.

We have done all that any country could do to establish peace. But now that it has come to war, I know every American will play his part with calmness and courage.

"Now may God bless you all. He will defend our cause. It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against--brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression, and persecution--and against them I am certain that the right shall prevail."

Flora applauded till her palms hurt. It was a good speech. The only way it could have been better was if Al Smith hadn't had to give it at all.

When the air-raid sirens screeched in the middle of the night, Armstrong Grimes thought it was a drill.

He figured some sadistic officer had found a new way to rob him of sleep, as if basic training didn't take enough anyhow. But listening to a sergeant screaming, "Get moving, assholes! This is the real thing!" sent him bouncing out of his cot in a hurry.

He could normally dress in three minutes. He had his green-gray uniform on in under two. "Do we line up for roll call?" somebody yelled.

"Jesus Christ, no!" the sergeant hollered back. "Get your asses into the shelter trenches! If you bastards live, we'll count you later."

They'd dug the shelter trenches near theFortCuster barracks outsideColumbus,Ohio , the week before.

Wasted work, Armstrong had thought. And it had been then, in the dim dark disappearing days of peace. Now war was coming, riding closer every second on the screams of the sirens. War was coming, and what had been waste might save his life. A lesson lurked there somewhere, if only he could find it.

No time now, no time, no time. Along with the other raw recruits, he dove for the trenches. A mosquito whined through the din, the song of its wings somehow penetrating the greater madness all around. If it pierced him, he would itch. If fragments of steel from the greater madness pierced him, he would scream till he could no longer hear the sirens, till he choked on the song of death.

Antiaircraft guns pounding, pounding. Lights in the sky: bursting

shells. And the buzz of engines overhead. Armstrong had never known anything like it before. He hoped he never did again. When the U.S. Army conscripted him, he'd looked forward to war. What point to putting on the uniform if you weren't going to see action? Well, here it was, and it wasn't what he'd thought it would be.

He'd pictured himself shooting at Confederate soldiers in butternut uniforms while they shot back at him.

He'd pictured them missing, of course, while his bullets knocked them over one after another as if they were part of a funhouse shooting gallery. He'd pictured the enemy soldiers who managed to survive throwing up their hands and surrendering in droves. He'd pictured generals pinning medals on him, and pretty girls giving him a hero's reward.

What he hadn't pictured was lying in a muddy trench--it had rained two days before--while the Confederates dropped bombs on his head and while he didn't even have aSpringfield in his hand so he could shoot back. Whether he'd pictured it or not, that was his introduction to war.

Somebody not far down the trench started screaming as soon as he heard the bombs falling. Armstrong had thought he would laugh about something like that. It seemed funny and cowardly, both at the same time. He wasn't laughing, not for real. It was all he could do not to scream himself.

And then the bombs weren't falling any more. They were bursting. The noise was like the end of the world. He'd got used to the bang of Springfields on the firing range. These, by contrast, were hammer blows against the ears. They picked him up and slammed him down. They tried to reach down his throat and tear his lungs out through his nose. The ground twisted and quivered and shook under him, as if in torment. By then, plenty of people were screaming. After a little while, he realized he was one of them.

Fragments of bomb casing hissed and whistled past overhead. Armstrong wondered again what would happen if they ran into flesh, then wished he hadn't. Mud and dirt thrown up by bomb bursts rained down into the trench. I could be buried alive, he thought. The notion didn't make him much more frightened than he was already.

A chunk of metal thumped into the soft ground about six inches from Armstrong's head. He reached out and touched it, then jerked his hand

away--it was hot as hell. Maybe it was a chunk of casing, or maybe a shell fragment from a round out of an antiaircraft gun. If it had come down on his head instead of near it, he would have had himself a short and ignominious war.

A bomb hit the barracks he'd come out of a few minutes before. That rending crash was different from the ones he'd heard when bombs hit bare ground. "McCloskey!" Armstrong sang out, doing his best to imitate a pissed-off sergeant. "Pick up your fucking socks!"

Four or five scared recruits stopped screaming and laughed. Somewhere up the trench, Eddie McCloskey gave his detailed opinion about what Armstrong could do with and to his socks.

Then a bomb burst in the trench, less than a hundred feet away. The earthwork zigzagged, so the blast didn't travel far. What the bomb did do was bad enough anyway. Something thumped Armstrong in the shoulder. He automatically reached out to see what it was, and found himself holding a little less than half of somebody's hand.

Blood splashed and streaked his palm. With a cry of disgust, he threw away the ruined part of a man.

But shrieks from close by where the bomb had hit sent him moving in that direction. (Only silence came from the very place where the bomb had landed. Nothing right there lived to shriek.) He stumbled over a man's head. It moved when his foot hit it--moved like a kicked football, moved in a way that proved it was no longer attached to a body. He gasped out a couple of horrified curses. He'd made a joke about Eddie McCloskey's socks when he didn't know how bad things could be. Now he was finding out, and whatever jokes might have lived within him withered.

It was still nighttime. He couldn't see very well. But he knew the bloody smell of a butcher's shop. He knew it, and he'd never expected to find it here, especially not mingled with the darker outhouse reeks of offal.

Along with the young men who were dead were several who wished they were. They shouted loudly for someone to kill them. Armstrong would have done it, too, if only to make them shut up, had he had any kind of weapon. Since he didn't, he had to try to keep them alive instead.

That was hardly easier than putting them out of their misery. He had

no bandages, no medicines, no nothing. He found one fellow clutching a gaping wound in his calf. He tore the laces out of the injured soldier's shoes and used them for a tourniquet. He never knew for sure if that did any good, for he went on to someone else right away, but he dared hope.

Somebody let out a whoop of savage glee, shouting, "We got one of the sons of bitches, anyhow!" And so they had. A C.S. bomber overhead trailed fire from one engine. The flames slid up the wing toward the fuselage.

"I hope all the cocksuckers in there roast," Armstrong snarled.

Several other men nodded or wished something even worse on the Confederate fliers. "Shitheads didn't even declare war on us," someone said.

"Well, what do you think?" another soldier asked. "You think we're at war with them now--or shall we invite 'em in for tea?"

Armstrong kept hoping this was a nightmare from which he'd wake up. The hope kept getting dashed, again and again and again. The bombers didn't linger overhead very long--they must have had other targets besidesFortCuster . It only seemed like forever, or ten minutes longer. As the bombs started falling somewhere else, Armstrong came out of the trench and looked around.

Nothing was left of the barracks except burning rubble. Several other buildings were also on fire. So were autos and trucks. Bomb craters made the paths and lawns resemble what people with high foreheads said the surface of the moon was like. Armstrong didn't know much about that. He did know it was the biggest, most godawful mess he'd ever seen in his life. His mother and his granny had gone on and on about whatWashington,D.C. --his home town--was like during the Great War. He hadn't taken them too seriously. He didn't remember such things, after all. But now, with a convert's sudden zeal, he believed.

"Who the hell is that?" One of the other men pointed at somebody walking in out of the predawn darkness.

The newcomer wore coveralls of an unfamiliar cut. Even by the light of blazing buildings and vehicles, Armstrong could see the coveralls were the wrong color, too. The stranger had a pistol on his hip, but he didn't try to use it. Instead, he raised his hands above his head. "Reckon y'all got me," he drawled, sounding cheerful enough. "Isn't

much point for a flyin' man to go on with the fight once his airplane goes down, now is there?"

Just hearing that Southern accent made Armstrong wish he had a gun handy. The bastard thought he could murderU.S. soldiers and then bail out of the war as easily as he'd bailed out of the bomber?

Growling like an angry dog, Armstrong took a couple of steps toward him.

A rock sailed out of the darkness and caught the Confederate airman above the ear. In the firelight, he looked absurdly surprised. As he started to crumple, he tried to get the pistol out of the holster. He couldn't. His hands didn't seem to remember what they were supposed to do.

And it probably wouldn't have made any difference anyway. Armstrong and eight or ten others rushed him. He wouldn't have been able to hold on to the gun for more than a heartbeat. He might have shot one of theU.S. soldiers, or two, but after that. . . . After that, he would have been a dead man. Which he was anyway.

By the time the soldiers finished pounding and kicking and stomping, he didn't look anything like a man any more. He resembled nothing so much as a large broken doll lying there on the grass, all of its limbs bent in directions impossible in nature. His neck had an unnatural twist in it, too.

A corporal came up right after the recruits realized the flier had no more sport left in him. "Jesus Christ, you bastards, what the hell did you go and do?"

"Gave this asshole what he deserved," Armstrong answered. Morning twilight was beginning to paint the eastern sky with gray.

"Well, yeah." The noncom stared at the crumpled corpse. "But do you know how much of a stink there'll be if the Confederates find out what the hell you did? They're liable to start doing the same thing to our guys, too."

Armstrong hadn't thought of that. It was the only reason he could imagine for regretting what he'd just helped do. He would have rid the world of ten or a hundred Confederates as cheerfully, if only he'd got his hands on them.

One of the other men who'd mobbed the flier said, "Hell with it,

Corporal. We'll throw the motherfucker in the trench where the bomb hit, toss his clothes on the fire, and bury the pistol somewhere. After that, who's gonna know?"

After a little thought, the soldier with two stripes on his sleeve nodded. "All right. That's about the best we can do now, I guess. Get the identity disk off from around his neck, too, and bury it with the piece.

That way, people will think he was one of ours when they deal with the bodies." He came closer and took a long look at the dead Confederate. "Fuck! Nobody'll recognize him, that's for sure."

"It's a war, Corporal," Armstrong said. "You wanted us to give him a big kiss when he came in here with that shit-eating grin on his face? We kissed him, all right. We kissed him good-bye." The noncom waved for him and the others to take care of the body. They did. The corporal didn't do any of the work himself. That was what having those stripes on his sleeve meant.

Brigadier General Clarence Potter had spent three years up near the front in the Great War. He hadn't had to do a lot of actual fighting; he'd been in Intelligence with the Army of Northern Virginia. He was in Intelligence still--or rather, after close to twenty years out of the Confederate Army, in Intelligence again--but wished he could get up to the front once more instead of being stuck in Richmond.

A tall, well-made man in his mid-fifties, Potter had close-cropped hair now closer to white than to its original dark brown. His cold gray eyes surveyed the world from behind steel-rimmed spectacles. The spectacles, these days, were bifocals. That had annoyed him when he first got them. By now, he was used to them and took them for granted.

A telephone on his desk rang. "Potter speaking," he said briskly. His accent was clipped and Yankeelike. He'd gone to college at Yale, and the way of speaking up there had stuck. That made some of his fellow Confederates look at him suspiciously. It also made him and those like him valuable in intelligence work. The CSA andUSA spoke the same language, with minor differences in accent and vocabulary. A man from the Confederate States who could sound as if he came from theUnited States made a valuable spy.

A man from the United States who could sound as if he came from the

Confederate States . . . was somebody else's worry to hunt down, though Potter had been the one who first realized such a man might pose problems.

"Good morning, General. Saul Goldman," said the voice on the other end of the line.

Potter came alert at once. "What can I do for you, Mr. Goldman?" he asked. The little Jew held an innocuous-sounding title: Director of Communications. But he was a force to be reckoned with in the Featherston administration. He shaped the news that went out over the wireless, in newspapers, and in cinema newsreels. His wireless station here inRichmond had helped Jake Featherston rise, and Featherston, who never forgot an enemy, also never forgot a friend.

The only problem being, he hasn't got many friends. Considering what a charming fellow he is, it's no surprise, either, Potter thought. He didn't count himself among that small group. Five years earlier, he'd come toRichmond with a pistol in his pocket, intending to rid the CSA of Jake Featherston once for all.

Instead, he'd ended up shooting a black frankfurter seller who had the same idea but who sprayed bullets around so wildly, he endangered everybody near him--including Potter.

Memory blew away like a dandelion puff on the breeze as Goldman answered, "I would like to know how I can give your outfit the attention it deserves. I want the people to understand we're doing everything we can to find out what the Yankees are up to and to stop it."

"You want to give us the attention we deserve, eh?" Potter said. "Well, I can tell you how to do that in one word."

"Tell me, then, General," Goldman said.

"Don't."

"But--" Saul Goldman wasn't a man who usually spluttered, but he did now. "We need to show the people--"

"Don't," Potter repeated, this time cutting him off. "D-O-N-apostrophe-T, don't. Anything you tell us, you tell the damnyankees, too. Now you may want Joe Dogberry from Plains,Georgia , to be sure we're a bunch of clever fellows. That's fine, when it's peacetime. When it's war, though, I want theUnited States to be sure we're a pack of goddamn

idiots."

"This is not the proper attitude," Goldman said stiffly.

"Maybe not from the propaganda point of view. From the military point of view, it sure as hell is." Potter didn't like defying the director of communications. But, Intelligence to his bones, he liked the idea of giving away secrets even less.

Unlike the swaggering braggarts who made up such a large part of the Freedom Party, Saul Goldman was always soft-spoken and courteous. When he said, "I guess I'll have to take it up with the President, then," a less alert man might not have recognized that as a threat.

"You do what you think you have to do, Mr. Goldman," Potter said. "If President Featherston gives me an order . . ." He decided not to say exactly what he'd do then. Better to keep his choices open.

"You'll hear from me--or from him. Good-bye." Saul Goldman hung up.

Potter went back to work. Since the war started, his biggest worry was how to hear from his agents in theUnited States . Postal service between the two countries had shut down. So had the telegraph lines.

Where there's a will, there's a lawyer, Potter thought cynically. He'd managed so far.North America was a big place. Slipping over the border one way or another wasn't that hard, especially west of theMississippi . Advertisements on wireless stations and in local newspapers along the border that sounded innocent weren't always. If they were phrased one way, they could mean this. If they were phrased another, they could mean that.

Some of his people had wireless transmitters, too. That was risky in any number of ways, but sometimes the rewards outweighed the risks. Potter knew he was going to be busy as a one-armed man with poison ivy all through the war. The front? He'd be lucky if he saw the sun once a week.

The telephone rang again. He picked it up. "Clarence Potter."

"Hello, Potter, you stubborn son of a bitch." That harsh rasp was infinitely familiar all the way across the Confederate States, fromNorfolk to Guaymas.

"Hello, Mr. President. Saul Goldman talked to you, did he?"

"He sure as hell did," Jake Featherston answered. "I want you to cooperate with him just as far as you can. Have you got that?"

"Yes, sir. I do. Who decides how far I can cooperate?"

"You do and he does, together."

"In that case, sir, you'd better take me out of this job, give me a rifle, and send me toOhio orIndiana ,"

Potter said. "I wouldn't mind going. I was thinking about that a little while ago. By the nature of things, Saul and I aren't going to see eye to eye about this."

"What do you mean?" As always when somebody bucked him, suspicion clotted Featherston's voice.

"Goldman's a publicist. He's got a story he wants to tell, and he wants to shout it from the housetops,"

Potter replied. "Me, I'm a spy. That's why you put the uniform back on me."

"That's not why, and we both know it," Jake said. "I put the uniform back on you because shooting you five years ago would've raised a stink."

"I believe it," Clarence Potter said cheerfully. "If you give me a rifle, though, you've got a pretty good chance the damnyankees'll do it for you."

"Don't tempt me." The President of the Confederate States laughed. It was not a pleasant sort of laugh.

"God damn you, why won't you ever be reasonable?"

"Mr. President, I am being reasonable--from my own point of view, anyway," Potter said. "I told you: I'm a spy. The best thing that can happen to me is that the bastards on the other side don't even remember I'm here. And Saul wants to shine a searchlight on me. No, thanks."

"Then you jew him down to shining a flashlight on you," Featherston said. "Whatever you don't want to show, you don't show, that's all."

"I don't want to show anything." Potter did his best to keep his temper.

It wasn't easy, not when everyone around him seemed willfully blind. "Don't you understand, sir? For every one thing I show, the damnyankees are going to be sure I'm hiding half a dozen more. And the bastards will be right, too."

"But even if you don't show anything, the Yankees will know you're hiding something," Jake Featherston returned. "You reckon they don't know we've got spies? They're bastards, but they aren't stupid bastards--you know what I'm saying? They might not have your telephone number, but they know where you work. Now you tell me, Potter--is that the truth or ain't it?"

"Well . . . maybe," Potter said reluctantly.

"All right, then. In that case, quit your bellyaching," Jake said. "Let Saul take his photos and write his story. If you want to say this is your supersecret brand-new spy headquarters inWilliamsburg or something, you can go ahead and do that. I don't mind one goddamn bit. Maybe it'll make theUSA drop some bombs on that ratty old place. Nobody'd mind if they blew it to hell and gone, and they wouldn't hurt anything we want to hold on to. How does that sound?"

Potter thought it over. He didn't like Jake Featherston, and knew he never would. He'd had to develop considerable respect for Featherston's driving will, but he'd never thought the President was what anybody would call smart. Smart or not, though, no denying Jake could be shrewd.

"All right, sir. New supersecret spy headquarters inWilliamsburg it is," he said. "But Goldman will have to be careful taking pictures with windows in them. Now that some of the people I boss actually work above the ground here, people who take a good look at what's in the windows will be able to see it'sRichmond ."

"You talk to Saul about that kind of crap," Featherston said. "He'll take care of it. You know your business. You'd best believe he knows his." He hung up.

So did Potter, slowly and thoughtfully. Featherston had just got him to do what he was told. If I'd pushed it, I could have gone to the front, the intelligence officer realized ruefully. But you didn't push things against Jake Featherston, not when he was pushing on you. Potter knew himself to be no weakling.

Featherston had imposed his will even so.

A young lieutenant came in and dropped eight or ten envelopes on Potter's desk. "These just came in, sir," he said. "Not likely we'll be getting any more like 'em."

"No, not likely," Potter agreed. The envelopes were from his agents in the USA, and they'd gone to mail drops in the CSA--mail sent directly to the War Department in Richmond might have made U.S. postal clerks just a trifle curious. All of them were postmarked in the last few days before the war broke out.

Potter opened one fromColumbus,Ohio . "Well, let's see what we've got."

The agent inColumbus played the role of a businessman. He played it so well, he was getting rich up there in theUnited States . He'd acquired a Packard and a mistress. While Potter knew about the latter, he didn't think the man's wife inJacksonville did.

Codes were crude. The agent wrote that his competition was alert, that the other fellows were sending salesmen down into towns close by theOhio River , and that they'd ordered more heavy machinery.

Potter didn't have to be a genius to figure out that salesmen were soldiers and heavy machinery meant barrels. Neither would any other reasonably suspicious fellow who happened to read the letter.

But if you weren't suspicious, it looked like an ordinary business letter. So did the others. They all told about the same story: the damnyankees knew something was coming, and they were getting ready to try to stop it.

Clarence Potter muttered to himself. Had he been running things, he wouldn't have been so belligerent ahead of time. That way, the attack might have been a strategic as well as a tactical surprise. But he didn't run things. For better and for worse, this was and would be Jake Featherston's show.

Jefferson Pinkard slept badly. In part, that was because the weather atCampDependable --not far outsideAlexandria ,Louisiana --was even hotter and muggier than it was inBirmingham , where he'd lived most of his life. And in part . . . He mostly didn't remember his dreams, even when they woke him up with his heart pounding and his eyes wide and staring. Considering the kind of dreams a camp commandant was likely to have, that made him more lucky than not.

CampDependablewasn't desperately crowded any more. The camp had a limited capacity. The number of black prisoners who came into it from all over the CSA seemed unlimited. Rebellion had smoldered and now and then burst into flame ever since the Freedom Party came to power--and Jake Featherston and his followers didn't believe in turning the other cheek. When they got hit, they hit back--hard.

When a new shipment of captured rebels came into the camp, guards led a matching number of prisoners out to the nearby woods and swamps. The guards always came back. The prisoners they escorted didn't.

The first time Jeff had to order something like that, he'd been appalled. He'd had to do it several times now, and it did grow easier. You could get used to damn near anything. He'd seen that in westTexas during the war, and again in the civil war down inMexico . But, even though he didn't break out in palpitations whenever he had to do it again, it told on him when he went to bed at night.

It told on the guards, too, or on some of them, anyhow. The ones who went out on those disposal jobs often drank like fishes. Pinkard couldn't clamp down on them as hard as he would have liked. He knew what they were doing out there. They needed some way to blow off steam. One of them, the very first time, had stuck his pistol in his mouth and blown off the top of his head instead.

Others, though, didn't seem bothered at all. They came back to camp laughing and joking. Some took it as all in a day's work. And some took it as the best sport this side of coon hunting. When Jeff said as much after the latest operation, one of those fellows grinned at him and said, "Hell, it is coon hunting, ain't it?"

"Funny, Edwards. Funny like a goddamn crutch," Pinkard had answered. But a lot of the returning guards thought it was the funniest thing they'd heard in all their born days. Pinkard said, "All right, you bastards. Go ahead and laugh. But you better not be laughing and screwing around when you're watching the niggers. You'll be sorry if you are, by Jesus."

That got their attention. By God, it had better, Jeff thought.CampDependable didn't hold political prisoners any more (well, except for Willy Knight, and the ex–Vice President was a special case if ever there was one). These days, the prisoners were Negroes who'd fought against the Confederate States. If they saw a chance, they would rise up against the guards in a heartbeat.

Pinkard's gaze went to the machine-gun towers rising above the barbed-wire perimeter of the camp. If the spooks in here did try to get cute, they'd pay for it. Of course, they were going to pay for it anyway, so what did they have to lose? Guarding desperate men had its disadvantages.

Some of the guards in the towers were men who had the toughest time going out on population-reduction maneuvers. (Jeff wanted to think about what he did with the Negroes who left the camp and didn't come back in terms like those. That way, he didn't have to dwell on the details of what went on out there in the woods and swamps. He had his weaknesses, too.) Even so, he didn't worry about them where they were. If it came down to their necks or those of the prisoners, he knew they'd save themselves.

"Keep your eyes open," he urged for what had to be the millionth time. "Keep your ears open, too.

Don't let those sneaky black bastards tell you what they want you to hear." He looked around. "Any questions?"

The guards shook their heads. Pinkard, who was an ordinary Joe himself, knew a lot of them weren't any too bright. It didn't matter, as long as they were tough and as long as they followed orders. They were more than tough enough. And they obeyed pretty well. If nothing else, the fear of disaster kept them in line.

He nodded. "All right, then. Dismissed."

Off they went. Mercer Scott, the guard chief, stayed behind to talk privately to Pinkard. Scott was plenty sharp, or sly anyway, and about as tough as they came. His jowly face looked as if it were made out of boot leather. Pausing to shift his chaw from one cheek to the other, he said, "Boss, we got to do a better job of what we're doin'."

"Yeah?" Jeff said noncommittally. He worried that Scott was after his job. He also worried that the guard chief told tales on him back toRichmond . Jake Featherston (or Attorney General Ferd Koenig, which amounted to the same thing) kept an eye on everybody. Pinkard had been in the Freedom Party since the first time he heard Featherston speak, and he'd stayed in it through good times and bad. You'd think they'd cut me a little slack. But that wasn't how things worked, and he knew it.

Mercer Scott nodded now. "Yeah, I reckon so. Taking a batch of niggers out and shooting 'em . . . That wears on the men when they

got to do it over and over, you know what I mean?"

"Well, we wouldn't have to do it if Richmond didn't keep sending us more smokes than we got any chance of holding, let alone feeding," Jeff said. "If you've got any clout back there, make 'em stop."

There. Now he'd told Scott at least some of what he suspected. But the guard chief shook his bullet head. "Not me. Not the way you mean. I don't believe I've got as much as you."

Was he sandbagging? Pinkard wouldn't have been surprised. He said, "Well, what the hell are we supposed to do? We've got to get rid of the extra niggers, on account of the camp sure as shit won't hold as many as they send us. Got to keep the goddamn population down." No, he didn't like talking--or thinking--about shooting people. That Mercer Scott didn't seem to mind only made him ruder and cruder than ever in Pinkard's eye.

Now he said, "Yeah, boss, we got to get rid of 'em, but shooting 'em ain't the answer. That's what I'm trying to tell you."

Pinkard began to lose patience. "You're telling me you don't like it, so--"

"It ain't just me," Scott broke in. "It's the men, too. This here business is hard on 'em, way we're doing it now. Some can take it, yeah, but some can't. I got me a ton of transfer requests I'm sitting on. And folks around this place know what we're doing, too--whites and niggers. You hear all those guns goin'off every so often, nobody needs to draw you a picture after that."

"Fine," Jeff said. "Fuckin' wonderful. I told you, Mercer, I know what you've got your ass in an uproar about. You tell me what sort of notion you've got for fixing it, then I'll know whether we can try it or we need to keep on doin' what we're doin' undisirregardless of whether anybody likes it. So piss or get off the pot, is what I'm telling you."

That got him a sullen look from the guard chief. "It's your camp, dammit. You're the one who's supposed to keep it running smooth."

"You mean you don't know what to do," Jeff said scornfully. "Get the hell out of here."

"Oh, I'll go." But Scott turned back over his shoulder to add, "I'm telling you, boss, there's got to be a better way."

"Maybe there does," Pinkard said. "You figure out what it is, you let me know. Till then, you got to shut up and do your job just like the rest of us."

Black prisoners--Willy Knight a white crow among them--lined up to get their noon rations. Those rations, even now, were none too large. They'd never caught up with the capacity ofCampDependable .

If Pinkard hadn't carried out periodic population reductions, he wouldn't have been able to feed the population he had. That would have reduced it, too, but not neatly or efficiently.

The blacks sent Pinkard looks in which hate mingled with fear. They knew what he was doing to them.

They couldn't help knowing. But they were warier about showing their hatred than they had been.

Anything that put them on the wrong side of any guard was liable to get them included in one of the reductions. If that happened, they'd die quickly instead of slowly.

Pinkard went into the dining area and watched them gulp down their soup--cooked up from whatever might be edible that the camp got its hands on--and grits. The food disappeared amazingly fast. Even so, there was never enough. Day after day, prisoners got scrawnier. Less and less flesh held their skin away from their bones.

One of them nodded to Pinkard. "You give me a gun, suh," he said. "You give me a gun and I shoots me plenty o' damnyankees. Give me a gun and give me a uniform and give me some food. I be the best goddamn sojer anybody ever see."

Maybe he would. He'd fought against the Confederate States. Why not for them? Sometimes a fellow who'd learned what to do with a rifle in his hands didn't care in which direction he pointed it. Jeff had been that way himself when he went down toMexico . The only reason he'd fought for Maximilian and not the republican rebels was that his buddies were on the Emperor's side. He'd cared nothing for the cause as a cause.

Of course, this Negro was hungry to the point where his ribs would do duty for a xylophone. If his number came up in a population reduction, hunger would be the least and last of his worries, too. He'd probably say and do anything to keep breathing and to put real rations in his belly. He was at least as likely to desert the first chance

he saw, or to start aiming his rifle at Confederates again.

Any which way, that wasn't Jeff's call. He said, "You're eating at the table you set when you did whatever the hell you did to land yourself in here. You don't like it now, you shouldn't've done whatever the hell it was."

He waited to see if the colored man had some kind of smartmouth comeback ready. Some of these bastards never learned. But this fellow just poured down the soup and spooned up his grits and kept his mouth shut otherwise. That was smart. Of course, if he were really smart, he wouldn't have been here.

Some of the Negroes in here insisted they were guilty of nothing but being black. They could insist as much as they wanted. It wasn't going to change a goddamn thing. And if Jake Featherston wanted to run every Negro man, woman, and child throughCampDependable . . . Pinkard laughed. If he wanted to do that, he'd have to build himself a hell of a lot bigger camp.

Jeff didn't see that happening. If anything, the start of the war would probably starve Dependable and the other camps in the CSA of guards and resources. Fighting theUSA was a hell of a big job. Everything else, he figured, would have to wait on a siding while that train rolled by.

Which also meant he didn't have to flabble like a turtle jumping off a rock to figure out better ways to deal with population reductions. No matter what Mercer Scott thought, they wouldn't be too urgent. If some of the guards couldn't stand the strain, he'd get others. There'd be wounded veterans not fit for tougher duty who could take care of this just fine.

There's a relief, Pinkard thought. All the same, finding other ways to go about it kept gnawing at him, like the very beginnings of a toothache.

The wind came out of the west, off theCarolina coast. That made Lieutenant, j.g., Sam Carsten happy. It meant the USS Remembrance could steam toward the coast when she launched her bombers and torpedo aircraft atCharleston harbor. Had the wind blown in the other direction, she would have had to head straight away from land to send her aircraft towards it.

Not that Sam expected to watch much of the fight either way. His battle station was down in the bowels of the carrier. He was assistant damage-control officer, under Lieutenant Commander Hiram Pottinger.

He would rather have had more to do with aviation, but the Navy wanted what it wanted, not what he wanted.

And, in late June off theCarolina coast, being where he was had its advantages. With fair, fair skin, pale blond hair, and blue eyes, he was this far from being an albino. Even the mild sun of northern latitudes was a torment to him. Down in Confederate waters, the sun came closer to torture than torment. He painted himself in zinc-oxide ointment till he was blotchy as a leper, and burned anyhow.

One more airplane roared off the deck. Silence came down. "Now we wait," Pottinger said. He was twenty years younger than Sam, but he'd graduated fromAnnapolis and was on his way through a normal officer's career. Carsten had started as an ordinary seaman. He was a mustang, up through the hawse hole. He'd spent a long time as an ensign, and even longer as a j.g. If he ever made lieutenant, he'd be proud. If he made lieutenant commander, he'd be ecstatic.

Of course, there was a war on. All the naval yards on both coasts would start cranking out ships as fast as they could. They'd need bodies to put into them. And some ships would go to the bottom, too, or suffer battle damage and casualties. They'd need replacements. Sam wasn't thrilled at the idea of getting a promotion on account of something like that, but he knew those things happened. He'd seen it in the last war.

An hour and a half later, the intercom buzzed and squawked. Sam's head swung towards it. One of the sailors in the damage-control party said, "Oh, God, what the hell's gone wrong now?" Carsten had the same thought. The intercom seldom brought good news.

"Men, this is the captain speaking," came from the squawkbox. Whatever the news was, then, it wasn't small. Captain Stein didn't waste his time on small stuff. He left that to Commodore Cressy, the exec.

After a tiny pause, the skipper went on, "The government ofGreat Britain has announced that a state of war exists between their country and theUnited States ."

"Aw, shit," somebody said, softly and almost reverently. Again, Sam

was inclined to agree. The Royal Navy could play football on anybody's gridiron. It had written the book from which other navies around the world cribbed--and it had been building hard these past few years.

"Prime Minister Churchill said,, ‘We have not journeyed all this way across the centuries, across the oceans, across the mountains, because we are made of sugar candy. We know the United States are strong. But the destiny of mankind is not decided by material computation. Death and sorrow will be the companions of our journey; hardship our garment; constancy and valor our only shield. We must be united, we must be undaunted, we must be inflexible. Victory at all costs." " Captain Stein paused again, then continued, "Well, he gives a nice speech, doesn't he? But we'll whip him and the limeys anyhow."

"Yeah," several sailors said together. The skipper had gauged their feelings well. No matter how good a speech Churchill gave, Sam wondered how smart he was. He could have stayed out of the American war and concentrated on helpingFrance andRussia whipGermany and her European allies. He might have had a pretty good chance of bringing that off, too, and theUSA would never have declared war on him.

But Churchill was rolling the dice. He'd always been a man for whomBritain without her empire was like eggs without ham. BeatingGermany alone wouldn't get back what she'd lost at the end of the Great War.

BeatingGermany and theUnited States might.

"Where we are now, we don't have to worry about the Royal Navy right away," Lieutenant Commander Pottinger said. "We have plenty of other things to worry about instead."

The sailors laughed. Sam did, too, not that it was all that funny. Land-based bombers had damaged his battleship off the South American coast during the last war. The state of the art had improved a lot since then. By attackingCharleston harbor, the Remembrance was sticking her head in the lion's mouth.

To keep from thinking about that, he thought about something else: "If the one that started in 1914 was the Great War, what are we going to call this one? The Greater War?" He got a laugh. He almost always could. He had a knack for that, whenever he felt like using it.

Hiram Pottinger said, "Let's hope we call it the, ‘This Was Easy and We All Went Home in a Hurry War." " He got a bigger laugh. Sam joined it and softly clapped his hands. He liked that kind of name just fine.

A few minutes afterwards, the intercom came to life again. "This is Commander Cressy." As usual, the executive officer sounded cool, calm, and collected. "Our wireless ranging gear shows aircraft not our own approaching the ship from the west. It is a wee bit unlikely that those aircraft will be friendly. I know you'll give them the warm reception they deserve."

"Happy days," Sam said. The lion was trying to bite.

"Better this news than a surprise," Pottinger said, and Sam could only nod. The wireless ranging gear had gone into the Remembrance just the year before. She'd made a special trip to the Boston Navy Yard for the installation. Without it, she would have been blind to the approaching menace, maybe till too late.

Sam wondered whether the Confederates also had wireless ranging gear--Y-range, people were calling it. They'd figured out where the Remembrance was pretty damn quick. Nobody'd said anything about their having it. But then, how much of war was finding out the hard way what the other fellow had that you didn't know about ahead of time? Put that way, it sounded quietly philosophical. Put another way, it meant Sam was likely to get killed because some dimbulb inPhiladelphia was asleep at the switch.

"They're going to throw up a lot of antiaircraft all around us," said one of the sailors in the damage-control party. Maybe he'd had the same nasty thought Sam had, and was trying to reassure himself.

And maybe whoever'd given the order for this raid hadn't stopped to figure out the likely consequences of sending an airplane carrier within range of land-based aircraft. Hardly anybody had had to worry about land-based attacks on ships during the Great War. Sam was a rare exception. If an admiral hadn't had a new thought since 1917, he'd figure everything would go fine. And maybe he'd turn out to be right, and maybe he wouldn't. And the Remembrance was going to find out which.

If the Confederates happened to have a submarine in the neighborhood, too . . . Well, that was another reason destroyers and cruisers ringed the carrier. They were supposed to carry better antisubmersible gear than they'd had in the Great War, better even

than they'd had in the Pacific War against Japan .

Would you be able to hear the ships around the Remembrance shooting at Confederate airplanes if you were way the hell down here? Carsten cocked his head to one side, listening intently. All he could make out were the carrier's usual mechanical noises.

And then, without warning, all hell broke loose. The Remembrance's dual-purpose five-inch guns and all her smaller quick-firing antiaircraft weapons let go at once. Sam could sure as hell hear that. The engines started working harder. The ship heeled to the left, then to the right. Captain Stein was handling her as if she were a destroyer, dodging and twisting on the open sea like a halfback faking his way past lumbering defensive linemen.

Trouble was, airplanes didn't lumber. By comparison, the Remembrance was the one that was slow.

A bomb burst in the water close by the ship. That felt almost like being inside a bell when it was rung.

Two more went off in quick succession, a little farther away. Fragments would cause casualties up on deck. The blasts might spring seams, too. Nobody was screaming for damage control, though, so maybe not.

Then, up near the starboard bow, a bomb burst on the Remembrance.

The ship staggered, as if she'd taken one right on the chin--and she had. Lights flickered, but they stayed on. The reassuring deep throb of the engines went on. So did the antiaircraft fire. Not a mortal wound, then--not right away, anyhow. But it could be.

"Carsten, take a party and deal with that!" Pottinger rapped out.

"Aye aye, sir!" Sam turned to the sailors. "Come on, boys. We've got work to do. Sections one and two, with me."

The ship was buttoned up tight. They had to open and close a slew of watertight doors to get where they were going. Carsten wished there were something to be done about that. It slowed aid. But it also helped keep the ship afloat, which counted for more.

He'd been out on deck under air attack during the Pacific War. It was just as much fun as he remembered. A Confederate airplane went into the sea almost without a splash. Another flew by nearly low enough to

land, spraying machine-gun bullets down the flight deck. Men dove for cover, not that there was much. Screams rose when bullets struck home.

Sam sprinted up the deck toward the bomb hit. He skidded to a stop at the smoking edge of the damage. The explosion had torn off a corner of the flight deck, exposing one of the five-inch gun positions just below. The gun seemed intact. Red smears and spatters said the gunners were anything but.

Sam turned to a petty officer--one of the flight-deck crew--beside him. "Can you still take off and land with the deck like this?"

"Hell, yes, sir," the man answered. "No problem. It was a glancing hit--should have been a miss, I think, but we zigged instead o' zagging." He didn't seem very worried.

"All right." Carsten gave orders to most of the men he commanded to help set things right. Then he said,

"Doheny, Eisenberg, Bengough--follow me. We can still fight that gun, God damn it." He hadn't been in charge of a five-inch for years, but he knew how.

He scrambled down through the wreckage to the gun. He cut his hands a couple of times, but he wouldn't notice till later. A fighter from the carrier's combat air patrol, flame licking back from the engine cowling toward the eagle with crossed swords on the tail, cartwheeled into theAtlantic . Another Confederate airplane shot up the Remembrance.

"Doheny, jerk shells. Bengough, you load and shoot. Eisenberg, handle azimuth! Can you do that?" Sam waited for a nod, then grabbed the elevation screw. "Come on, you bastards! Like the skipper said, we've got company!"

At his orders, the gun started banging away. Black puffs of smoke dotted the sky. A Confederate airplane, hit square in the fuselage, broke in two. Both burning chunks went into the drink. The pilot never had a chance to hit the silk. Carsten and his makeshift crew cheered like maniacs. Even as he yelled, though, he was looking for a new target. How many waves of attackers would the Confederates send at the Remembrance? And how long till her own bombers and torpedo airplanes came home and she could get the hell out of range? It already seemed like forever.

Anne Colleton looked across the warm blue water ofCharleston harbor towardFortSumter . A plaque said General Beauregard had stood right here when the Confederacy opened fire on the island fortress theUnited States and that damned fool Abraham Lincoln refused to surrender. FIRST SHOTS IN THE

BATTLE FOR OUR FREEDOM FROM YANKEE OPPRESSION, the plaque declared.

That little island remained fortified to this day. Big coast-defense guns could reach far out to sea. But they couldn't reach far enough to smash all the threats theUnited States might throw atCharleston .

Antiaircraft guns bristled on the island and around the harbor. If the damnyankees flew airplanes off the deck of a ship at the ships and the shore installations here, they would catch as much hell as the gunners could give them.

A Freedom Party stalwart named Kirby Walker stood at Anne's right hand. "If they try anything, we'll be ready for 'em," he declared. Despite the heat and breathless humidity of early summer inCharleston , he looked cool and well pressed in crisp white shirt and butternut slacks. "We know--darn well they can't lick us."

He couldn't have been more than thirty years old. He would have been a little boy when the Great War ended. She wondered how long it would be till this new one put him in a real uniform instead of the imitation he wore. She also wondered if he had any brains at all. Some stalwarts didn't--they were all balls and fists, and they didn't need to be anything else. She said, "We don't know anything of the sort. If they hadn't licked us the last time, this war would look mighty different."

"Well, but we were stabbed in the back then."Walker sounded as positive as if he'd been there to watch the knife go home. "It'll be a fair fight this time, so of course we'll lick 'em."

He talked just the way Jake Featherston and Saul Goldman would have wanted him to. He talked just the way the President and his director of communications had been training Confederates to talk ever since Featherston took the oath of office. He thought the way they wanted him to think. He was the new Confederate man, and there were an awful lot just like him.

Anne, in fact, had come toCharleston to put on a rally for the new Confederate men and their female opposite numbers. When a lot of

those men would be going into uniform, and when, in due course, they would start coming back maimed or not coming back at all, they needed to be reminded of what this was all about. Speeches on the wireless went only so far. Nothing like a real rally where you could see your friends and neighbors jumping up and yelling along with you, where you could smell the fellow next to you getting all hot and bothered, to keep the juices flowing.

A gray-mustached man who walked with a limp and carried a submachine gun led a gang of Negroes towards a merchant ship. The blacks wore dungarees and coarse, collarless cotton work shirts. Their clothes weren't quite uniforms. They weren't quite prison garb, either. But they came close on both counts.

Kirby Walker followed the blacks with his eyes. "Lousy niggers," he muttered. "We work 'em hard enough, they won't have a chance to get themselves in any trouble this time around."

"Here's hoping they won't," Anne said.

"If they do, we start shooting first,"Walker said. "We'd've shot a few of 'em early on in the last war, we never would've had half the trouble with 'em we did. We were too soft, and we paid for it."

Again, he sounded as if he'd been there. This time, Anne completely agreed with him. She had been there. The Marshlands plantation, these days, was nothing but ruins. Before the war, she'd treated her Negroes better than anyone else nearby. And what had she got for it? Half--more than half--the leaders of theRedCongareeSocialistRepublic came from her plantation.

She muttered to herself. Not very long before, she'd been sure she found Scipio, her old butler, waiting tables at a restaurant inAugusta,Georgia . He'd been in theCongareeSocialistRepublic up to his eyebrows, and he'd managed to stay hidden for more than twenty years after its last vestiges collapsed.

She wanted him dead. She'd been so sure she had him, too, till the restaurant showed her paperwork proving the black man she thought was Scipio really was the Xerxes he claimed to be, and that he'd worked there since before the Great War.

Anne muttered some more. She hated being wrong about anything. She especially hated being wrong about anything that meant so much to her. As far as she knew, that black man was still waiting tables at that restaurant. What would have happened to him if he really were

Scipio . . . Her nails bit into the flesh of her palms. How she'd wanted that!

And she'd been so very certain! Half of her still was, though she couldn't imagine how that manager might have had faked paperwork that went back close to thirty years handy. Then she shrugged and laughed a singularly unpleasant laugh. Her gaze swung to the Negro work gang, which was hauling crates out of a freighter under the watchful eye of that half-disabled veteran with the submachine gun. Whether the Negro inAugusta really was Scipio or Xerxes, he might yet get his.

"What's funny, Miss Colleton?" Kirby Walker asked.

"What?" Anne blinked, recalled from dreams of vengeance to present reality. "Nothing, really. Just thinking of what might have been."

"Not a . . . heck of a lot of point to that, I don't reckon," the Freedom Party stalwart said. "You can't change things now."

"No?" Back at the start of the Great War, the glance Anne sent him would have melted him right out of his shoes. Now it only made him shrug stolidly. Her blond good looks hadn't altogether left her, but they slipped away day by day. She could still hope for vengeance against Scipio and against theUnited States

. Nobody got even with time. She sighed. "I want to have another look at the hall, if that's all right."

"Sure enough, ma'am. I'm here to do what you need me to do,"Walker said. He made himself a liar without even knowing he was doing it. What she needed him to do was acknowledge her as the beauty she had been. That wouldn't happen. She knew it wouldn't, couldn't. Knowing was an ulcer that ate at her and would not heal.

It was, perhaps, just as well that Clarence Potter would not know where this rally was being held. The hall had belonged to the Whigs for generations. Clarence had gone to God only knew how many meetings here himself. It wasn't far from the harbor, and it was right across the street from a bar: a good location. These days, nobody but the Freedom Party held meetings. The hall had stood vacant for quite a while. It wouldn't stay vacant long. And the Freedom Party, unlike the Whigs, did meetings right.

Stalwarts and Freedom Party guards and ordinary Party members

started filling the place more than an hour before the scheduled meeting time. Everyone wore a Freedom Party pin: the Confederate battle flag with red and blue reversed. Most of the pins had a black border. That showed that the people who wore them had joined the Party after March 4, 1934, when Jake Featherston became President of the CSA.

Members who'd belonged before that day looked down their noses at the johnny-come-latelies and opportunists, which didn't keep them from using the newcomers whenever they needed to.

A young Congressman named Storm or something like that was the first one up to address the meeting.

Anne had heard him before. He was very good on the Negro question, weaker elsewhere. Here, he didn't get to show his paces. He'd barely started his speech when air-raid sirens outside began to wail.

"You see?" he shouted. "Do you see?" He shook a fist at the sky. "The damnyankees don't want you to hear the truth!"

People laughed and cheered. "Go on!" somebody shouted. "Who cares about a damned air raid?"

And the Congressman did go on, even when the antiaircraft guns around the harbor started pounding and bombs started falling. The Freedom Party men in the audience clapped their hands and stomped their feet to try to drown out the din of war. That made the Congressman shout to be heard over them and over the fireworks not far away.

Anne thought they were all insane. She'd been through a bombing raid in the last war. Sitting here in this exposed place was the last thing she wanted to do now. But she knew what would happen if she yelled, Take cover, you damned idiots! The Freedom Party stalwarts would think she was nothing but a cowardly, panicky woman. They wouldn't listen to her. And they wouldn't take her seriously any more afterwards, either. That was the biggest part of what kept her quiet.

Resentment burned in her all the same. Because you're so stinking stubborn, I'm liable to get killed.

More bombs burst. Windows rattled. Not all the Yankees' presents were falling right on the harbor.

Maybe that meant the antiaircraft fire was heavier than the enemy

had expected. Maybe it meant his bombardiers didn't know their business. Either way, it meant more ofCharleston was catching hell.

Finally, a man about her age whose Party pin showed he'd been a member before 1934 and who wore the ribbon for a Purple Heart just below it, stood up and bellowed, "Time to get the hell out of here, folks, while the getting's good!"

They listened to him. Anne saw that with a mixture of relief and resentment. The veteran had a deep, authoritative rasp in his voice. Would they have paid that kind of attention to her contralto? Not likely!

"Where's a shelter?" somebody called. "This goddamn building hasn't got a cellar."

"Across the street," someone else said. He sounded as if he knew what he was talking about. People got up and started leaving. Anne wasn't sorry to go--far from it. She had all she could do not to run for the door. Again, fear of being thought weak carried more weight than fear of death. She didn't know why that should be so, but it was.

Out in the street, the noise was ten times worse. Chunks of shrapnel from spent antiaircraft shells rained down out of the sky. A man cried out in pain when one hit him in the shoulder. He sat down, hard, right there in the middle of the road.

Anne looked around for theU.S. airplanes that were causing all the commotion. She didn't see any--and then she did. Here came one, over the tops of the buildings, straight toward her. It was on fire, and still had a bomb slung below the fuselage. Maybe the pilot was dead. If he wasn't, he couldn't do anything with or to his airplane.

"Run!" Half a dozen people yelled it. It was good advice, but much too late. The bomber screamed down. The world blew up.

When Anne came back to consciousness, she wished she hadn't. She'd heard you often didn't feel pain when you were badly wounded. Whoever had said that was a goddamn liar. Someone very close by was screaming. She needed a little while to realize those noises were pouring out of her own mouth. She tried to stop, and couldn't.

Kirby Walker lay a few feet away, gutted like a hog. He was lucky. He was already dead. Anne looked down at herself, and wished she hadn't. Consciousness faded. Black rose up to swallow it.

II

Somewhere down below Major Jonathan Moss wasOhio , somewhereKentucky . He saw the ribbon of theOhio River , but could not for the life of him have said which side of it he was on, not just then. He'd just broken off a dogfight with a Confederate fighter pilot who'd run into a cloud to get away from him, and he didn't know north from his elbow.

Then he saw shells bursting on the ground, and he realized that had to beOhio . The CSA had kicked theUSA in the teeth, attacking without bothering to declare war first. The Confederates had the edge right now. They were across the river inIndiana andOhio , across with infantry and artillery and barrels, and they were pushing forward with everything they had.

No Great War army had ever moved like this. Moss knew that from experience. Going fromNiagara Falls toToronto had taken three long, bloody years. The Canadians had defended every foot of ground as if they were holding Satan's demons out of heaven. And, with trenches and machine guns, they'd been able to make every foot of ground count, too. Moss had started out flying a Curtiss pusher biplane, observing the front from above. He'd imagined himself a knight of the air. He'd ended up an ace in a fighting scout, knowing full well that his hands were no cleaner than any ground-pounding foot slogger's.

Living conditions were better for fliers, though. He hadn't got muddy. He'd had his own cot in a barracks hall or tent out of artillery range of the front. He'd eaten regularly, and well. And people with unpleasant attitudes had tried to kill him only every once in a while, not all the time.

So here he was back again for another round, something he never would have imagined when the Great War ended. He'd spent a lot of years as a lawyer specializing in occupation law inCanada . He'd married a Canadian woman. They'd had a little girl. And a Canadian bomb-maker had blown them up, maybe under the delusion that that would somehow helpCanada toward freedom. It wouldn't. It couldn't. It hadn't. All it had done was wreck his life and drive him back to flying fighters.

He pushed the stick forward. The Wright 27 dove. The ground swelled. So did the Confederate soldiers and barrels in front ofLebanon ,Ohio --he thought it wasLebanon , anyway, and if he was

wrong, he was wrong. He wasn't wrong about the advancing Confederates. Thanks to the barrels, they'd already smashed through trench lines that would have held up a Great War army for weeks, and the war was only a couple of days old.

Someone down there spotted him. A machine gun started winking. Tracers flashed past his wings. He jabbed his thumb down on the firing button on top of the stick. His own machine guns spat death through the spinning disk of his propeller. Soldiers on the ground ran or threw themselves flat. That damned machine gun suddenly stopped shooting. Moss whooped.

Here and there, Confederates with rifles took potshots at him. Those didn't worry him. If a rifle bullet knocked down a fighter, the pilot's number was surely up. He checked six as he climbed. No Confederate on his tail. In the first clash, the CSA's machines--they were calling them Hound Dogs--seemed more maneuverable, butU.S. fighters had the edge diving and climbing. Neither held any enormous advantage over the other.

The Confederates had some real antiaircraft guns down there. Puffs of black smoke appeared in midair not far from Moss' fighter. They weren't quite round; they were longer from top to bottom than side to side. "Nigger-baby flak," Moss muttered to himself. With extensions of gas out from the main burst that could have been arms and legs, the smoke patterns did bear a certain resemblance to naked black dolls.

A bang said a shell fragment had hit the fighter somewhere. Moss' eyes flicked anxiously from one gauge to another. No loss of oil pressure. No loss of coolant. No fuel leak. No fire. The controls answered--no cut wires or bad hydraulics. He breathed a sigh of relief. No damage done.

Trouble was, he hadn't done the Confederates on the ground much harm, either. They would keep right on pushing forward. They weren't trying to break intoLebanon , which looked to be heavily fortified.

They were doing their best to get past it and keep pushing north. If it still had someU.S. soldiers in it afterwards . . . well, so what?

Neither side had fought that way during the Great War. Neither side could have. That had mostly been a war of shoeleather, with railroads hauling soldiers up to the front and with trucks lugging supplies. But no army then had moved faster than at a walk.

Things looked different here. Barrels were a lot faster than they had

been a generation earlier. Trucks didn't just haul beans and bullets. They brought soldiers forward to keep up with the barrels. The internal-combustion engine was supercharging this war.

His fighter's internal-combustion engine was running out of gas. He streaked north to find another airstrip where he could refuel. He'd started the war in southernIllinois , but they'd sent him farther east right away. For the time being, the action was hottest along the central part of theOhio River .

The strip he found wasn't even paved. He jounced to a stop. When he pulled back the canopy and started to get out of the fighter, a lieutenant on the ground shouted, "Can you go up again right away?"

Moss wanted nothing more than sleep and food and a big glass of something strong. But they didn't pay him for ducking out of fights. He said, "Fill me up and I'll go."

"Thanks--uh, thank you, sir," the young officer said. "Everybody down south is screaming for air support."

"Why aren't they getting more of it?" Moss asked as groundcrew men in coveralls gave the fighter gasoline. Another man in coveralls, an armorer, wordlessly held up a belt of machine-gun ammunition.

Moss nodded. The armorer climbed a ladder and went to work on the airplane's guns.

"Why? 'Cause we got sucker-punched, that's why," the lieutenant said, which fit too well with what Moss had seen and heard in the past couple of hectic days. The younger officer went on, "God only knows how many airplanes they got on the ground, either, the sons of bitches."

"No excuse for that," Moss said. "No goddamn excuse for that at all."

"Yeah, I know," the lieutenant answered. "That doesn't mean it didn't happen. Some heads ought to roll on account of it, too."

"You bet your--" Moss broke off. Antiaircraft guns south of the airstrip had started banging. Through them, he heard the rising note of fighters. They were Confederates, too. The engine roar was slightly deeper than that ofU.S. aircraft. And he was standing in what was at the moment a bomb with wings. He got out of the cockpit and leaped to the ground as fast as he could, shouting, "Run!"

None of the groundcrew men had needed the advice. They were doing their best to imitate Olympic sprinters. When bullets started chewing up the airstrip, some of them hit the dirt. Others ran harder than ever.

Three bullets slammed into the armorer's back. He was only a few bounds ahead of Jonathan Moss, who saw dust puff out from the man's coveralls at each hit. When the bullets went out through his belly and chest, they took most of his insides with them. He crumpled as if all his bones had turned to jelly. He was surely dead before he stopped rolling.

Moss wanted to go flat. He also wanted to get as far away from his fighter as he could. When he heard a soft whump! behind him and felt a sudden blast of heat at his back, he knew he'd been smart.

The Confederates came back for another strafing run. By then, Moss was on the ground, in a wet, muddy ditch by the side of the hastily made airstrip. Cold water helped fear make his balls crawl up into his belly. The lieutenant lay a few feet away from him, staring foolishly at his right hand. He had a long, straight, bleeding gouge along the back of it, but his fingers all seemed to work when he wiggled them.

"You're lucky as hell, kid," Moss said, glad to have something to talk about besides the pounding of his heart. "That's only a scratch, and you'll get yourself a Purple Heart on account of it."

"If I'd been lucky, they would have missed me," the lieutenant said, which held more than a little truth. If he'd been unluckier, though, all the infinite cleverness and articulation of that hand would have been smashed to bloody, bony ruin in less than the blink of an eye.

Ever so cautiously, Moss stuck up his head. The Confederate fighters--there'd been three of them--were streaking away. Futile puffs of flak filled the sky. He'd hoped to see at least one go down in flames, but no such luck. His own machine burned on the strip. The ammunition the luckless armorer had been loading into it started cooking off. Bullets flew in all directions. He ducked again.

"You have transportation?" he asked. "I've got to get to my unit, or at least to an air base with working fighters."

"There's an old Ford around here somewhere, if the Confederates didn't blow it to hell and gone," the young officer said. "If you want to put it on the road, you can do that. We don't exactly have control of the air right here, though."

That was a polite way to put it--politer than Moss could have found. What the shavetail meant was, If you start driving around, the Confederates are liable to shoot up your motorcar, and we can't do a whole hell of a lot to stop 'em.

"I'm not worth much to the country laying here in this goddamn ditch." Moss crawled out of it, dripping.

"Point me at that Ford."

It was old, all right--so old, it was a Model T. Moss had never driven one in his life. His family had had too much money to get one. After the war, he'd gone around in a lordly Bucephalus for years--a make now extinct as the dodo, but one with a conventional arrangement of gearshift, clutch, and brake. He tried the slab-sided Ford, stalled it repeatedly, and had a devil of a time making it go. Finally, a corporal with a hard, flat Midwestern accent said, "Sir, I'll take you where you want to go. My folks are still driving one of them buggies."

"Thanks." Moss meant it. "I think I'm more afraid of this thing than I am of Confederate airplanes."

"All what you're used to." The corporal proceeded to prove it, too. Under his hands, the Model T

behaved for all the world as if it were a normal, sane automobile. Oh, it could have stopped quicker, but you could say that about any motorcar of its vintage. The only way it could have gone faster than forty-five was by falling off a cliff, but that also turned out not to be a problem.

Refugees clogged every road north. Some had autos, some had buggies, some had nothing but shank's mare and a bundle on their backs. All had a serious disinclination to staying in a war zone and getting shot up. Moss couldn't blame them, but he also couldn't move at anything faster than a crawl.

And the Confederates loved shooting up refugee columns, too, just to make the madness worse. Moss had done that himself up inCanada during the Great War. Now he got a groundside look at what he'd been up to. He saw what people looked like when they burned in their motorcars. He smelled them, too.

It put him in mind of roast pork. He didn't think he'd ever eat pork again.

Colonel Irving Morrell had always wanted to show the world what fast, modern barrels could do when they were well handled. And so, in a way, he was doing just that. He'd never imagined he would be on the receiving end of the lesson, though, not till mere days before the war broke out.

He would be fifty at the end of the year, if he lived that long. He looked it. His close-cropped sandy hair was going gray. His long face, deeply tanned, bore the lines and wrinkles that showed he'd spent as much time as he could in the sun and the wind, the rain and the snow. But he was a fit, hard fifty. If he could no longer outrun the men he commanded, he could still do a pretty good job of keeping up with them. And coffee--and the occasional slug of hooch--let him get by without a whole lot of sleep.

He would have traded all that fitness for a fat slob's body and an extra armored corps. The Confederates were putting everything they had into this punch. He didn't know what they were up to on the other side of theAppalachians , but he would have been amazed if they could have come up with another effort anywhere close to this one. If this wasn't the Schwerpunkt, everything he thought he knew about what they had was wrong.

His own barrel, with several others, lurked at the edge of the woods east ofChillicothe,Ohio . The Confederates were trying to get around the town in the open space between it and the trees. Morrell spoke into the wireless set that connected him to the others: "Wait till their move develops more fully before you open up on them. That's the way we'll hurt them most, and hurting them is what we've got to do."

"Hurt them, hell, sir," said Sergeant Michael Pound, the gunner. "We've got to smash them."

"That would be nice." Pound was nothing if not confident. He wasn't always right, but he was always sure of himself. He was a stocky, broad-shouldered man with very fair skin and blue eyes. He came from the uppermostMidwest , and had an accent that might almost have been Canadian.

He should have commanded his own barrel. Morrell knew as much. But he didn't want to turn Pound loose. The man was, without a doubt, the best gunner in the Army, and they'd spent a lot of time together in those periods when the Army happened to be interested in barrels. Pound had also done a stretch as an ordinary artilleryman during that long, dreary dry spell when the Army stopped caring that

cannon and armor and engine and tracks could go together into one deadly package. Trouble was, the package was also expensive. To the Army, that had come close to proving the kiss of death.

It was, in fact, still liable to prove the kiss of death for a lot ofU.S. soldiers. Even though the factories up inPontiac were going flat out now, they'd started disgracefully late. The CSA had factories, too, inRichmond andAtlanta andBirmingham . They weren't supposed to have been working so long and so hard. But the Confederates were using more barrels than anybody in what was alleged to be U.S. Army Intelligence had suspected they owned.

Here came three of them, a leader and two more behind him making a V. They didn't look much different from the machine he commanded. They were a little boxier, the armor not well sloped to deflect a shell. But they hit hard; they carried two-inch guns, not inch-and-a-halfers. All things considered,U.S.

and C.S. machines were about even when they met on equal terms.

Morrell didn't intend to meet the Confederates on equal terms. Hitting them from ambush was a lot more economical. "Range to the lead barrel?" he asked Sergeant Pound.

He wasn't surprised to hear Pound answer, "It's 320 yards, sir," without the slightest hesitation. The gunner had been traversing the turret to keep that barrel in the gunsight. He wasn't just ready. He was eager. That eagerness was part of what made him such a good gunner. He thought along with his commander. Sometimes he thought ahead of him.

"Let him have it," Morrell said.

"Armor-piercing, Sweeney!" Pound said, and the loader slammed a black-tipped round into the breech.

The gunner traversed the turret a little more, working the handwheel with microscopic care. Then he fired.

The noise was a palpable blow to the ears. It was worst for Morrell, who'd just stuck his head out the cupola so he could see the effect of the shot. Fire spurted from the muzzle of the cannon and, half a second later, from the side of the Confederate barrel. Side armor was always thinner than at the front or on the turret.

"Hit!" Morrell shouted. "That's a goddamn hit!" Easier to think of it as

the sort of hit you might make in a shooting gallery, with little yellow ducks and gray-haired mothers-in-law and other targets going by on endless loops of chain. Then you didn't have to contemplate that hard-nosed round slamming through armor, rattling around inside the fighting compartment, and smashing crewmen just like you--except they wore the wrong uniforms and they weren't very lucky.

Smoke started pouring from the wounded barrel, which stopped dead--and dead was the right word. A hatch at the front opened. A soldier in butternut coveralls--probably the driver--started to scramble out.

Two machine guns opened up on him from Morrell's barrel. He crumpled, half in and half out of his ruined machine.

As Morrell ducked down inside the turret, it started traversing again. Sergeant Pound had commendable initiative. "Another round of AP, Sweeney!" he bawled. "We'll make meat pies out of 'em!" The loader gave him what he wanted. The gun bellowed again--to Morrell, a little less deafeningly now that he was back inside. The sharp stink of cordite filled the air inside the turret. The shell casing came out of the breech and clanged on the floor of the fighting compartment. It could mash toes if you weren't careful.

Peering through the gunsight, Pound yelled, "Hit!" again.

"Was that us, or one of the other barrels here with us?" Morrell asked.

"Sir, that was us." The gunner was magisterially convincing. "Some of those other fellows couldn't hit a dead cow with a fly swatter."

"Er--right." Morrell stuck his head out of the cupola. All three of the lead Confederate barrels were burning now. Somebody in one of the otherU.S. machines must have known what to do with his fly swatter.

A rifle shot from a Confederate infantryman cut twigs from the oaks above Morrell's head. He didn't duck. His barrel was well back in the shade. Nobody out there in the open could get a good look and draw a bead on him. That didn't mean a round not so well aimed couldn't find him, but he refused to dwell on such mischances.

He hoped the Confederates would try to charge his barrels. He could stand them off where he was for quite a while, then fall back to another position he'd prepared deeper in the woods. Defense wasn't his first choice, but that didn't mean he couldn't handle it. And the enemy, charging hard, might well be inclined to run right on to a

waiting spear.

But the Confederates had something else in mind. After about ten minutes of confusion, they started lobbing artillery shells toward the woods. At first, Morrell was scornful--only a direct hit would make a barrel say uncle, and hits from guns out of visual range of their targets were hard as hell to come by. But then he caught the gurgling howl of the shells as they flew through the air and the white bursts they threw up when they walked toward the barrels.

Swearing, he ducked down into the turret and slammed the cupola hatch behind him. "Button it up!" he snarled. "Gas!" He got on the wireless to all the barrels he commanded, giving them the same message.

"Masks!" he added to the men in his own machine. "That's an order, God damn it!"

Only when he put on his own mask did Pound and Sweeney reach for theirs. He couldn't see the driver and the bow gunner up at the front of the hull. He hoped they listened to him. If the barrel stayed buttoned up, the men would start to cook before too long. It might have been tolerable inFrance orGermany . InOhio ? Right at the start of summertime? In gas masks to boot?

Sergeant Pound asked an eminently reasonable question: "Sir, how the hell are we supposed to fight a war like this?"

"How would you like to fight it without your lungs?" Morrell answered. His own voice sounded even more distant and otherworldly than Pound's had. He couldn't see the gunner's expression. All he could see were Pound's eyes behind two round portholes of glass. The green-gray rubber of the mask hid the rest of the sergeant's features and made him look like something from Mars or Venus.

Looking out through the periscopes mounted in the cupola hatch was at best a poor substitute for sticking your head out and seeing what was going on. Shoving one of those glass portholes up close enough to a periscope to see anything was a trial. What Morrell saw were lots of gas shells bursting.

He did some more swearing. The barrel wasn't perfectly airtight, and it didn't have proper filters in the ventilation system. That was partly his own fault, too. He'd had a lot to say about the design of barrels.

He'd thought about all sorts of things, from the layout of the turret to

the shape of the armor and the placement of the engine compartment. Defending against poison gas hadn't once crossed his mind--or, evidently, anyone else's.

"What do we do, sir?" Sergeant Pound asked.

Morrell didn't want to fall back to that prepared position without making the Confederates pay a price.

His lips skinned back from his teeth in a fierce grin the gas mask hid. "Forward!" he said, first to Pound, then on the intercom to the driver, and then on the wireless. "Let's see if those bastards want to drop gas on their own men."

The barrel rumbled ahead. Morrell hoped not too much gas was getting into the fighting compartment.

He could tell the instant they came out into the sunlight from the shade of the trees. It had been hot in the barrel before. It got a hell of a lot hotter when the sun started beating down on the hull and the turret.

Bullets began hitting the barrel as soon as it came out into the open, too. Morrell didn't worry about ordinary rifle or machine-gun rounds very much, not while he wasn't standing up and looking out through the cupola. (He didn't worry about them while he was, either. Afterwards, sometimes, was a different story.) But the Confederates had the same sort of .50-caliber antibarrel rifles asU.S. troops. Even one of those big armor-piercing bullets wouldn't penetrate the front glacis plate or the turret, but it might punch through the thinner steel on the barrel's sides.

Sergeant Pound and the bow machine gunner, a redheaded mick named Teddy Fitzgerald, opened up on the Confederate soldiers they'd caught in the open. Pound abandoned the turret machine gun after a little while. "H.E.!" he called to Sweeney, who fed a high-explosive round into the cannon. It roared.

Through the periscopes, Morrell watched the round burst. A couple of enemy soldiers went flying.

The Confederates didn't put gas down on top of their own men. They didn't break through east ofChillicothe , either. Morrell's barrels gave them a good mauling there. But they did break theU.S. line west of town. Morrell had to fall back or risk being surrounded. Even pulling back wasn't easy. He fought a brisk skirmish at long range with

several C.S. barrels. If the Confederates had moved a little faster, they might have trapped him. He hated retreat. But getting cut off would have been worse. So he told himself, over and over again.

As Mary Pomeroy walked to the post office inRosenfeld,Manitoba , with her son Alexander in tow, she laughed at herself. She'd always thought she couldn't hate anyone worse than the green-gray-cladU.S.

soldiers who'd occupied the town since 1914. Now the Yanks, or most of them, were gone, and she discovered she'd been wrong. The soldiers from theRepublic ofQuebec , whose uniforms were of a cut identical to theirU.S. counterparts but sewn from blue-gray cloth, were even worse.

For one thing, the Yanks, however much Mary despised them, had won the war. They'd driven out and beaten the Canadian and British defenders of what had been the Dominion of Canada. If not for them, there wouldn't have been any such thing as theRepublicofQuebec .Quebec had been part ofCanada for more than 150 years before the Yanks came along. TheUSA had no business splitting up the country.

For another, hardly any of the Quebecois soldiers spoke more than little fragments of English. You couldn't even try to reason with them, the way you could with the Yanks. Some Yanks--Mary hated to admit it, but knew it was true--were pretty decent, even if they did come from theUnited States . Maybe some Quebecois were, too. But if you couldn't talk to them, how were you supposed to find out? They jabbered away in their own language, and it wasn't as if Mary or anybody else in Rosenfeld had ever learned much French.

And not only did the men in blue-gray speak French, they acted French. She'd long since got used to the way American soldiers eyed her. They'd done it in spite of her wedding ring, later in spite of little Alec.

She was a tall, slim redhead in her early thirties. Men did notice her. She'd grown used to that, even if she didn't care for it.

But the two Quebecois soldiers who walked by her were much more blatant in the way they admired her than the Yanks had been. It wasn't as if they were undressing her with their eyes--more as if they were groping her with them. And when, laughing, the Frenchies talked about it afterwards, she couldn't understand a word they said. By their tone, though, it was all foul and all about her. She looked

straight ahead, as if they didn't exist, and kept on walking. They laughed some more at that.

"Are we almost there yet?" Alec asked. He'd be starting kindergarten before long. Mary didn't want to send him to school. The Yanks would fill him full of their lies about the past. But she didn't see what choice she had. She could teach him what he really needed to know at home.

"You know where the post office is," Mary said. "Are we almost there yet?"

"I suppose so," Alec said in a sulky voice. He didn't take naps any more. Mary missed the time when he had, because that had let her get some rest, too. Now she had to be awake whenever he was. But even if he didn't actually take naps any more, there were still days when he needed them. This felt like one of those days.

Mary did her best to pretend it didn't. "Well, then," she said briskly, "you know we cross the street here--and there it is."

There it was, all right: the yellow-brown brick building that had done the job since before the last war.

The postmaster was the same, too, though Wilfred Rokeby's hair was white now and had been black in those distant days. Only the flag out front was different. Mary could barely remember the mostly dark blue banner of the Dominion of Canada. Ever since 1914, the Stars and Stripes had fluttered in front of the post office.

Alec swarmed up the stairs. Mary followed, holding down her pleated wool skirt with one hand against a gust of wind. She was damned if she'd give those Frenchies--or anybody else--a free show. She opened the door, the bronze doorknob polished bright by God only knew how many hands. Her son rushed in ahead of her.

Stepping into the post office was like stepping back in time. It was always too warm in there; Wilf Rokeby kept the potbellied stove in one corner glowing red whether he needed to or not. Along with the heat, the spicy smell of the postmaster's hair oil was a link with Mary's childhood. Rokeby still plastered his hair down with the oil and parted it exactly in the middle. Not a single hair was out of place; none would have dared be disorderly.

Rokeby nodded from behind the counter. "Morning, Mrs. Pomeroy," he said. "New notices on the bulletin board. Directions are I should tell

everybody who comes in to have a look at 'em, so I'm doing that."

Mary wanted to tell the occupying authorities where to head in. Getting angry at Wilf Rokeby wouldn't do her any good, though, or the Yanks and Frenchies any harm. "Thank you, Mr. Rokeby," she said, and turned toward the cork-surfaced board with its thumbtack holes uncountable.

The notices had headlines in big red letters. One said, NO HARBORING ENEMY AGENTS! It warned that anyone having anything to do with people representingGreat Britain , the Confederate States, Japan, orFrance would be subject to military justice. Mary scowled. She knew what military justice was.

In 1916, the Yanks had taken her brother Alexander, for whom Alec was named, and shot him because they claimed he was plotting against them.

NO INTERFERENCE WITH RAILWAY LINES! the other new flyer warned. It said anyone caught trying to sabotage the railroad would face not just military justice but summary military justice. As far as Mary could tell, that meant the Yanks would shoot right away and not bother with even a farce of a trial.

The notice was relevant for Rosenfeld. The town would have been only another patch of Manitoban prairie if two train lines hadn't come together there.

She turned back to Wilf Rokeby. "All right. I've read them. Now you can sell me some stamps without getting in trouble inPhiladelphia ."

"It wouldn't be quite as bad as that," the postmaster answered with a thin smile. "But I did want you to see them. You have to remember, it's a war again, and those people are jumpier than they used to be.

And these here fellows fromQuebec . . . I've got the feeling it's shoot first and ask questions later with them."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Mary said. "They hardly seem like proper human beings at all."

"Well, I don't know there," Rokeby said. "What I do know is, I wouldn't do anything foolish and get myself in trouble with 'em."

"Why do you think I would want to get myself in trouble with them?" Mary asked.

Rokeby shrugged. "I don't suppose you'd want to, exactly, but. . . ."

"But what?" Mary's voice was sharp.

"But I recollect who your brother was, Mrs. Pomeroy, and who your father was, too."

Hardly anyone in Rosenfeld mentioned Arthur McGregor, her father, to her. He'd been blown up by a bomb he meant for General George Custer, who'd passed through the town on his way into retirement.

All that was left of Arthur McGregor these days was his Christian name, which was Alec's middle name.

And Mary couldn't remember the last time anyone had spoken of Alexander McGregor. A lot of people in town were too young even to remember him. Twenty-five years was a long time.

But she didn't quite like the way the postmaster had spoken of them. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I wouldn't like to see the same sort of thing happen to you as happened to them," Rokeby answered.

She stared at him. Except for Alec, they were the only two people in the post office, and Alec paid next to no attention to what grownups said to each other unless they started shouting or did something else interesting or exciting. "Why on earth would anything like that happen to me?" she asked, deliberately keeping her voice calm and her face straight.

"Well, I don't know," Wilf Rokeby said. "But I do recall a package you posted to a cousin of yours inOntario not so long ago--a cousin named Laura Moss."

"Do you?" Mary said tonelessly.

The postmaster nodded. "I do. And I recall reading in the paper a little later on about what happened to a woman named Laura Moss."

What had happened to Laura Moss--who'd been born Laura Secord, descended from the Canadian patriot of the same name, and who'd been a Canadian patriot herself till she ended up in a Yank's bed--was that a bomb had blown her and her little girl sky high. "What's that got to do with me?" Mary asked, again with as little expression in her

voice or on her face as she could put there. "Do you think I'm a bomber because my father was?" There. The challenge direct. What would Rokeby make of it?

He looked at her over the tops of the old-fashioned half glasses he wore. "Well, I don't know anything about that for certain, Mrs. Pomeroy," he said. "But I also believe I recollect a bomb that went off at Karamanlides' general store after he went and bought it from Henry Gibbon. He's from down in theUSA

, even if he's been here a while now."

"I didn't have anything to do with that--or with this other thing, either," Mary said. After the challenge direct, the lie direct.

Wilf Rokeby didn't raise an eyebrow. He didn't call her a liar. He showed not the slightest trace of anything but small-town interest. "Did I say you did, Mrs. Pomeroy?" he asked easily. "But I thought, with those new notices up there, you maybe ought to remember how nervous the Yanks and Frenchies are liable to be. You wouldn't want to do anything, oh, careless while you're near a train track, or anything like that."

The only place where Mary had ever been careless was in letting Rokeby get a look at the name on the package she'd posted. She didn't see how she could have avoided that, but she hadn't imagined he would remember it. It only went to show you never could tell.

She studied the postmaster. If he'd wanted to, he could have told the Yanks instead of bringing this up with her. Searching her apartment wouldn't have told them anything. Searching the basement of her apartment building would have. Her father's bomb-making tools were hidden, but they could be found.

So what did he want? Money? She and Mort had some, but not a lot. The same probably applied to Wilfred Rokeby. Did he want something else from her, something more intimate? He was a lifelong bachelor. He'd never had any sort of reputation for skirt-chasing. She'd heard a couple of people over the years wonder if he was a fairy, but nobody had ever had any real reason to think so except that he didn't have much to do with women.

"I always try to be careful," she said, and waited to see what would happen next.

Rokeby nodded. "Good. That's good. Your family's seen too many bad

things. Wouldn't think you could stand a whole lot more of 'em."

"Can I buy those stamps now?" Mary asked in a tight voice.

"You sure can," the postmaster answered. "Just tell me what you need." She did. He got out the stamps and said, "That'll be a dollar and a half all told." She paid him. He nodded as he would have to any other customer he'd been seeing for years. "Thank you kindly, Mrs. Pomeroy. Like I say, you want to be careful, especially now that there's a war on."

"I heard you," Mary said. "Oh, yes. I heard you."

Alec in tow, she left the post office and started back to their apartment. They hadn't gone far before her son asked, "Mommy, what was that man talking about?"

It was a good question. Did Wilf Rokeby really sympathize with her? He hadn't told the Yanks and he hadn't asked for anything from her. He'd just warned her. So maybe he did. Could she trust everything to the strength of a maybe? She had to think about that. She had to think hard. She also had to tell Alec something. "Nothing important, sweetie," she said. "Grownup stuff, that's all." He accepted that with a nod. His question was easily answered. Her own? No.

When the last war broke out, Chester Martin had been a corporal taking a squad ofU.S. soldiers fromWest Virginia intoVirginia . He'd been through the mill, sure as hell, and he'd been lucky, too, as luck ran in wartime: three years of hard fighting, and only one wound. Back in 1914, he'd been a Democrat.

He'd lived inToledo .

A lot of things had changed since. He wasn't a kid any more. He was closer to fifty than forty. His light brown hair had gone gray. His features had been sharp, almost foxy. Now he had jowls and a belly that stuck out farther than his chest, though not much. He had a wife and a young son. He was a Socialist, a construction workers' organizer inLos Angeles .

He was a Socialist these days, yes. But he'd voted for Robert Taft in the 1940 presidential election, not Al Smith. He'd been through the mill. He didn't want to see the Confederate States strong. As his wife set a plate of ham and eggs in front of him, he said, "Things don't look so good back East."

"No, they don't," Rita agreed.Chester was her second husband. Her first had gone to war a generation earlier, but he hadn't come back. That was as much luck of the draw asChester 's survival. If you happened to end up in the wrong place at the wrong instant, you could be the best soldier in the world and it wouldn't matter one goddamn bit. Your next of kin would get a wire from the War Department, and that would be that.

"I wish . . ."Chester began, and then let it trail away.

He might as well not have bothered. Rita knew what he hadn't said. "It wouldn't have made any difference if Taft beat Al Smith," she said. "We'd still have a war right now, and we wouldn't be any readier than we are."

She was a Socialist, too. She'd never been anything else. Her folks were Socialists, whereChester 's were rock-ribbed Democrats. And she sometimes had a hard time forgiving him when he backslid--that was how she looked at it, anyhow.

Here, she was probably right. Al Smith had agreed to the plebiscites inHouston and Sequoyah andKentucky before the election. Even if Taft had won, they were scheduled for early January, before he would have been inaugurated. And onceKentucky andHouston went Confederate in the vote, could he have thrown out the elections? That would have touched off a war all by itself.

Of course, it would have touched off a war withKentucky and what was once more westTexas inU.S.

hands, which might have made things better.Chester almost said so--almost, but not quite. He and Rita had been married a while now. He'd learned a wise man didn't antagonize his wife over something inherently unprovable, especially when she'd just given him breakfast. He finished the ham and eggs and some toast, gulped his coffee, put on a cap, and headed out the door. Rita gave him a kiss as he left, too, one more reason to make him glad he hadn't got her angry.

"Chillicothefalls!" a newsboy shouted. "Read all about it!"

He forked over a nickel for a copy of the Los Angeles Times. He hated giving the Times his money. It thought labor unions were nothing but a bunch of Reds; reactionary didn't begin to go far enough to describe it. But it was the only morning paper he could buy on the way to the trolley stop. Sometimes convenience counted for more than ideology.

Another nickel went into the trolley's fare box, and four pennies for two transfers. He was going all the way down toTorrance , in theSouthBay ; he'd have to change trolleys twice. He plopped his fanny into a seat and opened up the Times. He had some time to kill.

Long shadows of early morning stretched out toward the west. The day was still cool, but wouldn't stay that way for long. It would be better in Torrance, which got the sea breeze, than here in Boyle Heights on the east side of town; the breeze didn't usually come in this far. It got hotter here than it ever did inToledo

.Chester didn't mind. Hot weather inToledo was steam-bath central. He'd known worse inVirginia during the war, butToledo was plenty bad. Next to that kind of heat, whatL.A. got was nothing. Your clothes didn't stick to you. You didn't feel you'd fall over dead--or at least start panting like a hound dog--if you walked more than a hundred yards. And he didn't miss snow in the wintertime one bit.

His smile when he thought of not getting snowed on slipped as he read the lead story.Chillicothe wasn't the onlyOhio town that had fallen to the Confederates. They looked to be pushing north throughOhio andIndiana with everything they had: men and airplanes and barrels and poison gas.

"God damn Jake Featherston,"Chester muttered under his breath. Neither side had moved like this during the Great War. Machine guns had made attacks almost suicidally expensive. Railroads behind the lines had stayed intact. That meant defenders could move men forward faster than attackers could push through devastated terrain. That was what it had meant in the last war, anyhow. This time, trucks and barrels seemed to mean the rules had changed.

Other news wasn't good, either. Confederate bombers had hitWashington andPhiladelphia again, and evenNew York City . The Empire of Japan had recalled its ambassador to theUSA . That probably meant a new war in the Pacific, and sooner, not later. And the war in the Atlantic already looked insane, with ships from theUSA ,Germany , the CSA,Britain , andFrance all hammering at one another.

From whatChester remembered, the naval war in theAtlantic had been crazy the last time around, too.

He didn't remember much of that, though. He'd been too busy trying not to get shot to pay it a whole lot of attention.

And Governor Heber Young ofUtah said his state would react with

"disfavor and dismay" if theUSA tried to declare martial law there.Chester didn't have much trouble translating that into the kind of English somebody who wasn't the governor of a state might speak. If theUnited States tried to put their foot down inUtah , the state would explode like a grenade. Of course, if theUnited States didn't put their foot down inUtah , the state was liable to explode like a grenade anyhow. Mormons thought theUSA had been oppressing them since before the Second Mexican War sixty years ago, if not longer than that. If they had a chance to break away and get their own back, wouldn't they grab it with both hands?

The French were claiming victories in Alsace-Lorraine. The Germans were loudly denying everything.

They were also loudly denying that theUkraine 's army had mutinied when the Tsar's forces crossed the border fromRussia . Maybe they were telling the truth and maybe they weren't. Time would show, one way or the other.

Suddenly sick of everything that had to do with the war,Chester turned to the sports section, which was mostly full of news of football games canceled. The Los Angeles Dons, his favorite summer league team, had been up inPortland to play the Wolves. Now a quarter of the squad had got conscription notices, and the rest were arranging transportation back toLos Angeles . He sighed. He hadn't really thought about what the war would do to ordinary life. He hadn't been part of ordinary life the last time around.

He got so engrossed in the paper, he had to jump off the trolley at the last moment to make one of his transfers. He was still reading when he got off inTorrance . He walked three blocks to the construction site the union was picketing. The builders had done everything under the sun to drive away the pickets.

They'd even sicced Pinkerton goons on them. That hadn't worked; the union men had beaten the crap out of the down-and-outers the detective agency hired.

Chesterexpected more trouble here. What he didn't expect was a man of about his own age in a double-breasted gray pinstripe suit and a straw hat with a bright plaid hatband who came up to him, stuck out his hand, and said, "You must be Martin."

"Yeah."Chester automatically took the proffered hand. The other fellow didn't have a worker's calluses, but his grip was strong. Martin

said, "Afraid I don't know you."

"I'm Harry T. Casson," the other man said.

Son of a bitch,Chester thought. Harry T. Casson might not have been the biggest builder inLos Angeles , but he was sure as hell one of the top three. He was also, not coincidentally at all, the man trying to run up the houses here. "Well, what do you want with me?"Chester asked, hard suspicion in his voice.

"Cooperation," Casson said. "Things are different with a war on, don't you think?"

"If you're going to try to use the war for an excuse to exploit the people who work for you, you can go straight to hell, far as I'm concerned,"Chester said.

He almost hoped that would make Casson spit in his eye. It didn't. Calmly, the builder said, "That's not what I meant. I know I have to give some to get some."

Give some to get some?Chester had never heard anything like that before from the men who hired construction workers here. He wondered why he was hearing it now. Smelling a rat, he said, "You know what we want. Recognize the union, dicker with us in good faith over wages and working conditions, and you won't have any trouble with us. No matter what theL.A. goddamn Times says, that's all we've ever wanted."

Harry T. Casson nodded. He was a cool customer. He said, "We can probably arrange something along those lines."

"Christ!"Chester didn't want to show his astonishment, but he couldn't help it. "I think you mean it."

"I do," Casson said.

Visions of glory danced in Martin's head. All these years of struggle, and a victory at the end of them? It seemed too good to be true. Of course, things that seemed too good to be true commonly were. "What's the catch?" he asked bluntly, and waited to hear what sort of smooth bushwah Harry T. Casson could spin.

"Look around," Casson said. "Plenty of people I'm hiring"--he meant scabs--"are going to go into the Army. Plenty of your people will, too.

That's already started to happen. And a lot of the others will start working in munitions plants. Those will pay better than I've been. If I'm going to have to pay high to keep things going, I don't want to stay in a scrap with you people, too. That just adds insult to injury. So--how about it?"

Chesterconsidered. Try as he would, he couldn't see a whole lot of bushwah there. What Harry T.

Casson said made good, hard sense from a business point of view. Martin said, "Make your offer. We'll vote on it. If it's something we can live with, we'll vote for it. I just wish to God you'd said something like this a long time ago."

The building magnate shrugged. "I had no reason to. I made more money without you people than I would have with you. Now it looks like things are different. I hope I'm not stupid. I can see which way the wind is blowing."

It all came down to dollars and cents for him--his dollars and cents. How his workers got by? If they got by? He didn't care about that. It wasn't his worry, or he didn't see it as such. Capitalist,Chester thought, but then, Now the wind's blowing in our direction.

"I think we can work together," he said. "You're right about one thing: it's high time we tried." He put out his hand now. Harry T. Casson took it.

For a long time, Cincinnatus Driver had thought of himself as a lucky man. He'd been inCovington

,Kentucky , when it passed from the CSA to theUSA at the start of the Great War. Escaping the Confederate States was a good start on luck all by itself for a black man.

Then he'd got out ofKentucky . Escaping what had been the Confederate States was good luck for a black man, too. Negroes didn't have it easy inDes Moines , but they had it a lot easier. His son had graduated from high school--and married a Chinese girl. Achilles and Grace seemed happy enough, so he supposed that was luck . . . and he loved his grandchildren. Amanda, his daughter, was going to graduate, too. When Cincinnatus was a boy inCovington , any schooling for Negroes had been against the law.

He'd built up a pretty fair trucking business inDes Moines . That wasn't luck. That was hard work, nothing else but. But his father and mother had stayed behind inCovington . His mother began to slip into her second childhood. When Al Smith agreed to the plebiscite inKentucky , Cincinnatus knew he would have to get his folks up toDes Moines . The Confederates would win that vote, and he didn't want two people who were born as slaves to go back under the Stars and Bars, especially not with Jake Featherston running the CSA.

And so he'd come back to Covington to help his father bring his mother out of Kentucky and back to Iowa . . . and his luck had run out. His mother, senile, had wandered away from home, as she was doing more and more often. He and his father went after her. Cincinnatus found her. He ran across the street to get her--and never saw the motorcar that hit him.

Fractured leg. Fractured skull. Everybody said he was lucky to be alive. He wasn't sure he called it luck.

He'd been laid up when the plebiscite went off. He'd been laid up during the grace period afterwards, when people who wanted to stay in theUSA could cross theOhio . By the time he could travel at all, theUSA had sealed the border. Now he was trapped in the Confederate States with a war on. If this wasn't hell, you could see it from here.

He still limped. A stick helped, but only so much. He got blinding headaches every now and again, or a little more often than every now and again. Worse than any of that were the reflexes he had to learn all over again, the things he'd put aside in almost twenty years inIowa . There, he was a man among men--oh, not a man at the top of the heap, but a man nonetheless.

Here, he was a nigger.

Whenever he leftCovington 's colored district near theLicking River for any reason, he had to expect a cop to bear down on him and growl, "Let me see your passbook, boy." It didn't matter if the cop was only half his age. Negro males in the CSA went straight from boy to uncle. They were never misters, never men.

The cop this particular day had a white mustache and a limp almost as bad as Cincinnatus'. He wouldn't be any good in the army chewing north throughOhio andIndiana . He also had a gray uniform, an enameled Freedom Party flag pinned next to his badge, and the sour look of a man who was feeling a couple too many from the night

before. He could be mean just for the fun of being mean.

"Here you are, suh," Cincinnatus said. His passbook looked official. It wasn't. Before he leftCovington , he'd had connections with both the Red Negro underground and the Confederate diehards who'd resistedKentucky 's incorporation into theUSA . He hadn't much wanted those connections, but he'd had them. Some of the Reds were still around--and still Red. False papers weren't too hard for them.

The policeman looked at the photo in the passbook and compared it to Cincinnatus' face. That was all right. The photo really was his. "Go on," the cop said grudgingly, handing back the passbook. "Don't you get in no trouble, now."

"Don't want no trouble, suh," Cincinnatus said, which was true. He put the passbook in his pocket, then gestured with his cane. "Couldn't get in no trouble even if I did want to."

"I never yet knew a nigger who couldn't get in trouble if he wanted to," the policeman said. But then he walked on by, adding, "You get your ass back into your own part of town pretty damn quick, you hear?"

"Oh, yes, suh," Cincinnatus said. "I hear you real good."

Newsboys hawked papers, shouting of Confederate victories all along the border with theUSA . By what Cincinnatus gathered fromU.S. wireless stations, the headlines in the Confederate papers weren't lying too much, however badly he wished they were. Since the war started, tuning in to the wireless had become an iffy business. It was suddenly against the law to listen toU.S. stations. The Confederates tried to back that up by jamming a lot of them. TheUSA fought back in kind against Confederate broadcasts.

What you mostly heard these days was faint but urgent gabbling through roaring waterfalls of static.

With the cynicism black men learned early, Cincinnatus figured both sides would soon be lying just as hard as they could.

Antiaircraft guns poked their snouts up from parks and vacant lots. Some had camouflage netting draped over them in caseU.S. airplanes came over in the daytime. Others didn't bother, but just stood there in their bare deadliness. So far,U.S. bombers had paid a couple of brief calls onCovington by night. They'd cost people some sleep, but they

hadn't hit anything worth hitting.

Here was the grocery store he needed to visit. He had to wait a while to get noticed. The man behind the counter dealt with white customers till he didn't happen to have any in the store. Then he deigned to pay attention to Cincinnatus. "What do you want?" he asked. He didn't say, What can I do for you? the way he had for his white customers. Not many whites in the CSA thought about what they could do for Negroes.

"I need a gallon of ketchup for the barbecue place," Cincinnatus answered.

"Oh, you do, do you?" The white man paid some real attention to him for the first time. "Heinz or Del Monte?"

"Del Monte, suh. It's the best." Cincinnatus knew he sounded like a wireless advertisement, but he couldn't help it.

The clerk eyed him for a long moment. Then he said, "Hang on. I have to get it from the back room." He disappeared, returning a moment later with a carton that prominently featured the gold-bordered red Del Monte emblem. He set it on the counter. "Jug's inside. Thirty-six cents." Cincinnatus gave him a half-dollar, got his change, and stuck it in his pocket. The white man asked, "You carry that all right with the cane? You don't want to drop it, now."

Cincinnatus believed him. "I'll be careful," he promised. He tucked the carton under his free arm, then left the grocery and made his slow way back toward the Negro district. The policeman who'd asked him for his passbook saw him again. Since he was walking east, the cop didn't trouble him any more. As long as you know your place and stay there, you're all right. The white man didn't say it, but he might as well have.

Don't trip. Don't fall down. Cincinnatus was listening to what he himself wasn't saying as well as to what the cop wasn't. Got to pay for my passbook some kind o' way. I fall down, though, I pay too much.

Even before he got back into the colored part of town, his nostrils twitched. The breeze was out of the east, and brought the sweet, spicy, mouth-watering smell of barbecue to his nostrils. First Apicius Wood and then his son, Lucullus, had presided over what locals had long insisted was the best barbecue place between the Carolinas andKansas City . The Woods, over the years, had had just about as many white customers as black. Freedom Party stalwarts weren't

ashamed to get Lucullus' barbecue sauce all over their faces as they gnawed on falling-off-the-bone tender pork or beef ribs. They might despise Lucullus Wood. Nobody but a maniacal vegetarian could despise those ribs.

And the smell just got stronger and more tempting as Cincinnatus came closer. Walking inside was another jolt, because the Woods cooked indoors. It was like walking into hell, though Cincinnatus didn't think the sinners on the fire there would smell anywhere near so tasty. Carcasses spun on spits over pits of prime hickory wood. Back after theUSA tookKentucky away from the CSA, Apicius had chosen his surname from that wood.

Assistant cooks didn't just keep the spits and carcasses going round and round. They also used long-handled brushes to slather on the spicy sauce that made the barbecue something more than mere roast meat. Fat and juices and sauce dripped down onto the red-hot coals, where they hissed and popped and flamed.

Coming in here on a dubious errand took Cincinnatus back in time. How often had he done that during and just after the Great War? Back then, he'd been whole and strong and young, so goddamn young.

Now the years lay on his shoulders like sacks of cement. His body was healing, but it was a long way from healed. That fellow in the auto had almost done for him. But it had been his own fault, no one else's.

He'd run out in the street, though he still didn't remember doing it, or actually getting hit. The pain when he came back to himself afterwards? That he remembered all too well.

One of the cooks pointed with a basting brush. Cincinnatus nodded. He already knew the way back to the office that had been Apicius' and now belonged to Lucullus. He'd been going there longer than that pimply high-yellow kid had been alive. He set down the box and knocked on the door. There had been times when he barged in there without knocking. He'd got away with it, but he wondered how.

"Yeah?" came the deep, gruff voice from the other side of the door. Cincinnatus opened it. Lucullus'

scowl disappeared when he came in. "Oh. Sorry, friend. Thought you might be somebody else. Set yourself down. Here. Have some of this." He reached into his battered desk, pulled out a bottle, and offered it to Cincinnatus.

"Thank you kindly." Before taking the bottle, Cincinnatus carefully lifted the Del Monte carton and set it on the desk. "This here's for you. Ofay who gave it to me said not to drop it."

Lucullus Wood rumbled laughter. His father had been unabashedly fat. He was big and solid and heavy, but too hard for the word fat quite to fit him. He said, "I didn't aim to do that anyways. I know what's in there."

"Suits me. Reckoned I better speak up, though, just in case." Now Cincinnatus picked up the bottle and tilted it back. The whiskey wasn't very good, but it was strong. It went down his throat hot and snarling.

"Do Jesus!" he wheezed. "That hit the spot."

"Good. Glad to hear it." Lucullus' Adam's apple worked as he took a formidable knock of hooch himself. He said, "Part of me's sorry you stuck here with your folks, Cincinnatus, but you got to answer me somethin', and answer it for true. Ain't it better to give them Confederate sons of bitches one right in the teeth than it is to sit up North somewheres and make like everything's fine?"

Cincinnatus owed Lucullus for his passbook, so he didn't laugh in his face. He said, "Mebbe," and let it go at that. But he would have given anything he had, including his soul for the Devil to roast in a barbecue pit, to be back inDes Moines with his family again.

Hot, humid summer weather was always a torment to Brigadier General Abner Dowling. An unkind soul had once said he was built like a rolltop desk. That held an unpleasant amount of truth. And now, after long years as General George Custer's adjutant, after an even longer stretch as occupation commander in Salt Lake City, after the infuriating humiliation of being kept in that position during the Pacific War against Japan, he finally had a combat command of his own.

He had it, and he could feel it going wrong, feel the ground shifting under his feet as if he were stumbling into quicksand. When the fighting broke out, he'd worried that his headquarters inColumbus was too far behind what would be the front. Now he worried that it was too far forward. He also worried about holding on toColumbus , and if that wasn't bad news, he couldn't imagine what would be.

Chillicothewas gone. Dowling hadn't expected to keep the former state

capital forever. He hadn't expected to lose it in the first few days of fighting, either. He'd had several defense lines prepared between theOhio andChillicothe . He had only one betweenChillicothe andColumbus . He was likely to lose the present state capital almost as fast as he'd lost the earlier one.

Of course, how much good his defense lines had done him was very much an open question. The Confederates had pierced them, one after another, with what seemed effortless ease. A few local counterattacks had bothered the men in butternut, but nothing seemed to slow them down for long. They kept coming: barrels and airplanes to punch holes inU.S. positions, foot soldiers and artillery to follow up and take out whatever the faster-moving stuff had left behind. It was a simple formula, but it had worked again and again.

The window in Dowling's office was open, to give a little relief from the heat. Masking tape crisscrossed the windowpane. If a bomb or a shell burst nearby, that would keep flying glass splinters from being quite so bad. The open window also let him hear a low rumble off to the south, a rumble like a distant thunderstorm. But it wasn't a thunderstorm, or not a natural one, anyhow. It was the noise of the approaching front.

It was also only background noise. What he heard in the foreground was a horrible cacophony of military transport and raw panic. Trucks full of soldiers and barrels were trying to push south, to get into position to hold back the Confederate flood. They needed to move quickly, and they were having a hard time moving at all. The whole population of southernOhio seemed to be fleeing north as fast as it could go.

Dowling had trouble blaming the people running for their lives. If he were a farmer or a hardware-store owner and somebody started shooting off cannon and dropping bombs all around him, he would have got the hell out of there, too. But refugees were playing merry hell with troop movements. And Confederate fighters and light bombers had taken to tearing up refugee columns whenever they got the chance. That spread panic farther and wider than ever. It also coagulated road traffic even worse than simple flight could.

A knock on the door interrupted Dowling's gloomy reflections. A lieutenant stuck his head into the office and said, "Excuse me, sir, but Colonel Morrell is here to confer with you."

"Send him in," Dowling said. Morrell still wore a barrel man's coveralls. Grime and grease stains spotted them. Dowling heaved his bulk up out of the chair. "Good morning, Colonel. Good to see you."

"I wish I were back at the front," Irving Morrell said. "We've got to do something about those bastards, got to slow them down some kind of way. Can you get me more barrels? That's what we need most of all, dammit."

"I've been screaming into the telephone," Dowling answered. "They say they need them back East. They can't leaveWashington andPhiladelphia uncovered."

Morrell's suggestion about what the U.S. War Department could do withWashington andPhiladelphia was illegal, immoral, improbable, and incandescent. "Is the General Staff deaf, dumb, and blind?" he demanded. "We're liable to lose the war out here before those people wake up enough to take their heads out of their--"

"I know," Dowling broke in, as soothingly as he could. "I'm doing my best to get them to listen to me, but. . . ." He spread pink, pudgy hands.

"The Confederate attack is coming in on the line I predicted before the balloon went up," Morrell said bitterly. "Fat lot of good anticipation does if we haven't got the ways and means to meet it."

"I've heard good things about the action you fought east ofChillicothe ," Dowling said. "You did everything you could."

"Yes? And so?" Morrell, Dowling rediscovered, had extraordinary eyes. A blue two shades lighter than the sky, they seemed to see farther than most men's. And, at the moment, they were remarkably cold.

"They don't pay off for that, sir. They pay off for throwing the bastards back, and I didn't do it. I couldn't do it."

"You've done more than anybody else has," Dowling said.

"It's not enough." Nothing less than victory satisfied Irving Morrell. "If I'd had more to work with, I'd have done better. And if pigs had wings, we'd all carry umbrellas. If Featherston had held off a little longer, we'd have been in better shape. Every day would have helped us. Every--"

He broke off then, because the air-raid sirens started to howl. Some of

the wireless-ranging stations along the border had had to be destroyed to keep them from falling into Confederate hands. That cut down the warning timeColumbus got. Dowling rose from his chair. "Shall we go to the basement?" he said.

"I'd rather watch the show," Morrell said.

"Let me put it another way: go to the basement, Colonel. That's an order," Dowling said. "The country would probably muddle along without me well enough. It really needs you."

For a moment, he thought he would have a mutiny on his hands. Then Morrell nodded and flipped him as ironic a salute as he'd ever had. They went down to the basement together. Bombs were already falling by the time they got there. The noise was impressive.

Safety, here, was a relative thing. They weren't risking splinter and blast damage, the way they would have if they'd stayed in Dowling's office. But a direct hit could bring down the whole building and entomb them here. Buried alive . . . except they wouldn't stay alive very long.

Antiaircraft guns started hammering. Someone in the crowded cellar said, "I hope they knock a lot of those shitheads out of the sky."

Dowling hoped the same thing. But antiaircraft fire, no matter how ferocious, couldn't stop bombers. All it could do, at best, was make raids expensive. The Confederates had already proved they didn't mind paying the bill.

Bomb bursts walked closer to the building. After each one, the floor shook more under Dowling's feet.

A captain a few feet away from him started screaming. Some men simply couldn't stand the strain. A scuffle followed. Finally, somebody clipped the captain, and he shut up.

"Thank God," Dowling said. "A little more of that, and I'd've started howling like a damn banshee, too."

Colonel Morrell nodded. "It really can be catching," he remarked, and rubbed the knuckles of his right hand against his trouser leg. Had he been the one who'd laid out the captain? He'd been in the brawl, but Dowling hadn't seen him land the punch.

The stick of bombs passed over the headquarters building. Dowling thought of the Angel of Death, and wondered if someone had slapped lamb's blood on the doorframe at the entrance. The bursts diminished in force as they got farther away.

"Whew," somebody said, which summed it up as well as anything else.

"Columbusis catching hell, though," someone else said. "Too goddamn bad. This is a nice town."

"Too goddamn bad is right," Morrell said. "This is a town we've got to hold." He plainly didn't care whetherColumbus was nice, dreary, or actively vile. All he cared about wasColumbus as a military position.

After about half an hour, the all-clear sounded. Confederate air bases weren't very far away. The bombers could loiter for a while ifU.S. fighters didn't rise to drive them off. That didn't seem to have happened this time. Of course, the C.S. bombers would have had fighters of their own riding shotgun.

"Well," Dowling said in what he hoped wasn't black despair, "let's see what they've done to us this time."

He and Morrell and the rest of the officers and enlisted men climbed the stairs out of the basement. A corporal looked up and said, "Jesus God, but it's good to see the sky again!" He crossed himself.

Dowling was more than happy to see the sky again, too, even if clouds and streamers of smoke and the contrails left by airplanes now departed still marred its blue perfection like burn scars on what would have been a beautiful face. A staff officer pointed to a tall pillar of smoke off to the west and said,

"They've gone and pastedCampCuster again, the sons of bitches."

"No big surprise there," Dowling said. The Confederates had been hitting the training facility every chance they got ever since the war broke out. It was, without a doubt, a legitimate military target. But they were also punishing civilian sectors ofColumbus and otherU.S. cities. In retaliation--President Smith said it was in retaliation--the United States were visiting the same sort of destruction on C.S. towns.

Colonel Morrell was thinking along the same lines. "Going to be a swell old war, isn't it?" he said to nobody in particular.

The air-raid sirens started up again, not the usual shrill warble but one

that got louder and softer, louder and softer, over and over again till back-teeth fillings started to ache. "What the hell?" Dowling said.

Everybody stared for five or ten seconds, trying to remember what that signal was supposed to mean.

At last, a sergeant exclaimed, "It's a goddamn gas alert!"

There was a new wrinkle. The Confederates hadn't dropped that kind of death from the air before, at least not onColumbus . The soldiers dashed back into the building they'd so gratefully vacated moments before. Some of them found gas masks. Others had to take their chances without.

From behind his hot, heavy rubber monstrosity, Dowling said, "This is going to be hell on civilians. They don't have anywhere near enough masks." Even he could hear how muffled his voice was.

Morrell wore a mask, too. He did so self-consciously, as if he didn't want to but knew he had to. He said, "The Confederates only need to drop a few gas bombs, too, to make us flabble all over the place.

You can't help taking gas seriously, and they get a big payback for a small investment."

"So they do," Dowling said morosely. "But I'll tell you this, Colonel: they won't be the only ones for long."

III

When it came to waiting tables at the Huntsman's Lodge, summer was the worst season of the year.

Scipio had to put on his tuxedo in the Terry--Augusta,Georgia's, colored quarter--and then walk through the heat and humidity to the restaurant where he worked. The walk would also expose him to what passed for wit among the whites ofAugusta . If he had a dime for every time he'd heard penguin suit, he could have retired tomorrow and been set for life.

He would have liked to retire. He was, these days, nearer seventy than sixty. But if he didn't work, he wouldn't eat. That made his choices simple. He would work till he dropped.

Bathsheba, his wife, had already left their small, cramped apartment

to clean white folks' houses. Scipio kissed his daughter and son and went out the door. They'd had a better flat before the white riots of 1934 burned down half the Terry. Not much had been rebuilt since. The way things were, they were lucky to have a place at all.

A couple of blocks from the apartment building, a long line of Negroes, almost all men, stood waiting for a bus. It pulled up just as Scipio walked by. Some of the blacks stared at him. Somebody said something to his friend that had penguin suit in it. Scipio kept walking. He shook his head. Real wit was hard to come by, whether from whites or blacks.

The placard on the bus that pulled up said war plant work. Scipio shook his head again. Negroes weren't good enough to be Confederate citizens, weren't good enough to be anything but the CSA's whipping boys. But when the guns started going off . . .

When the guns started going off, the whites went to shoot them. But the soldiers went right on needing more guns and ammunition and airplanes and barrels. If the CSA took whites out of the line to make them, it wouldn't have enough men in uniform left to face theUSA 's greater numbers. That meant getting labor out of black men and white women.

Scipio wouldn't have wanted to make the tools of war for a government that also used those tools to hold Negroes down. But none of the blacks getting on that war plant work bus seemed unhappy. They had jobs. They were making money. And if they were doing something Jake Featherston needed, Freedom Party stalwarts or guards were less likely to grab them and throw them in a camp. Those camps had a reputation that got more evil with each passing day.

Scipio didn't believe all the rumors he'd heard about the camps. Some of them had to be scare stories, of the sort that had frightened him when he was a pickaninny. Nobody in his right mind could do some of the things rumor claimed. Confederate whites wanted to keep blacks down, yes. But killing them off made no sense. Who would do what whites called nigger work if there were no blacks to take care of it?

He imagined white women cleaning house for their rich sisters. And he imagined white men out in the cotton fields, picking cotton dawn to dusk under the hot, hot sun. It was pretty funny.

And then, all of a sudden, it wasn't. One of the things the Freedom Party had done was put far more machinery in the fields than had

ever been there before. A few men on those combines could do the work of dozens, maybe hundreds, with hand tools. It's almost as if they were working out ahead of time how they would get along without us. That precisely formed sentence made Scipio nervous for two reasons. First, it had the unpleasant feel of truth, of seeing below the surface to the underlying reality. And second, it reminded him of the education Anne Colleton had forced on him when he was her butler at the Marshlands plantation. Again, she hadn't given it to him for his benefit, but for her own. But that didn't mean it hadn't benefited him.

And now Anne Colleton was dead. He'd read that in the Augusta Constitutionalist with astonished disbelief. He hadn't thought anything could kill her, could stop her, could turn her aside from a path she'd chosen. She'd always seemed as much a force of nature as a mere human being.

But even a force of nature, evidently, could get caught in a damnyankee air raid. For years, Scipio had lived in dread of her showing up at the Huntsman's Lodge. And then one day she had, and sure as hell she'd recognized him. She wanted him dead. He knew that. But he'd managed to slither out from under her wrath, and now he didn't have to worry about it any more.

Without looking at the people around him, he could tell the minute he left the Terry and entered the white part ofAugusta . Buildings stopped having that bombed-out look. They started having new coats of paint.

The streets stopped being minefields of potholes. The stripes between lanes were fresh and white. Hell, there were stripes between lanes. On most of the streets in the Terry, nobody'd ever bothered painting them.

A cop pointed his nightstick at Scipio. "Passbook," he said importantly.

"Yes, suh." Scipio could talk like an educated white man. If he didn't--and most of the time he didn't dare--he used the thick dialect of theCongareeRiver swampland where he'd been born.

The gray-uniformed policeman peered at the passbook through bifocals. "How the hell you say your name?" he demanded, frowning.

"It's Xerxes, suh," Scipio answered. He'd had the alias for a third of his life now. He took it more for granted than the name his mama gave

him. After escaping the ruin of theRedCongareeSocialistRepublic , keeping that real name would have been suicidally dangerous.

"Xerxes," the cop repeated. He looked Scipio up and down. "Reckon you wait tables?"

"Yes, suh. Huntsman's Lodge. Mistuh Dover, he vouch fo' me."

"All right. Get going. You're too goddamn old to land in a whole lot of trouble anyways."

Scipio wanted to do something right there to prove the policeman wrong. He didn't, which went some way toward proving the man right. He did go on up the street to the Huntsman's Lodge. Sometimes no one bothered him on the way. Sometimes he got endless harassment. Today, in the middle, was about par for the course.

He went into the kitchen and said hello to the cooks as soon as he got to the restaurant. If they were happy with you, your orders got done quickly. That meant you had a better chance for a good tip. If you got on their bad side, you took your chances.

Jerry Dover was going through the kitchens, too. The manager was making sure who was there and who wasn't, and that they had enough supplies to cover the day's likely orders. All the cooks except the head chef were black.Dover himself, of course, was white. A Negro manager would have been unimaginable anywhere in the CSA except a place that not only had exclusively colored workers but also an exclusively colored clientele.

"Afternoon, Xerxes,"Dover said.

"Afternoon, Mistuh Dover," Scipio answered. "How you is?"

"Tolerable. I'm just about tolerable," the manager said. He didn't ask how Scipio was. He wouldn't, unless he saw some obvious sign of trouble. As white men in the Confederate States went, he wasn't bad in his dealings with blacks . . . but Confederate whites had a long way to go.

"People comin' in like they ought to?" Scipio asked.

"Yeah. Doesn't look like we'll be shorthanded tonight,"Dover said. "But we may lose some fellas down the line, you know."

"War plant work, you mean?" Scipio asked, and the other man nodded.

Jerry Dover was thin and wiry and burned with energy. From the owners' point of view, the Huntsman's Lodge couldn't have had a better manager. Scipio had to respect him, even if he didn't always like him. He said, "I seen dat de las'

war."

"Where'd you see it?"Dover asked. Scipio didn't answer right away. After a moment, the white man waved the question aside. "Never mind. Forget I asked you that. It was a long time ago, and you weren't here. Whatever you did, I don't want to know about it."

Thanks to Anne Colleton, he already knew more than Scipio wished he did. No help for that, though, not unless Scipio wanted to get out ofAugusta altogether. The way police and stalwarts checked passbooks these days, that was neither easy nor safe.

ThenDover said something that rocked Scipio back on his heels: "This place is liable to be losing me down the line, too."

"You, suh?" Scipio said. "Wouldn't hardly be no Huntsman's Lodge without you, suh." The people who ate there might not understand that, but it was certainly true for those who worked there. "How come you go, suh? You don't like it here no mo'?"

Doversmiled a crooked smile. "It ain't that," he said. "But if they conscript me, I got to wear the uniform." He chuckled. "You imagine me trying to feed a division's worth of soldiers all at once instead of worrying about whether the goddamn venison's marinated long enough?"

"You do good, I reckon," Scipio said, and he meant that, too. He didn't think there was anything Jerry Dover couldn't do when it came to handling food and the people who fixed it. ButDover was past forty.

"They puts a uniform on you?"

The manager shrugged. "Never know. I wouldn't be surprised. I was a kid when the last war came along. Didn't see much action. But I saw how it sucked in more and more men the longer it went on.

They were putting uniforms on fellows older than I am now. No reason they won't do it again, not unless we win pretty goddamn quick."

If he thought he would be conscripted, he didn't think the Confederate States would win in a hurry.

Scipio didn't, either. He wouldn't say so. A black man dumb enough to doubt out loud wouldn't last long.

When he started waiting tables, he found, as he had before, thatAugusta 's big shots had far fewer doubts about how things were going than Jerry Dover did. When they weren't trying to impress the women with them with how magnificent they were, they blathered on about how degenerate the damnyankees had become and how they were surely riding for a fall. Anne Colleton had talked that way when the Great War broke out. She'd found she was wrong. These big-talking fools hadn't learned anything in a generation.

They hadn't even learned that black men had ears and brains. Had Scipio had a taste for blackmail, he could have indulged it to the fullest. He didn't; he'd always been a cautious man. But what were the odds for Confederate victory if such damn fools could rise high in the CSA? Did the same hold true in theUnited States ? He dared hope not, anyhow.

Jake Featherston studied an immense map ofIndiana andOhio tacked to a wall of his office in the Gray House, the Confederate Presidential residence. Red pins showed his armies' progress, blue pins the positionsU.S. defenders still held. The President of the CSA nodded to himself. Things weren't going exactly according to plan, but they were pretty close.

Someone knocked on the door. "Who is it?" Featherston rasped. His voice was harsh, his accent not well educated. He was an overseer's son who'd been an artillery sergeant all through the Great War before joining the Freedom Party and starting his rise in the world.

The door opened. His secretary came in. "Mr. Goldman is here to see you, Mr. President," she said.

"Thanks, Lulu. Send him right on in." Jake spoke as softly to her as was in him to do. She'd stuck with him through bad times and good, even when it seemed as if the Freedom Party would go down the drain.

And it might have, if she hadn't helped hold things together.

Saul Goldman came into the office a moment later. The director of communications--a drab title for the Confederate master of propaganda--was short, and had lost his hair and grown pudgy in the nearly twenty years Featherston had known him. Jake himself remained lanky, rawboned, long-jawed, with cheekbones like knobs of granite. He'd lately had to start wearing reading glasses. Nobody ever photographed him with them on his nose, though.

"Good morning, Mr. President," Goldman said.

"Morning, Saul," Jake answered cordially. Goldman was another one who'd stayed loyal through thick and thin. There weren't that many. Featherston gave back loyalty for loyalty. He repaid disloyalty, too.

Oh, yes. No one who crossed him or the country could expect to be forgotten. He put on a smile. "What can I do for you today?"

The round little Jew shook his head. "No, sir. It's what I can do for you." He held out a neat rectangular package wrapped in plain brown paper and string. "This is the very first one off the press."

"Goddamn!" Jake snatched the package with an eagerness he hadn't known since Christmastime long before the last war. He tugged at the string. When it didn't want to break, he reached into a trouser pocket on his butternut uniform and pulled out a little clasp knife. That made short work of the string, and he tore off the brown paper.

over open sights was stamped in gold on the front cover and spine of the leather-bound book he held.

So was his name. He almost burst with pride. He'd started working on the book in Gray Eagle scratch pads during the Great War, and he'd kept fiddling with it ever since. Now he was finally letting the whole world see what made him tick, what made the Freedom Party tick.

"You understand, of course, that the rest of the print run won't be so fancy," Saul Goldman said. "They made this one up special, just for you."

Featherston nodded. "Oh, hell, yes. But this here is mighty nice--mighty nice." He opened the book at random and began to read: ", ‘The Confederate state must make up for what everyone else has neglected in this field. It must set race at the center of all life. It must take care to keep itself pure. Instead of annoying Negroes with teachings they are too stupid to understand, we would do better to instruct our whites that it is a deed pleasing to God to take pity on a

poor little healthy white orphan child and give him a father and mother." " He nodded. "Well, we've gone a hell of a long way towards doing just that."

"Yes, Mr. President," the director of communications agreed.

Jake held the book in his hands. It was there. It was real. "Now folks will see why we're doing what we're doing. They'll see all the things that need doing from here on out. They'll see how much they need the Freedom Party to keep us going the way we ought to."

"That's the idea," Goldman said. "And the book will sell lots and lots of copies. That will make you money, Mr. President."

"Well, I don't mind," Jake Featherston said, which was not only true but an understatement. He'd lived pretty well since coming up in the world. But he added, "Money's not why I wrote it." And that was also true. He'd set things down on paper during the war and afterwards to try to exorcise his own demons. It hadn't worked, not altogether. They still haunted him. They still drove him. Now they were all out in the open, though. That was where they belonged.

"Everyone who joins the Freedom Party should have to buy a copy of this book," Goldman said.

Featherston nodded. "I like that. It's good. See to it." The Jew pulled a notebook from an inside pocket of his houndstooth jacket and scribbled in it. Jake went on, "Other thing you've got to do is arrange to get it translated into Spanish. The greasers inTexas andSonora andChihuahua may not be everything we wish they were, but they don't much fancy niggers and we can trust 'em with guns in their hands. An awful lot of 'em are good Party men even if their English isn't so hot. They need to know what we stand for, too."

Goldman smiled and said, "Sir, I've already thought of that. The Spanish version will only be a couple of weeks behind the English one."

"Good. That's damn good, Saul. You're one sharp bastard, you know that?" Jake was usually sparing of praise. Finding fault was easier. But without Saul Goldman, the Freedom Party probably wouldn't have got where it was. The wireless web he'd stitched together sent the Party's message all over the Confederate States. It got that message to places where Jake couldn't go himself. And now all the wireless stations and newspapers and magazines and newsreels in the CSA put out what Goldman told them to put out.

"I try, Mr. President," Goldman said now. "I owe you a lot, you know."

"Yeah, you've said." Jake waved that away. Inside, he wanted to laugh. Right at the start of things, Goldman had worried that the Freedom Party might come after Jews. It was a damn silly notion, though Featherston had never said so out loud. Why bother? There weren't enough Jews in the Confederate States to get hot and bothered about, and the ones who were here had always been loyal. Blacks, now, blacks were a whole different story.

"Well . . ." Goldman dipped his head. All these years, and he was still shy. "Thank you very much, Mr.

President."

"Don't you worry about a thing." Jake shook his head. "No--you worry about one thing. You worry about how we're going to tell the world we've kicked the damnyankees' asses, on account of we're going to." He looked toward the door. Saul Goldman took a hint. He dipped his head again and stepped out.

Jake went back to the desk. He spent the next little while flipping through Over Open Sights. The more he read, the better he liked it. Everything--everything!--you wanted to know about what the Freedom Party stood for was all there in one place. Everybody all over the Confederate States, even those damn greasers, would be able to read it and understand.

He expected the telephone to ring and ruin the moment. As far as he could see, that was what the lousy thing was for. But it held off. He had twenty-five minutes to flip through twenty-five years' worth of hard work. Oh, he hadn't fiddled with the book every day through all that time, but it had never escaped his mind. And now the fruits of all that labor were in print. The more he thought about it, the better it felt.

In the end, the telephone didn't interrupt him. Lulu did. "Sir, the Attorney General is here to see you," she said.

"Well, you'd better send him in, then," Jake answered. His secretary nodded and withdrew. Ferdinand Koenig came into the President's office a moment later. Jake beamed and held up his fancy copy of Over Open Sights. "Hello, Ferd, you old son of a bitch! Ain't this something?"

"Not bad," Koenig answered. "Not bad at all, Sarge." He was one of the handful of men left alive who could call Featherston a name like that. A massive man, he'd been in the Freedom Party even longer than Jake. He'd backed the uprising that put Jake at the head of the Party, and he'd backed him ever since. If anybody in this miserable world was reliable, Ferdinand Koenig was the man.

"Sit down," Featherston said. "Make yourself comfortable, by God."

The chair on the other side of the desk creaked as Koenig settled his bulk into it. He reached for the book. "Let me have a look at that, why don't you? You've been talking about it long enough."

"Here you are," Jake said proudly.

Koenig paged through the book, pausing every now and then to take a look at some passage or another. He would smile and nod or raise an eyebrow. At last, he looked up. "You saw a lot of this before the last war even ended, didn't you?"

"Hell, yes. It was there, if you had your eyes open," Jake answered. "Tell me you didn't know we'd never be able to trust our niggers again. Everybody with an eye to see knew that."

"That's what I came over here to talk about, as a matter of fact," Koenig said. "Way things are going, I need to ask you a couple of questions."

"Go right ahead," Featherston said expansively. With Over Open Sights in print and in his hands at last, he felt happier, more mellow, than he had for a hell of a long time. Maybe this was what women felt when they had a baby. He didn't know about that; he'd never been a woman. But this was pretty fine in its own way.

Koenig said, "Well, the way things are, we're doing two different things, seems to me. Some of these niggers are going into camps like the one that Pinkard fellow runs out inLouisiana ."

"Sure." Jake nodded. "Bastards are going in, all right, but they're not coming out again. Good riddance."

"That's right," the Attorney General said. "But then we've got all these other niggers we're roping into war production work, and they just live wherever they've been living when they aren't at the plant."

"So?" Featherston said with a shrug. "They'll get theirs sooner or later,

too. The more work we can squeeze out of 'em beforehand, the better."

"I agree with you there," Ferdinand Koenig said. Hardly anyone dared disagree with the President of the CSA these days. Koenig went on, "I've been thinking, though--there might be a neater way to do this."

"Tell me what you've got in mind," Jake said. "I'm listening."

"Well, Sarge, the word that really occurs to me is consolidation," Koenig said. "If we can find some kind of way to put the war work and the camps together, the whole operation'll run a lot smoother. And then, when some of these bucks get too run down to be worth anything on the line . . ." He snapped his fingers.

Featherston stared. Slowly, a grin spread across his face. "I like it. I like it a hell of a lot, matter of fact.

Get it set up so it doesn't disrupt everything else going on too much, and we'll do it, by God."

As Saul Goldman had a little while before, Koenig took a notebook from an inside jacket pocket and wrote in it. He said, "I'll have to see exactly what needs doing. Whatever it is, I'll take care of it. It does seem to be a way to kill two birds with one stone."

"You might say that," Jake answered. "Yeah, you just might. But we'll do a hell of a lot more killing than that." He threw back his head and laughed like a loon. He was not a man to whom laughter came often.

When it did, the fit hit him hard.

"Damn right we will." Koenig got to his feet. "I won't bother you any more, Sarge. I know you've got the war with theUSA to run. But I did want to keep you up to date on what we're doing."

"That's fine." Featherston laughed again. "Oh, hell, yes, Ferd. That's just fine. And the war with theUSA and the war against the niggers go together. Don't you ever forget that."

Down in southernSonora , Hipolito Rodriguez could have thought the new war against theUSA nothing but noise in a distant room. NoU.S. bombers appeared over the small town ofBaroyeca , outside of which he had his farm. NoU.S. soldiers were within a couple of hundred miles, and none seemed likely to come any closer. Peace might have

continued uninterrupted . . . except that he had one son in the Army and two more who might be called to the colors at almost any time. For that matter, he was only in his mid-forties himself. He'd fought in the last war. It wasn't unimaginable that they might want to put butternut on his back again.

He didn't want to leave his farm. He even had electricity these days, something he couldn't have imagined when he leftSonora the first time. That went a long way toward making the place a paradise on earth. Electric lights, a refrigerator, even a wireless set . . . what more could one man need?

One evening when the war was still very new, he kissed his wife and said, "I'm going into town for the Freedom Party meeting."

Magdalenaraised an eyebrow. "Do you think I didn't know you were going to?" she asked. "You've been going as many weeks as you can for more than fifteen years now. Why would you change tonight?"

They spoke Spanish between themselves, a Spanish leavened with English words absorbed in the sixty yearsSonora andChihuahua had belonged to the CSA. Their children used more English, an English leavened with many Spanish words from the 350 yearsSonora andChihuahua had belonged first toSpain and then toMexico . Their grandchildren and great-grandchildren might one day speak an English more like that heard in the rest of the Confederacy. Thinking about that occasionally worried Rodriguez. Most of the time, though, it lay too far beyond the horizon of now to trouble him very much.

Out the door he went. He still hadn't had a letter from Pedro since the shooting started. There was a worry much more immediate than any over language. He also hadn't had a telegram from the War Department inRichmond . That made him think everything was all right, and that his youngest son was just too busy to write. He hoped so, anyway.

Baroyeca lay in a valley between two ridge lines of theSierra Madre Occidental . The westering sun shone brightly on them, burnishing their peaks and gilding them. From lifelong familiarity, Rodriguez hardly noticed the mountains' stern beauty. The wonders of our own neighborhoods are seldom obvious to us. What he did notice were the men coming out of the reopened silver mine, the railroad that had closed in the business collapse but was running again, and the poles that carried electricity not only to Baroyeca but also to outlying farms like his. Those, to him, were the real marvels.

He lived about three miles outside of town. The power poles ran alongside the dirt road. Hawks sat on the wires, looking for rabbits or mice or ground squirrels. He had never understood why they didn't get electrocuted, but they didn't. Some of them let him walk by. Others flew away when he got too close.

The country was dry--not disastrously dry, not with water coming down out of the mountains, but dry enough. Somewhere off in a field, a mule brayed. In the richer parts of the Confederate States, tractors did most of the field work that horses and mules had done since time out of mind. Around Baroyeca, a man with a good mule counted for wealthy. Hipolito had one.

The town could have been matched by scores of others inSonora andChihuahua . The alcalde's house and the church stood across the square from each other; both were built of adobe, with red tile roofs.

Baroyeca had one street of business. The most important of those, as far as Rodriguez was concerned, were Diaz's general store and La Culebra Verde, the local cantina. Down near the end of the street stood Freedom Party headquarters.

It had both freedom! and ¡libertad! painted on the big window out front. The Freedom Party had always been scrupulous about using both English and Spanish inSonora andChihuahua . That was one reason it had prospered. The Whigs used to look down their snooty noses at the citizens they'd acquired in the states they bought from the Empire of Mexico. Even the Radical Liberals had dealt with the rich men, the patrones, and expected them to deliver votes from their clients. Not the Freedom Party. From the start, it had appealed to the people.

Rodriguez went in. Robert Quinn, the Party representative in Baroyeca, nodded politely. "Hola, Señor Rodriguez," he said in English-accented Spanish. "¿Como está Usted?"

"Estoy bien, gracias," Rodriguez answered. "And how are you, Señor Quinn?"

"I am also well, thanks," Quinn said, still in Spanish. Not only had he learned the language, he treated people who spoke it like anyone else. The Freedom Party didn't care if you were of Mexican blood. It didn't care if you were a Jew. As long as you weren't black, you fit right in.

Carlos Ruiz waved to Rodriguez. He patted the folding chair next to him. Rodriguez sat down by his friend. Ruiz was a veteran, too. He'd

fought up inKentucky andTennessee , where things had been even grimmer than in westTexas . He too had a son in the Army now.

Quinn waited another fifteen minutes. Then he said, "Let's get started. For those of you without wireless sets, the war news is good. We are driving onColumbus,Ohio . The town will fall soon, unless something very surprising happens. In the East, our airplanes have bombedWashington andBaltimore andPhiladelphia andNew York . We have also bombed the oil fields in Sequoyah, so los Estados Unidos will not get any use from the state they stole from us. We are going to beat those people."

A pleased murmur ran through the Freedom Party men. A lot of them had fought in the Great War.

Hearing about things happening onU.S. soil instead of a massiveU.S. invasion of the Confederate States felt good.

"You will also have heard that the Empire of Mexico has declared war on theUnited States ," Quinn said. Another murmur ran through the room. This one was half pleased, half scornful. Sonorans and Chihuahuans, these days, looked at Mexicans the way a lot of white Confederates looked at them: as lazy good-for-nothings living in the land of perpetual mañana. That might not have been fair, but it was real.

Somebody behind Rodriguez asked, "How much good canMexico do us?"

"Against los Estados Unidos, los Estados Confederados need men," Quinn replied. "We have the factories to give them helmets and rifles and boots and everything else they require. But getting more soldados up to the front can only help."

"If they don't run away as soon as they get there," Rodriguez whispered to Carlos Ruiz. His friend nodded. Neither of them had much faith in the men who followed Francisco José II, the new Emperor of Mexico.

Quinn went on, "But that is not the only news I have for you tonight, mis amigos. I am delighted to be able to tell you that I have a copy of President Featherston's important new book, Over Open Sights, for each and every one of you." He picked up a crate and set it on the table behind which he sat. "You can get it in Spanish or English, whichever you would rather."

An excited murmur ran through the Freedom Party men. Rodriguez's voice was part of it. People had been talking about Over Open Sights for years. People had been talking about it for so long, in fact, that they'd begun to joke about whether Featherston's dangerous visions would ever appear. But here was the book at last.

Only a few men asked for Over Open Sights in English. Rodriguez wasn't one of them. He spoke it fairly well, and understood more than he spoke. But he still felt more comfortable reading Spanish. Had his sons been at the meeting, he suspected they would have chosen the English version. They'd had more schooling than he had, and more of it had been in English.

"Pay me later, as you have the money," Quinn said. "Some of the price from each copy will go to helping wounded soldiers and the families of those who die serving their country. Señor Featherston, el presidente, was a soldier himself. Of course you know that. But he has not forgotten what being a soldier means."

Hipolito Rodriguez wasn't the only one who nodded approvingly. Now that Jake Featherston was rich and famous, he could easily have forgotten the three dark years of the Great War. But Quinn was right; he hadn't.

The local Freedom Party leader went on, "At the end of the last war, our own government tried to pretend it didn't owe our soldiers anything. They'd fought and suffered and died--por Dios, my friends, you'd fought and suffered and died--but the government wanted to pretend the war had never happened.

It had made the mistakes, and it blamed the men for them. That's one of the reasons I'm so glad we finally came to power. What the Whigs did then, the Freedom Party will never do. Never!"

More nods. Some people clapped their hands. But the applause wasn't as strong as it might have been.

Rodriguez could see why. Instead of giving Señor Quinn all their attention, men kept opening their copies of Over Open Sights here and there and seeing just what Jake Featherston had to say. The President would never come to Baroyeca, especially not now, not with a war on. But here, in his book, Featherston was setting out all his thoughts, all his ideas, for his country to read and to judge.

Rodriguez held temptation at bay only long enough to be polite. Then he, too, opened Over Open Sights. What did Jake Featherston have to

say? The book began, I'm waiting, not far behind our line. We have niggers in the trenches in front of us. As soon as the damnyankees start shelling them, they'll run.

They don't want anything to do withU.S. soldiers--they'd sooner shoot at us. I'd like to see the damnyankees dead. But I'd rather see those niggers dead. They aim to ruin this country of ours. And most of all, I want to pay back the stupid fat cats who put rifles in those niggers' hands. I want to, and by Jesus one of these days I will.

And he had. And he was paying back the mallates, and he was paying back the damnyankees, too.

Rodriguez had always thought Jake Featherston was a man of his word. Here once again he saw it proved.

Quinn laughed. He said, "I am going to ask for a motion to adjourn. You are paying more attention to the President than you are to me. That's all right. That's why Jake Featherston is the President. He makes people pay attention to him. He can do it even in a book. Do I hear that motion?" He did. It passed with no objections. He went on, "Hasta la vista, señores. Next week, if it pleases you, we will talk about some of what he has to say."

The Freedom Party men went out into the night. Some of them headed for home, others for La Culebra Verde. After a brief hesitation, Rodriguez walked to the cantina. He didn't think people would wait for next week's meeting to start talking about what was in Over Open Sights. He didn't want to wait that long himself. He could read and drink and talk--and then, he thought with a smile, drink a little more.

Dr. Leonard O'Doull was not a happy man. He found that all the more strange, all the more disheartening, because he'd been so happy for so long. He'd come up to Quebec during the Great War to work at the hospital the U.S. Army had built on a farmer's land near the town of Rivière-du-Loup.

He'd ended up marrying the farmer's daughter, and he and Nicole Galtier had come as close to living happily ever after as is commonly given to two mortals to do. Their son, Lucien, named for his grandfather, was a good boy, and was now on the edge of turning into a good young man.

Oh, they'd had their troubles. O'Doull had lost his father, a physician

like himself, and Nicole had lost both her mother and her father in the space of a few years. But those were the sorts of things that happened to people simply because they were human beings. As a doctor, Leonard O'Doull understood that better than most.

He'd made a good life, a comfortable life, for himself in theRepublicofQuebec . He'd spoken some French before he ever got up here. These days, he used it almost all the time, and spoke it with a Quebecois accent, not the Parisian one he had of course learned in school. There had been times when he could almost forget he was born and raised inMassachusetts .

Almost.

He'd been reminded his American past still stayed a part of him when war clouds darkened the border between theUnited States and theConfederateStates . To most people in Rivière-du-Loup--even to his relatives by marriage--the growing strife between theUSA and the CSA was like a quarrel between strangers who lived down the street: interesting, but nothing to get very excited about.

Now that war had broken out, the locals still felt the same way. TheRepublic ofQuebec was helping theUSA with occupation duty in English-speakingCanada , but the Republic remained neutral, at peace with everyone even when most of the world split into warring camps.

As Leonard O'Doull walked from his home to his office a few blocks away, he did not feel at peace with the rest of the world. Far from it. He was a tall, lean man, pale as his Irish name suggested, with a long, lantern-jawed face, green eyes that usually laughed but not today, and close-cropped sandy hair now grayer than it had been. He didn't feel fifty, but he was.

People nodded to him as he walked by. Rivière-du-Loup wasn't such a big town that most folks didn't know most others. And O'Doull stood out on account of his inches and also on account of his looks. He didn't look French, and just about everybody else in town did. Most people were short and dark and Gallic, the way their ancestors who'd settled here in the seventeenth century had been.

Oh, there were exceptions. Nicole's brother, Georges Galtier, was as tall as O'Doull, and twice as broad through the shoulders. But Georges looked like a Frenchman, too; he just looked like an oversized Frenchman.

Here was the office. O'Doull used one key to open the lock, another to

open the dead bolt. His was one of the few doors in Rivière-du-Loup to have a dead bolt. But he was a careful and reputable man. He kept morphine and other drugs in here, and felt an obligation to make them as hard to steal as he could.

He got a pot of coffee going on a hot plate and waited for his receptionist to come in. Stephanie was solidly reliable once she got here, but she did like to sleep in every so often. While he waited for the coffee to perk and for her to show up, O'Doull started skimming medical journals. With vitamins and new drugs and new tests appearing seemingly by the day, this was an exciting time to be a doctor. He had a chance of curing diseases that would have killed only a few years before. Every journal trumpeted some new advance.

The outer door opened. "That you, Stephanie?" O'Doull called.

"No, I'm afraid not." It was a man's voice, not a woman's, and used a clear Parisian French whose like Leonard O'Doull hadn't heard for years. Then the man switched to another language with which O'Doull was out of touch: English. He said, "How are you today, Doctor?"

"Pas pire, merci," O'Doull replied in Quebecois French. He had no trouble understanding English, and thanks to his journals read it all the time, but he didn't speak it automatically the way he once had. He needed a conscious effort to shift to it to ask, "Who are you?"

"Jedediah Quigley, at your service," the stranger said. He paused in the doorway to the private office till O'Doull nodded for him to come in. He was trim and lean, still erect and probably still strong though he had to be past seventy, and he had the look of a man who'd spent a long time in the military. Sure enough, he went on, "Colonel,U.S.Army, retired. I've done a fair amount of liaison work between theU.S. and Quebecois governments in my time. I confess to taking it easier these days, though."

"Jedediah Quigley." O'Doull said the name in musing tones. He'd heard it before, and needed to remember where. He snapped his fingers. "You're the fellow who took my father-in-law's land for the military hospital, and then ended up buying it from him after the war."

"That's right." Quigley gave back a crisp nod. "He skinned me for every sou he could, too, and he enjoyed doing it. I was sad to hear he'd joined the majority."

"So was I," O'Doull said. "He was quite a man. . . . But you didn't come here to talk about him, did you?"

"No." The retired officer shook his head. "I came here to talk about you."

"Me? Why do you want to talk about me?" O'Doull pulled open a couple of desk drawers to see if he could find a spare cup. He thought he remembered one, and he was right. He stuck it on his desk, filled it with coffee, and shoved it across to Quigley. Then he poured the usual mugful for himself. After a sip, he went on, "I'm just a doctor, doing my job as best I can."

"That's why." Quigley sipped his own coffee. He chuckled as he set down the cup. "Some eye-opener, by God. Why you, Dr. O'Doull? Because you're not just a doctor. You're an American doctor. What I came to find out is, how much does that mean to you?"

"Isn't that interesting?" O'Doull murmured. "I've been wondering the same thing myself, as a matter of fact. What have you got in mind?" Even as he asked the question, a possible answer occurred to him.

When Jedediah Quigley said, "Your country needs doctors, especially doctors who've seen war wounds before," he knew he'd got it right. Quigley added, "Things aren't going as well as we wish they were.

Casualties are high. If you still think of yourself as an American . . ."

"Good question," Dr. O'Doull said. "Till this mess blew up, I really didn't. I was as much a Quebecois as anybody whose umpty-great-grandfather fought alongside Montcalm on thePlains of Abraham . But there's nothing like seeing the country where you were born in trouble to make you wonder what you really are."

"If you think we're in trouble now, wait till you see what happens if those Confederate bastards make it all the way up toLake Erie ," Quigley said.

"You think that's what they're up to?" O'Doull asked.

"I do." Quigley spoke with a good officer's decisiveness. "If they can do that, they cut the country in half.

All the rail lines that connect the raw materials in the West with the factories in the East run throughIndiana andOhio . If those go . . . Well, if those go, we have a serious problem on our hands."

Leonard O'Doull hadn't thought of it in those terms. He'd never been a

soldier. At most, he'd been a doctor in uniform. But a picture of the USA formed in his mind--a picture of the factories in eastern Ohio and Pennsylvania and New York and New England cut off from Michigan iron and from Great Plains wheat and from oil out of Sequoyah and California. He didn't like that picture--didn't like it one bit.

"What do we do about it?" he asked.

"We do our damnedest to stop them, that's what," Quigley answered. "If you cut me in half at the belly button, I won't do too well afterwards. The same applies to theUnited States . I can tell you one thing stopping the Confederates means, too: it means casualties, probably by the carload lot."

"Well, I do understand why you're talking to me," O'Doull said.

The retired colonel nodded. "I would be surprised if you didn't, Doctor. You're good at what you do. I don't think anybody in town would say anything different. And you've got plenty of experience with military medicine, too, as I said before."

"More than I ever wanted," O'Doull said.

Jedediah Quigley waved that aside. "And you're an American." He cocked his head to one side and waited expectantly. "Aren't you?"

No matter how much O'Doull wanted to deny it, he couldn't, not when he'd been thinking the same thing on his way to the office. "Well, what if I am?" he asked, his voice rough with annoyance--at himself more than at Quigley.

"What if you are?" Quigley echoed, sensing he had a fish on the hook. "If you are, and if you know you are, I'm going to offer you the chance of a lifetime." He sounded like a fast-talking used-motorcar salesman, or perhaps more like a sideshow barker at a carnival. Before going on, he made a small production of lighting up a stogie. The match hissed when struck, sending up a small gray cloud of sulfurous smoke. What came from the cheroot wasn't a whole lot more appetizing. Quigley didn't seem to care. After blowing a smoke ring, he said, "If you're an American, I'm going to offer you the chance to get close enough to the front to come under artillery fire, and probably machine-gun fire, too. You'll do emergency work, and you'll swear and cuss and fume on account of it isn't better. But you'll save lives just the same, and we need them saved. What do you say?"

"I say I'm a middle-aged man with a wife and a son," O'Doull

answered. "I say that if you think I'm going to try to keep them going on a captain's pay, or even a major's, you're out of your mind."

Quigley blew another smoke ring, even more impressive--and even smellier--than the first. He steepled his fingers and looked sly. "They aren't Americans, of course," he said. "They're citizens of theRepublicofQuebec ."

"And so?" O'Doull asked.

"And so the Republic, out of the goodness of its heart--and, just between you and me, because we're twisting its arm--will pay them a stipend equal to your average income the last three years, based on your tax records. That's over and above what we'll pay you as a major in the Medical Corps."

You do want me, O'Doull thought. And theUSA had set things up so theRepublicofQuebec would pay most of the freight. That seemed very much like something theUnited States would do. O'Doull laughed.

He said, "First time I ever wished I didn't have a good accountant."

That made Jedediah Quigley laugh, too. "Have we got a bargain?"

"If I can persuade Nicole," O'Doull answered. His wife was going to be furious. She was going to be appalled. He was more than a little appalled himself. But, for the first time since the war broke out, he also felt at peace with himself. At peace with Nicole was likely to be another matter.

George Enos, Jr., scanned the waters of theNorth Atlantic for more than other fishing boats, sea birds, and fish and dolphins. He'd heard how a Confederate commerce raider had captured his father's boat, and how a C.S. submersible had tried to sink her, only to be sunk by aU.S. sub lurking with the boat. He hardly remembered any of that himself. He'd been a little boy during the Great War. But his mother had talked about it plenty, then and afterwards.

He bit his lip. His mother was dead, murdered by the one man she'd fallen for since his father. That Ernie had blown out his own brains right afterwards was no consolation at all.

Inside of a day or two, the Sweet Sue would get to the Grand Bank offNewfoundland . Then George wouldn't have the luxury of leisure to stand around. He'd be baiting hooks with frozen squid, letting lines

down into the cold, green waters of theAtlantic , or bringing tuna aboard--which always resembled a bout of all-in wrestling much more than anything ordinary people, landlubbers, thought of as fishing. He'd barely have time to eat or sleep then, let alone think. But the long run out gave him plenty of time to brood.

Under his feet, the deck throbbed with the pounding of the diesel. The fishing boat was making ten knots, which was plenty to blow most of the exhaust astern of her. Every so often, though, a twist of wind would make George notice the pungent stink. The morning was bright and clear. The swells out of the north were gentle. TheAtlantic was a different beast in the wintertime, and a much meaner one.

George ducked into the galley for a cup of coffee. Davey Hatton, universally known as the Cookie, poured from the pot into a thick white china mug. "Thanks," George said, and added enough condensed milk and sugar to tame the snarling brew. He cradled the mug in his hands, savoring the warmth even now. Spin the calendar round half a year and it would be a lifesaver.

Hatton had the wireless on. They were beyond daytime reach of ordinary AM stations in theUSA or occupiedCanada andNewfoundland , though they could still pull them in after the sun went down.

Shortwave broadcasts were a different story. Those came in from theUSA , the CSA,Britain , andIreland

, as well as from a host of countries where they didn't speak English.

"What's the latest?" George asked.

Before answering, the Cookie made a production of getting a pipe going. To George's way of thinking, it was wasted effort. The tobacco with which Hatton so carefully primed it smelled like burning long johns soaked in molasses. Old-timers groused that all the tobacco went to hell when theUSA fought the CSA.

George didn't see how anything could get much nastier than the blend the Cookie smoked now.

Once he'd filled the galley with poison gas, Hatton answered, "The Confederates are pounding hell out ofColumbus ."

"Screw 'em," George said, sipping the coffee. Even after he'd doctored it, it was strong enough to grow hair on a stripper's chest--a waste of a great natural resource, that would have been. "What are we doing?"

"Wireless says we're bombingRichmond andLouisville andNashville and evenAtlanta ," Hatton answered. He emitted more smoke signals. If George read them straight, they meant he didn't believe everything he heard on the wireless.

"How about overseas?" George asked.

"BBC saysCork andWaterford 'll fall in the next couple of days, and that'll be the end ofIreland ," the Cookie replied. "That Churchill is an A-number-one son of a bitch, but the man makes a hell of a speech.

Him and Featherston both, matter of fact. Al Smith is a goddamn bore, you know that?"

"I didn't vote for him," George said. "What about the rest of the war over there?"

"Well, the BBC says the French are kicking Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm's ass. They say theUkraine 's falling apart andPoland 's rebelling againstGermany . But they tell a hell of a lot of lies, too, you know what I mean? If I could understand what's coming out ofBerlin , you bet your butt the krauts would be singing a different tune. So who knows what's really going on?"

At that moment, the Sweet Sue gave a sudden, violent lurch to starboard, and then another one, just as sharp, to port. "What the hell?" George exclaimed as coffee slopped out of the mug and burned his fingers.

Then he heard a new noise through the chatter on the wireless and the diesel's deep, steady throb: a savage roar rising rapidly to a mechanical scream. It seemed to come from outside, but filled the galley, filled everything. George got a glimpse of an airplane zooming toward them--and of flames shooting from its wings as it opened up with machine guns.

Bullets stitched their way across the fishing boat. One caught the Cookie in the chest. He let out a grunt--more a sound of surprise than one of pain--and crumpled, crimson spreading over the gray wool of his sweater. His feet kicked a few times, but he was plainly a dead man. A sudden sharp stench among the good smells of the galley said his bowels had let go.

Screams on the deck told that the Cookie wasn't the only one who'd been hit. George saw right away that he couldn't do anything for

Hatton. He hurried out of the galley. Chow'll be rotten the rest of the run went through his mind. Then he realized that was the least of his worries. Getting home alive and in one piece counted for a hell of a lot more.

Chris Agganis was down on the deck clutching his leg. Blood spilled from it. George was used to gore, as anybody who made his living gutting tuna that could outweigh him had to be. But this blood spilled out of a person. He was amazed how much difference that made.

"Hurts," Agganis moaned in accented English. "Hurts like hell." He said something else in syrupy Greek.

This was his first time on the Sweet Sue. The skipper'd hired him at the last minute, when Johnny O'Shea didn't come aboard--was probably too drunk to remember to come aboard. Agganis knew what he was doing, he played a mean harmonica, and now he'd been rewarded for his hard work with a bullet in the calf.

George knelt beside him. "Lemme see it, Chris." Agganis kept moaning. George had to pull the Greek's hands away so he could yank up his dungarees. The bullet had gone through the meat of his calf. As far as George could see, it hadn't hit the bone. He said, "It's not good, but it could be a hell of a lot worse."

He stuffed his handkerchief into one hole and pulled another one out of Chris Agganis' pocket for the second, larger, wound.

He was so desperately busy doing that--and fighting not to puke, for hot blood on his hands was ever so much worse than the cold stuff that came out of a fish--that he didn't notice how the shriek of the airplane engine overhead was swelling again till it was almost on top of the fishing boat.

Machine-gun bullets dug into the planking of the deck. They chewed up the galley once more, and clanged through the metal of the smokestack. Then the fighter zoomed away eastward. The roundels on its wings and flanks were red inside white inside blue: it came from a British ship.

"Fucking bastard," Chris Agganis choked out.

"Yeah," George agreed, hoping and praying the limey wouldn't come back. Once more and the fishing boat was liable to sink. For that matter, how many bullet holes did she have at the waterline? And how many rounds had gone through the engine? Was she going to catch fire and burn right here in the middle of the ocean?

The engine was still running. The Sweet Sue wasn't dead in the water. That would do for a miracle till a bigger one came along.

And she still steered. That meant the skipper hadn't taken a bullet. George got to his feet and went back into the galley. He knew where the first-aid kit was. Shattered crockery crunched under the soles of his shoes. The air was thick with the iron stink of blood, the smell of shit, and the nasty smoke from the cheap pipe tobacco the Cookie had lit a couple of minutes before he died.

George took a bandage and a bottle of rubbing alcohol and, after a moment's hesitation, a morphine syringe out to Chris Agganis. The fisherman let out a bloodcurdling shriek when George splashed alcohol over his wound. "You don't want it to rot, do you?" George asked.

Agganis' answer was spirited but incoherent. He hardly noticed when George stuck him with the syringe and injected the morphine. After a few minutes, though, he said, "Ahhh."

"Is that better?" George asked. Agganis didn't answer, but he stopped

thrashing. By the look on his face, Jesus had just come down from heaven and was patting him on the back. George stared at him, and at the syringe. He'd heard what morphine could do, but he'd never seen it in action till now. He hadn't imagined anybody with a bullet wound could look that happy.

With Chris Agganis settled, George could look over the Sweet Sue. Chewed to hell but still going seemed to sum things up, as it had before. Captain Albert had swung her back toward the west. With one dead and at least one hurt man on board, with the boat probably taking on water, with the engine possibly damaged, what else could the skipper do? Nothing George could see.

But heading west produced a painful pang, too. They'd get intoBoston harbor with nothing on ice except the Cookie, and they couldn't sell him. What the hell would they do without a paycheck to show for the trip? What the hell would Connie say when George walked into the apartment with nothing to show for his time at sea?

She'll say, "Thank God you're alive," that's what, George thought. She'd hug him and squeeze him and take him to bed, and all that would be wonderful. But none of it would pay the rent or buy groceries.

What the hell good was a man who didn't bring any money with him when he walked through the front door? No good. No good at all.

He went up to the wheelhouse. The fighter hadn't shot that up. The skipper was talking into the wireless set, giving the Sweet Sue's position and telling a little about what had happened to her. He raised a questioning eyebrow at George.

"Chris got one in the leg," George said. "And the Cookie's dead." He touched his own chest to show the hit Hatton had taken.

"At least one dead and one wounded," the skipper said. "We are returning to port if we can. Out." He set the microphone back in its cradle, then looked at--looked through--George. "Jesus Christ!"

"Yeah," George said.

"See who else is still with us, and what kind of shape the boat's in," Albert told him. "I don't know what the hell the owners are going to say when we get back like this. I just don't know. But I'll be goddamn glad to get back at all, you know what I mean?"

"I sure do, Skipper," George answered. "You better believe I do."

Somewhere out in the westernNorth Atlantic prowled a British airplane carrier with more nerve than sense. The USS Remembrance and another carrier, the Sandwich Islands, steamed north fromBermuda to do their damnedest to send her to the bottom.

Sam Carsten peered across the water at theSandwich Islands . She was a newer ship, built as a carrier from the keel up. The Remembrance had started out as a battle cruiser and been converted while abuilding. TheSandwich Islands ' displacement wasn't much greater, but she could carry almost twice as many airplanes. Carsten was glad to have her along.

Repairs still went on aboard the Remembrance. The yard atBermuda had done most of the work. In peacetime, the carrier would have stayed there a lot longer. But this was war. You did what you had to do and sent her back into the scrap. It had been the same way aboard the Dakota during the Great War.

Sam wondered whether the battleship's steering mechanism was everything it should be even now.

Destroyers and cruisers ringed the two carriers. That reassured Sam less than it had before the raid onCharleston . The screening ships hadn't been able to keep land-based aircraft away from the Remembrance. Would they and the combat air patrol be able to fend off whatever the limeys threw at this force? Carsten hoped so. He also knew that what he hoped and what he got were liable to have nothing to do with each other.

He rubbed more zinc-oxide ointment on a nose already carrying enough of the white goo to resemble one of the snow-capped peaks of theRockies . He only wished the stuff did more good. With it or without it, he burned. Without it, he burned a little worse.

Up at the top of the Remembrance's island, the antennas for the wireless rangefinder spun round and round, round and round. The gadget had done good work off the Confederate coast, warning of incoming enemy airplanes well before the screening ships or the combat air patrol spotted them. As the carriers got more familiar with their new toy, they said Y-range more and more often. The whole name was just too clumsy.

Some of the cruisers also sported revolving Y-range antennas. They

used them not only to spot incoming enemy aircraft but also to improve their gunnery. Y-ranging gave results more precise than the stereoscopic and parallax visual rangefinders gunners had used in the Great War.

A signalman at the stern wigwagged a fighter onto the deck. Smoke stinking of burnt rubber spurted from the tires. The hook the airplane carried in place of a tailwheel snagged an arrester wire. The pilot jumped out. The flight crew cleared the machine from the deck. Another one roared aloft to take its place.

"You're in unfamiliar territory, Carsten," said someone behind Sam.

He turned and found himself face to face with Commander Dan Cressy. "Uh, yes, sir," he answered, saluting the executive officer. "I'm like the groundhog--every once in a while, they let me poke my nose up above ground and see if I spot my own shadow."

The exec grinned. "I like that."

Sam suspected Cressy would have a ship of his own before long. He was young, brave, and smarter than smart; he'd make flag rank if he lived. Unlike me, Carsten thought without rancor. As a middle-aged mustang, he had much slimmer prospects of promotion. He'd dwelt on them before. He didn't feel like doing it now, especially since all of them but getting the junior grade removed from his lieutenant's rank would take an uncommon run of casualties among officers senior to him.

"Glad you do, sir," Sam said now. He sure as hell didn't want the exec to catch him brooding.

"Damage-control parties have done good work for us," Cressy said. "The skipper is pleased with Lieutenant Commander Pottinger--and with you. You showed nerve, fighting that five-inch gun when the Confederates hit us offCharleston ."

"Thank you very much, sir," Sam said, and meant it. The exec usually did Captain Stein's dirty work for him. The skipper got the credit, the exec got the blame: an ancient Navy rule. Winning praise from Cressy--even praise he was relaying from someone else--didn't happen every day.

"You were on this ship when you were a rating, weren't you?" Cressy asked.

"Yes, sir, I sure was, just after she was built," Sam said. "I had to leave her when I made ensign. There wasn't any slot for me here. When I came back, they put me in damage control. If I'd had my druthers, I'd have stayed in gunnery, or better yet up here with the airplanes." He knew he was sticking his neck out. Grumbling about an assignment he'd had for years was liable to land him in dutch.

Commander Cressy eyed him for a moment. "When you're so good at what you do, how much do you suppose your druthers really matter?"

"Sir, I've been in the Navy more than thirty years. I know damn well they don't matter at all," Sam answered. "But that doesn't mean I haven't got 'em."

That got another grin from Cressy. Sam had a way of saying things that might have been annoying from somebody else seem a joke, or at least nothing to get upset about. The exec said, "Well, fair enough. If we ever get the chance to give them to you . . . we'll see what we can do, that's all."

"Thank you very much, sir!" Sam exclaimed. It wasn't a promise, but it came closer than anything he'd ever heard up till now.

"Nothing to thank me for," Cressy said, emphasizing that it was no promise. "There may not be anything to do, either. You have that straight?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I sure do," Sam said. "I can handle the job I've got just fine. It isn't the one I would have picked for myself, that's all."

Klaxons began to hoot. "Now we both get to do the jobs we've got," Commander Cressy said, and went off toward the Remembrance's island at a dead run. Carsten was running, too, for the closest hatchway that would take him down to his battle station in the carrier's bowels.

Closing watertight doors slowed him, but he got where he was going in good time. Lieutenant Commander Pottinger came down at almost exactly the same moment. "No, I don't know what's going on," Pottinger said when Sam asked him. "I bet I can guess, though."

"Me, too," Sam said. "We must've spotted that British carrier."

"I can't think of anything else," Pottinger said. "Their pilot was probably stupid, shooting up that fishing boat."

"One of ours would've done the same thing to their boat off the coast ofEngland ," Sam said. "Flyboys are like that."

In the light of the bare bulb in its wire cage overhead, Pottinger's grin was haggard. "I didn't say you were wrong. I just said the limey was stupid. There's a difference."

The throb of the Remembrance's engines deepened as the great ship picked up speed. One after another, airplanes roared off her flight deck. Some of those would be torpedo carriers and dive bombers to go after the British ship, others fighters to protect them and to fight off whatever the limeys threw at the Remembrance and theSandwich Islands .

As usual once an action started, the damage-control party had nothing to do but stand around and wait and hope its talents weren't needed. Some of the sailors told dirty jokes. A petty officer methodically cracked his knuckles. He didn't seem to know he was doing it, though each pop sounded loud as a gunshot in that cramped, echoing space.

Time crawled by. Sam had learned not to look at his watch down here. He would always feel an hour had gone by, when in fact it was ten minutes. Better not to know than to be continually disappointed.

When the Remembrance suddenly heeled hard to port, everybody in the damage-control party--maybe everybody on the whole ship--said, "Uh-oh!" at the same time. If the antiaircraft guns had started banging away right then, Sam would have known some of the British carrier's bombers had got through. Since they didn't . . .

"Submersible!" he said.

Lieutenant Commander Pottinger nodded. "I'd say the son of a bitch missed us--with his first spread of fish, anyhow." He added the last phrase to make sure nobody could accuse him of optimism.

Not much later, explosions in the deep jarred the Remembrance. "They're throwing ashcans at the bastard," one of the sailors said.

"Hope they nail his hide to the wall, too," another one said. Nobody quarreled with that, least of all Sam.

He'd seen more battle damage than anybody else down there. If he never saw any more, he wouldn't have been the least bit disappointed.

Another depth charge burst, this one so close to the surface that it

rattled everybody's teeth. "Jesus H.

Christ!" Pottinger said. "What the hell are they trying to do, blow our stern off?"

Nobody laughed. Such disasters had befallen at least one destroyer. Sam didn't think anybody'd ever screwed up so spectacularly aboard a carrier, but that didn't mean it couldn't happen.

Then the intercom crackled to life. "Scratch one sub!" Commander Cressy said exultantly.

Cheers filled the corridor. Carsten shouted as loud as anybody. A boat with somewhere around sixty British or Confederate or French sailors had just gone to the bottom. Better them than me, he thought, and let out another whoop. Lieutenant Commander Pottinger stuck out his hand. Grinning, Sam squeezed it.

Thuds on the deck above told of airplanes landing. One of the sailors said, "I wonder what the hell's going on up there." Sam wondered the same thing. Everybody down here did, no doubt. Until the intercom told them, they wouldn't know.

An hour later, the all-clear sounded--still with no news doled out past the sinking of the one submarine.

Sam would have made a beeline for the deck anyway, just to escape the cramped, stuffy, paint- and oil-smelling corridor in which he'd been cooped up so long. The added attraction of news only made him move faster.

He found disgusted fliers. "The limeys hightailed it out of town," one of them said. "We went to where they were supposed to be at--as best we could guess and as best we could navigate--and they weren't anywhere around there. We pushed out all the way to our maximum range and even a little farther, and we still didn't spot the bastards. They're long gone."

"Good riddance," Sam offered.

"Well, yeah," the pilot said, shedding his goggles and sticking a cigar in his mouth (he wasn't fool enough to light it, but gnawed at the end). "But that's a hell of a long way to come to shoot up a goddamn fishing boat and then go home."

"I think they were trying to lure us out to where the submarine could

put a torpedo in our brisket," Sam said. "The Japs did that to the Dakota in theSandwich Islands , and she spent a lot of time in dry dock after that."

"Maybe," the pilot said. "Makes more sense than anything I thought of."

"It didn't work, though," Sam said. "We traded one of our fishing boats for their sub--and I hear they didn't even sink the fishing boat. I'll make that deal any day."

IV

Clarence Potter's promotion to brigadier general meant inheriting his luckless predecessor's office. Not being buried under the War Department had a couple of advantages. Now he could look out a window.

There wasn't much point to one when all it would show was dirt. And now a wireless set brought in a signal, not just static.

He knew, of course, that Confederate wireless stations said only what the government--that is, the Freedom Party--wanted people to hear. Broadcasters could not tell too many lies, though. If they did,U.S. stations would make them sorry. Unjammed,U.S. broadcasts could reach far into the CSA, just as C.S. programs could be heard well north of the border.

And so, when a Confederate newsman gleefully reported that the Confederate Navy and the Royal Navy had combined to take Bermuda away from theUnited States , he believed the man. "In a daring piece of deception, HMS Ark Royal lured twoU.S. carriers away from the island, making the joint task force's job much easier," the newscaster said.

Slowly, Potter nodded to himself. That must have been a nervy piece of work. The Royal Navy must have believed thatBermuda was worth a carrier. It hadn't had to pay the price, but it might have.

Eyeing a map, the Intelligence officer decided the British were dead right. The game had been worth the candle. With Bermuda lost,U.S. ships would have to run the gauntlet down the Confederate coast to resupply theBahamas . He didn't think theUnited States could or would do it. Taking them away from theUSA would probably fall to the Confederacy rather thanBritain , but it would eliminate a threat to

the state ofCuba and make it much harder forU.S. ships to move south and threaten the supply line betweenArgentina and theUnited Kingdom . Cutting that supply line was what had finally madeBritain throw in the sponge in the Great War.

And if we take theBahamas , what will we do with all the Negroes there? he wondered. That was an interesting question, but not one he intended to ask Jake Featherston. If he was lucky, Featherston would tell him it was none of his goddamn business. If he was unlucky, something worse than that would happen.

He didn't waste a lot of time worrying about it. As Confederates went, he was fairly liberal. But Confederates--white Confederates--did not go far in that direction. What happened to Negroes--in the Confederate States or out of them--wasn't high on his list of worries. Blacks inside the CSA deserved whatever happened to them, as far as he was concerned.

There, Anne Colleton would have completely agreed with him. He shook his head. He made a fist.

Instead of slamming it down on the desk, he let it fall gently. He still couldn't believe she was dead. She'd been one of those fiercely vital people you thought of as going on forever. But life didn't work like that, and war had an obscene power all its own. What it wanted, it took, and an individual's vitality mattered not at all to it.

His fist fell again, harder this time. He was damned if he knew whether to call what he and Anne had had between them love. There probably wasn't a better name for it, even if the two of them had disagreed so strongly about so many things that they'd broken up for years, and neither one of them ever really thought about settling down with the other. Anne had never been the sort to settle down with a man.

"And neither have I, with a woman," Potter said softly. He tried to imagine himself married to Anne Colleton. Even if what they'd known had been love, the picture refused to form. Domestic bliss hadn't been in the cards for either one of them.

Potter laughed at himself. Even if he'd had a wife who specialized in domestic bliss--assuming such a paragon could exist in the real world--he wouldn't have had time to enjoy it. When he wasn't here at his desk, he was unconscious on a cot not far away. The coffee he poured down till his stomach sizzled made sure he was unconscious as little as

possible.

He lit a cigarette. Tobacco didn't help keep him awake. It did, or could every now and then, help him focus his thoughts. Since the war started, getting instructions to the spies the CSA had in theUSA and getting reports back from them had grown a lot harder than it was during peacetime.

Where was that roster? He pawed through papers till he found it. One of the Confederates who spoke with a goodU.S. accent worked at aColumbus wireless station. Potter scribbled a note: "Satchmo's Blues" at 1630 on the afternoon of the 11th, station CSNT.

The note would go to Saul Goldman. Goldman would make sure the right song went out at the right time from theNashville wireless station. The Confederate inColumbus listened to CSNT every afternoon at half past four. If he heard "Satchmo's Blues," he made his coded report when he went on the air in the wee small hours. Someone on the Confederate side of the line would hear and decipher it. Potter didn't know all the details, any more than Goldman knew exactly who would be listening for that tune.

Someone was listening. Someone would hear. That was all that mattered.

Sooner or later, some bright young damnyankee would be listening, too, and would put two and two together and come up with four. At that point, the Confederate inColumbus would start suffering from a sharply lower life expectancy, even if he didn't know it yet.

Or maybe, if the men from theUSA were sneaky enough, they wouldn't shoot the Confederate spy.

Maybe they would turn him instead, and make him send their false information into the CSA instead of the truth.

How would the people who listened and deciphered know the agent had been turned? How would they keep the Confederates from acting on damnyankee lies? Mirrors reflecting into other mirrors reflecting into other mirrors yet . . . Intelligence was that kind of game, a chess match with both players moving at the same time and both of them blindfolded more often than not.

Somewhere not far fromColumbus , some other Confederate spy would be waiting for a different signal.

He would have a different way to respond. If what he said didn't match what the fellow at the wireless station reported, a red flag would--with luck--go up.

Potter snorted. Without luck, nobody would notice the discrepancy till too late. In that case, some Confederate soldiers would catch hell. It wasn't as if soldiers didn't catch hell all the time.

Air-raid sirens began to warble. That was what the instruction posters said, anyhow. When the siren begins to warble, that is your signal to take cover. It didn't sound like a warble to Potter. It sounded like the noise a mechanical dog would make if a giant stepped on its tail. howlhowlhowlhowlhowlhowl endlessly, maddeningly repeated . . .

The damnyankees had nerve, coming overRichmond in broad daylight--either nerve or several screws loose. Potter locked up his important papers in a desk drawer, then headed for the stairway to the shelters in the War Department subbasement--not far from where he'd formerly worked, in fact. He'd just reached the stairwell when the antiaircraft guns started banging away. "I hope we shoot down all of those bastards," a young lieutenant said.

"That would be nice," Potter agreed. "Don't hold your breath till it happens, though." The lieutenant gave him an odd look. It was one he'd seen a great many times before. "Don't worry, sonny," he said. "I'm as Confederate as you are, no matter what I sound like."

"All right, sir," the lieutenant said. "I don't reckon they'd make you a general if you weren't." His voice was polite. His face declared he didn't altogether believe what he was saying. Potter had seen that before, too.

Bombs were already screaming down when Potter got into the shelter. It was hot and crowded and not very comfortable. The ground shook when bombs started bursting. The lights overhead flickered. The shelter would be a hell of a lot less pleasant if they went out. Crammed into the sweaty dark with Lord only knew how many other people . . . He shuddered.

More bombs rained down. A woman--a secretary? a cleaning lady?--screamed. Everybody in the shelter seemed to take a deep breath at the same time, almost enough to suck all the air out of the room.

One scream had probably come close to touching off a swarm of others.

Crump! The lights flickered again. This time, they did go out, for about five seconds--long enough for that woman, or maybe a different one, to let out another scream. A couple of men made noises well on the way toward being screams, too. Then the lights came on again. Several people laughed. The mirth had the high, shrill sound of hysteria.

Behind Potter, somebody started saying, "Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me," again and again, as relentless as the air-raid siren. Potter almost shouted at him to make him shut up--almost but not quite. Telling the man that maybe Jesus loved him but no one else did might make the Intelligence officer feel better, but would only wound the poor fellow who was trying to stay brave.

The next explosions were farther away than the blast that had briefly knocked out the lights. Potter let out a sigh of relief. It wasn't the only one.

"How long have we been down here?" a man asked.

Potter looked at his watch. "Twenty-one--no, twenty-two--minutes now."

Several people loudly called him a liar. "It's got to be hours," a man said.

"Feels like years," someone else added. Potter couldn't very well quarrel with that, because it felt like years to him, too. But it hadn't been, and he was too habitually precise to mix up feelings and facts.

After what seemed like an eternity but was in truth another fifty-one minutes, the all-clear sounded.

"Now," somebody said brightly, "let's see if anything's left upstairs."

Had the War Department taken a direct hit, they would have known about it. Even so, the crack spawned plenty of nervous laughter. People began filing out of the shelter. This was only the third or fourth time theUSA had bombedRichmond . Everybody felt heroic at enduring the punishment. And someone said, "Philadelphia's bound to be catching it worse."

Half a dozen people on the stairs nodded. Potter started to himself. He wondered why. Yes, there was a certain consolation in the idea that the enemy was hurting more than your country. But if he blew you up, or your family, or your home, or even your office, what your side

did to him wouldn't seem to matter so much . . . would it? Vengeance couldn't make personal anguish go away . . . could it?

That near miss hadn't blown up Potter's office. But it had blown the glass out of the windows, except for a few jagged, knife-edged shards. The soles of his shoes crunched on glittered pieces of glass in the carpet. More sparkled on his desk. He couldn't sit down on his swivel chair without doing a good, thorough job of cleaning it. Otherwise, he'd get his bottom punctured. He shrugged. A miss was about as good as a mile. An hour or two of cleanup, maybe not even that, and he'd be back on the job.

Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Colleton peered north towardGrove City,Ohio . It wasn't much of a city, despite the name; it couldn't have held more than fifteen hundred people--two thousand at the outside.

What made it important was that it was the last town of any size at all southwest ofColumbus . Once the Confederate Army drove the damnyankees out ofGrove City , they wouldn't have any place to make a stand this side of the capital ofOhio .

Trouble was, they knew it. They didn't want to retreat those last eight miles. If the Confederates got intoGrove City , they could bring up artillery here and add to the poundingColumbus and its defenses were taking.U.S. forces were doing their best to make sure that didn't happen.

Grove Citylay in the middle of a fertile farming belt. Now, though, shells and bombs were tearing those fields, not tractors and plows. Barrel tracks carved the most noticeable furrows in the soil. The smell of freshly turned earth was sweet in Colleton's nostrils; he crouched in a foxhole he'd just dug for himself, though the craters pocking the ground would have served almost as well.

More shells churned up the dirt. TheU.S. soldiers had an artillery position just behindGrove City , and they were shooting as hard and as fast as they could. Somewhere not far away, a Confederate soldier started screaming for his mother. His voice was high and shrill. Tom Colleton bit his lip. He'd heard screams like that in the last war as well as this one. They meant a man was badly hurt. Sure enough, these quickly faded.

Tom cursed. He was in his late forties, but his blond, boyish good looks and the smile he usually wore let him lie ten years off his age. Not right now, not after he'd just listened to a soldier from his

regiment die.

And when bombs or shells murdered his men, he couldn't help wondering whether his sister had made those same noises just before she died. If Anne hadn't been inCharleston the day that goddamn carrier chose to raid the city . . . If she hadn't, the world would have been a different place. But it was what it was, and that was all it ever could be.

"Wireless!" Tom shouted. "God damn it to hell, where are you?"

"Here, sir." The soldier with the wireless set crawled across the riven ground toward the regimental commander. The heavy pack on his back made him a human dromedary. "What do you need, sir?"

"Get hold of division headquarters and tell 'em we'd better have something to knock down those Yankee guns," Colleton answered. "As best I can make out, they're in map square B-18."

"B-18. Yes, sir," the wireless operator repeated. He shouted into the microphone. At last, he nodded to Tom. "They've got the message, sir. Permission to get my ass back under cover?"

"You don't need to ask me that, Duffy," Tom said. The wireless man crawled away and dove into a shell hole. Soldiers said two shells never came down in the same place. They'd said that in the Great War, too, and often died proving it wasn't always true.

Within a few minutes, Confederate shells began falling on map square B-18. The bombardment coming down on the Confederate soldiers south ofGrove City slowed but didn't stop. Tom Colleton shouted for Duffy again. The wireless man scrambled out of the shell hole and came over to him, his belly never getting any higher off the ground than a snake's. Duffy changed frequencies, bawled into the mike once more, and gave Tom a thumbs-up before wriggling back to what he hoped was safety.

Dive bombers screamed out of the sky a quarter of an hour later. Screamed was the operative word; the Mules (soldiers often called them Asskickers) had wind-powered sirens built into their nonretractable landing gear, to make them as demoralizing as possible. They swooped down on theU.S. artillery so fast and at so steep an angle, Tom thought they would surely keep going and crash, turning themselves into bombs, too.

He'd watched Mules in action before. They always made him worry

that way. He'd seen a couple of them shot down--if Yankee fighters got anywhere near them, they were dead meat. But they didn't fly themselves into the ground, no matter how much it looked as if they would. One after another, they released the bombs they carried under their bellies, pulled out of their dives, and, engines roaring, raced away at not much above treetop height.

Mules aimed their bombs by aiming themselves at their target. They were far more accurate than high-altitude bombers--they were, in effect, long-range heavy artillery. Counterbattery fire hadn't put theU.S. guns out of action. A dozen 500-pound bombs silenced them.

"Let's go, boys!" Colleton yelled, emerging from his foxhole and dashing forward. His men came with him. If he'd called for them to go forward and hung back himself, they wouldn't have moved nearly so fast. He'd discovered that in the Great War. He was one of the lucky ones. He'd had only minor wounds, hardly even enough to rate a Purple Heart. An awful lot of brave Confederate officers--and damnyankees, too--had died leading from the front.

Even without their artillery, theU.S. soldiers inGrove City didn't intend to leave. Tracer rounds from several machine guns sketched orange lines of flame across the fields. Men went down, some taking cover, others because they'd been hit. The volume of fire here was less than it had been on theRoanoke front; this was a war of movement, and neither side got the chance to set up defenses in depth the way both had a generation earlier. But even a few machine guns could take the starch out of an attacking infantry regiment in a hurry.

"Goddammit, where the hell are the barrels?" somebody shouted.

Whoever that fellow was, noncom or more likely private, he thought like a general. Barrels--a few stubborn Confederates called them tanks, the way the British did--were the answer to machine-gun fire.

And here they came, five--no, six--of them, as if the bellyaching soldier really had summoned them.

TheU.S. machine guns started blazing away at them. You needed a bigger door knocker than a machine-gun round to open them up, though. The bullets sparked off their butternut-painted armor.

The barrels also carried machine guns. They started shooting up theU.S. position at the southern edge ofGrove City . And the barrels' cannon spoke, one by one. One by one, the Yankees' machine guns stopped shooting back. Rifle fire still crackled, but rifle fire couldn't

wreck advancing foot soldiers the way machine guns could.

"Let's go!" Tom Colleton yelled again. He panted as he dashed forward. He'd been a kid during the Great War. He wasn't a kid any more. He flinched when a bullet whined past him. Back then, he'd been sure he would live forever. Now, when he had a wife and kids to live for, he knew all too well that he might not. He didn't hang back, but part of him sure as hell wanted to.

Young soldiers on both sides still thought they were immortal. A man inU.S. green-gray sprang up onto a Confederate barrel. He yanked a hatch open and dropped in two grenades. The barrel became a fireball. TheU.S. soldier managed to leap clear before it blew, but Confederate gunfire cut him down.

Five trained men and a barrel, Tom thought glumly. The damnyankee had thrown his life away, but he'd made the Confederates pay high.

Another barrel hit a buried mine. Flames spurted up from it, too, but most of the crew got out before the ammunition inside started cooking off. The remaining barrels and the Confederate infantry pushed on intoGrove City . Tom waited for barrels painted green-gray to rumble down from the north and stall the Confederate advance. He waited, but it didn't happen. TheUSA didn't seem to have any barrels around to use.

They're bigger than we are, Colleton thought as he peered around the corner of a house whose white clapboard sides were newly ventilated with bullet holes. They're bigger than we are, but we're a lot readier than they are. If we'd waited much longer, we'd be in trouble.

But the Confederate States hadn't waited, and their armies were going forward. In the last war, they'd thrust towardPhiladelphia , but they'd fallen short and been beaten back one painful mile at a time. Other than that, they'd fought on the defensive all through the war. Tom had been part of it from first day till last, and he'd never once set foot onU.S. soil.

Here he was inOhio now. Jake Featherston had always said he would do better than the Whigs had when it came to running a war against theUnited States . Tom had had his doubts. He'd never sold his soul to the Freedom Party, the way he often thought his sister had. You couldn't argue with results, though. A couple of weeks of fighting had taken the Confederacy halfway from the banks of the Ohio River to the shores ofLake Erie . If another two or three weeks could take the

CSA the rest of the way .

. .

If that happens, theUnited States get to find out what it's like when an axe comes down on a snake. Both halves wiggle for a while afterwards, but the damn thing dies just the same. Tom grinned fiercely, liking the comparison.

Freight-train roars in the sky reminded him that the damnyankees weren't cut in half yet. Half a dozen soldiers yelled, "Incoming!" at the same time. The Mules might have knocked out the battery that had flayed the regiment as it advanced, but theUSA had more guns where those came from.

And, along with the usual roaring and screaming noises shells made as they flew toward their targets, Tom also heard sinister gurgles. He knew what those gurgles meant. He'd known for more than a quarter of a century, though he'd hoped he might forget what he knew.

"Gas!" he shouted. "They're shooting gas at us!" He pulled his mask off his belt and thrust it over his face. He had to make sure the straps that held it on were good and tight and that it sealed well against his cheeks. No soldier who wanted to make sure he was safe against gas could afford to grow a beard.

Shells thudded home, one after another. Most were the robust black bursts with red fire at their heart that Tom had long known and loathed. A few of them, though, sounded more like sneezes. Those were the gas shells going off. Tom wondered what kind of gas the Yankees were using. A mask alone wasn't really enough protection against mustard gas. It would blister your hide as well as your lungs. A few gas specialists wore rubberized suits along with their masks. A rubberized suit inOhio in July was torture of its own.

The gas would also torment the defenders inGrove City , who were falling back toward the racetrack at the north end of town. The Yankee high command didn't seem to care. The more they slowed down the Confederates, the longer they would have to fortifyColumbus .

Tom wondered if his own side could be that ruthless. Part of him hoped so, if the need ever arose. But he prayed with every fiber of his being that such a day of need would never come.

Brigadier General Abner Dowling stood by the side of Highway 62, watchingU.S. soldiers fall back from the south and intoColumbus . Dowling didn't think he had ever seen beaten troops before. In the Great War, he'd watched George Custer throw divisions into the meat grinder, sending them forward to take positions that couldn't possibly be taken. Where divisions went forward, regiments would come back. Before barrels changed the way the war was fought, machine guns and artillery made headlong attacks impossibly, insanely, expensive--which hadn't stopped Custer from making them, or even slowed him down.

Those who lived through his folly had been defeated, yes. By the nature of things, what else could have happened to them? But they hadn't been beaten, not the way these soldiers were. They'd been ready to go back into the fight as soon as the trains disgorged some more newly minted, shiny troops to go in with them.

Looking at the men trudging up the asphalt towards and then past him, Dowling knew they weren't going to be ready for battle again any time soon. They weren't running. Most of them hadn't thrown away their Springfields. Their eyes, though . . . Their eyes were the eyes of men who'd seen hell come down on earth, who'd seen it, been part of it, and had no intention of being part of it again for a long time, if ever.

Beside Dowling stood Captain Max Litvinoff, a short, skinny young man with a hairline mustache. The style was popular these days, but Dowling didn't think much of it. He was used to the bushier facial adornments men had worn in years gone by. He didn't think much of Captain Litvinoff, either. Not that the man wasn't competent--he was. He was, if anything, theUSA 's leading expert on gas warfare. That by itself was plenty to give Dowling the cold chills.

"If we are to hold this city, sir, we need a wider application of the special weapons." Litvinoff's voice was high and thin, as if it hadn't quite finished changing. He wouldn't call poison gas poison gas, from which Dowling concluded his conscience bothered him. If he used an innocuous-sounding name, he wouldn't have to think about what his toys actually did.

"We've already used enough gas to kill everything between theOhio and here, haven't we, Captain?"

Dowling growled.

Behind the lenses of his spectacles, Litvinoff's eyes registered hurt. "Obviously not, sir, or the opposing forces would not have succeeded in advancing this far," he replied.

"Right," Dowling said tightly. "Have we really accomplished anything by using gas? Except to make sure that Featherston's bastards are using it, too, I mean?"

"Sir, don't you think it likely that we would be in an even worse situation if we were not using gas?"

Litvinoff replied. "The Confederates would be under any circumstances, would you not agree?"

Dowling muttered under his breath. However much he didn't want to, he did agree with that. Jake Featherston's main goal in life was to kill as manyU.S. soldiers as he could, and he wasn't fussy about how he did it. As for Litvinoff's other comment, though . . . Dowling asked, "Captain, how in damnation could we be in a worse situation than we are now? If you can tell me that one, you take the prize."

You Take the Prize was the name of a popular quiz show on the wireless. Dowling listened to it every once in a while. Part of the attraction, for him, was finding out just how ignorant the American people really were. By the way Max Litvinoff blinked, he'd not only never listened to the show, he'd never heard of it.

"What do you recommend, sir?" he asked.

"How about going back in time about five years and building three times as many barrels as we really did?" Dowling said. Captain Litvinoff only shrugged. However good that sounded, they couldn't do it.

What could they do? Dowling wished he knew.

Soldiers weren't the only people retreating intoColumbus . Civilian refugees kept right on clogging the roads. Naturally, nobody in his right mind wanted to hang around where bullets and shells were flying.

And a good many people didn't want to live where the Stars and Bars flew. Three generations of enmity betweenUSA and CSA had drilled that into citizens of theUnited States . What nobody had told them before the war was that running for their lives wasn't the smartest

thing they could have done.

Had they sat tight, the fighting would have passed them by. On the road, they kept blundering into it again and again. And Confederate pilots had quickly discovered that the only thing that blocked a highway better than a swarm of refugees was a shot-up, bombed-out swarm of refugees.U.S.

propaganda claimed they attacked refugee columns for the fun of it. Maybe they had fun doing it, but it was definitely business, too.

Dowling wished he hadn't thought of air attacks just then. Sirens began yowling, which meant the Y-range gear had picked up Confederate airplanes heading forColumbus . Those rising and falling electrified wails were enough to galvanize soldiers where nothing else had been able to. They scrambled off the road, looking for any cover they could find.

Civilians, by contrast, stood around staring stupidly. To them, the air-raid sirens were just one more part of the catastrophe that had overwhelmed their lives. Maybe this bunch had never been attacked from the air before. If not, they were about to lose their collective cherry.

Captain Litvinoff nudged Dowling. "Excuse me, sir," he said politely, "but shouldn't we think about finding shelter for ourselves?"

Dowling could already hear airplane engines. Overeager antiaircraft gunners began shooting too soon.

Black puffs of smoke started dotting the sky. "I think it's too late," Dowling said. "By the time we can run to a house, they'll be on top of us." He threw himself down on the ground, wishing he had an entrenching tool.

Litvinoff flattened out beside him. "What will theUnited States do if we are killed on account of this incaution?" he asked.

By the way he said it, theUSA would have a tough time going on if the two of them got hit. Also by the way he said it, he was the one the country would particularly miss. Dowling didn't blame him for that.

Any officer who didn't think he was indispensable was too modest for his own good.

On the other hand, reality needed to puncture egotism every once in a

while. "What will theUnited States do?" Dowling echoed. "Promote a colonel and a first lieutenant and get on with the goddamn war."

Captain Litvinoff sent him a wounded look. That was the least of his worries. As he answered, his voice had risen to a shout to make itself heard above the rapidly rising roar of the Confederate bombers.

Mules, Dowling thought as the airplanes screamed down. No other machines made that horrible screech or had those graceful gull wings.

They seemed to be diving straight down. Dowling knew they weren't, knew they couldn't be, but that was how it seemed just the same. "Crash, you bastards!" he shouted. "Fly it right into the ground!"

The Mules didn't, of course, but that bellowed defiance made him feel better. He pulled his .45 out of its holster and banged away at the Confederate dive bombers. That also did no good at all. He consoled himself by thinking that it might. He wasn't the only one shooting at the airplanes. Several other soldiers were doing the same. Every once in a while, he supposed they might bring one down by dumb luck.

Most of the time, they didn't.

Then the bombs fell from the Mules' bellies. The airplanes leveled off and zoomed away. Blast picked Dowling up and slammed him down on the dirt as if it were a professional wrestler with the strength of a demon. "Oof!" he said. He tasted blood. It ran down his face, too. When he raised a hand, he discovered it came from a bloody nose. It could have been worse.

A few feet away, Max Litvinoff was trying to get his feet under him. By his dazed expression, he might have taken a right to the kisser. Missing glasses accounted for some of that. Without them, he looked even more confused than he was. He also had a bloody nose, and a cut on one ear that dripped more blood down onto the shoulder of his uniform tunic.

Dowling pointed. "Your spectacles are a couple of feet to the left of your left foot, Captain."

"Thank you, sir." Litvinoff plainly had to think about which foot was his left. He groped around on the grass till he found the eyeglasses, then set them on the bridge of his beaky nose. He peered over at Dowling with a worried frown. "I'm afraid I must have suffered some sort of head injury, sir. You look clear enough through one eye, but

with the other one I might as well not have the glasses on at all."

"Captain, if you check them, I think you'll discover that you've lost one lens," Dowling said.

Litvinoff raised a shaky forefinger. When he almost poked himself in the left eye, he said, "Oh," in a small, wondering voice. After a moment, he nodded. "Thank you again, sir. That hadn't occurred to me."

Another pause followed. "It should have, shouldn't it? I don't believe I'm at my best."

"I don't believe you are, either," Dowling said. "Unless I'm wrong, you got your bell rung there. If that bomb had hit a little closer, the blast might have done us in."

"Yes." Litvinoff looked down at himself. He seemed to realize for the first time that he was bleeding. The damage wasn't serious, but at the moment he was unequipped to do anything about it.

Dowling plucked a handkerchief from his own trouser pocket and dabbed at the younger man's nose and at his cut ear. "That's definitely a wound, Captain. I'll write you up for a Purple Heart."

"A Purple Heart? Me?" That needed a while to penetrate, too. Dowling suspected Litvinoff's likely concussion was only part of the reason. The gas specialist had done most of his work at the War Department offices back inPhiladelphia . Thinking of himself as a front-line soldier wouldn't seem easy or natural. Slowly, a smile spread across his face as the idea sank in. "That will impress people, won't it?"

"Provided you live long enough to show off your pretty medal, yes," Dowling answered. "I'll be damned if I know how good your chances are, though."

As if to underscore his words, Confederate shells began landing a few hundred yards away. The bursts walked closer. "No special weapons in any of those," Captain Litvinoff said distinctly. Concussed or not, he still knew his main business.

"Happy day," Dowling said. "They can kill us anyway, you know." Litvinoff looked astonished again.

That hadn't occurred to him, either. Abner Dowling wished it hadn't

occurred to him.

Properly speaking, Armstrong Grimes hadn't had enough training to go into combat. After the Confederates bombedCampCuster , nobody seemed to worry about anything like that. He had a uniform. They gave him aSpringfield all his own. True, he was still missing some of the finer points of the soldier's art. The theory seemed to be that he could pick those up later. If he lived.

Getting bombed had gone a long way toward clearing notions of immortality from his head. The first bullet that cracked past his head missed him but slew several more illusions. Bombs fell out of the sky, the way rain or snow did. That bullet had been different. That bullet had been personal. He'd dug his foxhole deeper as soon as it flew by.

West Jefferson, the town he and his fellow frightened foot soldiers were supposed to defend, lay about fifteen miles west ofColumbus . It was on the south bank of Little Darby Creek, and had probably been a nice place to live before the Confederates started shelling it. Brick houses from the nineteenth century stood side by side with modern frame homes. When shells hit the brick houses, they crumbled to rubble.

When shells hit the frame homes, they started to burn. Six of one, half a dozen of the other, as far as Armstrong could see.

Up ahead, something that might have been a man in a butternut uniform moved. Armstrong Grimes still had a lot to learn about being a soldier, but he understood shooting first and asking questions later. He raised theSpringfield to his shoulder, fired, worked the bolt, and fired again.

Maybe he'd hit the Confederate soldier. Maybe the fellow flattened out and took cover. Or maybe there hadn't been a Confederate soldier in those bushes to begin with. Any which way, Armstrong saw no more movement. That suited him fine.

His company commander was a pinch-faced, redheaded captain with acne scars named Gilbert Boyle.

"Keep your peckers up, boys!" Boyle called. "We've got to make sure Featherston's fuckers don't ford the creek."

A corporal named Rex Stowe crouched in a foxhole about ten feet from Armstrong's. He was swarthy, unshaven, and cynical. A cigarette

dangled from one corner of his mouth. It jerked up and down as he said, "Yeah, keep your pecker up. That way, Featherston's fuckers can shoot it off you easier."

The mere thought made Armstrong want to drop his rifle and clutch himself right there. He'd seen a lot of horrible things since the war started. He hadn't seen that yet, for which he thanked the God in Whom he believed maybe one morning in four.

A submachine gun stuttered, somewhere not far away. Bullets stitched up dirt and grass in front of Armstrong. Then, when the burst went high the way they always did, more rounds clipped twigs from the willow tree behind him. He tried to disappear into his foxhole. It wasn't big enough for that, but he did his damnedest.

Stowe fired a couple of times in the direction from which the burst had come. More submachine-gun fire answered him. He curled up in his hole, too. "I think everybody in the whole goddamn Confederate Army carries an automatic weapon," he growled, a mixture of disgust and fear in his voice.

"Seems that way," Armstrong agreed. "There's always more of us, but they put more lead in the air."

After another burst of fire, this from a new direction, a Southern voice called, "You Yankees! y'all surrender now, get yourselves out o' the fight, make sure y'all live through the war!"

"No," Captain Boyle shouted back, and then, "Hell, no! You want us, you come get us. It won't be as easy as you think."

"You'll be sorry, Yank," the Confederate answered. "Sure you don't want to change your mind? . . .

Going once . . . Going twice . . . Gone! All right, you asked for it, and now you'll get it."

Armstrong's father went on and on about Confederate attacks during the Great War, about artillery barrages and then thousands of men in butternut struggling through barbed wire toward waiting machine guns and riflemen. Merle Grimes had a Purple Heart and walked with a cane. Armstrong thought he was a blowhard, but he'd never figured his old man didn't know what he was talking about.

These Confederates, though, had a different set of rules--or maybe just

a different set of tools. Instead of an infantry charge to clear theU.S. soldiers out ofWest Jefferson , four barrels rattled forward.

Foot soldiers ran along with the machines, but Armstrong hardly noticed them. He started shooting at the lead barrel. His bullets threw off sparks as they ricocheted from the frontal armor. For all the harm they did, he might as well have been throwing peaches.

"Where's our barrels?" he shouted. It was, he thought, a hell of a good question, but no one answered it.

Behind an oak tree, three artillerymen struggled to make a 1.5-inch antibarrel gun bear on the Confederate machines. "Fire!" yelled the sergeant in charge of the gun. The shell exploded between two of the barrels. The gun crew reloaded. The sergeant shouted, "Fire!" again. This time, they scored a hit.

As flame and smoke spurted from a barrel, the artillerymen whooped in delight.

They didn't enjoy their triumph long. Two of the surviving barrels turned their machine guns and cannon fire on them. The splinter shield on their piece wasn't big enough to protect them. Down they went, one after another. Armstrong didn't know what artillerymen learned while they trained. Whatever it was, it didn't include much about taking cover. Shell fragments hissed and squealed through the air, right past his head. He sure as hell ducked.

On came the three remaining Confederate barrels. They looked as big as houses to Armstrong. The soldiers who advanced with them also shot and shot and shot, making theU.S. defenders keep their heads down. Some of the C.S. foot soldiers carried submachine guns. Others had automatic rifles, which were even nastier weapons. Submachine guns fired pistol cartridges of limited range and hitting power.

But an automatic rifle with a round as powerful as aSpringfield 's . . . that was very nasty news indeed.

"Hang tough, men!" Captain Boyle shouted. "We can stop them!"

The Confederate barrels shelled the houses on the south side of town. They knocked down a couple of them and started several new fires. Coughing at the smoke, Armstrong didn't think they accomplished much else.

In spite of Captain Boyle's commands,U.S. soldiers started slipping

back towards and over Little Darby Creek.West Jefferson didn't seem worth dying for. Facing barrels and infantrymen with automatic weapons when they had none of their own looked like a bad bargain to more and more men.

"How long you going to stick, Corporal?" Armstrong asked. He figured he could honorably leave when Rex Stowe pulled out.

Stowe didn't answer. Armstrong looked over to his foxhole, fearing the noncom had stopped a bullet while he wasn't looking. But the foxhole was empty. Stowe had already decided this was a fight the U.S.

Army wouldn't and couldn't win.

"Shit," Armstrong muttered. "You might have told me you were bugging out."

Escaping was harder than it would have been five minutes earlier. With the barrels and the Confederate foot soldiers so close, getting out of his foxhole was asking to get killed. Of course, staying where he was was liable to be tough on living to get old and gray, too.

Captain Boyle kept on yelling for everybody to stand his ground. "Screw you, Captain," Armstrong muttered. He looked back over his shoulder. If he ran like hell, he could get around the corner of that garage before anybody shot him--as long as he was lucky.

He didn't feel especially lucky. But he did feel pretty damn sure he'd get his head blown off if he hung around. Up! Run! Pounding boots. Bullets kicking up dirt around his feet. One tugging at his trouser leg like the hand of a friend. Others punching holes in the clapboard ahead. But none punching holes in him.

Panting, trotting along all doubled over to make himself a small target, he headed for the creek. He knew where the ford was. That had to be why the Confederates wantedWest Jefferson . Soldiers could cross Little Darby Creek damn near anywhere. It wasn't so easy for barrels. They couldn't swim. They couldn't even wade all that well. They had to have shallow water to cross.

Captain Boyle had stopped yelling about standing fast. Maybe he'd seen the light. Maybe he was too dead to grumble any more. Either way, Armstrong didn't have to worry about disobeying orders now.

He was going to do it, but he didn't have to worry.

The creek was crowded with men in green-gray floundering across to the north bank. Some of them carried their Springfields above their heads. Others had thrown away the rifles to get across faster. The discarded Springfields lay here and there on the south bank, the sun now and then glinting from a bayonet. Armstrong thought about throwing away his piece. In the end, he hung on to it. The Confederates were going to cross the creek, too, sure as hell they were. He'd need the rifle on the other side.

He hurried down toward the ribbon of water. He was only about thirty feet from the creek when a Confederate fighter skimmed along it, machine guns chattering with monstrous good cheer. Armstrong threw himself flat, not that that would have done him a hell of a lot of good. But the fighter pilot was shooting up the men already floundering across Little Darby Creek. They couldn't run, they couldn't hide, and they couldn't fight back. All they could do was go down like stalks of wheat before a harvester's blades.

The Hound Dog fighter roared away. Armstrong lifted his head out of the dirt. Bodies floated in the water. Next to them, men who hadn't been hit--and who had and who hadn't was only a matter of luck--stood as if stunned. LittleDarbyCreek ran red with blood. Armstrong had heard of such things.

He'd never imagined they could be true.

But he couldn't afford to hang around here staring, either, not with C.S. soldiers and barrels coming up behind him any minute now. He scrambled to his feet and ran for the water. He splashed into it. It was startlingly cold. The stream came up to his belly button at the deepest. If the Hound Dog came back while he was fording it, he was likely a dead man. If he didn't ford it, though, he was also a goner.

He got across and, dripping, dashed for the bushes on the far bank. He flopped down behind them. Not ten feet away lay Corporal Stowe, rifle pointed toward the south. Out of curiosity just this side of morbid, Armstrong asked, "What would you have done if I'd kept going?"

Stowe didn't waste time pretending to misunderstand him. "Shot you in the back," he answered laconically.

"Figures," Armstrong said. He peered through the undergrowth, then stiffened. "Here they come." Sure as hell, the men approaching Little Darby Creek wore butternut and had on helmets of slightly the wrong

shape. He drew a bead on a Confederate and squeezed the trigger. Down went the soldier in a boneless sprawl. Got that bastard, Armstrong thought, and swung the rifle towards a new target.

Plain City,Ohio , was a neat little town north and west ofColumbus . BigDarbyCreek chuckled through it. Shade trees sheltered the houses, and also the stores in the two-block shopping district. A fair number of Amish lived nearby; in peaceful times, wagons had mingled with motorcars on the roads. Had Irving Morrell been a man who cared to settle down anywhere, he could have picked plenty of worse places.

Agnes and Mildred would have likedPlainCity just fine.

At the moment, though, Morrell wasn't worried about what his wife and daughter might think of the place. He wanted to keep the Confederates from getting overBigDarbyCreek as easily as they'd crossed Little Darby Creek a few miles to the south. Every thrust of their barrels put them closer to outflankingColumbus and threatening to encircle it.

Morrell knew the kind of defensive campaign he would have run if he'd had the barrels. If he'd had enough machines, he could have made his Confederate opposite number's life very unhappy. He'd already slowed the C.S. forces down several times. He counterattacked whenever he saw the chance.

Trouble was, he didn't see it often enough.

"Ten years," he growled to Sergeant Michael Pound. "Ten mortal years! We figured the Confederates would never get back on their feet again, and so we sat there with our thumb up our ass."

"And now we're paying for it," the gunner agreed. "You and I both thought this would happen. If we could see it, why couldn't the War Department?"

What the War Department had seen was that barrels cost money, airplanes cost money, submersibles and airplane carriers cost money. It had also seen that, under twelve years of Socialist administrations, money was damned hard to come by. And it had seen that theUnited States had won the war and the Confederate States were weak, and if they got a little less weak, well, who cared, really? The United States were still stronger. They always would be, wouldn't they?

Well, no. Not necessarily.

Morrell stuck his head out of the cupola for a look around. Unless the Confederates planned on throwing a pontoon bridge acrossBigDarbyCreek somewhere west ofPlainCity , they would have to come through here. This was where the ford was, where their barrels could easily get over the stream and keep pushing north. And he knew without being told that that was what they wanted to do. It was what he would have wanted to do if he'd worn butternut instead of green-gray. Whoever was in charge on the other side thought very much the way he did. It was like fighting himself in a mirror.

But the fellow on the other side had more barrels. He had more airplanes. And he had one other thing going for him. It was the edge theUnited States had had in 1914. The Confederates here were convinced they owed theUSA one, and they intended to pay theUnited States back. It made them come on where more sensible soldiers would have hung back. Sometimes it got them killed in carload lots. More often, though, it let them squeeze through holes in theU.S. line that less aggressive troops never would have found.

Morrell had about two dozen barrels. More were supposed to be coming down from the north, but he didn't know when they'd get here. As far as he was concerned, that meant they were out of the fight.

During a war, nobody ever showed up on time, except possibly the enemy. He'd found few exceptions to that rule during the Great War. So far in this one, he hadn't found any.

He couldn't see more than a couple of his barrels. They waited behind garages and in hedgerows and hull-down behind little swells of ground. All of them had secondary and tertiary positions to which they could fall back in a hurry. Morrell didn't like standing on the defensive. He would much rather have attacked. He didn't have the muscle to do it. If he was going to defend, he'd do the best job he could.

Nothing comes cheap--that was his motto.

A soldier in green-gray came pelting up a driveway toward him. "They're heading this way, sir!" he called.

"Give me today's recognition signal," Morrell said coldly.

"Uh, hamster-underground," this man said.

"All right. Tell me more." The Confederates had no trouble getting

hold ofU.S. uniforms. They didn't have much trouble finding men whose drawls weren't too thick. Add those two together and they'd made a couple of holes for themselves where none had been before, simply by telling the right lie at the right time. That madeU.S. officers leery about trusting men they didn't know by sight.

With luck,U.S. soldiers in butternut were also confusing the enemy. Both sides had used such dirty tricks in the last war. They both seemed much more earnest about them this time around.

The man in green-gray pointed southwest. "Barrels kicking up dust, sir. You'll see 'em yourself pretty soon. And infantrymen moving up with 'em, some on foot, some in trucks."

"How many barrels?" Morrell asked. He worried about the Confederate soldiers in trucks, too. This war was being fought at a pace faster than men could march. The CSA seemed to understand that better than his own side did.

"Don't know for sure, sir," the man answered. Was he really aU.S. soldier? The Confederates could have wrung the signal out of a prisoner. He went on, "Looked like a good many, though."

Artillery started coming in out of the south. That argued the fellow was telling the truth. Morrell hoped all the civilians were out ofPlainCity . Artillery killed.

Up ahead, machine guns started rattling. They sealed the messenger's truth for Morrell. Up there, grizzled noncoms would be teaching their younger disciples the mysteries of the two-inch tap, mysteries into which they themselves had been initiated during the last war. Tap the side of the weapon so that it swung two inches to right or left, keep tapping back and forth through its whole arc of fire, and it would spit out a stream of bullets thick enough that advancing against it was death for foot soldiers.

Small-arms fire answered the machine guns. But it was not small-arms fire of the sort Morrell had heard in the Great War, not the steady pop-pop-pop! that came from bolt-action rifles. These stuttering bursts were like snippets of machine-gun fire themselves. Some of the Confederates had submachine guns, whose racket was relatively weak and thin. But others carried those damned automatic rifles that were young machine guns in their own right.

And here came the Confederate barrels. The lead machines did what they were supposed to do: they stopped and began taking out theU.S.

machine-gun nests. Once those were silenced, the infantry could go forward without being bled white. But the Confederates didn't seem to suspectU.S. barrels were in the neighborhood. Stopping to fire gave irresistibly tempting targets.

"Pick your pleasure, Sergeant Pound," Morrell said with an odd, joyous formality.

"Yes, sir." Pound traversed the turret, peered through the rangefinder, and turned a crank to elevate the gun ever so slightly. He barked a hyphenated word at the loader: "Armor-piercing!"

"Armor-piercing!" Sweeney set a black-tipped shell in the breech; high-explosive rounds had white tips.

Pound fired. The gun recoiled. The roar, Morrell knew, was softer inside the turret than it would have been if he had his head out the cupola. He coughed at the cordite fumes.

"Hit!" Pound shouted, and everyone in the crowded turret cheered and slapped everyone else on the back. Morrell popped up like a jack-in-the-box to get a better look at what was going on. Three Confederate barrels were burning. Men were bailing out of one, andU.S. machine-gun and rifle fire was cutting them down. The poor bastards in the other two barrels never had even that much chance to get away.

Now the C.S. barrel crews knew they weren't facing infantry alone. They did what Morrell would have done had he commanded them: they spread out and charged forward at top speed. A moving target was a tough target. And they had, however painfully, developed theU.S. position: now they knew where some of their assailants hid. A glancing blow from a shell made one of them throw a track. It slewed sideways and stopped, out of the fight. The rest came on.

Sergeant Pound fired twice in quick succession. The first round set a barrel on fire. The second missed.

The Confederates started shooting back. AU.S. barrel brewed up. Ammunition exploded inside the turret. An enormous and horribly perfect smoke ring rose from what must have been the open cupola.

Morrell hoped the men inside the barrel hadn't known what hit them.

He got on the wireless to his machines: "Fall back to your second prepared positions now!" He didn't want the Confederates outflanking his barrels, and he didn't want them concentrating their fire on the

same places for very long, either.

His own barrel retreated with the rest. The second prepared position was under a willow tree that made the great steel behemoth next to invisible from any distance. He wished he could have offered more support to the foot soldiers, but his main task was to keep the Confederate barrels on this side ofBigDarbyCreek .

Sergeant Pound fired again. He swore instead of whooping: a miss. And then, as much out of the blue as a sucker punch in a bar fight, a shell slammed into Morrell's barrel.

The front glacis plate almost kept the round out--almost, but not quite. The driver and the bow machine gunner took the brunt of the hardened steel projectile. They screamed, but not for long. The loader likewise howled as the round smashed his leg before crashing through the ammunition rack--luckily, through a slot without a shell in it--and into the engine.

As smoke and flame began filling the turret, Morrell threw open the cupola. "Out!" he shouted to Pound.

"I'll give you a hand with Sweeney."

"Right you are, sir," the gunner said, and then, to the loader, "Don't worry. It will be all right."

"My ass," Sweeney ground out.

They got him and themselves out of the barrel before ammunition started cooking off. One look at his leg told Morrell he'd lose it--below the knee, which was better than above, but a long way from good. A tourniquet, a dusting of sulfa powder, and a shot of morphine were all Morrell could do for him. He shouted for medical corpsmen. They took the wounded man away.

"Now we have to get out of this ourselves. That could be interesting." Michael Pound sounded more intrigued than alarmed.

U.S.barrels were falling back towards and then across the ford overBigDarbyCreek . The Confederates pressed them hard. Morrell would have done the same thing. It might cost a few more casualties now, but the rewards were likely to be worth it.

The two barrel men splashed through the creek. A Confederate barrel

whose machine gun was swinging their way took a round in the flank and caught fire. The crew lost interest in them and started bailing out.

Morrell and Pound made it across and into the bushes on the far side. For the time being, the Confederates couldn't force a crossing here. But Morrell wondered how long that would last and whether they could get over the creek somewhere else.

Major Jonathan Moss was not the man he had been half a lifetime ago, not the bright young flying officer who'd gone into the Great War all bold and brave and chivalrous. The desperate campaign in the skies aboveOhio andIndiana rubbed his nose in that.

Last time around, he'd been able to live practically without sleep for weeks at a time, and to make up for it when the weather was too bad to let him get his rickety machine off the ground. Now, more than a quarter of a century further on, he needed a rest every so often. Despite coffee and pep pills, he couldn't bounce from mission to mission as fast as the younger men in his squadron.

He went to a doctor at the airstrip just outsideWinchester,Indiana , and asked what the fellow could do to help him. The doctor was a tall, skinny, middle-aged man with bags under his eyes and yellow hair heavily streaked with gray. His name was Clement Boardman; he went by Doc or Clem. After a brief pause to light a cigarette and take a deep drag, he said, "Goddammit, Major, if I had the fountain of youth, don't you think I'd use it on myself?"

"I don't want miracles," Moss said.

"Like hell you don't. I want 'em, too," Boardman said. "Difference between us is, I know I won't get

'em."

"What can I do?" Moss demanded.

"Shack up with an eighteen-year-old blonde," the doctor answered. "That'll have you walking on air for a few weeks, anyhow--if it doesn't remind you you're not a kid any more some other ways, either."

He didn't know how Moss' wife had died. The flier had to remind himself of that to keep from getting angry. He said, "I already know I can't screw like I did when I was in college. But that's just me. This is

my country."

"All you can do is all you can do," Clem Boardman said. "If you fly into a tree or you get shot down because you're too goddamn sleepy to check six, what good does that do your country--or you?"

It was an eminently sensible question. Moss didn't want good sense, though. He wanted to be told what he wanted to hear. That he was thinking like a three-year-old was a telling measure of how tired he was, but he was too tired to realize it.

"Here. Take these." The doctor handed him two pills.

"What are they?" Moss asked suspiciously.

"They'll make a new man out of you." Boardman filled a glass from a metal pitcher of water. "Come on.

Down the hatch. In my medical opinion, they're what you need."

"All right. All right." Moss swallowed both pills at once. He could take almost any number of pills at the same time. That had amazed, amused, and horrified his wife, who couldn't . . . and try as he would, he couldn't get Laura out of his mind. He wondered if she'd ever fade, even a little. He also still wondered about the pills. "I don't feel any different than I did before."

"Wait twenty minutes," Boardman said.

"Then what happens?"

"Your hair turns blue, your nose catches fire, you start spouting Shakespeare, you grow fins, and your balls swell up to the size of cantaloupes," Boardman answered, deadpan. "I told you, they'll make a new man out of you."

"I think maybe I like the old man better." Moss yawned. "Dammit, who knows what the Confederates are liable to do if I'm not up there to shoot 'em down?"

"You're not going to win the war singlehanded," Dr. Boardman said. "If you can't see that, you're in even worse shape than I thought."

Moss yawned again, enormously. The hinges of his jaws creaked. He'd been tired before, but he hadn't been sleepy. So he told himself, anyhow. But no matter what he told himself, he kept on yawning.

Pointing an accusing finger at Boardman took real effort; his arm seemed to weigh half a ton. "God damn you, Doc, you slipped me a mickey," he said, his voice slurring more with every word.

"Guilty as charged," Boardman said cheerfully. "If you won't take care of yourself, somebody's got to do it for you."

Moss cussed him with sleepy sincerity. The pills took the edge off his inhibitions, and then more than the edge. They also left him swaying like a badly rooted tree in a high wind.

He never did remember blowing over. One minute, he was calling Doc Boardman every name in the book--or every name he could come up with in his ever more fuddled state. The next--so it seemed to him, anyhow--he was in a cot, still in uniform except for his hat and his shoes. He was also still sleepy as hell. He never would have awakened, except he had to piss fit to bust. He put on the shoes, staggered out to a slit trench, did what he needed to do, and then lurched back to the cot. He'd just realized he had a godawful hangover when he passed out again, still with the shoes on.

It hadn't gone away by the time he woke up again, some unknown while later. He'd done his share of drinking, and his share of waking up wishing he hadn't. This topped all of that. He had trouble remembering his name. His head didn't ache. It throbbed, as if bruised from the inside out. Cautiously, he looked down along the length of himself. No fins. He remembered that, all right. He looked again.

Nothing wrong with his balls, either.

He needed to take another leak. The room spun around him when he stood up. He went out and did his business. When he came back, he found Dr. Boardman waiting for him. "How long have I been out?" he croaked.

"Two and a half days," Boardman answered. "You slept through an air raid. That's not easy. You slept through getting picked up and flung in a shelter trench. That's a hell of a lot harder. Of course, you had help."

"Two and a half days?" Moss shook his head, which made it want to fall off. "Jesus." His stomach growled fearsomely. He didn't think the doctor was lying. "Got to get something to eat. Got to get some coffee, too. Sure as hell can't fly like this. Feel like I'm in slow motion."

"You are," Dr. Boardman agreed. "But it'll wear off. And you're smart

enough to realize you're stupid now, which you weren't before. This is progress. Food and coffee will do for you, yeah."

Moss plowed into scrambled eggs and a young mountain of fried potatoes. He washed them down with mug after tin mug of corrosive coffee partly tamed by lots of cream and sugar. Once he got all that inside him, he felt amazingly lifelike. But when he asked Boardman for clearance to fly, the doctor shook his head. "Why not?" Moss demanded irately.

"Because your reflexes are still shot," Boardman answered. "Tomorrow? Fine. Today? Nope. Let the pills wear all the way off. The Confederates haven't marched intoPhiladelphia while you were out, and I don't expect one more day with you on the sidelines will lose us the war."

He only laughed when Moss suggested what he could do to himself. But as it happened, Moss did fly out ofWinchester late that afternoon. It wasn't a flight he much wanted to make, but he had less choice than he would have liked. The Confederates had come far enough north to let their heavy artillery start probing for the airstrip. That likely meant the town would fall before long. Sure as hell, Moss spotted barrels nosing up from the south when he took off.

The squadron came down at a field near Bluffton, a town about two-thirds of the way fromMuncie toFort Wayne . The town looked pleasant as Moss flew over it. It sat on the south bank of theWabashRiver . The streets downtown were paved with red brick; those farther out were mostly just graveled. So many shade trees grew around the houses that some of those were hard to see from the air.

Nobody'd bombed the place yet.

He wondered how long the landing field had been there. Not long, probably: it had been gouged out of the middle of a wheat field. Groundcrew men threw camouflage tarps over the fighters as they came in, but how much good would those do? How much good would anything do? Moss was gloomy as he headed for the tent where he'd flop that night. The field stuck out like a sore thumb. They hadn't mowed BOMB ME! in the wheat, but they might as well have.

As evening fell, trucks brought up three antiaircraft guns. More camouflage netting went over them.

Camouflaged or not, they were still going to stick out, too. The younger pilots weren't worried about a thing. They laughed and joked

and bragged about the havoc they'd wreak on the Confederates the next day.

Was I like that up inCanada in the last war? Moss wondered. He clicked his tongue between his teeth.

He probably had been. Everybody'd been like that back then. Flying was brand new. It hadn't been around long enough to attract gray, middle-aged pilots who could see farther than the end of their noses.

Up in the sky, he still knew what he was doing. He'd proved it the only way you could: he'd gone into combat and come back alive. Down here? Down here, he wanted to talk with grownups. The only one anywhere close by who seemed to meet the description was Dr. Clement Boardman.

"Take a walk with me, will you, Doc?" Moss said.

Boardman glanced at him sidelong. By the evil gleam in his eye, he almost said something like, You aren't my type. But he didn't. Maybe the look on Moss' face convinced him it wasn't a good idea. They strode out into the night.

Crickets chirped. A whippoorwill sang mournfully. Off in the distance, a dog howled. Fireflies blinked on and off like landing lights. The muggy air smelled of growing things, and faintly of exhaust and hot metal.

Moss' footfalls, and Boardman's, were almost silent on the soft ground.

When they'd gone a hundred yards or so from the tents, the doctor asked, "Well, what's on your mind now?"

"We're losing the war, aren't we?" Moss said bluntly.

Boardman stopped. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes, lit one, and offered them to Moss. The pilot shook his head. Boardman shrugged, dragged till the coal glowed red, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

Only then did he answer, "Mm, I expect things could look a little better."

"What are we going to do?" Moss said. "We can't let Featherston take a bite out of us. He'll just want another one as soon as he can get it."

"Why are you asking me? I'm not the President. I didn't even vote for

him." The doctor blew out more smoke. As always, what he exhaled smelled milder than the harsh stuff spiraling up off the cigarette.

Moss' Canadian law practice meant he hadn't voted for close to twenty years. He said, "It's either talk about it or start screaming, you know what I mean? It's not just could look better. Things don't look good. For God's sake, tell me I'm wrong. Make me believe it." Dr. Boardman walked along in silence.

After a few steps, Moss realized that was all the answer he'd get. "Give me a smoke after all, would you?" he said, and Boardman did.

V

Jake Featherston had fought through the Great War in the First Richmond Howitzers. Even then, the name had been a misnomer; the artillery outfit had had quick-firing three-inch field guns--copies of the French 75--instead of the howitzers its gunners had served during the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War.

Nowadays, the First Richmond Howitzers used four-inch guns. They could fire a shell twice as heavy almost half again as far as the last war's models. But the principles hadn't changed one goddamn bit.

If the crew that was shelling damnyankee positions north of Fredericksburg, Virginia, was nervous about performing under the knowing eye of the President of the CSA, it didn't show. Bare to the waist and gleaming with sweat in the July sunshine, they loaded, aimed, and fired again and again. The gun pit in which they served their piece was bigger and deeper than the ones Jake remembered, but the gun was bigger, too. It needed more digging in.

A sergeant named Malcolm Clay commanded not only the gun but the battery of which it was a part. He was about thirty-five, blond with strawberry stubble on his cheeks and chin, and did a perfectly capable job. All the same, watching him, Jake smiled behind his hand.

He turned to Saul Goldman and asked quietly, "Did you put them up to this, or were they smart enough to come up with it on their own?"

Goldman looked silly in a helmet, the way a coal miner would have looked silly in a top hat: it wasn't his style at all. The director of communications conscientiously wore it just the same. Peering out from under the steel brim, he said, "I don't know what you're talking

about, Mr. President."

"Hell you don't," Jake said genially. "I was a sergeant in charge of a battery, too. They let me run it on account of I could and I was good, but the bastards never would promote me." He raised his voice:

"Clay! Come on over here!"

"Yes, sir?" Red dust kicked up from the noncom's boots as he obeyed. He smelled hot and sweaty, too, but it wasn't a nasty stink. He was working and sweating too hard for that.

"How'd you get command of this here battery?" Featherston asked.

"Sir, Captain Mouton got wounded four or five days ago, and I'm in charge till they drop another officer into his slot."

"No, goddammit." Jake shook his head. "It's your battery now, Lieutenant Clay. You can do the job, so you deserve the rank."

"Thank you very much, sir!" Sergeant--no, Lieutenant--Clay's eyes were a bloodshot blue. They shone now. His grin showed a missing front tooth.

"You're welcome," Featherston answered. "In this here war, people who deserve to be promoted are going to get promoted. Nobody's gonna get screwed over like I got screwed over twenty-five years ago."

"You won't be sorry, sir!" Clay exclaimed. "We'll give those damnyankees what-for--you wait and see.

Freedom!" He shouted the Party greeting.

"Freedom!" Jake said. "On this front, what I want is for you to keep the Yankees from giving us what-for. That's what we need here: to stop those sons of bitches in their tracks. Can you do that?"

"Hell, yes," Clay said, and then, "Uh, yes, sir."

Jake Featherston laughed. "I understood you the first time. I used to do your job, remember?"

Newsreel cameras ground away. They would capture Jake daring to visit the front, brave Confederate soldiers blasting the hell out of the damnyankees, and as much other good news as they could find.

Before long, the result would be in theaters all across the CSA,

running in front of thrillers from before the war and, soon, melodramas that would help people see things the way the Freedom Party wanted them to.

U.S.artillery wasn't idle around here. Every so often, a few shells would come down on the Confederate positions behind the town ofFredericksburg . No doubt they did some harm, in the sense that they did wound or kill a few men in butternut. But Featherston, having fought here in the last war, knewFredericksburg was a damn tough nut to crack. From where he was when the order came to cease firing, he could have slaughtered all theU.S. soldiers in the world if they'd kept coming at him, and they wouldn't have been able to do much to hurt him.

Things weren't quite the same this time around, of course. Bombers and barrels had both been babies in the Great War. They'd grown up now. If theUSA got barrels across theRappahannock , they might tear the defenses to pieces. They might--but it wouldn't be easy even so.

Saul Goldman plucked at his sleeve. "We've done everything we came here to do, Mr. President," he said, half good flunky, half mother herding would-be rebellious child on its way before it could get into trouble.

"All right, Saul," Featherston said indulgently. He could play the role of good little boy, too. He could play any role he wanted. If more than twenty years on the stump had taught him anything, it was how to do that.

He went back to Army of Northern Virginia headquarters, a few miles farther behindFredericksburg

--out of artillery range. There, Nathan Bedford Forrest III was hashing things out with Lieutenant General Hank Coomer, currently in charge of the army that had once belonged to Robert E. Lee. The two officers stood in front of a map table so big, they needed pointers to show what they wanted to do; their arms weren't long enough to reach.

"Dammit, they can't bring that off, Nate," Coomer was saying when Featherston walked into the middle of the argument. Like Forrest, he was a new man. He was just a few years past forty, and had been a lieutenant in the Great War. He came from no fancy-pants family; his father had pressed pants inAtlanta .

He'd belonged to the Freedom Party since 1922.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III did some pointing of his own. "They can't bring it off now," he said. "But they're building up for it. Do you think some spoiling attacks on the flanks will disrupt them, make them spread out? Because we sure as hell don't want them pushing down towardRichmond with everything they've got."

Coomer scowled. When he did, a scar over his right eye pulled his eyebrow out of shape. The ribbon for the Purple Heart was among the fruit salad above the left breast pocket of his tunic. He said, "Even if they do get over theRappahannock , we can stop 'em."

"Don't even let 'em try, not if you can help it," Jake said. "We've got to hang in here till what we're doin'

farther west takes hold. They can hurt us bad right now if they get the chance. Later on, it'll be a hell of a lot harder for 'em. I don't believe they've quite figured that out yet."

"Some of them have," Forrest said. "That Morrell is squealing like a shoat caught in a fence. He knows what's going on."

"He's the bastard who tookNashville away from us last time," Coomer said. "He knows his business, all right."

"Damnyankees paying any attention to him?" Featherston asked.

"Not yet. Not by what they're putting into theMidwest ," Forrest answered.

"Good. Outfuckingstanding, as a matter of fact," Jake said. "If we get where we're going, they are screwed."

"That's true, Mr. President," his chief of staff said. "But it's like any coin: it's got another side to it. What the damnyankees aren't sending to the Schwerpunkt, they are sending here."

"Damn right they are," Coomer agreed. "They want to makeVirginia the Schwerpunkt, same as they did in the War of Secession. They reckon they can smash on through toRichmond and give us one in the nuts."

"I understand that. Your job is to make sure they don't do it," Jake said. "This isn't the best country for barrels--too many river barriers, not enough space between the mountains and the ocean--so we've got to keep blocking their punch till ours lands on their chin. If we can't do that, we've got a lot more trouble than we figured on."

He eyed Hank Coomer. If you can't do that, you've got a lot more trouble than you ever figured on, he thought. He'd pumped Coomer up. He'd deflate him and pick somebody else just as fast if the fellow in charge of the Army of Northern Virginia let him down.

But Coomer said, "I understand what we need, sir." By the look in his eye, he probably understood what Featherston was thinking along with what he was saying. "All the bombing we're doing helps keep the Yankees from concentrating. And the sabotage problem on the roads and railways back of their lines is pretty bad."

"Damn well better be," Featherston said. He and Hank Coomer and Nathan Bedford Forrest III all had the identical gleam in their eye. At the end of the Great War, theUnited States had annexed as much of northernVirginia as they'd occupied, and they'd tacked it on toWest Virginia . They could do that. They'd won the war, and the Confederate government was in no condition to tell them no. They could do it, but they couldn't make the people they'd done it to like it.

The annexed part ofVirginia had given theUSA trouble ever since they took it. Even the Whigs had had sense enough to encourage that. But the damnyankees wouldn't cough it up, because it protectedWashington as long as they had it, andWashington had been threatened in the War of Secession, shelled in the Second Mexican War, and occupied during the Great War.

So what had been northernVirginia remained part ofWest Virginia . And it remained a place where roads were mined, where machine guns shot up trucks and troop trains and then disappeared, where switches got left half open, and where stretches of rail vanished into thin air so locomotives derailed. It also remained a place where the Yankees hanged anybody whose looks they didn't like, which only made survivors love them better still.

"We've got to hold 'em," Jake repeated. "If we can keep their attack here from coming off at all, that's best. If we can't, though, we've got to blunt it, contain it. We've got to, God damn it, on account of we can't afford to pull anything away from our own main attack."

"That's always been our problem," Forrest said. "TheUnited States are bigger than we are. They've got more people than we do, and more factories, too. They can afford to make some mistakes. We can't.

We've got to do it right the first time."

"We've done it before," Jake said. "We did it in the War of Secession and in the Second Mexican War.

It was only in the Great War that the Whigs screwed the pooch."

They'd done the most obvious thing they could: they'd driven straight forPhiladelphia . He'd known better than that this time, anyway. So far, everything was going fine. In the War of Secession, the damnyankees had tried to come down theMississippi and cut the CSA in half. It hadn't worked. But turnabout was fair play. How would theUSA do if it got split in two? Jake smiled hungrily. If things went well for just a little longer, he'd find out.

Gasoline rationing had come toCanada as soon as fighting broke out between theConfederateStates and theUnited States . Mary Pomeroy resented that. TheUSA had made sure her country wasn't in the fight this time. Why did the Yanks have to steal gas from people who weren't at war? She knew the answer perfectly well: so they could use it against the Confederates. Knowing the answer didn't make her like it.

Not long after the war began, the wireless announced that gasoline rationing had also been imposed in theUSA . That didn't make Mary any happier. The Yanks deserved it. Her own people didn't.

Rationing didn't keep her and Mort and Alec from going for a picnic one warm, bright Sunday afternoon. Such days didn't come to Rosenfeld all that often. Wasting this one would have felt sinful.

Mary did the cooking. They could have taken food from the Pomeroy diner, but it wouldn't have seemed like a real picnic to her then. She fried chicken and made potato salad and cole slaw and deviled eggs and baked two cherry pies. She filled an enormous pitcher with iced tea. And, though she didn't brew the beer herself, she didn't forget it, either.

By the time the picnic basket was full of food--and ice from the diner, to keep the cold things fresh--it weighed about a ton and a half. She happily let Mort show how strong he was by carrying it down the stairs to the Oldsmobile. "What did you put in here, an anvil?" he asked halfway down.

"That's right," she answered. "I roasted it special--it's one of Ma's old recipes." Alec giggled at that.

Mort just shook his head. "Ask a silly question, get a silly answer." But when he put the picnic basket in the back seat of the motorcar, it made the springs visibly settle. Mary's husband shook his head again.

"Maybe there really is a roasted anvil in there."

"Is there, Mommy?" Alec asked eagerly. "Can I have a piece?"

"It'll make all your teeth fall out," Mary said. Her son didn't seem to mind. He hadn't lost any teeth yet, but he had heard of the tooth fairy. He liked the idea of getting money whenever a tooth came out.

The road they took ran west, parallel to one of the railroad tracks that came into Rosenfeld. Getting out of town wasn't hard; inside of ten minutes, they'd put all memory of the place behind them. To Mary, being out in the middle of that vast, gently rolling farm country seemed the most natural thing in the world.

Her husband and her son had grown up in town. They weren't used to a horizon that stretched out forever.

After a while, Mort pulled off onto the shoulder and stopped the auto. "As good a place as any," he said. "If I don't fall over lugging the picnic basket away from the road . . ."

"It's not as heavy as all that," Mary said indignantly. She grabbed blankets with one hand and Alec with the other.

Mort mimed staggering under the weight of the basket. Mary mimed tripping him so he really would fall.

They both laughed. She spread out the blankets on the grass. Mort set down the basket with a theatrical groan of relief. Even after he set it down, he kept listing to the right, as if the weight had permanently bent him. Alec thought that was funny, too.

Mort's condition improved remarkably once Mary opened a Moosehead for him. He gulped about half the bottle and then sat down. "Is that a hawk up there in the sky?" he asked, pointing towards a wheeling shape high overhead.

"No, that's a turkey vulture," Mary answered at once. "See how the wings go slanting up a bit from the body? Hawks mostly carry theirs flat."

"A vulture, is it?" Mort said. "It must know how worn out I am from

hauling that basket."

"Well, you can make it lighter so you won't have to carry so much back to town," Mary said.

"I aim to do that very thing," he answered. "Let me have some of the fried chicken, if you'd be so kind."

Before long, he'd turned a lot of chicken into bones. He liked light meat, Mary liked dark, and Alec was partial to giblets. They damaged the cole slaw and the potato salad, too, and the two grownups got rid of several bottles of beer. The bones, inevitably, drew ants. That vulture, or another one, soared past again.

"We're not going to leave it much to eat," Mary said.

"Good," Mort said. "I'd rather gobble up all this good stuff myself than leave it for an ugly old bird with a bald pink head."

Every so often, a motorcar would rattle past. A couple of drivers honked their horns at the picnickers.

When they did, Mary would wave and Mort solemnly lift the straw hat from his head. Alec paid no attention to salutations from the passersby. He was busy picking wildflowers and hunting bugs.

They'd been there a little more than an hour, and had reached the filling-in-the-corners stage of things, when an eastbound train roared past. That made Alec sit up and take notice, even if he'd ignored the passing autos. The great wheel-churning, smoke-belching locomotive was too grand and noisy to ignore.

The engineer blew a long, mournful blast on his whistle, too. And once the steam engine had gone by, there were still all the boxcars and flatcars and tank cars to admire, and at last the caboose--this one painted yellow instead of the more usual red.

"Wow!" Alec's eyes shone. "I want to make one of those go when I get big."

"Maybe you will," Mort said. "It's a good job."

For all the sense he made to his son, he might as well have started speaking Eskimo. Alec couldn't imagine that being an engineer was work, and often hard work to boot. He would have paid, and paid

anything he happened to have, for the privilege of riding in that thundering monster.

"Want another piece of pie, anyone?" Mary asked.

"Twist my arm," Mort said lazily. "Not too big a piece, or I'm liable to explode."

"Kaboom!" Alec yelled. "Can I have another piece, too, Mommy?" If he hadn't been eating cherry pie, the sticky red all around his mouth would have meant he'd got a split lip.

Mary was cutting him the new piece when a truck pulled off the road behind their Oldsmobile. It had a blue-gray body and a green-gray canvas top over the bed. Half a dozen soldiers who wore blue-gray uniforms and carried bayoneted rifles jumped out and advanced on the Pomeroys.

Their leader was a sergeant with a salt-and-pepper mustache. "What you do here?" he asked in bad English.

"We're having a picnic." Mort waved to the basket. "Want some fried chicken?"

The sergeant spoke to his men in French. They plundered the picnic hamper as if they'd heard food might be outlawed tomorrow. All the leftovers and all the beer--and even the iced tea--vanished inside of fifteen minutes. Mary knew she'd made more food than her family needed. She hadn't made enough for a squad of hungry Quebecois infantry.

"You too close to train tracks," the sergeant said, gnawing the last meat off a drumstick. "You no come here no more. It could be I have to run you in. But you not doing nothing bad, you just have food. You go home, you don't get in no trouble. You be happy, we be happy. C'est bon?"

"Oui, monsieur. Merci." Mort had picked up a little French at the diner.

The Quebecois sergeant beamed at him. He ruffled Alec's reddish-brown hair. "Mon fils, he about this big," he said. He added something in French. His men got back in the truck. It rolled away.

"That was funny," Alec said.

"Ha," Mary said in a hollow voice. "Ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha."

Mort picked up the basket. It hardly weighed anything now. "So much for leftovers," he said, and then,

"Damn Frenchy was right. We might as well go home now. There's sure no point to staying any more."

"If they do things like that, they only make people want to blow up trains," Mary said. "Can't they see?"

"Doesn't look like it," Mort said. "Me, I'd sooner blow up their barracks right now." He carried the basket to the auto and put it in.

Mary rolled up the picnic blankets. Alec tried to get rolled up in one of them. When he kept trying till he annoyed her, she swatted him on the bottom. After that, he behaved--for a little while. She tossed the blankets into the Olds. Mort, of course, had been joking about blowing up the garrison's headquarters in Rosenfeld. Mary had really contemplated it. She'd never done more than contemplate it, though. It wouldn't have been easy to pull off, and would have been risky.

Blowing up a train, on the other hand, or the tracks, or a train and the tracks . . . The Canadian prairie was enormously wide. Only bad luck the Frenchies' patrol had driven past while they were picnicking.

To come out here by herself would be easy. In spite of the signs on the bulletin board inside the post office, it didn't seem dangerous.

For the first time, she looked forward to the day when Alec would go off to school. That would give her back several hours of free time during the day. She laughed. She hadn't even thought about free time in years.

"What's funny?" Mort asked.

"Nothing, really." She looked back toward where they'd been eating. "Have we got everything?"

"Everything the Frenchies didn't eat, yeah," her husband answered. "I'm surprised they didn't walk off with our plates and our spoons."

"They're the occupiers. They can do what they want," Mary answered.

Mort came back with something suggesting exactly what the Frenchies could do, and where. Alec's eyes got big and round. Mary was

surprised, too, though she didn't show it. Mort had always been a Canadian patriot, but he'd always been a lukewarm Canadian patriot, one who grumbled about the occupation and disliked it, but who wasn't likely to do anything more than grumble. Now . . .

Experimentally, Mary said, "This is what the Yanks have done to us."

"I didn't mind the Yanks all that much," Mort said. "I guess maybe I'd got used to them--I don't know.

But these Frenchies . . . I can't stand 'em. They think they're better than white people, and we just have to stand here and take it."

That was moderately promising, but only moderately. It wasn't anything that gave Mary a real handle to pull. But maybe she'd get one with him, sooner or later. Meanwhile . . . Meanwhile, she opened the passenger-side door. "Let's go home."

Mort started the auto. Making a U-turn back onto the road was easy--no traffic in either direction. Back toward Rosenfeld they went.

Like a lot of people in the Confederate States, Jefferson Pinkard had been waiting for Over Open Sights for a long time. The prison-camp boss liked having things spelled out for him. As long as they were, he didn't have to do a whole lot of thinking on his own. And he was an orderly man. If he had the rules, he'd follow them, the same way as the prisoners inCampDependable had to follow the rules he laid down.

Now, at last, he had a copy of Over Open Sights in his hand. So what if it had a cheap paper dust jacket over a cheap cloth binding? So what if it had cost him six dollars? Now he could get the straight dope, just the way Jake Featherston wanted him to have it.

And now he was one sadly confused stalwart. He'd skimmed through Over Open Sights the way a younger man might have gone through a sex book looking for the dirty parts. He'd found some of what he was after, too--stuff about revenge against blacks and against theUSA that set his pulse pounding. But most of it was just . . . dull. Of all the things he'd expected from Jake Featherston, a dull book was among the last.

Jake was still settling accounts with people who'd wronged him back in the Great War. Many of them were dead now. He gloated over that. He was still refighting Freedom Party squabbles from the earliest days,

still getting even with people the world had long forgotten. (For that matter, the world hadn't heard enough about most of them to forget them.)

And he was lecturing. He didn't just explain why he couldn't stand blacks. He went on and told why everybody had hated blacks since the beginning of time. That was more than Jeff wanted to know. He thought it was more than anybody wanted to know. He thought the same about the endless lectures on why the United States were dangerous to the Confederate States. Pinkard knew why. They were next door, they were too goddamn big, and they didn't like the CSA. How much more did you need to say?

Pinkard wasn't the only fellow inCampDependable to have shelled out for Over Open Sights. Damn near everybody had, as a matter of fact. Most of the guards were Freedom Party stalwarts. It would have looked funny if they hadn't bought the President's book. Not getting a copy might not have landed them in trouble, but who wanted to take a chance on something like that?

But, now that people had it, they had to pretend they'd read it. They had to pretend that they'd kept track of everything, too, instead of dozing off partway through as if they were reading Shakespeare back in school.

Conversations were . . . interesting. "Hell of a book, ain't it?" Pinkard said to Mercer Scott one hot, sticky morning. Thunderheads were piling up in the sky to the south. Maybe it would rain and cut the humidity a little. Maybe, on the other hand, it would just tease, like a woman who wore tight dresses and shook her ass but wouldn't put out. Jeff would have been inclined to slap a woman like that around to get her to change her mind. He couldn't very well slap the weather around, though.

The guard chief's leathery face assumed a knowing expression. "Goddamn right it is," he said, and paused to light a cigarette. After a couple of drags, Scott added, "Tears the goddamn niggers a new asshole."

"Oh, you bet," Pinkard agreed. He lit a cigarette, too. After that welcome pause, he said, "And he really lays into the damnyankees, too."

"Fuckers deserve it," Mercer Scott said.

"That's right. That's just right," Jeff said. They beamed at each other

and both blew smoke rings. They'd done their duty by Over Open Sights.

It didn't take long for the prisoners inCampDependable to find out Jake Featherston's book had finally seen print. Most of them didn't care once they did know; Pinkard would have bet more than half the Negroes waiting their turn for a population reduction couldn't read or write.

But all rules had their exceptions. Willy Knight was nothing but an exception. He had his letters. He was the only white prisoner in the camp. Had things gone a little differently, he would have been President of the CSA in Jake Featherston's place.

His Redemption League inTexas had done the same sorts of things as the Freedom Party had farther east. But the Freedom Party got bigger faster and swallowed the Redemption League instead of the other way round. Knight had been Featherston's running mate when the Freedom Party finally won. A few years later, tired of playing second fiddle, he'd tried to get Jake killed. If he'd pulled it off . . . But he hadn't, and here he was, getting what was coming to him.

At morning roll call, he asked, "Can I get me a copy of that there Over Open Sights, please?"

"You? What for?" Pinkard asked suspiciously.

Willy Knight smiled. His face was skinny and filthy. None of the Negroes inCampDependable had had the nerve to do anything to him, fearing punishment even though he was in disgrace. Jefferson Pinkard hadn't had the nerve to include him in a population reduction, either. If people back inRichmond changed their minds about Knight . . . It wasn't likely, but why take chances?

"How come?" Pinkard demanded.

"How come? On account of I've got the galloping shits, and where else around here am I gonna get me more asswipes all at once?"

Several Negroes snorted laughter. They probably wouldn't have had the nerve to come out with anything like that themselves. They'd seen that Knight wasn't expendable, and they knew damn well they were.

But just because Willy Knight couldn't be casually killed didn't mean he could get away with whatever he wanted. He might think so, but he was wrong. "Teach that man some respect," Pinkard told the guards

with him.

They did. They pulled him out of the roll-call formation and worked him over. None of what they did would cause him permanent damage. All the same, Jeff wouldn't have wanted any of it happening to him.

After a last kick, one of the guards stared down at Knight in cold contempt. "Get up," he growled. "You think you can lie around the whole goddamn morning?"

A trickle of blood running from the side of his mouth, Knight staggered upright. "Punishment cell. Bread and water. Ten days," Pinkard said. "Take him away."

Two guards half led, half dragged Knight off to the row of punishment cells. They weren't big enough to stand up in, or to lie down at full length. All you could do in one of them was squat or sit and take whatever the weather did to you. In this season, you'd bake.

Jeff eyed the assembled Negroes. "Anybody else feel like cracking wise? Want to show off how clever y'all are?" Nobody said a word. The black men stood at stiff attention. Their faces stayed as impassive as they could make them. Pinkard nodded: not approval, but acceptance, anyhow. "Good. You're showing a little sense. 'Course, if y'all had had any real sense, you wouldn't be here, now would you?"

That was another dangerous question. A couple of Negroes stirred. Jeff waited. Would they be fools enough to grouse about the way the Confederacy treated its black residents? Again, no one said a word.

Again, Jefferson Pinkard nodded. He turned to the remaining guards. "All right. Let's get 'em counted.

Remember to take one off for that little trip to the punishment cell."

"Right, boss," they chorused, and set to work. Until the count was right, nothing else happened: no breakfast, no work details, nothing. The Negroes knew that, and tried to make things as simple as they could. Things didn't always go smoothly even so. Some of the guards had trouble counting to eleven without taking off their shoes. Making the prisoner count come out the same way twice running sometimes seemed beyond them. This was one of those mornings.

The prisoners didn't say anything. Pointing out the obvious would only have landed them in trouble, the way so many things here did. But Jeff could see what they were thinking even so. He fumed quietly.

If whites were the superior race and blacks inferior, ignorant, and stupid, why wasn't the count going better?

Had Pinkard been a different sort of man, that might have made him wonder about a lot of the ruling assumptions the Confederate States had held since they broke away from theUnited States . Being who and what he was, though, he only wondered why he'd got stuck with such a pack of lamebrains. Even that wasn't a question easy to answer.

At long last, everything tallied. The prisoners trooped off to the mess hall. Jeff prowled through one of the barracks halls, peering at everything, looking for contraband and for signs of escape tunnels.

He found none. That might have meant the Negroes didn't have the nerve to try to break the rules. Or it might have meant they were too sneaky to let him notice anything they did have going on. He hoped and thought it was the former, but didn't rule out the latter. People who underestimated the opposition had a way of paying for it.

After the inspection, he went on to the next hall, and then to the next, till he'd been through the whole camp. Mercer Scott gave him a quizzical look as he finished his tour. Jeff stared back stonily. He'd learned down inMexico to rely on his own eyes and ears, not just on what the guards told him. You could count on what you saw for yourself. Guards? If guards were so goddamn smart, why couldn't they keep the count straight?

And if other camp commandants didn't have the brains to keep an eye on things for themselves, that was their tough luck. Jeff knew he could screw up in spite of inspections. Better that than screwing up because he hadn't made them.

He went back to his office and started plowing through paperwork. He'd never imagined how much paperwork went with keeping people locked up where they couldn't get in trouble. You had to keep track of who you had, who'd died, who was coming in. . . . It never seemed to end.

A guard walked into the office with a yellow telegram. Pinkard's heart sank. He knew what it was going to be. And he was right. Ferdinand Koenig was pleased to inform him of a shipment of so many prisoners, to arrive atCampDependable on such and such a day--which happened to be four days away.

"You son of a bitch," Jeff muttered. That wouldn't have delighted the Attorney General, but Koenig wasn't there to hear it. Koenig wasn't

there to deal with the mess he was causing, either. Oh, no. Hell, no.

He left that to Jeff to clean up.

A population reduction inside of four days? Mercer Scott'll scream bloody murder when I tell him, Pinkard thought. Well, too bad. Just as Jeff was stuck with whatRichmond did to him, so Scott was stuck with what Jeff needed from him. And bloody murder it would be, even if nobody called it that.

If they hadn't done it before, they wouldn't have been able to bring it off. It wouldn't be easy even now, because the prisoners would know what was going to happen to them when they went out into the bayou. They'd know they weren't coming back. They would have to be manacled and shackled. But the job would get done. That was all that counted.

Iron wheels squealing and sending up sparks as they scraped against the rails, the westbound train pulled into the station at Rivière-du-Loup. Dr. Leonard O'Doull stood on the platform. He hugged and kissed his wife, and then his son.

"I wish you weren't doing this," Nicole said. Tears stood in her dark eyes, but she was too proud, too stubborn, to let them fall.

"I wish I weren't, too," he answered. "But it's something I need to do. We've been over it before." That was a bloodless way of putting it. They'd screamed and yelled and done everything but throw crockery at each other.

"Be careful," she said. He nodded. It was useless advice. They both knew it. He made a show of accepting it just the same.

"Take care, Papa," Lucien said. He was twenty-three now. He had his full height, but was still three or four inches shorter than his rangy father. He didn't need to worry about going to war. His country was still at peace. In the end, though, theRepublicofQuebec wasn't Dr. O'Doull's homeland. He belonged to theUSA .

"All aboard!" the conductor shouted.

Black bag in hand, O'Doull got on the train. Nicole and Lucien waved to him after he found a seat. He waved back, and blew kisses. He kept on waving and blowing kisses as the train began to roll, even after his wife and son disappeared.

"God damn Jedediah Quigley," he muttered in English. But it wasn't Quigley's fault. The retired officer couldn't have sold him on returning to the service if he hadn't wanted to be sold. Blaming the other man was easier than blaming himself, though.

The train ran along the southern bank of the St. Lawrence for a long time. The river, through which the Great Lakes drained into theAtlantic , hardly seemed to narrow as O'Doull went south and west. The ocean was bigger, but theGreat Lakes might not have known it. They sent a lot of cold, clean, fresh water out into the sea. Even well beyond Rivière-du-Loup to the east, where the St. Lawrence river gradually became theGulf of St. Lawrence , the water remained at most brackish.

Farm country much like that which O'Doull's father-in-law had worked for so many years met the doctor's eye through the rather smeary window. Fields of wheat and barley and potatoes alternated with pear and apple orchards. The farmhouses also reminded O'Doull of the one in which Lucien Galtier had lived. They were built of wood, not stone. Almost all of them were white, with red roofs whose eaves stuck out to form a sort of verandah above the front door. The barns were white, too. O'Doull had got used to that. Now he recalled that most barns in theUSA were a dull red that got duller each year it wasn't touched up.

Towns came every few miles. They commonly centered on Catholic churches with tall spires made of pressed tin. Near the church would be a school, a post office, a few stores, and a tavern or two.

Sometimes there would be a doctor's office, sometimes a dentist's, sometimes a lawyer's. Houses with shade trees in front of them surrounded the little business centers.

Even if he hadn't been familiar with such small Quebecois towns, he would have come to know them well on the journey back to theUnited States , for the train seemed to stop at every one. That cut its speed down to a crawl, but nobody except O'Doull seemed to mind, and even he didn't mind very much.

Now a man in overalls would get on and light up a pipe, now a woman with squealing children or squealing piglets in tow, now a priest, now a granny. They would get to where they were going, get off at a station just like the one at which they'd boarded, and be replaced by other similar types. Once a handful of soldiers in blue-gray, probably coming back from leave, livened up O'Doull's car for a

while.

A couple of them were still drunk. They sang songs that made the grannies blush and cover their ears--except for one old dame who sang along in a voice almost as deep as a man's.

From Rivière-du-Loup to Longeuil, across the river from Montréal, was about 250 miles. The train didn't get there till evening, though it had left Rivière-du-Loup early in the morning. An express could have done the run in less than half the time. Leonard O'Doull laughed at himself for even imagining an express that ran out as far as Rivière-du-Loup. Where were the people who might make such a run profitable? Nowhere, and he knew it.

No matter how much the U.S. Army Medical Corps wanted his services, they hadn't wanted them badly enough to spring for aPullman berth. His seat reclined, a little. He dozed, a little. His route went south, away from the river at last and down toward theUnited States . Even so, the train kept right on stopping at every tiny town.

Here in what people called the Eastern Townships,Quebec changed. English-speakers replaced Francophones. The towns, from what he could see of them, lost their distinctively Quebecois look and began to resemble those of nearbyNew England . Most of the settlers in this part ofQuebec were descended from Loyalists who'd had to flee theUSA during and just after the Revolution.

O'Doull wondered how loyal those people were to the government inQuebec City even now.

French-speaking Catholics dominated theRepublicofQuebec --as well they might, when they made up close to seven-eighths of the population. The Republic's constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, and no one had yet tried to ram French down the throats of the people here, but where in the world did minorities ever have an easy time? Nowhere.

Not my worry, thank God, O'Doull thought, and dozed some more.

When he woke up again, the train was passing from theRepublic ofQuebec to theUnited States .

Customs inspectors in dark green uniforms went up and down the aisles, asking people from the Republic for their travel documents. What O'Doull had was sketchy: aU.S. passport from just before the Great War and a letter from Jedediah Quigley certifying that he had

been invited down to theUSA to rejoin the Medical Corps.

The customs inspector who examined his papers looked as if he'd swallowed a lemon. "Hey, Charlie!"

he called. "Come take a gander at this. What the hell we got here?"

In due course, Charlie appeared. He had slightly fancier gold emblems on his shoulder boards than the other customs man did. He frowned at the ancient passport, and frowned even harder at the letter. "Who the devil is Jedediah Quigley?" he demanded. "Sounds like somebody out of Dickens."

A literate official--who would have believed it? O'Doull answered, "Actually, I think he's fromNew Hampshire orVermont . He's been the middleman for a lot of deals between theUSA andQuebec . As far as he's concerned, I'm just small change."

Charlie might have been literate, but he wasn't soft. "As far as I'm concerned, you're just small change, too, buddy," he said coldly. "I think you better get off the train till we can figure out if you're legit. There's a war on, you know."

"If there weren't a war on, I wouldn't be back in theUnited States ," O'Doull said. "You can count on that."

"I don't count on anything," Charlie said. "That's why I've got this job, and that's why you're getting off this train."

O'Doull wanted to punch him in the nose. If he had, he probably would have ended up in jail instead of in the train station at Mooers,New York . By the time the sun came up, the distinction seemed academic.

Mooers lay in the middle of what had been forest and was now stubble, as if the earth hadn't shaved for several days. O'Doull had seen haphazard logging jobs inQuebec , but this one seemed worse than most.

Adding to the surreal feeling his weariness gave him, almost everybody in the train station except the customs inspectors seemed to be an immigrant fromQuebec . When he spoke French to a girl who brought him coffee, her face lit up. But he just made the customs men more suspicious.

"How come you parlez-vous?" Charlie demanded. "You're supposed to be a Yankee, aren't you?"

"I am a Yankee, dammit," O'Doull answered wearily. "But I've lived inQuebec for twenty-five years. My wife speaks French. All my neighbors speak French. All my patients, too. I'd better, don't you think?"

"I think we'll get your cock-and-bull story checked out, that's what I think," Charlie said. "Then we'll figure out what's what."

The girl brought O'Doull a plate of scrambled eggs and fried potatoes and more coffee. The customs men sent her sour stares; maybe she wasn't supposed to. O'Doull doubted she would have if he'd just used English with her. The potatoes were greasy and needed salt. He wolfed them down anyhow.

When he went to the men's room to get rid of some of that coffee, one of the customs men tagged along.

"Do you really think I'd try to run away?" O'Doull asked. "Where would I go?"

"Never can tell," said the man in the green uniform. O'Doull thought he was nuts, but didn't say so.

Mooers might not have been in the middle of nowhere, but it wasn't right at the edges, either.

Instead of escaping, he went back and sat down on the padless metal folding chair he'd vacated to whizz. His backside was sick of sitting, and this chair was even less comfortable than the seat on the train. He twisted and turned. Whenever he stood up to stretch, the customs men got ready to jump him.

He bought a hamburger and more greasy fries for lunch. By then, he'd started to wonder if he could open a practice here, because he seemed unlikely to go any farther. The customs men did finally let him buy a newspaper, too: a copy of the Plattsburg Patriot from two days before. The headline insisted thatColumbus wasn't cut off and surrounded, and denied that the U.S. Army had pulled itsOhio headquarters out of the city. O'Doull had seen headlines like that before. They were usually lies. He didn't say so. It would have made the customs men think him a defeatist.

Finally, at half past four, Charlie came up to him and said, "As far as

we can tell, Dr. O'Doull, you are what you say you are. We're going to let you go on as soon as the next train gets in."

"That's nice," O'Doull answered. "It would have been a lot nicer if you'd decided that a while ago, but it's still nice. When does the next train get in?" If Mooers hadn't been on the border, no railway would have come anywhere near it.

"Tomorrow evening," Charlie said, a little uncomfortably.

A little--not nearly enough. "Tomorrow evening!" Leonard O'Doull exploded. "Jesus Christ! I'm stuck in this lousy place for two stinking days? No wonder we're losing the goddamn war!" In the face of two days in Mooers,New York , defeatism suddenly seemed a small thing.

"We are not," Charlie said, but he didn't sound as if he believed himself. "And if you'd had proper travel documents--"

"I did," O'Doull said. "It only took you about a year and a half to check them." Charlie looked sullen.

O'Doull didn't care. "I don't suppose there's actually a hotel here?" The customs man's face told him there wasn't. He made more disgusted noises. If he wasn't going to enjoy himself in Mooers, he was damned if Charlie was going to enjoy having him here.

After the Second Mexican War,Philadelphia became the de facto capital of theUSA for one simple reason: it was out of artillery range of the CSA. During the Great War,Philadelphia hadn't quite come within artillery range of the CSA, either. Confederate bombers had visited the city every now and then, but they hadn't done much damage.

That was then. This was now. Flora Blackford had already come to hate the rising and falling squeal of the air-raid siren. Confederate bombers came overPhiladelphia every night, and they weren't just visiting.

They seemed bound and determined to knock the town flat.

Hurrying down to the cellar of her apartment building after the latest alarm, Flora complained, "Why didn't they move the government toSeattle ?"

"Because then the . . . lousy Japs would bomb us," said a man ahead of

her.

She scowled. The stairwell was dark. No one noticed, not even Joshua beside her. She'd been inLos Angeles in 1932, campaigning with her husband in his doomed reelection bid, when Japanese carrier airplanes came over the city. It had been only a pinprick, but it had let the last of the air out of his hopes.

Someone else on the stairs said, "Japanhasn't declared war on us yet."

"Yeah? And so?" another man replied. "Confederates didn't declare war on us, either. Slant-eyed so-and-sos are probably just waiting till they've got a big enough rock in their fist."

That made more sense than Flora wished it did. But she couldn't brood about it, not right then. Bombs started coming down. She took them more seriously than she had when the war began. Every time she went out during the day, she saw what they could do.

Into the cellar. It filled up fast. Fewer people bothered about robes and slippers than they had that first night. As long as you weren't naked, none of your neighbors would give you a second look. They had on pajamas and nightgowns, too. They hadn't combed their hair or put on makeup, either. Quite a few of them hadn't had baths. If you hadn't, it didn't matter so much. Nobody was going to get offended.

The floor shook under Flora's feet. "They're after the War Department again," Joshua said. "That's where most of the bombs are coming down." He pointed like a bird dog.

And Flora could tell he was right. The knowledge brought horror, not joy. Learning how to tell where bombs were falling was nothing she'd ever wanted to do. "Damn Jake Featherston," she said quietly.

"Amen," said somebody behind her. Half a dozen other people rumbled agreement.

She guessed they were damning him for bombingPhiladelphia and routing them out of bed again. She damned Featherston for that, too. But she had bigger reasons. She damned the President of the CSA for murdering hope. In the time the Socialists held the Presidency of theUSA after the Great War, they'd been reluctant to spend money on weapons. They'd thought the world had learned its lesson, and that nobody would try to kill anybody any more any time soon. Better to set things to rights inside theUnited States than to flabble about the

Confederate States.

After all, the CSA had suffered even more than theUSA in the Great War. The Confederates wouldn't want to risk that again, would they? Of course not! You'd have to be a madman to want to put your country through another round of torment.

As long as the Whigs ruled inRichmond , cool heads prevailed. The Whigs did what they could to rebuild. The Confederate States enjoyed a modest prosperity. TheUnited States weren't sorry to see that prosperity--or its modesty. The Freedom Party howled outside the door, but who was mad enough to invite it in?

Then came the worldwide collapse. Where cool heads had failed, hotheads prevailed. No one in theUSA had imagined Featherston could actually win an election. Flora knew she hadn't. The very idea had struck her as meshuggeh.

But, crazy or not, Featherston had gone about doing what he'd promised all along he would: getting even. If anyone in power in theUSA had believed he would be giving orders one day, War Department budgets would have looked different through the 1920s.

A few Democrats had screamed bloody murder about the way the budgets looked. They'd proved right, even if some of their own party reckoned them reactionaries at the time. They had been reactionaries.

Some of them, crowing on the floor of Congress now, were still reactionaries, and proud of it. But even reactionaries could be right once in a while. After all, a stopped clock was right twice a day.

Those Democrats, damn them, had picked something important to be right about. Flora hated admitting they had been right all the more because she thought them wrong about so many other things.

She'd been wrong here. She hated admitting that, too. She'd done it, though. It hadn't won her much respect from the Democrats. She hadn't expected it to.

"I think the AA is hotter than it was when the war started," Joshua said, bringing her back to the here and now.

"Maybe you're right," she said. "I hope you are."

"I'm not sure I hope I am," her son answered. "If the Confederates get shot at more, they won't hit their targets so much."

"That's good, isn't it?" Flora said.

Joshua shrugged. "Well, maybe. But if they don't hit their targets, they'd want to hit something before they get out of here. That means they're liable to drop their bombs any old place."

"Oh, joy," Flora said.

Not far away, a man muttered, "Oh, shit," which amounted to the same thing.

Flora had already accused her son of belonging to the General Staff. He got proved right here with alarming speed. A stick of bombs came down right in the neighborhood. Flora didn't know all that much about earthquakes, but this felt the way she imagined an earthquake would. She cast a frightened eye at the ceiling, wondering if it would stay up.

It did. The lights went out for a couple of minutes, but then they came back on. Everybody in the cellar let out a sigh of relief when they returned. "Isn't this fun?" a woman said. Several people laughed. With a choice between laughing and shrieking, laughing was better.

After that, the bombs hit farther away. The Confederate bombers lingered overPhiladelphia for more than an hour. Their bases weren't far away. Antiaircraft guns and searchlights and fighters hunting through the black skies of night were not enough to drive them off or even to slow them down very much. Every so often, one or two of them would crash in flames. What was that, though, but the cost of doing business?

The all-clear sounded. Yawning and sleepily cursing the Confederates, people went up to their flats. The air in the stairwell smelled of sweat and smoke.

Fire-engine sirens wailed, some nearer, some farther away. Flora had just opened the door to the flat she shared with Joshua when a big boom only a few blocks away made things shake all over again. "That was a bomb!" she said indignantly. "But the Confederates went away."

"Time fuse." Her son's voice was wise. "That way, people and stuff come close, and then it blows up."

He did his teenaged best to sound reassuring: "Don't worry, Mom. We've got 'em, too."

"Oh, joy," Flora said again, in the same tone and with the same meaning as she'd used down in the cellar.

Wasn't that a lovely piece of human ingenuity? It lay there quietly to lure more victims into the neighborhood, then slaughtered them. And theUSA and CSA both used such things. Whoever had invented them had probably got a bonus for his talents.

She would have liked to give him what he really deserved. The Geneva Convention probably outlawed that, though.

Lying down, she looked at the alarm clock's luminous dial, the only light in the bedroom. Half past three.

She said something more pungent than Oh, joy under her breath. It could have been worse. She knew that. It could have been better, too.

She yawned and stretched and tried to get comfortable and also tried to free her mind from the fear she'd known. That wasn't easy. She looked at the alarm clock again--3:35 now. Why did the dots by the numbers and the lines on the hour and minute hands glow? Radium--she knew that. But why did radium glow? Because it did; that was all she knew. Somewhere, there were probably scientists who could give a better explanation. She hoped so, anyhow.

She yawned again. Somewhat to her surprise, she did fall back to sleep. More often than not, she couldn't. She wasn't the only one doing without, either. Half the people inPhiladelphia seemed to be stumbling around with bags under their eyes these days. If the Confederates cut off coffee imports, the city would be in a bad way.

When the alarm went off not quite three hours later, she felt as if another bomb had exploded beside her head. The first time she tried to make it shut up, she missed. The second time, she succeeded. Yawning blearily, she got out of bed.

Coffee, for the time being, she had. She made herself a pot. Joshua's snores punctuated the wet blup-blup of the percolator. He didn't have school and he didn't have a job. He could sleep as long as he wanted. Flora marveled at that as she fried eggs to go with the coffee. Sleep as long as you wanted? Till Joshua, no one in her family had ever been able to do that. What else could more clearly mark an escape from the proletariat?

She dressed, went downstairs, and hailed a cab. The driver was a man

with a gray mustache and only two fingers on his left hand. "Congress," she told him.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, and put the elderly Buick in gear. "You a Congressman's wife, ma'am?"

"No," Flora said. "I'm a Congresswoman."

"Oh." The cabby drove on for a little while. Then he said, "Guess I just killed my tip." Flora said neither yes nor no, though the same thought had crossed her mind. The driver went on, "Any way you can make

'em pass a law to get me back into the Army? I can still shoot in spite of this." He held up his mutilated hand. "Stinking recruiting sergeants just laugh at me, though."

"I'm sorry," Flora told him. "I can't do much about that. The Army knows what it needs." There was something strange for a Socialist to say. It was true all the same, though. They rode the rest of the way into downtownPhiladelphia in glum silence.

Every day, Flora saw more damage to the city where she'd lived the second half of her life. A woman sat on the sidewalk with three little children and a dog. The children clung to odds and ends of property--shoes, framed pictures, and, ridiculously, a fancy china teapot. Flora knew what that meant: they'd lost everything else. They weren't the only ones, or anything close to it.

"Here you are, lady," the cab driver said, pulling to a stop in front of the Congressional building. "Fare's forty cents."

Flora gave him a half dollar. She hurried up the stairs. Even as she did, though, she wondered why.

Congress wouldn't change things much now. It was up to the men in green-gray and butternut.

Chester Martin and Harry T. Casson approached the table from opposite sides.Chester wore his usual workingman's clothes. Casson was natty in a white summer-weight linen suit. The builder could have bought and sold the labor organizer a dozen times without worrying about anything but petty cash.

Despite their differences, they sat down side by side. Martin stuck out his hand. Casson shook it.

Flashbulbs popped, even though nothing much had happened yet. Casson reached into an inside pocket and took out a sheet of paper and some glasses. Setting those on his nose, he looked at the waiting reporters and said, "I'd like to read a brief statement, if I might."

"Why are you making this deal with the construction workers' union?" a reporter called.

"Well, that's what the statement's about," the builder said. He glanced down at the typewritten sheet. "In this time of national emergency, the only enemy we have is our foreign foe. There is no place now for strife between labor and capital. Since that is obviously true even to those who have disagreed about other issues before, I have decided to sign a contract with the union at this time. Peace at home, war with theConfederateStates and their allies." He folded the paper and looked atChester . "Mr. Martin?"

"We've been working toward this moment for a long time."Chester had no notes. He felt like a hick next to the smooth Casson, but they sat here as equals. "A fair wage for a day's work and decent working conditions are all we ever wanted. With this contract, I think we're going to get 'em."

Harry T. Casson pulled a gold-nibbed fountain pen from his breast pocket. He signed all four copies of the contract, then ceremoniously offeredChester the pen.

"No, thanks. I've got my own." Martin had a plain steel nib, but it was plenty good enough for signatures. After he signed, he stuck out his hand again. Casson shook it. The flash photographers took more pictures.

"This is a great day forLos Angeles !" one of the reporters said.

He worked for the Times. "It'd be a better day, and it would have come sooner, if your paper hadn't spent the last I don't know how many years calling us a pack of lousy Reds,"Chester said. "I bet you don't print that--I bet you pretend I never said it--but it's true just the same."

"I'm writing it down," the reporter said. Men from the other, smaller, papers in town were writing it down, too. It would show up in their rags. Whether or not the guy from the Times put it in his piece,Chester 's bet was his editor would kill it before it saw print.

"How much will this help the war effort?" asked a man from the

Torrance Daily Breeze, a paper that had given labor's side of the class struggle a much fairer shake.

Chesternodded to Harry T. Casson, as if to say, You know more about that than I do.Chester wasn't shy about admitting it, not when it was true. The builder said, "We hope it will help quite a bit. We think everything will go better now that we're all pulling in the same direction."

"Will the other builders settle with the union?" asked the reporter from the Breeze.

"I can't speak for them," Casson said, which was half true at most. "I hope they will, though. We've had too much trouble here for too long."

"Amen to that,"Chester said. "I think we could have settled earlier--the union hasn't made any secret about the terms it was after--but I'm awfully glad we've got an agreement at last."

A man from the Pasadena Star-News asked, "With so many workers going into defense plants, how much will this deal really mean? Can the union keep its members? Except for war work, how much building will be going on?"

"You want to take that one?" Martin and Casson both said at the same time. They laughed. So did everybody else at the press conference. With a shrug,Chester went on, "Steve, to tell you the truth, I just don't know. We'll have to play it by ear and see what happens. The war's turned everything topsy-turvy."

"That about sums it up," Harry T. Casson agreed. "We're doing the best we can. That's all anybody can do, especially in times like these." He held up a well-manicured hand. "Thank you very much, gentlemen."

Some of them still scribbling, the reporters got up from their folding chairs and headed off toward typewriters in their offices or towards other stories. "Well, Mr. Casson, we've gone and done it,"Chester said. "Now we see how it works."

"Yes." The building magnate nodded. "That's what we have to do." He took out a monogrammed gold cigarette case that probably cost at least as much as Martin had made in the best three months of his life put together. "Smoke?"

"Thanks." Martin got out a book of matches that advertised a garage near his place. He lit Casson's cigarette, then his own. The tobacco was pretty good, but no better than pretty good. He'd wondered if capitalists could get their hands on superfancy cigarettes, the way they could with superfancy motorcars.

That they couldn't--or at least that Casson hadn't--came as something of a relief.

Casson eyed him. "And where do you go from here, Mr. Martin?"

"Me? Back to work,"Chester answered. "Where else? It's been way too long since I picked up a hammer and started working with my hands again."

"I wonder if you'll get the satisfaction from it that you expect," Casson said.

"What do you mean?"

"You said it yourself: you haven't worked with your hands for a long time," Casson answered. "You've worked with your head instead. You've got used to doing that, I'd say, and you've done it well. You're not just a worker any more. For better or worse, you're a leader of men."

"I was a sergeant in the last war. I commanded a company for a while, till they found an officer who could cover it,"Chester said.

Harry T. Casson nodded. "Oh, yes. Those things happened. I was a captain, and I had a regiment for a couple of weeks. If you lived, you rose."

"Yeah."Chester nodded, too. He wasn't surprised at what Casson said; the other man had the air of one who'd been through the mill. "Point is, though, I didn't miss it when the shooting stopped. I don't much like people telling me what to do, either."

Casson tapped his ash into a cheap glass ashtray on the table. "Maybe not, but you've done it, and done it well. You're in command of more than a regiment these days. Will the people you're in charge of let you walk away? Will the lady who's in charge of you let you do it?"

"Rita's my worry,"Chester said, and Casson nodded politely. Rita hadn't wanted him to start a union here. He remembered that. Why

would she care if he went back to what he'd done before? If local president sounded grander than carpenter, so what? As for the other members of the union . . . "There's bound to be somebody who can do a better job than I can."

"You may be surprised," Harry T. Casson said. "You may be very surprised indeed. You've been stubborn, you haven't been vicious, and you've been honest. The combination is rarer than you'd think. I made a bargain with you in half an hour, once I decided I needed to. I wouldn't even have dickered with some of your, ah, colleagues."

"That's flattering, but I don't believe it for a minute," Martin said.

"Believe it," the magnate told him. "I don't waste time on flattery, especially not after we've made our deal. What's the point? We've already settled things."

"I'm glad we have, too,"Chester said.

"Yes, well, this poor miserable old country of ours is going to take plenty more knocks from the damned Confederates. I don't see much point in hurting it ourselves," Casson said.

"Makes sense,"Chester said, and then, "Is Columbus really surrounded?"

"All I know is what I read in the newspapers and hear on the wireless," Casson answered. "The Confederates say it is, we say it isn't. But both sides say there's fighting north of there. Draw your own conclusions."

Martin already had. He liked none of them. He said, "I'm fromToledo . I know what holding on toOhio means to the country."

"I hope people back East do," Casson said. "If they don't, I think the Confederates'd be happy to teach them." He grimaced, then tried a smile on for size. "Not much either one of us can do about that."

"No, not unless we want to put on the uniform again,"Chester said. Harry T. Casson grimaced again, in a different way.Chester laughed, but not for long. "IfOhio goes down the drain, it could come to that.

IfOhio goes down the drain, we'll need everything and everybody we can get our hands on."

He hoped Casson would tell him he was wrong, tell him that he was flabbling over nothing. He wouldn't have agreed with the building

magnate, but he hoped so anyhow. Casson didn't even try. He just said,

"You're right. We're a little long in the tooth, but only a little, and we've been through it. They'd put green-gray on us pretty damn quick if we gave 'em the chance."

"I've thought about it," Martin said.

"Have you?" Casson pointed a finger at him. "You're mine now. I can blackmail you forever. If you don't do what I say, I'll tell that to your wife."

"Rita already knows,"Chester said. That was true. He didn't say anything about how horrified she'd been when she found out. He didn't suppose he could blame her. Her dismay was probably the biggest single thing that had kept him from visiting a recruiting station. He didn't say anything about that, either; it was none of Harry T. Casson's business. He just took his copies of the agreement they'd signed. "I'd better get home."

"You don't have an auto, do you?" Casson asked.

"Nope."Chester shook his head.

"That's hard here," the magnate said. "Los Angelesis too spread out to make getting around by trolley very easy."Chester only shrugged. Casson went on, "I'd be happy to give you a lift, if you like."

"No, thanks,"Chester said. "I took the trolley here. I can take it back. If you give me a ride, half the people in the union will think I've sold 'em down the river. And that's liable to be what you've got in mind."

The other man looked pained. "Times are pretty grim when a friendly gesture can get misunderstood like that."

"You're right. Time are pretty grim when something like that can happen,"Chester said. "But these are the times we've got. We've made a deal. I'm glad we've made a deal--don't get me wrong. We're class enemies just the same, and pretending we're not isn't going to change things even a dime's worth."

"I'm surprised you'd rather fight Featherston than me," Casson said.

"Up yours, Mr. Casson,"Chester said evenly. "He's a class enemy, too,

and he's a national enemy."

Before the Great War, Socialists hadn't realized how nationalism could trump the international solidarity of the proletariat. They had no excuse for not seeing that now.

Harry T. Casson snorted. "Have it your way. I still think the whole notion of class warfare is a bunch of crap."

"Of course you do. You can afford to."Chester walked out with the agreement and the last word.

VI

Early one stiflingly hot and sticky July morning, Cincinnatus Driver watched colored men lining up at the edge ofCovington,Kentucky 's, Negro district. A sign said, WAR WORK HERE. Three or four policemen--whites, of course--hung around just to make sure nobody got out of line literally or metaphorically.

Half a dozen buses rolled up. They were old and rickety. The nasty black diesel fumes that belched from their tailpipes made Cincinnatus cough. It wasn't the poison gas the Confederates and Yankees were shooting at each other on the far side of theOhio , but it was bad enough.

Doors wheezed open on the buses. The blacks filed aboard. They filled each bus to overflowing, taking all the seats and packing the aisles. More fumes poured from tailpipes as the buses rolled away.

Disappointed blacks who hadn't managed to get aboard milled around on the sidewalk.

"Form a new line!" one of the cops bawled. "Form a new line, goddammit! Next buses come along in fifteen minutes!"

The Negroes obeyed. They might have been so many sheep. Lambs to the slaughter, Cincinnatus thought. He got moving again, putting weight on his cane so he didn't have to put it on his bad leg. He couldn't go fast enough to get out of his own way. By now, the policemen were used to seeing him around. They hardly ever asked for his passbook any more, at least as long as he stayed in the colored district.

He couldn't have worked in a war plant even if he'd wanted to, not unless they found him a job that involved sitting down all the time. Such jobs undoubtedly existed. Did blacks have any of them?

Cincinnatus doubted that. It would have been unlikely in theUSA . In the CSA, it was inconceivable, or as close as made no difference.

But these Negroes, swarms of them, lined up for the chance to work at whatever kind of jobs their white rulers deigned to give them.Kentucky hadn't been back in the Confederate States for very long. Blacks here had already learned the difference between bad and worse, though. This was bad: long hours, lousy pay, hard work, no choice, no possible complaint.

Worse? Worse was drawing the notice of Confederate authorities--in practice, of any suspicious white.

If that happened, you didn't go on a ride to a war plant. You went for a ride, all right, but you didn't come back. People talked about camps. People talked about worse things than camps. A strange phrase had crept into the language since Cincinnatus found himself stuck inCovington . You gonna git your population reduced, one Negro would say to another when he meant the other man would end up in trouble. Cincinnatus hadn't heard that one before. He knew endless variations on git your tit in a wringer and git your ass in a sling, but git your population reduced was new--and more than a little ominous. The next person he heard of who'd come out of a camp would be the first.

He shuffled on. His father was sprier than he was these days. He hated that. With his mother slipping deeper into her second childhood every day, his father needed someone who could help keep an eye on her and take care of her. Cincinnatus had come down fromDes Moines so he could take them both back to theUSA beforeKentucky returned to the Confederate fold. Thanks to the man who'd run him down, Seneca now had two to take care of.

Somebody'd pasted a crudely printed flyer to a brick wall. sabotage! it said in bold black letters, and underneath, Don't make things the Freedom Party can use against theUSA ! If the Confederacy wins, Negroes lose! Below that was a set of broken chains.

Cincinnatus read the flyer out of the corner of his eye. He didn't turn his head towards it. Someone could have been watching him. Besides, he'd seen that particular flyer before. During the Great War, he'd

become something of a connoisseur of propaganda posters. This one, he judged, was . . . fair.

Nothing wrong with the message. If the CSA and the Freedom Party beat theUSA , things would only get worse for blacks here. But calling for sabotage was calling for a worker to take his life in his hands.

Those who got caught paid. Oh, how they paid.

He also saw lots of places where a flyer--probably the same one--had been torn down. Not many people would want that message on their wall or fence or tree. It would land them in trouble with the Confederate authorities, and trouble with the Confederate authorities was the last thing any black man inCovington needed.

Not entirely by coincidence, Cincinnatus' amble took him past Lucullus Wood's barbecue place. He started to go inside, but he was still reaching for the knob when the door opened--and out strode a gray-uniformed policeman gnawing on a beef rib as long as a billy club.

"You comin' in, uncle?" the cop said around a mouthful of beef. Grease shone on his lips and chin. He held the door open for Cincinnatus.

"Thank you kindly, suh," Cincinnatus said, looking down at the ground so the policeman wouldn't see his face. The man had done something perfectly decent: not the sort of thing one necessarily expected from a cop inCovington at all. But then he'd gone and spoiled it with one word. Uncle. Like boy, it denied a black male his fundamental equality, his fundamental humanity. And, worse, the policeman seemed to have no idea that it did.

Lucullus' place did a brisk breakfast business, mostly on scraps and shreds of barbecued beef and pork cooked with eggs and with fried potatoes or grits. Cincinnatus sat down at a bench and ordered eggs and pork and grits and a cup of coffee. Everything came fast as lightning; Lucullus ran a tight ship.

Cincinnatus' eyes widened when he took his first sip of the coffee. He sent the waitress an accusing stare.

"You reckon I don't know chicory when I taste it? There any real coffee in this here cup at all?"

"There's some," she answered. "But we havin' trouble gettin' the real

bean. Everybody havin' trouble gettin' the real bean, even white folks. We got to stretch best way we know how."

Cincinnatus took another sip. Some people in the CSA--especially blacks--had a taste for coffee laced with chicory. Some even liked it better than the real bean. He hadn't even tasted it since he moved up toIowa . It did help pry his eyes open. He couldn't deny that. "You go on, girl," he told the waitress. "It'll do. But you let Lucullus know he got somebody out front who wants a word with him."

"I do that," she said, and hurried off.

Lucullus didn't come out right away. Cincinnatus would have been astonished if he had. When he did, he planted his massive form across the table from Cincinnatus and said, "So you ain't much for chicory, eh?"

"It's all right. It's tolerable, anyways," Cincinnatus answered. "What it says that you can't get no coffee . .

. that's another story."

"There's some. There's always some, you wanna pay the price for it," Lucullus said. "But it ain't cheap no more, like it was before the war. I charge my customers a quarter a cup, pretty damn quick I ain't got no customers no more."

With his barbecue, he would always have customers. Cincinnatus took his point just the same. After another forkful of grits, he spoke in a low voice: "I seen six buses first pickup this mornin'. More comin' in fifteen minutes, police say."

"Six, with more comin'," Lucullus echoed quietly. Cincinnatus nodded. Lucullus clicked his tongue between his teeth. "They got a lot o' niggers workin' for 'em."

"You don't work for 'em, somethin' worse happen," Cincinnatus said. "You don't work hard for 'em, somethin' worse happen. You seen that sabotage flyer?"

"Yeah, I seen it," Lucullus answered. His smile was broad and genuinely amused. Cincinnatus hadn't asked him if he'd had anything to do with putting it up. Seeing it was safe enough. The other wasn't.

"Lots o' colored folks try that, they end up dead," Cincinnatus said.

"Colored folks don't try somethin' like that, we all liable to end up dead," Lucullus said. Cincinnatus made a face. That was going too far . . . wasn't it? But Lucullus nodded. "You reckon Jake Featherston don't want us dead?"

"Well, no," Cincinnatus said; nobody in his right mind could believe that. But he went on, "There's a difference between wantin' us dead an' makin' us dead."

"You go on thinkin' that way, you gonna git your population reduced." Lucullus pointed at Cincinnatus with a thick, stubby forefinger. "You hear that before?"

"I heard it," Cincinnatus said unwillingly.

"You suppose the folks who say it, they jokin'?" Lucullus persisted.

"How the hell do I know?" Cincinnatus spoke with more than a little irritation. "I ain't been in the goddamn Confederate States for a hell of a long time. Never wanted to be in the Confederate States again, neither. How do I know how you crazy niggers talk down here?"

That made Lucullus laugh, but not for long. He said, "We talks that way on account o' what goes on at them camps inAlabama andMississippi andLouisiana . You don't believe they reduces their population there? You don't believe they kills people so they don't got to worry 'bout feedin' 'em no more? You don't believe that?"

Cincinnatus didn't know what he believed. "Don't want to believe it," he said at last. "Even Featherston ain't that much of a son of a bitch."

"Hell he ain't." Lucullus had no doubts. "Mebbe they kills us whether we fights back or no. We sits quiet, though, they kills us for sure."

"He's fightin' the damnyankees," Cincinnatus said. "How's he gonna do that if he's doin' all this other shit, too?USA 's bigger'n the CSA. Featherston's a bastard, but he ain't no fool. He got to see he can't waste his men and waste his trains and waste all his other stuff goin'after niggers who ain't doin' him no harm."

"You been up in Ioway. You ain't been payin' enough attention to the CSA. Even whenKentucky was in theUSA , I had to," Lucullus said. "Why you reckon Confederate factories make about nine million tractors and harvesters and combines a few years back?"

"I seen that when it happened. Don't tell me I don't pay no attention,"

Cincinnatus said angrily. "Any damn fool can tell you why they done it: on account of any factory that can make tractors can make barrels, too, that's why."

Lucullus looked surprised, and not just at his vehemence. "That's part o' why, I reckon," he admitted.

"But they's more to it than that. They put all them machines in the fields. Just one of 'em do the work of a hell of a lot o' nigger farmhands. Niggers want to work, they got to go to town. Mister Jake Featherston got hisself a whole new proletariat to exploit . . . an' the niggers who fights back, or the niggers who can't find no work no way, nohow, he goes an' he reduces their population."

Cincinnatus stared at him. That had to be the most cynical assessment he'd ever heard in his life, and he'd heard a lot of them. But, along with the cynicism, it made a lot more sense than he wished it did.

Then Lucullus went back to his office. He returned a minute or so later. Cincinnatus wouldn't have minded if the barbecue king had brought back a bottle. Even though it was early, he could have used a drink after the talk they were having. But Lucullus wasn't carrying a bottle. Instead, he set a book on the table between them.

"Over Open Sights," Cincinnatus read aloud.

"It's all in here," Lucullus said. "Featherston ain't just a bastard, like you say. He's a bastard who knows what he wants to do. An' he wrote some of this shit back during the Great War. He say so, for Chrissake. He's knowed what he wants to do for years."

Scipio watched a plump, prosperous white businessman eat his venison at the Huntsman's Lodge. The man's supper companion was a very pretty blonde half his age--not his wife, as Scipio knew. He was saying, "Have you had a look at Over Open Sights, sweetcakes?"

That wasn't, to put it mildly, the approach Scipio would have taken. The girl said, "I've seen it, but I haven't read it--yet." She added the last word in a hurry.

"Oh, baby, you have to." The man paused to take a big gulp from a glass of burgundy whose rich bouquet Scipio savored from ten feet away. He'd ordered it because it was expensive. Treating a vintage like that was a disgrace, to say nothing of a waste. Scipio couldn't do a thing about it, though. Nor could he do anything but stare impassively

as the man went on, "He's sound on the nigger question. He's very, very sound. He knows just what he wants to do about coons."

Did he even remember Scipio was standing close by? Remember or not, he didn't care. What was a black waiter but part of the furniture? The man's companion said, "Good. That's good. They're a pack of troublemakers." She had no trouble forgetting about Scipio's existence, either.

They remembered him when they ordered peach cobbler for dessert, but gave no sign of knowing he'd been around while they were eating. Scipio was tempted to spit in the desserts. With something gooey like peach cobbler, they'd never know. He finally didn't, though he had trouble saying why. Life is too short, was all that really occurred to him.

The white man tipped well. He left the money where the girl could see it. He aimed to impress her, not to make Scipio happy. Scipio didn't care. Money was money.

Jerry Dover saw him pocket the brown banknotes. The manager missed next to nothing. He would have said--he did say--his job was to miss next to nothing. "Got yourself a high roller, did you?" he said as Scipio came back toward the kitchen.

"Not too bad," Scipio allowed.

"How come you don't look happy, then?"Dover asked.

"I's happy enough," Scipio said. His face became the expressionless mask he used to shield his feelings from the outside world, the white man's world. Even Jerry Dover had trouble penetrating that reserve.

He had trouble most of the time. Not tonight. "Sidneygoin'on about niggers again?" he asked.

"Well . . . yeah, he do dat some," Scipio said unwillingly.

"Can't be a whole lot of fun for you to listen to,"Dover said. Scipio only shrugged. His boss asked, "You want to go home early? All right by me."

"An' leave you shorthanded? Nah. I be fine," Scipio said, angry at himself for letting the white man see he was upset.

"Buy something nice for your missus with the money," Jerry Dover said. "Sidneyfigures if his new girl thinks he's one tough guy, she's more likely to suck him off. Haven't you seen that before?"

Damnfool buckra, Scipio thought. But he couldn't say that. A white could make cracks about another white. He could even do that in a black's hearing. But for a black to make cracks about a white, even with another white who'd just made a crack about the same man, broke the rules. Scipio didn't consciously understand that. For him, it was water to a fish. But a fish without water would die. A black who broke the rules of the CSA would die, too.

He got through the rest of the night. When he left the restaurant, he went into a world of darkness.

Blackout regulations had reachedAugusta , though the nextU.S. airplane the city saw would be its first.

Scipio went south toward the Terry with reasonable confidence. The colored part of town had never had street lights to black out. That made Scipio more used to getting along without them than most whites were.

Every so often, an auto would chug by, its headlights reduced to slits by tape or by hastily manufactured blinkers that fit over them. The muted lamps gave just enough light to keep a driver from going up on the sidewalk--as long as he didn't go too fast. The Constitutionalist seemed to report more nighttime smash-ups every day.

Lights or no lights, Scipio knew when he got to the Terry. No more motorcars. The pavement under his feet turned bumpy and hole-pocked. The stink of privies filled his nostrils. There even seemed to be more mosquitoes. He wouldn't have been surprised. Public-health men were likely to spray oil on puddles in the white part of town first and worry about the Terry later, if at all. If some Negroes came down sick, well, so what? They were only Negroes.

He tried to walk quietly in the Terry. Lately, lots of hungry black sharecroppers had come intoAugusta from the nearby cotton farms and cornfields. Tractors and harvesters and combines had stolen their livelihood. Here in the Terry, they weren't fussy about what they did to eat, or to whom they did it.

Some of them would sneak out and prey on whites. But that was risky, and deadly dangerous if they got caught. Most preyed on their own kind instead. The police were much less likely to go after blacks who

robbed other blacks. Blacks who stole from other blacks got easier treatment even when the police did catch them.

Scipio scowled, there in the midnight gloom. The white folks reckon we're worthless, he thought bitterly.

Is it any wonder a lot of us reckon we're worthless, too? That was perhaps the most bitter pill blacks in the CSA had to swallow. Too often, they judged themselves the way their social superiors and former masters judged them.

But how can we help it? Scipio wondered. Whites in the CSA had always dominated the printed word.

Now they had charge of the wireless and the cinema, too. They made Negroes see themselves as they saw them. Was it any wonder skin-lightening creams and hair-straightening pomades made money for druggists all over the Confederacy?

Some of the pomades worked, after a fashion. A lot of them, Scipio had heard, were mostly lye, and lye would shift damn near anything. What it did to your scalp while it straightened your hair was liable to be something else again. But then, some people judged a pomade's quality by how much it hurt. As far as Scipio knew, all the skin-lightening creams were nothing but grease and perfume. None of them was good for more than separating a sucker from his--or more likely her--hard-earned dollars.

His own hair, though cut short, remained nappy. His skin--he looked down at the backs of his hands--was dark, dark brown. But would he have found Bathsheba so attractive if she'd been his own color and not a rather light-skinned mulatto? He was damned if he knew.

After a few paces, he shook his head in a mixture of guilt and self-disgust. He did know. He just didn't want to admit it to himself. Whites had shaped his tastes, too, so that he judged Negro women's attractiveness by how closely they approached their white sisters' looks.

There were black men who'd been warped more than he had, who craved the genuine article, not the approximation. Things seldom ended well for the few who tried to satisfy their cravings. In the right circumstances, white male Confederates might put up with some surprising things from blacks. They never put up with that, not when they found out about it.

When he heard footsteps coming up an alley, he shrank back into the deeper shadow of a fence and did his best to stop breathing. One . . . two . . . three young black men crossed the street in front of him.

They had no idea he was there. Starlight glittered off the foot-long knife the biggest one carried.

"Slim pickin's tonight," the trailing man grumbled.

"We gits somebody," the one with the knife said. "We gits somebody, all right. Oh, hell, yes." On down the alley they padded, beasts of prey on the prowl.

Scipio waited till he couldn't hear their footfalls any more. Then he waited a little longer. Their ears were younger than his, and likely to be keener. The three didn't come running back toward him when he crossed the alley, so he'd waited long enough.

He hated them. He despised them. But next to the Freedom Party stalwarts--and especially next to the better disciplined Freedom Party guards--what were they? Stray dogs next to a pride of lions. And the Freedom Party men were always hungry for blood.

He got to his apartment building without incident. The front door was locked. Up till a little while before, it hadn't been. Then a woman got robbed and stabbed in the lobby. That changed the manager's mind about what was needed to make the building stay livable. Scipio went in quickly, and locked the door behind him again.

Climbing the stairs to his flat was always the hardest part of the day. There seemed to be a thousand of them. He'd been on his feet forever at the Huntsman's Lodge--it felt that way, anyhow. His bones creaked. He carried the weight of all his years on his shoulders.

I was born a slave, he thought; he'd been a boy when the Confederate States manumitted their Negroes in the 1880s. Am I anything but a slave nowadays? Most of the time, he had no use for the Red rhetoric that had powered the Negro uprisings during the Great War. He'd thought them doomed to fail, and he'd been bloodily proved right. But when he ached, when he panted, when the world was too much with him, Marx and revolution held a wild temptation. Like cheap booze for a drunk, he thought wearily, except revolutions make people do even stupider things.

The apartment was dark. It still smelled of the ham hocks and greens his family had eaten for supper. His children's snores, and Bathsheba's,

floated through the night. He sighed with pleasure as he undid his cravat and freed his neck from the high, tight, hot wing collar that had imprisoned him for so long.

Bathsheba stirred when he walked into their bedroom to finish undressing. "How'd it go?" she asked sleepily.

"Tolerable," he answered. "Sorry I bother you."

"Ain't no bother," his wife said. "Don't hardly see each other when we's both awake."

She wasn't wrong. He hung his clothes on the chair by the bed. He could wear the trousers and jacket another day. The shirt had to go to the laundry. He'd put on his older one tomorrow. If Jerry Dover grumbled, he wouldn't do any more than grumble.

Scipio asked, "How you is?" He let his cotton nightshirt fall down over his head.

Around a yawn, Bathsheba answered, "Tolerable, like you say." She yawned again. "Miz Finley, she tip me half a dollar--more'n I usually gits. But she make me listen to her go on and on about the war while I work. Ain't hardly worth it."

"No, I reckons not," Scipio said. "Could be worse, though. Buckra at the restaurant, he go on about de niggers to his lady friend--only she ain't no lady. He talk like I's nothin' but a brick in de wall."

"You mean you ain't?" Bathsheba said. Scipio laughed, not that it was really funny. If you didn't laugh, you'd scream, and that was--he supposed--worse. His wife went on, "Why don't you come to bed now, you ol' brick, you?" Laughing again, Scipio did.

Connie Enos clung to George. "I don't want you to go down to T Wharf," she said, tears in her voice.

For how many years hadBoston fishermen's wives been saying that to the men they loved? It took on special urgency when George was going out again after coming home aboard the shot-up Sweet Sue. He had no really good answer for Connie, and gave the only one he could: "We got to eat, sweetie. Going to sea is the only thing I know how to do. We were lucky when the company paid us off for the last run. I don't suppose they would have if the Globe hadn't raised a stink."

He hadn't expected the company to pay off even with the stink. But next to the cost of repairing the boat, giving the surviving crewmen what they would have got after an average trip was small change.

There were times when George understood why so many people voted Socialist, though he was a Democrat himself.

"Do you think the company will pay me blood money after the goddamn limeys sink your boat? Do you think I'd want it if they did?" Connie, born McGillicuddy, hardly ever swore, but made an exception for the British.

George shrugged helplessly. "Lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place," he said, knowing he was lying. Lightning hit wherever something tall stuck up, and hit again and again. But the Sweet Sue wasn't an especially remarkable boat. She'd been unlucky once. Why would she be again? Because there's a war on, he told himself, and wished he hadn't.

"Why don't you get a job in a war plant?" Connie demanded. "They're hiring every warm body they can get their hands on."

"I know they are." George tried to leave it at that.

Connie wouldn't let him. "Well, then, why don't you? War work pays better than going to sea, and you'd be home with your family. You'd be able to watch your kids grow up. They wouldn't be strangers to

you.

What's so bad about that?"

Nothing was bad about any of it. George's father would have been a stranger to him even if his destroyer hadn't been torpedoed at--after--the end of the Great War. Fishermen were strangers to their families, those who had families. That was part of what went into their being fishermen.

George knew that, felt that, but had no idea how to say it. The best he could manage was, "That isn't what I want to do."

His wife exhaled angrily. She put her hands on her hips, something she did only when truly provoked.

She played her trump card: "And what about me? Do you want to end up being a stranger to your own wife?"

Wearily, George shook his head. He said, "Connie, I'm a fisherman. This is what I do. It's all I ever wanted to do. You knew that when you married me. Your old man's been going to sea longer than I've been alive. You know what it's like."

"Yeah, I know what it's like. Wondering when you're coming home. Wondering if you're coming home, especially now with the war. Wondering if you'll bring back any money. Wondering why I married you when all I've got is a shack job every two weeks or a month. You call that a marriage? You call that a life?" She burst into tears.

"Oh, for God's sake." George didn't know what to do with explosions like that. Connie had them every so often. If he'd accused her of acting Irish, she would have hit the ceiling and him, not necessarily in that order. He said, "Look, I've got to go. The boat's not gonna wait forever. This is what I do. This is what I am." That came as close to what he really meant as anything he could put into words.

It wasn't close enough. He could see that in Connie's blazing eyes. Shaking his head, he turned away, slung his duffel over his shoulder, and started down the hall to the stairs. Connie slammed the door behind him. Three people stuck their heads out of their apartments to see if a bomb had hit the building.

George gave them a sickly smile and kept walking.

T Wharf was a relief. T Wharf was home, in many ways much more

than the apartment was. This was where he wanted to be. This was where his friends were. This was where his world was, with the smells of fish and the sea and tobacco smoke and diesel fuel and exhaust, with the gulls skrawking overhead and the first officers cursing the company buyers in half a dozen languages when the prices were low, with the rumble of carts full of fish and ice, with the waving, sinuous tails of optimistic cats, with the scaly tails of the rats that weren't supposed to be there but hadn't got the news, with . . . with everything. He started smiling. He couldn't help it.

The Sweet Sue had a fresh coat of paint. She had new glass. You could hardly see the holes the bullets had made in her--but George knew. Oh, yes. He knew. He'd never be able to go into the galley again without thinking of the Cookie dead on the floor, his pipe beside him. They'd have a new Cookie now, and it wouldn't be the same.

On the other hand . . . There was Johnny O'Shea, leaning over the rail heaving his guts out. He drank like a fish whenever he was ashore, and caught fish when he went to sea. He wasn't seasick now, just getting rid of his last bender. He did that whenever he came aboard. Once he dried out, he'd be fine. Till he did, he'd go through hell.

I don't do that, George thought. I never will--well, only once in a while. So what does Connie want from me, anyway?

"Welcome back, George," Captain Albert called from his station at the bow.

"Thanks, Skipper," George said.

"Wasn't sure the little woman'd let you come out again."

"Well, she did." George didn't want anybody thinking he was henpecked. He went below, tossed the duffel bag in one of the tiny, dark cabins below the skipper's station, and stretched out on the bunk.

When he got out of it, he almost banged his head on the planks not nearly far enough above it. He'd get used to this cramped womb again before long. He always did.

After stowing the duffel, George went back up on deck. But for the skipper and Johnny O'Shea, it was going to be a crew full of strangers. The old Cookie was dead, Chris Agganis was still getting over his wound, and the rest of the fishermen who'd been aboard on the last run didn't aim to come back.

A round man in dungarees, a ratty wool sweater, and an even rattier cloth cap approached the Sweet Sue. He'd slung a patched blue-denim duffel over his left shoulder. Waving to George, he called, "Can I come aboard?"

"You the new cook?" George asked.

"Sure as hell am," the newcomer answered. "How'd you know?" The gangplank rattled and boomed as his clodhoppers thumped on it.

Shrugging, George said, "You've got the look--know what I mean?" The other man nodded. George stuck out his hand and gave his name.

"Pleased t'meetcha." The new cook shook hands with him, then jabbed a thumb at his own broad chest.

"I'm Horton Everett. Folks mostly call me Ev." He pointed to Johnny O'Shea. "Who's that sorry son of a bitch?"

"I heard that," O'Shea said. "Fuck you." He leaned over the rail to retch again, then spat and added,

"Nothing personal."

"Johnny'll be fine when he sobers up and dries out," George said. "He's always like this when we're setting out."

Horton Everett nodded. He took a little cardboard box of cheap cigars from a trouser pocket, stuck one in his mouth, and offered George the box. George took one.Everett scraped a match alight on the sole of one big shoe, then lit both cigars. He liked a honey-flavored blend, George discovered. That made the smoke smooth and sweet, and helped disguise how lousy the tobacco was. And, with the Confederates shooting instead of trading, it would only get worse.

Other new hires came aboard. One of them, a skinny oldster who talked as if he wore ill-fitting dentures, joined Johnny O'Shea in misery by the rail. Terrific, George thought. We've got two lushes aboard, not just one. The skipper better keep an eye on the medicinal brandy.

After they pulled away from the wharf, the Sweet Sue had to join a gaggle of other fishing boats going out to sea. Actually, the skipper could have taken her out alone. But the fast little patrol boat shepherding his charges along had a crew who knew the route

through the minefields intended to keep Confederate raiders away fromBoston harbor. George suspected that was snapping fingers to keep the elephants away. Nobody much worried about his suspicions.

The Sweet Sue's diesel sounded just the way it was supposed to. George remained amazed that the British fighter could have shot up the boat so thoroughly without doing the engine much harm, but that was how things had turned out. Luck. All luck. Nothing but luck. If the fighter pilot had aimed his nose a little differently, he would have shot George and not the Cookie. George shivered, though summer heat clogged the air.

He shivered again when, after the Sweet Sue had threaded her way through the minefields, he went into the galley. Horton Everett had a pot of coffee going. "You want a cup?" he asked.

"Sure, Ev," George said. "Thanks." The new Cookie's cigar smoke gave the place a smell different from the one Davey Hatton's pipe tobacco had imparted. The coffee was hot and strong. George sipped thoughtfully. "Not bad."

"Glad you like it."Everett puffed on a new cigar. "You and the skipper and what's-his-name--the sot--are gonna measure every goddamn thing I do against what the other Cookie did, ain't you?"

"Well . . ." George felt a dull embarrassment at being so transparent. "I guess maybe we are. I don't see how we can help it. Do you?"

The new Cookie took off his cap and scratched tousled gray hair. "Mm, maybe not. All right. Fair enough. I'll do the best I can. Don't cuss me out too hard if it ain't quite the same."

For lunch, he fried up a big mess of roast-beef hash, with eggs over easy on top and hash browns on the side. Neither Johnny O'Shea nor the other drunk was in any shape to eat, which only meant there was more for everybody else. It wasn't a meal Davey Hatton would have made, but it was a long way from bad.

The skipper ate slowly, with a thoughtful air. He caught George's eye and raised an eyebrow ever so slightly: a silent question. George gave back a tiny nod: an answer. Captain Albert nodded in turn: agreement. Then he spoke up: "Pretty damn good chow, Cookie."

"Thanks, Skipper,"Everett answered. "Glad you like it. Of course, you'd be just as much stuck with it if you didn't."

"Don't remind me," the skipper said. "Don't make me wish another British fighter'd come calling, either."

Horton Everett mimed getting shot. He was a pretty good actor. He got the skipper and the new fishermen laughing. George managed to plaster a smile on his face, too, but it wasn't easy. He'd been right here when the old Cookie really did take a bullet in the chest. The one good thing was, he'd died so fast, he'd hardly known what hit him.

Everett said, "You guys better like the hash and eggs now, on account of it's gonna be tuna all the goddamn way home."

They cursed him good-naturedly. They knew he was right. Maybe he could even keep tuna interesting.

That would make him a fine Cookie indeed. And, with any luck, they'd never see a British airplane.

Lightning doesn't strike twice. George tried to make himself believe the lie.

Sometimes the simplest things could bring pleasure. Hipolito Rodriguez had never imagined how much enjoyment he could get just by opening the refrigerator door. An electric light inside the cold box came on as if by magic, so he could see what was inside even in the middle of the night. Vegetables and meat stayed fresh a very long time in there.

And he could have a cold bottle of beer whenever he wanted to. He didn't need to go to La Culebra Verde. He could buy his cerveza at the general store, bring it home, and drink it as cold as if it were at the cantina--and save money doing it. Not only that, he could drink a cold beer withMagdalena , and his esposa would not have been caught dead in La Culebra Verde.

Such thoughts all flowed from opening a refrigerator door. If that wasn't a miracle of this modern age, what would be? As soon as the question formed in his mind, so did an answer. What about the new wireless set? He'd left the valley in which Baroyeca sat only twice in his life: once to go to war and once to go toHermosillo , the capital ofSonora , to agitate for a second term for Jake Featherston. But the wireless set brought the wider world here.

Magdalenacame into the kitchen. She wasn't thinking about miracles. She said, "Why are you standing there in front of the refrigerator

letting all the cold air out?"

"I don't know," he answered, feeling foolish. "Probably because I'm an idiot. I can't think of any other reason." Watching the light come on didn't seem reason enough, that was for sure.

By the way his wife smiled, she had her suspicions. She said, "Well, whatever the reason is, come into the front room. It's just about time for the news."

The wireless set wasn't a big, fancy one, a piece of furniture in its own right. It sat on a small table. But the room centered on it. Chairs and the old, tired sofa all faced it, as if you could actually see the pictures the announcer painted with his words.

Magdalenaturned the knob. The dial began to glow--another little electric light in there. After half a minute or so of warming up, music started to play: it wasn't quite time for the news. Some people had had wind-up phonographs before electricity came to Baroyeca. Those were fine, but this was even better. Any sort of sound could come out of a wireless set, any sound at all.

"This is radio station CSON, telling you the truth fromHermosillo ," the announcer said in a mixture of Spanish and English almost anyone fromSonora andChihuahua --and a lot of people inTexas ,U.S.New Mexico andCalifornia , and several of the Empire of Mexico'snorthern provinces --could understand.

The announcer went on, "One more song to bring us up to the top of the hour, and then the news."

Like most of what CSON played, the song was norteño music, full of thumping drums and accordion.

The singer used the same blend ofSonora 's two languages as the announcer. That made Rodriguez frown a little. When he was a young man, norteño music had been in Spanish alone--even though its instruments were borrowed from German settlers along the old border betweenTexas andMexico . Because that was what he'd grown up with, he thought it right and natural. As the years went by, though, English advanced and Spanish retreated in his home state.

When the syrupy love song ended, a blaring march--a Confederate imitation of John Philip Sousa--announced the hour and introduced the news. "Here is the truth," the newscaster said: the Freedom Party's claim to it, these days, was far from limited to Jake Featherston alone.

Another march, a triumphant one, rang out. That meant the newscaster was going to claim a victory. Sure enough, he spoke in proud tones: "Your brave Confederate soldiers have closed an iron ring aroundColumbus,Ohio

. Several divisions of Yankee troops are trapped inside the city. If they cannot break out, they will be forced to surrender."

"That's amazing," Rodriguez said toMagdalena . "To have come so far so fast . . . Neither side did anything like this in the last war."

"Shh," she told him. "If we're going to listen, let's listen." He nodded. A wise husband didn't quarrel even when he was right. Quarreling when you knew you were wrong was a recipe for disaster.

The newscaster said, "Here is Brigadier General Patton, commander of the Army of Kentucky's armored striking force."

In pure English, a man with a raspy, tough-sounding voice said, "We've got the damnyankees by the neck. Now we're going to shake them till they're dead." For those who couldn't follow that, the announcer translated it into the mixed language commonly used in the Confederacy's Southwest. The officer--General Patton--went on, "They thought they were going to have things all their own way again this time. I'm here to tell them they've missed the bus."

Hipolito Rodriguez followed that well enough. He glanced over toMagdalena . She was waiting for the translation. He hadn't had much English, either, before he went to war. These days, he dealt with it without thinking twice.

The announcer went on to talk about what he called a terror-bombing raid byU.S. airplanes overLittle Rock . "Forty-seven people were killed, including nineteen children sheltering at a school," he said indignantly. "Confederate bombers, by contrast, strike only military targets except when taking reprisals forU.S. air piracy. And President Featherston vows that, for every ton of bombs that falls on the Confederate States, three tons will fall on theUnited States . They will pay for their aggression against us."

"This is how it ought to be," Rodriguez said, and his wife nodded.

"In other news, the reckless policies of los Estados Unidos have earned the reward they deserve," the newscaster said. "The Empire of Japan has declared war on theUnited States , citing their provocative policy in the Central Pacific. TheUnited States claim to have inflicted heavy

losses on carrier-based aircraft attacking the Sandwich Islands, but the Japanese dismiss this report as just anotherU.S. lie."

"They are supposed to be very pretty--the Sandwich Islands,"Magdalena said wistfully.

"Nothing is pretty once bombs start falling on it," Rodriguez replied with great conviction. "That was true in the last war, and it is bound to be even more true in this one, because the bombs are bigger."

"Prime Minister Churchill calls the entry ofJapan into the war a strong blow against theUnited States ,"

the announcer went on. "He says it will restore the proper balance of power in the Pacific. Once theUnited States are driven from the Sandwich Islands, Japanese-Confederate cooperation against the West Coast of theUSA will follow as day follows night, in his opinion."

That was a very large thought. Rodriguez remembered that the Japanese had bombedLos Angeles during the Pacific War. But that had been only a raid. This could prove much more important. Of course, the Japanese hadn't pushed los Estados Unidos out of theSandwich Islands . If they did, that would be wonderful. If they didn't, they would still tie up a bigU.S. fleet. Too bad they wouldn't be able to pull off a surprise attack, the way theUSA had againstBritain at the start of the Great War.

In portentous tones, the newscaster continued, "Prime Minister Churchill also spoke of the poundingBerlin ,Munich ,Frankfurt , and other German cities have taken from the French and British air fleets. Smoke climbs thousands of feet into the sky. German efforts to retaliate are feeble indeed. The Prime Minister also declares that the collapse of theUkraine atRussia 's first blows and the clear weakness ofAustria-Hungary argue the war inEurope will go differently this time."

Hipolito Rodriguez tried to imagine another war across the sea, a war as big as the one here inNorth America and even more complicated. He had trouble doing it. He would have had trouble imagining the war here if he hadn't fought in the last one. That was what came of peacefully living most of his life on a farm outside a small town inSonora .

"In a display of barbarism yesterday, the United States executed four Canadians accused of railroad sabotage," the newsman said. "Confederate security forces inMississippi , meanwhile, smashed a

squadron of colored bandits intent on murdering white men and women and destroying valuable property. The mallates and their mischief will be suppressed."

He sounded full of stern enthusiasm. Rodriguez found himself nodding. He'd suppressed mallates himself--niggers, they called them in English. That had been his first taste of war, even before he faced the Yankees. As far as he was concerned, black men caused nothing but trouble. He had another reason for despising them, too. They were below folk of Mexican descent in the Confederate social scale. If not for blacks, the white majority would have turned all its scorn on greasers. Rodriguez was as sure of that as he was of his own name.

A string of commercials followed. The messages were fascinating. They made Rodriguez want to run right out and buy beer or shampoo or razor blades. If he hadn't lived three miles from the nearest general store, he might have done it. Next time he was in Baroyeca, he might do it yet.

More music followed the commercials. The news was done. Rodriguez said, "The war seems to be going well."

"No war that has our son in it is going well." NowMagdalena was the one whose voice held conviction.

"Well, yes," Rodriguez admitted. "Tienes razón. But even if you are right, wouldn't you rather see him in a winning fight than a losing one? Winning is the only point to fighting a war."

His wife shook her head. "There is no point to fighting a war," she said, still with that terrible certainty.

"Win or lose, you only fight another one ten years later, or twenty, or thirty. Can you tell me I am wrong?"

Rodriguez wished he could. The evidence, though, seemed to lie on his wife's side. He shrugged. "If we win a great victory, maybe los Estados Unidos won't be able to fight us any more."

"They must have thought the same thing about los Estados Confederados,"Magdalena said pointedly.

"They did not count on Jake Featherston." Rodriguez missed that point.

His wife let out an exasperated sniff. "Maybe they will have that kind of President themselves. Or maybe they will not need a man like that. They are bigger than we are, and stronger, too. Can we really beat them?"

"If Señor Featherston says we can, then we can," Rodriguez answered. "And he does, so I think we can."

"He is not God Almighty,"Magdalena warned. "He can make mistakes."

"I know he can. But he hasn't made very many," Rodriguez said. "Until he shows me he is making mistakes, I will go on trusting him. He is doing very well so far, and you cannot tell me anything different."

"So far," his wife echoed.

Sometimes Rodriguez let her have the last word--most of the time, in fact. He was indeed a sensible, well-trained husband. But not this time, not when it was political rather than something really important.

They argued far into the night.

Brigadier General Abner Dowling had never expected to command the defense ofOhio from the great metropolis of Bucyrus. The town--it couldn't have held ten thousand people--was pleasant enough.

TheSanduskyRiver , which was barely wide enough there to deserve the name, meandered through it.

The small central business district was full of two- and three-story buildings of dull red and buff bricks. A factory that had made seamless copper kettles now turned out copper tubing; one that had built steamrollers was making parts for barrels.

How long any of that would last, Dowling couldn't say. WithColumbus lost, he had no idea whether or how long Bucyrus could hold out. He counted himself lucky to have got out ofColumbus before the Confederate ring closed around it. A lot of goodU.S. soldiers hadn't. TheColumbus pocket was putting up a heroic resistance, but he knew too well it was a losing fight. The Confederates weren't trying very hard to break into the city. Cut off from resupply and escape, sooner or later theU.S. soldiers would wither on the vine. The Confederates, meanwhile, kept storming forward as if they had the hosts of hell behind them.

Dowling's makeshift headquarters were in what had been a grain and feed store. The proprietor, an upright Buckeye named Milton Kellner, had moved in with his brother and sister-in-law. Sentries kept out farmers who wanted to buy chicken feed and hay. Dowling wished they would have kept out all the soldiers who wanted to see him, too. No such luck.

Confederate artillery could already reach Bucyrus. Dowling wondered if he should have retreated farther north. He didn't like making his fight from a distance, though. He wanted to get right up there and slug it out with the enemy toe to toe.

The only problem was, the enemy didn't care to fight that kind of war against him. Confederate barrels kept finding weak spots in his positions, pounding through, and forcing his men to fall back or be surrounded. Fighters shot up his soldiers from the sky. Dive bombers wrecked strongpoints that defied C.S. artillery. He didn't have enough barrels or airplanes to do unto the enemy as the enemy was doing unto him.

Boards covered the front window to Kellner's store. That wasn't so much to protect the window as to protect the people inside the building from what would happen if the glass shattered. Bucyrus still had electricity; it drew its power from the north, not fromColumbus . The environment inside the store wasn't gloomy. The atmosphere, on the other hand . . .

A young lieutenant stuck pins with red heads ever farther up a big map ofOhio tacked to the wall over a chart that luridly illustrated the diseases of hens. Dowling was just as glad not to have to look at that.

Hens' insides laid open for autopsy reminded him too much of men's insides laid open by artillery.

"By God, it's a wonder every soldier in the world isn't a vegetarian," he said.

"Because we do butchers' work, sir?" the young officer asked.

"It isn't because we parade so prettily," Dowling growled. The lieutenant, whose name was Jack Tompkins, blushed like a schoolgirl.

"What are we going to do, sir?" Tompkins asked.

Dowling eyed him sourly. He couldn't possibly have been born when the Great War ended. Everything he knew about fighting, he'd picked

up in the past few weeks. And, by all appearances, Dowling knew just as little about this new, fast-moving style of warfare. The idea was humiliating, which made it no less true. "What are we going to do?" he repeated. "We're going to go straight at those butternut sons of bitches, and we're going to knock the snot out of them."

Custer would be proud of you, a small mocking voice said in the back of his mind. Custer had always believed in going straight at the enemy, regardless of whether that was the right thing to do. Dowling wouldn't have thought his longtime superior's style had rubbed off on him so much, but it seemed to have.

And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than a messenger came into the feed store with what, by his glum expression, had to be bad news. "Well?" Dowling demanded. Since the war started, he'd already heard about as much bad news as he could stand.

No matter what he'd heard, he was going to get more. "Sir," the messenger said, "the Confederates have bombed a troop train just the other side ofCanton . Those reinforcements we hoped for are going to be late, and a lot of them won't come in at all. There were heavy casualties."

Custer would have screamed and cursed--probably something on the order of, Why do these things happen to me? He would have blamed the messenger, or the War Department, or anyone else who happened to be handy. That way, no blame was likely to light on him.

With a grimace, Dowling accepted the burden. "Damnation," he said. "So the antiaircraft guns on the flatcars didn't work?"

"Not this time, sir," the messenger answered.

"Damnation," Dowling said again. "I was counting on those troops to go into the counterattack against the Confederates' eastern prong. If I hold it up till they do come in . . . well, what the devil will the enemy do to me in the meantime?"

The messenger only shrugged. Dowling dismissed him with an unhappy wave of the hand. Lieutenant Tompkins said, "Sir, we haven't got the men to make that counterattack work without reinforcements."

"Now tell me something I didn't know," Dowling said savagely. Tompkins turned red again. Dowling felt ashamed of himself. He had to lash out at someone, but poor Tompkins was hardly a fair target. "Sorry,"

he mumbled.

"It's all right, sir," the young lieutenant answered. "I know we've got to do something." His eyes drifted to the ominous map. He spread his hands in an apology of his own. "I just don't know what."

The U.S. Army wasn't paying him to know what to do. It was, unfortunately, paying Abner Dowling for exactly that. And Dowling had no more inkling than Tompkins did. He sighed heavily. "I think the counterattack will have to go in anyway."

"Yes, sir." Lieutenant Tompkins looked at the map again. "Uh, sir . . . What do you think the chances are?"

"Slim," Dowling said with brutal honesty. "We won't drive the enemy very far. But we may rock him back on his heels just the same. And if he's responding to us, he won't be able to make us dance to his tune. I hope he won't." He wished, too late, that he hadn't tacked on those last four words.

With no great hope in his heart, he started drafting the orders. In the last war, Custer had fed men into the meat grinder with a fine indifference to their fate. Dowling couldn't be so dispassionate--or was it simply callous? He knew this attack had no real hope past spoiling whatever the Confederates might be up to. That that was reason enough to make it was a measure of his own growing desperation.

Artillery shells began falling on Bucyrus again not long after he got to work on the orders. He didn't think the Confederates knew he was here. They would have hit harder if they did.

And then, off in the distance, an automobile horn started honking, and another, and another. Dowling swore under his breath. Soldiers by the thousands--by the tens of thousands--were trapped in and aroundColumbus , but the Confederates were letting out women, children, and old men: anyone who didn't seem to be of military age. Why not? It made them seem humane, and it made theUSA take care of the refugees--whose columns Confederate pilots still gleefully shot up when they got out beyond the C.S. lines.

"What do we do with them, sir?" Lieutenant Tompkins asked.

"We get them off the roads so they don't tie up our movements," Dowling answered. That had been standard operating procedure ever since the shooting started. It had also proved easier said than done.

The refugees wanted to get away. They didn't give a damn about moving over to let soldiers by. After some more low-voiced swearing, Dowling went on, "Once we do that, we see to their food and medical needs. But we've got to keep the roads clear. How are we supposed to stop the Confederates if we can't even get from here to there?"

"Beats me, sir," Tompkins said. He didn't say the U.S. Army hadn't been able to stop the Confederates even when it had moved freely. Of course, he didn't need to say that, either. Headquarters forU.S. forces inOhio wouldn't have been in a feed shop in Bucyrus if it weren't true.

The horns went on and on. The refugees had probably bumped up against theU.S. lines on the south side of town. Abstractly, Dowling could know a certain detached sympathy for them. They hadn't asked to have their lives turned upside down. Concretely, though, he just wanted to shunt them out of the way so he could get on with the business of fighting the enemy.

He wasn't thrilled about letting them through his lines, either. Sure as hell, the Confederates would have planted spies among the fugitives. They seemed to be taking espionage and sabotage a lot more seriously in this war than they had in the last one. TheUSA had trouble gauging how seriously they were taking it, because not all their operatives were getting caught.

He knew his own side was doing the same in the CSA. He'd commanded inKentucky before the state fell back into Confederate hands. AfterU.S. forces had to pull out, he'd arranged to keep the new occupiers occupied. He only wished he would have seen more results fromU.S. efforts and fewer from the Confederates'.

An auto screeched to a stop in front of the feed store. A harried-looking sergeant came in. "Sir, what are we going to do with those bastards?" he said. "They've got a lawyer out in front of 'em. He says they've got a Constitutional right to come through."

Abner Dowling did not like lawyers. He said, "Tell the guy to go to hell. Tell himOhio 's under martial law, so all his Constitutional rights are straight down the toilet. If he gives you any lip after that, tell him we'll goddamn well conscript him into a ditch-digging detail unless he shuts up. If he doesn't shut up, you do it--and if he doesn't have bloody blisters on his hands inside of two hours after that, you're in big trouble. Got it?"

"Yes, sir!" The sergeant saluted. He did a smart about-face and got out

of there in a hurry. The motorcar roared away.

A few minutes later, the auto horns stopped very suddenly. Dowling grunted in an odd kind of embarrassed satisfaction. He'd done what he needed to do. That didn't make him very proud of himself.

It didn't do a thing to help the poor refugees. But it did mean he could get on with the war without having those people get in his way.

He finished drafting the order for the counterattack that would now have to start without the men from the westbound troop train. That didn't make him very proud of himself, either. He knew what was likely to happen to the soldiers who did go in.

What he didn't know was what the Confederates would do to him if he failed to make that attack. He was afraid to find out. He handed the orders to Lieutenant Tompkins, who hurried off to get them encoded and transmitted. "Poor bastards," Dowling muttered, feeling very much a poor bastard himself.

During the Great War, Dr. Leonard O'Doull had never actually seen action. He'd served in a hospital well back of the lines, a hospital artillery couldn't reach. He'd met his wife in that hospital. When the retired Colonel Quigley talked him into putting on aU.S. uniform again, he'd assumed he'd be doing the same kind of thing again.

So much for assumptions. War had changed in the past generation. Treating the wounded had changed, too. The sooner they got help, the better they did. Taking them back to hospitals far behind the lines often let them bleed to death, or quietly die of shock, or come down with a wound infection that would do them in. People had known about that during the Great War. This time around, they were actually trying to do something about it.

O'Doull worked in an aid station about half a mile behind the line. The tents had red crosses prominently displayed. He didn't think the Confederates would shell them or bomb them on purpose. That didn't make him feel any better when machine-gun bullets or rifle rounds cracked past, or when artillery shells came down close by. Even before he got there, all the tents had bullet holes as well as the red crosses.

WhenU.S. lines moved back, the tents moved with them. And whenU.S. soldiers counterattacked and regained ground, the aid station went along. The latest counterattack in easternOhio was aimed

atZanesville , which had fallen to the Confederates two weeks before.

Just because it was aimed atZanesville didn't mean it would get there. Confederate dive bombers had stalled it outside of Cooperdale, twenty miles north of the target. The aid station was operating in an oak wood a few miles north of the hamlet, which the Confederates were defending as if it wereColumbus .

O'Doull himself was operating on a man with a wounded leg. An X ray would have shown just where the shell fragment lay. The X-ray machine was at a field hospital five miles farther back. O'Doull was finding the sharp metal the old-fashioned way, with a probe.

He'd given the soldier a local, but it hadn't really taken hold. The man wiggled and cussed every time the probe moved. O'Doull couldn't blame him. He thought he would have done the same thing had he been on the other end of the probe. It did make his job harder, though.

"Try to hold still, Corporal," he said for about the dozenth time. "I think I'm very close to-- Ah!" The probe grated on something hard.

"Shit!" the corporal said, and wiggled again. O'Doull felt like saying shit, too; the writhe had made him lose the fragment.

But he knew it couldn't be far. He found it again a minute later. He slid the probe out of the wound and slipped a long-handled forceps in instead. The noncom gave his detailed opinion of that, too. O'Doull didn't care. He felt like cheering when the jaws of the forceps closed on the fragment. "Now you have to hold still," he warned the corporal. "This will hurt, but it'll be the end of it."

"Awright, Doc." The man visibly braced himself. "Go ahead."

When O'Doull did, a torrent of horrible curses broke from the corporal's lips. He did hold still, though.

O'Doull eased the shell fragment out through the man's torn flesh. When he drew it out, he found it about the size of his thumbnail. He opened the forceps. The fragment dropped with a clank into a metal basin.

"That it?" the corporal asked, staring with interest at what had laid him up. "That goddamn little thing?"

"I think so. I hope so." O'Doull dusted the wound with sulfa powder and sewed it up. After a moment's hesitation, he put a drain in it. Maybe it would heal clean--the new drugs did some wonderful things. But you never could tell.

He'd just straightened up when a yell came from outside: "Doc! Hey, Doc! We got a sucking chest!"

Now O'Doull did say, "Shit," but under his breath. "Bring him in," he called. "I'll do what I can."

He cut the soldier's tunic off him--that being the fastest way to get rid of it--to work on the wound on the right side of his chest. One of the corpsmen who'd come in with the casualty said, "Pulse is fast and weak and thready, Doc. He's losing blood in there like a son of a bitch."

One look at the wounded man's pale face would have told O'Doull that. The man was having trouble breathing, too. That blood was drowning him. O'Doull clapped an ether cone over his face. "Plasma!" he shouted. "Run it into him like it's going out of style." He might not have spoken English much over the past quarter of a century, but it came back.

All he could do was hope the wounded man was under when he started using the scalpel. If he waited, the soldier would die on him. He didn't need to be a medical genius to know that. The bullet, he saw when he got in there, had chewed up the lower lobe of the right lung. No chance to save it; he cut it out.

A man could live on a lung and a half, or even on a lung. He cleared the blood from the chest cavity, stuck a big drain in the wound--no hesitation this time--and closed.

"That's a nice piece of work, Doc," the corpsman said. The war was less than a month old, but he'd already seen plenty to have some professional expertise. "He may make it, and I wouldn't have given a wooden nickel for his chances when he got here."

"I dealt with the worst of the damage," O'Doull said. "He's young. He's strong. He's healthy--or he was before he got hit. He does have a shot." He stretched, and let out a sigh of relief. Only his right arm had been moving while he worked on the patient.

"Morphine?" the corpsman asked. "He ain't gonna be what you call happy when he comes out from under the ether."

"Half a dose, maybe," O'Doull answered after considering. He nodded to himself. "Yes, half a dose.

He'll have a devil of a time breathing anyway, what with the wound and the collapsed lung I gave him opening up his chest."

"He'd be dead if you hadn't," the other man observed.

"Yes, I know," O'Doull said. "But morphine weakens the breathing reflex, and that's the last thing he needs right now."

"I suppose." The corpsman took out a syringe and injected the unconscious soldier. "Half a dose, like you say. If it was me laying there, though, I bet like anything I'd want more."

"He can have more when he shows it won't kill him," O'Doull answered. "He wouldn't want that, would he?"

The corpsman took a somber look at the long, quickly sutured wound across the injured man's chest.

"Damned if I know. He'll wish he was dead for a while, I'll tell you."

He was bound to be right on that score. O'Doull didn't feel like arguing with him, and ducked out of the tent for a while. He couldn't light a cigarette in there, not with the ether. If he lit one out here, he was taking his chances with snipers. But it would steady his hands. He needed about fifteen seconds to rationalize it and talk himself into doing what he already wanted to do anyhow.

Now that, for a moment, he wasn't frantically busy, he listened to the way things were going up at the front. He didn't have much experience there, but he didn't like what he heard. All the artillery and machine guns in the world seemed to be pointing back at him. The front was alive with the catamount screech soldiers on both sides still called the rebel yell. The Confederates had their peckers up, and theU.S. soldiers facing them didn't.

A couple of men in green-gray came back through the trees. They both carried their rifles. Neither one looked panic-stricken. But they didn't look like men who intended to do any more fighting any time soon, either.

They eyed Dr. Leonard O'Doull. "Got some butts you can spare, buddy?" one of them asked.

Wordlessly, he held out the pack. They each took a cigarette and leaned close to him for lights. Then, nodding their thanks, they kept on heading north.

He started to call after them, but checked himself. It wasn't fear they would turn their rifles on him, though that crossed his mind, too. What really stopped him was just the conviction that they wouldn't pay any attention to him. He saw no point in wasting his breath.

He ground out his cigarette under his heel. Army boots were a discomfort he'd forgotten in the years since taking off his uniform. He felt as if he had a rock tied to each foot. He understood why infantrymen had to wear such formidable footgear. He was much less sure why he did.

Back into the tent. Back to work. He checked the man with the chest wound. The fellow wasn't in great shape, but he was still breathing. If sulfa drugs let him dodge a wound infection, he might pull through.

O'Doull looked around in sudden confusion. He'd been maniacally busy for he'd forgotten how many hours, running on nerves and nicotine and coffee. Now, all at once, he had nothing to do. His tremble was like the last lingering note from an orchestra after a piece had ended.

"Jesus, I'm bushed!" he said to nobody in particular.

"Why don't you flop, then, Doc?" said a corpsman named Granville McDougald: a man who had no degree in medicine but who would have made a good general practitioner and a pretty fair jackleg surgeon.

"I don't know, Granny. Why don't I?" O'Doull answered, and yawned.

"Go sleep," McDougald told him. "We'll kick your ass out of bed if we need you. Don't you worry about that."

"I'm not." O'Doull yawned again. "What I'm worried about is, will I have any brains if you wake me after I've been sleeping for a little bit? Or will I be too far underwater to do anybody any good for a while?"

"If you don't go to sleep, will you be able to do anybody good?" McDougald asked reasonably. "Sleepy docs kill patients."

He was right about that. O'Doull knew it. It got proved all too often.

He found his cot and lay down on it. He couldn't sleep on his belly the way he liked to, not without taking off his boots. That demanded too much energy. He curled up on his right side and fell asleep as if someone had pulled his plug.

He had no idea when Granny McDougald shook him awake. All he knew was, he hadn't been asleep nearly long enough. "Wha' happened?" he asked muzzily. "Who's hurt? What do I have to do?"

"Nobody's hurt," the corpsman replied. "Nobody's hurt that you gotta deal with, anyway. But we're pulling back, and we figured you better come along. It's that or you do your doctoring in a Confederate POW camp."

"What the hell?" O'Doull said. "Something go wrong while I was out?"

"Either you've got a clean conscience or you really were whupped," McDougald told him. "Didn't you hear all the shooting and bombing off to our right? The Confederates have smashed our line. If we don't get out, we get caught."

"Oh." O'Doull left it at that, which McDougald thought was pretty funny. They took down the tents, loaded them and their patients into trucks, and headed north. They didn't stop for quite a while. Nobody thought that was funny, nobody at all.

VII

Jefferson Pinkard prowledCampDependable like a hound hunting a buried bone. The black prisoners got out of his way. Even his own guards were leery of him. When the boss wanted something he couldn't figure out how to get, everybody was liable to suffer.

What Pinkard wanted was a bigger camp, or fewer shipments of Negroes coming in from all over the CSA. He wasn't likely to get either one of those. He would have settled for a way to reduce population quickly, efficiently, and above all neatly. He hadn't been able to manage that, either.

The morning's news was what had set him prowling. Mercer Scott had come to him with a scowl on his face. Scott always scowled, but this was something special. "Chick Blades is dead," he'd told Pinkard.

"Killed himself."

"Aw, shit," was what Pinkard had said. Some of that was dismay. More was a sort of resigned disgust.

Blades was a man who'd gone out on a lot of population-reduction details. After a while--how long depended on the man--some people cracked. They couldn't keep doing it, not and stay sane. Blades was the second or third suicideCampDependable had seen. One or two men were wearing straitjackets these days. And others got drunk all the time or ruined themselves other ways.

Mercer Scott had nodded. "That's what I said when I found out." He took a somber satisfaction in passing on bad news.

"How'd he do it? Wasn't a gun--somebody would've reported the shot." Pinkard liked to have things straight. "He hang himself?"

"Nope. Went out to his auto, ran a hose from the exhaust to the inside, closed all the windows, and started up the motor."

"Christ!" That had damn near made Pinkard lose his breakfast. The idea of sitting there waiting to go under, knowing what you'd done to yourself . . . If you were going to do it, better to get it over with all at once, as far as he was concerned.

"Yeah, well . . ." Scott had only shrugged. "Healthiest-looking goddamn corpse you ever seen."

"What do you mean?"

That question had surprised the head guard. Then he looked sly. "Oh, that's right--you never were a real cop or anything like that, were you?" He knew damn well Pinkard hadn't been. He went on, "When they kill themselves with exhaust, they're always pink instead of pale the way dead bodies usually are when you find 'em. Something in the gas does it. It's got a fancy name--I misremember what."

"Oh, that." Pinkard had nodded. "Now I know what you're talkin' about. Burn a charcoal fire in a room that's closed up tight and you're liable not to get out of bed the next morning, or ever. And if you don't, you look like that--all pink, like you say."

"Didn't figure Chick'd be the one to do it," Mercer Scott had said. "He never fretted over getting rid of niggers, not that I ever knew."

Jeff Pinkard hadn't noticed that Blades carried any special burden,

either. That bothered him. If he'd pulled the guard off of population reductions, would Blades still be alive today? How could you know something like that? You couldn't. You could only wonder. And so Pinkard prowled and prowled and prowled.

He kept chewing on what had happened. The worst thing about a guard's suicide was what it did to the morale of those who survived. He'd have to watch three or four people extra close for a while, to make sure they didn't get any bright ideas. And they were free citizens, like everybody else--everybody white, anyhow--in the CSA. You couldn't watch them every damn minute of every damn day. If they decided to kill themselves, you probably couldn't do much about it.

Chick Blades, if he remembered straight, had a wife and kids. Pinkard supposed it was a good thing the man hadn't hauled them into the motorcar with him. Exhaust from an engine could have done in four or five for the price of one.

A hurrying Negro almost ran into him. "Where the hell you think you're going, God damn you?" Jeff roared.

"Latrine, suh," the black man answered. "I got me the gallopin' shits, an' I don't want to get it on nothin'."

He shifted anxiously from foot to foot.

"Go on, then." Pinkard watched him with narrowed eyes till he squatted over the slit trench. The chief ofCampDependable could see flies rising in a buzzing cloud. The guards put down chloride of lime every day. But a lot of prisoners came down with dysentery. The chemical didn't do much good, and didn't do good for long. For the moment, the breeze blew from him toward the latrine trenches. That cut down on the stink, but didn't kill it. Nothing could kill it. When the wind blew in the other direction, it really got fierce.

The black man rose and set his tattered trousers to rights. He went on about his business. Had he waved to Pinkard or done anything cute, the camp commandant would have hauled him in for questioning. Here, no. Not worth the bother.

"Labor gang!" a guard bawled. "Get your lazy nigger asses over here, you stinking labor-gang men!"

The Negroes came running. A man who showed himself useful

building roads or crushing rock wasn't likely to be added to the next population reduction. So the blacks thought. They fought to get included in labor gangs, and worked like maniacs once they were. Lazy? Not likely!

Chick Blades' funeral came two days later, at a church inAlexandria . Behind her black veil, his widow looked stunned, uncomprehending. Pinkard got the idea the dead guard hadn't told her everything he did atCampDependable . Nobody would tell her now, either. She wouldn't understand. Neither would his little boys. His wife would wonder if she'd done something that pushed him over the edge or failed to notice something that might have saved him. Jeff didn't believe it for a minute, but he couldn't explain why, not without talking more than he should.

After the preacher read the graveside service and the body went into a hole in the ground, Mrs.

Blades--her name, he thought, was Edith--walked up to him and said, "Thank you for coming." Her face was puffy and swollen and pale. Had she slept at all since she found out about her husband? Jeff would have bet against it.

"Least I could do," he mumbled. "He was a good man."

Edith Blades nodded with frantic eagerness. "He was. He really was. He was a kind man, a gentle man.

He wouldn't have hurt a fly, Chick wouldn't."

Jeff bit back a sardonic reply. He also bit back a burst of laughter that would have turned the funeral into a scandal. No, the widow didn't know what her husband had been up to. How many Negroes had Chick Blades shot in the head from behind? Hundreds? Thousands? Pinkard shrugged. He'd shot one too many to keep doing it and go on breathing, and that was the only thing that mattered.

"Everybody liked him real good," Jeff managed at last. "He could play the mouth organ like you wouldn't believe."

"He courted me with it," she said, and broke down in tears again. She wouldn't have been a bad-looking woman, not at all, if she were herself. She was somewhere in her thirties, dishwater blond, with a ripe figure the mourning dress couldn't hide. "He was such a funny fellow."

"Yes, ma'am," Pinkard said uncomfortably. "I'll do what I can to make sure you get his pension."

She blinked in surprise. "Thank you!"

"You're welcome," Pinkard said. "I can't promise you anything, on account of this has to go throughRichmond . But I sure think you ought to have it. If any man ever died for his country, Chick Blades did."

"That's true," Blades' widow breathed. It was a lot more true than she knew. With any luck, she wouldn't find out how true it was. Chick had got rid of more enemies of the Confederacy than any general except maybe that Patton fellow up in Ohio, but would anybody ever give him any credit for it?

Not likely. The only credit he'd ever get was a pine box. Dirt thudded down on it as the gravediggers started filling in the hole.

"You take care of yourself, ma'am," Jeff said, and then startled himself by adding, "You ever need anything, you let me know. Like I say, I dunno if I can manage everything, but I'll do my best."

"I may take you up on that, sir, after things settle a bit," she answered. "I don't know, but I may." She shook her head in confusion. "Right now, I don't know anything--not anything at all. It's like somebody picked up my world and shook it to pieces and turned it upside down."

"I understand," Jeff said. She shook her head again, and then looked sorry she had. She didn't want to make him angry or anything. But he wasn't. It was no wonder she didn't believe him. But he knew more than she thought he did--he knew more than she did, come to that.

What would happen when she found out? Sooner or later, she would, sure as hell. Pinkard shrugged. He couldn't do anything about that.

He went back toCampDependable in a somber mood. What he saw inAlexandria did nothing to cheer him up. People who spoke English gestured and flabbled like Cajuns. People who spoke French--fewer than the English-speakers--peppered it with fiery Anglo-Saxon obscenities. Rusty decorative ironwork from before the War of Secession ornamented downtown businesses and houses. The whole town seemed rusty and rustic. He wondered if Pineville, on the other side of theRed River , was any better.

The town's name was ugly enough to make him doubt it.

Mercer Scott had the same feeling. "Ass end of nowhere, ain't it?" he said as their motorcar carried them out of town.

"Maybe not quite, but you can see it from there," Jeff answered.

Scott's chuckle, like a lot of his mirth, had a nasty edge. "Some of the white trash back there'd count themselves lucky to be living in the camp. I'm fromAtlanta , by God. I know what a real city's supposed to be like, and that one don't measure up."

Jeff hit the brakes to keep from eradicating an armadillo scuttling across the road. "Atlanta, is it?" That explained a lot.Atlanta was too big for its britches, and had been since before the turn of the century.

People who came from there always acted as if their shit didn't stink just because they were Atlantans.

Pinkard said, "Me, I come out ofBirmingham . I could give you an argument about what makes a good city."

"If you want to be a horseshoe or a nail or anything else made out of iron,Birmingham 's a fine enough town, I reckon. You want anything else,Atlanta 's the place to be."

That struck home, after all the time Jeff had spent at the Sloss Foundry working with molten steel. He was damned if he'd admit it. "Atlantasays it's a big city, but all you've got is fizzy water. And the fellow who invented the number one brand outa that place sucked up cocaine like it was going out of style."

Mercer Scott only laughed. "You had that kind of scratch back at your house, wouldn't you do the same?"

Since Jeff probably would have, he changed the argument in a hurry: "Besides, next toRichmond you ain't so much of a much."

"You don't want to push me too far," Scott said in suitably menacing tones. "You really don't . . . boss."

That could have provoked a fight between the two men as soon as they got out of the auto. It could also have made Pinkard pull off the road and settle things then and there. But he judged the other man's menace was put on, not genuine, and so he laughed instead. Mercer

Scott laughed, too, and the moment passed.

"Hell of a thing about Chick," Pinkard said a minute or so later.

"Well, yeah." But Scott didn't seem unduly upset, not any more. "We're here to get rid of niggers. If you can't do the job, you don't belong."

"I wish he'd've asked for a transfer out or something, though," Jeff said. "I'd've given him a good notice.

He did the best he could, dammit." His hands tightened on the wheel. If that didn't sound like an epitaph, he didn't know what did.

"Whole country did the best it could in the last war," Scott replied. "That's not good enough. Only thing that's good enough is doing what you got to do."

He had no give in him, not anywhere. That made him good at what he had to do. A camp guard who showed mercy was the last thing anybody needed. But it made Scott uncomfortable to be around. He was always looking for signs of weakness in other people, including Jefferson Pinkard. And if he found one, he'd take advantage of it without the least pity or hesitation. He made no bones about that at all.

"There's the camp," he said when Jeff swung the rattlingBirmingham --iron, sure enough--around a last corner.

"Yeah," Jeff said. "Wonder when they're gonna send us some more population."

"Whenever they do, we'll reduce it," Mercer Scott declared. "Only thing that can stop us is running out of ammo." He laughed again. So did Pinkard, not quite comfortably.

Flora Blackford's secretary stuck her head into the Congresswoman's office. She said, "Mr.Jordan is here to see you."

"He's right on time," Flora said. "Show him in."

OrsonJordan was a tall blond man in his mid-thirties. He was so pink, he looked as if he'd just been scrubbed with a wire brush. "Very pleased to meet you, ma'am," he said. By the way he shook Flora's hand, he was afraid it would break if he squeezed it very hard.

"Please sit down," Flora told him, and he did. She went on, "Shall I

have Bertha bring us some coffee--or tea, if you'd rather?"

"Oh, no, thank you, ma'am." OrsonJordan shook his head. He turned pinker than ever. Flora hadn't thought he could. He said, "Go right ahead yourself, if you care to. Not for me, though. I don't indulge in hot drinks."

He sounded like an observant Jew politely declining the shrimp cocktail. There were parallels between Jews and Mormons; Mormons had a way of making more of them than Jews did. Flora shrugged. That wasn't her worry, or she didn't think it was. "It's all right," she said. "Tell me, Mr.Jordan , what do you think I can do for you that your own Congressman fromUtah can't?"

"It's not what I think you can do, ma'am,"Jordan said earnestly. "It's what Governor Young hopes you can do." Heber Young, grandson of Brigham, had headed the Mormon church inUtah during the occupation after the Great War, when legally it did not exist. He was elected Governor the minute President Smith finally lifted military rule in the state. By all appearances, he could go on getting elected Governor till he died of old age, even if that didn't happen for the next fifty years.

Patiently, Flora asked, "Well, what does Governor Young think I can do for him, then? He's not my constituent, you know."

OrsonJordan smiled at the joke, even though Flora had been kidding on the square. He said, "In a way, ma'am, he thinks he is one of your constituents. He says anyone who respects liberty is."

"That's . . . very kind of him, and of you," Flora said. "Flattery will get you nowhere, though, or I hope it won't. What does he want?"

"Well, ma'am, you're bound to knowUtah is a bit touchy about soldiers going through it or soldiers being stationed there. We've earned the right to be touchy, I'd say. I was only a boy when the last troubles happened, and I wouldn't want my own children to have to worry about anything like that."

"I believe you," Flora said. When the Mormons rose during the Great War, they'd fought till they couldn't fight any more. Plenty of boys no older than OrsonJordan would have been had died with guns in hand. TheUnited States had triumphed in a purely Tacitean way: they'd made a desert and called it peace.

"All right, then,"Jordan said. He wore a somber, discreetly striped suit and a very plain maroon tie. A faint smell of soap wafted from him. So did a much stronger aura of sincerity. He meant everything he said. He was a citizen theUnited States would have been proud to have as their own--if he hadn't continued, "Governor Young wants to make it real plain he can't answer for what will happen if theUnited States keep on doing things like that. A lot of people there hatePhiladelphia and everything it stands for.

He's been holding them back, but he isn't King Canute. He can't go on doing it forever. Frankly, he doesn't want to go on doing it forever. We want what ought to be ours."

"Should what you want be any different from what other Americans want?" Flora asked. "When you got military rule lifted, part of the reason you did was that you convinced people back here you were ordinary citizens."

"We're citizens, but we're not ordinary citizens,"Jordan said. "We got hounded out of theUSA . That's why we went toUtah in the first place. It belonged toMexico then. But the First Mexican War put us under the Stars and Stripes again--and the government started persecuting us again. Look at 1881. The oppression after that was what made us rise in 1915. Do you think we can trust theUnited States when they start going back on their solemn word?"

He still sounded earnest and sincere. Flora still had no doubt he meant every word he said, meant it from the bottom of his heart. She also had no doubt he didn't have any idea how irritating he was to her. She said, "Another way you're special is that you're not conscripted. Shouldn't you count your blessings?"

OrsonJordan shook his head. "No, ma'am. We want to be trusted to do our duty, like anybody else."

She pointed a finger at him. "I'm afraid you can't have that both ways, Mr.Jordan . You want to be trusted, but you don't want to trust. If you don't trust, you won't be trusted. It's as simple as that."

The Mormon emissary looked troubled. "You may have a point there. I will discuss it with the Governor when I get back toSaltLake --you can count on that. But we have been through so much, trust will not come easy. I wish I could say something different, but I can't."

"Learning to trust Mormons won't come easy for the rest of the

country, either," Flora said. "As I told you, the knife cuts both ways."

"Yes, you did say that."Jordan gave no hint about what he thought of her comment. After a moment, he went on, "You will take my words to President Smith?"

"You can certainly trust me on that," Flora said, and her guest gave her a surprisingly boyish smile. She continued, "He needs to hear what you just told me. I can't promise what he'll do about it. I can't promise he'll do anything about it. There is a war on, in case you hadn't noticed."

"I rather thought there might be." SoJordan was capable of irony. That surprised Flora, too. She wouldn't have guessed he had such depths. She wondered what else might be lurking down there below that bland exterior. OrsonJordan politely took his leave before she had the chance to find out.

When Flora phoned Powel House--the President'sPhiladelphia residence--she thought at first that his aides were going to refuse to give her an appointment. That infuriated her. They both went back a lot of years in Socialist affairs inNew York . But when she mentioned Heber Young's name, hesitation vanished. If she had news about Mormons, Al Smith wasn't unavailable any more.

She took a cab to Powel House. The driver had to detour several times to avoid bomb craters in the road. "Lousy Confederates," he said. "I hope we blow them all to kingdom come."

"Yes," agreed Flora, who also hoped Confederate bombers wouldn't come overPhiladelphia by daylight, as they had a couple of times. They hadn't been back in the daytime for almost two weeks, though; heavy antiaircraft fire and improved fighter coverage were making that too expensive. But air-raid sirens howled most nights, and people scrambled for shelters.

Presidents had spent more time in Powel House than in the White House since the Second Mexican War. Flora had spent much of four years there herself, when Hosea Blackford ran the country. Her mouth tightened. The country remembered her husband's Presidency only for the economic collapse that had followed hard on the heels of his inauguration. He'd done everything he knew how to do to pull theUSA out of it, but hadn't had any luck. Calvin Coolidge had trounced him in 1932, and then died before taking office--whereupon Herbert Hoover had proved the Democrats didn't know how to fix the

economy, either.

Such gloomy reflections vanished from Flora's mind when an aide led her up a splendid wooden staircase and into the office that had been her husband's and now belonged to Al Smith. What replaced those reflections was something not far from shock. She hadn't seen the President since he came to Congress to ask it to declare war on the CSA. If Smith hadn't aged fifteen years in the month since then .

. . he'd aged twenty.

He'd lost flesh. His face was shrunken and bloodless. By the bags under his eyes, he might not have slept since the war began. A situation map hung on the wall to one side of his battleship of a desk. The red pins stuck in the map showed Confederate forces farther north inOhio than press or wireless admitted. Maybe that was why Smith hadn't slept.

"How are you, Flora?" Even his voice, as full ofNew York City as Flora's own, had lost strength. It didn't show up on the wireless, where he had a microphone to help, but was all too obvious in person.

"So what are these miserable Mormons trying to gouge out of us now?"

Had he been in other company, he might have asked what the Mormons were trying to jew out of the government. But Flora had met plenty of real anti-Semites, and knew Al Smith wasn't one. And she had more urgent things to worry about anyhow. As dispassionately as she could, she summed up what Orson Jordan had told her.

"Nice of them," the President said when she was through. "As long as we don't try to get them to do what other Americans do or try to govern them at all, they'll kindly consent to staying in theUSA . But if we do try to do anything useful with them or withUtah , they'll go up in smoke. Some bargain." His wheezy laugh was bitter as wormwood.

"They . . . don't like us any better than we like them," Flora said carefully. "They . . . think they have good reason not to like us, or to trust us."

"You know what? I don't give a damn what they like or what they trust," Al Smith said. "I let Jake Featherston take me for a ride, and the country's paying for it now. I'll take that shame to my grave. But if you think--if anybody thinks--I'll let Heber Young take me for a ride, too, you've got another think coming."

Was he reacting too strongly against the Governor of Utah because he hadn't reacted strongly enough against the President of the Confederate States? Flora wouldn't have been surprised. But that wasn't something she could say. She did ask, "Are you all right, Mr. President?"

"I'll do," Al Smith answered. "I'll last as long as I last. If I break down in harness, Charlie LaFollette can do the job. It seems pretty plain, wouldn't you say?" Except for a nod, Flora didn't have any answer to that, either.

Every time Mary Pomeroy turned on the wireless, it was with fresh hope in her heart. She lived for the hourly news bulletins. Whenever the Yanks admitted losses, she felt like cheering. Whenever they didn't, she assumed they were lying, covering up. The Confederates were bombing them in the East and pounding on them in theMidwest . Now you know how it feels, you murdering sons of bitches! she exulted.

The news on other fronts was good, too--good as far as she was concerned, that is. The Japanese were making menacing moves against theSandwich Islands . The U.S.-heldBahamas were being bombed fromFlorida . In Europe, the German and Austro-Hungarian positions in theUkraine seemed to be unraveling.Bulgaria wavered as a German ally--although she couldn't waver too much, not with the Ottoman Turks on her southern border.

And the wireless kept saying things like, "All residents ofCanada are urged to remain calm during the present state of emergency. Prompt and complete compliance with all official requests is required.

Sabotage or subversive activity will be detected, rooted out, and punished with the utmost severity."

Mary laughed whenever she listened to bulletins like those. If they weren't cries of pain from the occupying authorities, she'd never heard any. And the more the Americans admitted they were in distress, the bigger the incentive the Canadians had to make that distress worse. Didn't they?

If the bulletins didn't do it, the way the Quebecois troops in Rosenfeld acted was liable to. The Americans, whatever else you could say about them, had behaved correctly most of the time. They'd known how to keep their hands to themselves, even if their eyes were known to

wander. The Frenchies didn't just look. They touched.

Not only that, the soldiers in blue-gray spoke French. Most of them had grown up since theRepublic ofQuebec broke away fromCanada . They'd never had much reason to learn English. Nor had the local Manitobans had any more reason to pick up French. Hearing the Quebecois troopers jabber away in a language the locals couldn't understand made them seem much more foreign than the Americans ever had.

They came in to eat at the Pomeroys' diner fairly often. Even if they had to pay for it, the food there was better than what their own cooks dished out. Mort and his father took their money without learning to love them.

"It's humiliating, that's what it is," he said when he got home one summer's evening. "At least the lousy Yanks licked us. The Frenchies never did."

"The Yanks shouldn't have, either," Mary said.

Mort only shrugged at that. "Maybe you're right and maybe you're wrong. I don't know. I've never been much good at might-have-beens. All I know is, they did. I used to think they were pretty bad. Now I know better. The Frenchies showed me the difference between bad and worse."

"Well, the Frenchies wouldn't be here if they weren't doing the Yanks' dirty work for them," Mary pointed out.

"That's true," her husband admitted. "I hadn't thought of it like that."

"May I be excused?" asked Alec, who'd finished the drumstick and fried potatoes in front of him.

"Yes, go ahead," Mary answered. He hurried off to play. Mary looked after him with a smile half fond, half exasperated. "Little pitchers have big ears."

"He is getting old enough to repeat anything he hears, isn't he?" Mort said.

"Yes, but he's not old enough to know there are times when he shouldn't," Mary answered. "Whenever we start talking about the Yanks, we start coming close to those times, too."

"I don't want to talk sedition. I'm too tired to talk sedition," Mort said.

Mary was never too tired to talk sedition. She didn't talk it very much with Mort. For one thing, she knew he was more resigned to the occupation than she was. For another, since she'd done more than talk, she didn't want him to know that. The more people who knew something, the more who could give you away.

She did say, "The Yanks are flabbling about sedition on the wireless more than they used to."

Mort smiled and cocked his head to one side. "That's not a word I expected to hear from you."

"What?" Mary didn't even know what she'd said. She had to think back. "Oh. Flabbling?" Her husband nodded. She shrugged. "People say it. You hear it on the wireless. They'll probably stop saying it in a little while."

"I even heard a Frenchy use it today," Mort said. "This little kid started to cry and have a fit in the diner, and this soldier, he goes,, ‘Ey, boy! Vat you flabble for?' " He put on a French accent.

"Did the kid stop?" Mary asked, intrigued in spite of herself.

"Not till his mother warmed his fanny for him," Mort answered. "Then he really had something to cry about."

"Good for her." Mary didn't approve of children who made scenes in public. She didn't know anyone who did, either. The sooner you taught them they couldn't get away with that kind of nonsense, the better off everybody was. She said, "The Yanks must be worried about sedition and sabotage, or they wouldn't talk about them on the wireless so much."

"Does sound like they're hurting down south, doesn't it?" Mort allowed. "Couldn't happen to a nicer bunch of folks." He didn't love the Yanks. He never had. But he'd hardly ever been so vocal about showing how little he liked them, either.

Mary was tempted to let him know she still carried on the fight against the occupiers. She was tempted to, but she didn't. Three could keep a secret, if two of them were dead. That was Benjamin Franklin: a Yank, but a Yank who'd known what was what. The Americans routinely broke up conspiracies against them. Traitors toCanada and

blabbermouths gave the game away time after time. But her father had carried on the fight against theUSA undetected for years, simply because he'd been able to keep his mouth shut. Collaborators hadn't betrayed him; only luck had let him down. Mary intended to follow the same course.

Her husband went on, "The worst of it is, probably none of what happens down there matters to us.

Even if the Confederates lick the Yanks, how can they make them turnCanada loose? They can't. If you think straight, you've got to see that. We're stuck.England can't get us back, either, not if she's fightingGermany . Even if she isn't, she's an ocean away and the Yanks are right next door. I don't know what we're supposed to do about that."

Fight them ourselves! Mary thought. She didn't say it out loud, though. She knew what she needed to do. She waited only on opportunity. But dragging Mort in, when he plainly didn't want to be dragged in, wouldn't have been fair to him and might have proved dangerous to her. One man--or one woman--going it alone: that was the safe way to do it.

Every now and again, she wished she could be part of a larger movement. Many people working together could harry the Yanks in a way a loner couldn't. But a large operation could also go wrong in ways a small one couldn't. She was willing to give her life for her country. She wasn't willing to throw it away.

Mort said, "I may be wrong, but I do believe there's fewer Frenchies in town lately. Maybe they've decided we aren't going to start turning handsprings right here."

Mary shook her head. "That's not it. A lot of them are out guarding the railroad lines."

Her husband gave her an odd look. "How do you know?"

Careful! She couldn't tell him the truth, which was that she'd driven around and looked. She'd taken care not to examine any one stretch more than once; she hadn't done anything to rouse the least suspicion in any Quebecois corporal's heart. She didn't want to make Mort wonder, either, so she answered, "I heard somebody talking about it in Karamanlides' general store."

"Oh." Mort relaxed, so she must have sounded as casual as she hoped she had. He went on, "Good luck to them if somebody does decide to sabotage the railroad. Too many miles of train tracks and not enough Frenchies."

"Wouldn't break my heart," Mary said. Mort only smiled. He already knew how she felt about the Yanks. Saying she hoped somebody else did them a bad turn was safe enough. The only thing she couldn't tell him--couldn't tell anybody--was that she intended to do them a bad turn herself.

"Talk about hearing things," Mort said. "Reminds me of what else I heard in the diner today. Wilf Rokeby's retiring."

"You're kidding!" Mary exclaimed. "He's been postmaster as long as I can remember."

"He's been postmaster as long as anybody can remember," Mort agreed. "He's been here since dirt. But he's going to give it all up at the end of the year. Says he's getting too old for all the standing and lifting he's got to do." He chuckled. "Says he's had it with being polite to people all the time, too."

"But him going! I can't believe it," Mary said. "And what will the post office be like without the smell of that hair oil he uses? It won't be the same place."

"I know," Mort said. "We've got to do something nice for him when he does quit. The whole town, I mean. You said it: it'll hardly be Rosenfeld without Wilf."

"Good luck to him. I wonder what he'll do when he's not being polite to people all day long," Mary said.

Mort snorted at that.

Mary certainly did wonder what Wilf Rokeby would be doing. Rokeby knew things he shouldn't. He hadn't done anything with the knowledge. The proof was that Mary was still sitting at the supper table talking things over with Mort. If Rokeby had gone to the Yanks, she'd be in jail or shot like her brother.

But just because Wilf hadn't talked didn't mean he wouldn't talk. When you were worried about your life, you couldn't be too careful, could you? Mary suddenly understood why robbers often shot witnesses. Dead men told no tales. It sounded like something straight

out of a bad film--which didn't mean it wasn't true.

I have to think about this. Mary had been thinking about it for a while. Wilf Rokeby had been doing what the Yanks told him ever since they occupied Rosenfeld in 1914. That was a long time by now. He'd never shown any signs he was unhappy about cooperating withU.S. authorities. All he'd cared about was running the post office, and he hadn't worried about for whom.

That didn't mean he would go to the occupying authorities. But it didn't mean he wouldn't, either. Can I take the chance? Do I dare take the chance? The sky hadn't fallen. It hadn't, but it could.

Just then, the cat yowled and hissed. Alec yelled and started to cry. Mary stopped worrying about Wilf Rokeby. She ran into the front room to see what had happened. The cat crouched under the coffee table, eyes blazing. Alec clutched a scratched arm. He also clutched a small tuft of what looked like cat fur.

Cause and effect weren't hard to figure out.

"Don't pull the kitty's tail," Mary said. "If you do, you can't blame him for scratching."

"I didn't," Alec said, but his heart wasn't in it.

Mary whacked him on the backside, not too hard. "Don't tell fibs, either."

He looked amazed. She could read his thoughts. How can she tell I'm lying? She almost laughed out loud. Alec hadn't had much practice yet.

There was a saloon not far from Cincinnatus Driver's parents' house inCovington . There were a lot of saloons in the colored district inCovington . Blacks had troubles aplenty there, and needed places to drown them. Had Cincinnatus been all in one piece, he wouldn't have given the Brass Monkey the time of day. Since he was what he was, he spent a good deal of time there.

The inside of the Brass Monkey was dim, but not cool. A couple of ceiling fans spun lazily, as if to show they were doing their best. Next to one of them hung a strip of flypaper black with flies in every stage of desiccation. Sawdust lay in drifts on the floor. The place smelled of beer and cigars and stale piss.

"What can I get for you?" the barkeep asked when Cincinnatus gingerly perched on a bar stool.

"Bottle of beer," Cincinnatus answered. He pulled a dime from his pocket and set it on the bar. It was aU.S. coin. The bartender took it without hesitation. Not only hadKentucky been part of theUSA till a few months before, but theU.S. and C.S. dollars had officially been at par except during the Confederacy's disastrous inflation after the Great War. A dime held the same amount of silver in both countries, though you could buy a little more with one in theUnited States .

"Here you go." The barkeep took the beer out of the icebox behind him.

"Thank you kindly." Cincinnatus didn't bother with a glass. He took a sip from the bottle, then pressed it against his cheek. "Ah! That feels mighty good."

"Oh, yeah. I know." The barkeep fiddled with the white shirt and black bow tie that marked him for what he was. "Wish this here was looser. Feels like I'm cookin' in my own juice."

"I believe it." Cincinnatus sipped again. Two old black men, one bald, the other white-haired, sat in a corner playing checkers. He nodded to them; he'd seen them around inCovington since he was a kid.

One had a beer, the other a whiskey. They nodded back. He was as familiar to them, and his being away for close to twenty years meant very little.

A man about his own age sat on a stool at the far end of the bar. He had a whiskey in front of him. He knocked it back, his face working, and signaled to the bartender for another. "You sure, Menander?" the barkeep asked. "Somebody gonna have to carry you home?"

"Don't you worry about me none," Menander answered. "Just give me the damn whiskey, an' I'll give you the money. That's how it goes, ain't it?"

"Yeah. That's how it goes." The bartender sighed and gave him what he wanted. He gulped down the whiskey and set another quarter on the bar. The barkeep took it, but he sighed again. "Ain't like you to get shit-faced like this. You should oughta leave it to them what does."

"Ain't I earned the right?" Menander came back. "Do Jesus, ain't I

earned the goddamn right?"

"Damfino." The bartender ran his rag along the countertop before setting another whiskey there. "What happen, make you wanna git wide?"

"Didn't they go an' haul my brother off to one o' them goddamn camps?" Menander said. "Ain't I never gonna see him no more? Ain't the world one fucked-up place? You bet your ass it is."

That made Cincinnatus prick up his ears. He'd hated and feared the Freedom Party for those camps long before he got stuck in the CSA. He looked down the bar toward Menander. "What did your brother do, you don't mind me asking?"

"Do?" The other man stared blearily back at him. "He didn't do nothin'. What you need to do? Don't you just got to be in the wrong place at the wrong time? Don't the ofays jus' got to reckon, We needs us another nigger? Ain't that how it goes?" Now he waved to the barkeep for support.

The bartender said, "I done heard all kinds o' things."

"I believe that," Cincinnatus said.

He got a thin smile for a reward. "Yeah, a barkeep, he hear all kinds o' things," the bartender said. "But none o' what I hear tell about them camp places is good. You go in, you don't come out no more--not breathin', anyways. Menander, he ain't wrong about that there."

Slowly, Cincinnatus nodded. "I heard the same," he said, and also heard the trouble in his own voice. "I heard, they want to take you down toLouisiana , you're just as well off lettin' 'em kill you, on account of you ain't gonna stay 'mong the living real long."

Menander put his head down on the bar and started to weep. Did that mean his brother had gone toLouisiana ? Or did it only mean he'd drunk himself maudlin? Cincinnatus didn't have the heart to ask.

"We ought to do somethin' about that," he said instead.

He wasn't even sure Menander heard him. The barkeep did. He asked, "What you got in mind?"

Cincinnatus started to tell him what he had in mind. He started to say that no black man should quietly let himself be arrested. He started to

say that if every black man answered the door with a gun in his hand when police or Freedom Party stalwarts or guards came calling--not impossible, not with as many guns as there were floating around the CSA--the powers that be might start thinking twice before they arrested people quite so freely. If Negroes didn't just submit, how many dead white men would the Freedom Party need before it got the message? Not many, not unless Cincinnatus missed his guess.

He started to tell the bartender all those things. He started to, but the words never passed his lips.

Instead, after a thoughtful pull at his beer, he answered, "Well, now, I don't rightly know. We can't do a whole hell of a lot, don't look like to me."

The bartender polished the bar some more with his rag. It wasn't especially clean. If there was any dirt on the bar, he was just spreading it around, not getting rid of it. His face was expressionless, but barkeeps weren't supposed to show much of what they were thinking. Cincinnatus didn't want to show much of what he was thinking, either. He didn't like his own thoughts, which didn't keep him from having them.

He'd never set eyes on the man behind the bar before coming back toCovington . Oh, maybe he had, but the man would have been a boy when the Drivers moved toIowa . He didn't know him. That was what counted. That . . . and he could see how useful Confederate authorities would find it to have a black bartender letting them know which Negroes were getting uppity, and how.

No, he didn't know this fellow. Because he didn't know him, he couldn't trust him. Back when Kentucky belonged to the USA, Luther Bliss, the head of the Kentucky State Police (which might as well have been the Kentucky Secret Police), hadn't worked him over too badly when he had him in his clutches.

Whoever Bliss' counterpart was now thatKentucky had gone back to the CSA, Cincinnatus didn't think he would show such restraint.

At the far end of the bar, Menander raised his head. Tears streaked his cheeks. His face might have been one of those masks of tragedy you sometimes saw on theater curtains. "I tell you what we ought to do," he said in a terrible voice. "We ought to kill us some o' them white cocksuckers. We should ought to kill 'em, I say. Reckon they leave us alone then, by Jesus."

"Reckon they kills us, too," the bartender said quietly.

"They killin' us now," Menander cried. "We gots to make 'em stop."

The bartender got busy with the rag. It swished over the top of the bar. He watched it intently as he worked, but it didn't seem to be enough to distract him from his thoughts. He tossed it into that secret space under the bar that could hold almost anything: a cleaning rag, a bottle of maraschino cherries, a smaller bottle of knockout drops, a blackjack, a sawed-off shotgun. The rag disappeared with a damp splat. He lit a cigarette and took a long, meditative drag.

Cincinnatus wondered if all the smoke would stay in the man's lungs, but he blew out a blue cloud of it.

Only after that did he say, "Menander, I know you is hurtin', but you got to watch what you say and where you say it."

He might have been a father warning his little boy to look both ways before he crossed the street. Like the little boy if he happened to be in a crabby mood, Menander wasn't having any of it. "For Chrissake!"

he burst out. "You tellin' me some nigger here--some lousy nigger here--give me away to the motherfuckin' Freedom Party?"

"I didn't say that," the bartender answered. "You done said that."

"Some ofays sell their souls for a quarter," Cincinnatus answered. Menander nodded eagerly at that. But then Cincinnatus went on, "How come you reckon niggers is any different?"

Back inIowa , nigger was a term of abuse. Here inKentucky , blacks used it casually among themselves to describe themselves. Some whites here used it as a casual descriptive term, too--some, but not all. In the mouth of a Freedom Party stalwart, it was ugly as could be. Despite the hot, muggy day, Cincinnatus shivered. In a stalwart's mouth, the word had an evil rasp he'd never heard with any other.

Menander stared at him. "I don't reckon any nigger'd be a dog low enough to sell out his own kind."

Both Cincinnatus and the bartender laughed at him. So did both old men playing checkers in the corner.

Menander's eyes heated with drunken rage. "Calm yourself," Cincinnatus told him. "I didn't say niggers was worse'n white folks.

That ain't so. But if you reckon they's better, you got a ways to go to prove it."

"Don't see no niggers goin"round yellin,, ‘Freedom!' " Menander spat.

"Well, no," Cincinnatus admitted, "but I figure you would if we was on top and the ofays was on the bottom. When the Reds rose up in the last war, what was they but Freedom Party men with different flags shoutin' different slogans?"

By the time the black Marxists rose in the CSA,Covington and most ofKentucky were underU.S.

occupation. The rebellion had been muted here. Lucullus Wood, a Marxist still, would have been irked to hear Cincinnatus compare the Reds to the Freedom Party. Word of what was said in the Brass Monkey was likelier to get back to him than it was to reach the Freedom Party, too. Cincinnatus sighed. It wasn't as if he hadn't said what he believed.

"There's a difference, though," Menander insisted.

"What's that?" Cincinnatus asked.

"The ofays, they deserves it," Menander said savagely. "Got my brother, got . . ." His voice trailed away into a slur of curses. How much whiskey had he downed?

That was the obvious question. From cursing, Menander started crying again. He'd put down a lot of whiskey, which answered the obvious question. But wasn't there another related question, maybe not so obvious? Wasn't Jake Featherston saying, The niggers, they deserve it over inRichmond ? Too right he was.

And what could anybody do about that? In the short run, fight back and hope Featherston couldn't lick theUSA . In the long run . . . In the long run, was there any answer at all to whites and blacks hating each other?

Cincinnatus hadn't seen all that much hate inDes Moines . But there weren't that many Negroes inDes Moines , either: not enough to trigger some of the raw reactions only too common in the Confederate States. The United States were happy they didn't have very many Negroes, too. Immigrants--white immigrants--took care of what was nigger work in the CSA.

Yeah, theUSA can do without us, Cincinnatus thought glumly. Can the CSA? Over inRichmond , Jake Featherston sure thought so.

"Keep them moving forward, goddammit!" Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Colleton yelled into the mike on his portable wireless set. The company commanders in his regiment, or at least their wireless men, were supposed to be listening to him. If they weren't, he'd hop in a motorcar and shout sense right into their stupid faces.

In many ways,Ohio was an ideal place for a mechanized army to fight. The country was mostly flat. It had a thick road and railroad net, which was the whole point of pushing up through it in the first place.

And if the Confederate Army ever ran short of transport, which happened now and again, motorcars commandeered from the damnyankees often took up the slack. There were even gas stations where autos and trucks and barrels could tank up.

Right now, his regiment stood just outside ofFindlay,Ohio . The town lay in the middle of rich farming country punctuated by oil wells. Back in the 1890s, the oil had set off a spectacular boom in these parts.

The boom had subsided. Some of the oil still flowed. The Yankees were fighting like the devil to keep the Confederates from seizing the wells that did survive.

Tom didn't give a particular damn about the oil wells. He would have, but he'd been ordered not to. As far as he was concerned, the only thing that was supposed to matter was getting toLake Erie . He'd promised the men he would strip naked and jump in the lake when they did.

That had produced a mild protest from the regimental medical officer, Dr. David Dillon. "Why don't you promise them you'll jump in an open sewer instead?" Dillon asked. "It would probably be healthier--a little more shit, maybe, but not nearly so many nasty chemicals."

"Seeing how many nasty chemicals the Yankees have been shooting at us, to hell with me if I'm going to flabble about what they pour in the lake," Colleton had answered. The medical officer found nothing to say to that.

Now Tom could seeFindlay through his field glasses. It had been a

nice little city, with a lot of ornate Victorian homes and shops and office buildings left over from the boom-town years. Now bombardment and bombing had leveled some of the buildings and bitten chunks out of others. Smoke from fires in the town and from destroyed wells nearby made it harder to get a good look at the place.

Somewhere in all that smoke,U.S. artillery still lurked. Shells fell a few hundred yards short of where Tom Colleton was standing. If he and his men stayed where they were, they'd get badly hurt when the Yankees found the range.

He wouldn't have wanted to stay there anyhow. The Confederates hadn't invadedOhio to hold in place.

"Advance!" he shouted again. "We aren't going to shift those sons of bitches if we stand around with our thumbs up our asses!"

Behind him, somebody laughed. He whirled. There stood a rawboned man about his own age with the coldest pale eyes he'd ever seen. He wore three stars in a wreath on each side of his collar: a general officer's rank markings. Among the fruit salad on his chest were ribbons for the Purple Heart and the Order of Albert Sidney Johnston, the highest Army decoration after the Confederate Cross. Also on his chest was the badge of a barrel man, a bronze rhomboid shape like the Confederate machines from the last war.

"That's telling 'em!" he said, his voice all softVirginia .

"Thank you, sir," Tom answered. "General Patton, isn't it?"

"That's right." The Confederate officer's smile didn't quite reach his eyes. "George Patton, at your service. I'm afraid you have the advantage of me." Tom gave his own name. "Colleton," Patton repeated musingly. His gaze sharpened, as if he were peering down the barrel of one of the fancy revolvers he carried in place of the usual officer's .45. "Are you by any chance related to Anne Colleton?"

"She was my sister, sir." If Tom had a dime for every time he'd answered that question, he could have bought the Army instead of serving in it.

"A fine woman." But then Patton's gaze sharpened further. ", ‘Was,' you say? She's suffered a misfortune?"

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid so. She was inCharleston when the Yankee carrier raided it. One of the bombs hit nearby, and--" Colleton spread his

hands.

"I'm very sorry to hear that. You have my sincere sympathies." General Patton reached up to touch the brim of his helmet, as if doffing a hat. The helmet was of the new style, like Tom's: rounder and more like what the Yankees wore than the tin hats the C.S. Army had used in the Great War. Patton went on, "It's a loss not only to you personally but also to the Confederate States ofAmerica ."

"Very kind of you to say so, sir."

"I commonly say what I mean, and I commonly mean what I say." Patton paused to light a cigar. "She helped put the Freedom Party over the top, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude for that. We can't be too careful about the dusky race, can we?"

Tom Colleton considered that. His politics were and always had been less radical than Anne's. But when he thought about Marshlands as it had been before 1914 and the ruin it was now . . . "Hard to argue with you there."

"It usually is." Patton looked smug. Considering how far north the armor under his command had driven, that wasn't surprising. He pointed towardFindlay . "Are you having difficulties there?"

"Some, sir," Tom replied. "The damnyankees want to hold on to the oil in the neighborhood as long as they can. They've got machine guns and artillery, and they've slowed down our push. If you've got a few barrels you could spare, either to go right at them or for a flanking attack, it would help a hell of a lot."

"I have a few. That's about what I do have," Patton said. "I wish I could say I had more than a few, but I don't. Colonel Morrell, who's in charge of theU.S. barrels, knows what he's doing. He wrote the book, by God! If not for him, we'd be swimming in the lake by now."

Tom decided not to mention his promise to his men, much less the medical officer's opinion of it. He also marveled that Patton, who'd come so far so fast, was disappointed not to have come farther faster. He said, "Whatever you can do, sir, would be greatly appreciated."

"Give me an hour to organize and consolidate," Patton said. "Then I'll bring them in along that axis"--he pointed west, where a swell in the ground would offer the barrels some cover--"unless the situation changes in the meantime and requires a different approach."

"Yes, sir." This I have to see, Tom thought. He'd expected Patton would talk about tomorrow, if not the day after. An hour? Could anybody really put together an attack so fast? Tom held up his own troops till he found out.

Patton proved as good as his word. About five minutes before the appointed time, three three-barrel platoons showed up and started shelling theU.S. positions in front ofFindlay . Whooping gleefully, Tom Colleton sent his men forward with them. He went forward, too. He fired his .45 a couple of times, but didn't know if he hit anything.

He did know he wanted Patton to see him at the front. The man plainly had no use for laggards. He wouldn't have done what he had if he'd tolerated failure, or even incompetence.

TheU.S. soldiers blew up the oil wells as they retreated from them. That sent more clouds of black, noxious smoke into the hot, blue summer sky. One of Tom's men asked, "Should we put on our masks, sir? This here stuff's got to be as poisonous as mustard gas."

He was exaggerating, but by how much? When Tom spat, he spat black. The inside of his mouth tasted oily. What was that horrible smoke doing inside his lungs? He said, "Do whatever you think best. If you can stand to wear the mask in this heat, go ahead."

One of Patton's barrels hit a mine and blew up. Colleton didn't think any of the crew got out. The rest of the barrels poundedFindlay from the edge of town. They didn't actually go in. Tom couldn't blame them for that. Barrels weren't made for street fighting.

For that matter, he didn't send his own men intoFindlay , either. Now that the way around it was open, he gladly took that. TheU.S. soldiers inside would have to fall back to keep from being cut off or wither on the vine, holding a little island in a rising Confederate sea. There were still islands like that all the way back to the Ohio River, though they went under one by one, subdued by second-line troops.

A few of them, the larger ones, still caused trouble. Tom knew that, but refused to worry about it.

Someone else had the job of worrying about it. His job was to push toward theGreat Lakes with everything he had. If he did that, if everybody at the front did that, the islands would take care of themselves.

TheU.S. soldiers inFindlay seemed to think so. They pulled out of the

town instead of letting themselves be surrounded. Their rear guard kept the Confederates from taking too big a bite out of them. Tom Colleton regretted that and gave it the professional respect it deserved at the same time.

He was glad to flop down by a fire when the sun went down. One drawback to a war of movement for a middle-aged man was that you had to keep moving. He could keep up with the young soldiers he commanded, but he couldn't get by on three hours' sleep a night the way they could. He felt like an old car that still ran fine--as long as you changed the oil and the spark plugs every two thousand miles.

His men had liberated some chickens from a nearby farm. Chicken roasted over an open fire--even done as it usually was, black on the outside and half raw on the inside--went a long way towards improving the rations they carried with them. Tom gnawed on a leg. Grease ran down his chin.

In the darkness beyond flames' reach, a sentry called a challenge. Tom didn't hear the answer, but he did hear the sentry's startled, "Pass on, sir!" A few seconds later, George Patton stepped into the firelight.

"Good thing there aren't wolves in this country, or the smell would draw them," he said. "You boys think you can spare a chunk of one of those birds for a damn useless officer?"

"You bet we can, General," Tom said before any of his men decided to take Patton literally. "If it weren't for those barrels you loaned us, likely we'd still be stuck in front ofFindlay ."

Patton sprawled in the dirt beside him and attacked a leg of his own with wolfish gusto. As he had been earlier in the day, he was perfectly dressed, right down to his cravat and to knife-sharp trouser creases.

Off in the distance were spatters of small-arms fire. Telling the two sides apart was easy. The Yankees still used bolt-action Springfields, as they had in the last war. With submachine guns and automatic rifles, Confederate soldiers filled the air with lead whenever they bumped into the enemy.

"Your boys did handsomely yourselves," Patton said, throwing bare bones into the bushes. "You understand the uses of outflanking." His eyes glittered in the firelight. "Were you in the Army all through the dark times?"

"No, sir," Tom answered. "They took the uniform off my back in 1917,

and I didn't put it back on till things heated up again."

"That's what I thought," Patton said. "I would have heard of you if you'd stayed in. Hell, you'd probably outrank me if you'd stayed in. You may not be a professional in name, but by God you are in performance." Maybe he meant it. Maybe he was just making Tom Colleton look good to his men. Either way, Tom felt about ten feet tall.

About the only thing Armstrong Grimes knew these days was that theUnited States were in trouble. He shook his head. He knew one other thing: he was still alive. He hadn't the faintest idea why, though.

"I figured we were going to keep that fuckingFindlay place," he said as he lay down by a campfire somewhere north of the fallen town.

"We would have, if those stinking barrels hadn't shown up," said a new man in the squad, a New York Jew named Yossel Reisen. He was a few years older than Armstrong. He'd been conscripted in the peaceful 1930s, done his time, and been hauled into the Army again after the shooting started.

They'd fallen back to the northeast through the hamlet ofAstoria toward the larger town ofFostoria . Five rail lines fanned throughFostoria . It also boasted a carbon electrode factory and a stockyard. It was not the sort of place theUSA wanted to see in Confederate hands.

"Where the hell were our barrels?" Armstrong demanded of everyone within earshot. "What were they doing? I'm sick of getting run out of places because the other guys have barrels and we can't stop 'em."

Off not far enough in the distance, artillery rumbled. The noise came from the north, which meant the guns belonged to theUSA . Armstrong hoped that was what it meant, anyhow. The other possibility was that the Confederates had badly outflankedU.S. forces, and that Armstrong and his comrades were cut off and in the process of being surrounded. There were times when sitting out the rest of the war in a Confederate prison camp didn't seem so bad.

That was one thing Armstrong didn't say. Everybody who outranked him was awfully touchy about defeatism. You could grouse about why the Army wasn't fighting back as hard as it might have; that was in the rules. But if you said you'd just as soon not be fighting at all, you'd gone too far. He didn't know exactly what happened to soldiers who

said such things. He didn't want to find out, either.

Overhead, shells made freight-train noises. They flew south, south past theU.S. lines, and came down somewhere not far fromAstoria . That was Confederate-held territory now, which meant those wereU.S.

guns firing, and that the soldiers in butternut and their swarms of barrels hadn't broken through.

Counterbattery fire came back very promptly. It might be dark, but the Confederates weren't asleep.

Those shells flew over Armstrong's head, too, roaring north. As long as the guns traded fire with one another, he didn't mind too much. When the Confederates started pounding the front line, that was something else again.

That was trouble, was what it was.

Armstrong rolled himself in his blanket and went to sleep. He'd discovered he could sleep anywhere when he got the chance. All he needed was something to lean against. He didn't have to lie down; sitting would do fine. Sleep, in the field, was more precious than gold, almost--but not quite--more precious than a good foxhole. Whenever he could, he restocked.

Corporal Stowe shook him awake in the middle of the night. Armstrong's automatic reaction was to try to murder the noncom. "Easy, tiger," Stowe said, laughing, and jerked back out of the way of an elbow that would have broken his nose. "I'm not a goddamn infiltrator. Get your ass up there for sentry duty."

"Oh." Now that Armstrong knew it wasn't kill or be killed in the next moment, he allowed himself the luxury of a yawn. "All right." He pulled on his shoes, which he'd been using for a pillow. "Anything going on? Those bastards poking around?"

"That's why we have sentries," the squad commander answered, and Armstrong really wished that elbow had connected. Stowe went on, "Seems pretty quiet. You run into trouble, shoot first."

"Bet your ass," Armstrong said. "Any son of a bitch tries to get by me, he pays full price."

When the war first broke out, Stowe would have laughed at him for

talking like that. But he'd lived through more than a month of it. Not only that, he'd shown he was one of the minority of soldiers who did the majority of damage when fighting started. The corporal thumped him on the shoulder and gave him a little shove.

He got challenged by the man he was replacing. Gabby Priest hardly ever said anything that wasn't line of duty. He and Armstrong spoke challenge and countersign softly, to keep lurking Confederates from picking them off--another drawback to a war where both sides used the same language.

Gabby went back the way Armstrong had come. Armstrong settled himself as motionlessly as he could.

He listened to chirping crickets. They didn't know anything about war, or how lucky they were to be ignorant. An owl hooted. A whippoorwill called mournfully.

Armstrong listened for noises that didn't belong: a footfall, a twig breaking under a boot heel, a cough.

He also listened for sudden silences that didn't belong. Animals could sense people moving even where other people couldn't. If they stopped in alarm, that was a good sign there was something to be alarmed about.

He heard nothing out of the ordinary. Somebody fired off a burst of machine-gun fire over to the west, but it had to be at least half a mile away. As long as nothing happened any closer than that, he didn't need to worry about it.

He yawned. He wished he were back under the blanket. After another yawn, he swore at himself in a low whisper. One of the things they'd made very plain in basic training, even before the war started, was that they could shoot you if you fell asleep on sentry duty. That didn't necessarily mean they would, but he didn't care to take the chance. If the Confederates broke through because he was snoring, his own side wouldn't be very happy with him even if he survived--which wasn't particularly likely.

Some guys carried a pin with them when they came on sentry duty, to stick themselves if they started feeling sleepy. Armstrong never had. From now on, though, he thought he would.

Was that . . . ? He tensed, sleep forgotten as ice walked up his back. Was that the clatter of barrel tracks, the rumble of engines? Or was it

only his imagination playing tricks on him? Whatever it was, it was either just above or just below his threshold of hearing, so he couldn't decide how scared he ought to be.

If those were barrels coming forward, theSpringfield he clutched convulsively wouldn't do him a damn bit of good. He could shoot it at a barrel till doomsday, and he wouldn't hurt a thing. He listened as he'd never listened before--and still couldn't make up his mind whether he'd heard anything. He didn't hear any more. That meant the barrels weren't coming any closer, anyhow, which suited him fine.

The artillery duel betweenU.S. and C.S. guns started up again, each side feeling for the other in the night.

Listening to death fly back and forth overhead was almost like watching a tennis match, except both sides could serve at once and there could be more than one ball in the air at the same time.

One other difference belatedly occurred to Armstrong. Tennis balls weren't in the habit of exploding and scattering deadly shell fragments, or perhaps poison gas, all over the court. Artillery shells, unfortunately, were.

Armstrong longed for a cigarette. It would make him more alert and help the time pass. Of course, a sniper who aimed at the coal could blow his face off. Even someone who didn't spot the coal could smell smoke and know he was around. He didn't light up, but let out a soft snort of laughter. Somebody might smell him and know he was around. He couldn't remember the last time he'd bathed. Of course, any Confederate sneaking up was liable to be just as gamy as he was.

He crouched in the foxhole, peering into the night, hunter and hunted at the same time. With trees overhead, he couldn't even watch the stars go by and gauge the time from them. Little by little, though, black gave way to indigo gave way to gray gave way to gold gave way to pink in the east.

Soft motion behind him. He whirled, swinging his rifle toward the noise. "Halt!" he called. "Who goes there?"

"Nagurski," came the response: not a name but a recognition signal.

"Barrel," Armstrong answered. AnyU.S. football fanatic knew the hard-pounding Barrel Nagurski. The Confederates had their own football heroes. With luck, they didn't pay attention to muscular Yankee running backs.

Yossel Reisen came out into the open just as the sun crawled over the horizon. "Anything going on?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," Armstrong answered, and told him of what he thought he'd heard. He finished, "They've been quiet since then. I am sure of that. Whether they were there at all"--he shrugged--"who the hell knows?"

Reisen started to say something. Before he could, he and Armstrong both looked to the sky. Airplanes were coming up out of the south, motors roaring. At the same time, the Confederate bombardment not only picked up, it started falling on the front line and not on theU.S. artillery. The foxhole Armstrong stood in wasn't really big enough for two. Yossel Reisen jumped in anyhow. Armstrong said not a word.

He would have done the same thing.

Screaming sirens added to the engine roars: dive bombers stooping like hawks. "Mules!" Reisen yelled, at the same time as Armstrong was shouting, "Asskickers!" He hoped the Confederate artillery shells would shoot down their own airplanes. Wish for the moon while you're at it, went through his mind. It was a one-in-a-million chance at best.

Bombs began bursting, back a few hundred yards where the other men in the squad rested. Some of the shells came down much closer to the foxhole. Fragments snarled past, some of them bare inches above Armstrong's head. He yelled--no, he screamed, and was unashamed of screaming. Yossel Reisen probably couldn't hear him through the din. And Yossel's mouth was open, too, so he might have been screaming himself.

Armstrong's father went on and on about the day-long bombardments he'd gone through during the Great War. He had a limp and the Purple Heart to prove he wasn't kidding, too. Armstrong had got sick of hearing about it all the same. Now he understood what his old man was talking about. Experience was a great leveler.

This bombardment didn't go on all day. After half an hour, it let up. "We're in for it now," Armstrong said. Reisen nodded gloomily.

Confederate soldiers loped forward, bent at the waist to make themselves small targets. Armstrong and Yossel both started shooting at them. They went down--hitting the dirt, probably, rather than dead or wounded. Sure as hell, some of them began shooting to make theU.S. soldiers keep their heads down while others advanced.

"We better get out of here before they flank us out," Armstrong said. Yossel Reisen nodded. The two of them scrambled back through the trees, bullets snapping all around them.

Nothing was left of the encampment except shell holes and what looked like a butcher's waste. As the twoU.S. soldiers fell back farther, they fell in with other survivors. Nobody seemed interested in anything but getting away. They didn't find anything like a line till just in front ofFostoria . No one there asked them any questions. The position farther south had plainly been smashed. Now, would this one hold? With no great optimism, Armstrong hoped so.

VIII

With the bulk of theAmericas in the way, getting from the Atlantic to the Pacific was a long haul for aU.S. warship. For many years, people in theUSA and the CSA had talked about cutting a canal throughColombia 's Central American province or throughNicaragua . No one had been able to agree on who would do the work or who would guard it once done. TheUnited States had threatened war if the Confederate States tried, and vice versa. And so, in spite of all the talk, there was no canal.

The Remembrance and her accompanying cruisers and destroyers and supply ships steamed south toward Cape Horn andTierra del Fuego . She kept her combat air patrol constantly airborne. The Empire of Brazil was neutral. When they got as far south as Argentina, on the other hand, she was on the same side as England and France, which meant the same side as the CSA.

Sam Carsten had seen in the last war that land-based airplanes could be hard on ships. He knew from the raid onCharleston that they could be a lot harder now. The CAP also kept an eye out for British, Confederate, and French submersibles--maybe even Argentine ones, for all Sam knew.

Even in wartime, though, some rituals went on. Carsten had crossed the Equator several times. That made him a shellback, immune from the hazing men doing it for the first time--polliwogs--had to go through. Officers suffered along with ratings. They got their backsides paddled. They had their hair cut off in patches. They got drenched with the hoses. They had to kiss King Neptune's belly. The grizzled CPO

who played King Neptune had a vast expanse of belly to kiss. To make the job more delightful, he smeared it with grease from the galley.

Everybody watched to see how the polliwogs took it. A man who got angry at the indignities often paid for it later on. If you went through things with a smile--or, better, with a laugh and a dirty joke for King Neptune--you won points. And the suffering polliwogs needed to remember that they were turning into shellbacks. One of these days, they would have the chance to get even with some new men.

Commander Dan Cressy came up to Carsten as he watched the hijinks. "Well, Lieutenant, what do you think?" the exec asked.

"Damn good show, sir," Sam answered. "Szymanski makes about the best King Neptune I've ever seen."

"Can't argue with you there," Cressy said. "But I didn't mean that. A lot of officers just do their jobs and don't worry about anything outside them. You look at the bigger picture. What do you think of our move to the Pacific?"

"Thank you, sir," Sam said. That the exec should ask his opinion was a compliment indeed. After a moment, he went on, "If we have to go, it's probably a good thing we're going now. That's how it looks to me: we're grabbing the chance while it's still there."

"I agree," Cressy said crisply. "With Bermuda lost and theBahamas going, we'll have a much tougher time getting a task force into these waters once the Confederates and the British consolidate their positions." He looked unhappy. "They snookered us very nicely to draw us out ofBermuda so they could hit it. We shouldn't have fallen for the lure of the British carrier--but we did, and now we have to live with it."

"Yes, sir," Sam said. "Other thing that occurs to me is, will this task force be enough help for theSandwich Islands ?"

"Damn good question," Cressy said. "We have to try, though, or else we'll lose them, and that would be a disaster. You see the difficulty we face, I presume?" He cocked his head to one side like a teacher waiting to see how smart a student was. The impression held even though Sam was the older man.

"I think so, sir," Sam said, and then spluttered as water splashed off a luckless polliwog and onto him.

He wiped his face on his sleeve and tried to remember what he'd been about to say. "We have to be strong in theAtlantic and the Pacific, because we've got enemies to east and west. The Japs can concentrate on us."

Commander Cressy brought his hands together, once, twice, three times. They made hardly any sound at all. Even so, Sam felt as if he'd just got a standing ovation from a capacity crowd at Custer Stadium inPhiladelphia . "That is the essence of it, all right," the exec said. "And the Japs have a running start on us, too. Since they gobbled up what was theDutch East Indies , they've got the oil and the rubber and a lot of the other raw materials they need for a long war. Going after them starting from theSandwich Islands will be hard. Going after them from the West Coast would be impossible, I think."

"Yes, sir," Sam said, "Especially if--" He broke off.

He hadn't stopped soon enough. "Especially if what?" Cressy asked--and when he asked you something, he expected an answer.

Unhappily, Sam gave him one: "Especially if the Confederates cut us in half, sir, is what I was going to say. That would leave the West on its own, and it just doesn't make as much or have as many people as they do back East."

Commander Cressy rubbed his chin. Slowly, he nodded. "This isn't the first time I've thought it was a shame you're a mustang, Carsten. If you'd come up through theNavalAcademy , you'd outrank me now."

"You do what you can with the cards they deal you, sir," Sam said. "I joined the Navy when I was a kid.

It's been my home. It's been my family. Least I can do to pay it back is to work hard. I've done that. I'm happy I've got as far as I have. When I signed up, being an officer was the last thing on my mind. I figured I'd end up where Szymanski is, except maybe without the grease on my stomach. And I could've done a lot worse'n that, too."

The exec glanced over toward Szymanski, who was bawling obscenities at a lieutenant, j.g., less than half Carsten's age. "He's a good man, a solid man," Cressy said. "The big difference between the two of you is that he's got no imagination. He just accepts what he finds, while you've got that itch to figure out how things work."

"Do I?" Sam thought about it. "Well, maybe I do. But I could have thrown it into, say, being a machinist's mate just as easy."

"So what? Could have doesn't count for anything, not in this man's navy," Commander Cressy said crisply. "You are what you are, and I'm damn glad to have you on my ship." He clapped Carsten on the back and went on his way, dodging the stream from another hose as smoothly as a halfback sidestepping a tackler. Whatever he did, he did well.

And he likes me, Sam thought. I'm only a mustang, a sunburned sea rat up through the hawse hole, but he likes me. That made him feel better about himself than he had since . . . since . . . He laughed. He was damned if he remembered when anything had made him feel better.

A sunburned sea rat he certainly was. Orders had gone out for all hands to wear long sleeves and not to roll them up regardless of the weather. Action had shown that protected against flash burns when shells and bombs burst. Sam had been wearing long sleeves for more than thirty years. That way, he burned only from the wrists down and from the neck up: a dubious improvement, but an improvement nonetheless.

After the festivities that went with crossing the Equator, routine returned to the Remembrance. Drills picked up as the ship and the accompanying task force neared Argentine waters. General quarters sounded at all hours of the day and night. It bounced men out of their bunks and hammocks. It pulled them out of the showers. Sailors laughed when their comrades ran to battle stations naked and dripping, clothes clutched under one arm. But they didn't laugh too much. Most of them had been caught the same way at one time or another. And besides, with the task force where it was, nobody could be sure when a drill might turn into the real thing.

The summer sun receded in the north. Sam still suffered, but not so severely. He might have been the only man aboard who looked forward to roundingCape Horn in the Southern Hemisphere's winter.

There, if nowhere else south of theYukon , the weather suited his skin.

One of the destroyers in the task force detected, or thought she detected, a submersible. She dropped depth charges. Down deep in the bowels of the Remembrance, Sam listened to the ashcans bursting one by one. They were too far away to shake the ship as they would have at closer range.

"Hope they sink the son of a bitch," one of the soldiers in the damage-

control party said savagely.

"Not me," Sam said. Everybody looked at him as if he'd lost his mind. He explained: "I hope there's no sub there at all. I hope they're plastering the hell out of a whale, or else that the hydrophone operator's got a case of the galloping fantods."

"Why?" Lieutenant Commander Hiram Pottinger asked, real curiosity in his voice. "Don't you want to see the enemy on the bottom?"

"Oh, hell, yes, sir, if that's the only boat out there," Sam told his superior. "But they're liable to hunt in packs. If we get one, there may be more. I'd just as soon there weren't any."

Pottinger pursed his lips, then slowly nodded. "You've got kind of a lefthanded way of looking at things, don't you? Can't say you're wrong, though."

They never found out whether the destroyer sank the submersible, or whether a sub had been there at all. The only evidence was negative: no torpedoes streaked toward any ship in the task force. If the sub had been there, and if it had been sunk, it was a lone wolf, not part of a pack.

No Argentine airplanes came out to harry the Remembrance and her satellites.Argentina and theUSA were formally at war, but that was becauseArgentina did so much to feedEngland andFrance , and theUnited States threatened her commerce. The task force was bound for the Pacific. If provoked, though, it might pause. Maybe the Americans had quietly warned they would pause if provoked. Sam didn't know anything about that. As far as he could tell, nobody on the Remembrance did. He did know he was glad not to have to fight his way pastArgentina .

The Argentines hadn't unbent enough to let the task force through the Straits of Magellan. TheU.S. ships had to go around Tierra del Fuego and through the thunderous seas ofCape Horn . It felt like the devil's sleigh ride: up one mountainous wave after another, then down the far side. Some of those waves broke over the carrier's bow, sending sea surging across the flight deck and carrying away anything that wasn't lashed down and quite a bit that was. A sailor on one of the accompanying destroyers got washed overboard. He was gone before his mates had any chance to rescue him.

Vomit's sharp stink filled the corridors of the Remembrance. The stoves in the galleys were put out; the pitching was too much for

them. Chow was sandwiches and cold drinks, not that many men had much appetite. Sam was a good sailor, but even he was off his feed.

What really amazed him was the knowledge that things could have been worse. A hundred years earlier, clippers had rounded the Horn on sail power, going into the teeth of the howling westerly gale. He admired the men aboard those ships without wanting to imitate them. The passage was hard enough with 180,000 horsepower on his side.

And then, at last, they were through. The Pacific began to live up to its name. The stoves were lit again.

Hot meals returned. The crew felt good enough to eat them, and to clamor for more. And all the task force had to deal with were the Chileans, who were irked theU.S. ships hadn't punished their Argentine enemies. After what the Remembrance had just been through, mere diplomacy felt like child's play.

Jonathan Moss spotted a flight of Mules buzzing along above northernOhio . His lips skinned back from his teeth in a predatory grin. The gull-winged Confederate dive bombers raised hell withU.S. infantry. But they were sitting ducks for fighters. He spoke into the wireless for the men of his squadron: "You see 'em, boys? Two o'clock low, just lollygagging along and waiting for us. Let's go get 'em."

He pushed the stick forward. The Wright fighter dove. The squadron followed him down. They'd been trying to do too much with too little for too long. Now they had a chance to take a real bite out of the Confederates. Those damned Asskickers were like flying artillery, poundingU.S. positions ordinary shellfire couldn't hurt. Take them out and the Confederate ground attack would suffer.

Nobody could say the men who flew the Mules were asleep at the switch. They scattered when they spotted theU.S. fighters stooping on them. Some dove for the deck. Others hightailed it back toward the Confederate lines.

Moss picked his target: a Mule scooting along just above the treetops. The rear gunner saw him, and started shooting. A stream of tracers flew from the back of the Mule's long cockpit toward him.

His grin got wider and more savage. The Mule had one machine gun. He had half a dozen, and a much steadier gun platform than a jinking bomber. His finger jabbed the firing button on top of the stick. The leading edges of the Wright's wings spouted flame as the guns

hammered away. He held the dive, careless of the enemy's fire. The best way to knock an airplane down was to do your shooting from as close as you could.

He fired another burst into the Mule. The rear gunner stopped shooting. Moss was close enough to see him slumped over his gun. Flame ran back from the wing root along the dive bomber's fuselage. The Mule suddenly heeled over and slammed into the ground. Flame and smoke volcanoed upward. The pilot had never had a chance.

"Scratch one bandit!" Moss shouted exultantly, and then clawed for altitude. He wanted more of those Asskickers burning, and he thought he knew how to get what he wanted, too.

But then one of his pilots yelled, "Bandits! Bandits at three o'clock high!" Moss' exultation turned to cold sweat on the instant.

As his fighters had had the advantage of altitude against the Mules, so the Confederate Hound Dogs had the edge on the Wrights. The C.S. fighters tore into them, guns blazing. Frantic shouts came from Moss'

wireless set. A couple of them cut off abruptly as fighters or pilots were hit.

He'd been late pulling up. Too late. Here came a Hound Dog, diving on him. He twisted to try to meet it.

Too late again. Machine-gun bullets and a couple of shells from the cannon that fired through the Confederate fighter's propeller hub stitched across his machine's left wing and fuselage. The engine made a horrible grinding noise. Smoke poured from it. Suddenly Moss was flying a glider that didn't want to glide.

He had to get out--if he could. The controls still answered, after a fashion. He got the crippled fighter over onto its back, opened the canopy, undid the harness that held him in his armored seat, and fell free.

The slipstream tore at him. He just missed killing himself by smashing into the Wright's tail. Then he was clear of the airplane, clear and falling toward the ground far below--far below now, but drawing closer with inexorable speed.

He yanked the ripcord. Folded silk spilled out from the pack on his back. He'd put the parachute in there himself. If it didn't open the way it was supposed to, he'd curse himself all the way down.

Whump! The shock when the canopy opened was enough to make him bite his tongue. He tasted blood in his mouth. Considering what might have happened, he wasn't complaining. He hung in midair. All at once, he went from brick to dandelion puff. Even so, he would sooner have done this for fun than to save his own neck.

His fighter hit the ground and burst into flames, just like the Mule he'd shot down. And he hadn't finished saving his own neck, either--here came the Hound Dog that had knocked him out of the sky. Or maybe it was another one--he couldn't tell. But he'd never felt more helpless than he did now, hanging in the air.

During the Great War, hardly any fliers had worn a parachute. The ones who did were reckoned fair game till they got to the ground. If that Confederate pilot wanted to fire a machine-gun burst into him, he couldn't do one goddamn thing about it. He had a .45 on his hip, but he didn't bother to reach for it.

Instead of shooting, the Confederate waggled his wings and zoomed away. Moss thought he saw the other man wave inside the cockpit, but the Hound Dog was gone too fast for him to be sure. He waved his thanks, but he didn't know if the Confederate could see that, either.

"They aren't all bastards," he said, as if someone had claimed they were. He felt weak and giddy with relief. To his disgust, he also realized he felt wet. Somewhere back there, he'd pissed himself. He shrugged inside the parachute harness. He wasn't the first flier who'd done that, and he wouldn't be the last. When he got down on the ground, he'd clean himself off. That was all he could do. Only dumb luck he hadn't filled his pants, too.

He swung his weight to the left, trying to steer the chute away from the trees below and towards a stretch of grass. Was he over Confederate-held territory, or did theUSA still have a grip here? He didn't know. Pretty damn soon, he'd find out.

He passed over a pine almost close enough to kick it on the way down. There was the meadow, coming up. He bent his knees, braced for the impact--and twisted his ankle anyhow. "Son of a bitch!" he said loudly. The chute tried to drag him across the field. He pulled out his knife and sawed at the shrouds.

After what seemed a very long time, he cut himself free. He tried to get to his feet. The ankle didn't want to bear his weight. He could hobble, but that was about it.

From behind him, somebody said, "Hold it right there, asshole!" Moss froze. Was that aU.S. or a C.S.

accent? He hadn't been able to tell. The soldier said, "Turn around real slow, and make sure I can see both hands are empty."

Moss couldn't turn any way but slowly. He whooped when he saw the man pointing a rifle at him wore green-gray. "I'm Jonathan Moss, major,U.S. Army Air Force," he said.

"Yeah, sure, buddy, and I'm Queen of the May," theU.S. soldier said. For a dreadful moment, Moss thought his career would end right there, finished by someone on his own side. But then the soldier said,

"I see you're heeled. Drop your piece, and don't do anything stupid or you'll never find out who wins the Champions' Cup this year."

"Whatever you say." Moss fished his pistol out of the holster with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He dropped it on the ground, then took a couple of limping steps away from it. "Get me back to your CO. I'll show him I'm legit."

The soldier came forward and scooped up the .45. Never for an instant did hisSpringfield stop pointing at Moss' brisket. "Maybe you will and maybe you won't," he said. "But all right--I've pulled your teeth.

Come along. You better not try anything funny, or that's all she wrote."

"I'm coming," Moss said. "I can't run, not on this leg." The soldier in green-gray only shrugged. Maybe he thought Moss was faking. Moss wished he were. He asked, "Where the hell are we, anyway? I flew out ofIndiana , and I got all turned around in the last dogfight."

"If my lieutenant wants you to know, he'll tell you," the soldier answered. "Can't you move any faster than that?"

"Now that you mention it," Moss said, "no." Behind him, the soldier scattered unprintables the way Johnny Appleseed had scattered seeds. The sputter of bad language eased but didn't stop when they got in under the trees. Moss was glad to get out of the meadow, too; one of those Hound Dogs might have paid a return visit, and shooting up soldiers caught in the open was any pilot's sport.

"Halt!" an unseen voice called. "Who goes there?"

"No worries, Jonesy--it's me," Moss' captor (rescuer?) replied. "I got me a flyboy--says he's one of ours. He don't talk like a Confederate, but he don't quite talk like one of us, neither." That's what I get for living inCanada for most of twenty years--I started sounding like a Canuck, Moss thought unhappily.

"Well, bring him on," Jonesy said. "Lieutenant Garzetti will figure out what the hell to do with him."

Lieutenant Giovanni Garzetti was a little dark man in his late twenties who looked as if he'd never smiled in his whole life. He made his headquarters in a barn that had had one corner blown off by a shell. He looked Moss and his gear over, asked him a few questions, and said, "Yeah, you're the goods, all right."

He turned to the soldier who'd brought in the fighter pilot. "Give him back his sidearm, Pratt."

"Yes, sir," the soldier said. This was the first time Moss had heard his name. Pratt took the .45 off his belt and handed it back. "Here you go. I didn't want to take any chances with you, you know what I mean?"

Moss could tell he wouldn't get any more of an apology than that. He nodded as he slid the pistol into the holster again. "Don't worry about it."

"So what can we do for you, Major?" Lieutenant Garzetti asked.

"A bandage for my ankle and a lift to the closest airstrip would be good," Moss answered. "I can't walk for beans, but I expect I can still fly."

"Pratt, go chase down a medic," Garzetti said. The soldier sketched a salute and departed. Garzetti nodded to Moss. "We'll get you wrapped up good. Meanwhile . . ." He pulled a little silver flask out of his pocket. "Have a knock of this."

This was some of the best--certainly the most welcome--bourbon Moss had ever drunk. "Anesthetic,"

he said solemnly, and Garzetti nodded. The lieutenant took a drink from the flask when Moss returned it.

Then he put it in his pocket once more. Was he a quiet lush? He didn't act like one. If he fancied a drink every now and then . . . well, Moss

fancied a drink every now and then, too. "Boy, that hit the spot. You sure you aren't part St. Bernard?"

Lieutenant Garzetti still didn't smile. His eyes twinkled, though. "If you said on my mother's side, you'd've called me a son of a bitch."

"That's not what I meant!" Moss exclaimed.

"I know it's not, and I'm not flabbling about it," Garzetti said. A man with a Red Cross armband came in through the missing corner of the barn. "Here's the medic. Let's see what he can do."

After poking and prodding at Moss' ankle, the medic said, "I don't think it's busted, Major, but you sure as hell ought to get it X-rayed first chance you find."

Moss only laughed. "And when's that likely to be?"

"Beats me, sir, but you ought to. You can mess yourself up bad, trying to do too much on a busted ankle. In the meantime . . ." In the meantime, the medic used what seemed a mummy's worth of gauze to wrap the injured part. "There you go. Try that. Tell me how it is. If you're not happy, I'll put some more on."

How? Moss wondered. He got to his feet. The ankle still complained when he put weight on it, but it didn't scream so loud. He could walk, after a fashion. "Thanks," he said. "It's not perfect, but it's an awful lot better. And as long as I can get into a fighter, what else do I need?" Neither the medic nor Lieutenant Garzetti had anything to say to that.

Scipio watched bored cops herd colored factory workers onto their buses near the edge of the Terry.

He'd got used to that. It bothered him less than it had when he first saw it. The buses brought the workers back every evening. They really did take the men and women to do war work. They didn't haul them off to those camps from which nobody ever came back. "Come on. Keep moving," a cop said.

"You got to--"

The world blew up.

That was how it seemed to Scipio, anyhow. One minute, he was walking along the streets, watching the workers board the buses and

thinking about what he'd be doing once he got to the Huntsman's Lodge.

The next, he was rolling on the ground, tearing out both knees of his tuxedo pants and clapping his hands to his ears in a useless, belated effort to hold out that horrible sound.

Afterwards, he realized that the buses had shielded him from the worst of the blast. The motorcar bomb went off across the street from them. If they hadn't been in the way, the twisted metal junk screeching through the air in all directions probably would have cut him down, too. As things were, he got a couple of little cuts from flying glass, but nothing worse than that.

Head ringing from the force of the explosion, he staggered upright again. He heard everything as if from very far away. He knew his hearing could come back to normal in a couple of days. A hell of a country, he thought, when you know how things are after a bombing on account of you've been through them before.

When he looked at what the bomb had done to the buses and to the people waiting for them, his stomach did a slow lurch. All four buses were burning furiously. That would have been even worse if they'd had gasoline engines rather than using diesel fuel, but it was plenty bad enough as things were. One of them lay on its side; another had been twisted almost into a right angle. And the people . . .

"Do Jesus!" Scipio whispered, realizing just how lucky he'd been. The bomb might have been a harvester for people; the blast had cut them down in windrows. Men and women and bleeding chunks that had belonged to men and women lay everywhere. A policeman's head stared sightlessly at a black woman's arm. A disemboweled worker--still somehow wearing his cloth cap--tried to rearrange his guts till he slumped over, unconscious or dead. A man whose face was nothing but raw meat lay on his back and screamed agony to the uncaring sky.

The worst of all this was, Scipio knew what to do. He had been through the nightmare before. This wasn't the first motorcar bomb to hitAugusta --Negroes who hated the Freedom Party had struck before. Scipio began looking for people who'd been badly hurt but might live if someone stanched their bleeding in a hurry. He used whatever he could to do the job: socks, hankies, shirts, shoelace tourniquets.

He wasn't the only one, either. Passersby and the lucky few the bomb hadn't hurt badly did what they could to help the wounded. Scipio

found himself bandaging a white policeman with a gaping hole in his calf. "Thank you kindly, uncle," the cop said through clenched teeth.

He meant well. That made the appellation sting more, not less. Even in his pain, all he saw was . . . a nigger. Scipio wanted to find some way to change his mind. If doing his best to save the white man's life couldn't turn the trick, he was damned if he knew what could.

Clanging bells announced ambulances and fire engines--a building across the street, by the scattered smoking fragments of the auto that had held the bomb, was burning. Scipio hadn't even noticed. He was intent on more urgent things close by him. He did hear the ambulance crews' exclamations of dismay. The men pitched in and helped. To give them their due, they didn't seem to care whether they aided whites or the far more numerous blacks.

"Here, Pop, scoot over--I'll take care of that," one of them said, elbowing Scipio aside. And he did, too, digging a jagged chunk of metal out of a man's back and bandaging the wound with practiced dispatch.

Scipio minded pop much less than he'd minded uncle. The fellow from the ambulance could have called anyone no longer young pop regardless of his color, and Scipio's hair was gray heading toward white.

One of the ambulances had a radio. A blood-spattered driver was bawling into the microphone: "y'all got to send more people here, Freddy. This is a hell of a mess--worst damn thing I've seen since the end of the war . . . Yeah, whatever you can spare. I hope they catch the goddamn son of a bitch who done it.

Hang the bastard by his balls, and it'd still be too good for him."

Scipio was inclined to agree with the driver. He would have bet his last dime that the man who planted the bomb was black. That didn't change his opinion. What did the bomber hope to accomplish? He'd killed at least twenty of his own kind, and wounded dozens more. He'd wrecked buses that were taking the Negroes to work that kept them out of camps. And the Freedom Party would probably land on the Terry with both feet after this. Would Jake Featherston's men squeeze another indemnity out of people who had very little to begin with? Or would stalwarts and guards simply fire upAugusta 's whites and start a new pogrom? Oh, they had plenty of choices--all of them bad for Negroes.

More ambulances clattered up to the disaster. The fellow who'd pushed Scipio aside nudged him now.

"Thanks for your help, Pop. You can go on about your business, I reckon. Looks like we're getting enough people to do the job."

"Yes, suh," Scipio said. "I stays if you wants me to."

The ambulance man shook his head. "That's all right." He looked Scipio up and down. "If you don't have a job you need to get to and a boss who's wondering where you're at, I'm a damnyankee. Go on, get going."

Till the man mentioned them, Scipio had forgotten about the Huntsman's Lodge and Jerry Dover. He surveyed himself. Except for the ruined trousers, he'd do. He didn't have much blood on his boiled shirt, and his jacket was black, so whatever he had on that didn't show.

He thought about going back to the flat to change trousers--thought about it and shook his head. He was already badly late. He supposed he could get another pair at the restaurant. Even if he couldn't, those ruined knees would silently show the rich white customers a little about what being a black in the Confederate States ofAmerica was like.

"You sure it's all right?" he asked the ambulance man. The fellow nodded impatiently. He made shooing motions. Scipio left. He discovered his own knees had got scraped when he hit the pavement. Walking hurt. But he was damned if he'd ask anybody to paint him with Merthiolate, not when there were so many people who were really injured.

Whites often stared at him when he walked to the Huntsman's Lodge. A black man in a tuxedo in a Confederate town had to get used to jokes about penguins. Today, the stares were different. Scipio knew why: he was a singularly disheveled penguin. People asked him if he'd got caught in the bombing.

He nodded over and over, unsurprised; they must have heard the blast for miles around.

He'd just put his hand out to open the side door to the restaurant when another blast shookAugusta .

The sound came from back in the Terry--from the very direction in

which he'd just come. "Do Jesus!" he said again. In his mind's eye, he could imagine bombers setting timers in two motorcars parked not too far apart, not too close together. The first one would wreak havoc. Ambulances and fire engines would come rushing to repair the damage--and then the second bomb would go off and take out their crews.

Scipio shivered. If he'd guessed right, someone had a really evil turn of mind.

Still shaking his head, he opened the door and went in. He almost ran into Jerry Dover, who'd come hurrying up to find out what the second blast was about. The restaurant manager gaped at him, then said,

"Xerxes! You all right? When you didn't show up for so long, I was afraid the bomb--the first bomb, I mean--got you."

"I's all right, yes, suh," Scipio said. "Bomb damn near do get me." He explained how being behind the buses had shielded him from the worst of the blast, finishing, "I he'ps de wounded till de ambulances gits dere. Now--" He spread his hands. His palms were scraped and bloody, too.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Jerry Dover hadn't put the two explosions together. Scipio did some more explaining.Dover 's mouth tightened. Now that Scipio had pointed it out to him, he saw it, too. He made a fist and banged it against the side of his leg. "Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch! That's . . . devilish, is what it is."

"Yes, suh," said Scipio, who would have had trouble coming up with a better word. "I don't know it's so, mind you, but I reckon dat what happen."

"I reckon you're right,"Dover said. "You're damn lucky that ambulance man sent you away. If he'd asked you to stay instead . . ."

"Lawd!" That hadn't occurred to Scipio. But his boss was right. If the man had asked him to stay, he would have, without hesitation. And then that bomb would have caught him, too.

Jerry Dover clapped him on the shoulder. "You sure you're all right to work? You want to go home, I won't say boo. Hell, I'll pay you for the day. You went through a lot of shit there."

"Dat right kind of you, Mistuh Dover." Scipio meant it. His boss was

actually treating him like a human being. The restaurant manager didn't have to do that. Few bosses with black workers bothered these days. Why should they, when the Freedom Party and the war gave them a license to be as nasty as they pleased? After a moment, Scipio went on, "All de same to you, though, I sooner stay here. I hopes they keeps me real busy, too. Busier I is, less I gots to think about what done happen."

"However you want. I ain't gonna argue with you,"Dover said. "But you better rustle up another pair of pants from somewhere. The ones you got on don't cut it."

"Somebody let me borrow a pair, I reckon," Scipio said.

The cook's trousers he got didn't really go with his jacket and shirt. But they were black. Anybody who saw the rest of the outfit would probably fill in what he expected to see. The pants didn't fit all that well, either. They would do for a shift. He had that other pair back home. Now he'd have to go out and buy one more. Jerry Dover didn't offer to cover that expense.

Customers talked about the bombing. A lot of them thought, as Scipio did, that it was foolish for Negroes to bomb their own kind. "I bet they're in the damnyankees' pay," one man said. "They're trying to disrupt our production."

"Wait till we catch them," said another white man, this one in a major's uniform. "We'll send them to--"

But he broke off, noticing Scipio within earshot.

What was he going to say? Did he know about the camps? Did he think Scipio didn't? Whatever it was, Scipio never found out, because the major did know how to keep his mouth shut.

None of the prosperous whites eating at the Huntsman's Lodge thought to ask Scipio if he'd been anywhere near the bomb when it went off. He looked all right now, so it didn't occur to them. No one here cared what he thought about it. He wasn't a person to these people, as he was to Jerry Dover. He was only a waiter, and a colored waiter at that. His opinions about the day's specials and the wine list might be worth hearing. Anything else? No.

That didn't surprise Scipio. Normally, he hardly even noticed it. Today, he did. After what he'd been through, didn't he deserve better? As far as the Confederate States were concerned, the answer was no.

All Irving Morrell wanted to do was put together enough barrels to let him counterattack the Confederates inOhio instead of defending all the time. If he could act instead of reacting . . . But he couldn't. He didn't know where all the barrels were going, but he had his dark suspicions: infantry commanders were probably snagging them as fast as they appeared, using them to bolster sagging regiments instead of going after the enemy. Why couldn't they see barrels were better used as a sword than as a shield?

Fed up, Morrell finally took a ride in a command car to see Brigadier General Dowling. The ride proved more exciting than he wanted it to be. A low-flying Confederate fighter strafed the motorcar. Morrell shot back with the pintle-mounted machine gun. The stream of tracers he sent at the fighter made the pilot pull up and zoom away. The fellow hadn't done much damage to the command car, but the flat tire from one of his bullets cost Morrell almost half an hour as he and the driver changed it.

"Good thing he didn't take out both front tires, sir," the driver said, tightening lug nuts. "We've only got the one spare, and a patch kit's kind of fighting out of its weight against a slug."

"Try not to attract any more Hound Dogs between here and General Dowling's headquarters, then,"

Morrell said.

"I'll do my best, sir," the driver promised.

Morrell got intoNorwalk,Ohio , just as the sun was setting.Norwalk was the last town of any size south ofSandusky andLake Erie . It had probably been pretty before the fighting started. Some of the houses still standing looked as if they dated back to before the War of Secession. With their porticoes and column-supported porches, they had an air of classical elegance.

Classical elegance had a tough time against bombs, though. A lot of houses probably as fine as any of the survivors were nothing but charred rubble. Here and there, people went through the wreckage, trying to salvage what they could. The sickly-sweet smell of decay warned that other people were part of the wreckage.

Dowling had his headquarters in one of those Classic Revival houses. He was shouting some thoroughly unclassical phrases into a field

telephone when Morrell came to see him: "What the hell do you mean you can't hold, Colonel? You have to hold, hold to the last man! And if you are the last man, grab a goddamn rifle and do something useful with it." He hung up and glared at Morrell. "What the devil do you want?"

"Barrels," Morrell answered. "As many as you can get your hands on. The Confederates are smashing us to pieces because they can always mass armor at the Schwerpunkt. I don't have enough to stop them when they concentrate."

"I'm giving you everything that's coming intoOhio ," Dowling said.

"If that's true, we're in worse trouble than I thought," Morrell said. "My guess was that infantry commanders were siphoning some of them off before I got my hands on them. If we're not making enough new ones . . ."

"Production isn't what it ought to be," Dowling said. "Confederate bombers don't have any trouble reachingPontiac ,Michigan , fromOhio , and they've hit the factories hard a couple of times. They're also plastering the railroad lines. And"--his jowly features twisted into a frown--"there are reports of sabotage on the lines, too: switches left open when they should be closed, bombs planted under the tracks, charming things like that."

Morrell used several variations on the theme Dowling had set on the telephone. The Confederates were doing everything they could with saboteurs this time around. That looked to be paying off, too. Anything that added to the disarray ofU.S. forces inOhio paid off for the CSA.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," Dowling said. "Believe me, I'm sorry. We're doing everything we can. Right now, it isn't enough."

"I've got an idea." Morrell snapped his fingers. He pointed at the fat general. "Once the barrels come off the line inMichigan , let 'em drive here. It'll cost us fuel, but fuel we've got. I'd like to see one of those Confederate bastards try to sabotage all the roads betweenPontiac and here, by Jesus."

Dowling scribbled a note to himself. He grunted when he finished. "There. I've written it down. I'd forget my own head these days if I didn't write down where I kept it. That's not a bad idea, actually. It'll tear up the roads--they aren't made for that kind of traffic--but--"

"Yes. But," Morrell said. "The damned Confederates can already plasterSandusky . But what they plaster, we can repair. If they break through again, if they reach the lake, they cut us in half. I saw this coming. That doesn't make me any happier now that it's here."

If the Confederates broke through toLake Erie , the War Department would probably put General Dowling out to pasture. Someone, after all, had to take the blame for failure. Morrell realized the War Department might put him out to pasture, too. That was the chance he took. They were asking him to make bricks without straw. They'd deliberately withheld the straw from him, withheld it for years. And now they could blame him for not having enough of it. Some people back inPhiladelphia would leap at the chance.

"Sorry I haven't got better news for you, Colonel," Dowling said.

"So am I," Morrell told him. "I think I've wasted my trip here. The way things are, we can't afford to waste anything."

Before Dowling could answer, the field telephone jangled again. Looking apprehensive, the general picked it up. "Dowling speaking--what now?" He listened for a few seconds. His face turned purple.

"What? You idiot, how did you let them get through? . . . What do you mean, they fooled you? . . . Oh, for Christ's sake! Well, you'd better try and stop them." He hung up, then glowered at Morrell.

"Goddamn Confederates got a couple of our damaged barrels running again and put them at the head of their column. Our men didn't challenge till too late, and now they're making us sorry."

"Damn!" Morrell said. At the same time, he filed away the ploy in the back of his mind. Whoever'd thought it up was one sneaky son of a bitch. Morrell would have loved to return the favor. But the Confederates were advancing. His side wasn't. The enemy had more access to knocked-outU.S. barrels then he did to C.S. machines. He saluted. "If you'll excuse me, sir, I'm going to get back to the front." As he left, General Dowling's field telephone rang once more.

Out in front of the house, Morrell's driver was smoking a cigarette, his hands cupped around it to hide the coal in the darkness. "Get what you wanted, sir?" he asked.

"No." Morrell shook his head. "The commanding general tells me it's unavailable. So we'll just have to do the best we can without it." He

climbed into the command car. "Take me back to our encampment.

Try not to run over anything on the way."

"Do my best, sir," the driver answered. Only the narrowest of slits let light escape from his headlamps.

He might as well have done without for all the good it did. But if he showed enough to light the road, he invited attack from the air. Blackout was a serious business on both sides of the border.

Off they went. They'd just leftNorwalk when Morrell heard bombers droning far overhead. The airplanes were coming up from the south and heading northwest. Morrell swore under his breath. If that didn't meanPontiac was about to get another pounding . . .

The driver almost took him straight into a Confederate position. They'd gone past there without any trouble on the way toNorwalk . Whatever Abner Dowling was yelling about on the field telephone must have happened in these parts. Morrell fired a few bursts from the machine gun at the Confederate pickets, who were at least as surprised to see him as he was to encounter them. They shot back wildly.

Tracers lit the night. Bouncing along little country roads, the driver made his getaway.

"You know where you're going?" Morrell asked after a while.

"Sure as hell hope so, sir," the driver answered, which could have inspired more confidence. He added,

"If those bastards have come farther than I thought, though, getting back to where we were at is liable to take some doing."

"If they've come that far, the barrels won't be where they were, either," Morrell pointed out. The driver thought that over, then nodded. He was going much too fast for the meager light the headlamps threw.

Morrell said not a word. Had he been behind the wheel, he would have driven the same way.

The next time they got challenged, Morrell couldn't tell what sort of accent the sentry had. The driver zoomed past before he could exchange recognition signals. A couple of shots followed. Neither hit. Then the driver rounded a corner he noticed barely in time.

"That was one of ours," Morrell said mildly.

"How do you know?" The driver paused. His brain started to work. "Oh--single shots. ASpringfield .

Yeah, I guess you're right." He paused again. "Wish to God I had one of those automatic rifles Featherston's fuckers carry. That's a hell of a nice piece."

"Wouldn't do you as much good as you think," Morrell said. "Caliber's different from ours, so we can't use our own ammo in it. That was smart." He scowled in the darkness. Too much of what the Confederates had done in this fast-moving war was smart.

If I were trying to whip a country twice the size of mine, what would I do? Morrell scowled again. Jake Featherston's blueprint looked alarmingly good. That remained true, even though in effective manpower theUSA 's lead was closer to three to one than two to one. If you got the Negroes doing production work, if you mechanized your farming so it used the fewest possible people, if you went straight for the throat . . . If you did all that stuff, why then, goddammit, you had a chance.

"Hold it right there, or you're fucking dead." That challenge came from a sandbagged machine-gun nest blocking the narrow road. Morrell set a hand on the driver's shoulder to make sure they did stop. He thought those wereU.S. forces behind the sandbags. He also doubted the command car could get away.

Cautiously, he exchanged password and countersign with the soldiers. They were as wary about him as he was about them. As usual, nobody wanted to say anything very loud. "Never can tell if those butternut bastards are listening," a sentry said. And he was right, too. But Morrell worried all the same. IfU.S.

soldiers spent more time thinking about the enemy than about what they were going to do next, didn't that give the Confederates an edge?

He got past the machine-gun nest. What should have been a half-hour ride to his own position outside the hamlet of Steuben ended up taking close to three hours. To his relief, he found the barrels still there.

The Confederate penetration farther east hadn't made them pull back--yet.

Sergeant Michael Pound handed him the roasted leg of what was probably an unofficial chicken. "Here you are, sir," the gunner said. "We figured you'd be back sooner or later. Any good news from the general?"

He assumed he had the right to know--a very American thing to do. And Morrell, after gnawing the meat off the drumstick and thigh, told him: "Not a bit of it. We get to go right on meeting what Patton's got with whatever we can scrape together."

"Happy day," Sergeant Pound said. "Hasn't it occurred to anybody back inPhiladelphia that that's a recipe for getting whipped?"

"It probably has, Sergeant," Morrell answered. "What they haven't figured out is what to do about it.

The Confederates have been serious about this business longer than we have, and we're paying the price."

Sergeant Pound nodded gloomily. "So we are, sir. Have they realized it's liable to be bigger than we can afford to pay?" Morrell only shrugged. The noncom could see that. Morrell could see it himself. He too wondered if the War Department had figured it out.

Clarence Potter was, if not a happy man, then at least a professionally satisfied one. Seeing that his profession kept him busy eighteen to twenty hours a day, seven days a week, satisfaction there went a long way toward simulating happiness.

Sabotage alongU.S. railroad lines wasn't easy to arrange. The lines were guarded, and the guards were getting thicker on the ground every day. Even so, he'd had his successes. And every railroad guard toting aSpringfield two hundred miles from the front was a man who wasn't aiming aSpringfield at Confederate soldiers in the field.

He wondered if he ought to sacrifice a saboteur, arrange for the Yankees to capture somebody and shoot or hang him. That might make theUnited States flabble about spies and hurt their war effort.

"Have to do it so the poor son of a bitch doesn't know we turned him in," Potter said musingly. The idea of getting rid of a man who'd worked for him didn't horrify him. He was coldblooded about such things.

But it would have to be done so that nobody suspected the tip had

come from Confederate Intelligence.

He'd have a hell of a time getting anyone to work for him if people knew he might sell them out when that looked like a profitable thing to do.

If you had scruples about such things, you didn't belong in Intelligence in the first place. Potter snorted and lit a cigarette. If he had any scruples left about anything, he wouldn't be here in the Confederate War Department working for Jake Featherston. But love of country came before anything else for him, even before his loathing of the Freedom Party. And so . . . here he was.

The young lieutenant who sat in the outer office and handled paperwork--the fellow's name was Terry Pendleton--had a security clearance almost as fancy as Potter's. He stuck his head into Potter's sanctum and said, "Sir, that gentleman is here to see you." Along with the clearance, he had an even more useful attribute: a working sense of discretion. Very often, in the business he and Potter were in, that was a fine faculty to exercise. This looked to be one of those times.

"Send him in." Potter took a last drag at the cigarette, then stubbed it out. The smoke would linger in his office, but he couldn't do anything about that. At least he wouldn't be open in his vice.

"That gentleman" came in. He was in his fifties: somewhere not too far from Potter's age. He was tall and skinny, and carried himself like a man who'd fought in the Great War. Potter was rarely wrong about that; he knew the signs too well. The gentleman wore a travel-wrinkled black suit, a white shirt, a dark fedora, and a somber blue tie. "Pleased to meet you, General Potter," he said, and held out his hand.

Potter took it. The newcomer's grip was callused and firm. "Pleased to meet you, too, ah. . . ." Potter's voice trailed away.

"Orson will do," the other man said. "It was enough of a name to get me across the border. It will be enough of a name to get me back. And if I need another one, I can be someone else--several someones, in fact. I have the papers to prove it, too."

"Good," Potter said, thinking it was good if the Yankees didn't search Orson too thoroughly, anyhow.

"You didn't have any trouble crossing intoTexas ?"

Orson smiled. "Oh, no. None at all. For one thing, the war's hardly going on in those parts. And, for another, you Easterners don't understand how many square miles and how few people there are in that part of the continent. There aren't enough border guards to keep an eye on everything--not even close."

"I see that. You're here, after all," Potter said.

"Yes. I'm here. Shall we find out how we can best use each other?" Orson, plainly, had had fine lessons in cynicism somewhere. He went on, "You people have no more use for us than theUnited States do. But the enemy of one's enemy is, or can be, a friend. And so . . ."

"Indeed. And so," Clarence Potter said. "IfUtah --excuse me, if Deseret--does gain its independence from theUnited States , you can rest assured that the Confederate States will never trouble it."

The Mormon smiled thinly. "A promise worth its weight in gold, I have no doubt. But, as it happens, I believe you, because no matter how the war goes theConfederateStates andDeseret are unlikely to share a border."

Not only a cynic but a realist. Potter's smile showed genuine good nature. "I do believe I'm going to enjoy doing business with you, Mr. . . . uh, Orson."

"That's nice," Orson said. "Now, what kind of business can we do? How much help can you give a rising?"

"Not a lot, not directly. You have to know that. You can read a map--and you've traveled over the ground, too. But when it comes to railroads and highways--well, we may be able to do more than you think."

"Maybe's a word that makes a lot of people sorry later," Orson observed.

"Well, sir, if you'd rather, I'll promise you the moon," Potter said. "I won't be able to deliver, but I'll promise if you want."

"Thanks, but no thanks," Orson said. "Maybe isn't much, but it's better than a lie."

"We're going in the same direction--or rather, we both want to push theUSA in the same direction,"

Potter said. "It's in the Confederacy's interest to give you a hand--and it's in your interest to work with us, too, because where else are you going to find yourselves any friends?"

"General, we've been over that. We aren't going to find any friends anywhere, and that includes you,"

Orson answered calmly. "Do you think I don't know that the Confederacy persecutes us, too? We've also been over that. But it's all right. We're not particularly looking for friends. All we want is to be left alone."

"Well, Jeff Davis said the same thing when the Confederate States seceded," Potter answered. "We have a few things in common, I'd say. And you haven't got any more use for niggers than we do, have you?"

"Depends on what you mean," Orson said. "We don't really want to have anything to do with them. But I don't think we'd ever do some of the things you people are doing, either. I don't know how much of what I hear is true, but. . . ."

Clarence Potter had a pretty good idea of how much of rumor was true. Here, he didn't altogether disapprove of what the Freedom Party was up to. He hadn't trusted the Negroes in the CSA since 1915.

He said, "You can afford to take that line, sir, because you can count the niggers inUtah on your thumbs, near enough. Here in the CSA, they're about one in three. We have to think about them more than you do."

"I don't believe, if our positions were reversed, that we would do what you are doing, or what I hear you're doing," Orson replied.

Easy enough for you to say. But the words didn't cross Potter's lips. That wasn't for fear of insulting Orson. He could afford to insult him if he wanted to. The Mormon was a beggar, and couldn't be a chooser. On reflection, though, Potter decided he believed Orson. His people had always shown a peculiar, stiff-necked pride.

Instead, the Confederate Intelligence officer said, "And how are the Indians who used to live inUtah ?

Will you invite them to join your brave new land?"

Orson turned red. Potter wasn't surprised. The Mormons had got on with the local Indians no better than anyone else in theUnited States

did. TheUSA might have a better record dealing with Negroes. The CSA did when it came to Indians.

"What do you want from us?" Potter asked again, letting the Mormon down easy. "Whatever it is, if we've got it, you'll have it."

"Grenades, machine guns--and artillery, if you can find a way to get it to us," Orson answered. "But the first two especially. Rifles we've got. We've had rifles for a long time."

"We can get the weapons over the border for you. If you got in, we can get them out," Potter promised.

"It's just a matter of setting up exactly where and when. How you get them to where you use them after that is your business."

"I understand." Orson snapped his fingers. "Oh--one other thing. Land mines. Heavy land mines. They're going to throw barrels at us. They didn't have those the last time around. We'll need something to make them say uncle."

"Heavy land mines." Potter scribbled a note to himself. "Yes, that makes sense. How are you fixed for gas masks?"

"Pretty well, but we could probably use more," Orson answered. "We didn't have to worry much about gas the last time around, either."

"All right." Potter nodded. "One more question, then. This one isn't about weapons. What will Governor Young do whenUtah rises? What will you do about him if he tries to clamp down on the rising?" That was two questions, actually, but they went together like two adjoining pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Orson said, "There are some people who still think we can get along with theUSA . We'll take care of them when the time comes. We have a list." He spoke without anger but with grim certainty. He didn't name Heber Young--one of Brigham's numerous grandsons. On the other hand, he didn't say the governor wasn't on the list, either.

"That's good," Clarence Potter said. "I was hoping you might."

The Mormon--nationalist? patriot? zealot? what was the right word?--eyed him with no great liking.

"Occurs to me, General, that it's just as well we won't share a border

no matter how things turn out.

You'd be just as much trouble as theUnited States are."

"You may be right," Potter said, thinking Orson certainly was. "But what does that have to do with the price of beer?"

Beer. Orson's lips silently shaped the word. Potter wondered how badly he'd just blundered. The man in the somber suit undoubtedly didn't drink. But Orson could be practical. After a small pause, he nodded.

"Point taken, sir. Right now, it doesn't have anything to do with anything."

"We agree on that. If we don't agree on other things--well, so what?" Potter said. "I'm going to take you to my colleagues in Logistics. They'll arrange to get you what you need when you need it." He got to his feet.

So did Orson. He held out his hand. "Thank you for your help. I realize you have your own selfish reasons for giving it, but thank you. Regardless of what you're doing here in the CSA, you really are helping freedom inDeseret ."

I love you, too, Potter thought. Whatever his opinion of Orson's candor, it didn't show on his face. But as they walked to the door, he couldn't help asking, "Would the, um, gentiles in your state agree with you?"

Orson stopped. His face didn't show much, either. But his pale eyes blazed. "If they'd cared what happened to us for the past sixty years, maybe I would worry more about what happens to them. As things are, General . . . As things are, what do they have to do with the price of beer right now?"

"Touché," Potter murmured. He took the Mormon down the hall to Logistics. People gave the obvious civilian curious looks. He didn't seem to belong there. But he was keeping company with a brigadier general, so no one said anything. And, even if he didn't belong in the War Department, he had the look of a man of war.

Logistics didn't receive Orson with glad cries. Potter hadn't expected them to. They parted with ordnance as if they made it themselves right there in the War Department offices. But they'd known the

Mormon was coming. And they knew one other thing: they knew Jake Featherston wanted them to do what they could for Orson. In the Confederate States these days, nothing counted for more than that.

George Enos, Jr., found himself facing the same dilemma as his father had a generation earlier. He didn't want to join the U.S. Navy. He would much rather have stayed a fisherman. If he tried, though, his chances of being conscripted into the Army ranged from excellent to as near certain as made no difference. He relished the infantry even less than the Navy.

"I'd better do it," he told his wife on a morning when the war news was particularly bad--not that it had ever been good, not since the very start of things.

Connie began to cry. "You're liable to get killed!" she said.

"I know," he replied. "But what's liable to happen to me if they stick a rifle in my hands and send me off toOhio ? Where are my chances better? And it's not safe just putting to sea these days." He remembered too well the gruesome strafing the British fighter had given the Sweet Sue.

"Why don't you just get a job in a war plant here inBoston and come home to me every night?" Connie demanded.

They'd been over that one before--over it and over it and over it again. George gave the best answer he could: "Because I'd start going nuts, that's why. The ocean's in me, same as it is with your old man."

She winced. Her father had been a fisherman forever. As long as he could keep going out, he would.

She and George both knew it. She said, "That's not fair. It's not fair to me, it's not fair to the boys. . . ."

But she didn't say it wasn't true. She couldn't, and she knew it.

"I'm sorry, hon. I wish I was different," George said. "But I'm not. And so . . ."

And so the first thing he did the next morning was visit the Navy recruiting station not far from T Wharf.

It was in one of the toughest parts ofBoston , surrounded by cheap saloons, pawnshops, and houses where the girls stripped at second-story windows and leaned out hollering invitations to the men passing by below and abuse when they got ignored. George wouldn't have minded stripping himself; the day was breathlessly hot and muggy.

Even walking made sweat stream off him.

A fat, gray-haired petty officer sat behind a sheet-steel desk filling out forms. He finished what he was doing before deigning to look at--look through--George. "Why shouldn't I just be shipping your ass on over to the Army where you belong?" he asked in a musical brogue cold enough to counteract the weather.

"I've been going to sea for more than ten years," George answered, "and my father was killed aboard the USS Ericsson at--after--the end of the last war."

The petty officer's bushy, tangled eyebrows leaped toward his hairline. He pointed a nicotine-stained forefinger at George. "We can check that, you know," he rumbled. "And if you're after lying to me for sympathy's sake, you'll go to the Army, all right, and you'll go with a full set of lumps."

"Check all you please," George said. "Half the people inBoston know my story." He gave his name, adding, "My mother's the one who shot Roger Kimball."

"Son of a bitch," the petty officer said. "They should have pinned a medal on her. All right, Enos. That's the best one I've heard since the goddamn war started, so help me Hannah." He pulled open a desk drawer. It squeaked; it needed oiling, or maybe grinding down to bright metal. "I've got about five thousand pounds of forms for you to be filling out, but you'll get what you want if you pass the physical."

One of those eyebrows rose again. "Maybe even if you don't, by Jesus. If you come from that family, the whole country owes you one."

"I can do the job," George said. "That's the only thing that ought to matter. I never would have said a word about the other stuff if you hadn't asked me the way you did."

"You've got pull," the petty officer said. "You'd be a damn fool if you didn't use it." He pointed again, this time towards a rickety table against the far wall. "Go on over there and fill these out. To hell with me if we won't have the doctors look you over this afternoon. You can say your good-byes tonight and head off for training first thing tomorrow mornin'."

He sent three men away while George worked on the forms. Two went quietly. The third presumed to object. "I'll go to another station--you see if I don't," he spluttered. "I was born to be a sailor."

"You were born to go to jail," the petty officer retorted. "Think I don't know an ex-con when I see one?"

The man turned white--that shot struck home like a fourteen-inch shell from a battleship. The petty officer went on, "Go on, be off with you. Maybe you can fool some damn dumb Army recruiting sergeant, but the Navy's got men with eyes in their heads. You'd be just right for the Army--looks like all you're good for is running away."

"What's he got that I haven't?" The man pointed at George.

"A clean record, for one, like I say," the petty officer answered. "And a mother with more balls than you and your old man put together, for another." He jerked a thumb toward the door. "Get out, or I'll pitch you through the window."

The man left. Maybe he would have made a good Navy sailor and maybe he wouldn't. George wouldn't have wanted to put to sea with him in a fishing boat. A quarrelsome man in cramped quarters was nothing but a nuisance. And if this, that, and the other thing started walking with Jesus . . . George shook his head. No, that was no kind of shipmate to have.

He finished the paperwork and thumped the forms down on the petty officer's desk. The man didn't even look at them. He picked up his telephone, spoke into it, and hung up after a minute or two. "Go on over to Doc Freedman's. He'll give you the physical. Here's the address." He wrote it on a scrap of paper. "You bring his report back to me. Unless you've got a glass eye and a peg leg you haven't told me about, we'll go on from there."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," George said.

The petty officer laughed. "You've still got some learning to do, and that's the God's truth. You don't call me sir. You call me Chief. Save sir for officers."

"Yes--" George caught himself. "Uh, right, Chief."

"That's the way you do it." The older man nodded. "Go on. Get the hell out of here."

George left. The doctor's office wasn't far. The receptionist, a sour old biddy, sent the new arrival a disapproving look. "You are unscheduled, Mr. Enos," she said, as if he had a social disease. But she sent him on in to see the sawbones.

Dr. Freedman was a short, swarthy Jew with a pinkie ring. He looked as if he made his money doing abortions for whores, and maybe selling drugs on the side. His hands were as cold and almost as moist as a cod just out of theAtlantic . But he seemed to know what he was doing. He checked George's ears, looked in his mouth and ears and nose, listened to his chest, took his blood pressure, and stuck a needle in his arm for a blood sample. Then he put on a rubber glove and said, "Bend over." Apprehensively, George obeyed. That was even less fun than he thought it would be. So was getting grabbed in intimate places--much less gently than Connie would have done--and being told to cough.

After half an hour's work, the doctor scrawled notes on an official Navy form. "Well?" George asked as he got back into his clothes. "How am I?"

"Except for being a damn fool for wanting to do this in the first place, you're healthy as a horse,"

Freedman answered. "But if they disqualified every damn fool in the Navy, they'd have twenty-seven men left, and how would they win the war then?"

George blinked. He didn't think he'd ever run into such breathtaking cynicism before. He asked, "You think going into the Army is better?"

The doctor laughed, a singularly unpleasant sound. "Not me. Do I look that stupid? I'd get a job where they weren't going to conscript me and sit this one out. Wasn't the last one bad enough?"

Connie had said much the same thing. George hadn't wanted to hear it from her. He really didn't want to hear it from a big-nosed Hebe with all the charm of a hagfish. "Don't you care about your country?" he asked.

"Just as much as it cares for me," Freedman said. "It takes my money and throws it down ratholes. It tells me all the things I can't do, and none of the things I can. So why should I get all hot and bothered?"

"Because the Confederates are worse?" George suggested.

Freedman only shrugged. "What if they are? This isBoston , for God's sake. We could lose the next three wars to those bastards, and you'd still never see one within a hundred miles of here."

"What if everybody felt the way you do?" George said in something

approaching real horror.

"Then nobody would fight with anybody, and we'd all be better off," Freedman replied. "But don't worry about that, because it isn't going to happen. Most people are just as patriotic"--by the way he said it, he plainly meant just as stupid--"as you are." He scratched his name at the bottom of the form. "Take this back to the recruiting station. It'll get you what you want. As for me, I just made three dollars and fifty cents--before taxes."

Slightly dazed, George carried the form back to the petty officer. He had to wait; the man was dealing with another would-be recruit. At last, he set the form on the petty officer's desk, remarking, "The doc's a piece of work, isn't he?"

"Freedman? He is that." The petty officer laughed. "He thinks everybody but him is the world's biggest jerk. Don't take him serious. If he was half as smart as he thinks he is, he'd be twice as smart as he really is, you know what I mean?"

George needed a couple of seconds to figure that out. When he did, he nodded in relief. "Yeah."

"All right, then. It won't be tomorrow after all--I was forgetting they'd need a few days to run your Wasserman. Report back here in a week. If the test is good, you're in. If it's not, you're likely in anyway.

In the meantime, get lost. Don't put to sea, though. If you're not back here in a week now, we have to notice, and you won't like it if we do."

"A week." It felt like an anticlimax to George. "My wife'll want me out of her hair by the time I have to come back here. And she'll be nagging me all the time while I'm there. Why'd I go and do this? I can hear it already in my head."

The petty officer only shrugged. "You just volunteered, Enos. Nobody was after holding a gun to your head or anything like that. This is part of what you volunteered for. You don't like it, you should have joined the Army. The way things are these days, they sure as hell wouldn't give a damn about your Wasserman. You're breathing, they'll take you."

"No, thanks," George said hastily. The petty officer's laugh was loud and raucous.

When George went back to his apartment, he found Connie red-eyed, her face streaked with tears. She shouted at him. He gave back soft answers. It didn't do him any good. Now that he had volunteered and couldn't take it back, she was going to get everything she could out of her system. She didn't quite throw a flowerpot at him, but she came close.

Despite that, they spent more of the following week in bed than they had since their briefNiagara Falls honeymoon. George was used to going without on fishing runs. But how long would it be this time before he saw Connie again? He tried to make up in advance for time to be lost in the future. It wouldn't work.

He could sense that even as he tried. But he did it anyway--why not?

He reported back to the Navy recruiting station on the appointed day. The petty officer greeted him with, "You live clean." From then on, he belonged to the Navy.

IX

Chester Martin sat with Rita and Carl in the dark of aLos Angeles movie theater, waiting for the night's feature to come on. The war hadn't laid a glove onCalifornia . No Confederate bombers had flown this far fromTexas orSonora . No Confederate or Japanese ships had appeared off the West Coast. If you wanted to, you could just go on about your business and pretend things weren't going to hell in a handbasket back East.

People all around crunched popcorn and slurped sodas. The Martins were crunching and slurping, too.

That was what you did when you came to one of these places. Somebody behind them bit down on a jawbreaker. It sounded as if he were chewing a bunch of rocks.

The newsreel came on after the cartoon. Carl enjoyed it. He liked watching things blow up, and wasn't fussy about whose things they were. ButChester and Rita got very quiet. WatchingOhio torn to pieces hurt them all the more because they'd lived most of their lives there. Rita reached out and squeezedChester 's hand when the newsreel showed bomb damage inToledo .

They didn't cheer up much at seeing the wreckage of Confederate bombers, either. "We are fighting back," the announcer declared.

"Every day, the vicious enemy has a harder time going forward. We will stop him, and we will beat him back."

Was he whistling in the dark? It sure seemed that way toChester . So far,U.S. forces had done nothing but retreat. Could they do anything else? If they could, when? When would it be too late? What would happen if the Confederates cut theUnited States in half? The resolutely cheerful announcer not only didn't answer any of those questions, he didn't acknowledge that they existed.

Then the newsreel camera cut away to somewhere behind the lines, as the card at the head of the feature declared. Soldiers sat on the ground watching four men with long beards cavort on a makeshift stage with a pathetically dignified woman. "The Engels Brothers entertain the troops," the announcer said. "Their mad hijinks help our brave men forget the dangers of battle."

Sure enough, the soldiers were laughing.Chester remained dubious. He'd laughed, too, when he escaped from the trenches for a little while. But he'd never forgotten the dangers. How could he? He still woke up screaming every so often, though now it was once every two or three years, not once every two or three weeks.

After the Engels Brothers left the stage, bathing beauties paraded across it. The soldiers liked them even better, even if they could only look and not touch. The girls were wearing much less than they would have in a Great War entertainment.Chester approved of that. He was sure the young soldiers enjoyed it even more.

Al Smith appeared on the screen. Some people in the theater cheered the President. Others booed. By Smith's ravaged face, he was hearing those boos--and the roar of the guns--even in his sleep. He looked out at the audience he would never see in the flesh. "Our cause is just," he insisted, as if someone had denied it. "We will prevail. No matter how fierce and vicious our enemy may be, he will only destroy himself with his wickedness. Stand together, stand shoulder to shoulder, and nothing can hold you back."

That sounded good.Chester wondered if it was true. So far, the evidence looked to be against it. But then the newsreel cut from President Smith to the Stars and Stripes flying in front of a summer sky. "The Star-Spangled Banner" swelled on the soundtrack. People sang along in the theater. For a couple of minutes, Socialists, Democrats, and the handful of remaining Republicans did stand shoulder to shoulder.

The film started. It was a story of intrigue set inKentucky between the wars. All the villains had Confederate drawls. The hero and heroine sounded as if they came fromNew York andBoston , respectively. They foiled the villains' plot to touch off a rebellion and fell in love, both at the same time.

"Kentuckywill be ours forever," he said, gazing into her eyes.

"Kentuckywill be free forever," she replied, gazing into his. They kissed. The music went up. The credits rolled. The film had to have been made in a tearing hurry--certainly since the plebiscite early in the year.

Did it help? Or did it only make people feel worse by reminding them thatKentucky was lost?

"Is there another picture after this one?" Carl asked.

"The cartoons and the newsreel and the movie weren't enough for you?"Chester asked.

Carl shook his head. "Nope." But he betrayed himself by yawning.

"Well, it doesn't matter, because there isn't another picture," Rita said. "And you're up way past your bedtime."

"Am not," Carl said around another yawn.

Since there wasn't another picture, though, arguments for staying out later had no visible means of support. They walked back to the apartment where they'd lived since moving fromToledo . It was only a few blocks, but they had to go slowly and carefully through the blacked-out streets. Cars honked to warn other cars they were there as they came to intersections. That no doubt cut down on accidents, but it didn't do much for people who were trying to get to sleep.

ToChester 's relief, Carl went to bed without much fuss.Chester knew he wouldn't sleep well himself, and the honks out in the street had nothing to do with anything. "Things are lousy back East," he said heavily.

"Looks that way," Rita agreed. "Doesn't sound like they're telling everything that's going on, either."

"Oh, good,"Chester said, and his wife looked at him in surprise. He

explained: "I didn't want to think I was the only one who was thinking something like that."

"Well, you're not," his wife said. "We've both been through this before. If we can't see past most of the pap, we're not very smart, are we?"

"I guess not,"Chester said unhappily. He lit a cigarette. The tobacco was already going downhill. The Confederate States grew more and better than theUnited States . He hoped losing foreign exchange would hurt them. Blowing a moody cloud of smoke toward the ceiling, he went on, "Got to do something about it."

"Who's got to do something about what?" Rita's voice was sharp with fear. She'd been married once before. Her first husband hadn't come home from the Great War. Had he talked like this before joining the Army?Chester wouldn't have been surprised. Everybody'd been openly patriotic in 1914. Machine guns hadn't yet proved heroism more expensive than it was often worth.

Chestersucked in more smoke. It didn't calm him as much as he wished it would. He said, "Doesn't hardly feel right, being out here all this way away from the fighting."

"Why not? Isn't one Purple Heart enough for you?"

He remembered the wound, of course. How not, when he would take its mark to the grave with him?

He remembered hitting a man in butternut in the face with an entrenching tool, and feeling bone give beneath the iron blade. He remembered cowering in trenches as shells came down all around him. He remembered his balls crawling up into his belly in terror as he went forward in the face of machine-gun fire. He remembered poison gas. He remembered lice and flies and the endless stench of death.

But, toward the end, he also remembered the feeling that everything he'd gone through was somehow worthwhile. That wasn't just his looking back from almost a quarter of a century's distance; he'd felt it in 1917. Only one thing explained it--victory. He and so many like him had suffered so much, but they'd suffered for a reason: so theUSA could get out from under the CSA's thumb.

That was why the plebiscites inKentucky andHouston had disturbed him so much. They returned to the Confederates for nothing what

theUnited States had spent so much blood to win. What was the point of everything he and so many millions like him had gone through if it was thrown away now?

Slowly, he said, "If they lick us inOhio , they'll turn the clock back to the way it was before 1914."

"So what?" Rita said. "So what,Chester ? What difference will that make to you? You'll still be right here where you've been for years. You'll be doing the same things you've done. Your hair is going gray now.

You're not a kid any more. You've given the country everything it could want from you. Enough is enough."

Every word of that made good, solid sense. But how much sense did good, solid sense make when the United States were in trouble? "I don't feel right standing on the sidelines and watching things go down the drain," he said.

"And how much difference do you think you're going to make if you do put the uniform back on?" his wife demanded. "You're not General Custer, you know. The most they'd do is give you your sergeant's stripes back. How many thousands of sergeants are there? Why would you be better than any of the others?"

"I wouldn't,"Chester admitted. "But the Army needs sergeants as much as it needs generals. It needs more of them, but it can't get along without them." He thought the Army could get along without lieutenants much more easily than it could without sergeants. Lieutenants, no doubt, would disagree with him--but what the hell did lieutenants know? If they knew anything, they wouldn't have been lieutenants.

Rita glared at him. "You're going to do this, aren't you? Sooner or later, you are. I can see it in your face. You're going to put the uniform back on, and you'll be all proud of yourself, and you won't care two cents' worth what happens to Carl and me after you . . . after you get shot." She burst into tears.

Chestercouldn't even say he wouldn't get shot. He'd been a young man during the Great War, young enough to be confident nothing could kill him. Where had that confidence gone? He didn't own it any more. He knew he could die. He'd known it even in brawls with union-busting Pinkertons. If he went back to where they were throwing lead around with reckless abandon . . . Well, anything could happen.

He understood that.

He started to tell Rita something reassuring, but gave it up with the words unspoken. He couldn't be reassuring, not knowing what he knew, understanding what he understood. All he could do was change the subject. He got up and turned on the wireless. A little music might help calm Rita down--and it would make him feel better, too.

He had to wait for the tubes to warm up. Once they did, it wasn't music that came out of the speaker, but an announcer's excited voice: "--tial law has been declared inUtah ," the man said. "At present, it is not clear how much support the insurrection commands. There are reports of fighting fromOgden down toProvo . Governor Young has appealed for calm and restraint on all sides. Whether anyone will listen to him may be a different question. Further bulletins as they break."

"Oh, Jesus Christ!"Chester exclaimed, and turned off the wireless with a vicious click. The Mormons had caused theUSA endless grief by rising in the last war. If they were trying it again, they might do even more harm this time.

"I wish you hadn't heard that," Rita said in a low voice.

"Why? Are you afraid I'll run right out to the nearest recruiting station?"

Chesterhad intended that for sarcasm, but his wife nodded. "Yes! That's exactly what I'm afraid of," she said. "Every time you go out the door, I'm afraid I'll never see you again. You've got that look in your eye. Ed had it, too, before he joined the Army." She didn't mention her first husband very often, and hardly ever by name. More than anything else, that toldChester how worried she was.

He said, "I'm not going anywhere right now." He'd hoped to make her feel better. The fright on her face told him that right now had only made things worse. He started to say everything would be fine and he'd stay where he was. He kept quiet instead, though, for he realized he might be lying.

Summer lay heavy on Baroyeca. The sun was a white-hot blaze in the blue dome of the sky. Vultures circled overhead, riding the invisible streams of hot air that shot up from the ground. Every so often, when a deer or a mule fell over dead, the big black birds would spiral down,

down, down and feast. And if a man fell over dead under that savage sun, the vultures wouldn't complain about turning his carcass into bones, either.

Hipolito Rodriguez worked in his fields regardless of the weather. Who would do it for him if he didn't?

No one, and he knew it. But he always wore a sombrero to shield his head from the worst of the sun.

And he worked at a pace a man who forgot the weather might have called lazy. If he cocked his head skyward, he could see the vultures. He didn't want them picking his bones.

When the weather was less brutal, he worried about meeting snakes in the middle of the day. Not now.

They might come out in the early morning or late afternoon, but they stayed in their holes in the ground the rest of the time. They knew they would die if they crawled very far along the baking ground. Even the scorpions and centipedes were less trouble than usual.

Rodriguez had one advantage the animals didn't. It was an edge he hadn't had for very long. He sometimes had to remind himself to use it. When he felt worst, he could go back to the house, open the refrigerator, and pour himself a big glass of cold, cold water. The luxury of that seemed more precious than rubies to him. He wouldn't drink the water right away. Instead, he would press the chilly, sweating glass against his cheek, savoring its icy feel. And when he did drink, it was as if the water exorcised the demons of heat and thirst at the very first swallow.

He made sure he filled the pitcher up again, too. He could go out to the fields again, come back in a couple of hours, and find more deliciously chilly water waiting for him. It wasn't heaven--if it were heaven, he wouldn't have had to go out to the fields in the first place. But the refrigerator made life on earth much more bearable.

Magdalenaenjoyed the cold water no less than he did. Once they both paused for a drink at the same time. "Is it true," she asked him, "that in parts of los Estados Confederados they have machines that can make the air cold the same way as the refrigerator makes water cold?"

"I think it is," Rodriguez answered cautiously. "I think that's what they call air conditioning. Even in the rich parts of the country, they don't have it everywhere, or even very many places."

"I wish we had it here," his wife said.

He tried to imagine it: going from the back oven of a summer to winter just by opening and closing a door. It was supposed to be true, but he had trouble believing it. He said, "Electricity is one thing. This air conditioning is something else. It's very fancy and very expensive, or so they say."

"I can still wish,"Magdalena said. "I wished for electricity for years before we got it. I wished and I wished, and here it is. Maybe if I do enough wishing, we will have this air conditioning, too, one of these years. Or if we don't, maybe our children will. With all the changes we've seen, you never can tell."

"You never can tell," Rodriguez agreed gravely. "As for me, what I wish for is an automobile."

"An automobile," his wife breathed. She might have been speaking of something as distant and unlikely as air conditioning. But then her eyes narrowed. "Do you know, Hipolito, we could almost buy one if we wanted to badly enough."

"Yes, that occurred to me, too," he answered. The motorcar they could get for what they could afford to spend wouldn't be anything fancy: a beat-up old Ford or some Confederate make of similar vintage. But even a beat-up old auto offered freedom of a sort nothing else could match. Rodriguez went on, "The only times I was ever out of the valley were to fight in the last war and to go toHermosillo to help get President Featherston a second term. It's not enough."

In a small voice, Magdalena Rodriguez said, "I've never been outside this valley at all. I never really thought about what was going on anywhere else till we got the wireless set. But now . . . If I can hear about the world outside, why can't I see it?"

For years, even trains had stopped coming to Baroyeca. They were back again, now that the silver (and, perhaps not so incidentally, lead) mines in the hills above the little town had reopened. But traveling by train was different from hopping into an auto and just going. Trains stuck to schedules, and they stuck to the rails. In a motorcar, you could go where and when you wanted to go, do whatever you wanted to do.

. . .

You could--if they let you. Rodriguez said, "I think this would be

something for after the war. We might buy a motorcar now, sí. But whether we could buy any gasoline for it is a different question."

Rationing hadn't meant much to him. It still didn't, not really. He'd even stopped worrying about kerosene. With electricity in the house, the old lamps were all packed up and stored in the barn. But gasoline, these days, was for machines that killed people, not for those that made life easier and more pleasant.

"If we had an automobile to go with electricity . . . Ten years ago, only the patrones had such things, and not all of them,"Magdalena said.

"That was before the Freedom Party took over," Rodriguez answered. "Now ordinary people can have the good things, too. But even if I had a motorcar, I wouldn't be a patrón. I would never want to do that.

To be a patrón, you have to like telling others what to do. That has never been for me."

"No, of course not."Magdalena 's voice had a certain edge to it. She might have been warning that if he thought he could tell her what to do, he had better think again.

Since he didn't have an automobile, he walked into Baroyeca for the next Freedom Party meeting. He would have grumbled if he'd had to walk because his motorcar was in the garage. Because he'd never done anything but walk, he didn't grumble at all. He took the journey for granted.

A drunken miner staggered out of La Culebra Verde as Rodriguez came up the street toward Freedom Party headquarters. The man gave him a vacant grin, then sat down hard in the middle of the dirt road.

Rodriguez wondered how many drunks had come out of the cantina and done the exact same thing. He'd done it himself, but no more than once or twice. Miners drank harder than farmers did. They might have worked harder than farmers did, too. Rodriguez couldn't think of anyone else for whom that might be true. But to go down underground all day, never to see the sun or feel the breeze from one end of your shift to the other . . . That was no way for a man to live.

He walked past Diaz's general store. A storekeeper, now, had it easy. If Diaz wasn't sitting in the lap of luxury, who in Baroyeca was? Nobody, not that Rodriguez could see. And yet Jaime Diaz complained about the way things went almost as if he tilled the soil. He wasn't too proud

to act like anybody else.

"Good evening, Señor Rodriguez," Robert Quinn said in Spanish when the farmer came into the headquarters. "Good to see you."

"Gracias, señor. The same to you," Rodriguez answered gravely. He nodded to Carlos Ruiz and some of his other friends as he sat down on a second-row folding chair. The first row of chairs, as usual, was almost empty. Not many men were bold enough to call attention to themselves by sitting up front.

Freedom Party headquarters filled up with men from Baroyeca and peasants from the surrounding countryside. Some of them had walked much farther to come to town than Rodriguez had. "Freedom!"

they would say as they came in and sat down--or, more often, "¡Libertad!"

Quinn waited till almost everyone he expected was there. Then, still in Spanish, he said, "Well, my friends, let's get on with it." When no one objected, he continued, "This meeting of the Freedom Party, Baroyeca chapter, is now in session."

He went through the minutes and old business in a hurry. Hipolito Rodriguez yawned a little anyhow. He hadn't joined the Freedom Party for the sake of its parliamentary procedure. He'd become a member because Jake Featherston promised to do things--and kept his promises.

As quickly as Quinn could, he turned to new business. "I know we'll all pray for Eduardo Molina," he said. "He can't be here tonight--he just got word his son, Ricardo, has been wounded inOhio . I am very sorry, but I hear it may be a serious wound. I am going to pass the hat for the Molinas. Please be generous."

When the hat came to him, Rodriguez put in half a dollar. He crossed himself as he passed it along. He could have got bad news about Pedro as easily as Eduardo Molina had about Ricardo. What happened in war was largely a matter of luck. So many bullets flew. Every so often, one of them was bound to find soft, young flesh.

A man at the back of the room brought the hat up to Robert Quinn. It jingled as the Freedom Party organizer set it down beside him. "Gracias," he said. "Thank you all. I know this is something you would rather not have to do. I know it is something some of you have trouble affording. Times are not as hard as they were ten years ago, before we

came to power, but they are still not easy. But all of you understand--but for the grace of God, we could have been taking up a collection for your family."

Rodriguez started. Then he nodded. It really wasn't that surprising to have Señor Quinn understand what was in his mind. Quinn knew how many men here had sons or brothers in the Army, and what could happen to those men.

"On to happier news," the Freedom Party man said. "Our guns are now poundingSandusky,Ohio . Let me show you on the map whereSandusky is." He walked over to a campaign map pinned to the wall of Freedom Party headquarters. When he pointed to the city on theshoreofLake Erie , a low murmur ran through the men who crowded the room. Quinn nodded. "Sí, señores, es verdad--we have cut all the way throughOhio and reached the water. Soon our men and machines will be on the lake. TheUnited States cannot send anything through the middle of their country. It is cut in half. And do you know what this means?"

"It means victory!" Carlos Ruiz exclaimed.

Quinn nodded. "That is just what it means. If los Estados Unidos cannot send the raw materials from the West to the factories in the East, how are they going to make what they need to go on fighting?" He beamed. "The answer is simple--they cannot. And if they cannot make what they need, they cannot go on with the fight."

Could it be as simple as that? It certainly seemed to make good sense. Rodriguez hoped it did. A short, victorious war . . . The North American continent hadn't seen one like that for sixty years. Maybe this wouldn't be a fight to the finish, the way the Great War had been. He could hope not, anyhow.

"War news elsewhere is mostly good," Quinn said. "There is no moreU.S. resistance in theBahamas .

Some raiding does go on, but it is by black guerrillas. The mallates may be a nuisance, but they will not keep los Estados Confederados from occupying these important islands."

As far as Rodriguez was concerned, mallates were always a nuisance--a deadly nuisance. He'd got his baptism of fire against black rebels inGeorgia . That fight had been worse than any againstU.S. troops.

The blacks had known they couldn't surrender, and fought to the end.

Well, the Freedom Party was putting them in their place in the CSA. And if it was doing the same thing in theBahamas , too . . . good.

"Sandusky." Jake Featherston spoke the ugly name as if it belonged to the woman he loved. When the thrust up intoOhio began, he hadn't known where the Confederates would reach Lake Erie--whether atToledo orSandusky or evenCleveland . From the beginning, that had depended as much on what the damnyankees did and how they fought back as on his own forces.

"Sandusky." He said it again, eyeing the map on the wall of his office as avidly as if it were the woman he loved slipping out of a negligee. Where Confederate troops reachedLake Erie didn't matter so much.

That they reached it . . . That they reached it mattered immensely. He'd seen as much before the fighting started. The United States were only starting to realize it now.

"Sandusky." Featherston said it one more time. Getting toSandusky --or anywhere else along the shores ofLake Erie --didn't mean victory. He had a hell of a lot of work to do yet. But if his barrels had been stopped in front ofColumbus , that would have meant defeat. He'd done what he had to do in the opening weeks of his war: he'd made victory possible, perhaps even likely.

Lulu knocked on the door. Without waiting for his reply, she stuck her head in the office and said,

"Professor FitzBelmont is here to see you, Mr. President."

"Send him in," Jake said resignedly, wondering why he'd given the man an appointment in the first place.

"I promised him, what--ten minutes?"

"Fifteen, Mr. President." Lulu spoke in mild reproof, as if Featherston should have remembered. And so he should have, and so he had--but he'd done his best to get out of what he'd already agreed to. Lulu was better at holding him to the straight and narrow path than Al Smith dreamt of being. She ducked out, then returned with a formal announcement: "Mr. President, here is Professor Henderson V. FitzBelmont ofWashingtonUniversity ."

Henderson V. FitzBelmont looked like a professor. He wore rumpled

tweeds and gold-framed eyeglasses. He had a long, horsey face and a shock of gray hair that resisted both oil and combing. When he said, "Very pleased to meet you, Mr. President," he didn't tack on a ringing, "Freedom!" the way anybody with an ounce of political sense would have done.

"Pleased to meet you, too." Jake stuck out his hand. FitzBelmont took it. To the President's surprise, the other man had a respectable grip. His hand didn't jellyfish under Featherston's squeeze. Obscurely pleased, Featherston waved him to the chair in front of his desk. "Why don't you take a seat? Now, then--you're a professor of physics, isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir. That is correct." FitzBelmont talked like a professor, too. His voice had the almost-damnyankee intonation so many educated men seemed proud of, and a fussy precision to go with it, too.

"Well, then . . ." Jake also sat, and leaned back in his chair. "Suppose you tell me what a professor of physics reckons I ought to know." He didn't quite come out and say that a professor of physics couldn't tell him anything he needed to know, but that was in his own voice and manner.

Henderson V. FitzBelmont didn't seem to notice. That didn't surprise Featherston, and did amuse him.

The professor said, "I was wondering, Mr. President, if you were familiar with some of the recent work in atomic physics coming out of the German Empire."

Jake didn't laugh in his face, though for the life of him he couldn't have told why not. All he said was,

"Sorry, Professor, but I can't say that I am." Or that I ever wanted to be, either. He looked at his watch.

Damned if he would give this fellow a minute more than his allotted time.

"The Germans have produced some quite extraordinary energy releases through the bombardment of uranium nuclei with neutrons. Quite extraordinary," Professor FitzBelmont said.

"That's nice," Jake said blandly. "What does it mean? What does it mean to somebody who's not a professor of physics, I ought to say?"

He didn't know how he expected FitzBelmont to answer. The tweedy academic made an unimpressive fist. "It means you could take this much uranium--the right kind of uranium, I should say--and make a blast big enough to blow a city off the map."

"Wait a minute," Jake said sharply. "You could do that with one bomb?"

"One bomb," Professor FitzBelmont agreed. "If the theoretical calculations are anywhere close to accurate."

Featherston scratched his head. He'd heard things like that before. Theory promised the moon, and usually didn't even deliver moonshine. "What do you mean, the right kind of uranium? Up till now, I never heard of uranium at all, and I sure as hell never heard of two kinds of it."

"As you say, sir, there are two main kinds--isotopes, we call them," the professor answered. "One has a weight of 238. That kind is not explosive. The other isotope only weighs 235. That kind is, or seems to be. The trick is separating the uranium-235 from the uranium-238."

"All right." Featherston nodded. "I'm with you so far--I think. The 235 is the good stuff, and the 238

isn't. How much 235 is there? Is it a fifty-fifty split? One part in three? One part in four? What?"

Henderson V. FitzBelmont coughed. "In fact, Mr. President, it's about one part in a hundred and forty."

"Oh." Now Jake frowned. "That doesn't sound so real good. How do you go about separating it out, then?"

The professor also frowned, unhappily. "There is, as yet, no proven method. We cannot do it chemically; we know that. Chemically, the two isotopes are identical, as any isotopes are. We need to find some physical way to capitalize on their difference in weight. A centrifuge might do part of the job.

Gaseous diffusion might, too, if we can find the right kind of gas. The only candidate that seems to be available at present is uranium hexafluoride. It is, ah, difficult to work with."

"How do you mean?" Featherston inquired.

"It is highly corrosive and highly toxic."

"Oh," Jake said again. "So you'd need to do a lot of experimenting before you even have a prayer of making this work?" Professor FitzBelmont nodded. Jake went on, "How much would it cost? How much manpower would it take? There's a war on, in case you hadn't noticed."

"I had, Mr. President. I had indeed," FitzBelmont said. "I confess, it would not be cheap. It would not be easy. It would not be quick. It would require a very considerable industrial effort. I do not minimize the difficulties. They are formidable. But if they can be overcome, you have a weapon that will win the war."

Jake Featherston had heard that song before. Crackpot inventors sang it every day. Professor FitzBelmont didn't seem like the worst kind of crackpot, the kind with an obviously unworkable scheme for which he wanted millions of dollars--all of them in his own personal bank account. That kind of crackpot always said things would be easy as pie. Sometimes he knew he was lying, sometimes he didn't.

Because FitzBelmont seemed basically honest, Jake let him down as easy as he could. "If you'd come to me with this here idea six years ago, Professor, I might have been able to do something for you."

"Six years ago, sir, no one in the world had the slightest idea this was possible," FitzBelmont said. "Word of the essential experiment was published in a German journal about eighteen months ago."

"Fine. Have it your way. But you don't see the point," Featherston said. "The point is, right now we are in the middle of a war. We're stretched thin. We're stretched thin as can be, matter of fact. I can't take away God knows how much manpower and God knows how much money and throw all that down a rathole that won't pay off for years and may not pay off at all. You see what I'm saying?"

Professor FitzBelmont nodded stiffly. "Yes, sir, I do understand that. But I remain convinced the benefits of success would outweigh all these costs."

Of course you do. You wouldn't be here bending my ear if you didn't, Jake thought. But that doesn't mean you're right. He stayed polite. One of the drawbacks of being President, he'd discovered, was that you couldn't always call a damn fool a damn fool to his face. Sometimes, no matter how big a damn fool he was, you knew you might need him again one of these days.

After he'd shown Professor FitzBelmont the door, Jake let out a sigh. For a moment, the man had had him going. If you could take out a whole city with just one bomb, that would really be something. It sure would--if you could. But odds were you couldn't, and never would be able to. Odds were the professor wanted the Confederate government to pay for a research project he couldn't afford any other way.

Odds were nothing but a few papers with FitzBelmont's name on them would ever come out of the research project. Since becoming President, Jake had become wise in the ways of professors. He'd had to.

He lit a cigarette, sucked in smoke, and blew a wistful cloud at the ceiling. It was too goddamn bad, though.

Distant thunder muttered, off to the north. Jake's lips tightened on the cigarette. The day was fine and clear. Oh, it was hot and muggy, but it was always going to be hot and muggy inRichmond this time of year. It wasn't thunder. It was the artillery duel that went on between Yankee and Confederate forces. If theUnited States had wanted to drive forRichmond the way the Confederates had driven forLake Erie , the Confederate defenders would have had a bastard of a time holding them back.

It hadn't happened, though, and defenses at the river lines grew stronger every day. A thrust the damnyankees could have easily made a month before would cost them dear now. In another few weeks, it would--Jake hoped--be impossible.

He walked over to his desk and stubbed out the cigarette. Somewhere in the pile of papers was one Clarence Potter had sent him. Where the devil had that disappeared to? He reached into the stack and, like Little Jack Horner pulling out a plum, came up with the document he needed. The desk always looked like hell. It was Lulu's despair. But he could find things when he needed to.

From what Potter said--and, Featherston remembered, General Patton agreed--theUSA 's most aggressive officer who was worth anything was a barrel commander named Morrell. Jake grinned. He thought he'd remembered the name, and he was right. If the fellow had been in charge in northernVirginia

, he could have raised all kinds of Cain. But he was busy over inOhio , playing defense instead of getting the chance to attack. That suited Featherston--to say nothing of the Confederate cause--down to the

ground.

TheUnited States made most of their barrels inMichigan . It made sense that they should. That was where their motorcar industry had grown up. But with a corridor from the Ohio River toLake Erie in Confederate hands, how were they going to get those barrels to the East? And if they couldn't, what would happen when the Confederate States hit them again?

"Yeah," Jake said softly. "What will happen then?" His grin got wider. He had his own ideas about that.

Al Smith probably wouldn't like them very much, but Jake didn't give a damn about what Al Smith liked or didn't like. He'd pried the plebiscite out of the President of theUSA . He would have fought without it, but the odds wouldn't have been so good. Getting what the Yankees calledHouston back was nice.

GettingKentucky back was essential.Kentucky was the key to everything.

And he had it, and the key was turning in the lock.

Like anyone else who got a halfway decent education in the Confederate States before the Great War, Tom Colleton had fought his way through several years of ancient Greek. He didn't remember a hell of a lot of it any more, but one passage had stuck in his head forever. In Xenophon's Anabasis, the Greek mercenaries who'd backed the wrong candidate in a Persian civil war had had to fight their way out of thePersian Empire . They'd come up over a rise, looked north, and started yelling, "Thalatta!

Thalatta!"--"The sea! The sea!" Once they reached the sea, they knew they could get home again.

Looking north toward the gray-blue waters ofLake Erie , Tom felt like shouting, "Thalatta! Thalatta!"

himself. As Xenophon's Greeks had more than 2,300 years earlier, he'd come in sight of his goal. He still intended to jump in the lake when he got the chance.

Now he had to get there, and to get there without throwing away too many of his men.Sandusky sprawled along the southernshoreofLake

Erie . It was about five miles wide and two miles deep. Not far from the water was Roosevelt Park--it had been Washington Park till the United States decided they would rather not remember a man from Virginia. The factories and foundries lay south of town. The business district--brick buildings that had gone up between the War of Secession and the turn of the century--lay to the north. The whole damn town crawled withU.S. soldiers. Trains were still trying to get through, even though Confederate gunners had the tracks in their sights.

As Tom watched, a steam engine hauled a long train toward the town from the west. What was it carrying? Men? Barrels? Ammunition? All three? Artillery opened up on it right away. The engineer had nerve--either that or an officer was standing behind him with a gun to his head. He kept coming.

He kept coming, in fact, after two or three shells hit the passenger cars and flatcars he was hauling. Not till an antibarrel round of armor-piercing shot went right through his boiler did he stop, and that halt wasn't voluntary on his part.

Sure as hell, soldiers in green-gray started spilling out of the passenger cars. Artillery bursts and machine-gun fire took their toll among them, but the Yankees mostly got away. By how the survivors dove for whatever cover they could find, they'd been under fire before. Tom Colleton felt a certain abstract sympathy for them. It wasn't as if he hadn't been under fire himself.

Then the damnyankees did something he thought was downright brilliant. He would have admired it even more if it hadn't almost cost him his neck. Despite bullets striking home close by, theU.S. soldiers managed to get a handful of barrels off the train and send them rattling and clanking against the advancing Confederates.

All by themselves, those barrels almost turned advance into retreat for the CSA. One driver plainly knew what he was doing; either he was a real barrel man or he'd driven a bulldozer or a big harvester in civilian life. The others were far more erratic, learning as they went along. The Yankees at the machine guns and cannon had more enthusiasm than precision. As long as they kept shooting, they made it almost impossible for Confederate infantry to get anywhere near them. And they shot up the crews of some of the guns that had been punishing theU.S. soldiers from the train.

An antibarrel round set one of the snorting horrors on fire. A brave Confederate flung a grenade into an open hatch on another--theU.S. soldiers manning the barrel hadn't known enough to slam it shut. That machine blew up; Tom didn't think anybody got out of it. A third barrel bogged down in an enormous bomb crater. The amateur driver couldn't figure out how to escape. That limited the damage that machine could do.

But the last one, the one with the driver who wasn't an amateur, kept on coming. The antibarrel cannon that had put paid to the firstU.S. machine scored a hit, but a hit at a bad angle--the round glanced off instead of penetrating. Then machine-gun fire from the mechanical monster drove off the cannon's crew.

And then, in an act of bravado that made Tom Colleton clap his hands in startled admiration, the barrel drove right over the gun. Nobody would use that weapon again soon.

Without infantry support, though, a lone barrel was vulnerable. Confederate soldiers sneaked around behind it and flung grenades at the engine decking till--after what seemed like forever--the barrel finally caught fire. They showed their respect for the men who'd formed the makeshift crew by taking them prisoner instead of shooting them down when they bailed out of the burning barrel.

Tom Colleton looked at his wristwatch. To his amazement, that hour's worth of action had been crammed into fifteen minutes of real life. He turned to a man standing close by him. "Well," he said brightly, "that was fun."

"Uh, yes, sir," the young lieutenant answered.

"Now we have to make up for lost time." Tom pointed toward downtownSandusky . "Any bright ideas?"

The lieutenant considered, then asked what had become the inevitable question in theOhio campaign:

"Where are our barrels?"

"I think I'd better find out," Tom said. He didn't want to send infantry forward without armor--he was sure of that. IfU.S. soldiers felt like fighting house-to-house, his regiment would melt like snow in springtime. He looked for outflanking routes, and didn't see any the damnyankees hadn't covered. With a sigh, he shouted for the man with a wireless set on his back.

Ten minutes of shouting into the mouthpiece at a colonel of barrels named Lee Castle showed him the armor wasn't that eager to get involved in house-to-house fighting, either. "That's not what we do," Castle said. "Place like that, they could tear us a new asshole, and for what? Sorry, pal, but it's not worth the price."

"What are you good for, then?" Tom knew that wasn't fair, but his frustration had to come out somewhere.

"I'm doing this the way I'm doing it on orders from General Patton,"ColonelCastle said, and he might have been quoting Holy Writ. "You don't like it, take it up with him--either that, or bend the flyboys'

ears."

Tom doubted Patton would bend. He could see why the commander of armor would want to keep his machines from being devoured while clearing a few blocks of houses and factories. He didn't like it, but he could see it. Calling in the bombers to soften upSandusky was a happier thought. It wasn't as if the town hadn't been hit before. But now it would get hit with a purpose.

A couple of hours later, bombs rained down onSandusky from a flight of Razorback bombers that droned along a couple of miles up in the sky. Their bombsights were supposed to be so fancy, they were military secrets. That didn't particularly impress Tom, not when some of the bombs came down on his men instead of inside enemy lines. He lost two dead and five wounded, and shook his fist at the sky as the bombers flew south toward the field from which they'd taken off.

But then the Mules started hammeringSandusky . The dive bombers screamed down to what seemed just above rooftop height before releasing their bombs and pulling up again. Their machine guns blazed; their sirens made them sound even more demoralizing than they would have otherwise. What they hit stayed hit. No wonder the soldiers on the ground called them Asskickers.

No matter how hard they hit, though, they couldn't work miracles. When Confederate troops poked forward after the Mules flew away, machine guns and mortars and rifles greeted them. Bombers could change a town from houses to ruins, but that didn't mean stubborn soldiers wouldn't keep fighting in those ruins. And ruins, as Tom had discovered, sometimes offered better cover than houses did.

Try as they would, his men couldn't clear theU.S. soldiers from one

factory. By the sign painted on the side of its dingy brick walls, it had manufactured crayons. Now it turned out trouble, and in carload lots, too. It was too big and too well sited to bypass; it had to fall before the rest ofSandusky could.

Tom almost got shot reconnoitering the place. A bullet tugged at his shirtsleeve without hitting his arm.

He drew back, figuring he'd tempted fate far enough for the moment. Then he got on the wireless and summoned the Mules again. They wouldn't get rid of all the enemy soldiers in the place, but they were the best doorknockers the Confederate Army had.

Back came the dive bombers. They blew the factory to hell and gone. The walls fell in. A great cloud of dust and smoke thickened the pall that had already turned a blue sky brownish gray. This time, though, the Mules didn't get away scot-free.U.S. fighters knocked two of them out of the sky. The Asskickers seemed impressively fast diving on ground targets, but they couldn't measure up against fighters. And the airplanes with eagles on their sides shot up Confederate soldiers on the ground, too, before streaking off towardsIndiana .

Gunfire still blazed from the crayon factory when the Confederates attacked again. Colleton swore. The Yankees weren't making things easy or simple. Tom decided to try a trick that had worked for Nathan Bedford Forrest in the War of Secession. He showed a flag of truce till firing on both sides died away, then sent in a man calling on the Yankees to surrender. "Tell 'em we can't answer for what happens if they keep fighting," he told the young officer.

The man came back through the eerie silence a few minutes later. "Sir, a captain in there says,, ‘And the horse you rode in on,' " he reported.

"Does he?" Tom said. The officer nodded. Tom sighed. Forrest must have been facing a different breed of Yankee. With another sigh, Tom pointed toward the factory. "All right, then. We'll just have to do it the hard way." He shouted for a wireless man, then shouted into the set.

Artillery fire rained down on the crayon factory. A lot of shells gurgled through the air as they flew: gas rounds. By the time the Confederate gunners were done pounding the place, nothing without a mask could have survived for more than a breath. Even though the wind was with them, Tom's men had to don gas gear, too.

He gave the order to attack again. Submachine guns and automatic rifles blazing, his men obeyed. By then, the crayon factory was

nothing but a poison-filled pile of rubble. Not all theU.S. soldiers inside were dead, though. Machine guns and rifles in the ruins greeted the Confederates. This time, though, the men in butternut gained a toehold inside the factory.

It was still an ugly business. Here and there, the fighting came down to bayonets and entrenching tools, as it had in trench raids during the Great War. The damnyankees had to be cleared from what was left of the building one stubborn knot at a time. The Confederates took very few prisoners. That wasn't deliberate brutality. Their foes were in no mood to give up while they could still hit back.

At last, not long before sunset, the fight for the factory ebbed. A handful of damnyankees fell back to the north. Tom's men let them go. They couldn't do much else. They'd been chewed to red rags themselves.

He looked at the prize they'd won. By itself, the crayon factory wasn't worth having. How many more stands like that didU.S. soldiers have in them?

Tom recalled his classical education. It wasn't Xenophon this time; it was Plutarch. King Pyrrhus ofEpirus had won his first battle against the Romans. Then he looked at his battered army and exclaimed,

"One more such victory and we're ruined!" If he'd seen the fight for the crayon factory, he would have understood.

Jonathan Moss enjoyed hunting Mules.U.S. foot soldiers hated and feared the Confederate dive bombers--he knew that. Asskickers could pound ground positions to a fare-thee-well . . . if they got the chance. WhenU.S. fighters caught them in the air, they often didn't. Their pilots and rear gunners were more than brave enough. But the machines weren't fast enough to run away or maneuverable enough to fight back. They got hacked out of the sky in large numbers.

The Confederates didn't take long to figure out they had a problem. In the fight forSandusky , they quickly took to sending in swarms of Hound Dogs along with the Mules. The fighter escorts tried to keepU.S. fighters away from the dive bombers till they'd done their dirty work and headed back for where they came from.

Unlike the Asskickers, Hound Dogs were a match for the Wrights U.S. pilots flew. Moss had discovered that the hard way not long before. He found out again in a heated encounter above the embattled

lakeside city. The Confederate pilot couldn't bring him down, but he couldn't get rid of the enemy, either. The flak bursting all around could have knocked down either one of them. He didn't think the gunners on the ground could tell them apart--or much cared who was who.

After ten or fifteen nerve-wracking minutes, he and the Confederate pilot broke off by what felt like mutual consent. Moss hoped he never saw that particular Confederate again. The fellow was altogether too likely to win their next encounter. He hoped the Confederate felt the same way about him.

His fuel gauge showed he was getting low. He wasn't sorry to have an excuse to leave. His flight suit was drenched in sweat despite the chill of altitude. He knew nothing but relief when the enemy pilot seemed willing to break off the duel, too. Maybe they'd managed to put the fear of God in each other.

The latest airstrip from which he was flying lay nearDefiance,Ohio , in the northwestern corner of the state. Once upon a time, it had been all but impenetrable forest. These days, it was corn country, and the airstrip had been carved out of a luckless farmer's field. When Mad Anthony Wayne first ran up a fort at the junction of theMaumee andAuglaizeRivers , he'd said, "I defy the English, the Indians, and all the devils in hell to take it." The English and Indians were no longer worries inOhio . From what Moss had seen, the devils in hell were busy inSandusky .

He bumped to a landing. The strip had been cleared in a tearing hurry, and was a long way from smooth.

As soon as he got out of his fighter, groundcrew men pushed it off towards a camouflaged revetment. If a bomb hit it, fire wouldn't spread to any other aircraft.

Camouflage netting also concealed the tents where pilots slept and ate and drank, not necessarily in that order. The heavy leather clothes that had kept him warm three miles up in the sky were stifling in August on the ground. He unfastened toggles and unzipped zippers as fast as he could. (He remembered from the Great War that he would be glad to have such gear when winter rolled around, assuming he was still alive by then.)

Twilight seemed to close in around him when he ducked under the netting. He trudged wearily to the headquarters tent. It was even

gloomier inside there, which perfectly suited his mood. Another major, a knobby-cheeked Irishman named Joe Kennedy, Jr.--he insisted on the Junior--was doing paperwork by the light of a kerosene lamp. He was a boy wonder, half Moss' age, the son of aBoston politico. That went a long way towards accounting for his rank, but he could fly. He'd already shot down three Confederate airplanes--and, as the bandages on his left arm showed, been shot down himself. Till the burns healed, he was grounded.

He looked up and nodded to Moss. "How'd it go?" he asked, aNew England accent broadening his vowels.

"Got myself a Mule," Moss answered. "Our own antiaircraft was doing its goddamnedest to shoot me down. So was a Hound Dog. We were a match--neither one of us could get the drop on the other.

Finally we both gave up and went home. How about you, Joe? How's the arm?"

"Hurts a little," Kennedy admitted. He dry-swallowed a couple of small white pills. They were codeine, not aspirin; he hadn't graduated to aspirin yet. Moss suspected his arm hurt more than a little, but he didn't bitch about it. No matter how he'd got his rank, he seemed to be doing his best to deserve it. After the pills went down, he asked, "How'sSandusky look?"

"Kicked flat and then stomped on," Moss said. "It's not going to hold, and life gets a hell of a lot more complicated when it falls."

"Yeah." Joe Kennedy, Jr., nodded. "You should hear my old man go on about Al Smith. Two Irishmen, two Catholics--but it doesn't matter a hill of beans, not as far as Dad's concerned. He's a Democrat and Smith's a Socialist, and that's what really counts."

Moss only grunted. "Far as I can see, how we got into this mess stopped mattering as soon as the shooting started. Now we've got to get out of it the best way we can."

"Makes sense to me," Kennedy said mildly; even though his father was at least a medium-sized wheel back inBoston , he didn't try to ram his own politics down anybody else's throat.

Come to that, Moss wasn't precisely sure what the younger Kennedy's politics were. He didn't ask now, either. Instead, he said, "What's new out ofUtah ?"

Kennedy's face twisted with a pain that had nothing to do with his injury. "It's as bad as it was in the last war," he said, swallowing that final consonant. "The Mormons are up in arms, all right. Governor Young's run forColorado ." More r's vanished, while one appeared at the end of the state's name.

"What are we going to do about those bastards?" Moss aimed the question at least as much at himself, or perhaps God, as at Joe Kennedy, Jr.

But Kennedy had an answer. His face went hard and ruthless as he said, "Bomb them, shoot them, blow them up, and hang the ones that are left. Smith was nice to them, same as he was nice to Featherston. He thought that was all it took. Just be nice, and everybody'd love you and do what you wanted. It's really worked out great, hasn't it?"

"I think it's a little more complicated than that, at least with the Mormons," Moss said. "Utah's been a mess longer than I've been alive. It didn't start with the Great War."

"They got one bite then." Kennedy waved complications away with his good arm; he didn't want to hear about them. "That's what you give a mean dog--one bite. If it bites you again, you get rid of it."

"Shall we do the same for the Confederates?" Moss' voice was dryly ironic. He had no more use for simplicity than Kennedy did for complexity.

The younger man refused to acknowledge the sarcasm. "We'd better, don't you think? They'd get rid of us if they had the chance. The way things are going, they think they do. I happen to think they're full of shit. I don't suppose you'd be wearing the uniform if you didn't feel the same way. But if we can beat them, they'd better not get another chance to do this to us. If they do, we deserve whatever happens to us afterwards, wouldn't you say?"

"If you think occupyingCanada 's been expensive, occupying the CSA'd be ten times worse," Moss said.

"Maybe." Kennedy shrugged, then bit his lip; the pain pills must not have kicked in. "Maybe you're right.

But if occupying the Confederate States will be expensive, how expensive will not occupying them be?"

He had no give in him. He wanted theUnited States to have no give in

them, either. Moss said, ", ‘They make a desert and call it peace,' eh?"

Kennedy recognized the quotation. Moss had figured his education included Latin. Kennedy said,

"Tacitus was a stiff-necked prig who didn't like anything the Roman government did. The Romans might have made a desert out ofBritain , but they hung on to it for the next four hundred years after that."

"Have it your way." Moss was too weary to argue with him. "What I could use right now is a drink"--or three, he added to himself--"and then some sack time."

"Go ahead." Kennedy jerked his thumb toward the tent that held what passed for the officers' club. "I've got to finish this crap first." He attacked the paperwork.

In the Great War, pilots had drunk as if there were no tomorrow. For a lot of them, there hadn't been.

This time around, men seemed a little more sober. Maybe they were thinking more about what they were doing. Moss' chuckle came sour. If people really thought about what they were doing, would they have started wars in the first place?

Instead of bar stools, the officers' club had metal folding chairs that looked as if they'd been liberated from an Odd Fellows' hall in Defiance. Moss wasn't inclined to be unduly critical. He sat down in one of them and called for a whiskey sour.

"Coming right up, sir," answered the soldier behind the bar, which was as much a makeshift as the seating arrangements. He brought the drink, then took fresh beers to a couple of fliers who already had a lot of dead soldiers in front of them.

Moss poured down half his drink. He hardly knew anybody else who flew out of this airstrip. He'd got acquainted with Joe Kennedy, Jr., in a hurry, because Kennedy liked to hear himself talk. Most of the others remained ciphers, strangers. Squadron organization hadn't held up well under the relentless pressure of the Confederate onslaught. Moss hoped victory had disrupted the enemy as much as defeat had disorganized theUSA , but he wouldn't have bet on it.

He finished the whiskey sour and held up the glass to show he wanted another one. Two stiff drinks started to counter the adrenaline still

coursing through him after his inconclusive duel with the Confederate fighter pilot. He got up and headed for his cot. Sleep seemed the most wonderful thing in the world.

He was deep underwater when C.S. bombers paid a call onDefiance . The roar of the antiaircraft guns around the field didn't wake him. When bombs started falling, though, he sat up and blearily looked around. He thought about going back to sleep again, but didn't. He got up and ran for a trench carrying his shoes; he was still wearing the rest of his clothes.

The airplanes overhead were Razorbacks, not Mules. They dropped their bombs from three miles up in the sky. That meant they mostly couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. Bombs fell on and around the airstrip almost at random. "We ought to scramble some of our fighters and shoot those bastards down,"

Moss called to Joe Kennedy, Jr., who sprawled in the trench about ten feet away.

"Can't," Kennedy answered.

"Why the hell not?"

"On account of they put a couple of 250-pounders right in the middle of the strip," Kennedy said. "We aren't going anywhere till the 'dozers fill in the holes."

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" Moss said, too disgusted even to swear.

Major Kennedy only shrugged. "Sometimes you'd rather be lucky than good. Maybe some of the guys from other fields'll get after their asses."

"Hope somebody's home," Moss said. MostU.S. fighters spent as much time as they could over the corridor the Confederates had carved up throughOhio andIndiana . They'd done all they could to keep the CSA from reachingLake Erie . They'd done all they could--and it hadn't been enough.

What were they going to do now? Huddled in the trench, Moss had no idea.

Flora Blackford's secretary looked into the office. "Mr. Caesar is here to see you, ma'am," she said, and let out a distinct sniff.

"Send him in, Bertha," Flora answered.

Bertha sniffed again. Flora understood why. It saddened her, but she couldn't do much about it. In came the man who'd waited in the outer office. He was tall and scrawny, and wore a cheap suit that didn't fit him very well. He was also black as the ace of spades, which accounted for Bertha's unhappiness.

"Please to meet you, Mr. Caesar," Flora said. She waved the Negro to a chair. "Sit down. Make yourself comfortable. I gather you had quite a time getting toPhiladelphia ."

"Caesar's not my last name, ma'am, so I don't hardly go by Mister," he said. "It's not my first name, neither. It's just . . . my name. That's how things is for black folks down in the CSA." He folded himself into the chair. "Gettin' here . . . ? Yes, ma'am. Quite a time is right. Confederate soldiers almost shot me, and then Yankee soldiers almost shot me. But I got captured instead, like I wanted to, and they sent me up here. When they did, I knew you was the one I wanted to see."

"Why?" Flora asked.

"On account of I heard tell of you down inVirginia . You're the one they call, ‘the conscience of the Congress,' ain't that right?"

A flush warmed Flora's cheeks. "I don't know that I deserve the name--" she began.

Caesar waved that aside. "You got it. It's yours." He was plainly intelligent, even if his accent tried to obscure that. "Figured if anybody would take me serious, you're the one."

"Take you seriously about what?" Flora asked.

"Ma'am, they are massacrin' us," Caesar answered solemnly. "They got camps in the pinewoods and in the swamps, and black folks goes into 'em by the trainload, and nobody never comes out."

"People have been telling stories like that about the Freedom Party since before it came to power," Flora said. "What proof have you got? Without proof, those stories are worse than useless, because the Confederates can just call us a pack of liars."

"I know that, ma'am. That's how come I had to git myself up here--so I could give you the proof."

Caesar set a manila envelope on her desk. "Here."

She opened the envelope. It held fifteen or twenty photographs of varying size and quality. Some showed blacks in rags and in manacles lined up before pits. Others showed piles of corpses in the pits.

One or two showed smiling uniformed white men holding guns as they stood on top of the piles of dead bodies. She knew she would remember those small, grainy, cheerful smiles the rest of her life.

She both did and didn't want to look all the way through the photos. They were the most dreadful things she'd ever seen, but they also exerted a horrid, almost magnetic, fascination. Before she saw them, she hadn't dreamt humanity was still capable of such things. This was a sort of education she would rather not have had.

At last, after she didn't know how long, she looked up into Caesar's dark, somber features. "Where did you get these?" she asked, and she could hear how shaken her voice was. "Who took them?"

"I got 'em on account of some folks--colored folks--knew I wanted to prove what people was sayin',"

Caesar answered. "We had to do it on the sly. If we didn't, if the Freedom Party found out what we was up to, I reckon somebody else'd take a photo with me in one o' them piles."

"Who did take these?" Flora asked again.

"Some of 'em was took by niggers who snuck out after the shootin' was done," Caesar said. "Some of

'em, though, the guards took their ownselves. Reckon you can cipher out which. Some of the guards down at them places ain't always happy about what they're doin'. Some of 'em, though, they reckon it's the best sport in the world. They bring their cameras along so they can show their wives an' kiddies what big men they are."

He wasn't joking. No one who'd had a look at those photographs could possibly be in any mood to joke. Flora made herself examine them once more. Those white faces kept smiling out of the prints at her. Yes, those men had had a good time doing what they did. How much blood was on their boots?

How much was on their hands?

"How did your friends get hold of pictures like this?" she asked.

"Stole 'em," he answered matter-of-factly. "One o' them ofays goes out with a box Brownie every time there's a population reduction, folks notice. Plenty o' niggers cook and clean for the guards. They wouldn't do nigger work their ownselves, after all. They got to be ready to take care o'--that." He pointed to the photos on the desk.

Ofays. Population reduction. Neither was hard to figure out, but neither was part of the English language as it was spoken in theUnited States . The one, Flora guessed, was part of Confederate Negro slang.

The other . . . The other was more frightening. Even though she heard it in Caesar's mouth, it had to have sprung from some bureaucrat's brain. If you call a thing by a name that doesn't seem so repellent, then the thing itself also becomes less repellent. Sympathetic magic--except it wasn't sympathetic to those who fell victim to it.

Flora shook herself, as if coming out of cold, cold water. "May I keep these?" she asked. "I'm not the only one who'll need to see them, you know."

"Yes, ma'am. I understand that," Caesar said. "You can have 'em, all right. They ain't the only ones there is."

"Thank you," Flora said, though she wished with all her heart that such photographs did not, could not, exist. "Thank you for your courage. I'll do what I can with them."

"That's what I brung 'em for." Caesar got to his feet. "Much obliged. Good luck to you." He dipped his head in an awkward half bow and hurried out of her office with no more farewell than that.

If Flora put the photos back in the manila envelope, her eyes wouldn't keep returning to them. She told her secretary, "Cancel the rest of my appointments for this morning. I have to get over to Powel House right away."

Bertha nodded, but she also let out another sniff. "I don't know why you're getting yourself in an uproar over whatever that . . . that person told you."

"That's my worry," Flora said crisply. She went outside to flag a cab. Fifteen minutes later, she was at the President'sPhiladelphia residence. Antiaircraft guns poked their long snouts skyward on the crowded front lawn. They were new. She walked between them on the way to

the door.

She was a Congresswoman. She was a former First Lady. She'd known Al Smith for more than twenty-five years, since before she was either. Put that all together, and it got her fifteen minutes with the President after half an hour's wait. When a flunky escorted her into his office, she had to work hard to keep her face from showing shock. Smith hadn't looked well the last time she came here. He looked worse now, much worse. He looked like hell.

He'll never live through this term, Flora thought. She bit her tongue, even though she hadn't said anything at all. "Are you . . . getting enough sleep, Mr. President?" she asked carefully.

"I get a little every night, whether I need it or not." His grin came from the other side of the grave, but his voice, though weaker than before, was still the cheerfulNew York bray it had always been, the voice that had made people call him the Happy Warrior. Maybe he didn't want anyone else to know his job was killing him. Maybe he didn't know himself. "What have you got for me, Flora? Malcolm said you said it was important."

"It is, sir. A colored man escaped fromVirginia gave me these. . . ." She set the manila envelope on the desk between them. "I hope you have a strong stomach. This is proof the Confederates aren't just mistreating their Negroes, the way they always have. They're slaughtering them."

"Let's see." He set reading glasses on his nose, which only made him look like a learned skeleton. He went through the photos one by one, nodding every now and then. When he was through, he eyed Flora over the tops of the glasses. "All right. Here they are. What do you want me to do about it?"

"Shout it from the housetops!" she exclaimed. "When the world knows they're doing this, they'll have to stop."

"Will they?" Smith said. "Remember when the Ottomans started killing Armenians?" He waited. When Flora didn't answer, he prodded her: "Remember?"

"I remember," she said, a sudden sinking feeling at the pit of her stomach.

"We protested to the Sultan," the President said. "You'd know about that--Hosea was Vice President then, wasn't he? We protested. Even the Kaiser said something, I think. And theUSA andGermany had

fought on the same side asTurkey during the Great War. How much attention did anybody inConstantinople pay?"

Again, he stopped. Again, she had to answer. Miserably, she did: "Not much."

"Not any, you mean," Al Smith said. "They went on killing Armenians till there weren't a whole lot of Armenians left to kill. We're not the Confederates' allies. We're enemies. They'll say we're making it up.Britain andFrance will believe them, or pretend to.Japan won't care. And people here won't much care, either. Come on, Flora--who gives a damn about shvartzers?" Of course a New York Irish politician knew the Yiddish word for Negroes.

"They're slaughtering them, Mr. President," Flora said stubbornly. "People can't ignore that."

"Who says they can't?" Smith retorted. "Most people in theUSA don't care what happens to Negroes in the CSA. They're just glad they don't have to worry about very many Negroes here at home. You can like that or not like it, but you can't tell me it isn't true." He waited once more. This time, Flora had nothing to say. But even saying nothing admitted Smith was right. Nodding as if she had admitted it, the President continued, "And besides,Sandusky 's fallen."

"Oh . . . dear," Flora said, in lieu of something stronger. It wasn't that she hadn't expected the news. But it was like a blow in the belly even so.

"Yeah," Smith said, trying to seem as upbeat as he could. He put Caesar's photographs back in the envelope. "So if we start going on about this stuff right now, what will people think? They'll think we're trying to make 'em forget about what we couldn't do on the battlefield. And will they be wrong?"

"But this--this is the worst wickedness the world has ever seen!" The word was old-fashioned, but Flora couldn't find another one that fit.

"We're already in a war full of bombed cities and poison gas," Smith said. "When we're doing that to each other, who's going to get all hot and bothered about what the Confederates are doing to their own people?"

"Mr. President, this isn't war. This is murder. There's a difference," Flora insisted.

"Maybe there is. I suppose there is. If you can make people see it, more power to you," Al Smith said.

"I'm very sorry--I'm more sorry than I know how to tell you--but I don't think you can."

Flora wanted to hit him, not least because she feared he was right. Instead, keeping her voice under tight control, she said, "Would you say the same thing if they were Jews and not Negroes?"

"I don't know. Maybe not. People in theUSA are more likely to get hot and bothered about Jews than they are about Negroes, don't you think?" Smith sounded horribly reasonable. "If you can make it go, I'll get behind you. But I won't take the lead here. I can't."

"I'm going to try," Flora said.

X

The worst had happened. That was what everybody said. The Confederates had sliced up throughOhio and cut theUnited States in half. If the worst had already happened, shouldn't that have meant that men from theUSA and CSA weren't killing one another quite so often now? It didn't, not so far as Dr.

Leonard O'Doull could tell.

U.S.forces were trying to strike back toward the west and cut through the Confederate corridor. The Confederates, for their part, were doing their best to push eastward, towardPennsylvania . So far, nobody seemed to be making much progress. That didn't mean an awful lot of young men on both sides weren't getting maimed, though.

O'Doull's aid station lay a few miles west ofElyria ,Ohio --about halfway between lostSandusky andCleveland .Elyria had been the town with the largest elm inOhio : a tree with a spread of branches of over a hundred thirty feet and a trunk almost sixty-five feet thick. It had been, but no more: Confederate artillery and bombs had reduced the tree to kindling--along with much of what had been a pleasant little place.

"Burns are the worst," O'Doull said to Granville McDougald. "Some of the poor bastards with burns, you just want to cut their throats and do them a favor."

"This tannic acid treatment we're using now helps a lot," the corpsman answered. McDougald was resolutely optimistic.

"We're saving people we wouldn't have in the last war--no doubt of that," O'Doull said. "Some of them, though . . . Are we doing them any favors when we keep them alive?"

"We've got to do what we can," McDougald said. "Once they get the pain under control, they thank us."

"Yeah. Once," O'Doull said tightly. He was seeing a lot more burn cases this time around than he had in the last war. Men who bailed out of barrels usually had to run a gauntlet of flame to escape. During the Great War, barrels had been latecomers and oddities. They were an ordinary part of the fighting here.

With so many more of them in action, so many more horrible things could happen to their crews.

In the last war, O'Doull didn't remember anyone asking to be killed so he could escape his torment. It might well have happened, but he hadn't seen it. He did now. More than once, he'd been tempted to ignore the Hippocratic oath he'd sworn and give the victims what they wanted.

"That's why God made morphine, sir," McDougald said.

"God made morphine--and we make addicts," O'Doull replied.

"If you're in pain, that's the least of your worries," the corpsman said. "All you want to do is stop hurting.

You can get over morphine addiction once you're not hurting any more. As long as the burns are giving you hell, you might as well be dead."

O'Doull thought of addiction as a personal failing, even if pain relief caused it. He eyed McDougald thoughtfully. The corpsman had a different slant on things. "You look at it from the patient's point of view, don't you? Not the doctor's, I mean."

"I'm not a doctor," McDougald said, which was formally true. He went on, "And we're here for the patients, aren't we?"

A lot of people at aid stations thought they were there to advance their own careers, or to stay out of the front-line fighting. And there

were some men from churches that did not approve of members who carried guns, but that had nothing against helping the wounded. "Everybody ought to think the way you do," O'Doull said. "We'd all be better off."

The corpsman only shrugged. "Maybe yes, maybe no. My guess is, we'd just be screwed up a different way."

"Doc! Hey, Doc!" O'Doull had come to dread that call. It meant another wounded man coming in. Sure enough, the corpsman outside went on, "Got a belly wound for you, Doc!"

"Oh, hell," O'Doull said. Even with sulfa drugs, belly wounds were always bad news. The chance for peritonitis was very high, and a bullet or shell fragment could destroy a lot of organs a person simply couldn't live without. O'Doull raised his voice: "Bring him in."

The corpsmen were already doing it. They lifted their stretcher up onto the makeshift operating table that had been someone's kitchen table till the Medical Corps commandeered it. The soldier on the stretcher wasn't groaning or screaming, as men with belly wounds often did. He'd passed out--a mercy for a man with an injury like that. He was ghost pale, and getting paler as O'Doull eyed him.

"I don't think you'd better wait around real long, Doc," said the corpsman who'd shouted for O'Doull.

"I don't intend to, Eddie," O'Doull answered. He turned to McDougald. "Pass gas for me, Granny?"

McDougald wasn't an anesthetist, either, but he'd do a tolerable job.

He nodded now. "I'll take a shot at it." He grabbed the ether cone and put it over the unconscious man's face. "Have to be careful not to give him too much, or he's liable to quit breathing for good."

He was liable to do that anyway. He looked like the devil. But he was still alive, and O'Doull knew he had to give it his best shot. He said, "Eddie, get a plasma line into his arm. We're going to have to stretch his blood as far as it'll go, and then maybe another ten feet after that."

"Right, Doc." Eddie grabbed for a needle. O'Doull hoped it wasn't one he'd just used on some other patient, but he wasn't going to get himself in an uproar about it one way or the other. This wounded man had more important things to worry about. Surviving the next half hour topped the list.

When O'Doull opened him up, he grimaced at the damage. The bullet had gone in one side and out the other, and had tumbled on the way through. There were more bleeders than you could shake a stick at, and they were all leaking like hell.

Granville McDougald said, "You don't want to waste a lot of time, Doc. He's just barely here."

"What's his blood pressure, Eddie?" O'Doull asked. His hands automatically started repairing the worst of the damage.

"Let me get a cuff on him," the corpsman said. "It's . . . ninety over sixty, sir, and falling. We're losing him. Down to eighty over fifty . . . Shit! He's got no pulse."

"Not breathing," McDougald said a moment later, and then, "I'm afraid he's gone."

Eddie nodded. "No pulse. No BP. No nothin'." He loosened the cuff and pulled the needle from the plasma line out of the soldier's--the dead soldier's--arm. "Not your fault, Doc. You did what you could.

He got hit too bad, that's all. I saw what you were trying to fix up. His guts were all chewed to hell."

"That they were." Leonard O'Doull straightened wearily. "Get his identity disk. Then call the burial detail and Graves Registration. Somebody's going to have to notify his next of kin."

"That's a bastard of a job," McDougald said. "In the last war, no one wanted to see aWestern Union messenger coming to the door. Everybody was afraid he had a, ‘deeply regret' telegram. It's gonna be the same story this time around, too."

O'Doull hadn't thought spending the last war in a military hospital had shielded him from anything. Now he discovered he was wrong. People inQuebec hadn't had to worry about telegrams with bad news--not in the part ofQuebec where he'd been stationed, anyhow. Farther west,Quebec City andMontreal had held out for a long time before falling. Francophones had defended them along with English-speaking Canadians.

Lucien doesn't have to worry about the war. He can get on with his life. That was a relief, anyhow.Quebec 's conscription law wasn't universal, and Lucien had never had to be a soldier. And with the Republic formally neutral--even if it did lean toward theUSA and help

occupy English-speakingCanada --it wasn't likely the younger O'Doull would ever have to aim a rifle in anger.

That bothered the elder O'Doull not at all. He'd seen too much of what rifles aimed in anger could do in the last war. The refresher course he was getting now--including the poor son of a bitch who'd just died on the table--had done nothing to change his opinion.

He discovered he was still holding the scalpel. He chucked it into a wide-mouthed jug of rubbing alcohol. The jug had a big red skull and crossbones on it, plus a warning label in red capital letters: poison! do not drink! He hoped that would keep thirsty soldiers from experimenting. You never could tell. He'd heard that sailors were draining the alcohol fuel from torpedo motors and drinking it. But that really was ethyl alcohol, and wouldn't hurt them unless they were pigs. Rubbing alcohol was a different critter. It was poison even in small doses.

He scrubbed his hands with strong soap. He could get the dead soldier's blood off of them easily enough. Getting it off his mind . . . ? He shook his head. That was another story. If anybody could sympathize with Lady Macbeth, a battlefield surgeon was the one to do it. Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes ofArabia will not sweeten this little hand. And Macbeth himself: Will all greatNeptune 's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

Making the green one red.

Macbeth, unlike his lady, had borne up under what he'd done. O'Doull had to do the same.

"Can't save them all, Doc," Eddie said.

It was meant to be sympathy. O'Doull knew as much. He wanted to punch the corpsman even so.

Instead, he hurried out of the tent. He gaped and blinked in the sunshine like some nocturnal creature unexpectedly caught out by day. That wasn't so far wrong. He spent most of his time under canvas trying to patch up what the fierce young men on either side were so eager to ruin.

For the time being, the front was pretty quiet. The Confederates had got what they wanted most.

TheUnited States hadn't yet decided how their real counterattack would go in. Only an occasional shot or brief burst of gunfire marred the day.

O'Doull pulled out a pack ofRaleighs . They were spoil of war: taken from a dead Confederate soldier and passed on to him in appreciation of services rendered. The C.S. tobacco was a hell of a lot smoother than what theUSA grew. Even since he'd got to the front, O'Doull had noticed a steep dive in the quality ofU.S. cigarettes as stocks of imported tobacco got used up. These days, brands like Rose Bowl and Big Sky tasted as if they were made of dried, chopped horse manure.

He still smoked them when he couldn't get anything better. They relaxed him and calmed his nerves even if they did taste lousy. Most of the time, his hands steadied down when he got to work. Still, a dose of nicotine didn't hurt.

Raleighs, now,Raleighs had it all. They gave your nerves what you craved, and they tasted good, too.

How could you go wrong?

O'Doull stopped with the half-smoked cigarette halfway to his mouth. How could you go wrong? He wouldn't have been enjoying this savory smoke if some kid fromNorth Carolina orMississippi orTexas hadn't stopped a bullet or a shell fragment. Things had gone wrong for the Confederate soldier, and they'd never go right for him again. O'Doull started to throw down the cigarette, then checked himself.

What was the point of that? It wouldn't do the dead man any good. But the smoke didn't taste as good now when he raised it to his lips.

He finished theRaleigh , then stomped it out. Behind the line,U.S. guns began to roar. Shells flew through the air with freight-train noises. Gas rounds gurgled as if they were tank cars full of oil or molasses.

O'Doull's mouth twisted. The Confederates would respond in kind, of course. Each side always did when the other used gas.

"Different kinds of casualties," he muttered. "Happy goddamn day." He ducked back into the tent to get ready for them.

They put Armstrong Grimes' company into two boxcars. It wasn't quite the 8 HORSES or 40 MEN

arrangement the French had used during the Great War--Armstrong didn't think the cars had housed horses or cattle or anything similarly appetizing. But he did come to feel a strong and comradely relation with a sardine. The only difference was, they hadn't poured olive oil in after his buddies and him. Maybe they should have. The grease might have kept the men from rubbing together so much. Just getting back to the honey buckets was trial enough.

"How come we're so lucky?" he grumbled.

"Can't you figure it out for yourself?" Corporal Stowe asked. "I thought you were a smart fellow. You graduated high school and you stayed alive, right? That's why you made PFC."

Armstrong was convinced simply staying alive had more to do with the stripe on his sleeve than the high-school diploma did. He had that more because his old man would have walloped the snot out of him if he'd quit beforehand than for any other reason. Yeah, only about one guy in three in theUSA did, but so what? It didn't mean anything to him.

He said, "Maybe I'm a moron especially for today, but I don't see what you're driving at."

"No, huh?" The grin the corporal sent his way wasn't especially friendly or amused. "All right--I'll spell it out for you. We're going where we're going on account of we ended up west of fuckingSandusky when the Confederates cut the country in half. If we'd been east of the goddamn place, they'd've done something different to us--I mean, with us."

"Oh." Armstrong Grimes thought it over. It made more sense than he wished it did. Getting from, say,Cleveland toUtah would have been hard, long, and dangerous. Getting from westernOhio to Mormon country was a straight shot--except, with luck, nobody would be shooting at them till they got there. He nodded. "Yeah, I guess maybe you're right."

"Bet your ass I am." Stowe's laugh was the laugh of a man waiting for the gallows the next morning. "I'll tell you something else, too: I'd sooner fight Featherston's fuckers than the damned Mormons. The Confederates play by the rules, pretty much. The Mormons, it's you or

them, and they don't quit till they're dead."

"How do you know that?" Grimes asked.

"That's how it was in the last war, anyway," Stowe answered. "Men, women, kids--they threw everything at us but the kitchen sink. And they probably loaded that full of TNT and left it for a booby trap."

"Oh, boy," Armstrong said in a hollow voice. His father hadn't fought inUtah , and so he'd never had much to say about the Mormons. History books in school made them out to be bad guys, but didn't talk about them a whole lot. The books seemed to take the attitude that if you didn't look at them, they'd go away. All he knew about them was that they wanted to have lots of wives and they hated theU.S.

government. The wives didn't seem to matter. Hating theU.S. government did.

The train rattled west. Every so often, it would stop at a siding. They'd open the doors to the boxcars and let the soldiers out to stretch. The country gradually got flatter and drier. They clattered over theMississippi betweenQuincy ,Illinois , andHannibal,Missouri . The bridge had a nest of antiaircraft guns around it. Armstrong doubted they would have done much good had Confederate bombers come calling.

Missourigave way toKansas . Armstrong discovered why they called them theGreat Plains . Nothing but miles and miles of miles and miles.Western Colorado was the same way. But then, in the distance, theRockies poked their way up over the horizon. Those were mountains. Nothing Armstrong had ever seen in the eastern part of theUSA prepared him for country like that.

The next day, the train went over them. Even the passes were high enough to make his breath come short. He was glad he didn't have to do anything serious there. The train went down the other side, but not so far down.

It stopped again inGrand Junction ,Colorado , where the Gunnison andColoradoRivers came together.

Again, Armstrong was glad to get out and stretch. A sign on the train station said, biggest town incolorado west of the rockies. That might have been true, but it didn't strike him as worth bragging about. IfGrand Junction had ten thousand people, that was pushing things. It was full of frame houses, most of them painted white. Not far from the

railroad yards, several factories and packing plants dominated the business district.

Railroad workers hooked up a car full of coal and scrap iron in front of the locomotive. Pointing, Armstrong asked, "What the hell's going on there?"

Corporal Stowe laughed. Again, the sound didn't hold a whole lot of mirth. "Goddamn Mormons are mining the train tracks. Better if they blow up a car full of junk than an engine with people in it."

"Oh." Armstrong thought that over. "Yeah, I guess so." He eyed the forward car. "Bastards really are playing for keeps, aren't they?"

"I said so before. You better believe it," Stowe answered. Behind them, somebody blew a whistle. The noncom grimaced. "Time to get back in."

"Mooo!" Armstrong said mournfully. Stowe laughed once more, this time as if he really meant it.

Armstrong couldn't have said for sure when they crossed fromColorado intoUtah . The train went at a crawl all the way. If that warning car did touch off a mine, the engineer wanted the damage to be as limited as possible. He was probably thinking more of his own neck than of his passengers'. Armstrong didn't mind. He was in no great hurry to meet the Mormons.

Nothing blew up in the trip across the rebellious state, for which he was duly grateful. The train stopped at a place called Woodside. Soldiers threw the doors to the cars open. "Out!" they yelled. "Out! Out!

Out! This here's the end of the line."

"Jesus!" Armstrong said when he got a look around. "It sure as hell looks like the end of the line."

Grand Junctionhad been a small city.Woodside,Utah , was barely a wide place in the road. Along with a railroad depot, it boasted two gas stations and, between them, a trickle of water that had a sign above it: WOODSIDE GEYSER. DO NOT DRINK.

Armstrong jerked a thumb toward the sign. "What the hell's that?"

"Bad water, that's what," answered one of the men who looked to have been there for a while. "Railroad dug for water back around the turn of the century and got a gusher they couldn't cap. Only trouble was, it was bad water. People couldn't drink it. Cows kept trying--and kept dying. Ain't much of a geyser now, but from what the old-timers say it really used to be something."

"Oh, boy." Armstrong tried to imagine what being an old-timer inWoodside,Utah , would be like. If you had a chance between living here for fifty or sixty years and blowing out your brains, wouldn't you think hard about picking up a rifle?

But even the old-timers had probably never seen Woodside the way it was now. Green-gray tents spread out in all directions. For reasons known only to itself and possibly to God, the Army had decided to make this miserable place its chief staging area for moves against the Mormon rebels farther west. The rebels were holding the parts ofUtah worth hanging on to. They seemed perfectly willing to let the Army have the rest.

Off in the distance, artillery muttered and growled. Armstrong was more familiar with that noise than he wished he were. He wasn't sorry to hear it at a distance, though. He'd heard artillery at much closer ranges than this. He'd heard soldiers after shells landed among them, too. He shoved that thought out of his mind. He didn't want to remember what happened when things went wrong.

For the rest of that day, things went right. He and his buddies lined up for showers--presumably not in water from the Woodside Geyser. They lined up again for chow. They got steaks and french fries, the first meal that didn't come out of cans they'd had since leavingOhio . It wasn't a great steak, but the only thing really wrong with it in Armstrong's eyes was that it was too damn small.

He slept on a real steel-framed cot with a real mattress that night. When first conscripted, he'd hated Army cots. They weren't a patch on his bed back home. Compared to the floor of a jouncing freight car, though, or to sleeping in a muddy foxhole, this one was a good approximation of heaven. He got rid of at least a few of the kinks of travel before reveille the next morning.

Breakfast was even better than supper had been. Bacon and real scrambled eggs, biscuits with gravy, fresh-brewed coffee . . . He ate till he was groaningly full. He wasn't the only one, either. The cooks had a devil of a time keeping ahead of the ravening hordes of hungry men.

Content with the world, Armstrong was slowly walking back to his tent when a metallic buzzing in the air made him look west. "What the hell's that?" he said.

"Looks like a crop-duster," another soldier said. The fabric-covered biplane certainly wasn't very impressive. Armstrong felt as if he could run as fast as it flew. He knew that wasn't so, but the impression remained.

A few men pointed at the biplane. More paid no attention to it at all as it sputtered along over the Army encampment at Woodside. Armstrong might have been the only one who saw a crate tumble out of it. He had time for no more than a startled, "What the--?" before the crate hit the ground.

Boom! The next thing Armstrong knew, he was on the ground. That wasn't the blast--it was reflex painfully acquired on the battlefield. When something blew up, you hit the dirt. You did if you wanted to keep breathing, anyhow.

A soldier off to his right didn't hit the dirt fast enough--and let out a startled squawk of pain. He pulled a tenpenny nail out of his arm. The nail was red and wet with his blood from point to head.

"Find an aid station," Armstrong said. "There's a Purple Heart for you."

The soldier just gaped at him. Ignoring the man, Armstrong jumped to his feet and ran toward the place where the makeshift bomb had gone off. The biplane, meanwhile, buzzed off in the direction from which it had come. Nobody took a shot at it. Very likely, only a handful of people had any idea it had dropped the improvised bomb.

Makeshift, improvised, or not, the bomb did everything its equivalent from a fancy ordnance factory might have done. It knocked things down. It blew things--and soldiers--up. It sprayed fragments of sharp metal (nails, here) all over the place. What more could you ask for from something that fell out of an airplane?

Armstrong tripped over a leg and almost fell. He gulped. Breakfast nearly came up. The rest of the man wasn't attached to the leg. A little closer to where the Mormons' explosive had hit, he found a soldier as neatly disemboweled as if he'd be cut up for butcher's meat in the next few minutes. Then he came upon someone he could actually help: a sergeant with a mangled hand trying without much luck to bandage himself with the other. Kneeling beside him, Armstrong said, "Here,

let me do that."

"Thanks, kid," the noncom got out through clenched teeth. "What the hell happened?" Armstrong told him in a few words. The sergeant swore. "Ain't that a son of a bitch? Goddamn Mormons got bombers?"

"Looks that way." Armstrong stared west, then shook his head. "Who knows what else they've got, too?"

Brigadier General Abner Dowling rode a train east towardPhiladelphia . The journey was one he would much rather not have made. He'd known it was coming, though. He hadn't been recalled by the War Department. That would have been bad enough. But instead, he'd been summoned by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. That was at least ten times worse.

Congress had formed such a committee once before, during the War of Secession. It hadn't proved a good idea then. The committee had crucified officers it didn't like, and terrorized more than it crucified. It hadn't done a damn thing to keep the war from being lost. And now, just to prove how clever the elected rulers of the country were, they'd decided to reprise what hadn't worked before.

And, of course, Abner Dowling was the first, to say nothing of the most obvious, target the committee had chosen. People fromBangor toSan Diego were going to be yelling, "Who lostOhio ?" They were going to be pointing fingers and shouting for heads. And there was Dowling, right square in the crosshairs. They didn't even need to look very hard.

If a Congressman can spot me, I must be obvious, Dowling thought savagely. He could make a good guess about what would happen when he got to the de facto capital. They were going to pin everything on him. They would say that, if the U.S. forces in Ohio had had a general who knew his ass from a hole in the ground, everything would have gone fine, and soldiers in green-gray would have chased those butternut bastards all the way down through Kentucky and into Tennessee, if not into Alabama and Mississippi.

They'd expect him to fall on his sword, too. What else could he do? He'd issued the orders--the orders that hadn't worked. If he'd issued some different orders, wouldn't things have turned out differently?

Wouldn't they have turned out better?

Of course they would. That was how Congress, with its infinite wisdom and twenty-twenty hindsight, was bound to see things, anyhow.

"Oh, yes. Of course," Dowling muttered. The woman across the aisle from him gave him an odd look.

He ignored her.

An hour out ofPittsburgh , the train slowed and then stopped. They hadn't come to a town, not even a whistlestop. They were out in the middle of nowhere, or as close to the middle of nowhere as you could get in a crowded state likePennsylvania . A telegraph line ran next to the tracks. A big crow--a raven?--sat on the wire staring in through the window at Dowling. I'm not dead yet, he thought. Then he wished that last word hadn't occurred to him.

An important-looking man in an expensive suit and a dark homburg reached up and grabbed the cord that rang for the conductor. In due course, that blue-uniformed worthy appeared. "See here," the important-looking man said. "I demand to know what has happened to this train. I have an urgent engagement in the capital."

Dowling had an urgent engagement in the capital, too. He wasn't eager enough to make a fuss about it, though. As far as he was concerned, the train could sit there as long as it pleased. He glanced out at the big black bird on the wire. If we do wait a long time, you'll starve before I do.

The conductor was a tall, pale, skinny man who looked as if he'd been working on trains forever. "Well, I'll tell you," he said in a broad Down East accent. "Th' engineer calls it sabotage." He stretched out the final a till it seemed to last about a minute and a half.

"Sabotage!" Half a dozen people in the car echoed the word; all of them pronounced it much faster than the conductor had.

"Ayuh," he said. Dowling needed a moment to understand that meant yes. "Hole in the track up ahead.

Hole in the ground up ahead. Damn big hole." He spoke with a certain dismal satisfaction.

"How long are we going to be stuck here?" the important-looking man asked. "My missing that meeting would be a disaster--a disaster, I tell

you."

"Well, if you care to, you can walk." The conductor stretched that last a as far as he had the one in sabotage. The important-looking man glared furiously. Several other people snickered. That only made Mr. Urgent Meeting more unhappy. The conductor continued, "They got a crew workin' on it. Be another hour, hour and a half, I reckon."

Some passengers sighed. Some groaned. The important-looking man fumed. Dowling wondered just how much sabotage the Confederates were bringing off in theUSA . Not as much as we are in the CSA, I hope. He also wondered how Lucullus Wood and the other stubborn blacks inKentucky were doing.

Maybe the Confederates would have hitOhio even harder than they had if not for Negro sabotage. But they'd hit plenty hard enough as things were, dammit.

The promised hour to an hour and a half stretched out to closer to three. Dowling hadn't expected anything different. The crow or raven flew away. The important-looking man almost had a fit of apoplexy. Dowling almost hoped he would.

By the time the general got intoPhiladelphia , night had fallen. The train crawled in with blackout curtains over the windows and with no light on the engine. No one knew if Confederate bombers would come over; no one wanted to give them targets if they did. The station had black cloth awnings stretched over the platforms. Dim lights gathered arriving passengers through double curtains of black cloth into the more brightly lit interior.

"General Dowling?" The officer who waited inside was tall and lean and fair--pale, really--almost to the point of ghostliness. He wore eagles on his shoulder straps. His arm-of-service colors were the gold and black of the General Staff.

"Hello, Colonel Abell," Dowling said stiffly. Et tu, Brute? was what went through his mind. He had not got on well with General Staff officers since the days of the Great War. Part of that was guilt by association; he'd served with George Custer and Irving Morrell, both men who had little use for the stay-at-homes inPhiladelphia and weren't shy about letting those stay-at-homes know it. And part of it was that Abner Dowling felt the same way. If John Abell and his fellow high foreheads were to help the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War ease Dowling out . . .

"We have a car waiting for you, sir," Abell said. "If you'll just come with me . . ."

"I have a suitcase," Dowling said.

"It will be taken care of," the bloodless General Staff officer promised. "That sort of thing, after all, is why God made enlisted men."

He led Dowling out to a Chevrolet with headlights reduced to slits. A dent in one fender said the little bit of light they threw hadn't always been enough. "Nice of you to meet me," Dowling said as they got in.

The driver--an enlisted man--started up the engine and put the auto in gear.

Colonel Abell lit a cigarette and offered Dowling the pack. He leaned close to give Dowling a light. Then he smiled--a surprisingly charming smile from someone usually so cold. "Don't worry, General," he said, amusement--amusement? yes, definitely amusement--lurking in his voice. "Our interests here run in the same direction."

"Do they?" Dowling said. Had the General Staff officer told him the sun was shining, he would have gone to a window and checked.

Abell laughed. The noise was slightly rusty, as if from disuse, but unmistakable. "As a matter of fact, they do. You don't want the Joint Committee crucifying you for losingOhio , and the War Department doesn't want the Joint Committee crucifying it for allowingOhio to be lost."

"Ah," Dowling said. That did make sense. In the War of Secession, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had run rampant over the Army. No wonder Colonel Abell and his superiors were anxious to avoid a repeat performance.

"Are you a quick study, General?" Abell asked.

"Tolerably," Dowling answered. Anyone who'd served under Custer had to be a quick study, to find ways to get his superior out of the trouble he insisted on getting himself into. "Why?"

"Listen to me for about twenty minutes. With things the way they are, getting you to BOQ will take that long anyhow." Colonel Abell proceeded to fill Dowling's head with the inadequacies ofU.S. military budgets, starting in the early 1920s and continuing to the present day.

Dowling found himself nodding again and again. Abell finished, "You know perfectly well we could have put up a much stronger defense inOhio if we'd had more and better matériel. I want you to let the Joint Committee know, too."

"They won't want to hear it," Dowling said. "Congress never wants to hear that anything is its fault. But I will tell them. I'll be delighted to--and I thank you for the chapter and verse."

"My pleasure, sir," Abell said as the Chevrolet pulled up in front of Bachelor Officer Quarters.

"Not altogether, Colonel," Dowling said. "Not altogether."

His suitcase had beaten him there. He wondered how that had happened. He slept better than he'd thought he would, and it wasn't just because the Confederates didn't come over that night.

The next morning, as another noncom drove him to the hall where the Joint Committee met, he got a look at what the bombers had done toPhiladelphia when they did come over. It wasn't pretty. On the other hand, he'd seen worse inOhio . Oddly, that thought steadied him. When he got to the hall and was sworn in, his first interrogator was a white-maned Socialist Senator fromIdaho , a state that might never have seen a real, live Confederate and surely had never seen a hostile one. "Well, General, to what besides your own incompetence do you ascribe our failures inOhio ?" the Senator brayed.

"Sir, I think one of our worst problems is the fact that Congress put so little money into the military after the end of the Great War," Dowling answered. "And when the Confederates did start loading up, we didn't try to match them as hard as we might have. As I recall, sir"--as Colonel Abell had briefed him--"you last voted for an increased military appropriation in 1928--or was it, ‘27?"

He'd heard about men standing with their mouths hanging open while nothing came out. He wasn't sure he'd ever seen it, not till that moment. The sight was sweeter than the sugar he'd spooned into his morning coffee. After close to half a minute, the Senator recovered enough to say, "How dare you blame this august body for your own dismal failings?"

"Sir, war's been staring us in the face ever since Jake Featherston got elected. That's almost eight years ago now," Dowling said. "Anyone could see it. Plenty of people did see it. Why was Congress so slow about giving us the money to build and develop the tools we need to

lick the son of a bitch?"

More bellows and barks followed, but the Senator fromIdaho seemed more than a little disconcerted by answers he hadn't expected. He acted relieved to turn the grilling over to a Congresswoman fromNew York City . Flora Blackford said, "Instead of snarling at each other, what can Congress and the Army do to work together and gain the victory we have to have?"

A sensible question! Dowling had wondered if he'd hear any. "Get all our factories humming," he answered. "Make sure the raw materials reach them. Make sure the weapons reach the front. Keep the Confederates as busy as we can--never let 'em relax. Uh, knockUtah flat. And while we're at it, get the niggers in the CSA plenty of guns, as many as we can. That'll make sure Featherston's boys stay hopping."

It went on and on. There was more hostility from the committee members, but also, increasingly, a wary respect. Dowling had no idea whether they were really listening to him or just posturing for the hometown papers. He also had no idea whether he was saving his career or sinking it forever. The strange thing was, he didn't care. And it was amazing how liberating that could be.

Jake Featherston looked at the engineer in his cramped, glassed-in booth. Saul Goldman was in there with the engineer. The little Jew didn't usually look over people's shoulders like that--he wasn't pushy, the way sheenies were supposed to be. But this was a big speech. Featherston was glad to see Goldman there. When something needed doing, the director of communications made sure he was on the spot.

The engineer pointed through the glass. Jake nodded. The light on the wall above the booth glowed red.

He was on.

"I'm Jake Featherston," he said, "and I'm here to tell you the truth." How many times had he said that on the wireless? More than he could count, by now. While he was saying it, he believed it every single time, too. That was what let him make other people believe it right along with him.

"Truth is, we never wanted this here war with theUnited States . Truth is, they forced it on us when they wouldn't listen to our reasonable demands. Well, now they've paid the price for being stupid. They've got their country cut in half, and they've seen they can't hope to stand

against us. Our cause is just and right, and that only makes us stronger.

"But I'm a reasonable man. I've always been a reasonable man. I want to show I don't hold a grudge.

And so I'm going to offer terms to theUSA , and I do believe they're terms so kind and generous that nobody could possibly say no to 'em.

"First off, as soon as theUnited States agree to 'em, we'll pull out ofU.S. territory fast as we can. We didn't want Yankees on our soil in 1917, and we don't want to be on theirs now." He'd won, or come as close to winning as didn't matter to him. Now was the time to sound magnanimous. "All we want is what's rightfully ours. I'll tell you what I mean.

"At the end of the last war theUSA took Sequoyah and chunks ofVirginia andSonora away from us. We want our country back. We've got a right to have our country back. And it's only fitting and proper for theUnited States to give back everything they took."

In the engineer's booth, Saul Goldman nodded vigorously. Saul was a good guy, as solid as they came.

If he worried a little more than most Freedom Party men, well, what could you expect from a Jew?

Plenty of Party men had all the balls in the world. Featherston knew he needed some with brains, too.

Goldman fit the bill there.

"And it's only fitting and proper that the United States should pay back the reparations they squeezed out of us when we were down," Featherston went on. "Paying them killed our currency and damn near ruined us. There was a time when, instead of carrying your money to the store in your pocket and your groceries home in your basket, you needed the basket for your money and you could take home what you bought in your pocket. We don't ever want that to happen again."

He didn't mention that theUnited States had stopped demanding reparations after a Freedom Party man gunned down the Confederate President inAlabama . If Grady Calkins hadn't died in that park, Jake would have killed him. He would have stretched it out over days, maybe even weeks, to make sure Calkins suffered the way he should

have. The assassin had come closer to murdering the Party than any of its enemies.

And if theUnited States came down with their own case of galloping inflation . . . If they did, wouldn't that just be too bad. Jake grinned wolfishly. Seeing theUSA in trouble would break his heart, all right.

"We don't want to have to worry about Yankee aggression any more, either," he went on. "We don't mind if theUnited States keep their forts aroundWashington . That's all right. George Washington was the father of their country, too, even if he was a good Virginian. But except for those, we want a disarmed border. No more forts within a hundred miles of the frontier. No barrels within a hundred miles, either, or war airplanes. We will have the right to send inspectors into theUSA to make sure the Yankees hold up their end of the bargain."

He didn't say anything about lettingU.S. inspectors travel on the Confederate side of the border. There were good reasons why he didn't, chief among them that the only way he intended to letU.S. inspectors into the CSA was over his dead body. After the Great War,U.S. snoops had worn out their welcome in a hurry. He didn't intend to dismantle his fortifications, either, or to move back his fighters and bombers and armor. TheUnited States had let down their guard after the Great War. He wasn't about to make the same mistake.

Saul Goldman had stopped nodding. He wore a frown. He wanted to make really easy terms with theUSA . Featherston couldn't see that. He was on top, by God. What point to being on top if you didn't take advantage of it? And he needed to squeeze theUnited States while he was on top. They were bigger and richer and more populous than the Confederate States. He never forgot that. No Confederate leader could afford to forget it. However badly the Whigs had botched the Great War, it had proved the Yankees could be dangerous foes, not just a bunch of bumbling fools.

Featherston continued, "And both we and theUnited States have internal troubles we need to deal with.

Unlike some countries I could name, we don't interfere in other nations' private business."

He didn't care about selling the Mormons of Deseret down the river. TheUSA didn't need to know he'd supplied the Mormons with weapons and advice. The damnyankees could probably figure it out for themselves, but figuring it out and proving it were two different

critters.

And the damnyankees might think he would wait till this war was over to settle accounts with blacks in the CSA. He wanted to laugh. He was going to take care of that business anyway, come hell or high water.

"It's a shame we had to fight again," he said. "Now that things are decided, let's get back to business as usual. It's time for peace. We only want what's ours. Too bad we had to go to war to get it, but that's how things work out sometimes. I'm just waiting on Al Smith to set things to rights. Thank you, and good night."

The red light went out. He wasn't on the air any more. He gathered up his speech and left the soundproofed studio. Saul Goldman came out into the hallway to meet him and be the first to shake his hand. "I think that went very well, Mr. President," Goldman said.

"Thank you kindly, Saul," Featherston said. "Me, too, matter of fact."

"I hope President Smith takes you up on it," the director of communications said. He was good, amazingly good, at what he did, but no, he didn't have the fire in his belly that a lot of Freedom Party men did.

"So do I. I expect he will," Jake said. "Why wouldn't he? It's been two months, hardly even that, and we've knocked the snot out of theUSA . We've done a damn sight better than the French and the British and the Russians have againstGermany andAustria-Hungary , and you can take that to the bank."

Goldman nodded at that last. As they had in the last war, the Russians had tried to drown the Central Powers in oceans of blood. Against the barrels and artillery the new Kaiser's army could hurl at them, they'd made small gains for high cost--though Jake did think the Central Powers were going to lose most of theUkraine , which had always been more nearly subject than ally.

Francehad reached theRhine , driving through the rugged country to the west of the river. But she hadn't been able to cross the river, and the Germans claimed they were rallying. Action Française denied that with particular venom, which made Jake all the more inclined to believe it true. And the British end run throughNorway had accomplished nothing but infuriating the Norwegians and pushing them over to the German side. Churchill had got himself a black eye

with that one.

Only the Anglo-French thrust through theLow Countries was still going well. The Belgians had welcomed the French and British as liberators, the way the Ukrainians welcomed the Russians. The Dutch were more pro-German, but the Germans had had a lot of other things on their plate.Holland was lost to them, and some of the North German plain. IfHamburg fell . . . But it hadn't fallen yet.

Jake's smile showed sharp teeth. His allies might be having trouble, but he'd done what he'd set out to do. "Yeah, I reckon Smith'll come around," he said. Come across came closer to what he really meant.

"I do hope he does," Saul Goldman said earnestly. "I wish you hadn't put in that part about demilitarizing the border. He won't like that."

"He may not like it, but he'll swallow it," Featherston said. "I know my man."

He thought he did. He'd slickered Smith into agreeing to the plebiscite that broughtKentucky and the abortion calledHouston back into the CSA. And Smith had believed him when he said he wouldn't put troops into the redeemed states for years. Finding an excuse to do what you needed to do anyway was never hard.

If Smith could be suckered on a deal like that, couldn't he also be suckered into leaving himself open for the next punch Jake Featherston planned to throw? Jake didn't see why not. The Yankees needed one more licking after this one, maybe even two, before they'd roll over and play dead for a good long time, the way they had after the War of Secession and the Second Mexican War. And Smith was dumb enough and weak enough--ballsless enough--to cave in one more time. Jake was so sure . . . "Bet you a stonewall," he said.

"Sir?" Goldman said.

"Five dollars in gold says Al Smith caves."

The communications director shook his head. "I wouldn't bet against you, Mr. President. You've shown you know what you're doing. I hope you're right again."

He wasn't saying that for the sake of flattery. More than most people around Jake, he spoke his mind.

And Featherston didn't think he declined the bet because he was a

cheap Jew, either. That was a measure of the respect Jake had for Goldman. The other man had turned it down because he'd thought he would lose, which was a hell of a good reason to turn down a bet.

"I reckon I am." Jake generally thought he was right, and he generally was right. He'd proved it again and again, in the Freedom Party's rise and in the way things had gone since he took the oath of office.

He was on his way back to the Gray House through the blacked-out streets ofRichmond when air-raid sirens began to scream. The racket penetrated even the bulletproof glass of his armored limousine. So did the harsh, flat crumps of exploding Yankee bombs a few minutes later.

"You want me to find a shelter for you, Mr. President?" the driver asked.

The man was a Freedom Party guard. He was as tough as they came. He wasn't worried about his own neck, only about Featherston's safety. Jake knew that. All the same, he wished Willy Knight's hired guns hadn't done in Virgil Joyner. His old driver hadn't just taken care of him. He'd known him, as much as any man could.

Jake had to answer this fellow. "Hell, no, Mike," he said. "Keep going--that's all. We'll be back pretty damn quick, and this here auto can take anything but a direct hit."

"All right, sir." The driver's broad shoulders moved up and down in a shrug. "Reckoned I better ask.

You suppose this raid is the damnyankees' answer to you?"

That was a different question, and a different kind of question. After a moment's thought, Featherston shook his head and said, "No, I don't believe so. They'll need a while to think about it. This here is nothing but business as usual."

He did go to the shelter when he got to the Presidential residence. He didn't want to; he would rather have stayed out and watched the show. But he knew he had to keep himself safe. Nobody else was up to the job of leading the CSA against theUSA --nobody came close. The Yankees stayed overRichmond for close to two hours. Not all their bombs hit targets worth hitting, but the Confederates had the same problem when they bombedU.S. cities. Featherston still hoped Al Smith would say yes to him. TheUSA hadn't gone away yet, though.

Clarence Potter listened toU.S. wireless broadcasts. Had he been just anybody in the CSA, he might have got in trouble for that. But rank had its privileges. So did belonging to Intelligence. He needed to know what the enemy was saying.

Finding out wasn't always easy. The CSA and theUSA jammed each other's stations. Very often, in places as close to the border asRichmond , you got nothing but howls of static as you spun the dial.

As usual, though, patience paid off. So did a wireless set a good deal more sensitive than the ones ordinary Confederates could buy. Potter brought in aPhiladelphia station that broadcast President Smith's response to President Featherston's call for an end to the fighting.

Smith wasn't half--wasn't a quarter--the speaker Featherston was. All the same, he left no doubt about where he stood. Through buzzes and hisses and pops, he said, "The United States have lost a battle. We have not lost the war. As John Paul Jones said when the British called on him to surrender,, ‘I have not yet begun to fight!' By treacherously attacking after loudly pledging peace, the Confederate States have gained an early advantage. I cannot deny that. I cannot conceal it. I do not intend to try. But we are still in the fight. We will stay in the fight. And wars are not decided by who starts ahead, but by who wins in the end. In the Great War, the CSA occupiedWashington and threatenedPhiladelphia . We won even so.

We can win again. We will win again. Jake Featherston has shown he is a man who cannot be trusted even when he sounds most reasonable. He has shown he cannot be trusted especially when he sounds most reasonable. We will not disarm. We will not open our borders to future aggression. This war is not over. The Confederate States started it. We will finish it. Good day."

"Shit," Clarence Potter said, and turned off the wireless. Al Smith had been slow figuring out his Confederate opponent, but he had Jake Featherston down cold now. And if theUnited States wouldn't curl up and die just because they'd taken a hard right to the chops, the Confederate States would have to knock them flat. Could they?

We're going to find out, Potter thought unhappily. Standing toe to toe with a bigger foe and trading punches till one side couldn't stand up any more hadn't worked during the Great War. Would it this time?

Potter shrugged. The Confederate States were better at knocking things flat than they had been a generation earlier. Unfortunately, so

were theUnited States . The attack onRichmond the night before had been one of the worst of the war. Confederate antiaircraft gunners had fired away like madmen.

Searchlights had swung through the sky. Fighters had searched the blackness for theU.S. bombers tormenting their city. But only a handful of Yankee airplanes had gone down.

The North American air war struck Potter as a duel with machine guns at a pace and a half. The CSA andUSA faced each other across a long, long border. When they started smashing up each other's cities, they could hardly miss. The Confederates had got off to a better start. They'd begun gearing up for the war before their enemies had, and they'd begun with the advantage of surprise.

But the damnyankees hadn't thrown up their hands or thrown in the sponge. That they would try to ride out the CSA's first blows, stay in the war, and use their greater numbers and strength had always been Potter's worst fear. Placed where he was, he thought he understood theUSA better than most of his countrymen (including Jake Featherston) did. He looked like he was right, too. That worried him.

The United States were still cut in half. Potter nodded to himself--that would help a lot. Even the biggest body still needed food. If the factories in the Northeast couldn't get the raw materials they had to have, they couldn't make guns and shells for all the millions ofU.S. soldiers to shoot at their Confederate counterparts. And if theUSA 's soldiers couldn't shoot, what difference did it make how many of them there were? They'd lose any which way.

If I were a Yankee logistics officer, what would I be doing now? Potter wondered. He had a pretty good idea. He'd be seeing what he could get aboard freighters on the Great Lakes, and he'd be seeing how much the Canadian railroad lines north ofLake Superior could carry and how fast he could bump up their capacity.

And would all that add up to anything that could replace the rail lines and highways the Confederacy had cut? Not a chance in church. Potter didn't need to be a logistics officer to know that much. Would it add up to enough to keep theUnited States breathing? That was a harder question, and one for which he didn't have the answer. Neither did anybody else in the Confederate States. In one sense, that was why people fought wars: to find out such things.

Lost in calculations--and even more lost because he didn't have all the

information he needed to make them--Potter jumped a little when the telephone rang. "Intelligence--Potter speaking," he said into the mouthpiece; no one on the other end of the line would know he'd been startled.

"Hello, Potter, you sly son of a bitch." That was Jake Featherston's perpetually angry rasp.

"Good morning, Mr. President. To what do I owe the honor of this call?" Potter, on the other hand, was perpetually ironic, or near enough to make no difference: an asset for an Intelligence officer.

Featherston went on, "You're laughing your ass off, aren't you, on account of you figured theUnited States 'd keep fighting and most folks here didn't? I didn't myself, and that's a fact. I reckoned Al Smith'd see reason." He sounded angry that Smith hadn't, too.

Of course, what he called reason meant what Jake Featherston wants. Featherston didn't, couldn't, see that. And Al Smith finally saw it clearly. Potter said, "Sir, I'm not laughing. There's nothing funny about it.

I wish theUnited States had rolled over and played dead, believe you me I do."

"Well, if they won't roll over, we goddamn well have to roll 'em over," Featherston said. He didn't quit when things failed to go the way he wanted them to. That was one of the things that made him so dangerous--and so successful.

"Yes, sir." Potter had a good deal of stubbornness in his system, too. He didn't like admitting, even to himself, that the President of the CSA had more. But he knew it was true, however little he liked it.

"What can I do for you now? Besides not gloating, I mean?"

After a couple of seconds of surprised silence, Featherston offered him an anatomically unlikely suggestion. Then the President of the CSA laughed. "You've got your nerve, don't you?" He sounded more admiring than otherwise. "We've got to keep the damnyankees hopping, is what we've got to do.

What sort of ways can you pump up those Mormon maniacs inUtah ?"

"It would be easier if you hadn't offered them to theUSA on a platter," Potter said dryly.

"Potter, it doesn't matter for hell--not for hell, you hear me?" Featherston said. "If the Devil could get those sorry sons of bitches guns, they'd take 'em and they wouldn't say boo. You gonna tell me I'm wrong about that?"

"Not me," Clarence Potter said, and he meant it. "The Mormons love theUSA about as much as our niggers love the Freedom Party."

"Yeah." For once, Featherston sounded not only unhappy but also unsure of himself. He rarely hesitated, but he did now. At last, he went on, "Goddamn Yankees know about that, too. They use it to give our nuts a twist whenever they can. That one's a bitch to get a handle on."

One way to reduce the problem would have been to give Negroes in the CSA privileges to match those of whites. The Whigs had taken tentative steps in that direction during the Great War--they'd granted Confederate citizenship, as opposed to mere residence, to colored men who honorably completed a term of service in the C.S. Army. Potter had never thought that was a smart idea. What had it done but given a large cadre of Negroes training in how to shoot white men and the certain knowledge that they could?

He said, "The harder we press theUnited States on their home grounds, the harder the time they'll have poking us down here."

"That's how I figure it, too," Featherston said. "The best defense is giving the other bastard a good kick in the teeth before he gets his dukes up." If that wasn't Jake Featherston to the core, Potter had never heard anything that would be. Like a lot of things Featherston said, it held its share of truth. Also like a lot of things the President said, it wasn't so simple as he made it out to be.

"Even if Smith did say no, we're off to a pretty good start on that," Potter said.

"You bet we are," Featherston said, though he still sounded furious that the President of theUSA hadn't done as he'd hoped. "Reason I called you, though--along with the Mormon business, I should say--is that I want your people to step up sabotage east of what we're holding inOhio . The United States are building up to try and cut off the base of our salient, and I want 'em to have all the trouble they can handle doing it--all they can handle and then some."

"I'll take care of it, Mr. President," Potter said. That was his bailiwick, all right. "Do you have anything in particular in mind, or just general

mischief?"

"Always general mischief," Featherston answered, "but not just general mischief. If nasty things happen to bridges strong enough to take barrels, the Yankees'll have a harder time coming at us, and that's what I've got in mind."

"Yes, sir," Potter said crisply, even though he couldn't help adding, "Bombing will help, too."

Jake Featherston had a nasty laugh most of the time. He sure did now. "Don't teach your granny to suck eggs. Trouble is, the high-level bombers are good for tearing hell out of a city, but the only way they can hit a bridge is fool luck. Our airplane and bombsight makers kind of sold us a bill of goods on that one."

"Looks like theUSA 's people sold them the same bill of goods," Potter remarked.

"Yeah, you got that right. Those high-forehead types are the same wherever you find 'em." With one casual sentence, Featherston dismissed scientists and intellectuals. He went on without even noticing what he'd done: "Mules, now, Mules can hit bridges they aim at. But the damnyankees have got antiaircraft guns coming out of their assholes, and Asskickers turn out to be sitting ducks when the other guy's waiting for them. We've lost more airplanes and more pilots than we can afford. So . . . sabotage where we can."

Again, that made sense. Featherston, after all, had spent three years in combat in the Great War. He'd been in at the start, and he'd still been shooting at the Yankees when the Confederacy finally threw in the sponge. When he talked about the battlefield, he knew what he was talking about.

"Sabotage where we can," Potter agreed. "I'll see who's in place in that area--and then we'll find out who talks a good game and who's serious about this business."

"Fair-weather friends," Featherston fleered.

"It happens, sir," Potter said. "Happens all the time, in fact. Some people just talk about helping us.

Some will pass information, but that's all. Some, though, some will put their necks on the line."

"I reckon you'll know which ones are which," Featherston said.

"I have my notions, but I could be wrong," Potter said. "It's not like giving orders to soldiers, sir. These men are volunteers, and we mostly can't coerce them if they don't do what we say. They're behind the enemy's lines, after all. If we push them too hard, they can just go . . . selectively deaf, you might say."

"They better not, by God." Rage clotted the President's voice. "Might be worth exposing one or two who don't go along to the damnyankees. That'd make the rest shape up."

Pour encourager les autres, Potter thought, but Jake Featherston wouldn't have heard of Voltaire, not in a million years. Potter remembered having a similar notion himself. Thinking like the President worried him. He spoke carefully: "We need to make sure we don't scare people away from working with us."

"Handle that. I reckon you know how," Featherston said.

"I hope so, Mr. President." And I hope you go on remembering it. But Clarence Potter knew saying that would do more harm than good. He could come closer than many to being frank with the man he'd once known as a sergeant. Coming closer, though, wasn't the same as going all the way. Potter also knew that, only too well.

Colonel Irving Morrell rode along with his head and shoulders out of the cupola on his barrel's turret.

He'd been doing that since the Great War, when he'd had a machine gun mounted in front of the barrel commander's hatch. Most good barrel commanders rode that way whenever they could. You could see so much more when you were actually out there looking. Riding buttoned up and peering through periscopes wasn't the same.

Of course, the better you could see, the better the enemy could see you. Barrel commanders who exposed themselves too much turned into casualties in short order. Morrell didn't want to be a casualty.

He had Agnes and Mildred at home, and he hoped to come back to them. He couldn't let that get in the way of doing his job, though. Unless things improved in a hurry, the United States were in trouble.

Here, at least, he didn't have to worry so much about getting picked off. He wasn't trying to keep the Confederates from reaching theGreat

Lakes any more. They'd already done it. His guessing they would try that crippling stroke consoled him only a little. I should have been more ready to stop them, dammit.

Given what he'd had to work with, he supposed he'd done about as well as he could. The CSA had got serious about fighting before theUSA had, and the United States were paying the price.

A green-gray barrel had pulled off the road under the shade of a spreading elm. Two men were attacking the engine with wrench and pliers. One of them aimed an obscene gesture into the air as Morrell's barrel clattered by. The rest of the crew sprawled on the grass in the shade, smoking cigarettes and probably thanking God they were out of the war--if only for a little while.

Barrels broke down more often than Morrell wished they did. They were large, heavy, complicated machines often forced to go as hard as they possibly could. In the Great War, breakdowns had put far more of them out of action than enemy fire had. Things weren't quite so bad so far in this fight, but they weren't good. From what Morrell had seen, C.S. barrels needed repair about as often as theirU.S.

counterparts. That was something, anyhow.

The highway leading from Martins Ferry,Ohio , down toward Round Bottom would need repair, too, after the column of barrels finished going by. Pavement plenty good enough for motorcars crumbled when caterpillar treads supporting fifteen or twenty times the weight of a motorcar dug into it. Morrell's barrel took newly gouged potholes and chunks of asphalt gouged out of the surface in stride.

Several barrels ahead of Morrell's had halted at a stream called--he checked the map--Sunfish Creek.

"What the hell?" Morrell said, or perhaps something a little more pungent than that. He ducked down into his barrel to get on the wireless to the leading machine. "Why aren't you moving forward?" he demanded.

"Sir, the bridge is out," answered the lieutenant commanding that barrel.

"What the hell?" Morrell said again--or, again, words to that effect. "How did that happen? I hadn't heard anything about it."

"It looks blown, sir," the lieutenant said.

This time, Morrell's profanity drew a glance of wonder and admiration from Sergeant Michael Pound.

Morrell tore the earphones off his head, climbed out of his halted barrel, and trotted south toward Sunfish Creek. He'd been wounded in the leg not long after the Great War started. Even after all these years, the thigh muscle twinged painfully when he exerted himself. That pain was as much a part of him as the thud of his heartbeat. He paid it no more mind.

Sun dapples sparkled across the surface of the stream. Oaks and willows grew down close to the bank.

Thrushes hopped beneath them, careless of man's killing tools close by. Midges droned. Morrell smelled engine exhaust, hot iron, his own sweat, and, under them, the cool green odors of vegetation and running water.

Sunfish Creek flowed swiftly. That meant it was probably more than three feet deep: the depth a barrel could ford without special preparation. And someone had dropped the bridge across the creek right into it. The concrete span had a good fifteen-foot gap blown from the center. If it wasn't a professional job, the amateur who'd done it sure had promise.

"You see, sir," said the lieutenant in the lead barrel.

"I see, all right," Morrell agreed grimly. "I see sabotage, that's what I see. Somebody ought to dance at the end of a rope for this."

"Er--yes, sir." That didn't seem to have occurred to the young officer. "But who?"

"We'll set the constables or county sheriffs or whatever they've got at Round Bottom trying to figure that out," Morrell answered. "Have you sent men into the creek to find a ford?"

"Not yet, sir," the lieutenant said.

"Then do that, by God," Morrell told him. "I'll be damned if I'm going to sit around here with my thumb up my ass waiting for Army engineers to repair this span."

Two crews' worth of barrel men emerged from their machines. They seemed glad to strip off their coveralls and plunge, naked, into Sunfish

Creek. The day was hot and sticky, and they'd been cooped up inside iron bake ovens since sunrise. In fact, the men seemed more inclined to swim and splash one another than to do what needed doing. "Quit skylarking, you sorry bastards!" the lieutenant shouted. "Do you want to keep Colonel Morrell waiting?"

Morrell was gratified to find that the question did get the men moving. If it hadn't, he would have jumped into the creek himself. The water looked mighty inviting. "Here you go!" a man shouted from downstream, his voice thin across perhaps a hundred yards of distance. "I can keep my balls dry all the way across--there's a little sandbar or something right here."

How badly would a column of barrels tear up that sandbar? Enough to flood the machines that came at the end? Some officers would have hesitated. Morrell didn't, not for an instant. "Well done!" he yelled to the soldier. "Go on over to the far side and mark the ford. We'll cross to you."

"Can't I get my clothes back first?" the man asked.

"No. One of your buddies will bring them. You can dress on the other side," Morrell told him. He turned to the lieutenant and added two words: "Get moving."

"Uh, yes, sir," the youngster said. He didn't get moving quite so fast as Morrell would have liked; one of the crews looking for a ford was his. They reluctantly emerged, all dripping and cool-looking, and even more reluctantly dressed again. Still, less than five minutes went by before the barrel's engine came to flatulent life. As soon as it did, Morrell jogged back to his own machine.

"A ford, sir?" Sergeant Pound asked when he got in again. Unlike that lieutenant, Pound seemed capable of independent thought. Morrell didn't have to provide the brains for him.

"That's right," the officer answered. "A ford--but a sabotaged bridge."

"We ought to take hostages," Pound said. "If there's any more trouble, we ought to execute them."

Everything seemed simple to him.

"Unfortunately, this is our own country," Morrell pointed out.

"Well, sir, in that case the people around here ought to act like it,"

Pound said. "If they don't, they don't deserve our protection, do they?" He was calm, reasonable, and altogether bloodthirsty.

Here, Morrell was inclined to agree with him. Wasn't helping armed enemies of theUnited States treason? Weren't they shooting and hanging Mormons out inUtah for doing things like blowing bridges?

Why shouldn't the same rules apply here inOhio ? Morrell had no answers, only questions. Setting policy wasn't his job. Carrying it out was.

He found no help in Round Bottom,Ohio , which turned out to be nothing but a wide spot in the road--and not a very wide spot, at that. It had neither policemen nor sheriff. It had a general store, a saloon, and eight or ten houses. A sign in front of the general store said WELCOME TO ROUND

BOTTOM. POPULATION 29. The census-takers had been there before the war. If half that many people lived in the hamlet now, Morrell would have been astonished.

He had to check the map to find the closest real town: Woodsfield, the seat--such as it was--ofMonroeCounty . He sent a barrel west to inform the local sheriff of the sabotage. It didn't get there as fast as he would have liked. A wireless message came crackling: "Sir, the road goes over something called Sandingstone Run."

Morrell had to look at the map again to find out where Sandingstone Run was. He discovered it was, of all things, a tributary to Sunfish Creek. "Well?" he said ominously.

"Sir, the bridge is blown," the barrel commander said.

That disgusted Morrell without surprising him. "Find a ford," he growled. "Don't waste time doing it, either. By the look of that run on the map, if you piss in it you'll send it over its banks."

He got a burst of startled laughter. "It's a little bigger than that, sir, but not a hell of a lot," the barrel commander said. "All right. We'll take care of it."

Fifteen minutes later, the barrel commander reported he was over the stream. Another delay, Morrell thought unhappily. And how many more bridges in easternOhio had gone splashing into the streams they crossed? More than a few, unless he missed his guess.

Maybe I should have gone to Woodsfield myself, he thought. A sheriff would pay more attention to a bird colonel than he would to Joe Blow in a barrel. Then Morrell laughed at himself. Anybody in a barrel could command attention. All he had to do was aim his cannon at the sheriff's station and threaten to start blowing things up unless he got what he wanted. Civilians couldn't do much about that except knuckle under.

And then Morrell remembered Featherston Fizzes. Somebody in what had been the state ofHouston had figured out that a bottle of gasoline with a lit wick would set a barrel on fire easy as you please. Barrels were inflammable things any which way, what with paint and grease all over them. Spill burning gasoline down through the engine-decking louvers onto the motor and you really had yourself a problem.

"Sir?" The barrel commander's voice sounded in his earphones.

"I'm here," Morrell said.

"Yes, sir. Well, truth is, this town got bombed to hell and gone back I don't know when--not too long ago. Sheriff's dead. Nobody's sent out a replacement yet."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," Morrell said. But it wasn't that surprising. A replacement for a county sheriff would have been chosen inColumbus .Columbus had had other things to worry about than sending somebody with a badge out to a place where nothing ever happened anyway. These days, the Stars and Bars, damn them, flew over the capital ofOhio . Nobody there would care aboutMonroeCounty now.

"What do you want me to do, sir?" the barrel commander asked.

"Hold your position. We'll move up and join you. Describe where the ford is relative to the bridge,"

Morrell said. He got the column moving again. They rumbled through forest country. A sniper could have had a field day picking off barrel commanders. But there were no snipers. The things I'm grateful for these days, Morrell thought sourly. How much delay would the blown bridges between here and the start of the counteroffensive impose? And what would that do to the attack when it did get going? Nothing good. He shook his head. No, nothing good at all.

XI

Mary Pomeroy didn't like going to the post office in Rosenfeld any more. Wilf Rokeby knew too much.

He never said anything, not after the first time, but he knew. Sooner or later, she was going to have to do something about that. She hadn't figured out what yet. Whatever it was, it had to be something that didn't draw suspicion down on her.

She wished she didn't see the need. But he had a hold on her. He could use it to blackmail her, or he could go to the occupying authorities. He'd got along with them ever since 1914. He'd had to get along with them if he wanted to stay postmaster--and, as far as Mary could tell, being postmaster had been his whole life, even if he was finally retiring at the end of the year. He'd never married. He lived by himself.

Maybe because he was so fussy and precise, some people wondered if he was a pansy, but nobody had anything even resembling proof of that. It was just something to gossip about when folks were in a more scandalous mood than usual.

A bomb? Bombs were always Mary's first thought. She was, after all, her father's daughter. Arthur McGregor had hit back hard at the Yanks for years till his luck ran out. But Wilf would surely be alert to anything that came in the post. As far as Mary could see, the only thing worse than not trying to get rid of him was trying and failing. That would surely send him off to the authorities.

Poison? Similar objection. She could bake an apple pie, lace it with rat poison, and smile sweetly while she gave it to him. No matter how sweetly she smiled, though, would he eat any of the pie? Would he eat more than one bite if it tasted even the least bit funny? Not likely.

Pretending the brakes on the auto failed and running him down in the street? She could do it, but she didn't see how she could keep from going to jail once she did. That wasn't what she had in mind.

Frustration gnawed at her. What she really wanted was to plant bombs on the railroad tracks outside of town. Canadian railroads were suddenly a lot more important to theUSA than they had been before the war. The Yanks couldn't ship through their own country, because the Confederates had split it in two (and the Mormons were also sitting astride one of their transcontinental routes). If they wanted to move things from west to east or from east to west, they had to go throughCanada . Damaging the railroads could really hurt them now.

But damaging the railroads would also make Wilf Rokeby sit up and take notice. And what would he do if he did take notice? Mary couldn't tell. She couldn't very well ask him, either. He wouldn't give her a straight answer, and the question would only put his wind up.

That left . . . waiting and seeing what happened next. Mary didn't like that. It meant the ball was in Wilf's hands. What happened next might beU.S. soldiers--or, worse, Quebecois soldiers--banging on her door in the middle of the night. If they searched the apartment building, they would find her bomb-making tools. Everything would be all over then. She wondered if she could die as bravely as her brother, Alexander, had during the Great War. She had her doubts. Alexander hadn't been old enough to believe death could really happen to him. Mary knew better.

The irony was,Canada had started seething like a pot coming to the boil since the war broke out. Fresh signs had gone up in the post office, warning not just of Japanese spies (a ridiculous notion in Rosenfeld) but also of British agents (perhaps not so ridiculous after all). The Rosenfeld Register trumpeted out the same warnings.

Pointing to one of those stories in the weekly, Mary said, "Seems some of us remember the mother country after all."

"Does look that way." Mort Pomeroy eyed her from across the dining-room table. "You don't want to say that kind of thing outside the apartment, though, or to anybody but me."

Such were the lessons of occupation. Mary had learned them, too. She nodded. "I know, Mort. You didn't marry a fool." You married a bomber's daughter. You knew that. You still don't know you married a bomber, too.

He smiled. "I wouldn't have married a fool. That's not what I was looking for."

And Mary found what she was looking for a few days later, in Karamanlides' general store. She didn't realize what she'd found, not at first. It was a folded piece of cheap pulp paper stuck between cans of tomatoes. She pulled it out, wondering why anyone would have wasted time sticking an advertising circular there.

When she unfolded it, she found it wasn't an advertising circular--not one of the usual sort, anyway. A cartoon at the top showed a Satanic-looking Uncle Sam with a scantily clad maiden labeledcanada slung over his shoulder. He was heading up a stairway, plainly intending to

visit a fate worse than death upon her when he got to the room at the top. A nasty little dog with a Frenchman's face--labeledquebec

--bounded along behind him. God only knew what the dog would do up there. Whatever it was, it wouldn't be pretty.

FIGHT FOR YOUR COUNTRY! FIGHT FOR THE MOTHER COUNTRY! shouted the headline below the cartoon. The text under that was as vicious a denunciation of theUSA as Mary had seen since the Yanks came into Rosenfeld in the first place.

Automatically, she tucked the flyer into her handbag. She had no idea what she'd do with it, not right then. But it encouraged her even so. Somebody in town besides her couldn't stand the Yanks. That was plenty to make her feel good all by itself. British agents, indeed!

She got what she needed and brought it up to the counter. Karamanlides added it up. "Eight dollars and eighteen cents," he said, his accent part Yank and part Greek. She gave him a ten and waited for her change. The storekeeper had come up from theUSA and brought out Henry Gibbon, who'd run this place for years and years. No wonder the person with the flyer had stuck it here--this was one place where what had happened toCanada was obvious. It was the same reason Mary had planted a bomb here.

Karamanlides wasn't a bad fellow, not as an individual. He was honest enough. He carried a wide variety of goods, probably even more than Henry Gibbon had. He didn't give anybody any trouble. But he was a Yank. IfCanada were a free country, he never would have come up here. That made all the difference in the world.

Mary carried the groceries and sundries back to her apartment building and up the stairs. Alec was still busy with the fortress of blocks and toy soldiers he'd been playing with when she went to the general store. He was getting bigger; she didn't need to keep an eye on him every minute of every day.

After she'd put things away, she pulled the delicious flyer out of her purse and reread it. It was just as wonderful the second time through. The Yanks and the Frenchies would have kittens if they saw it. She suspected it did come fromBritain . A couple of turns of phrase weren't quite Canadian. It was good to see that the British hadn't forgotten their colony, even if it lay in enemy hands.

And then, all at once, Mary started to laugh. "What's so funny,

Mommy?" Alec called from the front room. "Tell me the joke."

"It's for grownups, sweetheart," Mary answered. Alec made a disappointed noise. A minute later, though, he was blowing things up again. He had quite a war going on here. Mary decided to take advantage of that. She said, "I'm going over to the post office. Do you want to come along?"

Had he said yes, she would have had to bring him. But he shook his head. She'd hoped he would, and thought so, too. He didn't like it there; he always fidgeted. And he really was engrossed in the lead-soldier war.

"I won't be too long," she said. He hardly heard her. She closed the door behind her and went out again.

The post office was only a five-minute walk. Nothing in Rosenfeld was more than a five-minute walk from anything else. Mary nodded to several people on the street as she strolled along. No point to acting as if she were in a hurry.

As usual, Wilf Rokeby had a fire going in the potbellied stove in one corner of the post office. It made the room too warm on a mild summer day. It also seemed to bring out the spicy smell of his hair oil.

"Good morning, Mrs. Pomeroy," he said, polite as usual. "Please excuse me for just one moment, if you'd be so kind." He ducked into a back room, closing the door behind him. No one else was in the building.

Better and better! Mary hurried behind the counter. She took the subversive flyer out of her purse and stuffed it into a drawer with the words POSTAGE FOR FOREIGN COUNTRIES neatly stenciled on the front. She was back on her side before the toilet flushed.

Rokeby came out and nodded briskly. "Sorry to keep you waiting there. What can I do for you today?"

"I need twenty stamps, please," Mary said.

"Coming right up." Rokeby counted them off a roll. "That'll be one dollar."

"A dollar!" Mary said. "Aren't they still three cents apiece?"

"New surcharge--I just got these in." The postmaster tapped one of the stamps with a fingernail. Sure enough, it had 12 printed in black over

President Mahan's face. Rokeby went on, "It's to help pay for the war, I expect."

Mary expected he was right. Now that she thought back on it, she remembered her father grumbling about such things during the Great War. She sighed as she reached into her purse. "They get you every which way, don't they?"

"Seems like it sometimes, that's for sure." Wilf Rokeby put the dollar bill in the cash box. "I thank you very much."

Waiting six days after that was one of the harder things Mary had done. If Rokeby happened to reach into that drawer in the meantime . . . But how many people in sleepy little Rosenfeld needed postage for foreign countries--especially these days, when a censor was bound to take a long, hard look at any letters bound for distant lands?

At the end of the wait, Mary went to Rosenfeld's only telephone booth, which stood beside one of the town's three gas stations (all run by Americans). She folded the glass door shut behind her and put a nickel in the coin slot. When the operator came on the line, she said, "Occupation headquarters, please."

She made her voice squeakier than usual so Maggie McHenry, who ate at the diner about three times a week, wouldn't recognize it.

"Yes, ma'am," was all the woman at the switchboard said.

"Allo? Who is this?" a Frenchy said in accented English when he picked up the call.

Again, Mary did her best not to sound like herself. She also did her best to sound as if she was very excited. And so she was, but not in the way she was pretending. "Horrible treason!" she gasped. "Wilf Rokeby! At the post office! Filthy pictures! Hid it when I came in, but-- Oh, my God! Horrible!"

"Who is this?" the Quebecois demanded. "What do you say?"

"Treason!" Mary repeated, and then, "I've got to go. They're looking." She was proud of that. It could have meant anything at all. She hung up and left the phone booth in a hurry.

She strolled home as calmly as if she had nothing in the world on her mind. The Frenchies probably wouldn't have the brains to question Maggie. Even if they did, she hadn't sounded as if she knew Mary's

voice. And now whatever happened with Wilf Rokeby would happen. Mary nodded and kept walking.

"Hear the news?" Mort asked at supper that night.

Mary shook her head. "I've been here almost all day. Just stepped out once for a second. Didn't talk to anybody." That should forestall Alec, who might have given her the lie if she said she hadn't been out at all. She looked interested, which wasn't hard--not a bit. "What's up?"

"Frenchies hauled Wilf Rokeby off to jail," Mort said solemnly. "Story is, they found subversive literature at the post office, if you can believe it. Wilf Rokeby! My God! Who would've figured him for that kind of thing? What was he going to do when he retired--start shooting at Frenchies and Yanks for the fun of it?"

"That's terrible. Terrible!" Mary knew she had to sound dismayed. Once she'd done it, she took another bite of meat loaf.

Hipolito Rodriguez was as happy as a man with a son in the Army could be during time of war.

Everything else in his life was going well, and nothing had happened to Pedro. This war, from what the wireless said and from the way the front moved, was a different sort from the one he'd known. You weren't stuck in trenches all the time, waiting for enemy machine-gun bursts to knock over anyone careless enough to show even a bit of himself. A war of movement, people called it.

Did it mean it was a war in which ordinary soldiers were less likely to get killed? So far, it seemed to.

Rodriguez sometimes lit candles in the hope that would go on. At Freedom Party meetings, Robert Quinn kept telling everybody how well things were going. The wireless said the same thing, over and over again.

Every day, it seemed, the men who read the news announced some new triumph.

Most people who heard the news believed every word of it. Why not? Nothing else in the Confederate States challenged the reporting. One evening after a Freedom Party meeting, though, Rodriguez went to La Culebra Verde for a few drinks. IfMagdalena yelled at him when he

got home, then she yelled at him, that was all. He didn't feel like standing at the bar; he spent too much time on his feet in the fields. He and Carlos Ruiz took a table against the wall. When the barmaid came up and asked what they wanted, they both ordered beers.

Away she went, hips swinging in her flounced skirt. Rodriguez's eyes followed her--in a purely theoretical way, he told himself.Magdalena , no doubt, would have had another word for it. He shrugged.

He was a dutiful enough husband. He hadn't done more than look at another woman since coming home from the war. If he'd gone upstairs with a few putas while he wore butternut . . . well, he'd usually been drunk first, and he'd been a lot younger, and he'd been a long way from home, with no assurance he'd ever see his wife again. What she didn't know and couldn't find out about wouldn't hurt her.

He noticed Ruiz wasn't watching the barmaid. "Are you all right?" he asked his old friend. "She's pretty."

Ruiz started. His laugh sounded embarrassed. "I wasn't even thinking about her. I was thinking about the war." He had two sons in the Army.

"Oh." Rodriguez couldn't tease him about that. He said, "Gracias a Dios, everything goes well."

His friend made the sign of the cross. "I hope so. By all the saints, I hope so. They tell us about victory after victory--heaven knows that's true."

"That proves the war is going well, sí?" Rodriguez said. The barmaid came back and set two foam-topped mugs on the table. He smiled at her. "Thank you, sweetheart."

Her answering smile was a professional grimace that showed white teeth. "You're welcome." She hurried away, her backfield in motion.

Rodriguez raised his mug. "Salud." He and Carlos Ruiz both drank. Rodriguez sucked foam off his upper lip. "Why aren't you happy about the war, then?"

Ruiz eyed his beer. "If it's going as well as they say it is, why haven't los Estados Unidos given up?"

"They're the enemy," Rodriguez said reasonably.

"Well, yes." Ruiz finished his beer and waved to the barmaid for a refill. Rodriguez hadn't intended to pour his down, but he didn't want to fall behind, either. He gulped till the mug was empty. Ruiz, meanwhile, went on, "But in 1917 they beat us over and over. They beat us like a drum." He'd fought inKentucky andTennessee , where the worst beatings had happened. "And when they'd beaten us hard enough and long enough, we had to give in. Now everyone says we're beating them like that. So why aren't they quitting, the way we had to?"

Rodriguez shrugged. "We'd been fighting for three years then. We couldn't fight any more. This war is hardly even three months old yet."

"And if it goes on for three years, we will probably lose again," Carlos Ruiz said gloomily. "If a little man fights a big man, sometimes he can hit him with a chair right at the start and win like that. But if the big man gets up off the floor and keeps fighting, the little man is in trouble."

"Countries aren't men," Rodriguez said.

Ruiz shrugged again. "I hope not. Because we've knocked theUnited States down, but we haven't knocked them out."

The barmaid set fresh beers on the table and took away the empty mugs. Her smile might have been a little warmer--or maybe Rodriguez's imagination was a little warmer. He was pretty sure she did put more into her walk this time. She's just trying to get a bigger tip out of you, he told himself. He enjoyed watching her even so. Thinking about the war took a real effort. "We've cut theUnited States in half," he said.

"Sí, es verdad," Ruiz said. "But even if it is true, so what? Why did we cut los Estados Unidos in half?

To make them quit fighting, yes? If they don't quit fighting, what good does it do us?" He started emptying his second mug of beer as methodically as he'd finished the first.

"Well . . ." Rodriguez thought for a little while. "If they're cut in half, they can't send men and supplies from one part to the other. That's what Señor Quinn says, and the wireless, too. How can they fight a war if they can't do that? They'll run out of men and food and guns."

"They still have men on both sides. They still have food on both sides,

and factories, too." Carlos Ruiz seemed determined to be glum. "We've made it harder for them, sí, sin duda. But also without a doubt, we haven't beaten them unless they decide they're beaten. It isn't like it was with us at the end of the last war, when we couldn't stand up any more. They can go on for a long time if they decide they want to, and it looks like they do." He tilted back his mug. His throat worked. He set the mug down empty and waved to the barmaid again.

Rodriguez had to gulp to get his mug dry, too, by the time she walked over. He said, "At the rate we're going, you're not going to be able to stand up any more, and neither am I." But he nodded when his friend ordered refills for both of them.

Ruiz said, "I'll be able to get home. I'm not worried about that. But if I get drunk tonight--so what? I don't do it very often any more. If I have a headache tomorrow, I'll have a headache, that's all. That's tomorrow. Tonight, I'll be drunk."

Magdalenawould have something besides so what? to say to getting drunk. Rodriguez suspected Carlos'

wife would, too. That didn't make the idea any less tempting. Rodriguez didn't get drunk very often any more, either. Did that mean he couldn't do it every once in a while if he felt like it? He didn't think so. The two beers he'd already drunk argued loudly that they ought to have some company.

Here came the barmaid. She had company for those beers in her hands. "Here you are, señores," she said, bending low to set the fresh mugs on the table. Rodriguez tried to look down her ruffled white blouse. By the way Carlos Ruiz craned his neck now, so did he. By the way the barmaid giggled, she knew exactly what they were doing, and knew they wouldn't--quite--have any luck.

They drank. The barmaid brought over a plate of jalapeños. Those were free, but they made the two men thirstier. They drank some more to put out the fire. They weren't the only ones doing some serious drinking tonight, either. Somebody at the bar started to sing. It was a song Rodriguez knew. Joining in seemed the only right thing, the only possible thing, to do. He'd never sounded better, at least in his own ears. And the rest of the audience wasn't inclined to be critical, either.

It was two in the morning when he and Carlos staggered out of La Culebra Verde. "Home," Rodriguez said, and started to laugh.

Everything was funny now. It might not be whenMagdalena saw the state he was in, but he wasn't going to worry about that. He wasn't going to worry about anything, not right this minute. He embraced his friend one last time. They went their separate ways.

The long line of power poles pointed the way home. They went straight across the countryside. Hipolito Rodriguez didn't, but he did go generally in the same direction. And he found the power poles convenient in another way, too. He paused in front of one of them, undid his trousers, and got rid of a good deal of the beer he'd drunk. A couple of miles farther out of Baroyeca, he did the same thing again.

The night was cool and dry. Days here in late summer kept their bake-oven heat, but the nights--growing longer now--were much more tolerable. Crickets chirped. Moths fluttered here and there, ghostly in the moonlight. Bigger flying shapes were bats and nightjars hunting them.

A coyote trotted past, mouth open in an arrogant, almost-doggy grin. Have to look out for my lambs, Rodriguez thought, wondering if he'd remember when he got home. Farmers around here shot coyotes on sight, but the beasts kept coming down out of the mountains and stealing stock.

There was the house, a light on in the front window. He approached with drunken caution; if the light was on,Magdalena might be waiting up for him. And ifMagdalena was waiting up, she wouldn't be very happy.

He tiptoed up the steps. Somehow, he wasn't so quiet as he wished he would have been. He managed to slam the front door behind him. Even that didn't bring out his wife. Maybe she'd stayed up till an hour or so ago, and was deep asleep now. That would save him for the time being, but she'd be twice as angry in the morning, and he'd be hung over then. He didn't look forward to that.

He didn't want to be very hung over in the morning. He knew it was too late to block all the aftereffects of what he'd drunk tonight. Maybe he could ease the pain to come, though, at least a little. He went into the kitchen and flipped on the light in there. He didn't have to fumble around lighting a lamp. A flick of the switch was all it took. A good thing, too; he might have burned down the house fooling around with kerosene and matches.

In the refrigerator were several bottles of beer. Rodriguez let out a

silent sigh of relief;Magdalena might have thrown them all away. He reached for one. It might take the edge off the headache he'd have in the morning. He was still drunk, and proved it by knocking over a pitcher of ice water next to the beer on the top shelf.

A desperate, drunken, miraculous grab kept the pitcher from crashing to the floor and bringingMagdalena out with every reason to be furious. It didn't keep the whole pitcher's worth of water from splashing down onto the floor and all over everywhere. He jumped and cursed. The cold water froze his toes. He'd hardly felt them for quite a while, but they announced their presence now.

Still swearing under his breath, he fumbled for rags. He did a halfhearted--a very halfhearted--job of cleaning up the mess, or at least that part of it right in front of the refrigerator. Puddles still glittered on the floor in the light of the electric lamp. He started to go after some of them, then shook his head. It was only water. It would dry up. And getting down on his hands and knees was making his head hurt. He didn't just want that beer. He needed it.

He opened it. He drank it. It wasn't just delicious, though it was that. It was medicinal. His headache retreated. He started to smile. Maybe he would get away with this after all. He set the bottle on the counter. Then he smiled a sly smile and put it in the trash instead.Magdalena wouldn't have to know. He wasn't as sly as he thought, though, and he was drunker than he thought.

As he reached for the light switch, his sandal splashed in one of the puddles he hadn't bothered sopping up. The instant he touched the switch, he realized he'd made a dreadful mistake. Current coursed through him, stinging like a million hornets. He tried to let go, and discovered he couldn't. Just a stupid mistake, he thought over and over. Just a stupid . . .

Honolulu. TheSandwich Islands .Paradise on earth. Warm blue water. Tropic breezes. Palm trees.

Polynesian and Oriental and even white women not overencumbered with inhibitions or clothes. Bright sunshine the whole year round.

Every paradise had its serpent. The bright sunshine was Sam Carsten's.

He'd had duty inHonolulu before. It had left him about medium rare, the way bright sunshine always did.

He was too fair to stand it, and he wouldn't tan. He just burned, and then burned some more. He wished the Remembrance were charged with protectingSeattle orPortland ,Maine , or, for that matter,Tierra del Fuego . At least then he could stick his nose out on deck without having it turn the color of raw beef.

Staying below in warm weather was no fun, either. The ship's ventilators ran all the time, but heat from the sun and from the engine room combined to defeat them. Sometimes that drove him topside. He stayed in the shade of the carrier's island when he could, which helped only so much. Even the reflection of the sun off the Pacific was plenty to scorch him.

The exec noticed his suffering. "Are you sure you want to stay aboard?" Commander Cressy asked. "If you want to transfer to a ship in the North Atlantic--one that's out to keep the British from sneaking men and arms to Canada, say--I'll do all I can to put your transfer through."

"Sir, I've been tempted to do that a few times," Sam answered. "I've been tempted, but I'd rather stay here. This is where the action is."

"Plenty of action everywhere, I'd say," Cressy observed. "But I do take your point. And if you don't want to leave us, well, you'd better believe we're glad to have you. You're a solid man. You've proved that plenty of times--and you may get the chance to do it some more."

"Thank you very much, sir," Sam said. The exec's good opinion mattered to him, probably more than that of any other officer on the ship. Cressy was a man who would soon have a ship of his own, if not a fleet of his own. Hoping to take advantage of his friendly mood, Sam asked, "When do we go into action against the Japs?"

"Damn good question," Cressy told him. "What I haven't got for you is a damn good answer. Right now, I'd say it's more up toTokyo than to us. We're playing defense here, trying to make sure they don't take theSandwich Islands away from us. We've got the Remembrance for mobility, and we've got as many land-based airplanes as we could ferry over here. We've got submersibles--oh, and battleships and cruisers, too. The enemy won't have an easy time if he comes."

"Yes, sir," Sam said. Back during the Great War, the battlewagons and cruisers would have taken pride of place. He knew that full well; he'd served aboard the Dakota back then. In this fight, Commander Cressy tossed them in as an afterthought, and that was only fitting and

proper. They could still hit hard--if they ever got close enough to do it. But airplanes, either land-based or flying off carriers, were likely to sink them before they got the chance. Even in the Pacific War, airplane carriers had attacked one another without coming over the horizon.

"The other thing we've got is Y-ranging," Cressy said. "That gives us early warning. We don't think the Japs do. Most of their engineering is pretty good; their ships and airplanes measure up to anybody's."

"Oh, yes, sir," Carsten agreed. "We've found that out the hard way."

"So we have," the exec said. "But they're just a little bit slow in electrical engineering. Most of their gear is like what we were using, oh, five years ago. They get the most out of it--never underestimate their skill.

It's one place where we know a few tricks they don't, though."

"That could be a big edge," Sam said.

"It could be, yes. Whether it will be . . ." Commander Cressy shrugged. "It's like anything else: it's not only what you've got, it's how well you use it." He nodded. "I always enjoy passing the time of day with you, Lieutenant. But now, if you'll excuse me . . ." He hurried away. He always hurried. That added to the impression that nothing ever got by him.

When Sam got leave, he took the trolley from Pearl Harbor east toHonolulu . Hotel Street was where the ratings congregated: an avenue full of bars and dance halls and brothels, all designed to make sure a sailor out on a spree didn't leave any money in his wallet and had a good time with what he spent. Shore patrolmen tramped along in groups of three or four; traveling in pairs wasn't enough. Men called them names behind their backs, and sometimes to their faces.

Sam sighed. Being an officer meant he was slumming here. He didn't really belong, the way he had during the Great War. There were some quieter, more discreet establishments an officer could visit without losing face. Carsten liked rowdiness as much as the next sailor on leave. But he was conscious that, as a mustang, he couldn't get away with certain things other officers might have. His superiors had warned him against acting as if he were still a CPO. Mustangs had the deck stacked against them anyhow. They made things harder for themselves if they remembered what they had been and forgot what they were.

He was walking toward one of those discreet establishments when a plump blond woman not far from his own age came up the street toward him. He started to go past her, then stopped and did a double take. "I'll be a son of a gun," he said. "You're Maggie Stevenson, aren't

you?"

"Hello, Lieutenant," she said, pronouncing it Leftenant in the British way. A wide, amused smile spread across her face. "I take it we've met before?"

"Just once," he replied with genuine regret. "That was the only time I could scrape so much cash together back in the last war. But you see I never forgot."

Her smile got wider yet. "I always wanted satisfied customers," she said. "Every so often, a man who was here back then recognizes me. It's flattering, in a way." During the Great War, she'd been the undisputed queen ofHonolulu 's women of easy virtue. She'd charged thirty bucks a throw, ten times the going rate for an average girl, and she'd made sailors think they got their money's worth, too. She eyed Carsten's shoulder boards. "You've come up in the world a bit since then."

He shrugged. "Maybe a bit. How about you?" She couldn't be in the business any more, but she didn't look as if she'd missed any meals. She'd made money hand over fist back then. Had she managed to hold on to any of it?

She laughed. "Lieutenant, I own about half ofHotel Street . Every time some horny able seaman gets a piece, I get a piece of his piece. I get a piece of what he drinks, too, and of what he eats, whatever that is." She laughed again. "I haven't done too badly for myself."

"Good," he said. Broken-down, penniless whores who'd got too old to turn tricks any more were a dime a dozen. Whores who'd made a killing in real estate, on the other hand . . . Well, now he'd met one.

"Good for you, by God!"

"You really mean it," Maggie Stevenson said wonderingly.

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Plenty of reasons, starting with that boring text about the wages of sin. For me, the wages of sin turned out to be pretty good, I had a lot of fun earning them, and I don't regret a goddamn thing. What do you think of that?"

"You sure gave a lot of fun," Sam said. "I'm glad you had some, too. I've known quite a few working girls who didn't--don't."

"So have I." She nodded. "I'm lucky. I have been lucky, most ways. So where are you headed, Lieutenant?"

"I was going to the Excelsior Hotel."

She made a face at him. "That's not one of mine. Would you rather visit the Oceanview?"

From what he'd heard, the Oceanview was the best officers' place inHonolulu . It was also the most expensive. "Sure," he said, "or I would if I could afford it."

"Don't worry about that." She took a business card and a pen from her purse. She wrote on the card, then handed it to Sam. "Show them this at the door. On the house. For old times' sake, you might say."

"Thanks very much." He eyed the card. She'd written, Anything--Maggie in a bright purple ink. The printed card described her as a caterer. She catered to all kinds of appetites. "Thanks very much."

"You'll pay me back. Just keep the Japs away. They'd be hell on business. Good luck, Lieutenant." Off she went, the same determination in her stride as when she'd gone on to the next eagerly waiting sailor after leaving Sam. He looked down at the card again, smiled, and shook his head in wonder.

The bouncers at the door to the Oceanview could have played professional football. They were used to seeing commanders and captains and even admirals, not an overage lieutenant, junior grade. "Help you, sir?" one of them rumbled. Help you get lost? he no doubt meant. Sam displayed Maggie Stevenson's card, wondering what would happen next.

"Oh," the bouncer said. He actually came to attention, and nudged his even beefier pal so he did the same. "Didn't know you knew the owner." He handed back the card, nothing but respect on his blunt-featured face. "Have a good time, sir."

"I do believe I will," Sam said, bemused. He walked in. The place wasn't whorehouse gaudy. Everything had an air of quiet elegance. You could see the money, but it didn't shout. And the purple ink on that card was a potent Open, Sesame.

With that card in hand, his own money was no good in there. No one would take it, not even for tips.

The food was good. The booze was better. After a while, he picked himself a girl. Just making the choice wasn't easy; the Oceanview had girls to match anyone's taste, as long as that taste was good.

Sam finally settled on a blue-eyed brunette named Louise. She did whatever he wanted, and smiled while she was doing it. He didn't ask for anything fancy or jaded; his own habits didn't run that way. He didn't think he warmed her, but she was pleasant all the way through.

She didn't throw him out of bed so she could go on to her next customer right away, either, the way girls in houses usually did. Instead, she lay beside him for a lazy cigarette and a brandy. "How did you get to know the Boss?" she asked; he could hear the capital letter.

"Same way I just got to know you," he answered, patting her round behind. He wondered if he could manage a second round. He'd been at sea a long time.

Louise's eyes widened. "She gave you that card for a roll in the hay years ago?" She didn't say, You must have been better with her than you were with me. Even if she didn't, Sam could tell what she was thinking.

He shrugged. "Maybe she was feeling sentimental." That sent Louise into gales of laughter. Well, Maggie Stevenson didn't strike Sam as the sentimental type, either. But what other explanation made sense?

And, in the end, what difference did it make? With Louise on top the second time, Sam did succeed again. He went back to the Remembrance thinking there were worse places to fight a war thanHonolulu in spite of the tropical sun.

Jefferson Pinkard always dreaded telephone calls fromRichmond . When people inRichmond phonedCampDependable , it was usually to tell him to do things he didn't want to do. Some things they didn't want to put in writing, even in something as ephemeral as a telegram.

"Hello, Pinkard." Ferdinand Koenig sounded almost offensively cheerful this morning. Why not? The Attorney General gave orders. He didn't have to take them. "How are you today?"

"Fine, sir," Jeff answered. Hopefully, he added, "Connection isn't real good."

"No? I hear you just fine," Koenig said--so much for that. "There's

something you need to take care of for me."

"What's that?" Jeff asked, trying to hide the resignation he felt.

"You still have Willy Knight there, right? Nothing's happened to him or anything?"

"No, sir. Nothing's happened to him. We've still got him right here," Pinkard said. He'd never included the former Vice President of the CSA in a population reduction. What you once did, you couldn't undo.

"How come? You need him again?" If they were crazy enough to want to use Knight to rally the country, or some small part of it, they could. Pinkard didn't think it would work, but nobody'd asked his opinion, and nobody was going to, either.

"Need him? Jesus Christ, no!" Ferd Koenig hadn't lost all of his mind, then. "He's never going to have any use for anybody again. Time to dispose of him."

"Dispose of him?" Pinkard wanted to make sure he had that right before he did anything. "Shall I expect something in writing that tells me the same thing? You people change your mind about that, whose ass is in a sling? Mine."

"Nobody's going to put anything in writing about this," Koenig said. "I'll call you back tomorrow, that's all." He hung up.

"Shit." Jefferson Pinkard hung up, too. The Attorney General hadn't said what would happen if he called back and found Willy Knight still breathing. Pinkard didn't need anybody to draw him a picture, though.

He could figure it out for himself. Somebody else would do Knight in--and he'd trade his uniform for prison coveralls, if the powers that be didn't decide to dispose of him instead.

It had to be done, then. And he had to see it done. You never could tell which guard was a secret Knight sympathizer. If the man got loose, especially now with a war on . . . Pinkard supposed that was whyRichmond had decided it didn't want to keep him around any more. If he ever escaped, the damnyankees could use him against the CSA. Or he could rally the black rebels, maybe even join them to white troublemakers. No wonder the Freedom Party didn't want to take the chance of letting him keep breathing, even in a place

likeCampDependable .

When Jeff walked out of the office compound and into the very different world of the camp itself, he wasn't surprised to have Mercer Scott come over to him within a couple of minutes. "What's up?" the guard chief asked.

He knew Pinkard had got a call fromRichmond . He didn't even bother hiding that. But he didn't know, or didn't let on that he knew, what the call was about. Maybe he was sandbagging. Jeff didn't think so.

He hoped not, anyway. He said, "Have Atkins and Moultrie and McDevitt bring Willy Knight here right away. Those three, nobody else. Anybody fucks this up, Mercer, it may cost me my ass, but I promise you you'll go down with me."

Again, Scott didn't bother pretending he didn't know what Jeff was talking about. He said, "You want to come along with me, see I don't talk to nobody else?"

"Yeah," Jeff said after a moment's thought. "I guess maybe I do. No offense, Mercer, but this here's important."

"Soon as you said it was about Willy, I reckoned it was," Mercer Scott answered. "His clock finally run out?"

Pinkard didn't answer that, not in so many words. "Let's just go get him, separate him off from the rest of the prisoners." He laughed. "One thing--he won't be hard to find." Except for the guards, Knight was still the only white man in the camp.

Braxton Atkins, Clem Moultrie, and Shank McDevitt were guards personally loyal to Pinkard. Mercer Scott had his own favorites, too. A guard chief would have been a damn fool not to. But Jeff was going to stand and fall with his people on this. Things still might go wrong, but they wouldn't go wrong because he hadn't done everything he could to make them go right.

All five white men carried submachine guns with big, heavy snail-drum magazines when they went after Willy Knight. If anybody tried to give them trouble, they could spray a lot of lead around before they went down. The Negroes in the camp had been taken in arms against the Confederate States. They knew what sort of weapons the guards had, and no doubt why. They also knew the men in uniform wouldn't hesitate to start shooting, not even a little bit. They gave them a wide

berth.

Pinkard and his followers found Knight coming back from the latrine trenches. When the former Vice President realized they were heading his way, he straightened into a mocking parody of attention. "Well, gents, what can I do for you?"

"Got a message for you fromRichmond ," Pinkard answered stolidly. "It's waiting back at the compound."

"A message? What kind of message?" Hope warred with fear on Knight's scrawny, care-worn face. Did any part of him really imagine Jake Featherston would ever let him off the hook? Maybe so, or the hope wouldn't have been there.

"I don't know. A message. They wouldn't let me look at it." Pinkard lied without compunction. This had to go smoothly. The way to make sure that happened was to keep Knight soothed, keep him eager, till the very last instant.

And it worked. He believed because he wanted to believe, because he had to believe, because not believing meant giving up. "Well, lead me to it, by God," he said, more life in his voice than Jeff had heard there for years.

"No, Mr. Knight. You go first. You know the way," Pinkard said. That Mister sealed the deal. Knight hurried on ahead of the guards. Behind his back, Mercer Scott gave Jeff a look filled with reluctant respect. He brought his free hand up to touch the brim of his juice-squeezer hat, as if to say, You know what you're doing, all right.

Once Pinkard had Willy Knight away from the rest of the prisoners, he knew things would go the way he wanted them to. He nodded to his three loyalists. They all raised their weapons and shot Knight several times each. He died hopeful, and he died fast. There were worse ways to go out--plenty of them.

The camp gave examples every day.

"Good job," Jeff told the guards. His ears still rang from the gunfire. "Take what's left here and get rid of it." They dragged Willy Knight's body away by the feet. That way, they didn't get their uniforms so dirty.

The corpse left a trail of red behind it. Flies started settling on the blood and buzzed round the body.

"Well, there's one loose end taken care of," Scott said.

"I was thinking the same thing," Jeff answered. He was also thinking that another one had just shown up.

Now the guard chief knew for sure who three of his chief backers were. He didn't see what he could have done about that, but he knew he would have to get some less obvious followers, too.

"Just complicated our lives, having him around," Mercer Scott added.

"You think I'm gonna tell you you're wrong, you're nuts," Jeff said. "Now I'm gonna go call the Attorney General back, tell him it's been taken care of." He didn't aim to wait for Ferdinand Koenig to telephone him again. He would have liked to call Koenig something worse than his formal title. He would have liked to, but he didn't, not where Scott could hear. The guard chief had his own channels back toRichmond .

Giving him dirt to report was just plain stupid.

"I liked the way you handled that. Slick as hell," Scott said.

"Thanks," Pinkard said. Maybe good reports could go back to the capital, too. Maybe. He wouldn't have bet anything much above a dime on it.

He placed the call to Koenig's office. Hisses and pops and clicks on the telephone line said it was going through. Every once in a while, Jeff could hear operators talking to each other. They sounded like faraway ghosts. And then, also from some considerable distance but not quite from the Other Side, the Attorney General said, "Koenig here."

"Hello, sir. This is Pinkard. Wanted to let you know it's all done."

"Good. That's good," Koenig said. "You didn't waste any time, did you?"

"Didn't reckon I ought to," Jeff answered. "Never can tell what'll happen if you dick around on something like this."

"Well, you're right about that." The Attorney General paused. "You're sure about it?"

Jeff had expected that. He found himself nodding, even though Ferd Koenig was a thousand miles away.

"Sir, I saw it with my own eyes. I made sure I did. Can't take chances on something so important."

"All right. I reckon you know why I have to make certain," Koenig said. Pinkard nodded again. That meant the Attorney General would also check with Mercer Scott, and maybe with some other people atCampDependable , too, people about whom neither Pinkard nor Scott knew anything. Jeff didn't know Koenig had people like that here, but he would have in the other man's shoes. The Attorney General went on, "I'll let the President know what a good job you did."

"I thank you kindly." Jeff meant that. "How do you want me to put it in the books, sir?, ‘Shot while attempting to escape' or, ‘natural causes'?"

", ‘Natural causes,' " Koenig answered after a bare moment's hesitation. "His heart stopped, didn't it?"

"Sure as hell did."

"All right, then. Leave it at that. The less we stir up those waters, the better off everybody'll be,"

Ferdinand Koenig said.

Jeff found himself nodding one more time. "That's how it'll be, then." There were still more than a few people who liked Willy Knight. They mostly kept their mouths shut if they wanted to stay healthy, but they were out there. No point getting them all hot and bothered, not if you could help it. Natural causes could mean anything.

"All right." Koenig paused once more. "Sounds like it went off smooth as can be. I'll let the President know about that, too."

"Thanks. Thanks very much." Pinkard beamed. Most of the time, nobody ever gave a jailer the respect he deserved.

After a few more polite noises--ones that didn't matter nearly so much--Koenig hung up. Jeff let out a long sigh. If it wasn't one thing, it was another. But he'd handled it.

He nodded to himself. If it wasn't one thing, it was another, all right. And he had a pretty good notion of what the next thing would be: a new population reduction. How many more of those could the guards take and still keep their marbles? He didn't want them blowing out

their own brains or finding other ingenious ways to kill themselves, the way Chick Blades had.

What could he do about it, though? He didn't have the room or the food to keep all the blacks who flooded intoCampDependable . If he tried, he'd touch off an explosion here. He couldn't do that, not when the Confederate States were fighting for their lives. He had to make things here run as well as he could. He wasn't supposed to cause trouble. He was supposed to stop it.

At least he didn't have Willy Knight to worry about any more. No more bad dreams about Knight escaping, either. That was something, anyhow.

When Cincinnatus Driver went to a drugstore to buy himself a bottle of aspirins, he had to wait till the druggist took care of every white customer in the place before he could give the man his money. Back before the Great War, he'd taken such humiliations for granted. After a quarter of a century of living as a citizen rather than a resident, though, they galled him. He couldn't do anything about that, not unless he wanted to get his population reduced, but he was muttering to himself as he made his slow, halting way out the door.

He'd been lucky, after a fashion. Another white man came in just as he was going out: a tall, jowly fellow, still vigorous despite his white hair, with a mournful face and the light brown eyes of a hunting dog.

He held the door open for Cincinnatus, saying, "Here you go, uncle."

"Thank you kindly, suh," Cincinnatus said. That uncle still grated, too. But it wasn't the reason he leaned against the sooty brickwork of the drugstore's front wall. Nobody bothered him there. Why would anyone? He was just a decrepit, broken-down nigger soaking up some sunshine. He could have been sprawled on the sidewalk with a bottle in his hand. Nobody would have bothered him then, either, unless a cop decided to beat on him or run him in for being drunk.

A pigeon strutted by, head bobbing. It could walk about as fast as Cincinnatus could. He opened the bottle of aspirins and dry-swallowed a couple of them. They wouldn't get rid of all his aches and pains, but they would help some. And the sun did feel good on his battered bones.

After five or ten minutes, the man with the white hair and the hunting-hound eyes came out of the drugstore. He was carrying a

small paper sack. He would have walked past Cincinnatus without a second glance, but the Negro spoke in a low voice: "Mornin', Mistuh Bliss."

The man stopped dead. Just for a moment, his eyes widened. Surprise? Fear? Cincinnatus would have bet on surprise. Luther Bliss was a first-class son of a bitch, but nobody'd ever said he scared easy.

Cincinnatus wondered if he'd deny being who he was. He didn't; he just said, "Who the hell are you?

How do you know who I am? Speak up, or you'll be sorry."

Sorry probably meant dead. His voice still held the snap of command. WhenKentucky belonged to theUSA , he'd headed up the Kentucky State Police--the Kentucky Secret Police, for all intents and purposes. He'd battled Negro Reds and Confederate diehards with fine impartiality, and he'd got out of the state one jump ahead of the incoming Confederates. If he was back now . . .

Cincinnatus said, "I holler for a cop, we see who's the sorriest." That brought Luther Bliss up short.

Cincinnatus went on, "I spent time in your jail. Your boys worked me over pretty good."

"You probably deserved it." No, nobody'd ever said Bliss lacked nerve.

"Fuck you," Cincinnatus said evenly.

That made Bliss jump; no Negro in his right mind would say such a thing to a white man here. But the former--or not so former--secret policeman was made of stern stuff, and shrewd as the devil, too. "You want to holler for a cop, go ahead. You'll help the CSA and hurt theUSA , but go ahead."

"Fuck you," Cincinnatus said again, nothing but bitterness in his voice this time. Luther Bliss had found the switch to shut him off, all right.

Seeing as much, Bliss managed a smile that did not reach his eyes. "This time, I reckon we're on the same side. Any . . . colored fellow who isn't on theUSA 's side, he's got to have something wrong with him." He didn't say nigger, but his hesitation showed he didn't miss by much.

He wasn't wrong, either. Cincinnatus wished he were. And sure as hell he wasn't a coward. If the Confederates caught him here, they'd take him apart an inch at a time. "What the devil you doin'

inKentucky again?" Cincinnatus asked him.

Bliss gave back that unamused smile once more. "Raising Cain," he answered matter-of-factly. Those light brown eyes--an odd, odd color, one that almost glowed in the sunlight--measured Cincinnatus like a pair of calipers. "I remember you. That Darrow bastard sprung you. Old fool should have kept his nose out of what was none of his business."

"I hoped to God I'd never see you again," Cincinnatus said.

"Well, you're about to get your wish," Bliss replied. "Like I say, you want to yell for a cop, go right ahead." He didn't bother with a farewell nod or anything of the sort. He just walked away, turned the corner, and was gone, as if he were a bad dream and Cincinnatus suddenly awake.

Shaking his head, Cincinnatus walked to the corner himself. When he looked down the street, he didn't see Luther Bliss. The ground might have swallowed up the secret policeman. Cincinnatus shook his head again. That was too much to hope for. "Do Jesus!" he muttered, shaken to the core. Ghosts kept coming back to life now that he was here inKentucky again.

He made his slow return to the colored part of town. No drugstores operated there. A couple had been open while Kentucky belonged to the USA, run by young, ambitious Negroes who'd managed to get enough education to take on the work. The Confederates had made them shut down, though. The Freedom Party didn't want capable colored people. As far as Cincinnatus could tell, the Freedom Party didn't want colored people at all.

A policeman in a gray uniform strode up to Cincinnatus on an almost visible cloud of self-importance.

"What're you doing out of the quarter, boy?" he demanded. Boy was even worse than uncle.

"Got me some aspirin, suh." Cincinnatus displayed the bottle. "I'm crippled up pretty bad, an' they help--some."

"Let me see your passbook."

"Yes, suh." Cincinnatus handed him the all-important document. The cop studied it, nodded, and handed it back with a grudging nod. Like Luther Bliss, he walked away without a backward glance.

Cincinnatus stared after him, then slowly put the passbook in his pocket once more. He despised and feared Luther Bliss, but he was damned if he would tell a Confederate cop about him. One thing he'd learned and learned well was the vital difference between bad and worse. Bliss was bad, no doubt about it. Anything that had to do with the Freedom Party was bound to be worse.

Now that he was back in his own part of town, Cincinnatus had to be extra careful where he set his cane and where he put his feet. Sidewalks here were bumpy and irregular and full of holes. In the white part ofCovington , they got repaired. Here? Not likely. This part of town was lucky to have sidewalks at all.

TheUSA hadn't spent much more money here than the Confederate States had while they ranKentucky .

One slow, painful step at a time, Cincinnatus trudged over to Lucullus Wood's barbecue place. As usual, the smell made him drool blocks before he got there. Also as usual, Lucullus had customers both black and white. Freedom Party stalwarts might hate Negroes on general principles. That didn't mean they didn't know good barbecue when they sank their teeth into it.

The heat inside was terrific. Pig carcasses and great slabs of beef turned on spits over glowing hickory coals. Cincinnatus recognized one of the men turning the spits. "Can I see Lucullus?" he asked.

"Sure. Go on back," the turner answered. "He ain't got nobody with him now."

"Come in," Lucullus called when Cincinnatus knocked on the door. The barbecue cook had a hand in the top drawer of his desk. If Cincinnatus had been an unwelcome visitor, Lucullus probably could have given him a .45-caliber reception. But he smiled and relaxed and showed both hands. "Sit yourself down.

What you got on your mind?"

Sitting down felt good--felt wonderful, in fact. Cincinnatus didn't like being on his feet. Baldly, he said,

"Luther Bliss is back in town."

"My ass!" Lucullus exclaimed. "If he was, I reckon I'd known about it. How come you got the word ahead o' anybody else? I don't mean no disrespect, but you ain't nobody special."

"Never said I was," Cincinnatus answered. "But he was goin'into Goldblatt's drugstore when I was comin' out. I ain't nobody special, but I ain't nobody's fool, neither. I seen him, I recognized him--you better believe I recognized him--an' I talked to him. He got white hair now, but he ain't changed much otherwise. Luther Bliss, all right."

Lucullus drummed his plump fingers on the desktop. "Confederates catch him, he take a looong time to die."

"I know. I thought o' that." Cincinnatus nodded. "Man's a bastard, but he's a brave bastard. I always figured that."

"What the hell he doin' here?" Lucullus asked. Cincinnatus could only shrug. Lucullus waved away this motion. "I wasn't askin' you. Ain't no reason for you to know. But I ought to have. I got me connections up in theUSA . They shoulda told me he was comin' back."

"Back in the days whenKentucky belonged to theUnited States , Bliss cared more about chasin' your daddy than about workin' with him," Cincinnatus said.

"Well, that's so, but times is different now. You gonna tell me times ain't different now?" Lucullus sent Cincinnatus a challenging stare.

Cincinnatus shook his head. "Not me. I oughta know. Still and all, though, Bliss, he works with white folks. He likely come down here for some special nasty trick or another, an' he got his people all lined up an' ready to go. I don't reckon he wants nobody else to know he's here."

"You got to be right about that." Lucullus eyed Cincinnatus again, this time speculatively. "You got to be lucky he don't decide to dispose o' you for knowin' who he is."

"He thought about it," Cincinnatus said. The sun hadn't been the only thing glowing in Luther Bliss' eyes.

"He thought hard about it, I reckon. He probably figured no nigger's gonna give him away."

"He a damn fool if he think like that. Plenty o' niggers sell their mama for a dime." Lucullus held up a hand, pale palm out. "I don't mean you. I know better. You is what you is. But a lot o' niggers is just plain scared to death--an' the way things is goin', to death is just about the size of it."

"I ain't gonna do nothin' to help the Confederates an' the Freedom Party," Cincinnatus said. "Nothin', you hear me?"

"I done said I don't mean you. I said it, an' I meant it. You got to listen when you ain't talkin'," Lucullus said. "Bliss was at Goldblatt's, was he? He likely ain't stayin' real far from there, then."

"Mebbe," Cincinnatus said. "Never can tell with him, though. That there man taught theMississippi to be twisty."

"You ain't wrong," Lucullus said. "And I is much obliged to you fo' passin' on what you seen. I should know that sort o' thing. Luther Bliss!" He whistled mournfully. "Who woulda thunk it?"

The cook heaved himself to his feet and led Cincinnatus out of the office. At his shouted order, one of the youngsters behind the counter gave Cincinnatus a barbecued-beef sandwich so thick, he could barely get his mouth around it. He walked back to his father's house engulfing it like a snake engulfing a frog.

But all the barbecue in the world couldn't have taken the taste of Luther Bliss from his mouth.

Just swinging a hammer felt good to Chester Martin. Watching a house go up, making a house go up, seemed a lot more satisfying than tramping along the sidewalk with a picket sign on his shoulder. He'd never been thrilled about taking on a general's role in the war against capitalist oppression.

So he told himself, anyhow--and told himself, again and again. With patriotic zeal, one big builder after another had made his peace with the construction workers' union. Nobody could afford strikes any more. Everyone from the President on down was saying the same thing. People were actually acting as if they believed it, too. Love of country trumped love of class. That was one of the lessons of 1914, when international solidarity of the workers hadn't done a damn thing to stop the Great War. A generation of peace had let memories grow hazy. Now the truth came to light again.

Martin found himself quietly swearing at Harry T. Casson as he rode the trolley home from work one hot afternoon. The building magnate had known him better than he knew himself. Try as he would to get back to normal, to return to being an ordinary working man, he missed the class struggle, missed heading the proletariat's forces in that struggle. Was ordinary work enough after such a long, bruising fight?

When he got off the trolley a few blocks from his place, a newsboy on the corner was hawking the Daily Mirror--Los Angeles' leading afternoon paper--with shouts of, "Sabotage! Treason! Read all about it!"

That was a headlineChester would have expected from the Times. In fact, half a block away another newsboy was selling the afternoon edition of the Times with almost identical cries. In the Times, they were usually aimed at union organizers and other such subversives.Chester bought a copy of the Daily Mirror. That way, he didn't have to give the Times any of his money.

He discovered that the Daily Mirror--and, presumably, even the Times for once--meant their headlines literally. AU.S. offensive against the Confederates inOhio had been blunted because Confederate sympathizers blew bridges, took down important road signs, and otherwise fouled things up. One of them had been caught in the act. He'd killed himself beforeU.S. forces could seize him and, perhaps, squeeze answers out of him.

"Fighting the enemy is hard enough. Fighting the enemy and our own people at the same time is ten times worse," an officer was quoted as saying. Right next to his bitter comment was a story about the secondary campaign inUtah . The Mormons were using lots of land mines againstU.S. soldiers andU.S.

barrels, making the advance towardProvo hideously expensive.

Chesteralmost walked past his own building. He folded the newspaper under one arm and thumped his forehead with the heel of his other hand. Then he went inside and went upstairs. He sniffed when he let himself into the apartment. "What smells good?" he called.

"It's a tongue," Rita answered from the kitchen.Chester smiled. When times were good, back in the 1920s, he would have turned up his nose at tongue. He and Rita had started eating it when times went sour. They'd kept on eating it afterwards because they both found they liked

it. So did their son. Rita went on, "How did it go today?"

"All right, I guess."Chester did his best not to think about his discontent. To keep from flabbling about what he was doing, he flabbled about external things instead: "War news isn't very good."

"I know. I've been listening to the wireless," his wife said. "Not much we can do about it, though."

He walked into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and took out a bottle of Lucky Lager. "Want one?"

he asked. When Rita nodded, he opened the beer, put it on the counter by her, and got another one for himself. They clinked the brown glass bottles together before drinking.

Not much we can do about it. Rita knew he sometimes thought about putting on the uniform again. He wasn't afraid of getting shot at. Her knowing he might get shot at? That made him shiver.

"Ahhh! That hits the spot!"Chester said after a third of the bottle ran cold down his throat. Rita, who'd taken a smaller sip, nodded.Chester drank again, then went on, "At least it doesn't look like the Confederates are going to takeToledo away from us."

"Thank God for small favors." Rita's second swig was a hefty one.Chester understood that. They'd come toLos Angeles fromToledo after he lost his job at a steel mill there. Both of them still had family in the town. If the Confederates had decided to drive west after reaching Lake Erie atSandusky . . .

But they hadn't.Chester added, "Last letter we got from my old man, he says even the bombers aren't coming over as often as they did."

"They don't need to so much, not any more," Rita said.

One more truth,Chester thought. Till the Confederates cut theUSA in half, all sorts of cargoes rolled throughToledo , bound for points farther east. Now those cargoes couldn't go much farther east--not on land, anyhow. "I'll bet the docks are booming,"Chester said.

His wife gave him a look. "Of course they are. That's why the bombers still come over at all: to make them go boom."

Chestergroaned. "I didn't mean it like that." Whether he'd meant it or

not, it was still so. He usually made the jokes in the family, but he'd walked right into this one. He said, "You can get rich sailing on a freighter in theGreat Lakes today."

"You can get blown to kingdom come sailing in one of those freighters, too," Rita pointed out. Pay was high because the chances of running the Confederate gauntlet were low.Chester finished his beer with a last gulp and opened another one. Rita didn't say anything. He wasn't somebody who made a habit of getting smashed after he came home from work. He certainly wasn't somebody who made a habit of pouring down a few boilermakers before he came home from work. He'd known a few--maybe more than a few--steelworkers like that. Builders drank, too, but mostly not with the same reckless abandon.

"I'm home!" Carl shouted. The front door slammed. Feet thundered in the hall.

"Oh, good,"Chester told his son. "I thought we were in the middle of an elephant stampede."

Carl thought that was funny. He also thought his father hadn't been joking. Rita said, "Go wash your hands and face. With soap, if you please. Supper's just about ready."

Despite the warning, Carl's cleanup was extremely sketchy. Like any boy his age, he was not only a dirt magnet but proud of it. When he came out of the bathroom with the dirt still there and not even visibly rearranged,Chester sent him back. "Do a better job or you won't have to worry about supper," he said.

"And it's tongue tonight."

That got Carl moving--yes, he loved tongue. Nobody'd told him it was poor people's food. He just thought it tasted good. When he emerged this time, there was no doubt water had touched his face.Chester wasn't so sure about soap. But when he went into the bathroom himself to unload some of that beer, he found the bar of Ivory had gone from white to muddy brown.

"For Pete's sake, wash the soap after you use it," he told his son when he came out.

Carl giggled. "That's a joke, Daddy! You wash with the soap."

"If anybody washes with the soap after you've been anywhere near it,

he'll get dirtier, not cleaner,"Chester said. Carl thought that was funny, too.Chester wondered if anything this side of a clout in the ear would make him change his mind.

Along with the tongue, supper included potatoes and carrots and onions. Sometimes Rita made tongue with cloves, the way most of her cookbooks recommended.Chester liked it better with lots of salt and horseradish. Carl couldn't stand horseradish--it was too strong for him.Chester hadn't liked it when he was a kid, either. Too big a mouthful was like a dagger up into your head.

After supper, Rita washed dishes and Carl unenthusiastically dried.Chester turned on the wireless. He spun the dial, going from quiz show to comedy to melodrama to music. Not a football game anywhere.

He muttered to himself, even though he'd known there wouldn't be. The war had put paid to football leagues strong and weak all across the country. Travel for nothing more important than sport seemed unpatriotic--and a lot of football players were wearing uniforms of green-gray, not some gaudier colors.

Chestermissed the broadcasts even so. He'd played a lot of football when he was younger--not for money, but he knew the game. And listening to announcers describing far-off action was one of the best ways he knew to wind down after a long, hard day.

Without any games, he settled on an adventure story set inCanada . The hero was trying to forestall Japanese agents from touching off an uprising. The Japs sounded like characters from a bad imitation of Gilbert and Sullivan. The Canadians who stayed loyal to theUSA were almost as good as real Americans; the ones who didn't were truly despicable. All in all, the show was pretty dumb, but it made half an hour go by and it sold shaving cream--to say nothing of selling the Stars and Stripes.

At the top of the hour came five minutes of news. Stations had to have some if they wanted the government to renew their broadcast licenses. This was a pretty bare-bones setup--the reader droned away, presenting copy plainly taken straight from the wire services: "U.S.pilots have pounded strategic targets inRichmond ,Louisville , andNashville for the third night in a row. Damage is reported heavy. Only a few Confederate raiders appeared overPhiladelphia last night. Several of them were shot down, while those that escaped did little harm."

Chesterwondered how much of that he could believe. All of it? Any of it? What were the people who could actually see what was happening hearing on the news? Was it so relentlessly upbeat? He wouldn't have bet anything on it.

"Confederate authorities have denied reports that former Vice President Willy Knight was killed while attempting to escape," the newsman said. "Knight has been imprisoned since failing in his attempt to overthrow President Featherston. When asked about his current whereabouts and condition, Confederate spokesman Saul Goldman declined comment."

Again, more questions than answers. Was Willy Knight still alive? Had he died not attempting escape?

Chester Martin shrugged. He wished Knight had managed to get rid of Featherston. The CSA wouldn't have been so dangerous without that maniac in charge.

"President Smith has announced that theUnited States are preparing strong counterblows against the Confederate States., ‘We are one people. We are strong and determined, and we will prevail,' the President said to war workers in a factory outsidePhiladelphia . Long and tumultuous applause greeted his remarks."

Well,Chester knew what that meant: nothing at all. It was only wind and air. Of course the United States were preparing counterblows. Whether any would work was a different question. So far, the Confederates had been ready for everything theUnited States threw at them.

After a couple of local stories, the announcer said, "Coming up next is the popular Marjorie's Hope.

Stay tuned." Marjorie's Hope wasn't popular withChester . He turned off the wireless.

XII

When George Enos, Jr., joined the Navy, he thought he would go aboard a warship right away. Why not? He'd been a seaman for years. What more did he need to know? In his mind, the answer to that was nothing. The Navy had other ideas.

The Navy's ideas won. When the Navy's ideas bumped up against his, they always won. That was annoying, but it was how things worked.

It was also one of the things he had to learn before he could go from fisherman to Navy man. As the saying went, there was a right way, a wrong way, and a Navy way. If you did things the Navy way, you couldn't get in too much trouble. The training camp outsideProvidence drove that home.

George had been hundreds of miles out to sea. Except for his honeymoon atNiagara Falls , the train ride toProvidence was the longest one he'd ever made. He was jammed up against a window. He liked that fine, except when he had to fight his way to the aisle to go to the toilet. Otherwise, he pressed his nose to the dirty, smeary glass and gaped at the countryside rolling by.

Training camp wasn't what he'd expected, either. The Navy seemed determined to make soldiers, not sailors, out of its recruits. George didn't mind the calisthenics, though the fellows ten years younger than he was had an easier time with them. He didn't mind making his cot up just so; he understood the need to keep things tidy in cramped places. He did mind the endless marching in formation. He saw no point to it.

"Are we going to do close-order drill on a battleship deck, for crying out loud?" he grumbled one hot, sticky evening before lights-out.

"You know what it is? I'll tell you what it is," a skinnyNew York kid named Morris Fishbein said. His accent and George's were much further apart from each other than the miles separating their home towns; sometimes they hardly seemed to be speaking the same language. "They want to pound the individualism out of us, that's what they want to do."

"What do you mean?" George asked.

Before answering, Fishbein lit a cigarette. He smoked in quick, nervous puffs. Everything he did seemed fast and herky-jerky. His thoughts went the same way, leaping over the mental landscape where George had to plod one mental step at a time. Blowing out smoke, Fishbein said, "Only stands to reason. We all gotta act the same way on a ship. We all gotta do what they tell us, no matter what the hell it is, without even thinking about it. We don't do that, we get in trouble and maybe we put the ship in trouble. We gotta do it automatic-like, you know what I mean? So that's what close-order drill

is for."

Maybe he was right. Maybe he was wrong. Right or wrong, he was sure as hell plausible. When George was marching and countermarching and turning to the left flank and the right, he didn't feel like an individual. He barely felt like a human being. He was just one gear in an enormous machine where all the pieces worked smoothly together. Maybe that was what Fishbein was talking about.

Every once in a while, something would go wrong in the machinery. Somebody would turn right when he should have turned left, or else keep going straight when he should have countermarched. What happened to such luckless people didn't bear thinking about. CPOs descended on them like a swarm of cats on a mouse. The abuse they screamed startled George, who'd been working at T Wharf and going to sea since before he started shaving, and who thought he'd heard it all.

"They should treat us better," he complained.

"Yeah, and then you wake up," Morrie Fishbein said scornfully. "All we're there for is to get work out of us. Military proletariat is what we are. They don't have to treat us good. We fuck up, they replace us."

"You talk too much like that, they'll come down on you," George said.

"I'm a Socialist. So what? So's the President. It's still a free country--more or less. I'm not talking about the revolt of the proletariat. I don't want that. I want to blow the reactionaries in the goddamn CSA to hell and gone. We need an Army and a Navy for the job. But I know a class structure when I see one."

A big, slow-talking Midwesterner named Oswald Schmidt said, "I know something you don't know."

His flat accent sounded nothing like George's or Fishbein's.

"Oh, yeah? What's that?" Fishbein bristled at the very idea.

"I know you talk too goddamn much."

It could have been the start of a fight. But everybody who heard it laughed too hard for anything to get started. And everybody except possibly Morris Fishbein knew he did talk too much.

Reveille at half past five made a lot of people groan every morning.

George took it in stride. He put in longer hours at sea than the Navy made him put up with. Navy cooks weren't anything special--they couldn't very well be, not cooking for so many men. But quantity counted, too. Bacon and eggs and fried potatoes and plenty of coffee made the day worth facing.

George also learned to shoot aSpringfield as if he were in the Army. He supposed that gave him a certain mental discipline, too. From rifles, he graduated to machine guns, and then to one-pounder antiaircraft guns. He felt a certain thrill firing one of those--his father had helped tend the same kind of weapon in the Great War.

Some of the recruits had no idea how to take care of weapons, or how to fix them when part of their mechanism went out of whack. George had no problems there. Any fisherman had to be a pretty good jackleg mechanic. If something broke down while you were out on the Grand Bank, you couldn't take it to the nearest repairman. You damn well had to fix it yourself, with whatever you had on your boat.

A couple of petty officers noticed that George's hands knew what they were doing. "Keep that up and you'll be a machinist's mate in jig time," one of them said.

"I don't much want to be a machinist's mate," George answered.

"Why not? People who can put things back together like you don't grow on trees. The Navy needs as many of 'em as it can get," the chief said, scowling at George for daring to have a mind of his own.

George shrugged. "If I have my druthers, I'll be a gunner. That's what my father was. Besides, I'd sooner blow up the other guys if I'm going to be in the scrap at all."

The chief stuck out his chin farther than should have been humanly possible. "Listen, Enos, you're in the Navy now. You don't get your druthers, and you ain't gonna have 'em, neither. You'll do what we tell you, or else you'll be the sorriest son of a bitch ever born--and then you'll do what we tell you. You got that?"

"Yes, Chief Isbell. Sure do." George knew better than to come right out and argue. That would have asked to get his square peg self rammed into a round hole. But he didn't volunteer for special machinist's training, either. He wondered if anybody would volunteer him. No one did. He let out a discreet sigh of relief, making sure none of the fearsome chiefs could hear him when he did it.

Before long, the raw seamen started training cruises in a destroyer that hadn't been new in the Great War and was downright ancient now. The Lamson's decrepitude made her a better ship to learn in than a newer vessel would have been. Things were always going wrong with her. Her hull wasn't much more than rust covered by paint. That gave the aspiring sailors endless practice at chipping paint and polishing metal, two skills any seaman needed.

She was so old, she burned coal. George did a stretch in the black gang, shoveling it into her furnace.

He came off those shifts exhausted and looking like the end man in a minstrel show. He coughed up black-streaked phlegm for days afterwards.

Once upon a time, the Lamson had been able to make twenty-eight knots. The only way she could do that these days was by falling off a cliff. Her boilers had more wheezes than a sanatorium full of consumptives. George knew diesels, but he'd never worked with steam before. He found himself interested in spite of his vow to steer himself toward gunnery.

He had a hammock and a duffel bag to call his own: even less in the way of space and belongings than he'd had on the Sweet Sue. For him, though, the adjustment was small. Some of the landsmen groused all the time. A couple of them just couldn't take it. They'd managed the barracks outside ofProvidence , but couldn't stand the even tighter quarters at sea.

Or maybe it was the heads that did them in. They had no partitions. You did your business sitting next to somebody else who was doing his business, and if what you saw and heard and smelled put you off your stride, you got more and more constipated. The pharmacist's mates did a booming--so to speak--business in castor oil.

The Lamson had five three-inch guns. They hadn't been much back when she was built, and they were only popguns by today's standards. But they were big enough to give the crew practice at loading, firing, and shooting real artillery pieces.

An ensign with peach fuzz on his cheeks asked, "What would you do, men, if we were attacked by a British cruiser?"

Get blown to hell and gone, George thought, but that probably wasn't what the baby-faced officer wanted to hear. Morrie Fishbein said, "Launch torpedoes, sir. They'd be our best chance against anything

that outgunned us by so much."

The ensign frowned. That was a good answer, but not the one he'd been looking for. He said, "But how would you fight back with our guns?"

"Shoot like hell and hope for the best, sir," Fishbein answered. "One hit from a six-inch gun and we're scrap iron anyway." He was right there, too. Destroyers weren't armored against shellfire. They couldn't be; they depended on speed instead. Armor added weight and would have slowed them down.

After that, the ensign asked fewer questions.

George did everything at the Lamson's guns: he jerked shells, loaded, handled the altitude and azimuth screws, and finally commanded the piece. If he served a gun once he was assigned to his own ship, he knew he would start as a shell jerker. That was low man on the totem pole. He didn't care. As long as that gun was shooting at the Confederates--or the British, or the French, or the Japanese--he didn't care at all.

Some of the men on the Lamson got dreadfully seasick. The waves did pick her up and toss her around a good deal. That fresh-faced ensign turned almost as green as theAtlantic . George took the destroyer's motion in stride. Whatever the ocean did to her, it wasn't a patch on a fishing boat riding out a storm.

Once you'd been through that, nothing else on the ocean would faze you . . . unless you were the luckless sort who never did find his sea legs. In that case, the Navy--or at least a warship--was a ghastly mistake.

There were men who kissed the dirty, splintery planks of the wharf when the Lamson got back to port inProvidence . Nobody laughed at them. Everyone had been through enough to feel There but for the grace of God go I. If the grace of God didn't decide who made a good sailor and who didn't, George couldn't imagine what would.

As usual, the land seemed to reel when he came ashore. He was used to a constantly shifting surface under his feet; one that stayed in place felt wrong. So did a horizon that failed to roll and pitch. He knew the abnormalities would subside in a little while, which made them no less strange while they were going on.

Routine returned, including close-order drill. George endured it,

waiting for his next cruise. The Navy had more nonsense in it than he'd expected when he put on the uniform. Once he was at sea, though, most of it went away. And that was what really mattered.

These days, cops with submachine guns patrolled the bus stop where blacks in the Terry went off toAugusta 's war plants. They made sure nobody could repeat the atrocity that had scarred the colored part of town. Scipio didn't care. He went a couple of blocks out of his way every day so he didn't have to walk past that bus stop.

He knew avoiding it might not save him. There weren't enough cops inAugusta to examine every automobile in the Terry, let alone every one in the whole town. And a bomb didn't have to hide inside an auto. A creative terrorist had plenty of other choices.

Fewer whites joked about his penguin suit as he walked to the Huntsman's Lodge. Fewer joked at all.

Hard suspicion filled most of the glances he got. His passbook got checked two or three times in the trip up to the restaurant.

Bathsheba said the same thing happened to her when she went to clean houses. More and more, whites inAugusta didn't want Negroes coming out of the Terry at all unless they rode on those buses.

Scipio wondered what the whites thought they would do if they started excluding waiters and cleaners and barbers and others who served them and made their lives easier and more comfortable. Would they start waiting on one another? He couldn't believe it. In the Confederate States, that was nigger work. The whole point of being a white in the CSA was that you didn't have to do nigger work. All whites were equal, above all blacks. Why else had the Confederate States seceded, if not to preserve that principle?

He slipped into the Huntsman's Lodge with a sigh of relief. As long as his shift lasted, everything would probably be all right. He knew his role here. He knew what to expect from his boss and the cooks and the other waiters and the customers. They wouldn't be wondering if he aimed to blow the place to hell and gone. The most they'd worry about was whether the steak they'd ordered rare would come back medium-rare. They'd look down their noses at him, but in a familiar way.

"Hello, Xerxes," Jerry Dover said when he came in. "You know a

colored fella about your age named Aurelius? He said you did."

"Yes, suh, I knows Aurelius," Scipio answered. "How come you knows he?"

"He's looking for work here. Place he was at's closing down."

"Do Jesus! John Oglethorpe's place closin' down?" Scipio said in altogether unfeigned dismay. "He give me my first job waitin' tables in dis town--alongside Aurelius--when I come here durin' de las' war. What fo' he closin' down?"

"Got somethin' wrong with his ticker--he's not strong enough to keep the place open any more,"Dover answered. "Too damn bad--I know he's been here a long time. This Aurelius knows his stuff, then?"

"Oh, yes, suh," Scipio said at once. "I reckon you knows about Oglethorpe's. Ain't no fancy place--just a diner. But Aurelius, he always put out de right forks an' spoons, an' he put dey where dey goes. I walk in dere lookin' for work, he check me on dat first thing."

He wondered if he'd just talked too much. Jerry Dover might ask him where he'd learned such things, if not at Oglethorpe's. On the other hand,Dover already knew Anne Colleton claimed he'd worked for her.

If the restaurant manager had an ounce of sense, he knew that claim was true, too. He'd protected Scipio, but for the restaurant's sake more than the Negro's. And now Anne was dead. Scipio still found that hard to believe.

AllDover did ask was, "You reckon he can do the job?" That didn't just mean keeping the customers happy and knowing which fork went where. It meant showing up on time every day no matter what. It meant not making yourself intolerable to the cooks. It meant a good many other things, too, but those were the big ones.

Scipio nodded without hesitation. "Yes, suh. He do it. Dat man don't give you no trouble, not fo'

nothin'."

"All right, then. I expect I'll take him on. We both know that Marius fella isn't working out."

This time, Scipio's nod was reluctant. Marius meant well. Scipio was convinced of that. But he also knew which road good intentions

paved. The young waiter would come in late, and without lettingDover know ahead of time he'd be late. He was clumsy, and the cooks ragged him because of it. Like any cooks, the ones here were merciless when they scented weakness. And Marius couldn't take ribbing, and he was no damn good at giving it back.

Jerry Dover clapped Scipio on the back. "Don't worry about it. You're not the one who's going to can his ass. I am." He laughed. "And he'll probably end up in a war plant two days after I do it. Getting fired might be the best thing that ever happens to him."

"Yes, suh," said Scipio, who didn't believe it for a minute. Working in a war plant was better than getting shipped off to a camp, but it wasn't a whole lot better. The hours were long, the work was hard, and the pay was lousy. Very few blacks complained where whites could hear them. By all appearances, nobody did that more than once.

Out to the dining room Scipio went. It hadn't started filling up yet. A couple of businessmen sat smoking Habanas and going on in low voices about the killings they were making. Blacks might not gain much from the war plants. More than a few whites did.

Off at a corner table, a Confederate captain was spending a week's pay to impress a pretty blond girl.

Scipio wondered if he'd get as much return for his investment as the businessmen did for theirs. He must have thought so, or he wouldn't have brought her here.

Scipio smiled at the eagerness blazing from the young officer. Confederate soldiers bothered him much less than Freedom Party stalwarts or guards. Soldiers mostly looked outward, not inward. The Party oppressed Negroes. Soldiers aimed at theUSA .

And yet . . . Scipio wished he hadn't thought about and yet. He'd killed a Confederate officer in 1916, as theCongareeSocialistRepublic fell to pieces. Plenty of other officers and soldiers had helped to break it. He wished he could forget those days, but he didn't think he'd ever be free of them.

Before long, more people started coming into the Huntsman's Lodge. Scipio was glad enough to serve them, and wished there were more still. As long as he stayed busy, he didn't have to think. Not thinking, these days, counted for a blessing.

Bathsheba would have wagged a finger at him if he'd said something

like that where she could hear it.

Her faith sustained her. Part of Scipio wished he too believed in God and in good times to come. He wished he could. But what kind of God would let people go through what the Negroes in the CSA were enduring? No kind that Scipio wanted anything to do with.

When his shift ended, he made his way home. That was plenty to put the fear of God in him. Since the two auto bombs went off, black predators weren't all he had to worry about in the Terry. Whites with pistols or rifles or submachine guns often came in after night fell and shot up the place almost at random.

They'd hit his building only once, and never the floor where he and his family lived. Who could say how long that would last, though?

Sometimes people in the Terry would shoot back. But that carried its own risks. The only thing that would guarantee a Negro a more horrible death than killing a white man was raping a white woman. No matter how desperate for self-defense the blacks ofAugusta were, any serious resistance would bring more firepower than they could hope to withstand down on their heads.

Damned if we do, damned if we don't, Scipio thought miserably. Somebody not too far away chose that exact moment to fire off a whole magazine from a submachine gun. It punctuated his bitter thoughts. So did the laughter--without a doubt from a white throat--that followed.

"Praise the Lord you're here," Bathsheba said when Scipio finally walked into their apartment.

"Praise de Lawd," Scipio echoed, tasting his own hypocrisy. He added, "You should oughta be sleepin'."

"Guns woke me." By the calm way his wife said it, it might have been an everyday occurrence.

Increasingly, it was. As Scipio got out of his tuxedo, Bathsheba asked, "What's the news?"

He had some this evening: "Look like Aurelius be comin' to work at de Huntsman's Lodge."

"How come?" Bathsheba asked. "Don't you tell me Mr. Oglethorpe

threw him out. I don't believe it."

John Oglethorpe was the most decent white man either of them knew. He would have clouted anybody who told him so in the side of the head with a frying pan. In an odd way, that too was a measure of his decency.

Scipio shook his head. "Mistuh Oglethorpe closin' down on account of he ain't well no more. Aurelius got to find what he kin."

"I pray for Mr. Oglethorpe," Bathsheba said. Scipio nodded. Prayer couldn't hurt. On the other hand, he didn't think it would do much good. Oglethorpe had to be pushing eighty, or maybe past it. When you got to that age, you didn't sit down and start War and Peace.

Sliding his nightshirt on over his head, Scipio brushed his teeth at the sink and then lay down beside Bathsheba. Had he been in a mood to thank God for anything, it would have been for good teeth. He still had all but two of the ones he'd been born with, and they didn't give him much trouble. He knew how lucky he was by the misery so many people went through.

Then again, he still had the skin he was born with, too. That caused him lots of misery all by itself. That kind of skin caused millions of people in the CSA misery. And who cared about them? Nobody in this country. Nobody in the United States, or they would have protested louder when the Confederates started abusing Negroes over and above the ways they'd always abused them. Nobody in the Empire ofMexico . Nobody inBritain orFrance , not when they were on the same side as Jake Featherston.

Nobody at all.

"Ain't easy, bein' a nigger," he muttered.

"What you say?" Bathsheba asked sleepily. He repeated himself, a little louder this time. She nodded; he could feel the bed move. "Never was, never is, never gonna be. You ain't used to that by now?"

Her words paralleled his thoughts all too well. But, for once, however bad it had been, however bad it might be, didn't measure up to how bad it was now. Scipio started to say so. But his wife's breathing had gone soft and regular; she'd fallen back to sleep.

Scipio wished he could do the same. No matter what he wished, he couldn't. He had too much on his mind. What if a white man sent a

burst of submachine-gun fire through this flat in the next five minutes?

What if a black man set off an auto bomb in front of the building? What if . . . ?

What if you relax and get some rest? Scipio shook his head. Those other things might happen. They were only too likely to happen. Rest and sleep were unlikely to come any time soon. He didn't know what he could do about that. He didn't think he could do anything. And that by itself made a perfectly good reason not to be able to sleep.

Armstrong Grimes loped in the direction ofProvo,Utah . Barrels rumbled along with the advancingU.S.

infantry. Most of them couldn't go any faster than he could. The Army had hauled Great War machines out of storage and put them to work against the Mormons.Philadelphia needed its modern barrels for the fight against the CSA, and must have figured these antiques would do well enough here.

In a way, Armstrong could see the War Department's point of view. Against an enemy with no barrels of his own, any old barrels would do. But these beasts had enormous crews, broke down if you looked at them sideways, and couldn't get out of their own way. It did make him wonder how seriously the folks back East took this fighting.

A machine gun in a farmhouse up ahead started chattering. Armstrong dove behind a boulder and shot back. He didn't know how much good that would do. A lot of the houses here were built like fortresses.

The Mormons defended them as if they were fortresses, too. Armstrong had already discovered that.

One of those slow, awkward barrels turned toward the farmhouse. Since it had a prow-mounted cannon instead of a rotating turret, it had to turn to make the gun bear on the target. It waddled forward. Bullets from the machine gun spanged off its armor. It could ignore those, though any cannon shell would have ripped into it like a can opener.

Confident in its immunity, the barrel moved in for the perfect shot--and ran over a buried mine. Whump!

Armstrong didn't know how many tons the barrel weighed, but the mine made it jump in the air. Smoke and flames poured out of the cannon port and all the machine-gun ports. They poured from the escape hatches, too, when those flew open. Only a handful of crewmen managed to get out, and the Mormon machine gunners remorselessly shot most of them down.

Ammunition started cooking off inside the carcass of the machine. The pop-pop-pop sounded absurdly cheerful, like firecrackers on the Fourth of July. By then, whoever was still inside the barrel had to be dead.

"Son of a bitch," Armstrong muttered. A moment later, another barrel hit a mine and started to burn.

"Son of a bitch!" he said. The Mormons had known what they'd be up against, all right, and they were ready to fight it. Did anybody know what we'd be up against? he wondered.

Whistling screams in the air made Armstrong dig in for dear life. The shells that came down on theU.S.

soldiers weren't of the ordinary sort. The Mormons had some conventional artillery, but not a whole lot.

As they had with their biplane bomber, they'd improvised. Large-caliber mortars didn't shoot very far, but you didn't want to be on the receiving end when the bombs landed.

The earth shook under Armstrong. He jammed his thumbs into his ears and yelled as loud as he could.

That eased the blast, a little. Dirt and small stones--and a couple not so small--thrown up by near misses pattered down on his back.

Corporal Stowe jumped in the foxhole with him. The squad leader shouted something. Armstrong took his thumbs out of his ears. Stowe shouted it again: "Gas!"

"Shit," Armstrong said, and grabbed for his mask. If it was mustard gas or nerve gas, even the mask might not help. Those could get you through the skin--you didn't have to inhale them.

More mortar bombs thudded home. They were obviously homemade. What about the poison gas in them? Did the Mormons have labs

cranking it out in the desert somewhere? That wasn't impossible; who paid attention to anything inUtah but the stretch fromProvo up toOgden ? But it was also possible that the rebels here had had some help from others who called themselves Rebels. The Confederates would have to be crazy not to do all they could for the Mormons. As long as this uprising tied down large numbers ofU.S. soldiers, those soldiers wouldn't go into action against the CSA.

Armstrong breathed in air that tasted of rubber. He peered out through little portholes that needed cleaning.

AU.S. barrel was shelling the house that held the machine gun. Part of the roof had fallen in, but the machine-gun crew was still in business. Muzzle flashes and the streaks of tracers made that very clear.

Sooner or later,U.S. forces would drive the Mormons out of that house, but at what price? TheUSA had already lost two barrels and most of the big crews the lumbering Great War machines carried. And another old-fashioned barrel wasn't moving and wasn't shooting. Had gas got the men inside? Armstrong wouldn't have been surprised.

We aren't buying anything cheap today, he thought. Whatever the price, in the end theUnited States could afford to pay it and the Mormons couldn't. Just because theUnited States could, though, didn't necessarily mean they should. That seemed obvious to PFC Armstrong Grimes. He wondered if it had occurred to anybody in the War Department. On the evidence, it seemed unlikely.

U.S.artillery started pounding the machine-gun position. MoreU.S. shells fell farther back: counterbattery fire against the Mormon mortars. Of course, the mortar crews might not have hung around to get pounded. Mortars were much lighter and more portable than regular artillery. Again, did anybody on theU.S. side think in those terms?

Any which way, Armstrong knew what his job was. He jumped out of his foxhole, ran forward twenty or thirty feet, and threw himself into a crater one of the mortar bombs had made--they hadn't all been loaded with poison gas. The machine gun's stream of bullets came searching for him, but too late. He'd reached new cover.

Have to stay here a while, till they forget about me. He panted. Running hard in a gas mask wasn't easy.

It was, in fact, damn near impossible. The filter cartridge wouldn't let you suck in enough air.

He could have all the air he wanted if he took off the mask. Of course, he would also keel over in short order if he got unlucky. Some men didn't care. They took big chances with poison gas, just because they couldn't stand their gas masks. Armstrong took his share of chances, too, but not like that.

When artillery failed to silence the Mormon machine gun, dive bombers paid it a call. They didn't scream like Confederate Asskickers, but they flattened the house. The machine gun fell silent at last.U.S.

soldiers, Armstrong among them, cautiously moved forward.

No one shot at them from the shattered house any more. But as they drew near, somebody stepped on a cunningly buried land mine. The man in green-gray screamed, but not for long--he'd been blown to red rags below the waist. And another machine gun a couple of hundred yards father back, whose crew seemed to have waited for just that, opened up on the Americans.

Armstrong didn't know whether to shit or go blind. He threw himself to the ground, wondering if explosives hidden beneath it would blast him sky-high an instant later. Bullets stitched malevolently through the dirt all around him, kicking dust off the portholes of his gas mask. He crawled for the shelter of a rock. It wasn't much shelter, because it wasn't much of a rock. He gratefully took anything he could get.

Behind him, an American machine gun opened up. Bullets zipped over his head--not far enough over it, as far as he was concerned. They'd probably nail some of his buddies, not that the gunners would give a damn. He didn't shed a tear when machine gunners got shot. They were almost as bad as snipers.

And they couldn't knock out the Mormon machine gunners, which made them all the more worthless. He had no idea where or if the Mormons had done their basic training. Wherever it was, they all fought like ten-year veterans. They never showed much of themselves, they always had gun positions supporting other gun positions, and they didn't seem to have heard of retreat. The only wayU.S. soldiers moved forward was over their dead bodies.

Armstrong spotted Corporal Stowe sprawled behind another rock. He pointed toward the Mormons ahead--making sure he exposed no part of himself to their fire--and shouted, "Why can't we turn these fuckers loose against the Confederates? They'd kick Featherston's ass." Through the mask, he sounded disembodied, unearthly.

"Tell me about it," Stowe yelled back. "Only trouble is, they'd rather shoot us."

"Yeah. I know." Armstrong started digging in behind his rock. The corporal was only too right.

As usual,U.S. artillery went into action to try to neutralize the latest Mormon machine-gun nest.

Neutralize was a nice, meaningless word. If you neutralized somebody, you just took him off the board like a captured checker. You didn't blow his arm off halfway between the elbow and shoulder or drive red-hot metal shards through his balls or take off the top of his skull like the shell from a hard-boiled egg.

Of course, he was trying to do all those charming things to you, too. You couldn't afford to waste a lot of grief on him. Not wasting grief on him was what brought words like neutralize front and center.

The machine gun stopped shooting. Armstrong stayed right where he was. He'd seen soldiers play possum before. If you thought they were really down for the count, you'd pay for it. Armstrong's goal in life was to make the other guy pay for it. So far, he'd managed.

He glanced over to Corporal Stowe. The two-striper wasn't going anywhere, either. Armstrong just hoped some whistle-ass lieutenant wouldn't order everybody forward. That would show whether the Mormons were fooling, all right--probably show it the hard way.

Before a junior officer could do anything stupid, some dumb kid did it for him, standing up so he could move toward the objective. Somewhere up the road was a town romantically called Thistle. That was about as good as naming a place Dandelion or Poison Ivy.

As the kid walked forward and a couple of other soldiers stood up to go with him, Armstrong hoped the artillery had got lucky. It could happen; a direct hit from a 105 would make even a sandbagged machine-gun nest say uncle.

Armstrong still sat tight. He wanted to see what was happening before he put his neck on the line. He didn't always get the chance, but he wanted to. Then more trusting soldiers trotted forward. They carried their Springfields at the ready. Fat lot of good it'll do them, Armstrong thought.

Fat lot of good it did them. The machine gun, very much unsubdued,

opened up again. Several advancing soldiers fell. Others dove for cover. Fools. Suckers, went through Armstrong's mind. He was no great brain, but he could figure out when somebody was lying in wait for him. Maybe some of the men who'd managed to take cover would learn that lesson now. The sorry bastards who'd stopped bullets wouldn't get the chance.

Eventually, a barrel shelled the machine gun into silence. Armstrong scurried forward. Would Thistle be worth having once the Army finally took it? Not likely. And what would happen after that? They'd push on toProvo , where the Mormons would fight from house to house, and which was big enough to have a lot of houses. How many men would go through the grinder there? How many would come out the other side? And the most important question of all: will I be one of them?

Alec Pomeroy wrinkled his nose when he walked into the barn on his grandmother's farm. "It smells like animal poop in here!" he said.

"Well . . . yes." His mother fought not to laugh. To Mary Pomeroy, the smell of a barn was one of the most normal, natural things in the world. She'd grown up with it. Even now, she took it altogether for granted. But Alec was town-raised. Farm life and farm smells didn't come natural to him. Mary said,

"Don't you like it?"

"No! Eww! It's nasty! It's disgustering!" Alec hadn't quite learned how to say that, but he knew what he meant.

"Well, why don't you go back to Grandma at the farmhouse, then?" Mary said. "If you ask her nicely, maybe--just maybe--she'll let you have another piece of rhubarb pie."

"Do you think so?" Alec's eyes got big.

"You'll never know till you try, will you?" Mary said. Alec was off like a shot.

Mary breathed a sigh of relief. She'd hoped the odor of the barn would be enough to get her son out of her hair for a little while. She didn't need long. The old wagon wheel still lay in the same old place.

Moving it took an effort, but not an enormous one. She scraped away the dirt under it, and then lifted up the flat board the dirt concealed.

Under the board was a hole her father had dug. Mary nodded to herself. She'd taken years to find that hole. No one else ever had. It had kept Arthur McGregor's bomb-making tools safe, even though the Yanks had searched the farm at least a dozen times.

And now it would keep them safe again. Mary was carrying the biggest handbag she owned, one the size of a young suitcase. It was plenty big enough to hold the dynamite and blasting caps and fuse and crimpers and other specialized tools of the bomber's trade.

She took them out of the purse and put them back in the hole from which she'd exhumed them years before. You're not going in there forever, she thought, only for a while. Who could say whether Wilf Rokeby would tell the occupiers what he knew about her? If he decided she was the one who'd planted that flyer in the post office, he would. She wanted the evidence out of the way, just in case.

With the explosives and tools stowed once more, she replaced the board and pushed dirt and straw over it till it looked like the rest of the barn's floor. Then the old wagon wheel went back where it belonged. She scuffed around the dirt where it had lain after she'd moved it, so that place looked ordinary, too.

Then she had to clean her hands as best she could on her skirt. Fortunately, it was beige, so the dust hardly showed. She looked around one more time. Satisfied she'd set everything to rights, she went back to the farmhouse herself.

As she always did, she felt as if she were falling back into her childhood when she went inside. But how had her mother got old? Maude McGregor's hair was supposed to be as red as her own, not this dull, lifeless gray. And when had her back begun to bend?

Alec was devastating an enormous chunk of rhubarb pie. Mary's mother looked up with a smile on her face. It slipped a little when her eyes met Mary's. "Did you take care of whatever needed taking care of?" she asked.

Maude McGregor had never said much of anything about what Arthur McGregor had done. She'd known. Mary was sure of that. Her mother couldn't have failed to know. But she'd got into the habit of keeping quiet, and she'd stuck with it. She'd never said much of anything about what Mary was up to, either. Plainly, though, she also knew about that--or knew enough, anyhow.

Mary nodded now. "Everything's fine, Ma. Everything's just fine."

"Good," her mother said. "Always nice to have you visit, dear. Don't want to see any trouble. Don't want to see any trouble at all. We've had enough, haven't we? Come back whenever you need to."

"Can I have some more pie?" Alec asked.

"If you eat any more pie, you'll turn into a rhubarb," Mary said. That was the wrong approach; Alec liked the idea. He would have liked it even better if he'd had any idea what a rhubarb looked like.

He'd eaten enough rhubarb pie and other things to fall asleep on the trip home. He hardly ever did that any more, however much Mary wished he would. He'd be grumpy when he woke up, grumpy and then bouncy. Mary knew he wouldn't want to go to bed tonight. She'd worry about that later. You sure will, she told herself.

On the way back into town, the Oldsmobile bumped over the railroad tracks. Alec stirred and muttered, but didn't rouse. Mary smiled to herself. One of these days before too long . . . but not quite yet.

"I hope you told your mother hello for me," Mort said when he got home that night.

"Of course I did," Mary said.

"That's good." His smile was wide and genial, as usual. "I'm glad. You haven't been out there for a while.

Is she still all right by herself?"

With a parent getting older, that was always a worry, and Mary had noticed how the years were starting to lie heavy on her mother's shoulders. Even so, she nodded. "For a while longer, I think. She hangs on.

That farm is her life--that and her grandchildren." For some reason, Alec wasn't much interested in supper. Mary didn't scold him, not after what she knew he'd put away.

Three days later, someone knocked on the door in the middle of the afternoon. When Mary opened it, she found herself facing a tall, skinny, swarthy officer in a blue-gray uniform. "Mrs. Pomeroy?" he asked in accented English. "I am Captain Brassens of the Army of theRepublicofQuebec ." He touched one corner of the skinny black mustache that made him look like a cinema villain. Behind him stood four or five soldiers, Frenchies all.

"Yes?" Mary said. "And so? What do you want with me? I haven't done anything."

"It could be," Captain Brassens said. "Or it could be otherwise. We shall see. Do you know a certain Mrs. Laura Moss, formerly Laura Secord, ofBerlin,Ontario ?"

"Never heard of her," Mary said at once. Wilf Rokeby was throwing mud, then. She might have known.

She had known.

Brassens's raised eyebrow was Gallic almost to the point of self-parody. "You deny, then, that you posted to the said Mrs. Moss a package shortly before a bomb burst in her flat, killing her and her young daughter?"

"Of course I deny it," Mary said. "I've never heard anything so ridiculous in all my born days."

"This may be true. Or, on the other hand, this may be something other than true." Captain Brassens turned to the men at his back and spoke to them in French. Mary knew next to nothing of what had beenCanada 's other language. The soldiers showed her what their commander had said, though. They turned her apartment upside down.

"I don't suppose you have a warrant," she said as they got to work.

The Quebecois officer shook his head. "I have none. I need none. Military occupation takes precedence. You should know this." He looked at her reproachfully, as if to say he might have to give her a low mark because of her ignorance. But she knew. She'd just wanted to get her protest on the record.

And she had one more protest to add: "I think it's a crying shame you can do this to an innocent person who's never done anybody any harm."

"So you say," Captain Brassens answered coldly. "But is it not true that your brother was shot for sabotage? Is it not true that your father was a notorious bomber who killed many? It could be that you are an innocent person. It could be, yes. But it also could be that you are not. We shall see."

Wilf Rokeby must have been singing like a meadowlark in spring. He

has a yellow belly like a meadowlark, too, Mary thought. "You can't blame me for what my family did--and my brother never did anything," she told Brassens. "Go ahead and look as much as you please. I've got nothing to hide." That's the truth. I already hid it.

The soldiers were gentle with Alec. They didn't let him interfere, but they didn't smack him or even shout at him. He seemed to decide they were making a mess for the fun of it. To a little boy, that was a perfectly reasonable conclusion. He started throwing things around, too. The Frenchies thought that was funny.

After they'd done their worst, they reported back to Captain Brassens. They spoke French, so Mary didn't know what they said. He asked them several sharp questions in the same language. After they'd answered, he turned to her and said, "Eh bien, it appears--it appears, mind you--that you have been telling the truth and someone else is the liar. We shall remember that."

"I hope you do," Mary said--raw relief helped her sound angry, the way she was supposed to. She drew herself up and glared at Captain Brassens. "And I hope you'll have the common decency to apologize for being wrong."

He stared steadily back at her. "I am sorry . . ." he began, and she could tell he meant, I am sorry we did not catch you. But then, after a pause, he finished, ". . . we have disturbed your tranquility. Good day."

He started to turn away.

"Wait," Mary said. The Quebecois officer stopped in surprise. "There's some of our stuff stored in the basement, too," she told him. "If you're going to do this to me, you might as well do everything at once."

"Oh. I see. You need not worry yourself about that, Mrs. Pomeroy," the Frenchy said. "We searched those things before paying a call upon you. Had we found anything of interest there, we would have paid a different sort of call. On that, you may rely." He spoke to his men in their own language. They tramped away.

"Look what they did, Mommy!" Alec said. "Are they going to come back and do it some more?"

"I hope not," Mary answered. "Will you help me try to put things back together?"

He did try. She gave him credit for that. But he was much more interested in making messes than in repairing them. He got bored in a hurry. Mary hadn't realized how much she and Mort had till she saw it all spilled on the floor. The soldiers in blue-gray had enjoyed mess-making as much as Alec did. They'd even pawed through her underwear, though explosives were unlikely to be lurking there.

She'd got things about half repaired by the time Mort came home from across the street. "What happened here?" he asked. "Our own private earthquake?"

"You're close," Mary answered. "The Frenchies searched the place."

Her husband blinked. "Why would they do that?"

"Because my father . . . did what he did. Because my brother . . . was who he was," she said. Because Wilf Rokeby is trying to save his own skin, she added, but only to herself. She wasn't supposed to know anything more than the usual gossip about how and why the longtime postmaster had ended up in trouble with the occupying authorities.

Mort gave her a hug. "Those dirty bastards," he said, which was about as rough as he ever talked around her. "They've got no business doing that. None, you hear me?"

"They've got the guns," Mary said bleakly. "They can do whatever they want."

She hated that kind of argument when Mort used it on her. By his sour expression, he didn't like it coming back at him, either. He said, "It's not right. They can't tear your place to shreds for no reason at all." It wasn't for no reason at all, but he didn't know that. Mary didn't intend to let him find out, either.

Big, snorting trucks brought the latest shipment of Negroes toCampDependable . The trucks were painted butternut and had butternut canvas covers over the back. From the outside, they looked just like the vehicles that hauled Confederate soldiers here and there. And, in fact, the differences were minor.

The biggest one was that these trucks were fitted with manacles and leg irons to make sure their passengers didn't depart before they got where they were going.

Jefferson Pinkard came out to watch the unloading, the way he always did. His men had it down to a science. He watched anyway. The Negroes coming into his camp had nothing to lose, and they probably knew it. If some of them could beat the restraints before they got here, they might grab a guard who was releasing them and turn his gun on the others. Even science could go wrong, especially if you got careless.

Nobody here got careless. That was another reason Jeff came to the unloadings. When men worked under the boss's eye, they worked by the book. They didn't get smart. They didn't get cute. They just did what they were supposed to do. Nothing went wrong, which was exactly what Jeff wanted.

"Good job," he told Mercer Scott when the last Negro had been processed through into the camp.

"Yeah." The guard chief nodded. He paused to light a cigarette, then held out the pack. Jeff took one, too. Scott went on, "All the same, though, I wonder why the hell we bother."

"How do you mean?" Jeff asked.

Scott's gesture left a small trail of smoke in its wake. "Well, shit, we could get rid of these niggers as soon as they come in the gates, blow their goddamn brains out while they're still in the trucks, and save ourselves the bother of leadin' 'em out to the swamp later on."

"Population reductions," Pinkard said distastefully. They still offended his sense of order. He was a jailer, dammit, not a . . . a. . . . He didn't have the word for what his superiors were turning him into, didn't have it and didn't want to go looking for it very hard. After a moment, he shook his head. "Wouldn't work so good. They'd have to shoot 'em, and then they'd have to get rid of their bodies, 'stead o' just letting 'em fall into the trenches like they do now. We'd have more people eating their guns and going out like Chick Blades."

"Shit," Scott said again, but he didn't try to tell Jeff he was wrong. Instead, he suggested, "We could let the niggers who're still alive dispose of the others."

That sounded halfhearted. There were good reasons why it should, too. Pinkard pointed that out: "This place is antsy enough as is. We start doin' our population reductions right here and let the niggers know for sure we're doin' 'em, it's gonna blow up right in our faces. You want to tell me any different?"

"No." Mercer Scott scowled, but he could see the obvious when you rubbed his nose in it. "No, goddammit."

"All right, then," Jeff said. "We'll keep on doin' it the same old way till we come up with somethin' better.

Better, you hear me?"

"I hear you." Scott threw his butt on the ground and crushed it out under his boot heel. He probably would have sooner crushed Jeff under it, but even a guard chief didn't always get his druthers.

For that matter, a camp commandant didn't, either. Jeff went back to his office muttering to himself. He hated the wayCampDependable worked now, but he hadn't been able to come up with anything better, either. Trucks came in. Shackled prisoners shambled into the swamp. They didn't come out. And, every so often, a Chick Blades would run a hose from his auto's exhaust pipe into the passenger compartment, turn on the motor, and. . . .

The obvious. And maybe, maybe, the not so obvious. Instead of sitting down at his desk, Pinkard started pacing around it. After half a dozen revolutions, he paused, an unaccustomed look of wonder spreading across his fleshy face. "Well, fuck me!" he exclaimed. "Maybe I am a genius."

If he was, he needed something to prove his genius on. He hurried out of the office again. To his relief, not all the trucks had left. He kept one of them and sent the driver back with a pal. When the man squawked, Pinkard said, "You tell your boss to give me a call. I'll square it with him--you bet I will." The driver grumbled some more, but Jeff had the bulge to get away with it.

"What's going on?" Mercer Scott asked, attracted by the argument.

"Need me a truck," Jeff answered.

Scott scratched his head. "How come?"

"You'll see," was all Pinkard said. If this worked, it was his baby. If it didn't work, he'd have to fix it up with the fellow from whose bailiwick he'd lifted the truck. He figured he could. One truck and one miffed driver were small change in the bureaucratic skirmishes that ate so much of his life these days. He clapped Scott on the back. "I'm going into town for a little while. Try not to let the niggers steal this

place or burn it down while I'm gone, all right?"

Scott staring after him, he drove the truck intoAlexandria . He was glad traffic was light. He'd never tried handling anything so big, and he wasn't used to a gearshift with five forward speeds instead of the usual three. But he didn't hit anything, and he wasn't grinding the gears when he shifted nearly so much by the time he got where he was going: a garage named Halliday's, on the outskirts of town.

Stuart Halliday was a compact man with battered, clever hands. "What can I do for you, buddy?" he asked when Jeff descended from the truck.

Jeff told him what he wanted, finishing, "Can you handle it?"

The mechanic rubbed his chin. "Sheet metal all the way around there . . . Gasketing on the doors . . ."

"Gotta be sturdy sheet metal," Pinkard said.

"Yeah, I heard you." Halliday thought for a little while, then nodded. "Yeah, I can do it. Set you back two hundred and fifty bucks."

"I'll give you one seventy-five," Jeff said. They haggled good-naturedly for a little while before settling on two and a quarter. Jeff asked, "How soon can you let me have it?"

"Be about a week." Halliday sent Pinkard a curious look. "What the hell you want it like that for?"

"Camp business," Jeff answered. If the snoopy garage man couldn't work it out for himself, that was all to the good. Then Pinkard coughed. In all of this, he hadn't figured in one thing. "Uh--you give me a lift back to camp?"

Halliday carefully didn't smile. "Why, sure."

When Jeff came back without the truck, Mercer Scott sent him a stare full of hard suspicion. He didn't care. He knew what he was doing, or thought he did. Over the week, while Halliday was overhauling the truck, he made a few preparations of his own. Till he saw how this would go, he intended to play his cards close to his chest.

He paid Halliday when the mechanic delivered the revised and edited machine. He used camp money. If the thing didn't work, he'd pay it back out of his own pocket. Halliday stuffed brown banknotes into his

coveralls. "I left that one hole, like you said," he told Jeff. "I don't understand it, not when the rest is pretty much airtight, but I did it."

"You got paid for doin' the work," Jeff answered. "You didn't get paid for understanding."

One of Halliday's kids drove him away fromCampDependable . Unlike Jeff, he'd thought ahead. After he was gone, Jeff did some of his own work on the truck. He drew a small crowd of guards. Most of them hung around for a while, then went off shrugging and shaking their heads.

Mercer Scott watched like a hawk. Suddenly, he exclaimed, "You son of a bitch! You son of a bitch!

You reckon it'll work?"

Pinkard looked up from fitting a length of pipe to the hole that had puzzled Stuart Halliday. "I don't know," he said, "but I aim to find out."

"Chick Blades ought to get a promotion for giving you the idea," Scott said. "Goddamn shame he's too dead to appreciate it."

"Yeah." Jeff examined his handiwork. Slowly, he nodded to himself. "That ought to do it. Now I'll just announce a transfer to another camp. . . ."

Getting Negroes to volunteer to hop into the truck was so easy, it almost embarrassed him. The hardest part was picking and choosing among them. They knew that when they got shackled together and marched out into the swamp, they weren't coming back. But a transfer to another camp had to be an improvement. Maybe there wouldn't be population reductions somewhere else.

Pinkard drove the truck himself that first time. It was his baby. He wanted to see how it went. He closed the gasketed doors behind the Negroes who'd got in. The lock and bar to keep those doors closed were good and solid. Halliday hadn't skimped. Jeff would have skinned the mechanic alive if he had.

He started up the engine and drove out of camp. It wasn't long before the Negroes realized exhaust fumes were filling their compartment. They started shouting--screaming--and pounding on the metal walls. Jeff drove and drove. After a while, the screams subsided and the pounding stopped. He drove a little longer after that, just to be on the safe side.

When he was satisfied things had worked out the way he'd hoped, he took a road that the prisoners had built into the swamp. Mercer Scott and half a dozen guards waited at the end of it. Jeff got out of the cab and walked around to the back of the truck. "Well, let's see what we've got," he said, and opened the rear doors.

"By God, you did it," Scott said.

The Negroes inside were dead, asphyxiated. All the guards had to do was take them out and throw them in a hole in the ground. Well, almost all. One of the men held his nose and said, "Have to hose it down in there before you use it again."

"Reckon you're right," Jeff said. But he was just about happy enough to dance a jig. No fuss, no muss--well, not too much--no bother. Guards wouldn't have to pull the trigger again and again and again.

They wouldn't have to see what they were doing at all. They'd just have to . . . drive.

And, best of all, the Negroes insideCampDependable wouldn't know what was happening. Their pals who got in the truck were going to another camp, weren't they? Sure they were. Nobody expected them to come back.

Mercer Scott came up and set a hand on Pinkard's shoulder. "You know how jealous I am of you? You got any idea? Christ, I'd've given my left nut to come up with something so fine."

"It really did work, didn't it?" Jeff said. "You know what? I reckon maybe I will try and bump poor Chick up a grade or two. It'd make his missus' pension a little bigger."

Scott gave him a sly look. "She'd be right grateful for that. Not a bad-lookin' woman, not a bit. Maybe I oughta be jealous of you twice."

Jeff hadn't thought of it like that. Now that he did, he found himself nodding. She'd been haggard and in shock at the funeral, but still. . . . Business first, though. "Other thing I'm gonna do," he said, "is I'm gonna callRichmond , let 'em know about this. They been tellin' me stuff all along. By God, it's my turn now."

Ferdinand Koenig strode into Jake Featherston's office in the Gray House. The Attorney General was a big, bald, burly man with a

surprisingly light, high voice. "Good to see you, Ferd. Always good to see you," Jake said, and stuck out his hand. Koenig squeezed it. They went back to the very beginnings of the Freedom Party. Koenig had backed Jake at the crucial meeting that turned it into his party. He came as close to being a friend as any man breathing; Jake had meant every word of his greeting. Now he asked, "What's on your mind?"

"Head of one of the camps out inLouisiana , fellow named Pinkard, had himself a hell of a good idea,"

Koenig said.

"I know about Pinkard--reliable man," Jake said. "Joined the Party early, stayed in when we were in trouble. Wife ran around on him, poor bastard. Went down to fight inMexico , and not many who weren't in the hard core did that."

Koenig chuckled. "I could've named a lot of people in slots like that--slots lower down, too--and you'd know about them the same way."

"Damn right I would. I make it my business to know stuff like that," Featherston said. The more you knew about somebody, the better you could guess what he'd do next--and the easier you could get your hooks into him, if you ever had to do that. "So what's Pinkard's idea?"

"He's . . . got a whole new way of looking at the population-reduction problem," Koenig said.

Jake almost laughed out loud at that. Even a tough customer like Ferd Koenig had trouble calling a spade a spade. Jake knew what he aimed to do. Koenig wanted to do the same thing. The only difference was, Ferd didn't like talking about it. He--and a bunch of other people--were like a hen party full of maiden ladies tiptoeing around the facts of life.

The laugh came out as an indulgent smile. "Tell me about it," Jake urged. Koenig did. Featherston listened intently. The longer the Attorney General talked, the harder Jake listened. He leaned forward till his chair creaked, as if to grab Koenig's words as fast as they came out. When the other man finished, Jake whistled softly. "This could be big, Ferd. This could be really, really big."

"I was thinking the same thing," Koenig said.

"A fleet of trucks like that, they'd be easy to build--cheap, too,"

Featherston said. "How much you tell me it cost Pinkard to fix that one up?"

Koenig had to check some notes he pulled from a breast pocket. "He paid . . . let me see . . . $225 for the sheet-metal paneling, plus another ten bucks for the pipe. He did the work with that himself--didn't want the mechanic figuring out what was going on."

"He is a smart fellow," Featherston said approvingly. "We get a fleet of those bastards made, we're out of the retail business and we go into wholesale." Now he did laugh--he was wondering what Saul Goldman would say to that. But he got back to business in a hurry. "Shooting people in the head all day--that's hard work. A lot of men can't take it."

"That's what Pinkard said. He said this guard named"--Koenig glanced at the notes again--"named Blades killed himself with car exhaust, and that's what gave him the idea. He asked if Blades' widow could get a bigger pension on account of this turned out to be so important."

"Give it to her," Jake said at once. "Pinkard's right. Like I say, shooting people's hard work. It wears on you. It'd be harder still if you were shootin' gals and pickaninnies. But, hell, you load 'em in a truck, drive around for a while, and the job's taken care of--anybody can do that, anybody at all. Get a 'dozer to dig a trench, dump the bodies in, and get on back for the next load."

"You've got it all figured out." Koenig laughed, but more than a little nervously.

"Bet your ass I do," Featherston said. "This is part of what we've been looking for. We've always known what we were going to do, but we haven't found the right way to go about it. This here may not be the final solution, but we're sure as hell gettin' closer. You get to work on it right away. Top priority, you hear me?"

"How many trucks you reckon we'll need?" Koenig asked.

"Beats me," Jake said. "Find some bright young fella with one o' them slide rules to cipher it out for you.

However many it is, you get 'em. I don't give a damn what you got to do--you get 'em."

"If it's too many, the Army may grumble," Koenig warned.

"Listen, Ferd, you leave the Army to me," Featherston said, his voice suddenly hard. "I said top priority, and I meant it. You get those trucks."

He hardly ever spoke to Ferd Koenig as superior to inferior. When he did, it hit hard. "Right, boss," the Attorney General mumbled. Jake nodded to himself. When he gave an order, that was what people were supposed to say.

After some hasty good-byes, Koenig all but fled his office. Featherston wondered if he'd hit too hard.

He didn't want to turn the last of his old comrades into an enemy. Have to pat him on the fanny, make sure his feelings aren't hurt too bad, he thought. He cared about only a handful of people enough for their feelings to matter to him. Ferd Koenig probably topped the list.

Lulu stepped in. "The Vice President is here to see you, sir."

"Thank you, dear," Featherston said. His secretary smiled and ducked back out. She was also one of the people whose feelings he cared about.

Don Partridge, on the other hand . . . The Vice President of the CSA was an amiable nonentity fromTennessee . He had a big, wide smile, boyishly handsome good looks, and not a hell of a lot upstairs. That suited Jake just fine. Willy Knight had been altogether too much like him, and he'd barely survived the assassination attempt Knight put together. Well, the son of a bitch was dead now, and he'd had a few years in hell before he died, too. I pay everybody back, Jake thought. The United States were finding out about that. So were the Negroes in theConfederateStates , and they'd find out more soon.

Have to do something nice for that Pinkard fellow . . .

Jake worried about no coups from Don Partridge. Not having to worry about him was why he was Vice President. "Well, Don, what's on your mind?" he asked. Not a hell of a lot, he guessed.

"Got a joke for you," Partridge said. He went ahead and told it. Like a lot of his jokes, it revolved around a dumb farm girl. This time, she wanted to make a little record to send to her boyfriend at the front, but she didn't have the money to pay the man at the studio in town. ". . . and he said,, ‘Get down on your knees and take it out of my pants." So she did., ‘Take hold of it,' he said, and she did. And then he said,,

‘Well, go ahead." And she said,, ‘Hello, Freddie . . ." "

Partridge threw back his head and guffawed. Jake laughed, too. Unlike a lot of the jokes Don Partridge told, that one was actually funny. "Pretty good," Jake said. "What else is going on?"

"That's what I wanted to ask you, Mr. President," Partridge said. He knew better than to get too familiar with Jake. "You've got me out making speeches about how well everything's going, and sometimes folks ask when the war's going to be over. I'd like to know what to tell 'em."

He was earnest. He didn't want to do the wrong thing. He also had to know Featherston would come down on him like a thousand-pound bomb if he did. Jake didn't mind being feared, not even a little bit.

He said, "You tell 'em it's Al Smith's fault we're still fighting. I offered a reasonable peace. I offered a just peace. He wouldn't have it. So we'll just have to keep knocking him over the head till he sees sense."

"Yes, sir. I understand that." Don Partridge nodded eagerly. "Knocking the damnyankees over the head is important. I know it is." He stuck out his chin and tried to look resolute. With his big, cowlike eyes, it didn't come off too well. "But the trouble is, sometimes the Yankees hit back, and people don't much like that."

"I don't like it, either," Jake said, which was a good-sized understatement even for him. "We're doing everything we can. As long as we hang in there, we'll lick 'em in the end. That's what you've got to let the people know."

The Vice President nodded. "I'll do it, sir! You can count on me."

"I do, Don." I count on you to stay out of my hair and not cause me any trouble. There are plenty of things you're not too good at, but you can manage that.

"I'm so glad, sir." Partridge gave Jake one of his famous smiles. From what some of the Freedom Party guards said, those smiles got him lady friends--or more than friends--from one end of the CSA to the other. This one, aimed at a man older than he was, had a smaller impact.

"Anything else I can do for you?" Featherston didn't quite tell Partridge to get the hell out of there, but he didn't miss by much. The

Vice President took the hint and left, which he wouldn't have if Jake had made it more subtle.

He's a damn fool, Featherston thought, but even damn fools have their uses. That's something I didn't understand when I was younger. One thing he understood now was that he couldn't afford to let the damnyankees kill him before he'd won the war. He tried to imagine Don Partridge as President of the Confederate States. When he did, he imagined victory flying out the window. Damn fools had their uses, but running things wasn't one of them.

Featherston looked at a clock on the wall, then at a map across from it. He'd got Partridge out early; his next appointment wasn't for another twenty minutes. It was with Nathan Bedford Forrest III. The general was no fool. Railing against the Whigs, Jake had cussed them for being the party of Juniors and IIIs and IVs, people who thought they ought to have a place on account of what their last name was. Say what you would about Forrest, but he wasn't like that.

He came bounding into the President's office. He didn't waste time with hellos. Instead, he pointed to the map. "Sir, we're going to have a problem, and we're going to have it pretty damn quick."

"The one we've seen coming for a while now?" Jake asked.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III nodded. "Yes, sir." His face was wider and fleshier than that of his famous ancestor, but you could spot the resemblance in his eyes and eyebrows . . . and the first Nathan Bedford Forrest had had some of the deadliest eyes anybody'd ever seen. His great-grandson (the name had skipped a generation) continued, "The damnyankees have seen what we did inOhio . Looks like they're getting ready to try the same thing here. After all, it's not nearly as far from the border toRichmond as it is from the Ohio River up toLake Erie ."

"Like you say, we've been looking for it," Featherston replied. "We've been getting ready for it, too.

How much blood do they want to spend to get where they aim to go? We'll give 'em a Great War fight, only more so. And by God, even if they do takeRichmond , they haven't hurt us half as bad as what we did to them farther west."

"I aim to try to keep that from happening," Forrest said. "I think I can. I hope I can. And you're right about the other. What we've done to them will make it harder for them to do things to us. But we're going

to have a hell of a fight on our hands, Mr. President. You need to know that. Life doesn't come with a guarantee."

"I haven't backed down from a fight yet," Jake said. "I don't aim to start now."

XIII

On the shelf. Abner Dowling hated it. Oh, they hadn't thrown him out of the Army altogether, as he'd feared they might. But he was back in the War Department inPhiladelphia , doing what should have been about a lieutenant colonel's job. That was what he got for lettingOhio fall.

He'd been George Armstrong Custer's adjutant for what seemed like forever (of course, any time with Custer seemed like forever). He'd been a reasonably successful military governor inUtah andKentucky .

These days,Utah was in revolt andKentucky belonged to the CSA, but none of that was his fault.

Then they'd finally given him a combat command--but not enough barrels or airplanes to go with it. He hadn't done a bang-up job with what he had. Looking back, he could see he'd made mistakes. But he was damned if he could see how anyone but an all-knowing superman could have avoided some of those mistakes. They'd seemed like good ideas at the time. Hindsight said they hadn't been, but who got hindsight ahead of time?

Dowling swore under his breath and tried to unsnarl a logistics problem. Right this minute, the war effort was nothing but logistics problems. That was the Confederacy's fault. Getting from east to west--or, more urgently at the moment, from west to east--was fouled up beyond all recognition. Everybody thought he deserved to go first, and nobody figured he ought to wait in line.

"I ought to give 'em a swat and make 'em go stand in the corner," Dowling muttered. If Army officers were going to act like a bunch of six-year-olds, they deserved to be treated the same way. Too bad his authority didn't reach so far.

Someone knocked on the frame to the open door of his office. A measure of how he'd fallen was that he didn't have a young lieutenant out there running interference for him. "General Dowling? May I have a few minutes of your time?"

"General MacArthur!" Dowling jumped to his feet and saluted. "Yes, sir, of course. Come right in. Have a seat."

"I thank you very much," Major General Daniel MacArthur said grandly. But then, Daniel MacArthur was made for the grand gesture. He was tall and lean and craggy. He wore a severely, almost monastically, plain uniform, and smoked cigarettes from a long, fancy holder. He was in his mid-fifties now. During the Great War, he'd been a boy wonder, the youngest man to command a division. He'd commanded it in Custer's First Army, too, which had made for some interesting times. Custer had never wanted anybody but himself to get publicity, while MacArthur was also an avid self-promoter.

"What can I do for you, sir?" Dowling asked.

"You may have heard I'm to head up the attack intoVirginia ." MacArthur thrust out his long, granitic chin. Like Custer, he was always ready--always eager--to strike a pose.

"No, sir, I hadn't heard," Dowling admitted. He wasn't hooked into the grapevine here. Quite simply, not many people wanted to talk to an officer down on his luck. He put the best face on it he could: "I imagine security is pretty tight."

"I suppose so." But Daniel MacArthur couldn't help looking and sounding disappointed. He was a man who lived to be observed. If people weren't watching him, if he wasn't at the center of the stage, he began to wonder if he existed.

"What can I do for you?" Dowling asked again.

MacArthur brightened, no doubt thinking of all the attention he would get once he became the hero of the hour. "You have more recent experience in fighting the Confederates than anyone else," he said.

"I guess I do--much of it painful," Dowling said.

"I hope to avoid that." By his tone, MacArthur was confident he would. Custer had had that arrogance, too. A good commander needed some of it. Too much, though, and you started thinking you were always right. Your soldiers commonly paid for that--in blood. MacArthur went on, "In any case, I was wondering if you would be kind enough to tell me some of the things I might do well to look out for."

Abner Dowling blinked. That was actually a reasonable request. He wondered if something was wrong with MacArthur. After some

thought, he answered, "Well, sir, one thing they do very well is coordinate their infantry, armor, artillery, and aircraft, especially the damned barrels. They'd studied Colonel Morrell's tactics from the last war and improved them for the extra speed barrels have these days."

"Ah, yes. Colonel Morrell." MacArthur looked as if Dowling had broken wind in public. He didn't much like Morrell. The barrel officer had gained breakthroughs last time around where he hadn't. Morrell was not a publicity hound, which only made him more suspicious to MacArthur.

"Sir, he's still the best barrel commander we've got, far and away," Dowling said. "If you can get him for whatever you're going to do inVirginia , you should."

"Colonel Morrell is occupied with affairs farther west. I am perfectly satisfied with the officers I have serving under me."

"Is it true that the Confederates have recalled General Patton toVirginia ?" Dowling asked.

"I have heard that that may be so." Daniel MacArthur shrugged. "I'm not afraid of him."

Dowling believed him. MacArthur had never lacked for courage. Neither had Custer, for that matter. He was as brave a man as Dowling had ever seen. When it came to common sense, on the other hand . . .

When it came to common sense, both MacArthur and Custer had been standing in line for an extra helping of courage.

"Flank attack!" Dowling said. "The Confederates kept nipping at our flanks with their armor. You'll have to guard against that on defense and use it when you have the initiative."

"I intend to have the initiative at all times," MacArthur declared. The cigarette holder he clenched between his teeth jumped to accent the words.

"Um, sir . . ." Dowling cast about for a diplomatic way to say what damn well needed saying. "Sir, no matter what you intend, you've got to remember the Confederates have intentions, too. I hope you'll mostly be able to go by yours. Sometimes, though, they'll have the ball."

"And when they do, I'll stuff it down their throat," MacArthur said.

"They cannot hope to stand against the blow I will strike them."

He sounded very sure of himself. So had Custer, just before the start of one of his big offensives. More often than not, the ocean of blood he spent outweighed the gains he made. Dowling feared the same thing would happen with Daniel MacArthur.

But what can I do? Dowling wondered helplessly. Nobody would pay attention to a fat failed fighting man who'd been put out to pasture. Lord knew MacArthur wouldn't. Everything already seemed perfect in his mind. To him, everything was perfect. What the real world did to his plans would come as a complete and rude shock, as it always had to Custer.

"If you already have all the answers, sir, why did you bother to ask me questions?" Dowling inquired.

Some officers would have got angry at that. Invincibly armored in self-approval, MacArthur didn't. "Just checking on things," he replied, and got to his feet. Dowling also rose. It didn't help much, for MacArthur towered over him. Smiling a confident and superior smile, MacArthur said, "Expect to read my dispatches fromRichmond , General."

"I look forward to it," Dowling said tonelessly. Major General MacArthur's smile never wavered. He believed Dowling, or at least took him literally. With a wave, he left Dowling's office and, a procession of one, hurried down the corridor.

With a sigh, Abner Dowling sat back down and returned to the work MacArthur had interrupted. It wasn't a grand assault onRichmond --assuming the grand assault got that far--but it wasn't meaningless, either. He could tell himself it wasn't, anyhow.

He jumped when the telephone on his desk rang. He wondered if it was a wrong number; not many people had wanted to talk to him lately. He picked it up. "Dowling here."

"Yes, sir. This is John Abell. How are you today?"

"Oh, I'm fair, Colonel, I guess. And yourself?" Dowling couldn't imagine what the General Staff officer might want.

"I'll do, sir," Abell answered with what sounded like frosty amusement--the only kind with which he seemed familiar. "Did you just have a visit from the Great Stone Face?"

"The Great--?" Dowling snorted. He couldn't help himself. "Yes, Colonel, as a matter of fact I did."

"And?" Colonel Abell prompted.

"He's . . . very sure of himself," Dowling said carefully. "I hope he had reason to be. I haven't seen his plans, so I can't tell you about that. You'd know more about it than I would, I'm sure."

"Plans go only so far," John Abell said. "During the last war, we saw any number of splendid-sounding plans blown to hell and gone. Meaning no offense to you, our plans in the West at the start of this war didn't work as well as we wish they would have."

"It does help if the plans take into account all the enemy can throw at us," Dowling replied, acid in his voice.

"Yes, it does," Abell said, which startled him. "I told you I meant no offense."

"People tell me all kinds of things," Dowling said. "Some of them are true. Some of them help make flowers grow. I'm sure no one ever tells you anything but the truth, eh, Colonel?"

Unlike Daniel MacArthur, Colonel Abell had a working sarcasm detector. "You mean there are other things besides truth, sir?" he said in well-simulated amazement.

"Heh," Dowling said, which was about as much as he'd laughed at anything the past couple of months.

Then he asked, "Is the General Staff concerned about Major General MacArthur's likely performance?"

Perhaps fifteen seconds of silence followed. Then Colonel Abell said, "I have no idea what you're talking about, General."

He said no more. Dowling realized that was all the answer he'd get. He also realized it was more responsive than it seemed at first. He said, "If you're that thrilled with him, why isn't somebody else in command there?"

After another thoughtful silence, Abell answered, "Military factors aren't the only ones that go into a war, sir. General MacArthur came . . . highly recommended by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the

War."

"Did he?" Dowling kept his tone as neutral as he could make it.

"As a matter of fact, he did. His service inHouston before the plebiscite particularly drew the committee's notice, I believe." Abell sounded scrupulously dispassionate, too. "It was decided that, by giving a little here, we might gain advantages elsewhere."

It was decided. Dowling liked that. No one had actually had to decide anything, it said. The decision just sort of fell out of the sky. No one would be to blame for it, not the General Staff and certainly not the Joint Committee. If MacArthur got the command, the committee would leave the War Department alone about some other things. Dowling didn't know what those would be, but he could guess. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. "I hope it turns out all right," he said.

"Yes. So do I," Colonel Abell answered, and hung up.

The knock on Seneca Driver's door came in the middle of the night, long after evening curfew in the colored district inCovington . Cincinnatus' father and mother went on snoring. Neither of them heard very well these days, and a knock wouldn't have meant much to her anyhow. Nothing much meant anything to her any more.

But a knock like that meant something to Cincinnatus. It meant trouble. It didn't sound like the big, booming open-right-now-or-we'll-kick-it-in knock the police would have used. That didn't mean it wasn't trouble, though. Oh, no. Trouble came in all shapes and sizes and flavors. Cincinnatus knew that only too well.

When the knocking didn't stop, he got out of bed, found his cane, and went to the door. He had to step carefully. Darkness was absolute. Police enforced the blackout in this part of town by shooting into lighted windows. If they saw people, they shot to kill. They were very persuasive.

Of course, Luther Bliss didn't run the Kentucky State Police any more. He might come sneaking around to shut Cincinnatus up. That occurred to Cincinnatus just as he put his hand on the knob. He shrugged.

He couldn't move fast enough to run away, so what difference did it make?

He opened the door. That wasn't Luther Bliss out there. It was another Negro. Cincinnatus could see that much--that much and no more. "What you want?" he asked softly. "You crazy, comin' round here this time o' night?"

"Lucullus got to see you right away," the stranger answered.

"During curfew? He nuts? You nuts? You reckon I'm nuts?"

"He reckon you come," the other man said calmly. "You want I should go back there, tell him he wrong?"

Cincinnatus considered. That was exactly what he wanted. Saying so, though, could have all sorts of unpleasant consequences. He muttered something vile under his breath before replying, "You wait there.

Let me get out of my nightshirt."

"I ain't goin'nowhere," the other man said.

I wish I could tell you the same. Cincinnatus put on shoes and dungarees and the shirt he'd worn the day before. When he went to the door, he asked, "What do we do if the police see us?"

"Run," his escort said. Since Cincinnatus couldn't, that did him no good whatever.

They picked their way along the colored quarter's crumbling sidewalks. Cincinnatus used his cane to feel ahead of him like a blind man. In the blackout, he almost was a blind man. Starlight might have been beautiful, but it was no damn good for getting around.

His nose proved a better guide. Even in the darkness of the wee small hours, he had no trouble telling when he was getting close to Lucullus Wood's barbecue place. The man with him laughed softly. "Damn, but that there barbecue smell good," he said. "Make me hungry jus' to git a whiff." Cincinnatus couldn't argue, not when his own stomach was growling like an angry hound.

The other man opened the door. Cincinnatus pushed through the blackout curtains behind it. He blinked at the explosion of light inside. He wasn't much surprised to find the place busy regardless of the hour.

Several white policemen in gray uniforms were drinking coffee and devouring enormous sandwiches.

Cincinnatus would have bet they hadn't paid for them. When did cops ever pay for anything?

All the customers were out after curfew. The policemen didn't get excited about it. They didn't jump up and arrest Cincinnatus and his companion, either. They just went on feeding their faces. The sandwiches and coffee and whatever else Lucullus gave them looked like a good insurance policy.

The other black man took Cincinnatus to a cramped booth closer to the police than he wanted to be.

The other man ordered pork ribs and a cup of coffee. Cincinnatus chose a barbecued beef sandwich. He passed on the coffee: he still nourished a hope of getting back to sleep that night. He knew the odds were against him, but he'd always been an optimist.

To his amazement, Lucullus Wood lumbered out and took a place in the booth. It had been cramped before; now it seemed full to overflowing. "What you want that won't keep till mornin'?" Cincinnatus asked, doing his best to keep his voice down.

Lucullus didn't bother. "What you know about trucks?" he asked in turn.

"Trucks?" Whatever Cincinnatus had expected, that wasn't it. "Well, I only drove 'em for thirty years, so I don't reckon I know much."

"Funny man." Lucullus scowled at him. "I ain't jokin', funny man."

"All right, you ain't jokin'." Cincinnatus paused, for the food arrived just then. After a big bite from his sandwich--as good as always--he went on, "Tell me what you want to know, and I'll give you the answer if I got it."

"Here it is," Lucullus said heavily. "You got a Pegasus truck--you know the kind I mean?"

"I've seen 'em," Cincinnatus answered. The Pegasus was the CSA's heavy hauler. You could fill the back with supplies or with a squad of soldiers--more than a squad, if you didn't mind cramming them in like sardines. A Pegasus would never win a beauty contest, but the big growling machines got the job done.

"Good enough," Lucullus said, and then, loudly, to a waitress, "You

fetch me a cup of coffee, Lucinda sweetie?" Lucinda laughed and waved and went to get it. Lucullus turned back to Cincinnatus. "You know how it's got the canvas top you can put up to keep rain off the sojers or whatever other shit you got in there?"

"I reckon I do," Cincinnatus answered. "White truck had the same kind o' thing in the last war. What about it?"

"Here's what," Lucullus said. "How come you'd take a bunch o' them trucks and take off that whole canvas arrangement and close up the back compartment in a big old iron box?"

"Who's doin' that?" Cincinnatus asked.

Now Lucullus did drop his rumbling bass voice. "Confederate gummint, that's who," he said solemnly.

Lucinda set the coffee in front of him. He swatted her on the behind. She just laughed again and sashayed off.

"Confederate government?" Cincinnatus echoed. Lucullus nodded. Cincinnatus did a little thinking. "This here ironwork armor plate?"

"Don't reckon so," Lucullus answered. "Ain't heard nothin' 'bout no armor. That'd be special, right?--it ain't no ordinary iron."

"Armor's special, all right. It's extra thick an' extra hard," Cincinnatus said. Lucullus started to cough.

After a moment, Cincinnatus realized he was trying not to laugh. After another moment, he realized why.

"I didn't mean it like that, goddammit!"

"I know you didn't. Only makes it funnier," Lucullus said. "Figure this here is regular ironwork, anyways."

"Well, my own truck back inIowa 's got an iron cargo box. Keeps the water out better'n canvas when it rains. Keeps thieves out a hell of a lot better, too."

"These here is Army trucks--or trucks the gummint took from the Army," Lucullus said. "Reckon they gonna be where there's sojers around. Ain't got to worry 'bout thievin' a whole hell of a lot."

This time, Cincinnatus laughed. "Only shows what you know. You ain't never seen the kind o' thievin'

that goes on around Army trucks. I know what I'm talkin' about there--you'd best believe I do. You start loadin' stuff in Army trucks, and some of it's gonna walk with Jesus. I don't care how many soldiers you got. I don't care how many guns you got, neither. Folks steal."

Maybe his conviction carried authority. Lucullus pursed his lips in what was almost a parody of deep thought. "Mebbe," he said at last. "But it don't quite feel right, you know what I mean? Like I told you, these here ain't exactly no Army trucks no more. They was took from the Army. I reckon they be doin'

somethin' else from here on out."

"Like what?" Cincinnatus asked.

"Don't rightly know." Lucullus Wood didn't sound happy about admitting it. "I was hopin' you could give me a clue."

"Gotta be somethin' the government figures is important." Cincinnatus was talking more to himself than to Lucullus. "Gotta be somethin' the government figures is real important, on account of what's more important than the Army in the middle of a war?"

He couldn't think of anything. Lucullus did, and right away: "The Freedom Party. Freedom Party is the goddamn gummint, near enough." He was right. As soon as he said it, Cincinnatus nodded, acknowledging as much. Lucullus went on, "But what the hell the Freedom Party want with a bunch o'

gussied-up trucks?"

"Beats me." Cincinnatus finished his sandwich. "That was mighty good. I wish you didn't haul me outa bed in the middle o' the night to eat it."

"Didn't get you over here for that." Lucullus' face could have illustrated discontented in the dictionary. "I was hopin' you had some answers for me."

"Sorry." Cincinnatus spread his hands, pale palms up. "I got to tell you, it don't make no sense to me."

"I got to tell you, it don't make no sense to me, neither," Lucullus said, "but I reckon it makes sense to somebody, or them Party peckerheads over in Virginia wouldn't be doin' it. They got somethin' on their evil little minds. I don't know what it is. I can't cipher it out. When I can't cipher out what the ofays is gonna do next, I commence to worryin',

an' that is a fac'."

"Sorry I'm not more help for you," Cincinnatus said again. "I know trucks--you're right about that. But you know a hell of a lot more about the Freedom Party than I do. I ain't sorry about that, not even a little bit. I wish to God I didn't know nothin' about 'em."

"Don't we all!" Lucullus said. "All right, git on home, then." He turned to the man who'd brought Cincinnatus to the barbecue place and sat silently while he and Lucullus talked. "Git him back there, Tiberius."

"I take care of it," the other man promised. "Don't want no trouble." He caught Cincinnatus' eye. "You ready?"

Slowly, painfully, Cincinnatus rose. "Ready as I ever be." That wasn't saying a hell of a lot. He knew it, whether Tiberius did or not.

They went out into the eerie, blackout-deepened darkness. Everything was quiet as the tomb: no bombers overhead tonight. A police car rattled down a street just after Cincinnatus and Tiberius turned off it, but the cops didn't know they were around. Lights were for emergencies only. Tiberius laughed softly. "Curfew ain't so hard to beat, you see?" he said.

"Yeah," Cincinnatus answered. Tiberius stayed with him till he went up the walk to his folks' house, then disappeared into the night.

Cincinnatus' father was up waiting for him. "You did come home. Praise the Lord!" Seneca Driver said.

"Wasn't the police at the door, Pa," Cincinnatus answered. "Sorry you woke up while I was tendin' to it."

"Don't worry about that none," his father said. "Got us plenty o' more important things to worry about."

Cincinnatus wished he could have told him he was wrong. And he could have, too--but only if he were willing to lie.

Tom Colleton felt proud of himself. He'd managed to wangle four days of leave. That wasn't long enough to go home toSouth Carolina , but it did let him get away from the front and down toColumbus . Not worrying about getting shelled or gassed for a little while seemed a good start on the road to the earthly paradise.

It also proved too good to be true. As he got on the train that would take him fromSandusky toColumbus , a military policeman said, "Oh, good, sir--you've got your sidearm."

"What about it?" Tom's hand fell to the pistol on his hip.

"Only that it's a good idea, sir," the MP answered, his white-painted helmet and white gloves making him stand out from the ordinary run of noncoms. "The damnyankees down there aren't real happy about the way things have gone."

"Unhappy enough so that a Confederate officer needs to pack a pistol?" Tom asked. The MP gave back a somber nod. Tom only shrugged. "Well, ifU.S. soldiers couldn't kill me, I'm not going to lose too much sleep overU.S. civilians." That got a grin from the military policeman.

The train was an hour and a half late getting intoColumbus . It had to wait on a siding while workmen repaired damage--sabotage--to the railway. Tom Colleton fumed. "Don't get yourself in an uproar, sir,"

advised a captain who'd evidently made the trip several times. "Could be a hell of a lot worse. Leastways we haven't had any fighters shooting us up this time around."

"Gurk," Tom said. No, he hadn't come far enough to escape the war--not even close.

And he was reminded of it when he got intoColumbus . The city had been at the center of a Yankee pocket. TheU.S. soldiers who'd held it had fought hard to keep the Confederates from taking it. They'd quit only when they ran too low on fuel and ammunition to go on fighting. That meantColumbus looked as if rats the size of automobiles had been taking big bites out of most of the buildings.

The porter who fetched suitcases from the baggage car for those who had them was a white man. He spoke with some kind of Eastern European accent. Tom stared at him. He'd rarely seen a white man doing nigger work, and in the CSA few jobs more perfectly defined nigger work than a porter's.

This fellow stared right back at him. That wasn't curiosity in his eyes. It was raw hatred. Measuring me for a coffin, Tom thought. He'd wondered if the MP had exaggerated. Now he saw the man hadn't. The weight of the .45 on his hip was suddenly very comforting.

Union Station was a few blocks north of the state Capitol, whose dome had taken a hit from a bomb.FortMahan , which had been the chiefU.S. military depot inOhio , was now where visiting Confederates stayed. It lay a few blocks east of the station, onBuckingham Street . Sentries checked Tom's papers with scrupulous care before admitting him. "You think I'm a Yankee spy?" he asked, amused.

"Sir, we've had us some trouble with that," one of the sentries answered, which brought him up short.

"Have you?" he said. All three sentries nodded. Two of them had examined his bona fides while the third covered them and Tom with his automatic rifle. Tom asked, "You have a lot of problems with people shooting at you, stuff like that?"

"Some," answered the corporal who'd spoken before. "We gave an order for the damnyankees to turn in their guns when we took this here place, same as we always do." He made a sour face. "Reckon you can guess how much good that done us."

"I expect I can," Tom said. If theUnited States had occupiedDallas and tried to enforce the same order, it wouldn't have done them any good, either. People in both theUSA and the CSA had too many guns and too many hiding places--and the Yankees hated the Confederates just as much as the Confederates hated the Yankees, so nobody on either side wanted to do what anyone on the other side said.

The sentry added, "It's not shooting so much. We've hanged some of the bastards who tried that, and we've got hostages to try and make sure more of 'em don't. But there's sabotage all the time: slashed tires, busted windows, sugar in the gas tank, shit like that. We shot a baker for mixing ground glass in with the bread he gave us. They even say whores with the clap don't get it treated so as they can give it to more of us."

"Do they?" Tom murmured. He hadn't been with a woman since the war started. But Bertha was a long way away. What she didn't know wouldn't hurt her. He'd thought he might . . . Then again, if what this fellow said was true, he might not, too.

"I don't know that that's so, sir," the corporal said. "But they do say it." He gave Tom his papers again.

"Pass on, and have yourself a good old time."

Don't eat the bread, Tom thought. Don't lay the women. Sounds like a

hell of a way to have a good old time to me. At least he didn't say the bartenders were pissing in the whiskey.

He found the Bachelor Officers' Quarters without any trouble.FortMahan bristled with signs, some left over from when theUSA ran the place, others put up by the Confederates. He got a room of his own, one of about the same quality as he would have had in the CSA. Two stars on each collar tab helped.

Had he been a lieutenant or a captain, he probably would have ended up with a roommate or two.

Since the sentry hadn't warned that they were pissing in the booze, he headed for the officers' club once he'd dumped his valise in the room. He got another jolt when he walked in: the barkeep was as white as the railroad porter. Tom walked up to him and ordered a highball. The man in the boiled shirt and black bow tie didn't bat an eye. He made the drink and set it on the bar. "Here you go, sir," he said quietly. His accent declared him a Yankee.

Tom sipped the highball. It was fine. Even so . . . "How long have you been tending bar?" he asked.

"About . . . fifteen years, sir," the fellow said after a moment's pause for thought. "Why, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Just wondering. What do you think of the work?"

"It's all right. Money's not bad. I never did care for getting cooped up in a factory. I like talking with people and I listen pretty well, so it suits me."

"Doesn't it, oh, get you down, having to do what other folks tell you all the time? Serving them, you might say?"

He and the bartender both spoke English, but they didn't speak the same language. The man shrugged.

"It's a job, that's all. Tell me about a job where you don't have to do what other people tell you. I'll be on that one like a shot."

Tom decided to get more direct: "Down in the Confederate States, we'd call a job like this nigger work."

"Oh." The barkeep suddenly found himself on familiar ground. "Now I

see what you're driving at. Some other people have asked me about that. All I got to tell you, pal, is that you're not in the Confederate States any more."

"I noticed that." Shaking his head, Tom found an empty table and sat down. The man behind the bar plainly didn't feel degraded by his work. A white Confederate would have. You're not in the CSA any more is right, Tom thought. That was true.

A couple of other officers came in and ordered drinks. One of them nodded to Tom. "Haven't seen you before," he remarked. "Just get in?"

"That's right," Tom answered. "Nice, friendly little town, isn't it? I always did enjoy a place where I could relax and not have to look over my shoulder all the time."

The officer who'd spoken to him--a major--and his friend--a lieutenant-colonel like Tom--both laughed.

After they'd got their whiskeys, the major said, "Mind if we join you?"

"Not a bit. I'd be glad of the company," Tom said, and gave his name. He got theirs in return. The major, a skinny redhead, was Ted Griffith; the other light colonel, who was chunky and dark and balding, was Mel Lempriere. He had a pronouncedNew Orleans accent, half lazy and half tough.Griffith sounded as if he came fromAlabama orMississippi .

They started talking shop. Aside from women, the great common denominator, it was what they shared.

Ted Griffith was in barrels, Lempriere in artillery. "We caught the damnyankees flatfooted," Lempriere said. "It would've been a lot tougher if we hadn't." Actually, he said woulda, as if he came from Brooklyn instead of theCrescentCity .

"Reckon that's a fact,"Griffith agreed. "Their barrels are as good as ours, and they use 'em pretty well.

But they didn't have enough, and so we got the whip hand and ripped into 'em."

"Patton helped, too, I expect," Tom said. He got to the bottom of his highball and waved for a refill. The bartender nodded. He brought over a fresh one a minute later.

"Patton drives like a son of a bitch," Lempriere said. "Sometimes our guys had a devil of a time keeping up with the barrels." He and Major Griffith both finished their drinks at the same time. They also waved to the barkeep. He got to work on new ones for them, too.

OnceGriffith had taken a pull at his second drink, he said, "Patton's a world-beater in the field. No arguments about that. If the Yankees hadn't had their number-one fellow here, too, we'd've licked 'em worse'n we did. Yeah, he's a damn good barrel commander."

He didn't sound as delighted as he might have. "But . . . ?" Tom asked. A but had to be hiding in there somewhere. He wondered ifGriffith would let it out.

The major made his refill disappear and called for another. Dutch courage? Tom thought. "Patton's a world-beater in the field,"Griffith repeated. "He does have his little ways, though."

Mel Lempriere chuckled. "Name me a general officer worth his rank badges who doesn't."

"Well, yeah,"Griffith said. "But there's ways, and then there's ways, if you know what I mean. Patton fines any barrel man he catches out of uniform, right down to the tie on the shirt underneath the coveralls.

He fines you if your coveralls are dirty, too. How are you supposed to run a barrel without getting grease and shit on your uniform? I tell you for a fact, my friends, it can't be done."

"Why's he bother?" Tom asked.

"Well, he likes everything just so,"Griffith answered, which sounded like an understatement. "And he likes to say that a clean soldier, a neat soldier, is a soldier with his pecker up. I suppose he's got himself a point." Again, he didn't say but. Again, he might as well have.

Lieutenant-Colonel Lempriere laughed again. "You know any soldier in the field longer'n a week who hasn't got his pecker up?"

That brought them around to women. Tom had figured they'd get there sooner or later. He asked about the local officers' brothels, and whether the girls really did steer clear of cures for the clap. Lempriere denied it. He turned out to be a mine of information. As Tom had, he'd been in the last war. Ted Griffith was too young. He listened to the two lieutenant-colonels swap stories of sporting houses gone by. After a while, he said, "Sounds like bullshit to me, gentlemen."

"Likely some of it is," Tom said. "But it's fun bullshit, you know?" They all laughed some more. They ended up yarning and drinking deep into the night.

When the USS Remembrance sortied fromHonolulu , Sam Carsten had no trouble holding in his enthusiasm. The airplane carrier wasn't going any place where the weather suited him: up toAlaska , say.

She could have been. The Tsars still ownedAlaska , andRussia and theUnited States were formally at war. But they hadn't done much in the way of fighting, and weren't likely to. The long border between the U.S.-occupiedYukon and northernBritish Columbia on the one hand andAlaska on the other was anything but the ideal place to wage war.

The western end of the chain ofSandwich Islands , now . . .

Midway, a thousand miles north and west ofHonolulu , had aU.S. base on it. The low-lying island wasn't anything much. Aside from great swarms of goony birds, it boasted nothing even remotely interesting. But it was where it was.Japan had seized Guam along with thePhilippines in the Hispano-Japanese War right after the turn of the century, and turned the island into her easternmost base. If she took Midway from theUSA , that could let her walk down the little islands in the chain toward the ones that really mattered.

Japandidn't have anyone to fight but theUSA . TheUnited States , by contrast, had a major land war against the Confederate States on their hands. They were trying to hold down a restiveCanada . And the British, French, and Confederates made theAtlantic an unpleasant place--to say nothing of the Confederate submersibles that sneaked out of Guaymas to prowl the West Coast.

Sam wished he hadn't thought about all that. It made him realize how alone out here in the Pacific the Remembrance was. If something went wrong, theUSA would have to send a carrier around the Horn--which wouldn't be so easy now that the British and Confederates had retaken Bermuda and theBahamas . The only other thing theUnited States could do was start building carriers inSeattle orSan Francisco or San Pedro orSan Diego . That wouldn't be easy or quick, either, not with the country cut in two.

Most of the crew enjoyed the weather. It was mild and balmy. The sun shone out of a blue sky down on an even bluer sea. Carsten could have

done without the sunshine, but he had special problems. Zinc oxide helped cut the burn a little. Unfortunately, a little was exactly how much the ointment helped.

He glanced up to the carrier's island every so often. The antenna on the Y-range gear spun round and round, searching for Japanese airplanes. Midway also had a Y-range station. Between the two of them, they should have made a surprise attack impossible. But Captain Stein was a suspenders-and-belt man.

He kept a combat air patrol overhead all through the day, too. Sam approved. You didn't want to get caught with your pants down, not here.

Fighters weren't the only things flying above the Remembrance and the cruisers and destroyers that accompanied her. As she got farther out into the chain ofSandwich Islands , albatrosses and their smaller seagoing cousins grew more and more common. Watching them always fascinated Sam. They soared along with effortless ease, hardly ever flapping. The smaller birds sometimes dove into the ocean after fish. Not the albatrosses. They swooped low to snatch their suppers from the surface of the sea, then climbed up into the sky again.

They were as graceful in the air as they were ungainly on the ground. Considering that every landing was a crash and every takeoff a desperate sprint into the wind, that said a great deal.

The other impressive thing about them was their wingspan, which seemed not that much smaller than an airplane's. Sam had grown up watching hawks and turkey buzzards soar over the upperMidwest . He was used to big birds on the wing. The goony birds dwarfed anything he'd seen then, though.

"I hear the deck officer waved one of them off the other day," he said in the officers' wardroom. "Fool bird wasn't coming in straight enough to suit him."

"He didn't want it to catch fire when it smashed into the deck," Hiram Pottinger said. "You know goonies can't land clean."

"Well, sure," Sam said. "But it shit on his hat when it swung around for another pass."

He got his laugh. Commander Cressy said, "Plenty of our flyboys have wanted to do the same thing, I'll bet. If that albatross ever comes back,

they'll pin a medal on it."

Sam got up and poured himself a fresh cup of coffee. He was junior officer there, so he held up the pot, silently asking the other men if they wanted any. Pottinger pointed to his cup. Sam filled it up. The head of damage control added cream and sugar. Before long, the cream would go bad and it would be condensed milk out of a can instead. Everybody enjoyed the real stuff as long as it stayed fresh.

Pottinger asked Commander Cressy, "You think the Japs are out there, sir?"

"Oh, I know they're out there. We all know that," the exec answered. "Whether they're within operational range of Midway--and of us--well, that's what we're here to find out. I'm as sure that they want to boot us off theSandwich Islands as I am of my own name."

"Makes sense," Sam said. "If they kick us back to the West Coast, they don't need to worry about us again for a long time."

Dan Cressy nodded. "That's about right. They'd have themselves a perfect Pacific empire--thePhilippines and what were the Dutch East Indies for resources, and theSandwich Islands for a forward base. Nobody could bother them after that."

"The British--" Lieutenant Commander Pottinger began.

Sam shook his head at the same time as Commander Cressy did. Cressy noticed; Sam wondered if the exec would make him do the explaining. To his relief, Cressy didn't. Telling a superior why he was wrong was always awkward. Cressy outranked Pottinger, so he could do it without hemming and hawing. And he did: "If the British giveJapan a hard time, they'll get bounced out ofMalaya before you can say Jack Robinson. They're too busy closer to home to defend it properly. The Japs might take away Hong Kong or invadeAustralia , too. I don't think they want to do that. We're still on their plate, and they've got designs onChina . But they could switch gears. Anybody with a General Staff worth its uniforms has more strategic plans than he knows what to do with. All he has to do is grab one and dust it off."

Pottinger was Navy to his toes. He took the correction without blinking. "I wonder how the limeys like playing second fiddle out in theFar East ," he remarked.

"It's Churchill's worry, not mine," Cressy said. "But they're being good little allies to the Japs out here.

They don't want to giveJapan any excuses to start nibbling on their colonies. They make a mint from Hong Kong, and it wouldn't last twenty minutes ifJapan decided she didn't want them running it any more."

"Makes sense," Hiram Pottinger said. "I hadn't thought it through."

"Only one thing." Sam spoke hesitantly. Commander Cressy waved for him to go on. If the exec hadn't, he wouldn't have. As it was, he said, "The Japs may not need any excuse if they decide they want Hong Kong orMalaya . They're liable just to reach out and grab with both hands."

He waited to see if he'd made Cressy angry. Before the exec could say anything, general quarters sounded. Cressy jumped to his feet. "We'll have to finish hashing this out another time, gentlemen," he said.

Neither Sam Carsten nor Hiram Pottinger answered him. They were both on their way out of the wardroom, on their way down to their battle stations below the Remembrance's waterline. Panting, Sam asked, "Is this the real thing, or just another drill?"

"We'll find out," Pottinger answered. "Mind your head."

"Aye aye, sir," Sam said. A tall man had to do that, or he could knock himself cold hurrying from one compartment to another. He could also trip over his own feet; the hatchway doors had raised sills.

Some of the sailors in the damage-control party beat them to their station. They'd been nearby, not in the wardroom in officers' country. "Is this the McCoy?" Szczerbiakowicz asked. "Or is it just another goddamn drill?"

He shouldn't have talked about drill that way. It went against regulations. Sam didn't say anything to him about it, though. Neither did Lieutenant Commander Pottinger. All he did say was, "We'll both find out at the same time, Eyechart."

"I don't hear a bunch of airplanes taking off over our heads," Sam said hopefully. "Doesn't feel like we're taking evasive action, either. So I hope it's only a drill."

The klaxons cut off. The all-clear didn't sound right away, though. That left things up in the air for about fifteen minutes. Then the all-clear did blare out. Commander Cressy came on the intercom: "Well, that was a little more interesting than we really wanted. We had to

persuade a flight patrolling out from Midway that we weren't Japs, and we had to do it without breaking wireless silence. Not easy, but we managed."

"That could have been fun," Sam said.

Some of the other opinions expressed there in the corridor under the bare lightbulbs in their wire cages were a good deal more sulfurous than that. "What's the matter with the damn flyboys?" somebody said.

"We don't look like a Jap ship."

That was true, and then again it wasn't. The Remembrance had a tall island, while most Japanese carriers sported small ones or none at all. But the Japs had also converted battleship and battle-cruiser hulls into carriers. Her lines might have touched off alarm bells in the fliers' heads.

"Nice to know what was going on," a junior petty officer said. "The exec may be an iron-assed son of a bitch, but at least he fills you in."

All the sailors nodded. Sam and Hiram Pottinger exchanged amused glances. They didn't contradict the petty officer. Commander Cressy was supposed to look like an iron-assed son of a bitch to everybody who didn't know him. A big part of his job was saying no for the skipper. The skipper was the good guy.

When, as occasionally happened, the answer to something was yes, he usually said it himself. That was how things worked on every ship in the Navy. The Remembrance was no exception. Some executive officers reveled in saying no. Cressy wasn't like that. He was tough, but he was fair.

Chattering, the sailors went back to their regular duties. Sam went up onto the flight deck, braving the sun for a chance to look around. Nothing special was going on. He liked that better than rushing up to jury-rig repairs after a bomb hit while enemy fighters shot up his ship. All he saw were vast sky and vaster sea, the Remembrance's supporting flotilla off in the near and middle distance. A couple of fighters buzzed overhead, one close enough to let him see theUSA 's eagle's head in front of crossed swords.

And a pair of albatrosses glided along behind the Remembrance. They really did look almost big enough to land. He wondered what they thought of the great ship. Or were they too birdbrained to think at all?

But this was their home. Men came here only to fight. That being so, who really were the birdbrains here?

Flora Blackford's countrymen had often frustrated her. They elected too many Democrats when she was convinced sending more Socialists to Powel House and to Congress and to statehouses around theUnited States would have served the country better. But she'd never imagined they could ignore large-scale murder, especially large-scale murder by the enemy in time of war.

Whether she'd imagined it or not, it was turning out to be true. She'd done just what she told Al Smith she would do: she'd trumpeted the Confederacy's massacres of Negroes as loudly and as widely as she could. She'd shown the photographs Caesar had risked his life to bring into theUSA .

And she'd accomplished . . . not bloody much. She'd got a little ink in the papers, a little more in the weekly newsmagazines. And the public? The public had yawned. The most common response had been, Who cares what the Confederates are doing at home? We've got enough problems on account of what they're doing to us right here.

She shook her head. No, actually that wasn't the most common response. She would have known how to counter it. And even a response like that would have meant people in theUSA were talking about and thinking about what was going on in the CSA. Against silence, against indifference, what could she do?

Confederate wireless hadn't called her a liar. The Freedom Party's mouthpieces hadn't bothered.

Instead, they'd started yelling and screaming and jumping up and down about what they called theUSA 's

"massacre of innocents" inUtah . They didn't bother mentioning that the Mormons had risen in rebellion.

Flora's mouth twisted as she sat in her office. She supposed the Confederates might claim Negroes had risen in rebellion againstRichmond . As far as she was concerned, that servedRichmond right. The Confederate States oppressed and repressed their blacks. TheUnited States had given the Mormons full equality--and they'd risen anyhow.

Besides, the Mormons who died died in combat. The Confederates

seemed to have set up special camps to dispose of their Negroes. Gather them in one place, get rid of them, and then bring in a fresh batch and do it again. It all struck her as being as efficient as a factory. If Henry Ford had decided to produce murders instead of motorcars, that was how he would have gone about it.

Bertha knocked on the office door, which took her out of her unhappy reverie. "Yes?" she said, a little relieved--or maybe more than a little--to return to the here and now.

Her secretary looked in. "The Assistant Secretary of War is here, Congresswoman."

"Oh, yes. Of course." Flora shook her head again. It was eleven o' clock. She'd had this appointment for days. This whole business with those photos really was making her forget everything else. "Please tell him to come in."

"All right." Bertha turned away. "Go on in, Mr. Roosevelt, sir." She held the door open so he could.

"Thank you very much," Franklin Roosevelt said as he propelled his wheelchair past her and into Flora's office. He was only distantly related to Theodore Roosevelt, and a solid Socialist rather than a Democrat like his more famous cousin. He did seem to have some of his namesake's capacity for getting people to pay attention to him when he said things.

"Good to see you, Mr. Roosevelt." Flora stood up, came around the desk, and held out her hand.

When Franklin Roosevelt took it, his engulfed hers. He had big hands, wide shoulders, and a barrel chest that went well with the impetuous, jut-jawed patrician good looks of his face. But his legs were shriveled and useless in his trousers. More than twenty years earlier, he'd come down with poliomyelitis.

He hadn't let it stop him, but it had slowed him down. Some people said he might have been President if not for that mishap.

"Can I have Bertha bring you some coffee?" Flora asked.

"That would be very pleasant, thanks,"Roosevelt replied in a resonant baritone.

"I'd like a cup, too, Bertha, if you don't mind," Flora said. She and Roosevelt made small talk over the steaming cups for a little while. Then she decided she might as well get to the point, and asked, "What can I do for you today?"

"Well, I thought I would come by to thank you for your excellent work on publicizing the outrages the Confederate States are committing against their Negroes," Roosevelt answered.

"You did?" Flora could hardly believe her ears. "To tell you the truth, I'd begun to wonder if anyone noticed."

"Well, I did,"Roosevelt said. "And you can rest assured that the Negroes who are fighting for justice in the CSA have noticed, too. The War Department has made a point of being careful to let them know the government of theUnited States sympathizes with them in their ordeal."

"I . . . see," Flora said slowly. "I didn't say what I said for propaganda purposes."

"I know that."Roosevelt beamed at her from behind small, metal-framed spectacles. "It only makes things better. It shows we understand what they're suffering and want to do something about it."

"Does it?" Flora had held in her bitterness since discovering she couldn't even raise a tempest in a teapot.

Now it came flooding out: "Is that what it shows, Mr. Roosevelt? Forgive me, but I have my doubts.

Doesn't it really show that a few of us may be upset, but most of us couldn't care less? What the Confederate States are doing is a judgment on them. And how little it matters here is a judgment on us."

Franklin Roosevelt pursed his lips. "You may be right. That may be what it really shows," he said at last.

"But what the Negroes in the CSA think it shows also counts. If they think the United States are on their side, they'll struggle harder against the CSA and the Freedom Party. That could be important to the war.

When you play these games, what people believe is often as important as what's really so. I'm sure you've seen the same thing in your brand of politics."

Flora studied him. That was either the most brilliant analysis she'd ever heard--or the most breathtakingly cynical one. For the life of her, she couldn't decide which. Maybe it was both at once. Was that better or worse? She couldn't make up her mind there, either.

Rooseveltsmiled. When he did, she wanted to believe him. When Jake Featherston talked, people wanted to believe him.Roosevelt had some of the same gift. How much had poliomyelitis taken away from the country?

Or, considering to whom she'd just compared him, how much had it spared the country? Either way, no one would ever know.

"You see?" he said.

With his eyes twinkling at her, she wanted to see things his way. "Maybe," she said, though she hadn't expected to admit even that much. "It hardly seems fair, though, to use them for our purposes when they're so downtrodden. They'll grab at anything they see floating by." She realized she'd just mixed a metaphor. Too late to worry about it now.

"This is a war,"Roosevelt said. "You use the weapons that come to hand. The Confederates have used the Mormons. The British and the Japanese have both worked hard to rouse the Canadians against us.

Should we waste a chance to make the Confederates have to fight to keep order in their own country?

Isn't that a choice that would live in infamy?" He thrust out his chin.

He had a point, or part of one. Flora said, "In that case, we shouldn't let the Negroes in the CSA live on hope and promises. If they're going to fight Confederate soldiers and Freedom Party goons, they ought to have the guns to make it a real fight. Otherwise, we just set them up to be massacred."

"We are sending them guns, as we can,"Roosevelt replied. "They do live in another country, you know.

Smuggling in weapons isn't always easy. We did some in the Great War. We can do more now, because we can drop more from bombers. It's less than I would like, but it's better than nothing. If we give them the tools, they can finish the job."

Finish the job? It was a fine phrase, but Flora didn't believe it. Blacks in the Confederate States would always be outnumbered and outgunned. They could rebel. They could cause endless trouble to the whites in the CSA. They couldn't hope to beat them.

Could they hope to live alongside them? That would take changes from both whites and blacks. Flora wished she thought such changes were likely. When she asked Franklin Roosevelt whether he did, he shook his head. "I wish I could tell you yes," he said. "But if people are going to change, there has to be a willingness on both sides to do it. I don't see that there. What Negroes want is very far removed from what whites will give."

Flora sighed. "I'm afraid it seems that way to me, too. I was hoping you might tell me something different."

"I'd be happy to, if you want me to lie,"Roosevelt said. "I thought you would rather have a straight answer."

"And I would," Flora said. "I tell you frankly, I would also like to have the executive branch say some of the things I'm saying. If it did, the Negroes in the Confederate States might have some real reason to hope."

"I have two things to say about that,"Roosevelt replied. "The first is that if you want to persuade the executive branch to say anything in particular, you need to persuade the President, not the Assistant Secretary of War."

"President Smith has a view of this matter somewhat different from mine," Flora said unhappily.

Rooseveltshrugged those broad shoulders. "That's between you and him, then, not between you and me.

The other thing I would tell you, though, is that you should watch what the administration does, not just what it says. I am sure the President has his reasons for not wanting to make the sort of statement you wish he would. You may not agree with them, but he has them. No matter what he says, we are doing what we can to arm Negroes in the Confederate States. If they can fight back, they're less likely to be slaughtered, don't you think?"

Carefully, Flora said, "I wish we were doing it for reasons of justice

and not just for political and military considerations."

When Teddy Roosevelt's cousin shook his head, he showed a lot of his more famous namesake's bulldog determination. "There, meaning no offense, I have to say I disagree with you. Whenever someone talks about doing something for reasons of justice, you should put your hand in your pocket, because you're about to get it picked. That's not always true--your own career proves as much--but it's the way to bet."

"Thank you for making the exception," Flora murmured, wondering if he really meant it.

"Any time," he said cheerfully. He was too smart to make any protestations that he had. She wouldn't have believed those. Instead, he went on, "Political and military reasons are the ones you should rely on, if you care to know what I think. They have self-interest behind them, and that makes them likely to last.

Principles are pretty, but they go stale a lot faster."

Again, Flora wondered whether that was wisdom or some of the most appalling cynicism she'd ever heard. Again, she had a devil of a time coming up with an answer.

The more Clarence Potter learned about the intelligence assets the Confederates had in place in theUSA

, the more he respected his predecessors. Some of the people who contrived to send word south of the border had been quietly working in the U.S. War Department and Navy Department and Department of State since before the Great War broke out. Most of the time, they were what they pretended to be all the time: clerks and bookkeepers who did their jobs and didn't worry about anything else. They did their jobs, all right, but every now and then they did worry about something else.

Seeing what they did also made Potter worry about something else. He dared not assumeU.S.

spymasters were any less clever than those on his own side. That made him wonder who in the C.S. War Department had ways to get word of this, that, or the other thing to the damnyankees. Who was in the C.S. State Department but not fully of it?

Trying to find out wasn't his province. He had plenty to keep his own

plate full--not least those reports that came out ofPhiladelphia andWashington . They helped confirm what he'd suspected for some time: that theUnited States were getting ready to try an offensive of their own, and thatVirginia , the obvious target, was the one they had in mind.

But he did do what anyone who'd spent a while in government service would have done: he wrote a memorandum. He sent it to his opposite number in Counterintelligence, and sent a copy to Nathan Bedford Forrest III as chief of the Confederate General Staff. He thought about sending a copy to Jake Featherston, too, but decided against it--that would be going over too many people's heads.

Instead of having the President descend on him like a ton of bricks, then, he had the head of the General Staff pay him the same kind of call. Potter jumped to his feet and saluted when Forrest barged into his office unannounced. Nathan Bedford Forrest III was not a man to cross, any more than his great-grandfather was said to have been.

"At ease," Forrest said, and then, "By God, General, once I started looking at your note, I started doubting whether anybody here would ever be at ease again."

"One of the things we've found out over and over again, sir, is that anything we can do to the Yankees, they can damn well do to us," Potter said. "We didn't believe it in the Great War, and look at the price we paid for that." Part of the price the Confederate States had paid was Jake Featherston. Potter still thought so, but not even he was bold enough to say so out loud.

"I don't think I much care for the sound of that," Forrest observed. "Do you think they could pull off an armored attack like the one that took us up toLake Erie ?"

"Give that Colonel Morrell of theirs enough barrels, for instance, and I expect he could," Potter answered. "One of the things that goes some little way towards easing my mind about what's building up to the north of us here is that Morrell's nowhere near it."

Forrest chewed on the inside of his lower lip as he thought that over. At last, he nodded. "A point. But that's not what I came here to talk to you about. Do you truly believe we've got us some damnyankee gophers digging out what we're up to here in the War Department?"

"Gophers." Potter tasted the word. He nodded, too--he liked it. He could all but see spies gnawing underground, chomping away at the

tender roots of Confederate plans. "Unfortunately, sir, I do. Why wouldn't theUnited States want to do something like that? No reason I can see. And they'll have people who can sound as if they belong here, same as we have people who can put on their accent."

"You're one of those," Forrest said. "Every now and then, I get calls about you from nervous lieutenants.

They think you're a spy."

"And so I am--but not for theUnited States ." Potter allowed himself a dry chuckle. "Besides, I only sound like a Yankee to somebody who's never really heard one. I do sound a little like one, but only a little. Comes of going to college up there. That turned out to be educational in all kinds of ways."

"I'll bet it did," Forrest said.

"Sir, you have no idea how much in earnest those people were," Potter said. "This was before the Great War, you understand. We'd licked them twice, humiliated them twice. They were bound and determined to get their own back. That holiday of theirs, Remembrance Day . . . They wanted the last war more than we did, and they got it."

"Well, now that shoe is on the other foot," Forrest said. He was right. The Confederates had been whipped up into a frenzy of vengeance, whileU.S. citizens hadn't cared to think about a new fight. The chief of the General Staff brought things back to what he wanted to know: "If we've got gophers, how do we find 'em? How do we go about getting 'em out of their holes?"

"I can tell you the ideal solution," Potter said. Forrest raised an eyebrow. His eyes and eyebrows were much like his famous ancestor's, more so than the lower part of his face. Clarence Potter went on, "The ideal solution would be for our gophers inWashington andPhiladelphia to dig up a list ofU.S. gophers here. That could solve our problem."

"Could, hell!" Forrest said. "That would do it."

"Well, sir, not necessarily," Potter said. "If the Yankees knew we were looking for that kind of list, they could arrange for us to find it--and to shoot ourselves in the foot with it."

Nathan Bedford Forrest III raised both eyebrows this time. "You have a damn twisty mind, General."

"Thank you, sir," Potter answered. "Considering the business I'm in, I take that for a compliment."

"Good. That's how I meant it." Forrest pulled a pack ofRaleighs out of his pocket. He stuck one in his mouth and held out the pack. Potter took one, too. Forrest had a cigarette lighter that could have done duty for a flamethrower. He almost singed Potter's nose giving him a light. After they'd both smoked for a little while, the head of the General Staff said, "Something I want you to do for me."

"Of course, sir." Potter gave the only kind of answer you were supposed to give to a superior officer.

"If you get word that that Morrell is moving fromOhio to the East, I want you to let me know the instant you do. The instant, you hear me? I don't care if I'm on the crapper with my pants down around my ankles. You barge in there yelling,, ‘Holy Jesus, General, the damnyankees have transferred Morrell!' "

Potter laughed. Nathan Bedford Forrest III wagged a finger at him. He wasn't kidding. "If I have to do that, I'll do it," Potter promised.

"You'd better." Forrest got to his feet. "And if you have any good ideas about how to make a gopher trap, I wouldn't mind hearing those."

"That's really more Counterintelligence's cup of tea, sir. I just wanted to alert you to the possibility,"

Potter said. "I don't want to step on General Cummins' toes any more than I have already."

"Oh, I'll put him on it, too. Don't you worry about that," Forrest said. "You've already done some thinking about this, though. Kindly do some more." Trailing smoke, he hurried out the door.

"Gopher traps," Potter muttered. He did some more muttering, too, while he finished the cigarette and stubbed it out. It wasn't as if he weren't already riding herd on 127 other things, all of which were in his bailiwick. And it wasn't as if General Cummins weren't a perfectly competent officer. Potter wanted to put the whole business on the back burner.

He wanted to, but he found he couldn't. He kept worrying at it in odd moments. It might have been a bit of gristle stuck between his teeth. It kept drawing his attention no matter how much he wished it wouldn't.

"Gopher traps." He kept saying it, too. If only Forrest hadn't come up with such a good phrase. It commanded attention whether Potter felt like giving it or not.

For the next few days, as he watched the growingU.S. storm in the north, he tried hard not to think about catching any possible spies in the War Department. He was, in fact, clacking away at a report summarizing news from spies inKansas andNebraska when he suddenly stopped and stared out the window, his eyes far away behind his spectacles.

His gaze returned to the report. It was as dull as it deserved to be. Not a hell of a lot was going on inKansas andNebraska . Not a hell of a lot had ever gone on in that part of theUSA . In spite of that, he started to smile. In fact, he started to laugh, and the report had not a single funny word in it.

He walked over to Lieutenant General Forrest's office. The chief of the General Staff wasn't in the men's room. That being so, Potter had no trouble getting in to see him. The power of these wreathed stars, he thought. He'd never expected to become a general officer. He'd ten times never expected to become a general officer with Jake Featherston as President of the CSA. But here he was.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III looked up from whatever paperwork jungle he'd been hacking his way through. "Morrell?" he asked. "If he's up there, the other shoe'll drop on us any day now."

"No, sir. Haven't heard a thing about him." Potter shook his head. "I may have found a gopher trap, though."

"Well, that's interesting, too." Forrest waved him to a chair. "Why don't you sit down and tell me all about it?"

"Let me show you this first." Potter set the report onKansas andNebraska on Forrest's desk. "Glance over it, sir, if you'd be so kind." After Forrest did, he nodded. Potter explained. He finished, "You see how I could do that, don't you, sir?"

"I believe I do." Forrest looked the report over one more time. "It would mean a good deal of extra typing for you--because if you take this on, you're not going to trust it to a secretary."

"Oh, good heavens, no, sir. Of course not." Potter was shocked. "The thought never once crossed my mind."

"Good. I believe you--you sound like a schoolteacher talking about the bawdyhouse next door to her apartment building." The chief of the General Staff chuckled. Potter was less amused, but let it pass.

Chuckling still, Forrest went on, "I should have remembered you run spies. You think about these things more than an ordinary officer is liable to."

"Well, I should hope so!" Clarence Potter exclaimed. "Ordinary officers . . ." He shook his head. "I read a memoir once, by one of Robert E. Lee's couriers. In thePennsylvania campaign, he almost lost a set of Lee's special orders--the damned fool had wrapped them around three cigars. If McClellan had found out how badly Lee had divided the Army of Northern Virginia, who knows how much mischief he could have done? An enlisted man saw the orders fall and gave them back. If he hadn't, that courier's name would be mud all over the CSA."

"You do have to pay attention to little things," Forrest agreed. He tapped the report with his fingernail.

"Go ahead with what you've got in mind. I'll be interested to see what you turn up."

"Yes, sir." Potter's smile was all sharp teeth. "What--and who."

XIV

Colonel Irving Morrell hadn't read the Iliad since he got out of theMilitaryAcademy , almost thirty years ago now. Chunks of it still stuck in his mind, though. He didn't remember the anger of Achilles so much as the Greek hero sulking in his tent after he'd quarreled with Agamemnon.

All things considered, Morrell would rather have sulked in Achilles' tent than inCaldwell,Ohio , where he found himself ensconced for the moment.Caldwell was a town of fifteen hundred or two thousand people, a few miles west of Woodsfield. It was the county seat forNobleCounty , as a sign in front of the county courthouse declared. That made him feel sorry for the rest of the county.

Caldwellwas a coal town. People had been mining coal there for more than sixty years, and it showed.

The air was hazy with coal dust. When Morrell needed to hawk and spit, he spat black. There were no red brick buildings inCaldwell .

There were no white frame houses, either. The brick buildings were murky brown, the frame houses gray. The people seemed as subdued as their landscape. A lot of them seemed covered in a thin film of coal dust, too.

All things considered,Caldwell would have made Irving Morrell gloomy even if he'd gone into the place cheery as a lark. Since he'd gone in sullen, he would have been satisfied to come away without hanging himself. Even that much sometimes seemed optimistic.Caldwell was where what would have been his grand attack against the base of the Confederate salient inOhio had ingloriously petered out. Sabotage and Confederate Asskickers had brought his armor to a standstill.

That wasn't the worst of it, either. He'd thought it would be, but he'd been wrong. As he watched some of his precious barrels chained onto flatcars bound for the East Coast, his fury and frustration grew too large to hold in. He turned to Sergeant Michael Pound, who was always good for sympathy over imbecilities emanating from the War Department. "I'm being robbed, Sergeant," he said. "Robbed, I tell you, as sure as if they'd held a gun to my head and lifted my wallet."

"Yes, sir," Pound said. "If they're going to take your barrels, the least they could do would be to take you, too. Seems only fair."

"They don't want me anywhere nearPhiladelphia ," Morrell said. "They want me to keep fighting here inOhio . They've said so."

"They just don't want to give you anything to fight with," Sergeant Pound said. "They'll probably set you to making bricks without straw next."

"You mean they haven't?" Morrell said. "By God, I was doing that for years atFortLeavenworth . We had the prototype for a modern barrel twenty years ago--had it and stuck it in a back room and forgot about it. Christ, Sergeant, you went back to the artillery when they closed down the Barrel Works."

"I'm glad you don't hold it against me, sir," Pound said.

"A man has to eat. There's nothing in the Bible or the Constitution against that," Morrell said. "If there were no barrels to work on--and there damn well weren't--you needed to be doing something."

"That was how I looked at it, too." Pound suddenly snapped his fingers. "I'll bet I know one of the reasons why they're taking your

barrels away from you."

"More than I do," Morrell said sourly. "Tell me."

"They're the biggest bunch we can get our hands on this side of the Confederate salient," Pound said.

"Everything west of here has to go the long way around, up throughCanada --either that or onGreat Lakes freighters that the enemy can bomb."

Morrell eyed him. "Normally, Sergeant, when I say somebody thinks like a General Staff officer, I don't mean it as a compliment. This time, I do. That makes much more sense than anything I've been able to think of." He paused. "How would you like me to recommend you for a commission? You have the brains to do well by it. You have more in the way of brains than four out of five officers I know, maybe more."

"Thank you very much, sir." Michael Pound smiled a crooked smile. "If it's all the same to you, though, I'll pass. I've seen what officers do. There's a lot more nonsense in it than there is when you've just got stripes on your sleeve. Gunner suits me fine. It's simple. It's clean. I know exactly what I have to do and how to do it--and I'm pretty damn good at it, too. My notion is, the Army needs a good gunner more than it needs an ordinary lieutenant, which is what I'd be."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that." Morrell's smile lifted only one corner of his mouth. "Whatever else you were, you'd be an extraordinary lieutenant. You talk back to me as a sergeant. If you got a gold bar on your shoulder, you'd probably talk back to the chief of the General Staff."

"Seeing how the war is going, wouldn't you say somebody ought to?" Pound sketched a salute and ambled off. He was blocky as a barrel himself--and solid as a barrel, too. And, when he went up against something he didn't like, he could also be as deadly as a barrel.

Morrell looked east. Then he looked west. Then he muttered something uncomplimentary about Jake Featherston's personal habits, something about which he was in no position to have firsthand knowledge.

Sergeant Pound was altogether too likely to be right. The thrust up to Lake Erie was starting to hurt theUSA . Morrell wondered what the exact problem was. Could they ship enough fuel or enough barrels on the rail lines north of theGreat Lakes , but not both at once? Something like that, he supposed.

Logistics had never been his favorite subject. No good officer could afford to ignore it, but he preferred fighting to brooding about rolling stock.

Of course, if not for rolling stock he'd still have had his barrels with him. They would have broken down one after another if they'd had to get to easternWest Virginia under their own power. Breakdowns kept almost as many of them out of action as enemy fire did. Morrell wished it were otherwise, but it wasn't.

The weight of armor they carried stressed engines and suspensions to the point of no return, or sometimes past it.

Half a dozen barrels still inCaldwell had their engine decking off. Soldiers were attacking them with wrenches and pliers. Some, maybe even most, of them hadn't broken down. A barrel whose crew kept it in good running trim didn't fail as often as one whose crew neglected it.

Far off in the distance, artillery rumbled. Morrell cursed under his breath. He should have been up there punching, not stalled in this jerkwater town. And how could he ever hope to land any punches if they kept siphoning away his strength? He couldn't, but they'd blame him because he didn't.

The Constitution saidU.S. soldiers weren't supposed to quarter themselves on civilians. Like most rules, that one sometimes got ignored when bullets started flying. Morrell didn't ignore it, though. He was perfectly happy in a tent or a sleeping bag or just rolled in a blanket--he liked the outdoors. That was a concept General Staff officers back inPhiladelphia had trouble grasping.

He was glad he had a tent when it started to pour about eight that night. Rain bucketed down out of the sky. It wasn't a warm summer rain, either: not the kind you could go out in and enjoy. The nasty weather said the seasons were changing. It would turn everything but paved roads into soup, too. Morrell muttered to himself. Enough mud could bog down barrels. That would slow things here.

He did some more muttering a moment later. If it also rained like this inVirginia , it wouldn't do the buildingU.S. offensive any good. That wasn't his campaign, but he worried about it. He worried about it all the more because it wasn't his campaign. But all he could do was worry. The weather did as it pleased, not as he pleased.

He'd just stretched out on his cot when Confederate bombers came

overCaldwell . The drumming rain drowned out the drone of their motors. The first he knew that they were around was a series of rending crashes off in the woods east of the little town. Frightened shouts came from nearby houses. Morrell almost laughed. Civilians got a lot more excited about bombing than soldiers did.

With those clouds overhead, the Confederates were bombing blind. Morrell didn't worry that they would actually hitCaldwell . . . until the bomb impacts started walking west from those first blasts. The lead bombers had missed their targets by a lot. But the ones behind them, trying to bomb from the same point as they had, released their bombs too soon, an error that grew as it went through the formation.

That sort of thing happened all the time. Here, though, it was bringing the bombs back toward where they should have fallen in the first place. Morrell had taken off his boots to get comfortable. He put them on again in a tearing hurry, not bothering to tie them. Then he bolted from his tent and ran for the closest shelter trench.

He splashed and squelched getting down into it. It filled rapidly with cursing crewmen from his remaining barrels. However much they cursed, they kept their heads down. A chunk of bomb could do as neat a job as a headsman's axe--but a messy one would leave you just as dead.

"Here they come," somebody said as bombs started falling insideCaldwell . The ground shook.

Fragments hissed and screeched not nearly far enough overhead. As Morrell bent to tie those boots, he hoped the civilians had had the brains to go down into their basements.

One crash was especially loud, and followed by a flash of light. "Fuckin' lucky bastards," a soldier said.

"If they didn't just blow a barrel to hell and gone, I'm a monkey's uncle." Ammunition cooking off inside the stricken machine proved him right.

Another, different-sounding, crash probably meant a bomb had come down on a house. Going to the basement wasn't likely to save the poor bastards who'd lived there. Morrell sighed a wet sigh. Nothing to be done about it--and it wasn't as ifU.S. bombers weren't visiting the same kind of hell on Confederate civilians.

"Pay those stinking sons of bitches back for getting me all wet and

muddy," a barrel man said. Civilian casualties worried him even less than Morrell. His own discomfort was another story.

The bombs stopped falling. Morrell stood up straight and looked out of the trench. The barrel that had taken a direct hit was still burning in spite of the rain. By that yellow, flickering light, Morrell saw that two or three houses had fallen in on themselves. They were trying to burn, too, but weren't having an easy time of it in the downpour.

"Come on," he said. "Let's see what we can do for the locals."

A civilian lay in the middle of one of the streets, suddenly and gruesomely dead. What had he been doing out there? Watching the bombs come down? Did he think it was sport? No one would ever know now.

Other people came staggering out of houses. Some of them were wounded. Some were simply in shock, and crying out their terror to whoever would listen, or maybe to the world at large. "My baby! My baby!" a woman shrieked. She was holding the baby, which was also shrieking.

A corpsman took the baby from her. After looking it over--carefully, because fragments could produce tiny but deadly wounds--he spoke in tones of purest New York City: "Lady, ain't nuttin' wrong wid dis kid but a wet diaper."

"But the poor thing is frightened half to death!" the woman said.

What the corpsman said after that was memorable, but had very little to do with medicine. The woman squawked indignantly.Irving Morrell filed away some of the choicer--the corpsman would have said chercer--phrases. When he found a moment, he'd aim them atPhiladelphia .

When Scipio looked in his pay envelope, he thought the bookkeeper at the Huntsman's Lodge had made a mistake. That had happened before, two or three times. As far as he could tell, the bookkeeper always erred in the restaurant's favor. He took the envelope to Jerry Dover. "I hates to bother you, suh, but I's ten dollars light."

Dovershook his head. "Sorry, Xerxes, but you're not."

"What you mean?" For a second, Scipio thought the restaurant manager thought he'd pocketed the missing banknote before

complaining. Then he realized something else was going on. "You mean it's one o' them--?"

"Contributions. That's right. Thought you might have seen the story in the Constitutionalist yesterday, or maybe heard about it on the wireless. It's on account of the bombing in the Terry."

"Lawd!" Scipio burst out. "One o' dem bombs almost kill me, an' now I gots to pay fo' it? Don't hardly seem fair." It seemed a lot worse than unfair, but saying even that much to a white man carried a certain risk.

Jerry Dover didn't get angry. He just shrugged. "If I don't short you and the rest of the colored help, my ass is in a sling," he said. If it came to a choice between saving his ass and the black men's, he'd choose his own. That wasn't a headline that would make the Augusta Constitutionalist.

Scipio sighed. Only too plainly, he wasn't going to get his ten dollars. He said, "Wish I seen de newspaper. Wish I heard de wireless. Wouldn't be such a surprise in dat case."

"How come you missed 'em?"Dover asked. "You're usually pretty well up on stuff." He didn't even add, for a nigger. Scipio had worked for him a long time now. He knew the colored man had a working brain.

"One o' them things," Scipio said with a shrug of his own. He'd missed buying a paper the day before.

He hadn't listened to the wireless very much. He did wonder how he'd managed not to hear the newsboys shouting the headline and the waiters and cooks and dishwashers grousing about it. "Been livin'

in my own little world, I reckon."

"Yeah, well, shit like that happens."Dover was willing to sound sympathetic as long as he didn't have to do anything about it.

Before Scipio could answer, a dishwasher came up to their boss. "Hey, Mr. Dover!" he said. "I got ten clams missin' outa my envelope here!"

"No, you don't, Ozymandias," the manager said, and went through the explanation again. Scipio knew a certain amount of relief that he hadn't been the only one not to get the word.

Ozymandias, a young man, didn't take it as well as Scipio had. He cussed and fumed till Scipio wondered whether Jerry Dover would fire him on the spot.Dover didn't. He just let the Negro run down and sent him out the door. Quite a few white men boasted about being good with niggers. Most of them were full of crap. Jerry Dover really was good with the help at the Huntsman's Lodge, though he didn't go around bragging about it.

Of course,Dover was good with people generally, whites as well as Negroes. We are people, dammit, Scipio thought. The Freedom Party had a different opinion.

Doversaid, "You be careful on the way home, you hear? Don't want your missus and your young ones grieving on account of some bastard who's out prowling after curfew."

"I's always careful," Scipio said, and meant it. "But I thanks you fo' de thought."

He went out into the black, black night.Augusta had never been bombed, but remained blacked out.

Scipio supposed that made sense. Better safe than sorry was a pretty good rule.

The weather was cooler and less muggy than it had been. As fall came on, the dreadful sticky heat of summer became only a memory. It wasn't cold enough to put all the mosquitoes to sleep for the winter, though. Scipio suspected he'd get home to his apartment with a new bite or two. He couldn't hear the mosquitoes buzzing any more unless they flew right past his ears. Those nasty whines had driven him crazy when he was younger. He didn't miss hearing them now--except that they would have warned him the flying pests were around.

An auto slid past, going hardly faster than Scipio was. Masking tape reduced its headlights to slits. They cast a pallid glow that reached about as far as a man could spit. At least the driver here didn't have the delusion he could do more than he really could. Accidents were up even though fewer motorcars were on the road. That meant one thing and one thing only: people were driving like a bunch of damn fools.

As usual, Scipio had no trouble telling when he got to the Terry, even though he could hardly see a hand in front of his face. As soon as the sidewalk started crumbling under his feet, he knew he'd come to the colored part of town.

He skirted the shortest way home, which took him past what had been the bus stop for war workers. It remained a sea of rubble. Repairs got done slowly in the Terry--when they got done at all. Some of the buildings white mobs had burned in the pogroms after the Freedom Party took over remained ruins after seven years.

He'd almost died then. Two different auto bombs had almost killed him. He'd lived through the bloody rise and even bloodier fall of theCongareeSocialistRepublic . He'd outlived Anne Colleton, and he never would have bet anything on that. After what I've been through, maybe I'll go on forever, he thought.

A bat flittered past, not a foot in front of him. It was out of sight almost before he realized it had been there. He wondered if the war had brought hardship to bats. Without street lights to lure insects, wouldn't they have to work harder to get enough to eat? Strange to imagine that one man's decision inRichmond might affect little furry animals hundreds of miles away.

"Hold it right there!" The harsh, rasping voice came out of an alley not ten feet away. "Don't even breathe funny, or it'll be the last thing you ever do."

Scipio froze. Even as he did it, he wondered if it was the worst thing he could do, not the best. If he ran, he might lose himself in the darkness. Of course, if he ran, he might also give the owner of that voice the excuse to blast him to hamburger with a charge of buckshot. He'd made his choice. Now he had to see what came of it.

"All right, nigger. Suppose you tell me what the fuck you're doin' out after curfew."

He'd thought that was a white policeman there, not a black robber. He would have been more likely to run from a man of his own color. "Suh, I works at de Huntsman's Lodge," he answered. "Dey don't let me off till midnight. I goes home at all, I gots to go after curfew."

"Likely tell," the white man said. "Who's your boss, damn you? Make it snappy!"

"Jerry Dover, suh," Scipio said quickly. "Mebbe he still dere. I ain't left but fifteen minutes ago. He tell you who I is."

Footsteps crunching on gravel, thumping on cement. A dark, shadowy shape looming up in front of Scipio. The silhouette of the juice-

squeezer hat the other man wore said he really was a policeman. He leaned forward to peer closely at Scipio. "Holy Jesus, you're in a goddamn penguin suit!"

"I gots to wear it," Scipio said wearily. "It's my uniform, like."

"Get the fuck outa here," the cop said. "Nobody's gonna be dumb enough to go plantin' bombs or nothin' in a lousy penguin suit."

"I thanks you kindly, suh," Scipio said. If the policeman had been in a nasty mood, he could have run him in for being out after curfew. Scipio thought Jerry Dover or the higher-ups at the restaurant would have made sure he didn't spend much time in jail, but any time in jail was too much.

"A penguin suit," the cop said one more time--another dime Scipio didn't have. "Shit, the boys at the station'll bust a gut when I tell 'em about this one."

With a resigned chuckle and a dip of his head to show he was a properly respectful--a properly servile--Negro, Scipio made his way deeper into the Terry. He peered carefully up and down every street and alley he came to before crossing it. How much good that would do, with so many inky shadows for robbers to hide in, he didn't know. But it was all he could do.

When he came to a couple of the places where he was most likely to find trouble--or it was most likely to find him--he wished he had that foul-mouthed policeman at his side. He shook his head, ashamed and embarrassed at wanting a white man's protection against his own people. Ashamed and embarrassed or not, though, he did. The Terry was a more dangerous place these days than it had been a few years before. Sharecroppers and farm workers forced from fields when tractors and harvesters took their jobs away had poured into Confederate cities, looking for whatever they could find. When they could find nothing else--which was all too often-- they preyed on their fellow Negroes. And Reds sheltered here, too. They weren't above robbery (from the highest motives, of course) to keep their cause alive.

He got through the worst parts safely. His last bad moment was opening the fortified door to his building.

If somebody came up while he was doing that . . . But nobody did. He quickly shut the door behind him, locked the lock, and used the dead bolt. Then he breathed a sigh of relief. Made it through another night,

he thought.

As the fear dropped away, he realized how tired he was. The climb up the stairs to his flat felt as if he were going up a mountain. He'd had that happen before, too. He didn't know what he could do about it.

If he didn't work at the Huntsman's Lodge, he'd be waiting tables somewhere else. And if he couldn't do it anywhere, what would he be doing then? Prowling the alleys, looking for someone unwary to knock over the head?

Scipio laughed, not that it was funny. He might make the Constitutionalist if he tried it. What would the headline be?Augusta 's oldest strongarm man?Augusta 's dumbest strongarm man? Oldest and dumbest?

That would probably do the job.

He trudged down the hall and opened his front door. A light was burning inside. Blackout curtains made sure it didn't leak out. Here as in other colored districts throughout the CSA, blackout wardens and cops were likelier to shoot through lighted windows than to bother with a warning and a fine.

As usual, he got out of his tuxedo with nothing but relief. Putting on his nightshirt felt good, where even that much in the way of clothes had been a sore trial in the hot weather not long before. Bathsheba murmured sleepily when he lay down beside her. "How'd it go?" she asked.

"Not too bad," he answered automatically. But then he remembered that wasn't quite true. "Got my pay docked ten dollars, though." He couldn't hide that from his wife--better to let her know right away, then.

The news got her attention, no matter how sleepy she was. "Ten dollars!" she said. "What you do?"

"Didn't do nothin'. Everybody git docked," Scipio said. "De gummint fine de niggers here fo' de auto bombs."

"Ain't fair. Ain't right," Bathsheba said. "Gummint don't fine no ofays when they do somethin' bad."

"I ain't sayin' you wrong," Scipio replied. "But what kin we do 'bout it?" The answer to that for Negroes in the CSA had always been not much.

Jonathan Moss led his squadron of Wright fighters out overLake Erie . They were looking for trouble.

They would probably find it, too. Just in case they couldn't on their own, they had help. The wireless set sounded in Moss' earphones: "Red-27 leader, this is Mud Hen Base. Do you copy?"

"Go ahead, Mud Hen Base," Moss said. "I read you five by five." Mud Hen Base was the Y-ranging station back inToledo . For reasons known only to God, theToledo football team was called the Mud Hens. They didn't play in one of the top leagues, so maybe Confederate wireless men monitoring the conversation--and there were bound to be some--wouldn't figure out where the fellow on the other end of the circuit was for a while.

And maybe the stork brings babies and tucks them under cabbage leaves, too, Moss thought.

"We have bogies on the lake. Range about seventy, bearing oh-seven-five. I say again, range about seventy, bearing oh-seven-five."

"Roger that," Moss said, and repeated it back. "We'll have a look. Out." He checked a small map, then got on the circuit with the rest of the airplanes he led. After passing on what he'd got from the Y-ranging station, he added, "Sounds like they're somewhere out east ofPointPeleeIsland . Let's see if we can't catch 'em."

PointPeleeIslandlay north ofSandusky . Before the Great War, it had belonged to theprovinceofOntario .

It had been fortified to hell and gone, too; reducing it had cost most of a division. Technically, Moss supposed it still belonged toOntario . That didn't matter now, though--it was underU.S. management.

When the island came into sight, he led the squadron north around it. Some of theU.S. antiaircraft down there opened up on the fighters anyway. "Knock it off, you stupid sons of bitches!" Moss shouted in the cockpit. The gunners, of course, paid no attention to him. They probably wouldn't have even if he'd been on the wireless with them--how could they be sure he wasn't a Confederate who could put on a Yankee accent?

U.S.guns had already shot at Moss quite often enough to last him several lifetimes. They hadn't hit him yet. He knew of pilots who

weren't so lucky. He also knew of pilots who hadn't come home because their own side shot them down.

Nobody got hit here. Someone--Moss couldn't tell who--spoke in his earphones: "I'd like to go down there and strafe those assholes." That had occurred to him, too.

Once past the danger, he peered east. He also looked down to the surface of the lake every now and again. The Confederates would be out hunting freighters. With the rail lines and railroads throughOhio cut, theUnited States had to do what they could to move things back and forth between East and West.

And the Confederates had to do what they could to try to stop theUSA .

He hoped he'd find Mules buzzing along in search of ships to dive on. The CSA's Asskickers were formidable if you were underneath them. To a fighter pilot, they might have had shoot me down! painted on their gull wings. They couldn't run fast enough to get away, and they couldn't shoot back well enough to defend themselves.

"There they are--eleven o' clock!" The shout crackled with excitement.

Moss peered a little farther north than he'd been looking. He spotted the sun flashing off cockpit glass, too. "Well, let's go see what we've got," he said. "Stick with your wingmen, keep an eye on your buddies, and good hunting."

His own wingman these days was a stolid squarehead named Martin Rolvaag. He came on the circuit to say, "They don't look like Mules, sir."

"I was thinking the same thing," Moss answered. "Razorbacks, unless I miss my guess." The medium bombers couldn't outrun Wrights, either, but they carried more machine guns than Mules did, and had to be approached with caution. And . . . "They've got Hound Dogs escorting them."

"They've seen us," Rolvaag said.

Sure enough, the Confederate fighters peeled away from the Razorbacks and sped toward theU.S.

airplanes. Their numbers more or less matched those he had. So did

their performance. They were a little more nimble, while the Wrights climbed and dove a little better.

Moss didn't want to fight the Hound Dogs. He wanted to punish the Razorbacks. Knocking them out of the sky was the point of the exercise. They could sink the ships theUnited States had to have.

Confederate fighters could shoot up ships, but couldn't send them to the bottom.

But if Moss wanted the Razorbacks, he had to go through the Hound Dogs. The C.S. fighter pilots understood what was what as well as theirU.S. counterparts. They were there to make sure the bombers got through.

Elements--lead pilots and their wingmen--were supposed to hold together. So were flights--pairs of elements. And so were squadrons--four flights. In practice, damn near everything went to hell in combat.

Lead pilots and wingmen did stick together when they could; you didn't want to be naked and alone out there. Past that, you did what you could and what you had to and worried about it later.

Head-on passes made you pucker. You and the other guy were zooming at each other at seven hundred miles an hour. That didn't leave much time to shoot. And if you both chose to climb or dive at the same instant . . . The sky was a big place, but not big enough to let two airplanes occupy the same small part of it at the same time.

The Hound Dog coming at Moss started shooting too soon. You couldn't hit the broad side of a barn from half a mile out. That told Moss he was flying against somebody without a whole lot of experience.

Anybody who'd done this for a while knew you had to get in close to do damage. Moss waited till the Hound Dog--painted in blobs of brown and green not much different from those on his Wright 27--all but filled the windshield before thumbing the firing button.

He missed anyway. The Hound Dog roared past him and was gone. He swore, but his heart wasn't in it.

"Watch my back, Marty," he called to his wingman. "Let's go after the bombers."

"Will do." Nothing fazed Rolvaag. That went a long way toward

making him a good pilot all by itself. If he didn't quite have a duelist's reflexes and a duelist's arrogance . . . That went a long way toward making him a good pilot but not a great one.

His calm answer had to fight its way through the shouts--some wordless, others filled with extravagant obscenity--from the other pilots in the squadron. A flaming fighter tumbled toward the lake far below.

Moss couldn't tell if it bore the eagle and crossed swords or the Confederate battle flag. Like theUSA and the CSA, their fighter aircraft bore an alarming resemblance to each other.

Bombs rained down from the Razorbacks. The bombers had no target--all they'd kill were fish. But they were faster and less likely to go up in a fireball if they got rid of their ordnance. As soon as they'd done it, they streaked for the deck. In a dive, they were damn near as fast as a fighter.

Damn near, but not quite. Moss picked his target. Once he heeled over into a dive, he stopped worrying about the Hound Dogs. They couldn't catch him from behind. The dorsal and portside machine gunners on the Razorback opened up on him. He respected their tracers, but didn't particularly fear them. They had to aim those single guns by hand. Hits weren't easy.

He, on the other hand, needed only to point his Wright's nose at the Razorback's wing root. The bombers carried fuel in their wings. Confederate self-sealing gas tanks were as good as the ones theUSA used, but they weren't perfect. No tanks were. Put enough armor-piercing and incendiary bullets through them and they'd burn, all right.

This one did. Fire licked back from the wing. The portside engine started burning, too. "You nailed his ass!" Rolvaag shouted as the Razorback's pilot lost control and the bomber spiraled down toward the water.

"Yeah," Moss said. As long as he was in his dive, he didn't have to worry about Hound Dogs. Once he came out . . . Once he came out, he was down here, and they could dive on him.

You traded speed for altitude. To gain speed, you had to give up altitude. That was why fights that started three miles up in the sky often finished just above the ground. To get the altitude back, you had to give up speed. You were vulnerable to the fighters that hadn't

dropped so low.

Another bomber plunged down towardLake Erie . A moment later, so did theU.S. fighter that had shot it down. Moss eyed it, hoping the pilot could get out before it went into the water. No such luck. The squadron leader swore. Another one of the bright, eager youngsters he commanded wouldn't be coming home.

The Hound Dogs were a little slower down to the deck than the U.S. Wrights. Once they got there, though, they got between theU.S. fighters and the fleeing Razorbacks. By then, the Razorbacks were streaking towards occupiedOhio . The Confederates had brought up what seemed like all the antiaircraft in the world. Going after the bombers, especially down low like this, was liable to prove expensive.

Moss got on the all-squadron circuit: "Let's head for home, boys. We did what we were supposed to do. Those Razorbacks won't bother our shipping for a while."

"Some of those bastards won't ever bother it again," somebody said. Moss thought that was Red Geoffreys, who had every ounce of the killer instinct Marty Rolvaag was a hair short on. He couldn't be sure, though. There was a lot of other wireless traffic, and the earphones didn't reproduce anybody's voice real well.

A few pilots grumbled, but no one complained very much when he swung back toward the west. The Hound Dogs followed the Razorbacks down to the south. They were content to let the Wrights go. Moss nodded to himself. That was always a sign the guys on the other side had had enough of you.

He'd seen two Razorbacks go down. He knew his own squadron had lost at least one fighter. As the Wrights went back to their airstrip, the men made their claims about enemy aircraft shot down. To listen to them, the Confederates had lost half their Razorbacks and at least half a dozen Hound Dogs. Moss had heard--and made--enough excited claims to take all of them with a grain of salt. If you didn't see an airplane crash, you couldn't be sure it was really downed. Even if you did, two or three guys were liable to think they were the one who'd shot it out of the sky.

Rolvaag came on the element-only circuit: "Looks like we're down two, Major."

"Shit," Moss said. His wingman had done the count before he'd had the chance to. He wondered how manyU.S. fighters the Hound Dogs

would claim once they got back to their airstrip. If it were only two, he would have been amazed.

How much punishment could the Confederates take overLake Erie before they decided their attacks cost more than they were worth? How much damage were they doing toU.S. shipping? How much to theU.S. airplanes that opposed them? Moss had no idea. He wondered whether anybody on either side did.

After too much experience with too many wars, he wouldn't have bet on it. They'd just go on till one side or the other couldn't stand it any more. Which one that would be, how long the whole bloody business would take . . . There alone in the cockpit, he shrugged. No way to tell, not ahead of time.

He wondered if he'd be around to see the end of it. He shrugged again. He'd got through the Great War in one piece. He hadn't even been scratched. But what did that prove? Nothing, and he knew it too well.

George Enos didn't mind getting bounced out of bed at half past five every morning. He didn't mind the calisthenics that followed, either. He would have got up earlier and worked harder had he been bringing in cod out on the Grand Bank.

Some people grumbled about the chow. He'd figured out nobody could do anything about that, not when the cooks here turned out meals for hundreds at a time. It wasn't terrible food, and you could make a pig of yourself, which he did. He poured down coffee with every meal, too. Sometimes he thought he'd have trouble going to sleep without it.

After breakfast came gunnery practice. He'd graduated from a one-pounder like those his father had served to a twin 40mm cannon. That gun probably would have amazed his old man. It sure amazed him.

It was a Swedish design, built under license in theUSA , and it could put a hell of a lot of shells in the air.

Chief Isbell, the gunnery instructor, was another one of those broad-beamed, gray-stubbled CPOs. The Navy seemed to have a factory that turned them out as needed. They were, if not the brains of the outfit, at least its memory. Behind Isbell's back--but only behind his back--the raw seamen he taught called him the Bald Eagle: when he took off his cap, which he did as little as he could, he showed the world a wide expanse of shining scalp.

He knew his business, though. "They come after you, you start shooting like a bunch of mad bastards, you hear?" he said one morning. "Start shooting before you really start aiming. Just point it sorta at the fuckers comin' your way and let fly."

"What the hell good will that do, Chief?" somebody asked.

Isbell spelled it out like a third-grade teacher working on the multiplication table with a class full of dumbbells: "I'll tell you what, by God." He laid an affectionate hand on the barrel of the gun, the way a husband might on his wife's behind. A stab of longing for Connie pierced George to the root, but only for a moment, for Isbell went on, "For one thing, you're liable to scare him away. These babies put out muzzle flashes as long as your arm. He sees 'em, he knows you're going after him. Not everybody's a hero. Sucker in that airplane may decide he'd rather go home to his girlfriend than press home and maybe get shot down. Even if he does press home, he won't do it as well as he would have if you weren't banging away at him. You see what I mean?"

A few would-be sailors nodded.

"You see what I mean?" Isbell growled.

"Yes, Chief!" the men chorused.

Isbell nodded. "That's more like it. I spend my breath talking to you puppies, I want to know you're paying attention. I don't like wasting my time, you know what I mean?" He paused and lit a cigarette.

After his first drag, he made a face. "Damn thing tastes like horseshit." That didn't stop him from smoking it down to a tiny butt as he continued, "Other thing you gotta remember is, ammo's cheap. Ships are a lot more expensive." He looked the trainees up and down. "You guys might be worth a little somethin', too, but I wouldn't count on it a whole hell of a lot."

So there, George thought. An old-fashioned two-decker flew back and forth, towing a cloth target at the end of a long line. No matter how long the line was, one eager-beaver group almost shot down the target tug instead of the target. The Bald Eagle waxed eloquent on the shortcomings of the material the Navy had to use these days. That, in its way, was also rather like walking into an unexpected volley of 40mm ammunition.

George's group did better. He wasn't sure they hit the target, but they did scare it. "I've seen worse,"

Isbell declared. From him, that was high praise.

After the session, George went up to the chief and said, "My father used to serve a one-pounder on a destroyer in the last war."

"Those goddamn things." Isbell spoke with a mixture of affection and exasperation that George understood from training on such a gun. "You had to be lucky to hit an airplane with 'em, but you sure could make a sub say uncle if you caught it on the surface. What ship, kid?"

George was past thirty. Nobody'd called him kid for quite a while. If anyone had the right, though, it was somebody like the Bald Eagle. "He was on the Ericsson," he answered.

Isbell's face changed. Every Navy veteran knew about the Ericsson. "At the end?" he asked. George nodded. To his amazement, the Bald Eagle set a hand on his shoulder. "That's rough, kid. I'm sorry as hell." All at once, the chief's gaze sharpened. "Wait a minute. You're Enos. Are you related to the Enos gal who . . . ?"

"Who shot the Confederate submersible skipper? That was my mother," George said proudly.

"Fuck me." Isbell made the obscenity sound like a much more sincere compliment than the one he'd given the gun crew. "You want antiaircraft duty, kid? You been making noises like you do. I bet you can have it. Personnel ain't gonna say no, not to somebody with your last name."

"I've . . . thought about that," George said. "I don't want to get anything just on account of who my mother and father were."

"You've got an angle. You've got an in. You'd have to be nuts not to use 'em," Isbell said. "Life gives you lemons, make lemonade."

George had heard plenty of advice he liked less. He said, "Is there any way I can get to sea faster than usual?"

But Isbell just laughed at that, laughed and shook his head. "Nope. Sorry, Enos, but that ain't gonna happen. You gotta know what you gotta know, and the Navy's gotta know you know what you gotta know. Nothing personal--don't get me wrong--but if they put you on a ship before that, you're liable to be more of a menace than a help, if

you know what I mean."

With a tight, sour smile, George changed the subject. He did know what the Bald Eagle meant, and wished he didn't. A couple of times, he'd gone on a fishing run with men who didn't know what the hell they were doing, men who were trying the fisherman's life for the first time. Even when they were eager to work, they might as well have been so many kittens. They got in everybody's way and caused more trouble than they were worth.

And then he realized that, once upon a time, he'd been one of those kittens himself. How had the old-timers put up with him when he first started going out to fish? He'd been sixteen, seventeen, something like that: somebody the phrase green as paint was made for. The other guys had probably remembered what they were like when they first put to sea. That was the only explanation that made any sense to him. If he saw any of them again, he'd have to buy them a beer and thank them for their patience.

He worked hard on antiaircraft gunnery. He got practice firing bigger guns, too, as he had on the Lamson. The men in training didn't get to handle full-sized big-gun ammunition. The guns had subcaliber practice rounds, which couldn't do as much harm if something went wrong and which, as the CPO in charge of those guns (a near twin to Bald Eagle Isbell, except that he had a full head of graying hair) pointed out, were a hell of a lot cheaper than the real thing.

And he tried to learn the other things the Navy threw at him. Like anybody who'd made more than a few fishing runs, he was a pretty fair amateur mechanic. He'd fiddled with the Sweet Sue's diesel several times, and made things better more often than he'd made them worse. He'd learned on the Lamson, though, that, just as sailing on a fishing boat wasn't enough to let him go to sea right away on a warship, so fiddling with a diesel didn't teach him what he needed to know about the care and feeding of a steam turbine.

Some guys bitched about the classwork. Morris Fishbein asked the overage lieutenant who was teaching them, "Why do we need to know this, sir? Most of us aren't going into the black gang."

"I know that, Fishbein," the officer answered. "But if your ship takes a bomb or a shell or a torpedo and they have casualties down there, the men left alive will be screaming for help as loud as they can. And when they get it, they won't want a bunch of thumb-fingered idiots who don't know their ass from the end zone. They'll want people who

can actually do them some good. Not all of you will be gunners, either, but you're learning to handle guns. Well, a ship's engine is just as much a weapon as her guns are."

The answer made more than enough sense to keep George happy. And the Navy knew how to ram home what people needed to learn. He wished his high-school teachers had been half as good. He might have stayed in long enough to graduate.

By the time he had both the training and the hands-on work on the Lamson, he thought he could have built an engine from scratch. He was wrong, of course, but a little extra confidence never hurt anybody.

Men applied for specialist schools: those who really would go into the black gang, men who'd handle the wireless and Y-ranging gear, cooks. There was a gunnery school, too. George put in for it. He let Bald Eagle Isbell know he had.

"Way to go, kid," the CPO said. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll bend a few people's ears. I know the right ones to talk to. I'd goddamn well better by now, eh? I've been at this business long enough."

"Thanks very much, Chief," George said.

"You're welcome," Isbell answered matter-of-factly. "I wouldn't do it if I didn't think you had the makings. That wouldn't be fair to whoever you shipped with. But you can do the job, so why the hell not?"

Lists of those assigned to this, that, or the other school appeared on the door outside the camp's administrative offices. George scanned them eagerly. His name wasn't on the one for the gunnery school, but it wasn't on any of the other lists, either. He wondered if the Navy really wanted him for anything at all.

And then, after a week of what felt like the worst anticlimax in the world, he found his name. Actually, Morrie Fishbein, who was standing beside him to check the lists, found it for him. Fishbein gave him a nudge with an elbow and said, "Hey, George, here you are."

"What? Where? Lemme see," George said. Fishbein pointed. George looked. "Gunnery school! Yeah!"

He pumped his fist in the air. Then he remembered the other man. "What about you, Morrie? You anywhere?"

"Doesn't look like it." Fishbein sounded mournful. "I don't think anybody gives a damn about me."

George hadn't been the only one with such worries, then.

A yeoman came out of the office and stuck another list to the door with a piece of masking tape. Morrie turned away in dejection. George took a look at it. ", ‘Fishbein, Morris D.,' " he read. "It's the antisubmersible-warfare list. They're going to teach you to throw ashcans at subs--either that or put earphones on you and show you how to really use that sound-ranging gear they've got."

"Oh, yeah?" The other man turned back. George aimed an index finger to show him his name. Fishbein thought it over. "Antisub . . . That's not too bad. They could've sent me plenty of worse places.

Minesweeping, for instance." He shuddered at the mere idea.

"If I didn't get gunnery, I would've wanted antisub," George said. "You sink one of those bastards for me, you hear?"

"Sure as hell try," Fishbein said. "If you don't get them, they get you."

"You'd best believe it," George said. "Like the chaplain tells us every Sunday--it is better to give than to receive."

He realized too late that Fishbein listened to his chaplain on Saturday, if he listened at all. But the New Yorker laughed. "That's pretty goddamn funny, George."

George checked the lists again. "They're going to ship us out this afternoon. Better throw your stuff in your duffel."

"Uh-huh." Fishbein stopped laughing. "Ain't that a pisser? Everything you got in the world, and you can sling it over your shoulder."

"Just one of those things," George answered with a shrug. He'd been used to living with not much more than a duffel's worth of stuff for weeks at a time when he went on a fishing run. To someone new to the sea, though, it couldn't be easy.

He stared at the list again. Gunnery school. He nodded to himself. He thought the father he didn't remember well enough would approve.

Hipolito Rodriguez turned off the lights in the farmhouse kitchen. As

always these days, he did it with enormous respect, after first making sure the floor under his feet was dry. He'd been careless once, and it had almost killed him. IfMagdalena hadn't come out of the bedroom and knocked him away from the switch he couldn't let go of on his own, it would have finished the job in short order.

From what he'd heard since, she was lucky she hadn't stepped in the water herself, or the treacherous electricity would have seized her, too. Electricity was a strong servant, yes. Like anything strong, though, it could use its strength for good or ill. He'd found that out. He hoped one lesson would last him a lifetime.

When he went into the front room,Magdalena asked, "How are you?"

"I'm all right. I'm not made of glass, you know," he answered. His wife gave him a look that said she didn't believe a word of it. He still hadn't got back all his strength and coordination. Sometimes he wondered if he ever would, or if he'd remain a lesser man than he once had been.

He frowned. He wished he hadn't thought of it like that. He was a lesser man than he had been in some other ways, too. He wasn't quite no man at all, but the electricity hadn't done that any good, either.

Magdalenahadn't complained. She'd done everything she could to help him. He was discovering that women got less upset about such things than did the men to whom they happened. That was a small relief, even if one he would rather not have had.

To keep from worrying about his shortcomings, he said, "I'm going to turn on the wireless. It's just about time for the news."

"All right."Magdalena didn't tell him to be careful when he turned on the set. She never told him anything like that. She knew he had his pride. Whether she said it or not, though, he knew what she was thinking.

And he was careful when he turned it on. He thought he always would be.

Click! The set was on. He stepped away from it. Nothing had happened to him. Absurd to feel relief at that, but he did. Then he stepped back and turned the tuning knob to the station he wanted.

As usual when the wireless hadn't been on for a while, the sound needed a bit of time to show up. When it did, the announcer was in the middle of a sentence: "--the news in a moment, after these brief

messages." An improbably cheerful chorus started singing the praises of a brand of kitchen cleanser.

ByMagdalena 's sniff, it wasn't a brand she thought much of.

Another chorus, this one full of deep, masculine voices, urged people to buy Confederate war bonds.

Rodriguez had already done that: as many as he could afford. "Bonds and bullets, bonds and bombs!"

they chanted, drums thudding martially in the background. Just hearing them made you want to give money to the cause.

Their music faded. The familiar fanfare that led off the news followed. "Now it is time to tell you the truth," the announcer said. "Yankee air pirates were severely punished in raids overVirginia andKentucky last night. Confederate bombers struck hard at Yankee shipping in theGreat Lakes yesterday.U.S.

industry cannot keep making munitions if it cannot get supplies."

"Es verdad. Tiene razón," Rodriguez said. His wife nodded--she thought it was true and the newsman was right, too.

"InUtah , poison-gas attacks did not make the Mormon freedom fighters rebelling against Yankee tyranny pull back fromProvo ," the newsman went on. "And inNew Mexico , a daring raid by the Confederate Camel Corps caused the destruction of aU.S. ammunition dump outside ofAlamogordo .

The shells and bombs would have been used against Confederate women and children inTexas ."

Rodriguez found himself nodding. That was how the damnyankees did things, all right.

"There were minor raids by Red mallate bandits inMississippi ,Georgia , andSouth Carolina over the past few days," the newsreader said. "None of them did much damage, and the Negroes were driven off with heavy losses." Rodriguez nodded again. If blacks in the CSA took up arms against the government, they deserved whatever happened to them. Even if they didn't . . .

"And inRichmond , President Jake Featherston announced the formation of the Confederate Veterans'

Brigades," the newsman said. "These men, while no longer fit for the demands of modern war, will free younger men now serving behind the lines to go up to the front."

More singing commercials followed. Rodriguez listened to them with half an ear. When they went away, the newsman gave football scores from across the CSA. Rodriguez waited for the score of the Hermosillo-Chihuahua match. It had ended up 17–17. He sighed. He'd hoped for a win, butChihuahua had been favored, so he didn't suppose he could be too disappointed that the team from the Sonoran capital had managed to earn a tie.

After the sports came the weather forecast. Rodriguez did about as well by going outside and watching the clouds and feeling the breeze as the weathermen did with all their fancy gadgets. He listened anyway, not least so he could laugh at them when they turned out to be wrong.

Music came back after more commercials. He listened for a while, then got up and yawned and stretched. "Estoy cansado. I'm going to bed," he said.

"I'm tired, too," his wife agreed. She turned off the wireless. Rodriguez didn't say anything. If he had, she would have told him she was closer to the set than he was. It would have been the truth, too, but not all of the truth.

When they lay down together, he wondered if he would know the sweetness of desire. It had been a while. But nothing happened. He sighed once more, yawned, rolled over, and fell asleep.

He was chivvying a chicken into the henhouse the next morning when an auto pulled off the road and stopped not far from the barn. He blinked. That didn't happen every day--or every month, either. The motorcar wasn't new, and hadn't been anything special when it was: a boxy, batteredBirmingham with bulbous headlights that stuck out like a frog's eyes. Out of it stepped Robert Quinn.

The Freedom Party organizer hadn't come to Baroyeca to get rich--or if he had, he'd been out of his mind. He hadn't got rich, either. That was one of the reasons he commanded so much respect in town.

He was doing what he believed in, not what would serve his own selfish interests.

Rodriguez waved to him. "Hola, Señor Quinn. What can I do for you today?"

"Well, I thought I'd come by and see how you were doing, Señor Rodriguez," Quinn replied. "How do you feel?"

"From what the doctor said, I am doing about the way I should be," Rodriguez said. "I wish I were better, but I could be worse. I am not shockingly bad, anyhow."

Quinn made a face at him. "I see the electricity did not fry your brains--or maybe I see that it did."

"Would you like to come in the house?" Rodriguez asked. "If you have the time, we could drink a bottle of cerveza."

"Muchas gracias. I would like that," Quinn said. "I have a question I would like to ask you, if you don't mind." I want something from you, was what he meant. But he was too smooth, too polite, to say so straight out. Maybe he would have when he first came to Baroyeca from the more bustling northeast of the Confederate States. But he'd learned to fit into the Sonoran town's slower rhythms.

"I would be very pleased to hear it," Rodriguez said. "Just let me attend to this miserable hen first. . . ."

He waved his hat. The hen, which had paused to peck in the gravel, squawked irately and retreated. He got it back where it belonged and slammed the door on it. Then he raised his voice: "Magdalena, we have company. Señor Quinn has come to ask me something."

His wife came out onto the front porch. She nodded to Robert Quinn. "Very good to see you, señor."

"And you as well." Quinn's answering nod was almost a bow.

"Come in, come in," Rodriguez said. "Magdalena, would you get us some beer, por favor?"

"Of course," she answered. If they'd been down to their last bottle of beer and had nothing else on the farm, Quinn would have got it. Not only that--he would have got it in a way that said they had plenty more, even if they didn't.

Rodriguez settled his guest in the most comfortable chair. That was the one he usually sat in himself, but the next best would

do.Magdalena brought in two bottles of beer. She served Quinn first. "Thank you very much," he said, and raised his bottle to Rodriguez. "¡Salud!"

The simple toast--health--meant more than it would have before Rodriguez almost electrocuted himself.

"¡Salud!" he echoed feelingly. He sipped at the beer. "Ask me your question, Señor Quinn."

"I will, never fear." Quinn nodded to the wireless set. "Did you hear any news last night?"

"Some," Rodriguez said, surprise in his voice: that wasn't the sort of question he'd expected.

Robert Quinn went on, "Did you hear the news about what President Featherston is calling the Confederate Veterans' Brigades?"

"Yes, I did hear that," Rodriguez answered. "It struck me as being a good idea."

"It struck me the same way," Quinn said. "It is something this country needs when we fight an enemy larger than we are. I was wondering if you had thought about joining the Veterans' Brigades yourself."

"I see," Rodriguez said. "Before my . . . my accident, I was wondering whether los Estados Confederados would call me back to the colors to fight at the front, not behind it."

"Así es la vida," Quinn said. "The way things are now, you would probably not do well with a Tredegar automatic rifle in your hands." He was being polite, and Rodriguez knew it. If he put on the butternut uniform again, he would be almost as big a danger to his own compadres as he would to the damnyankees. Robert Quinn added, "But you also serve your country if you free up a fitter man to fight.

That is what the Confederate Veterans' Brigades are for."

"I understand. But one thing I am not so sure I understand is who would take care of the farm if I went away. My one son is already in the Army. The other two are bound to be conscripted soon. Magdalena cannot possibly do everything by herself."

"People can do all sorts of things when they find they have to," Quinn

remarked. "But the Freedom Party looks out for the people. You would have your salary, of course. And the Party would pay your wife an allowance that would go a long way toward making up for your being gone."

"Well, that is not so bad," Rodriguez said. "It gives me something to think about, anyhow."

"You might do better not to think too long. So far, the Confederate Veterans' Brigades are voluntary."

Quinn paused to let that sink in before continuing, "I do not know when, or if, men our age will be conscripted into them. But I know it could happen. This is war, after all. If you volunteer, you will have the best chance to get the assignment you might want. You could patrol the dams in the Tennessee Valley to guard against sabotage, or you could guard the mallates taken in arms against the Confederate States, or--"

He knew what levers to pull. He even knew not to name guarding the Negroes first, lest it seem too obvious. "I will think about that," Rodriguez said. Robert Quinn didn't even smile.

The fighting off to the west, in the direction ofSandusky , had picked up again. If the racket of the small-arms and artillery fire hadn't told Dr. Leonard O'Doull as much, the casualties coming into the aid station nearElyria,Ohio , would have. There seemed to be no easy times, just hard ones and harder.

O'Doull stepped out of the tent for a cigarette. He made sure everyone did that, and set his own example. Smoking around ether wasn't the smartest thing you could do. All he'd had before was green-gray canvas with a big Red Cross on it between him and the noise of battle. Somehow, things sounded much louder out here. Back in the tent, of course, he'd been concentrating on his job. That helped make the world go away. A cigarette couldn't equal it.

He smoked anyway, enjoying the ten-minute respite he'd given himself. His boots squelched in mud as he walked about. It wasn't raining now, but it had been, and the gray clouds rolling in off the lake said it would again before too long. He would have thought both sides would have to slow down in the rain.

Things had worked like that in the Great War, anyhow. Here, they didn't seem to.

And then the shout of, "Hey, Doc! Doc!" made him stamp out the cigarette and mutter a curse under his breath. So much for the respite. War didn't know the meaning of the word.

"I'm here," he yelled, and ducked back into the tent.

Stretcher-bearers brought in the casualty half a minute later. At first, O'Doull just saw another wounded man. Then he noticed the fellow wore butternut, not green-gray. He made a small, surprised noise.

Eddie--one of the corpsmen--said, "We found him, so we brought him in. Their guys do the same for our wounded. Sometimes we bump into each other when we're making pickups--swap ration cans for good tobacco, shit like that."

Such things were against regulations. They happened all the time anyhow. O'Doull wasn't about to get up on his high horse about them. They wouldn't change who won and who lost, not even a little bit. And he had the wounded Confederate here. "What's going on with him?" he asked.

What was going on was pretty obvious: a shredded, bloodied trouser leg with a tourniquet on it. "Shell blew up too damn close," Eddie answered. "You think you can save the leg?"

"Don't know yet," O'Doull said. "Let's get his pants off him and have a look." As the corpsman started cutting away the cloth, O'Doull added, "You gave him morphine, right? That's why he's not talking and yelling and raising a fuss? He's not shocky? He doesn't look it."

Eddie nodded. "Right the first time, Doc. Gave him a big old dose. He was screamin' his head off when we found him, but the dope's taken hold pretty good."

The wounded Confederate opened his eyes. They were startlingly blue. O'Doull wasn't sure the man was seeing him or anything else this side of God. In a faraway voice, the soldier said, "Don't hardly hurt at all no more."

"Good. That's good, son." O'Doull tried to sound as reassuring as he could. One look told him that leg was going to have to come off. It was a miracle the Confederate hadn't bled out before Eddie got to him.

Or maybe not a miracle--his hands were all bloody. Maybe he'd held on literally for dear life and slowed things down enough to give

himself a chance to survive. O'Doull turned to Granville McDougald. "As soon as he's on the table, get him under. We've got work to do." With the soldier conscious, he didn't want to say any more than that.

McDougald nodded. "Right, Doc." He didn't say anything else, either. But he could see what was what at least as well as O'Doull could.

Grunting, Eddie and the other corpsman got the Confederate off the stretcher and onto the operating table. Granville McDougald stuck an ether cone over the soldier's nose. The fellow feebly tried to fight; ether was nasty stuff. Then he went limp. Eddie said, "You are gonna have to amputate, aren't you?" He could see what was what, too.

"You bet," O'Doull answered. "Got to be above the knee, too. That makes learning to walk with an artificial leg harder, but look at his thigh. I'll be damned if I see how the burst missed cutting the femoral artery. That would've been curtains right there. But it sure as hell tore everything else to cat's meat."

"If it's above the knee anyhow, do it pretty high," McDougald advised. "You can pack more tissue below the end of the bone for a good stump."

"Right," O'Doull said. "You want to do it yourself, Granny? He'd have just as good a result with you cutting as he would with me." He meant it; the other man was a thoroughly competent medical jack of all trades.

But McDougald shook his head. "Nah. You go ahead. You got me up here passing gas. I'll go on with that." He didn't say he made a better anesthetist than O'Doull would. Whether he said it or not, they both knew it was true.

"All right, then." The more O'Doull considered the wound, the less happy he got. "It will have to be high.

Some of this flesh is just too damn tattered to save. Tabernac!" Every once in a while, he still swore in Quebecois French. Constant use had brought his English out of dormancy in a hurry, though.

He got to work, repairing what he could, removing what he had to, picking out shell fragments and bits of cloth driven into the Confederate's wounds, and dusting sulfa powder over them. That could have gone on a lot longer than it did, but he didn't need to worry about the damage below mid-thigh.

"Give me the bone saw, Eddie," he said when he was ready for it. The corpsman handed it to him. He used it. Cutting through even the longest, strongest bone in the body didn't take long. The leg fell away from its former owner.

"Very neat, Doc," McDougald said. He'd watched the whole procedure with his usual intelligent interest.

"You fixed that up better than I thought you could."

It wasn't over yet. O'Doull still had to make the fleshy pad below the femur and suture the flaps of skin he'd left attached for that purpose. But McDougald was right: that was just follow-up. He'd finished the challenging part.

"How's he look?" he asked.

"He's pretty pink. Pulse is strong. These young ones are tough. He's got a decent chance of coming through," McDougald answered.

"Keep him doped up," O'Doull said. "I don't want him feeling all of this till it's had the chance to settle down a little bit. Be a shame to lose him to shock when we've got what looks like such a good result."

"Too bad he's not one of ours," Eddie said, though he'd brought in the Confederate.

"Nothing we can do about that," O'Doull said. "Geneva Convention says we take care of wounded from both sides the same way. Only common sense that we do, too. If we don't, the Confederates won't for our guys."

"I suppose." But Eddie still didn't sound happy about it.

"We can question him while he's all doped up," Granville McDougald said. "If he knows anything, he'll spill his guts."

That bent the rules if it didn't actually break them. O'Doull thought about saying so. Then he looked at the Confederate soldier's tunic: two stripes on his sleeve. The man was only a corporal. Whatever he knew, it wouldn't matter much. Besides, O'Doull had no doubt the Confederates did the same thing.

Who wouldn't? He kept his mouth shut.

Eddie took the canteen off his belt and sloshed it suggestively. "Want

to celebrate pulling him through?"

Where had he come up with booze? O'Doull laughed at himself for even wondering. It wasn't hard. The corpsman would just claim it was medicinal if anyone came down on him for it. He didn't let whatever he scrounged interfere with the job he did. As far as O'Doull was concerned, nothing else mattered.

As for the offer . . . The doctor shook his head. "Ask me when I'm not on duty and I'll say yes. Till then, I'll pass. I don't want to do anything that might make me screw up a case. That wouldn't be fair to the poor sorry bastards who depend on me to patch 'em up the best way I know how."

"I know plenty of docs who'd say yes so fast, it'd make your head swim," Eddie said.

O'Doull only shrugged. "That's their business. I've got to mind mine."

"All right. All right." By his shrug, Eddie thought O'Doull was nuts, but most likely in a harmless way. The corpsman went on, "I'm going to clean up and go see who else got lucky out there." He spoke with a casual lack of concern that sounded more cold-blooded than it was. When he went out there, he could

"get lucky" as easily as anyone else--more easily than most, for he exposed himself to more fire than any normal soldier in his right mind would have. Yes, he wore Red Cross armbands and smock and had Red Crosses on the front and back of his helmet, but not everybody paid attention to that kind of thing. And machine-gun bullets and shell fragments flew more or less at random. What did they care about the Red Cross? Not a thing, not a single thing.

After Eddie headed off toward the front, McDougald said, "You've got pretty good sense, Doc."

"Oh, yeah? Then why did I put the uniform back on? What the hell am I doing here?" O'Doull said. "It isn't for the pay and it isn't for the scenery, that's for goddamn sure."

The other man chuckled. "Why? On account of you're good at what you do, that's why. Sometimes, if you're good at what you do, you've got to go do it where it's hardest or where you can do the most good with it. That's how it looks to me, anyway. But what the deuce do I know? If I had any brains, I'd be out in California laying on the beach and soaking up something with a lot of rum in it."

O'Doull scrubbed at his hands with water and disinfectant. He used soap and a toothpick to get blood out from under his nails. He always kept them trimmed short, which helped, but not enough. Lying on a beach soaking up something with a lot of rum in it sounded pretty good to him, too. But he knew what sounded better: "I wish I were home."

"Yeah, there is that, too." McDougald nodded. "For you there is, anyway. Me, I'm a lifer at this--and if that doesn't prove I haven't got any brains, screw me if I know what would."

"You said it yourself, Granny," O'Doull answered. "You're good at what you do, and you're doing it where it counts most. Next question?"

He got another small laugh from McDougald. "Well, maybe I have picked up a trick or two over the years. I'd better. I've been at this game long enough, you know." He wasn't one to parade his knowledge, which was at least as extensive as O'Doull's even if less formally gained. He wasn't one to make a big fuss about anything--something a lot of men who'd spent a lot of time in the Army had in common.

"I'm glad to have you here, I'll tell you that," O'Doull said, "especially when the chips are down."

"Well, thanks very much. I expect you're making more out of it than there is to make, but thanks all the same," McDougald said. "I'm just a gas-passer who can do a little sewing and cutting when I have to, that's all."

"Bullshit." O'Doull didn't always cuss in French. Sometimes only English had the word he needed.

"Maybe you couldn't teach this stuff at a medical school, but you can sure as hell do it better than most of the docs who do teach it. When the war's done, you ought to go back to school and pick up your M.D."

Granville McDougald shrugged. "Have to pick up a bachelor's first. Hell, I'm lucky I got out of high school."

Before O'Doull could answer, a salvo of Confederate shells roared by overhead. Somebody'd be sorry when they came down. "You call this luck?" O'Doull asked. McDougald only shrugged.

FromLos Angeles , the war back East seemed a quarrel in another room. Chester Martin followed it as closely as anyone, but that wasn't so closely as he would have liked. The wireless and the newspapers gave him the broad outlines of the stories, but only the broad outlines. He always wanted to learn more.

Not being able to ate at him.

Even the Mormon uprising inUtah was hundreds of miles away. Martin kept trying to figure out how manyU.S. divisions it was tying down. Try as he would, he couldn't. The papers and the wireless were coy as could be about stuff like that. He muttered and fumed. Those were divisions that should have been in action against the CSA. They should have, but they weren't.

When he muttered and fumed once too often in front of Rita, she said, "Why don't you stop flabbling about it? They aren't going to come out and tell you. If you can't figure it out from what you hear and what you read, maybe the Confederates won't be able to, either."

"Oh."Chester felt foolish. He wanted to say several things. They were things he wasn't supposed to say in front of his wife, so he didn't. What he did say was, "Well, sweetheart, when you're right, you're right."

Anyone who'd been married for a while learned to use that phrase pretty often.

Rita just nodded, as if she knew she'd got her due. "The only way they'd pay as much attention to the war as you want would be if it came here."

Chestersnorted. "Fat chance."

"You're right. Fat chance," Rita agreed. "And you know what else? I'm not sorry, not even a little bit.

We've paid everything we owe anybody." She'd lost her first husband in the Great War.Chester had scars on his arm that would never go away and a Purple Heart stashed in a nightstand drawer. Rita repeated, "Everything." She knew he still thought about putting on the uniform again. She did everything she could to keep him from going out and signing up.

Four days later, on a cool, gray morning as close to autumnal asL.A.

got (not very close, not as far asChester was concerned, not when the leaves were mostly still on the trees and mostly still green), the Times and the wireless went nuts. A submersible--Confederate? Mexican? Japanese? nobody knew for sure--had surfaced off the coast nearSanta Barbara , northwest ofLos Angeles . Its deck gun fired maybe a dozen rounds at a seaside oil field. Then it slipped below the surface and disappeared. It was long gone before flying boats and destroyers got to the neighborhood.

At a construction site on the west side of town,Chester observed the hysteria with more than a little amusement. "You've almost got to hand it to the Confederates or whoever the hell it was," he said.

"Sneaking up the coast took balls."

"We got ours draped over a doorknob, that's for damn sure," another builder said.

"You wait. You watch. Now we're going to have air-raid alerts and blackouts and all the other crap we've done without since just after the war started,"Chester predicted. "Talk about a pain in the ass . . ."

But the other man said, "Maybe we need 'em. If the Confederates put bombers inSonora , they could get here. Look at a map if you don't believe me."

Martin thought about it. Slowly, he nodded. "Maybe you're right, Frank. I guess they could. Whether it'd be worth their while is a different story, but they could."

Perhaps the powers that be were looking at the same map. By that afternoon, fighters started buzzing aboveLos Angeles , something else that hadn't happened since the war was new. They would dash across the sky like bad-tempered little dogs looking for rats to tear to pieces. No rats seemed to be in evidence. That relieved Chester, but only so much. Bombers on both sides that came overhead in daylight got shot down in large numbers. Night was the time when they could fly in something resembling safety.

He rode the trolley home with more than a little apprehension. What would the night be like? When he got off in Boyle Heights, newsboys on all the corners were still shouting about the submarine and what it had done. As a matter of fact, it hadn't done much. What it had done wouldn't change the way the war turned out by even the thickness of a hair.

But Rita greeted Chester at the door with, "Wasn't that horrible? Right off our coast, bold as brass!

What's the world coming to?"

"I don't know, babe," he answered. "Somebody was asleep at the switch, is what it looks like to me."

That sort of thing was not what the authorities wanted people to be thinking. The wireless crackled with bulletins and commands all through the evening. Coast-watching battalions would be set up all the way from the border withBaja California toSan Francisco . Airship patrols would be doubled and redoubled.

And, asChester had gloomily foretold, the blackout returned.

"We want to make sure the cunning enemy has no opportunity to strike us unawares," brayed the man who made that announcement.

Chesterlaughed out loud. "What do they think just happened?" he asked.

"Oh, hush," Rita said. "This is important."

"Yeah, it is," he agreed. "It's so important, they want us to forget they just got caught with their pants down. But they darn well did."

"We'll manage," Rita said. "I never threw out the blackout curtains I made. I'll put 'em up again tomorrow. It won't be so bad in the fall and winter. They made the place beastly hot in the summertime.

You couldn't open a window and get a breath of fresh air unless you turned out all the lights. . . ."

She didn't want to think about what had gone wrong. She just wanted to go on from day to day. And if she thought that way, how many hundreds of thousands of others in Los Angeles did, too? Magnified, that attitude probably showed how people back East on both sides of the border got on with their lives even though bombers appeared overhead almost every night.

Another announcer said, "Mayor Poulsen and Brigadier General van der Grift, commandant of the Southern California Military District, have jointly declared that the area is in no danger and there is no cause for alarm. Steps are being taken to ensure that what Mayor

Poulsen termed, ‘the recent unfortunate incident' cannot possibly recur. General van der Grift was quoted as saying,, ‘Our state of readiness is high. Anyone who troubles us is asking for a bloody nose, and we will give him one." "

"Where were they before this sub started shooting at us?" Chester asked. But Rita hushed him again.

She was already busy putting up the blackout curtains when he left for work the next morning. He didn't say anything. It needed doing. And she seemed convinced it would go some little way toward winning the war. Maybe she was even right. But if she is, God help us all,Chester thought. That was one more thing he didn't say.

He bought a Times on the way to the trolley stop. The front page showed a shell hole in the oil field, as if no one had ever seen such a thing before. That made Martin want to laugh out loud. He'd seen shell holes so close together, you couldn't tell where one stopped and the next one started. Seen them? He'd huddled in them, hoping the next shell wouldn't come down on top of him. How many men his age hadn't?

But a lot of people these days were younger than he was. And women hadn't had to go to war. Talk at the trolley stop was about nothing but the shelling. Having the trolley pull up was something of a relief, but not for long. As soon as everybody got settled, the talk started up again. And the people already aboard the car must have been talking about the shelling, too, for they chimed right in.

Chester tried to concentrate on the newspaper, but had little luck. Across the aisle from him, another man who was starting to go gray also kept out of the conversation. They caught each other's eyes. The fellow across the aisle tapped his chest with a forefinger and said, "Kentucky and Tennessee. How about you?"

"Roanoke front and then northern Virginia," Chester answered. "I thought you had the look."

"I thought the same thing about you," the other middle-aged man said.

"Yeah, well . . ." Martin shrugged. "Everybody's running around like a chicken after the hatchet comes down. We've seen the real thing, for Christ's sake. Next to that, this isn't so much of a much."

"Yup." The other man nodded. "Try and tell anybody, though. Whoever did it stuck a pin in us so we'd jump up and down and yell,,

‘Ouch!' Sure got what they wanted, too, didn't they?"

"You'd better believe it," Chester said.

Hardly anything is more pleasant than talking about why other people are a pack of damn fools. Chester and the veteran across from him enjoyed themselves till the other man climbed to his feet and said, "I get off here. Take care of yourself, Roanoke."

"You, too, Kentucky," Martin said. They nodded to each other.

A lot of the builders at the construction site were veterans, too--more than would have been true before the war started. Some of the younger men had gone into the Army or the Navy. Others were working in armament factories, hoping that would keep the government from conscripting them. Chester suspected that was a forlorn hope, but it wasn't his worry.

Most of the men who'd seen the elephant reacted the same way as Chester and the vet on the trolley had: they couldn't believe everyone else was making such a fuss over a nuisance raid. "It's here, that's why," somebody said. "The Times just had to send photographers up the coast a little ways and they got the pictures they needed for the goddamn front page. Hell, I could piss in one of those lousy little holes and fill it up."

That got a laugh. "You'd need three or four beers first, Hank," somebody else said, and got a bigger one.

Another builder spat a couple of nails into the palm of his hand. He said, "And the mayor's against people shooting at us. He's got a lot of guts to take a stand like that, doesn't he?"

"He's like the rest," another man said. "If it's got a vote in it, he's all for it. Otherwise, he thinks it's a crappy idea."

"Not a hell of a lot of votes in getting shelled,"Chester observed. "And did you notice the general came out and said we'll clean their clocks the next time they try something like this? He didn't say a word about how come the sub got away this time."

"Oh, hell, no," Hank said. "That'd show everybody what an egg-sucking dog he really is."

"I think trying to cover it up is worse,"Chester said. "How dumb does

he think we are, anyway? We're not going to notice nobody sank the damn thing? Come on!"

"Tell you what I wish," another man said. "I wish Teddy Roosevelt was President. He'd give that Featherston bastard what-for. Smith tries hard, and I think he means well, but Jesus! The way Featherston picked his pocket last year, they ought to throw him in jail. I voted for Smith, on account of we didn't have to fight right then, but it looks like I got my pocket picked, too."

Several men nodded at that. Chester said, "I voted for Taft because I was afraid Featherston would cheat. I wish I was wrong. I've voted Socialist almost every time since the Great War. I don't like it when I don't think I can. Hell, I wish we had TR back again, too."

Were Roosevelt alive, he would have been in his eighties. So what? Chester thought. George Custer had been a hero one last time at that age. Would TR have let the general with whom his name was always linked upstage him? Martin shook his head. Not a chance. Not a chance in church.

When the door to Brigadier General Abner Dowling's office opened, he swung his swivel chair around in surprise. Not many people came to see him, and he didn't have a hell of a lot to do. He'd been staring out at the rain splashing off his window. There'd been a lot of rain lately. Watching it helped pass the time.

His visitor could have caught him playing solitaire. That would have been more embarrassing.

"Hello, sir." Colonel John Abell gave him a crisp salute and a smile that, like most of the General Staff officer's, looked pasted on. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything important."

Dowling snorted. They both knew better. "Oh, yes, Colonel. I was just finishing up my latest assignment from the President--the plan that will win the war in the next three days. Remember, you heard it here first." Dowling hardly cared what he said any more. How could he get an assignment worse than this one?

Abell smiled again. This time, he actually bared his teeth. That was as much reaction as Dowling had ever got from him. He said, "Are you prepared to take command of General MacArthur's First Corps inVirginia ?"

Dowling's jaw dropped. His teeth clicked together when he closed it. "If this is a joke, Colonel, it's in poor taste." Kicking a man when he's down, was what went through his head. Did Abell think he was too far down to take revenge? If Abell did . . . he was probably right, dammit.

But the slim, pale officer shook his head and raised his right hand as if taking an oath. "No joke, sir.

General Stanbery's command car had the misfortune to drive over a mine. They think he'll live, but he'll be out of action for months. That leaves an open slot, and your name was proposed for it."

"My God. I'm sorry to hear about Sandy Stanbery's bad luck. He's a fine soldier." Dowling paused, then decided to go on: "I think I'd better ask--who proposed me? As much as I'd like to get back into action, I don't want to go down there and find out that General MacArthur wishes somebody else were in that position."

"Your sentiments do you credit," Abell said. "You don't need to worry about that, though. MacArthur asked for you by name. He said you were very helpful in his recent meeting with you, and he said bringing you in would cause fewer jealousies than promoting one of General Stanbery's subordinates to take his place."

That made some sense, anyhow. Dowling didn't know that he'd been so helpful to MacArthur, but he wasn't about to argue. He did ask, "How will this sit with the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War?"

"Well, sir, I would say that's largely up to you." Abell's pale eyes--Dowling never could decide if they were gray or light, light blue--measured him. "If the attack succeeds, how can the Joint Committee complain? If it fails, on the other hand . . ." He let that hang in the air.

"Yes. On the other hand." Dowling left it there, too. He hadn't thought much of what he'd heard of MacArthur's plans. He didn't think Colonel Abell had, either. Do I really want this assignment? Am I sure I do? But he did, and he was. Anything was better than sitting here counting raindrops. "I'll do my best.

Can you get me a copy of the plan? I'll want to be as familiar as I can with what I'm supposed to do by the time I get down to the border. The attack should begin soon." The attack should have begun a while ago, but he didn't mention that. All the rain that had fallen lately wouldn't make things any easier.

"I'm sorry. I should have brought one with me, but I wanted to make sure you would say yes first," Abell said. "I'll have a runner get you one right away. How soon do you plan on going down to the border?"

"As soon as I can throw a change of clothes into a duffel bag--sooner, if they need me there right away,"

Dowling answered.

"I'll put a motorcar at your disposal," Abell said. "It will have a civilian paint job--nothing to draw special notice from the air."

"Thanks," Dowling said, and then, in a different tone of voice, "Thanks. I'll do everything I can." Colonel Abell nodded, saluted, and left.

Two hours later, Dowling was rolling south in a middle-aged Ford that was indeed thoroughly ordinary.

He paid little attention to the landscape. He did notice bomb damage dropped off sharply once the motorcar got out ofPhiladelphia . It didn't pick up again till the Ford went throughWilmington,Delaware .

For the most part, though, he found the three-ring binder spread out on his ample lap much more interesting than the countryside. Daniel MacArthur--or rather, the clever young officers on his staff--had planned everything down to the last paper clip. MacArthur knew exactly what he wanted the First Corps to do. If everything went according to Hoyle, it could handle the job, too.

If. As usual, the word was the joker in the deck. One of the few things Dowling found inadequate in the enormous plan was its appreciation of Confederate strength. MacArthur's attitude seemed to be that the men he commanded would brush aside whatever enemy soldiers they happened to run into, march into Richmond, and hold a victory parade past the Confederate White House and Confederate Capitol.

Maybe things would work out that way. Every once in a while, they did. If the Confederate thrust through Ohio hadn't gone according to plan, Dowling would have been amazed. He shifted in the back seat. He'd been on the receiving end of that plan. Getting his own back would be sweet . . . if he could.

"You all right, sir?" the driver asked. He must have seen Dowling fidget in the rearview mirror.

"Yes." Dowling hoped he meant it.

The sun started to sink below the horizon as they passed fromDelaware toMaryland . Dowling held the plan ever closer to his nose so he could go on studying it. One other thing that seemed to be missing from it was any notion of how bad weather would affect it. Listening to rain drum on the roof of the Ford, Dowling found the omission unfortunate. The driver turned on the slit headlights that were all anyone could use these days. They were inadequate in good weather, and almost completely useless in this storm. The motorcar slowed to a crawl. Dowling hoped other drivers would have the sense to slow to a crawl, too. Every so often, he got glimpses of wreckage hauled off to the side of the road. He could have thought of lots of things that would have done more for his confidence in the good habits of other drivers.

Outside of Baltimore, the Ford stopped crawling. That didn't mean it sped up: it stopped moving at all.

"What the hell?" Dowling said irritably, wondering if Abell shouldn't have laid an airplane on for him instead.

"Some kind of mess up ahead. We'll find out when we get there." The driver sounded philosophical.

That did little to ease Dowling's irritation. "If we get there, you mean," he growled. There was barely enough light to let him see the driver's shoulders go up and down in a shrug.

They took twenty minutes to go half a mile to the trouble. A bomb crater rendered the road impassable south- and northbound. Engineers had just finished spreading steel matting of the sort that made instant airstrips out to either side of the damage. Without it, motorcars would have bogged down in the mud when they went off the road and onto the shoulder. With it, Dowling felt as if he were being shaken to pieces. He breathed a sigh of relief when the Ford got on the road again.

The relief didn't last. No sooner had they got intoBaltimore than the Confederates started bombing it.

With that cloud cover overhead, the enemy bombers couldn't hope to be accurate. But they didn't seem to care. The bombs would come down somewhere onU.S. soil. If they didn't blow up ships in the harbor or factories or warehouses, they'd flatten shops or apartments or houses. And if they hit a school or a hospital or a church--well, that was just one of those things. U.S. pilots didn't lose sleep over it, either.

Cops and civil-defense wardens were shouting for everybody to get off the streets. "Keep going,"

Dowling told the driver. The man shrugged again and obeyed.

Somewhere near the middle of town, a warden stepped in front of the Ford. He almost got himself run over for his trouble. "Are you out of your frigging mind?" he yelled as a bomb crashed down a few hundred yards away. "Get into a cellar, or the undertaker will bury you in a jam tin."

"What do we do, sir?" the driver asked Dowling. "Your call."

Before Dowling could answer, a bomb went off much closer than the one a minute before. A fragment of casing clanged into the Ford's trunk. Another pierced the left front tire, which made the auto list. And another got the civil-defense warden, who howled and went down in the middle of the wet street.

"I think we just had our minds made up for us," Dowling said as he opened the door. "Let's give this poor bastard a hand, shall we?"

The warden was lucky, if you wanted to call getting wounded lucky. The gouge was on the back of his calf, and fairly clean as such things went. He was already struggling back to his feet again by the time Dowling and the driver came over to him. "Let me get bandaged up and I'll go back on duty," he insisted.

Dowling doubted that; the wound was larger and deeper than the warden seemed to think it was. But it hadn't hamstrung him, as it would have were it a little lower. "Where's the closest cellar?" Dowling asked.

"We'll get you patched up, and then we'll worry about what happens next."

"Just you follow me," the civil-defense warden said. Dowling and the driver ended up hauling him along with his arms draped over their shoulders. Trying to put weight on the leg showed him he was hurt worse than he'd thought. He guided them to a hotel down the block. Dowling was soaked by the time he got there. Manhandling the warden down the stairs to the cellar was another adventure, but he and the driver managed.

People in the cellar exclaimed at the spectacle of a bedraggled brigadier general. All Dowling said was,

"Is there a doctor in the house?" For a wonder, there was. He went to work on the wounded warden.

Dowling turned to his driver. "Do you think you can fix that flat once the bombs stop falling?"

"I'll give it my best shot, sir," the driver said resignedly.

It took more work than he'd expected, for the fragment that got the trunk had torn into the spare tire and inner tube. The driver had to wait till a cop came by, explain his predicament to him, and wait again till the policeman came back with a fresh tire and tube. They didn't get moving again till well after midnight.

As Dowling fitfully dozed in the back seat, he hoped the driver wasn't dozing behind the wheel. The Ford didn't crash into another auto or go off the road, so the driver evidently managed to keep his eyes open.

More problems with the road stalled them outside ofWashington . The driver did start snoring then.

Dowling let him do it till things started moving again. They didn't get through the de jure capital of theUSA until after dawn. That let Dowling see that Confederate bombers had hit it even harder thanPhiladelphia . Still, it wasn't the almost lunar landscape it had been after theUSA took it back from the CSA in the Great War.

The Confederates had knocked out the regular bridges over thePotomac . Engineers had run up pontoon bridges to take up the slack. The Ford bumped into what had beenVirginia and was now an eastern extension ofWest Virginia .

Daniel MacArthur made his headquarters near the little town ofManassas , scene of the firstU.S.

defeat--but far from the last--in the War of Secession. As Dowling, wet and weary, got out of the motorcar, he hoped that wasn't an omen.

Waiting for the first bigU.S. attack to go in wasn't easy for Flora Blackford. If it succeeded, it would bring the war back to something approaching an even keel. If it failed . . . She shook her head. She refused to think about what might happen if it failed. It would succeed. It would.

Ordinary business had to go on while she waited along with the rest of theUnited States . Studying the budget was part of ordinary business. If you looked long enough, you learned to spot all sorts of interesting things.

Some of the most interesting were the ones that were most puzzling. Why was there a large Interior Department appropriation for construction work in westernWashington ? And why didn't the item explain what the work was for?

She called an undersecretary and tried to find out. He said, "Hold on, Congresswoman. Let me see what you're talking about. Give me the page number, if you'd be so kind." She did, and listened to him flipping paper. "All right. I see the item," he told her. Close to half a minute of silence followed, and then a sheepish laugh. "To tell you the truth, Congresswoman, I have no idea what that's about. It does seem a little unusual, doesn't it?"

"It seems more than a little unusual to me," Flora answered. "Who would know something about it?"

"Why don't you try Assistant Secretary Goodwin?" the undersecretary said. "Hydroelectric is his specialty."

"I'll do that," Flora said. "Let me have his number, please." She wrote it down. "Thanks very much." She hung up and dialed again.

Assistant Secretary Goodwin had a big, deep voice. He sounded more important than the junior functionary with whom she'd spoken a moment before. But when she pointed out the item that puzzled her, what he said was, "Well, I'll be . . . darned. What's that doing there?"

"I was hoping you could tell me," Flora said pointedly.

"Congresswoman, this is news to me," Goodwin said. She believed him. He seemed angry in a special bureaucratic way: the righteous indignation of a man who'd had his territory encroached upon. She didn't think anyone could fake that particular tone of voice.

Tapping a pencil on her desk, she asked, "If you don't know, who's likely to?"

"It would have to be the secretary himself," Goodwin answered. "Let's see which one of us can call him first. I aim to get to the bottom of this, too."

The Secretary of the Interior was a Midwesterner named Wallace. The first time Flora tried to reach him, his secretary said he was on another line. Goodwin must have dialed faster. "I'll have him call you back, if you like," the secretary added.

"Yes. Thank you. Please do that." Flora gave her the number and returned the handset to its cradle. She did some more pencil tapping. Were they just passing the buck? Her mouth tightened. If they were, they'd be sorry.

She jumped a little when the telephone rang a few minutes later. Bertha said, "It's Assistant Secretary Roosevelt, Congresswoman."

"Oh!" Flora said. She'd been expecting the Secretary of the Interior. She wondered whatRoosevelt wanted. More propaganda? She shrugged. Only one way to find out. "Put him through, please."

"Hello, Congresswoman." As usual, Franklin Roosevelt sounded jaunty. No one who didn't know would ever imagine he couldn't get out of his wheelchair. "How are you this lovely morning?"

It wasn't lovely; it was still raining. Even so, Flora couldn't help smiling. "I'm well, thanks," she answered.

"And you?"

"In the pink,"Roosevelt said. "I just had a call from Hank. He thought I might be able to tell you what was going on."

"Hank?" Flora echoed with a frown. "Hank who? You're a step or two ahead of me."

"Wallace,"Roosevelt told her. "You've been talking to people about thatWashingtonState item in the Interior Department budget. It's no wonder nobody over there knows anything much about it. It really has more to do with my shop, if you must know."

"With the War Department?" Flora said. "Why isn't it listed under War Department appropriations, in that case?" Curiouser and curiouser, she thought.

Roosevelt coughed a couple of times. He sounded faintly embarrassed as he answered, "Well, Congresswoman, one reason is that we didn't want to draw the Confederates' notice and make them wonder what we were doing way out there." He laughed. "So we drew your notice and made you wonder instead. Seems we can't win."

"So you did," Flora said. "What are you doing way out there? Something large, by the size of the appropriation you're asking for."

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you what it is," Roosevelt said.

"What?" Now Flora really did start to get angry. "What do you mean, you can't? If you don't want to talk to me here, Mr. Roosevelt, you can answer questions under oath in front of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Now--what sort of boondoggle has the War Department got going on in Washington State?"

"We don't believe it's a boondoggle. We wouldn't be working on it if we did,"Roosevelt answered. "And you can summon me to the Joint Committee, no doubt about it. But if you do, I will lie like Ananias. That will be the best possible way for me to serve my country. I will be convincing, too. Your colleagues, or enough of them, will believe me. And, of course, I will deny we ever had this conversation."

He meant every word of it. Flora had dealt with a lot of recalcitrant bureaucrats. Once in a great while, one of them would dig in his heels and refuse to move. Plainly, that was what was happening here. Flora didn't understand why, though. "What could possibly be so important?" she asked.

"I can't tell you that, either,"Roosevelt said. "I will tell you that it is more important than my job. If you want to send me to the calaboose for contempt of Congress, I will cheerfully go. It is that important. It is so important, I am going to ask you to let me sell you a pig in a poke and trust me without asking any more questions. If you do, I will thank you. If you don't, Jake Featherston will. Up to you."

He meant every word of that, too. Whether he was right or wrong was a different question--and he didn't want to give Flora any clues that would let her decide. She said, "You don't make this easy, do you?"

"Few things in wartime are easy. Figuring out whether to keep this secret is one of them," he answered.

"If you turn out to be wrong, Mr. Roosevelt, there is no place in the world you can hide from me," Flora said.

"That's fair," Roosevelt said at once. "If you have a price, I will pay it. The administration will pay it. You were unhappy President Smith hasn't said more about the way the CSA treats its Negroes. He could. He would. He will, if you like."

"The last time we talked about this, you said it was between the President and me," Flora reminded him.

"You told me you couldn't do anything about it. I believed you." Of course she'd believed him. What he'd told her was the way things always worked in theU.S. government--or any other. "Why have you changed your mind? Why do you think he'll change his?"

"Because he agrees with me about how important this is--and how important keeping it secret is,"

Franklin Roosevelt answered.

Flora didn't ask him if he could deliver. She had no doubt he could. But what was so very important out there by the Pacific that Al Smith would change a political position he'd taken after the coldest of calculations? She started to ask the Assistant Secretary of War. Only one thing held her back: the certainty that he wouldn't tell her.

Slowly, she said, "I think I will take you up on that. This war has a moral element. We aren't just fighting it to protect ourselves, though we certainly are doing that. But the Confederates are committing crimes against humanity. They need to be stopped."

"Crimes against humanity,"Roosevelt echoed. Flora could hear the faint scrape of pen on paper. "It's a good phrase, a telling phrase. You'll hear it again. Is there anything else?"

There was one thing more--the secret Roosevelt was willing to pay any price to preserve. Again, though, Flora knew he wouldn't tell her. "No, I don't think so," she answered, and wondered what sort of deal she'd just made. Franklin Roosevelt wasn't her idea of the Devil--but how could she be sure?

She couldn't. That bothered her more than anything. She'd done it anyhow. Done what, exactly? Agreed to keep quiet about something he wished she'd never found in the first place. It was almost as if she'd discovered him being unfaithful to his wife.

Would she have kept quiet about something like that? She didn't suppose she would have gone out of her way to talk about it, but. . . . She didn't supposeRoosevelt could have offered such a tempting bargain about that, either.

What on earth was going on out there to make them willing to go so

far to cover it up? Flora laughed.

She almost wanted to be difficult just so she could find out.

She wondered if they were developing some fancy new poison gas.Western Washington was full of empty square miles. If you wanted to experiment with something toxic, you wouldn't do it in New York City. You'd go someplace where a mishap wouldn't turn into a disaster.

Slowly, Flora nodded to herself. If she had to bet, she would have put her money on something like that.

The longer the Confederates didn't know what was going on, the shorter the time they'd have to start working on an antidote or new protective clothing or whatever they'd need to neutralize the weapon once the United States trotted it out.

She nodded again. That left her more or less satisfied, but it also left her more than a little miffed. No matter how she'd threatened Roosevelt, she wasn't about to start screaming about a new poison gas from the housetops. She wanted this war won, too. Didn't Roosevelt see that? Evidently not. He'd promised her the sun, moon, and little stars to keep her mouth shut instead.

The telephone in the outer office rang. Bertha answered it. She called, "Congresswoman, it's the President."

Flora picked up the phone on her desk. "Hello, Mr. President," she said.

"Hello, sweetheart," Al Smith answered. "So you want me to squawk about the shvartzers, do you? So all right, I'll do it." Like a lot of New York Irish politicians, he could sound very Jewish when he wanted to.

"That's . . . kind of you, sir," Flora said. "I still don't quite understand why you're raising such a fuss."

"I know," Smith said. "Franklinmade the deal with you so you wouldn't ask questions, remember, not so you would."

"Oh, yes. I remember. I'm not likely to forget," Flora answered. "If you meet your end, I'll meet mine."

She said that with a curious reluctance. "I won't ask any questions. I won't poke my nose where it doesn't belong. But if you think I won't

be ready to blow up from curiosity, you'd better think again."

Al Smith laughed. Even then, he sounded tired. "Well, I've been worrying about some bigger bangs than that lately."

"Not likely," Flora said. The President laughed again. He made a kissing noise over the telephone and hung up. Flora smiled as she did, too. She was still curious, but she didn't feel quite so bad about the bargain now.

Major Jonathan Moss bounced to a stop at an airstrip outside aMaryland town with the odd name ofTexas . One after another, the rest of his fighter squadron landed behind him--all except one pilot, who'd had engine trouble and had to come down somewhere in western Pennsylvania. Moss hoped the missing man would get repairs and rejoin the squadron soon. By the looks of things here in the East, they were going to need all the help they could get.

Led by a groundcrew man with wigwag flags, Moss taxied into a revetment. As soon as his prop had stopped spinning, more groundcrew men spread camouflage netting over his Wright. He slid back the canopy and climbed out.

"Looks like the balloon's going to go up here pretty soon," he remarked.

"Beats me," the groundcrew man answered. "Far as I'm concerned, we've already been sitting around too long with our thumbs up our asses."

A man of strong convictions, Moss thought, amused. But then again, why not? Everybody in theUSA seemed to wonder why the attack here in the East hadn't started yet. Moss' flying boots dug into mud as he walked out of the revetment. The rain had messed things up. He knew that. And the high command here was pulling together whatever it could to add to the fight. But didn't the powers that be think the Confederates were doing the same damn thing?

Martin Rolvaag came out of another revetment. Moss' wingman waved to him. "At least we didn't have to fight our way across Ohio," Rolvaag said.

"That occurred to me, too," Moss admitted. "Can't say I'm sorry we didn't."

"Way it looks to me, we can't do more than one big thing at a time, and neither can the Confederates,"

Rolvaag said. "As soon as one side or the other manages to run two full-scale attacks at once, it'll have the edge."

"Makes sense," Moss said. Rolvaag usually did. Along with the rest of the pilots from the squadron, they walked toward the biggest camouflaged tent nearby. Either that would hold local headquarters, in which case they could get billeted, or it would be the local officers' club, in which case they could get lit.

It turned out to be local headquarters. Several fliers looked disappointed. Moss was a little disappointed himself, but only a little. They'd be going into action soon, and he didn't want to fly hung over. Some of the younger guys didn't give a damn. Back in the Great War, he hadn't given a damn, either.

The captain who let them know where they'd be eating and sleeping (and who told them where the officers' club was, so they could drink, too) only shrugged when Moss asked him when theU.S. push towardRichmond would start. "Sir, when the orders come in, they'll get to you, I promise. We won't leave you on the ground," he said. "Past that, you know as much as I do."

"I don't know a damn thing," Moss complained. The captain just nodded, as if to say they were still even.

After supper, Moss did find his way to the officers' club. Blackout curtains inside the tent flap made sure no light leaked out. The fog of cigarette smoke inside would have done a pretty good job of dimming the light even without the curtains. Along with tobacco, the air smelled of beer and whiskey and sweat.

Moss made his way up to the bar and ordered a beer. He reminded himself that drink wasn't spelled with a u. As he sipped, he listened to the chatter around him. When he discovered that the three men immediately to his left were reconnaissance pilots, he started picking their brains. If anybody could tell him what the Confederates were up to, they were the men.

But they couldn't tell him much. One said, "Bastards know how to palm their cards as well as we do. If they haven't got more than they're showing, we'll waltz into Richmond. 'Course, I hope to hell they're saying,, ‘Sure don't look like them damnyankees got much up

there a-tall." " His impression of a Confederate accent was less than successful.

"Here's hoping," Moss agreed. A second beer followed the first. He had a few more over the evening.

He didn't get drunk--he was sure of that--but he did get happy. He heard about as many opinions of Daniel MacArthur as there were people offering them.

Not long after he hit the sack, Confederate bombers came overhead. They were doing their best to disrupt what they had to know was coming. Moss ran for a damp trench. He didn't think any of their load hit the airstrip, but it wasn't coming down very far away. He hopedU.S. bombers were paying similar calls on the defenders. Soldiers who went without sleep didn't fight as well as those who got their rest.

Orders for his squadron came in the next morning. He'd wondered if they'd been sent east to escort bombers. They hadn't had any training or practice in that role. But instead the command was ground attack. Moss nodded to himself. They could handle that just fine. And he had a date--three days hence.

He talked with men who'd been in Maryland longer about local landmarks and Confederate antiaircraft.

The day of the attack dawned cold and gloomy. Moss yawned as he went to his fighter. He didn't like the low clouds overhead. They would make it harder for him to find his targets. He managed a shrug. His squadron wouldn't be the only one hitting the Confederates. He could probably tag along with someone else.

He ran through his flight checks with impatience, but was no less thorough because he was impatient.

Like a modern automobile, the Wright had a self-starter. No groundcrew man needed to spin the prop for him. He poked the button. The engine roared to life; the propeller blurred into a disk.

He raced down the runway and flung himself into the air. One by one, the airplanes in his squadron followed. They rocketed south toward Virginia and the enemy. Moss got the feeling of being part of something much bigger than himself. He'd known it in the Great War, too, but seldom in this fight.

As they got farther south, the clouds began to break up. That was a relief. Maybe the people who'd ordered the attack weren't complete idiots after all. Then again, you never could tell. Moss got a quick glimpse ofWashington ,D.C. , before he zoomed over thePotomac . Plumes of smoke rose here and there from the formal capital--for all practical purposes, the former capital. Confederate bombers must have visited there the night before. Not even Y-ranging had helped fighters do much to track bombers by night.

After the Potomac, the next good-sized river was theRappahannock . IfU.S. soldiers could get over the Rappahannock and the Rapidan, the next stop wasRichmond , which lay on the north bank of the James.

Crossing the Rappahannock wouldn't be a whole lot of fun, though. Confederate artillery was zeroed in on the river, and pounded the pontoon bridges U.S. military engineers were running up under the not quite adequate cover of their own artillery. Asskickers were out dive-bombing those bridges, too. Moss watched one crash into the Rappahannock in flames. Somebody had thought to bring plenty of antiaircraft guns forward, then. Good.

And there were plenty of Confederate antiaircraft guns right up at the front, too. Shells began bursting around Moss and his squadron even while they were on the U.S. side of the Rappahannock. He hoped those came from Confederate guns. He didn't like the idea of getting shot down by his own side. Come to that, he didn't like the idea of getting shot down by the enemy, either.

He dove on a battery of Confederate artillery pieces. He could damn well shoot back at the bastards on the other side. He thumbed the firing button. His Wright seemed to stagger a little in the air from the recoil of the guns. Soldiers in butternut scattered as he roared past overhead. Muzzle flashes showed that some of them were taking potshots at him with whatever small arms they carried. He wasn't going to lose any sleep over that--he was gone before they could hope to aim.

He had more targets than he could shake a stick at. The Confederates had known this attack was coming, and they'd spent a lot of time getting ready for it. That worried Moss. When the Confederates struck for Lake Erie, they'd caught theUSA by surprise. Maybe they shouldn't have, but so what?

Surprise had helped them go as far and as fast as they had.

Surprise wouldn't do theUSA a nickel's worth of good here. Could a major armored thrust succeed without it? Moss didn't know. One way or the other, he'd find out. And so would everybody else.

He shot up another artillery position, and a battalion's worth of infantrymen he caught in the open. He'd pitied the poor foot soldiers in the last war. Their lot was, if anything, worse now. The fighters he and the Confederates were flying now were ever so much more deadly as ground-attack machines than their Great War ancestors had been. Barrels were correspondingly more dangerous, too. Even the poison gas was more poisonous than it had been a generation earlier.

When Moss tried to strafe some more infantrymen, his guns emptied in the middle of the burst. Time to head for home, he thought, and hoped no Hound Dog would jump him on the way back to Maryland. All he could do was run away.

From the squadron's wireless traffic, a lot of the other pilots were in the same boat. "Let's go back,"

Moss said. "They can reload us, and then we'll hit 'em again." Savage sounds of approval dinned in his earphones.

Finding Texas, Maryland, wasn't easy, even though the clouds had thinned out up there, too. He knew how things had looked going from north to south. They didn't look the same coming back from south to north. They never did. Anyone who drove a motorcar knew that. The problem was ten times worse in an airplane.

He finally spotted the town by the nearby ponds that had once been mine shafts. If they were there, then the airstrip was . . . there. He bumped to a landing. It wasn't pretty, but he'd take it.

Groundcrew men swarmed over the fighters. He got refueled. Armorers took out the empty ammunition belts and loaded in full ones. An officer came out of the headquarters tent with a map. He pointed a few miles west of where Moss and his squadron had been strafing. Moss called his pilots to gather around so they got a look at the map, too. After a little while, everybody nodded. Moss thought he knew how to get there.

As it happened, the squadron never did. They'd come into U.S.-held West Virginia and were heading for Confederate Virginia when they ran into a squadron of Hound Dogs flying north to shoot up the men in green-gray who wanted to invade their country. Fliers from each side spotted the other at about the same time. Both sides started

shooting at about the same time, too.

Nobody'd planned the fight. Nobody'd expected it. Nobody backed away from it, either. It was a wild mêlée. Both Wrights and Hound Dogs were already on the deck; they had no altitude to give up. They just darted and swooped and fired. Gunners down below--Moss was damned if he knew whose gunners--seemed to blaze away impartially at both sides.

Moss thought he hit a Hound Dog, but the Confederate fighter kept flying. A Wright smashed into the ground. A fireball blossomed where it went down. He swore. That was one of his men surely dead; nobody could hope to bail out this low. A Hound Dog limped off toward the south trailing smoke. Moss hoped it crashed, too.

After several more airplanes went down or had to pull out of the fight, both sides broke off, as if licking their wounds. Moss and his squadron didn't shoot up the Confederates in northern Virginia. The Hound Dogs didn't shoot up U.S. soldiers in eastern West Virginia (they would have called it occupied northern Virginia). They'd battled one another to a standstill. At the moment, as far as he was concerned, that would have to do.

Armstrong Grimes sat cross-legged in front of a campfire on the outskirts ofProvo,Utah . He leaned close to the flames. The night was chilly, and he had his tunic off. He was sewing a second stripe onto his left sleeve, and not having an easy time of it. "My aunt ought to be doing this, goddammit," he grumbled.

Across the fire from him, Rex Stowe was sewing a third stripe onto his sleeve. He raised an eyebrow.

"Your aunt?"

"Yeah." Armstrong nodded. "She's only two years older than me. My granny got married again right when the Great War ended, and she had a kid just a little before my ma did. Clara would be good at this--and it would piss her off, too. We fight like cats and dogs."

"All right." Stowe laughed and shrugged. "Whatever makes you happy."

"What'd make me happy is getting the hell out of here," Armstrong said. "You fix that up for me, Corp--uh, Sarge?"

Stowe laughed again. "In your dreams. And now all the fresh young dumb ones can call you Corporal.

Looks to me like we've got two ways to leaveUtah any time soon. We can get wounded--or we can get killed."

It looked like that to Armstrong, too. He'd hoped Stowe would tell him something different. Not too far away, a machine gun started hammering. Armstrong and Stowe both paused in their sewing. Tunics or no tunics, they were ready to grab their rifles and do whatever they had to do to keep breathing. Then the gunfire stopped. The two noncoms looked at each other. "Is that good or bad?" Armstrong asked.

"Dunno," Stowe answered. "If they just overran one of our machine-gun nests, it's pretty bad, though."

He pointed to a couple of privates. "Ustinov! Trotter! Go see what the hell's going on with that gun. Try not to get killed while you're doing it, in case the Mormons have got the position."

"Right, Sarge." The two men slipped away. Grimes didn't think a machine gun could fall with so little fuss, but the Mormons had already come up with too many surprises to leave him sure of anything.

He waited. IfUstinov and Trotter didn't come back pretty soon, the Army was going to need a lot more than two guys to set things right. Stowe must have thought the same thing. He put his tunic back on even though his new stripes were only half attached. So did Armstrong.

No gun suddenly turned the wrong way started spitting bullets. A sentry not far from the fire called a challenge. Armstrong heard a low-voiced answer. He couldn't make out what it was. That was good, because one of the Mormons' little games was to steal countersigns and use them to sneak infiltrators in among theU.S. soldiers. If Armstrong couldn't hear the countersign, odds were the enemy couldn't, either.

He shook his head at that. Up till a few weeks before, the Mormons hadn't been the enemy. They'd been his fellow citizens. But they didn't want to stay in the USA, any more than the Confederates had.

The Confederates had made secession stick. They were genuine, sure-

as-hell foreigners these days. The Mormons wanted to be, but the United States weren't about to let them go.

Ustinov and Trotter came back in. Trotter said, "Gun's still ours, Sergeant. He squeezed off a burst on account of he thought he saw something moving out in front of him."

"Thanks," Stowe said. "You guys did good. Sit your butts down and take it easy for a couple minutes."

Ustinovlaughed. He was a big bear of a man; the noise reminded Armstrong of a rockslide rumbling down the side of a valley. "You take it easy around here, you start talking out of a new mouth," he said, and ran a finger across his throat in case anybody had trouble figuring out what he meant.

He wasn't wrong, either. The Mormons were playing for keeps. They'd tried rising up once before.

TheUSA had pushed their faces into the dirt and sat on them for twenty years afterwards. They had to know that whatever happened to them if they lost again would be even worse. And they had to know the odds were all against their winning. They'd risen again anyhow. That spoke of either amazing stupidity or undying hatred--maybe both.

Hardly any Mormons surrendered. Not manyU.S. soldiers were in much of a mood to take prisoners even when they got the chance. Every now and again, the Mormons took some. Oddly, Armstrong had never heard that they mistreated them. On the contrary--they stuck to the Geneva Convention straight down the line.

When he mentioned that, Sergeant Stowe spat into the campfire. "So what? Bunch of holier-than-thou sons of bitches," he said. Heads bobbed up and down. Armstrong didn't argue. How could he? If the Mormons hadn't been a pack of fanatics, would they have rebelled against all the might the United States could throw at them?

Later that night, U.S. bombers paid a call on Provo. They weren't the most modern models. Those went up against the Confederates--Armstrong hoped the attack in Virginia was going well. But the Mormons didn't have any night fighters, and they didn't have much in the way of antiaircraft guns. Second-line airplanes were plenty good enough for knocking their towns flat.

After the explosions to the north and west had stopped, a couple of

Mormon two-deckers buzzed over the U.S. lines and dropped small--probably homemade--bombs on them. "Goddamn flying sewing machines," Armstrong grumbled, jolted out of a sound sleep by the racket.

Antiaircraft guns and machine guns turned the sky into a fireworks display with tracers. As far as Armstrong could tell, they didn't hit anything. If they fired off a lot of ammo, people would think they were doing their job. The racket killed whatever chance he'd had of going back to sleep.

When morning came, the Mormons started firing the mortars they used in place of conventional artillery.

Like what passed for their air force, the mortars weren't as good as the real thing. Also like the makeshift bombers, the ersatz artillery was a lot better than nothing. And cries of, "Gas!" made Armstrong snarl curses as he put on his mask.

He wasn't the only one. "How are we supposed to fight in these goddamn things?" Trotter demanded.

Sergeant Stowe took care of that: "Can't very well fight if you suck in a gulp of mustard gas, either." He already had his mask on. From behind it, his voice sounded as if it came from the other side of the grave, but he wore the mask to make sure it didn't.

U.S.artillery wasted little time in answering. Some of the shells theU.S. guns flung gurgled as they flew: they were gas rounds, too. In a way, that pleased Armstrong; he wanted the Mormons to catch hell. In another way, though, it mattered very little, because theU.S. bombardment didn't do much to stop the hell he was catching.

Somebody not nearly far enough away started screaming like a damned soul. That was a man badly wounded, not somebody who'd been gassed. The ordinary Mormon mortar rounds produced a hail of nasty fragments and splinters when they burst. Some poor bastard had stopped at least one.

Mortar bombs were still falling, too. Some of them made the ground shake when they hit. Armstrong didn't know much about earthquakes, not when he'd grown up inWashington,D.C. He did know he wanted terra to stay firma under him.

The wounded man kept screaming. Armstrong swore under his breath.

Someone had to go get the sorry son of a bitch and bring him in. Someone, at the moment, looked remarkably like him. He was no hero.

All he wanted to do was get out of this war with a whole skin. But if that were him screaming, he would also have wanted his buddies to bring him in if they could.

Scrambling out of his hole was one of the hardest things he'd ever made himself do, and he'd been in combat since the Confederates bombedCampCuster . Once in the open, he flattened out like a toad after a steamroller ran over it. His belly never left the ground as he crawled ahead and sideways. Sharp rocks poked him in the stomach. With bullets and sharper fragments snarling by much too close overhead, the pebbles were the least of his worries.

He found the wounded man. It wasUstinov . His left arm ended just above the wrist. He was holding on to the stump with his right hand, slowing the bleeding. "Oh, shit," Armstrong said softly. He bent and pulled the lace out of one of Ustinov's shoes. "Hang on, pal. I'll fix you a tourniquet." Ustinov nodded. He didn't stop screaming.

Armstrong tied the tourniquet as tight as he could. Maybe that cost Ustinov some extra agony. Maybe he was already feeling as much as one man could. The noise he made never changed. Armstrong fumbled at his belt till he found the morphine syringe every soldier carried. Awkwardly, he stuck the wounded man and pushed the plunger home.

He hoped for some immediate change, but didn't see one. Shrugging, he said, "We've got to get you out of here. I'll help you out of the hole. Then you climb on my back, and I'll do the best I can." He was a good-sized man himself, but Ustinov was bigger.

GettingUstinov out of the foxhole was a bitch. Again, Armstrong wasn't sure whether he hurt the other man worse by shoving him up. He was afraid he did. But it had to be done. WhenUstinov got on top of him, he felt as if he'd been tackled. He crawled on anyhow. He was about halfway back to his own foxhole whenUstinov sighed and stopped screaming. The morphine must have taken hold at last.

Trotter and Yossel Reisen were on their way out after him when he broughtUstinov in. When Trotter saw what had happened toUstinov , he said some of the same things as Armstrong had.

"Where the hell are the corpsmen?" Armstrong growled.

"They were coming up," Reisen answered. "A mortar burst caught them. They're both down."

"Oh." With news like that, Armstrong had nothing else to say.

"Neither one of them is as bad off as he is." Reisen pointed to Ustinov.

"One second I was fine. The next . . . I looked down, and my hand was gone." Ustinov sounded quiet and calm. That was the morphine talking.

"Take him back, you two," Armstrong told Trotter and Reisen.

"Right, Corporal," the privates said together. They couldn't complain. Armstrong had already done his share and then some.

He got back into his foxhole with nothing but relief. "You ought to pick up a Bronze Star for that,"

Sergeant Stowe said. "Maybe a Silver Star."

"Fuck it," Armstrong said. "Not a guy here who wouldn't do the same for his pals. I don't give a damn about the medal. He was making a racket, and I wanted him to shut up."

"There you go." Stowe laughed, or at least bared his teeth and made noises that sounded amused. "You were a brand new conscript when this shit started, weren't you?" Armstrong nodded. The sergeant said,

"Well, you're sure as hell not a raw conscript any more, are you?"

"Doesn't look that way," Armstrong allowed.

Dive bombers roared down on the Mormon positions at the southern edge ofProvo . Armstrong hoped they were blowing up the mortars that had caused so much torment. He wouldn't have bet too much on it, though. Unlike ordinary artillery pieces, mortars broke down easily into man-portable loads. They were made to shoot and scoot.

Three barrels of Great War vintage waddled up to the front. Their crews must have been wearing masks, for the gas didn't faze them. A Mormon with a bottle of burning gasoline--a Featherston Fizz--incinerated one at the cost of his own life. The other two ledU.S. foot soldiers, Armstrong among them, deeper intoProvo .

Like most ofRichmond , Clarence Potter lived suspended between hope and fear. The damnyankees were coming--everybody knew that. Whether they'd get there was a different question. Brigadier General Potter hoped it was, anyhow.

Unlike most of the people in the Confederate States, he knew U.S. forces were over the Rappahannock and pushing down toward the Rapidan. The wireless just talked about heavy defensive fighting.

Broadcasts also had a lot to say about the losses Confederate forces were inflicting on the enemy. As far as Potter could tell, those losses were genuine. But the wireless didn't mention whatever the Yankees were doing to the Confederate defenders.

Even before the latest U.S. push, people in Richmond had been able to hear the artillery duels to the north. Now there was no escaping that low rumble. It went on day and night. If it was louder than it had been a few days earlier, if the guns were closer than they had been . . . Potter tried not to dwell on that.

By the way other people talked, they were doing the same thing.

His work at the War Department kept him too busy to pay too much heed to the battle to the north. He knew what he would do and where he would go if he got an evacuation order. Plans had long since been laid for that. Until the hour, if it came, he would go on as he always had.

As he always had, he worked long into the night. Now, though,U.S. bombers visitedRichmond every night after the sun went down. Wave after wave of them pounded the Confederate capital. Potter spent more time than he would have wanted in the shelter in the bowels of the building instead of at his desk.

Even if everything above ground fell in, a tunnel would take people in the shelter to safety. Potter wished he could take his work with him. He even longed for the days when he'd been subterranean all the time.

His prewar promotion to an office with a window had its drawbacks. In the general shelter, too many unauthorized eyes could see pieces of what he was up to. Security trumped productivity.

Considering one of his projects, that was very true indeed. He still waited for results from it. He had no idea how long he would have to go on waiting, or if it would ever come to fruition. Logically, it should, but whether evidence that it had would ever appear to

someone who could get word back to him was another open question.

Before theU.S. onslaught, Jake Featherston had called him about it two or three times. Featherston didn't have the patience to make a good intelligence man. He wanted things to happen right now, regardless of whether they were ripe. That driving, almost demoniac, energy had taken the Confederate States a long way in the direction he wanted them to go, but not all problems yielded to a hearty kick in the behind. The President of the CSA sometimes had trouble seeing that.

People who came to the office every day spoke of the poundingRichmond was taking. Potter hardly ever got out of the War Department, and so saw less of that destruction than most people.

TheU.S. attack disrupted his news gathering--his spying--on the other side of the border more than he'd thought it would. Some of his sources were too busy doing their nominal jobs to have the chance to send information south. That frustrated him to the point where he reminded himself of Featherston.

He ate when he got the chance. As often as not, he had someone go to what passed for the War Department canteen and bring him back something allegedly edible. Half the time, he didn't notice what it was. Considering what the canteen turned out, that might have been a blessing.

Every once in a while, he emerged from his lair. He felt like a bear coming out of its den after a long winter when he did. By the way the inside of his mouth tasted after too much coffee and too many cigarettes, the comparison was more apt than he would have liked.

Once, he walked into the canteen at the same time as Nathan Bedford Forrest III. The head of the Confederate General Staff looked even more weary, rumpled, and disheveled than he did. Forrest was also in a perfectly foul temper. Fixing Potter with as baleful a stare as the spymaster had ever got, the younger officer growled, "God damn those nigger sons of bitches to hell, so the Devil can fry 'em even blacker than they are already."

"What now?" Potter asked with a sinking feeling.

"We had two big trainloads of barrels that were supposed to get up here fromBirmingham , so we could gas 'em up, put crews in 'em, and throw 'em into the fight against the damnyankees. Two!" Forrest said.

"Fucking niggers planted mines under both sets of train tracks. Blew two locomotives to hell and gone, derailed God only knows how many freight cars, and now those stinking barrels won't get here for another three days at the earliest. At the earliest!" He was extravagantly dismayed and even more extravagantly furious.

"Ouch!" Potter said. He didn't ask what the delay would do to the defense of northernVirginia . The answer to that was only too obvious: nothing good. Instead, he chose the question that touched him professionally: "How did the coons find out those trains were on the way?"

Lieutenant General Forrest looked even grimmer than he had before. "I've asked General Cummins the very same thing. So far, he hasn't come up with answers that do me any good." His expression said that the head of Counterintelligence had better come up with such answers in a tearing hurry if he wanted to keep his own head from rolling.

The canteen line snaked forward. Potter picked up a tray and a paper napkin and some silverware. So did Forrest. Potter got a dispirited salad and a ham sandwich. Forrest chose a bowl of soup and some of the greasiest fried chicken Potter had ever seen. He wondered what the cooks had fried it in. Crankcase oil? He wouldn't have been surprised.

Forrest followed him to a table. They sat down together. The head of the General Staff went right on cursing and fuming. Potter had the rank and the security clearance to listen to his rant. After a while, when Forrest ran down a little, Potter asked, "Do you think the damnyankees knew about those trains and tipped off the raiders?"

"That's the way I'd bet right now." Nathan Bedford Forrest III demolished a drumstick, plainly not caring what he ate as long as it filled his belly. "General Cummins says it isn't possible. I wish I thought he was right, but I just can't believe it. The timing was too goddamn good. For them to nail both those trains within an hour of each other . . . They knew they were coming, all right."

"I agree," Potter said crisply--which was not a word he could use to describe the lettuce in his salad.

"You can only bend the long arm of coincidence so far before you break it."

"Yeah." Forrest slurped up soup with the same methodical indifference he'd shown the chicken. "General Cummins thinks otherwise . . . but

he's got his prestige on the line. If the niggers figured it out all by themselves, then his shop doesn't look bad."

Potter didn't say anything to that. Instead, he took a big bite of his ham sandwich--and regretted it.Virginia made some of the finest ham in the world, none of which had gone between those two slices of bread. But Forrest was liable to see any comment he made about Cummins as self-serving.

Forrest scowled across the table at him. "What can you tell me about this business? Anything?"

"Right this minute, sir, no," Potter answered. "If the Yankees are getting messages to our niggers, I don't know how they're doing it. I don't know how they're getting word of our shipments, either. That's probably not too hard for them or the niggers, though. They could do it here, or in any one of half a dozen--likely more--railroad dispatch offices, or at the factories in Birmingham."

"I'd like to put you in charge of finding out," Forrest said. "You seem to have more ideas about it than General Cummins does."

Part of Potter craved the extra responsibility. The rest of him had more sense. He said, "Sir, there aren't enough hours in the day for me to give it the attention it ought to have. General Cummins is a good officer. If he can't track down what's going on, odds are nobody can."

"He hasn't done it yet, and he's had his chances," the chief of the General Staff said. "You're right, Potter: he's sound. I know that. But he hasn't got the imagination he needs to be really top-notch."

"If that means you think I do, then I thank you for the compliment," Potter said. "But I'm sure General Cummins has some bright young officers in his shop. Give one of them his head, or more than one. They'll have all the imagination you could want--probably more than you can use."

"With Cummins in charge, they won't get the chance to use it. He'll stifle them," Forrest predicted.

"Sir, there are ways to finesse that." The word made Potter wonder when he'd last played bridge. He loved the game. Like so much of his life, the chance to sit at a table for a few hands had been swallowed up by duty.

"I know there are," Forrest said. "I'd still rather the imagination came from the top. That idea you had for finding spies here--"

"Has come to exactly nothing so far," Potter pointed out.

"It will, though." Forrest sounded more confident than Potter felt. "I don't know when, but it will. Soon, I hope. What I do know is, Cummins wouldn't have had the idea in a million years."

"Somebody over there would have," Potter said.

Nathan Bedford Forrest let out a deeply skeptical grunt. "I don't think so. The President doesn't think so, either."

"Really?" Potter pricked up his ears. "I would have thought I'd have heard that from the President himself if it were so."

"Not lately. He's been at the front a lot." Forrest made a face and dropped his voice. "You didn't hear that from me, dammit."

"Yes, sir." Clarence Potter smiled. Forrest still didn't. He'd let his mouth run freer than it should have, and it worried him. Considering Featherston's temper, it should have worried him, too. Smiling still, Potter went on, "What's he doing up there, playing artilleryman again?"

Now the chief of the General Staff gaped at him. "How the devil did you know that?"

"Well, I didn't know for sure, but I thought it was a pretty good bet," Potter answered. "Remember, the two of us go back to 1915. We go back longer than he does with any of his Freedom Party buddies. We haven't always got along"--now there was an understatement; Potter remembered the weight of the pistol in his pocket when he came up toRichmond for the 1936 Olympics--"but I do have some notion of the way he thinks." And he has a notion of how I think, too, dammit. Otherwise, I wouldn't be in uniform right now.

"All right, then." Forrest didn't sound sure it was all right, but he nodded. "Yeah, he's done some shooting. But you didn't hear that from me, either."

"Hear what?" Potter said blandly. Forrest made a face at him. Potter decided to see if he could squeeze some extra information out of the younger man now that he'd caught him embarrassed: "Sir, are we

going to holdRichmond ?"

"We'll find out, won't we, General?" Forrest answered. Nodding, Potter dropped it. He could tell he'd got as much as he would get.

XVI

Tom Colleton had a rain slicker on over his uniform. The hood was made to cover his head even when he wore a helmet. In spite of slicker and hood, cold water dripped down the back of his neck. And he had it better than the damnyankees looking his way from a small forest betweenSandusky andCleveland : the rain was at his back, while it blew into their faces. He'd never liked rain in the face. Some of the Yankee soldiers, like some of his own, wore glasses. For them, rain in the face wasn't just an annoyance.

It could be deadly if it blurred an approaching enemy.

A barrel rumbled up the road toward him. He wouldn't have wanted to try sending barrels anywhere except along roads right now. The rain had turned an awful lot of dirt into mud. He'd seen a couple of bogged-down barrels. They needed specialized recovery vehicles to get them out of their wallows.

The man commanding the barrel rode with his head and shoulders out of the cupola. Tom approved of that, especially in this weather. A lot of people would have stayed buttoned up and dry and comfortable inside the turret--and if they couldn't see quite as much that way, well, so what? If you took care of your job first and yourself second, you were more likely to live to keep on doing your job.

As the barrel drew near, the commander ducked down into the turret. He must have given an order, for the machine stopped, engine still noisy even while idling. The commander popped up out of the cupola again like a jack-in-the-box. He waved to Tom. "What's going on up here?" he called, pitching his voice to carry over the engine and through the rain.

Probably a lieutenant or a sergeant himself, he had no idea he was talking to a lieutenant-colonel. Tom gave the same answer any foot soldier who'd seen some action would have: "Not a hell of a lot, thank God."

"Sounds good to me," the barrel commander said. By his accent, he came fromTexas , or possiblyArkansas --somewhere west of

theMississippi , anyhow. He wiped the back of his hand across his face. "I don't mind the rain one goddamn bit, let me tell you."

"Because of the lull, you mean?" Tom asked. As if to belie the word, an automatic rifle not too far away stuttered out a short burst. Several shots from Springfields answered. Tom waited to see if anything big would flare up.

So did the barrel commander. When the firing died away instead, his smile showed nothing but relief.

"Partly the lull, yeah," he said. "But there's one thing more: weather like this here, all the poison gas in the world ain't worth shit."

"You've got a point," Tom said. He didn't want to think about wearing a gas mask in a driving rain like this. All his thoughts about eyeglasses came back, doubled and redoubled. With a gas mask's portholes, you couldn't even peer over the tops if the lenses got spattered. You were stuck trying to see through drip-filled glass.

"Damnyankees throw that stuff around like it's going out of style." The barrel commander patted the cast steel of the cupola. "Sometimes inside here, we don't know they've done it till too late."

"Hadn't thought of that," Tom admitted. He imagined rattling along inside the noisy barrel, maybe firing its cannon and machine guns to add to the din. If gas shells started bursting near you, how would you know?

Likely by getting a lungful of the stuff, which wasn't the best way. Colleton asked, "Haven't you got any filters to keep it out?"

"Yeah, but we have to seal everything up for 'em to work at all, and you don't want to do that most of the time, on account of you can't see out so good," the man standing in the cupola replied, illustrating his own point. "Besides, it's cooled down now, but in the summertime you purely can't stand getting all cooped up in here. They throw some potatoes in with us, they could serve us up for roast pork."

Tom's stomach did a slow lurch. In the last war and this one, he'd smelled burnt human flesh. It did bear a horrid resemblance to pork left too long on the fire. Would it taste the same way? He didn't want to know.

The barrel commander disappeared down into the turret again. As he

emerged, the engine noise picked up. The barrel started forward. "Don't go too far into the woods, or you'll run into the Yankees," Tom shouted. The commander cupped a hand behind his ear. Tom said it again, louder this time. The barrel commander waved. Tom hoped that meant he understood, not that he was just being friendly.

A few minutes later, two more Confederate barrels rattled down the road after the first one. Tom Colleton frowned. Had some kind of push been ordered, one nobody'd bothered to tell him about? He wouldn't have been surprised; that kind of thing happened too often. On the other hand, maybe the barrels' crews thought something was going on when it really wasn't. In that case, they were likely to get a nasty surprise.

Frowning, Tom shouted for a wireless man. The soldier with the heavy pack on his back seemed to materialize out of thin air. One second, he was nowhere around. The next, he stood in front of Colleton, asking, "What do you need, sir?"

"Put me through to division HQ in Sandusky," Tom answered. "I want to find out what the hell's going on up here."

When the wireless man wanted to, he had a wicked laugh. "What makes you think they'll know?"

That held more truth than Tom wished it did. "Somebody has to," he said. "They're as good a bet as any, and better than most. Come on, get on the horn with them."

"Right." The wireless man got busy. Before he could raise Sandusky, though, an antibarrel cannon went off in the direction the Confederate barrels had taken. It fired several rounds. Those weren't big guns; a crew could serve them lickety-split. A machine gun started to answer, undoubtedly trying to shoot down the gunners, but fell silent all at once. A moment later, Tom heard ammunition start to cook off. At least one of those barrels was history.

He muttered a curse and set a hand on the wireless man's shoulder. "Never mind. I just got my answer."

Pulling his pistol from its holster, he ran forward to see what he could do for the luckless barrel men.

Some of them came running or staggering back toward him. Most were wounded. A couple of the soldiers in butternut coveralls turned

around and went with him. The others kept going. Tom didn't suppose he could blame them, not after what had just happened.

And it turned out not to matter any which way. All three barrels were burning. Tom couldn't get close to any of them. Several men, including the commander of that first barrel, lay dead near the dead machines.

Tom swore again. They'd walked into a buzzsaw. He hoped the end had come quickly for them.

Sometimes, in war, that was as much as you could hope for.

A burst of machine-gun fire chewed up the fallen leaves not far from his feet. He dove for cover and swore one more time, now at himself. He hadn't come up here to be a target. Of course, the poor bastards in the barrels hadn't, either, and what had happened to them?

The damnyankee behind the machine gun squeezed off another burst. Hunting me, the son of a bitch, Tom thought as he rolled and scrambled toward and then behind the thickest tree he could find. The U.S

gunner's fire went a little wide. Tom lay there panting for a couple of minutes. In the last war, he might have laughed at himself for getting into and out of a scrape like that. He didn't feel like laughing any more.

Careful not to draw the machine gunner's notice again, he crawled off to the west, putting as many trees between himself and the enemy as he could. Only when he was sure he could do it without getting shot did he climb to his feet. By then, he was so wet, he might as well not have bothered with the rain slicker.

He felt like a cat that had fallen into a pond.

To add insult to injury--or, here, almost to add injury to insult--some Confederate soldiers hurrying into the woods came close to shooting him for a Yankee. No good deed goes unpunished, he thought as he finally made it back out into open country.

His wireless man looked him over. "Sir, you're a mess."

"Thanks. Thanks a hell of a lot, Rick," Tom said. "I never would have figured that out without you."

Rick took his canteen off his belt. "Here you go, sir. Have a knock of this." This turned out to be a good deal more potent than water. Tom swigged gratefully.

"Ahhh," he said when the fire in his gullet had faded a little. "That hit the spot. Now get on the horn to divisional headquarters. They need to know the damnyankees have got antibarrel guns and all sorts of other little delights lurking in those woods."

"I'll do it, sir," the wireless man said, and he did. Tom spoke with heat perhaps partly inspired by the liquid flames he'd just drunk.

"Well, we'll see what we can do about it." The staff officer back inSandusky didn't sound very worried.

Why should he be? He was far enough behind the lines that nobody was shooting at him. He went on,

"Can't really send out the Mules in weather like this, you know."

He was bound to be dry and under a roof, too. More cold water trickled down the back of Tom Colleton's neck. He was amazed his anger didn't turn it to steam. "Have you ever heard of artillery?" he growled.

"Oh, yes, sir," the staff officer said brightly. "I told you, sir--we'll see what we can do. Things are spread a little thin right now."

"What's left of three crews' worth of barrels is spread pretty thin right now, too," Tom said. "They didn't know what they were walking into. Now they've found out the hard way. The Yankees need to pay for that."

"Yes, sir," the staff officer said. That wasn't agreement; Tom had listened to too many polite but unyielding staff officers to mistake it for any such thing. The man was just saying that he heard Tom. He went on, "I'm afraid I can't make you any promises, but I'll do what I can."

"Right. Thanks. Out." Tom's thanks wasn't gratitude, either. It was rage. He turned away from the wireless set before he said something worse.

Rick understood that perfectly. "Don't worry, sir," he said. "I broke the link as soon as you said,, ‘Out."

"

"Thanks." This time, Tom did mean it. "I won't say you saved me a court-martial, but I won't say you didn't, either. Those goddamn behind-the-lines types are all the same. No skin off their nose what happens up here, because it isn't happening to them."

The wireless man looked at him with real surprise. "You sound like a noncom grousing about officers, sir. Uh, no offense."

Tom laughed. "You think we don't know what noncoms say about us? It's the same as privates say about noncoms."

Rick looked surprised again, this time in a different way. "You know what? I reckon you're right. I know what I called sergeants before I got stripes on my sleeve."

Artillery did start falling on the forest. The bombardment wasn't as hard as Tom would have liked to see it, but it was heavy enough to let division HQ think they'd taken care of the problem--and to say so if the people who gave them orders ever asked about it. Tom could have calledSandusky again and complained, but he didn't see the point. He was getting what Division had to give. If the Confederates had planned a big push through those woods, that would have been a different story. He would have squawked then no matter what. Now? No.

Before long, U.S. artillery started shooting back at the C.S. guns. The counterbattery fire also seemed halfhearted. How much had the United States moved from Ohio to Virginia? Would the Confederate defenders there be able to hold on? From where Tom was, he could only hope so.

As he always did when he went to the front, Jake Featherston was having the time of his life. He often wished he could chuck the presidency, put on his old sergeant's uniform, and go back to blowing up the damnyankees. Of course, that would leave Don Partridge in charge of the country, which was a truly scary thought.

But what could be better than yanking the lanyard, hearing the gun roar, and watching another shell fly off to come down on some U.S. soldiers' heads? This was what Jake had been made for. Everything that came after he took off the uniform . . . There were times when it might have happened to somebody else.

And he loved the automatic rifles Confederate soldiers carried. He had a hell of a time filling the air with lead when Yankee fighters shot up the gun pits. He hadn't hit anything yet, but he kept trying. It drove his bodyguards nuts.

He wished the Confederates had thrown back theU.S. attack without letting it get across theRappahannock . In a perfect world, things would have worked out like that. If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride, Featherston thought. The damnyankees were over theRappahannock , and driving for the Rapidan. They weren't slicing through the C.S. defenders the way the Confederates had sliced through the Yankees inOhio , but they were still going forward. And they didn't have to go all that far before they got toRichmond .

"Sir? Mr. President?" somebody shouted right next to Jake.

He jumped. What with the bellowing guns of the battery and his own thoughts, he hadn't even realized this crisp-looking young captain of barrels had come up. "Sorry, sonny," he said. "Afraid I've got a case of artilleryman's ear. What's up?" Too much time by the guns had left him a little hard of hearing, especially in the range of sounds in which people spoke. But he was also selectively deaf. When he didn't feel like listening to somebody, he damn well didn't, regardless of whether he heard him.

"Sir, General Patton's come up to talk with you," the captain answered.

"Has he, by God?" Featherston said. The young officer nodded. Jake slapped him on the back, hard enough to stagger him. "Well, lead the way, then. I'm always interested in what General Patton has to say."

Again, he wasn't lying. He'd picked George Patton as a winner before the barrel commander helped put the Confederates in Sandusky. Patton's driving aggressiveness reminded him of his own. The general always had his eye on the main chance. You wouldn't go anywhere in this world if you didn't.

A butternut Birmingham with Red Crosses prominent on the roof and sides waited for Featherston. He felt not the least bit guilty about the ruse. If anything happened to him, the whole Confederacy would suffer. He knew that. Remembering it while he was blazing away with an automatic rifle was a different story.

Patton's camouflage-netted tent stood with several others in among some trees not far south ofCulpeper,Virginia . The deception would have been better in the summertime. With leaves gone from trees, the

tents were noticeable in spite of the netting. With luck, though, the Red Crosses on the auto would make Yankee pilots think they made up a field hospital.

"Mr. President!" Patton jumped out of a folding chair, sprang to stiff attention, and saluted. "Freedom!"

he added.

"Freedom!" Jake echoed automatically. "At ease, General. Are we ready to twist the damnyankees'

tail?"

"Just about, sir," Patton answered. He had some of the palest, coldest eyes Featherston had ever seen.

They lit up now with a glow like the northern lights shining on Greenland ice. "Then we don't just twist it.

We land on it with both feet."

"And won't they yowl when we do!" Featherston said.

"That's the idea." Patton pointed north toward the din of battle. "These head-on attacks--all they prove is that General MacArthur hasn't figured out what to do with all the tools his War Department gave him."

"Well, General, if you think I mind, you can damn well think again," Jake said. "When you're ready, I want you to do just what you said. We'll bundle these bastards out of your country with their jumped-on tails between their legs."

"We'll do it, Mr. President. We're better men than they are. We always have been," Patton said. "And while wars may be fought with weapons, they are won by men. It is the spirit of the men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory."

When he spoke of the man who led, he thought of himself. When Jake Featherston heard it, he thought of himself. He nodded. "You've got that right, General. The triumph of the will is going to take us where we want to go, and the United States won't be able to do a thing about it."

"In war nothing is impossible, provided you use audacity," Patton said. "We have it. The Yankees don't.

To win battles you do not beat weapons--you beat the soul of man of the enemy first."

"Damn right!" Jake said enthusiastically. "When the Freedom Party was down in the, ‘20s, we could have folded up our tents and packed

it in. But I hung tough, and that made people stick with me. I knew our time would come around."

"That is the way it works, Mr. President," Patton said. "And I hope the way things work in our counterattack will be to your satisfaction. My only concern is that theU.S. forces have General Dowling commanding their right wing."

"Why worry about him?" Featherston said. "You beat him inOhio . You can do it again."

"Well, sir, I hope so. But he was sensitive to his flanks there," Patton replied. "He didn't fight a bad campaign, given what he had to work with. Of course, Colonel Morrell commanded his armor then, and Morrell is still in the West, for which I am glad."

"You're not the first officer I've heard who talks about Morrell like that," Jake observed. "Maybe something ought to happen to him."

"Maybe something should," Patton agreed. "It's not what you would call sporting, but war is not a sporting business. I don't give a damn about good losers. I want the tough bastards who go out there and win, no matter how."

"That sure as hell sounds right to me. When I get back to Richmond, I'll see what we can do about it."

Jake made a sour face. He didn't want to go back to the Confederate capital. In a lot of ways, he really would rather have been an artilleryman than President. But he talked about duty to other people. He couldn't go on pretending it didn't matter for him.

He motored back toRichmond in theBirmingham with the prominent Red Crosses. No Yankee airplanes attacked it, though a couple of flights of fighters roared by at not much above treetop height, looking for things to shoot up. He got out of the auto at the foot of Shockoe Hill, and rode to the Presidential mansion near the top in his armored limousine. He didn't want the auto with the Red Crosses seen near the Gray House. That might give the damnyankees ideas they would be better off not having.

"Good to have you back, Mr. President," Lulu said.

He smiled at his secretary. "Thank you kindly, sweetheart. It's good to be back." He was lying through his teeth, but he didn't want Lulu to

know it. He didn't care to hurt her feelings by making her think he would sooner have been away from her.

His desk was piled high with papers. He swore under his breath, even though he'd known it would be.

He wished he could aim a 105 at it and blow it to hell and gone. If he'd known how much paperwork being President of the CSA entailed, he wouldn't have wanted the job so much. Despite hating it, he had to keep up with it. If he gave it all to flunkies, he wouldn't be able to watch what went on. Nobody was going to get away with any private empire-building, not if he could help it.

He sifted through things as fast as he could, writing Yes--J.F. on some and No--J.F. on others and setting still others aside for consultation before he decided what to do about them. You had to use experts--you couldn't know everything yourself. But you had to watch them, too; otherwise they'd spend you out of house and home. Jake chuckled wryly, remembering the professor who'd wanted a fortune to play around with uranium. There were plenty more like him, too.

Every once in a while, something interested Featherston enough to make him slow down and read carefully instead of skimming.England was doing something new with airplane engines, something that didn't use a propeller but that promised a better turn of speed than anyone had managed with props. We need to find out everything we can about this, Jake wrote.

That might not be easy. In the last war, both sides had had a rough time crossing theAtlantic . Even submersibles had had trouble. The Yankees had been ready to copy a German fighting scout, but the sub carrying an example of the airplane got sunk. That set the USA back for months. The same thing could happen to any ship leaving the UK for the CSA. It could--but it had better not.

A note from Ferdinand Koenig also drew Jake's full attention. Things at Camp Dependable and some of the others were going the way everybody'd hoped they would. Featherston nodded to himself. That was good news.

Fewer bombers than usual came over Richmond that night; the ones that did seemed to strike mainly at the railroad yards. Most of the U.S. bombers dropped their loads farther north, at the Confederates defending against the Yankee onslaught. Jake hoped antiaircraft guns and night fighters knocked down a lot of them. No matter what he

hoped, he knew better than to be too optimistic. U.S. gunfire hadn't badly hurt the Confederate airplanes that struck at Washington, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and other cities north of the border.

At dawn the next morning, the distant crashing of guns announced General Patton's counterattack out of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Telephones in the Gray House started ringing right away. Aides brought Featherston notes on how things were going. As soon as he finished breakfast, the notes stopped satisfying. He had the calls routed to his own line, and started tracing progress on a map of Virginia that had gone up on his office wall next to the map of Ohio.

Before long, he was muttering to himself. Things weren't going as well as he'd hoped they would. Things never went as well as he hoped they would. In his mind, every campaign was a walkover till it turned out not to be. But reports of heavy enemy resistance all along theU.S. right flank did nothing to improve his temper. He barked at everyone who came in to see him except Lulu, and he never barked at her.

He tried to talk directly to Patton. He found out he couldn't; the general commanding the barrels was in one himself. There was another way in which the two men were very much alike: they both wanted to get out there and fight. Most people didn't have the stomach--or the balls--for it. Even a lot of officers were happier well back of the line. But Jake and Patton both enjoyed mixing it up with the enemy--and if he shot back, well, so what?

As the day wore along, the news gradually got better. The Yankees began falling back from positions they'd tenaciously defended all morning. But Jake's vision of cutting off their salient looked more like a pipe dream with each passing hour.

On the other hand, it didn't look as if U.S. forces were driving so hard for the Rapidan. Some units that had been spearheading the U.S. attack turned back to help deal with Patton's counterblow. Featherston nodded to himself. In war, you rarely got everything you wanted. He hadn't smashed the Yankees, or he didn't think he had, but he'd slowed them down, maybe even stopped them. That would do. It would definitely do.

Jefferson Pinkard felt awkward in a civilian suit. He could hardly remember the last time he'd worn one.

Lately, he'd just about lived in his uniform. The gray flannel suit smelled of mothballs. It didn't fit too well, either. His shirt collar was

tight around his neck. He'd added a few pounds since the last time he got into ordinary civvies.

But he didn't think he ought to call on Edith Blades in his camp commandant's uniform. It would only remind her that her husband had worn one like it, if less fancy. That didn't seem to be the right thing to do, not after Chick Blades had killed himself.

Before going on to Edith's house, Jeff stopped at a florist's inAlexandria and picked up a bouquet of daisies and chrysanthemums. He felt callow as he carried it up the walk and knocked at her front door.

That made him want to laugh. There was a feeling he hadn't had in a hell of a long time--not since before the Great War. He had it again, though.

He knocked on the door. She opened it. She was wearing dark gray, too: not quite widow's weeds, but not far from them. "Hello, Mr. Pinkard, uh, Jeff," she said.

"Hello." Awkwardly, Jeff thrust the flowers at her. "I brought you these."

"Thank you. They're very pretty." She stepped aside. "Why don't you come in for a minute while I put

'em in something?"

"I'll do that." The house was small and cramped. Another woman with Edith's dark blond hair and strong cheekbones sat on the sofa keeping an eye on the two small boys wrestling on the floor not far away. Jeff nodded to her. "Ma'am."

"I'm Judy Smallwood," she said. "I'm Edith's sister"--as if Jeff couldn't figure that out for himself--"and I'll be riding herd on these two terrors tonight." The terrors kept on trying to assassinate each other.

Edith brought the flowers out in a green pressed-glass vase not quite big enough for the job. She started to put the vase on the coffee table in front of the sofa, then thought better of it. The top of the wireless cabinet made a safer choice. Once she'd set the vase there, she nodded to Jeff. "Well, I'm ready," she said, and she might have been challenging the world or herself to tell her she wasn't.

"Let's go, then," he said.

"Have a good time," Edith's sister called after them. Jeff held the door open for Edith and closed it again after she went through. He opened theBirmingham 's passenger-side door, too, then went around and got in behind the wheel himself.

As he started the auto, Edith said, "I want to thank you again for everything you did about Chick's pension. That was kinder'n anybody had any need of bein'."

"Least I could do." He put the motorcar in gear and pulled away from the curb. "He gave his life for his country, just like he got shot at the front." That was more true than the prison guard's widow knew.

Edith Blades looked down at her hands. She wasn't wearing a wedding ring any more, but Jeff could still see the mark on her finger. "Thank you," she repeated, not much above a whisper.

He parked right across the street from the Bijou. The theater wasn't going to be crowded tonight.

People came up by ones and twos. No line stretched along the sidewalk out from the ticket counter, the way it did when a hit came to town. If a hit had been in town, he would have taken her to it. As things were, he had to make do. He set two quarters on the counter, got two poorly printed tickets, and gave them to the attendant at the door, who tore them in half.

At the refreshment counter, he bought popcorn and candy and waxed cardboard cups of fizzy Dr.

Hopper. Edith called up a faint smile. "Been a while since I went to a picture show," she said. "Even before Chick . . . died . . . It's been a while."

"Well, we're here," Jeff said. "Let's have the best time we can." She nodded.

The plush seats creaked when they sat down in them. The seats needed reupholstering; too many backs and bottoms had rubbed against them since they were new. Everything about the Bijou was overdue for a fix-up. The carpet had seen better years. The gold paint on the lamps was dusty and peeling. The curtain in front of the screen had frayed, threadbare spots.

And all of that stopped mattering the minute the lights went down and the threadbare curtain pulled back. All that mattered were the

pictures on the screen. The newsreel came first, of course. There was President Featherston, firing a cannon at the Yankees. There were General Patton's barrels rumbling forward. There were burnt-out Yankee barrels and throngs of dirty, disheveled U.S. prisoners trudging into captivity with their hands above their heads. There were Confederate bombers blasting U.S. cities.

Patriotic music blared. The announcer gabbled. By what he said, the war was as good as won. Jeff hoped he was right.

The serial was installment number nine--or was it number ten?--about a blond heroine kidnapped by Red Negro guerrillas and constantly threatened with a fate worse than death, a fate she somehow kept evading episode after episode. The Negroes mugged and rolled their eyes and showed their teeth. They seemed to know they'd get what was coming to them in the last reel. Jeff knew they'd get worse than that if they didn't shut up and do as they were told. They might end up in Camp Dependable, for instance.

In the feature, a loose-living woman from New York City (was there any other kind?--in the CSA, the place was a synonym for depravity) tried to seduce military secrets from a Confederate aeronautical engineer. His love for the girl he'd left behind him kept him from yielding to temptation, and everything turned out for the best. In films, it always did.

When the lights came up again, Jeff sighed. He didn't want to face the real world. But here it was, whether he wanted it or not. "I'll take you home," he told Edith Blades.

"All right," she answered. "Thank you again for asking me out."

"You're welcome. I'd like to do it again, if you care to," he said. She nodded. He smiled. He felt like a kid having a pretty good time on a first date. If that wasn't silly at his age, he didn't know what would be.

Silly or not, it was real.

He walked her up to her front door when they got back to her house. "Good night," she said, and squeezed his hand. He wondered if he ought to try to kiss her. Something told him it wouldn't be a good idea, so he held off. She opened the door, went inside, and softly closed it behind her.

Even without a kiss, a broad grin stretched over Jeff's face as he drove back toCampDependable . In the morning, Mercer Scott would grill

him about what he'd done. He was as sure of that as he was of the coming sunrise. He didn't know if the guard chief would care for the story he spun. He didn't much care, either. If Mercer Scott wanted to play Peeping Tom, he could watch prisoners, not his boss.

Sure as hell, the first thing Scott said the next morning was, "How'd it go?"

"Fine," Jeff answered. "She's a nice gal." After that, he went back to his ham and eggs and grits and toast and coffee.

"Well?" Scott went on. "Where'd you go? What did you do?"

"Went to the Bijou. Spy picture there's not bad." Jeff pointed. "Pass me that strawberry jam, would you?" Fuming, Scott did. He asked a few more questions. Pinkard sidestepped most of them, which only annoyed the guard chief more. The harder the time Scott had hiding it, the more Jeff wanted to laugh out loud.

Instead of laughing, he prowled through the camp after breakfast, the way he did almost every morning.

Things felt quieter than they had when bands of Negroes were led out into the swamps every so often and didn't come back. Some of the desperation, the certainty they had nothing left to lose, was gone from the prisoners. That eased Jeff's mind. A man with nothing left to lose would lash out against the people holding him. Why not? If he figured he'd last a while, though, he'd think twice.

Nobody made a fuss when a fleet of trucks pulled up in front of the camp. "Come on!" the guards shouted. "Get your raggedy asses lined up, niggers. Some of y'all are goin'toTexas ! Be good to see the last of you, you miserable bastards. Free up space in the camp, and about time, too."

The black men who boarded the trucks didn't fuss at talk like that. White men had talked to them like that since they were babies. Had the guards spoken softly and politely, it would have made them suspicious. Ordinary, bantering abuse they were used to.

They didn't give anyone any trouble as they filled one truck after another. Why should they? Texas was a big place. Camps there were bound to be big, too, with more room than this one had. Guards slammed the rear doors of the trucks. None of the Negroes flabbled at those metallic clangs, or at the thud of the bar coming down across the doors. Naturally, the white men wouldn't want them getting away.

At least they weren't shackled into place in the cargo box. It might get a little crowded in there, but it wouldn't be too bad . . . would it?

One after another, the loaded trucks rolled away. A couple of the guards waved good-bye. Jefferson Pinkard saw that. As soon as the trucks were gone, he summoned those guards to his office. "You ever do that again, I will fire your sorry asses so fast, it'll make your heads swim," he snarled. "Ever! You don't like those niggers well enough to wave if they're going toTexas . Only thing that'd make you wave is if something else is goin'on."

"But, sir, somethin' else is--" one of the guards began.

"Shut up," Jeff told him. "Every time you open your mouth, your brains try and fall out. You may know somethin'. I doubt it, but you may. I may know somethin'. Matter of fact, I damn well do. But do we want the niggers here gettin' a whiff of it? Do we, you stupid son of a bitch?"

The guard stood mute, which was the smartest thing he could have done. Pinkard jerked his thumb toward the door. The guards almost tripped over each other in their eagerness to escape. They left the door open. Jeff shouted after them. One came back and closed it. Jeff listened to his footsteps recede.

That afternoon, Mercer Scott said, "Don't you reckon you came down on my boys a little hard?"

"Sorry, Mercer, but I don't," Jeff answered. "I want things to go smooth around here. That means I don't want some damn fools tryin' to be funny spookin' the spooks. They get the wrong idea"--by which he meant the right idea--"and we're right back where we were at before." He didn't go into detail. They were out in the open. It wasn't likely anybody could overhear them if they talked quietly, but it wasn't impossible, either.

Scott understood what he was saying--and what he wasn't. The guard chief didn't want Camp Dependable simmering at the edge of revolt the way it had been when Negroes were marched off into the swamps any more than Jeff did. "I don't reckon they'll make that mistake again," he said.

"They'd better not, or they're gone," Jeff said. "That's how come I came down on 'em like I did. They've got to know I won't put up with that shit. And if you want to talk to your friends in Richmond about it, you go right ahead. I don't aim to back down on this one."

He watched Scott weighing his chances. By the downward curve of the guard chief's mouth, he didn't think they were good. Jeff didn't, either. He was sure right lay on his side. And he was in favor inRichmond because of the transport trucks that did more than transport. Put right and favor together and you were pretty hard to beat.

From the way the papers and the wireless news inCovington ,Kentucky , were crowing, Cincinnatus Driver feared that theU.S. offensive inVirginia had come to grief. He didn't completely trust the papers or the wireless; he'd seen they told more lies than a husband coming home with lipstick on his collar and whiskey on his breath. But Lucullus Wood was gloomy, and he had more ways of knowing than what the papers and the wireless said.

Cincinnatus made a habit of visiting Lucullus' barbecue joint every so often. If the police ever asked him what he was doing there, he could truthfully say he was a regular and have witnesses to back him up.

How much good that would do him he didn't know, but it couldn't hurt.

Lucullus often came out from the back of the place and sat with him when he did show up. Cincinnatus got the feeling the cook who was more than a cook was looking for somebody to talk to, somebody who he could be sure wouldn't go to the police with whatever he said.

"Yeah, the USA screwed up," Lucullus said mournfully. "Got over the Rappahannock, but they ain't over the Rapidan yet, an' I dunno if they ever git that far. All depends on how much bleedin' they wanna do."

"Great War was like that," Cincinnatus said after swallowing a bite from his barbecued-pork sandwich.

"This here one wasn't supposed to be. Goddamn Confederates done it right."

"Yeah, well . . ." Lucullus' broad shoulders went up and down in a shrug. "Where they went, they caught the Yankees by surprise. Daniel MacArthur sure didn't surprise them none." He took a swig of coffee, as if to wipe a bad taste from his mouth.

"Too bad," Cincinnatus said: a two-word epitaph for the Lord only knew how many men and how many hopes.

"Uh-huh. You said it. Too bad is right." By the way Lucullus agreed,

his hopes were among those that lay bleeding between the twoVirginia rivers.

Trying to change the subject, Cincinnatus asked, "You ever run across Luther Bliss?"

Lucullus had been raising the coffee cup again. It jerked in his hand--only a little, but Cincinnatus saw.

"Funny you should ask me that," the barbecue cook said. "He come in here the other day."

"Is that a fact?" Cincinnatus said. Lucullus nodded. Cincinnatus wagged a finger at him. "And you called me a liar when I said he was back in town."

Lucullus shifted uncomfortably. "Yeah, well, looks like I was wrong."

"Looks like," Cincinnatus agreed. "What did he want?"

The other man hesitated. Cincinnatus understood that: the less Lucullus said, the less anybody could tear from him. At last, the barbecue cook answered, "He's interested in makin' trouble for folks he don't like an' we don't like."

For the Confederates, Cincinnatus thought. "Do Jesus!" he said, as if astonished such an idea could have crossed Luther Bliss' mind.

Hearing the sarcasm, Lucullus made a sour face. "He want you to know more, I reckon he tell you more his ownself."

That put Cincinnatus in his place, all right. The last thing he wanted was Luther Bliss telling him anything at all. He'd hoped he would never see the secret policeman again. Like so many of his hopes, that one had been disappointed. He changed the subject once more: "You ever find out anything more about them trucks?"

"They usin' 'em in the camps," Lucullus replied. "They usin' 'em to ship niggers between the camps. Now you knows as much as I does." He didn't sound happy confessing his ignorance.

"Well, that explains it, then," Cincinnatus said. It did for him, anyhow. "They use 'em in the camps, they reckon that's important--maybe even important enough to take 'em away from the Army."

"Maybe." But Lucullus sounded deeply dubious. "But what they use 'em

for?"

"You done said it yourself: to ship niggers from one place to the next."

"Yeah, I done said it. But it don't add up, or it don't add up all the way. They already had trucks for that kind o' work. Ordinary Army trucks with shackles on the floor . . . You put a nigger in one o' them, he ain't goin'nowhere till you let him loose. How come they change, then?" Lucullus was as suspicious of change as the most reactionary Freedom Party man.

Cincinnatus could only shrug. "They don't always do stuff on account of it makes sense. Sometimes they just do it for the sake of doin' it, you hear what I'm sayin'?"

"I hears you. I just don't think you is right," the barbecue cook answered. "What the Freedom Party does don't always make sense to us. But it always make sense to them. They gots reasons fo' what they does."

That made sense to Cincinnatus. He wished it didn't, but it did. He said, "But you don't know what those reasons are?"

"No. I don't know. I ain't been able to find out." By the way Lucullus said it, he took not knowing as a personal affront.

Cincinnatus said something he didn't want to say: "You reckon Luther Bliss knows?"

Lucullus started to answer, then checked himself. He eyed Cincinnatus with pursed lips and a slow nod.

"Your mama didn't raise no fools, did she?"

"My mama--" Cincinnatus broke off. What his mother had been bore no resemblance to the husk she was these days.

"I'm sorry 'bout your mama now. That's a tough row to hoe. I didn't mean it like that," Lucullus said.

Cincinnatus made himself nod, made himself not show most of what he was thinking. Lucullus went on, "I ain't talked to Bliss about none o' this business. Didn't cross my mind to. Didn't, but it damn well should have. Reckon I will next time I sees him."

"All right. Meanwhile--" Cincinnatus got to his feet. He was smoother

at it than he had been even a few weeks earlier, and it didn't hurt so much. Little by little, he was mending, but he didn't expect to try out for a football team anytime soon. "Meanwhile, I'll be on my way."

"You take care o' yourself, you hear?" Lucullus said.

"Do my best," Cincinnatus said, which promised exactly nothing. "You be careful, too, all right?"

The barbecue cook waved that aside. "Ain't the time for nobody to be careful. Time to do what a man gotta do. If you ain't a man at a time like this, I don't reckon you is a man at all."

That gave Cincinnatus something to chew on all the way home. It was tougher and less digestible than the sandwich he'd eaten, but it too stuck to the ribs. Three airplanes buzzed high overhead: C.S. fighters on guard against U.S. bombers sneaking over the border by daylight. Bombers mostly came by night, when the danger facing them was smaller. Back East, where defenses were concentrated, day bombing was suicidal. Here, though, the country was wider and airplanes and antiaircraft guns fewer and farther between. Raiders from both sides could sometimes cross the border, drop their bombs, and scoot before the enemy hunted them down.

Cincinnatus always looked both ways before crossing the street. The cane in his right hand and the pain that never went away were reminders of what happened when he didn't. So was the brute fact that he and his father and mother remained stuck inCovington instead of being safe inDes Moines , far away from the war and from the Freedom Party.

"Hello, son," Seneca Driver said when Cincinnatus came in. The older man looked as gloomy as Cincinnatus felt.

"Hello. How's Ma?" Cincinnatus asked.

"Well, she sleepin' right now." His father sounded relieved. Cincinnatus understood that. When his mother was asleep, she wasn't getting into mischief or wandering off. She didn't do anything out of malice, or even realize what she was doing, but that was exactly the problem. Seneca went on, "How is things down to Lucullus'?"

"They're all right." Cincinnatus stopped and did a double take. "How you know I was there?"

"I ain't no hoodoo man. I ain't no Sherlock Holmes, neither," his father said. "You got barbecue sauce on your chin."

"Oh." Cincinnatus felt foolish. He pulled a rumpled handkerchief out of his pocket and dabbed at himself.

Sure enough, the hankie came away orange.

His father said, "Lucullus, he's a pretty smart nigger, same as his old man was. He got one trouble, though--he reckon he so smart, nobody can touch him. Ain't nobody that smart. He gonna pay the price one day. Anybody too close to him gonna pay the price, too."

That sounded much more likely than Cincinnatus wished it did. He said, "I'm bein' as careful as I can."

"Good. That's good." To his relief, his father didn't push it. He just sighed and said, "If Livia hadn't chose that one day to wander off . . ."

"Uh-huh." Cincinnatus nodded. That came close to paralleling the thought he'd had walking home. He managed a shrug. "Ain't nothin' nobody can do about it now."

"Ain't it the truth?" Seneca smiled a sweet, sad smile. "I's sorry you down here. Shouldn't oughta happen on account of our troubles."

"Do Jesus, Pa!" Cincinnatus exclaimed. "If your troubles ain't my troubles, too, whose is they?

Everything shoulda gone fine when I came down. It just . . . didn't, that's all."

"Leastways you ain't got that Luther Bliss bastard breathin' down your neck no more. That's somethin', anyhow," his father said.

"Yeah, somethin'." Cincinnatus hoped his voice didn't sound too hollow. Bliss wasn't exactly breathing down his neck, true. But the former head of the Kentucky State Police hadn't been happy to have Cincinnatus recognize him. Bliss might yet decide dead men couldn't go blabbing to the Confederates.

Cincinnatus didn't know what to do about that. He couldn't hide and he couldn't run.

"Still and all, I reckon you do better goin'to Lucullus' place'n down to the saloon," his father said.

"I'm all grown up, Pa." Now Cincinnatus knew he sounded patient. "And I never knew you was a temperance man."

"Temperance man?" Seneca Driver shook his head. "I ain't. I never was. Don't reckon I ever will be. But I tell you, too many people does too much listenin' at the saloons. Too many people does too much talkin', too, an' a lot of 'em ends up sorry afterwards."

Cincinnatus had had that thought himself. He said, "I never been one to run my mouth, not even when I get liquored up. I don't get liquored up all that often, neither, not even after . . . all this happen." He gestured with his cane to show what he meant.

"All right, son. All right. I's glad you don't." His father raised a placating hand. "But I ain't wrong.

Lucullus watch what goes on in his place for his sake. Some o' the niggers in them saloons, they watch what goes on for the gummint's sake." Cincinnatus was damned if he could tell him he was wrong.

No matter how many strings Colonel Irving Morrell pulled, he couldn't get sent to theVirginia front.

From southernOhio , he listened with growing dismay to the reports of a bogged-downU.S. offensive.

He also listened to them with considerable sympathy. Why not, when he presided over a bogged-down offensive himself? If the War Department had given him enough barrels, he might have accomplished something with them. They hadn't; they'd taken. And he'd accomplished nothing.

"It's enough to drive a man to drink, Sergeant," he told Michael Pound. They hadn't moved from Caldwell. The front a few miles to the west hadn't moved, either. The only thing that had moved was the calendar, and it was not in the USA's favor. The longer the Confederates held their corridor through Ohio, the worse they squeezed the United States.

"Nobody would blame you if it did, sir," Pound answered.

"The War Department would," Morrell said dryly.

"Well, if those idiots in Philadelphia aren't a pack of nobodies, who is?" As usual, Pound sounded reasonable. If you already despised the

powers that be, he could give you more reasons for doing so than you'd thought of yourself.

Morrell laughed. If he didn't laugh, he'd start swearing. He'd already done that a time or six. He didn't think doing it again would help. "You're thoroughly insubordinate, aren't you, Sergeant?"

"Who, me?" Pound might have been the picture of innocence. "I don't know what you're talking about, sir. Have I ever been insubordinate to you?"

"Well, no," Morrell admitted.

"There you are, sir. As long as somebody shows he knows what he's doing, I don't have any trouble with him at all. Some numskull who thinks he's a little tin Jesus because he's got oak leaves on his shoulder straps, now . . ."

"You've taken that thought about as far as it ought to go," Morrell said. Pound had known that for himself, or he wouldn't have stopped where he did. Sometimes a reminder didn't hurt, though. Morrell's principal concern was with numskulls who thought they were big tin Jesuses because they had stars on their shoulder straps. They could do more damage than the ones Pound had named.

Shrugging, the gunner said, "What are we going to do to get this war rolling the way it should?"

By the way he asked the question, he thought he and Morrell could take care of it personally. Morrell wished he thought the same thing. He said, "I'm going to do whatever my superiors tell me to. And you, Sergeant, you're going to do whatever your superiors tell you to. If you'd let me promote you, you wouldn't have so many superiors. Wouldn't you like that?"

"There'd still be too many," Pound said. The only way he would be happy, Morrell realized, was to have no superiors at all. In the military, that wasn't practical. Why not? Morrell wondered. Would he do so much worse than the people we have in charge now? The answer was bound to be yes, but the fact that Morrell could frame the question didn't speak well for what was going on back at the War Department.

Pound took out a pack of cigarettes, stuck one in his mouth, and offered them to Morrell. "Thanks,"

Morrell said. Pound flicked a cigarette lighter. Both men inhaled. Both made sour faces when they did.

Morrell took the cigarette out of his mouth and looked at it. He neighed, suggesting where what passed for the tobacco had come from. Sergeant Pound got a case of the giggles. "Can you tell me I'm wrong?"

Morrell asked him.

"Not me, sir," Pound said. "But we keep smoking them just the same."

"We do, don't we? Bad tobacco's better than no tobacco." Morrell studied the cigarette before he put it back in his mouth. "I wonder what that says about us. Nothing good, probably."

Still puffing on it, he walked towards a barrel whose crew was working on the engine. One of the men in dark coveralls looked up and waved. "I think we've finally got the gunk out of the goddamn carburetor,"

he called.

"Good. That's good." Morrell kept his distance. The barrel crew had the sense not to smoke while they messed around with the engine. That deserved encouragement. He looked out toward the woods that ringedCaldwell . With the leaves off the trees, they seemed much grimmer than they would have in summertime.

Because he was looking out toward them, he saw the muzzle flash. The rifle report came a split second later--right on the heels of the bullet that slammed into his shoulder.

"Oh, shit!" he exclaimed, and clapped his other hand to the wound. Blood dripped out through his fingers. For a couple of seconds, he felt only the impact--as if somebody'd belted him with a crowbar.

Then the pain followed. He howled like a wolf. The next thing he knew, he was sitting on the muddy ground, with no memory of how he'd got there.

"Holy shit! The colonel's down!" Three people said the same thing at the same time. Another shot rang out. This one cracked past Morrell's ear.

Sergeant Pound ran over to him. The gunner grabbed Morrell and

heaved him across his broad back.

Morrell howled again, louder this time--getting manhandled like that hurt worse than getting shot had.

Michael Pound paid no attention to him. He ran for cover, shouting, "Doc! Hey, Doc! Some son of a bitch shot the colonel!"

One more bullet snarled by, much too close for comfort. That's not just somebody picking off whoever he can get, Morrell thought dazedly. He wants my ass. Christ, I wish that's where he'd shot me.

Morrell hadn't thought about the aid station in a while. The medics and the doctor there hadn't had to worry about anything worse than cuts and burns for a bit, not since the plannedU.S. offensive stalled.

They'd probably been playing poker in their tent before Pound burst in, still carrying Morrell. "For God's sake, Doc, patch him up," the gunner panted.

The doctor attached to the force was a New Yorker named Sheldon Silverstein. "Get him on the table,"

he said. The corpsmen obeyed, taking Morrell from Sergeant Pound. Morrell tried to bite down on a shriek as they shoved him around. He succeeded less well than he wished he would have.

Silverstein looked down at him. The doctor settled a gauze mask over his nose and mouth. His eyes were dark and clever. "Morphine," he said, and one of the corpsmen stuck a needle in Morrell.

Silverstein went on, "I'm going to have to poke around in there, Colonel. I'm sorry, but I've got to figure out what's going on."

When he did, pieces of broken bone grated. Morrell tried to rise up off the table like Lazarus. The corpsmen and Michael Pound held him down. He called them and Silverstein every name in the book--and a couple he invented specially for the occasion.

"Smashed up your clavicle, sure as hell," Silverstein said, as if he and Morrell were discussing the weather. "Doesn't look too bad after that--bounced off a rib and exited under your arm."

"Hot damn," Morrell said, or perhaps something rather warmer.

Dr. Silverstein smiled a thin smile. "I'll see how we do," he said. An

ether cone came down over Morrell's face. He feebly tried to pull it off--it reminded him too much of poison gas. Somebody grabbed his good hand. Then the ether took him away from himself.

When he came back to the real world, things hurt less than they had before he went under. He croaked something even he couldn't understand. A corpsman called, "Hey, Doc! He's awake!" The man gave Morrell a small swig of water.

Silverstein looked down at him from what seemed a great height. "How do you feel?" he asked.

"I was born to hang," Morrell said feebly.

"Wouldn't be a bit surprised." Nothing fazed Silverstein--he worked at it. "Can you move the fingers on your right hand?"

"Don't know." As more cobwebs came off his brain, Morrell realized a good many were still there. He tried to move those fingers. The effort made him grunt. "I--think so." He wasn't sure whether he'd succeeded.

But Dr. Silverstein nodded. "Yeah. That means the bullet didn't tear up the nerve plexus in there. You should do pretty well now, as long as you don't get a wound infection."

Even dopey and doped-up as he was, Morrell winced. "Had one of those in the last war. Damn near lost my leg."

"Well, we can do some things this time around they didn't know about then," the doctor told him. "I think you've got a pretty good chance."

"That's nice." Morrell yawned. Yes, he still felt disconnected from the physical part of himself.

Considering what had happened to his physical part, that was just as well. "How long will I be on the shelf?"

"Depends on how you do," Silverstein said, which was no answer at all. He seemed to realize that. "My best guess is a couple of months, maybe a little longer than that. You aren't as young as you used to be."

When Morrell was young, he'd lain in the dust inSonora wondering if he'd bleed to death. Was this an improvement? "Should be sooner," he said, and yawned again. Whatever Dr. Silverstein told him, he didn't hear it.

He woke later with something closer to his full complement of wits. He also woke in more pain, because the morphine they'd given him was starting to wear off. He was in a different place--a real building with walls and a ceiling, not a tent. A corpsman he'd never seen before asked him, "How do you feel?"

"Hurts," he answered--one word that covered a lot of ground.

"I believe it, buddy. Stopping a bullet's no fun at all." The corpsman gave him a shot. "Here you go.

This'll make things better pretty soon."

"Thanks," Morrell said. What was pretty soon to the medic seemed like forever to him. He tried to think, hoping that would distract him from the fire in his shoulder. The fire made thinking hard work, and all he could think about was how he'd got wounded. He was behind the line when he got hit. How had the Confederates sneaked a sniper that far into U.S.-held territory?

After a little while, he realized how might not be the right question. Why had the Confederates sneaked a sniper that deep into U.S.-held territory? The only answer that came to mind was to knock off a certain Irving Morrell. The bastard had been shooting at him--at him and nobody else--even while Sergeant Pound was hauling him to Dr. Silverstein's tent.

It was an honor, of sorts. It was one he would gladly have done without. He tried to move the fingers on his right hand again. When he did, it was as if he'd put a bellows to the fire in his shoulder. The Confederates thought he was dangerous to them, did they? He wondered if the United States were trying to assassinate Confederate officers who'd hurt them. Neither side had fought that way in the Great War.

This time, it looked to be no holds barred.

Little by little, the new shot of morphine sneaked up on him. It built a wall between his wound and the part of him that mattered. It also slowed his thinking to a crawl . . . and that wasn't such a bad thing, either.

Part of Mary Pomeroy was glad to see Alec in kindergarten. It meant she didn't have to keep an eye on him every hour of every day. She'd

almost forgotten what having time to herself felt like. Finding some again was even better than she'd thought it would be.

But, however convenient it was for her, it came at a price. What didn't? In kindergarten and all the years of school that followed, Alec's teachers would do their best to turn him into a Yank, or at least into somebody who thought like a Yank. Some of what they taught him would be small and probably harmless. Would it really matter if he spelled in theU.S. style, writing color for colour and check for cheque? Maybe not. As far as Mary was concerned, though, it would matter a lot if he decided the United States had had right on their side in the War of 1812--or, for that matter, in the Great War.

Her own father had pulled her out of school when he saw what the Yanks were up to. She couldn't do that with Alec. The rules were tighter now than they had been a generation before--and she was in town, not on a farm. If she held him out, she'd draw questions. They'd investigate her. They might look harder at what Wilf Rokeby had claimed about her. She couldn't take the chance. And so Alec went off to school every day, and never knew about his mother's misgivings.

He had none of his own. He loved school. He said over and over that he was the biggest boy in his class, and the toughest. He had fights on the schoolyard, and he won them. Every once in a while, his teacher paddled him. He seemed to take that in stride--part of the price of being exuberant. Mary still sometimes had to whack him to get his attention, too.

"He's a little hell-raiser, isn't he?" Mort said, more proudly than not, one day after Alec came home with a torn shirt and a fat lip.

"Does he take after you?" Mary asked.

"Oh, I expect so," Mort answered. "I got into trouble every now and again. Not a whole lot of kids who don't, are there? Boys, anyway, I mean. Girls are mostly pretty good."

"Mostly," Mary said, and Mort laughed. He didn't know about the bomb she'd put in Karamanlides'

general store, or about the one she'd sent to Laura Moss. She had no intention that he find out, either.

The laugh drew Alec into the kitchen. "What's so funny?" he asked.

"You are, kiddo," Mort said.

"I'm not funny. I'm tough," Alec said.

"You sure are, kiddo," Mort said. "Here--put up your dukes." He and Alec made as if to turn the kitchen intoMadisonSquareGarden .

"You'd better be careful, champ, or he'll knock you out when you aren't looking," Mary said. Alec threw haymakers with wild enthusiasm. Mort caught them with his hands. He didn't let his chin get in the way of one. When Alec stepped on Mary's toes twice in the space of half a minute, she chased him and her husband out of the kitchen. Had she married a different man, she might have threatened him with having to do his own cooking. That didn't work with Mort, though.

"Good chicken," he said once she finally got it on the table. Threats might not work with him, but his compliments counted for more than they would have from a man who didn't know anything about food.

Alec gnawed all the meat off his drumstick, then thumped it against his plate. That was taking the word too literally for Mary. "Cut it out," she said, and then, louder, "Cut it out!" Next stop was a spanking.

Alec knew as much, and did cut it out. His mother sighed. "He is a little . . . what you said earlier."

"A what?" Alec asked. "What am I? I'm a what?"

"You're a what, all right," Mort Pomeroy said. "Try to be a good what, and do what your mother tells you to."

"I'm a what! I'm a what! What! What!" Alec shouted. He liked that so well, he wasn't about to pay attention to anything else.

When supper was done, Mary got up from the table, saying, "I'm going to wash dishes. How would you like to dry them, what?"

The what didn't like that idea at all. He retreated into the living room, where he loudly told the cat what he was. If Mouser was impressed, he hid it very well. Mort said, "I'll dry. I'm less likely to drop things than Alec is, anyway."

"I'm not Alec! I'm a what!" The what, like a lot of little pitchers, had big ears.

Most husbands who volunteered to dry would have got nothing but gratitude from their wives. Mort made Mary feel guilty. She said, "You

mess around with dishes all day long."

"A few more won't hurt me," he said gallantly, and then, lowering his voice, "Besides, maybe we can talk a little without the hell-raiser listening in." Since Alec didn't know he was a hell-raiser, he didn't rise to that.

Mary started running water in the sink. The splashing helped blur their voices. "What's up?" she asked, also quietly.

"They gave Wilf Rokeby ten years," Mort answered as he grabbed a dish towel. "Five for having subversive literature, and five for lying about you and that bomb. He swore up and down that he wasn't lying, but he would, wouldn't he?"

"He knew my father. He remembered what happened to my brother. He thought the Yanks--well, the Frenchies--would believe any old lie about me on account of that." Mary had no trouble sounding bitter.

She was bitter about everything theUSA had done to her family and made it do to itself. That the postmaster was telling the truth was something only he and she knew--an odd sort of intimacy, but no less real for that. In an abstract way, she pitied him. He had to be out of his mind with rage and frustration because he couldn't make anybody believe him.

"He's got a lot of . . . darn nerve, trying to get you in trouble on account of what happened a long time ago." Mort slung a couple of forks into the silverware drawer. He was furious, even if he didn't raise his voice.

"Ten years is a long time. He'll be an old man when he gets out, if he doesn't die in there," Mary said.

Mort slipped an arm around her waist and kissed the back of her neck. "You're a peach, you know that? I want to murder Wilf Rokeby, and here you are sticking up for him after he did his best to ruin you."

He had his reasons, too. The only difference is, I managed to ruin him instead. Mary shrugged. "He didn't. He couldn't. Not even the Frenchies would believe him without evidence, and he didn't have any."

I made sure of that.

"I should hope not!" Mort let his hand rest on the swell of her hip.

She looked back over her shoulder at him. "Sooner or later, you-know-who's got to go to bed." She didn't name Alec, and so he didn't notice that.

"Well, I guess he does." Mort gave her a quick kiss. "I can hardly wait."

To Mary's surprise, Alec didn't stay up too late, or fuss too much about going to sleep. Maybe he'd worn himself out running around at school, or maybe the chasing game he played with the cat--who was chasing whom wasn't always obvious--did the trick. Mort read him a story fromEngland about a talking teddy bear and his animal friends. Even the Yanks enjoyed Pooh; Alec adored him. As usual, he listened, entranced, till the end of the tale. Then he kissed Mort and Mary and went off to his room. Five minutes later, he was snoring.

Those snores brought a particular kind of smile to Mort's face. "Well, well," he said. "What did you have in mind?"

"Oh, I don't know," Mary answered demurely. "I suppose we could think of something, though."

And they did. Mort locked the bedroom door and left one of the bedside lamps on, which made everything seem much more risqué than it did in the usual darkness. Mary wasn't sure whether it would excite her or embarrass her. It ended up doing a little of both. Her nails dug into his back.

Then it was over, and he suddenly seemed very heavy on her. "You're squashing me," she said, sounding

. . . squashed.

"Sorry." He rolled off and reached for a pack of cigarettes on the nightstand. "Want one?"

"No, thanks." Mary had tried to smoke, but didn't care for the burning feeling in her chest. She put on a housecoat, belted it around her, and went into the bathroom to freshen up. When she came back, Mort was blowing smoke rings. She liked that as much as Alec did. It was the one reason she'd ever found that made smoking seem worthwhile.

He went out to the bathroom in a ratty old bathrobe. By the time he got back, Mary had got into a flannel nightgown and bundled under the covers. He put on pajamas and got in beside her. "Time for long

johns soon," he said.

Mary sighed and nodded. "I hate them, though," she said. "They itch."

"Wool," Mort said, and Mary nodded again. He went on, "You need 'em, whether you like 'em or not."

"I know." Mary thought about going out without long underwear when it got down to fifteen below. Even the thought was plenty to make her shiver.

Mort leaned over and gave her a kiss. "Good night. I love you."

"I love you, too," she said, and she did. She yawned, rolled over, twisted once or twice like a dog getting the grass just right, and fell asleep. Next thing she knew, the alarm clock started having hysterics.

Mort killed it. Yawning, Mary went out to the kitchen to make coffee. She would rather have had tea, but it was impossible to come by with theUSA at war withBritain andJapan . Coffee was harsher, but it did help pry her eyes open.

After a hasty morning smooch, Mort hurried across the street to the diner. It was still dark outside; the sun came up later every day. Mary poured herself a second cup of coffee and turned on the wireless.

Pretty soon she'd haul Alec out of bed and start getting him ready for school, but not quite yet. She had a few minutes to herself.

"And now the news," the announcer said. "Confederate claims of victory inVirginia continue to be greatly exaggerated.U.S. forces continue to advance, and have nearly reached the Rapidan in several places.

Further gains are expected."

Mary had been listening to U.S. broadcasters for as long as she'd had a wireless set. By now, she knew what kinds of lies they told and how they went about it. When they said the other side's claims were exaggerated, that meant those claims were basically true. Mary hoped they were. She had no great love for the Confederate States, but they'd never bothered Canada.

"U.S.bombers punished targets inVirginia ,Kentucky ,Arkansas , andTexas in reprisal for the terrorist outrages the Confederates have

inflicted on theUnited States ," the newsman continued. "Damage to the enemy was reported to be heavy, while C.S. antiaircraft fire had little effect."

Again, no details, but it sounded good to anyone who already liked theUSA . Since Mary didn't, she hoped the Yanks were lying again. She expected they were. What else did Yanks do but lie? They'd lied about Alexander, lied so they could line him up against a wall and shoot him.

What goes around comes around, Mary thought. And it hasn't finished coming around yet. One of these days, she would get back to the farm where she'd grown up. Not yet--the time wasn't ripe quite yet. But it would be.

XVII

Robert Quinn looked up from the papers on his desk when Hipolito Rodriguez walked into Freedom Party headquarters in Baroyeca. "Hola, Señor Rodriguez," Quinn said. "I don't often see you except on meeting nights."

"Usually, I am working on the farm during the day," Rodriguez said. "But I've been thinking about what you said about the Confederate Veterans' Brigades."

"Ah. Have you?" Quinn smiled broadly. "I'm glad to hear it, señor. And what have you decided about them?"

"I would like to join," Rodriguez said simply.

"¡Bueno!" Quinn jumped up from his chair and stuck out his hand. He pumped Rodriguez's.

"Congratulations! I think you are doing the right thing for yourself and the right thing for your country."

"For myself, I'm sure I am," Rodriguez replied. "I've studied what the law gives, and it's generous. It gives more than I could make if I stayed on my farm." He knew why that was so, too, though he didn't mention it. The law that set up the Veterans' Brigades was bound to be geared to the richer Confederate northeast. What would have been barely enough to get by on there seemed like a lot more inSonora andChihuahua . He went on, "Do you have the papers I will need to

sign?"

Quinn shook his head. "No. They are not here. You will find them at the alcalde's office. This is a government matter, not a Freedom Party matter."

"What is the difference?" Rodriguez asked, honestly confused.

"Many times, it is not so much," Quinn admitted. "But military affairs--except for the Freedom Party guards--belong to the government, and even the guards end up getting their gear through the Attorney General's office. So yes, you do this there."

"Then I will. Muchas gracias, señor. Freedom!"

Back before the Freedom Party rose to power, the alcalde's office had been a sleepy place. It had been a center of power, yes, but a small one. The dons, the big landowners, were the ones who'd given the orders. But the Party had broken them; Rodriguez had been in a couple of the gunfights that turned the trick. These days, the alcalde and the guardia civil took orders fromHermosillo and fromRichmond , which meant from the Party. If those orders sometimes came through Robert Quinn, they did so unofficially.

All the same, the clerk to whom Hipolito Rodriguez spoke seemed unsurprised to see him. The man had the paperwork ready for him to fill out. He even had a voucher for a railroad ticket, though not the exact date. A telephone call to the train station took care of that. "You leave forTexas day after tomorrow. The train goes out at twenty past ten in the morning. You must be here by then."

"I will." Rodriguez knew the train often ran late. But it didn't always, and he didn't think he could get away with taking a chance here. In the last war, the Army had been very unhappy with people who ran late.

"One other thing," the clerk said. "How is your English? You will have to use it when you go to the northeast."

They'd both been speaking the English-laced Spanish that remained the dominant language in Sonora and Chihuahua. Rodriguez shrugged and switched to what he had of real English: "I do all right. Learn some when I fight before, learn some from niños, learn some from wireless. No is muy good, but is all right."

"Bueno," the clerk said, and then, "That is good." His English was

smoother than Rodriguez's--almost as good as, say, Robert Quinn's Spanish. He went on in the CSA's leading language: "Be on the train, then, the day after tomorrow."

Rodriguez was. His whole family--except for Pedro, who was in Ohio--came with him to the station to say good-bye. He kissed everybody. The train pulled in two minutes early. He'd hoped for more time, but what you hoped for and what you got too often had little to do with each other. He climbed on board, showed the conductor the voucher, and took a seat by the window. He waved to his wife and children till the train chugged off and left them behind.

He hadn't gone this way since he headed off for basic training more than half a lifetime before. He'd been jammed into the middle of a crowded car then, and hadn't had much chance to look out. Now he watched in fascination as the train climbed up through the Sierra Madre Occidental and then down into the flatter country in Chihuahua.

Some Chihuahuans got on the train as it stopped at this town or that one. They and the Sonorans jeered at one another in the same mixture of Spanish and English. To English-speaking Confederates, Sonorans and Chihuahuans alike were just a bunch of damn Mexicans. They knew how they differed, though.

Rodriguez made as if he were playing an accordion. Norteño music, with its thumping, German-based rhythms and wailing accordions, was much more popular inChihuahua than inSonora , though some musicians from the northern part of his state played it, too.

More things than the music changed when the train got into northernChihuahua . Rodriguez started seeing bomb damage. Once, the train sat on a siding for most of a day. Nobody gave any explanations.

The men going into the Veterans' Brigades hadn't expected any--they'd been in the service before, after all. Rodriguez's guess was that the damnyankees had managed to land a bomb, or maybe more than one, on the tracks.

Eventually, the train did start rolling again. When it went over a bridge spanning the Rio Grande between El Paso del Norte and El Paso, it crossed from Chihuahua into Texas. Rodriguez braced himself. So did a lot of the other middle-aged men in the car with him. They weren't entering a different country, but they were coming into a

different world.

Some of the men who got on near the Rio Grande were short and dark and swarthy like most of them, and spoke the same English-flavored Spanish. But some--and more and more as the train rolled north and east--were big, fair, light-eyed English-speakers. They eyed the men already aboard with no great liking. They thought of Rodriguez and his kind as greasers and dagos--not quite niggers, but not white men, either. Rodriguez remembered his soldier days, and threatening to kill a white man who'd called him names once too often. He wondered if he'd have to do it again.

Then one of the Texans peered through bifocals at one of the men who'd got on the train in Chihuahua.

"Luis, you stinking son of a bitch, is that you?"

The other fellow--Luis--stared back. "Jimmy? Sí, pendejo, is me." He got up. The two men embraced and showered each other with more affectionate curses in English and Spanish.

"This little bastard drug me back to our lines after I got hit on a trench raid over in Virginia--drug me on his back, y'all hear?" Jimmy said. "I coulda bled to death or been a prisoner for a coupla years, but he done drug me instead. Doc patched me up, an' I was back in the line in three weeks."

"Then he save me," Luis said in English no better than Rodriguez's. "He--¿como se dice?--he kick grenade away before it go off."

"Hell, I was savin' my own ass along with yours," Jimmy said. "It wasn't nothin' special."

After that, none of the other white men in the car acted rude toward the brown men they rode with.

Rodriguez didn't know what they were thinking. He doubted that had changed much. But so what? A man's thoughts were his own business. What he did, he did in public.

When the train stopped in Fort Worth, the conductor shouted, "All out for guard training here!"

Rodriguez had to push past his seatmate on the aisle. "Excuse, please. Is me." He grabbed his denim duffel bag from the rack above the seats,

slung it over his shoulder, and went up the aisle to the door. A good many others, some brown like him, others ordinary Texans, got out, too.

Stretching his legs on the platform felt good. A man in a uniform of military cut but made from gray rather than butternut spoke in a loud voice: "I am Assault Troop Leader Billy Joe Hamilton. I have the honor and privilege to be a Freedom Party guard. Freedom!" The last word was a fierce roar.

"Freedom!" Rodriguez and his comrades echoed.

Assault Troop Leader Billy Joe Hamilton sneered at all of them impartially, caring no more for white than for brown. "y'all have a lot to learn, and you won't learn some of it till you get to a real camp," he said.

"Come on, now, let's get you off to where you're supposed to be at, get your paperwork all done, and then we'll see what the hell we got in you. Follow me." He did a smart about-face and marched off the platform.

"Ain't it nice they're so glad to see us?" Jimmy didn't bother to keep his voice down. Assault Troop Leader Billy Joe Hamilton's back got even stiffer than it was already; Rodriguez hadn't thought it could.

The Freedom Party guard didn't stop or turn around, though.

Buses waited outside the station. The recruits for the Veterans' Brigades filled two of them. Rodriguez got into the second one. The cloud of black, stinking smoke that belched from the tailpipe of the first almost asphyxiated him. If the Confederate States weren't using it for poison gas, they should have been.

His own bus coughed out the same sort of fumes, but he didn't have to breathe those. Gears grinding, the bus groaned into motion.

Decatur, Texas, was about forty miles northwest of Fort Worth. Getting there took an hour and a half--not bad, not as far as Rodriguez was concerned. The town was bigger than Baroyeca, but not very big. It stood on what the locals called a hill. To Rodriguez, who knew what mountains were supposed to be, it seemed like nothing more than a swell of ground, but he saw no point in arguing.

On the flat land below Decatur stood a compound surrounded by barbed wire. There was a ramshackle barracks hall inside; a guard

tower with a machine gun stood at each corner. The guard towers were manned. Negroes wandered inside the barbed-wire perimeter. Outside the compound were neat rows of butternut tents.

Assault Troop Leader Billy Joe Hamilton said, "This here is Training Camp Number Three. y'all are gonna learn to take care of nigger prisoners by taking care of the stinkin' sons of bitches. Ain't no better way to learn than by doin' what you got to do. Am I right or am I wrong?" When the men didn't answer fast enough to suit him, he donned an ugly scowl. "I said, Am I right or am I wrong?"

He may have a funny rank because he is a Party guard and not a soldier, but he is nothing but a top sergeant, thought Rodriguez, who remembered the breed well. "You are right, Assault Troop Leader!" he shouted along with the rest of the veterans. By the way some of them smiled, they were remembering their younger days, too.

The paperwork was about what Rodriguez expected: fitting pegs into slots. He had to ask for help two or three times; he spoke more English than he read. He didn't feel bad or embarrassed about it. Others from Sonora and Chihuahua were doing the same thing, some more often than he.

He got a gray uniform like Hamilton's but plainer. He got a pair of shiny black marching boots. He got a submachine gun, but no ammunition for it yet. And he got assigned to a cot in one of those tents. His tentmate turned out to be a Texan named Ollie Parker. "You ain't no nigger-lover, are you?" Parker demanded. Rodriguez shook his head. Parker, who'd looked worried, relaxed. "In that case, I reckon we'll get on just fine."

Rain poured from the night sky. Scipio put on his galoshes and his raincoat and took his umbrella out of a wastebasket at the Huntsman's Lodge. He'd get wet walking home anyway. He knew that ahead of time, and knew how inconvenient it was. He also knew he couldn't do anything more than he'd already done.

"See you tomorrow, Xerxes," Jerry Dover said.

"Reckon so," Scipio answered, although, since it was half past one, his boss would really see him again later today.

He slid out the door and started for the Terry. The thick, black clouds overhead only made it darker than it would have been otherwise--

which is to say, very dark indeed. He tried to stride carefully, feeling with each foot as well as stepping. He didn't want to walk off the curb and fall in the gutter or land in a pothole and sprain his ankle.

He'd got almost to the Terry when a flashlight beam stabbed into his face from up ahead. He gasped in surprise and fear. With the raindrops drumming down on his umbrella, he hadn't heard anyone up there.

And, coming out of the gloom, the beam felt bright as a welder's torch.

"What the hell you doin' out after curfew, nigger?" The voice that snapped the question belonged to a white man.

Scipio realized the raincoat hid the tuxedo that told without words what he did. "Suh, I waits table up at de Huntsman's Lodge," he answered. "I jus' git off work a few minutes gone by."

By now, just about every cop in Augusta had stopped him at one time or another. From behind the flashlight, this one said, "Show me you got on your fancy duds under that there raincoat."

"Yes, suh. I do dat." Scipio shifted the umbrella from his right hand to his left and used his right to undo the top couple of buttons on the coat and tug it wide so the policeman could see the wing collar and bow tie beneath it.

"It's him, all right," another policeman said. "I almost blew the bastard's head off a few weeks ago."

Scipio still couldn't see anything but the dazzling beam of light and the raindrops falling through it. He heard more cops muttering agreement. How many were out there? He got the idea there were quite a few.

"Whereabouts exactly you live, uncle?" asked the policeman behind the flashlight.

After giving his address, Scipio buttoned the raincoat to keep out the November chill. "How come you wants to know dat, suh?" he asked. "I ain't done nothin' wrong."

"You're out after curfew. We wanted to jug you, we sure as hell could," the cop said, and the cold of a winter from much farther north took

root in Scipio's vitals. But the white man went on, "You just get your sorry black ass home, then. This here ain't got nothin' to do with you."

"This here what?" Scipio inquired.

"Cleaning out transients and terrorists." Abruptly, the flashlight beam winked out. Green and purple afterimages danced in front of Scipio's eyes. Aside from them, he couldn't see a thing. He'd hardly been able to before, but this was even worse. "Come on through," the policeman told him. "Come on. You'll be fine."

Had he ever heard a white man say something like that before? Maybe, but not for a long time. Since the Freedom Party took over? He wouldn't have been surprised if he hadn't.

And the cop didn't lie. Nothing happened to him when he went by however many white men stood out there in the rain. No colored night runners tried to redistribute the wealth, either. The Negroes had enough sense to stay in where it was dry. Scipio had already unlocked the front door to his apartment building before he started wondering why the police didn't. He shrugged. They'd let him alone. If they got rid of some of the predators who preyed more on their own kind than on whites, he wouldn't shed many tears.

He slipped into bed without waking Bathsheba. He was awakened an hour or so later himself, though, by harsh barks that effortlessly pierced the patter of the rain on the windows. Bathsheba woke, too. "Do Jesus!" she said. "What's that?"

"Guns," Scipio answered, and told her of the policemen in the Terry. He finished, "Reckon some o' dem terrorists an' transients don't fancy gettin' cleaned out."

"How fussy the police gonna be, figurin' out who is one o' them bad folks and who ain't?" his wife asked.

Scipio hadn't thought about that. How often were cops fussy when they dealt with blacks? Not very. But he said, "Dey didn't run me in."

Bathsheba laughed. "Oh, you is real dangerous, you is."

That infuriated Scipio. He brought up the educated white man's voice he hardly ever used: "Once upon a time, more than a few people believed I was."

"Oh." Bathsheba laughed again, this time nervously. "I done forgot

about that."

He returned to the dialect of the Congaree to say, "Somewhere inSouth Carolina is folks who don't never forget." Anne Colleton hadn't forgotten. She might have kept after him if the Yankees' bombers hadn't put an end to her career. She couldn't be the only one in that part of the state who refused to give up the hunt, either.

More gunfire split the night. In spite of it, Scipio yawned. By now, he knew more about gunfire than he'd ever wanted to learn. This wasn't getting any closer. As long as it stayed away, he wouldn't get too excited about it. Gunfire or no gunfire, he fell asleep.

When he woke, watery sunshine was trying to get through the blackout curtains. Bathsheba had gone off to clean white men's houses. Scipio put on dungarees and an undershirt and went out to fix breakfast for himself.

His son was in there washing everyone else's breakfast dishes. Cassius liked that no better than any other thirteen-year-old boy would have, but he did it when his turn came up. He looked back over his shoulder at Scipio. "Noisy in the nighttime," he said.

"Sure enough was," Scipio agreed.

"You know what was goin'on?" By the eager bounce in Cassius' voice, he wished he'd been a part of it, whatever it was. Scipio had named him for the Red rebel who'd led theCongareeSocialistRepublic to its brief rise and bloody fall. This Cassius didn't know to whom he owed the name, but he seemed to want to live up to it.

He also seemed surprised when Scipio nodded and said, "Cops goin'after riffraff in de Terry. You don'

want to mess wid no police. Buckra gots mo' guns'n we. You always gots to, ‘member dat. You ain't right if you is shot." Maybe, just maybe, he could make his son believe it. So many didn't or wouldn't, though, and had to find out for themselves. Whites never tired of teaching the lesson, either.

"What do the ofays call riffraff?" Cassius asked.

"Dunno," Scipio admitted. "Dey reckon I weren't las' night, though. Dey lets me go on pas' 'em to git here. I finds out when I goes to work."

Cassius' expression said being passed like that was cause for shame,

not pride. But he didn't push it, which proved he had some sense, anyhow. Then, as if to show he didn't have much, he said, "I could go out now an' take a look."

"You could stay here, too, and you gwine stay here," Scipio said. "Mebbe still trouble out dere. We already gots enough troubles. Don't need to go lookin' for mo'."

"Nothin' happen to me." Cassius was sure as could be.

"I say you stay here. You hear me?" Scipio sounded as firm and fatherly as he could. Cassius was getting to the age where they butted heads. Scipio knew that sort of thing happened. But he didn't want his son disobeying him here. The way things were in the CSA these days, this was a matter of life and death. Scipio hated clichés. He hated them all the more when they were literally true.

Some of his urgency must have got through to his son, for Cassius nodded. "I hear you,Pa. "

"Good. Dat's good. You is a good boy." As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Scipio hoped they wouldn't make things worse. They might have with him when he was Cassius' age.

When it was time to head for the Huntsman's Lodge, Scipio put on his boiled shirt and black bow tie, his tuxedo jacket and satin-striped trousers. Not trusting the weather, he carried his raincoat and umbrella.

But it was clear and sunny outside. The rain had washed the mugginess out of the air. It was the kind of crisp, cool fall day Augusta didn't get very often. Scipio savored the breeze against his cheek. The only thing he missed was the sharp smell of burning leaves, but after last night's downpour a man would have to drench them in gasoline to get them to burn.

As he usually did, he skirted the bus stop where the auto bombs had gone off. He hadn't gone much farther toward the white part of town when he stopped in astonishment. By the way things looked, the Augusta police hadn't just been after transients and terrorists in their raid the night before. Doors hung open in house after house, tenement after tenement. Not a shop near there was doing business. A stray dog whined and ran up to Scipio, looking for reassurance on the empty, quiet street.

Scipio had none, not for the dog, not for himself. The breeze swung

one of those open doors on squeaky hinges. The small, shrill noise made the black man start violently. "Do Jesus!" he said, and wished he had even a fraction of his wife's faith. "The buckra done clean out dis whole part o' de Terry."

He hurried up into whiteAugusta as if fleeing ghosts. And so he might have been, for there were no living souls to flee in that part of the colored district. No one in the white part of town seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary. The newsboys hawking the Augusta Constitutionalist shouted about the fighting inVirginia , not what had happened here. Scipio bought a copy anyhow. The story had to go in the paper somewhere . . . didn't it?

He found what he was looking for buried near the bottom of page four. It didn't say much: just that theAugusta police had cleaned out some criminals in the Terry. In the course of the investigation, more than a few Negroes were discovered not to possess papers authorizing them to dwell in our fair city, the reporter wrote. They have been removed for resettlement. Some minor resistance was encountered, but soon overcome.

Anyone who'd listened to the gunplay the night before would have known the resistance was more than minor. And anyone who'd walked through that part of the Terry could see the cops had cleared out everybody, not just people without the right stamps in their passbooks. But how many white men were likely to do that? And how many were likely to give a damn if they did?

When Scipio got to the Huntsman's Lodge, he wasn't surprised to find Jerry Dover in a state. "We're missing a waiter, a cook, and a busboy!" Dover exclaimed. "No word, no nothing. They just aren't here.

Three at once! That's crazy."

"Reckon this here gots somethin' to do wid it." Scipio showed him the Constitutionalist.

"Well, shit!"Dover said. "How the hell am I supposed to run a restaurant? Got to get on the phone, get those boys back where they belong." Off he went, to use what pull he and the Huntsman's Lodge had.

Because he was doing that, Scipio hardly even minded the boys. ButDover returned with a fearsome scowl on his face. Pull or no pull, he'd plainly had no luck.

Aurelius nodded to Scipio when they bumped into each other in the kitchen. "I was afraid I wasn't gonna see you no more, Xerxes," the other waiter said.

"I been afeared o' the same thing 'bout you," Scipio answered. They clasped hands. Still here, Scipio thought. We're both still here. But for how much longer, if they start cleaning out whole chunks of the Terry at a time?

"The Star-Spangled Banner" blared from the wireless set in Chester Martin's living room. The announcer said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States!"

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," Al Smith said. It was nine o'clock back East, but only six here in Los Angeles--evening in the autumn, yes, but just barely, especially since summer time stayed in force all year around now that the war was on. The President continued, "Some of the things I have to tell you are less pleasant than I wish they were, but this has never been a country that lived in fear of bad news.

Unlike our enemies, we don't need to lie every time we open our mouths to keep our people in the fight."

At the kitchen table, Carl wrestled with arithmetic homework. To him, that was more important than anything the President had to say. Who was to say he didn't have the right attitude, either? Chester lit a cigarette and held out the pack to Rita. She shook her head. He set the pack on the little table by the sofa.

"Things inVirginia haven't gone as well as we wish they would have," Smith said. "If they had, we'd be inRichmond by now. But we have moved down from theRappahannock to the Rapidan, and we haven't given up. We still hold the initiative."

Chesterblew out a plume of smoke. He'd heard officers talk that way on theRoanoke front in the last war. Add things haven't gone as well as we wish and we haven't given up together, and what did you get? The answer was easier to figure out than Carl's arithmetic problems. What you got was simple--a hell of a lot of dead soldiers.

"I'm not claiming any great victories down there," the President continued. "But we've hurt the Confederate States, and we aim to go right on hurting them. I said when we declared war that they might

have started this fight, but we were going to finish it. I said it, and I meant it, and I still mean it." The jaunty New York rasp in his voice made him sound all the more determined.

He paused and coughed. "There's something else you need to know about, something I wish I didn't have to tell you. It says a lot about the people we're at war with, and what it says isn't very pretty. You may have heard this before, but it's the truth, and not the garbage Jake Featherston puts out with that label on it. Those Freedom Party maniacs and butchers really are massacring Negroes. There's no doubt about it, and they're doing more of it, and worse, than even the Confederates have ever before.

"We know this is true because we have photographs that prove it. Some were taken by Negroes who escaped or who came upon piles of bodies before they were buried. Others were taken by Confederate murderers who were proud of what they did. I know that seems incredible, but it's the truth, too."

Chesterlooked over at Rita. She was also looking his way. Almost at the same time, they both shrugged.

Not many Negroes lived inLos Angeles . Come to that, not many Negroes lived anywhere in theUSA .

Dealing with the ones who'd fledKentucky when it returned to the CSA had stirred enough hard feelings.

He might have been listening to a report about a flood inChina . It was too bad, certainly, but it didn't affect him much.

The President tried hard to persuade him that it did: "We can't let people who do these terrible things beat us. Who knows where they would stop? Who knows if they would stop anywhere? We must show them that no one in the world will tolerate even for a moment the crimes against humanity they are committing. We have to stop them. We have to, and with your help and God's we will. Thank you, and good night."

"That was the President of the United States, Al Smith," the announcer said, as if anyone could have imagined it was, say, the mayor of St. Paul. "We now return you to your regularly scheduled programming." Music came out of the speaker.

"He's done better," Rita said.

"He sure has," Chester agreed. "It was like he was saying things weren't going so well in Virginia, so he'd give us something else to get all hot and bothered about. Except I don't think very many people will start flabbling about this."

"Why should we?" his wife said. "It's going on in another country--and when was the last time you saw a Negro around here, anyway?"

"I don't know. I was trying to think of that myself while he was talking," Chester said. "I couldn't--not right away, anyhow."

"I think there was a colored woman at the grocery store a few weeks ago," Rita said. "But she wasn't buying much. She looked like she was just passing through, not like she really lived around here."

"Once during the last war, I passed a Negro through our lines," Chester said. "I expect he was one of the blacks who rose up against the Confederates a little later on. Served 'em right, the way they treated Negroes even back then."

His wife nodded. "I suppose so. But when the colored people down there keep on fighting against the government, why would anybody think the government would want to give 'em a kiss?"

"Beats me,"Chester said. "The Confederates treat their Negroes like dirt, so the Negroes raise Cain, and that makes the Confederates treat 'em worse. Of course, the Freedom Party would treat 'em bad no matter how they behave--I know that. It's a mess, yeah. But is it really our mess? I don't think so."

Rita nodded again. "That's a better way to put it. It's terrible, like you say, but it isn't really anybody's fault. It's . . . one of those things that happen."

Carl looked up from his homework. "Can I have a snack?" The President might have been talking about the cost of cauliflower for all the attention he'd paid to the speech.

"How much have you done?" Rita asked--Carl had been known not to pay too much attention to the homework, too.

He held up the sheet of cheap pulp paper--so cheap it was closer to tan than white, with little bits of wood that hadn't quite been pulped embedded here and there--he'd folded to make individual squares for all twelve problems. "More than half. See?"

"Have you done them right?" Chester asked. Carl nodded vigorously. "We'll check," Chester warned.

"Arithmetic comes in handy all sorts of places. A builder like me needs it every day. Go on and have your snack--but then finish your work."

"I will, Dad." And, after Chester had inhaled half a dozen chocolate cookies and a glass of milk, he did buckle down. Fortified, Chester thought. His son waved the paper in triumph to show he'd finished.

Rita went over to check it. "This one's wrong . . . and so is this one."

"They can't be! I did 'em right." Carl stared at the paper as if his answers had mysteriously changed while he wasn't looking.

"Well, you can darn well do 'em over," Rita told him. "And you'd better not get the same answers this time, or you'll be in real trouble."

"I'll try." Carl might have been sentenced to ten years at San Quentin. He erased what he'd done and tried again. When he was done, he pushed the paper across the table to his mother. "There."

She inspected the revised problems. "That's more like it," she said. Carl brightened. But she wasn't going to let him off the hook so soon. "If these answers are right, that means the ones you got before were wrong, doesn't it?"

"Uh-huh," Carl said unwillingly.

"How come you didn't get 'em right the first time?"

"I don't know. I thought I did."

" 'Cause you were goofing around, that's why. Are you going to goof around when your teacher gives you a test?" Rita asked. He shook his head. He knew that question had only one safe answer. His mother continued, "You'd better not. I'm going to be looking for that test paper when you come home with it. If you only get a C, I'll make you sorry. And don't think you can hide it from me if you do bad, either,

'cause that won't work. I'll call up Mrs. Reilly and find out what you got. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Mommy," Carl said in a very small voice. Telephoning the teacher was a parent's ultimate weapon.

Kids had no defense against it this side of running away from home.

"All right, then." Rita seemed satisfied that she'd bombed him into submission. "Do you have any more homework?" He shook his head again. She ruffled his hair. "Then go take a bath and get into your pajamas, why don't you?"

A spark of resistance flared. "Do I hafta?"

She ruthlessly squashed it. "Yes, you have to. Go on. Scoot." Routed, Carl retreated to his bedroom.

He came out in pajamas: the garments of surrender.

"Honestly," Rita said after she andChester had played with him and read to him and finally kissed him good night. "Getting him to do anything is like pulling teeth." She scowled atChester . "Why are men always like that?"

"Because women would walk all over us if we weren't," he answered, and tickled her. There was probably something in the Geneva Convention about that, especially since he wasn't ticklish himself, which meant she couldn't retaliate in kind.

They did have a more enjoyable way of unknotting such problems than the earnest diplomats at Geneva had imagined. Afterwards, they both smoked cigarettes. Then Chester turned out the lamp on his nightstand. Rita stayed up a while with a mystery. As he rolled himself into a cocoon of blankets--one more Geneva violation--she said, "You do remember Sue and Otis and Pete are coming over for dinner tomorrow night?"

"I do now," he said, and fell asleep.

He was glad to see his sister and brother-in-law and nephew. Sue had a beaky face much like his.

Where he was going gray, her hair remained a time-defying sandy brown. He suspected a bottle helped her defy time, but he'd never asked. Otis Blake had a wide, perfect part along the top of his head--the scar from a bullet crease. An inch lower and Sue never would have had the chance to meet him. Their son was several years older than Carl.

"I'm working with glass again," Otis said. "When they found out I had

plate-glass experience, they put me on cockpits." Till the war boom started, he'd been in and out of work since coming toCalifornia .

He'd spent years in a plate-glass plant inToledo before the business collapse got him along with so many others.

"Good for you, Otis."Chester meant it. He'd helped out when he could. Otis had done the same for him back in Ohio when Chester lost his steel-mill job there while his brother-in-law still had work.

"You ought to get a war-plant job," Otis said. "I'm making more money than I ever did before."

"I'm doing all right where I am," Chester said. "I like building better than steel, too."

"You're losing money," his brother-in-law declared.

"Not much,"Chester answered. "We're getting raises. The contractors know they've got to give 'em to us, or else we darn well will quit and start making airplanes or shells or whatever else the war needs."

"Before too long, I'll be able to start paying back some of what I owe you," Otis said. "Haven't wanted to show my face around here till I could tell you that."

Chestershrugged. "Hey, I never worried about it. It's not like you didn't carry me for a while. If you can do it without hurting yourself, great. If you can't--then you can't, that's all."

"You're all right,Chester ," Sue said softly.

Framed on the wall of the front room was a note from Teddy Roosevelt hopingChester would recover from his war wound. They'd met on one of TR's tours of the Great War trenches. From that day to this,Chester had never found any words that mattered so much to him. Now maybe he had.

The USS Remembrance lay at anchor off the town ofLahaina on theislandofMaui . The airplane carrier hadn't come back toPearl Harbor after her cruise up to Midway. Somebody with a lot of braid on his sleeves had decided that putting an extra ninety miles or so between the Remembrance and a Japanese attack from the west would help keep her safe. Sam Carsten wasn't completely convinced, but nobody except the sailors in the damage-control party cared about

his opinion.

His boss wasn't thrilled, either. "If they bomb us inPearl Harbor , we sink in shallow water and we're easy to refloat," Lieutenant Commander Hiram Pottinger grumbled at a general-quarters drill. "If they bomb us here, down we go, and they never see us again. There's a hell of a lot of water underneath us."

"If we can figure that out, how come the brass can't?" Szczerbiakowicz asked.

"Beats me, Eyechart," Sam said. "You want stuff to make sense all the time, why the hell'd you join the Navy?"

"You got me there, Lieutenant," the Pole said. "Why the hell did you join the Navy?"

"Me?" Sam hadn't thought about it for a while. "Mostly because I didn't want to walk behind a horse's ass the rest of my life, I guess. My folks had a farm, and I knew that was hard work. I figured this would be better. And it is--most of the time."

"Yeah, most of the time," Szczerbiakowicz agreed dryly. Everybody laughed, not that it was really funny.

You weren't likely to run into dive bombers and battleships and submarines on a farm.

When the all-clear sounded, Sam went up to the flight deck. Destroyers and cruisers flanked the Remembrance to the west; their antiaircraft guns would help defend the vital ship if the Japs figured out she wasn't atPearl Harbor . To the east layMaui . Lahaina had been the capital of theKingdomofHawaii till 1845. It had been a boomtown in whaling days. Now it seemed to have forgotten its lively past, and slumbered the days away--until Navy ships anchored offshore, when it perked up amazingly. Sam had seen the enormous banyan tree in the town square, which had to shade an area a couple of hundred feet across. Any town whose main attraction was a tree wasn't the most exciting place God ever made.

Fighters buzzed high overhead. The Remembrance's Y-ranging antenna swung round and round, round and round. Nobody's going to catch us with our pants down, Sam thought approvingly. But how many carriers did the Japanese have? It was possible--hell, it was easy--to be ready for battle in a tactical sense but to get overwhelmed

strategically.

That thought came back to haunt him at supper. He was halfway through a good steak--he couldn't remember the last time he'd had a better one--when the intercom suddenly announced, "Midway reports itself under attack by Japanese aircraft. The island has launched aircraft along the vector given by the enemy machines. We are proceeding to lend our assistance."

No sooner had the metallic words died away than the engines rumbled to life under Sam's feet.

Somebody down the table from him said, "Godalmighty--we're not wasting any time, are we?"

Commander Dan Cressy had been swearing under his breath. The officer's remark made him revert to straightforward English: "We've wasted more than three hours just by being here instead of inHonolulu .

Now we get to find out how much that costs us."

"We have all the supplies we need, sir?" Sam asked.

"We have enough fuel to get us to Midway, and we have enough aviation gas to fly our airplanes,"

Cressy answered. "What more do we need past that?"

Carsten said the only thing he could: "Nothing, sir." If they had enough fuel to come home from Midway, the exec hadn't said a word about it. He hadn't said anything about food, either. They could get there, and they could fight once they did. Past that . . . well, they could worry about everything else afterwards.

Captain Stein came on the intercom a little later, urging men who weren't on duty to go out on the flight deck and keep an eye peeled for periscopes. "We have fancy new sound gear since the last war," the captain said, "but nothing is perfect. One of you may see something everybody else misses. It's worth a try."

Sam would have gone out anyway. If the Japs were attacking Midway, they might well have sent subs out ahead of their fleet to pick off American reinforcements rushing up from the mainSandwich Islands .

The Remembrance's anchorage off Lahaina might actually have done the ship and its escorts some good.

Submarines would be most likely to prowl the line betweenPearl Harbor and Midway. The carrier and her flanking ships would take a different course.

Several sailors called out alarms. None of them came to anything--all they'd seen was an odd wave or a bird diving into the sea or, once, a spouting whale that had three or four men shouting at the same time.

Some sailors stayed on the flight deck even after the sun went down. That wasn't the worst gamble in the world; a periscope might leave a phosphorescent trail against dark water or might be spotted by moonlight. Sam went over to the wireless shack to see if he could find out what the Remembrance was liable to be walking into. But the yeomen didn't have a lot to say: Midway was under attack from the air, and had launched aircraft against the enemy. That much Sam already knew, and so did everyone else.

The men with the earphones wouldn't tell him on which vector the U.S. airplanes had gone out from Midway. They did allow that no Japanese troops had landed on the low, flat island. That was good news, anyhow.

He decided to hit the sack early. Even at top speed, the Remembrance was a day and a half from Midway. When she got there, she'd be busy. Grabbing what rest he could seemed like a good idea. He had no idea how much that would be. An alert or a real attack might bounce him out of his bunk any old time.

Except for shoes and hat, he slept in his uniform. If he looked rumpled when he got up--well, so what?

To his surprise, he got most of a full night. He woke at 0400, feeling refreshed and ready for whatever lay ahead. He went to the galley for food and coffee. As with sleep, no telling how soon he'd have a chance for more.

Commander Cressy sat there with a steaming mug in front of him. Sam's guess was that he'd had no sleep since the Remembrance set out. The exec nodded to him. "Midway thinks there are three Jap carriers out there," he said, as calmly as if he were talking about shoelaces.

"Three?" Sam made a face. "That's not so good, sir." He filled his plate

with bacon and eggs--real ones, not the powdered kind--and hash browns. "Airplanes from the island do them any harm?"

"They say they did." By Cressy's sour smile, he didn't believe it. After a sip from the thick white mug, he explained why: "The incoming waves haven't stopped, and they aren't getting smaller, either. What does that tell you?"

Sam's smile was sour, too. "No damage to the Jap carriers, sir, or not much, anyway. Uh--where are they?"

"North of Midway, and a little west--about where you'd expect," the exec answered. "Maybe we can give them a surprise. Here's hoping." He raised the mug.

Sam grabbed a nap in the afternoon, and sacked out early in the evening. That proved wise--they went to general quarters about midnight. He ran to his post in his stocking feet and put on his shoes only when he got there. Then it was a long wait for anything to happen. The mess gang brought sandwiches and coffee down to the damage-control party. The men wolfed down the chow.

"Sunday morning," Lieutenant Commander Pottinger said. "I'd rather being going into Lahaina for liberty.

I'd really rather be going into Honolulu for liberty."

"Three weeks till Christmas, too," Sam said. "Well, two and a half weeks, if you want to get fancy."

At just past six, airplanes started taking off from the Remembrance's flight deck. "Must be getting light,"

Pottinger said. Down where they were, day and night had no meaning. He added, "Here's hoping they've got good targets."

An hour and a half went by. The intercom came to life. "Y-ranging gear reports aircraft bound this way, about half an hour out. They are not believed to be friendly. All hands stand by for action."

Not believed to be friendly . . . They were Japs, for Christ's sake!Japan didn't have Y-ranging gear, or theUSA didn't think she did. They'd probably spottedU.S. airplanes coming from the Remembrance or her escorting cruisers and flown along the reciprocal of their courses. That was how the U.S. aircraft from Midway had attacked the Japanese

carriers. However they'd done it, they meant trouble.

Even in the bowels of the carrier, Sam heard the ships around the Remembrance start shooting. Then her guns started banging away, too. Her engines revved up to emergency full. She started twisting and dodging for all she was worth. How much was she worth, though? Compared to an airplane, she might have been nailed to the surface of the Pacific.

A bomb burst in the water nearby, and then another. Szczerbiakowicz worked a set of rosary beads.

Sam wondered if he knew he was doing it. And then a bomb hit near the bow, and he stopped worrying about things that didn't matter. "Let's go!" He and Pottinger shouted it in the same breath.

Another bomb hit, also well forward, as the damage-control crew rushed to do what they could. The engines kept running, which meant they had power for hoses and pumps. "Gotta get the flight deck fixed,"

Pottinger panted while he ran. "If our aircraft can't land and take off, we're screwed."

Then a bomb hit near the stern, and all the fire alarms started going off. That was where they stored the aviation fuel. Ice ran through Carsten. They were liable to be screwed any which way.

When he got up on deck, he saw they were. The two hits at the bow were bad enough. The Remembrance didn't have enough steel plates to cover those gaping gaps. But the fierce flames leaping up through the hole in the stern were ten times worse. If they didn't get a handle on that fire right now, it would roar through the whole ship.

Sam grabbed a hose, careless of Japanese fighters whizzing by low overhead and spraying the flight deck with machine-gun bullets. "Come on!" he shouted to a couple of his men, and ran back toward the flames.

But even high-pressure seawater at a range close enough to blister his face wasn't enough to douse that inferno, or to slow its spread very much. "Back!" somebody shouted. Sam ignored him. Then a hand grabbed his arm. He shook it off. "Back, Lieutenant Carsten! That's an order!" He turned his head. There was Commander Cressy. Even as Sam started to yell a protest, the pressure in the hose went from high to zero. "You see?" the exec said grimly. "We aren't going to save her. The abandon-ship order went out five minutes ago."

"It did?" Sam stared in amazement. He'd never heard it.

"Yes, it did. Now come on, God damn your stubborn, two-striped squarehead soul, before you cook."

Only when Sam was bobbing in the Pacific did he realize he'd also been promoted. A j.g. was addressed as a lieutenant, yes, but wore only one and a half stripes. Carsten grabbed a line flung from a surviving destroyer. Five minutes after he'd clambered up onto her deck, the Remembrance went to the bottom. He burst into tears.

"Mail call!"

That was always a welcome sound. Dr. Leonard O'Doull looked up from the little chessboard over which he and Granville McDougald sat hunched. "I resign, Granny," he said. "You'd get me anyway."

"Quitter," McDougald said. "You're only down two pawns."

"Against you, that's plenty." O'Doull won some of the time against the other man. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have kept playing him. But if McDougald got an edge, he wasn't the sort to give it up. "Besides, mail's more interesting."

"For you, maybe." McDougald had been in the Army a long time. He didn't have anybody on the outside who wrote him very often. This was his life. To O'Doull's way of thinking, it wasn't much of a life, but Granny didn't lose sleep over what he thought.

Eddie carried a fat wad of envelopes into the tent. "Got three for you, Doc," the corpsman said. "One for you, too, Granny." He passed the rest out to the other medics.

"Holy Jesus," McDougald said. "Somebody must have decided I owe him money." He opened the envelope, unfolded the letter inside, and sadly shook his head. "See? I knew it."

"What is it really?" O'Doull asked. His letters stood out from the rest. They bore bright red stamps from theRepublicofQuebec . These all showed General Montcalm fighting bravely against the British during the French and Indian War. His bravery hadn't done him a damn bit of good. He'd lost and got killed, and Quebec had spent the next century and a half as a sometimes imperfectly willing part of British-created Canada.

"Letter from an old-maid cousin of mine in Pittsburgh," Granville McDougald answered. "She complains about everything to everybody, and my number happened to be up. Prices are too high, and there isn't enough of anything, and bombers are annoying when they come over, and why don't I fix all of it?

Trudy's kind of stupid, but she makes up for it by being noisy."

"Er--right." O'Doull recognized Nicole's handwriting on his envelopes. He made sure he opened the one with the earliest postmark first. By now, he was so used to English that he had to shift gears to read his wife's French.

Unlike McDougald's cousin, Nicole had better sense than to complain about how things were back in Rivière-du-Loup. Since Pittsburgh was getting bombed, Cousin Trudy had some right to complain--but not to a man who saw at first hand what war did every day and who had to try to repair some of the damage.

Keeping track of her two brothers and three sisters and their families let Nicole ramble for a page and a half before she even got around to town gossip. O'Doull soaked it all in; it had been his life, too, ever since the Great War. Who was putting on airs because she'd got a telephone and who'd knocked over a mailbox because he'd taken his Buick out for a spin while he was drunk was big news in Rivière-du-Loup.

And Lucien sends his love, Nicole wrote. He is home for the holidays from the university, and says he did well on his examinations. O'Doull read that with relief. His son wasn't always an enthusiastic student, and had dawdled a good deal on his way to a bachelor's degree. That he was going to college at all made him an object of wonder to his throng of cousins.

The other two letters had much the same theme. Only the details changed, and not all of them: Jean Diderot had assassinated another mailbox by the time Nicole finished her last letter. Someone should take away his keys before he hurts a person instead, she wrote indignantly. O'Doull was nodding as he read. He'd patched up plenty of drunks and the people they hit--that wasn't quite so bad as battle damage, but it came close.

"I wish I were back there," he said.

"It's your own damn fault that you're not, Doc," Granville McDougald said. "See what you bought for volunteering?"

"You should talk," O'Doull retorted. "How long have you been doing this?"

"A while," McDougald allowed. "I hope your news is better than what's coming out of the Pacific."

"It is, yeah," O'Doull said. "We hurt the damn Japs, anyhow. We sank one of their carriers and damaged another one."

"But they got the only one we had out there, and they got their people ashore on Midway, and that's what counts," McDougald said. "Now they're the ones who can build it up, and we'll have to worry about getting things through to Oahu. We can't send a carrier with our ships for protection till we build more or pull one out of the Atlantic and send it around the Horn."

"If we pull one, that makes things tougher against England and France and the CSA," O'Doull pointed out.

"I didn't say it didn't," McDougald answered. "But we can fly airplanes out of Honolulu and we can fly them out of San Francisco, and there's still that space in between that neither bunch can really cover. And if I can figure that out from the map, you bet your ass some smart Jap admiral can do the same thing and stick a carrier up there somewhere to make our lives difficult."

"Makes sense," O'Doull said. "That doesn't mean it's true, mind you, but it makes sense." He hesitated, then went on, "Hey, I've got one for you, Granny."

"Shoot," the medic told him.

"What do you think about what Smith said on the wireless a little while ago--about the Confederates slaughtering their Negroes, I mean?"

Granville McDougald frowned. "Well, I don't know. In the last war, the limeys told stories about how the Germans marched along with Belgian babies on their bayonets, called 'em Huns, and that was a crock of shit. I figure it's about even money that he's trying to whip things up on the home front because the offensive inVirginia isn't going the way he hoped it would. The Confederates are bastards, yeah, but are they crazy bastards?"

"Featherston is," O'Doull said, to which McDougald only grunted.

O'Doull added, "Smith said he had photos. The limeys never said that about the Germans."

"I haven't seen any photos." McDougald shrugged. "Come to think of it, that Congresswoman--you know, the one who was poor damned Blackford's wife--said she had photos. I didn't see those, either. I wonder if they're the same ones. Till I see the evidence with my own eyes, I'm going to keep this one in the, 'not proven' column."

"All right." O'Doull had trouble quarreling with that, even though he wanted to. As far as he was concerned, Jake Featherston should have been locked up in a loony bin instead of running a country. He struck O'Doull as nuttier than a three-dollar fruitcake, and he'd driven the Confederate States nuts along with him.

Up at the front, several machine guns started stuttering. Everybody in the tent with the Red Crosses on it swore with varying degrees of imagination. It had been quiet up there for a while. The weather'd been nasty, and both sides were throwing most of their energy into the fighting back East. But now one side or the other had put on a raid--or maybe somebody'd just imagined he'd seen something and opened up on it, which made everybody else open up, too.

"Come on," Eddie told the other corpsmen. "We better shag ass up there. Sure as hell, somebody's gonna be bleeding." Off they went.

"You and me," Granville McDougald said to O'Doull.

"Let's hope it stays that way," O'Doull answered. "My best kind of day here is one where I don't do a goddamn thing."

But the first casualty came back about ten minutes later. He got there under his own power, clutching a wounded hand. Trying to encourage him, McDougald said, "It could have been worse--it could have been the other one."

"Screw you," the soldier said. "I'm a lefty."

"Let's get him under, Granny," O'Doull said. Looking as nonplused as O'Doull had ever seen him, McDougald nodded. Because it was the man's skilled hand, O'Doull took special pains to do the best job of patching it up he could. With so many bones and tendons in the palm smashed up, though, he didn't know how much use the soldier would have when he recovered. Hope for the best, he thought.

"That's very neat work, Doc," McDougald said when O'Doull finished

at last. "I'm not sure I could handle anything that delicate myself."

"Nice of you to say so," O'Doull answered. "I don't know what kind of result he'll get out of it, though.

He'll just have to wait and see how he heals." O'Doull himself would probably never find out; the wounded man would be sent farther back of the line as soon as possible.

He and McDougald dealt with three more wounded soldiers in the course of the afternoon, none of them, luckily, with life-threatening injuries. Knowing someone would come back to something approaching full health once he recovered was a good feeling. For a day, at least, O'Doull could pretend he'd won a round against death.

Darkness fell early--not so early as it would have up in Rivière-du-Loup at this season of the year, but early enough. The gunfire died away to occasional spatters. It had never been a full-strength exchange; neither side brought barrels and artillery into it. That strengthened O'Doull's impression that the firefight had started more by accident than for any real reason.

He was spreading a can of deviled ham over a couple of crackers when a runner stuck his head into the tent. He wasn't a man O'Doull remembered seeing before. "Get ready to shut this place down," he announced. "Whole division's pulling out of the line here and heading forVirginia ."

"Jesus!" O'Doull exclaimed. "Nice to give people a little warning, isn't it?"

"You've got a little warning, sir," the runner answered. "This is it." He wasn't even sarcastic. He meant it.

As far as O'Doull was concerned, that made things worse, not better.

"Who's taking our place?" Granville McDougald asked.

"Two regiments from a new division--the 271st," the runner said. Two regiments from a full-strength division would match the number of effectives facing the Confederates, all right. Even casual firefights like the one earlier in the day caused casualties, and they happened all the time.

"Why didn't they ship the 271st toVirginia ?" O'Doull asked bitterly.

The runner didn't answer that.

O'Doull had no trouble finding his own answers. The obvious one was that they wanted to send veteran troops up against the Confederate defenders. That was a compliment of sorts, but one O'Doull could have done without. If they kept feeding veteran units into the sausage machine, they wouldn't have any veteran units left before too long.

Nobody cared about a Medical Corps major's opinion. He looked at McDougald. The Army medic shrugged and said, "Looks like we've got to take care of it. I hear Virginia is really shitty this time of year."

"Wouldn't be surprised," O'Doull agreed. But the other man was right--they had to take care of it.

And they did. It wasn't as if they had no practice moving the aid station; they'd done it whenever the front went forward or back. They weren't doing it under fire this time, and, though it was chilly, it wasn't raining. Things could have been worse. The medics bitched, but O'Doull would have thought something was wrong with them if they hadn't. He bitched, too; he didn't like climbing into a truck at two in the morning any better than anybody else. Like it or not, he did it. The truck jounced off down a road full of potholes. He was leaving the war behind--and heading straight towards it.

George Enos, Jr., slung his duffel bag over his right shoulder. Leaning to the left to balance the weight, he strode up the Boston Navy Yard gangplank to the USS Townsend. He felt good about coming home toBoston to get a ship, and felt even better to have a ship at last.

When he stepped from the gangplank to the destroyer, he saluted the colors and the officer of the deck and said, "Permission to come aboard, sir?"

"Granted," the OOD said, returning the salute. "And you are . . . ?"

"Seaman George Enos, Junior," George said, and rattled off his pay number.

"Enos." The OOD looked down at his clipboard and made a checkmark. "Yeah, you're on the list.

Specialty?"

"Antiaircraft gunnery, sir."

The young j.g. wrote something beside his name. "All right. Gather with the other new fish there, and one of our petty officers will take you to your bunk."

"Thank you, sir." About a dozen men stood by the rail. Some were raw kids. Others, like George, had been around the block a few times. Two or three of them had good-conduct hashmarks on their sleeves that spoke of years in the Navy. Part of George felt raw when he saw those. Telling himself he'd been going to sea for years helped some, but only some.

Five or six more men came aboard after him. The OOD stared down at his clipboard and muttered to himself. George didn't need a college degree to figure out what that meant: a few sailors hadn't shown up.

They were probably out drunk somewhere. George didn't know just what the Navy did to you for missing your ship. He didn't want to find out, either.

Finally, still muttering, the officer of the deck called, "Fogerty! Let's get this show on the road. If they show up, they show up. If they don't . . ."--he muttered some more, grimly--"it's their funeral."

"Aye aye, sir." Fogerty was a CPO with a big belly and an impressive array of long-service hashmarks.

He glowered at the new men as if they were weevils in the hardtack. "Come on, youse guys. Shake a leg."

The Townsend was larger and bound to be faster than the Lamson, the Great War relic on which George had trained. She was every bit as crowded as the training ship, though: with her bigger displacement, she carried more weapons and more men. They ate up the space.

George's bunk turned out to be a hammock. He did some muttering of his own. What fun--he could sleep on his back or fall on his face. And he lay on his belly when he had a choice. No help for it, though.

If he got tired enough, he'd sleep if he had to hang himself by his toes like a bat.

"Youse guys know your way around?" Fogerty asked, and then answered his own question: "Naw, of course youse don't. Come on, if you want to after you all get your bunks, and I'll give youse the tour."

When George accompanied him, he got more than he'd bargained for. Fogerty prowled from bow to stern and from the Y-ranging antenna down to the bilges. George hoped he would remember everything he'd seen.

One thing he made sure he'd remember was the OOD reaming out a hung-over sailor who'd shown up later than ordered. He didn't want that happening to him. And at least one man was still missing, because the officer had spoken of they to Chief Fogerty.

With or without the missing man or men, the Townsend sailed that afternoon. The Lamson's engines had wheezed. These fairly thrummed with power. Asking one of the men who'd been aboard her for a while, George discovered that she was rated at thirty-five knots, and that she could live up to the rating. The training ship had been a tired old mutt. This was a greyhound.

He got assigned to an antiaircraft gun near the Townsend's forward triple five-inch turret. They made him an ammunition passer, of course; men with more experience held the other positions, all of which took more skill. A shell heaver just needed a strong back--and the guts not to run away under attack.

They steamed south. Men not on duty stood at the rail. Some were watching for submersibles. Others were just puking; theAtlantic in December was no place for the faint of stomach. George took the heaving sea in stride. He'd known plenty worse, and in a smaller vessel.

"Not sick, Enos?" asked the twin 40mm's loader, a hulking kraut named Fritz Gustafson.

"Nah." George shook his head. "I was a Boston fisherman since before I had to shave. My stomach takes orders."

"Ah." Gustafson grunted. "So you're a sailor even if you're not a Navy man." He let out another grunt.

"Well, it's something."

"Sure as hell is." The gun chief was a petty officer called Fremont Blaine Dalby--he described himself as a Republican out of a Republican family. With most of the USA either Socialist or Democrat, that made him a strange bird, but he knew what he was doing at the gun mount. Now he went on, "There's guys who've been in since the Great War who still lose their breakfast when it gets like this. North

Atlantic this time of year ain't no joke."

"That's the truth. I've been on a fewNantucket sleigh rides myself." George had been on more than a few, riding out swells as high as a three-story building. He didn't want to brag in front of men senior to him, though. They were liable to make him pay for it later. That turned out to be smart, as he found out when he asked, "You know where we're headed?"

Dalby and Gustafson both stared at him. "They didn't tell you?" Dalby asked.

"Nope. Just to report aboard."

Fritz Gustafson grunted again. "Sounds like the Navy, all right. We're heading for the Sandwich Islands.

We get to go around the Horn. You think the waves up here are bad? The ones down there make this look like a dead calm."

Now it was George's turn to grunt. He'd heard stories about going around the Horn--who hadn't? "Have to see what that's like," he said. "I've been east a ways, but I haven't been south."

"So you're a polliwog, are you?" Gustafson asked with a cynical laugh. Enough fishermen came out of the Navy and had crossed the Equator to let George know what that meant. He nodded. Gustafson laughed again. "Well, you'll get yours."

"Rounding the Horn shouldn't be too bad," Dalby said. "It'll be summer down there, or what passes for it. Going through in winter is worse. Then it's just mountains of water kicking you in the teeth, one after another after another."

"People have been talking about a canal through Central America damn near forever," Gustafson said. "I wish they'd finally get around to building the fucker."

"Yeah, but who'd run it?" George said.

Gustafson and Dalby looked at each other. "He's no dope," Dalby said. No doubt it was possible to build a canal throughColombia 's upper neck or throughNicaragua . TheUSA and the CSA had both examined the project. Each had threatened war if the other went ahead with it. It might have happened after the Great War, when the Confederate States were weak, but the United States had been putting themselves

back together then, too. And after the bottom fell out of the economy, nobody'd had the money or the energy for a project like that.

The Townsend joined three more destroyers and a heavy cruiser that came out of New York harbor.

The flotilla also picked up a pair of oilers from Philadelphia. The ships would have to refuel before they swung around the southern tip of South America. The Empire of Brazil was technically neutral, but wasn't friendly, not when it was getting rich off fees from Argentine, British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese freighters hauling beef and wheat through its territorial waters for the dash across the Atlantic to Dakar in French West Africa. There were no guarantees that U.S. ships would be able to top off there.

My father went this way, George thought. He didn't go around the Horn--I don't think he did, anyhow--but he was here before me. He nodded to himself. I'll pay 'em back for you, Pa.

"Gonna be a little interesting, sliding past Bermuda and the Bahamas," Dalby said. "Yeah, just a little.

How many ships and patrol airplanes do the limeys and the Confederates have?"

George's father hadn't had to worry about airplanes, or not very much. Warships were terribly vulnerable from the air. The loss of the Remembrance drove that home, in case anyone had forgotten.

"What do we do if they spot us?" George asked.

Fremont Blaine Dalby let his hand rest on the right barrel of the twin 40mm. "Why, then, we give 'em a big, friendly hello and we hope for the best," he said. "That's why we're here, Enos--to make sure they get that big hello."

"Right," George said, as nonchalantly as he could. The rest of the men in the gun crew laughed at him.

He kept his mouth shut. He knew they'd go right on laughing till he showed what he was worth. He'd had the same thing happen the first time he went out on a fishing run--and, in the days since, he'd jeered at other first-timers till they showed they were worth something.

As the flotilla went down pastMaryland andDelaware toward Virginia and the CSA, it swung ever farther from shore, both to avoid

Confederate patrol aircraft and to take a course halfway between theBahamas andBermuda . The men on the hydrophones worked around the clock. Sailors stayed on deck whenever they could, too, watching for death lurking in the ocean.

They ran between the enemy's Atlantic outposts on a dark, cloudy midnight. No bombs or bullets came out of the sky. No torpedoes slid through the sea. The farther south they went, the calmer that sea got, too. That mattered less to George than to some afflicted with seasickness, but he didn't enjoy swinging in his hammock like a pendulum weight when the rolling got bad.

Not that he was in his hammock when the Townsend ran the gauntlet. He stayed at his battle station through the long night. When the east began to lighten, Fritz Gustafson let out a long sigh and said, "Well, the worst is over."

"May be over," Fremont Dalby amended.

"Yeah. May be over." Gustafson pointed up to the gray sky. "Long as the ceiling stays low like this, nothing upstairs can find us."

Having been shot up aboard the Sweet Sue, George wouldn't have been sorry never to see another airplane carrying guns. He said, "Which means all we've got to worry about is submarines. Oh, boy."

"We can shoot subs, or drop ashcans on 'em, or even run away from 'em if we have to," Dalby said.

"Can't run from a goddamn airplane--looks like that's the number one lesson in this war so far."

Gustafson shook his head. "Number one lesson in this war so far is, we should've been ready for it five years before it started. And we weren't. And we're paying for it. We ever make that mistake again . . ."

He spat over the rail.

"But Featherston's a nut," George said. It wasn't quite a protest. He answered himself before the others could: "Yeah, I know. It's not like he didn't advertise." Dalby and Gustafson both nodded. George sighed. The Townsend steamed south.

XVIII

The wind that roared down onProvo ,Utah , felt as if it had started somewhere inSiberia . Snow blew almost sideways. Armstrong Grimes huddled behind a wall that blocked the worst of it. Most of the house of which the wall had been a part had fallen in on itself. Armstrong turned to Sergeant Stowe and said, "Merry Christmas."

Rex Stowe needed a shave. So did Armstrong, but he couldn't see himself. Snowflakes in the other man's whiskers gave him a grizzled look, old beyond his years. Armstrong sure as hell felt old beyond his.

Stowe said, "The fuck of it is, it is a merry Christmas. Goddamn Mormons aren't shooting at us. Far as I'm concerned, that makes it the best day since we got to this shitass place."

"Yeah." Armstrong cupped his hands and lit a cigarette. Arctic wind or not, he got it going first try. He hardly even noticed the blasphemy and obscenity with which Stowe had decked the day of Jesus' birth.

He would have done it himself had the other noncom given him a Merry Christmas before he spoke. He said, "Nice to have a smoke without worrying some sniper'll spot the coal and blow my head off."

"Uh-huh." Stowe nodded. "Truce looks to be holding pretty good. If the Mormons want to make like they're holier'n we are 'cause they proposed it, I don't care."

"Me, neither," Armstrong said. "Amen, in fact."

He could even stick his head up over the wall without worrying about anything more than wind and snow. He could, but he didn't. He knew what the rest ofProvo looked like: the same sort of lunar landscape as the part the U.S. Army had already clawed away from the rebellious Mormons.

His old man had talked about how the truce in 1914 almost knocked the war into a cocked hat. At Christmas the next year, both sides had fired endless artillery salvos to make sure it didn't happen again.

The truce here wasn't anything like that. As soon as the clock hit 12:01 a.m., both sides were going to start banging away at each other again. The only thing either felt for the other was hatred--that and, possibly, a wary respect.

And then that howling wind brought something strange with it: the sound of men singing carols. When Army chaplains talked about the Mormons at all, they insisted the folk who liked to call this

placeDeseret weren't really Christians. They tried to make the fight sound like a crusade.

Armstrong had never paid much attention to that. He didn't feel like a knight in shining armor. He was filthy and fleabitten and probably lousy again. If they would have put him on a train and shipped him home, he wouldn't even have turned around to wave good-bye. He was here because the Army told him to be here and would shoot him if he bailed out, not because he thought God willed it. God was bound to have better things to do with His time.

But hearing "Silent Night" and then "O Little Town of Bethlehem" gave him pause. "Reminds me of the days when I was a kid and I'd go caroling in the streets," he said.

"You did that?" Stowe said. "I did, too. I guess there aren't a hell of a lot of people who didn't--except for sheenies, I mean."

"Well, yeah, sure," Armstrong said, thinking of Yossel Reisen. "But I didn't think these Mormon bastards had the same songs ordinary people do."

As if to prove him wrong, the men who'd been trying to kill him sang "The Twelve Days of Christmas"

and "Deck the Halls" and "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." They were pretty good. Armstrong wondered if any of them belonged to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. It had come back to life the minute Mormonism turned legal again, even before the Mormon Tabernacle was rebuilt. By now, Armstrong was willing to bet U.S. bombers had knocked the Tabernacle flat again.

How long would it be before the Army fought its way into Salt Lake City for a firsthand look?

Armstrong wished he hadn't had that thought. It led to too many others. Chief among them were, How many men will get shot between Provo and Salt Lake? and Will I be one of them? He'd stayed lucky so far. How long could it go on?

Somebody behind Armstrong--a U.S. soldier like him--started singing "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful." He and Stowe both joined in at the same time. He hadn't sung carols in years, and he'd never had what anybody would call a great voice. He sang out anyhow, for all he was worth. It felt good.

He wondered if the Mormons would try to outshout their enemies. They could do it; they had that howling wind at their backs. Instead, they joined in. Tears stung his eyes and started to freeze his eyelashes together. He rubbed at his eyes with his knuckles. He would have been more embarrassed if the hard-bitten Stowe weren't doing the same thing.

Both sides caroled for half an hour or so. When the singing ended, they gave each other a hand.

Armstrong didn't mind clapping for the Mormons. It was Christmas, after all. And he knew it didn't truly mean anything. The war might hold its breath, but it wouldn't go away.

Somebody from the other side of the line called, "You guys sing like you're nice people. Why don't you ever just leave us alone to do what we want?" He didn't even drawl, the way Confederate soldiers did.

He sounded like anybody else: he had a vaguely Midwestern accent like half the guys in Armstrong's platoon. That made Mormons deadly dangerous infiltrators. It also made their uprising harder for Armstrong to fathom. They seemed like people no different from anybody else. They seemed like that--but they weren't.

"Why don't you stay here in the USA where you belong?" someone on the U.S. side yelled back.

That brought angry shouts from the Mormons--so angry that Armstrong looked to make sure he could grab his Springfield in a hurry. The truce felt on the edge of falling apart. He also found out a few things he hadn't known before. Nobody'd ever told him the Mormons had come to Utah before the First Mexican War exactly because they'd wanted to escape the USA even back then, only to find themselves under the Stars and Stripes again whether they wanted to be or not.

"Jesus," Stowe said: an appropriate comment on the day. Less appropriately, he went on, "These assholes have wanted to secede even longer than the goddamn Confederates."

"Yeah, well, how can they?" Armstrong asked. "They're right here in the middle of us. You can't make a country like that. Besides, they're a bunch of perverts. They ought to straighten out and fly right."

"Tell me about it," Stowe replied with a filthy leer. But then, as the shouting went back and forth between the lines, he added, "I wish to

God they weren't shooting at us. Then we could make a couple of Mormon divisions and throw 'em at Featherston's fuckers. That would use 'em up in a hurry." He chuckled cynically.

"Maybe not. They might just mutiny and go over to the CSA," Armstrong said.

Stowe grunted. "You're right, dammit. They might. Plain as the nose on your face the Confederates are giving 'em as much help as they can."

In the end, nobody on either side started shooting in spite of the curses that flew back and forth. It stayed Christmas to that extent, anyhow. And Armstrong went back to the field kitchen without worrying about Mormon snipers. The cooks served ham and sweet potatoes and something that was alleged to be fruitcake but looked as if it came from a latrine. It did taste all right, and it gave the soldiers the chance to razz the cooks. They always liked that.

Once they returned to their positions at the front line, Stowe pulled a flask from his jacket pocket. He brought it to his mouth, then passed it to Armstrong. "Here. Have a knock of this."

"Thanks." Armstrong swigged, trying not to be too greedy. Brandy ran down his throat, smooth as a pretty girl's kiss. "Where'd you come up with this shit? Damn Mormons aren't supposed to have any."

"Musta been a gentile's house," Stowe said.

"Hope the Mormons didn't poison it and leave it for us," Armstrong remarked.

Stowe gave him the finger. "There's a hell of a thing to go and say. I've had hooch poison me a time or three, but I haven't got enough in here for that."

Armstrong did his best to look worldly-wise. He'd done some drinking in the Army, but hardly any before. His folks would take a drink every now and then, but they didn't make a big thing out of it. His father would have walloped the tar out of him if he ever came home smashed. As for the swig of brandy the sergeant had given him, it sent a little warmth out from his stomach, but otherwise left him unpoisoned.

He rolled himself in a down-filled quilt. That was a bit of his own war booty, and a hell of a lot warmer than an Army-issue wool blanket. He

used the folded-up blanket for a pillow. As he fell asleep, he wondered when he'd last lain in a real bed. It had been a while.

Some time in the middle of the night, he woke up. There were occasional flurries of gunfire, nothing to get excited about. If he'd let stuff like this bother him, he wouldn't have been able to sleep at all near the front. Only after he'd wiggled around for a little while did he think, Oh. It must be after midnight. Then he went back to sleep. If the shooting picked up, he knew he'd wake again.

What happened instead was that Sergeant Stowe shook him awake. The sun still hadn't come up, but the sky behind the mountains to the east was beginning to go gray. "Welcome back to the war," Stowe said.

"Screw the war." Armstrong yawned. "Screw you, too."

"I don't want you. I want a blonde with big tits," Stowe said. "Only trouble is, the gals like that carry rifles around here. They'd sooner blow my brains out than blow me."

As it got lighter, bombers came overhead and started pounding the parts of Provo the Mormons still held. The bombers were not only outmoded but flying above the clouds. Thanks to both those things, they weren't the most accurate bombing platforms God or U.S. factories had ever made. Some of the bombs came down on the U.S. side of the line.

The handful of Mormon antiaircraft guns banged away at the bombers overhead. Firing blind, they didn't have much hope of hitting them. All the same, Armstrong--who'd got dirt down the back of his neck from a near miss by his own side--snarled, "I hope they shoot those fuckers down."

"Bet your ass," Stowe said. "Goddamn bombers can't hit the broad side of a barn."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Armstrong said. "If they're aiming at us, they're pretty good shots."

"Ha! That'd be funny if only it was funny, you know what I mean?"

"Hell, yes," Armstrong said. "If I ever run into one of those flyboys, I hope I come as close to killing him as he just came to killing me."

"Yeah! That's good!" Stowe said. "If I run into one of 'em, I think I would kill him. It's what he was trying to do to me. Only difference is,

I'm good at what I do, and those bastards aren't."

Mortar bombs came whispering down on U.S. trenches and foxholes. The Mormons often tried to repay whatever the USA did to them. After the ordnance the bombers had expended on their own men, the mortar rounds hardly seemed worth getting excited about. Again, Armstrong wondered how long he would take to get out of Utah and if he could somehow do it alive and in one piece.

As a lieutenant, junior grade, Sam Carsten had worn a thick gold stripe and a thin one on his jacket cuffs for a long time. A lieutenant wore two full stripes. Carsten didn't give a damn about the promotion. Some things were too dearly bought. He would rather have been a j.g. aboard the Remembrance than a lieutenant waiting for new orders at Pearl Harbor and contemplating a gloomy New Year.

Too many men were gone. He didn't know what had happened to Lieutenant Commander Pottinger. All he knew was that nobody'd fished the chief of the damage-control party out of the Pacific. Eyechart Szczerbiakowicz hadn't made it back toOahu , either. Somebody had said the sailor was wounded going into the drink and hadn't been able to stay afloat. And Captain Stein, an officer of the old school, had gone down with the Remembrance. Word was that he'd got a Medal of Honor for it. Much good the decoration did him.

Gloomily, Sam trudged over to the officers' club. He intended to see 1942 in smashed. He'd feel like grim death when he sobered up tomorrow morning, but he didn't care. He was too sorrowful to face the world sober.

Despite the loss of Midway--and of the only U.S. airplane carrier in the Pacific--a lot of officers were living it up. Some of them had wives along, others girlfriends. The band played a bouncy tune that mimicked Confederate rhythms without being too blatant about it.

Here and there, though, sat other gloomy men with slumped shoulders, intent on the serious business of getting drunk. At the bar, one of them waved to Sam. Dan Cressy had four stripes on his sleeves these days. They'd promoted him to captain. By all the signs, that delighted him no more than Sam liked his promotion.

"Happy New Year, Carsten." Yes, if Cressy was happy, Sam wouldn't have wanted to see him sad.

Carsten sat down by the Remembrance's exec and ordered a shot over ice. Even before the drink got there, he said, "It's a bastard, sir."

They made an odd pair: the aging lieutenant and the young, promising captain. They'd been through a lot together, though. Cressy said, "It's a bastard and a half, is what it is." He emptied his glass and signaled for a refill. "I'm ahead of you."

"Oh, that's all right," Sam answered. "I expect I can catch up." He got the shot, poured it down, and waved for another.

Both new drinks arrived at the same time. Cressy stared moodily into his. "This isn't how I wanted to get promoted, God damn it." He bit the words off one by one.

"No, sir. Me, neither," Sam said.

"I tried to get him to come away." Cressy was talking more to himself than to Sam. "I tried. I said the Navy needed him. I said the country needed him. I said . . . Well, it doesn't matter what I said. He looked at me and he told me,, ‘This is my ship, and she's sinking. Get off her, Commander. Good-bye and good luck." So I got off her. What else could I do?"

"Nothing I can see. You got me off her the same way," Sam said.

"You." Commander--no, Captain--Cressy seemed to come back to himself, at least a little. He managed a smile of sorts for Sam. "I'd've kicked myself for the rest of my days if anything had happened to you."

That made Sam blink even as he knocked back his shot and waved for another reload. "Me?" His voice squeaked in surprise. He wondered when he'd last squeaked like that. Probably not since he'd joined the Navy, which was a hell of a long time ago now. "Nothing special about me, sir. Just a mustang who's long in the tooth."

With whiskey-fueled precision, Cressy started ticking off points on his fingers. "Item: there aren't that many mustangs to begin with. Coming up through the hawse hole's never been easy. Item: most of the mustangs I've known don't make very good officers. That doesn't mean they're not good men. They are, just about every one of them. And they have fine records as ratings, or they wouldn't have made officer's grade in the first place. But most of 'em don't have the imagination, the, the breadth, to make good officers. You're different."

"Thank you kindly. I don't know that it's true, but thank you. I try to do the best work I can, that's all."

The vehemence with which Captain Cressy shook his head spoke of how much he'd put away. "No.

Any mustang, near enough, will do his particular job pretty well. Most of them won't care about anything outside their assignment, though. You aren't like that. How many times did you get chased out of the wireless shack?"

"Oh, maybe a few, sir," Sam allowed. "I like to know what's going on."

"That's what I'm saying," Cressy told him. "And you would always come up with something interesting in the officers' wardroom--always. You don't just want to know what's going on. You think about it, too, and you think straight."

Sam only shrugged. Praise made him uncomfortable. "Sir, you know ten times as much as I do."

"More, yes, but not ten times. How much schooling did you have before you enlisted?"

"Eighth grade, sir. About what you'd expect."

"Yes, about what I'd expect. On the other hand, I've got one of these." Cressy tapped hisAnnapolis class ring with the forefinger of his other hand. "If you had one of these, you'd hold flag rank now. You've

. . . picked up your learning other ways, and that's a slower, harder business. I was talking about breadth a little while ago. You can make officer's rank with an eighth-grade education, but if you haven't got something more than that on the ball you won't go anywhere even if you do. That's what sets you apart from most mustangs. You've got that extra something."

"Fat lot of good it did me," Sam said bitterly. "I could know everything there was to know and I wouldn't've been able to douse that fire aft on the Remembrance."

"Some things are bigger than you are, that's all," Cressy said. "You weren't the only one trying, you know."

"But I was in charge, dammit," Carsten said. "Well, Lieutenant Commander Pottinger was, God rest his soul, but I was the fellow with

a hose in my hand."

"Some things are bigger than you are," Cressy repeated. "That fire was bigger than a man with a hose."

Sam wanted to argue with him. However much he wanted to, he knew he couldn't. The Remembrance had taken too many hits for any damage control to help. He changed the subject: "You'll have your own command now, sir. A cruiser at least--maybe a battleship."

"Not the way I wanted to get it," Cressy said once more. "And if I do go into business for myself, I'd sooner do it in another flattop. Trouble is, we haven't got any that are short a skipper, and we won't till they launch the ones that are building. And the carriers have the same trouble everything else has--getting stuff and people from A to B when A is west of Ohio and B is east or the other way round."

"What the hell can we do about that, sir?" Sam asked.

"Fight. Keep fighting. Not give up no matter what," Cressy answered. "The Japs can't hope to lick us.

Oh, if we screw up bad enough, they may drive us out of the Sandwich Islands"--he grimaced at the thought--"but even if they do, they won't land three divisions south of Los Angeles. Britain and France can't lick us--same argument on the East Coast. And I don't see how the Confederates can lick us, either. They can hurt us. But I think we're too big and too strong for them to knock us flat and hold us down. We're the only people who can lick us. If we give up, if we lay down, we're in trouble. As long as we don't, we'll stay on our feet longer than anybody who's in there slugging with us."

Sam waved to the barkeep for another shot. Noticing Cressy's glass was also empty, he pointed to it and held up two fingers. The bartender nodded. As the man poured the drinks, Sam said, "I hope you're right, sir."

Cressy gave him a sad, sweet smile he never would have shown sober. "Hell, Carsten, so do I." He waited till the bartender brought the fresh drinks, then lifted his glass in salute. "And here's to you. Since they fished you out of the Pacific, where do you want to go from here?"

"I haven't really worried about it all that much, sir," Sam answered. "I'll go wherever they send me. If they want to leave me in damage control, well, I'll do that. I don't like it a whole lot, but I'm good at it by now. If they put me back in gunnery, that'd be better. Or if they

finally give me something to do with airplanes, I'd like that the most. It's why I transferred over to the Remembrance in the first place, back when I was still a petty officer."

"If I were running the Bureau of Personnel, that's not what I'd do with you," Captain Cressy said.

"Sir?" A polite question was always safe.

"If it were up to me, I'd give you a ship," Cressy said, which made Sam want to jam a finger in his ear to make sure he'd heard right. The other officer went on, "I would. I'd give you a destroyer or a minelayer or a minesweeper. You could handle it, and I think you'd do a first-rate job."

"Th-Thank you, sir," Sam stammered. "I'm gladder than hell you think so." He wasn't nearly so sure he thought so himself, or that he wanted so much responsibility. But if he didn't, why had he tried to become an officer in the first place?

This time, Captain Cressy's smile was knowing. "Don't pop a gasket worrying about it, because the odds are long. BuPers doesn't know you the way I do. But they may stick you in a destroyer as exec under a two-and-a-half striper. Or they may give you something little--a sub chaser, say--and let you show what you can do with that."

"Well," Sam said wonderingly, and then again: "Well." Command hadn't occurred to him. Neither had serving as exec. He raised his glass in a salute of his own. "If they do give me the number-two slot somewhere, sir, the man I'll try to imitate is you."

"That's a real compliment," Cressy said. "I know who my models are. I suppose a few people in the Navy have picked up a pointer or two from me." He was sandbagging, and doubtless knew it. He pointed at Sam. "You'll have to do it your own way in the end, though, because you're you, not me.

You've got years on me, and you've got all that experience as a rating. Use it. It'll do you good."

"Me? Command?" Sam didn't squeak this time, but he still did sound wondering, even to himself. He wondered if he could swing it. He'd understudied poor dead Pottinger in the damage-control party for years. The men had obeyed him about as well as they had the lieutenant commander. He'd always figured he could run the party if something ever happened to Pottinger. Now something damn well

had, but it had happened to the Remembrance, too.

"You can do the job, Carsten. You can get the men to do what they're supposed to do, too," Cressy said. "You think I would say that if I didn't mean it?" He eyed Sam with owlish, booze-fueled intensity.

"Command," Sam said once more. He was feeling the whiskey, too. "Well, it's up to BuPers, not me."

But now he couldn't help wondering what sort of orders the clerks back in Philadelphia would cut for him.

Sometimes January south of the Potomac was almost as bad as January up in Ontario. Sometimes, though, January here could feel like April up there. A high up close to fifty? A low above freezing? That hardly seemed like winter at all to Jonathan Moss.

He remembered flying in the Canadian winter during the Great War. More to the point, he remembered not flying most of the time. Bad weather--either snow or just low clouds--had kept fighters on the ground more often than not. Things weren't so bad here.

And theU.S. soldiers on the ground needed all the help they could get. They were trying to gain footholds on the south bank of the Rapidan, and not having a whole lot of luck. The only place where they'd gained any lodgement at all was in some truly miserable second-growth country that was marked on the map as the Wilderness. Having flown over it, Jonathan could see how it had got the name. The only reason the Confederates hadn't thrown the Army back into the river there was that they had as much trouble bringing men up to defend as the U.S. forces did in expanding their little bridgehead.

Moss' squadron listened in a tent as he briefed them. He whacked a large-scale map with a wooden pointer. "This is a ground-attack mission, gentlemen," he said. "We're going to shoot up the Confederates. Then we'll come home, gas up, get reloaded, and go back and do it again. We'll keep on doing it till they break. Have you got that? Any questions?"

Nobody said anything. Moss had a question of his own: what happens if we keep hammering and they don't break? He'd seen that more times than he could count in the last war. What happened was that a lot of men ended up dead and maimed. But he was the only Great War veteran here. The pilots he led were young and eager. He envied

them. He was neither.

Eager or not, he was good at what he did. He wouldn't have lived through one war and the first six months of another if he hadn't been. And, eager or not, he was reasonably confident he'd come back to this airstrip once he and his men had worked over the Confederate positions. He'd made a lot of flights.

What was one more?

The groundcrew men said his Wright was in fine fettle. He ran down the checklist himself just the same.

They weren't going up there. He damn well was. Everything did seem all right. It almost always did. The day he didn't double-check, though, was bound to be the day when something went wrong.

Engine roaring, the fighter jounced along the runway and sprang into the air. Moss climbed quickly. He circled above the field, waiting for the men he led to join him. "Ready?" he called on the wireless.

"Ready!" The word dinned in his earphones.

"Then let's go." He flew south. A few puffs of smoke from bursting antiaircraft shells sprouted around the squadron. What dinned in Jonathan's earphones then were curses. He added a few of his own, or more than a few. They were still in U.S.-held territory, which meant their own side was doing its best to shoot them down. That its best wasn't quite good enough failed to reassure him.

Before long, they left the overenthusiastic gunners behind. From the air, the battlefield looked much more like those from the Great War than the Ohio ones had. Because the front had moved slowly here, things on both sides of it had been pounded and cratered in a way they hadn't farther west. The bombed-out landscape took Jonathan back half a lifetime across the years.

There was the Rappahannock. Hardly the blink of an eye later, there was the Rapidan, and the U.S.

toehold on the far bank. The Wilderness had surely looked like what it was even before war came to it.

Bombs and artillery and entrenchments did nothing to improve it.

Moss didn't want to shoot up his own side, even if his own side hadn't

been shy about shooting at him.

Green flares went up from the ground to mark U.S. positions. Anything beyond them was fair game. He swooped low over the battlefield, shooting up trenches and trucks and anything that caught his eye. A column of men in butternut tramping up a road dissolved like maple sugar in water under machine-gun fire.

Whoops of glee filled Moss' earphones. He let out shouts when he was shooting things up, too. It was fine sport--none finer--if you didn't think about the havoc you were wreaking on the ground. Watching trucks go up in flames, watching ant-sized men scatter in all directions, was like being inside an adventure film.

This had a drawback adventure films didn't: people shot back at you here. Confederate antiaircraft gunners and machine gunners and riflemen filled the air with lead. Strafing runs were more dangerous than bomber escort because of all the small-arms fire that couldn't touch you at altitude. Moss never worried about it very much. It was just something that came with the mission.

He was clawing his way up off the deck to go around for another pass when his engine suddenly quit.

Smoke and steam gushed from it. Oil streamed back and smeared his windshield. A chunk of metal from the cowling slammed off the bulletproof glass, too.

"Shit," he said, and then something stronger. He gave the altimeter a quick glance--two thousand feet. If he didn't get out now, he never would. He cranked back the canopy, stood up in his seat, and bailed out.

He got away from the stricken fighter without smashing against the tail--always an escaping pilot's first worry. As soon as he was free, he yanked the ripcord. He didn't have a lot of time to waste, not down that low. The parachute opened with a loud whump! Moss' vision went red for a few seconds, then slowly cleared.

Another, smaller, whump! was a bullet going through the silk canopy above his head. He was a target hanging up here in the sky. If the Confederates on the ground wanted to shoot him, they could. They could shoot him by accident, too. Till he got down, he couldn't do anything about anything.

A tall column of black, greasy smoke rising from the ground not too

far away had to be the Wright's funeral pyre. He shuddered. If the canopy had jammed, it would have been his funeral pyre, too.

Here came the ground. He steered away from a stand of trees and towards a clearing. Then he wondered if he'd made a mistake, because soldiers in butternut came out of the woods. No help for it now. He bent his knees, bracing for the landing. He twisted an ankle, but that was all.

As he struggled to get out of the parachute harness, the soldiers ran up to him. He looked down the barrels of several automatic rifles and submachine guns. "Surrender!" three men yelled at the same time.

"Well, what the hell else am I going to do?" Moss asked irritably. "There!" He shed the harness. He knew of a man who'd had to cut his way free, and had cut off the tip of his thumb without even noticing till later.

One of the Confederates had a single bar on either side of his collar: a second lieutenant. "Can you walk, Yankee?" he asked.

"Let's see." Gingerly, Moss got to his feet and put weight on that ankle. "Kind of."

"Pull his teeth, somebody," the lieutenant said. A corporal plucked the .45 automatic from Moss' belt.

The downed fighter pilot looked at it as if it belonged to somebody else--which it did, now. He'd been about as likely to yank it out and start shooting as to sprout wings and fly away without his airplane. Of course, the Confederates didn't know that. To them, if not to himself, he was still a dangerous character.

They also relieved him of his wristwatch. That was a different story. He let out a squawk: "My wife gave me that watch." It was one of the last things he had by which to remember Laura.

The lieutenant stuck it in his pocket. "And so?" he asked coolly. Moss wondered whether a sob story would do him any good. He didn't wonder for more than about three seconds, though. They didn't have to take prisoners, no matter what the Geneva Convention said. Not every fighting man who fell into enemy hands ended up in a POW camp. If they shot him now, who'd know? Who'd care? Nobody and nobody, respectively. When Moss kept his mouth shut, the lieutenant nodded and said, "I reckoned you were a smart fellow. Now get

moving."

He got moving. He couldn't go very fast, but they didn't push him. As long as they were herding him along, they were doing something clearly line-of-duty and just as clearly not very hard. That came close to a soldier's ideal. One of them even cut a branch off a pine and trimmed it with his bayonet to make Moss a walking stick. He took it gratefully. It helped.

They'd spread camouflage netting and branches over their tents. That must have worked; they didn't seem to have been shot up. The lieutenant took Moss into a tent where a man in his thirties with three bars on each side of his collar--a captain--sat behind a folding table doing paperwork. "Captured the damnyankee flier we heard going down," the lieutenant said proudly.

"Good work." By the casual way the captain said it, this sort of thing happened every day, which was bullshit of the purest ray serene. The captain looked at Moss and said, "For you, the war is over."

How many bad films about the Great War had he seen, to come out with a line like that? Moss almost laughed in his face. But it wasn't really a laughing matter, not when he could still suffer an unfortunate accident--and when the captain was right. "Looks that way to me, too," Moss said.

The captain got down to business. "Give me your particulars."

"Jonathan Moss.Major,U.S. Army." He rattled off his pay number. He knew it as well as he knew his name.

"What was your mission?" the Confederate officer asked.

"I've told you everything the laws of war say I have to," Moss answered, and waited to see what happened next. If the captain felt like giving him the third degree . . . he couldn't do a whole hell of a lot about it.

But the man just said, "Well, we can't keep you here. We don't have the setup to hold prisoners.

Jenkins!"

"Yes, sir!" the lieutenant said.

"Take him intoSpotsylvania . They'll have a jail there. He won't get out till they can take him down to the Carolinas or Georgia or one of those places where they've got themselves POW camps."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant repeated. Into Spotsylvania Moss went. Hell of a name for a town, he thought, but that was one more thing he kept quiet about. The auto was of Confederate make, but looked and performed like one built in the USA. Two soldiers with submachine guns sitting behind Moss discouraged any thoughts of adventure.

The jail was a squat red-brick building. The sheriff considerately gave Moss a cell as far away from the drunk tank as he could. It had a cot and a chamber pot and a pitcher and cup and basin. The water was cool, not cold. Moss drank it anyway. The bars all looked very solid. He rattled them. They were. He sighed and lay down on the cot. For you, the war is over. And so it was.

Brigadier General Abner Dowling was not a happy man. For Dowling, that made anything but a man-bites-dog headline. What with long service under George Armstrong Custer, even longer service in hate-filled Utah, and brief service trying to hold back the Confederate thrust into Ohio, he hadn't had a lot to be happy about. When some of your fonder memories were of a Salt Lake City sporting house, you hadn't lived life for the fun of it.

He wasn't enjoying himself much here inVirginia , either. His corps had borne the brunt of the Confederate flank attack. They'd contained it, but they'd been badly battered in the process. The counterattack against the right and the coming of winter had slowed theU.S. advance--intended to be as quick and ferocious as the Confederate drive that had opened the fighting--to a crawl right out of 1915.

And now Daniel MacArthur had a new brainstorm. As Dowling's driver took him over the icy roads to MacArthur's headquarters in Warrenton, he wondered what the army commander had come up with this time. MacArthur's last inspiration had led to this bloody stalemate. Dowling was more than a little surprised to see the flamboyant officer get a second chance. He wondered what MacArthur would do with it.

When fighters roared by overhead, he wondered if he would live to find out. The Confederates still came over and harried road traffic in U.S.-held territory, just as U.S. airplanes shot up motorcars farther south.

But either these were U.S. fighters or the Confederates didn't think the middle-aged Buick worth wasting ammunition on, for he came through unscathed.

Warrenton was nothing special. It had gone from Virginia to West Virginia, from the CSA to the USA, after the Great War, and had never got over it. YANKEES GO HOME! graffiti, others saying FREEDOM!, and whitewashed patches covering up more such love notes scarred the walls. Dowling saw no U.S. soldiers by themselves. Everybody always had at least one buddy along, which spoke volumes about how much the locals thought of themselves as U.S. citizens.

Daniel MacArthur had appropriated the fanciest house in town for his headquarters. That struck Dowling as utterly in character. If MacArthur had made one more Warrentonian turn scarlet about the United States and everything they stood for . . . Dowling, frankly, wasn't going to give a damn.

The neoclassical columned portico made him feel as if he were walking into a government building inPhiladelphia orWashington . The only difference was, the architect here had shown better taste and more restraint than builders in theUSA 's capitals were in the habit of doing.

"Good afternoon, General." MacArthur greeted him in the foyer.

It was getting on toward evening, but Dowling didn't argue. "Good afternoon, sir." He saluted. Grandly, MacArthur returned the courtesy. His long, lean toothpick of a body was made for the grand, arrogant gesture. Built more along the lines of a refrigerator, Dowling had to make do with competence. He asked, "What have you got in mind, sir? Some way to punch through the Wilderness?" He didn't think any such way existed. His superior was all too likely to own a different opinion. Which of them turned out to be right might prove a different question, but MacArthur had more stars on his shoulder straps than Dowling.

The cigarette in MacArthur's long, fancy holder quivered. Excitement? Disdain? Who could tell? "Come with me to the map room," the U.S. general commanding said. You couldn't fight a war without maps.

Only MacArthur would make it sound as if he never looked at them outside of this one room.

He led Dowling to a chamber that was indeed full of maps. To Dowling's surprise, he pointed to a large-scale one that showed all

over Virginia and the surrounding states, both U.S. and C.S. "I'm sorry, sir, but I can't make it out from this alone," Dowling said.

"No?" By MacArthur's tone, he'd just proved himself a moron. "What I aim to do, General, is force the Confederates to divide their forces by making a surprise landing at the mouth of the James and advancing on Richmond along the river." He struck a pose, plainly waiting for Dowling to acclaim his genius.

Whatever else you could say about him, he didn't think small. But there were other things to say.

Dowling didn't scream, Are you out of your goddamn mind, sir? He was proud of himself because he didn't. It showed commendable restraint on his part--that was how he saw it, anyway.

"Didn't General McClellan try that same move during the War of Secession?" he inquired, hoping to lead MacArthur back to reality by easy stages.

"He did indeed," MacArthur said. "But he didn't move fast enough. The only thing about McClellan that might have moved fast enough was his bowels."

Dowling fought back a startled giggle. From everything he'd read about McClellan, that was gospel truth. Even so, he said, "But you have to worry about things he didn't--the Confederates' Navy and their bombers, for instance. If you do land a force, can you supply it?"

"By God, I can. By God, I will." MacArthur stuck out his granite chin, as if to say he needed nothing but determination.

It wasn't that simple, as Dowling knew too well. "Sir, they'll have artillery that can reach our rear, too,"

he said. "General McClellan didn't have to worry about that kind of thing, either."

Outside the map room, light drained from the sky. MacArthur looked at him as if he'd just crawled out, all pallid and moist, from under a flat rock. "I had hoped you would show confidence in the fighting ability of the American soldier, General," he said stiffly.

"Sir, I do. I'm more confident of that than of just about anything else in the world," Dowling answered.

"But I also think we shouldn't have to depend on his fighting ability by itself. I think he ought to go into battle with a plan that gives him the best chance to win without getting slaughtered."

Now Daniel MacArthur looked as if he wanted to step on what had crawled out from under the flat rock. "Are you saying my plan does not meet that criterion? I must tell you, I beg to differ." He didn't beg to differ; he demanded.

Instead of answering directly, Dowling asked, "What does the General Staff think of your scheme?"

MacArthur snapped his fingers with contempt a Shakespearean actor might have envied. "That for the General Staff!" he said. "If they fart, they'll blow their brains out."

Custer would have agreed with that, and would have laughed himself into a coughing fit when he heard it.

Dowling persisted: "Have you submitted this plan to them?"

"I don't need to," MacArthur said. "I command in theVirginia theater."

"Well, yes, sir. Of course, sir." Dowling might have been trying to soothe a dangerous lunatic. As far as he was concerned, that was exactly what he was doing. He went on, "But if you're going to land troops at the mouth of the James, you'll need some help from the Navy, you know."

"Oh, I have that." MacArthur waved away such trivial concerns. "Rear Admiral Halsey, the commander of the Southern Shore Naval District, is confident he can give me everything I need along those lines."

"Is he?" Dowling said tonelessly. He hadn't known the Navy also had a wild man running around loose.

He supposed it was fate--probably a malign fate--that let this other officer link up with MacArthur.

"Does the Navy Department have any idea what he's up to?"

"General Dowling, your continual carping questions grow tiresome in the extreme," MacArthur said. "I thought you would be eager to come to grips with the enemy in some new place. I see I was unduly optimistic."

"I would have been more eager to come to grips with him here in northern Virginia if the attack hadn't been delayed so long," Dowling said.

Daniel MacArthur's face went a dusky, blotchy red. "Good evening," he choked out.

"Good evening, sir." Dowling saluted again and left MacArthur's sanctum sanctorum. If the other man wanted to relieve him, Dowling wouldn't lose any sleep over it. Even going back toPhiladelphia might be a relief after serving under such a prima donna. I've done this before. I don't need to do it again, Dowling thought.

His driver was smoking a cigarette when he got out to the motorcar. When the man said, "Where to now, sir?" he had whiskey as well as smoke on his breath. Either he carried a flask or he'd made a friend while waiting for Dowling to emerge.

"Back to my headquarters," Dowling said, and then, "Do you want me to do the driving?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm fine," the driver assured him, unabashed. "I just had a nip. I didn't get smashed or anything."

"All right." Dowling waited to see if it was. It seemed to be. The driver shifted gears smoothly, didn't speed, and didn't wander all over the road. Considering that the taped-over headlamps didn't reach much farther than a man could spit, not speeding was an especially good idea.

Dowling kept a hand on his sidearm all the way back. Confederate bushwhackers sometimes took potshots at passing autos. He didn't intend to go down without shooting back. What he intended to do and what he got a chance to do might prove two different things. He understood that, even if he didn't want to think about it.

He wondered whether Daniel MacArthur had ever grasped the difference between intention and reality.

All the signs said he hadn't, any more than George Custer had before him. Once, Custer had proved spectacularly right. By substituting his own view of what barrels could do for War Department doctrine, he'd gone a long way toward winning the Great War for theUSA . Before that, though, how many soldiers in green-gray had he slaughtered in his headlong attacks on entrenched Confederate positions?

Tens of thousands, surely.

Maybe MacArthur's plan for a landing at the mouth of the James and a drive on Richmond from the southeast was a brilliant move that would win the war. Then again, maybe it wasn't. It hadn't been for McClellan, eighty years ago now. MacArthur was without a doubt a better general than McClellan had been. Of course, saying that was like saying something smelled better than a skunk. It might be true, but how much did it tell you?

Once Dowling had got back, he went to his code book for the five-letter groups that let him ask Colonel John Abell, WHAT IS GENERAL STAFF'S VIEW OF PROPOSED LANDING? He handled that personally; he didn't want even his signals officer knowing anything about it. MacArthur would probably guess where the leak came from. Too bad, Dowling thought.

The answer, also coded, came back inside half an hour. That didn't

surprise Dowling. Colonel Abell damn near lived at his desk. Dowling also did his own decoding. WHAT PROPOSED LANDING?

Abell asked.

"Ha!" Dowling said, and found the groups for a new message: SUGGEST YOU INQUIRE

COMMANDING GENERAL THIS THEATER.

If the General Staff decided the plan was brilliant, they'd let MacArthur go ahead. So Dowling told himself, anyhow. But he also told himself somebody other than the scheme's originator ought to look at it before it went forward.

He didn't hear from Colonel Abell again. He also didn't receive a detonation from Daniel MacArthur.

Abell knew when to be subtle, then. MacArthur pulled no troops from Dowling's command to go into a landing force. That didn't leave Dowling downhearted, not at all. Sometimes what didn't happen was as important as what did.

In spite of everything, reports fromPhiladelphia did get back toRichmond . They took a while, but they got here. Clarence Potter, unlike a lot of people in the Confederate government and military these days, was a patient man. Sooner or later, he expected he would find out what he needed to know.

One of the things he'd grown interested in was how reports got fromRichmond toPhiladelphia , to whatever opposite numbers he had there. A clerk in the U.S. War Department had sent by a roundabout route aU.S. report that . . . quoted Potter, as a matter of fact.

I believe the situation with regard to the Negroes inMississippi is hectic, and our response to it must be dynamic. Seeing his own words come back was interesting--and exciting, too. He'd written several versions of that report. In another, he called the situation distressing and the needed response ferocious; in yet another, the keywords were alarming and merciless; and so on. He had a list of where the report with each set of keywords had been distributed. He kept that list in his wallet. No one but him could possibly get at it.

When he took out the list, he checked to see where the relevant words were hectic and dynamic. Then, whistling to himself, he went to

Lieutenant General Forrest's office. He had to cool his heels in an anteroom for half an hour before he could see the chief of the Confederate General Staff. By the glum expressions on the faces of the two major generals who emerged from Forrest's inner office, they would have been glad to let him go before them.

"Good morning, General," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said when Potter came in at last. "Sometimes you have to take people out to the woodshed. It's not a hell of a lot of fun, but it's part of the job."

"Yes, sir. You're right on both counts." Potter closed the door behind him and lowered his voice:

"You're right on both counts, and you've got a Yankee spy somewhere in the Operations and Training Section."

"Son of a bitch," Forrest said. "Son of a bitch! So your cute little scheme there paid off, did it?"

"Yes, sir." Clarence Potter nodded in somber satisfaction. "When I drafted that report on the guerrilla situation inMississippi , I varied the words in some of the most important sentences. Each version went to a different section here in the War Department and in the State Department. If a spy sent it north and one of our people in theUSA got it back to me, I'd know where it came from. I've had to wait longer than I wanted to, but that's part of the game."

"Operations and Training, eh?" A savage gleam came into Forrest's eyes. His great-grandfather had probably worn that same expression just before he drew his saber and charged some luckless damnyankee cavalryman. "You have any idea who the snake in the grass is?"

"No, sir," Potter answered. "I can't even prove he's the only spy in the War Department. But I know he's there, and I can think of a couple of different ways to get after him."

"I'm all ears," Forrest said.

"One would be to do the same thing I did this time: make several versions of a report, one for each subsection of O and T. The problem with that is, getting results back from theUSA is slow and uncertain," Potter said. "The other one is the usual--seeing who has a grudge, seeing who's spending more money than his salary accounts for, seeing who all had access to the report, and on and on. You'll have plenty of people who can do that for you; you don't need me to give them lessons."

"Let's try both approaches," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said after only the barest pause for thought.

"You fix up another report--hell, make it on the organization and training of spies. They'll sit up and take notice of that. We'll use it to winnow out suspects, or we'll try to, anyway. And we'll do the usual things, too. We don't want to miss a trick here."

Potter nodded. "All right, sir. I'll take care of it. I wonder how much this bastard has given theUSA without our ever noticing it."

"When we catch him, we'll squeeze him like an orange," the chief of the General Staff promised. "Oh, yes. I have plenty of people who can take care of that for me, too."

"No doubt, sir." Now Potter did his best to hide his distaste. Intelligence work wasn't always about friendly persuasion. Potter didn't shrink from straightforward brutality, but he didn't relish it, either. Some people did. They usually made better Freedom Party stalwarts and other sorts of strongarm men than they did spies--usually, but not always.

"You did a terrific job here, Potter," Forrest said. "Your country won't forget."

"This is just a start. When we catch this son of a bitch, then I've done something," Potter said.

"Well, at least we're looking in the right place now--or one of the right places." Forrest looked harried.

"Jesus Christ! We're liable to be ass-deep in these stinking Yankees."

"Every one we ferret out is one we don't have to worry about later." Potter didn't say that one captured spy would lead to others. It was possible, but not likely. If the Yankees had the brains God gave a blue crab, they'd have each spy sending what he found to someone he never saw, didn't know, and would have a hard time betraying. Jack Smith wouldn't know that Joe Doakes three desks over was also selling out his country. They could eat lunch together every day for twenty years without finding out about each other. He'd organized things inPhiladelphia andWashington that way. His counterparts in green-gray would do the same thing.

"You fix up some fresh bait." Nathan Bedford Forrest III might have

been on a fishing trip. And so he was--but he hoped to fry up a nastier catch than crappie or bluegill. "We'll take it from there."

Potter recognized dismissal when he heard it. He got to his feet and saluted. "Yes, sir." Out he went, coldly pleased with himself. He wished he could have talked with Anne Colleton about what he'd done.

She would have appreciated it. She might have thought of it herself--she'd been nobody's fool. If she hadn't gone down toCharleston the day the Yankee carrier raided . . .

He shrugged. Bad luck came to everybody. You had to look at it that way, or else the voices that came to you in the wee small hours of bad nights started showing up at all hours every day. You weren't good for anything then, to yourself or to anybody else. Bury your dead, drink a toast to them now and again, and move on. As long as you kept moving, you made a hard target.

They'd get you anyway, of course. Odds were, though, they'd take longer.

He sat down at his desk. It wasn't as if he had nothing to do. He'd pile those bait reports on top of everything else. No rest for the weary, he thought. Or was it for the wicked? He never could remember.

And what difference did it make? It fit either way.

He swore when the telephone rang. There went a perfectly good train of thought. He wondered if he'd be able to find it again. The telephone went on ringing. He picked it up. "Clarence Potter here." Anybody who didn't know he was in Intelligence had no business calling on this line.

"Hello, Potter, you sly son of a bitch. General Forrest tells me you really are as smart as you think you are."

"Thank you, Mr. President--I suppose." Potter wasn't inclined to let anyone praise more faintly than he did.

Neither was Jake Featherston. Laughing, he said, "You're welcome--I reckon." His good humor never lasted long. He went on, "That was a good piece of work. We've got to make sure the damnyankees aren't looking over our shoulder and reading our cards before we ever set 'em down."

"Yes, sir." Potter hoped his resignation didn't show. In spite of

everything the Confederate States could do, theUnited States were going to find out some of what they were up to. The countries were too similar and shared too long a border to keep that from happening. He went on, "As long as we find out more about what they're up to, we're ahead of the game."

"I don't just aim to be ahead of the game. I aim to win it and then kick over the goddamn table."

Featherston sounded perfectly serious. He also sounded as angry as usual--not at me, Potter judged, but at the USA.

Really whipping the United States, whipping them to a point where they couldn't hope to fight back, had always been the Confederate dream. Featherston still believed it. Maybe that made him crazy. Potter had long thought so. He wasn't so sure any more.

"Gotta knock 'em flat," Featherston went on. "Gotta knock 'em flat and never let 'em build up again.

They tried it with us at the end of the Great War, but they couldn't make it stick. When we do it, we'll fuckin' do it right."

Potter remembered U.S. inspectors in Charleston harbor making sure the Confederate States adhered to the armistice they'd signed. But Jake Featherston was right; the USA hadn't kept that up for long. The United States had wanted to forget about the war, to enjoy what they'd won. They were able to afford it--they had won. For the Confederates, everything since then had been about getting even. With Featherston, everything still was.

If he made the damnyankees say uncle, he wouldn't forget about holding them down. He wanted nothing more than to stand on them with a boot on their neck. For as long as he lived, theUnited States would go through hell on earth. And if anything could make Jake Featherston a happy man--which was by no means obvious--that would be it.

What would happen after Jake finally went? Potter wondered if the President of the CSA had ever wondered about that. The Intelligence officer doubted it. Everything was personal with Jake Featherston.

If it didn't have him in it, he didn't give a damn. Whatever happened after he was gone would just have to take care of itself.

"How would you like to run the operation that makes sure the

damnyankees keep on being good little boys and girls?" Featherston asked.

Not only was everything personal with him, he knew who had an axe to grind, and which axe it was. He assumed everybody took things as personally as he did. He knows just what to offer me, by God, Potter thought. He said, "If we get there, I'll do that job for you, Mr. President."

"Oh, we'll get there. Don't you worry about that. Don't worry about it even for a minute." As usual, Jake sounded messianically certain. By being so sure himself, he made other people sure, too. And when they were sure, they could do things they never would have imagined possible before.

The Confederate States had done some things Clarence Potter wouldn't have imagined possible. Could they do more? Could they flatten theUnited States ? A smaller country flatten a bigger one and hold it down? Before this war started, Potter never would have believed it. Now--and especially after he listened to Jake Featherston for a while--he really thought he did.

Hipolito Rodriguez hadn't needed long to decide that Assault Troop Leader Billy Joe Hamilton put him in mind of his Great War drill sergeant. "I want y'all to listen up. Listen up real good, you hear?" he'd say several times a day, sticking out his chin to seem even meaner than he did already. "y'all better listen up good, on account of I ain't got the time to say this shit over and over."

He gave his warning over and over. He didn't seem to realize that. Rodriguez didn't challenge him on it.

Neither did any of the other men in his training group. Challenge an instructor and you lost even if you won.

"Anybody here ever hear people talk about a population reduction?"Hamilton asked one day.

A few men from the Confederate Veterans' Brigade raised their hands. The ones Rodriguez knew came from big cities--Richmond,Atlanta ,New Orleans .

"Means, ‘I'll fix you,' somethin' like that, right?"Hamilton said. "Folks say,, ‘I'll reduce your population, you son of a bitch,' right? Doesn't

make a whole hell of a lot of sense, but who said the way people talk's gotta make sense, right? Right?"

"Right!" the men chorused. If loud agreement was what the Freedom Party guard wanted, they'd give it to him.

"That's a bunch of bullshit," he said now. "When we talk about reducing population, we goddamn well mean it. Too many niggers in this country, right? Gotta do somethin' about that, right? Right?"

"Right!" The chorus sounded odd this time. Some of the men bayed out the word in voices full of savage enthusiasm, while others sounded oddly doubtful. Rodriguez's tones were somewhere in the middle. He had no use for mallates, but he'd never been filled with blood lust, either.

The Party guard studied his students. "Some of you sorry sons of bitches are gonna puke like you wouldn't believe when we get rolling on this here job. Some of y'all won't be able to cut it. We'll have to ship your asses home--either that or put you in an easier line of work."

"How come?" somebody in back of Rodriguez called.

"How come?" Billy Joe Hamilton echoed. "You'll find out how come. Bet your balls you will. I got one other thing to tell you, too--no matter how tough y'all reckon you got it, you don't know squat about what tough is. Fellas who were doin' this before we got the system down, they're the ones who can talk about tough. What they saw is tougher'n any battlefield."

"Bullshit." This time, it was a man off to Rodriguez's left. Rodriguez was thinking the same thing himself.

Nothing was worse than a battlefield. Nothing could be. He was convinced of that. The Devil hadn't known how to run hell before he took a long look at a Great War battlefield.

"I heard that,"Hamilton said. "You go ahead. You think that way. y'all'll find out what it's like now. But that ain't a patch on what camp guards were doin'. No, sir, not even a patch."

Rodriguez remained dubious. Everybody who was an old-timer at this, that, or the other thing always went on and on about how tough things had been before all these new fellows came in. Talk was cheap.

Talk was also commonly nonsense.

Camp guards learned by doing. They ran their own camp, out there pastDecatur,Texas . They were Great War veterans, every man jack of them. They knew all they needed to know about barbed wire and machine guns. Most of them had taken prisoners, too. Some of them had been prisoners, which also taught a lot about what they needed to know.

Submachine guns were new to Rodriguez, but easy to learn. For guard duty, they were better than the bolt-action Tredegar he'd carried during the last war. No one bullet had the stopping power of a Tredegar round, but you could do a lot of shooting mighty fast with a submachine gun. If you got in trouble in the camp, that mattered more.

"Never trust the niggers here. Never believe the niggers here," Assault Troop Leader Hamilton told his pupils. "You do, you'll end up with your throat cut. They didn't get in here on account of they was nice people. They got here on account of they was trouble."

That Rodriguez believed. The blacks in the camp looked like men who would raise hell if they ever got the chance. They looked like captured enemy soldiers, as a matter of fact. In essence, they were.

Rodriguez figured he would have been safer guarding Yankee prisoners. They would have been less desperate than the Negroes here.

A truck with an iron box of a cargo compartment pulled up to the camp. At the morning roll call, the experienced guards picked twenty Negroes from the lineup. "You men are going to be transferred to another camp," one of them told the blacks.

There were the usual grumbles. "I jus' got here two weeks ago," a prisoner complained. "How come you shippin' me somewheres else?"

"To confuse you. Working pretty good, isn't it?" the guard answered. The prisoner scratched his head.

He didn't know how to take that, and so he warily accepted it.

Rodriguez was one of the guards outside the barbed-wire perimeter who made sure the Negroes didn't try to run off on their way to the truck. The black men gave no trouble. Most of them seemed glad to get away from where they were. One of the experienced guards closed the doors behind the prisoners and dogged them shut. The bar that did

the trick seemed exceptionally sturdy.

"We'll need a driver," Hamilton said. Rodriguez didn't volunteer; he couldn't drive.

They packed him and the other trainee prison guards into a couple of ordinary trucks with butternut canvas canopies over their beds. Those trucks followed the one with the Negro prisoners. Rodriguez wondered where they were going. He didn't know of any other camps close by. Of course, Texas had more empty space than it knew what to do with. Maybe there were others, somewhere not too far over the horizon.

His truck ride lasted about an hour. Looking out at where he'd been--he couldn't see where he was going--he found he'd passed through a gate in a perimeter marked off by barbed wire. Maybe it's another camp after all, he thought.

The truck stopped. "Everybody out!" Billy Joe Hamilton yelled. "y'all got work to do!"

Out Rodriguez came. Like a lot of the other middle-aged men who'd ridden with him, he grunted and stretched. His back ached. The truck had been anything but comfortable.

The other truck, the one with the Negroes in it, had stopped, too, at the edge of a long, deep trench a bulldozer had scraped in the ground. Rodriguez looked around. All he saw was prairie. They were a long way from anything that mattered. He nodded to himself. He remembered this kind of landscape from when he'd fought in the Great War, though he'd been farther west then.

"You!" Hamilton pointed to him. "Open the rear doors on that there truck."

"Yes, Assault Troop Leader!" Rodriguez answered. His pure English would never be great, but he followed what other people said to him, and he could speak enough to get by. Nobody'd complained about the way he talked.

He went over to the truck with the iron box for a passenger compartment. He needed a moment, but no more than a moment, to figure out how the heavy bar that kept the doors closed was secured. He got it loose before the Freedom Party guard either showed him or brushed him aside as a goddamn dumb greaser. That done, he grabbed the handles and pulled the doors open.

"¡Madre de Dios!" he exclaimed as the fecal stink poured out of the compartment and into the chilly air.

He crossed himself, not once but two or three times in quick succession. None of the blacks in the truck remained alive. They sprawled atop one another in unlovely, ungainly death.

"Isn't this smooth?"Hamilton said. "We take 'em out, we drive 'em off, and they're dead by the time they get where they're goin'. Matter of fact, the only place they're goin'is straight to hell." He shook his head, correcting himself. "Nope--other place they're goin'is right into this here ditch. y'all drag 'em out of the truck and fling 'em in. Then the 'dozer'll scrape the dirt back over 'em, and that'll be the end of that. Good riddance to bad rubbish." He made hand-washing motions.

Nobody said no. The trainees did the job willingly enough. It didn't bother Rodriguez all that much once he got over his first horrified astonishment. The Freedom Party hadn't been kidding when it said it wanted to put Negroes in their place. After all the trouble they'd caused the Confederate States, he wasn't going to lose much sleep over what happened to them.

Into the ditch thudded the corpses, one after another. They were still limp; they hadn't started to stiffen.

Good riddance to bad rubbish, the Freedom Party guard had said. To him, and to Hipolito Rodriguez as well, that was all they were. Rubbish.

Somebody asked what struck him as a practical question: "Can we kill 'em off faster'n they breed?"

"Oh, you bet your ass we can." Assault Troop Leader Hamilton sounded as if he hadn't the slightest doubt. "If we want to bad enough, we can do any goddamn thing we please. And Jake Featherston wants to do this really bad. Whatever we have to do to take care of it, well, that's what we do. Pretty soon, we don't got to worry about niggers no more."

The guards murmured among themselves. Most of the murmurs sounded approving to Rodriguez.

Nobody who didn't see this as at least a possibility would have volunteered for camp-guard duty. Wiping his hands on his trousers, a trainee askedHamilton , "How come this used to be a tougher duty than it is now?"

"On account of these trucks are new," the Freedom Party guard answered. "Up until not so long ago, guards had to shoot the niggers they needed to get rid of." His voice was altogether matter-of-fact. "That was hard on everybody. Some guards just couldn't stand the strain, poor bastards. And the niggers knew what was comin' when they got marched outa camp, too. Made 'em twice as dangerous as they would've been otherwise. Some fella named Pinkard, runs a camp over in Mississippi or Louisiana--one o' them places--came up with this here instead."

"¡Madre de Dios!" Rodriguez said again, this time in an altogether different tone of voice.

"What's eatin' you?" the Party guard asked.

"I know this Pinkard--or a Pinkard, anyhow," Rodriguez answered. "We fight together here in Texas in the Great War. Not many with this name, I think."

"Reckon maybe you're right," the Freedom Party man agreed. "Ain't that a kick in the nuts? This here Pinkard, he's come up a long ways since then. Runnin' a camp, that's like commanding a regiment."

Rodriguez tried to imagine Jefferson Pinkard as a high-ranking officer. It wasn't easy. It was, in fact, damn hard. The Pinkard he'd known had been an ordinary soldier--till he started having woman trouble.

After that, all he'd cared about was killing damnyankees. Up until then, he'd been like any sensible fighting man, more interested in staying alive himself than in getting rid of the enemy. But afterwards . . .

Afterwards, he hadn't cared whether he lived or died.

Evidently he'd lived. And now a lot of mallates were efficiently dead because he had. Rodriguez shrugged and pulled one of them out of the truck. Who'd miss them, after all?

XIX

They'd sent Irving Morrell to a military hospital outside ofSyracuse,New York . The sprawling wooden building had enormous Red Crosses painted on the roof, in case Confederate bombers came that far north. Up till now, none had.Syracuse had to seem like the end of the world to the Confederates. It sure as hell seemed like the

end of the world to Morrell.

Dr. Silverstein had told him his shoulder would heal well. And it was healing--but not nearly fast enough to suit him. He looked at the snow blowing by outside and asked, "How long before I get out of here?"

The sawbones currently in charge of him was named Conrad Rohde. "I don't know, exactly," he answered. "A few weeks, I expect."

"That's what everybody's been telling me for--a few weeks now," Morrell said irritably.

Dr. Rohde shrugged. He was a big, blond, slow-moving man. Nothing seemed to faze him. A bad-tempered colonel sure didn't. "Do you want a wound infection?" he inquired. "You told me you had one of those the last time you got shot. You're older than you were then, you know."

"Oh, yeah? Since when?" Even Morrell's sarcasm drew nothing more than a chuckle from Rohde.

Morrell did know he was older than he had been in 1914. Even with the wound infection that didn't want to go away, he'd got his strength back then a hell of a lot faster than he was now.

"Do your exercises," Rohde told him, and went off to inflict his resolute good cheer on some other injured soldier.

"Exercises." Morrell said it as if it were a four-letter word. He started opening and closing and flexing his right hand. It didn't hurt as much as it had when he'd begun doing it. Then it had felt as if his whole right arm were being dipped in boiling oil. Now he just imagined he had a wolverine gnawing at his shoulder joint. This was progress, of a sort.

Dr. Rohde insisted that the more he did the exercises, the easier they would become. To Morrell, that only proved that Dr. Rohde, no matter how smart and well trained he was, had never got shot. Morrell wished he could say the same thing.

Instead, he got an oak-leaf cluster for his Purple Heart, an honor he would gladly have done without.

The decoration looked absurd on the green-gray government-issue pajamas he wore.

Even though the exercises hurt, he did keep up with them. He'd done that with his wounded leg, too, once it finally healed enough to let him. His thigh still twinged every once in a while, but he could use it as well as the other. Dr. Rohde beamed at him a few days later. "You are a conscientious man, Colonel."

"Doc, what I am is one stubborn son of a bitch." The two phrases meant the same thing, but Morrell preferred his version. He went on, "Long as you're here, Doc, I've got a question for you."

"If I know the answer, you will have it." Rohde still looked and sounded mighty cheerful for a medical man. Morrell wondered if he'd been getting into the prescription brandy.

Well, if he had, that would only make his tongue flap more freely. Morrell asked, "Am I the only officer you know of who's been specifically targeted, or are the Confederates really trying to knock off people who know what they're doing?"

"I did not know you had been, let alone any others," Rohde said.

So much for that, Morrell thought. Aloud, he said, "I damn well was. That sniper bastard took two more shots at me after I got hit, when they were carrying me off to cover." And thank God for Sergeant Pound's strong, broad back. "He missed me by a gnat's whisker both times, and he didn't even try for anybody else. So am I just lucky, or is Jake Featherston trying to kill officers who've shown that they're competent?"

"Let me try to find out." Dr. Rohde pulled a notepad from the breast pocket of his long white jacket. He scribbled something on the pad, then stuck it back in the pocket.

"You going to be able to read that?" Morrell gibed.

Rohde took the pad out again, wrote something else in it, tore out that sheet of paper, set it on Morrell's bed, and left his room. Morrell picked up the paper with his good hand. Mind your own goddamn beeswax, he read. The script was an elegant copperplate; a schoolteacher would have envied it. Morrell laughed out loud. There went one cliché, shot down like a dive bomber with a fighter on its tail.

For the next few days, Conrad Rohde was all business. Morrell wondered if he'd really offended the doctor. He didn't think he should have, but how could anybody know for sure? Maybe he'd been the

fourth guy to rag on Rohde's writing in the space of an hour and a half. That would frost anybody's pumpkin.

At the end of the examination, though, the doctor said, "I haven't forgotten about what you asked. I'm trying to find out."

"All right," Morrell said mildly. "Uh--thanks."

"You're welcome," Rohde answered. "For whatever you may think it's worth, some of the people to whom I've put your question seem to think it's very interesting."

"I'd rather they thought I was full of hops," Morrell said. "The war would be easier if they did."

Rohde didn't say anything about that. He just finished writing up Morrell's vital signs and left the room.

When he came back that afternoon, he set another sheet of paper from his notepad on the bed. Again, he left without saying a word.

Morrell read the sheet. In that same precise script--rub it in, Doc, why don't you? he thought--Rohde had listed seven names. Beside four of them, he'd written KIA. Beside the other three was the word wounded. Morrell recognized five of the names. He knew two of the men personally, and knew of the other three. They were all officers who were good at whatever they happened to do: infantry, artillery, one a genius at logistics. That lieutenant-colonel had kia by his name; someone else, someone surely less capable, was filling his slot now.

The doctor didn't return till the following morning. By then, Morrell had all he could do not to explode.

"They are!" he exclaimed. "The sons of bitches damn well are!"

"So it would seem," Rohde answered. "You've certainly found a pattern. Whether the pattern means something is now under investigation."

"If it's there, it has to mean something," Morrell said.

But the doctor shook his head. "If you're in a crap game and somebody rolls four sevens in a row, that just means he's hot. If he rolls fourteen sevens in a row, or twenty--"

"That means he's playing with loaded dice," Morrell broke in.

"Exactly," Rohde said. "So--which is this? Four sevens in a row, or fourteen? All these officers have served at or near the front. Plenty of people who'd never make your list have got shot, too. So maybe this is a coincidence. But maybe it isn't, too. And if it isn't, you're the one who spotted it."

"Thanks a lot," Morrell said. "There's one more prize I'd just as soon not win."

"Why?" Rohde said. "We can do a better job of protecting our people if we know this than we could before we knew. That may come to matter, and not a little, either."

Morrell's grimace, for once, had nothing to do with his shattered shoulder. "And what else will we do?

Go after the Confederates the same way?"

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," Dr. Rohde said.

"Neither would I." Morrell pulled another horrible face. "Makes the war even more wonderful than the bombing raids and the poison gas and the machine guns, doesn't it?"

Rohde shrugged. "No doubt. You're the one who makes his living fighting it, though, you and the fellows like you on the other side. I just make mine patching up the ones you don't quite kill."

"Thanks a lot, Doc. I love you, too."

"I'm not saying we don't need soldiers. I've never said that. There's no way to get rid of such people, not without everybody doing it at the same time. If you think twenty sevens in a row are unlikely . . . But don't expect a doctor to get all misty-eyed and romantic about war, either. I've seen too much for that."

"So have I," Morrell said soberly. "Plenty of people have ugly jobs. That doesn't mean they don't need doing."

"Well, all right--we're not so far from the same page, anyhow," Rohde said. "I'll tell you, though, I've heard plenty who won't admit even that much."

Somebody down the hall shouted his name. He muttered something vile under his breath, then hurried off. Patching up another one my

Confederate counterparts didn't quite kill, Morrell thought. They'll get reprimanded if they don't quit screwing up like that. He chuckled, though it wasn't really funny. Up till now, he'd never thought about war from a doctor's point of view.

Here he was, flat on his back again. For the first time since he'd got shot in 1914, he had plenty of time to lie there and think about things. He couldn't do much else, as a matter of fact. After he asked for a wireless set, he had it to help him pass the time. Sometimes the saccharine music and the sports shows and the inane quizzes made him want to scream. Sometimes what passed for news in the civilian world made him want to scream, too.

He solved that problem by turning off the wireless. Then he stared at the set sitting there on the little table by the bed. What good was it to him if he didn't listen to it? On the other hand, what good was it to him if it drove him out of his mind?

He was still trying to work that out three days later when he had a visitor. "Good God in the foothills!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know they let you out ofPhiladelphia except when you needed to make a mess on the floor."

Colonel John Abell gave him a thin, cool smile--the only kind the cerebral General Staff office seemed to own. "Hello," Abell said. "You do pose interesting questions, don't you? Well, I've got a question for you--can you open this?" He handed Morrell a small box covered in felt.

"Damn straight I can. I can do almost anything one-handed these days." Morrell proceeded to prove himself right--and then stared at the pair of small silver stars inside the box.

"Congratulations, General Morrell," Abell said.

"Oh, my," Morrell whispered. "Oh, my." He went on staring. After some little while, he realized he ought to say a bit more. Softly, he went on, "The last time I felt something like this, I was holding my new daughter in my arms."

"Congratulations," Abell repeated. "If the Confederates think you're important enough to be worth killing, I daresay you're important enough to deserve stars."

Morrell gave him a sharp look. The General Staff officer looked back

blandly. He probably wasn't kidding. He almost surely wasn't, in fact. What Morrell had done in the field looked unimpressive toPhiladelphia . What the enemy thought of him was something else again. That mattered to the powers that be. In the end, though, how Morrell had got the stars hardly mattered. That he'd got them made all the difference in the world.

Jefferson Pinkard swore when the telephone in his office jangled. Telephone calls were not apt to be good news. He always feared they'd be fromRichmond . As far as he could remember, calls fromRichmond had never been good news. When his curses failed to make the telephone stop ringing, he reluctantly picked it up. "Pinkard here."

"Hello, Pinkard. This is Ferd Koenig. Freedom! How are you this morning?"

"Freedom! I'm fine, sir. How are you?" What the hell do you want with me? But that wasn't a question Jeff could ask the Attorney General.

"Couldn't be better," Koenig said expansively, which only made Jeff more suspicious. The Attorney General continued, "Got a question for you."

"Shoot." What else could Pinkard say? Nothing, and he knew it.

"You reckon Mercer Scott's ready to take overCampDependable ?"

Ice ran through Pinkard's veins. "I reckon that depends, sir," he said cautiously.

"Depends on what?"

Caution flew out the window. "On what you intend to do with me, sir. I've run this here camp since we took it over from that goddamn Huey Long. Don't think I've done too bad a job, either. Just in case you forgot, I was the fellow came up with those trucks. Nobody else--me."

"Easy, there. Easy. I do remember. So does the President. Nobody's putting you on the shelf,"

Ferdinand Koenig said. "It's not like that at all. Matter of fact, I've got a new job for you, if you want it."

"Depends on what it is," Pinkard said, dubious still.

"Well, how long have you been complaining thatCampDependable isn't

big enough for everything it's supposed to do?"

"Only forever."

Koenig laughed, which did nothing to make Jeff feel any easier. "All right, then," the Attorney General said. "How would you like to run a camp that's big enough for everything? Not just run it, but set it up from scratch. You've got practice at that kind of thing, don't you?"

"You know damn well I do, sir," Jeff answered. "Wasn't for me startin' up a camp inMexico , I never would've got into this here line of work at all." And there's plenty of times I wish I never did.

"Whereabouts'll this new camp be at?"

"Texas," Koenig said. "We'll put you out on the goddamn prairie, so you'll have plenty of room to grow.

There'll be a railroad spur out to the place so you can ship in supplies easy. Won't be any trouble shippin'

in plenty of niggers, either."

"That kind of camp again?" Pinkard said heavily. "I was hopin' you'd let me handle real prisoners of war."

"Any damn fool can do that," Ferd Koenig said. "We've got plenty o' damn fools doing it, too. But this other business takes somebody with brains and somebody with balls. That's you, unless. . . ."

Unless you haven't got the balls to do it. That hurt. Angrily, Pinkard said, "I've never backed away from anything you threw at me, Koenig, and you know it goddamn well. I'll do this, and I'll do it right. I just wish I had my druthers once in a while, is all."

He waited. If the Attorney General felt like canning him because he had the nerve to answer back . . . If he did, then he would, that was all. Jeff refused to worry about it. He'd paid his dues, and he'd given the Freedom Party everything it could possibly have asked from him. He could always find other things to do now. He was too old to make a likely soldier, but he still had his health. Factories lined up to hire people like him these days.

Instead of getting angry, Koenig said, "Keep your shirt on, Jeff. I know what you've done. Like I told you, the President knows, too. Why do you think I called you first? This is going to be the top camp job in the

whole country. We want the best man for it--and that's you."

Koenig had never been the sort to flatter for the sake of flattery. As Jake Featherston's right-hand man, he'd never needed to. He meant it, then. Since he meant it, Pinkard didn't see how he could say no. He drummed his fingers on the desktop. But he also had reasons he hadn't mentioned for being unenthusiastic about saying yes. He asked, "How long would it be before I have to go out to this place inTexas ?"

"Part-time, pretty damn quick. Like I said, you'll be doing a lot of the setup," Koenig answered.

"Full-time? A few months, I expect. You can ease Scott into your slot there while you're away, finish showing him whatever he needs when you come back toLouisiana . How's that sound?"

"Fair, I reckon," Jeff said, still with something less than delight. "A little longer might be better."

To his surprise, Ferd Koenig laughed out loud. "I know what part of your trouble is. You're courting that guard's pretty widow."

Pinkard growled something he hoped the Attorney General couldn't make out. Of course the government and the Freedom Party--assuming you could tell one from the other--were keeping an eye on him. He'd risen high enough that they needed to. He didn't like it--how could anybody like it?--but he understood it.

"Well, what if I am, goddammit?" he said. He almost said, God damn you, but managed not to. "I don't sit in this office or prowl around the camp every minute of the day and night."

"Didn't say you did," Koenig told him. "All right--how's this? When you go toTexas full-time, bring her along. Call her a secretary or whatever the hell you please. If she really does some work, that's fine. If she doesn't, nobody's gonna lose any sleep over it. We'll pay her a salary on top of the pension either way. We want you there, and if that means forking over a little extra on the side, then it does, and we'll live with it. That's why we've got bookkeepers."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Koenig." Now Jeff was glad he hadn't aimed his curses straight at the Attorney General. "That's mighty handsome of you. I'll do it, and I'll see if she wants to come along."

"Good," Koenig said. "I'll tell you one more thing, long as I'm on the

line: if she doesn't want to go toTexas with you, chances are it wouldn't have worked out even if you stayed inLouisiana ."

Pinkard grunted. That was probably gospel, too. He said, "She's got young, ‘uns, you know. There a place close by this here new camp for them to go to school?"

"Beats me," the Attorney General said. "But if there isn't, there will be by the time you move there for good. You've got my word on it. You're an expensive proposition, you know that?"

"You said you wanted the good stuff. I don't come cheap," Pinkard answered.

Ferdinand Koenig laughed again. "We'll take it from there, then," he said, and hung up.

"Yeah. I guess maybe we will," Pinkard said to the dead line. He set the telephone back in the cradle.

When he went out into the yard, he wasn't surprised to find Mercer Scott coming up to him inside a minute and a half. The guard chief knew when he got a telephone call. Jeff had never found out how, but Scott knew. "What's the latest?" the hard-faced man asked casually.

"Congratulations," Jeff said, his own features as tightly shuttered as if he were in a high-stakes poker game. "Looks like you're gonna be takin' over this here camp in a few months' time."

"Oh, yeah?" Mercer Scott had a pretty good poker face, too, but it failed him now, shattering into astonishment. "What the hell's goin'on? You ain't in trouble far as I know, so help me God." He had to be wondering what sort of revenge Jeff had planned for him.

"Nah, I ain't in trouble," Jeff allowed after letting the other man stew for a little while. "They're startin' up a new camp inTexas , and they want me to go over there, get it up and running, and then take it over."

"Ah." Scott's narrow eyes were shrewd. "Good break for you, then. It'll be a big son of a bitch, I bet.

They wouldn't waste you on anything pissant-like. So you'll be able to set it up the way you want to, will you?"

"That's what Koenig says, anyways," Jeff answered. "I'll find out how

much he means it when I get there.

Some--I'm pretty sure o' that. All the way? Well, Jesus walked on water, but there ain't been a hell of a lot of miracles since."

"Heh," Scott said. "Yeah. That'd be funny, if only it was funny. Well, you earned it--screw me if you didn't." He stuck out his hand. Jeff solemnly shook it. The clasp seemed less a trial of strength than their handshakes usually did. Still shrewd, Scott went on, "What's Edith Blades gonna think about it?"

Pinkard shrugged. "Dunno yet. I only just found out myself. I got to see what she thinks, see if she feels like packin' up and headin' west."

"You're serious," Scott said in some surprise.

"Expect I am," Jeff agreed. "She's a nice gal. She's a sweet gal. She wouldn't play around on you, not like--not like some." He didn't need to tell Mercer Scott the unhappy story of his first marriage.

Scott didn't push him. Maybe the guard chief already knew. He just said, "Good luck to you." His voice was far away. His eyes weren't quite on Jeff, either. He was looking aroundCampDependable . Jeff had no trouble figuring out what he was thinking about: things he'd do different when he took over.

That would be his worry. Jeff had plenty of things to think about, too. Paying a call on Edith once he got off duty topped the list, but only barely. Part of his mind was already way the hell out inTexas . Just like Mercer Scott, he was thinking about what he'd do when he started his new post. But Edith did come first.

He couldn't telephone her. She didn't have a telephone. He drove on over that evening after sundown.

Her boys said, "It's Mr. Pinkard!" when she opened the door. They sounded glad to see him. That made him feel good. He'd never had much to do with kids since he stopped being one himself, not till now.

"Well, so it is," she said. "Come on in, Jeff. What brings you here?"

He told his story all over again. This time, he finished, "An' I was wondering, if I was to go toTexas , whether you'd like to come along--you and the kids, of course." He didn't want her thinking he didn't give a damn about the boys. He wasn't even trying to fool her, because he did like them.

She said, "That depends. I could go out there and we'd keep on seeing each other like we been, or I could go out there married to you. I'm not saying you've got to propose to me now, Jeff, but I tell you straight out I won't go out there in between the one of those and the other, if you know what I mean."

He nodded. He knew exactly what she meant. He liked her better for meaning it, not less. He would gladly have slept with her if she'd let him, but he never would have thought about marrying her if she had.

He said, "I'd be right pleased to marry you, if that's what you want to do." His heart pounded. Would he be pleased? One way or the other, he'd find out.

"That's what I'd like to do," she said. "I'd be proud to go toTexas as your fiancée. I'd like to wait till Chick's dead a year before I marry again, if you don't mind too much."

"I don't mind," Jeff said. Too much, he thought.

Tom Colleton had hoped to land another leave down inColumbus . Then theUSA threw a fresh attack atSandusky . It was more an annoyance than a serious effort to drive the Confederates out. The blizzard that blew into theU.S. soldiers' faces as they advanced from the east didn't make their lives any easier, either. After a couple of days of probing and skirmishing, they sullenly drew back to their own lines--those who could still withdraw, of course.

Whatever else the attack accomplished, it made the Confederate high command nervous. An order canceling all leaves came down from on high. Privates and sergeants hoping for some time away from the front were disappointed. So was Tom Colleton. One more reason to hate the damnyankees, he thought as the arctic wind offLake Erie threatened to turn him into an icicle.

For a wonder, the Confederate powers that be actually suspected they might have disappointed their men. From officers of such exalted grade, that was almost unprecedented. Colleton put it down to Jake Featherston's influence on the Army. Say what you would about the President of the CSA, but he'd been a noncom up close to the front all through the Great War. He knew how ordinary soldiers thought and what they needed. Some of that knowledge got through to the people directly in charge of the Army these days.

They tried to make up for banning leaves by sending entertainers up toSandusky . It wasn't the same--they didn't send a brothel's worth of women up there, for instance--but it was better than nothing.

There were some women in the troupe: singers and dancers. The soldiers who packed a high-school auditorium whooped and cheered and hollered. Officers were no less raucous than enlisted men. They might have charged the stage if a solid phalanx of military policemen with nightsticks hadn't stood between them and the objects of their desire.

Most of the acts that didn't have girls in them met a reception as frigid as the weather outside. A comic who told jokes about the war but was plainly making his closest approach to anything that had to do with combat by being here almost got booed off the stage.

"You cocksucker, you'd shit your drawers if you saw a real Yankee with a real gun in his hands!"

somebody yelled. A fierce roar of approval rose from the crowd. It was all downhill from there for the luckless comic.

One exception to the rule was a Negro musical combo called Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces. Negro musicians had been part of life in the Confederate States since long before the War of Secession--and Satchmo was a trumpeter the likes of whom Tom Colleton had never seen or heard. The rest of the Rhythm Aces were good without being especially memorable. Backing the brilliant Satchmo, they shone brighter in the light of his reflected glory.

With a harsh spotlight on him, he looked like nothing so much as a big black frog. His eyes and his cheeks bulged in a way that would have been comical except for the sounds that came out of his horn. A man who made music like that? No matter what he looked like, you couldn't help taking him seriously.

A man sitting in the row behind Tom said, "I'll be goddamned if that nigger don't look scared to death."

He was right. Colleton realized as much almost at once. He'd taken Satchmo's grimaces and contortions as some ill-advised comedy thrown into the act. Colored performers often did things like that when they played in front of whites. But these weren't the usual nigger's smirks and simpers. They didn't come close to fitting the music, either, and Satchmo wasn't the sort of man who would have sullied that.

What was he so afraid of? Nobody here was going to do anything to him. On the contrary: the soldiers were listening in the enchanted silence only the finest performers could earn. When Satchmo finished a number, the cheering nearly tore the roof off the auditorium.

What, then? Tom shrugged. You couldn't expect Negroes to love the CSA. As far as Tom was concerned, they deserved a lot of what they were getting. He remembered the way the Marshlands plantation had been, and the ruin it was now. If the colored Reds hadn't risen up, that wouldn't have happened. But blacks didn't like it so much now that the shoe pinched the other foot.

Tom didn't know everything the Freedom Party was doing down in the CSA. He did know he wasn't sorry for it, whatever it was. He'd never asked himself where the phrase population reduction came from.

Few whites had, though they used it. Had the question occurred to him, he might have understood why terror lay under Satchmo's music.

When the trumpeter and the Rhythm Aces finished their set, they got another thunderous hand. Tom wasn't the only man who leaped to his feet to show how much he'd liked them. They played an encore and got even more applause, enough to prompt a second encore. They could have played all night, as far as the soldiers went. At last, though, Satchmo mimed exhaustion.

"I thanks you right kindly, gentlemen," he said in a deep, gravelly voice, "but we gots us another gig in the mornin'. When the gummint done sent us up here to Yankeeland, they made sure they kep' us busy."

How many shows did they have to play? How much rest did they get between them? The answers were bound to be lots and not much, respectively. Reluctantly, the Confederate soldiers let them go--and then jeered the white song-and-dance man who had the misfortune to come on after them.

Quite a few men got up and left after Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces quit the stage. They might have been saying they were sure they wouldn't see anything else worth watching. Tom sat through the rest of the evening. He saw a few more pretty girls than the soldiers who'd walked out early, but that was about it.

He tramped back through the snow to the house where he'd been staying since his regiment reachedSandusky . The Yankees who'd lived there before him had either got out or been killed. The house itself

had taken some damage, but not a lot. With wood in the fireplace and coal in the stove, it was cozy enough, even in wintertime.

A commotion--men running every which way and shouting--woke Tom before sunup the next morning.

He put on his boots and the greatcoat he'd piled on top of his blanket and went out to see what the hell was going on. The only thing he was sure of was that it wasn't the damnyankees: nobody was shooting and nobody was screaming in the way only wounded men did.

He got his answer when a soldier burst out, "Them goddamn niggers've run off!" By the fury in his voice, he might have been an overseer back in the days before the Confederate States manumitted their slaves.

"Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces?" Tom asked. He couldn't imagine men making such a fuss over either of the other colored acts in the show.

"That's right. Goddamn stinking ungrateful coons," the soldier said. "We catch their black asses, we'll make 'em sorry they was ever born."

"They're probably already sorry," Tom said. "And if they aren't now, they will be pretty damn quick.

Even if they do make it through our lines, they'll find out the damnyankees don't like niggers a hell of a lot more than we do."

The soldier--a sergeant who needed a shave--nodded. "That's a fact, sir. But I want to make 'em as sorry as they can be. They got themselves a nerve, playin' like that last night and then runnin' away. Like I said, ungrateful bastards."

"Which way did they go?" Tom asked. "In this snow, they should have left a trail a mile wide."

"What it looks like they done is, it looks like they stole themselves a command car," the noncom said.

"Once they got on the eastbound road, their goddamn tire tracks look like everybody else's."

He was right about that. Command cars often mounted machine guns, too. Whoever tried to stop the blacks might get a nasty surprise. "Did you send a wireless message on ahead, warning people the niggers are

liable to be on the way?" Tom asked.

"Sure did, sir," the unshaven sergeant answered, "but Christ only knows how much good it'll do. We only just found out they was gone--reckon the ruction's what rousted you out of the sack--and they have hours of start. They could've gone a hell of a long ways before we knew they took off."

He was right about that, too. Tom said, "God help their sorry necks if we do catch 'em. They'll get their population reduced faster than you can whistle, ‘Dixie." "

"Just goes to show you can't trust a nigger no matter what," the noncom said. "Somebody down in the CSA figured those spooks wouldn't make a break for it if he let 'em get close to the damnyankees. That's what he figured, but it sure looks like he was full of shit."

Another soldier came running out of regimental headquarters. "Son of a bitch!" he shouted. "Just got word back from the east. They found a picket post, looks like it was all shot to hell. Shot to hell from this side, mind you, not like the Yankees done it. Hell with me if those coons didn't get away."

Tom and the sergeant both swore. Evidently the stolen command car had carried a machine gun. Had one of the Rhythm Aces, or maybe even Satchmo himself, served a weapon like that in the uprisings of 1915 and 1916? Or--worse thought yet--had one of them served in the C.S. Army during the Great War and learned to use a machine gun there? So much for gratitude: if he had, he'd just bitten the hand that fed him.

And the Confederate pickets would have been paying attention to theU.S. troops in front of them, not to a command car coming up from behind. They would have figured an officer was coming up to look things over. It would have been the last mistake they ever made.

"How far from there to the Yankees' positions?" Tom asked.

"Not very far, sir," answered the soldier who'd heard the report.

"Any sign of dead niggers between the outpost and theU.S. lines?"

"No, sir."

"They got away, then, sure as hell." Tom cussed some more. So did the

sergeant. After a moment, so did the man who'd brought the news. Tom went on, "The real pisser is, odds are they won't let any more niggers come up and perform after this. I bet they ship the other colored acts in this troupe back home, too. It's a damn shame for soldiers, is what it is. We aren't using niggers to fight. If we can't use 'em to entertain, what are they good for?"

"Who says niggers are good for anything?" the sergeant growled. "It'd be a better country if we didn't have to worry about 'em no more."

The other soldier standing there in the snow nodded. Tom didn't argue. He wouldn't have been sorry to see all the blacks in the CSA disappear, either. He didn't have the stomach for killing them all himself, but he wouldn't shed a tear if the Freedom Party found men who did. As for Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces .

. . "I can think of some we don't have to worry about any more--unless the Yankees use 'em to mock us." That could be a nuisance. But, as long as he stood here byLake Erie , it couldn't be much more than a nuisance.

Flora Blackford picked up the telephone in her office. "Yes? What is it?" she said.

"Mr. Roosevelt wants to speak to you, Congresswoman," her secretary answered.

"Thank you, Bertha. Of course I'll talk to him," Flora said. When the Assistant Secretary of War came on the line, she continued, "Good morning, Mr. Roosevelt. What can I do for you today?"

"Hello, Congresswoman." As always, Franklin Roosevelt sounded jaunty in spite of his paralysis. "I've just run into something that I thought might interest you."

"What is it?" Flora asked.

"Seems some colored musical ensemble that was up inOhio to entertain Confederate soldiers decided the grass was greener on our side of the fence. They got away. I gather they shot up some Confederates doing it, too."

"Good for them!" Flora exclaimed. "They didn't get shot when they walked into our lines?"

"They drove in, as a matter of fact--they stole a command car. That's what gave them their firepower,"Roosevelt answered. "No, they didn't get shot. I'm not sure they know how lucky they are."

"What are we going to do with them? We can't very well send them back--that would be murder," Flora said.

"No, we'll keep them. We can use their testimony about Confederate atrocities. And they're supposed to be pretty good musicians, if you like that kind of thing."Roosevelt 's laugh was a little self-conscious.

"Not really to my taste, I'm afraid: too wild. But some people are excited that they've made it over the border. Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces, they're called."

"Satchmo?" Flora wasn't sure she'd heard straight.

"That's right." Franklin Roosevelt laughed again. "I gather he was named, er, Sennacherib, but nobody who knew him could pronounce it. I believe that--I can't pronounce it myself."

"Sennacherib is a fancy handle even for a Negro from the Confederate States," Flora agreed. "Will we be bringing, uh, Satchmo and the--the Rhythm Aces, did you say?--toPhiladelphia ? This is where the wireless networks have their headquarters."

"Yes, I think we'll do that. I don't know how much broadcasting we'll have them do, though. What we call English and what they call English are almost two different languages, I'm afraid."

"I'd like to see them when they get here," Flora said.

"Actually, I was hoping you'd say that." The Assistant Secretary of War sounded pleased. "You've taken the lead in telling the world about what the Confederates are doing to their colored population."

"It's worse than what the Ottomans did to the Armenians during and after the Great War," Flora said. "If the Russians started killing off their Jews, that might come close, but even it wouldn't be the same."

"The Russians or the Germans,"Roosevelt said. "With theKingdomofPoland a German puppet, the Kaiser rules over as many Jews as the Tsar does."

"Yes, but the Russians have pogroms for the fun of it, and to distract

people from what a mess the Tsar's government is," Flora answered. "The Germans are too civilized for that kind of thing, thank God."

"Half their brain trust are Jews, too. They can't afford to do without them,"Roosevelt said. "But that's beside the point. Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces have heard about you, too. So I'm doubly glad you want to meet them, because they've already said they want to meet you."

"How have they heard about me? Do you know?" Flora asked.

"From the wireless, mostly, I think,"Roosevelt told her. "That's good to hear; it shows some of our propaganda is getting through. Would you like to be there on the platform when they come in?"

"That might be nice." Flora sighed reminiscently. "When I was first elected to Congress and came down here to start my term, Hosea met me on the platform and took me to my flat. That was the first time we met. I had no idea it would go the way it did."

"He was a good man. A good man," Franklin Roosevelt said. "I've always thought it was horribly unfair to blame the business collapse on him. If it weren't for that, he would have made a fine President. No, that's not right--he did make a fine President. It's just that the times were against him."

"Thank you. I've always thought the same thing," Flora said. "And we elected Coolidge--and gotHoover

. Coolidge wouldn't have made things better, andHoover didn't. And the Confederates chose Jake Featherston, and the French got Action Française and a king, and the English got Mosley and Churchill.

That's a lot to pin on an Austro-Hungarian bank failure, but it's the truth."

"If you toss a pebble into a snowbank, you can start an avalanche that will wipe out everything down below,"Roosevelt said. "The first failure was a pebble, and the avalanche rolled downhill from there."

"Didn't it just!" Flora said mournfully.

When Roosevelt spoke again, it was after a paper-shuffling pause: "Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces get into town at the Broad Street station, Platform 27, at . . . let me see . . . at half past nine tomorrow night.

That's when they're scheduled, I should say. Confederate bombers and Confederate saboteurs may change everyone's plans."

"Oh, yes, I know," Flora replied. "Well, I'll get there on time--unless an air raid changes my plans."

"Thank you very much." Franklin Roosevelt hung up.

To Flora's relief, the sirens didn't howl that night. The Confederates weren't coming overPhiladelphia quite so much these days. More of their airplanes were staying home to attack theU.S. forces slogging forward through an ocean of blood inVirginia . She had no trouble getting a cab and going over to theBroad Street station.

Platform 27 wasn't the one where she'd got off the train fromNew York City all those years ago. Too bad, she thought. She'd wondered if Franklin Roosevelt would also be there to greet the escaped musicians. He wasn't, but several lesser War Department dignitaries were.

The train ran late. Some years before, there'd been an Italian politician who'd promised to make the trains run on time if he were elected. He hadn't been; nobody had believed he could do it. Flora tried to remember his name, but couldn't, which only went to show how unimportant he'd been.U.S. trains weren't so bad as their Italian counterparts were said to be, but they weren't all that good, either. And the war had done nothing to help.

At ten, Flora was resigned. At half past, she was annoyed. At eleven, she didn't know whether to be furious or worried. The train finally pulled into the station at ten minutes to twelve. That irked her all over again. She'd decided to give the laggard locomotive till midnight. After that, she could have gone home and gone to bed in good conscience. She wouldn't see bed at even a halfway reasonable hour now.

People who got off before Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces shook their heads and grumbled, often profanely, about delays and detours. A few of them muttered apologies to Flora as they walked by. One of the foulest-mouthed passengers, though, was a woman, and she was in no mood to apologize to anybody for anything.

Flora had no trouble recognizing the men she was looking for. In the bright light under the platform, the Negroes seemed all eyeballs and teeth. They wore green-gray uniform tunics and trousers with the highly polished shoes that must have accompanied more formal wear. They stared every which way, plainly with no idea what to do next.

She stepped up to them, gave her name, and said, "Welcome toPhiladelphia . I'd say welcome to freedom, but there's a party down in the CSA that's given the word a bad name."

All five of the black men grinned and nodded. "Ain't it the truth!" said the one who stood out a little from the rest. If he wasn't Satchmo, she would have been very surprised. He had a deep, raspy voice and an engagingly ugly face. "We're right pleased to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Blackford. Ain't that right, boys?" The other Negroes nodded again, in unison.

The men from the War Department were a few paces behind Flora. Since they were the ones who were going to take charge of the newcomers, she stepped aside and let them introduce themselves. Then she asked, "What is it like for a Negro in the Confederate States these days?"

"Ma'am, I reckon you got a notion already that it's pretty bad," Satchmo said. Flora didn't need to nod to show she did. The musician went on, "All right. Well, for true, it's a hundred times that bad." The other Rhythm Aces murmured agreement, as if he were a lead singer and they his backup vocalists.

"Do most of the Negroes in the CSA know what the Freedom Party is doing to them--to you?" Flora asked.

One of the Aces spoke on his own for the first time: "If we didn't, ma'am, you reckon we take the chance o' doin' what we done?"

"But musicians like you travel all over the place. You hear things most people wouldn't," Flora persisted.

"What about ordinary Negroes who stay in one spot? Do they know what's happening in those Freedom Party camps?"

A major asked, "Do they hear our wireless broadcasts? We try to let them know what's going on." He had to be in Intelligence or Propaganda. Nobody who wasn't could have made that sound so smooth.

"They hear some, I reckon, but the Freedom Party jams you pretty good, suh," Satchmo replied. "Don't want nobody, white or colored, listenin' to the damnyankee wireless."

Flora had heard white Confederates say damnyankee as if it were one

word. She hadn't expected a black man to do the same. "How do they know, then?--the black people in the CSA, I mean."

The musicians looked at her. One of them said, "Everybody know somebody done got sucked into a camp. Ain't nobody know nobody who ever come out again. We ain't educated. White folks in the CSA always been afraid o' what'd happen if we git educated. But we ain't stupid, neither. Don't gotta be no sly, sneaky Jew to figure out what folks goin'in an' not comin' out means."

He knew as little of Jews as Flora did of Negroes, probably less. She had to remind herself of that. And he'd made his point. She said, "Well, you're safe here--as long as a bomb doesn't fall on your head. We all take that chance."

"Thank you, ma'am. God bless you, ma'am," Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces chorused together.

"You're welcome," Flora said. "And I'll do whatever I can to stop those Freedom Party goons from massacring your people. I don't know how much that will be, but I'll do my damnedest." She hardly ever swore, but it seemed fitting now.

"God bless you," Satchmo repeated. "Nice to know somebody here cares a little, anyways. Ain't nobody south of the border cares at all."

How many people north of the border cared at all? Too few, too few. Flora didn't care to tell Satchmo that. He and his friends had just escaped from worse. Let them find out a little at a time that they hadn't come to paradise. That way--maybe--their hearts wouldn't break.

Cincinnatus Driver couldn't believe he'd been stuck inCovington more than a year. He knew he was lucky his father hadn't had to bury him here, but he wasn't always sure his luck in surviving had been good.

Just the same, he had made progress. He still used a cane, and feared he would for the rest of his life.

He was fairly spry with it now, where he had been an arthritic tortoise. He didn't get headaches as often as he had not long after the accident, either, and the ones that did come weren't so blinding. Progress. He laughed. It was either that or cry. He'd gone from worse to bad. Huzzah!

His mother, now, his mother went from bad to worse. She still knew who Seneca was, and sometimes Cincinnatus, but that was almost her only hold on the real world. She made messes like a toddler. The first time Cincinnatus cleaned her, he burst into tears as soon as he got out of the room. He had to harden himself to do it over and over again. He never cried after that once, but it tore at his heart every time. It wasn't right. It wasn't natural. She'd done this for him when he was little. That he should have to do it for her . . .

He found himself looking at his father. Would he have to do the same for him one day? The horror of that thought drove Cincinnatus out of the house. He could have gone to the Brass Monkey; getting drunk would--well, might--have kept him from dwelling on it. Instead, he headed for Lucullus'. He couldn't buy a drink there, not officially, but that didn't mean he couldn't get something to wet his whistle if he wanted to. Knowing the proprietor had its advantages.

The place wasn't crowded when he limped in. He hadn't thought it would be, not on a drizzly Tuesday afternoon. But it wasn't empty, either. As far as he knew, Lucullus' place was never empty. The barbecue was too good for that. Negroes and whites both came here. As usual, whites sat at some tables, blacks at others, and. . . . There, a white man and a Negro sat across from each other at the same table. That was out of the ordinary not only at Lucullus' but anywhere in the CSA.

Then Cincinnatus saw the Negro at the table was Lucullus himself. The bulky barbecue chef broke the rules whenever he pleased. The white man glanced up as Cincinnatus came in. The fellow didn't look to be far from a skid row bum. His gray hair came down in odd tufts from under a disreputable hat. He'd needed a shave for three or four days. His scruffy sweater had had spots on it before barbecue sauce added a more colorful one.

None of that had anything to do with the icy lizards that walked up Cincinnatus' back. Going around like somebody who'd been hitting the bottle too hard for too long might fool most people, but not Cincinnatus. He would have recognized Luther Bliss in pancake makeup and a little black dress, let alone this outfit.

His face must have given him away. Bliss said something to Lucullus, who looked up. He waved to Cincinnatus and beckoned him over. Cincinnatus would sooner have jumped into a nest of rattlesnakes.

He didn't see what choice he had, though. Moving even more slowly

than he had to, he approached.

"Well, well. Damned if it ain't little Mary Sunshine." Bliss sounded like a crack-brained derelict, too, which was harder than looking like one. His eyes, though, his eyes he couldn't disguise. They were too alert, too clever, to match the rest of his pretended persona.

"What you doin' here?" Cincinnatus asked as he sat down--by Lucullus. Nothing in the world would have made him sit down by Luther Bliss.

"Me? goin'to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it," Bliss answered.

For a moment, that made no sense to Cincinnatus. Then it did. It was from the Book of Job. "You don't gotta do much talkin' to make me believe you're the Devil," Cincinnatus said.

Bliss brayed out a loud, stupid laugh. "Love you, too," he said, and blew Cincinnatus a kiss.

Cincinnatus turned to Lucullus. "What you doin' with this man? Whatever it is, he ain't doin' it for you.

He's doin' it for his ownself, nobody else." Bliss laughed again, even more raucously. Cincinnatus glared at him once more. All that did was prove looks couldn't kill.

Before saying anything of consequence, Lucullus waved for a waitress and told her to fetch Cincinnatus a plate of pork ribs and a bottle of Dr. Hopper. Only after she went away did he remark, "Ain't always who you're for what matters. Sometimes who you're against counts fo' mo'."

"Yeah, sometimes." Cincinnatus pointed at Luther Bliss. "He's against you, for instance, on account of you're a Red." Keeping his voice down so the whole place wouldn't hear what he was saying took almost more willpower than he had in him.

"I got bigger worries right now, bigger fish to fry." Bliss talked normally. He just made sure nobody in his right mind would want to listen. That was a considerable talent. He had a lot of them. Getting Cincinnatus to trust him would never be one.

The waitress brought the food and the soda pop. Nobody said anything till she left. Cincinnatus wondered whether that was wasted

caution. People who worked for Lucullus were probably involved in his schemes up to their eyebrows. Then the delicious aroma of the ribs distracted him. He dug in, and promptly got a stain on his shirt to match the one on Luther Bliss' sweater.

"How'd you like to help us give the Confederate States ofAmerica one right in the nuts?" Lucullus asked.

He might have asked, How'd you like to buy a pig in a poke? Or he might have asked, How'd you like to get killed? Cincinnatus suspected all three questions boiled down to the same thing. "Depends," he said. "What do I gotta do?"

"I knew he didn't have the balls for it," Luther Bliss said scornfully.

Cincinnatus didn't raise his voice as he said, "Fuck your mother, Luther."

Bliss' mahogany eyes opened very wide, perhaps at the obscenity, perhaps because a black man had presumed to call him by his first name. Before he could say anything, Lucullus beat him to it: "That'll be enough outa both o' you." He glowered at white man and black in turn, as if to say they'd have to quarrel with him before they could go at each other.

If Luther Bliss wanted a fight, Cincinnatus was ready. He didn't even worry about being a cripple. He intended to use his cane to knock the white man ass over elbow. He didn't figure Bliss would fight fair, so why should he?

"You reckon you can drive a truck?" Lucullus asked him.

"Can I? Hell, yes," Cincinnatus answered. "Why do I want anything to do with this ofay bastard, though?" He pointed across the table at Bliss.

"Because it'll heap coals of fire on Jake Featherston's head." Lucullus could quote Scripture for his purpose, too. "Next to that, what else matters?"

That was a potent argument with any Negro, but not necessarily potent enough with Cincinnatus. "Jake Featherston never lured me down here so he could throw me in jail," he snarled. "This here asshole did."

Bliss didn't deny it. How could he, when it was true? He said,

"Featherston's killing spades by the tens of thousands--hell, maybe by the hundreds of thousands now. You gonna piss and moan about a jail cell next to that?"

He had an odd way of arguing, which didn't mean it wasn't effective. He didn't care what Cincinnatus thought of him. He just worried about what the black man did. Cincinnatus didn't look at him or speak to him. Instead, he turned to Lucullus. "Where's this truck at? Where do I got to drive it to?"

"It's by the train station," Lucullus answered. "You got to bring it over to the river."

"TheOhio ?" Cincinnatus asked. You could almost spit from the station to theOhio .

Lucullus shook his head. The soft flesh under his chin wobbled. That made Cincinnatus think of the barbecue chef's father. Apicius Wood's flesh had been the only soft thing about him. Lucullus said, "No, not theOhio . The Licking, here in the colored part o' town."

That made sense. Cincinnatus wasn't sure a colored truck driver could get near theOhio without challenge. The tributary was bound to be a different story. "What's the truck got in it?" Cincinnatus asked.

"Something I arranged," Luther Bliss said. "You don't need to know what."

Cincinnatus started to get to his feet. "Obliged for the ribs," he told Lucullus. "Reckon you don't need me for no driver."

"Git down off your high horse. You are the proudest damn nigger," Lucullus said querulously.

Cincinnatus didn't deny it. He didn't leave, either. He waited. If he got an answer, that was one thing. If he didn't . . . He could always leave then. Lucullus muttered under his breath. Then he stopped muttering and spoke in that same low, breathy voice: "Got us some mines to dump in the river."

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus said. Luther Bliss doubtless had connections with the U.S. War Department.

Even so, smuggling infernal devices like that across the border couldn't have been easy. Since Bliss had managed to do it, or

somebody had managed to do it for him . . . "When you want me there?"

Cincinnatus asked.

Two days later, wearing a pair of overalls and a cloth cap furnished by Lucullus, he made his way toward the truck. A gray-uniformed cop checked his passbook and let him go on without asking exactly where he was going and why. The Confederates thought everything inCovington was under control.

Cincinnatus' carnivorous smile said otherwise.

He found the truck right where Lucullus said it would be. One of the keys in his pocket opened the door. Another fit the ignition. The motor roared to life when he turned that key and stamped the starter.

Releasing the hand brake and putting the truck in gear felt good. He'd been driving for more than thirty years. He'd taken his surname because of what he did. Driving was a big part of his life, and he hadn't been able to do it since coming down toCovington . Now he could.

He shook his head and clucked sadly as he went through the colored quarter. A lot of houses stood empty; their owners had been sensible enough to get across theOhio to theUSA when the CSA won the plebiscite. Cincinnatus sighed. He'd been sensible himself. Fat lot of good it had done him.

The derelict garage where Lucullus had told him to pull in was hard by the river. The building faced away from the Licking, but had a back door that opened on it. Even before Cincinnatus killed the engine, half a dozen black men stepped out from the gloom and darkness inside the garage.

"You brung 'em?" one of them asked.

"Yeah," Cincinnatus answered. The men took half a dozen crates out of the back of the truck. They pried up the tops and carefully removed the mines, one after another. Two men on each mine, they carried them down to the river. Cincinnatus didn't see how they placed them: whether they dropped them in, had a rowboat waiting, or what. As soon as the last mine was gone, he fired up the truck again and drove off. Lucullus' crew of men with strong backs also broke up in a hurry.

The truck went back where he'd found it. He returned the keys to

Lucullus. The barbecue chef gave him a conspiratorial wink. He returned it, then limped out of the barbecue shack and headed home.

Jake Featherston scowled as he read the report fromKentucky . A Confederate gunboat on theLicking River had blown sky-high when it hit a mine. Two dozen men dead, another eight or ten badly hurt, an expensive piece of machinery gone to hell . . . He cursed under his breath, and then out loud.

After he'd thought for a few seconds, his curses got nastier. The Licking ran into theOhio . You couldn't drop a mine into theOhio and expect it to go up the Licking. Sure as hell, the damnyankees had sneaked people and at least one mine from theUSA into the CSA. Either that or they'd sneaked in the explosives and then used white traitors or niggers to do their dirty work for them.

After a few more seconds, Jake swore even louder. That at least one mine stuck in his head. How much time and money and manpower would the authorities inCovington have to spend before they made sure there weren't any others--or before they got rid of the ones they found? Too much, too much, and too much, respectively.

Back beforeKentucky and the abortion calledHouston came home to the CSA, pro-Confederate demonstrators had been as nasty and as noisy as they could. Yankee backers in the redeemed states were quieter. If they showed what they thought, the police and Freedom Party stalwarts and guards would land on them with both feet. The Yankees had been soft-headed and let their enemies shelter under the protection of the Constitution. In the CSA, the Whigs had made the same mistake--and they'd paid for it, too.

Unfortunately, the damnyankees had wised up. They'd figured out how to play nasty, and they'd turned out to be pretty good at it. Featherston swore once more, this time at himself. He'd misread Al Smith.

The man--and the country Smith led--turned out to have more backbone than he'd expected. He'd been so sure the Yankees would go for his peace offer after the CSA's smashing victories inOhio . He'd been sure, and he'd been wrong.

"Well, if the bastards won't lay down on their own, we'll just have to knock 'em flat, that's all," he muttered. "And we goddamn well will." The telephone rang. He picked it up. "Yeah? What is it, Lulu?"

"General Potter is here to see you, sir," his secretary answered.

"Send him in," Jake said, and hung up. When Clarence Potter walked into the President's office, Featherston fixed him with a glare. "You know about the goddamn mess inCovington ?"

"Yes, sir, I do," Potter answered. Jake's glare, which reduced a lot of men to quivering jelly, had disappointingly little effect on the Intelligence officer. Potter went on, "That's one of the things I was coming to talk to you about. We've got reports Luther Bliss has been seen inCovington . Does that name mean anything to you?"

"I hope to shit it does!" Featherston burst out. "That cold-blooded bastard was nothing but trouble for us while theUSA held on toKentucky ."

Potter's face never showed a whole lot. Even so, the slight twitch of an eyebrow gave Jake some idea of what was going through his devious mind. If it wasn't something like, Takes one to know one, the President of the CSA would have been mightily surprised.

"I can't prove he had anything to do with the mines in the Licking," Potter said. "I can't prove it--but that's the way to bet."

"You'd better believe it," Jake said. "I want that son of a bitch taken out. He can cause us more trouble than a regiment of regular Yankee soldiers."

"We're working on it," Potter said. "Trouble is, he's a professional, too. I'd guess he's been in place there a good long while, getting set up and so on, but I first got word of him just a few days ago. He's not going to be there by himself. He'll have friends lending a hand."

"Niggers lending a hand," Featherston said savagely. "You see why we're on our way to taking care of them."

"Oh, yes, Mr. President. I've never had any trouble with that," Potter said.

Jake eyed him. He hadn't quite come out and said he did have trouble with other things the Freedom Party had done, but he might as well have. "How the hell did I get me a goddamn stiff-necked Whig running my spies?" Jake asked Potter--or possibly God.

God, as usual, kept quiet. Potter, as usual, didn't. Giving Jake a

crooked smile, he answered, "Well, sir, looks to me like it's because you aren't a wasteful man."

Among his other annoying traits was being right most of the time. He'd sure put a hole right in the middle of this bull's-eye. Featherston remained sure Potter had come up toRichmond in 1936 to put a hole right in the middle of his bull's-eye. He'd accidentally become a hero instead, and made the most of things since.

The really crazy part was that, if he'd just stayed down inCharleston as an ordinary loud-mouthed Whig, he would have got arrested and gone into a camp for politicals, the way so many others had. Or maybe, since he was tougher than most, he would have been shot while resisting arrest. He would have been out of the picture, though, for sure.

But here he was--not only alive but useful. He'd done better for himself as a would-be assassin than he ever could have as an ordinary loud-mouthed Whig.

"That was part of what you wanted to tell me," Featherston said. "What else have you got?"

Clarence Potter smiled again. This time, a leopard wouldn't have been ashamed to show its teeth like that. "We've found one of the spies in the War Department, anyhow--sniffed him out with another round of multiversion reports."

"There you go!" Jake slammed a fist down on the desk. Papers and even the gooseneck lamp jumped.

"Who was it?"

"A mousy little file clerk in Operations and Training named Samuel Beauchamp Smith," Potter answered.

"He's been shuffling and filing papers since 1912, God help us, and he's probably been passing things along all that time, too."

"Peel him," Featherston said. "Peel him like an onion, and make him hurt every time you strip off a new layer. He's been hurting us all that time--he should hurt for a long time himself. Just be sure you keep him alive so he can go on answering questions, that's all."

"It's being taken care of, sir." Clarence Potter didn't bat an eye. He didn't lose any sleep over playing a dirty game. He understood you

sometimes had to get answers any way you could. If that was hard on the bastard who didn't want to give them . . . well, too bad for him.

"All right," Featherston said. "And a good job on that sniper who shot Morrell."

"Not good enough." Potter said. "He's on the shelf, but I wanted him dead."

Potter was a perfectionist. Unless things went exactly the way he wanted them to, he wasn't happy. That was not the least of the things that made him so useful to the CSA in spite of his godawful politics.

Featherston said, "By your report, the Yankees scooped him up and got him out of harm's way pretty damn quick."

"First shot should have finished him off." Yes, Potter was discontented. "One of our snipers would have.

But this was so far in back of their lines, I had to rely on local talent--and the local talent wasn't talented enough."

"You'll have other chances at other officers," Featherston said. "If we can knock the brains out of the U.S. Army, it'll be that much easier to lick."

"Yes, sir. But the Yankees have figured out that that was an assassination try," Potter said. "I'd suggest you beef up security for our own best men."

"I've already done it," Featherston said. "And, to tell you the truth, there's a few generals I wouldn't mind seeing 'em knock off. I won't name names, but I reckon you can figure some of 'em out for yourself."

"Could be." Potter's voice and chuckle were dry. But he quickly grew serious again. "The other thing is, you ought to beef up your security, too. The war effort goes down the drain if we lose you."

"Don't you worry about my security. That's not your department, and it's tight as an old maid's. . . ."

Featherston didn't finish, but he came close enough to make Potter chuckle again. And the truth was, he didn't worry all that much about his security, at least not in the way Potter meant. If it was good enough to keep blacks and disgruntled Freedom Party men from knocking him off, it was bound to be good enough to hold the

damnyankees at bay, too.

And if it wasn't . . . If it wasn't, Don Partridge became President of the CSA. Jake didn't think Partridge could run things, even if he did have the title. Who would? Ferd Koenig, from behind the scenes? Nathan Bedford Forrest III, from even further behind them?

Featherston only shrugged. If he wasn't there to see the unlucky day, what difference did it make to him?

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Only the thought that, since the damnyankees didn't quit after we got up to Lake Erie, we might do better finding a peace both sides can live with than butting heads for God knows how long," Potter answered. "That kind of fight favors them, not us."

"I want your opinion on how to run my business, you can bet I'll ask for it," Featherston growled. "Till I do, you can damn well keep your mouth shut about it. So long, General Potter."

"So long, Mr. President." Potter wasn't the least bit put out as he left the office. He'd probably said what he'd said for no better reason than to rattle Jake's cage.

I don't care why he said it. He can goddamn well shut up about it, Featherston thought. Defiantly, he looked north. He'd taken Confederate arms where they'd never gone before, where none of his predecessors had ever dreamt they could go. He still intended to lick theUnited States , to lick them so they stayed licked. It might take longer than he'd thought when he set out, but that didn't mean he couldn't do it.

"I can, and I will," he said, as if someone had denied it. All he had to do to make something real was to want it, to keep going after it, and not to quit no matter what. Sooner or later, it would fall into his hands.

I'm sitting here in the Gray House, aren't I?

He nodded. Even if the Whigs didn't like it, he was here. He belonged here. And he intended to take the Confederate States with him where he wanted to go. By the time they were someone else's worry, they would look the way he'd wanted them to all along. No one else would be able to change them back to the way they were now.

As for theUnited States . . . Featherston's swivel chair squeaked as he swung it around toward the north, too. All right, they hadn't given up the way he'd thought they would. That didn't mean they couldn't be beaten down. He intended to do just that. By the time he got finished, the Confederate States would be the number-one power on this continent.

They'd stay number one, too. He intended to fix things so even a dunderhead like Partridge couldn't mess them up. And everyone would always remember the name of the man who'd put them on top. His name. Him. Jake Featherston.

XX

TheSandwich Islands . Home of perfect weather, sugar cane, pineapple, and women of several races wearing no more than the perfect weather required. Home of the ukulele, the instrument the Devil had invented when he was trying for the guitar. Home of romance. That was what the tourist brochures said, anyhow.

George Enos, Jr., didn't have the chance to pay attention to the tourist brochures. He didn't have time to pay attention to the pineapple or the sugar cane or even the women and what they were or weren't wearing. He'd been away from Connie for quite a while. His interest might have been more than theoretical. He didn't get the chance to find out.

As soon as the Townsend pulled intoPearl Harbor , she refueled and steamed northwest toward Midway. Even though the island was lost to the Japanese, theUSA seemed determined to defendOahu as far forward as possible. That would have been farther forward still if the Remembrance hadn't lain at the bottom of the Pacific. As things were, the Americans didn't poke much beyond the distance air cover from the main islands could reach.

Out beyond that distance lay . . . the Japs. They had carriers in the neighborhood, and they'd proved airplanes could do more to ships than other ships could. The Townsend did have Y-ranging gear, which struck George as something not far from black magic. Black magic or not, though, how much would it help? Airplanes were so much faster than ships--you couldn't run away even if you saw the other guy long before he saw you.

Hydrophone gear listened for Japanese submersibles. Old-timers--the

Townsend had a handful--said the gear was greatly improved over what the Navy had used in the last war. It could hear a sub while the destroyer's engines were going. If they hadn't been able to do that in the Great War, George wondered how any surface ships had survived. His mouth tightened. Too many hadn't, including the one with his father aboard.

When he wasn't chipping paint or swabbing the deck or doing one of the nine million other jobs the Navy had to keep all hands from knowing any idle moments, he stuck close to the 40mm mount. If anything came within range of the destroyer, he wanted the best chance to blast it he could get. When the klaxons sounded general quarters, he ran like a man possessed. So did his crewmates. In these waters, it was too likely no drill.

"We're trying to find their subs, and they're trying to find us," Fremont Blaine Dalby said one morning.

The gun chief peered out over the blue, blue water, as if expecting to see periscopes lined up like city workers waiting for the trolley. He might not have been so far wrong, either. He went on, "Whoever plays the game better gets to play it again. Whoever screws up . . ." A shrug. "It's a hell of a long way down in this part of the Pacific."

"Happy day," George said.

"Ain't it?" That was Fritz Gustafson. The loader seldom had a whole lot to say, but he never left any doubt where he stood. He jerked a thumb at Dalby. "Just our luck to have a damn Jonah bossing this gun."

"A Jonah?" Dalby swelled up like a puffer fish. "What do you mean, a Jonah?"

"What I said," Gustafson answered. "Named for Republicans. Phooey! Bunch of goddamn losers."

"Could be worse," George said helpfully. "His mama could have called him Lincoln."

Dalby gave him a more venomous look than the one he'd sent Gustafson. He and the loader had been together for a long time. They'd probably been needling each other just as long, too. George was still a new kid on the block. He was showing some nerve by joining in.

Before Dalby could call him on it, if he was going to, the klaxons

began to hoot. Feet clanged on metal decks. George started to laugh. He was already at his battle station. The only thing he did was button up his shirt and roll down his sleeves. Orders were to cover as much of yourself as you could when combat was close. That could be uncomfortable in warm weather, but it could also be a lifesaver. Flash burns from exploding ordnance often killed even when shrapnel didn't turn a man to butcher's work.

The Townsend's engines took on a deeper note. The destroyer sped up and started zigzagging. The men on the gun crew looked at one another. They all said the same thing at the same time: "Uh-oh."

When the klaxons stopped, it wasn't to sound the all-clear. An officer's voice came over the speakers:

"Now hear this. We've picked up airplanes heading this way from the northwest. They are unlikely to be friendly. That is all."

"Unlikely to be fucking friendly." Fremont Dalby spat. "Yeah."

With Midway gone, theUSA had no bases northwest of where the Townsend steamed. However many Japanese carriers were up there, they had the best of both worlds. They could launch their airplanes at American ships while staying out of range of retaliation from Oahu orKauai . They might lose fighters or bombers. They wouldn't expose themselves to danger.

Y-ranging gear had a range far beyond that of the Mark One eyeball. It gave the gun crews fifteen or twenty minutes to get as ready for the onslaught as they could. Everyone started toward the northwest.

Somebody opened up on a particularly majestic goony bird. The shells screamed past it. The goony bird altered course not a bit.

But then shouts rang out up and down the Townsend. Those dark specks weren't birds, goony or otherwise. They were enemy airplanes.

The Townsend's five-inch guns could fight both ships and airplanes. They opened up first. The blast from them was like the end of the world. George felt it as much as he heard it. Black puffs of smoke appeared among the incoming Japs. None of them tumbled out of the sky, not yet. They didn't even break formation. The Pacific War had proved Japanese pilots knew their stuff. Nothing that had happened in this one made anybody want to change his mind.

"Let's get 'em!" Dalby shouted. The twin 40mm guns started

hammering away. George fed shells as fast as he could. Fritz Gustafson might have been a mechanism designed for nothing but loading. The rest of the crew swung the guns toward their targets.

Flame spurted from the gun barrels. Shell casings leaped from the breeches. George passed more ammo. The noise of the twin antiaircraft guns was terrific, but not so overwhelming as the roar of the dual-purpose five-inchers not far away. They kept shooting, too, adding bass notes to the cacophony.

Bombs burst in the sea, much too close to the Townsend's flank. George remembered destroyers were built for speed, and sacrificed all armor plate to get it. He could have done without the thought. Great plumes of white water flew up. Some of it splashed him. He wondered what flying fragments from the casing were doing to the hull. Nothing good.

A fighter streaked for the Townsend, machine guns blazing. Tracers from several guns converged on it.

It blew up in midair; the remains splashed into the Pacific. "Scratch one Jap!" George yelled in delight, even if he was far from sure his gun had put the fatal round into the enemy fighter.

But plenty of Japanese airplanes were left unscratched. A dive bomber screamed down on the Townsend. Fritz Gustafson swiveled the antiaircraft gun with desperate haste to bring it to bear on the bomber. Tracers swung toward the hurtling plane, swung into it, and left it a smoking, flaming ruin that crashed into the sea--but not before it loosed the bomb.

George watched it fall. He felt the Townsend heel sharply--but not sharply enough. The bomb struck home at the destroyer's stern. It struck home . . . but it didn't burst.

"Thank you, Jesus!" George said. He'd nominally turned Catholic to marry Connie, but he didn't feel it.

That was too bad. Crossing himself and really meaning it would have felt good just then.

"Fuck me." Fremont Dalby sounded as reverent as George did, even if he'd chosen different words. "A dud!" Those were beautiful words, too.

Gustafson shook his head. "I bet it isn't. I bet they put an armor-

piercing fuse on it, and it didn't hit anything tough enough to make it go off. It would have raised all kinds of hell on a cruiser or a battlewagon."

"Fuck me," Dalby said again, this time much less happily. "I bet you're right. That means we've got a real son of a bitch in there somewhere."

"It'll go off if somebody sneezes on it, too, most likely." Gustafson spoke with a certain somber satisfaction.

Another dive bomber stooped on the destroyer. One of the Townsend's five-inch guns got this one.

When that kind of shell struck home, the enemy airplane turned into a fireball. The dive bomber behind it flew past the edge of the fireball, so close that George hoped it would go up in flames, too. It didn't. It released its bomb and zoomed away only a few feet above the waves.

Maybe evading the fireball had spoiled the pilot's aim, because the bomb went into the Pacific, not into the Townsend. It also failed to explode, which suggested all the dive bombers bore badly fused bombs.

George expended some more hope on that.

Even if it was so, the Townsend wasn't out of the woods yet. More bombs rained down from the level bombers high overhead. None had hit yet, but they kept kicking up great spouts of water when they splashed into the sea. Nothing was wrong with their fuses. And fighters buzzed around the destroyer like so many malevolent wasps. They strafed the deck again and again. Someone on the Townsend shot down another one, but cries for medics said the fighters' machine guns were doing damage, too.

After what seemed forever but was by the clock eighteen minutes, the Japanese airplanes flew back in the direction from which they'd come. Fritz Gustafson nodded to George. "Well, rookie, you're a veteran now," he said.

George looked around. There were bullet holes and dents much too close for comfort. Blood streaked the deck at the next 40mm mount. That could have been me, he thought, and started to shake.

Gustafson slapped him on the back. "All right to get the jimjams now," the loader said. "You did good when it counted."

"We all did good when it counted," Dalby said. "Damn Japs didn't buy anything cheap today."

"Unless that bomb goes off," Gustafson said. Dalby gave him the finger.

Men from the damage-control party brought the bomb up on deck in a canvas sling. Ever so gently, they lowered it over the side. All the sailors watching cheered as it disappeared into the depths of the Pacific.

"Still here," George breathed. He hardly dared believe it. If that carrier decided to send more airplanes after the Townsend, it might not last. Nothing seemed better, though, than taking the enemy's best shot--and coming through.

Scipio didn't like going through the Terry any more. He especially didn't like going through the northern part, the part that had been emptied out by police and Freedom Party stalwarts and guards. Scavengers prowled it, pawing through what the inhabitants had had to leave behind when they were sent elsewhere.

A lot of the houses and apartments there weren't uninhabited any more. They had no electricity, water, or gas, but the people in them didn't seem to care. For some, they turned into homes. For others, they were no more than robbers' dens.

Every time Scipio got into the white part ofAugusta , he breathed a sigh of relief. That felt cruelly ironic.

Whites were doing horrible things to blacks all over the CSA. No one could deny it. But a white man wouldn't murder him on the street for the fun of it or for whatever he had in his pockets. A black man might. He hated that knowledge, which didn't mean he didn't have it.

He grumbled about it during the waiters' hasty supper at the Huntsman's Lodge. Now that Aurelius was also working there, he had someone to talk to, someone who'd been through a lot of the things he had.

Two gray heads, he thought.

"Ain't nothin' to be done about it," Aurelius said. "Things is what they is. Ain't for the likes of us to change 'em. We just got to git through

'em."

"I knows it," Scipio said. "Don't mean I likes it."

"Tell you what the difference is, ‘tween niggers and ofays," Aurelius said.

"Go on," Scipio urged him. "Say your say, so's I kin tell you what a damn fool you is." He smiled to show he didn't intend to be taken seriously.

Aurelius ignored the gibe altogether, which showed how seriously he took it. Before he went on, though, he looked around to make sure neither Jerry Dover nor any other white was in earshot. That was serious business. Satisfied, he said, "Difference is, when niggers kill whites, they does it one at a time. When the ofays decide they gonna kill niggers, they does it by city blocks an' by carloads. If I was forty years younger . . ." He didn't finish that.

What would you do? But Scipio didn't wonder for long. What could the other man have meant but that he would pick up a gun and use it against the whites? Scipio said, "We tries dat, we loses. They gots more guns, an' they gots bigger guns, too. Done seen dat in de las' war."

"Yeah." Aurelius didn't deny it. He couldn't very well; it was self-evident truth. But he did say, "We don't try it, we loses, too. Can't very well turn the other cheek when the ofay jus' hit you there soon as you do."

Scipio grunted. That also held more truth than he wished it did. Before he could say anything, Jerry Dover stuck his head into the room and said, "Eat up, people. We've got customers coming in, and the floor has to be covered." He disappeared again.

The floor has to be covered whether you're done eating or not, he meant. Waiters and busboys could eat, as long as they did it in a way that didn't interfere with their work. If it came to a choice between work and food, work always won.

Gulping down a last bite of chicken breast cooked with brandy, Scipio went out onto the floor. He stood straighter. He walked with dignity. He put on some of the airs he'd shown as Anne Colleton's butler at Marshlands. Assuming all of them would have been laying it on too thick, but customers here expected a certain amount of well-trained servility. Giving them what they wanted put a little extra money in his

pocket.

As he took orders and recommended specials, he thought about Marshlands, now a ruined ghost of its former self. Anne Colleton dead . . . That still amazed him. One of her brothers had died--bravely--at the very start of the black revolt in 1915. The other one, as far as Scipio knew, was still alive.

After the war, Tom Colleton had turned out to be more dangerous and more capable than he'd expected. The white man had crushed what was left of theCongareeSocialistRepublic . Till then, Scipio hadn't thought of him as anything but a lightweight. It only went to show, you never could tell.

That was probably true for almost all white men. Scipio laughed, not that it was funny. Whites in the CSA probably said the same thing about blacks. No, they certainly said the same thing about blacks.

Hadn't he overheard them often enough, at Marshlands and here at the Huntsman's Lodge and plenty of places between the one and the other whenever they didn't think blacks could listen?

Of course, when whites talked among themselves, they often didn't pay enough attention to whether blacks were in earshot. Why should they, when blacks were hewers of wood and drawers of water?

Blacks talking about whites? That was a different story. Blacks had known for hundreds of years that a white man overhearing them could spell disaster or death.

A white man at one of Scipio's tables waved to him. "Hey, uncle, come on over here!" the man called.

"What you need, suh?" Scipio asked, obsequious as usual.

"How long do they need to do up a steak in the kitchen? Have they all died in there? Of old age, maybe?" He was playing to the rest of the whites at the table. His friends or business associates or whatever they were laughed at what passed for his wit.

"It come soon, suh. Dey needs a little extra time, git it well-done de way you wants it."

"Oh. All right. Thanks, uncle. Make sure you bring it out the minute they get it finished." The white man, mollified, forgot about Scipio, even though he was still standing right there.

"Yes, suh. I do dat." Scipio could have laughed in the man's face. He could have, but he didn't. It wouldn't have been polite. But he knew the kitchen was glad to get well-done orders. They let it dispose of meat too nasty to serve before searing it thoroughly enough to destroy all the flavor. They also let it get rid of meat too tough to be worth eating; once cooked well-done, almost all meat was too tough to be worth eating. If the customer couldn't tell the difference--and the customer never could--the kitchen only smiled.

After Scipio brought that dinner and the rest of the food to that table, he got a better tip than he'd expected. He thought that was pretty funny, too. No matter what he thought, his face never showed a thing.

It had looked like rain when he came to work, but the clouds had blown through by the time he left the restaurant. A big yellow moon hung in the sky; its mellow light went a long way toward making up for the street lamps that shone no more. Farther north, they would have called it a bombers' moon, but no bombers had come toAugusta .

Scipio and Aurelius walked along side by side. Scipio was glad to have company on the way back to the Terry. Neither of them said much. They just walked in companionable silence, both of them puffing on cigarettes. Then, about a block and a half from the edge of the colored part of town, Aurelius stopped. So did Scipio, half a step later. Aurelius pointed ahead. "Somethin' goin'on up there, Xerxes."

"I sees it." Scipio squinted. The moonlight wasn't enough to let him make out what it was. It seemed as if it ought to be that bright, but it wasn't. Moonlight had a way of letting you down when you needed it most. Suddenly, absurdly, Scipio remembered a girl from more than fifty years before, not long after he was manumitted. She'd seemed pretty enough by moonlight. Come the day . . . Come the day, he wondered what he'd been thinking the night before. He hadn't been thinking the night before, which was exactly the point.

Aurelius had similar doubts. "Reckon we ought to find out what it is?" he asked.

"Can't stay here," Scipio said. "The buckra find we here in de mornin', we gwine wish we was dead."

"Uh-huh." Aurelius took a couple of steps forward, then stopped again. "We go on, maybe we be dead."

"We gots to go on," Scipio said. "They catches we in de white folks' part o' town, we be dead then, too.

Either that or they puts we in jail, and only one place a nigger go from jail dese days--to one o' dem camps."

Aurelius plainly wanted to argue. No matter what he wanted to do, he couldn't. With dragging feet, he and Scipio approached. "Halt! Who goes there?" a white man barked at them, and then, "Advance and be recognized."

Even more hesitantly, the two Negroes obeyed. As Scipio drew near, he saw that uniformed white men were surrounding the Terry with barbed wire. There were gateways; he and Aurelius were coming up to one. Trying to keep his voice from shaking, he asked, "What you do?"

"Too many troublemakers getting in and out," the white man answered briskly. "High time we kept a closer eye on things, by God. And what the hell are you coons doing out after curfew anyways?"

"We works at the Huntsman's Lodge, suh. Dey closes late," Scipio answered.

"Yeah? If that's so, you'll have fancy dress on under those topcoats. Let's have a look," the white--a Freedom Party stalwart--said. Scipio and Aurelius hastily unbuttoned their coats to display the tuxedos beneath.

"I know them two niggers, Jerry," anAugusta cop told the stalwart. "They are what they say they are.

They don't give anybody trouble." He pointed at Scipio and Aurelius with his nightstick. "Ain't that right, boys?"

"Yes, suh!" the waiters chorused.

"Any nigger'll give trouble if he gets the chance." Jerry spoke with great conviction. But then he shrugged. "All right--have it your way, Rusty. Pass on, you two."

"Yes, suh!" Scipio and Aurelius said again. The gates were barbed wire, too, strung on wooden frames instead of fastened to metal posts. Scipio doubted the barrier would stop all unsupervised traffic between the Terry and the outside, but it was bound to slow that traffic to a trickle.

Once they got on their own side of the barbed wire, he and Aurelius let out identical exhalations: half sigh, half groan. "Do Jesus!" Scipio

said. "We is caged in."

"Sure enough," Aurelius agreed. "They kin feed us through the bars--if they want to. An' if they want to, they kin poke us through the bars, too."

"Or they kin take we out an' git rid o' we if they wants to." Scipio paused. "But why dey bodder? Dey done made de whole Terry a camp."

Aurelius' jaw worked, as if he were literally chewing on that. "We're in trouble," he said in a low voice.

"All the niggers inAugusta is in trouble."

"InAugusta ?" Scipio's fears reached wider than that. "You reckon dis here the onliest place in the country where dey runs up de barbed wire?"

Now Aurelius was the one who whispered, "Do Jesus!" That bright, cheerful moon showed how wide his eyes went. "You suppose they doin' this everywhere?"

"You got a wireless?" Scipio asked. The other Negro nodded. Scipio went on, "Reckon the news say one way or de other. If they do it all over everywhere, they won't hide it. They brag an' be proud."

Slowly, Aurelius nodded. Scipio shivered, there in the night. He'd finally found something he feared more than the regime's hatred of blacks. Its grim certainty that it was doing right frightened him far worse.

The move fromOhio toVirginia had changed life very little for Dr. Leonard O'Doull. He still worked in an aid station not far behind the line. The wounds he and his crew faced changed not at all. The weather was a little milder, but he had scant leisure to notice it. Going outside the aid tent for a quick cigarette every now and then hardly counted.

Repair, stabilize, send the successes back out of harm's way, send the failures back for burial . . .

Sometimes he thought the wounded were war's mistakes--if everything had gone just the way the enemy planned, they would be dead. Or would they? In his more cynical moments, he reminded himself that a

wounded soldier made theUSA spend more resources on him than an easily replaceable dead one did.

When he mentioned that to Granville McDougald, the medic only nodded. "Same thing's occurred to me, Doc--you bet it has," he said. "Take a look at mustard gas, for instance. That shit hardly ever kills outright. It just makes casualties."

O'Doull hadn't even thought about mustard gas. "Tabernac!" he said.

McDougald laughed at him. "When you get excited, you start talking like a Frenchy."

"I know. I spoke French every day for almost twenty-five years, remember. I wasn't sure my English would come back as well as it has." O'Doull paused, then said, "Son of a bitch! There. You feel better now, Granny?"

He got another laugh out of McDougald. "Sure. Much better. I'll take two aspirins and you can see me in the morning."

"What I'd like to see in the morning is home," O'Doull said. His longing for Rivière-du-Loup suddenly pierced like an arrow. "I feel like nothing but a goddamn butcher down here."

"That's not right," McDougald said. "The butchers are the ones with the stars on their shoulder straps--and that maniac down inRichmond . If it weren't for Featherston, you'd be inQuebec and I wouldn't be worrying about anything more urgent than shortarm inspections."

"With the new drugs, we can even do something about a dose of the clap." O'Doull preferred thinking of gonorrhea to mustard gas. "Who would have figured that ten years ago?"

"Oh, irrigation with permanganate would cure some of the time," McDougald said. "Of course, most of the guys who went through it would sooner have had the disease."

"It wasn't pleasant," O'Doull agreed. He'd had to administer that treatment a good many times himself.

Quebecois civilians were no fonder of it thanU.S. soldiers. "A few pills or shots are a lot easier--and they work a lot better, too."

"And what's that going to do, Doc?" McDougald asked. "If we can

screw as much as we want without worrying about coming down with VD, don't a lot of the old rules fly right out the window?"

"You come up with the most . . . interesting questions," O'Doull said admiringly. "I don't think the rules go till women don't have to worry about getting knocked up whenever they sleep with a guy. Rubbers aren't reliable enough for that, and a lot of men don't want to use 'em."

"Makes sense." Granville McDougald started to nod, then caught himself. He pointed a finger at O'Doull. "You're a Catholic, Doc. Won't you get in trouble with the Church for saying stuff like that?"

"In trouble? I doubt it. The Church isn't the Freedom Party, and the Pope isn't Jake Featherston.

Nobody's going to come and burn me at the stake for having a mind of my own. The Spanish Inquisition went out of style a long time ago, even inSpain ."

"Well, all right." McDougald seemed happy enough to return to the point: "You think we can do that?

Make really good contraceptives, I mean?"

"Sure we can," O'Doull said. "It's just a matter of putting our minds to it and doing the research. It'll happen. I don't know when, but it will. And the world will be a different place."

Far above the tent with the Red Cross on each side, shells flew back and forth. O'Doull gauged how the fighting was going by the quality of those sounds. If more came in from the Confederate side of the line than went out at the C.S. forces, he might have to pull back in a hurry. IfU.S. gunfire was outdoing the enemy's, he might have to move up quickly, which could be almost as big a nuisance. Right now, things seemed pretty even.

McDougald was listening, too, but in a different way. "Goddamn gurglers," he said. "I hate those goddamn gurglers. They're throwing gas around again. You'd think we had more sense than that. Hell, you'd think the Confederates had more sense than that."

"No such luck," O'Doull said sadly.

"I don't know what the hell good gas is." McDougald sounded bitter. "It kills people and it ruins people, and that's about it. You can't win a battle with it, not when both sides use it. It's only one more torment

for the poor damned fools with guns in their hands."

"Every word you say is true," O'Doull answered. "Every single word. But saying it, no matter how true it is, doesn't make anybody on either side change his mind."

"Don't I know it? Haven't we seen it? Christ!" The way McDougald took the name of the Lord in vain wasn't so far removed from the Quebecois habit of swearing by the host and the chalice. He went on, "At least we have an antidote that does some good against nerve gas, as long as the casualties get here before it's too late. But mustard gas? Once you've got mustard gas on you or in your lungs, it will do what it does, and that's that."

A shell landed a couple of hundred yards away: not close enough to be dangerous--though O'Doull wouldn't have believed that when he first put on a uniform again--but plenty close enough to be alarming.

"Was that a short round of theirs or a short round of ours?" O'Doull wondered.

"What difference does it make?" McDougald asked. "Whoever it comes down on is screwed either way."

O'Doull sighed. "Well, I'm not going to tell you you're wrong, because you're right. How many have we treated where our own guns did the damage?"

"I don't have the slightest idea, and neither do you," McDougald said. "The only thing I can tell you is, it's too goddamn many."

He was right again. Accidents of all sorts were only too common in war. Some of them made O'Doull think God had a nasty sense of humor. TwoU.S. companies would attack the same bit of high ground from different directions. Maybe neither would know the other was in the neighborhood. Maybe somebody in one or the other--or both--would see soldiers moving toward him and open up regardless of what uniform they wore. In a split second, dozens of soldiers would be blazing away at one another, trained reflex overriding thought . . . and adding to the casualty lists.

Artillery wasn't always the infantryman's friend, either. Very often,U.S. and C.S. lines would lie close together. Rounds didn't have to fall short by much to come down on soldiers in green-gray rather than those in butternut. Some of the fault, no doubt, lay in mismanufactured shells and in powder that didn't do everything it was

supposed to. And some, just as surely, lay in the calculations artillerymen botched when they were in a hurry--and sometimes when they weren't. All those blunders bloated the butcher's bill.

"One thing," O'Doull said.

"What's that?" Granville McDougald inquired.

"Over on the other side of the line, there are bound to be a couple of Confederate medics bitching about the same thing."

"Oh, yeah." McDougald nodded. "But does that make it better or worse?"

That was another of those . . . interesting questions. How you answered it depended on how you looked at war. It was better for theUSA if the Confederates also killed and maimed their own. It was better for theUSA , yes, but much worse for a good-sized group of men who would either die too young or go through life with puckered scars and perhaps without fingers or a foot or their eyesight or testicles.

O'Doull answered with a question of his own: "Are you asking me as an American or as a doctor?"

"That's for you to figure out, wouldn't you say?" McDougald was enormously helpful when dealing with the wounded, much less so when he and O'Doull were making the time pass by.

Another round burst closer than it should have. O'Doull swore in English and in Quebecois French.

Somebody on one side of the line or the other didn't know his ass from the end zone. No one set out to shell an aid station, but that was also one of the accidents that happened.

"I think we'd better--" O'Doull began.

Granville McDougald was already doing it. O'Doull followed him out of the tent. Both men jumped into a zigzagging trench not far away. O'Doull was glad they had no wounded lying in the tent right that minute. Getting them out would have been a nightmare. The doctor thought he would sooner have stayed in the tent himself and taken his chances.

"Cigarette?" McDougald held out a pack.

"Thanks." O'Doull took one. They were Niagaras, aU.S. brand, and tasted as if they were made of hay and horseshit. Even bad tobacco, though, was better than no tobacco at all. O'Doull sucked in smoke.

"Yeah, thanks, Granny. I needed one there."

Another shell screamed in. A man who listened closely could tell which rounds were long, which short, and which right on the money. O'Doull ducked and threw his hands up over his head. So did McDougald, who'd judged the incoming round the same way he had.

The shell burst between the trench and the aid tent. Shrapnel whined through the air not far enough over their heads; dirt pattered down on them. Some slid down the back of O'Doull's neck. He knew that would drive him crazy later. Nothing he could do about it now.

Cautiously, he stuck his head up above the rim of the trench. The explosion had shredded the green-gray canvas of the aid tent; the Red Cross on the side was ventilated with several rips and tears. And what the fragments would have done to them had they stayed in the tent . . . "You know something? I'm not what you'd call sorry we vacated the premises."

"Now that you mention it, neither am I." McDougald looked up to survey the damage, too. He whistled mournfully. "No, that wouldn't have been a hell of a lot of fun, would it?"

"No. Looks to me like we could have practiced sewing each other up," O'Doull said.

"Suture self, Doc," McDougald said. O'Doull sent him a reproachful stare. The other man didn't seem to notice he'd been reproached. Anyone who'd say something like that probably wouldn't notice such a thing.

Then O'Doull threw himself flat in the trench again. Two more shells came down, one on the tent, the other close by it. He and McDougald would have been in no position to do any sewing after that. Light a candle for me, Nicole, he thought, and wondered if he'd ever see Rivière-du-Loup again.

Mary Pomeroy hugged her mother. "So good to see you, Ma," she said.

"You, too, dear," Maude McGregor answered. "It was a nice visit,

wasn't it?"

"I sure thought so," Mary answered. "Easier to get out of town now that Alec's in kindergarten." She made a sour face. "Even so, I wish I didn't have to send him. The Yanks make teachers fill up the children's heads with the most fantastic lies you ever heard."

"You don't want to get in trouble for leaving him out, though," her mother said. "You don't want to get in trouble at all, especially after all the lies Wilf Rokeby told about you."

"I know, Ma," Mary said, and said no more. She knew Wilf Rokeby hadn't told lies. She knew her mother knew, too. Maude McGregor never would have said so, though, even if you put her on the rack.

There were things she carefully didn't see. She hadn't seen them when her husband was alive, and she didn't see them when she looked in her daughter's direction, either.

She'd never asked, for instance, why Mary spent half an hour or an hour or an hour and a half of each recent visit to the farm out in the barn by herself. She never came out to see what her daughter was doing there. She didn't want to know--or rather, to know officially.

All she said now was, "Whatever you're doing, be careful about it."

Gently, Mary answered, "I'm always careful, Ma," and her mother nodded. Mary knew she hadn't been careful enough with Wilf. She'd dodged the immediate danger, but the postmaster had brought her to the occupiers' notice.

The Yanks suspected Pa, but he kept on going, Mary thought fiercely. I can, too. As long as they only suspected, what could they do? They'd never found any evidence against her. They'd never found any evidence against her father, either, till things went wrong when he threw the bomb at General Custer. And if Custer hadn't been more alert than an old man had any business being, Pa might have got away with that, too.

"I'll see you before too long," Mary said. Her mother nodded. The two women embraced. Mary went out to the Oldsmobile. She started the auto and drove away from the farm where she'd grown up.

What went through her mind was, I have to be extra careful now. If the Frenchies caught her with a bomb in the Olds, everything was over. They had no particular reason to search it, but. . . .

Even when she used the bomb, she had to be extra careful. If it went off somewhere too close to Rosenfeld, that would make the occupiers wonder. She muttered to herself as she drove across the vast, wintryManitoba prairie. The Olds was almost the only motorcar on the road. What she didn't know was how active the overall resistance against the Yanks was. How many things happened that never got into the newspapers or on the wireless? If the Americans were smart--and they were, damn them; they were--they would keep most of those things quiet.

If she wasn't the only one fighting the Yanks in this part of the province, though, then one more bomb wouldn't mean so much. It wouldn't necessarily make the occupiers look toward her. If nobody else was giving them trouble, that was a different story.

She sighed. She hadn't heard anyone else's bombs blow up in Rosenfeld. A lot of the farmers in these parts were Mennonites who went along with the central authority, whatever it happened to be. But there had been that pamphlet, the one she'd turned against Rokeby. Somebody had put it out.

About ten miles west of Rosenfeld lay Coulee, an even smaller town. Like Rosenfeld, Coulee would have had no reason to exist if not for the railroad. It was a place where people loaded grain; Mary had trouble imagining anyone getting off the train in Coulee without the immediate, intense desire to get right back on again. People in Rosenfeld hardly ever thought about Coulee; when they did, it was usually with a condescending smile. Even in Rosenfeld, people needed someone to feel superior to.

The paved road to Coulee paralleled the train tracks. It went on right through the town. Mary got off the paved road before Coulee, went around the place on lesser tracks like the one that led to her family's farm, and then got back on to drive for another couple of miles.

She stopped the auto there and pulled off to the side of the road. When she got out of the Olds, she looked both east and west. Nobody coming in either direction--that was what she'd wanted to see. She remembered the Quebecois soldiers who'd appeared out of nowhere while her family was picnicking.

Having a patrol show up now wouldn't do at all.

No patrol. There were too many miles of railroad, not enough soldiers to keep an eye on all of them all the time. Mary opened the trunk. She

carried the box in it over to the railroad tracks, then came back.

As she returned, she scuffed and kicked the footprints she'd made in the snow till they were unidentifiable. She drove the auto back onto the road and did the same thing to the tire tracks. The occupiers would be able to figure out where she'd planted the bomb. The explosion itself would tell them that. Who she was, or even that she was a she? No. Not if she could help it.

Mary drove back to Rosenfeld the same way as she'd come west, skirting Coulee. Nobody in the town would see the Oldsmobile. She tried to use different little country roads heading east. She didn't want a farmer remembering he'd seen the same auto coming and going in a short stretch of time.

She got back to her apartment less than an hour later than she would have if she'd come straight from the farm. Who was to say when she'd broken off her visit with her mother? Mort might notice that the gas gauge on the motorcar was down a little farther than it should have been. But so what? Even if he did, would he turn her in to the occupiers? Not likely!

All the way back to Rosenfeld, she'd listened for an explosion. She hadn't heard one. Maybe no train had gone through during her drive. Maybe she'd got too far away for the sound to carry. Or maybe the bomb had failed. That was an unwelcome possibility, but one she couldn't ignore.

As soon as she got into the apartment, she used a nail file to get rid of the dirt from the barn and washed her hands. Drying them, she felt a little like Lady Macbeth--another stubborn Scotswoman advancing her cause no matter what.

Music blared from the wireless when she turned it on. It was twenty minutes to the hour, so she had a while to wait before she could hear the news. She used the time to good advantage, making herself a cup of coffee and sitting down with a mystery story set inToronto before the Great War. She knew what she was doing--pretending things hadn't changed since. Again, so what?

When the news came on, it talked about an American submersible torpedoing a Japanese cruiser somewhere in theSandwich Islands . It talked aboutU.S. bombing raids on Confederate cities, and about Confederate terror attacks onU.S. cities. Mary sneered. She knew propaganda when she heard it. The wireless talked aboutU.S. progress

inUtah . It talked about an Austro-German counterattack against the Tsar's armies in theUkraine , and about a German counterattack against the British nearHamburg .

It talked about cuts in the coal ration forCanada , and about reductions in civilian seat allocations on the railroads here. Bombs on the tracks? Not a word.

Mary said a word--a rude one. Maybe it was too soon to get the news on the air. Maybe no train had gone along that stretch of track, which didn't strike her as very likely. Or maybe something had gone wrong. Could a patrol have found the bomb before a train went over it? Worry settled over her like the clouds that presaged a snowstorm.

After Alec got back from kindergarten, even worry had to stand in line. He rampaged through the apartment. Mouser had been asleep under a chair. Alec blew a horn right by him, which horrified him and Mary both. He fled, squalling. "Leave the cat alone!" Mary shouted at Alec, who wanted to do no such thing.

She kept the wireless on, wondering whether she would get news from it or a knock on the door. At last, three hours after that first newscast, the announcer started inveighing against saboteurs who tried to put a spike in the American war effort. "These evildoers hurt their Canadian brethren by further decreasing the number of seats available in the railway system as a whole.Southern Manitoba is particularly afflicted, but authorities have every confidence they will soon hunt down the murderers and depraved individuals responsible for these dastardly acts of terrorism." The man sounded ready to flop down on the floor and start chewing up the carpet.

Hearing that report took the nervous edge off Mary's temper. Alec kept after the cat. Before long, Mouser had had enough and scratched him. He ran to Mary, crying. She managed to be sympathetic, and painted the wounds with Mercurochrome, which didn't sting, and not with Merthiolate, which did.

"He's a bad kitty," Alec declared, glowering at the orange-red blotches on his arm.

"He is not. If you tease him, he's going to scratch." Mouser rarely bit, thank heaven. Mary and Mort had trained him out of that when he was a kitten. "How would you like somebody blowing a horn in your ear when you were asleep and chasing you all over everywhere?"

Alec looked as if he thought that might be fun. Mary might have realized he would. And then, all at once, an amazingly knowing expression passed over his face--he saw he shouldn't have let her notice that. He's growing up, she thought, and couldn't decide whether to laugh or to cry.

When Mort came home from the diner that evening, he was oddly subdued. She wondered if he'd had a row with his father. She didn't want to ask him about it till after Alec went to bed. Then her husband beat her to the punch: "They say a train got bombed, other side of Coulee."

Uh-oh, Mary thought. Voice somewhere between casual and savage, she answered, "I heard something about it on the wireless. They didn't say much, though. I hope it gave the Yanks a good kick in the slats."

Mort made a small production out of lighting a cigarette. He said, "When the Frenchies turned this place upside down, they didn't find anything."

"Of course they didn't. There wasn't anything to find." I made damn sure of that, Mary added, but only to herself.

"They never found any of the stuff your father used, either," he said.

That rocked her again; she didn't think he'd ever come right out and talked about Arthur McGregor and what he'd done before. She made herself nod. "No, they never did."

"Mary . . ." Mort paused, maybe not quite sure how to go on. He drew on the cigarette till the coal glowed tomato red. "For God's sake watch yourself, Mary. This isn't a game. They'll kill you if they catch you. I don't think I could stand that. I know Alec couldn't."

How long had he known and kept quiet? If he could add two and two, how many other people in Rosenfeld could do the same thing? "I always watch myself, Mort," Mary said, but she knew she would have to be more watchful yet.

A corner drugstore not far from Chester Martin's house inEast L.A. had gone belly-up a few months before the war started. Times were still hard; the building had stood vacant ever since, the door padlocked, the going out of business! sign painted on the window slowly fading in the harshCalifornia sun.

And then, quite suddenly, the place wasn't vacant any more. Off came going out of business! A new sign went up on the window: a fierce-looking bald eagle in left profile in front of crossed swords, and below it, in red, white, and blue, the legendu.s. army recruiting station.

Chestereyed that with thoughtful interest. He smiled a little when he thought about the men who'd be working there. They had a tough job, didn't they? Talking other people into carrying rifles and going off to shoot Confederates was a hell of a lot safer than carrying a rifle and going off to shoot Confederates yourself.

His wife couldn't have been more horrified if a bordello had opened up in that building. By the hard, set expression on Rita's face, she would rather have seen a bordello there.Chester knew why, too--she was afraid the recruiting station would take him away from her.

He knew what she was waiting for: for him to laugh and joke and tell her she was worrying over nothing.

Then she would have relaxed. For the sake of family peace, he wished he could have. But the eagle's hard golden stare reproached him every time he saw it. He knew what he could do for the country; he'd been through the mill. He just hadn't decided whether the country truly needed him to do it.

"You haven't been in there, have you?" she anxiously asked him one Sunday afternoon, as if it were a house of ill repute.

All he wanted to do was drink a bottle of beer, eat a corned-beef sandwich, and listen to the football game on the wireless. President Smith had decreed that football was essential toU.S. morale, so some leagues had resumed play. Some of their stars had joined the armed forces, and some of the players they were using wouldn't have had a chance of making their squads before the shooting started. But the Dons were still the Dons, no matter who wore their black and gold. Today they were inPortland , squaring off against theColumbias .

"Well?" Rita said when he didn't answer right away. "Have you?"

He washed down a bite of the sandwich with a swig of Lucky Lager. "No, I haven't been in there," he said. "I am curious--"

"Why?" Rita broke in, her voice sharp with fear. "Don't you already know everything you ever wanted to about getting shot?"

"You bet I do."Chester wore a long-sleeved shirt, so the scars on his arm didn't show. That didn't mean he'd forgotten them. You couldn't forget something like that, not ever. After another pull at the Lucky, he went on, "No, what I'm curious about is who's doing things in there. Have they got real soldiers, or are they cripples or Great War retreads? You'd think they'd want every able-bodied man up at the front."

"What difference does it make?" Rita wouldn't see reason on this. She'd made that very plain. "You don't need an oak-leaf cluster on your Purple Heart. I don't need aWestern Union boy knocking on my door. I've already done that once."

Most of the time, the kids who delivered telegrams were welcome visitors. Not when theUSA and CSA grappled with each other. Then they were all too likely to bring bad news, a dreaded Deeply Regret message from the War Department. Their uniforms were a little darker thanU.S. green-gray. People watched them go by on their bikes and prayed they wouldn't stop. One of those kids had rung Rita's doorbell in 1916.

Chestersaid, "I haven't been in there. I--" He stopped. ThePortland crowd was yelling its head off. The Dons had just fumbled. Having Rita in the same room with him inhibited his choice of language.

"You what?" she asked suspiciously.

"I wish we could find a halfback who can hold on to the darn ball, that's what."

"That isn't what you were going to say, and we both know it." Rita spoke ex cathedra, as the Pope or an upset wife had the right to do.

He sighed. "Like I said before, the only thing I'm curious about is who they've got in there."

Rita rolled her eyes. "Like I said before, what the devil difference does it make? Whoever they are, what are they selling? The chance to get killed. They already gave you that once. Are you dumb enough to want it again?"

"No," he said, but even he heard the doubt in his own voice.

"Don't you want to live to see Carl grow up? Don't you want to live to see your grandchildren?" His wife had no more compunction about fighting dirty than did the officers on both sides of this war who fired poison gas at their foes.

"That's not fair,"Chester protested, a complaint that did him no more good with Rita than it did an ordinary soldier on the battlefield.

She got the last word, as wives have a way of doing: "All you care about is how sharp you'll look in the uniform, even if they have to use it to lay you in a coffin. What the hell makes you think there'll be enough of you left to bury?" She stormed out of the living room in tears.

Chesterswore mournfully. How the deuce was he supposed to enjoy a football game--or even a corned-beef sandwich and a bottle of beer--after that?

Rita eased up on him during the week, but turned up the heat on the weekends. To her, that no doubt seemed perfectly logical. During the week, he was busy working, so he wasn't likely to have the time to do anything she disapproved of. On the weekend, he could run loose. He could--but she didn't aim to let him.

He didn't always vote the straight Socialist ticket the way she did, but he understood the way the dialectic worked. A thesis created an antithesis that reacted against it. The more Rita told him to stay away from the recruiting station, the more he wanted to go inside. He almost wished it were a whorehouse. He could have had more fun if he did.

The clash of thesis and antithesis generated a synthesis.Chester never wondered what that might be. A more thoroughgoing Socialist might have.

He hoped Rita believed him when he said he was going out to get a haircut two Sundays after their big argument. It wasn't that he was lying; he did visit the barbershop. He got a shave, too--an unusual luxury for him, because he took care of that himself most mornings. But it was also camouflage of a sort. If he came back to the house smelling of bay rum, Rita couldn't doubt where he'd been.

No bell chimed when he walked into the recruiting station. He'd half expected a carillon to play "The Star-Spangled Banner." Inside, a first sergeant with row after row of fruit salad on the chest of his dress uniform was talking earnestly with a man in his mid-thirties.Chester had expected to see kids here. He needed only a moment to figure out why he didn't, though. Kids would get conscripted anyhow. The Army didn't need to recruit them. This place was geared to persuading people like him to put on the uniform again.

Another noncom in a fancy uniform nodded to him. "Hello, sir," the man said in friendly tones. "What can I do for you today?"

"I don't know that you can do anything for me,"Chester answered. "I just came in for a look around."

"Well, you can do that," the recruiter said easily. "Want a cup of coffee while you're doing it?"

"Thanks. I wouldn't mind one a bit,"Chester said, even though he was thinking, Step into my parlor, said the spider to the fly. . . .

"We've got a hot plate back here. You take cream and sugar?" the noncom asked. He walked over to the pot on the hot plate with a peculiar rolling gait.Chester had seen that before; it meant the man had an above-the-knee amputation. He wouldn't be any good in combat. He had to be a smooth talker, though, or they wouldn't have let him keep wearing the uniform.

Once he'd doctored the coffee toChester 's taste, he brought it back. "Thanks,"Chester said again.

The recruiter eyed him. "You saw the elephant the last time around, I'd say," he remarked.

"Oh, yeah."Chester sipped the coffee. It tasted about the way coffee that had sat on a hot plate since early morning usually tastes: like battery acid diluted with cream and sugar.

"What did you top out at, you don't mind my asking?"

Chesterdidn't answer. The guy in his thirties got up and left. The sergeant to whom he'd been talking pushed back his chair--andChester saw it was a wheelchair. He had legs, but they evidently weren't any good to him. "Are you sure you guys are recruiting?"Chester blurted.

He wondered if the noncom who'd brought him coffee would deliberately misunderstand. The man didn't. He didn't even blink. "Yes, we are," he said. "If you went through it, you already know what can happen. We don't need to be able to run and jump to do this job. In the field, we would. Here, we can still help the country. So . . . You were in the last one, you said."

"Yeah, from start to finish. I ended up a sergeant. I was in charge of a company for a while, till they scraped up an officer for it."

"Wounded?"

"Once--in the arm. It healed up pretty good. I was lucky."

"You sure as hell were," the recruiter agreed soberly. "What have you done since?"

"Steel. Construction. Union organizing."Chester wondered if that would faze the Army man.

It didn't. The fellow just nodded. "If you can command a company, you can run civilians, too. As long as you're not a Freedom Party stalwart or a Mormon, I don't care about your politics. And if you're a loyal Mormon--there are some--and you take the oath, we'll find some kind of place for you. The other stuff?

Socialist? Democrat? Republican? Nobody gives a damn. You can argue about it in the field. It helps the time go by."

"Interesting,"Chester said, as noncommittally as he could.

The recruiter looked him in the eye. "What have you got to say for yourself? Did you just come here to window shop, or are you serious about helping the country?"

There it was, right out in the open.Chester licked his lips. "If I go back in, can I hold off induction for a month? I'm not a kid any more. I'm going to need to straighten out some things."

"It's a seller's market," the noncom said. "However you want us, we want you." He stuck out his hand.Chester shook it. Rita's gonna kill me, he thought.

Air-raid sirens screamed. Flora Blackford and her son hurried downstairs to the basement of their block of flats. Joshua said, "They haven't come overPhiladelphia for a while." He sounded excited, not afraid.

"I'd just as soon they didn't," Flora answered. A very fat man--he was a lobbyist for the meat-packing business--was taking the stairs at a snail's pace, which was as fast as he could go. He filled the stairwell from side to side, so nobody could get around him. Flora felt like giving him a push and going over his back. Bombs were already bursting in the city.

"I'd just as soon they didn't, too," Joshua said. "It means we aren't putting enough pressure on them inVirginia --they think they can use their bombers up here instead of against the troops."

Flora almost asked if she should send him over to the General Staff. The only thing checking her was the certainty that he'd say yes. He'd take it for an invitation, not sarcasm. He studied war with a passionate intensity altogether alien to her--and, she was convinced, understood its permutations in ways she didn't.

Maybe he would do some good on the General Staff. You never could tell.

At last, the fat lobbyist came to the bottom of the stairs. People surged around him to either side in the hall. He placidly rolled on at his own pace. If that pace had happened to kill him and a lot of people behind him . . . But, yet again, it hadn't, so why flabble?

People in the shelter mostly wore flannel pajamas. Some of them had thrown robes over the PJs.

Men's-style nightwear was now de rigueur for women in cities likely to be bombed. Filmy peignoirs lost most of their allure when you were liable to be showing off for everyone in your apartment building.

Thump! Thump! Thump! The ground shook under Flora's feet. Several people in the basement groaned.

The lights flickered. The sound on the old wireless set faded out for a moment, but then came back to life.

"There is an enemy bomber going down in flames!" the announcer said excitedly. "I don't know whether our antiaircraft guns or a night fighter got him, but he's a goner."

Three or four people clapped their hands. A few more applauded when the Confederate bomber hit the ground. The blast when it did was different from ordinary bomb impacts: larger, more diffuse. Most of the men and women down there just waited to see what would happen next. The CSA lost some bombers whenever it sent them overPhiladelphia . The Confederates never lost enough to keep them from sending more.

On and on the pounding went. It always seemed to last an eternity, though the bombers rarely loitered more than an hour. The building,

so far, had lived a charmed life. Its windows had lost glass, but not many buildings inPhiladelphia kept unshattered glass these days. No bomb had landed on it. That counted most.

The wireless announcer went on giving a blow-by-blow account of the fight against the airplanes from the CSA. Not all of that blow-by-blow account would be the truth, though. The Confederates--both in the air and down inVirginia --would be monitoring the stations broadcasting from cities they bombed.

Keeping them guessing about what they actually accomplished struck theU.S. powers that be as a good idea. Flora normally extolled the truth. Here, she could see that telling all of it might not be a good idea.

Twenty minutes after bombs stopped dropping, the warbling all-clear sounded. A man in front of her and a woman in back of her both said the same thing at the same time: "Well, we got through another one." The same thought had been in her mind, too.

Along with everybody else, she wearily trudged up the stairs. She wondered whether she would be able to sleep when she got back to her flat. Joshua seldom had trouble dropping off again, but he lived in the moment much more than she did. She couldn't help brooding on what might have been and what might be.

Brooding or not, she was drifting toward sleep when someone knocked on the door. She looked at the clock on the nightstand. The glowing hands told her it was a quarter to three. Like anyone else with an ounce of sense, she was convinced nothing good ever happened at a quarter to three. But the knocking went on and on.

She got out of bed and went to the door. "Who is it?" she called without opening up. Robbers prowled blacked-outPhiladelphia .

"It's Sydney Nesmith, Congresswoman--assistant to the House Sergeant at Arms." And it was; she recognized his voice. He went on, "Please come with me to Congress right away. Someone would have telephoned, but the lines to this building are down, so I came in person."

Flora did open the door then, saying, "Good heavens! What's happened?"

"Everything will be explained once you get there, ma'am," Nesmith answered, which told her nothing--but if it weren't important, he

wouldn't have been here.

"Let me change," she said, and started to turn away.

"People aren't bothering," he said.

"What is it, Mom?" Joshua asked from behind her.

"I don't know," she answered, thinking, Nothing good, all right. She nodded to Nesmith. "I'll come."

"Thank you, ma'am. An auto is waiting down below." Nesmith started to turn away, then checked himself. "Beg your pardon, but I've got a couple of more to get up in this building."

"Do what you have to do." Flora closed the door. If he was going to wake others, she had a minute, no matter what he said. She threw on a dress and a topcoat.

"Something terrible has happened, hasn't it?" Joshua said as she did start out into the hallway.

"I'm afraid it has. I'll let you know what it is as soon as I can. Try to go back to sleep in the meantime."

That sounded foolish as soon as Flora said it, but what else was her son supposed to do? She hurried downstairs.

The waiting motorcar was an enormous Packard. It had room for the driver, for Sydney Nesmith, and for all the members of Congress from her building. Some of the others had put on clothes, as she had, but a couple were still in pajamas. "Step on it, Fred," Nesmith said as the auto pulled away from the curb.

Stepping on it in a blacked-out city just after an air raid struck Flora as a recipe for suicide. Fortunately, Fred paid no attention to the Sergeant at Arms' assistant. The only lights inPhiladelphia were the ones from fires the bombing had started. Their red, flickering glow seemed brighter and carried farther than it would have without pitch darkness for a backdrop.

Flora and the other members of Congress tried to pump Nesmith about why he'd summoned them. He refused to be pumped, saying, "You'll find out everything you need to know when you get there, I promise." By the time the Packard pulled up in front of the big, slightly bomb-battered building that took the place of the Capitol here, he'd said that

a great many times.

They all hurried inside. Flora blinked several times at the bright electric lights. They too seemed all the more brilliant because of the darkness from which she'd just emerged.

Sydney Nesmith shepherded his charges toward the House chamber. Flora would have gone there anyway; it was her natural habitat. She saw Senators as well as Representatives in the large hall. That was nothing too far out of the ordinary. When Congress met in joint session, it met here: the hall had room for everybody.

Vice President La Follette and the Speaker of the House, Joe Guffey ofPennsylvania , sat side by side on the rostrum. Again, that didn't surprise Flora; it was where the two presiding officers belonged. But Charlie La Follette, normally a cheerful man, looked as if a bomb had gone off in front of his face, while the Speaker seemed hardly less stunned. When Flora spotted Chief Justice Cicero Pittman's rotund form in the first row of seats in front of the rostrum, ice ran through her. All at once, she feared she knew why all the Senators and Representatives had been summoned.

"Alevai omayn, let me be wrong," she murmured. At the same time, an Irish Congressman from anotherNew York City district crossed himself. That amounted to about the same thing.

Members of Congress kept crowding in. By the look of things, not everyone had figured out what might be going on. Some people couldn't see the nose in front of their face. Some, perhaps, didn't want to.

At 5:22--Flora would never forget the time--the Speaker nodded to the Sergeant at Arms. He in turn waved to his assistants, who closed the doors to the chamber. The Sergeant at Arms banged his gavel to call Congress to order, then yielded his place to the Speaker.

Guffey approached the microphone like a man approaching the gallows. "Ladies and gentlemen, I would give anything I own not to be where I am right now and not to have to make this announcement," he said heavily. He needed a moment to gather himself, then went on, "The President of theUnited States --Al Smith--is dead."

Gasps and cries of horror rang through the hall. Yes, some had been caught unawares. Flora gasped, too, but only in dismay to find her fears confirmed. Swallowing a sob, Guffey continued, "He took shelter from the raid as he should have, but three bombs hit the same place in

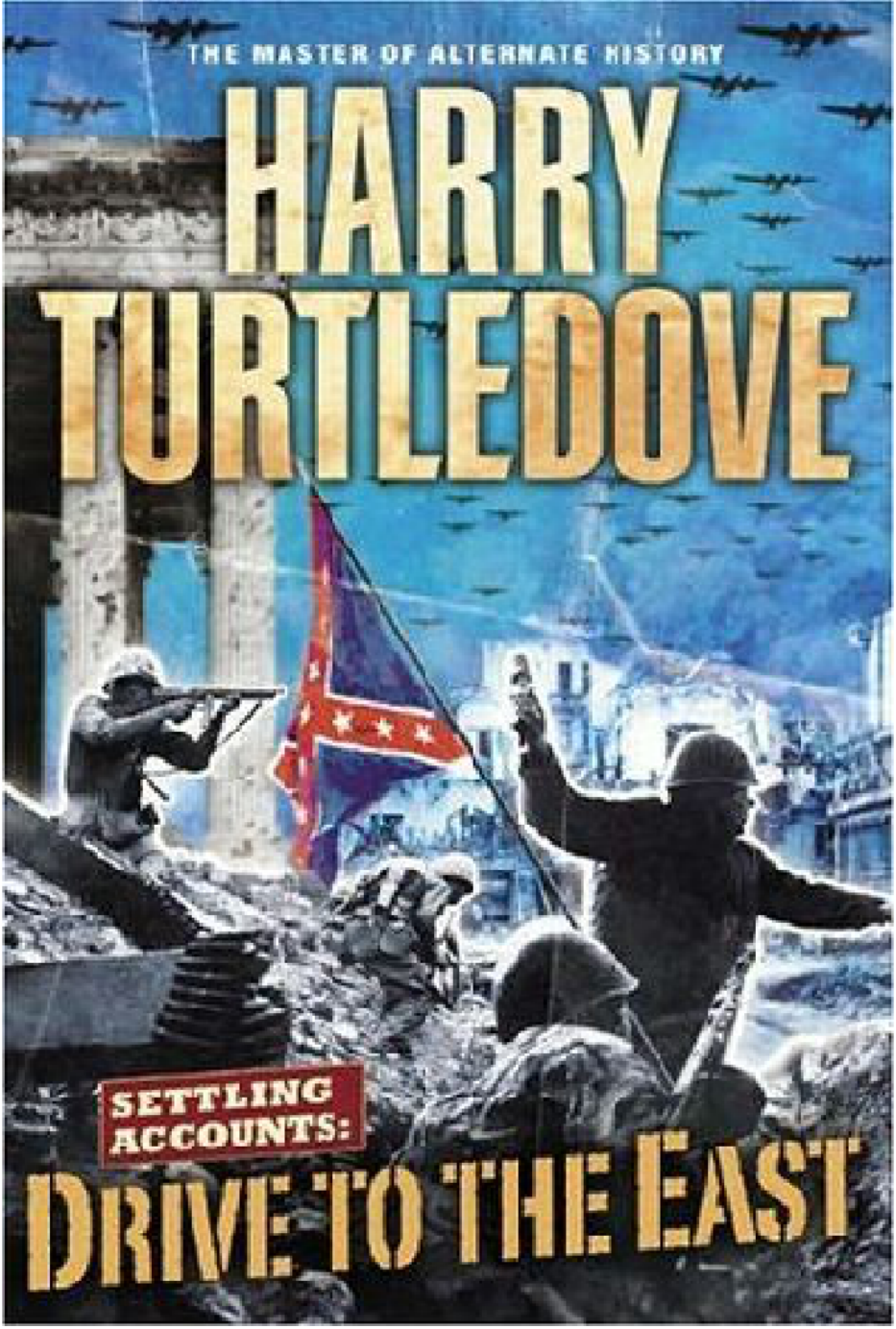
Powel House--a million-to-one shot, the War Department assures me. The first two cleared obstructions from the path of the third, which . . . which destroyed the shelter under the Presidential residence. There were no survivors."

More cries rose. Men wept as unashamedly as the handful of women in Congress. Speaker Guffey paused to take off his reading glasses and dab at his streaming eyes. "But, while the loss to our nation is incalculable, we must go on--and we shall go on. Here to administer the oath of office to the new President is Chief Justice Pittman."

Flora saw what looked like the collar of bright red pajamas peep out from under the Chief Justice's judicial robes for a moment. She swallowed a tear-filled giggle. Charles La Follette--he wouldn't be Charlie any more, she supposed--towered over Pittman. He set his left hand on a Bible, raised his right hand, and took the oath: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of theUnited States , and will to the best of my Ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of theUnited States ."

Very solemnly, he shook hands with the Chief Justice, and then with the Speaker of the House. That done, he looked out to the Senators and Representatives staring in at him. "As Speaker Guffey said, all I have I would have given gladly not to be standing here today. When they told me what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me. Al Smith was the leader this country chose, and he did well to the very last instant of his life. Even when days looked darkest, he never gave up hope. While we are not where we would wish to be in this war, neither are we where the enemy would have us. The road to victory may be long, but we will walk it. With God's help, we will walk it to the end."

Applause thundered through the sobs. Flora clapped till her palms burned. The United States were bigger than any one man. Were the Confederate States? She had her doubts.


THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY
HARRY TURTLEDOVE
SETTLING ACCOUNTS:
DRIVE TO THE EAST

Drive to the East
Settling Accounts [2]
Harry Turtledove

Rating:****
Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

From Publishers Weekly

In Turtledove's engrossing second book in the alternate history master's Settling Accounts trilogy (after 2004's *Return Engagement*), Confederate forces, in an undeclared war of revenge that coincides with WWII, have split the United States from the Ohio River to Lake Erie, but this only stiffens Yankee resolve. Insurrection breaks out in occupied Canada and in Mormon Utah, resulting in harsh reprisals by U.S. troops against civilians, while Confederate President Jake Featherstone pushes for more "population reductions" of freed slaves. As in the previous volume, Turtledove comes up with convincing analogues to events during WWII, such as the Confederate army's Stalingrad-like defeat around Pittsburgh. On the other hand, his portrait of the führer-like Featherstone is less persuasive. The Southern leader shows more courage and flexibility than his model, making intimations of future behavior a procrustean attempt to force him back into a Hitlerian mold. There's enough back story for the benefit of new readers, while established fans, despite the repetition, will find this latest installment thoroughly satisfying.
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From

Starred Review The second volume of Turtledove's third alternate World War II trilogy, Settling Accounts, is in many ways the strongest one in any of them. The Confederacy has given its best shot at cutting the U.S. in two between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes, but U.S. production and tenacity are beginning not only to hold the line but also to regain lost ground. Meanwhile, at sea the primary opponents are the U.S and Britain, and "deep in the heart of Texas," nobody is singing as Jake Featherston's final solution to the Negro problem picks up speed. There is plenty of action, and, of course, characterization remains one of Turtledove's long suits. But the real strength of the book, and of the whole alternate-history saga of which it is neither least nor last, lies in

the juxtaposition of events not usually associated with people who could be readers' parents or grandparents. Firing squad executions in Canada? Suicide bombers in Utah and the Deep South? A U.S. destroyer escort sinking a British Q-ship? The pacing practically compels one to keep reading, but after a certain point, Turtledove's not-just-refutation but massacre of "American exceptionalism" may bring some readers to the point of putting the book away and seeking a soothing, cozy novel by Stephen King. *Roland Green*
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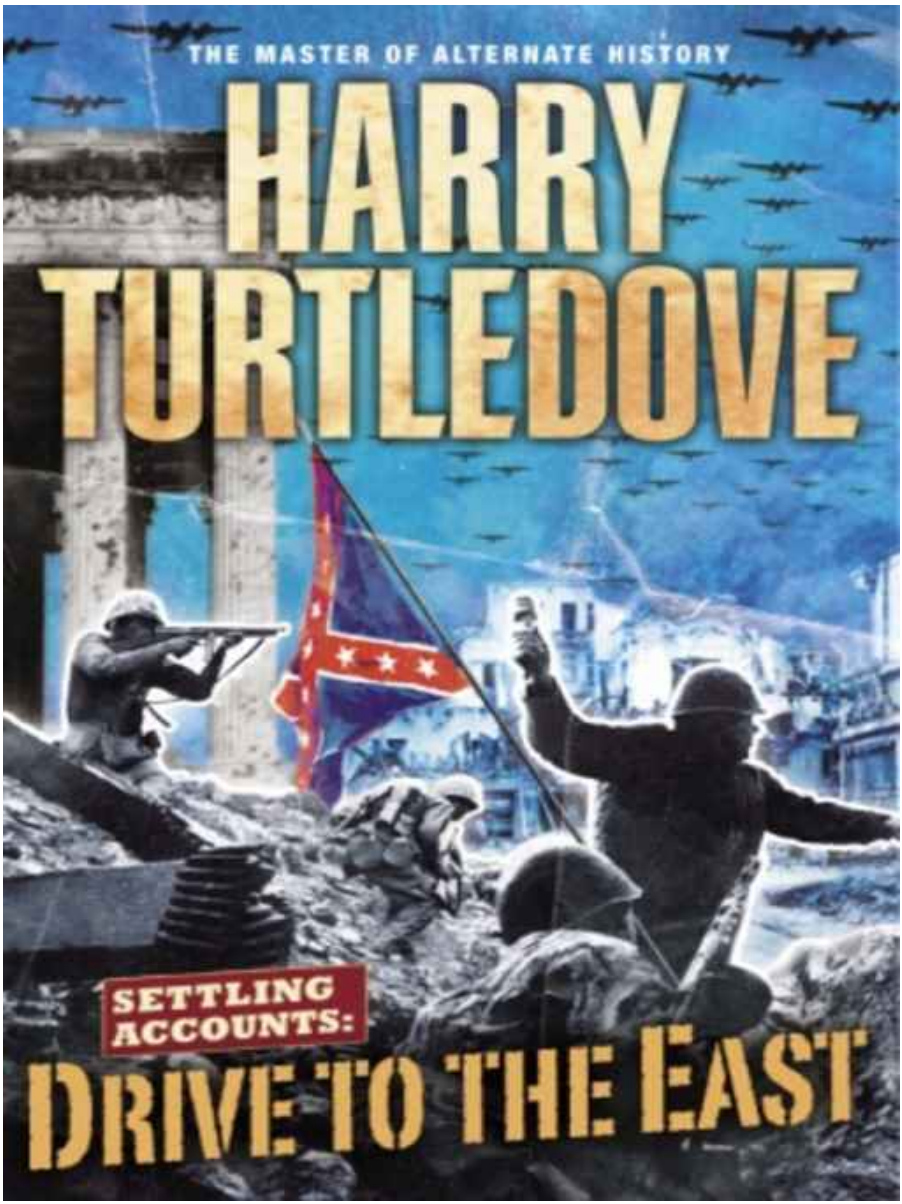
SETTLING ACCOUNTS:
DRIVE TO THE EAST



Harry Turtledove

About the Author

HARRY TURTLEDOVE is a Hugo Award–winning and critically acclaimed writer of science fiction, fantasy, and alternate history. His novels include *The Guns of the South; How Few Remain* (winner of the Sidewise Award for Best Novel); the Great War epics *American Front, Walk in Hell,* and *Breakthroughs;* the World War series: *In the Balance, Tilting the Balance, Upsetting the Balance,* and *Striking the Balance;* the Colonization books: *Second Contact, Down to Earth,* and *Aftershocks;* the American Empire novels *Blood & Iron, The Center Cannot Hold,* and *Victorious Opposition; Settling Accounts: Return Engagement; Homeward Bound; Ruled Britannia* (also a Sidewise winner), and many others. He is married to fellow novelist Laura Frankos. They have three daughters: Alison, Rachel, and Rebecca.

BOOKS BY HARRY TURTLEDOVE

The Guns of the South

THE WORLDWAR SAGA

Worldwar: In the Balance

Worldwar: Tilting the Balance

Worldwar: Upsetting the Balance

Worldwar: Striking the Balance

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The Great War: American Front

The Great War: Walk in Hell

The Great War: Breakthroughs

American Empire: Blood and Iron

American Empire: The Center Cannot Hold

American Empire: The Victorious Opposition

Settling Accounts: Return Engagement

Settling Accounts: Drive to the East

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About the Author

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I

E very antiaircraft gun in Richmond seemed to thunder at once. The sky above the capital of the Confederate States filled with black puffs of smoke. Jake Featherston, the President of the CSA, had heard that his aviators called those bursts nigger-baby flak. They did look something like black dolls—and they were as dangerous as blacks in the Confederacy, too.

U.S. airplanes didn't usually come over Richmond by daylight, any more than Confederate aircraft usually raided Washington or

Philadelphia or New York City when the sun was in the sky. Antiaircraft fire and aggressive fighter patrols had quickly made daylight bombing more expensive than it was worth. The night was the time when bombers droned overhead.

Today, the United States was making an exception. That they were, surprised Jake very little. Two nights before, Confederate bombers had killed U.S. President Al Smith. They hadn't done it on purpose. Trying to hit one particular man or one particular building in a city like Philadelphia, especially at night, was like going after a needle in a haystack with your eyes closed. Try or not, though, they'd flattened Powel House, the President of the USA's Philadelphia residence, and smashed the bomb shelter beneath it. Vice President La Follette was Vice President no more.

Featherston wasn't sure he would have deliberately killed Al Smith if he'd had the chance. After all, he'd hornswoggled a plebiscite on Kentucky and the part of west Texas the USA had called Houston and Sequoyah out of Smith, and triumphantly welcomed the first two back into the Confederacy. But he'd expected Smith to go right on yielding to him, and the son of a bitch hadn't done it. Smith hadn't taken the peace proposal Featherston offered him after Confederate armor sliced through Ohio to Lake Erie, either. Even though the USA remained cut in two, the country also remained very much in the war. The struggle wasn't as sharp and short and easy as Jake had hoped.

So maybe Al Smith was better off dead. Maybe. How could you tell? Like any Vice President, Charlie La Follette was the very definition of an unknown quantity.

But it was only natural for the United States to try to take revenge. Kill our President, will you? We'll kill yours!

U.S. Wright-27 fighters, no doubt diverted from shooting up Confederate positions near the Rappahannock, escorted the bombers and danced a dance of death with C.S. Hound Dogs. Level bombers, two- and four-engined, rained explosives down on Richmond.

With them, though, came a squadron of dive bombers, airplanes not usually seen in attacks on cities. To Jake's admittedly biased way of thinking, the CSA had the best dive bomber in the world in the Mule, otherwise known on both sides of the front as the Asskicker. But its U.S. counterparts were also up to the job they had to do.

That job, here, was to pound the crap out of the Confederate

Presidential residence up on Shockoe Hill. The building was often called the Gray House, after the U.S. White House. If the flak over Richmond as a whole was heavy, that over the Gray House was heavier still. Half a dozen guns stood on the Gray House grounds alone. If an airplane was hit, it seemed as if a pilot could walk on shell bursts all the way to the ground. He couldn't, of course, but it seemed that way.

A dive bomber took a direct hit and exploded in midair, adding a huge smear of flame and smoke to the already crowded sky. Another, trailing fire from the engine cowling back toward the cockpit, smashed into the ground a few blocks away from the mansion. A greasy pillar of thick black smoke marked the pilot's pyre.

Another bomber was hit, and another. The rest bored in on their target. Back before the Great War started in 1914, lots of Confederates believed the Yankees were not only enemies but cowardly enemies. They'd learned better, to their cost. The pilots in these U.S. machines were as brave and as skilled as the men the CSA put in the air.

Yet another dive bomber blew up, this one only a few hundred feet above the Gray House. Flaming wreckage fell all around, and even on, the Presidential residence. The survivors did what they were supposed to do. One after another, they released their bombs, pulled out of their dives, and scurried back towards U.S.-held territory as fast as they could go.

No antiaircraft defenses could block that kind of attack. The Gray House flew to pieces like an anthill kicked by a giant's boot. Some of the wreckage flew up, not out. The damnyankees must have loaded armor-piercing bombs into some of their bombers. If Jake Featherston took refuge in the shelter under the museum, they aimed to blow him to hell and gone anyway.

But Jake wasn't in the Gray House or in the shelter under it.

Jake wasn't within a mile of the Gray House, in fact. As soon as he heard Al Smith was dead, Jake had ordered the Presidential residence evacuated. He'd done it quietly; making a fuss about it would have tipped off the damnyankees that he wasn't where they wanted him to be. At the moment, he was holed up in a none too fancy hotel about a mile west of Capitol Square. His bodyguards kept screaming at him to get his ass down to the basement, but he wanted to watch the show. It beat the hell out of Fourth of July fireworks.

Saul Goldman didn't scream. The C.S. Director of Communications was both more restrained and smarter than that. He said, "Mr. President, *please* take cover. If a bomb falls on you here, the United States win, just the same as if you'd stayed up on Shockoe Hill. The country needs you. Stay safe."

Jake eyed the pudgy, gray-haired little Jew with something that was for a moment not far from hatred. *He* ran the Confederate States, ran them more nearly absolutely than any previous North American ruler had run his country—and that included all the goddamn useless Maximilians in the Empire of Mexico. Nobody could tell him what to do, nobody at all. Saul hadn't tried, unlike the Freedom Party guards who'd bellowed at him. No, Saul had done far worse than that. He'd talked sense.

"All right, dammit," Featherston said peevishly, and withdrew. He affected not to hear the sighs of relief from everyone around him.

Sitting down in the basement was as bad as he'd known it would be. He despised doing nothing. He despised having to do nothing. He wanted to be up there hitting back at his enemies, or else hitting them first and hitting them so hard, they couldn't hit back at him. He'd tried to do that to the United States. The first blow hadn't quite knocked them out. The next one . . . He vowed the next one would.

Catching his foul mood, Goldman said, "Don't worry about it, Mr. President. When you go on the wireless and let the United States know you're still here, that will hurt them worse than losing a big city."

Again, the Director of Communications made sense. Jake found himself nodding, whether he wanted to or not. "Well, you're right," he said. "They can't afford to come after me like that all the time. They won't have any airplanes or pilots left if they do, on account of we'll blow 'em all to hell and gone." He pointed to Goldman. "Make sure there's a studio waiting for me just as soon as these Yankee bastards let up, Saul."

"I'll see to it, sir," Goldman promised.

He was as good as his word, too. He always was. That by itself made him somebody to cherish. Most people did what they could and gave excuses for the rest. Saul Goldman did what he said he'd do. So did Jake himself. People hadn't believed him. He'd taken more than sixteen years, a lot of them lean and hungry, to get to the top. Now that he'd arrived, he was doing just what he'd told folks he would.

Some people had the nerve to act surprised. Hadn't they been listening, dammit?

An armored limousine took him to a studio. Nothing short of a direct hit by a bomb would make this baby blink. Jake had already survived two assassination attempts, not counting this latest one from the USA. Except when his blood was up, the way it had been during the air raid, he didn't believe in taking unnecessary chances.

By now, sitting down in front of a microphone was second nature to him. He'd been a jump ahead of the Whigs and Radical Liberals in figuring out what wireless could do for a politician, and he still used it better than anybody else in the CSA or the USA. Having Saul Goldman on his side helped. He knew that. But he had himself on his side, too, and he was his own best advertisement.

In the room next door, the engineer held up one finger—one minute till airtime. Jake waved back at the glass square set into the wall between the rooms to show he'd got the message. He always acknowledged the competence of people like engineers. They did their jobs so he could do his. He took one last look around. There wasn't much to see. Except for that glass square, the walls and ceiling of the studio were covered in what looked like cardboard egg cartons that helped deaden unwanted noise and echoes.

The engineer pointed to him. The red light above the square of glass came on. He leaned toward the microphone. "I'm Jake Featherston," he said, "and I'm here to tell you the truth." His voice was a harsh rasp. It wasn't the usual broadcaster's voice, any more than his rawboned, craggy face was conventionally handsome. But it grabbed attention and it held attention, and who could ask for more than that? Nobody, not in the wireless business.

"Truth is, I'm still here," he went on after his trademark greeting. "The Yankees dropped bombs on the Gray House, but I'm still here. They threw away God only knows how many airplanes, but I'm still here. They wasted God only knows how much money, but I'm still here. They murdered God only knows how many innocent women and children, but I'm still here. They've thrown God only knows how many soldiers at Richmond, but I'm still here—and they're not. They've had God only knows how many fine young men, who could've gone on and done other things, shot and gassed and blown to pieces, but I'm still here. They've had God only knows how many barrels smashed to scrap metal, but I'm still here. They've given guns to our niggers and taught 'em to rise up against the white man, but

I'm still here. And let them try whatever else they want to try. I've taken it all, and I'll take some more, on account of I'm—still—here."

The red light went out. Behind the glass, the engineer applauded. Jake grinned at him. He didn't think he'd ever seen that before. He raised his hands over his head, fingers interlaced, like a victorious prizefighter. The engineer applauded harder.

When Jake came out of the studio, Saul Goldman stood in the hall with eyes shining behind his glasses. "That . . . that was outstanding, Mr. President," he said. "Outstanding."

"Yeah, I thought it went pretty well," Featherston said. Around most people, he bragged and swaggered. Goldman, by contrast, could make him modest.

"No one in the United States will have any doubts," Goldman said. "No one in the Confederate States will, either."

"That's what it's all about," Jake said. "I don't want anybody to have any doubts about what I've got in mind. I aim to make the Confederate States the grandest country on this continent. I aim to do that, and by God I'm going to do that." Even Saul Goldman, who'd heard it all before, and heard it times uncounted, nodded as if it were fresh and new.

A ship of his own! Sam Carsten had never dreamt of that, not when he joined the Navy in 1909. He'd never dreamt of becoming an officer at all, but he wore a lieutenant's two broad gold stripes on each sleeve of his jacket. The *Josephus Daniels* wasn't a battlewagon or an airplane carrier—nothing of the sort. The U.S. Navy called her a destroyer escort; in the Royal Navy, she would have been a frigate. She could do a little bit of everything: escort convoys of merchantmen and hunt submersibles that menaced them, lay mines if she had to (though she wasn't specialized for that), bombard a coast (though that was asking for trouble if airplanes were anywhere close by), and shoot torpedoes and her pair of four-inch popguns at enemy ships. She was all his—306 feet, 220 men.

Commander Cressy, the *Remembrance*'s executive officer, had been surprised when he got her—surprised, but pleased. Sam's own exec was a lieutenant, junior grade, just over half his age, a redheaded, freckle-faced go-getter named Pat Cooley. Cooley was probably headed for big things—he was almost bound to be if the war and its

quick promotions lasted . . . and if he lived, of course. Carsten knew that he himself, as a mustang, had gone about as far as he could go. He could hope for lieutenant commander. He could, he supposed, dream of commander—as long as he remembered he was dreaming. Considering where he'd started, he had had a hell of a career.

Cooley looked around with a smile on his face. "Feels like spring, doesn't it, Captain?"

Captain. Sam knew he couldn't even dream about getting a fourth stripe. But he was, by God, captain of the *Josephus Daniels.* "Always feels like spring in San Diego," he answered. "August, November, March—doesn't make much difference."

"Yes, sir," the exec said. "Another three weeks and we'll have the genuine article."

"Uh-huh." Sam nodded. "We'll think it's summer by then, I expect, cruising off the coast of Baja California."

"Got to let the damn greasers know they picked the wrong side—again," Cooley said.

"Uh-huh," Sam repeated. The Empire of Mexico and the Confederate States had been bosom buddies ever since the Second Mexican War. There was a certain irony in that, since Mexican royalty came from the same line as the Austro-Hungarian Emperors, and Austria-Hungary lined up with Germany and the USA. But Confederate independence and Confederate friendship with the first Maximilian had kept the USA from invoking the Monroe Doctrine—had effectively shot the Doctrine right between the eyes. The Emperors of Mexico remembered that and forgot who their ancestors had been.

Pat Cooley was the one who took the *Josephus Daniels* out of San Diego harbor. Sam knew damn near everything there was to know about gunnery and damage control. His shiphandling skills were, at the moment, as near nonexistent as made no difference. He intended to remedy that. He was and always had been a conscientious man, a plugger. He went forward one step at a time, and it wasn't always a big step, either. But he *did* go forward, never back.

Three other destroyer escorts and a light cruiser made up the flotilla that would pay a call on Baja California. Sam could have wished they had some air support. Hell, he did wish it. He'd heard that a swarm of light carriers—converted from merchantman hulls—were abuilding. He hoped like anything that was true. True or not, though, the light

carriers weren't in action yet.

He smeared zinc-oxide ointment on his nose, his cheeks, and the backs of his hands. Freckled Pat Cooley didn't laugh at all. Sam was very blond and very fair. Even this early impression of San Diego spring was plenty to make him burn. He offered Cooley the tinfoil tube.

"No, thank you, sir," the exec said. "I've got my own." He'd start to bake just about as fast as Carsten did.

The long swells of the Pacific, swells all the way down from the Gulf of Alaska, raised the destroyer escort and then lowered her. She rolled a few degrees in the process. Here and there, a sailor ran for the rail and gave back his breakfast. Sam smiled at that. His hide was weak, but he had a strong stomach.

He took the wheel when they were out on the open sea. Feeling the whole ship not just through the soles of his feet but also through his hands was quite something. He frowned in concentration, the tip of his tongue peeping out, as he kept station, zigzagging with his companions.

"You're doing fine, sir," Cooley said encouragingly. "Ask you something?"

"Go ahead." Sam watched the compass as he changed course.

"Ease it back just a little—you don't want to overcorrect," Cooley said, and then, "How bad are things over in the Sandwich Islands?"

"Well, they sure as hell aren't good." Sam did ease it back. "With no carriers over there right now, we're in a bad way." He remembered swimming from the mortally damaged *Remembrance* to the destroyer that plucked him from the warm Pacific, remembered watching the airplane carrier on which he'd served so long slide beneath the waves, and remembered the tears streaming down his face when she did.

Cooley frowned. "We've got plenty of our own airplanes on the main islands. We should be able to make the Japs sorry if they come poking their noses down there, right?"

"As long as we can keep 'em in fuel and such, sure," Carsten answered. "But the islands—Oahu, mostly—just sit there, and the Japs' carriers can go wherever they want. There's a gap about halfway between here and the islands that we can't cover very well from the mainland or from Honolulu. If the Japs start smashing up our supply

convoys, we've got big trouble, because the Sandwich Islands get damn near everything from the West Coast."

"We ought to have airplanes with longer range," the exec said.

"Yeah." Sam couldn't say the same thing hadn't occurred to him. It had probably occurred to every Navy man who'd ever thought about the question. "Only trouble is, that's the *one* place where we need 'em. The Confederate States are right next door, so the designers concentrated on guns and bomb load instead. Before the war, I don't think anybody figured we'd lose Midway and give the Japs a base that far east."

Cooley's laugh was anything but amused. "Surprise!" He cocked his head to one side and studied Sam. "You think about this stuff, don't you?"

Commander Cressy had said almost the same thing in almost the same bemused tone of voice. Like Cressy—who was now a captain—Cooley came out of the Naval Academy. Finding a mustang with a working brain seemed to have perplexed both of them. Cooley had to be more careful about how he showed it: Sam outranked him.

Shrugging, Sam said, "If you guess along, you're less likely to get caught with your skivvies down. Oh, you will some of the time—it comes with the territory—but you're less likely to. The more you know, the better off you are."

"Uh-*huh,*" Cooley said. It wasn't disagreement. It was more on the order of, *Well,* you're *not what I thought you were going to be.*

The first Mexican town below the border had a name that translated as Aunt Jane. In peacetime, it was a popular liberty port. The handful of Mexican police didn't give a damn what American sailors did—this side of arson or gunplay, anyhow. If you couldn't come back to your ship with a hangover and a dose of the clap, you weren't half trying.

But it wasn't peacetime now. The Mexicans hadn't built a proper coast-defense battery to try to protect poor old Aunt Jane's honor. What point, when overwhelming U.S. firepower from across the border could smash up almost any prepared position? The greasers *had* brought in a few three-inch pieces to tell the U.S. Navy to keep its distance. Some of them opened up on the flotilla.

Sam called the *Josephus Daniels* to general quarters. He laughed to himself as the klaxons hooted. This was the first time he hadn't had to

run like hell to take his battle station. Here he was on the bridge, right where he belonged.

The Mexicans' fire fell at least half a mile short. Columns of water leaped into the air as shells splashed into the Pacific. Sailors seeing their first action exclaimed at how big those columns were. That made Sam want to laugh again. He'd seen the great gouts of water near misses from fourteen-inch shells kicked up. Next to those, these might have been mice pissing beside elephants.

"Let's return fire, Mr. Cooley," Sam said.

"Aye aye, sir." The exec relayed the order to the gun turrets. Both four-inchers—nothing even slightly fancy themselves: not even secondary armament on a capital ship—swung toward the shore. They fired almost together. At the recoil, the *Josephus Daniels* heeled slightly to starboard. She recovered almost at once. The guns roared again and again.

Shells began bursting around the places where muzzle flashes revealed the Mexican guns. The other members of the flotilla were firing, too. The bigger cannons on the ships could reach the shore, even if the guns on shore couldn't touch the ships. Through binoculars, Sam could easily tell the difference between bursts from the four-inch guns on the destroyer escorts and the light cruiser's six-inchers.

Plucky if outranged, the Mexicans defiantly shot back. "I wouldn't do that," Cooley said. "It just tells us we haven't knocked 'em out. Now more'll come down on their heads."

"They're making a point, I suppose." Sam peered through the binoculars again. "Our gunnery needs work. I'd say that's true for every ship here. I can't do anything about the others, but by God I can fix things on this one."

"Uh, yes, sir." Cooley looked at him, plainly wondering whether he knew any more about that than he did about conning a ship.

Sam grinned back. "Son, I was handling a five-inch gun on the *Dakota* about the time you were a gleam in your old man's eye."

"Oh." The exec blushed between his freckles. "All right, sir." He grinned, too. "Teach me to keep my mouth shut—and I hardly even opened it."

One of the bursts on shore was conspicuously bigger than the others

had been. “There we go!” Sam said. “Some of their ammo just went up. I don’t know whether they’ve got real dumps there or we hit a limber, but we nailed ’em pretty good either way.”

“Blew some gunners to hell and gone either way, too,” Cooley said.

“That’s the point of it,” Carsten agreed. “They won’t care if we rearrange the landscape. After they bury José and Pedro—if they can find enough of ’em left *to* bury—they’ll get the idea that we can hurt them worse than they can hurt us. It’s about people, Pat. It’s always about people.”

“Uh, yes, sir,” Pat Cooley said again. This time, it wasn’t doubt in his eyes as he looked Sam over: it was bemusement again. Sam laughed inside himself. *No, the mustang isn’t quite what you figured on, eh, kid?*

The light cruiser’s skipper didn’t choose to linger to continue the one-sided gun duel. The flotilla steamed south. Sam hoped the Mexicans didn’t have anything more up their sleeves than what they’d already shown.

F *or you, the war is over.* The Confederate officer who took Major Jonathan Moss prisoner after his fighter got shot down over Virginia had sounded like an actor mouthing a screenwriter’s lines in a bad film about the Great War. The only thing that had kept Moss from telling him so was that the son of a bitch was likely right.

Moss strolled near the barbed-wire perimeter of a prisoner-of-war camp outside the little town of Andersonville, Georgia. He didn’t get *too* close to the barbed wire. Inside it was a second perimeter, marked only by two-foot-high stakes with long, flimsy bands supported on top of them. The red dirt between the inner and outer perimeters was always rolled smooth so it would show footprints. The goons in the guard towers outside the barbed wire would open up with machine guns without warning if anybody presumed to set foot on that dead ground without permission.

Other officers—fliers and ground pounders both—also walked along the perimeter or through the camp. The only other thing to do was stay in the barracks, an even more depressing alternative. The Confederates had built them as cheaply and flimsily as the Geneva Convention allowed. No doubt U.S. accommodations for C.S. prisoners were every bit as shabby. Moss didn’t care about that; he wasn’t in a U.S. camp. What he did care about was that, when it rained here—

which it did all too often—it rained almost as hard inside the barracks as it did outside.

Clouds were rolling in out of the northwest, which probably meant yet another storm was on the way. Moss looked down at his wrist to see what time it was. Then he muttered to himself. He'd been relieved of wristwatch and wallet shortly after his capture.

All things considered, it could have been worse. The food was lousy—grits and boiled greens and what the guards called fatback, a name that fit only too well—but there was enough of it. Meals were the high points of the day. Considering how dreary they were, that said nothing good about the rest of the time.

A captain came up to Moss. Nick Cantarella looked like what he was: a tough Italian kid out of New York City. "How ya doin'?" he asked.

Moss shrugged. "All things considered, I'd rather be in Philadelphia." He wasn't above stealing a line from one of the more inspired film comics he'd seen.

Chuckling, Cantarella said, "Yeah, this place makes Philly look good, and that's sayin' somethin'." He looked around. The guard in the closest tower was watching the two of them, but he couldn't hear a quiet conversation. No prisoners were in earshot, either. "It could happen one of these days."

"Could it?" Moss said eagerly.

"Could, I said." Cantarella left it at that, and trudged away with his head down and the collar of his leather jacket turned up.

However much Moss wanted to learn more, he kept quiet. Trying to know too much and learn too fast only made people in the Andersonville camp suspicious. Not all the inmates were prisoners: so Moss had been assured, anyhow. The United States and Confederate States were branches off the same trunk. They'd grown apart, but not that far apart. It wasn't impossible for a clever Confederate to impersonate a U.S. officer. No one here was trusted with anything important—indeed, with anything at all—till someone known to be reliable vouched for him. Till then, he was presumed to be talking to the guards.

That had made it harder for Moss to gain people's confidence. His squadron was fairly new in Maryland, and not many people fighting in the East knew him. Finally, another pilot shot down over Virginia

proved to have flown with him in Ohio and Indiana, and also proved to be known to a couple of pilots already in the Andersonville camp. Once they'd assured their friends that Joe was legit, Joe could do the same for Moss.

So now he knew there were plans to stage an escape from the camp. That was all he knew about them. Details would come sooner or later. He had no idea whether he'd be on the list of prisoners chosen to disappear. He did think the breakout had a chance. Following Geneva Convention rules, the Confederates paid prisoners who were commissioned officers the same salary as they gave to men of equal grade in their own service. Escapees would have money, then. They spoke the local language, even if their accent was odd. If they could get outside the barbed wire, get a little start . . .

For you, the war is over. Moss could hope not, anyhow. He didn't know what the hope was worth. In the meantime . . . In the meantime, the rain arrived about half an hour later. It drove Moss back into the barracks. The red dirt outside rapidly turned to a substance resembling nothing so much as tomato soup. Inside, rain dripped between the unpainted pine boards of the roof. Some of the leaks were over bunks. Makeshift cloth awnings channeled away the worst of them.

Moss' mattress and pillow were cheap cotton sacking stuffed with sawdust and wood shavings. Eight wooden slats across the bed frame supported the bedding. The mattress was every bit as comfortable as Moss had thought it would be when he first set eyes on it. He might have had worse nights sleeping on the slats. Then again, he might not have.

A poker game was going on in one corner of the barracks. A poker game was always going on in one corner of the barracks. The prisoners had little on which to spend the brown banknotes—not bills, not down here—the Confederates gave them. They could buy cigarettes at what passed for the camp canteen. They could pay guards a little extra to bring them something besides grits, greens, and fatback. Past that . . . Past that, they could play poker and redistribute the wealth.

Every once in a while, Moss sat in, but only every once in a while. The gods might have designed poker as a way to separate him from his money. In a poker game, you were either a shark or you were bait. In the courtroom, he'd been a shark. In the air, he'd been a shark—till a Confederate took a bite out of his fighter. At the poker table, he was

bait.

Other captured officers came in out of the rain. Some of them sat down on their bunks. Some of them lay down. Two or three went to sleep. Some men seemed to go into hibernation here, sleeping fourteen or sixteen or eighteen hours a day. Geneva Convention rules said officers didn't have to work. The sleepy ones took not working to an extreme. Moss didn't know whether to envy them or to give them a good swift kick in the ass to get their motors started.

As it happened, he didn't have to boot them today. Confederate guards took care of that. They burst into the barracks, submachine guns at the ready. "Everybody up!" they shouted. "Out of the sack, you lazy fuckers!" Even the yelling didn't roust one POW. He could have slept through the Trump of Doom, but not through getting thrown out of bed onto the floor.

"What the hell?" he said plaintively, picking himself up.

No one paid any attention to him. The guards didn't pay attention to any of the prisoners once they were out of the bunks. They paid attention to the bunks themselves, and to the number of slats that held each one up. They were not top-quality human material, to put it mildly—if they had been, they would have been up at the front. Some of them seemed to have trouble counting to eight. *Good thing there aren't eleven slats,* Moss thought. *They'd have to take off their shoes.*

"How come this here one's only got seven?" one of them demanded.

"Because one of 'em damn well broke, because you damn well used cheap-shit wood when you made it," answered the lieutenant whose bunk that was. His accent was identical to Cantarella's, though he looked Irish rather than Italian. He also had the New Yorker's way of challenging anything he didn't like.

Moss didn't give the guards a hard time. It struck him as cruising for a bruising. He'd seen the guards rough people up. That violated the Geneva Convention, but you couldn't call them on it. They would say the roughee had it coming, and the camp commandant would back them right down the line.

Here, though, the guards didn't push things. They grumbled and they fumed and then tramped out of the barracks. "What the hell was that all about?" asked a captain who'd been in Andersonville only a few days.

“Beats me,” somebody else answered—an officer who’d been a prisoner longer than Moss had.

It beat Moss, too. When he got the chance to ask Nick Cantarella, he did. Cantarella started laughing. “I’ll bite. What’s funny?” Moss asked.

“The Confederates know what they’re doing, that’s all,” Cantarella answered. He was still laughing, and didn’t care who heard him. He thought it was funny as hell. “If we’re digging a tunnel, those slats are about the best thing we could use to shore it up.”

“Oh.” A light dawned. “And if they’re not missing, then we’re not digging a tunnel?”

“I didn’t say that.” Cantarella was nothing if not coy. “You said that. With a little luck, the guards think that.”

“Then we *are* digging a tunnel?” Moss persisted.

“I didn’t say that, either. I didn’t say anything. It’s the waddayacallit—the Fifth Amendment, that’s it.”

Moss hadn’t had much to do with the Fifth Amendment while practicing law in occupied Ontario; it hadn’t crossed the border with the U.S. Army. It wasn’t as strong as it might have been in the USA, either. From the 1880s until the Great War, the United States had geared up for a rematch against the Confederacy. Nothing had got in the way of gearing up—and, thanks to a pliant Supreme Court, that nothing included big chunks of the U.S. Constitution.

When he expressed his detailed opinion of the Fifth Amendment and of the horse it rode in on, he just made Cantarella laugh some more. “Dammit, you know I’m legit now,” Moss groused. “The least you could do is tell me what’s going on.”

“Who says I know?” Cantarella answered. “I just work here.” Had he put a pot full of cold water on Moss’ head, it would have boiled in about thirty seconds. Moss’ face must have told him as much. When he laughed again, it was in some embarrassment. “Don’t ask for what I shouldn’t give you, buddy.”

“Why shouldn’t you?” Moss went on steaming. “Only reason I can see is that you still think I might *not* be the goods.”

“Then you aren’t looking hard enough.” The New Yorker’s voice took on a hard edge. “I don’t give a shit if you’re as legitimate as Teddy

Roosevelt. The more people who know more stuff than they ought to, the better chance Featherston's fuckers have of tearing it out of them. Have you got that through your goddamn thick head now, or shall I draw you a picture?"

"Oh." Jonathan Moss' temperature abruptly lowered. He didn't like security concerns, but he understood them. "Sorry, Captain. I was out of line there."

"Don't worry about it." Like most people, Cantarella was more inclined to be magnanimous after he'd got his way. "When the time comes—if the time comes—you'll find out whatever you need to know. Till then, just relax. Let Jake Featherston pay your room and board—and your salary, too."

"He needs to learn something about the hotel business. You're not supposed to have to lock up your customers to get 'em to stay," Moss said. Nick Cantarella thought that was funny as hell. Moss would have, too, if he'd been on the other side of the barbed wire.

F or quite a while after rejoining the Confederate Army, Brigadier General Clarence Potter had worked underground, in War Department offices that officially didn't exist. Intelligence tended to get quartered in places like that. For one thing, it was supposed to be secret. For another, if you didn't have to look at spies, you could use what they gave you and still pretend to yourself that your hands were clean.

When he got the wreath around his three stars that meant promotion to general's rank, he also got his unfortunate predecessor's upstairs office. Being able to look out at Richmond instead of just walls was very nice. That is, it had been very nice till U.S. bombers started coming over Richmond in large numbers.

These days, only the foolhardy and those who had no choice worked above ground in the heart of the city. A lot of War Department operations had moved to the suburbs. Those that couldn't had gone underground. Potter's new office was only a few doors down from the one he'd had as a colonel. Returning to the subbasement, he'd displaced a captain, not the colonel who had the old room. As long as the electricity kept working, he could get the job done.

He stared at the papers on his desk through the bottoms of his bifocals. He was an erect, soldierly-looking man, nearer sixty than fifty, with iron-gray hair, a stern expression, and the same style of

steel-rimmed glasses he'd worn as a major in Intelligence in the Army of Northern Virginia during the Great War (they hadn't been bifocals then). The spectacles softened what would otherwise have been some of the coldest gray eyes anyone ever owned.

One of the reasons he glowered at those papers was that they should have got to him weeks before they did. Before the shooting started, he'd run Confederate espionage operations in the USA. Two countries hardly separated by language made spying here easier in many ways than it was in Europe. Some Confederate operatives had been in place in Washington and Philadelphia and elsewhere since before the Great War.

There were two problems with that. Shooting and moving armies and closed ordinary channels of mail and telegraphy made it harder for information to get across the border—which was why these papers were so late. The other problem was, what were the damnyankees doing in the CSA? Ease of spying cut both ways, worse luck.

Formally, counterintelligence was on Brigadier General Cummins' football field, not his. He wasn't sorry about that, or most of him wasn't. Even guzzling coffee as if they'd outlaw it day after tomorrow, he did have to sleep every once in a while. He didn't see how he could conjure up enough extra hours in the day to do a proper job if more responsibility landed on his head.

Jake Featherston and Nathan Bedford Forrest III, the head of the Confederate General Staff, thought he could handle it if he had to. He had a hard time quarreling with either of them, because they both had more in their laps than he did. But he was a relentless perfectionist in ways they weren't, and couldn't let go of things till they were exactly as he wanted them. He had enough insight to understand that that wasn't always a desirable character trait. Understanding it and being able to do anything about it were two different things.

Someone knocked on the door. Down here, the rule was that you didn't walk in till you were invited. Potter checked to make sure nothing sensitive was out in the open before he said, "Come in."

"Thank you." It was Nathan Bedford Forrest III. Potter started to come to attention; Forrest waved him back into his chair before the motion was well begun, saying, "Don't bother with that silly nonsense." The great-grandson of the cavalry raider in the War of Secession had a fleshier face than his famous ancestor, but his eyes, hooded under strong dark brows, proclaimed the relationship.

“Good morning, sir, or afternoon, or whatever time of day it is out there,” Potter said. “What can I do for you?”

Instead of answering right away, Forrest cocked his head to one side, an odd sort of smile on his face. “I purely love to listen to you talk, General—you know that?”

“You may be the only person in the Confederate States who does,” Potter answered. He’d gone to college up at Yale before the Great War. U.S. speech patterns and accent had rubbed off on him, not least because even then the Yankees had made things hard for Confederates in their midst. He’d wanted to fit in there, and he had—and he’d had a certain amount of trouble fitting into his own country ever since.

“But I know how useful it is to be able to talk like that,” Forrest said.

Quite a few of the C.S. spies Potter ran in the USA were Confederates who’d been raised or educated on the other side of the border. Sounding like a damnyankee helped a lot. It made real Yankees believe you were what you said you were, and was often more convincing than the proper papers. If you sounded right, you might never have to show your papers.

With a sour chuckle, Potter said, “It’s almost got me shot for a spy here a few times.”

“Well, that’s some of what I want to talk to you about.” Nathan Bedford Forrest III sank into the chair in front of Potter’s desk. He pulled a pack of cigarettes from the breast pocket of his butternut tunic, stuck one in his mouth, and offered Potter the pack. After Potter took one, Forrest lit them both.

They smoked for a couple of drags apiece. Potter knocked ash into a brass astray on the desk. He said, “If you think you’ve intrigued me . . . you’re right, dammit.”

The chief of the General Staff grinned at him, unabashed. “I hoped I might, to tell you the truth. I’m getting up a volunteer battalion I’m going to want you to help me vet.”

“Are you? A battalion of our people who can sound like damn-yankees?” Potter asked. Forrest nodded. Potter sucked in smoke till the coal at the end of his cigarette glowed a furious red. After he let it out, he aimed another question at his superior: “Are you putting them in U.S. uniforms, too?”

Nathan Bedford Forrest III didn't jump. Instead, he froze into immobility. He clicked his tongue between his teeth after fifteen seconds or so of silence. "Well, General," he said at last, "you didn't get the job you've got on account of you're a damn fool. If I didn't know that already, you just rubbed my nose in it like I'm a puppy getting house-trained."

"If they're captured in enemy uniform, the United States will shoot *them* for spies," Potter said. "We won't be able to say boo about it, either. Under the laws of war, they'll have the right."

"I understand that. Everybody who goes forward with this will understand it, too," Forrest answered. "You have my word on that, General. I already told you once, this is a project for volunteers."

"All right," Potter said. "But I did want to remind you. As a matter of fact, for something like that I was obliged to remind you. So where exactly do I fit in?"

"You're the fellow who's been running people who can sound like damnyankees and act like damnyankees." Forrest stubbed out his smoke and reached for the pack to have another one. When he offered it to Potter this time, Potter shook his head. The chief of the General Staff lit up again. He sucked in smoke, then continued, "If they can be halfway convincing to you, they'll be good enough to convince the enemy, too."

"It's not just accent." Potter scratched his chin as he thought. "You can get away with flattening out the vowels some. Even swallowing *r*'s might make the Yankees think you're from Boston or somewhere up there—what even the Yankees call a Yankee. But some things will kill you if the USA hears 'em coming out of your mouth."

"*Banknote* is one," Forrest said. "I know they say *bill* instead."

"Just about everybody knows that one—just about everybody thinks about money a good deal," Potter agreed. Nathan Bedford Forrest III laughed, though Potter hadn't been kidding, or not very much. He went on, "They don't say *tote* up there, either—it's *carry.* And they mostly say *bucket* instead of *pail,* though you might get by with that one. You won't ever get away with *windscreen;* they always say *windshield.* They might think somebody who says *windscreen* is an Englishman, but that won't help anybody in a U.S. uniform much, either."

"No, not hardly." Forrest laughed once more: a grim laugh.

“What will you be using them for?” Potter quickly held up his right hand. “No, don’t tell me. Let me figure it out.” He thought for a little while, then nodded—at least as much to himself as to his superior. “Infiltrators. They have to be infiltrators. Get them behind the lines, giving false directions, sabotaging vehicles, putting explosives in ammunition dumps, and they’ll be worth a lot more than a battalion of ordinary men.”

Again, Forrest gave him a careful once-over before speaking. When he did, he said, “Shall I put you in an operational slot, Potter? If you want your own division, it’s yours for the asking.”

“I think I can do the damnyankees more harm right where I am, sir,” Potter replied. Nathan Bedford Forrest III didn’t argue with him. He thought a bit more. “Do you know what the really elegant part of the scheme is? As soon as the damnyankees realize we’ve got men behind their lines like that, nobody in a green-gray uniform will trust anybody he doesn’t know. And that’ll last for the rest of the goddamn war.”

Forrest slowly nodded. He looked like a man trying to show nothing on his face at a poker table. Did that mean he or whoever’d come up with the notion hadn’t thought so far ahead? Potter would have bet it did. He almost asked, but checked himself. That might have looked like showing off.

One other thing did occur to him, though: “You know they’ll do the same thing to us? They just about have to, if for no other reason than to make us as scared of our own shadows as they will be.”

“I’ll . . . take that up with the President,” Forrest said. Were the raiders in Yankee uniform Jake Featherston’s idea? Potter wouldn’t have been surprised; Featherston had a genius for making trouble in nasty ways. He also had the gifted amateur’s problem of not seeing all the consequences of his troublemaking.

This long war, for instance. He really thought Al Smith would make peace. Potter muttered unhappily. If only the Yankees would have quit. Jake Featherston would have gone down in history then, no doubt about it. Things wouldn’t be so easy now. He asked Forrest, “What do you think of Charlie La Follette?”

“We’ll just have to see,” the chief of the General Staff replied. “So far, he sounds like Smith. But who knows what he’ll be like once he gets out from under the other fellow’s shadow? How about you? You

probably know more about him than I do.”

“I doubt it. Who pays attention to the Vice President?” Potter said, and Forrest laughed, again for all the world as if he’d been joking. He went on, “I think you’ve got it about right. Doesn’t look like he’s going to pack in the war.”

“No, it sure doesn’t. Too bad. It’d make our lives easier if he did, that’s for damn sure,” Forrest said—one more thing Potter thought he had about right.

T hey’d pulled Armstrong Grimes’ regiment, or what was left of it, out of the lines in Utah for a while. The corporal and his buddies had to march away. The powers that be saved most of their trucks to haul men to and from fights they thought more important than the one against the Mormon rebels.

Marching out meant he and his fellow survivors tramped past the men coming up to take their places in Provo. Telling who was who couldn’t have been easier. The new fish had fresh uniforms, and carried very full packs on their backs. They were clean-shaven. They looked bright and eager.

Armstrong and the rest of the veterans stank. He couldn’t remember when he’d last bathed or changed his underwear. He was as whiskery as any of the others. His uniform had seen better days, too. He carried nothing he couldn’t do without. And his eyes went every which way at once. They were the eyes of a man who never knew which way trouble was coming from, only that it was coming.

Most of the soldiers pulling out had eyes like that. The rest just stared straight ahead as they trudged along. The thousand-yard stare belonged to men who’d seen and done too much. Maybe rest would turn them back into soldiers again. Maybe nothing would. The way war was these days, it had no trouble overwhelming a man.

Some of the veterans jeered at the rookies: “Aren’t you pretty?” “Aren’t you sweet?” “Do your mothers know you’re here?” “Where do you want your body sent?”

The men going into the line didn’t say much in return. They eyed the troops they were replacing like people in a zoo eyeing tigers and wolves. But no bars stood between them and the veterans. They plainly feared they’d get bitten if they teased the animals. They were

right, too.

“Got a cigarette, Sarge?” Grimes asked. He was a big man—he’d been a second-string lineman on his high-school football team what seemed a million years ago and was actually just over one. Under the whiskers, his face was long and oval like his mother’s, but he had his old man’s dark hair and eyes.

“Here you go.” Rex Stowe pulled one out of a pack.

“Thanks.” Armstrong lit up and sucked in smoke. He was named for George Armstrong Custer; his father had been born in the same little Ohio town as the hero of the Second Mexican War and the Great War. Armstrong was born in Washington, D.C., where Merle Grimes settled down and married after a war wound from which he still limped. He’d had a comfortable postwar career as a minor government functionary. He and the rest of the family probably weren’t comfortable now. Washington was too close to the border with the CSA to be safe, though as far as Armstrong knew his father and mother and younger sister were well.

A middle-aged woman and a couple of little kids stood in the rubble by the side of the track and watched the U.S. soldiers go by. Silent hatred burned in their eyes. Of itself, Armstrong’s Springfield swung a couple of inches toward them. Plenty of Mormon women fought alongside their husbands and brothers and sons. Plenty of kids threw homemade grenades and firebombs—Featherston Fizzes, people called them. You never could tell, even with people behind the lines.

“They don’t like it that you’re smoking,” Stowe said.

No mere cigarette could have made them look like that. They wished him straight to hell. If they’d had weapons, they would have done their best to send him there.

Every civilian he saw looked at him like that. He knew there were people in Utah who weren’t Mormons. The Mormon majority called anybody who wasn’t one of them a gentile. Even Jews were gentiles here. One of Armstrong’s buddies was a New York City guy named Yossel Reisen. He thought that was funny as the devil.

But a lot of the so-called gentiles had joined their Mormon neighbors in rising up against the USA. Armstrong had trouble figuring that out. What had the U.S. government ever done to *them*? Had they hated the way Utah was treated so much that they wanted to leave the USA? Weren’t they a little crazy, or more than a little, if they had? Yeah, the

rebels were brave, no doubt about it. But bravery had only so much to do with anything when it ran up against superior firepower.

The rebels were taking a while to lose, because the United States had other things to worry about and weren't giving them anything like their full attention. But the Mormons and their pals had to be chewing locoweed if they thought they had a Chinaman's chance of bailing out of the USA.

Rex Stowe said, "The way things are around here, I don't even know if I want to come out of the line. Aren't they likelier to jump us when our guard is down than when we're looking for it?"

"Who says our guard's going to be down? I don't know about you, but I'm still watching all the goddamn time," Armstrong answered.

Stowe considered, shrugged, and nodded. "You've got something there."

On they slogged, past buildings pulverized in the slow, brutal U.S. advance. Armstrong wondered if there'd be enough Mormons left alive to keep their faith going after this rebellion finally got smashed. There had been the last time around, which struck him as a damn shame.

He marched for a solid day to get back to the recuperation center that had sprung up in Thistle, southeast of Provo. That put it out of range of Mormon guns—unless the rebels got sneaky, which they might well do. Barbed wire and machine-gun nests around the center made the place seem like a prisoner-of-war camp, but the guns faced out, not in.

Once inside the perimeter, Armstrong followed signs to a bank of showers and then to a delousing station. The showers were cold. His father had talked about hot water as part of the delousing process, but times had changed. They sprayed him with something that smelled like poison gas instead of boiling him or soaking him or whatever they'd done in his old man's day.

"What is this shit?" he asked the guy doing the spraying.

"It's like Flit, only more so. It *really* kills bugs," the other soldier answered, and sprayed the naked man in line behind him.

They didn't bother trying to get his uniform clean. That would have defeated Job's patience. They issued him fresh clothes instead, from long johns on out. He felt like a new man.

The new man got a feed of bacon and real eggs and hash browns and toast and jam. Most of what he'd eaten lately had come out of cans or cartons. This felt like heaven, especially since he could pile as much as he wanted on his mess tray. After about three breakfasts' worth, he said, "That's a little better."

Rex Stowe had eaten at least as much. "Yeah, a little," he agreed. "I expect I'll be able to handle lunch, though."

"Oh, fuck, yes." Armstrong took that for granted.

Yossel Reisen sat on Armstrong's other side. He'd also put away a hell of a lot, though he skipped the bacon. He often swapped ration cans, too, so he wouldn't have to eat pork. He gulped down a big white china mug full of coffee pale with fresh cream. "Damn good," he said —he was at least as foul-mouthed as anybody else.

"Ask you something?" Armstrong said to him, and waited for him to nod. "You already did your conscript time, right? And then they sucked you back in?"

"Yeah, that's true. You know it is," Yossel answered. "So what?"

"So how come I'm a corporal when I've been in less than a year and you just made PFC?" Armstrong asked. "They should've given you two stripes the minute you came back, and you ought to be at least a sergeant by now."

Reisen shrugged. "You know who my aunt is." It wasn't a question.

"Well, sure," Armstrong said. Everybody knew Yossel's aunt had been married to the President and was a Congresswoman herself. "You don't make a big deal out of it, the way a lot of guys would. But that ought to get you promoted faster, right, not slower?"

"I don't want it to." Yossel Reisen spoke with quiet emphasis. "I don't want anybody giving me anything on account of Aunt Flora. I just want to be a regular guy and get what regular guys get. I know damn well I earned the stripe I've got. If somebody handed it to me, what would it be worth?"

Armstrong was chewing a big mouthful of bacon, so he couldn't answer right away. If he were related to somebody famous, he would have milked it for all it was worth. A cushy job counting brass buttons five hundred miles away from guns going off sounded great to him.

Yossel went on, “When my Uncle David got conscripted in the last war, my aunt was already in Congress. She could have pulled strings for him. He wouldn’t let her. He lost a leg. He’s proud of what he did. He wouldn’t have it any different.”

He’s out of his fucking mind, Armstrong thought. And yet his own father was unmistakably proud of his war wound, too. No doubt he’d screamed his head off when he got it, just like anybody else when a bullet bit him. Memory did strange things, no doubt about it.

“Have it your way,” Armstrong said when at last he swallowed. “You pull your weight. Anybody tells you anything else, kick his ass for him.”

“Thanks,” Reisen said. “You, too.” Armstrong followed the bacon with a swig of coffee. Till he got in the Army, he’d always been half-assed about things, doing enough to get by and not another nickel’s worth. You couldn’t do that once you put on the uniform, though. It might get you killed. Even if it didn’t, it would make your buddies hate you. If you let your buddies down, they’d let you down, too—and that *would* get you killed. Having somebody he cared about tell him he was all right felt damn good.

After they ate, they went over to a barracks hall. It was cheap plywood, and probably better suited to prisoners on the U.S. side. Armstrong wasn’t inclined to be critical. He threw his few chattels into a footlocker at the end of a real cot with a real mattress and real bedding. Then he took off his shoes and threw himself down on the mattress. “Oh, Jesus Christ!” he said ecstatically. A real bed. The first real bed since . . . He’d tried to remember not so long before. He tried again, harder. He still couldn’t.

Nobody told him he had to get out of it. He was full. He was clean, in a clean uniform. Nobody was shooting at him or even near him. He allowed himself the luxury of taking off his shoes. Then, blissfully, he fell asleep.

As far as he could tell, he hadn’t changed position when reveille sounded the next morning. He yawned and stretched. He was *still* tired. But he wasn’t weary unto death anymore. He was also starved—he’d slept through the lunch that had sounded so inviting and dinner, too, damn near slept the clock around.

By the way the rest of the men in the hall rose, they’d done nothing much in the nighttime, either. Some of them had had the energy to

strip to their shorts and get under the covers instead of lying on top of them. *Maybe tonight,* Armstrong told himself.

He made an enormous pig of himself again at breakfast. Then he went back to the barracks and flopped down again. He didn't fall asleep right away this time. He just lay there, marveling. He didn't have to go anywhere. He didn't have to do anything. He didn't have to have eyes in the back of his head—though having them doubtless was still a good thing. He could just ease back and relax. He wondered if he still remembered how. He aimed to find out, for as long as he had in this wonderful place.

J efferson Pinkard hadn't been in Texas since he headed home to Birmingham after the Great War ended. He'd fought north of where he was now, but the country around Snyder wasn't a whole lot different from what he'd known half a lifetime earlier: plains cut by washes, with low rises here and there. The sky went on forever, and the landscape seemed to do the same.

Bulldozers were kicking dust up into that endless sky right now. Along with their diesel snorting, the sounds of saws and hammers filled the air. Camp Determination would seem to go on forever when it got finished, too. Jeff had run Camp Dependable near Alexandria, Louisiana, for years. Once Determination got done, you'd be able to drop Dependable into it and not even know the older camp was there.

The barbed-wire perimeter stretched and stretched and stretched. A lot of people would go through Camp Determination. It had to be able to hold them all. And Pinkard had to make sure nobody got out who wasn't supposed to. Guard towers outside the walls had gone up before the barracks inside. Machine guns were already in place inside the towers. Anybody who tried to escape would be real sorry real fast—but probably not for long.

Stalking along outside the perimeter, Jeff looked up at each tower he passed. He'd climbed up into all of them, checking their fields of fire. If you wanted something like that done right—hell, if you wanted anything done right—you were better off doing it yourself.

His black, shiny boots scuffed still more dust into the air. He wore three stars on each collar tab, the equivalent of a colonel's rank. But he was called Standard Leader, not Colonel. He had a Freedom Party rank, not one from the Army. His uniform was of the same cut as a

colonel's, but gray rather than butternut.

Tunic and trousers both had some extra room for his belly. He still carried muscle under the fat, though; he'd been a steelworker till he got conscripted and for a while after the war, and no weakling ever went into the Sloss Works. If he scowled more often than he smiled, that was true of most people who bossed other people around.

After he got done prowling the perimeter, he went inside the camp. He carried a submachine gun with a full magazine when he did. So did all the whites who went inside. He had another man with him, too. The rule was that no white man went in alone. He'd made the rule. He lived up to it.

The construction-gang bosses were white. Negroes did most of the actual work, building the barracks where they would later live . . . for a while. If they did a lousy job, they had only themselves to blame.

Pinkard checked with the straw bosses. He could tell by looking that things were pretty close to being on schedule. The bosses blamed the rain that had come through a few days earlier for what delays there were. "Make it up," Jeff told them. "We'll open on time, or I'll know the reason why. And if we don't, I won't be the only one who's sorry. Have you got that?"

He was bigger than most of the gang bosses, and he had a loud, rasping voice, and everybody knew he was in good odor in Richmond. People might grumble about him behind his back, but nobody had the nerve to get mouthy to his face.

There was also another reason for that. Jeff Pinkard didn't just talk to the construction-gang bosses. He poked his nose in everywhere, as had been his habit ever since he started taking care of prisoners during the civil war between the Emperor of Mexico and the U.S.-backed republican rebels after the Great War ended.

He went up to a colored man nailing boards to the side of a barracks unit. "You got everything you need to do your job?" he demanded.

"Yes, suh. Sure do," the Negro answered. "Got me a hammer an' plenty o' nails." He looked Pinkard in the eye. "You give me a rifle an' plenty o' bullets, I do a job on *you.*"

"I bet you would," Pinkard said. "But you tried that, and they caught you." Most of the laborers were men taken in rebellion against the CSA. "If you try and you lose, this is what you get."

“I ain’t got my population reduced yet,” the black man said, and went back nailing up boards.

Population reduction and its variants had been Confederate slang for a little while now. *I’ll reduce your population, you bastard!* an angry man might shout, when he meant no more than, *I’ll fix you!* Used that way, the phrase wasn’t so heavily freighted with meaning. But, like a lot of slang, it sprang from something that was literally true. More Negroes, many more, were going into camps all over the CSA than were coming out—coming out alive, anyhow.

Jeff Pinkard eyed the colored man with the hammer in his hand. How did he mean what he’d just said? Was it only slang in his mouth, or had he seen enough to understand exactly where the slang came from? Jeff wondered, but he didn’t ask. As long as it was possible for Negroes to stay optimistic, they made more docile, more cooperative prisoners. Men who were sure they were doomed anyhow had nothing to lose. They caused trouble no matter what it cost them. Better to keep them as happy as you could.

That wasn’t real happy. Several Negroes asked Jeff if they could have bigger rations. He just shook his head and kept walking. They didn’t complain too much. The grits and occasional beans or biscuits they got didn’t quite amount to a starvation diet. The ration was just small enough to remind people it should have been larger.

The workers had no shortage of building supplies. Ferdinand Koenig, the C.S. Attorney General, had promised Pinkard a railroad spur would run to Camp Determination, and he’d kept his word. Everything Jeff needed came right to his front door. As soon as the camp was finished, trainloads of prisoners would come right to his front door, too. It wouldn’t be very long.

More colored prisoners were paving the road that led into Camp Determination and the big parking area at the end of it. Along with the railroad spur, there’d be plenty of truck traffic going in and out of the camp. Jeff smiled to himself. That had been his idea, back at Camp Dependable. But there he hadn’t had the room to do things right. Here, he did. And if anybody came up with something better than trucks, he’d have room for that, too, whatever it turned out to be. Nobody’d improved on trucks yet, but you never could tell what someone might think up.

“You make sure you get that concrete nice and smooth,” Jeff barked to a Negro working on the lot.

“Oh, yes, suh, I do dat. You don’t gots to worry none. Everything be fust-rate. We takes care of it.” As any Negro would when a white boss bore down on him, this one was quick and ready to promise the moon. Whether he’d deliver was liable to be a different question.

Pinkard didn’t care so much about the barracks halls. But the parking lot and the road—they really counted. The trucks were important and expensive. They had to be well taken care of. “I’ll have my eye on you,” Pinkard growled. “You think I’m kidding, you’ll be sorry.”

“Yes, suh.” The Negro didn’t get up from his hands and knees. He probably wanted to show Jeff how diligent he was. “Don’t you fret none.”

As things advanced here, more barbed wire with gates in it would separate the road and the lot from the rest of the camp. He had everything planned. The blueprints for Camp Determination had come out of Richmond, but he had permission from Ferd Koenig to modify them as he thought best. This was going to be *his* camp, and by God it would work the way he wanted it to.

Guards saluted as he and his silent gun-toting companion left the perimeter. He’d need more manpower when the camp got going, but he didn’t expect that to be a problem. The Confederate Veterans’ Brigades had a guard-training center not far outside of Fort Worth. The way Jeff saw things, the men who came out of it would probably do better than the cops and tough guys who made up most of the guard force now. They’d really know what they were supposed to do.

He had his own office by the growing camp. Telephone and telegraph lines connected it to the outside world. That was more so Richmond could send him instructions than so he could reach other places, but the powers that be back in the capital didn’t mind if he did.

When he walked up to the telegrapher, the young man didn’t quite sit at attention, but he came close. Jeff said, “Billy Ray, I want you to send a wire to Edith Blades in Alexandria, Louisiana. You’ve got the address, right?”

“Yes, sir, Standard Leader!” Billy Ray said. If he didn’t have the address of his boss’s fiancée handy, he’d be in trouble. He grabbed a message pad and poised a pencil over it. “Go ahead, sir.”

“Right.” Jeff paused a moment to work out what he wanted to say before he said it. He always felt like a damn fool when he had to mumble and stumble and backtrack. “Here we go. . . . ‘Dear Edith, All

well here. Progress on schedule. Will be back to visit in about two weeks. Expect things to start up in less than two months. Miss you and the boys. See you all soon. Love, Jeff.' " He tried to keep things short, even if he wasn't paying for the wire out of his own pocket.

"Let me read that back for you, sir." Billy Ray did. He had it right. *The boys* had surprised him the first time he heard it; he hadn't known Edith was a widow. Now he took them for granted.

"Send it off," Jeff told him. The telegraph key started clicking.

Jeff went into his inner office. He'd been careful about more than keeping things short. Suppose the damnyankees got their hands on this wire. He hadn't given his last name or his rank. He hadn't said anything specifically about the camp, either. Anybody who didn't already know what he was talking about wouldn't be able to make much sense of it. He sounded like a drummer or an efficiency expert, not a camp commandant.

I damn well am an efficiency expert, he thought. A lot of the changes he'd made to the blueprints involved smoothing things out, clearing up bottlenecks, avoiding trouble wherever he could. The parking area was bigger than it had been in the original drawings, and the road leading to and from it better laid out. A lot of trucks would go in and out of Camp Determination. A hell of a lot of Negroes would come in and go out.

He knew where the road out of camp led. At the end of it, there was another barbed-wire enclosure. That one kept people out, not in. Texas had a hell of a lot of prairie. If you put some dozer crews on the job, they could dig a lot of trenches without drawing much notice. Fill those trenches full of bodies, bulldoze the dirt back over them, and dig some new ones . . .

Jeff nodded to himself. The Negroes who got into trucks would think they were on their way to some other camp. So would the ones who stayed behind. They wouldn't know the exhaust fumes were routed into the airtight passenger box, not till too late they wouldn't.

Camp Determination was big. The burial ground was even bigger. The Freedom Party was—was *determined,* by God!—to solve the Negro problem in the CSA once and for all. It would take a lot of work, but Jeff figured they could do it.

II

B rigadier General Irving Morrell wished to God he could get out of the hospital. His shattered shoulder was improving, but there was an unfortunate difference between *improving* and *improved.* Morrell, a rawboned, weathered man of fifty, had found out all about that when he was wounded in the Great War. An infection after he got shot in the leg had kept him on the shelf for months, and kept the doctors darkly muttering about amputation. In the end, they didn't have to go in there with a hacksaw, for which he'd never stopped being grateful.

No wound infection this time, or none to speak of. They had drugs now they hadn't dreamt of a generation earlier. But he still needed to heal, and that took time, however much he wished it didn't. He could use his right hand again, though he feared the arm would never regain all its strength and dexterity.

"When can I go back to work, Doc?" he asked the Army physician who was tending his wound. He might have been a roofer who'd taken a fall—most wounds in war weren't that different from industrial accidents. Most—but not his. The sniper who'd wounded him hadn't been aiming at anybody else. Two more bullets had cracked past him as the gunner on the barrel he commanded hustled him out of harm's way.

Like any Army doctor, Conrad Rohde held officer's rank so he could tell enlisted men what to do. He had a major's gold oak leaves on the green-gray tunic he wore under his white hospital coat. He was big and blond and slow-moving—slow-talking, too. After his usual careful consideration, he answered, "Well, sir, it shouldn't be too long now."

"Gee, thanks a lot. Thanks a hell of a lot," Morrell said. Rohde'd been telling him the same thing for a while now. Before that, he'd said *a few weeks* . . . for a few weeks.

"I'm sorry I can't be more exact." As usual, the sawbones sounded not the least bit sorry. "You aren't ready yet, not unless you don't intend to do anything more strenuous than stay behind the line—far behind the line—and move pins on a map."

Since Morrell intended no such thing, he swore under his breath. A barrel commander who didn't lead from the front wasn't worth much.

So he told himself, anyhow. It was true enough. The other half of the truth was that he'd always been a man who liked to mix it up with the enemy.

Rohde knew what that muttering meant. He didn't even smirk and look superior; he had a deadpan that probably won him money in poker games. He did say, "You see?"

"The arm's not *too* bad," Morrell insisted. "Honest to God, it's not."

Dr. Rohde didn't come right out and tell him he was a liar. He thought for a moment, then said, "You're in a barrel. It gets hit. It starts to burn. You have to bail out—right now. Can you open a hatch with that arm?"

Morrell thought about it. He raised the injured member. It hurt. That didn't bother him so much. He'd learned to live with pain. What bothered him was how weak the arm was. Savagely, he said, "I wish I were lefthanded."

"I can't do anything about that. You should have talked to God, or to your parents." Rohde was maddeningly unhelpful. "Since you aren't lefthanded, do I take it you've answered my question?"

"Yes, dammit." Morrell couldn't have been more disgusted. He was even willing to make what was, for him, not far from the ultimate sacrifice: "If they need me on light duty behind the lines for a while, I'll do that. Anything to get out of here."

Rohde looked at him. "You don't like it in beautiful, romantic Syracuse?"

"Now that you mention it, no."

"And if I turn you loose, how do I know you won't head straight for the front? That's the reputation you've got."

The reputation was well deserved. Morrell knew as much. He said, "I could sign a pledge, but you probably wouldn't believe me. Or you could take your chances and let me take mine. I'm a big boy, Doc. I *can* take my own chances if I think I ought to and if I think the country needs me."

"Part of my job, General, is to see that you don't endanger yourself without good reason," Dr. Rohde replied. "And do you really think you're as indispensable to the United States as all that?"

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Morrell said. “Go call Philadelphia and find out what the War Department thinks. They wouldn’t have given me stars if they didn’t think I was good for something. Call them. If they say I can sit on the shelf a while longer, I’ll sit. I’ll even stop bitching about it. But if they say they need me . . .”

He was rolling the dice. Not everybody in the War Department loved him. He also had a reputation for being right in spite of people. High-ranking officers were supposed to be right. They weren’t supposed to rub their superiors’ noses in it, as Morrell had done. But if even the Confederates thought him worth killing, his own side ought to be able to figure out he was worth a little something. That was how he’d got promoted to general’s rank.

“I’ll take you up on that—sir.” Dr. Rohde lumbered out of the room.

He didn’t say anything to Morrell about the War Department for the next several days. With some men, that would have made Morrell suspect he hadn’t got on the horn to Philadelphia at all. The barrel officer didn’t believe that of Rohde. The doctor struck him as honest, if stuck in a rut. And the War Department never had been, wasn’t, and probably never would be an outfit that could make up its mind in a hurry—which was part of the reason the United States were in the current mess.

I’ll give him a week. Then I’ll ask him, Morrell thought. Nobody could get huffy about his asking after a week. And if Rohde hadn’t made the call or if the War Department was still twiddling its thumbs, well, at least he would know what was what.

Come the day, he got ready to beard Rohde. But the doctor forestalled him. Wearing an uncommonly sour expression, the big blond man said, “Pack your bags—sir. Philadelphia is dying to have you, and I don’t suppose you’ll die if you go there.”

“Thanks, Doc!” Morrell grinned as if he’d just stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum. “Uh—what bags? All I came here with was the uniform I got shot in, and that’s never going to be the same.”

“A point,” Dr. Rohde said. “Nothing to flabble about, though. I’m sure we can fix you up. This sort of thing happens now and again.”

The hospital proved to have a good selection of uniforms for both officers and enlisted men. Some of them bore signs of being repaired; others seemed as fresh as the day they were made. Morrell didn’t care to think about how they’d been obtained, or about what had

happened to the men who'd formerly worn them. He chose an officer's tunic and trousers that fit well enough, and pinned his stars on his shoulder straps and the Purple Heart with oak-leaf cluster above his left breast pocket. He got his own shoes back. The hospital had cleaned off whatever blood he'd got on them, and polished them to a higher gloss than he usually achieved himself.

Getting dressed was tougher and more painful than he'd thought it would be. It left him feeling worn as a kitten, and without the kitten's sharp claws and teeth. He did his best not to show Dr. Rohde weakness. The doctor didn't say a word, but Morrell doubted he was fooling him.

A driver took him to the train station in an ordinary auto. He'd wondered if Rohde would stick him in an ambulance and gain a measure of revenge for getting overruled by Philadelphia. Maybe the doctor was too nice a man to do something like that. On the other hand, maybe it just hadn't occurred to him.

Coming down from upstate New York brought Morrell back to the war a little at a time. It hadn't touched Syracuse. The farther east and south the train went, the more bomb damage he saw. Before long, the train started sitting on sidings or just on the tracks when it should have been moving. He wondered whether that was bomb damage or sabotage. Whatever it was, it slowed him to a crawl.

A sergeant waited for him on the platform when he finally pulled into Philadelphia in the middle of the night. The man wasn't standing there in plain sight. He dozed on a bench near the far wall. Morrell shook him awake.

Horror spread over the noncom's face when he saw a general looming over him. "I'm sorry, sir!" he cried, and sprang to his feet.

"It's all right. Don't blow a gasket." Morrell returned a rather frantic salute. "You weren't on sentry duty. Nobody's going to shoot you for sacking out. How late was I, anyway?"

Before answering, the sergeant looked at his watch. "Uh—just over three and a half hours, sir."

"That's about what I thought," Morrell said. "Are things always that bad around here?"

"Well . . ." The sergeant didn't want to admit it. "They're not what you'd call real good." Whether he wanted to admit it or not, he didn't

seem to have much choice. Reality spoke for itself.

“Take me to the War Department,” Morrell said.

“Yes, sir.” The sergeant did. The short journey was slow and roundabout. Philadelphia had a battered look. Months of bombing hadn’t knocked it out of action, though. Traffic still moved, even if it had to detour around craters in the street. Repairmen swarmed over damaged buildings, even if the next raid might hit them again. Men and women filled the sidewalks and the shops: Philadelphia ran around the clock. They didn’t seem beaten or intimidated, just determined to get on with the job no matter what.

Antiaircraft guns were everywhere, their snouts poking up from vacant lots and street corners and roofs. Searchlight batteries would do what they could to find the guns’ targets. Signs pointed the way to air-raid shelters.

The War Department was one of the buildings under repair. That didn’t surprise Morrell. It was a big target, and the Confederates knew where it was. Even bombing by night, they were bound to score some hits.

“Here we go, sir.” The sergeant jumped out of the auto and held the heavy bronze doors that led inside for Morrell. The barrel officer was gladder of that than he cared to admit. He wasn’t sure he could have opened them with his right hand, though his left would have done the job.

Even in the War Department, brigadier generals were uncommon birds. Morrell got whisked to the offices of the assistant to the chief of the General Staff, a much more senior one-star general named Edward McCleave. “How are you feeling?” McCleave asked.

“Sir, I’ll do,” Morrell answered. “That’s why I wanted to get out of the damn hospital. I wasn’t doing anybody any good there.”

“Except yourself,” McCleave pointed out.

Morrell shrugged. It didn’t hurt—too much. “Sitting on the shelf was worse than getting shot. Can you send me to Virginia, sir? If we’re going to make a real run at Richmond, I want to be part of it.”

“Your attitude does you credit,” the older man said. “Although General MacArthur has forced a crossing of the Rappahannock, he does not anticipate an immediate armored assault on the

Confederates. The terrain is not conducive to such movements."

"You're telling me he's stuck," Morrell said.

"That's not what I said." Brigadier General McCleave sounded prim.

"It's what you meant, though," Morrell said, and McCleave didn't deny it. Morrell went on, "Do you want me to take over the barrels down there and see what I can shake loose?"

"MacArthur has not requested your presence," McCleave said. "If, however, the War Department were to order you to the Virginia front . . ." He waited. Morrell nodded. The two men exchanged smiles that were downright conspiratorial. *And so much for staying behind the lines,* Morrell thought.

L ieutenant-Colonel Tom Colleton knew his regiment helped hold an important position. His soldiers defended Confederate positions east of Sandusky, Ohio, on the southern shore of Lake Erie. As long as the Confederate States held a corridor from the Ohio River to the lake, they cut the United States in half. The damnyankees couldn't ship anything or anybody by rail or road from east to west or west to east within their own territory. They had to take the long way around, through occupied Canada—and Canada didn't have nearly so many lines or roads as the USA did.

No matter how true that was, though, Tom Colleton wasn't happy. He didn't like standing on the defensive. He'd reveled in the push north from the border. That was what war was supposed to be about. He'd fought in Virginia the last time, and hated stalemates with the grim and bitter passion of a man who'd seen too many of them. Barrels meant soldiers didn't have to huddle in trenches this time around. They didn't have to, no—but too often they did anyway.

Fortunately, the Yankees were as preoccupied with Virginia these days as the Confederates had been with Ohio and Indiana at the start of the war. Even more fortunately, U.S. forces weren't doing as well in Virginia as the Confederates had here farther west. In Sandusky, Tom couldn't help hearing both C.S. and U.S. wireless reports. When both sides told the same story, it was probably true. When they diverged, he had to try to figure out who was lying and who wasn't.

No matter what his sister had thought about Jake Featherston, Tom had no great love or admiration for him. His mouth tightened. Anne

had died in the opening days of the war. If she hadn't been down in Charleston when that damnyankee carrier raid hit the town . . . But she had, and nobody could do anything about it now.

His own wife and boys were safe in St. Matthews, not far from Columbia, the capital of South Carolina. *The last of the Colletons,* he thought. He'd never felt that way while Anne was alive, even though she'd been childless. She'd bossed the family ever since their parents died. Now everything rode on his shoulders.

He laughed as he looked east toward the damnyankees' lines. The Colletons were a family with a fine future behind them. Before the Great War, Marshlands was one of the leading plantations in South Carolina, with hundreds of colored hands working in the cotton fields. The mansion went up in flames in the Negro uprising in 1915, and not even Anne could make a go of cotton after the war.

Up ahead, the Yankees and some of Tom's men started banging away at one another. Telling which side was which by ear was easy. The U.S. soldiers used bolt-action Springfields, rifles much like the Tredegars C.S. troops had carried in the last war. In this fight, soldiers in butternut had either automatic rifles or submachine guns. The damnyankees were always going to outnumber them, so each Confederate soldier needed to have more firepower than his U.S. counterpart.

The only trouble was, rifles and submachine guns weren't the sole weapons involved. U.S. and C.S. machine guns were as near identical as made no difference. So were the two sides' artillery, barrels, and aircraft. Add all that in and what had been a good-sized edge for the Confederate foot soldier shrank considerably.

Sure as hell, machine guns from both sides joined the conversation within a couple of minutes. Mortar rounds didn't make much noise leaving their tubes—soldiers on both sides called them stove pipes—but the harsh, flat *crump!* of the bursting bombs was unmistakable.

Colleton shouted for his wireless man. When the small soldier with the large pack on his back came up, Tom said, "What the hell's going on there? This was a pretty quiet sector up until a few minutes ago. Get me one of the forward company command posts."

"Yes, sir." The wireless man did his job without fuss or feathers. "Here's Captain Dinwiddie, sir—A Company, First Battalion."

"Dinwiddie!" Tom called into the mouthpiece. "Who went and pulled

on the damnyankees' tails?"

"Other way round, sir," the captain answered. "Yankee sniper potted Lieutenant Jenks. He's not dead, but he's hurt pretty bad. Some of our boys spotted the muzzle flash up in a tree. They started shooting at him, and some of those green-gray fuckers shot back, and now it's hell's half acre up here."

"You want artillery? You want gas?" Tom asked. He hated gas, as every Great War veteran did, which didn't mean he wouldn't use it in a red-hot minute. God only knew the damnyankees weren't shy about throwing it around.

"Not right now, sir," Dinwiddie said. "They're just shooting. There's no real attack coming in. If we stir 'em up, though, Lord only knows what they might try."

"All right." Colleton wasn't particularly sorry about the response. His job now was to keep the USA out of Sandusky, no matter what. If that meant not stirring up the enemy, he didn't mind. He didn't much feel like getting stirred up himself. It was a cold, miserable day, and he would sooner have stayed inside by a nice, hot fire.

The firefight lasted about half an hour. Well before then, Confederate medics with Red Cross armbands and Red Crosses on their helmets went up to the front to bring back the wounded. A couple of medics came back on stretchers themselves. Tom swore, but without particular fury. He'd never yet seen the Yankees make a habit of picking off medics, any more than the Confederates did. But neither machine-gun bursts nor mortar bombs were fussy about whom they maimed.

After the shooting eased, a U.S. captain came across the line under flag of truce. An officer at the front sent him back to Tom. The Yankee gave him a stiff little nod. "I'd like to ask you for a two-hour truce, Lieutenant-Colonel, so the corpsmen on both sides can bring in the dead and wounded."

"Do you think they'll need that long?" Tom asked.

"Been a lot of shooting going on up there," the U.S. captain answered. He had a flat, harsh Midwestern accent, far removed from Colleton's South Carolina drawl. They spoke the same language—they had no trouble understanding each other—but they plainly weren't from the same country.

Tom considered, then nodded. “All right, Captain. Two hours, commencing at”—he looked at his watch—“at 0945. That gives you half an hour to get back to your own line and pass the word that we’ve agreed. Suit you all right?”

“Down to the ground. Two hours, starting at 0945. Thank you, Lieutenant-Colonel. You’re a gentleman.” The captain stuck out his hand. Tom hesitated, but shook it. The man was an enemy, but he was playing by the rules—was, in fact, making a point of playing by the rules.

As the U.S. officer left, Tom had his wireless man tell the forward positions that the truce was coming. He sent runners up to the front, too, to make sure no platoon with a busted wireless set failed to get the word. Once the truce started, his men would probably swap cigarettes with the damnyankees for some of the ration cans the U.S. Army issued. Tom didn’t intend to issue an order forbidding it: less than no point in issuing an order bound to be ignored. Like everybody on both sides of the front, he knew the USA made horseshit cigarettes but had rations better than their C.S. counterparts.

It won’t make a dime’s worth of difference who wins the war, he consoled himself. That same sort of illicit trading had gone on in the Great War and in the War of Secession, too. Then it was tobacco for coffee. That wasn’t a problem these days, not with the Caribbean a Confederate lake.

At 0945, the guns on both sides fell silent. The sudden quiet made Tom jumpy. He didn’t feel he could trust it. But the truce held. Confederate medics brought back more bodies and pieces of bodies than wounded men, though they did save a couple of soldiers who might have died if they’d been stuck where they were. Graves Registration—usually called the ghouls—took charge of the remains. Colleton was damned if he knew how they would figure out just whose leg came back in a stretcher, especially since it had no foot attached. That, thank God, wasn’t his worry.

Sure as hell, he saw men in butternut chowing down on corned-beef hash and creamed beef and something tomatoey called goulash, all from cans labeled with the U.S. eagle in front of crossed swords. The only thing he wished was that he had some of those cans for himself.

At 1130, both sides started shouting warnings to their opposite numbers. At 1145, firing picked up again. Neither side shot as ferociously as it had earlier in the morning, though. Tom thought the

gunfire was as much an announcement that the truce was over as anything else.

That didn't turn out to be quite right. At about 1205, the Yankees started shelling his front—not just with the mortars they'd been using before but with real artillery, too. Shouts of, "Gas!" rang out through the chilly air. Dismayed wireless calls came in from the front and from his reserves. The U.S. guns seemed to know just where to hit.

Tom started swearing horribly enough to startle his wireless man, who asked, "What's the matter, sir?"

"I'll tell you what's the matter, goddammit," Colleton ground out, furious at himself. "I'm an idiot, that's what. That Yankee son of a bitch who came back here to dicker the truce—to hell with me if the bastard didn't spy out our dispositions on the way here and back. Nothing in the rules against it, of course, but fuck me if I like getting played for a sucker."

U.S. forces followed the bombardment with an infantry push, and drove Tom's regiment from several of the positions it had been holding. He got on the field telephone with division HQ in Sandusky, warning them what had happened and how.

"Sneaky bastards," was the comment he got from the major to whom he talked. "How much ground have they gained?"

"Looks like about a mile," Tom said ruefully. He'd be kicking himself for weeks over this one. He hadn't thought he was a trusting soul, but that Yankee captain had sure made a monkey out of him.

The major back in Sandusky didn't seem all that upset. "Don't get your balls in an uproar, Lieutenant-Colonel," he said. "We'll see what we can do about it."

Later that afternoon, eight or ten butternut-painted barrels came rumbling up the road and across the fields to either side of it. Confederate foot soldiers loped along with them. The armored fighting vehicles started shelling the ground the U.S. forces had gained. Just seeing and hearing them was enough to make soldiers who'd been huddling in foxholes ready to get out and fight some more. The Confederates still sometimes called their battle cry the Rebel yell, though they'd been their own country, not rebels at all, for eighty years. The shrill ululation resounded now, way up here in Yankeeland. The surge that had gone west reversed course once more.

But nothing came cheap today. The Yankees had brought a couple of antibarrel cannons to the front. The sound of an armor-piercing round smashing into steel plate reminded Tom of an accident in a smithy. The stricken barrel burst into flames. A couple of men managed to get out. The other three didn't. The blazing barrel sent up a plume of greasy black smoke. Some of what burned in there had been alive moments before.

Colleton cursed softly. "See if I give those sons of bitches another truce," he muttered. "Just see if I do, ever."

M ary Pomeroy always liked driving out from Rosenfeld and visiting the farm where she'd grown up. Her mother was all alone on the Manitoba prairie these days. Maude McGregor still had her health, but she wasn't getting any younger. Mary felt good checking up on her every so often.

The visits did remind her how much time had passed by. Mary's mother had had hair as red as her own. No more; it was almost all gray now. As Mary neared thirty-five, the first silver threads were running through her copper, too.

She and her mother sat in the kitchen, drinking coffee and eating sweet rolls her mother had baked. "Oh, Ma," Mary said, "the smells in here take me back to when I was a little girl. The oilcloth on the table, the coal fire, the kerosene lamps, all the cooking . . ." She shook her head, lost in a world that would never come back again, a world where her father and older brother were alive, a world where the Yanks hadn't occupied Canada for a generation.

"It does smell different in your apartment," her mother agreed. Quickly, she added, "Not bad—not bad at all—but not the same, either."

"No, not the same," Mary said. She had a gas stove and electricity; the one didn't smell like coal, while the other didn't smell like anything. And what she cooked just wasn't the same as what her mother made. She couldn't put her finger on the difference, but she knew it was there.

"How are the Frenchies?" Maude McGregor asked.

"They're there." Mary made a sour face. These days, the United States needed all the soldiers they could scrape up to fight the Confederate

States. The men now occupying Rosenfeld and a lot of other Canadian towns came from the Republic of Quebec. They wore blue-gray uniforms, not U.S. green-gray. Mary couldn't stand them. They should have been Canadians, too, but instead they helped the Yanks oppress their countrymen. Most of them—almost all of the young ones who'd grown up in the so-called Republic—spoke nothing but French, and jibber-jabbered in it all the time. As far as she was concerned, that added insult to injury.

"Any trouble with them?" her mother asked.

"No," Mary said tonelessly. "No trouble at all."

She wondered where her mother would go with that, but Maude McGregor didn't go anywhere at all. She only nodded and got the teapot and filled her own cup. She held the pot out to Mary, who nodded. Her mother refilled it. The milk Mary added came from one of the cows in the barn.

"How's Alec?" her mother asked.

Mary smiled. She didn't have to consider her answers and watch every word about her son. "He's fine, Ma. He's growing like a weed, he raises trouble every chance he gets, and he's doing good in kindergarten. Of course, he already pretty much knew how to read and write before he started."

"I should hope so," her mother said. "You and Julia and Alexander did, too."

Alec was named for Mary's dead older brother. Remembering him took the smile off her face. She said, "You know what the bad thing is about school these days?"

"Of course I do," Maude McGregor said. "The Yanks pound their lies into the heads of children who aren't old enough to know malarkey when they hear it."

"That's it. That's just it." Mary didn't know what to do about it, either. Her mother and father had pulled her out of school when the Americans started throwing propaganda around instead of teaching about what had really happened—that was how Canadians saw it, anyhow. No one had raised a fuss back then, but rules were stricter now. And Mary didn't want the Yanks paying attention to her for any reason.

Her mother said, “And Mort? How’s the diner doing?”

“Pretty well,” Mary answered. “One of the cooks burned his hand, so he’ll be out a few days. Mort’s filling in behind the stove.”

“Must be strange, having a man who knows how to cook,” her mother remarked.

“It is. It keeps me on my toes all the time,” Mary said. “But it’s all right. I’m glad I found anybody, and Mort and I get along real good.”

She’d had a young man courting her when her father was killed by his own bomb trying to blow up General Custer as he passed through Rosenfeld. Afterwards, the young man dropped her as if she were explosive herself. Nobody looked at her for years after that, not till Mort Pomeroy did. Was it any wonder she’d promptly fallen in love?

Her mother said, “I’m glad you do. It’s nice. Your father and I, we hardly had a harsh word between us.”

“I know, Ma.” Mary also knew why. Her mother noticed everything and said nothing. If she didn’t complain, how could Pa have found fault with her? Mary wasn’t like that. She’d never believed in suffering in silence. If something was wrong, she let the world know about it. She didn’t always restrict herself to words, either, any more than her father had. She asked, “How are things here?”

“Oh, I get along,” Maude McGregor answered. “I’ve been getting along for years and years now. I expect I’m good for a little while longer.”

The farm lacked not only electricity but also running water and indoor plumbing. Mary had never noticed what was missing when she was growing up. She’d taken the pungency of the outhouse as much for granted as the different pungency of the barn. Kerosene lamps had always seemed good enough. So had the pot-bellied coal-burning stove. Now the stinks and the inconveniences, though still familiar, jolted her when she visited. Little by little, she’d got used to an easier life in town.

Even so, she said, “I’m going out to the barn for some chores.”

“Oh, you don’t need to do that,” her mother said quickly.

“It’s all right. I don’t mind.” Mary did intend to gather eggs and feed the animals while she was out there; she wasn’t dressed for mucking out the place. That wasn’t all she would do, though. Her mother knew

as much, knew and worried. But, being who and what she was, she couldn't bring herself to say much.

A motorcar rolled along the dirt track that ran in front of the McGregor farm as Mary went from the farmhouse to the barn. The dirt road didn't see much traffic these days, though Mary remembered endless columns of soldiers in green-gray marching along it when she was a little girl: U.S. soldiers heading for the front that had stalled between Rosenfeld and Winnipeg. Then the front wasn't stalled anymore, the Yanks got what they'd always wanted, and hard times descended on Canada. They weren't gone yet.

The barnyard stink wasn't as sharp and oppressive as the one from the privy. It made Mary smile instead of wrinkling her nose. Her shoes scrunched on straw as she walked back toward the chickens. She proved to herself that she still knew how to get eggs out of nests without ruffling feathers and without getting pecked. A few hens clucked complaints, but that was all. Smiling a self-satisfied smile, she put the eggs in a basket.

That done, she fed all the livestock. She could still handle a pitchfork, too. She didn't have much need to do that in the apartment in Rosenfeld. Come to think of it, though, sometimes a pitchfork would come in handy for prodding Alec along in the right direction.

Off in one corner of the front of the barn lay an old wagon wheel. Its iron tire was red with rust. It had been lying there for at least twenty years, probably longer. Anyone who saw it would figure it was just a piece of junk nobody'd bothered getting rid of. Mary had thought the same thing for years.

Now, grunting, she shoved it off to one side and scraped away at the straw and dirt under it. Before long, her fingernails rasped against a board. She got the board free and looked down into the neat, rectangular hole in the ground it and the wagon wheel concealed.

Her father had dug out that hole to hide his bomb-making tools. The U.S. occupiers had long suspected him. They'd searched the farmhouse and the barn again and again. Despite their suspicions, they'd never found a thing. Arthur McGregor had known what he was doing, in explosives as in everything else.

These days, the bomb-making tools belonged to Mary. She hadn't used them as often as her father had. But she'd bombed the general store in town (owned by a Yank), killed a traitor in Ontario (she thought of it

that way, not as blowing up a woman and a little girl), and derailed a train not far from Coulee, the next town west of Rosenfeld. With Ohio lost, the United States depended on rail traffic through Canada. Doing the train had proved easier than she'd expected. She thought she would go in some other direction when she planted her next bomb.

She was so intent on her work, she didn't hear the running feet till they were just outside the barn. She looked up in horror as half a dozen men in green-gray, some with pistols in their hands, others with rifles, burst in shouting, "Hold it right there! You're under arrest, in the name of the United States of America!"

It was over. After all these years, it was over. Mary lifted one of the sticks of dynamite that had sat in her lap. "If you want to take the chance of shooting this instead of me—" she began. If the dynamite went up, the Yanks would go up with it—a good enough last exchange, as far as she was concerned.

But one of the riflemen said, "Ma'am, I've been on the national rifle team at ranges a lot longer than this—they didn't know if they'd need a sharpshooter to take you. If I shoot, I won't miss, and I won't hit the explosives."

He sounded coldly confident, confident enough to make Mary believe him. She set down the dynamite and slowly got to her feet. "Raise your hands!" two Americans shouted at the same time. She obeyed. Why not? Nothing mattered anymore. One of the Yanks said, "Out of the barn now. Slow and easy. Don't do anything cute, or you won't last long enough to stand trial."

"Oh, yes. I'm sure you're worried about that," Mary said. They didn't answer her. Why should they? They'd won.

When she got outside, she saw two more Yanks holding her mother back. They'd slapped a gag on her so she couldn't scream and warn Mary. Two motorcars were parked by the side of the house. She thought one was the auto she'd seen driving along the dirt road. They must have been keeping an eye on her all along, then.

"Leave my mother alone," she said dully. "She never had anything to do with this. It was all me."

"We'll see about that," one of the Yanks said. But he turned to the men holding Maude McGregor. "Take the gag off her, Jack. She can yell her head off now. It won't make any difference."

As soon as Jack removed the gag, Mary's mother said, "She's lying to save me. I was the one who set the bombs."

"That isn't so!" Mary exclaimed. "How about that one the other side of Coulee, Ma? You don't even drive."

"I took the wagon," her mother said with stubborn, hopeless defiance.

"And that's how come we caught your daughter in there with dynamite in her lap, right?" said the Yank who seemed to be in charge of things. He waved to his men. "Get her into the auto. We'll take her up to Winnipeg and tend to business there."

As the other Americans obeyed, one of them asked, "How about the old broad?" Both Mary and her mother squawked irately. The Yanks ignored them.

"Leave her alone for now," their boss said. "Looks to me like we've got the one we want." They shoved Mary into a Chevrolet. As it sped off down the dirt road, she knew how right he was.

C hester Martin had known rejoining the U.S. Army would make his wife furious. He hadn't known *how* furious. Rita had lost her first husband in the Great War, and seemed sure she would lose her second in this one. When Chester reupped, he'd asked for a month to get his affairs in order before he went in. The Army gave it to him; they weren't conscripting middle-aged retreads, even if they were glad to have them, and so they'd acted accommodating as all get-out.

Now he wished he hadn't asked for so long. It was the longest month of his life. "You said they'd shot you last time, and that was plenty for you!" Rita said over and over again. "You lied!" She might have accused him of falling off the wagon—or maybe falling into the arms of an old girlfriend came closer to the mark.

And maybe he was. He had no romantic illusions about war. Nobody who'd been a noncom in the trenches all the way through the Great War could possibly have any illusions about it. But he kept saying, "The country needs me," and that was no illusion. The United States needed all the help they could get from anywhere.

"Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately?" Rita would ask. That stung, not least because he had. His hair, once sandy-brown, was graying and thinning at the temples. There were lines on his forehead,

and more beside his pointed nose. He had a double chin and something of a belly. He still had muscles, though; nobody could hold a construction job without them.

His son, Carl, who was six, didn't know whether to be proud of him or worried about him. Carl knew people could get shot. "You won't let that happen to you, will you, Dad?" he would ask.

"Not me," Chester would answer gravely. "That kind of stuff always happens to the other guy." Carl accepted that. Chester knew better, but didn't want to burden the boy with worries he couldn't do anything about. Rita knew better, too, and wasted no time pointing out to Chester what a liar he was.

With all that going on, then, he wasn't altogether unhappy escaping the little rented house in East Los Angeles and heading to the recruiting station a few blocks away when the time finally came. He took the oath there, which officially put him back in uniform. They gave him just enough of a physical to make sure he had a pulse and could see out of both eyes. If he'd flunked the second half, he suspected they would have worked something out.

They gave him a uniform, too. The tunic was too tight and the trousers were baggy; the tailoring hadn't changed a bit since the Great War. They gave him a first sergeant's stripes on his left sleeve. He knew what that meant. "You're going to have me nursemaid some officer who was still spitting up sour milk when the Confederates tossed in the sponge the last time."

He got exactly no sympathy, which was exactly what he'd expected. The sergeant who'd talked him into rejoining said, "Well, Martin? What about it? Are you going to tell me you're not qualified for the job? I'll say bullshit to your face if you've got the brass to try it."

Martin didn't have that kind of brass. Maybe he could keep a kid from getting some good men killed. He might even save the kid's neck—and, with luck, his own in the process.

His orders were to report to a replacement depot in Virginia. Accompanying them was a travel voucher for rail transportation from Los Angeles to Milwaukee. He asked the noncom who gave him the voucher, "How the devil do I get from Milwaukee to where I'm supposed to go? Stick out my thumb?"

"Beats me," that worthy said cheerfully. "For all I know, hitching's faster than any other way. Once you get to Milwaukee, I promise

they'll tell you what to do next."

"I hope so." Martin didn't trust Army bureaucracy. While the people in Wisconsin were figuring out how to get him past the Confederate corridor that split the USA in two, the people in Virginia were liable to decide he was AWOL if he didn't show up on time and throw him in the guardhouse when he finally did. He knew that was unreasonable. He also knew the Army had some strange notions about what was reasonable and what wasn't.

He had a brand-new green-gray duffel bag slung over his shoulder when he went to Remembrance Station, the big new railroad depot in downtown Los Angeles. Rita and Carl came along to say good-bye. If Rita cried, she wasn't the only wife with a husband in uniform who did. He squeezed her and kissed her one last time, kissed Carl on the forehead, and climbed into a second-class car. Maybe officers got Pullman berths. Sergeants, or at least one sergeant in particular, didn't.

More than half the men in the car were soldiers, either coming back from leave or reporting to duty for the first time. Chester listened. The chatter sounded much like what he remembered from the last go-round. Nobody seemed to want to talk to him. That didn't surprise him. He had a lot of stripes on his sleeve, and he was at least twice the age of most of the men in green-gray.

When night came, the train slowed down to a crawl. He hadn't thought about how the blackout applied to trains. He realized he should have. If locomotives went tearing along at full speed behind the beam of a big, bright light, they shouted, *Hey, come shoot me up!* at whatever enemy airplanes happened to be in the neighborhood. That made perfect sense—once you worked it out.

Conductors went through the cars making sure blackout curtains were in place on every window. Light leaking out the sides was as bad as any other kind. Chester wondered how likely an attack was. He shrugged. If it could happen at all, you didn't want to take needless chances.

About half an hour after the blackout curtains came down, Chester went back to the dining car. The featured entrée was something called Swiss steak. It struck him as a good reason for emigrating from Switzerland. He looked at the private at the table next to his and said, "I'm not back on duty yet, but now I feel like I'm back in the Army, by God."

“Yeah.” The kid was pushing the gravy-smeared meat around with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. “This is pretty lousy, isn’t it?” He eyed Martin’s heavily striped sleeve. “Have you, uh, been in the Army all along?”

By the way he said it, he might have meant since the War of Secession, or possibly since the War of the Roses. Chester laughed and shook his head. “Nope. I got out in 1917”—undoubtedly before the private was born—“and went on with my life.”

“Oh.” The youngster digested that, which had to be easier than digesting the Swiss steak. He risked another question: “How come you came back? They conscripted me. I had to go. But you must’ve had it made.”

“Well, not quite,” Martin said. “I was doing all right, but I wasn’t rich or anything. But I didn’t want to see Jake Featherston kicking us in the slats, and so here I am.”

“Uh-huh.” The private seemed surprised anybody who didn’t have to would put on the uniform. Maybe he was what was wrong with the USA, part of the reason the country was having so much trouble with the CSA. On the other hand, maybe he just had a good deal of common sense.

Chester wondered how the Chicago-bound train would go to avoid both the Mormon uprising and the chance of bumping into Confederate raiders. It headed east through Kingman and Flagstaff, New Mexico, and on to Santa Fe, where it turned north for a run through the mountains to Denver. It got hung up there for two days, though, at a little Colorado town called Salida. Somebody said *Salida* meant *exit* in Spanish, but there was no exit from the place till damaged track up ahead was repaired. Avalanche? Sabotage? No one seemed to want to say, which left Chester suspecting the worst.

He dug a greatcoat out of his duffel and used it to stay warm. Sleeping in his seat was anything but delightful. Everybody grumbled. Nobody could do anything but grumble. Misery might not have loved company, but had a lot of it.

Once they got going again, they made pretty good time till they came to Chicago. The Confederates had done what they could to bomb the railroad yards. Given the accuracy of night bombing, that meant the whole city had caught hell. But the crawl at which the train proceeded showed the enemy had hurt the tracks and the stations to which they

led.

Following signs that said MILITARY PASSENGERS for the transfer to Milwaukee, Chester stood in line for twenty minutes and then presented his voucher to a bored-looking corporal who eyed it and said, “You’re late.”

“My whole goddamn train is late. So sue me,” Chester said. The corporal looked up, wondering who could be so cavalier about this business. Seeing a man with a lot more stripes than he owned instead of a scared young private, he kept his mouth shut. Chester went on, “I knew I was late before I got here. Now I want to know how to get where I’m going.”

“I’ll fix it, Sergeant,” the corporal promised, and he did. If he took it out on some luckless kid later on, Chester didn’t find out about that.

From Chicago to Milwaukee was a short hop, like the one from Toledo to Cleveland. Naturally, whatever eastbound transport they’d planned from Milwaukee was also obsolete. Another noncom did some more fixing. An hour and a half later, Martin found himself taking off in a twenty-two-seat Boeing transport, bound for Buffalo: the first airplane ride of his life.

He didn’t like it. It was bumpy—worse than bumpy, in fact. Several people were airsick, and not all of them got all of it in their sacks. There was a snowstorm over Buffalo. The pilot talked about going on to Syracuse or Rochester. He also talked about how much—or rather, how little—fuel he had. The kid next to Chester worked his rosary beads hard.

They did put down in Buffalo, snowstorm or not. The transport almost skidded off the end of the runway, but it didn’t quite. The rosary beads got another workout during and after that. “Give ’em some for me, too,” Chester said when the airplane finally decided it *did* intend to stop. The only thing that could have made the landing more fun would have been Hound Dogs shooting up the transport while it came in.

He wondered if the Army would try to fly him down to Virginia. If they did, he might have found out more about Confederate fighters than he ever wanted to know. But he got on another train again instead. And he got delayed again, twice: once from bombed-out rails and once from what they actually admitted was sabotage.

Somebody in the car said, “Christ, I hope we’re doing the same thing

to the Confederates.”

“If we weren’t, we would’ve lost the goddamn war by now, I expect,” somebody else replied. Chester suspected that was true. He also suspected the United States were using Negro rebels to do a lot of their dirty work down there. He knew they’d done that in the last war; he’d led a Negro Red through U.S. lines to get whatever he needed in the way of arms and ammunition. Blacks now had even less reason to love the CSA than they’d had then.

“You’re late,” a sergeant growled at him when he finally got where he was going.

“That’s right,” Chester said. “I’m damn lucky I’m here at all.” The other sergeant stared at him. He stared back. He’d had three years of guff the last war. Enough, by God, was enough.

C incinnatus Driver sat in the Brass Monkey soaking up a bottle of beer. The Brass Monkey wasn’t the best saloon in Covington, Kentucky. It wasn’t even the best saloon in the colored part of Covington. But it was the closest one to the house where he lived with his father and his senile mother. He walked with a cane and had a permanent limp. Close counted.

A couple of old black men sat in a corner playing checkers. They were regulars, and then some. As far as Cincinnatus could tell, they damn near—*damn* near—lived at the Brass Monkey. They’d nurse a beer all day long as they shoved black and red wooden disks back and forth. Every so often, they would stick their heads up and join in some conversation or other. More often, though, they stayed in their own little world. Maybe they were smart. The one outside looked none too appetizing to any Negro in the Confederate States of America.

Talk in the saloon reflected that. A middle-aged man named Diogenes blew cigarette smoke up at the ceiling, smiled, and said, “Shoulda got outa here when the gettin’ was good. Too damn late now.”

“Do Jesus, yes!” another man said, and knocked back his shot. He set a quarter on the bar for another one. “We is nothin’ but the remnants—the stupid remnants, I should oughta say. Remnants.” He repeated the fancy word with an odd, somber relish.

He wasn’t wrong. After Kentucky voted to return to the CSA in early 1941, a lot of blacks voted with their feet, heading across the Ohio to

states that remained in the USA. Cincinnatus had intended to do that with his father and mother. He'd been sure ahead of time how the plebiscite would go. If he hadn't stepped in front of a car searching for his mother after she wandered off . . .

Diogenes savagely stubbed out his cigarette. "God damn Al Smith to hell and gone. Reckon he fryin' down there now, lousy, stinkin' son of a bitch."

Several men nodded, Cincinnatus among them. Al Smith hadn't had to give Jake Featherston that plebiscite. He hadn't had to, but he'd done it. Cincinnatus wasn't sorry he was dead, not even a little bit.

The bartender ran a rag over the smooth top of the bar. The rag was none too clean, but neither was the bar. Cincinnatus couldn't tell what, if anything, went on behind that expressionless face. Nodding while somebody else cursed Al Smith had probably been safe enough. He wouldn't have cursed Smith himself, not where people he didn't know could hear. Even if everybody here was black, that was asking for trouble. Anybody—anybody at all—could be an agent or a provocateur.

And sometimes trouble came without asking. The doors to the Brass Monkey flew open. In stormed half a dozen Freedom Party guards, all in what looked like C.S. Army uniforms, but in gray cloth rather than butternut. They all had submachine guns and mean looks on their faces. When the one with a sergeant's stripes on his sleeve said, "Don't nobody move!" the saloon suddenly became a still life.

The white men fanned out. They weren't quite soldiers, but they knew how to take charge of a situation. The three-striper (he wasn't officially a sergeant; the Freedom Party guards had their own silly-sounding names for ranks) barked, "Let's see your passbooks, niggers!"

No black in the CSA could go anywhere or do anything without showing the book first. It proved he was who he was and that he had the government's permission to be where he was and do what he was doing. Cincinnatus dug his out of the back pocket of his dungarees. He handed it to the gray-uniformed white man who held out his hand. The guard checked to make sure his photo matched his face, then checked his name against a list.

"Hey, Clint!" he exclaimed. "Here's one we're looking for!"

Clint was the noncom in charge of the squad. He pointed his submachine gun at Cincinnatus, then gestured with the weapon. "Over

here, nigger! Move nice and slow and easy, or that spook back of the bar's gonna have to clean you off the floor."

Cincinnatus couldn't move any way but slowly. The noncom was careful not to let him get close enough to lash out with his cane. He hadn't planned to anyhow. He might knock the gun out of the man's hand, but then what? He wasn't likely to shoot all the Freedom Party guards before one of them filled him full of holes. He couldn't run, either, not with his ruined leg. He was stuck.

They hauled him away in a paddy wagon. He felt some small relief when they took him to a police station, not a Freedom Party meeting hall. The police still stood for law, no matter how twisted. The Party was a law unto itself, and beyond anyone else's reach.

And a police captain rather than a Freedom Party guard questioned him. "You know a man named Luther Bliss?" the cop demanded.

That told Cincinnatus which way the wind was blowing. "I sure do, an' I wish to Jesus I didn't," he answered.

"Oh, yeah? How come?" The policeman exuded skepticism.

"On account of he lured me down here and threw me in jail back in the Twenties," Cincinnatus said, which was nothing but the truth. He didn't like and didn't trust Luther Bliss. He never had and never would. The U.S. secret policeman and secret agent with the hunting-hound eyes was too singlemindedly devoted to what he did.

His reply seemed to take the policeman by surprise. "How come?" the cop repeated. "He reckon you was a Red nigger?"

"Hell, no." Cincinnatus sounded as scornful as a black man in a Confederate police station dared. Before his interrogator could get angry, he explained why: "Reds didn't bother Luther Bliss none back then. They weren't out to overthrow the USA. Bliss was afraid I was too cozy with Confederate diehards."

"Nigger, we can look all this shit up. If you're lyin', you're dyin'," the cop growled.

"Why you reckon I'm telling you this stuff? I *want* you to look it up," Cincinnatus said. "Then you see I ain't done nothin' to hurt the CSA." The one didn't follow from the other, but he hoped with all his heart that the policeman wouldn't see that.

His attitude did confuse the white man, anyhow. He sounded a little less hostile when he asked, “You seen Bliss since?”

That was a dangerous question, because the answer was yes. Since Luther Bliss was one of the worst enemies the Confederates had in Kentucky, Cincinnatus would be suspected for not reporting that he’d spotted him. Cautiously, he said, “I done heard tell he was in town, but I ain’t set eyes on him. Don’t want to set eyes on him, neither.” The last sentence, at least, was true.

If the Confederates asked the right questions of the right people, they could show the rest was a lie. The cop pointed a warning finger at Cincinnatus. “Don’t you go nowhere. I’m gonna check up on what you just told me. What happens next depends on whether you were tryin’ to blow smoke up my ass. You got me?”

“Oh, yes, suh. I surely do,” Cincinnatus said. “An’ I ain’t goin’ nowhere.” He almost laughed at the policeman. If the fellow thought he could just waltz out of the station, that didn’t say much for how alert the Covington police usually were.

He sat there in the little interrogation room and worried. After a while, he needed to use the toilet—the Jax he’d drunk was taking his revenge. He stuck his head out the door and asked another cop if he could. He was afraid the white man would say no, if only to pile more discomfort and indignity on him. But the cop took him down the hall, let him do his business, and then led him back.

Cincinnatus had almost started to doze when his interrogator came back. “Well, looks like you weren’t lying about your run-in with Bliss,” he said grudgingly. He pointed an accusing finger at Cincinnatus. “Why didn’t you tell me you’d been living in Iowa? Why the hell didn’t you get your black ass back there when you had the chance? What have you been doin’ here since you came back?” He seemed sure Cincinnatus’ answer would have to be something incriminating.

“Suh, I been takin’ care o’ my mama, an’ my pa’s been taking care o’ me.” Cincinnatus explained how he’d returned to Kentucky to get his parents out, and what had gone wrong. He finished, “You don’t believe that, go check the hospital.”

“I seen you walk. I know you’re screwed up some kind of way,” the cop said.

“Do Jesus! That is the truth!” Cincinnatus said.

“I know what we ought to do with you,” the policeman told him. “We ought to send you over the damn border. If the Yankees want you, they’re welcome to you. Sounds like all you want to do is get the hell out, and take your ma and pa with you. The longer you stay here, the more likely you are to get in trouble.”

Hope flowered in Cincinnatus. He needed a moment to recognize it; he hadn’t felt it for a long time. He said, “Suh, you do that for me, I get down on my knees to thank you. You want me to kiss your foot to thank you, I do that. I was laid up when I could have taken my folks out of here. By the time I could get around even a little bit, the border with the USA was closed.”

“I’ll see what we can cook up,” the policeman said. “We deal with the damnyankees every now and then under flag of truce. If they want to let you cross the border, we’ll let you go.”

“Suh, when them guards grabbed me, I reckoned I was a dead man,” Cincinnatus said, which was also nothing but the truth. “But you are a Christian gentleman, an’ I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

“Don’t get yourself all hot and bothered yet,” the police captain said. “These things don’t move fast. When we’ve got to talk to the Yankees or they’ve got to talk to us, though, you’re on the list. For now, go on home and stay out of trouble.”

“Yes, suh. God bless you, suh!” Cincinnatus had dished out a lot of insincere flattery to white men in his time. He didn’t know any Negroes in the CSA—or, for that matter, in the USA—who hadn’t. It was part of life for blacks in both countries. Here, though, he meant every word of what he said. This Confederate cop hadn’t had to do anything for him. Cincinnatus had expected the man to do things to him. Maybe the policeman thought he *would* turn subversive if he stayed in the CSA. (Fortunately, the man didn’t know he’d already turned subversive.) Whatever his reasons, he wanted Cincinnatus out of the CSA and back in the USA. Since Cincinnatus wanted the same thing . . .

Since he wanted the same thing, he didn’t even complain about the long walk home. It didn’t hurt as much as it might have, either. When he got there, he found his father almost frantic. “What you doin’ here?” Seneca Driver exclaimed, eyes almost bugging out of his head in disbelief. “Some damnfool nigger done tol’ me them Freedom Party goons grab you.”

“They did, Pa,” Cincinnatus answered, and his father’s eyes got bigger yet. He went on, “An’ then they let me go.” He told what had happened at the station.

“You believe this here *po*liceman?” His father didn’t sound as if *he* did.

But Cincinnatus nodded. “Uh-huh. I believe him, on account of he didn’t have no reason to lie to me. I was *there.* He had me. He coulda done whatever he pleased. Who’s gonna say boo if a cop roughs up a nigger? Who’s gonna say boo if a cop kills a nigger, even? Nobody, an’ you know it as well as I do.”

The older man thought it over. He screwed up his face in what was almost a parody of cogitation. “He don’t mean nothin’ good by it,” he said at last. He wouldn’t believe a Confederate cop could be decent, and Cincinnatus had a hard time blaming him.

Cincinnatus had a trump card, though. “I’m here,” he said, and his father couldn’t very well quarrel with that.

C ongresswoman Flora Blackford clicked on the wireless set in her Philadelphia office. She usually left it off, turning it on at the hour and half hour to get what news she could. She had little—no, she had no—use for the music and advertising drivel that came out of the speaker most of the time.

Some people were saying television—wireless with moving pictures—was the next big thing. The war had put it on hold, and might have derailed it altogether. Flora wasn’t sure she was sorry. The idea of having to watch advertisements as well as listen to them turned her stomach.

She wasn’t listening to news now, though, or not directly. She looked at the clock on the wall. It was a quarter to five. What were they waiting for? The announcer said, “Ladies and gentlemen, live from New York City and newly escaped from the Confederate States of America, we are proud to present . . . Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces!”

Out of the wireless poured music the likes of which was almost unknown in the United States. Negroes in the Confederate States had been oppressed for hundreds of years, and had no hope of anything else, anything better. They poured their wish for a different life—and a jaunty defiance of the life they were forced to live—into their music. Those sly rhythms and strange syncopations had no parallel in the

USA. Satchmo might almost have been playing his trumpet in Portuguese rather than English.

And yet, a great singer could make an audience feel what he felt even in a foreign language—would opera have been so popular if that weren't true? Satchmo had the same gift. Nobody in the United States played his kind of music. But joy and despair and anger came through just the same.

When the Rhythm Aces finished their number, the announcer said, "You know folks will hear this program in the CSA as well as the USA. What do you have to say to the people of the country you chose to leave?"

"Ain't got nothin' much to say to the white folks there," Satchmo answered, sounding like a gravelly bullfrog. "White folks down there don't listen to the niggers anyways. If you is colored an' you is in the Confederate States, I gots one thing to tell you—git out if you can. You stays dere, you gwine end up dead. I hates to say it, but it's de Lawd's truth."

His English was almost as foreign to Flora's ear as his music. White Confederates had their own accent, or group of accents; she was used to those. People from the USA, though, seldom got to hear how uneducated Confederate Negroes spoke.

"How did *you* get out of the CSA?" the announcer asked.

Flora already knew that story; she'd met Satchmo after he and his fellow musicians came to Philadelphia. Knowing what he was going to say helped her follow his account: "We was up in Ohio, playin' fo' de sojers dere. We done decided we better run, on account of we never gits no better chance. So we steals a command car—you know, one o' dem wid a machine gun on it." His accent got even thicker as excitement filled his voice. "We drives till we comes to de front. It's de nighttime, so de Confederate pickets, dey reckons we's ossifers—"

"Till we commences to shootin' an' drives on by," one of the other Rhythm Aces broke in. They all laughed at the memory.

"Good for you. *Good* for you," the announcer said. Flora didn't like his fulsome tones; she thought he was laying it on with a trowel. The idea wasn't to patronize the Negroes. It was to show the world they were human beings, too, human beings abused by their white Confederate masters. She couldn't think of a better word than that, even though the Confederates had formally manumitted their slaves in the 1880s.

Neither side's propaganda was subtle these days. The announcer asked, "What will you play for us next?"

As usual, Satchmo spoke for the band: "This here is a song dat show we is glad to be where we's at."

They broke into "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was not the National Anthem as Francis Scott Key had written it. It was not the National Anthem as Flora had ever imagined it, either. They did things with and to the rhythm for which she had no names. But what they did worked. It made the staid old tune seem new and fresh to her again. Most of the time, she listened to "The Star-Spangled Banner" with half an ear, if that. She knew it too well to pay much attention to it. Not here, not now. She had to listen closely, because she couldn't be sure just what was coming next. She didn't think even the Rhythm Aces knew before the notes flowed from their instruments.

After the last proud wail of Satchmo's trumpet, even the bland announcer seemed moved when he murmured, "Thank you very much."

"You is mighty welcome, suh," Satchmo said. "You is mighty welcome, an' we is mighty glad to be in 'de land o' de free an' de home o' de brave.' If we was still in de CSA, maybe they fixin' to kill us."

The announcer still didn't seem to know what to make of that. Getting people in the USA to believe that whites in the CSA were systematically killing blacks wasn't easy. Getting people in the USA to care even if they did believe was harder yet. People in this country wanted as little to do with blacks as they could, and wanted as few blacks here as possible.

Flora wondered if Satchmo and his fellow musicians had bumped up against that yet. They weren't valued for themselves; they were valued because their escape gave the Confederates a black eye.

"What will you do now that you're in our great country?" the wireless man asked at last.

"Play music." By the way Satchmo said it, he could conceive of no other life. "Wherever folks wants us to play music, we do dat."

How many people would want them to play music as alien to the U.S. tradition as that National Anthem had been? Flora couldn't know. One way or another, Satchmo and his band would find out. They wouldn't

starve; the government wouldn't let them. And they wouldn't have to worry about pogroms and worse. People might not like them, but their lives weren't in danger anymore.

After farewells and commercials, the news did come on. It wasn't good. The big U.S. push in Virginia remained bogged down. U.S. counterattacks in Ohio hadn't come to much. The fight to grind down the Mormon uprising remained stalled in Provo. If the United States could have thrown their full might at Utah, the revolt would have been crushed in short order. The Mormons, of course, had the sense not to rebel when the USA could do that. Flora hoped Yossel stayed safe.

Other fronts were sideshows. Confederate-sponsored Indian uprisings in Sequoyah kept the occupied territory in an uproar. That wouldn't have mattered much if Sequoyah didn't have more oil than you could shake a stick at. As things were, the United States had trouble using what they could get, and sabotage ensured that they didn't get much.

Sequoyah was one more piece of trouble left over from the Great War and the harsh peace that followed. If the peace had been milder, maybe someone like Jake Featherston never would have arisen in the Confederate States. The smoldering resentments and hatreds that fueled the Freedom Party's growth wouldn't have existed. On the other hand, if the peace had been more draconian—more on the order of what the United States had visited on Canada—any sign of trouble would have been ruthlessly suppressed before it could turn dangerous.

Which would have been better? Flora didn't know. All she knew for sure, all anyone in the battered USA knew for sure, was that what they'd tried hadn't worked. That was particularly bitter to her because so much of what they'd tried had been under Socialist administrations, including her own late husband's.

The Democrats had ruled the USA almost continuously between the disaster of the War of Secession and the bigger disaster of the Great War. Teddy Roosevelt hadn't seen the Great War as a disaster; he'd seen it as a vindication, a revenge toward which the country had worked for two generations. Maybe he'd even been right. But the voters thought otherwise. They'd elected Socialists ever since, except for one four-year stretch.

And what had that got them? The economic collapse while Hosea Blackford was in the White House, and the rebirth of Confederate military power while Al Smith was. If only he hadn't agreed to the

plebiscites in Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah . . . But he had, and he'd won reelection on the strength of it, and none of Jake Featherston's solemn promises turned out to be worth the paper it was written on.

We aren't immune from mistakes, either, Flora thought, and laughed bitterly. There were times when the Socialists seemed to go out of their way—a long way out of their way—to prove that.

The telephone rang, dropping a bomb on her train of thought. Not sorry to see it go, she picked up the handset and said, "Yes? What is it, Bertha?"

"Mr. Roosevelt is on the line, Congresswoman," her secretary answered.

"Is he?" Flora could hear the pleasure in her voice. "Put him through, of course."

"Hello, Flora! How are you today?" the Assistant Secretary of War said. Franklin Roosevelt always sounded jaunty, even though poliomyelitis left him paralyzed from the waist down. He was only a distant cousin to Theodore, and had always been a solid Socialist.

"I'm fine, Franklin. How are you? What can I do for you today?" Flora said.

"I'm about as well as can be expected," he replied. "I'd be better if the war were better, but I expect that's true of the whole country. Reason I called is, I wondered whether you'd listened to Satchmo and his pals on the wireless just now."

"I certainly did," Flora told him. "I don't think I ever heard the National Anthem sound like *that* before."

Roosevelt had a big, booming laugh, a laugh that invited everyone who heard it to share the joke. "Neither did I, by God!" he said. "But it didn't sound *bad,* you know—just different."

Had he been a Democrat like his late cousin, the two words would have meant the same thing to him. Flora said, "I liked the way he and the Rhythm Aces talked between numbers. They'll make some people think—here and in the CSA."

"That's the idea," Roosevelt said. "We made sure this broadcast went out over a big web. Featherston's boys could try till they were blue in

the face, but they couldn't jam all our stations. People on the other side of the border *will* have got the message."

"Good. Excellent, in fact," Flora said. "Featherston says he tells the truth. His people—white and black—need to know better." She knew white Confederates wouldn't pay much attention to anything Negroes said. But plenty of blacks in the Confederate States had wireless sets, too.

"They sure do." Franklin Roosevelt paused. It seemed very casual. Then he went on, "President La Follette wanted me to pass on to you that, as far as he's concerned, the bargain you had with Al Smith still holds. He'll meet his end of it. He wants me to check and see that you will, too."

"If he does, I will." Flora hoped she hid her bemusement. Two presidents, now, had agreed to speak out against Confederate atrocities on Negroes if she *didn't* speak out on a strange budget item she'd found. Stranger still, she didn't even know what the item was for.

III

W hen Scipio was Anne Colleton's butler, back in the days before and at the start of the Great War, he'd got an education less formal but more thorough than he would have had at most colleges. He knew the name for a group of people forced to live in a walled-off part of a town. They formed a *ghetto.*

The Terry had been Augusta, Georgia's colored district for God only knew how long. Blacks lived there and nowhere else. Whites didn't live there, no matter what. But it hadn't been a ghetto. Negroes had worked all over Augusta, waiting tables, cleaning houses, cutting hair, and doing all sorts of backbreaking, low-paying jobs that were beneath whites' dignity.

But the Terry was a ghetto now. Barbed wire surrounded it. Armed guards—police and Freedom Party stalwarts—patrolled the perimeter. The only people who got out were the ones who showed their passbooks at the gates and were approved. Reentering was controlled just as rigidly.

Even before the barbed wire went up, the authorities swept out—emptied—one big chunk of the Terry. Word was that the people removed had been resettled somewhere else. Scipio didn't know of anybody who'd heard from any of them, though. His guess was that they'd gone to a camp. Negroes went into camps. He didn't know of anybody who'd come out of one, either.

All he could do was live his life one day at a time, try to get through, try to get by. Every afternoon, he put on the tuxedo he wore to his job at the Huntsman's Lodge and headed for the nearest gate.

He'd been waiting tables there for a long time. The cops and the stalwarts knew him. They'd known him long enough that most of them had even stopped teasing him about the penguin suit he wore—and for a white man, or even a black, to abandon that particular joke required a forbearance not far from the superhuman. Better still, they'd even known him long enough to let him back into the Terry when he got off work after the usual curfew hour for Negroes.

That he worked at the Huntsman's Lodge in particular undoubtedly helped him and his fellow waiters and cooks and busboys acquire their immunity from the curfew. The place was the finest and fanciest restaurant in Augusta. It was where the town's most important whites gathered—and of course they had to be well served. Of course.

As usual, Scipio arrived for his shift about twenty minutes early. Showing up early and showing up all the time no matter what were two of a restaurant worker's chief virtues. Reliability counted for more than anything else he could think of.

He ducked into the staff entrance—customers had a much fancier one—and hung his ratty overcoat on a hook. He didn't think he'd need it much longer. Spring came early to Augusta, and summer followed hard on its heels. In the subtropical heat and humidity of a Georgia summer, his wing collar and tailcoat became a torture and a torment.

"Hello, Xerxes." That was Jerry Dover, the manager at the Huntsman's Lodge. The sharp-faced white man made a pretty good boss.

"Good day to you, suh." Scipio responded to his alias more readily than he would have to his own name. As Scipio, he was still a wanted man in South Carolina. He hadn't thought the Red uprising during the Great War had a prayer of success, which hadn't kept him from becoming a prominent and visible part of the short-lived Congaree Socialist Republic. As far as he knew, the others who could say that were long dead; his son Cassius was named for one of them.

He expected Jerry Dover to go on his way after the greeting. The manager ran himself ragged making sure the Huntsman's Lodge stayed the best place in town. However much Dover's bosses paid him, it wasn't enough.

Instead, though, Dover said, "Grab yourself some grub and then come see me in my office. I've got something I want to talk to you about."

"I do dat, suh. What you need?"

"It'll keep till then." Jerry Dover did hurry off after that. Scipio scratched his head. Something was on Dover's mind. The manager hadn't seemed anxious or upset, so it probably wasn't anything too dreadful.

You couldn't get rich waiting tables. (If you were a Negro in the CSA, you were most unlikely to get rich any which way, but you sure wouldn't by waiting tables.) The job had its perquisites, though. The

meals the cooks fixed for themselves and the rest of the help weren't so fancy as the ones they made for the paying customers, but they weren't bad, and they were free. Scipio ate fried chicken and string beans and buttery mashed potatoes smothered in gravy, and washed them down with coffee with plenty of cream and sugar.

Thus fortified, he went to Jerry Dover's office, tapped on the open door, and said, "What kin I do fo' you, suh?"

"Come on in," Dover told him. "Close that thing, will you?"

"Yes, suh." As Scipio did, he began—oh, not to worry, but to wonder. What didn't Jerry Dover want anybody else hearing? The restaurant business had few secrets—fewer, most of the time, than the people who believed they were keeping them imagined.

Jerry Dover pointed to the battered chair in front of his battered desk. "Sit down, sit down," he said impatiently. "You don't need to stand there looking down at my bald spot. I've got something I want you to take care of for me."

"I do dat," Scipio said, assuming it was something that had to do with the restaurant. "Ask you one mo' time—what you need?"

"Something a little special," Dover answered. Scipio still didn't worry. Later, he realized he should have started right then. But he just sat there politely and waited. His mama had raised him to be polite, going on seventy years ago now, and Anne Colleton's relentless training reinforced those early lessons. Dover went on, "I need you to take something to somebody down in Savannah for me."

"Savannah, suh?" Automatic deference tempered even the horror Scipio felt. "Do Jesus, suh! How I gonna git to Savannah, things like they is now? I is lucky I kin git outa de Terry."

"I'll get you authorized to leave town. Don't you fret about that," Jerry Dover said, which only made Scipio more alarmed than ever.

"What is this thing?" he demanded. "You can't go your ownself? You can't put it in de mail, let de postman bring it?"

"No and no," the manager answered. "If I go out of town, people will notice. Right now, I can't afford to have anybody notice me leaving town. And the mail's not as safe as it used to be. A lot of people are mighty snoopy these days." He doubtless meant people who worked for the Freedom Party. He doubtless meant that, but he didn't say it.

“You reckon nobody care about some raggedy-ass nigger?” Scipio said. Quite calmly, Jerry Dover nodded. His very coolness infuriated the black man. “Suh, this here ass o’ mine may be raggedy, but it be the onliest one I got.”

“Then you’ll be careful of it, won’t you . . . Scipio?”

There it was. He’d feared it was coming. Anne Colleton had known who he was, had known what his right name was. She’d eaten at the Huntsman’s Lodge—was it really less than a year earlier?—and recognized him. Naturally, she’d wanted him arrested, brought back to South Carolina, and shot. Jerry Dover had forestalled her. He’d shown her that a colored waiter named Xerxes had worked at the Lodge before the Great War. It was, of course, a different Xerxes, but she couldn’t prove that. Anne Colleton had always been a woman who got her own way. She couldn’t have liked being thwarted here.

Maybe she would have done something about it had she lived. Thanks to the U.S. raid on Charleston, she hadn’t. Scipio was free of her forever. But . . . She’d told Jerry Dover his right name. It was a gun in Dover’s hands no less than it had been in hers.

Dover opened a desk drawer and reached inside. What did he have in there? A pistol? Probably. What had Scipio’s face shown? What he was really thinking? A Negro in the CSA could do nothing more dangerous. Dover said, “You know what I’m talking about, don’t you?”

“I know what you talkin’ ’bout, yes, suh,” Scipio said. Then he let the accent he’d used only once or twice since the downfall of the Congaree Socialist Republic, the educated white man’s accent Anne Colleton had made him learn, come out: “I know exactly what you are talking about, and I wish to heaven that I didn’t.”

Jerry Dover’s eyes widened. “You *are* a sandbagging son of a bitch. How many times did you tell me you could only talk like a swamp nigger?”

“As many times as I needed to, to keep myself safe,” Scipio answered. Bitterly, he added, “But I see there is no safety anywhere. Now—suppose you eliminate the nonsense. What must I deliver, and to whom, and why?”

Accent was almost as important in the CSA as color. Scipio remained black. He couldn’t do anything about that. But his skin said he was one thing. Now, suddenly, his voice said he was something else. His voice proclaimed that he was not just a white man, but someone to be

reckoned with: a lawyer, a judge, a Senator. Jerry Dover shook his head, trying to drive out the illusion. Plainly, he wasn't having an easy time of it.

He had to gather himself before he answered, "You don't need to know that. You don't need to know why. The less you know, the better for everybody."

"So you say," Scipio replied.

"Yeah. I do. And I say something else, too: you don't want to mess with me. Anything happens to me, I got stuff written down. You'll wish you was dead by the time they get through with you—and with your family, too."

Bathsheba, whom he'd loved since they met at a boarding house in the Terry. Cassius, who had reached the age when every boy—almost a man—was as much a rebel as the Red he'd been named for. Cassius's older sister, Antoinette, old enough for a husband now—but in these mad times, how much sense did marrying make?

Scipio wasn't the only one whose life Jerry Dover held in the hollow of his hand. Everything in the world that mattered to him—and if Dover made a fist . . .

"All right, Mr. Dover," he said, still with those white men's tones. They helped him mask his feelings, and his feelings needed masking just then. "I shall do what you require of me."

"Figured you would," the restaurant manager said complacently. "Talkin' fancy like that may help you, too."

But Scipio held up a hand. "I had not finished. I shall do what you require—but you will pay my wife my usual wages and tips while I am away, and—"

"Wait a minute," Dover broke in. "You think you can dicker with me?"

"Yes," Scipio answered. "I can bargain with you because I can read and write, too. You have a way to protect yourself against me. That knife cuts both ways, Mr. Dover. I shall do what you require, and I shall carefully note everything I have done, and I shall leave my notes in a safe place. I have those, and they have nothing to do with this restaurant."

Dover glared at him. "I ought to turn you in now."

“That is your privilege.” Scipio masked terror with a butler’s impenetrable calm. “But if you do, you will have to find someone else to do your service, someone on whom you do not have such a strong hold.” He waited. Jerry Dover went on scowling, scowling fearsomely. But Dover nodded in the end. He hadn’t intended to end up with a bargain—he’d intended just to impose his will, as whites usually intended and usually did with blacks—but he’d ended up with one after all.

D r. Leonard O’Doull was a tall, thin man with a long jaw and a face as Irish as his name. He worked in a U.S. Army aid station a few hundred yards behind the line in Virginia. A few hundred yards, in this case, was enough to put him on the north side of the Rapidan when the front was on the south side, in the almost impenetrable second-growth country called the Wilderness. He didn’t like that. Getting wounded men back over the river meant delay, and delay, sometimes, meant a death that faster treatment could have stopped.

But there was no help for it. The U.S. bridgehead over the Rapidan was small and under constant assault by air, armor, and artillery. The Confederates were no worse about respecting the Red Cross than their counterparts in green-gray, but there was nowhere in the bridgehead itself that an aid station could hope to escape the evil chances of war.

First Sergeant Granville McDougald waxed philosophical when O’Doull complained: “We do what we can do, Doc, not what we want to do.”

“Yeah, Granny, I know.” O’Doull had an M.D. He’d had a civilian practice up in Rivière-du-Loup, in the Republic of Quebec, where he’d settled after a stint as an army surgeon there in the Great War. McDougald had been a medic in the last go-round, and ever since. O’Doull wasn’t at all sure which of them knew more about medicine. He went on, “Just ’cause I know it doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“Well, no,” McDougald allowed. “But there’s not a hell of a lot of point to flabbling about things you can’t help.”

O’Doull grunted. Like any doctor, he was an officer—he had a major’s oak leaves on his shoulder straps. Like any long-service noncom, McDougald had ways of subverting the privileges rank gave to officers. Being right most of the time was not the least of them.

Before O’Doull could do anything more than grunt, a flight of

northbound shells roared by overhead. The sound put him in mind of a freight train rumbling down the track. Confederate artillery constantly tried to disrupt U.S. supply lines.

Disrupt supply lines. That was a nice, bloodless phrase. What the Confederates were really trying to do was blow up trucks and motorcars and trains, to turn the vehicles into fireballs and the men inside them into burnt, mangled, screaming lumps of flesh. That was what it boiled down to.

Granville McDougald also listened to the shells flying north. “Didn’t hear any gurgles that time,” he said.

“Happy day,” O’Doull answered. And it was a happy day . . . of sorts. Rounds filled with poison gas made a distinctive glugging noise on their way through the air. Mustard gas hardly ever killed quickly. But the blisters it raised on the skin could keep a man out of action for weeks. And the blisters it raised on the lungs could keep him an invalid for years, strangling him half an inch at a time and making all his remaining days a hell on earth.

Nerve agents, on the other hand . . . Get a whiff of those, or get even a little drop on your skin, and the world would go dark because your pupils contracted to tiny dots. Your lungs would lock up, and so would your heart, and so would your other muscles, too—but when your lungs and heart stopped working the rest of your muscles didn’t matter a whole hell of a lot.

Soldiers on both sides carried syringes full of atropine. Anyone who thought he was poisoned with a nerve agent was supposed to stab himself in the thigh and ram the plunger home. If he was right, the atropine would block the effects of the poison gas. If he was wrong, the antidote that would have saved him would poison him instead. That wasn’t usually fatal, they claimed.

All the same, it made for one hell of a war.

“You know,” O’Doull said meditatively, “twenty-five years ago I thought we’d hit bottom. I thought we were doing the worst things to each other that human beings could think of to do.” He laughed—in lieu of sobbing or screaming. “Only goes to show what I know, doesn’t it?”

“Well, I don’t suppose you were the only one with that idea,” McDougald said. “Kind of makes you wonder where we go from here, doesn’t it?”

“Tabernac!” O’Doull said, and Granny McDougald laughed at him. When he didn’t watch himself, he swore in Quebecois French. Why not? He’d spoken it every day for a quarter of a century. English was the rusty language for him. He was surprised it had come back as well as it had. He’d read it all through his time in Rivière-du-Loup, to keep up with medical literature. That had probably helped.

U.S. counterbattery fire answered the C.S. artillery. By the sound of things, the U.S. bombardment had plenty of poison gas in it. Intellectually, O’Doull understood why. The gas would either deny Confederate guns to their gunners or force the men to don masks and heavy, rubberized outfits that covered every inch of them. Those were unpleasant in cool weather. In the summer, there was some question whether gas or protection from it was more lethal.

As far as O’Doull was concerned, though, the intellect had little to do with gas. He loathed it, pure and simple. He’d never known a doctor or a medic who didn’t. How could anyone not loathe stuff made to incapacitate and torment?

People on both sides of the front seemed to have no trouble at all.

Savagely, O’Doull said, “I wish to God they’d test that shit”—he could swear in English, too—“on the people who invent it and the people who improve it and the people who make it. Then they’d be sure they’ve got it just right.”

“Works for me,” McDougald said. “Write up a memo and send it on to the Ordnance Bureau. See what they have to say about it.”

“I’ll be damned if I’m not tempted to,” O’Doull said. “What can they do? Court-martial me and throw me out of the Army? I’d thank ’em and go home, and they’d never see my ass again.”

“Do it,” McDougald urged. “I’ll sign it. They want to bust me down to private, I don’t care. I’d be doing the same thing with a lot of stripes or without any, and I won’t get rich on Army pay no matter what grade I’m in.”

Before O’Doull could say anything to that, a shout from outside the aid station brought him back to the real and immediate world of war: “Doc! Hey, Doc! You there? We got a casualty for you!”

“No, I’m not here, Eddie,” O’Doull yelled back. “I went to Los Angeles for the sun.”

“Funny, Doc. Funny like a crutch.” Eddie and another corpsman, a big, burly, taciturn fellow named Sam, carried a stretcher into the tent. Both medics wore smocks with Red Crosses fore and aft, Red Cross armbands, and Red Crosses painted on the fronts and backs of their helmets. Corpsmen on both sides sometimes got shot anyway.

The corporal on the stretcher wasn’t at death’s door. He was, in fact, swearing a blue streak. He had most of one trouser leg cut away, and a blood-soaked bandage on that thigh. His opinion of the Confederate who’d shot him wasn’t far from Sophocles’ of Oedipus.

“Round tore out a big old chunk of meat,” Eddie said. “Missed the femoral artery, though.”

“I guess it did,” Granville McDougald said. “He’d be holding up a lily if the artery got cut.”

O’Doull nodded. A man could bleed out in a hurry if anything happened to his femoral artery. “Let’s get him on the table,” O’Doull said. “I’ll do what I can to patch him up, but he’s going to be on the shelf for a while.” He spoke to the noncom: “You’ve got yourself a hometowner, buddy.”

“Oh, yeah, just what I fuckin’ need,” the corporal said as Eddie and Sam lifted him off the stretcher and onto the operating table. “Got a letter from my sis last week—my wife’s fuckin’ around with the fuckin’ milkman. I go back to fuckin’ St. Paul, I’ll beat the fuck out of her.”

A man of strong opinions but limited vocabulary, O’Doull thought. He nodded to McDougald: “Pass gas for me, Granny.” Before the corporal could editorialize about that, McDougald stuck an ether cone over his face. He got out another couple of blurry four-letter words, then went limp.

“Watch what the fuck you’re doin’ with the fuckin’ scalpel, Doc,” Eddie said.

“Everybody’s a funny man,” O’Doull said mournfully. Eddie wasn’t half so impassioned as the corporal. Of course, he hadn’t just stopped a bullet, either. O’Doull cut away still more of the trouser leg and the wound dressing, too. *Had* the corporal stopped the bullet, or had it just taken a bite out of him and kept on going? O’Doull would have bet the round was long gone, but he did some probing all the same. You never could tell.

“Anything?” McDougald asked.

“Doesn’t look like it,” O’Doull answered. “They can X-ray him when they get him back to the division hospital, but it sure as hell looks like a hometowner to me. I’m going to try to spread his skin over as much of the wound as it’ll cover, tie off some of the bigger bleeders, dust him with sulfa and bandage him up, and then send him on his merry way.”

“Make sure you don’t tie off the artery when you’re fooling around in there,” McDougald warned.

“I’ll be careful.” O’Doull knew some doctors would have got their noses out of joint at a warning from a mere medic. You wouldn’t make a mistake like that if you were paying attention to what you were doing. But you could if you got careless. Granny helped make sure O’Doull didn’t.

The wound wasn’t pretty after he got done with it, but he thought the corporal had a good prognosis. Whether the noncom’s wife had a good prognosis might be a different story. When O’Doull said as much, McDougald said, “This guy won’t enter the hundred-yard dash in the Olympics any time soon. Maybe she can outrun him.”

“Olympics. Right.” O’Doull turned to Eddie and Sam. “Take him back to division. Tell ’em to keep an eye on his blood pressure, give him plasma if it falls. I don’t think it will—he looks pretty good—but they should monitor it.”

“Right, Doc,” Eddie said. Sam nodded—a paragraph from him.

O’Doull let out a sigh after they carried the wounded corporal away. “Another miracle of modern medicine,” he said.

McDougald clucked at his sarcastic tone. “Hey, you did good, Doc. I think that guy’ll be fine, and he lost a lot of meat off the bone.”

“Only thing I did that a surgeon in the War of Secession couldn’t have was put sulfa powder on the wound,” O’Doull said. “That doesn’t make me feel special, believe me.”

“Leg wounds are what they are,” McDougald answered with a shrug. “Nobody in the War of Secession knew anything about X-rays or plasma, I’ll tell you that. And the old-timers couldn’t do anything about chest or belly wounds—they had to watch people die of shock and blood poisoning. We’ve got a real chance against them—well,

some, anyhow."

"Hot damn." But O'Doull shook his head. "Sorry, Granny. I'm tired as hell." He didn't see that changing any time soon, either.

H onolulu was a nervous town these days. With the Japanese holding Midway and with their airplane carrier probing down from the northwest, all of the main Sandwich Islands were nervous these days. The United States had taken them from Britain at the start of the Great War, and it looked altogether too possible that they might change hands again in the not very indefinite future.

George Enos, Jr., understood exactly why the Sandwich Islands were nervous. His destroyer, the USS *Townsend,* was in dry dock at Pearl Harbor. Japanese carrier aircraft had pummeled her when she poked her nose up too close to Midway. There were no U.S. airplane carriers in the Pacific right now. Sending ships around the Horn wasn't easy, fast, or efficient—and the fight in the North Atlantic was right at the USA's front door. U.S. warships and what chunks of the German High Seas Fleet that could get out of the North Sea squared off there against the British, Confederate, and French Navies. The Sandwich Islands? The Sandwich Islands were a long way from anywhere.

The chief of George's twin 40mm antiaircraft gun owned the rock-ribbed Republican name of Fremont Blaine Dalby. His politics matched his name, which made him a queer bird. The Republicans, to the left of the Democrats and the right of the Socialists, had won few elections since the 1880s.

"You coming into town with us, George?" he asked. The gun crew had got a twenty-four-hour liberty. The whole ship's crew was getting liberty in rotation while repair teams set the destroyer to rights again.

"I dunno," George said uncomfortably.

"I dunno." Dalby mocked not only his indecision but his flat Boston accent, which sounded especially absurd in the petty officer's falsetto. "Well, you better make up your mind pretty damn quick."

"Yeah." George didn't mind going into Honolulu with his buddies. He didn't mind drinking with them, even if he got blind drunk. Part of him, though, did mind the idea of standing in line at one of Honolulu's countless brothels for a quick piece of ass. He was married and had a couple of boys, and he'd never fooled around on Connie. Of

course, he'd never been so far from her, either, or had so little chance of seeing her any time soon. When he was out on a fishing run, he made up for lost time as soon as his boat got back to T Wharf. He wasn't coming back to T Wharf, or even to Boston, maybe for years.

And Fremont Dalby knew exactly what ailed him. The gun-crew chief gave him an elbow in the ribs. "What she don't know won't hurt her," he said.

"Yeah," George said again. Connie was a long way away. His pals, the men he ate and slept with, the men he fought beside, were right here. He didn't want them to think he was a wet blanket. *And I don't* have *to stand in line at a whorehouse,* he told himself. That helped salve his conscience. He nodded. "Sure, I'll come."

"Oh, boy." Dalby made as if to bow. "Thank you so much. Well, come on, then, if you're coming."

Along with the other ratings given liberty, the gun crew showed their paperwork before leaving the barracks and then headed for the nearest trolley stop. From the Pearl City stop, they rode east past Custer Field, one of the many airstrips on Oahu. Even as they passed, Wright fighters were landing and taking off. An air umbrella floated over Oahu at all times.

"I wish we'd had some of those guys up over our heads when the Japs jumped us," George said.

"Would've been nice," agreed Fritz Gustafson, the loader on the twin 40mm cannon. The rest of the men from the gun crew nodded.

"Technically, we *were* under air cover," Dalby said. Several people, George Enos, Jr., among them, let out snorts, guffaws, hoots, and other expressions of derision and disbelief. Dalby held up his right hand, as if taking oath in court. "So help me, we were. Fighters could have flown up from here to the ship and got back."

"Big fucking deal," George said. Others expressed similar opinions, some even more colorfully.

"Yeah, I know," Dalby said. "It would've taken 'em most of an hour to get there, the fight would've been over by the time they did, and they couldn't've hung around anyway, not if they *did* want to get back. But we were under air cover, by God. That's how the brass sees it."

The way George saw it, the brass was full of idiots. He would have

found formidable support for that view among ratings—and probably more than he would have imagined among officers as well. Flabbling about it would just have ruined the day, so he made himself keep quiet. The Sandwich Islands were too nice a place to waste time getting upset and fussing for no good reason.

It wasn't too hot. It wasn't too cold. From everything he'd heard, it never got too hot or too cold. The air was moist without being oppressively sticky, the way it got in Boston in the summertime. It could rain at any time of the day or night all year around, but it rarely rained hard. The hills north of Honolulu were impossibly green, the sky improbably blue, the Pacific bluer still.

"I don't just want to be stationed here," George said. "I want to live here."

"In a little grass shack?" Dalby jeered.

"Why not?" George said. "You don't need anything more than that."

Civilians started getting on as the trolley stopped here and there. The sailors eyed them suspiciously. Some were Orientals, and how could you tell if the Japs were loyal to the USA? And quite a few of the whites, especially the older ones, spoke with British accents. They probably wouldn't be sorry to see the United States booted out of Honolulu, either.

Well, too bad, George thought. *It's not going to happen.* He hoped it wouldn't, anyway. The place where the islands were vulnerable was their dependence on the mainland for food and fuel. If the Japanese could cut off supplies, holding them might not be easy no matter what the actual battle situation looked like.

Then the trolley got into Honolulu, and he stopped worrying about things like that. The city had a filigreed, before-the-Great-War feeling to it. Not a whole lot had been built during the American occupation. The hotels that had accommodated visitors before the new war shut down tourism were the ones that had accommodated them before 1914.

Even the red-light district had been there a long time. The saloons and tattoo parlors and "hotels" that greeted sailors and soldiers had the look of places that might have greeted their grandfathers. The lurid neon signs a lot of them sported seemed afterthoughts, not essentials.

"We need a few drinks," Fremont Dalby declared, and nobody

presumed to disagree with him. He swaggered into a dive called the Swizzle Stick. The rest of the gun crew followed.

Dalby ordered whiskey. Most of the other sailors followed suit. George and Fritz Gustafson got beers instead. “What do you want to go and do that for?” somebody asked. “Haven’t you got better things to do with your dick than piss through it?”

“It’s good for both,” Gustafson said, which quelled that in a hurry.

Some of the barmaids were white, others Oriental. They were all female, and wore low-cut white blouses and short black skirts. Seeing them reminded George how long it had been since he’d set eyes on a woman, let alone touched one. He stared down at his glass of beer. He didn’t want to be unfaithful to Connie—but he didn’t want to go without loving, either.

The facsimile of loving you could buy for money wasn’t as good as the real thing. You didn’t need to be an egghead to figure that out. It was a lot better than nothing, though. Was it enough better than nothing to make him decide to do it? *That’s the question,* he thought, and chewed on it as hard as Hamlet had grappled with *To be or not to be.*

He didn’t have to choose right away. They weren’t going anywhere for a while. Some of the sailors had already knocked back their whiskeys. They were waving their glasses for refills. George didn’t feel like drinking that fast. If he drank that fast, he’d get drunk. If he got drunk, he’d do something stupid. He could feel that coming like a rash. And if he did something stupid and he wasn’t lucky, he’d end up with a goddamn rash, too.

But his glass emptied, as if by magic. “You want another?” a slant-eyed, tawny-skinned barmaid asked. George found himself nodding. The next beer appeared in short order. It vanished in short order, too. So did the one after that, and the one after *that.* About then, George stopped counting them.

Fremont Dalby got to his feet. Considering how much he’d put down, that he could get to his feet proved he was made of stern stuff. “The time has come,” he declared, “and we’re damn well going to. Drink up, you bastards.”

George knew all the reasons he didn’t want to go to a brothel. He knew, all right, but he’d stopped caring. Connie was five thousand miles away—a lot farther if he had to sail it. What she didn’t know wouldn’t hurt her. Dalby’s words came back to him, handy as could

be. Everybody who went to stand in one of those lines told himself the same thing. If he drank enough beforehand, he might even make himself believe it.

The line moved forward at a good clip. “They hustle guys in and out, don’t they?” George said. The rest of the gun crew laughed as if that was the funniest thing they’d ever heard. George had to listen to himself before he realized what kind of joke he’d made. Then he laughed, too.

It cost three dollars, payable in advance. He didn’t even get to choose a girl. He got assigned a cubicle. He went to it and there she lay, already naked on the bed. She was plump, and had black hair; she might have been part Oriental. “Hurry up,” she said. “You only got five minutes.”

He wondered if he’d drunk too much to perform. He quickly discovered he hadn’t. And, speaking of quickly, it was over almost before it began. He didn’t need to worry about spending too much time in the nasty little room. *That was it?* he thought as he did up his pants. *I got all hot and bothered about* that*?* He had, too.

Whoever had designed the place knew his business. The exit funneled customers into a pro station. Taking care of prophylaxis against venereal disease—something new for George—proved nastier than the brief coupling had been enjoyable. When he said so to a pharmacist’s mate, the fellow shrugged and asked, “Would you rather have VD?”

“Couldn’t be worse than this,” George said.

“Shows what you know. Shows you never tried pissing through a dose of the clap, too.” The pharmacist’s mate jerked a thumb toward the door at the far end of the room. “I ain’t got time to argue with you. Go on, get the hell out of here.”

Out George went. The sordidness of what he’d just been through far outweighed the pleasure. The spasm of drunken guilt he felt didn’t help, either. *If Connie ever finds out, she’ll murder me. I’ll have it coming, too.*

Most of the other men from the gun crew were already out on the sidewalk. Some of them seemed as subdued as George. Not Fremont Dalby, though. “Twice!” he bragged.

Two times nothing is still nothing, George thought. Then he blinked. He’d never been anything special in school. He wouldn’t have bet he

remembered how multiplying by zero worked, not in a million years. Things came back in the strangest ways.

T here were times when Brigadier General Abner Dowling suspected he must have been a fire brigade in some past life. Not a member of a fire brigade, but a whole brigade all by himself. That was the only thing that could explain how many fires he'd put out in his long career in the U.S. Army.

More than ten years as adjutant to General George Armstrong Custer made a good start—or a bad one, depending on how you looked at things. Custer was the hero of the Great War, but no man was a hero to his adjutant, any more than he was to his valet. Dowling knew too well how vain, how stubborn, how petulant the old fool was . . . and how those qualities went a long way toward making him the man who, in spite of everything—including himself—made the decisions that ended up beating the Confederate States.

After the Army finally put Custer out to pasture—over his vehement and profane objections—what had Dowling's reward been? Eagles on his shoulders, eagles and the post of commandant of Salt Lake City. Trying to hold the Mormons down was even more fun than trying to hold Custer down had been. Dowling had been in General Pershing's office when a sniper assassinated Pershing. No one had ever caught the murderer—the Mormons took care of their own. And after that, Utah was Abner Dowling's baby.

He'd kept the lid on. The permanently rebellious state had even seemed quiet enough to persuade President Al Smith, in his infinite wisdom, to lift military occupation and restore full civil rights to the inhabitants. When Dowling left, the War Department gave him stars on his shoulders. He was immodest enough to think he'd bloody well earned them, too.

And his reward for that? He'd been sent to Kentucky to hold down Freedom Party agitation. There'd been times when the Freedom Party maniacs made the Mormons seem a walk in the park by comparison. Then President Smith, infinitely wise again, agreed to Jake Featherston's demands for a plebiscite. Afterwards, Dowling got to preside over the U.S. withdrawal over Kentucky and the Confederate reoccupation.

War, plainly, was right around the corner then. They'd put Dowling in

Ohio, which turned out to be the Confederate *Schwerpunkt.* The U.S. War Department had always had trouble seeing west of the Appalachians. Dowling didn't have enough barrels or airplanes to counter Confederate General Patton's armored onslaught. He still thought he'd put up the best campaign he could, given what he had to work with.

Maybe the War Department even agreed with him. They recalled him from Ohio after it fell, but they didn't quite—make him the scapegoat for that fall. After a spell in Philadelphia counting rubber bands and making sure everyone's necktie was on straight, they'd put him back to work. Oh, he wasn't an army commander anymore, but they did give him a corps under Major General Daniel MacArthur for the great U.S. counterstroke, the move against Richmond.

Forward to Richmond! was a rallying cry in the War of Secession. It didn't work then. It didn't work so well this time as the USA hoped, either. It was the obvious U.S. rejoinder to what the Confederates had done—obvious enough for Featherston's men to have anticipated it. They hadn't stopped the U.S. attack, but they'd slowed it to a crawl.

And Abner Dowling, commanding MacArthur's right wing, had had to face a second armored attack from General Patton, this one aimed at his flank. Patton, plainly, had wanted to roll up the whole U.S. force facing him, but he hadn't brought it off. He wouldn't, either.

But was it any wonder Dowling felt the weight of the world on his broad shoulders?

Yes, those shoulders were broad. His belly was thick. He had a series of chins cascading down to his chest. He was, all things considered, built like a barrel. If he took to food to shield himself from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, well, it was a wonder he hadn't taken to drink.

He sighed and stretched and yawned. He hated paperwork. He'd earned the right. He'd done too much of it for too many years, first for Custer and then on his own hook. The more rank he got, the more paperwork went with it. He'd got good at the bureaucratic infighting, too, the sort of quiet warfare that measured itself as much by things prevented as by those accomplished.

That thought made him look east toward Warrenton, where Daniel MacArthur had his headquarters. MacArthur had wanted to pull one out of General McClellan's book from the War of Secession, land at the

mouth of the James, and go after Richmond from the southeast. It could have been a good plan in 1862 had McClellan pursued it with energy—a word not often associated with his name. In 1942, against aircraft and the C.S. Navy, it would have been an invitation to suicide.

Well, it wouldn't happen now. A quiet coded message from Dowling to the War Department had made sure of that. He'd got good at what he did, all right; MacArthur wasn't sure even yet who'd put paid to the project he thought so wonderful. But Dowling remained convinced he'd prevented Western Union messenger boys from delivering a lot of Deeply Regrets telegrams in a campaign that wouldn't have been worth them.

His own headquarters were in Washington, Virginia, a town with nothing to recommend it that he could see. U.S. soldiers walked through the place in groups of five or six or by squads; even traveling in pairs wasn't enough to keep them from getting knocked over the head and having their throats cut. The locals kept chalking FREEDOM! and CSA! on light walls and painting the slogans on dark ones. There were rumors the local women of easy virtue deliberately didn't get their VD treated so they could pass it on to U.S. soldiers. For once, the brass hadn't started those rumors. The men had.

Dowling went outside. The sentries in front of the house he'd commandeered came to an attention so stiff, he could hear their backs creak. "As you were," he told them, and they relaxed—a little. Relax too much in hostile territory and you'd relax yourself right into the grave. "Anything seem strange?" he asked them.

They looked at one another. At last, with unspoken common consensus, they shook their heads. "No, sir," they chorused.

"All right. Good, in fact," Dowling said. Enlisted men had a feel for such things that all the fancy reports from Intelligence often couldn't match. They listened to what the locals said, and to what they didn't. If they'd been in enemy territory for even a little while, they got good at adding two and two—and sometimes even at multiplying fractions.

Guns boomed off to the south and east. Corps headquarters was supposed to be out of artillery range of the front. So were divisional headquarters. Dowling had noticed, though, that the most effective divisions were the ones whose COs ignored that rule. The closer to actual fighting an officer got, the better the feel for it he came to have. Dowling did his best to apply that rule to himself as well as to the officers who served under him.

The guns boomed again, and then again. Dowling cocked his head to one side, studying the sound. After due consideration, he nodded. That was just the usual exchange between a couple of U.S. batteries and their Confederate counterparts. It was liable to smash up a few unlucky men on each side, but it wouldn't change the way things turned out if it went on for the next million years. It was just part of the small change of war.

Somewhere overhead, airplanes droned by. Dowling wasn't the only one who listened to the sound of their engines with a certain concentrated attention, or who glanced around to see where the nearest trench was in case he had to dash for cover. Not this time. One of the sentries delivered the verdict: "Ours."

"Yeah." Another man nodded. "Sounds like they're going to drop some shit on Featherston's head in Richmond."

"Good," Dowling said.

The sentries nodded again. "We nail him, we win big," one of them said, and then, meditatively, "Asshole."

"Chrissake, Jimmy," hissed the soldier who'd spoken first. "You don't say that in front of a general."

Jimmy looked abashed—or rather, worried that he might get in trouble. "Don't get yourself in an uproar about it, son," Dowling said. "I guarantee you I have seen and worked with and worked for more people of the asshole persuasion than you can shake a stick at."

"Like who, sir?" Jimmy asked eagerly.

Abner Dowling could have named names. The question was, could he stop once he got started? He was tempted to let all the resentment out at once, in a great torrent that would leave the sentries' eyes bugging out of their heads. He wouldn't get in trouble for that; a man with a silver star on each shoulder strap was allowed his little eccentricities. That was what they called them for generals, even if a lot of them would have landed lesser mortals in the stockade. But it took a hell of a lot to make the powers that be decide to jug a general.

So it wasn't fear of consequences that kept Dowling's mouth shut. It was more the fear of seeming like a four-year-old—a fat four-year-old with a white mustache—in the middle of a temper tantrum. Dowling remembered too many times when he'd had to calm General Custer down after one of his snits. What was distasteful in another man might

also be distasteful in him.

He wagged a coy finger at Jimmy and the other soldiers. “That would be telling.” The men looked disappointed, but not too—he didn’t suppose they’d really expected him to spill the beans. He took out a pack of cigarettes and stuck one in his mouth. Then he held out the pack to the sentries. They accepted with quick grins and words of thanks. The Raleighs—spoil from a dead Confederate—bore Sir Walter’s face above an enormous, and enormously fancy, ruff.

“Damn, but these are good,” Jimmy said after his first drag. “Stuff we call tobacco nowadays tastes like an old cowflop.”

“A *real* old cowflop,” one of the other sentries added. “One that’s been out in the sun for a while and got all dried out.”

Dowling thought of burnt weeds and lawn trimmings when he smoked U.S.-made cigarettes. He blew out a cloud of smoke, then said, “You boys want to make me give up the habit.”

The sentries laughed. Jimmy said, “Don’t do that, sir. Only thing worse than lousy tobacco is no tobacco at all. Besides, when you’re smoking you can’t smell the goddamn war so much.”

You can’t smell the goddamn war so much. Dowling wouldn’t have put it that way, which didn’t mean the kid was wrong. Even here in Washington, well back of the line, you noted whiffs of that smell. Dowling didn’t know what all went into it. Among the pieces, though, were unburied corpses, unwashed men, and uncovered latrine trenches. Cordite and smoke were two other constants. The smell had a sharper note in this war, for exhaust fumes had largely ousted the barnyard aroma of horses.

And there was one other stink that never went away. It blew out of the War Department. With luck, it blew out of the War Department on the other side, too. And it usually did, for most wars went on for a long, long time. No, there was no escaping the all-invasive, all-pervasive reek of stupidity.

H ipolito Rodriguez had worn butternut in the Great War. The Confederate Conscription Bureau had pulled him off his farm in the state of Sonora, given him a uniform and a rifle and rather more English than he’d had before, and sent him out to fight. And fight he had, first in Georgia against the black rebels in one of the Socialist

Republics they'd proclaimed there and then in west Texas against the damnyankees.

He had a son in butternut in this war, and two more bound to be conscripted before long. And he was back in uniform himself. He'd signed up as a member of the Confederate Veterans' Brigades: men who weren't fit for front-line service anymore but who could still help their country and free fitter men for the fight.

Now he found himself in Texas again, riding a bus across a prairie that seemed to stretch forever. He wore uniform again—of similar cut to the one he'd had before, but of gray rather than butternut cloth. The rest of the new camp guards wore identical clothes. Only two or three of them besides Rodriguez were from Sonora or Chihuahua. The rest came from all over the CSA.

Being in Texas was a mixed blessing for a man of Mexican blood. White Texans often weren't shy about calling their fellow Confederate citizens greasers and dagos, sometimes with unprintable epithets in front of the names. But at least Confederates of Mexican blood *were* citizens.

In an odd way, Rodriguez thanked heaven for the Negroes who would fill the camp where he was to become a guard. If not for them, Mexicans would have been at the bottom of the hill, and everything would have flowed down onto them. As things were, most of the trouble went past them and came down on the *mallates*' heads. That suited him fine.

The bus stopped once, in a dusty little town whose name—if it had a name—Rodriguez didn't notice. The place had a Main Street with a filling station, a saloon that doubled as a diner, and a general store that doubled as a post office. It was even smaller than Baroyeca, the Sonoran town outside of which Rodriguez had a farm. It looked to be even poorer, too. Since Sonora and Chihuahua were and always had been the two poorest states in the CSA, that said frightening things about this place on the road to nowhere.

Along with everybody else, Rodriguez lined up to use the toilet at the filling station. It was dark and nasty and smelly. The proprietor stared at the camp guards as if they'd fallen from another world.

Some of them bought cigarettes and pipe tobacco at the general store. Rodriguez went into the saloon with others. The bartender must have been used to three customers a day. Having a dozen all at once made

his eyes bug out of his head. Somebody ordered a ham sandwich. In an instant, all the men in gray uniforms were clamoring for ham sandwiches. The barkeeper worked like a man possessed, slicing bread, slicing ham, slicing pickles, slapping on mustard and mayonnaise. The bus driver leaned on his horn.

“Screw him,” one of the camp guards said. “He ain’t gonna take off without all of us.” As if to contradict him, the driver blew another long blast.

None of the guards paid any attention. They stayed right there, waiting for their sandwiches and slapping down quarters as they got them. When Rodriguez’s turn came, the man in the boiled shirt and the black bow tie—as much a uniform as his own gray one—gave him a funny look. His dark skin and black hair said one thing, while the outfit he had on said another. Rodriguez just waited. The man handed him the sandwich.

“Gracias,” Rodriguez said as he paid him. He spoke more Spanish than English, but his English was more than good enough for *thank you.* He wanted to make the Texan twitch, and he did.

When they’d all got their food and their tobacco, they deigned to reboard the bus. The driver muttered to himself. He did no more than mutter, though. Considering how badly he was outnumbered, that was smart of him.

Rodriguez sank down into his seat with a grunt of relief. Not long after his farmhouse got electricity, he’d almost electrocuted himself. He hadn’t been the same since—otherwise, he might have gone to the front himself, and not into the Confederate Veterans’ Brigades.

Away went the bus, rattling west down the imperfectly paved highway. “Reckon I’m gonna pawn my fuckin’ kidneys when we finally get where we’re goin’,” one of the men in gray said.

“You been fuckin’ with your kidneys, Jack, there’s some shit your pappy never learned you,” another one replied. Goatish laughter erupted. The rattletrap bus filled with cigarette smoke.

Towards evening, the bus came into Snyder. It looked like all the other Texas towns through which Rodriguez had passed on the way west: bigger than some, smaller than others. Then the bus rolled on a few miles farther. Somebody sitting up near the front who could see out through the big windscreen said, “Son of a bitch!” It was an expression of awe, not anger.

Other soft oaths, and a few not so soft, followed. Rodriguez, who was sitting somewhere near the middle, tried to peer past the men in front of him to find out what they were getting excited about. He didn't have much luck. They were all shifting and moving, too.

The bus stopped. This was where they were going, whatever *this* was. The driver answered that, saying, "Welcome to Camp Determination. Everybody off."

With a tired wheeze, the bus' front door opened. One by one, the new camp guards filed out. Some of them gathered in front of the luggage bin, waiting for the driver to unlock it so they could get out their duffels. Others, Rodriguez among them, took a look at Camp Determination first. He decided the fellow who said *son of a bitch* had known just what he was talking about.

"I was eighteen years old and in the Army in the last war before I saw a town that size," said one of the gray-haired men in gray uniforms.

"*Sí,* me, too," Rodriguez agreed. You could drop Baroyeca down in the middle of that camp, and it wouldn't even make a splash.

Barbed wire surrounded an enormous square of Texas prairie. Machine guns poked their snouts out of guard towers outside the wire perimeter. Barracks halls built of bright yellow pine as yet unbleached by the sun and unstained by the rain and rusty nails rose in the middle distance. There were a lot of them, but the vast acreage inside the barbed wire had room for at least as many more.

Somebody else pointed in a different direction. "Holy Jesus!" the man said. "Will you look at all them trucks?"

There they sat, on an asphalted lot separated from the barracks by more barbed wire. Along with the rest of the guards, Hipolito Rodriguez had become very familiar with those trucks. They looked like ordinary Army machines, except that the rear compartment was enclosed in an iron box—an airtight iron box. Pipe the exhaust in there and people who got into the trucks didn't come out again . . . not alive, anyhow.

"They're gonna get rid of a hell of a lot o' niggers in this place," the man next to Rodriguez said. "*Hell* of a lot."

"You want to shut your mouth about that, Roy," somebody else told him. "We don't talk about that shit. If we do it amongst ourselves, we're liable to do it where the coons can hear us, and then we'll have

trouble." He'd learned his lessons well; the Freedom Party guards who'd trained them at the much smaller camp near Fort Worth had rammed that home again and again. "Far as the niggers know, when they get on those trucks, they're always going somewhere else."

"Yeah, yeah," Roy said impatiently. "Far as *I* know, they're all goin' to hell, and it damn well serves 'em right."

"Come on, come on." The bus driver sounded even more impatient than Roy did. "Y'all get your gear and get moving. I got to get moving myself, get the hell outa here and back towards where I live."

Rodriguez found the gray canvas bag with his last name and first initial stenciled on it in black paint. He slung it over his shoulder and joined the column of guards thumping toward what looked like the main gate, at least on this side of the square. Extra guard towers watched over it. Anyone who tried attacking it without a barrel would get chopped to hamburger.

The camp was already manned. A couple of the men at the gate lowered the muzzles of their submachine guns toward the ground. "New fish," one of them remarked.

"Don't look so new to me." His pal had the heartlessness of a man with all his hair and all his teeth.

"Sonny boy, I learned to mind my own business before you were a hard-on in your old man's dungarees," said a man from the Confederate Veterans' Brigade.

"I believe you, Pops," the guard answered. "Some people need as big a head start as they can get." He didn't smile when he said it.

Guards on duty and new arrivals glared at one another. Before anybody could get around to demanding papers and showing them—and before anybody could get around to tossing out more insults like grenades—a man with a deep voice spoke from inside the gate: "What's going on here? Are these the new guards they've been promising us? About goddamn time, that's all I've got to say."

As soon as the men at the gate heard that voice, they became all business. As soon as Hipolito Rodriguez heard it, he had to look around to remind himself that he wasn't in a trench somewhere even farther west in Texas, with damnyankee machine-gun bullets cracking by overhead and damnyankee shells screaming in.

Out through the gate came Jefferson Pinkard. He was older now, but so was Rodriguez. He had a good-sized belly and two or three chins and harsh lines on his face that hadn't been there in 1917. Back when Rodriguez was training, he'd heard that a man named Pinkard was high in the camp hierarchy. He'd wondered if it was the man he'd known. He didn't wonder anymore.

He took half a step out of line to draw Pinkard's eye to him, then said, "How are you, *Señor* Jeff?"

Pinkard eyed him for a moment without recognition. Then the big man's jaw dropped. "Hip Rodriguez, or I'm a son of a bitch!" he exclaimed, and thundered forward to fold Rodriguez into a bear hug. The two of them pounded each other on the back and cursed each other with the affection a lot of men can show no other way.

"Teacher's pet," said one of the guards who'd ridden on the bus with Rodriguez. But he made sure he sounded as if he was joking. If one of his comrades turned out to be a war buddy of the camp commandant's, he didn't want to seem to resent that, not if he knew which side his bread was buttered on.

When Pinkard let Rodriguez go, he said, "So you're here to help us deal with the damn niggers, are you? Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Rodriguez echoed automatically. He was used to saying it in English now instead of going, *¡Libertad!* the way he had down in Baroyeca. "*Sí, Señor* Jeff. That is why I have come."

"Good," Camp Determination's commandant told him. "We're gonna have us a hell of a lot of work to do, and we're just about ready to do it."

Since coming to Augusta near the end of the Great War, Scipio hadn't gone far from his adopted home. For one thing, he hadn't cared to go anywhere else; he'd made his life there, and hadn't wanted to wander off. And, for another, travel restrictions on Negroes had started tightening up again even before the Freedom Party came to power. They'd got much worse since.

Just how much worse, he discovered in detail when he went to the train station to buy a ticket for Savannah. The line for whites was much longer than the one for blacks, but it moved much, much faster. Whites just bought tickets and went off to the platforms to board their

trains. Blacks . . .

“Let me see your passbook, Uncle,” said the clerk behind the barred window. Scipio dutifully slid it over to him. The man made sure the picture matched Scipio’s face. “Xerxes,” he muttered, botching the alias the way most people did when they saw it in print. “What’s the purpose of your visit to Savannah, Uncle?”

“See my family there, suh,” Scipio said. He had no family in Savannah, but it was the safest reason to give.

The clerk grunted. “You got permission from your employer to be away from work?”

“Yes, suh.” Scipio produced a letter from Jerry Dover on Huntsman’s Lodge stationery authorizing him to be absent for one week.

Another grunt from the clerk. He jerked a thumb to the left. “Go on over there for search and baggage inspection.”

Scipio went “over there”: to a storeroom now adapted to another purpose. A railroad worker—a weathered fellow who couldn’t have been far from his own age—patted him down with almost obscene thoroughness. Two more white men of similar vintage pawed through his carpetbag.

“How come you do all dis?” Scipio asked the man who was groping him.

“So nobody sneaks a bomb on the train,” the white man answered matter-of-factly. “It’s happened a couple-three times. We’ve had to tighten up.” He turned to the men checking Scipio’s valise. “How’s it look?”

“He’s clean,” one of them said. “Bunch of junk, but it ain’t gonna go boom.”

Stung by that appraisal of his stuff, Scipio said, “Ask you one mo’ thing, suh?”

“Yeah?” The white man who’d searched him spoke with barely contained impatience. *Why are you bothering me, nigger?* lay at the bottom of it. But Scipio had sounded properly deferential, so the fellow let him go on.

“What you do when a lady come in here?”

“Oh.” The man laughed and gestured as if grasping a woman’s breasts from behind. Scipio nodded; that was what he’d meant. The frisker said, “We got a couple of gals who take care of that. Don’t you worry your head about it, Uncle. Just get on down to Platform Eight.”

“Thank you, suh.” Scipio picked up the carpetbag and headed for the platforms. The Confederate authorities—or maybe it was just the railroad employees—were shrewd. If they had white men groping black women, they would stir up trouble they didn’t need. They already stirred up a whole great storm of troubles; at best, life for Negroes in the CSA was one long affront. But it often wasn’t the sort of affront that made people flash into fury. Back in the days of slavery—the days into which Scipio had been born—white men did as they pleased with black women . . . and with black men who presumed to object. Resentment still simmered, ready to boil. The railroads didn’t turn up the heat under it.

The corridors were designed so that nobody could give Scipio anything while he was on the way from the inspection station to the platform. Some of the barriers were of new, unweathered wood. *We’ve had to tighten up lately,* the railroad man said. They seemed to have done a good job.

Several whites were already waiting on the platform. A couple of them sent Scipio suspicious glances. *Do you have a bomb? Did you sneak it past the inspectors? Will you blow us up?* For his part, he might have asked them, *If you send colored folks into camps, why don’t they come out again?*

He didn’t say anything, any more than they did. The questions hung in the air just the same. Despair pressed down heavily on Scipio. How were you supposed to make a country out of a place where two groups hated and feared each other, and where anybody could tell to which group anyone else belonged just by looking? The Confederate States of America had been working on that question for eighty years now, and hadn’t found an answer yet.

The Freedom Party thought it had. It said, *If only one group is left, the problem goes away.* The trouble was, the problem went away for only one group if you tried that solution. For the other, it got worse. No one in the Party seemed to lose any sleep over that.

More whites came onto the platform. So did a few more Negroes. The blacks all grouped themselves with Scipio, well away from the whites. Had they done anything else, they would have fallen into a category:

uppity niggers. Nobody in his right mind wanted to fall into that category these days.

A little blond boy pointed up the tracks. “Here comes the train!” He squeaked with excitement.

It rumbled into the station. Departing passengers got off, got their luggage, and left the platform by a route different from the one Scipio had used to get there. He and the other Negroes automatically headed for the last two cars in the train. They wouldn’t sit with whites, either: they knew better. And if the cars in which they sat were shabbier than the ones whites got to use, that was unlikely to be a surprise.

Rattles and jolts announced the train’s departure. It rolled south and east, the tracks paralleling the Savannah River. When Scipio looked across the river, he saw South Carolina. He shook his head. Even after all these years, he wasn’t safe in the state where he’d been born. Then he shook his head again. He wasn’t safe in Georgia, either.

Cotton country and pine woods filled the landscape between Augusta and Savannah. Scipio saw several plantation houses falling into ruin. Marshlands had done the same thing. Raising cotton on plantations wasn’t nearly so practical when the colored workforce was liable to rise up against you.

People got on and off at the stops between the two cities. Scipio wouldn’t have bet that God Himself knew the names of hamlets like McBean Depot, Sardis, and Hershman.

And, when the train was coming out of the pine woods surrounding Savannah, it rolled through a suburb called Yamacraw that seemed to be the more southerly town’s Terry. Negroes did what they could to get by in a country that wanted their labor but otherwise wished they didn’t exist. Drugstores in white neighborhoods sold aspirins and merthiolate and calamine lotion—respectable products that actually worked. Scipio saw a sign in Yamacraw advertising Vang-Vang Oil, Lucky Mojoe Drops of Love, and Mojoe Incense. He grimaced, ashamed of his own folk. Here were the ignorant preying on the even more ignorant.

As soon as he got on the east side of Broad Street, things changed. The houses, most of them of brick, looked as if they sprang from the eighteenth century. Live oaks with beards of moss hanging from their branches grew on expansive lawns. That moss declared that Savannah, its climate moderated by the Atlantic only fifteen miles away, was a

land that hardly knew what winter was.

“Savannah!” the conductor barked, hurrying through the colored cars as the train pulled into the station. “This here’s Savannah!” He didn’t quite come out and snap, *Now get the hell off my train, you lousy coons!* He didn’t, no, but he might as well have.

Scipio grabbed his carpetbag and descended. As at Augusta, the exit to the station kept him from having anything to do with boarding passengers. He gave the system grudging respect. That it should be necessary was a judgment on the Confederate States, but it did what it was designed to do.

Once he got out of the station, he stopped and looked at the sun, orienting himself. Forsyth Park was east and south of him. He walked towards it, wondering if a policeman would demand to see his papers. Sure enough, he hadn’t gone more than a block before it happened. He displayed his passbook, his train ticket, and the letter from Jerry Dover authorizing him to be away from the Huntsman’s Lodge. The cop looked them over, frowned, and then grudgingly nodded and gave them back. “You keep your nose clean, you hear?” he said.

“Yes, suh. I do dat, suh,” Scipio said. His Congaree River accent had marked him as a stranger in Augusta. It did so doubly here; from what little he’d heard of it, Savannah Negroes used a dialect almost incomprehensible to anyone who hadn’t grown up speaking it.

Forsyth Park was laid out like a formal French garden, with a rosette of paths going through it. With spring in the air, squirrels frisked through the trees. Pigeons plodded the paths, hoping for handouts. Flowering dogwood, wisteria, and azaleas brightened the greenery.

Scipio had to find the Albert Sidney Johnston monument. The Confederate general, killed at Pittsburg Landing, was something of a martyr, with statues and plaques commemorating him all over the CSA. In this one, he looked distinctly Christlike. Scipio fought the urge to retch.

He sat down on a wrought-iron bench not far from the statue. One of those importunate pigeons came up and eyed him expectantly. When he ignored it, he half expected it to crap on his shoes in revenge, but it didn’t. It just strutted away, head bobbing. *You’ll get yours,* it might have said, and it might have been right.

A squirrel overhead chittered at him. He ignored it, too. He had no certain notion how long he’d have to wait here, so he tried to look as

if he were comfortable, as if he belonged. Several white women and a few old men passed with no more than casual glances, so he must have succeeded. Very few white men between the ages of twenty and fifty were on the streets. If they weren't at the front, they were in the factories or on the farms.

"How do I get to Broad Street from here?" asked a woman with brown hair going gray.

"Ma'am, you goes west a few blocks, an' there you is," Scipio answered.

"Oh, dear. I was all turned around," the woman said. "I'm afraid I have no sense of direction, no sense of direction at all."

The code phrases were the ones Scipio had been waiting for. He hadn't expected a woman to say them. He wondered why not. Jerry Dover hadn't said anything about that one way or the other. A woman could do this as well as a man—maybe better, if she was less conspicuous. Scipio took a small envelope out of the hip pocket of his trousers. As casually as he could, he set it on the bench and looked in the other direction.

When he turned his head again, the envelope was gone. The woman was on her way toward Broad Street. No one else could have paid any attention to, or even seen, the brief encounter in the park. Scipio wasn't sure what he'd just done. Had he given the Confederate States a boost or a knee in the groin? He had no way of knowing, but he had his hopes.

IV

J efferson Pinkard was a happy man, happier than he had been since moving out to Texas to start putting up Camp Determination. For one thing, Edith Blades was coming out to Snyder with her boys before too long. That would be nice. She didn't want to marry Jeff till her husband was in the ground for a year, but he'd still be glad to have her close by instead of back in Louisiana.

And, for another, now he had a man he could trust absolutely among

the guards. “Hip Rodriguez!” he murmured to himself in glad surprise. He hadn’t seen the little greaser for twenty-five years, but that had nothing to do with anything. After what they’d been through together in Georgia and west Texas, he knew he could count on Rodriguez. He didn’t know how many times they’d saved each other’s bacon, but he knew damn well it was more than a few.

And he knew how important having somebody absolutely trustworthy was. Running prison camps was a political job, though he wouldn’t have thought so when he started it. And the higher he rose, the more political it got. When the only man over you was the Attorney General, you found yourself in politics and maneuvering up to your eyebrows, because Ferdinand Koenig was Jake Featherston’s right-hand man—and about two fingers’ worth of the left as well.

Back by Alexandria, Mercer Scott was heading up Camp Dependable these days. Scott had led the guard force when Jeff commanded the camp. He’d had his own ways to get hold of Richmond. No doubt the guard chief here did, too. The Freedom Party people at the top wanted to make sure they knew what was going on, so they had independent channels to help them keep up with things.

And if the guard chief started telling lies, or if he started scheming, having someone on your side in the guard force was like an insurance policy. Hip Rodriguez couldn’t have fit the bill better.

With a grunt, Pinkard got up from his desk and stretched. He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of the top drawer, lit one, started to put the pack back, and then stuck it in his pocket instead. He was about to start his morning prowl through the camp when the telephone rang.

“Who’s bothering me now?” he muttered as he picked it up. His voice got louder: “This here’s Pinkard.”

“Hello, Pinkard. This is Ferd Koenig in Richmond.”

“Yes, sir. What can I do for you, sir?” *Speak of the devil and he shows up on your front porch,* Jeff thought.

“I want to know how things are coming,” Koenig said, “and whether you can make a few changes in the way the camp’s laid out.”

“Things *were* coming fine, sir. There’s been no problem on shipments out of here,” Pinkard answered. *Shipments* was a nice, bloodless way to talk about Negroes sent off to be asphyxiated by the truckload. It kept him from thinking about what went on inside those trucks. He

didn't feel bloodless toward Ferd Koenig. If the son of a bitch thought he could run a Texas camp from Richmond . . . he might be right, because he had the authority to do it. Grinding his teeth, Pinkard asked, "What do you need changed?"

"Way you've got the place set up now, it's just for men—isn't that right?" the Attorney General said.

"Yes, sir. That's how all the camps have been, pretty much," Jeff replied. "Not a hell of a lot of women and pickaninnies packing iron against the government." There were some, but not many. He didn't know if there were separate camps for black women, or what. He guessed there were, but asking questions about things that were none of your business was discouraged—strongly discouraged.

"That's going to change." Koenig's voice was hard, flat, and determined. "You can bet your bottom dollar that's going to change, in fact. What's wrong with the CSA is that we've got too many niggers, period. Not troublemaking niggers, but niggers, period—'cause any nigger's liable to be a troublemaker. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Oh, you're right, sir, no doubt about it," Jeff said. Koenig was just quoting Freedom Party chapter and verse. Jake Featherston had been going on about niggers and what they deserved ever since he got up on the stump for the Party. Now he was keeping his campaign promises.

"All right," Koenig said. "If we're gonna get rid of 'em, we've got to have places to concentrate 'em till we can do the job. That means everybody we clean out of the countryside and the cities. Everybody. So can you separate off a section for the women?"

"I can if I have to," Pinkard replied; you didn't come right out and tell the big boss no, not if you wanted to hold on to your job you didn't. Thinking fast on his feet, he went on, "It'd mess things up here pretty bad, though, the way Determination is laid out now." *Ain't that the truth?* he thought. "What'd be better, I reckon, is building a camp for women right *alongside* the one we've got now. That way, we could start from scratch and do it right the first time. Lord knows we've got the land we need to do it."

He waited for Koenig to tell him all the reasons that wouldn't work. Not enough time was always a good one, and often even true. After perhaps half a minute's silence, the Attorney General said, "Can you have a perimeter up and a place for shipments to go out of ready in

ten days' time? They can sleep in tents or on the ground till you get the barracks built."

"Ten days? Oh, hell, yes, sir," Jeff said, trying not to show how pleased he was. He would have agreed to five if he had to. He hadn't expected Koenig to say yes at all.

But Koenig went on, "That's what I like to see—a man who'll show initiative. I told you one thing, but you had a different idea, and it looks to me like a better idea. Make sure you fix up this new camp so it's the same size as the one you've got now. It'll need to be."

"I'll take care of it," Pinkard promised, slightly dazed. "Uh—if you aim to do shipments out of two big camps like that, I'm gonna need more trucks. The ones I've got now won't begin to do the job."

"More trucks," Koenig echoed. Across all those miles, Jeff heard his pen scratching across paper. "You'll have 'em." Another pause. "Instead of building the new camp *right* alongside, why not put it across the railroad spur from the old one? That way, you can separate the niggers out soon as they get off the trains."

"I'd have to run another side of barbed wire that way, 'stead of using what we've got." Pinkard thought for a moment. "I'd need to get some dozers back again, too, to level out the ground over there."

"Can't you use the niggers you've got in the men's camp?" Koenig demanded.

"Well, I could, yeah, but dozers'd be a hell of a lot faster," Jeff replied. "I figured that mattered to you. If I'm wrong, you'll tell me."

Ferdinand Koenig paused once more. "No, you're not wrong. All right—fair enough. You'll have your bulldozers. And I'm going to bump you up a rank to brigade leader. That translates to brigadier general in regular Army ranks. You'll get a wreath around your stars, in other words. Congratulations. When you were in the Army the last time around, did you ever reckon you'd make general?"

"Hell, no. I never even worried about making corporal," Jeff answered, which was the God's truth. "Thank you very much, sir."

"You're welcome. A raise comes with the promotion. I expect you'll earn the money," Koenig said. "More responsibility comes with the promotion, too. You're going to be in charge of a really big operation out there, and a really important one, too. I wouldn't do this if I didn't

think you could swing it.”

“I’ll do my damnedest, sir,” Pinkard said. “It’s for the Party and it’s for the country. You can count on me.”

“I do. So does the President. You’ve shown you’ve got what it takes,” Koenig said, which made Jeff button-popping proud. The Attorney General went on, “Those bulldozers and their crews’ll show up in the next few days. You tell ’em what needs doing, and they’ll do it. Anything else you need—barbed wire, lumber, whatever it is—you holler, and you’ll have it. If you don’t, somebody’s head’ll roll, and it won’t be yours. Freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jeff echoed the Party slogan, but he was talking to a dead line.

He got up from his desk, stretched, and went to the window. Out beyond the barbed wire, and out beyond the railroad spur and the road that ran alongside it, what was there to see? Nothing but more prairie—sagebrush and tumbleweed and jackrabbits and little gullies that turned into torrents when it rained. Leveling them out would be the dozers’ main job. They could do it, and it wouldn’t take long.

“Son of a bitch,” he said softly. “A women’s camp.” They were serious back there in Richmond. He’d known they were serious—he wouldn’t have been a Freedom Party man if they weren’t—but he hadn’t known they were *that* serious. If they kept on the way they were going, there wouldn’t be a Negro left in the CSA before too long.

Pinkard shrugged as he headed out the door. He wouldn’t shed a whole lot of tears if that happened. If there weren’t any Negroes, white men wouldn’t have to worry about them taking away their jobs. They wouldn’t have to worry about Negroes eyeing white women. And they wouldn’t have to worry about Red uprisings. He’d got his baptism of fire in 1916 against Red Negro rebels in Georgia. They’d fought harder than the damnyankees had. Of course, the USA and CSA took prisoners. Neither side in the black uprisings had bothered with that very often. So . . . good riddance to bad rubbish.

Out into the sunshine he went. Spring was in the air, but the sun wasn’t biting down with full force yet. He’d grown up in Alabama and spent time in Louisiana. Texas summer was no fun for anybody, but it wouldn’t be any worse than what he was used to.

With several submachine-gun-toting guards at his back, he did his usual prowl through Camp Determination. That he did it was normal.

How he did it wasn't. He tried not to make his rounds the same two days running. He'd stick his head into barracks halls, or he'd go through the kitchens, or he'd go around just inside the perimeter checking for signs of tunneling, or he'd talk with prisoners, or . . . He never knew ahead of time. He just followed whatever gut feeling he had.

The Negroes had found they could complain to him if they stayed respectful. "Suh, we needs mo' food," a skinny black man said. He didn't ask for better food; that was obviously a lost cause.

"You're getting what I can give you," Jeff said, which was more or less true. "If I get more in, you'll get more, too." That was also true, although he didn't expect to see the camp's supply increased. To drive the point home, he added, "I can't make you any promises, mind."

"Do what you can, suh, please," the black man said. Pinkard nodded and went on to the next barracks hall. The Negroes there grumbled about the food, too. Jeff listened and nodded and again said he'd do something if he got the chance. As long as they were grumbling about the food and not about the trucks that transported them to other camps, everything was fine. The trucks were what really mattered—and the Negroes didn't seem to know it.

F or once, Cincinnatus Driver felt as if he were leading a charmed life. The Confederates had arrested him—and they'd let him go. To him, that went a long way toward proving white men weren't as smart as they thought they were. He might even find himself on the U.S. border one of these days before too long. He dared hope, anyhow.

Meanwhile . . . Meanwhile, life went on in Covington's colored quarter. It wasn't much of a life. Even compared to what he remembered of times before the Great War, it wasn't much of a life. He shrugged. He couldn't do much about that. He couldn't do anything about it, in fact. All he could do was try to get through from day to day.

He thought about staying away from Lucullus Wood's barbecue place. He thought about it, but found he couldn't do it. His showing up there wouldn't make alarm bells go off at the police station. The only Negroes who didn't show up there were the unlucky ones too poor to afford any of Lucullus' barbecue.

He hoped—he prayed—he wouldn't see Luther Bliss at the barbecue

place anymore. He hated, despised, and feared the former head of the Kentucky State Police. Of course, he also hated, despised, and feared the Confederate States of America. Bliss was one of the CSA's sincerest and ablest enemies—and gave Cincinnatus the cold horrors just the same.

If the Confederate police didn't have informers posted in the barbecue joint, they were missing an obvious trick. Despite the risk, talk there was freer than anywhere else in Covington that Cincinnatus knew about.

By now, everybody who worked in the place recognized him when he came in. More than a few people also recognized that he had a special connection with Lucullus. They would always find a seat for him, even when the ramshackle restaurant was packed. He got extra barbecue when he ordered, and some of the time they didn't bother charging him. He'd always been a man who paid his own way, but he appreciated that now, because he didn't have a whole lot of money.

Policemen and Freedom Party stalwarts came into Lucullus' place, too. They also recognized Cincinnatus—recognized him and left him alone. They'd caught him once, and it hadn't stuck. Not all of them understood why it hadn't stuck, but they knew it hadn't. They were no more energetic than most mere mortals. They didn't feel like doing anything they didn't have to.

Lucullus came up to Cincinnatus while he was eating a big plate of beef ribs. The barbecue cook was a massive man, muscle more overlain by fat with each passing year. Who could blame him for liking his own cooking? Everyone else did, too. His father, Apicius, had been even wider and thicker.

Cincinnatus set down a rib. "Afternoon," he said.

"Afternoon." Lucullus had a big, deep voice that went with his bulk. "Mind if I join you?"

"You throw me out on my ear if I'm dumb enough to tell you yes in your own place," Cincinnatus said. "I done plenty o' dumb things in my time, but nothin' dumb as that."

"Glad to hear it." Lucullus squeezed into the booth, across the table from him. He waved to one of the waitresses. "Bring me a cup of coffee, would you, Aspasia honey, when you git the chance?" Nodding, the woman waved back.

The coffee arrived faster than *when you git the chance.* Cincinnatus hadn't expected anything different. When the boss asked for something, only a fool kept him waiting—and Lucullus wasn't the sort to put up with fools. Casually, Cincinnatus asked, "So what do you hear from Luther Bliss?"

He'd timed it well; Lucullus was just taking a sip. The cook choked, but the coffee didn't—quite—go up his nose. After managing to swallow, Lucullus sent him a reproachful stare. "Damn you, you done that on purpose."

"Who, me?" Cincinnatus was innocence personified—not easy for a black man on the wrong side of fifty with a ruined leg. But he'd been only partly malicious. "What *do* you hear from him?" he asked again.

Lucullus didn't bother pretending he hadn't had anything to do with the white man with the mahogany eyes of a hunting hound. "Says he owes you one on account of you done that truck for him."

The truck had held mines that went into the Licking River. At least one of them had blown a Confederate gunboat sky-high. The news should have gladdened Cincinnatus' heart. And so it did, in fact. All the same, he said, "Reckon I owe Luther Bliss more'n one."

"Mebbe." Lucullus calmly filched one of the ribs off Cincinnatus' plate and took a bite out of it. Fiery barbecue sauce ran down his chin—an occupational hazard. "How come you didn't spill your guts to the Confederates when they done grabbed you, you feel that way?"

Cincinnatus couldn't squawk at Lucullus' scrounging, not after all the free food the other man let him have. As for the other . . . "Well, I didn't know where the bastard was at, or I might have."

"Better be more to it than that," Lucullus said severely.

There was, no matter how little Cincinnatus wanted to admit it. Scowling, he said, "Don't reckon I'd tell the Confederates where a *dog* was at, let alone a son of a bitch like that one."

Laughing, Lucullus said, "That's better." He lit a cigarette.

"Gimme one o' them things," Cincinnatus said. Lucullus did, and leaned across the table so Cincinnatus could take a light from his. After a long, satisfying drag, Cincinnatus added, "You don't know you're playin' with a rattlesnake there, on account of I ain't told you."

“He is one, sure enough.” Lucullus sounded more pleased than otherwise. He explained why: “Dat man be a serpent, sure enough, but he be *our* serpent. He don’t bite niggers. He bites Confederates, an’ they shrivels up an’ dies.”

That wasn’t quite literally true, but it made a telling metaphor. Cincinnatus wanted no part of it, or of Luther Bliss. “He done bit me,” he said angrily.

“Well, but he reckon mebbe you got somethin’ to do with them Confederate diehards back then.” Lucullus cocked his head to one side and studied Cincinnatus. “Plenty other folks reckon the same thing. My pa, he was one of ’em.”

And Cincinnatus *had* had something to do with them, not that he intended to admit it now. “That man steal two years outa my life,” he growled. “You reckon I gonna trust him far as I can throw him after that?”

“Trust him to give the Freedom Party a boot in the balls,” Lucullus said. “He do dat every chance he git.”

Before Cincinnatus could answer, a gray-haired, stooped, weary-looking black man came into the barbecue place. One of the small hells of Cincinnatus’ injuries was that he couldn’t jump to his feet. He had to make do with waving. “Pa! I’m over here! What is it?”

But he knew what it was, what it had to be. Seneca Driver didn’t only look weary. He looked as if he’d just staggered out of a traffic accident. “She gone, son,” he said as Cincinnatus did fight his way upright. “Your mama gone.” Tears ran unnoticed down his face.

Lucullus had risen, too. He set a hand on Cincinnatus’ shoulder. “Sorry to hear the news,” he said in a low voice. “Why don’t you set your pa down, he tell you what happened.”

Numbly, Cincinnatus obeyed. As numbly, his father accepted the cup of coffee Aspasia brought him. His hands added cream and sugar. Cincinnatus didn’t think he knew they were doing it. He said, “She done laid down for her nap—”

“I know,” Cincinnatus broke in, wanting to say something. “She was asleep when I went out.”

“Uh-huh.” His father nodded. He sipped from the coffee, then stared at it in surprise, as if wondering how it had got there. “Sometimes I’m

glad when she go to sleep, on account of I don't got to worry none fo' the nex' little while."

"I understand that," Cincinnatus said. "Feel the same way my ownself."

"But she don't usually sleep this long," Seneca said. "I go in to see how she is, an'—" He wrinkled his nose. "I don't think nothin' special of it, on account of she makin' messes a while now."

"Yeah." Cincinnatus looked down at the gnawed ribs on the plate in front of him. His mother had cleaned him when he was a baby. He'd found cleaning her one of the cruelest parts of her slide into senility.

"I put my hand on her shoulder, an' she gettin' cold," his father said. "Jus' like somebody blowed out a candle. She go easy. I bless the good Lord fo' dat. Pray to Jesus I go so easy when my time come."

Cincinnatus made himself nod. Grief and relief warred inside him, along with shame that he should feel relief. "It's over now," he said, and choked on his own tears.

Aspasia brought Seneca a plate of ribs. "Why, thank you, child," he said in mild surprise. "You didn't have to do nothin' like that."

"On the house," she said softly. "You need anything else, you jus' sing out, you hear?" She hurried away.

As automatically as he'd fixed the coffee to suit him, Seneca started to eat. He said, "What am I gonna do without your mother?"

"Got to let the undertaker know," Cincinnatus said.

"I do *dat.*" His father sounded impatient, almost irritable. "Yeah, I do *dat.* But so what? Your mama an' me, we been together close to sixty years. Now she ain't there no more." He waved before Cincinnatus could speak, so Cincinnatus didn't. "I know she ain't hardly been here this las' couple years, but it ain't the same. It just ain't." He started crying again, as unknowingly as he had before.

"Maybe we get you up into Iowa," Cincinnatus said. "Start everything all over up there. You got great-grandchildren you never seen."

"I don't believe no ofays. I especially don't believe no Confederate ofay *po*liceman," Seneca Driver replied with a shrug.

“Even if he lied, maybe we get there on our own.” Cincinnatus knew it would be easier—not easy, but easier—with his mother gone. He didn’t say that; even thinking it gave his relief and shame fresh ammunition.

“We see.” His father sounded altogether indifferent. “Got other things to fret about right now.”

With Cincinnatus at his side, he arranged them. The funeral was four days later, on a bright spring day. Cincinnatus wore a suit he’d brought down from Des Moines. It wasn’t funereally dark, but it was the only one he had. None of the neighbors and friends who’d come presumed to say anything about it.

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” the preacher intoned. “God bless and keep Livia Driver, who is free of the evils of this world and free to enjoy a kinder one beyond. We pray for her in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

“Amen,” Cincinnatus echoed. Preachers always said such things. He knew that. But for a Negro in the CSA, the evils of this world were altogether too real.

P art of Clarence Potter wished he hadn’t gone to school in the USA. It wasn’t that he begrudged the education; he didn’t. Yale was a first-rate school. Back before the Great War, quite a few Confederates and Yankees had studied in each other’s homelands. Some people had thought that would bring the CSA and USA closer together. It hadn’t. It never would. They were as different as chalk and Friday.

So it seemed to a patriot from either one, anyhow. Potter, despite his own differences with the government he served, certainly qualified. But not even the most ardent patriot from either country could deny that they were similar in some important ways, too, language high on the list.

Potter listened to a sergeant talking. “Where did you learn to sound like a damnyankee?” he asked.

“Sir, I grew up in Pittsburgh,” the noncom answered. “My father was in the tobacco business, and he lived up there. Wasn’t much fun when I came down here, because I already had the accent, and people got on me for it.”

“I believe that,” Potter said. Somebody else would have to check the

man's story. If it was true, it accounted for the accent. If it wasn't, it was outstanding cover for the Yankees to sneak one of their own into a secret Confederate operation.

But that wasn't Potter's worry, or not directly. All he could do was note the possibility. Somebody else *would* have to deal with it. His job was checking the way the sergeant sounded. And the man sounded pretty good to him. He scribbled notes in a loose-leaf binder, then nodded to the sergeant.

"I think you may well hear back from us," he said.

"I hope so, sir," the man said, still sounding much too much like a damnyankee for comfort. "This sounds like a good way to give the United States a good, stiff kick in the nuts."

Potter hadn't said much about the operation. The sergeant, however, plainly had the brains to add two and two and get something close to four. "If you do hear from us, you'll get the details then," Potter told him.

He also had the brains not to ask too many questions. He said, "I hope I do, sir," saluted, and left the underground room in the War Department.

Instead of calling in another candidate, Potter telephoned Nathan Bedford Forrest III. The chief of the Confederate General Staff said, "Forrest here. What can I do for you, General?"

"You've already done it, sir," Potter said. "You've got me playing God for these fellows you're recruiting."

"And so?" Forrest said. "This isn't the first time you've had to select people for a dangerous mission. That's part of your job."

"Oh, yes, sir," Potter agreed. "Usually, though, the men I pick and choose from aren't so eager as these kids. They're going to get killed. Some of them will get a blindfold and a cigarette if they're lucky, or a bullet in the back of the head if they aren't. But they don't care. I could give you a division if willingness were all it took."

"Well, willingness damn well isn't," Forrest said. "These man have got to be *good.* They'll have to convince Yankees that they're Yankees. We don't want just anybody here. We want men who can get well behind enemy lines and raise hell."

“I understand that. There was a fellow a couple of days ago who’d played a Yankee two or three times in amateur theatricals down in Mississippi.” Potter sighed. “He was every bit as bad as that would make you think, but he didn’t believe it. He got mad as hops when I told him he’d have to fight the war the regular way.”

Forrest laughed, not that it was really funny. “Amateur theatricals, eh? I believe you—you couldn’t make that up. He must have convinced *somebody* he could sound like he came from the USA, or he never would have got as far as you.”

“I suppose he did.” Potter drummed his fingers on the binder. “Have to see who he did convince, and weed that man out—whoever he is, he’s got a tin ear.” He wrote himself another note.

“You think of everything, don’t you?” Forrest said admiringly.

“Don’t I wish I did? If I’m so smart, how come I’m not rich?” Potter said. Forrest laughed, though again he wasn’t joking. He went on, “I’m just trying to stay one step ahead of the damnyankees.”

“We’ll be farther ahead of them than that if things go the way I hope they do,” Lieutenant General Forrest said.

Potter almost asked what kind of things the chief of the General Staff had in mind. He refrained at the last moment, at least as much because he feared Forrest would tell him as because he feared Forrest wouldn’t. He didn’t have a need to know, no matter how badly he wanted to know. He didn’t want to make Forrest responsible for breaching security. *I really have spent too much time in Intelligence,* he thought.

Instead of prodding at things that weren’t his proper concern, he asked something that was relevant: “Any sign the United States are training infiltrators who wear butternut?”

He got silence on the line for about half a minute. Then Forrest said, “Thank you for reminding me that anything we can do to the USA, the USA can do to us. No, General, I haven’t had any reports like that. But just because I haven’t had them doesn’t mean the damn-yankees aren’t doing something like that. They could, couldn’t they?”

“Oh, yes—maybe more easily than we could,” Potter answered. Kentuckians loyal to the USA had no trouble sounding as if they came from Confederate Tennessee. Men from the less mountainous parts of West Virginia sounded like their Virginia neighbors. And the United

States had their share of people who'd grown up in the Confederate States or gone to school here.

"One more thing we'll have to watch out for," Forrest said mournfully. "The President won't be jumping up and down when he hears about it."

"No, he won't," Potter agreed. "But I'll tell you one thing: he'll be a lot angrier if you don't tell him about it till it ups and bites you, if it does."

"You're likely right," Forrest said.

"Yes, I think so," Potter said. He'd known Jake Featherston longer than even the President's oldest Freedom Party buddies. He didn't know Featherston so deeply, but he'd spent a lot of time brooding over what the head of the Freedom Party was likely to do next, and he'd been right more often than he'd been wrong.

"All right, then. I will pass it along," Forrest said. "And I'll try to make sure no more ham actors get as far as you. So long." He didn't quite suppress a snort before hanging up.

It *was* funny. Potter couldn't deny that, though he'd been annoyed at the inept Mississippian and even more annoyed at the officer who'd passed the man. That officer would soon find himself in a new assignment. Potter didn't know whether it would be defusing mines with his teeth or just counting thumbtacks in Georgia or Alabama or somewhere else far away from the real war. Wherever it was, the fellow wouldn't have anything to do with this project.

At the moment, Clarence Potter didn't want to have anything more to do with this project, either. He suddenly seemed to feel the weight of the whole War Department pressing down on him. If he didn't get out, he thought he'd suffocate. That set of symptoms had afflicted other men who worked in the subbasement, but never him, not till now.

Rank had its privileges. If he felt like getting out, he could, and he didn't have to ask anyone's permission. He blinked a little when he came out into Richmond in broad daylight. He might have been a suddenly unearthed mole. When *was* the last time he'd been out and about with the sun in the sky? He couldn't remember, which wasn't a good sign.

Propaganda posters sprouted everywhere: on walls, on fences, on doors. They cursed the enemy and exhorted people to work hard and

keep their mouths shut. One of them, an idealized portrait of Jake Featherston (and Potter, who saw Featherston fairly often, knew how idealized it was), simply said, THE PRESIDENT KNOWS. That gave Potter something to think about; he suspected it would have given anybody something to think about. Another one showed two bestial-looking Negroes with knives sneaking up on a house where a blond woman slept. LOOK OUT! it warned. The Intelligence officer nodded to himself—there was a good piece of propaganda.

The city of Richmond, now that he was actually looking around, seemed to have taken a worse beating already in this war than it had all through the Great War. Clarence Potter didn't know why that surprised him, but it did. Bombers could rain far more death down onto the ground than they'd been able to a generation earlier. They carried bigger bombs farther, faster, and higher, so they were harder to shoot down. And there were more of them than there had been. It showed.

Buildings that still had glass in their windows were the lucky ones. Some people had replaced the glass with sheets of plywood. Others made do with cardboard, which was fine till it got wet. Quite a few hadn't patched the wounds with anything. *Those* buildings, even when otherwise undamaged, seemed to look out on the world with dead eyes.

A lot of motorcars were missing glass from their windows, too. Patching them with plywood wasn't practical. People made do, not that they had much choice.

Bomb damage beyond broken windows was scattered almost at random throughout Richmond. Here a building would have a chunk bitten out of it or a street would be cordoned off with sawhorses to keep automobiles from diving into a hole in the pavement eight feet deep and thirty feet across. Gangs of Negroes directed by whites with submachine guns worked with picks and shovels to clear rubble and repair roads.

Every now and then, most of a city block of buildings was gone, smashed to matchsticks and bricks and rubbish. Men and women sifted through the rubbish, trying to find fragments of the lives they'd just had blown to smithereens. A girl of about six clutched in her arms a rag doll she'd just picked up and did a triumphant, defiant dance. *Take that,* Potter thought, looking north. The damnyankees might have wrecked her home, but she'd found her best friend again.

Despite the wreckage, morale seemed good. Men and women on the street often greeted Potter with calls of, “Freedom!” He had to return the same answer, too, which made his sense of irony twinge. His rank drew notice. “We’ll get ’em, General,” one man said. “Don’t you worry about it.”

“Yankees can’t lick us,” a woman declared. “We’re tougher’n they are.”

Potter made himself nod and agree whenever someone said something like that. He also thought any one Confederate was likely to be tougher than any one Yankee. Did that mean the USA couldn’t lick the CSA? He wished he thought so. There were a lot more Yankees than Confederates. Jake Featherston had hoped to knock the United States out of the fight in a hurry. It hadn’t quite worked.

Now it was a grapple. The Confederates still had an edge, but it wasn’t so big as Potter would have liked. *The United States* can *lick us,* he thought. *They’d just better not, is all.*

M ary Pomeroy sat in a jail cell in Winnipeg, waiting for the other shoe to drop. That it would, she had no doubt. They’d caught her red-handed this time. And, of course, now that they had caught her red-handed, Wilf Rokeby’s charges looked a lot different. They hadn’t believed the retired postmaster when he said she’d sent a bomb through the mail. They hadn’t—but they sure did now.

A rugged matron in a green-gray blouse and skirt—a woman’s U.S. uniform—led two male guards up the corridor toward her. “Your lawyer is here,” she announced. “You have half an hour to talk with him.”

“Thanks a lot,” Mary said. Sarcasm rolled off the matron like rain off a goose. She opened the door. Mary came out through it; if she hadn’t, the matron would have slammed it shut again. Anything was better than just sitting on the rickety cot in there.

The guards pointed the rifles at Mary as she went up the hall. They looked ready to start shooting at any excuse or none. They no doubt were, too. She almost wished they would. If she went up before a real firing squad, she’d have to try to be as brave as Alexander was. *Maybe I’ll see him up in heaven,* she thought.

Heavy wire mesh kept her from doing anything but talking with the

lawyer. His name was Clarence Smoot; the military judge in charge of her case had appointed him. He was plump and bald and looked prosperous. Maybe that meant he got clients off every once in a while. Mary didn't expect he'd be able to do much for her. She knew she was guilty, and so did the Yanks.

"Half an hour," the matron barked again. "From now. Clock's ticking."

"Oh, shut up, you miserable dyke," Clarence Smoot muttered, loud enough for Mary but not for the matron to hear. The lawyer raised his voice then: "Shall we talk about your chances, Mrs. Pomeroy?"

"Have I got any?" Mary asked bleakly.

"Well . . . you may," Smoot said, fiddling with the knot on his gaudy necktie. "They can't *prove* you blew up Laura Moss and her little girl. They may think so"—*and they may be right, too,* Mary thought—"but they can't prove it. All they can prove is that you had explosives when they caught you, and that those explosives were well hidden. You won't get away with saying you were going to blow up stumps or anything like that."

"They won't listen to me no matter what I say." Mary was more nearly resigned than bitter. "I'm Arthur McGregor's daughter and I'm Alexander McGregor's sister. And now they've got me."

"They may not apply the maximum penalty—"

"Shoot me, you mean."

Clarence Smoot looked pained. "Well, yes." *But you don't have to come right out and say it,* his attitude suggested. "Colonel Colby is a fairly reasonable man, for a military judge."

"Oh, boy!" Mary put in.

"He is," Smoot insisted. "Compared to some of the Tartars they've got . . ." His shudder made his jowls wobble. "If you throw yourself on the mercy of the court, I think he'd be glad enough to let you live."

"In jail for the rest of my life?" Mary said. Reluctantly, Smoot nodded. She shook her head. "No, thanks. I'd sooner they gave me a blindfold and got it over with."

"Are you sure?" Smoot asked. "Do you want your husband to have to bury you? Do you want your mother and your husband and your sister

and your son to have to go to the funeral? If you do, you'll be able to get what you want. I don't think there's any doubt of that."

Mary winced. He was hitting below the belt. Alec was too little to understand what all this meant. His mother was in a wooden box and they were putting her in the ground forever? That would have to be a bad dream, except it wouldn't be. It would be real, and when he grew up he would hardly remember her.

But some things were more important. If she'd thought they would let her out one day before too long, she might have weakened. With nothing but endless years in a cell as an alternative, though . . . "My brother didn't beg. My father didn't beg. I'll be damned if I'm going to."

Clarence Smoot exhaled heavily and lit a cigarette. "You don't give me much to work with, Mrs. Pomeroy."

"I'm sorry," she said. Then she shook her head again. "I'm sorry they caught me. That's the only thing I'm sorry for. They've got no business being here. *You've* got no business being here. You're a Yank, eh? You talk like one."

"I'm from Wisconsin. Up till now, I didn't know that made me a bad person." Smoot's voice was dry. He eyed her. "Would you rather have a Canadian lawyer bumping up against an American military judge? I don't think that would do you an awful lot of good, but you can probably find one."

"What I want . . ." Mary took a deep breath. "What I *want* is for all you Yanks to get out of Canada and leave us alone to mind our own business. That's what I've wanted since 1914."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Pomeroy, but that's not going to happen. It's way too late to even worry about it," Clarence Smoot said. "We're not going to go away. And the reason we won't is that you wouldn't mind your own business if we did. You'd start playing footsie with the Confederates or England or Japan, and you'd make all kinds of trouble for us. We don't aim to let that happen."

"Can you blame us?" Mary exclaimed. "After everything the United States have done to my country, can you blame us?"

Smoot spread his pudgy hands. He wore a wedding ring; Mary hoped he wasn't married to a Canadian woman. "Whether I can blame you doesn't matter," he said. "Whether the United States are going to take

that kind of chance . . . well, they won't, so there's no point even thinking about it."

That was how a Yank *would* think. Before Mary could tell him so, the matron stuck her formidable face into the room and said, "Time's up."

Mary's time nearly *was* up. She felt it very strongly. Smoot said, "We'll do the best we can at your hearing. The less you say, the better your chances. I can see that plain as day."

In tramped the guards. They didn't point their rifles at Mary this time, but they looked as if they were just about to. "When I say that's it, that's it," the matron barked, her voice almost as deep as Smoot's.

"Take it easy, Ilse," the lawyer said soothingly. But the matron wasn't inclined to take it easy. She jerked a muscular thumb toward the door. Mary got up and went. If she hadn't, the matron would have made her pay for it—oh, not right there where Smoot could see, but later on. The food would be worse, or Mary wouldn't get to bathe, or maybe the matron would just come in and thump her. She didn't know what would happen, only that it wouldn't be good.

They took her to the hearing in an armored personnel carrier, a snorting monster of a vehicle only one step this side of a barrel. If they had to use it here, they weren't using it against their foreign enemies. That consoled her a little—as much as anything could.

Colonel Colby was a Yank in a uniform. That was all that registered on her at first. Another, younger, Yank, a captain named Fitzwilliams, prosecuted her. He laid out what her family connections were. Clarence Smoot objected. "Irrelevant and immaterial," he said.

"Overruled," the military judge said. "This establishes motive." The worst of it was, Mary knew he wasn't wrong. She hated the Yanks for what they'd done to her country and what they'd done to her family.

Captain Fitzwilliams set out the case linking her to the bombing at Karamanlides' general store (she thought they'd forgotten all about that one) and to the one that killed Laura and Dorothy Moss. Smoot objected to that, too. "The only kind of evidence you've got is the testimony of a man who is obviously biased," he insisted.

"Why obviously?" Fitzwilliams asked. "Because he doesn't agree with you? It doesn't matter much anyhow. She was caught with explosives in the barn on the farm where her mother lived. Bomb-making is—and should be—a capital crime all by itself. The other charges are icing on

the cake." By the pained way Smoot grunted, he knew that only too well.

"Does the defendant have anything to say in mitigation or extenuation?" the judge asked. He sounded as if he hoped she did. That surprised her. As Clarence Smoot had said, he wasn't a monster, only a man doing his job.

Smoot nudged Mary. "This is your chance," he whispered. "Think of your little boy."

She hated him then, for trying to deflect her from what she intended to do. She had to steel herself to tell the judge, "No. I did what I did, and you'll do what you do. If you think I love my country any less than you love yours, you're wrong."

Colonel Colby looked at her. "A plea for mercy might affect the verdict this court hands down." It wasn't that he wanted her to beg. He wanted her to live.

"You can give me the same mercy you showed Alexander," she said.

The military judge sighed. "Why do you want to martyr yourself? It won't change anything one way or the other."

"You have no right to be here. You have no right to try me," Mary said.

"We have the best right of all: we won," Colby said. "If your side had, would you have been gentle to the United States? I doubt it." Mary hadn't even thought about that. It didn't worry her, either. Colby let out a long, sad sigh. "I have no choice but to pronounce you guilty, Mrs. Pomeroy. The punishment for the infraction is death by firing squad."

"We will appeal, your Honor," Smoot said quickly.

"No." Mary overruled him, or tried to.

"An appeal in a capital case is automatic," Colby told her. "Part of me hopes I will be overruled. I must say, though, I don't expect to be."

They took Mary back to her cell. They allowed her no visitors. That was more a relief than a torment. She didn't want to see Mort, and she especially didn't want to see Alec. He might have made her weaken. She didn't think she could stand that, not when she'd come so far.

Colonel Colby knew what he was talking about. The appeal was denied. The panel that heard it ordered the sentence carried out, and so it was, on a sunny day with spring in the air. Mary knew she should have been afraid when they tied her to the pole, but she wasn't.

They offered her a blindfold. She shook her head, saying, "This is for Canada. I'll take it with my eyes open."

A minister prayed. She wondered why the Yanks had him here when they were doing something so ungodly. An officer commanded the men in the squad: "Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!" The noise was shattering. So was the impact. And then it was over.

G uards at the Andersonville prison camp often let U.S. POWs see Confederate papers. Sometimes they would offer their own editorial comments, too. They jeered whenever the CSA did something good. If the USA scored a success, it never showed up in the news in the Confederate States.

The guards also jeered at what they called U.S. atrocities. "Look at this here," one of them said, waving a newspaper at Major Jonathan Moss. "Now you people are shooting women up in Canada."

Moss glared at him. "Are you going to let me see it, or are you just going to flap it in my face?" The guard blinked, then handed him the paper, which came from Atlanta. Where Confederate newspapers came from hardly mattered. They all had the same stories in them: whatever the Freedom Party wanted the Confederate people to hear.

Moss read the story. The way the reporter told it, Mary Pomeroy was a martyr whose like the world hadn't seen since St. Sebastian. That the damnyankees alleged she'd blown up a woman and a little girl in Berlin, Ontario, only proved what a pack of liars and murderers came out of the United States.

So the reporter said, anyhow. It proved something different to Jonathan Moss. He thrust the paper under his arm without a word. "Well?" the Confederate asked him. "What have you got to say about that there?"

"She had it coming." Moss' voice was hard and flat.

The guard gaped at him. "How can even a damnyankee say such a heartless thing as that?"

“Because she murdered my wife and my daughter, you cracker son of a bitch.” Moss braced himself. If the guard wanted to mop the floor with him, he could. The fellow was bigger than he was and only half his age—and carried a submachine gun besides.

But the guard’s gape only got wider. “She killed—*your* kinfolk?” He sounded as if he couldn’t believe his ears.

“That’s what I told you,” Moss answered. “It’s the God’s truth, too. If she hadn’t done that, I’d probably still be up in Canada. I’d be a damn sight happier than I am now, too. I wish I’d been up there even now. I’d have stood in that firing squad. I’d have pulled that trigger. You bet your life I would have.”

He wondered if the guard would call him heartless again. The man didn’t. He just went off shaking his head. *That’ll teach you to wave a newspaper in somebody’s face, you know-nothing bastard,* Moss thought savagely.

He was avenged. After a couple of years without any movement, he’d doubted he ever would be. *And so?* he wondered. Was he any happier because this woman was dead? He would gladly have killed her, yes, but was he happier? Slowly, he shook his head. That wasn’t the right word. He’d never be happy, not thinking of Laura and Dorothy dead. But he had a sense of satisfaction he hadn’t known before. It would have to do.

Of course it will, you fool. It’s all you’ll ever get. His wife and his daughter wouldn’t come back. And neither would the woman who’d sent them the bomb. From what the Confederate newspaper said, she had a husband and a little boy. They’d miss her the way he missed his wife and daughter. There was no end to this. Try as you would to find one, there wasn’t any.

He read the story over and over. Rosenfeld, Manitoba . . . That rang a bell. He nodded to himself. Wasn’t that where that fellow tried to blow up General Custer and ended up blowing himself up instead? Moss was pretty sure it was, though it had happened almost twenty years earlier. Was this gal any relation to that bomber? He didn’t remember the fellow’s name, but he was pretty sure it wasn’t Pomeroy. But then, the woman was married, and the paper didn’t say anything about her maiden name.

It wouldn’t. If she was related to the other Rosenfeld bomber, that would make her a murderer from a family of murderers. Somebody

like that wouldn't draw sympathy even from the Confederates. And so, if it was true, the C.S. propaganda machine just ignored it.

Here came that guard again. He had another one in tow. The second man, as Jonathan saw when he got closer, was an officer. He strode up to Moss. "What's this I hear?" he demanded.

"I don't know," Moss answered. "What do you hear?"

"Conley here tells me you're related to the people this woman the Yankees shot is alleged to have blown up."

"Alleged?" The word made Moss furious. "I heard the explosion. I saw the building—and some of the other people she hurt while they were getting out. I buried what was left of my wife and little girl. Don't you talk to me about alleged, goddammit."

The guard officer gave back a pace. He hadn't expected such vehemence. *Well, too bad for him,* Moss thought. Weakly, he said, "How do you know she really did it?"

"I don't know for sure." Now Moss did some paper-waving of his own. "But I'm a lawyer. It sure looks beyond a reasonable doubt to me."

"A lawyer? How'd you get captured? Couldn't run away fast enough?" The officer laughed at his own wit.

"I'm a fighter pilot. I fought at the front line or on your side of it," Moss answered coldly. "I wasn't making like a hero in a prison camp hundreds of miles away." The guard officer retreated in disorder.

Moss started to throw the Atlanta paper to the ground, then checked himself. It might not be anything he'd wanted to keep—he had his vengeance, and now he knew it, but the price he'd paid!—but that didn't mean the paper was useless. Torn into strips, it would come in handy at the latrine trenches.

He didn't intend to say anything about the story to his fellow POWs. It was none of their business. But either the guard who'd given him the paper or the officer he'd routed must have blabbed, for the other prisoners found out about it even though he kept his mouth shut.

Every so often, one of them would come up to him, clap him on the back, and say something like, "You got your own back. That's good."

They meant well. He knew as much. That didn't keep him from losing

patience. Finally, after about the fourth time it happened, he snapped. “What do you mean, got my own back?” he growled at a luckless first lieutenant. “If I had my own back, I’d still be married. I’d still have my little girl. And I’d probably still be up in Canada.”

“Sorry, sir,” the lieutenant said stiffly, and he retreated as fast as the Confederate guard officer had. After that, fewer prisoners sounded sympathetic, which suited Moss fine.

In fact, fewer prisoners wanted anything to do with him. That also suited him fine—till he got a summons from the senior U.S. officer, a colonel named Monty Summers. “See here, Moss,” he said, “no man is an island.”

“Sir, isn’t it a little early in the morning for John Donne?” Moss asked.

“It’s never too early for the truth,” Summers said, which proved he’d never been a lawyer. “We don’t want you solitary. It’s not good for you, and it’s not good for the camp, either.”

“I’ll worry about me, sir,” Moss said, “and the camp can take care of itself, as far as I’m concerned.”

Summers snorted in exasperation. He was a corn-fed Midwesterner who’d been captured in Ohio when the war was new. He had sandy hair going gray, ruddy cheeks, blue eyes, and a rock of a chin that he stuck out whenever he wanted to make a point. He stuck it out now. “You haven’t got the right attitude,” he said.

“Sorry, sir,” said Moss, who wasn’t. “It’s the only one I’ve got.”

“Well, you’d damn well better change it.” Summers sounded as if that were as easy as changing a flat tire. He aimed his chin at Moss again. “We’re still in the war. We’re still fighting the Confederates. We’re all in this together. We’re a team, dammit. And you let the team down if you don’t play along. Don’t you want to help drive these fucking goons nuts?”

“Well . . .” Moss nodded. “All right, Colonel. Maybe you’ve got a point.”

“You’d better believe I have,” Summer said. “If we weren’t all on the ball, for instance, we’d have Confederate spies raising all kinds of trouble.”

“How do you know we don’t?” Moss asked.

“There are ways.” The senior U.S. officer spoke with assurance. “There are ways, but they don’t work unless everybody’s on the ball. Have you got that?”

“Yes, sir,” Moss said.

“All right, then.” Monty Summers’ nod seemed amiable enough. “I won’t say anything more about it, then. A word to the wise, you know.” He seemed to like other people’s distilled wisdom.

Moss went on much as he had before—but not quite. He’d never been a back-slapping gladhander. He never would be, either. But he did try to stop making his fellow captives actively dislike him. They seemed willing enough to meet him halfway. He started hearing more camp gossip, which gave him something to chew on, if nothing else.

Nick Cantarella sidled up to him one warm spring morning. “How you doing, Major?” he asked.

“Not too bad,” Moss answered. “How’s yourself?”

“I’ve been worse. Of course, I’ve been better, too. This isn’t exactly my favorite place,” Cantarella said.

“I wouldn’t come here on vacation, either,” Moss said, and Cantarella laughed. Moss added, “The only people who like it here are the guards. They’re too dumb not to—and they get to carry guns, but nobody’s going to shoot back at them.” He was thinking of the officer he’d routed. Cantarella laughed again, even more appreciatively this time. Moss started to laugh, too, but swallowed the noise in a hurry. Captain Cantarella was somehow involved in escape plans—if there were any escape plans to be involved in. As casually as Moss could, he asked, “What is your favorite place?”

“New York City,” Cantarella replied at once.

With his accent, that didn’t surprise Moss at all. Still casually, the fighter pilot asked, “How soon do you expect to see it again?”

Cantarella didn’t answer right away. He scratched his cheek. Whiskers rasped against his fingernails; he was a man who got five o’clock shadow at half past one. Then he said, “Well, sir, I hope I don’t have to sit out the whole goddamn war here.”

“Who doesn’t?” Moss agreed. “Let me know if you have any other thoughts along those lines.”

“I’ll do that, Major,” Cantarella said. “You can count on it.” Off he went. He gave the impression of still being very much in the war even though he was hundreds of miles behind the lines and on the wrong side of the barbed wire and machine-gun towers. Moss looked after him. How long did he intend to stay on the wrong side of the barbed wire? *Will he take me with him when he goes?* That was the question that mattered most to Moss.

“**H**ello, General,” Brigadier General Irving Morrell said, walking up toward the frame house that held Brigadier General Abner Dowling’s headquarters.

“Hello, General,” Dowling replied. “Good to see you again, and it’s high time you had stars on your shoulders, if anybody wants to know what I think.”

“Thanks. Thanks very much,” Morrell said. “They do make me think I haven’t wasted the past thirty years, anyway.”

“I know what you mean,” Dowling said, and no doubt he did: he’d been in the Army even longer than Morrell had before trading his eagles for stars. He went on, “How are you feeling?”

“Sir, I’ll do,” Morrell answered. His shoulder chose that moment to twinge. He did his best not to show how much it hurt. It would sting him if he tried to move it too far—to move it as if he weren’t wounded, in other words—or sometimes for no reason at all: certainly none he could find. With a wry chuckle, he continued, “One of the so-called advantages of my new exalted status is that they don’t expect me to push back the Confederates singlehanded.”

Dowling snorted—a rude noise to come from a general. “You can’t fool me. I’ve known you too long. First chance you get, you’re going to climb back into a barrel. Five minutes later, you’ll stick your head out of the cupola, because you can’t see a damn thing through the periscopes.”

“Who, me?” Morrell said, as innocently as he could. Both men laughed. Dowling had him pegged, all right. Morrell added, “I don’t know that I like being so predictable.”

He’d thought Dowling would go on laughing, but the fat officer sobered instead. “You probably shouldn’t be that predictable, as a matter of fact. If you are, the Confederates are liable to take another

shot at you.”

Morrell grunted. The other general might well be right. Morrell said, “It’s an honor I could do without. I never minded getting shot at because I was a U.S. soldier. I minded getting shot, that time in Sonora—it hurt like blazes, and it left me flat on my back for a hell of a long time. But it was one of those things that happen, you know what I mean? But if they’re shooting at me *because* I’m me . . . That’s assassination. It isn’t war.”

“They’re doing it,” Dowling said.

“I know they are,” Morrell answered. “We’ve lost some good people because they’re doing it, too—lost them for good, I mean, not just had them wounded the way I was.”

“Unofficially—and you haven’t heard this from me—we’re doing it, too,” Dowling said.

That made Morrell grunt again. “Well, I can’t even tell you I’m very surprised,” he said at last. “It’s the only thing we can do, pretty much. If they hit us like that, we have to hit back the same way, or else they get an edge. But I’ll be damned if I like it. It makes this business even filthier than it has to be.”

“Personally, I agree with you. You’ll find those who don’t, though.” Dowling paused, ruminating on that. After a bit, he went on, “When you were in Ohio, you met Captain Litvinoff, didn’t you?”

“The skinny fellow with the little mustache that looked like it was penciled on? The poison-gas specialist? Oh, yes. I met him. He gave me the cold chills.” Now it was Morrell’s turn to pause. He let out a long, sorrowful sigh. “All right, General. You made your point.”

“Over in Richmond or wherever they keep them, the Confederates have men just like dear Captain Litvinoff,” Dowling said. Morrell realized the other general liked the poison-gas expert even less than he did. He hadn’t imagined such a thing was possible. Dowling went on, “Now we’re finding assassins under flat rocks. And things are liable to get worse before they get better.”

“How could they?” Morrell asked in honest perplexity.

“Well, I don’t exactly know. But I can tell you something I heard from somebody I believe,” Dowling said.

“I’m all ears.” Morrell liked gossip no less than anyone else.

“You ever hear of that German scientist named Einstein? You know—the Jew with the hair that looks like steel wool in a hurricane?”

Morrell nodded. “Sure. Who hasn’t heard of him? He’s the one they always make absentminded professor jokes about. What’s he got to do with the price of beer, though?”

“He’s a hell of a sharp man, no matter how absentminded he is.”

“I never said he wasn’t. You don’t get to be famous like that if you haven’t got a lot on the ball. But what about him?”

“He’s disappeared,” Dowling said portentously. “Not disappeared as in his apartment building got hit by a bomb while he was in the bathtub. Disappeared as in fallen off the map. Quite a few of the other high-forehead fellows in Germany and Austria-Hungary have quietly dropped out of sight, too.”

“They’re working on something.” Morrell didn’t phrase it as a question. He’d been in the Army a long time. He recognized the signs. When a lot of people who did the same kind of work quietly dropped out of sight, something—probably something big—was going on behind the scenes. He pointed a finger at Dowling. “Do you know what it is?”

“Not me,” Dowling said. “When I need to count past ten, I take off my shoes.”

He was sandbagging; he was nobody’s fool. Morrell paused one more time. Then he asked, “Whatever the Kaiser’s boys are working on, are we working on it, too?”

Dowling had started to light a smoke—a Confederate brand, no doubt captured or confiscated here in Virginia. He froze with the cigarette in his mouth and the match, still unstruck, in his hand. “You know, General, I asked my . . . friend the very same question.”

“And? What did he tell you?”

“He told me to mind my own goddamn business and get the hell out of his office.” Dowling did light the cigarette then. He took a long, deep drag, as if he wanted to escape the memory of his friend’s reply. “So you can take that any way you want to. Either we aren’t or we are and we don’t want to talk about it—*really* don’t want to. You pays

your money and you takes your choice."

"You sound like that colored band that got away from the Confederates," Morrell said. "They put them on the wireless enough, don't they?"

"Oh, you might say so." Dowling's voice was dry. "Yes, you just might. But propaganda is where you find it."

"And isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" Morrell looked west from Culpeper, the town where Dowling presently made his headquarters. The Blue Ridge Mountains sawtoothed the horizon. The mountains didn't worry Morrell so much. What the Confederates might have lurking in them did. "Is Patton going to try to hit us from the flank again?"

"He's welcome to, by God. He'll have even less fun than he did the last time," Abner Dowling growled. "But things seem pretty quiet off to the west. If what the spies say is true, the enemy's pulled some forces away from there."

"Where have they gone, then?" Morrell asked the immediately obvious question—not only was it obvious, it was important.

"Best guess is, to attack our salient on the other side of the Rapidan."

"The Wilderness." Morrell made a discontented—almost a disgusted—noise. "I've been down there. I've looked it over. You couldn't come up with worse country for barrels if you tried for a year. What on earth possessed General MacArthur to get a foothold *there*?"

Dowling considered before answering, "Well, General, you'll have to understand that he and I are not on the most intimate terms." By the pained expression he bore, that was an understatement. "My guess is only a guess, then. I suppose that's where we have the foothold because it's the only place we could get one."

"I see," Morrell said—two words that covered a lot of Deeply Regrets telegrams from the War Department. After a meditative pause of his own, he added, "Do you suppose that salient does us more good than it does the Confederates?"

"I *hope* so," Dowling answered, which wasn't quite what Morrell had asked. "If we can ever get out of that nasty second growth, the terrain gets better. But the Confederates know that as well as we do, and they don't want to turn us loose."

“How many casualties are we taking down there?” Morrell asked. “They can hit us from three sides at once.”

“It’s . . . bothersome,” Dowling admitted, which meant it was probably a lot worse than that. “What we need to do is get barrels over onto the other side of the Rapidan in country where we can really use them. I’m glad you’re here—if anyone can arrange that, you’re the man.”

“Thanks,” Morrell said. “I’m just glad I’m anywhere right now.” As if to underscore that, his shoulder twinged again. “I’ve been thinking about that particular problem myself, and I’ve got a few ideas.”

“You’ll want to talk with a map in front of you,” Dowling said, proving he’d done a good deal of planning in his time, too. He waved back toward the frame house. “Shall we?”

“In a minute,” Morrell said. “Let me scrounge another one of those nice cigarettes off you, if you don’t mind.”

“Not a bit.” Dowling stuck another one in his mouth, too. “Really taste like tobacco, don’t they? Not like . . .” He paused, searching for a simile.

Morrell supplied one: “Horseshit.”

Dowling laughed. “Well, now that you mention it, yes.” He lit it; his cheeks hollowed as he inhaled. “Damn things are supposed to be hell on the wind. You couldn’t prove it by me—I never had any wind to begin with.” He patted his belly as if it were an old friend—and so, no doubt, it was.

“I don’t think they’ve hurt mine much,” Morrell said. Unlike Dowling, he was usually in good, hard shape, though his stay in the hospital had set him back. He took another drag.

Planes buzzed by overhead. Morrell automatically looked around for the closest trench, and spotted one less than ten feet away. He could jump into it in a hurry if they dove on him. But they kept going: they were U.S. fighters heading south to strafe the Confederates and shoot up C.S. dive bombers and whatever else they could find.

“Good luck, boys,” he called to the pilots once he was sure they wouldn’t come after him.

“Amen,” Abner Dowling agreed, adding, “We could use the Lord on our side. Considering what Featherston’s people are up to, He’d better

be.”

“Well, yes,” Morrell said, “but you know what they say about the Lord helping people who help themselves. We’d better do some of that, too, or we’re in real trouble.” He almost wished Dowling would have told him he was wrong, but Dowling didn’t.

V

S econd Lieutenant Thayer Monroe wasn’t even a bulge in his pappy’s pants when the Great War ended. He was just out of West Point, and so new an officer, he squeaked. He really *did* squeak; he had a thin tenor voice that often didn’t seem to have finished breaking. He went tomato-red whenever something he was saying came out especially shrill.

First Sergeant Chester Martin hadn’t expected anything different, so he wasn’t disappointed. The recruiters back in California had as much as told him this was what he’d be doing. Veteran noncoms held pipsqueak officers’ hands till the pipsqueaks either figured out what they were doing or got wounded or killed. In the first case, the blooded officers commonly won promotion. In the second, they left the platoon for less pleasant reasons. Either way, the platoon got a new, green CO, and the first sergeant’s job started all over again.

At the moment, Lieutenant Monroe’s platoon sprawled on the ground under some oaks not far outside of Falmouth, Virginia. On the other side of the Rappahannock, the Confederates held Fredericksburg. Scuttlebutt said General MacArthur’s next try at dislodging the enemy from his defenses in front of Richmond would go through the C.S. forces here.

“What do you think, Sarge?” asked Charlie Baumgartner, a corporal who led one of the squads in the platoon. “They gonna send us over the river?”

“Beats me,” Martin answered. “I hope to God they don’t. I don’t like getting shot at any better than the next guy.”

“Yeah, well, that’s on account of you’ve got your head screwed on

tight," Baumgartner said. He was more than twenty years younger than Chester, but he'd been in the Army for a while. "Some people . . ." He didn't go on.

He didn't need to, either. Lieutenant Monroe was telling anybody who'd listen what a howling waste they were going to make out of Fredericksburg and its Confederate defenders. Since he outranked everyone close by, people had to listen. Whether they believed him was liable to be a different story.

"Our bombardment will stun them. It will paralyze them," Monroe burbled. "They'll never know what hit them. We'll get over the river without the least little bit of trouble."

Baumgartner's grunt was redolent of skepticism. So was Chester Martin's. He'd seen lots of bombardments, which Thayer Monroe plainly hadn't. Not even the fiercest one knocked an enemy out altogether. As soon as the bombing and the shelling let up, the survivors ran for their machine guns and popped up out of their holes with rifles in their hands.

The noncoms in the platoon all plainly knew as much. But rank had its privileges: no one told Monroe to shut up. Chester thought about it. He would have been more diplomatic than that if he'd decided to do it. In the end, he kept quiet with the rest. The young lieutenant was heartening new men who hadn't been through the mill yet. That counted for something.

But when Thayer Monroe said, "We ought to be in Richmond a week after we break through at Fredericksburg," Chester cleared his throat. For a wonder, the lieutenant noticed. "You said something, Sergeant?"

"Well, no, sir. Not exactly, sir." Chester knew he had to be polite to the snotnose with the gold bar on each shoulder strap. He wasn't convinced Monroe deserved such courtesy, but the military insisted on it. "Only, sir, it might be better if you don't make promises we can't keep."

Monroe stared at him. Failure had plainly never crossed the shavetail's mind. He said, "Sergeant, once we cross the river, we *will* go forward." He might have been propounding a law of nature.

He might have been, but he wasn't. Chester knew it too well. "Yes, sir," he said, meaning, *No, sir.*

Maybe Monroe wasn't altogether an idiot. He heard what Martin

wasn't saying. Stiffly, he said, "When the order comes, Sergeant, we *will* go forward."

"Oh, yes, sir," Martin agreed—he couldn't quarrel with that, not without ending up in big trouble himself. But he did want to persuade the lieutenant not to take on faith everything his superiors told him. "Sir, when you were at West Point, did you study the battles on the Roanoke front?"

"Sure." Monroe chuckled. "All twelve or fourteen of them, or however many there were."

To him, those fights were just things he'd studied in school. He could laugh about them. Chester couldn't. His memories were too dark. "Sir, I was there for the first six or eight—till I got wounded. I was lucky. It was just a hometowner. But before every attack, they told us this would be the one that did the trick. Do you wonder that after a while we had trouble jumping up and down when they told us to go over the top?"

"I hope we've got better at what we're doing since then." By the way Thayer Monroe said it, it was a forgone conclusion that the Army had.

"So do I." By the way Chester Martin said it, it was anything but.

The bombardment started on schedule, regardless of Martin's opinion. It didn't go on for days, the way it would have during the Great War. The men in charge of the guns *had* learned something. Long bombardments did more to tell the enemy where the attack was going in than they did to smash him flat. Make him keep his head down, then strike hard—that was the prevailing wisdom these days.

Martin would have liked it better if they hadn't had to throw bridges across the Rappahannock before they could cross. He and the rest of the platoon—the rest of the regiment—waited by the river for the engineers to do their job. Martin liked and admired military engineers. They were good at their specialized trade, and when they had to they made pretty fair combat soldiers, too.

They did their damnedest on the Rappahannock, but they never had a chance. Even though U.S. artillery kept pounding Fredericksburg, Confederate machine guns and mortars started pounding the engineers right back. Guns up in the hills behind the town, guns that had stayed quiet so the U.S. cannon wouldn't spot them and knock them out ahead of time, added their weight of metal to the countershelling.

And they added more than metal. The U.S. engineers had to try to do strenuous work in gas masks. U.S. guns had thrown poison gas at Fredericksburg along with everything else, and the C.S. artillery replied in kind. Martin was wearing his mask well before the order went out to put them on. He'd seen mustard gas the last time around. He hadn't seen what they called nerve agents—those were new. But he didn't want to make their acquaintance the hard way.

Confederate Mules—U.S. soldiers more often called them Asskickers—swooped down on the bridges. These days, the gull-winged dive bombers weren't the symbol of terror they had been when the war was new. They were slow and ungainly; U.S. fighters hacked them out of the sky with ease when they ventured into airspace where the CSA didn't have superiority. But they still had a role to play. They screamed down, put bombs on three bridges, and zoomed away at just above treetop level.

"I hate those bastards, but they've got balls." Because of Corporal Baumgartner's mask, his voice sounded distant and otherworldly.

"You want to know what I think, I think we have to be nuts to try to cross here at all," Martin said. Baumgartner didn't argue with him. He wished the other noncom would have.

U.S. raiders in rubber boats tried crossing the Rappahannock to quiet the mortar crews and machine gunners and riflemen on the other side. Despite smoke screens and heavy U.S. fire, a lot of the boats got sunk before they made it to the south bank of the river. The raiders who managed to cross no doubt did their best, but Chester couldn't see that Confederate fire diminished even a little.

About every half hour, Lieutenant Monroe would say, "We'll get the order to cross any minute now, men," or, "It won't be long!" or, "Be ready!" Knowing how stubborn the high brass could be, Chester feared the platoon leader was right, but kept hoping he was wrong.

The order never came. Towards evening, the units that had been pushed forward drew back out of enemy artillery range. Martin wondered how many casualties they'd taken, and how many they'd inflicted on the Confederates. He would have bet the first number was a lot bigger than the second one.

"Don't worry, men," Thayer Monroe said, invincibly optimistic. "We'll get them soon, even if we didn't get them today."

Chester had never known a common soldier who worried about *not*

going into battle. No doubt such men existed. You heard stories about them, stories often prefaced, *There was this crazy bastard who . . .* But he'd never run into one himself.

Like other lower forms of life, second lieutenants were too dumb to know better. Martin thought some more about telling this particular lieutenant to put a sock in it, but refrained. Monroe had a job, too. He was supposed to make soldiers enthusiastic about going out there and getting maimed. Having led that company in the Great War, Chester knew what a nasty job it could be.

At the moment, he worried more about whether the regiment would get its field kitchens set up after all the marching and countermarching it had done. He wasn't especially surprised when it didn't. "Canned rations," he told the men in his platoon. (Thayer Monroe had a different opinion about whose it was, but what did second lieutenants know?)

"That shit again?" somebody said. It wasn't the only grumble sullying the sweetness of the evening air. Canned rations ranged from boring to actively nasty. The labels usually peeled off, too, so you didn't know ahead of time whether you were getting spaghetti and meatballs—tolerable—or chicken with stewed prunes—disgusting. As with men who liked combat, there were a few who liked the chicken concoction and would trade for it, but Chester didn't think any were in his platoon.

Charlie Baumgartner plopped down beside him. "How's that gonna look in the newspapers, Sarge? 'U.S. Army Pulls Back from Fredericksburg! Does Not Cross!' " He made the headline very convincing.

Chester opened his can. It was hash—not very good, not very bad. He dug in. After the first mouthful, he said, "They can print that if they want to. I don't care. As long as they don't say, 'U.S. Army Massacred at Fredericksburg!' I'm not going to worry about it."

"You got a good way of looking at things," Baumgartner said. "Better'n some people I could name—that's for damn sure."

"He's nothing but a puppy," Martin said, identifying one of those unnamed people without undue difficulty.

"You know what a puppy is?" the corporal said. He waited for Chester to shake his head, then answered the rhetorical question: "Just a little son of a bitch."

“Ouch,” Martin said. To his own surprise, he found himself defending Lieutenant Monroe: “He’s not so bad. He just needs experience.”

“He needs a good, swift kick in the ass,” Baumgartner said.

“Odds are he’ll get one. Let’s just hope he lives through it,” Chester said.

“Yeah.” Baumgartner nodded. “Let’s hope we do, too.”

A rmstrong Grimes didn’t know where the Mormons got all their machine guns. He supposed the Confederates had sneaked some to them and they’d taken others from U.S. arsenals when they started their latest uprising. Or, for all he knew, maybe they had secret machine shops out in the desert somewhere, and men with green eyeshades working lathes to turn out their own.

Wherever the machine guns came from, they had a hell of a lot of them.

The one in front of Armstrong and his companions now was firing from the window of a house in Orem, Utah; U.S. forces had finally managed to drive the Mormons out of Provo. An enormous canning plant dominated Orem. The rebels were holed up inside the factory, too, but the Americans were going to have to clear them out of the buildings in front of the place before they could even think about attacking it.

Clearing them wouldn’t be easy. Nothing that had to do with Mormons ever was. The machine gun spitting death in front of Armstrong, for instance, hadn’t just been set in that window. As soon as it started up, Sergeant Stowe called artillery fire in on it. The guns had turned the house to rubble. They hadn’t bothered the machine gun or its crew one bit.

Crouched in a hole that didn’t feel nearly deep enough with bullets cracking past just overhead, Armstrong turned to Yossel Reisen and said, “Bastards have that thing all sandbagged.”

“Either that or there’s a real cement bunker inside the place,” Reisen answered. “Wouldn’t surprise me a bit.”

“Me, neither,” Armstrong agreed with a sour sigh. “They were probably getting ready here while they were still fighting down in

Provo."

"I bet you're right," Reisen said. They both swore: part of the automatic obscenity that made up the small change of any conversation between military men. To Armstrong, the idea of preparing a position long before you fell back into it felt like cheating.

A runner scrambled into the hole with the two of them. "When the whistle blows, pop up and start shooting at that machine gun as hard as you can," he said, and then climbed out to pass the word to the next few U.S. soldiers.

"What's going on?" Armstrong called after him. The runner didn't answer. Armstrong did some more swearing, this time in earnest. He didn't like orders he didn't understand, especially when they were liable to get him killed.

Like them or not, he had them. About fifteen minutes later, an officer's whistle shrilled. He popped up and fired a shot, then ducked down again to work the Springfield's bolt. He felt like a jack-in-the-box after a while, or maybe like a jackass. But everybody else in front of the machine gun was doing the same thing, so the Mormons manning the piece didn't aim all their attention—to say nothing of all their fire—at him.

"Ha!" Yossel Reisen spoke with a certain somber satisfaction. "I see what's going on."

"Yeah?" said Armstrong, who didn't. "What?"

"Guy with a flamethrower sneaking up on that house," Reisen answered.

"Is that what it is?" Armstrong said. "Well, no wonder we're supposed to keep 'em busy, then."

The only drawback to a flamethrower was that the fellow who used it had to get close to his target before opening up—and had to get close while he was lugging a tank of jellied gasoline on his back. Armstrong's opinion was that the men who carried flamethrowers had to be nuts. If, say a tracer round hit that tank of fuel . . .

And one did, just when Armstrong was squeezing off a round. The fireball made him blink. "Oh, fuck," he said softly. Nobody would ever bury that soldier, because there wouldn't be much left of him. Armstrong hoped it was over in a hurry. He'd got hardened to a lot of

war, but that was a nasty way to go. The poor bastard hadn't had time to scream, anyhow. Maybe his silence meant something.

After the flamethrower man's untimely demise, firing at the Mormon strongpoint eased off. That made perfect sense, as far as Armstrong was concerned. Why take a chance on getting killed when you wouldn't accomplish anything doing it?

Yossel Reisen summed it up in four words: "So much for that."

"Yeah. You said it." Armstrong sagged back down into the hole they shared. "You got a cigarette?" As Reisen gave him one, the enemy machine gun cut loose with a defiant burst to tell the world its crew was alive, well, and sassy.

That machine-gun position had to go if U.S. troops were to advance. Armstrong hoped a barrel would waddle up and blast the nest to kingdom come. But barrels, even the old-fashioned waddling kind, were in short supply in Utah these days. A lot of them had gone up in flames in the house-to-house fighting in Provo. Without them, the soldiers still might have been stuck down there. But none seemed to be close by right now.

"What would you do if you were a general?" Yossel Reisen asked.

"Me? Find another line of work," Armstrong answered. Reisen laughed but waved to show he'd really meant the question. Armstrong thought about it, then said, "Probably another guy with a flamethrower. Cheapest way there is to make those fuckers say uncle if we don't have a barrel ready, and it doesn't look like we do."

He guessed wrong, which didn't much surprise him—he'd never wanted to be a general. The powers that be decided to try shelling the machine-gun nest out of existence again. As soon as Armstrong heard the first couple of shells gurgle by overhead, he knew they weren't just counting on explosive power to do the job this time. "Gas!" he shouted. "Gas!" He jammed the mask over his head as fast as he could. Some of those shells were bound to fall short, the artillery being what it was. And even if they didn't, the breeze, what there was of it, came from the north, and would blow some of the poison back towards U.S. lines.

A big stretch of the world disappeared with the pig-snouted mask over his face. What was left he saw through two portholes of none too clean glass. The air tasted of rubber. He didn't feel as if he could get quite enough of it. That was an illusion; he'd proved as much plenty of

times. But he did have to work harder to suck breaths through the activated-charcoal filter cartridge, so the illusion persisted.

Sure as hell, a couple of rounds were short, which meant they came down among the soldiers stuck in front of the machine gun. Armstrong hoped they weren't carrying what people called nerve agents. That crap could kill you if it got on your skin. Everybody had rubberized coveralls. Nobody wanted to wear them. They were unbearably hot.

With infinite caution, Armstrong stuck up his head. The machine-gun nest was catching hell, no doubt about it. With a little luck . . .

That officer's whistle squealed again. "Forward!" he shouted.

"Aw, shit," Armstrong muttered. They were going to find out if they'd got rid of the Mormons, all right. Armstrong thought of spraying Flit all over an ants' nest. Mormons stung even harder than red ants, though.

They were harder to kill, too. The U.S. soldiers ran toward the machine-gun nest in little scuttles from one bit of cover to the next. The gun that had held them up stayed silent. Some of them, the green ones, whooped and got a little less cautious, figuring the rebel gunners were dead.

Armstrong kept his belly on the dirt and the snout of his gas mask banging the ground. He trusted Mormons no farther than he could throw them. They were as sneaky a bunch of bastards as you could imagine. He tried not to show himself as he scooted up toward that battered house.

Beside him, Yossel Reisen took no chances, either. He snaked ahead. He didn't walk. He didn't even crawl. He snaked on his belly, pulling himself along with his elbows.

And their wariness and distrust paid off, for the Mormons inside the machine-gun nest must have had masks and must have got them on in time. The gunners waited till they found good targets, then opened up with a savage burst that cut down half a dozen American soldiers. After that, the advance congealed. Everybody knew you couldn't charge a well-served machine-gun nest. If armor or artillery didn't take it out, infantry would just keep piling up corpses in front of it.

Quite suddenly, the Mormon machine gunners ceased fire. Armstrong didn't even twitch; he suspected another nasty trick. Then somebody

behind him shouted, “Flag of truce! Flag of truce coming forward!”

That didn’t make Armstrong move, either. Mormons sounded just like anybody else. They looked just like anybody else, too. And they had no trouble getting green-gray uniforms from dead or captured U.S. soldiers. They often pretended to be ordinary Americans, and they caused a lot of trouble when they did.

But a flag of truce *was* coming forward. The U.S. captain who carried it shouted to the men in the machine-gun nest: “I have a message for your leaders.” He had trouble being as loud as he wanted through his mask, but he managed.

“Come ahead.” The Mormon who answered was also yelling through a gas mask. “We won’t shoot as long as nobody in front of us tries moving forward.”

“Agreed,” the captain said. Waving the white flag so the rebels could see who he was, he picked his way through the wreckage, towards and then past the machine-gun nest. Other Mormons emerged from concealment that didn’t look big enough to hide a cat. One of them blindfolded the U.S. officer, which struck Armstrong as a sensible precaution. Then they led him north.

“Wonder what that’s all about,” Yossel Reisen said. “Are they flabbling so much about this one strongpoint? They wouldn’t call a truce just on account of it . . . would they?”

“Christ, I hope not,” Armstrong said. “Wish I had a cigarette.” No matter how much he wished he did, he didn’t take off his mask and light up. There was bound to be gas still floating in the air. If he saw somebody else smoking and getting away with it, he’d try. Till then, no. He went on, “Most of the damn Mormons don’t smoke. Makes ’em harder to spot.”

He didn’t stick his head up or expose himself unduly. The rebels were good about honoring cease-fires, but they weren’t perfect—and they’d said they would open up if anybody on the American side got frisky.

After the truce had stretched for a couple of hours, Americans got up and stretched and began to move around. The Mormons let them. When someone was dumb enough to start to go toward the machine-gun nest, the gunners fired a warning burst well over his head. He got the message and drew back in a hurry.

A little before sunset, the captain returned. This time, he waved the

flag of truce so his own side wouldn't shoot him. With him came a little old man in a somber black suit. He looked like a grandfather who was having a tough day. Nimble as a mountain goat, he followed the captain through the rubble of what had been Orem.

"What the hell's going on here?" Armstrong asked. Neither Yossel Reisen nor anybody else had a good answer for him.

* * *

“**W** hat the hell’s going on here?” Senator Robert Taft demanded. He was a thoroughly reactionary Democrat who’d run against Al Smith in 1940. Flora Blackford didn’t think along with him very often when they met together with the rest of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. She didn’t very often, but she did now.

The chairman rapped loudly for order. “You were not recognized, Senator,” he said in tones of bureaucratic severity.

“I’m very sorry, Mr. Chairman.” Taft sounded anything but. “I must say that I have trouble recognizing what the present administration is up to.”

Bang! The chairman rapped again. “You are out of order, sir. Your remarks will be stricken from the record.” He pointed to Flora. “Congresswoman Blackford!”

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman,” Flora said. George Norris smiled in relief. Like her, the Senator from Nebraska was a Socialist; he judged she was likely to go easy on President La Follette and his henchmen. Not today, though; she continued, “Mr. Chairman, I would also like to know what the hell is going on here.”

Several people exclaimed in surprise in the Philadelphia meeting room. “*Thank* you, Mrs. Blackford!” Senator Taft said in glad surprise. Senator Norris looked as if he’d stepped on a land mine.

“I didn’t do it for you, Senator. I did it for me,” Flora replied. That made the chairman no happier. She’d hoped it would—Norris was an old man, and a Party warhorse—but hadn’t really expected it to. Turning to him, she went on, “What *is* the administration doing by negotiating with the Mormons? What have they done that makes them deserve negotiation?”

“I couldn’t have put that better myself,” Taft said.

“Congresswoman, I am not the right person to answer your question, as I trust you are aware,” the chairman said.

“Certainly,” Flora said. “That is why I move that we call the Secretary of the Interior to come before the committee and explain this extraordinary action.”

“Second!” Robert Taft wasn’t the only one to call out the word; it came from half a dozen throats. Some were Democrats, some Socialists; here, people were breaking party lines.

Seeing as much, Senator Norris looked even more pained than he had before. “With talks in progress, I am not sure the Secretary would respond to such a summons,” he replied. “I am not sure he *should* respond to such a summons.”

“There, Mr. Chairman, I must respectfully disagree,” Flora said. The language of Congress was marvelously polite. Anywhere else, she would have said something like, *My God, you’re an idiot!* Polite language or no, the message came through. Norris turned a dull red. Flora went on, “If the Secretary does not respond to an invitation to come before us, I will move that we subpoena him. We need to know why the administration thinks it can offer concessions to a group now rebelling against the U.S. government not for the first, not for the second, but for the third time.”

“You will not need to look far to find a second for that motion, either, Congresswoman,” Senator Taft said. Flora nodded back to him. He was only half the man his father had been; he was on the lean side, where William Howard Taft had been as round as the golf balls he’d loved to whack. William Howard Taft had also had the fat man’s gift of being, or at least seeming, good-natured most of the time. His son was far more acerbic—which had probably helped him lose the last election.

George Norris coughed. “You do realize that publicizing disagreements over policy may give aid and comfort to the Confederate States?”

“Oh, no, you don’t!” Flora said sharply. “I’m sorry, sir, but no one is going to get away with that. You can’t say I’m not a proper patriot if I don’t agree with everything this administration does. That’s Jake Featherston’s way of doing things, and he’s welcome to it. Why have we got a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War if we can’t ask questions that have to do with the way we’re conducting the war?”

Several Senators and Representatives clapped their hands. The chairman licked his papery lips. He spoke carefully: “We are at war with the Confederate States, Congresswoman, and with the Empire of Mexico, and with Britain, France, Japan, and Russia. We are not at war with the state of Utah.”

Flora curtsied. “Thank you for informing me of that, Mr. Chairman. You might do better to inform the state of Utah, which seems unaware of the fact.” She got a laugh loud enough to make Norris ply his gavel with might and main. She continued, “By all precedent, it is a war. Congress established a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War during the War of Secession, long before we had to recognize the CSA as an independent nation. Will you tell me I’m wrong, sir?”

By his expression, George Norris would have liked nothing better, but knew he couldn’t. “Call the question on the motion!” someone yelled. Looking even more unhappy, the chairman did. It passed with only a couple of dissenting votes.

When Flora walked into to her office, her secretary said, “Mr. Roosevelt called a little while ago, Congresswoman. He’d like you to call him back.”

“Thanks, Bertha. I’ll bet he would,” Flora said. How angry would the Assistant Secretary of War be? Only one way to find out. She went into the inner office and made the call.

“This is Franklin Roosevelt.” As always, his voice conceded nothing to the illness that left him in a wheelchair. When Flora gave her name, Roosevelt started to laugh. “You’ve been naughty today, haven’t you?” he said.

“I don’t think so. I think the administration has,” Flora said. “Talking with the Mormons? It’s madness.”

“Is it? President La Follette doesn’t think so. Neither do I,” Roosevelt said. *If he did, you would, too,* Flora thought. But a lot of politics worked that way. Roosevelt went on, “Don’t you think the Confederate States would be better off if Jake Featherston tried talking with his colored rebels instead of doing his best to put them all six feet under?”

“I don’t want the Confederate States better off,” Flora said.

Roosevelt’s laugh invited everyone who heard it to share the joke. “You can’t duck me like that and expect me not to quack,” he said. “You’re too smart not to know what I’m talking about.”

“We can talk to the Mormons till we’re blue in the face,” Flora said. “What good will it do if they don’t want to listen?”

“That’s what Ferdinand Koenig would say, all right.” Roosevelt was

being as exasperating as he could.

“What can we possibly give the Mormons that would satisfy them and us?” Flora asked.

“I don’t know,” Roosevelt admitted. “But the President thinks we ought to find out and not go on till everyone who could fight us is dead.” Pointedly, he added, “And he thinks his own party ought to back him while he’s doing it.”

“I will happily back the President when I think he’s right, or even when I’m not sure—I haven’t said a word about whatever is going on in western Washington, and I don’t intend to,” Flora said. “But when I think he’s wrong . . . I’m sorry, Franklin, but party loyalty doesn’t go that far.”

A lot of people thought it did. Presidents were usually of that opinion. Roosevelt just sighed. “I might have known you’d say that. As a matter of fact, I did know you’d say that. It doesn’t make things any easier for me, you know.”

I’m the one who’s in charge of keeping you from running wild, Flora translated mentally. “Tell me what sort of terms we’re offering the Mormons. Then maybe I’ll change my mind and believe this is worth doing,” she said.

“Not my bailiwick,” Roosevelt told her. “But I’d hope you’d trust Charlie La Follette far enough to believe he wouldn’t make terms that are bad for the country.”

“I trusted Al Smith not to make a deal that was bad for the country,” Flora said. “Look how that turned out.” *Good God!* she thought. *I sound just like my reactionary brother David.* But that didn’t mean she thought she was wrong now, however much she wished it did.

“Low blow,” Franklin Roosevelt said.

“Is it? We’ll see what the Secretary of the Interior has to say,” Flora answered.

“Some people are disappointed in the stand you’re taking.”

Though Roosevelt couldn’t see her, Flora shrugged. “They can put up another Socialist candidate when my district nominates this summer. Or they can back the Democrat against me this fall.”

“No one would do anything like that,” Roosevelt said hastily. Flora also knew nobody would do anything like that. She’d represented her district for most of the past twenty-six years, and she was a President’s widow. They’d need better reasons than this to oppose her: treason, say.

A few days later, the Secretary of the Interior *did* appear before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Harry Hopkins came from Iowa and still spoke with a flat Midwestern accent, but he’d gone to New York as a young lawyer. He’d got to know Al Smith there, and had risen with him. Now he had to defend the policies of another President.

“What terms has the administration offered the Mormon insurgents in Utah?” Senator Norris asked the question reluctantly. He knew the other members would be sharper than he if he faltered.

“No more than a return to the *status quo ante bellum* if they lay down their arms,” Hopkins answered. “If they want peace, we will give them peace: no treason trials, no persecutions. But that is absolutely as far as we will go. Demands for autonomy and independence for the so-called State of Deseret have been and will continue to be rejected out of hand.”

“And what is the response of the Mormon representative to this proposal?” the chairman asked. “Uh—what is the gentleman’s name?” He plainly wanted to call the Mormon representative something else, something less polite, but refrained.

“Rush. Hyrum Rush.” Hopkins spelled the Mormon’s first name. Having done so, he let out a resigned sigh. “Mr. Rush does not feel our proposal goes far enough, and fears it leaves his people vulnerable to further U.S. aggression. Those are his words, not mine.”

Flora raised her hand. With a certain amount of trepidation, Norris recognized her. She said, “Mr. Hopkins, why does Mr. Rush think Utah would be any safer as an independent country surrounded by the United States than as one state among many? This makes little sense to me.”

“He said, ‘You gave Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah plebiscites, but you wouldn’t give us one. You thought we were a bunch of perverts, and we didn’t deserve one,’ ” Hopkins replied.

Hyrum Rush wasn’t so far wrong. Flora said, “Don’t you think we ought to get rid of an abscess like that instead of putting a bandage on

it?”

“Normally, Congresswoman, I’d say yes. Right now, we’ve got bigger things to worry about than an abscess.”

Flora winced. With the country cut in half, she couldn’t very well disagree with the Secretary of the Interior. “The rebels show no sign of agreeing to these terms?” she asked.

“That’s correct, ma’am,” Harry Hopkins said.

Good, Flora thought, but she kept it to herself. She nodded to the chairman. “No further questions.”

B rigadier General Abner Dowling studied Confederate dispositions on a large map pinned to a wall of the house in Culpeper he used as a headquarters. If the U.S. Army ever moved deeper into Virginia, the house’s owner would get it back, and would probably be unhappy about the holes in his plaster. Dowling, whose own disposition was none too good, intended to miss not a moment of sleep worrying about that.

He called Captain Toricelli in to look at the latest dispositions. His adjutant was a sharp young officer. “Tell me what you make of this,” Dowling said, as neutrally as he could. He left it there. He wanted to see if the junior officer noticed the same thing he had—and if it was truly there to notice.

Angelo Toricelli eyed the map with unusual care. He knew Dowling wouldn’t have asked him for no reason. After a thoughtful pause, he said, “They really are thinning out their positions a bit, aren’t they?”

“It looks that way to me,” Dowling answered. “It’s got to the point where we can’t ignore it, hasn’t it?”

His adjutant nodded. “I’d say so. But the bastards in butternut don’t want us to spot it. Just by the way they’re doing it, I’d bet money on that.”

“Does seem so, doesn’t it?” Dowling said. “And why not? For fear we’ll pour through? They aren’t weakening themselves *that* much.”

“Where are those men going?” Toricelli asked.

“If I knew, I would tell you.” Dowling scratched his head. His hair was thinning—one more indignity of age. He sighed. “We ought to send out raiders, bring back some prisoners. They may know where their pals are headed. It doesn’t seem to be down toward the Wilderness. That was what I guessed when I conferred with General Morrell. If it turns out to be over toward Fredericksburg instead, we’ll have to alert General MacArthur, assuming such a thing is possible.”

“Er—yes, sir,” Captain Toricelli said. These days, Dowling didn’t bother hiding his scorn for his superior. MacArthur didn’t like him, either, and manifested it by withholding men and matériel from his corps. That was how things looked to Dowling’s jaundiced eye, anyhow.

“Draft the orders,” Dowling said. “Send them by runner, not by telegraph or telephone or wireless, not even in code. I don’t want the Confederates getting wind of what we’re up to and priming some men to lie like Ananias.” Maybe he had what the smart alienists these days were calling a persecution complex. He didn’t intend to worry about it. An Army officer who didn’t worry that the enemy was out to diddle him didn’t deserve his shoulder straps.

And Toricelli didn’t think his orders were anything out of the ordinary—or, if he did, he had the sense to keep his mouth shut about it. “I’ll have them on your desk in twenty minutes, sir,” he promised.

“That sounds good,” Dowling said.

As if further to disguise whatever they were up to, the Confederates in front of Dowling’s corps suddenly turned aggressive—not in any big way, but with lots of raids and artillery barrages and all the other things that made it look as if a major offensive might be brewing. Several regimental commanders sent panicky messages back to Culpeper.

One thing Dowling was good at was not getting excited at every little thing. Had he got excited at every little thing while serving under General Custer, he would have jumped out a window early in his career. He managed to calm down his subordinates, too. Had he been wrong, had the Confederates been planning a big push, he might have ended up with egg on his face for calming them down too well. But no big push came.

In due course, the interrogation reports did. Dowling’s eyebrows rose toward his retreating hairline when he read them. He looked up to

Captain Toricelli, who'd given him the transcripts. "The questioners think this is reliable and accurate?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I talked to one of them. They're pretty certain," Toricelli replied.

"All right. We'll relay it to General MacArthur's headquarters, and we'll also relay it to the War Department," Dowling said. "In code, mind you."

"Oh, yes, sir," his adjutant agreed. "This is too hot to go out in clear." For once, he showed none of the quiet scorn with which adjutants often greeted their superiors' ideas. *I hope my notions aren't as bad as a lot of Custer's were,* Dowling thought. And yet one of Custer's ideas—as foolish at first sight and as stubbornly maintained as any of the others—had gone a long way toward winning the Great War. You never could tell.

A few hours later, Dowling's telephone jangled. He picked it up. "First Corps Headquarters, Dowling speaking."

"Hello, sir. This is John Abell." The General Staff officer didn't give his rank or affiliation. That was no doubt wise. A lot of telephone wire lay between Philadelphia and Culpeper. If the Confederates weren't tapping it somewhere, Dowling would have been amazed. Abell went on, "You have confidence in the information you sent us?"

"Would I have sent it if I didn't?" Dowling returned.

"You'd be amazed," Abell said, and that was probably true. He continued, "We still have to confirm it at the other end."

"I don't know anything about that," Dowling said. "But I do know what I've seen, and I know—or I think I know—I wasn't imagining it."

"You weren't, not if these reports are even close to accurate," Abell said. "Have you heard anything from General MacArthur yet?"

"No, not a word," Dowling said.

The General Staff officer sniffed disdainfully. "Why am I not surprised?"

"I've alerted him to the possibility. That's all I can do," Dowling said. *That's all I want to do,* he added to himself. *If I could have found any way to keep from doing even that much, I would have grabbed it like you*

wouldn't believe.

"I hope something good comes of it." Abell's tone suggested he didn't think that was likely. "So long, sir. Take care of yourself." He hung up.

So did Dowling, muttering to himself. Daniel MacArthur didn't want to talk to him any more than he wanted to talk to MacArthur. So he thought, anyhow. But when the telephone rang again and he picked it up, what he heard was an abrupt rasp: "This is MacArthur."

"Yes, sir." Dowling unconsciously came to attention in his chair. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"It's really true that the Confederates are draining men away from this entire front?" MacArthur demanded.

"Sir, that's the way it looks from here." Dowling didn't intend to commit himself any further than that. Assert that something was really true and it was only too likely to come back and haunt you.

What he did say seemed to satisfy MacArthur. "In that case, I'm going to take one of the divisions out of your corps and bring it east."

"What?" The word burst from Dowling's throat as a pained yelp. "What do you want to do that for?"

"We mounted an attack at Fredericksburg that could have succeeded—that should have succeeded, in fact," MacArthur answered. "I intend to send more men in this time—send them in and have them break through."

From everything Dowling had heard, the attack on Fredericksburg hadn't come anywhere near as close to succeeding as MacArthur claimed. From everything Dowling had heard, U.S. forces hadn't even got over the Rappahannock and into Fredericksburg itself. Would throwing in more men help? Dowling didn't know. Custer had always liked to smother fires by burying them in bodies. He'd had his share of bloody fiascoes, but he'd also finally had his breakthrough. Maybe Daniel MacArthur would, too. Maybe.

One thing was certain: if MacArthur wanted one of Dowling's divisions, he had the right to take it. Dowling did what he could, saying, "We'll be spread thin here if you do shift it east."

"So are the Confederates you're facing. You found that out yourself. Since they are, why worry? It seems to me that you spend too much

time carping and complaining and not enough figuring out how to strike the foe."

It seemed to Dowling that MacArthur spent too much time figuring out stupid ways to strike the foe. He didn't say so. What point to it? He'd just get MacArthur angry at him again. He wouldn't change his superior's mind. No one except MacArthur could do that, and he wasn't in the habit of doing so.

Suppressing a sigh, Dowling said, "Sir, I'll do my best with whatever men you leave me. You can rely on that."

"There. You see?" Daniel MacArthur actually sounded pleased. "You can be cooperative when you set your mind to it."

By *be cooperative,* he meant *do exactly what I tell you without asking any inconvenient questions no matter what.* Dowling knew that only too well. Again, though, what could he do about it? Not much, as he knew all too well. He tried his best to keep resignation out of his voice as he answered, "Yes, sir."

"Good," MacArthur said. Dowling wondered if it was. MacArthur went on, "You'll have your orders soon. Thin their lines against *me,* will they? I am going to bury those Confederates—bury them, I tell you. There's no doubt in my mind."

"Yes, sir," Dowling said. Maybe he would. But how many U.S. soldiers would they bury, too? No way to know, not till it happened. Dowling had long since abandoned optimism along with the other illusions of his youth. He had thought before that MacArthur had more in common with George Custer than either of the two generals would ever have admitted: a complete lack of doubt and a strong belief in their own brilliance running neck and neck.

As if to underscore that, MacArthur said, "See you in Richmond, then," and slammed down the telephone. Dowling slowly replaced his own handset in its cradle. *See you in Richmond?* MacArthur would either make good on the boast or an awful lot of young men would die trying.

Dowling knew which way he would bet. He couldn't say anything about that, not to anybody, not without being accused of deliberately damaging morale. He couldn't even get on the telephone to Philadelphia, the way he had when MacArthur proposed the amphibious operation aimed at the mouth of the James. That had been madness. This might work. Dowling didn't think it would, but he

had to give his superior the benefit of the doubt.

He said something filthy. However much he'd longed for combat posts, he'd spent much of his career either as Custer's adjutant or on occupation duty in Utah—his main job there, in fact, had been to keep that from turning into a combat post, and he'd done it. Now he had what he'd always wanted. He had it, and he hadn't covered himself with glory in it. Maybe he wasn't cut out to be a hero. Or maybe he should have been more careful about what he wished for, lest he get it.

J ake Featherston peered down from Marye's Heights over the town of Fredericksburg toward the Rappahannock and the damnyankees on the other side. He turned to Nathan Bedford Forrest III, who stood by his side. "I was right about here when the last war ended," the President of the CSA said.

"Yes, sir," replied the chief of the Confederate General Staff, who'd been too young to fight in the Great War.

"Well, I was, goddammit," Featherston said. "When the order to cease fire came, I waited till the very last minute. Then I took the breech block out of my piece and chucked it in that creek over yonder." He pointed. "I was damned if the United States were gonna get anything they could use from me."

"Yes, sir," Forrest repeated, adding, "That sounds like you."

"Good. It ought to," Jake said, more than a little smugly. "Maybe what pissed me off most about having to quit, though, was that I could have killed every damnyankee in the world from right here, if the bastards kept coming at me and my ammo held out."

"It's a good position," Forrest allowed. "Not as good as it would have been in the Great War—artillery's better now than it was then, and barrels and bombers are a hell of a lot better. But it's still mighty good."

"I know it is," Jake said. "That's how come I was more than half disappointed we didn't let the enemy get into Fredericksburg and then try to storm these heights. We'd have been shooting 'em till they got sick of trying."

Nathan Bedford Forrest III frowned. "Conventional wisdom says you

don't want to let them have a bridgehead if you can help it. You can get around conventional wisdom a lot of the time, but not always. That foothold they've got south of the Rapidan in the Wilderness still worries me."

One of the reasons Forrest headed the General Staff was that he wasn't afraid to speak his mind, even to the President of the Confederate States. Jake asked, "Are you telling me they might break through if they cross the river here? We couldn't hold 'em and drive 'em back?"

Forrest scratched his mustache with his right thumb. "Odds are we could, but it's not a sure thing. Remember, sir, they kept fighting after we thought they wouldn't."

After you thought they wouldn't, he meant. Featherston couldn't even swear at him, not when he wasn't wrong. Because Forrest spoke his mind, Jake handled him more carefully than he would have dealt with some Party yes-man. "What's your judgment, then, General? If you reckon the risk is too high, we won't take it. But if you don't, this looks like a dandy place to bleed the damnyankees white."

"If everything goes well, sir, we ought to be able to do that," Forrest said at last. "If things go wrong, though . . . If things go wrong, we've given ourselves a lot of trouble that we didn't have to. And remember, Mr. President—we'll need more men here to bleed the Yankees than we would if we just kept 'em on the north bank of the Rappahannock. Those are men we wouldn't be able to use for other operations. The one thing the Yankees always have is more men than we do. So which is more important to you?"

Featherston smiled. He almost laughed out loud. He'd put the burden on Forrest's shoulders, and the chief of the General Staff had put it right back on his. And Forrest's question was a serious one. Jake hated nothing worse than being deflected from any purpose of his—indeed, he'd made a hallmark of being impossible to deflect. Here, though, Nathan Bedford Forrest III was speaking plain good sense, much too plain to ignore. "All right, dammit," Jake said grudgingly. "Hold 'em on the other side of the Rappahannock if you can."

He didn't fail to note how relieved Forrest looked. "We'll do that, sir, or we'll do our best to do it, anyhow," the general said. "If they try to force another crossing, they may get over whether we want them to or not. In that case, we'll do our best to give you the killing ground you have in mind."

He's trying to let me down easy. Again, Jake almost laughed. He said, "All right, that's how we'll do it, then. Make your orders out that way. And make sure the other thing, Coal-scuttle, is going forward the way it's supposed to. I want to make the United States feel the pinch, goddammit."

"Things are moving into place on that one, Mr. President," Forrest said. "Keeping a smaller presence here will help that, too. I don't think you'd find anyone who'd disagree there."

"All right. All right. You made your point." No, Jake didn't like being balked. It didn't happen very often, not when he was both President of the Confederate States and head of the Freedom Party. He'd thought he knew just how Al Smith's mind worked, but then the son of a bitch decided to go on with the war. And now this . . .

"Mr. President, we simply aren't big enough to do two big things at once," Forrest said. "That's a nuisance, but it's the truth. If we try to pretend we are, we'll end up in trouble."

"If you try to teach your grandma how to suck eggs, *you'll* end up in trouble," Jake said. Nathan Bedford Forrest III chuckled, though Jake hadn't been joking. The President went on, "Let's get back to Richmond, then." He all but spat out the words. He'd wanted to take off his shirt and serve a gun, the way he had in the Great War. Things were simple then. With the enemy right in front of you, you went ahead and blew him up. You didn't need to worry about anything else.

These days, enemies were everywhere: not just the damnyankees, not just the niggers who tormented the CSA, but fools and bunglers who wouldn't go along and traitors who wanted to see him fail just because that would mean they were right and he was wrong. *I'll settle them all—every last one of them,* Jake thought. *By the time I'm through, this country will look the way it's supposed to, the way I want it to.*

As usual, he went back to Richmond in an ambulance. If U.S. airplanes appeared overhead, the Red Crosses on the vehicle ought to keep the Yankees from shooting it up. Also as usual, he had an ordinary—although armored—motorcar take him the last leg of the journey so no Yankee reconnaissance aircraft or spies on the ground would spot an ambulance going into the Gray House.

Bomb craters turned the grounds around the Presidential residence into a lunar landscape. And repairmen swarmed over the building itself. "Jesus!" Jake exclaimed. "How come nobody told me it got hit

again?”

“Probably didn’t want to get you all upset, sir,” his driver answered.

Probably didn’t want to make you blow a gasket, that meant. The driver was probably right, too. Jake had succeeded in making people afraid of him. Men who would tell him what they thought, men like Nathan Bedford Forrest III and Clarence Potter, were rare. The rest said what they thought he wanted to hear—either that or they hunkered down and didn’t tell him anything. That last looked to be what had happened here.

“Is Lulu all right?” he demanded when he got inside. If his secretary wasn’t and they’d kept that from him, they’d be sorry, and pretty damn quick, too.

But the flunky he’d asked nodded. “She sure is, Mr. President. Just about everybody got down to the shelter before the bombs started falling.”

“Well, that’s good, anyway,” Featherston said. The bomb shelter below the Gray House was as elaborate as the one under the Confederate War Department. No doubt the shelter under Powel House in Philadelphia was just as fancy, but it hadn’t done Al Smith one damn bit of good. Jake preferred not to dwell on that.

When he got to his office, Lulu greeted him with a nod. “Hello, Mr. President,” she said, as calmly as if nothing had happened while he was away.

“Hello, sweetie,” he said, and gave her a hug. She was one of the tiny handful of people he cared about as people and not as things to order around or otherwise manipulate. If he’d lost her . . . He didn’t know what he would have done.

Her sallow cheeks turned pink. “You worry about running the country, sir,” she said. “You don’t need to worry about me.” In such things, she could give him orders, or thought she could.

“I’ll worry about whatever I . . . darn well want to,” he said. He swore like the old soldier he was around everyone else, but tried not to around her. Her disapproving sniffs were too much for him to take. He went on, “Can I still work at my desk, or did it get blown to, uh, smithereens?”

“I’m afraid it did, sir,” Lulu answered. “But everything down below

came through just fine."

Jake made a discontented noise, down deep in his throat. He didn't want to run the war from down in the bomb shelter, even if its air conditioning made it a comfortable place in the hot weather that lay ahead. It felt like being cooped up inside a submarine. Actually, Jake had never been inside a sub, so he couldn't prove that, but it felt like what he thought being cooped up in one *would* feel like. And what he wanted to do wasn't always the same as what he needed to do. The shelter bristled with telephone and wireless links. He *could* run the war from it. If he didn't like it—well, too bad. This was war, and people all over the continent were putting up with things they didn't like.

A young man in a State Department uniform came up to him, waited to be noticed, and then said, "Sir, may I speak to you for a moment?"

"You're doing it," Jake told him.

"Er—yes." For some reason, that flustered the State Department fellow. He needed a moment to gather himself. Then he said, "Sir, we've heard from the Emperor of Mexico. His Majesty will provide the three divisions you requested."

"Good. That's good." Featherston tried to make his smile benign instead of tigerish. Maximilian hadn't wanted to cough up the men. Jake had been blunt about what would happen to his miserable gimcrack country—and to him—if he didn't. Evidently the message had got through. The President went on, "We've saved the greasers' bacon a few times. Only fitting and proper they pay us back."

"Yes, sir," the State Department man said. He looked as if he would have been more comfortable in striped trousers and cutaway coat. Too damn bad for him.

"Anything else, sonny?" Jake asked. The puppy shook his head. Featherston jerked a thumb toward the front door, which hadn't been damaged. "All right, then. Get lost."

The kid from the State Department disappeared. Jake stared after him. Either they really were making them younger than they had once upon a time or he himself was starting to get some serious mileage on him. He suspected the problem did not lie with the State Department.

Whether he was getting old or not, he still had a war to run. He could do that better than anybody else in the CSA. *Better than anybody else in*

the USA, too, by God, he thought. And those three Mexican divisions would help, especially since, now that Maximilian had agreed once, he'd have a harder time saying no if Jake asked again. And Jake intended to do just that.

D r. Leonard O'Doull wondered what was going on when he and his aid station got pulled out of their position across the Rapidan from the Wilderness and shifted east. Now he knew: they'd left the frying pan and gone straight into the fire.

Most of the frying was getting done on the other side of the Rappahannock, in and just beyond Fredericksburg. The U.S. Army had battered out a foothold there, as it had in the Wilderness. It was trying to feed in enough men and machines to make the foothold mean something. Whether it could was very much up in the air.

Whether the kid on the table in front of O'Doull would make it was also up in the air. A piece of shrapnel had torn the hell out of his chest. He was bleeding faster than O'Doull could patch him. "Keep pouring in the plasma!" O'Doull barked to Granville McDougald. "Gotta keep his blood pressure up."

"Pretty soon there won't be any blood in the pressure," McDougald said. That exaggerated, but not by much. An awful lot of blood had come out, and an awful lot of plasma had gone in. "Shit!" McDougald exclaimed. "We haven't got any pressure now!"

"Yeah." O'Doull had no trouble figuring out why, either—the kid's heart had stopped. He grabbed it and started cardiac massage. Once in a blue moon, that worked. Most of the time, a heart that stopped would never start again. This was one of those times. After a few minutes, he let it go and shook his head. "We've lost him."

McDougald nodded. "Afraid you're right. That was a nasty wound. We did everything we could." He beckoned to a corpsman. "Get him off the table, Eddie. He's Graves Registrations' business now."

"Right, Granny," Eddie said. "One more Deeply Regrets telegram. One more time when everybody hopes the Western Union delivery boy stops next door."

The corpse was hardly out of the tent before a groaning sergeant with a shattered knee came in on a stretcher. "Granny, you do this one and I'll pass gas," O'Doull said. "You're neater at orthopedic stuff than I

am.”

“I’ve had more practice, Doc, that’s all.” But McDougald sounded pleased. He wasn’t an M.D. despite his vast experience; to have a real doctor defer to him had to make him feel good.

“Gas!” the sergeant said when O’Doull pressed the ether cone down over his nose and mouth. O’Doull had seen that before. He and Eddie kept the wounded man from yanking off the cone till the anesthetic took hold.

Eddie shook his head as the sergeant’s hands finally went limp. “That’s always so much fun,” he said.

“Yeah,” O’Doull agreed. “How’s he look, Granny?”

“It’s a mess in there. Kneecap’s smashed, medial collateral’s cut,” McDougald answered. “Can you get him down a little deeper? I want those leg muscles as relaxed as I can get ’em.”

“Will do.” O’Doull opened the valve on the ether cylinder a little more.

After a minute or so, McDougald gave him a thumbs-up. The medic worked quickly and skillfully, repairing what he could and removing what he couldn’t repair. When he was through, he said, “He’ll never run the mile, but I think he’ll walk . . . pretty well.”

“Looked that way to me, too,” O’Doull said. “That medial collateral was nicely done. I don’t think I could have got it together anywhere near as neat as you did.”

“Thanks, Doc.” McDougald’s gauze mask hid most of his smile, but his eyes glowed. “Had to try it. A knee’s not a knee without a working medial collateral. It’s not a repair that would do for a halfback, but for just getting around it ought to be strong enough.”

“They play football in Quebec, too. Well, sort of football: they’ve got twelve men on a side, and the end zones are big as all outdoors. But it’s pretty much the same game. Guys get hurt the same way, that’s for sure,” O’Doull said. “I’ve had to patch up a couple of wrecked knees. I told the men I’d come after ’em with a sledgehammer if I ever caught ’em playing again.”

“Did they listen to you?” McDougald asked, amused interest in his voice.

“Are you serious? Quebecois are the stubbornest people on the face of the earth.” Leonard O’Doull knew *he* sounded disgusted. “Repairing a knee once isn’t easy. Repairing it twice is damn near impossible.” He flexed his none too impressive biceps. “I’m getting pretty good with a sledgehammer, though.”

“I believe that.” McDougald and Eddie eased the wounded sergeant off the table. He would finish recovering farther back of the line. McDougald caught O’Doull’s eye. “Want to duck out for a butt before the next poor sorry bastard comes in, Doc?”

“I’d love to. Let’s—” But O’Doull stopped in midsentence, because the next poor sorry bastard came in right then.

One look made O’Doull wonder why the hell the corpsmen had bothered hauling him all the way back here. He had a bullet wound—pretty plainly an entry wound—in his forehead, just below the hairline, and what was as obviously an exit wound, horrible with scalp and blood, in back.

Seeing O’Doull’s expression, one of the stretcher-bearers said, “His pulse and breathing are still strong, Doc. Maybe you can do *something* for him, anyways.”

“Fat chance,” O’Doull muttered. Military hospitals still held men who’d got turned into vegetables by head wounds in the Great War. Some of them had a strong pulse and breathed on their own, too. Some of them would die of old age, but none would ever be a functioning human being again.

Then the wounded man sat up on the stretcher and said, “Have any aspirins, buddy? I’ve got a hell of a headache.”

“Jesus Christ!” Everybody in the aid tent except the fellow with the head wound said the same thing at the same time. One of the bearers and Eddie and O’Doull crossed themselves. O’Doull had seen a lot of things in his time, but never a man with a through-and-through head wound who sat up and made conversation.

Granville McDougald strode forward. He bent low and looked not at the soldier’s injuries but at the scalp between them. Then he shook his head in slow wonder. “I will be damned,” he said. “I’ve heard of wounds like this, but I didn’t think I’d ever run into one myself.”

“What is it, Granny?” O’Doull asked. He wanted to latch on to something, anything, but the idea of a dead man talking.

“Look, Doc. You can see for yourself.” McDougald’s finger traced the injury. “The slug must have gone in, then slid around the top of this guy’s skull under the scalp till it exited back here. It didn’t do a damn thing more. It couldn’t have, or he’d be dead as shoe leather.”

“I’m fine,” the soldier said. “Except for that headache, anyhow. I asked you guys for aspirins once already.”

“Well, I’ll be a son of a bitch,” O’Doull said, ignoring him. “You’re right. You’ve got to be right. That is the luckiest thing I have ever seen in my life. I thought he was a ghost for a second, I swear to God I did.” The rational part of his brain started working again. “We’d better send him back for X-rays once we clean him up. He could have a fracture in there—though his head’s so hard, he might not.”

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean?” the wounded man demanded.

“If you didn’t have a thick skull, pal, that bullet might’ve gone through instead of around,” O’Doull told him. “Can you get up on the table by yourself? We’re going to want to get some disinfectant on that and stitch you up and bandage you. You’ve got a story you can tell your grandchildren, that’s for sure.”

The soldier walked to the table and sat down. “You ain’t doin’ nothin’ to me till I get my aspirins, you hear?”

“Give him a couple, Eddie,” O’Doull said wearily. “Hell, give him a slug of the medicinal brandy, too. If anybody ever earned it, he did.”

That produced the first thing besides loud indignation he’d got from the wounded man, who exclaimed, “Now you’re talkin’, Doc! Want a smoke? I got these off a dead Confederate—fuck of a lot better’n what we make.”

O’Doull grabbed his hand before he could light a match. “You don’t want to do that in here,” the doctor said in gentle tones that camouflaged the panic inside. “You’re liable to blow us sky high if you do.”

After the little white pills and the knock of honey-colored hooch, the wounded man was willing to sit still while O’Doull patched him up. He grumbled about the way the doctor’s novocaine burned before it numbed. He grumbled that he could feel the needle even after the novocaine started working. Except for complaining about his headache, he didn’t grumble at all about getting shot in the head.

“Don’t get the bandages over my eyes, dammit,” he said. O’Doull had to coax him back into the stretcher so the corpsmen could take him away—he wanted to walk.

Once he was gone, O’Doull let out a long sigh and said, “Now I *am* going to have that smoke, by God!”

“Me, too,” Granville McDougald said. They both left the tent to light up—and they both smoked Confederate tobacco, too.

O’Doull blew out a long plume of smoke. “Great God in the foothills,” he said. “Now I really have seen everything.”

“Yeah, well, you know what’s gonna happen as well as I do, Doc,” McDougald said. “They’ll patch him up and they’ll send him home till he finishes healing, and he’ll be a nine days’ wonder while he’s there. And then he’ll come back to the front, and he’ll stop a shell burst with his nuts, and he won’t have to worry about telling his grandchildren stories anymore.”

“Christ!” Whatever O’Doull had expected him to say, that wasn’t it. “And I thought this war was making *me* cynical.”

McDougald shrugged. “You got out after 1917. You found yourself a nice little French gal and you settled down. I’ve worn the uniform all that time. I’ve got a long head start on you. The shit I’ve seen . . .” He shook his head. But then he shook it again in a different way. “I’d never seen anything like that before, though. Talk about beating the odds! I’d heard of it. I knew it was possible. But I’d never seen it, and I never thought I would.”

“You sure were one up on me,” O’Doull said. “When he rose up on the stretcher there, I figured he was Lazarus.”

“Gave me a turn, too, and I won’t try to tell you any different.” McDougald took a last drag on his cigarette and crushed it out under his boot. “Well, at least we can feel good about things for a while. Lazarus is going to get better. Some of the ones like that help make up for the sorry bastards we lose.”

On the other side of the Rappahannock, Confederate guns started pounding. Asskickers screamed down out of the sky. Bombs burst. O’Doull stamped out his cigarette, too. “They’ll be bringing more back to us before very long,” he predicted. “Either that or they’ll move us forward up into Fredericksburg.”

“Gotta keep us close to the source of supply,” McDougald said.

“The source of supply,” O’Doull echoed. “Right.” That was cynical, too, which didn’t mean it was wrong.

VI

S nyder, Texas, was a long way north of Baroyeca, Sonora. It could get just as hot, though. Hipolito Rodriguez didn’t know how or why that was so, but he knew it was. He’d seen as much in the summertime in Texas during the Great War.

It wasn’t summer yet, but the hot weather had arrived ahead of the season. Down in Baroyeca, he’d have worn a broad-brimmed straw sombrero, a loose-fitting cotton shirt, baggy trousers, and sandals. He would have been a lot more comfortable than he was in his gray guard uniform, too. The cap he had on didn’t keep the sun off him nearly well enough. And he especially hated his shiny black boots. He didn’t think he would ever get used to them. They pinched his feet at every step he took.

Nothing he could do about it, though. Guards had to stay in uniform. That was one of the rules, and nobody who didn’t stick to the rules had any business being a guard. Along with the rest of his squad, he stood by the train tracks that ran between Camp Determination and the new women’s camp alongside it.

Officially, the women’s camp was part of Camp Determination. Brigade Leader Pinkard—Rodriguez’s old war buddy—was in charge of it, too. Unofficially, the guards called the women’s half Camp Undecided. Despite being married to a thoroughly decisive woman, Rodriguez thought that was pretty funny.

All the guards carried submachine guns. Tower-mounted machine guns also bore on the disembarking point. Prisoners who tried anything cute ended up dead in a hurry. The overwhelming firepower on display helped persuade incoming Negroes that acting up wasn’t smart.

A big, swag-bellied Alabaman named Jerry pointed east down the

track. “Look at the smoke,” he said. “Another load of niggers coming in.”

The sergeant in charge of the squad said, “Well, what the hell would we be cookin’ our brains for out here if there wasn’t another goddamn train comin’ in?” Tom Porter, like the men he led, was a Freedom Party guard, so his formal rank was troop leader, not sergeant, but he wore three stripes on the sleeve of his gray tunic, and he acted like every senior noncom Rodriguez had ever known.

Up in the towers, the machine guns swung toward the train when it was still a good half a mile off. A couple of the men in Rodriguez’s squad hefted their weapons. Other guards along the track also grew alert. Dog handlers patted their coon hounds. The dogs were called that because they were most often used to hunt raccoons. The men who used them here had a different sort of fun with the name.

Wheezing and groaning, the train slowed and then stopped. The locomotive had to date back to the turn of the century, if not further. Even in sleepy Sonora, it would have been an antique. More modern machines served closer to the front. This one would do for hauling *mallates.*

The passenger cars and freight cars it pulled had also seen better decades. Again, they were good enough for this. The passengers cars had shutters hastily nailed up outside their windows. That kept the blacks inside from looking out and people outside from looking in.

All the cars were locked from the outside. Tom Porter pointed to the two closest to his squad. “We’ll take ’em one at a time,” he said, “the front one first.” As he set his beefy hands on the latch, he added, “Be ready for anything. Niggers comin’ out, they’re liable to be a little crazy, or more than a little.”

When he opened the door, the first thing that rolled out was a ripe, rich stench: shit and piss and puke and stale, sour sweat. Rodriguez wrinkled his nose. Far too many people had been packed inside that passenger car for much too long. They came spilling out now, a jumble of misery, blinking and shading their eyes against the sudden harsh sunlight.

If you got the jump on them early, they usually didn’t get it back. “Move!” Porter screamed, and the other guards echoed him. “Men to the left! Women and pickaninnies to the right! Move, God damn you!”

They moved—the ones who could. Some just collapsed by the railroad

car. Kicks and punches drove most of those to their feet. The rest were too far gone for even brutality to rouse. “Water!” one of them croaked in a dust-choked voice. “I gots to have water. Ain’t had no water since I dunno when.”

Rodriguez kicked him—not hard enough to cripple, just hard enough to make sure the *mallate* knew who was boss. “Get up!” he yelled. “No water here. Water inside the camp.” Slowly, the Negro struggled upright and stood swaying.

A plump black woman said, “Dey’s dead folks inside de car dere, poor souls.”

There usually were casualties on a journey like this. The cars carried six or seven times as many people as they were designed to hold. Food was whatever the Negroes managed to smuggle aboard the train. The windows wouldn’t open, and the shutters would have kept out most of the air if they had.

And, all things considered, this carload of blacks had it easy. They could have come to Camp Determination in a cattle car, the way a lot of Negroes in this train had. Nobody bothered cleaning cattle cars very well before loading people into them. They had no windows, shuttered or otherwise. They had no toilets, either, only a honey bucket or two. And they were so jammed with men, women, and children that getting to a honey bucket would have taken a small miracle.

A striking young woman with a dancer’s walk and high cheekbones that argued for an Indian grandparent sidled up to Rodriguez. “You keep me safe in here, I do anything you want,” she purred in a bedroom voice. “Anything at all. My name’s Thais. You look for me. I’m *real* friendly.”

“Go on. Get moving,” he said stonily, and her face fell. Like most of the guards, he heard something like what she’d said at least once whenever a train came in. Women thought it would help. Sometimes they were even right. Not here. Not now.

“Form lines! Bring your luggage! Form lines! Bring your luggage!” Like every squad leader, Tom Porter yelled the same thing over and over. “You gotta be searched! You gotta be deloused! You gotta be searched! You gotta be deloused!”

The searchers would take away all the weapons and all the valuables they found. That stuff was supposed to go back into the war effort.

Some of it, maybe even most of it, did. The rest stuck to the searchers' fingers. Searchers were senior men. They'd paid their dues, and now they were getting their reward. Some of them were getting to be wealthy men.

Slowly the lines formed. Even more slowly, they moved forward. Men and women too weak to rise in spite of calculated brutality lay by the railroad cars. "Get the stretcher parties out!" an officer shouted. "We'll move them to the transfer facility!"

None of the guards laughed or winked or nudged one another. They'd got lessons about that. *Never do anything to spook the spooks,* one trainer had put it. *The transfer facility* was a killing truck. The only place they'd be transferred was the mass grave not far away. All the prisoners in Camp Determination were heading that way. The ones too weak to rise got an express ticket—that was the only difference.

Black men carried away the weaklings. The story the bearers got was that the trucks would take them to an infirmary a couple of miles away. The infirmary existed. Every once in a while, a Negro came back from it. That kept the inmates from flabbling about what happened to the ones who didn't. More guards with submachine guns kept an eye on the stretcher bearers. But guards kept an eye on everybody all the time, so that didn't seem out of the ordinary.

Guards went through the cars to bring out the dead, the dying, and anybody who thought he'd get sneaky and try to hide. It was nasty work, but they couldn't trust it to the stretcher bearers, who were too soft on their own kind. Some of the dead ones had money or jewelry worth lifting. You never could tell.

Shouts farther down the train said another squad had caught a lurker. More shouts—these of pain—said he was getting what was coming to him. The guards would beat him to within an inch of his life. Then he'd get thrown on the first available truck "to the transfer facility"—and that would take care of the last inch.

"They're such damn fools," said a guard heaving bodies out of the car with Rodriguez. "They think we're not gonna check the fuckin' cars. Gotta be dumb as rocks if they do."

"That's right," Rodriguez said.

"Damn straight it is," the other guard said. Buchanan Thornton was his name—he told people to call him Buck. He had no doubts about anything, not as far as Rodriguez could see. Few whites in the CSA

did, and Buck Thornton was as white as they came: sandy hair with a lot of gray in it, blue eyes, pointy nose, freckles.

If there weren't blacks around to revile, he probably whiled away the time cussing at greasers. Where he was, though, he didn't have the time or energy to worry about anything but Negroes. As a Sonoran, Rodriguez knew he was on the bottom rung of the social ladder. But he was on the ladder; down below lay the ooze and the muck—the blacks on whose back the ladder stood.

He looked down on them all the more because he was closer to them than people higher up the ladder. In an odd way, though, Negroes were an insurance policy for people of Mexican blood. As long as they were there, nobody except a few Texans got excited about his kind.

The first trucks rolled out of Camp Determination. When they came back, the *mallates* aboard them wouldn't be there anymore. Rodriguez wouldn't miss them a bit, either. The first Negroes he'd ever met had had guns in their hands. They'd done their level best to kill him. He'd hated and feared them ever since. If Jake Featherston wanted to get rid of them, more power to him and to the Freedom Party.

As more stretcher bearers hauled away dead and dying blacks, Rodriguez had an odd thought. Suppose Camp Determination and others like it—for there were bound to be others like it—succeeded. Suppose they made the Confederate States Negro-free. What would the country be like then?

It would be a lot safer, was the first answer that sprang into his mind. *Mallates* were nothing but trouble. Even now, they left car bombs in cities and bushwhacked whites in the countryside. Good riddance to them.

But if they were gone—if they were *all* gone—what would that social ladder be like? People always needed someone at whom they could look down their noses. Who would fall into that unenviable role?

People like me, Rodriguez thought—people with brown skin and black hair, people who spoke English with an accent. That might not be so good. He wondered why the question hadn't occurred to him sooner.

He shrugged. That would come later, much later, if it ever happened at all. It wasn't anything he had to lose sleep over, and he didn't intend to. He had a job to do, and he was going to do it the best way he knew how.

And maybe he shouldn't have looked down his nose at that Thais. She wasn't bad, and he hadn't seen Magdalena for a long time now. He shrugged again. It wasn't as if there weren't plenty of fish in that particular sea.

A ir-raid sirens howled, tumbling George Enos, Jr., out of bed much too early on a Sunday morning. Either somebody with a sadistic sense of humor had picked the time for a drill—always a possibility in the Navy—or the Japs were feeling friskier than usual.

When antiaircraft guns not far from the barracks started banging away, George got his answer. He also heard several anguished groans—gunfire and hangovers mixed poorly.

He took the time to throw on tunic and trousers and shoes before running for the closest slit trench. Not everybody bothered. Some people dashed out in nothing but skivvies. Nobody ragged them for it, either. In combat, what you had to do came first, with everything else a long way behind.

A fighter swooped low. Machine-gun bullets chewed up the grass and sent dirt jumping. Some of them kicked into the trench, too. Somebody howled like a coyote when a bullet found him. George scrunched himself up as small and as low as he could. His whites got filthy, but that was the least of his worries.

Most of the action, though, was well away from the barracks. The Japs were aiming for the harbor and the nearby airfield. Warships and airplanes could hurt them. Mere men were an afterthought.

Fremont Blaine Dalby jumped into the trench and just missed pulverizing George's kidneys with his big feet. He must have dodged the strafing fighter's bullets like a halfback dodging tacklers. "Bastards are going to pay for this," he panted, crashing down beside George.

Something blew up with force enough to make the ground shake. "Looks like they're dishing it out, not taking it," George pointed out in a bellow that, under those circumstances, did duty for a whisper.

"Yeah, but if they want to yank the lion's tail, they gotta stick their head in his mouth," Dalby said. That wasn't the way George would have gone about pulling a lion's tail, assuming he were mad enough to try such a thing, but he knew better than to criticize a CPO's choice of metaphors. And when Dalby went on, he was as concrete as Boulder

Dam: “If their airplanes can reach us, ours can reach their carriers. And we must have known they were coming unless every goddamn Y-range operator in the Sandwich Islands is asleep at the switch. So we oughta be good and ready for ’em.”

“Here’s hoping,” George said.

An airplane smashed to the ground not far enough away. He stuck his head up, hoping to watch a Japanese pilot fry in the wreckage. But the burning fighter was American: he could still make out the eagle and crossed swords painted on the fuselage. He hoped the pilot had bailed out before his machine crashed. Then the warm, tropical breeze brought him the stink of burning meat. His stomach did a flipflop worse than any in the North Atlantic in wintertime.

Dalby stuck his head up, too. He was looking along the trench. “We’ve got a lot of our crew here,” he said. “We ought to find us a gun to man.”

The prospect of getting out of the trench did not fill George with delight. He wanted to tell Dalby as much. What came out of his mouth was, “I’ll follow you, Chief.” The desire not to look bad before one’s fellow man is a strange, compelling, and terribly powerful thing.

When Dalby yelled, Fritz Gustafson answered the call right away. George might have known nothing would faze the loader; even if he was scared, he was too damn stubborn to show it, probably even to himself. Dalby looked around again. The rest of the gun crew were either out of earshot or sensibly keeping their heads down and their mouths shut. “Screw it,” Dalby said. “We got a shell-heaver, a loader, and I can damn well aim. Come on.”

He scrambled out of the trench. George did follow him. If he muttered about how many different kinds of damn fool he was, then he did, that was all. There was still a hell of a lot of racket all around. Dalby either didn’t hear him or had a good enough excuse to pretend he didn’t.

“Plenty going on,” Gustafson said: a novel’s worth of words from him.

He wasn’t wrong. American and Japanese warplanes tangled overhead. If anybody had an edge, George couldn’t tell who it was. Both ground-based antiaircraft guns and those mounted on ships in Pearl Harbor were throwing shells up as fast as they could. Shrapnel was starting to come down, pattering and clattering off roofs and sidewalks and thumping into bare ground. George wished he had a

helmet. That stuff would rearrange your brains if it hit you in the head.

“Come on,” Fremont Dalby said again. “Let’s find us a gun.” He trotted off as if he knew exactly where to do it.

And damned if he didn’t. Twin 40mm mounts were almost as thick as fleas on land as well as aboard ship. This one had fallen silent because a bomb burst behind it turned the crew to tattered red rags. George gulped. Blood splashed the guns’ breech ends and dappled the shells.

Dalby looked at the fallen gunners. “They’re dead,” he said, which was almost an understatement. “Not a damn thing we can do for ’em—except maybe pay the Japs back. You guys feed and load, I’ll aim, and we’ll all hope like hell.”

George got blood on his hands when he passed shells to Fritz Gustafson. The loader got more on his when he shoved them home. Dalby aimed at a bomber.

The gun roared. Shell casings leaped from the breeches and clanged on the cement sidewalk. With only three men to serve the piece, it couldn’t fire as fast as it would have with a whole crew. Nobody cared. They were hitting back, not just taking a pounding the way they had been.

George had no idea whether they hit anything. He didn’t have time to look up. He was too busy doing his job, trying to pass as much ammunition as two men would. The loader didn’t complain, and neither did Fremont Dalby. He couldn’t have done too badly, then.

Only when the gun fell silent did he pause, blinking in surprise. “No more targets,” Dalby announced. “They’ve flown the coop.”

When George glanced at his wristwatch, he blinked in amazement. He also took a good, long look to make sure the second hand was going around. “We’ve only been here fifteen minutes?” he said.

“Time flies when you’re having fun,” Dalby said. “I think maybe we ran ’em off. Other question is, what did they do to us?”

Whenever George moved, his shoes left bloody footprints. He didn’t want to look at what was left of the gun’s original crew. But, in a fight like this, men were small change. How many airplanes had the Japs lost? Would they lose any carriers? Measure that against the damage they’d done and you’d get some idea of who’d come out on top.

Maybe.

“You men!” That was an unmistakable officer’s bark. Along with his shipmates, George turned, came to attention, and saluted. The unmistakable officer—a lieutenant commander, no less—kept on barking: “I haven’t seen you before, and I know damn well this isn’t your proper station. Explain yourselves.”

“Sir, we’re from the *Townsend,*” Dalby answered. “We were looking for a way to hit back at the enemy. You can see for yourself what happened to the men who were posted here. We fought this gun as well as we could, sir.” He spoke calmly, quietly, respectfully. Only his eyes asked, *What were* you *doing while all this crap was going on?*

The lieutenant commander had some mileage on him. By the fruit salad on his chest, he’d started out during the Great War. He knew what the petty officer wasn’t saying. Knowing, he turned red—not so red as George’s footprints, but red enough. “Carry on,” he said in a choked voice, and got out of there in a hurry.

“You showed him,” George said.

“Yeah.” Fremont Dalby didn’t sound happy. “You shouldn’t *have* to show officers, though, especially not the ones who’ve been around the block. But some of ’em just have to make like they’re God.”

When stretcher bearers came by, the men from the *Townsend* waved to them. They hurried over, but they didn’t stay. “We’re supposed to be looking for wounded,” one of them said. “Those birds ain’t goin’ anywhere if we leave ’em where they’re at. Sooner or later, the meat wagon will deal with ’em.”

“Not right,” George said. “These guys were doing everything they could till their number came up. Shouldn’t just leave ’em like garbage.” Actually, they reminded him of what was all over the decks of the *Sweet Sue* after the men on the fishing boat had been gutting big cod.

But Dalby cut the stretcher bearers more slack than he’d given the officer. “Wounded count for more,” he allowed. “You can still save them.”

“Thanks, Chief,” said the man who’d spoken before. The bearers hurried away.

Dalby looked at his shipmates. “Either one of you notice if we had

bombers taking off?”

“Not me,” George said at once. “I was too busy trying not to let the Japs blow me to kingdom come, and then trying to shoot ’em down.”

“We did,” Fritz Gustafson said. “They were already airborne when I hit the trench.” Two consecutive sentences from him were a telephone book, an unabridged dictionary, from a noisier man.

Fremont Dalby nodded. “That’s pretty good. We ought to be hitting back pretty damn quick, then. Those bastards need to pay.”

“Bombers should have taken off the minute we picked up the Japs’ airplanes on the Y-range set,” George said.

“Yeah,” Dalby said thoughtfully, and then, in deeper, gruffer, angrier tones, *“Yeah!”* He kicked at the sidewalk. “Yeah, goddammit. Somebody *was* asleep at the switch again. That would have been the best way to do it, sure as hell. Christ, there are times when I really do think we want to lose this fuckin’ war.”

“Hey, Dalby, you still in one piece?” The shout came from the direction in which the gunners had come. Only another CPO would have used the gun chief’s naked surname with such relish.

“Yeah, we’re here, Burnett.” Dalby gave back what he’d got. “Leastways we didn’t stay in the trench sucking our thumbs and hanging on to our Theodore bears.”

Chief Burnett’s reply offered an improbable and uncomfortable destination for both thumbs and Theodore bears. Dalby suggested that Burnett’s mother already resided there. Burnett gave forth with an opinion on certain habits of Dalby’s mother about which he was unlikely to have personal knowledge. Then, in the same unruffled tone of voice, he asked, “You cocksuckers hit anything?”

“Damfino,” Dalby answered, also without much heat. “We gave it our best shot, that’s all.” He slapped Gustafson and George on the back, staggering them both—and George was not a small man, and Fritz Gustafson was a big one. “You already knew the squarehead’s solid. And this guy here ain’t half bad.”

George shuffled his feet on the blood-splashed sidewalk. “Thanks, Chief,” he mumbled. A Naval Cross from the hands of an admiral wouldn’t have meant nearly so much as that laconic praise from a man who mattered to him.

“**W** ell, well,” Tom Colleton said. “What have we here?”

What they had there was a company of Confederate barrels: big, snorting machines painted in butternut with swirls and splotches of dark green and dark brown to make them harder to spot and harder to hit. But they were barrels the likes of which hadn’t been seen up in Ohio before.

Lieutenant-Colonel Colleton strolled over for a closer look at the new monsters. They were plainly related to the beasts that had spearheaded the Confederate thrust to Lake Erie the summer before. They were just as plainly bigger and meaner—*Tyrannosaurus rex* next to the earlier *Allosaurus.* They seemed more squat, lower to the ground. As Tom Colleton got up to them, he realized they weren’t, but the impression remained. Instead of going straight up and down, most of their armor was cleverly sloped to help deflect shells. And their turret guns were bigger and longer than those of the earlier models.

One of the barrel drivers was head and shoulders out of his machine: no point in buttoning up when the damnyankees weren’t close. “That’s a two-and-a-half-inch cannon you’ve got there?” Colleton asked.

“Three inches, sir,” the man answered, proud as if he’d said *eight inches* of himself. “Some of those Yankees’ll never know what hit ’em. Seventeen-pound shell.”

“Sweet Jesus!” Tom exclaimed. “Yeah, that’ll make you sit up and take notice, all right. How many of these bastards have we got?”

“Many as we need, I reckon,” the driver said.

“Oh, yeah? I’ll believe that when I see it,” Tom Colleton said. In his experience, nobody ever had as many barrels as he needed. The enemy wrecked a few, some more broke down—and then, just when they would have come in handy to take out some well-sited, well-protected machine-gun nests, there wouldn’t be any for miles around.

But the driver nodded. Why not? He could duck down inside all that lovely armor plating. He didn’t have to look longingly at it from the outside. He didn’t have to worry about machine guns, either, no matter how well protected they were. He said, “Sir, don’t you fret. This time, by God, we’re going to get the job done.”

“Here’s hoping,” Tom said. The driver—a cocky kid—just grinned at

him. He found himself grinning back. It wasn't as if barrel crewmen didn't have worries of their own. When they were in the field, they were cannon magnets. All the enemy's heavy weapons bore on them. The armor that kept out small-arms fire could turn into a roasting pan to cook soldiers if something did get through.

"You'll see." Yeah, the kid was cocky.

He also sounded like somebody who knew more than he was letting on. "What *is* the job we're going to get done?" Tom asked. He commanded a regiment; nobody'd bothered to tell him anything. He should have been miffed that a noncom from another unit knew more about what was going on than he did. He should have been, but he wasn't, or not very. He'd seen enough in both the Great War and this one to know that kind of crap happened all the time.

Before the barrel driver could answer, somebody inside the machine said something to him through the intercom. Tom heard the squawk in the kid's earphones, but he couldn't make out any words. The driver said, "Sorry, sir—gotta go. Orders are to push up a little closer to the front."

"Be careful," Tom warned. "The damnyankees have started sneaking in more and more infiltrators. They like to plant mines, and their snipers try and blow the heads off drivers and commanders who don't stay buttoned up."

"Sir, we've got us this big ol' cannon and two machine guns. I reckon we can make any old infiltrators knuckle under," the driver answered. He ducked down into the barrel, but didn't close the hatch. The engine's note deepened as the machine rattled forward with its companions.

Tom stared after them, coughing a little from the noxious exhaust fumes. He would have bet everything he owned that the kid had never seen combat. Nobody who had was that casual about snipers. If the other guy shot first, how big your gun was or how many rounds per minute you could put out didn't matter.

"Luck," Tom muttered. If that smiling puppy lived through his first couple of brushes with U.S. soldiers, he had a good chance of living quite a while longer. You got experience in a hurry—or, if you didn't, they buried you somewhere up here with a helmet stuck on a stick or on a rifle to mark where you lay.

That fancy barrel the kid was driving couldn't help but improve his

odds. *If we'd had these when the war started . . .* Tom shook his head. The CSA hadn't had them, and he couldn't do a thing about it. The damnyankees hadn't had them, either. How long would they need to come up with barrels that matched these? How long before both sides sported land dreadnoughts, behemoths that laughed at danger and squashed antlike mortal men under their tracks without even knowing they were there?

Tom shook his head again. Nothing he could do about it except try to make sure he wasn't one of the poor sorry bastards who got squashed. He had no guarantees of that, either, and he knew it.

The barrels had rolled east out of Sandusky, not west. That said something, anyhow. He'd expected them to go in that direction, but nothing was carved in stone. It did look as if the CSA would have to hit the USA another lick to make the bigger country fall over. Cutting the United States in half hadn't quite done the job.

Why hadn't Al Smith thrown in the sponge, dammit? Everybody could have gone home. Tom would rather have been in St. Matthews than in Sandusky. He didn't know anybody who *wanted* to be here. But needing to be here was a different story.

Not all the reinforcements that came in were armored units. The infantrymen Tom saw made him raise an eyebrow. They weren't raw troops in fresh uniforms. They wore butternut frayed at the cuffs and the elbows and knees, faded by the sun, and deprived of all possibility of holding a crease by hard use. Their weapons were well tended, but a long way from factory-new. They were, in other words, just as much veterans as the men he commanded.

Where had they come from? Virginia seemed the only likely answer. Outside of Ohio, it was the only place that could have produced men like this. Fighting went on here and there in the West, but neither side put full force into that effort. The CSA and the USA both seemed sure the decision would come where they were strongest, not at the periphery. As far as Tom could see, the big brains on both sides were likely right.

But the damnyankees were still pounding away in Virginia. Could the Confederate States pull men out of there and go on holding them off? Tom had to hope so.

A day or two later, he realized that wasn't necessarily the right question. An even more pressing one was, couldn't the Confederate

States do anything in Ohio without bleeding Virginia of men? The answer to that one looked to be no, and it wasn't the answer Tom wanted to find. Robbing Peter to pay Paul wasn't a good way to fight a war.

But what choice did the CSA have? None Tom could see. This was the downside of getting into a fight with a country that had a lot more manpower than you did. He called down more curses on Al Smith's head. The whole idea of storming up through Ohio, of cutting the United States in half, had been to knock the USA out of the fight before numbers really mattered. The Confederates had tried it. They'd succeeded as well as they'd hoped to. Everything had been perfect.

Except the United States hadn't quit.

Now the Confederate States faced the same sort of grinding struggle as they'd seen in the Great War. What should have been a one-punch KO was a no-holds-barred wrestling match now.

Airplanes droned by overhead. Tom Colleton cast a wary eye up to the heavens. He knew where he'd jump if they turned out to be U.S. airplanes. He looked for shelter as automatically as he breathed. That he looked for shelter so automatically helped keep him breathing.

But they were C.S. machines. Even when the silhouettes were tiny, he recognized them. He wondered what he'd do when his side—or the damnyankees—brought out new models. He had a pretty good notion, too: the first few times, he'd dive for cover whether he needed to or not. After that, he'd be able to tell friend from foe again.

The day was coming. It was probably coming soon. The Confederate States had new, improved barrels. Before long, they were bound to have new, improved airplanes, too. So were the United States.

Where would it end? Probably with both sides flying to the moon, with guns that could strike from five hundred miles away, and with bombs that could blow up whole counties if not whole states. Tom laughed at himself, but then he wondered why. Back in 1917, he couldn't have imagined the weapons the CSA and the USA were using now. What *would* the state of the art be in 1967, or in 1992?

He shivered, standing there under the warm spring sunshine. Things were much deadlier now than they had been a generation earlier. If that went on for another twenty-five years, wouldn't wars end almost before they started? And if not, why not?

“Sir?”

Tom started. He wondered how long the sergeant standing beside him had been trying to get his attention. By the exaggerated patience on the man’s face, he’d done everything but wave wigwag flags. “What is it, Meyers?” Tom asked. “I’m here—I really am.”

“That’s good, sir,” Sergeant Meyers said. “I was going to ask you if you knew when the balloon was going up. Not officially, you understand, but if you knew. It’d help the men get ready.”

“I wish to God I did, Sergeant, but whatever we’re doing, nobody has bothered to tell me about it yet. You can take that for whatever you think it’s worth.” Tom’s laugh was half rueful, half furious. “One of the drivers for those new barrels had a pretty good notion, or reckoned he did. He had to pull out before he could tell me what it was. Damned impressive barrel, though.”

“Oh, yes, sir!” Meyers was not a man given to wild enthusiasms; few sergeants were. That sort of man was much more likely to be a private or a lieutenant. But the sergeant waxed enthusiastic now. “We have enough of those critters, we’ll make the damnyankees say uncle for sure.”

“I hope you’re right, Sergeant.” Tom meant it. After what the C.S. Army had been through the year before, though, and after what it had accomplished, he took nothing for granted. That any one weapon, no matter how wonderful, could knock the USA out of the war struck him as unlikely.

He kept his mouth shut. If Sergeant Meyers thought the Yankees would fall over dead as soon as the Confederates kicked them back one more hill, fine. That made him a more cheerful soldier, a *better* soldier, at least until the damnyankees did get pushed back past that last hill, if they ever did. If they got pushed back and didn’t fall over dead . . . Well, in that case Meyers and the other men like him would have some rethinking to do. He might not be such a terrific soldier for a while after that.

Wherever we’re going, we’re going east, Tom thought. *Right into the heart of Yankeeland. We’d better make ’em say uncle, by God.*

“**S** teady as she goes, Mr. Cooley,” Sam Carsten told his executive officer.

“Steady as she goes—aye aye, sir,” Pat Cooley replied, his freckled face intent on keeping the *Josephus Daniels* as steady as she could possibly go. The destroyer escort crept through the hot, muggy night towards a shoreline that was. . . .

Carsten didn’t like to think about how very ready to receive them that Virginia shoreline probably was. Keeping anything secret in these crowded waters required a miracle beyond the power of any Navy Department functionary to provide. Sam wasn’t altogether certain the Holy Ghost could have given him one as big as he needed. Sneaking into Chesapeake Bay without getting either mined or torpedoed hadn’t been the smallest of miracles all by itself.

He spoke into the telephone that connected the bridge with the gun turrets: “Everything ready there? You have your targets?”

“Yes, sir!” the gun chiefs answered together.

“All right, then.” Sam smiled there in the darkness. Even as a rating, he’d been in charge of bigger pieces than these four-inch popguns. “At my order, and give it everything you’ve got. . . . *Fire!*”

Twin tongues of flame belched from the turrets, lighting up the night for a heartbeat with a hellish orange glow. Recoil made the ship shudder. Those tongues thrust out again, and then again and again, as each gun crew did its best to prove it was faster than the other. First the bow turret took the lead, then the stern. All told, judging a winner was next to impossible.

Splashes of fire inland told of shell hits. Sam knew where the target was, but not what it was. That evidently wasn’t necessary for the mission. He kept an eye on the luminous hands of his watch. When exactly five minutes had gone by, he said, “Cease firing,” into the telephone. An aching silence fell. He turned to the exec. “Mr. Cooley, I do believe we may have worn out our welcome. Get us out of here. All ahead full, course 010.”

“All ahead full, course 010.” Cooley rang the engine room. The *Josephus Daniels* put on as many revolutions and as much speed as she had. Sam was used to ships with a lot more dash. He felt nailed to the surface of the bay despite the phosphorescent wake streaming from the bow. Destroyer escorts were cheap and easy and fast to build. Considering their liabilities, they needed to be.

On the shore, the Confederates were waking up. First one field gun and then a whole battery started firing at where the *Josephus Daniels*

had been. Those were 105s—guns of about the same caliber as the destroyer escort carried.

The bridge telephone rang. When Sam picked it up, one of the turret chiefs said, “Sir, permission to return enemy fire?”

“Permission denied,” Sam answered, in lieu of screaming, *Are you out of your frigging mind?* He went on, “We’ve done what we came to do here. Now our job is to get out in one piece so we can come back and do it again one day before long. Shooting back makes us much too visible, and they have more guns than we do. We just scoot. Got that?”

“Yes, sir,” the turret chief said sullenly. Carsten found it hard to fault a man who wanted to raise hell with the enemy, but you needed a sense of proportion. *No,* I *need a sense of proportion. That’s why I’m the Old Man.* There were times when he felt like a very old man indeed.

Pat Cooley eyed him from the wheel. Cooley was ten times the ship handler he would ever be. Sam hadn’t taken the wheel of any ship till he became the skipper here. “Your thoughts, Mr. Cooley?” Sam asked.

“Sir, I’d like to shoot back at those bastards,” the exec answered. Sam stiffened. But after a moment Cooley went on, “You’re right, though. Probably a good idea that we don’t. They’re missing us pretty bad—if I were in charge of that battery, I’d be reaming ’em out right now.”

But the man in charge of that C.S. battery—a sergeant or lieutenant tumbled from his blanket when the *Josephus Daniels* opened up—had a better idea. Two of his guns fired star shells that lit up the bay—and the destroyer escort—with a cold, clear, terrible light.

Men at the antiaircraft guns started shooting at the star shells. If they could wreck the parachutes that supported them in the air, the blazing shells would fall into the sea and sizzle out. The bow turret no longer bore on the Confederate battery. The stern turret opened up without orders. Sam only nodded to himself. With the *Josephus Daniels* out there in plain sight, a muzzle flash or three didn’t make a rat’s ass’ worth of difference.

And she *was* out there in plain sight. The Confederate guns on the coast wasted no time correcting their aim. Shells began bursting around and on the destroyer escort. Most of the ships on which Sam had served would have laughed at 105mm shells. But the *Josephus Daniels,* like any destroyer, was thin-skinned. She had no armor to protect her. Screams made Sam grind his teeth. Men serving the

antiaircraft guns topside were vulnerable aboard any ship that floated. He knew that. Knowing it left it no easier to take.

“Smoke, Mr. Cooley,” he said. “We’ll see how much good it does.”

“Smoke. Aye aye, sir.”

More star shells lit up the night. Smoke blossomed around the *Josephus Daniels.* It helped less than it might have under other circumstances. Sam had feared as much. She was the only thing afloat in this part of Chesapeake Bay. If the smoke screen moved, she had to be at the front end of it. Knowing that, the Confederate gunners didn’t lose a whole lot of accuracy from not being able to see their target anymore.

Nothing to do but take the pounding and try to get away. Sam had heard Great War stories about how raiders caught between their trench line and the enemy’s hated star shells with a purple passion. Now he understood exactly how they felt. There you were, all lit up, naked as a bug on a plate.

A big boom and a flash of light from the shore said the *Daniels’* gun had hit something worthwhile—probably the ammunition store for one of the guns shooting at the ship. Before Sam could let out a whoop, a Confederate shell burst just forward of the bridge. He watched a machine-gun crew blown to cat’s meat. Fragments whistled and screeched past him. After pausing to make sure he was still in one piece, he asked, “You all right, Mr. Cooley?”

“Everything’s copacetic here, Skipper,” Cooley said, and then, “Well, almost everything.” He displayed his left sleeve, which had a brand-new gash in it. An inch farther in and he would have gone down to the sick bay with a wounded arm. Six inches farther in and they would have had to carry him to sick bay with a belly wound. Even with all the fancy drugs they had these days, belly wounds were very bad news.

“Good for you, Pat.” That sliced sleeve made Sam less formal than usual. “You don’t really want a Purple Heart, no matter how pretty the ribbon would look on your uniform.”

“Yes, sir,” Cooley said. Another shell screamed in. He and Sam both ducked automatically, not that ducking was likely to do a hell of a lot of good. The shell was a clean miss, bursting a good hundred yards to starboard. A little hesitantly, the exec asked, “Are we going to get out of this, sir?”

Sam thought of talking about the Battle of the Three Navies, when the British and the Japanese hit the *Dakota* with everything but their purse. He thought about the *Remembrance*'s last fight, when Japanese air power finally sank the tough old carrier. In the end, though, he just stuck to business: "Unless we take one in the engine room that leaves us dead in the water, we will. Otherwise, those 105s may hurt us, but they won't be able to kill us before we get out of range."

Cooley considered that, then nodded. He looked at his wristwatch. "At flank speed, we've got to stand the gaff for—what? About another fifteen minutes?"

Carsten checked his watch, too. He laughed ruefully. "Yeah, that's about right. I didn't think it would be so long. Aren't we lucky?"

"Lucky. Right." Cooley managed an answering grin, but one of a distinctly sepulchral sort. A Confederate shell burst just behind the stern. Those near misses were dangerous, because fragments still flew. Screams from that direction said some of these had struck home.

"Can you give us any more down there?" Sam yelled to the engine room through a speaking tube.

"Sir, she's flat out," the chief engineer said. "Shit, we've got the valves tied down the way they did on the old paddle-wheel riverboats."

"All right—thanks." Sam sighed. He shouldn't have expected anything different. He hadn't really, but he'd hoped for something like, *Oh, yes, sir, we'll dreelspayl the paragore and get you two more knots easy as you please.* Two more knots? He snorted. He wanted ten more. *Well, sonny boy, you ain't gonna get 'em.* He turned back to the exec. "Do you think we ought to throw some zigzags into the course?"

"Straight gets us out of range faster," Cooley said doubtfully.

"Yeah, but it lets them lead us, too," Sam answered. "Ever hunt ducks?"

"Once or twice, but I didn't like it. It's not all it's quacked up to be."

"Ouch. Don't do that again. I think I'd rather—" Sam broke off. However bad Cooley's occasional puns were, he didn't prefer being under Confederate gunfire to listening to them.

The exec did start zigzagging at random. That would have been better with another ten knots, too, but you did what you could with what

you had. Sam thought it helped. They took another hit and a couple of more near misses, but nothing that slowed them down. And, even though those were some of the longest fifteen minutes of Sam's life, they finally ended.

By then, all the shells were coming in astern of the *Josephus Daniels.* When the Confederates realized as much, they ceased fire.

"Now we're home free, if one of their airplanes doesn't find us," Sam said.

"You're full of cheerful thoughts, aren't you, sir?" Cooley said.

"Like a sardine can is full of sardines, son," Sam answered. "Straighten out and head for home. I'm gong to assess the damage. Keep straight unless we're attacked. If they jump us before I'm back to the bridge—" He broke off again. "Belay that. I'll take the conn. *You* go assess the damage and report back."

"Aye aye, sir." Cooley didn't question him. The *Josephus Daniels* was *his,* Sam Carsten's, no one else's. Responsibility for her was his, too. He couldn't stand the idea of anything happening if he wasn't there when it did. Cooley said, "I'll hustle, sir."

Sam stared at the Y-range screens as the ship sped up toward Maryland. No aircraft heading his way, nothing on the water. He didn't think the Confederates had anything bigger than a torpedo boat operating in the bay, but a torpedo boat could ruin you if you didn't spot it till too late.

Cooley came back. "Sir, looks like four to six dead, a couple of dozen wounded. We've got one wrecked 40mm mount—that's the worst of the damage. The rest is mostly metalwork. All things considered, we got away cheap."

"Thank you, Mr. Cooley," Sam said. *We got away cheap.* The dead and the maimed would not agree with the exec. Sam found that he was inclined to. War measured what you dished out against what you took. By that grim arithmetic, the *Josephus Daniels* had got away cheap.

H yrum Rush had gone back to Utah and been passed through the lines into Mormon-held territory under flag of truce. As far as Flora Blackford was concerned, even that was better than he deserved. His

parting words before getting on the train that would take him west were, “You people will see what this costs you.” If he hadn’t been under safe-conduct, that would have been plenty to make Flora lock him up and throw away the key.

“The nerve of the man!” she spluttered when his warning—his threat?—got back to the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. “We should never have talked with him in the first place!”

“There I agree with you completely,” Robert Taft said. “You will have more luck persuading the administration than I’m likely to, though.”

Taft was a famously acerbic man, and also one given to understatement. He remained the leading hard-line Democrat in the Senate. Flora worried about agreeing with him. He no doubt also worried about agreeing with her.

“I’ve never said Socialists can’t make mistakes,” Flora answered. “I have said they aren’t the only ones who can make mistakes. Some people don’t recognize the difference.”

He gave her a tight smile—the only kind his face had room for. “I can’t imagine what you’re talking about,” he said, and she found herself smiling back.

They had plenty to do, questioning officers and men about the bloody fiasco at Fredericksburg. About the most anybody—including Daniel MacArthur—would say to defend it was, *It seemed like a good idea at the time.* Trying to pin down why it had seemed a good idea was like trying to scoop up water with a sieve. The committee remained very busy and accomplished very little.

Like anyone else these days, Hyrum Rush had to go up through Canada to travel from east to west. Flora kept track of his progress through Franklin Roosevelt. “I hope you’re making him cool his heels up there,” she told the Assistant Secretary of War.

“We thought about it, Congresswoman,” he said. “We thought about it long and hard—believe you me we did. Finally, though, we decided that showing him how bad our bottleneck up there really is would only encourage him. And so we hustled him through instead.”

Flora thought about that. Reluctantly, she nodded. “You’re inconveniencing him most by inconveniencing him least,” she said.

Even over the telephone, his laugh made her want to laugh along with

him. “That’s just what we’re doing, Flora,” he said between chortles. “The only thing is, I didn’t know it was what we were doing till you told me just now. I’m going to steal your line every chance I get, and most of the time I’m not going to give you any credit.”

“Who in politics ever does give anybody else any credit?” Flora said, which only set him laughing again.

She stopped worrying about Hyrum Rush once she heard he’d got back to what his people called Deseret. Sooner or later, the U.S. Army would grind it out of existence—for good this time, she hoped. Utah and the Mormons had been a running sore on the body politic for much too long.

The biggest question facing the Joint Committee was whether it would have the nerve to tell the War Department to put somebody besides Daniel MacArthur in charge in Virginia. Flora was convinced the man didn’t deserve his command. But she also saw he had an aura of invulnerability about him—not because of his battlefield talents but because of his personality.

George Custer had had an aura like that during the Great War. Even Teddy Roosevelt had moved carefully around him. Of course, Custer and Roosevelt—the other Roosevelt—had been rivals for years, ever since the Second Mexican War. But no one in the present administration had anything close to TR’s own strength of character. That being so, any decisive steps without prodding from the Joint Committee struck even Flora, a good Socialist, as unlikely.

She was saying so, pointedly enough to dismay Chairman Norris, when an explosion made the building shake. Plaster pattered down from the ceiling. Somebody said, “That was a close one.”

Somebody else said, “Damn Confederates haven’t sent any day bombers for a while—begging your pardon, Congresswoman.”

“Oh, I damn them, too,” Flora said. “You don’t need to doubt that for even a minute, believe me.” She looked down at her notes. “May I continue, Mr. Chairman?”

“You have the floor, Congresswoman.” Senator Norris looked as if he wished she didn’t.

“Thank you, sir.” The florid politeness that had once seemed so unnatural to her was now second nature. “As I was saying—”

But before she could say it, a man in a guard's uniform stuck his head into the meeting room. "We're evacuating the building. That was an auto bomb near the front entrance. We don't know if they've got any more close by." He grimaced. "We don't even know who *they* are, dammit." He didn't apologize for swearing in front of Flora.

They. The enemy within never went away. Who was it this time? Confederate saboteurs? Mormons living up to Hyrum Rush's promise? Rebellious Canadians? British agents? Any combination of those groups working together? Flora didn't know. Somebody was going to have to find out, though.

"Please come with me," the guard said.

"Before we do, let's see your identification," Robert Taft snapped. Flora reluctantly allowed that that made good sense. If the man in the uniform was part of the plot . . . People were going to start looking under beds before they went to sleep if this went on.

The guard showed Senator Taft his identity card without a word of protest. Satisfied, Flora nodded. Flora wondered what Taft would have done if the man had gone for his pistol instead. Probably thrown himself at it—he had the courage of his convictions, as well as plenty of courage of the ordinary sort.

Following the guard, the members of the Joint Committee hurried out of the massive building Congress used in Philadelphia—wags called it the box the Capitol came in. They emerged on the side opposite the one where the auto bomb had gone off. Along with several others, Flora started around the building so she could see the damage for herself. "That isn't safe!" the guard exclaimed.

"And how do you know standing here is?" she answered. "Any one of these motorcars may be full of TNT and ready to blow up." The guard looked very unhappy, which didn't mean she was wrong.

"You told him," Taft said approvingly.

"So I did," she said, and hurried on. A makeshift police and fire line stopped her and the others before they got very close to the site of the explosion. Even what they could see from there was bad enough. Bodies and pieces of bodies lay everywhere. The front of the hall had taken heavy damage. It all seemed worse than the aftermath of an air raid, perhaps because the auto's chassis turned into more, and more lethal, shrapnel than a bomb casing did. One of Flora's colleagues was noisily sick on his shoes.

“Someone will pay for this.” Robert Taft sounded grim.

No sooner had he spoken than half the façade of the Congressional hall crashed down to the cratered street. A great gray-brown cloud of dust rose. Soldiers and policemen rushed into it to rescue whoever lay buried under the rubble. Flora covered her face with her hands.

A reporter chose that moment to rush up to her and ask, “Congresswoman, what do you think of this explosion?”

“I hope not too many people got hurt. I hope the ones who did will recover.” Flora realized the man had a job to do, but she didn’t feel like answering foolish questions right now.

That didn’t stop the reporter from asking them. With an air of breathless anticipation, he said, “Who do you think is to blame for this atrocity?”

“I don’t know. I’m sure there will be an investigation,” Flora said.

“But if you had to guess, who would be responsible?” he persisted.

“If I had to guess right now, *I* would be irresponsible,” Flora told him.

The answer should have made him take a hint and go away. No such luck. He was not one of those reporters who recognized anything as subtle as a hint. And that turned out to be just as well, for his next question told Flora something she didn’t know: “What do you think of the explosions in Washington and New York and Boston and Pittsburgh and Chicago and—other places, too?”

“What explosions?” Flora and Robert Taft spoke together, in identical sharp tones.

“Whole bunch of auto bombs.” The reporter seemed as willing to give information as to try to pry it out of other people. “The Capitol and Wall Street and the State House in Boston and I don’t know what all else. Lots of damage, lots of people dead. All about the same time as this one. News was coming over the wire and by wireless when I got the call to get my, uh, fanny over here.”

“Jesus Christ!” Taft burst out. Flora didn’t echo him, but her thoughts amounted to something similar. He went on, “This has the smell of a conspiracy.” Flora wouldn’t have argued with that, either.

The reported scribbled in his spiral-bound notebook. “Smell of a

conspiracy," he repeated, and dipped his head. "Thank you, Senator—that's a good line." He hurried off.

"A good line," Taft echoed bitterly. "That's all he cared about. But my God—if what he said about those other places is true . . ."

"That would be very bad," Flora said, one of the larger understatements of her own political career. "The Confederates have had a lot of trouble with auto bombs. I wonder if they're paying us back, or if it's someone else."

As she had to the reporter, Taft said, "I don't know."

She nodded. But her conscience niggled at her all the same. She'd applauded when she heard about auto bombs going off in the Confederate States. The Confederates, after all, deserved it for the way they treated their Negroes.

Again, who thought the United States deserved it? The Confederates, because the USA had had the gall to win the Great War? The Mormons, because the United States wouldn't leave their precious Deseret alone? She would have bet one them, but what did she have for proof? Nothing, and she knew it. The Canadians, because the United States still held their land? The British, because the Americans had taken Canada away from them?

All of the above? None of the above?

Sounding both furious and frightened, Robert Taft went on, "We'd better get a handle on this business in a hurry. If we don't, any damn fool with an imaginary grievance will think he can load dynamite into a motorcar and get even with the world."

Flora's thoughts hadn't gone in that direction, which didn't mean the Senator from Ohio was wrong. She said, "We'd better get a handle on this for all kinds of reasons." Two firemen carried a moaning, bloody woman past her on a stretcher. She pointed. "There's one."

"Yes." Taft tipped his fedora to her. "We have our differences, you and I, but we both love this country."

"That's true. Not always in the same way, but we do," Flora said. Cops helped a wounded man stagger by. Flora sighed. "At a time like this, though, what difference does party make?"

S ergeant Michael Pound was not a happy man. His barrel—and, in fact, his whole unit of barrels—had finally escaped from the southern Ohio backwater where they'd been stuck for so long. They were facing the Confederates farther north. That should have done something to improve the gunner's temper. It should have, but it hadn't.

No, Pound remained unhappy, and made only the slightest efforts to hide it. He was a broad-shouldered, burly man: not especially tall, but made for slewing a gun from side to side if the hydraulics went out. He had a deceptively soft voice, and used it to say deceptively mild things. When he thought the men put above him were idiots, as he often did, he had a way of making sure they knew it.

What really irked him was that he'd been the gunner on Irving Morrell's personal barrel. Whatever Morrell found out, Pound had learned shortly thereafter. Morrell hadn't minded his sarcastic comments on the way the brass thought (if the brass thought at all: always an interesting question). And Michael Pound hadn't thought Morrell was an idiot. Oh, no—on the contrary. The only thing wrong with Morrell was that *his* superiors hadn't seen how good he was.

The Confederates had. After their sniper put a bullet in Morrell, Pound was the one who'd carried him out of harm's way and back to the aid tent. Scuttlebutt said Morrell was finally back in action. That was good. The CSA would be sorry.

But Morrell wasn't back in action *here.* That wasn't good, and it especially wasn't good for Michael Pound. He'd declined a commission several times. Now he was paying for it. Because of his reputation as a mouthy troublemaker, he didn't even command his own barrel, though a lot of sergeants did. They'd put him under a young lieutenant instead. Pound didn't know if they'd deliberately intended to humiliate him, but they'd sure done the job.

Bryce Poffenberger might have been born when Pound joined the Army, but probably hadn't. But he owned a little gold bar on each shoulder strap, and Pound had only stripes on his sleeve. That meant Poffenberger was God—and if you didn't believe it, all you had to do was ask him.

He never asked for Pound's opinion. He didn't seem to think the War Department had issued opinions to enlisted men. If he'd had a better notion of what he was doing himself, Pound wouldn't have minded so much. But he never had been able to suffer fools gladly, and he never had been able to suffer in silence, either.

When Poffenberger ordered the barrel to stop on the forward slope of a hill, Pound said, “Sir, we would have done better to halt on the reverse slope.”

“Oh?” The second lieutenant’s voice already had a defensive quaver to it, and he’d known Pound for only a few days at that point. “Why, pray tell?”

Pray tell? Pound thought. Had anyone since the Puritans really said that? Bryce Poffenberger just had, by God. Patiently, the sergeant answered, “Because on the reverse slope we’re hull-down to the enemy, sir. This way, the whole barrel makes a nice, juicy target.”

Lieutenant Poffenberger sniffed. “I don’t believe there are any Confederates close by.” He stood up in the turret to look out through the cupola. That was something good barrel commanders did. It took a certain nerve. Poffenberger might have been a moron, but he wasn’t a cowardly moron.

Not half a minute later, a round from a Confederate antibarrel gun assassinated an oak tree just to the barrel’s left. Poffenberger ducked back down with a startled squeak. Sometimes—not often—Sergeant Pound was tempted to believe in God. This was one of those times.

“Reverse!” Poffenberger ordered the driver. “Back up!” The Confederates got off one more shot at the barrel before it put the hill between itself and the gun. Lieutenant Poffenberger eyed Michael Pound. “How did you know that was going to happen, Sergeant?”

“I have more combat experience than you do, sir,” Pound answered matter-of-factly. *So does my cat, and I haven’t got a cat.*

“They warned me about you,” Poffenberger said. “They told me you had a big mouth and were insubordinate.”

“They were right, sir.” Pound knew he shouldn’t sound so cheerful, but he couldn’t help it.

The young lieutenant went on as if he hadn’t spoken: “They told me you were all puffed up because you’d served with Colonel Morrell for so long, and he used to let you get away with murder. They told me you’d started to think you were a colonel yourself.”

That did hold some truth, which Sergeant Pound also knew. He said, “Sir, there was one difference between when I talked to Colonel Morrell and when I talk to you.”

“Oh?” What’s that?” Poffenberger sounded genuinely intrigued.

“When I said something to the colonel, sometimes he’d believe me before the barrel almost blew up.”

Poffenberger was a fair-haired, fair-skinned youngster from somewhere in the upper Midwest. When he turned red, it was easy to see. He turned red as a traffic light now. “Maybe you have a point, Sergeant,” he choked out. “Maybe. But I command this barrel. You don’t. There’s no getting around that.”

“I don’t want to get around it, sir,” Pound answered earnestly. “I don’t want to be an officer. I could have been an officer years ago if I wanted to put up with the bother.” Watching Lieutenant Poffenberger’s jaw drop was amusing, but only for a little while. Pound added, “I don’t want to be an officer, but I don’t want to get killed, either. Not even sergeants like getting killed . . . sir.”

“I didn’t think they did.” Poffenberger couldn’t have sounded any stiffer if he’d been carved out of marble.

Pound pretended not to notice. He said, “Well, in that case, sir, don’t you think we ought to scoot to one side or the other? We’re hull-down here, but we’re not turret-down, and if those butternut bastards get a halfway decent shot at us, they’ll remind us the hard way.”

He waited. How stubborn was the lieutenant? Stubborn enough not to listen to somebody with a lower rank even if not listening made getting nailed with a high-velocity armor-piercing round much more likely? Some officers—more than a few of them—were like that. They wanted to be right themselves, even if it meant being dead right. Short of knocking them over the head, what could you do?

But Poffenberger spoke to the driver, and the barrel shifted position. Quietly, Pound said, “Thank you, sir.”

“I didn’t do it for you.” The lieutenant was testy. “I did it for the sake of the barrel.”

Like a man who’d sweet-talked a girl into bed with him, Sergeant Pound cared little about the whys and wherefores. All he cared about was that it had happened. He didn’t point that out to Lieutenant Poffenberger. He didn’t want the lieutenant thinking he’d been either seduced or screwed. And if Poffenberger hadn’t done it for love . . . well, so what?

No steel dart came hurtling toward them. That was the only thing that mattered. A little later, a platoon of U.S. foot soldiers went over the hill and chased away the antibarrel cannon. A tiny triumph, no doubt, but anything that looked even a little like a victory pleased Pound.

Lieutenant Poffenberger had an extra circuit on his wireless set, one that hooked him to division headquarters. When he started saying, “Yes, sir,” and, “I understand, sir,” and, “We’ll be careful, sir,” Pound started worrying. Something had gone wrong somewhere, and what was even a tiny triumph worth?

“What’s up, sir?” the sergeant prompted when his superior showed no sign of passing along whatever he’d learned.

Poffenberger gave him a resentful look, but maybe the lesson from the antibarrel gun was sticking, at least for a little while. “There are reports the Confederates are stirring around,” the lieutenant said unwillingly. Even more unwillingly, he added, “There are reports they’ve got a new-model barrel, too.”

Michael Pound nodded. “Yes, sir, I’ve heard about that. Did they give you any details on the beast?”

“What do you mean, you’ve heard about it?” Poffenberger’s eyes seemed ready to start from his head. “I just this minute got word of it.”

“Well, yes, sir.” Pound smiled. That only unnerved the lieutenant more, which was what he had in mind. “Trouble is, you have to wait for the wireless to tell you things. Enlisted men have their own grapevine, you might say. From what I’ve heard, the new enemy barrel’s supposed to be very bad news: bigger gun, better armor, maybe a bigger engine, too.”

“Jesus,” Poffenberger muttered, more to himself than to his gunner. “What the hell do we bother with espionage for? Put a few corporals on the job and they’d have Jake Featherston’s telephone number in nothing flat.”

“It’s FReedom-1776, sir,” Pound answered seriously. Poffenberger stared at him, convinced for one wild moment that he meant it. That told Pound everything he needed to know about how much he’d intimidated the lieutenant. In a gentle voice, he said, “I’m only joking, sir.”

“Er—yes.” Lieutenant Poffenberger gathered himself. The process was

very visible, and so funny that Pound had to bite down on the inside of his lower lip to keep from laughing out loud. Carefully, Poffenberger asked, “How did Colonel Morrell ever put up with you?”

“Oh, we didn’t have any trouble, sir,” Pound answered. “Colonel Morrell wants to go after the bad guys just as much as I do. I hear they’ve sent him to Virginia. The people over there must be keeping him under wraps, or else we would have heard a lot more out of him.”

“I . . . see.” Poffenberger eyed Pound the way a man wearing a suit made of pork chops might eye a nearby bear. More than a little plaintively, the lieutenant said, “I want to go after the enemy, too.”

“Of course, sir,” Pound said in tones meant to be soothing—but not too soothing. “The point is, though, to be as sure as we can that we get them and they don’t get us.”

Poffenberger started to say something. After what had almost happened on the forward slope of the hill, though, he couldn’t say a whole lot, not unless he wanted Pound to blow a hole in it the way the antibarrel cannon had almost blown a hole in the machine he commanded. What he finally did say was, “You are a difficult man, Sergeant.”

“Why, thank you, sir!” Pound exclaimed, which only seemed to complete Lieutenant Poffenberger’s demoralization.

An officer? Who needs to be an officer? Pound thought, more than a little smugly. *As long as you’ve got the fellow who’s supposed to be in charge of you eating out of the palm of your hand, you have the best of both worlds.*

Bombers rumbled by overhead. Antiaircraft guns started up behind the U.S. lines—they were Confederate airplanes. By the way Poffenberger looked up at them through the cupola, they didn’t worry him nearly so much as the man with whom he shared a turret. Michael Pound . . . smiled.

M ail call!”

Like most of his buddies, Armstrong Grimes perked up when he heard that. It wasn’t even so much that he expected mail. The only person who regularly wrote to him was his father, and Merle Grimes’ letters weren’t the most exciting in the world. But being reminded that people back home remembered the soldiers here in Utah were alive counted for a good deal.

“Jackson!” called the corporal with the mail bag.

“He’s on sentry duty,” somebody said. “I’ll take ’em for him.”

The soldier with the sack handed him half a dozen letters held together with a rubber band. He pulled out another rubber-banded clump. “Reisen!”

“I’m here,” Yossel Reisen answered, and grabbed his mail. He had a lot of family back in New York, and got tons of letters.

“Donovan!” The noncom with the mail held up some more letters and a package.

“He got wounded last Tuesday,” one of the gathered soldiers answered. The man with the mail bag started to put back the package. The soldier said, “If that’s cake or candy, we’ll keep it.”

“Depends,” the corporal said. “How bad is he?”

Etiquette required an honest answer to that question. After brief consultation, another soldier said, “He can probably eat it. Send it back to the field hospital.”

Some more names were called, including Armstrong’s. He had a letter from his father and, he was surprised to see, one from Aunt Clara. His aunt, a child of his grandmother’s old age, was only a couple of years older than he was. They’d fought like cats and dogs ever since they were tiny. He wondered what the devil she wanted with him now.

Before he could open it, the guy with the sack called, “Appleton!”

Tad Appleton’s birth name was something Polish and unpronounceable. That, at the moment, didn’t matter. Three men put what did matter into two words: “He’s dead.” One of them added, “Stopped a .50-caliber round with his face, poor bastard.” Armstrong found himself grinding his teeth. When Appleton’s body got back to

Milwaukee, they'd bury him in a closed casket. No undertaker in the world could fix up what that bullet had done to him.

"Here, then." The soldier with the mail tossed a package to the men gathered around him. That also followed etiquette—such things shouldn't go to waste.

More letters and packages got passed out, till the sack was empty except for mail belonging to the wounded and the dead. The corporal with the sack bummed a cigarette and stood around talking with the men to whom he'd delivered the mail. A few soldiers who hadn't got anything stood there dejectedly. Their buddies consoled them as best they could. That wasn't just for politeness' sake. Armstrong had seen more than one man, forgotten by the folks back home, stop caring whether he lived or died.

He opened the letter from his aunt. It turned out to be a wedding announcement. Clara was marrying somebody named Humphrey Baxter. "Humphrey?" Armstrong said. "Who the hell names their kid Humphrey?"

"There's that actor," Reisen said. "You know, the fellow who was in *The Maltese Elephant.*"

"Oh, yeah. Him." Armstrong nodded. "This ain't him, though, I'll tell you that. This guy's probably a bad actor—you know what I mean? He's our age—gotta be—and he's not in the Army. He's pulling some strings somewhere, sure as hell." He eyed the announcement with distaste. "Damn paper's too stiff to wipe my ass with." He scaled it away.

The letter from his father mentioned Clara's upcoming wedding, too. Merle Grimes had little to say about Clara's intended. Armstrong nodded to himself. His old man had seen the elephant, and took pride in it. He wouldn't have much use for somebody who'd managed to wiggle out of conscription.

Yossel Reisen was methodically going through his mail. He held up one letter. "My aunt was in a meeting room when that auto bomb went off in front of Congress." He always played down being the nephew of the former First Lady. If he hadn't downplayed it, Armstrong didn't suppose he would have had to put the uniform back on at all. Unlike this Humphrey Baxter item, Yossel pulled his weight.

"She get out all right?" Armstrong asked.

“Uh-huh. Not a scratch, she says,” Reisen answered. “She wasn’t near the front of the building, thank God.”

“That’s good,” Armstrong said, and then, “Goddamn Mormons.” The Latter-Day Saints hadn’t claimed responsibility for the recent wave of auto bombs, but Deseret Wireless didn’t go out of its way to deny anything, either. Its tone was, *Take that! Serves you right, too.*

“They look just like anybody else,” Yossel said. “That makes them hard to catch, hard to stop.”

“Don’t it just?” Armstrong’s agreement was ungrammatical but heartfelt. He added, “I don’t like the way Confederate Connie goes on and on about it.”

“Well, who would?” Yossel paused. “Even when you know she’s full of crap, though, she’s fun to listen to.”

“Oh, hell, yes!” Armstrong’s agreement there was heartfelt, too. Nobody he knew took Confederate Connie even a quarter of the way seriously. Like every wireless broadcaster from the CSA, she was Jake Featherston’s mouthpiece. But a doozie of a mouthpiece she was, and she sounded like a doozie of a piece, period—she had the sexiest voice Armstrong had ever heard.

She spent a lot of time between records gloating about the auto bombs that had U.S. cities so on edge. “Now you-all know how we feel,” she would say. “We’ve been putting up with these contraptions for years. You laughed when it happened to us. Do you-all reckon we’re laughing now?” She would pause. She would giggle. “Well, you know what? . . . You’re right!”

Yossel Reisen opened another letter. “Who’s this one from?” Armstrong asked, having already gone through his meager mail.

“My Uncle David.”

“Which one’s he again?” Armstrong asked—Yossel had a *lot* of relatives.

“The one who lost a leg in the last war,” Reisen answered. “He’s a right-wing Democrat now. It drives Aunt Flora nuts.”

“Oh, yeah.” Armstrong nodded. Yes, his own father was inordinately proud of the wound that made him walk with a cane. Yossel’s uncle David overtrumped Dad’s wound in a big way. Come to that, Yossel’s

father had got killed before he was even born. Sure as hell, some people had had a tougher time of it than Merle Grimes, even if he wouldn't admit it this side of the rack. Armstrong asked, "What's he got to say?"

"He's talking about the auto bombs in New York City," Yossel answered, not looking up from the letter. "He says there were four of them—one on Wall Street, one in the Lower East Side where I grew up, and two in Times Square."

"Two?" Armstrong said.

"Two," Yossel repeated, his face grim. "One to make a mess, and then another one that went off fifteen minutes later, after the cops and the firemen showed up."

"Oh." Armstrong grimaced. "That's a dirty trick. Confederate Connie hasn't talked about anything like that."

"Probably doesn't want to give the *shvartzers* in the CSA ideas if they're listening to her," Yossel said. Armstrong nodded; that made pretty good sense. Yossel went on, "Waste of time, I bet. If the Mormons can figure it out, you've got to figure the *shvartzers* can, too."

"Bet you're right. It's a goddamn lousy war, that's all I've got to say. Poison gas and blowing the other guy's cities to hell and gone and both sides with maniacs blowing their *own* cities to hell and gone . . . Some fun," Armstrong said. "And these fucking Mormons won't quit till the last one's dead—and his ghost'll haunt us."

As if on cue, somebody shouted, "Incoming!" Armstrong threw himself flat even before he heard the shriek of the incoming round. It was a terrifying wail. The Mormons had something homemade and nasty. Artillerymen called it a spigot mortar. Most soldiers called the projectiles—each about the size of a wastebasket with fins—screaming meemies.

When they hit, they made a roar like the end of the world. They were stuffed with explosives and scrap iron, to the point where they were almost flying auto bombs themselves. The only drawback they had that Armstrong could see was that, like most of the Mormons' improvised weapons, they couldn't reach very far. But when they did get home . . .

Blast picked him up and slammed him down again, as if a professional

wrestler—or possibly God—had thrown him to the canvas. He tasted blood. When he brought a hand up to his face, he found his nose was bleeding, too. He felt his ears, but they seemed all right. After he spat, his mouth seemed better. His nose went on dripping blood down his face and, as he straightened, onto the front of his tunic. That was all right, or not too bad. Anything more and he would have worried about what the screaming meemie had done to his insides.

Instead, he worried about what the horrible thing had done to other people. The corporal who'd brought the mail forward was torn to pieces. If not for the sack, Armstrong wouldn't have recognized him. Poor bastard wasn't even a front-line soldier. Wrong place, wrong time, and he'd make another closed-casket funeral.

Shouts of, "Corpsman!" rose from half a dozen places. There weren't enough medics close by to see to everybody at once. Armstrong bandaged wounds and tied off one tourniquet and gave morphine shots with the syrettes in the soldiers' first-aid kits: all the things he'd learned how to do since he got thrown into battle the summer before.

Yossel Reisen was doing the same sorts of things. He also had a bloody nose, and he'd put a bandage on the back of his own left hand. More blood soaked through it. "There's a Purple Heart for you," Armstrong said.

Reisen told him where he could put the Purple Heart, and suggest that he not close the pin that held it on a uniform.

Armstrong gave back a ghastly grin. "Same to you, buddy, only sideways," he said. They both laughed. It wasn't funny—nothing within some considerable distance of where a screaming meemie went off was funny—but it kept them both going and it kept them from shrieking. Sometimes men who'd been through too much would come to pieces in the field. Armstrong had seen that a few times. It was even less lovely than what shell fragments could do. They only ruined a man's body. When his soul went through the meat grinder . . .

Belatedly, U.S. field guns started shelling the place from which the screaming meemie had come. Odds were neither the men who'd launched it nor the tube from which it started its deadly flight were there anymore.

"Bastards." Even Armstrong wasn't sure whether he was talking about the Mormons on the other side of the line or the gunners on his own. It fit both much too well.

* * *

“**N** eed to talk to you for a minute in my office, Xerxes,” Jerry Dover said when Scipio walked into the Huntsman’s Lodge.

Scipio was already sweating from the walk to work in formalwear under the hot Augusta sun. When his boss told him something like that, he started sweating all over again. But he said the only thing he could: “Be right theah, suh.” Maybe—he dared hope—this had to do with restaurant business. Even if it didn’t, though, he remained at the white man’s beck and call.

Dover’s office was as crowded and as filled with lists of things to do as ever. The restaurant manager worked hard. Scipio never would have presumed to think otherwise. The ashtray on the desk was full of butts, a couple of them still smoldering.

Dover paused to light yet another cigarette, sucked in smoke, blew it out, and eyed Scipio. “What’s your address, over in the Terry?” he asked.

That wasn’t what Scipio had expected. “Same one you got on all my papers, suh,” he answered. “I ain’t moved or nothin’.”

“For true?” Jerry Dover said. “No bullshit? No getting cute and cagey?”

“Cross my heart an’ hope to die, Mistuh Dover.” Scipio made the gesture. “How come you needs to make sure o’ dat?”

His boss didn’t answer, not right away. He smoked the cigarette down to a little dog-end in quick, savage puffs, then stubbed it out and lit a new one. When he did speak, he went off on a tangent: “I don’t reckon your wife and your young ’uns have ever seen the inside of this place.”

“No, suh, they ain’t never,” Scipio agreed, wondering what the hell Dover was going on about. The restaurant—by which he naturally thought of the part the customers never saw—was crowded enough with the people who had to be there: cooks, waiters, busboys, dishwashers. Others would have fit in as well as feathers on a frog. The manager had to know that better than he did.

No matter what Jerry Dover knew, he said, “Why don’t you bring ’em by tomorrow night when you come in for your shift? They get bored, they can spend some time here in the office.”

“Suh, my missus, she clean white folks’ houses. She already be at work when I comes in here,” Scipio said.

Dover frowned. “Maybe you tell her to take the day off tomorrow so she can come in with you.”

“People she work fo’ ain’t gwine like dat,” Scipio predicted dolefully. Blacks in the CSA never had been able to risk antagonizing whites. With things the way they were now, even imagining such a thing was suicidal.

The second cigarette disappeared as fast as the first one had. Dover lit a third. He blew a stream of smoke up at the ceiling. “Scipio,” he said softly, “this is important.”

Scipio froze, there in the rickety chair across the desk from the restaurant manager. Jerry Dover used that name to remind Scipio who had the power here.

By why he would want to use that power for this purpose baffled the Negro. Sending him down to Savannah made sense. This? This seemed mere whim. A man who expended power on a whim was a fool.

In the tones of an educated white man, Scipio said, “Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me *why* you require my family’s presence, sir?”

Dover’s eyes widened. He laughed out loud. “Goddamn!” he said. “She told me you could do that, but I plumb forgot. That’s fucking amazing. You ought to go on the wireless instead of some of those muttonheads they’ve got.”

“As may be, sir,” Scipio answered, and Jerry Dover laughed again. The black man added, “You still have not answered my question.” He dared hope Dover would. Skin color was the most important thing in the CSA; no doubt about it. But accent ran color a close second. If he sounded like an educated white man, the presumption that he was what he sounded like ran deep.

But not deep enough, not here. Dover set the live cigarette in the ashtray, steepled his fingertips on the desk, and looked at Scipio over them. “It would be a good idea if you got ’em here,” was all he said. His own way of speaking didn’t come close to matching Scipio’s. By his nervous chuckle, he knew it, too.

Scipio wanted to ask, *A good idea how? Why?* He wanted to, but he didn’t. He’d pushed the white man as far as Dover was willing to go.

Returning to the Congaree dialect that was his natural speech, Scipio said, “Reckon I do it, den.”

“Good,” Dover said. “I knew you were a smart fellow. If I didn’t think so, I wouldn’t have wasted my time banging my gums at you in the first place. Now get your ass out there and go to work.”

“Yes, suh,” Scipio said, relieved to be back on familiar ground.

When his shift ended, policemen let him through the barbed-wire perimeter surrounding the Terry. They knew him. He had a dispensation to be out after curfew. He made it back to his block of flats without getting knocked over the head.

Then he had his next hurdle: persuading Bathsheba not to do what she usually did. “Why for he want us there?” she demanded.

“Dunno,” Scipio answered. “But he want it bad enough to use my fo’-true name.”

“*Did* he?” That made Bathsheba sit up and take notice. Worry in her voice, she asked, “You reckon he do somethin’ nasty if we don’t come?”

“Dunno,” Scipio said again, more unhappily than ever. “But I reckons y’all better do it.”

Bathsheba sighed heavily. “Miz Kent, she ain’t gonna be real happy with me. Miz Bagwell neither. But we come.”

When his children got up the next morning, they were even more bemused than his wife was. “Somethin’ bad liable to happen, Pa,” Cassius said. His hands bunched into fists. “Can we fight back?” He was more like the hunter and guerrilla for whom he’d been named than he had any business being.

“Odds is bad,” was all Scipio said. That gave his son very little to react against.

“Don’t know that I ever wants to go into the ofay part of Augusta no more,” Antoinette said. “They hates us there.”

“They hates we here, too,” Scipio answered. “You should oughta come, though. I don’t reckon Mistuh Dover playin’ games.” That wasn’t quite true. But he didn’t know what kind of game the manager was playing, and he couldn’t afford not to play along.

His wife and children dressed in their Sunday best for the unusual excursion. Since he was in his own formalwear, the family looked as if they were bound for a fancy wedding or a banquet. When they got to the barbed-wire perimeter, the cops and Freedom Party stalwarts and guards stared at them. There seemed to be more whites manning the perimeter than usual. *Or is it just my nerves?* Scipio wondered—nervously.

The policeman who checked passbooks had sent Scipio through any number of times. He raised an eyebrow to see the black man's family accompanying him, but didn't say anything about it. He was, within the limits of his job and his race, a decent fellow. A stalwart came up to talk to him. Scipio wondered if they would yell at him to halt and send Bathsheba and the children back. They didn't, though.

When Scipio got to the Huntsman's Lodge, he found that Aurelius also had his wife—a plump, dignified, gray-haired woman named Delilah—with him. *Something* was going on. He still didn't know what, and wished he did.

They all got suppers of the sorts the cooks turned out for the waiters. Two or three other waiters and cooks—all of them men who'd worked at the Lodge for a while, and all of them also men who lived not far from Scipio and his family—also had family members with them.

Jerry Dover hovered over the Huntsman's Lodge's uncommon customers. He was fox-quick, fox-clever, and also, Scipio judged, fox-wary. "Thank y'all for being here today," he said. "I've worked with your husbands and fathers for years, and I've never met y'all before. Hope I do again before too long."

He was saying something between the lines. But not even Scipio, who knew he was doing it, could make out the words behind the words. He wanted to scratch his head. Instead, he had to go out and work his shift as if everything were normal.

It only seemed to last forever. In fact, it went as smoothly as most of the shifts he put in. He pocketed a few nice tips and got stiffed once, by a lieutenant-colonel with his left arm in a sling. Scipio hoped the next Yankee who shot him took better aim.

When he left the dining room after the Lodge closed, he found his family on the ragged edge of mutiny. "If I was any more bored, I'd be dead," Cassius snarled.

"Thanks for bringin' 'em by, Xerxes," Jerry Dover said—now he used

the alias that seemed to fit Scipio better than his real name these days. “Glad you could do it.”

“Uh-huh,” Scipio said, still puzzled about what was going on. Something, yes—but what? He nodded to Bathsheba, who was yawning. “Let’s go.”

The streets of the white part of Augusta were quiet and peaceful. When they got back to the fence around the Terry, another cop who knew Scipio let them through without any trouble about being out after curfew. He laughed as he opened a barbed-wire gate much like the one that would keep livestock in a pen. “You ain’t hardly gonna know the place,” he said. The rest of the goons at the gate thought that was the funniest thing they’d ever heard.

Only little by little did Scipio and his family discover what they meant. At first, he just thought things seemed too quiet. Curfew or no curfew, there was usually a lot of furtive life on the dark streets of the Terry. A lot of it was dangerous life, but it was life. Tonight, no.

Tonight . . . Cassius figured it out first, from the number of doors standing open that shouldn’t have. “Do Jesus!” he exclaimed, his voice echoing in the empty street. “They done had another cleanout!”

As soon as he pointed it out, it was obvious he was right. The northern part of the Terry had been scooped up and sent off to camps—or somewhere—months before. As far as Scipio knew, nobody’d come back, either. Now the heart had been ripped out of the colored part of Augusta. *And all in one day,* Scipio thought dazedly. *All in half a day, in fact.* How long had they been planning this, to bring it off with such practiced efficiency? And where had they got the practice?

Bathsheba squeezed his hand, hard. “If it wasn’t fo’ Jerry Dover, they’d’ve got us, too,” she whispered.

And that was as true as what Cassius had said. Somehow, Dover had known ahead of time. He’d done what he could—or what he’d wanted to do. Now Scipio owed him not just one life but four. He thanked the God he mostly didn’t believe in for the debt. And he wondered how Jerry Dover would want it repaid.

For there would be a price. There was always a price. Scipio knew that in his bones, in his belly, in his balls. For a Negro in the CSA, there was *always* a price.

A fter his mother died, Cincinnatus Driver had watched his father like a hawk. He knew the stories about old, long-married couples where, when one spouse died, the other followed soon after, as if finding life alone not worth living.

But Seneca Driver seemed as well as ever. If anything, he seemed better than he had for some time. His shoulders came up; his back straightened. “I is free of a burden,” he said once. “That weren’t your mama we laid in the ground. Your mama was gone a long time ago. What we buried, that there was just the husk.”

Cincinnatus nodded. “I saw that, Pa. I saw that real plain and clear. Wasn’t sure you could.”

“Oh, I seen it,” his father said. “Couldn’t do nothin’ about it, but I seen it.”

If that last sentence wasn’t a summary of Negroes’ troubles in the Confederate States, Cincinnatus had never heard one. And the government and the Freedom Party had always moved more carefully in Kentucky than rumor said they did farther south. Kentucky had spent a generation in the USA. Negroes here knew what it meant to be citizens, not just downtrodden residents. Even some whites here were . . . less hostile than they might have been.

That meant the barbed-wire perimeter that went up around Covington’s colored district came as a special shock. Cincinnatus had heard that such things had happened elsewhere. He didn’t think they could here. Finding he was wrong rocked him. Finding he was wrong also trapped him. The perimeter included the bank of the Licking River, and included motorboats with machine guns on the river to make sure nobody tried cutting the wire there.

The first place Cincinnatus went when he found out what was going on was, inevitably, Lucullus Wood’s barbecue shack. He found the plump proprietor in a worse state of shock than he was. “They told me they wasn’t gonna do this,” Lucullus said. “They *told* me. They fuckin’ lied.” He sounded as dazed as a man staggering out of a train wreck.

Seeing Lucullus struck all in a heap discomfited Cincinnatus worse than the barbed wire itself. “What you gonna do about it?” he demanded. “What *can* you do about it?”

“Do Jesus! I dunno,” Lucullus answered. “They done ruined me when they done this.” Odds were he had that right. Almost as many whites as blacks had come to his place. No more. That perimeter would keep

people out as well as keeping them in.

“You can still get word through.” That was a statement, not a question. Cincinnatus refused to believe anything different.

“What if I kin?” Lucullus didn’t deny it. He just spread his hands, pale palms up. “Ain’t gonna do me a hell of a lot of good. Who’s gonna pay any mind to a nigger all shut up like he was in jail? They gonna haul us off to them camps nobody never comes out of.”

That had a chilling feel of probability to Cincinnatus. Even so, he gave Lucullus the best answer he could: “What about Luther Bliss?” He hated the man, hated and feared him, but Bliss’ remained a name to conjure with. He hoped hearing it would at least snap Lucullus out of his funk and make him start thinking straight again.

And it worked. Lucullus very visibly gathered himself. “Mebbe,” he said. “But only mebbe, dammit. Freedom Party fellas is hunting Bliss right now like you wouldn’t believe.”

“Hell I wouldn’t,” Cincinnatus said. “If they know he’s around, they’ll want him dead. He’s too dangerous for them to leave him breathin’. Ain’t that all the more reason for you to git back in touch with him?”

“Mebbe,” Lucullus said again. “What kin he do, though? They gots *po*lice an’ them damn stalwarts all around. Anytime they wants to come in an’ start gettin’ rid of us . . .”

“We got guns. *You* got guns. You ain’t gonna tell me you ain’t got guns, ’cause I know you lie if you do,” Cincinnatus said. “They come in like that, they be sorry.”

“Oh, yeah.” Lucullus’ jowls wobbled as he nodded. “They be sorry. But we be sorrier. Any kind o’ fight like that, we loses. Guns we got is enough to make them fuckers think twice. Ain’t enough to stop ’em. Cain’t be, and you got to know that, too. They uses barrels, we ain’t got nothin’ ’cept Featherston Fizzes against ’em. They sends in Asskickers to bomb us flat, we ain’t even got that. We kin hurt ’em. They kin fuckin’ *kill* us, an’ I reckon they is lookin’ fo’ the excuse to do it.”

Cincinnatus grunted. Lucullus had to be right. Against the massed power of the CSA, the local Negroes would lose. And the Confederate authorities might well be looking for an excuse to move in and wipe them out. Which meant . . . “You got to git hold o’ Bliss,” Cincinnatus said again.

“What good it do me?” Lucullus asked sourly. “I done told you—”

“Yeah, you told me. But so what?” Cincinnatus said, and Lucullus stared at him. The barbecue cook usually dominated between them. Not now. Cincinnatus went on, “We’re all shut up in here. Bad things start happenin’ out past the wire, how could we have much to do with ’em? But you kin get hold of Luther Bliss, and that son of a bitch got other ofays who’ll do what he tell ’em to.”

Lucullus kept right on staring, but now in a new way. “Mebbe,” he said once more. This time, he didn’t seem to mean, *You’re crazy.* Even so, he warned, “Luther Bliss don’t care nothin’ about niggers just ’cause they’s niggers.”

“Shit, I know that. Luther Bliss hates everybody under the sun,” Cincinnatus said, startling a laugh out of Lucullus. “But the people Luther Bliss hates most are Freedom Party men and the Confederates who run things. We hate them people, too, so we’s handy for him.”

“Well, yeah, but the people he hates next most is Reds,” Lucullus said. “You got to remember, that don’t help me none.”

“You got any better ideas?” Cincinnatus demanded, and then, “You got any ideas at all?”

Lucullus glared at him. If anything, that relieved Cincinnatus, who didn’t like seeing the younger man paralyzed. Cincinnatus would have done almost anything to get Lucullus’ wits working again; enraging him seemed a small price to pay. Lucullus said, “I kin git hold o’ him. He kin do dat shit, no doubt about it. But how much good it gonna do *us*?”

“What do you mean?” Cincinnatus asked.

“They got the wire around us. We is in here. Whatever they wants to do with us—whatever they wants to do *to* us—they got us where they wants us. How we get out? How we get away?”

Cincinnatus laughed at him. “They gonna let us out. They gonna let a lot of us out, anyways.” Lucullus’ jaw dropped. Cincinnatus drove the point home: “Who’s gonna do their nigger work for ’em if they don’t? Long as they need that, we ain’t cooped up in here all the time.”

“You hope we ain’t,” Lucullus said, but a little spirit came back into his voice.

“Talk to Luther Bliss,” Cincinnatus repeated. “Hell, they let me out for anything, *I’ll* talk to him.”

“Like he listen to you,” Lucullus said scornfully. “You ain’t got no guns. You ain’t got no people who kin do stuff. I tells you somethin’—you git outa the barbed wire, you try an’ get your black ass back to the USA. Ain’t far—jus’ over de river.”

“Might as well be over the moon right now,” Cincinnatus said with a bitter laugh. “Confederate soldiers holdin’ that part of Ohio. By what I hear, they’re worse on colored folks than the Freedom Party boys are here. They reckon they’re United States colored folks, an’ so they got to be the enemy.” Cincinnatus thought that was a pretty good bet, too. He added, “ ’Sides, I ain’t leavin’ without my pa.”

“You is the stubbornest nigger ever hatched,” Lucullus said. “Onliest thing that hard head good for nowadays is gittin’ you killed.” He made shooing motions with his hands. “Go on. Git. I don’t want you ’round no mo’.”

Cincinnatus didn’t want to be in the barbecue place anymore. He didn’t want to be in Covington anymore. He didn’t want to be in Kentucky at all anymore. The trouble was, nobody else gave a damn what he wanted or didn’t want.

Cane tapping the ground ahead of him, he walked out for a better look at what the whites in Covington had done. He’d seen more formidable assemblages of barbed wire when he was driving trucks in the last war, but those had been made to hold out soldiers, not to hold in civilians. For that, what the cops and the stalwarts had run up would do fine.

Normally, making a fence out of barbed wire would have been nigger work. Whites had done it here, though. That worried Cincinnatus. If whites decided they *could* do nigger work, what reason would they have to keep any Negroes around in the CSA?

A swagbellied cop with a submachine gun strolled along outside the fence. He spat a brown stream of tobacco juice onto the sidewalk. The sun sparkled from the enameled Freedom Party pin on his lapel. Hadn’t Jake Featherston climbed to power by going on and on about how whites were better than blacks? How could they be better than blacks if they got rid of all the blacks? Then they would have to work things out among themselves. Race wouldn’t trump class anymore, the way it always had in the Confederacy.

That fat policeman spat again. His jaw worked as he shifted the chaw from one cheek to the other. Did he care about such details? Did the countless others like him care? Cincinnatus couldn't make himself believe it. They'd get rid of Negroes first and worry about what happened after that later on.

Cincinnatus suddenly felt as trapped as Lucullus did. Up till now, the rumors about what the Confederates were doing to Negroes farther south in the CSA, things he'd heard at Lucullus's place and the Brass Monkey and in other saloons, had seemed too strange, too ridiculous, to worry him. Now he looked out at the rest of Covington through barbed wire. It wasn't even rusty yet; sunshine sparkled off the sharp points of the teeth. He couldn't get out past it, not unless that cop and his pals let him. And they could reach into the colored district whenever they pleased.

He didn't like the combination, not even a little bit. Except for trying to escape with his father as soon as he got even a halfway decent chance, though, he didn't know what he could do about it.

I need a rifle, he thought. *Reckon I can get one from Lucullus. They come after me, they gonna pay for everything they get.*

Dead night again, and the *Josephus Daniels* creeping along through the darkness. Sam Carsten peered out at the black water ahead as if he could see the mines floating in it. He couldn't, and he knew as much. He had to hope the destroyer escort had a good chart of these waters, and that she could dodge the mines. If she couldn't . . . Some of them were packed with enough TNT to blow a ship high enough out of the water to show her keel to anybody who happened to be watching. Out on the open sea, he didn't worry much about mines. Here in the narrow waters of Chesapeake Bay, he couldn't help it.

At the wheel, Pat Cooley seemed the picture of calm. "We're just about through the worst of it, sir," he said.

"Glad to hear it," Sam said. "If we go sky-high in the next couple of minutes, I'm going to remind you you said that."

The exec chuckled. "Oh, I expect I'll remember it myself."

Sam set a hand on his shoulder. The kid was all right—not a nerve in his body, or none that showed. And he was a married man, too, which made it harder for him. "Family all right?" Carsten asked.

“Oh, yes, sir,” Cooley answered. “Jane’s over the chicken pox, and Sally didn’t catch ’em.” His wife had worried when his daughter came down with the ailment, because she didn’t remember having it as a little girl. If she hadn’t got chicken pox by now, though, she must have had them then, because anybody who could catch them damn well would.

Another twenty minutes crawled by in a day or two. The soft throb of the engines came up through Sam’s shoes. The sound, the feel, were as important as his own pulse. If they stopped, the ship was in mortal peril. As things were . . . “I think we’re out of it now,” Sam said.

Cooley nodded. “I do believe you’re right—except for the little bastards that came off their chains and started drifting.” He paused. “And unless one side or the other laid some mines nobody knows about that aren’t on our charts.”

“You’re full of cheerful thoughts today, aren’t you?” Sam said. Pat Cooley just grinned. Either or both of those things was perfectly possible, and both men knew it too well. Those weren’t the only nasty possibilities, either, and Sam also knew that only too well. He spoke into a voice tube: “You there, Bevacqua?”

“Not me, Skip,” came the voice from the other end. “I been asleep the last couple weeks.” A snore floated out of the tube.

“Yeah, well, keep your ears open while you’re snoozing. This is good submarine country,” Sam said.

“Will do, Skip,” Vince Bevacqua said. The petty officer was the best hydrophone man the *Josephus Daniels* carried, which was why he was on duty now. Back during the Great War, hydrophones had been as near worthless as made no difference. The state of the art had come a long way since then. Now hydrophones shot out bursts of sound waves and listened for echoes—it was almost like Y-ranging underwater. It gave ships like this one a real chance when they went after subs.

“Not the best submarine country,” Cooley observed. “Water’s pretty shallow.”

“Well, sure, Pat, but that’s not quite what I meant,” Sam said. “It’s good sub country because we’ve just made it past the minefields. When some people get through something like that, they go, ‘Whew!’ and forget they’re not all the way out of the woods. They get careless, let their guard down. And that’s when the bastards on the other side drop the hammer on them.”

The bridge was dark. Showing a light in crowded, contested waters like these was the fastest way Sam could think of to get the hammer dropped on him. In the gloom, he watched the exec swing toward him, start to say something, and then think twice. After a few seconds, Cooley tried again: “That’s . . . pretty sensible, sir.”

He sounded amazed, or at least bemused. Carsten chuckled under his breath. “You live and learn,” he told the younger man. “You’ve got an Academy ring. You got your learning all boiled down and served up to you, and that’s great. It gives you a hell of a head start. By the time you get to my age, you’ll be a four-striper, or more likely an admiral. I’ve had to soak all this stuff up the hard way—but I’ve had a lot longer to do it than you have.”

Again, Pat Cooley started to answer. Again, he checked himself so he could pick his words with care. Slowly, he said, “Sir, I don’t think that’s the kind of thing they teach you at Annapolis. I think it’s the kind of thing you do learn with experience—if you ever learn it at all. You’re—not what I expected when they told me I’d serve under a mustang.”

“No, eh?” Instead of chuckling, Sam laughed out loud now. “Sorry to disappoint you. My knuckles don’t drag on the deck—not most of the time, anyway. I don’t dribble tobacco juice down my front, and I don’t spend all my time with CPOs.” A lot of mustangs did hang around with ratings as much as they could: those were still the men they found most like themselves. Sam had been warned against that when he got promoted. He suspected every mustang did. A lot of them, though, didn’t listen to the warning. He had.

“Sir, you’re doing your best to embarrass me,” Cooley said after one more longish pause. “Your best is pretty good, too.” He laughed as Sam had. Unlike Sam, though, he sounded distinctly uneasy when he did it.

A tinny ghost, Vince Bevacqua’s voice floated out of the mouth of the tube: “Skipper, I’ve got a contact. Something’s moving down there—depth about seventy, range half a mile, bearing 085.”

“Seventy,” Sam echoed thoughtfully. That was below periscope depth. If the hydrophone man had spotted a submersible, the boat didn’t know the *Josephus Daniels* was in the neighborhood—unless it had spotted the destroyer escort and submerged before Bevacqua realized it was there. Sam found that unlikely. He knew how good the petty officer was . . . even if he didn’t hang around with him. “Change

course to 085, Mr. Cooley," he said, switching to business.

"I am changing course to 085, sir—aye aye," the exec replied.

Sam tapped a waiting sailor on the shoulder. "Tell the depth-charge crews to be ready at my order."

"Aye aye, sir." The sailor dashed away. He didn't care whether Sam was a mustang. To a kid like him, the Old Man was the Old Man, regardless of anything. And if the Old Man happened to be well on the way toward being an old man—that still didn't matter much.

"I'll be damned if he thinks we're anywhere around, sir," Bevacqua said, and then, "Whoops—take it back. He's heard us. He's picking up speed and heading for the surface."

"Let's get him," Sam said. "Tell me when, and I'll pass it on to the guys who toss ash cans."

"Will do, Skipper." Bevacqua waited maybe fifteen seconds, then said, "Now!"

"Launch depth charges!" Sam shouted through the PA system—no need to keep quiet anymore.

During the Great War, ash cans had rolled off over the stern. The state of the art was better now. Two projectors flung depth charges well ahead of the ship. The charges arced through the air and splashed into the ocean.

"All engines reverse!" Cooley said. Sam nodded. Depth charges bursting in shallow water could blow the bow off the ship that had launched them. Carsten recalled the pathetic signal he'd heard about from a destroyer escort that had had that misfortune befall her: I HAVE BUSTED MYSELF. If it happened to him, *he'd* be busted, too, probably all the way to seaman second class.

Even though the *Josephus Daniels* had backed engines, the ash cans did their damnedest to lift her out of the water. Sam felt as if somebody'd whacked him on the soles of his feet with a board. Water rose and then splashed back into the sea. More bursts roiled the Atlantic.

Somebody at the bow whooped: "She's coming up!"

"Searchlights!" Sam barked, and the night lit up. He knew the chance he was taking. If C.S. planes spotted him before he settled the sub, he

was in a world of trouble. *Have to settle it quick, then,* he thought.

Men spilled out of the damaged submersible's conning tower and ran for the cannon on the deck. It was only a three-inch gun, but Carsten's destroyer escort wasn't exactly a battlewagon. If that gun hit, it could hurt.

"Let 'em have it!" Sam yelled. The forward gun spoke in a voice like an angry god's. The antiaircraft cannon at the bow started barking, too. They were more than good enough to tear up an unarmored target like a sub. The enemy got off one shot, which went wild. Then men on that deck started dropping as if a harvester were rumbling down it.

"White flag!" Three people shouted the same thing at the same time.

"Cease fire!" Sam yelled through the intercom, and then, "If they make a move toward that gun, blow 'em all to hell!" He turned away from the mike and spoke to Cooley: "Approach and take survivors."

"Aye aye, sir," the exec said. He had a different worry: "I hope to hell she's not one of our boats."

"Gurk!" Sam said. That hadn't even crossed his mind. It wasn't impossible in these waters, one more thing he knew too well. They wouldn't just bust him for that. They'd boot him out of the Navy.

As the *Josephus Daniels* drew closer, he breathed again. The shape of the conning tower and the lines of the hull were different from those of U.S. boats. And the sailors tumbling into life rafts wore dark gray tunics and trousers. They were Confederates, all right.

A last couple of men popped out of the hatch atop the conning tower. The submersible startled rapidly settling down into the sea. *They opened the scuttling cocks,* Sam realized. He swore, but halfheartedly. In their place, he would have done the same thing.

"Watching them will be fun," Cooley said. "We haven't got a brig. Even if we did, it wouldn't hold that many."

"We'll keep them up on deck, where the machine guns will bear," Sam answered. "I don't see how we can make our cruise with them along, though. I'll wireless for instructions."

As soon as the prisoners were aboard, he doused the searchlight. The pharmacist's mate did what he could for the wounded. Sam went

down to the deck and called for the enemy skipper. “Here I am, sir,” a glum-sounding man said. “Lieutenant Reed Talcott, at your service. I don’t thank you for wrecking us, but I do for picking us up.” He tipped a greasy cap he’d somehow kept on his head.

“Part of the game, Lieutenant,” Sam said, and gave his own name. “If it makes you feel any better, I’ve been sunk, too.”

“Not one damn bit,” Talcott said promptly.

Sam laughed. “All right. Can’t say as I blame you. We’ll put you somewhere out of the way, and then we’ll get on with the war.”

N ot for the first time, Clarence Potter thought that Richmond and Philadelphia were both too close to the C.S.–U.S. border for comfort. When war came between the two countries—and it came, and came, and came—the capitals were appallingly vulnerable. They got more so as time went by, too: each side developed new and better—or was worse the right word?—ways to punish the other. For all practical purposes, the damnyankees had abandoned Washington as an administrative center. It just made too handy a target.

At the moment, though, Washington wasn’t the first thing on Potter’s mind. He stood behind a sawhorse in Capitol Square, one of at least a dozen that had red rope strung from them to form a perimeter. Signs hung from the rope: WARNING! UNEXPLODED BOMB! If that wasn’t enough to get the message across, the signs also displayed the skull and crossbones.

Even so, a woman started to duck under the ropes to take a shortcut to the Capitol. “Get the hell out of there, lady!” a sergeant shouted at her. “You want to get your stupid ass blown off?”

“Well!” she sniffed. “Such language!”

The sergeant sighed and turned to Potter. “It ain’t like she hasn’t got enough ass so she couldn’t use some of it blown off,” he said. The Intelligence officer chuckled; indeed, the woman hadn’t missed any meals. The noncom, a member of the Bomb Disposal Unit, went on, “Jesus God, sir, you wouldn’t reckon people could be so stinking stupid, though, would you?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Potter said. “That kind of thing rarely surprises me. A lot of people *are* damn fools, and there’s not much you can do

about it, except maybe try to keep them from killing themselves."

"Ugly bitch wouldn't have been that much of a loss." The sergeant sighed again. "Still and all, I expect you're right. I just wish the Yankees were damn fools."

Potter pointed toward the hole in the ground where the sergeant's colleagues were working. "If they made better ordnance, that would have gone off," he said, though he knew Confederate munitions factories turned out their fair share of duds, too.

But the sergeant shook his head. "It ain't necessarily so, sir. Some of these fuckers—uh, excuse me—"

"I've heard the word before," Potter said dryly. "I've even used the word before."

"Oh." The sergeant eyed the wreathed stars on either side of his collar. "I guess maybe. Anyways, though, like I was saying, some of 'em have time fuses, so they go boom when people aren't expecting 'em. You'll have heard about that, won't you?"

"I sure have," Potter said. "So you have to get them out of there before they go off. I'd be lying if I said I envied you."

"Sometimes we get 'em out. Sometimes we have to defuse 'em where they're at," the BDU sergeant said. "And that's what I meant when I said I wished the damnyankees were fools. Some of their time fuses're just time fuses. Then we race the clock, like. Some of 'em, though, some of 'em are booby-trapped, so they'll go off when we start messing with the time fuse. They'll put those on ordinary bombs, too, so they'll explode if you tinker. Sons of bitches want to kill *us* off, see, so then more of their time bombs'll work."

"That's . . . unpleasant," Potter said. "How do you handle those?"

"Carefully," the sergeant answered.

Potter laughed, not that the younger man was kidding. Here was a glimpse of a cat-and-mouse game he hadn't imagined before. Of course the Yankees wanted to blow up the people who got rid of unexploded bombs. It made perfect military sense—but it was hard on the men of the BDU. He asked, "Do we do the same thing to them?"

"Beats me, sir," the noncom said, "but if we don't, we're missing a hell of a chance."

“All right. That’s fair enough—no reason to expect you to know,” Potter said. He could find out for himself—or maybe he couldn’t, depending on how tight security was. Discovering the answer to that might be interesting all by itself.

“Hey, Cochrane!” somebody bawled from the direction of the hole in the ground. “Give me a hand setting up the clockstopper. We’re going to need it on this son of a bitch.”

“The clockstopper?” Potter said, intrigued.

“Sir, I can’t talk about that,” the sergeant—presumably Cochrane—said. “Security—you know how it is. And now, if you’ll excuse me . . .” He sketched a salute and hurried away.

No bomb burst shattered the calm of Richmond in the next half hour, so Potter supposed the clockstopper and whatever other arcane tools the Bomb Disposal Unit brought to bear on the bomb did what they were supposed to do. The war spawned every kind of specialist, not all of whom operated with as many eyes upon them as did the men of the BDU.

After Potter went back to the War Department, he remarked on what he’d seen to Nathan Bedford Forrest III. He couldn’t very well breach security with the head of the General Staff; if Forrest didn’t have the right to know everything there was to know, nobody in the CSA did. (Given the way things were in the Confederacy these days, quite possibly no one but Jake Featherston did. Potter preferred not to dwell on that.)

As things turned out, he didn’t have to dwell on it, because General Forrest knew enough to satisfy his curiosity. Nodding, Forrest said, “The BDU men are some of the best we have. Every one of them is a volunteer, too.”

Potter couldn’t look out on Richmond from Forrest’s office, which had plywood in place of window glass. Before long, window glass here in the capital might grow as extinct as the passenger pigeon. Of course, the same was no doubt just as true in Philadelphia. After pausing to light a cigarette, the Intelligence officer said, “I hadn’t thought about it, but I’m not surprised. You wouldn’t want somebody who didn’t want to be there messing with those bombs.”

“That’s what everybody thinks,” Forrest agreed. “Let me steal one of those from you.” Potter gave him a smoke. He tapped it on his desk a couple of times to settle the tobacco, then stuck it in his mouth. Potter

lit a match for him and held it out. “Thanks,” Forrest said. He took a drag, blew out a plume of smoke, and looked up at the ceiling. “A lot of men volunteer for the duty.”

“Good,” Potter said. “I’d worry if they didn’t.”

“Yes, yes.” Forrest sounded impatient. “When you put it that way, so would I. But do you know how long the average service career of a BDU man is?”

“No, sir,” Potter admitted. “I don’t have the faintest idea.”

“Two and a half months—I saw the number just the other day, so it’s fresh in my mind,” Forrest said. “We *need* a lot of volunteers. By the way, we don’t talk about that number to BDU personnel, not under any circumstances.”

“I believe it.” Potter also believed that BDU men could probably figure it out for themselves, or at least come close. They all had to be mourning friends and comrades. Two and a half months . . . That was worse than he would have guessed. *“Nos morituri te salutamus,”* he murmured.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III nodded. “The only good thing you can say about the business is that, if something goes wrong, it’s all over before the poor bastards know it. The bombs go off faster than the nervous system can react.”

“That does matter,” Potter said. He hadn’t been at the front in the last war, but he’d been close enough to have seen horrors aplenty. Dreadfully wounded men, as far as he was concerned, were worse horrors than the dead. No matter how gruesome a corpse was, it was beyond suffering. For the living, pain went on and on.

The telephone rang. “Forrest here,” Forrest said. Potter left. He didn’t wait for Forrest to wave him out because he lacked clearance to hear whatever the chief of the General Staff was talking about. Disappearing without being asked in such circumstances was part of the etiquette of the security-conscious.

Potter’s own above-ground office, to which he’d defiantly returned, also had plywood in place of glass. Glass, these days, was not only a luxury but a dangerous luxury. In a bomb burst, shards were so many flying knives. They could chop a man into hamburger in the blink of an eye. Potter knew that. He missed being able to see out even so.

One thing—since he couldn't look out the window, he couldn't use looking out the window as an excuse for daydreaming. He had to buckle down and tackle the work on his desk. And so, reluctantly, he did.

On top of the pile was an urgent request from the Mormons of Deseret for whatever the Confederacy could send them. Getting supplies to them was harder than it had been when the rebellion first broke out. The U.S. noose was tightening. Potter had known it would. In a way, encouraging and helping the Mormon uprising seemed dreadfully unfair. Those people had not a chance in the world of winning, but they were eager to try, eager to the point of madness. It was enough to make a man with a conscience feel guilty.

Of course, a man with that kind of conscience had no business getting into Intelligence in the first place. Potter knew as much. He also knew his damnyankee counterparts were doing everything they could to arm the Negro terrorists in the CSA. If turnabout wasn't fair play, what was? The only thing he really felt bad about was that there were so many more Negroes in the Confederate States than Mormons in the United States. Blacks caused more trouble for his side than the religious maniacs did for the enemy.

He wondered whether some Confederate operative had suggested auto bombs to the Mormons or they'd come up with them on their own. Either way, they made a viciously effective weapon for the weak against the strong. Again, Negroes in the CSA had proved that—and continued to prove it whenever they got the chance.

We need to keep this uprising alive as long as we can, he wrote. *Where else can we tie down so many U.S. soldiers at so little cost to ourselves?*

Even though the question was rhetorical as he wrote it, he knew it did have a possible answer. If Canada flared into rebellion, the Yankees would need endless divisions to hold it down. But, despite assiduous efforts, the Confederates hadn't made a lot of friends up there. To Canadians, they might as well have been Yankees themselves. That infuriated Clarence Potter—and every other Confederate who'd ever run into the problem—but fury didn't do much good.

If any outsiders could make the Canadians rise up, the Confederates weren't the ones. The British were. Potter paused thoughtfully. Winston Churchill was supposed to favor quixotic schemes like that—and keeping the USA busy was as much in Britain's interest as it was in the CSA's.

A memorandum from Potter would never reach the British Prime Minister. A memorandum from Jake Featherston, on the other hand . . . Potter nodded to himself. Churchill might not agree. That was the chance you took. But he wouldn't be able to ignore the request from an allied head of state. And Featherston would look at a memorandum from Potter. The Intelligence officer paused for a moment to gather his thoughts, then began to write.

J ake Featherston often felt busier than a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest. He sometimes thought he wouldn't have wanted to become President if he'd known ahead of time how much work the job was. That wasn't true—down deep in his heart, he knew as much—but it gave him something to complain about.

Take paperwork. He'd never known what an obscene word that could be till he came to the Gray House. No matter how much he gave to other people, he still had plenty and then some. Paperwork was the price he paid for being boss.

Every once in a while, he ran into something he really needed to see. When he came to a memorandum from Clarence Potter, he knew he had to read it. For one thing, Potter would give him a hard time if he didn't. And, for another, even though he trusted the Intelligence officer about as far as he could throw him, Potter had a lefthanded way of looking at the world that was often valuable. By his own lights, Potter was a patriot. Where his lights and Jake's corresponded, they got on fine.

As Featherston read through this scheme, he found himself nodding. "Yeah," he said when he was done. "About time we got some help from our so-called allies." He knew as well as anybody that Britain was heavily bogged down in western Germany, trying to hold on to the gains she and France had made when the war was shiny and new. He recognized the feeling. He had it himself. The problem with grabbing a tiger by the tail was that letting go could hurt even worse than hanging on.

He picked up a pen and started to write. If Churchill wanted to play along, this wouldn't cost the limeys much—and if it went off well, it could bring the United States untold grief. That wouldn't break Jake's heart. Oh, no—far from it.

His big worry was that Churchill was too obsessed with the Kaiser to

care what happened on this side of the Atlantic. But the USA was the country that had taken Canada and Newfoundland away from England after the Great War. Winston was almost as good at remembering offenses done him as Jake was himself.

“Lulu!” he called from his office.

“What is it, Mr. President?” his secretary asked.

“I want Major Hamilton right away.”

Major Ira Hamilton hurried into the President’s underground office inside of five minutes. “Reporting as ordered, sir,” he said. He was tall, thin, and bespectacled; he looked much more like a math teacher than a major.

“Good. Good.” Jake thrust the paper at him. “I need you to put this into our fanciest code and send it to London just as fast as you can.” There was a reason Hamilton looked like a math teacher: up till the war started, he’d been a professor of mathematics at Washington University.

“I’ll do it, sir,” he said. “It doesn’t look too long—it should go out this afternoon.”

“That’ll be just fine, Major. Thank you kindly.” Featherston was far more polite with people who were useful to him than with the rest of the world. Hamilton gave him a ragged salute and hurried away. Someone would keep a discreet eye on the unmilitary major to make sure he did what he was supposed to do and nothing else. And someone would watch the man who watched Hamilton, and somebody would. . . .

Things had to work that way. If you didn’t keep an eye on people, they’d make you wish you had. Jake even kept an eye on Don Partridge. He’d chosen his Vice President because Partridge was the mildest, safest, most inoffensive, and most useless man he could find—and he kept an eye on him anyway. You couldn’t be too careful.

Some of the papers Featherston plowed through were damage reports from the western part of the Confederacy. The damnyankees were trying to knock out the dams he’d built on the Tennessee and the Cumberland Rivers. That infuriated him. It alarmed him, too. The Confederate States needed the electricity those dams produced. It kept factories going. And it changed millions of people’s lives. He was as proud of those dams and what they did as of almost anything else his

administration had accomplished.

Almost was the key word there. Ferd Koenig came in a couple of hours later. “Good to see you, by God,” Jake said. “Have a seat.” He opened his desk drawer and pulled out a bottle of fine Tennessee sipping whiskey. “Have a snort.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Koenig took the bottle from him, raised it, swallowed, and passed it back. “Virgin’s milk. The corn that went in there died happy.”

“You better believe it.” Jake swigged, too. Velvet fire ran down his throat. He set the bottle on the desk after one knock. He wanted the taste. He didn’t want to get smashed. “So how’s relocation coming?”

“Tolerable. Better than tolerable, matter of fact,” Koenig answered. “One neighborhood at a time, one town at a time, we clean ’em out. Off they go. They reckon they’re going to camps, and they are. What they don’t reckon on is, they don’t come out again.”

“Towns are all very well. Towns are better than all very well, matter of fact,” Jake said. “But there’s still the core of the cotton country—from South Carolina through Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi into Louisiana. We thinned that out some when we brought in harvesters—got a bunch of niggers off the farms and into towns where we could deal with ’em easier.”

“Got a bunch of ’em with rifles in their hands, too,” Ferdinand Koenig said dryly. “They didn’t have work anymore, so they reckoned they might as well go out and start shooting white folks.”

He wasn’t wrong, but Featherston said, “We had trouble with ’em before that, too,” which was also true. He went on, “That whole goddamn Black Belt’s been up in arms ever since the Great War. Damn Whigs never were able to put it down all the way, and we’ve had our own fun and games with it. Plenty of places down there where it’s never been safe for a white man to go around by himself in broad daylight, let alone after the sun goes down.”

“That’s only part of the problem,” Koenig said. “In towns, you can put barbed wire around the nigger district, and after that you can go in and clean it out one chunk at a time, however you want to. The niggers in the countryside, you can’t cordon ’em off so easy. They just slip away. It’s like trying to scoop up water with a sieve.”

“Gotta keep working on it,” Jake said.

The Attorney General's jowls wobbled as he nodded. "Oh, hell, I know that," he said. "But the real trouble is, it takes a lot of manpower, and we haven't got a lot of people to spare, not the way things are going."

"I know, I know." Featherston reached for the whiskey bottle again. More heat trickled down his throat. He'd been so certain he could knock the USA out of the war in a hurry. He'd been so certain—and he'd been so wrong. Soldiers at the front were more important than anything else, even people to help round up the niggers. After yet another swig, he added, "Those trucks that Pinkard came up with can't handle all the volume we need for this operation, either."

"They're the best we've got," Koenig said. "And we don't have guards eating their guns all the goddamn time anymore, either, the way we did before we started using them."

"I know that, too, dammit," Jake said impatiently. "We need something better, though—and no, I don't know what it is any more than you do. But something. We've got to get rid of those niggers in great big old lots."

"You can figure out damn near anything if you throw enough money and enough smart people at it," Ferd Koenig observed. "Is this worth throwing 'em at it? Or do we need the people and the money more somewhere else?"

"This is what we spent all that time wandering in the wilderness for," Jake said, as if he were Moses leading the CSA to the Promised Land. That was exactly how he felt, too. "If we don't do this, we're letting the country down."

"Well, all right." Koenig nodded again. "I feel the same way, but I needed to make sure you did. We can do that—you know we can. But it'll likely mean pulling those people and that money away from the war effort."

"This *is* the war effort," Jake Featherston declared. "What else would you call it? *This* is what counts." Even as he spoke, he heard the rumble of U.S. artillery fire, not nearly far enough to the north. He nodded anyway. "We clean out the coons, we'll do something for this country that'll last till the end of time."

"All right, then. We'll tend to it." Koenig sighed. "I wish we had as many people as the Yankees do. They can afford to keep more balls in the air at the same time than we can."

“I don’t care about their balls in the air. Those aren’t the ones I aim to kick,” Jake said.

“Heh,” Ferd Koenig said. “Well, I hope we can do it, that’s all.” He was listening to the gunfire from the north, too. He didn’t brush it aside the way Jake did. It worried him, and he made no secret about that, not even to Featherston.

Showing what he thought took nerve. Lesser men had ended up in camps for lesser offenses. But regardless of whether Koenig agreed with Jake’s policies, his personal loyalty was unshakable. Jake could count the people he fully trusted on his fingers—sometimes, on a bad day, on his thumbs—but Ferd always had been, was, and always would be one of them.

“We will.” Featherston retained his conviction in his own destiny. “The show will be starting soon, and we’ll squash ’em flat. You’ll see.”

“Expect I will.” Koenig didn’t say *one way or the other.* He didn’t even leave it hanging in the air. He believed in Jake’s destiny, too. He’d gone on believing in it through the black years in the middle twenties, when so many others wrote Jake and the Freedom Party off. He asked, “You need me for anything else?”

“Don’t think so,” Jake answered. “But we do need some kind of way to get rid of more niggers faster. You put some bright boys on that and see what they can come up with.”

“Right.” Ferdinand Koenig heaved himself out of his chair and headed for the door. Jake had no idea what he would come up with or even if he would come up with anything, but had no doubt he would look, and look hard. If you looked hard enough, you generally found *something.*

Muttering, Jake went back to looking through his paperwork. He wished he thought he would find anything else important, or even something interesting, in there. “Fat chance,” he muttered. “Fat fucking chance.” He made sure he kept his voice down; Lulu didn’t like to hear him swear. That didn’t always stop him, but it did a good part of the time.

And then he turned up a report from an outfit called the Huntsville Rocket Society. He wondered how the hell anything that bizarre had made it onto his desk. Then he saw why. The brigadier general in charge of air defense of Alabama and Mississippi endorsed it, writing, *However startling these claims sound, I believe they can be made real soon*

enough to prove useful in the present conflict.

That made Jake read it more carefully than he would have otherwise. "Son of a bitch," he murmured halfway through. "*Son* of a bitch. Wouldn't that be something if they could?"

VIII

A s the weather heated up, the POW camp near Andersonville, Georgia, did an increasingly good impression of hell. With the heat came humidity. With the humidity came thunderstorms that awed Jonathan Moss. The red dirt in the camp turned to something not a great deal thicker than tomato soup after one of those downpours.

And the mosquitoes came. Moss had known mosquitoes up in Canada, too. These seemed a larger and more virulent breed. He slapped and swore and itched. He was anything but the only one. Nick Cantarella said, "This one I smashed last night, you could hang machine guns under its wings and go to war in it."

"Who says they don't?" Moss answered. "That would account for the size of some of the bites I've got."

The other officer laughed. "You're a funny guy, Major."

"Funny like a crutch," Moss said, and then, "Colonel Summers ought to do something about it. We could all come down with yellow fever."

"Do what?" Cantarella asked in reasonable tones. "Moses parted the Red Sea, but all he did was plague the Egyptians with bugs. God was the one who had to call 'em off."

Patiently, Moss answered, "Moses couldn't ask for bug repellent and Flit. Come to think of it, Pharaoh couldn't, either. But Summers damn well can."

"Oh." Cantarella looked foolish. "Well, yeah."

Moss didn't ask him how escape efforts were going. He assumed they *were* still going. He also assumed that much rain did tunnels no good.

He looked out the window, out beyond the barbed wire. Even if the prisoners did get out of the camp, could they cross several states and get back to the USA? They spoke with an accent very different from the locals'. They would be pursued—he pictured bloodhounds straight out of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* And the people they met—the white ones, anyhow—would be Freedom Party fanatics. Put that all together and staying in the camp started to seem the better bargain.

But life here was no picnic, either. And prisoners of war had a duty to escape. Moss knew he'd run if and when he found a chance. As for what would happen after that . . . He'd worry about such things when he had to, not before.

In due course, citronella candles appeared in the prisoners' barracks. They filled the air with a spicy, lemony scent as they burned. The odor was alleged to discourage mosquitoes. Maybe Moss got bitten a little less often after that. On the other hand, maybe he didn't. He wasn't convinced, one way or the other.

Guards went through the camp with spray pumps. The mist that came out of them smelled something like mothballs and something like gasoline. Moss had no idea what it did to mosquitoes. It made him want to wear a gas mask. Since he didn't have one, he just had to put up with it.

Again, he wasn't sure how much difference the spraying made. The bugs didn't disappear, however much he wished they would. Of course, nobody was spraying outside the camp. Even if mosquitoes died by the thousands inside the barbed wire, plenty of replacements flew on in to sample the flavor delights of prisoner of war on the hoof.

Colonel Summers, once prodded, kept right on complaining, both to the Confederate authorities and to his fellow prisoners. "What they really need to do is spray a thin film of oil over every pond and puddle they can find," he said. "That would kill the mosquito larvae, and then we really might get some relief."

"Well, why don't they?" Moss said. "It wouldn't just benefit us. Their own health would get better, too." He thought like the attorney he was, weighing advantages and disadvantages.

Summers only shrugged. "They say they haven't got the manpower for it."

"In a way, that's good news," Moss said. "If they're stretched too thin to take care of important things behind the lines, pretty soon they'll be

stretched too thin to take care of things at the front." Like a lawyer—and like a prisoner—he bent reality so it looked better than it really was.

"That hasn't happened yet." Colonel Summers brought him back to earth with a dose of the current news.

"Are you sure, sir?" Moss asked. "Anything you see in the papers the guards give us is just so much Freedom Party garbage."

"I'm sure." And Summers sounded very sure indeed. Moss knew there were a couple of clandestine wireless sets in the camp. He knew no more than that, which was a good thing for all concerned. He looked around the barracks. Two or three of the men were new fish, new officers for whom nobody here could vouch. They probably came from the United States. They talked as if they did. But good Confederate spies would sound like Yankees. The less Summers said while they were around, the better.

Machine-gun fire woke Moss in the middle of the night not quite a week later. His first reaction was fury. They'd pulled off an escape attempt, and they hadn't included him. His second reaction was despair. If the guards were shooting, the attempt couldn't have amounted to much. Was this the best his countrymen could do?

He got very little sleep the rest of the night.

At roll call the next morning, the Confederate guards swaggered and strutted like pouter pigeons. "Damn niggers came sniffin' round the camp last night," one of them said. "We drove 'em off, though—you better believe it."

However proud of themselves they were, their posturing only filled Moss with relief. Nothing inside here had gone wrong. If the guards wanted to jump up and down because they'd beaten back a few sorry guerrillas, they were welcome to, as far as he was concerned.

Later that day, he found an excuse to amble around the grounds with Nick Cantarella. As casually as he could, he asked, "Do we have any way of getting in touch with those colored men on the other side of the barbed wire?"

Cantarella took a couple of steps without saying anything. What he did say, at last, was, "I ought to tell you I don't know what you're talking about."

“Why?” Moss asked. “They could do us a lot of good if we ever happened to get on the other side of the wire ourselves.”

“Maybe.” Cantarella paused to light a cigarette. It was one of the lousy U.S. brands that came in Red Cross packages from the north. Prisoners could sometimes get the much better Confederate tobacco from the guards. Quiet little deals like that happened every now and again. After the first drag, Cantarella made a face. “Tastes like straw and horseshit.” A moment later, he added, “Want one?”

“Sure.” Moss took one, then leaned close to get a light. The tobacco *was* bad, but bad tobacco beat the hell out of no tobacco. He blew out smoke and then asked, “How come just maybe?”

The other officer looked around before answering. Satisfied nobody else was in earshot, he said, “For one thing, if the Confederates catch us with them, we’re dead. No ifs, ands, or buts. Dead.”

That was probably true. Moss shook his head—no, that was bound to be true. The Confederate States played by the usual international rules when they fought the United States. They played by no rules at all when they fought their own Negroes. By all the signs, the Negroes returned the favor—if that was the word. Moss said, “But if we’ve got a better chance of not getting caught at all . . .”

“Maybe,” Nick Cantarella said again, even more dubiously than before. “But why should they help us get back to the USA?”

As if to a child, Moss answered, “Because we’re fighting Featherston, too.”

“Terrific,” the younger man said. “Doesn’t that make them more likely to give us rifles and enlist us? You want to be a guerrilla yourself? I don’t, or not very much. It’s not what I was trained for, but I wouldn’t have a Chinaman’s chance of convincing the smokes of that.” He’d been an artilleryman before he got caught.

“Some of the people here would be good at it,” Moss said. Infantry officers might make the black guerrillas considerably more effective. They really did have training in what the Negroes were trying to do. Moss himself was in Cantarella’s boat. All his military expertise, such as it was, centered on airplanes. He didn’t think the guerrillas would be taking to the air anytime soon.

A flight of a dozen biplanes buzzing along at not much above treetop height made him wonder if he was wrong. Those weren’t military

aircraft, except in the sense that any aircraft could be military when you had them and the other fellows didn't. As if to prove the point, and to show whose side they were on, they dropped bombs on the woods out beyond the prison camp. The explosions set Moss' teeth on edge.

"Think they'll hit anything in there?" he asked Cantarella.

"Oh, they'll hit *something,*" the other officer answered with an expressive shrug. "Whether it'll be anything worth hitting . . . That's liable to be a different question."

"Looking like they were just tossing those bombs out of the cockpit," Moss said. "That's how this whole business got started, back when the Great War was new."

"If you say so." Cantarella wasn't old enough to remember the start of the Great War. He sure as hell hadn't been flying then, as Moss had.

A few days later, Moss put the question he'd asked Cantarella to Colonel Summers. The senior officer looked at him as if he'd suddenly started spouting Cherokee. "Trust a bunch of raggedy-ass niggers? You must be kidding, Major." But for his accent, he sounded like a Confederate himself.

With such patience as he could muster, Moss asked, "Do you know anybody who hates Jake Featherston more—or who has better reason to?"

Summers ignored that. "Besides, Major, we've got no way to get in touch with the spooks." He sounded like a man anxious to close off a subject he found distasteful. He might have been a maiden lady forced into talking about the facts of life.

Moss didn't laugh in his face, which proved military discipline still held. He did say, "Sir, we have all kinds of deals cooking that stretch farther than the camp. Spread a few dollars around and you can do damn near anything."

"Not this." Summers spoke as if from On High. "Not this, by God. No Confederate guard is going to go out and get hold of the niggers for us. That'd be like asking them to cut their own throats."

He had a point—of sorts. "There are bound to be ways if we look for them," Moss persisted. "We haven't even tried."

“Once we’re outside the barbed wire, Major, you may put your faith in niggers or Christian Science or any other damnfool thing your heart desires,” Colonel Summers said. “Until then, I make the decisions, and I have made this one. Is that clear enough for you, or shall I be more explicit?”

“You are very clear . . . sir.” Moss turned the title of respect into one of reproach.

Summers heard the reproach and went red. “Will that be all, Major?” he asked in a voice like ice.

“I suppose so,” Moss answered bitterly. “After all, we’re not going anywhere, are we?”

“**O**h, for Christ’s sake!” Jefferson Pinkard slammed down the telephone and scowled at it as if it were a rattlesnake. “Son of a bitch!” he added for good measure. He slammed a fist down on his desk. His coffee mug and the gooseneck lamp there jumped. He had to grab the lamp to keep it from toppling over.

He’d hated calls from Richmond ever since he started running camps. He had good reason for hating them, too. Richmond had a habit of wanting miracles, and of wanting them yesterday.

Jeff had already given them one—a more efficient, more secure way of disposing of excess Negroes than they’d ever had before. Now that wasn’t good enough for them anymore. He had to come up with something better yet. He hoped the other people who were running camps had got the same call. Let one of them have a brainstorm for a change!

“Fat chance,” he muttered. Some of those people could blow their brains out if they sneezed, goddammit.

He knew the question was ridiculous and unfair. That didn’t stop him from worrying at it like a dog worrying at a bone that was plumb out of meat. How *could* you get rid of more spooks faster than with this fleet of special trucks?

Oh, you could use more trucks, but that wasn’t the answer Richmond wanted to hear. Richmond wanted something different, something spiffy, something where you could wave a hand and all of a sudden a thousand Negroes weren’t there anymore.

And Richmond needed something like that, too. Pinkard couldn't very well deny it. All he had to do was look across the railroad tracks at the new women's half of the camp. Towns were getting their colored districts emptied out one after another. The blacks came into places like Camp Determination. They came in, and they didn't come out again—not alive, anyway.

How many niggers were there in the Confederate States? How many could the camps dispose of every day? How long would the CSA need to start really cutting into their numbers?

"Gotta be done," Jeff said heavily, as if someone had denied it. "It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it." Every now and then, the sheer amount of work he had to do tempted him toward self-pity.

He pushed back his chair and got to his feet. He could look out at the camp from the window—no substitute for prowling through it, but sometimes a fast way to spot trouble before it got out of hand. Barbed wire and machine-gun towers separated the administrative block from the seething misery in the main compound. At the moment, a long line of blacks was snaking forward, the skinny men often eager to board the trucks that would, they thought, take them to another camp. In fact, their journey would be strictly one-way. That they didn't know it, was one of the beauties of the scheme, for their ignorance kept them docile.

Pinkard shook his head. How could you come up with anything better than this? Oh, sure, it used a lot of trucks, but so what? It did the job, didn't it? Some people were just never satisfied, that was all.

He stuck his head into the chief guard's office. Vern Green was second in command here, and needed to know where Jeff was when he wasn't at the camp. "I'm going into town for a little while," Pinkard told him. "Anything goes wrong, send somebody after me."

"Will do, boss." Green knew Jeff wouldn't be anywhere but three or four places in Snyder, one of them far more likely than any of the other. Finding him wouldn't be hard. Green couldn't help adding, "Things are smooth, though."

"Yeah, I know. They're smooth now, anyways," Pinkard said. "But just in case, I mean."

"Sure, sure." Vernon Green nodded. He smiled. He was no less ambitious than Mercer Scott had been back in Louisiana. Like Scott, Green undoubtedly reported back to someone in Richmond about how

Jeff did his job. But he wasn't so obnoxious about it. Scott had had a drill sergeant's manner and a face like a boot. Green smiled a lot of the time, whether there was anything to smile about or not. He caught his flies with honey, not vinegar. He caught a lot of them, however he did it, and that was what a second-in-command was for.

As camp commandant, Pinkard had a motorcar laid on. He could have had a driver, too, but he didn't want one. He could drive himself just fine. Guards saluted as he left the camp. He would have to go through all the boring formalities getting back in. He shrugged. He would have had the guards' heads if they were anything but careful about letting people into Camp Determination.

Snyder, Texas, was a nice little town of perhaps three thousand people. Before the camp went up, business there had centered on cattle and on ginning the cotton grown in the surrounding countryside and making cottonseed cake that the cattle ate. The influx of guards had everybody in the four-street central business district smiling. By local standards, they made good money, and they weren't shy about spending it. And new houses were going up, because a lot of the guards were married men, and didn't want to live right by the camp.

Whoever'd named the roads in Snyder had no imagination at all. The ones that ran east-west were numbered streets. The ones that ran north-south were avenues, identified by letter. He pulled up in front of a house on Thirty-first Street near Avenue Q, in the southern part of town. Two boys were wrestling on the threadbare lawn in front of the house. They broke off when he got out of the motorcar.

"Papa Jeff!" they yelled. "It's Papa Jeff!" They ran up to him and tried out a couple of tackles that would have drawn flags on any football field in the CSA or USA. Fortunately, they were still too little to flatten him.

He ruffled their hair. He liked Chick Blades' sons. He liked Chick Blades' widow even more. "Easy, there," he told the kids, trying to pry them loose from his legs without damaging them. It wasn't easy; they clung like limpets. "Is your mama home?" he asked them.

That did the trick better than any wrestling hold. "She sure is," they said together, and dashed toward the house yelling, "Ma! Ma! Papa Jeff's here!" If the racket wasn't enough to wake the dead, it would have made them turn over in their graves a couple of times.

Edith Blades came out on the front porch. She was a nice-looking

blond woman in her early thirties. Each time Jeff saw her, she seemed a little less ravaged by her husband's suicide. Time did heal wounds. Jeff had got over the disastrous end of his first marriage to the point where he was game to try it again. And so was Edith, though she wouldn't tie the knot till after the first anniversary of Chick Blades' death. They were getting there.

"Hello, Jeff. Good to see you," she said as he walked up to the porch. "How are things?"

"Things are . . ." He paused. "Well, they could be better."

"Come in and tell me about it," she said, and then, "Boys, go on and play. Papa Jeff will be with you in a little bit."

They made disappointed noises, but they didn't argue too much. They were good boys, well-behaved boys. She'd done a fine job with them, before Chick died and afterwards. Jeff admired that. He also admired the way she listened to him. He'd never known that with another woman—certainly not with his first wife. Animal heat had held him and Emily together—and then broken them apart.

"Set yourself down," Edith said when she and Jeff went back into the living room.

"In a second." He kissed her. She let him do that. In fact, she responded eagerly. Whenever he tried for more than a kiss, though, she told him they had to wait. That didn't make him angry. He thought the more of her for being able to say no. Emily hadn't, with him or with his best friend. But he didn't want to remember Emily. "How you doin' here?" he asked. "You got everything you need?"

"Sure do," Edith answered. "And I'm not sorry to be out of Alexandria, out of that house, and there's the Lord's truth."

"I do believe it." Jeff wouldn't have wanted to live in a house where somebody'd committed suicide. Actually, Chick had done it in his auto, but still. . . . "What do you think of Texas?"

"There's so much of it, and it's so big and flat," Edith answered. "Seemed like we were on the train forever, and that was just getting most of the way across one state. People act nice enough." She held up a hand. "But tell me what's gone wrong at the camp."

Jeff did. The only thing he didn't tell her was that Chick's suicide with auto exhaust had given him the idea for the trucks that used their

fumes to kill off Negroes. He would never say a word about that, not even if he was on fire. There was such a thing as talking too damn much.

When he finished, Edith was suitably indignant for him. “They’ve got their nerve,” she said. “After everything you’ve done cleaning up the colored problem for them, then they expect *more*? They should get down on their knees and thank God they’ve got a good man like you, Jeff.”

“Ha! Those . . . people in Richmond don’t notice anybody but their own selves,” Jeff said. Only belatedly, after venting his spleen, did he notice the size of the compliment she’d paid him. “Thank you, darlin’. You say sweet things.”

“You’re my sweetheart,” Edith said, her voice dead serious. “If I don’t stick up for you, who’s going to?”

Instead of answering with words, he kissed her again. She pressed herself against him. But when, ever optimistic, he let his hand fall on her thigh as if by accident, she knocked it away. He didn’t get mad—he laughed. “You’re somethin’.”

“So are you.” Edith was laughing, too. Even if she was, he remained sure she’d keep right on holding him at bay till their wedding night. It wasn’t as if she were a virgin—or she could have doubled up on Mary—but she was a respectable woman, and she acted like one.

For a moment, Jeff thought the deep thrumming he heard was the pounding of the blood in his veins. Then he realized it was outside himself. No sooner had he realized that than Edith’s kids ran in, yelling, “Ma! Papa Jeff! There’s a million airplanes up in the sky! Come look! Quick!”

“What the—?” Jeff was off the couch and heading for the door as fast as he could go, Edith right behind him.

They stared up and up and up. Passing high above them, scribing ruler-straight contrails across the sky, were more big airplanes than Jeff had ever seen before. They flew east in what was obviously a strong defensive formation: in staggered echelons where one bomber could easily fire on enemy fighters attacking another. And *enemy fighters,* here, could mean only one thing: Confederate fighters.

“Damnyankees.” Jefferson Pinkard made the calculation almost without conscious thought. “I bet they’re headin’ for Forth Worth and

Dallas.”

“How could they?” Edith said.

“They’ve got their nerve, sending ’em out in the daytime.” Pinkard had a nasty feeling the bombers would get through. The war west of the Mississippi had been quiet. He doubted the Confederate authorities were ready for an attack on this scale. The damnyankees had pulled a fast one here.

“Will they drop bombs on *us,* Papa Jeff?” Frank Blades asked anxiously.

“Nah.” Now Jeff spoke with great assurance. He set a big, meaty hand on the boy’s shoulders. “Ain’t nothin’ here the Yankees would ever want to touch. Don’t you worry ’bout a thing, not as far as that goes.”

O ne thing Chester Martin had to give to Lieutenant Thayer Monroe: the kid could read a map. “We want to call down more fire on these emplacements in back of Fredericksburg, eh, Sergeant?” he said. “I make their positions out to be in square Green-6. That sound right to you?” There was something else Martin had to give him: he did ask the older man’s opinion, and sometimes even listened to it.

Martin looked out from the ruins of Fredericksburg toward the heights to the south and southwest. They weren’t mountains; they were hardly even hills. But they were plenty to let the Confederate field guns and mortars dug in on them make life hell on earth for the U.S. soldiers *in* the Virginia town.

“Yes, sir. I think Green-6 is right,” he said. The platoon commander called for the signalman with the field telephone, then shouted into it. U.S. artillery was still on the far side of the river. Chester had the nasty suspicion that the Confederates had let the U.S. Army get foot soldiers over the Rappahannock so they could bleed them white. All attempts to break out from the town had failed. None seemed likely to succeed, at least not to him.

“Goddammit!” Lieutenant Monroe hung up in disgust. “I can’t get through. Bastards must have cut the wires again.”

“Wouldn’t be surprised,” Chester agreed. After a moment, he added, “I wonder how much truth there is in the talk you hear.”

“You mean about Confederates running around in U.S. uniforms and raising Cain?” the lieutenant asked. Chester nodded. After some thought, Thayer Monroe said, “I don’t know for sure, but I wouldn’t be surprised. It’s the sort of bastardly trick Featherston’s people would pull.”

Was it? It struck Martin as the sort of trick anybody with half an ounce of brains would pull, especially in a war where both sides spoke what was for all practical purposes the same language. He said, “I hope we’re doing the same thing to them, that’s all.”

Lieutenant Monroe looked astonished. “It goes dead against the Geneva Convention, Sergeant. If you’re caught in the enemy’s uniform, you get a blindfold and a cigarette. That’s too far to go for a good smoke.”

Chester dutifully chuckled, though he had Confederate cigarettes in his pocket. Plundering enemy corpses—and, here in Fredericksburg, plundering shops—kept front-line infantrymen supplied with better tobacco than they could get from their own country. Front-line service had few advantages, but that was one of them.

Freight-train noises filled the air. Monroe might not have been able to get through to U.S. artillery, but someone had. High explosives thundered down on the heights behind Fredericksburg. How much good they would do . . .

Through the din, the lieutenant said, “At least we don’t have any orders to get out of our holes and attack as soon as the barrage lets up.”

“Thank you, Jesus,” Chester Martin said, most sincerely.

His platoon commander nodded. Monroe *could* learn. The company, and the regiment of which it was a part, were in the line because so many men had tried to take the high ground in back of Fredericksburg: tried and bloodily failed. The Confederate gunners on those heights could murder every U.S. soldier in the world if the Army chose to come at them there. Machine guns and artillery swept the rising ground. Not even barrels had a chance of forcing their way forward.

Martin drew in a breath and made a face. Most of the time, you could forget about the stench of death on the battlefield—oh, not forget about it, maybe, but shove it down to the back of your mind. He’d thought about it, though, and that brought it up in his mind again. His

guts did a slow lurch. Too many unburied bodies lay out there, bloating in the sun.

When the company went back into reserve, he would bring that stench with him—in his clothes, in his hair, on his skin. It took a long time to go away. And he'd smelled it in plenty of nightmares between the wars. Bad as it was here, it had been worse in the trenches on the Roanoke front, where the line went back and forth over the same few miles of ground for a couple of years, and where every square yard of ground was manured with a corpse or two.

Keeping his head down—he didn't know whether the Confederates had any snipers close enough to draw a bead on him, and didn't care to find out the hard way—he lit one of those smooth Confederate cigarettes and held the pack out to Lieutenant Monroe. "Thanks, Sergeant," Monroe said. He leaned close for a light.

The smoke in Chester's mouth and in his nose masked the smell of death. For that, one of the stables-scrapings cigarettes the USA turned out would have done as well. If you were going to go this way, though, why not go first class?

"I pity those poor bastards who don't smoke," Chester said out of the blue.

"Why's that?" The lieutenant, not unreasonably, couldn't follow his train of thought.

"On account of they can't ever get out from under the goddamn smell."

"Oh." Thayer Monroe considered, then nodded. "Hadn't looked at it like that, but you're right." He started to add something else, probably on the same theme, but all of a sudden he ducked down deep in the foxhole instead. "Incoming!"

"Aw, shit!" Martin got right down there with him. The Confederates were doing something sneaky—something gutsy, too. They couldn't huddle in reinforced-concrete gun emplacements to serve their mortars. They had to come out into the firing pits to use them. But the nasty little bombs flew at Fredericksburg almost silently. With all the big stuff roaring by overhead, nobody was going to notice the mortars till they started bursting, which would be too late for some luckless soldiers.

And sometimes even being right on the money didn't do you a damn

bit of good. One of the reasons soldiers hated mortars was that the bombs went up at a steep angle and came down at an even steeper one. Plunging fire, the boys with the high foreheads called it. A foxhole didn't protect you from a round that came right down in there with you.

Chester heard the boom. Next thing he knew, he was grabbing at his leg and bawling for a corpsman. Absurdly, the first thing that went through his mind was, *Rita's gonna kill me.* When he could think of anything past his own pain, he got a look at Lieutenant Monroe—and wished he hadn't. The platoon commander was the only reason Chester was still breathing. He'd been between Chester and the mortar round, and he'd taken almost all of it. There wasn't a hell of a lot of him left, and what there was wasn't pretty.

"That you, Sarge?" one of the stretcher bearers called.

"Yeah." Chester forced out the word through clenched teeth.

The corpsman jumped down into the hole. He swore softly when he saw what had happened to Monroe, then turned to Chester. "How much of that blood is yours and how much is the other poor bastard's?"

"Beats me." Chester looked down at himself. He was pretty well drenched in the lieutenant's mortal remains. He didn't want to let go of the leg, though, or more of what soaked him would be his. He was much too sure of that. "Can you stick me and bandage me or put on a tourniquet or whatever the hell you're gonna do? This hurts like a son of a bitch."

"Right." The corpsman jabbed Chester with a morphine syrette, then said, "Lemme see what you caught." Blood flowed faster when Chester took his hand away from his calf, but it didn't spurt. Frowning, the corpsman went on, "I think we can get by without a tourniquet." He bandaged the wound, watched how fast the gauze turned red, and nodded to himself. "Hey, Elmer! Gimme a hand here, will ya? Let's get the sarge outa this hole."

"Sure." The other corpsman hopped down in there, too. "Fuck," he said when he got a look at the platoon commander's ruined corpse. "Who was that, anyways?"

"Lieutenant Monroe," Chester answered, a certain dreamy wonder in his voice. The painkiller hit hard and fast.

“He got it quick, anyhow,” Elmer said, about as much of a eulogy as anyone ever gave Thayer Monroe.

Despite the morphine, Martin howled when the grunting corpsmen got him up on flat ground. Mortar rounds were still landing not far away. A few fragments whistled by. Chester didn’t want to get hit again. But he didn’t want to stay at the front, either. With another grunt, the corpsmen carried the stretcher on which he lay, back toward the Rappahannock.

A white powerboat with big Red Crosses took him and the medics over the river. The Confederates weren’t supposed to shoot at such vessels, any more than they were supposed to shoot at ambulances. Accidents did happen, though.

When he got back to the field hospital, the first thing a doctor did was give him a shot. “Tetanus,” the man said. By then, Martin wouldn’t have cared if it was French dressing; he was feeling very woozy indeed. The doctor cut away his trouser leg and the bandage and looked at the wound. He nodded thoughtfully. “Not too bad, Sergeant. If it heals clean, you’ll be back on duty in a few weeks.”

“Terrific,” Chester said, more or less at random.

He got some more shots, these to numb the leg while the doctor sewed him up. Eyeing him, the man asked, “Did you have a Purple Heart in the last war?”

“Yeah. Oak-leaf cluster. Hot damn,” Martin answered.

“Heh.” The doctor sounded more tired than amused. He wrote notes on a form, then tied it to Chester’s wrist. “Orders for your disposition,” he explained.

“Yeah,” Chester said again. He’d always known the Army ran as much on paperwork as on bullets and canned rations.

He got stuffed into an ambulance and sent north up roads cratered by shellfire. Despite morphine and local anesthetic, the jolts made him groan and curse. His partner in misery, a PFC with a bandaged shoulder, was still very groggy from whatever he’d been under, and didn’t seem to feel a thing. Martin envied him.

The military hospital was up near the Potomac. Like the powerboat, like the ambulance, it was painted a dazzling white and had Red Crosses on the walls and roof. Chester would rather have been farther

away, but Confederate bombers reached all the way up to New York City and Boston, just as U.S. warplanes had recently flown from New Mexico to unload hell on Forth Worth and Dallas.

A briskly efficient nurse in starched whites got him into a bed. “We’ll have to clean you up,” she remarked.

“That’d be nice,” he said vaguely. All he knew was that he wasn’t going anywhere for a while. And not going anywhere suited him fine.

A bner Dowling could have done without a summons to report to Warrenton, Virginia. That Daniel MacArthur wanted to see him did not fill his heart with joy. Instead, the news filled him with apprehension. He feared it meant MacArthur had come up with another scheme for discomfiting the Confederates. The only thing wrong with MacArthur’s schemes that Abner Dowling could see was that they didn’t work.

MacArthur kept coming up with them, though. He had an endlessly fertile, endlessly inventive mind. If only he’d had a better sense of what was practical . . . Well, in that case he would have been someone else. Dwelling on it seemed pointless, which didn’t always stop Dowling.

The general commanding made his headquarters in a house different from the one he’d occupied the last time Dowling came to Warrenton. Then he’d chosen the fanciest place in town for his own. Perhaps knowing his habits, the Confederates had knocked that house flat—not while he was in it. Dowling tried not to think about whose war effort they would have helped more if they’d got MacArthur as well as the building.

Not that MacArthur’s current residence was anything to sneeze at. Having lost the most impressive place—and, no doubt, thereby endeared its owner to the USA for ever and ever—the American general had chosen the next grandest for his own: another Classical Revival home from before the War of Secession. Sandbagged machine-gun nests and a thicket of barbed wire around the place detracted from the air of quiet elegance the colonnaded entranceway tried to project.

Sentries gave Dowling a careful once-over before letting him inside the perimeter. Some of them carried Confederate-made submachine guns in place of bolt-action Springfields. “You really like those

better?" Dowling asked a corporal who toted one of the ugly little weapons.

"Yes, sir, for what I'm doing here," the noncom told him. "Wouldn't care to take it up to the front. Not enough range, not enough stopping power. But for putting a lot of lead in the air right up close, you can't beat it."

"All right." That struck Dowling as a well-reasoned answer. He did inquire, "What does General MacArthur say about your using a Confederate weapon?"

"Sir, he says he wished we made one as good."

That also struck Dowling as a cogent comment. He wondered how MacArthur had come up with it. But that was neither here nor there. He walked on toward the house: Greek refinement surrounded by modern barbarity. But then, considering some of the things Athens and Sparta did to each other during the Peloponnesian War, the Greeks had surrounded refinement with their own barbarity.

One of MacArthur's staff officers, a captain as lean and probably as swift as a greyhound, met Dowling at the door. "Please come with me, General," the bright young man said after saluting. "General MacArthur is eagerly awaiting your arrival."

Eagerly? Dowling wondered. What could make MacArthur eager to see him after the way they'd quarreled? Was the commanding general going to cashier him? Dowling resolved to fight like hell if MacArthur tried. He hadn't done anything wrong, and he thought he'd done more things right than his superior.

"Here we are—in the map room," the captain murmured. Daniel MacArthur had had a map room in the other house he used for a headquarters, too. If he'd had the sense to read the maps instead of just having them . . .

"Good afternoon, General," MacArthur said. A cigarette—Confederate tobacco, by the smell—burned in the long holder he affected. He also affected an almost monastically plain uniform, one whose only ornaments were the stars on his shoulder straps. Custer, by contrast, had made his clothes more ornate and gaudy than tightly interpreted regulations would have allowed. Both approaches had the same purpose: to call special attention to the man wearing the uniform.

"Reporting as ordered, sir," Dowling said, and waited to see what

happened next.

“You were the one who discovered the Confederates were thinning their lines in front of us here in Virginia.”

By the way MacArthur said it, he didn’t think Dowling’s discovery would go down in history with Columbus’. His tone declared that Dowling might have been found picking his nose and wiping his finger on a trouser leg. Ignoring that, Dowling replied, “Yes, sir, I was the one. I’m sorry you discovered we couldn’t take advantage of that at Fredericksburg.”

He’d told the exact and literal truth there. He *was* sorry the U.S. attacks hadn’t succeeded. If they had, MacArthur would have become a hero. That wouldn’t have filled Dowling with delight. Custer was already a hero when Dowling got to know him. When the pompous windbag became a bigger hero, that didn’t delight Dowling, either. It hadn’t broken his heart, though. Custer’s success had meant the USA’s success. MacArthur’s would mean the same thing. Dowling prided himself on his patriotism. *I’d admire a skunk who helped my country.* He eyed MacArthur in a speculative way.

MacArthur was looking back, also in a speculative way. He was, no doubt, trying to tease an insult out of Dowling’s remark. But Dowling hadn’t said anything like, *Only a blind jackass would have tried to break the Confederates’ line at Fredericksburg.* He might have thought something like that, but MacArthur couldn’t read minds—and a good thing, too.

Ash almost as long as the first joint of a man’s thumb fell from MacArthur’s cigarette. The general commanding ground it into the expensive-looking rug. That was bound to make whoever owned the place love him even more than he did already. He lowered his voice to a portentous whisper: “I think I know where they’ve gone.”

“Do you, sir?” Dowling was ready to get news or gossip from anybody, even MacArthur. “Where?”

“To the west.” Yes, the general commanding sounded portentous, all right. Half a dozen Old Testament prophets could have taken lessons from him.

Once Dowling had the news, it didn’t strike him as improbable. “What are they going to do there?” he asked.

“I doubt they’ll dance around the Maypole and strew flowers over the

landscape," MacArthur replied.

"Very funny, sir." Dowling lied dutifully. Why not? He'd had practice. "But I did wonder whether they were going to push toward Toledo and Detroit or go east toward Cleveland and Akron and—what's the name of the place?—Youngstown, that's it." He felt proud of visualizing the map.

"Ah." Daniel MacArthur nodded. He took another cigarette from his pack, stuck it in the holder, and lit it. With his prominent nose and his jowls wattling an otherwise thin face, he reminded Dowling of a chain-smoking vulture. "That, I must tell you, I do not know. If the budding Alexanders at the War Department do, they have not seen fit to impart that information to me."

Dowling snorted. He was little more fond of the functionaries at the War Department than MacArthur was. He realized he'd acquired his attitude from George Custer. That realization didn't thrill him, but also didn't change his mind. He said, "In case they do attack in the West, what's the best thing we can do here?"

He could see he'd made MacArthur unhappy again. He needed a moment to figure out why. MacArthur didn't want to be reduced to a sideshow. He wanted to be the main event. But even MacArthur could see he wouldn't be the main event if major fighting erupted in the West once more. Reluctantly, he said, "Keep the enemy as busy as we can, I suppose. If you see a better choice, point it out to me."

"I'm afraid I don't," Dowling said. What was the world coming to when one of Daniel MacArthur's proposals made sound military sense?

"Very well. I may call on your corps to try to break through the Confederate defenses and threaten Richmond," MacArthur said now.

I failed at one end of my line, so I'll try the other. That was what it amounted to. Dowling gave a mental shrug. MacArthur had the right to ask that of him—and the busier the Confederates were in Virginia, the smaller their chance to send even more men west. With a little luck, they might even have to bring some back. Dowling said what needed saying: "Of course I'm at your service, sir. Whatever you require of me, I'll do."

Nothing made Daniel MacArthur happier than unhesitating obedience. He looked quite humanly pleased as he answered, "Thank you, General. That was very handsomely said."

For once, Dowling made his farewells without getting the impression of breaking off an artillery duel. As he headed for his green-gray motorcar, another one—a bright blue civilian Olds—pulled up alongside it. A woman not far from his own age got out. Her hair was the pinkish white peculiar to aging redheads. She moved with a brisk spryness that belied her years.

“Hello, Colonel Dowling. No, excuse me—hello, General Dowling. I didn’t expect to see you here,” she said. “Got a cigarette?”

A broad smile spread over Dowling’s face. “Hello yourself, Miss Clemens. I sure do. Here you are.” He pulled the pack from his pocket and handed it to her.

“Thanks.” Ophelia Clemens lit one and sucked in smoke. Then she stuck out her hand. When Dowling took it, she gave his a firm pump and let it go. The formalities satisfied, she nodded toward MacArthur’s headquarters and asked, “So how’s the Great Stone Face?”

One of the reasons Dowling had always liked her, as a reporter and as a person, was that she said what was on her mind. He, of course, did not enjoy the privilege of being outside the chain of command. He answered, “General MacArthur seems well.”

“Oh, yeah?” she said. “Then how come he’s dumb enough to keep feeding troops into a meat grinder like Fredericksburg?”

“I’m afraid I’m not the one to answer that, since he is my superior and since my corps is stationed at the other end of our line.” Having said what any loyal subordinate ought to say, Dowling couldn’t resist adding, “If you need to know his views, you’ll have to ask him yourself.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” Ophelia Clemens said, and Dowling wanted to hug himself with glee. Unlike a lot of correspondents, she had no patience with bloated egos or double talk. She had cut through Custer’s pompous bluster like a regiment of barrels going through Sioux Indians. He didn’t think she’d have any trouble doing the same with MacArthur. Then she surprised him by asking, “And how have *you* been?”

“Oh, tolerable. Yes, tolerable’s about right.” Dowling batted his eyelashes at her. “I didn’t know you cared.”

She was taking a drag, and choked on it. She went alarmingly red. Dowling had to pound her on the back. When she could talk again,

she wheezed, “God damn you, General—you caught me by surprise.”

“Sorry, Miss Clemens.” Dowling more or less meant it.

“A likely story,” she said, sounding more like her herself. “You’re just trying to get rid of me so you don’t have to answer questions about how things got screwed up this time.”

“I thought you already had all the answers,” he teased.

She shook her head. “Not yet. But I aim to get ’em.” With determined stride, she advanced on Daniel MacArthur.

T he *Townsend* slid over the improbably blue waters of the tropical Pacific as smoothly as if Japanese airplanes had never bombed her. As George Enos, Jr., swabbed her deck, he looked over the side every now and again to see if he could spot the feathery wake of a periscope.

When he did it once too often to suit a petty officer, that worthy barked, “Enos, you’re goldbricking. You think your eyeballs are gonna spot something our hydrophones miss?”

“Probably not.” George knew better than to make a challenge too blatant. “But you never can tell, can you?”

“I can tell when you’re goofing off,” the petty officer said. After the one growl, though, he went off to harass somebody else. George’s answer held enough truth to let him wiggle off the hook.

He swabbed conscientiously for a while, in case the petty officer came sneaking back and caught him doing too close to nothing. He wasn’t terrified of the man, the way some ordinary seamen were. For one thing, he was in his thirties himself; the other man didn’t put him in mind of an angry father. For another, he’d been yelled at by experts on the *Sweet Sue.* What was one more fellow with a big voice? Getting along was easier, but one more bawling-out wouldn’t be the end of the world.

Fighters buzzed overhead. These days, American ships didn’t sail out of range of land-based aircraft from the Sandwich Islands. Somebody in Honolulu, or perhaps somebody back in Philadelphia, had finally had a rush of brains to the head. George wished that would have happened sooner. The *Townsend* would have been better off for it.

Or maybe it wasn't such a rush of brains. About fifteen minutes later, the destroyer's klaxons hooted for general quarters. George threw the mop into the bucket and ran for his antiaircraft gun. He didn't know whether the skipper had spotted an enemy submarine or aircraft or just had a case of the galloping jimjams. That wasn't his worry. Being ready to do his little bit to keep the ship safe was.

He got to the twin-40mm mount just ahead of Fremont Dalby. If you were ahead of your gun chief, you were doing all right. "You know what's going on?" Dalby panted.

"Nope. All I know is, I run like hell when I hear the siren," George answered.

Dalby chuckled. "Long as you do know that, what you don't know doesn't matter anywhere near as much."

The rest of the sailors who served the gun took their places within another minute or so. The *Townsend*'s intercom crackled to life: "Now hear this. We have detected aircraft approaching from the northwest. Y-ranging gear says we have about fifteen minutes. Assistance from more land-based airplanes is promised. That is all." A pause. "Do your duty and all will be well."

George laughed a sour laugh. " 'All will be well.' Yeah—unless we get blown to kingdom come, anyway."

"I'd like to see those Army assholes get more fighters out here in fifteen minutes, too," Dalby added. "Matter of fact, I *would* like to see it, but I'm not gonna bet the damn farm."

Two other destroyers cruised with the *Townsend,* a reconnaissance in force north of Kauai. The American powers that be wanted to tell the Japs the Sandwich Islands weren't going to be their ham and cheese on rye. That was what the American authorities wanted to say, yeah, but they were liable to be offering the patrol up as an hors d'oeuvre.

Fritz Gustafson kept things short and to the point: "Give me lots of ammo. Can't do much without it." There was a loader's notion of practicality.

As usual, the time between the call to general quarters and the appearance of enemy fighters seemed an eternity and an eyeblink at the same time. One of the 40mm mounts on another destroyer opened up. Tracers tiger-striped the sky. Shells burst here, there, everywhere. The only trouble was, George couldn't spot any airplanes but the U.S.

fighters.

“Spring fever,” Dalby said scornfully.

“Better too soon than too late,” Gustafson said. That was thoroughly practical, too.

And then everybody spotted the Japs. The American fighters zoomed toward them. All three destroyers put up a curtain of anti-aircraft fire. Japanese fighters rushed ahead to hold the enemy away from the torpedo-carriers and dive bombers they shepherded. Almost at the same time, two fighters plunged into the Pacific. One carried the Rising Sun, the other the eagle in front of crossed swords.

George pointed. “Torpedo bomber, coming at us!”

He didn’t think he’d ever seen anything so ugly in all his life. In fact, the airplane carrying the torpedo under its belly—offset slightly to the left—was smoothly streamlined. The torpedo itself was a straight tube with a bluntly curved nose and with fins at the stern: a splendid piece of industrial design. But it was designed to sink his ship and to kill him. If that didn’t make it ugly in his sight, nothing could.

Streams of tracers converged on the Japanese aircraft. George wasn’t the only one who’d spotted it. The pilot had to fly straight and low to launch his fish. That left him a perfect, and perfectly vulnerable, target while he did it. He was a brave man; he did what he’d been trained to do. His airplane exploded into fire. But the torpedo was in the water by then.

“HailMaryfullofgracetheLordiswiththee—” George prayed in a rapid gabble. The prayer he chose took him by surprise. He’d turned Catholic because Connie made it plain she wasn’t about to marry him if he didn’t. He hadn’t thought he took it seriously, not till now. Somebody’d said there were no atheists in foxholes. The deck of a ship under torpedo attack evidently counted.

The *Townsend* was a greyhound of the sea, capable of well over thirty knots. Why, then, did she feel as if she were nailed in place? The heeling, surging turn she made might have been filmed in slow motion. It might have been, but it wasn’t. It took her out of harm’s way, for the torpedo raced past her stern.

“Thank you, Jesus.” Fritz Gustafson used words as if he had to pay for them. He packed a lot of meaning into those three.

Meatballs on its wings and fuselage, a Jap fighter shot up the destroyer. Bullets clanged and snarled and whined in wild ricochets. Wounded men screeched. Every antiaircraft gun on the ship tried to knock the pilot into the Pacific. He darted away just above the wavetops, untouched or at least still flying.

Fremont Dalby gave credit where it was due: “He’s a motherfucking son of a bitch, but he’s a motherfucking son of a bitch with balls. I hope he gets home.”

“I don’t.” George was not inclined to be chivalrous.

Then, suddenly, the sky was full of airplanes—airplanes blazoned with the American eagle and swords. They threw themselves at the Japs. The Army was on the ball after all. Ignoring the enemy fighters where they could, the fighters bored in on the torpedo-carriers and dive bombers—those were the ones that could sink ships. The Americans outnumbered the Japanese aircraft. Before long, the Japanese decided they’d had enough and flew off in the direction from which they’d come.

No dive bombers had attacked the *Townsend.* George was pretty sure of it. Even near misses kicked up great columns of water and threw splinters of bomb casing every which way. He couldn’t have ignored anything like that in his singleminded ammunition-passing . . . could he?

One of the other destroyers hadn’t been so lucky. Black, greasy smoke poured from her. A bomb had burst near her bow. She wasn’t dead in the water, but she couldn’t do much more than crawl. Even as he watched, her starboard list got worse.

Sailors bobbed in the water not far from her. The bomb blast had blown them off her deck. Some—corpses—floated face down. Others struggled to stay above the surface. Still others, in life jackets, didn’t have that worry.

As the *Townsend* swung toward her stricken comrade, the exec’s voice blared from the intercom: “All hands! Lower lines and nets and life rings for rescue!”

Sailors rushed to obey. The other destroyer slumped lower in the water. They weren’t going to be able to save her. Men started coming up on her deck from below. Some of them helped wounded buddies. They were going to abandon ship.

“That could be us,” George said.

He didn’t realize he’d spoken aloud till Dalby nodded. “That damn near was us last year,” the gun chief said. “We pick up these sorry bastards and then figure out what to do next.”

Pausing to take on survivors carried risks of its own. If a Japanese submersible prowled these waters, the *Townsend* would be a sitting duck for it. George thought of his father. But the senior George Enos thought the war was over when his destroyer went down. George, Jr., knew better. Again, he kept an eye peeled for periscopes. This time, no one reproved him. He was a long way from the only sailor doing the same thing.

“Pull hard, you lazy fuckers! Put your backs into it! Haul that line!” a petty officer screamed. By his orders, he might have been serving aboard a nineteenth-century ship of the line. But the destroyer’s men weren’t swinging from one tack to the other; they were bringing a sailor up on deck.

He clung to the rope for dear life. His feet thudded against the side of the ship. “God bless you!” he gasped when he came aboard. He got down on hands and knees and puked his guts out. Nobody could possibly have blamed him for that; he was covered from head to foot in heavy fuel oil, so that he looked as if he’d just escaped from a minstrel show. But if you swallowed much of that stuff, it would kill you as surely as a bullet would. Heaving up your guts was one of the best things you could do.

“Ain’t this a fuckup?” one of the rescued men said as he stood there dripping. “Ain’t this just a grand fuckup? We wanted to see if there was Japs there. We found out, all right. Didn’t we just?”

Didn’t we just? The mournful words echoed inside George’s head. He turned to Fremont Dalby and said, “I wonder if we’ll be able to hang on to the Sandwich Islands.”

“We wouldn’t have any trouble if the Japs were the only thing on our plate,” Dalby said. “We could lick ’em easy enough. But this is the ass end of the goddamn war. Whatever they can spare from fighting the CSA and the big mess in the Atlantic and holding Canada down—whatever they can spare, we get that.”

“It’s not enough,” George said.

Dalby shrugged. “They haven’t thrown us out yet. They’re not fighting

anybody else, either. But the Sandwich Islands are even harder for them to get at than they are for us."

"I guess so." George knew he sounded dubious. He felt dubious. He'd seen too much to feel any other way. And if he hadn't, one look at the draggled survivors from the other destroyer would have been plenty to show him.

H ipolito Rodriguez packed his worldly goods into a duffel bag. He didn't know how many times he'd done that when he was in the Army during the last war—enough so that he hadn't lost the knack, anyhow. Shouldering the duffel wasn't as easy as it had been then, though. A lot more years had landed on him since, and almost getting electrocuted hadn't helped.

All the same, he managed. Some of the other guards from the Confederate Veterans' Brigades were in no better shape than he was. They managed, too. If you couldn't manage, you shouldn't have been here at all.

"Well done, men," said Tom Porter, the troop leader—essentially, the top sergeant. "God knows we do need to fumigate these barracks—we've got more bugs in 'em than you can shake a stick at. I'm not telling you one goddamn thing you don't already know."

"Got that right," a guard drawled. He mimed scratching—or maybe he wasn't miming. Rodriguez had found out about delousing stations during the Great War, too. They'd changed a little since then—a little, but not nearly enough.

"It's all them niggers' fault," another guard said. "They's filthy, and we git their vermin."

He was bound to be right about that. The rank smell of Camp Determination was always in a guard's nostrils. Put lots of unwashed men and women together with Texas heat and humidity and it was no wonder you raised a bumper crop of every kind of pest under the sun.

The exterminators were a cheerful crew who'd come west from Abilene. BUGGONE! their trucks said. On the side of each was painted a man walking up to an overgrown cockroach. He had a mallet behind his back; the roach wore an apprehensive expression.

"Y'all got dogs or cats or canaries or snakes or goldfish or whatever

the hell still in the building?" one of the men asked, fumbling in the breast pocket of his coveralls for a cheap cigar. "Better get 'em out if you do, on account of this stuff'll kill 'em deader'n shit."

A couple of the guards did have pets, but they'd taken them out. When the exterminator lit that cheroot, one of Rodriguez's comrades asked him, "You gonna kill the bugs with the smoke from that goddamn thing?"

Laughing, the fellow answered, "How'd you guess? Now our secret's out."

He and his crew covered the barracks with an enormous tent of rubberized cloth. They could make it as big as they wanted; squares of the stuff zipped together. Rodriguez admired that—it struck him as good design.

One of the squares had a round hole in it that accepted the tube from the machine that pumped the poison into the tent: again, good design. The exterminators didn't leave anything to chance, any more than the people who'd designed Camp Determination had done. A small gasoline engine powered the machine, which was hooked up to a gas cylinder with a large skull and crossbones painted on it.

Rodriguez had seen poison-gas cylinders during the last war. He asked the fellow with the nasty cigar, "You use chlorine or phosgene? I remember how chlorine kill all the rats in the trenches. More come later, though." The trenches had been heaven on earth for rats and mice.

"Nah, this here is a different mix," the exterminator told him. "It's stronger than any of the stuff they used back then."

"Bueno," Rodriguez said. "This means, maybe, the bugs don't come back for a while once you kill them?"

"Maybe," the man answered. By the way he hesitated before he said it, Rodriguez decided he meant *no.* Sure enough, he continued, "We get paid to kill all the little bastards that're in there now. What happens after that . . . If you leave out ant syrup and spray Flit around and keep the place clean so you don't draw roaches, you'll do pretty good. And you can always call us out again."

"Bueno," Rodriguez repeated, more sourly this time. Like undertakers, exterminators weren't likely to go out of business anytime soon.

The engine came to noisy life. Whatever was in the gas cylinder started going into the tented barracks hall. Rodriguez got a tiny whiff of something that smelled sort of like mothballs but a hell of a lot stronger. That whiff was plenty to convince him he didn't want to breathe any more of it. He moved away from the barracks in a hurry, and noticed the exterminators had already put some distance between themselves and their machinery.

"How soon can we go back in after y'all leave?" a guard asked one of the Buggone people.

"You folks did leave the windows and doors open so the place can air out?" the exterminator asked in return. The guard nodded. The exterminator said, "Well, in that case you oughta be safe goin' in there tonight—say, after ten."

Several guards swore. Rodriguez gave a mental shrug. Some things you just couldn't help. What was the point of getting all excited about those?

"Wish we could fumigate the damn niggers like they was bugs," a guard said.

Unfortunately for him, he said it where Tom Porter could hear him. The underofficer reamed him out for it: "Goddammit, Newcomb, watch your fool mouth. This here is a transit camp. It ain't nothin' else but a transit camp. You let the idea get out that it *is* somethin' else and you turn the devil loose. Do you want that? *Do* you? Answer me when I talk to you, goddammit!"

"No, Troop Leader," Newcomb said hastily.

"Then shut up, you hear me? Just shut up," Porter said, and put his hands on his hips like an angry parent scolding a five-year-old. "You've all heard this shit before. To hell with me if I know what's so hard about keeping your damnfool mouths shut, but y'all leak like a pail with a hole in it. We got to keep the niggers in camp tame, or we buy ourselves all kinds of shit. They go wild on us, we got to watch our backs every second like they did in the camps in Mississippi and Louisiana. Y'all want that? *Do* y'all?" Now he was yelling at every guard in earshot.

"No, Troop Leader," they chorused, Rodriguez loud among them.

"All right, then," the troop leader said, at least partly mollified. "Try and remember. You're makin' your own lives easier if you do."

When Rodriguez patrolled the camp—either the men's or the women's half—he tried to watch his back every minute anyway. He didn't know anybody who came from the Confederate Veterans' Brigade who didn't. Anybody who'd lived through the last war had seen for himself that not having eyes in the back of your head was a good way to end up dead in a hurry. Some of the younger fellows, the men who'd been Party stalwarts or guards but hadn't actually known combat, were the ones who strolled through the compounds without a visible care in the world. Sooner or later, one of them would get knocked over the head. That might teach the others some sense. Rodriguez hoped it would, anyhow.

His shift was on the women's side today. He would have gone up with the window shade if he'd accepted all the favors offered him. The women figured their lives could be easier if they had a guard on their side, and they knew what they had to give to get one. If he wanted favors like that, he could have them. When they got thrown in his face half a dozen times a day, he mostly didn't want them.

"These nigger bitches is all whores," opined his partner, an Alabaman named Alvin Sprinks.

"It could be," Rodriguez said. He didn't think it was, at least under most circumstances, but he didn't feel like arguing. Life was too short.

A couple of guards with submachine guns at his back, Jefferson Pinkard prowled through the women's camp. Rodriguez had seen how his wartime buddy made his own rounds in Camp Determination, going where he wanted to go when he wanted to go there. That was just an extension of the rule of watching your back all the time. To a man of Pinkard's rank, the whole camp was his back.

"You think we get a lot of pussy thrown at us? Man, what about him?" Sprinks sounded jealous. Rodriguez only shrugged. If they tried to give you more than you wanted or could use, who cared how much more than that they tried to give you?

Pinkard spotted him, waved, and made a sudden left turn to head his way. The guards tramped along behind him like a couple of well-trained hounds. "How you doin', Hip?" the camp commandant called.

"Not bad, sir. Thank you." Rodriguez was always careful to show respect for his friend's rank. Nobody'd called him *Hip* since the Great War ended; it was the sort of nickname only an English-speaker would use. From Pinkard, it didn't bother him; it reminded him of the days

when they'd been miserable side by side.

"Your barracks got fumigated this morning—ain't that right?" Pinkard asked.

"Yes, *Señor* Jeff." In spite of himself, Rodriguez was impressed by Pinkard's grasp of detail. Nothing went on in Camp Determination that he didn't know about, often before it happened.

"Bet you'll be glad to get rid of the bugs," Jeff said.

"Oh, yes, sir." Rodriguez nodded. "But it is like anything else, *sí*?" He had the brains not to talk directly about the way the camp worked, not where *mallates* could overhear. "One batch goes away, but before long there is another."

"Yeah, well, then we'll call out those Buggone folks one more time and do it all over again. We'll—" Pinkard broke off. He looked around the women's half of Camp Determination. Then he looked back at Hipolito Rodriguez. "Son of a bitch," he said softly. "*Son* of a bitch!"

"What is it?" Rodriguez asked.

"Don't rightly know yet," Jeff answered. "Might be nothin'. But it might be somethin' big, too. You never can tell till you go and find out. If it is, I promise you I'll get you what you deserve for it. Don't want you to be like Chick Blades, who never did find out what he came up with."

Rodriguez scratched his head. "What you mean, *Señor* Jeff?"

"Never mind. Don't worry about it. It happened a long time ago, back in Louisiana." Pinkard shook his head, as if at something he didn't want to remember but couldn't forget. He gathered himself. "You got to go on with your rounds, and so do I. See you later. Freedom!" Off he went, his guards in his wake.

"What the devil was that all about?" Alvin Sprinks asked.

"I don't know," Rodriguez said truthfully. "The commandant, he has an idea, I think."

"Reckon so." Despite agreeing, Sprinks sounded doubtful. The next idea he had would be his first. He could read and write—Rodriguez didn't think there were any guards who couldn't—but he didn't like to.

“When we gonna git outa this place?” a gray-haired colored woman asked as the guards started through the camp again.

“Soon, Auntie, soon,” Rodriguez answered. Alvin Sprinks nodded solemnly. Rodriguez thought he would laugh or give the game away in some different fashion, but he didn’t. Maybe the troop leader had put the fear of God in him, at least for a while. He might not have his own ideas, but he could get them from someone else.

IX

W aiting for the balloon to go up was the hardest thing a soldier did. Back in 1914, Tom Colleton had waited eagerly, even gaily, confident the war would be won and the damnyankees smashed before the cotton harvest came in. Everything would be glorious. Three years later, he was one of the lucky ones who came home again, glory quite forgotten.

The new war *had* smashed the USA, had split the country in two. That he was up here by Sandusky, Ohio, proved as much. Like Jake Featherston, like everyone else in the CSA, he’d assumed that splitting the United States meant winning the war. There was a lesson there, on what assumptions were worth, but he didn’t care to dwell on it.

“This time for sure,” he muttered.

“Sir?” asked an improbably young lieutenant commanding one of the companies in his regiment. He should have had a more experienced officer in that slot, but the replacement depot hadn’t coughed one up. Reinforcements were coming into Ohio, which was good. Even with them, though, not every hole got filled.

Tom wished the damnyankees had the same problem. He envied them their manpower pool. Confederate soldiers mostly had better weapons. He thought, and was far from alone in thinking, Confederate soldiers were better trained. Every one of them was worth more in combat than his U.S. counterpart. But Jesus God, there were a hell of a lot of Yankees!

He needed to answer the youngster. “This time for sure,” he repeated.

“When we hit the U.S. forces this time, we’ve got to knock them out of the war. We’ve got to, and we damn well will.”

“Oh, yes, sir!” said the shavetail—Tom thought his name was Jackson. It was a safe bet, anyway; about one in every three Confederate soldiers seemed to be named Jackson. “Of course we will!”

He hadn’t been at the front very long. He could still think about—could still talk about—inevitable victory, the way Confederate wireless broadcasts did. Tom knew better. He thought the Confederates still had a good chance of doing what they wanted, but a good chance wasn’t a sure thing. Anyone who’d ever lost a hand with a flush knew all about that.

“We’ll see pretty soon,” he said.

Lieutenant—Jackson?—said, “How can we lose?”

Colleton put a hand on his shoulder. “I said the same damn thing when I came to the front at the start of the last war. I would have been a little older than you are now, I suppose, and then I spent all the time that came afterwards finding out how we could lose. I just hope like hell that doesn’t happen to you.”

“It won’t.” Jackson sounded supremely confident. “We got stabbed in the back last time. Niggers won’t have the chance to do that now. The Party’s going to take care of ’em, but good.”

He really believed that. To a certain extent, Tom did, too, but only to a certain extent. He said, “We would have had a better chance if they hadn’t risen up—sure. But there’s something you’ve got to remember, or you’ll go home in a box and never find out how the latest serial ends: the damnyankees can fight some, too.”

“Yes, sir.” Jackson’s tones were those of a well-brought-up young man too polite to correct an elder who’s said something obviously foolish. “But they’re just doing it on account of their government makes ’em.”

“Where did you hear that?” Tom asked, sending him a curious stare.

“In school. Everybody knows it.”

Is this what they’re teaching my children, too? Tom wondered. *God help us if it is.* Gently, he asked, “Haven’t you ever noticed that not everything they teach you in school is true, and that a lot of things ‘everybody knows’ aren’t true at all?”

“No, sir, can’t say that I have,” Jackson answered after serious, earnest, and very visible consideration.

He meant that, too. For the first time, Tom found himself frightened for the younger generation in the CSA. If this was what they learned . . . “Lieutenant, there’s something you have to understand, because it’s the Lord’s truth. The Yankees don’t like us any better than we like them. They don’t need the government to make them fight. They’d do it anyhow, on account of we jumped them. Next time we interrogate some prisoners, you listen in. You’ll see.”

“I’ll do that,” Jackson said. “But they’ll just spout the nonsense their higher-ups told them. They’re—what’s the word? They’re indoctrinated, that’s it.” He looked pleased with himself for remembering.

And you’re not? Tom wondered. He couldn’t ask, though. Jackson might see other people’s indoctrination. His own was to him like the air under its wings to a butterfly. He didn’t think about it. He didn’t notice it. He just floated on it and let it support him.

Not far behind them, artillery rumbled. Things were starting to pick up. The Confederate gunners fired barrages to east and west, to keep the U.S. soldiers posted in front of them from guessing which way they would move when the time came. Tom wished the men in green-gray didn’t know the time was coming. *Wish for a million dollars while you’re at it,* he thought. The Yankees weren’t blind men. The Confederate buildup had been as subtle as the soldiers with wreathed stars on their collars could make it, but you couldn’t hide everything no matter how hard you tried.

The Confederates were doing their best. As Tom walked up toward the front, he passed barrels—both the older model and the new—crouching under camouflage netting with leaves and sod applied to make them as nearly invisible as possible. They’d moved up under cover of darkness; the orders against moving by daylight were explicit to the point of bloodthirstiness. More C.S. artillery fire had masked the sound of their advance. The damnyankees had used that trick in the last war. Imitation was the sincerest form of flattery. With luck, it would be the best revenge, too.

“Get low, you damn fool, before somebody shoots you!” The raucous advice came from a foxhole by the side of the path. Only the two stars on each side of Tom’s collar that marked his rank showed he was an officer. He’d deliberately dulled them, so the Yankees’ snipers

wouldn't single him out. Evidently his own men couldn't single him out, either.

And getting low was good advice almost any time. Tom hit the dirt and crawled toward the foxhole. U.S. artillery started coming in before he got there. The crawl turned into an undignified scramble.

"Jesus!" The private already in it sounded disgusted. "This fucker ain't big enough for two." Then he noticed Tom's rank badges. "Uh, sir."

He wasn't wrong, even if he was rude. Tom took his entrenching tool off his belt and started digging like a mole after forty cups of coffee. "Just have to make it bigger," he said. He added the dirt from his excavation to the breastwork in front of the hole.

"Huh," the soldier said in surprise. "Didn't know officers knew how to handle one o' them things."

"If I didn't, I would have got killed when I was your age," Tom answered, glad to pause and pant. "Ever hear of the Roanoke front?"

"Sure as hell did. Uncle Lucas came back without most of his arm on account of he was there." The soldier paused, taking longer than he should have to make the connection. "You was there, too?"

"That's right. I'm sorry about your uncle. I never got more than a few scratches myself—I was lucky."

"Better believe you was." The private might have said more, but the scream of an incoming shell warned it would come down somewhere close. He and Tom both ducked. The explosion was close enough to make the ground shake. Fragments maliciously whined and screeched overhead. A few clods of dirt pattered down into the hole, but nothing worse.

On the Roanoke front, that one shell would have been the harbinger of many more, and only extraordinary luck and a hole better than this one would have kept a man from getting maimed or killed. Things were quieter here. The damnyankees had shifted a lot of their weight to Virginia. What was left was good enough to hold the Confederates in place and harass them, but not to work the wholesale slaughter that had been so common in the Great War.

The United States didn't seem to have figured out that the Confederate States were shifting men out of Virginia and sliding them back over here. Nothing made Tom happier than their continued ignorance. The

more the Yankees fussed and fumed in the East, the less attention they'd pay to anything out here. If they stayed ignorant till morning after next . . .

They did. The real Confederate barrage started an hour before sunrise. It was thunderous enough to wake Tom. After all the gunfire he'd slept through at the front in two wars—and in fighting the Negroes after the first one—that was no mean feat. Freight-train noises traveled the rails of the sky from west to east.

Yankee counterbattery fire started almost at once. The U.S. soldiers weren't fools. He'd said as much to Lieutenant Jackson. (Absently, he wondered whether Jackson still lived. He thought so, but he hadn't had any reports from that company for most of a day.) They knew trouble when they walked into it. One after another, though, their guns fell silent, battered into submission by a heavier weight of metal.

The Confederate barrage let up precisely at sunrise. Its purpose was to stun, not to kill everything on the U.S. side of the line. Three years of bloody experience had taught the CSA and the USA that they couldn't kill all their enemies, or even enough of them, with big guns alone. And a really heavy artillery preparation, one that went on for days, ruined the ground over which attackers would advance and slowed them down. Less gunnery amounted to more.

Confederate barrels rumbled and rattled and clanked forward. Tom scrambled up out of his hole. He had an officer's brass whistle, and blew a long, shrill blast on it. "Come on, you lazy sons of bitches!" he yelled. "We've caught 'em by surprise, and now we'll make 'em pay. Watch your buddies and follow me!"

An officer who told his men to follow him could almost always get them to obey. An officer who told troops to advance but sat tight himself had a lot more trouble. The only thing wrong with officers of the first sort was that they got shot a lot more often than the others.

If you thought about things like that . . . Tom resolutely didn't. If everybody thought about things like that instead of being afraid to act like a coward in front of his buddies or his men, war would become impossible. The machine-gun fire in front of him said this war remained altogether too possible. Not all the damnyankees were stunned—far from it.

Asskickers screamed down out of the sky to bomb strongpoints the C.S. artillery hadn't silenced. For the moment, the dive bombers—and

the Confederates—had it all their own way. Dazed U.S. soldiers threw up their hands and hoped the advancing men in butternut would let them surrender instead of just shooting them and moving on. *Just like last year,* Tom thought, and wondered if that was good or bad.

* * *

W hen Brigadier General Irving Morrell's train pulled into the Broad Street Station in Philadelphia, he couldn't have been in a worse mood if he'd tried for a week. The endless delays on the trip north from Virginia did nothing to improve his temper. Between bomb damage and rail sabotage, the trip took three times as long as it should have. All he missed was getting the train strafed from the air. But he could have flown up in the Army's fastest fighter and still arrived ready to bite nails in half.

Colonel John Abell met him at the station. That didn't make him any happier, even if the colorless General Staff officer was the one who'd let him know he'd finally earned stars on his shoulder straps.

"Goddammit, Colonel, I'm not a Ping-Pong ball, you know!" Morrell exploded. He almost said, *God damn you, Colonel.* He suspected Abell was responsible for getting him pulled out of Virginia, and he intended to raise Cain about it.

For the moment, Abell was imperturbable. "Consider it a compliment, sir," he answered, his voice—an unmemorable baritone—never rising. "We always try to send you where the country needs you most."

That took some of the wind out of Morrell's sails, but only some. "I'm not a fire brigade all by myself," he pointed out. "Where are my fire engines? Where are my firemen? Where's my . . . hook and ladder?" At the last possible instant, he left off the participle.

"Come with me, sir," Abell said, still mildly. "We'll give you our estimate of the situation in Ohio, and then we'll send you West to—"

"Make bricks without straw," Morrell broke in. The General Staff officer looked pained. How he looked wasn't a patch on how Morrell felt. "I've already tried that in Ohio, thank you very much. Are you going to see if history can repeat itself? And are you setting me up to take the fall if it does? It can't be *your* fault, after all."

By *you* he didn't mean Abell's alone, but all the officers in Philadelphia who thought of war as theory and maps and not as cordite and burning barrels and mangled men. They were good at what they did. Because they were, they thought they knew everything there was to know about the business of organized slaughter. Morrell had a different, and lower, opinion.

“We’re both on the same side, sir,” Abell said. “We’ve flushed out several traitors—some of them planted long, long ago—and more no doubt remain in place. But no one has ever questioned your loyalty or patriotism.”

“That’s white of you, by God,” Morrell said.

“Making things as difficult as possible is another story,” Abell snapped, his iron control rusting a little at last. “Will you come with me to the War Department, please? We can’t hash things out here on the platform.”

“I’ll come,” Morrell replied, and he did.

He and Abell had little to say to each other on the short ride through central Philadelphia. The de facto capital looked more battered every time Morrell saw it. The War Department had taken several hits since the last time he was there. Abell remarked, “Much of what we do these days is underground. We dig like moles.”

“You’ve had your heads in the ground for a long time,” Morrell observed, and bright patches of red burned on Abell’s sallow cheeks. Morrell went on, “Tell me about the new Confederate barrels. How long will we have to wait before we’ve got anything like that?”

The General Staff officer got redder. *Amazingly lifelike,* Morrell thought. “Production of an improved model is expected to begin within the next few weeks,” Abell said stiffly.

That was better than Morrell expected. He’d feared the USA would have to design anything new from scratch. Even so, he asked, “How late will the improved model be if the Confederates take Pittsburgh away from us? How much of our steel production would that cost?”

“We are hoping . . . sir . . . that that will not happen,” Abell answered. “We are hoping you will help keep that from happening. That’s why we’re sending you to Ohio.”

“Why you’re sending me *back* to Ohio,” Morrell corrected, and had the somber satisfaction of seeing John Abell flinch. To rub it in, he murmured, “Youngstown. Akron. Cleveland.”

“They haven’t taken Cleveland this past year!” Now Abell sounded truly furious. “What makes you think they can take it now?”

“They weren’t trying before,” Morrell said. “They wanted to split us,

and they did. Now they want to cripple us."

"If you're telling me this is hopeless, General, someone else will be appointed. Your resignation will be accepted. You will be permitted to return home to your wife and daughter. Not just permitted—encouraged."

Will be appointed. Will be accepted. Will be permitted. Abell didn't say who would do any of those things. He probably didn't even think about it. In his world, things just happened, without any particular agency. That made him a good bureaucrat. Whether it made him a good soldier was a different question.

Morrell wanted to go home to Agnes and Mildred—but not that way. "Sorry, no. If you want to get rid of me, you'll have to throw me out. I'm telling you it would have been a lot easier if we'd started getting ready when the Confederates did."

"Hindsight . . ." But Abell's voice lacked conviction. Morrell had been saying the same thing when it was foresight. Abell gathered himself. "We're almost to the map room. You'll see what we're up against there."

Except for lacking windows, the map room could have been three stories above ground instead of two stories below it. A haze of tobacco smoke hung in the air. It also smelled of coffee that had been perking for too long and bodies that had gone unwashed for too long. That last odor pervaded the front, too, so Morrell nodded, as at an old friend, when he recognized it here. The stench of death, at least, was mercifully absent.

Officers were poring over large-scale maps of Virginia and Ohio. John Abell led Morrell to one that covered the eastern part of the latter state. Morrell let out a tuneless note of dismay when he saw where the pins with the red heads were. "They've come that far this fast?"

"I'm afraid it looks that way," John Abell answered.

"Jesus," Morrell said. "They're *already* inside Cleveland. I thought you told me they couldn't take it."

"They must have revised this since I went to meet you at the station," Abell said unhappily.

"Are the Confederates moving *that* fast?" Morrell asked.

“They can’t be.” Abell spoke with less conviction than he might have liked. “It’s just signal lag, I’m sure.”

“It had better be,” Morrell said. “Well, what do you expect me to do about it? Have we got armor here?” He pointed. “If we do, we can thrust toward the lake and try to cut through their advancing column—do to their supply lines what they’ve done to us.”

“I don’t believe we have enough equipment in place there to give us much hope of success,” Abell replied.

“Why am I not surprised?” Morrell didn’t bother to keep his voice down. Several officers studying other maps looked up at him. He scowled back at them, too furious to care. They looked away. Fury wasn’t an emotion they were used to seeing here. *Too bad,* Morrell thought savagely. He turned back to John Abell. “Well, if we can’t do that, our next best move is pretty obvious.”

“Is it?” The General Staff officer raised an almost colorless eyebrow. “It hasn’t seemed that way here.”

Morrell almost asked why he wasn’t surprised again. Then, remembering the old saw about flies and honey and vinegar, he didn’t. He pointed again instead, this time along the lakeshore, from Cleveland over to Erie, Pennsylvania. “We’ll have to fight like hell here. We’ll have to fight like hell in all the built-up places—barrels aren’t really made for street fighting in the middle of towns.”

“They can do it,” Abell said.

“Sure they can,” Morrell agreed. “Dogs can walk on their hind legs, too, but it’s not what they’re *for,* if you know what I mean. Send barrels through a few good-sized towns and you won’t see very many come out the other end.”

“Suppose they bypass them.” Abell might have been back at West Point, trying to solve a tactical problem. “That’s what they did last year. They didn’t go into Columbus with armor. They got it in a pocket and attacked with infantry and artillery.”

“That’s why we defend the towns along the lake like mad bastards,” Morrell said. “They can’t surround them the way they surrounded Columbus. They have to take them instead, and that’s more expensive. If they don’t, we can resupply and reinforce by water, maybe break out and get into their rear. They’ll know that—they can read maps.” *Unlike some people I could name.*

John Abell drummed his fingers on the side of his thigh—from him, the equivalent of another man's jumping up and down and waving his arms and yelling his head off. "This would involve cooperation with the Navy," he said at last. By the way he said it, he might have been talking about eating with his fingers. The Army always had the feeling that the Navy didn't quite pull its weight. Here, though . . .

Morrell shrugged. He had that feeling himself. There'd been no great naval coups in this war, nothing like the capture of the Sandwich Islands. Indeed, the Navy seemed to be losing those islands a few at a time. Even so, he said, "This is something they can do," and hoped he told the truth.

Rather than replying, Abell pulled a notebook from a breast pocket and scribbled in it. "You . . . may be right," he said when he put the notebook back. "It's a, ah, more indirect approach to defending the interior regions than we'd had in mind. What happens if you're wrong?"

"I'll probably be too dead to worry about it," Morrell answered. Abell blinked—no, he didn't think about things like leading from the front. Morrell went on, "But whoever takes over for me will have a couple of things going for him. Either the Confederates won't have taken all the lakefront, or they'll have fought their way through it. If they haven't, he can hit them in the flank. If they have, with luck they'll be bled white and they'll have a tougher time getting to Pittsburgh—if that's where they're going."

"That is the current assessment," Abell said primly.

Bully. But, again, Morrell swallowed the old-fashioned slang before it came out. He and the desk warriors of Philadelphia might not agree on means, but they did on ends. If he were Jake Featherston and he wanted to try to knock the USA out of the war, he would have gone after Pittsburgh, too. Pontiac was the other possibility. Engine production, though, was more widely dispersed than steel. And without steel, you couldn't make engines for very long, either.

"We'll do what we can, Colonel," he said.

"We have to do more than *that,*" John Abell exclaimed.

Morrell started to laugh, then checked himself yet again. Abell hadn't been joking. Morrell looked at the map again. Abell had no reason to joke, either.

D r. Leonard O'Doull had thought that pulling out of Fredericksburg would cut U.S. casualties. And so it would, no doubt, in the long run. In the short run . . . In the short run, the Confederates on the heights gleefully bombarded the withdrawing men in green-gray. They'd knocked out the pontoon bridges over the Rappahannock more than once, knocked them out and then poured shellfire into the men stuck near them waiting to cross.

"I hate artillery," O'Doull remarked as he worked to repair a mangled leg. He'd thought at first that he would have to take it off. Now he hoped this corporal would be able to keep it, and thought he would, too, if he didn't get a wound infection that spread to the bone.

Across the table from him, Granville McDougald nodded. "The wounds are a lot nastier than anything a bullet can do, aren't they?"

"They're more likely to be, anyhow." O'Doull had seen horrors from both. A lot of the very worst horrors, he'd never seen at all. They were reserved for front-line soldiers and stretcher bearers and Graves Registration personnel. No one could hope to repair some wounds. God almighty would have had trouble repairing some men hit by artillery fire for the Resurrection.

"Get that bleeder there, Doc," McDougald said, and O'Doull did. The bald medic went on, "I thought you were crazy when you said you were going to try and patch this leg. I'd've just reached for the bone saw myself. But you may get a good result out of it. My hat's off to you." He doffed an imaginary chapeau.

"I hope so—and thanks." O'Doull yawned behind his surgical mask. Granville McDougald chuckled, recognizing the expression. O'Doull added, "Jesus, but I'm tired."

"I believe it. This just never ends, does it?"

"Doesn't seem to," O'Doull said. "Now they'll probably ship us back to Ohio, eh? That would give us a few days of vacation."

"Oh, boy," McDougald said in a hollow voice. "We're getting plenty of practice going back and forth, anyway."

They were still joking about it when the corpsman brought in another wounded man. They both fell silent at the same time. All O'Doull said was, "Get him under fast, Granny." McDougald nodded and put the

ether cone over the soldier's face. Even that wasn't easy; he'd lost part of his nose. He'd also lost a chunk of his upper jaw and a bigger chunk of his lower jaw. He made horrible gobbling noises nothing like words.

"Can you fix him, Doc?" one of the corpsmen asked. The fellow gulped afterwards, and O'Doull had a devil of a time blaming him. This was another artillery horror, and viler than most.

Before answering, O'Doull told MacDougald, "Get a blood-pressure cuff on him, and watch his airway, too—don't want him drowning on us."

"Right." The medic handled his end of the business with quick but unhurried competence. "BP is 110 over 70," he reported a few seconds later. "He's got a strong pulse, the poor bastard."

"He would," O'Doull said morosely. He nodded to the stretcher bearer then. "I don't think he's going to up and die on us, but I'm not sure we're doing him any favor keeping him alive."

"Yeah." The corpsman looked away. With the best will in the world, with the best plastic surgery in the world—which, odds were, the wounded soldier wouldn't be lucky enough to get—people would be looking away from the man on the table for the rest of his life. Did he have a girlfriend? A wife? Would he still, once she saw him? Did he have a little boy? What would Junior make of Daddy with half a face?

"Gotta try," McDougald said, and O'Doull nodded. Some men were tough enough to come through something like this not only sane but triumphant. Some had people around them who loved them no matter what they looked like.

Most, unfortunately, didn't.

Knowing that made O'Doull more hesitant than he wished he were. He did what he could to clean the wound, trim away smashed tissue and bone, and make repairs where and as he could. Then he shot the man full of morphine and told McDougald, "Put him under as deep as he'll go, Granny. He won't want to be awake once he finally is. Let's put off the evil minute as long as we can."

"No arguments here. Back at a field hospital, they'll get him all bandaged up so he won't have to look at—that—right away. If they know what they're doing, they'll break it to him gently."

“Yeah,” O’Doull said tightly, and let it go at that. Field hospitals were almost as frantic as aid stations. Would the people farther back of the line have the time to think of gently breaking the news of this man’s mutilation? Even if they did think of it, would they have the time to do it? Or would they treat him as one more body that took up a valuable cot till they could send him somewhere else? O’Doull didn’t know, but he knew how he’d bet.

Granville McDougald straightened and stretched. “I’m gonna have me a cigarette,” he announced, and headed out of the tent.

“Sounds good to me.” Leonard O’Doull didn’t want to look at or think about that operating table for a while. The Virginia countryside wasn’t much of an improvement, not battered and bludgeoned by war as it was, but mutilated meadows were easier to bear than mutilated men.

McDougald held out a pack of Confederate cigarettes. O’Doull gladly took one. The veteran noncom gave him a light. He drew in smoke. Here, he almost wished it were the harsh stuff that came from U.S. tobacco. Wanting to choke would have done more to distract him than this rich-tasting smoothness.

Off to the south, artillery rumbled. Nothing was coming down close by. He thanked the God he was having ever more trouble believing in. “Bad one,” he said.

“Now that you mention it—yes. Don’t see ones like that ever day, and a good thing, too.” McDougald exhaled a thin gray stream of smoke. “You fixed him up as well as anybody could have, Doc.”

“I know. And he’ll still look like something they wouldn’t put in a horror movie because it would *really* scare people.” O’Doull took a flask off his belt and swigged from it, then offered it to McDougald. He didn’t usually drink when he might be operating again in another couple of minutes. This time, he made an exception. You *didn’t* see ones like that every day.

“You can do things now you couldn’t begin to in the last war,” McDougald said after a swig of his own. “Thanks, Doc. That hits the spot. Where was I? Yeah—you really can. Get him to where he looks like—”

“A disaster and not a catastrophe,” O’Doull finished for him. “Come on, Granny. There’s not enough left to fix. I’ve seen a lot of wounds, but that poor fucker made me want to lose my lunch.”

He tried to imagine writing Nicole a letter about what he'd just done. That was cruelly funny. He wouldn't—couldn't—have written it even if the censors would have passed it. He always wrote her in French, but they would have found somebody who could read it. But you couldn't subject anyone you loved to even the shadow of what you went through when you were in combat or where you could see what combat did to men. His letters to his wife and son were bright, cheerful lies. When somebody at the aid station said something funny, he would pass that along, especially if it stayed funny in French. Otherwise, he just said he was well and safe and not working too hard. Lie after lie after lie. He didn't know anyone who tried to tell the truth, not about this kind of thing.

McDougald ground out the cigarette under his heel and lit another one. "Days like this, I wonder why I stayed in the Army," he said.

"I wonder why I came back," O'Doull agreed.

"Oh, no, Doc. Oh, no. You did more for that guy than I ever could have. You're good. I'm not bad—I know I'm not bad—but you're *good.*"

"Thanks, Granny. I'm not good enough, not for that. Nobody's good enough for that." O'Doull muttered something under his breath. Even he wasn't sure if it was curse or prayer. He went on, "Is there any point to all this?"

"For us? Sure," Granville McDougald answered. "If not for us, a lot of guys would be a lot worse off than they are. What we do is worth doing. For the whole thing? I'm not the one to ask about that, sir. If you want to cross the lines and talk to Jake Featherston . . ."

"If I ever ran into Jake Featherston, I'd smash his head in with a rock, and screw the Hippocratic oath," O'Doull said. McDougald laughed, for all the world as if he'd been kidding. He hadn't, not even a little bit. In plaintive tones, he added, "Featherston went through the last war, every goddamn bit of it. Wasn't that enough for him?"

"When you lose, a war is never enough," McDougald answered. That probably held an unfortunate amount of truth. "You happen to recall what Remembrance Day was like before the Great War?"

O'Doull grunted, because he did. The United States, twice beaten and humiliated by the Confederates and Britain and France, had had a lot to remember. The regimentation, the constant stinting to build up the Army and Navy, the tub-thumping speeches, the parades with the flag

flown upside down as a symbol of distress . . . He sighed. “So we finally won. So what did it get us?” He waved. “This.”

“What would we have got if we lost?” McDougald asked. “Something better? Something worse? Christ, we might have grown our own Featherston.”

“Tabernac!” O’Doull said, startled into the Quebecois French he’d used for so long. “That’s a really scary thought, Granny.”

The medic only shrugged. “When things go good, everybody laughs at people like that and says they belong in the loony bin. But when times get hard, they come out of the woodwork and people start paying attention. You go, ‘Well, how could they make things any worse? Let’s see what they can do.’ ”

“Yeah. And then they go and do it,” O’Doull said. Featherston wasn’t the only one of that breed running around loose these days, either. *Action Française* and King Charles had mobilized France even sooner than the Freedom Party grabbed the reins in the CSA. And in England, Churchill and Mosley were yet another verse of the same sorry song.

“It’s a bastard,” McDougald said. “Except for bashing in Featherston’s brains, to hell with me if I know what to do about it. And it might even be too late for that to do any good. By now, this mess has a life of its own.”

“Some life.” The aid station was close enough to the front to share in the smell of the battlefield. O’Doull knew what death smelled like. He lived with that odor—not always heavy, but always there. When war was alive, that smell always got loose.

“Doc! Hey, Doc!” Stretcher bearers hauled another wounded man toward the tent with the big Red Crosses on the sides. Leonard O’Doull and Granville McDougald looked at each other. Maybe they could save this one. Maybe he wouldn’t be horribly mangled. Maybe . . . They’d find out in a minute. Shaking their heads, they ducked back into the tent.

A ppointments, appointments, appointments. Jake Featherston had started to hate them. They chewed up his time and spat it out. When he was talking with people, he couldn’t do the things that really needed doing. He even resented Ferdinand Koenig, and if Ferd wasn’t a friend he didn’t have any.

Today, a smile lightened the Attorney General's heavy features. "That Pinkard fellow's given us a new line on things," he said. "We may be able to dispose of more niggers faster than we ever dreamed we could."

"Oh, yeah?" Sure as hell, that piqued Jake's interest. "Tell me about it." Koenig did. The more Jake listened, the more intrigued he got. "Will this shit work?" he asked. "Do we make it in bulk now, or would we have to run up a new factory to get as much as we need?"

"That's the beauty of it," Koenig answered. "They already use the stuff to fumigate houses and such. There's a company in Little Rock—Cyclone Chemicals, the name of the place is—that makes it by the ton. They aren't the only one, either. They're just the biggest."

"Well, I will be a son of a bitch. Pinkard's chock full of good ideas, isn't he?" Jake said. "Promote him a grade and tell him to see what he can do to try this out as fast as he can. We've got a big job ahead of us, and we're going to need all the help we can get."

"I'll do it." The Attorney General wrote in a notebook he pulled from a breast pocket. Half apologetically, he said, "I've got so much going on, I lose things if I don't write 'em down. Forget my own head if it wasn't nailed on tight."

Jake laughed. "I know what you mean. Boy, don't I just? But stay on that one, Ferd. Taking care of the niggers is just as important as licking the Yankees. Anything else I ought to know about?"

"Reports I get from here and there, grumbling about the war is up a little."

"We'll deal with it." Jake muttered to himself. Things were dragging on longer than he'd told the country they would. That made propaganda harder than it should have been. "New offensive's going well," he said, looking on the bright side. "I'll talk with Saul, too, see if we can't figure out a way to perk up morale. Anything besides that?"

"Don't think so." Big and ponderous, Koenig rose to his feet. "I'll get on the telephone to Pinkard right away."

"Yeah, you do that." Featherston got up, too, and walked to the door with him. As Koenig left, Jake asked, "Who's next on the list, Lulu?"

"A Professor FitzBelmont, Mr. President," his secretary answered.

Working underground fazed her not at all. Jake suspected working underwater wouldn't have fazed her, either.

"FitzBelmont . . ." The name was vaguely familiar. And then, with a good politician's near-total recall for people, Jake remembered exactly who Professor Henderson V. FitzBelmont was. He groaned. "Oh, for God's sake! The uranium nut. How did *he* get another appointment?"

"Do you want me to tell him it's been canceled, sir?" Lulu asked.

"No, no," Jake said resignedly. "If he's out there cooling his heels in the waiting room, he'll raise a stink if you send him home now. Fetch him in. I'll get rid of him as quick as I can."

Professor FitzBelmont was as rumpled and tweedy as he had been the year before. "Good to see you, Mr. President," he said.

"Likewise," Jake lied. "What's on your mind today, Professor? Kindly cut to the chase—I've got a lot to do."

"You will remember, sir, that I told you that uranium—uranium-235, that is—has the potential to make an explosive thousands of times as strong as dynamite."

"I do recollect, yeah. But I also recollect it'd cost an arm and a leg, and you weren't sure how long it'd take or whether you could do it at all. Has anything changed since then? Better be something, Professor, or I won't be real happy with you. I haven't got time to waste."

Henderson V. FitzBelmont licked his lips and nervously fiddled with his gold-framed spectacles. "In terms of what we know about uranium itself, not much *has* changed." Jake started to growl angrily, but FitzBelmont plowed ahead anyway: "But I do know, or I can make a good guess, that the United States are probably looking at this same question."

"How do you know that?" Featherston rapped out. Professor FitzBelmont had found a way to make him pay attention, all right.

"For one thing, their journals have suddenly stopped mentioning uranium at all. For another, there are large engineering works in the northwestern USA that appear consistent with an effort along these lines."

"And how do you know *that*?"

“I was asked by C.S. Intelligence to identify buildings in photos,” the professor replied. “No doubt because of my previous visit to you, those officers knew of my interest in that field. And if I were to build a plant for producing enriched uranium, it would look something like what the United States are building in Washington.”

“All right.” Featherston surprised himself by how mildly he spoke. Every once in a while, somebody who looked and sounded like a nut turned out not to be one after all. This felt like one of those times. “If the damnyankees are interested in this uranium stuff, too, there must be something to it. That’s what you’re telling me, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know, sir, not for sure. I don’t know whether we can isolate U-235, how long doing it would take, or how much it would cost. There also seems to be a possibility that U-238 can be transmuted—”

“Can be what?” Jake wished the prof would stop talking like a prof.

“Changed,” FitzBelmont said patiently. “Maybe it can be changed into another element that will also explode. Theory seems to suggest the possibility. I know less about this than I do about U-235. There is much more U-238, so the second possibility would be advantageous to us. But I am certain of one thing.”

“Oh? And what’s that?” Jake asked, as the physics professor surely wanted him to do. Usually, he manipulated. Not today; not right now.

Henderson V. FitzBelmont moved in for the kill, an intellectual tiger on the prowl: “If the enemy succeeds in acquiring this weapon and we do not, I fail to see how our cause can avoid disaster.”

Jake thought about it. Twenty thousand times as strong as TNT? One bomb and no more city? The USA with eight or ten of those bombs and the CSA with none? A fleet of Yankee bombers had done horrible things to Fort Worth and Dallas, catching the Texas towns by surprise. That wouldn’t happen again. The officer who’d been asleep at the switch now made his reports in hell; those bombers had made him pay for his mistake. But if the USA didn’t need a fleet of bombers, if one airplane would do the job . . . Nobody could stop every single goddamn airplane.

“Figure out what you need, Professor,” Jake said heavily. “Money, machinery, people—whatever it is, you’ll get it. I want the list as fast as you can shoot it to me. No more than two weeks, you hear?”

“Uh, yes, sir.” FitzBelmont sounded more than a little dazed. He lost a

point in Jake's book on account of that. If he'd really believed in this, he would have pulled that list out of his briefcase now. Maybe he hadn't believed he could persuade the President of the CSA. Featherston hoped that was it.

He accompanied FitzBelmont out of his subterranean sanctum, as he had Ferd Koenig a little while before. After the physics professor left, Jake turned to Lulu and said, "Get on the horn to General Potter. Tell him I want to see him here ten minutes ago."

"Yes, Mr. President." She didn't bat an eye. She never did. "Can I tell him what this is in reference to?"

"Nope. I'll take care of that when he gets here."

"Yes, Mr. President." Lulu knew what was always the right answer.

Featherston endured a delegation of Freedom Party officials from Alabama and Mississippi going on about how they needed more men and more guns to help keep their smoldering Negro rebellions from bursting into flames. Since Jake couldn't possibly give them more men, he promised them more guns, and hoped he wasn't crossing his fingers on the promise. They seemed satisfied as they went away. Whether he could keep them satisfied . . . *I'll do my goddamnedest, that's all.*

Clarence Potter came in next. Somebody in the waiting room down the hall was bound to be madder than hell. *Too bad,* the President thought. Without preamble, he barked, "What do you know about Henderson V. FitzBelmont and uranium?" *Sweet Jesus Christ,* he thought. *Till FitzBelmont came here last year, I'd never even heard of the shit. I wish I still hadn't.*

"Ah," Potter said. "Has he convinced you?"

"He sure as hell has," Jake answered. "How about you?"

"I'm no scientist," Potter warned. Jake made an impatient noise. Potter made an apologetic gesture. "Yes, sir, he's convinced me, too. Sooner or later, somebody's going to be able to make a hell of a bang with that stuff. If it's sooner, and if it's the damnyankees, we've got us some big worries."

"That's how it looks to me, too," Featherston said unhappily. He pointed at Potter. "How the hell did you find out about that place in Washington? That's as far from here as it can be."

“It’s in the U.S. budget—a lot of money, and no details at all about what the Yankees are spending it on,” the Intelligence officer replied. “Spotting the combination sent up a red flag.”

“Good,” Jake said. “Nice to know somebody in your outfit wouldn’t blow his brains out if he farted, by God. Now the next question is, how did you get the pictures of that place for FitzBelmont to look at? I didn’t think our spy airplanes could fly that far, and I reckon the USA’d shoot ’em down most of the time even if they could.”

“Yes, Mr. President, I agree with you—that’s what would have happened if we’d taken off from Texas or Sonora,” Potter said. “And we would have given away our interest in the area, too. So we didn’t do that. Our man in western Washington rented a crop duster at a local airstrip. Nobody paid any attention to him, and he got his photos.”

Jake Featherston guffawed. “Good. That’s goddamn good. But we won’t be able to do it again anytime soon, though.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Potter said, nodding.

“We found out what we need to know, so we don’t have to worry about putting the damnyankees’ backs up by trying it again,” Jake said, and Clarence Potter nodded once more. The President aimed his finger like a rifle. “We’ve got to keep the USA from finding out that we know what they’re up to, and from finding out we’re up to the very same thing ourselves. Whatever your super-duper top-secret security business is, use everything you’ve got and then some on whatever has anything to do with uranium.”

“I’ve already given those orders, sir,” Potter said. “Minimum possible in writing, and code phrases all through instead of the name of the metal. No telephone discussion at all—never can tell who might be listening. You did that just right when you had your secretary call me.”

“Thanks,” Jake said. “Uranium! Who would’ve thunk it?” He would have bet money Henderson V. FitzBelmont was a nut. He would have bet big—and he would have lost his shirt.

* * *

Scipio felt like a ghost, rattling around in a nearly empty part of the Terry. His family wasn't the only one in the area to have survived the cleanout, but there weren't many. A few others had got advance warning, but only a few—the ones that had good connections with white folks one way or another.

Nobody knew where the people who'd been evacuated had gone—or rather, had been taken. They'd just . . . vanished. No cards, no letters, no photographs came back to Augusta. Maybe the deportees who could write didn't have the chance. Maybe the C.S. authorities weren't letting them. Or maybe they were simply dead.

For the handful who remained, life got harder. The authorities shut off electricity and gas in the depopulated areas. The water still ran. Maybe that was only an absentminded mistake, or maybe the people who ran Augusta kept it on so they could put out fires if they had to. Scipio had nobody he could ask.

He did ask Jerry Dover where the deportees went. The white man looked him in the eye and said, "I have no idea."

"Could you find out, suh?" Scipio asked. "It do weigh on my mind."

The manager of the Huntsman's Lodge shook his head. "No, I'm not about to ask. Some answers are dangerous. Hell, some *questions* are dangerous. Do I have to draw you a picture?"

"No, suh," Scipio answered unhappily. "Don't reckon you do."

"All right, then." Dover hesitated before adding, "Sometimes finding out is worse than wondering. You know what I mean?"

Had the white man not told him to bring his family when he came to work that one night, *they* would have found out. Scipio didn't think the answer would have made them happy. They might yet learn from the inside out, and so might he. He didn't want to.

Dover lit a cigarette, then held the pack out to Scipio, who couldn't remember the last time he'd seen a white man do even such a simple favor for a black. "I thanks you kindly," Scipio said. He had matches of his own. He didn't need to lean close to Dover to get a light from his cigarette; his boss might have taken that as an undue familiarity.

“Everything’s gonna be . . .” Dover stopped and shook his head. “Shit, I don’t know whether everything’s gonna be all right. You got to do the best you can, that’s all.”

“Yeah.” Scipio smoked with short, savage puffs. “Don’t mean no offense, suh, but you got an easier time sayin’ dat than I does doin’ it.”

“Maybe. But maybe I don’t, too,” Dover said. Scipio felt a rush of scorn the likes of which he’d never known. What kind of trouble could the restaurant manager have that came within miles of a Negro’s? But then Dover went on, “Looks like they may pull me into the Army after all. More and more people are putting on the uniform these days.”

“Oh.” Scipio didn’t find anything to say to that. Horrible things happened to Negroes in the CSA, yes. But horrible things could happen to anybody in the Army, too. The one difference Scipio could see was that Dover’s family wasn’t in danger if he went into the service. Then a fresh worry surfaced: “You puts on de uniform, suh, who take over here?”

“Well, I don’t exactly know.” Dover didn’t sound comfortable with the answer.

“Whoever he be, he give a damn about colored folks?”

“Well, I don’t exactly know that, either.”

“Do Jesus!” Scipio stubbed out the butt in the pressed-glass ashtray on the manager’s desk. The deceased cigarette had plenty of company. “He one o’ *dat* kind o’ buckra, we is all dead soon.”

“I do know that,” Dover said. “Other thing I know is, I can’t do thing one about it. If they call me up . . .” He shrugged. “I can talk to my own bosses till I’m blue in the face, but they don’t have to listento me.”

Scipio sometimes had trouble remembering that Jerry Dover *had* bosses. But he didn’t own the Huntsman’s Lodge; he just ran the place. He was good at what he did; if he hadn’t been, he wouldn’t have kept his job for as long as he had. As long as he stayed in Augusta, he had no place to move up from the Huntsman’s Lodge. He would have to go to Atlanta, or maybe even to New Orleans, to do better.

Now he said, “Go on. Go to work. Get your ass in gear.”

Not having anything else he could do, Scipio obeyed. Despite his

worries, he got through the shift. When he went back to the Terry, he had no trouble passing through the barriers around the colored part of town. Cops and stalwarts knew who he was.

Getting back to work the next day, he found his boss in a terrible temper—not because he'd been called up but because two dishwashers weren't there when they were supposed to be. That was a normal sort of restaurant crisis, and Dover handled it in the normal way: he hired the first two warm bodies off the street that he could.

Neither of them spoke much English. They were Mexicans—not Confederate citizens from Chihuahua or Sonora, but men out of the Empire of Mexico up in the CSA looking for work. Now they'd found some, and they went at it harder than anyone Scipio had seen in a long time. They wanted to keep it.

At first, thinking of the restaurant and nothing more, Scipio was pleased to see their eagerness. He didn't blame Jerry Dover for telling the black men they'd replaced not to bother coming back to work. The look on the Negroes' faces was something to see, but the color of those faces didn't win the men much extra sympathy from Scipio. If you didn't, if you couldn't, show up, you were asking for whatever happened to you. Showing up on time all the damn time counted for more than just about anything else in the restaurant business.

That was at first. Then, coming up to the Huntsman's Lodge a couple of days later, Scipio walked past a barbershop. All the barbers in there had been Negroes; he couldn't imagine a white Confederate demeaning himself by cutting another man's hair. But now the barber at the fourth chair, though he wore a white shirt and black bow tie like the other three—a uniform not far removed from a bartender's—did not look like them. He had straight black hair, red-brown skin, and prominent cheekbones. He was, in short, as Mexican as the two new dishwashers.

Ice ran through Scipio, not when he noticed the new barber but when he realized what the fellow meant, which didn't happen for another half a block. "Do Jesus!" he said, and stopped so abruptly, the white man behind him almost walked up his back.

"Watch what you're doing, Uncle," the ofay said irritably.

"I is powerful sorry, suh," Scipio replied. The white man walked around him. Scipio stayed right where he was, trying to tell himself he was wrong and having no luck at all. He wasn't sorry. He was afraid,

and the longer he stood there the more frightened he got.

For twenty years and more, Jake Featherston had been screaming his head off about getting rid of the Negroes in the Confederate States. Scipio had had trouble taking the Freedom Party seriously, not because he didn't think it hated blacks—oh, no, not because of that!—but because he didn't see how the CSA could get along without them. Who would cut hair? Who would wash dishes? Who would do the field labor that still needed doing despite the swarm of new tractors and harvesters and combines that had poured out of Confederate factories?

Whites? Not likely! Being a white in the Confederacy meant being above such labor, and above the people who did it.

But whites felt themselves superior to Mexicans: not to the same degree as they did toward Negroes, but enough. And the work blacks did in the CSA couldn't have looked too bad to people who had no work of their own. Which meant . . .

If workers from the Empire of Mexico came north to do the jobs Negroes had been doing in the CSA, the Freedom Party and Jake Featherston might be able to have their cake and eat it, too.

Scipio wasn't at his best at work that day. He was far enough from his best to make Jerry Dover snap, "What the hell's the matter with you, Xerxes?"

"Jus' thinkin' 'bout José an' Manuel, Mistuh Dover," he answered.

"They aren't your worry. They're mine. If they keep on like they've started, they're no worry at all, and you can take that to the bank. You just keep your mind on what you're supposed to be doing, that's all. Everything will be fine if you do."

"Yes, suh," Scipio said. But *yes, suh* wasn't what he meant. José and Manuel—and that barber in the fourth chair—were the thin end of the wedge. If Jake Featherston banged the other end, what would happen? Nothing good.

The restaurant manager eyed him. "You wondering if we can find some damn greaser to do *your* job? Tell you one thing: the worse you do it, the better the chances are."

That came unpleasantly close to what Scipio *was* thinking. Say what you would about Dover, he was nobody's fool. "Ain't jus' me I is

worried about," Scipio muttered.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Dover asked.

"More Mexicans they is, mo' trouble fo' niggers," Scipio answered.

"Oh." Dover thought about it for a little while, then shrugged. "I can't do anything about that, you know. The only thing I care about is keeping this place going, and I'll handle that till they stick a uniform on me and drag me out of here."

He'd done everything a decent man could—more than most decent men would have. Scipio had to remind himself of that. "Yes, suh," the black man said dully.

"Hang in there," Dover said. "That's all you can do right this minute. That's all anybody can do right this minute."

"Yes, suh," Scipio said again, even more dully than before. But then, in spite of himself, his fear and rage overflowed. He let them all out in one sarcastic word: "Freedom!"

Jerry Dover's eyes got very wide. He looked around to see if anyone else could have heard the rallying cry that, here, was anything but. Evidently satisfied no one else had, he wagged a finger at Scipio, for all the world like a mother scolding a little boy who had just shouted a dirty word without even knowing what it meant. "You've got to watch your mouth there, Xerxes."

"Yes, suh. I knows dat." Scipio was genuinely contrite. He knew what kind of danger he'd put himself in.

Dover went on as if he hadn't spoken: "You've got a nice family. I saw them. You want to leave them without their pa?"

"No, suh." Again, Scipio meant it. Still clucking, the restaurant manager let it go and let him alone. He'd told the truth, all right. Here, though, how much did the truth matter? His family, like any black family, was all too likely to be torn to bits regardless of what he wanted.

C hester Martin couldn't have been more bored if the Confederates had shot him. As a matter of fact, they *had* shot him, or rather, ripped up his leg with a shell fragment. Everybody kept assuring him he

would get better. He believed it. He did feel better than he had right after he was wounded. Thanks to sulfa powder and pills and shots, the wound didn't get badly infected. A little redness, a little soreness on top of the normal pain from getting torn open, and that was it.

Everybody kept telling him he'd get back to duty pretty soon, too. He also believed that. People kept saying it as if it were good news. For the life of him, he couldn't understand why. *Hey, Chester! The Confederates'll get another chance to maim you or kill you before too long. Ain't that great?* Maybe he was prejudiced, but it didn't seem great to him.

Meanwhile, he lay on a cot with the iron frame painted Army green-gray. Once a day, he got exercise and physical therapy. The rest of the time, he just lay there. The Army gave him better rations in the hospital than it had while he was in the field. That struck him as fundamentally unfair, but then, so did a lot of other things about the Army.

He also got his pay here. Money in his pocket let him sit in on a poker game whenever he felt like it. The only trouble was, he didn't feel like it very often. Sometimes he sat in even when he didn't much feel like it. It was something to do, a way to make time go by.

Because he didn't much care whether he won or lost, he had a terrific poker face. "Nobody can tell what you're thinking," one of the other guys in the game grumbled.

"Me? I gave up thinking for Lent," Chester said. Everybody sitting around the table laughed. And he had been joking . . . up to a point.

He'd just come back from his exercise one day when a ward orderly stuck his head into the room and said, "You've got a visitor, Martin."

"Yeah, now tell me another one," Chester said. "I'm not bad enough off to need the padre for last rites or anything, and who else is gonna want to have anything to do with me?"

The orderly didn't answer. He just ducked back out of sight. Rita walked into the room. "You idiot," she told him, and burst into tears.

Chester gaped at his wife. "What are you doing here?" he squeaked.

She pulled a tiny linen handkerchief out of her purse and dabbed at her eyes. "When I found out you got wounded, I asked the War Department where you were," she answered. "They told me, and so I

got on a train—got on a bunch of trains, really—and here I am. Carl's with Sue and Otis till I get back."

"All right," Chester said dazedly. His sister and brother-in-law would do fine with his son. "Jesus, sweetie, it's good to see you."

Rita gave him a look laced with vitriol. "If you like seeing me, why did you go put that stupid uniform on again? You could have stayed in L.A. and seen me every day."

He sighed. "It seemed like a good idea when I did it." How many follies got perpetrated because they seemed a good idea at the time? Was there any way to count them? Chester didn't think so.

By the way Rita drummed her fingers against the painted iron of the bedstead, she didn't, either. "They told me you weren't hurt bad enough for them to discharge you from the Army," she said. "That means the Confederates will have to shoot you at least one more time before I get you back, doesn't it?"

"I . . . hadn't thought of it like that," Chester said, which was true.

"No? Maybe you should have." Rita could be devastating when she felt like it. "How many pieces of you will be missing when you finally do come home?"

"For all either one of us knows, I won't get another scratch the rest of the way," Chester said.

She didn't laugh in his face. She didn't say anything at all. Her silence made his remark sound even more foolish than it would have anyway. He grimaced. He knew that as well as she did.

At last, she unbent enough to ask, "How are you?"

"I'm getting better," he answered. "As soon as the leg is strong enough, they'll send me back."

"Swell," Rita said. "I thought I was going to die when I got the wire that said you'd been hurt."

"Chance I took," Chester said. "It's not that bad." That was true. He would recover, as he had when he got hit in the arm during the Great War. He'd seen plenty of men crippled for life, plenty of others torn to pieces or blown to bits.

Rita's first husband hadn't come out of the Great War alive, so she knew about that, too. "What will it be like the next time?" she demanded pointedly. "I love you. I couldn't stand getting another 'The War Department deeply regrets to inform you . . .' telegram. I'd die."

No, I would. Chester swallowed the words long before they passed his lips. Rita wouldn't find them funny. He did, but only in the blackly humorous way that didn't make sense to anyone who hadn't been through the things front-line soldiers had.

Rita came over, bent down, and laid her head on his shoulder. She really started to bawl then. "I don't want to lose you, Chester!"

"Hey, babe." Awkwardly, he put his arms around her. "Hey," he repeated. "I'm not going anywhere." He did laugh then, because that was literally true.

Almost to Chester's relief, the orderly came in then and said, "You've got to go, ma'am. Doctors don't want him tired out."

The look she gave the man should have put *him* in a hospital bed. She kissed Chester. His eyes crossed; nobody'd done that since he reenlisted. Then, reluctantly, she let the orderly lead her away.

When she'd left the ward, the guy in the next bed said, "Must be nice, getting a visit from your wife." He wasn't even half Chester's age. By pure coincidence, the two of them had almost the same wound.

"Yeah, it was," Chester said, more or less truthfully. "She sure caught me by surprise, though." That was also true.

"Too bad you don't have a private room." The kid—his name was Gary—leered at him.

"Yeah, well . . ." Chester didn't know why he was embarrassed; the same thought had crossed his mind. He went on, "If I wasn't just a noncom, if I was an officer like the snotnose whose hand I was holding, maybe I would have one. Life's a bitch sometimes."

"Would we be here if it wasn't?" Gary was a buck private. To him, a top sergeant was as exalted a personage as any officer, at least this side of a general.

"You've got a point," Chester said. Of course, instead of ending up in a military hospital, they could have ended up dead. Or they could have been maimed, not just wounded.

Or we might not have got hurt at all, Chester thought resentfully. But he knew too well how unlikely that was. If you stayed in the meat grinder long enough, odds were you'd brush up against the blades.

Gary was looking at him. "You're not a lifer, are you?"

"Me? Hell, no," Chester said. "Do I look crazy?"

"Never can tell." Gary wouldn't get in Dutch for sassing a sergeant here; the rules were relaxed for wounded men. "It's like your wife said—if you're so smart, how come you signed up for round two when you'd already been through round one?"

"We licked those Confederate bastards once, but then we let 'em up, and look what we got," Chester answered. "Millions of maniacs screaming, 'Freedom!' and out to take anything they can grab. If we don't beat 'em again, they'll damn well beat us, and then we have to start all over."

"Yeah, but why *you*?" Gary persisted. "You paid your dues the last time. You didn't have to take a chance on getting your ass shot off twice."

"You're too young to know what Remembrance Day was like before the last war," Chester said slowly. "It really was a day of remembrance and a day of mourning. Things shut down *tight* except for the parades and the speeches. Nobody who saw it could ever forget the flag going by upside down. The Confederates and the limeys and the frogs beat us twice. We had to get tough. We had to build up if we were going to pay them back—and we did. I don't ever want to see the country go through anything like that again."

"That talks about the country. That doesn't talk about you," Gary said. "Me, I'm here on account of I got conscripted. But they weren't going to conscript you." *You old fart.* He didn't say it, but he might as well have. "So how come you volunteered to let 'em take another shot at you? You're not Custer—you aren't going to win the war all by yourself."

That would have been insulting if it hadn't been true. "Yeah, I know," Chester said with a sigh. "But if everybody sat on his hands, we'd lose. That's the long and short of it. So I put the uniform back on."

"And look what it got you," Gary said.

"I think I did some good before I got hurt," Chester said. "I

commanded a company for a while the last time around, so—"

"Wait a second," Gary broke in. "You were an officer then?"

Chester snorted. "Hell, no. Just an ordinary three-striper. But when everybody above me got killed or wounded, I filled the slot for a while. Did all right, if I say so myself. After a while, they found a lieutenant to run it. If I could do that then, I didn't have any trouble helping a shavetail run a platoon this time. I'll probably do the same thing somewhere else when they turn me loose here."

"You're like a football coach," Gary said.

"Sort of, I guess. I never even thought about coaching football, though. I used to play it—not for money, but on a steel-mill team. We weren't bad. We sure had some big guys—you better believe that." Chester's eye went to the clock on the wall. It was a few minutes before eleven. "Hey, Greek. you've got two good legs. Turn on the wireless, why don't you? News coming up."

"Sure." The guy called Greek had one arm in a cast, but nothing was wrong with the other.

The knob clicked. The set started to hum. Everybody waited for the tubes to warm up. What came out of the wireless when the sound started reminded Chester of a polka played by a set of drunken madmen. When it mercifully ended, the announcer said, "That was the Engels Brothers' new recording, 'Featherston's Follies.' " Everyone snorted; the Engels Brothers *were* madmen. The announcer went on, "And now the news."

"Heavy fighting is reported in and around Cleveland," a different announcer said. "The fierce U.S. defense is costing the Confederates dearly." Chester knew what that meant—the United States were getting hammered. The newsman continued, "Occupation authorities have also declared that the situation in Canada *is* under control, despite enemy propaganda." He went on to another story in a hurry. Chester didn't think *that* sounded good, either.

T oo many things were happening all at once for Flora Blackford's comfort. None of them seemed to be good things, either. The U.S. offensive in Virginia, on which so many hopes had been pinned, was heading nowhere. The new Confederate assault in Ohio, by contrast, was going much better than she wished it were. The Mormons still tied down far too many soldiers in Utah. And the Canadian uprising, from everything she could gather, was a lot more serious than the authorities were willing to admit in the papers or on the wireless.

All in all, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had plenty to do. She would rather it didn't.

And there were other distractions. Her secretary stuck her head into the inner office and said, "Miss Clemens is here to speak with you, Congresswoman."

"Thank you." Flora meant anything but. Some things couldn't be helped, though. "Send her in."

In marched the reporter. Ophelia Clemens had to be fifteen years older than Flora, but still looked like someone who took no guff from anybody. There, at least, the two women had something in common. "Hello, Congresswoman. Mind if I smoke?" she said, and had a cigarette going before Flora could say yes or no. That done, she held out the pack. "Care for a coffin nail yourself?"

"No, thanks. I never got the habit," Flora said, and then, "That's a Confederate brand, though, isn't it?"

"You betcha. If you're gonna go, go first class," Ophelia Clemens said. Flora didn't know how to answer that, so she didn't try. The reporter came straight to the point: "How many soldiers are we going to have to send up to Canada to help the Frenchies keep the lid on?"

"I don't have a number for that," Flora said cautiously. "You might do better asking at the War Department."

"Yeah, and I might *not,*" Ophelia Clemens said with a scornful toss of the head. "Those people were born lying, and you know it as well as I do."

Since Flora did, she didn't bother contradicting the correspondent. "I'm afraid I still don't have the answer. Even if it's just one, it'll be more than we can afford."

Scritch, scritch. Clemens' pencil raced across a notebook page. "That's

the truth—and it's a good quote. How come the Confederates can advance whenever they want to, but we keep dropping the ball?"

"If I knew that, I'd belong on the General Staff, not here," Flora said. Ophelia Clemens laughed, though she hadn't been joking. She continued, "The Joint Committee is doing its best to find out."

"Do you think keeping our generals on a red-hot grill will make them perform better?" the reporter asked.

"I hope we don't do that," Flora said.

"*I* hope you do," Ophelia Clemens said. "They'd better be more afraid of us than they are of the enemy." She waited to see if Flora would rise to the barb. When Flora didn't, she tried another question: "Is our publicity making the Confederates treat their Negroes any different—any better, I should say?"

That, Flora was ready to comment on. "Not one bit," she said angrily. "They're as disgraceful as ever, and as proud of it as ever, too."

The pencil flew over the page. "Too bad," the correspondent said. "I've heard the same thing from other people, but it's still too damn bad."

"Nice to know *someone* thinks so." Flora held up a hand. "This is off the record." She waited. Ophelia Clemens nodded. Flora went on, "Too many people on *this* side of the border just don't care, or else they say, 'The damn niggers have it coming to them.' "

"Yes, I've seen that, too," Clemens said. "All depends on whose ox is being gored. If the Freedom Party were going after Irishmen or Jews, they'd be squealing like a pig stuck in a fence." She threw back her head and let out a sudden, startling noise. She knew what a stuck pig sounded like, all right. And then, raising an eyebrow, she added, "No offense."

Flora had wondered if the older woman remembered she was Jewish. That answered that. She said what she had to say: "None taken."

"Good. Some people can get stuffy about the strangest things. Where was I?" That last seemed aimed more at herself than at Flora. Flipping pages in the notebook, Ophelia Clemens found what she was looking for. "Oh, yeah. That." She looked up at Flora. "Have you noticed there's something funny in the budget?"

“There’s always something funny in the budget,” Flora answered. “We’re in a war. That just makes it funnier than usual.”

Ophelia Clemens sent her an impatient look. “This has to do with funny business in . . .” She checked her notes again. “In Washington, that’s where. Washington State, I mean. The government is spending money hand over fist out there, and I’ll be damned if I can figure out why.”

“Oh. That.” With those two words, Flora realized she’d admitted to knowing what *that* was. She hadn’t wanted to, but didn’t see that she had much choice. Sighing, she said, “Miss Clemens, I don’t know all the details about that, but I have been persuaded that keeping it secret is in the best interests of the United States. The less said about it, especially in the newspapers, the better.”

“*You’ve* been persuaded?” The correspondent raised a gingery eyebrow. “I thought you were hard to persuade about such things.”

“I am. I hope I am, anyway,” Flora said. “This is one of those times, though. Have you spoken with Mr. Roosevelt about this business?”

“No. Should I? Would he tell me anything?” Ophelia Clemens wasn’t writing now.

Flora took that for an encouraging sign. “I don’t know whether he would or not. I’m inclined to doubt it,” she said. “But I think he might have more to say than I would about why you shouldn’t publish.”

“Well, I’ll try him.” Clemens got to her feet. “I’ll try him right now, as a matter of fact.” She sent Flora a wry grin. “But you’ll be on the telephone before I can get over there, won’t you?”

“Yes.” Flora didn’t waste time with denials. “He needs to know. I told you—I do think this is that important.”

“All right. Fair enough, I suppose. Nice chatting with you—turned out more interesting than I figured it would.” With no more farewell than that, Ophelia Clemens swept out of the office.

No sooner had the door closed behind her than Flora was on the telephone to the War Department. Before long, she had the Assistant Secretary of War on the line. “Hello, Flora. To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?” Franklin Roosevelt inquired, jaunty as usual.

“Ophelia Clemens is on her way to see you,” Flora answered without

preamble. “Somehow or other, she’s got wind of what’s going on in Washington.”

“Oh, dear. That doesn’t sound so good,” Roosevelt said. “I wonder how it happened.”

“I don’t know. I doubt she’d tell you,” Flora said. “But I thought you ought to know.”

“Thank you. She’s a chip off the old block, all right,” Roosevelt said. Flora made a questioning noise. Roosevelt explained: “Her father was a reporter out in San Francisco for a million years. He had a nasty sense of humor—funny, but nasty—and he spent most of it on the Democrats. If I remember straight, he died not long before the Great War started. Stan Clemens, his name was, or maybe Sam. Stan, I think.”

“You could ask Ophelia when she gets there,” Flora said. “She’s on her way now, and she’s not the kind of person who wastes a lot of time.”

Franklin Roosevelt laughed. “Well, I’m sure you’re right about that. I wonder what sort of cock-and-bull story I’ll have to tell her.”

“She knows at least some of the truth,” Flora warned, remembering how little of the truth she really knew herself. “If what she hears from you doesn’t match what she already knows, that will be worse than if you didn’t tell her anything at all. Think of the headlines.”

“ ‘Boondoggle to end all boondoggles!’ ” Roosevelt seemed to be quoting one. He also seemed to be enjoying himself while he did it. He went on, “Where *did* that word come from, anyway? It sounds like it ought to be something a Confederate would say.”

“It does, doesn’t it?” Flora said. “I don’t know where it’s from, not for sure. I’ve certainly heard it. I don’t think you can live in Philadelphia without hearing it.”

“That’s because so many boondoggles live here,” Roosevelt said cheerfully.

“No doubt.” Flora didn’t sound cheerful, or anything close to it. “Is this project out in Washington another one?”

“If it works, no one will ever say a word about what we spent on it,” the Assistant Secretary of War answered. “And if it doesn’t, nobody will ever stop investigating us. I can’t do anything about it either way

except hope it works and do everything I can to help the people who know more about it than I do."

That sounded less encouraging than Flora wished it did, but was perhaps more honest than the usual glowing promises. She said, "I think you ought to tell Ophelia Clemens as much as you've told me"—*however much that is*—"and swear her to secrecy."

"If she'll swear *to* instead of swearing *at.*" Roosevelt sounded dubious.

"She may not like the administration. She may not even like the government, no matter who's in charge," Flora said. "But I'll tell you one thing, Franklin: I promise she likes it better than she likes Jake Featherston."

"Mm, you've probably got something there," Roosevelt admitted. "No—you've definitely got something there. I think I'm going to have to call the President before I talk to her, but that's what I'll put to him. Before I go, though, I've got a question for you."

"Go ahead. What is it?" Flora said.

"Midterm elections coming up this November. Has the Joint Committee talked about how we're going to handle the House districts the Confederates are occupying? Thank God neither Senator from Ohio is up for reelection this year."

"Senator Taft"—who was from Ohio—"has said the same thing," Flora answered.

Roosevelt laughed. "I'll bet he has!"

"Right now, the plan is to let the Congressmen in occupied districts hold their seats," Flora added. "That seems only fair. And it doesn't hurt that they're pretty evenly split between Socialists and Democrats. There's even a Republican."

"Republicans." Franklin Roosevelt laughed again, this time on a sour note. "The lukewarm, the politicians who can't make up their minds one way or the other. No wonder the American people spewed that party out of their mouths."

The language was from the New Testament, but Flora understood it. She was a Jew, but she was also an American, and the USA, for better or worse—no, for better *and* worse—was a Christian country. If you lived here, you had to accommodate yourself to that reality.

Of course, the Confederacy was also a Christian country . . . and what did that say about Christianity? Nothing good, she was sure.

C larence Potter did not care for Professor Henderson V. FitzBelmont. The dislike was plainly mutual. Potter thought FitzBelmont was a pompous stuffed shirt. Not being a mind reader, he didn't know just what the physics professor thought of him. Probably that he was a military oaf who couldn't add two and two without counting on his fingers.

That stung, since Potter reckoned himself a cultured man. He'd known a lot of military oafs in his time. To be thought one himself rankled.

His surroundings conspired against him. Instead of bringing Professor FitzBelmont back to Richmond, he, like Mohammed, had gone to the mountain—in his case, to the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Washington University was in Lexington, Virginia, not far from the Virginia Military Institute—what the damnyankees called the Confederate West Point.

War hadn't come home here. It was something people read about in the newspapers and heard about on the wireless. Every once in a while, airplanes would drone by overhead. But the locals were still talking about a U.S. air raid on VMI the year before. After that calling card, the Yankees hadn't come back. For Clarence Potter, who'd watched men work on unexploded bombs and who'd spent enough time underground to get little beady eyes like a mole, this was the next best thing to paradise. The streets weren't full of rubble and broken glass. Artillery didn't rumble in the distance. The air didn't stink of smoke—and of death.

The university sat at the top of a sloping meadow at the northwest edge of Lexington. Professor FitzBelmont's office, in one of the red brick buildings with white porticoes at the heart of the campus, had a fine view of the forested mountains to the west. The professor's tweeds seemed far more appropriate here than Potter's butternut uniform.

With such patience as Potter could muster, he said, "I have to understand this business as well as I can, Professor, to be able to give my people in the United States the best possible idea of what to look for."

"Indeed." Professor FitzBelmont looked like a maiden aunt called

upon to discuss the facts of life with the madam of the local bawdyhouse. He looked *just* like that, in fact. He might not approve of Clarence Potter the soldier, but he definitely didn't approve of Clarence Potter the spy.

Potter nodded to himself. He'd seen that before. "Professor, there isn't a country in the world that can get along without an intelligence service. We spy on the damnyankees, yes, and you can bet your bottom dollar they spy on us, too. If they're ahead of us in this uranium business, we need to do everything we can to catch up, don't we?"

"Indeed," FitzBelmont repeated, even more distaste in his voice than he'd shown the time before.

"Sir, you were the one who brought this to the President's attention. You must have done that because you're a patriotic citizen," Potter said.

"I don't want *those people* to beat my country again." Henderson FitzBelmont packed more scorn into that than most Confederates did into *damnyankees.* He went on, "If that makes me a patriot, so be it. But if you expect me to jump up on my hind legs and shout, 'Freedom!' every other sentence, I fear you will be disappointed in me."

He was either braver or more naive than Potter had thought—maybe both. The Intelligence officer said, "I don't do that, either." FitzBelmont's eyebrow was eloquently skeptical. Potter continued, "By God, sir, I don't. My politics have always been Whig, and I did everything I could to keep Jake Featherston from getting elected." That was not only true, it was a spectacular understatement. He could talk about it, too, because it was common knowledge. Talking about going up to Richmond in 1936 with a pistol in his pocket was a different story. He finished, "I'm also a Confederate patriot, though. For better or worse"—*for better and worse*—"this is my country."

Professor FitzBelmont studied him, perhaps seeing the man instead of the uniform this time. "Maybe," he said at last.

"*Maybe* isn't the right answer, Professor," Clarence Potter said gently. "You can talk to me now, or you can have some less pleasant conversations with some much less pleasant people later on. Your call, either way."

FitzBelmont didn't try to misunderstand him. The physics professor

did try to get huffy. “This is not the right way to get my cooperation, General. And if I don’t work with you wholeheartedly, how will you go forward?”

Potter’s smile, all sharp teeth, might have been borrowed from a gator. He named four physics profs at universities scattered across the CSA. Henderson V. FitzBelmont looked appalled. Still smiling carnivorously, Potter said, “Give me credit for doing my homework, please. If you were the only fellow in the country who could do this work, we couldn’t compete with the Yankees anyhow, because they have so much more manpower than we do—and that includes trained manpower along with every other kind. You may be important, Professor—you *are* important—but you’re not indispensable, and you’d better get used to it.”

Plainly, FitzBelmont wanted to be indispensable. How many years had he been the next thing to invisible? A lot, no doubt—who paid attention to a bespectacled physics professor? Well, important would damn well have to do. With a sigh, FitzBelmont said, “Tell me what you already know.”

“There are two kinds of uranium. U-235 will go boom. U-238 won’t, but maybe, if you do things to it, it will turn into something else that will go boom. I don’t quite follow that part. It seems like magic. But anyway, most of the uranium is 238, and it’s going to be harder than hell to separate the 235 out of it.” Potter paused. “How am I doing?”

“You’ll never make a physicist,” Professor FitzBelmont said.

“I don’t want to be a physicist. That’s your job,” Potter said. “I want to know enough to be able to do *my* job. Tell me what my people need to look for to tell whether the damnyankees are separating 235 from 238, or if they’re doing this other stuff with 238 to make it go boom.”

He’d asked FitzBelmont the same thing when he first walked into the professor’s office. If FitzBelmont had started talking then, he could have saved both of them some time. Potter approved of saving time wherever he could. Some people, though, had to work up to things by easy stages.

Potter had done more homework than he’d shown the physics professor; he believed in keeping a couple of hole cards hidden. All the same, once FitzBelmont did start talking he had a hard time keeping up. Gaseous diffusion, thermal diffusion, centrifuges . . .

Those were complicated enough, but what FitzBelmont called an

atomic engine was worse. “Wait a minute,” Potter protested. “You really change the U-238 into another element?”

“That’s right.” FitzBelmont nodded.

“When I went to Yale back before the last war, my chemistry professor told us transmutation was impossible,” Potter said.

“So *that’s* why you talk the way you do,” Henderson FitzBelmont murmured. He shrugged narrow shoulders and went on, “Your chemistry professor was right, in a way. You can’t transmute elements chemically. Chemistry only has to do with the electrons around the nucleus. Change the nucleus, though, and you change the atom. And nuclear processes are much more energetic than chemical ones.”

“Do you have any idea how long it will take us or the Yankees to get the 235 for a bomb or to get one of your atomic engines going?” Potter asked. “Can we do it in this war? Can they?”

“Turning theory into engineering is never simple,” FitzBelmont said. “The researchers in the USA must think they can do it fast, or they wouldn’t be putting so much effort into it. And who knows where the Germans are? They were the ones who discovered uranium fission in the first place, after all.”

“Are England and France working on this stuff, too?” Potter asked.

“I’d be amazed if they weren’t. They have some talented people—more than we do, probably.” The parenthetical phrase, while true, plainly made Professor FitzBelmont unhappy. It made Clarence Potter unhappy, too. It was true in more areas than nuclear physics. The Confederacy’s biggest problem had always been doing all the things it needed to do with the number of white men it had to do them. Doing all of them had proved beyond its ability in the Great War. Potter had to hope it wouldn’t this time around.

That one of the things the CSA’s whites had to do was hold down the country’s blacks made things no easier. The Freedom Party’s determination to settle that mess once and for all helped justify its rule in Potter’s eyes. If whites didn’t have to worry about niggers, they could get on with the serious business of building the country they should have had from the beginning.

Incorporating blacks into the pool of trained manpower would also have reduced the drain on whites and on the CSA generally, but it never once crossed Clarence Potter’s mind—or those of any other

whites in the Confederate States. They'd experimented with colored soldiers in the Great War . . . and some of those men, who'd learned what fighting was about, remained in arms against the CSA even now. No one in authority would make that mistake again.

Potter pulled his thoughts back to the business at hand. "You don't know for a fact what the British and French are up to?"

"I'm afraid not." FitzBelmont shook his head. "Whatever it is, they'll be keeping it secret, too."

"I suppose so." Potter hesitated, then asked, "Are they likely to be ahead of us? If we get hold of them about it, will they be able to give us information that would help us move faster?"

"It's possible, certainly. I don't know how probable it is."

"Have to find out." Potter wrote himself a note. He wondered whether the British and French *would* help the Confederacy. They'd always looked on the CSA as a poor relation, a tool to keep the United States weak but never more than a local power. But if the Confederate States had this superbomb, they wouldn't be a local power anymore. "One more question, Professor: do you think the Germans are helping the United States?"

Henderson V. FitzBelmont looked at him over the tops of those gold-framed spectacles. "You are the Intelligence officer, General. Surely you would know better than I."

So there, Potter thought. The truth was, he had no idea. He didn't think anyone in the CSA did. You couldn't find an answer if you didn't know you should be asking the question.

Glancing at his watch, FitzBelmont said, "Is there anything else? I have to go to class in a few minutes. Some of the people I'm teaching will probably be working with me when we start real work on this—if we do."

"Oh, I don't think you need to worry about that, Professor," Potter said. "If the damnyankees are going full speed ahead on this, we will be, too. We can't afford not to, can we?" He imagined superbombs blowing Richmond and Atlanta and New Orleans off the map. Then he imagined them coming down on Philadelphia and New York City and Boston instead. He liked that *much* better.

C leveland was a mess. Tom Colleton had been sure it would be a mess before his regiment got into the city. Built-up terrain was bad for barrels—too many places to ambush them. Machine-gun nests cut into the firepower edge his men had over their U.S. opponents. This was Great War fighting: block to block and house to house. It wasn't the way the Confederates had wanted to fight this war.

Sometimes, though, you had no choice. Leaving Cleveland and its harbor untaken would have asked for worse trouble than slugging it out in the wreckage. A U.S. landing and a thrust south from the city would have played merry hell with supply lines. Meanwhile, though, a lot of good men were dying.

The only good news was that the damnyankees didn't have as many men in the city as they might have. They'd weakened their defenses to put as much as they could into Virginia, and not all the men who'd gone were back. That let the Confederates keep pushing forward despite casualties. A lot of the big steel mills and refineries on the Flats by the lake, structures that could have turned into formidable fortresses, had already fallen. The Confederate advance had touched the Cuyahoga in a couple of places, but the men in butternut didn't yet own bridgeheads on the east bank of the river.

Above the city, Confederate Hound Dogs and U.S. Wright fighters wrestled in the sky. When the Hound Dogs had the edge, Mule dive bombers screamed down to pound U.S. ground positions. When the Wrights gained the upper hand, they shot down the Asskickers before the bombers could deliver the goods.

Right now, the Confederates were on top in the air war. Maybe C.S. bombers had hit airstrips farther east, so U.S. fighters had trouble getting off the ground. Whatever the reason, Asskickers smashed U.S. positions that even barrels couldn't take out. Antiaircraft fire was heavy, but antiaircraft fire was only a nuisance. Fighters were a Mule pilot's great fear.

All the bridges over the Cuyahoga were down. Tom Colleton wondered if any bridges in the USA and the CSA *didn't* have demolition charges, ready to go up at a moment's notice. He wouldn't have bet on it.

"Sir!" A runner came back from the line, a couple of hundred yards ahead. "Sir, looks like the damnyankees are pulling back. That machine gun that was givin' us hell—it ain't there no more."

“No?” Tom’s suspicions roused before his eagerness. That was natural in anyone who’d seen more than a little war. “All right,” he said at last. “Send a patrol forward. *Only* a patrol, you hear me? They’re liable to be setting up to bushwhack us if we get too happy.”

“Yes, sir. Send a patrol forward.” The soldier started forward himself. He ran hunched over, dodging from cover to cover. Any runner who lasted more than twenty minutes learned that gait. Odds were it just put off the inevitable. Few runners were likely to last out the war.

Tom waited. He ordered the regimental reserve up closer to the front. If the U.S. soldiers truly had retreated, he wanted to be in position to take advantage of it. If they hadn’t . . . Well, the patrol would find out if they hadn’t.

The runner came back again. “Sir, they’re really gone,” he reported. “We’re moving up till we bump into ’em again.”

“Good. That’s good,” Tom said. His company commanders were up to snuff. They could see what needed doing without his telling them. He would have been angry if they’d waited for orders before advancing. He turned to his wireless man. “Get back to Division—let ’em know we’re up in square Blue-7.”

“Blue-7. Yes, sir,” the wireless man answered. When the next artillery duel started, Tom didn’t want his own side’s shells coming down on his men’s heads. Some would anyway—some always did. But there wouldn’t be so many if the gunners knew where his soldiers were.

Corpsmen wearing white smocks with the Red Cross on chest and back and helmets with the emblem painted in a white circle carried the wounded back to aid stations. “You’ll be fine,” Tom said more than once, and always hoped he wasn’t lying.

One of the injured men wore green-gray, not butternut. The corpsmen had no doubt risked their lives to bring in the Yankee. Nobody was supposed to shoot at them, but accidents—and artillery, which didn’t discriminate—happened. To be fair, U.S. medics did the same for wounded Confederates. The Geneva Convention was worth something, anyhow.

Geneva Convention or not, the smell of death filled Tom Colleton’s nostrils. So did the other stenches of war: cordite and shit and blood and fear. Just getting a whiff of that sharp, sour tang made him want to be afraid, too. It struck at an animal level, far below conscious thought.

Confederate artillery might have spared his men, but gunners in green-gray didn't. Some of the shells gurgled as they flew through the air. Some of the bursts sounded . . . odd. Colleton swore. He knew what that meant. He'd known since 1915. "Gas!" he shouted, and yanked his mask out of the pouch on his belt. He pulled it on and made sure it fit snugly. "Gas!" he yelled again. This time, the mask muffled the word.

Others, though, were also taking up the cry. Somebody was beating on an empty shell casing with a wrench. The clatter penetrated the din of combat better than most other noises.

It was a hot, sticky summer day in Cleveland. It was, in fact, as hot and sticky as it ever got down in St. Matthews, South Carolina. The damnyankees had nastier winters than the Confederacy ever got, but their summers were no milder. As far as he could see, that meant they got the worst of both worlds.

Even without the mask, he didn't feel as if he were getting enough air. With it, he might as well have been trying to breathe underwater. One of the gases the Yankees used could kill if a drop of it got on your skin. People were issued rubberized suits to protect them from the menace. Tom had never ordered his men to wear those suits. He didn't know anybody who had. Especially in this weather, moving around in them steamed you in your own juices. Soldiers preferred risking the gas to dying of heat exhaustion, which more than a few of them had done.

He swore. The mask muffled the curses, too. Trust the high foreheads to come up with protection that made danger seem welcome by comparison. If that wasn't a metaphor for the futility of war in general . . .

But this war in particular had better not be futile, not for the CSA. "Tell Division we need counterbattery fire, and we need it ten minutes ago!" he shouted to the wireless operator.

For a wonder, the Confederate guns woke up in short order. Some of what they threw at the Yankees was gas, too. Even when the shells flew by far overhead, you could hear the stuff sloshing inside them. Tom laughed. If anything was worse than being an infantryman under gas attack, it was trying to jerk shells with a gas mask on. *Serves you right, you bastards,* he thought savagely. *See how you like it.*

The U.S. bombardment slackened but didn't stop. Then a flight of

Mules swooped down on the Yankee gun positions. One of the Asskickers crashed in flames. Maybe it got hit; maybe the pilot didn't pull out of his dive soon enough. What difference did it make, one way or the other? But the dive bombers did a better job of silencing the artillery than counterbattery fire had.

Some Confederate barrels clattered and crunched up to the front. Fighting inside one of them was no picnic in weather like this, either, especially when they needed to stay buttoned up tight against gas. But their guns blasted the U.S. soldiers out of the positions to which they'd withdrawn.

"Come on!" Tom shouted, running forward. "We can get to the river. Maybe we can even get over the river." Before long, he caught up with the barrels, and then ran past them. Soldiers turned to stare at him. In their pig-snouted, portholed masks, they looked like the Martians in that Yankee film that had scared the pants off everybody a few years before the war. But he knew the magic words that would get them moving: "Follow me!"

That spell never failed. Men might balk at going forward alone, but they would go after an officer. Tom's heart thudded in his chest. He hoped he didn't fall over dead leading from the front. Middle-aged officers took that chance when they tried to lead young men.

To his relief, the barrels also rumbled forward. Armor and infantry working together were hard to stop. The damnyankees didn't stop them. Tom whooped. "The river!" he yelled. There was the muddy Cuyahoga, winding its way north and west toward Lake Erie. The tail of a crashed fighter stuck up from the water near the far bank.

On that far bank, U.S. troops didn't seem to know they had trouble. Tom ordered his men not to shoot across the river. He sent an urgent request back to Division for engineers with rubber boats. If they could cross in a hurry, set up a bridgehead on the far bank . . . Maybe they'd get slaughtered. Troops that tried to do too much too fast sometimes did. But maybe they'd shake the Yankees loose from the river line, too.

For a wonder, the engineers showed up in less than an hour. Soldiers piled into the boats as fast as the engineers could inflate them. The Confederates paddled like men possessed. But their foes didn't stay bemused long enough. Heavy machine-gun fire from the east bank of the river turned them back with heavy losses.

C.S. barrels waddled forward and shelled the machine-gun nests. “Let’s try it again!” Tom shouted. This time, he scrambled into one of the black rubber boats himself. He’d get over the Cuyahoga or he’d probably die in it. He grabbed a paddle and thrust it into the muddy water.

The machine guns stayed quiet. The barrels had done their job, then. Rifle fire from the far bank was galling, but no worse than galling. Confederate machine guns, some on the barrels and others served by infantrymen, made the damnyankee riflemen keep their heads down.

A bullet cracked past Tom. When you heard that crack, the round came too damn close. He automatically ducked, not that it would have done him any good. Nobody thought anything less of him for ducking. Only a handful of nerveless people lacked that reflex.

Here came the far bank. “Let’s go!” Tom yelled, and paddled harder than ever. As soon as the rubber boat grounded on the mud, he leaped out and ran for the closest wreckage. He threw a grenade into what looked like the mouth of a cave in case any U.S. soldiers lurked there, then dove behind a burned-out truck carcass. “Stay down!” he called to his men. “If they want you, make ’em pay for you!”

More Confederates got over the Cuyahoga. U.S. soldiers rushed up to try to wipe out the bridgehead before it got established. A mortar bomb whispered down much closer to Tom than he would have liked. Fragments of hot, jagged steel snarled through the air. Not far away, somebody shrieked—some of those fragments had snarled through flesh instead.

Asskickers that stooped on the attacking men in green-gray might have been angels in camouflage paint. Tom Colleton yelled exultantly at the chance to get killed farther east in Ohio than other Confederates had before him.

S ergeant Michael Pound approved of the way Lieutenant Bryce Poffenberger’s combat education was coming. Lieutenant Poffenberger hadn’t gone and killed himself yet. Even more to the point, the barrel commander hadn’t yet gone and killed Sergeant Pound. Pound strongly approved of that.

What he didn’t approve of were the new Confederate barrels. No, that wasn’t quite true. He highly approved of them—as machines. What he didn’t approve of was that the long-snouted monsters had

Confederates inside them and not U.S. barrelmen.

“We could have had barrels like that,” he told Lieutenant Poffenberger as they camped somewhere between Akron and Canton. “We could have had them more than ten years ago, but we didn’t want to spend the money.”

Incautiously, Poffenberger said, “And I suppose you were there at the creation.”

“Yes, sir,” Pound said—if the puppy forgot, he had to have his nose rubbed in it. “I was at the Barrel Works at Fort Leavenworth when General Morrell—of course, he wasn’t a general then, just a colonel—designed the prototype for the model we’re using now. If we’d had that then, we would have upgraded long since. I’m sure of it.”

Poffenberger stared at him. Firelight shone from the junior officer’s wide eyes. Not for the first time, he asked the question a lot of people had asked before him: “Why the devil aren’t you an officer, Sergeant?” What he meant by it was, *Why the devil aren’t you out of my hair?*

“I like what I’m doing, sir,” Pound replied in his best innocent tones. “Things are—looser this way.”

“Hrmp,” Poffenberger said, a noise that might have meant anything at all.

“If you’ll excuse me, sir . . .” Pound waited to be sure the lieutenant wouldn’t hold him, then walked over to the barrel. The driver, a blond from Dakota named Tor Svenson, was fiddling with the engine, wrench in one hand, flashlight in the other. Any good barrel crew did a lot of its own maintenance; the big, heavy machines operated at—or often past—the limits of engine, transmission, and suspension, and they broke down a lot even when coddled and cosseted. “What’s up, Svenson?”

The driver had been so engaged in what he was doing, he needed a moment to realize somebody was talking to him. When he looked up, a smear of grease darkened one Viking cheekbone. “Oh, it’s you, Sarge,” he said, relief in his voice. Relief that it wasn’t Second Lieutenant Bryce Poffenberger? Pound wouldn’t have been surprised. Svenson went on, “You notice how the beast doesn’t quite pick up fast enough when I goose it?”

“Uh-huh.” Pound nodded. “Figure it’s the carb?”

“Yah, but I can’t find anything wrong with the son of a bitch.”

“Let me have a look.” With a grunt, Pound heaved himself up onto the machine so he could look down on the engine. As a matter of fact, he *did* look down on it; it wasn’t powerful enough to let the barrel do everything he wished it could. He had a variety of wrenches and other tools in his coverall pockets. Some of them helped him adjust his beloved gun. The others clanked there because any barrelman who’d been at his trade for a while turned into a pretty fair mechanic.

Svenson had already partly disassembled the carburetor. Pound continued the attack with his own wrenches and, soon, a needle-nosed pliers and a jeweler’s screwdriver. Svenson watched with interest, occasionally offering a suggestion. He wasn’t a bad mechanic himself, but recognized Pound was a better one.

“What do you think?” the driver asked in due course.

“Looks to me like the metering rod’s not quite in synch with the throttle valve, so you get that delay when you want high power,” Pound answered. “I like a power jet better—less to go wrong. But we’ve got what we’ve got. Clean everything out there real well and it should be all right.” He crossed his fingers.

“Yah, I’ll do it, Sarge.” Some of the flat vowels of Scandinavia lingered in Svenson’s speech. “Thanks. I’m not sure I would’ve picked that up myself.”

“I expect you would have.” Pound didn’t know whether the driver would have or not, but Svenson worked hard. He was also a man whom a pat on the back helped more than a boot in the backside. He grinned a dirty-faced grin at Pound as he started setting the delicate mechanism to rights.

When they moved out the next morning, the engine was noticeably smoother. Pound reminded himself to say something nice to Svenson when they stopped somewhere. There wasn’t a lot of really open ground as they moved northwest towards Akron. Ohio was densely settled; suburbs spread from towns like tentacles. That meant a barrel commander had to have eyes in the back of his head to keep from walking into trouble.

Lieutenant Poffenberger did his best. He rode head and shoulders out of the cupola so he could look around in all directions. Staying buttoned up and using the periscopes was safer for the commander but much more dangerous for the barrel as a whole.

The open cupola also let a little fresh air into the machine. That was good; it felt hot enough in there to cook meat. At least the engine had a compartment of its own, which it hadn't in Great War barrels. Pound wiped sweat off his forehead with a coverall sleeve and thought longingly of blizzards.

Foot soldiers trotted alongside the barrels. If they started yelling about gas—or if they started putting on masks, for they might not be heard no matter how they yelled—the machine would have to button up. That would be . . . even less pleasant than it was already.

For all of Lieutenant Poffenberger's good intentions, he never saw the C.S. barrel that wrecked the one he commanded. The shot came from the side. *Wham! Clang!* It was like getting kicked by a mule the size of a *Brontosaurus.* The barrel stopped at once. The steel bulkhead between the engine compartment and the crew would hold fire at bay—for a little while.

"Holy Jesus!" Poffenberger yipped, his voice high and shrill.

"Sir, we've got to get out of here right now," Michael Pound said urgently.

"Yes," Poffenberger said. Had he said no, Pound would have clipped him and then got out anyway. Poffenberger started up through the cupola. A burst of machine-gun fire from that same Confederate barrel—or so Pound thought—made his body jerk and twitch. The lieutenant let out a thin, startled bleat and slumped back down into the turret.

He blocked Pound's escape and the loader's. Swearing, Pound heaved his body up again so he himself could get at the escape hatch on the far side of the turret. His hands left blood on the steel as he undogged the hatch. "Come on!" he shouted to the man who sat below him and to his left.

"What about the lieutenant?" asked the loader—his name was Jerry Fields.

"He's gone. Get moving, goddammit! Next one hits right here." Pound hauled himself out of the turret with his muscular arms. He crouched on the stricken barrel's chassis, then dropped to the ground. The loader was right behind him. They used the barrel as cover against enemy fire from the flank. Flame and black smoke boiled up from the engine compartment. That would help hide them from Confederates trying to do them in.

A hatch opened at the front of the barrel. Tor Svenson and the bow gunner tumbled out one after the other. Pound shouted and waved to them. That enemy machine gun blew off the top of the bow gunner's head. Svenson's dash turned into a limp, and then a crawl.

As Pound crouched to bandage the driver's leg, another armor-piercing round slammed into the barrel, just as he'd known it would. Ammunition started cooking off inside, the cheerful *pop-pop-pop* of machine-gun cartridges—like a string of firecrackers on the Fourth of July—mingling with the deeper roars of the shells for the main armament. The explosions blew what was left of Lieutenant Poffenberger's body off the turret. More flames and smoke burst from the cupola—including a perfect smoke ring, as if Satan were puffing on a stogie.

"How is it, Svenson?" Pound asked.

"Hurts like a bastard," the driver answered with the eerie matter-of-factness of a just-wounded man.

Pound nodded. The bullet had taken a nasty bite out of Svenson's calf. Pound gave him a shot of morphine, then yelled for a corpsman.

"Feel naked outside the machine," the loader said.

"No kidding," Pound replied with feeling. He felt worse than naked—he felt like a snail yanked out of its shell. The infantrymen around him knew how to be soft-skinned slugs, but he had no idea. The .45 on his belt, a reasonable self-defense weapon for a barrel crewman, suddenly seemed a kid's water pistol.

The war went on without him. Nobody cared that his barrel had been smashed, or that Lieutenant Poffenberger was nothing but torn, burnt, bleeding meat and the bow gunner'd had his brains blown out. Other U.S. barrels kept grinding towards Akron. For all he knew, some of them were hunting the C.S. machine that had put him out of action. Foot soldiers loped past. None of them stopped for the deshelled snails; as proper slugs, they had worries of their own.

A couple of corpsmen did come up. "All right—we'll take charge of him," one of them said. "Looks like you done pretty good."

"Thanks," Pound said. He turned to Jerry Fields. "Come on. Let's get moving."

"Where to?" the loader asked reasonably.

“Wherever we can find somebody who’ll put us back in another barrel, or at least give us something to do,” Pound answered. “We can’t stay here, that’s for damn sure.”

He couldn’t have been righter about that. The Confederates on the U.S. flank ripped into the advancing men in green-gray. A shell from a C.S. barrel slammed into the turret of a U.S. machine, letting him see what he’d been afraid of a couple of minutes earlier. The high-velocity round almost tore the turret right off the barrel. The men inside never had a chance. They had to be hamburger even before their ammo started cooking off.

“Jesus,” Fields said beside him. “That could’ve been us.”

“Really? That never occurred to me,” Pound said. The loader, for whom sarcasm was a foreign language, gave him a peculiar look.

In the face of concentrated automatic-weapons fire, U.S. foot soldiers went down as if to a reaper. *A reaper is right—a grim one,* Pound thought. All he knew about infantry combat was to stay low. That didn’t seem to be enough. He pulled out the .45, in case any Confederate soldiers got close enough to make it dangerous. It didn’t seem to be enough, either.

The attack unraveled. It quickly grew obvious the U.S. soldiers weren’t going to make it to Portage Lake, let alone into Akron. Instead of going northwest, they started going southeast as fast as they could. The question became whether they would be able to hang on to Canton, and the answer looked more and more like no.

Pound hated retreats. He wanted to do things to the enemy, not have those nasty bastards on the other side do things to him. But one of the things he didn’t want them to do was kill him. He fired several rounds from the .45. He had no idea whether he hit anybody. With luck, he made some Confederates keep their heads down. Without luck . . . No, luck was with him, for he got back to Canton—still in U.S. hands—alive and unhurt. And as for what the powers that be came up with next—he’d worry about that later.

A lthough the newspapers the Confederates let into the Andersonville prison camp boasted of C.S. victories and U.S. disasters, Major Jonathan Moss didn’t throw them away. That was not to say he believed them. Confederates in Cleveland? Ridiculous. Confederates in Canton? Preposterous. Confederates in Youngstown? Absurd.

And the news from more distant lands struck him as even less likely. The Japs threatening to take away the Sandwich Islands? The Russians driving toward Warsaw? He shook his head. Whoever came up with those headlines had a warped sense of humor. Only on the Western Front in Europe, where the papers admitted that Germany still had soldiers fighting, did even the tiniest hint of reality emerge.

Like the rest of the U.S. officers in the camp, though, Moss did hold on to the newspapers he got. Since the Confederates didn't issue toilet paper and Red Cross packages held only a little, the product of Jake Featherston's propaganda mills made the best available substitute.

He wasn't the only one dubious about what sort of leaves Confederate headline writers loaded into their pipes. An indignant-looking captain named Ralph Lahrheim came up to him one breathlessly hot and muggy afternoon and waved a copy of a rag called the *Augusta Constitutionalist* in his face. "What do you think of this, Major?" Lahrheim demanded in irate tones. "What do you *think*?"

"That one? I don't much like it," Moss answered gravely. "It's scratchier than most of the Atlanta papers."

"No, no, no—that isn't what I meant," Lahrheim said. "I was talking about the *story*."

"Oh, the story. Haven't seen this one yet," Moss said. The younger man—there weren't a lot of older men in the camp—handed him the newspaper. He read the story Lahrheim pointed out, then made a reluctant clucking noise. "Well, Captain, a lot of Canucks don't much like the USA."

"Yeah, I know what. But could they throw us out of Winnipeg? Could they cut the east-west railroads?"

"I'm sure they could cut some of them," Moss answered. "All? I don't know about that. I don't know how strong the rebels are in Winnipeg. I suppose they could drive us out for a while."

"We're busy a lot of other places," Captain Lahrheim said, as if to declare that the Canadians couldn't hope to cause the USA trouble if that weren't so. That was true. It was also rather aggressively irrelevant.

It was, in fact, irrelevant enough that Moss couldn't resist mocking it: "Really? I hadn't noticed."

Lahrheim turned red. “You’re making fun of me.” He had a rubbery face that conveyed indignation even better than his voice.

“Not of you, Captain, not personally,” Moss said. The Andersonville camp was crowded; you had to be able to get along with people if you possibly could. Again, though, lawyer’s instinct or perhaps plain cussedness made him add, “You did say something silly.”

After a moment, Captain Lahrheim managed a laugh of sorts. “Well, maybe I did,” he allowed. But he remained indignant, even if he aimed his ire in a different direction. “Did you see how the damn Frenchies performed? *Did* you? They just cut and run, sounds like.”

“I did notice that, yes.” Moss was disappointed, if less surprised than the other officer. Men from the Republic of Quebec were tolerable occupation troops. Their mere presence had made English-speaking Canadians think twice about rising against the forces that had beaten them in the Great War. Once the Canucks had thought twice and rose anyway, the men from Quebec proved less then enthusiastic about putting them down. There weren’t enough Frenchies to go around, and they weren’t really trained for serious combat anyway.

“We have to do everything ourselves,” Lahrheim grumbled, a constant complaint in the USA. Maybe there weren’t enough Americans to go around, either. Jonathan Moss hoped there were, but how could you tell ahead of time?

Moss looked north. He didn’t know how much Lahrheim knew about the tunnel ever so quietly working its way out past the stockade. Since he didn’t know, he pretended the tunnel didn’t exist. But escape still filled his thoughts. If a good many men could break out, if they could cross Georgia and South Carolina and North Carolina and Virginia or maybe go up through Tennessee and Kentucky . . . If all that could happen, the United States would gain a few reinforcements.

All of which would matter—how much? On the big scale of things, probably not much. If the fate of the United States depended on a handful of escaping POWs, the country was in worse shape than anyone could imagine. But by escaping the prisoners would help the USA and hurt the CSA, which seemed worth doing. They would also embarrass the Confederates. The longer Moss stayed in Andersonville, the more appealing that looked.

Ralph Lahrheim also looked north, or rather northwest. “Storm coming,” he remarked.

Since Moss couldn't argue with him, he nodded. Big thunderheads were building and rolling toward the prison camp. "Wouldn't want to fly through those," he said, which was the Lord's truth. The clouds towered higher than a fighter's ceiling, and were full of turbulence that could damn near tear the wings off an airplane.

"I don't much fancy being under them when they get here, either." Captain Lahrheim retreated toward the prisoner barracks.

He wasn't a particularly clever man, which didn't mean he was wrong here. Moss didn't fancy staying out in the open once the storm broke, either. The rain would be bad enough. If you were unlucky, lightning would be worse.

The first raindrops started kicking up puffs of dust from the red dirt just as Moss ducked into his barracks. The inevitable nonstop card game paused for a moment as people made sure he was someone to be trusted. Then the players got back to the serious business at hand: "I'll see that, and I'll raise you five clams."

More rain fell, drumming on the roof. That roof would start leaking any minute. Men who weren't playing cards set buckets and pots where they'd do the most good. Lightning flashed. God's artillery followed close on its heels.

"Well, this is fun," somebody said. The crack got a laugh, but a laugh distinctly nervous around the edges.

Having grown up in Chicago and spent a lot of time in Ontario, Moss had seen his share of several different flavors of bad weather. What Georgia got, though, was different from anything he was used to. It was more . . . *energetic* was the first word that came to mind, and it fit pretty well.

Rain came down as if Noah were somewhere just over the next rise. Moss didn't know about forty days and forty nights, but the next forty minutes marked as ferocious a cloudburst as he'd ever imagined. Lightning crackled again and again, a couple of times close enough to make all his hair stand on end. The thunder that followed sounded like a dress rehearsal for the end of the world.

"Liable to be tornadoes on the edge of a storm like this," a POW observed.

"We're safe, then. We're not on the edge. We're in the goddamn middle," another prisoner said.

“Besides, who’d notice anything as small as a tornado in the middle of this?” a would-be wit added. He got a laugh, but all he did was prove he didn’t know the first thing about tornadoes, as several POWs from the Midwest loudly explained to him. Moss agreed, even if he didn’t fuss and fume about it. Wherever tornadoes went, they made themselves noticed.

Colonel Summers looked less and less happy with each minute the downpour went on. Moss had a pretty good notion why, too. He sidled up to the senior officer and murmured, “How well is the tunnel shored up?”

“We’ll find out, won’t we?” was all Monty Summers said. Moss nodded. If something went wrong, there was damn-all he or any other prisoner could do about it right this minute.

Before too long, he stopped worrying about the tunnel. He started worrying about whether they would have to be rescued by rowboat instead. That seemed a much more immediate problem. He also wondered whether the Confederates had any rowboats handy. Had they anticipated storms this big?

Looking out the windows helped very little. Except when lightning tore across the sky, it was almost night-dark. And what the lightning illuminated was mostly a bumper crop of raindrops.

But after something less than an hour, the storm eased. The thunderheads glided off to the east with ponderous dignity. The subtropical sun of Georgia summer came out again. The ground started to steam—not just the puddles and ponds the rain had left behind but the ground itself.

Colonel Summers strode to the north-facing window. The starch came out of his shoulders; he might have aged ten years in ten seconds. “There’s a hole in the ground not far from the deadline inside the fence,” he said, his tone that of a man in the room with a deathbed. And so he might have been, for that hole meant the passing of many men’s hopes.

No one had ever accused the Confederate guards of brilliance. If they’d had any brains at all, they would have been at the front doing something more useful for their country than this. But they didn’t have to be Sir Isaac Newton to figure out that holes in the ground, especially long, straight ones like this, didn’t happen by themselves.

One of the guards who’d squelched through the mud to the subsidence

sighted along it as if down the barrel of a rifle. What he saw when he did was the barracks where Moss stood waiting for the other shoe to drop.

He didn't have to wait long. The Confederates advanced on the building. One of them fell on his can in the slick red mud. Normally, the U.S. captives would have laughed and jeered at his clumsiness. No one made a peep now. The guards were unlikely to find much funny about an escape attempt, especially one they hadn't noticed till the storm betrayed it.

"Y'all come out right now!" one of them shouted. "Y'all come out or else."

The prisoners *did* come out; Moss, for one, didn't think the guards were kidding about that *or else.* Crashing sounds from inside the barracks declared that the Confederates were taking the place apart, looking for where the tunnel started. Along with everybody else in green-gray, Moss stood glumly in the mud, waiting for them to find it.

And they did. He'd known they would. They were stupid, but not stupid enough to miss it. Their leader came out with his face even hotter than the weather. "You sons of bitches!" he screamed. "How dare you try and escape from this here prison? How *dare* you?"

"We have the right." Moss spoke up, the lawyer in him touched by that peculiar brainless fury. "The Geneva Convention says so."

That rocked the Confederate guard officer back on his heels. But he rallied, barking, "It also says I got the right to punish the bastards who try an' break out. 'Fess up, y'all. Who worked on that there tunnel? Rest of you'll have an easier time if we can punish the real criminals."

Every single U.S. prisoner raised his hand at the same time. Most of them hadn't had anything to do with the tunnel. Some, the new fish, hadn't even known it was there. They raised their hands anyway, without hesitation. Moss was proud of them.

What the guard officer felt was something else again. "All right. *All right,*" he said heavily, and snorted like a boar hog. "Y'all reckon you're so goddamn smart. Well, you'll all catch it together, then, and see how you like *that.*" He stormed away. Moss hoped he would take a pratfall in the mud, but no such luck. The rain was on the Confederate side every which way today.

D r. Leonard O'Doull was about to get on a train that would take him back from Virginia to Ohio (or perhaps, given the way things were going, only to western Pennsylvania) when a clerk bounced out of a command car with a canvas sack slung over his shoulder. "Hang on, Doc!" he called. "I got mail for youse guys."

Youse guys was as far outside the bounds of ordinary English as the Confederate *y'all.* A lot of languages had separate forms for second-person singular and plural. English didn't, but kept trying to invent them. The thought flashed through O'Doull's mind and flew away in a split second, replaced by simple joy. "Give it here," he told the clerk. "I thought it would be weeks catching up with us."

Red Crosses adorned the tops of the cars and the sides of the locomotive. Locomotive and cars alike were painted white. With luck, that would keep the Confederates from dropping bombs on the train or machine-gunning it from the air. There had been a few horrible incidents, but only a few. There had also been a few south of the Mason-Dixon line. O'Doull wondered if Jake Featherston's propaganda machine had manufactured those, but wouldn't have been surprised if they proved real. War was full of things like that.

He stopped worrying about the war when he saw his wife's handwriting on a letter with a stamp from the Republic of Quebec. Sorting through the pile, he found several of those, and one from his brother-in-law, Georges Galtier. Seeing that one made him smile in a different way. Among his wife's relatives, Georges was the zany, the cuckoo, the odd man out—sometimes very odd indeed.

"Gotta go, Doc. Good luck to you." Without waiting for a reply, the Army mail clerk hopped back into the command car and drove away.

O'Doull carried the stack of envelopes and magazines and newspapers and small packages up into the train. "Mail call!" he shouted, and for the next couple of minutes he was the most popular guy around.

Once the mail was all doled out, that popularity naturally faded. Only Granville McDougald hung around. He looked glum. To show why, he held up an envelope. It had a big handstamp on it: RETURN TO SENDER. ADDRESSEE DECEASED.

"I'm sorry, Granny," O'Doull said. "Who is it?"

"Fellow I've known since the Great War. He lost a hand then, so they wouldn't let him stay in the Army, not even as a medic. Dammit, Don was a good guy—one of the best. Now I've got to see if I can come up

with his sister's address, find out what happened to him."

The letter had gone to Trenton, New Jersey. Confederate bombers certainly reached that far. But other things could happen to a middle-aged man, too. As a middle-aged man himself, O'Doull knew that much too well. "I'm sorry he's gone," he repeated. "Whatever it was, I hope it was quick."

"Yeah. Amen," McDougald said. They'd both seen too many men who lingered in agony and would not let go of life, even if some of them wanted to. A fast end—*dead before he knew what hit him*—was far from the smallest mercy the world had to offer, and the world didn't offer it often enough.

"Here." O'Doull reached into his bag and pulled out a bottle of brandy. "Have a knock of this. Medicinal, you know."

"Sure. Thanks, Doc. You're a medical genius." McDougald took the bottle and raised it in salute. "Here's to you, Don." He took one long swig, then handed it back. O'Doull put it away and closed the bag.

As an officer, O'Doull had a Pullman berth. He took his letters there to read them in curtained-off privacy. He opened the one from Georges first. It was the usual nonsense from his brother-in-law: the usual nonsense with the usual ironic sting. *Aren't you glad I am not an English-speaking Canadian?* Georges wrote—in English, not the French that was his usual language and that he used for almost all of the letter. He went on in English for one more sentence: *If I were, you might have to shoot me.* After that, he returned to his own tongue and the usual doings in and around Rivière-du-Loup.

O'Doull wondered whether Georges had had someone else compose that English for him. He would have studied the language in school before the Great War, when Quebec was still part of Canada, but when would he have needed it since? Of course, being Georges, he might have remembered it just so he could make a sarcastic nuisance of himself thirty years later. The uprising in anglophone Canada worried O'Doull, too, and not because he might be called on to pick up a rifle himself.

He went through his wife's letters one by one, starting with the earliest. He got more gossip from Rivière-du-Loup, and a different view of a small scandal involving a greengrocer and the butcher's wife. Georges had treated the whole thing as a joke. To Nicole, the butcher was a brute and his wife looking for happiness wherever she

could find it. O'Doull himself knew all the people involved, but not well. He wouldn't have cared to judge where, if anywhere, the rights and wrongs lay.

Nicole didn't talk about the Canadian uprising till her next to last letter. Then she wrote, *There is a bill in the House of Deputies to extend military service. I am lighting candles and praying it does not pass.*

"So am I, sweetheart," O'Doull muttered, and then, *"Moi aussi."* He'd seen news about that bill, too. The United States were doing everything they could to get the Republic of Quebec to contribute more men to quelling the revolt north of the forty-ninth parallel. That way, the United States wouldn't have to pull so many of their own men off the fighting front against the Confederates, or even out of rebellion-wracked Utah.

But if the Republic of Quebec did contribute more soldiers, one of them was much too likely to be a young man named Lucien O'Doull. One of the great advantages of living in Quebec was that the country was technically neutral, even if it inclined toward the USA. Leonard O'Doull hadn't had to worry about his boy's becoming a soldier. He hadn't had to—but now he did.

Nicole, naturally, kept a close eye on the bill's progress. Her latest letter reported that it had come out of committee. *I do not know anyone who favors this bill, not a single soul,* she wrote bitterly. *It moves forward anyway. It moves forward because the politicians are afraid of what the United States will do to us if it fails.*

She was bound to be right about that. Without the United States, there wouldn't have been a Republic of Quebec. The Republic's economy had very strong ties to the USA, as strong as the Americans could make them. If Quebec made the United States unhappy, the USA could make the Republic unhappier.

O'Doull swore under his breath. He understood both sides, but, because of Lucien, hoped the Republic's politicians would show some backbone. *All politics is personal,* he thought.

After getting everything off her chest, his wife went back to family chatter and the nine-days' wonders of Rivière-du-Loup. It was as if she didn't want to look at what she'd written about the bill, either. Only one more sentence at the end of the letter betrayed her worry: *I wish you were home.*

"I wish I was home, too, dammit," O'Doull muttered. But he damn

well wasn't, and whose fault was that? No one's but his own. The United States were his country, and he'd volunteered to help them in a way that best matched his skills and talents. And so here he was in a white-painted train, rumbling along toward more trouble. "Happy day."

He wondered how the United States could find more trouble than they already had. With Japan bearing down on the Sandwich Islands, with the Confederates raising hell in Ohio and heading for Pennsylvania, with the Mormons still kicking up their heels in Utah and the Canucks north of the border, that looked as if all the troubles in the world, or at least on the continent, had come home to roost.

Back before the Great War, people had talked about how encircled the United States were, with the CSA, Canada, Britain, and France all keeping a wary eye on the giant they'd tied down. The country had burst its bounds in the war, and dominated North America for a generation. Now everybody else was trying to get the ropes back on again.

If Canada broke away from U.S. occupation, if British influence returned to the northern part of the continent, how long could the Republic of Quebec stay independent? That had to be on the minds of the politicians in Quebec City. It was on Leonard O'Doull's mind, too. But so was his son, and his son counted for infinitely more.

Engine puffing, iron wheels screeching against the track and throwing up sun-colored sparks, the train stopped. O'Doull opened the curtains in front of the window and looked out. They were, as far as he could tell, in the middle of nowhere. Something had gone wrong up ahead, but he couldn't make out what.

The conductor was a Medical Service corporal. O'Doull hoped he made a better corpsman than conductor, because he wasn't very good at his secondary role. But he did have an answer when the doctor asked him what had happened farther west: "Sabotage." He seemed to take a certain somber pleasure in the word.

" 'Osti!" O'Doull burst out, which made the noncom give him a curious look. O'Doull looked back in plain warning. The other man decided walking down the corridor would be a good idea.

O'Doull shook his head. It wasn't that he didn't believe the corporal. No, the trouble was just the opposite. As long as Confederate operatives sounded reasonably Yankeelike, they could hide in plain

sight till they went off to work mischief in the middle of the night.

No doubt U.S. operatives were doing the same thing on the other side of the border, and helping C.S. Negroes in their sputtering civil war against Jake Featherston's government. O'Doull hoped they were, anyhow. But that didn't do him, or this train, any good at all.

Three hours later, after a repair crew filled in a crater and laid new track across it, the train got rolling again. By then, the sun was going down in the west and O'Doull was going up in smoke. If he was going to be useful, he wanted to be *useful.* He couldn't do a damn thing stuck here on a train track.

Unlike most trains, this one rolled through the night all lit up. Trains full of soldiers and weapons and raw materials sneaked along, trusting to darkness to hide them from Confederate aircraft. This one showed its true colors, and the enemy left it alone.

There were whispers that the Confederates sometimes used the Red Cross to disguise troop movements. O'Doull hoped that wasn't so. It would make C.S. raiders want to disregard the symbol when the USA used it, and it would make the United States distrust even legitimate Confederate uses. Things were hard enough as they were. Did they have to—could they—get even worse?

XI

B ack when Cincinnatus Driver lived in Confederate Covington before the Great War, he hadn't liked going to the zoo. Animals in cages had reminded him too strongly of the black man's plight. Then when he moved up to Des Moines after the war, he'd been able to take his kids to the zoo there and enjoy it himself. He'd felt freer there—and, to be fair, Des Moines had a much fancier zoo than Covington's.

Now things had come full circle. Here he was, back in Covington. Here he was, back in the CSA. And here he was, caged.

When the barbed-wire perimeter around the colored quarter went up, a few blacks figured it was just for show, to let colored people know who was boss without really intending to imprison them. Cincinnatus

could have told them they were fools. The Freedom Party lied about plenty of things, but not about what it thought of Negroes. Some of the optimists tried to slip between the strands or attacked them with wire cutters, right there where the guards could see them.

Cincinnatus had known for years what automatic-weapons fire sounded like. Hearing it again saddened him without greatly surprising him. The guards' callousness afterwards *did* surprise him. They left the bodies they'd shot where they fell, so the sight and, after a day or two, the stench would intimidate the Negroes inside the perimeter.

He didn't talk to Lucullus about the odious and odorous events. For one thing, visiting Lucullus probably put him on some kind of list. The powers that be in Covington already had too many reasons to put him on a list. And, for another, Lucullus remained in a state of shock at being closed off from the outside world. Cincinnatus had never dreamt the barbecue cook could stay downcast for so long, but that seemed to be what was going on.

With Lucullus . . . disabled, Cincinnatus took his troubles to the Brass Monkey instead. He didn't talk about them in the saloon, but that didn't mean they didn't go away. A lot of things dissolved in beer, and there was whiskey for what beer wouldn't melt.

Covington's colored quarter had always had a lot of saloons. People there had always had a lot of trouble that needed dissolving. Saloons were the one kind of business in the colored part of town that was doing better now than before the wire went up. Even more sorrows than usual needed drowning. And the Confederate authorities no doubt learned all sorts of things from saloon talk. Some of what they learned might even have been true.

Cincinnatus perched on a stool under one of the two lazily spinning ceiling fans. He slid a dime across the bar. "Let me have a Jax," he said.

"Comin' up." The bartender took one out of the cooler, popped the cap with a church key, and handed Cincinnatus the beer.

Resting his can against one knee, Cincinnatus closed both palms around the cold, wet bottle. "Feels good," he said, and held it for a little while before lifting it to his lips and taking a long pull. "Ah! That feels even better."

"I believe it." Sweat beaded the barkeep's forehead the way

condensation beaded the bottle. In his boiled shirt and black bow tie, he had to be hotter and more uncomfortable than Cincinnatus was.

Motion up near the ceiling caught Cincinnatus' eye. He glanced up. It was a strip of flypaper, black with the bodies of flies it had caught, twisting in the breeze from a nearby fan. That strip had been there since Cincinnatus started coming into the Brass Monkey, and probably for a long time before that. The dead flies couldn't be anything but dried-up husks. Plenty of live ones buzzed in the muggy air.

Two stools down from Cincinnatus, a very black man in dirty overalls waved to the bartender. "Gimme 'nother double," he slurred. By his voice and his potent whiskey breath, he'd had several doubles already. The bartender took his money and gave him what he asked for.

The drunk stared down into the glass as if the amber fluid inside held the meaning of life. Maybe, for him, it did. He gulped it down. When the glass was empty, the drunk set it on the bar and looked around. Whatever he saw, Cincinnatus didn't think it was in the Brass Monkey. During the last war, soldiers had called the glazed look in his eyes the thousand-yard stare. Too much combat and too much whiskey could both make a man look that way.

"What is we gonna do?" the drunk asked plaintively. Was he talking to Cincinnatus, to the bartender, to himself, or to God? No one answered. After half a minute of silence, the Negro brought out the question again, with even more anguish this time: "What *is* we gonna do?"

The barkeep ignored him, polishing the battered bar top with a none too clean rag. God ignored the drunk, too—but then, God had been ignoring Negroes in the CSA far longer than the Confederacy had been an independent country. If the man was talking to himself, would he have asked the same question twice? That left Cincinnatus. He thought about ignoring the drunk like the bartender, but he didn't have a polishing rag handy. Swallowing a sigh, he asked, "What are we gonna do about what?"

"Oh, Lordy!" Resignation and annoyance mixed in the bartender's voice. "Now you done got him started."

The drunk, lost in his own fog of alcohol and pain, might not have heard the barkeep. But Cincinnatus' words somehow penetrated. "What is we gonna do about what?" he echoed. "What is we gonna do about *us*?—dat's what."

He might have been pickled in sour mash. That didn't mean the

question didn't matter. No, it didn't mean anything of the sort. Cincinnatus wished it did. "What *can* we do about us?" he asked in return.

"Damfino," the drunk said. "Yeah, damfino. But we gots to do *somethin',* on account of they wants to kill us all. Kill us all, you hear me?"

His voice rose to a frightened, angry shout. Cincinnatus heard him, all right. So did about half the colored quarter of Covington, Kentucky. Even the bartender couldn't ignore him anymore. "Hush, there. Easy, easy," the man said, putting away the rag. He might have been trying to gentle a spooked horse. "Ain't nothin' *you* kin do about it, Hesiod."

Hesiod muttered and mumbled to himself. "Gots to be somethin' somebody kin do," he said. "*Gots* to be. If'n they ain't, we is all dead."

Before the barbed wire went up, Cincinnatus would have taken that for no more than a drunk's maunderings. He still took it for a drunk's maunderings—what else was it?—but not just for that, not any more. If Freedom Party goons wanted to reach into the quarter they'd cordoned off, take out some Negroes, and do away with them, they would. Who'd stop them? Who'd even know for certain what they'd done?

Hesiod slapped four bits on the bar. "Gimme 'nother double," he said, and then, as if still ordering the drink, "Gots to kill them ofays. Kill 'em, you hear me?"

"Here you is." The bartender set the drink in front of him. "Now you get outside o' this. When you ain't drinkin', shut your damn mouth. You gonna open it so wide, you falls in."

There was another home truth, even if the Brass Monkey was a long way from home. Somebody in the dive—maybe even the barkeep himself—was bound to be spying for the white man, spying for the government. Some blacks thought they could make deals with the devil, grab safety for themselves at the expense of their fellows, their friends, their families.

Cincinnatus didn't believe it, not for a minute. Like any wild beast, sooner or later the Freedom Party would bite the hand that fed it. Anyone who thought it would do anything else was bound to be a sucker. No, Jake Featherston had never bothered lying about what he aimed to do with and to Negroes, because that was exactly what so many whites in the CSA wanted to hear.

“Them ofays come in here, we gots to shoot ’em! *Shoot* ’em, hear me?” Hesiod said.

The only trouble with that was, the white men would shoot back. And they were the ones with the heavy weapons. Lucullus Wood had seen as much, and Lucullus knew more than anybody else about the guns the Negroes in Covington had. Lucullus, no doubt, had brought a lot of those guns into the colored part of town.

Expecting a drunk to know what Lucullus knew was bound to be blind optimism. Cincinnatus did say, “Anybody shoot at the ofays, everybody gonna be real sorry.” He didn’t want Hesiod grabbing a .22 and trying to blow out the brains of the first white cop he saw.

“Everybody real sorry already,” Hesiod said, breathing more bourbon into Cincinnatus’ face. “How you reckon things git worse?”

Before Cincinnatus could say anything to that, the bartender spoke up: “Things kin *always* git worse.” He did not sound like a man who intended to let himself be contradicted.

And he did not impress Hesiod. “What they gonna do? Line us up an’ shoot us?”

“Matter of fact, yes.” This time, Cincinnatus spoke before the barkeep could. “They’d do that. They wouldn’t lose a minute o’ sleep, neither.”

“But they’s already doin’ it. *Already,*” Hesiod said triumphantly. “They ship your ass to one o’ them camps, you don’t come out no more. They shoots you there, else they kills you some other kind o’ way. Might as well shoot back at them ofay motherfuckers. They come after us, we gots nothin’ to lose.”

A considerable silence followed. Both Cincinnatus and the bartender wanted to tell Hesiod he was wrong. Both of them wanted to, but neither one could. He was too likely not to be wrong at all.

Cincinnatus finished his Jax, set the bottle on the bar, and walked out of the Brass Monkey. The tip of his cane tapped against the sawdust-strewn floor, and then against the battered sidewalk outside. He still carried the cane everywhere he went, but it wasn’t a vital third limb for him the way it had been when he was first getting around after the car hit him. He wasn’t as spry as his father, but he got around tolerably well these days.

Seneca Driver was listening to the wireless when Cincinnatus came

back to the house where he'd grown up. The Confederates and the Yankees were jamming each other's stations extra hard these days, and most of what came out of the wireless set's speakers were hisses and unearthly whines.

"What you doin' home so quick, Son?" Seneca had been born a slave, and still spoke with the broad accent of a black man who'd never had a chance to get an education. "Reckoned you'd stay down at de saloon longer."

"No." Cincinnatus shook his head. "Can't get away from bad news anywhere." After so many years in Iowa, his own speech sounded half-Yankee, especially by comparison to what he heard around himself here. He laughed bitterly. And a whole fat lot of good not sounding ignorant was likely to do him!

"These is hard times," Seneca said. "We gots to be like turtles an' pull our heads into our shell an' not come out till things is better."

Most of the time, that would have been good advice. Cincinnatus was sure it had worked for his father many times before. But what were you supposed to do when those troubling you wanted to smash the turtle's shell to get at the meat inside? What then? Cincinnatus had no answers, and feared no one else did, either.

S omewhere up ahead, a machine gun started chattering. Armstrong Grimes threw himself flat. Bullets cracked past overhead. Any time you could hear bullets cracking, they came too damn close.

Armstrong shared a stretch of brick wall near the southern outskirts of Salt Lake City with Yossel Reisen. "Don't these Mormon maniacs ever give up?" he demanded—more of God, probably, than of the Congresswoman's nephew.

God had nothing to say. Yossel did: "Doesn't look like it. Long as they've got guns and people to shoot 'em, they're going to keep fighting."

"People." Armstrong made it into a swear word. Yossel was too right. Some of the Mormons who carried rifles, pistols, and grenades were women. Some of the Mormons who crewed mortars and machine guns were women, too. From everything Armstrong had seen, they fought just as hard and just as well as their male counterparts. He didn't know if that old saw about the female of the species' being more

deadly than the male was true, but in Utah she sure wasn't any *less* deadly.

Mormon women usually fought to the death whenever they could. They had their reasons, most of them good. U.S. soldiers who captured women in arms were inclined to take a very basic revenge. That went against regulations. Officers lectured about how naughty it was. It went on happening anyway. Armstrong didn't see how to stop it. If he caught some gal who was trying to kill him . . . It was more interesting than thinking about shooting a guy the size of a defensive tackle, that was for sure.

Down in the Confederate States, some of the black guerrillas were of the female persuasion. The bastards in butternut who caught them served them the same way. U.S. propaganda said that only went to show what a bunch of cruel and miserable bastards the Confederates were. Armstrong didn't doubt the Confederates were cruel and miserable bastards; they'd come too close to killing him too many times for him to doubt it. But raping captives wasn't one of the reasons he didn't, not anymore. He understood the enemy in ways he hadn't before.

That sparked a new thought. He turned to Yossel Reisen and said, "You ever get the idea we're more like the assholes on the other side of the line who're trying to kill us than we are like the fancy-pants fuckers back in Philly who give us orders?"

He realized he could have picked somebody better than the Jew to ask. Yossel's aunt was one of those fancy-pants folks. If he'd wanted to, he almost certainly could have got out of being conscripted. That he hadn't either spoke well for him or said he was a little bit nuts, depending.

But he nodded now. "Oh, hell, yes. I wonder how many guys in the War Department have ever had lice. Maybe a few in the last war, when they were lieutenants or something."

"Not many, I bet," Armstrong said. "People like that, they would've found cushy jobs back then, too."

"Wouldn't be surprised." Reisen took a pack of cigarettes out of a tunic pocket, stuck one in his mouth, and offered the pack to Armstrong. Once they were both smoking, he went on, "Did I ever tell you my Uncle David only has one leg?"

There weren't a whole lot of families in the USA that didn't have a

wounded or mutilated male relative. Armstrong said, “Maybe you did. I think so, but I’m not sure.”

“Aunt Flora could have kept him out of the Army if he’d wanted her to. Same with me,” Yossel said, his voice matter-of-fact. “But you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do. Otherwise, how can you stand yourself?” After a moment, he added, “Did I ever tell you Uncle David’s a fire-breathing Democrat?”

“Yeah, I think you did,” Armstrong answered. Because Reisen seemed to expect him to, he asked, “How does your aunt like it?”

“She doesn’t,” Yossel said, as matter-of-factly as before. “They still get along with each other well enough, but they argue whenever they talk about politics.”

Before Armstrong could say anything, a horrible screech filled the air. “Screaming meemies!” he yelled, and folded himself as small as he could, down there in the foxhole that was now suddenly, horribly, on the wrong side of the fence. Yossel Reisen did the same.

The spigot mortar burst with a roar like the end of the world. A lot of the rounds from the Mormons’ weird makeshift artillery were duds. The ones that weren’t packed a hell of a wallop. The ground shook under Armstrong. For a horrid moment, he thought the foxhole would collapse and bury him alive.

What if it did? The headline would be FORMER FIRST LADY’S NEPHEW KILLED IN COMBAT! Armstrong would make a one-sentence add-on to the story—*Another soldier also died*—if that.

When he could hear anything but the thunder of the explosion, he heard people screaming. There in the bottom of the hole, his eyes met Yossel Reisen’s. He knew exactly what Yossel was thinking, because he was thinking the same thing himself. *Oh, hell,* or words to that effect.

He wanted to come out of the safety of the foxhole about as much as he wanted to dance naked in front of the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City wagging his pecker at the gilded statue of the Angel Moroni. That might get him shot faster than this. On the other hand, it might not.

But you had to pick up your buddies. That had been drilled into him since day one of his abbreviated basic training. He’d seen the sense of it in the field, too, which wasn’t true of a lot of the crap they’d fed him in basic. If you didn’t help your buddies when they needed it most, they wouldn’t help you if you did—and you were liable to.

“Come on, dammit.” He and Yossel said the same thing at the same time, as if they were an old married couple. They’d both been around this particular block often enough, that was for damn sure.

Up they went, keeping their bellies rattlesnake-low on the ground. Rex Stowe was out there, too. The sergeant made no bones about disliking several of the new men in his section. He came to help them anyway. They were part of his job—and, again, he expected them to do the same for him.

That damned Mormon machine gunner opened up again after the spigot-mortar round went off. He knew there’d be wounded—and that there’d be guys trying to do what they could for them. Spray enough bullets around and you’d get some more wounded, maybe even some dead.

Armstrong and Sergeant Stowe reached the closest injured man at about the same time. They looked at him and then looked at each other. Armstrong was pretty sure his face wore the same horrified expression as Stowe’s. That a man could make so much noise when so little of him was left . . . War was full of nasty surprises, and it had just pulled another one on Armstrong Grimes.

“Cavendish! Hey, Cavendish!” Stowe said. When he got a momentary lull in the screaming, he asked, “You want us to bring you in, or you want to get it over with right now? Your call.”

Had that been Armstrong, he would have wanted it over and done with. He had no idea how Stowe knew the wounded man was Cavendish; there sure wasn’t enough left of his face to tell by that, and one guy’s shrieks sounded a lot like another’s. But Cavendish seemed perfectly coherent when he said, “For the love of Mike, take me in.” Then, hardly missing a beat, he went back to screaming again.

Stowe looked at Armstrong and shrugged. “He might live.”

He didn’t sound as if he believed it. Armstrong sure didn’t. He looked at what was left of Cavendish. No, he wouldn’t have wanted to go on if he looked like that. But if the other soldier did . . . “Gotta try, I guess.”

They bandaged and tourniqueted Cavendish’s wounds, stopping the worst of the bleeding. Stowe closed the one in the man’s belly with a couple of safety pins. They weren’t much, but they were better than nothing. Both Armstrong and Stowe gave him a shot of morphine. “Maybe he’ll shut up,” Armstrong said.

“Yeah, and if we gave him too much of the shit, maybe he’ll shut up for good,” Stowe said. “That’s easier than going out the way he was.” Armstrong grunted and nodded. His hands were all bloody. So were Stowe’s. The sergeant asked, “You want to take him back, or shall I?”

No corpsmen were in sight. They did the best they could, but they couldn’t be everywhere. Armstrong considered. Taking Cavendish back would get him out of the front line for a bit, but the Mormons might shoot him while he did it. He shrugged. “I’ll take care of it if you want me to.”

“Go on, then.” Stowe could make the same calculation as Armstrong. “I’ll get him on your back—you’ll want to stay low.”

“Fuckin’-A I will,” Armstrong said fervently. He’d stayed as near horizontal as he could while working on Cavendish. So had Rex Stowe. They’d both spent a lot of time—too much time, as far as Armstrong was concerned—up at the front. They’d learned what tricks there were to know about staying alive and not getting hurt. The only trouble was, sometimes all the tricks in the world didn’t do you a damn bit of good.

With what was left of Cavendish on top of him, Armstrong crawled away from the Mormon machine gun. At least the dreadfully wounded man wasn’t wriggling so much. Maybe the morphine the two noncoms had given him was taking hold.

Even half a mile back of the line, they acted a lot more regulation. A soldier in a clean new uniform stared at Armstrong and said, “What are you doing bringing a body back here? Leave him for Graves Registration.”

“Fuck you, Jack,” Armstrong said without heat. “For one thing, he ain’t dead. For another thing, he’s worth two of Graves Registration and four of you. Point me at the nearest aid station before I kick your worthless ass.”

Armstrong wasn’t small, but the other man was bigger. Fury wouldn’t have worried him. Armstrong’s complete indifference to consequences did. Maybe he thought Armstrong would just as soon kill him as look at him—and maybe he was right. He said, “There’s a tent behind that pile of bricks. It shields ’em from small-arms fire.”

“Thanks.” Armstrong headed that way, carrying Cavendish now. The wounded man was a lot lighter than he had been before he got hurt. A corpsman came out before Armstrong got halfway there. “Hey!” he

called. “Come give me a hand with this guy.”

The corpsman trotted toward him. When he got close enough to take a good look at Cavendish, he stopped short, his boots kicking up dust. “Jesus!” he said.

“Tell me about it,” Armstrong said. “You should’ve seen him before my sergeant and me patched him up. But he said he wanted to live if he could.” He shrugged. “What are you gonna do when a guy says that?”

“Jesus.” The corpsman looked green, and he’d seen some of the worst things war could do. “Well, I guess we’ve got to try. I’ll help you get him to the tent.”

“Thank you.” Cavendish’s voice was dreamy and far away. Armstrong had thought he’d long since passed out. The corpsman looked as if he’d just heard a ghost.

The surgeon in the tent did a double take when he saw Cavendish. Armstrong got out of there before the doc went to work. Watching would have made him sick. That was crazy, but it was true. He went back up to the front line. There, at least, death and mutilation came at random. You didn’t know about them ahead of time. That made them, if not tolerable, at least possible to bear.

J efferson Pinkard wondered why the hell the vice president of the Cyclone Chemical Company wasn’t in the Army. Cullen Beauregard —“Call me C.B.”—Slattery couldn’t have been more than thirty. He was obviously healthy, and just as obviously sharp.

“Oh, yes, sir,” he said. “Anything alive, this’ll shift. You don’t need to worry about that at all.”

“You make it for bugs, though.”

“That’s right.” Slattery nodded.

“But it’ll kill rats and mice,” Jeff said. C.B. Slattery nodded again. Jeff went on, “And cats and dogs?” Another nod. “And people?”

“Yes, sir. It will absolutely kill people. That’s why you’ve got to be careful when you use it,” Slattery said. “Matter of fact, the chemical’s the same one some Yankee states use to kill criminals.”

“Really? Is that a fact?” Jeff said. One more nod from Slattery. He was one of the noddingest people Jeff had ever met. “If you wanted to, you could use it to kill a whole bunch of people, then?”

“Absolutely. You absolutely could.” The chemical-company official didn’t ask why Pinkard might want to use his product, made to get rid of roaches and other pests, to dispose of large numbers of people instead. What he did say was, “If you use large quantities, you’d be entitled to a bulk discount.”

“That’s nice. That’s white of you, matter of fact,” Jeff said. C.B. Slattery laughed uproariously. He didn’t ask what color the people who might die were. Pretty plainly, he already knew.

Somewhere in Camp Determination, a work gang of Negroes chanted rhythmically as they carried or dug or did whatever the guards told them to do. Slattery smiled at that, too, the way he might have smiled at a bear playing with a medicine ball in a zoo.

The shape of his smile decided Jeff. This wasn’t a man who would balk at what needed discussing here. “Let’s get down to brass tacks, then,” Jeff said. “Can your firm design us a facility, I guess you’d call it, that would let us reduce the camp population without leaving the niggers still here any the wiser about what was going on inside?” He’d talked about killing people when it was in the abstract. When it got down to something he might actually do, his own words turned abstract. Reducing population didn’t seem to mean so much.

“My firm? No, sir. Sorry, but that’s not what we do. We make insecticide,” Slattery answered. Pinkard muttered under his breath; he hadn’t expected a flat refusal. But when the bright young man continued, he discovered he hadn’t got one, either: “But I can put you in touch with some design outfits that will help you along those lines. Just as a guess, I’d say you’d want to call it a delousing station or a bath-house or something like that. Sound reasonable?”

“Sounds sensible. I was thinking along those lines myself, to tell you the truth,” said Pinkard, who hadn’t been. He picked up a pencil and wrote, *Delousing? Baths?* on a sheet of foolscap. Maybe Slattery saw through him, maybe not. He went on, “Now, these outfits you’re talking about—they in Arkansas like you? If I have my druthers, I want to work with somebody local, you know what I mean?”

“I sure do, and I respect that,” Slattery said quickly. Respecting it didn’t mean agreeing with it, but did mean he’d go along if he wanted

the Cyclone Chemical Company to get the business. When Jefferson Pinkard wanted his druthers these days, he damn well got them. He remembered wishing for them in the last war, wishing and not getting. A lot of things about growing older were damned unpleasant (his last visit to the dentist leaped to mind). But if you were halfway decent at what you did, you got your druthers a lot more often than you had when you were younger. As if to underscore that, C.B. Slattery continued, “Naturally, we work with people from Little Rock a lot of the time. But I do believe a couple of these outfits have branches in Texas—Dallas or Houston, I’m not quite sure which.”

“Well, you can wire me the details when you get home,” Jeff said, and it was Slattery’s turn to write himself a note. “I’ll do some checking on my own, too.” If Slattery thought he could set up some sweetheart deal, maybe rig kickbacks for Cyclone Chemical, he could damn well think again.

He wasn’t fool enough to let on that he’d had anything like that in mind. “You go right ahead, sir. I think you’ll find out the firms I recommend are competitive in quality and in price.” He paused to pull out a pack of cigarettes, offer one to Jeff, and then stick one in his own mouth. Once they both had lights, he remarked, “Something else occurs to me.”

“What’s that?”

“You might want to site this, ah, facility away from the main camp and take prisoners to it. You’d be less likely to spook the spooks that way, if you know what I mean.” Slattery had a disarming grin.

He also had a point. Jeff scribbled some more on that sheet of foolscap. “Could be,” he said. It applied the same principle as telling Negroes they were going to another camp when they got into the trucks from which they would never get out. “We could move ’em right on through, just like a . . . factory.”

The word that first crossed his mind, that caused the pause, was *slaughterhouse.* He didn’t want to say that, any more than he wanted to talk about killing Negroes rather than reducing population. It made him think too openly about what this camp was for.

“You sure could.” C.B. Slattery fairly radiated enthusiasm. “It’d be a privilege for my firm to be affiliated with such a patriotic enterprise. Freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jeff echoed automatically. “You’ll be hearing from us. I

expect some of those designers may, too, so get me that word quick as you can. Like I say, though, I'll check out some other outfits in these parts along with 'em."

"You know your business best." No, Slattery wasn't about to argue. No matter who built the places where the Negroes went in and didn't come out, the chemical that made sure they didn't come out would come from his company. He said, "Freedom!" one more time and hurried out of Pinkard's office. By the way he moved, his next appointment was just as urgent and just as important as this one. It wasn't likely to be, but treating it that way made him a good businessman.

Jeff got up and watched him leave the administrative center, then went back to his desk. He picked up the telephone and called Richmond. He wanted Ferdinand Koenig knowing what was going on every step of the way. The Attorney General heard him out—he did try to keep things short—and then said, "This all sounds pretty good. Only one thing bothers me a little."

"What's that?" Jeff asked. Whatever bothered Jake Featherston's right-hand man was guaranteed to be dead on arrival.

"This whole business of building the, uh, fumigator—whatever the hell you want to call it—away from the camp. That means we're using trucks again. I thought one of the big points of building the fumigator in the first place was getting away from the goddamn trucks."

"Well, yes, sir," Jeff said reluctantly. "Only problem I see with building it here is, the niggers won't take long to figure out this is the end of the line if we do. We'll have more trouble from 'em in that case. Camp's been pretty quiet so far, and I'd like to keep it that way."

"I understand that, but we've got to think about efficiency, too," Koenig said. "If we can give your trucks back to the Army—minus your exhaust hookup, of course"—he laughed, which meant Pinkard had to do the same—"that'll help the war effort a lot. We need all the transport we can get right now, what with the big push into Pennsylvania. And you've got a good solid perimeter around the camp, right? You've got guards who know what they're doing, right?"

"Well, yes, sir," Jeff repeated. He couldn't very well say the camp didn't have a solid perimeter, or that the guards didn't know what the hell they were doing. If he said that, he wouldn't stay camp commandant for another five minutes, and he wouldn't deserve to,

either.

“All right, then,” the Attorney General said. “Any trouble comes up, I reckon you’ll be able to handle it. A few bursts from the guards’ submachine guns should settle most troubles pretty damn quick. If they don’t, well, the machine guns in the towers outside the barbed wire sure as hell will.”

“Yes, sir,” Pinkard said one more time. Everything Ferd Koenig said was true. If the Negroes caused trouble, the guards ought to be able to smash it.

“Good.” Koenig sounded pleased. “You keep at it, Pinkard. I’m sure everything will work out fine. Freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jeff said, but he was talking to a dead line.

He hung up, swearing under his breath. Everything Koenig said was true, yeah, but what he said was only part of the story. Jeff remembered how things had been back at Camp Dependable in Louisiana when his guards were reducing population by taking niggers out to the swamps and shooting them. Not only had that put a strain on the white men, it had also made them stay on edge every minute of the day and night. The Negroes in the camp had known too well they had nothing to lose. If they tried to nail a guard, they’d get killed, sure. But if they didn’t, they’d get killed anyhow. So why not try to take somebody with you when you went?

Camp Determination wasn’t like that now. The blacks here believed this wasn’t the last stop. They were wrong, but the belief itself mattered. It mattered a lot. Because they still believed they had a future, they were much more docile than they would have been otherwise.

Building the fumigator here would ruin all that. They’d figure out what was what. How could they help it? Everybody knew Negroes weren’t as smart as white people, but they wouldn’t have to be geniuses to figure this out. And guards would have to stay on their toes every second from then on.

But now Jeff had his orders. He wished he’d never called Richmond. He should have just gone ahead and built the fumigator where he wanted it and then told Ferd Koenig what he’d done. The Attorney General would have gone along with it. The way things worked out, Jeff was stuck.

He swore again, louder this time, sat down to look at a map of Camp Determination, and then swore some more. Pretty plainly, he'd have to build two fumigators, one for men, the other for women and pickaninnies. Otherwise, the sexes would meet on the way to getting eliminated, and that would cause all kinds of trouble—to say nothing of making inmates' attitudes even worse than they would be anyhow.

After another look at the map—and some more venting of his spleen—he decided how things would have to work. The fumigators could go at, or even next to, the present outer boundaries of the camp. That way, he could use the current perimeter to separate them from the areas where the Negroes lived. Maybe he could send people through on the pretext that they had to be deloused before going to a new camp. That would explain why they didn't come back.

How long could he keep them from learning that only bodies left Camp Determination? Not forever, he feared. But he could buy at least some time that way. The longer he didn't have to worry about uppity niggers, the better he liked it. And he would be following orders.

I rving Morrell got his first look at one of the new Confederate barrels just outside of Salem, Ohio. The town, east of Canton, called itself "Ohio's City of Friends." It had been founded by Quakers, and many still lived there. What was happening around Salem now had nothing to do with those peaceable people or their ideals.

A U.S. 105 firing over open sights had knocked out the barrel in question. The young lieutenant who gravely explained that to Morrell didn't see anything funny about it. He didn't associate it with Jake Featherston's ranting tract of the same name. Morrell wondered whether to explain why he was laughing. In the end, he didn't. Any joke you had to explain wasn't funny.

Neither was the new barrel. It stank of gasoline and cordite and burnt paint and rubber and burnt flesh. Morrell's nostrils tried to pinch in on themselves to hold out as much of that horrible smell as they could. His stomach lurched as soon as he recognized it. He'd smelled it too often before.

No barrel in the world could withstand a direct hit from a 105 at point-blank range. *Getting* hits with an artillery piece even at point-blank range was a much bigger problem, though. The best antibarrel weapon was still another barrel.

When Morrell walked around the charred corpse of this one, he got the feeling that the machines he commanded were like boys trying to stop men. The long gun with the big bore, the sloped armor, the low profile . . . This was what the USA should have had at the start of the war.

He turned to the lieutenant. “Can the inch-and-a-half guns on our barrels hurt these monsters at all?”

“They can penetrate the side armor, sir,” the youngster answered. “That frontal plate—I’m afraid not. Our barrels’ armor-piercing rounds mostly just bounce off.”

“Happy day,” Morrell muttered, and then, “We’ve *got* to upgun. That’s all there is to it.”

“Yes, sir,” the lieutenant said. “But the turret ring on our present model won’t let us mount a three-incher like these bastards have. Two and a fraction, that’s it—and even then we need a new turret to hold the larger weapon.”

“We’ve got to do it,” Morrell said, more to himself than to his guide. “Building a whole new machine from the ground up—well, we should have started a long time ago. Since we didn’t, we’ve just got to squeeze the most out of what we have for a while longer.”

“Can we?” the lieutenant asked—a question Morrell wished he didn’t have to contemplate.

After a moment’s thought, he answered, “Of course we can, son—because we’ve got to. Now where’s the map that shows our armored dispositions?”

“It’s back in town, sir,” the young lieutenant said. Morrell wished it were farther forward: one of a lot of things he wished that he wasn’t going to get. Back to Salem they went. Refugees from farther west clogged the road. Some of them tried to take shelter in Salem, even as the people who lived there cleared out.

Once upon a time, before bombs and artillery started landing on it, Salem had been a pleasant little city. It had held ten or twelve thousand people, and had boasted a flour mill, a dairy outfit, a couple of china factories, and some metalworks. It also boasted a monument to one Edwin Coppock, an abolitionist who’d raided Harpers Ferry with John Brown, and who’d been hanged with him. If the Confederates took Salem, they would blow that to hell and gone.

When Morrell actually got a look at the armored dispositions in northeastern Ohio, his own disposition soured, and his temper almost blew to hell and gone. “My God!” he burst out. “They’ve got them scattered all over the damned landscape!”

“They support the infantry, sir,” the shavetail said.

“No, no, no, no, no!” Morrell didn’t pound his head against the wall in the pleasant little clapboard house now doing duty for his headquarters. Why he didn’t, he couldn’t have said. As far as he was concerned, that restraint should have been worth a medal. “We’ve been at war for more than a year now. Hasn’t anybody learned anything about anything?”

“Sir?” The lieutenant, an earnest young man, realized he was out of his element.

Morrell didn’t try to explain. It would have taken too long. But the officer he was replacing hadn’t learned a thing from two wars’ worth of barrel tactics. The one thing you needed to do to get the most out of your armor was to mass it, to use it as the spearhead to your attack. Putting some of it here, some of it there, and some more of it in a no-account town twenty miles away was asking—begging—to get defeated in detail. And the Confederates—who, while they were manifest sons of bitches, were also capable sons of bitches when it came to handling armor—were only too happy to oblige.

The study Morrell went into was more nearly black than brown. “How the hell can I get my forces concentrated so I can *do* something with them?” he muttered.

“How can our infantry respond to the Confederates if they don’t have barrels to stiffen them, sir?” the lieutenant asked.

The look Morrell gave him should have left him charred worse than the burnt-out C.S. barrel. “I don’t want to respond to Featherston’s fuckers,” he ground out. The young lieutenant’s eyes widened, perhaps at the obscenity but more likely at the heresy. Morrell proceeded to spell it out: “I want to make Featherston’s fuckers respond to *me.* I can’t do that, can I, unless I can pull together enough barrels to get their attention?” It seemed obvious to him. Why didn’t it seem obvious to anybody else in a green-gray uniform?

“But, sir, if the infantry isn’t supported, the enemy will just slice through it, the way he has before.” The lieutenant sounded like a man trying to reason with a dangerous lunatic.

“He’s welcome to try,” Morrell said, which made the shavetail’s eyes get big all over again. “If I have a decent force of barrels of my own, though, I’ll land on his flank and cut his supply line neat as you please. Let’s see how much slicing he does without gasoline or ammo.”

He waited. The lieutenant contemplated. “Do you really think you could do that, sir?” He was too polite and too far under military discipline to call Morrell a liar in so many words, but he didn’t believe him, either.

“Would they have sent me here if they didn’t think I could?” Morrell asked. “Or don’t you think the War Department knows what it’s doing?”

“Sir, if the War Department knew what it was doing, would we be in a quarter of the mess we’re in?” the lieutenant replied.

Morrell stared at him as if he’d never seen him before. In a very real way, he hadn’t. He stuck out his right hand. When the lieutenant hesitated, Morrell grabbed his hand and pumped it up and down. “Congratulations!” he said. “That’s the first halfway smart thing I’ve heard out of you.”

“Uh, sir?” He’d bewildered the lieutenant.

“Always distrust what the people too far from the front line to hear small-arms fire tell you,” Morrell said. “*Always.* Most of what they think they know is going to be out of date or wrong some other way. It will have gone through too many mouths before it finally gets to them. And a lot of them won’t *ever* have got close enough to the front to hear small-arms fire. Half the time, they won’t understand what other people are trying to tell them even if it turns out to be the gospel truth. Sometimes it does—accidents will happen.”

The young officer eyed him. “What about *you,* sir?”

“There. That’s the second smart thing you’ve said.” Morrell grinned. “All I can tell you is, I’ve got an oak-leaf cluster for my damn Purple Heart. Do I pass inspection?”

“Uh, yes, sir.” The lieutenant blushed like a schoolgirl. A glance at the short row of fruit salad on his chest showed he’d never been wounded. He probably thought that made him less of a man. Morrell had had stupid notions like that till he got shot in the leg. Nothing like a wound infection to take the romance out of war.

He got down to business. “All right, then. How secure are the telephone lines out of this place?”

“Well, we do the best we can, sir, but I can’t guarantee the bastards in butternut aren’t tapping them,” the lieutenant said. “Same with the telegraph.”

“It would be,” Morrell muttered. A war between two countries that spoke the same language was harder than other kinds just about every which way. You had to assume the enemy was listening to everything you did, and that he knew what you were up to as soon as you did. You’d give him too much credit some of the time, but you didn’t dare give him too little.

You had to assume he was listening. You had to assume he knew what you were up to . . . “Do you know, Lieutenant, I hope he is. He’s almost bound to be, isn’t he?”

“Sir?” The blank look was back on the kid’s baby face.

Morrell clapped him on the shoulder. “Never mind. Point me at a typewriter. We do have messengers we can rely on, right?” If the lieutenant told him no, he was up the well-known creek without even a canoe, much less a paddle.

But the young officer nodded. “Oh, yes, sir. They’re very reliable, and they make sure to destroy what they’re carrying if they run into trouble.”

“That’s what I wanted to hear,” Morrell said. “Now where’s that typewriter?”

For the next couple of hours, he pounded away at it. He was no secretary; he typed with his two forefingers. He wasn’t fast, but he got the job done. A look at the messengers reassured him more than the lieutenant’s praise did. They were a raffish lot, men who could be counted on to get where they were going. And if they liberated booze or smokes or a steak along the way . . . well, so much the better.

He gave them oral orders. Then he handed them the dispatches he’d written. Off they went, in command cars, on horseback, on bicycles, on shank’s mare. Before long, one-word responses started coming in by telephone and telegraph. *Received,* Morrell heard, again and again and again. He marked the map, again and again and again.

When he was satisfied, he got on the telephone. He called officer after

officer, delivered his orders, and hung up. Maybe this would work and maybe it wouldn't. It seemed worth a try, though.

One thing: U.S. reconnaissance was good. Most people who lived in Ohio, especially in this northern part of it, wanted nothing to do with the Confederates. They slipped through enemy lines, risking their necks to report on what Jake Featherston's men were up to. When Morrell heard the Confederates were assembling armor in Homeworth, a few miles west of Salem, he smiled to himself.

Their attack on Salem went in two days later. They came loaded for bear, convinced they had a big force of barrels in front of them. Morrell showed a few and shelled the Confederates heavily to slow them down. That only made them push harder. They'd just about reached Salem's outskirts . . . when the real U.S. barrel force, which had concentrated some miles to the north, roared down and struck them in the flank.

The Confederates still might have made a fight of it. They had at least as many machines as the USA did, and theirs hit harder. But they were rattled, as anybody hit from a direction he didn't expect would have been. They fell back in some disorder, and left a lot of barrels burning in front of Salem.

"That was amazing, sir!" Now the young lieutenant looked at Morrell with something not far from hero worship.

"That's what we're supposed to do, dammit," Morrell said, wondering how—and if—he could bring off the same sort of thing again.

A bner Dowling was the man who'd spotted the Confederates thinning their lines in Virginia so they could send more men into Ohio. He hadn't had the chance to attack them after he caught them doing that. Oh, no. His reward was thinning his own lines so the USA could try to smash through the Confederates' position at Fredericksburg, which hadn't worked at all. Now he was thinning them still further to send reinforcements to the West.

He took a half pint of whiskey out of his desk drawer and stared at it. Like most half pints, it was curved to fit the hand. He wasn't a man who drank to excess. He remembered General Custer. With whiskey as with women, Custer could resist everything except temptation. And Custer with a snootful was even more a bull in a china shop than he had been any other time.

No, Dowling wasn't like that—which didn't mean he was teetotal, either. Every once in a while, a nip was welcome. Sometimes you needed *not* to think about things for a little while, and whiskey was the best thought preventer this side of a blackjack. He undid the metal screw top, raised the bottle to his lips, and took a healthy slug.

His adjutant chose that moment to walk in the door.

Captain Angelo Toricelli had been with him since his unhappy stay as commandant in Salt Lake City—another one of the garden spots of the universe. Unlike some adjutants, Toricelli understood that he wasn't about to end up on Skid Row just because he drank now and again. It was embarrassing all the same.

Trying to cover that embarrassment, Dowling held out the bottle and asked, "Want some for yourself?"

"No, thank you, sir," Captain Toricelli answered—not primly, but not in a way that suggested he'd change his mind, either. "We have a message from General MacArthur inquiring how the pullback is going in this corps."

"Tell General MacArthur to—" Dowling broke off. If he went on in that vein, Toricelli would think it was the whiskey talking. That was nonsense. Dowling needed no booze to despise Daniel MacArthur. Still . . . "Tell General MacArthur to rest assured that we are complying with his orders and the War Department's."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. That's well phrased." Toricelli's dark eyes glinted. He knew what Dowling had been on the point of saying. But Dowling hadn't said it. Neither he nor the half pint could get the blame. Toricelli saluted and left the room.

Dowling eyed the little bottle. It was almost as if the narrow escape gave him the license for another drink. He shook his head and put the bottle back in the desk drawer. It would be there when he really needed it. If he drank when he didn't really need it . . . That was how trouble started.

Off in the distance, somebody's artillery opened up. He thought those were U.S. guns. With fewer foot soldiers on the ground, artillery had to take up some of the slack. Of course, some of his artillery was getting pulled west to try to stop the Confederates, too.

After fifteen or twenty minutes, the guns fell silent. Dowling hoped that meant they'd smashed whatever they were aiming at. If not, some

wireless man would rush in with news of a new disaster. And Dowling would have to try to put the pieces back together—and take the blame if Humpty Dumpty remained bits of eggshell.

His eyes went to the large-scale map of Virginia on the wall. He didn't like the way his right flank was vulnerable. He never had. General Patton, the Confederates' answer to Irving Morrell, had roared out of the mountains trying to roll him up. Patton hadn't managed it. Dowling took a certain amount of pride in the way he'd defended against the CSA's armored wizard, but they didn't pin medals on your chest for losing only a few square miles. Often that deserved a medal, but it never got one.

If Patton or some other Confederate hotshot tried charging out of the mountains again, could Dowling's corps hold the enemy again? He muttered unhappily. If the Confederates hit him as hard as they had the last time, he probably couldn't. But he brightened a little a moment later. He might not have the wherewithal to defend that he'd had before, but he was pretty damn sure the boys in butternut couldn't mount the same kind of attack as they had then. They seemed to be putting everything they had into the push through Ohio and into Pennsylvania.

He looked at the map again, then slowly nodded to himself. Ever since the war started, people had been saying that whoever could mount two big drives at once would likely win. So far, neither side had come close. Logic said the United States had the better chance. They had more men and more resources. They also had more problems. The Confederates had a smoldering Negro uprising to worry about; their response seemed to be massacre. The United States had to flabble about the Mormons, and now the Canadians, the Japanese in the Pacific, and the really mad naval struggle in the North Atlantic. With all the sideshows, they couldn't concentrate on the main event.

Captain Toricelli came in again. "Yes? What is it?" Dowling asked with a sinking feeling. His adjutant could bear bad tidings at least as well as a wireless operator.

But Toricelli only asked, "Sir, do you know a Miss Ophelia Clemens?"

"The reporter? I should say I do," Dowling answered. "I spoke with her outside General MacArthur's headquarters not more than a few weeks ago, as a matter of fact. Why?"

"Because she just pulled up in front of this building, sir," Toricelli

said. “I doubt like the dickens she’s here to talk to me.”

“Send her in. Send her in,” Dowling said. “How subversive do you think I can be?”

“I couldn’t begin to guess.” By Toricelli’s expression, though, he feared for the worst.

When Ophelia Clemens marched into Dowling’s office, she looked him in the eye and said, “General, I’d murder somebody for a drink.”

“Not me, I hope.” Dowling opened his desk drawer and, with the air of a vaudeville conjuror, produced the half pint. “Here you are, ma’am. At your service.”

“God bless you,” Ophelia Clemens said. “I hoped I could find a St. Bernard in all these Alps.” After that rhetorical outburst, she unscrewed the cap and swigged like a man. She eyed the bottle in her hand with a certain amount of respect. “That’s what they call panther piss, isn’t it?”

“Something like that,” Dowling allowed. “It sure isn’t sipping whiskey.”

She handed the half pint back to him. When he put it away without drinking, she said, “Keep it around just for poisoning visitors, do you?”

“By no means, ma’am. You misunderstand me. I’m about half an hour ahead of you, that’s all. And what besides bartender duty can I do for you on this none too lovely day?”

“Well, I’ve got my own cigarettes,” she replied, and lit one to prove it. “I don’t suppose you could spare me some truth?”

Dowling snorted. “You don’t ask for much, do you?”

“If you had it, I think you might give it to me,” Ophelia Clemens told him. “That’s more than I can say about most of the people in your line of work I know.”

“You flatter me,” he said. “Keep it up. I love it.”

“I’ll give you the reporter’s ultimate flattery, then,” she said. “How would you like to be ‘a reliable source’?”

Dowling knew what that meant: somebody who shot off his mouth

without getting called to account for it. At his age and station, such a chance tempted him more than a twenty-two-year-old virgin—more than a twenty-two-year-old professional, come to that. “Go ahead and ask,” he said, “and we’ll see how reliable I am.”

“All right.” Ophelia Clemens took out a spiral-bound notebook, opened it to a blank page, and poised a pencil above it. “How bad do things look in Ohio and Pennsylvania?”

“You just named Pennsylvania. Right there, that says we aren’t doing as well as we ought to be.” Dowling shook his head. “No, I take it back. That’s not fair. I don’t know what things are like on the ground over there. I have my own troubles, Lord knows. You can say things aren’t going as well as we wish they were.”

Her pencil scratched across the page. “Do you think Featherston’s going after Pittsburgh?”

“Too early to be sure, but that’s how it looks right now,” Dowling said.

“Uh-*huh.*” Ophelia Clemens wrote some more. “Do you know, they wouldn’t give me a straight answer in the War Department? You never heard so many variations on ‘No comment’ in all your born days. Franz Liszt couldn’t write variations like that.”

“Heh,” Dowling said doubtfully as the allusion flew over his head. Had he been up in the War Department, he would have played it cagey, too—he knew that. You could get in trouble for saying yes and being right, for saying yes and being wrong, and conversely with no as well. *No comment* looked pretty good under those circumstances.

“Can the Confederates take Pittsburgh?” Ophelia Clemens asked.

When Dowling got questions like that, being a “reliable source” looked a lot less enjoyable. “I hope not,” he blurted.

Scritch, scritch, scritch went the pencil point. “Can we stay in the war if they do take Pittsburgh?”

No, this wasn’t any fun at all. “I hope so,” Dowling answered. “Losing it would hurt us. We make an awful lot of steel there. But it’s not like Birmingham—it’s not just about the only place where we make steel. As far as that goes, we can hold on and hold out. Even so . . .”

“Will the country stand for it?” she asked. “Cleveland was supposed to

hold up the Confederates for a long time. It didn't, not for nearly long enough. It's gone. It's lost. If Pittsburgh goes the same way, won't we just say, 'Oh, no, we can't win this one,' and throw in the towel?"

"That's what Jake Featherston hopes we'll do, anyhow," Dowling said. "We've got elections coming up this fall. Now, I'm just a soldier. I'm not supposed to know anything about politics, and I mostly don't." Soldiers, even soldiers acting as reliable sources, had to say such things. Dowling—and, no doubt, Ophelia Clemens with him—knew he was being disingenuous, but he couldn't help it. He went on, "One thing I haven't seen is anybody from any party campaigning on a 'Peace Now!' platform."

Scritch, scritch, scritch. "Well, neither have I," the reporter said. "Why do you suppose that is?"

"Because everybody figures Featherston would kick us while we're down," Dowling answered at once. "Don't you? What else could it be? He's made it pretty damn clear that he tells lies whenever he opens his mouth. Or do you think I'm wrong?"

"Me?" She shook her head. "No, sir. Not even a little bit. You know the number of the beast, all right. I've been in this business for as long as you've been in the Army—longer, really, because I watched my father before I was old enough or good enough to do it myself. Jake Featherston scares the spit out of me. I've never seen anybody like him, not on this continent. Some of the people in *Action Française,* maybe, and that Mosley fellow in England, but nobody here comes close."

"We should have smashed him when we had the chance, just after he got power," Dowling said. But Featherston didn't look so dangerous then. And the USA was stuck in the economic collapse. And so . . . *Yes,* Dowling thought sourly. *And so* . . .

H ipolito Rodriguez sat on his cot in the guards' barracks at Camp Determination, methodically cleaning his submachine gun. He'd learned in the dirt and mud and dust of the trenches that a clean weapon could make the difference between life and death. The submachine gun had a more complicated apparatus than his old Tredegar, too.

Another guard, an Alabaman named Jonah Gurney, said, "Anybody'd reckon you was married to that gun." He carried his weapon when he

walked through the camp and ignored it the rest of the time. He was a younger man, not a recruit from the Confederate Veterans' Brigades. He'd never seen combat, and it showed.

"Married? No." Rodriguez shook his head. "My wife screw me, I like that. This gun screw me, I don't like nothin' no more." He pushed an oily rag through the barrel with a cleaning rod.

The rest of the men in the barracks laughed. "He got you, Jonah," somebody said. "He got you good."

By the dull flush rising on Gurney's blunt features, he already knew that. He liked ragging on other people. Oh, sure—he liked that fine. It wasn't so much fun when somebody turned the tables on him. If Rodriguez had had a dime for everybody like that he'd met, he would have been one of the richest men in Sonora, certainly too rich to be a camp guard.

Scowling, Gurney said, "You're asshole buddies with the big cheese in the camp, ain't you?"

"We were in the war together," Rodriguez answered with a shrug. Because he'd practiced stripping and assembling the submachine gun so much, he could let his hands do it while he kept an eye on the other guard. "I dunno about asshole buddies. I don't think I like the sound of that too much." He did like the sound with which a full magazine went into place: a satisfying click.

Jonah Gurney didn't seem to notice. "No?" he said. "What you aim to do about it, greaser?"

One step up from niggers—that was how Sonorans and Chihuahuans seemed to a lot of whites in the CSA. Another, smaller, click from Rodriguez's gun: the safety coming off. Casually, calmly, Rodriguez said, "What do I aim to do? I aim to blow your fucking head off, *pendejo.*" All at once, the barrel of the gun pointed straight at Gurney's nose. Rodriguez's finger twitched on the trigger.

That wasn't what shook the Alabaman. The smile on his face was. Gurney's own face went pale as a plate of grits. He tried a smile of his own. The only word that suited it was ghastly. "Hey," he said with lips and tongue that suddenly seemed numb, "I didn't mean nothin' by it, honest to God I didn't."

"Kiss my ass," Rodriguez said succinctly.

“Put down the piece, Rodriguez.” That was Troop Leader Porter, the noncom in charge of Rodriguez’s squad. “There ain’t gonna be any killing here today.”

“Thank you, Troop Leader,” Jonah Gurney gabbled. “You see what that crazy Mexican fucker was gonna do to me? Ought to take him out and—”

“Shut up.” Porter’s voice was flat and hard. “Pack up your shit and get the hell out of here. You’re reassigned, as of now. Maybe some other camp’ll take you. I don’t know. I don’t care. But you’re not gonna stay at Camp Determination another minute, and you can take that to the bank. You’re a troublemaking son of a bitch, and we’ve got no need for people like you. Get out. Fuck off.”

Gurney stared at him as if he couldn’t believe his ears. “You’re gonna back a goddamn dago against a white man?”

“I’m going to back a guard who pulls his weight against a slacker who does as little as he can to get by,” Porter said. “I wouldn’t have been real sorry to see you dead, Gurney, if it wasn’t for the paperwork I’d have to fill out to make sure Rodriguez didn’t end up in hot water over your worthless carcass.”

Gurney plainly thought himself as much abandoned and thrown over the side for no good reason as the original Jonah. He gestured toward the rest of the guards in the barracks, a wave full of angry disbelief. “Come on, y’all!” he cried. “You gonna let him get away with that? You gonna let him screw over a white man for the sake of a goddamn *Mexican*?” Disbelief stretched his voice high and shrill.

For close to a minute, nobody said anything. Nobody seemed to want to look at Gurney, or at Rodriguez, or at Troop Leader Porter. For that matter, nobody seemed to want to look at anybody else. Finally, somebody behind Gurney said, “He’s got the stripes, Jonah. Reckon that gives him the right.”

“Like hell it does!” Jonah Gurney shouted furiously. “We’re white men! That gives *us* the right. That’s what this here country’s all about, ain’t it? That’s what the Freedom Party’s all about, ain’t it?”

Again, silence stretched. This time, Porter broke it. “Go on, Jonah,” he said, his voice surprisingly gentle. “Go on now, and don’t get yourself any deeper in Dutch. I’m gonna make like I didn’t hear any of what you said just now. A man’s gotta blow off steam. I know that. But you don’t want me to have to tell the commandant you were trying to

make a mutiny, now do you?”

When Rodriguez was in the Army, they’d read out the Articles of War every so often. Making a mutiny was one of the things they could shoot you or hang you for. Even mentioning it put a chill in the hot, muggy air. Rodriguez didn’t know if camp guards came under the same military law as soldiers, but he would have bet they did.

The ominous words seemed to get home to Gurney, too. “This ain’t right, dammit,” he muttered. “My Congressman’s gonna hear about it, so help me God he is.” But he might have shrunk, standing there in plain sight. He filled his gray canvas duffel bag, slung it over his shoulder, and trudged out of the barracks.

Rodriguez nodded to Porter. “Thank you,” he said softly.

“I didn’t do it for you,” the noncom answered.

“Thank you anyway,” Rodriguez said.

His gratitude only embarrassed the troop leader. “I didn’t do it for you, dammit,” he repeated. “I did it for all of us. When we’re in there with the coons, we’ve got to know we can trust each other to guard our backs. Anybody who doesn’t care to help another man who wears the same uniform no matter what, I don’t want that son of a bitch here. I can’t trust him. Nobody can trust him.” He looked around the barracks. “We got anybody else who feels the way Gurney did? Anybody who does, clean out your footlocker and head out the door. I won’t put a bad word on your fitness report—swear to Jesus I won’t—but I want you doin’ somethin’ else. Anybody?”

No one moved. No one spoke.

“All right, then,” Porter said. “Rodriguez isn’t the only man from Sonora and Chihuahua we’ve got at this camp—not even close. Has anybody seen any sign that those people are falling down on the job? Anything at all?” Again, no one said a word. The noncom nodded. “I haven’t, either. The government and the Party—*and the Party,* mind you—thought they could do it, or they wouldn’t have recruited them in the first place, right? Y’all gonna tell Jake Featherston he doesn’t know what he’s doin’? You let me know where you want your body sent first.”

That pretty much took care of that. White men were careful around Rodriguez from then on out. He wasn’t sure whether they were afraid to say anything bad to him even if he had it coming or they were

afraid he'd shoot them if they did say anything. Either way felt awkward. He wished they would just treat him the way they treated one another. Too much to hope for, he feared.

He wasn't a Mexican, a greaser, to the Negroes in the camp. Maybe that was because they knew most Sonorans and Chihuahuans had no more use for them than most whites did. More likely, he judged, it was because to them, in his gray uniform, he was a guard. The uniform took precedence over the face.

When he went over to the women's side of the camp, the prisoners always tried to soften him up. If he'd do something for them, they made it plain, they would do something for him. And some of them left nothing to the imagination. Taking up all the offers and come-ons and out-and-out propositions would have drained a man half his age dry in nothing flat.

Some of the guards took up as many as they could. In a way, Rodriguez understood that. They had to think, *Why not?* Sooner or later, whether she knew it or not, a woman was going out in a truck. Why not enjoy her while she was here? If she was enjoyable, why not fix it so she went out later, not sooner? In the end, what difference did it make?

Rodriguez took up an offer himself every now and then, but only every now and then. Most of the time, he remembered he was a married man. When three guards in quick succession got the clap, that made him more cautious than ever. Magdalena wouldn't thank him for bringing home a drippy faucet.

Troop Leader Porter was loudly disgusted when that happened. "Jesus fucking Christ!" he exclaimed. "And *fucking*'s about right, ain't it? We gonna have to set up a shortarm station around here? I knew we had some dumb pricks on this duty, but y'all have gone over the line. Next man who comes down venereal, he's gonna get a dishonorable discharge to go with his dishonorable discharge, you hear me?"

"Yes, Troop Leader!" the guards chorused. Sooner or later, somebody would. If it was later, the noncom might have forgotten about his threat. If it was sooner . . . Rodriguez resisted temptation till he got shifted to the men's side.

That was a different business. Walking through the men's side, inspecting barracks to make sure the prisoners weren't working on tunnels or any other nefarious schemes, was like walking through a

cage full of wolves and cougars. Nothing was likely to happen to you if you were careful and if you stayed with your buddies. If you went off by yourself . . .

One guard got his head smashed in. His weapon disappeared. Everybody turned the men's half of the camp upside down and inside out. Rodriguez thought that submachine gun was gone for good, or till a *mallate* emptied the clip into more guards. But, by what had to be not far from a miracle, it got fished out of a latrine trench. It was wrapped in greasy rags and slathered with lard—not as good as Cosmoline, but enough to keep it in working order. No one ever found out who did in the guard. All the prisoners had their rations cut in punishment, but nobody squealed.

"Suh, what they buildin' out past the wire?" a man asked Rodriguez not long after the gun was recovered.

By chance, the black had picked a guard who knew. The answer would get Rodriguez a promotion as soon as the paperwork went through. But he just scowled at the scrawny prisoner and said, "You find out when the time comes."

"You don't got to be dat way, suh." The Negro's voice was a sheepish whine he'd no doubt used to talk his way out of trouble before. "I didn't mean no disrespect. I wasn't rude or crude or mean or nothin' like that. I just wants to know."

"You find out when the time comes," Rodriguez repeated, and glared at the prisoner. The fellow knew when to back off in a hurry. When the time came, when he found out, that wouldn't help him a bit.

XII

A ll ahead one-third," Sam Carsten called down to the engine room from the *Josephus Daniels*' bridge.

"All ahead one-third, sir, aye aye." The answer came back at once. The destroyer escort picked up a little speed.

Sam read the chart by the dim glow of a flashlight with red cellophane

taped over the bulb. That didn't spoil his night vision and wouldn't be visible from any great distance. Getting out of Philadelphia Harbor and Delaware Bay was going to be even more fun than escaping Chesapeake Bay.

If the clouds overhead broke . . . If they did, moonlight would pour down on the U.S. warship while she was still sneaking through the minefields that protected the harbor. That, to put it mildly, wouldn't be good. Confederate subs lurked just outside, hungry for anything they could catch.

"I wish they would have given us a pilot who really knows these minefields," Pat Cooley said.

"Me, too," Sam told his exec. "I asked for one at the Navy yard. Hell, I screamed for one. They wouldn't give him to me. They said we'd have to stop and lower a boat to let him come back, and that that would make the mission even more dangerous. They said they didn't have enough pilots like that for us to just go on and take him with us."

"Well, I can sort of see their point," Cooley said reluctantly. "Sort of." In the light of that cellophane-covered flashlight, he looked like a pink, angry ghost. "If we were a battleship or a carrier, though, we would have got one."

"Now that you mention it, yes." Carsten gave the younger officer a crooked smile. "Didn't you figure out we were expendable the first time they gave us a shore-bombardment mission?"

"Sorry, sir. I guess I'm just naive," Cooley answered. "But I'll tell you something—I'm sure as hell convinced now."

"That's, uh, swell." Sam had almost said it was bully. To someone the executive officer's age, that would have smacked of the nineteenth century, if not the Middle Ages. Since Sam was only middle-aged himself—and not always reconciled to that—he didn't want Cooley to think of him as one with Nineveh and Tyre. Then he stopped flabbling about changing tastes in American slang and went back to worrying about getting blown out of the water if he screwed up. "Come left to 150. I say again, come left to 150."

"Coming left to one-five-oh: aye aye, sir." Cooley changed course without question or comment. He was still the best shiphandler on the *Josephus Daniels.* In a nasty spot like this, the best shiphandler belonged at the wheel. He had to make his course corrections on the basis of what Sam told him, and had to hope Sam was telling him the

right thing. If that wasn't enough to give you an ulcer before you hit thirty, Sam didn't know what would be.

Even if I do everything right, we still may go sky-high, Sam thought unhappily. Not all Confederate submersibles carried torpedoes. Some laid mines. If they'd laid some that U.S. sweepers hadn't found yet, that could get—interesting. Or a moored mine might have come loose. If it drifted into their path . . . Sam would have done everything right, and a fat lot of good it would do him.

He gauged distances and times and speed and ordered other course corrections. Lieutenant Cooley coolly made them. "How am I doing?" the exec asked after a while.

"You're here to ask the question. You're standing on a nice, level deck. We're not burning. We're not sinking. You're doing fine. If you hit a mine, I'll have something to say to you. Till then, don't worry about it."

Cooley chuckled. "You've got a good way of looking at things, sir."

"Do I? I don't know," Sam said. "This whole business of being in command is new to me. I'm making it up as I go along—and I probably shouldn't tell you a word of that. Well, too goddamn bad. It's not like you and everybody else aboard don't already know it."

"Don't worry about it, sir. Everybody knows you're the Old Man, and everybody feels good about it," Cooley said.

"Thanks," Sam said. On the *Josephus Daniels,* he was the old man literally as well as figuratively. The destroyer escort had a couple of grizzled chiefs with close to his mileage on them, but only a couple. He was old enough to be father for most of the crew. If anything, that might help his position of command. If somebody looked and sounded like your dad, you were used to taking orders from him. Of course, if you were eighteen you were probably convinced your dad was a jerk, so maybe command authority didn't follow from age after all.

Like his early small worry, that one got submerged in the intricacy and tension of what he was doing. He stayed at it till the gray light of earliest morning grew brighter than the flashlight's red beam. Then he stood up very straight and allowed himself to look away from the chart and stretch.

"I think we're through it, Pat," he said.

“Good. That’s hard work.” The exec also stretched. “I think we handled it about as well as we could.”

“You did the hard part,” Carsten said. “I just told you where to go.” He grinned. “I’m the only man on this ship who can.”

“You’re the only one who can *say* it,” Cooley replied. “Everybody else just thinks it.” He turned to the bespectacled, extremely junior J.G. in charge of the Y-range gear. “Isn’t that right, Walters?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, sir,” Thad Walters replied, deadpan—which, in a perverse way, proved Cooley’s point.

Sam took another look at the lightening sky. He didn’t like what he saw, not even a little bit. “Any sign of those damn Confederate maritime bombers?” he asked, knowing he sounded anxious. Any skipper without air cover of his own—and even skippers with it—had the right to sound anxious in this day and age.

Walters eyed the screen. So did Sam. *He* didn’t see anything untoward, but would an expert? War was getting to be a business of gadget against gadget, not man against man. Well, that had been true when battleships ruled the seas, too, but the gadgets were a lot subtler these days.

“Looks all right for now,” the young J.G. said.

“Keep an eye peeled,” Sam told him. He spoke into a voice tube: “Anything on the hydrophone, Bevacqua?”

“No, sir,” the petty officer’s voice came back. “Everything’s quiet.”

“That’s what I like to hear.” *Another gadget,* Sam thought. They’d had hydrophones during the Great War, too. Back then, though, you’d had to stop to listen. If a sub *was* in the neighborhood, stopping wasn’t the best thing you could do. In the last war, also, the hydrophone could give you a bearing on where a submersible prowled, but not a range.

The boys with the thick glasses and the slide rules had fancied up the device in the interwar years. These days, hydrophones could filter out a ship’s own engine noise, though they still worked better in silence. They could also say just where in the water an enemy submarine hid. The way Vince Bevacqua explained it, new-model hydrophones used sound waves as Y-ranging gear used wireless waves: they bounced them off a target and picked up the reflections.

Technical details fascinated Sam. He knew he would never be able to repair, let alone improve, a Y-range set or a hydrophone. That didn't bother him. The better he understood how the gadgets worked, what they could and couldn't do, the better he'd be able to use them and the more he could count on what they told him.

"Keep listening," was all he said now.

"Who, me?" Bevacqua answered. Sam laughed. He knew how hard the petty officer concentrated with the earphones on his head.

Pat Cooley waved at the thick clouds overhead. "We've got a nice low ceiling this morning," he remarked. "We probably don't have to worry about the maritime bombers too much. Only thing that has any real chance of running across us is a flying boat out snooping."

"Yeah, those bastards fly low all the time," Sam agreed. "One of these days before too long, they'll have Y-range gear, too, and then everything'll be out to lunch. Makes you wonder what the Navy's coming to, doesn't it?" He wasn't worried, not as far as his own career went. A kid like Cooley would see a lot more change, though.

The exec didn't seem unduly worried. "If we're vulnerable to air power, we'll just have to bring our own air power with us, that's all. If our airplanes shoot down their airplanes before they can get at us, we win. That was the real lesson of the Pacific War."

Sam had been *in* the Pacific War. Cooley hadn't even been at Annapolis yet. That didn't mean he was wrong. "Carriers have a hard time operating against land-based air, though," he said. "Too many attackers can swamp you. We found that out at Charleston." He'd been there, too, when this war was new.

"Put enough carriers together and you'll swamp the land-based air." Cooley might have been right about that. Neither the United States nor Britain, the two major carrier powers in the Atlantic, had been able to prove it yet. Japan was trying its hardest to do so over and around the Sandwich Islands.

Since Sam couldn't prove anything one way or the other, he said, "Bring us around to course 090, Pat."

"Changing course to 090—aye aye, sir." Cooley swung the *Josephus Daniels* to port till she was steady on her new easterly course. "Steady on 090, sir."

“Thank you. Now we’ve got a clear track to Providence—except for subs and mines and raiders and those flying boats and other little details like that.”

“Providence?” By the way the exec said it, he might have been talking about the Black Hole of Calcutta. He sighed noisily. “Well, it’s better than staying stuck in Philadelphia would be . . . I suppose. What are we going to do there, deliver the *Daniels* so she can take over as a training ship for the swabbies there?”

Seamen learning their trade went out on the *Lamson,* a destroyer of Great War vintage. They learned to fire weapons aboard her. They formed the black gang that served her wheezy engines. They worked in the galleys. They cleaned heads. They learned what it was like to sleep in a hammock with another sailor’s bad breath and backside only inches from their face.

“We’re not quite spavined enough for that,” Sam said. Cooley raised an eyebrow at an evidently unfamiliar word, but he figured out what it had to mean. Sam felt his years showing again. Back when people talked about horses all the time, you heard *spavined* every week if not every day. But the exec had grown up in an automotive age. If you talked about a spavined motorcar, you were making a joke, not describing anything real. Sam went on, “We’re going to escort a convoy down the coast to New York City and then back to Philly.”

“Should be exciting.” The exec mimed an enormous yawn.

Sam laughed. “If you’re on convoy-escort duty, you hope to Jesus it *isn’t* exciting. Everything that could make it exciting is bad.”

“I suppose so.” Cooley grudged him a nod, then winked. “One thing, Skipper—all that zigzagging will do wonders for you at the wheel.”

“Yeah, I know,” Sam answered seriously, which spoiled Cooley’s joke, but the same thought had already occurred to him. And he wanted his shiphandling to get better. He wanted everything he did to get better. He’d got such a late start at being an officer, and still had so much catching up to do. . . .

F remont Blaine Dalby stared at the ships coming into Pearl Harbor. The CPO shook his head. “If those aren’t two of the ugliest sons of bitches I ever set eyes on, then you two guys are.” He nodded to Fritz Gustafson and George Enos, Jr.

George said, “I dunno, Chief. They look pretty damn good to me.”

“Yeah.” Gustafson added a nod.

“Bullshit,” Dalby said. The boss of the twin-40mm crew was a man of strong opinions. His being a Republican proved that. Some of his opinions were crackpot, too; as far as George was concerned, his being a Republican also proved that. He went on, “Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying we don’t need ’em, on account of we do. But they’re still as ugly as the guy sitting next to you on the head.”

George grunted at that. Like any new sailor, he’d had to get used to doing his business in a facility without stalls. He hadn’t thought about it for a while now, and wondered if he’d be stricken with constipation because he did. He admitted to himself—if not to Fremont Dalby—that the senior rating had a point of sorts. The *Trenton* and the *Chapultepec* didn’t have the raked grace of a heavy cruiser. But the escort carriers brought something vital to the Sandwich Islands: hope.

They looked like what they were—freighters that had had their superstructures torn off and replaced with a flight deck. A tiny starboard island didn’t begin to make up for what had been amputated. But they carried thirty airplanes apiece. They had dive bombers and torpedo-carriers, and fighters to protect the strike aircraft and the ships themselves. The two of them put together were worth about as much as one fleet carrier.

“What I want to know is, are there more of them out in the Pacific?” George said. “That’s what really counts. If they can watch the gap where airplanes from the Sandwich Islands can’t stay and the ones from the West Coast can’t, either, then we really might hang on to this place.”

“They didn’t come by themselves, you know,” Dalby reminded him. “Most of the freighters and tankers that came with ’em are unloading in Honolulu, not here. But everybody’ll have enough beans and gasoline for a while longer.”

“Sure, Chief.” Disagreeing with a CPO when you were only an able seaman took diplomacy. Picking his words with care, George went on, “But it’s not waddayacallit—not economical, that’s what I want to say—to send these ugly ducklings back and forth to Frisco or wherever for each new convoy.”

“He’s right,” Gustafson said—another good-sized speech for him. He was a petty officer himself, though not an exalted chief. He could

speak somewhat more freely to Dalby, but only somewhat. George was more than halfway convinced that CPOs really ran the Navy. They let officers think they did, but so many officers' orders were based on what they heard from CPOs. A lieutenant, J.G., who tried to buck one of the senior ratings didn't have a prayer. Even his own superiors wouldn't back him, and it wouldn't have helped if they did.

"Well, yeah," Fremont Dalby said, "but these babies ought to be good for more than defense. They ought to be able to play sixty minutes. How many of 'em d'you figure we'd need to take Midway back from the Buddhaheads?"

Gustafson eyed the *Chapultepec,* which was closer. "Damn thing can't do more'n eighteen knots if you chuck her off a cliff," he opined—a veritable oration. He didn't bother to say what he already knew: that Japanese fleet carriers, like most self-respecting warships, could make better than thirty.

Dalby only shrugged. "Doesn't matter all that much. Airplanes are a hell of a lot faster than ships any which way."

That held some truth, but only some. Other things went into the mix. "Jap carriers can walk away from subs. These little guys won't be able to."

Another shrug from the gun chief. "That's why the *Townsend*'s in the Navy. If we can't keep submersibles off of carriers, what the hell good are we?"

George gave up. He wasn't about to change Dalby's mind. That was as plain as the nose on the CPO's face—which was saying something, because Dalby had a formidable honker. In the end, changing Dalby's mind didn't matter a dime's worth anyhow. Dalby wasn't the one who'd decide what to do with the escort carriers. He wasn't the one who'd decide what to do with the *Townsend,* either, though he often acted as if he were the skipper.

He said, "It'll be goddamn nice operating with real air cover for a change. Not even the brass'd be dumb enough to send us out naked anymore."

"Here's hoping." Fritz Gustafson packed a world of skepticism into two words.

This time, George thought Dalby had the right of it. There were plenty of land-based airplanes on Oahu. Why send carriers all the way to the

Sandwich Islands if not to use them with the rest of the Navy?

When the *Townsend* put to sea a few days later, she did so without either the *Trenton* or the *Chapultepec*. Even though she did, George didn't flabble about it: she went out on an antisubmersible patrol to the east of Oahu. Japanese carrier-based aircraft were most unlikely to find her there.

After George remarked on that, Dalby looked at him—looked through him, really. "You'd sooner be torpedoed?"

"Got a better chance against a sub than we would against airplanes," George said stubbornly. Then he wondered if that was true. His father hadn't had any chance against a submarine. *But he got sucker-punched after the war was over. We'd be on our toes.*

Whenever George was on deck, he kept an eye peeled for periscopes. He also looked for the thin, pale exhaust from a submersible's diesel engine. What with the *Townsend*'s hydrophone gear, all that was probably wasted effort. He didn't care, not even a little bit. He did it anyhow. He noticed he was far from the only one who did.

He wasn't on deck when general quarters sounded. He was rinsing off in the shower. He threw on his skivvies and ran for his gun with the rest of his clothes, including his shoes, under his arm.

Nobody laughed, or not very much. Nobody who'd been in the Navy longer than a few weeks hadn't been caught the same way. He dressed at his post. His hair was still wet. It dripped in his face and down his back. He would have minded that much more in the North Atlantic in December than he did here.

"Now hear this!" The exec's voice crackled out of the loudspeakers. "We've found us a submarine, and we are going to prosecute the son of a bitch."

An excited buzz ran through the sailors. George looked enviously up toward the depth-charge launchers near the destroyer's bow. Their crews were the ones who'd have the fun of dropping things on the Japs' heads.

"Don't go to sleep, now," Fremont Dalby warned. "If those bastards surface, we're the ones who'll fill 'em full of holes." He set a hand on one of the 40mm's twin barrels. The quick-firing gun made an admirable can opener.

The *Townsend* swung to port. Down under the surface, a submersible was no doubt maneuvering, too. It could have been cat-and-mouse, but the mouse here had almost as good a chance as the cat. The *Townsend*'s advantage was speed, the sub's stealth. Where was that boat?

They must have thought they knew, for depth charges flew from the launchers and splashed into the Pacific. George waited, bracing himself. When the ashcans burst, it was like a kick in the ass from an elephant. The *Townsend*'s bow lifted, then slammed back down.

More charges arced through the air. Some would be set for a depth a little less than the hydrophone operator thought accurate, some for a little more. With luck, the submersible wouldn't get away. With luck . . .

"Oil! Oil!" somebody yelled. His voice cracked the second time he said it.

"Could be a trick," Fritz Gustafson said. George nodded. A canny sub skipper would deliberately release oil and air bubbles to try to fool his tormentors into thinking they'd smashed him. Then he could slink away or strike back as he got the chance.

Not this time, though. "Coming up!" screamed somebody near the bow. "Motherfucker's coming up!"

Like a breaching whale but far bigger, the Japanese submarine surfaced. She might not have been able to stay down anymore, but she still showed fight. Men tumbled out of her conning tower and ran for the deck guns. The odds against them were long—a destroyer vastly outgunned a submersible—but they had a chance. If they could hurt the *Townsend* badly enough, they might yet get away.

But the destroyer's guns were already manned and ready. George wasn't sure if his weapon was the very first to start blazing away, but it was among the first. Tracers walked across the water toward the sub less than a mile away. They were close enough to the target to let him see chunks of metal fly when shells slammed into the side of the boat and the conning tower. One of the shells hit a Japanese sailor amidships. He exploded into red mist. There were worse ways to go; he must have died before he knew it.

The Japs got off a few shots. One of them hit near the *Townsend*'s bow, just aft of the ashcan launchers. George heard shrieks through the din of gunfire. But the sub was in over its head. Its guns were out in the

open and unprotected, and the American 40mms and machine guns picked off the crews in nothing flat. When the destroyer's main armament started taking bites out of the sub's hull, it quickly sank. It kept firing as long as it could. The crew had guts—no way around that.

A few men still bobbed in the water after the submersible went down. The *Townsend* steered toward them and threw lines and life rings into the water. The Japanese sailors stubbornly refused to take them. A couple of sailors deliberately sank when lines came near. Others shook defiant fists at the ship that had sunk their sub. They shouted what had to be insults in their own language.

"They're crazy," George said. "If that was me, I'd be up on this deck and down on my knees thanking God they'd rescued me instead of shooting me or leaving me for shark bait or just to drown."

"Japs aren't like that," Dalby said. "Bunch of crazy monkeys, if you want to know what I think."

"They figure being a POW is the worst thing in the world," Fritz Gustafson said. "Far as they're concerned, dying's better."

"Like I said—crazy," Dalby said.

"Nasty, too." Gustafson was, for him, in a talky mood. "Don't let 'em catch you. If you're a POW, they figure you're in disgrace. Anything goes, near enough."

"How do you know that?" George asked.

The loader shrugged. "You hear stuff, is all."

One of the last Japanese sailors afloat spat seawater up at the *Townsend.* He made gestures that probably meant the same as giving her the finger. The ship took the perfect revenge: she sailed away. The sailors whooped and cheered. "I think you're right, Chief," George said. "They *are* crazy."

"Told you so," Fremont Dalby said smugly. "I just wish they weren't so goddamn tough, that's all."

* * *

J efferson Pinkard inspected his dress grays in the mirror. He looked pretty goddamn sharp, if he did say so himself. The three wreathed silver stars on either side of his collar gleamed and sparkled. The way he'd polished them, they couldn't very well do anything else. His silver belt buckle shone, too. So did the black leather of his belt and boots.

When he got married the first time, back before the Great War, he'd done it in a rented tailcoat. He'd thought he was hot stuff, then. Maybe he'd even been right. His belly hadn't bulged over his belt in those days, anyhow.

He scowled as the memory came back. Emily'd been hot stuff in those days, too. Too goddamn hot, it turned out. "Little whore," he growled. She hadn't wanted to wait till he got back from the trenches. She'd spread it around, starting with his best friend. He remembered walking in after he got a leave he hadn't told her about ahead of time, walking in and . . .

Angrily, he turned away from the mirror. Then, feeling foolish, he had to turn back to get his hat—almost a Stetson, but with a higher crown and a wider brim—cocked at just the right jaunty angle. Everything was going to be perfect, dammit, perfect, and he wasn't going to think about Emily even once.

A Birmingham painted in official butternut waited for him. "Take you into town, sir?" the driver said.

"If you don't, we ain't got a show," Jeff answered, and the fellow behind the wheel laughed. Jeff added, "Yeah, you might as well. I've come this far. I don't reckon I'll chicken out now." He slid into the back seat.

"Better not," the driver agreed. "That's where you get one of them waddayacallems—breeches of promise suits, that's it."

That wasn't exactly it, but came close enough. Jeff wondered if any lawyers were filing breach of promise suits these days, or if the Army had grabbed them all. Most, anyhow, he guessed. But a maiden spurned could probably still find a lawyer to be her knight in shining armor—at a suitable hourly rate, of course.

Edith Blades was no maiden. On the other hand, Jeff didn't aim to

spurn her. “Long as I’m at the church, everything’ll be just fine,” he said.

A couple of buses sat in the church parking lot. They’d brought guards in from Camp Determination. Patrols would be thin there this afternoon and evening. Jeff hoped they wouldn’t be *too* thin. He didn’t think they would. He’d made the camp as hard to break out of as he could. It ought to get along just fine for a few hours with a skeleton crew.

Hip Rodriguez waited in the doorway and waved when Jeff got out of the Birmingham. Edith had squawked a little when Jeff asked a Mexican to be his best man, but he’d won the argument. “Wasn’t for him, sweetheart,” he’d said, “it’s not real likely I’d be here to marry you.” Edith hadn’t found any answer for that. Pinkard hadn’t figured she could.

“You look good, *Señor* Jeff,” Rodriguez called.

“So do you,” Pinkard said, which was true. His old Army buddy hadn’t put on nearly so much weight as he had, and looked impressive as the devil in his guard’s uniform. Whoever had designed those clothes knew how to intimidate.

“Gracias.” Rodriguez’s smile was on the sheepish side. “You know something? This is the very first time I ever go inside a Protestant church.”

Thinking about it, Jeff realized *he’d* never set foot inside a Catholic church. He remembered some of the things he’d heard about those places when he was growing up in Birmingham. Turning them on their head, he said, “Don’t worry, Hip. I promise we don’t keep the Devil down in the storm cellar.”

By the way his pal started to cross himself, he must have been wondering something like that. Rodriguez broke off the gesture before completing it. “Of course not, *Señor* Jeff,” he said, though his expression argued it was anything but *of course.*

Jeff went on into the vestibule or whatever they called the antechamber just inside the entrance. Edith’s sister, who would be her maid of honor, stood guard at the door to the minister’s little office. The bride waited in there, and the groom was not going to set eyes on her till the ceremony started.

Jeff liked Judy Smallwood just fine. If he hadn’t got to know Edith

first, he might have liked her sister better. Since Judy was going back to Alexandria right after the wedding, though, that wasn't likely to prove a problem. "You look mighty nice," he told her, and she did. Her dress was of glowing blue taffeta with short puffed sleeves that set off her figure and her fair skin, dark blond hair, and blue eyes.

By the way those eyes traveled him, she thought he cut a pretty fine figure himself in his fancy uniform. She said, "Kind of a shame you haven't got anybody coming out from Alabama for the day."

"My ma and pa been dead for years," Jeff answered with a shrug. "Don't have any brothers or sisters. My cousins . . ." He shrugged again. "I don't recollect the last time I talked to one of them. They heard from me now, they'd just reckon I was aiming to pry a wedding present out of 'em."

"Well, if it's like that, you shouldn't," Judy said. "It's too bad, though."

"Have I got time for a cigarette before we get going?" Jeff wondered. He'd just pulled the pack out of his pocket when the minister emerged from the office. Jeff made the cigarettes disappear again. A smoke would have calmed his nerves, but he could do without. Anyhow, the only real cure for prewedding jitters was about four stiff drinks, and that would make people talk. He touched the brim of his hat. "Howdy, Parson."

"Mr. Pinkard," the Reverend Luke Sutton said, bobbing his bald head in return. He sent Hip Rodriguez a slightly fishy stare. Rodriguez showed no sign of sprouting horns on his forehead or letting a barbed tail slither out past his trouser cuffs, so the minister looked away and started down the aisle.

Mrs. Sutton struck up the wedding march on a beat-up old upright piano against one wall. Some Baptist churches didn't approve of music at all; Jeff was glad the Suttons weren't quite so strict. As they'd rehearsed, he listened to her play it through once. Then he headed down the aisle himself. His best man followed.

Uniforms filled the folding chairs on one side. The other held Edith's relatives: ordinary-looking men and women in black suits and in dresses of a variety of colors and styles—some of them must have dated from just after the Great War, and they ran up to the present.

Edith's sons by Chick Blades were the ring bearers. Small, smothered chuckles rose as people got a look at the young boys. Jeff had to work

to keep his own face straight. Edith had told him she would make sure Frank and Willie didn't have silly grins on their faces when they came down the aisle. She'd put the fear of God in them, all right, better than Reverend Sutton could have dreamt of doing. They looked serious past the point of solemnity—all the way to absurdity, in fact.

Edith's sister came next. She was grinning, but on her it looked good. And Edith herself followed a moment later. Her dress was identical in cut to Judy's, but of a taffeta somewhere between cream and beige: this wasn't her first marriage, so white wouldn't have been right. She'd had to do some searching to find a veil that matched, but she'd managed.

She stood beside Jeff. They faced the minister. He went through a wedding sermon he'd probably delivered a hundred times before. It wasn't fresh. It wasn't exciting. It wasn't even very interesting. Pinkard didn't care. It was official—that was all that mattered. Before too long, Sutton got down to business. They exchanged rings, taking them from the velvet pillows Edith's sons carried. "Do you, Jefferson Davis Pinkard, take this woman as your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, till death do you part?"

"I do," Jeff said.

Edith's vows were the same, except there was a *to obey* in them somewhere. Jeff hardly noticed it, and suspected Edith would hardly notice it, either. Her chin went up in pride as she also said, "I do."

"Then by the authority vested in me by the Confederate Baptist Convention and by the sovereign state of Texas, I now pronounce you man and wife," Luke Sutton declared. "You may kiss the bride."

Jeff lifted Edith's veil to do just that. He made the kiss thorough without, he hoped, making a spectacle of himself. Edith stayed relaxed in his arms, so he didn't think he overdid it.

The wedding march rang out again as the new couple and their attendants went up the aisle to the back of the church. Everybody else filed by to congratulate them. "Well, what do you think?" Jeff asked Hip Rodriguez after the last guards and cousins of Edith's slowly shuffled past.

"Very nice, *Señor* Jeff," Rodriguez answered, but he couldn't help adding, "I miss the priest's fancy robes and the incense and the Latin. This way, it hardly seems like you are in an *iglesia*—a church."

“Oh, it’s a church, all right,” Jeff said. He *had* seen priests in rich robes down in the Empire of Mexico. He hadn’t seen a service there, though. It didn’t seem as if those prelates and somebody like Reverend Sutton were talking about the same God.

The church boasted a little social hall next to the sanctuary. The reception was there. The punch and cider were teetotal; Reverend Sutton wouldn’t have it any other way. Warned of this, Jeff had got the intelligence to the guards. A lot of them carried flasks with which to improve the liquid refreshment. They stayed reasonably discreet, and the minister stayed reasonably polite.

One of the guards made models for a hobby. Working with a tiny brush, he’d changed the clothes of the groom atop the wedding cake from white tie and tails to dress-gray uniform. The figure was still too slim to make a good image of Jeff Pinkard, but it looked a lot more like him than it had before. Edith stuffed gooey chocolate cake into his mouth, and he did the same for her.

He wasn’t sorry not to dance on church property. He’d never been much for cutting a rug. At about ten o’clock, he and Edith went out to the Birmingham. People cheered and yelled bawdy advice and pelted them with rice. The driver took them back to Jeff’s quarters. Edith squeaked when he picked her up to carry her over the threshold. Then, as he set her down, he said, “What’s this?”

This was a bottle of champagne in a bucket of ice by the bed. A card in an envelope leaned against the bucket. When Jeff opened the envelope and took out the card, his eyes almost bugged out of his head. *Hope the two of you stay real happy together,* it read in a looping scrawl surely written by no secretary. The signature was in that same rough hand: *Jake Featherston.*

“Oh,” Edith said, reading it with him. “Oh, Jeff.”

“Yeah,” Jeff said. “That’s . . . somethin’, all right.” He picked up the champagne bottle. “Reckon the least we can do is drink some o’ this before . . .” He stopped. Edith turned pink anyhow. He laughed. Wedding nights were for laughing, weren’t they?

Champagne went down smoother than spiked punch had. Edith got pinker yet, not from embarrassment but from the sparkling wine. Jeff picked her up again. He was a big man, and she wasn’t a very large woman. This time, he set her down on the bed.

She was no giggling maiden. She knew what was what, the same as

Jeff did. That made it better, as far as he was concerned. When it was over, he stroked her, lazy in the afterglow. “Hello there, wife,” he said.

“Hello . . . husband,” Edith said, and started to cry. “I love you, Jeff.” Even though she said it, even though he was sure she meant it, he knew she was remembering Chick, too. He didn’t know what the hell he could do about it. Doing nothing seemed the smartest thing, so he did that.

* * *

Chester Martin’s leg still didn’t feel like carrying him around. Like it or not, though, the leg could do the job. The Army let wounded men heal, but only as long as it absolutely had to. Then it threw them back into the meat grinder to see if they could get chopped up again.

As Martin lit a cigarette in a replacement depot somewhere in western Pennsylvania, he wondered why the devil he’d joined up again. He’d known he could get hurt. Get hurt, hell—he could get killed. He’d done it anyhow. After a while, you forgot how bad it had been. That was the only thing he could think of. Women said the same thing happened when they had babies. If they’d truly remembered how bad labor was, none of them would have had more than one.

He couldn’t imagine a lonelier place than this depot. He was still part of the Army, of course, but he wasn’t exactly *in* it. He wasn’t part of a unit. A soldier by himself was hardly a soldier at all. Whatever outfit he joined now, he’d be *the new guy* for a while—till enough other men got killed and maimed and enough other replacements took over for them to make him an old-timer again.

The way things were going these days, it wouldn’t take long.

Men ranging in rank from private up to major sat on benches and folding chairs. Some of them smoked, some read newspapers or paperback adventures or mysteries, some just stared into space. Chester recognized that stare, because he’d worn it: the look of a man who’d seen too much of hell. You could help a buddy out when things got bad, or he could help you. Nobody here had a buddy. That was part of being in limbo, a bad part. You were stuck with yourself.

A fat technical sergeant who would never get any closer to the front than this called out three names, following each with a serial number.

Two privates and a corporal shouldered the packs they'd had between their feet. They went up to the tech sergeant, signed some papers, and went out the door by which Chester had come in. They were fully part of the military machinery again.

Off in the distance, antiaircraft guns barked. Confederate dive bombers and strafing fighters were tearing up U.S. positions in these parts, softening them so C.S. barrels and foot soldiers could cut through them more easily. The boys in butternut had the bit between their teeth again, and they were running like hell.

Chester ground out the cigarette under his heel and lit another one. He didn't have the wind he'd had the last time around, but who did? Smoking gave him something to do. It was as much fun as he was allowed to have here.

Out popped that tech sergeant again. Half a dozen privates got up and trudged off to whatever awaited them. Chester went on chain-smoking. Second lieutenants got killed in droves. First sergeants were a tougher, smarter—or at least more experienced—breed. Till one went down, he'd sit here twiddling his thumbs.

"Martin, Chester A.!" the tech sergeant yelled, and his pay number after it. The man also shouted several other names.

Speak of the devil, Martin thought. He rose, slung on his pack—which didn't make his sore leg rejoice—and went over to the other noncom. The men with him were all kids—a PFC and five or six newly minted privates. The technical sergeant paid more attention to him than to the rest of them put together. Chester signed off on his paperwork, then went outside.

He'd wondered if his new outfit would have sent another senior sergeant to collect men from the repple-depple. Instead, a shavetail second lieutenant awaited him. That was good news and bad: good because it showed his new CO had enough sense to pick somebody who wasn't needed in the field, bad because the youngster here was liable to know that and resent it.

By the sour expression on the lieutenant's rather rabbity features, he knew it too well. "Hello, Sergeant. I'm Jack Husak," he said. "You're my new nursemaid, aren't you?"

Yes, Chester thought as he saluted and gave his own name. But dealing with a superior with a chip on his shoulder was the last thing he wanted, so he said, "I'm sure that won't be necessary, sir."

“So am I,” Husak said. “I’ve been in charge of my platoon for a good six weeks now, and I’ve got it running solid—*solid,* all right.”

“I’m glad to hear it, sir.” Chester wondered what the youngster’s notions of solid were. He hadn’t got shot in six weeks, but what did that prove? Not much, as Chester knew too well.

Second Lieutenant Husak didn’t want to leave it alone. “Commanding a platoon is an important responsibility,” he said, which only proved he didn’t understand his place in the world. Lieutenants in charge of platoons had the company CO above them and a senior noncom below to fix things if they screwed up too badly. Doing all right meant you were training for a real role. *Not* doing all right probably meant getting wounded or killed, and certainly meant you’d never see another promotion. Husak went on, “What’s the biggest command *you* ever had, Sergeant?”

All right, sonny boy. You asked for it. “Sir, I led a company for a while in the last war, over in northern Virginia.”

“What?” Husak’s voice went high and shrill. By the way he jerked, he might have sat on a tack. “How could you do that?”

“Usual way, sir: all the officers were killed or wounded,” Martin answered stolidly. “This was 1917, sir, and we were almost as beaten down and beat up as the Confederates were. Eventually they got around to putting a lieutenant in the slot, so I got bumped back down again, but I had it for a month or so.”

“Oh.” Husak looked as if he wanted to call him a liar, but he didn’t have the nerve. Chester’s matter-of-fact account was impossible to contradict, especially for someone who’d been making messes in his drawers in 1917. The young lieutenant also looked as if he hated Chester and as if he was scared to death of him, both at once. He jerked a thumb towards a waiting truck. “Hop in. We’ll see how you do in the war we’ve got now.”

“Yes, sir.” As Chester did, he called himself seventeen different kinds of idiot. For this sour little punk he’d walked away from his wife, his son, and a pretty damn good slot in the construction business? What *had* those bastards at the recruiting station put in his coffee? Whatever it was, they should have used it against the Confederates instead. It would have made them quit without a fight.

The other replacements got in after him. Husak did, too. He spent a lot less time on them than he had on Chester. The PFC—Chester thought

his name was Fitzpatrick, though he looked more Italian than Irish—sent him a sympathetic look, but with the lieutenant in the truck with them that was all he could do.

“Move out,” Husak called to the driver.

“Yes, sir.” The man fired up the engine, put the truck in gear, and started west. Chester sighed softly. *Back to the war, dammit,* he thought.

Instead, the war came to him, and within ten minutes. The truck, which had been rumbling along at a good clip, slowed and then stopped. The driver leaned on his horn. Lieutenant Husak went up to the little window that separated the rear compartment from the driver’s and shouted, “What the hell?”

“Refugees.” The driver’s answer was equally laconic.

“Jesus Christ!” Husak clapped a hand to his forehead.

A few seconds later, Martin, who could only see where he’d been, not where he was going, got a look out the back of the truck at the detritus of war. By the time he’d got to Virginia, all the civilians who’d wanted to leave the combat zone were long gone. Here, a woman stared at him out of eyes as empty and exhausted as those of an overworked draft animal. Sweat plastered her hair to her head; her freckled skin was badly sunburned. She had a knapsack on her back and a crude harness rigged from bed sheets on her chest that let her carry a howling toddler there. A little girl of four or five clung to one hand, a boy a year or two older to the other.

Beside her stood a man in a battered straw hat pushing a wheelbarrow that held whatever he’d been able to distill of his life. He hadn’t shaved for a week or so. His checked shirt was filthy, his dungarees were out at the knees, and his shoes out at the toes. He looked as weary and as beaten as the woman.

Except as an obstacle, they and the others like them ignored the truck. They flowed around it, flowed past it—and kept the men in it from getting to where they could do anything about stopping the Confederate advance that had set the refugees in motion in the first place.

A Model T that edged around the truck held—Chester counted carefully—fourteen people. He wouldn’t have bet you could cram that many in as a stunt. This was no stunt; it was, literally, life and death.

The ancient flivver ran, even if it sagged on its springs.

“Lord, what a fuckup,” the PFC said softly. Chester nodded and lit yet another cigarette. That was about the size of it.

Lieutenant Husak, meanwhile, started throwing a fit. “We’ve got to clear these people!” he yelled. “How are we supposed to fight a war if civilians keep getting in the way?” Civilians getting in the way weren’t an accidental consequence of Confederate attacks; Featherston’s men knew they would, and took advantage of it. Husak turned to the soldiers with him. “You men! Fix bayonets and get these refugees off the road. If an Asskicker comes by, we’re sitting ducks, and so are they.”

He wasn’t wrong. Chester hadn’t used his bayonet for anything but a knife and a can opener since the Great War. He put it on the business end of his Springfield now. It was still good for intimidating civilians.

“Get out of the road!” he shouted as he hopped down from the truck. He did his best to sound like a traffic cop. “Come on, people—move it! You’re blocking military traffic! You’ve got to get out of the way!”

Had the truck been full of soldiers, he would have got results faster. It wasn’t so easy with only half a dozen men at his back. The civilians didn’t want to listen. All they wanted was to get away from the Confederates. They returned to the highway as soon as Chester and his comrades went by.

And then a Confederate dive bomber *did* spot the column and the halted truck.

Chester knew what that scream in the sky was as soon as he heard it. “Hit the dirt!” he yelled, and took his own advice, scrambling away as fast as he could. The PFC dove for cover, too. The rest of the soldiers and the civilians were still mostly upright when the Mule machine-gunned them, dropped a bomb right in front of the truck, and roared back toward the west.

Screams. Shrieks. Raw terror. People running every which way. People down and bleeding—some writhing and howling, others lying still. Pieces of people flung improbably far. The truck going up like Vesuvius. Whatever problems Lieutenant Husak had with his temper, he’d never fix them now.

And now there was even more chaos and delay on the road than there had been before. Chester looked around. With the lieutenant dead, he

was the highest-ranking man here. He wanted the responsibility about as much as he wanted a root canal. Want it or not, it had just landed in his lap. He got up and started doing what little he could to set things right.

D espite its quaint name, Tom Colleton found himself liking Beaver, Pennsylvania. The town sat in the middle of a mining and industrial belt near the border with Ohio, but was itself pleasant and tree-shrouded. He'd commandeered the ivy-covered Quay House, former home of a prominent Socialist politician, for his regimental headquarters.

The runner from division HQ, a few miles farther south, caught up with him there. After saluting, the corporal said, "Sir, I have a special order for you."

It must have been special, or his superiors would have sent it by wireless or field telephone, enciphering it if they thought they had to. Tom nodded. "Give it to me, then."

He expected the messenger to pull out a piece of paper for him to read and then destroy. Instead, it came orally. The powers that be really didn't want anything that had to do with it falling into U.S. hands. "Sir, you are ordered to allow a special unit to pass through your lines, and to make sure the troops under your command do nothing to interfere with this special unit in any way."

That said just enough to leave Lieutenant-Colonel Colleton scratching his head. "Of course I'll obey, but I'd like to know a little more about what I'm obeying," he said. "Why would my men want to interfere with this special unit, whatever it is? How can I tell them not to if I don't know why it'll cause trouble?"

"Sir, I was told you'd likely ask that question, and that I was allowed to answer it," the corporal said seriously. "The answer is, this special unit is made up of men who can talk like damnyankees. They wear Yankee uniforms and act like U.S. soldiers."

"*Son* of a bitch!" Colleton exclaimed. Whatever he'd expected, that wasn't it. After a moment, he wondered why not. Troops like that could raise merry hell behind enemy lines. Of course, they'd have a short life and not a merry one if they got captured. But that was their lookout, not his. He asked, "How will they get up here without having some overeager kid in butternut shoot their asses off?"

He won a smile from the runner. “They’ve come this far, sir,” the corporal said. “They’ll have escorts who look the way they’re supposed to. And they’ll move up at night, when they’re less likely to be noticed.”

“All right. Makes sense.” Tom wondered if the special unit had come up from the CSA entirely by night, lying quiet and hidden by day. He couldn’t think of any better way to keep his own side from trying to kill them. He asked, “Can you tell me anything about what they’ll be doing?”

“No, sir,” the messenger answered. “They didn’t tell me, so I couldn’t tell the damnyankees in case I got caught.”

“Fair enough—that makes sense, too,” Tom said. “What time can I expect ’em? My men will need some warning.”

“They should get here about eleven o’clock,” the messenger said. “Please don’t brief your men too soon. If they get captured, or if they just start bragging to damnyankee pickets . . .”

“I understand.” What Tom understood was that he was between a rock and a hard place. His men *did* need warning, or they would do their best to murder the ersatz Yankees. If he had to hold off till the last minute for fear of breaching security, some of them might not get the word. “I’ll do what needs doing.”

“Yes, sir.” The corporal saluted. “If you’ll excuse me . . .” He headed back toward division HQ, presumably bearing word that the special unit could come ahead.

Tom shook his head in wonder. Then he got on the field telephone with his company commanders, trying to find out where U.S. lines in front of him were most porous. “What’s cooking, sir?” one of his captains asked. “We going to sneak raiders through?”

“You might say so, Bobby Lee,” Tom answered. “You’ve got the quiet sector, so you win the cigar. Alert your men that the infiltrators will have escorts, and that they are to follow the orders they get from those escorts. Got it?”

“Well enough to do what I’m told,” the captain answered plaintively. “Something funny’s going on, though, isn’t it?”

“You don’t know the half of it.” Tom didn’t want to go into detail on the telephone. The damnyankees were better than he wished they

were at tapping telephone lines. He didn't know some U.S. noncom with earphones was listening to every word he said, but he didn't want to elaborate on what was going to happen, not when his own superiors had gone out of their way to keep from sending anything on the air or over the wires.

With his own curiosity aroused, he waited impatiently for nightfall. Somewhere off to the north, artillery rumbled. His own area stayed pretty quiet. He supposed his superiors wanted it that way. If the Confederate soldiers dressed as Yankees were going to cause the most trouble, they ought to go in where the real enemy wasn't keyed up and ready to start shooting at anything that moved.

Trucks rumbled into Beaver a few minutes past eleven. A Confederate major in proper uniform alighted from the first one and came looking for Tom. After being directed to the Quay House, he said, "Here we are, sir. You've been warned about us?"

"I sure have," Tom Colleton answered.

"Good," the major said. "Please bring some men with you to form a screen around the, ah, special soldiers as they go forward. We don't want to have any unfortunate accidents."

We don't want the ordinary soldiers shooting up the special men, he meant. Tom nodded. "I understand, Major. I agree one hundred percent."

Nobody had got out of the trucks a couple of blocks away. Tom rounded up a couple of squads' worth of clerks and technicians and other rear-echelon troops and had them surround the silent vehicles. "What's up, sir?" one of them asked, reasonably enough.

"Don't be surprised and don't start shooting when you see who gets out of these trucks," Tom answered. "No matter what these men look like, they aren't real damnyankees. They're infiltrators. They're going to cause trouble behind the enemy's lines. If this goes well, it'll make the advance on Pittsburgh a hell of a lot easier." He turned to the major. "All right?"

"Couldn't be better, sir. Thanks." The major raised his voice: "You can come out now, boys!"

Tom's men swore softly as the *faux* Yankees emerged. He couldn't blame them; he muttered under his breath, too. They looked much too much like the real thing. Their uniforms and helmets were the ones

he'd been shooting at for more than a year. They wore U.S. shoes and carried U.S. weapons. And, when they spoke, they *sounded* like damnyankees, too. That really made the hair on his arms and at the back of his neck want to stand on end.

One of his men said, "Sir, you *sure* these bastards is on our side?"

"If I was a real Yankee, I'd shoot you for that, you son of a bitch," one of the men said. He wore a sergeant's uniform, and sounded like a cocky noncom . . . a cocky noncom from New York City. He could have taken his act to the stage. In fact, he was taking it to the stage—and a bad review would cost him his neck.

"Come on," Tom said. "I'll take you up to the line. One of my companies is facing a sector where the enemy doesn't really have much of a line in place against us—that's what happens sometimes when you push hard."

"Good," the major said. "Can you start a little firefight somewhere else to distract the Yankees some more?"

The request made sense, even if it would get some of his men wounded or killed. "I'll take care of it," he said, and sent the order over the field telephone. A machine gun and some riflemen opened up off to the right. The enemy returned fire. Springfields sounded very different from automatic Tredegars. Machine guns differed, too. The U.S. weapons were closely related to their Great War ancestors. The C.S. model was lighter, cooled by air rather than a clumsy water jacket, and designed to put out absolutely as much lead as possible. It sounded like nothing so much as a giant tearing up an enormous sheet of cloth: the individual rounds going off blended into an almost continuous roar.

"All right, Major," Tom told the officer in charge of the imitation Yankees when they got to the perimeter. "I've done what I can do. The rest is up to you and your boys. Good luck."

"Thank you kindly, sir." The major, at least, sounded like a proper Confederate. He turned to the men in his charge. "Come on. Y'all know the drill."

"Yeah." "Sure thing." "No problem." Those laconic grunts sounded as if they came from the wrong side of the border. One of the men muttered, "Goddamn cowflop cigarettes from now on." Tom sympathized with that. Everybody knew how eager Yankees were for Confederate tobacco.

A few at a time, the Confederates in U.S. uniform slipped off into the night. Tom waited tensely. If gunfire erupted right in front of him, something had gone wrong up there. But everything stayed quiet. Could they have the passwords for this sector? If the enemy had any brains, he would change those every day. Tom knew his own side wasn't perfect at that. He supposed the Yankees also were unlikely to be.

Everything stayed quiet. However the infiltrators were doing it, they were doing it. The company commander said, "If that doesn't buy us a breakthrough, nothing will."

Even talking about breakthroughs made a Great War veteran nervous. "We'll see what happens, that's all, Bobby Lee," Tom answered. "And I reckon we'd better tighten up our own procedures."

"What do you mean, sir?" Bobby Lee asked.

"What goes around comes around," Tom answered. "You don't suppose the damnyankees have men who sound like they come from the CSA? You don't suppose they can get their hands on our weapons and uniforms? Like hell they can't. I think we came up with this one first—I hope to God we did—but we're liable to be on the receiving end one day."

"Son of a bitch," the young captain said. "My hat's off to you, sir." He took himself literally, doffing his helmet.

Tom snorted. "Never mind that. Just have our men ready to move fast if the order comes."

"Yes, sir. They will be, sir," Bobby Lee promised.

By the time Tom got back to Beaver, the buses that brought in the phony U.S. soldiers had gone. But Confederate barrels—with, he devoutly hoped, real Confederates inside them—were rumbling into town.

The storm broke the next afternoon. The barrels slammed into the shaky U.S. position, and it turned out to be even shakier than anybody would have expected. Enemy reinforcements showed up late, showed up in the wrong places, or didn't show up at all. Unlike a lot of people, Tom Colleton had a pretty good notion of why that was so. He wondered what it was costing the Confederates in U.S. green-gray. *We'd better make it worthwhile,* he thought, and pushed his own men forward without mercy.

J onathan Moss mooched back toward the barracks at the Andersonville POW camp from the latrine trenches. Nick Cantarella was coming the other way. He gave Moss a sour nod. “They still have guys looking up your ass when you take a crap?” he asked.

“Just about,” Moss answered. They both rolled their eyes. Ever since that downpour made part of the U.S. escape tunnel fall in on itself, the Confederates had been as jumpy as mice at a cat’s wedding. Moss knew they had every reason to be. Knowing it didn’t make him like it any better.

“Such fun,” Cantarella said. The Confederates still didn’t know who’d built the tunnel. That Cantarella kept on walking around proved as much. If the guards had had any idea what was what, he would have been in solitary confinement or manacles or leg irons or ball and chain or whatever else they thought up to keep POWs from absquatulating.

“I wonder if anyone has anything else going on,” Moss remarked.

“You never can tell,” said the captain from New York. “One of these days, the guards are liable to wake up and find out we’ve all flown the coop. What do they do then? Jump off a cliff? Here’s hoping.”

“Yeah. Here’s hoping.” Moss knew his own voice sounded hollow. He wanted *out.* He wanted *out* so bad he could taste it. He wasn’t the only POW who did, of course. The guards knew as much, too. They’d known that even before the tunnel collapsed. Now, with their noses rubbed in it, they tried to keep an eye on everybody all the time.

Wrinkling his own nose, Captain Cantarella walked on toward the latrine trenches. Jonathan Moss ambled back to the barracks. Other POWs nodded to him as he went by. He was one of the boys by now, not a new fish who drew dubious glances wherever he went and whatever he did. Having the enemy suspicious of you was one thing. It came with being a prisoner of war. Having your own side suspicious of you felt a lot worse.

“ ’Day, Major,” First Lieutenant Hal Swinburne said.

“Hello, Hal.” Moss hid a smile at his own thoughts of a moment before. Hal Swinburne hadn’t been at Andersonville very long, but nobody suspected him of being a Confederate plant. For one thing, three officers already incarcerated vouched for him. For another, he was a Yankees’ Yankee: he came from Maine, and spoke with such a

thick down-East accent, half his fellow POWs had trouble following him. Moss couldn't imagine a Confederate plant talking like that.

"Hot today," Swinburne said mournfully.

"Hot yesterday. Hot tomorrow. Hot the day after, too." Moss kicked at the red dirt. Dust rose from under his foot. He pointed up into the sky, where big black birds circled. "See those?"

Swinburne looked, shielding his eyes with the palm of his hand. He was about six-one, on the skinny side, with dark blond hair and a thin little mustache that almost disappeared if you looked at it from the wrong angle. "Ravens?" he asked.

Did you see ravens soaring over the Maine woods? Moss wouldn't have been surprised. He wasn't sure he'd ever seen one, but he was no birdwatcher. He did know the birds he was watching now weren't ravens. "Vultures," he said solemnly. "Waiting for something to fall over dead from the sun so they can come down and have dinner."

"Vultures." The way Swinburne said it, it sounded like *vuhchaaz.* He nodded. "Ayuh. Seen 'em on the field, time or two. Nasty birds." He stretched out the *a* in *nasty* and swallowed the *r* in *birds.* After wiping his forehead with the back of his hand, he went on, "How do folks live in weather like this all the time, though?"

People wondered the same thing about Maine, of course, for opposite reasons. Moss said, "I'm from Chicago. I don't think there's any kind of weather in the world you don't see there."

"That's not so bad," Swinburne said. "That's variety, like. But this here every day?" He shuddered. "I'd cook."

There was a variation on this theme. When it wasn't hot and muggy and sunny, it was hot and muggy and pouring rain. Moss didn't bother pointing that out. He doubted the other POW would find it an improvement.

With another nod, Hal Swinburne went on his way. He didn't move any faster than he had to. In this heat and humidity, nobody moved any faster than he had to. Sweat coated Moss' skin, thick and heavy as grease. It welded his shirt and even his trousers to his body.

Coming into the shade inside the barracks hall was a small relief, but only a small one. "A little warm out there," Moss remarked.

That made even the men in the unending corner poker game look up. “Really?” one of them said.

“Never would have guessed,” another added.

“Come on, Major,” a third poker player put in. “You knew hell was supposed to be hot, right?”

Moss laughed. A moment later, he wondered why. If this wasn’t hell, it had to be one of the nastier suburbs of purgatory. He went over to Colonel Summers. “Could I talk with you for a moment, sir?” he asked.

The senior U.S. officer in the camp nodded. “Certainly.” He closed the beat-up paperbound mystery he’d been reading. “I already know who done it, anyhow.” Moss knew who done it in that one, too. The camp library didn’t hold enough books. Anyone who’d been here for a while and liked to read had probably gone through all of them at least once. Monty Summers got to his feet. “What’s on your mind, Major?”

Till they walked outside again, Moss kept it to small talk. Summers didn’t seem surprised or put out. When Moss was sure neither guards nor fellow prisoners could overhear, he asked, “Are we still working on an escape?”

“Officially, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Colonel Summers answered. “Officially, I had no idea there was a tunnel under these grounds till the rain showed it. I was shocked—shocked, I tell you—to learn that some men here were planning to break out. The Confederates couldn’t prove any different, either. I’m glad they couldn’t. It would have been troublesome if they could.”

He wouldn’t admit a damn thing. That was bound to be smart. The less he said, the less the Confederates could make him sorry for. The less Moss heard, the less the enemy could squeeze out of him. All the same . . . “I do believe I’m going to go smack out of my mind if I stay cooped up here much longer.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t,” Summers said. “They’ll put you in a straitjacket, and those things are uncomfortable as the devil, especially in this weather.”

“Yes, sir,” Moss said resignedly. He should have known he wouldn’t get a straight answer. As a matter of fact, he had known it, or had a pretty good idea. That he’d squawked anyhow was a telling measure of how fed up and cooped up he was feeling.

Voice far drier than the dripping air they both breathed, Summers said, “Believe me, Major, you aren’t the only one incompletely satisfied with the accommodations around here.”

“No?” Moss’ spirits revived, or tried to. “Is there anyone in particular I should talk to? Is anybody besides me *especially* unhappy about them?”

“If someone is, I’m sure he’ll get in touch with you,” Colonel Summers said, which again told Moss nothing. “Was anything else troubling you? As I say, you’re not the only one who doesn’t like it here. Remember that and you may keep from winning one of the guards a furlough.”

“Bastards,” Moss muttered. The POWs didn’t know for a fact that their guards got time off for shooting a prisoner who’d set foot on the smoothed ground just inside the barbed wire—or, sometimes, for shooting a prisoner who looked as if he was about to do such a thing. They didn’t know it, but they believed it the way a lot of them believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

“Of course they’re bastards,” Summers said. “They get paid to be bastards. You don’t want to make things easy for them, do you?”

“Well, no, sir,” Moss said.

“Good.” Summers nodded in a businesslike way. “I should hope not.” He waved to Lieutenant Swinburne, who was on his way back to the barracks. “What do you think of the guards, Lieutenant?”

“Me, sir? Pack of bastards,” Swinburne answered at once. The word was *bahstuds* in his mouth, giving it only a vague resemblance to what Moss had called the guards.

“Thanks. I couldn’t have put that better myself,” Summers said. The officer from Maine touched his cap with a forefinger and went on his way. Colonel Summers turned back to Moss. “You see? You’re not the only one who loves these people.”

“I never said I was, sir.” Moss scowled. “I’ve got more right to complain than he does. I’ve been here longer.”

“Yes, but they interrogate him more. They’ve already squeezed everything out of you that they’re going to get,” Summers said. “He’s new, so they still have hopes.”

“If there’s more than three Confederate officers between here and Richmond who don’t know my name, rank, and pay number, I’d be amazed. And not a goddamn one of them knows anything but that.” Moss spoke with a certain somber pride.

“They’ve grilled all of us, Major,” Summers replied, wearily rolling his eyes as if to say, *Haven’t they just!* “I know they get more out of some people than they do from others.” He held up a hasty hand. “I’m not talking about you, and I’m not talking about Swinburne, either.”

“I know, sir. I understood that. Some men will talk more than others, and they lean on some harder than others, depending on what they think the poor sons of bitches know.” Moss sighed. “I can’t even cuss ’em for that, or not real hard, because I know damn well we do the same thing.”

Monty Summers shrugged. “It’s war,” he said: two words that covered a multitude of sins. “We all do the best we can.”

“Yes, sir,” Moss agreed mournfully. “And look what that’s got us.” His wave encompassed the camp. “God knows what would have happened if we tried to screw up.”

“Heh,” Colonel Summers said—a noise that sounded like a laugh but wasn’t. “A hell of a lot of people who didn’t do their best are dead right now.”

“Oh, yes, sir,” Moss agreed. “And some of them are back in Philadelphia with stars on their shoulder straps. They’re drinking good booze and eating steaks and screwing their secretaries. For them, the war’s a nuisance or an opportunity, depending on how you look at things.”

Summers eyed him for a long moment before saying, “That holds on both sides of the border, you know.”

“I sure hope so, sir,” Moss said. “But what worries me is, the Confederates may have done a better job of sweeping away their deadwood than we have, and that’s liable to cost us. It’s liable to cost us a lot.”

XIII

D r. Leonard O'Doull wondered how many places he'd set up his aid station since returning to the war. A lot of them—that was all he knew for sure. After a while, they started blurring together. So did cases. What made that worse was, he never saw them again after they went back for more treatment. He never found out whether they got better or worse. They were just arms or legs or bellies or chests or heads—not that he or anybody else this side of God could do much for too many head wounds.

When he complained about that outside the aid tent one day, Granville McDougald said, "Well, Doc, remember the fellow who had the round burrow under his scalp and come out the back?"

"*Calisse!* I'm not likely to forget him," O'Doull said. That one would stay in his memory forever. "I haven't come that close to crapping myself since I was three years old. But most of the bullets don't go around. They go in."

McDougald grimaced. He crushed a cigarette under his foot. They'd set up in some woods north of Pittsburgh. Catbirds mewed and squawked in the trees. They made an ungodly racket, not all of it catlike. You didn't see them all that often. They were gray with black caps and rusty brown under their tails—good camouflage colors—and stayed where leaves and bushes were thick. A cardinal scratching for seeds on the ground, on the other hand . . .

"I used to love those birds," O'Doull said sadly, pointing towards it. "Nowadays, though, the color just reminds me of blood."

"You *are* cheery this morning, aren't you?" McDougald studied the plump, crested cardinal. "I still like 'em."

"To each his own." O'Doull looked up at the leaves and branches overhead in a different way. "I wish we were a little more out in the open. A tree burst right above us would fill the aid tent with shrapnel."

"If we were out in the open, we'd get shrapnel from ground bursts that the tree trunks will stop," McDougald answered, which was also true. "Only way not to worry about artillery is not to have a war, and it's a little late for that now."

"Just a bit, yeah," O'Doull said. "And ain't it a shame?"

His head came up like a pointer's taking a scent. So did McDougald's. But they didn't smell anything. No, they heard heavy footsteps: the footsteps of stretcher bearers bringing back a casualty. "Doc!" Eddie yelled. "Hey, Doc! Here's a new model for you!"

"Back to work," O'Doull murmured, and Granville McDougald nodded. The doctor raised his voice: "Bring him to us, Eddie!" He went inside and washed his hands with soap and disinfectant, taking special care to clean under and around his nails. McDougald did the same. They slipped on surgical masks together. Sometimes O'Doull wondered how much good that did when wounds were often already filthy before they got back to him. He supposed you had to try.

Another groaning wounded man, this one shot in the leg. Except, as Eddie had said, he wasn't what O'Doull was used to seeing. He was short and swarthy and black-haired, and wore a uniform of cut and color—a khaki more nearly yellow than brown—different from either U.S. green-gray or C.S. butternut. When words broke through the animal noises of pain, they came in Spanish, not English.

"Heard there were Mexican troops in front of us," McDougald remarked.

"So did I." O'Doull nodded. "Poor devil came a long way just to let some nasty strangers put a hole in him."

McDougald shook his head. "He came to put holes in the nasty strangers himself. Suckers always do. They never figure the guys on the other side are gonna shoot back."

The Mexican soldier's moans eased. Eddie or one of the other corpsmen must have given him morphine. He said something. O'Doull couldn't figure out what it was. Spanish and French were related, sure, but not closely enough to let him understand one even if he knew the other.

He spoke in English: "You'll be all right." From what he could see of the wound, he thought that was true. The bullet looked to have blown off a chunk of flesh, but not to have shattered any bones. He turned to McDougald. "Put him under."

"Right you are, Doc." McDougald settled the ether cone over the wounded man's face. He and Eddie had to keep the soldier from yanking it off; a lot of men thought they were being gassed when they inhaled the anesthetic. After a few breaths, the Mexican's hands fell away and he went limp.

O'Doull cleaned out the wound and sewed it up. Had men from the soldier's own side brought him in, it would have been a hometowner: good for convalescent leave, but nothing that would keep him from coming back to the front. As things were, he'd sit out the rest of the war in a POW camp.

When the job was done, O'Doull nodded to Eddie. "You can take him back to the rear now. If they have anybody who speaks Spanish handy, they'll probably want to grill him."

"I suppose," Eddie said. "Like worrying about the Confederates wasn't bad enough. Now we've got the greasers jumping on us, too."

No matter what he called Mexicans, he handled this one with the same rough compassion he would have shown any wounded soldier, white, brown, black, or even green. He and the other stretcher bearers carried away the still-unconscious man.

"Interesting," Granville McDougald said. "Does this mean the Confederates are starting to run low on their own men?"

"Don't know," said O'Doull, who hadn't looked at it like that.

"Well, neither do I," McDougald allowed. "I don't think like Jake Featherston or Francisco José, thank God. I hope I'm not a son of a bitch or a moron." That startled a laugh out of O'Doull. The medic went on, "But even if I don't *know,* that's sure how it looks to me."

"It makes sense," O'Doull said. "We beat the CSA last time by hammering on them till they couldn't hammer back anymore. If we're going to win this war, we'll have to knock 'em flat again."

"Flatter," McDougald said. "Last time, we let 'em up again. If we beat 'em this time, we'd better not do that again. I don't know how long we'll have to sit on 'em, but we need to do it, however long it takes."

"I suppose so," O'Doull said mournfully. "But remember what Kentucky and Houston were supposed to be like before the plebiscite?"

"I'd better remember—I was *in* Houston for a while. Half of what went on never made the papers in the USA, let alone in Quebec, I bet." Granville McDougald paused. He looked very unhappy. "I don't want to think about how much trouble sitting on the whole Confederacy would be. Those people purely hate us, no two ways about it. But if we don't occupy them and control them, we'll have to fight 'em again

in another twenty years, and I sure as hell don't want to do that, either."

"So what you're telling me is, we're in trouble no matter what happens," O'Doull said. "Thanks a lot, Granny."

"There's trouble, and then there's *trouble,*" McDougald said. "Trouble is us occupying the Confederate States. *Trouble* is the Confederates occupying us. If I've got a choice, I know which one I'd take."

"Yeah, me, too," O'Doull said. "Here's hoping we've got a choice."

"Now why would you say something like that?" McDougald inquired. "Haven't you got confidence in our brilliant leaders? Doesn't the fact that we're fighting in Pennsylvania mean victory's right around the corner?"

"That's what I'm afraid of," O'Doull answered. "The only trouble is, whose victory are you talking about?"

McDougald laughed, for all the world as if they were sitting in a saloon telling jokes. The fate of nations? Who could get excited about the fate of nations if the beer was cold and the joint had a halfway decent free-lunch spread? The medic said, "If we were a little farther back of the line and we talked like this, we'd catch hell for defeatism, you know?"

"Yeah, they'd yell at us," O'Doull agreed. "But that's all they'd do. If we talked like this on the Confederate side of the line, they'd probably shoot us."

"Y'all are damnyankee sympathizers." McDougald's Southern drawl wouldn't get him into espionage. "Y'all can have blindfolds. I ain't gonna waste good Confederate tobacco on you, though—that's for damn sure."

"A Kentucky colonel you're not," O'Doull said. But then he thought about the warning that had come in: Confederate soldiers in U.S. uniform were supposed to be operating behind U.S. lines. They were supposed to have good U.S. accents, too. O'Doull had no idea if that was true, or how you went about telling a disguised Confederate from an average screwup. He also wondered what to do if one of those Confederates in U.S. clothing came into the aid station. Then he wondered how the devil he'd know.

* * *

Scipio got more frightened every day. Nothing had changed in the Terry since the sweep that would have swept out his family and him. Nothing had changed, no, but trouble was in the air. Something new was stirring, and he didn't know what it was.

He came right out and asked Jerry Dover. The manager at the Huntsman's Lodge just shrugged and said, "I haven't heard anything."

"Do Jesus!" Scipio said. "Them Freedom Party stalwarts, they looks like they gwine kill all o' we, an' you ain't *heard* nothin'?"

"If I had, I'd tell you," Dover said. "This time, I think you're flabbling over nothing."

"Ain't you got no mo' errands fo' me to run? Ain't you got no errands fo' me an' my whole fambly to run?" Scipio paused, then switched dialects to the one he hardly ever used: "Mr. Dover, please understand me—I am a desperate man, sir." He had to be desperate to use his white man's voice.

It rocked Dover, the way it would have rocked any white in the CSA. Biting his lip, the restaurant manager muttered, "If I'd known you were that goddamn sharp, I never would've sent you to Savannah."

Scipio wanted to laugh, or possibly to scream. Jerry Dover had worked alongside him for more than twenty years. If that didn't give Dover the chance to figure out what kind of brains he had . . . Scipio knew what the trouble was, of course. All that time, he'd talked like a nigger, and an ignorant nigger at that. Perception clouded reality. Like so many whites, Dover had assumed anybody who sounded like an illiterate field hand had to be as ignorant and probably as stupid as a field hand.

Of course, there were holes in that line of thought. Dover had known all along that he could read and write and cipher. Set that against sounding like a buck from the Congaree swamps, though, and it suddenly became small potatoes.

"What *was* in that envelope I took there?" Scipio pressed his advantage. He didn't get one very often, and knew he had to make the most of it. "Something for the United States? Something for the Freedom Party? Something for a lady friend of yours, perhaps?" Even to himself, he sounded smarter when he talked like a white man. If

that wasn't a measure of what living in the Confederate States his whole life had done to him, he didn't know what would be.

Jerry Dover turned red. "Whatever it was, it's none of your damn beeswax," he snapped. "The less you know about it, the better off we both are. Have you got that?"

He made sense, no matter how much Scipio wished he didn't. If they arrested Scipio instead of just hauling him off to a camp, he couldn't tell them what he didn't know. Of course, he could tell them Dover's name, at which point they'd start tearing into the restaurant manager. And how would *he* stand up to the third degree? Scipio almost looked forward to finding out. If Dover's ruin didn't so surely involve his own, he would have.

"Somethin' else you better keep in mind," Dover said. "Wasn't for me, you'd be dead. Wasn't for me, you'd be in wherever niggers go when they clean out part of the Terry. Instead, you're still walkin' around Augusta, and you don't seem any too goddamn grateful for it."

"If walking around Augusta involved anything even approaching freedom—lowercase *f,* mind you—I *would* be grateful," Scipio said. "But this is only a slightly more spacious prison. I don't ask for much, Mr. Dover. I could accept living as I did before the war began. It was imperfect, but I know it was as much as I could reasonably expect from this country. What I have now, sir—I do believe a preacher would call it hell."

He'd hoped his passion—and his accent—would impress the white man. Maybe they even did. But Dover said, "All I got to tell you is, you don't know what you're talking about. You go on about a preacher? You ought to get down on bended knee and thank God you don't know what you're talking about."

Where Scipio had rocked him before, now he shook the black man. He sounded as if he knew exactly what *he* was talking about. "Mr. Dover, if what you say is true, then my family and I have even more urgent reasons to leave Augusta immediately."

"Bullshit," Dover said. Scipio blinked as if he'd never heard the word before. "Bull*shit,*" Dover repeated. "What the hell makes you think things are better anywhere else, for crying out loud?"

Scipio bit down on that like a man breaking a tooth on a cherry pit in his piece of pie. "Do Jesus!" he exclaimed, startled for a moment back into his usual way of talking. He'd always thought of Augusta as an

aberration, a disaster. If it wasn't . . .

"Jesus ain't got nothin' to do with it," Jerry Dover said brutally. "Don't be dumber than you can help, all right? If you reckon you're the only one in the world with troubles, what does that make you? Besides a damn fool, I mean?"

"Do Jesus!" Scipio said again, softly this time. "What am I gonna do?"

He wasn't asking the question of the restaurant manager. He wasn't asking God, either. He was asking himself, and he had no more answers than either God or Dover did.

Dover thought he had one: "Get your ass out there, do your job, and keep your head down."

Had Scipio been alone in the world, that might even have sufficed. As things were, he shook his head. "I got a wife, Mistuh Dover. I got chilluns." He couldn't talk like a white man now; that would have hurt too much. "I wants dem chilluns to do better'n I ever done. How kin dey do dat? Likely tell, dey don't even git to grow up." Tears filled his eyes and his voice.

Dover looked down at his desk. "I don't know what you want me to do about it."

"He'p me!" Scipio burst out. "You gots to he'p me. Git me outa here."

"How? Where?" the restaurant manager demanded. "You reckon I got some magic carpet that'll fly you to Mexico or the USA? If you do, give me some of whatever you're drinking, on account of I want to get goofy, too."

Scipio looked wildly around him. The walls of Dover's office seemed to be closing in. Except it wasn't the office alone. . . . "You know somethin', Mistuh Dover?" he said. "This whole country—this whole goddamn country—ain't nothing but a prison camp fo' black folks."

"Yeah, well, I can't do nothin' about that, neither," Jerry Dover said. "All I can do is run this place here. And if you aren't out there waiting tables in five minutes, I start having trouble doing that."

"No, suh," Scipio said, and Dover blinked; whites in the CSA seldom met outright refusal from Negroes. Scipio went on, "Reckon you do more'n dat. Reckon you never woulda sent me to Savannah, you didn't do more'n dat." He still didn't know why the white man had sent him

there. He didn't care, either. That he'd gone gave him a weapon. "You got to he'p me. You got to he'p my chilluns."

"I already have," Dover said quietly. Scipio grimaced. That was true. Dover went on, "You want me to do more than I can do. You want me to do more than anybody can do. I can't make you turn white. That's what you really want out of me, isn't it?"

He made Scipio grimace again. Even when times were relatively good for blacks in the CSA, skin lighteners and hair straighteners—a lot of them, especially the lighteners, only quack nostrums—sold briskly. The worse times got, the better they sold, too. These days, anyone who could possibly pass for white was doing it. Scipio's own skin was far too dark even to let him think about it. Bathsheba was lighter, but not light enough. Neither were Antoinette and Cassius. They were all irredeemably marked as what they were.

"Damn you, Mistuh Dover," Scipio said dully.

"I'm sorry. Hell, I *am* sorry. I didn't want things to turn out like this," Jerry Dover said. "I'm no goddamn Freedom Party goon. You know that. But I can't stick my neck out too far, either, not unless I want it chopped."

Scipio tried to hate him. Try as he would, he couldn't. Dover wasn't as big a man as he might have been. But plenty were smaller, too, and not all of them were white. Dover didn't even use his advantage in color and class to order Scipio out of his office. He just waited. Scipio could tell no hope was to be had here. He left by himself.

Taking orders in the restaurant, bringing them back to the kitchen, and carrying food out again felt strangely surreal. The prosperous white men and their sleek companions treated him as they always would have: like a servant. They talked as if he weren't there. Had he been a U.S. spy, he could have learned some interesting things about railroad repairs and industrial bottlenecks. He could have picked up some pointers on barrel deployment from an officer trying—the wrong way, in Scipio's view—to impress a really beautiful brunette.

He kept waiting to hear word about the Terry, about yet another cleanout. He'd been doing that ever since the night when the Angel of Death, thanks to Jerry Dover, passed over his family and him. But the whites in the Huntsman's Lodge never talked about things like that. Maybe they didn't want to think about them while they were eating venison or duck in orange sauce and drinking fancy French wine. Or

maybe they weren't quite so oblivious to the colored staff as they let on.

It was probably some of each. Scipio wouldn't have wanted to think about sending people off to camps while he was enjoying a fine meal, either. And, while whites in the CSA often pretended to ignore Negroes, they knew they couldn't really afford to do it very often. They would pay, and pay high, if they did.

He got through the evening. He clocked out of the Huntsman's Lodge and walked through Augusta's dark, silent streets—the city remained under blackout even if no Yankee bombers had ever appeared overhead—toward the Terry. It was like going back to jail—with the barbed wire all around, just like that.

"Halt!" called one of the policemen and stalwarts at the gate. "Advance and be recognized. Slow and easy, or you never get another chance."

They were jumpy tonight. Scipio didn't like that; it was too likely a harbinger of trouble. "Ain't nobody but me," he said. What would the ruffians have done if he'd used his white man's voice with them? Shot him, probably, for not being what they expected.

As things were, they laughed. "It's the old spook in the boiled shirt," one of them said. The gate creaked as they opened it. "Go on through." They didn't even ask for his passbook. Whatever the shape of the trouble they were flabbling about, it wasn't his.

The Terry's streets were even quieter than those of the white part of Augusta. Scipio imagined he heard ghosts moaning along them, but it was only the breeze . . . or was it? With more than half the Negroes scooped out of the place and carried off to a fate unknown but unlikely to be good, ghosts were bound to be wandering the streets where so many real people no longer went.

His apartment was dark. Bathsheba had got a couple of kerosene lamps after the electricity was cut off, but kerosene was hard to come by these days, too. They used it only when they had to. He navigated with the confidence of a man who knew where everything was whether he could see it or not. His wife had left his nightshirt out for him on a chair by the bed. He sighed with relief at escaping the tuxedo. Sleep dissolved night terrors.

Breakfast was bread and jam. Cassius and Antoinette were already up when Scipio rose. His son said, "Pa, we got to fight the ofays. We don't

fight 'em, reckon they go an' kill us all."

"We do fight de buckra, reckon dey kills all o' we anyways," Scipio answered.

"Leastways we gets to hit back," Cassius said.

Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;/He thinks too much: such men are dangerous. Having watched the brutal collapse of the Congaree Socialist Republic, Scipio knew black uprisings against whites in the CSA had no hope. He looked around. Was there hope anywhere else in the Terry? Not that he could see. All he said was, "Be careful, son. Be careful as you kin."

Cassius' face lit with a terrible joy, the joy of a man who had nothing left to lose.

M idnight was the traditional time for the knock on the door. Had the police come then, Cincinnatus Driver would have greeted them with the bolt-action Tredegar he'd hidden under a floorboard in the front room. But they caught up with him in the middle of the afternoon and found him on the street, armed only with a cane.

There were four of them. Three were older than Cincinnatus. The fourth, who must have been a cadet or a pup or whatever they called it, couldn't have been above sixteen. But he carried a .45, while the regular cops sported two submachine guns and a shotgun. They didn't come into the colored part of Covington without being ready for trouble.

They started to walk on past Cincinnatus. Then one of the geezers—he wore a bushy mustache that had been red once but was almost all white now—paused and said, "You're Cincinnatus Driver, ain't you?"

Cincinnatus thought hard about denying it. But if he did, they'd ask him for his passbook, and that would prove he'd lied. The truth seemed a better bet. "Yes, suh," he said, and waited to see what happened next.

"He's on the list!" the cadet exclaimed, his voice breaking.

"He sure as hell is," the cop with the mustache agreed. Cincinnatus didn't like the sound of that. As usual in the CSA, what a Negro liked or didn't like didn't matter. The cop gestured with his submachine

gun. “You’re gonna come along with us.”

“What for?” Cincinnatus yelped. “I ain’t done nothin’!” He didn’t think he had done anything they could prove. Hadn’t they grabbed him once and let him go?

The white-mustached cop chuckled. “Buddy, if I had a dime for every asshole I nabbed who hadn’t done anything, I could’ve quit workin’ a hell of a long time ago. Now you can come along quiet-like or you can come along some other way. But you’re gonna come. So what’ll it be?”

One cane against all that firepower made ridiculous odds. And the policemen were pros. The old-timers didn’t come close enough to let Cincinnatus lash out even if he’d been crazy enough to do it. When the kid started to, one of them pulled him back and explained how he’d almost been a damn fool. “I’ll come quiet,” Cincinnatus said.

“Smart fellow,” the mustachioed cop said. He turned to the cadet. “He’s smarter’n you are, Newt. How’s that make you feel?” By the look on Newt’s face, it made him want to cry.

A blue jay scolded Cincinnatus and the policemen for having the nerve to walk under the oak tree where it perched. A little kid playing in his front yard stared at them, eyes enormous in his dark face. So did a drunk draped over a front porch. Cincinnatus happened to know the drunk reported to Lucullus Wood. He feared that wouldn’t help him.

When the gate closed behind him and he passed out of the barbed-wire perimeter around the colored quarter, that small latch click had a dreadfully final sound. A police car waited just beyond the gate. The policeman with the mustache took Cincinnatus’ cane away when he got into the back seat, then got in beside him. “I’ll give it back when we get to the station,” he said in the tones of a man just doing his job. “Don’t want you trying anything silly, though.”

“Know how to get what you want, I reckon,” Cincinnatus said. The cop laughed.

When they got to the station, they didn’t tell Cincinnatus what he was charged with. He feared that was a bad sign. They stuck him in a cell by himself. None of the other cells close by had anybody in it, so he had no one to talk to. He feared that was a bad sign, too.

But they let him keep the cane. Maybe they knew how much trouble he had getting around without it. Police, though, weren’t in the habit of showing white prisoners consideration, let alone blacks. Sitting on

the edge of the cot—the only place he could sit except for the concrete floor—he scratched his head.

A guard who must have been called back from retirement brought him supper on a tray: two cheese sandwiches on coarse, brownish bread and a big cup of water. Cincinnatus shoved the empty tray and cup out into the hall and went back to the cot.

The guard nodded when he came back to pick up the tray. “You know the drill, all right. Reckon you been in the joint before.”

“Not for anything I did,” Cincinnatus said.

“Likely tell. That’s what they all say.” Bending made the guard swear under his breath: “Goddamn rheumatism.”

Cincinnatus had never expected to sympathize with a screw. But he had aches and pains, too. Whatever his thoughts, the guard never knew them. The white man would have taken sympathy as weakness. Show weakness in a place like this and you were . . . even worse off than you were already, which wasn’t good.

He waited for them to come and start squeezing him for whatever they thought he knew. No matter what they did, he couldn’t tell them much about Luther Bliss. He had no idea where the U.S. secret policeman was staying, or even if he was still in Covington. If they started asking him about Lucullus, though . . . He could do Lucullus a lot of harm. He didn’t want to, but he knew the best will in the world wouldn’t always stand up against enough pain.

They left him in there. They fed him. The food was a long way from good, but he didn’t go hungry. They took out the honey bucket twice a day. It was just . . . jail. It didn’t feel as if they were softening him up for anything drastic. They could easily have done much worse.

Maybe they thought they were lulling him. He didn’t mind. He would take whatever he could get. Boredom wasn’t much, but it beat the hell out of brutality. If he yawned, if he paced—well, so what? He could have bled. He could have spat out teeth. He’d heard of things they could do with a motorcar battery and some wires that made his stomach turn over. Compared to any of that, boredom was a walk in the park on a sunny spring day.

It had to end. And when it did, it was even worse than he’d feared. Police didn’t come for him. Instead, the man at the head of three guards who carried submachine guns was a jackbooted Confederate

major with a face like a clenched fist. “You’re Cincinnatus Driver?” he barked.

“Yes, suh,” Cincinnatus admitted apprehensively.

“Damnfool notion, letting niggers have last names,” the officer muttered. Cincinnatus kept his mouth shut. It wouldn’t do him any good—he was all too sure of that—but it wouldn’t harm him, either. Anything he said might have. The major glowered at him. The man’s mouth got even tighter. Cincinnatus hadn’t thought it could. One of the guards had a key. He opened the cell door. “Come on,” the major said. “Get out. Get moving.”

Cincinnatus obeyed—what choice did he have? “Where you takin’ me?” he asked. They couldn’t get too angry at him for wanting to know.

That didn’t mean they would tell him. “Shut up,” the major said. “You’re coming along with me.” He looked as if he would sooner have scraped Cincinnatus off the soles of those highly polished boots than had anything more personal to do with him. Cincinnatus wasn’t all that eager to have anything to do with the major, either. The white man, however, had a choice. As usual, Cincinnatus got none.

They marched him down the corridor to the front desk. The Confederate officer signed whatever paperwork he had to sign to take Cincinnatus farther than that. Then he and two of the guards took Cincinnatus out of the city jail altogether (the third one, the one with the key, stayed behind). They bundled him into a motorcar and took him up to the docks on the Ohio. Another auto pulled up beside his. To his surprise, his father got out of that one. Seneca Driver had his own contingent of guards. “What’s goin’ on, Son?” he asked.

“Beats me,” Cincinnatus answered.

“Shut up, both of you,” the major said. “Into the boat.” He pointed. It was a smallish motorboat with, at the moment, a Red Cross flag draped across what had to be a machine-gun mount up near the bow. Awkwardly, Cincinnatus obeyed. Then he helped his father into the boat, though the older man was probably sprier than he was.

The engine roared to life. The motorboat arrowed across the river to the Cincinnati side. More guards waited at a pier there. One of them condescended to give Cincinnatus a hand as he struggled out of the boat. “Thank you, suh,” he said softly.

“Shut up! No talking!” The major had strong opinions and what seemed to be a one-track mind. He pointed to a waiting motorcar painted C.S. butternut. “Get in.”

Soldiers stood near the motorcar. The automatic rifles they carried made the submachine guns he’d seen before seem children’s toys by comparison. Their expressions said they would just as soon shoot him as look at him. He got into the auto. One of them got in beside him. “Don’t fuck with me, Sambo,” the Confederate said casually, “or you’ll never find out how the serial down at the Bijou turns out.”

“I ain’t done nothin’,” Cincinnatus said. “I ain’t gonna do nothin’, neither.” The soldier only grunted. He didn’t believe a word of it. Another heavily armed man sat in the front seat next to the driver.

Away went the motorcar. Cincinnatus looked out the window. Cincinnati had taken more battle damage than Covington. The people on the streets looked shabby and unhappy. He never saw Confederate soldiers in parties smaller than four. That told him a lot about what the occupied thought of their occupiers.

“Can I look out the back window, suh, without you shootin’ me?” he asked the soldier.

After considering, the man nodded. “Hand me your stick first,” he said. “Move slow and careful. Don’t get cute, or you’ll be sorry—but not for long.”

Cincinnatus obeyed in every particular. He saw what he’d hoped to see: another motorcar full of soldiers right behind this one. With any luck at all, that one also held his father. He swung around so he was sitting straight ahead again. “Thank you kindly, suh.”

“Huh,” the Confederate soldier said, and then, “Looks like we’re here.”

Here was the Cincinnati city jail. Cincinnatus wondered if he’d just traded one cell for another. Nobody told him to get out of the auto, though. In fact, three more motorcars joined the ones he and his father were in. The procession headed west and north through occupied Ohio.

Most of the countryside looked normal, as if war had never touched it. Here and there, usually around towns, were patches of devastation. You could see where U.S. soldiers had stood and fought and where they’d been outflanked, outmaneuvered, and forced from their positions.

The little convoy passed through checkpoint after checkpoint. At one of them, a soldier put something on the wireless aerial to Cincinnatus' auto. He couldn't see what it was. He asked permission to look back at the motorcar behind him again. The soldier with the automatic rifle looked disgusted but nodded. He didn't get any less alert. He also showed no sign of needing to take a leak, though they'd been traveling for quite a while. Cincinnatus didn't know how much longer *he* could go on before asking for a stop. He didn't know if he'd get one, though, even if he asked.

A white flag flew from the other auto's aerial. He supposed his motorcar carried the same flag of truce. But when he asked about it, the soldier stared through him and said, "Shut up." He didn't argue with an armed man.

Just before he had to ask for a stop—and just after they'd rolled through a small town called Oxford—the convoy halted on its own. "Where the hell are they?" the driver grumbled.

"They'll be here," said the other man in the front seat. "Ain't like we never done this before."

Sure enough, five minutes later another convoy of motorcars approached from the west. Those also had white flags on their wireless antennas. They were painted green-gray, not butternut. The soldier next to Cincinnatus nudged him with the muzzle of his rifle. "Get out." He obeyed. The soldier passed him his cane. His father left the auto behind him. Three skinny white men who needed shaves emerged from the other motorcars.

Along with U.S. soldiers, five whites got out of the green-gray autos. Cincinnatus' dour major went up to confer with a U.S. officer who might have been his long-lost twin. They signed some papers for each other. The C.S. major turned back. "You are exchanged!" he shouted to Cincinnatus and the others. "You're the damnyankees' worry now. Far as I'm concerned, they're welcome to you. Go on—git!"

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus whispered as he limped forward into U.S. custody. That cop in Covington hadn't lied to him after all. "Do Jesus!" He looked back to his father. "Come on, Pa. I think we're goin' home."

Sergeant Michael Pound had a new barrel. Considering what had happened to the old one, that was anything but a surprise. But this

wasn't a new barrel of the same old style. U.S. engineers had rapidly figured out they needed to do something about the fearsome new machine the Confederates had introduced. Their answer was . . . not everything it might have been, but a damn sight better than no change at all.

The chassis hadn't changed much. The engine was of similar design to the old one, but put out an extra fifty horsepower. That was all to the good, because the new barrel was heavier, and needed the extra muscle to shove it around.

Almost all the weight gain came from the new turret. It was bigger than the old one. Its armor was thicker and better sloped. And it had been upgunned. Instead of a 37mm gun—an inch and a half to a gunner—it now carried a 60mm piece—a little less than two and a half inches. That still didn't match the three-inch monster the new Confederate barrels used, but it was big enough to make any enemy barrel say uncle, where you had to be damn good or damn lucky to hurt the new C.S. machine with the 37mm cannon.

And the 60mm gun was absolutely the biggest one that would fit on the turret ring of the old chassis. A new, improved body took a lot longer to turn out than a reworked turret. The Confederates must have been planning their Mark 2 while the Mark 1 was just starting production. The USA hadn't done that. And so, instead of a proper Mark 2, the United States had to make do with Mark 1.5, more or less.

"Ugly beast," Pound said, laying a hand on its armored flank. He didn't see how anybody could argue with that. The new turret went with the old chassis about the way a rhino's head went with a cow's body. Everything on the Confederates' new barrels fit together with everything else. They had a grim, functional beauty. The Mark 1.5 was just grim.

"Well, Sergeant, Featherston's fuckers will think it's ugly, too, especially after it bites them a few times." That was Cecil Bergman, Pound's new loader. He was a skinny little guy, which helped him do his job—even though the new turret was bigger on the outside, it had even less room within than the old one.

"That's a fact. The new gun will make them sit up and take notice. About time, too," Pound said. "Maybe we have a chance of holding them out of Pittsburgh now. Maybe." He sounded anything but convinced.

He sounded that way because he *was* unconvinced. The U.S. Army hadn't been able to stop the latest Confederate push, any more than it had been able to stop the Confederate drive up through Ohio the summer before. If you couldn't stop the enemy, how the devil were you supposed to win the war? Pound saw no way.

He could have elaborated on the many failings of the U.S. War Department, but Bergman hissed at him and jerked a thumb off to the left. "Here comes the lieutenant," he warned.

Second Lieutenant Don Griffiths was typical of the breed. He was young, he didn't know much, and one of the things he didn't know was how much he didn't know. He had blond hair and freckles and couldn't possibly have bought a drink without proving to the bartender that he was over twenty-one.

Sergeant Pound and PFC Bergman saluted him. He returned the gesture. "Men, we have our orders," he said.

He sounded full of enthusiasm. It was too early in the morning for Pound to feel enthusiasm or much of anything else except a deep longing for another cup of coffee. But Griffiths stood there waiting expectantly, so Pound did what he was supposed to do: he asked, "What are they, sir?"

"We are going to drive the enemy out of Pennsylvania," the lieutenant said grandly.

"What? All by ourselves?" Pound said.

Don Griffiths wagged a finger in his face. "I've heard about you, Sergeant—don't think I haven't," he said. "You haven't got the right attitude."

"Probably not, sir," Pound agreed politely. "I do object to being killed for no good reason."

"Don't get smart with me, either." Griffiths' voice didn't break the way the late Lieutenant Poffenberger's had, but he still sounded like a kid. "I'll bust you down to private faster than you can say Jack Robinson."

"Go ahead, sir," Pound answered, politely still. "I'll never get rich on Army pay no matter what my rank is, and if I'm a private again I'll get out from under you. Besides, how likely is either one of us to live through the war? Why should I get excited about whether my sleeve has stripes on it?"

Lieutenant Griffiths gaped at him. The gold bar Griffiths wore on each shoulder strap was the only thing he had going for him. He couldn't imagine anybody who didn't care about rank. In fact, Pound did, very much, but the best way to hang on to what he had and be able to mouth off the way he wanted to was to pretend indifference. "You are insubordinate," Griffiths spluttered.

"Not me, sir. Bergman is my witness," Pound said. "Have I been disrespectful? Have I been discourteous? Have I been disobedient?" He knew he hadn't. He could be much more annoying when he stayed within the rules.

Griffiths proved it by spinning on his heel and storming away. PFC Bergman chuckled nervously. "He's gonna get you in Dutch, Sarge," Bergman predicted.

"What can he do to me? Throw me in the stockade?" Pound laughed at the idea. "I hope he does. I'll be warm and safe in a nice cell back of the line, three square meals a day, while he's stuck up here with unfriendly strangers trying to shoot his ass off. The worst thing he could do to me is leave me right where I am."

Bergman shook his head. "Worst he could do is bust you *and* leave you where you're at."

Pound grunted. That, unfortunately, was true. He didn't think Lieutenant Griffiths had the imagination to see it; if he'd had that kind of imagination, he would have been a real officer, not a lowly shavetail. Pound proved right. The next time Griffiths had anything to do with him, the barrel commander pretended their last exchange hadn't happened. Pound played along. He watched the way Griffiths eyed him: like a man watching a bear that might or might not be ready to charge.

Their barrel moved out the next morning. Several platoons of the new machines rumbled north and west from the classically named town of Tarentum. Tarentum lay northeast of Pittsburgh; the barrels wanted to knock in the head of the Confederate column sweeping past the industrial center. Another enemy column was pushing up from the southwest. If they met, they would put Pittsburgh in a pocket. That had happened to Columbus the summer before. If the Confederates brought it off here, they could smash up the U.S. defenders in the pocket at their leisure.

Pittsburgh was the most important iron and steel town in the United

States. If it fell, how could the country go on with the war? If it fell, would the country have the heart to go on with the war? Those were interesting questions. Michael Pound hoped he—and the USA—didn't find out the answers to them.

"This is pretty good barrel country, sir," he remarked to Lieutenant Griffiths after they'd been rolling along for a while.

"It is?" Griffiths sounded suspicious, as if he feared Pound was pulling his leg. "I thought you wanted wide-open spaces for barrels, not all these trees and houses and other obstructions."

Anyone who used a word like *obstructions* in a sentence was bound to have other things wrong with him, too. "You do, sir, if you're on the attack," Pound said patiently. "But if you want to defend, if the enemy's coming at you, having enough cover to shoot from ambush is nice."

"Oh." The lieutenant weighed that. "Yes, I see what you mean."

"I'm glad, sir." Now Pound sounded—and was—dead serious. "Because the point of the whole business is to kill the other guys and not get killed ourselves. That's the long and short of it."

Griffiths didn't disagree with him. The young officer opened the cupola and stood up in the turret to see what he could see. Pound just got glimpses through the gunsight—which was also improved from the one in the earlier turret. The Confederates hadn't got here yet, so the landscape wasn't too badly battered. That didn't mean he would have wanted to live here even if no one had ever heard of war. Coal mines, tailings from coal mines—he'd heard the locals call the stuff red dog—and factories dealing with coal and steel and aluminum dotted the landscape. Some of the factories belched white or gray or black or yellowish smoke into the sky even though the enemy was only a few miles away. They were going to keep operating till the Confederates overran them.

Michael Pound scowled. When they shut down, all the workers would try to get away at once. He'd seen that before. They'd clog the roads, U.S. troops would have trouble going around them or through them, and the Confederates would have a high old time bombing them and shooting them from the air.

Not five minutes after that thought crossed his mind, the barrel slowed and then stopped. Lieutenant Griffiths shouted from the cupola: "You people! Clear the road at once! At once, I tell you! You're

impeding the war effort!" Pound wouldn't have moved for anybody who told him he was impeding anything. This crowd didn't, either.

And they paid for not moving. No Asskickers screamed down out of the sky to pummel them, but they were in range of Confederate artillery. So were the advancing U.S. barrels. That didn't worry Pound very much—except for the rare unlucky direct hit, long-range bombardment wouldn't hurt them. He did tug on Griffiths' trouser leg and call, "Better get down, sir. Fragments aren't healthy."

"Oh. Right." The lieutenant even remembered to close the cupola hatch after himself. He was faintly green, or more than faintly. "My God!" He gulped. "What shellfire does to civilians out in the open . . . It's a slaughterhouse out there."

"Yes, sir," Pound said, as gently as he could. "I've seen it before." He'd got glimpses through the gunsight here, too, and was glad he'd had no more than glimpses. Shrapnel clattered off the sides and front of the barrel. There were times when sitting in a thick armored box wasn't so bad, even if it was too damn hot and nobody in there with you had bathed anytime lately.

Griffiths spoke to the driver over the intercom: "If you can go forward without smashing people, do it." The barrel moved ahead in low gear. Pound didn't like to think about what it was running over, so he resolutely didn't. The lieutenant peered through the periscope: a far cry from sticking your head out and looking around, but nobody would have done that under this kind of shellfire. Well, maybe Irving Morrell would have, but officers like him didn't come along every day.

Suddenly, Griffiths let out an indignant squawk. "What is it, sir?" Pound asked.

"Our men," Griffiths answered. "Our soldiers—retreating!"

Pound got a brief look at them, too, and liked none of what he saw. "We'd better find an ambush position pretty quick, then, sir," he said. "We're going to have company."

Griffiths didn't get it right away. When he did, he nodded. A stone wall that hid the bottom half of the barrel wasn't perfect cover, but it was a lot better than nothing.

"Have an AP round ready," Pound told Bergman. The loader tapped him on the leg to show he'd heard.

“There’s one!” Griffiths squeaked with excitement. “Uh, front, I mean!”

“Identified,” Pound confirmed. “Range six hundred yards.” He added, “Armor-piercing.” Bergman slammed the round into the breech. With quick, fussy precision, Pound lined up the sights on the target: one of the new-model C.S. barrels. Now to see what this new gun could do. He nudged Lieutenant Griffiths. “Ready, sir.”

“Fire!” Griffiths said, and the cannon spoke.

Here in the turret, the report wasn’t too loud. The empty casing leaped from the breech and clattered down onto the deck. Cordite fumes made Pound cough. But he whooped at the same time, for fire spurted from the enemy barrel. “Hit!” he shouted, and Griffiths with him. The old gun wouldn’t have pierced that armor at that range.

“Front!” Griffiths said again, more businesslike this time. “About ten o’clock.”

“Identified,” Pound replied. He scored another hit. Whatever the Confederates wanted today, they weren’t going to buy it cheap.

O ut of the line. Armstrong Grimes knew only one thing besides relief: resentment that he’d have to go back when his regiment’s turn in reserve was up. For the time being, though, nobody would be shooting at him. He wouldn’t be ducking screaming meemies. He wouldn’t wonder if the stranger in a green-gray uniform was really a U.S. soldier, and worry that that unfamiliar face might belong to a Mormon intent on cutting his throat or stabbing him in the back and then sneaking away.

He turned to Sergeant Rex Stowe, who tramped along beside him down what had been a highway and was now mostly shell holes. “Ain’t this fun?”

“Oh, yeah. Now tell me another one.” Stowe needed a shave. His helmet was on crooked. A cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth. He looked like most of the other U.S. soldiers trudging through the wreckage that had been Provo.

“Anybody figure this fight would take so long when it started?” Armstrong persisted. “We’ve been here forever, and we’re still not in Salt Lake City.” He was no lovelier than his sergeant, and had no

doubt he smelled as bad, too.

“We’re doing it on the cheap,” Yossel Reisen complained. “We could end this mess in a hurry if we’d put enough men and barrels and bombers into it.”

“Write your Congresswoman,” Stowe said—a joke that had grown old in the company.

But Reisen answered, “I’ve done it. Aunt Flora says the Confederates and now Canada are taking away what we need.”

Sergeant Stowe didn’t seem to know what to say to that. Neither did Armstrong. They both outranked Yossel, but when it came to clout. . . . Armstrong had none, and as far as he knew Stowe didn’t either. Yossel Reisen, on the other hand, had all the clout in the world—and didn’t want to use any of it.

If he had wanted to use it, he would have been anywhere but here. Provo looked as if God had dropped a cigarette here and then ground it out with a hobnailed boot. The city had fallen weeks ago, but smoke still rose here and there. The smell of death lingered, too. By the urgent insistence it took on every now and then, some of the dead were a lot more recent than the fall of the town.

As Armstrong and his buddies slogged south, other soldiers came north. They were cleaner and better barbered, but their faded uniforms and hard, watchful faces said this wasn’t the first time they were heading up to the front. “What’s new?” one of them called in Armstrong’s general direction.

“You know about the fucking spigot mortar?” he replied.

“Sure do.” The soldier going the other way nodded. “Ka-*boom!* They had that the last time I went up.”

“Yeah, but now they’ve started loading the screaming meemies with mustard gas. They can carry a lot of it, too.”

“Well, shit,” the other soldier said bitterly. “If it’s not one goddamn thing, it’s another. If I have to put on that rubber gear, the heat’ll kill me.”

It was probably somewhere in the upper nineties. That wasn’t so dreadful as it would have been back in Washington or Philadelphia. As people from out West never got tired of saying, it was a dry heat.

That didn't mean it wasn't hot, though. And when you wore full antigas gear, you cooked in your own juices. Who needed humidity then?

A little blond girl came out of the ruins to stare at Armstrong. She was about eight years old, and would have been pretty if she weren't scrawny and filthy and wearing what looked like a torn burlap bag for a dress. The stony hatred on her face didn't help, either.

"Jesus!" He wanted to make the sign of the cross to ward off that look, and he wasn't even Catholic. "She'll shoot at us in the next go-round, and her kid'll pick up a gun in the one after that."

"We oughta just shoot all of these bastards and start over here," Stowe said. "Treat 'em like the Confederates treat their niggers. Then we could do this place right."

"You think Featherston's fuckers really are doing that shit?" Armstrong said. "Seems hard to believe."

"You'd better believe it—it's true," Yossel Reisen said. "My aunt knows more about that stuff than she ever wanted to find out. They're filthy down there, really filthy."

His aunt was likely to know if anybody did. Armstrong said, "Still seems crazy to me. Why would anybody want to do that to somebody else just on account of what he looks like? I mean, I've got no use for niggers, God knows, but I don't want to kill 'em all." He had no idea how many oversimplifications and unexamined ideas he'd packed into that, and was probably lucky he didn't.

"People do it all the time," Yossel said. "You're not Jewish, that's for sure."

"Nope, not me." Armstrong might have had more to say on the subject of Jews, too, but not where his buddy could hear it. You didn't do things like that. Life at the front was tough enough as is. If you pissed off somebody who might save your ass one day soon, you only made it worse.

A sign led to the trucks that would take them back to the R and R center at Thistle. Before long, they'd have to leave again, but Armstrong looked forward to getting clean, getting deloused, and eating real food and sleeping on a real mattress.

As happened too often in the Army, somebody'd screwed up. There

were far more soldiers than trucks to take them to Thistle or anywhere else. The men milled around, waiting for something to happen. A lot of Army life was like that. A captain climbed up on what was left of a brick wall and shouted that more trucks would be along in an hour or so. The cheers he drew were distinctly sarcastic. The catcalls, on the other hand, came from the heart. The captain turned red and got down in a hurry.

Armstrong didn't know what drew his eye to the woman who walked toward the crowd of soldiers. Maybe it was just that she *was* a woman. Most of the ones he'd seen lately wore dungarees and carried rifles and wanted to kill him. He returned the favor the best way he knew how.

This one had on a dress, a baggy dress that reached almost to her ankles. Her face was pinched and pale. Maybe that was what kept Armstrong's eye on her—not her good looks, though she wasn't half bad, but her absolute determination. An alarm bell went off in his mind. He nudged Rex Stowe. "Sergeant, something's wrong with that broad." He pointed.

"Yeah?" Stowe didn't see it for a second. Then he did. "Yeah." He took a step toward her, and started to take another one—

And the world exploded.

Next thing Armstrong knew, he was on his back. Something that stung ran into his eyes. He put up a hand and discovered it was blood. He was bleeding from the leg, too, and from one arm. He looked around. Yossel Reisen, somehow, was still on his feet and didn't seem to be scratched. Sergeant Stowe was down and moaning, both hands pressed to a swelling scarlet stain on his belly.

"She blew herself up!" The words seemed to come from a million miles away. Armstrong realized the bomb must have stunned his ears. He hoped they weren't ruined for good.

He scrambled to his feet. Closer to the woman—who wasn't there anymore, of course—the landscape was a surreal mess of bodies and body parts. How many had she killed? How many had she hurt? Armstrong watched a soldier pull a nail out of his arm. He realized the woman hadn't just carried explosives. She'd had shrapnel, too. She'd done what she'd done on purpose, and she'd made sure she did as much damage as she could when she did it.

"You all right?" Yossel's voice came from far, far away, too.

“If I’m not, I’ll worry about it later,” Armstrong said. “We’ve got to do what we can for these poor mothers.”

He bent beside Rex Stowe and gave him a shot of morphine. He might have wasted it; Stowe was going gray. He put a dressing on the noncom’s wound, but blood soaked through right away. “Corpsman!” Yossel Reisen shouted. But a dozen other soldiers were yelling the same thing, and no medics seemed close by. Who would have thought trouble might strike *here*?

Nobody would have. Nobody had. And that was probably *why* it had happened here. The men waiting for transport hadn’t paid any attention to the Mormon woman . . . till too late.

Yossel Reisen slapped a bandage on Armstrong’s forehead. “Thanks,” he said.

“It’s all right,” Yossel said absently—he had other things on his mind. In disbelieving tones, he went on, “She blew herself up. She fucking blew herself up. She fucking blew herself up on purpose.”

“She sure as shit did.” Armstrong liked that no better than his buddy did. “How do you stop somebody who wants to make like a bomb?”

“I don’t know. I have no idea, and I don’t think anybody else does, either,” Yossel said. “Who would have thought anybody could be that crazy?”

“Mormons,” Armstrong said. The Mormons had caused so much trouble for the USA, and had notions so different from those of most Americans, that blaming things on them just because they *were* Mormons came easy. But even Armstrong, who was anything but reflective, realized more than that went into it. Despite the heat, he shivered. “A woman. She waited till she could hurt the most soldiers, and then—she did.”

“They could pull shit like this anywhere,” Yossel Reisen said, a new horror in his voice. “Anywhere at all. On a bus, in a subway, in a theater, at a football game—anywhere there’s a crowd. If you hate enough and you want to hit back enough . . . you just do.”

“Fuck.” Armstrong meant the word more as prayer than as curse. He said the worst thing he could think of to follow it: “You’re right.”

Men with Red Cross armbands did rush up then. They got Rex Stowe on a stretcher and carried him away. He was still breathing, but

Armstrong didn't think he'd live. Even if he did, he'd be out of the war for months, probably for good.

Bodies and pieces of bodies remained after all the wounded were taken away. So did the butcher-shop stink of blood. Armstrong walked over to where the woman had been standing. He found a torn and charred shoe that wasn't Army issue. But for that, there was no sign she'd ever existed—except the carnage all around. "Fuck," he said again, no less reverently than before.

A dozen U.S. trucks painted Army green-gray rumbled up then. The drivers stared in disbelief at the blood-soaked scene. "What the hell happened here?" one of them said.

Somebody threw a piece of broken brick at his truck. It clanged off the hood. "You son of a bitch!" the soldier shouted. "If you'd got here on time, we wouldn't have been here when she did that!"

Another rock or brick banged off a different truck. For a moment, Armstrong wondered if the soldiers who'd survived the bomb would lynch the truck drivers. They might have if a burly first sergeant hadn't said, "She was gonna do it anyways. If it wasn't us, it woulda been the next poor bunch of bastards. What the fuck you gonna do?"

He was so obviously right—and so large—that he threw cold water on the lynching bee. An officer thought to set up a perimeter in case more Mormons decided to blow themselves to kingdom come for their cause. And then the unwounded and the walking wounded got on the trucks and headed down to Thistle after all. *What the fuck are you gonna do?* Armstrong thought. Like Yossel, he had no idea. He hoped somebody did.

F lora Blackford had never warmed to the Philadelphia cheese steak. The only way they could have made it more *treyf* was to add ham and oysters. She stuck with pastrami on rye. Robert Taft probably wouldn't have minded if they'd added ham and oysters to his cheese steak. Those weren't forbidden foods for him.

The Old Munich was near the damaged Congressional building. It had pretty good prices and air conditioning. Looking around, Flora didn't think she could assemble a quorum from the Representatives and Senators in the place, but she didn't think she would miss by much, either.

Taft raised a schooner of beer. “Here’s to you—most of the time,” he said, and sipped from it.

Flora had a gin and tonic: almost as good a cooler as the refrigerated air. “Same to you,” she said. “We see eye to eye about the war, anyhow.”

“Seems that way.” Taft made a very unhappy face. “Maybe the President knew what he was doing when he tried to come to terms with the Mormons.”

“Maybe.” Flora sounded unhappy, too. Did Taft know that woman had almost blown up her nephew? Instead of asking, she went on, “Would you be comfortable making peace with people who do things like that?”

“It depends,” Taft said judiciously. “If peace meant they weren’t going to do them, I might. If every nut with a grievance is going to strap on some dynamite and start seeing how many honest people he can take with him, we’ve really got a problem.” He drained the schooner. “The way things look now, we’ve really got a problem.”

Flora remembered that she was about to answer. The explosion outside beat her to the punch. Women screamed. So did a couple of men. Flora didn’t, quite. What came out instead—a soft, “Oh, dear God!”—was close to a sob of despair.

Taft jumped to his feet, the cheese steak forgotten. “We’d better see if we can do anything to help,” he said, and hurried out of the Old Munich. Flora paused long enough to pay the check, then ran after him.

A bus halfway down the block sprawled sideways across the road. The crumpled shape was burning fiercely. Window glass glittered in the streets and on the sidewalk like out-of-season snow. Some people were still trapped on the bus. Their shrieks dinned in Flora’s ears. One of them threw himself out a window. He was on fire. Passersby tried to beat on the flames with their hats and with their hands.

“He blew himself up!” shouted a man with blood rilling down his face. “The motherfucker blew himself up! He had a, a thing, and he pushed it, and he blew himself up.” He paused, then spoke again in an amazingly calm voice: “Somebody get me a doctor.” He folded up and passed out.

Plenty of others were wounded. Flora couldn’t tell whether some had

been on the bus or were just luckless passersby. Others, the burned, had obviously been passengers along with the man with the thing—some sort of switch, Flora supposed. She tore her handkerchief in half and made two bandages with it. After that, she used the tissues in her handbag on smaller cuts.

Robert Taft sacrificed his handkerchief and his tie. Then he took off his shirt and his undershirt and used a pocket knife to cut them into strips of cloth. “Other people need them worse than I do,” he said, and he wasn’t the only bare-chested man around, either.

“Good for you,” Flora told him. “Let me have some of those, too, please.”

Ambulances roared up, sirens wailing. Philadelphia was good at responding to disasters. And so it should have been—it had had enough practice. “Somebody put a bomb on the bus?” asked a white-coated man from an ambulance.

“Somebody *was* a bomb on the bus,” a woman answered. The man’s answer was eloquent, heartfelt, and altogether unprintable.

“Well,” Taft said, “looks like we have the answer to my question, and it’s not the one I wish we had.” He was splashed with blood past his elbows. His trousers were bloodstained, too, but Flora didn’t think any of the gore was his.

She glanced down at herself. The cotton print dress she had on would never be the same. Blood also dappled her arms. “What are we supposed to do?” she asked, a question aimed more at the world at large than at Senator Taft. “How do we fight people who’ll kill themselves to hurt us?”

“If we have to, we—” Taft broke off, as if really hearing what he’d been about to say. He shook his head. “Good Lord. I started to sound like Jake Featherston.”

“Yes.” Flora wanted to cry, or to scream. Here, for once, the USA faced a knottier problem than the CSA. Negroes looked like Negroes. Mormons? Mormons looked and talked just like anybody else. Anybody here could be a Mormon, and could have another bomb waiting. How would you know till it went off?

“Good Lord,” Taft said again. “We’re going to have to start searching people before we let them gather. Football games, films, trains, buses, department stores—for all I know, we’ll have to check anybody who

goes into the Old Munich."

"I was thinking how many members of Congress were in there," Flora said shakily. "If that bomber had walked inside instead of blowing up the bus . . ." Philadelphia was its usual hot, muggy summer self. That kind of weather wouldn't last much longer, but it was still here—sweat ran down Flora's face. She shivered anyhow.

"Auto bombs are bad enough," Taft said. "People bombs . . ." Like Flora, he seemed to run out of words. He spread his bloody hands. "What could be worse?"

What were they working on, out in western Washington? Something they thought might win the war. Whatever it was, that all but guaranteed it would be a horror worse than any they'd known up till now. Worse than poison gas? Worse than the camps where the Confederates were systematically doing away with their Negroes? She had trouble imagining such a thing. That didn't mean the people out in Washington State had any trouble, though.

While horror swelled inside her, rage seemed to fill Taft. "This is no fit way to fight," the Senator from Ohio ground out. "If they want to meet us like men, that's one thing. If they want to see how many innocent civilians they can blow up—"

"They used it against soldiers first," Flora said, remembering Yossel's narrow escape again. "And we drop bombs on civilians all over the CSA. It's just that . . . Who would have expected people to *be* weapons instead of using weapons?"

"Well, the genie's out of the bottle now," Taft said grimly. "Nobody in the world is safe from here on out. Nobody, do you hear me? There isn't a king or a president or a prime minister somebody doesn't hate. A man comes up to you in a reception line. Maybe you didn't appoint him postmaster. Maybe he just hears voices in his head. You reach out to shake his hand. Next thing you know, you're both dead, and a dozen people around you, too. How do you stop something like that?"

Flora only shrugged helplessly. For thousands of years, war had been based on the notion that you wanted to hurt the other side without getting hurt yourself. Now the rules had shifted under everybody's feet. How *could* you stop someone who embraced death instead of fleeing it?

Fresh dread filled her when she thought about how *useful* a weapon like this might be. Surely the United States could find men willing to

die for their country. If you sent them after Jake Featherston and you got him, weren't you doing more to win the war than you would by smashing a division or two of ordinary soldiers?

But the Confederates would have targets of their own. *I might even be one,* Flora thought, and ice walked up her back again. Like it or not, it was true. Nobody in the USA had spoken out more ferociously than she had about what the Confederate States and the Freedom Party were doing to their Negroes.

"How many more of these bombs will we see in the next week? In the next month? In the next year?" Taft asked. "We've *never* known anything like this before. Never. That Canadian who kept blowing up American soldiers after the last war, the one who tried to blow up General Custer—he finally blew himself up, but he didn't want to. If he'd been like these Mormons, he could have gone to a rally and done even worse." He suddenly laughed, which made Flora stare.

"What could possibly be funny about this?" she demanded.

"I'd like to see Featherston's face when he hears about it," Robert Taft answered. "He knows how many people . . . mm, don't love him, shall we say? He's the one who'll really have reason to be shaking in his boots. *Sic semper tyrannis,* by God—*thus always to tyrants,* if your Latin's rusty."

It was; Flora hadn't even thought about those classes in close to forty years. At the time, she hadn't thought they were good for anything; it wasn't as if she were likely to train for the Catholic priesthood! Looking back, though, they'd probably improved her English. And, looking back, that had probably been the point. It sure hadn't occurred to her then.

What Taft said made a certain amount of sense. What he said often did. People who had or should have had bad consciences would worry more about men—or women—with bombs than others would. And yet . . . "The Mormons are using them against us," she said bleakly.

"Yes, but the Mormons are a pack of crazy fanatics," Taft said. But that wouldn't do, and he realized it wouldn't. "I see what you're saying. I wish I didn't. To them, *we* look like the tyrants."

"That's what I was thinking," Flora agreed. "A lot of it's like beauty—it's in the eye of the beholder."

"God help us," Taft said.

"Omayn," Flora said, "or *amen,* if you'd rather."

"*That* doesn't matter to me one way or the other," Taft said. Flora believed him; whatever else he was, he was no anti-Semite. He sadly shook his head. "What *are* we going to do?"

"I can't begin to tell you, and I wish I could," Flora answered. "We might have a better chance now if we'd done something different a lifetime ago, but it's a little late to worry about that now."

"Yes—just a little," Taft said. "We have this pack of people who hate us right there in the middle of the country, and the most we can hope for, as far as I can see, is that they do us as little harm as we can manage." Taft absently wiped his high forehead with the heel of his hand, and left a red streak on his skin.

"This has gone on for too long," Flora said. "If we don't settle it once and for all during the war, we have to try afterwards." That sounded good, but what did it mean? She listened to her own words with the same sick horror Taft had known before her. What could settling it once and for all during the war mean but killing all the Mormons? If the United States did that, they wouldn't have to worry about it afterwards—except when the country looked at itself in a mirror. Flora shuddered. All the carnage around her hadn't nauseated her the way that thought did. "Dear God in heaven," she whispered. "There's a little bit of Jake Featherston in *me,* too."

"A little bit of that bastard's in every one of us," Taft said. "The point of the exercise is not to let him out."

"Well, Senator, we've found one more thing we agree on." Flora held out her bloodstained hand. Taft clasped it in his.

XIV

T he telephone on Clarence Potter's desk rang. He picked it up. "Potter here," he said crisply.

"Hello, Potter there," Jake Featherston rasped in his ear. "I need you to be Potter *here,* fast as you can, so get your ass on over right now."

“On my way, sir.” Potter hung up. He grabbed his hat, closed and locked the office door behind him, and went upstairs to get a motorcar. From the War Department to the Gray House on Shockoe Hill shouldn’t have taken more than five minutes. In fact, it took more like fifteen. The U.S. air raid the night before had cratered several streets on the most direct routes.

“Sorry, sir,” the driver kept saying as he had to double back. Potter suspected the President would make *him* sorry, too, but he didn’t take it out on the luckless young soldier behind the wheel. When he arrived, he hopped out of the Birmingham, showed his ID to the guards at the entrance to the battered Confederate Presidential residence, and was escorted below ground to the enormous bomb shelter in which Jake Featherston operated these days.

New York City had skyscrapers. Potter wondered how long it would be before men built twenty, thirty, even fifty stories underground to keep from getting blown up when bombers came overhead. He laughed. That wouldn’t work in New Orleans, where the cemeteries were on top of the ground because of the high water table. Such details and anomalies aside, the picture seemed scarily probable.

Saul Goldman sat in the waiting room. Potter nodded to the director of communications. “Am I after you in line?” he asked.

“I don’t think so, General,” Goldman answered. “I think we go in together.”

“Do we?” Potter kept his voice as neutral as he could. Goldman was good at making propaganda, but the Intelligence officer didn’t want to be part of any propaganda, no matter how good. He’d had that argument with the President before. He hadn’t completely lost it, which only went to show how good his case was.

Featherston’s secretary stuck her head into the room. “Come with me, gentlemen.” Goldman caught Potter’s eye and nodded. Sure enough, they were an entry, like 3 and 3A at the racetrack.

When Potter came into the President’s sanctum, Featherston fixed him with a fishy stare and barked, “Took you long enough. What did you do—walk?”

“Sorry, sir. Bomb damage.” Potter had been braced for worse.

And Featherston let him off the hook after that, which also surprised him. “We need to get down to brass tacks,” the President said. “You’ve

both heard about these people bombs up in the USA—Mormons strapping on explosives and blowing themselves to hell and gone as soon as they can take a raft of damnyankees with 'em?"

"Yes, Mr. President," Saul Goldman said. Potter nodded. Goldman went on, "We've been working on ways to play them up—to show the Yankees are so low and evil, people will kill themselves before they live under them."

That sounded like a good line to take to Potter, but Jake Featherston shook his head. "I was afraid you were gonna do somethin' like that," he said heavily. "That's how come I called you in here—to tell you not to. No way, nohow. Not a word about 'em out of us, and jam the Yankees hard as you can when they talk about 'em. You got that?"

"I hear you, sir, but I don't understand." Goldman looked and sounded pained. Clarence Potter didn't blame him. Had he been in the communications director's shoes, he would have been pained, too.

But Featherston repeated, "Not a word, goddammit, and I'll tell you why." He went on, "I don't want the damn niggers to hear anything about people bombs, you hear me? Not one fucking word! Coons are enough trouble as is. You don't reckon some of those bastards'd blow themselves to the moon if they could take a raft of decent white folks with 'em? I sure do."

"But—" Saul Goldman began. Even starting the protest took nerve; not many people had the nerve to squawk to Featherston's face.

Here, though, Potter agreed with the President. "I'm sorry, Mr. Goldman, but I think he's right," he said. "We'd better keep the lid on that one for as long as we can, because the niggers will make us sorry if we don't."

"Damn straight," Featherston said.

The director of communications still looked unhappy. "Since you've made up your mind, sir, that's the way we'll do it." He plainly thought the President was wrong to have made up his mind that way.

Jake Featherston just as plainly didn't care. "Make sure you do. And pick up the jamming on the damnyankees, too. We will be sorry—we'll be sorry as hell—if we can't keep this quiet."

"I'll do my best, Mr. President. If you'll excuse me . . ." The little Jew left the President's office very abruptly.

As soon as the door clicked shut behind Goldman, Jake Featherston let out a long sigh. “I don’t like making Saul do like I tell him instead of like he wants to. He’s good—he’s damn good. You need to give a man like that his head. This time, though, I just don’t reckon I’ve got much choice.”

Potter nodded. “I think you’re right, Mr. President. I said so.”

“Yeah, you did.” Featherston eyed him. “You’re not one to do something like that just to make me wag my tail, either.”

Remembering the weight of the pistol in his pocket as he rode the train up to Richmond in 1936, Potter nodded again. “No, sir. Whatever else I am, I’m no yes-man.”

“Son of a bitch. I never would’ve known if you hadn’t told me.” Maybe Jake Featherston was remembering that pistol, too. He drummed his fingers on top of his desk. “Got a question for you, Mr. Straight Answer.”

“Go ahead,” Potter said.

“Those fucking Mormon people bombs—did any of your men give ’em the idea, or did they come up with it all by themselves?”

“Mr. President, our people did not have thing one to do with that,” Potter said positively. “Nobody in the CSA—no white man in the CSA, anyhow—is that crazy. The Mormons came up with it on their own.”

“All right. I believe you. But if I ever find out you’re lying to me about this one, I’ll have your head,” Featherston said. “People bombs hurt the damnyankees, yeah, but they can hurt us a lot worse. And you know as well as I do that Saul won’t be able to clamp down on the news forever. One way or another, this kind of shit always comes out.”

“I knew that, sir. I wasn’t sure you did,” Potter answered. People who weren’t in the intelligence business often had an exaggerated notion of how easy keeping a secret was.

Jake Featherston laughed at him. “I never went to a fancy U.S. college, General, but I reckon I may know a thing or two anyways.”

“That’s not what I meant, Mr. President,” Clarence Potter said stiffly.

Featherston laughed some more. “Yeah, likely tell.” But amusement

didn't live long on his face. It never did, not that Potter had seen. The President of the CSA always had to be angry at something or worried about something. And today he had something to be angry and worried about. "Damn niggers are gonna start blowin' themselves up, sure as hell they are. Damfino how much we can do about it, either."

"Massive reprisals," Potter suggested. "Kill ten coons for every white a people bomb blows up, or twenty, or a hundred."

"That won't stop 'em," Featherston predicted morosely. "There'll always be some bastards who think, *Who gives a damn what happens after I'm dead?* And the ones who go after us without counting the cost are the ones we've got to be afraid of."

He knew what he was talking about. The Freedom Party had always gone after its foes without counting the cost, whether those foes were Whigs and Radical Liberals, Negroes, or the United States. Potter said, "Yes, sir. You're right—we'll still have trouble even if we do that. But I think we'll have less. We'll make some niggers think twice before they turn into people bombs. And we'll make the niggers who don't want to blow themselves up think twice before they help or cover up for the ones who do. They'd better, anyhow, if they know they're going to get shot after a people bomb goes off."

"It could be." Featherston picked up a pencil and wrote himself a note. "It's a better scheme than anybody else has come up with, I'll say that. Whatever else you are, General, you aren't soft on niggers."

"I should hope not, sir," Potter said. "That's how we first met, remember. I was trying to head off the Red uprising before it got started. I was after that officer's body servant—"

"Pompey, his name was," Jake Featherston said at once. Potter wouldn't have remembered the Negro's name if they'd set him on fire. Featherston had a truly marvelous memory for detail—and never forgot an enemy or a slight. He went on, "He was a mincing, prissy little bastard, thought his shit didn't stink. Just what you'd expect from a stinking blueblood like Jeb Stuart III to have for a servant." He looked as if he wanted to spit on the carpet, or possibly start chewing it.

And he wasn't wrong. During the Great War and even afterward, the Confederate States had had too many sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of founding fathers in positions of authority for no better reason than that their ancestors had done big things. It wasn't like that

anymore, Nathan Bedford Forrest III notwithstanding. Forrest was there because of what he could do, not because of what great-grandpa the cavalry general had done. The Freedom Party had swept away most of the Juniors and IIIs and IVs. And that, Potter was willing to admit, needed doing.

Featherston let the pencil fall. “All right, General. That’s about it, looks like. Main reason I wanted you here was to find out if those damn people bombs were your notion. But you gave me a good idea, and I reckon we’ll try it out when the time comes—and it will, goddammit. I thank you for that.”

Potter got to his feet. “You’re welcome, Mr. President. We’re on the same side in this fight.”

“In this one, yeah. How about some of the others?” But Featherston waved that aside. “Never mind. Get out of here.”

A man in a State Department uniform went in as Potter went out. Potter wondered what that was all about. He knew he could learn with a little poking and prodding. He also knew he’d catch merry hell if anybody found out he was doing it. You didn’t try to find out what was none of your business. That was one of the rules in this game, too. There were often good reasons why it was none of your business.

After the air conditioning under the Gray House, ordinary Richmond late summer seemed twice as hot and muggy as usual. A haze of dust and smoke hung over the Confederate capital: a souvenir of Yankee bombing raids. The same sort of haze was said to hang over Philadelphia.

Will anything be left of either side when this war is over? Potter wondered. More and more, it reminded him of a duel of submachine guns at two paces. Both countries could strike better than they could defend.

He didn’t know what to do about that. He didn’t think anyone else did, either. Maybe taking Pittsburgh away from the damnyankees really would knock them out of the fight. It had a chance of doing that, anyway. Potter couldn’t think of anything else that did.

A truck dumped gravel and asphalt on the street in front of the Gray House. A heavy mechanized roller started smashing it down into a more or less level surface. And it would stay level till the next time U.S. bombers visited Richmond, or the time after that, or perhaps the time after *that.*

The machine was more interesting to Clarence Potter than the job it was doing. Not long before, a swarm of Negroes with hand tools would have done work like that. No more. Machinery was much more common than it had been . . . and there weren't so many Negroes around. Potter nodded to himself. Both halves of that suited him fine.

H ipolito Rodriguez awkwardly sewed a sergeant's—no, a troop leader's—stripes onto the left sleeve of his gray tunic. The letter that came with his promotion notice said it was for "contributions valuable to the safety and security of the Confederate States of America." That left the guards at Camp Determination who hadn't been promoted both puzzled and jealous. It also gave the noncoms whose ranks he'd suddenly joined something new to think about.

Tom Porter, who'd been Rodriguez's squad leader till he got the promotion, added two and two and got four. "This has to do with those new buildings going up alongside the men's and women's half, doesn't it?" he said.

"I think maybe it does, *sí,*" Rodriguez answered. He was still getting used to the luxury of the noncoms' quarters. He had a room of his own now, with a closet and a sink. No more cot in the middle of a barracks with a lot of other noisy, smelly guards. No more shoving everything he owned into a footlocker, either. He had more room to be a person as a troop leader; he wasn't just one more cog on a gear in a vast machine.

"I know you helped give the commandant the idea for those new buildings," Porter said. "If they work out as well as everybody hopes, I reckon you've earned your stripes."

Porter's acceptance helped ease the transition from ordinary guard to troop leader. It meant the other noncoms made it plain they would back Rodriguez if he ran into trouble. With that going for him, he didn't, or never more than he could handle by himself. And those buildings rapidly neared completion.

Nobody ever called them anything but that. If you talked about one of them, it was *that building.* The guards knew what they were for; they'd been briefed. They had to be, by the nature of things. But, also by the nature of things, they didn't call them by their right names. If you didn't name something, you didn't have to dwell on what it really was and really did. Not thinking about those things helped you sleep at

night.

A few of the guards, men who'd come to Camp Determination as it went up, would sometimes talk about shooting Negroes in the swamps of Louisiana. They were mostly matter-of-fact, but they would also talk about comrades who couldn't stand the strain. "So-and-so ate his gun," they would say. That was how Rodriguez learned Jeff Pinkard's new wife was a dead guard's widow. He'd known she was married before; two boys made that obvious. The details . . .

"Poor son a bitch just couldn't take it," a guard said sympathetically.

"He shoot himself, too?" Rodriguez asked with a certain horrid fascination.

"Nope." The veteran guard shook his head. "Chick must've got sick of guns. He ran a hose from his auto exhaust into the passenger compartment and fired up the motor. Sure as hell wish we'd've had those trucks back then. You don't have to worry so much about what you're doing when you load one of them."

"The trucks, they came after this fellow kill himself?" Rodriguez said.

"That's right." The guard who was talking didn't see anything out of the ordinary about that. Maybe there was nothing out of the ordinary to see. To Rodriguez, the timing seemed . . . interesting, anyhow. *Señor* Jeff was good at getting ideas from things that happened around him.

Rodriguez almost remarked on that. Then he thought better of it. He couldn't prove a thing, after all—and he couldn't unsay something once he'd said it. Better to keep his mouth shut.

And keeping his mouth shut proved a good idea, as it usually did. A few days later, an officer tapped him for special duty, saying, "The commandant tells me you won't screw this up no matter what. Is that a fact?" He sent Rodriguez a fishy stare.

"I hope so, sir," Rodriguez answered. He recognized that stare. He'd seen it before on white Confederates. They looked at him, saw a Mexican, and figured he wasn't good for much. He asked, "What do I got to do?"

"Well, we're going to test out one of those buildings," the officer answered. "We're going to pick about a hundred niggers and run 'em through it."

“Oh, yes, sir. I do that. Don’t you worry,” Rodriguez said.

His confidence seemed to relieve the officer. “All right,” the man said. He drummed the fingers of his left hand against the side of his leg. His right sleeve was pinned up short, as his right arm ended just below the shoulder—he too came out of the Confederate Veterans’ Brigade. He went on, “This has to go good, mind you. We got bigwigs from Richmond comin’ out to watch the show.”

Rodriguez shrugged. “Maybe it go good. Maybe it go wrong. I dunno. All I know is, it don’t go wrong on account of me.”

The other man considered that. He finally nodded. “Fair enough. Make sure all the ordinary guards you’re in charge of feel the same way.”

“*Sí, señor.* I do that,” Rodriguez promised.

Because they were trying things out for the first time—and because bigwigs from Richmond were watching—they used far more guards than they normally would have to deal with a hundred black men. They got the Negroes formed up in a ten-by-ten square. The inmates carried whatever small chattels they intended to take away to the new camp where they thought they were going.

That was part of the plan. As long as they thought they were going somewhere else, they would stay docile. They wouldn’t cause trouble unless they figured they were going on a one-way trip. The one-armed officer worked hard to keep them unsuspecting: “You men, we want y’all to be clean and tidy when we ship you out of Camp Determination. We’re going to get you that way before you leave. You’re gonna take baths. You’re gonna be deloused. No horseplay, or we will make your black asses sorry. Y’all got that?”

“Yes, suh,” the Negroes chorused. Black heads bobbed up and down. The Negroes didn’t think anything was wrong. They were dirty. Most if not all were lousy. They probably wanted to get clean, and they could see why the men who ran the camp would want them to be that way before they left. Oh, yes—everything made perfect sense to them. But it made a different kind of sense to the guards and their superiors.

“Come on, then,” the one-armed officer said. “Keep in formation, now, or you’ll catch it.” The Negroes had no trouble obeying. They often marched here and there through the camp in formation.

Guards opened the barbed-wire gate separating the main camp from

that building. In the Negroes went. Two guards waited in an antechamber. One of them said, “Strip naked and stow your stuff here. Everybody remember who put what where. You get in a fight over what belongs to who, you’ll be sorry. You got that?” Again, the Negroes nodded.

So did Hipolito Rodriguez, watching as the black men shed their rags and set down their sorry bundles. This was a very nice touch. It convinced the prisoners they’d come back. The large contingent of guards was hardly necessary. A handful of men could have done the job. But Rodriguez understood why Jefferson Pinkard had assigned so many men to the prisoners. The more ready for trouble you were, the less likely you were to find it. And with visiting firemen watching, you couldn’t afford it.

A sign on the wall above an onward-pointing arrow said DELOUSING AHEAD. The Negroes who could read went that way without hesitation. Most of the others followed. “Move along, move along,” the guards said, and chivvied the rest of the men into the room at the end of the corridor.

It could hold a lot more than a hundred people—but this was, after all, only a test. Even here, the deception continued. A doorway was set into the far wall. A sign above it said TO THE BATHS.

At the officer’s nod, Rodriguez shut the door through which the Negroes had gone in. That door didn’t match the rest of the scene. It was thick and made of steel, and had rubber gasketing all around the edge to make an airtight seal. Rodriguez spun the wheel in the center of the door’s back, making sure it fit snugly against the frame and locking it in place.

Above the wheel, a small window with rounded corners let him look into the chamber he’d just sealed off. More rubber gasketing, inside and out, made sure what was inside that chamber would stay there.

Other windows were set into the chamber’s walls. They too were protected with rubber inside and out. Guards took their places at some of them. Higher-ranking camp officials and the delegation from Richmond already stood by the rest. They wanted to see how this building worked out.

Near the center of the chamber stood half a dozen steel columns, painted the same gray as the walls. The bottom two or three feet of them were not solid metal, but a grillwork too fine to poke a finger

through. The naked Negroes in there milled about. Some of them went up to one column or another. A man rapped on a column with his knuckles. Rodriguez heard the dull clang.

He knew exactly when guards up above the ceiling poured the Cyclone into the columns. All the Negroes sprang away from them as if they'd become red-hot. Men started falling almost at once. Not all of them fell right away, though. Some ran for the doorway marked TO THE BATHS. They pounded on it, but—what a surprise!—it didn't open.

And some ran back to the door through which they'd come. Desperate, dying fists battered against the steel. An agonized face looked out at Rodriguez, with only glass and the gasketing between them. Startled, he took a step away from the door. The Negro shouted something. Rodriguez couldn't make out what he said. His words were drowned in the chorus of yells and screams that dinned inside the chamber.

As the insecticide took hold, the black man's face slid down and away from the window. The frantic pounding on the door eased. One by one, the shouts and screams faded and stopped. Rodriguez looked in again. A few of the huddled bodies in the chamber still moved feebly, but only a few. After fifteen or twenty minutes, they all lay still.

A bell rang. Several heavy ceiling fans came on; he could feel their vibration through his feet. They sucked the poisoned air out of the chamber. After about ten more minutes, another bell chimed. Now the door marked TO THE BATHS opened—from the outside. Guards went in and carried corpses out to the waiting trucks.

Rodriguez nodded to himself. This would work. Those hundred black men hadn't come close to filling the chamber. Of course, this was only a practice run. Now that they knew things really went about the way they'd expected, they could load in a lot more *mallates.* Load them in, take them out, load in the next batch . . . You could use ordinary trucks to haul away the bodies now, too, and you could pack them much tighter with dead men than you could with live ones. Yes, the scheme would definitely do what it was supposed to.

"Attention!" the one-armed officer called.

Automatically, Rodriguez stood stiff and straight. Here came Jefferson Pinkard with one of the men from Richmond: a burly fellow with a tough, square, jowly face. Rodriguez recognized him right way. It was the Attorney General, Don Fernando Koenig, the biggest man in the

Freedom Party except for Jake Featherston himself! No wonder everything had to go just right today!

Pinkard and the Attorney General stopped. “Sir, this here’s my buddy, Hip Rodriguez,” the camp commandant said. “He helped give me the notion for this whole setup.”

“Well, good for him, and good for you, too, Pinkard. This is all first-rate work, and I’ll say so to the President.” Koenig stuck out his hand in Rodriguez’s direction. “Freedom!”

Dazedly, Rodriguez shook it. “Freedom, *señor*!”

Then Koenig clapped him on the back—man to man, not superior to inferior. “We’re going to have freedom from these damn niggers, aren’t we? And you’ve helped. You’ve helped a lot.”

“Yes, sir,” Rodriguez said. “Thank you, sir.”

Koenig and Pinkard went on their way. The rest of the guards stared at Rodriguez in awe.

J ake Featherston had been in Pennsylvania before. During the Great War, the Army of Northern Virginia had pushed up almost to within shelling distance of Philadelphia. That *almost* counted for everything. If the de facto capital of the USA had fallen along with Washington, would the enemy have been able to go on with the fight? No way to know now, but a lot of people in the CSA doubted it. As things were, Jake had survived the grinding retreat through Pennsylvania and Maryland and back into Virginia. He’d survived defeat, and hoped for victory.

Now he was within shelling distance of Pittsburgh, in the western part of Pennsylvania. Confederate 105s boomed in their gun pits, sending shells south toward the Yankee defenders and the factories and steel mills they fought to hold. He wanted to take off his uniform shirt and serve one of those 105s himself. He’d done that before, too, over in Virginia.

His bodyguards were more nervous now than they had been then. “Sir, if we can shell the damnyankees from here, they can reach us here, too,” one of them said. “What do we do then?”

“Reckon we jump in a hole, just like the gunners.” Jake pointed to the

foxholes a few feet away from each 105.

“Yes, but—” the bodyguard began.

“No, no buts,” Featherston said firmly. “Chances are I’m safer here than I am back in Richmond, and that’s the God’s truth.”

The guard looked at him as if he’d lost his mind. The man was young, brave, and good at what he did. He also had all the imagination of a cherrystone clam. Most of the time, the lack didn’t affect the way he did his job even a dime’s worth. Every once in a while . . . “Sir, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” His voice couldn’t have been any stiffer if he’d starched and ironed it.

“Hell I don’t,” Jake said. “Difference is, here I know where the enemy’s at. I know what he can do, and I know what I can do about it.” He pointed to the foxholes again. “In Richmond, any goddamn son of a bitch could be kitted out with explosives. If he’s got the balls to blow himself up along with me, how you gonna stop him?”

All his bodyguards looked very unhappy. Featherston didn’t blame them. He was very unhappy about people bombs himself. A man willing—no, eager—to die so he could also kill made a very nasty foe. War and bodyguarding both assumed the enemy wanted to live just as much as you did. If he didn’t give a damn . . .

If he didn’t give a damn, then what would stop a rational soldier or assassin wouldn’t matter a hill of beans to him. That seemed more obvious to the President of the CSA than it did to his guards. They didn’t want to admit, even to themselves, that the rules had changed.

This one said, “Mr. President, there’s no evidence anyone in the CSA has thought of doing anything like that.”

Jake Featherston laughed in his face. “Evidence? First evidence’ll be when somebody damn well does blow himself up. It’s coming. Sure as shit, it’s coming. I wish like hell we could stop it, but I don’t see how. We can’t jam all the U.S. wireless stations—too many of ’em. And they can’t hardly talk about anything else. Fucking Mormons.” He shook his head in disgust.

“Good thing there aren’t hardly any of them in our country,” the bodyguard said, proving he’d missed the point.

If he were smarter, if he were able to think straighter, he probably wouldn’t want to be a bodyguard. You couldn’t get all hot and

bothered because people weren't the way you wanted them to be. Oh, you could, but a whole fat lot of good it would do you. Taking them as they were worked better. *Will this fellow see it if I spell it out in small, simple words?* Jake wondered.

The decision got made for him. He knew what that rumbling, rushing sound in the air was. "Incoming!" he shouted, and was proud his yell came only a split second after the first artilleryman's.

He sprang for the foxholes, and was down in one before the first shells landed. The men who fought the 105s were just as fast, or even faster. Some of his bodyguards, though, remained above ground and upright when shells burst not far away. They didn't know any better—they weren't combat troops. Here, ignorance was expensive.

"Get in a hole, goddammit!" he yelled. Some of the artillerymen were shouting the same thing. And the bodyguards who hadn't been hit did dive for cover, only a few seconds slower than they should have. But a barrage was a time when seconds mattered.

Till things let up, Jake couldn't do anything. If he came out of his foxhole, he was asking to get torn up himself. He wasn't afraid. He'd proved that beyond any possible doubt in the last war. But he knew too well the CSA needed him. That kept him where he was till the U.S. bombardment moved elsewhere.

That bombardment wasn't anything that warned of an attack. It was just harassing fire, to make the Confederates keep their heads down and to wound a few men. During the Great War, Jake had fired plenty of shells with the same thing in mind.

If he wasn't the first one out of a foxhole when the shelling eased, he couldn't have been later than the third. "Fuck," he said softly. You forgot what artillery could do to a man till you saw it with your own eyes. One of his guards lay there, gutted and beheaded—except the reality, which included smell, was a hundred times worse and only a tenth as neat as the words suggested.

Another bodyguard lay hunched over on his side, clutching his ankle with both hands. He had no foot; he was doing his best to keep from bleeding to death. Jake bent beside him. "Hang on, Beau," he said, far more gently than he usually spoke. "I'll make you a tourniquet." His boots—the same sort he'd worn in the field in the last war—had strong rawhide laces. He pulled one out, fast as he could. "Easy there. I got to move your hands so I can tie this son of a bitch."

“Thank you, sir.” Beau sounded preternaturally calm. Some wounded men didn’t really feel it for a little while. He seemed to be one of the lucky ones, though he hissed when the President of the CSA tightened the tourniquet around his ragged stump. Jake used a stick to twist it so the stream of blood slowed to the tiniest trickle. He’d tended to battlefield wounds before; his hands still remembered how, as long as he didn’t think about it too much.

“Morphine!” he yelled. “Somebody give this poor bastard a shot! And where the hell are the medics?”

The men with Red Cross smocks were already there, taking charge of other injured guards. One of them knelt by Beau. The medic injected the bodyguard, then blinked to find himself face to face with Jake Featherston. “You did good, uh, sir,” he said. “He ought to make it if everything heals up all right.”

“Hear that, Beau?” Jake said. “He says you’re gonna be fine.” The medic hadn’t quite said that, but Jake didn’t care. He wanted to make the bodyguard as happy as he could.

“Fine,” Beau said vaguely. Maybe that was shock, or maybe it was the morphine hitting him. The medics got him onto a stretcher and carried him away. Jake wondered what kind of job he could do that didn’t require moving around. The President shrugged. Beau would be a while getting better, if he did.

The head of the bodyguard contingent came up with fire in his eye. He’d got his trousers muddy; Jake judged that accounted for at least part of his bad temper. When the man spoke, he did his best to stay restrained: “Sir, can we please move to a safer location? You see what almost happened to you here.”

Jake shook his head. “Not to me, by God. I know what to do when shells start coming down. I’m sorry as hell some of your men didn’t.”

“And if a shell had landed in your hole, Mr. President?” the bodyguard asked.

“It didn’t, dammit,” Jake said. The guard chief just looked at him. Jake swore under his breath. The man was right, and he knew it. Admitting somebody else was right and he himself wrong was the hardest thing in the world for him. He didn’t do it now, not in so many words. He just scowled at the bodyguard. “I reckon I’ve seen what I came to see.”

“Thank you, sir.” The man saluted. He called to the other guards who hadn’t been hurt: “We can get him away now!”

They all showed as much relief as a drummer who finds out his latest lady friend isn’t in a family way after all. And they hustled Jake back from the gun pit with Olympic speed. He thought it was funny. The guards thought it was anything but. One of them scolded him: “Sir, did you *want* to get yourself killed?”

If he’d asked whether Jake wanted to get the guards killed, the President would have gone up in smoke. But that wasn’t what he’d wanted to know, and so Jake Featherston only sighed. “No. I wanted to watch the damnyankees catch it.”

“Well, you’ve done that, and now you’ve seen we can catch it, too,” the bodyguard said. “Will you kindly leave well enough alone?”

“Sure,” Featherston said, and all the bodyguards brightened. Then he added, “Till the next time it needs doing.” Their shoulders slumped.

“We really shouldn’t be anywhere close to the line,” the guards’ leader said. “Damnyankee airplanes are liable to drop bombs on our heads. Even less we can do about that than we can about artillery, dammit.”

Jake laughed raucously. “Jesus H. Christ, don’t the damnyankees come over Richmond about every other night and drop everything but the fucking kitchen sink on our heads? Bastards’d drop that, too, if they reckoned it’d blow up.”

Some of the bodyguards smiled. Their chief remained severe. “Sir, you’ve got a proper shelter there, not a, a—hole in the ground.” He slapped at the knees of his trousers. Not much mud came away. He fumed. He didn’t like to get dirty.

“Hell of a lot of good a proper shelter did Al Smith,” Jake said. That made all the guards unhappy again. They didn’t like remembering all the things that could go wrong. Jake didn’t like remembering those things, either, but he would do it if he could score points off men who liked it even less.

The guard chief changed the subject, at least a little: “Sir, couldn’t you just stay somewhere safe and follow the war with reports and things?”

“No way in hell,” Jake replied at once. “No place’d stay safe for long. Soon as the Yankees found out where I was at, they’d send bombers after me. I don’t care if I went to Habana—they’d still send ’em. But

that's beside the point. Point is, you can't trust reports all the goddamn time. Sometimes you've got to, yeah. You can't keep up with everything by your lonesome. But if you don't get your ass out there and see for yourself every so often, people'll start lying to you. You won't know any better, either, 'cause you haven't been out to look. And then you're screwed. Got it?"

"Yes, sir," the bodyguard said mournfully. He knew what that meant. It meant he and his men would have to keep worrying, because Jake would go on sticking his nose where the damnyankees could shoot it off.

Airplanes droned by overhead. Jake looked for the closest hole in the ground. So did most of the guards. They weren't combat troops, no, but a trip to the field taught lessons in a hurry. The airplanes flew from west to east. They had familiar silhouettes. Jake relaxed—they were on his side.

None of the bodyguards relaxed. They weren't supposed to, not while they were on duty. Their leader said, "Mr. President, can we please take you someplace where you're not in quite so *much* danger?"

"Gonna fly me to the Empire of Brazil?" Jake quipped. A few guards gave him another round of dutiful smiles. Most stayed somber. He supposed that was just as well. Like sheep dogs, they had to be serious about protecting him. Trouble was, he made a piss-poor sheep.

S ometimes Sam Carsten thought the Navy didn't know what to do with the *Josephus Daniels.* Other times he was sure of it. After the destroyer escort had threaded its way out through the minefields in Delaware Bay once more, he turned to Pete Cooley and said, "I swear to God they're trying to sink us. I really do."

"I think we'll be all right, sir," the exec said. "We will as long as Confederate airplanes don't spot us, anyhow."

"Yeah," Sam said. "As long as." His ship was ordered to strike at the CSA. U.S. flying boats and other aircraft constantly patrolled the United States' coastal waters. If there was intelligence to say the Confederates didn't do the same thing, he hadn't seen it.

"Mission seems simple enough," Cooley said. "We start heading in as soon as night falls, land the raiders, pick 'em up, and get the hell out of there." He sounded elaborately unconcerned.

Sam snorted. “One of these days, Pat, somebody needs to explain the difference between ‘simple’ and ‘easy’ to you.”

“I know the difference,” Cooley said with a grin. “An easy girl puts out right away. A simple girl’s just dumb, so you’ve got to snow her before she puts out.”

“All right, dammit.” In spite of himself, Sam laughed. The exec *wouldn’t* take things seriously. Maybe that was as well, too. “Just so we don’t get spotted. And our navigation better be spot-on, too.”

“I’ll get us there, sir,” Cooley promised.

As with shiphandling, Sam was learning to use sextant and chronometer to know where the ship was and where it was going. He thought it was the hardest thing he’d ever tried to pick up. The Navy had tables that made it a lot easier than it was in the days of iron men and wooden ships, but *easier* and *easy* didn’t mean the same thing, either. Sorrowfully, Sam said, “This is the first time in a million years I wish I’d paid more attention in school.”

“You’re doing real well, sir, for a—” Two words too late, Pat Cooley broke off. He tried again: “You’re doing real well.”

For a mustang. He hadn’t quite swallowed enough of that. Or maybe it had been *for a dumb mustang.* Taking sun-sights and then trying to convert them to positions sure as hell made Sam feel like a dumb mustang. He painfully remembered the time when he’d screwed up his longitude six ways from Sunday and put the *Josephus Daniels* halfway between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

The only thing the exec said then was, “Well, the infantry could use the fire support.” Sam thought that showed commendable restraint.

For now, he swung the destroyer escort well out into the North Atlantic before steaming south. He figured that was his best chance to get where he was going undetected. He didn’t know that it was a good chance, but *good* and *best* also weren’t always synonyms. The ocean wasn’t nearly so rough as it would be when winter clapped down, but it wasn’t smooth, either. Sailors and Marine raiders spent a lot of time at the rail.

Sam might not have been much of a navigator. He might not have been the shiphandler he wished he were. He might—he would—burn if the sun looked at him sideways. But by God he had a sailor’s stomach. Some of the youngsters in the officers’ mess and some of the

Marine officers who dined with them looked distinctly green. Sam tore into the roast beef with fine appetite.

“Be thankful the chow’s as good as it is,” he said. “When we’re on a long patrol or going around the Horn, it’s all canned stuff and beans after a while.”

“Excuse me, sir,” Lieutenant Thad Walters said. The Y-range operator bolted from the mess with a hand clapped over his mouth. Carsten hoped the J.G. got to a head before he wasted the cooks’ best efforts.

Lieutenant Cooley brought the *Josephus Daniels* about 125 miles off the North Carolina coast just as the sun was sinking in flames in the direction of the Confederacy. “We’re as ready as we’ll ever be, sir,” the exec said.

“Fair enough.” Sam nodded. “All ahead full, then. Course 270.”

“All ahead full. Course 270,” Cooley echoed. “Aye aye, sir.” He called the order for full power down to the engine room. The ship picked up speed till she was going flat out. Sam wished for the extra ten knots she could have put on if she were a real destroyer. Of course, they never would have dropped a mustang on his first command into a real destroyer. He knew damn well he was lucky to get anything fancier than a garbage scow.

Lieutenant Walters seemed to have got rid of what ailed him. The Y-range operator was still a little pale, but kept close watch on his set. If the ship could spot an enemy airplane before the enemy spotted her, she would have a better chance of getting away. The darker it got, the happier Sam grew. He didn’t think the Confederates had aircraft with Y-ranging gear. He sure hoped they didn’t.

“Keep an eye peeled for any sign of torpedo boats, too,” he warned. “A fish we’re not expecting will screw us as bad as a bomb.”

“Yes, sir,” Walters said, and then, “Aye aye, sir.” *We’re doing everything we know how to do,* Sam thought. *Now—is it enough?*

The *Josephus Daniels* ran on through the night. Listening to her engines pound, Sam felt she was yelling, *Here I am!* to the world. If she was, the world stayed deaf and blind. Every so often, Lieutenant Walters looked over at him and shrugged or gave a thumbs-up. CPO Bevacqua on the hydrophone kept hearing nothing, too.

Shortly before 2300, the commander of the Marine detachment came

onto the bridge. “About an hour away, eh, Captain?” he said.

“That’s right, Major,” Sam answered. Mike Murphy outranked him—except that nobody on a ship outranked her skipper. Murphy understood that, fortunately. He was a black Irishman with eyes as blue as a Siamese cat’s—bluer than Sam’s, which took doing. Carsten went on, “Your men are ready?”

“Ready as they’ll ever be.” Murphy pointed into the darkness. “They’re by the boats, and they’ll be in ’em in nothing flat.” He snapped his fingers.

“Good enough,” Sam said, and hoped it would be.

Not quite an hour later, the shape of the western horizon changed. It had been as smooth and flat there as in any other direction. No more. That deeper blackness was land: the coast of the Confederate States of America. “Here we are, sir,” Pat Cooley said. “If that’s not Ocracoke Island dead ahead, my career just hit a mine and sank.”

So did mine, Sam thought. The Navy Department might blame an exec who’d been conning a ship for botched navigation. The Navy Department would without the tiniest fragment of doubt blame that ship’s skipper. And so it should. The destroyer escort was *his* ship. This was *his* responsibility. Nothing on God’s green earth this side of death or disabling injury could take it off his shoulders.

“Send a petty officer forward with a lead and a sounding line,” Sam said, an order more often heard in the riverboat Navy than on the Atlantic. But he didn’t want the *Josephus Daniels* running aground, and she drew a lot more water than any river monitor. She needed some water under her keel. Cooley nodded and obeyed.

Feet thudded on the deck. “Sir, we’ve spotted a light about half a mile south of here!” a sailor exclaimed. “Looks like it’s what we want!”

It wouldn’t be the Ocracoke lighthouse at the southwestern tip of the island; that had gone dark at the beginning of the war. If you didn’t already know where you were in these waters, the Confederates didn’t want you here. Major Murphy quivered like a hunting hound. “I’d best join my men, I think,” he said, and left the bridge.

“Very pretty navigation, Pat,” Sam said. “Bring us in a little closer and we’ll lower the boats and turn the Marines loose.”

“Aye aye, sir,” Cooley said, and then, to the engine room, “All ahead

one third." The *Josephus Daniels* crept southwest.

After a breathless little while, Sam said, "All stop." The executive officer relayed the order. The ship bobbed in the water. Sam sent a sailor to Major Murphy to let him know everything was ready. Murphy had no doubt figured that out for himself, but the forms needed to be observed.

Lines creaking in the davits, the boats went down to the ocean. For this raid, they'd been fitted with motors. One by one, they chugged toward the shore that was only a low, darker line in the night. North Carolina barrier islands were nothing but glorified sandbanks. Every time a hurricane tore through, it rearranged the landscape pretty drastically. Sometimes, after a hurricane tore through, not much landscape—or land—was left in its path.

"Confederates at that station are going to think a hurricane hit 'em," Sam murmured.

He didn't know he'd spoken aloud till Pat Cooley nodded and said, "Hell, yes—uh, sir."

Grinning, Sam set a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, Pat. We're on the same page."

Gunfire crackled across the water. Sam tensed. If something had gone wrong, if the bastards in butternut somehow knew the Marines were coming . . . In that case, the destroyer escort's guns would have to do some talking of their own. The wireless operator looked up. "Sir, Major Murphy says everything's under control."

Sure enough, the gunfire died away. Sam had nothing to do but wait. He drummed his fingers on the metalwork in front of him. Waiting was always a big part of military life. Right this minute, it was also a hard part.

"There we go!" Pat Cooley pointed. Fire rose from the station.

"Yeah, there we go, all right," Sam agreed. "Other question is, did the Confederates get off an alarm call before we finished overrunning the place?" He shrugged. "Well, we'll find out."

Not very much later, sailors peering over the starboard rail called, "Boats coming back!" Sam almost said something like, *Stand by to repel boarders!* He wondered when the skipper of a ship this size last issued an order like that. But these boarders were on his side—or

they'd damned well better be.

Raising boats was harder than lowering them. He had nets out against the sides of the ship for the Marines and their prisoners—he hoped they'd have prisoners—to climb if the crew couldn't do it. But they managed. He went down to the deck and met Major Murphy there. "Everything go well?" he asked.

"Well enough, Captain," the Marine officer answered. "We lost one man dead, and we have several wounded we brought back." The groans on deck would have told Sam that if Murphy hadn't. The Marine went on, "But we destroyed that station, and we've brought back prisoners to question and samples of Confederate Y-ranging gear for the fellows with thick glasses and slide rules to look at. What they do with the stuff is up to them, but we got it. We did our job."

"Sounds good," Sam said. "Now my job is to make sure we deliver the goods. Is everybody back aboard ship?"

"I think so," Major Murphy said.

An indignant Confederate came up to them. "Are you the captain of this vessel?" he demanded of Sam. "I must protest this—this act of piracy!" He sounded like an angry rabbit.

"Go ahead and protest all you please, pal," Sam said genially. "And you can call me Long John Silver, too." Major Murphy and several nearby Marines spluttered. Sam went to the rail to make sure no boats or Marines were unaccounted for. Satisfied, he hurried back up to the bridge.

"Are we ready to leave town, sir?" Pat Cooley asked.

"And then some," Sam said. "Make our course 135. All ahead full."

"All ahead full," Cooley echoed, and passed the order to the engine room. "Course is . . . 135." He sounded slightly questioning, to let Sam change his mind without losing face if he wanted to.

But Sam didn't want to. "Yes, 135, Pat," he said. "I really do want to head southeast, because that's the last direction the Confederates will look for us. Once we get away, we can swing wide and come back. But I figure most of the search'll be to the north, and I want to get away from land-based air the best way I know how. So—135."

Cooley nodded. "Aye aye, sir—135 it is." The *Josephus Daniels* steamed

away from the North Carolina coast at her sedate top speed.

B rigadier General Irving Morrell did not like getting pushed around by the Confederates. They'd done it in Ohio, and now they were doing it in Pennsylvania. They had the machines they needed to go forward. He didn't have as many machines as he needed to stop them. It was as simple as that.

Men . . . Well, how much did men count in this new mechanized age? The United States had more of them than the Confederate States did. The question was, so what?

A nervous-looking POW stood in front of Morrell. In the other man's beat-up boots, Morrell would have been nervous, too. He said, "Name, rank, and pay number."

An interpreter turned the question into Spanish. A torrent of that language came back. The interpreter said, "His name is José María Castillo. He is a senior private—we would say a PFC. His pay number is 6492711."

"Thanks." Morrell studied Senior Private Castillo. The prisoner from the Empire of Mexico was medium-sized, skinny, swarthy, with mournful black eyes and a big, bushy mustache like the ones a lot of Confederate soldiers had worn during the Great War. His mustard-yellow uniform would have given good camouflage in the deserts on Mexico's northern border. Here in western Pennsylvania, it stood out much more. Morrell said, "Ask him what unit he's in and what their orders were."

More Spanish. The POW didn't have to answer that. Did he know he didn't have to? Morrell wasn't about to tell him. And he answered willingly enough. "He says he's with the Veracruz Division, sir," the interpreter reported. "He says that's the best one Mexico has. Their orders are to take places the Confederates haven't been able to capture."

"Are they?" Morrell carefully didn't smile at that. He suspected any number of Confederate officers would have had apoplexy if they heard the Mexican prisoner. If the Veracruz Division was the best one Francisco José had, the Emperor of Mexico would have been well advised not to take on anything tougher than a belligerent chipmunk. The men all had rifles, but they were woefully short on machine guns, artillery, barrels, and motorized transport. The soldiers seemed brave

enough, but sending them up against a modern army wouldn't have been far from murder—if that modern army hadn't been so busy in so many other places.

The prisoner spoke without being asked anything. He sounded anxious. He sounded, frankly, scared out of his wits. Morrell had a hard time blaming him. Surrender was a chancy enough business even when two sides used the same language, as U.S. and C.S. soldiers did. Would-be POWs sometimes turned into casualties when their captors either wanted revenge for something that had happened to them or just lacked the time to deal with prisoners. If a captive knew no English . . . *He likely thinks we'll eat him for supper,* Morrell thought, not without sympathy.

Sure enough, the interpreter said, "He wants to know what we're going to do with him, sir."

"Tell him nobody's going to hurt him," Morrell said. The interpreter did. José Castillo crossed himself and gabbled out what had to be thanks. Every once in a while, war made Morrell remember what a filthy business it was. That a man should be grateful for not getting killed out of hand . . . Roughly, Morrell went on, "Tell him he'll be taken away from the fighting. Tell him he'll be fed. If he needs a doctor, he'll get one. Tell him we follow Geneva Convention rules, if that means anything to him."

The prisoner seized his hand and kissed it. That horrified him. Getting captured had, in essence, turned a man into a dog. He gestured. The interpreter led José Castillo away. Morrell wiped his hand on his trouser leg.

"Don't blame you, sir," one of his guards said. "God only knows what kind of germs that damn spic's got."

Germs were the last thing on Morrell's mind. He just wanted to wipe away the touch of the desperate man's lips. If he couldn't feel them anymore, maybe he could forget them. He needed to forget them if he was going to do his job. "He's out of the fighting now," he said. "He's luckier than a lot of people I can think of."

"Well, yeah, sir, since you put it that way," the guard said. "He's luckier'n me, for instance." He grinned to show Morrell not to take him too seriously, but Morrell knew he was kidding on the square. Only a few hard cases really *liked* war; most men endured it and tried to come through in one piece.

From everything Morrell had heard, Jake Featherston was part of the small minority who'd enjoyed himself in the field. Morrell couldn't have sworn that was so, but he wouldn't have been surprised. Who but a man who enjoyed war would have loosed another one on a country—two countries—that didn't?

That guard shifted his feet, trying to draw Morrell's attention. Morrell nodded to him. The soldier asked, "Sir, is it true that the Confederates are inside Pittsburgh?"

"I think so, Wally," Morrell answered. "That's what it sounds like from the situation reports I've been getting, anyhow."

"Son of a bitch," Wally said.

"It isn't what we had in mind when this whole mess started," Morrell allowed. What the USA had had in mind was a victory parade through the ruined streets of Richmond, preferably with Jake Featherston's head on a platter carried along at the front. Richmond was close to the border, which didn't mean the United States had got there. They hadn't in the War of Secession or the Great War, either.

"So what are we gonna do?" Wally asked—a thoroughly reasonable question. "How come we don't just pitch into 'em?"

"Because if we do, we'd probably lose right now," Morrell said unhappily. "We don't have enough men or matériel yet. We're getting there, though." *I hope.*

As a matter of fact, things could have been worse. The Confederates had been planning to surround Pittsburgh instead of swarming into it, but U.S. counterattacks hadn't let them do that. Now they had to clear the Americans from a big city house by house and factory by factory. That wouldn't come easy or cheap. Again, Morrell hoped it wouldn't, anyhow.

He'd been screaming at every superior in Pennsylvania to let him concentrate before he counterattacked. He'd been screaming at Philadelphia to get him enough barrels so he'd have a legitimate chance of getting somewhere when he finally did. He was sure he'd made himself vastly unpopular. He couldn't have cared less. What could they do to him? Dismiss him from the Army? If they did, he would thank them, take off the uniform, and go back to Agnes and Mildred outside of Fort Leavenworth. Whatever happened to the country after that . . . happened. Whatever it was, it wouldn't be his fault.

Before long, he discovered they could do something worse than dismissing him. They could ignore him. They could, and they did. His requests for more barrels and more artillery fell on deaf ears. Since they wouldn't dismiss him, he sent a telegram of resignation to the War Department and waited to see what came of that.

He didn't want them to accept it. He thought he could hit the Confederates harder than anyone they could put in his slot. But if they thought otherwise, he wasn't going to beg them to let him stay. Maybe they would give his replacement the tools they were denying him. If someone else got the weapons he wasn't getting, that made him less indispensable than he thought himself now.

No answering telegram came back. Instead, less than twenty-four hours later, Colonel John Abell showed up on his doorstep. No, Brigadier General Abell: he had stars on his shoulder straps now. "Congratulations," Morrell told the General Staff officer, more or less sincerely.

"Thank you," Abell answered. "For some reason, I'm considered an expert on the care and feeding of one Irving Morrell. And so—here I am."

"Here you are," Morrell agreed in friendly tones. "Nice weather we're having, isn't it?"

"As a matter of fact, it looks like rain," Abell said—and it did. He gave Morrell a severe look. It was like being haunted by the ghost of an overstrict schoolteacher. "See here, General—how dare you threaten to resign when the country is in crisis?"

"After all these years we've been banging heads, you still don't know how I work." Morrell wasn't friendly anymore. "How can you care for me and feed me if you don't know where I live or what I eat? I wasn't threatening anything or anybody. I've just had enough of being asked to do the impossible. If you put someone else here, maybe you'll support him the way you should."

"You are the recognized expert on barrel tactics—recognized by the Confederates as well as your own side." Abell spoke the words as if they tasted bad. To him, they probably did. He said them anyhow. He did have a certain chilly integrity.

"Confederate recognition I could do without," Morrell said. As if in sympathy, his shoulder twinged. The enemy wanted him dead—him personally. That was why he tolerated Wally and the other

bodyguards he didn't want. He knew too well the Confederates might try again. Anger rising in his voice, he went on, "And if the War Department thinks I'm so goddamn wonderful and brilliant and all that, why do I have to send a letter of resignation to get it to remember I'm alive?"

"That is not the case, I assure you," John Abell said stiffly.

"Yeah, and then you wake up," Morrell jeered. "Now tell me another one, one I'll believe."

"We are trying to meet your needs, General." If Abell was angry, he didn't show it. He was very good at not showing what he thought. "Please remember, though, this is not the only area where we are having difficulties."

"Difficulties, my ass. The Confederates are in Pittsburgh. They're going to tear hell out of it whether they keep it or not. That's not a difficulty—that's a fucking calamity. Tell me I'm wrong. I dare you. I double-dare you." Morrell felt like an eight-year-old trying to pick a fight.

"If we destroy the Confederate Army causing the devastation in Pittsburgh, that devastation may become worthwhile," Abell said.

Morrell clapped a hand to his forehead. If he was going to be melodramatic, he'd do it in spades. "Christ on His cross, Abell, what do you think I'm trying to do?" he howled. "Why won't Philadelphia let me?"

"You will agree the cost of failure is high," Abell said.

"You make sure I fail if you don't support me," Morrell said. "Is that what you've got in mind?"

"No. Of course not. If we didn't want you here, we would have put someone else in this place," Abell said. "We had someone else in this place before you recovered from your wound, if you'll remember."

"Oh, yes. You sure did." Morrell rolled his eyes. "And my illustrious predecessor scattered barrels all over the landscape, too. He aimed to support the infantry with them. Perfect War Department tactics from 1916."

John Abell turned red. In the last war, the War Department had thought of barrels as nothing more than infantry-support weapons. George Custer and Morrell had had to go behind Philadelphia's back

to mass them. The War Department would have stripped Custer of his barrels if it found out what he was up to—till he proved his way worked much better than its.

“That’s not fair,” Abell said once his blush subsided. “We did put you here to set things right, and you can’t say we didn’t.”

“All right. Fine.” Morrell took a deep breath. “If that’s what you want, I’ll try to give it to you. Let me have the tools I need to do my job. Stand back and get out of my way and let me do it, too.”

“And if you don’t?” Now Abell’s voice was silky with menace.

Morrell laughed at him. “That’s obvious, isn’t it? If I make a hash of it, you’ve got a scapegoat. ‘Things went wrong because General Morrell fucked up, that no-good, bungling son of a bitch.’ Tell every paper in the country it’s my fault. I won’t say boo. If I have what I need here and I can’t do what needs doing, I deserve it.”

“You’ll get what’s coming to you,” the General Staff officer said. “And if you don’t deliver once you get it, you’ll *really* get what’s coming to you. I’m glad you think it seems fair, because it will happen whether you think so or not.”

“Deal.” Morrell stuck out his hand. John Abell looked surprised, but he shook it.

T he other sailor tossed five bucks into the pot. “Call,” he said.

“Ten-high straight.” George Enos, Jr., laid down his cards.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!” The other sailor couldn’t have sounded more disgusted if he tried for a week. George understood when he threw down his own hand: he held an eight-high straight.

“Got him by a cunt hair, George,” Fremont Dalby said as George scooped up the cash. It was a nice chunk of change; they’d gone back and forth several times before the call. Losing would have hurt. It wouldn’t have left George broke or anything—he had better sense than to gamble that hard—but it would have hurt. Dalby scooped up the cards and started to shuffle. “My deal, I think.”

“Yeah.” George wiped sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. The compartment where they played was hot and airless. A bare bulb in an

iron cage overhead gave the only light. The door said STORES on the outside, but the chamber was empty. The sailors sat on the gray-painted deck and redistributed the wealth.

Fremont Dalby passed George the cards. “Here. Cut.” George took some cards from the middle of the deck and stuck them on the bottom. Dalby laughed. “Whorehouse cut, eh? All right, you bastard. I had my royal flush all stacked and ready to deal, and now you went and fucked me. Some pal you are.”

“Sorry,” George said in tones suggesting he was anything but. As the CPO dealt, George asked, “Ever see a real royal flush in an honest game?”

“Nope, and I’ve been playing poker for a hell of a long time,” Dalby answered. “I saw a jack-high straight flush once. That was a humdinger of a hand, too, on account of it beat four queens. But I knew the people, and they weren’t dealing off the bottom of the deck or anything.”

Nobody else in the game admitted to seeing a royal flush, either. George looked at his cards. None of them appeared to have been introduced to any of the others. This wasn’t a jack-high straight flush; it was jack-high garbage. He almost threw it away, but he’d won the last hand, so he stayed in and asked for four cards.

That left him with a pair of jacks. When Dalby called for jacks or better to open, he put in a dollar. The hand got raised twice before it came back to him. He tossed it in with no regret except for the vanished dollar. Fremont Dalby ended up taking it with three kings.

George had just started to shuffle when the klaxons called men to battle stations. Everyone paused just long enough to scoop up the money in front of him. “To be continued,” somebody said as the poker game broke up. And so, no doubt, it would be; it seemed as unending as any movie serial.

His feet clanged on the deck as he ran for the nearest stairway. Dalby was older and rounder, but stayed with him all the way. They got to their antiaircraft gun at the same time. Along with the *Townsend,* three other destroyers surrounded the *Trenton.* The escort carrier’s fighters buzzed high overhead. Kauai lay somewhere to the southeast. They were out tweaking the Japs again, much as Francis Drake had singed the beard of the King of Spain. Like King Philip, the Japs were liable to singe back.

“Is this real or a drill, Enos?” Dalby said. “I got five bucks says it’s a drill.”

The odds favored him. They had many more drills than real alerts. Still, in these waters . . . “You’re on,” George said. They shook to seal the bet.

“Now hear this! Now hear this!” the intercom blared. “Aircraft from the *Trenton* are attacking a Japanese carrier. The Japs are sure to try to return the favor if they can. Be ready. It is expected that the *Trenton* will be their main target, but we want to remind them that we love them, too.”

“There’s a fin you owe me,” George said happily. “That’ll buy one of the boys some shoes.”

“My ass,” Fremont Dalby said, his voice sour. “It’ll buy you a couple of shots and a blowjob from a Chinese whore on Hotel Street when we get back to Pearl.”

Since he was probably right, George didn’t argue with him. He just said, “Well, that’s a damn sight better than nothing, too.” The gun crew laughed. Even the CPO’s lips twitched.

They waited. Before too long, the executive officer said, “Y-ranging gear reports inbound aircraft. They aren’t ours. We’re going to have company in about fifteen minutes. Roll out the welcome mat for our guests, boys.” Five minutes later, he came back on the loudspeakers: “*Trenton*’s aircraft report that that Jap carrier is on fire and dead in the water. Score one for the good guys.”

Cheers rang out up and down the *Townsend*’s main deck, and probably everywhere else on the ship, too. The crew had faced savage air attacks more than once. Getting their own back felt wonderful.

“Those Jap pilots are liable to know they can’t go home again,” Dalby warned. “That means they’ll give it everything they’ve got when they hit us. Knock ’em down as quick as you can so they don’t crash into the ship or something.”

Knocking down airplanes was hard enough without any extra pressure to do it fast. George just shrugged. Unless somebody got hurt, all he had to do was make sure the gun had enough ammo to keep shooting. What happened after that was Dalby’s responsibility, not his.

The Y-range antenna swung round and round. George and everybody

else up on deck peered northwest, the direction from which trouble had so often come before. The *Townsend* picked up speed. She would want to do as much dodging as she could. George glanced over toward the *Trenton.* The carrier couldn't pick up a lot of speed. Her engines wouldn't let her.

"There they are!" somebody yelled.

George swore softly. Those were Jap airplanes, all right. Their silhouettes might have been more familiar to him than those of U.S. aircraft. The half dozen fighters in combat air patrol over the little U.S. fleet streaked toward the enemy. Japanese escort fighters were bound to outnumber them. Their pilots would want to take out as many enemy strike aircraft as they could before the enemy shot them down. A pilot's life wasn't always glamorous. George wouldn't have traded places with anybody up there.

An airplane tumbled out of the sky, leaving a comet's trail of fire and smoke all the way down to the Pacific. "That's a Jap!" someone shouted. George hoped he knew what he was talking about.

This wasn't like the last few times the *Townsend* had ventured out in the direction of Midway. The main attack wasn't aimed at the destroyer. The Japs wanted the *Trenton.* A carrier was really dangerous to them, as aircraft from the converted freighter had just proved. Destroyers? Destroyers were nuisances, annoyances, worth noticing now only because they tried to keep enemy aircraft away from the *Trenton.*

That made the 40mm crews' jobs easier. They were less rattled, less hurried, than they had been when enemy dive bombers singled the *Townsend* out for attention. George fed his gun shells. Fritz Gustafson loaded them into the breeches. At Fremont Dalby's command, two other sailors shifted the antiaircraft gun in altitude and azimuth. Empty shell casings clattered down onto the deck by the gun crews' feet. Every so often, George or Gustafson would kick them out of the way so nobody tripped over them.

The *Townsend*'s five-inch guns blasted away at the Japs. Their shells could reach a lot farther and packed much more punch, but they couldn't fire nearly so fast. Their roar, on top of the thunder from all the smaller weapons, hammered the ears. George wondered whether he'd be able to hear at all by the time the war ended.

And the big guns' blast shook and jarred loose damn near everything

on the deck. The last time they'd cut loose, a sailor George knew ended up spitting a filling out into the palm of his hand. He'd been lucky, too, even if he didn't think so when the pharmacist's mate played dentist on him. Stray too close to a five-incher's muzzle when it went off and blast could kill, even if it didn't leave a mark on your body. George didn't aspire to be a corpse, unmarked or otherwise.

"Hit!" The whole gun crew shouted at the same time when a Japanese dive bomber they'd been shooting at suddenly wavered in the air and started trailing smoke. "We *got* the son of a bitch!" George added exultantly.

That pilot must have known he had nowhere to go. With his own carrier in flames, he wouldn't have had anywhere to go even if his engine were running perfectly. Taking a hit must have rubbed his nose in it. He dove for the *Trenton.* Instead of releasing his bomb and trying to pull up, he seemed intent on using his airplane as an extra weapon.

A hail of antiaircraft fire from the escort carrier said its gunners realized the same thing. They scored more hits on the dive bomber, but didn't deflect it from its course. The ship swung to starboard—slowly, so slowly. A carrier built from the keel up as a warship would have had a much better chance of getting away.

But that turn, small as it was, saved the *Trenton.* Maybe the enemy pilot was dead in the cockpit, or maybe the heavy fire severed the cables to his rudder and ailerons so he couldn't swerve no matter how much he wanted to. He splashed into the Pacific a hundred yards to port of the carrier. His bomb went off then, sending up a great plume of white water. A near miss like that would damage the *Trenton* with fragments, and might make her leak from sprung seams. But it wouldn't turn her into a torch and send her to the bottom.

"Fucker had balls," Fritz Gustafson said with grudging respect. As grudgingly, George nodded. Trying to get in a last lick at your foe when you knew you were a goner took nerve.

Not so many Japanese airplanes were left in the sky now. U.S. fighters and ferocious AA had knocked down a lot of them. Then George watched something that chilled him to the bone. A Jap fighter pilot heeled his undamaged airplane into a dive and swooped on the *Trenton* like a hunting falcon. He didn't try to save himself—all he wanted to do was damage that carrier the only way he had left. That he would die if he succeeded couldn't have mattered to him. He wasn't going home anyway.

The *Trenton* shot him down. His fighter broke up and fell in flaming pieces into the sea. But he'd given the other Japs an idea—or maybe he'd told them over the wireless what he aimed to do. One after another, they all dove on the American ships below them. Dead men themselves, they didn't want to die alone.

George's gun put as many rounds as it could into a fighter. The Japanese didn't make their aircraft as sturdy as Americans did—not that a U.S. fighter would have survived a pasting like that. But the Jap wasn't trying to survive, only to take Americans with him. He didn't quite make it. His burning airplane crashed into the ocean off the *Townsend*'s starboard bow.

One fighter did crash on the *Trenton*'s flight deck—and then skidded off into the sea, trailing flames. It scraped eight or ten sailors off the ship with it. Fires lingered on the flight deck after the Jap was gone. Damage-control parties beat them down with high-pressure seawater. By the time the escort carrier's strike aircraft got back, she was ready to land them. "By God, we did it," George said. In the waters off the Sandwich Islands, Americans hadn't said anything like that for a while, but they'd earned the right today. George said it again, with feeling.

XV

B rigadier General Abner Dowling's guards now enforced a wider perimeter around the house he was using than they had before. He wondered if they joked that he had a wide perimeter, too. He wouldn't have been surprised. The perimeter around the place, though, was no laughing matter. It came by direct order from the War Department.

"People bombs," Dowling said as he showed his adjutant the order. "Not just auto bombs anymore, but people bombs, too. What on God's green earth are we coming to? That's all I want to know."

Captain Angelo Toricelli studied the order. "The Mormons have done this in the USA," he said. "Negroes have done it in the CSA. It doesn't say white Confederates have started doing it anywhere."

“If they haven’t, it’s only a matter of time till they do,” Dowling said gloomily. “If you think the Freedom Party doesn’t have people who’d martyr themselves for St. Featherston, you’re out of your tree. Plenty of fanatics who’d thank him for the chance to blow up a damnyankee or three. Go ahead. Tell me I’m wrong. I dare you.”

“I wish I could, sir.” Toricelli sounded mournful, too. He went on, “I don’t think the world is ever going to be the same. From now on, if you’re in a big city or if you’re in politics or the military, you won’t be able to go down to the corner diner for a cup of coffee or a ham on rye without wondering whether the quiet fellow in the next booth is going to blow himself to hell and gone—and you along with him.”

“You’re in a cheerful mood today, aren’t you?” But Dowling feared the younger officer was right—dead right. “One thing consoles me, anyhow.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“Bound to be more people who want to blow up Jake Featherston than ones who want to see me dead bad enough to kill themselves to get me.”

“Sir, I believe they call that a dubious distinction.”

“And I believe you’re right.” Dowling laughed, but on a note not far from despair. “What *is* the world coming to, Captain? Just before the war started, I listened to a fellow named Litvinoff going on and on about nerve agents—he wouldn’t call them gases. He was happy as a clam in chowder, you know what I mean?”

“Oh, yes, sir.” Toricelli nodded. “I’ve met people like that. It’s their toy, and they don’t care what it does, as long as it does what it’s supposed to.”

“That’s right. That’s exactly right.” Dowling nodded, too. “And now this. Is there *anything* we won’t do to each other?”

Toricelli considered that. “I don’t know, sir. I’m not sure I’m the right person to ask,” he said. “Don’t you think you ought to talk to one of the Negroes in a Freedom Party camp instead? But ask fast, while there are still some left.”

“Ouch!” Abner Dowling winced. “Well, you got me there. Maybe I ought to put it a different way: aren’t there some things we *shouldn’t* do to each other?”

“We’ve got the Geneva Convention,” Toricelli said.

“It doesn’t talk about people bombs,” Dowling said. “It doesn’t talk about those camps, either. It doesn’t talk about gas, come to that. Nobody wanted to talk about gas when they were hammering it out, because everybody figured he might need it again one of these days.”

Now Toricelli eyed Dowling with a certain bemusement. “You’re just about as cheerful as I am, aren’t you, sir?”

“I’m as cheerful as I ought to be,” Dowling answered. He looked out the window. An auto painted U.S. green-gray was coming up to his headquarters. The guards stopped it before it got too close. Anybody could paint a motorcar. Who was inside mattered far more than what color it was.

But the driver seemed to satisfy the guards. He got out of the Chevrolet and hurried toward the building. “I’ll see what he wants, sir,” Captain Toricelli said.

“Thanks,” Dowling told him.

His adjutant returned a few minutes later with the man from the auto —a sergeant. “He’s from the War Department, sir,” Toricelli said. “Says he’s got orders for you from Philadelphia.”

“Well, then, he’d better give them to me, eh?” Dowling did his best not to show worry. Orders from Philadelphia could blow up in his face almost as nastily as a people bomb. He could be cashiered. He could be summoned before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War again—and wasn’t even once cruel and unusual punishment? He could be ordered back to the War Department to do something useless again. The possibilities were endless. The *good* possibilities seemed much more sharply limited.

“Here you are, sir,” the sergeant said.

Dowling opened the orders and put on his reading glasses. If this noncom had orders to report on how he took bad news, he was damned if he’d give the man any satisfaction. Wounded soldiers bit back screams for the same reason.

He skimmed through the orders, blinked, and read them again more slowly. “Well, well,” he said when he’d finished.

“May I ask, sir?” Captain Toricelli was sensitive to everything that

might go wrong. What hurt Dowling's career could hurt his, too.

"I've been relieved of this command. I've been transferred," Dowling said.

Toricelli nodded. Like Dowling, he didn't want to show a stranger his wounds hurt. "Transferred where, sir?" he asked, trying to find out how badly he was hit.

"To Clovis, New Mexico, which is, I gather, near the Texas border," Dowling answered. He couldn't keep the amazement out of his voice as he went on, "They've appointed me commander of the Eleventh Army there. They want somebody to remind the Confederates there's a war on in those parts. And—"

"Yes, sir?" Toricelli broke in, eyes glowing. He might have been a soldier who'd discovered a bullet had punched a hole in his tunic without punching a hole in him.

"And they've given me a second star, Major Toricelli," Major General Abner Dowling said. He and Toricelli shook hands.

"Congratulations, sir," the sergeant from the War Department said to Dowling. The man turned to Toricelli. "Congratulations to you, too, sir."

"Thank you," Dowling said, at the same time as Toricelli was saying, "Thank you very much." Dowling went back to his desk and pulled out the half pint. He eyed how much was left in the bottle. "About enough for three good slugs," he said as he undid the cap. He raised the little bottle. "Here's to Clovis, by God, New Mexico." He drank and passed it to Angelo Toricelli.

"To Clovis!" Toricelli also drank, and passed it to the sergeant. "Here you go, pal. Kill it."

"Don't mind if I do," the noncom said. "To Clovis!" He tilted his head back. His Adam's apple worked. "Ah! That hits the spot, all right. Much obliged to you both." He would still have a story to tell when he got back to the War Department, but it wouldn't be one of frustration and rage and despair. Sergeants didn't drink with generals—or even majors—every day.

One swig of whiskey didn't turn him into a drunk. He drove off toward Philadelphia. That left Dowling and his adjutant in a pleasant sort of limbo. "What the deuce is going on in New Mexico?" Toricelli

asked.

“All I know is what I read in the newspapers, and you don’t read much about New Mexico there.” Dowling figured he was heading to Clovis to fix that, or try. “Only thing I can really recall is that bombing raid on Fort Worth and Dallas a few months ago.”

“Probably a good idea to find out before we get there,” Toricelli said.

“Probably,” Dowling agreed. He was sure that never would have occurred to George Custer. Custer would have charged right in and started slugging with the enemy, regardless of what was going on beforehand. Nine times out of ten, he and everyone around him would soon have regretted it. The tenth time . . . The tenth time, he would have ended up a national hero. Dowling didn’t make nearly so many blunders as his former boss. He feared he would never become a national hero, though. His sense of caution was too well developed.

“I’m sure we’ll stop in Philadelphia on our way to Clovis,” his adjutant said. “The War Department can brief us there.” Captain—no, Major—Toricelli had a well-developed sense of caution, too.

Not even the stars on his shoulder straps kept Dowling from being searched before he got into the War Department. “Sorry, sir,” said the noncom who did the job. “Complain to the Chief of Staff if you want to. Rule is, no exceptions.”

Dowling didn’t intend to complain. As far as he could see, the rule made good sense. “How many people bombs have you had?” he asked.

“Inside here? None,” the sergeant answered. “In Philadelphia? I think the count is five right now.”

“Jesus!” Dowling said. The man who was patting him down nodded sadly.

He felt like saying *Jesus!* again when he got a look at the situation map for the Texas–New Mexico border. The so-called Eleventh Army had a division and a half—an understrength corps—to cover hundreds of miles of frontier. The bombers that had plastered Dallas and Fort Worth had long since been withdrawn to more active fronts.

Only one thing relieved his gloom: the Confederates he was facing were just as bad off as he was. Where he had a division and a half under his command, his counterpart in butternut commanded a scratch division, and somebody had been scratching at it pretty hard.

Dowling thought he could drive the enemy a long way.

After studying the map, he wondered why he ought to bother. If he advanced fifty miles into Texas, even a hundred miles into Texas—well, so what? What had he won except fifty or a hundred empty, dusty miles? All those wide-open spaces were the best shield the Confederacy had. Advance fifty or a hundred miles into Virginia and the CSA staggered. Advance fifty or a hundred miles into Kentucky and you cut the enemy off from the Ohio River and took both farming and factory country. Texas wasn't like that. There was a lot of it, and nobody had done much with a lot of what there was.

"Are you sending me out there to do things myself, or just to keep the Confederates from doing things?" he asked a General Staff officer.

That worthy also studied the map. "For now, the first thing is to make sure the Confederates don't do anything," he replied. "If they take Las Cruces, people will talk. If they go crazy and take Santa Fe and Albuquerque, I'd say your head would roll."

"They'd need a devil of a lot of reinforcements to do that," Dowling said, and the colonel with the gold-and-black arm-of-service colors didn't deny it. Dowling went on, "They'd have to be nuts, too, because even taking Albuquerque won't do a damn thing about winning them the war."

"Looks that way to me, too," the colonel said.

"All right, then—we're on the same page, anyhow," Dowling said. "Now, the next obvious question is, who do I have to kill to get reinforcements of my own?"

"Well, sir, till we settle the mess in Pennsylvania, you could murder everybody here and everybody in Congress and you still wouldn't get any," the General Staff officer said gravely. That struck Dowling as a reasonable assessment, too. The colonel added, "I hope you'll be able to hold on to the force you've got. I don't promise, but I hope so."

"All right. You seem honest, anyhow. I'll do what I can," Dowling said.

When he headed to the Broad Street Station for the roundabout journey west, he discovered fall had ousted summer while he wasn't looking. The temperature had dropped ten or twelve degrees while he was visiting the War Department. The breeze was fresh, and came from the northwest. Gray clouds scudded along on it. No red and gold leaves on trees, no brown leaves blowing, not yet, but that breeze said

they were on their way.

H ome. Cincinnatus Driver had never imagined a more wonderful word. While he lived in it, the apartment in Des Moines had seemed ordinary—just another place, one where he could hang his hat. After almost two years away, after being stuck in a country that hated his—and hated him, too—that apartment seemed the most wonderful place in the world.

The apartment and the neighborhood seemed even more amazing to his father. “Do Jesus!” Seneca Driver said. “It’s like I ain’t a nigger no more. Don’t hardly know how to act when the ofay down at the corner store treat me like I’s a man.”

Cincinnatus smiled. “It’s like that here. I tried to tell you, but you didn’t want to believe me.” Of course one reason it was like that was that Des Moines didn’t have very many Negroes: not enough for whites to flabble about. The United States as a whole didn’t have very many. Cincinnatus’ smile slipped. The USA didn’t want many Negroes, either. That left most of them stuck in the CSA, and at the tender mercy of Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party.

No such gloom troubled his father. “Bought me a pack of cigarettes, an’ I give the clerk half a dollar. An’ he give me my change, an’ he say to me, ‘Here you is, sir.’ Sir! Ain’t nobody never call me ‘sir’ in all my born days, but he do it. Sir!” He might have been walking on air. Then something else occurred to him. “That clerk, he call a Chinaman ‘sir,’ too?”

“Reckon so,” Cincinnatus answered. “What color you are don’t matter—so much—here. Achilles and Amanda, they both graduated from high school. You reckon that happen in Kentucky? And you got yourself two grandbabies that are half Chinese, and another one on the way. You reckon *that* happen in Kentucky?”

“Not likely!” His father snorted at the idea. “I seen Chinamen in the moving pictures before, but I don’t reckon I ever seen one in the flesh in Covington. Now I ain’t just seen ’em—I got ’em in the family!” He thought himself a man of the world because of that.

“They’ve got you in the family, too,” Cincinnatus said. Achilles’ wife, the former Grace Chang, really seemed to like Cincinnatus’ father, and to be glad Cincinnatus himself was home. Her parents had much less trouble curbing their enthusiasm. They weren’t thrilled about being

tied to Achilles or Cincinnatus or Seneca. The funny thing was, they would have been just about as dismayed if the Drivers were white. What bothered them was that their daughter had married somebody who wasn't Chinese.

"They is welcome in my family, long as they make that good beer," Seneca Driver said. Cincinnatus nodded. Homebrew mattered in Iowa, a thoroughly dry state. He first got to know Joey Chang because of the beer his upstairs neighbor brewed. Achilles and Grace got to know each other in school. The rest? Well, the rest just happened.

Cincinnatus wondered how the Freedom Party would look at that marriage. Who was miscegenating with whom? He didn't have to worry about that here. He didn't have to worry about all kinds of things here, things that would have been matters of life and death in the Confederate States. He could look at a white woman without fearing he might get lynched. He didn't much want to—he'd always been happy with Elizabeth—but he could. He could testify in court on equal terms with whites—and with Chinese, for that matter. And . . .

"You're a U.S. citizen, Pa," he said suddenly. "Once you've lived in Iowa long enough to be a resident, you can vote."

His father was less delighted than he'd expected. "Done did that once in Kentucky," Seneca Driver replied. "There was that plebiscite thing, remember? I done voted, but they went ahead an' gave her back to the CSA anyways." He plainly thought that, since he'd voted, things should have gone the way he wanted them. Cincinnatus wished the world worked like that.

Elizabeth came out of the kitchen and into the front room. "You two hungry?" she asked. "Got some fried chicken in the icebox I can bring you." She thought Cincinnatus and his father were nothing but skin and bones. Since they'd eaten too much of their own cooking down in Covington, she might have been right.

"I would like that. Thank you kindly," Seneca said. Cincinnatus nodded, but he was less happy than his father sounded. To Seneca Driver, his son's family seemed rich. Compared to anything the older man had had in Kentucky, they were. But Cincinnatus knew money didn't grow on trees, and neither did chickens. Elizabeth had done cooking and cleaning to make ends meet while he was stuck in Covington. Achilles had helped out, too. All the same . . .

Cincinnatus knew his hauling business was dead. His wife had sold the

Ford truck he'd been so proud of. He didn't blame her for that; if she couldn't pay the rent, the landlord would have thrown her out onto the street. But he didn't have enough money to buy another one. He wasn't going to be his own boss anymore. He would have to work for somebody else, and he hadn't done that since the end of the Great War. He hated the idea, but he didn't know what he could do about it.

Were there jobs for a middle-aged black man with a bad leg and a none too good shoulder? There, for once, Cincinnatus wasn't so worried. With the war sucking able-bodied men out of the workforce, there were jobs for all the people who wanted them. He'd seen how many factories and shops had NOW HIRING signs out where folks could see them. Women were doing jobs that had been a man's preserve before the war. He figured he could find something.

Elizabeth came back with a drumstick for his father, a thigh for him, and two more glasses of beer. "You holler if you want anything else," she said. She swung her hips as she walked off. In some ways, Cincinnatus was glad to discover, he wasn't crippled at all. His homecoming had been everything he hoped it would be along those lines.

"Sure is good," his father said, taking a big bite out of the chicken leg and washing it down with a sip of Mr. Chang's homebrew. "They always said folks in the USA had it good. I see they was right."

All he had to do was enjoy it. He didn't have to worry about where it came from. For the past couple of years, Elizabeth had done that. Cincinnatus was sure she'd done a lot of worrying, too. But she'd managed. Now that Cincinnatus was finally home, the worrying fell on his shoulders again.

He'd hoped the government would help him out. No such luck. To those people, he'd been in Kentucky on his own affairs, and never mind that the plebiscite and its aftermath were what had stuck him there.

Amanda came into the apartment. She'd found work at a fabric plant, and her paycheck was helping with the bills now, too. She smiled at Cincinnatus and Seneca. "Hello, Dad! Hello, Grandpa!" she said, and kissed them both on the cheek. She'd always got on better with Cincinnatus than Achilles had. There was none of that young goat bumping up against old goat rivalry that sometimes soured things between Cincinnatus and his son.

“How are you, sweetheart?” he asked her.

She made a face. “Tired. Long shift.”

Seneca laughed. “Welcome to the world, dear heart. You better git used to it, on account o’ it gonna be like dat till God call you to heaven.”

“I suppose.” Amanda sighed. “I wish I could have gone on to college. I’d be able to get a really good job with a college degree.”

“Lawd!” The mere idea startled Cincinnatus’ father. “A child o’ my child in college? That woulda been somethin’, all right.”

“Even if you had started college, hon, reckon you would’ve gone to work anyways with things like they were,” Cincinnatus said. “Sometimes you just can’t help doin’ what you got to do.”

“I suppose,” his daughter said again. She went into the kitchen to say hello to Elizabeth. When she came back, she had a glass of beer in her hand.

Cincinnatus raised an eyebrow when she sipped from it. “When did you start drinking beer?” he asked.

“I knew you were going to say that!” Amanda stuck out her tongue at him. “I *knew* it! I started about a year ago. I needed a while to get used to it, but I like it now.”

Cincinnatus smiled, remembering how sour beer had tasted to him the first few times he tasted it. “All right, sweetheart,” he said mildly. “I ain’t gonna flabble about it. You’re big enough. You can drink beer if you want to. But when I went away, you didn’t.” He didn’t want to get upset about anything, not here, not now. He was so glad to see his daughter, he wouldn’t worry about anything past that.

She looked relieved. “I was afraid you’d get all upset, say it wasn’t ladylike or something.”

“Not me.” He shook his head. “How could I do that when your mama’s been drinkin’ beer a whole lot longer’n you’ve been alive?”

“You could have,” Amanda said darkly. “Some people think what’s fine for older folks isn’t so fine for younger ones.”

So there, Cincinnatus thought. “Yeah, some people do that,” he

admitted. “But I ain’t one of them.” He listened to the way his words sounded compared to those of the people around him. After so many years in Iowa, he’d seemed more than half a Yankee whenever he opened his mouth in Covington. But Amanda and Achilles had taken on much more of the flat Midwestern accent of Des Moines than he had. Next to them, he sounded like . . . a Negro who’d just escaped from the Confederate States. *Well, I damn well am.*

“When I was jus’ a li’l pickaninny—this here was back in slavery days—my pa give me my first sip o’ beer,” his father said in an accent far thicker and less educated than his own. He screwed up his face at the memory. “I axed him, ‘Am I pizened?’ An’ he tol’ me no, an’ he was right, but I done pizened myself with beer a time or two since. Yes, suh, a time or two.”

“Oh, yeah.” Cincinnatus remembered times when he’d poisoned himself, too, some of them not so long ago. He wondered how the Brass Monkey and the dedicated drinkers—and checker-players—who made it a home away from home were doing. Already, the time when he was stuck in Covington was starting to seem like a bad dream. He remembered waking up in the hospital. If only that were a bad dream! The pain in his leg and shoulder and the headaches he still sometimes got reminded him it was all too real.

He still didn’t remember the motorcar hitting him. The doctors had told him he never would. They seemed to be right. From what they said, lots of folks didn’t remember what happened when they had a bad accident. If his were any worse, they would have planted him with a lily on his chest.

“Glad you’re home, Dad,” Amanda said. *Dad.* There it was again. Down in Covington, she would surely have called him *Pa.* She had called him *Pa* for years. When had she changed to this Yankee usage? Whenever it was, he hadn’t particularly noticed—till he went away and came back and got his nose rubbed in it.

“I’m glad I’m home, too,” Cincinnatus said. When you got right down to it, he didn’t much care what she called him. As long as she could call him anything and he was there to hear it, nothing else mattered.

He thought about the Brass Monkey again, and about Lucullus Wood’s barbecue place, and about his father and mother’s house, now empty and, for all he knew, standing open to the wind and the rain. And he thought about the barbed wire and the guards around Covington’s colored quarter. Autumn was coming to Des Moines, but winter lived

in his heart when he remembered that barbed wire.

A llegheny. Monongahela. Beautiful names for rivers. Even Ohio wasn't a bad name for a river. When you put the three of them together, though, they added up to Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh hadn't been beautiful for a long time. The way things looked to Tom Colleton, it would never be beautiful again.

The damnyankees were not going to give up this town without a fight. They poured men into it to battle block by block, house by house. Crossing a street could be and often was worth a man's life. Barrels came in and knocked houses flat and machine-gunned the men who fled from the ruins. Then some damnyankee they hadn't machine-gunned threw a Featherston Fizz through an open hatch and turned a barrel into an iron coffin for the men inside. And *then* a counterattack went in and threw the Confederates back six blocks.

Somebody not far away started banging on a shell casing with a wrench or a hammer or whatever he had handy. "Oh, for Christ's sake!" Tom said, and grabbed for his gas mask. The weather seemed to have broken; it wasn't so hot and sticky as it had been. But the gas mask was never any fun. If U.S. artillery was throwing in nerve gas, he'd have to put on the full rubber suit. He'd be sweating rivers in that even in a blizzard.

Confederate shells crashed down on the factories and steel mills ahead. The bursts sent up smoke that joined the horrid stuff belching from the tall stacks. Air in Pittsburgh was already poisonous even without phosgene and mustard gas and the nerve agents. They called the thick brown eye-stinging mix smog, jamming together smoke and fog. What they got was more noxious than the made-up word suggested, though.

Tom wouldn't have wanted to work in one of those places with shells bursting all around. But the factories kept operating till they burned or till the Confederates overran them. Trucks and trains took steel and metalware of all kinds east. Barges took them up the Allegheny, too. Confederate artillery and dive bombers made the Yankees pay a heavy price for what came out of the mills and factories. Some of it got through, though, and they must have thought that was worthwhile.

Barrels painted butternut ground forward. Telling streets from blocks of houses wasn't so easy anymore. Confederate-occupied Pittsburgh

was nothing but a rubble field these days. The whole town would look like that by the time Tom's countrymen finished driving out the damnyankees . . . if they ever did.

A machine gun fired at the barrels from the cover of a ruined clothing store. Bullets clanged off the snorting machines' armor. Tom didn't know why machine gunners banged away at barrels; they couldn't hurt them. Bang away they did, though. He wasn't sorry. The more bullets they aimed at the barrels, the fewer they'd shoot at his foot soldiers, whom they really could hurt.

Traversing turrets had a ponderous grace. Three swung together, till their big guns bore on that malevolently winking eye of fire. The cannons spoke together, too. More of the battered shop fell in on itself. But the machine gun opened up again, like a small boy yelling, *Nyah! Nyah! You missed me!* when bigger kids chucked rocks at him. The crew had nerve.

All they got for their courage was another volley, and then another. After that, the gun stayed quiet. Had the barrels put it out of action, or was it playing possum? Tom hoped his men wouldn't find out the hard way.

And then, for a moment, he forgot all about the machine gun, something an infantry officer hardly ever did. But a round from a U.S. barrel he hadn't seen slammed into the side of one of the butternut behemoths. The Confederate barrel started to burn. Hatches popped open. Men dashed for cover. The U.S. barrel was smart. It didn't machine-gun them and reveal its position. It just waited.

The other two C.S. barrels turned in the general direction from which that enemy round had come. If the U.S. barrel was one of the old models, their sloped front armor would defeat its gun even at point-blank range. But it wasn't. It was one of the new ones with the big, homely turret that housed a bigger, nastier cannon. And when that gun roared again, another Confederate barrel died. This time, several soldiers pointed toward the muzzle flash. By the time the last C.S. barrel in the neighborhood brought its gun to bear, though, the damnyankee machine had pulled back. Tom Colleton got glimpses of it as it retreated, but only glimpses. The butternut barrel didn't have a clear shot at it, and held fire.

He sent men forward to keep the enemy from bringing barrels into that spot again. He was only half surprised when the machine gun in the ruined store opened up again. His men were quick to take cover,

too. He didn't think the machine gun got any of them. He hoped not, anyway.

The Confederate barrel sent several more rounds into the haberdashery. The machine gun stayed quiet. Ever so cautious, soldiers in butternut inched closer. One of them tossed in a grenade and went in after it. Tom wished he had a man with a flamethrower handy. The last fellow who'd carried one had got incinerated along with his rig a few days earlier, though. No replacement for him had come forward yet.

Not enough replacements of any kind were coming forward. Little by little, the regiment was melting away. Tom didn't know what to do about that, except hope it got pulled out of the line for rest and refit before too long. However much he hoped, he didn't expect that would happen soon. The Confederates needed Pittsburgh. They'd already put just about everybody available up at the front.

After a minute or so, the soldier came out of the wreckage with his thumb up. There was one damnyankee machine gun that wouldn't murder anybody else. Now—how many hundreds, how many thousands, more waited in Pittsburgh? The answer was too depressing to think about, so Tom didn't.

One thing he hadn't seen in Pittsburgh: yellowish khaki Mexican uniforms. The Mexicans hadn't done badly in Ohio and Pennsylvania, but they weren't the first team, and everybody knew it. They held the flanks once the Confederates went through and cleared out the Yankees. They were plenty good enough for that, and it let the Confederates pile more of their own troops into the big fight.

A rifle shot rang out. A bullet struck sparks from the bricks just behind the head of the soldier who'd thrown the grenade. He hit the dirt. Three other Confederates pointed in three different directions, which meant nobody'd seen where the shot came from. The machine gun might be gone, but the Yankees hadn't given up the fight for this block. It didn't seem as if they would till they were all dead.

Down in the CSA, some people—mostly those who hadn't been through the Great War—still believed U.S. soldiers were nothing but a pack of cowards. Tom laughed as he ducked down into a shell hole to shed his mask and smoke a cigarette—he didn't turn blue and keel over, so it was safe enough. And much better not to let the match or the coal give the damnyankee sniper a target. He just wished Confederate propaganda were true. Pittsburgh would have fallen long

since.

A runner came skittering back to him, calling his name. “Here I am!” he shouted, not raising his head. “What’s up?”

“Sir, there’s a Yankee with a flag of truce right up at the front,” the runner replied. “Wants to know if he can come back and dicker a truce for the wounded.”

The last time a U.S. officer proposed something like that, he’d scouted out the C.S. positions as he moved with his white flag. The damnyankees kept the truce, but they knew just where to strike after it ended. Tom threw down the half-finished smoke. “I’ll meet the son of a bitch at the line,” he growled.

He made his own flag of truce from a stick and a pillowcase, then went up with the runner. The truce already seemed to be informally under way. Firing had stopped. Confederates were swapping packs of cigarettes for U.S. ration cans. Both sides deplored that. Neither could do anything about it. Commerce trumped orders. The Yankees had better canned goods and worse tobacco, the Confederates the opposite.

A U.S. captain in a dirty uniform waited for Tom. “I could have come to you,” the man remarked.

Colleton smiled a crooked smile. “I bet you could,” he said, and explained why he didn’t want the Yankee back of his lines.

“I wouldn’t do a thing like that,” the U.S. officer said, much too innocently. “And I’m sure you wouldn’t, either.”

“Who, me?” Tom said with another smile like the first. The U.S. captain matched it. They’d been through the mill, all right. Tom got down to business: “Is an hour long enough, or do you want two?”

“Split the difference?” the damnyankee suggested, and Tom nodded. The captain looked at his watch. “All right, Lieutenant-Colonel. Truce till 1315, then?”

“Agreed.” Tom stuck out his hand. The U.S. captain shook it. They both turned back to their own men and shouted out the news. Corpsmen from both sides came forward. Ordinary soldiers did some more trading. Somebody had a football. C.S. and U.S. soldiers tossed it back and forth. Tom remembered the 1914 Christmas truce, when the Great War almost unraveled. He knew that wouldn’t happen here.

Both sides meant it now.

Corpsmen poked around through rubble. They called outside of smashed houses. Sometimes they got answers from smashed people trapped inside. Soldiers helped move wreckage so the medics could do their job. When U.S. corpsmen found wounded C.S. soldiers, they gave them back to the Confederates. Corpsmen in butternut returned the favor for the Yankees.

Tom and the officer in green-gray—his name was Julian Nesmith—hadn't agreed to that, but neither of them tried to stop it. "Won't change how things end up one way or the other," Nesmith remarked.

"I was thinking the same thing about smokes and grub a little while ago," Tom agreed. He'd handed Captain Nesmith a couple of packs of Raleighs, and was now the proud possessor of two cans of deviled ham, a delicacy esteemed on both sides of the front. His mouth watered. If he could scrounge up some eggs . . . Even if he couldn't, the ham would be a treat.

"We might as well be comfortable as we can while we slaughter each other," Nesmith said.

"We're enemies," Tom said simply. "You won't make me believe the United States wants to do anything but to squash my country, and I don't expect I can persuade you the Confederate States aren't full of villains."

"It wouldn't matter if you did," Nesmith answered. "As long as you've got villains at the top, all they have to do is shout loud enough to make everybody else go along."

That came close to hitting below the belt. Tom hadn't much cared to listen to Jake Featherston on the wireless at all hours of the day and night. But Jake Featherston had got Kentucky and Houston back into the CSA after the damnyankees stole them at gunpoint in 1917. The Whigs hadn't come close to managing that. Featherston was doing something about the Negroes in the Confederate States, too. The Whigs hadn't known what to do. And so . . .

"Who's a villain and who isn't depends on how you look at things," Tom said.

"Sometimes," Julian Nesmith replied.

They shook hands again when the truce ended. Corpsmen

disappeared. Men got back under cover. Almost ceremoniously, a U.S. soldier fired a Springfield to warn anybody who hadn't got the word. In that same spirit, a Confederate soldier answered with one round from a Tredegar.

Then another Confederate squeezed off a burst from his automatic rifle. A U.S. machine gun opened up. Tom sighed. The little peace had been nice while it lasted.

Salt Lake City wasn't hell, but you could see it from there. Armstrong Grimes peered toward the rubble of the Mormon Temple—twice built and now twice destroyed. He peered very cautiously. All the Mormons still fighting were veterans. Some of them were veterans of two uprisings. Show any body part, and they'd put a bullet through it faster than you could say Jack Robinson.

Armstrong wondered who the hell Jack Robinson was. He also wondered how life would change now that he was a sergeant instead of a corporal. He'd hesitated before sewing the new stripes onto his sleeve. The Mormons' snipers liked to pick off officers and noncoms.

Yossel Reisen had two stripes now. He wore them, too. Their promotions both came through while the regiment was in reserve in Thistle. Somebody must have thought they were on the ball when that woman blew herself up in Provo. All Armstrong knew was that the two of them hadn't got badly hurt when the people bomb went off, and afterward he'd done what anybody else would have. That must have been enough to impress one officer or another.

He turned to Reisen, who crouched behind a stone fence not far away. "You hear the skinny last night?" he said. "They figure Sergeant Stowe's gonna make it."

"Yeah, somebody told me." Yossel nodded. "I would've thought he was a goner for sure. He looked like hell."

"Boy, didn't he?" Armstrong said.

"He's lucky."

"Hunh-unh." Now Armstrong shook his head. "*We're* lucky. We didn't catch shrapnel. We aren't in the hospital with our guts all messed up. If Stowe was lucky, he'd still be here, same as we are. Instead, he's in a bed somewhere, and they probably have to shoot morphine into him

all the goddamn time. Belly wounds are supposed to hurt like anything."

His vehemence surprised him. It must have surprised Yossel Reisen, too. Armstrong didn't usually argue with him. Yossel was older and more experienced, even if he didn't care about rank. Here, though, Armstrong couldn't keep quiet. And after a few seconds, Yossel nodded. "Well, you're right," he said. "He's alive, and that's good, but he still isn't lucky."

"There you go," Armstrong said. "That's how it looks to me, too."

"Sarge! Hey, Sarge!" somebody yelled.

Armstrong needed a moment to remember that meant him. "Yeah? What is it?" he said, a beat slower than he should have.

"Mormon coming up with a flag of truce."

Firing had died away. Armstrong hadn't noticed that, either. He felt as far down on sleep as he had before his regiment got R and R. Cautiously, he stuck his head up again. Sure as hell, here came a Mormon in what the rebels used for a uniform: chambray shirt, dungarees, and boots. "Hold it right there, buddy, or you'll never know how your favorite serial comes out on the wireless!" Armstrong yelled.

The Mormon waved the white flag. "I want to talk to an officer. I mean no harm."

"Yeah, now tell me another one," Armstrong said. "How do I know you're not a goddamn people bomb waiting to go off?"

"Because I say I am not," the rebel answered. "I am a major in the Army of the State of Deseret." Armstrong could hear the capital letters thud into place.

Capital letters didn't impress him. "And I'm the Queen of the May," he said. "You want to come forward?" He waited for the Mormon to nod, then made a peremptory gesture. "Strip. Show me you're not loaded with fucking TNT."

If looks could kill . . . But they couldn't, and TNT might. Fuming, the Mormon major shed his boots, his jeans, and his shirt. He even took off his Stetson. That left him in a peculiar-looking undershirt and longish drawers. It was getting toward long-underwear time—nights

were downright chilly—but it hadn't got there yet. The strange getup didn't particularly bother Armstrong; he'd seen it on other Mormons. Some sort of religious rule said they had to wear it.

That didn't mean he had to trust it. "Lift up the shirt," he called. "The drawers are snug enough—don't bother with those." The Mormon did, showing a hard belly covered with hair a shade darker than the blond hair on his head. Armstrong waved to him. "Now turn around." After the rebel did, Armstrong reluctantly nodded. "All right. Looks like you're clean. Put your stuff back on and come ahead."

As the Mormon major dressed, he said, "I ought to complain to your officers."

"Go ahead, buddy," Armstrong said. "You think they'll come down on me? *I* think they'll pat me on the back. They don't trust you people any further than I do, and I don't trust you at all."

"Believe me, we feel the same way about you," the Mormon said, bending to tie his bootlaces. "If you would only leave us alone—"

"If you hadn't risen up, I'd be back east somewhere with Confederates trying to shoot me," Armstrong said. "And you'd be here in Utah, happy as a goddamn clam. They didn't even conscript you people."

"We want to be free. We want to be independent," the Mormon said as he picked up his white flag. "What's so wicked about that?" He came toward the U.S. lines.

Armstrong laughed a dirty laugh. "You want to have lots of wives. Are they all in the same bed when you screw 'em? Does one lick your balls while another one gets on top?"

The Mormon's jaw set. "It's a good thing I don't know your name, Sergeant." He walked past Armstrong as if he didn't exist. Armstrong called for a couple of privates to take him back toward the rear.

"He's going to put you on a list even if he doesn't know your name," Yossel said. "You'll be the sergeant in so-and-so sector, and those bastards will be gunning for you."

"Big fucking deal." Armstrong laughed again. "Easy enough to get shot around here even when the bastards aren't gunning for you. Won't make a whole hell of a lot of difference one way or the other."

"You better hope it won't." Yossel seemed willing to look on the

gloomy side of life.

“Screw it. Nobody’s even shooting right now.” Armstrong lived for, and in, the moment. The less you thought about all the horrible things that had happened, the horrible things that would happen, and the horrible things that might happen, the better off you were.

After a bit, Captain Lloyd Deevers came over and got down in the hole with him. Armstrong liked Deevers a lot better than Lieutenant Streczyk, who ran the platoon. Deevers actually had a pretty good idea of what he was doing. He nodded to Armstrong now and said, “I don’t think that Mormon likes you.”

“Now ask me if I care, sir,” Armstrong answered. “I don’t like him, either.”

Deevers chuckled. “All right. I’m not going to flabble about it—except if you want to transfer to some other outfit on the line, I won’t say no.”

“No, thanks, sir. I already told Reisen I can stop one as easy somewhere else as I can here,” Armstrong said. Captain Deevers grinned and slapped him on the back. Armstrong asked, “Did that Mormon say why he wanted the truce?”

“Not to me,” Deevers answered. “He wanted to talk to the high mucky-mucks. I passed him back to Division HQ, and we’ll see what they do with him. If I had to guess, I’d say he wants to dicker a surrender that isn’t really a surrender, if you know what I mean. But that’s only a guess.”

“Good fucking luck, uh, sir,” Armstrong said. Lloyd Deevers laughed.

“He would have had a better chance before they started blowing themselves up,” Yossel said. “If we let ’em off the hook now, it’s like they screwed it out of us. And if they want something else, they’ll think all they have to do is use a few more people bombs to make us give in.”

“That’s how it looks to me, too, especially since we’ve almost got ’em licked,” Armstrong said.

“Well, boys, I won’t argue with either one of you, ’cause I think you’re dead right,” Deevers said. “But it isn’t up to me, any more than it’s up to you. We’ll see what the fellows with the stars on their shoulders have to say—and maybe the fellows in the cutaway coats, too.”

“They’ll screw it up,” Armstrong predicted. “They always do.” He waved a hand at the devastation all around. The wreckage and the smell of corpses might not prove his point, but they didn’t come out and call him a liar, either.

Captain Deevers just shrugged. “Like I told you, I can’t do anything about it, either. I suppose what they decide to do here depends a lot on how things look in Pennsylvania and up in Canada.”

That made sense. Armstrong might have been happier if it didn’t. Soldiers in Utah didn’t hear much news from Pennsylvania. Not hearing news was a bad sign all by itself. When things went right, nobody on the wireless would shut up about it. That same ominous quiet came out of Canada. For all Armstrong knew, hordes of pissed-off Canucks were swarming over the border toward Minneapolis and Seattle.

“We’re off in the back of beyond,” Yossel said. “Nobody tells us anything.”

“Wonder how much news about us gets out,” Captain Deevers said musingly.

“You ought to ask your aunt,” Armstrong told Yossel. He kept an eye on the company CO as he spoke. Deevers didn’t blink. He was fairly new to the unit, but he knew it had a VIP’s nephew.

Yossel said, “She doesn’t tell me a whole lot—nothing I’m not supposed to know. She’s got to worry about security like anybody else.”

“Too bad,” Armstrong said. “What’s the point of being related to a big shot if you don’t get anything out of it?”

“People always say that,” Yossel Reisen answered. “But if somebody important gives you a hand all the time, how do you know what you’re good for by yourself?”

He had a point. Armstrong could see it. His family, though, had no fancy connections. He thought not having to worry about money or a good job or the right college would be awfully nice. No doors had opened for him because he was so-and-so’s nephew. His family had plenty of so-and-sos in it, but not that kind.

Somebody called a question across the line to the Mormons: “How long is this truce supposed to last?”

“Till the major comes back,” a rebel answered. “Then we give you thieving wretches more of what you deserve.”

Thieving wretches. Armstrong smiled in spite of himself. The Mormons seldom came right out and cussed. Some of the insults they used instead sounded pretty funny.

Men on both sides walked around and stretched, showing their faces without fear of taking a bullet if they did. The Mormons were scrupulous about honoring truces. U.S. soldiers smoked. Some of them probably had something better than water in their canteens. The Mormons weren’t supposed to use tobacco or alcohol, and most of them didn’t. Armstrong figured that meant screwing was the only way they could have a good time. They sure did that. They’d raised up a big new generation of rebels after getting one killed off in their uprising during the Great War.

In midafternoon U.S. soldiers passed the Mormon officer back through the lines to his own side. His face was a thunderstorm of fury. He hardly even had an extra glare for Armstrong as he went by. The Mormons fired a warning shot into the air. A U.S. soldier answered it. A couple of minutes later, a screaming meemie came down on Armstrong’s company, and then another one. All things considered, maybe he would rather have stayed anonymous.

L eonard O’Doull had worked in a hospital before. He’d met his wife working in one outside of Rivière-du-Loup during the last war. If the authorities hadn’t decided Lucien Galtier was an unreliable nuisance and confiscated his land for the building, Nicole never would have come to work there. O’Doull knew he wouldn’t have settled in the Republic of Quebec if he hadn’t made family ties. Sometimes very strange things could twist a man’s fate.

He was in a fancier hospital now. The University of Pittsburgh had had one of the best medical schools in the USA, and a large hospital where staff members trained residents, interns, medical students, and nurses. Now the hospital was full of wounded and gassed soldiers. Along with the people in training—those who hadn’t put on the uniform—the staff were getting trained themselves, by experts like Leonard O’Doull and Granville McDougald.

“Speed,” McDougald told a surgeon with an old-fashioned, upturned Kaiser Bill mustache. “The faster we can get to ’em, the better they do.

If we're operating less than an hour after they get hit, they'll probably make it. Every minute after that hurts their chances."

The white-mustached healer nodded. "I've also seen this in motorcar accidents," he said.

"It's even more critical with gunshot and shrapnel wounds, because the trauma's usually worse," McDougald said. The surgeon nodded again, thoughtfully, and walked down the corridor. McDougald looked over at Leonard O'Doull and grinned. "Look at me, Doc, going on just like I know what I'm talking about."

"Don't sandbag, Granny," O'Doull answered. "When it comes to wounds, who's seen more than you?"

"Nobody this side of the guy who cuts up steers in a Chicago slaughterhouse," McDougald said. "But he always sees the same ones. Not like that in our line of work, is it?"

"Always something new," O'Doull agreed. "People keep coming up with new ways to maim their fellow man. I don't know why I don't despair of the human race."

"Somebody once said people were the missing link between apes and human beings," McDougald said wistfully. "Damned if he didn't hit that one on the button."

"Didn't he just?" O'Doull listened to the artillery outside. "If the Confederates get over the Allegheny, we're going to be even busier than we are already."

"So will they," McDougald said. "They'll be busier than a one-armed paper hanger with the hives. They may take this place away from us, but Christ!—they're paying through the nose."

Leonard O'Doull nodded. It looked that way to him, too. The dashing C.S. barrels weren't dashing, not in Pittsburgh. They had to fight their way forward house by house, and a lot of them ended up as burnt-out hulks. Confederate infantry had trouble advancing without the barrels, too. Local U.S. counterattacks meant the hospital held a good many wounded Confederates along with U.S. soldiers. That might have been for the best—the more of their own men in this place, the less inclined the Confederates would be to hit it "by accident."

"Wouldn't put it past 'em," McDougald said when O'Doull remarked on that. "They fought as clean as we did the last time around. Here?

Now?" He made a sour face. "I think they cheat when they use the Red Cross, and I think they think we cheat, too. Makes them more likely to hit our aid stations and hospitals and ambulances. Featherston's fuckers, sure as hell."

"I hope that isn't true." O'Doull let it go there. The bad news seemed more likely to be true with each unfolding day. There were even rumors Featherston himself traveled in an ambulance to keep U.S. fighters from shooting him up.

"Well, Doc, if you want some consolation, the bastards in butternut aren't as bad as they could be," Granville McDougald said. "It sounds like the *Action Française* boys really abuse the Red Cross."

"Yeah. I've heard that, too," O'Doull said. "There's another war as big as this one going on over there—"

"Bigger," the medic said.

"Bigger, all right." O'Doull accepted the correction. "But it's like noises in another room to us. Oh, we're working with the German High Seas Fleet where we can, but mostly we've got our troubles, and Germany and Austria-Hungary have theirs."

"Austria-Hungary's got more troubles than you can shake a stick at," McDougald observed. "All the uprisings in the Balkans make what's going on in Utah and Canada look like pretty small potatoes." He grinned crookedly at O'Doull. "Might as well be Ireland, matter of fact."

"Heh," O'Doull said sourly—something that sounded like a laugh but really wasn't. With U.S. help, Ireland had thrown off the English yoke after the Great War. The first thing Winston Churchill's government did when the new round of fighting flared was send in barrels and bombers and battleships. The Union Jack flew again in Belfast and Dublin and Cork—and the island heaved with rebellion. "I wonder how long it'll be before Irish people bombs start going off in London."

McDougald winced. "Those damned Mormons let the genie out of the bottle with that one," he said. "How do you stop somebody who's already decided to die?" By the evidence available so far, you *couldn't* stop somebody like that, not often enough. McDougald added, "They'll feel it in Vienna and Budapest, too." Serbs and Romanians and Bosnians and God only knew how many others from the Balkan patchwork quilt of peoples and competing nationalisms bushwhacked the King-Emperor's soldiers where and as they could. Russia

encouraged them and sent them arms and ammunition, the way the British helped the Canucks, and the Confederates armed the Mormons.

Of course, the USA armed Negroes in the CSA. (O'Doull didn't even think about U.S. support for the Republic of Quebec, which would still have been a Canadian province absent the Great War.) Germany played those games with Finns and Jews and Chechens and Azerbaijanis inside the Tsar's empire. And both sides helped their own sets of guerrillas inside the Ukraine, which was, in technical terms, a mess.

An orderly trotted up to O'Doull and McDougald. "We've got a man with a leg wound in OR Seven," he said.

"We should do something about that," McDougald said, and O'Doull nodded. They hurried toward the OR. Working in an actual operating room was an unaccustomed luxury for O'Doull. It beat the hell out of doing his job under canvas. He had a real operating table, surgical lights he could aim wherever he wanted, and all the other amenities he'd almost forgotten in the field.

And he had a nasty case waiting on the table for him. *A leg wound* hardly did the injury justice. "Get him under fast, Granny," O'Doull said after one glance at the shattered appendage.

"Right," McDougald said, and not much else till the soldier was mercifully unconscious. Then he asked, "You're not going to try and keep that on, are you?"

"Good God, no," O'Doull answered. "Above the knee, too, poor bastard." He picked up a bone saw and got to work.

Like most amputations, it was bloody but fast. The wounded soldier was young and strong and healthy. O'Doull thought he would do well —or as well as you could do after you'd been maimed. How many men on both sides of the border were short an arm or a leg? Too many, that was for sure.

As he closed up the stump, O'Doull asked, "Ever see a real basket case, Granny?"

"No arms, no legs?" McDougald asked, and O'Doull nodded. The medic shook his head. "No, not me. You always hear about 'em, but I've never seen one. You get wounded like that, most of the time they take your pieces back to Graves Registration, not to an aid station. How about you?"

“The same,” O’Doull answered. “You hear about ’em all the time. Hell, people talk about basket cases when they mean somebody who’s just all messed up. But I’ve never seen the real McCoy, either.”

“I suppose there really are some,” McDougald said. “Would we have the name if we didn’t have the thing?”

“Beats me,” O’Doull said. “We have names for truth and justice and liberty, too. How often do you really see the things those names point at?”

“Touché, Doc.” Granville McDougald gave him another sour laugh. “And then we’ve got ‘Freedom!’ too.” By the way he said the word, he might have been a stalwart in white shirt and butternut trousers getting ready to go out there and break some heads.

“God damn Jake Featherston up one side and down the other,” O’Doull said wearily as he went to the sink and washed the now one-legged soldier’s blood from his hands. How much blood did Featherston have on *his* hands? But he didn’t care about washing it off. He reveled in it.

McDougald stood beside him and scrubbed down, too. “I’ve been wishing that very same thing,” he said, holding out his arms in front of him with the wrists up so water would flow down from his hands and carry germs away with it. “I’ve been wishing for it since before the war started, matter of fact, and God hasn’t done thing one. Far as I can tell, He’s at a football game—probably standing in line to get Himself a couple of franks and a beer.”

That was blasphemous, which didn’t mean it didn’t hold a lot of truth. “I don’t know how anybody’s going to be able to believe in anything by the time this damn war is done,” O’Doull said.

“I don’t know how anybody believed anything after the last one,” McDougald said. “But you’re right. This one’s worse. The poison gas is more poisonous. We’re better at dropping bombs on the Confederates’ cities, and they’re better at dropping them on ours. ‘O brave new world, that has such people in’t!’ ” He quoted Shakespeare with malice aforethought.

“You forgot one,” O’Doull said. McDougald raised a questioning eyebrow. The doctor explained: “We didn’t slaughter people just because of who they were the last time around.”

“Oh, yeah? Tell it to the Armenians. And the Turks were on our side,”

McDougald said. O'Doull winced. He'd forgotten about the Armenian massacres. He was sure most people in the USA had. McDougald went on, "But you're right—*we* didn't, not on this continent. And Jake Featherston probably noticed nothing much ever happened to the Turks, and he must have figured nothing much would happen to him if we went after his spooks. And you know what else? Looks like he's right."

"It does, doesn't it?" O'Doull said unhappily.

"I don't think a whole lot of people in the USA like smokes a whole hell of a lot," McDougald said. "I'd be lying if I said I liked 'em a whole hell of a lot myself. Don't know very many. Don't know any very well—aren't that many here *to* know, and that suits me fine. What I do know . . . Well, you can keep 'em, far as I'm concerned. But there's a lot of difference between saying that and wanting to see 'em dead."

"I'm with you," O'Doull said. "I don't think I saw a Negro all the time I was up in Rivière-du-Loup, and I didn't much miss 'em, either. Lots and lots of 'em in the CSA, so the Confederates can't pretend they aren't there, the way we can. But making so they really *aren't* there—that's filthy."

"Yeah, we're on the same page again, Doc," Granville McDougald said. "And you know what else?" O'Doull raised an interrogative eyebrow. The medic went on, "It won't do those poor sons of bitches one damn bit of good." Leonard O'Doull sadly nodded, because that was much too likely to be true.

* * *

Coming back to the Lower East Side of New York City always felt strange to Flora Blackford. It was only a couple of hours by fast train from Philadelphia, but it was a different world. As she made a campaign visit just before the 1942 Presidential elections, she found it different in some new ways.

Confederate bombers hadn't hit her hometown nearly so hard as they'd hit Philadelphia. Those extra 90 miles—180 round trip—meant more fuel and fewer bombs aboard. They also meant U.S. fighters had all that extra time to try to shoot the Confederates down. And most of the bombs that had fallen in New York City had fallen on Wall Street and the publishing district, and on and around the factories in the Bronx and Brooklyn. The neighborhood where she'd grown up was—oh, not untouched by war, but not badly damaged, either.

She spoke in a theater where she'd debated her Democratic opponent during the Great War. This time, the Democrats were running a lawyer named Sheldon Vogelman. He stood well to the right of Robert Taft, and only a little to the left of Attila the Hun. He was the sort of man who, if he weren't Jewish, probably would have been a raving anti-Semite. Instead, he raved about plowing up the Confederates' cities and sowing them with salt so nothing ever grew there again. He also wanted to plow up anybody in the USA who presumed to disagree with him.

"My opponent," Flora said, "would ship salt from the Great Salt Flats in Utah especially for the purpose. Digging up the salt and bringing it east for his purposes would create jobs. I'm afraid that's his entire definition of a full-employment policy."

She got a laugh and a hand. The Democrats could nominate a right-wing lunatic in this district because they weren't going to win no matter whom they nominated. Vogelman blew off steam for their party. He was loud and obnoxious and, for all practical purposes, harmless.

"We made mistakes," Flora said. "I'm not going to try to tell you anything else. We should have been tougher on Jake Featherston as soon as he made it plain he was building up a new war machine. But Herbert Hoover was President of the United States from 1933 to 1937, and he and the Democrats didn't do anything about Jake Featherston then, either."

“That’s right!” somebody in the audience shouted. A few hecklers booed. But there weren’t many. Sheldon Vogelman was not only a reactionary nut, he was an ineffective reactionary nut. *Best kind,* Flora thought. The best—or worst—example of the other kind was Featherston.

She and Vogelman agreed on one thing: the war had to be fought to a finish. They had different reasons, but they agreed. She didn’t know of any Socialists, Democrats, or even Republicans running on a peace-at-any-price platform. Jake Featherston had been effective at uniting the United States against him, too.

“When this war is over—when we have won this war—” Flora began, and had to stop for a flood of fierce applause. “When we have won, I say, Featherston and his fellow criminals will face the bar of justice for their aggression against the United States”—more ferocious cheers—“and for their cold-blooded murder of tens of thousands of their own people.”

She got cheers for that, too, but not so many, even if she didn’t call a spade a spade. The painful truth was that not even her mostly Jewish audience could get excited about the fate of Negroes in the CSA. Flora had been banging her head against that truth ever since she started speaking out about Jake Featherston’s persecutions.

“Don’t you see?” she said. “Pogroms are *wrong.* How many of your ancestors—how many of *you,* ladies and gentlemen—came to the United States because of the Tsar’s pogroms? Come on—I know it’s more than that.”

All over the hall, hands went up. People raised them reluctantly and lowered them as soon as they could. If they’d had their druthers, they wouldn’t have raised them at all. They didn’t want to think about why they’d come to America. They especially didn’t want to compare their past to the Confederate Negroes’ present.

Flora wanted to make sure they remembered. She wanted that even if it cost her votes. Against a candidate like Sheldon Vogelman, losing a few didn’t much matter. If the Democrats had run someone stronger, she hoped she would have done the same thing.

“If you turn your back on other people when they’re in trouble, who’ll look out for you when you are?” she asked. “Don’t you see? If we don’t look out for the Negroes in the CSA, in an important way we don’t look out for ourselves, either.”

“We don’t want those people here!” somebody shouted. Several people clapped their hands. They weren’t all hecklers. She knew where the hecklers were sitting. Listening to them hurt more because they weren’t.

“The Democrats are the party for people who only care about themselves,” Flora said. “If your fellow man matters to you, you’ll vote Socialist next week. I hope he does. I hope you do. Thank you!”

She got a good hand as she stepped away from the lectern. She could have been caught pulling hundred-dollar bills out of a contractor’s pocket with her teeth, and she still would have won here this time around.

For lunch the next day, she faced a more critical audience. David Hamburger had come out of the Great War with one leg and with politics not far from Vogelman’s. He and Flora still got on well when they stayed away from political matters. When they didn’t—and they couldn’t all the time—sparks flew.

They met at Kaplan’s, a delicatessen that had been around at least as long as Flora had. David was waiting for her when she came in. That was probably just as well; she didn’t have to watch the rolling gait required by an artificial leg that started above the knee.

“Hello, there,” he said as she joined him. “So how does it feel to be slumming in your old stomping grounds?”

“Kaplan’s isn’t slumming,” Flora said. “Don’t be silly. Not a place in Philadelphia comes close to it.” The waiter was bald and had a gray mustache. Flora ordered corned beef on rye. Her brother chose pastrami. They both ordered beer. The waiter nodded and hurried away. “How have you been?” Flora asked.

“Not too bad—middle-class, or somewhere close.” David shrugged. “My son’s too little to conscript in this war, so that’s good.”

“Yes,” Flora said tonelessly. Her own son was heading toward eighteen, and Joshua wouldn’t hear of her doing anything to keep him out of the conscription pool. Having a nephew in harm’s way was bad enough. Having a son on the front lines would be ten thousand times worse.

The food and the beers came quickly. Flora took a long pull at hers. David drank more slowly. He pulled a dill pickle from the jar on the table and nibbled it with his sandwich and his beer. After a bit, he

said, “Looks like you’ll be away for another couple of years.”

“Well, I hope so,” Flora said.

“You’ve done a good job, and Vogelman’s *meshuggeh,*” David said. “Between the two, that ought to do the job. If it doesn’t, this district is even more *verkakte* than I give it credit for—and I didn’t think it could be.”

Hearing the Yiddish made Flora smile. Like her brothers and sisters, she’d grown up speaking it more often than English at home. Now, though, she never heard it, never spoke it, unless she came back to the district. No one she knew in Philadelphia used it. Her husband, a gentile from Dakota, had learned a few phrases from her, but that was all. Joshua knew a few phrases, too. He couldn’t begin to speak it. Flora wasn’t so sure she could speak it herself anymore.

She thought, and then did bring out a Yiddish sentence: “What’s going to happen to this language in a couple of generations?”

“I don’t know,” David answered, also in Yiddish. He dropped back into English to go on, “And I won’t lose much sleep over it, either. We brought Yiddish from the old country. Now we’re Americans. They speak English here. So, fine—I’ll speak English.”

“I suppose so,” Flora said. “Joshua doesn’t seem much interested in learning it, anyhow. But I can’t help wondering whether my grandchildren or great-grandchildren won’t think they missed out on something special because they didn’t get the chance to learn it.”

“Well, if they do, there’s always night school,” David said, and Flora nodded. How many immigrants had learned all sorts of different things in night school? Hundreds of thousands, surely. Some were accountants, some were lawyers, because of the courses they’d taken in hours snatched from sleep and rest. Still . . .

“It won’t be the same,” she said. “What you learn in school isn’t like what you pick up around the house.”

“I can’t do anything about it.” David pulled another pickle spear out of the jar and aimed it at her like a bayonet. “I can’t—but *you* can. You can pass the Preservation of Yiddish Act and make it a crime for all the *alter kackers*”—he tacked the English plural onto the Yiddish word—“who can still yatter away in the old language to use English instead. And you can make it another crime for anybody Jewish not to listen to them and talk back in Yiddish.”

Flora laughed so hard, she almost choked on her sandwich. “You,” she said severely, “are ridiculous.”

“Thank you,” her brother answered, which only made her laugh harder. “And while you’re at it, you can have them make the Lower East Side a national park. Buffalo have Yellowstone. Why shouldn’t people who speak Yiddish have their own game preserve, too? And if we get too crowded, you could issue hunting licenses to anti-Semites, and they’d come in here and thin us out. Only difference between us and the buffalo is, we might shoot back.”

“You—” Flora stopped. She had to reach into her purse for a handkerchief to wipe her streaming eyes. She tried again: “You ought to sell that routine to the Engels Brothers. If they wouldn’t pay you for it, I’m a Chinaman.”

“You could do the same thing for Chinamen, here and in San Francisco,” David said, warming to his theme. “And think of the chances Jake Featherston’s missing. If he charged fees to get into the hunting preserves for *shvartzers,* he could probably cut taxes in half.”

That killed Flora’s laughter. “It isn’t hunting down there,” she said. “It’s slaughter, nothing else but.”

“They might as well be Mormons, eh?” David insisted on being difficult.

“It’s worse,” Flora insisted. “We’re fighting the Mormons, but we aren’t murdering the ones in the land we’ve taken. The Confederates are emptying out one town after another, taking the Negroes off to camps and killing them once they get there. It’s . . . about as bad as it can be down there.”

“And it’s just pretty bad up here,” David said. “Well, nice to know we’ve still got room for improvement.”

That wasn’t funny, either—or, if it was, only in the blackest way. When Flora laughed this time, it was only to keep from sobbing.

XVI

Some lovely rubble lay between Sergeant Michael Pound's barrel and the advancing Confederate armor. Once upon a time, the rubble had been homes and shops and people's hopes. All things considered, Pound liked it better as rubble. If you knocked a wall down in a neighborhood that hadn't been trampled, the enemy would notice right away. If you rearranged what was already wreckage, though, so what?

Not many Pittsburgh neighborhoods had gone untrampled. The United States were making a stand here, defying the Confederates to drive them out. Jake Featherston seemed willing, even eager, to try. He keep feeding men and barrels and artillery and airplanes into the fight. No matter who held Pittsburgh by the time the battle here was done, one thing was clear: it wouldn't be worth holding.

Pound tapped Lieutenant Don Griffiths on the leg. "Sir, do you think we could crawl inside that ruined—garage, I guess it used to be—over there? We've got a nice field of fire where the window was, and the shadows inside'll keep the bastards in butternut from spotting us."

The barrel commander stuck his head out of the cupola for a good look. He had nerve; nobody could say he didn't. And he seemed to own more in the way of sense than the late Lieutenant Poffenberger, anyway. When he ducked back down again, he said, "Good idea, Sergeant," and spoke to the driver by intercom. Jouncing over shattered brickwork, the barrel took its new position.

Another reason Pound liked the ruined garage was that he'd seen U.S. infantrymen huddled in the ruins not far away. Your own foot soldiers were the best insurance policy you had in a barrel. They kept the other side's foot soldiers away. No sneaky bastard could plant a magnetic mine on your side, chuck a grenade through an open hatch, or throw a Featherston Fizz at your engine compartment so the flaming gasoline dripped down through the louvers and set you on fire, not if you had pals around.

He spotted motion up ahead through the gunsight. Not the dinosaurian shape of a Confederate barrel rumbling into position, but . . . "Sir, they're moving infantry up."

"Yes, I saw them, too," Griffiths answered. "Hold fire for now. Let our own infantry deal with them if they can. We've got this good position. I don't want to give it away for something as small as a few soldiers on foot."

“Yes, sir.” Pound surprised himself by smiling at the lieutenant. What Griffiths said made perfectly good sense. Pound wouldn’t have thought the junior officer had it in him.

Confederate Asskickers screamed down out of the sky to bomb and machine-gun U.S. positions. What seemed like every antiaircraft gun in the world opened up on them. So many guns blazed away, Pound wondered if some of them hadn’t kept quiet before to lure the Confederate dive bombers into a trap. Three or four Mules didn’t pull up from their dives, but went straight into the ground. The explosions made the ground shake under his barrel. He saw one funeral pyre through the hole that had held the garage window.

“Good riddance,” he muttered.

“Amen,” Cecil Bergman said. The loader added, “See anything out there that needs killing, Sarge?”

“Quiet right now,” Pound answered.

“Good,” Bergman said—not a bloodthirsty attitude, but a sensible one. Nobody in his right mind was eager for combat. You had a job to do, you did it, and you tried not to think about it. When you had to think about it, you thought about targets and barrels. You didn’t think about men. Because those sons of bitches on the other side had a job to do, too, and theirs was turning you into a target. If that also meant turning you into raw hamburger or burnt hamburger, they would try not to think about it.

“Somebody coming over to us,” Griffiths said, and then, “He’s in our uniform.”

“Right,” Pound said, and pulled the .45 on his belt out of its holster. Confederates in U.S. uniform, Confederates who talked like U.S. soldiers, had caused a lot of grief in Pennsylvania. “Make sure he’s got the right countersign before you let him get close.”

“I intend to, Sergeant.” Griffiths sounded like a small boy reproving his mother. The barrel commander popped out of the cupola. “Foxx!” he said.

“Greenberg,” the soldier answered. Michael Pound relaxed—mostly. That was the right countersign. The Confederates had their own football heroes. They were unlikely to know the names of a couple of U.S. running backs. Of course, they might have captured a prisoner and torn the countersign out of him. Pound didn’t relax all the way.

He was glad to see Lieutenant Griffiths didn't, either. "That's close enough, soldier. I don't know you," Griffiths said. Pound grinned, down there where nobody but Cecil Bergman could see him. Maybe the lieutenant wasn't *such* a little boy after all.

"Yes, sir," the man in green-gray said. "Just wanted to let you know Featherston's fuckers have armor coming forward. One of our artillery-spotting airplanes saw the barrels."

"All right—thanks," Griffiths said. The soldier sketched a salute and left. Griffiths ducked down into the turret. "What do you think, Sergeant?"

Pound had enormous respect for artillery spotters. They flew low and slow, and often got shot down. But that had only so much to do with the lieutenant's question. "Well, sir, if he's legit we'll find out pretty soon," Pound said.

"Yes," Griffiths said. "But that kind of message can't hurt us, so he must be the real thing, right?"

"Well, no, sir, not quite," Pound answered patiently. "He could have had a harmless message just waiting in case we were on our toes. If he did, he's out there looking for somebody else to screw."

"Oh," Griffiths said in a hangdog voice. "I didn't think of that." A moment later, softly and to himself, he added, "Dammit!"

"Don't worry about it, sir," Pound said. "You did what you were supposed to do. Nobody could ask for anything more."

"I'm supposed to see more than you do, though." The barrel commander sounded fretful. "If I don't, then you ought to be the officer."

"I don't want to be an officer, sir," Pound said for what had to be the hundredth time in his career. Senior enlisted men were supposed to curb junior officers' enthusiasms. That was at least as important a part of their job as anything else. Most junior officers didn't know it. Pound didn't know how to say it without offending the lieutenant. If he didn't say anything, Griffiths couldn't get his ass in a sling. He kept quiet.

A few minutes later, the Confederates laid on an artillery barrage. Griffiths kept the hatch up on the cupola as long as he could. When gas rounds started gurgling in, though, he clanged it shut. "Button

up!" he yelled over the intercom to the driver and bow gunner. Then he put on his gas mask. Resignedly, Pound did the same. With autumn here, wearing it wasn't so awful as it had been during the summer. Even so, it cut down his vision, and it was awkward to use with a gunsight. Lieutenant Griffiths had an even harder time seeing out the cupola periscopes through his mask's portholes.

Shrapnel clanged off the barrel's chassis. A barrage like this wasn't dangerous to armor except in case of an unlucky direct hit. Pound traversed the turret so the big gun—the pretty big gun, anyway—bore on the approach route he would use if he were a Confederate barrel commander. Griffiths set a hand on his shoulder to say he understood and approved.

Not much later, the barrel commander sang out: "Front!"

"Identified," Pound answered—he saw the ugly beast, too. "Range 350."

"You lined up on him so nicely, Sergeant," Griffiths said. "Go ahead and do the honors."

"Yes, sir," Pound said, and then, to Bergman, "Armor-piercing."

"Armor-piercing," the loader echoed, and slammed a round in the breech.

Pound adjusted the main armament's elevation just a little. The C.S. barrel came on, sure nothing nasty was in the neighborhood. Pound wouldn't have been that confident. The enemy machine was one of the new models. Maybe that made the commander feel invulnerable. Infantrymen in butternut loped alongside, automatic rifles at the ready.

The U.S. barrel's gun spoke. Pound's mask kept out the cordite fumes. The shell casing clanged on the fighting compartment floor. "Hit!" Lieutenant Griffiths yelled. "That's a hit!"

Smoke and fire spurted from the stricken C.S. barrel. The U.S. bow gunner opened up on the Confederate foot soldiers. One of them spun, his rifle flying out of his hands. He crumpled, right out there in the open. Other Confederate soldiers went down, too. They were more likely diving for cover than hit. Nobody came out of the barrel. Flames and a cloud of smoke burst from the cupola hatch. *Five men dead,* Pound thought, and then, *Well, they wanted to kill me. I like it better this way.*

He tapped Lieutenant Griffiths. “Sir, shouldn’t we move out of here and find another firing position? Next enemy barrel that comes this way is going to know where we’re at. Most ambushes only work once.”

“Good point,” the barrel commander said, and then, over the intercom to the driver, “Back us out, Mancatelli. Shift us over behind that pile of bricks to the left.”

He hadn’t been ready to move quite soon enough, but he’d had a backup firing position in mind when he did. It was a pretty good one, too; Michael Pound would have suggested it if Griffiths hadn’t seen it himself. But he had. No, he wasn’t such a helpless puppy after all.

After the barrel backed out of the garage, Mancatelli stayed in reverse long enough to move forward toward the secondary position. That kept the front glacis plate and the front of the turret facing the direction from which the barrel was likeliest to take fire. It avoided exposing the machine’s thinner side armor. Those who served in barrels knew their weaknesses best—except, maybe, for those who tried to destroy them.

Peering out through the gunsight, Pound saw soldiers in butternut pointing to where the barrel had been. That probably meant they were warning it was still there. Nobody pointed toward the wreckage behind which it now hunkered down. If a machine weighing upwards of twenty tons could be sneaky, this one had just done the trick.

And here came a pair of Confederate barrels. “Front!” Griffiths sang out. “The one on the right, Sergeant.”

“Identified,” Pound acknowledged. “Bergman, we’re going to have to do this fast as hell, because that other bastard will start shooting at us as soon as we nail his pal.” He assumed he *would* nail the first barrel; he had all the arrogance a good gunner should. As he traversed the turret, he added, “So give me two rounds of armor-piercing, fast as you can, when I say, ‘Now.’ . . . *Now!*”

The first round clanged home. Pound fired. He got his hit, on the enemy barrel’s turret. The second round was in the breech well before he’d brought the gun to bear on the second Confederate barrel—and the new turret had a hydraulic traverse, too, a feature he adored. His gun and the enemy’s belched fire at the same instant. The C.S. barrel burst into flames. The Confederate’s round slammed into the rubble, slammed through the rubble, but slowed enough so that it clanged off

the U.S. barrel's glacis plate instead of penetrating.

"Two hits! Two!" Griffiths yelled. He pounded Pound on the back. Cecil Bergman thumped him on the leg, which was the only part of him the loader could reach. They both told him what a wonderful fellow he was.

"Thank you, sir," he said to Griffiths. Then he added, "I'd like to go on being wonderful a while longer, too, so could we please find another firing position?"

Griffiths laughed, but the barrel moved. That was all that really mattered.

Night came earlier now. As autumn deepened, U.S. bombers could spend more time above Richmond and other Confederate cities. Jake Featherston hated that as much as he loved C.S. bombers' being able to spend more time over cities in the United States.

Except for that, night and day meant little to him in the shelter under what was left of the Gray House. He slept in odd chunks, a couple of hours here, three there, and stayed awake in equally odd chunks between the stretches of sleep.

Everyone around him had to adapt to that. If Jake was awake at four in the morning and needed to talk to Nathan Bedford Forrest III, Forrest could damn well get his ass over to the Gray House at four in the morning. The same went for Ferd Koenig and Clarence Potter and Saul Goldman and Lulu and the rest of his inner circle. He seemed to thrive on his erratic sleep schedule. No one else did.

Lulu stuck her head into his underground office. She was paler than she should have been. She didn't get up into the sun and fresh air as often as she should these days. Jake suspected he was paler than he should have been, too. He didn't like being stuck down here, but he didn't like getting blown up, either.

"General Forrest is here to see you, Mr. President," she said.

"Well, send him on in," Jake replied. "Did he tell you what it was all about?" Forrest had asked for this meeting; Jake hadn't summoned him. The chief of the General Staff had been coy about saying just what was on his mind, too.

But Featherston's secretary shook her head. "No, sir."

"All right. Never mind. I'll find out," Jake said.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III strode into the office and saluted. "Mr. President," he said, and then, "Freedom!" and then, "May I shut the door?"

"Go ahead," Featherston answered. Forrest had a pistol in his holster. He was one of the handful of men allowed to bear arms in Jake's presence. Jake didn't think Forrest had come here to plug him. If Forrest had, he wouldn't waste time with the door. He'd just go ahead and do it. Jake waved him to a chair and asked, "What's up?"

"Mr. President, it seems to me we've done a pretty good job of making Pittsburgh useless to the damnyankees," Forrest said. "We've smashed it up so the steel production there's gone straight to hell. Most of what the mills do make, the USA can't get out of the city. Do we really need to hold the ground?"

"Damn straight we do," Jake said without even a heartbeat's hesitation. "We need to show those bastards we can beat 'em anywhere we please. And besides, the second we ease up, that town'll come back to life like a monster in a horror flick. You know it as well as I do, too."

Forrest looked unhappy. "Sir, what I know is, the damnyankees are chewing up men and barrels and airplanes we can't afford to lose. They've got more people than we do, dammit, and that's what they're using. Between us, we and the Yankees've knocked Pittsburgh cockeyed. They squat in the ruins and potshoot us."

"We'll lick 'em," Jake declared. "That's why every infantryman's got an automatic weapon. Put enough lead in the air and the other guys fall over dead."

"Sir, it's not that simple," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said. "Fighting like that, there are no good targets. They make us come to them, and then they make us pay for coming. We've got crack regiments knocked down to the size of a couple of companies. Units just aren't the same when you have to rebuild 'em after losses like that. It's the same way with barrels. They pick a spot, they wait, and then they shoot first. Their new models aren't as good as ours, but getting the first shot off counts for a hell of a lot, especially at short range. We're losing barrels as fast as we can build 'em. And we're losing veteran crews, too. That just isn't good terrain for armor to attack in."

“Whatever we’re losing, they’re losing worse,” Jake said.

Forrest nodded, which didn’t mean he agreed. “Yes, sir. They are,” he said. “But they can afford it better. This is how we got in trouble in the last war.”

He hadn’t been old enough to fight in the last war. Jake had been in it from first day to last. That a pup should have the nerve to tell him what had happened and what hadn’t . . . “We are going to take Pittsburgh,” Featherston said in a voice like iron. “We *are.* We’ll take it, and we’ll hold it, and if the damnyankees want it back they’ll have to kiss our ass. That’s the way it’s gonna be, General. Have you got it?”

“Yes, sir.” Nathan Bedford Forrest III got to his feet. He stood at stiff attention. He saluted with machinelike precision. He did a smart about-turn and marched out of the President’s office. He didn’t slam the door. He closed it silently, which was even more sarcastic.

“I haven’t convinced that man,” Jake muttered. But Forrest would follow orders when he got them. That was what soldiers were for. And Pittsburgh *would* fall. And when it did, the United States would have to make peace. They couldn’t very well fight a war if they didn’t have anything to fight with, could they?

Sometimes the fellows in the fancy uniforms started flabbling over nothing. Forrest hadn’t been one to do that, but he was doing it now. Jake had no doubts. He hardly ever had doubts. That was why he’d got where he was, why the Freedom Party had got where it was. People with doubts stopped before they ought to. If you just kept going, you’d get there. And he was going to get Pittsburgh.

Lulu came in. “Mr. President, Mr. Goldman is here to see you. He says it’s urgent.”

“Well, then, I’d better find out what he wants, eh?” Jake wondered what had gone wrong. Something must have, or Saul wouldn’t come to his office uninvited.

The director of communications gave him the news in three bald words: “Another people bombing.”

“Son of a bitch!” Jake said. “Where? How bad?”

“Jackson, Mississippi, sir,” Goldman answered. “A waiter at a restaurant there last night. It was crowded—some kind of ladies’ club

function. Eleven known dead, at least forty hurt."

"Plus the nigger, of course," Featherston said.

"Yes, sir. Plus him. Two other waiters were also injured." Goldman paused. "How do you want to treat this, Mr. President? I hate to say it, but keeping quiet about what the Mormons are doing in the USA hasn't worked."

Jake knew why he hated to say it: saying it meant saying Jake Featherston was wrong. But Goldman *had* said it, and Jake couldn't very well claim not talking about people bombs had kept them from scarring the CSA. He made a discontented noise down deep in his throat. He wanted to say exactly that. But he had to deal with the truth, no matter how little he liked it.

He thought for a few seconds, then nodded to himself. "All right. Here's how we'll play it. You can splash this one all over the papers, Saul. A ladies' club, you say? Make it an atrocity story to end all atrocity stories, then. Nigger murders Confederate white women! That'll make people's blood boil. And you can let folks know all the coons'll pay for what that one bastard went and did."

Goldman didn't always show everything he thought. By the way he brightened now, that was what he'd wanted to hear, and he'd wanted very much to hear it. "Yes, sir, Mr. President!" he said, enthusiasm bubbling in his voice. "That sounds like just the right line to take. I'll handle everything. Don't you worry about it."

"I don't," Jake said simply. "If I worried about the way you did your job, Saul, somebody else would be doing it, and you can take that to the bank."

"Uh, yes, sir," Goldman said. Jake didn't want him scared, so he made himself smile. That did the trick. Goldman got to his feet and said, "I'll get right on it. If you'll excuse me . . . ?"

"Go on, go on," Featherston said indulgently. The director of communications hurried away. Jake got on the telephone. "Ferd? . . . You heard about the shit that happened in Jackson? . . . Yeah, Saul told me just now. Eleven dead plus the nigger! Jesus Christ! . . . How fast can you get the Party mobilized to help the cops and soldiers? . . . That quick? Good! . . . By this time Thursday, then, I don't want one nigger left in Jackson—not one, you hear me? And when they get where they're going, I don't want 'em hanging around, either . . . You see to it, that's all. 'Bye." He hung up—he slammed down the

telephone, as a matter of fact.

He wasted a few seconds swearing at the Mormons. Those damned fanatics had come up with a weapon other fanatics could use. Mississippi and Alabama had been in revolt since he took office, and they hadn't been what anybody would call calm even before that. Too damn many coons, that was all there was to it. Well, he aimed to thin 'em out. And what he aimed at, he got.

He wondered whom Lulu would announce when she came in again. Instead of announcing anybody, she asked, "When was the last time you ate something, Mr. President?"

"Why—" Before Jake could finish talking, his stomach let out a rumble you could hear across the room. "Been a while, I guess," he said sheepishly.

"I'll get the kitchens to send you something." She wagged a finger at him. "You've got to take care of yourself, you know."

"Right," Jake said. "I have been busy, you know." He was amazed at how defensive he sounded. He could ream out the chief of the General Staff and stop him in his tracks. His own secretary? That was a whole different story. What made the difference? Lulu was right, and Nathan Bedford Forrest III damn well wasn't. So he told himself, anyhow.

Not ten minutes later, Lulu came back with a tray with two thick roast-beef sandwiches, potato salad, and a bottle of beer. Jake got outside the food in nothing flat. He did feel better afterwards. He wasn't about to admit it to her. On the other hand, he didn't have to—she would already know.

His restless energy burned off what he ate and left him with the same lanky frame he'd had half a lifetime before. He knew he wasn't as strong as he had been then, though. He wasn't fat, but his muscles had gone soft and slack. He didn't get the exercise he once had. Manhandling a field gun was a lot tougher physically than being President of the CSA and running things from behind a desk.

"I ought to put in time every day at . . . something hard, anyway," he muttered to himself. "Something, dammit." When you got past fifty, you had to take care of yourself the way you took care of a motorcar. You'd break down if you didn't, and replacement parts for your carcass were mighty hard to come by.

But he had no idea what to do to keep fit. He couldn't imagine himself

playing golf or riding a bicycle or anything like that. Plain old calisthenics, like the ones from his Army days, were too boring to stand without a drill sergeant making you do them. And where would he find the time, anyway? He didn't have time to do everything he needed to do now.

He muttered again, this time blasphemously. He knew what would happen. He *wouldn't* find the time, and then six months or a year from now he'd be even angrier and more disgusted with himself, because he'd be that much further out of shape. He didn't have any good answers, though. The only way he could find the time to exercise was to stop being President. He wasn't about to do that.

Some of his pilots took pep pills to stay awake when they needed to fly mission after mission after mission. He'd always stayed away from those. Coffee and his own drive kept him going. But if coffee and his own drive flagged . . .

He shrugged. It was something to think about, anyway. He didn't have to make up his mind once and for all right this minute. If he ever decided he needed those pills, he could get 'em.

R ichmond. Capitol Square. A cool, gray, fall day, with the smell of burning leaves in the air—along with other, less pleasant, smells of burning and death. Clarence Potter sat on a bench in the bomb-cratered square and looked at the enormous pyramids of sandbags surrounding the great statues of George Washington and Albert Sidney Johnston. The Egyptians wouldn't have been ashamed of pyramids like those. So far, they'd done their job. Despite all the damnyankee bombing raids, both statues remained more or less intact.

The Confederate Capitol couldn't be sandbagged. It looked more like a ruin from the days of Greece and Rome than a place where important things happened. And important things didn't happen there anymore. Congress met somewhere else these days—exactly where was classified. Potter wasn't sure why. What difference did it make? Even if the USA blew Congress clean off the map, what difference would it make? Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party ran the CSA these days; Congress was a rubber stamp and a sounding board, and that was about it.

Potter lit a cigarette, adding more smoke to the air that had already made him cough twice. He looked at his watch. The man he was

supposed to meet here was late, and he shouldn't have been. Had something gone wrong?

But when he looked up, Nathan Bedford Forrest III was picking his way across the battered ground. Forrest already had a cigarette going, the coal furiously red. He sat down next to Potter and smoked in angry silence for a minute or so. Then he said, "I do thank you kindly for coming."

"I should get out and about more often," Potter answered. "Keeps me fresh. What's on your mind?"

Instead of answering right away, Forrest lit another cigarette. He smoked it halfway down, blowing out an almost continuous stream of smoke. At last, he asked, "Do you . . . think Jake Featherston's got all his oars in the water?"

Whatever Potter had expected, that wasn't it. He looked around again to make sure nobody was paying extra attention to a couple of officers sitting on a park bench. Seeing nothing and no one out of the ordinary, he said, "Well, I haven't always been in love with the man"—which was a bigger understatement than Nathan Bedford Forrest III might realize—"but I never thought he was ready for the straitjacket, either. How come you do?"

Forrest hesitated again. Potter had no trouble figuring out why—if he went telling tales to the President, the chief of the General Staff was a dead man. But Forrest must have known that before he asked to meet with Potter. The Intelligence officer gestured impatiently, as if to say, *Piss or get off the pot.* Unhappily, Forrest said, "Well, things aren't going as well as we wish they were in Pittsburgh."

"That makes me unhappy, but it doesn't make Jake Featherston a candidate for the booby hatch." Potter's voice was desert-dry.

"No, of course not." Nathan Bedford Forrest III looked down at the ground between his feet. He bent and picked up something: a little chunk of shrapnel from a bomb casing. With a grimace, he tossed it away. "But a few days ago I went and asked him if maybe we wouldn't do better just wrecking Pittsburgh than throwing away more men and matériel than we can afford."

"And?" Potter asked. "There's always an 'and' to a story like that."

"Oh, there is," Forrest said. "And he damn near threw me out of his office—damn near threw me through the door, matter of fact. We're

going to take Pittsburgh, take it away from the damnyankees, come hell or high water, no matter how many soldiers or barrels or airplanes we lose. He . . . just wouldn't listen to me. It was like he *couldn't* listen to me. His mind was made up, and nothing anybody could say would change it."

"And so?" Potter said. "The President's never been what you'd call good at listening to other people or changing his mind. I don't suppose he'd be President if he were, because he would have quit trying a long time ago." Not liking Jake Featherston didn't mean you could ignore his furious, driving, almost demonic energy.

"This wasn't like a stubborn man talking," Forrest said—stubbornly. "This was like—like a crazy man talking." He looked relieved at finally getting that out. "By God, Potter, it really was."

"All right. Let's say it was." Potter knew he sounded as if he might be humoring a lunatic himself. "If it was, what do you propose to do about it? Bear in mind that we're in the middle of a small disagreement with our neighbors right now." His wave encompassed the sandbagged statues, the cratered square, the ruins of the Confederate Capitol.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III's eyes followed his hand. Forrest grimaced again, as if he hadn't noticed how things were till then. Maybe he hadn't—maybe he hadn't let himself. "Jesus Christ, if we followed a nut into this war—"

"You didn't reckon he was a nut as long as things went our way," Potter said brutally. Forrest flinched. Potter went on, "Do you really think this is the time to start plotting a *coup d'état*? That's what it would have to be, you know. You'd have to take him down. He'd never leave or change on his own."

"I do understand that," Forrest said. "That's why I wanted to talk to you. You were a red-hot Whig even after it wasn't safe to be a Whig anymore." He did know a fair bit about Potter's past, then. "If anybody could see the need for putting our house in order, I reckoned you'd be the man. For God's sake, Potter, we can't afford to lose another war. It would ruin us for good."

"This one's a long way from lost. We may get Pittsburgh yet." Part of Potter wanted to leap at any chance to cast down Jake Featherston. That made him even more careful about what he said than he would have been otherwise. He didn't *think* Forrest was trying to entrap him

—the other officer sounded too upset for that—but he wasn't a hundred percent sure. *When three men plot, one is a fool and two are government spies.* What about two men?

I'm already a spy, Potter thought. He laughed inside, though he held his face straight. But he was a spy for the Confederate States. He wasn't a spy for Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party, and he was damned if he'd turn into one. And if he did ever turn into such a debased creature, he doubtless *would* be damned.

"So we may." Forrest spoke cautiously, too. "But how likely do you think that is, what with the way things look now?"

"I don't know," Potter said: the exact and literal truth. He thought about Henderson FitzBelmont over at Washington University. He thought about 235 and 238, and the trouble FitzBelmont and his fellow physicists were having in separating the one from the other. He had no idea whether Forrest knew about FitzBelmont's project. He couldn't ask, either, for fear the chief of the General Staff didn't.

If the physicists could build their bomb, the CSA would win the war. Drop one of those on Pittsburgh, and it wouldn't cause problems anymore. Drop one on Philadelphia, one on New York City, one on Boston, one on Pontiac . . . That would knock the United States flat and kick them in the teeth while they were down.

Then Potter thought about the U.S. project in Washington State. He thought about bombs blowing Richmond and Atlanta and Louisville and Birmingham and New Orleans and Dallas off the map. It was a race, a race into the unknown. Whoever first played Prometheus and stole fire from the gods would drop that fire on his enemies' heads.

He tried to imagine fighting a war where both sides had bombs like that. His mind recoiled like a horse shying at a snake. That wouldn't be submachine guns at two paces. It would be flamethrowers at two paces.

And what sort of weapons would you use in the war after *that* one? To his surprise, the answer formed almost as soon as the question did.

You would fight that next war with rocks.

"We're on the tiger's back right now, and we've got hold of his ears," he said, not knowing and not much caring whether he was talking about Featherston or about the war. "If you tell me that's not where we want to be, I won't argue with you. But if you say we'd do better

letting go and jumping off, I have to say I think you're out of your mind—sir. Do you want Don Partridge trying to run things?" He supposed he'd been talking about Jake after all.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III hissed like a wounded snake himself. "Damn you, Potter, you don't fight fair."

"I didn't know that was part of the requirement," Potter said. "I thought the only thing you had to do was win."

"That's it," Forrest agreed. "And that's what I wanted to ask you. Do you think we can win the war with Jake Featherston in charge of things?"

"Do you think we can win without him?" Potter asked in return. "Do you think we can even get out of the war without him?" He didn't ask about getting out of the war with Featherston still in the Gray House. That wouldn't happen. Period. Exclamation point, even.

Forrest sat on the bench with a faraway look in his eyes. Potter suspected his own face bore a similar expression. How would the Confederate States do if they had to fight on without that pillar of fire at their heart? No, he didn't love Featherston—far from it. He did, reluctantly, respect him.

Slowly, the chief of the General Staff got to his feet. "Maybe we'll talk about this another time," he said. "I hope we don't, but maybe we will." He tipped his hat and walked away.

A starling perched in a shattered tree not far from where Potter sat. It chirped metallically. The shimmering summer gloss was off its feathers; it wore a duller autumn plumage. Potter swore under his breath. The gloss was off the war, too. He thought of one question he hadn't asked himself before. Could the CSA win even *with* Jake Featherston at the helm?

Potter had thought so when the barrels charged from the Ohio up to Lake Erie. He hadn't believed he was guilty of the old Confederate error of underestimating how tough the damnyankees were. He hadn't believed it, but evidently he was, because the United States refused to fold up. Would even the fall of Pittsburgh knock them out of the fight? Again, he just didn't know.

And did Nathan Bedford Forrest III know what he was talking about? Was the President of the Confederate States of America nuttier than a five-dollar fruitcake? Potter shook his head. That was the wrong

question. If Featherston *was* nuttier than a five-dollar fruitcake, what about it? Being out of your tree didn't necessarily disqualify you from holding office. Some people said only a crazy man would want to be President of the CSA. Potter wasn't one of them, but he could see their point.

Was Featherston crazy enough to be unfit to lead during wartime? That was what it came down to. Potter would have loved to believe it. He wouldn't have been sorry for an excuse to throw Jake Featherston out on his ear—no, to kill him, because he wouldn't go without a fight, and he'd fight hard. He always did. Forrest said he'd seemed crazy when he refused to pull back from Pittsburgh.

Maybe the chief of the General Staff was right. But Potter wasn't ready to upset the Confederate applecart on a maybe. Featherston was at least as likely to be crazy like a fox. He'd proved that time and again. Taking Pittsburgh might prove it once more.

"Better to wait," Potter murmured. Acting was irrevocable, and he didn't think the time ripe. If going into Pittsburgh proved a fiasco . . . Well, so what? Did that mean Featherston had gone around the bend, or just that he'd made a mistake?

Did it matter? If Pittsburgh proved a fiasco, the Confederate States were in trouble either way. Somebody would have to take the blame. Who else but Jake Featherston then?

Nodding to himself, Potter got to his feet with one more thing to worry about. If Pittsburgh proved a fiasco, who took the blame might not matter, either.

T o say Jefferson Pinkard was not a happy man failed to use the full power of language. Somebody in Richmond got a brainstorm. Who got to make that brainstorm real? Pinkard did. Some damnfool Negro in Jackson blew himself up, and a bunch of white women with him? Yeah, all right, he was a dirty, stinking son of a bitch. But get rid of all the Negroes in Jackson on account of him? At once? That was lunacy. That was also what Jeff had orders to do.

When the telegram came in, he telephoned Ferdinand Koenig and asked, "How many niggers are we talking about here?"

"Hell, I don't know off the top of my head," the Attorney General answered, which did not fill Jeff with confidence. Koenig said, "I'll get

back to you this afternoon. You want to know what you're getting into, do you?"

"You might say so," Pinkard said tightly. "Yeah, you just might."

Ferdinand Koenig was as good as his word. Just after Jeff's lunch, he got another telegram. TWENTY-FIVE OR THIRTY THOUSAND. F.K., it said. What Pinkard said when he saw that had an *f* and a *k* in it, too, with a couple of other letters in between. He said several other things right afterwards, most of them even hotter than what he'd started with.

Once his spleen was well and truly vented—once it had blown off about three counties' worth of steam—he called Vern Green into his office and gave the guard chief the news. "Well, Jesus Christ!" Green said. "We got to get rid o' these niggers? We don't just try and stuff 'em on in here?"

"That's what the orders are," Jeff said grimly.

"How soon they gonna start coming?" Green asked.

"I don't exactly know—not exactly," Pinkard answered. "But it won't be long—I sure as hell know that. Fast as they can throw 'em on trains and ship 'em out here. A few days—a week, tops."

"You figuring on using the bathhouses *and* the trucks?"

Jeff nodded. "Don't see how we've got even a prayer of doing it if we don't. You get the 'dozer crews out to the other place, too, and have 'em dig lots of new trenches. If we're doing all of Jackson, that'll take up some room." He didn't talk about mass graves, not in so many words.

The guard chief followed him even so. "I'll see to it," he promised. "We're gonna be busy as shit, ain't we?"

"No," Jeff answered. Green looked at him in surprise. He condescended to explain: "We'll be a hell of a lot busier than that."

"Oh. Yeah," Green said. "Wish to God I could tell you you were wrong, but that's how it's gonna be, all right." He scowled. "We'll have a fuck of a time keeping the rest of the niggers from figuring out what's goin' on, too."

"Uh-huh. That already crossed my mind," Pinkard said. "Don't know

what we can do about it. We got orders on this—orders right from the top." Ferdinand Koenig wasn't *the* top, of course, but he was only one short step down. And he'd made it real clear the President of the CSA wanted every black from Jackson wiped off the face of the earth. What Jake Featherston wanted, Jake Featherston got.

Green sighed. "Well, we'll just have to take care of that when it turns into a problem, that's all. In the meantime . . . In the meantime, I'll let the boys know a big pile of shit's rolling down the hill, and we're on the bottom." He got to his feet. "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Jeff echoed. The guard chief left his office. Jeff pulled his copy of *Over Open Sights* off the shelf by his desk. He knew just the passage he was looking for: the one where Featherston talked about how killing off a few thousand Negroes before the Great War would have saved a lot of trouble during and after. Jeff nodded to himself. That was true, every word of it. When he read the words, he could hear Jake Featherston's hot, angry voice.

Even so, after a while he scratched his head and put down the book. This didn't seem the same as that. People on the outside would know Jackson's blacks had been sent away to camps, but that was all they would know. Even the Negroes already in the camps weren't supposed to know they'd never come out alive. So what, exactly, was the point?

But that did have an answer. The point was to get rid of as many spooks as the Freedom Party and the Confederate government could arrange to get rid of. Jeff didn't see anything wrong with what the Party wanted—just the opposite. But doing it in such a big lump made things work less smoothly than they might have, less smoothly than they should. Camp Determination's profile was going to look like a boa constrictor that had swallowed a big old pig. You'd be able to see the lump the pig made as it worked its way from one end of the snake to the other.

Both sides of the camp, men's and women's, were on edge even before the first trains rolled in out of the east. The Negroes knew something was going on, even if they didn't know what. They must have got that from the guards. Pinkard thought about reaming Vern Green out about it, but he didn't. The guards wouldn't have been human if they didn't pass on the feeling that something was cooking. They hadn't said what, for which Jeff was duly grateful.

He went out to watch his crews at work when the first train from Jackson came in. He was proud of them. They had a routine, and they

stuck to it as much as they could. They hauled the luckless blacks off the train and separated them, men to the left, women and children off to the right. Then they went through the train and pulled out any Negroes who'd tried to get cute and hide. Then more blacks—men as close to trusties as Camp Determination held—removed the bodies of those who'd died on the way.

There were more of those than usual. The survivors moaned about how they'd been packed like sardines, about how they hadn't had anything to eat or drink. Most of them moaned about how they hadn't even been able to pack a carpetbag.

The guards did their best to soothe them. "Don't y'all worry 'bout a thing," a troop leader called reassuringly, smooth and confident as a preacher in the pulpit. "We're gonna ship some of you out to other camps right away, and we're gonna let the rest of you get cleaned up before we move you. You do what people tell you, and you'll be just fine."

"This way!" guards yelled. "This way!" The Negroes obeyed. They were too dazed and battered not to—and the guards had automatic weapons to make sure they didn't get out of line. Most of them didn't even try.

One man did ask, "How come we gonna git shipped somewheres else when we only just got here?" Nobody answered him, and he didn't ask twice.

"Listen up, y'all!" an officer shouted. "You're gonna be in two groups. One group goes on to a camp by Lubbock, the other one goes down by El Paso." There were camps in both places, small ones. They were there mainly to keep Negroes from panicking when they heard something like that. The officer went on, "Those of you bound for the Lubbock camp, we're gonna bathe and delouse y'all right here, on account of we got bigger bathhouses than they do at that camp. Y'all goin' to El Paso, they'll take care of that when you get there."

Pinkard and his top officers had hammered out the story in the time before the trains started coming in. He didn't like it; it had holes you could throw a dog through. But it gave some kind of explanation, anyway, and the Negroes wouldn't have much time to wonder and worry.

Guards started going along the lines of Negroes. They would say, "Lubbock," to some and, "El Paso," to others. Every so often, they

would add, “Remember where you’re supposed to go, or you’ll catch hell!”

When everybody had an assignment, officers yelled, “El Paso, this way!” and, “Lubbock, *this* way!” Two columns of men and two of women and children formed. “Now get moving!” the officers shouted.

A fat black woman let out a screech: “My husband goin’ to de one place, an’ I is goin’ to de other one!” The baby she held in her arms wailed.

“Can’t do anything about it now,” a troop leader told her. “When you get where you’re goin’, you talk to the people there. They’ll do the paperwork and transfer you.”

She still grumbled, but she seemed happier. Pinkard craned his neck to see who that troop leader was. Hobart Martin, that was his name. He’d won himself a commendation letter, sure as hell. That kind of complaint could have caused real trouble, maybe even a riot. It was something the guards hadn’t thought of, and they should have. Of course separating families made people jump and shout. But Martin had calmed the woman down, and his words kept other men and women from raising a stink. As long as they thought everything would be taken care of . . .

Pinkard nodded to himself. Everything would be taken care of, all right.

He went with the men who believed they were bound for El Paso. They had to march—or rather, shamble—all the way through the camp to get to the bathhouse that wasn’t. He’d posted guards with automatic rifles on both sides of their route. He didn’t think they would try to break away, but he worried that the present inmates might try to rescue them. A show of force ahead of time was the best thing he could think of to keep that from happening.

“Move along! Move along!” guards shouted. “Don’t hold up the line, or you’re in trouble!” They were already in the worst trouble they could find, but they didn’t know it. This whole charade was to keep them—and the present inmates—from finding out.

Hipolito Rodriguez stood there with a rifle at the ready. Like most men from the Confederate Veterans’ Brigades, Hip liked a submachine gun better because it was lighter and smaller. But Jeff wanted the guards to have weapons with real stopping power today. He nodded to Rodriguez. The Sonoran nodded back. Then he looked away, scanning

the inmates for any sign of trouble. He knew how things worked. The more you showed that you were ready for anything, the less likely you were to run into trouble.

Jeff nodded to himself when the last black man passed through the gateway separating the main camp from the bathhouse. Getting the line through the camp was the hardest, most worrisome part. Already, trucks were taking away the first Negroes who thought they were heading for El Paso. Their true journey would be a lot shorter—and a good thing, too, because Jeff would need those trucks again pretty damn quick to handle more blacks.

He nodded again when the door to the bathhouse closed behind the last Negro man in the queue. Wasn't there some poem that went, *All hope abandon, ye who enter here?* Once that door closed, those Negroes lost their last hope. They'd get herded into the big room that wasn't a delousing chamber, and that would be that.

When was the next train coming? Would the camp be able to handle it? Could the crew get the corpses out of the alleged bathhouse, could the trucks get back from the mass grave, fast enough? They could. They did. By the time the next trainload of Negroes from Jackson stopped on the spur between the men's and women's camps, the guards were ready.

The next week was the busiest time Jeff remembered. He and his crew ran on sleep snatched in the intervals between trains and on endless cigarettes and cups of coffee. Every storage facility in the camp overflowed, even if relatively few of the Negroes had brought baggage with them. Where those Negroes went, they didn't need baggage.

And at the end of it, Jefferson Pinkard looked at Vern Green and said, "By God, we reduced that population."

"Sure as hell did," the guard chief agreed. Jeff pulled a pint of whiskey out of his desk drawer. He took a snort, then passed the pint to Green. The number two man at Camp Determination also drank. After what they'd just been through, they'd damn well earned the booze.

B lack clouds boiled up over Andersonville, Georgia. Where the sky wasn't black, it was an ugly yellow, the color of a fading bruise. The rising wind blew a lock of Jonathan Moss' hair into his eyes. He tossed his head. The wind got stronger. A raindrop hit him in the nose.

He looked around the prison-camp grounds. POWs were heading into the barracks as fast as they could. That looked like a hell of a good idea. The wind tugged at his clothes as he hurried toward shelter.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” one of the other prisoners said when he walked in. “Moss *does* have the sense to come in out of the rain.”

POWs laughed. Hell, Moss laughed himself. In Andersonville, fun was where you found it, and you didn’t have a lot of places to look. But Captain Nick Cantarella, who’d come in just ahead of Moss, said, “Noah would find someplace to hide from this. It looks like a bastard and a half out there.”

“Worse than that storm this summer?” somebody said.

“I think maybe,” Cantarella answered, and Moss found himself nodding. That had been a cloudburst to end all cloudbursts, yeah. It had also been a cloudburst to end all escape plans, at least for the time being. But whatever was building out there now looked downright vicious. The light was weird, almost flickering; it might have come from the trick-photography department of a bad horror film.

Somebody sitting close by a window said, “Son of a bitch!” Several people asked him what was going on. He pointed. “The guards are coming down from their towers and running like hell!”

“Jesus!” Moss said, which was one of the milder comments in the barracks. The gray-uniformed guards never left the towers unmanned. Never. They always wanted to be able to rake the camp with machine-gun fire. If they were bailing out now . . .

“Oh, fuck!” said the man by the window. Then he said something even worse: “Tornado!”

Somebody with a flat Indiana accent said, “Open the doors, quick! It’ll try and suck all the air out of any building it comes close to. If the air can’t get out, the buildings’ll blow up.” Moss, who’d shut the door behind him, quickly opened it again. The Midwesterner sounded like a man who knew what he was talking about.

POWs crowded toward windows to watch the twister. Moss didn’t. He didn’t want to be anywhere near glass that was liable to splinter and fly as if a bomb went off close by. “Godalmightydamn, will you look at that motherfucker!” somebody said, more reverently than otherwise.

“Wish to hell we had a storm cellar,” somebody else put in. That made good sense. Moss wished for one, too. What they had were barracks built as flimsily as the Geneva Convention allowed, or maybe a little cheaper than that. If the tornado plowed into them, it wouldn’t even notice. Everybody unlucky enough to be inside sure would, though.

He could hear it now, and feel it, too. It sounded like the world’s biggest freight train heading straight for him. That wasn’t really fair to the tornado. If it ran into a train, it would scatter railroad cars like jackstraws. “The Lord is my shepherd—” somebody began.

The Twenty-third Psalm seemed right. “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” might have fit even better, because the Lord was doing some serious trampling out there. Wind tugged at Moss, trying to pull him out the open door. The officer who’d suggested opening it knew what was what. That air would have escaped anyway. With the doors open, it could get out without forcing itself out.

Moss stepped away from the door. The flow wasn’t strong enough to keep him from doing that. He looked over his shoulder and got a glimpse of the onrushing funnel cloud. That made him do a little praying of his own. He’d known one or two tornadoes when he lived near Chicago, but only one or two. They visited downstate Illinois more often.

And they visited the CSA.

“Looks like it’s not gonna hit us,” somebody said—shouted, actually, because that was the only way anyone could make himself heard through the roar and scream of the wind.

Maybe the man who’d yelled was a bombardier. Whoever he was, he seemed able to gauge what that horrid funnel would do. Instead of blowing the barracks to hell and gone, it walked along a couple of hundred yards away. A few windows blew out, but that was all the damage they took. The twister snarled away toward the east.

“Lord!” a POW said, which summed things up pretty damn well.

Nick Cantarella looked outside. He said, “My God,” too, but in an altogether different tone of voice. The captain from New York City pointed. “That fucker just blew half the wire around the camp all the way to the moon.”

Prisoners rushed to the windows, those that still had glass and those that didn’t. Cantarella wasn’t wrong. The tornado cared no more

about barbed wire and guard towers than it did about anything else in its path. Three men had the same thought at the same time: “Let’s get out of here!”

That sounded good to Jonathan Moss. He even had some brown Confederate bills—no, they called them banknotes down here—in his pocket. The CSA played by the rules of war, and paid captive officers at the same rate as their own men of equivalent grade. Why not? In camp, the notes were only paper, good for poker games but not much else.

“If they catch you, they can punish you,” Colonel Summers warned. The senior U.S. officer went on, “We’re a long way from the border. Odds of making it back to the USA aren’t good. You might be smarter just sitting this one out.”

Summers had to say something like that. Moss understood as much. Someone needed to be careful and responsible and adult. Captain Cantarella put the other side of things in perspective: “Anybody who’s gonna go better get his ass in gear right now. Those Confederate bastards won’t waste a hell of a lot of time hunkered down wherever they’re at. They’ll come out, and they’ll have guns.”

That made up Moss’ mind for him. He wasn’t the first one out the door, but he was only a couple of steps behind the guy who was. Cantarella was hard on his heels. “How did the escape committee sign up a tornado?” Moss asked him.

Cantarella’s grin was swarthy and stubbly and full of exhilaration. “Hey, Mother Nature owed us one after the way that thunderstorm fucked us over. Every once in a while, I think maybe there’s a God.”

Moss had thought so, too, till that Canuck’s bomb robbed him of Laura and Dorothy. Believing in anything but revenge came hard after that. He said, “You want to stick together? Two heads may be better than one.”

“Long as we can, anyway,” Cantarella answered. “We may have to split up somewhere down the line, but I’m with you till then.” He stuck out his hand. Moss shook it.

Out past the wire they went, out past the wreckage of the guard towers. A machine gun stuck up from a clump of bushes. “Wish it was a rifle,” Moss said. “Piece like that, though, it’s too heavy to lug.”

“Yeah,” Cantarella said. “What we gotta do now is, we gotta make

tracks. Somethin' tells me we don't have a whole lotta time." His clotted accent was about as far from a C.S. drawl as it could be.

The something that told him was no doubt common sense. "You think we have a better chance heading north, or east toward the ocean?" Moss asked.

"Depends," the other U.S. officer said. "If you figure our Navy's got boats or ships or whatever the hell out in the Atlantic, we haul ass that way. God knows it's closer. But if we gotta sail up the coast, fuhgeddaboutit, unless you're a hell of a lot better sailor than I am."

"John Paul Jones I'm not," Moss answered, and Cantarella laughed. What the Italian said made an unfortunate amount of sense. Moss faced the general direction of Atlanta. "North, then."

"Right. Maybe we can steal some clothes so we look like a coupla ordinary Confederate assholes, buy train tickets, and get up to Richmond or somewheres in style," Cantarella said.

They carried no papers. They wore elderly U.S. uniforms (Cantarella did remember that). They had the wrong accent. They probably didn't have enough money for train tickets. But for those minor details, it struck Moss as a terrific plan. He didn't criticize, not out loud. He liked the idea of hoofing it across Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia no better than Cantarella did.

They hadn't got very far into the pine woods north of Andersonville before gunshots rang out behind them. "Ahhh, shit," Cantarella said, which summed up Moss' feelings, too. The guards had noticed prisoners escaping, then.

Without Nick Cantarella, Moss figured he would have been recaptured in short order. The younger man was an infantry officer, and actually knew what he was doing as he clumped along on the ground. He and Moss splashed along creeks to throw hounds off the scent. "Didn't they do this in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?" Moss said.

"Beats me," Cantarella answered. "All I know is, this shit works."

Maybe it did. Moss heard several more bursts of gunfire, but he didn't see any C.S. prison guards or soldiers. He did get tired. His feet got sore. He knew he was slowing Cantarella down. "If you want to go on without me, it's all right," he said.

"Nah." Cantarella shook his head. "Like you said, two heads are better

than one. ’Sides, you can come closer to talking like these assholes than I can.”

“I wonder,” Moss said. Midwest overlain by Canadian didn’t sound much more Confederate than strong New York City. He figured he’d worry about that when he had to, not before. He had other things to worry about now: not only his feet but also the growing emptiness in his belly. If this were a planned escape, he would have brought food along. Now, he and Cantarella would be raiding henhouses before long. That would leave a trail a blind idiot, or even a Confederate guard, could follow.

They came out of the woods into cotton country. Moss had always pictured swarms of darkies in the fields with hoes. It wasn’t like that. Except for a cultivator chugging along in the distance, the countryside was eerily empty. Cantarella had the same thought. “Where’d all the smokes go?” he said.

“Beats me.” Moss had trouble believing the atrocity stories he’d heard. Seeing that landscape without people, though, he had less trouble than before.

He and Nick went on up a poorly paved road till nightfall. Then they lay down by the roadside. All they had to cover themselves with were cotton plants. That would help give them away, too. But it got chilly after the sun went down. The plants weren’t good blankets, but they were better than nothing. Moss wasn’t sure he could fall asleep on bare ground. Five minutes later, he was snoring.

Morning twilight turned the eastern sky gray when he woke. But the growing light wasn’t what roused him. Those voices weren’t just part of his dreams. He saw three men silhouetted against the sky. They all carried rifles.

He nudged Nick, who’d stayed asleep. “Wake up!” he hissed. “We’re caught!”

One of the armed men came up to them. In a low voice, he asked, “You some o’ the Yankees what got outa Andersonville?”

“That’s right.” Suddenly hope flared in Moss. “Are you . . . fighting against the Confederate government?”

“Bet your ass, ofay,” the rifle-toting Negro answered. “How you like to he’p us?”

Moss looked toward Nick Cantarella. Cantarella was looking back at him. Moss didn't think it was the sort of invitation they could refuse, not if they wanted to keep breathing. He got to his feet, ignoring creaks and crunches. "I think we just joined the underground," he said. Nick Cantarella nodded.

"**S** hould auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days o' auld lang syne!"

Scipio didn't think he'd ever heard "Auld Lang Syne" sung when it wasn't New Year's Eve. He didn't think he'd ever heard it sung in such a variety of accents, either—none of them the least bit Scots.

Jerry Dover grinned at the cooks and waiters and busboys and dishwashers he'd bossed for so long. "I'd like to tell y'all one thing," he said. They waited expectantly. His grin got wider. "Fuck you, you sons of bitches!"

They laughed like loons. Scipio laughed as loud as anybody, but his mirth had a bitter edge. With Jerry Dover gone, all the Negroes who worked for the Huntsman's Lodge were liable to get fucked. Who could say what the new manager would be like? Would he take care of his people the way Dover had? Scipio supposed it wasn't impossible. He also knew only too well it wasn't likely.

"You go kill them damnyankees, Mistuh Dover! Shoot 'em down like the yellow dogs they is!" a cook shouted. He swigged from a bottle of champagne. Jerry Dover's sendoff was going to put a dent in the restaurant's liquor stock.

"If I have to pick up a gun, this country's in deeper shit than anybody ever figured," Dover said, and got another laugh. "It's the Quartermaster Corps for me."

That actually made good sense. The Confederate Army was doing it anyway. Jerry Dover knew everything there was to know about feeding people. Feeding them in the Army was different from doing it in a restaurant, but not all that different. He'd help the CSA more doing that than he would in the infantry, and somebody must have realized as much.

Scipio had an almost-empty glass in his hand. A moment later, as if by magic, it wasn't empty anymore. He sipped. He had had bourbon in there. This was Scotch. He'd feel like hell in the morning. Right now,

morning felt a million miles away.

“T’ank you, *Señor* Dover. You give us work.” That was José, one of the dishwashers from the Empire of Mexico. He’d taken a job from a black man. Scipio wanted to hate him because of that—wanted to and found he couldn’t. José was only trying to make a living for himself, and he worked like a man with a gun to his head. How could you hate somebody like that?

“For he’s a jolly good fellow!” The staff at the Huntsman’s Lodge started singing again, louder and more raucously than ever. In some ways, blacks and whites in the CSA understood one another and got along with one another pretty well . . . or they would have, if the Freedom Party hadn’t got in the way.

Jerry Dover hoisted his own glass. He’d been drinking as hard as his help. “You bastards are good,” he said. “Sometimes I don’t reckon y’all know how good you are. I’m gonna have to whip some new folks into shape, and I don’t figure they’ll be a patch on you.”

“Take us with you!” somebody behind Scipio shouted. In an instant, everyone was yelling it: “Take us with you! Take us with you!”

“Hell, I would if I could,” Dover said. “I don’t think that’ll happen, though.”

The clamor went on all the same. Scipio understood why: if these black men were busy cooking for soldiers and serving them, they’d be less likely to go to a camp. Anything—anything at all—seemed better than going to a camp.

“I don’t want anybody to get in trouble for being out too late,” Dover said after a while. The response to that was angry and profane. This was a night of license, and would have been even if not fueled by booze. Whatever the restaurant staff did short of burning the place down, he would let them get away with it.

Aurelius tapped Scipio on the arm. “How you like bein’ an old man at a young men’s fling?” the other veteran waiter asked.

“Long as I’s here,” Scipio answered. “Long as I’s anywhere.”

“Amen,” Aurelius said.

Scipio beckoned him off to one side. Once the two old men had put a little distance between themselves and the rest of the staff, Scipio said,

“Tell you what I was afeared of. I was afeared of a people bomb. I done been through two auto bombs. Don’t reckon I’d las’ if somethin’ else blow up around me.”

“Auto bombs is nasty business,” Aurelius said. “People bombs . . . People bombs is worse.” He shuddered. “How you walk in somewhere, knowin’ you got ’splosives strapped on you? All you got to do is click the switch or whatever the hell—and then you is splattered all over the walls.”

“Way things is nowadays, lotta niggers reckon they gots nothin’ to lose,” Scipio said.

Aurelius nodded. “I know that. I don’t like it. If it ain’t a judgment on the Confederate States of America, I dunno what would be. But still, no matter how bad things is, is they ever bad enough to blow your ownself up?”

“Dat nigger in Jackson done thought so,” Scipio said. “Damn nigger was a waiter, too. My tips ain’t been the same since he done it.”

“Your tips ain’t all that’s hurtin’,” Aurelius reminded him. “They put all the niggers in Jackson on trains an’ ship ’em off to camps. All of ’em, jus’ like that.” He snapped his fingers. “An’ the Freedom Party don’t try to hide it or nothin’. Hell, the Freedom Party braggin’ to beat the band.”

“Not too long after de Great War end, I’s in de park takin’ de air, an’ who should come make a speech but Jake Featherston?” Scipio shuddered at the memory, even if it was almost a quarter of a century old. “Everybody reckon he nothin’ but a crazy man. I reckon de same thing back then. But he scare de piss outa me even so.”

Aurelius looked around to see if anyone was listening to them. Once he was satisfied, he said, “That Featherston, he *ain’t* nothin’ but a crazy man.”

“No.” Regretfully, Scipio shook his head. “He a crazy man, sho’, but he ain’t nothin’ *but* a crazy man. You hear what I’s sayin’? Nobody who’s nothin’ but a crazy man kin do as much harm as Jake Featherston.”

Aurelius considered that. He also considered his glass, which was empty. When he too shook his head, Scipio wasn’t sure whether he mourned the empty glass or the Freedom Party’s devastation. Then he said, “Well, you is right, an’ I wish you wasn’t.” He could do

something about getting more whiskey. Nobody on the North American continent had had much luck doing anything about Jake Featherston.

Scipio and Aurelius reeled back to the Terry together. No explosions marred the night. No automobiles going up in fireballs threw jagged metal and blazing gasoline in all directions. No desperate Negroes threw nails and chunks of themselves every which way. Except for a whip-poor-will's mournful call, everything was peaceful and quiet.

"You damn coons are late," grumbled the cop who opened the gate for them. "Even for y'all, you're late."

"Sorry, suh," Scipio slurred. "We was sayin' good-bye to our boss. He goin' into de Army."

The cop's left hand had only the thumb and index finger. You didn't notice straight off, probably because he kept that hand in his pocket whenever he could. "Good luck to him," he said. "You spooks don't know when you're well off. You don't got to worry about shit like that."

Was he right? Scipio didn't think so. If Negroes had the same privileges and rights as whites, wouldn't they be glad to pick up rifles to help defend the Confederacy? It looked that way to him. But if they had all those privileges and rights, the Confederacy they were defending would be a very different place. Just for openers, it would be a place where Jake Featherston could never get elected, and neither could anyone like him.

Well, it wasn't like that, and it never would be. The thump of the gate behind Scipio and Aurelius proved as much, and proved it all too well.

He did have a headache when he got up. Cassius scowled at him. "How can you have a good time sayin' so long to a damn ofay?" his son demanded.

With a sigh, Scipio answered, "It ain't as simple as you think it is."

"Oh, yeah," Cassius said scornfully—he'd got to the point where he would quarrel with anything Scipio said just because Scipio said it. "How come?"

"On account of I be dead if Jerry Dover don't want me alive an' workin' there," Scipio said. "On account of you an' your sister an' your mama go to a camp—or else you jus' end up dead, too."

“Jerry Dover still a damn ofay,” Cassius said.

“Fine.” Scipio didn’t feel like arguing with him, especially not with a head pounding like a drop forge. He took a couple of aspirins. They made his stomach sour, but after a while his headache receded.

He hated walking through the cleaned-out parts of the Terry on his way to work that afternoon. Lawns grew tall and untended and full of weeds. Lots of houses had broken windows. Quite a few had doors standing open. A skinny dog trotted out of one of them and gave Scipio a hard stare. If it were a little bigger, it might have gone for him. Stray dogs scrounged whatever they could. So did stray people. The cleanouts hadn’t missed many. If not for Jerry Dover, they wouldn’t have missed Scipio and his family.

And now Dover was in the Army. Scipio shook his head, dreading what would come next. He’d got to the age where he feared any kind of change. It was too likely to be change for the worse.

A white man waited just inside the kitchen entrance to the Huntsman’s Lodge. “Are you Xerxes or Aurelius?” he asked.

“I is Xerxes, suh,” Scipio answered. The new manager was younger than he’d expected—in his early forties. He had a thin, sharp, clever face and cold blue eyes. Scipio didn’t wonder why he wasn’t in the Army: he sat in a wheelchair, his legs thin and useless inside his trousers.

“My name’s Willard Sloan,” he said, and tapped the arms of the chair with his own arms, which seemed fine. A moment later, he explained why: “Stopped a damnyankee bullet with my back in 1917. I used to be a hell of a football player, you know? So much for that.” His mouth twisted. Then he went on, “Jerry Dover says you’ve been here since dirt. If I need to know anything special, I’m supposed to ask you.”

“I tells you anything I knows, suh.” Scipio meant it. He didn’t expect the white man to like him. It might end up happening, but he didn’t expect it. If Sloan found him useful, that would do almost as well.

“All right. If I have to pick your brains, I’ll holler. For now, you just go on about your business the way you always have. I’ll keep an eye on things, cipher out how they are, before I decide what works good and what needs tinkering.”

“Fair enough, suh. Dis place been de bes’ in town a long time. Sure enough want to keep it dat way,” Scipio said. He and the rest of the

staff would be judging Willard Sloan as he judged them. The only trouble was, his judgment carried more weight than theirs.

He did start well. When the cooks were unhappy with some of the beef they got, he used the telephone like a deadly weapon. “You bastard, you reckon you can screw me over on account of I ain’t Dover?” he screamed at the butcher. “You reckon I don’t know Chet Byers? You reckon I won’t do business with him from here on out if you *ever* pull this shit on me again? Make it right in fifteen minutes, or I blacken your name all over town.” New beef—of the proper quality—got there in twelve minutes flat. Jerry Dover couldn’t have done better, and there was no higher praise than that.

XVII

A utumn was when the leaves turned red and gold and then fell off the trees. It was when the weather got crisp, so your cheeks also turned red and tingled after you’d stayed outside a while. If you were a fisherman on the North Atlantic, it was when the ocean started tossing you around, not knowing—or caring—your boat was out there.

George Enos, Jr., was used to the rhythms of the changing year. A Massachusetts man had to be. In the Sandwich Islands, the year didn’t change much. The sun still rode high in the sky, if not quite so high. Days remained warm. Everything stayed green.

Bigger swells did start rolling in out of the north. The *Townsend* would slide up over a crest and then down into a trough. That didn’t seem enough to get excited about.

When George said so out loud, Fremont Dalby laughed at him. “Christ, Enos, haven’t you had enough excitement for a while?” the gun chief said. “Far as I’m concerned, I can stay at my station and gather dust for a while, because that’ll mean nobody’s trying to strafe the ship or drop a bomb on her or stick a torpedo up our ass.”

“Japs are out there somewhere,” George said.

“I know, I know. You don’t got to remind me,” Dalby said. “But I don’t like thinking about it every goddamn minute, you know what I

mean?”

“Sure, Chief.” George didn’t want to get the CPO ticked off at him. Getting any CPO ticked off at you was a bad idea. When the man in question happened to be your boss, it was four times as bad.

They kept station with three other destroyers and with the *Trenton*. The escort carrier hadn’t taken too much damage in her last brush with the Japanese. Her airplanes had given out more than she’d got. That was the first real naval victory the USA had had in the islands around the Sandwich Islands for quite a while.

U.S. fighters buzzed overhead. They flew a dawn-to-dusk combat air patrol. The *Townsend*’s Y-ranging antenna went round and round. Y-ranging gear could spot incoming enemy aircraft while they were still well out to sea. The other destroyers and the carrier all had sets, too. Whatever else happened, the Japs wouldn’t be able to get in a sucker punch at the little flotilla. The *Trenton* would be able to scramble all her fighters. The destroyers would start throwing up as much anti-aircraft as they could. And after that, what could you do but pucker your asshole and hope?

Fritz Gustafson pointed off to starboard. The loader didn’t bother with words when one finger would do. Fremont Dalby wasn’t shy about words, though. “Dolphins!” he said with a smile. “They’re supposed to be good luck. Here’s hoping, anyway.”

George enjoyed the dolphins for their own sake. They were swift and graceful and, as always, they looked as if they were having a good time out there. “I wonder what they make of us,” he said. “Till we got ships like this, they were some of the biggest, toughest things in the ocean.”

“They figure we’re good for a handout, anyway,” Dalby said, which was true. They would follow ships for scraps and garbage. Sometimes, though, they would track ships for what looked like nothing more than the hell of it. Were they skylarking? Did they really have the brains to play? More to the point, did they have the brains not to want to work? For their sake, George hoped so.

Four hours on, four hours off. When the other crew for the twin 40mm mount replaced Dalby’s, George went below, grabbed himself a couple of sandwiches and some coffee, and then found his hammock. He laughed as he climbed up into it. “What’s so funny?” asked another sailor about to grab some shut-eye.

“Used to be I couldn’t sleep for beans in one of these goddamn things,” George answered. “Used to be I couldn’t hardly get into one without falling out on my ear. But now I don’t even think about it.”

“That’s ’cause you’re a real Navy guy now,” the other sailor said, getting up into his hammock as nimbly as a chimp might have. “You know how to do shit. You aren’t a little lost civilian anymore, looking for somebody to hold your hand and tell you what to do.”

Was I really that green? George wondered, wiggling to get comfortable. He supposed he had been. He knew the sea from his fisherman days, but knowing the sea and knowing the Navy weren’t the same thing—not even close. He settled his cap over his eyes. Two minutes later, he was snoring.

Standing watch and watch wore on a man. He felt groggy, almost underwater, when he slid out of the hammock and down to the deck again. He got rid of some of the coffee he’d drunk just after he came off the last watch, then went back to the galley for more. It might help keep him conscious, anyway.

Fremont Dalby was at the gun when he got there. The CPO looked fresh and fit. Maybe Dalby didn’t need to sleep. George yawned. *He* damn well did, and he hadn’t done enough of it. “All quiet?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Dalby answered. “We’re getting up toward Midway, too.”

“Uh-huh.” George looked north and west, as if he expected the atoll to come over the horizon any minute now. He didn’t; they weren’t *that* close, not by three or four hundred miles. “Anything from the Y-range?”

“Quiet as a mouse, far as I know,” Dalby said. “Way it looks to me is, the Japs haven’t got a carrier operating south of the island.”

“Makes sense,” George agreed. “If they did, they would’ve figured out we’re around by now. Hell, we’re almost close enough for land-based air from Midway to spot us.”

“*Almost* is the word,” the gun chief said. “And if they don’t have a carrier operating south of Midway, we really have made them pull in their horns. Us coming up here is a lot better than them bombing the crap out of Oahu.”

“You better believe it,” George said. “It’d be good if we could push ’em off Midway, too. Where would they go then?”

“Wake,” Fremont Dalby replied at once. “It’s another pissant little bird turd of an island southwest of Midway. But I’ll be damned if I’d want to hop from island to island across the whole stinking Pacific toward Japan.”

“Oh, good God, no!” George shuddered at the very idea. “You’d have to be crazy to try something like that. You’d have to be crazy to want to. As long as they get out of the Sandwich Islands and stay away, that’s plenty. This is a big goddamn ocean. There’s room enough for us and them.”

“That’s how it looks to me, too,” Dalby said. “Of course, how it looks to Philadelphia is anybody’s guess. The big brains back there can screw up anything if they put their minds to it. Minds!” He rolled his eyes. “If they had any, we’d all be better off.”

“Treason,” Fritz Gustafson said. “Off with your head.”

Dalby suggested that the loader lose some other organ important for happiness, if not absolutely necessary for personal survival. Gustafson didn’t say another word. He’d got his lick in, and he was content.

George’s watch passed quietly. No warning shouts of approaching Japanese airplanes came from the loudspeakers. The hydrophones didn’t pick up telltale noises from lurking Japanese submersibles. No torpedoes from lurking submersibles the hydrophone hadn’t picked up arrowed through the water toward the *Townsend.*

When the other crew took over the gun, George went down to the galley for more sandwiches and coffee. He felt as if he’d done the same thing just a few hours earlier. Of course, he *had* done the same thing, so no wonder he felt that way. These sandwiches were ham on wheat, not corned beef on rye. Other than that, he might have been running the film over again. Standing watch and watch made time blur. George tried to come up with the name of the artist who’d painted the pocket watch sagging and melting as if it were left out in the rain. It was something foreign, that was all he could remember.

Yawning, he headed for his hammock. “Here we go again,” he said as he climbed up into it.

The sailor he’d talked with the last time he sacked out laughed. “We gotta stop meeting like this,” he said. “People will get suspicious.”

George laughed, too, a little nervously. Was that just a joke, or did something faggoty hide underneath it? Aboard ship, you always

wondered. The *Townsend* went back to Oahu often enough to let the crew get their ashes hauled on Hotel Street, but you wondered anyway. Some guys were flat-out queers, no two ways about it, and they couldn't have cared less about the floozies on Hotel Street.

But you couldn't call somebody on what was probably nothing but a harmless joke. If the other guy didn't make another like it, George figured he would forget about this one. If he did . . . *I'll worry about that later.* With another yawn, an enormous one, George decided to worry about everything later, and went to sleep.

Night had fallen when he came back up on deck with another mug of coffee. It was cool and quiet: no CAP after dark. Fremont Dalby got to the 40mm mount with a mug of his own. He nodded to George and said, "We've got to stop meeting like this."

Him, too? "Uh, yeah," George said. He could imagine a lot of things, but the gun chief as a homo? Never in a million years.

"Should be a little easier this time through," Dalby said. "We don't have airplanes coming at us with bombs or torpedoes during the night."

"Or trying to crash into us, either," George put in.

"Yeah, that was fun, wasn't it?" Dalby said. *Fun* wasn't the word George would have used. He didn't know which one he *would* have used, but it wasn't one he would see in any family newspaper.

"All we gotta worry about now is submarines," Fritz Gustafson said. As usual, the loader didn't talk much. Also as usual, he got a lot of mileage out of what he did say.

Fremont Dalby's suggestion about what submarines could do was illegal, immoral, and impossible. George stared out over the black waters of the Pacific. Starlight glittered off the sea, but the moon was down. A dozen submersibles could have been playing ring around the rosy half a mile from the *Townsend* and he never would have known it. Out in the tropical Atlantic, a Confederate boat had sneaked up on his father's destroyer and sunk it in the middle of the night. The same thing could happen to him. At times like this, he knew it much too well.

Then Dalby said, "Those bastards have as much trouble finding us at night as we do finding them."

That was true enough, and reassuring to boot. Besides, what would a Jap sub be doing out here in the middle of the night? George wished he hadn't asked the question, because he saw an obvious answer: looking for American ships. If a submersible could, it would probably go after the *Trenton* ahead of the *Townsend,* but it might take whatever it could get.

He kept his nerves to himself. He didn't want his buddies to know he'd got the wind up. Odds were he was flabbling over nothing. He understood that, which didn't make not doing it any easier.

The watch passed quietly. No airplanes. No submarines. No nothing. Just the wide Pacific and, somewhere not far away, the rest of the flotilla. The other crew took over the gun. George went below for food and coffee and sleep. Coffee had trouble keeping him awake through watch and watch.

He came back on at four in the morning, and watched the sun rise out of the sea. The flotilla turned away from Midway during his watch, and started back towards Oahu. Now the United States were doing the poking. He hoped Japan liked getting poked.

"**H** ey, Mistuh Guard, suh."

Hipolito Rodriguez swung the muzzle of his submachine gun toward the Negro who'd spoken to him. The motion was automatic and not particularly hostile. He just didn't believe in taking chances. "What you want?" he asked.

"What I want?" The skinny black man laughed. "Mistuh Guard, suh, I got me a list long as your arm, but gettin' let outa here do the job all by its ownself." Rodriguez waited stonily. That wouldn't happen, and the Negro had to know it. He did; the laughter leaked out of his face as he went on, "What I wants to ask you, suh, is where them niggers from Jackson is at now. They come through here, but they don't hardly stop for nothin'."

"Some go to Lubbock," Rodriguez answered. "Some go to El Paso." He was stubborn about sticking to the story the guards told the Negroes in Camp Determination. Not all the *mallates* believed it. But they weren't sure what really had happened, which was all to the good.

This prisoner looked sly. "That a really fo'-true fac', suh?"

“Of course it is.” Rodriguez lied without hesitation. He had as much of an interest in keeping the Negroes quiet as Jefferson Pinkard did himself.

“Ain’t how I hear it,” the fellow said.

“What you hear, then?” Rodriguez asked. “Tell me what you hear. Tell me who you hear it from, too.”

“Well . . .” The Negro suddenly realized he might have talked more than was good for him. “I ain’t so sure I recollects now.”

“No, eh?” Now the muzzle of Rodriguez’s submachine gun pointed toward the man’s midsection in a businesslike way. “Maybe we take you back. Maybe we ask some questions. We find out who telling lies here, *sí*?”

The black man couldn’t turn pale. If he could have, he would have. If he could have, he would have disappeared. Since he couldn’t, he said, “You don’ need to do nothin’ like that, Mistuh Guard, suh. My memory, it’s much better all sudden-like.”

“*Bueno.* Glad to hear it,” Rodriguez said dryly. “Tell me, then—what you hear?”

“Well . . .” the Negro repeated. He licked his lips. “I don’t say this or nothin’—not me. I jus’ hear it.” Rodriguez gestured impatiently with the submachine gun. A weapon that could cut a man in half in the blink of an eye made a hell of a persuader. The black man spoke up in a hurry: “Some folks say them niggers didn’t go nowheres. Some folks say they was kilt.”

Some folks were right—dead right. “Who say stupid things like this?” Rodriguez asked. The Negro hesitated. He didn’t want to squeal on his friends, even with the threat from the submachine gun. Rodriguez asked a different question, one that seemed safer on the outside: “What barracks you live in?”

“I’s in Barracks Twenty-seven, suh,” the Negro said.

“Twenty-seven.” Rodriguez turned to the guards with him. “Remember that.”

“Will do, Troop Leader,” the three of them said as if they were one man. Rodriguez had discovered he liked wearing three stripes on his sleeve. He gave more orders than he took these days. In orders as in

many other things, it was better to give than to receive.

He turned back to the Negro. “I find you lie to me about where you at, *mallate,* this camp ain’t big enough for you to hide. You understand?”

“I ain’t lyin’, Mistuh Guard, suh.” The prisoner practically radiated innocence—and no doubt would keep doing it till Rodriguez looked away or turned his back. “If I’s lyin’, I’s flyin’.”

“If you lyin’, you dyin’.” Rodriguez capped the black man’s rhyme with one of his own. He gestured with the muzzle of the submachine gun once more, this time in dismissal. The prisoner scurried away, glad to be out of the dread eye of officialdom.

“Troop Leader, how come we got to remember that barracks number?” asked one of the guards.

Rodriguez swallowed a sigh. Some of these people had no business looking down their noses at Negroes for stupidity. Patiently, he answered, “Because, Pruitt, we got to do something about Barracks Twenty-seven.”

“Like what, Troop Leader?” Pruitt radiated innocence, too. The trouble was, his was real.

“Ain’t gonna talk about it here.” Rodriguez gestured once more, this time with his left hand. There were four of them in their gray uniforms. All around them were Negroes, thousands of Negroes. Even though the men in gray all carried submachine guns, Rodriguez found himself sweating despite the cooler weather. The Negroes could rush them. Other guards would come try to save them. The machine gunners in the guard towers outside the barbed-wire perimeter would fire till their gun barrels glowed cherry red. They would massacre the blacks. Rodriguez doubted that would do him much good.

But no attack came. He and his companions finished their patrol. When they got back to the guards’ quarters, he reported to an officer what the Negro had told him. “Hmm,” said the chief assault leader—the equivalent of a captain in the Freedom Party guards. “What do you reckon we ought to do?”

“Clean out Barracks Twenty-seven, sir,” Rodriguez answered at once. “Tell them we ship them somewhere else because they talk too much. Then put them in trucks or send them to the bathhouse.”

“Hmm,” the chief assault leader said again. “I can’t decide that. I’ll

have to pass it on up the line."

"Yes, sir," Rodriguez said resignedly. He'd seen this sort of thing in the Great War. Some officers knew what needed doing, then went and did it. Others knew what needed doing, then waited till somebody over them told them to do it. They weren't so useful as the first kind, but they weren't hopeless. The ones who didn't know what needed doing . . . those were the officers who got their men killed.

Barracks Twenty-seven got cleaned out four days later than it should have, but it did get cleaned out. Rodriguez was part of the crew that took care of it. He wasn't sorry; he wanted to see the job done. He also wanted to see it done right. "Gotta make sure we don't spook the spooks," another guard said. That summed things up, though Rodriguez's smile was more dutiful than amused: he'd heard that joke, or ones too much like it, too many times before.

A different chief assault leader was in charge of the cleanout. Rodriguez wouldn't have entrusted it to the man with whom he'd spoken, either. This fellow—his name was Higbe—handled it with aplomb. "We are too goddamn crowded here," he told the black men lined up in front of the barracks, "so we're shippin' your asses down to El Paso. Y'all go back in the barracks and get whatever you need. Much as you can keep on your lap in a truck." He looked at his watch. "You got ten minutes. Get movin'!"

That was a nice touch. Nothing too bad could happen to a man if he could bring his handful of miserable possessions with him . . . could it? One Negro hung back. Rodriguez recognized the black who'd spoken to him before at the same time as the *mallate* recognized him. Instead of hurrying into the barracks, the black man came over to him and said, "Mistuh Guard, suh, I don't want to go to no El Paso."

He knows what's coming, all right, Rodriguez thought. "I think we fix it so you don't got to," he said aloud. He didn't want the Negro kicking up a fuss. The less fuss, the better for everybody—except the prisoners, and they didn't count. He went on, "Let me talk to my officer. We take care of it. You stay here. Don't go nowhere."

"Lawd bless you, suh," the Negro said.

Rodriguez spoke briefly with Chief Assault Leader Higbe. Unlike the other officer, Higbe didn't hesitate. He just nodded. "That sounds good to me, Troop Leader. You take care of it like you said."

"Yes, sir." Rodriguez saluted and went back to the Negro, who was

nervously shifting from foot to foot. He nodded to the black man. “You come with me.”

“Where you takin’ me, suh?”

“Guards’ quarters. Got some questions to ask you.”

“Oh, yes, suh.” The Negro almost capered with glee. “I sings like a canary, long as you don’t put me on no truck.”

“You don’t want to go, you don’t go,” Rodriguez said. “What’s your name?”

“I’s Demetrius, suh,” the Negro answered.

Another fancy name, Rodriguez thought scornfully. The more raggedy the *mallate,* the fancier the handle he seemed to come with. “*Bueno,* Demetrius.” His words gave no clue to what lay in his mind. “You come along.”

Demetrius came, all smiles and relief. None of the other prisoners took any special notice; guards pulled blacks out of camp for one reason or another all the time. “What you need to know, suh?” Demetrius asked as they got near the barbed wire that segregated prisoners and guards. “Don’t matter what, not hardly. I tell you.”

“Bueno,” Rodriguez said once more. He waved to the gate crew. They opened up for him and Demetrius. Rodriguez urged the Negro on ahead of him. As soon as buildings hid them from the prisoners’ view, he fired a shot into the back of Demetrius’ head. He waited to see if he would need give him another one to finish him off, but he didn’t. The black man probably died before he finished crumpling to the ground.

“What’s up, Troop Leader?” another guard asked, as casually as if they were talking about the weather.

“Troublemaker,” Rodriguez answered: a response that could bury any black man. “We got to get rid of the body quiet-like.”

“Niggers’ll know he came in here. They’ll know he didn’t come out,” the trooper said.

Rodriguez shrugged. “And so? We say we catch him dealing in contraband, they think he deserve what he get.”

That overstated things a little. The prisoners admired people who

could smuggle forbidden things into Camp Determination. But they knew the guards came down hard on the smugglers they caught. Dealers in contraband usually bribed guards to get stuff for them and look the other way. Guards got fired for doing things like that. The Negroes got fired, too: fired on.

“Get the body out of here,” Rodriguez told the man who’d questioned him.

He had stripes on his sleeve. The other guard didn’t. “Yes, Troop Leader,” he said, and took the late, unlamented Demetrius by the feet.

“I want to congratulate Troop Leader Rodriguez for a fine piece of work,” Jefferson Pinkard said at a guards’ meeting a few days later. “He spotted trouble, he reported it, and we dealt with it. Nobody in Barracks Twenty-seven is going to spread rumors anymore, by God. Chief Assault Leader Higbe deserves commendation for making the cleanout run so smooth. A letter will go in his file.”

He didn’t talk about a letter going into Rodriguez’s file, even if they were friends. Rodriguez might get rockers under his stripes, but that was it. All the commendation letters in the world wouldn’t make him anything more than a top kick. The Confederate States were more likely to name a Sonoran peasant an officer than they were to appoint a Negro Secretary of State, but only a little. Rodriguez didn’t worry about it. He knew he’d done a good job, too. He’d saved everybody in camp—except the Negroes—some trouble. That was plenty.

Major General Abner Dowling could see the Confederate States of America from his new headquarters in Clovis, New Mexico. His only major trouble was, at the moment he couldn’t see much of the Eleventh Army, with which he was supposed to go after the enemy. He had a lot of territory to cover and not a lot of men with which to cover it. The war out here by Texas’ western border seemed very much an afterthought.

Back in the lost and distant days of peace, Clovis was a minor trade center on the U.S.–C.S. frontier. The town was founded in the early years of the century with the unromantic handle of Riley’s Switch; a railroad official’s daughter suggested renaming it for the first Christian King of France. Cattle from the West Texas prairie paused at its feed lots before going on to supply the meat markets of California. It had flourished when western Texas, under the name of Houston, joined

the USA: those same cattle kept coming west, only now without a customs barrier. Houston's return to Texas and to the CSA sent Clovis into a tailspin from which it had yet to recover.

Men in green-gray weren't cattle, even if they were often treated in ways that would have made a rancher blush or turn pale. Feeding them and separating them from the little money the U.S. government doled out to them had produced a small upturn, but the Clovis Chamber of Commerce still sighed for the days when the longhorn ruled the local economy.

The Chamber of Commerce's sighs were not Dowling's worry, except when the local greasy spoons all jacked up their prices to gouge soldiers at the same time. He growled then. When growling didn't work, he threatened to move his headquarters and place Clovis permanently off-limits to all military personnel. A threat to the pocketbook got people's attention. Prices promptly came back down.

Up till now, that was the biggest victory Dowling had won. Both his side and his Confederate counterparts patrolled the border on horseback. Even command cars were hard to come by in these parts, and some of the terrain was too rugged for anything with wheels. Every so often, cavalrymen in green-gray and those in butternut would shoot at one another. Their occasional casualties convinced both sides they were being aggressive enough.

Dowling was plowing through paperwork and patting himself on the back for getting out from under Daniel MacArthur when his adjutant stuck his head into the office. "Sir, there's an officer from the War Department here to see you," Major Angelo Toricelli said.

"There is?" Dowling blinked. "Why, in God's name?"

"Beats me, sir. He didn't say," Toricelli answered cheerfully. "All he said was that his name is Major Levitt and he's got something he's supposed to hand-deliver to you." Toricelli paused. "I had him searched. Whatever it is, it's not a people bomb."

"Thank you, Major," Dowling said. "Maybe you'd better show him in."

Major Levitt was skinny, sandy-haired, and not particularly memorable. After Toricelli ducked out of the office, he said, "Your adjutant is, ah, a diligent young man."

"Well, yes," Dowling said. In a low-key way, Levitt had style. Dowling knew his features would have been much more ruffled if he'd just

been frisked. “What can I do for you today, Major?”

“I have this for you, sir.” Levitt set a sealed envelope on Dowling’s desk. “Major Toricelli didn’t find anything obviously lethal about it.”

“I’m so relieved,” Dowling murmured, not about to let the officer from Philadelphia show more sangfroid than he did himself. Levitt smiled. When he did, his whole face lit up. He looked like a human being, and a nice one, instead of a cog in the military machine. Dowling opened the envelope, unfolded the papers inside, and began to read. He suddenly looked up. “Jesus Christ!” he said, and then, “You know what’s in these orders?”

“Yes, sir,” Levitt said. “You’re allowed to discuss them with me.”

“Oh, joy.” Dowling went on reading. When he finished, he looked up again. “I understand what I’m supposed to do. But why on earth am I supposed to concentrate my forces and launch an attack? There’s nothing in West Texas worth having.”

“I know.” Major Levitt smiled another of his charming smiles. “I served there for a while between the wars, when it was Houston.”

“These”—Dowling tapped the orders with the nail of his index finger—“are very strange. When I was sent here, they told me that as long as the Confederates didn’t steal Albuquerque and Santa Fe while we weren’t looking, I’d be doing my job. And now this. What’s going on?”

Levitt told him exactly what was going on, in about half a dozen sentences. “Any questions, sir?” he finished.

“No,” Dowling said. “You’re absolutely right. I can see the need. Just the same, though, Major, and no offense to you, I’m going to keep you here for a while, till Philadelphia confirms that it really did send these orders. They look authentic—but then, they would if they were phony, too. Featherston’s bound to have some good forgers in Richmond, same as we’re bound to be forging Confederate papers.”

“No offense taken, sir,” Levitt said. “As long as your force gets rolling by that date, what happens beforehand doesn’t matter.”

“Ha!” Dowling muttered. Major Levitt was a General Staff officer. To them, logistics was an abstract science like calculus. They didn’t have to worry about moving actual men and guns and munitions and fuel and food. Abner Dowling did, and knew his supply train was as flimsy as the rest of the alleged Eleventh Army. “Major Toricelli!” he called.

“Can I see you for a moment?”

“Yes, sir?” Toricelli was in the office in nothing flat, sending Levitt a suspicious look. “What is it?”

Dowling handed him the orders. “Please get confirmation of these from Philadelphia. Until we have it, Major Levitt is not to leave this building.”

“Yes, *sir*!” Toricelli gave Levitt a real glare this time.

“Highest security,” Dowling added. “Don’t compromise the orders to verify them.” Toricelli saluted and hurried away. Dowling nodded to Levitt. “Care for a cigarette?”

“No, thank you, sir. I never got the habit. I ran track at West Point, and they’re bad for your wind.”

“Ah. I was a football man myself—a tackle,” Dowling said. “Even back in those days, I was built more like a brick than a greyhound.” He lit up. He wasn’t running anywhere.

Not quite half an hour later, the telephone on his desk rang. He picked it up. “Dowling here.”

“Hello, sir. This is John Abell. Do you recognize my voice?”

Even across two-thirds of the country and an indifferent connection, Dowling did. “Yes, indeed, General,” he said.

“Good. That makes things easier,” the General Staff officer said. “I can confirm those orders for you. We did send Major Levitt west with them. Please follow them precisely.”

“I’ll do it,” Dowling promised. “Anything else?”

“No, sir. That covers it,” Abell answered. The line went dead.

Dowling nodded to Levitt. “All right, Major. You are what you say you are, and these”—he tapped the orders again—“are what they say they are. I’ll carry them out.”

“Thank you, sir.” Levitt grinned. “Would you be kind enough to let your adjutant know I don’t have horns and fangs and a spiked tail?”

Dowling smiled, too. “If he frisked you, he should already know that.” But he did get up and let Major Toricelli know the courier was neither

a devil nor, worse, a Confederate.

“I didn’t *think* he was, sir, but you never can tell,” his adjutant said. “I wondered if he was a Mormon in disguise, too, to tell you the truth.”

“Gark,” said Dowling, who hadn’t thought of that. “No wonder you checked to see if he was loaded with explosives.”

“It’s a rum old world, sir,” Toricelli said.

“Ain’t it the truth?” Dowling agreed. “And we’re going to be the busiest people in it the next few days. The Eleventh Army is strung out from the border with Chihuahua to the border with Sequoyah. I want to concentrate here, but I want to leave enough of a screen behind so the Confederates don’t notice we’re concentrating till we go over the border.”

“That would be easier if we had more men,” Major Toricelli said.

“Of course it would. And if pigs had wings we’d all carry umbrellas,” Dowling said, which made his adjutant send him a quizzical look. He ignored it and went on, “Let’s go to the map room and see what we can work out.”

The more he studied the situation, the less happy he got. Major Toricelli had it right: if he left enough men behind to fool the foe, he wouldn’t be able to mount the kind of attack the War Department had in mind. He grumbled and fumed, thinking about bricks without straw. His adjutant seemed sunk as deep in gloom—till Toricelli suddenly started to laugh.

Now Dowling had the quizzical stare. “What’s so funny, Major? Nice to think something is.”

“Sir, I don’t think we need the screening force,” Toricelli said. “If the Confederates see what we’re doing and attack us somewhere else along the line—well, so what? Aren’t they doing exactly what we want them to do?”

Dowling eyed the map a little while longer. Then he laughed, too. “Damned if they aren’t, Major,” he said. “Damned if they aren’t, by God. All right. We’ll keep it just secret enough so Featherston’s fuckers think we’re trying to but we aren’t very good at it. We can’t be too open, or they’ll start wondering what’s up.”

Toricelli nodded. “Got you, sir. I like that.”

“So do I,” Dowling said. “Let’s start drafting orders, then.”

The orders went out. The U.S. Eleventh Army started concentrating on Clovis. U.S. air strength in New Mexico started concentrating on Clovis, too. The fighters would help keep the Confederates from breaking up the concentration with bombers when they noticed it. They didn’t take long. Urgent signals started heading east from the C.S. Army of West Texas. Dowling’s cryptographers couldn’t make sense of all of them, but what they could read suggested the enemy was alarmed.

“If I were in West Texas, I’d be alarmed, too,” Dowling told Angelo Toricelli. “I’d think the U.S. general on the other side of the border had gone clear around the bend. Why stir things up here?”

“Because the USA can fart and chew gum at the same time?” his adjutant suggested.

“That’s what we’re doing, all right.” Dowling had to stop, because he was laughing too hard to go on. “If we had a real army here . . .” He shrugged. “But we don’t, so we do the best we can with what we’ve got.”

He was ready on the appointed day. He was less than an hour away from issuing the order to start the opening barrage when he got another phone call from John Abell. “Please hold up for three days, sir,” Abell said. *Please* made the order more polite, but no less an order.

“All right, General. I can still do that—just barely,” Dowling said, and shouted for Major Toricelli to put the brakes on things. Toricelli swore, then started making calls of his own. Dowling asked Abell, “Can you tell me why?”

“Not on a line that isn’t secure,” the General Staff officer replied. Dowling found himself nodding. The Confederates had a couple of thousand miles of wire on which to be listening in. And, after a little thought, he had a pretty fair notion of the answer anyway.

N ovember in the North Atlantic wasn’t so bad as, say, January in the North Atlantic. Nobody would ever have mistaken it for July off the Sandwich Islands, though. The *Josephus Daniels* climbed over swells, slid into troughs, bounced all the time, and generally behaved like a toy boat in a bathtub with a rambunctious four-year-old.

Sam Carsten took it all in stride. He'd rounded the Horn more than once, facing seas that made the North Atlantic at its worst seem tame by comparison. But he wasn't surprised when the destroyer escort's passageways began to stink of vomit. A lot of men were seasick. He ordered cleaning parties increased. Smelling the result of other men's nausea helped make sailors sick. The reek diminished, but didn't go away. He hadn't expected anything different.

"You're a good sailor, sir," Pat Cooley said, watching Sam tear into a roast beef sandwich on the bridge. The exec hadn't been sick, not so far as Sam knew, but he did look a little green.

"Not too bad," Sam allowed, and took another bite. "I've had plenty of practice, that's for damn sure." He looked up at the cloud-filled sky. "Weather's right for people like us, anyhow."

The fair, auburn-haired exec eyed the even fairer blond skipper. "Well, that's true," Cooley said. "But everything comes with a price, doesn't it?" Yes, he *was* green.

"It does." Sam finished the sandwich and wiped crumbs off his hands. "When we're up and down so much, and when all this damn spray's in the air, the Y-ranging set doesn't give us as much as it would in softer weather."

Cooley gulped. "I wasn't thinking of the Y-ranging set, sir." Sam thought he would have to leave the bridge in a hurry, but he fought down what might have been about to come up. Sam admired that. Carrying on in spite of what bothered you was a lot tougher than not being bothered, which he himself wasn't.

"I know, Pat," he said now, more gently than he was in the habit of speaking. "But it also means we have to patrol the hard way, and it means we can't see as far. I hope it doesn't mean something slips past us."

Along with several other destroyer escorts and destroyers, the *Josephus Daniels* sailed east of Newfoundland. Their goal was simple: to stop the British from sneaking men and arms into Canada to keep the rebellion there sizzling. As with most goals, setting it was easier than meeting it.

The U.S. Navy had bigger fish to fry, or it would have committed more ships to the job. Fortunately, the Royal Navy did, too. If it didn't keep the USA away from the convoys from South America and South Africa that fed the United Kingdom, Britain would start to starve.

Losing that fight had made the U.K. throw in the sponge in the Great War. Under Churchill and Mosley, the limeys were doing their best to make sure it didn't happen again. They didn't treat supporting the Canuck rebels as job number one.

But the British had one big advantage: the North Atlantic was vast, and the ships in it relatively tiny. A lot of what they sent got through. And as for what didn't—well, if it didn't, what did they lose? A rusty freighter, some munitions, and a few sailors captured or killed. Cheap enough, for a country fighting a war.

Meanwhile, the United States had to pull ships away from attacking Britain's supply convoys for this thankless job. Carsten didn't love convoy-hunting; he'd done too much of it the last time around. But it seemed like a trip to Coney Island next to this.

Up to the crest of a wave. As the *Josephus Daniels* started to slide down into the trough, the Y-range operator stirred in his seat. "Something?" Sam asked.

"I'm—not sure, sir," the young officer answered. "I thought so for a second, but then we lost the target."

"What bearing?" Sam tried not to sound excited. He *wanted* to go after something.

"About 315, sir," said Lieutenant, J.G., Thad Walters.

"Mr. Cooley." Now Sam's voice was sharp and crisp. "Change course to 315. All ahead full. And sound general quarters, if you please."

"Changing course to 3-1-5: aye aye, sir," Cooley said. He called, "All ahead full," down to the engine room. His finger stabbed a button near the wheel. Klaxons hooted. Sailors dashed to their battle stations.

Sam stared northwest. *You bastard—you almost snuck past us,* he thought. He knew he might be thinking unkind thoughts at a figment of the electronics' imagination. That was a chance he took. He spoke to the wireless operator on the bridge: "Signal the other ships in the patrol that we are changing course to pursue a possible enemy ship."

"Aye aye, sir." The rating at the Morse key reached for the book to find the proper code groups.

Lieutenant Walters watched his set like a cat keeping an eye on a mousehole. He didn't say anything the first time the *Josephus Daniels*

climbed to the top of a crest. The next time, though, he jerked as if he'd stuck his finger in a light socket. "It's there, sir!" he exclaimed. "Bearing 310, speed . . . eleven knots."

"Change course to 310, Mr. Cooley," Sam said, and then, to the Y-range operator, "Mr. Walters, give me a range as soon as you can." Eleven knots. That sure sounded like a lumbering British freighter. He couldn't think of any other kind of ship likely to be in these waters right now.

After a couple of more climbs to the crest, Walters said, "Sir, range is about six miles."

"Thank you," Sam answered. In good weather, the target would have been easily visible. Of course, for the limeys to bet that the weather off Newfoundland in November would be lousy gave odds a hell of a lot better than putting chips down on double-zero at the roulette table.

Before too long, the freighter did come into sight: a big, lumbering tub not much different from what Sam had expected. At his order, the wireless operator sent more code groups.

"Come up alongside, Mr. Cooley," Sam said. "I think we'll need to put a prize crew aboard."

The *Josephus Daniels* was a tub herself, but she seemed all sharklike grace alongside the freighter. Sam handled the blinker himself, signaling, WHAT SHIP ARE YOU? HEAVE TO FOR BOARDING AND INSPECTION.

WE ARE THE *KARLSKRONA*. WE ARE SWEDISH. WE ARE NEUTRAL, came the reply.

"Fat chance," Sam said. He signaled, HEAVE TO FOR BOARDING AND CONTRABAND INSPECTION. He called to the forward gun turret: "Put one across her bow if she doesn't stop."

She didn't. The shot rang out. LAST WARNING, Sam signaled. Sailors ran across the *Karlskrona*'s deck. For a couple of seconds, Sam thought it was panic. Then, suddenly, he didn't: it was too well organized, too well drilled.

"Sink that ship!" he shouted at the same time as Pat Cooley yelled, "She's got guns!"

Ever since taking over the *Josephus Daniels,* Sam had concentrated on gunnery. His men hadn't been the best then. They were now. He would have matched them against the gunners from any other destroyer escort in the Navy.

And they needed to be. He and Pat Cooley both exclaimed in horror when the armed freighter opened fire. The size of the spout that miss kicked up . . . "She's got six-inchers!" Cooley yelped.

"Uh-huh," Sam said grimly. The enemy outgunned his ship, and they weren't far from point-blank range. A couple of hits could sink the *Josephus Daniels.* "Flank speed and zigzag, Mr. Cooley. Let's not make it easy for them."

"Aye aye, sir." Cooley swung the wheel hard to port, then just as hard to starboard. Another great gout of water rose, this one closer to the destroyer escort. The limeys were getting the range.

But the *Josephus Daniels*' gunners already had it. Both turrets were firing, and the ship's violent maneuvers fazed them not a bit. "Hit!" Sam yelled, and then, "Hit!" again. He whooped after the second one —it was near the bow, where the freighter carried one of her guns. The destroyer escort's twin 40mms opened up, too—they were close enough for them to reach the foe. He felt as if he'd fallen back in time to the War of 1812, when ships went toe to toe at short range and slugged away at each other till one surrendered or sank.

One of those big shells—the damn freighter had a light cruiser's firepower—burst much too close to the *Josephus Daniels*' stern. Shrapnel howled through the air. That one would cause casualties even if it was a miss. If the burst was close enough, it might spring hull plates, too, and make the destroyer escort's seams leak. But it wouldn't hurt her badly.

And she was chewing up the freighter. Her four-inch guns threw shells that weighed only a third as much as the enemy's, but she fired much faster and she fired much straighter. "She's on fire!" Pat Cooley yelled, and then, half a minute later, "She's struck her colors!"

Sure enough, the freighter's ensign came down, and a white flag of surrender went up to replace it. "Cease fire!" Sam ordered. The turrets stopped at once; the men at the antiaircraft guns needed a few seconds to get the word—or maybe they just didn't want to hear it. That went against the rules, but not against human nature. "Approach to pick up survivors, Mr. Cooley," Sam said. He told the men at the gun turrets

what the destroyer escort was doing, and added, “If you see anybody going near her guns, open up again.”

But the freighter—Sam didn’t suppose she was really the *Karlskrona*—had no more fight in her. Her men were taking to the boats—which, in the North Atlantic, was no joke. Sam ordered nets lowered to let the British sailors come up the *Josephus Daniels*’ side. His own crew, armed with a couple of submachine guns, rifles, pistols, axes, and even some big wrenches, looked like a nineteenth-century boarding party as they took charge of the prisoners. The pharmacist’s mate had groaning wounded men to deal with.

Sam went down to the deck for a closer look at the vanquished enemy. The British skipper, a weary and bedraggled man with a horsy face and bad teeth, recognized him for the destroyer escort’s captain at once. “Well fought, sir,” the limey said, saluting. “Thought we might surprise you, but you maneuvered well—and those bloody guns! Damn me if I think you missed even once.”

“You gave us a nasty start,” Sam said. “You were loaded for bear, all right.” That probably made him sound like Daniel Boone to the Englishman, but he didn’t care. If the freighter’s gunners were better . . . But the best gun crews were bound to be in the Royal Navy. Little jaunts like this would have to take whoever was left, and whoever was left hadn’t been good enough.

“Kind of you to take us aboard, all things considered,” his opposite number said.

“If you’d fired after the white flag went up, I’d’ve sunk you,” Sam said matter-of-factly. “Short of that, though, I wouldn’t leave a ship’s cat in an open boat on the North Atlantic. I’ve been in the Navy better than thirty years. I’ve seen a few things I’d rather not see again, or think about, either.”

“I believe you, sir. I’m grateful all the same,” the Englishman said.

“Gratitude is worth its weight in gold,” Sam said, and the limey flinched. Sam went on, “You and your men are POWs now. We’ll take you back to the USA. When the war’s over, you can go home. For now . . .” *For now,* he thought, *you didn’t blow me to hell and gone. I’ll take that.*

I rving Morrell looked up into the western sky. A snowflake hit him

right between the eyes. “By God, the bastards weren’t lying,” he breathed, and his breath smoked as if he had a cigarette in his mouth. Just this minute, he didn’t, though a pack sat in his pocket.

For once, the weathermen had hit things right on the button. They’d said this early snowstorm would get here now, and they were right. He’d gambled and held up his attack three days to wait for it, and his gamble looked as if it would pay off.

Meadville, Pennsylvania, lay in the foothills of the Alleghenies. Morrell stood on the grounds of Allegheny College. The Georgian and Greek Revival architecture told of timeless elegance and dedication to scholarship. But Confederate bombs and artillery had turned some of the buildings to ruins—not that the Greeks hadn’t wrecked masterpieces in their own wars. And the barrels snorting on the yellowing lawn were not in perfect keeping with an academic atmosphere.

Only a few blocks away stood the world’s biggest zipper factory. Morrell wondered if button manufacturers cursed Meadville whenever they thought of it. That wasn’t his worry, though. He aimed his curses at Jake Featherston, and before long he’d aim them through the barrel of a gun.

He scrambled up into the closest barrel, which was his to command. When the fighting started, he intended to lead from the front. Generals who stayed in back of the line soon lost track of what was really going on. Generals who didn’t stay back of the line often got killed, but Morrell refused to worry about that.

“We just about ready, sir?” asked his gunner, a dark, and darkly clever, corporal named Al Bergeron. He was a good soldier and a good gunner; Morrell missed Michael Pound all the same, and hoped the veteran underofficer was safe. Wherever Pound was, he’d be acting as if he wore three stars, not three stripes.

But Morrell would have to worry about him later, too. “Just about, Frenchy,” he answered. During the Great War, more than a few people with French names changed them to German-sounding ones so their neighbors wouldn’t suspect them. That kind of hysteria hadn’t come again. The Confederate States were the only enemies people flabbled hard about now.

Morrell put on his earphones. This barrel had a fancier wireless setup than any of the rest. He could link up not only to other barrels but

also to artillery, infantry, and aviation circuits. He wondered whether being able to talk to so many people at once was part of the privilege of his rank or part of the price of it.

He connected to the artillery web. “Ready at 0730?” he asked. If he got a no, somebody’s head would roll—H-hour was only fifteen minutes away.

But the answer came back at once: “Ready, sir.” The officer who replied sounded young and excited. Morrell wondered if he’d seen action before. Whether he had or not, he would now.

Those fifteen minutes, like the last fifteen minutes before every attack, seemed to crawl by on their bellies. Corporal Bergeron said, “Almost seems a shame to do this to those damn greasers.”

“Almost—but not quite,” Morrell said dryly. The gunner chuckled. Morrell’s mouth stretched in a grin of savage anticipation. No, he didn’t think it was a shame, not even slightly. If Jake Featherston was stretched so thin that he needed to use second-grade troops from the Empire of Mexico to hold part of his line, he had only himself to blame if the USA tried to stomp the stuffing out of them.

No sooner had that thought crossed Morrell’s mind than the artillery opened up. Even here inside the turret, the thunder was cataclysmic. He’d been hoarding guns as hard as he’d been hoarding barrels. The Mexicans would like things even less.

The barrage went on for a precise hour and a half. As soon as the guns let up, Morrell spoke into the intercom to the driver and then over the webs connecting him to the rest of the barrels and to the infantry. He said the same thing every time: “Let’s go!”

Engine roaring, his barrel rumbled forward. Morrell stuck his head out of the cupola so he could see better. That was a splendid way to get shot. He knew as much. It was the chance he took. If he got another oak-leaf cluster for his Purple Heart, then he did, that was all. He needed to see what was going on, as much as he could. And if he stopped one with his face . . . Well, a general officer’s pension would leave Agnes and Mildred without many worries about money.

Along with the rest of the barrels, his pushed southwest out of Meadville. Some foot soldiers loped along among the big, noisy machines. Others rode in trucks or in lightly armored carriers to keep up more easily. A few infantrymen clambered up onto barrels and let them do the work. That was highly unofficial. Doctrine handed down

from on high—which is to say, from Philadelphia—frowned on it. Riding barrels left soldiers vulnerable to the fire they inevitably drew. But it also got them where they were going faster and fresher than marching would have done. No matter what doctrine the War Department laid down, Morrell liked that.

He knew just when they broke into the Mexicans' lines. The U.S. barrage had come down right on the button. Only a few soldiers in that yellowish khaki were in any shape to fight. Scattered rifle fire and a handful of machine guns greeted the advancing U.S. forces, but that was all. Francisco José's soldiers didn't carry the automatic rifles that made C.S. infantrymen so formidable. They had bolt-action Tredegars, pieces much like U.S. Springfields.

They didn't have barrels. They didn't have much artillery. They didn't have armored personnel carriers. And they didn't have a chance. Morrell had loaded up with a rock in his fist. Now he swung it with all his might.

Here and there, the Mexicans fought bravely. Knots of them held up Morrell's forces wherever they could. Stubborn men who would die before they yielded a position were an asset to any army, and the Empire of Mexico's had its share. But the Mexicans didn't have enough men like that, and the ones they did have couldn't do what they might have done with better equipment. More often than not, the U.S. advance flowed past those stubborn knots to either side. They could be cleaned up at leisure. Meanwhile, the push went on.

"Keep moving!" Whenever Morrell ducked down into the turret, he spread his gospel over the wireless. "Always keep moving. Once we get in among 'em, once we get behind 'em, they'll go to pieces. And then we'll be able to move even faster."

And he had the pleasure of watching his prophecy come true. Till the early afternoon, the enemy soldiers in front of his barrels and infantry did everything they could to stop them and even to throw them back. After that . . . After that, it was like watching ice melt when spring came to a northern river. Once the rot started, it spread fast. By that first nightfall, he was seeing the enemy's backs.

He didn't want to stop for the darkness. He kept going till his driver couldn't see any farther. He sent infantry ahead even after that. And he had the barrels moving again as soon as the first gray showed in the east.

The Mexicans kept trying to fight back early in the second day. But when they saw barrels coming at them out of the swirling snow, a lot of them lost their nerve. Morrell would have lost his nerve, too, trying to stand up against barrels with no more than rifles. Some of the men in the yellowish khaki ran away. Others dropped their rifles and raised their hands. A lot of them looked miserably cold. They didn't have greatcoats, and probably didn't have long johns, either. Down in the Empire of Mexico, they wouldn't have needed them. They were a long way from home.

By the end of that second day, Morrell's barrels had smashed through the crust of enemy resistance. Behind it lay . . . not much. Morrell had a gruesomely good time shooting up a Confederate truck convoy. The big butternut trucks rolled right up to his barrel, sure it had to be on their side even if it was the wrong color.

They found out how wrong they were in a hurry. At Morrell's orders, Frenchy Bergeron wrecked the first truck in the convoy with a well-aimed cannon shell. The second truck tried to go around it. Bergron blasted that one, too, effectively blocking the road. Then he and the bow gunner used their machine guns to shoot up the rest of the trucks. More U.S. barrels came up and joined the fun.

It wasn't much fun for the poor bastards on the receiving end. Soldiers spilled out of some of the trucks and tried to find shelter from the storm of bullets wherever they could. Other trucks carried munitions, not men. When they burned, they sent tracers flying every which way. Standing up in the cupola again, Morrell whooped. Corporal Bergeron got the view through his gunsight. He pounded Morrell gently on the leg, which also amounted to a whoop.

Desperate to escape the trap, some of the trucks went off the road and into the fields on either side. Like their U.S. counterparts, they had four-wheel drive. That gave them some traction on the wet ground, but only some. Great gouts of mud flew from their tires as they struggled forward. While they did, the green-gray barrels went right on shooting at them, and they couldn't shoot back. Without antibarrel cannon, the only weapons foot soldiers had against armor were grenades through the hatches and Featherston Fizzes. They couldn't get close enough to use anything like that here.

Once he'd smashed the column of trucks, Morrell got on the wireless circuit to the barrels closest to his: "Let's get rolling again. We've got to keep moving." He popped up again and cast a wary eye at the sky. So far, the promised storm was still rolling through. When the weather

got better, the Confederates were going to throw anything that could fly at his armored forces. From what he could see, air strikes had the best chance of slowing him down—if anything could. Now that he'd broken through the C.S. line, he saw nothing in the rear that had much chance of doing the job.

As his armored column pushed south and west from Meadville, another, slightly smaller, U.S. force was driving north from Parkersburg, West Virginia. If everything went according to plan, Morrell's men and the troops advancing from West Virginia would clasp hands somewhere in eastern Ohio. And if they did, the Confederate Army infesting Pittsburgh would find itself in a very embarrassing position indeed.

Surrounded. Cut off from reinforcements, except perhaps by air. Cut off from resupply, with the same possible exception. Could Featherston's men fly in enough fuel and ammo to keep a modern army functioning? Morrell didn't know, but this whole two-pronged attack was based on the assumption that it was damned unlikely. And even if the Confederates could at first, would they be able to build transports as fast as U.S. fighters shot them down? He didn't think so.

What *would* he do if he were Jake Featherston? Try to pull out of Pittsburgh and save what he could? Try to break the ring around the city from the outside? Try to do both at once? Did the CSA have the men and machines to do both at once? With every mile his barrels advanced, Irving Morrell doubted that more and more. At the front, Confederate armies remained formidable, even fearsome. But they were like an alligator that went, "I've been sick," in an animated cartoon: all mouth, with no strength anywhere else. If you concentrated on the puny little legs and tail instead of the big end that chomped . . . "Well, let's see how Jake likes this," Morrell murmured, and he rolled on.

D uring the Great War, Chester Martin would never have imagined hitching a ride on a barrel. For one thing, there hadn't been so many of the lumbering monstrosities in the last fight. For another, a Great War barrel going flat out was faster than a man, but not by a whole hell of a lot.

Here at the end of 1942, though, things had changed. Most of Chester's new platoon had attached itself to a platoon of barrels. They rumbled through Pennsylvania—or maybe they were in Ohio by now.

One state didn't look a whole lot different from another, especially when you were crashing along at fifteen or twenty miles an hour.

Every once in a while, the platoon had to fight. Sometimes the men would drop down from the barrels and shoot at startled Confederates. Sometimes they wouldn't bother descending. A PFC from Chicago carried a captured Confederate submachine gun and sprayed bullets around from the back of a barrel. Chester kept thinking he should have been called Vito or something like that, but he was a big blond Pole named Joe Jakimiuk.

What really amazed Chester was the speed of the U.S. advance. "It wasn't like this in the Great War, I'll tell you," he said as he sat by a campfire the second night and ate something alleged to be beef stew out of a can. It bore as much resemblance to what Rita called beef stew as boiled inner tube in motor-oil gravy, but it filled him up. "Back then, even in a breakthrough we only made a few miles a day, and nobody figured out how to do even that much till 1917."

"Better barrels and better trucks now." That was Second Lieutenant Delbert Wheat, the platoon commander. He spoke with the flat vowels and harsh consonants of Kansas. Odds were he hadn't been born in 1917. Even so, he wasn't an obnoxious twerp like the other shavetails Chester had met since reenlisting. He actually seemed to have some idea of what he was doing—and when he wasn't sure, he didn't act as if asking questions would cost him a couple of inches off his cock. If he lived and didn't get maimed, he wouldn't stay a second lieutenant long. Chester could see a big future ahead of him.

For now, Wheat paused and lit a cigarette. Chester's nostrils twitched at the fragrant smoke. "You lifted a pack off of one of Featherston's fuckers, sir," he said. "The smokes we get with our rations don't smell that good."

"Right the first time, Sergeant." Wheat grinned. His looks were as corn-fed as his accent: he was a husky blond guy, good-sized but not quite so big as Joe Jakimiuk, with a narrower face and sharper features than the PFC's. He held out the pack to Chester. "Want one?"

"Sure. Thanks a lot, sir," Chester answered. A lot of lieutenants would have gone right on smoking the good stuff themselves without a thought for their noncoms. Some officers acted as if they were a superior breed of man just because of their metal rank badges. Wheat didn't have that kind of arrogance—another sign he'd do well for himself if he stayed healthy.

“Sentries all around our position tonight,” he told Chester. “No telling which way the Confederates will come at us. We’re really and truly in their rear, so they could come from any direction at all.”

“Yes, sir,” Chester said. “I’ll take care of it.” In the enemy rear! He didn’t think that had ever happened in the Great War: not to him, anyway. You could beat back the Confederates, but get behind them? Retreating troops had always been able to fall back faster than advancing troops could pursue them through the wreckage of war. Now . . . Now this armored thrust had pierced the zone of devastation and found nothing much behind it.

“You men will want to sleep while you can,” Lieutenant Wheat told his soldiers. “I don’t know how much we’re going to get from here on out.”

“Listen to him, guys,” Chester said. “He knows what he’s talking about.”

He curled up in his own bedroll not long after he stubbed out the mild, flavorful Confederate cigarette. Exhaustion blackjacked him moments later. He forgot the chilly air and the hard, damp ground and everything else. He wished he could have slept for a week. What was hard on the young guys was a hell of a lot harder for somebody of his vintage.

Instead of a week, he got till the end of the wee small hours. Jakimiuk shook him awake, saying, “Sorry, Sarge, but we’re gonna move out.”

“Coffee,” Chester croaked, like a man in the desert wishing for water. The instant coffee that came with rations was nasty, but it did help pry his eyelids open. And it was hot, which was also welcome.

Ham and eggs out of a tin can made the beef stew from the night before seem delicious by comparison. Chester shrugged. The ration would keep him going another few hours. Maybe he’d eat something better then. The really scary thing was, the soldiers who wore butternut had it worse.

As the sky grayed toward dawn, the barrels the platoon had been riding roared to life. Chester clambered aboard the one he’d ridden the past two days. The barrel’s commander popped out of his cupola like a jack-in-the-box. He was a sergeant, too, though a younger man than Chester. “We going to give them another boot in the balls today?” he asked cheerfully.

“Here’s hoping, anyway.” Chester wasn’t about to commit the sin of optimism. Justifiably or not, he feared it would jinx everything.

No one would see the sun even when it rose. Clouds filled the sky. They couldn’t seem to make up their mind whether to give rain or snow or sleet. Since they couldn’t decide, they spat out a little of each at random. Even when nothing was coming down, the wind out of the northwest had knives in it. Chester would have disliked the weather much more than he did if it hadn’t kept C.S. Asskickers from diving on him.

“Here we go!” Lieutenant Wheat shouted when the barrels moved out. He might have been a kid on a Ferris wheel at a county fair. Chester suspected he wouldn’t take long to lose that boyish enthusiasm. Once you’d been through a few fights, once you’d seen a few horrors, you might be ready to go on with the war, but you weren’t likely to be eager anymore.

A train ahead chugged east. *On its way to Pittsburgh?* Chester wondered. He couldn’t think of any other reason why an engine pulling a lot of passenger cars should be on its way through what had been territory firmly under the Confederate thumb.

The barrel commander evidently decided the same thing. The big, snorting machine stopped. The turret—one of the massive new models, with a bigger gun—slewed to the left, till it bore on the locomotive. When the cannon fired, the noise was like the clap of doom. Hearing it, a man with a hangover might have his head fall off—and if he didn’t, he might wish he did. The shot was perfect. It went right through the boiler. Great clouds of steam rose from the engine. Only momentum kept it moving after that; it wasn’t going anywhere under its own power.

Other barrels started shelling and shooting up the passenger cars. Chester had an abstract sympathy for the soldiers in butternut who tumbled out like so many ants when their hill was kicked. The Confederates had been going toward battle, yes. They’d been thinking about it, worrying about it, no doubt. But they hadn’t expected it, not yet. Too bad for them. Life was what you got, not what you expected.

“Come on, boys,” Chester said to the men on the barrel with him. “Let’s make them even happier than they are already.”

They got down and started shooting at the dismayed Confederates from behind the barrels and whatever other cover they could find. The

machine guns in the turret and at the bow of each barrel raked the scattering soldiers in butternut, too. Every so often, for variety's sake, a cannon would lob a high-explosive shell or two into the Confederates.

A few bullets came back at the U.S. barrels and foot soldiers, but only a few. A lot of the Confederates probably hadn't even been able to grab their weapons before they spilled from the train. Some of the ones who had were bound to be casualties. And others, instead of returning fire, were doing their best to disappear, keeping the battered railroad cars between themselves and their tormentors as they ran for the woods.

Chester wasn't so sure he wouldn't have done the same thing. Sometimes going forward, or even staying where you were, was asking to be killed. He'd retreated more than once in the Great War, and by Fredericksburg not so long ago. He wouldn't have been surprised if he did it again before too long.

Now, though, he was going forward. That was better. He didn't suppose even the Confederates could disagree with him. They'd done more advancing than retreating in this war. He hoped they enjoyed going the other way.

The sergeant in charge of the barrel he rode popped out of the cupola again. "We've got orders to get moving," the other noncom said. "Faster we put a ring around Pittsburgh, faster we can pound Featherston's fuckers inside to pieces."

Somebody was driving the U.S. forces as if a pack of wolves ran right behind them. Chester didn't mind. They probably needed driving. If they weren't driven, they wouldn't do what needed doing. Even if they were, they might not.

On they went. Every so often, Confederate soldiers would shoot at them. That caused a few casualties, but only slight delays. Machine-gun and small-arms fire didn't make the barrels slow down. They had somewhere important to go, and they wanted to get there in a hurry. More foot soldiers would be coming along behind them, and artillerymen, too. People like that could deal with the odd set of holdouts.

From everything Chester heard, Featherston's men and barrels fought that way when they stormed through Ohio to Lake Erie, and then again this summer when they smashed east to Pittsburgh. He didn't

think the United States had ever done anything like this before. He wondered why not.

The barrels and the men who rode them and the men who tried to keep up with them did have to slow down when they passed through towns. That usually wasn't because Confederate soldiers made stands there. Most towns held hardly any Confederates. But the people who hadn't fled ahead of the advancing Confederate tide came out in droves to welcome the U.S. Army's return.

Chester got handed eggs, an apple pie, a chunk of home-cured ham, and a pouch of pipe tobacco. He got snorts of booze ranging from good Scotch to raw corn liquor. He got his hand shook and his back slapped. Several pretty girls kissed him. What Rita didn't know wouldn't hurt her. If he could have stayed in any one place for a little while . . . But the speed of the advance helped hold him to the straight and narrow.

Locals hauled down the Stars and Bars and burned it. Up went the Stars and Stripes in its place. Chester hoped the CSA didn't retake any of these towns. People would catch it if the Confederates did. They didn't seem to care. "Them bastards would just as soon shoot you as look at you," an old man said. "My pa, he fought 'em in the War of Secession. He always said they fought fair then. No more. They hanged one poor son of a bitch for thumbing his nose at 'em when they rode down the street. Hanged him from a lamppost, like he was a nigger."

In the field, the Confederates played by the rules most of the time. Up till now, Chester hadn't seen what they did behind the lines. It didn't make him like them any better. It did make him think the atrocity stories he heard were more likely to be true.

Lafayette, Ohio, was a little town notable only for the red-brick tavern in the middle of it—the place looked older than God. As Chester's barrel paused in the village square, more green-gray machines rumbled up from the south. Barrel crews and the infantrymen with them exchanged backslaps and cigarettes. "Lafayette," Chester said happily. "Here we are!" They'd encircled the Confederates. Now—would the ring hold?

XVIII

M r. President, sir, we have got to break out from Pittsburgh," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said. "We have got to do it right now, right this minute, the sooner the better, while the machines still have enough gas to go at least partway."

Jake Featherston scowled at the head of the Confederate General Staff. "We're doing all right in there," he said.

"We are *now,* Mr. President," Forrest said. "We've still got ammo. We've still got fuel. When we start running low . . ." He shook his head. "And it won't be long, either. They've cut the supply routes, same as we cut the USA in half last summer."

"If we can't get the shit in by road or railroad, we'll damn well fly it in," Jake said. "That'll keep the men fighting."

"Sir, we've got a whole army in there," Forrest replied, shaking his head. "No offense, sir, but no way in hell we can bring in enough by air to keep that many men going."

"That isn't what the flyboys tell me," Jake said. "I've talked with 'em. They say they're up for the job."

"They're lying through their teeth, Mr. President, on account of they're scared to tell you you truth," Nathan Bedford Forrest III declared. "You tell me who you talked to, and I'll personally go punch the son of a bitch in the nose."

"You'll do no such thing. They had diagrams and everything—showed just what they could do," Featherston said. "Long as they can do it, the boys up there can keep fighting, right? And you can work out some kind of way to break through to 'em. How many damnyankees can there be in that ring, anyhow?"

"Too many," Forrest said morosely. "They hit us where we were weakest and punched on through."

"Goddamn Mexicans. I ought to have Francisco José's guts for garters. If he had any guts, by God, I would, too." Jake was not only furious, he wanted to blame someone—anyone—else for what was going on in Pennsylvania and Ohio. That way, the blame wouldn't come down on his own head.

The chief of the General Staff didn't seem interested in casting blame: a blessing and an annoyance at the same time. "Sir, we just didn't have enough of our own people to go around. That's the trouble with fighting a country bigger than we are," he said. "That's why we've got to get as many of our men in and around Pittsburgh out as we can. If we lose them all—"

"They'll take plenty of damnyankees with 'em," Jake broke in.

"Yes, sir." Forrest sounded patient. He also sounded worried. "But if we trade men one for one with the USA, we lose, on account of they've got more men than we do. Pretty soon we just run dry, and they keep going. That's the point of everything we've done up till now: to make them pay more than we do. If that whole big army's stuck inside of Pittsburgh, it can't play that game anymore."

Jake Featherston grunted. However little he wanted to see that, Forrest's picture left him little choice. But trying to break out of Pittsburgh would be a disastrous admission of defeat. "What can we get together in Ohio?" he asked. "What can we use to break through the ring and get those people out?"

Forrest frowned. "It won't be easy, Mr. President. We put the best of what we had into the attacking force. That's what you're supposed to do, sir: make the *Schwerpunkt* as strong as you can."

"Yeah, yeah. Don't you go spouting German at me," Jake said. "Goddamn Kaiser's got troubles of his own. You'd better believe he does. If we can break in far enough for the men in Pittsburgh to break out and link up, that'll be all right." He shook his head. "It won't be all right, but we can take it. There's politics in this damn war, too, don't forget."

"All right, sir. If that's all I can get from you, that's all I can get," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said. "I'll . . . see what we can put together. And the air resupply will do the best job it can. If you'll excuse me . . ." He saluted and hurried away.

"Fuck," Featherston muttered. He scowled at the map on the wall of his underground and armored office. He would have been tougher on Forrest if he hadn't seen at once that the head of the General Staff wasn't alibiing—he was telling the truth. Where the devil *could* they scrape up enough men to relieve Pittsburgh? Wherever it was, they had to do it pretty damn quick.

He turned his head to the bigger map on the far wall, the one that

showed the whole frontier from Sonora to Virginia. He could yank some soldiers from. . . .

“Fuck,” he said again, louder this time. The damnyankees were mounting an attack on Lubbock. He didn’t think it would get there, but the town had to be held. They were kicking up their heels in Sequoyah. A column from Missouri was pushing down into Arkansas. It wasn’t a real big column, but it was big enough to keep him from taking men out of the state. General MacArthur was getting uppity just a little north of Richmond, too. The Confederates had already pulled men from the Army of Northern Virginia to load up farther west. They couldn’t very well pull more.

Featherston repeated the obscenity yet again. Early in the war, somebody’d said that whoever could keep two big campaigns going at once would probably win. Both sides seemed to have taken that as gospel. Now, suddenly and painfully, Jake saw it wasn’t necessarily so.

The damnyankees had done one big thing. They were also doing a bunch of little things. By itself, not one of those little things mattered. Added together, though, they kept the Confederates from properly countering the big thrust. It was like being gnawed by rats instead of eaten by a bear. It was ignominious. It was humiliating.

You ended up just as dead either way. That was the point, and he’d taken too damn long to see it. Something, somewhere, would have to give. That was all there was to it. While Jake eyed the map with the big picture, he also scowled at the red pins stuck into the interior of the CSA: from South Carolina all the way west to Louisiana, and some in the mountains of Cuba, too. They marked spots where Negro guerrillas were kicking up their heels.

He swore so foully, he took a hasty look toward the door to make sure Nathan Bedford Forrest III had closed it behind him. He didn’t want Lulu hearing and wagging a finger at him. That was pretty funny when you got right down to it: the most powerful man the Confederate States had ever known, afraid of his own secretary. But Featherston wasn’t laughing at all.

If the blacks in the country had just stayed quiet, he would have had several more divisions to throw at the damnyankees. He wouldn’t be jumping up and down now about where to find men to try to bail out the force trapped in Pittsburgh.

“Those bastards’ll pay,” he growled. “Oh, Lord, how they’ll pay.” He got on the telephone and called Ferdinand Koenig. Ferd had a new secretary, one with a hell of a sultry voice. Jake wondered if the rest of her lived up to it. If it did, Koenig might be finding after-hours work for her, too.

“Office of the Attorney General,” she purred, as if she’d just got out of bed.

Featherston didn’t have time for that, though. “This is the President,” he said. “Get Ferd on the line right this second, you hear?”

“Y—Yes, sir.” Most of that sexy lilt disappeared—most, but not all.

“Ferd Koenig.” The Attorney General’s deep, gruff voice sounded the way it always did. Jake tried to imagine Koenig talking in soft, throaty tones. He couldn’t do it.

“Listen, we have got to get rid of more niggers faster,” he said without preamble. “The damn guerrillas are a running sore. We’ve got to get rid of it, or it’s going to screw us for the rest of the war.”

“Camps are running pretty close to capacity,” Koenig said dubiously.

“Bump it up,” Jake said. “Build more bathhouses. Build more trucks. Hell, build more camps. Whatever it takes, but bump it up. And fast.”

“All right, sir. I’ll handle that,” Koenig said, and he was a man who did what he said he would do. He was an old Party buddy, one of the last ones Jake had, but he was also damn good at his work. He went on, “The more we step it up against the coons, the more they’re liable to try and fight back, you know. That’ll cost us men who could be at the front.”

He was thinking along with Jake, but Jake was a little bit ahead of him. Jake hoped he was, anyhow. “You handle your end of it, Ferd,” he said. “I’ll take care of the other—or if I don’t, somebody’s gonna be mighty goddamn sorry, and it won’t be me or you.”

“I’ll do everything I can. The camps will do everything they can,” Koenig promised.

“Good. That’s what I need to hear. Freedom!” Featherston hung up. His next call was to the Secretary of State. He talked with Herbert Walker much less often than with Ferdinand Koenig. The Secretary of State was a real diplomat, and always looked uncomfortable wearing a

Freedom Party uniform instead of striped pants and cutaway coat.

Walker knew better than to keep Jake waiting, though. “Yes, Mr. President? What can I do for you today, sir?”

Again, Featherston came straight to the point: “I need another five divisions of Mexicans from Francisco José, and I need ’em yesterday.”

“Mr. President!” The Secretary of State sounded horrified. “After what’s happened to the men he sent you before, you’ll be lucky to get the time of day out of him, let alone anything more.”

“Tell him I won’t use them against the damnyankees. Promise him on a stack of Bibles—it’s the truth,” Jake said. “Tell him I want ’em for . . . for internal security. That’s what it is, all right. I’m gonna sic ’em on the damn uppity niggers, free up our own men to fight against the USA. That’s what I should’ve done with the last batch of Mexicans, only I didn’t think of it then. Sometimes you’re smarter the second time around.”

“Well, I’ll try, sir,” Walker said. “On that basis, I will try. Even so, I don’t know what the answer will be.”

“We’ve got Mexicans coming up here to get work now, lots of ’em,” Jake said. “Tell Francisco José that if he doesn’t want to give us a hand, we won’t just seal the border—we’ll ship the ones who are already here back to Mexico.”

“The way things are, that’s liable to hurt us worse than the Mexicans,” Walker said.

Jake understood what he meant: the Mexicans were doing the scutwork Negroes had done in the CSA for generations. They were also filling more and more factory slots white men would have taken if they weren’t off fighting a war. Even so, he said, “Tell him anyway, by God. If we don’t have Mexicans giving us some help with the work, it’s a pain in the ass. If Francisco José’s got a pile of Mexicans who can’t get *any* work sitting around, it’s a civil war waiting to happen. You reckon he doesn’t know it? He’s dumb, but he’s not that dumb.”

“All right, sir. I’ll tell him. Internal security. It’s a good phrase,” the Secretary of State said.

“He damn well better say yes,” Jake said. A small gasp came from the other end of the line. Hastily, he added, “It’ll be his hard luck if he doesn’t, not yours. I didn’t mean that.”

“Thank you, Mr. President. I’m glad you didn’t. And now I’d better get on with it.” When Jake didn’t say no, Walker hung up. Jake chuckled harshly. He could still make people afraid of him, an essential part of the business of ruling.

But the chuckle cut off as he looked from one situation map to the other. How was he supposed to make the damnyankees afraid of him? He’d hurt them badly. He’d stopped their first big counterattack. Now, though, they were running with the ball, and he was going to have a devil of a time tackling them.

A bner Dowling had spent too long either retreating before the Confederates or banging his head into a stone wall. Now, for the first time since gaining a command of his own, he was going forward—and he was enjoying it, too. So what if the force he had consisted mostly of what nobody else in the USA wanted? The force trying to stop him consisted mostly of what nobody else in the CSA wanted. By the way it had performed so far, it was even more raggedy than his own.

His new headquarters lay in the grand metropolis—say, a thousand people—of Sudan, Texas. He’d been disappointed when one of the locals told him it was named for the kind of grass that fed the local cattle, not for the place in Africa. He supposed the grass was named for the place in Africa, but it didn’t seem the same.

Sudan grass didn’t cover everything. Not far away, a brownish-yellow ridge line ran east and west. It was called, bluntly, the Sand Hills. People from the north side of the hills were supposed to vote differently from those to the south, and each group was supposed to have its own little social sets. Dowling lost not a moment’s sleep about that. People on both sides of the Sand Hills were Confederates, which was everything he needed to know about them.

His line stood about four miles farther down C.S. Highway 84, halfway between Sudan and Amherst, a town of about the same size. Another eight or ten miles down the road was Littlefield, which was the next size up. Lubbock lay thirty-five miles southeast of Littlefield, and Lubbock, with more than 20,000 people, was a real city. If he could take it, people as far away as Richmond would jump and shout and swear.

And if he couldn’t . . . “News from Pennsylvania and Ohio’s better than what we’ve heard before,” he said to Major Toricelli.

“Yes, sir,” his adjutant agreed. “Now we get to see how tough the enemy is when things don’t go his way.”

Dowling coughed. He wished the younger man hadn’t put it that way. He’d seen the Confederates in adversity during the last war, and they’d fought like sons of bitches. They *were* sons of bitches, as far as he was concerned, but that didn’t mean they weren’t brave and tough and stubborn.

“We’re playing some little part in what’s going on there, too,” he said. “I like that.”

“Yes, sir. Me, too,” Angelo Toricelli said. “Wherever they get reinforcements from, they won’t get ’em from here. We’re keeping ’em too busy for that.”

“We may even grab Lubbock,” Dowling said. “I didn’t think we could when we got started, but you know what?”

“The Confederates around here are even more screwed up than we are?” Toricelli suggested.

“That’s just exactly what I was going to say.” Dowling raised an eyebrow. “By now, you’ve signed my name with ‘by direction’ after it so many times, you really are starting to think like me. No offense, of course.”

“Did I say anything like that, sir?” Toricelli looked and sounded so innocent, Dowling wouldn’t have been surprised to see a halo suddenly start glowing above his head. The general commanding Eleventh Army chuckled under his breath. If his adjutant had started thinking like him, he could also start thinking like his adjutant. He’d been an adjutant for years, while Toricelli would have to wait for the next war against the Confederates for his turn as a CO.

The next war against the Confederates . . . The noises Dowling made under his breath when that thought crossed his mind weren’t nearly so amused. When the Great War ended, he’d hoped the USA would never have to worry about the CSA again. He’d been too optimistic once. He would be a fool to make the same mistake twice. Nothing kept a man from making a fool of himself now and again. Dowling did try not to make a fool of himself that way too often.

Half a dozen artillery rounds came down a few hundred yards short of Sudan. “They’re probably after you, sir,” Major Toricelli said.

“They’re a pack of idiots if they are,” Dowling replied. “This attack doesn’t need Julius Caesar or Napoleon at the top. As long as I keep the boys in butternut too busy to head east, I’m a hero.”

“A regular Robert E. Lee,” Toricelli said with malice aforethought. Dowling scowled, his severity more or less real. If his Confederate opposite number talked about officers to emulate, Lee’s name would likely be the first one in his mouth. Why not? Lee trounced every U.S. general he faced in the War of Secession.

When the War of Secession was new, just as Virginia was going from the USA to the CSA, Abe Lincoln offered Lee command of U.S. forces. Had Lee said yes, the USA might well be one country now. Lincoln might not share with James G. Blaine the dubious distinction of being the only Republican Presidents. They also shared the even more dubious distinction of starting wars—and losing them.

Dowling tried to remember. Wasn’t it during Blaine’s term that Lincoln had pulled out of the Republican Party and gone over to the Socialists? He thought so. The Republicans had never been the same since. Now Dowling, a thoroughgoing Democrat, had to hope the Socialists hadn’t started a war they were going to lose. He had to do whatever he could to help make sure they didn’t lose it, too.

More shells crashed down southeast of Sudan. These were closer. Dowling and Major Toricelli both raised eyebrows. Toricelli said, “Sir, I move we adjourn to the storm cellar. You may not think you’re important, but it looks like they do.”

“Damn nuisance,” Dowling grumbled, but he didn’t say no. An unlit kerosene lantern hung on the wall by the trap door to the cellar. Tornadoes tore across the West Texas prairie every now and again. Most houses in these parts—and on the U.S. side of the line in New Mexico, too—had shelters that could save lives . . . if you were lucky enough or quick enough to get into them fast enough.

Toricelli ceremoniously lifted the trap door. “After you, sir.” A couple of the wooden stairs creaked under Dowling’s weight, but they held. Toricelli followed him down and closed the door behind them. “I’ve got a match, sir,” he said, and lit one.

Dowling hadn’t checked to see if the lamp held fuel. “Just my luck if it’s dry,” he said. But it wasn’t. Buttery light pushed back shadows. It wasn’t very bright, but it would do. Four milking stools comprised the cellar’s furniture. He set the lamp on one and perched himself on

another. It also creaked.

“We’ve done what we can do, sir,” Major Toricelli said. One more set of booms came in, some of them very loud and close. “I’m glad we did, too,” he added.

“Well, now that you mention it, so am I,” Dowling allowed. His adjutant smiled. Dowling didn’t think of himself as particularly brave. General Custer, now, had been as brave a man as any ever born, even up into his seventies and eighties. Dowling admired that without being convinced it made Custer a better commander. It might have made him a worse one: since he didn’t worry about his own safety, he also didn’t worry much about his men’s. Daniel MacArthur also had as much courage as any four ordinary people needed, which didn’t make him any less a vain blowhard or any more a commanding general in command of himself. If you weren’t a hopeless coward—more to the point, if the soldiers you led didn’t know you were a hopeless coward—you could function as a commanding officer.

More shells crashed down in Sudan. “I hope the sentries outside the house are all right,” Toricelli said. “They’ve got foxholes, but even so . . .”

“Yes, even so,” Dowling said. “We ought to be going after the Confederates’ guns. They must have pushed them well forward to land shells this far back of the line. Our own artillery should be able to pound on them.”

“Here’s hoping,” his adjutant said. “Do you want me to go up and get on the telephone with our batteries?”

“No, no, no.” Dowling shook his head. “If the people in charge of them can’t figure that out for themselves, they don’t deserve to have their jobs.”

“That’s always a possibility, too.” Toricelli had seen enough incompetents in shoulder straps to know what a real possibility it was.

So had Abner Dowling. “If they just sit around and waste the chance, that will tell us what we need to know about them,” he said. “And if they do just sit around, we’ll have some new officers in those slots by this time tomorrow, by God.”

“What do we do with the clodhoppers, then?” Toricelli asked. “Not always simple or neat to court-martial a man for moving slower than he should.”

“You’re right—a lot of the time, it’s more trouble than it’s worth,” Dowling agreed. “But somebody who can’t do what he needs to when the chips are down shouldn’t be face-to-face with the enemy. We damn well can transfer people like that out of here. As long as they’re in charge of the coast-defense batteries of Montana, they don’t do much harm.”

“The—” Major Toricelli broke off and sent him a reproachful stare. “Every so often, the devil inside you comes out, doesn’t he?”

“Who, me?” Dowling said, innocent as a mustachioed baby. His adjutant laughed out loud.

About ten minutes later, the Confederate shelling suddenly stopped. “Maybe some of our people had a rush of brains to the head,” Toricelli said.

“Here’s hoping.” Dowling’s devil must still have been loose, for he went on, “ ‘Hmm. They’re shooting at us. What should I do? Why, I’ll —I’ll shoot back!’ ” He snapped his fingers as if that were a brilliant idea arrived at after weeks or maybe months of research. In tones more like the ones he usually used, he went on, “If we need to send people to West Point or Harvard to figure that out, Lord help us.”

“No, sir,” Toricelli said. “If we sent people to West Point or Harvard and they *can’t* figure that out, Lord help us. And some of them can’t. That’s probably why we’ve got coast-defense batteries in Montana.”

“Wouldn’t be a bit surprised.” Dowling picked up the lantern and started up the stairs. “Let’s see if they’ve blown Sudan to hell and gone. I don’t suppose many people will miss it if they have.”

No shells had landed on the house. When Dowling went outside, he found the sentries just coming out of their holes in the ground. They saluted him and then went back to brushing themselves off.

An irate local shouted at him: “You damnyankee son of a bitch, you trying to get me killed?”

“I don’t know why you’re blaming me. I didn’t shoot at you. Jake Featherston’s men did,” Dowling answered.

“The hell you say!” The Texan wouldn’t believe a word of it. “We used to have to belong to the USA when y’all called this place Houston. Jake Featherston done gave us back our freedom.” The last word wasn’t quite the Party howl, but it came close.

“Watch how you talk to the general, buddy,” one of the sentries warned, swinging his Springfield toward the local.

“It’s all right, Hopkins,” Dowling said. By the look on the sentry’s face, it wasn’t even close to all right. Dowling turned back to the Texan. “Jake Featherston gave you *this*—all of it. If he was as tough and smart as he said he was, it never could have happened, right? Since it *has* happened, he’s not so tough and he’s not so smart, right?”

Somehow, that didn’t make the unhappy civilian any happier. Somehow, Abner Dowling hadn’t thought it would. And somehow, he couldn’t have cared less.

A bout one day in three, the skies above central Ohio cleared. Those were the days when Confederate dive bombers and fighters struck savagely at the U.S. soldiers in and around Lafayette. Chester Martin liked being strafed and bombed no better than anyone else in his right mind.

But the U.S. position was a lot stronger than it had been when troops moving southwest out of Pennsylvania joined hands with men coming up from West Virginia. Antiaircraft guns followed close on the heels of barrels and hard-driving soldiers. They weren’t much use against Hound Dogs; the C.S. fighters more often than not struck and then vanished. But Asskickers, slower and clumsier, paid a high price for screaming down on U.S. entrenchments.

And fighters with the U.S. eagle in front of crossed swords came overhead as often as their C.S. counterparts did. They were a match for Hound Dogs and more than a match for Asskickers. Confederate aircraft hurt the men in green-gray down on the ground, but the Confederates hurt themselves, too, and badly.

“How many airplanes can they throw away to soften us up?” Chester asked, scooping hash out of a ration can with a spoon. He sat by a campfire with several other men from the platoon. Banks of earth shielded the fire from any lurking C.S. snipers.

“That’s only part of the question.” Lieutenant Delbert Wheat lit a cigarette. It smelled good, which meant it was Confederate. After taking a drag, he went on, “The other part is, when do they counterattack on the ground? That’s got to be what they’re softening us up for.”

Chester nodded. He'd been thinking the same thing ever since the linkup here. "I would have looked for them to try it already, sir," he said. "I wonder why they haven't."

"Only one answer I can think of," Lieutenant Wheat said. "They aren't strong enough to bring it off."

"They'll be sorry if they wait around much longer," Chester said. "They may be getting stronger, but so are we." Not far away from the fire lay the wreckage of a downed Asskicker, the crumpled tail pointing pathetically toward the sky.

Del Wheat's smile made his mouth crooked. "And you're sorry for this because . . . ?"

Chester laughed. "Not me, sir. Not even a little bit. But this is the first time I've seen 'em where it doesn't look like they know what they want to do. Makes me suspicious—know what I mean?" He'd seen in the last war that the Confederates could be beaten, that their plans didn't always work. But to find them without any plans . . . That struck him as a more typical U.S. failing.

"They were taking a chance when they struck at Pittsburgh," Wheat said. "Taking it away or even wrecking it hurts the USA. Maybe they've gone and wrecked themselves, too, though."

"Here's hoping," Chester said.

Rain and a little sleet came in the next morning. That meant the Mules and the Asskickers would stay away till the weather got better. It didn't mean the throb of airplane engines left the sky. Up above the clouds, Confederate transports were doing what they could to keep Jake Featherston's surrounded army supplied.

The antiaircraft guns near Lafayette boomed, firing by what one gunner called earsight. It would take a lot of luck to knock down any airplanes that way. As long as the guns had plenty of ammo, though, why not put it in the air? Shoot off enough and you were bound to hit something sooner or later.

Besides, the ring around the Confederates trapped in Pittsburgh was getting thicker as the USA rushed more troops through the gaps the men and barrels in green-gray had torn in the C.S. flank defenses. These weren't the only antiaircraft guns that would be shooting at the cargo planes on their way to Pennsylvania—far from it. If they didn't go down in flames here, they might yet farther east.

And U.S. fighters also prowled above the clouds. Transports weren't made to go fast and be nimble, any more than buses were. If fighters attacked them, their best hope lay in how much damage they could take before they fell out of the sky.

Sometimes the Confederate transports had Hound Dogs of their own to escort them to the target and drive off U.S. Wright fighters. Sometimes they didn't. When they didn't, they paid for it.

"Why don't the Confederates send escorts along all the time?" Chester asked when a burning transport crashed less than half a mile from his foxhole.

"Well, I don't know for sure, but I think I can make a pretty fair guess," Lieutenant Wheat answered.

"Sir?" Chester said. He'd served under a couple of platoon commanders whose opinions he didn't want, but who insisted on giving them anyhow. Del Wheat wasn't like that. Some of the things he had to say were worth hearing, but he didn't make a big deal out of them. Those other guys seemed to think they were the Pope speaking *ex cathedra.*

"Well, my guess is that the Confederate States don't have enough airplanes—or maybe enough pilots—to be able to do all the things they'd like to do," Wheat said. "Now they can do this, now they can do that—but it doesn't look like they can do this *and* that at the same time."

Chester thought about it. After a moment, he nodded. "That does make sense, yes, sir." He paused again, then resumed: "Getting that cargo into Pittsburgh is pretty important for them right now. If they can't take care of that because of everything else they've got going on, maybe they bit off more than they can chew."

"That's true. Sergeant. Maybe they did." Lieutenant Wheat looked like a cat contemplating a saucer of cream.

Civilians came from C.S.-occupied territory farther west. They claimed the Confederates there were building up for an attack on the U.S. ring. Lieutenant Wheat listened to them and sent them on to Intelligence officers back at division HQ. "You're not flabbling much about this," Chester remarked.

"Nope, not me," the platoon commander said. "If the enemy does try to come through here, we'll do our damnedest to stop him. That's all

we can do. But what do you want to bet that some of those so-called civilians are really Confederate plants, and they're trying to make us jump at shadows?"

"Ah," Chester said. "Well, sir, since you put it that way, I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

"Neither would I," Delbert Wheat said. "So I'll worry when my superiors tell me to, but not till then."

Chester did notice that some of the ammunition coming in for the antiaircraft guns had the black-painted tips of armor-piercing rounds. The Confederates used their antiaircraft guns against barrels with vicious effect. Imitation was the sincerest, and most deadly, kind of flattery.

Not long before Christmas, word came down from on high that the Confederates would be coming soon. The United States had taken advantage of the weather to break through in November. A new snowstorm might give the Confederates the same sort of extra concealment.

The C.S. bombardment had gas shells in it. They were less deadly in cold weather, and gas masks more nearly tolerable—unless your mask froze up. That didn't mean Chester wanted to put on his mask. Want it or not, he did. He'd seen gas casualties in the Great War, and a few this time, too. Getting shot was bad enough. He knew just how bad it was from twofold experience. By everything he knew except that direct experience, getting gassed was worse.

As soon as the shelling let up, Lieutenant Wheat shouted, "Be ready!" Up and down the U.S. line, that same cry rang out. The troops in green-gray had the advantage of standing behind the Tuscarawas River. Chester hoped that would mean something. The Confederates had more practice crossing in the face of resistance than any Great War army had.

Where Chester's platoon was stationed, the river, which ran mostly north and south, took an east-west bend. Instead of pressing down on that east-west length, the soldiers in butternut trundled past it to hit the next north-south stretch. "They're giving us their flank!" Wheat exclaimed in amazement.

True, the Confederates did stay out of effective rifle range of the men on the south bank of the Tuscarawas. But several of their barrels trundled along only a few hundred yards from the antiaircraft guns

that could also fire against ground targets. When the gunners got targets that artillerymen mostly only dreamt of, they made the most of them. Four or five barrels went up in flames in a few minutes' time. U.S. machine guns and riflemen harried the crewmen bailing out of the machines. They were shooting at long range, but with enough bullets in the air some probably struck home.

Some barrels paused, presented their glacis plates to their tormentors, and fired back. Others scooted farther north, so the U.S. guns wouldn't bear on them any more. Artillery fire fell around those antiaircraft guns. Sometimes it fell on them. Had the weather been better, Asskickers would have gone after them one by one. With clouds huddling low, though, dive bombers were liable to fly straight into the ground instead of pulling up in time.

When yet another Confederate barrel brewed up because it incautiously came too close to the U.S. antiaircraft guns, Chester yelled and pounded the dirt at the front of his foxhole. "Those butternut bastards aren't buying anything cheap today!" he yelled.

But he could see only his little corner of the fight. Early in the afternoon, orders came to fall back to the east. "Why?" somebody said indignantly. "We're pounding the crap out of 'em here!"

"Here, yes," Lieutenant Wheat said. "But Featherston's fuckers are over the Tuscarawas south of Coshocton—south and west of here. If we don't give up some ground, they'll hit us in the flank and enfilade us."

Taking enfilading fire was like getting your T crossed in a naval battle: all the enemy's firepower bore on you, but most of yours wouldn't bear on him. It was, in other words, a damn good recipe for getting killed.

"Have we got positions farther east that face west instead of north?" Chester asked.

"Good question, Sergeant," Del Wheat said. "We'll both find out at the same time." He paused. "I hope we do. We must have known this was coming. If we *didn't* get ready for it, then we've got the same old muddle up at the top."

When they came to zigzag trenches hastily dug and bulldozed out of fields, Chester felt like cheering. Somebody with stars on his shoulder straps could actually see a step or two ahead. That made Chester think things might go better than he'd expected.

The Confederates who came up against those trenches went to earth in a hurry when a fierce blast of fire met them. More than a few U.S. soldiers carried captured C.S. automatic rifles for extra firepower. They had to get ammunition from dead enemy soldiers, but there'd been a lot of them around.

Before long, Chester and his comrades needed to fall back again. Again, though, they fell back into prepared positions. In spite of retreating, he felt more confident. The Confederates could overrun any one position, but each one cost them. How many could they overrun before they started running out of men to do it?

* * *

N ot far from Ellaville, Georgia, ran a stretch of highway locally called the Memorial Mile. Marble stelae stood by the side of the road. Brass plaques mounted on the marble commemorated Sumter County soldiers who'd served in the Great War. WIA by a name meant the soldier had been wounded in action; KIA by a name meant he'd been killed.

The Negro guerrillas who'd attached Jonathan Moss and Nick Cantarella to their number hated the Memorial Mile with a fierce and terrible passion. "How many names you reckon they be if they put up all the niggers from here they done killed?" asked their chief, who went by the name of Spartacus. Moss suspected that was a *nom de guerre;* it was, as far as he was concerned, a damn good one.

"If you're gonna keep on playing this game, you'll put some more crackers' names on some kinda stones," Nick Cantarella said. His clotted New York vowels and Spartacus' lazy-sounding drawl hardly seemed to belong to the same language. Sometimes they had to pause so each could figure out what the other was saying. But they had something in common: they both wanted to cause the Confederates as much grief as they could.

A convoy of trucks rumbled along the road from Ellaville towards Americus. Command cars with machine guns shepherded the trucks along. Opening up on them would have invited massive retaliation. "One advantage you've got with these pine woods," Moss said.

"What's that?" Spartacus asked.

"They don't lose their leaves this time of year," Moss replied. "Easier to hide here than it would be in a forest full of bare-branched trees."

"Not gonna be much snow on the ground, neither," Cantarella said. "It's really a bitch, tryin' to cover your tracks in the snow."

Spartacus pursed his lips, then slowly nodded. He was about forty-five, just going gray at the temples, with a scar that looked like a bullet crease on his right forearm. If he hadn't been black, he would have put Moss in mind of a career noncom—he had that air of rough, no-nonsense competence about him. Suddenly, Moss asked, "Did *you* fight for the CSA the last time around?"

"Sure enough did," Spartacus answered. "Got shot fo' mah country—

reckoned it *was* mah country in them days. Case you wonderin', ain't no niggers' names on them goddamn memorials, neither. I even vote once—they let me do it in '21, on account of they was afeared that Featherston fucker was gonna win then. But he los', an' I never seen the inside o' no votin' booth since. Ain't seen nothin' but trouble since the Freedom Party come in."

A boxy, old-fashioned Birmingham with a white-haired white man at the wheel drove by. "You could nail somebody like him easy enough, make the Confederates try and go after you here, then hit somewhere else," Cantarella said.

"Don't want to shoot that there ofay," Spartacus said. "That there's Doc Thomason, an' he been settin' bones an' deliverin' babies for buckra and niggers for damn near fifty years. If you can only pay him a chicken, he take your chicken. If you can't pay him nothin', he set your arm anyways. Ain't all white folks bad—jus' too many of 'em."

"All right. Fine. We don't shoot the doc. He ain't gonna be the only guy on the road, though," Cantarella said. "Shoot somebody else. Maybe even hang around to shoot at the first fuckers who come to see what you went and did. Then when they're all flabbling about that, kick 'em in the nuts some other place. Make them react to you."

"We done some o' that," Spartacus said. "We done a couple of people bombs, too, over by Americus. Them Freedom Party assholes, they don't like people bombs none." He spoke with a certain grim satisfaction.

Moss looked at Cantarella. The Army captain was looking back at him. Moss didn't need to be able to read minds to know what Cantarella was thinking. They didn't like people bombs, either. But as weapons the weak could use against the strong, they were hard to match.

"How do you get people to volunteer to blow themselves up?" Moss asked carefully, not sure if the question would offend Spartacus.

But the guerrilla leader looked at him—looked through him, really—and answered, "Don't gotta drug 'em none or get 'em drunk. Don't gotta say we's gonna kill their wives an' chillun, neither. Dat's what you mean, ain't it?" Moss gave back an unhappy nod. Spartacus went on, "See—you is a white man, even if you comes from the US of A. You is happy most o' the time, an' you reckons everybody else happy most o' the time. Ain't like dat if you is a nigger in these here Confederate States. Somebody blow hisself up here, he a lucky man.

Do Jesus!—he mighty lucky. He go out quick—it don't hurt none. He make the ofays pay. And he don't go to no goddamn camp where they let him in but he don't come out no mo'. I got mo' people wants to be people bombs'n I got 'splosives an' chances to use 'em."

"Shit," Nick Cantarella said softly. His comment was at least as reverent as Spartacus'. He added, "That explains the Mormons up in the USA, too—to hell with me if it doesn't."

"We is powerful jealous o' them Mormons," Spartacus said.

"Because they thought of people bombs and you didn't?" Moss asked.

"No, no." Spartacus waved that aside. "On account o' they is white, jus' like the rest o' you damnyankees. Can't tell who a Mormon is jus' by lookin'. He go where he please before he press the button. Nobody worry about him none till too late."

Moss and Cantarella looked at each other again. The Negro wasn't wrong. And he understood the difference between deaths and effective deaths. A lot of Great War generals hadn't—their method for smothering fires was burying them in bodies. Some officers in this war had the same disease; Daniel MacArthur's name sprang to mind. Had Spartacus worn stars on his shoulder straps instead of a collarless shirt with rolled-up sleeves and dungarees out at the knees, he might have made a formidable officer, not just a sergeant.

But the United States didn't let Negroes enlist in the Army as privates, let alone send them to West Point to learn the art of command and the fine points of soldiering. In a troubled voice, Moss said, "You make me wonder about my own country, Spartacus, not just yours."

"Good," the black man rumbled. "Wonderin's good. Ain't nothin' gonna change till you wonder if it oughta."

A band of his raiders slipped south from Ellaville toward Plains, a small town west of Americus. Moss and Cantarella went along with them, bolt-action Tredegars in their hands. They were moving south and west from Andersonville: deeper into the Confederacy. In a way, that was good—the camp guards and county sheriffs and whoever else went after escaped POWs were less likely to look for them there. But they had to move cautiously. Negroes walking through peanut fields could be sharecroppers looking for work, but whites doing the same thing were bound to rouse suspicion.

Burnt cork, the staple of minstrel shows for generations, solved the

problem. Up close, Cantarella and especially the fairer Moss made unsatisfactory Negroes, but they passed muster at a distance.

“What do we do when we get there?” Moss asked Spartacus.

“Much as we kin,” Spartacus replied. “Burn, kill, and then git.” That seemed to cover everything that needed covering, as far as he was concerned.

Real sharecroppers and farm laborers put the guerrillas up for the night. The way the other blacks accepted them said everything that needed saying, as far as Moss was concerned. Not all the Negroes in the CSA would fight against the Freedom Party. That took more spirit than some people owned. He couldn’t imagine a black betraying those who would fight to the authorities, though.

Negroes raised eyebrows at him and Cantarella, but relaxed when they heard the white men were escaped U.S. POWs. “Damnyankees is all right,” said an old man with only a few teeth. He didn’t seem to know any other name for people from the United States. Sowbelly, fatback, hominy, sweet potatoes, harsh moonshine—the locals fed them what they had.

“Gots to make the ofay pay.” Moss heard that again and again.

The band that approached Plains numbered about fifty—a platoon’s worth of men. Moss worried as he trudged through the night toward the little town. If the Confederates had a real garrison there, they could slaughter the raiders. “Don’t flabble about it,” Nick Cantarella said when he worried out loud. “First thing is, the smokes around here would know if they were layin’ for us. Second thing is, they don’t have enough guys to garrison every little pissant burg, not if they want to fight a war with us, too.”

Logic said he was right. Sometimes logic let you down with a thud, but. . . . “Sounds good,” Moss said.

Sentries did patrol the peanut fields around Plains. With almost contemptuous ease, the Negroes disposed of the one who might have discovered them. The gray-haired man died almost before he knew someone was drawing a knife across his throat. Only a small, startled sigh escaped him. A guerrilla threw aside his own squirrel gun and appropriated the sentry’s Tredegar. “Too good a piece to waste on a damn fool,” he said.

“Let’s go,” Spartacus said.

They trotted silently into Plains. The silence didn't last long. They started firing into some houses and tossing Featherston Fizzes into others. Fires roared to life. Alarm bells started ringing. Volunteer firemen emerged from their houses to fight the flames. The raiders picked them off one after another.

"Niggers!" somebody shouted. "Holy Jesus, there's niggers loose in Plains!"

"Phone wires cut?" Cantarella demanded of Spartacus.

"We done took care of it," the guerrilla leader said with a savage grin. "Don't want no help comin' from nowhere else."

Here and there, townsfolk fired from windows with rifles or shotguns. Those houses got volleys of fire from the Negroes, as well as gasoline bombs to kill the resisters or drive them out in the open where they made easier prey. Moss also heard women's screams that sounded more outraged than terrified. "You won't find any fighting force in the world where that shit doesn't happen," Cantarella said. Moss nodded, which didn't mean he liked it any better.

Somebody in Plains organized defenders who fought as a group, not as so many individuals. "Over here, Jimmy!" a woman called. "We got trouble over here!"

"Be there real quick, Miss Lillian!" a man answered. Moss got a glimpse of him in the firelight: a kid with a mouthful of teeth, wearing a dark gray C.S. Navy tunic over pajama bottoms. Home on leave? Whatever the reason he was here, he was tough and smart and brave, and he'd make real trouble if he got even half a chance.

He didn't. Moss made sure of that. The Tredegar's stock didn't fit his shoulder quite the same way as the U.S. Army Springfield he'd trained with, but the difference didn't matter. He pulled the trigger gently—he didn't squeeze it. The rifle bucked. Jimmy, the Navy man here in the middle of Georgia, spun and crumpled.

"Good shot!" Spartacus yelled.

Without a commander who sounded as if he knew what he was doing, the defenders went back to fighting every man for himself. Spartacus' raiders weren't well disciplined, but they had a better notion of what they were doing than their foes. They killed as many whites as they could, started fires all over town, and faded back into the countryside. "Well," Moss said, "we yanked their tails pretty good."

“Sure did,” Nick Cantarella agreed. “Now we see how hard they yank back.”

C larence Potter had been going at a dead run ever since he put on the Confederate uniform again. He’d been going even harder than that since the war started. And he was going harder still these past few weeks, since things started turning against the CSA.

To make matters worse, he and Nathan Bedford Forrest III flinched whenever they saw each other even if they were just getting bad fried chicken in the War Department cafeteria. He wished Forrest had kept his mouth shut. Now the chief of the General Staff had him thinking—always a dangerous thing to do.

What if Jake Featherston wasn’t crazy like a fox? What if he was just plain crazy, period? Around the bend? Nutty as a fruitcake? Two cylinders short of a motor?

“Well, what then?” Potter muttered. He wouldn’t have been surprised if there were microphones in his subterranean office. The President of the CSA wouldn’t need to be crazy to mistrust him, not after everything that had happened between them over the past twenty-five years. Featherston wouldn’t need to be crazy to mistrust his spymasters, either, no matter who they were. But that handful of words seemed safe enough; Potter could have been wondering about any number of things.

He laughed, as people will laugh when the other choice is crying their eyes out. The rescue drive toward Pittsburgh was moving forward. The map on his wall showed that. But it wasn’t moving forward fast enough. And the cargo airplanes that were supposed to supply the Confederates trapped in the Pittsburgh pocket were taking an ungodly beating. Potter didn’t know what the officers who’d promised transports could do the job had been smoking. Whatever it was, he wished he had some now. Reality needed some blurring.

And Featherston still wouldn’t let the men in the pocket fight their way west to meet their would-be rescuers, either. “What we have, we hold!” he said, over and over again. Clarence Potter didn’t know what he’d been smoking, either.

Just to make matters more delightful, Lubbock was liable to fall. Some of the nuisance drives the USA had launched to keep the Confederates from strengthening themselves for the rescue effort in Ohio and

Pennsylvania were turning into bigger nuisances than even the generals who'd launched them probably expected.

The Attorney General's office, of all things, was having conniptions about this one. Somewhere southeast of Lubbock was something called Camp Determination. Clarence Potter didn't know what that was, not in any official way. He didn't *want* to know, not in any official way. He had a pretty good unofficial idea.

He also saw the need for places like that. Negro raiders were getting more and more annoying. That Navy man in that little Georgia town, shot down in front of his mother . . . Half the town was wrecked, too, and it wasn't the only one guerrillas had hit. Two people bombs in Augusta, one in Savannah, another in Charleston . . .

Potter whistled tunelessly between his teeth. The really alarming part was, things could have been worse. The USA did only a halfhearted job of supplying black guerrillas. Whites up there didn't love them, either. If the damnyankees had gone all-out, they could have caused even more trouble than they did.

One bit of good news—Mexican troops would take some of the spook-fighting off the CSA's hands. Potter didn't know what Jake Featherston said to Maximilian. Whatever it was, it got the Emperor of Mexico moving. It probably scared the living bejesus out of him, too. Jake Featherston was not a subtle man.

Someone knocked on Potter's door. He paused to put a couple of papers into drawers before he said, "Come in."

"Here you are, sir." A lieutenant handed him a manila envelope.

"Thanks," Potter said. "Do I need to sign for it?"

"No, sir," the junior officer answered, which surprised him.

"All right, then." The lieutenant saluted and disappeared. When Potter opened the envelope, he understood. It was a progress report from Henderson V. FitzBelmont. That project was so secret, it didn't have a paper trail. This way, no Yankee spy filing sign-off sheets would wonder about it. Better safe.

He quickly read through the report. It was, for the most part, an account of technical difficulties. Uranium hexafluoride was poisonous and savagely corrosive. FitzBelmont and his people were still working out techniques for handling it. Till they did, separating U-235 from

U-238 couldn't even start.

Do you have any idea how the U.S. project is proceeding? FitzBelmont wrote. Potter didn't. He wished he did. He didn't think anyone in the Confederate States did. If someone did, the report would have come through him . . . wouldn't it? If it didn't, it would have gone only one place: straight to Jake Featherston. The President knew Potter was loyal to the CSA—otherwise, he wouldn't have got involved in this uranium business in the first place. So everyone else in the country was probably as ignorant as he was about Yankee progress, if any.

Featherston didn't seem to have found out he and Nathan Bedford Forrest III had met, there in Capitol Square. If the President did know, neither man would still be free. Potter's first thought was that neither would still be alive. After a moment, he realized that wasn't necessarily so. Some of the people Ferd Koenig bossed could keep a man alive and hurting for a long, long time before they finally gave him peace—or maybe just made a mistake and hit him too hard or once too often.

Potter rolled a sheet of paper into the typewriter on his desk and started an answer to Professor FitzBelmont. If he worked on something important, he wouldn't have to think about some of the people who took the Attorney General's orders. *Dear Professor,* he typed, *I hope you and your fmaily are well.* The error in the first sentence assured FitzBelmont the letter really came from him: a simple code, but an effective one. *Thank you for your recent letter, which I have just received. I wish I were more familiar with the Japanese project you mention, but I am afraid I cannot tell you how close they are to invading the Sandwich Islands.*

That, of course, was also code. It might be obvious to anyone who intercepted the letter that Potter wasn't talking about Japan. What he was talking about wouldn't be so obvious, though. He wondered if the Japanese were working on nuclear fission. They weren't white men, but they'd proved they could play the white man's game. He shrugged. That wasn't his worry. It was probably the USA's nightmare. If one bomb could wreck Pearl Harbor or Honolulu, how did you defend them?

Back to what was his problem. He clacked away at the big upright machine. It had a stiff action, but that didn't matter; he was a two-fingered typist with a touch like a tap-dancing rhinoceros. *You did not state when we could expect success from your own work. Its early completion could result in a major increase in efficiency. Hoping to hear*

from you soon on this point, I have the honor to remain. . . . He finished the flowery closing phrases on automatic pilot, took out the sheet of paper, and signed the squiggle that might have been his name.

He put the letter in an envelope, sealed it, and wrote Professor FitzBelmont's name and *Washington University* on the outside. Then he took it down the hall to the couriers' office, first carefully locking the door to his own office behind him. He nodded to the major in charge of the War Department's secret couriers. "Morning, Dick," he said. "I need one of your boys to take this out of the city."

"Yes, sir. We can do that." The dispatching officer took the envelope, glanced at the address, and nodded. "Do you want someone who's been there before, or a new man?" That was the only question he asked. Who Henderson V. FitzBelmont was and what the professor was working on were none of his business, and he knew it.

"Either way will do," Potter answered. FitzBelmont might recognize a courier he'd seen before. Then again, he might not. He wasn't quite the absentminded professor people made jokes about, but he wasn't far removed, either. Potter got the feeling subatomic particles and differential equations were more real to him than most of the human race.

"We'll take care of it, then," the major said. "You'll want the courier to report delivery, I expect?"

"Orally, when he gets back here," Potter said.

The major raised an eyebrow. Potter looked back as if across a poker table. He held the high cards, and he knew it. So did the major. "Whatever you say, sir."

"Thanks, Dick." Potter went back to his own office. *Whatever you say, sir.* He liked the sound of that. As a general, he heard it a lot. The more he heard it, the more he liked it.

How long had it been since Jake Featherston heard anything but, *Whatever you say, sir?* Since he took the oath of office in 1934, certainly. In most things, nobody'd tried arguing with him for years before that. And he was a man who'd liked getting his own way even when he was only an artillery sergeant.

If somebody had tried telling the President more often, the country might be in better shape right now. Or it might not—Featherston might just have ordered naysayers shot or sent to camps. He'd done a

lot of that.

Potter lit a cigarette and blew a meditative cloud of smoke up toward the ceiling. Two questions: was Jake Featherston leading the Confederate States to ruin, and could anybody else do a better job if Featherston came down with a sudden case of loss of life?

With the building disaster in Pittsburgh, with Featherston's stubborn refusal to cut his losses and pull out (which looked worse now than it had when Nathan Bedford Forrest III and Potter sat on the park bench), the answer to the first had gone from *unlikely* through *maybe* and on toward *probably,* even if it hadn't got there yet.

As for the second . . . Potter blew out more smoke. That wasn't nearly so obvious. Nobody could wear Jake Featherston's shoes. The Vice President? Don Partridge was a cipher, a placeholder, somebody to fill a slot because the Confederate Constitution said you needed to fill it. His only virtue was knowing he was a lightweight. Ferdinand Koenig? The Attorney General would have the Freedom Party behind him if the long knives came out. He was able enough, in a gray, bureaucratic way, but about as inspiring as a mudflat. As a leader . . . ? Potter shuddered. Ferd Koenig was one of those people who made a terrific number two but a terrible number one. Unlike some of them, he had the sense to realize it.

Which left—who? Congress was a Freedom Party rubber stamp. Potter couldn't think of any governor worth a pitcher of warm spit. Besides, most people outside a governor's home state had never heard of him.

What about Forrest? Clarence Potter blinked, there in the privacy of his office. He was surprised the idea had taken so long to occur to him. He laughed at himself. "You old Whig, you," he murmured. If the armed forces were going to overthrow the President—and it wouldn't happen any other way—who better to take over the government than the chief of the General Staff? The Freedom Party had danced on the spirit of the Constitution while holding on to most of the letter. Throwing it out the window altogether seemed not just unnatural but wicked. But Forrest just might do.

Losing the war is wicked. Anything else? Next to losing this war to the USA, anything else looks good. Anything at all. Potter nodded decisively. About that, he had no doubts at all. The United States had forced a harsh peace on the Confederate States in 1917, but hadn't kept it going for very long. Terms would be even worse this time, and the United States would make sure the Confederates never got off their

knees again.

The next time Potter saw Nathan Bedford Forrest III in the cafeteria, he nodded casually and said, “Something I’d like to talk to you about when we have the chance.”

“Really?” Forrest said, as casually. “Can we do it here?”

Potter shook his head. “No, sir,” he answered. “Needs privacy.” From one general to another, that wasn’t a surprising thing to say. For a split second, Forrest’s eyes widened. Then he nodded and put some silverware on his tray.

M ichael Pound grinned as his barrel rumbled forward, jouncing over rubble and grinding a lot of the big chunks into smaller ones. “Advancing feels good, doesn’t it, sir?” he said.

Lieutenant Don Griffiths nodded. “You’d better believe it, Sergeant. We’ve done too much falling back.”

“Yes, sir.” Pound wouldn’t have argued with that for a moment. “Looks to me like the Confederates are starting to feel the pinch.”

“Here’s hoping,” Griffiths said. “I wouldn’t want to try reinforcing and supplying an army the size of theirs by air, I’ll tell you that. And I don’t think they’ve got an airstrip left that our artillery can’t reach.”

“My heart bleeds—but not as much as they’re going to bleed before long,” Pound said. “I wonder why they haven’t tried to break out to the west. Somebody in their high command must have his head wedged. Too bad for them.” He had no respect for his own superiors. Finding out some dunderheads wore butternut was reassuring.

A rifle bullet pinged off the barrel’s armored side. *That* wouldn’t do the Confederates any good. As if to prove it wouldn’t, the bow machine gun chattered. Pound peered through his own gunsight, but he couldn’t see what the bow gunner was shooting at—if he was shooting at anything. It hardly mattered sometimes.

Off to the left, something on the Confederate side of the line blew up with a roar loud enough to penetrate the barrel’s thick skin. “That sounded good,” Pound said. “Wonder what it was.”

“Want me to stick my head out and look around?” Lieutenant Griffiths

asked.

“Not important enough, sir,” Pound answered. “Who knows if our machine gun took out whoever was shooting at us?” Barrel commander was a dangerous job. Now that Pound had finally found an officer with some notion of what he was doing, he didn’t want to lose him for no good reason. There were too many times when a barrel commander had perfectly good reasons for exposing himself to enemy fire.

Something else blew up, even louder. Griffiths put a hand to his earphones. He often did that when he was getting a wireless message. Sergeant Pound had no idea whether it helped or how it could, but he’d never said anything about it to the officer. It couldn’t hurt.

Lieutenant Griffiths leaned forward to use the speaking tube to the driver’s position: “Forward again, and a little to the left, but slowly,” he said. He turned to Pound. “That was an ammunition dump. They won’t be able to shell us so well for a while.”

“We hope,” said Pound, ever willing to see the cloud next to the silver lining.

“Well, yes. We hope. There’s always that,” Griffiths agreed. “But we’ve got infantry moving up with us. With luck, they’ll keep the short-range trouble away from us. As for the other side’s barrels and antibarrel guns—we’ve done all right so far. Of course, we’ve got a pretty good gunner.”

“So we do.” Pound knew his own talents too well to be modest about them. Half a second later than he should have, he added, “You’re not bad at spotting trouble before it spots us. Best way to get rid of it that I know.”

No sooner had he said that than something clanged against the front of the turret with force enough to shake the whole barrel. *I’m dead,* Pound thought. Only a moment later did he realize he would have been too dead to think if that round had got through. *Thank God for the upgraded armor on the new turret. If this beast hadn’t been retrofitted, I’d be burnt meat right now.*

Without waiting for orders, the driver roared forward, looking for cover behind the nearest pile of rubble. Then, abruptly, he slammed on the brakes. “Did you see it, sir?” Pound asked.

“No, goddammit.” Griffiths sounded angry at himself. “That son of a

bitch knows where we're at, and I didn't spot the muzzle flash. Wherever he is, he's hidden good."

"Not sporting," Pound agreed. He'd been more than happy enough to ambush C.S. barrels from an empty garage, but having them turn the tables on him wasn't playing fair. Someone with a more objective view might not have found that unfair, but so what? It wasn't the impartial observer's neck. It was his.

He traversed the turret, staring through the gunsight as he did. The hatch opened. Lieutenant Griffiths stood up to get a better look than he could through the periscopes in the cupola. This was one of *those* times. Griffiths might get shot, but he also might get a better look at the hidden cannon or barrel that had just come within inches of incinerating him.

It didn't fire again, which argued that the rubble in front of Pound's barrel gave pretty good protection. A rifle bullet snapped past; as always, the sound seemed hatefully malicious. Lieutenant Griffiths ducked a little—you did that without thinking—but he didn't come back inside the steel shell. He had balls. Pound nodded approvingly.

Probably not somewhere close, the gunner thought, looking for straight lines that broke the irregular pattern of the ruins of Pittsburgh. If the enemy were close, he would have a better shot at the U.S. barrel. And, if he were close, his round likely would have penetrated in spite of the improved turret. A cannon made a damned effective door knocker.

There! Or Pound thought so, anyhow. "Armor-piercing!" he snapped.

"Armor-piercing," Cecil Bergman answered. The loader slammed a black-tipped cartridge into the breech. Pound worked the elevation handwheel. Fifteen hundred yards *was* a long shot. As near as he could tell, he fired at the same time as the C.S. gunner. The enemy's shot snarled past, a few feet high. Pound's struck home. The enemy barrel started to burn.

"Hit!" Lieutenant Griffiths shouted. "How on earth did you make that shot?"

"Twenty-odd years of practice, sir," Pound answered. The Confederate gunner hadn't had so much—though he'd hit Pound's barrel before Pound even knew he was there. He wouldn't get another chance now. A great cloud of black smoke was rising, almost a mile away.

The shot ricocheting inside the barrel would have killed or maimed

some of the crew. The fire would be searing the rest. By the way the smoke billowed out, that barrel was a total loss. Odds were the crew was, too. Pound had bailed out of a crippled barrel, but then only the engine compartment was burning. Could anyone get out here? He didn't think so.

I just killed five men. Most of the time, he didn't worry about that. When he watched a barrel brew up, it was only a machine that died. But he'd just had his own brush with death, and it reminded him of the soldiers inside the barrels. He knew what they were going through; he'd come close to going through it himself. If he'd met them in a bar, he could have drunk the night away talking shop with them.

But they'd just done their best to kill him, and their best was hideously close to good enough. *They're dead and I'm alive and that's how I want it to be.*

"We can move up a little more now, sir," he said.

Griffiths thought about it, then nodded. He called up to the driver. The barrel came out from behind the pile of wreckage and clattered towards another one. Pound tensed when it came out into the open. If the Confederates had drawn a bead on them . . . But no hardened-steel projectile tore into the machine's vitals. He breathed again as a pile of tumbled bricks came between his machine and the people who wanted to do unto it as he'd done unto theirs.

U.S. foot soldiers ran forward with the barrels. A Confederate machine gunner opened up on them. "Front!" Lieutenant Griffiths shouted.

"Identified!" Pound answered. He turned his head and shouted to the loader: "HE!"

"HE," Bergman said. A white-tipped high-explosive round went into the breech. Pound lined up the sights on the C.S. machine gun's winking muzzle. He jerked the lanyard. The cannon bellowed. The shell casing clanked on the floor of the fighting compartment.

A 2.4-inch shell didn't have room for a whole lot of explosive. A three-incher from one of the Confederate barrels would have held almost twice as much. Sandbags and rubble flew from in front of the C.S. gun, but it kept shooting. Tracers drew fiery lines through the air.

Pound abstractly admired the enemy gunners' nerve. If a round burst right in front of him, he would have got the hell out of there. They kept doing what they'd been trained to do. "Another round," he said.

In went the shell. He swung the cannon's muzzle a gnat's hair to the left and fired again.

Another hit, but the enemy gun went on firing. He needed two more rounds before it fell silent. The stink of cordite was thick in the turret. "Stubborn bastards," Lieutenant Griffiths said.

"Yes, sir," Pound agreed, coughing. "They're the ones you've especially got to get rid of."

With the machine gun knocked out, U.S. infantry moved up some more. They took casualties. With automatic rifles and submachine guns, the Confederate soldiers could outshoot them. But how long could the Confederates keep outshooting them if more ammunition didn't come into Pittsburgh?

The Confederates couldn't use captured U.S. ammo unless they also used captured Springfields. They'd chosen different calibers on purpose, to make it harder for U.S. soldiers to turn captured automatic rifles against them. It must have seemed a good idea at the time. It probably was. But it cut both ways.

Off to the left, a U.S. barrel got hit and started burning. Nothing in Pittsburgh came cheap. Nothing came easy. The Confederates weren't going to quit, and they fell back only when they had no choice. How long could they keep it up?

He shrugged. That wasn't his worry. People with shoulder straps and metal ornaments on them had to fret about such things. All he had to do was shoot whatever he and Lieutenant Griffiths spotted in front of their barrel and hope like hell nobody shot him. He nodded. That would do nicely.

Shells started bursting around them. The bursts weren't the ordinary kind; they sounded wrong, and even through the gunsight he saw the crawling mist that spread from them. "Gas!" he yelled.

Griffiths clanged down the hatch on top of the cupola. "I saw it," he said. "I was hoping those fuckers were running short. No such luck, I guess."

"No, sir," Pound said as he put on his mask. Out in the open, U.S. infantrymen paused to do the same. Pound went on, "Now we'll throw some at the Confederates, just to make sure they have to wear masks, too. As long as both sides have it, it doesn't change anything."

“I’m not saying you’re wrong,” Griffiths answered. He had his mask on, too. “But I am saying it’s out there.” Pound couldn’t very well quarrel with that. The barrel commander started to wave to emphasize his point. He choked off the gesture before it was well begun. The inside of a turret was a crowded place.

Michael Pound made a good prophet, as he often did. A U.S. gas barrage followed in short order. It was heavier than the one the enemy had laid down. Infantrymen advanced in short rushes. The barrel moved up to the next decent firing position. Another block of Pittsburgh, cleared of Confederates.

XIX

New Year’s Eve. One more day till 1943. Flora Blackford was back in her Philadelphia apartment. She hadn’t expected to be anywhere else. Even if she hadn’t campaigned at all, she thought she would have beaten Sheldon Vogelman. People in her district were used to reelecting her. She nodded to herself. It was a nice habit for them to have.

Joshua was out with friends. “I’ll be back next year,” he’d said. How long had people been making that joke? Probably as long as people had divided time into years. He was liable to come back drunk, too, even if he was underage. Well, if he did, the hangover the next morning ought to teach him not to do it again for a while. She could hope so, anyhow.

“Underage,” she muttered, and clicked her tongue between her teeth. He would turn eighteen in 1943. Old enough to be conscripted. And conscripted he probably would be. He was healthy. He didn’t have flat feet, a punctured eardrum, or bad eyes. Nothing could keep him out of the war—except being a Congresswoman’s son.

And he was as stubborn and as stupid as her brother had been in the last war. He didn’t want her to do anything to keep him out. Not even Uncle David’s artificial leg could make him change his mind. He didn’t believe anything like that would happen to him. No one ever believed anything would happen to him—till it did.

The telephone rang. It made her start. She hurried towards it, more relieved than anything else. If she was talking to somebody, she wouldn't have to worry about Joshua . . . so much. "Hello?"

"Flora?" That cheerful baritone could belong to only one man.

"Hello, Franklin," she said. "What can I do for you?" Roosevelt had never called her at the apartment before.

"How would you like to ring in the New Year with me at the War Department?"

She hesitated only a moment. "I'll be over as soon as I can get a cab."

"See you in a little while, then." He hung up.

She didn't think the USA's military planners had a fancy party waiting for her. But the Assistant Secretary of War wasn't going to go into detail about why he wanted to see her, not over the telephone. She called the cab company. They started to tell her she would have to wait half an hour. "It's our busiest day of the year, lady. Sorry." The dispatcher didn't sound the least bit sorry.

"This is Congresswoman Blackford." Flora didn't tell him he would be sorry if she didn't get a cab sooner than that, but she didn't need to, either. He got the message, loud and clear.

A cab sat waiting when she got to the street. An ordinary person wouldn't have been able to summon one so fast. Remembering that chafed at her Socialist sense of equality. She consoled herself by thinking she carried more responsibility than an ordinary person. *From each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs.* Right now, she needed to get to the War Department in a hurry.

The cabby hopped out and held the door open for her. "Where to, ma'am?" he asked. She told him as she got in. He nodded. "Fast as I can," he promised; the dispatcher must have let him know who she was.

He kept his word, but he couldn't go very fast. Confederate bombers had been over the night before, so some of the roads had fresh craters, while sawhorses and red tape closed off others so specialists could try to defuse time bombs. Flora had heard their life expectancy was measured in weeks. That information was secret from the public, but she feared the specialists knew it.

Not far from downtown, the wreckage of a downed C.S. airplane further snarled traffic. “Nice to see we nail one every once in a while,” the taxi driver said. “Those . . . people need to pay for what they do.” The little pause said he’d remembered just in time that he carried someone important.

“Yes.” Flora almost spoke more strongly herself. There wasn’t enough plywood and cardboard in Philadelphia—there probably wasn’t enough in the world—to cover up all the windows the Confederates had blown out. So many buildings had pieces bitten from them, or were only charred ruins. Ordinary bombs could start fires, and the Confederates dropped incendiaries, too. One popular propaganda poster showed a long, skinny incendiary bomb with Jake Featherston’s bony face at one end clamped in a pair of tongs and about to go into a bucket of water. Underneath the sizzling Confederate President were three words: COOL HIM OFF!

“Here you go, ma’am.” The driver pulled up in front of the War Department. It had taken plenty of damage, too, even if it was built from the best reinforced concrete taxpayer dollars could buy. Most of its business went on underground these days. Flora didn’t know how far underground the tunnels ran. She didn’t need to know. Not many people did.

She paid the cabby. Her breath smoked as she went up the battered steps. She showed the sentries her identity papers. “I’m here to see Assistant Secretary Roosevelt,” she said.

“Hold on for a minute, ma’am.” One of them picked up a telephone and spoke into it. After not much longer than the promised wait, he hung up and nodded to her. “You can go ahead, ma’am. You’re legit, all right. Willie, take her to Mr. Roosevelt’s office.”

Willie looked younger than her own Joshua. He led her down endless flights of stairs. All she knew when he walked her along a corridor was that at least one more level lay below the one she was on. He stopped at a door with ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR neatly painted on the frosted-glass window. “Here you are, ma’am. When you need to come up, call the front desk and somebody will come down to guide you.”

Don’t go wandering around on your own, he meant. “All right,” Flora answered. Willie looked relieved.

She opened the door. “Hello, Flora! Come in,” Franklin D. Roosevelt

said. Sitting at his desk, a cigarette holder in his mouth at a jaunty angle, he looked strong and virile. But he sat in a wheelchair, and went on, “You’ll have to excuse my not rising, I’m afraid.” A shrug of his broad shoulders might have added, *What can you do?*

“Of course,” Flora said quickly, and then, “Happy New Year.” She couldn’t go wrong with that.

“Same to you,” Roosevelt answered. “And I hope it will be a Happy New Year for the country, too. We’re in better shape now than we were when 1942 started, anyhow. I don’t think the Confederates will be able to get out of the noose around Pittsburgh, and that will cost them. That will cost them plenty.”

“Good,” Flora said. “Lord knows they’ve cost us plenty. Is that what you wanted to talk about tonight?”

“As a matter of fact, no. I wanted to tell you Columbus has discovered America.”

Flora didn’t know how to take that. With a smile seemed the best way. “I thought he might have,” she agreed. “Otherwise we’d be doing this somewhere else and speaking a different language—a couple of different languages, I expect.”

Roosevelt’s big, booming laugh filled the office. “Well, when you’re right, you’re right. But that’s the message we got back from Washington State—Hanford, the name of the town is—the other day. It means they’ve done the first big part of what they set out to do.”

“And what is that, Franklin?” she asked. “I’ve sat on the secret for so long, don’t you think I’m entitled to find out?”

“*That’s* what I wanted to talk about tonight,” he answered. “I have clearance from the President to tell you what’s what.” He cocked his head and gave her a coy, even an arch, smile. “So you want to know, eh?”

“Maybe a little,” Flora said, and Roosevelt laughed again.

“Tell me everything you know about uranium,” he said.

Flora sat silent for perhaps half a minute. “There,” she said. “I just did.”

This time, Roosevelt positively chortled. “Well, that’s what I said

when this whole thing started—my exact words, to tell you the truth. Now I'm going to tell you what the professors with the slide rules told me."

And he did. He was a lively, well-organized speaker. He could have lectured at any college in the country. Flora's head soon started spinning even so. Uranium-235, U-238, uranium hexafluoride, centrifuges, gaseous diffusion, thermal diffusion . . . It all seemed diffuse to her, and quite a bit of it seemed gaseous.

"What have they done out there now?" she asked.

"They've enriched enough uranium to have a self-sustaining reaction," Roosevelt replied. Enriched, Flora had learned, meant getting a mix with more U-235—the kind that could explode—and less U-238, which couldn't. A sustained reaction wasn't an explosion, but she gathered it was a long step on the way towards one.

"If everything goes right and we get the weapon soon enough, this could win us the war, couldn't it?" Flora said.

"Well, nobody knows for sure," Roosevelt answered, "but the professors seem to think so."

"The Germans are working on it, too?" she asked.

"Yes. No doubt about it. They're the ones who found fission in the first place," he said.

"All right. What about the Confederates?" Flora asked.

"We think they have something going on," the Assistant Secretary of War said carefully. "We don't know as much about it as we wish we did. We're trying to find out more."

"That sounds like a good idea." Flora's own calm meant she would have started screaming at him if he'd told her anything else. "How much do they know about what we're doing?"

"That *is* the question." Maybe Roosevelt was quoting *Hamlet,* maybe just answering her. "The truth is, we're not sure. Counterintelligence hasn't picked up whatever intelligence they've gathered on us."

"I hope you're trying everything under the sun," Flora said, again in lieu of yelling.

“Oh, yes,” Roosevelt said. “So far, we’ve only figured out one defense against these atomic explosions.”

“Really? That’s one more than I’d imagined,” Flora said. “What is it?”

“To be somewhere else when they go off.”

“Oh.” Flora laughed. But Franklin Roosevelt wasn’t laughing now. He meant it. Another thing she hadn’t imagined was a race where the winners won everything and the losers were probably ruined forever. “How long between the, uh, sustained reaction and a real bomb we can use?”

Roosevelt spread his hands. “That’s what we’re trying to find out. The physicists say anywhere between six months and ten years, depending on how fast they can solve the engineering problems.”

“That’s no good!” Flora said. “If it’s ten years for us and six months for the CSA, we’ll never get the chance to finish.”

“They tell me it’s more likely to be the other way around,” Roosevelt said. “For one thing, we do seem to have started before the Confederates did. For another, we’ve got three times as many physicists and engineers and such as they do.”

“Serves them right for not educating their Negroes.” Flora stopped and grimaced. These days, the Confederates were doing worse with their Negroes than not educating them. Thinking of what they were doing made her say, “We’d better win this race.”

“I think we will.” Franklin Roosevelt sounded confident—but then, he usually did. “Whether we’ll win it in time to use one of those bombs in this war . . . That I don’t know, and I’d be lying if I said I did.”

“What about Germany and England and France? What about Japan?” Flora asked.

“As I said, we have to guess the Kaiser is somewhere ahead of us. How far, I don’t know,” Roosevelt said. “The others? I don’t know that, either. If we have intelligence about what they’re doing, it doesn’t come through me.” Flora thought it should have, but that wasn’t her province. She decided she had done the right thing by not making a fuss about the budget entry she’d found. If this worked, it *would* win the war.

And if it didn’t, how many hundreds of millions of dollars would they

have thrown down a rathole? As 1942 passed into 1943, she tried not to think about that.

A rmstrong Grimes had charge of a platoon. In the middle of Salt Lake City in the middle of winter, he could have done without the honor. But Lieutenant Streczyk was somewhere far back of the line, his left leg gone below the knee. He'd been unlucky or incautious enough to step on a mine.

One of these days, they might send another junior officer out to the front to take charge of things. But the Utah campaign got what other fronts didn't want or need, and these days didn't get a whole lot of that. Till some luckless and probably brainless lieutenant showed up, Armstrong had the job.

Yossel Reisen commanded the squad that had been his. "If this shit keeps up, we'll be majors by the time we got out of here," Armstrong said.

"I don't even care if I'm a corporal when I get out of here," Yossel answered. "As long as I get out, that's all that matters."

"Well, yeah. I'm not gonna tell you you're wrong, on account of you're not," Armstrong said. "Wish to God the Mormons would pack it in and quit. They gotta know ain't no way in hell they can win."

"I don't think they care. I think all they've got left is going down swinging." Yossel paused to light a cigarette. He and Armstrong sprawled behind a stone wall that protected them from snipers. If Armstrong stuck his head up, he could see the rebuilt and rewrecked Mormon Temple ahead. He didn't—if he were so foolish, a Mormon rifleman would put a round in his ear. After a drag, Yossel went on, "Jews were like that once upon a time. They rose up against the Romans whenever they saw the chance . . . and the Romans handed them their heads every damn time."

Palestine, these days, was a sleepy Ottoman province. It had lots of Arabs, some Jews, and just enough Turks to garrison the towns and collect taxes. No matter how holy it was, nothing much ever happened there. Odds were nothing ever would.

Something erupted from behind the Mormon lines. "Screaming meemie!" Armstrong yelled.

The spigot-mortar bomb came down a few hundred yards away. Even that was close enough to shake him with the blast. “They really do love you,” Yossel Reisen said. “Ever since you had that Mormon strip, we’ve got more little presents like that than anybody else.”

“Oh, shut up,” Armstrong said, not because Reisen was wrong but because he was right. Armstrong wished he hadn’t given the Mormon a hard time, too. Fighting these maniacs was hard enough when you were just one enemy among many. When they were trying to kill you in particular . . . The most Armstrong could say was that they hadn’t done it yet.

U.S. artillery woke up about ten minutes later. Shells screamed into the area from which the screaming meemie had come. But then, the launcher was bound to be long gone.

“How far do you think it is to the Temple?” Armstrong asked. His voice sounded strange because he was talking through his gas mask. Some of the crap the Army threw at the Mormons was liable to blow back into the U.S. positions. And the Mormons still had gas of their own, which they fired from mortars whenever the artillery used it against them. Armstrong didn’t know whether they got it from the CSA or cooked it up in a basement in Ogden. He didn’t care, either. He did know it was a major pain in the rear.

Yossel Reisen also looked like a pig-snouted Martian monster in a bad serial. “Couple miles,” he answered, sounding almost as unearthly as he looked.

“Yeah, about what I figured,” Armstrong agreed. “How long you think we’ll need to get there? How hard will those Mormon fuckers fight to hang on to it?”

“Too long, and even harder than they’ve fought already,” Yossel said.

That wasn’t scientific, but it matched what Armstrong was thinking much too well. He said, “What do you think the odds are we’ll live through it?”

This time, Reisen didn’t answer right away. When he did, he said, “Well, we’re still here so far.”

Armstrong almost asked him what the odds of that were. The only reason he didn’t was, he already knew the answer. The odds were damn slim. He wouldn’t have been leading a squad if that people bomb hadn’t got Sergeant Stowe. He wouldn’t have had the platoon if

that mine hadn't nailed Lieutenant Streczyk. Either or both of those disasters could have happened to him just as easily. So could a thousand others. The same went for Yossel. But they were both still here, neither of them much more than scratched.

In the next few days, Armstrong really started wondering how long he would last. More and more barrels came forward. Most were the waddling monsters kept in storage since the Great War, but some more modern machines went into the mix. None, though, had the stouter turrets and bigger guns that marked the latest models. Every time one of those rolled off the assembly line, it headed straight for the closest Confederate concentration.

More artillery came in, too. And when the weather cleared enough for bombers and fighters to fly, there were more of them, and less antiquated machines, than usual. He knew the signs. The United States were gearing up for another big push.

All the support would help. When the balloon went up, though, it would still be man against man, rifle against rifle, machine gun against machine gun, land mine against dumb luck. Armstrong had a wholesome respect for the men he faced. Nobody who'd been in the line more than a few days had anything but respect for the men of what they called the Republic of Deseret.

Armstrong respected them so much, he wished he didn't have to go after them one more time. Such wishes usually mattered not at all. This time, his fairy godmother must have been listening. The high command pulled his battered regiment out of the line and stuck in a fresh one that was at full strength.

"Breaks my heart," Armstrong said as he trudged away from what was bound to be a bloody mess.

"Yeah, I can tell," Yossel Reisen agreed. "I'm pretty goddamn disappointed myself, if anybody wants to know the truth." They both laughed the giddy laughs of men who'd just got reprieves from the governor.

The rest of the soldiers heading back into reserve were every bit as relieved. They were dirty and skinny and unshaven. Their uniforms were faded and torn and spotted. A lot of them wore ordinary denim jackets and canvas topcoats liberated from the ruins instead of Army-issue warm clothing. Their eyes were far away.

By contrast, the men replacing them might have stepped out of a

recruiting film. They were clean. Their uniforms were clean. Their greatcoats were the same green-gray as everything else. Armstrong was younger than most of the rookies, but felt twenty years older. These fellows hadn't been through hell—yet.

"Does your mama know you're here?" he called to a natty private moving up.

By the private's expression, he wanted to say something about Armstrong's mother, too. He didn't have the nerve. It wasn't just that Armstrong outranked him, either. The kid probably hadn't seen action yet. Armstrong's grubby clothes, his dirt, and his whiskers said he had. He'd earned the right to pop off. Before long, the youngster would enjoy it, too—if that was the word, and if he lived.

"Look at all these men." Yossel nodded toward the troops marching past. "Remember when our regiment was this big?"

"Been a while." Armstrong tried to work out just how long it had been. He needed some thought. "Shit, I think we'd taken enough casualties after the first time we ran into the Confederates in Ohio to be smaller than that outfit."

"I think you're right," Yossel said. "And they never send enough replacements to get us back up to strength, either."

"Nope." Armstrong pulled out a pack of cigarettes, stuck one in his mouth, and offered them to Yossel. The other noncom took one. He lit it. Armstrong leaned close to get his started, then went on, "The ones we do get aren't worth much, either."

"If they live long enough, they mostly learn," Yossel said. "Those first few days in the line, though . . ."

"Yeah." Armstrong knew he'd lived through his opening brushes with combat as much by dumb luck as for any other reason. After that, he'd started to have a better idea of what went into staying alive when Featherston's fuckers or Mormon fanatics tried to do him in. That gave him no guarantee of living through the war, something he knew but tried not to think about. But it did improve his chances.

Replacements got killed and wounded in large numbers, just because they didn't know how not to. They didn't dig in fast enough. They didn't recognize cover when they saw it. They didn't know when to stay down and when to jump up. They couldn't gauge whether incoming artillery bursts were close enough to be dangerous. And that

wasn't the worst of it. The worst was that they got veterans killed, too, because they gave things away without even knowing they were doing it.

Most veterans tried to stay away from them those first couple of weeks. That wasn't fair. It meant even more replacements became casualties than might have been otherwise. But it saved veterans' lives—and it saved the pain of getting to know somebody who wasn't likely to stick around long anyway.

A swarm of soldiers waited at the makeshift bus depot to go from the line back to some of the comforts of civilization: hot showers, hot food, clean clothes, real beds. Armstrong surveyed the swarm with a jaundiced eye. "Something's fucked up somewhere," he predicted.

"Bet your ass, Sarge." That was one of the men already milling around. "Goddamn Mormons snuck a machine gun somewhere down the highway. They shot up a bus like you wouldn't believe. Now everybody's trying to hunt 'em down."

"Christ, I hope so," Armstrong said. "That'd be what everybody needs, wouldn't it?—getting your goddamn head blown off when you're on your way to R and R?"

"Sooner we kill all the Mormons, happier I'll be," the other soldier said. "Then we can get on with the real war. Finally starting to go our way a little, maybe."

"Maybe, yeah. Depends on how much you believe of what they tell you." Armstrong knew damn well the wireless didn't tell the truth all the time. When he was in Ohio, it had gone on and on about U.S. victories and advances while the Army got bundled back and back and back again. He couldn't prove it wasn't doing the same thing about what was going on in Ohio and Pennsylvania now.

The other soldier spat a stream of brown tobacco juice. "There is that," he allowed. Armstrong had thought about chewing tobacco himself. You could do it where the sight of a match or a glowing coal or even the smell of cigarette smoke would get you killed.

An officer called, "The route south has been resecured. Boarding will commence in five minutes."

Do I want R and R enough to risk getting shot on the way? Armstrong wondered. He must have, because he got on the bus when his turn came.

W hen Cincinnatus Driver walked into the Des Moines Army recruiting station, the sergeant behind the desk looked up in surprise from his paperwork. Cincinnatus eyed him the same way: the sergeant held his pen between the claws of a steel hook.

“What can I do for you?” the sergeant asked.

“I want to join up,” Cincinnatus answered.

“Sorry, pal. We don’t use colored soldiers,” the sergeant said. “Navy takes colored cooks and stewards. If you want to, you can talk to them. You don’t mind my saying so, though, you’re a tad overage. That cane won’t do you any good, either.”

“You got a uniform on even though you got a hook,” Cincinnatus said.

“I was in the last one,” the recruiting sergeant said. “That’s where I got it. I’m no damn good at the front, but I can do this.”

“Well, I was in the last one, too,” Cincinnatus said. “Drove a truck haulin’ men an’ supplies in Kentucky and Tennessee. Been drivin’ a truck more’n thirty years now. Sure as hell can do it some more. Put me in a deuce-and-a-half and you got one more white boy can pick up a rifle and shoot at Featherston’s fuckers.”

“Ah.” The sergeant looked more interested. “So you want to be a civilian auxiliary, do you?”

“If that’s what you call it these days,” Cincinnatus answered. “Last time around, I was just a truck driver.” He eyed the man behind the desk. “They pay any better on account of the fancy name?”

“Oh, yeah, pal—and then you wake up,” the sergeant said. Cincinnatus chuckled; he hadn’t expected anything different. The veteran reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a fresh form. He did that with his left hand, which was still flesh and blood. Then he poised the pen over the blank form. “Name?”

“Cincinnatus Driver.”

After the sergeant wrote it down, he glanced over at Cincinnatus. “Heard of you, I think. Didn’t you get exchanged from the Confederates not so long ago?”

“Yes, suh, that’s right,” Cincinnatus said.

“You don’t call me ‘sir.’ You call me ‘Sergeant.’ ” The noncom scribbled a note. He handled the pen very well. As he wrote, he went on, “Just so you know, they’re gonna check you seven ways from Sunday on account of you were in the CSA.”

“They can do that,” Cincinnatus agreed. “They reckon a colored man’d help Jake Featherston, though, they’re pretty goddamn stupid.”

“Yeah, you’d think so, wouldn’t you? But it all depends,” the sergeant said. “Maybe they got your wife an’ kids down there, and they’ll feed ’em to the alligators unless you play along.”

“My wife an’ kids are right here in Des Moines,” Cincinnatus said.

“Good for you. Good for them,” the sergeant said. “You know what I mean, though. They’ll check. Now—you say you drove an Army truck in the Great War? What was your base? Who commanded your unit?”

“I drove out of Covington, Kentucky, where I come from,” Cincinnatus replied. “Fella who ran things was a lieutenant name of Straubing.”

The sergeant raised his right eyebrow. “Think he’d remember you?”

Straubing had shot a Confederate diehard dead on Cincinnatus’ front porch. With a jerky nod, Cincinnatus said, “Reckon he would. He still in the Army?”

“Oh, you might say so.” The sergeant wrote another note. “There’s a Straubing who’s a brigadier general in logistics these days. Might not be the same man, but you don’t hear the name every day, and the specialization’s right. You know what logistics is?”

Are you a dumb nigger? he meant. But Cincinnatus did know the answer to that one: “Gettin’ men and stuff where they’re supposed to go when they’re supposed to get there.”

“Right the first time.” The sergeant nodded. “Bet you did drive a truck in the last war. Where else would you have heard the word?”

“I done said I did.” Cincinnatus paused. “But I bet you hear a lot o’ lies, sittin’ where you’re sittin’.”

“Oh, you might say so,” the sergeant repeated, deadpan. “You sure you want to go through with this, Mr. Driver?”

“Yes, suh—uh, Sergeant—an’ I tell you why,” Cincinnatus answered. The sergeant raised a polite eyebrow. Cincinnatus went on, “You just called me *Mistuh.* Ain’t no white man anywhere in the whole CSA call a colored man *Mistuh.* Call him *boy,* call him *uncle* if his hair’s goin’ gray like mine is. *Mistuh?* Never in a thousand years. An’ if you don’t respect a man, you don’t have no trouble killin’ him off.”

“Uh-*huh.*” The sergeant wrote something else on Cincinnatus’ papers. Cincinnatus tried to read what it was, but he couldn’t, not upside down. The man with the hook looked across the desk at the man with the cane. “Thanks for coming in, Mr. Driver. Like I told you, we’re going to have to look at you harder because the Confederates turned you loose. You have a telephone?”

“No, suh,” Cincinnatus answered.

“All right. We’ll send you a letter, then,” the sergeant said. “Probably be ten days, two weeks, something like that. We’ll see what General Straubing has to say about you.”

“Thank you, Sergeant.” Cincinnatus did it right this time. “When he was in Covington, he always treated the colored fellows who drove for him like they was men. Reckon he was the first white man I ever knew who did.”

Cincinnatus went home, not so happy as he’d hoped but not so disappointed as he might have been. He felt as if he were cluttering up the apartment. That was another reason he’d visited the recruiting station. But his urge to get even with the Confederates counted for more.

“Don’t want to jus’ sit here playin’ with my grandbabies,” he told Elizabeth. “I love my grandbabies, but I got some doin’ in me yet.”

“I didn’t say nothin’, dear,” his wife answered.

“I love you, too,” Cincinnatus said, mostly because she hadn’t said anything. They’d been married a long time. Despite the separations they’d gone through, she knew him better than anybody.

The letter from the recruiting station came eight days later. That was sooner than the sergeant had said. Cincinnatus didn’t know whether the quick answer meant good news or bad. He opened the letter—and still didn’t know. It just told him to come back to the station two days hence.

“Why couldn’t that blamed man say one way or the other?” he asked when he took it upstairs.

“You find out then, that’s all,” Elizabeth said. She was calmer than he was—and she wasn’t trying to find out what she’d be doing for the rest of the war.

Cincinnatus took a trolley to the recruiting station bright and early on the appointed day. He got there before it opened, and went across the street to a diner to get out of the cold. The guy behind the counter who served him a cup of coffee gave him a fishy look, but took his five cents without saying anything.

The one-handed sergeant got to the station when Cincinnatus was about halfway through the cup. He left it on the counter and limped over to find out what was what. The sergeant was getting his own pot of coffee going on a hot plate. He looked up without much surprise when the bell above the door jingled.

“Good morning, Mr. Driver,” he said. “You didn’t waste any time, did you?”

“No, suh—uh, no, Sergeant,” Cincinnatus said, and the noncom smiled at the self-correction. Cincinnatus wished he’d got it right the first time. He went on, “You gonna let me drive a truck, or shall I see what I can do in a war plant? Gotta do my bit some kind o’ way.”

Reaching into the top desk drawer, the recruiting sergeant pulled a sheet of Army stationery. “Here’s what Brigadier General Straubing has to say about you, Mr. Driver.” He set a pair of reading glasses on his nose. “ ‘I remember Cincinnatus well. He was a solid driver, clever and brave and resourceful. I have no doubts as to his loyalty or devotion to the United States.’ How’s that?”

“That’s—mighty fine, Sergeant. Mighty fine,” Cincinnatus said. “So you let me drive again?”

“We’ll let you drive,” the sergeant answered. “You said it yourself—if you go behind the wheel, a younger man gets to pick up a Springfield.”

“Ain’t quite what I said.” Cincinnatus knew he ought to leave it there, but he couldn’t. “What I said was, a white man gets to pick up a Springfield. I still don’t reckon that’s fair. Do Jesus, in the last war the Confederates let some o’ their colored men carry guns.”

“Yeah, and they’ve been regretting it ever since,” the sergeant said dryly. He held up his hook. “You can say it wouldn’t be like that here. You can say it, and I wouldn’t give you any grief about it, Mr. Driver, ’cause I think you’re likely right. But I don’t make the rules, and neither do you. The War Department says we’ll play the game like this, so we will. Do you want to do it, or don’t you? If you do, you’ve got about a million forms to fill out. If you don’t, well, thanks for stopping by.”

He had no give in him. He didn’t need to; the government backed him straight down the line. Cincinnatus sighed. “Let me have the damn forms. You ain’t what you oughta be, but you’re a damn sight better’n Jake Featherston.”

The sergeant had to go back to a filing cabinet to get the papers. “You’re a sensible man, Mr. Driver. The difference between bad and worse is a lot bigger than the difference between good and better.”

Cincinnatus started to answer, then stopped before he said anything. That would give him something to think about when he had the time. Now . . . paperwork. The recruiting sergeant had exaggerated, but not by much. Cincinnatus filled out forms till he got writer’s cramp—not an ailment he worried about very often.

Officially, he wasn’t joining the Army. Officially, he was becoming a civilian employee of the U.S. government. *The undersigned agrees, acknowledges, and accepts that his duties may require him to enter areas not definitively known to be safe.* He wasn’t sure what *definitively* meant, but he signed anyway. He knew he wasn’t going to be driving from Idaho to Minnesota.

For purposes of self-protection, employees hired for the aforementioned duty may be permitted to carry firearms, another form told him. He looked at the recruiting sergeant. “The Confederates catch me with a gun, they gonna shoot my ass,” he said.

“Don’t worry about it,” the sergeant answered. “If they catch you without a gun, they’ll shoot your ass anyway.” Since Cincinnatus couldn’t very well argue with that, he signed again.

At last, only one sheet of paper was left: a loyalty oath. Cincinnatus signed that, too, then set down the pen and shook his hand back and forth to work out the kinks. “Lot o’ paper to go through,” he said. “What do I do next?”

“Go home,” the sergeant told him, which caught him by surprise.

“Bring a suitcase—a *small* suitcase—with you Monday morning. You report to the State Capitol, room . . . 378. After that, you do what they tell you.”

“All right. Thank you kindly, Sergeant,” Cincinnatus said.

“Thank *you,* Mr. Driver. You said it—you’re doing your bit.” The sergeant looked down at his hook for a moment, then up at Cincinnatus again. “And if you have to use a gun, make it count.”

“I do that, Sergeant,” Cincinnatus promised. “Yes, suh. I do that.”

A clear predawn morning in mid-January. When Irving Morrell looked west, he saw red flares in the sky—Confederate recognition signals. When he looked east, he saw more red flares. The Confederates to the east and west could probably see each other’s flares, too. Only twenty or thirty miles separated them, twenty or thirty miles and the force Morrell commanded.

So far, the C.S. rescue force pushing east hadn’t been able to reach the men trapped in and around Pittsburgh. Morrell didn’t intend that they should, either. He turned to his wireless man. “Send ‘Rosebud’ to Philadelphia, Jenkins,” he said.

“ ‘Rosebud.’ Yes, sir.” The wireless operator didn’t know what the code phrase meant. He sent it anyway. A moment later, he nodded to Morrell. “Received, sir.”

“Good,” Morrell said. “Now we see how they like that.”

“Yes, sir,” Jenkins repeated. “Uh, what’s it all about, sir?”

Morrell didn’t think the wireless man could be a Confederate plant. He didn’t think so, but he didn’t take any chances, either. “It means Featherston’s fuckers are going to have some tough sledding, that’s what,” he said. That seemed safe enough—the younger man still didn’t know where or how.

He could have meant sledding literally. Snow blanketed eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania. Everywhere he looked, everything was white—except for the soot smears that marked burnt-out barrels, wrecked strongpoints, and other works of man.

Artillery boomed, off to the north. Those were U.S. guns, throwing

death at the Confederates pushing in from the west. The men in butternut who hung on around Pittsburgh hadn't pushed west to try to join them. Maybe they were too short of fuel to move. By now, Featherston's transport aircraft had taken a devil of a beating. And they were flying in from farther and farther away, too, as U.S. bombers plastered their fields.

Had Morrell been running the Confederates' show, he would have ordered the C.S. troops in Pittsburgh to break out no matter what. Yes, they would have given up the city. Yes, they would have taken losses. But if they'd done it soon enough, they would have saved most of their men and some—maybe a lot—of their equipment. Now they were in real trouble.

That didn't break Morrell's heart. For the first year of the war, everything Jake Featherston tried seemed golden. He'd jumped on the United States with both feet. He'd held the USA down, too, even though he ran a smaller country. That had really alarmed Morrell. Featherston didn't just intend to lick the United States. He intended to conquer them. Morrell wouldn't have believed it was possible—till the Confederates cut the USA in half.

After that, it was hang on tight and try to survive. Looking back on things, the U.S. counteroffensive in Virginia was ill-conceived. Sure, charge right into the teeth of the enemy's defenses. Featherston had known the United States were coming, and he'd baked a cake—a reinforced-concrete cake. Fredericksburg? The Wilderness? Nobody in his right mind would want to attack in places like those.

That didn't stop Daniel MacArthur, of course. He attacked, and paid for it, and attacked again, and got another bloody nose. He hurt the CSA, too, but not in proportion.

"Sir, there's enemy pressure near Cambridge," Jenkins reported.

"Is there?" Morrell said. The men and barrels in butternut would be coming along the east-west highway that went through the manufacturing town. A north-south road also ran through Cambridge. Morrell and the couple of dozen barrels he personally commanded were in bivouac along it, a few miles south of the place. Charging to the attack was a major's job, not a one-star general's. All at once, Morrell didn't care. "Then let's hit them, shall we?"

Within twenty minutes, his barrels were rolling north. The sun came up as they got moving. Infantrymen accompanied them, some riding

barrels, some in trucks, some in half-tracked troop carriers that could cross ground where even a four-wheel-drive truck bogged down. When the fighting started, the foot soldiers would jump out and go to work.

The Confederates had stalled just outside of Cambridge. Morrell could see why: it was a tough nut to crack. It sat on a rise, and dominated the ground on which Featherston's men had to approach. Several butternut barrels burned. But there was already fighting just outside the town. The chatter of automatic weapons made Morrell grind his teeth. The Confederates had plenty of firepower.

Still, he was hitting them in the flank when all their attention was focused ahead of them. "Front!" he called to his gunner.

"Identified!" Frenchy Bergeron answered, a quarter of a heartbeat slower than he should have. Maybe Morrell was overcritical; maybe Michael Pound had spoiled him for other gunners. Morrell yelled to the driver. The barrel stopped. The gun slewed a few degrees to the left. It roared.

"That's a hit!" Morrell whooped with glee as the C.S. barrel caught fire. A pair of crewmen got out and ran for the closest trees. They didn't make it. Morrell picked another target. "Front!—the one next to the upside-down auto."

"Identified!" Bergeron sang out. The turret traversed again. The cannon shouted. The Confederate barrel went up in flames. Morrell whooped again.

For two or three minutes, the U.S. machines had it all their own way. Their enemies didn't seem to realize where the devastating fire was coming from. Then the Confederates rallied. Most of their barrels were new models, with the well-sloped armor and the big gun. When they turned toward the U.S. barrels on their flank, they suddenly became much harder to knock out. And those three-inch guns began taking a toll on the barrels Morrell led.

But in confronting Morrell's barrels, the Confederates left themselves vulnerable to the U.S. defenders holed up in Cambridge. The force in the town didn't seem to have many barrels, but did have plenty of antibarrel cannons. Those began picking off the C.S. barrels that turned to expose their thinner side armor to them.

A clear day had disadvantages as well as advantages. Confederate Asskickers screamed down out of the sky to bomb the antibarrel

cannons. The dive bombers put several guns out of action in the space of a few minutes. Asskickers were hideously vulnerable to U.S. fighters, but no U.S. fighters seemed to be in the neighborhood. They were probably out chasing Pittsburgh-bound transports.

Morrell swore under this breath, and then over it. No matter how you tried, the pieces didn't all fit together the way you wanted them to. If everything worked the way you hoped it would, you'd win the war in a couple of weeks, and you'd hardly take any casualties. If . . .

Fortunately, the Fuckup Fairy visited both sides. Considering all the Confederates trapped in the Pittsburgh pocket, she'd sprinkled more of her magic dust on Jake Featherston lately than she had on the U.S. General Staff. And if that wasn't a miracle of rare device, Morrell had never seen one.

He ducked down into the turret to use his fancy wireless set. "Close with them!" he called to his crews. "Front to front, they can hurt us from farther away than we can hurt them. If we get in close, it evens out."

What had Horatio Nelson said? *No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of the enemy,* that was it. Nelson had a better turn of phrase than Irving Morrell. They both thought the same way, though.

Engine growling, Morrell's barrel raced forward. His driver had got the order along with the others. A couple of bullets clanked off the machine's steel hull. Bullets didn't matter. Confederate foot soldiers could shoot at the barrel till the cows came home. A three-inch armor-piercing round, unfortunately, was another story.

It was a wild melee, there on the snow-covered fields. The two barrel forces got within point-blank range of each other. Whoever shot first won. U.S. barrel turrets had hydraulic traverse. The Confederates had to crank theirs around by hand. It gave the green-gray barrels a small edge on the ones painted butternut.

And the antibarrel fire from Cambridge didn't stop. After as wild a half hour as Morrell had known, the Confederates sullenly drew back. They'd lost fifteen or twenty barrels, and taken out about half as many U.S. machines. "We smashed 'em, sir!" Bergeron exclaimed.

"Maybe," Morrell said. "I hope so. But maybe they're just waiting till reinforcements come forward. If they are, we've got some problems." He smiled. That was putting it mildly. He didn't know where he would

find reinforcements. The Confederates had stretched him about as thin as they'd stretched themselves. If what he had here and what was in Cambridge couldn't stop Featherston's men, they might link up with their trapped comrades after all.

That wouldn't be good. Not even slightly.

He drew back to the outskirts of the town. He had more cover for his remaining barrels there. The Confederates had got themselves mired in a big house-to-house fight in Pittsburgh. If they tried coming this way again, he aimed to give them a smaller one in Cambridge.

Time crawled by. The Confederates didn't return to the attack. Maybe they couldn't scrape together any more reinforcements after all. Morrell hoped not. They'd already put in a stronger attack from the west than he'd expected. They were bastards—no doubt about that. But they were formidable bastards—no doubt about that, either.

After the Confederates left him alone for a couple of hours, he sent foot soldiers down the west-facing slope to reoccupy the open ground where his force and theirs had clashed. When another hour went by with everything still quiet, he sent three or four barrels down there, too. They took up positions behind the burnt-out hulks of dead machines.

"Not like those assholes to stay quiet so long," Bergeron remarked.

"No, not usually," Morrell said. "I hope I know why they're doing it, but I'm not sure yet." The longer the Confederates held off, the higher his hopes rose.

The officer in charge of the infantry down below showed initiative. He ordered scouts west to see what the enemy was up to. When he got on the wireless to Morrell, he sounded as if he could hardly believe what the men told him. "Sir, they're pulling back," he said. "Looks like almost all of 'em are heading west as fast as they can go."

"Are they?" Morrell breathed. That was as far as his hopes had gone, and maybe a couple of furlongs further.

"Yes, sir," the infantry officer said. "I've got four independent reports, and they all tell me the same thing. They're leaving a screen behind to slow us down if we come after them, but most of their force is going like nobody's business."

"Thank you, Major. Thank you very much," Morrell said. "Out." After

he broke the connection, he murmured, “Son of a bitch—it worked.”

“Sir?” Bergeron asked.

“Rosebud.” Morrell could talk about the code name now. “We took what we could piece together in northern Indiana and the northwestern corner of Ohio and threw it east against the Confederates from there. And they don’t have anything around those parts that can stop it. They stripped themselves naked to mount this push toward Pittsburgh. The only prayer they’ve got of holding the corridor up to Lake Erie is breaking off the attack and using their men from this force to defend instead.”

“But if they do that, their guys inside Pittsburgh are screwed.” The gunner saw the key point in a hurry.

“They sure are,” Morrell said. This still wasn’t the two big simultaneous attacks planners on both sides dreamt of. It was about one and a half. It might be enough. Maybe the Confederates’ position in Ohio would unravel even if they did go over to the defensive. Morrell aimed to make it unravel if he could. He got on the all-hands wireless circuit. “The enemy is retreating. We’re going after him.”

J efferson Pinkard stood outside the house in Snyder, Texas, where his wife and two stepsons lived. He kept staring northwest, toward Lubbock and toward the damnyankees not far outside the town. He couldn’t hear the artillery—it was too far away. But it was close enough to let him imagine he could when he was feeling gloomy. He felt plenty gloomy this morning.

Edith came out with him in spite of the raw wind blowing down from the north. He’d never seen such a place for wind as the West Texas prairie. No matter what direction it came from, it had plenty of room to get a good running start. “What’s the matter?” she asked him.

“Wondering what the devil we’re gonna do if Lubbock falls,” he answered. “If Lubbock falls, there’s not a . . . heck of a lot between the Yankees and here. Just miles.” He didn’t worry that much about Snyder itself. The locals could always evacuate to the east. But Camp Determination . . . Camp Determination was a different story.

“They can’t expect you to take all the niggers out of that place.” Edith knew he worried about the camp, not the town.

“No, don’t reckon they can.” Jeff let it go at that. But the bathhouses that weren’t bathhouses, the trucks with the sealed passenger compartments, the mass graves—all those would be worth millions to damnyankee propaganda. Richmond wouldn’t want such secrets getting out. How could he do anything to stop that, though?

You could drive the trucks away. You could, he supposed, blow up the bathhouses. That would make Camp Determination look like an ordinary concentration camp . . . till the damnyankees found the mass graves. How many tens, how many hundreds, of thousands of corpses lay in them? Pinkard didn’t know, though he could have figured it out from camp records.

He did know the graves were too big to hide. Even if he bulldozed the ground flat, the bodies and bones remained below. And somebody was bound to blab. Somebody always blabbed. Some secrets you couldn’t keep, and that was one of them.

“Records,” he said to himself.

“Records?” Edith said. “The kind you listen to? The kind you dance to?”

Jeff didn’t answer. Those weren’t the records he had in mind. Just like any other big operation, the camp generated lots of paperwork. If the U.S. Army got close, that paperwork would have to disappear, too. Right this minute, he didn’t know where all of it was. He did know it wasn’t all in the same place, and he couldn’t get rid of all of it in a hurry. And he realized he would have to fix that as soon as he could.

The things you never reckon you’ll have to worry about, he thought. But that was foolish. He’d fought not too far from here a generation before. The Yankees had pushed east from New Mexico then. Why shouldn’t they be able to do it again?

Because we were going to lick ’em this time. Because Jake Featherston promised we’d lick ’em this time. Jeff believed what Jake Featherston said. He’d believed him ever since first hearing him in Birmingham not long after the end of the last war. He didn’t want to think—he hardly dared think—the President of the CSA might be wrong.

He muttered again, this time without words. Whether he wanted to or not, he had to be ready to do what he could in case the Confederates didn’t come out so well in this particular part of the war. (Putting it like that meant he didn’t have to dwell on how things were going across the length and breadth of the North American continent.)

When Edith looked northwest, she had other things on her mind. “Jeff . . .” she said.

“What is it?”

“Will . . . Will the boys be all right? The war’s not as far away as I wish it was.”

“Things aren’t bad now. I don’t reckon they’ll turn bad real quick. If the damnyankees get into Lubbock, or if they get past Lubbock, maybe you and the boys ought to go east for a bit.”

His wife nodded. “I’ve got some stuff packed up in case we have to leave in a hurry.”

“Good. That’s good, babe,” Jeff said. “Should be easy enough to get away. Nothing around here is what you’d call a great big target.”

“What about the camp?” Edith asked.

“Nah.” He shook his head. “Don’t you worry none about that. What’s in the camp? Niggers. Who gives a . . . darn about niggers?” To anyone else, he would have said, *Who gives a rat’s ass?* or something like that. But he tried to watch his language around Edith. He answered his own question: “Nobody does, not on either side of the border.”

She nodded again, reassured. “Well, you’re right about that, Lord knows. They’re nothing but our misfortune.”

Jeff kissed her. “That’s just what they are, all right.” Not even Saul Goldman and the other fancy-pants slogan-makers for the Freedom Party had ever put it any better. He went on, “They’re not going to be such a big misfortune after a while, though; that’s for sure.”

He didn’t talk in any detail about what Camp Determination did, not even to Edith, not even if she’d been married to a guard at Camp Dependable in Louisiana before she said her I do’s with him. Nobody who didn’t wear the uniform needed to know the details. He felt a certain lonely pride in the knowledge of what he did to serve the Confederate States. He was part of the war, just as much as if he commanded a division of troops.

Edith didn’t ask for details, either. She just said, “All right,” and let it go at that.

When Jeff got back to Camp Determination, he summoned the camp's chief engineer, a dour assault band leader—the Party equivalent of a major—named Lyle Schoonover, and told him what he needed. One of the reasons Schoonover was dour, and that he held a Party rank and not one in the regular Army, was that he'd lost his right leg below the knee. He heard Pinkard out, nodded, and said, "I'll take care of it."

"Not just the bathhouses, mind," Jeff said. "Set something up where we can get rid of the records in a hurry, too."

"I said I'd take care of it." Schoonover sounded impatient. "I meant all of it."

"You meant all of it . . ." Jefferson Pinkard tapped the three wreathed stars on the left side of his collar.

The engineer had only one star on each side of his collar, and no wreath. He gave Jeff a dirty look, but said what he had to say: "Sir."

"That's more like it," Jeff said. "I'm in charge here, dammit, for better and for worse. Now that things don't look so good, we've got to ride it out the best way we know how."

Schoonover's expression changed. There was respect on his narrow features now—reluctant respect, maybe, but respect all the same. Jeff smiled, down inside where it didn't show. Educated people often started out looking down their noses at him. He hadn't finished high school. Before he wound up running prison camps, he was a steelworker and a soldier of fortune. But he had a good eye for what needed doing. He'd always had it, and it let him get and stay ahead of a lot of people who thought they were more clever than he was.

"You're not running from trouble, anyway—sir," Schoonover said.

"Trouble's like a dog. You run from it, it'll chase you and bite you in the ass," Pinkard said. A startled grunt of laughter escaped Schoonover. Jeff went on, "You go at it, though, sometimes you can make it run instead."

"Wish we could make the damnyankees run," the assault band leader said.

"That ain't the point." Educated or not, Jeff knew enough to say *isn't*. He used *ain't* with malice aforethought. "The damnyankees are the Army's trouble. Them finding out about what all we're doin' here—that's our trouble. That's what we can take care of on our own."

“Some of it, anyhow,” Schoonover said. “Those graves won’t disappear all by themselves.”

“Well, you’re right. I already figured that out myself, too,” Jeff said. “But since we can’t do anything about ’em, no point to flabbling about ’em, either. We got to take care of what we can take care of, that’s all.”

Lyle Schoonover got to his feet. He moved well, as long as he didn’t have to get anywhere in a tearing hurry. “Fair enough, sir. That’s a sensible attitude.” His salute didn’t seem too grudging. He left Pinkard’s office. If you didn’t know he’d been maimed in the Great War, his gait wouldn’t give it away.

He hadn’t been gone more than ten minutes before the telephone on Jeff’s desk jangled. Jeff picked it up. “Pinkard here.” He wondered what had gone wrong now. Telephone calls while he was at work were rarely good news.

“Hello, Pinkard. This is Ferd Koenig.”

“What can I do for you, sir?” Jeff tried to stay cool. Calls from the Attorney General were never good news.

“You’ve got the damnyankees a little closer to you than we thought you might,” Koenig said.

“Yes, sir. That’s a fact.” Jeff began to suspect he knew why Koenig was calling. “We’re doing what we can to get ready, just in case.”

“Are you?” the Attorney General said. “Like what?”

With the conversation with the camp engineer fresh in his mind, Pinkard went into detail—maybe more detail than Ferdinand Koenig wanted to hear. He finished, “Nothin’ we can do about the graves, sir. Except for them, though, we can have this place looking like an ordinary concentration camp mighty quick.”

“All right,” Koenig said when he got done. The Attorney General sounded more that a little stunned. Yes, Jeff had told him more than he wanted to know. *Serves you right,* Jeff thought. After a moment to gather himself, Koenig continued, “Sounds like you’ve done everything you could.”

“You come up with anything else, sir, you just tell me, and I’ll take care of it,” Pinkard promised. He didn’t believe Koenig could. If he’d

thought the man back in Richmond would have orders for him, he would have kept his mouth shut.

“I’ll do that.” By the Attorney General’s tone, he didn’t want to talk to anybody from Camp Determination for quite a while. That suited Jeff fine; he didn’t want to talk to Ferd Koenig, either. Koenig added, “I’ll tell the President how thorough you’ve been out there. He’ll be glad to have the good news.”

“Thank you kindly, sir.” Jeff might not be an educated man, but he could read between the lines. He heard what Koenig didn’t say: that Jake Featherston hadn’t had much good news lately. “Things aren’t going so good up in Yankeeland, are they?”

“They could be better.” By the Attorney General’s heavy sigh, they could be a lot better. Koenig went on, “But with any luck at all, the Army will do its job up there by Lubbock, and everything you’re doing will be like putting a storm cellar into a house—it’ll be nice to have, but you won’t really need it.”

“Here’s hoping, sir,” Pinkard said.

“Yeah, here’s hoping. Freedom!” Ferdinand Koenig hung up.

“Freedom!” Jeff echoed, but he was talking to a dead line. He put the handset back in its cradle. How much freedom could the CSA enjoy if the USA came down and took it away? The Negroes in his domain? Their freedom? They never entered his mind.

* * *

J anuary in the North Atlantic was about as bad as it got. Waves threw the *Josephus Daniels* this way and that. The destroyer escort had a course she was supposed to follow. Keeping to it—keeping anywhere close to it—was a long way from easy. Even knowing exactly where the ship lay was a long way from easy.

Sam Carsten had only one thing going for him: he didn't get seasick no matter what. Pat Cooley was a good sailor, but the exec looked a little green. A lot of the men seemed even less happy with their own insides than they had when they whipped the British auxiliary cruiser a couple of months earlier.

Cleaning crews with mops and buckets kept patrolling the heads and passageways. The faint reek of vomit persisted all the same. Too many sailors were too sick to hold in what they ate. More often than not, they couldn't use the rail, either. To try would have asked to get washed overboard.

Waves and spray made the Y-ranging gear much less reliable than it would have been in better weather and calmer seas. Thad Walters looked up from his screens and put the best face on things he could: "Well, sir, the damn limeys'll have just as much fun finding us as the other way round."

"Oh, boy," Sam said in hollow tones. "They'll find Newfoundland. They'll find the Maritimes. They'll find trouble for the USA—find it or make it."

"That's the name of the game for them, sir," Lieutenant Cooley said.

"I know. But the name of the game for me is stopping them if I can," Sam answered.

"Sir, with that gunship to our credit we're still a long way ahead," the exec answered.

"No." Sam shook his head. "That's ancient history. Anything that happened yesterday is ancient history. What we do today matters. What we're going to do tomorrow matters. Forget the old stuff. We've still got a big job ahead of us."

The Y-ranging officer and the exec exchanged glances. "Sir, I'm sorry you didn't go to Annapolis," Cooley said. "To hell with me if you

wouldn't have flag rank. You've got more killer instinct than anybody else I know."

"What I haven't got is the brains to make an admiral," Sam said. "You know it, I know it, and the Navy Department sure as hell knows it. I'm damn proud I've come as far as I have."

"You've got plenty of brains, sir. You've got as many as any officer I've served under," Cooley said. "It's just too bad you had to start late."

"Well, thank you very much, Pat. That's white of you," Carsten answered. He knew the exec meant it; whatever else the younger man was, he was no brown-noser.

A wave crashed over the *Josephus Daniels*' bow. White water cascaded back. No sailors manned the ship's antiaircraft guns. They would have gone overboard in a hurry if they'd tried. No carrier-based aircraft could fly or hope to land in weather like this, either, so things evened out.

"Boy, this is fun," Lieutenant, J.G., Walters said, raising his eyes from the electronic display for a moment.

"This time of year, the weather's a worse enemy than the limeys and the frogs and the damn Confederates all rolled together," Sam said. "When spring finally comes around, we'll all get serious about the war again."

"Sub drivers are always serious," Cooley said.

"That's a fact. And they've got it easy once they submerge—that's another fact," Sam agreed. "But God have mercy, I wouldn't want to be a submersible skipper here and now, not even a little bit. They have to get into position on the surface, remember. They're way too slow underwater to do it there. I'll tell you one thing—*I* wouldn't like to be a sub captain trying to stay up with us here."

"Wouldn't be a whole lot of fun, would it?" the exec allowed after a moment's contemplation.

"Not hardly." Sam thought about the wave his ship had shrugged off. He thought about the captain of a submarine standing on top of the conning tower when a wave like that washed over his boat. He thought about that skipper either washed out to sea or, if held in place by a line, doing his best imitation of a drowned puppy. He thought about Lord only knew how many gallons of the North Atlantic going

down the hatch and into the submersible. He was glad to be thinking about such things as the captain of a destroyer escort. They couldn't happen to him. They sure could to a sub driver.

Somewhere out in the North Atlantic, such things probably were happening to several submarines from both sides right this minute. Sam hoped no enemy boats were within a hundred miles. Then he hoped no U.S. boats were within a hundred miles, either. You were just as dead if your own side sank you as you were any other way. And in weather like this, mistakes were too simple.

Things only got worse. Snow and sleet blew down out of the north, coating the *Josephus Daniels*' deck and lines and railings with ice. Sam ordered everyone who had to go up on deck to wear a lifeline. Ice made slipping even easier than it had been before.

After leaving the bridge, Sam went down to the wireless shack. One of the yeomen there was telling the other a dirty story. He broke off when his pal hissed. Both ratings sprang to attention.

"As you were," Sam said. "You can finish that joke if you want to, Hrolfson. Don't mind me if I don't laugh real hard—I've heard it."

"It's all right, sir," Petty Officer Hrolfson said, not relaxing from his stiff brace. "It'll keep. What can we do for you, sir?"

"What's the last weather forecast?" Sam asked.

"Ours or theirs?" Hrolfson said. The USA and the UK both sent predictions to their ships. The United States had broken the British weather code. The limeys had likely broken the American code, too; it wasn't a tough cipher. Both sides had weather stations in Greenland and Newfoundland and Labrador and Baffin Island to keep an eye on conditions as they developed. Sam had heard quiet, deadly warfare went on up there in the northernmost reaches of the world.

"Whatever you've got," he said now.

"Well, sir, the limeys figure the storm's good for about another three days. Our guys figure it'll blow out sooner than that," Hrolfson said.

Sam grunted. "I'd bet on the Englishmen." He usually did when their reports disagreed with the ones from the Navy Department. And the blow he was in now felt strong enough to last a long time.

"We've got more stations up there than they do," Hrolfson said. "How

come their forecasts are better than ours?”

“More experience, I guess,” Sam answered. “They’ve been doing this a long time, and we didn’t get serious about it till the war.” The ship plunged down into a trough. He steadied himself without even knowing he’d done it. “What else have we got besides the weather reports?”

“Well, the BBC says England won a big battle against the Germans in the North Sea,” Hrolfson told him. “The Kaiser’s English-language news station says Churchill’s full of shit.”

Sam sighed. “That figures, I guess. Nobody who wasn’t there will really know what’s what—and the people who were there won’t be sure, either. I still couldn’t tell you who won the Battle of the Three Navies.”

“You were there, sir?” said the other yeoman, whose name was Lopatinsky. “My uncle was there, too. He used to say the same thing. He was in the *Dakota* when the hits jammed her steering and she made that circle through the fleet.”

“Son of a—gun!” Sam said. “I was in the *Dakota,* too. What’s your uncle’s name?”

“Kruk, sir,” Lopatinsky answered. “Jerzy Kruk—people call him Jerry most of the time.”

“Son of a bitch!” This time, Sam didn’t sanitize it. “I knew him. Kind of a big gut, eyes green like a cat’s, ears that stuck out, and a go-to-hell grin. He fought one of the one-pounders topside, right?”

“That’s him,” Lopatinsky said. “His gut’s even bigger nowadays, but he’s still got that damn grin.”

“What’s he doing these days?” Carsten asked.

“Coal miner. We’re a family of miners, down in West Virginia,” Lopatinsky said. “I went down below myself for a couple of years, but I figured there’s got to be a better way to make a living.”

“That’s how I got off the farm,” Sam said. “Take it all together and I expect I was right.”

“I feel the same way, sir,” the yeoman said. “Yeah, we get shot at, but so what? At least we can shoot back. The roof comes down or the

mine floods, what can you do about it? Not much."

"Here's something, sir." Hrolfson had been listening intently to whatever was coming in through his earphones. "Our wireless says we've sent the Confederates in Pittsburgh a messenger under flag of truce. He's asking for their surrender."

"That *is* good news," Sam said. "What are the Confederates doing?"

Hrolfson listened for a little while longer before shrugging. "They don't say anything about that, sir."

"Ha!" Lopatinsky said. "That means the Confederates told 'em to fold it till it was all corners." Carsten nodded. That was his guess, too. If you listened to the wireless much these days, you had to learn to sift through the crap to get at the few nuggets of truth the broadcasters were, as likely as not, trying to hide.

"If they don't give up pretty soon, we'll kill all of them." Hrolfson sounded as if he looked forward to it.

So did Sam. Even so, he said, "Depends on how many of our guys they can take out before they go down. If they hurt us bad enough, then it's not a bad bargain for them even if they do buy a plot."

"Think they can do that, sir?" Lopatinsky asked anxiously.

"I hope not, and that's the best answer I can give you." Sam tapped the two broad gold stripes on his sleeve. He was proud he'd got them. He hadn't dreamt of coming so far when he scrambled up the hawse hole into officers' country. "I know a little something about what we do on the water. Land fighting—the only thing I know is, I'm glad I'm not in it. It's a nasty, bloody business. When we go into action here, it's usually over in a hurry, anyhow."

"Yes, sir," Lopatinsky said. "How long did we need to knock that limey out?"

"I didn't look at my watch, but it wasn't long." Sam let it go at that. If one of the *Karlskrona*'s big shells had hit the *Josephus Daniels,* the fight might have been over even quicker, with the wrong side winning. That bastard carried big guns, even if she had no armor and only a freighter's engines.

"Could she have sunk us if she hit us?" Hrolfson asked, proving ignorance could be bliss.

“You bet your sweet ass she could,” Sam blurted. Hrolfson and Lopatinsky both stared at him. He laughed self-consciously. “You wanted a straight answer. You got one.”

“You usually give ’em, Skipper. That’s good,” Lopatinsky said. Hrolfson nodded. They made Sam almost as proud as knocking out the *Karlskrona* had done.

XX

O n the women’s side again. In a way, Hipolito Rodriguez had to be more careful there than he did on the other side of Camp Determination. He knew in his gut that the black men were dangerous. With the women, he and the other men in gray could let down their guard. They could regret it if they did, too.

The women tried to make the men set over them let down their guard. They dressed provocatively, and acted provocative. And it wasn’t just an act—a lot of them would deliver. They wanted more food, better food, better quarters. They wanted to stay out of the bathhouses. They hadn’t needed long to realize those were news as bad as it got. The trucks, by contrast, nobody seemed to mind. The *mallates* knew they would be leaving Camp Determination in them, so didn’t worry about climbing aboard. That the trips had no destination, they hadn’t figured out.

“Hello, Mistuh Sergeant, suh.” The black woman who spoke to Rodriguez was falling out of her blouse. “You takes care o’ me, I takes care o’ you. I takes care o’ you real good.” She had only her body to get what she wanted. She used what she had, striking a pose that would have got her arrested on any street corner in the CSA.

Rodriguez just kept walking. He’d found that worked best. If you stopped to talk it over and argue with every colored woman who made advances, you’d never go anywhere and you’d never get anything done all day.

Sometimes nothing worked. “You lousy fairy!” the woman snarled at his back. He ignored her. If he turned around, he could get her into

whatever kind of trouble he wanted, up to and including a trip to the bathhouse.

He kept walking anyhow. With or without his help, she'd get hers soon enough any which way. Even if she latched on to some other guard as a protector, she'd get hers before long. Either he'd get bored with her or he'd find somebody else or he'd be off duty when she got picked in a cleanout. He might even be sorry afterwards. She wouldn't be, not for long.

Another woman came up to him. "Mistuh Sergeant, suh?" None of them ever called him *Troop Leader.* They knew about Army ranks. The ranks Freedom Party guards used might have been in some foreign language for them. Since Rodriguez felt the same way about those ranks, he couldn't blame the women—not for that, anyhow.

"What you want?" he asked. Unlike most, this one wasn't trying to act like a slut. The novelty intrigued him. Because it did, he answered her instead of pretending she wasn't there.

"Mistuh Sergeant, suh, my little boy, he powerful hungry. He only five year old. You got chilluns your ownself, suh?"

"I got children," Rodriguez said. "I'm sorry, but I can't do nothin'." Children died fast in the camp. Their mothers often died with them, from trying to share rations that weren't enough for one.

The Negro woman sighed. "You find him some extra food, Mistuh Sergeant, suh, I do anything you want. Reckon you know what I mean. I don't want nothin' for me. But he too little to die like dat. He ain't done nothin' to nobody."

"I don't want nothing like that. I got a wife, too." Rodriguez occasionally forgot about Magdalena—temptation would get the better of him. But he didn't forget more than occasionally.

"You sound like you is a Christian man." The colored woman sounded surprised.

Almost all *mallates* were Protestants. To Rodriguez, that meant they hardly counted as Christians themselves. He didn't want to argue with the woman. The less he had to do with the prisoners, the less he had to think of them as people. The job went better when they were just—things—to him. So all he said was, "I try," and he started to go on with his rounds.

“If you is a Christian man, suh, an’ if you loves Jesus Christ, what you doin’ here?” the woman asked.

He knew what he was doing: reducing population. As far as he was concerned, that needed doing. If it weren’t for the Negroes, the Confederate States wouldn’t have had so many troubles. He’d got his first taste of combat not against the USA but stamping out a Negro Socialist Republic in Georgia. Were blacks any more loyal to the Stars and Bars than they had been a generation earlier? If they were, would the country need camps now?

“Reckon I ax somebody else, then,” the woman said with another sigh. “You seemed like you was a decent fella, but I gots to do what I gots to do to keep my Septimius alive.”

Another raggedy-ass pickaninny with a ten-dollar name. Rodriguez almost asked the woman why she couldn’t have called him Joe or Fred or Pete or something sensible. In the end, he held his tongue. That little kid had nothing left but his fancy name. Why not let him make the most of it for whatever small span of days he had here?

When Rodriguez walked on, the woman didn’t try to stop him. He wondered what her chances of hooking up with some other guard were. She wasn’t anything special to look at. With so many women throwing themselves at the men in gray, it was a buyers’ market. The Freedom Party guards could pick and choose. Ordinary girls got left behind.

Off to the northwest, something that might have been distant thunder muttered. But it wasn’t thunder, not on a day that was fine and bright if chilly. It was artillery. Rodriguez knew the sound—he knew it at much closer range than this. Just the other side of Lubbock, Confederate and damnyankee gunners were doing their best to blow each other to hell and gone.

If the men in green-gray broke through, if they started down the highway toward Snyder and toward Camp Determination . . . That wouldn’t be so good. The guards had orders to get rid of as many Negroes as they could, and then to blow up the bathhouses and escape themselves.

More mutters in the distance. Would the prisoners know what those sounds meant? Some of the men would; Rodriguez was sure of that. Either they’d fought for the C.S. government or against it—maybe both. Any which way, they would know what artillery was. That could

mean trouble.

Rodriguez glanced at the young men with submachine guns who accompanied him. They showed no signs of recognizing the far-off rumble. That only proved they'd never seen combat.

Why aren't you in the real Army? Rodriguez wondered. The answer wasn't hard to figure out—they'd pulled strings. This was bound to be a safer duty than facing soldiers in green-gray. The *mallates* here might be troublesome, but they didn't shoot back. And they definitely didn't have artillery.

An airplane buzzed over the camp. It was a Confederate Hound Dog; Rodriguez could make out the C.S. battle flags painted under the wings. U.S. warplanes had made appearances, too. If they wanted to bomb or strafe, they could. Camp Determination wasn't set up to defend against air attack; nobody had ever thought it would have to.

So far, the U.S. aircraft had left the place alone. Maybe the fliers didn't know what this place was. Or maybe they knew and didn't care. It wasn't as if people in the USA loved Negroes, either. They complained about what the Confederates were doing to them, but that struck Rodriguez as nothing but propaganda. If the United States really cared about Negroes, they would have opened their borders to them. They hadn't. They weren't about to, either.

Two women got into a catfight. They screeched and scratched and wrestled and swore. Rodriguez and his comrades hurried toward the squabble. The women were shrieking about somebody named Adrian. Was he a guard? Rodriguez couldn't think of any guards named Adrian, but he might have missed somebody. Was he a black man in the other half of the prison? Or was he somebody they'd known back where they came from?

Whoever he was, he wasn't worth disturbing the peace for. "Enough!" Rodriguez yelled. "Break it up!"

The women ignored him. They were too intent on maiming each other to care what a guard said. "You whore!" one of them shouted.

"I ain't no whore!" The second woman pulled the first one's hair, which produced a shrill scream. "*You* the whore!"

"Break it up!" Rodriguez yelled again. "Punishment cell for both of you!"

Life at Camp Determination was hard anyway. It was harder in a punishment cell. They didn't give prisoners room to stand up or sit down. They had no stoves—you froze in the winter. In the summer, you baked, but everybody in the camp baked in the summer. You got starvation rations, even skimpier and nastier than the cooks doled out to anybody else.

But the two women really meant this brawl. They wouldn't stop no matter what a man in uniform said. That was unusual. Rodriguez nodded to the junior guards with him. "Take care of it," he said.

They did, using the butt ends of their submachine guns. Some of the models that went up to the front were of all-metal construction, so cheap they'd fall to pieces if you dropped them on the sidewalk. But the guards got better-made weapons with real wooden stocks. One reason they did was for times like this. Even if you didn't want to shoot somebody, you sometimes had to knock sense into an empty head.

Now the women shrieked on a different note. Back when they first got half the camp to themselves, some of the guards were reluctant to clout them. No more. Familiarity had bred contempt.

"Didn't you hear the troop leader yell for you to break it up?" one of the guards panted. "He tells you to do something, you cut the crap and you do it, you hear?"

If Rodriguez hadn't had three stripes on his sleeve, he likely would have been nothing but a damn Mexican to the guard. Of course, even a damn Mexican stood higher on the Confederate ladder than a nigger (unless you were a white Texan from down near the Rio Grande). And a troop leader stood infinitely higher than a prisoner in an extermination camp.

One of the women had an eye swollen shut. The other one had blood running down the side of her head. They pointed at each other. At exactly the same time, they both said, "She started it."

"Nobody cares who start it," Rodriguez said. "You don't stop when I say to stop. I say twice, you still don't stop. Now you pay." He turned to the guards. "To the punishment cells. They start this shit again, you shoot. You hear?"

"Yes, Troop Leader!" they chorused, their timing almost as good as the women's.

Rodriguez wondered if the Negroes thought he was joking. If they did, it was the last mistake they'd ever make. Nobody in the Confederate States—nobody who mattered, anyway—would care whether a couple of colored women died a little sooner than they would have otherwise. Far away in the distance, artillery rumbled again. As long as it didn't get much closer, everything was all right. Rodriguez hoped everything would go on being all right, too.

* * *

W illard Sloan was not a nice man. Scipio listened to him screaming on the telephone: “You call that lettuce? Holy Jesus, only thing it was good for was wiping my ass! What do I mean? I’ll tell you what I mean. It was limper than an old man’s dick, that’s what, and it looked like the bugs ate as much as you sold me. Nobody pulls that kind of shit on me twice, you hear?” *Bang!* Down went the receiver.

Sloan might have been nice before the Yankee bullet paralyzed him from the waist down. Or he might have been a son of a bitch from the start. If he’d ever heard the old saying about catching more flies with honey than with vinegar, he didn’t believe it. Maybe he just didn’t like flies.

Most restaurant managers worth their pay had some son of a bitch in them. Jerry Dover sure did. But the new man at the Huntsman’s Lodge took it to extremes. When something made him unhappy, you heard about it, loudly and profanely. Sloan operated on the theory that the squeaky wheel got the grease. He didn’t just squeak—he screeched.

He cussed Scipio out when the black man made mistakes. Scipio did make some—with all the things that went on in a busy restaurant, he couldn’t help it. But he didn’t make many, and Willard Sloan noticed. “Well, looks like Dover knew what he was talking about,” he said one day. “You do know what the fuck you’re doin’.”

“I thanks you, suh,” Scipio said. “You do somethin’, you likes to do it good.”

“Ha!” Sloan said. “Most people”—he didn’t say *most niggers,* for which Scipio gave him credit—“only want to do enough to get by. You show up every day, and you work like a bastard.”

“I does my job bes’ way I knows how,” Scipio said.

“Well, that’s what you’re supposed to do,” the manager said. “Doesn’t happen as often as it ought to, though. I can hire a hundred people who could wait tables kinda half-assed, you know what I mean? Good enough to get by, but not really good. One of you is worth all of them put together. You’re the kind of waiter a place like this is supposed to have. You’re the kind of waiter who makes the Huntsman’s Lodge the kind of place it is.”

“Thank you, suh. Don’t reckon I hear many finer compliments.” Scipio

meant it. Willard Sloan didn't have to waste praise on him. If Sloan did it, he meant it. Maybe hearing that praise made Scipio rash, for he went on, "How much it matter, though, when they kin ship me off to a camp whenever they please?"

As soon as the words were gone, he wished he had them back. Whining to a white man never did a Negro any good. Willard Sloan didn't answer for a while. Then he said, "When I got shot, I was out in no-man's-land, between our lines and the damnyankees'. A nigger soldier brought me back, or maybe I would've died out there."

"What happen to him afterwards?" Scipio asked.

Sloan sighed. "Xerxes, I don't know. I just don't know. I don't know where he's from. I don't know his name. I don't know if he got himself killed next day or next week or next month. I can't tell you, that's all. I wasn't an officer leading colored troops or anything—their sector was next to ours, that's all. I don't even know if he was out there already or if he came out to get me. I was in the hospital a hell of a long time after that. I never had the chance to find out."

"All right, suh." Thus encouraged, Scipio felt bold enough to add, "If he still 'live now, reckon he either in a camp or worried about goin' in. Don't hardly seem fair."

Sloan sighed again. He spread his hands. "Ain't much I can do about it. Who pays attention to a guy in a wheelchair who runs a restaurant? Maybe I can help my own people some. I hear tell Dover did. Things are getting tougher all the time. I don't know if it'll still work. I aim to try, anyhow."

"Can't ask for no more'n dat," Scipio said. So a human being did lurk under that acid-tongued exterior. Worth knowing, maybe.

Human being or not, Sloan didn't put up with slackness, any more than Jerry Dover had. When a cook came in late three times in two weeks, he was gone. The Mexican who took his place spoke next to no English, but showed up early every day. He picked up the language in a hurry, especially the obscenities that laced the conversation of the rest of the kitchen staff.

How many Mexicans were in Augusta these days? How many Mexicans were in towns and fields all over the Confederacy, doing what had been nigger work till blacks started getting cordoned off by barbed wire and disappearing into camps? Not so many as the Negroes they replaced, surely. But enough to keep crops coming in,

wheels turning, meals cooked and served, hair cut.

They can get along without us. The idea terrified Scipio. He hadn't thought the Freedom Party could strike at Negroes in any really important way. He hadn't thought the CSA could do without the hard, unglamorous labor colored men and women provided. He hadn't thought so, but maybe he was wrong.

One good thing about a busy shift: it left him no time to brood. He was always hopping, taking orders, bringing food out from the kitchen, barking at the busboys, trying to hear the gossip at his tables without letting the whites know he was listening.

Everybody talked about Pittsburgh. The more that people knew, the gloomier they sounded. Some of them sounded very gloomy indeed. "We're going to lose that whole army," a colonel home on leave told his banker friend. "We're going to lose a big piece of Ohio, too. It's just a mess—a mess, I tell you."

"What can we do?" the banker asked.

"Hold on tight everywhere else and hope we can ride it out," the officer answered. "Don't know what else there is *to* do. Give up? Not while we've still got bullets in the gun. You reckon the last peace was bad? It'd be a walk in the park next to what we'd get from the damnyankees this time around."

Scipio wished for the destruction of the Freedom Party with all his heart. He had mixed feelings about the Confederate States of America. Every man needed a country, and the Confederate States, for better and often for worse, were his. He'd had no trouble getting along before Jake Featherston took power. Things hadn't been perfect or even very good, but they hadn't been so bad, either. He'd known where he fit.

But Negroes didn't fit anywhere in Featherston's CSA. And enough whites agreed with Featherston to bring him and his followers into places where they could do something about their ideas. And so . . .

And so, when Scipio went home that night, he passed the barbed-wire perimeter around the Terry. No street lights inside kept him from tripping. Power had been off for a long time. He stepped slowly and carefully. Falling would be bad, not just because he was an old man and getting brittle but because he might tear his trousers. That would be a real disaster.

He made it back to the apartment undamaged. It was chilly in there. No buildings in the Terry had heat anymore. The handful of people left here used makeshift wood-burning stoves for cooking and heating. One of these days, maybe, a fire would get loose. Scipio dreaded that, but didn't know what he could do about it.

Bathsheba stirred when he came to bed. "Sorry," he said. "Didn't mean to bother you none."

" 'S all right," his wife answered sleepily. "Sunday tomorrow. We kin go to church."

"All right." Scipio didn't argue. He thought God had long since stopped listening to the Confederacy's Negroes, but Bathsheba still believed. Going along was easier than quarreling.

He thought so, anyway. In the morning, Cassius said, "I ain't goin'. I got to see some people about some business."

"What kind of business?" Scipio asked.

His son just looked at him—looked through him, really. Cassius didn't answer. Some kind of resistance business, then. Scipio sighed but didn't insist. Bathsheba tried to. It didn't work. Cassius was going to go his own way. Seeing what things were like these days, Scipio had a harder time thinking him wrong than he would have a couple of years earlier.

The church was as rundown as everything else in the Terry. The preacher's coat and trousers were shiny with age. The reverend preached a careful sermon, praying for peace and for justice and for an end to misery and oppression. He made a point of not saying that the members of his congregation should rise up against oppression. Somebody was bound to be listening for the authorities. If the government or the Freedom Party—assuming there was any difference between the two—didn't like what he said, he would vanish off the face of the earth as if he'd never been born.

He might have preached fire and brimstone. He might have preached revolt and revolution. It wouldn't have mattered. He was just finishing his sermon when somebody at the back of the church exclaimed, "Lord have mercy, dey is out dere!"

Nobody wondered who *they* were. With gasps of horror, people sprang up from their rickety seats and hurried out of the church, hoping to get away before it was too late. "God be with you, brothers and

sisters!" the preacher called after them. He didn't try to get them to stay. Maybe he had his own escape route planned.

Scipio and Bathsheba and Antoinette scurried away with the rest of the congregation. *Like rats,* he thought. Any kind of hiding place would do now.

But there were no hiding places. Augusta policemen and Freedom Party stalwarts and guards waited out in the street. They had smiles on their faces and rifles and submachine guns in their hands. One of them shifted a wad of tobacco into his cheek so he could talk more clearly: "Y'all can come along with us quiet-like, or y'all can get shot right here. Don't matter none to us. Which'll it be?"

One young man, only a little older than Cassius, ran for it. A submachine gun spat fire. The young man fell and writhed on the cracked pavement. The stalwart who'd cut him down ambled over and put a bullet through his head. The Negro groaned and lay still.

"Anybody else?" asked the cop with the chaw. No one moved. No one spoke.

Cassius. Thank God Cassius isn't here. Someone may get away, Scipio thought. He glanced over at his wife. She nodded when their eyes met. She had to be thinking along with him.

The policeman spat a brown stream of tobacco juice in the dead man's direction. "All right," he said. "Get moving."

Away the Negroes went. The congregation was only part of the cleanout. Some men tried to offer money to get away. Some women tried to offer themselves. The white men only laughed at them.

Out of the Terry they went. A lot of white Augustans were worshiping and praying at this hour of the day. Maybe God listened to them. He sure hadn't paid any attention to the colored preacher. The whites who weren't at church stared at the Negroes herded along like cattle. Some just stared. Some jeered. No one called out a word of protest.

Confederate Station was by Eighth and Walker, right next to St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Did God listen harder if you called on Him in Latin? Scipio wouldn't have bet on it. The station wasn't far from the Terry. The captured Negroes were lucky in that, because he was sure they would have had to walk no matter how far it was.

And then all their luck ran out. Everything happened so fast, neither

Willard Sloan nor anyone else had the slightest chance to do anything. “In! Get in, God damn you!” shouted the white men with guns. They stuffed cars tighter than should have been humanly possible. By the way the boxcar Scipio and his family went into smelled, it had hauled cattle the last time. The whites packed it till no one could sit down, then slammed the door shut. That cut off almost all of the air. Scipio resigned himself to dying before he got wherever the train was going. With a jerk and a lurch, it began to roll.

* * *

D r. Leonard O’Doull sometimes thought he was trapped in one of the nastier suburbs of hell. One bleeding, mangled, screaming man after another, from the time he gulped coffee to wake up to the moment he lay down for a stolen bit of sleep. Some of the soldiers wore green-gray, others butternut. He’d almost stopped noticing which color uniform he had to cut away to get at the latest mutilation.

“When will this end?” he groaned to Granville McDougald after amputating a shattered arm.

“You’re asking the wrong guy,” the medic answered. “Only one who can tell you is the Confederate CO.”

“He should have quit three weeks ago,” O’Doull said.

McDougald shrugged. “He’s got orders to hold to as long as he can, and he’s got ammo for his guns. Featherston would probably send a people bomb after him if he did throw in the towel. As soon as we smash him flat, that frees up all of our men here to roll west and knock the Confederates out of Ohio. So he’s holding down a lot more men than he’s still got left himself.”

“You spent all these years as a medic, right?” O’Doull asked. McDougald nodded. The doctor went on, “So how come you talk like you come from the General Staff?”

“Me?” Granville McDougald laughed. “I’m just picking up stuff I hear from the wounded. We’ve got enough of ’em.”

“Well, God knows you’re right about that,” O’Doull said. The University of Pittsburgh hospital held U.S. wounded ranging in rank from private to brigadier general—and Confederates ranging from private to full colonel. It was always stuffed. Men lay on gurneys in

the hallway, sometimes on mattresses on the floor, sometimes—when things were at their worst—on blankets on the floor.

The Confederates never had made it over the Allegheny River. They never had tried to break out of Pittsburgh to the west, either. They'd waited till the relieving column could link up with them—but it never did. Now, outside the pocket, there were no Confederate soldiers for miles and miles. The men who'd tried to relieve Pittsburgh had turned west themselves, to try to stem the U.S. advance out of northwestern Ohio and Indiana.

"One thing," O'Doull said. McDougald raised an eyebrow. O'Doull went on, "I bet the poor bastards stuck here don't think Jake Featherston is always right anymore."

"That doesn't matter," McDougald said. "What matters is the people down in the CSA. When they figure out Featherston's led 'em down the primrose path, that's when things get interesting."

"Maybe—but maybe not," O'Doull said. "Yeah, some of them may hate Featherston after things go wrong. But won't they go on hating us even worse? They really do, you know." He'd listened to wounded men, too, and some of the captured Confederates were alarmingly frank.

"I don't care if they hate us. I hate them, too." Granville McDougald was so matter-of-fact, he might have been talking about the weather. "What I want 'em to remember is, if they mess with us, we're going to pound the kapok out of 'em, and they better get used to the idea."

"Oderint dum metuant," O'Doull murmured. McDougald made a questioning noise. Half embarrassed, O'Doull explained: "I did a lot of Latin when I was an undergrad—in those days, you had to when you went to college. It's helped with the medical terms, I will say. But the Emperor Caligula said that."

"Caligula? The crazy one?"

"That's him. He was nuttier than Jake Featherston, to hell with me if he wasn't. But it means, 'Let them hate, as long as they fear.' "

"Three words," McDougald said admiringly. "Boy, that packs more into three words than anything this side of 'I love you.' There I was, yakking about how I feel about the Confederates, and that old son of a bitch got it into three words."

“He wasn’t an old son of a bitch. He was a young son of a bitch,” O’Doull said. “I think he was twenty-seven when they murdered him.”

“Well, he’s been dead long enough that he seems old,” McDougald said. O’Doull nodded; he was right about that. It was something over 1,900 years now.

He didn’t get the chance to cudgel his brains over exactly how many years it was, because the PA system brayed, “Major O’Doull! Sergeant McDougald! Report at once to OR Three! Major O’Doull! Sergeant McDougald! Report at—”

“No rest for the wicked,” McDougald said.

“I thought that was ‘weary,’ ” O’Doull said.

“Works both ways, don’t you think?” McDougald was right about that, too.

They hastily scrubbed in and gowned and masked. Then they found what they were dealing with: a soldier who’d stepped on a mine. That was an even worse misfortune than it might have been, because the Confederates, or possibly the Devil, had come up with a new model. Instead of just exploding and blowing off a man’s foot or his leg, it bounced up to waist height and then burst . . . with the results they had in front of them.

The kid on the table was shrieking in spite of surely having had a morphine shot. He held his hands in front of his crotch like a maiden surprised, and wouldn’t move them no matter what. “My nuts!” he moaned. “It got my nuts!”

“You’re gonna be all right, son.” O’Doull feared he was lying through his teeth. He turned to McDougald and spoke in a quick, low voice: “Get him under.”

“Right, Doc.” In one swift, practiced motion, McDougald put the ether cone over the soldier’s face and turned the valve on the gas cylinder. The wounded man choked on the pungent fumes, but didn’t try to yank off the mask the way a lot of people did. His hands stayed right where they were till the ether got him and he went limp.

“Let’s see how bad it is,” O’Doull said grimly. Now he could move those blood-dripping hands. When he did, he wished he hadn’t. What he saw made him want to cover himself up the same way.

“How bad?” McDougald asked.

“Well, he won’t need to worry about getting a girl in trouble anymore—that’s for damn sure,” O’Doull answered. “I’ll see if I can put his dick back together well enough for him to piss through it. And he’s got some nasty belly wounds, too.”

“Remember we were talking about the Geneva Convention a while ago?” McDougald said as O’Doull, his mouth a tight line behind the mask, got to work.

“Yeah,” he answered absently, trimming mangled tissue as conservatively as he could. “What about it?”

“Nobody’d thought of Popping Paula back when they were hammering it out,” McDougald said. “Otherwise, it’d be on the list for sure.”

“It’s filthy, all right,” O’Doull agreed. “And you know what’s even worse? I bet you anything the engineer who came up with it got a bonus.”

“I won’t touch that,” McDougald said. “If you look at it the right way—or the wrong way, depending—it’s almost the perfect weapon. Who’d want to maybe trade his family jewels for a hundred-yard advance?”

“I’m just glad they don’t have many of those little toys here,” O’Doull said. “And we’ve got all their airstrips under our guns now, so they won’t be bringing in more.”

“Always parachute drops,” McDougald said helpfully. But there weren’t many of those anymore. Pittsburgh had cost the CSA a god-awful lot of transports. No more than a handful tried to make the trip these days; U.S. Wright fighters ruled the skies above western Pennsylvania.

Outside the hospital, the thunder of U.S. guns went on around the clock. O’Doull hardly noticed it. He might have looked up in surprise if it stopped. Incoming rounds were growing scarcer. That Confederate Army might have got into Pittsburgh. It didn’t look as if it would get out.

“How are you doing there?” McDougald asked after a while.

“Oh, he’ll live. I’m not so sure he’ll think that’s doing him a favor, though,” O’Doull said. “I *think* he’ll have a penis that works, even if he

won't get much fun out of it. I sure hope it works—otherwise, it's catheter time."

"Ouch." McDougald winced. "Don't even want to think about that."

"It's a bitch." O'Doull used the smallest needles and finest catgut for his sutures. He couldn't remember the last time he'd done such delicate work. He wished he could have done more for the wounded soldier, but the essential parts were gone.

At last, the job was done. McDougald surveyed the site. "Well, I think you did about as much as anybody would have been able to," he said.

"Yeah." O'Doull gave back a somber nod. "I wish I could say more. I wish I had a drink, too."

"Don't blame you a bit. Why don't you, once you get out of the OR?"

"When I come off, maybe I will," O'Doull said. "Don't want to do it now—odds are I'll be operating again before long."

"There is that," McDougald allowed. "I'll tell you something, though—I've known plenty of docs that wouldn't have stopped for a second, let alone a minute. Some of the old-timers in the last war, the guys who'd been in the Army since 1880—hoo-boy!" He rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, I ran into some of those fellows, too," O'Doull said. "This one surgeon named Schnitzler—I don't think he drew a sober breath all the time I knew him. But put a wounded man in front of him and a scalpel in his hand and he'd do as good a job as anybody you'd ever want to meet. He could operate in his sleep. I think he did sometimes."

"That's the kind I mean," McDougald said. "There's the drunk who goes and drinks till he passes out. And then there's the other kind, the guy who gets a buzz in the morning and stays buzzed all day long, and as long as he is, he's fine."

"Till his liver craps out on him, anyway," O'Doull said.

"Oh, sure." By the way McDougald said that, he took it for granted. "Of course, there are some of the first kind, too. Part of the way I learned surgery was when one of the docs who should have been doing it got too toasted to see, let alone operate. If I didn't cut, this soldier was ruined for sure. If I did, maybe he had a chance. So I did, and he made it—and I thought, *Son of a bitch! I can do this shit!* I was

hooked."

"It grows on you, all right," O'Doull agreed. "What happened to the drunken doctor?"

"He kept at it whenever he was sober enough to work," McDougald answered. "After a while, people said I was doing better work than he was. I don't know about that. He had the training, after all, and I was amateur city. But I sure was doing *more* work than he was, 'cause he got loaded more and more often."

"They should have discharged the fool." Though a Catholic, O'Doull had more than a little New England Puritan sternness in him.

Granville McDougald shook his head. "It was a war, Doc. If he was only a quarter of what he should have been, that was still a quarter of a surgeon more than they would have had if they canned him. Hell, he may be in the Army yet. He may be in the OR next door, for all I know."

"He probably killed patients he should have saved," O'Doull said.

"So have I," McDougald said. He didn't ask if O'Doull had. That was generous of him. Like any doctor, O'Doull had buried some of his mistakes. It came with being human. The most important thing was trying not to make the same mistake twice.

* * *

H otel Street in Honolulu was a raucous, drunken place twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Sailors who had liberty got drunk and got laid, caring about nothing but the moment. George Enos, Jr., knew exactly how they felt. He should have—he was one of them.

He'd drunk enough to make the sidewalk seem to sway and twist under his feet like the *Townsend*'s deck in a heavy sea. But the pavement wasn't listing—he was.

"Where do we go now?" he asked Fremont Dalby. He'd pretty much given up thinking on his own. If the gun chief could manage it, George would follow along.

Dalby made a production out of pondering. He'd taken plenty of antifreeze on board, too. "Well, do we want to drink some more, or do

we want to screw?" he asked.

George frowned. He didn't want to decide anything. He wasn't sure he could decide anything. Fritz Gustafson settled things by walking through the next open door they passed.

If it had been a brothel, they would have done their best there. But it was another gin mill. The air smelled of cigarette smoke and spilled beer and vomit. A record player was cranking out Hawaiian music much too loud. George's head started to ache, and he wasn't even hung over yet. That would come tomorrow morning, and tomorrow morning might as well be ten years away.

He and his buddies from the *Townsend* elbowed their way up to the bar. A couple of the men they muscled by gave them sour stares, but nobody threw a punch. "What'll you have, gents?" the barkeep asked.

"Whiskey," Fremont Dalby said. George nodded. So did Fritz Gustafson. The man behind the bar poured the booze into three glasses, added ice, and waited till he saw money before sliding the drinks across the bar. Dalby gulped his. So did Gustafson. George went a little slower. By himself, he would have stuck with beer. He liked it better. But when he was out with friends, whiskey got him drunk faster. On a forty-eight-hour liberty, speed mattered.

He wasn't sorry this had turned out to be a bar, not a cathouse. He always felt bad about being unfaithful to Connie. Oh, not while he was in the act—it felt wonderful then. It always did. How could it not, even with a bored Chinese floozy who chewed gum while you pounded away? But he never failed to feel guilty afterwards.

"Drink up, George," Dalby said. "The night is young, and you are—hell, I ain't drunk enough to think you're beautiful."

George laughed. He knocked back his drink, then coughed two or three times. The rotgut in the glass was smooth as sandpaper. Gustafson pounded him on the back. "Thanks," he wheezed.

"Sure," the loader said. Even pretty well lit up, he spent words as if he paid for them out of his own pocket.

"Another round," Dalby told the the bartender.

"Coming up." The man's gray hair said he'd been around a while. So did his faint British accent. The Sandwich Islands had belonged to the limeys before the USA took them away in 1914. A lot of the old-timers

had been here since the Union Jack flew alongside the flag of the Sandwich Islands, which joined it to the Stars and Stripes in what had been the old Kingdom of Hawaii's doomed effort to keep everybody happy.

George would have loved to spend the rest of his life in the Sandwich Islands. He didn't suppose many people who came here didn't want to stay. After the winter he'd just been through, he would never look at January in Boston the same way again. He wouldn't look at the North Atlantic in January the same way again, either. Oh, they had swells here. But nothing he'd seen came within miles of the Nantucket sleighride. And you'd never have to worry about working on deck in the middle of an ice storm.

Again, Dalby and Gustafson poured down their drinks in nothing flat. Again, they waited not too patiently for him to finish his. He was about to go bottoms up when a brawl broke out behind him.

He never knew what started it. An argument over a barmaid? Two sailors from the same ship who didn't like each other? Sailors from two ships that didn't like each other? The roll of the dice at a corner table?

Whatever got it going, it was everywhere fifteen seconds later. Nobody tried to stop it; everyone just joined in. If that didn't prove there were a lot of drunks in the place, nothing ever would have.

Somebody swung at George: a big, burly machinist's mate. The haymaker would have knocked him into the middle of next week had it landed, but it missed by at least a foot. George threw what was left of his drink in the other sailor's face. The man roared and rubbed frantically at his eyes. George hit him in the belly. He folded up with an explosive, "Oof!"

Oh, shit! The bartender was probably yelling it, but George had to read his lips to understand it. Everybody in the joint was shouting at the top of his lungs. The noise of things breaking didn't help.

Somebody took a swing at Fremont Dalby. The gun chief ducked so the punch caught him on top of the head. That hurt the puncher much more than it hurt Dalby. One of the things you learned in a hurry was not to punch bony places. By the way the sailor clutched his wounded hand, he'd probably broken a knuckle or two. A heartbeat later, he had other things to worry about. Dalby, a barroom veteran, didn't waste time fighting fair. He kneed the sailor in the crotch. The man

howled like a wolf.

George stopped a punch with his forehead. He saw stars. It probably hurt the other guy worse than it hurt him, but that didn't mean he enjoyed it. Plenty of sailors got into fights for the fun of it. George didn't understand that. Watching a fight was fun. Getting punched and kicked and elbowed? That wasn't what he called a good time.

He hit the other guy in the ribs. He'd aimed for the sailor's solar plexus. If he'd hit it, that would have taken the SOB out of the brawl till his motor started working again.

But a shot to the ribs just pissed the sailor off. He gave George a punch identical to the one he'd just taken. George grunted and swore. That would leave a bruise, and he'd probably be sore whenever he breathed for the next week.

Nobody in a barroom brawl played much defense. George slugged the guy in front of him again. Then Fritz Gustafson hauled off and belted the sailor in the chops. The man went down like a felled tree. With a small smile, Gustafson displayed a set of brass knucks. He would have made a hell of a Boy Scout. He was prepared for anything.

Halfway down the bar, somebody who didn't have brass knuckles improvised. He picked up a long-legged stool and swung it like a flail, felling whoever he could reach. Maybe the rising and falling screech that burst from him was intended for a Rebel yell. Maybe it just meant he was enjoying himself.

Whatever it meant, the screech abruptly cut off. Someone coldcocked the stool swinger from behind with a beer bottle. The bar stool crashed to the floor. So did the sailor, bleeding from a scalp wound.

A fighting knife gleamed in the hand of a Marine in a forest-green uniform. George didn't see the leatherneck stick anybody. All the same, he decided he was up way past his bedtime.

Getting out of a brawl without getting a name for running away from brawls wasn't so easy, though. George didn't want to skip out on his buddies. And so he stayed there and took some punches and dealt out a few more. Dalby and Gustafson both seemed happy enough where they were.

Then somebody yelled, "Shore patrol!" That sent everybody surging toward the door. George hoped the bartender had shouted out the warning to get the sailors to quit tearing his place to pieces. No such

luck. The Navy equivalent of MPs waded into the fray, nightsticks swinging.

George counted himself lucky—he didn't get hit in the head. He did get hit in the ribs, which made the punch he'd taken there seem a love pat by comparison. Fremont Dalby got a bloody stripe over one eye. Fritz Gustafson knocked a shore patrolman ass over teakettle with his knuckleduster. That could have won him a pounding to end all poundings, but none of the shore patrolman's pals saw him do it. Some people had all the luck.

Gustafson's luck didn't keep him—and George, and most of the rest of the people in the bar, including the barkeep—from getting grabbed and tossed into one of the paddy wagons that pulled up outside.

The SPs had a brig set up a couple of blocks away. It had probably been there for years, but George hadn't known about it. They found out he and Dalby and Gustafson had legitimate liberty papers, and they found out the three men from the *Townsend* hadn't started the fight. When they discovered Gustafson's persuader, they took it away from him. He looked aggrieved, but he didn't say anything. Under the circumstances, that was bound to be smart. Of course, Gustafson never had much to say.

Another paddy wagon delivered them to their ship and two more men to the destroyer tied up next to her. The officer of the deck eyed them as if he'd found them in his apple. "Well, well," he said. "What have we got here?"

"Drunk and disorderly, sir," a shore patrolman answered. "Tavern brawl on Hotel Street."

"All right. We'll take care of them," the OOD said.

And they did. No one got very excited about it. Captain's mast was something that happened now and again. George had never come up in front of one before. He might have been more worried if he were less hung over. That made him think more about internal miseries than any the *Townsend*'s skipper would inflict.

By their expressions, Dalby and Gustafson also had a bad case of the morning afters. Lieutenant Commander Brian McClintock glowered at each of them in turn. "Anything to say for yourselves?" he growled.

"No, sir," Dalby said. George and Fritz Gustafson shook their heads. George wished he hadn't. It only made the throbbing behind his eyes

worse.

“Why the devil didn’t you get out of there before the SPs came? Now I have to notice this.” McClintock sighed. “Three days in the brig, bread and water.”

The brig was tiny and cramped. Through most of the first day, George didn’t want anything resembling food. He drank lots of water. It helped the hangover a little. By the time he got out, he was sick of piss and punk: Navy slang for the punishment rations. Making him sick of them so he didn’t want to do it again was part of the point of the sentence, but that didn’t occur to him.

Ordinary chow on the *Townsend* was no better than it had to be. It tasted like manna from heaven when they turned him loose. Greasy fried chicken? Lumpy mashed potatoes? Coffee like battery acid? He made a pig of himself.

“Didn’t figure you for a brawler, Enos,” somebody said.

“Yeah, well . . .” George shrugged and let the well-gnawed bone from his drumstick fall to the plate in front of him. He had a few bruises to show he’d been in a fight, and delivered the classic line with as much conviction as if no one had ever said it before: “You ought to see the other guy.”

Some British poet talked about ending the world with a whimper, not a bang. Tom Colleton figured that meant the limey had missed out on the Great War. It sure as hell proved he’d never set foot in one of the two or three Confederate pockets left in Pittsburgh.

That Tom didn’t know how many positions his countrymen still held spoke volumes about how bad things were. He was hungry. He was cold. He was lousy—he itched all the time. The regiment he commanded might have had a company’s worth of effectives, which made it one of the stronger units in this pocket. They were desperately low on ammo for their automatic weapons. Most of them carried captured U.S. Springfields instead. They had no trouble scrounging cartridges for them.

Only a couple of hundred yards from the edge of the pocket, the Allegheny rolled south towards its junction with the Monongahela. Tom Colleton felt a certain somber pride at being where he was. His regiment had pushed as far east as any Confederate outfit. They’d

done everything flesh and blood could do.

They'd done it, and it hadn't been enough.

Confederate commanders had already refused two U.S. surrender demands. Tom didn't know who was in charge over the twitching, dying C.S. positions in Pittsburgh. A light airplane had sneaked into the city and taken out General Patton at the direct order of Jake Featherston. Patton might be useful somewhere else later on. Nobody could do much about what was going on here.

The wind picked up. Snow started to swirl. Crouched in the ruins of what had been a secondhand book shop, Tom lit a cigarette. He muttered something foul under his breath. It was U.S. tobacco, and tasted like straw. He'd taken the pack from a dead Yankee. No way to get the good stuff from home, not anymore.

U.S. barrels rattled forward. Before long, the damnyankees would take another shot at overrunning this pocket, and they just might bring it off. Few Confederate barrels were still in working order. Even fewer had fuel. Fighting enemy armor with grenades and Featherston Fizzes was a losing game.

"Give it up!" a U.S. soldier shouted across the narrow strip of no-man's-land. "You're dead meat if you stick it out. We play fair with prisoners."

Tom knew some of his men had thrown down their rifles and saved their skins. They had orders to hold out, but blaming them for surrendering wasn't easy. Still, what would happen if—no, when—the Yankees didn't have to worry about the Confederates in Pittsburgh anymore? How many U.S. soldiers and barrels and guns and airplanes would that free up? How much would C.S. forces elsewhere have to pay?

All those things mattered. Living mattered more to a lot of people. Tom was too hungry and weary to care anymore one way or the other. And he thought like a soldier. As long as he still had bullets in his rifle, he wanted to shoot them at the damnyankees.

He wasn't a professional. He hadn't gone to VMI or the Citadel or one of the other schools that turned out the Confederacy's professional officer corps. But he'd made it through the Great War and through more than a year and a half of this one. He knew what he was doing.

He hadn't had any experience when they gave him a captain's uniform

in 1914. But he'd come from a plantation-owning family. In those innocent days, they didn't think he needed anything else. He was innocent himself back then. He was sure he would come home, the Yankees whipped, in time for the cotton harvest.

Innocence died fast on the Roanoke front. So did soldiers, in both butternut and green-gray. The dashing war he'd imagined turned into a brutal slog of trenches and barbed wire and machine guns and gas and always, always, the stench of death.

He'd lived. He hadn't even been badly hurt. And he'd liked spending the next twenty-odd years as a civilian. He'd gone into this second war with his eyes open. This time, he'd known from the start the Yankees would be tough.

And everything went just the way Jake Featherston said it would. Tom was part of the lightning thrust that carried Confederate troops all the way to Lake Erie. No one could have imagined the operation would go so well.

And no one could have imagined having it go well could mean so little. *Maybe my eyes weren't so wide open after all,* Tom thought unhappily. He didn't know one single Confederate who hadn't been sure the United States would fold up once they got cut in half. But the USA—again!—proved tougher than the CSA figured.

Pittsburgh, then. Taking Pittsburgh would surely knock the damnyankees out of the fight and give the Confederates the victory they deserved. Except they didn't take it. And if they were getting what they deserved . . . In that case, God had a nastier sense of humor than even Tom had imagined.

Pittsburgh then and Pittsburgh now. Pittsburgh now was cold and smoke and blood and fear. Pittsburgh now was that Yankee yelling, "Awright, then, you ast for it!" Most of the time, letting your enemy know you were going to hit him would be stupid—idiotic, even. If you already held all the aces, though, what difference did it make?

Artillery and mortar fire came first. Dive bombers followed a few minutes later. The U.S. airplanes didn't scream in a dive like Confederate Mules. They didn't have an impressive nickname like Asskickers; nobody ever called them anything but Boeing 17s. The damnyankees made war as romantically as a bunch of insurance salesmen. But their uninteresting bombers did a fine job of blowing holes in the landscape where they needed them most.

“Barrels!” somebody yelled.

U.S. barrels weren’t as good as their C.S. counterparts. They had more of them than the Confederates did, though. In this pocket of Pittsburgh, that was all too painfully true. And after a while, quantity took on a quality of its own.

The leading U.S. barrel commander rode with his head and shoulders out of the cupola. He was brave and smart. He wanted to see more of what was going on than he could all buttoned up.

He didn’t see Tom draw a bead on him and fire two quick shots. He crumpled as if made from paper when they both struck home. Tom had long since forgotten about his sidearm. He carried a captured Springfield himself. In a battlefield full of artillery and machine guns, even a rifle seemed pitifully inadequate.

Tom worked the bolt and chambered a new round. Springfields didn’t measure up to automatic Tredegars, either. But they were good enough, or more than good enough. Despite losing its commander, the barrel still came on. Tom hadn’t expected anything else. The gunner would run the behemoth now. But it wouldn’t fight so well as it had with a full crew.

A machine next to it hit a mine and threw a track. That barrel slewed sideways and stopped. The five men inside stayed where they were. They could still use the turret and the bow gun, but they weren’t going forward anymore. The barrel’s steel skin protected them from small-arms fire. If a cannon started shooting at the crippled machine, they were in trouble. The Confederates in the Pittsburgh pocket were as short on guns and shells as they were on everything else, though. The Yankees in there might make it.

There weren’t enough mines to stop the rest of the barrels, either. The U.S. machines really were ugly compared to the sleek, elegant Confederate new models. It wasn’t a beauty contest, though. The damnyankees could do the job, which was the only thing that mattered.

If they kept coming, they would tear a hole in the C.S. line. Tom knew only too well what lay behind it: not much. He didn’t know what anybody in the line could do about it.

Some men were ready to give up their lives to try to stop them. Two soldiers ran out with Featherston Fizzes, wicks alight. A Yankee foot soldier cut down one of the Confederates before he got close enough

to throw his. As he fell, the burning gasoline gave him his own pyre. Tom hoped he was already dead; if he wasn't, that was a hard way to go.

But the other soldier flung his Fizz. Fire spread across a barrel's turret and dripped down into the engine compartment. Paint and grease made barrels vulnerable to fire anyway. When the engine started to burn, too . . .

Hatches popped open as the crew bailed out. Tom Colleton wasn't the only man who fired at them. One barrelman might have reached the shelter of a pile of bricks. The rest lay dead.

But all that only put off the inevitable. The Yankees had the firepower, and the Confederates didn't. The Yankees threw reinforcements into the battle. The Confederates didn't have enough men to begin with. Fight as the men in filthy butternut would, the pocket shrank.

Tom stumbled back to the next line of trenches and foxholes. If he hadn't fallen back, the damnyankees would have flanked him out and killed him. Oh, maybe he could have surrendered, but maybe not, too. U.S. soldiers treated prisoners all right—when they took them. They didn't always. Sometimes they were too busy to be bothered. Then would-be POWs ended up dead. It wasn't anything the Confederates didn't do, just . . . part of the game.

Another weary, unshaven Confederate soldier—a corporal—crouched in a hole a few feet from Tom's. The noncom managed a smile. "Ain't this fun?" he said.

"As a matter of fact," Tom said, "no."

"Reckon we'll win the war anyways?" the corporal asked.

"I stopped worrying about it a while ago," Tom answered after a moment's thought. "Whatever happens in the rest of it, I think it'll happen without me." He popped up and snapped off a shot at what might have been motion. It stopped. Maybe he'd cut down a damnyankee. Maybe he'd fired at nothing.

"Freedom!" the corporal said. "That's what it's all about, ain't it? Fighting so the Confederate States can be what they want and do whatever they please?"

"I never thought about it much," said Tom, who avoided Jake Featherston's slogan whenever he could. "All I know is, I never liked

the damnyankees. They gassed my brother and they bombed my sister, and I owe ’em plenty. I’ve paid back a lot, but I want to get some more.”

Mortar rounds started falling. Tom pulled in his head like a turtle, and wished he had his own hard shell. Machine-gun bullets snarled overhead. Yes, this was going to be a big push. “Here they come!” the corporal yelled. “Freedom!” He fired—once, twice, three times.

Tom fired, too, at the Yankees coming from the front. But more were slipping around the right flank. He turned and got off a couple of quick shots at them. Then he had to slap a fresh clip into the Springfield. An automatic Tredegar took a twenty-round magazine, not a five-round box. Of course, you could empty it faster, too.

If he and the corporal didn’t fall back again, they were dead. The men in green-gray would surround them and hunt them down. “I’ll cover you,” Tom said. The corporal ran for a hole deeper in the pocket. He made it, then waved for Tom to follow him.

Up. Run like hell. Hunch over to make yourself a smaller target. How many times had Tom done it before?

This was once too often. The bullet caught him in the back. He spun and toppled. His chin hit the snowy, rubble-strewn ground. His legs didn’t want to work. He reached for the Springfield. One more shot. “Oh, no, you don’t,” a Yankee said. He fired from no more than ten feet away. And Tom Colleton didn’t.

A wan early-February sun shone on the snowy, soot-streaked disaster that had been Pittsburgh. The last Confederate pocket on the North Side had surrendered, or was supposed to have surrendered, an hour earlier. Sergeant Michael Pound hadn’t made it this far by being trusting. He had a round of HE in the barrel’s cannon. If any of the men going into captivity felt like getting cute, he would do his damnedest to make sure they couldn’t.

Lieutenant Griffiths stood up in the cupola. He had a much broader view of the devastation than Pound did. He said something in a language that wasn’t English. “What was that, sir?” Pound asked.

The barrel commander laughed self-consciously. “Latin, Sergeant. From Tacitus, the Roman historian. ‘They make a desert and they call it peace.’ ”

“Oh.” Pound weighed that. He approved of the sentiment, taken all in all. But he was not the sort of man to resist discordant details: “It’s sure as hell a desert out there, sir, but we don’t have peace.”

“Not everywhere,” Griffiths agreed. “But nobody’s shooting at anybody in Pittsburgh anymore.”

After another moment of judicious consideration, Michael Pound nodded. “Well, no, sir. Nobody’s shooting right here.” And if anybody in butternut tried shooting right here, Pound intended to shoot first.

“Here they come!” Griffiths squeaked in excitement.

Pound peered through the gunsight, his reticulated window on the world while he was in the barrel. The Confederates were a sorry-looking lot. Out they came, a long, draggling column of them, from the last few square blocks of Pittsburgh they’d held. Their breath smoked in the chilly air. None of them was smoking a cigarette, though. The U.S. infantrymen guarding them had no doubt already relieved them of their tobacco. *Lucky bastards,* Pound thought without rancor.

The Confederates were skinny and dirty and hairy. They’d been living mostly on hope the past few weeks. Pound had heard of raids with the sole aim of stealing U.S. rations. If that wasn’t desperation, he didn’t know what was. When you were empty, any food looked good.

A lot of the Confederates looked miserably cold. Their issue greatcoats were thinner than U.S. models. Some of the men were all lumpy and bumpy, because they’d stuffed crumpled newspapers under the greatcoats for a little extra warmth. Others wore a variety of captured civilian coats on top of or instead of their greatcoats. They didn’t have good winter boots, either. Those needed to be oversized, to allow for extra padding. They needed to be, but the Confederates’ weren’t.

“There they are,” Lieutenant Griffiths said. “Jake Featherston’s supermen. They don’t look so tough, do they?”

“Sir, if they aren’t tough, what have we been doing here since November?” Pound asked. Griffiths didn’t answer.

A newsreel crew cranked away, filming the enemy soldiers’ trudge into captivity. Maybe the Confederates would look like beaten men on the Bijou screen in St. Paul. Well, they *were* beaten men—now. If Michael Pound knew the way propagandists’ minds worked, the newsreels would make the Confederates out to be weaklings and

cowards. If they were, though, how had they fought their way into Pittsburgh in the first place? The newsreels wouldn't talk about that. And most people, unless Pound was wildly wrong, would never think to ask.

"I wonder where we'll go from here," Griffiths said.

"Wherever it is, I don't think it'll be as tough as this," Pound answered. *It had better not be, or there's no way in hell I'll live through it.*

How many Confederates were holed up in that pocket? More than he'd figured. Some of them helped wounded men along. Others carried stretchers. How many unburied dead lay in the pocket?

"Good thing we fought through the winter," Griffiths said, thinking along with him. "Can you imagine what this battlefield would be like in August?"

"Yes, sir, I can," Pound answered. That probably wasn't what the barrel commander expected to hear. But Pound had gone through the Great War. The stench of those fields soaked into your clothes, soaked into your lungs, soaked into your skin. You thought you'd never be rid of it. Pound still sometimes smelled it in his nightmares, so maybe he wasn't even now.

The young barrel commander sighed. "I sometimes forget you're on your second go-round."

"Wish I could, sir," Pound said. Was that strictly true? A lot of what he'd learned the last time around helped keep him alive here. Some of it helped keep Lieutenant Griffiths alive, too, whether Griffiths knew it or not. That wasn't the main thing on the gunner's mind, though. "Those damned foot soldiers will plunder the bodies. We won't get a crack at 'em, and we'll have to pay through the nose for good tobacco and whatever else they've got."

"Won't be much of that stuff left," Griffiths said. "They weren't quite eating their boots when they gave up, but they weren't far from it, either."

Michael Pound grunted, more in annoyance than anything else. The shavetail saw something he'd missed. It was supposed to be the other way around. Most of the time, it was—most of the time, but not always. "Well, sir, you're right," Pound said.

"You're a strange man, Sergeant," Griffiths said.

“Me, sir? How come?” Pound thought himself normal enough, or as normal as anyone could be after close to thirty years in the Army.

“Well, for starters, you just say, ‘Well, you’re right,’ ” Griffiths answered. “Most people would want to argue and fuss.”

“What’s the point?” Pound said, genuinely puzzled. “You *are* right. I said something silly, and you called me on it. You should have. If I tried to tell you it wasn’t silly, I’d just make a bigger fool of myself.” Clinging to a position that was bound to fall seemed as senseless to him as Jake Featherston’s failure to pull his troops out of Pittsburgh while he still had the chance. Being stubborn just cost you more in the long run.

At last, the stream of Confederates slowed up. There were bound to be stragglers heading west and south, hoping to link up with other units in butternut or simply to get away. But for them, though, Pennsylvania was clear of Confederates. And if half of what people said on the wireless was true, Confederate control in Ohio was crumbling, too.

“He’s not going to win, not anymore,” Pound said, thinking aloud.

“I’m sorry, Sergeant,” Lieutenant Griffiths said. “What was that?”

“Jake Featherston,” Pound answered. “He’s not going to win the war. I don’t see how he can now. Only question left is, can he still get a draw?”

“Nice to know you’ve got it all worked out,” Griffiths said dryly. “Takes a lot of the strain off Philadelphia.”

Pound laughed. “Good shot, sir. But I still think it’s true.”

“Well, I hope you’re right,” the barrel commander said. “With this damn war, though, you never can tell. They’ve done some awfully surprising things. And so have we, now. The move that pinched off Pittsburgh was as pretty as you’d ever want to see.”

“General Morrell knows what’s what,” Pound said.

Griffiths started to rise to that, then caught himself. “No, wait. You were his personal gunner for a while. How did that stop?”

“He got wounded, sir,” Michael Pound answered, remembering Morrell’s weight on his back when he carried the armor commander

general to cover after a Confederate sniper hit him. “They didn’t think I deserved that long a vacation.”

“And so now you’re stuck with me,” Griffiths said, his voice still dry.

“You’ve got a pretty good idea of what you’re doing, sir.” From Michael Pound, that was highest praise. By the barrel commander’s quiet snort, he realized as much. Pound went on, “I hope we get a vacation after this. We’re way, way overdue for rest and refit.”

“I know,” Griffiths said. “I haven’t got any more say over that than you do, though. We’ll go where they tell us to go and we’ll do what they tell us to do.”

“Anybody would think we were in the Army or something,” Pound said.

“Wonder why that is.” Lieutenant Griffiths grew intense. “Here come their big shots.”

Pound peered through the gunsight. A few days earlier, he would have loved to put a couple of rounds of HE—or, better yet, shrapnel—on that group of eight or ten Confederate officers. All the men had three stars on the collar tabs of their greatcoats. All but two or three had those stars enclosed in wreaths, which meant they were generals, not colonels. They all looked to be in their late thirties or early forties, younger than most U.S. officers of similar grade.

And they all looked as if they’d just watched a bulldozer run over their kitten. “They really didn’t think this could happen to them,” Pound said. “They’ve been whipping us for a year and a half. They figured it would go on forever.”

“Too damn bad,” Griffiths said.

One of the U.S. soldiers guarding the high-ranking Confederate officers carried an automatic Tredegar rifle, another a captured C.S. submachine gun. Pound wondered whether the colonels and generals in butternut appreciated the compliment. He was inclined to doubt it.

“They get off easy,” Griffiths said. “They stay in a camp away from the fighting for the rest of the war, and the U.S. government pays their salary. The rest of us still have to go on out here.”

Some of the C.S. officers looked as if they would rather be dead. If they were smart, though, they wouldn’t say anything about that to the

men in green-gray who herded them along. The U.S. soldiers might oblige them.

“If we get a refit, where do you suppose we’ll go next?” Pound asked.

Lieutenant Griffiths ducked down into the turret to favor him with a wry grin. “I said that before, Sergeant. I thought you’d have a better idea than I did.”

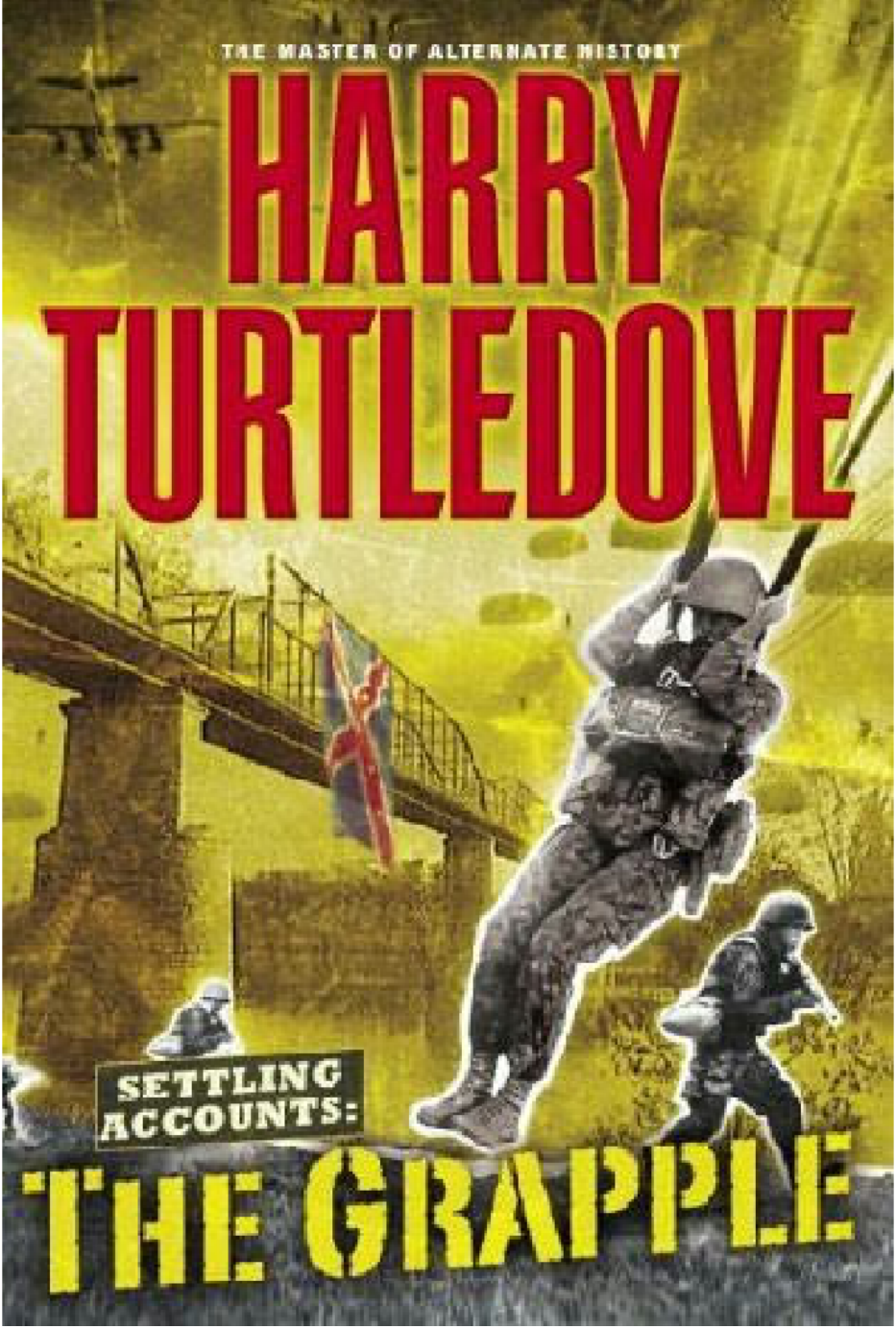
“Not me, not now.” Pound shook his head. “General Morrell would tell me what was up sometimes. Far as everybody else is concerned, I’m just a damn noncom.” He spoke without heat.

“Can’t imagine why that would be,” Griffiths said, and Pound chuckled. The young lieutenant went on, “Well, all I can tell you is, we’ll go wherever they need us most once we get our refit—if we get our refit.”

“Sounds about right.” Pound pictured a map. He pictured what was likely to happen over the next few weeks. “Virginia or Ohio,” he said. “Whichever heats up fastest, I guess.”

“I wouldn’t bet against either one of them,” Lieutenant Griffiths said. “I hope it’s Ohio, to tell you the truth.”

“Me, too—we have a better chance of hurting them bad there, I think,” Pound said. “But wherever it is, by God, we’ll get the job done.”


THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY
HARRY TURTLEDOVE
SETTLING ACCOUNTS:
THE GRAPPLE

The Grapple

Settling Accounts [3]

Harry Turtledove

Rating:***

Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

SUMMARY:
The United States have found their fighting form at last. Pushed back from Pittsburgh, by 1944 the Confederate States of America are struggling to hold their ground against an American army that seems to grow stronger by the day. While the United States press on towards the Mississippi valley, Jake Featherston's strategists in Richmond look for some way - any way - to slow down their inexorable advance. Deep in the heartland the extermination camps continue, but when all hope seems lost for their victims, the United States army turns at last towards the Texas plains. The fate of both sides, though, may lie elsewhere. A new menace appears in the Atlantic, intent on attacking the United States and scientists on both sides of the rapidly-moving border have nearly perfected an awesome new weapon that will guarantee victory for whoever uses it first. The greatest war of the twentieth century - fought this time in the heart of America - moves towards its blood-soaked climax.

I

F unereal music poured out of the wireless set on Brigadier General Clarence Potter's desk. For three days, Confederate stations had played nothing but somber tunes and even more somber commentaries praising the courage of the army whose survivors had just surrendered in Pittsburgh.

Potter's mouth twisted. Behind steel-rimmed spectacles, his cold gray eyes flashed. That army should have taken Pittsburgh away from the damnyankees. With their great industrial center gone, the USA should have had to make peace. From everything the Intelligence officer knew, Pittsburgh was a wreck.

That would hurt the United States. But the army that should have conquered it was gone, every man a casualty or a prisoner. That would hurt the Confederate States even more.

The latest dirge-tempo march ended. An announcer came on the air. "Courage, self-denial, modesty, and the willingness to make every sacrifice are the highest virtues of the Confederate soldier," he said. "It was not the lust for conquest which caused the Confederacy to take up arms. This war was forced upon us by the destructive aims of our enemies."

Well, what else could the man say? If he came right out and announced that Jake Featherston wanted to go to war long before he became President of the CSA, it wouldn't look good. Potter knew perfectly well that it was true. He also knew that what was true and what made good propaganda often had not even a nodding acquaintance with each other.

"Our soldiers are completely imbued with the importance and the value of the ideas now championed by the Freedom Party," the announcer said. For better and for worse, Potter knew how true that was. The announcer went on, "The Confederate soldier is convinced of them to the very depths of his innermost being, and that is why the Confederate armed forces form an invincible bloc having as its spiritual foundation the sublime ethics of a soldierly tradition. It is, moreover, inspired by belief in its high mission of protecting the Confederate States against the longtime enemy to the north, the enemy who would gladly deny our great nation its very right to exist."

Again, he wasn't wrong. This was the fourth war between the USA and the CSA in the past eighty years.

But if the Confederates were so bloody invincible, what went wrong in Pennsylvania? Potter, a confirmed cynic, would think of something like that. Would the average Confederate who was listening? Maybe not.

“We see the most magnificent example of this in the sacrifice of the troops fighting at Pittsburgh,” the announcer went on. “That let our armies farther west build up new dams to hold back the raging Yankee torrent and continue to preserve the Confederacy from the annihilating rule of the USA. Cut off from all possibility of receiving reinforcements, surrounded by implacable foes, they fought on with bayonets and entrenching tools after their ammunition was exhausted. Truly their courage and devotion will live forever.”

The music swelled once more: yet another sorrowful tune. Potter sighed. Putting a good face on disaster was always hard. He wondered why he kept listening. Knowing what the rest of the country was going through was useful. That had something to do with it. The rest was akin to picking at a scab. The pain held a perverse attraction.

He started a little when the telephone rang. Turning down the music, he picked up the handset. “Potter here.” If anybody needed to know what he did, that person had got hold of him by mistake.

“Hello, Potter there.” The voice on the other end of the line was a harsh rasp every Confederate citizen recognized at once. “I need you to be Potter *here,* soon as you can get on over.”

“Yes, Mr. President. On my way.” Potter hung up. He turned off the wireless. When Jake Featherston said he wanted to see you as soon as you could come, you needed to get to the Gray House in a hurry.

Potter went upstairs. The door by which he came out on the ground floor had something innocuous painted on the frosted-glass window. You would never open it unless you already knew where it led.

Workmen labored to repair bomb damage. The damnyankees hit the War Department as often as they could. More and more of the business here went on underground—how far underground, even Potter wasn’t sure any more. The men who bossed the work parties were whites too old or too crippled to help the war effort. Some of the men in the crews were colored, though a lot of Negroes had already been removed from Richmond. More workmen were Mexicans, up from Francisco José’s ramshackle empire to find better-paying work in the CSA.

Some offices on the ground floor were still usable. The officers and clerks who worked in them took a sour pride in staying at those battered desks as long as they could. Several men waved to Potter as he walked past. He nodded in return.

All the motorcars outside the War Department were ordinary civilian models. Every so often, U.S.

fighters streaked low over Richmond in broad daylight, shooting up whatever they could. No point giving them any special targets. As if at a cab stand, Potter got into the forward-most auto. “The Gray House,”

he told the driver.

“Yes, sir.” The soldier started the engine and put the Birmingham in gear.

More work crews repaired streets and gas lines and water mains and electric lines and telephone wires and…anything else that could be damaged when bombs fell on it or near it. Hardly any glass windows faced the world these days. Plywood and cardboard covered even the ones the damnyankees hadn’t blown to smithereens.

Again, Mexicans did a lot of the work Negroes would have handled before. The Confederate States would be a different country when the war was through. Whites had anxiously watched blacks for much too long. Well, soon there’d be far fewer blacks to need watching. Potter had long opposed the Freedom Party, but he didn’t mind its taking a shot at the Negro problem. He didn’t know any white man who did.

As he’d expected, the driver had to detour several times before he got to the presidential mansion.

Craters made some streets impassable. One block had sawhorses and warning signs all around.

DANGER! UNEXPLODED BOMB ! the signs shouted in big red letters. Maybe the bomb was a dud.

Maybe a time fuse ticked inside it. Either way, Potter didn’t envy the men who worked to get the ordnance out of there. They were skilled technicians. No matter how skilled they were, their average life expectancy was measured in weeks.

The snouts of sandbagged antiaircraft guns poked up from the Gray House grounds. Not much of the building was left above ground. The

damnyankees kept doing their best to level it. They wanted Jake Featherston dead, not only because losing him would take the wind out of the Confederacy's sails, but also because Confederate bombs had killed U.S. President Al Smith.

"Here you are, sir." The driver pulled to a stop in front of the rubble pile.

"Thanks." Clarence Potter got out of the Birmingham. With a clash of gears, it rolled away.

Guards waited in among the wreckage. "Let's see your papers, sir," one of them said.

No one got anywhere in the CSA without proper papers these days. Potter displayed his. Once the guards were satisfied about who he was, one of them used a telephone. That done, he nodded to his pal.

Together, they opened a heavy steel trap door.

Potter went down the stairs. They bent several times to foil blast that might penetrate the door above. In due course, he got to another door, this one even thicker. He pressed the button next to it. It swung open from the inside. More guards nodded to him. "Come with us, sir," one of them said.

"I know the drill," Potter said.

They ignored him. He'd figured they would. All of what went on at the Gray House went on underground these days. People who spent a lot of time down there were as pale and pasty as…people who spent a lot of time underground at the War Department. Potter looked at the backs of his own hands, and at the veins clearly visible there. He wasn't a vampire, to whom the sun was death, but he often behaved as if he were.

Lulu, Jake Featherston's longtime secretary, nodded to him. "He'll be with you in a moment, General,"

he said.

"Thank you, ma'am," Potter answered. You treated Lulu with respect or you were sorry. No one ever talked about the authority secretaries and other such people had, which didn't make it any less real.

The moment stretched to about five minutes. Featherston wasn't in the habit of making people cool their heels just to be sitting. Something had to be going on. And something was. Nathan Bedford Forrest III, the head of the Confederate General Staff, came out of the President's office. He didn't look happy.

He looked even less happy when he saw Potter in the waiting room. Potter wasn't happy to see him, either. They weren't quite conspirators. If it looked as if Jake Featherston was dragging the CSA down to ruin, someone would have to try to dispose of him. If that worked, someone would have to try to run the country afterwards. As far as Potter could see, Nathan Bedford Forrest III made far and away the best candidate.

Forrest wanted the job as much as he wanted another head. That didn't mean he wouldn't try to do it—he had a strong sense of duty. It meant he hoped everything would turn out all right, even though he was the one who'd first wondered whether Jake Featherston was going round the bend.

Did Featherston know about those wary discussions? If he did, would Nathan Bedford Forrest III still be free? Potter didn't think so.

"You can go in now, General," Lulu said.

"Thank you very much," Potter said. From most Confederates, that would have been, *Thank you kindly.* He'd never lost the more than half-Yankee way of speaking he picked up to fit in while he was at Yale.

"Hello, Potter," Jake Featherston said. The President of the CSA was in his early fifties, tall and rawboned, his close-cropped brown hair going gray. His eyes had dark pouches under them that hadn't been there a few years before. They still blazed, though. If ruthless determination could pull the CSA through, Featherston was the man to give it.

"What's up, sir?" Potter asked, hoping it had nothing to do with Nathan Bedford Forrest III.

"I need you to light a fire under Professor FitzBelmont. I don't care if you promise him prime pussy or promise you'll shoot his kids if he doesn't get his ass in gear, but get him moving. We really need that uranium bomb," Featherston said.

The Confederate uranium program had got off to a slow start because the President didn't believe in it at first. Potter couldn't blame him for

that; who in his right mind would have believed it? But when the Confederates learned the United States were going after uranium explosives as hard as they could, they'd had to follow suit.

"If lighting a fire will do anything, I'll do it." Potter wasn't sure it would. Separating U-235 from U-238

was proving fiendishly hard and fiendishly expensive. "They could use more money and more men, too."

"Whatever they need, we'll give it to them," Featherston vowed. "If the damnyankees are ahead of us on this one, we're screwed. If we beat 'em to the punch, we win. Even Pittsburgh won't matter at all. It's about that simple. Or will you tell me I'm wrong?" He glared a challenge at Potter.

"No, sir." Potter meant it. He might despise Jake Featherston the man, but Jake Featherston the leader was dead right here.

M ajor Jonathan Moss became a flier at the start of the Great War because he thought it would prove a cleaner, more chivalrous way of fighting than the mess on the ground. And he was right—for a while.

After a career as a lawyer in occupied Canada, he came back to flying not long before the new—the greater?—war broke out. With his wife and daughter killed by a Canuck bomber, he threw himself into aviation as much to stay sane as for any other reason. And he got shot down over Virginia and spent a while languishing in the Confederates' Andersonville POW camp. If not for a tornado that flung barbed wire in all directions, he would have been there yet.

Now he was a foot soldier, not because he wanted to be one but because he had no choice. The Negro guerrillas who found him would have killed him if he didn't join their band.

Chickens and chunks of pork roasted over campfires in the pine woods of southwestern Georgia. The white man from whose farm they'd been taken didn't need to worry about his livestock any more.

Neither did his family. The USA and the CSA followed the Geneva Convention when they fought each other. The USA and the Mormon rebels in Utah played by the rules, too; the Mormons were, if anything, more scrupulous than their U.S. foes about keeping them. Between black guerrillas and Confederates, rules went out the window. It was war to the knife.

“Smells goddamn good,” Captain Nick Cantarella said. The infantry officer, much younger than Moss, had escaped from Andersonville with him. With his knowledge of how to fight on the ground, Cantarella had to be more valuable to the Negroes than Moss was.

“Be ready soon.” The black who led the guerrillas called himself Spartacus. He wasn’t far from Moss’

age. He’d fought for the CSA in the Great War, and reminded Moss of a career noncom in the U.S.

Army. Jake Featherston didn’t want any Negroes fighting on his side. Spartacus used everything he’d learned fighting for the Confederacy to fight against it now.

After Moss got outside of some hot, greasy pork and a tin cup of chicory-laced coffee, he asked, “What do you aim to do next?” He had no trouble treating Spartacus as his CO, and it wasn’t just because the black man could kill him with a word. Like most whites in the USA, Moss hadn’t had much to do with Negroes. There weren’t many in the United States, and most whites were happy to keep it that way.

He’d always thought of Negroes as inferior; he hadn’t had much reason to think otherwise. But Spartacus would have commanded respect as a man if he were green with blue polka dots.

He tossed a chicken bone back into the fire. “Well, I was thinkin’ o’ comin’ down on Plains again.” His voice was a smooth, rich baritone.

Moss stared. The band had raided the small town the autumn before. “You don’t think they’ll be laying for us?”

“Reckon not.” When Spartacus grinned, his teeth gleamed white in his dark face. “Reckon the ofays don’t think even a nigger’d be dumb enough to come back so soon.”

Nick Cantarella laughed out loud. “I like it. Fuck me if I don’t.” He’d grown up in New York City, and sounded like it. Sometimes he and Spartacus had trouble understanding each other. For that matter, sometimes Moss, who was from Chicago, had trouble understanding Cantarella. He rarely did with Spartacus. The Negro might drawl and slur, but at least he spoke slowly. Cantarella’s harsh consonants and clotted vowels came at machine-gun speed.

“Got me a couple people lookin’ the place over,” Spartacus said.

“Don’t seem like nobody doin’ nothin’

special there. They reckon they done got hit once, so they’s immune now.” He grinned again. “It don’t work dat way.”

“All right by me,” Moss said.

But the raid didn’t come off. Spartacus didn’t want to move till he had everything just the way he wanted it. From a Regular Army commander, Moss might have thought that too cautious. But Regular Army commanders had men to spare, and regularly proved it. Spartacus didn’t. He needed to be careful not to walk into a trap.

While he was waiting and getting ready, the situation changed. Two companies of soldiers who wore yellowish khaki uniforms and helmets of unfamiliar shape came into the area. “Mexicans!” Nick Cantarella said in disgust. “Goddamn bean-eating greasers! Wonder how the hell Featherston pried ’em outa Francisco José.”

“Screw that.” Spartacus didn’t let the Mexican soldiers faze him. “What I wonder is, can them fuckers fight?”

“When the U.S. Army broke through in Pennsylvania last fall, it broke through against the Mexicans,”

Cantarella said.

“Uh-huh, but y’all got barrels an’ airplanes an’ all that good shit.” Spartacus was nobody’s fool. “All we got is us, an’ we ain’t got so many of us.” He frowned in concentration. “Make them come at us, mebbe, an’ see how good they is.”

“Always better to meet them where you want to, not where they want to,” Moss said.

“Make sense,” Spartacus agreed. “Now we got to cipher out how them greasers can reckon they is doin’ what they wants when they is really doin’ jus’ what we aims to have ’em do.”

Arranging to have a letter intercepted in Plains turned out to be the easiest thing in the world. Moss’ only worry was that the Mexicans would decide it was too obviously a fraud. It told a fictitious comrade in the town where Spartacus’ band would be and what they planned to do for the next four days. One of the blacks sneaked into Plains at night and dropped the envelope that held the letter not far from the little hotel where Francisco José’s soldiers were garrisoned. Another

black, one who lived in town, brought word the envelope had been found.

As Spartacus hoped, the Mexicans moved down the road from Plains toward Preston, the next town farther west. They marched in good order, with scouts well forward and with men out to either side to make sure they didn't get hit from the flank. But the scouts saw nothing the guerrillas didn't want them to, and the flank guards weren't out far enough.

Spartacus approached field fortifications with the eye of a man who'd seen plenty of trench warfare. He had eight or ten riflemen dug in at the top of a tiny swell of ground. Jonathan Moss was one of them. He clutched his Tredegar with sweaty palms and hoped none of the blacks in the trench with him noticed how nervous he was.

The one thing he felt he could tell them was "Don't open up too soon. We want to make the Mexicans bunch up in front of us, remember." The Negroes nodded. Some of them still automatically acted deferential toward whites when they weren't trying to kill them. That was a funny business.

Moss had only a few minutes to wonder about it before the Mexicans' scouts came into sight. Their pale khaki might make good camouflage in northern Mexico, but it didn't do so well against the green woods and red dirt of Georgia. The guerrillas waited till the scouts got close, then shot all three of them down.

Moss thought he hit one of them, and also thought they went down before they were sure where the killing fire came from.

Those gunshots brought the rest of the Mexicans at a trot. They came in loose order, so nobody in front of them could pick off too many men at once. They would soon have overwhelmed the Negroes in that trench—if those were the only men Spartacus had. But their commanding officer did what the guerrilla leader hoped he would: in concentrating on what lay ahead, he forgot all about what might might be waiting off to the flank.

And he paid for it. What waited off to the flank was an artfully concealed machine gun. The Negroes didn't take it with them everywhere they went; it was heavy and clumsy to move. But when they could set it up ahead of time…

When they could set it up ahead of time, it was the concentrated essence of infantry. The Mexicans hurried forward to deal with the

roadblock in front of them. The machine-gun crew couldn't have had a better target for enfilading fire if they'd set up the enemy themselves.

When the machine gun started stuttering, the Mexicans toppled like tenpins. They were close enough to let Moss hear their cries of fear and dismay and agony. Some of them tried to charge the machine-gun position. That was brave, but it didn't work. The gun itself might have held them at bay. In case it didn't, other blacks with rifles were there to help protect it.

Realizing they'd run into a trap helped break the Mexicans. When they took heavy casualties without taking the machine gun, they fled east, back toward Plains. Some of them threw away their weapons to run faster. The guerrillas galled them with gunfire till they got out of range.

After the Negroes emerged from cover, they methodically finished off the wounded Mexicans. Some of the guerrillas carried shotguns or small-caliber hunting rifles. They replaced them with bolt-action Tredegars taken from Francisco José's men. A handful of the Mexicans carried submachine guns. Those also went into the blacks' arsenal. None of the dead men had the automatic rifles that gave Confederate soldiers so much firepower. Moss wasn't much surprised; the Confederates didn't have enough of those potent weapons for all their own front-line troops.

Nick Cantarella went up to Spartacus, who was pulling clips of ammunition from the equipment pouches on a dead man's belt. "We better haul ass outa here, and I mean now," the U.S. officer said. "Those greasers'll be back, either by themselves or with the local Freedom Party stalwarts. Ain't gonna make the same trick work twice, not here."

"You don't reckon so?" The guerrilla leader didn't sound convinced. "Them Mexicans ain't smart, an'

the ofays who yell, 'Freedom!' all the goddamn time, they's dumber."

"Quickest way to end up dead is to think the guy you're fighting is a damn fool," Cantarella said.

"Second quickest way is to get greedy. You try both at once, you're askin' for it, you hear what I'm sayin'?"

Spartacus looked at him. Jonathan Moss thought another quick way to

end up dead was by pushing the Negro too far. Spartacus didn't take kindly to listening to whites. But Cantarella had the certainty that went with knowing what he was doing. He wasn't trying to show Spartacus up, just to give good advice.

And he wasn't much inclined to back down himself.

Muttering to himself, Spartacus looked along the road toward Plains. "Reckon mebbe you's right," he said unwillingly. "We done stuck 'em pretty good, an' that'll have to do." He raised his voice to a shout:

"Let's git! Time to move out!"

The Negroes and their white advisers streamed away from the ambush. Moss didn't see how Spartacus could have wanted much more. He wondered if the Mexicans would push hard after the guerrillas again, or if one introduction like this would show them that wasn't a good idea.

When he asked Nick Cantarella, the infantry officer only shrugged. "Have to find out," he said. "Pretty plain they never saw combat before. Whether they can't stand up to it or whether they figure they've got something to prove now—well, we'll see before long, I figure."

"Guerrillas did well," Moss remarked.

"Yeah." Cantarella looked around, then spoke in a low voice: "Wouldn't've thought the spooks had it in

'em. But if your ass is on the line, I guess you do what you gotta do, no matter who you are."

"We just did," Moss said. Nick Cantarella blinked, then nodded.

S cipio was almost too far gone to notice when the train stopped. The Negro and his wife and daughter were scooped up in Augusta, Georgia, a week earlier—he thought it was a week, but he could have been off by a day or two either way.

Along with so many others from the Terry—Augusta's colored district—they were herded into a boxcar and the door locked from the outside. It was too crowded in there to sit down, let alone to lie down.

Scipio wasn't off his feet for a minute in all that time, however long it

was. He couldn't make it to the honey buckets that were the only sanitary facilities, so he fouled himself when he couldn't hold it any more. He wasn't the only one—far from it.

He got a couple of sips from a dipper of water that went through the miserable throng, but nothing more.

If the boxcar held any food, he never saw it. By the time the train finally got wherever it was going, his nose told him the car held dead bodies.

Had they made this journey in high summer, everyone would have died. He was as sure of that as he was of his own name—surer, since he'd gone by Xerxes for many years. Scipio was still a wanted man in South Carolina for his role in the Red Negro uprisings during the Great War.

But it was February, so heat and humidity didn't add themselves to starvation and overcrowding. *What a mercy,* Scipio thought.

"Bathsheba?" he croaked through a dust-dry throat. "Antoinette?"

He heard no answer from either of them. Maybe they were dead. Maybe they were just too dry to talk.

Maybe they couldn't hear his husk-filled voice. Or maybe the noise other people were making covered their replies. His ears weren't what they had been once upon a time. He was getting close to seventy.

He'd been born a slave, back in the days before the Confederate States reluctantly manumitted their Negroes.

There was a bitter joke! Technically free, blacks didn't have a prayer of equality with whites even in the best of times. Here in the worst of times…Scipio wasn't worried about seeing another birthday now. He wondered if he would see another day, period.

Then what seemed like a miracle happened. The door to the boxcar opened. A cold, biting wind blew in.

Fresh air hit Scipio almost as hard as a slug of whiskey would have. His eyes opened very wide. He thought his heart beat a little faster.

"Out!" White men's voices, harsh as ravens' croaks, roared out the word. "Come on out o' there, you goddamn shitty niggers! Form two

lines! Men on the left, women and pickaninnies on the right! Move!

Move! Move!”

A few people stumbled out of the boxcar. A few corpses fell out. That eased the pressure that had held Scipio upright for so long. He started to sag to the planking of the floor. If he did, though, he didn’t think he’d be able to get up again. And the way these ofays—guards; he could see they were guards—were screaming at people to come out, he could guess what would happen to a man who couldn’t rise.

He wanted to live. He wondered why. After what he’d gone through, dying might have come as a relief.

But he stumbled forward and awkwardly got down from the boxcar.

“Men on the left! Women and pickaninnies on the right!” the guards yelled again. Then one of them smacked a black man with a club he pulled from his belt. “You dumb fucking coon, don’t you know which one’s your right and which one’s your left? Get your lazy ass over where you belong!” Blood pouring down his face, the Negro staggered into the proper line.

Somebody touched Scipio’s hand. There stood Bathsheba, with Antoinette beside her. They looked like hell, or maybe a little worse. Scipio tried not to think about what he looked like himself. It didn’t matter.

Nothing mattered except that they were all alive.

“We gots to get in our line,” Bathsheba said in a voice like ashes. “The good Lord keep you safe, darlin’.

We see you when we can.”

His wife had always been a churchgoing woman. She’d got Scipio to go with her a good many times.

They were captured in church, in fact. Education and Marxism had corroded Scipio’s faith. If they hadn’t…Well, the trip he’d just finished would have turned St. Thomas Aquinas into an atheist.

Somehow, though, it hadn’t shaken Bathsheba, not that way.

“You move, old man.” The Mexican-looking guard who gave the order had three stripes on the left sleeve of his gray uniform tunic. “You

move, or you be sorry." He didn't sound particularly mean. He just sounded like a man doing his job—and a man who would do it, whatever that took. Was it better that he didn't seem to enjoy tormenting his captives? Or did that make it worse?

The guard sergeant (no, in a gray uniform he'd have some kind of silly Freedom Party rank) waited to see if Scipio would obey, or maybe if he could obey. His wife and daughter had already gone off to their line. Nothing held him here except exhaustion, thirst, and starvation.

"I goin'," he said, and discovered his feet still worked after all. The Mexican guard nodded and went to prod another sufferer into moving.

Standing in line wasn't easy. Several men begged for water. The guards ignored them. One of the Negroes fell over. A man in a gray uniform kicked him. When the Negro didn't respond, the guard peeled back his eyelid, then felt for a pulse. The white straightened, wiping his hand on his thigh. "Son of a bitch is dead as belt leather," he said. "Gotta haul his worthless carcass outa here."

A skinny black man in ragged shirt and dungarees out at the knee dragged the corpse away by the feet.

A crew of similar wraiths were pulling bodies out of the train cars. Once, one of them called, "This here fella ain't dead."

A guard stood over the live Negro and fired a burst from his submachine gun. "Sandbagging fucker is now," he said. The man who'd announced the survival hauled away the body as if such things happened whenever a train came in. They probably did.

"Jesus God, you are the smelliest, most disgusting bunch of niggers I ever seen!" a guard officer shouted.

What else could we be? Scipio thought. He knew how filthy he was. He knew he didn't have any choice about it, either. None of the lurching unfortunates in the line had any choice. The officer went on, "Strip naked and we'll hose you down, get the worst shit off you."

"What about our clothes?" somebody asked.

"Clean clothes inside," the officer said. "Get out of them duds! Move it!"

Despite the cold wind, Scipio was glad to shed the suit in which he'd

gone to church. High-pressure hoses played over the black men. He feebly tried to wash and drink at the same time. He got a couple of swallows of water, and he got rid of some of his own filth. When he stood there naked and dripping, the north wind really did cut like a knife.

The blacks who'd hauled away corpses took charge of the discarded clothes, too. Some of the men whose clothes they were pulled long faces. Maybe they'd managed to hang on to money or valuables.

Since Scipio hadn't, he was just as well pleased to be rid of his.

Bins of shirts and trousers and drawers and shoes and socks waited for the black men. As Scipio found clothes that more or less fit, he wondered who'd worn them before and what had happened to him. This time, his shiver had nothing to do with that biting wind. Better not to know, maybe.

Losing his clothes also lost Scipio his passbook. In a way, that was a relief. Without it, he could claim to be anyone under the sun. In another way, though, it was as ominous as those bins of clothing. A Negro couldn't exist in the CSA without a passbook. If the inmates of this camp didn't need passbooks…If they didn't, wasn't that an argument they didn't exist any more?

"Line up in rows of ten!" a guard shouted. "Rows of ten, y'all hear? We got to get you coons counted.

Soon as we do that, we can get your asses into barracks."

"Food, suh? Water?" Several men called the desperate question at the same time.

"Y'all can get water once you're counted," the guard answered. "Food comes at regular time tonight.

Now line up, goddammit. Can't do anything till we count you."

Another man fell over dead waiting to be counted. More ragged, skinny Negroes seemed to materialize out of thin air to drag off the body. Would the clothes he had on go back into the bin? Scipio would have bet on it.

He got assigned to Barracks 27, which differed from the halls on either side only by its number. The wind blew right through the thin

wallboard. Pails and cups told where the roof leaked when it rained. Bunks went up five and six high. Healthier, younger, stronger prisoners claimed the ones closest to the pot-bellied stove in the middle of the room. Scipio got a miserable bunk in the outer darkness near the wall. The only good thing about it was that it was on the second level, so he didn't have to climb very high. A burlap bag did duty for a blanket. Another, smaller, one stuffed with sawdust made a pillow of sorts. That was the extent of the bedclothes.

He staggered out and went looking for water. He found lines snaking up to three faucets. The lines were long. He wondered if he'd live till he got to the front of his. He did, and then drank and drank and drank.

That brought some small fragment of life back to him. It also made him realize how hungry he was. But he wouldn't starve to death right away, while thirst had almost killed him.

He went back to his bunk. Lying down seemed a luxury after his time on the train. He fell asleep, or passed out—which hardly mattered. He would have slept through supper—he would have slept the clock around—if somebody didn't shake him back to consciousness. He wasn't sure the man did him a kindness. He was almost as weary as he was hungry.

Standing in line in someone else's clothes, in shoes that didn't quite fit, was a displeasure all its own.

What he got when they fed him was another displeasure: grits and beans and greens. All in all, it wasn't enough to keep a four-year-old alive. His pants felt a little tight. He didn't think he'd need to worry about that for long.

After supper came the evening roll call. "Line up in rows of ten!" a guard yelled. Scipio wondered how often he would hear that command in the days to come. More often than he wanted to; he was sure of that.

The count went wrong. For one thing, there'd been the influx of new prisoners. For another…The scrawny Negro standing next to Scipio muttered, "These ofays so fuckin' dumb, they can't count to twenty-one without playin' with themselves."

In spite of everything, Scipio snorted. "Thank you," he whispered—he'd already seen making noise during roll call could win you a beating.

“Fo’ what?” the other black man said. “Ain’t nothin’ to thank nobody for, not here. I’s Vitellius. Who you be?”

The real Vitellius, if Scipio remembered straight, had been a fat man. This fellow didn’t live up to the name. “I’s Xerxes,” Scipio replied. That was funny, too, in the wrong kind of way. He’d used Xerxes for years, fearing his own handle might get him sent to a camp. Well, here he was. What more could they do to him? One way or another, he’d find out.

M ajor General Abner Dowling’s guns pounded Lubbock, Texas. Confederate artillery in and behind the city sent high-explosive death northwest toward Dowling’s Eleventh Army. Back East, the Eleventh Army wouldn’t even have made a decent corps; it had about a division and a half’s worth of men. But the war out here in the wide open spaces ran on a shoestring, as the last one had. Dowling’s men outnumbered the Confederates defending Lubbock.

Jake Featherston’s soldiers were fighting with everything they had, though. He couldn’t push them out of Lubbock, and he couldn’t flank them out, either. Up till recently, it hadn’t mattered. As long as he kept them too busy to send reinforcements east to help rescue their army in Pittsburgh, he was doing his job.

But now Pittsburgh wouldn’t fall to the CSA. Now Lubbock became valuable for its own sake, or as valuable as a city of 20,000 in the middle of nowhere could be. Dowling’s headquarters lay in Littlefield, the last town northwest of Lubbock. He studied the map. He’d tried outflanking the Confederates to the south. Maybe if he swung around to the north this time…

His adjutant stuck his head into the map room. “I’ve got some new aerial recon photos, sir,” Major Angelo Toricelli said. Toricelli was young and handsome and spry. Dowling was in his sixties, built like a breakfront, and wore a large, unstylish gray mustache. Even when he was young, he hadn’t been spry.

He’d played in the line at West Point just before the turn of the century. No, he hadn’t been spry, but he’d been tough.

Several chins wobbled as he nodded to Toricelli. “Let’s see ’em,” he said. Both sides here were short on airplanes, too. Both sides here were short on everything under the sun, as a matter of fact.

“These are the deep-penetration photos, sir,” Toricelli said as he spread out the prints on top of the map.

“They go all the way down to Snyder, and to that…thing outside it.”

Snyder lay southeast of Lubbock. It was a bigger town than Littlefield, but not a whole lot bigger.

Normally, Dowling wouldn’t have worried about it, not where he was now. It was too small, and too far away.

Snyder was too small, yes. The…thing was another story altogether. It was called Camp Determination—so Intelligence said, anyhow. And it was not small at all. “How many niggers have they got crammed in there?” Dowling asked.

“Many, many thousands. That’s the best Intelligence is willing to do, sir,” Toricelli said. Dowling thought he put it an interesting way, but didn’t push him. The younger officer went on, “There’s a lot of incoming train traffic, too.”

“If there is, then this place must get fuller all the time, right?” Dowling said. Toricelli shook his head.

Dowling raised an eyebrow. “Not right?”

“No, sir.” His adjutant pointed to another photo. “Looks like the overflow goes here.”

Dowling studied the picture. Trucks—they looked like ordinary C.S. Army trucks—stood next to a long, wide trench. The scale they provided gave him some notion of just how long and wide the trench was. It seemed to be full of bodies. Dowling couldn’t gauge its depth, but would have bet it wasn’t shallow.

The photo also showed several similar trenches covered over with dirt. The trenches went out of the picture on either side. Dowling couldn’t tell how many filled-in trenches it wasn’t showing, either.

“They go there, huh?” His stomach did a slow lurch. How many corpses lay in those trenches? How many more went into them every day? “Any idea how they get from the camp to the graveyard?”

“How they get killed, you mean?” Toricelli asked.

“Yes, dammit.” Dowling usually despised the language of euphemism

that filled military and bureaucratic life. Here, though, the enormity of what he saw made him unwilling to come out and say what he meant.

“Intelligence isn’t quite sure of that,” his adjutant said. “It doesn’t really matter, does it?”

“It does to them.” Dowling jerked a thumb at that photo with the trenches. “Lord knows I’m no nigger-lover, Major. But there’s a difference between not loving somebody and setting up a factory to turn out deaths like shells for a 105.”

“Well, yes, sir,” Major Toricelli said. “What can we do about it, though? We aren’t even in Lubbock, and this Snyder place is another eighty miles. Even if Lubbock falls, we’ll be a long time getting there.

Same with our artillery. And what good would bombers do? We’ll just be killing spooks ourselves if we use ’em.”

“I know what I’m going to do,” Dowling said. “I’m going to send these photos back to Philadelphia, and I’m going to ask for reinforcements. Now that Pittsburgh’s ours again, we ought to have some men to spare. We *need* to advance on this front, Major. We need it a lot more than we do some other places.”

“Yes, sir. I think you’re right,” Toricelli said. “But will they listen to you back East? They see things funny on the other side of the Mississippi. We found out about that when we were trying to hold the lid down on the Mormons.”

“Didn’t we just?” Dowling said. “Tell you what—let’s light a fire under the War Department’s tail. Can you get another set of those prints made?”

“I’m sure I can, sir.”

“Bully!” Every once in a while, Dowling still came out with slang whose best days lay back before the Great War. Toricelli loyally pretended not to notice. Dowling went on, “Send the second set of prints to Congresswoman Blackford. She’s been up in arms about how the Confederates are treating their niggers ever since Jake Featherston took over. If she starts squawking, we’re likelier to get those troops.”

“That’s…downright byzantine, sir.” Major Toricelli’s voice held nothing but admiration.

Dowling resolved to look up the word to see whether it carried praise or blame. He nodded to his adjutant. “Get me those extra prints. I’ll draft the letter to the General Staff. We’ll want to encrypt that before we send it.”

“Oh, yes,” Toricelli said. When you were fighting a war with somebody who spoke the same language you did, you had to be extra careful about what you said openly. The only good news there was that the enemy had to be as careful as you were. Sometimes he slipped, and you could make him pay.

Sometimes he pretended to slip, and you could outsmart yourself in a hurry if you weren’t careful.

“Do that yourself, if you’d be so kind, Major,” Dowling said.

“Yes, sir. I’ll take care of it.” Dowling’s adjutant didn’t even blink. This was a hell of a war all kinds of ways. When you couldn’t be a hundred percent sure of the men in the cryptography section—you did without them whenever you could, or whenever you had something really important.

Rolling a sheet of paper into his Underwood upright, Dowling banged away at it, machine-gun style, with his forefingers. The machine was at least twenty years old, and had an action stiff as a spavined mule’s.

Fancy typists used all ten fingers. Dowling knew that—knew and didn’t care. Being able to type at all put him ahead of most U.S. generals.

He tried to imagine George Custer pounding on a typewriter. The man under whom he’d served as adjutant during the Great War and for some years afterwards would have counted himself progressive for using a steel pen instead of a quill. Dowling wondered how many letters he’d typed up for Custer over the years. A whole great pile of them, anyhow. The old Tartar had had a legible hand. Dowling, who could fault him for plenty of other things, couldn’t deny that.

Of course, Custer had spent more than sixty years in the Army. He was one of the longest-serving soldiers, if not *the* longest-serving, in the history of the United States. Back when his career started, you had to be able to write with tolerable neatness. If you couldn’t, no one would be able to make out what you were saying.

Dowling read through his draft, pen-corrected a typo that had escaped him while the paper was on the platen, and took it to Major Toricelli.

“Get this off to Philadelphia as fast as you can,” he said.

“I’ll tend to it right away.” Toricelli had already taken the code book out of the small safe that accompanied Eleventh Army as it advanced —and, at need, as it fell back, too.

“Good. Thanks. Now I need to get a letter ready for those photos that’ll go to Flora Blackford.”

Dowling had met her before, in that she’d questioned him when he testified before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. He hadn’t appreciated her prodding then. If he could get her to prod in a way that did him some good, though, that was a different story. He wagged a finger at Toricelli. “Make sure we get that other set of prints pronto, too.”

“Yes, sir.” Now his adjutant sounded resigned. Dowling knew he was guilty of nagging. How often had he sounded like that when Custer gave him the same order for the fourth time? At least he—sometimes —noticed when he repeated himself. He wrote the letter, signed it, and gave it to Major Toricelli. The younger officer, who was deep in five-letter code groups, nodded abstractedly.

When Dowling walked out of the house he’d commandeered for a headquarters, the sentries in front of the porch stiffened to attention. “As you were,” Dowling said. The sentries had foxholes into which they could dive in case C.S. artillery reached Littlefield or enemy bombers came overhead.

A thick barbed-wire perimeter isolated headquarters from the rest of the small west Texas town. The wire was far enough from the house to keep an auto bomb from doing too much damage if one blew up outside it. Soldiers and matrons frisked people entering the perimeter to make sure none of them carried explosives. Dowling didn’t think he was important enough to make much of a target for a people bomb, but he didn’t take chances, either.

Headquarters occupied one of the few undamaged houses in Littlefield. The Confederates had made a stand here. They fought wherever they could find an advantageous position. They didn’t like retreating.

But this country was so wide, they didn’t have enough men to hold on to all of it. He’d flanked them out here. He wasn’t having so much luck with that around Lubbock.

The Stars and Stripes floated above the house. Littlefield had been in the U.S. state of Houston till the Confederacy won the plebiscite here a little more than two years earlier. Now it was back in U.S. hands, and the locals liked that no better than they had before.

Dowling cordially despised the locals, too. He wished he could put up photographs of the murder camp and the mass graves outside Snyder—put 'em up all over town. He wished he could parade everybody *in* Littlefield past those graves, let people see what thousands of bodies looked like, let them find out what thousands of bodies smelled like. *You sons of bitches, this is what you bought when you went around yelling, "Freedom!" all the goddamn time. How do you like it now?*

What really scared him was, they were liable to like it just fine. He could easily imagine them looking down at all those contorted corpses and saying, *Well, so what, you lousy damnyankee? They're only niggers, for cryin' out loud.*

He scowled out at Littlefield, wishing his imagination didn't work quite so well. All at once, he wanted nothing more than to wipe the town and everybody in it off the face of the earth.

Major Jerry Dover knew how to give men orders. He'd commanded at about the platoon level during the years between the wars. Bossing the cooks and waiters and busboys at the Huntsman's Lodge in Augusta, Georgia, gave him most of the experience he needed to put on the uniform and tell people in the Confederate Quartermaster Corps what to do.

Being white and the boss had given him authority over the staff at the restaurant. Military law made a good enough substitute in the field. Dover hadn't been out there long before one of his subordinates exclaimed, "Jesus, sir, you work us just like a bunch of niggers!"

"Good," Dover answered, which made the grumbling corporal goggle and gape. "Good, goddammit,"

Dover repeated. He was a foxy-featured man, wiry and stronger than he looked, with graying sandy hair and mustache. "We've all got to work like niggers if we're going to whip those bastards on the other side."

He drove himself at least as hard as he drove anybody under him. He left a trail of chain-smoked Raleigh butts and empty coffee cups

behind him. He tried to be everywhere at once, making sure all sorts of supplies got to the men at the front when they were supposed to. The men who worked under him didn't need long to figure that out. They swore at him as they shivered in the snow in southern Ohio, but his kitchen staff had sworn at him the same way while they sweltered over their stoves. The soldiers might not love him, but they respected him.

His superiors didn't know what to make of him. Most of them were Regulars, men who'd stayed in butternut all through the lean times before Jake Featherston started building up the C.S. Army again. A colonel named Travis W.W. Oliphant—he got very offended if you left the *W.W.* out of any correspondence addressed to him, no matter how trivial—said, "You know, Major, you'll just kill yourself if you try to run through every brick wall you see instead of going around some of them."

"Yes, sir." Dover ground a cigarette out under the heel of his left boot (Boot, Marching, Officer's Field, size 9½C). He lit another one and sucked in smoke. Without a cloud of smoke around him, he hardly felt real. "If you'll excuse me, sir, those damned idiots south of the Ohio finally got us about half as many of the 105 shells we've been screaming for as we really need. Gotta move 'em up to the people who shoot

'em out the guns."

Travis W.W. Oliphant scratched his head. He looked like a British cavalry colonel, or what Jerry Dover imagined a British cavalry colonel would look like. "See here, Dover, are you trying to mock me?" he said.

"Mock you? No, sir." Dover scratched his head, too. "Why would you say that? I'm just trying to do my job."

"You're not a Regular," the senior officer said.

"No, sir," Dover agreed. "So what? I can still see what needs doing. I can still get people to do it, or else do it myself."

"There are people in this unit who think you're trying to show them up," Colonel Oliphant said.

Dover scratched his head again. He blew out another stream of smoke. "Sir, don't the Yankees give us enough trouble so we haven't got time to play stupid games with ourselves? I work hard. I want everybody

else to work hard, too."

"We won't get the job done if we wonder about each other—that's for sure," Oliphant said. "We've all got to pull together."

"What am I supposed to do when I see some people who won't pull?" Dover asked. "You know some won't as well as I do, sir. Plenty of men in the Quartermaster Corps who like it here because they're in the Army, so nobody can complain about that, but they aren't what you'd call likely to see a damnyankee with a piece in his hand and blood in his eye."

"You're in the Quartermaster Corps," Colonel Oliphant pointed out.

"So are you, sir." Dover stamped out the latest cigarette and lit a replacement. "You want to send me up to a line battalion, go right ahead. I happen to think I help the country more where I'm at, on account of I really know what the fuck I'm doing here. But if you want to ship me out, go on and do it. I was in the line last time around. Reckon I can do it again. Where were you…sir?"

Travis W.W. Oliphant didn't answer right away. He turned red, which told Dover everything he needed to know. Had Oliphant ever fired a rifle, or even an officer's pistol, in anger? Dover didn't believe it, not even for a minute.

"You are insubordinate, Major," Oliphant said at last.

"About time somebody around here was, wouldn't you say?" Dover saluted and walked away. If the high and mighty colonel wanted to do something about it, he was welcome to try. Jerry Dover laughed.

What was the worst Oliphant could do? Get him court-martialed? Maybe they'd drum him out of the Army, in which case he'd go back to the restaurant business in Augusta. Maybe they'd throw him in a military prison, where he'd be housed and fed and out of the war. About the worst thing the goddamn stuffed shirt could do was leave him right where he was.

Did Oliphant have the brains to understand that? Did the colonel know his ass from his end zone? Dover only shrugged. He didn't really care. Oliphant would do whatever he did. In the meantime, Dover would do what he had to do.

As soon as he stepped out of the butternut tent, a cold breeze from the

northwest started trying to freeze his pointed nose off his face. “Fuck,” he muttered. He hadn’t been up in Ohio long, but the weather was really and truly appalling. Augusta got a cold snap like this maybe once in five years. Ohio could get them any time from November to March, by what he’d seen. He wondered why the hell the CSA wanted to overrun country like this in the first place.

Not all the trucks into which cursing Confederates were loading crates of shells had started life down in Birmingham. Some were captured U.S. machines, with slightly blunter lines, slightly stronger engines, and suspensions that would shake a man’s kidneys right out of him on a rough road. They had butternut paint slapped on over the original green-gray. They had butternut paint slapped on their canvas canopies, too.

Rough use and rough weather were making it peel off. Dover hoped that wouldn’t get some luckless driver shot by somebody on his own side.

The drivers were safe if those trucks didn’t get moving. Dover rounded on a quartermaster sergeant.

“What’s the slowdown about?” he demanded.

“Sir, we were suppose to get a couple dozen military prisoners to help us load, and they ain’t showed up,” the sergeant said stolidly. “We’re doin’ what we can with what we got. Ain’t like the last war—no nigger labor gangs up here.”

Jerry Dover muttered discontentedly. He’d never been a big Freedom Party man; he thought Jake Featherston was more a blowhard than anything else. Without Negroes, the Huntsman’s Lodge either couldn’t have operated at all or would have had to charge three times as much. Negroes had done a lot for the Army in the Great War. Not this time around. Featherston didn’t trust them—and he’d given them abundant good reason not to trust him.

Before saying anything, Dover eyed the quartermaster sergeant’s hands. They were muddy and battered, with a couple of torn fingernails. He’d been humping crates just like everybody else. Nobody could complain about effort. “All right, Sergeant. Do the best you can. I’ll track those damn convicts for you.”

“Thank you, sir,” the noncom said.

The convicts wouldn’t work the way Negroes would have in the last

war. They'd know they were doing nigger work, and they'd do it badly just to remind people they weren't niggers and the work was beneath their dignity. That they might get their countrymen killed because they worked badly wouldn't bother them. That they might get themselves killed wouldn't bother them, either. Showing they were good and proper white men counted for more.

Were Dover a convict, he knew he would act the same way. No less than the men who'd fallen foul of military justice, he was a Confederate white man. He'd probably had more experience with Negroes than any white since the days of overseers. That had nothing to do with the price of beer. There were some things a Confederate white man wasn't supposed to do.

Of course, one of the things Confederate white men weren't supposed to do was lose a war to the USA.

If not losing meant they had to do some other things they wouldn't normally, then it did, that was all. So Dover thought, anyhow. Some of his countrymen seemed to prefer death to dirtying their hands.

Shells burst a few hundred yards away. Dover didn't flinch, didn't duck, didn't dive for cover. They'd have to come a lot closer than that before he started flabbling. Back in the last war, he'd learned to gauge how dangerous incoming artillery was. The knack came back in a hurry this time around.

Most of the older men working with these crates had it. Some of the younger ones didn't. What did worry Dover was that the damnyankees' guns were close enough to strike what should have been the Confederates' safe rear in Ohio. That showed how badly things had gone wrong. With so many men dead or captured in and around Pittsburgh, the defenses farther west were crumbling. One U.S. thrust was coming west from Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, the other southeast from northern Indiana and northwestern Ohio. If they met, they would enfold even more irreplaceable Confederate troops in a pocket.

Dover went over to the field telephone station. The state of the art there had improved a lot since the Great War. Then people used Morse more often than they shouted into field telephones, just to make sure their message got through. Now you knew the guy on the other end of the line would hear you.

Whether he felt like listening to you might be a different story. For

years, Dover had battled people who tried to palm off lower-quality meat and seafood and vegetables on him and to give him what he needed later than he needed it. Now he turned all his suavity and charm on the Confederate military policemen who hadn't delivered the promised convicts on time.

"This here's Major Dover in the Quartermaster Corps south of Columbus," he rasped. "Where the hell are they? You lazy sons of bitches, y'all tryin' to lose the war for us? How're we supposed to get the shit to the front if you hold out on us?…What do you mean, I can't talk to you that way? I'm doin' it, ain't I?

An' if those convicts don't show up in the next hour, I'll sic my colonel on you, and we'll see how you like that!" He slammed down the phone without giving the MP he was talking to the chance to answer back—always a favorite ploy.

He knew Travis W.W. Oliphant was useless in these turf battles. He knew it, but the MP didn't. And the unhappy fellow evidently didn't care to take chances with an angry senior officer. The convicts arrived less than half an hour later.

"About fucking time," Dover snarled at the driver who brought them. "You should have got 'em here when you said you would, and saved everybody the aggravation."

"Sir, I don't have nothin' to do with that," the driver said. "They load the truck, they tell me where to go an' how to git there, an' I do it."

Dover wanted to tell him where to go and how to get there, too. He feared he'd be wasting his breath.

Instead, he glowered at the convicts. "You are going to work like mad sons of bitches, or else."

"Or else what?" one of them said scornfully.

"Or else I will personally shoot your worthless ass off, and I'll laugh while I do it, too," Dover replied.

"You reckon I'm funnin' with you, you go ahead and try me." He waited. The convicts worked. He'd expected nothing else.

S ergeant Michael Pound had been in the U.S. Army a long time. He'd spent a lot of that time getting barrels to do what he needed them to

do. He wasn't just one of the better gunners who wore green-gray coveralls, though he was that. He was also a damn good jackleg mechanic. A lot of barrel men were.

The more repairs you could make yourself, the less time you had to spend in the motor pool. The less time you were out of action, the more trouble you could give the Confederates.

"Distributor cap, I bet," he said when the mechanical monster wouldn't start up one rainy morning east of Columbus, Ohio. "Damn thing gets wet inside too easy. It's a design flaw—it really is."

"Can you fix it?" asked Second Lieutenant Don Griffiths, the barrel commander. He was perhaps half Pound's age: a puppy, like most second lieutenants. Unlike a lot of shavetails, he had a fair notion of what he was doing. He also didn't seem to think asking questions threatened his manhood.

"Yes, sir." Along with a .45, Pound carried a formidable set of tools on his belt and in his pockets. He had the engine louvers off in nothing flat, and got the distributor cap off the engine almost as fast. One glance inside made him nod. "Condensation, sure as hell." The loader, Cecil Bergman, held a shelter half over his hands while he worked. The rain would only make things worse.

"What can you do about it?" Griffiths asked. "A dry rag?"

"Even better than that, sir," Pound said. He was stocky and wide-shouldered—built like a brick, really.

His brown hair had begun to go gray and to retreat at the temples. His eyes were pale in a broad face more Scots than English: marksman's eyes. He pulled out a small bottle half full of clear liquid. "Absolute alcohol," he explained. "I'll rub a little where it'll do the most good. It evaporates like anything, and it'll take the moisture with it." He suited action to words.

The distributor cap went back on. So did the louvers that protected the engine from small-arms fire while letting its heat escape. Pound scrambled down from the engine compartment. "Fire it up!" Bergman yelled to the driver.

There was a cough, a bang, and then the flatulent roar of a barrel engine coming to life. "Nicely done, Sergeant!" Griffiths said.

"Thank you, sir." Pound clambered up to the turret and opened his

hatch. He paused before climbing in and sitting down behind the gun. “Shall we get on with it?”

“I hope so, anyway,” Griffiths answered. “If this rain starts thawing out the ground, though, we’re liable to bog down.”

Pound didn’t think that likely. It was a little above freezing, but only a little. He guessed the rain would turn to sleet or snow before long. But he didn’t want to argue with Griffiths—which, considering how firmly armored in his own competence he was, was no small compliment to the young officer.

They rattled west in company with six or eight more barrels and several squads of foot soldiers. Only two of the barrels were the old models, with an inch-and-a-half gun. The improved machines, of which Pound’s was one, featured an upgunned, uparmored turret and a more powerful engine to handle the extra weight. Their 2.4-inch cannon still weren’t a match for the three-inchers new Confederate barrels carried, but they were the biggest guns the turret ring in the chassis would allow. And they were good enough to give the U.S. machines a fighting chance against the best the enemy could throw at them.

“After Pittsburgh, moving so fast seems strange,” Griffiths said.

“Yes, sir.” Pound nodded. In Pittsburgh, they’d measured progress in blocks per day, sometimes houses per day, not miles per hour. That was a fight of stalks and ambushes and strongpoints beaten down one by one. Now they were out in the open again, rolling forward. “Only a crust here,” Pound said. “Once we break it, they haven’t got so much behind it.”

As if to give him the lie, a Confederate machine gun opened up ahead of them. Even through the turret, Pound had no trouble telling it from a U.S. weapon. It fired much faster, with a noise like ripping canvas.

The Confederates, with fewer men than the USA, threw bullets around with reckless abandon.

“Can you see where that’s coming from, sir?” he asked Lieutenant Griffiths.

Griffiths peered through the periscopes built into the commander’s cupola. He shook his head. “Afraid not, Sergeant,” he answered. “Want me to stick my head out and have a look?”

He didn't lack for nerve. The barrel was buttoned up tight now. You could see more by opening the hatch and looking around, but you also ran a formidable risk of getting shot—especially anywhere in the neighborhood of one of those formidable machine guns.

"I don't think you need to do that, sir," Pound said. Now that he'd found a junior officer he could stand, he didn't want the youngster putting his life on the line for no good reason. Sometimes you had to; Pound understood as much. Was this one of those times? He didn't think so.

But Griffiths said, "Maybe I'd better. That gun'll chew hell out of our infantry." He flipped up the hatch and stood up so he could look around, head and shoulders out of the cupola. Along with a flood of cold air, his voice floated down to Pound: "I don't like staying behind armor when the foot soldiers are out there naked."

Michael Pound made an exasperated noise down deep in his throat. Yes, a crewman in a barrel had face-hardened steel between himself and the enemy's attentions. An infantryman had nothing but his helmet, which wouldn't even keep out small-arms fire. On the other hand, nobody used antibarrel cannon or antibarrel mines or Featherston Fizzes to try to knock out individual foot soldiers. Lieutenant Griffiths wasn't thinking about that.

"There it is—about one o'clock," Griffiths said. "Do you see it now, Sergeant?"

As Pound traversed the turret, he looked through the gunsight. Sure enough, there was the malignantly flashing machine-gun muzzle. "Yes, sir," he said, and then, to the loader, "HE!"

"HE!" Bergman loaded a white-tipped high-explosive round into the breech.

The gun roared. The noise was tolerable inside the turret. To Lieutenant Griffiths, out there in the open, it must have been cataclysmic. Soldiers joked about artilleryman's ear, but they were kidding on the square.

When the machine gun kept firing, Pound swore. A 2.4-inch HE shell just didn't carry a big enough bursting charge to be very effective. He'd seen that in Pittsburgh, and he was seeing it again in among the trees here. "Give me another round," he told Cecil Bergman.

“You got it, Sarge.” The loader slammed the shell home.

An instant before Pound fired, Don Griffiths groaned. Pound didn’t let himself pay attention till the second HE round was on the way. He saw the Confederate machine gun fly one way and a gunner, or some of a gunner, fly another. But he had no time to exult; Griffiths was slumping down into the turret.

“How bad is it, sir?” Pound asked, swearing at himself—if he’d knocked out the gun first try, the lieutenant might not have got hit.

“Arm,” Griffiths answered through clenched teeth. He had to be biting down hard on a scream. Sure as hell, his left sleeve was bloody, and blood dripped from his hand down onto the shell casings on the fighting compartment floor.

“Can you wiggle your fingers?” Pound asked. Griffiths tried, but gasped and swore and shook his head.

He’d had a bone shattered in there, then—maybe more than one. Pound took a morphine syrette from the wound pouch on his belt, stuck it into Griffiths’ thigh, and pushed home the plunger. Then he said,

“Let’s bandage you up.”

He had to cut away the sleeve to get at the wound. He dusted it with sulfa powder and packed it with gauze. As soon as he could, he’d get Griffiths out of the barrel and send him to the rear with some corpsmen.

“You’ve got yourself command here whether you want it or not.” The lieutenant sounded eerily calm, which meant the morphine was taking hold.

“Even if I did want it, sir, I wouldn’t want it like this,” Pound said, which was true. “You’ll be back soon.” He hoped that was true.

He stuck his own head out of the cupola. With the machine gun gone, all he had to worry about were ordinary Confederate infantrymen and maybe snipers in the trees. He looked around. Sometimes luck was with you, though he wished it would have shown up a little sooner. But he did see a couple of corpsmen with Red Crosses on smocks and armbands and helmets. He waved to them.

“What’s up?” one of them yelled.

Before Pound could answer, a bullet cracked past. He ducked. He knew it was a useless reflex, which didn't mean he could help himself. He hoped it was a random round. If it wasn't, the medics would have two casualties to deal with. *Unless, of course, I get killed outright,* he thought cheerily.

"Got a wounded officer. Forearm—broken bones," he called after he straightened up.

"All right—we'll take care of him," the corpsman said. "Can you swing sideways so the barrel covers him while you get him out of the hatch?"

Pound liked that idea about as much as he liked a root canal. Expose the barrel's thin side armor to whatever guns the goons in butternut had up ahead? But the medics weren't armored at all. Neither was Lieutenant Griffiths, and he'd gone and proved it.

Sometimes you needed a root canal. It was no fun, but you had to go through with it. This wouldn't be any fun, either. If they hustled, though, they ought to get away with it. "Will do," Pound called to the medics. He ducked down into the turret and told the driver to make a hard right and stop.

"Jesus! You sure?" The protest came back through the speaking tube.

"Damn straight. I wouldn't ask you if I wasn't," Pound answered. "Come on. Step on it. The lieutenant's bleeding all over everything back here."

"It's not so bad now." Griffiths sounded as if he hadn't a care in the world. The morphine must have hit him hard. Well, good.

Snorting, the barrel turned. The movement wasn't so sharp as it might have been. Try too tight a turn and you might throw a track, in which case you wouldn't go anywhere for a while. When Pound was satisfied, he yelled, "Stop!" and the barrel did. He undogged the side hatch and sketched a salute to Don Griffiths. "Out you go, sir. You did good. Hope I see you again one day." He meant it. He wasn't the sort to waste compliments on people who didn't deserve them.

"Thank you, Sergeant." Awkwardly, Griffiths scrambled out of the barrel. Pound helped him leave. The corpsmen took charge of him once he got through the hatch. They eased him down to the ground and got him moving away from the front. They were probably relieved

to help somebody able to move on his own: they didn't have to lug him in a stretcher.

After waiting till they'd gone some distance from the barrel, Pound clanged the hatch shut and dogged it.

He yelled into the speaking tube: "All right, Miranda—square us up again."

"You bet, Sarge!" The barrel jumped as the driver put the thicker steel of the glacis plate and the turret between the crew and the enemy.

Peering through the periscopes in the commander's cupola, Pound saw the heaviest action off to his left.

He ordered the barrel over that way. For now, it was his.

II

C louds and rain and sleet shrouded the North Atlantic. A few hundred miles to the west of the *Josephus Daniels* lay Newfoundland. To the east of the destroyer escort, probably, lay trouble. The British never stopped sending arms and men to Newfoundland and to Canada to give the rebellion against the USA a helping hand. Lieutenant Sam Carsten and the skippers of his fellow picket ships did everything they could to keep the limeys from getting through.

He halfheartedly swore at the weather. It made enemy ships all that much harder to find. The rain and sleet even interfered with the Y-ranging gear. The wireless waves bounced back from raindrops, too. A good operator could peer through the interference, but it sure didn't make life any easier. And the old-fashioned Mark One eyeball had a very short range here.

He swore only halfheartedly because the weather suited his own needs very well. He was a short step away from being an albino. His skin was pink, his eyes pale blue, and his hair white gold. It was even whiter these days than it had been when he was younger—he'd spent almost thirty-five years in the Navy now. Summer in the tropics was a never-ending misery for him. Summer in Seattle was a misery for him, and that took doing.

His executive officer was a young, auburn-haired lieutenant named Pat Cooley. If not for Sam, the exec might have been the the fairest man on the ship. Cooley had gone through Annapolis, while Sam was

a mustang who hadn't made ensign till some years after the Great War.

Cooley was a comer, a hotshot. He'd have a ship of his own before long. Sam didn't want the exec promoted out from under him, but he knew things worked that way. As for himself, when he walked into the recruiting office all those years ago he never dreamt he would wear two stripes on his sleeve. He'd just been looking for a way to escape walking behind the north end of a southbound mule for the rest of his life.

The *Josephus Daniels* pitched down into the trough between two waves. Seas on the North Atlantic weren't quite so fierce and mountainous as they had been earlier in the winter, but they weren't any fun, either. "You all right, Mr. Cooley?" Sam asked when the exec grabbed for something to steady himself.

"Yes, sir. Just clumsy." Cooley's eyes were green as a cat's. Just now, he looked like a cat that had rolled off a bed and was trying to pretend it hadn't.

"Insides not turning inside out?" Sam had rounded the Horn more than once. Those were the only seas he knew that put the North Atlantic to shame. He hadn't been seasick. He might sunburn in anything this side of a cloudburst, but he had no trouble keeping his grub down.

Pat Cooley was a good sailor. The North Atlantic seemed intent on showing good sailors they weren't as good as they thought. Here, though, the exec shook his head. "Not giving me any trouble right this minute," he said: a precise man's cautious answer.

"Skipper?" That was a very young, very junior lieutenant, junior grade, named Thad Walters: the officer responsible for the care and feeding of the Y-ranging gear. He looked up from the green blips on his oscilloscope screens. "I've got something showing."

"A ship?" Sam asked. Even troubled by the weather, the Y-ranging set was more likely to pick up limeys trying to run the U.S. gauntlet than lookouts were.

But the j.g. shook his head. "No, sir. It's an airplane. Have we got a carrier in the neighborhood?"

"If we do, nobody told me, that's for damn sure," Sam answered. Nobody'd warned him a British carrier was operating in the

neighborhood, either. That could be very bad news. A beat slower than he might have, he heard exactly what Walters said. “Wait a second. *An* airplane?”

“Yes, sir. Y-ranging gear sees one. Speed two hundred. Bearing 085. Range…Range is twenty-five miles and closing—he’s heading our way.”

“Just one, though?” Sam persisted. “Not a bunch of them?”

Walters shook his head. “Sure doesn’t look like it. The set could pick them out at that range.”

“All right.” Carsten turned to the exec. “Call the men to general quarters, Mr. Cooley. If he finds us in this slop, we’ll have to try to shoot him down.” He’d been attacked from the air before, even back in the Great War. He didn’t enjoy it, not even a little bit.

“General quarters. Aye aye, sir,” Cooley said. Klaxons hooted. Sailors started running like men possessed. They dashed into the turrets that held the *Josephus Daniels’* two 4.5-inch guns. And they manned all her twin 40mm antiaircraft guns and the .50-caliber machine guns that supplemented them.

The unknown airplane would get a warm reception, anyhow.

As soon as Sam heard the snarl of an airplane engine off in the distance, he said, “Evasive action, Mr.

Cooley.”

“Evasive action—aye aye, sir.” Cooley was a better shiphandler than Sam was. Sam had never had his hands on a wheel till he took over the *Josephus Daniels.* He was a lot better now than he had been then, but the exec was better still. “All ahead full!” Cooley called down to the engine room, and the throb of the destroyer escort’s own engines picked up.

Cooley started zigzagging the ship across the ocean, lurching now to port, now to starboard, at random times and angles. But the *Josephus Daniels* was only a destroyer escort, not a full-fledged destroyer.

She had a smaller crew, a smaller hull, and a smaller powerplant than a destroyer proper. She couldn’t come within several knots of a real destroyer’s speed. One of these days, that would hurt her. Sam felt it in his bones. He hoped today wasn’t the day.

The airplane with the blue-white-red British roundel broke through the clouds. “All guns open fire!” Sam shouted. They did. The racket was impressive. Even the popguns that were the *Josephus Daniels’* main armament could fire antiaircraft shells. Black puffs of smoke appeared around the British aircraft.

Sam nodded to himself in more than a little satisfaction. He was still no great shakes as a shiphandler, no.

But gunnery aboard the *Josephus Daniels* was far better than it had been when he took over the ship.

He’d been part of a five-inch gun crew before becoming an officer; he knew what was what there.

That airplane jinked and dodged like the destroyer escort, though much faster. It had a bomb slung under its belly. It also had floats under the belly and each wing. Despite its maneuvers, it bored in on the *Josephus Daniels.* The bomb fell free. The airplane raced away. Cursing, Pat Cooley swung the ship hard to starboard.

With a roar and a great gout of water hurled into the sky, the bomb burst about a hundred yards to port.

The airplane vanished into the clouds. For all the shells the gunners threw at it, Sam didn’t think they’d hit it. He hoped no splinters from the bomb casing had sliced into his crew.

“Nice job, Pat,” he said.

“Thank you, sir,” the exec answered. “Every so often, this looks like work, doesn’t it?”

“Maybe a little,” Carsten answered. They smiled at each other, both glad to be alive. Sam went on,

“Well, we don’t have to worry about a limey carrier, anyway.”

“Sir?” Cooley said.

“Oh. I guess you were kind of occupied.” Sam chuckled under his breath. “Son of a bitch was a floatplane. A freighter could catapult-launch it, let it scout around, and then haul it out of the drink with a crane.”

“Damn. My hat’s off to the pilot,” Cooley said. “I sure as hell wouldn’t

want to try putting a plane down on the water in seas like this."

"Good point." Sam hadn't thought of that, but he nodded. "When I was on the *Remembrance,* we wouldn't launch or land aircraft from the flight deck in this, let alone try to get down on the sea. But that's not my worry…. Mr. Walters!"

"Sir?" the Y-range operator said.

"You still have that airplane on your screen? What's his course?"

"Flying out at 085, sir—going out on the reciprocal of the vector he came at us on."

"All right." Sam turned back to the exec. "Mr. Cooley, bring our course to 080. Let's see if we can follow him back more or less down his trail and find the ship that sent him out."

"Changing course to 080, sir." Cooley's smile was predatory. "You'd make a good duck hunter."

"Thanks. You've got to lead them a little," Sam said. "The limey'll still be heading west. If we get close, the Y-ranger will spot him."

"Here's hoping, anyway," Walters said.

"You've done it before," Sam said. "If we do find the ship, let's just hope she's not loaded for bear like the last one we met."

"We'll be ready this time, anyhow," Pat Cooley said. Sam nodded. The British had taken to mounting guns on some of their freighters. The *Josephus Daniels* got a nasty surprise the first time she ran into one of those. She'd outfought the *Karlskrona,* but Sam still shuddered thinking about what might have happened if one of those big shells had hit his ship.

He wondered how far that floatplane had come from. If it was a hundred miles, the destroyer escort would never find the ship that had launched it. He wouldn't have wanted to try to find the ship after flying a hundred miles each way through this kind of weather. He'd seen the limey pilot had guts. But wasn't there a difference between having guts and being out of your skull?

He'd sailed east and a little north for about an hour when Lieutenant Walters stirred at his set.

“Something?” Sam asked hopefully. The *Josephus Daniels* was up at the crest of a swell, which let the Y-ranging gear see a little farther.

“I—think so, sir,” the j.g. answered, and then grimaced. “Gone now.” They’d slid into the trough. He waited till the ocean carried the ship higher again, then nodded. “Yes, sir. Range, eight miles. Bearing 075.”

“Nice navigating, sir,” Cooley said.

“Thanks. Change course to 075,” Sam answered. In good weather, he would have seen the stranger’s smoke before he got within eight miles. But the weather wasn’t good, and wouldn’t be for weeks.

He drew within a mile of the freighter before he spotted her. The message he blinkered over was hard and uncompromising: HEAVE TO. SURRENDER. ANY FALSE MOVES AND WE FIRE

WITHOUT WARNING. *Once bitten, twice shy,* he thought. Through binoculars, he could see the airplane that tried to bomb the *Josephus Daniels* stowed aft of the bridge.

The rustbucket ran up a white flag even as he ordered a shot across her bow. He wasn’t the only man scanning her for anything the least bit wrong. If canvas was thrown aside to clear hidden guns…But it wasn’t, not this time.

Feeling piratical, he sent across a boarding party armed with rifles and pistols and submachine guns. The British sailors offered no resistance. “’Ow the bleedin’ ’ell did you find us?” their skipper asked when the Americans brought him back to the *Josephus Daniels.*

Sam almost told him. Why not? The limey wasn’t going anywhere. But the urge to take no chances prevailed. “Just luck,” he answered, and smiled to himself. “Yeah, just luck.”

T wice built, twice destroyed. Sergeant Armstrong Grimes strode through the wreckage of Temple Square in Salt Lake City. The Mormons had risen during the Great War, and been brutally smashed.

They waited for years. They finally got their civil rights back from President Al Smith. And then, no doubt with Confederate encouragement, they rose against the USA again. And now the Temple and the Mormon Tabernacle were rubble again, perhaps more finely pulverized rubble than they had been a generation earlier.

Armstrong's eyes flicked now this way, now that. Since Lieutenant Streczyk got wounded, he'd commanded a platoon. One of these days, a new junior officer might take charge of it. Armstrong wasn't holding his breath. The war in Utah got what the war against the CSA didn't need. Since the war against the CSA needed everything, the war in Utah got…hind tit.

Corporal Yossel Reisen walked through the wreckage, too. Like Armstrong, the Jew from New York City held his Springfield at the ready. Reisen took a drag at the cigarette that hung from the corner of his mouth. "Well, here we are. We've liberated Temple Square," he said.

"Yeah." Armstrong looked around. He didn't see a piece of rock bigger than about two by two. The United States had expended a *lot* of bombs and shells on this place. "We've liberated the living shit out of it, haven't we?"

Here and there, Mormon civilians who'd lived through the fighting were starting to come out of their holes. They said they were civilians, anyway. Orders were to treat them as civilians unless they showed signs of being dangerous. Armstrong didn't know why the U.S. government was trying to win the locals'

hearts and minds. That had been a losing game for more than sixty years now. But he didn't shoot at people he would have tried to kill not long before.

That didn't mean he wanted the Mormons coming anywhere near him. One of the ways they could show signs of being dangerous was by blowing themselves up, along with whatever U.S. soldiers happened to be within range of the blast. Mormons had invented people bombs, and still used them to deadly effect.

And they weren't the only ones who did. Plainly, they'd hit upon an idea whose time had come. Blacks in the CSA used people bombs to strike at the Freedom Party. Half a dozen Balkans groups were using them against Austria-Hungary. Armenians blew themselves up to hit back at the Ottoman Turks. In Russia, the Reds had lost a long, brutal civil war to the Tsar. Now their remnants had a new weapon, too.

Other soldiers in green-gray kept chivvying the emerging Mormons away from them. Most of the civilians were women. That cut no ice with Armstrong Grimes. The first person he'd seen using a people bomb was a woman. And plenty of Mormon women picked up rifles

and grenades and fought alongside their husbands and brothers and sons.

“You ever…pay a Mormon gal back?” he asked Yossel Reisen.

Reisen was watching the women, too. He shook his head. “Not like that. You?”

“No,” Armstrong said. Not many Mormon women let themselves be captured. They had reasons for fighting to the death, too. The revenge U.S. soldiers took was basic in the extreme. Gang-raping captured Mormon women was against orders, which didn’t mean it didn’t happen.

Off to the north, artillery boomed. U.S. airplanes buzzed overhead, some spotting for the guns, others dropping bombs on Mormon positions. The Confederates would have hacked the lumbering, obsolescent bombers out of the sky with ease. Against enemies who didn’t have fighters and didn’t have much in the way of antiaircraft guns, they were good enough.

“Blow all the bastards to hell and gone.” Armstrong picked up a chip of granite that might have come from the Temple. “Then we can get on with the real war.” He flung the stone chip away. It bounced off a bigger rock and disappeared in the rubble.

Yossel’s expression changed. He bent and picked up a bit of stone, too. Tossing it up and down, he murmured, “I wonder what Jerusalem is like these days.”

“Huh?” Armstrong knew what Jerusalem was like: a sleepy Ottoman town full of Arabs and Jews where nothing much had happened for centuries.

But his buddy said, “We had our Temple destroyed twice, too.”

He didn’t usually make a big deal out of being a Jew, any more than he made a big deal out of being a Congresswoman’s nephew—and not just any Congresswoman, but one who’d also been First Lady.

“You guys are real Americans,” Armstrong said. “Hell, you’re a gentile here—just ask a Mormon.”

“I know. I think it’s a scream,” Yossel Reisen said. “Yeah, we’re real Americans—or we try to be, anyhow. But we sure didn’t make real

Romans a couple of thousand years ago. That's why the Second Temple got it."

"I guess." Except for what little Armstrong remembered from a high-school history class and from *Julius Caesar* in English Lit, ancient Rome was a closed book to him.

"We think the Mormons are nuts, and we treat 'em that way, and what happens?" Yossel said. "Bang!

They rise up. We treat Jews all right, and they're happy and quiet. The Romans thought my ancestors were nuts, and they treated 'em that way, and what happened? Bang! The Jews rose up."

"Bunch of bullshit, if you want to know what I think," Armstrong said. "We were nice to the Mormons right before the war, and what did we get for it? They kicked us anyway, soon as we got busy with Featherston's fuckers." He might not know ancient history, but he remembered the end of the occupation of Utah. Fat lot of good ending it did anybody.

"Yeah, there is that," Yossel allowed. "Maybe you just can't make some people happy."

"Better believe you can't," Armstrong said. "These bastards have spent the last God knows how long proving it, too." He was some small part of what the U.S. government had done to Utah, but that never entered his mind. Neither side, by then, worried much about who'd started what and why. They both knew they had a long history of hating, mistrusting, and striking at each other. Past that, they didn't much care.

Yossel Reisen pointed to another corporal trudging through the wreckage of Temple Square. He nudged Armstrong. "You recognize that guy?"

Armstrong eyed the two-striper. He looked like anybody else: not too young, not too old, not too big, not too small. But he didn't look like anybody Armstrong knew, or even knew of. Maybe that didn't mean anything. Now that Temple Square had finally fallen, it drew its share of gawkers.

But maybe it did mean something. The USA had trouble fighting the Mormons just because they looked so ordinary. They had no trouble getting U.S. uniforms, either. Down in the CSA, the Freedom Party knew who was a Negro and who wasn't. Here…Armstrong unslung his

Springfield. “Let’s go check him out.”

The corporal wasn’t doing anything to draw notice; he ambled around with his hands in his pockets.

Once he bent down and picked up a bit of rock and stowed it away. To Mormons, pieces of the Temple were sacred relics. But to U.S. soldiers who’d gone through hell to get here, they made good souvenirs.

Carrying one didn’t say a thing about what you were.

“Hey!” Armstrong said, quietly slipping off the Springfield’s safety.

“You want something, Sarge?” The corporal sounded like anybody else, too. Mormons did.

“Yeah. Let’s see your papers.”

“Sure.” The noncom started to take something out of his pocket.

“Hold it right there!” Yossel Reisen snapped. Armstrong didn’t like the way the stranger’s hand bunched, either. He sure looked as if he was grabbing something bigger than a set of identity documents. “Take both hands out, nice and slow,” Yossel told him. “If they aren’t empty when you do, you’re dead. Got it?”

“Who are you clowns?” the corporal demanded. “You Mormons trying to hijack me? You won’t get away with it!”

If he was trying to put the shoe on the other foot, he had balls. Armstrong gestured with his Springfield.

“Do like my buddy says.” His own balls tried to crawl up into his belly. If this guy was a Mormon and what he had in there was a detonator…But his hands came out empty.

Yossel reached into that pocket and pulled out a pistol: not an Army .45, but a smaller revolver, a civilian piece. Armstrong’s suspicions flared. Then Yossel found the other corporal’s papers. He looked from the photo to the man and back again. He shook his head.

“Let’s see,” Armstrong said. His pal showed him the picture. It was of a guy noticeably darker and noticeably skinnier than the fellow in the uniform. Armstrong gestured with the rifle again. “Come on. Get moving. You got a bunch of questions to answer.”

“I haven’t done anything!” the corporal said. One thing he hadn’t done was swear, not even once. Most U.S. soldiers would have. Mormons watched their mouths better.

“Well, you’ll get the chance to prove it,” Armstrong said. “Yossel, grab his rifle.”

Carefully, Yossel Reisen unslung the other corporal’s Springfield. “Move,” he told the man.

Still squawking—but still not cursing—the soldier who might not be a soldier moved. They led him back over the ground for which the Mormons had fought so long and so hard, the ground that was cratered and crumpled and crushed, the ground over which the stench of death still hung. That would only get worse when the weather warmed up. Armstrong wondered if it would ever leave the land, or if the foul, clinging odor would linger forever, an unseen but unmistakable monument to what Salt Lake City had gone through.

Sentries outside of regimental headquarters popped up out of the foxholes where they spent most of their time—not every sniper had been hunted down and killed. “What the fuck’s going on here?” one of them demanded. He talked the way most U.S. soldiers did.

“We caught this guy up by the Temple,” Armstrong answered. “Yossel here spotted him.” It didn’t occur to him till later that he might have taken the credit himself. He didn’t want to screw his buddy. “We figure maybe he’s a Mormon. His papers don’t match his face, and he was carrying this little chickenshit pistol—show ’em, Yossel.” Reisen displayed the revolver.

The sentry eyed the corporal who didn’t seem to be a corporal. “Waddayou got to say for yourself, Mac?” he asked, his voice colder than the weather.

“They’re full of baloney,” the—maybe—two-striper said. Not *shit*—*baloney*. He added, “I don’t like a

.45—kicks too hard.”

“Huh,” the sentry said, no doubt noticing, as Armstrong did, that that—maybe—Mormon didn’t say anything about his papers. The sentry nodded to Armstrong and Yossel. “Bring him on in. They’ll find out what’s going on with him. And if it is what you think it is…” He didn’t go on, or need to. If it was what they thought it was, the fellow they’d

captured was a dead man. He wouldn't die quickly or cleanly, either. *Oh, what a shame,* Armstrong thought, and led him on.

C incinnatus Driver hadn't been under fire for more than twenty-five years. He'd forgotten how much fun it wasn't. If he hadn't forgotten, he never would have volunteered to drive a truck in a combat zone again. He would have stayed back in Des Moines and found work in a war plant or tried to bring his dead moving and hauling business back to life.

But he'd been flat on his back in Covington, Kentucky, when the state passed from the USA back to the CSA. He supposed he was lucky: the car that hit him didn't kill him. It didn't seem like luck while he was recovering from a broken leg and a fractured skull and a smashed shoulder. Even now, almost two and a half years later, he walked with a limp and a cane and sometimes got headaches that laughed at aspirin.

He was finally exchanged for a Confederate the USA was holding—U.S. citizenship meant something, even for a Negro. It didn't mean everything; Negroes in the United States couldn't join the Army, couldn't pick up rifles and go after the enemies who were tormenting their brethren south of the Mason-Dixon Line. With his age and his injuries, Cincinnatus wouldn't have been able to join the Army if he were white.

This was the next best thing. He'd driven trucks for more than thirty years. He'd driven for the USA during the Great War. Here he was, doing it again, part of a long column of green-gray machines hauling ammunition and rations to the U.S. troops trying to drive the Confederates out of western Ohio.

The state of the art had improved over the past quarter-century. The Chevy truck he drove now had a much more powerful, much more reliable engine than the White he'd used then. It had a fully enclosed cabin, too, and a heater. It boasted a self-starter; he didn't have to crank it to life. Its headlights were electric, not acetylene lamps. With all-wheel drive, it could get through terrain that would have shaken the White to pieces.

But the driving wasn't much different. Neither was the fear when shells started bursting in the field to either side of the road. Cincinnatus' mouth went dry. His sphincters tightened. He wanted to stop and turn around and get the hell out of there.

A .45 lay on the seat beside him. He couldn't afford to let the Confederates capture him. It wasn't just that he was colored, though no black man in the USA wanted to think about falling into Confederate hands. But he was also on the CSA's list of dangerous characters. When they removed him from Covington, they made it very plain they didn't want to have anything to do with him ever again. They might regret it if they did, but he would never get over it.

Next to those bursting shells, the .45 seemed like small potatoes. Next to the dreadful immensity of the war, Cincinnatus himself seemed like small potatoes: just one man, and an ordinary man at that. But all you could do was all you could do. Everybody was just one person, doing what he or she could do.

Added together, all those people made up the USA and the CSA—made up the war. If, added together, all the people of the USA could do more…

"They better," Cincinnatus said, there alone in the cab of the Chevrolet truck. Imagining a North America dominated by the Confederacy and the Freedom Party…He didn't want to do it. He'd seen what Covington was like after the Stars and Bars replaced the Stars and Stripes. Thinking of that happening everywhere made him a little sick, or more than a little.

One of the incoming shells hit a truck a couple of hundred yards ahead of him. The truck, loaded with the same sort of cargo as his, went up in a fireball. Luckily, it careened off the road instead of blocking it. All the same, Cincinnatus hit the brakes. He didn't want to get any closer than he had to till that ammo finished cooking off.

Could have been me, he thought, and shuddered. It would have been him if one of the Confederate artillery men had paused to scratch an itch or stick a fresh chaw in his mouth before pulling the lanyard.

About fifteen seconds later, his truck would have been where that shell landed.

He sped up when he went past the shattered deuce-and-a-half. Not a chance in hell the driver got out.

He hoped the man died fast, anyhow. Given the size of that explosion, the odds seemed good.

Another shell left a crater in the road, forcing Cincinnatus over onto the soft shoulder to get around it.

With power to all six wheels, he managed to get by without bogging down. He hoped the trucks that came after his would be able to do the same. Each one chewed up the ground more and more.

The truck column rolled into Findlay about five minutes later. Here and there around the town, tall columns of black, greasy smoke rose into the air: oil wells torched by the retreating Confederates. A team of U.S. engineers was trying to put one out as Cincinnatus came into town. He wondered if retreating U.S. soldiers had fired the wells a year and a half earlier, leaving the Confederates to get them working again. He wouldn't have been surprised.

He didn't get long to worry about it. "Come on! Come on! Over here!" a sergeant bellowed, waving like a man possessed. Cincinnatus did his best to follow the noncom's instructions. At last, the sergeant threw up both hands, as if he'd just scored a touchdown. He stopped.

A swarm of soldiers descended on the truck, transferring the munitions and rations to several smaller trucks for the trip to the front. It wasn't far away; Findlay itself had fallen only a few days before. Shells still came down on the town, as they'd landed on the road to the northwest. The faster the explosives left Cincinnatus' truck, the happier he would be.

Of course, as soon as the deuce-and-a-half was empty, he had to drive back to the big depot in Defiance to load up again for another trip to Findlay. The CSA had heavily bombed Defiance earlier in the war. Not many enemy airplanes came over these days. U.S. fighters and bombers took off from airstrips on the outskirts of town. Antiaircraft guns by the score poked their long snouts up toward the sky. Camouflage netting masked some of them. Others stood out in the open, as if warning the Confederates they were there.

Cincinnatus gulped a sandwich and drank coffee while they filled his truck again. There was one other Negro driver in his transport unit. Douglass Butler came from Denver, of all places. He talked like a white man. Cincinnatus' son and daughter had grown up in Des Moines, and lost a lot of their Confederate Negro accent. Cincinnatus had lost some of it himself; he'd noticed that when he got stuck in Covington. But Douglass Butler didn't have any, and apparently never had had any. He puffed on a cigar, waiting for his truck to get reloaded.

"My dad went out to Colorado to see if he could get rich mining," he said, every vowel sharp, every consonant distinct. "He didn't—only a

few people did—and he ended up running a grocery store. I started driving a truck for him, but I found I liked driving more than I liked the grocery business."

"Folks out there give you a lot of trouble on account o'—?" Cincinnatus brushed two fingers of his right hand across the back of his left to remind the other Negro what color they were.

"Well, I know what *nigger* means, that's for damn sure." Butler shrugged. "But Jews are kikes and Chinamen are Chinks and Irishmen are micks and Mexicans are greasers and Italians are wops and even Poles are lousy Polacks, for God's sake. I don't get too excited about it. Hell, my brother's married to a white woman."

That made Cincinnatus blink. "Work out all right?" he asked.

"They've been married almost twenty years. People are used to them," the other driver said. "Every once in a while, John'll hear something stupid if he's standing in line for a film with Helen or out at a diner or something like that, but it's not too bad." He chuckled. "Of course, he's my *big* brother—he goes about six-three, maybe two-fifty. I don't care if you're green—you want to be careful what you say around him." He was of ordinary size himself.

"Does make a difference," Cincinnatus agreed. He wondered if John Butler was named for John Brown; with two s's in his first name, Douglass Butler was bound to be named for Frederick Douglass.

Before he could ask, somebody shouted that their trucks were ready to roll. "Got to get moving," Butler said. "I want to parade through Nashville or Birmingham or one of those places. And if I hear some Confederate asshole yell, 'Freedom!'—well, I want to pull out my .45 and blow his fucking head off."

He sounded altogether matter-of-fact about it, the way a U.S. white man would have. But for the color of his skin, he might as well have been a U.S. white man. He seemed as sure of his place in the world and as comfortable with it as any white man, whether from the USA or the CSA. Cincinnatus, whom life had left forever betwixt and between, envied him for that.

He climbed into the cab of his truck, slammed the door, turned the key in the ignition, and put the beast in gear. South and east he rolled, back toward Findlay. No shellfire fell on the road this time. U.S. guns, or maybe dive bombers, had silenced the Confederate batteries that were shelling it. Cincinnatus approved.

Unlike Douglass Butler, he didn't want to use his .45 for anything. He had it. He could use it if he had to.

But he didn't want to.

What if Jake Featherston was right in front of you? He glanced over to the pistol. Well, you could make exceptions for everything. Dream as he would, though, he didn't expect to be sharing a diner with the President of the CSA any time soon.

When he rolled into Findlay, he got waved through the town. "What's goin' on?" he called to a soldier with wigwag flags.

"We broke through again, that's what," the white man answered. "They need their shit farther forward."

"I like that," Cincinnatus said, and drove on.

Shells were falling not far from the new unloading area, but they'd been falling in Findlay and beyond it only a couple of hours before. The men who hauled crates out of the back of his truck had an air of barely suppressed excitement. They didn't seem to think the Confederates would be able to slow this latest push.

Do Jesus, let 'em be right, Cincinnatus thought. That Ohio should be liberated didn't matter so much in and of itself—not to him, anyway. But he could see that U.S. soldiers would have to clear the Confederates out of their own country before they started doing what really did matter—to him, anyway.

If the United States were going to lick Jake Featherston, they would have to do it on Featherston's turf.

Cincinnatus thought about the last time he'd driven trucks full of munitions through Kentucky and Tennessee. He thought about the Confederate diehards who'd shot up his column more than once. Then he thought about U.S. artillery and bombers blowing all those people to kingdom come.

War was a filthy business for everybody, no doubt about it. Cincinnatus wanted a little more filth to come down on the other side. He didn't think that was too much to ask.

B rigadier General Irving Morrell was a man in a hurry. He always had

been, ever since his days as a company commander at the start of the Great War. He took the first position he ever attacked—and he got shot charging with the bayonet when he ran out of ammunition. That taught him an important lesson: like anything else, being in a hurry had its disadvantages.

It also had its advantages, though. Massing barrels and smashing Confederate lines made the CSA say uncle in 1917. At the Barrel Works at Fort Leavenworth after the Great War, Morrell designed a machine with all the features a modern barrel needed: a reduced crew, a powerful engine, a big gun in a turret that turned through 360 degrees, and a wireless set.

He designed it—and he found nobody in the USA much wanted it. The Great War was over, wasn't it?

There'd never be another one, would there? Being a man in a hurry sometimes put you too far ahead not only of the enemy but also of your own side.

By the time it became clear the Great War wouldn't be the last one after all, the state of the art all over the world had caught up with Morrell's vision. Germany and Austria-Hungary built barrels incorporating all the features he'd envisioned more than fifteen years earlier. So did France and England and Russia.

And so did the Confederate States.

So did the United States, but belatedly and halfheartedly. When the fighting started, Morrell had to try to defend Ohio without enough machines—and without good enough machines. He failed. Even in failure, he alarmed the Confederates. A sniper gave him an oak-leaf cluster for his Purple Heart and put him on the shelf for weeks.

Returning to duty, he didn't have much luck in Virginia, a narrow land bristling with fortifications. But he was the architect of the U.S. thrust that cut off, surrounded, and destroyed the Confederate army that fought its way into Pittsburgh. Now the armored force he led was driving west through Ohio. He knew exactly what he wanted to do. If, somewhere south of Columbus, his force could meet up with the one pushing southeast from northwestern Ohio and Indiana, they would trap all the Confederates to the north of them in another pocket.

He didn't think Jake Featherston could afford to lose one army. He knew damn well the President of the CSA couldn't afford to lose two. What could be better, then, than giving Jake exactly what he didn't

want?

Right this minute, Morrell was bivouacked with his lead barrels atop Mount Pleasant, in Lancaster, Ohio.

The 250-foot sandstone rise looked down on the whole town. It had not lived up to its name. Not being fools, the Confederates put an observation post and several artillery batteries atop the rise, and protected them with pillboxes and machine-gun nests.

Clearing them out was a slow, bloody, expensive job. Morrell believed in bypassing enemy strongpoints wherever he could, letting slower-moving infantry clean up in the armor's wake. Some strongpoints, though, were too strong to bypass. This, unfortunately, was one of them.

Dive bombers helped pound it into submission. Several 105s sprawled in the snow, knocked ass over teakettle by 500-pound bombs. Dead soldiers in butternut lay there, too. Some of them wore white camouflage smocks over their uniforms, which struck Morrell as a good idea. Good idea or not, it didn't save them. Along with soot, their blood streaked the snow.

Crows and a couple of turkey vultures were feeding on the bodies. Standing up in his barrel's cupola, Morrell waved his arms and yelled, "Yaaah!" A few of the birds flew away. Most of them ignored him.

The gunner tapped him on the leg. "What the hell, sir?" Corporal Al Bergeron said plaintively. "You scared the crap out of me there."

"Sorry, Frenchy," Morrell answered. Bergeron was a good man and a good gunner—maybe not quite so good as Michael Pound, who was one of a kind in several different ways, but damn good just the same.

Morrell explained why he made his horrible noise.

"Oh." Bergeron thought about that for a little while. Then he said, "Yeah, those damn things are filthy, all right. Tell you one thing, though: I'm glad they're chowing down on Featherston's fuckers and not on us."

"Me, too," Morrell said, though he knew the carrion birds didn't care whether their suppers came wrapped in butternut or green-gray. For that matter, the crows and vultures feasted on dead civilians, too.

“What’s it look like off to the west?” Bergeron asked.

Before answering, Morrell scanned the way ahead with binoculars. Visibility wasn’t everything he wished it were, but he could see enough to get some idea of what was going on. “Sure looks like they’re pulling back,” he said.

Corporal Bergeron summed up his reaction to that in two words: “Well, shit.”

“You said a mouthful, Frenchy.” Morrell really had hoped he could cut off as many Confederates with this thrust as he had in and around Pittsburgh. Then, Jake Featherston forbade his men to withdraw.

Morrell had hoped he would do it again. But evidently he was able to learn from experience. *Too bad,* Morrell thought. The Confederates were heading south in anything that would roll: truck convoys, barrels, commandeered civilian motorcars. Bombers and artillery and saboteurs did everything they could to knock the railroads out of action, but Ohio had such a dense net of tracks that it wasn’t easy. Every soldier, every barrel, every gun, every truck that got out now was a soldier, a barrel, a gun, a truck the USA would have to put out of action later on.

Morrell scanned the horizon again. He knew he was being foolish, but he did it anyhow. If he could have seen the U.S. forces coming down from the northwest, the Confederates would have been in even worse trouble than they really were. When he sighed, the vapor threatened to cloud the field glasses’ lenses.

That western column wasn’t so strong or so swift as this one. Even so…

“We get the country put back together again,” Frenchy Bergeron said.

You didn’t need to be a general to see that; a noncom would do just fine. The Confederates’ armored thrust had carried them all the way from the Ohio River up to Sandusky. They cut the United States in half. For more than a year and a half, goods and men moved from east to west or west to east by air (risky), on the waters of the Great Lakes (also risky, with C.S. airplanes always on the prowl), and over the Canadian roads and railroads north of the lakes (of limited capacity, and vulnerable to sabotage even before the Canucks rebelled).

“It’ll be better,” Morrell agreed. It probably wouldn’t be a whole lot

better any time soon. The Confederates were professionally competent. They would have done their best to wreck the east-west highways and railroad lines they were now sullenly abandoning. Putting the roads and railways back into action wouldn't happen overnight, especially since C.S. bombers would go right on visiting northern Ohio.

But now the Confederates were reacting to what Morrell and his countrymen did. For the first year of the war and more, the enemy had the United States back on their heels. The CSA called the tune. No more.

As Morrell watched, artillery rounds began falling near the Confederate convoy. The first few shells missed the road, bursting in front of or behind it. The trucks sped up. If they could get out of trouble…But they couldn't, not fast enough. A round hit the road. The convoy had to slow down to go onto the shoulder. And then a truck got hit, and began to burn.

That was all Morrell needed to see. He was commanding a large, complex operation. But he was also a fighting man himself. When he saw trucks in trouble, he wanted to give them more.

His barrel carried a large, complicated wireless set. He could talk with his fellow armored units, with artillery, with infantry, or with bombers and fighters. He didn't want to, not here. He used the company circuit any barrel commander might have clicked to: "We've got a Confederate convoy stalled on the road a few miles west. Let's go get 'em!"

Along with the others nearby, his own machine rumbled down off Mount Pleasant. Even after giving up the high ground, they had no trouble tracking their quarry: the pyre from that one burning truck—and maybe from more by now—guided them straight to it.

They met a warm reception when they got there. The Confederates had to know trouble was on the way.

They didn't stay in the trucks waiting around to get shot up. Some of them made their way south on foot.

And others had manhandled an antibarrel gun into position, and opened up on the U.S. machines as soon as they came into range.

The Confederates hit one, too, fortunately with a round that glanced off instead of penetrating. "Front!"

Morrell said.

“Identified!” Frenchy Bergeron answered. “HE!” the gunner called to the loader. The barrel stopped. He fired a couple of high-explosive shells at the gun. He wasn’t the only barrel gunner shooting, either. The Confederates serving the cannon had only a small splinter shield to protect them. They soon went down.

Brave bastards, Morrell thought, watching with his head and shoulders out of the cupola. Small-arms fire came his way, but not a lot of it. He ignored it with the stoicism of a man who’d known worse. One bullet was all he needed to make this as bad as it could be, but he didn’t think about that.

Then something different happened. A projectile trailing smoke and flame seemed to come out of nowhere. It slammed into a U.S. barrel and set it afire. Morrell couldn’t see if any of the men got out. He didn’t think so.

“What the fuck was that?” Bergeron must have seen it through the gunsight.

“I’ll be goddamned if I know,” Morrell answered.

He didn’t have to wait long. A couple of minutes later, another one of those darts of fire lanced out to incinerate a U.S. barrel. “It’s some kind of rocket, like on the Fourth of July,” Frenchy Bergeron said.

“How the hell did they come up with that?”

“How? I don’t know, but they sure did.” Morrell ducked down into the turret. “Did you see where they’re shooting it from?”

“Yes, sir,” the gunner answered. “Behind that stone fence there near the road.”

“All right. If they pop up again, try and shoot them before they can let go with it. I’ve got to get on the horn to my people.” He flipped to the circuit that would connect him to senior armor officers. “The Confederates have a portable antibarrel device, something an infantryman can use to knock out a machine at a couple of hundred yards. I say again, a foot soldier can use this thing to knock out a barrel at a couple of hundred yards.”

Life suddenly got more complicated. If foot soldiers really could fight back against armor without the suicidal impulse required to fling a

Featherston Fizz… *We need something like that ourselves,* Morrell thought.

The coaxial machine gun chattered. "*Got* the son of a bitch!" Bergeron said.

Plainly, the C.S. rocket was new. Plainly, the Confederates here didn't have many rounds. Just as plainly, the damn thing worked. And how many factories would start turning it out as fast as they could? Morrell swore. Yes, life was a lot more complicated all at once.

W hen Jake Featherston wanted to fly into Nashville, his bodyguards didn't just have kittens. They had puppies and lambs and probably baby elephants, too. Their chief was a group leader—the Freedom Party guards' equivalent of a major general—named Hiram McCullough. "Mr. President," he said, "your airplane could crash."

Featherston scowled at him. "My train could derail, too, if I go that way," he growled.

"Yes, sir," Group Leader McCullough agreed stolidly. That gave Featherston's ever-ready anger no good place to light. McCullough went on, "The other thing that could happen is, the damnyankees could shoot you down. The country needs you too much to let you take the chance."

Without false modesty, Jake knew the country needed him, too. He couldn't think of anyone else with the driving will to hold the CSA together if anything did happen to him. That was only the second half of what McCullough said, though. As for the first…"How could the damnyankees shoot me down? They won't know I'm in the air till I've landed."

"Sir, you don't know that for sure. Neither do I." McCullough had a round, red face pitted with acne scars. He was good at looking worried, as a bodyguard should be. He looked very worried now. "We don't know for a fact how many of our codes the Yankees can read. We don't know for a fact that they don't have spies who'd pass on where you're going and when. If you give the orders, I'll follow 'em. But do you want to take a chance you don't have to?"

Damn you, Jake thought. Since turning fifty—and since surviving two assassination tries, one by his own guards—he was more careful about his own safety. No one could question his courage, not after the record

he'd racked up in the Great War. However much he wanted to, he couldn't deny that Group Leader McCullough had a point.

"All right, Hiram," he said. "I'll take the goddamn train."

"Thank you, Mr. President!" McCullough said in glad surprise. Those doleful features hardly seemed able to contain the smile that lit them now.

Featherston held up a bony hand. "Don't thank me yet. We'll keep the train real quiet—I mean *real* quiet. What you put out through the regular secure channels is that I am going to fly. Send my regular pilot, send my regular airplane, give it the regular fighter escort. Put somebody who looks like me on it. If the Yankees jump it, you win. If they don't, I'll damn well fly when I feel like it. You got that?"

"Yes, sir," McCullough said. "I'll take care of it, just like you want me to." Just about everyone said that to the President of the CSA. It was what he liked to hear most. McCullough got to his feet. "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" Jake echoed.

Two days later, an armored limousine took someone who looked like him from the ruins of the Gray House to the airport outside Richmond. Escorted by Hound Dogs, his personal transport took off for Nashville. With no ceremony at all, Jake went to the train station and headed west in a Pullman car.

He got to the capital of Tennessee six hours later than he expected to; U.S. bombs had knocked out a bridge. He was glad he wasn't scheduled to speak till that evening. Delaying his talk because of what the enemy did would be embarrassing.

Hiram McCullough went to Nashville a day ahead of him to make sure security was tight. The group leader met Jake at the train station. As soon as he could, he took Featherston aside. In a low voice, he said, "Mr. President, two squadrons of Yankee fighters jumped your airplane before it got out of Virginia. They shot it down, and they shot down three of the Hound Dogs with it, too."

"Jesus Christ!" Jake exploded.

"Yes, sir," McCullough said. "I'm mighty glad you stayed on the ground, Mr. President." That was *I told you so,* but Jake didn't care. He was glad, too.

He said so. He didn't see how he could avoid it. Then he asked, "How the hell are those bastards picking up our codes?"

"Don't know, sir," McCullough answered. "I'm going to be looking at that, though—you better believe I will. And I'll tell you something else, too: I won't be the only one, either."

"Better not be," Featherston said. "Dammit, I'm gonna have to do more talking with Clarence Potter."

Potter was smart—sometimes too damn smart for his own good, but smart. And a breach like this would make him focus all of his formidable brainpower on it.

Unless he's the one who fed the damnyankees the codes in the first place. In Jake Featherston's shoes, you worried about everybody all the time, and for every possible reason. But Featherston couldn't make himself believe Clarence Potter would sell the CSA down the river. Potter didn't love him; he'd known that for many years. But the Intelligence officer was a Confederate patriot. If you didn't understand that, you didn't understand anything about him.

"I brought an armored car to the station, sir, to take you to the hotel," McCullough said. "Just in case."

"Thanks." Featherston couldn't deny that that made sense. If the Yankees knew he was on the way to Nashville, they might have people here who would try to strike at him. Of course, they might also be thinking they'd just killed him—in which case they were all probably out getting drunk and trying to lay their secretaries. He let out a nasty chuckle. Before long, they'd know he was still alive and kicking, all right.

The armored car looked impressive as hell. It had six big tires with cleated treads. Its angles were harsh and military. It sported a barrel-like turret with a cannon and a coaxial machine gun. But factories weren't making very many of them these days, and most of the ones that did get made were used against rebellious Negroes, not against the damnyankees. Armored cars made tolerable scout vehicles. Their steel sides kept out small-arms fire. But they were horribly vulnerable to any kind of cannon, and even with six wheels and all-wheel drive they weren't as good away from roads as tracked machines were.

This one, though, was fine to get him to the Hermitage Hotel. He peered out at Nashville through firing slits and periscopes. The city

hadn't been bombed nearly so hard as Richmond had. It was farther from U.S. airstrips than the capital, and not so vital a target. But it had suffered, too.

So much to rebuild when this is over, Jake thought. A scowl made his rawboned features even harsher than they were already. As long as the United States needed to put more back together, it didn't matter.

Everybody at the Hermitage Hotel was nervous, though Featherston had stayed there on earlier visits to Nashville. The manager said, "I hope the suite will be satisfactory," about three times in the space of two minutes.

"Don't worry about it. It'll be fine," Jake told him. The manager had to be scared he'd get skinned alive if the rooms weren't fancy enough. That only proved he didn't know the President of the CSA. Jake liked Habana cigars and good whiskey, but that was as far as he went along those lines. He hadn't got into politics hoping for riches and luxury. Power drove him, nothing else.

He didn't stay at the Hermitage very long: just long enough to freshen up after the train trip. Then he went across the street to the Nashville Memorial Auditorium, a ponderous concrete building that went up after the Great War.

He didn't have a full house in the auditorium, but he didn't care. This speech was for the wireless and the newsreels, not for the people actually in the hall. When it was filmed, the place would look full whether it was or not. Saul Goldman didn't hire cameramen who didn't know what they were doing.

"I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth." He'd been opening with that line ever since he discovered the wireless. That was twenty years ago now. He found it hard to believe, but it was true.

When he said it, he believed it. His speeches wouldn't have worked half as well if he didn't.

"The truth is, we are going to win this war!" When he said that, the Party stalwarts and fat cats in the Memorial Auditorium started yelling as if it were going out of style. Maybe he inspired them. Maybe they were scared shitless and needed a pat on the fanny to make 'em feel better. If they did, he would give them one.

"We *are* going to win," he repeated. "They can't beat us, because we damn well won't quit! We'll never quit, not while we've got one free

white man who can stand on his own two feet and aim a rifle at the enemy." More applause came echoing back from the ceiling. The noise made Jake's heart beat faster.

Talking in a wireless studio was one thing. Talking in front of a living, breathing, sweating crowd was something else, something better, something hotter.

"Truth is, the Freedom Party's had the right idea for twenty-five years now," Jake went on. "And if an idea's right to begin with, it will take up arms and struggle in this world. And once it does, nobody can beat it. Nobody, you hear? Every time someone persecutes it, that only makes it stronger!"

"Freedom!" somebody in the audience yelled. An instant later, everyone took up the cry. It washed over Jake Featherston. He scowled toward the north. If the damnyankees thought the Confederate States would fold up and die because things hadn't gone perfectly in Pennsylvania and Ohio, they could damn well think again.

"We're in this for the long haul!" he shouted. "This isn't any ordinary war, and everybody needs to remember it. This is the kind of fight that will shape the new millennium. A war like this doesn't come along every day. It shakes the world once in a thousand years. We're on a crusade here, a crusade for—"

"Freedom!" The roar was louder this time.

Featherston nodded. "That's right, friends. We can't quit now. We *won't* quit now, either. If the Confederate people give up, they won't deserve anything better than what they get. If they give up, I won't be sorry for them if God lets them down." He paused to let that sink in, then softly asked, "But we won't give up, will we? We'll never give up, will we?"

"No!" No hesitation, no backsliding. If they were there, he would hear them. As always, the Confederate States were going where he took them. And he knew where that was.

"We'll buckle down, then," he said. "We'll work hard at home. We'll whip the damnyankees yet. For every ton of bombs they drop on us, we'll drop ten tons on their heads, same as we've been doing all along. And we'll never get stabbed in the back again, on account of we're putting our own house in order, by God!"

That drew more frantic applause. Most of Nashville's Negroes were already in camps. Lots of Negroes went into camps in Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana and Texas. They went in, but they didn't come out. That suited most of the whites in the CSA just fine. And if the Confederate States of America weren't a white man's country, then there was no such thing, not anywhere in the world.

S ince the war started, wireless broadcasting was a tricky business. The USA and the CSA jammed each other's stations as hard as they could. As often as not, snarls of static strangled and distorted music and comedies as well as news.

But that wasn't the only reason the tune coming out of the wireless set in Flora Blackford's office sounded strange to her. Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces weren't an ordinary U.S. combo. They were colored men who'd escaped to the USA after being sent north into Ohio to entertain Confederate troops. Nobody in the United States played music like "New Orleans Jump." If the Negroes weren't minor heroes because of their daring getaway, they never would have got airtime for anything with such peculiar syncopations. As things were, they had a minor hit on their hands.

Congresswoman Blackford was happy for them. She'd met Satchmo and his less memorable bandmates.

They were talented men. To her, they were a symbol of everything the Confederate States were wasting with their constant war against the Negro.

She clucked unhappily. To her countrymen, Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces were a curiosity, nothing more. Most people in the USA didn't want to hear about Negroes, didn't want anything to do with them, and didn't want to be told what the Confederates were doing to them. She'd tried her best to make her countrymen pay attention. Her best wasn't good enough.

"New Orleans Jump" struck her as fitting background music for what she was reading: the transcript of Jake Featherston's recent speech in Nashville. She'd got it from the War Department. The captain who gave it to her seemed angry that he had to.

Flora wondered what that was all about. She didn't think the young officer had any reason to be angry at her personally. She'd never set eyes on him before. She wasn't trying to cut off funding—who would, these days? You gave the Army and the Navy what they said they

needed, and you hoped they found ways to shoot all the money at the enemy.

So why was the captain steaming, then? She picked up the telephone and called the Assistant Secretary of War, who was somewhere between a conspirator and a friend. “Hello, Flora,” Franklin Roosevelt said genially. “What can I do for you today?”

“A captain just brought me a copy of Featherston’s latest speech,” Flora said.

“Jake’s a son of a bitch, isn’t he?” Roosevelt said. “Pardon my French.”

“There’s certainly no give in him—as if we didn’t know that,” Flora said. “But that isn’t why I’m calling, or not exactly, anyhow. This captain seemed to be doing a slow burn, and I wondered why. It’s not like I ever met him before.”

“Oh. I think I can tell you that on the telephone,” Roosevelt said. “It’s not as if the Confederates don’t already know it. Dear Jake gave that speech in Nashville, right?”

“Yes.” Flora found herself nodding, though of course Franklin Roosevelt couldn’t see her. He had a gift for inspiring intimacy. If infantile paralysis hadn’t left him in a wheelchair, he might have tried to follow his cousin Theodore into the White House. And he was a solid Socialist, too, unlike Theodore the Democrat. “What about it?” Flora went on.

“This about it: we knew Featherston was going to Nashville. We hoped we’d arranged things so he wouldn’t get there.” Roosevelt sighed. “Obviously, we didn’t. He’s a suspicious so-and-so, and he dodged the bullet. I wouldn’t be surprised if that’s why your captain was steaming. I’m steaming, too, to tell you the truth.”

“Oh.” Flora nodded again. “Well, now that I know, so am I. If we could bump him off…”

“Wouldn’t it be lovely?” Franklin Roosevelt said.

“It sure would.” Flora was sure she and the Assistant Secretary of War shared the same beatific vision: the Confederate States of America thrashing around like a headless snake if Jake Featherston got it in the neck. She had no idea who would or could replace Featherston if he got it in the neck. She doubted the Confederates had any more idea

than she did. Jake Featherston made the CSA tick. If he wasn't there, wouldn't the country stop ticking?

"The other bad thing about it is, now they know we've broken some of their codes," Roosevelt said.

"They'll change them, and that will complicate our lives for a while."

Till we break them again, he had to mean. "Too bad," Flora said. "Too bad all the way around, in fact.

Thanks for letting me know. That does make me pretty sure the captain wasn't mad at me personally, anyhow."

"Always a relief," Roosevelt agreed. "The last thing anybody wants or needs is a secret unadmirer."

"Er—yes." Flora tasted the phrase. "But it's a shame Featherston's unadmirers here didn't stay secret enough."

"Well, so it is," the Assistant Secretary of War said. "The Confederates didn't break off the flight because they're reading *our* codes. I think they put a decoy on it because one of their security people got jumpy. The good ones do, from everything I've heard, and Lord knows Featherston needs good ones."

"Plenty of people on both sides of the border who want to kill him, all right," Flora said. "Did you notice inflation is coming back to the Confederate States?"

"No." Roosevelt was suddenly and sharply interested. After the Great War, the Confederate dollar collapsed; when things were at their worst, enjoying a beer took billions. "What do you mean? It would be wonderful if their economy went down the drain again."

But Flora didn't mean that, however much she wished she did. "Not what I was thinking," she said sadly.

"When the war was new, though, Featherston promised to drop three tons of bombs on our heads for every ton we landed on the CSA. Now he's up to ten tons."

"Oh." Franklin Roosevelt laughed. "I'd call that deflation myself—as his spirits go down, his threats go up. He was lying then, and he's still lying now. The Confederates weren't that far ahead at the start of

things, and they're behind us now. We're landing more on them than they are on us—quite a bit more, as a matter of fact."

"Good," Flora said, wondering how he knew. If she asked him, he'd probably tell her it was a very precise statistic he'd just made up. Odds were neither side knew exactly how much it was getting and receiving. She asked a different question instead: "How are things out West?"

"They're doing quite well." Roosevelt sounded enthusiastic, as he often did. "It really does look like General Dowling *will* take Lubbock away from the Confederates. If he does, we may proclaim the state of Houston again. That will give the people in west Texas something to flabble about—something to fight among themselves about."

"No one—except maybe them—would be sorry about that," Flora said. "It would also give him a base to go after Camp Determination." The camps where the Confederates systematically got rid of their Negroes sickened her as nothing else ever did.

"Well, maybe." Franklin Roosevelt didn't sound so enthusiastic about that. He spelled out his reasons:

"It's farther from Lubbock to the camp than it is from the border to Lubbock, quite a bit farther. Those are the wide open spaces out there. And detaching men from more urgent things farther east may not be easy, either."

Flora could have argued that nothing was more urgent than saving the lives of untold thousands of innocent human beings. She could have, but she knew the Assistant Secretary of War wouldn't pay any attention if she did. He would say that wouldn't win the war, and winning the war was the most urgent item on the agenda. She would have a devil of a time showing he was wrong, too. So, again, she took a different tack: "How are things farther west than that?"

Had Roosevelt started giving her chapter and verse about the skirmishes on the border between New Mexico and Sonora—and there'd never been more than skirmishes on that border, even though the war was heading towards its second birthday—she would have got angry. But he didn't. "That seems to be going as well as expected, too," he said.

"I'm glad to hear it." Flora didn't expect to hear anything more, not over the telephone. The project centered on Hanford, Washington, sounded like something from the pages of a pulp magazine with

bugeyed monsters and scantily clad girls on the cover. In fact, though, someone had told her that those magazines had a lot of subscribers in Hanford—they were much more popular with scientists and engineers than with the general public. She hoped the Confederacy's spymasters didn't know that.

"I do think we're making progress. I really do," Roosevelt said.

"Here's hoping." Flora didn't think she'd ever heard of uranium till after the war began. Now she knew there was more than one kind. If the 235 could be separated from the 238, or if the 238 could somehow make some new element altogether—it all sounded more like medieval alchemy than science—the bombs that resulted might blow whole cities off the map. With luck, those would be Confederate cities.

Without luck…"Any word on how they're doing with this on the other side of the line?"

"Well, they do seem to be trying." The Assistant Secretary of War sounded less jaunty than was his wont.

Fear clogged Flora's throat. If the cities blown off the map belonged to the USA, Jake Featherston would win his war in spite of the disasters the Confederates had suffered in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

"What can we do about that?" she asked. "Can we do anything?"

"We won't let them get away with it if we can possibly stop them, I promise you that," Roosevelt said.

"Good," Flora said, before she asked herself how good it really was. What had Roosevelt promised? To stop the CSA from building a uranium bomb? No. He'd promised to try to stop the Confederates from building one. Of course the United States would do that. Flora found one more question: "What can they do to stop us?"

"They haven't tried anything yet," Roosevelt said—another answer that wasn't an answer. He went on,

"They may have done some reconnaissance—we're not sure about that. If they did, they won't be able to do it again. We've tightened up since the last time we think they came around."

"Why weren't things tight right from the beginning?" Flora admired her own restraint. She didn't raise her voice at all, no matter how much she felt like yelling her head off.

“Because we were asleep at the switch.” Roosevelt could be disarmingly frank. “We aren’t any more.

We won’t be, either. That’s about the best I can tell you, Flora.”

“All right,” she said, and hoped it was. “I’m sure we’ll do everything we can.” She said her good-byes then. She hoped the USA bombed the Confederates’ uranium-producing plants to hell and gone. She hoped the CSA didn’t do the same to the one the United States had. Was such hope enough? The only answer that occurred to her was painfully clichéd, which made it no less true. She’d have to wait and see.

III

M ail call!” That shout always made the guards at Camp Determination hurry up to see what they had.

Troop Leader Hipolito Rodriguez wasn’t as good at hurrying as some of his younger, sprier comrades.

He was still on the sunny side of fifty, but moved like an older man. He’d almost got electrocuted a year and a half earlier, and he’d never been the same since. He belonged to the Confederate Veterans’

Brigades: men who couldn’t hope to fight at the front, but who could still serve the CSA behind the lines.

All the men at Camp Determination, whether from the Veterans’ Brigades or not, were Freedom Party guards, with the funny ranks that accompanied Party positions. Rodriguez had three stripes on the left sleeve of his gray uniform. He thought of himself as a sergeant. He did a sergeant’s job and got a sergeant’s pay. If they wanted to call him something silly, who was he to tell them they couldn’t?

Because he had three stripes on his sleeve, Rodriguez didn’t need to hurry as much as ordinary guards did. They got out of the way for him. They never would have if he hadn’t been promoted. To most Confederates, greasers from Chihuahua and Sonora were only a short step up from niggers. Rank carried more weight than race, though.

And a short step could be the longest step in the world. Hipolito Rodriguez—Hip to men who grew up speaking English—wasn’t the only guard with Mexican blood. On the other side of the barbed wire were untold thousands of *mallates.* And the camp outside of Snyder,

Texas, existed for one reason and one reason only: to kill them off as fast as possible.

The two-stripe assistant troop leader with the sack of mail started pulling out letters and stacks of letters held together by rubber bands and calling off names. As each guard admitted he was there, the corporal tossed him whatever he had.

“Rodriguez!” The noncom, a white man, made a mess of the name. Confederates born anywhere east of Texas usually did.

“Here!” Rodriguez knew the ways they usually butchered it. He raised his hand. The corporal gave him three letters.

He fanned them out like cards. They were all from Magdalena, his wife. He opened the one with the oldest postmark first. She wrote in the English-flavored Spanish middle-aged people in Sonora and Chihuahua commonly used. His children’s generation, further removed from the Empire of Mexico, spoke and wrote a Spanish-flavored English. Another couple of generations might see the older language disappear altogether.

But that thought flickered through Rodriguez’s mind and was lost. He needed the news from Baroyeca.

He hadn’t been back since he joined the Confederate Veterans’ Brigades, and he might not get home till the war was over.

Magdalena had heard from the Confederate Red Cross: Pedro was a POW in the United States.

Hipolito Rodriguez let out a sigh of relief. His youngest son was alive. He would come home one of these days. He’d done everything he could against the USA, and he was safe. No one could ask for more, especially since the news out of Ohio, where he’d fought, was so bad.

From what Rodriguez’s wife wrote, his two older sons, Miguel and Jorge, were also well. By an irony of fate, Pedro had gone into the Army ahead of them. He was in the first class after the CSA reintroduced conscription, where his older brothers missed out till it was extended to them. Miguel was in Virginia now, while Jorge fought in the sputtering war on Sonora’s northern border, trying to reclaim what the damnyankees annexed after the Great War.

Compared to that news, nothing else mattered much. Magdalena also talked about the farm. The farm was doing all right—not

spectacularly, because it wasn't spectacular land and she had trouble keeping things going by herself, but all right. The family had no money problems. With her getting allotments from her husband and three sons, they probably had more in the way of cash than they'd ever had before.

Robert Quinn was wearing the uniform. That rocked Rodriguez back on his heels. Quinn had run the Freedom Party in Baroyeca since not long after the Great War. He'd put down as many roots as anyone who wasn't born in the village could hope to do. And now he was gone? The war was longer and harder than anyone imagined it could be.

Carlos Ruiz's son was wounded. The doctors said he would get better. That he would was good news.

That he'd been hurt in the first place wasn't. Rodriguez and Ruiz had been friends…forever. They grew up side by side, in each other's pockets. *I have to write him,* Rodriguez thought.

And a couple of women were sleeping with men who weren't their husbands since the men who were their husbands went to the front. Rodriguez sighed. That kind of gossip was as old as time, however much you wished it weren't. Back in the Great War, Jefferson Pinkard, the man who was *comandante* at Camp Determination, had had the same kind of woman trouble.

Other guards read their letters from home as avidly as Rodriguez tore through his. Letters reminded you what was real, what was important. They reminded you why you put on the uniform in the first place.

Helping the country was too big and too abstract for most people most of the time. Helping your home town and your family…Anybody could understand that.

Not all the news was good. One guard crumpled a letter and stormed away, his face working, his hands clenched into fists. A couple of his friends hurried after him. "Can we help, Josh?" one of them said.

"That goddamn, no good, two-timing bitch!" Josh said, which told the world exactly what his trouble was. Rodriguez wondered if the letter was from his wife telling him she'd found someone new, or from a friend—or an enemy?—telling him she was running around. What difference did it make? Something he'd thought fireproof was going up in flames.

Rodriguez crossed himself, hoping he never got a letter like that. He

didn't think he would; what he and Magdalena had built over the years seemed solid. But Josh didn't expect anything like this, either. The trouble you didn't see coming was always the worst kind.

He thought about that when he patrolled the women's side of the camp north of the railroad spur that came out from Snyder. He and the two guards with him all carried submachine guns with big drum magazines. If they got in trouble, they could spray a lot of lead around in a hurry.

But life-and-death trouble mostly wasn't the kind guards had to worry about here. In the men's side, south of the train tracks, you were liable to get knocked over the head if you were stupid or careless.

Here, your biggest worries were probably syphilis and the clap. Like anybody else, the Negro women used whatever they had to keep themselves and their children alive. What they had was mostly themselves, and a lot of them were diseased before they came here.

"Mistuh Sergeant, suh?" a pretty colored woman in her twenties purred at Rodriguez. Like most people, she knew what three stripes were supposed to mean and didn't give a damn about Freedom Party guard ranks. "Mistuh Sergeant, you git me some extra rations, I do anything you want—an' I mean anything." If he had any doubts about what she meant, a twitch of the hips—damn near a burlesque-quality bump and grind—would have erased them.

He didn't even change expression. He just kept walking. When he did, she called him something that reflected badly on his manhood. "I wouldn't mind me a piece of that, not even slightly," said one of the younger men with him.

"You want her, you take her," Rodriguez answered with a shrug. "You think you pass shortarm inspection afterwards?" They had those now. Jefferson Pinkard pitched a fit when four men came down with the clap inside of three days. Rodriguez had a hard time blaming him.

The guard looked back at the woman. "I don't reckon she's got anything wrong with her," he said.

Rodriguez didn't try to argue with him. She had a large, firm bosom and round hips, and that was all the younger man cared about. To Rodriguez, one of the things her looks meant was that she hadn't been here very long. Eat prisoner rations for a bit and the flesh melted off of you.

Another black woman nodded to him. “Hello, Sergeant,” she said. She wasn’t trying to seduce him. Her gray hair said she was older than he was. But she greeted him every time she saw him. Some people were just nice. Some people were nice enough to stay nice even in a place like this—not many, but some. She was one of them.

“Hello, Bathsheba.” He had trouble pronouncing her name, which had two sounds right in the middle of it that Mexican Spanish didn’t use. Her smile said he’d done pretty well today.

Her daughter came up beside her. Even though the girl was darker than her mulatto mother, he found her very pretty. But she wasn’t one of those who tried to screw their way to safety. Maybe she realized there was no safety to be had. Or maybe she kept her morals. Some women did.

She nodded, too. “Sergeant,” she said politely.

“*Señorita* Antoinette.” Rodriguez nodded back.

“Can you take a message to the men’s side?” her mother asked. Some women would do anything to get word to husbands or lovers.

“Is against regulations,” Rodriguez said.

“It’s not anything bad, not anything dangerous,” Bathsheba said. “Just tell Xerxes we love him an’ we’s thinkin’ about him.” Antoinette nodded.

Rodriguez didn’t. “Even if I find him”—he didn’t say, *Even if he’s still alive*—“maybe it’s code. I don’t take no chances.”

“Please, Mistuh Guard, suh,” Antoinette said. “Ain’t no code—swear to Jesus. Ain’t nothin’ but a Christian thing to do. Please, suh.” Unlike her mother, she was young and pretty. Even so, she didn’t promise to open her legs or go down on her knees if Rodriguez did what she wanted. Oddly, her not promising made him take her more seriously, not less. He lost track of how many times he heard promises like that. More than he wanted to collect. More than he *could* collect, too.

He sighed. “I see this Xerxes”—he stumbled over the peculiar name—“maybe I tell him this. Maybe.”

He wouldn’t make any promises of his own, not where the guards with him could hear.

The older woman and the younger both beamed at him as if he'd promised to set them free. "God bless you!" they said together.

He nodded gruffly, then scowled at the other two guards in gray. "Come on. Get moving," he said, as if they'd stopped for their business, not his.

All they said was, "Yes, Troop Leader." That was what he said when someone with a higher rank came down on him. Now he had…some rank of his own, anyway. He enjoyed using it.

Would he pass on the message if he found that man on the other side? He didn't really believe it was code. He also didn't really believe it mattered one way or the other. Before long, that Xerxes was a dead man, and Bathsheba and Antoinette were dead women, too.

O ne of the Confederates up ahead of First Sergeant Chester Martin squeezed off a short burst from his automatic rifle. Martin had been about to jump out of his foxhole and move forward maybe twenty feet, maybe even fifty. Instead, he decided to stay right where he was for the next little while. He'd been wounded once in the Great War and once in this one. As far as he was concerned, that was enough and then some.

Didn't the Confederates know they were supposed to be on the run in this part of Ohio? Didn't they know they'd already pulled out of Columbus and they were hightailing it down toward the Ohio River?

Didn't they know they would have to fall back across the Scioto River into Chillicothe on the west side?

Didn't they know they couldn't hold Chillicothe, either?

By the way they were fighting, they didn't know any of that. They were bastards, yeah, no doubt about it, but they were tough bastards.

More automatic-weapons fire came from the west. Somebody not nearly far enough from Chester Martin let out a screech and then hollered for a corpsman. That was a wound, but it didn't sound like too bad a wound. Martin knew what badly wounded men sounded like. He'd hear those shrieks in his nightmares till the day he died—which, given the way things worked, might be any day now.

From a hole in the ground not far from Chester's, Second Lieutenant Delbert Wheat called, "Mortars!

Put some bombs down on those gunners!”

Mortar rounds started dropping on the Confederate line. Mortars were handy things to have. They gave infantry platoons instant artillery support, without even adding boiling water. Lieutenant Wheat made a pretty fair platoon leader, too. Before him, Martin had served with a couple of much less satisfactory officers. One of the things a first sergeant was supposed to do was keep the shavetail set over him from making too big a jackass of himself. Most second lieutenants never understood that. They labored under the delusion that they were in charge of their platoon.

A lot of them got killed laboring under that delusion. A first sergeant was also supposed to keep them from killing too many other people on their own side. The second lieutenants who survived went on to bigger and better things. First sergeants who survived got brand-new second lieutenants to break in.

Martin saw only one thing wrong with Lieutenant Wheat’s order. Just about every Confederate soldier carried either an automatic rifle or a submachine gun. The Confederates understood right from the start that they’d be outnumbered. They used firepower to make up for it.

These days, more than a few U.S. soldiers used captured C.S. automatic rifles. The biggest problem with them was that they needed captured ammunition to stay usable. Back when the Confederates were always pushing forward, captured ammo was hard to come by. Now Martin’s countrymen often overran C.S. positions. Both rifles and cartridges were in pretty fair supply.

Lieutenant Wheat stuck his head up like a groundhog looking around to see if it cast a shadow. Another burst of Confederate fire made him duck in a hurry. He popped up again a couple of minutes later, which was asking to get his head blown off.

“You want to be careful there, sir,” Martin said. “You show yourself twice running, the bastards in butternut are liable to have time to draw a bead on you.”

He didn’t want this particular platoon commander to stop a slug with his face. Wheat had a pretty good idea of what he was doing; odds were anyone who replaced him would be worse. Or maybe nobody would replace him for a while. Officers weren’t thick on the ground, and the brass might figure a first sergeant could handle a platoon for a while.

Martin figured he could, too. He led a company for a while during the Great War, when everybody above him got killed or wounded. They lost officers even faster in that war than they were losing them in this one. But, having proved he could command a company, Martin didn't want to take over the platoon now. They'd never make *him* an officer—who ever heard of a fifty-year-old second lieutenant? He had plenty to do the way things were.

"Thanks for the tip, Sergeant," Wheat said, as calmly as if Chester advised him to lead the fourth highest from his longest and strongest suit. "I'm trying to see how we can cross the Scioto."

"*We* as in the division or *we* as in this platoon?" Chester asked, more than a little apprehensively. Before long, U.S. forces were bound to get over the Scioto somewhere. The luckless bastards who crossed the river first would pay the price in blood, though. They always did.

"This platoon, if we can," Wheat answered, and damned if he didn't stand up and look around one more time. "We're only about a mile from the river, and the Confederates are pulling back across it. They may not even notice we've got the bridgehead on the other side till we're too strong to throw back."

What have you been smoking? Martin wanted to yell. The soldiers in butternut were alert. Just because they were the enemy, that didn't mean they were morons. Most of this war was fought on U.S. soil. That at least argued the dummies were the ones in green-gray.

Another sputter of bullets made Wheat duck down again before Chester could say anything at all. And then the Confederates threw something new at them. That screaming in the sky wasn't any ordinary artillery Martin had ever heard. And ordinary rounds didn't come in trailing tails of fire. You mostly couldn't see ordinary rounds at all till they burst.

Rockets, Chester thought. Featherston's men were firing them at barrels. These were different—much bigger and nastier. They slammed down and went off with roars like the end of the world. He didn't know how many burst all at once. A dozen? Two dozen? Something like that. However many it was, he felt as if God stamped on the platoon with both feet.

He wasn't ashamed to scream. Hell, he was too scared not to. Nobody heard him, not through that roar.

Even if somebody did hear him, so what? He wouldn't be the only

man yelling his head off. He was sure of that.

And he didn't even get hurt, except for being bruised and battered and half stunned by blast. He was one of the lucky ones. As his stunned ears came back to life, he heard soldiers screaming to the right and left and behind him. He scrambled over to the closest wounded man. Shrapnel had gouged a chunk out of the soldier's leg. As Chester dusted sulfa powder onto the wound and slapped a dressing over it, the soldier said, "What the fuck was that, Sarge?"

"Beats me, Johnny," Martin answered. "I just hope to Christ we never see it again." He injected the soldier with a morphine syrette, knowing all too well the Confederates would play with their new toy over and over again. Why would they do anything else? Wherever that salvo of rockets came from, it did a better job of plastering a wide area with explosives than any other weapon he'd ever seen.

"Fuck," Johnny said again, biting his lip against the pain. "When do we get something like it?"

That was another good question. "Soon, I hope," Martin said, which was nothing but the truth. Now that his side knew the other side had something new and nasty, how long would they need to copy it or come up with something on the same order? *Months,* he thought glumly. *Gotta be months.* That meant U.S.

soldiers would be on the receiving end for months, too, which was anything but a cheery idea.

Chester yelled for the medics. So did Johnny. They didn't come right away. He wasn't surprised. They had to be dealing with a lot of casualties. If another salvo came in…

And then one did. The incoming rockets' shrieks put him in mind of damned souls. He did some more shrieking himself when they crashed down. Blast picked him up and smashed him into the dirt. "Oof!" he said, struggling to breathe. He tasted blood in his mouth. If the Confederates threw in a counterattack just then, they could push as far as they wanted. The platoon—hell, probably the whole damn regiment—was in no shape to stop them.

"Boy," Johnny said, "it's a good thing they didn't have those a little while ago, or they'd still be in Pittsburgh." He sounded detached, almost indifferent. The morphine was working its magic.

Chester wished he could be indifferent to the chaos and carnage

around him. “You ain’t kidding,” he said. These rockets were very bad news. Somebody over in Richmond was probably kicking somebody else’s ass around the block for not thinking of them sooner or for not getting them into production fast enough.

Motion behind him made him whirl, ready to plug whoever made it. “Easy, buddy,” the soldier there said.

The man wore the same uniform he did. Even that didn’t have to mean anything. The Confederates sometimes put their guys in green-gray to raise hell behind U.S. lines. But this fellow had a Red Cross on his helmet, Red Cross armbands, and a white smock with big Red Crosses front and back. “You got a wounded guy here?”

“That’s me.” Johnny sounded halfway proud of himself. Part of that was the morphine talking. And part of it was knowing he had a hometowner. His wound wasn’t enough to ruin him for life, but it was plenty to keep him away from the front for a while. Chester’s wound in the Great War was one like that. He actually did go back to Toledo for a while to recuperate. Maybe Johnny would get to see his family and friends.

“We’ll haul him out of here.” The corpsman yelled for buddies. They manhandled Johnny onto a stretcher and lugged him back toward the closest aid station. Chester hoped the rockets didn’t knock it flat. They sure did a hell of a job up here.

Even if he got himself a hometowner this time around, they wouldn’t ship him over to Los Angeles. He was as sure of that as he was of his last name. Yes, the CSA’s retreat from northern Ohio meant the United States were no longer cut in half, but it would be quite a while before anything but the most urgent supplies and people crossed the gap. A general with a hometowner might fall into that category. A sergeant damn well didn’t.

A bullet cracking past made him flatten out on the ground like a run-over toad. He didn’t want to get shot again, not even with a hometowner. And life didn’t come with a guarantee. You might not pick up a hometowner. You might turn into Graves Registration’s business, not some corpsman’s. Rita would never forgive him if he got himself killed, not that he’d be able to appreciate her anger.

Half an hour later, a thunderous U.S. artillery barrage came down on the heads of the Confederates withdrawing across the Scioto. Every gun the USA had handy opened up on the men in butternut. Some of

them would be screaming for medics, no doubt about it.

But would all those guns match the horror the Confederates inflicted with a couple of salvoes of rockets?

Chester Martin wasn't sure. Maybe the rockets seemed worse because he'd been shelled too many times before. And maybe they seemed worse because they *were* worse. He feared he would see them again often enough to make up his mind.

I n a way, Dr. Leonard O'Doull wasn't sorry to get back under canvas again. It meant the front was moving forward. He'd spent longer than he wanted to working out of the University of Pittsburgh's medical center as the battle for the city swayed back and forth. He didn't want to think about how much work he did there.

Operating in a tent a few hundred yards back of the line also had its drawbacks. What he'd done at the medical center reminded him of that. He'd worked in fully equipped operating rooms, with nurses at his beck and call and with X-ray equipment right down the corridor. He had it easy, in other words.

Now he was on his own again, doing the emergency work that patched people up well enough to get them farther back so other doctors could do a more thorough job if they had to. It was, or could be, satisfying work—he saved a lot of lives, and he knew it. But he also knew he might save more still if he had everything here that he had back at the hospital.

He worked like a man possessed, trying to save a private who'd got caught in the open by one of the Confederates' newfangled rockets. "Who would have thought we'd see a new kind of wound?" he said, tying off a bleeder and extracting a chunk of casing with a forceps. "Half blast, half shrapnel."

"Best of both worlds. Happy day," Granville McDougald said. "Aren't we clever?"

Because O'Doull had an M.D., he held officer's rank—they made him a major when they talked him out of the Republic of Quebec and back into U.S. uniform for the first time in a quarter of a century. That didn't mean he would ever have to command a battalion. *A good thing for the battalion, too,* he thought. It did let him give orders to the men he worked with.

Granny McDougald was a sergeant. He'd been a medic as long as O'Doull had been a doctor—he didn't leave the Army after the Great War, the way O'Doull did. His knowledge was much narrower than the physician's. But, within its limits, it was just as deep. He was all too intimately familiar with the multifarious ways in which human bodies could get mangled.

He knew how to fix them, too. Even without formal training, he made a damn good surgeon. He was a more than capable anesthetist, too. O'Doull knew McDougald could do most of his work if anything happened to him.

The medic said, "I wonder when they'll figure out how to pack gas into those rockets." Above his mask, his gray eyes were grim.

"Bite your tongue, Granny!" O'Doull exclaimed. But what a U.S. medic could imagine, so, no doubt, could a C.S. engineer. Morosely, O'Doull said, "Probably just a matter of time."

"Uh-huh," McDougald said. "How's he doing there?"

"I *think* he'll make it," O'Doull answered. "I've got most of the wound cleaned up. The blast damage to his lungs, though…Damn rocket might as well have been a bomb."

"Lucky they didn't point those things in our direction," McDougald said. "Doesn't look like they can aim

'em for hell."

"Tabernac!" O'Doull muttered. He still swore in Quebecois French every once in a while; it was almost the only language he spoke for half his life. He never gave up reading English, because so much medical literature was written in it. But not much of his birthspeech came out of his mouth while he was living in Rivière-du-Loup. "You get the nicest ideas, Granny."

"Yeah, well, you go through a couple of wars and you figure anything that can come down can come down on your head."

O'Doull had his own fair share of the cynicism so many medical men wear. When you spend your days looking at the way the human body can go wrong—or, in war, can be made to go wrong—you are unlikely to believe, as Candide did, that this is the best of all possible worlds. But Granny McDougald had his fair share and what seemed like two or three other people's besides.

“You know what we really need?” McDougald went on as O’Doull put in suture after suture.

“Tell me. I’m all ears,” O’Doull replied.

“Must make sewing up that poor bastard kind of clumsy, but all right,” the senior medic said. “What we really need is a bomb so big and juicy, they won’t waste it on the battlefield. They’ll drop it on New York City or New Orleans, and *boom!* —it’ll blow the whole place right off the map like *that.* ” He snapped his fingers.

“Calisse!” O’Doull said, and then, “Son of a bitch! Why would you want a bomb like that?”

“Because it’s the only thing I can think of that’s so awful that after you use it a few times and everybody sees how awful it is, it’ll scare the shit out of people and they won’t want to use it any more. If we had bombs like that and the CSA did and England and France and Germany and Austria-Hungary and Russia and the Japs, how the hell could you fight a war?”

“Carefully,” O’Doull answered. He set down his scalpel as Granville McDougald laughed. “I’ve got this guy stabilized, or as stabilized as I can get him. If his lungs aren’t wrecked and if the tissue the blast tore up doesn’t go gangrenous on him, chances are he’ll pull through.”

“Good job, Doc. I wouldn’t have given more than about four bits for his chances when the corpsmen hauled him in,” McDougald said.

A couple of minutes later, at Leonard O’Doull’s direction, the corpsmen sent the wounded man back to a real hospital several miles to the rear. He might finish his recovery there, or he might go farther back still. O’Doull would have bet on the latter—this guy would live, he thought, but wasn’t likely to put on a helmet and pick up a Springfield again any time soon.

O’Doull shed his mask and tossed it in a trash can. He washed the soldier’s blood off his hands and chucked his surgical instruments into a tub of alcohol. If he had time, he’d autoclave them before he used them again. If he didn’t…Well, alcohol made a good disinfectant.

“I’m going outside for a smoke before they bring in the next poor miserable so-and-so,” he said. “Come with me?”

“You bet,” McDougald said. “Grab all the chances to loaf you can—they may not come your way again.”

With ether and alcohol and other inflammables inside the aid station, lighting up in there was severely discouraged—with a blunt instrument, if necessary. Once O'Doull had stepped away from the green-gray tent, he took out a pack of Niagara Falls.

"Oh, come on, Doc." McDougald pulled a horrible face. "Haven't you got anything better than those barge scrapings?"

"'Fraid not," O'Doull admitted. "Smoked my last Confederate cigarette a couple of hours ago. U.S.

tobacco won't kill me, and it's like coffee—bad is better than none at all."

"Like booze, too," the medic said, and the doctor didn't deny it. McDougald reached into his pocket and extracted a pack of Dukes. "Here. Bad is better than none, but good is better than bad."

"Thanks, Granny. I owe you," O'Doull said. The noncom was a better scrounger than he was. Some headline that made. O'Doull took a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth. McDougald gave him a light. He inhaled, then smiled. "My hat's off to the Dukes."

"I ought to make you put up your dukes for one that bad." Granville McDougald paused. "Except mine was even worse, wasn't it?"

"Sure wasn't any better," O'Doull allowed. "But this tobacco is, and I thank you for it."

"Any time," McDougald said. "Not like I haven't mooched butts from you a time or three."

The roar of artillery from behind them drowned his last couple of words. The fire from the big and medium guns went on and on and on. Some of the shells flying west gurgled as they spun through the air.

Leonard O'Doull winced at that sound: gas rounds. He tried to look on the bright side of things: "Sounds like we're finally going over the river."

"And through the woods, yeah, but where's Grandmother's house?" McDougald said. While O'Doull was still digesting that, the medic went on, "About time we got across the damn Scioto, don't you think?

Hanging on to Chillicothe like they have, the Confederates must have pulled God only knows how many men and how much matériel out of northern Ohio."

"You sure you don't belong back at corps HQ or something?" O'Doull said. McDougald laughed at him.

They had time to finish their cigarettes, and that was about it. Then the familiar and hated shout of, "Doc!

Hey, Doc!" rang out again.

"I'm here!" O'Doull yelled. More quietly, he added, "Well, let's see what we've got this time."

They had a corporal with a bullet through his calf. He was cussing a blue streak. "Hey, keep your shirt on, pal," Granville McDougald said. "If that's not a hometowner, there's no such animal."

"Fuck hometowners," the corporal snarled. "And fuck you, too, Jack. For one thing, it hurts like shit.

And besides, I don't want any goddamn hometowners. I want to blow the balls off some more of Featherston's fuckers."

A man of strong opinions, O'Doull thought. His voice dry, he said, "It's not usually smart to swear at the guy who's going to help fix you up. You might find out it hurts even more than you expected. And before you tell me where to head in, you need to know I'm a major." Cussing out an officer was a good way for an enlisted man to run into more trouble than he ever wanted to find.

The noncom opened his mouth to draw in a breath. About then, though, the novocaine O'Doull injected by the wound took effect. What came out was, "*Oh,* yeah. That's not so fucking bad now. You can go ahead and sew me up." He caught himself. "You can go ahead and sew me up, *sir.* "

O'Doull decided he'd been given the glove. By Granny McDougald's barely smothered snort, he thought the same thing. But the corporal scrupulously stayed within regulations. O'Doull cleaned out the wound and sewed it up. "Like it or not, pal, you've got a hometowner," he said. "I know you'd be happier if you didn't get shot, but you could have stopped it with your face or your chest, too."

"Oh, yeah. I know. I've seen—" He broke off, then shook his head. "I

started to say, I've seen as much of that shit as you have, but I probably haven't."

"Depends," O'Doull answered. "We see plenty of nasty wounds, but the poor guys who get killed on the spot don't make it back to us. Maybe it evens out."

"Hot damn," the corporal said. "Tell you one thing, though—it's a bunch of fucked-up shit any which way."

"Buddy, you are preaching to the choir," Granville McDougald said solemnly. O'Doull decided he couldn't have put it better himself.

F rom the deck of the USS *Townsend,* George Enos watched two new escort carriers come into Pearl Harbor. Like the pair that had previously sailed from the West Coast down to the Sandwich Islands, the *Tripoli* and the *Yorktown* were as ugly as a mud fence. They were built on freighter hulls, with a flight deck and a little island slapped on topside. They had a freighter's machinery, too, and couldn't make better than eighteen knots unless they fell off a cliff.

But each one of them had thirty airplanes: fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo-carriers. They weren't fleet carriers; since the loss of the *Remembrance* more than a year earlier, the USA had no fleet carriers operating in the Pacific. Still, they were ever so much better than no carriers at all, which was what the United States had had in these waters for most of the time since the *Remembrance* went to the bottom.

"Well, doesn't look like the Japs are going to drive us back to San Francisco after all," George remarked. He spoke with the flat vowels and swallowed r's of the Boston fisherman he was before he joined the Navy to make sure the Army didn't conscript him.

"Damn well better not," said Fremont Blaine Dalby, the CPO who commanded the twin 40mm antiaircraft gun for which George jerked shells.

"Didn't look so good when they were bringing their carriers down from Midway and knocking the snot out of us here," George said.

"They had their chance. Now it's our turn." Chief Dalby was a man who knew what he knew. Even his name showed that: it showed he came from a rock-ribbed Republican family in a country where the Republicans, caught between the Socialists and the Democrats, hadn't

amounted to a hill of beans since the 1880s.

“About time, too.” Fritz Gustafson, the gun crew’s loader, talked as if the government charged him for every word he said.

“If we can get Midway back…” George said.

“That’d be pretty good,” Dalby agreed. *He* wasn’t shy about talking—not even a little bit. “Run the Japs out there, run ’em off Wake, too, so they don’t come back to Midway, and then we can stop worrying about the real Sandwich Islands, the ones down here, for a while.”

“Gotta hang on to Hotel Street,” Gustafson said. George and Fremont Dalby both snorted. Hotel Street not only had more saloons and cathouses per square inch than any other street in Honolulu, it probably had more than any other street in the world. Sailors and soldiers and Marines might not give a damn about the Sandwich Islands as a whole, but they’d be bound to fight like men possessed to keep Hotel Street in American hands.

“Think four of these baby flattops are enough to take Midway?” George asked.

“Dunno. I ain’t no admiral,” Dalby said. As a CPO, he had a much smaller sphere of authority than a man with a broad gold stripe on his sleeve. But within that sphere, his authority was hardly less absolute.

“Tell you what, though—I hope like hell there’s a couple more of those babies somewhere halfway between here and the coast.”

“Yeah.” George nodded. There was a gap in the middle of the eastern Pacific that neither aircraft from Oahu nor those from the West Coast could cover very well. Japan had done her best to get astride the supply line between the mainland and the Sandwich Islands and starve the islands into submission. It didn’t quite work, but it came too close for comfort, both metaphorically and literally.

Thinking of U.S. warplanes looking for enemy aircraft and ships made George notice the combat air patrol above Pearl Harbor. Fighters always buzzed overhead these days. Y-ranging gear should be able to give U.S. forces enough warning to scramble airplanes, but nobody seemed inclined to take chances.

“Wonder how come Jap engines sound screechier than ours,” George said. Japanese carrier-based fighters had strafed the *Townsend* more than once. He knew the sound of those engines better than he wanted

to.

“They take ’em out of the washing machines they used to buy from us,” Dalby suggested. George laughed. Any joke a CPO made was funny because a CPO made it.

The *Townsend* sailed a couple of days later, escorting the *Tripoli* and the *Yorktown* north and west toward Midway. They wouldn’t get there in a hurry, not at the escort carriers’ lackadaisical cruising speed. George wasn’t enthusiastic about getting there at all. He’d gone north and west from Oahu too many times, and sailed into danger each and every one of them.

You always ran to your battle station like a madman when general quarters sounded. When you didn’t know if it was a drill or the real McCoy, you ran even harder.

Run as he would, George couldn’t get to the twin 40mm mount ahead of Fremont Dalby. The gun chief seemed drawn there by magnetism instead of his legs, which were shorter than George’s.

“What can I tell you?” he said when George asked him about it. “I know I’ve got to be here, so I damn well am.” In a way, that didn’t make any sense at all. In another way, it did.

Up above the bridge, the Y-ranging antenna spun round and round, round and round. It would pick up incoming Japanese aircraft long before the naked eye could. How much good picking them up ahead of time would do was an open question. They weren’t any easier for guns on the destroyer to shoot down.

With luck, though, fighters from the carriers could drive them off before they got within gunnery range.

Few of the islands north and west of Kauai were inhabited; if not for its position, Midway wouldn’t have been, either. Albatrosses and other sea birds nested on the rocks and reefs rising above the Pacific.

Some of the enormous birds glided past the *Townsend* and the other ships in the flotilla.

Pointing to a long-winged albatross, George said, “I’m surprised Y-ranging doesn’t pick up those things.

They’re damn near as big as a fighter.” He exaggerated, but not too much.

“I hear from the guys on the hydrophones that they’ve got to be careful, or else they really can mistake a whale for a sub—and the other way round,” Fremont Dalby said.

“That wouldn’t be good,” George said.

“No shit!” No, Fritz Gustafson didn’t talk a lot, but he got plenty of mileage out of what he did say.

As they got closer to Midway, tension built. George didn’t want to do anything but stick close to his gun.

The *Townsend* had come through a couple of ferocious attacks. Blazing away with everything you had gave you a chance to come through, but the pilots in the enemy airplanes were the guys in the driver’s seat these days.

Dive bombers and escorting fighters roared off the escort carriers and flew up toward Midway. “Still not obvious the Japs have Y-ranging,” Dalby said. “If they don’t, we can plaster their aircraft on Midway before they even know we’re on the way.”

“Wouldn’t break my heart,” George said. “Bastards tried to do it to us at Pearl Harbor. Not like we don’t owe ’em.”

“If they’d done it, I bet they would have followed up with a landing,” the gun chief said. “Maybe we’ll be able to do the same up here before long.”

“That wouldn’t break my heart, either,” George said.

The more time went by without a warning over the PA that the Y-ranging gear was picking up enemy airplanes, the happier he got. Maybe the American bombers really were knocking the daylights out of whatever the Japs still had on Midway.

Then the speakers crackled to life. George groaned, and he wasn’t the only one. “May I have your attention?” the exec said, as if he didn’t know he would. “Our aircraft report the Japanese appear to have abandoned Midway…. May I have your attention? Our aircraft report the Japanese appear to have abandoned Midway.”

“Fuck me,” Fremont Dalby said reverently.

“Wow,” George agreed.

“Little yellow bastards know how to cut their losses,” Dalby said. “If they can’t take the Sandwich Islands, what’s Midway worth to ’em? It’s out at the ass end of nowhere, and it’s got to be even more expensive for the Japs to supply than it is for us.”

“What do you want to bet they’ve bailed out of Wake, too?” George said.

“I wouldn’t mind,” the gun chief told him.

“Beats working,” Fritz Gustafson said.

“Oh, hell, yes,” Dalby said. “If they’re gone from Midway and Wake, what are we gonna do? Go after

’em? Charge through all their little islands and head for the Philippines? We need the Philippines like we need a hole in the head.”

“Amen,” George said. “If they want to call this mess a draw, I don’t mind. I don’t mind a bit.” The rest of the gun crew nodded. They’d all developed a thoroughgoing respect for Japanese skill and courage. The Japs had already come too close to killing them more than once. George knew he wouldn’t be sorry never to see any more maneuverable fighters with meatballs on their wings.

But that raised another question. George asked it: “If the Japs are pulling back here, where are they going to use their ships and airplanes?” He assumed Japan would use them somewhere. In a war, that was what you did.

Fremont Dalby suddenly started to laugh. “Malaya. Singapore. What do you want to bet? Malaya’s got tin and rubber, and Singapore’s the best goddamn harbor in that whole part of the world.”

“But they belong to England,” George objected. “England and Japan are on the same side.”

“Were,” Fritz Gustafson said.

Dalby nodded. “I think you nailed that one, Fritz. England’s busy in Europe. England’s busy in the Atlantic against us. What can the fuckin’ limeys do if Japan decides to go in there? Jack shit, far as I can see. When Churchill hears about this, I bet he craps his pants.”

“So let’s see,” George said. “Japan’s at war with us, and England’s at war with us, but away from all that they’re at war with each other?

You ask me, they're trying to set a world record."

"Better them than us," Dalby said. "Only way England's stayed in the Far East as long as she has is that Japan's let her. If Japan doesn't want her around any more…Well, she may hang on to India—"

"Her goose is really cooked if she doesn't," George said.

"Yeah. That's why she's got to try, I expect," the gun chief said. "But Japan's already in Indochina.

She's already in the East Indies. Siam's on her side, not England's. What with all that, no way in hell the limeys keep her out of Malaya."

"Japan has all that stuff, she'll be really nasty twenty, thirty years down the line," Fritz Gustafson said.

"Let's worry about winning this one first," George said, and neither of the other men chose to disagree with him.

E ven though Jefferson Pinkard had run Camp Determination since the day it started going up on the west Texas prairie, he got his news on the wireless just like everybody else in the CSA. "In heavy defensive fighting just southeast of Lubbock, Confederate troops inflicted heavy losses on the Yankee invaders," the announcer said.

That same bulletin probably went out all over the Confederate States. If you didn't have a map handy and you didn't bother working out what lay behind what actually got said, it sounded pretty good. Like a lot of people, though, Jeff knew what lay behind it, and he didn't need a map to know where Lubbock was. *Defensive fighting* meant the Confederates were retreating. *Just southeast of Lubbock* meant the town had fallen. *Heavy losses on the Yankee invaders* meant…nothing, probably. And Lubbock was just up the road from Snyder—and from the camp.

Just up the road, in Texas, meant about eighty miles. Soldiers in green-gray wouldn't be here day after tomorrow. Jefferson Pinkard and Camp Determination were ready if the damnyankees did come close.

The trucks that asphyxiated Negroes would drive away. The bathhouses that gassed them would go up in explosions that ought to leave no sign of what the buildings were for. The paperwork that touched on killings would burn. Nothing would be left except an enormous concentration camp….

And mass graves. Jeff didn't know what to do about those. He didn't think he could do much of anything. Oh, bulldozers could cover over all of the trenches, but nothing could dispose of all the bodies and bones.

He got to his feet and stared out at the camp from the window in his office. He looked like what he was: a middle-aged man who'd been a steelworker when he was younger. Yes, his belly hung over his trousers and he had a double chin. But he also had broad shoulders and a hard core of muscle under the weight he'd put on as the years went by.

And he had the straightforward stubbornness of a man who'd worked with his hands and expected problems to go away if you put some extra muscle into them. Not all of a camp administrator's problems disappeared so conveniently. He knew that; he'd gained guile as well as weight over the years. Still, his first impulse was to try to smash whatever got in his way.

He couldn't smash the damnyankees single-handed. He'd fought in west Texas during the Great War as a private soldier. Even now, he had no particular clout with local Army officers. His Freedom Party rank—group leader—was the equivalent of major general, but he had no authority over Army troops.

No direct authority, anyhow. He did have friends, or at least associates, in high places. When he got on the phone to Richmond, he didn't call the War Department. He called the Attorney General's office. He didn't love Ferdinand Koenig, who kept piling responsibility onto his back as if he were a mule. Here, though, the two of them were traveling the same road. Pinkard hoped they were, anyhow.

"What can I do for you today?" Koenig asked when the connection went through. He assumed Pinkard wanted him to do something. And he was right.

"Any chance you can get more soldiers on this front, sir?" Pinkard asked. "If Lubbock's gone, we got us some real trouble."

"Well, now, you know that isn't my proper place," Koenig said cautiously. "I can't come out and tell the Army what to do."

"Yes, sir. I know that. I damn well ought to. Damn soldiers won't listen to me, neither." Jeff spoke with the resentment of a man who'd tried to get them to move but couldn't. "But does the President want

the damnyankees to take Camp Determination away from us?”

“You know he doesn’t.” Now Koenig spoke without hesitation.

“Well, I sure *hope* he doesn’t, anyway. But if he doesn’t, we better have the men out here to keep the USA from doing it,” Jeff said.

“We’ve got trouble other places, too,” the Attorney General reminded him.

“Oh, yes, sir. You don’t need to tell me that,” Jeff said. “But we got trouble here, too, and we’re out in the back of fucking beyond—pardon my French—so who ever hears about it? Yankee general hasn’t got much more than a scratch force himself. Some more men, some more airplanes, some more barrels, we can run him right back over the border.”

“I can’t promise you anything,” Ferdinand Koenig said. “I’ll talk to the President, and that’s as much as I can tell you.”

“Thank you kindly, sir. That’s all I wanted,” Jeff lied. He wanted a couple of divisions rolling through Snyder on their way to driving the damnyankees back from Lubbock. He thought Camp Determination deserved to be protected. “Wouldn’t want the United States going on about this place if they grabbed it.”

“No, we don’t want that,” Koenig agreed. “I’ll see what I can do, and that’s all I can say.”

“All right.” Jeff knew he wouldn’t get anything more. He tried to make sure he did get something:

“Doesn’t even have to be regular Confederate soldiers. Most of what we need out here is bodies, so the damnyankees can’t just go around us. Mexicans would do the trick, or Freedom Party guards.”

“Won’t be Mexicans,” Koenig said. “The Emperor doesn’t want ’em going into combat against the USA, not any more. Only way the President talked him into giving us more was by swearing on a stack of Bibles he wouldn’t use ’em for anything but internal security. Freedom Party guards, though…” He paused thoughtfully.

Pinkard was a fisherman from way back when. He knew he had a nibble. Trying to set the hook, he said,

“This might be a good place to let the guards show what they can do. If they fight harder than soldiers…”

He paused, too. The Freedom Party guards were Ferd Koenig’s own personal, private bailiwick. If they fought better than soldiers, or at least as well, then Koenig had his own personal, private army. He might not mind that. No, he might not mind that at all.

He was nobody’s fool, either. If Jefferson Pinkard could see the

possibilities, he would also be able to.

But all he said was, “Well, I’ll see what the President wants to do.” He was a cool customer. He didn’t get all excited—or he didn’t show it if he did. And the odds were that somebody was tapping his telephone, too. Sure, he went back forever with Jake Featherston. All the more reason for Featherston to make sure he didn’t get out of line, wasn’t it?

Pinkard got off the phone. When you were talking with the higher-ups, you didn’t want to waste their time. He’d done everything he reasonably could. Now he had to wait and see if the Attorney General could run with the ball.

And he had to make sure the camp went on running smoothly, regardless of where the Yankees were.

Ever since he first started taking care of prisoners during the Mexican civil war in the 1920s, he’d been convinced the only way you could keep your finger on the pulse of what was going on was by seeing for yourself. A lot of ways, his office looked like any other Confederate bureaucrat’s. Most bureaucrats, though, didn’t have a submachine gun hanging on the wall by their desk. Pinkard grabbed the weapon, attached a big snail-drum magazine, and went out to take a look around.

A couple of junior guards fell in behind him when he did. That was all right; nobody armed had any business going into the camp alone except in an emergency. The puppies wouldn’t cramp Pinkard’s style.

They wouldn’t know where he was going and what he was doing because he wouldn’t know himself till he started doing it. That often made his subordinates despair, but more than once it let him nip what could be trouble before it got too big to be easily nippable.

The guards at the barbed-wire-strung gates between the administrative compound and the camp proper saluted him. “Group Leader!” they chorused.

“At ease, at ease,” he said, returning the salute. Part of him liked being treated like the equivalent of a major general. Another part, the part that was a private during the Great War, thought it all a bunch of damn foolishness. Right now, that part had the upper hand.

After the guards let him and his watchdogs through the inner gate, they closed it behind him. Then they opened the outer gate. He and

the younger men walked into the camp.

Even the stink seemed stronger on this side of the barbed wire. Maybe that was Jeff's imagination. He couldn't prove it wasn't. But his nose wrinkled at the odors of unwashed skin and sewage. Skinny Negroes stared at him as if he'd fallen from another world. By the difference between his life and theirs, he might as well have.

The wreathed stars on either side of his collar drew the black men as honey drew flies. "You gots to let me out, suh!" one man said. "You gots to! I's an innocent man!"

"Kin we have us mo' food?" another Negro asked.

"My fambly!" said another. "Is my fambly all right?"

"Everybody's in here for a reason." Jeff spoke with complete certainty. He knew what the reason was, too. *You're a bunch of niggers.* Oh, the Freedom Party still ran camps for white unreliables, too. The whole camp system cut its teeth on them. But not many white unreliables were left any more. The Party also had better ways to get rid of them these days. Slap a uniform on an unreliable, stick a rifle in his hands, put him in a punishment battalion, and throw him at the damnyankees. Most of those people loved the United States, anyway. Only fair they should die at U.S. hands. And if they took out a few soldiers in green-gray before they got theirs, so much the better.

"Food!" that second Negro said. "We's powerful hungry, suh."

"I'm spreading out the ration best way I know how," Pinkard said, which was true—all the inmates starved at the same rate. "If I had more, I'd share it out, too." That was also true; he was cruel because he found himself in a cruel situation, not because he enjoyed cruelty for its own sake. He understood the difference. Whether a scrawny black prisoner did…mattered very little to him.

When the scrawny black looked at him, it wasn't at his fleshy face but at his even fleshier belly. *You ain't missed no meals.* The thought hung in the air, but the Negro knew better than to say it. He turned away instead, hands curling into useless fists.

As for the man with the family, he was already gone. He must have realized he wouldn't get any help from Jeff Pinkard. And he was right. He wouldn't. Other blacks came up with their futile requests. Jeff listened to them, not that it did the blacks much good.

Every once in a while, though, somebody betrayed an uprising or an escape plot. All by itself, that made these prowl-throughs worth doing. The ones who did squeal got their reward, too: a big supper where the other inmates could watch them eat, and a ride out of Camp Determination…in one of the sealed trucks that asphyxiated their passengers.

That was a shame, but what could you do? The CSA had no room for Negroes any more, not even for Negroes who played along.

Guards kept a long file of men moving toward the bathhouse. "Come on!" one of them called. "*Come* on, goddammit! You don't want to be a bunch of lousy, stinking niggers when we ship your asses out of here, do you?"

Jeff Pinkard smiled to himself. By the time the Negroes got out of the bathhouse, they wouldn't care one way or the other—or about anything else, ever again. But as long as they didn't know that beforehand, everything was fine.

"**Y** ou, there! *Sí,* you. *Mallate!* "

Scipio stared in alarm. Were he white, he would have turned whiter. The guard with the sergeant's stripes was pointing at him. He hadn't been in Camp Determination long before he realized you didn't want guards singling you out for anything at all. And *mallate* from a Sonoran or Chihuahuan, as this fellow plainly was, meant the same thing as *nigger* from an ordinary white Confederate.

He had to answer. The only thing worse than getting singled out by a guard was pissing one off. "Yes, suh? What you need, suh?"

"You named, uh, Xerxes?" asked the swarthy, black-haired sergeant.

"Yes, suh. That's my name." At least the man wasn't asking for him as Scipio. Even though he used it here himself, hearing it in a guard's mouth might mean his revolutionary past in South Carolina had popped up again. If it had, he was a dead man…a little sooner than he would be anyway. Once you landed in here, your chances weren't good any which way.

The guard gestured with his submachine gun. "You come here." Did some special school teach guards that move? They all seemed to know it. It was amazingly persuasive, too.

“I’s comin’,” Scipio said. If you told a guard no, that was commonly the last thing you ever told anybody.

Legs light with fear, Scipio stepped away from Barracks 27. Even *I’s comin’* might be the last thing he ever told anyone. That sergeant and his two white flunkies looked ready to chalk him up to “shot while attempting to escape.”

“You know two women named Bathsheba and Antoinette?” the guard demanded. In his mouth, Scipio’s wife’s name came out as *Bat’cheba;* Scipio almost didn’t recognize it.

But he nodded. “Yes, suh, I knows dey,” he said. Fear and hope warred, leaving his voice husky. “Is dey—Is dey all right?” He had to fight to get the words out.

“They all right, *sí.* ” The guard nodded, too. “They say, they hope you all right, too.”

“Do Jesus!” Relief flooded through Scipio. “Thank you, suh. Thank from from de bottom o’ my heart.

You see dey again, you tell dey I’s doin’ fine.” No black in Camp Determination was doing fine. His wife and daughter were bound to know that as well as he did. They didn’t want him to worry, though, and he didn’t want them to, either.

“I tell ’em.” The guard sergeant from Sonora or Chihuahua gave him one more brusque nod, then strode away, the two bigger men still at his heels.

Bathsheba and Antoinette were still alive. There was still hope. And Lubbock belonged to the Yankees.

Like a lot of Negroes in the CSA, Scipio would have been a patriot if only the whites around him let him.

The Confederate States were the only country he had. But if his own homeland set out to do horrible things to him and the people he loved, then its enemies became his friends.

He laughed, not that it was funny. From everything he’d heard, the Mormons up in Utah were as firm in denying Negroes equality as white Confederates were, even if they had different reasons. He sympathized with them now, no matter what they believed. What the United States were doing to them wasn’t that different from what the

Confederate States were doing to blacks.

And yet you never could tell. Even in this hellhole, that guard went out of his way to deliver the message from Bathsheba and Antoinette. He didn't have to do that. He could have refused them straight out. He could have promised to pass along their words and then gone on about his business. He hadn't. Decency cropped up in the strangest places.

Scipio looked north. He could see the women's barracks, there on the other side of the railroad line that brought his family here. Not one but two barbed-wire perimeters separated him from his loved ones. He drew himself up a little straighter. The train ride from Augusta didn't kill him. If it didn't, could anything?

He didn't believe it. He wouldn't believe it.

His gaze swung from the north, the unattainable, toward the northwest. The Yankees might well come down to Camp Determination. If Lubbock was gone, other west Texas towns could fall. He just had to stay alive till U.S. troops arrived.

Just. That made it sound easier than it was.

He still didn't know how many people died in that cattle car. He didn't know why he still lived, either.

Plenty of men and women younger and stronger than he was were dead. If he could make the Yankees listen to his story, maybe his survival would mean something. Bathsheba would say so. She believed things happened for reasons. She believed God watched over people.

Scipio wished he could do the same. He also wished God did a better job of watching over the Negroes in the CSA. He wished God did any kind of job of watching over them. As far as he could see, God was out to a film, leaving them to fend for themselves. The only trouble with that was, the Freedom Party had a lot more fending power than the Negroes did.

"Labor gang!" a guard shouted. "Need fifty volunteers for a labor gang!"

Labor gangs left the camp with men chained to one another like criminals. They worked killing hours on little food. When they came back, the men in them were worn to nubs.

The guard could have got five hundred volunteers, or five thousand. Work on a labor gang was real work, and you did come back when you went out. Nobody knew what happened when you got shipped to another camp. A lot of people muttered about that. If you muttered too loud, you had a way of getting shipped out yourself. Then other people muttered about what happened to you.

Except for the labor gangs, there was nothing to do inside the camp but stew and starve. If the Confederate authorities were smart, they could have set up factories where the Negroes they'd dragged from the cities and countryside could make things for them. The authorities didn't bother. They just didn't care.

The only sport in camp was watching new fish come in. Scipio had been a new fish himself, not so long before. Now he watched other dazed, thirsty, half-starved—or sometimes more than that—men stagger into Camp Determination. Their astonishment was funny, as his must have been to those who arrived before him.

"What you lookin' at?" a black man would yell at the newcomers. "Y'all reckon you's in New Yawk City?"

Scipio didn't understand why, but talking about New York City never failed to send the prisoners into gales of laughter. For as long as he could remember, the biggest town in the USA had been the symbol of degeneracy and depravity to white Confederates. In films made in the CSA, New York City seemed entirely populated by villains and lounge lizards and slutty women. Maybe that was part of it.

But New York City was also full of riches and luxury. No matter how white Confederates despised the place, they couldn't deny or ignore it. That probably made the camp jokes funnier. And sometimes things didn't have to make any sense at all to be funny. Sometimes not making sense was the point of the joke.

"You park your Cadillac car outside befo' you come in?" the wit would call to the new fish. It was always a Cadillac car, never just a Cadillac. Scipio didn't know why that was so, but it was. It was one more thing that made the jokes funnier.

Sometimes a new fish would have spirit enough to say something like, "You niggers crazy."

That would send the camp veterans into capers as wild as they had the energy to perform. "We sure is crazy," someone would say. "If you ain't crazy in dis here place, you gots to be nuts."

At one level, that made no sense at all. At another level, it held a profound truth. Scipio was used to thinking in terms like that. Anne Colleton made sure he was thoroughly educated, not for his sake but so he made a better butler, a better ornament, for the Marshlands plantation. Marshlands was a ruin today.

Anne Colleton was dead, killed in the early days of the war when U.S. carrier-based bombers hit Charleston.

And here I am, in Camp Determination. Much good my education did me, Scipio thought. The one thing that mattered in the CSA was his color. How smart he was? That he could quote Shakespeare from memory? Nobody white cared a bit.

The Negro who'd made the crack about craziness was just making a joke. Scipio was sure he didn't see that he was kidding on the square. He talked like a field hand. He certainly wasn't educated. He probably wasn't very smart. What difference did it make? Here he was, and here Scipio was. They had equality of a sort—equality of misery.

This batch of new fish had no trouble finding bunks—a large number of men were transferred to other camps just a couple of days before they got here. People came into Camp Determination. They went out.

Nobody seemed to stay very long. That could have been why all the rumors swirled around the trucks and the bathhouses. Scipio hoped that was the reason.

And then he got the chance to find out for himself. When his barracks lined up for roll call one morning, a guard shouted, "We're gonna ship your asses to Abilene. Head on over to the bathhouse. Don't want you bringin' lice an' fleas an' shit like that with you, so we're gonna wash you off and delouse you."

"Befo' breakfast?" somebody said in dismay.

"You'll get breakfast on the trucks that take you east," the guard said. "They got bread an' all kinds of good stuff. From what I hear, they feed you better in Abilene than we do here." That sent a buzz through the assembled Negroes. Whatever the food in Abilene was like, it couldn't very well be worse than it was here.

Nobody raised any particular fuss as the guards marched the Negroes to the bathhouse. Anyone who did raise a fuss would have been sorry; the guards carried automatic rifles as well as submachine guns, and looked very ready to use them. Among the guards was the Mexican-

looking sergeant who'd delivered the message from Bathsheba and Antoinette. Seeing him made Scipio feel better. He didn't think the man would let anything bad happen to him.

Inside the bathhouse, the guards ordered the Negroes to take off their rags and store them in cubbies.

One of the gray-uniformed men who watched them do it said, "Remember where your shit's at.

Anybody tries stealing somebody else's duds, he's gonna wish he was never born."

A sign pointed the way to the delousing station. The naked black men walked along the corridor in that direction. It was a big chamber, but they filled it up. Scipio noticed the door was steel, with rubber gasketing around the edges. His unease began there. But for a few metal columns with grillwork at the bottom, the chamber was bare. A sign over a door in the far wall said, TO THE BATHS.

He'd heard veterans, both white and black, go on about Great War delousing stations. Either they'd changed the way things worked since or…

Some kind of gas started pouring out of the grillwork. Even a tiny whiff of it set Scipio's lungs on fire. He ran toward that door in the far wall. Other blacks got there ahead of him. They screamed in despair—the door didn't open. *They fooled us,* Scipio thought. *They fooled us good, damn them.* Half crushed in the panic, half poisoned by the gas, he crumpled. Blackness enfolded him.

IV

U p until a few years earlier, sharecroppers lived in this sorry little collection of shacks. Now the buildings stood sad and vacant under Georgia's mild spring sun. "Where did everybody go?" Jonathan Moss asked. "Did the Freedom Party catch the people who were here and send them to a camp?"

To his surprise, Spartacus shook his head. "Don't reckon so," the black guerrilla leader answered.

"Reckon they went to town, to look for work there. Weren't no' mo' work here, that's fo' damn sure."

“Why the hell not?” Nick Cantarella asked. “You got nothin’ but miles and miles of cotton farms and tobacco farms and shit like that.”

Spartacus surprised Moss again, this time by chuckling in grim amusement. “You is a city fella,”

Spartacus said, not unkindly. “You is a city fella, an’ you don’t see how the country work. Used to be plenty jobs fo’ nigger field hands, yeah. Then the Freedom Party make all these tractors an’ harvesters an’ shit, throw Lawd only know how many niggers outa work. Goddamn bastards.”

“That’s not all it did,” Cantarella said. “Factories they built to turn out those tractors and harvesters, they’re making barrels and armored cars nowadays. You can bet your ass on that.”

“Sly,” Moss said. “Sly twice, because it let them drive the Negroes off the fields and let them gear up for turning out war machines without making the USA flabble about it.”

“Fuck me,” Spartacus said, looking from one of them to the other. “I seen the first part o’ dat, on account of it happen to me an’ mine. But the other half…Didn’t worry ’bout dat none.”

“Yeah, well, those Freedom Party fuckers wouldn’t be half so dangerous if the guys running the show for

’em were dumb,” Cantarella said. “Featherston’s a maniac, but he’s a goddamn smart maniac, you know what I mean?”

Jonathan Moss did, and wished he didn’t. Fighting the war against the Confederates hadn’t proved anything to him one way or the other. Soldiers were soldiers, and sometimes where they came from hardly mattered. Military life had rhythms of its own. But his time since escaping from Andersonville told a different story.

He’d wondered how the Confederates could hold down the countryside with so many whites of military age off fighting the USA. Now he knew. If Negroes in the countryside lost their jobs, a lot of them had to go to the CSA’s cities and towns, where they were easier to keep track of and get hold of. No, the people at the top of the Freedom Party weren’t dumb at all. Too damn bad.

Meanwhile, some of the blacks still in the countryside did their best to make the Confederates unhappy.

Spartacus said, “Reckon we kin spend the night heah. Ain’t nobody round seen us go in. Better’n sleepin’ on bare ground.”

Moss didn’t argue with that. His middle-aged bones thought anything was better than sleeping on bare ground. War was a young man’s game. As a fighter pilot, he’d made up in experience what he lacked in exuberance. Even so, he’d needed more rest and more regular rest than his young comrades, and he wasn’t able to fly as many missions.

Here, on the ground in Georgia, his years shoved themselves in his face in all kinds of ways. He got tired.

He got hungry. When the shooting started, he got scared. Spartacus’ black guerrillas were mostly young and entirely fearless. When they attacked whites, they did it with a fierce joy, almost an exaltation, that left him admiring and astonished. He didn’t think he’d ever felt that ferocious in an airplane over Canada in the last war.

Of course, he hadn’t had such good reasons for ferocity, either.

He went into one of the cabins. It smelled all musty; it had been deserted for some time, and water and mold had their way inside. But even brand-new, it would have indicted the system that produced it. No running water. No plumbing. No electricity. No gas. Not even a wood-burning stove—all the cooking was done over a fireplace.

“I’ve seen horses with better stalls than this,” he said.

“Yeah.” Nick Cantarella nodded. “Tell you something else, too—horses deserve better than this. So do people.”

Not much was left inside the cabin to show how the people who used it had lived. A cheap pine stool lay tumbled in a corner. A few dishes, just as cheap, some of them broken, sat on a counter. When Moss put the stool back on its legs, he found a rag doll, face leprous with mildew, forgotten behind it. Did some little colored girl cry and cry because that doll was lost? He’d never know now, any more than he’d know whether that little girl was still alive.

“Can’t even light a fire,” Cantarella grumbled. “Anybody white sees smoke coming out of the chimney, he’ll sic the Mexicans on us.”

“Yeah, well, it could be worse,” Moss said. “They could have guys after us who really want to fight.”

Nick Cantarella laughed, though he wasn't kidding. Francisco José's soldiers rapidly discovered the black guerrillas were desperately in earnest. Spartacus' men didn't need long to figure out that the soldiers from the Empire of Mexico weren't, at least if not under direct attack. The Mexicans didn't want to be in Georgia. They resented C.S. whites almost as much for making them come up here as they resented C.S. blacks for having the gall to shoot back. It wasn't quite *a plague on both your houses,* but it came close.

"What do we have for food?" Cantarella asked.

"I've got some ham and cornbread. How about you?"

"Cornbread, too, and I've still got a couple of ration cans from that dead Mexican we found." Cantarella grimaced. "Damned if I know how the Confederates go on eating that slop. I mean, the stuff we have is lousy, but this is a hell of a lot worse."

"It's pretty bad," Moss agreed. Pilots ate better than soldiers in the field—most of the time, anyway. He went on, "It's better than what we got in Andersonville, though, except when the Red Cross packages came through." Rations for POWs were supposed to be the same as what the captor's soldiers got.

Theory was wonderful—either that or the Confederate States were in more trouble than anybody north of the Mason-Dixon Line suspected.

They shared what they had. It filled their bellies, although a chef at the Waldorf-Astoria—or even a mess sergeant—would have turned up his nose, or more likely his toes. Despite lacking a fire, Moss appreciated being able to sleep with a wall, no matter how drafty, between him and the outside world.

What Georgia called winter had been mild by the standards of Ontario or Chicago, but it still got chilly.

Spring days were warmer. Spring nights didn't seem to be.

Then again, Moss suspected he could sleep through an artillery duel in the middle of a blizzard. Any chance for sleep he got, he grabbed with both hands. He knew his age was showing, knew and didn't care.

Captain Cantarella shook him awake much too early the next morning. Any time before the next afternoon would have been too early, but the sun was barely over the horizon. Moss' yawn almost made the top of his head fall off. "Already?" he croaked.

“’Fraid so,” Cantarella answered. “They’ve got coffee going out there, if that makes you feel any better.”

“Not much,” Moss said, but he sat up. “What they call coffee’ll be nothing but that goddamn chicory, anyhow.”

“Maybe a little bit of the real bean,” Cantarella said. “And chicory’ll open your eyes, too.”

“Yeah, but it tastes like you’re drinking burnt roots,” Moss said.

“That’s ’cause you are,” Cantarella said cheerfully. “If you don’t get your ass in gear, though, you *won’t* get to drink any burnt roots, on account of everybody else will have drunk ’em all up.” There was a threat to conjure with. Moss got to his feet. He creaked and crunched, but he made himself move.

After a tin cup full of essence of burnt roots—and maybe a little bit of the real bean—life looked better, or at least less blurry. Moss munched on a chunk of cornbread. Spartacus squatted beside him. “Nigger come out from Americus in the night,” the guerrilla leader remarked. “He say there’s a train comin’ we gots to blow. Gots to sabotage.” He spoke the last word with sardonic relish.

And Jonathan Moss liked the idea of striking a train better than he liked going into these half-assed Georgia towns and shooting them up. Shooting up a town annoyed the Confederates and made them flabble. Wrecking a train, though, meant the men and munitions aboard either wouldn’t get into the fight against the USA or would get there late. “Sounds good,” he said. “What’s on this one? Do you know?”

“Oh, I know, all right.” Spartacus sounded thoroughly grim. “Niggers is on it.”

“Huh?” Even after the mostly ersatz coffee, Moss wasn’t at his best.

“Niggers,” Spartacus repeated. “From No’th Carolina, I reckon. They’s headin’ for them camps. They git there, they don’t come out no mo’. So we gots to make sure they ain’t gonna git there.”

Rescuing a trainload of blacks wouldn’t do the USA much good, but Moss didn’t even dream of trying to talk the guerrilla chieftain out of it. Spartacus had his own worries, his own agenda. When those took him on a track that also helped the United States, he didn’t mind. When they didn’t, he didn’t care.

One of his men knew more about dynamiting train tracks than Nick Cantarella did, and Cantarella was no blushing innocent. The U.S. officer did suggest a diversionary raid a few miles away to give the explosives man—his name, also likely a *nom de guerre,* was Samson—a chance to work undisturbed.

Spartacus liked that. “Sneaky fucker, you,” he said, nothing but admiration in his voice.

He sent off a few of his men to shoot at trucks on the highway. That would be plenty to draw the Confederates’ attention—and that of their Mexican stooges, too. The rest of the band lurked close by where Samson did his job.

The train pushed a heavily laden flat car ahead of the locomotive. That kept Samson’s bomb from wrecking the engine itself. Against some kinds of sabotage, it might have mattered. But the bomb still made the train stop. Then the guerrillas sprayed the engine and the men inside with gunfire. Steam plumed from the punctured boiler.

Some of Spartacus’ men ran forward to open the passenger cars and freight cars in the train. Others stayed back to cover them. Jonathan Moss was one of those who hung back—he doubted the Negroes in there would welcome any white face just then.

Blacks began spilling out, more and more and more of them. “Sweet Jesus!” Cantarella said. “How many smokes did those Freedom Party bastards cram in there?”

“Too many,” Moss said, and then, “Now I believe every atrocity story I ever heard. You don’t pack people in like that if you don’t mean to dispose of them.”

He watched in horrified fascination as the Negroes scattered over the countryside. They didn’t know where they were going, where they would sleep, or what—if anything—they would eat. But they were sure of one thing, and so was he: whatever happened to them here, they would be better off than if this train got to where it was going.

M ost of the time, Irving Morrell didn’t like getting called back to Philadelphia for consultation. Some things, though, were too big to plan on the back on an envelope. What to do once the USA drove the CSA out of Ohio seemed to fall into that category.

Brigadier General John Abell met him at the Broad Street Station. The

tall, thin, pale General Staff officer was as much a product of the War Department as Morrell was of the field. Morrell was sure Abell distrusted him as much as he distrusted the other man, and for reasons probably mirroring his own.

“Good to see you under these circumstances,” Abell said, shaking his hand.

“Good to be here under these circumstances,” Morrell answered. Better by far to come to Philadelphia to plan the next attack than to figure out how to defend the city. More than eighty years had passed since a Confederate army reached Philadelphia. Morrell devoutly hoped the city never saw another one.

As they walked from the station to the auto Abell had waiting, the General Staff officer said, “When we beat the Confederates this time, we’re going to beat them so flat, they’ll never give us trouble again.

We’ll beat them so flat, they won’t even *think* about raising a hand against us from now on.”

“I like that,” Morrell said. The enlisted man driving the government-issue Chevrolet sprang out to open the back door for his exalted passengers. After Morrell slid into the green-gray auto, he went on, “Can we bring it off?”

“Militarily? I think we can. It won’t be easy or cheap, but we can do it.” Abell sounded coldly confident.

“We can, and we need to, and so we will.” As if to underscore his determination, the Chevy rolled by a downed Confederate bomber. Behind a barricade of boards on sawhorses, technicians swarmed over the airplane, partly to see if the enemy had come up with anything new and partly to salvage whatever they could.

“Oh, yeah—I think we can whip ’em, too,” Morrell said. “But we have to occupy them once we do.

Otherwise, they’ll just start rearming on the sly the way they did after the Great War.”

John Abell nodded. “You and I are on the same page, all right.” He let out a small chuckle; they’d known each other for close to thirty years, and that wasn’t the kind of thing either one of them said every day.

Then he went on, “Plans for doing that are already being prepared.”

“Good. Are the planners working out how much it’ll cost us?” Morrell asked. Abell made a questioning noise. Morrell explained: “They hate us down there. They hate us bad. Maybe they hate their own Negroes worse, but maybe they don’t, too. And it’s awful easy to make a guerrilla war hurt occupiers these days. Auto bombs. People bombs. Land mines. Time bombs. These goddamn newfangled rockets.

It was bad when we tried to hold down Houston and Kentucky. It’ll be worse now. ‘Freedom!’” He added the last word with sour emphasis.

General Abell looked pained—not so much for the wit, Morrell judged, as for what lay behind it.

“Maybe it’s a good thing you’re here for more than one reason,” Abell said. “You ought to write an appreciation with all that in mind.”

“No one will appreciate it if I do,” Morrell said.

That made Abell look more pained still. But he said, “You might also be surprised. We’re looking at this.

We’re looking at it very seriously, because we think we need to. If you point out some pitfalls, that will be to everyone’s advantage—except the Confederates’, of course.”

He was serious. The War Department was serious, then: whatever else you could say about John Abell, he made a good weather vane. “If we occupy the CSA, we won’t even pretend to be nice people any more,” Morrell warned. “It’ll be like Utah, only more so. We’ll have to kill anybody who gives us a hard time, and maybe kill the guy’s brother-in-law to make sure he *doesn’t* give us a hard time afterwards.”

“That is the working assumption, yes,” Abell agreed matter-offactly.

Morrell let out a soft whistle. “Lord!” he said. “If the Confederates are killing off their own Negroes the way we say they are—”

“They are.” Abell’s voice went hard and flat. “That’s not just propaganda, General. They really are doing it.”

However many times Morrell had heard about that, he didn’t want to believe it. Because the Confederates fought clean on the battlefield, he wished they played fair with their own people, too. But Abell’s certainty was hard not to credit. Sighing, Morrell went on, “Well, if

they're doing that, and if we kill off any whites who get out of line, people are liable to get thin on the ground down there."

"Yes, that's true." Spring was here, but Abell remained blizzard-cold. "And so?"

He envisioned massacre as calmly as Jake Featherston did. The only difference was, he might let whites in the CSA live if they stayed quiet. Featherston killed off Negroes whether they caused trouble or not—his assumption was that Negroes *were* trouble, period. The distinction didn't seem enormous.

Morrell clung to it nonetheless.

"Either this town was already as beat-up as it could be or it hasn't taken a whole lot of new damage since the last time I was here," he remarked.

"The Confederates still come over," Abell said. "Maybe not so much—and we can hurt them more when they do."

"That sounds good," Morrell said.

But when he got to the War Department, he went underground—far underground. Brigadier General Abell had to vouch for him before he even got into the battered building. The stars on his shoulders meant nothing to the guards at the entrance. That was how it should be, as far as Morrell was concerned. "No one has been able to blow himself up inside yet," Abell said with what sounded like pride.

They went down endless flights of stairs. Morrell revised his notions about whether people around here ever got exercise. Climbing those stairs on the way back up would be no joke. "How close have they come?" he asked.

"Somebody dressed like a major took out a guard crew at the eastern entrance a couple of weeks ago,"

Abell answered. "One of the men there must have seen something he didn't like, and so…."

"Yeah. And so," Morrell said. "I wonder how long it'll be before they start using two-man suicide crews.

The first fellow blows himself up, then the next one waits till the place

is crowded before he uses his bomb—either that or he uses the confusion to sneak into wherever he really wants to go. It works with auto bombs; I know the Negroes in the CSA have done it. It might work with people bombs, too."

"You're just full of happy thoughts this morning, aren't you?" John Abell said. "Well, put that in your appreciation, too. If you can think of it, we have to believe those Mormon bastards can, too." He made a sour face. "Probably not going to be many people left alive in Utah by the time that's all done, either."

"No," Morrell agreed. His own name for planning had suffered when a Great War attack against the rebels there didn't go as well as it might have. He was banished from the General Staff back to the field then—a fate that dismayed him much less than his banishers thought it would. He said, "One thing—if we need to sow the place with salt, we won't have to go very far to get it."

"Er—no." Abell didn't know what to make of foolishness. He never had. To Morrell's relief, he left the stairwell before they got all the way to China. "The map room is this way," he said, reviving a little.

Separate a General Staff officer from his maps and he was only half a man.

Officers ranging in rank from captain to major general pored over maps on tables and walls. Those maps covered the U.S.-C.S. frontier from Sonora all the way to the Atlantic. Some of the men in green-gray used their pointers decorously, like schoolteachers. Others plied them with brio, like orchestra conductors. Still others might have been knights swinging swords: they slashed and hacked at the territory they wanted to conquer.

Morrell was a slasher himself. He grabbed a pointer from a bin that looked like an archer's quiver and advanced on a map showing the border between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. "This is what I want to do," he said, and executed a stroke that would have disemboweled the Confederacy if it went across the real landscape instead of a map.

John Abell's pale eyebrows rose. "You don't think small, do you?"

"I've been accused of a lot of things, but rarely that," Morrell said. "We can do it, you know. We should have started building up a little sooner, but I really think we can do it."

Abell studied the map. He borrowed the pointer from Morrell and walked over to another map. His slash was as surgical as Morrell's, if less melodramatic. "This would be your follow-up?" he inquired.

"Absolutely." Morrell set a hand on the other man's shoulder. "If we're thinking along the same lines, chances are this will really work, because we never do that. Or we never did—now it's twice in just a little while."

"More likely we're both deluded," the General Staff officer replied. Morrell laughed, hoping Abell was joking. Abell studied the map himself. "This may be a two-year campaign, you know, not just one."

"That's…possible," Morrell said reluctantly. "But I don't think the Confederates will have a whole lot more than wind and air once we breach their front. They shot their bolt, and they hurt us, but they didn't quite kill us. Now it's our turn, and let's see how they like playing defense."

"Defense is cheaper than offense," Abell warned. "And they have some new toys of their own. These multiple rocket launchers are very unpleasant." He hadn't come within a hundred miles of those rocket launchers—he was that kind of soldier—but he spoke with authority even so.

"Where are our new toys?" Morrell asked.

"I thought you might be wondering about that." With the air of a stage magician plucking a rabbit from a hat, John Abell took a folded sheet of paper out of his breast pocket. "Tell me what you think about this."

Morrell paused to put on reading glasses, a concession to age he hated but couldn't do without. He unfolded the paper and skimmed through it. The more he read, the wider his smile got. "Well, well," he said. "This is more like it! But there isn't anything about when they'll be ready. Are we talking about soon, or is this in the great by-and-by?"

"Soon," Abell said. "Immediately, as a matter of fact. They're coming off the lines in Pontiac—and in Denver—even as we speak. Whatever you do this summer, you'll be able to use them."

"That's the best news I've had in quite a while," Morrell said. "*Quite* a while. We've always had to play catch-up to Confederate armor. If we've got better barrels for a change, that just makes it more likely we can give them a good sickle slice and cut 'em off at the roots."

“Depending on what they’re doing themselves along these lines,” Abell said. “Our intelligence isn’t perfect.”

“Really? I never would have guessed,” Morrell said. Abell gave him a sour stare. But with that piece of paper in his hand, with the idea for that campaign in his head, Irving Morrell wasn’t inclined to pick a fight with his own side. “Perfect or not, General,” he went on, “we’ll manage. I really think we will.”

C onfederate shells crashed down outside of Lubbock. Inside the Texas town, Major General Abner Dowling was not a happy man. After Lubbock fell to his Eleventh Army, he’d hoped he could go on biting chunks out of west Texas, but it didn’t work out like that. The Confederates, to his surprise—to everybody’s surprise—threw fresh troops into the fight, and those men didn’t seem to care whether they lived or died. They weren’t here in more than brigade strength, but that was plenty to stabilize the line and even to push U.S. forces back toward Lubbock.

Major Angelo Toricelli stuck his head into Dowling’s office. It did belong to a bank manager, but he took a powder before U.S. troops occupied Lubbock. “Sir, you said you wanted to question one of those Confederate fanatics,” Toricelli said. “We’ve got one for you.”

“Do you?” Dowling brightened fractionally. “Well, bring him in. Maybe we’ll have a better notion of what we’re up against.”

His adjutant saluted. “Yes, sir.”

In came a large, burly Confederate soldier, escorted by three large, burly U.S. soldiers with submachine guns. The Confederate had two stripes on his tunic sleeve. Tunic and trousers weren’t the usual C.S.

butternut, but a splotchy fabric in shades of tan and brown ranging from sand to mud. “Who are you?”

Dowling asked.

“Sir, I am Assistant Troop Leader Lee Rodgers, Freedom Party Guards,” the prisoner said proudly. He recited his pay number.

“Assistant Troop Leader?” Dowling pointed to Rodgers’ chevrons. “You look like a corporal to me.”

“Sir, they are equivalent ranks,” Rodgers said. “The Freedom Party Guards have their own rank structure. This is to show that they are an elite.” He still sounded proud. He also sounded as if he was rattling off something he’d had to learn by rote.

Dowling had heard that before, though he didn’t know the guards actually went into combat. He thought they were just prison warders and secret policemen and Freedom Party muscle. But they fought, all right, and they fought well. Their tactics left something to be desired, but not their pluck.

“What’s your unit?” Dowling asked.

“Sir, I am Assistant Troop Leader Lee Rodgers, Freedom Party Guards.” Rodgers gave Dowling his pay number again. “Under the Geneva Convention, I don’t have to tell you anything else.”

He was right, of course. Sometimes that mattered more than it did other times. Had Dowling thought Rodgers held vital information, he might have squeezed him. There were ways to do it that technically didn’t violate the Convention. As things were, though, Dowling only asked, “Do you tell the Negroes in that prison camp down the road about their rights under the Geneva Convention?”

“No, sir,” Rodgers answered without hesitation. “They aren’t foreign prisoners. They’re internal enemies of the state. We have the right to do whatever we need to do with them.” He eyed Dowling. “They might as well be Mormons.”

He was sharper than the average corporal. If the Freedom Party Guards really were an elite, Dowling supposed that made sense. “We follow the Geneva Convention with the Mormons we capture,” Dowling said, which was—mostly—true. Then again, the Mormons had more than a few female fighters. They generally fought to the death. When they didn’t, U.S. soldiers often avenged themselves in a way they wouldn’t with Mormon men. That was against regulations and officially discouraged, which didn’t mean it didn’t happen.

Assistant Troop Leader Lee Rodgers only snorted. “If you do, it just means you’re weak and degenerate. Enemies of the state deserve whatever happens to them.” That sounded like another lesson learned by heart.

“How many Freedom Party Guards units are in combat?” Dowling asked.

“More every day,” Rodgers said, which gave the U.S. general something to worry about without giving him any real information. The prisoner folded his right hand into a fist and set it on his heart. “Freedom!”

he shouted.

The U.S. soldiers guarding him growled and hefted their weapons. Rodgers seemed unafraid, or else more trusting than most new POWs. Dowling scowled. “Take him away,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” one of the men in green-gray said. “Shall we teach him not to mouth off, too?”

“Never mind,” Dowling said. “We’ll see how mouthy he is when we start advancing again.” That seemed to satisfy the soldiers. They weren’t more than ordinarily rough with the Freedom Party Guard, at least where Dowling could see them. The general commanding Eleventh Army sighed. “He’s a charmer, isn’t he?”

“Yes, sir,” Major Toricelli said. “That’s why you wanted to see him, isn’t it?”

“I wonder if they’re all like that. All the Party Guards, I mean,” Dowling said.

“Well, they sure fight like it’s going out of style,” his adjutant answered. “Those people are fanatics, and the Freedom Party is taking advantage of it.”

“Huzzah,” Dowling said sourly. “Do you suppose we have to worry about them turning into people bombs? That’s what fanatics do these days, it seems like.”

Toricelli looked startled. “Hadn’t thought of that, sir. They haven’t done it yet, if they’re going to.”

“Well, that’s good. I suppose it is, anyhow,” Dowling said. “Of course, maybe they just haven’t thought of it yet. Or maybe they’re going to put on civilian clothes instead of those silly-looking camouflage outfits and start looking for the biggest crowds of our soldiers they can find.”

“Or maybe they’ll start looking for you, sir,” Toricelli said. “The Confederates like to assassinate our commanders.”

“I know I’m not irreplaceable.” Dowling’s voice was dry. “I suspect the Confederates can figure it out, too. Besides, how would they get me? I’m not about to go strolling the streets of Lubbock.” He yawned.

“I’d bore myself to death if I did.”

Lubbock held many more people than the other west Texas towns Dowling’s troops held for the USA. It wasn’t much more exciting. And the people here were as stubbornly pro-Confederate as in those small towns. When this part of Texas was the U.S. state of Houston, there were collaborators hereabouts. But they’d had the sense to get out when Jake Featherston conned Al Smith into a plebescite that returned Houston to Texas and the CSA. The ones who didn’t have that kind of sense ended up in camps themselves.

Under both the Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars (whose display now violated martial law), Lubbock had been a dry town. Dowling tried to win some popularity among local drinkers by declaring it wet. A couple of saloons opened up—and a minister promptly petitioned him to close them down.

The Reverend Humphrey Selfe looked as if he’d never had a happy thought in his life. He was long and lean, all vertical lines. He wore stark white and funereal black. His voice sounded like that of a bullfrog that had just lost its mother. “Wine is a mocker,” he told Dowling, aiming a long, skinny forefinger at him like the barrel of an automatic rifle. “Strong drink is raging.”

“Judge not, lest ye be judged,” Dowling answered—he’d loaded up with his own set of quotations ahead of time.

Reverend Selfe glowered. He was good at glowering. His physiognomy gave him a head start, but he had talent, too. “Do you make sport of me?” he demanded, as if he’d take Dowling out behind the woodshed if the answer was yes.

Dowling, however, declined to be intimidated by a west Texas preacher skinny enough to dive down a soda straw. “Not at all,” he lied. “But you need something more than fire and brimstone to tell me why a man shouldn’t be able to buy a shot or a bottle of beer if he feels like it.”

“Because God says drinking is a sin,” Selfe said. “I was trying to illustrate that for you.”

“But He also says things like, ‘And the roof of thy mouth like the best

wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly,'" Dowling said—sweetly. "How do you pick and choose? Remember, 'Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake.'"

Humphrey Selfe looked like a man who needed wine for his stomach's sake. He certainly looked like a man whose stomach pained him. "You are a sinner!" he thundered.

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right," Dowling answered, fondly recalling a certain sporting house in Salt Lake City. "But then, who isn't? I have at least as many quotations that say it's all right to drink as you do to say it's wrong. Shall we go on, sir? I'll show you."

"Sinner!" Selfe said again. "Even the Devil can quote Scripture for his purposes."

"No doubt," Dowling said. "Which of us do you suppose he's speaking through? And how do you aim to prove it one way or the other?"

"You do mock me!" the pastor said.

Dowling shook his head. He was enjoying himself, even if the Reverend Selfe wasn't. "No, you said wine was a mocker," he said. "I haven't had any wine for weeks." He didn't mention strong drink, lest Selfe start raging. "Shall we go on with our discussion? It was getting interesting, don't you think?"

Humphrey Selfe wasn't interested in discussing. Like a lot of people, he wanted to lay down what he saw as the law. "I shall denounce you from the pulpit!" he said furiously.

"Remember the line about rendering unto Caesar, too, your Reverence," Dowling said. "Lubbock is under martial law. If you try to incite riot, rebellion, or uprising, I promise you'll be sorry."

"I shall preach on the subject of saloons," Selfe said.

"You do that," Dowling told him. "I'm sure they can use the advertising. It will be fascinating to see how many of your congregants—is that the word?—decide to wet their whistles once you let them know where they can."

The Reverend Selfe left most abruptly. The way he slammed the door, a large shell might have gone off.

Major Toricelli opened the door again—to Dowling's surprise, it was

still on its hinges—and asked,

“What did you do to him?”

“Talked about the Scriptures,” Dowling answered. “Really, there’s no making some people happy.”

“Uh- *huh,* ” Angelo Toricelli said. “Why do I think you made a nuisance of yourself…sir?”

“Because you know me?” Dowling suggested. Then he added, “Sunday, we’ll need people listening to the quarrelsome fool’s sermon. If he goes overboard, we’ll make sure he pays for it.”

“That will be a pleasure,” Toricelli said.

After his adjutant withdrew once more, Dowling cursed. He’d wanted to ask the Reverend Humphrey Selfe what he thought of that camp for Negroes down by Snyder. Then he shrugged. Odds were the preacher would have said he’d never heard of the place. Odds were that would be a big, juicy lie, but Dowling wouldn’t be able to prove it.

More C.S. artillery came in. Some of those rounds sounded as if they were hitting in town, not just on the southern outskirts. *Maybe,* Dowling thought hopefully, *they’ll knock Reverend Selfe’s church flat.* He laughed. Who said he wasn’t an optimist?

A nother downstate Ohio town. Having grown up in Toledo, First Sergeant Chester Martin looked on the southern part of his own state with almost as much scorn as a Chicagoan viewed downstate Illinois.

Maybe people down here didn’t marry their cousins, but they were liable to fool around with them—so he uncharitably thought, anyhow.

Hillsboro had a couple of foundries and a couple of dairy plants. It sat on a plateau in the middle of Highland County. Because it lay on high ground, the Confederates were hanging on to it as an artillery base to shell the U.S. forces advancing from the north and east.

Martin was frustrated at the way the war in southern Ohio was going. “We should have trapped all the Confederates in the state,” he grumbled as he waited for water to boil for his instant coffee. “We should have given them the same business we gave the butternut bastards in Pittsburgh.”

“Isn’t there a difference, Sarge?” asked one of the privates huddled around the little campfire.

“Like what?” Chester said. What was the younger generation coming to? When he was a buck private, he wouldn’t have dared talk back to a first sergeant.

“When they were in Pittsburgh, they had orders not to pull back till after it was too late and they couldn’t,” the kid answered. “Here, they are falling back—looks like they’ll try and make the fight on their side of the Ohio.”

“Everybody thinks he belongs on the damn General Staff,” Chester said. But that wouldn’t quite do.

“Well, Rohe, when you’re right, you’re right. I forgot they had those orders, and it does make a difference.”

Somewhere off to the left and ahead, a Confederate fired a short burst from one of their submachine guns. A U.S. machine gun answered. So did a couple of shots from the guys with the Springfields who helped protect the machine-gun crew. Another Confederate fired, this one with an automatic rifle. The machine gun answered again. Silence fell.

By then, Chester and the rest of the soldiers around the fire had their weapons in their hands, ready to hurry to help the machine-gun position if they had to. The Confederates in front of Hillsboro defended aggressively, probing as if they intended to go over to the attack any minute now. Martin didn’t think they would, but you never could tell.

“Gotta hand it to those bastards,” said one of the privates by the fire. “They still have their peckers up.”

That wasn’t far from what Chester was thinking.

But brash Private Rohe said, “Yeah, well, I wish I did.”

That got a laugh. One of the other men said, “Hey, you can’t get laid around here, you ain’t tryin’. These Ohio broads are mighty glad—I mean *mighty* glad—we ran off those butternut bastards.”

Several men nodded. From what Chester had seen, the private wasn’t wrong. Some of the local women seemed convinced they had a patriotic duty to celebrate the return of the Stars and Stripes. “Do your prophylaxis, just like they’re whores,” he said: a sergeantly growl.

“They aren’t, though, Sarge. That’s what makes ’em so much fun—they’re nice gals,” Rohe said. More nods.

“You think you can’t come down venereal from laying a nice gal, you better think twice,” Chester said.

“Remember, some of those ‘nice’ gals were probably screwing Featherston’s boys while they were here.

They’re laying you to take the whammy off.”

“They wouldn’t do that!” Two young men spoke in identical dismay.

Chester laughed. “Hell they wouldn’t. There are collaborators on both sides. Always have been. Always will be.” He looked at his men. “You may be handsomer than the bastards in butternut—but if you are, the Confederacy’s got more trouble than it knows what to do with.”

The infantrymen jeered at him. He sassed them back. If they were laughing and loose, they’d fight better.

They didn’t worry about anything like that, but he did. That was why he had those stripes, and the rockers under them.

Airplanes droned by overhead. Chester and the rest of the men looked for the nearest hole, in case those airplanes carried the Confederate battle flag. But they unloaded their ordnance on Hillsboro. Great clouds of smoke and dust rose above the town.

“Hope our people got out of there,” Rohe said, eyeing the devastation a couple of miles away.

Some of the locals probably—no, certainly—hadn’t. War worked that way. U.S. soldiers and armored vehicles started moving toward Hillsboro. Chester Martin sighed. He knew what would happen next.

And it did. Lieutenant Wheat called, “Come on, men! Now that we’ve got the Confederates softened up, it’s time to drive them out of there once and for all!”

Chester heaved himself to his feet. “You heard the man,” he said. “Let’s get moving. Stay on your toes as we move forward. The Confederates may not be as beat up as we hope they are.”

He feared they wouldn’t be. He’d seen too many massive bombardments in the Great War yield little or nothing. He wouldn’t be

surprised to see the same thing all over again here.

Rohe took point as the platoon moved up. He was small and skinny and sly, a good man to spot trouble before he tripped over it. The guys Chester had lugging the platoon's machine guns were the ones who would have played the line in a football game. He would have been the sort to lug one himself in the last war.

He also had four or five men carrying captured C.S. automatic rifles. He blessed the extra firepower they gave. The whole platoon kept its eyes open for dead Confederates. Scrounging ammo never ceased—they didn't want to run dry just when they needed it most.

They'd got about halfway to Hillsboro when mortar rounds started falling out of the sky. "Down!"

Chester yelled. "Dig in!" There were plenty of shell holes that needed only minimal improvement to become foxholes. Some of them were already pretty good. Chester dove into one of those. Dirt flew as if he were part mole. Pretty good wasn't good enough. He wanted outstanding.

The veterans in the platoon all dug in as fast as he did. New replacements stood around gaping and wondering what the hell was going on. Nobody'd had time to show them the ropes, and they didn't own enough combat experience to do what needed doing without having to think about it. The extra few seconds they stayed upright cost them.

One was gruesomely killed. Two more went down wounded, both screaming their heads off.

"Corpsman!" other soldiers shouted. "Over here, corpsman!" A veteran scrambled out of his hole to help a wounded rookie, and another fragment bit him. He howled in pain and howled curses at the same time.

In due course, U.S. artillery thundered. The mortars fell silent. *Biding their time,* Martin thought gloomily. But he was one of the first ones out of those newly enlarged and improved holes. "Come on!"

he called to the rest of the men. "We've got a job to do."

It was a nasty, unpleasant job. The ground over which they advanced offered little cover. To the Confederates in Hillsboro, they had to look

like bugs walking across a plate. Smoke rounds helped, but only so much. If Featherston's boys had one of those rocket launchers up there, they could put a hell of a crimp in anybody's morning.

U.S. barrels rattled forward. Chester always liked to see them. They could do things infantry simply couldn't. And they always drew enemy fire away from foot soldiers. He wasn't the only one who knew they were dangerous—the Confederates did, too.

One of the things the barrels could do was lay down more smoke. That helped shield the advancing men in green-gray from the Confederates on the high ground. The Confederates kept shooting, but now they had trouble finding good targets. Chester trotted on, ducking and throwing himself into shell holes whenever he thought he had to.

Out of the smoke loomed a man in the wrong uniform: dirty butternut instead of dirty green-gray, a helmet of not quite the right shape. Chester's Springfield swung toward the Confederate's chest. The enemy soldier dropped—in fact, violently cast away—his submachine gun and threw up his hands.

"Don't shoot, Yankee!" he moaned. "You got me!"

"What do we do with him, Sarge?" one of Martin's men asked.

Chester thought, but not for long. They didn't really have time to deal with POWs…. "Take him on up the road," he said.

"Right," the U.S. soldier said. He gestured with his Springfield. "Come on, you." Pathetically eager, the prisoner came. Martin went on advancing. A shot rang out behind him, and then another one. He swore softly. It was too bad, but they just didn't have the time. If he'd told his men to take the Confederate to the rear, that would have removed at least one of them from the fight. And so he used the other phrase, and the man was dead. At least he wouldn't have known he was about to die till it happened. That was something, though not much.

Martin was sure the Confederates played the game the same way. It was too bad, but what could you do? If taking a prisoner didn't inconvenience or endanger you, you'd do it. Why not? But if it did…It was a tough war, and it didn't get any easier.

Shame he didn't have one of their automatic rifles—submachine-gun cartridges don't matter so much, Martin thought. *Well, the guy who plugged him will get his cigarettes and whatever else he has that's worth*

taking. And that was what a man's life boiled down to: cartridges and cigarettes.

Yeah, it sure was a tough war.

Artillery and the barrels pounded the Confederates ahead. The gun bunnies were in good form; hardly any rounds fell short. More soldiers in butternut came out of their holes with hands high. Chester did let them surrender. When men gave up in a group, it was too easy to have something go wrong if you tried to get rid of all of them at once.

Hillsboro fell that afternoon. The enemy pulled back when U.S. barrels threatened to cut off his line of retreat to the Ohio. He did a professional job of it, moving his guns out hitched to trucks and commandeered motorcars. He even paused to fire a few Parthian shots as he went south.

"We licked him here," Private Rohe said, inspecting what was left of Hillsboro. "We licked him, yeah, but he ain't licked yet."

Chester was thinking about the same thing. "As long as we keep licking him, the rest doesn't matter.

Sooner or later, he'll be licked whether he likes it or not."

"Yeah?" Rohe weighed that, then nodded. "Yeah. Sounds right, Sarge. So when do we go over the Ohio?"

"Beats me," Chester said. "Let's bundle the other guys across first. Then we can worry about us, right?"

Rohe nodded again.

M ajor Jerry Dover watched from the south bank of the Ohio as trucks and infantrymen crossed the bridge back into Kentucky. The span was laid about a foot below the surface of the river. The damnyankees still hadn't figured out that trick. When no one was on the bridge, it was invisible from the air. U.S. bombers didn't keep coming over and trying to blow it to hell and gone.

The foot soldiers on the bridge looked like men walking on water. Dover turned to Colonel Travis W.W.

Oliphant and said, "If we keep it up, sir, we can start our own religion."

“What’s that?” Colonel Oliphant didn’t get it. *I might have known,* Dover thought with a mental sigh.

Then the light dawned on his superior. Oliphant scowled. “I don’t find that amusing, Major. I don’t find that amusing at all,” he said. “I find it the next thing to blasphemous, as a matter of fact.”

“Sorry, sir,” Dover lied. *Damned stuffed shirt.* It wasn’t as if he didn’t know as much. He did. Any man who got huffy over not one initial but two couldn’t be anything but a stuffed shirt.

Colonel Oliphant went on trumpeting and wiggling his ears and pawing the ground. After a little while, Dover stopped listening to him. He was watching the stream of men and machines to make sure all the field kitchens safely returned to the CSA. Oliphant was supposed to be doing the same thing. He was too busy ranting.

“If we make God turn His face away from us in disgust, how can we prevail?” he demanded.

Dover thought about Negroes disappearing in Atlanta. He thought about the people he lost from the Huntsman’s Lodge in cleanouts. He wondered what was going on since he put on the uniform and went away. Was Xerxes still there? He could hope, but that was all he could do. “Sir, do you know about the camps?” he asked Colonel Oliphant in a low voice.

“What?” The other officer stared at him as if he were suddenly spouting Choctaw. “What are you talking about?”

“The camps,” Dover repeated patiently. “The camps where niggers go in but they don’t come out.”

He wondered if Travis W.W. Oliphant would deny that any such things existed. A little to his surprise, Oliphant didn’t. “Yes, I know about them. So what?” he said.

“Well, sir, if God will put up with those, I don’t think He’ll get too disgusted about a bad joke of mine,”

Dover said.

Oliphant turned red. “The one has nothing to do with the other, Major,” he said stiffly. “The Negroes deserve everything that we’re giving them. Your so-called joke, on the other hand, was completely

gratuitous."

"God told you the Negroes have it coming, did He?" Jerry Dover asked.

"See here, Dover, you don't have the right attitude," Colonel Oliphant said. "Whose side are you on, anyway?"

"I'm on the Confederacy's side…sir," Dover answered. "If you think a stupid joke will put us in bad with God, I'm not so sure you are, though." He'd managed the Huntsman's Lodge too damn long. He wasn't inclined to take guff from anybody, even if the guff-slinger wore three stars on either side of his collar while Dover had only one.

"I will write you up for this insubordination, Major," Oliphant said in a low, furious voice. "You'll get a court-martial, by God—yes, by God!"

He failed to impress Dover, who said, "Go ahead. One of three things will happen. They'll throw my ass in the stockade, and I'll be safer than you are. Or they'll take the uniform off my back and ship me home, and I'll be a lot safer than you are. Or—and here's my bet—they'll tear you a new asshole for wasting their time with this picayune shit, and they'll leave me the hell alone. So sure, court-martial me, Colonel.

Be my guest. I'll thank you for it."

Travis W.W. Oliphant's mouth opened and closed several times. He might have been a freshly hooked perch. Subordinates were supposed to react to the threat of a court-martial with terror, not gloating anticipation. After his wordless tries, he finally managed to choke out, "You're not a proper soldier at all, Dover."

"That depends, sir. If you want me to keep people fed, I'll do it like nobody's business," Dover said. "If you feed me bullshit and tell me it's breakfast, I'm gonna puke it all over your shoes."

Colonel Oliphant retreated in disorder, shaking his head. No summons to a court-martial ever came.

Dover hadn't expected one.

Since he wasn't going to the stockade, he had plenty to do. The Confederate units that got out of Ohio were in a horrible tangle. They had to try to improvise a defense where they'd thought they wouldn't

need to. The CSA hadn't had much time to fortify Kentucky before the war broke out, and neglected it afterwards. Confederate thinking was surely that Ohio was more important.

But now Ohio was back in the damnyankees' hands. Whatever happened next would happen because the United States wanted it to, not because the Confederate States did. How good was the Confederacy at playing defense? Nobody knew, probably including Jake Featherston.

When supplies didn't come up from farther south fast enough to suit him, Dover acquired an evil reputation with farmers all over northern Kentucky. He requisitioned what he needed, paying in Confederate scrip.

Some of the farmers' screams reached Richmond. They got Dover a letter of commendation in his promotion jacket. Colonel Oliphant ignored it. Colonel Oliphant ignored Jerry Dover as much as he could from then on out, too.

That suited Dover down to the ground. He got more work done without Colonel Oliphant than he would have with him. He moved depots closer to the river than Oliphant liked, too. He didn't think Oliphant was a coward—he'd seen the man blazing away at strafing U.S. fighters with a submachine gun, cool as you please. But the colonel's ideas about logistics formed during the Great War, and didn't move forward with the easy availability of telephones and wireless sets and trucks.

Front-line soldiers appreciated what Dover did, regardless of whether Travis W.W. Oliphant understood it. Dover got to the front himself whenever he could. The best way to make sure things worked as you wanted them to was to check them with your own eyes. He knew that from the restaurant business.

And he promptly caught one potbellied supply sergeant diverting rations to the local civilians—for a nice little rakeoff, of course. Of course. He landed on the enterprising noncom like a thousand-pound bomb.

After the sergeant went off in irons—nobody wasted time being nice to mere noncoms—things elsewhere along the line of the Ohio tightened up remarkably.

Because of all his time at the Huntsman's Lodge, Dover knew better than to believe he'd worked miracles. He didn't labor under the

delusion that he'd changed human nature. Thieves and grifters were going to keep right on being thieves and grifters. But he forced them to be careful for a while, which was better than a poke in the eye with a carrot.

"Way to go, Major," a first lieutenant running a company right on the southern bank of the river told him.

"We've got more grub here than I reckoned we'd ever see."

"Good," Dover said. "Good you've got it now, I mean. Not so good you gave up thinking you ever would."

"Yeah, well, what can you do? Shit happens," the lieutenant answered. "We were up on the other side of the border for a long time. We could swap smokes with the damnyankees for some of their rations, and we could requisition on the farms when we ran low. But that don't go over so good when you're requisitioning from your own people. So we were making do and getting by down here, but it's a damn sight better now."

"Dammit, this country grows enough food. This country cans enough food," Dover said—and requisitioning from his own side bothered him not a bit. "We ought to be able to get that stuff to the people who need it the most."

"We ought to be able to do all kinds of shit," the lieutenant said, and paused to light a cigarette. "We ought to still be up at Lake Erie. We ought to still be in Pittsburgh. Fuck, we ought to be in Philadelphia."

He looked at Dover. He did everything but blow smoke in Dover's face. "And if you want to report me for defeatism, go right ahead…sir. It's not like I give a good goddamn."

"I'm not going to report you. I think you're right." Only later did Dover wonder if the other officer was trying to entrap him. No hard-faced men in gray trenchcoats swooped down on the tent where he slept during the wee small hours. No one hauled him away for bright lights and hard knocks and endless rounds of questions.

That didn't keep him from almost getting killed. Just as the Confederates were trying to strengthen their defenses on the southern bank of the Ohio, so the damnyankees were building up north of the river. The first two summers of the war, the Confederates struck when and where they chose. This time, the United States enjoyed the initiative. What they would do with it remained to be seen.

One of the things they did with it was strike at the C.S. positions south of the Ohio from the air. Bombs blasted field fortifications. Fighters streaked low to shoot up anything that moved. Confederate airplanes were bound to be doing the same thing on the other side of the river, but that didn't help Dover when a Yankee fighter strafed his Birmingham.

"Oh, shit!" the driver said when he saw the airplane in the rearview mirror. He jammed the gas pedal to the floor, which shoved Dover back in his seat. Then he did something his passenger thought smarter than hell, even if it almost put Dover through the windshield: he screeched the brakes, hoping to make the fighter overshoot.

It almost worked, too. Most of the U.S. fighter's machine-gun bullets chewed up the asphalt in front of the Birmingham. Most—but not all. A .50-caliber slug almost blew off the driver's head. Bone and blood and brains showered Jerry Dover. Two more bullets, or maybe three, slammed into the engine block.

Flames and smoke spurted up from under the hood.

If the driver weren't already stopping, the auto would have gone off the road at high speed, and probably rolled over and exploded. As things were, it limped onto the soft shoulder. Dover yanked open the door, jumped out, and ran like hell. He managed to get clear before the fire reached the gas tank. A soft *whoomp!* and the Birmingham was an inferno.

"Jesus!" Dover looked down at himself. He was as spattered with gore as if he were wounded himself.

He could *smell* it. His stomach heaved, but he kept breakfast down.

Looking back at the pyre that marked his driver's last resting place, he felt guilty about not getting the man out. The rational part of his mind said that was ridiculous—you couldn't possibly live with nothing left of your head from the ears north. He felt guilty even so, maybe for living where the other man died.

Another Birmingham painted butternut stopped. The officer inside stared from the burning motorcar to Jerry Dover. "You hurt, pal? You need a lift?" he asked.

"I'm all right. I do need a lift," Dover answered automatically. Then he said, "Christ, what I really need is a drink." The officer held up a silvered flask. Dover ran for the other Birmingham.

C incinnatus Driver rolled into Cincinnati, Ohio. His name didn't have anything much to do with the town, even if he was born in Covington, Kentucky, right across the Ohio River. Negroes in the CSA had long been in the habit of giving their babies fancy names, either from the days of ancient Greece and Rome or, less often, from the Bible. When you didn't have much but your name to call your own, you got as much out of it as you could.

Cincinnati looked like hell. The Confederates made a stand here before pulling back across the Ohio into Covington. As the USA taught the CSA in Pittsburgh, attacking a built-up area could be hellishly expensive. The bastards in butternut did their damnedest to make it so here.

Great flocks of metallically twittering starlings darkened the sky as they rose when Cincinnatus' truck convoy rolled by. The war didn't bother them much, except for the ones unlucky enough to stop bullets or bomb or shell fragments. Those made only a tiny, tiny fraction of the total.

Back when Cincinnatus' father was a little boy, there were flocks of passenger pigeons instead.

Cincinnatus had seen only a handful of those; they were in a steep decline when he was a boy around the turn of the century. They were all gone now, every one of them. Confederate artillery fire killed the last surviving specimen, a female in the Cincinnati zoo, early in the Great War.

By the same token, he remembered starlings arriving in the area not long after the war ended. Some crazy Englishman brought them to the USA in the 1890s, and they'd moved west ever since. He wondered if they filled up some of the hole in the scheme of things that was left when passenger pigeons disappeared.

And then he had more urgent things to wonder about, like whether he'd live long enough to deliver the shells he was carrying in the back of his truck. The Confederates on the far side of the river went right on lobbing their own shells into the ruins of Cincinnati, trying to make them even more ruinous.

Fountains of upflung dirt and smoke rose from not nearly far enough away. Cincinnatus kept on driving.

Why not? He was just as likely to stop a fragment standing still as he was moving forward.

The trucks in the convoy stayed well separated from one another. If a shell blew one of them to hell and gone, even one carrying munitions, the blast wouldn't take out the trucks in front of and behind it.

Everybody hoped it wouldn't, anyhow.

He pulled to a stop in front of the city jail. A lot more than one shell had fallen on that squat, ugly building.

The Confederates must have made a stand there. That made sense—a place designed to keep unfriendly people in would also be pretty good at keeping unfriendly people out.

When Cincinnatus got down from the cab of his truck, he was laughing to beat the band. "What's so funny?" asked one of the other drivers, a white man named Waldo something. "Way you're going on, anybody would think you did a couple months in there." He jerked a thumb toward the wreckage of the jail. A big grin took the sting from his words.

"You ain't so far wrong," Cincinnatus answered. "Damn Confederates jugged me across the river, over in Covington. But when they went an' exchanged me, they stopped here an' got some other guys out, too. So I ain't sorry to see this place catch hell, not even a little bit."

"Suits me," Waldo said. "The more jails they blow up, the happier I am. I've done stretches in too goddamn many of 'em. Never any big shit, but I like to drink, and when I drink I like to fight, and so…."

His face showed that he'd caught a few lefts and rights, or maybe more than a few, as well as dishing them out. He sounded proud of his escapades. A moment later, in fact, he went on, "I wonder if they got any saloons open in what's left of this town."

"You sure you want to find out?" Cincinnatus asked. "You got the government tellin' you what to do, they can give you a lot more grief if you get in trouble than some city *po* lice can."

Waldo thought it over. He nodded. "Makes sense. Thanks." If he'd left it there, everything would have been fine. But then he added, "You're pretty goddamn smart for a nigger, you know?"

The worst part was, he meant it for a compliment. "Thanks a bunch," Cincinnatus said sourly.

A few more 105s came whistling in, but none of them burst close to

where swarms of young soldiers unloaded the trucks. Watching them, Cincinnatus remembered how he'd done the same thing during the Great War. A lot of years had landed on his shoulders since, a lot of years and that encounter with the motorcar he didn't see before it almost killed him. He still didn't remember getting hit. He didn't suppose he ever would.

A second lieutenant who looked even younger than the soldiers doing pack-mule duty wandered through the unloading zone with a clipboard in his hands. It made him seem official, so official that Cincinnatus got suspicious. The Confederates would have no trouble putting one of their people in a U.S. uniform and sending him up here to see what he could see. They were supposed to do stuff like that all the time.

Cincinnatus hoped the USA did it, too.

Then the young lieutenant talked to an officer who came down with the truck convoy. That made Cincinnatus feel better. A spy wouldn't talk to anybody if he didn't have to—or so it seemed to Cincinnatus, anyway. The older officer nodded. He said something; Cincinnatus was too far away to make out what.

"Driver!" the second lieutenant yelled, plainly reading the name from his clipboard. "Cincinnatus Driver!"

Alarm sleeted through Cincinnatus. What the devil did they want with him? And who were they, anyhow?

"I'm here," he said, and picked his way through the rubble over to the shavetail. "What's up?"

"My superiors need to talk with you," the baby-faced officer said. He wore green-and-white arm of service colors on his collar, a combination Cincinnatus hadn't seen before. A badge—a wreath with the letters INT inside—gave him a pretty good idea of what those colors meant. Intelligence.

That made him feel better, not worse. He'd got out of Covington—and got out of its colored district—only a little while before. If the U.S. Army was looking for ways to use Covington's Negroes, he had some ideas. He also had the names of people they could get in touch with—and names of people to stay away from at all costs.

Sentries in green-gray uniforms stood in front of what used to be an

office building. The young lieutenant needed to exchange password and countersign with them before they let him in. Nobody trusted anybody these days. Cincinnatus hoped that was just as true on the side of the line where the men wore butternut.

A white-haired fellow in civilian clothes was talking with a lieutenant colonel and a major when Cincinnatus followed the lieutenant into the room where they sat. The man's eyes were the light, almost golden brown of a hunting dog's—a most unusual shade for a man. Cincinnatus stiffened. He knew those eyes anywhere, and the clever, engagingly homely face that housed them. Luther Bliss was trouble with a capital T.

When Kentucky belonged to the USA between the wars, Luther Bliss headed the Kentucky State Police, an outfit that hunted Confederate diehards and black radicals with equal enthusiasm. Cincinnatus spent almost two years in a Kentucky State Police jail. Bliss was a law unto himself, and paid attention to other law only when he felt like it.

He nodded to Cincinnatus now. "As long as you're against the Freedom Party, we're on the same side,"

he said. To the officers, he added, "We've had our run-ins, Cincinnatus and me, but he's all right. I'm glad his card came up."

Cincinnatus wasn't sure he was glad his card—what card?—turned up. Forced to choose between Luther Bliss and Jake Featherston, he would choose Bliss. No black man could possibly disagree there.

Forced to choose between Bliss and anyone else—anyone else at all… But that wasn't the choice he had.

Bliss went on, "I was hooked in with Lucullus Wood and the other colored activists, but only from the outside." He brushed one hand across the back of the other, noting his own white skin. "Cincinnatus here, though, he knows all that stuff from the inside out."

"Well, that's what we're looking for," the major said. "We want to try to stir things up in Covington so the Confederates will be busy when we go over the river."

"You gonna stir things up with the whites, too, or just with the blacks?" Cincinnatus asked.

"What business of yours is that?" the lieutenant colonel demanded in

a voice like winter.

Cincinnatus scowled at him. When the Negro eyed Luther Bliss, he saw that the secret policeman understood what he was talking about. “Just the niggers rise up,” he told the light colonel, “you let the Freedom Party bastards put ’em down, an’ *then* you move. I know how you work. You get the CSA to solve your nigger problem for you, and your own hands stay nice an’ clean.”

The officer with the silver oak leaves on his shoulder straps gaped like a boated bream. Luther Bliss laughed. “You see, Ray?” he said. “He’s nobody’s fool. He didn’t come to town on a load of turnips.”

Cincinnatus had come to town on, or at least with, a load of 105mm shells. “You ain’t got no white folks to rise up, I ain’t talkin’ ’bout no niggers.” His own accent came out more strongly with every sentence.

“They got enough troubles—they got too goddamn many troubles—without me givin’ ’em mo’.”

“You are insubordinate,” the major growled.

“Bet your ass,” Cincinnatus said proudly.

“Tell him what’s going on,” Luther Bliss advised. “He won’t blab. He never said anything to me that he shouldn’t have, and I squeezed him, too.”

“Most irregular,” the lieutenant colonel—Ray—muttered. Reluctantly, he said, “The unrest will involve members of both principal racial groupings in Covington.”

“He means whites and Negroes,” Luther Bliss put in.

“Why don’t he say so, then?” Cincinnatus asked. Bliss laughed. The lieutenant colonel looked irate and indignant. Cincinnatus didn’t care. If the man meant whites and Negroes, why did he have to hide it behind a bunch of fancy talk?

“You going to give us a hand?” Luther Bliss asked. “This’ll happen with you or without you. It may work a little better, kill more of the right people and not so many of the wrong ones, if you give us a hand. How does that sound?”

“Sounds like the best deal I’m gonna get,” Cincinnatus said. He talked about the Red network centered on Lucullus Wood’s barbecue shack.

Bliss already knew a lot about that; he'd dealt with Lucullus himself. Cincinnatus also talked about the probable Confederate informers at the Brass Monkey, a saloon not far from his father's house. He told the Intelligence officers everything he knew, and he hoped to heaven that it did some good.

V

W ith a theatrical flourish, Brigadier General John Wade pinned a Silver Star on Michael Pound's chest.

Then he pinned a small gold bar onto each shoulder strap on Pound's new shirt. The division commander stuck out his hand. "Congratulations, Lieutenant Pound!" he said warmly. A flashbulb flared as a photographer immortalized the moment.

"Thank you, sir." Pound feared he sounded as enthusiastic as he felt. He didn't want to be an officer.

He'd also done things a lot more dangerous than the ones that got him this medal. Nobody'd paid any attention to them, though. This time, the wounded Lieutenant Griffiths went on and on in writing about what a wonderful fellow he was. And so…He had the decoration, which he didn't mind, and the promotion, which he did.

"You'll have a platoon of barrels," General Wade said. "I'm sure you'll fight them as bravely and effectively as you fought your own machine after the commander got hurt."

"I'll do my best, sir." Pound liked giving orders only a little better than he liked taking them. The other four barrel commanders in the platoon would be sergeants who didn't want to hear from a lousy second lieutenant, even if Pound wasn't your everyday shavetail. Getting them to pay attention to him would be a pain in the neck, or probably points south of the neck.

But then Wade said, "Because of your excellent service and your long experience, Lieutenant, we'll give you a platoon of the Mark III machines. These are some of the first ones we have, just down from the factories in Michigan."

Suddenly, Michael Pound didn't mind the promotion. He didn't mind the prospect of giving orders to sergeants who didn't want to take them. He didn't mind a thing. He tore off a salute that would have

turned a drill sergeant green with envy. “Thank you very much, sir!” he exclaimed. “Are they here? Can I see them?” He’d heard about the new machines, but he had yet to set eyes on them.

Brigadier General Wade smiled. He was somewhere close to Pound’s age, with a chestful of medals and service ribbons—and with a scar on his face and a finger missing from his left hand that said he’d really and truly earned his decorations. “I know enthusiasm when I hear it, Lieutenant,” he said. “Why don’t you come with me?”

“Sir, I’d follow you anywhere,” Pound said, and John Wade laughed.

Hamilton, Ohio, was an industrial town of about 50,000 people, maybe a third of the way from Cincinnati up to Dayton. It sat in a bowl of hills on both sides of the Great Miami River. The west side of town was the nice side, or had been before the Confederates made a stand there. Wade had formally commissioned Pound in the Soldiers, Sailors, and Pioneers Memorial Building, a two-story structure of limestone blocks that housed a museum dedicated to U.S. wars. Two cannon from old Fort Hamilton stood in front of the building; the names of the men from Hamilton who’d served in the Mexican War, the War of Secession, the Second Mexican War, and the Great War were carved into the walls.

Now some new military hardware had joined those late-eighteenth-century guns. Michael Pound eyed the sleek lines of the new barrels with as much admiration as he would have given those of Daisy June Lee, even if of a slightly different sort. The armor on the green-gray machines—splotched here and there with darker green to help break up their outlines—was as well sloped as anything the Confederates had ever built. And that long 3½-inch gun would make any C.S. barrel, including the enemy’s latest and greatest, say uncle.

Brigadier General Wade looked as proud of the new barrels as if he’d designed them himself. “Well, Lieutenant,” he said genially, “what do you think?”

Pound knew what he was supposed to say. He was supposed to burble on about how wonderful the new barrels were and what a howling wilderness they would make of the Confederate States. If John Wade expected him to say things like that, it only went to show the general didn’t know his newest and most junior officer very well.

“Sir, they’re fine machines,” Pound said, and General Wade beamed—his new lieutenant was on the right track. Pound promptly proceeded

to drive off it: “I’d like them a lot better if we had them at the beginning of the war. And we could have, you know.”

General Wade’s smile faded. “That wouldn’t have been easy,” he said, the geniality leaking out of his voice word by word. “In fact, I doubt it would have been possible.”

“Oh, yes, it would, sir.” Pound didn’t mind correcting an officer with a star on each shoulder strap—Wade was wrong, and anybody who was wrong needed correcting. (No wonder he went gray before making officer’s rank himself.) He went on, “We had everything we needed in place to build machines like this twenty years ago—and then we turned our backs on barrels, because they were too expensive and we probably wouldn’t need them any more. If we’d just followed up, this is where we would have been going into the war, this or better.”

“And what makes you so sure of that, Lieutenant?” Brigadier General Wade asked unwisely.

“Sir, I was General Morrell’s gunner at the Barrel Works in Fort Leavenworth—he was only a bird colonel back then, of course,” Pound answered. “I remember the prototype he designed. It was just a one-off, in mild steel, but it pointed straight ahead to those machines. About the only thing missing was the sloped armor, and that would have come. Or if it didn’t, we would have built thicker instead and used a stronger engine to haul around the extra weight.”

“I…see,” Wade said in slightly strangled tones. Officers often used those tones when talking to or about Michael Pound. Wade aimed a forefinger at him. “If you were there then, Lieutenant, why in God’s name aren’t you a major or a colonel by now?”

“I liked being a noncom.” Pound spread his hands, as if to say, *There! Isn’t that simple?* “I’ve turned down more promotions than you can shake a stick at. If you gave me any chance to do it, I would have turned this one down, too.”

“My God,” John Wade muttered. He’d never even dreamt of turning down a promotion. No one who aspired to high rank ever did. “Didn’t you ever want to use your expertise on a wider scale?”

“My expertise is barrel gunnery, sir—and everything that has to do with keeping a barrel running, too, but anybody who’s been in barrels a while gets good at that,” Pound said. “But I can only shoot one cannon at a time, and the gun doesn’t care whether I’m a sergeant or

an officer. Besides, now that I'm going to be commanding a platoon, I won't get the chance to do my own shooting any more."

"My God," Wade said again. "You're an unusual man, Lieutenant. Don't let anyone tell you any different."

"I'll shoot the next so-and-so who tries," Pound agreed, which only seemed to fluster the division commander more. He went on, "When do we go into Kentucky and start chewing up the Confederates?

Soon, I hope, so they don't have much time to strengthen their defenses. We push southeast, maybe we can cut *them* in half."

If General Wade gaped before, he downright goggled now. Pound had seen that expression on officers'

faces before. They often didn't believe men in the ranks—or, in his case, just up from the ranks—could think on their own. Wade managed a ragged laugh. "I put bars on your shoulders, and you think you're ready for the General Staff."

"Oh, no, sir." That might have sounded suitably modest had Pound left it there. But he didn't: "I was wondering about this when I was still a sergeant. As long as we've got the initiative, we need to use it.

Jake Featherston is the world's biggest son of a bitch, but he understands that. Do we?"

John Wade gave him a wry grin. "If I tell you that, I tell you things I haven't told some members of my own staff. You tend to your knitting there, and I'll tend to mine. I don't think you'll end up disappointed."

Michael Pound ended up disappointed with most of what his superiors did. Even he could see that saying so wouldn't win him any points. And he did have new knitting to tend to. He saluted and said, "Yes, sir."

This time, Wade's smile wasn't wry. Pound smiled, too, if only to himself. Yes, they always liked that.

But the general wasn't wrong. Without waiting for permission, Pound started crawling all over the new barrel. He eyed the driver's seat and the bow gunner's spot next to it. Then he went into the turret. He sat in the gunner's seat, then got up from it with a sigh of real regret. Up till now, U.S. barrels were always outgunned. A U.S. machine's main

armament could defeat a C.S. barrel most of the time (though taking on a new-model C.S. barrel's frontal armor with the 1½-inch gun on the oldest U.S. barrels was an invitation to suicide—you had to hit them from the flank to have any kind of chance). Now, though, he would have the advantage. *This* gun would penetrate enemy armor at ranges from which the Confederates couldn't hope to reply.

He shook his head. *He* wouldn't have the advantage. His gunner would. *He'd* be stuck telling other people what to do.

With another sigh, he sat down in the commander's seat. He stood up so he could look out of the cupola. Seeing what was going on mattered more than maybe anything else on the battlefield. Sometimes, though, you would get killed if you tried to look out. He closed the cupola's lid and peered through the built-in periscopes. The view wasn't nearly so good, but it wasn't hopeless, either.

This barrel happened to have a platoon commander's wireless set like the one he'd be using. He studied that with extra care. He would have to keep track of four machines besides his own. They would have to become extensions of his will, all working together to give the bastards in butternut a good kick in the teeth.

He frowned thoughtfully. He'd never tried anything like this before. Maybe officers earned their money after all.

He climbed out of the turret with a certain sense of relief. Brigadier General Wade eyed him with amusement. "You're thorough," Wade said.

"Sir, it's my neck," Pound answered. Again, were he speaking to a less exalted personage, some other part of his anatomy would have occurred to him.

Yes, escaping the turret did bring relief with it. He felt as if he were leaving a platoon commander's responsibilities behind. Logically, that was nonsense, but logic and feelings had little to do with each other. He peered down through the engine louvers at the powerplant. "Anything special I should know about the motor, sir?" he asked. "Have they found any gremlins?"

"Some growing pains with the fuel pump, I've heard," Wade answered. "Engine seems fairly well behaved, though—it's a scaled-up model of the one we've been using in the older barrels."

"I thought so from the look of it," Pound said. "Well, we'll see how it

goes. How soon will we see how it goes?" One more probe couldn't hurt.

It also didn't help much. Chuckling, General Wade said, "It won't be too long," and Pound had to make what he could of that.

A rmstrong Grimes still had his platoon. No eager young second lieutenant had come out of the repple-depple to take his place. He would have bet the replacement depot had no eager young second lieutenants. He was still very young himself, but not very eager. Nobody who'd been in Utah for a while was eager any more except the Mormons. They were getting pounded to bits a block at a time, but they had no give in them.

A commendation letter sat in Armstrong's file for capturing the corporal who turned out not to be a corporal. They'd promoted Yossel Reisen to sergeant for his part in that. Armstrong didn't flabble about not getting bumped up to staff sergeant. For one thing, he cared more about coming out in one piece than he did about rank. And, for another, getting promoted up to sergeant was pretty easy. Adding a rocker to your stripes wasn't.

His whole regiment was out of line for R and R, or what passed for R and R in Utah: real beds, food that didn't come out of cans, hot showers, and a perimeter far enough out to make it hard for the Mormons to snipe at you or drop mortar bombs on your head. No women, but there was an NCOs' club where Armstrong could buy beer. Rank did have its privileges. He enjoyed them while he could.

Now he couldn't any more. In a clean uniform, he trudged back up toward the fighting. The dirty, ragged, unshaven men coming south for R and R of their own eyed him and his comrades with the scorn veterans gave to anybody who looked new and raw. "Does your mama know you're here?" one of them jeered—the oldest gibe in the world.

"Ah, fuck you," answered one of the privates in Armstrong's platoon. It wasn't even a challenge—more an assertion that the man who'd spoken wasn't worth challenging.

The vet coming back understood that tone. "Sorry, buddy," he said. "You didn't look like you'd been through it before."

"Yeah, well, fuck you anyway," the private said. This time, he did smile when he said it.

"Come on, keep moving," Armstrong said. "We've got so much to look

forward to."

"Funny," Yossel said.

"Tell me about it," Armstrong said. "I'm gonna grow a long blue beard and join the Engels Brothers."

That made his buddy shut up. Armstrong could see the wheels going round in Yossel's head. He would be thinking that Armstrong had to know the Engels Brothers dyed their beards all the colors of the rainbow…didn't he? He would also be wondering how Armstrong intended to grow a blue beard. Since Armstrong was wondering the same thing himself, he let it go there.

As soon as they got into the outskirts of Salt Lake City, the sniping started. Armstrong swore as he hit the dirt. This was supposed to be territory the USA controlled. Civilians here were supposed to be disarmed. With Utah under martial law, the penalty for keeping firearms was death. So was the penalty for harboring Mormon fighters. No one seemed to worry about that.

After a few minutes and a burst of machine-gun fire, the sniping stopped. The soldiers got to their feet again and tramped on. "Nice to be back at the same old stand, isn't it?" Armstrong said.

"Lovely." Yossel Reisen modified the word with a participle that brought a sour smile to Armstrong's face.

The Mormons still held the military compound northeast of downtown Salt Lake City that the United States, with the tact that made the central government so beloved in Utah, called Fort Custer. Before becoming a national hero in the Second Mexican War, George Armstrong Custer hanged John Taylor—Brigham Young's successor—and several other prominent Mormons on the grounds of that fort. Afterwards, Custer said his biggest regret was not hanging Abe Lincoln, too.

U.S. artillery and aircraft pounded the Mormon garrison up there. The Mormons replied with mortars and screaming meemies and whatever else they could get their hands on.

A lieutenant led the platoon Armstrong and his men were replacing. The officer showed no particular surprise at briefing a noncom. "A sergeant's got the other platoon in this company, too," he said. "Just dumb luck I haven't stopped anything myself." A cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth. He looked beat to hell. But for the gold bars

on his shoulders, he might have been a noncom, too.

Because he'd been through the mill, Armstrong gave him more respect than he would have otherwise.

"Hope you stay safe, sir," he said. "They got anything special up ahead of us I ought to know about?

Places where they like to put mortars? Sniper spots? Infiltration routes?"

"Ha! You're no virgin, sure as hell," the lieutenant said.

"Bet your ass," Armstrong told him, and then, "Uh, yes, sir."

"'Bet your ass' will do fine." The lieutenant laughed. "Don't slip and say it back of the line, that's all, or it'll be *your* ass." He pointed out the trouble spots on the other side of the line, and the places where U.S. soldiers had to keep their heads down if they didn't want to turn into sniper bait. And he added,

"Brigham's bastards have some kind of headquarters about half a mile ahead of us. That's what I figure, anyhow. More foot traffic up there"—he pointed—carefully—to show where—"than anything else is likely to account for."

"You put snipers on 'em?" Armstrong asked.

"Oh, hell, yes," the lieutenant said. "They're sneaky as snakes about it now, but the traffic won't go away."

"Maybe some mortars'll shift 'em," Armstrong said. "Maybe they'll go away and be somebody else's headache. Hell, that'd do." The lieutenant laughed again, for all the world as if he were kidding.

After the other platoon pulled back, Armstrong put his own snipers into some likely looking spots. He told them to pick off the first few Mormons they spotted. One of the snipers said, "I got it, Sarge. You don't want those shitheels figuring we're a bunch of damn greenhorns."

"Right the first time, Urban," Armstrong answered. "As soon as they know we know what the hell we're doing, they'll find somebody easier to pick on. Hell, I would."

One of the Mormons took a shot at him as he left that nest. The bullet

cracked past his head. He flattened out and crawled for a while after that. Yes, the guys on the other side were seeing what they were up against.

They tried a trench raid that night. Having acquired a nastily suspicious mind in the course of almost two years of fighting, Armstrong was waiting for it. He sited a couple of machine guns to cover the route he thought the enemy most likely to take, and he guessed right. The Mormons retreated as fast as they could—from the cries that rose, some of them were wounded. His platoon didn't lose a man.

They left him and his men severely alone for the next two days. That suited him fine, even if it did make him wonder what they were up to. He assumed they were up to something. They usually were.

On the third morning, a Mormon approached under flag of truce. Armstrong shouted for his men to stop shooting. One thing the Mormons didn't do was violate a cease-fire. They were scrupulous about that kind of thing. They always played fair, even if they played hard.

Armstrong stared at the Mormon. "You!" he said.

"You!" the Mormon—a major—echoed. They'd met before. Armstrong had made him strip to his drawers to prove he wasn't a people bomb. The Mormons did their best to pay him back by turning him into a casualty. They didn't quite manage, but not for lack of effort. The officer went on, "You'd better let me through this time."

"Oh, yeah?" That automatically made Armstrong suspicious. "How come?"

"Because—" The Mormon choked on his answer and had to try again: "Because I'm coming to try to work out a surrender, that's why." He looked like a man who badly, desperately, wanted to scream, *God damn it!* He didn't, though. In all too many ways, the Mormons were made of stern stuff.

"Oh, yeah?" In spite of himself, Armstrong didn't sound so hostile this time. The Mormon major's fury and frustration embittered his face as well as his voice.

"Yeah." Again, the Mormon's fastidiousness seemed to handicap him. "If we don't, you people will murder all of us, the same as the

Confederates are murdering their colored people.”

“Why should you piss and moan about Featherston’s fuckers?” Armstrong said. “You’re in bed with

’em, for Christ’s sake!”

He got a look full of hatred from the Mormon major. “‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend,’” the Mormon quoted. “You ever hear that one? You people send guns to the Negroes. The Confederates give us a hand when they can. It evens out.”

“Oh, boy. It evens out,” Armstrong said in a hollow voice. “How do we know you guys won’t keep using people bombs even after you say you’ve given up?”

“Because we’ll be hostages, that’s how.” The Mormon major looked and sounded like death warmed over. “How many of us will you murder every time anything like that happens? You’ll set the number high—and you know it.”

“Like you won’t deserve it,” Armstrong said.

“I don’t have to dicker with you, and I thank God for that,” the Mormon said. “Will you please pass me through to your officers? They’re the ones who can say whether they’ll let any of us live.”

Armstrong thought about making him strip again. He didn’t do it this time. He wanted nothing more than getting out of Utah in one piece. A truce or a surrender or whatever you called it made that more likely.

He did say, “Come forward so I can pat you down. You still may be a people bomb.”

“Do whatever you think you need to,” the Mormon said. By itself, that went a long way toward convincing Armstrong he wasn’t loaded with explosives. The man came up to him, lowered the white flag, and raised his hands. Armstrong frisked him and found the nothing he expected.

“Yeah, you’re clean,” Armstrong said when he was satisfied. “Come on with me. I’ll take you back.”

“You’re not gloating as much as I thought you would,” the Mormon major remarked.

“Sorry,” Armstrong said. “I just want to get this over with so we can go on with the real war, you know what I mean?”

“Oh, sure,” the enemy officer said bitterly. “We’re just the sideshow, along with the trained ponies and the flea circus and the freaks.”

“You said it, pal—I didn’t,” Armstrong replied. The Mormon gave him another dirty look. He ignored it.

He passed the Mormon major on to behind-the-line troops, then went back to his platoon. “You think anything will come of it?” Yossel asked him.

“Beats me,” Armstrong said. “Even if it does, are we ever gonna let up on these snakes again? Every time we try it, they give us one right in the nuts.”

“Be nice to get the hell out of Utah,” Yossel said wistfully.

“Yeah, and if they let us leave, you know where they’ll ship our asses next?” Armstrong waited for Yossel to shake his head, then went on, “Up to fucking Canada, that’s where. We’re good at putting down rebellions, so they’ll give us another one.” Yossel, a look of horror on his face, flipped him the bird. Armstrong gave it right back. He knew how the War Department’s mind worked—if you called that working.

F lora Blackford and Robert Taft glared at each other in the small conference room. The Congresswoman from New York and the Senator from Ohio were friends on a personal level. Though she was a Socialist and he a conservative Democrat, their views on prosecuting the war hadn’t been very different. They hadn’t been, but they were now.

“We have Jake Featherston to deal with,” Flora said. “He’s more important. We can worry about the Mormons later.”

“We’ve got them on the ropes now. We ought to finish them off,” Taft said. “Then we won’t have to worry about them later.”

“How do you aim to finish them?” Flora inquired. “If you don’t make peace when they ask for it, don’t you have to kill them all?”

Taft gestured toward the front of Congressional Hall. Along with Confederate bombs from the air, it was also scarred by Mormon auto

bombs and people bombs. “Aren’t they doing their best to kill us all, or as many of us as they can?” he said.

“But they can’t, and we can,” she said. “They’re only trouble to us. We can destroy them. Isn’t that reason enough not to?”

“How many bites do they get?” Robert Taft returned. “Whenever we get in trouble with the Confederate States, the Mormons try to take advantage of it. They did it in the Second Mexican War. They did it in the Great War. If they just stayed quiet in Utah this time around and enjoyed being citizens again, nobody would have bothered them at all.”

“‘Enjoyed being citizens again,’” Flora echoed. “Do you think they might resent us a little for occupying them for twenty years?”

“Maybe,” Taft answered calmly. “Do you think we might resent them a little bit for making us conquer the whole state of Utah house by house in the Great War? How many casualties did they cause? How many divisions did they tie down? And now they’re doing it again. Do you think they can just walk away and say, ‘All right, we’ve had enough,’ and get off easy? Your nephew’s there, isn’t he? What does he say about that?”

“Yossel says he’d sooner fight the Confederates. That’s the war that really counts,” Flora answered. He also said he worried about getting sent to Canada instead. She understood that. If a division showed it could put down one rebellion, wouldn’t the War Department figure it was good at the job and ship it off to help put down another one?

“Even if the Mormons do surrender, or claim they’re surrendering, how many troops will we have to leave behind in Utah to disarm them all and make sure they don’t start fighting again as soon as our backs are turned?” Robert Taft asked. “Just licking them isn’t the only problem. We have to remind them that they’re licked, and that they’ll catch it even worse if they give us any more trouble. Even now, they’re probably stashing guns and explosives as fast as they can.”

They probably were, too. She couldn’t tell him he was wrong. But she said, “If we say, ‘No, you can’t surrender,’ what will they do? Fight till they’re all dead. Send people bombs all over the country, and auto bombs, and poison gas if they can arrange that. They’ll play Samson in the temple, except they won’t be playing.”

Now Taft gave her an unhappy look, because that also seemed only too probable. “You’re saying we don’t win even if we win, and they

don't lose even if they lose."

"Oh, they lose, all right," Flora said. "But so do we."

"Maybe we ought to kill them all in that case," Taft said.

Now Flora violently shook her head. "No, Robert. I'm going to quote the New Testament at you, even if I am Jewish: 'For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?' You've seen the photos of those Confederate camp guards grinning while they hold their rifles and stand there on trenches full of dead Negroes. Do you want pictures like that with our soldiers in them?"

She waited. If Taft said yes, their cautious friendship was just one more war casualty. But he shook his head, too. "No. Those photographs sicken me—almost as much for what massacres like that do to the guards as for what they do to the poor colored people. I don't want to murder the Mormons like that.

But if they die in battle I won't shed many tears."

"The question is, can we make real U.S. citizens out of the Mormons?" Flora said.

"We've been trying since before the War of Secession, and we haven't had much luck," Taft said.

Almost two thousand years earlier, hadn't Roman senators and imperial officials in Palestine asked the same kind of questions about the Jews there? They didn't come up with any good answers.

Discrimination and maltreatment sparked one Jewish revolt after another. The revolts sparked mass slaughter, plus more discrimination and maltreatment. Finally, the Romans ended up throwing most of the surviving Jews out of Palestine altogether.

Flora's head came up. "I wonder if that would work here," she murmured.

"If what would work here?" Robert Taft asked.

"Expelling the Mormons from Utah after they surrender," Flora answered.

"Where would you put them if you did that?"

"Some place where they wouldn't make so much trouble." Flora

explained what she'd been thinking about her own people's past.

"Are they tied to Salt Lake City the way the Jews were to Jerusalem in days gone by?" Taft asked. "I have to tell you, I don't know the answer to that. Does anyone? Somebody would probably be able to tell us. But where *would* you put them? In Houston, now that we have some of it back? Wouldn't they join the Confederates against us? Would you send them up to Canada? Wouldn't they just stir up the Canucks? Aren't the Canucks stirred up enough already? Newfoundland? Wouldn't they start waving across the Atlantic to the British?"

Those were all good questions. Disagree with him or not, you judged Robert Taft a fool at your peril.

Flora said, "Maybe we could ship them to the Sandwich Islands. It looks like we'll be able to hold on to those now."

"Wouldn't the Mormons yell for the Japanese?" Taft snorted laughter. "And wouldn't they deserve each other?"

"Maybe we could keep them off the island with Honolulu and Pearl Harbor on it," Flora said. "The others don't matter so much to the military. What I'm thinking is that, if we get them out of Utah, we can search what they take with them. They wouldn't have years and years' worth of guns and ammunition and explosives squirreled away and hidden so well we couldn't find them."

"They wouldn't when they left, no," Taft agreed. "How long would they need to start getting hold of them, though?"

"Twenty minutes—maybe half an hour if we take them all the way out to the Sandwich Islands," Flora said. "I know that, Robert. But we have to do *something* with those people, and I don't want to kill them all. I don't want to leave them in place, either. That's just asking for the whole thing to start all over again in another generation."

"It won't if we keep an eye on them." Robert Taft sighed and ran a hand over the bald crown of his head. He was a much slimmer man than his father, but William Howard Taft had kept his hair till his dying day. With another sigh, the Senator from Ohio went on, "I don't suppose it's in the range of human nature to hold somebody down for much longer than a generation, is it? We couldn't even do it to the Confederates after the Great War."

"Will we after this one?" Flora asked. "If we don't, what will they

eventually do to us because we didn't?"

"Whatever they can, probably. We put off the evil day as long as we're able to, that's all," Taft said.

"I suppose so." Flora also supposed she sounded uneasy. If Taft knew about the U.S. project out in western Washington, he'd never given any sign of it. Flora didn't want to talk about the possibility of splitting atoms, or about the possibility of one bomb's being able to destroy a whole city. The Confederate States weren't so big a country as the United States. But they were plenty big enough to conceal a project like that.

If the Confederacy lost the war, that kind of project would also fall to pieces…wouldn't it? It would take lots of money and lots of equipment a beaten CSA wouldn't be able to afford or to hide. But the fastest way to go from a beaten country to one ready to stand on its own two feet again was to make a bomb like that.

"The Mormons." She got back to the issue at hand. "If we're not going to slaughter them all, we've got to accept their surrender. I don't see any other choice. Do you, really?"

"No-o-o." Taft sounded most reluctant to accept his own conclusion, for which Flora could hardly blame him. "But what *can* we do with them once we do?"

"Sit on them in Utah or sit on them somewhere else," Flora said. "Those are the only two things we can do. Which would you rather?"

"If we drive them out, we bring gentiles into Utah to take their place," Taft said. "That won't be easy or cheap, either."

"Robert, from now on nothing this government does will be easy or cheap," Flora said. Taft pursed his lips as if biting down on an unripe persimmon. Democrats hated letting the government spend money, except on guns. But he didn't contradict her. She went on, "We have to worry about whether we do the right thing. Finding it won't always be easy, but we have to try."

"Right now, nothing comes ahead of beating Jake Featherston," Taft said. "Nothing."

"Well, I don't think you'll find many people in the USA to tell you you're wrong," Flora said. "I sure won't. He's a danger to us and he's a

danger to his own country." *And if he gets one of those uranium bombs, he's a danger to the whole world.* Again, she swallowed that worry. "I don't like to speak ill of the dead, but you were right and Al Smith was wrong in 1940. We never should have allowed the plebiscites that gave Kentucky and Houston back to the CSA. Featherston uses the empty space in west Texas as a shield against us, and he used Kentucky as a springboard to attack us."

"He said he was going to," Taft said. "He told us what he had in mind, and we didn't listen to him. It almost makes you think we deserve what's happened since. Aren't we paying for our own stupidity?"

"We're paying for our own decency," Flora answered. "It's not quite the same thing, or I hope it's not.

And that brings us back to the Mormons, I'm afraid. Can we be right and decent at the same time?"

"If we don't wipe them off the face of the earth, if we do accept their surrender, how do we make sure we don't give them a chance to pay us back for letting them live?" Taft asked. "That's what it comes down to."

"Occupy the land they still hold. Disarm them as thoroughly as we can. Maybe ship them out of Utah; I don't know. Hostages for good behavior, I suppose." Flora grimaced. She didn't like that. But she could see that it had a better chance of controlling the Mormons than a lot of other things did. Taft nodded at each suggestion. Then she said, "Freedom of worship as long as they render unto Caesar." She laughed; she'd quoted the New Testament twice in the space of a few minutes.

"They'll use it as an excuse to take lots of wives. They'll use it as an excuse to get together and plot against us, too," Taft said.

"We have to give them a carrot along with the stick," Flora said. "Otherwise, they'll just keep fighting.

Wouldn't you, if you didn't get anything by quitting? And do you know what else? As long as all their marriages after the first one are unofficial, I'm sick of flabbling about them. Life is too short."

Taft grumbled discontentedly. He was a straitlaced man. But when they discussed the surrender offer in the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, he didn't oppose her when she made the same proposal. She hoped that was a good sign.

F rom Pittsburgh to Cincinnati. In one way, Dr. Leonard O'Doull thought that was progress. When he'd labored in the hospital on the University of Pittsburgh campus, the Confederates still had a chance to break through, to run wild in the second year of the war as they did in the first.

That didn't—quite—happen. Now, after a hard winter and a rugged spring, the enemy was gone from U.S. soil east of the Mississippi. This summer, the United States would have the chance to show what they could do.

Granville McDougald summed up O'Doull's worries in one pithy sentence: "How are we going to fuck it up this time?"

Even more than *To be or not to be?,* that was the question. The U.S. push toward Richmond had shown a lot of the ways not to fight a war. Daniel MacArthur seemed to do his best to acquaint the War Department with every single one of them. He hadn't come west to lead whatever the United States would do out here. That struck O'Doull as at least mildly encouraging.

But when he looked around at what was left of Cincinnati, when he thought about all the devastation between Pittsburgh and here, he came close to despairing. His church taught that despair was the one unforgivable sin, and he understood why, but it was hard to avoid anyway. "Have we got enough left to do what we need to do?" he asked.

"Have the Confederates got enough left to stop us?" McDougald returned.

That was the other side of the coin, all right. Plainly, the Confederates had put everything they had into the invasion of Ohio and Pennsylvania. "They aren't running up the white flag," O'Doull said. The ruins of Cincinnati proved that, too. After sullenly pulling back across the Ohio—and after rescuing most of the force they had north of the river—Featherston's men started methodically shelling the Ohio city from emplacements in Kentucky. Their attitude seemed to be that if the United States wanted to use Cincinnati as a base from which to invade C.S. territory, they were welcome to try.

Most of the casualties U.S. doctors were treating came from artillery rounds. Bombs caused the rest; Confederate airplanes didn't come over every night, but they came whenever they could. U.S. bombers also did their best to smash up targets on the far side of the river.

“When do you think the balloon will go up?” McDougald asked. The hospital where they worked was painted white and had big Red Crosses on the walls and roof. O’Doull didn’t think the Confederates shelled and bombed it on purpose. That didn’t mean it didn’t get hit every now and again. C.S. bombs and shells didn’t have eyes; they couldn’t see exactly where they were going.

O’Doull remembered other offensives in days and years gone by. “When we’ve gathered everything together so there’s no possible doubt about where we’re going or what we’re doing,” he answered.

“When we’ve given the Confederates all the time they need to get ready to knock us for a loop.”

McDougald raised an eyebrow toward the bald crown of his head. “You’re in a cheerful mood today, aren’t you, Doc?”

“Well, hell, Granny, you asked,” O’Doull said. “Tell me that’s not how we usually do things.”

“Can’t,” Granville McDougald admitted. “Wish to God I could, but I damn well can’t. Besides, it looks like we’re filling Cincinnati up with everything under the sun so we can pop the Confederates in the nose.”

“Doesn’t it just?” O’Doull said. “And don’t you suppose they’ve got a suspicion that we might want to cross the river here? Wouldn’t you?”

“Not me. I’ve given up having suspicions. They end up getting confirmed, and then I’m unhappy,” the medic said. “I don’t like being unhappy. It makes me sad when I am.”

“Er—right,” O’Doull said. McDougald smiled back, calm as a cynical Buddha.

Before either one of them could go any further with it, they got called into an operating room. They had no room for a difference of opinion there. What needed doing was only too obvious: nothing any surgeon in the world could do would save an arm mangled like that one.

“Want to do the honors, Granny?” O’Doull said. “I’ll pass gas for you if you care to.”

“Sure, if you don’t mind,” McDougald answered. “A straight amputation I can manage, and he’ll get the same result from me as he would from you. It’s the complicated stuff where you’ve got an edge

on me.”

To some degree, that was true. The degree was less than McDougald made it out to be. Scrupulously polite, the medic didn’t pretend to have an M.D.’s skills. But he did have close to thirty years of experience at repairing wounded men. Plenty of doctors knew less than he did, and were more arrogant about what they did know.

O’Doull knew he was an amateur anesthetist himself. He’d knocked out patients back in Quebec before operating on them. He’d done it in the field, too, but he wasn’t all that confident in his own skills.

Here, though, everything was straightforward. As soon as the man went out, McDougald got to work with scalpel and bone saw, taking the mangled arm off above the elbow. He tied off bleeders one after another, closed the dreadful wound, and sighed. “Whatever that poor guy was, he won’t be when he wakes up.”

“Maybe he was left-handed,” O’Doull said.

“Mm—maybe.” McDougald was a lefty himself. “Odds are long, though. And even if a one-armed man has his good arm, he’s still got a hard road in front of him.”

“Better than dying,” O’Doull said.

“I suppose you’re right. I never once heard a dead man say he’d rather be the way he was than short an arm,” McDougald said.

“You never…” O’Doull’s voice trailed away as he worked through the possibilities in that. “How many dead people do you usually talk with?”

“Oh, not that many,” Granville McDougald said. “Harder than anything getting a straight answer out of

’em.”

“I believe you,” O’Doull said. “Have you noticed it’s pretty damn hard getting a straight answer out of you, too?”

“Out of me? Nah.” McDougald shook his head. “I’m as transparent as glass. The only problem with that is, too many of our people are as breakable as glass, which isn’t so good.”

He could spin out nonsense, or sometimes stuff that seemed like

nonsense but wasn't, faster than O'Doull could pin him down on it. O'Doull mostly didn't try; only the sheer outrageousness of the medic's latest effort pulled a protest out of him.

Before he could do any more squawking, an officer who pretty plainly wasn't a doctor came into the O.R. "Major O'Doull?" the stranger asked. When O'Doull admitted he was himself, the newcomer said,

"I'm Vic Hodding. I'm a captain in Intelligence."

Granny McDougald let out a soft snort. Above Hodding's surgical mask, his cat-green eyes swung toward the medic. McDougald blandly stared back. Nobody could prove a thing, even if the editorial message came through loud and clear. "Well, Captain, what can I do for you?" O'Doull asked, wondering if he really wanted to know.

"We've got a wounded man we brought back from the other side of the Ohio," Hodding replied. "He knows some things we really need to find out. What are the drugs that would help pull them out of him?"

"Rack and thumbscrews often work wonders," McDougald said, hardly bothering to hide his scorn.

Hodding glanced toward him again. "Who is this man?" he inquired of O'Doull with a certain dangerous formality.

"Never mind," O'Doull answered. "If you need help from me, you don't need to know. And if you don't need help from me, I'll be damned if I tell you. And I'll do everything I know how to do to stop you from making trouble for him."

Captain Hodding took that more calmly than O'Doull expected—more calmly than he would have himself, he thought. "He must be good at what he does," the Intelligence officer remarked. O'Doull said nothing. Hodding went on, "Anyway, we need answers from this guy. Strongarm stuff may just get us lies—and besides, we don't like to do it, no matter what Mr. High And Mighty there says. What goes around comes around, and the Confederates are too likely to pay us back if we get rough."

O'Doull could see what Granny McDougald was thinking. *So then they pay us back with needles instead. Oh, boy.* But needles were less likely to wreck a man for life than some of the other things interrogators did.

"What do you think this guy knows?" O'Doull asked. Vic Hodding stood mute. O'Doull made an impatient noise. "Look, I'm going to be

there while you're questioning him, right? So what the hell are you flabbling about? You don't want me there, go find some other guy to do this for you."

After some thought and an apparent wrestle with himself, Hodding nodded. "Yeah, you're right, Doc.

You have need-to-know." The way he brought out the phrase would have told O'Doull he was in Intelligence even without any other evidence. He continued, "We infiltrated some people down south of the river and extracted this guy. What he doesn't know about their trains and trucks in Kentucky and Tennessee isn't worth knowing. We should have got him out clean, but he put up more of a fight than we figured." He shrugged. "These things happen."

"In films, the guy always has the secret for the new poison gas," O'Doull said.

"Yeah, and the blonde with the big boobs teases it out of him, and he loves every minute of it," Hodding said. "Doctors in films never treat ringworm, either. But if the Confederates have trouble moving supplies, that makes our life a hell of a lot easier."

He wasn't wrong. Granville McDougald murmured, "Pentothal?"

O'Doull nodded. "Best chance I've got." He turned to the Intelligence officer. "Sodium pentothal may make him not care so much about what he says. Or it may not. Drugging a guy and making him spill his guts is another one of those things that work better in films."

"All right. Do what you can," Hodding said. "He's likelier to blab with the stuff in him than without it, right?" O'Doull nodded again—that was true, and didn't commit him to anything. Captain Hodding gestured toward the door. "Come on, then."

The Confederate officer was wounded in the leg and shoulder. He glared at O'Doull. "I am Travis W.W.

Oliphant, colonel, C.S. Army." He gave his pay number.

"Pleased to meet you, Colonel. I'm Major O'Doull. I'm a doctor, and I'm going to give you something to make you feel a little better," O'Doull said. Colonel Oliphant looked suspicious, but he didn't try to fight as O'Doull injected him.

After a little while, the Confederate said, “I *do* feel easier.” Pentothal sneaked up on you. It didn’t make your troubles go away, but it did mean you weren’t likely to remember them once you came out from under it.

Captain Hodding started questioning Oliphant. The logistics specialist didn’t seem to worry about what he said. A lot that came out was drivel, but enough wasn’t to keep Hodding scribbling notes. O’Doull gave the colonel more pentothal. Too much and he’d stop making sense altogether. Not enough and he’d clam up. O’Doull found what seemed the right dosage by experiment.

“Thanks, Major,” Hodding said when Colonel Oliphant ran dry. “I think you helped.”

“Well, good,” O’Doull answered, and wondered if it was. Would he want to look in a mirror the next time he passed one?

I nstead of going off to the peaceful, even bucolic campus of Washington University, Clarence Potter summoned Professor Henderson V. FitzBelmont to Richmond. Potter wanted the nuclear physicist to see what the war was doing to the capital of the CSA. Maybe then FitzBelmont wouldn’t think of his experiments as abstractions that could move along at their own pace. Maybe.

If some Florida cinema studio needed a professor out of central casting, it could do much worse than Henderson FitzBelmont. He was tweedy. He was bespectacled. Clarence Potter wore eyeglasses, too, and had since he was a young man. But he didn’t look perpetually surprised at the world around him the way Professor FitzBelmont did.

He met the physicist in Capitol Square, across Ninth Street from the War Department. The bench on which he waited was the one where he and Nathan Bedford Forrest III hadn’t quite plotted against Jake Featherston. It gave a fine view of the bombed-out ruins of the Capitol, of the craters whose dirt sported new grass and even flowers as spring advanced, and of the sandbagged statues of George Washington and Albert Sidney Johnston. If you looked around, you could see more of what almost two years of Yankee air raids had done to Richmond.

Professor FitzBelmont came into Capitol Square at two o’clock, just when Potter asked him to. Potter stood up and waved. He kept waving till FitzBelmont spotted him. A look of relief on his face, the professor waved back and picked his way over the battered ground to the

bench.

“Hello, uh, General,” FitzBelmont said, sticking out a hand.

“Professor.” Potter shook hands. Henderson FitzBelmont did have a respectable grip. Potter gestured to the bench. “Have a seat. We’ve got some things to talk about.”

“All right.” Professor FitzBelmont looked around. “I must say I’ve seen views that inspired me more.”

“You surprise me,” Potter said.

“I do? Why?” the physicist said. “It’s dreary, it’s battered, it’s sad—I can’t think of one good thing to say about it.”

“That’s *why* it ought to inspire you,” Potter said. Behind the lenses of his spectacles, Henderson V.

FitzBelmont blinked. Potter went on, “It shows you that your country’s in trouble. If any one man can get us out of trouble, you’re him. If we have uranium bombs, we win. It’s that simple.”

“Mr. Potter—” FitzBelmont began.

“General Potter, please,” Potter broke in. He saw the faint scorn the other man didn’t have the sense to hide. Nettled, he did his best to explain: “It means as much to me as *Professor* does to you, and I had to go through a lot to earn it—not the same kinds of things you did, but a lot.”

Henderson FitzBelmont weighed that. He evidently didn’t find it wanting, for he nodded. “I’m sorry, *General* Potter. I’ll remember from now on. You must understand, we are doing everything we know how to do to make a uranium bomb. One of the things we’re finding out, unfortunately, is how much we don’t know how to do. When you go through unexplored territory, that happens. I wish it didn’t, but it does.”

He was calm, sensible, rational. Clarence Potter had no doubt that made him a splendid scientist. It didn’t help a country at war, a country fighting for its life, a country whose fight for its life wasn’t going any too well. “How do we go faster?” Potter asked. “Whatever you need, you’ll get. President Featherston has made that very clear.”

“Yes, I certainly can’t complain about the support I’m getting, especially after the…sad events in Pittsburgh,” FitzBelmont said—maybe he did own something resembling discretion after all. But then he went on, “What this project needs most of all is *time.* If you can give me back all the months when the President believed it a foolish waste of money and effort, we will be better off; I guarantee you that.”

So there, Potter thought. “You’re the physicist,” he said. “If you can undo that…Hell, if you can do that, forget about the uranium bomb.”

“Time travel is for the pulp magazines, I’m afraid,” FitzBelmont said. “No evidence that it’s possible, and plenty that it isn’t. The bomb, on the other hand, is definitely possible—and definitely difficult, too.”

“I remember your saying before that working with uranium hexafluoride was giving you fits,” Potter said.

“Are you doing better with that now?”

“Somewhat,” FitzBelmont answered. The physicist didn’t blink when Potter got *hexafluoride* out without stumbling. He chose to take that as a mild compliment. Henderson FitzBelmont continued,

“We’ve come up with some new chemicals—fluorocarbons, we’re calling them—that the uranium hexafluoride doesn’t attack. Nothing else seems to, either. They’ll have all kinds of peacetime uses—I’m sure of it. For now, though, they give us much better control over the UF .”

6

UF ? Potter wondered. Then he realized it was another way to say *uranium hexafluoride.* If he 6

weren’t used to hearing *CO* for *carbon dioxide,* he would have been baffled. “All right,” he said after a 2

pause he hoped FitzBelmont didn’t notice. “So you’ve got better control over it. What does that mean?”

“It puts fewer people in the hospital. It doesn’t eat through so much lab apparatus. Those are good starting points,” FitzBelmont said, and Potter could hardly tell him he was wrong. “Now we actually have a chance to separate the UF with the U-235 from the UF with the U-238.”

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“You haven’t done that yet?” Potter said in dismay.

“It’s not easy. The two isotopes are chemically identical,” FitzBelmont reminded him. “We can’t add, say, bicarbonate of soda and have it do something with one and not with the other. It won’t work. The difference in weight between the two molecules is just under one percent. That’s what we’ve got to take advantage of—if we can.”

“And?” Potter said.

“So far, we seem to be having the most luck with centrifuges,” Henderson FitzBelmont said. “The degree of enrichment each treatment gives is small, but it’s real. And the centrifuges we’re using now are a lot stronger than the ones we had when we started. They need to be—the old ones aren’t worth much, not for this kind of research.”

“And when you treat the slightly enriched, uh, UF , you get slightly more enriched UF ? Is that right?”

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Potter asked.

“It’s exactly right!” By the way FitzBelmont beamed, he’d just got an A on his midterm. “After enough steps, we do expect to achieve some very significant enrichment.”

“How far away from a bomb are you?” Potter asked bluntly.

“Well, I won’t *know* till we get closer,” Professor FitzBelmont said. Potter made an impatient noise.

Hastily, the physicist continued, “If I had to guess, I’d say we’re two years away, assuming everything goes perfectly. Since it won’t—it never does—two and a half years, maybe three, seems a better guess.”

“So we wouldn’t have this till…late 1945, maybe 1946?” Potter shook his head. “We need it sooner than that, Professor. We need it a hell of a lot sooner than that.” All those months Jake Featherston wasted were coming back to haunt the CSA. The damnyankees sure didn’t

waste any time when they realized a uranium bomb was possible. Which raised another question…"How soon will the United States get one of these things?"

"You'd do better asking someone in Philadelphia," FitzBelmont said. Clarence Potter made another wordless noise, this one full of frustration. He was doing his best to spy on the U.S. uranium-bomb project, without much luck. Yankee authorities were holding their cards so close to their chest, they were almost inside their ribs. FitzBelmont added, "You can do something about when the United States get theirs, you know."

"How's that again?" Full of his own gloom, Potter listened to FitzBelmont with half an ear. Jake Featherston was going to come down on him like a thousand-pound bomb. Featherston wouldn't blame himself for stalling the Confederate project. He never blamed himself for anything. But the Confederacy couldn't afford the late start. The United States had more scientists and more resources. They had enough left over that they could afford mistakes. Everything had to go right to give the CSA a decent chance to win. For a while, it had. For a while…

"You can delay the U.S. bomb, General," Henderson V. FitzBelmont said. "If you damage or destroy the facility where the Yankees are working on it, you'll make them deal with what you've done instead of going forward on their own work."

He wasn't wrong. He wasn't even slightly wrong. "Son of a bitch," Potter muttered. The U.S. project was hard for the CSA to reach—way the hell out there in Washington State. *Where there's a will, there's a lawyer,* he thought bemusedly. The Confederates could figure out how to attack it if they needed to badly enough. The way things looked now, they did.

Potter shook his head. He'd seen the race to the uranium bomb as just that: a race. If the United States started out ahead and ran faster anyhow, what would happen? They'd get to the finish line first. And when they did, Richmond would go up in heat like the center of the sun, and that would be the end of that.

But it wasn't just a race. It was a war. In a race, you'd get disqualified if you tripped the other guy and threw sand in his eyes. In a war, you might buy yourself the time you needed to catch up and go ahead.

This time, Clarence Potter grabbed FitzBelmont's hand and pumped it

up and down. “Professor, I’m damn glad I called you into Richmond,” he said. “*Damn* glad!”

“Good,” the physicist said. “As for me, I look forward to returning to my work. As long as I’m here, can I ask you send me, oh, five skilled workers? We’re desperately short of them, and it seems next to impossible to pry the kind of people we need out of war plants.”

“You’ll have ’em, by God,” Potter promised. “Can you tell me who told you no? Whoever it is, he’ll be sorry he was ever born.” Grim anticipation filled his voice.

FitzBelmont reached into the inside pocket of his herringbone jacket. “I have a list right here…. No, this is a list of some of the things my wife wants me to shop for while I’m in Richmond.” He frowned, then reached into the other inside pocket. “Ah, here we are.” He handed Potter the list he needed.

“I’ll take care of these folks, Professor. They’ll find out what *priority* means. You can count on that.”

Potter carefully put the list in his wallet. He even more carefully refrained from mentioning, or so much as thinking about, how well FitzBelmont played the role of an absentminded professor.

“Thank you, General. Are we finished?” FitzBelmont asked. When Potter nodded, the physicist got to his feet. He looked around at Capitol Square, sighed, and shook his head. He started off, then stopped and looked back. “Uh, freedom!”

“Freedom!” Potter hated the slogan, but that didn’t matter. In Jake Featherston’s CSA, not responding was inconceivable.

Henderson V. FitzBelmont walked north, toward Ford’s Hotel. Under one name or another, the hotel had stood across the street from Capitol Square since before the War of Secession. Watching the physicist go, Clarence Potter sighed. Anne Colleton always stayed at Ford’s when she came up to Richmond. Potter had stayed there himself, too, but his thoughts were on the South Carolina woman he’d…loved?

He nodded. No other word for it, even if it was a cross-grained, jagged kind of love, and one much marred by politics. She’d backed Jake Featherston when the Freedom Party was only a little cloud on the horizon. Potter laughed. He’d never leaned that way himself. He still didn’t, come to that.

But now Anne was dead, killed in a Yankee air raid on Charleston. One of her brothers got gassed by the Yankees in the Great War, and was murdered at the start of the Red Negro uprising. The other went into Pittsburgh. Tom Colleton wasn't listed as a POW, so he was probably dead. A whole family destroyed by the USA.

"We need that bomb," Potter murmured. "Jesus, do we ever."

"**W** ow!" George Enos said as the *Townsend* approached San Diego harbor. "The mainland! I wondered if I'd ever see it again."

"I'll kiss the pier when we get off the ship," Fremont Dalby said. The gun chief added, "Too goddamn many times when I didn't just wonder if I'd see it again—I was fucking sure I wouldn't."

He'd been in the Navy since…Well, not quite since steam replaced sail, but one hell of a long time. He could say something like that without worrying that people might think he was yellow. George couldn't, which didn't mean the same thought hadn't gone through his mind.

Dalby nudged him. "You can hop a train, go on back to Boston, see the wife and kiddies. All you need is a couple-three weeks of liberty, right?" He laughed and laughed.

"Funny," George said. "Funny like a broken leg." Nobody was going to get liberty like that. The brass might dole out twenty-four- and forty-eight-hour passes, enough to let sailors from the destroyer sample San Diego's bars and brothels and tattoo parlors and other dockside attractions. George had never been here in his life, but he was sure they'd be the same as the dives in Boston and Honolulu. Sailors were the same here, weren't they? As long as they were, the attractions would be, too.

"Hey, nobody's shooting at us for a little bit," Fritz Gustafson said. "I'll take that." From the loader, it was quite a speech.

"For a while, yeah," Dalby agreed. "Wonder where we'll go after they fuel us and get us more ammo and all that good shit? Probably down south against the Mexicans and the Confederates, I guess."

That sounded like nasty, unpleasant, dangerous work to George. He'd seen enough nasty, unpleasant, dangerous work already. "Maybe they'll send us up off the Canadian coast, so we can keep the Japs from running guns to the Canucks."

“Dream on,” Dalby said. “Fuck, if they send us up there, they’ll probably send us to whatever the hell the name of that other place is —you know, with the Russians.”

“Alaska,” Gustafson said.

The CPO nodded. “There you go. That’s it. Nothing but emperors for us. We’ve been messing with the Mikado’s boys for too long. Now we can tangle with the Tsar. And the seas up there are worse than the North Atlantic.”

George started to say that was impossible. He knew the North Atlantic well, and knew how bad it could get. But he’d also rounded Cape Horn. That was worse. Maybe the Pacific was godawful up in the polar-bear country, too.

“Russians hardly give a damn about Alaska anyway,” Fritz Gustafson said.

“Well, Jesus, would you?” Dalby said. “It’s more Siberia. They’ve got enough Siberia already. If somebody ever found gold in it or something, you’d have to remember it was there. Till then? Shit, who cares?”

San Diego wasn’t Honolulu. The weather wasn’t quite perfect. It got cooler at night than it did in the Sandwich Islands. It was just very good. To somebody who’d grown up in Boston, that would do fine.

George sent a telegram to Connie, letting her and the boys know he was all right. The clerk at the Western Union office said, “It may take a while to get there, sir. We still don’t have as many lines as we’d like to carry east-west traffic.” The man, who was more than old enough to be George’s father, held up a hand when he saw him start to get mad. “Don’t blame me, sir. I don’t have anything to do with it. I’m just telling you how things are. You got to blame somebody, go and blame Jake Featherston.”

Everybody in the USA had good cause to blame Jake Featherston for something or other. A telegram delayed was small change. Ohio’s being torn to pieces badly enough to delay the telegram was rather larger. George didn’t dwell on Ohio. The telegram ticked him off. Like politics, grievances were personal.

Sure enough, he got a twenty-four-hour liberty. He wished it were forty-eight, but anything was better than nothing. With the rest of the

40mm gun crew, he drank and roistered and got his ashes hauled. He felt bad about that afterwards—what was he doing going to bed with a whore with saggy tits right after sending his wife a wire? He felt bad afterwards, but it felt great while it was happening…and that was what he was doing lying down with the chippy.

He also got a tattoo on his left biceps—a big anchor. That didn't feel good while it was happening, even though he was drunk. But Fritz Gustafson was getting a naked woman on his right biceps, so George sat still for it. He wasn't about to flinch in front of his buddy. Only later did he wonder if Fritz took the pricking in silence because *he* was there getting tattooed, too.

His arm felt worse the next morning. He wasn't drunk then; he was hungover. All of him felt worse, but his arm especially. "It'll get easier in a day or two," Fremont Dalby said. That was rough sympathy, not hardheartedness: Dalby had ornaments on both arms and a small tiger on his right buttock.

He turned out to know what he was talking about. By the time the *Townsend* sailed a week later, George almost forgot about the tattoo except when he looked down and saw the blue marks under his skin. He also liked Gustafson's ornament, but Connie would clout him if he came home with a floozy on his arm. Fritz was a bachelor, and could get away with stuff like that.

The *Townsend* sailed south, toward the not very distant border with the Empire of Mexico. She was part of a flotilla that included three more destroyers, two light cruisers, a heavy cruiser, and two escort carriers. The baby flattops were just like the ones that helped make sure the Japs wouldn't take the Sandwich Islands away from the USA. They were built on freighter hulls, and had a freighter's engines inside. Going flat out, they could make eighteen knots. But each one carried thirty airplanes. That gave them ten or twenty times the reach of even the heavy cruiser's guns.

Although the flotilla stood well out to sea, it wasn't very long before Y-ranging gear picked up a couple of airplanes outbound from Baja California to look things over. "Goddamn Mexicans," Dalby said as George ran up to the antiaircraft gun.

"What did you expect, a big kiss?" George asked.

Dalby told him what Francisco José could kiss, and why. The CPO might have embroidered on that theme for quite a while, but Fritz

Gustafson said, “Next to what the Japs threw at us, this is all chickenshit. Take an even strain.”

Fighters roared east off the flight decks of the *Monitor* and the *Bonhomme Richard.* They came back in less than half an hour. A couple of them waggled their wings as they flew over the carriers’ escorts. No Mexican airplanes appeared over the flotilla.

“Score one—I mean two—for the good guys,” George said.

“Yeah.” Fremont Dalby nodded. “But now the greasers will start screaming to the Confederates. Gotta figure we’re in business to yank Jake Featherston’s tail feathers, anyway. So pretty soon we’ll be playing against the first team.”

“Confederates don’t have any carriers in Guaymas,” George said.

“No, but they’ve got land-based air, and they’ve got subs, and who knows what all shit they *do* have in the Gulf of California?” Dalby said. “I guess that’s what we’re doing—finding out what kind of shit they’ve got there.”

“Such a thing as finding out the hard way,” George said.

When the flotilla got near the southern end of Baja California, bombers and fighter escorts left the escort carriers’ decks to pummel the Mexican installations at Cabo San Lucas. Scuttlebutt said the installations weren’t just Mexican but also Confederate. George wouldn’t have been surprised. Cabo San Lucas warded the Gulf of California, which led to Confederate Sonora. And the place was isolated enough—which was putting it mildly—to keep word of Confederate soldiers doing Mexicans’ jobs from spreading too far or too fast.

Cabo San Lucas lay at about the same latitude as Honolulu. Even lying well offshore, the *Townsend* got much hotter weather than she did in the Sandwich Islands. George wondered why. Maybe the North American continent screwed up the winds or something. That was all he could think of.

Then he stopped worrying about the weather. “Now hear this! Now hear this!” the loudspeakers blared.

“We have two damaged aircraft returning from the raid on the Mexicans. They will come as far as they can before ditching, and we

are going to go out after them. We don't want to strand anybody if we can help it."

"Roger that!" George exclaimed. He imagined floating in a life raft, or maybe just in a life jacket, praying somebody would pluck him out of the Pacific before the sharks or the glaring sun did him in. He shuddered. It was worse than going into the drink after your ship sank, because you'd be all alone out there.

The *Townsend,* two other destroyers, and a light cruiser peeled off and raced toward the Mexican coast.

Up there in the sky, the pilots would be nursing everything they could from their shot-up airplanes. Every mile west they made bumped up their chances of getting rescued.

A swarm of intact aircraft flew over the ships. They were heading home to the carriers. Their pilots had to be thanking God they could get home. Then George spotted a dive bomber low in the sky and trailing smoke. Even as he watched, the airplane went into the Pacific. The pilot put it down as well as anybody could hope to. It skidded across the surface—it didn't nose in.

Did he ditch well enough? Only one way to find out. The *Townsend* was closer to the downed airplane than any of the other ships. She sped toward where it went down. By the time she got there, the dive bomber had already sunk. But George joined in the cheers on deck: an inflatable life raft bobbed in the blue, blue water. Two men crouched inside. A third, in a life jacket, floated nearby. They all waved frantically. One of them fired a flare pistol, though daylight overwhelmed the red glow.

Lines with life rings attached flew over the ship's side. The downed fliers put them on. Eager sailors hauled the men up on deck. "God bless you guys," said the one whom George helped rescue. "You're prettier than my wife right now."

He had a nasty cut over one eye and burns on his face and hands. All things considered, he was lucky.

The fellow who wore the life jacket couldn't stand. "Broken leg," somebody by him said. "Get him down to sick bay."

"I don't mind," the injured man said as they laid him on a stretcher. "I figured I'd be holding a lily. But Jack there, he did a fuck of a job."

“I hear somebody else was in trouble, too,” said the flier with the cuts and burns—Jack? “I hope some of you sailor fellows find him, too.”

“We’ll look for him, pal. That’s what we’re here for,” a sailor said. “Ought to get you down to sick bay, too. I bet you need stitches.”

“For what?” Jack didn’t even seem to know he was hurt. They took him below anyway.

A fighter was flying slow circles over where the other airplane went down, about forty miles east of the *Townsend*’s rescue. But all the destroyers and cruiser found when they got there was an oil slick and a little floating wreckage—no sign of the crew.

“Too bad,” George said.

“Can’t win ’em all,” Fremont Dalby said. “We broke even. Way things usually work out, that puts us ahead of the game.”

“I guess,” George said. The rescued men were here, yes. But the poor bastards who didn’t make it out of their airplane…They didn’t break even. They lost. Breaking even only mattered if you were on the outside.

VI

J efferson Pinkard watched Confederate soldiers set up antiaircraft guns around Camp Determination.

He went over to the major in charge of the job, an officer named Webb Wyatt. “How much good d’you reckon this’ll do?” he asked.

Wyatt shifted a chaw from one cheek to the other and spat a stream of tobacco juice much too close to Pinkard’s highly polished boots. “Well, I’ll tell you,” he drawled. “It’s a hell of a lot better’n not doing anything.”

“Than not doing anything, *sir,* ” Pinkard snapped.

The major in butternut looked him up and down. He was suddenly and painfully conscious that he wore Freedom Party gray himself. “Well, I’ll tell you,” Wyatt said again. “I say *sir* to people who I reckon deserve it. What did you ever do to make me reckon that?”

Rage ripped through Jeff. It thickened his voice as he ground out, “I’ll tell you what I did, you little chickenshit asshole. I fought in the

trenches when you were still in short pants. I joined the Party before you had hair on your nuts. I've been runnin' camps since Jake Featherston got to be President of the CSA. My rank's the same as major general. You want me to call up Ferd Koenig and ask him if *he* reckons you ought to call me sir? You cocksucking whistleass, how soon you reckon you'll see the inside of one of these here camps for your very own self? Well, motherfucker? Answer me, God damn you!"

Major Wyatt went very red. Then, as he realized how much more than he could chew he'd bitten off, he went white instead. Pinkard knew damn well he could send Wyatt to a camp. And he knew damn well he would, too, and enjoy every minute of it. Seeing that anticipation of pleasure yet to come helped break the Army officer.

"Please excuse me, sir," Wyatt mumbled, and saluted as if on the drill grounds at VMI. "I beg your humble pardon, sir."

"You fuckin' well *better* beg," Jeff said. "Who ever told you you could talk to a superior officer that way?"

Wyatt bit his lip and stood mute. Pinkard knew what he wasn't saying: that he didn't think a camp guard really was his superior, regardless of what rank badges might show. Too bad for him. He'd picked the wrong man to rile.

"Let's try it again," Pinkard told him. "How much will these guns help?"

"Sir, if the damnyankees send a whole big swarm of bombers over, you're screwed." Did Wyatt sound as if he hoped the USA did just that? If he did, he wasn't blatant enough to let Jeff call him on it. He went on, "For small raids, or for driving off reconnaissance airplanes, they'll do a lot."

"There. You see? You really can answer when you set your mind to it," Jeff said. "Now—how come we don't have more fighters to drive off those Yankee fuckers before they get here?"

"On account of all that stuff is back East, sir," Major Wyatt answered. "Far as Richmond is concerned, west Texas is strictly nowhere. Only good thing about that is, it's strictly nowhere for the damnyankees, too."

He had a point, but less of one than he thought. Snyder, Texas, and even Lubbock, Texas, were indeed strictly nowhere to both CSA and USA. But Camp Determination damn well wasn't. It was the biggest of

the camps the Freedom Party was using to solve the Confederacy's Negro problem. That made it vital to the country and the Party. And the Yankees used it for propaganda against the CSA.

"Can you use those guns against ground targets, too?" Jeff asked.

"Reckon we can if we have to, sir," Major Wyatt said. "Antiaircraft guns make pretty fair antibarrel guns, no doubt about it. But I think you're flabbling over nothing if you figure we'll need to. USA won't get this far."

"Well, if the damnyankees *don't* get this far, you know how come that'll be?" Pinkard demanded, his temper rising again. "On account of Freedom Party Guards stopped 'em—more than the Army could do by its lonesome. And you know who asked 'em to send in the guards? Me, that's who." He jabbed a thumb at his own chest.

"Uh, yes, sir." Wyatt was wising up.

He wasn't wising up fast enough to suit Jeff. "You think maybe people in uniforms that aren't the same as yours deserve a salute every now and then, Major? How about that, huh? What *do* you think?"

"Yes, sir, I think they do. I was wrong before." As if to prove the point, Major Wyatt saluted.

Pinkard returned the salute. He wasn't about to let the Army man accuse him of not following etiquette.

But as far as he was concerned, Wyatt didn't prove a damn thing except that he had maybe enough sense to try to save his own neck.

With a small sigh, Jeff decided that would have to do. He couldn't make the man in the butternut uniform love him. All he could do was make Wyatt treat him with military courtesy. *I damn well did that,* he thought.

"Anything else, Major?" Pinkard asked.

"No, sir." Wyatt saluted again. Jeff returned it again. The major said, "Permission to leave, sir?" He wasn't taking any chances now.

"Granted," Jeff said, and Wyatt got out of there as if the seat of his pants were on fire. He probably thought his drawers *were* smoking.

Watching the Army man's ignominious retreat, Jeff smiled a slow,

sated smile: almost the smile he might wear after going to bed with Edith. This was a different kind of satisfaction, but no less real. He was *somebody,* by God. He could throw his weight around. One hand rested on his belly. He had plenty of weight to throw, too. Not bad for somebody who'd figured on spending the rest of his life making steel at the Sloss Works in Birmingham. No, not bad at all.

Another sign he'd arrived was the driver who took him back into Snyder when his shift at Camp Determination was up. Some evenings he spent on a cot in the administrative compound. Not tonight, though. He smiled again as the camp receded behind him. Thinking about the kind of smile he'd have after going to bed with Edith made him want to put on that kind of smile.

Back in the days before the war, he might have had a colored chauffeur. He didn't suppose anybody had a colored chauffeur any more. Times were changing in the CSA. An ordinary camp guard had to do.

That was all right. The guard was the Party equivalent of a private, and privates got stuck with nigger work. That was true in King David's day, and Julius Caesar's, and William the Conqueror's, and it was still true now.

The brakes squeaked when the driver parked the Birmingham in front of Jeff's house in Snyder. *Got to get that seen to,* Jeff thought. The driver jumped out and opened the door for him. "Here you are, sir."

"Thanks, Cletus." Jeff made a point of learning the men's names. It didn't cost him anything, and it made them feel good. "See you in the morning—or sooner if anything goes wrong." He never stopped worrying. That was probably why things went wrong so seldom.

"Yes, sir." Cletus had no trouble remembering that he needed to salute. He jumped back into the auto and drove away.

When Pinkard walked into the house, his two stepsons were playing a game on the floor of the front room. It seemed to involve wringing each other's necks. They broke off as soon as he came in. "Papa Jeff!" they both squealed in the shrill small-boy register just below what only dogs can hear. "Hi, Papa Jeff!" They tried to tackle him. They weren't big enough, even together. But they were a lot bigger than when he married their mother the year before. One of these days…

He didn't want to think about that. And he didn't have to, not when Edith came out of the kitchen and gave him a kiss. "Hello, Jeff," she

said. “Wasn’t sure if you’d be back tonight.”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” he said, and gave her an extra squeeze to show what he had in mind. “What smells good?” he added; an alluring odor followed her.

“I’ve got a nice beef tongue cooking—with cloves and everything, the way you like it.” She paused to eye her sons. “Why don’t you boys go out and play? I’ve got something to tell Papa Jeff.”

“Why can’t we hear?” asked Frank, the older.

“Because I want to tell Papa Jeff, not you—that’s why,” his mother answered. “Now beat it, before I send you to your room instead.” He disappeared even faster than Major Wyatt had. So did his brother Willie.

“What’s up?” Pinkard asked.

“I’m going to have a baby.”

Jeff had gone so long without getting a woman pregnant, he wondered if he was shooting blanks. “Well, I’ll be,” he said. Then he realized Edith had to be looking for something better than that. “Wonderful!” He hugged her and kissed her and, with the boys out of the house, set a possessive hand on her backside.

She smiled. “That’s how this started.”

“I didn’t reckon it was any other way,” Jeff answered. “Jesus, yeah. Not us.”

“Don’t you start.” Edith was a churchgoing woman. She took her faith much more seriously than Jeff took his. He believed in Jake Featherston the way she believed in Jesus. From everything he could see, Jesus didn’t deliver.

Lately, though, Jake Featherston wasn’t delivering, either. The Confederate States were gone from just about all the U.S. territory they took when the war was new. Not even the professional optimists on the wireless were predicting when the CSA would reinvade the USA. All the talk these days was of defense and of outlasting the enemy.

The Freedom Party Guards Ferdinand Koenig threw into the fight had stopped the damnyankees not far beyond Lubbock. They couldn’t

retake the town, though, and they couldn't push U.S. forces back very far. A good-sized chunk of west Texas remained under the Yankee boot heel.

"All right," Jeff said to Edith, and then, in what had to seem like a change of subject to her but didn't to him, "I hear the United States are going to start up that, uh, darn state of Houston again—give the collaborators something to do."

"That's dreadful!" she exclaimed. "They're so wicked. They've got no business doing anything like that."

She paused, then asked, "How are things at the camp?"

"Going well enough." He rarely gave her a detailed answer when she asked something like that. She wasn't really looking for one, either. She both knew and didn't know what went on inside the barbed wire. She didn't like to think about it. For that matter, neither did Pinkard. He said, "What shall we name the baby?"

"If it's a girl, I'd like to call her Lucy, after my mother," Edith said.

Jeff nodded. "All right. It's a good name. And if it's a boy?"

"What do you think of Raymond?" she asked.

He hesitated. Her first husband was called Chick. What the devil was his real name? Jeff didn't want *his* son named after the camp guard who'd killed himself. Chick Blades' real name was…Leroy. Jeff almost snapped his fingers, he was so glad to remember. "Raymond'll do fine," he said. That was easy.

He ate more than his share at supper. So did his stepsons—they liked tongue. He smiled to see them stuff themselves. Maybe it would make them sleepy sooner than usual. And it did. He smiled again.

Things were going his way.

Edith even let him leave the light on. She usually liked darkness better. "You're beautiful," he said. While he stroked her and kissed her, while she touched him, he believed it. And he made her believe he believed it, too.

"Oh, Jeff," she said, and then, a little later, "*Oh,* Jeff." Her nails dug into his back. He spent himself at the same time as she quivered beneath him. The damnyankees, even the camp, seemed a million

miles away.

They wouldn't in the morning, though, and that was a crying shame.

"B oston," Lieutenant Sam Carsten said as a pilot guided the *Josephus Daniels* through the minefields that kept submersibles and surface raiders away from the harbor. "Boston's a good town."

"Oh, yes, sir," Pat Cooley agreed. The exec went on, "Good restaurants, theaters, all kinds of things you can do here."

"Yeah." Sam's voice was dry. When he was a rating, his liberties here revolved around saloons and whorehouses. Restaurants? Theaters? Those were for other people, people with time on their hands and without money burning a hole in their pocket.

The pilot swung the helm a little to port. "How did you know to do that then?" Cooley asked.

"Simple, sir. Last time I didn't, I blew up," the man answered, deadpan.

"That'll teach you, Pat," Carsten said.

"Teach me what?" Cooley said in tones more plaintive than they had to be. The pilot chuckled and turned the ship again when he thought he needed to. The *Josephus Daniels* didn't explode. Sam was in favor of not exploding.

An hour later, the destroyer escort was tied up at a pier in the U.S. Navy Yard, across the river from Boston proper—and Boston improper—in Charlestown. The first liberty party went off to roister, just as Sam would have without gold stripes on his cuffs.

Since he had them, he went through the Navy Yard to report to his superiors. He gave a lot of salutes and returned just about as many. To his own amusement, he caused a lot of confusion. Here he was, a middle-aged man with several rows of fruit salad on his chest. Young lieutenant commanders and commanders—the up-and-comers in the Navy—would assume he had to be at least a captain, if not of flag rank. Their right arms would start to go up. Then they would see he was only a lieutenant and stop in the middle of their salute till Sam bailed them out with one of his own.

Sometimes they wouldn't notice they outranked him. When that happened, he gravely returned a salute with one of his own. He left a trail of bemused officers in his wake. He messed up their mental Y-ranging gear.

The men to whom he reported had no doubt about his grade. They were his age, and had the rank he could have aspired to if he weren't a mustang. "Reporting as ordered, sir," he said to the four-striper who headed things. He saluted first.

Returning the courtesy, Captain William McClintock said, "Take a seat, Carsten."

"Thank you, sir," Sam said, though he wasn't sure he was grateful. He'd got used to being skipper of the *Josephus Daniels,* a potentate who gave orders and had to worry about receiving them only from a distance. Now, under the eyes of five senior officers, he felt more like a bug on a plate than a potentate.

"You've had a busy time in the North Atlantic," McClintock observed. His craggy features and sun-baked skin said he'd spent a lot of time at sea.

"Yes, sir," Sam answered. What McClintock said was true—and any which way, it was hard to go wrong saying *Yes, sir* to your superiors.

One of the other captains across the table looked down at some papers through bifocals, tilting his head back to read. Sam wore reading glasses, but still saw well enough at a distance. "You've done pretty well for yourself, seems like," said the captain—his name was Schuyler Moultrie.

"Thank you, sir," Sam said—one more phrase where it was hard to go wrong.

"Have you had any…special disciplinary problems aboard the *Josephus Daniels,* Carsten?" Captain McClintock asked.

Sam knew what that meant. Any mustang would have. "No, sir," he answered. "I try to keep a tight rein on my CPOs—not tight enough to choke 'em, you understand, because they have to do their jobs, but tight enough so they can't get away with murder."

McClintock's mouth twitched in what looked like a swallowed smile. Sam knew what that meant, too—he'd said the right thing. A mustang

who still behaved like a CPO himself was liable to let his chiefs run wild, and that wasn't good for the ship. One of the best pieces of advice he got after his promotion was to remember he was an officer. He always did his best to follow it.

"How badly are you hurting the British?" Captain Moultrie asked.

"Sir, you would know better than I do," Sam said. Moultrie raised an eyebrow and waited. Sam went on, "I know what we stop. I've got an idea of what the other ships in the squadron stop. But I don't think any of us knows how much gets through in spite of us."

"Good answer," said Ken Davenport, the captain at Sam's far left.

"Seems to be worthwhile, what we're doing," McClintock said. He eyed Carsten from across the table.

"Anything special you'd like to tell us, Lieutenant? Anything you've found out that other skippers ought to know?"

"Not to trust the limeys as far as you can throw them," Sam said at once. "That freighter with the big guns, the catapult-launched fighter…They're sneaky bastards."

McClintock's grin startled Sam. He hadn't thought the rugged badlands of that face could rearrange themselves so. "Then what does that make you?" the senior officer asked. "Whatever they threw at you, you beat."

"I don't know that for a fact, sir," Carsten answered. "I wish I did, but I don't. If they were sneaky enough, they slid on by me, and I never knew the difference."

"Not too likely, not with Y-ranging gear," Captain Davenport said, which only proved he didn't know much about the North Atlantic in dirty weather. By the way Captain McClintock stirred, he was thinking the same thing. Before he could say anything, Davenport went on, "I will say that recognizing the possibility does you credit."

"Well, that's true enough," McClintock said. "We've got ourselves a raft of officers who think they're smarter than they really are. Finding one who thinks he's dumber than he really is makes for a refreshing change." He eyed Sam. "Well, Lieutenant, do you want to go back on patrol when your refit's finished?"

"Sir, I'll go wherever you send me," Sam said. "Real destroyers are

probably better suited to that job than escorts like my ship, though. They've got more legs, so they can cover more ocean. Fewer things are likely to get past them."

"He *is* a smart one," Captain Moultrie remarked.

"So he is. Good for him," McClintock said placidly. He turned back to Sam. "You aren't wrong. The only trouble is, we haven't got enough real destroyers to go around. We're gaining on it, but we aren't there yet. And the ones we do have in the North Atlantic, we need farther east. Speed counts for even more there than it does on patrol duty."

"All right, sir." Where to send ships wasn't Sam's decision. "If you want the *Josephus Daniels* back out there, that's where she'll go."

"You're the fellow who landed those Marines on that Confederate coastal island, aren't you?" Moultrie asked.

"Yes, sir, I did that." Sam wondered if he should have said he was panting to go back out on patrol.

Coastal raiding made for exciting films, but if you were doing it for real you kept all your sphincters puckered tight till you got out of range of Confederate land-based air.

"We have anything like that in the hopper?" Davenport asked.

"Well, we *could,* if we had an experienced skipper to handle it," Moultrie answered. They talked as if Sam weren't there. He wished he weren't. He wasn't eager to volunteer for a dangerous mission, but he knew he wouldn't turn it down if they gave it to him. You didn't do that, not if you were an officer. You didn't if you were a rating, either.

"Gives us something else to think about." Captain McClintock sounded pleased. Of course he did—he'd be giving somebody else the shitty end of the stick. But the ribbons on his chest said he'd done warm work himself. He nodded to Sam. "We need to talk to some people ourselves, Lieutenant. If you stay in port an extra day or two, I'm sure it'll break your crew's hearts, won't it?"

"Sir, you'll probably hear them crying all the way over in Providence," Sam said.

That made two or three of the captains snort. McClintock said, "I'm sure I will. All right, Carsten—you'll hear from us one way or the other before long. You have anything to say before we let you go?"

“Whatever you give me, whatever you give my ship, we’ll take a swing at it,” Sam said. “I guess that’s it.

Oh—and my exec is ready for a command of his own. Past ready. I hate to say it because I hate to lose him, but it’s true.”

“We know about Lieutenant Cooley—indeed we do,” the senior captain replied. The others nodded.

Just how fast a track *was* Pat on? McClintock continued, “As for the other—well, plenty of worse things you could tell us. All right—dismissed for now.”

When Sam got back to the *Josephus Daniels,* Lieutenant Cooley asked, “What’s up, Skipper?”

“Well, I don’t exactly know,” Sam answered. He didn’t say anything about the senior officers’ regard for Cooley. That would come out in its own time, if it did. “Maybe they’ll send us out on patrol again, or maybe they’ll give us something else to do.”

“Something hush-hush and sneaky?” Cooley said. “Something where our ass is grass if the bad guys find out about it?”

“They didn’t say that in so many words,” Sam said. “It sounded that way to me, though. They remembered that time we carried the leathernecks.”

“They would,” the exec said darkly. “They didn’t tell you what, huh?”

“Nope.” Sam shook his head.

“Doesn’t sound good.”

“Nope,” Sam repeated. “Sure doesn’t. Way I figure it, we’ll sail up the James to Richmond, land our Marines to scoop up Jake Featherston, and shell the Tredegar Iron Works while we wait for them to bring the son of a bitch back.”

Cooley looked at him. “I hope you didn’t tell the brass anything like that. They’d take you up on it in a red-hot minute—and if they did, we wouldn’t sail up the James. We’d go up that other creek instead—without a paddle, too.”

“Don’t I know it!” Sam said. “No, I didn’t give them any fancy ideas. I may be dumb, but I’m not *that* dumb. Besides, they can come up with all kinds of fancy ideas all by themselves. They don’t need any help from me.”

“Maybe they’ll shift the whole crew to a river monitor so we can help when our guys go over the Ohio,”

Cooley suggested.

“There’s a cheery thought.” Carsten shivered. During the Great War, both sides put monitors on the Ohio and the Mississippi. Some of them carried guns worthy of a battleship. They gave heavy cannon mobility the big guns couldn’t get any other way, but even then they were vulnerable to mines, which both sides sowed broadcast in the rivers. And monitors were even more vulnerable these days. They were slow and they had little room to maneuver, which meant dive bombers cleaned up on them. Sam supposed he would rather command a river monitor than try to defuse unexploded bombs, but neither job was his idea of fun.

While waiting for orders, Sam did some discreet roistering at places where officers could roister discreetly. He enjoyed himself. He would have had more fun at the raucous joints where he went before he became an officer, but he kept that to himself. A mustang who still behaved like a petty officer wasn’t a good officer. Sam had seen enough men who proved the point.

Pat Cooley plainly had a good time at those discreet establishments. But then, he was an up-and-comer with an Annapolis ring. He was supposed to know how to enjoy himself like a gentleman.

They both happened to be aboard the *Josephus Daniels* when the orders arrived, as if from On High.

Sam read them. Without a word, he passed them on to Cooley. “Well, well,” the exec said brightly when he finished going through them. “Doesn’t this look like fun?”

“Now that you mention it,” Sam said, “no.”

T roop Leader Hipolito Rodriguez was starting to dread duty on the women’s side of Camp Determination. Whenever he went over there, Bathsheba and Antoinette looked for him so they could give him messages to take to Xerxes over on the men’s side. And he had to make up messages from Xerxes to give to them. Otherwise, they would realize the truth.

This is what you get for being kind even once, Rodriguez thought unhappily. He delivered one message. After that, he took the old *mallate* to the bathhouse. Xerxes didn’t care about anything any more. And he wasn’t about to send messages back to the women’s side on his own.

But how was Rodriguez supposed to tell the man's wife and daughter that he was dead? He saw no way, however much he wished he did. They would wail and scream and blame him. And he was to blame, too. Didn't he shepherd everybody in that barracks into the bathhouse? It needed doing; more Negroes filled the building now. Pretty soon, they would get what was coming to them, too.

When Rodriguez sent swarms of men and women he didn't know into the bathhouse or into the trucks that asphyxiated them, it was only a job, the way planting corn and beans on his farm outside of Baroyeca was only a job. He didn't think about it; he just did it. Didn't he back the Freedom Party because it promised to do something about the Negroes in the CSA, and because Jake Featherston kept his promises?

When it came to Bathsheba and Antoinette, though, they weren't just *mallates* any more. They were people. And thinking about killing people was much harder and much less pleasant than thinking about getting rid of abstractions, even abstractions with black skins.

Part of him hoped they would go in a population reduction while he was over on the men's side. Then they would be gone, and he wouldn't have to worry about it any more. But they kept hanging on. No matter what the guards' orders were, they didn't clean out the women's side as efficiently as the men's.

Even those hard-bitten men found their hearts softening—some, at least.

Naturally, that meant the women's side got more crowded than the men's. Just as naturally, Jefferson Pinkard noticed. Rodriguez remembered when Jeff came back from what was plainly a disastrous leave during the Great War. Pinkard went hard and merciless himself after that. He hadn't changed since—if anything, he was more so now. What with the job he had to do, that wasn't surprising.

He lectured the guards about not softening up—once. When that didn't work, he found a new way to solve the problem. A work gang—male prisoners—ran up new barracks on the women's side of Camp Determination. Before long, new guards filled them. They wore the gray of Freedom Party Guards…but instead of gray tunics and trousers, they wore gray blouses and skirts. Jefferson Pinkard or somebody set above him decided that female guards would be as tough on women as male guards were on men.

And it worked. To Hipolito Rodriguez's way of thinking, it worked

appallingly well. The new guards were all whites—no women from Sonora or Chihuahua. They were all tough-looking; Rodriguez would much rather have dallied with colored prisoners than with any of them. They carried the same submachine guns as their male counterparts, and they knew how to use them.

They wasted no time proving it to the Negro women, either. The first few days they started patrolling the north side of Camp Determination, they shot three women in separate incidents. It was as if they were warning, *Don't give us any guff. You'll pay for it if you try.*

And they didn't waste any time sending Negro women to the bathhouse on that side and for one-way rides in the asphyxiating trucks. They hardly bothered pretending the eliminations were anything but eliminations. The women's side began to bubble with terror.

With the female guards building up numbers over there, Rodriguez took a turn on that side less and less often. That wasn't bad; in a lot of ways, it was a relief. But he didn't like what he saw when he did a shift there, and he especially didn't like what he felt. The hair on his arms and at the back of his neck kept wanting to stand on end. That side was an explosion waiting to happen.

Because he was who he was, he had no trouble getting in to see Jeff Pinkard. Saluting his buddy from the trenches always felt funny, but he did it. "What's on your mind, Hip?" Pinkard asked. "You aren't one of those people who flabble for the fun of flabbling."

"I hope not, *Señor* Jeff," Rodriguez answered. "But those guards on the women's side, those *lesbianos*

"—he didn't know if they were or not, but if *some* of them weren't, he'd never seen any—"they make trouble there."

That got Pinkard's attention, all right. "How do you mean?" he rapped out.

"They don't—how you say?—they don't keep the secret. You make the men do it. The lady guards, they should do the same thing," Rodriguez said.

Pinkard drummed his fingers on the desk. "That's not so good." He got out of his chair, stuck his hat on his head, and grabbed his submachine gun. "I'll have a look for myself."

He said that whenever he found a problem. Rodriguez admired him for it. He didn't let things fester. If something was wrong, he went after it right away. He had no trouble making up his mind.

By that time the next day, three female officers and half a dozen noncoms in skirts were gone. Pinkard assembled the rest of the female Freedom Party guards and spoke to them for most of an hour while men patrolled the women's half of the camp. Rodriguez never found out exactly what the camp commandant said, but it seemed to do the trick. The female guards stopped being so blatant about what Camp Determination was for. Little by little, the women on that side relaxed —as much as they could relax while not so slowly starving to death.

Bathsheba and Antoinette still survived. The cleanouts missed them again and again. In a way, Rodriguez was glad. They *were* people to him now, and they hadn't done anything to deserve death except be born black. He liked the older woman. And the younger one would have been beautiful if she weren't so thin.

But they reminded him of exactly what he was doing here, and he didn't like that. Thanks to the hard-hearted female guards, they had a pretty good idea of what would happen to them. "One o' these days, they gonna put an end to us. Ain't that right?" Bathsheba asked with no particular fear and no particular hatred.

"Ain't happened yet. Don't got to happen." Rodriguez tried to dodge around the truth.

She wagged a finger at him. "I ain't nothin' but a nigger cleanin' lady, but I ain't no blind nigger cleanin'

lady. You wave somethin' in front o' my face, reckon I see it."

"I don't wave nothin'." He did his best to misunderstand.

She wouldn't let him. "Don't reckon it's any different on the men's side, is it?"

"I don't know what you mean. You got women over here, men over there. Of course is different."

Bathsheba sighed. "I spell it out for you." She laughed. "I ain't hardly got my letters, but here I is spellin'

fo' you. They killin' folks over yonder the same way they killin' folks here?"

He didn't answer. He couldn't answer. Saying yes would admit far too much. Saying no wouldn't just be a lie—that wouldn't bother him a bit—but an obvious lie. Obvious lies were no damn good, not when you were talking about life and death.

When you were talking about life and death, keeping quiet was no damn good, either. Bathsheba sighed again. "Well, I do thank the good Lord fo' preservin' my sweet Xerxes along with me an' Antoinette,"

she said. "We is in a hard road, but we is in it together."

Shame threatened to choke Rodriguez. Along with that shame, though, came an odd pride. Bathsheba and Antoinette still thought Xerxes was alive. That gave them pleasure and hope. And they thought so because of him.

"Ask you somethin' else?" Bathsheba said.

Rodriguez didn't sigh, though he felt like it. "Go ahead," he said, and wondered what sort of trouble her next question would land him in.

"Antoinette give herself to you, it keep her alive any longer?"

The question itself didn't surprise him. The brutal bluntness of it did. Again, he did his best to evade: "I got a wife at home down in Sonora. I don't need nobody here."

"Uh- *huh.* " Her agreement was more devastating than calling him a liar would have been. And he didn't tomcat around the women's side the way a lot of male guards did. Every now and then, yes, but only every now and then.

"Is true. I do," he said. He usually felt bad after he took a woman here. But not while he did it—oh, no, not then.

"All right." Bathsheba sounded as if that wasn't worth quarreling about. She got to the point: "Antoinette give herself to some *other* guard, then, it keep her alive any longer?"

He couldn't very well get around that, however much he wanted to. He gave the best answer he could, saying, "Maybe. Ain't no way to be sure."

"Ain't no way to be sure about nothin', is there?" Somehow, Bathsheba still didn't sound bitter. "Reckon some o' them ofays, they think it's funny to lie down with a girl one day an' reduce her

population the nex'."

She was righter than she knew, or maybe she knew the way guards' minds worked much too well. "I never done nothin' like that," Rodriguez said. That was true, but it didn't do him much good. And it didn't make him sound very good, even to himself.

"Didn't say you did," Bathsheba answered. "Wouldn't've asked if I reckoned you was one o' them. I is pretty much used up. Don't want to go, mind, but if I gots to, I gots to. But Antoinette, she jus' startin'

out. You do somethin' fo' her, you make an ol' nigger cleanin' lady happy."

"I do what I can." Rodriguez had no idea how much that would be. "She don't got to do nothin' like that for me."

Bathsheba started to cry. "You is a good man," she said, even if Rodriguez wasn't so sure of that himself right now. "You is a *decent* man. I reckon you is a God-fearin' man." She cocked her head to one side and eyed him, the streaks of tears on her cheeks shining in the sun. "So what you doin' here, doin' what you doin'?"

He had an answer. He'd always hated *mallates,* ever since they did their level best to kill him after he put on the Confederate uniform. Like any Freedom Party man, he thought Negroes meant nothing but danger and misfortune for the Confederate States. The country would be better off without them.

But how did he explain that to a colored woman in rags, her hair going all gray, who'd just offered her only daughter to him not for her own sake but for the younger woman's? How did he explain that to a wife and daughter who loved an old man on the other side of the camp, an old man now dead, an old man whose death Rodriguez didn't have the heart to tell them about?

He couldn't explain it. Even trying was a losing fight. He just sighed and said, "I got my job."

"Don't seem like reason enough." Had Bathsheba got mad and screamed at him, he could have lost his temper and stormed off. But she didn't. And that meant he couldn't. He had to listen to her instead. He had three stripes on his sleeve and a submachine gun in his hands. She had nothing, and chances were neither she nor her pretty daughter had long to live.

So why did he feel he was the one at a disadvantage? Why did he feel she could call the shots? Why did he wish he were still down on the farm outside of Baroyeca? He didn't know why. He didn't like wondering, not even a little bit.

J ake Featherston was not a happy man. Being unhappy was nothing new for him. He ran on discontent, his own and others', the way a motorcar ran on gasoline. He recalled only two times in his life when he *was* happy, and neither lasted long: when he took the oath of office as President of the CSA, and when his armies drove all before them pushing north from the Ohio to Lake Erie and cutting the United States in half.

Being President was still pretty good, but it was also a lot more work than he ever thought it would be.

Hard work corroded happiness. And Al Smith, damn him, was supposed to lie down with his belly in the air after the Confederates went and licked him. When he didn't, he dragged Jake and the Confederacy into a long war, the last thing anybody on this side of the border wanted.

Now the CSA would have to take a Yankee punch, too. Jake muttered under his breath. Like any barroom brawler, he wanted to get in the first punch and clean up afterwards, especially when the other guy was bigger. He tried it, and he didn't knock out the USA. He didn't have enough to hit again.

Standing on the defensive went against every ounce of instinct in him. Instinct or not, sometimes you had no choice.

His secretary looked into his office. "The Attorney General is here to see you, sir."

"Thank you kindly, Lulu. Bring him in," Jake said.

Ferd Koenig seemed bigger and bulkier than ever. "Hello, Jake," he said—he was one of the handful of men these days who could call the President by his first name.

"Hello, Ferd," Jake answered. "Have a seat. Pour yourself some coffee if you want to." A pot sat on a hot plate in the corner. Jake smacked a desk drawer. "Or I've got a fifth in here if you'd rather have that."

"Coffee'll do." Koenig fixed himself a cup, then sat down. After a sip,

he said, “Want to thank you for letting that Freedom Party Guard unit go into action in west Texas. They’ve done a pretty good job.”

“Better than I expected, to tell you the truth,” Featherston said. “You want to pick up recruiting for your combat wing, I won’t tell you no.”

“Thanks, Mr. President. With your kind permission, I will do that,” Koenig said. “We need a fire brigade when things get hot.”

“That’s a fact. Other fact is, some of the generals are getting jumpy. I can feel it,” Jake said. “A counterweight to the Army could come in goddamn handy one of these days. You never can tell.”

“Lord, isn’t that the truth?” Koenig set the coffee cup on the desk. “Pour me a shot in there after all, would you?”

“Help yourself.” Jake got out the bottle and slid it across the desk. “Shame to do that to good sippin’

whiskey, but suit yourself.”

“I want the jolt, but I run on coffee these days.” Koenig added a hefty slug of bourbon, then tasted. He nodded. “Yeah, that’ll do the trick.” He eyed Jake. “You really mean that about the Guards units?”

“Hell, yes.” Jake poured himself a shot, too, only without the coffee. He raised the glass. “Mud in your eye.” After a respectful drink—he couldn’t just knock it back, not after he called it sipping whiskey—he went on, “If Party guards aren’t loyal, nobody will be. You raise those units, and by God I’ll see they’re equipped with the best we’ve got.”

“Army won’t like it,” the Attorney General predicted.

“Fuck the Army,” Featherston said. “That’s the whole point. So what else have we got going on?”

“Did you forget?” Ferd Koenig asked. “Day after tomorrow, we clean out Richmond. Isn’t it about time the Confederate States had a nigger-free capital?”

“Oh, I remember, all right. You don’t need to worry about that,” Jake said. “All the cops and stalwarts and guards are geared up for it.” He chuckled. “With the niggers gone, we won’t need so many of those people around here. We can put some of ’em in the Army—and in your Party Guards outfits—and some in the factories, and we’ll be

better off both ways.”

“If we didn’t have all those Mexicans coming in, we’d never be able to make enough to stay in the war,”

Koenig said.

“Yeah, well, that’s the carrot we give Francisco José,” Jake answered. “He gives us soldiers to fight the niggers in the countryside, we keep the frontier open for his workers. That’s his safety valve, like. They get jobs here instead of going hungry down in Mexico and stirring up trouble against him. He gives us a hard time, we close the border… and start shipping the rebels old bolt-action Tredegars we don’t need any more. His old man made it through a civil war—we can see how he likes another one.” His laugh held all the cynicism in the world.

“Sounds like you’ve got that under control, all right.” Koenig’s role was domestic. He didn’t presume to mess around with foreign affairs. He had his place, he knew it, he was good at it, and he kept to it, all of which made him uniquely valuable to Jake Featherston. He added, “The sooner we clean out all the niggers, the sooner we can throw everything we’ve got at the USA.”

“That’s the idea, all right,” Jake agreed. Koenig didn’t know anything about the uranium bomb.

Featherston didn’t tell him anything, either. That secret couldn’t be too tightly held. He did say, “Starting day after tomorrow, Richmond’ll be a better place. You go in right at sunup like usual?”

“That’s what I’ve got in mind. We’ll have all day to move ’em out then. Yankee bombers aren’t likely to complicate things by daylight, either,” Koenig answered, and Jake nodded. As far as he was concerned, the difference between day and night was largely arbitrary. He’d always been a night owl, and spending so much time underground only encouraged him to catnap around the clock.

He was asleep at sunrise the day the cleanout started, but he got a wakeup call: literally, for the telephone by his cot jangled. That telephone didn’t ring unless something big was going on. He grabbed it in the middle of the second ring. “Featherston,” he said hoarsely, and then, “What the fuck have the damnyankees done to us now?”

“Not the damnyankees, Mr. President.” Ferd Koenig’s voice was on the other end of the line. “It’s the goddamn niggers. We’ve got…” He paused, maybe looking for a way to sugarcoat what came next, but he

almost always did speak his mind, and this morning proved no exception: “We’ve got an uprising on our hands.”

Jake sat bolt upright. “What’s going on? Fill me in fast.”

“Damn smokes must’ve known we were coming for ’em,” the Attorney General answered. “We’ve already had, I dunno, six or eight people bombs go off. They’ve got rifles and grenades and Featherston Fizzes and a couple of machine guns, anyway. They mined the streets into the colored quarter, the sneaky bastards, and they blew two armored cars to hell and gone. It’s a *fight,* sir, nothing else but.”

“Son of a bitch. Son of a motherfucking bitch,” Jake Featherston said. “All right, if they want a fight, they can damn well have one. Let me get hold of the War Department. If we have to, we’ll blow up the whole nigger part of town”—basically, southeast Richmond—“and all the coons inside it. That’ll do, by God.”

He sounded as if he looked forward to it. The reason for that was simple: he did.

“All right, Mr. President. I wanted to let you know,” Koenig said.

“Well, now I know. Get off the line, and I’ll get you what you need to finish the job.” Jake waited till the Attorney General hung up, then called Nathan Bedford Forrest III. He wasn’t surprised to find the chief of the General Staff at his desk. “Forrest, the niggers are raising a ruckus. What can we pull from north of here to squash those stinking, backstabbing shitheels flat?”

“Well, sir, there is a problem with that,” Forrest said slowly. “If we pull too much or make it too obvious what we’re doing, the damnyankees are liable to try and break through up there. They’re liable to make it, too—we’re already stretched pretty damn thin north of the city.”

“They won’t do it.” Jake sounded very sure. He wondered why. Then he found an answer: “They’re building up out West, not right here. You know that as well as I do.” He even thought he was telling the truth. And he added, “Besides, we can’t let the niggers get away with this kind of crap, or we’ll have trouble from here to fucking Guaymas. I want men. I want armor. I want artillery. And I want Asskickers. By the time they all get done, won’t be a nigger left on his feet in there.”

He waited. If Nathan Bedford Forrest III did any more bitching, the

C.S. General Staff would have a new chief in nothing flat. Forrest must have sensed as much, too, for he said, “All right, Mr. President.

They’ll get here as fast as they can.”

“Faster than that,” Featherston said, but it was only reflex complaint; Forrest had satisfied him. He slammed down the telephone, quickly dressed, and did something he didn’t do every day: he went up above ground.

Shockoe Hill gave him a good vantage point. When he looked southeast, he swore at the black smoke rising over the colored part of Richmond. He heard the rattle of small-arms fire and the occasional explosion, too. “Christ!” he said. The police and stalwarts and Party Guards always came loaded for bear, just in case. Well, they found a bear and then some this time.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III proved good as his word. About half an hour later, the first Mule dive bombers screamed down out of the sky above the colored quarter. Whatever the blacks had in the way of small arms, they didn’t have any antiaircraft guns. The flat, harsh *crump!* of bursting bombs echoed across Richmond.

But the Confederate Asskickers weren’t the only airplanes in the sky. U.S. fighters, flying at not much above rooftop level, darted over southeastern Richmond to strafe the people cleaning out the Negroes.

Then they zoomed away to the north again.

Jake Featherston did some more swearing at that, swearing sulfurous enough to make his guards and the crews of the antiaircraft guns on the cratered Gray House grounds stare at him in startled admiration. He didn’t know whether the damnyankees had urged Richmond’s Negroes to rise. He didn’t know, and he hardly cared. He did know they had good spies inside the city, to hear about it and take advantage of it so fast.

He called for his driver and pointed toward the trouble. “Take me down there, quick as you can.”

“Uh, yes, Mr. President.” The driver saluted. But then he went on, “Sir, what good will you be able to do there? You don’t want to give the coons a shot at you.”

“Don’t tell me what I want to do,” Jake snapped. “Just get moving, goddammit.”

The driver did. People were in the habit of doing what Jake Featherston said. *A good thing, too,* he thought. *A damn good thing.* Twenty minutes later, he was at what was for all practical purposes the fighting front. He found Ferd Koenig looking ridiculous with a helmet on his jowly head. A moment later, when a bullet cracked past, Featherston wished for a helmet of his own—not that any helmet ever made would stop a direct hit.

"It's a war, Mr. President," Koenig said unhappily.

"I see that." Featherston wasn't unhappy. He was furious. If the Negroes thought they could get away with this, they needed to think again. "Send in everybody we've got," he told Koenig. "This has to be stamped out right now."

"Shouldn't we wait till the soldiers get here?" the Attorney General asked, licking his lips. "Been kind of hot for the manpower we have."

"Send them in," Featherston repeated. "When we have the soldiers later, we'll use 'em. But if we can end it in a hurry, we'll do that. We've already got the Asskickers in action. What more do you want, egg in your beer?"

So the attack went in. And the Negro fighters, waiting in prepared positions, shredded it. Wounded whites staggered back out of the fighting. So did overage cops who looked as if they were on the point of having heart attacks. They killed some Negroes and brought out some others, but they didn't break the line. Jake Featherston swore yet again. Now he'd have to do it the hard way.

F rom the bridge, Sam Carsten looked at the *Josephus Daniels* with a kind of fond dismay. They'd done strange things to his ship. Her paint was the wrong shade of gray. Sheet metal changed the outline of the bridge and the gun turrets. Her sailors wore whites of the wrong cut. His own uniform was dark gray, not blue, and so were the rest of the officers'.

By the name painted on both sides of her bow, the *Josephus Daniels* was the CSS *Hot Springs,* a Confederate destroyer escort operating in the North Atlantic. The main danger coming south from Boston was that she would run into a U.S. patrol aircraft or submersible and get sunk by her own side.

The Confederate naval ensign, a square version of the C.S. battle flag, completed the disguise.

“If they capture us, they’ll shoot us for spies.” Lieutenant Pat Cooley didn’t sound worried. He was almost childishly excited at playing dress-up. The possibility of getting shot hardly seemed real to him.

It didn’t seem real to Sam, either, but for a different reason. “Not a whole lot of POWs off Navy ships,”

he said. “If something goes wrong, they’ll just damn well sink us.” That wasn’t romantic. It had no cloak-and-dagger flavor to it. He didn’t care. It was real.

By now, barring bad luck, they were too far south for U.S. airplanes to harry them. Subs were always a risk, but Sam didn’t know what to do about it except monitor the hydrophones as closely as he could.

The crew was doing that.

He had the best set of C.S. Navy recognition signals his U.S. Navy superiors could give him. He also had an ace in the hole, a deserter from the CSA named Antonio Jones. Normally, Sam would have been leery about a Confederate traitor. Anybody like that was too likely to be playing a double game. But he—and, again, his superiors—had a good reason for thinking Jones reliable.

The man was black as the ace of spades.

He came from Cuba, the only state in the CSA where Negroes had surnames. He pronounced his

“Hone-ace”: he spoke English with an accent half Confederate drawl, half syrupy Cubano Spanish. He hated the homeland he’d left behind, and he burned to go back there. And so here he was, with a disguised destroyer escort for transport…among other things.

“Not the first time I’ve been in the gun-running business,” Carsten remarked.

“No?” the exec said, as he was supposed to.

“Nope. I took rifles into Ireland in the last go-round, just to help keep England busy,” Sam said. “The Irish paid us off in whiskey. Don’t expect that’ll happen in Cuba.”

“No, suh,” Antonio Jones said. He wore a mess steward’s uniform. High cheekbones and a strong nose argued for a little Indian blood in

him. “But maybe you get some rum.”

“Oh, *I* won’t,” Sam said. “That’ll be for the fellows who do the real work. Long as they don’t get drunk and disorderly, I’ll look the other way.”

Pat Cooley raised an eyebrow, but lowered it again in a hurry. A lot of skippers would do the same thing, not just a man who was a mustang. The exec contented himself with saying, “Let’s hope they have the chance to drink it.”

“Not all these little tricks are easy,” Sam said. “We just have to do what we can and hope for the best, same as always.”

They were off the coast of South Carolina when a seaplane of unfamiliar design buzzed out to look them over. The mock Confederate sailors ran to their guns. With luck, that wouldn’t alarm the fliers in the seaplane, which also sported the Confederate battle flag on wings, fuselage, and tail.

After a couple of passes, the seaplane waggled its wings at the pseudo-*Hot Springs* and flew away.

“Let’s just hope it didn’t fly low enough to read our name,” Pat Cooley said.

“I don’t *think* it did.” Sam hoped he wasn’t whistling in the dark. The people the seaplane wirelessed probably wouldn’t be surprised to find a C.S. destroyer escort in these waters. They probably *would* be surprised to find the *Hot Springs* around here. They also probably wouldn’t be very happy. The *Josephus Daniels* wasn’t fast enough to run away from everything they’d throw at her. She wasn’t armed well enough to fight it off, either. All she could do was go down swinging.

“Y’all are *bueno*?” Antonio Jones asked.

“Well, I’ll tell you—if we’re not, we’ll know pretty damn quick.” Sam went from the bridge to the wireless shack. “Any Confederate traffic for us or about us?” he asked the men with earphones.

“Nothing for us, sir,” one of the yeomen answered. “If there’s anything about us, it’s not in clear.”

“If it’s in code, chances are we’re shafted,” Sam said. “All right—thanks.” He returned to his station, at least somewhat reassured.

Another seaplane examined them when they neared the southern tip of Florida. They must have passed that inspection, too. If they hadn't, cruisers and land-based dive bombers would have called on them. As far as Sam knew—as far as anybody in the U.S. Navy knew—the Confederates had no airplane carriers. It made sense that they wouldn't; they didn't need that kind of navy. Land-based air and coast-defense ships could keep the United States from mounting major operations against them, and submarines let them strike at the USA from far away.

"You know what our best chance is?" Sam said as the *Josephus Daniels* neared the northeastern coast of Cuba.

"Sure," his exec answered. "Our best chance is that the Confederates won't figure we're crazy enough to try anything like this in the first place."

"Just what I was thinking—maybe we ought to get married," Sam said.

"Sorry, sir. No offense, but you're not my type," Cooley answered. They both laughed.

Antonio Jones looked from one of them to the other. "This ain't funny, *amigos,* " he said. "What that Featherston bastard is doing to colored people in my *estado,* it's a shame and a disgrace. We got to go to the mountains and fight back."

"Sorry, Mr. Jones." Sam didn't think he'd ever called a Negro *mister* before, but orders were to treat him like a big shot. "We know your people are in trouble. We're not laughing about that. But my crew is in trouble, too, and it will be till we get back into U.S. waters." *And even after that,* he added, but only to himself. "We *can* laugh about that. We'd go nuts if we didn't, chances are."

"Ah. Now I understand." Jones sketched a salute. "All right, *Señor Capitán.* We do this, too, against our worries."

The sun sank into the sea with tropical abruptness. No long, lazy twilights in these latitudes; darkness came on in a hurry. Pat Cooley had the conn as the *Josephus Daniels* approached the Cuban coast.

Sam didn't want to risk the ship in any way he didn't have to. What they were doing was already risky enough by the nature of things.

"One patrol boat where it's not supposed to be could ruin our whole

day," Cooley remarked.

"All the guns are manned, and Y-ranging should let us see him before he sees us," Sam said. "With luck, we'll sink him before he gets word off about us."

Cooley nodded. Sam wondered how much luck they'd already used up when those C.S. seaplanes believed they were what they pretended to be. Did they have enough left? He'd find out before long.

Y-ranging gear also let them spot the Cuban coast. Although it was blacked out, the darkness wasn't so thorough as it would have been farther north. U.S. bombers weren't likely to visit here. Eyeing what had to be two fair-sized towns, Sam said, "That's Guardalavaca to starboard, and that has to be Banes to starboard. We are where we're supposed to be. Nice navigating, Mr. Cooley."

"Thank you very much, sir," the exec said.

Sailors were hauling crates of rifles and submachine guns and machine guns and cartridges up on deck.

Soon they'd be lowered into the *Josephus Daniels'* boats and brought ashore…if the destroyer escort got the recognition signal she was supposed to.

That thought had hardly crossed Carsten's mind before three automobiles on a beach aimed their headlights across the water in the warship's general direction. Antonio Jones breathed a sigh of relief.

Sam breathed another one. Anxiety tempered his—were they sailing into a trap? He had to find out.

"Thank you, sir," the black Cuban answered. "God willing"—he crossed himself—"the *Partido de Libertad* here will have some new worries." They went out on deck together. Sailors in ersatz Confederate uniforms swung crate after crate down into the waiting boats. Jones continued, "It is not as much white man against black man here as it is on the mainland of the CSA. There are many of mixed blood on this island, and even some whites help us as much as they can."

"Good. That's good, Mr. Jones." Sam did his best to pronounce it the way the Negro did. He was uneasily aware that his own country wasn't doing everything it could to help the Negroes in the

Confederate States. Well, the United States were doing *something.* The proof of that was right here.

Sailors scrambled down nets to board the boats and take the guns and ammo ashore.

Antonio Jones went to the port rail to go down himself. “I hope you stay safe, *Capitán* Carsten,” he said.

“I hope you do, too,” Sam said. “Maybe after the war’s done, we’ll get together and talk about it over a beer.”

“I hope so, yes.” Jones sketched a salute and swung himself over the rail. He descended as nimbly as any sailor. Motors chugging, the boats pulled away from the *Josephus Daniels* and went in toward the beach.

Nothing to do but wait, Sam thought. He would rather be doing. He’d smuggled arms into Ireland himself. He knew the ploy worked right away. If firing broke out on the beach now… *Well, in that case I’m screwed, too.*

The boats came back after what felt like years. His watch insisted it was more like forty-five minutes.

Sailors hoisted the boats up one after another. “Smooth as rum, sir,” said one of the men back from the beach. The simile made Sam suspicious, or more than suspicious. Remembering the good Irish whiskey he’d downed in the last war, he said not a word.

“Goddamnedest thing you ever saw, too,” a grizzled CPO added. “They had this kid running things on the beach. If he was a day over sixteen, I’m a nigger. But he knew what was what, Fidel did. He gave orders in that half-Spanish, half-English they talk here, and people jumped like you wouldn’t believe. He was a white kid, too, not a smoke like Mr. Antonio Jones.”

“Jones said whites and blacks were in it together down here,” Sam said. “Do we have all the boats aboard? If we do, we better get out of here.”

They did. The *Josephus Daniels* made for the open ocean. Aboard her, sailors put on their own uniforms for the first time since setting out from Boston. They started dismantling the sheet-metal camouflage that turned her into a Confederate ship. When morning came, they would give her a proper paint job, too. They couldn’t bring her back into U.S. waters looking the way she did, not unless they wanted her

sent to the bottom in short order.

“We got away with it,” Sam said to Pat Cooley.

“Did you think we wouldn’t, sir?” Cooley asked.

“Well, I’m damn glad we did,” Sam said, and let it go at that.

C larence Potter fitted a new clip to his Tredegar automatic rifle. He worked the bolt to chamber the first round. That done, he was ready to empty the twenty-five-round clip into anything that looked even a little bit like trouble.

The Negro uprising in Richmond was having unexpected effects. One of them was reminding even officers who normally spent their time deep in the bowels of the War Department that war meant fighting, and fighting meant killing. Nathan Bedford Forrest III’s great-grandfather first said that, and the cavalry general from the War of Secession knew what he was talking about.

Small bands of blacks had managed to get out through the barbed-wire perimeter that was supposed to seal the colored quarter off from the outside world. Bombed-out buildings gave them hiding places uncountable during the day. When night fell, they came out and shot whoever they could find. Rumor said a Negro’d come close to killing Jake Featherston. Potter didn’t know if he believed rumor. He didn’t know how he felt about it even if it was true, either. He didn’t love the President of the CSA, but he knew the country needed him.

His own foxhole was just inside the colored district. “Come on!” he shouted to the Confederate soldiers entering the perimeter. “They’re shooting back from over there, and from over there, too.” The Virginia Confederate Seminary ordained black preachers; it was as close to an institution of higher learning as Negroes could have in the CSA. For now, its large, solid buildings made a splendid strongpoint for Negroes armed with old-fashioned bolt-action Tredegars, sporting rifles, shotguns, pistols, and whatever else they could get their hands on.

They even had a few mortars, perhaps captured, perhaps homemade, perhaps sneaked in by the damnyankees. But what they had was no match for the artillery, barrels, and air power the Confederacy used against them, to say nothing of the ground troops clearing them out one block, one building, at a time.

More Confederates, some in gray, some in butternut, led a long column of black captives out of the colored district. Any time a Negro hesitated, a soldier or Freedom Party guard shot him—or her. If Asskickers bombed apartment blocks into rubble, who could say how many people died in the explosions or in the fires that followed? And who cared, except the Negroes themselves? Anybody blown to bits now didn't need shipping to a camp later. Population reduction came in all different flavors.

Antiaircraft guns started going off. Clarence Potter swore and dove into a foxhole. The Yankees sent fighters into Richmond whenever they could. Helping the black uprising was good for them, just as helping the Mormons helped the CSA. But the U.S. border was much closer to Richmond than the Confederates were to Salt Lake City. *Too bad,* Potter thought.

The U.S. fighters came in low, the way they always did. They blasted whatever they could, then roared off. A few bullets slammed into the sandbags that helped strengthen Potter's foxhole. Dirt leaked out of them and onto him.

Leaking dirt he didn't mind. Leaking blood was a different story. Potter straightened up again when he was reasonably sure the enemy airplanes were gone. A latecomer shot past then, but didn't open up on him. He let out a sigh of relief. That could have been…unpleasant.

"Potter!" someone yelled. "Potter!"

"I'm here!" Clarence Potter shouted back. By Jake Featherston's orders, no one named anyone else's rank inside the perimeter. Shouting out for a general only made the man a tempting target for snipers.

Quite a few officers and even noncoms didn't wear their rank badges for the same reason. Potter did, but more from a sense of fussy precision than out of vanity.

He kept calling till the runner found his foxhole. "Here you are, sir," the man said, and handed him a sealed envelope.

"Thanks," Potter said. Things did happen outside this colored district, though proving as much wasn't easy, not when the capital was on fire. He broke the seal, took out the papers inside it, read through them, and nodded to himself. "So that's ready to get going, is it?"

“I don’t know what you mean, sir,” the runner said. “Do I need to take an answer back to anybody?”

“No, that’s all right. This just lets me know something’s going to happen. You can leave,” Potter answered. The young Confederate soldier didn’t seem sorry to disappear. No doubt he would have been happier running messages through the War Department’s miles of underground corridors. Potter couldn’t blame him. Rifle and machine-gun bullets hardly ever flew down those corridors. Here, now…

Well, he’d got this message where it needed to go. Potter lit a match and burned it. Confederate bombers flying out of extreme northwestern Sonora were going to try to hit the U.S. uranium works in western Washington. It was a gamble in all kinds of ways. Other C.S. bombers taking off at the same time would head toward Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Denver. With luck, the damnyankees’ fancy electronics—better than anything the CSA had—would make them concentrate on those other bombers, not on the ones that really counted.

With a little more luck, the bombers would do some real damage when they got over the target. They had to fly a long way to get there: something on the order of 1,200 miles. The Confederacy didn’t have long-range heavy bombers that could carry a big bomb load that far and then turn around and fly home.

If the war broke out in 1945, say, instead of 1941, the Confederacy probably would have such airplanes. But the country needed to use what it could get its hands on now.

Even starting out with a light bomb load, those bombers wouldn’t be coming home again. They would land at a strip on Vancouver Island, a strip of whose existence the United States were—Potter fervently hoped—ignorant. Assuming everything went the way it was supposed to, pilots and aircrews would eventually get smuggled back to the Confederacy. Canadian rebels would wreck the aircraft so the USA couldn’t learn much from them. (So the Canucks claimed, anyhow. If they found people to fly those birds against the damnyankees, Potter suspected they would. He didn’t mind. He wished them luck.) Assuming everything went the way it was supposed to…Clarence Potter laughed, not that it was funny.

Things had a habit of going wrong. Any soldier, and especially any soldier in the intelligence business, could testify to that.

He laughed again. Assuming everything went the way it was supposed to, Richmond's Negroes would all be in camps by now. Assuming everything went the way it was supposed to, Potter himself would be back under the War Department figuring out sneaky ways to make life miserable for the damnyankees and to keep them from making it miserable for his own country. That knowledge didn't give him any great faith things would go the way they were supposed to.

But the Confederate States had to try. The United States started the race towards uranium sooner, and they were running faster. They had more trained people to attack the problem, and they had more industrial capacity to spare from straight-out, short-term war production.

"Thank you, Professor FitzBelmont," Potter muttered, there in his foxhole. Who would have thought an unworldly physicist would see something a spymaster missed? Physics was FitzBelmont's business, but all the same….

Even if everything did go the way it was supposed to, how long would this raid stall the United States?

Days? Weeks? Months? Potter laughed at himself. He couldn't know ahead of time. Neither could anybody else.

"The longer, the better," Potter said. And that was the Lord's truth. One raid on that facility might get through. A follow-up seemed unlikely to.

More Negroes came back past his foxhole. They were skinny and dirty. Despair etched their faces.

They'd done everything they could to hold off the Confederate authorities. They'd done everything they could, and it wasn't enough. Plenty of their friends and loved ones lay dead in the rubble from which they were pulled, and now they were going off to the camps in spite of everything.

Potter felt like waving good-bye to them. He didn't—that was asking for a bullet. But the temptation lingered. Too bad, fools!

Of course, if the damnyankees won this war as they'd won the last one, they would jeer the Confederates the same way. And they would have won the right. Potter tried to imagine what the Confederate States would be like with U.S. soldiers occupying them. He grimaced. It wouldn't be pretty.

The Yankees got soft after the Great War. They paid for it, too. They weren't as dumb as most Confederates thought they were. They weren't dumb enough to make the same mistake twice in a row. If they came down on the CSA this time around, they'd come down with both feet.

Of itself, Potter's gaze swung to the west, toward Washington University. How were Professor FitzBelmont and his crew of scientists doing? How much time did they need? How far ahead of them were their U.S. opposite numbers? How long would the C.S. bombers set the damnyankees back?

There. He was back where he started from. He had lots of good questions, and no good answers.

Rattling and clanking, a couple of Confederate barrels ground forward against the rebellious Negroes.

They were obsolescent machines left over from the early days of the war: only two-inch guns, poorly sloped armor. Having to use them—and their highly trained crews—for internal-security work was galling just the same.

A machine gun in the ruins of a grocery opened up on the barrels. That wasn't a C.S. weapon; it came from the USA. Its slower rate of fire made it immediately recognizable. Potter cursed under his breath.

Yes, the damnyankees helped the Negro revolt in the CSA, the same as the Confederates helped the Mormons. But the Mormon uprising was fizzling out, while Negroes went right on causing trouble.

Bullets ricocheted off the forward barrel's turret and glacis plate, some of them striking sparks from the armor. Even experienced soldiers tried to knock out barrels with machine guns, and it couldn't be done.

A Confederate infantryman fired an antibarrel rocket into the battered store. The machine gun suddenly fell silent. Antibarrel rockets were made for piercing armor plate. Confederate soldiers had quickly discovered they also made excellent housebreakers.

The barrels clattered on. When somebody with a rifle fired at them, the lead barrel sprayed the house from which he was shooting with machine-gun fire. But that rifleman was only a distraction. A skinny Negro kid—he couldn't have been more than fourteen—leaped up onto the second barrel, yanked open the hatch over the cupola, and threw in a Featherston Fizz.

A C.S. foot soldier with a submachine gun cut him down a moment later—a moment too late. Flames and black, greasy smoke burst from all the turret hatches. The gunner got out, but he was on fire. He took only a few steps before crumpling to the ground, and writhed like a moth that flew into a gas flame.

Then the barrel brewed up as its ammunition cooked off. Fire burst from it. Potter knew the commander and loader were stuck in there. He didn't think the driver or bow gunner got out, either.

Five good men gone. Five men who wouldn't fight the USA again. Five men the CSA couldn't afford to lose—but they were lost. Clarence Potter swore one more time. To his way of thinking, this proved the Confederacy had to get rid of its Negroes. What did they do but cause trouble and grief?

What the Confederacy might be if it treated Negroes like men and women rather than beasts…never even crossed his mind.

VII

F lora Blackford was listening to a Navy captain testifying about support for black rebels in the Confederate state of Cuba when a page approached her and whispered, "Excuse me, Congresswoman, but you have an urgent telephone call outside."

"Who is it?" she whispered back. This wasn't the most exciting testimony the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had ever heard, but it was important.

"Assistant Secretary Roosevelt," the page answered.

"Oh." Flora got to her feet. "Please excuse me," she told her colleagues. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

The page led her to one of the telephones outside the hearing room. "He's on this line."

"Thank you." Flora picked up the handset and said, "This is Congresswoman Blackford."

"Hello, Flora," Franklin Roosevelt said. "Can you come by here?"

"Right this minute?" she asked.

"Well, you might want to," Roosevelt answered. And what did that

mean? Something like, *If you don't you'll be sorry.* Flora couldn't think of anything else it was likely to mean.

"On my way," she said, and hung up. "Please apologize to the rest of the committee for me," she told the page. "I'm afraid I need to confer with the Assistant Secretary of War." The young man nodded and hurried away. Flora wondered what kind of connections he had, to be wearing a sharp blue suit instead of a green-gray uniform. She also wondered how long he would go on wearing his suit. Congressional pages did get conscripted. At least one had got killed.

And, as she hurried to the exit, she wondered what the other members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War would think. People knew she often talked with Franklin Roosevelt. She hoped to heaven they didn't know why. If they didn't know why, what would they think? That she and Roosevelt were having an affair? He was married, but that mattered little in high government circles. Reporters knew better than to write such stories. People called it a gentleman's agreement, though Flora had never seen anything very gentlemanly about it.

She walked over to the War Department. Sentries there scrupulously compared the photo on her ID

card to her face. They searched her handbag. A woman took her into a closed room and patted her down. And they called Roosevelt's office to make sure she was expected. Only when they were fully satisfied did a soldier escort her to that office far underground.

"Call when you need to come back up, ma'am," the soldier said: a polite way of warning, *Don't go wandering around by yourself.*

"I will," Flora promised.

Roosevelt's chief secretary or administrative assistant or whatever he was led her in to the Assistant Secretary of War. Then the man left, closing the door behind him. Did he knew about the work on uranium bombs? Flora wouldn't have cared to guess one way or the other.

"How are you, Franklin?" she asked.

"Oh, a little tired, but not too bad," he answered. He looked worn and weary, as if he was running on too much coffee, too many cigarettes in that jaunty holder of his, and not enough sleep. Few people with important jobs were doing anything else. He nodded, perhaps trying

to make himself believe it. “No, I’m not too bad myself, but the news could be better.”

“What is the news?” Flora asked.

“The Confederates bombed our Hanford facility in the wee small hours this morning.”

“Gevalt!” She sank into a chair. Her knees didn’t want to hold her up. “How bad is it? Do I want to know?”

“Well, it’s not good,” Roosevelt said. “They know we’re working on this, they knew where we’re working on it, they know it’s important, and they must be working on it, too, or they wouldn’t try so hard to shut us down.”

Every word of that was true. But he hadn’t told her what she most wanted to know. “How much damage did they do?”

“Oh. That.” His resonant laugh filled the office. “Now that the sun’s up out there, we can see it’s less than we feared at first. They don’t have aircraft that can carry heavy loads a long way, and it’s hard to bomb accurately at night anyway. They hit some of the works, but they didn’t damage the plant where we’re separating U-235 and U-238 or the pile—that’s what they’re calling the gadget that makes more energy than goes into it.”

“That would have been bad,” Flora said. “Repairing those things would take a long time.” She didn’t even mention money.

“Repair isn’t the only worry. If the bombers hit those, we’d have to worry about radioactive contamination like you wouldn’t believe,” Roosevelt said. Flora must have looked blank, for he went on,

“That kind of thing can cause cancer. It can poison you. If it’s strong enough, it can come right out and kill you. And it’s very hard to clean up.”

“But it didn’t happen?” Flora said.

“It didn’t happen. Hardly any contamination, in fact,” Roosevelt said.

“Good—I guess.” Flora hadn’t even thought about—what did Roosevelt call it?—radioactive contamination. She hadn’t known such a thing was possible, or that anybody needed to worry about it.

She was just starting to realize how much she didn't know about this whole uranium business.

"It's very good, believe me," Roosevelt said. "They could have made things worse for us than they did.

We're not badly delayed, anyhow."

"That *is* good," Flora said. "What kind of program do the Confederate States have? How far along are they? How do we go about finding out?"

"I don't know, I don't know, and we'll have to find a way, respectively." The Assistant Secretary of War sighed. "That's all I can tell you right now. As I say, they're working on it, the same as we are.

We're in a race, and we'd better win."

Eight words. As far as Flora could see, they said everything that needed saying. "If we knew where they're working, we could visit them the same way they just visited us," she said.

"If we knew that, we would have done it a long time ago," Roosevelt said. "We've got to look harder, that's all."

"It's a long way from Confederate territory to Washington State," Flora said. "That's one of the reasons you put the uranium works out there, I suppose. How did they manage to fly bombers all the way up there? And what happened to them afterwards?"

"They got cute," Franklin Roosevelt said unhappily. "I don't know what else to tell you. They flew a whole swarm of airplanes out of northwestern Sonora. Some of them headed for Los Angeles. Some attacked Las Vegas and Boulder Dam in Nevada. And some…some we just forgot about." He looked angry and embarrassed at the same time. "Airplanes flying over the middle of the country—too many people assumed they were ours and didn't worry about them. That won't happen again, either."

"They didn't go back to the CSA, did they?" Flora asked.

He shook his strong-chinned head. "No. We might have done something about that. I hope to heaven we would have done something about it, anyhow. But they flew on to Vancouver Island and landed at strips there. The crews were gone by the time we got people there, and they set fire to the airplanes—or maybe the Canadians who

helped them get away did. I don't know about that. I do know it was a very smart operation, and we're lucky it didn't hurt us a lot worse than it did."

"What can we do to make sure it doesn't happen again?" Flora asked.

"You do know the right questions to ask," Roosevelt said. Flattery? Truth? Both at once? He went on,

"From now on, we'll have fighters overhead all the time. That's effective immediately. We'll beef up the antiaircraft guns as soon as we can, and we'll put a Y-ranging station close by so we can spot the enemy a long way off. And we'll hit Confederate airports in Sonora and Chihuahua and even Texas to make it harder for them to fly up north."

"What do we do about auto bombs? What do we do about people bombs?" Flora asked.

"Well, the area is well fenced, and the fences are a long way out from the buildings—for one thing, we need room if experiments get out of hand," Roosevelt answered. "We have a garrison there." He wrote himself a note. "We'd better reinforce it, and we'd better add some armored vehicles, too. You *do* know the right questions." Maybe he really meant it this time.

"Did we lose any important people?" Flora asked.

"No. Absolutely not. No. We don't have as many first-rate physicists as Germany does, but we've got plenty of good people to take us where we're going," Roosevelt said. "And the bombers didn't hit any of them last night, so *that's* all right. If we find the Confederates' project, striking them will hurt them more, or I hope so, anyway. They only have a third as many educated people as we do. They can't afford to lose anybody."

"One more part of the price they pay for leaving their Negroes as nothing but field hands," Flora said.

"I agree. But they aren't even field hands now. They're…" Roosevelt paused.

"Victims." Flora supplied a word.

"Yes, that's what they are." Roosevelt shook his head. "Strange to use

a word like that in this day and age. Strange to use it like that, anyhow. If people drown in a flood, they're victims. If a man runs a stop light and kills a grandmother, she's a victim. But those aren't accidents in the CSA. The Freedom Party is doing it on purpose."

"Nobody up here wanted to believe that for the longest time," Flora said.

"I still don't want to believe it," Franklin Roosevelt said. "But I have no choice. It's true, all right. You deserve a lot of credit for making people see that."

"I don't want it. I wish I didn't have it," Flora said. "And speaking of such things, what are we doing to help the Negroes in Richmond?"

"What we can, which isn't much," the Assistant Secretary of War answered. "Our fighters strafe the Confederates. We bomb their positions as we can. Some of the weapons the Negroes are using, they got from us. Smuggling arms isn't easy, but we do what we can."

"The Confederates did a pretty good job of helping the Mormons in Utah," Flora said.

"More space and fewer people out there," Roosevelt replied. "Getting things into Richmond's never been easy. The Negroes are making the most of what we got them—and of what they got on their own. I will say that for them."

"They really can fight, can't they?"

"It does seem that way."

"Then why doesn't the U.S. Army let our Negroes put on the uniform and go after the Confederates?"

Flora asked. "God knows they have the incentive to do it."

"I can't change that policy myself, you know," Roosevelt said.

Flora nodded impatiently. "Yes, of course. But you can recommend a course of action to the President.

He could change it by executive order—I don't think he needs the consent of Congress to enlist Negro troops."

"I'd say you're right about that," Roosevelt replied. "My one worry is, I don't know how our white soldiers would like Negroes fighting

alongside of them."

"Who'd have a better reason to fight hard than colored troops?" Flora said. "If I were a black man in uniform, I wouldn't want to surrender to the Confederates. Would you?"

"When you put it that way, no," Roosevelt admitted. "I'll speak to President La Follette about this. You might do the same. The final decision will be up to him, though."

"Yes," Flora said. For the past year, Charlie La Follette wasn't just someone who could help make the upper Midwest vote Socialist. He was the man who decided things, and he seemed to be doing it well enough. "I'll talk to him, and we'll see what happens after that."

B rakes squealing, the train pulled into the station. "Rivière-du-Loup!" the conductor called. "All out for Rivière-du-Loup!" He spoke French, as most people did in the Republic of Quebec.

Dr. Leonard O'Doull hardly noticed. To him, French seemed at least as natural as English. *Home,* he thought, and got to his feet. After two years away, Rivière-du-Loup looked very good indeed. After almost two years of war, the Republic of Quebec—officially neutral in the war that convulsed the rest of North America—looked very good indeed, too.

People waiting on the platform waved as he and two other men and a woman got off the train. Nicole dashed up to him. He squeezed the air out of his wife, then did the same with his son. "You should get married more often, Lucien," he said. "It lets me take leave."

Lucien O'Doull sent him a severe look. "You're as bad as Uncle Georges," he said. "I only intend to get married once, thank you very much."

"As bad as me? Thank *you* very much, Lucien." Georges Galtier, the younger of Nicole's two brothers, was the family wit, the family cynic, the family punster and practical joker. Most of the Galtiers were swarthy and slight. Georges was dark, but almost as tall as Leonard O'Doull, and half again as wide through the shoulders. His older brother, Charles, stopped picking on him in a hurry when he began to get his full growth. Charles was no coward, but also no fool. No Galtiers were fools.

Charles came up to O'Doull now. He looked achingly like his father.

Lucien Galtier, after whom O'Doull's son was named, was several years dead. "Good to see you again," Charles said gravely.

"Good to see you safe." He sounded like his father, too, though he didn't have much of the old man's whimsy. Georges had got all of that, and a little more besides. They both made successful farmers, though. Crops didn't care if you were funny or not.

Hand in hand with Lucien stood his fiancée. Paulette Archambault was a dentist's daughter; the match, if not made in heaven, was certainly one that had a lot of study behind it. Paulette had black hair and blue eyes and a nice figure. O'Doull had no trouble understanding what his son saw in her. "Welcome to the family," he said.

"Thank you very much," Paulette said. "There's…a lot of it, isn't there?"

As if to prove her point, Nicole's three sisters, Susanne, Denise, and Jeanne, greeted O'Doull, too, each with a husband at her side. Jeanne, the youngest, was pregnant again. O'Doull tried to remember if this would be her fifth or sixth. He couldn't. But all the Galtier children had big broods except for Nicole.

Lucien O'Doull might be an only child, but he was an only with a raft of first cousins.

"You look tired," Jeanne told Leonard O'Doull. She was a farm wife with a flock of children, and she was telling him *he* looked tired? If that wasn't madness, damned if he knew what would be.

O'Doull managed a—tired—shrug. "I've been busier than I wish I were," he said, and let it go there.

Coming back to a country of peace, a country at peace, felt surreal. He'd got used to the tensions of emergency surgery, to the cries of wounded men, to the smells of ether and alcohol and pus and blood and shit, to washing gore from his hands more often than Lady Macbeth ever did. The only familiar odor on the platform was tobacco smoke. Perfume? For all he'd smelled it lately, perfume might be a Martian invention.

"You look like a man who needs a drink," his wife said.

"Amen!" he exclaimed. Everybody laughed except Nicole, who understood he wasn't kidding. They'd known each other for more than a quarter of a century now. If one of them didn't understand the other,

nobody ever would.

“Let’s go back to the house,” Nicole said. With the six Galtier children and their spouses and progeny leaving, the platform lost a big part of the crowd on it.

A house with a lawn in front of it. No broken windows. No bullet holes. No chunks bitten out by artillery or bombs. No craters in the front yard. No gunshots close by. No soldiers stumbling by with numb, stunned faces and thousand-yard stares. No, this wasn’t Mars. It seemed more alien than that.

Instead of decay, O’Doull smelled cooking of a sort he’d almost forgotten. He knew Nicole would do herself proud when it came to food. But…“Will we have enough to drink?” A lot of his nieces and nephews were getting old enough to hoist a glass. And Georges always seemed to have a hollow leg.

But Nicole said, “Don’t worry about it.” He *did* worry, till she went on, “For one thing, I bought twice as much as I thought we’d need. And, for another, the farmer across the road from Charles makes the best applejack in Temiscouata County. He makes a lot of it, too.”

When Leonard O’Doull heard that, he stopped flabbling. A lot of people with apple orchards turned out homemade Calvados. Quality varied widely from one farm to another, often from one batch to another.

None of it went through the tiresome formalities involving taxes. The Republic of Quebec loved distillers no more than the Dominion of Canada did before it, and had no better luck bringing them to heel.

O’Doull took packs of Raleighs and Dukes out of his suitcase and distributed them to his wife, his son, and his in-laws. They would have repaired his popularity had he lost it. Quebec got U.S. tobacco, and not enough of that. No one had tasted mild, flavorful cigarettes like these since the early days of the war.

“How did you get them through Customs?” Georges asked. His face was wreathed in smiles, and in smoke.

“I’m in U.S. uniform.” O’Doull tapped the gold oak leaf on one shoulder strap. “I speak pretty good French, too. And I let the inspectors have a couple of packs apiece, so they didn’t bother me a bit.”

“Such things are wasted on those swine, but what is a man to do?” Georges said with a philosophical shrug.

If the man was Leonard O’Doull, he was to eat too much and to get drunk. He wasn’t loud and boisterous, but he felt the applejack buzzing in him. He’d feel it in the morning, too, but he didn’t worry about that. He ate, he drank, he talked—and he didn’t tell war stories. His Quebecois extended family didn’t know how lucky they were not to know much about what he did, and he didn’t intend to enlighten them.

A lot of relatives stayed at the house. They slept in the front room, in the dining room, in the kitchen.

O’Doull didn’t mind. Even now, not everybody had a motorcar. For those who didn’t, going back out to a farm and then coming into town again for the wedding the next day would be slow and inconvenient. All the same, he whispered to Nicole, “You didn’t ask one of your sisters to share the bedroom, did you?”

“Why would you want to know that?” his wife asked archly.

“Ha!” he said. “You’ll find out.”

“With so many people here?” Nicole said. “It’s upstairs, remember. If we’re not careful, the bed will squeak, and they’ll laugh at us.”

“We’ll just have to be careful, then, won’t we?” O’Doull said. Nicole was laughing at him, but she didn’t say no.

She didn’t say no later that night, either, though she did lock the door first and she did insist on turning off the light. After nearly two years away, O’Doull felt almost as if he were having his wedding night all over again, just ahead of his son’s. He didn’t have the stamina Lucien would doubtless display, but he had the sincerity.

“I’ve missed you more than I know how to tell you,” he said afterwards.

“Why did you go, then?” Nicole asked.

“It needs doing,” he answered. “I’m a doctor. I’m good at putting people back together. A good many men are alive because I happened to be there.”

“So they can go back to the war and get killed somewhere else instead,” Nicole said tartly.

He shrugged. That made the bed squeak, where their side-by-side lovemaking hadn’t, or not very much.

It made Nicole squeak, too, in alarm. Laughing a little, O’Doull said, “I can’t do anything about that. God puts them where He wants them. I just patch them up when He looks the other way for a second.”

After the things he’d seen, he wondered how he still believed at all. Granny McDougald didn’t, not so far as he could tell. But his own faith survived…as long as he didn’t lean on it too hard. And he was strong-willed enough to make his own choices. As he usually did, he wore a rubber tonight. Nicole wasn’t likely to catch; she was close to fifty. But why take chances? And if that made the Pope unhappy—O’Doull didn’t lose much sleep about it.

He didn’t lose much sleep about anything. He couldn’t begin to guess how far behind he was. Nicole had to shake him awake the next morning. When he did come back to consciousness, the smells of coffee and of frying bacon helped reconcile him to the world. He found fried eggs and fried potatoes to go with the bacon. Susanne and Denise had been busy in the kitchen.

“Thank you, my dears,” he said after he finished breakfast. “You’re just about as wonderful as your sister.” They laughed. Susanne made as if to throw a spatula at him. He made as if to duck. Everybody laughed then. After flying shell fragments and machine-gun bullets, a spatula didn’t seem very dangerous.

He thought about wearing uniform to the wedding. He might have, if it were in the USA. In Rivière-du-Loup, he didn’t want to remind people he was a foreigner. He didn’t want to remind himself, either. His tailcoat smelled of mothballs, but he put it on anyway. It didn’t match Lucien’s hired suit, but that was all right: the groom was supposed to be noticed, while his father was perhaps the most easily disposable person in the wedding party. He wasn’t even footing the bill—Alphonse Archambault was.

Doctor and dentist greeted each other at the Église St.-Patrice with a handshake and identical words:

“Hello, quack.” They laughed and clapped each other on the back.

Bishop Guillaume celebrated the mass. He wasn’t a patch on the

former Bishop Pascal, who'd returned to secular life, but his lady friend hadn't had twins, either, which was why the former Bishop Pascal had returned to secular life.

Lucien lifted Paulette's veil and kissed her. The O'Doulls and the Archambaults stood in a receiving line and shook enough hands to make politicians jealous. Then everyone repaired to the Archambaults'

house—only a few blocks from the O'Doulls'—and ate and drank with as much abandon as people had the day before. Archambault had either talked with Charles or knew somebody else who made damn good applejack.

Rivière-du-Loup didn't have a hotel. O'Doull and Nicole went down to old Lucien's farm—run by Charles these days—to give Lucien and Paulette the privacy they needed for their first night. In the morning, the newlyweds would catch a train to honeymoon at Niagara Falls—on the American side, not the Canadian. The Canadian side was under martial law.

Nicole squeezed O'Doull's hand when they rolled past the hospital built on what was once Galtier land.

"If the occupiers hadn't wanted to punish your father by putting the hospital there, we probably wouldn't have met," O'Doull said.

"See how many things we can blame on them?" Charles said from behind the wheel, his voice as dry as if he were Georges.

"Since Father did eventually get paid, I suppose we can forgive them now," Nicole said.

"You don't have any other reasons?" O'Doull asked, and she poked him in the ribs.

The farmhouse hadn't changed much with Charles living there. Even most of the furniture was the same as it had been. "So many memories," Nicole murmured.

O'Doull nodded. He had a lot of memories of this place, too, though not so many as she did. But he also had other memories, more recent ones, darker ones. All too soon, he would have to get back on a train for himself, not for a honeymoon but to return to nightmare. *What was I doing? What was I thinking?*

he wondered. Even though he saved lives, even though he wanted to

save lives, he also wanted to stay here. He knew he couldn't, and got drunk again so he didn't have to remember.

S pring in Georgia. What could be finer? Mild air, occasional showers, everything green and growing, the countryside full of birdsong, hummingbirds flitting like bad-tempered jewels from flower to flower.

Everything was lovely.

Cassius noticed none of it. He cared about none of it. All he wanted to do was stay alive one more minute, one more hour, one more day.

Had he gone to church with his family in Augusta that Sunday morning, he wouldn't be wandering the Georgia countryside now. When his father and mother and sister didn't come back, he went looking for them—and almost ran right into the cops and Freedom Party stalwarts who'd rounded them up. The ofays were still laughing and joking about their haul, and didn't notice him in the shadows. Every once in a while, a dark skin came in handy.

Of course, if he were born with a white skin, he wouldn't have ended up shut in behind barbed wire in the Terry like a zoo animal. He would have been on the other side of the wire—probably with a submachine gun in his hand and a Freedom Party pin on his lapel.

He didn't dwell on that. He did realize he had to get out of the Terry, and right away. If he didn't, the whites would nab him in a cleanout before long. Off he'd go to a camp. People didn't come out of those places.

He waited till after midnight that night. He had two weapons when he headed for the wire—a pair of tin snips and the biggest, stoutest knife from his mother's kitchen. If anyone spotted him, he aimed to fight. If he could kill somebody with a gun, then he'd have one. He didn't think about dying himself. He was too young to take the idea seriously.

All the heroics he imagined ahead of time evaporated. The tin snips cut through the wire well enough.

Come morning, people would have no trouble figuring out where he'd got away, but he didn't care. He'd be long gone by then.

And he was, heading west. He couldn't very well stay inside Augusta. It wouldn't be thirty seconds till he heard, *Let's see your papers, boy!*

Nothing in his passbook said he had any business being out and about. Again, they'd ship him off to a camp—or maybe they'd just kill him on the spot.

Out in the country…There'd be more Negroes there. Maybe he'd fit in better. And then he could start paying the Freedom Party goons back for everything they were doing.

He'd had connections with the resistance in the city—had them and lost them as people kept dying or getting seized. Now he had to rely on his wits and on the kindness of strangers: black strangers, of course. He'd long since given up on expecting anything from whites. His father always said he got on well with Jerry Dover. He even said Dover had kept their whole family safe more than once. Maybe so—but Dover was in the Army now, and the rest of Cassius' family was in a camp.

When the sun came up, Cassius was walking along a road heading west. He didn't know where he was going. All he knew was that he'd made it out of Augusta alive, and that he was getting hungry and getting thirsty. All the money that had been in the apartment was in his pocket. How long could he make $27.59

(he'd counted it to the last penny—counted it twice, in fact, hoping it would be more the second time around and absurdly disappointed when it wasn't) last? Well, he'd find out.

Maybe he'd find out. On the other hand, maybe he'd get killed before he came close to going through his meager funds. Every time he saw a motorcar, he ran for the pine woods through which the road ran most of the time. Nobody stopped to go after him. None of the vehicles that went by was an armored car, so nobody sprayed the woods with machine-gun fire.

That was good luck, as good luck for Negroes in the CSA ran these days.

Cassius didn't see it so. Aside from being hungry and thirsty, he had sore feet. He couldn't remember when he'd done so much walking. He didn't think he ever had. He wondered if he ought to throw his shoes away. For a while, he didn't. He didn't want to look like a shiftless country nigger. He might have argued with his father, but his attitudes faithfully respected the way he was raised.

He did a little thinking. *Why* didn't he want to look like a shiftless country nigger? Wasn't that his best bet for survival? Away went the

shoes, and his socks, too.

Don't go barefoot. You get chiggers, an' hookworm, too. His old man's voice still rang in his ears, or rather, between them. Ignoring it wasn't easy, but Cassius managed. The blisters on his heels sighed with relief. Before long, though, his soles started to complain.

And his luck ran out with the pine woods. For miles ahead, the road ran through fields: cotton, peanuts, tobacco, even rice. He couldn't stay where he was. Living on what he could grub out of the ground—mushrooms and maybe berries—and on the squirrels and rabbits he killed with rocks wasn't living. It was just starving a little more slowly. For better or for worse, he'd grown up in the city. No doubt there were tricks to living out here. Only one trouble: he didn't know them.

He took a deep breath and set out down the road through the fields. A few years earlier, they would have been full of colored sharecroppers. Tractors and harvesters and combines drove Negroes off the land in swarms, though. Like so many towns in the CSA, Augusta had filled with farm workers who couldn't find work. Having them in the cities made it easier for the Freedom Party to scoop them up, too.

Here came a motorcar. It was fairly new and in good repair—not noisy, not belching smoke. That made it a good bet to belong to a white man. Cassius straightened up, squared his shoulders, and kept walking along as if he had every right to be there. Every Negro learned that trick: if you pretended you belonged somewhere, the ofays would believe you really did.

And it worked, damned if it didn't. The driver here wasn't a white man but a white woman, her blond hair blowing in the breeze that came in through the open windows. Her head didn't even turn toward Cassius. As far as she was concerned, he was part of the scenery, like a cow or a dog or a turkey vulture sitting on a telegraph pole.

In a way, that was good. She didn't notice him, and he couldn't afford to be noticed. In another way…He thought he deserved to be more important than a cow or a dog or a turkey vulture. Whites in the CSA didn't see things like that. They never had. Odds were they never would.

We have to make 'em see, Cassius thought fiercely.

Then a white *did* notice him, and it made his heart leap into his throat. He was walking past a farmhouse when somebody shouted,

“Hey, you! Yeah, you, boy!” The farmer wore bib overalls and a big straw hat. He carried a shotgun, at the moment pointed down at the ground.

“What you want, uh, suh?” Cassius tried not to show how scared he was.

“You chop wood? Got me a pile of wood needs chopping,” the farmer said. “Pay you a dollar for it when you get done.”

Part of Cassius wanted to leap at that. The rest…The rest was naturally leery of trusting any white man.

“Half a dollar now, half when I get through,” he said.

“Reckon I’d stiff you?” the farmer said. Cassius just spread his hands, as if to say you never could tell.

The farmer shrugged. “All right. But if you take off halfway through, I’ll send the sheriff after you, hell with me if I don’t.”

“That’s fair,” Cassius allowed. “Reckon I could get me a ham sandwich an’ maybe a Dr. Hopper at noontime ’long with my other four bits?” If he was going to bargain, he’d go all out.

The farmer took the request in stride. “Don’t see why not. Good Book says something about not binding up the mouths of the kine that tread the grain. Reckon that goes for people, too.”

How could he quote the Bible and go along with what was happening to Negroes in the CSA? Maybe he didn’t go along, or not all the way, anyhow. He didn’t ask to see Cassius’ passbook, and he didn’t ask any inconvenient questions about what a young black man in city clothes was doing here.

As soon as Cassius saw the mountain of wood he was supposed to chop, he understood at once why the man didn’t ask questions. If he chopped all that, he’d earn his dollar three or four times over. He was tempted to light out with the farmer’s two quarters in his pocket. One thing held him back: fear. County sheriffs were supposed to use bloodhounds to track people, just the way their grandfathers did back in slavery days. If this one caught him…He didn’t want to think about that.

With a sigh, he set to work. Before long, sweat ran down his face even

though the weather wasn't too warm. He got blisters on his palms bigger than the ones on his heels. The farmer came to check on him, took a look at those, and gave him strips of cloth to wrap around his hands. They helped.

At least an hour before noon, the man brought him an enormous sandwich, a big slice of sweet-potato pie, and a cool Dr. Hopper. The bottle was dripping; maybe it had been in the well. "Much obliged, suh,"

Cassius said.

"You're doing an honest job," the farmer said. "Looks like you could use a meal."

"Maybe some." Cassius wolfed down the food. He savored the Dr. Hopper, and smiled when bubbles went up his nose. "Can I pour a bucket o' water over my head? Feel mighty good if I do."

"Go right ahead," the farmer answered.

Cassius walked over to the well and did. He finished somewhere between three and four in the afternoon. The farmer didn't make any fuss about giving him the second installment of his pay, and even brought him another sandwich without being asked. "Thank you kindly," Cassius said with his mouth full.

"Want to stick around for a spell?" the white man asked him. "I could use a hand, and you pull your weight. Say…four dollars a week and board?"

The money was chicken feed, though a place to sleep and three—or at least two—meals a day made up for some of that. But Cassius shook his head. "I better keep movin' on," he said.

"You won't find many better deals," the farmer warned.

Not from ofays, Cassius thought. With Negroes, though, he had a chance for something this fellow couldn't hope to give him: vengeance. That still burned in him. "Obliged," he said again, "but I got places to go."

"And I know where you'll end up: in trouble," the farmer said. "You come sneakin' round here after dark raisin' Cain, I'll give you a bellyful of double-aught buckshot. Wouldn't be the first time."

That meant guerrillas were active in these parts: for Cassius, good news. Still, he said, “I wouldn’t do nothin’ like that with you, suh. You treated me fair. You treated me better’n fair, an’ I know it.”

“How long will you remember, though?” The white man shrugged. “Reckon we’re quits. I don’t have anything against you—you did a job of work there. Ain’t seen anybody go at it like that for a long time.”

“I was hungry,” Cassius said with a shrug.

“Makes a difference,” the farmer agreed.

“You know what they’re doin’ in the city, suh?” Cassius asked. “You know they got all the niggers shut up inside barbed wire? You know they’re takin’ ’em to camps an’ killin’ ’em? They took my ma and my pa and my sister yesterday.”

“No. I didn’t know any of that. They don’t talk about it much,” the farmer said.

Only after Cassius was a couple of miles down the road, still another sandwich tied up in a rag, did he realize the man had to be lying. Who were *they*? What *did* they say? He wondered why the man bothered to waste time lying to a black. Why not just tell the truth and gloat? One answer occurred to him after another half a mile or so. He’d been closer to the axe than the farmer was, and he’d shown he knew how to use it.

A rmstrong Grimes was fit to be tied, and he didn’t care who knew it. What was his reward, what was his regiment’s reward, what was his division’s reward for making the Mormons realize they couldn’t throw enough bodies on the fire to put it out? Why, to go to Canada, to go up against a bigger rebellion.

He’d called the shot too well.

“How many people in Utah?” he demanded of Yossel Reisen.

“I don’t know,” his fellow sergeant answered as the train rattled along through the upper Midwest—or maybe it was in Canada. One stretch of plain looked just as dreary as another. Yossel went on, “Half a million, maybe?”

“Yeah, and not all of ’em were Mormons, either,” Armstrong said. “All right—how many people in Canada?”

“Millions,” Reisen said. “Got to be millions.”

“Fuckin’-A it does. That’s what I figure, too,” Armstrong said. “So what do we have to do? Kill every goddamn one of them?”

“Hey, don’t get sore at me,” Yossel told him. “I didn’t give the orders. I’ve got to take ’em, same as you do.”

“I’ll tell you what’s sore. My ass is sore,” Armstrong grumbled. The car he was in had hard benches packed too close together to squeeze in as many soldiers as possible. The smell and a dense cloud of cigarette smoke thickened the air. The Army cared nothing for comfort. It valued efficiency much more.

Armstrong shifted from one weary cheek to the other. He nudged his buddy. “You oughta write your Congresswoman.”

“Armstrong, the first time you said that, it was funny,” Yossel Reisen said. “The fifth time you said it, I could put up with it. By now, though, by now it gives *me* a fucking pain in the ass, you know?”

“All right, already. Got a butt?” Armstrong asked.

“Sure.” Yossel passed him a pack. He lit up. It helped pass the time. When Armstrong returned the pack, Reisen stuck one in his mouth. Armstrong leaned close to give him a light. After Yossel’s first drag, he said, “We’ve got to lick the damn Confederates. If we don’t, we’ll be stuck with our own shitty tobacco forever.”

“There you go.” Armstrong blew out a cloud of smoke. “One more reason to hate Jake Featherston. I thought I already knew ’em all. We’ve got to kick his scrawny butt, all right. I wish *we* could do it, too, instead of fucking around with the goddamn stinking worthless Canucks.”

Yossel chuckled. “I don’t quite follow you. Tell us how you really feel.”

Before Armstrong could answer, he discovered they were already in Canada: somebody shot out a window in his railroad car. The bullet missed everybody, but glass sprayed soldiers. Everybody jumped and yelled and swore.

Machine gunners on the roofs of two or three cars opened up on the sniper. Armstrong had no idea if they hit him, but he did hope they made the bastard keep his head down. Then he said, “My guys—you

all right?" He still had his platoon. No eager young second looey had come out to take his place.

"I got somethin' in my eye, Sarge," somebody right behind him said. "Is it glass?"

"Lemme see." Awkwardly, Armstrong turned around. "Don't blink, Boone, for Christ's sake." He yanked at the private's eyelid. Damned if he didn't see a chunk of glass not much bigger than a grain of salt. "Don't flinch, either, dammit."

"I'll try," Boone said. Not flinching when somebody's hand came at your eye was probably harder than holding steady in combat. The soldier managed…pretty well.

"Hang on." Armstrong peered down at his thumb. Sure as hell, he'd got the glass out. He flicked it away.

"Blink. How's your eye?"

"Better, Sarge," Boone said in glad surprise. "Thanks a million." He blinked again. "Yeah, it's all right now."

"Bully." Armstrong didn't know why he said that. He couldn't remember the last time he'd used it. He couldn't remember if he'd ever used it. Even his old man hardly ever said it. But getting something out of somebody's eye made you feel fatherly, and fathers talked in old-fashioned ways.

Yossel Reisen gave him a quizzical look. "Bully?"

"Well, what about it?" Armstrong snapped. He was embarrassed he'd come out with it, too.

"Nothing," Yossel said. But it wasn't nothing, because he added, "You sounded like George Custer, that's all."

"Thanks a lot, Yossel." Armstrong had often wondered why his father gave him Custer's middle name and not his first one. George Grimes would have been a perfectly ordinary handle. Armstrong…wasn't.

He shrugged. Yossel had a funnier name yet, although maybe not if you were a Jew.

A few minutes later, the train screeched and squealed to a stop. They weren't anywhere that Armstrong could see—just out in the middle of

the damn prairie. Before long, though, officers started yelling, “Out!

Out!”

“What the fuck?” Boone said. Armstrong only shrugged. He didn’t know what was going on, either.

He was standing out on the prairie with his men, waiting for somebody to tell him what to do next. Either nobody was in a hurry to do that or nobody knew. He looked around. In Utah, he’d got used to always having mountains on the horizon. No mountains here. This was the flattest country he’d ever seen; it made Ohio look like the Himalayas. The train tracks stretched out toward infinity. As far as he could tell, the two rails met there.

“Next town ahead is Rosenfeld!” yelled somebody with a loud, authoritative voice. “Canucks ran the Frenchies out of there, and they hold the train station. We’re going to take it back from them. Rosenfeld sits at a railway junction, so we need the place if we’re going to be able to use both lines. You got that?”

“Goddamn Frenchies,” Armstrong muttered. The soldiers from the Republic of Quebec showed no enthusiasm for fighting their former countrymen. He’d heard Mexican troops in the CSA didn’t jump up and down at the idea of shooting at—and getting shot by—the spooks down there. Both sets of soldiers from small countries probably figured they didn’t really want to do big countries’ dirty work for them.

Well, the hell with ’em, he thought. *I don’t want to get my ass shot off, either.*

Yossel Reisen, on the other hand, summed things up in half a dozen words: “This is where we came in.”

Armstrong grunted and nodded. They’d got off the train and fought their way forward in Utah, too.

He hoped the Canadians wouldn’t be as fanatical as the Mormons. He had trouble imagining how they could be, but a soldier’s life was full of nasty surprises. The men in green-gray shook themselves out into skirmish lines and moved forward. A woman with hair once red but now mostly gray stood outside her farmhouse staring at them as they tramped past.

“She saw Americans come this way in 1914, too,” Yossel murmured.

“Yeah, and her husband probably made bombs or something,” Armstrong said. Yossel trudged on for another couple of paces, then nodded.

One good thing, as far as Armstrong was concerned: this flat, flat ground offered far fewer ambush points than Utah’s rougher terrain. The first gunfire came from a farmhouse and its outbuildings. The American soldiers went after the strongpoints with practiced ease. Machine guns made the Canadians stay down.

Mortar teams dropped bombs on the buildings and set some afire. Only then did foot soldiers approach.

A few Canucks opened up on them. More mortar and machine-gun fire silenced the position.

Then something new was added to the mix. A beat-up old pickup truck bounced across the fields. It turned broadside to the American soldiers. “Get down!” Armstrong yelled to his men. Whatever the bastard driving that truck was doing, it didn’t look friendly.

And it wasn’t. Two Canucks in the pickup’s staked bed served a machine gun on a tall mount. The gun chattered. Bullets sprayed toward the Americans. Wounded soldiers shouted and screamed. A few men in green-gray had the presence of mind to shoot back, but only a few. Leaving a trail of dust in the distance, the truck bucketed away.

“Jesus!” Armstrong said, and then, “Well, I will be damned.”

“How come?” Yossel Reisen asked.

“Because here’s a way to make our lives miserable the fucking Mormons never thought of,” Armstrong answered. He pointed toward the pickup, which was long out of range. “It’s not as good as a barrel, but they can sure as shit chew us up from long range if they’ve got more than one or two of those stinking things. And they will. Bet your ass they will.” He spoke with a veteran’s ingrained pessimism.

Yossel didn’t tell him he was wrong. The other sergeant did say, “A couple-three rounds through the engine block and those trucks won’t go anywhere fast.”

“Sure—if we can do it,” Armstrong said. “What about this guy,

though? We never laid a glove on the mother."

"He surprised us," Yossel said.

"Sure as shit surprised me," Armstrong agreed. "Damn near punctured me besides." He'd lasted two years with nothing worse than cuts and bruises and scrapes. He wanted to go on lasting, too. He'd seen too many horrible things happen to other people. He knew much too well that they could also happen to him.

"Now we know they've got 'em," Yossel said. "We'll spread our machine guns out more or whatever the hell. No soft-skinned trucks are going to make monkeys out of us."

"Ook," Armstrong said, and scratched under his armpits. Yossel gave him the finger, but he didn't care.

As far as he was concerned, he was dead right. That damn machine gun must have wounded eight or ten men. The Americans were flabbling as if it was going out of style, but they weren't doing anything except flabbling. One lousy pickup truck knocked them back on their heels.

They needed most of an hour to start moving forward again. Half a mile closer to Rosenfeld, another defended farmhouse held them up. As soon as they went to the ground, two pickup trucks showed up.

They stayed at extreme range and blazed away. Most of their bullets were bound to go wild. A few, though—a few would wound or kill.

Somebody with an antibarrel cannon made either a lucky shot or a great one and set a pickup on fire.

The other truck zoomed up alongside, picked up the men who got out, and roared off. Despite all the U.S. bullets and shells that flew toward it, it got away.

"How many little trucks do you suppose the Canucks have?" Yossel asked.

Armstrong gave that the only possible answer: "Too goddamn many." His buddy nodded.

They fought their way into Rosenfeld a couple of hours later. The Canadian fighters didn't try to hold the little prairie town with the

fanatical determination the Mormons showed over every inch of ground in Utah. But Canada had a hell of a lot more inches than Utah did. The defenders headed north, toward Winnipeg. They would make another stand somewhere else. Only at the train station and a diner called Pomeroy's did they put up much of a fight.

The Canucks wrecked the tracks in the station, blew up the building, and escaped. Pomeroy's was a different story. The rebels who holed up there didn't run and didn't give up. The only person who got out of the burning, battered building was a little boy about six years old. He'd lost the last joint of his left little finger. Otherwise, he didn't seem badly hurt.

"What's your name, kid?" Armstrong asked as he bandaged the boy's hand.

"I'm Alec." The boy looked at him. "You must be a goddamn Yank."

"Yeah, well, I love you, too." Armstrong pulled a squashed chocolate bar out of his pocket. "Here. Want it?"

"Thank you," Alec said gravely. "But you're still a goddamn Yank."

"You better believe it, you little bastard," Armstrong told him, not without pride.

V ienna, Georgia, was as far as east as Spartacus' guerrilla band had gone since Jonathan Moss and Nick Cantarella joined them. Spartacus insisted on pronouncing the name of the place as *Vie*-enna. So did everybody else who talked about it. From everything Moss heard, it probably didn't hold two thousand people. But its name was proudly distinct from that of the capital of Austria-Hungary.

Mexican soldiers and overage white men patrolled the roads. The Negroes moved cross-country, past the ghosts of what had been their lives till the Freedom Party turned on them. The countryside was achingly empty: so many people either gone to towns to look for work or just gone, period.

Nick Cantarella was chortling over an article in a three-day-old copy of the *Albany Gazette* somebody had brought into camp. "Listen to this," he said, nudging Moss with his elbow. "'Brave Canadian patriots with machine guns mounted on the back of pickup trucks have inflicted heavy casualties on the brutal U.S. occupiers in a series of lightning-like hit-and-run raids.' Isn't that terrific?"

Moss gave the U.S. infantry captain a quizzical glance. “Well, I guess it depends on whose side you’re on.”

“Oh.” Cantarella laughed some more. “Yeah, sure. But it’s a terrific idea. We could do that right here.

We *should* do it. And I was just laughing on account of Jake Featherston’s propaganda asswipe told me about it.”

“All right. Now I get it. Color me dumb,” Moss said. “Yeah, we could build a machine-gun mount if we had ourselves a truck.”

“Bet your ass we could,” Cantarella said. “Couple-three of these smokes are better mechanics than half the guys you’d find in a motor pool. They’re used to working with scrap metal and junk, ’cause they couldn’t get anything else.”

“Let’s talk to Spartacus,” Moss said.

They put their case to the guerrilla leader. “Ain’t hard gettin’ us a truck, or as many as we need,” he said.

“All we gots to do is steal ’em.” He took the prospect for granted. “Wish we had us mo’ machine guns.

We could fit ’em out like they was tanks, damn near.” That was the old-fashioned British word for barrels.

Cantarella shook his head. “Well, no, not quite. The thing about barrels is, they’re armored. Somebody shoots up one of these trucks, it’s gonna be shot up, all right. Can’t get too gay with ’em, or you’ll be sorry quick. You hear what I’m sayin’?”

“I hear you,” Spartacus answered. “Makes sense. Still and all…Reckon we can git some o’ the ofays round these parts to shit their pants?” He grinned.

“Oh, I think we might. I think we just might,” Cantarella answered. “We ought to make the mount so we can take it off a truck in a hurry. Sometimes a truck *will* get shot up. Sometimes we’ll have to leave it behind ’cause we can’t hide it. Shame to have to build a whole new mount again if something like that happens, you know?”

“That makes sense, too,” Spartacus allowed. His grin got wider. “We’s gonna put trouble on wheels.”

“Hell, yes,” Cantarella said.

Three pickups walked with Jesus in Vienna that very night. The guerrilla band’s blacksmiths got to work on one the next morning. Spartacus stashed the other two in an abandoned Negro village a few miles outside of town. Jonathan Moss found places like that heartbreaking. How many of them were there, from one end of the CSA to the other? And what happened to the people who used to live in them?

Nothing good—that was only too plain.

The colored blacksmiths got the idea about fitting a machine gun on a truck as soon as Cantarella started explaining. One of them—a man named Caligula—said, “Don’t need to give us no sermon on the mount, suh.” He sent the white man a sly smile.

Cantarella winced. Moss groaned. The Negroes broke up. Moss looked at them with new eyes from then on. Anyone who made puns that bad was—damn near had to be—a real live human being, and deserved to be slapped down just like anybody else.

And the mount the blacksmiths came up with was beautifully simple. They fastened a short length of upright iron pipe to the truck bed. If they lost the truck, they would lose it, too. Into it they stuck a longer pipe whose outer diameter matched the inner diameter of the bottom part of the mount. And on top of that they fixed the machine gun.

Jonathan Moss admired the result. “If you were going to make these as a regular thing, you couldn’t do any better,” he said. “Where did the pipe come from?”

“Reckon some plumber wonder where the pipe go, suh,” Caligula answered with another sidelong grin.

All the Negroes were eager to take their new toy out on the road, so eager that they almost came to blows. They all knew how to serve the machine gun. Only a handful of them, though, could drive. That was funny, in a frightening way. Spartacus sidled up to Moss and asked, “How you like to be our driver?”

How would *I like that?* Moss wondered. He was less useful to the guerrillas than Nick Cantarella, simply because he knew less about the infantryman’s trade. But he damn well could drive a truck.

“Sure,” he said after no more than a second’s hesitation. “Put

somebody who knows where he's going in the cab with me, though. I didn't grow up around here, so I don't know all the little back roads that'll get me out of trouble."

"I go with you my ownself," Spartacus said. "Reckon I knows this country tolerable good." He let out a nasty chuckle. "Reckon we gonna give the ofays a little bit of a surprise, too. Yeah, jus' a li'l bit."

What will the Confederates do to me if they recapture me fighting alongside the black guerrillas?

Moss decided he didn't want to know, not in any detail. He also decided he couldn't afford to be taken, not any more. "Let me have a pistol," he said, and mimed shooting himself in the head.

"Oh, yes. We takes care o' dat," Spartacus promised, and he did. The .45 he handed Moss the next morning was an officer's sidearm. It would do the job, all right.

Strategy was simplicity itself. About an hour after sunup, they set off up the road from Vienna, heading north toward the even smaller town of Pinehurst about ten miles away. Anything they passed, they shot up. The first auto they came up to was driven by a fat, gray-haired white man. He started to give Moss a friendly smile as the pickup truck passed his beat-up gray Birmingham. The smile changed to a look of horror when he saw Spartacus on the seat beside Moss. A moment later, a burst of machine-gun fire finished him and set his motorcar on fire.

Spartacus and the blacks in the back all whooped. "Do Jesus!" the guerrilla leader yelled. "This here gonna be fun!"

That white man wouldn't think so. But then, if he was one of the yahoos who went around yelling,

"Freedom!" he was helping the Confederate States' government visit wholesale slaughter on their blacks.

If he happened to get in the way of a little retail slaughter coming the other way—well, too damn bad.

A tractor sat in a cotton field not far from the side of the road. "Stop the truck!" Spartacus told Moss.

He followed the black man's order. Spartacus pointed out the window. "Put some holes in that fucker!"

he yelled. The gun crew obeyed. The tractor sent a plume of black, greasy smoke up into the sky.

They wrecked two more tractors and a combine. Jonathan Moss nodded to himself. Those were the tools that let white farmers get along without black sharecroppers. They were handy, yes, but they were also expensive. How would those whites like watching them go up in flames?

The gunners sprayed an oncoming automobile with bullets. It went off the road, flipped over, and burned like a torch. “This *is* fun!” Spartacus shouted. Moss nodded. Destruction for the sake of destruction brought a nasty thrill with it, almost as if he were a staid married man visiting a whorehouse.

There was a checkpoint outside of Pinehurst: a sleepy one, manned by three or four Great War veterans too old or too infirm to do anything more strenuous. They were just going through the motions. They didn’t expect any trouble as the pickup truck drew near. Spartacus ducked down so they couldn’t see him next to Moss.

When the machine gunners in the back of the pickup opened fire, the guards toppled like tenpins. “Git!”

Spartacus told Moss. “Go left, then left again soon as you can.”

The road up to Pinehurst was paved; the one onto which Spartacus put Moss was nothing but a dirt track. Red dust rose in choking clouds, for it hadn’t rained lately. “The dust will let them track us,” Moss said.

“So what?” Spartacus answered. “We be long gone by the time they catch up to us—an’ if we ain’t, they be sorry.” He probably wasn’t wrong about that. Pursuers—even riflemen—coming up against a machine gun would get a lethal surprise.

He sent Moss and the pickup bouncing along back roads and tracks nobody who hadn’t known these parts for years would have been able to follow. Moss’ teeth clicked together more than once. They weren’t necessarily *good* tracks. One of them had a hog wallow right in the middle. Spartacus pointed straight ahead. Moss gunned the engine and leaned on the horn. The machine gunners solved the problem a different way. As hogs scrambled out of the muck, the gunners shot them.

The truck sprayed stinking mud as it went through. “Stop!” Spartacus yelled when it got to the other side.

Moss hit the brakes. The machine-gun crew hopped out and threw three carcasses into the back of the pickup. “We don’t just shoot up the ofays,” Spartacus said happily. “We eats good today, too.”

A white man with a shotgun charged out of a farmhouse a couple of hundred yards away. He didn’t want to yield his porkers without a fight. The machine gunners sprayed a burst in his general direction. He ran away even faster than he’d come out.

“We don’t take shit from nobody!” Spartacus roared as Moss put the pickup in gear again. Riding around with a machine gun in the back of your truck worked wonders for your confidence.

Those side roads brought the pickup almost back to where its rampages had begun. The machine gun and the top part of the mount came off neat as you please. One of the gunners carried the weapon. The other shouldered the long pipe. More guerrillas emerged from the undergrowth to take charge of the dead pigs.

Roast pork and a ten-mile stretch of road shot to hell and gone made for a celebration that evening. So did a couple of jugs of raw corn whiskey. The stuff tasted like paint thinner and burned its way down like a lighted kerosene lamp. After a few swallows, Moss started forgetting things. A few more, he knew, and he’d have trouble remembering his name.

But he needed to remember something. “You’ve got to tell people,” he said to Spartacus, the homemade hooch adding urgency to his voice.

“Tell which people?” the guerrilla leader asked. “Tell ’em what?” He was drinking harder than Moss.

“Got to tell the other colored fighters.” Moss was proud of himself. He did remember! “Got to tell them what these pickup trucks can do.”

“Don’t you worry none about dat,” Spartacus said. “Be all over Georgia day after tomorrow. Be all the way to Louisiana this time nex’ week. Yes, suh. You best believe it will. We done hit the ofays hard.

Folks is gonna hear about it. You best believe folks is gonna hear about it.”

Moss turned to Nick Cantarella. “You’re a hero.”

“My ass,” Cantarella said. “I didn’t even get to drive the truck.” But he hadn’t drunk himself fighting mad, for he went on, “What I really like about this is that their own damn propaganda upped and bit ’em. I never woulda thought of mounting a machine gun on a pickup and raising hell. But since those stupid pricks went and told me how—”

“Here’s to propaganda,” Moss said. They both drank.

C olonel Terry DeFrancis was one of the youngest officers of his rank Major General Abner Dowling had ever seen. Remembering how long he’d taken to get to bird colonel himself, Dowling eyed the boy wonder with suspicion.

“My orders from the War Department are to subordinate myself to you and to smash C.S. air power in west Texas,” DeFrancis said. “I think my wing has brought enough fighters and bombers out here to do the job, too.”

“I wouldn’t begin to argue with you there, Colonel,” Dowling said. In one fell swoop, the air power at his command had tripled. “But why does Philadelphia care now when it didn’t before?”

“Sir, I can answer that in three little words,” DeFrancis told him.

“If you’re going to say, *I love you,* Colonel, I’ll throw you out on your ear,” Dowling warned, straight-faced.

Terry DeFrancis stared at him, then laughed like a loon. “You’re not what I expected, sir, not even slightly,” he said. “No, what I was going to say is, *I don’t know.* Have Featherston’s boys been pulling off air raids that hurt?”

“If they have, nobody told me about it,” Dowling answered. “They haven’t had enough airplanes out here to hurt us very badly. We haven’t had enough to do much to them, either. Sounds like things are going to change, though.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” Colonel DeFrancis agreed. “That’s what my boys are here for. We’re going to make them sorry if we can.”

“Good,” Dowling said. It was good in all kinds of ways. If the War Department had aircraft to spare for an out-of-the-way outfit like his Eleventh Army, it was bound to have even more farther east, where

the real decision would lie. And…“Tell me something, Colonel: when they sent you out here, did they say anything about Camp Determination?”

“No, sir,” the younger man answered. “Is that ours or theirs? Sounds like something the Freedom Party would name.”

“There’s a reason for that—it *is* something the Freedom Party named. Here. Take a look at these.”

Dowling’s desk had a locked drawer. He unlocked it and took out the aerial reconnaissance photos of the camp near Snyder…and of the mass graves not far away.

DeFrancis studied them with meticulous care. He was frowning as he looked up at Dowling. “Interpreting stuff like this isn’t always easy, especially when you’re seeing it for the first time. What exactly am I looking at here?” Dowling told him exactly what he was looking at there. DeFrancis’ jaw dropped.

“You’re making that up…uh, sir.”

“Colonel, I wish to Christ I were,” Dowling answered, and the disgust and horror in his voice had to carry conviction. “It’s the truth, though. If anything, it’s an understatement. They really are killing off their Negroes, and they really are doing it by carload lots. Literally by carload lots—that’s a railroad spur between the two halves of the camp.”

“Yes, sir. I saw that it was.” Colonel DeFrancis stared down at the pictures again. When he looked up this time, he wasn’t just frowning. He was slightly green, or more than slightly. “You know, I thought all those stories were bullshit. Propaganda. Stuff we pumped out to keep the civilians all hot and bothered about the war effort. Back in the last war, the British said the Germans boiled babies’ bodies to make soap. That kind of thing.”

“I felt the same way till I got out here,” Dowling said grimly. “Who wouldn’t? If you’re halfway decent yourself, you figure the guy on the other side is, too. Well, the guy on the other side here is Jake Featherston, and Jake Featherston really is just as big a son of a bitch as everybody always thought he was.”

DeFrancis eyed the photographs once more. Dowling understood that. They had an evil fascination to them. In their own way, they were just as much filthy pictures as the ones you could buy in any town where

soldiers or sailors got leave. “What can we do about this, sir?” DeFrancis asked. “We can’t just let it go on. I mean, I haven’t got any great use for niggers, but….”

“Yeah. But.” Dowling reached into another desk drawer. He pulled out a half-pint of whiskey and slid it across the desk to the younger man. “Here. Wash the taste out of your mouth.”

“Thank you, sir.” DeFrancis took a healthy swig, then set the flat bottle down. “What *can* we do? We’ve got to do something.”

“I think so, too, though you’d be amazed at how many people on our side of the border don’t give a rat’s ass,” Dowling said. “I’ve had the time to think about it now. Way it looks to me is, we can’t just bomb hell out of the camp. If we do that, we go into the nigger-killing business ourselves. Like you said, I don’t have much use for them, but I don’t want to do that.”

“I agree,” DeFrancis said. “Like I told you, sir, my first priority is blasting enemy airstrips and aircraft, but now I see what I do next.”

Dowling scratched his head. The War Department suddenly seemed to have a wild hair about C.S.

airstrips here in the West. Had the latest raids on Los Angeles and Las Vegas and Denver rattled people back East so much? If they had, why? Dowling shrugged. That wasn’t his worry—and, as often as not, the ways of the gods back in Philadelphia were unfathomable to mere mortals in the field.

“I haven’t operated out here before,” Colonel DeFrancis said. “What’s the fuel situation like?”

“We don’t have a problem there,” Dowling said. “The refineries in Southern California are working with local crude, so they’re at full capacity. We get what we need. A lot of the airplane plants are out there, too, so you should be able to get your hands on spare parts.”

“Assuming they don’t decide to send all of them—and all the avgas—to Ohio and Virginia,” DeFrancis said.

“Yes, assuming,” Dowling agreed. “We can’t do much about that, so there isn’t much point to worrying about it, is there?”

“No, sir.” The young officer eyed him. “I think we’re going to get on pretty well, sir.” He might have been announcing a miracle.

“Well, here’s hoping,” Dowling said. “I put up with General Custer for a lot of years. My thought is, if I managed that, most people ought to be able to stand me for a while.”

“Er—yes, sir.” Colonel DeFrancis gave him an odd look now. To DeFrancis, as to most people, George Armstrong Custer was a hero up on a marble column. He wasn’t a whiskey-drinking, cigar-smoking, skirt-chasing (whenever his wife wasn’t too close), evil-tempered, mule-stubborn old man. Reminding people that a hero had feet of clay (and sometimes a head of iron) seldom won you friends.

No matter what DeFrancis thought about General Custer, he knew what to do with airplanes. He built his strips close to the front, relying on the Eleventh Army not to lose ground and leave them vulnerable to artillery fire. Dowling thought he could oblige the flier there. But he was gloomily certain the Confederates would find out where the new fields were as soon as the bulldozers and steamrollers started leveling ground. No matter whether you called this part of the world west Texas or part of a revived U.S. state of Houston, the people here remained passionately pro-Confederate. And the land was so wide and troops scattered so thinly, those people had no trouble slipping across the front to tell the enemy what they knew.

Or rather, what they thought they knew. Terry DeFrancis proved devious to a downright byzantine degree. Earth-moving equipment laid out and flattened several dummy fields along with the ones his airplanes would actually use. Confederate bombers called on more of the dummies than the real airstrips, wasting their high-explosive sweetness on the desert ground.

And then DeFrancis’ medium and heavy bombers roared off to respond. Dowling drove back to one of the strips—irreverently named Fry Featherston Field—to watch them go. They and their escort fighters kicked up ungodly clouds of dust. Coughing, Dowling said, “We’ve got our own smoke screen.”

“Yes, sir,” DeFrancis shouted over the engines’ thunder. “We could use one, too. I’m not used to operating in broad daylight. It’s a different war out here. New rules.”

“No, Colonel.” Dowling shook his head. “Only one rule, the same one you find anywhere. We’ve got to beat those bastards.”

DeFrancis pondered that, but not for long. “We’ll do it, sir. We’ll beat ’em like a drum.”

He kept fighters in the air when the bombers came back for fuel and ordnance. A few bombers—and a few fighters—didn't come back. The Confederates had fighters of their own, and antiaircraft around their airfields. You couldn't fight a war without taking losses. Colonel DeFrancis looked grim. The men who went down weren't just fliers to him. They were friends, almost family.

Wireless technicians monitored signals from the U.S. airplanes, and also from the Confederates. They marked maps and brought them to DeFrancis and Dowling. "Looks like we're doing pretty good, sir,"

one of them said.

"We're plastering the fields we know about, all right," DeFrancis said.

"How many fields have they got that we don't know about?" Dowling asked.

"That's always the question," DeFrancis said. "We'll find out how hard they hit back, and from where.

Then we'll go blast hell out of those places, too. Sooner or later, they won't be able to stand the gaff any more."

He sounded confident. Dowling looked inside himself—and found he was confident, too. Enemy bombers returned, but at night: the Confederates had paid too high a price to go on with day bombing.

That was a sign they were hurting, or Dowling hoped it was. Night bombing spared their airplanes, but wasn't very accurate.

The Confederates managed to sneak auto bombs onto a couple of fields. They blew up one bomber in its revetment and cratered another runway. The runway was easy enough to repair; the bomber was a write-off. Terry DeFrancis cashiered the officers in charge of security at those strips.

When Dowling heard about the auto bombs, he telephoned and asked what the wing commander had done about them. When he found out, he grunted in sour satisfaction. "If you didn't give 'em the boot, I would have," he said.

"Figured as much, sir," DeFrancis said. "But I can shoot my own dog, by God. And I shot both those sons of bitches. They had no business falling asleep at the switch. This isn't Nebraska, for God's sake.

Enemy action shouldn't catch them playing with themselves."

"In two words, Colonel, you're right." Dowling hung up feeling better about the world than he had in quite a while. DeFrancis was an officer after his own heart.

On the ground, the Eleventh Army wasn't making much progress. Dowling used what he had as aggressively as he could. He'd already made the Confederates send that elite unit to stall his advance.

The Party Guards did it, too. He was disappointed about that, but not crushed. Whatever the Freedom Party Guards did here, they weren't doing in Ohio or Kentucky or Virginia, places that really mattered.

He wondered if the Confederates would send more bombers west to contest the skies with Terry DeFrancis' airplanes. They didn't. Their counterattacks dwindled. Before long, they were reduced to harassment raids from biplanes that sounded like flying sewing machines—Boll Weevils, the Confederates called them. They came straight out of the Great War: their pilots heaved five- and ten-pound bombs from the cockpit by hand.

That sounded laughable, till the first time one of those little bombs blew up an officers' club. The Boll Weevils flew at what would have been treetop height if there were any trees close by. Y-ranging had a devil of a time spotting them, and nothing else could, not till they got right on top of whatever they intended to hit.

They would never win the war for the CSA. Even so, they kept Dowling and DeFrancis back on their heels. U.S. air power had won part of the fight here in west Texas, but not all of it. Abner Dowling fumed in Lubbock. Nothing ever went quite the way you wished it would.

VIII

G eorge Enos had never crossed the country on a train before. That he could now said the war had come a long way in the past few months. The *Townsend* sat in drydock in San Diego, getting a refit and repairs. They'd given him enough liberty to go to Boston, stay a few days, and then hop another train heading back to the West Coast.

The one he was on now would have gone faster if it could have made anything better than a crawl at night. But blackouts were strictly enforced. The cars had black curtains. Along with conductors, they

had hard-faced blackout monitors who carried .45s and made sure nobody showed a light at night.

Those monitors had good reason to look tough. The farther east the train traveled, the more often George saw wrecks shoved off to one side of the railroad. The government no doubt figured they were part of the cost of making war. The government had a point. George doubted the people in those ravaged trains would have appreciated it.

He came through Ohio during the day, so he could see what the war had done. He stared in astonishment. It looked more like the mountains of the moon than any human landscape. How many years would this part of the country take to recover from the devastation? Would it ever? How could it?

He didn't go through Pittsburgh. From everything he'd heard, that was even worse. That he could get through at all was plenty. *This time last year, things were even worse,* he thought. He shook his head.

It seemed impossible.

Even Boston had taken bomb damage. He'd heard that, too. Seeing it as the train slowed and then stopped was something else again. *Those bastards hit my home town.* The fury that stirred up amazed him.

He wasn't overjoyed about coming into town three and a half hours behind schedule, either. He wasn't surprised, but he wasn't overjoyed. He hoped Connie and his sons weren't waiting for him on the platform. The boys would be bouncing off the walls if they'd had to sit around all that time.

When the train stopped, he jumped up, grabbed his duffel, and slung it over his shoulder. He almost clobbered another sailor. "Sorry, buddy," he said. Then a sergeant almost clobbered him. He laughed.

What went around came around, but not usually so soon.

There was a traffic jam at the door to the car. Everybody wanted to get out first. Eventually, the door opened and people squeezed out. Most of the passengers were soldiers and sailors coming home on leave. Screaming, weeping women rushed toward them.

"George!" That was redheaded Connie—she was there after all. She almost knocked him off his feet when she threw her arms around him.

"Hi, babe," he said. Then he kissed her, and that took a lot of careful

attention. He felt as if he stayed submerged longer than any submersible in the U.S. Navy. At last he came up for air, his heart pounding.

He noticed his wife was there by herself. “Where are the kids?” he asked.

“My mother’s got ’em,” Connie answered. “I figured the train would be late, and I was right…. What’s so funny?”

“You talk like Boston,” George said. “So do I, but I’m about the only guy on my ship who does. I’m not used to hearing it any more.”

“Well, you better get used to it pretty darn quick, on account of it’s how people talk around here,”

Connie said. “What do you think of that?”

He hadn’t let go of her. “Your ma’s got the boys?” he said. His wife nodded. “At her place?” Connie nodded again. George squeezed. “In that case, I know exactly what I think.” He squeezed her again, tighter.

“Oh, you do, do you? And what’s that?” Connie pretended not to know.

“Let’s go back to the apartment. You’ll find out,” he said.

“Sailors.” She laughed. “Sure, let’s go. You won’t be fit to live with till we do.” Her mock-tough tone softened. “And I’ve missed you.”

“Missed you, too, babe,” George said, and it was true. He did his best to forget his occasional visits to whores. He told himself they didn’t really count. He didn’t do anything like that when he was at home.

And his visits to pro stations must have worked; he’d passed every shortarm inspection. He wouldn’t be bringing Connie any unexpected presents. *That* was a relief.

When they got to the subway station, the ticket-seller wouldn’t take his nickel. “Free to men in uniform, sir,” she said. Before the war, everybody who worked in the subway system had been male. One more thing the pressure of fighting had changed.

“I hate these cars. They’re so crowded,” Connie said as the train rattled along. George nodded purely for politeness’ sake. It didn’t seem

that bad to him. He'd got used to being packed tight with other people on fishing boats. The Navy pushed men together closer still. No subway car could faze him.

He dropped the duffel inside the front door to the apartment and looked around in amazement. The living room was so big! And the kitchen and the bedrooms lay beyond! And a bathroom just for the family, with a door that closed! "I swear to God, hon, the skipper on the *Townsend* doesn't live half this good!"

George said.

"I should hope not," Connie said, and pulled her dress off over her head.

That wasn't what George meant, but it wasn't bad, either. He would have dragged her down on the floor and done the deed right there. Why not? With a carpet down, it was softer than the decks he'd been walking since going to sea. But, giggling, she twisted away and hurried back into the bedroom. He followed, standing at attention even while he walked.

A bed was better than even a carpeted floor. Afterwards, sated for the moment, George was willing to admit it. "Wow," he said, lighting a cigarette and then running a hand along Connie's sweet curves.

"Why'd I go and join the Navy?"

"I asked you that when you went and did it," Connie said. "See what you've been missing?"

"It's good to be home, all right," he said. "But the Army would've got me if I didn't put on a sailor suit. If I could've gone on doing my job, that would've been different. But conscription would've nailed me. I'd rather be a sailor than a soldier any day of the week, and twice on Sundays."

He wondered why. Putting to sea wasn't safer than staying on dry land. He'd seen as much in the endless clashes with the Japanese over the Sandwich Islands. But he'd been going out to sea since he was in high school. He'd never gone through the middle of the USA till this train trip from the West Coast. He was doing what he was used to.

Connie poked him in the ribs. He jerked. "What was that for?" he asked.

“What do you do when you come into port when you’re halfway around the world from me?” his wife said. “Do you go looking for floozies, the way sailors do when they get into Boston?”

“Not me,” he lied solemnly. If he hadn’t expected that question, he couldn’t have handled it so well. “I’m a married guy, I am. I like being a married guy.” To show how much he liked it, he leaned over and started caressing her in earnest. He wasn’t ready for a second round as fast as he would have been a few years earlier, but he’d gone without for a long time. He didn’t have much trouble.

Smiling in the afterglow, Connie said, “I like the way you argue.”

“Me, too,” George said, and they both laughed. She wouldn’t have liked it so much—which was putting things mildly, with her redhead’s temper—if he’d told her the truth. He never felt like straying if she was anywhere close by. If they were thousands of miles apart, though, if he wasn’t going to see her for months…As long as he didn’t come down with the clap and pass it along, what she didn’t know wouldn’t hurt her. And then he poked her the same way she’d poked him. She squeaked. “What about you?” he asked. “You looking at the handsome delivery guys and truck drivers while I’m gone?”

“That’s a laugh,” she answered. “These days, the delivery guys and truck drivers have white mustaches or hooks or wooden legs—either that or their voices aren’t done changing yet. Besides, if I was stupid enough to do something like that, you’d find out about it. Somebody would blab. Somebody always does. But you’re off in those places where nobody ever heard of you, so who knows what you could get away with if you wanted to?”

She was right. She was righter than she knew—and righter than he ever intended to let her find out. And she was right that word about straying wives did get back to husbands. A couple of men on the *Townsend* had got that kind of bad news from people in their home towns: either from relatives or from

“friends” who couldn’t stand keeping their big mouths shut.

Connie teased him about going off the reservation, but she didn’t really push him, which could only mean she didn’t really think he was doing it. That left him relieved and embarrassed at the same time. She said,

“Now that you’ve acted like a sailor who just got home, do you want

to see your children?”

“Sure,” George. “Let’s see if they remember me.”

Patrick and Margaret McGillicuddy had a house not far from the Enos’ apartment. Connie’s father was a fisherman, too, and out to sea right now. He was well past fifty; they weren’t going to conscript him no matter what. Connie’s mother was a lot like her, even if she’d put on a little weight and her hair wasn’t so bright as it used to be. Margaret McGillicuddy didn’t take guff from anyone, even her grandsons. To George’s way of thinking, that made her a better grandma, not a worse one.

He missed his own mother—a sudden stab of longing he could never do anything about now. If only she’d never taken up with that worthless, drunken bum of a writer. He’d shot himself, too, not that that did George any good.

When George walked into the McGillicuddys’ place, Leo and Stan were playing with tin soldiers, some painted green-gray, others butternut. Stan, who was younger, had the Confederates. He was losing, and not happy about it. Being a little brother meant getting the dirty end of the stick. George was the older of two children, and he had a sister. He hoped Mary Jane was doing well. He’d find out…soon.

For now, the boys looked up from their game, yelled, “Daddy!” and knocked everything over. They charged him. He picked them both up. That was harder than it had been before he joined the Navy—they’d grown a hell of a lot since.

“Hey, guys!” he said, and kissed each of them in turn. “Are you glad to see me?”

“Yeah!” they screamed, one into one ear, one into the other. The roar from the *Townsend*’s main battery might have been louder, but not a lot. Leo added, “We don’t ever want you to go away!”

“Neither do I,” Connie said softly.

“I don’t want to, either,” George said. “Sometimes you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do, though, not what you want to do.”

“That’s so,” Mrs. McGillicuddy said. She turned to Connie and went on, “Do you think I want your father to put to sea and stay away for weeks? But that’s how he keeps us fed, and that’s what he’s got to do.”

Connie couldn't even say being in the Navy was dangerous and being a fisherman wasn't. Storms out in the Atlantic claimed too many boats for that to be true. "I know," she did say. "But I still don't like it."

"Well, I don't like it, either," George said. He put down his sons. "They're heavy. I think you must be feeding 'em rocks." That made Leo and Stan giggle. Connie rolled her eyes. George aimed to enjoy his leave as much as he could. And when it was up…when it was up, he would go back, and that was all there was to it.

W ith the front stabilized not far southeast of Lubbock, Jefferson Pinkard stopped worrying about the damnyankees. He had more urgent things to worry about instead—making sure Negroes went through Camp Determination in a hurry chief among them. He didn't have numbers to let him know how the other camps in the CSA were doing, but if his wasn't the biggest he would have been mightily surprised. One thing seemed clear: they were reducing population faster than blacks could possibly breed. Every day they did that was a victory.

And then the United States started making his life difficult. U.S. bombers and fighters came overhead with little opposition from Confederate Hound Dogs. The antiaircraft guns around the camp boomed and bellowed, but didn't shoot down many enemy airplanes. Jeff telephoned the local C.S. field commander to ask for more help. "If I could give it to you, I would," Brigadier General Whitlow Ling said. "I don't have the aircraft myself, though."

"Where'd they go?" Jeff asked. He didn't quite add, *Did they fly up your ass?* He wanted the Army man to give him the facts, and pissing Ling off wouldn't help.

"Damnyankees pounded the crap out of 'em, that's where," Ling said glumly. "They got a whole new air wing sent in, and it gives 'em a big edge, dammit."

"Why can't we get more, then?" Pinkard demanded.

"I'm trying." Ling sounded harassed. "So far, no luck. Everything we make, they're keeping east of the Mississippi."

"But the *Yankees* can afford to send airplanes out here," Jeff said.

"That's about the size of it."

“And we can’t?”

“Right now, that’s about the size of it, too.”

“Shit,” Jeff said, and hung up. If the USA could do some things the CSA couldn’t match, the Confederacy was in trouble. You didn’t need to belong to the General Staff to figure that out. Only a matter of time before the damnyankees used their air superiority to…do whatever they damn well pleased.

And before long, what they pleased became pretty obvious. They started bombing the railroad lines that led into Snyder. You needed a lot of bombs to tear up train tracks, because the chances of a direct hit weren’t good. The USA *had* plenty of bombs. And U.S. fighters strafed repair crews whenever they could.

U.S. airplanes started pounding Snyder, too. That terrified Jefferson Pinkard, not for the camp’s sake but for his own. If anything happened to his pregnant wife and his stepsons, he had no idea what he’d do. *Go nuts* was all he could think of.

The house where Edith and Frank and Willie were staying—the house where Pinkard stayed when he didn’t sleep at Camp Determination—wasn’t that close to the tracks. But when the damnyankees hit Snyder, they didn’t seem to care. They did their best to knock the whole town flat. Maybe they figured that would interfere with the way Camp Determination ran. And maybe they were right, too.

Pinkard got a call from Ferdinand Koenig. “What’s this I hear about niggers piling up on sidings halfway across Texas?” the Attorney General barked. “Doesn’t sound like your camp is doing its job.”

The injustice of that made Pinkard want to reach down the telephone line and punch Koenig in the nose.

“Mr. Attorney General, sir, you repair the railroads for me,” he growled, clamping down on rage with both hands. “You get the fighters out here to shoot down the Yankee airplanes that are chewing up the line. You do that stuff, and then if I fall down on the job you can tell me I’m slacking off. Till you do it, though, you just back the hell off.”

“Maybe you want to watch your mouth,” Ferd Koenig said. How often did people talk back to him? Not very—Jeff was sure of that. The Attorney General went on, “I can have your job like *that.* ” He snapped his fingers.

“If you’re gonna blame me for shit that’s not my fault, you’re damn well welcome to it,” Jeff said. “If I screw up, that’s fine. Rake me over the coals on account of it. But if you want me to take the heat because some asshole on the General Staff won’t send airplanes way the hell out here, I’m damned if I’ll sit still for it. Go and find some other whipping boy. Then see how long *he* lasts. Me, I’ll get the fuck outa here and go someplace safer.”

A long, long silence followed. At last, Koenig said, “Maybe I was hasty.”

“Maybe you were…sir,” Jeff said. “I’ve got my family. Maybe you ought to can me. Then I can send them back to Louisiana, and I won’t have to worry about getting ’em blown to smithereens.”

“I’ll get back to you.” The Attorney General hung up.

He didn’t call back. Pinkard hadn’t really thought he would. Nobody wanted to admit he’d got his ears pinned back. But no more C.S. fighters appeared in the skies above west Texas. Maybe the CSA truly couldn’t spare them, no matter how much this front needed them. If the Confederacy couldn’t…

One more thing Jeff didn’t want to think about.

He was in Snyder for the worst air raid he’d ever gone through. His driver had just delivered him to his house and sped away when the sirens began to howl. Bombs started falling a few seconds later. Snyder boasted no fancy electronic detection gear—or if it did, Pinkard didn’t know about it. Somebody had to eyeball those airplanes before the sirens could cut loose.

He almost knocked down the front door flinging it open. “Get in the cellar!” he roared.

Edith was already herding her boys into it. “Come on, Jeff—you, too,” she said.

“I’m coming.” He tried not to show how scared he was. A storm cellar gave almost perfect protection against a tornado, as long as you got there in time. Against bombs…There was no guarantee. Nothing this side of reinforced concrete gave you a good chance against a direct hit. A wooden trapdoor wasn’t the same.

But going into a cellar was a lot better than staying out in the open. Fragments couldn’t get you. Blast probably wouldn’t, not unless the

bomb came down right on top of the house.

“Make it stop, Papa Jeff!” Frank wailed as explosions shook the earth.

“I can’t. I wish I could,” Pinkard said.

His stepson stared up at him in the dim yellow light of a kerosene lantern. “But you can do anything, Papa Jeff.”

That was touching. If only it were true. “Only God can do everything,” Pinkard said. And the way things were going for the CSA, even God looked to be falling down on the job.

“God and Hyperman,” Willie said. The younger boy sounded utterly confident. There was another comic with a similar name in the USA, but that one was banned down here. Its hero frequently clobbered Confederate spies and saboteurs. But it was so vivid and exciting, banning it wasn’t good enough. People smuggled it over the border till the powers that be in Richmond had to come up with an equivalent. Even now, from what Jeff heard, the Yankee comic circulated underground in the CSA. But Hyperman, who’d wrecked New York City at least three times and Philadelphia twice, made a good enough substitute.

Edith might have explained that God was real and Hyperman only make-believe. She might have, but bombs started falling closer just then. The thunder and boom, the earth rocking under your feet, made you forget about funnybooks. This was real, and all you could do was hope you came out the other side.

One hit so close that the lantern shuddered off the tabletop and started to fall. Jeff caught it before it hit the ground—miraculously, by the handle. He put it back where it belonged. “Wow!” Frank said, and then, “See? I told you you could do anything.”

Catching a lantern was one thing, and—Jeff knew, even if Frank didn’t—he was lucky to do even that.

Making the damnyankees stop dropping their bombs was a whole different kettle of fish. Jeff had no idea how to say that so it made sense to a little boy, and so he didn’t try.

All he could do, all anybody in Snyder could do, was sit tight and hope a bomb didn’t come down right on his head. Pinkard also hoped the Yankees weren’t bombing the camp. They hadn’t yet. What did that say? That they valued niggers’ lives more highly than those of

decent white folks? Jeff couldn't think of anything else—and if that was true, then what choice did the Confederacy have but to fight those people to the last cartridge and the last man?

After the longest forty minutes in the history of the world, the bombs stopped falling. "Do you reckon we can go up now?" Edith asked.

"I guess so," Pinkard answered, though he wasn't sure, either. His wife seemed to think he'd been through things like this before, and knew what to do about them. He wished it were true, but sitting in a cellar getting bombed was new for him, too. Back in the Great War, airplanes couldn't deliver punishment like this.

When they opened the door and went up, the house was still standing and still had all the roof. But window glass crunched and clinked under their feet. If they'd stayed up there, it would have sliced them into sausage meat. Edith softly started to cry. The boys thought it was fun—till they cut themselves on some razor-edged fragments. Then they cried, too.

Jeff went outside. "Jesus," he muttered. The house across the street had taken a direct hit. It had fallen in on itself and was burning fiercely. People stood around staring helplessly. Whoever was in there didn't have a chance of getting out. One of the houses next door to the wrecked one had half collapsed, too.

A little farther down, a bomb had gone off in the middle of the street. Water welled up onto the asphalt from a shattered main. That would make fighting fires harder, if not impossible. Telephone and power lines were down. He hadn't noticed that the electricity was out when he came up from the cellar, but he'd had other things on his mind.

And he smelled gas. "Jesus!" he said again. He'd been about to light a cigarette, but he thought better of that. Then he changed his mind and lit up anyhow. If that blaze across the street didn't set off the gas, his Raleigh wouldn't.

Plumes and clouds of smoke rose all over Snyder. It was just a little Texas town, lucky to have one fire engine. The siren wailed like a lost soul as the firemen did whatever they could wherever they could.

Edith came out, too, and looked around in disbelief. "This was a nice place," she said. "It really was.

Look what those goddamn sons of bitches went and did to it."

Pinkard's jaw dropped. She never talked like that. But she was right, no matter how she put it. Nodding, Jeff said, "Do you want to take the boys back to Alexandria, then? Y'all'd be safer there."

"No," she said, which surprised him again. "I want to stay right here with you. And I want us to lick the devil out of the USA."

Looking around at the wreckage, Jeff knew the Yankees had just licked the hell out of Snyder.

And…"They're liable to come back, you know. I don't think they'll just hit us once and go away." If they wanted to foul up Camp Determination, wrecking the way in would help.

"I'm not afraid," Edith said. "God will watch over all of us. I know He's on our side." Everybody in every war since the world began was convinced God was on his side. Half the people in every war since the world began ended up being wrong. Jeff didn't know how to say that, either. He did know Edith wouldn't listen if he tried, and so he let it go.

M ajor Jerry Dover didn't know what the hell had happened to Colonel Travis W.W. Oliphant. Dead?

Captured? Deserted? He couldn't say, and he didn't much care. With Oliphant out of the picture, keeping central Kentucky supplied landed on his shoulders. He could do it. Without false modesty, he knew he could do it better than his thickheaded superior did.

Oliphant, of course, was a Regular. He went to VMI or one of the other Confederate finishing schools for officers. No doubt he was a good enough subaltern during the Great War. But it wasn't the Great War any more, and Oliphant had had trouble figuring that out.

"Trucks!" Dover shouted into the telephone. "We need more trucks up here, dammit!" He might have been back at the Huntsman's Lodge, screaming at a butcher who'd shorted him on prime rib.

"We're sending up as many as we've got," said the officer on the other end of the line, an officer much more safely ensconced down in Tennessee. "Damnyankees are giving us a lot of trouble, you know."

That did it. Dover blew up, the same way he would have at a cheating butcher. "Give me your name, damn you! Give me your superior's name, too, on account of I'm going to tell him just what kind of a

clueless git he's got working for him. You want to know what trouble is, come up where you can hear the guns. Don't sit in a cushy office miles and miles away from anywhere and tell me how rough you've got it. Now give me your name."

Instead of doing that, the other officer hung up on him. Jerry Dover said several things that made the other logistics officers in the tent outside of Covington, Kentucky, look up in amazement. Then he called back. Someone else down in Tennessee picked up the telephone.

"Who was the last son of a bitch on the line?" Dover demanded.

"Brigadier General Tyler just stepped out," the other man replied. "Who are you, and who do you think you are?"

"Somebody who's looking for Tyler's superior," said Dover, who didn't back away from anybody. He had a short-timer's courage: he was a man with no military career to wreck. They wouldn't shoot him—the damnyankees were much more likely to do that. They wouldn't jail him for long. The worst they were likely to do was cashier him, in which case he'd go home and be better off than he was now.

"I'm going to get what I need up here in Kentucky, or I'll know the reason why."

"I'm Major General Barton Kinder," the officer said. "Now, one more time—who the dickens are you?"

"I'm Major Jerry Dover, and I want Brigadier General Tyler to pull his trucks out of his asshole and get

'em on the road up here," Dover said.

A considerable silence followed. Then Kinder said, "A major does not speak that way to a general officer."

"So sue me," Dover said. "All I know is, the damnyankees are building up like you wouldn't believe on the other side of the Ohio. We're lagging, on account of we can't get what we need where we need it.

And one of the reasons we can't is that you guys won't turn loose of your trucks. If we get swamped, you reckon anybody in Richmond's going to give a rat's ass that you've got all your fucking trucks?"

The silence lasted even longer this time. "I could have your head, Major," General Kinder said at last.

“Can you give me one good reason why I shouldn’t?”

“I can give you two, sir,” Dover said. “You give me the boot, you’ll get somebody up here who doesn’t know what the hell he’s doing, and that’ll screw up the war effort. There’s one. And two is, ten minutes after that new sucker gets here, he’s gonna be on the horn screaming his head off to you, wondering how come you’re not shipping him the shit he needs.”

“You can’t possibly be a Regular,” Major General Kinder said after yet another pause.

“Not me,” Jerry Dover agreed cheerfully. “I come out of the restaurant business. But I’m mighty goddamn good at what I do. Which counts for more…sir?”

“The restaurant business, eh? No wonder you’re such a foulmouthed son of a bitch,” Kinder said, proving he’d had at least one other restaurant manager serve under him. “All right, Major. We’ll see what we can do.”

“Thank you very much, sir.” Dover’s respect for military courtesy rose in direct proportion to how much his superiors were inclined to do what he wanted.

“You almost pushed it too far, Major,” Barton Kinder said. “I wouldn’t try that again if I were you.” He hung up before Dover could answer, which might have been lucky for all concerned.

One of the other logistics officers, who couldn’t possibly have heard what Major General Kinder said, told Dover, “Boy, you like to walk close to the edge, don’t you?”

“The damnyankees can blow me up. The damnyankees *will* blow me up if we give ’em half a chance—maybe even if we don’t,” Dover answered. “If a brass hat on my own side wants to throw me in the stockade or take the uniform off my back, what the hell do I care? The worst thing my own people can do to me is leave me right where I’m at.”

“I wish I could look at it that way.” The other man had a VMI class ring on the third finger of his right hand, so he was a career officer. That meant he was missing…

“Freedom!” Dover said. He was no Party stalwart, but the slogan rang

true here. “Isn’t that what this damn war’s all about? If we aren’t free to do what we want and tell everybody else to piss up a rope, what’s the point?”

Before the VMI graduate could answer, the world blew up. Alarms started howling and screeching.

Bombs started dropping. Shells started bursting. Men started screaming, “Gas! Gas!”

“Fuck!” Jerry Dover said, with much more passion than he’d used to say, *Freedom!* He had to rummage in his desk for a gas mask. As he fumbled it on, he knew what this was. He knew what it had to be. The Yankees had been building up for a long time. They weren’t building any more. They were coming.

Invasion! No word could rouse greater dread in the CSA. For the first two summers of the war, the Confederates had had everything their own way. The United States had a lot of debts to pay. Now it looked as if they were laying their money on the table.

“Out!” somebody shouted. “Out and into the trenches!”

That struck Jerry Dover as some of the best advice he’d ever heard. He flew out through the tent flap—not that he was the first man gone, or even the second. The trenches weren’t far away, but one of the men who got out ahead of him stopped a shell and exploded into red mist. Dover tasted blood on his lips as he ran by. He spat and spat, feeling like a cannibal.

He jumped into the trench feetfirst, as if going into a swimming hole when he was a kid. Then he looked around for something to dig with. Being merely a logistics officer, he had no entrenching tool on his belt.

A board was better than nothing. He started scraping his own dugout from the side of the trench.

Shell fragments screeched past above his head. A wounded man shrieked. Not everybody made it to the trench on time. Some Confederate guns started firing back. The noise of shells going out was different from the one they made coming in.

Bombs whistled down out of the sky. They were what really scared Dover. If one of them burst in this stretch of trench, that was it. He was safe enough from artillery here, but not from bombs.

Somebody punctuated a momentary lull by screaming, “This is it!”

“Make it stop!” someone else added a moment later, his voice high and desperate and shrill.

Jerry Dover wished it would stop, too, but it didn’t. It went on and on, till it reminded him of one of the unending bombardments from the Great War. He was convinced whoever’d let out that first cry was dead right—or, with better luck, still alive and right. This had to be it. If the damnyankees weren’t coming over the Ohio right here, this was the biggest bluff in the history of the world.

More Confederate guns boomed, but the noise they made seemed almost lost in the thunder of the Yankee barrage. Officers and sergeants shouted for men to move now here, now there. Dover wouldn’t have left his hole for all the money in the world, or for all the love in it. Moving about up there was asking to be obliterated.

Overhead, U.S. airplanes droned south. Dover swore as he listened to them. The Yankees weren’t just going after front-line C.S. troops. They were trying to tear up roads and railroads, too. The better the job they did, the more trouble the Confederacy would have bringing up men and matériel to beat them back.

And the better the job they did, the more trouble Jerry Dover would be in, not only from the U.S.

soldiers but also from his own superiors. They wouldn’t believe any disaster that befell the CSA was their fault. God forbid! Easier to blame the major who used to manage a restaurant.

A four-engine bomber fell out of the sky, its right wing a sheet of flame. It smashed down less than a quarter of a mile from where Dover huddled. Its whole bomb load went off at once. The ground shook under him. Blast slammed him into the side of the trench. He tasted blood again. It was his own this time.

“Corpsman!” “Medic!” the shouts rose again and again, from all directions. *God help these poor bastards,* Dover thought. Riflemen and machine gunners—mostly—turned their weapons away from the soldiers who wore Red Crosses. Shells and bombs didn’t give a damn.

After four and a half hours that seemed like four and a half years (Dover kept checking his watch every three months and being amazed only fifteen minutes had gone by), the gunfire let up. He waited for shouts of, *Here they come!* He was surprised he hadn’t already heard

those shouts. The damnyankees could have carved out a formidable bridgehead under cover of that barrage.

Then, just when he started to wonder if it was a bluff after all, more shells came in, these close by the river. “Smoke!” Again, the shout came from everywhere at once. U.S. light airplanes buzzed along the southern bank of the Ohio, spraying more smoke behind them. They got away with it, too. They made perfect targets, but the Confederates near Covington were simply too battered and rattled to shoot back.

Slowly, slowly, the smoke screen cleared. Jerry Dover started to look up, but the rattle of machine-gun fire made him duck back into the trench again. Those small airplanes came back and sprayed more smoke. The sound of machine guns and rifles roared from it.

“Reinforcements!” someone bawled. “We got to get us reinforcements, before they break out and go hog wild!”

“Fuck me!” That shout of despair came from close by Dover. “They’ve got barrels over the river!”

Dover looked up. Sure as hell, through the smoke that now thinned again he spied several squat, monstrous shapes. The growl of their engines added more noise to the racketing gunfire.

A Confederate shell burst in front of a barrel—and it ceased to be. It didn’t brew up; it didn’t catch fire.

It…vanished. “It’s a goddamn balloon!” Dover exclaimed.

There were no real barrels close by—only more balloons. The noise of engines and gunfire came from phonograph records and loudspeakers. Whoever’d planted them had disappeared. *The biggest bluff in the history of the world,* Jerry Dover thought again. And it had worked. It froze the Confederates by Covington. Now…Where was the real blow landing?

I rving Morrell was wary of repeating himself. Irving Morrell was wary of repeating himself. The armor commander shook his head, wondering if he was going out of his tree. He wanted to drive Jake Featherston out of *his* instead. Crossing a river the size of the Ohio wasn’t easy. When George Custer did it in the Great War, he paid a heavy price—and he went on paying a heavy price while his troops ground their way southward a few hundred yards at a time.

Back in 1917, Morrell got men over the Cumberland east of Nashville

much more quickly, much more neatly. But he had to figure the Confederates now knew all about what he did then and how he did it.

They were bastards, but they weren't dopes. If he tried the same thing twice, they would hand him his head. And he would deserve it.

And so, in football terms, he was doing his best to fake them out of their jocks. He laid on ferocious barrages in front of Covington and Louisville, and one on an open stretch of river between the two Kentucky towns. He used all the sneaky ingenuity the Army could come up with—and some straight out of Hollywood, too. Inflatable rubber barrels and sound-effects records kept the Confederates guessing a crucial extra little while. So did shells that gurgled as they flew through the air but didn't hold any gas. A sensible man would figure no one wasted gas shells on a bluff. And a sensible man would be right.

Morrell saved the real ones for the genuine assault.

The state of the art of crossing rivers in the face of enemy fire had improved since 1917. You didn't have to throw pontoon bridges across or send men over in wallowing barges. Armored landing craft delivered soldiers, barrels, and artillery in a hurry. Only a direct hit from a 105 or a bigger cannon yet could make them say uncle. Once the soldiers carved out a lodgement, then bridges could span the river.

No, the tricky part wasn't the crossing itself. The tricky part was moving men and matériel into southern Indiana without letting the bastards in butternut know what was going on. Lots of trucks made lots of trips carrying nothing to fool Featherston's fuckers into thinking the real blow would fall farther east. Lots of others carried men who promptly reboarded them under cover of darkness. More inflatable barrels and wooden artillery pieces left the impression of buildups where there were none. So did acres of tents just out of range of C.S. artillery.

Now Morrell had to hope all his deceptions were deceptive enough, his security tight enough. That the Confederates had spies on the northern bank of the Ohio went without saying. That U.S. Intelligence hadn't rooted out all of them was also a given. How much they reported, how much they were believed…Those were the questions only battle would answer.

So far, everything looked good. The U.S. concentration lay between two tiny Indiana riverside towns with odd names: Magnet and Derby.

Magnet hadn't attracted any particular Confederate attention. That made Morrell want to tip his derby to the men under him who'd made the crossing work.

He wanted to, but he didn't—he wasn't wearing a derby. He was wearing a helmet with two stars painted on the front. On a parade helmet, the stars would have been gold so they stood out. Morrell didn't want them to stand out. One sniper had already hit him. He wasn't anxious to make himself a target for another one. His rank emblems were dull brown, and invisible from more than a few feet away.

His own headquarters were in Derby, the more southerly of the two towns. People there talked with a twang that reminded him of the wrong side of the border. Intelligence assured him they were no more disloyal than anybody else. He hoped Intelligence knew what it was talking about. But his hackles rose whenever he listened to any of the locals.

Through field glasses, he watched artillery and dive bombers pound northern Kentucky. The Confederates were trying to hit back, but they seemed a little punch-drunk, a little slow. The corners of Morrell's mouth turned down. Two years earlier, he and Abner Dowling were a beat late when they tried to meet the C.S. thrust into Ohio. About time the other side found out what that felt like.

A soldier from the wireless shack came up to him and saluted. "We've reached Objective A, sir," he reported.

Morrell looked at his watch. Two in the afternoon, a few minutes past. "Almost an hour ahead of schedule," he said. They'd driven the Confederates out of rifle and machine-gun range of the Ohio: pushed them back more than a mile. Jake Featherston's men wouldn't have an easy time driving the invaders into the river now. And Morrell had another reason to beam. "With Objective A taken, I can cross myself."

"Yes, sir," the noncom said. Morrell had strict orders from Philadelphia to stay north of the Ohio till the Confederates were cleared from the riverside. He obeyed orders like that only when he felt like it. Here, reluctantly, he saw they made good sense.

"General Parsons!" he shouted now.

His second-in-command came running. "Yes, sir?" Brigadier General Harlan Parsons was short and square and tough. He didn't have much

imagination, but he didn't have much give, either.

"As of now, you're in command," Morrell said. "Keep 'em crossing the river, keep 'em moving forward.

When I get south of the Ohio, I'll take over again. My barrel's got enough wireless circuits to do the broadcasting for New York City." He exaggerated, but not by much.

Parsons saluted again. "I'll handle it, sir," he said, and Morrell had no doubt he would. "I'll see you when we get to Objective B."

"Right," Morrell said. They would have to drive the Confederates out of artillery range of the Ohio—say, ten or twelve miles back—to meet their second objective. If everything went according to plan, that would take another two days. But who could say what the plan had to do with reality? You went out there and you saw what happened.

Morrell hurried toward his fancy barrel with the eagerness of a lover going to his beloved. The rest of the crew stood around the machine, waiting. As soon as the four enlisted men saw him, they scrambled into the machine. The engine roared to life even as he was slipping down through the hatch atop the cupola and into the turret.

"Take us onto the landing craft," he called to the driver as soon as his mouth reached the intercom mike.

"Yes, sir!" The barrel rumbled forward, first on the soft riverside earth and then on the steel ramp that led up into the ungainly, slab-sided, river-crossing contraption.

Sailors—they wore Navy blue, not Army green-gray—raised the ramp. It clanged into place, hard enough to make the barrel shake for a moment. A series of clangs meant the ramp was stowed and now had become the boat's stern or rear end or whatever the hell you called it. The boat's engine started up.

The vibration made Morrell's back teeth ache. Well, a dentist could wait.

The landing craft was as graceful as a fat man waddling along with an anvil. But a fat man lugging an anvil would sink like a stone if he went into the water. The landing craft didn't. God and the engineers who designed it no doubt knew why it didn't. Irving Morrell had no idea. He took the notion on faith.

Somehow, believing in the landing craft was easier than his Sunday-school lessons had been.

Crossing the Ohio took about fifteen minutes. A few Confederate shells splashed into the river not far away. Fragments clanged off the landing craft's sides. Nothing got through. Up front, the barrel driver said, "Thank you, Jesus!" He still believed in what he'd learned in Sunday school.

Then, with a jolt that clicked Morrell's teeth together, the barrel wallowed up onto dry land again. The ramp thudded down. Morrell hadn't felt the boat turn in the water, but it faced away from the Ohio. The barrel went into reverse and left its steel nest. Morrell felt like cheering when the tracks bit into soft ground. Here he was, on Confederate soil at last after spending most of the two years trying to defend his own country.

"Forward!" he told the driver. "Toward the fighting!" Then he played with the dials on the big, bulky wireless set that cramped the turret. "Nest, this is Robin," he said, wondering who'd picked such idiotic code names. "Nest, this is Robin. Do you read?"

"Read you five by five, Robin." The answer resounded in his earphones. He was back in touch, back in command. After fifteen or twenty minutes of glory—and responsibility—Harlan Parsons could go back to being number two.

"What is the situation?" Morrell asked. "Any changes?"

"Negative, sir," the wireless man replied. "Everything's on schedule, or maybe a little ahead of schedule."

"Sounds good to me," Morrell said. Before the Nest could answer, a noise like a giant frying bacon filled his earphones. Swearing, he yanked them off his head. The Confederates were starting to jam signals.

That was a sign they were getting their wits about them and seriously starting to fight back. Morrell swore some more. He would have liked the enemy to stay stunned a while longer. You didn't always get everything you wanted. As long as the USA had enough…

The barrel jounced past the burning ruin of a C.S. machine. Four soldiers in blood-soaked butternut coveralls—the barrel crew—sprawled close by in death. Maybe the fifth man got away. Or maybe

he never got out, and was nothing but charred meat inside the barrel.

Morrell rode toward the front standing up in the turret, head and shoulders out of the cupola. He wanted to see what was going on. Enemy fire was light. Machine guns and other small arms farther forward chattered. Every Confederate foot soldier carried either an automatic rifle or a submachine gun. The bastards in butternut had plenty of firepower. Did they have enough big guns, enough barrels, enough airplanes, enough *men*? Morrell and the United States were betting they didn't.

A salvo of those newfangled rockets screamed in from the south. Morrell just had time to duck down into the turret and slam the cupola hatch shut before the rockets burst. Blast rocked the barrel. It could flip even one of these heavy machines right over. It could, but it didn't this time. Fragments clanged off armor.

"Son of a bitch!" Frenchy Bergeron said. "Those fuckers are no fun at all."

"Right the first time," Morrell told the gunner. Yes, the Confederates were fighting back. No reason to expect they wouldn't, no matter how much Morrell would have liked it if they rolled over onto their backs like whipped dogs.

Another salvo of rockets came down, this one a little farther away. "God help the poor infantry,"

Bergeron remarked. Morrell nodded. For plastering a wide area with firepower, those rockets were world-beaters. Bergeron went on, "How many of them have they got, anyway?"

"Good question," Morrell said. "Best answer I've got is, not enough to stop us." He hoped he was telling the truth. Somewhere in Alabama or Texas or Georgia, the CSA had factories working overtime to turn out the rockets and their launchers, though the latter were simplicity itself: just iron tubing and sheet metal.

But the more rockets the Confederates made, the less of something else they turned out. Bullets?

Automatic rifles? Barrel tracks? Canned corn? Something—that was for sure. Keep the pressure on them and they couldn't make enough of everything they needed and keep an army in the field at the same time, not when they were fighting a country more than twice their

size.

Things had worked that way in the Great War, anyhow. The United States ought to have a bigger edge this time, because the Confederates were persecuting their Negroes instead of using them. But industrialized agriculture and factory efficiency were both a lot further along than they were a generation earlier. Farms and factories kept fewer men away from the field than they had.

The bow machine gun on Morrell's barrel fired a quick burst. "Scratch one!" the gunner said. A Confederate who did make it to the battlefield wouldn't go home again. Morrell nodded to himself.

Now—how many more would it take before Jake Featherston said uncle?

C incinnatus Driver sat in a tent north of Cincinnati, hoping the other shoe would drop here. U.S. forces were already over the river farther west, driving from Indiana into western Kentucky. Meanwhile, Cincinnatus shoved money into the pot. "See you an' raise you a dollar," he said. He was holding three jacks, so he thought his chances were pretty good.

One of the other truck drivers still in the hand dropped out. The last driver raised a dollar himself.

Cincinnatus eyed him. He'd drawn two. If he'd filled a straight or a flush, he'd done it by accident. Odds against that were pretty steep. Cincinnatus bumped it up another dollar.

Now the other man—a white—eyed him. He tossed in one more dollar of his own. "Call," he said.

"Three jacks." Cincinnatus showed them. The other driver swore—he had three eights. Cincinnatus scooped up the pot. The other driver, still muttering darkly, grabbed the cards and shuffled them for the next hand.

He'd just started to deal when artillery, a lot of artillery, roared not far away. All the men in the card game cocked their heads to one side, listening. "Ours," one of them said. The rest nodded, Cincinnatus included.

"Don't sound like they're dicking around," said the fellow who'd held three eights. He was a wiry little guy named Izzy Saperstein. He had a beard so thick he shaved twice a day and the most hair in his nose and

ears Cincinnatus had ever seen.

“Put on a bigger barrage earlier,” another driver said. “Made the bastards in butternut keep their heads down and made sure they wouldn’t move soldiers west. Chances are this is more of the same.”

“Maybe.” Saperstein scratched his ear. With that tuft sprouting from it, he likely itched all the time.

Cincinnatus wondered if he couldn’t cut the hair or pluck it or something. It was just this side of disgusting.

They played for another couple of hours, while the guns boomed and bellowed. None of them got excited about that. They’d all heard plenty of gunfire before. As long as nothing was coming down on their heads, they didn’t flabble. Cincinnatus won a little, lost a little, won a little more.

He was up about fifteen bucks when a U.S. captain stuck his head into the tent. “Go to your trucks now, men,” he said. “Head for the depot and load up. We’ve crossed the Ohio, and our boys’ll need everything we can bring ’em.”

“Crossed the Ohio? Here?” Izzy Saperstein sounded amazed.

Cincinnatus was surprised, too. He hadn’t really believed the USA would try to force a crossing here. He didn’t know many people who had, either. If folks on this side were caught by surprise, maybe the Confederates would be, too. “We fighting in Covington, sir?” he asked. “I was born there. I know my way around good. I can lead and show folks the way.”

“Thanks, Driver, but no,” the captain answered. “We’re going to skirt the town, pen up the enemy garrison inside, and clean it out at our leisure. Now get moving.”

Only one possible answer to that. Cincinnatus gave it: “Yes, sir.” Along with the other men, he headed for his truck as fast as he could go.

A self-starter was so handy. A touch of a button and the motor came to life. He remembered cranking trucks in the Great War. That was even more fun in the rain—and if your hand slipped, the crank would spin backwards and maybe break your arm. He didn’t have to worry about that now. No—all he needed to worry about was getting shot or incinerated or blown sky-high. *Happy day,* he thought.

Soldiers with dollies filled the back of the truck with crates of God knew what. Ammunition, he guessed by the way the truck settled on its springs. “Go get ’em, Pop!” one of the young white men yelled to him.

Cincinnatus grinned and waved. He was plenty old enough to be that kid’s father. And *Pop* didn’t burn his ears the way *Uncle* would have. The soldier would have said the same thing to a white man Cincinnatus’ age. In the CSA, *Uncle* was what whites called a Negro too old to get stuck with *boy*.

The truck convoy rumbled south, toward the river. With so much weight in the rear, Cincinnatus’

deuce-and-a-half rode a lot smoother than it did empty. He drove past gun pits where gun bunnies stripped to the waist worked like men possessed to throw more shells at the Confederates. Some of the U.S. soldiers were already lobster-red from too much sun. Cincinnatus glanced at his own brown arm.

There weren’t many things white men had to worry about that he didn’t, but sunburn was one of them.

Every so often, incoming shells burst. Think what you would about the men who followed Jake Featherston, but they had no quit in them. Wherever they could hit back, they did.

“This way! This way!” A sergeant with wigwag flags directed the trucks toward slab-sided boats plainly made to cross rivers no matter what the unpleasant people on the other bank had to say about it.

Cincinnatus rolled into one.

“All the way forward!” a sailor told him. “We hold two trucks, by God.” Cincinnatus rolled up till his front bumper kissed the landing craft’s rear wall. The sailor rewarded him with a circle from his thumb and forefinger. Cincinnatus waved and nodded, as he had with the young soldier who loaded the truck.

He knew how the man in blue meant the gesture. Whether the sailor did or not, though, Cincinnatus also happened to know that to Germans (many of whom had crossed from Cincinnati to Covington in the easygoing days before the Great War) a very similar hand sign meant you were an asshole.

Another truck followed his into the ungainly boat. It didn’t quite have

to bump his machine to let the boat's crew raise the ramp and dog it shut. "Do I leave my motor on?" Cincinnatus called to the closest sailor.

"Bet your butt, buddy," the man answered. "You're gonna wanna hit the ground running, right?"

Cincinnatus didn't say no. He wished he were someplace where the Confederates couldn't shoot at him or shell him or drop bombs on his head. *Why didn't you stay in Des Moines, then?* he asked himself. A little—no, much—too late to worry about that now. And he knew why he didn't stay there: he owed the CSA too much. But understanding that and liking it when he headed into danger were two different things.

On land, the landing craft ran well enough to get down into the river. On the Ohio, it ran well enough to cross. On the other side, it got up onto the bank. It didn't do any of those things very well. That it could do all of them, even if badly, made it a valuable machine. The wall against which Cincinnatus' truck nestled also proved to be a ramp. It thudded down. He put the truck in gear and rolled off. The other truck in the landing craft followed him.

A corporal pointed at him, and then at some other trucks. "Follow them!" the man yelled. Cincinnatus nodded to show he understood. He wasn't sure those other trucks came from his unit. That wasn't his worry, not right now. Somebody'd told him what to do. He just had to do it.

He began to wonder if they'd caught the Confederates flatfooted. There wasn't a lot of incoming enemy fire. He didn't miss it, and he hoped that what there was kept missing him. Whenever he could, he glanced east, toward Covington. He could see…exactly nothing. He hoped the police and Freedom Party stalwarts and guards hadn't shipped all the Negroes in town off to camps farther south. He hoped Lucullus Wood and the other black Reds were finding ways to give the Confederates a hard time, even from behind barbed wire. All he could do was hope. He couldn't know.

The convoy stopped by a battery of 105s. Soldiers swarmed aboard his truck and unloaded it with locustlike intensity. He waited to see if they would start swearing, the way they might if, say, he carried crates full of machine-gun belts. When they didn't, he decided the corporal had sent him to the right place after all.

"Where do I go now?" he asked when the truck was empty. "Back across the river to load up again?"

"No, by God." A U.S. soldier pointed south and west. "We just took a Confederate supply depot. I mean to tell you, the guy who was running it must've been a fucking genius. Everything from pencils to pecans to power tools. Ammunition out the ass, too."

“That don’t do us much good,” Cincinnatus said. “They don’t use the same calibers as we do.”

“Yeah, but we got a lotta guys carrying their automatic rifles. Damn things are great, long as you can keep ’em in bullets,” the soldier said. “We got enough of their ammo at this here dump to keep a lot of our guys going for a long time.”

Cincinnatus liked the way that sounded. When he got to the depot, he decided the soldier who’d sent him there was right: the quartermaster who’d set it up was a genius. If he was still alive, he was bound to be gnashing his teeth that everything he’d labored to gather now lay in U.S. hands. The Confederates hadn’t even got the chance to blow up the ammunition.

This time, Cincinnatus could see what went into the back of his truck. RATIONS, CANNED, the crates said. No doubt U.S. authorities would use them to feed soldiers in green-gray. And no doubt the soldiers in green-gray would grumble when they got them. U.S. canned goods were better than their C.S.

equivalents. But Confederate rations were ever so much better than no rations at all.

Confederate prisoners marched glumly up the road toward the Ohio. The U.S. troops in green-gray who herded them along got them off the highway and onto the shoulder to keep them from slowing down the southbound trucks. Some of the men in butternut stared at Cincinnatus’ dark face in the cab of his truck.

He sent them a cheery wave and went on driving. So they didn’t think Negroes were good for anything, did they? Well, he hoped he gave them a surprise.

The U.S. soldiers who unloaded the truck didn’t seem so happy. “We’ve got our own canned goods, dammit,” one of them said. “We don’t want this Confederate shit.” His pals nodded.

“Don’t blame me, friends,” Cincinnatus said. “I just brung what they told me to bring.”

“Why didn’t they tell you to bring us a shitload of Confederate cigarettes?” the soldier said. “That woulda been worth somethin’.”

“Fuck it,” said another young man in green-gray. “We’re heading

down into tobacco country. We'll get our own smokes before long."

"Yeah!" Two or three U.S. soldiers liked the sound of that. So did Cincinnatus, for different reasons.

They weren't more than ten or twelve miles south of Covington, but they thought they could go a lot farther. He'd seen that arrogance in Confederate soldiers before, but rarely in their U.S. counterparts. If they thought going into a fight that they could lick the enemy, that made them more likely to be right.

"General Morrell, he knows what the hell he's doing," the first soldier said. Again, he got nothing but agreement from his buddies. Again, Cincinnatus wondered if he was hearing straight. U.S. soldiers usually thought of their generals as bungling idiots—and usually had good, solid reasons for thinking of them that way.

Up ahead, Confederate guns boomed. A few shells came down not too far away. The soldiers laughed.

"If that's the best those bastards can do, they won't even slow us down," one of them said.

"They pulled this shit on us two years ago," another one added. "Hell, I was in Ohio then. They caught me, but I slipped off before they took me very far. We didn't know how to stop 'em. And you know what? I bet they don't know how to stop us, either."

No sooner had he spoken than several rocket salvos screamed down out of the sky. They didn't land on the trucks, but half a mile or so to the east. Where the artillery hadn't, they sobered the U.S. soldiers.

"Well, maybe it won't be quite so easy," the first one said. "But I bet we can do it."

L ieutenant Michael Pound thought he was getting the hang of commanding four other barrels instead of doing the gunning for one. He hoped he was, anyhow. None of the other barrel commanders in the platoon was complaining. They'd plunged deep into Kentucky, and all five machines were still intact.

He studied the map. The next town ahead, on the north bank of the Green River, was called Calhoun.

The hamlet on the south side of the river, Rumsey, was even smaller. They probably didn't have a thousand people put together.

John Calhoun, Pound remembered, was a Southern politician before the War of Secession—and, therefore, a son of a bitch by definition. A town named after him deserved whatever happened to it.

Pound didn't know who Rumsey was. Nobody good, probably.

Calhoun and Rumsey together wouldn't have mattered if not for the bridge between them. The James Bethel Gresham Memorial Bridge, the map called it, and noted that it was named for a Kentuckian who was one of the first Confederate soldiers to die in the Great War. *He had it coming,* Pound thought unkindly.

He eyed the bridge from the edge of the woods that encroached on Calhoun from the north. Binoculars made it seem to leap almost to within arm's length. Some Confederate soldiers milled around in Calhoun, but not many, and they didn't seem very well organized.

As usual, Pound didn't need long to make up his mind. He got on the all-platoon circuit of his wireless:

"Men, we are going to take that bridge away from the enemy."

"How, sir?" That was Sergeant Frank Blakey, the next most senior barrel commander. "Won't they just blow it when they see us coming?"

"Sure—if they recognize us," Pound answered. "But if they don't…" He explained what he had in mind.

When he finished, Sergeant Blakey whistled. "You've got the balls of a burglar, sir. If we try it, though, we just have to hope you don't get 'em draped over a doorknob."

"If you think it won't work, sing out," Pound said. "I spent years telling officers they were a bunch of damn fools—and they mostly were, too. My ears won't fall off if you tell me the same thing."

Despite reassurances, none of the noncoms under him spoke up right away. At last, Blakey said, "I think we've got a chance, sir. Like you say, they sure as hell won't be expecting it." He laughed. "I wouldn't—you better believe that."

"Let's go, then." When an idea struck Pound, it struck hard. This one was no exception. He threw open the cupola lid and climbed out of the barrel. "Come on," he called to his gunner and loader. "Time's a-

wasting."

They descended from the machine, too. They both looked faintly dubious, or more than faintly, but they went along. Crewmen also got out of the other four barrels. Like Michael Pound and his men, they started cutting down bushes and leafy branches and tying them to the decking and turrets of their machines, breaking up their silhouettes and hiding a lot of the green-gray paint that covered them.

An infantry lieutenant came up to Pound. "What the hell are you guys doing?" he asked. "Playing Queen of the May?"

"I hope not." Pound pointed to the span between Calhoun and Rumsey. "I aim to take that bridge. I'll probably need your help to do it." He told the other officer—who was at least twenty years younger than he was—his plan.

"You got your nerve, don't you?" The infantry lieutenant echoed Sergeant Blakey. But he nodded.

"Yeah, we can do that. Keep quiet till you make it onto the bridge or you get in trouble, then open up with everything we got." He had a tough-guy, big-city accent—Pound guessed he was from Chicago. He added, "You know that's liable to be kinda too late, don't you?"

"Chance you take." Pound's broad shoulders went up and down in a shrug. "If we go down, we'll go down swinging."

"Hope you don't. We'll back your play." The other lieutenant stuck out his hand. "Luck." He didn't say, *You'll need it,* but it was written all over his face.

Pound shook hands with him anyway. "Thanks. If this does work, come on down once we're where we need to be and help us take charge of things."

"Right," the infantry lieutenant said. *Fat chance,* his face declared.

When the barrels were camouflaged to Pound's satisfaction, he led the parade down into Calhoun. The other four machines stayed buttoned up. He couldn't stand that. He wanted to see everything that was going on—and he thought he might need to talk his way past some of the men in butternut.

Along State Highway 81 they rumbled, past Seventh, Sixth, Fifth, Fourth. Calhoun didn't seem to have any street with a number bigger

than Seventh. They got down to Mayberry, four blocks past the county seat and only a block away from the river, before anybody thought to challenge them. A Confederate sergeant stepped out into the narrow road and called, “What do y’all reckon you’re doin’?”

“Securing the bridge, of course.” As usual, Michael Pound acted as if he had not a doubt in the world.

Frowning, the sergeant hefted his automatic rifle. The barrel’s bow machine gun could cut him in half before he started shooting…Pound hoped. “You talk funny,” the noncom said. “Where you from?”

“New Orleans,” Pound answered. The Crescent City’s half-Southern, half-Brooklyn speech pattern was different from anything else in the CSA. His own accent was much closer to Canadian than anything else; he’d grown up not far from the border. It didn’t sound much like that of a native Louisianan, but if this Confederate wasn’t expecting anybody from the USA….

And he wasn’t. He stepped aside, saying, “Wish to God somebody woulda told us we were getting barrels sent in.”

Life is full of surprises, Pound thought, but he didn’t say anything out loud—the less he opened his mouth where Confederates could hear, the better. The barrel turned right on First and rumbled west toward the bridge to Rumsey. The bridge was about a quarter of a mile away. Pound’s machine had covered a little more than half the distance when somebody shouted, “Holy Jesus! They’re Yankees!”

“Shit!” Pound said, without originality but with great sincerity. A burst of submachine-gun fire clanged off the side of the barrel. He dove down into the turret. “Gun it for the bridge!” he yelled to the driver. To the bow gunner, he added, “Shoot anybody who gets in our way or tries to blow the bridge!”

“Yes, sir,” both men answered. The barrel’s engine went from rumble to roar. The ponderous machine couldn’t leap, but it could scoot pretty fast. It could—and it did.

“What if they can blow the damn thing from the Rumsey side, sir?” the gunner asked.

“There’s a technical term for that, Sergeant,” Pound answered. “In that case, we’re screwed.” He startled a laugh out of Mel Scullard. A moment later, he added, “Once we’re *on* the bridge, I want you to make sure nothing alive has the chance to come up from Rumsey and

blow it. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, sir,” Scullard said, which was the right answer. He gave the loader a one-word order: “Canister!”

“Canister,” Private Joe Mouradian echoed. The shell went into the breech. Barrels carried only three or four rounds of canister in their racks because they needed it so seldom. When they did need it, though, they were liable to need it bad. It turned the main armament into an enormous shotgun. Anybody who came within a hundred yards or so was asking to get blown to bits.

The driver turned left onto the bridge so sharply, Pound thanked the God in Whom he only sporadically believed for not letting the barrel throw a track. One of the machines behind him fired a round from its main armament. He couldn’t see what it was shooting at—he had his eyes on the forward-facing periscopes that showed the far end of the bridge and the village of Rumsey beyond.

“Stop just at the end of the bridge,” he told the driver.

“At the end of the bridge—yes, sir.” No sooner had the driver stopped than soldiers in butternut started running toward the barrel. The bow machine gun chattered. The Confederate soldiers went down, some dead or wounded, others diving for cover. Civilians appeared in the streets, too, but they were running for cover.

After the first impromptu charge from Rumsey failed, the Confederates paused to put together a proper attack. Whoever led it was plenty smart. He had plenty of people with automatic rifles and submachine guns going forward in front of the men with Featherston Fizzes and the Confederates’ newfangled antibarrel rockets. If the troops making the racket with the small arms could distract the barrel crew…

But the Confederate commander reckoned without canister. Pound waited till the closest enemy soldiers were very close indeed before he shouted, “Fire!”

Even he was awed by the carnage a 3½-inch canister shell could cause. Men and pieces of men lay and writhed, broken, in front of the barrel. Several dropped Featherston Fizzes added flames to the horror.

“Shall I give ’em another round, sir?” Scullard asked.

“By all means,” Pound answered.

The second round of canister, when added to the steady rattle of death from the bow machine gun, convinced the handful of Confederates still on their feet to get away if they could. “Give me one more round,” the gunner told the loader.

“Hold up on that.” Pound overrode him. “Use HE instead, and start knocking down the houses closest to us. I don’t want one of those bastards with a rocket to be able to get off an easy shot at us.”

“I’ll do it, sir,” Scullard said, and he did, with the peculiar gusto a man has when destroying property that belongs to the other side. A secondary explosion from inside one of those houses in Rumsey made Pound think he’d barely beaten the Confederates to the punch: if that wasn’t a rocket blowing up, what was it?

Sergeant Blakey’s barrel came up alongside Pound’s. The other three in the platoon held the north end of the bridge against the Confederates in Calhoun. Their cannon and machine guns thundered and barked.

Pound hoped the U.S. foot soldiers in the woods north of Calhoun were pressing down into the town.

Squeezed between them and the barrels on the bridge, what could Featherston’s men do but get out?

The Confederates inside Rumsey had an antibarrel cannon: an inch-and-a-halfer from the days when the war first started. It had two virtues—it was easy to haul around, and it fired rapidly. Against one of the new U.S. barrels, though, it was hardly more than a doorknocker. Its shells had no hope of penetrating that thick, well-sloped armor.

“There it is, sir!” Scullard said. “In the bushes by that big house.”

“You’re right,” Pound said. “Do the honors, then.”

“Yes, sir,” the gunner said, and then, to the loader, “HE!” Two shells sufficed to upend the gun and send a couple of the men who served it flying. Pound nodded to himself in somber satisfaction. If the other side wanted to play the game but didn’t have good cards…well, too bad for them.

He looked through the periscopes facing back toward Calhoun. Alarm tingled through him. Soldiers were on the bridge. Could he traverse the turret fast enough to fire at them before they reached the barrel?

But then he relaxed—they wore green-gray, not butternut.

“We have Calhoun,” he said happily. “And we have the bridge—intact, by God. We can keep rolling right on through Kentucky. Let’s see Featherston stop us. Let’s see anybody stop us.”

IX

I n the reinforced-concrete shelter under the ruins of the Gray House, Jake Featherston fumed. He had the feeling of being a bug pinned down on a collector’s board. Wiggle as he would, the pin held him helplessly in place.

He’d had that feeling in the last war, when U.S. artillery and barrels inexorably pushed the Army of Northern Virginia back from Pennsylvania through Maryland and into the state for which it was named.

He’d sworn he would never feel that way again. He’d sworn the Confederate States would never let anybody on earth do that to them again. For two years, near enough, his barrels and dive bombers made good on the boast. Now…

Now the damnyankees had barrels and dive bombers, too. Their machines were just as good as the CSA’s. From the dismayed reports from the field, their latest barrels were better than anything the Confederates had. And the United States had swarms of barrels and cannon and airplanes and men, while the Confederates had…what was left from the adventures of the past two years.

Lulu stuck her head into the office. “Mr. President, General Forrest is here to see you.”

“Thanks,” Featherston said. “Please send him in.” He could order Negroes sent to camps by the tens of thousands, by the hundreds of thousands, without batting an eye, but he was always polite to his secretary.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III came in and gave him a perfunctory salute. “Mr. President,” he said, and then, plainly with an effort, “Freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jake echoed; the Party slogan never felt stale to him. He waved the head of the General Staff to a chair. Seeing how haggard Forrest looked, he took out the bottle of whiskey that lived in his desk

drawer. “Need a snort?”

“Don’t mind if I do, sir.” Forrest poured himself a healthy shot. “Mud in your eye.” He knocked it back.

Jake Featherston also drank. Forrest eyed him. “That was good, but I don’t reckon I can drink enough to make me forget how much trouble we’re in.”

“You’re the fellow who’s supposed to get us out of trouble like that,” Jake said.

“With what…sir?” Forrest asked. “Talk about making bricks without straw—I feel like I’m trying to make bricks without mud out there. How can I stop the damnyankees when they’re throwing everything but the kitchen sink at me and I don’t even have the goddamn sink?”

“It can’t be that bad,” Featherston said.

“No, sir. It’s worse,” Nathan Bedford Forrest III said. “We…lost a lot of men and we lost a lot of matériel in Pittsburgh and falling back afterwards.”

“The Yankees must have lost a lot, too.” Featherston eyed the whiskey bottle. He still drank, but he couldn’t remember the last time he really *drank.* Getting plowed, forgetting all this crap, was an enormous temptation. But the crap wouldn’t go away, and it would get worse while he wasn’t looking at it. And so, regretfully, he looked but he didn’t grab the bottle again.

“They did, sir. No doubt about it,” the chief of the General Staff said earnestly. *He’s getting ready to call me a damn fool,* Featherston thought. *He’ll be polite about it, but he’ll do it just the same.* And sure as hell, Forrest went on, “But they’ve got more men and more factories than we do. They can build up faster than we can, and they can go on building up to a level…we have trouble matching.”

A level we can’t match—that’s what he almost said. “They’ve got more men. We can’t do much about that,” Jake said. “But we’ve got better men, by God, and we’ve got better weapons. The automatic rifles, and now the rockets…”

“All that’s true, sir, and it’s why things aren’t worse,” Forrest said. “But our artillery’s no better than theirs, and they’ve got more. Our airplanes aren’t better, and they’ve got more. That’s really starting to hurt. And when it comes to barrels—sir, when it comes to barrels,

they've got a step up on us. That's starting to hurt bad, too."

"Goddammit, why can't we keep up?" Jake Featherston snarled. "We were ahead when the war started."

"We don't have enough engineers, sir. We don't have enough factory hands," Forrest said. "Damn near every healthy white man in the country from eighteen to fifty's in uniform."

"Women are taking up some of the slack in the factories—more every day, in fact." Forrest was angry he'd taken too long to see how important that was. He didn't like giving women such jobs. In the long run, it would twist the CSA out of the shape he wanted the country to have. But if you got smashed in the short run, the long run didn't matter. So women went to work in war plants, and he'd worry about what it all meant later—if there was a later.

"We still need more bodies in there, sir." Forrest took a deep breath. "If there was any way we could get more use out of our niggers—"

"No," Featherston said in a low, deadly voice. "The niggers are Party business. They're *my* business.

Don't you go sticking your nose in where it doesn't belong. We are gonna come out of this war nigger-free. Nigger-free, you hear me?"

"Mr. President, how much do we have to pay to make that happen?" Forrest asked. "We needed most of a division to clean Richmond out—a division we couldn't use against the damnyankees. If that happens too many more times, it'll put us in a world of trouble. I'm sorry I have to tell you such things, sir, but somebody needs to."

He had nerve. Not many people who came before Jake Featherston told him anything but what they thought he wanted to hear. Clarence Potter did, but Potter had almost official gadfly status. Even Ferd Koenig hesitated. Forrest might be hesitant, but he was saying what he thought.

"The worst is over," Jake said. "Most towns are cleaned out." That still left the black belt from rural South Carolina through Louisiana largely unaffected, but he wasn't about to split hairs with Nathan Bedford Forrest III. Besides, he had Mexican soldiers dealing with the coons there. He didn't need to pull so many of his own men away from more urgent—not more important, but more urgent—things.

"I hope you're right, sir," the chief of the General Staff said. "I hope

so, but….”

I haven’t convinced that man, Jake thought. He changed the subject from his own shortcomings to those of the Army: “We’ve got to stop the Yankees. They’re carving their way through Kentucky like we did through Ohio.”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you, Mr. President,” Forrest said. “We’re using every man and every piece of machinery we can get our hands on. We can’t get our hands on enough men or machines.”

“If you stop retreating, if you start hitting back—”

“Sir, that’s not fair to the men fighting and dying in Kentucky. You can hang me out to dry if you want—I’ll be your scapegoat. But they’re doing everything flesh and blood can do. They’re making stands every chance they get, and they’re counterattacking every chance they get, too. We’d be in worse shape if they weren’t, and you can take that to the bank.”

His passion startled Featherston. The President of the CSA would have thrown him to the wolves without a qualm—if he’d had someone in mind to replace him. But the only officer who came to mind for the job was George Patton, and Patton was too valuable in the field to bring him back to Richmond.

So instead of canning Nathan Bedford Forrest III, Featherston said, “Let’s take a look at the map.”

“Of course, sir.” Did Forrest sound relieved? If he didn’t, he damn well should have.

But the map mattered. Jake Featherston slashed a line across it with his forefinger—almost exactly the line Irving Morrell had slashed across a map of the CSA in Philadelphia some months earlier. Whatever Featherston’s flaws, he had a gift for seeing the big picture. “This is what the sons of bitches aim to do to us.”

Nathan Bedford Forrest III blinked. He worried about trees; he hadn’t looked at the forest as a whole for a while. “You don’t think small, sir,” he said after a moment’s pause for thought.

“Neither do the damnyankees,” Jake answered without the least hesitation. The truth burned hot and clear in his mind. (Lies burned just as hot and clear, which helped make him as effective as he was. But this was no lie; he wasn’t trying to fool either himself or the chief

of the General Staff.) “The damnyankees hurt us bad the last go-round, but that was all they did—they hurt us. With barrels that really haul ass, with airplanes that really bomb, they’ll fucking kill us this time. And that’s how they’ll do it—Chattanooga, Atlanta, the ocean.”

Forrest eyed the map as if a rattlesnake had crawled out from behind it. He licked his lips. “They can’t do that!” he blurted.

“They can unless we stop ’em,” Jake answered. “How do you aim to? Losing Atlanta’d be bad enough.

All the oil from Louisiana and Texas comes east through there. Atlanta goes down the toilet, everything north and east of it stops running. We are screwed, blued, and tattooed.”

“They can’t possibly do all that this year,” Forrest said.

Jake would have liked the assessment much better without the qualifier—and if it didn’t so closely match his own. He asked, “How much more can we pull out of Virginia to send west?”

“If we pull more out, the United States will just waltz into Richmond, you know,” Forrest said. “I’m not sure we can stop them if they push hard now.”

“If we have to, we can keep fighting without this town, right?” Jake knew losing the capital of the CSA would hurt. It would be a psychological blow that would start people plotting against him—if they weren’t already plotting against him, which they probably were. And Richmond wasn’t just the capital. It was one of the most important industrial towns in the CSA, right up there with Birmingham and Atlanta and Dallas. But…“If it comes down to choosing between Richmond and Atlanta, we have to hold on to Atlanta, because so many other things depend on it. If the damnyankees take this place away from us, they can’t go much farther. Is that right, or do you see it different?” He meant the question. Forrest was welcome to make him change his mind—if he could.

But the chief of the General Staff kept eyeing the map, and the slash Jake had cut across it. “I’m afraid it is right.” Forrest sounded unhappy about it, which convinced Jake he was telling the truth.

And if he was, and if Jake had things straight, the answer seemed plain: “We have to stop the USA as far this side of Atlanta as we can. Stop the damnyankees, then drive ’em back. They did it to us. Let’s see

how they like getting hoist with their own waddayacallit."

"Petard," Forrest said automatically. "I hope we *can* do it, sir. The one big difference between us and the United States is that they have more margin for error than we do. They fell all over themselves in the Ohio campaign, but we did everything we could do to get as far as we did. If things don't go just right for us…"

"Yes, yes." Jake Featherston had heard that too many times. One reason he'd heard it so often was that it was true. He didn't want to think about that, and no one in the CSA could tell him he had to. He said,

"We'll just have to make things go worse for the damnyankees, that's all. Stir up the Canucks wherever we can, try and talk Quebec into pulling its soldiers out of the rest of Canada so the United States have to send more men in, see if we can fire up the Mormons one more time…"

"Will it be enough?" Forrest asked.

"Of course it will," Jake said. "It's got to be." He also didn't want to think about what would happen if it wasn't, and no one in the CSA could tell him he had to do that, either.

F or a long time, Camp Determination had bustled. Load after load of Negroes came into the place.

Load after load of corpses went out. It was, in a way, a factory, with death as its chief product. And it ran very efficiently.

Troop Leader Hipolito Rodriguez longed for the old days. So did all the other guards, up to Jeff Pinkard himself. The only people who liked the way things were now were the Negroes still inside the camp, and their opinions didn't count.

Fewer and fewer Negroes were left. Thanks to the damnyankees' air raids, trains had a hard time getting to Snyder, Texas, and the camp just beyond it. The bathhouses that weren't bathhouses and the asphyxiating trucks went right on working, emptying barracks one by one. Blacks went to their deaths without too much fuss; the story now was that they were being moved for their own protection. They knew how many bombs fell on Snyder. They didn't know bombs wouldn't fall on them. And so they walked into the bathhouses and climbed onto the trucks—and they never worried about anything else after

that.

All of a sudden, Camp Determination had more guards than it needed. Rodriguez and the other men from the Confederate Veterans' Brigades didn't worry about going anywhere else; they were useless at the front. The tough females who did most of the guarding on the women's side didn't need to fear trading their gray uniforms for butternut, either. But the young men, the Freedom Party Guards…

"Shows what kind of people the damnyankees are," one of them said at supper after another day when no trains came in. "They'd sooner help niggers and blow decent white folks to hell and gone."

Rodriguez gnawed on a barbecued pork rib. As far as he was concerned, Texans only thought they knew how to barbecue. Down in Sonora, now, they did things right. He found himself nodding to the young guard, though he was neither black nor white himself.

Another youngster said, "How long till there aren't any niggers left here at all?"

"They aren't shipping so many spooks out this way, I hear," said the guard who'd spoken first. "More and more are going to camps farther east, where the U.S. bombers can't hit the train tracks so hard."

"That's not good," the second guard said. "Camp Determination was made to be the biggest and the best. Country can't do a proper job of reducing population if this here camp isn't doing its bit."

"They didn't think about no Yankees when they made it," Rodriguez put in.

"You're right, Troop Leader," the first young guard said. Without three stripes on his sleeve, Rodriguez would have been just another damn greaser to him. With them, the Sonoran was a superior. Party discipline ran deep.

"We've got to do something," the second guard added. "We've got to push the United States back into New Mexico."

Go ahead—volunteer, Rodriguez thought. Guards outfits were fighting alongside C.S. Army troops northwest of the camp. Even if he were hale, he wouldn't have volunteered himself. He'd seen too much infantry combat in west Texas in the last war. He didn't want or need any more.

“Maybe if we sneak in the spooks at night…” another guard said.

“Got to have lights to move ’em from the railhead into the camp,” Troop Leader Tom Porter said. The veteran was an outstanding noncom; Rodriguez tried to model himself after him. Porter went on, “Can you imagine what would happen if we lit this place up like a Christmas tree? Damnyankees’d be on it like ants on potato salad at a picnic.”

“They’ll blow up the niggers if they do that,” one of the young guards said. “They could hit this place any time they please. They don’t do it, on account of they love coons so goddamn much.”

Porter frowned. “Maybe you’re right. Maybe. But if they figure out they can take out a whole bunch of guards all at once, they might reckon it’s worthwhile. I mean, it’s not like we won’t reduce the niggers’

population anyway.”

The young guard grunted. So did Rodriguez. That sounded as if it made good military sense. “Why don’t they just bomb the camp anyhow, then, though?” the youngster said. “They’d just be blowing up the smokes a little bit before we take care of them.”

“Well, you’re right,” Porter said bleakly, which wasn’t what the young guard expected to hear. “That’s why we’ve got shelters in this place now. If they want to blast the living shit out of us, they can—no two ways about it.”

“What about the antiaircraft guns around the camp?” Two or three guards asked the question in almost identical words.

“What about ’em?” Porter said. “Antiaircraft guns don’t mean you can’t bomb a place if you want to bad enough. They just mean it costs more. If you’re willing to pay, you can do it. You bet your ass you can.

You reckon they don’t have antiaircraft guns all over Richmond and Philadelphia? You reckon those places don’t get bombed? Ha!”

Nobody said anything for a while after that. Hipolito Rodriguez found himself looking at the ceiling, as if to see bombers overhead. He would have been embarrassed if he were the only one doing it. But he wasn’t—nowhere close.

He almost panicked when droning airplane engines woke him later

that night. He was ready to run for the shelter, not that his middle-aged, almost-electrocuted body could run very fast. But the enemy airplanes went on to the east. Whatever they were after, it wasn't Camp Determination or Snyder.

Two days later, Jefferson Pinkard sent another contingent of female guards packing. The men who had to go over to the women's side to take their shift didn't know exactly why the guards left. All their guesses were lewd, though. It wasn't as if Pinkard minded brutality, as long as it stopped short of the point where prisoners rebelled.

Rodriguez wondered if he would find Bathsheba and Antoinette alive. To his surprise, he did. They'd lasted longer than most camp inmates. Both of them were dreadfully thin now; the older woman coughed all the time. But they greeted him with smiles. "It's the nice sergeant," Bathsheba said. "How is that Xerxes? How is our man?"

Dead. Rotting in a trench a bulldozer scraped in the ground, piled in with God knows how many other bodies. He couldn't tell them that. He didn't have the heart. He'd led so many men to their death—what was telling the truth about one of them next to that? Nothing, logically, but logical didn't seem to have much to do with it.

And so he lied: "He is good. He is about like you. He says hello. He says he loves you both. He says he misses your son." He remembered Bathsheba had one, and that the boy or young man didn't come to the camp.

"I misses Cassius, too," the older woman said, and Antoinette nodded. Bathsheba went on, "I hope he's all right."

Wherever he was, if he wasn't in a camp he was better off than the rest of the family. Rodriguez didn't say that—why belabor the obvious? He did say, "You got messages for—for your man?" He couldn't pronounce *Xerxes* to save his own life, and nothing would save Xerxes' now.

They poured out their hearts to him. That only made him feel worse about lying to them. But they would hate him all the more for deceiving them if they found out the truth now. And so he listened to words of love for a dead man and promised to bring back answers from beyond the grave.

None of the other guards knew what he was doing. Had they known, they would have laughed at him or said he was doing it to get

Antoinette to lie down with him. If he wanted her, he thought he could have her. But what was the point? She and her mother couldn't last much longer, not the way things were.

And when she was dead, he'd be sad she was gone. He'd be sad when she was gone even if she didn't sleep with him; he liked her.

He didn't miss the black women he did lay. They were just…bodies. Now they were dead bodies, and so what?

"If they was to drop bombs all over this place," Bathsheba said, "you reckon a couple o' skinny colored ladies could run off without nobody noticing?"

"You don't ask me that!" Rodriguez exclaimed. "I got to keep people inside here, not tell nobody how to get away."

"You keepin' people in here?" Bathsheba shook her head. "Don't reckon so. Ain't nobody in the whole wide world could keep *people* in a place like this. What you're doin' is, you're keepin' niggers here.

Niggers ain't people, not to the folks who go 'round yellin', 'Freedom!' all the damn time."

"Mama…" Antoinette said.

Bathsheba laughed. "It's the truth, ain't it? 'Course it is. You afraid I git in trouble on account of tellin'

the truth? Girl, how kin I git in trouble that's any worse'n what I'm in already? You answer me that." She turned to Rodriguez. "You answer me that, too, Mistuh Sergeant, suh."

Rodriguez had no answers, and he knew it. He was a twenty-year Freedom Party man. He'd shouted,

"Freedom!" and *"¡Libertad!"* plenty of times, more times than he could count. He had no use for blacks; if anything, *mallate* was even more insulting, even more demeaning, than *nigger.* He still believed Negroes caused most of the Confederacy's troubles. And without blacks, whites would come down on Mexicans instead.

But this skinny old woman did something no one else had ever been able to do: she made him ashamed of the uniform he wore, of the stripes on his sleeve, of the Party badge on his chest. Bathsheba did indeed tell the truth, and Hipolito Rodriguez wasn't too far gone to

know it.

“Where you goin’?” she called after him. He didn’t answer. He just went away, anywhere away from the terrible truth, as fast as his legs would take him.

“Now look what you went and done, Mama,” Antoinette said reproachfully, as if, despite everything that had happened to them, this could still be her mother’s fault.

“Me? I didn’t do nothin’,” Bathsheba answered, and then, more quietly but not too quietly for Rodriguez to hear, “He done it to hisself.”

And there was another piercingly painful truth. Rodriguez had done it to himself. He looked beneath the face of population reduction and saw murder. He looked at niggers, at *mallates,* and saw people. He looked at what he’d been doing and saw….

“Madre de Dios,” he whispered, and crossed himself. *“¡Ai, madre de Dios!”* But could even the Virgin forgive him for such a mountain of sins? He had trouble believing it. No—he couldn’t believe it.

That made a difference. That made all the difference in the world.

He crossed himself again. The gesture seemed extraordinarily pointless, extraordinarily futile. He was damned. He felt the certainty of his damnation like that mountain of sin falling on him.

He’d known for a long time that Edith Pinkard’s first husband was a camp guard who killed himself.

He’d heard of other men who did the same thing. Up till now, he’d thought they were crazy. All at once, he didn’t. How could you live with yourself when you understood what you were doing, what you were helping your country do?

He looked down at his hands. How much blood was on them? A river? A lake? An ocean? He looked at the submachine gun in those bloodstained hands. It was made for one thing: killing people. It was perfectly designed for the job, too. He clicked off the safety, flicked the change lever to full automatic fire. Then, like a man in a trance, he put the muzzle of the conveniently short weapon in his mouth. It smelled and tasted of metal and gun oil.

“Look out!” a woman cried. “He gonna—”

And he did. He pulled the trigger, hard. And that was most definitely that.

C hester Martin had never gone south of the Ohio River. He'd spend the Great War in Virginia, on the Roanoke front in the west and then, after recovering from his first wound, in the northern part of the state, pushing down toward Richmond. He'd been not far from Fredericksburg when the fighting ended in 1917—and not far from the same town when he got wounded twenty-five years later.

He liked Kentucky better. He especially liked how far the U.S. Army had driven into Kentucky, and how fast it was moving. They'd passed Madisonville and were heading south toward Earlington.

Madisonville was a tobacco town. The crop was nowhere near ripe, which didn't stop several U.S.

soldiers from plucking their own, drying or half cooking the leaves, and trying to smoke them afterwards.

They proved one thing in a hurry: making cigarettes wasn't as easy as it looked.

Earlington, by contrast, made its living from coal. U.S. Army engineers dynamited the entrances to one mine after another. "Is that smart, sir?" Martin asked his platoon commander. "Shouldn't we be using those mines ourselves?" He knew how much coal the steel industry needed, and it wasn't the only one.

Lieutenant Wheat only shrugged. "I guess the first thing is to deny this coal to the enemy," he answered.

"We can worry about everything else later. It's not like we don't mine plenty of our own."

"I suppose so, sir." If Chester didn't sound convinced, it was because he wasn't. But he didn't decide such things, even if the news would have come as a surprise to the men in the platoon.

Somewhere not far away, a rifle went off. He and Lieutenant Wheat both reached for their weapons—that wasn't a Springfield. It also wasn't one of the Confederates' automatic rifles, or an older bolt-action Tredegar. Martin didn't know exactly what it was—some kind of squirrel gun, he supposed.

He would have bet whoever squeezed the trigger wasn't aiming at a squirrel.

The same thought must have gone through Delbert Wheat's mind, for he said, "They don't love us around here, do they?"

"Not hardly," Chester said. The .22 or whatever it was barked again. "I bet we're going to have to take more hostages." Soldiers in butternut were trying to hold a line on the southern fringes of Earlington, and they would have to fall back from there in the next day or two. But Confederate civilians had rediscovered the thrills of guerrilla warfare. Kids and old men and even women turned into bushwhackers whenever they saw the chance.

The laws of war said people who weren't in uniform but took up arms anyway were fair game. Those laws didn't say taking hostages was all right, but every army on enemy territory did it. Sometimes it helped. Sometimes it just made more civilians want to pick up squirrel guns.

"We kill enough of these fuckers, sooner or later the rest will get the idea," Wheat said. "Or if they don't, we'll kill all of them." He didn't sound worried—more as if he looked forward to it.

After a third shot rang out, Martin got to his feet. "Somebody ought to do something about that damn sniper," he said.

He hadn't gone more than a step or two before a U.S. machine gun stuttered out a short burst, and then another one. A triumphant shout went up: "*Got* the son of a bitch!"

"Talk about service," Lieutenant Wheat said. Chester grinned and nodded and hunkered down again. He pulled out a pack of Raleighs—properly grown, properly cured tobacco—and lit up. After a deep drag, he nodded again. Yeah, this was what smokes were supposed to taste like.

A soldier trotted back to him and the lieutenant. "There's a Confederate captain with a flag of truce, wants to talk to us about civilians," he said.

"Bring him back here," Wheat said. "We can talk."

"Blindfold him first," Chester added. "No point letting him see what we've got. That may be part of what he's after." The platoon commander nodded. The soldier saluted Wheat and hurried away.

“Would you like to sit in on this?” the lieutenant asked politely.

“If you don’t mind, sir,” Chester answered, as politely. The platoon leader didn’t want to let the Confederates hornswoggle him. Chester was his ace in the hole, and appreciated being invited without having to invite himself.

When the C.S. captain took off his blindfold, he proved to be about thirty, with the ribbon for the Purple Heart—a decoration that went back to George Washington, and that both sides used—on his chest. He said his name was Wilbur Pease. He didn’t seem surprised to find a first sergeant sitting in with a second lieutenant, which showed he knew how the world worked.

Wheat did the talking: “Well, Captain, what’s on your mind?”

“I’ve had reports of atrocities against civilian citizens, Lieutenant, and I’ve come to investigate and to protest,” Pease answered.

“Considering what the Confederate States are doing to their Negroes, aren’t you in a poor position to talk about atrocities?” Wheat asked.

Wilbur Pease didn’t even blink. “Civilian citizens, I said. Negroes are only residents, not citizens. They don’t have the rights of citizens.” *We can do whatever we want to them,* Martin translated. Captain Pease went on, “I’m talking about white people, people who matter.” His racism was so complete, so perfect, he didn’t know he had it.

“We have a problem with—what’s the fancy French for it, Sergeant?”

“*Francs-tireurs,* sir.” Chester pronounced it *franks-teeroors;* he knew no more French than Chinese.

It satisfied both Lieutenant Wheat and Captain Pease. The U.S. officer went on, “If we catch people out of uniform shooting at us, we’re going to kill them. It’s as simple as that, Captain. We nailed one a few minutes ago. If we have to take hostages to make them think twice, we’ll do that, too. And we’ll shoot the hostages if it comes to that. I’m sorry, but these jerks with guns need to understand that we’re serious.”

“The laws of war—” Pease began.

“You did the same damn thing on our soil,” Chester Martin said. “Don’t get all high and mighty about it.”

“And don’t encourage the, uh, *francs-tireurs,* either,” Wheat added. “That way, everybody will be better off.”

Captain Pease scowled. His troops wouldn’t be better off. The more U.S. soldiers flabbled about civilians with rifles, the more distracted from fighting the regular Confederate army they were. “I deny that we encourage civilians to take up arms against invaders,” he said.

“Of course you do, Captain,” Wheat said.

“And the stork brings babies and sticks ’em under cabbage leaves,” Chester added.

“All right,” Pease said angrily. “I can see you don’t take this seriously.”

“Oh, we do,” Wheat said. “We take it so seriously, we’ll do whatever we have to to stamp it out. And if that means you run short on civilians, we won’t lose any sleep about it. Whatever people in these parts try to do to us, we’ll do worse to them. I promise you that, Captain. It worked in Utah. It should work here.”

“If you want that kind of fight, I’m sure you can have it,” Wilbur Pease said. “You’d better put my hoodwink back on—I’d like to return to my side of the line.”

“I’ll do it, sir,” Chester said to Lieutenant Wheat. As he blindfolded Pease, he went on, “We don’t have anything in particular against the Confederate Army. You play fair when you fight us. Civilians playing soldier—that’s a different story.”

“Yes, it is. You’ll see.” Pease held out his hand. “Someone take me back, please.”

A soldier led him through the U.S. positions. Chester’s face was troubled as he watched the Confederate officer go. A different story… He wondered if his own words would come back to haunt him. Auto bombs, people bombs…The Kentuckians hadn’t started making life as miserable for the U.S. Army as they could.

“How much trouble do you think civilians can make?” By the troubled note in Lieutenant Wheat’s voice, he was worrying about the same thing.

“It can’t be worse than Utah. That’s all I know for sure.” Martin paused for a moment. “Of course, Utah was pretty bad.”

A brief burst of gunfire came from the Confederates, formally marking the end of the truce. A U.S.

machine gun fired back, and after that it was time for everyone to keep his head down again.

The Confederates launched a salvo of their rockets. Most of them came down on Earlington. Civilians hadn't evacuated the town, and bore the brunt of the hellish weapons' bursts. "So much for taking care of their own," Martin said into Delbert Wheat's ear; they both crouched in the same shell hole. If something came down on them, the platoon would need new leaders.

"They don't give a damn. They never have," the young officer answered. "All they care about is scoring points off us."

Chester nodded. It looked like that to him, too. Chaos reigned in the town. Wounded U.S. soldiers screamed for medics. So did wounded civilians. The corpsmen dealt with soldiers first. That was likely to hurt their popularity with the locals. They didn't seem to care. Chester didn't, either.

U.S. warplanes streaked low overhead. They were fighters, but each one carried a bomb slung under its belly. They were bound to be slower and less maneuverable till they dropped those bombs. Explosions on the Confederate side of the line said they weren't wasting any time.

Barrels rumbled down toward the front, too. One platoon particularly caught Chester's eye. All five machines were the newest U.S. model, sleek and deadly as so many tigers. All five were unbuttoned, too, their commanders and drivers looking out to see where they were. When they got closer to the firing, the drivers would close their hatches. Some barrel commanders liked to stand up in the cupola as long as they could. They took chances doing that, but their machines fared better.

One of those commanders drew Chester's notice as he rolled down Highland Park and into the northern outskirts of Earlington. He spotted Chester, too, and no surprise, for they were about the same age: middle-aged survivors in a world of young men. Over the din of his engine, he called, "You went through it before and you came back for another round?" His accent said he came from somewhere close to the Canadian border.

"Yeah, I'm a glutton for punishment—just like you," Chester shouted

back. They grinned and waved at each other. “Stay safe,” Chester added.

“You, too.” The barrel commander laughed. So did Martin. If they wanted to stay safe, what were they doing here?

Lieutenant Wheat gave Chester a quizzical look. “You know that guy?”

“No, sir,” Chester answered. “But us old farts, we’ve got to stick together.”

His platoon went into the line not long after the barrels clattered past. With help from the armored behemoths, they shoved the Confederates all the way out of Earlington. More rockets came in from the south. Featherston’s soldiers had lots of nasty weapons. Whether they had enough men to use them was a different question. For all their firepower, Confederate troops seemed thin on the ground.

That barrel commander fought his machine aggressively. His gunner hit a Confederate barrel at what had to be over a mile, and set it afire. Two other Confederate barrels decided they’d be better off somewhere else. They trundled away in a hurry. Chester approved—the less he had to worry about enemy armor, the happier he was. Before too long, he trudged past the burning enemy machine. The push south rolled on.

C incinnatus Driver made sure the .45 on the seat of his truck was loaded and sat where he could grab it in a hurry—he never let it slide out of reach. The road between Paris and Winchester wasn’t safe for U.S. convoys. The drive south had pushed the Confederate Army out of this part of Kentucky. But C.S.

stragglers and bushwhackers who didn’t wear uniforms still took potshots at U.S. vehicles from the trees that grew too damn close to the side of the road.

A bloated body hung from a telegraph pole. The placard tied around the man’s neck said, FRANC-TIREUR. That was officer talk for *bushwhacker.* No doubt U.S. authorities hanged him there to warn his buddies. His wasn’t the first corpse Cincinnatus had seen. They didn’t seem to do much to intimidate the Confederates.

He sighed. Things hadn’t been that much different in the Great War. You did what they told you to do, and you hoped you came out the other side in one piece. *You volunteered for this,* Cincinnatus reminded

himself. *Were you born stupid, or did you have to study?* He concluded he was born stupid; he'd never been much for studying. But he'd had too recent a close-up look at the Confederacy. Any black man who did, naturally wanted to kill the country with an axe.

Since he didn't have an axe, truckload after truckload of supplies would have to do. In the Great War, the USA was content to make the CSA say uncle. This time, the United States seemed to want to kill the Confederate States with an axe. Cincinnatus understood why, too. The United States almost had the axe fall on them.

The lead truck in the convoy didn't run into an axe. It ran over a land mine, and started to burn. The lead truck never carried munitions, just because it was most likely to go boom. The driver probably didn't have a chance. A different truck, chosen by lot, led every convoy. *That could have been me,* Cincinnatus thought, gulping.

No matter what happened to the lead truck, the convoy had to get through. The second truck drove off the road onto the soft shoulder on the right—and ran over another mine and blew up. "Do Jesus!"

Cincinnatus yelped. He hit the brakes. There was going to be a holdup here—he could see that. If the third truck went off the road to the left, would it go sky-high, too? The driver didn't want to find out.

Cincinnatus wouldn't have, either. The Confederates who planned this one had outthought their U.S.

opposite numbers.

Just how badly they'd outthought them became obvious a moment later. When the U.S. trucks in the convoy were all stopped and all bunched up behind the two that were in flames, a machine gun and assorted automatic rifles and submachine guns opened up on them from the woods to the left. As soon as Cincinnatus heard the gunfire and saw muzzle flashes winking over there, he bailed out. He paused only to grab the .45 as he slid across the seat. He was damned if he'd get out of the truck on the driver's side and make himself a perfect target for the C.S. holdouts or guerrillas or whoever the hell they were.

His bad leg and bad shoulder both howled protests at what he was making them do. He paid them no attention. Getting hit by an auto had been bad, very bad. Getting chewed up by machine-gun fire was one of the few things he could think of likely to be worse. He didn't

want to find out the hard way.

No more than a second or two after he threw himself to the ground and crawled behind a tire, a burst of bullets chewed up the cab of the truck. Glass from the windshield and the driver's-side window blew out and then fell like rain.

Had the engine caught fire, he would have had to abandon the truck and make for the woods to the right.

He would also have had to pray Confederates didn't infest them, too. For the moment, though, the truck wasn't burning.

A couple of wounded drivers cried out in pain. Other men, like Cincinnatus, crouched and sprawled in whatever cover they could find. One of them called, "Be ready! Those fuckers are liable to rush us."

Can they be that smart and that dumb at the same time? Cincinnatus wondered. If he were in the woods, he would have kept shooting at the trucks till they all caught fire or started exploding. The Confederates had put themselves in a position where they could do that. Why wouldn't they, then?

Confederate soldiers probably would have reasoned the same way he did. The men in the woods turned out not to be soldiers. They were amateurs, bushwhackers, guerrillas. They cared about the trucks, yes, but they wanted to kill people, too. Once they'd peppered the trucks with bullets, set some on fire, and flattened a lot of tires, they loped forward to deal with the drivers.

They must have thought they'd killed and wounded more men than they had. That was the only thing Cincinnatus could think of. With just a pistol, he had to let them come near before he opened up. He eyed the bushwhackers. They wore dirty dungarees and dirtier flannel shirts. They were poorly shaved.

When they got a little closer, they would probably stink.

They never got that close. One of the drivers had a Springfield, not a .45. He fired from behind a tire, worked the bolt, and fired again. Two guerrillas fell. The others started spraying lead as if it were going out of style.

The drivers fired back. They didn't want the bushwhackers to concentrate on the man with the best weapon. Cincinnatus used the

two-handed grip to steady the .45, but it still bucked like an unbroken stallion when he pulled the trigger. The man he aimed at ducked, the way almost everyone did when a bullet came too close.

Several bullets came too close to Cincinnatus. He was already down on his belly. He tried to flatten out like a squirrel after a deuce-and-a-half ran over it. Another guerrilla fell. The drivers' cheers were punctuated by a shriek as one of them got hit.

In the films about fighting Indians on the Great Plains, the cavalry always charged over the hill in the last reel. It wasn't the cavalry this time. It was an armored car and two command cars that carried

.50-caliber machine guns. As soon as the U.S. soldiers in them got a look at what was going on, they hosed the irregulars down with gunfire. The men who fought for the Confederacy broke and flew toward the woods. Not many of them got there.

Even then, the bushwhackers didn't give up. The machine gun hidden among the trees started shooting at the oncoming vehicles. The armored car didn't need to worry about that, but the thin-skinned command cars did. The armored car had a small cannon, not just machine guns of its own. After it sent half a dozen rounds crashing into the woods, the enemy machine gun shut up in the middle of a burst.

Somebody in one of the command cars or the armored car must have used the wireless, because four or five fighter-bombers roared in and dropped their presents on the stand of trees. Cincinnatus hoped they blew the bushwhackers to hell and gone. No matter what he hoped, he knew some of them would get away. Maybe they would think twice about messing with the U.S. Army from now on. More likely, he feared, they wouldn't.

He didn't want to get out from behind his tire even after the armored car took up a position between the woods and the shattered convoy. Nobody could call him a cowardly coon, either, not when the white drivers also stayed right where they were.

A soldier got out of one of the command cars for a closer look at a dead irregular. A bullet from the woods made him throw himself flat. The armored car and the command car lashed the trees with machine-gun rounds. Another defiant bullet clanged off the armored car's turret.

Nobody went anywhere till more trucks brought soldiers forward,

some to clear the woods and others, engineers, to get rid of the rest of the mines the bushwhackers had planted. After that, still more trucks had to come up to salvage what the Kentuckians hadn't destroyed—and to pick up the drivers.

"I'm getting too old for this shit," one of them said wearily as he climbed into the back of a deuce-and-a-half.

"I was too old for this shit a long time ago," Cincinnatus said. "Remind me how come I signed up to do it again."

"On account of you're a damn fool," the other driver said. Before Cincinnatus could even start to get mad, the white man added, "Just like me." That took care of that.

The front lay just north of Winchester. Cincinnatus wished it were farther south still. He knew that was unfair. The U.S. Army had done in a couple of weeks what took months of slogging in the last war. And this wasn't even the main U.S. thrust. That was farther west, and was moving faster.

He got a new truck that afternoon, and a new assignment. The kid lieutenant in the motor pool gave him a dubious look. "You sure you're up for this, Gramps?" he said.

"It's gonna help whip Jake Featherston, ain't it?" Cincinnatus said.

"That's the idea, yeah," the lieutenant answered.

"Then I'm up for it," Cincinnatus declared.

After another pause, the lieutenant—he was younger than Cincinnatus' son Achilles, which made him seem very young indeed—nodded. "Well, when you put it that way—"

"I do," Cincinnatus said.

"Fair enough. I can see why," the lieutenant said. "Good luck."

Cincinnatus drove within artillery range of the front. Nothing came down too close, for which he thanked God. "What the hell took youse guys so long?" said the quartermaster sergeant who took charge of the supplies the truck convoy delivered. "We been waitin' for youse." He was a hairy little Italian guy from New York City. His accent and Cincinnatus' were a long way from each other.

He was also a long way from any place where bullets flew. His uniform was clean. It was even pressed.

“Sorry to disoblige you, Sergeant,” Cincinnatus said, “but before I got down here, bushwhackers hit the convoy I was in. We had trucks blown up an’ men killed, so maybe you better do your grousin’

somewheres else.”

“You gotta lotta noive, talkin’ t’me that way,” the sergeant growled. “Who do you think you are?”

“I’m an uppity nigger tryin’ to kick Jake Featherston’s raggedy ass,” Cincinnatus answered. “We on the same side or not?”

The noncom’s eyes almost bugged out of his head. “You can’t talk to me like that. You can’t, you hear?

Tell me your name. I’m gonna put you on report.”

“I’m Cincinnatus Driver. Do whatever you damn well please,” Cincinnatus said calmly. “Whatever you do, it ain’t gonna be worse’n what happened this morning.”

“You want to put him on report, put us all on report,” a white driver said. “He just told you what everybody was thinking. I’m Hal Williamson. Write it down.”

“Bruce Donovan,” another driver said. Everybody in the convoy gave the quartermaster sergeant his name. Somebody in the back of the crowd added, “You sad, sorry chickenshit asshole.”

“That does it! That fuckin’ does it!” the sergeant shouted. “Youse guys have had it.” He stormed off and returned a few minutes later with a captain in tow. “Listen to these wiseguys, sir!”

Cincinnatus and the other truckers were happy to let the captain listen. “We almost got killed today,”

Cincinnatus said. “I don’t see him with no Purple Heart or Silver Star or nothin’.” Again, the rest of the drivers chimed in on his side.

After listening to them, the captain turned to his sergeant and said, “Take an even strain, Cannizzaro. It’s not like they were holding you up on purpose.”

“But, sir—” Sergeant Cannizzaro began.

“Take an even strain, I said,” the captain told him, more sharply this time. “The stuff is here now. Let’s get it out to the troops who need it.” He walked away, leaving the quartermaster sergeant staring after him. *An officer with sense,* Cincinnatus thought. He’d run into some before, but it didn’t happen every day.

J erry Dover had a promotion. He wanted a second star on either side of his collar about as much as he wanted a third leg, but he was now officially a lieutenant-colonel. He was doing everything Colonel Travis W.W. Oliphant did before he went missing and more besides, so the powers that be seemed to have decided he deserved at least some of the vanished Colonel Oliphant’s rank.

Lieutenant-colonel wasn’t enough. To get the boneheads down in Tennessee to pay attention to him, he would have needed to be at least a lieutenant general—not a rank the Confederate States dished out every day.

“Listen, dammit,” Dover snarled over a bad telephone connection, “if you don’t get more ammo and gasoline up here pretty damn quick, you won’t need to worry about me pissing and moaning any more, that’s for sure.”

“You don’t know how bad things are down here,” said the colonel on the other end of the line. “The Yankees are bombing the shit out of the dams President Featherston built. We’ve got floods like you wouldn’t believe. Half the time we don’t have power, on account of they made so much of it. Roads are out, railroads are out—”

“If you don’t send us what we need to fight with, *we’re* out,” Dover interrupted. “You’ll be arguing with some damnyankee quartermaster, not me.” Some damnyankee quartermaster was enjoying the depot he’d put together outside of Covington. Nobody but nobody had dreamt the USA could move so fast.

“We’re trying,” the colonel said.

“You sure are,” Jerry Dover told him, but it went over his head. Dover would have bet on that. He went on, “This is a war, in case you didn’t notice…sir. If we don’t do it, we’re going to fucking lose.” He didn’t care what he said when he talked to a supplier. That was just as true when he talked to C.S. Army quartermasters as it had been when he talked to rascally butchers in Augusta.

“I am certain you are doing everything you can, Colonel,” said the

officer down in Tennessee. “Why don’t you give me and my men credit for doing the same?”

Because from up here it looks like you’ve got your head up your ass. But Dover didn’t say that, though it was a damned near-run thing. What he did say was, “Get as much forward as you can. They’ve promised me they’ll hold on to Bowling Green no matter what.”

They’d also promised they would hold on to Covington no matter what. He’d believed them, which only proved anybody could be a fool now and then. He was more ready to evacuate and wreck this depot than he had been when the line lay farther north. Some Yankee writer once said, *Trust everybody—but cut the cards.* That struck Jerry Dover as good advice.

Even the colonel down in Tennessee, who had to worry about nothing worse than bombers and floods—mere details in Dover’s harried existence—could see they might have promised more than they could deliver. “Keep your options open,” he said, and hung up.

“Options. Right,” Dover said tightly. At the moment, he didn’t know whether to shit or go blind, and that about summed up his options. The western U.S. column was already down about even with Bowling Green. The eastern one was still northeast of his current center. In a way, that was good news. It meant that, for the time being, he could resupply both crumbling Confederate fronts. But it also meant both fronts were liable to converge on him here, or even behind him. If that happened…

If that happens, I have to move like a son of a bitch to save anything, Dover thought glumly. *Take what I can, blow up what I can’t.* He already knew what was what, what would go and what would go up in smoke.

If this turned into the front, he was liable to have to turn into a combat soldier to get free of it. He muttered to himself; like every other white man his age in the CSA, he’d done a spell in the trenches in the last war. He wasn’t eager to repeat it. But if the damnyankees got in his way, he would try his best to run them over.

The telephone jangled. If it was that officious idiot in Tennessee, telling him something wouldn’t show up because somebody’d lost the paperwork…“Dover here,” he growled, a note of warning in his voice.

“This here is Major Kirby Bramlette over by Elkton,” the caller said.

Dover had to look at a map to find Elkton southeast of Hopkinsville, which had fallen to the USA only the day before. It was also definitely south of Bowling Green, which wasn't good news. Bramlette sounded right on the edge of being frantic as he went on, "You got any more o' them antibarrel rockets, the ones infantrymen can shoot off? Looks like every Yankee barrel in the world is heading right at me."

"You'll have some in a couple of hours, if U.S. fighters don't shoot up my trucks on the way," Dover answered.

"Sooner'd be better," Bramlette said. "Two hours from now, I'm liable to be dead." He didn't say anything about pulling back. The Confederates did that only when they couldn't help it.

"Fast as we can get there." Dover hung up and ran outside, yelling for drivers. When he'd assembled half a dozen, he said, "Load up on antibarrel rockets and get 'em to Elkton on the double."

"Where the fuck is Elkton?" one of them asked.

"Follow me. I'll get you there." By his accent, the man who spoke was from around these parts. You'd have to be, to know where Elkton was.

"Take your trucks to gate number nine," Dover said. "Go in through there and make the first left you can." He'd laid out the depot himself. He knew where everything was. If Major Bramlette needed cold-weather socks or prophylactics, he would have known where they were off the top of his head, too.

Confederate soldiers loaded the rockets and their stovepipe launchers onto the trucks. In the last war, Negroes would have done it. Not here, not now. The soldiers didn't even grumble about nigger work.

They just fetched and carried without a second thought. If blacks were working now, most of the soldiers working the depot could have been at the front with automatic rifles in their hands. That seemed obvious to Jerry Dover. The trouble he would land in if he said so out loud seemed even more obvious, so he kept his mouth shut.

Inside of half an hour, the trucks were on the way. Dover went back to his office and telephoned Major Bramlette. "Barring air strikes, they should get there in an hour or so. It's what, about forty miles from here to where you're at?" he said.

"Something like that, anyways," Bramlette answered. "Thank you kindly, Colonel. You've done what you could. Now we just have to see

if we can hold on that long." As if to punctuate the comment, explosions came over the telephone line. All of a sudden, he didn't have a connection. He swore, hoping the trouble was in the line and not because of a direct hit on Bramlette's headquarters.

He didn't find out till the trucks got back a little before sunset. "We delivered the rockets, sir," said the head driver, a master sergeant named Stonewall Sloane. (Dover had seen his papers—that was his real name. Why his parents couldn't have picked a different Confederate hero to name him after…Jerry Dover shrugged. How many babies born between 1934 and now were called Featherston? Too many—he was sure of that.)

"All right—you delivered them," Dover said. Sloane nodded. He neither looked nor sounded happy.

Dover asked the question he had to ask: "What went wrong?"

"Damnyankees had already shoved our guys out of Elkton by the time we got there, sir." Stonewall Sloane paused to light a cigar. Dover had a cigarette going—but then, he usually did. The sergeant went on, "I *hope* the rockets can help us blow some of the Yankees to hell and gone. If they can't…" He sent up gloomy smoke signals.

"Shit," Dover said. "Whereabouts exactly did you make your delivery? Was it south of Elkton or east of it?"

"East, sir," Sloane answered: a world of bad news in two words.

"Shit," Dover said again. "They're heading this way, then."

"Don't know if they want to take Bowling Green or get in behind it and cut it off," Sergeant Sloane said.

"They've been doing a lot of that crap lately. We did it in Ohio, so I reckon the United States learned their lessons from us."

"Did they have to learn them so goddamn well?" Dover stubbed out his cigarette and lit another one.

Stonewall Sloane managed a thin smile. After a deep, savage drag, Dover asked, "You think we'll have to get out of town? The more time we have, the more stuff we'll be able to save."

"Sir, I honest to God don't know," Sloane replied. "If you told me a month ago the Yankees could come this far this fast, I would've told

you you were out of your goddamn tree. Uh—meaning no disrespect."

"Don't worry about it," Dover said dryly.

Stonewall Sloane sent him an appraising glance. The cigar twitched. "You're all right, aren't you?"

"Well, I try."

"Yeah." Sloane scratched his head. "Where was I? Oh, yeah. They've already done more than I reckoned they could, so who knows what the fuck they're liable to do next? Do you want to take chances?"

Before Dover could answer, air-raid sirens wailed. "We're going to take chances whether we want to or not," he said, and grabbed his helmet and ran for the closest trench. Sergeant Sloane was right behind him.

Antiaircraft guns around the depot thundered. Dover was glad he had steel between his skull and the chunks of shrapnel that would start falling out of the sky any second now. You were just as dead if your own side killed you as you were any other way.

Fighter-bombers streaked by low overhead, the U.S. eagle in front of crossed swords plainly visible.

One trailed fire and smoke. It slammed into the ground and blew up. "That'll learn 'em!" Sloane yelled.

But other explosions came from the depot not far away. Some were single, others multiple: bombs touching off more explosions on the ground. What Jerry Dover had to say scuttled several commandments. He'd arranged ordnance in small lots with thick earthen dikes between them. That minimized the damage, but didn't, couldn't, stop it.

The surviving U.S. airplanes came back for another pass at the depot and the trucks, this time with their cannons and machine guns. Dover said something even worse. He yanked his .45 out of its holster and fired several shots at the U.S. warplanes. That did no good, of course. He'd known it wouldn't.

"Goddamn useless thing," he growled in disgust.

"Antiaircraft guns aren't doing a hell of a lot better," Stonewall Sloane said.

“Fuck them, too,” Dover said. The veteran noncom blinked, then laughed. Dover wasn’t laughing. He was furious. “We ought to have something that really will shoot airplanes down, dammit. All these things do is make noise.” The guns, at the moment, were making a godawful racket.

“Rockets, maybe?” Sergeant Sloane didn’t sound as if he took that seriously, even if he was the one proposing it.

But Dover said, “Why the hell not? They’ve got ’em for barrels. Why not airplanes? They’re a lot easier to wreck.”

“Harder to hit, though,” Sloane said.

“That’s for the guys with the high foreheads and the thick glasses,” Dover said. “I bet we’ve got people working on it. I bet the damnyankees do, too. If they figure it out first, that’s bad news.” He scrambled out of the trench and trotted toward the depot to do what he could to control the damage—and to see how much damage there was to control. Right now, he couldn’t find much good news for the CSA.

C assius skirted Milledgeville, Georgia, the way he skirted every town he approached. Milledgeville was a fair-sized place, with maybe 5,000 people in it. It was laid out with the idea that it would become the state capital—and it did, till brawling, bumptious Atlanta displaced it after the War of Secession. A sign on the outskirts bragged that Milledgeville was where Georgia legislators voted to leave the Union.

Cassius didn’t think that was anything to be proud of.

What would life be like in the United States? It probably wouldn’t be good; he didn’t suppose life for Negroes was good anywhere. But it couldn’t be like *this.* He was skinny and dirty. He smelled bad—the only chances he got to wash were in streams he walked past. He was hungry most of the time.

And, at that, he didn’t have it so bad. He wasn’t in a camp. He didn’t know what his family was going through, not exactly. Nobody knew exactly except the people who got carted away. The only thing people on the outside knew was that the ones who got carted away didn’t come back.

Most Negroes in the cities had been rounded up and taken away. It was harder out in the countryside.

They were more scattered, harder to get into one place with barbed wire all around it. Guerrillas scared some whites out in the country to death. Others, though, weren't so bad. Quite a few let you do odd jobs in exchange for food and a place to sleep and maybe a dollar or two.

Some of the farms had women running them, all the menfolk gone to war. Cassius learned it was harder to get a handout or even a hearing at those places than at the ones with white men on them. Women on their own commonly carried shotguns or rifles, and didn't want to listen to a hard-luck story. "Get lost before I call the sheriff," they would say—either that or, "Get lost before I shoot."

But they didn't call the sheriff. In spite of an Augusta passbook, Cassius hadn't had any trouble going where he pleased. If he stole, that might have been a different story. Except for trifles—a few eggs here, some matches there—he didn't. His parents had raised him the right way. *He* wouldn't have put it like that, not after the way he knocked heads with his father, but that was what it amounted to.

He stayed in the pine woods after getting run off a farm west of Milledgeville. With summer coming soon, nights were mild. Mosquitoes tormented him, but they would have done that anywhere except behind screens. He didn't worry about animals; bears and cougars were hunted into rarity. People, on the other hand…

He'd already seen Mexican soldiers on the march. He made sure they didn't see him, ducking into a stand of trees once and hiding behind a haystack another time. Those yellowish khaki uniforms made him angry—what were they doing in his country? He wouldn't have got nearly so upset about butternut or gray.

That was his gut reaction, anyhow. When he thought about it, he laughed at himself. As if the Confederate States were his country, or any Negro's country! The idea was ridiculous. And native whites would have been rougher on him or anyone else his color than these foreigners were.

He chopped wood for a farmer later that day. The blisters he'd got the first time he did it were starting to turn to calluses. The farmer gave him ham and grits and a big mug of homebrew. Making your own beer was against the law in Georgia, but plenty of people both white and black turned criminal on that score.

"You work good," the farmer said, spitting a stream of tobacco juice.

“Thank you, suh,” Cassius answered.

As others had before him, the white man asked, “Want to stick around?” He gave Cassius a shrewd look. “Sooner or later, you’re gonna run into trouble wandering around the countryside—or else trouble’s gonna run into *you.* ”

Cassius only shrugged. Whatever happened to him out here couldn’t be worse than what had happened to his father and mother and sister in Augusta. “Sorry, suh, but I got to be movin’ on,” he said.

“Whatever you want.” The farmer shrugged, too, but Cassius didn’t like the glint in his eye. He left a little earlier than he would have otherwise, and headed south where he had been going west. As soon as he got out of sight of the farmhouse, he took the first westward track he found. Luck was with him, because he came up to another farm just as the sun was going down. He scouted the place from the edge of the woods, and didn’t see or hear any dogs. When it got really dark, he sneaked into the haystack, which gave him a much better bed than bare ground would have.

He hadn’t fallen asleep yet when gunfire split the night: several bursts from submachine guns, with single shots from a pistol in between them. He wondered what that was all about. No, actually he didn’t wonder—he feared he knew. Had that farmer called the local sheriff or militia commander or whoever was in charge of the people with guns and said, “There’s an uppity nigger southbound from my place.

Reckon you ought to take care of him”?

Deputies or Mexicans must have picked on the first Negro they saw heading south on that road. That black wasn’t Cassius, but they didn’t know or care—especially after he started shooting back at them.

Cassius felt bad about snaring the other colored man in his troubles, and hoped the fellow got away.

If they were after me, they would’ve snagged me, he thought, shivering as he burrowed deeper into the sweet-smelling hay. *If I didn’t notice that damn ofay looking all sly…*

He woke up before sunrise, and got out of there before the farmer could come outside and discover him.

Once he was back in the woods, he took off his clothes and made sure he brushed all the hay off of them. He didn’t want to look like

somebody who had to sleep in a haystack, even if that was what he was—especially if that was what he was.

He heard gunfire again that afternoon: not just a little, the way he had the night before, but lots. Both sides had plenty of firepower and weren't shy about using it. *Now I know what war sounds like,* Cassius thought, which only proved he'd never come anywhere near a real battlefield.

But this would do. He walked toward it, thinking—foolishly thinking—he would watch what was going on from a safe distance, as he might have watched a football game back in Augusta. Even the first bullet that came close enough for him to hear the *crack!* as it zipped past wasn't enough to deter him. He got behind a pine tree and imagined he was safe.

Negro guerrillas held what had been a sharecropper village. Mexican soldiers were trying to push them out of it or kill them if they stayed inside. Hardly even noticing that he was doing it, Cassius leaned forward. This was more exciting than any football game he'd ever watched.

It stayed an exciting game till a Mexican took a bullet to the temple. The other side of his head exploded into red mush. His rifle fell from his hands as he crumpled to the ground. Even with that surely mortal wound, he didn't die right away. He jerked and flopped and twitched, like a chicken that had just met the chopper.

Cassius gulped. He almost wished someone would shoot the Mexican again to make him hold still. No, this wasn't a game, no matter what it looked like. People were really dying out there. When another bullet snapped past Cassius, he didn't just flinch. He felt as if somebody'd jabbed an icy dagger into each kidney. *This is what fear feels like,* he thought.

And fear had an odor, too. He could smell it coming off of himself. He could probably smell it drifting over from the Mexican soldiers and their Negro foes. And smelling it only made him more afraid, at some level far below conscious thought.

He heard footfalls coming through the woods toward him. They made him afraid, too. They were all too likely to come from Francisco José's men. And if the greasers spotted him, what would they do? They'd shoot him, that was what. He was a young Negro man. Of course they would think him an enemy.

And he was, even if he didn't carry a Tredegar. His heart was with the embattled blacks in the little hamlet. Not only his heart, either. Before he knew what he was doing, he ran for those shacks as fast as he could go.

Bullets chewed up the ground under his feet. They cracked and whirred past his head. He didn't know if the Mexicans or the Negroes were shooting at him. Both, probably. If the two sides weren't so busy blazing away at each other, they might have paid him even more attention than they did, not that it was attention he was likely to live through.

He dove behind a crate, hoping everybody would forget about him. "Who the hell're you?" one of the Negroes shouted at him.

"Name's Cassius," he answered, not that that told them much. "There's soldiers in them trees I run out of."

"Oh, yeah?" said the voice from behind him. "We can shift them fuckers, I reckon."

They did, too. They had a couple of machine guns, and they didn't seem short of ammunition for them.

Shrieks from the woods said they'd scored at least a couple of hits. Nobody used the trees to outflank the hamlet, which the Mexicans had probably wanted to do.

Cassius lay very still behind the crate. The Mexicans seemed to forget he was there, which suited him fine. He didn't want to remind them. After another half hour or so, the firing on both sides tapered off.

"They's goin'!" someone behind him shouted.

"Reckon you can come out now, whatever the hell your name was," someone else added.

Wearily, Cassius got to his feet. A couple of Negro men with rifles in their hands showed themselves.

One of them gestured to him. "Looks like you jus' joined us," the man said. He was short and wiry, with a knife scar pulling the left side of his mouth up into a permanent sneer. "Coulda had some trouble if them Mexicans got where they was goin'."

“Looked that way to me,” Cassius said.

“You know anything about guns?” the scarfaced man asked.

“No, suh, but I reckon I can learn,” Cassius replied.

The older Negro nodded. “That’s a good answer. Now I got another question fo’ you: you take orders?

Folks call me Gracchus.” He jabbed a thumb at his own chest. “I runs this outfit. You don’t like that, you hit the road. No hard feelin’s, but we don’t want nobody who’s out for hisself and not for all of us. The outfit gotta come first.”

“I’ll take orders,” Cassius said. “If you gave dumb ones, I reckon you’d be dead by now, not runnin’

things here.”

“Expect you’re right,” Gracchus said. “Well, my first order is, tell me about yourself. What’s your name again? Where you from?”

“I’m Cassius. I got out of Augusta when the ofays nabbed my folks.”

“How come they didn’t catch you, too?” Gracchus sounded coldly suspicious. Cassius wondered why.

Then he realized the rebel leader might fear he was bait, and would betray the whole band when he saw the chance.

“They went to church,” he answered truthfully. “Me, I stayed home.”

Gracchus nodded again. “God didn’t help ’em much, did He?”

“You reckon there’s a God?” Cassius said. “I got a hard time believin’ any more. Either God likes ofays, or there ain’t none. I got to choose between a God that loves Jake Featherston an’ one that ain’t there, I know which way I go.”

For the first time since he shouted out his warning, Gracchus eyed him with something approaching approval. “Maybe you’s all right after all,” he said.

“Give me a rifle. Teach me what to do with it,” Cassius said. “Reckon I show you how all right I am.”

X

I rving Morrell rolled into Bowling Green with a smile on his face. The burnt-out Confederate barrels he rolled past were what made him happy. The Confederates had fought hard outside—they'd fought hard, and they'd got smashed. The one thing they managed to do was empty out most of their big supply dump and wreck what they couldn't take away. The U.S. Army wouldn't be able to salvage much. Given what the CSA had in Kentucky, logistics was one of the enemy's strengths. Some capable officer or another probably needed killing.

Almost without thinking about it, Morrell brought his left hand up to his right shoulder. It still twinged every now and again. Now both sides used snipers and bombs and any other way they could find to try to murder their foes' better leaders. It hardly seemed like war. Neither USA nor CSA seemed to care.

Any weapon that came to hand, either side would use. When this war ended, one country or the other would lie flat on its back. The winner would have a booted foot on the loser's neck, and would try to keep it there as long as he could.

Somebody'd painted FREEDOM! on a wall. Somebody else—or maybe the same Confederate patriot—had added several blue X's: quick and easy shorthand for the C.S. battle flag. The Stars and Stripes might fly over Bowling Green, but the people still longed for the Stars and Bars.

Only a long lifetime ago, this town—this whole state—belonged to the USA. They spent a generation back in the USA after the Great War. The Negroes in Kentucky had liked that fine. Most of the whites had hated it. They thought of themselves as Confederates, and didn't want to be U.S. citizens. The ones who did fled north when the CSA won the plebiscite in early 1941.

All of a sudden, Morrell stopped muttering and swore with savage fluency. "What's wrong, sir?" Frenchy Bergeron asked.

"Nothing," Morrell said. That was so patently untrue, he had to amend it: "Nothing I can do anything about, anyway." How many whites—and maybe even blacks—who fled Kentucky after the plebiscite were really Confederate spies? That hadn't occurred to him till now. He hoped it hadn't because he was innocent and naive. He intended to send a message to the War Department anyway, on the off chance that everybody else was just as naive.

"Thinking about the next big push, sir?" the gunner asked.

“I’m always thinking about that,” Morrell said, and Sergeant Bergeron chuckled. He was a good gunner, even a very good gunner. He wasn’t quite in Michael Pound’s league, but who was? Now that Pound was an officer at last, he was finding new ways to annoy the Confederates. Seizing the crossing over the Green River between Calhoun and Rumsey probably put the western prong of Morrell’s offensive a couple of days ahead of where it would have been absent that.

A couple of artillery shells burst off to the south. The Confederates *were* fighting hard—if anything, harder than Irving Morrell had expected. No matter how hard they were fighting, they were still losing ground. They were losing it almost fast enough to suit Morrell’s driving perfectionism—almost, but not quite. When he conceived his plan, he wanted the CSA wrecked in a single campaigning season. Unless the bastards in butternut flat-out collapsed, he didn’t think he could bring that off. He would have to slice the Confederacy in half in two installments. John Abell was right about that.

“Ask you something, sir?” Frenchy Bergeron said.

“Sure,” Morrell answered. “What’s on your mind?”

“When do we go for Nashville?” Bergeron asked. Morrell started to laugh. The gunner coughed reproachfully. “What’s so damn funny, sir? Isn’t that’s what’s coming next?”

“You bet it is,” Morrell said. “And that’s what’s so damn funny. The War Department probably hasn’t figured out where I go from here, but you damn well have. I want to get moving as fast as I can, too, before the Confederates think I’m ready.”

He never denied the military talent facing him. After what happened in Ohio, after what came much too close to happening in Pennsylvania, he would have been a fool to do that (which didn’t always stop some of the more feverishly optimistic U.S. officers). What he wanted to do was make sure the Confederates’

talent didn’t matter much. If they lacked the men and barrels and airplanes to stop his thrusts, what was talent worth?

“Nashville…Nashville could be a real bitch,” Bergeron said. “Uh, sir.”

Why do I always get gunners who think they belong on the General Staff? Morrell wondered wryly.

It wasn’t that Frenchy was wrong. The problem, in fact, was that he

was right. Along with George Custer, Morrell had planned and executed the attack that crossed the Cumberland and took Nashville in 1917. That wasn't quite the blow that won the Great War, but it did knock the Confederates back on their heels, and they never got over it afterwards.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Bergeron was waiting for an answer. "I expect we'll come up with something,"

Morrell said.

"Oh, yes, sir," Frenchy said. "Don't want to try crossing the river where you did the last time, though.

What do you want to bet Featherston's little chums'll be laying for us there?"

"Jesus!" Morrell exploded. "You really do belong on the General Staff!"

"Not me, sir. I don't want to go back to Philly. The people back there, they just talk about what's supposed to happen. Me, I want to make that shit happen myself. They're smarter'n I am, but I have more fun."

"I feel the same way," Morrell said, which was only partly true. No way in hell did he think the high foreheads back in Philadelphia were smarter than he was. A lot of the time, he thought they thought they were smarter than they really were. Of course, Frenchy might have been sandbagging, too.

"You know what you're gonna do?" Bergeron persisted. "Anything happens to you, I may be the guy who has to talk through the fancy wireless set for a little while."

He was about as far removed from the chain of command as a soldier could be. That didn't necessarily mean he was wrong. If, say, Morrell got hit standing up in the cupola, which could happen easily enough, somebody who knew what things were like at the front might have to do some talking to keep an attack moving smoothly till Brigadier General Parsons could take over. It would be highly unofficial. Chances were it wouldn't show up in the after-action reports. It could be important, though.

"You're going to be an officer before this war is done," Morrell said.

How many times had he tried to promote Michael Pound? How many

times had Pound said no? Now Pound was a lieutenant himself, and proving he deserved his rank. Morrell hadn't expected anything different. As for Frenchy Bergeron, he said, "I hope so, sir."

"I'll promote you right now if you want," Morrell said. "Only thing I don't like about the deal is that I'll have to break in a new gunner."

"Thank you, sir!" Bergeron said. "You want to wait till we get past Nashville, then? I figure there'll be a lot of fighting up to there, and you'll need me."

"Deal," Morrell said at once. "And I think you're right. Getting over the Cumberland won't be fun. But if we made it across the Ohio, we can do that, too."

The U.S. spearhead broke out of Bowling Green heading south three days later. Air strikes took out a battery of Confederate rockets before they could salvo. Hearing that cheered Morrell no end. Those damn things could hamstring an advance before it really got going.

As usual, Morrell's place was at the front. He wanted to see what happened, not hear about it later from somebody else. Officers who served on the General Staff didn't understand that. To them, war was arrows on a map. To Morrell, it was shells going off and machine guns hammering and barrels brewing up and sending pillars of noxious black smoke into the sky and prisoners staggering out of the fight with shell shock on their faces and with their hands in the air. It was exhaust fumes and cordite and the sharp stink of fear. To the men of the General Staff, it was chess. They didn't understand both sides were moving at once—and trying to steal pieces and knock over the board.

Morrell's barrels raced by—raced through—a column of refugees U.S. fighter-bombers had hit from above. In 1941, the Confederates gleefully strafed Ohioans who didn't care to live under the Stars and Bars. Refugees clogged roads. Refugees who'd just been hammered from the air clogged them even better. So the Confederates taught.

And now they were learning the same lesson for themselves. Kentuckians—or maybe they were Tennesseans by now—who didn't want to live under the Stars and Stripes fled south as people from Ohio had fled north and east two years earlier. When they got hit by machine guns and cannon fire and bombs from above, it was as horrible as it had been in the USA.

Dead and wounded children and women—and a few men, mostly old

—lay in the roadway. Children with dead parents clutched corpses and screamed grief to the uncaring sky. People's most precious possessions were scattered everywhere. Automobiles burned.

A woman standing by the body of a little girl stared at Morrell with terrible eyes as his barrel rattled past.

The shoulder was wide here—the oncoming barrels didn't need to plow straight through what was left of the refugee column. The woman picked up a rock and threw it at Morrell. It clanged off the barrel's side.

"What the hell?" Frenchy Bergeron said.

"It's all right." Morrell ducked down into the turret. "Just a dissatisfied customer. If that was me out there and all I had was a rock, I expect I'd throw it, too."

He straightened up and looked out again. The Confederates didn't try to hold back the advancing U.S.

troops till they got to a hamlet called Westmoreland. Morrell looked for it on his Kentucky maps, didn't find it, and checked the sheets for northern Tennessee. That was how he was sure he'd crossed the state line. A sign said, WESTMORELAND—STRAWBERRY CAPITAL OF THE WORLD. Here as May passed into June, the crop was no doubt coming to full, sweet ripeness…or it would have been, anyhow.

The treads of Morrell's barrel and all the others speeding south with it churned the strawberries into jam.

Was that motion, there behind a farmhouse by Hawkins, the street leading into Westmoreland from the northwest? Morrell brought up his binoculars. "Front!" he sang out. "In back of that yellow clapboard house."

"Identified!" Bergeron said, and then, "Clapboard? That house go to a whorehouse?"

Morrell snorted and wheezed. He had to try twice before he could ask, "What's the range?"

"Just over a mile, sir."

"Can you hit it?"

“Bet your ass. I’ll *kill* the fucker, and he won’t dare open up on us till we get closer.”

“Do it, then.” Morrell ordered the barrel to a halt. The gunner traversed the turret till the long 3½-inch cannon bore on the C.S. barrel. The roar almost took Morrell’s head off. He used the field glasses again.

“Hit!” he yelled. “Way to go, Frenchy! Son of a bitch is burning!”

“Damn straight,” Bergeron said. “They got any others hanging around, they’ll know they better clear out.”

Other U.S. barrels started finding targets and setting them afire at a range the Confederates couldn’t hope to match. Sullenly, the surviving C.S. machines did pull back. They had to hope for wooded terrain where they had a better chance to strike from ambush. U.S. foot soldiers and barrels pushed into Westmoreland. The streets proved to be mined. That slowed them up, but not for long.

U .S. bombers left two major dams in northern Tennessee untouched —the one by Carthage and the one farther east near Celina. They didn’t do it out of the goodness of their hearts: they didn’t want the floods downstream to disrupt their own advance. The Confederates, desperate to slow U.S. ground forces however they could, blew both dams as they fell back over the Cumberland.

Michael Pound was not pleased. The floodwaters washed over the banks of the river and flowed across what had been fertile farmland. They turned it into something that more closely resembled oatmeal.

The new U.S. barrels had wide tracks. That meant each part of the track carried less weight than was true in older machines. It also meant they could keep going where older barrels would bog down. It didn’t mean they had an easy time.

Here and there, Confederate antibarrel guns and holdouts with rocket launchers lingered north of the Cumberland. “I hate those damn stovepipes,” Sergeant Mel Scullard said, using the name the men in green-gray had hung on the launchers. “Doesn’t seem fair, one miserable infantry son of a bitch able to take out a whole barrel all by his lonesome.”

“Especially when it’s your barrel—and your neck,” Pound observed

dryly.

“You bet,” the gunner said.

“They always could, with a Featherston Fizz,” Pound said.

“That’s different,” Scullard insisted. “You could see those assholes coming, and you had a chance to kill

’em before they got to you. These guys, they stay hidden, they fire the lousy thing, and then they run like hell.”

“I know,” Pound said. “We’ve got to get something just like that so our guys can give the Confederates what-for.” Had he been as mouthy to his superiors when he was a noncom? He smiled reminiscently. He was sure he had.

That evening, he got summoned to an officers’ conclave. This was the sort of thing he’d always had to find out about from his own superiors till he finally couldn’t evade promotion. It proved less impressive than he’d imagined it would. A dozen or so officers, ranging up from his lowly second lieutenanthood to a light colonel, gathered in a barn that smelled maddeningly delicious: the former owners had used it for curing tobacco.

The lieutenant colonel lit a U.S. cigarette, whose nasty smoke seemed all the viler by comparison with the aroma of choice burley. “Intelligence says the Confederates have some Freedom Party Guards units in the neighborhood,” he announced. “You want to watch out for those guys.”

“What’s so special about ’em, sir?” a captain asked. “If you shoot ’em, they go down, right? If you shoot

’em enough times, they stay down, right?” Michael Pound smiled. Meeting someone who thought the way you did was always nice.

After another drag on his cigarette, the senior officer (who was younger than Pound) looked at it in distaste. “I think they made this thing out of camel shit,” he said. How he knew what camel shit tasted like when he smoked it was probably a question for another day. No matter how little he liked the Niagara, he kept on smoking it. “What’s so special?” he echoed. “They’re supposed to be Featherston’s elite force. They’ve got the best men, and they’ve got the best equipment. Just about all of them carry those goddamn automatic rifles, they’ve

got plenty of stovepipes”—he used the new handle, too—“and their armor is the best the Confederates have.”

“Not good enough.” Pound and two other U.S. officers said the same thing at the same time.

The lieutenant colonel shook his head. “Even up, out in the open, we’ve got the edge. If they shoot from ambush when we’re out in the open…” He didn’t go on, or need to. Pound nodded reluctantly, but he nodded. A hit from a three-inch gun could kill his barrel. It wasn’t a sure thing, but it could.

“How do we know ’em when we see ’em?” somebody asked.

“They wear camouflage uniforms, not ordinary butternut,” the light colonel said. “They’ve caused a lot of trouble in Texas. This is the first report of ’em east of the Mississippi.”

“Just our luck,” Pound said. A couple of the other men in the barn sent him curious looks. He was the junior officer present. He was also the oldest man there. The combination was odd and awkward—awkward for other people, anyhow. Michael Pound didn’t much care. If they busted him back down to sergeant, he wouldn’t say boo. He’d found he could do more as an officer than as a noncom. That was nice, and the Confederates had reason to regret it on the Green River. But he wouldn’t mind looking through a gunsight again, either. That 3½-incher was a gunner’s delight. High muzzle velocity, a flat trajectory, better sights than earlier barrels had, too…

“You need to be aware they’re around,” the lieutenant colonel said. “And be aware our engineers are in the neighborhood, too. They’ll do their best to make ways for you to go forward where the flooding’s worse than usual.”

Now Pound beamed. That was good news. Army engineers were on the ball. Fighting wasn’t their job, but they did it when they had to. And they worked under fire without a peep. Solid men, sure as hell. He stuck up his hand. The lieutenant colonel nodded. “Sir, will they have bridging equipment to get us over the Cumberland?” Pound asked. “The sooner we can grab a bridgehead on the other side, the more the Confederates’ll have to flabble about.”

“You don’t think small, do you?” the light colonel said.

“No, sir.” Pound took the question literally and answered with a straight face.

He nonplused the colonel. The younger man rubbed his chin. “If we get that far, Lieutenant, I figure we’ll find some way to get over, too. Does that satisfy you?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” Pound said. “But as long as those bastards are down, I want to keep kicking them. I want to kick their teeth in.”

Again, he sounded perfectly earnest. Again, he made the lieutenant colonel pause. At last, the man made the best of it, saying, “Your spirit does you credit. You can serve as an example for all of us. Any more questions?” He waited. Nobody said anything. He clapped his hands together once, softly. “All right, then. Let’s go get ’em.”

“What’s the word, sir?” Sergeant Scullard asked when Pound came back from the meeting.

Pound hid a grin. How many times had he asked officers the same question when he was a sergeant himself? More than he could count, that was for sure. “We drive for the Cumberland—and cross it if we can,” he answered, which overstated the case a bit. “The engineers will give us a hand. We may have Freedom Party Guards units in front of us. They’re supposed to be tough, and they’ve got A-number-one equipment, but we’ll make ’em say uncle.”

“Sounds good to me.” The gunner was a man after his own heart.

The attack went in the next morning. Infantrymen in trucks and half-tracked armored personnel carriers kept up with the barrels, though the trucks had trouble with the mud and mostly stayed on the roads.

Engineers rode in combat cars and in bulldozers with steel plating welded around the driver’s position.

Some of the dozers sported machine guns, too. Those were informal, nonregulation additions, but the engineers were in a position to do that if anybody was.

Resistance was light at first. Pound had just begun to doubt whether that lieutenant colonel knew what he was talking about when all hell broke loose. An enemy barrel nicely hidden behind an overturned truck blew up two personnel carriers in quick succession. The crew, no fools, started to fall back to another position. “Front!” Pound sang out.

“Identified!” Scullard answered. What he identified, he could hit. He could—and he did. The C.S. barrel started to burn. Pound thought

some of the men inside got away—it was long range for a machine gun.

That was a shame; those soldiers plainly knew what they were doing. As soon as they got a new machine, they'd cause the USA more trouble.

But not now. When an antibarrel rocket took out a green-gray barrel, foot soldiers descended from their conveyances and started hunting the Confederates nearby. The enemy troops were plainly outnumbered, but nobody seemed to have told them anything about retreating. Holding their ground till they were overrun, they died in place, and took a lot of U.S. soldiers with them.

"Those the Freedom Party Guards, sir?" Scullard asked.

"I think so," Pound said. "Either they've all got a lot of mud on their butternut or they're wearing camouflage. And they fight hard—no two ways about that."

"We smashed 'em for now, looks like," the gunner said.

"Yup," Pound agreed. "And that means we ought to gun for the river fast as we can, before the Confederates bring more troops back to this side."

He stood up in the cupola and looked around to see if he could spot any engineers. His wireless set couldn't communicate directly with theirs, which he considered an oversight not far from criminal. But he spotted an armored bulldozer only a couple of hundred yards away. He had his driver go closer so he could shout back and forth with the man inside. The dozer driver waved and nodded.

Then it was on toward the Cumberland for his platoon and the foot soldiers with them, and blast anything that got in the way. The Confederates really didn't have much left on this side of the river. Michael Pound cheerfully went about reducing what they did have. He wondered how they planned on fighting the war next year and the year after if they were wrecking some of their most productive land and the United States were wrecking some more.

After a bit, he decided the Confederates didn't care about next year and the year after. If they couldn't stop the United States *now,* they were much too likely to lose the war *this* year. He nodded. Yeah, that might be so. The more he thought about it, the better he liked it. The better he liked it, the harder he pushed his platoon. Other green-gray

barrels stormed toward the Cumberland with them. And dozers and other engineering vehicles did their damnedest to keep up.

Even before he got to the river, he realized his chances of seizing a bridge intact, the way he had between Calhoun and Rumsey, were slim and none. The Confederates had blown the bridges over the Cumberland themselves, and were using it for a barrier. And if they hadn't, the flood they turned loose by blowing the dam upstream would have swept away any surviving spans.

He had hoped the engineers would be able to bridge the river in a hurry. But the Cumberland was too wide for anything engineering vehicles could carry on their backs. It would have to be pontoons, which took longer to rig and let the enemy concentrate his fire.

But Lieutenant Pound wasn't the only officer with a driving urge for speed. General Morrell had it, too, and had the authority to do something with it. The pontoon bridges started reaching across the river as soon as it got too dark for the Confederates on the southern bank to see what U.S. forces were up to.

Morrell or someone else with a good head on his shoulders ordered an artillery barrage laid on several miles to the west. The Confederates naturally replied in kind, and fired star shells to light up the Cumberland there to discover what the men in green-gray were doing. The soldiers and engineers there weren't doing anything much but shelling. Lulled, Featherston's men fired back.

At a quarter to four, a captain of engineers asked Pound, "You ready to go like hell, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir!" Pound answered around a yawn. He'd been up all night.

The captain nodded. "Good. That's the right answer. Won't be long. Haul ass when you get the word."

"I can do that, sir," Pound said. And, ten minutes later, he and his platoon did. They weren't quite the first U.S. barrels over the Cumberland, but not many were in front of them. Infantry in half-tracks crossed right behind them. By the time the sun came up, they'd carved out a solid bridgehead on the south bank.

"**G** as!" somebody shouted as U.S.shells rained down on the Confederate positions south of the Cumberland. Jorge Rodriguez already had his mask on—he'd heard the gurgle gas rounds made

flying through the air. He huddled in a hastily dug foxhole and prayed nothing would come down on his head.

Too much had landed on him in the past few weeks, not literally but metaphorically. Virginia had been fairly quiet. Getting transferred to the Tennessee front was like getting a bucket of ice water in the face.

But getting word that his father had died in Texas was like getting thrown into ice water with no way out.

The telegram gave no details, which only made things worse. Jorge had written to his mother down in Sonora, but he was still waiting for an answer.

He had little time to brood on it. That was the one good thing about getting thrown into combat fierce enough to give him a brush with death almost every day. He'd asked his company commander for compassionate leave. Captain Nelson Cash had looked at the telegram and shaken his head. "I'm mighty sorry, George," he said, that being what most English-speakers called Jorge. "I'm mighty sorry, but maybe you noticed there was a war on?"

"Yes, sir." Jorge hadn't really expected anything different, but he had to try. He thought about going AWOL, thought about it and then thought again. He was a long way from Texas, an even longer way from Sonora. Someone at a train station was bound to check his papers. They were making examples of deserters these days.

Of course, what the Army and the Freedom Party were doing to deserters wasn't a patch on what U.S.

bombs and bullets might do to him. He was in his late twenties, older than a lot of the conscripts who filled out his company, old enough to know God didn't have a carved stone somewhere that said he would live forever.

Even getting to the front hadn't been easy. He'd had to go all the way down to Atlanta and then north again, traveling mostly by night. The Yankees had torn up and bombed the railroad lines going west from Virginia into Kentucky, and also the ones going west from Asheville, North Carolina, to Knoxville, Tennessee. They wanted to keep the Confederates from hitting them in the flank while they pushed south.

By all the signs, they knew how to get what they wanted, too.

All that meant the C.S. reinforcements from Virginia reached the front a couple of days later than they would have with everything going smoothly. It meant the front was farther south than it would have been had they got there in good time. And it meant that the mission they'd been given when they left Virginia—throwing the U.S. bridgehead south of the Cumberland back over the river—was nothing but a pipe dream by the time they got there.

Jorge knew about all that only because of occasional grumbles from his superiors. He'd never been in Tennessee before. He wasn't sure where the Cumberland was, let alone any of the towns south of it. The only thing he knew was that his outfit had to fight like hell whenever it got where it was going. In a way, such a state of almost blissful ignorance wasn't bad for an ordinary soldier.

He got off the train somewhere not far south of Murfreesboro, and climbed into a truck for the journey up to the front. Jorge was sorry to change vehicles; he'd won more than two hundred dollars in the poker game that started back in Virginia. He was a good-tempered, easygoing fellow. A measure of how popular he was with his buddies was that nobody called him a goddamn greaser no matter how much he won.

Murfreesboro had taken a pounding. A lot of the places where Jorge was stationed in Virginia had taken a pounding, too, but they'd been at or near the front since 1941. Some of them had taken a pounding in the Great War, too, and even in the War of Secession.

Murfreesboro…Hell had opened up on Murfreesboro in the past few days. The ruins still had sharp edges. Smoke still curled up from them. The women and kids and old men who grubbed through them still looked stunned, astonished that such things could happen to them. The smell of death was very sweet, very strong. Jorge's stomach turned over. He gulped, trying to keep his rations down.

The move east from Murfreesboro also came by night. The butternut trucks had most of their headlights covered over with masking tape. The slits that remained shed more light than cigarette coals, but not a whole lot more. The truck convoy had to go slow. Even so, Jorge rattled past one machine that had driven off the side of the road and into a shell hole.

"That driver, he's gonna catch hell," he said. His English had an accent different from those of the white men in the truck with him. Every so often, he used a word that wasn't English anywhere except

Sonora and Chihuahua. But the other soldiers understood him. His father spoke mostly Spanish when *he* went off to fight in 1916. His mother was still more at home in it than in English. But he and his brothers, like most of the younger generation, embraced the tongue the rest of the CSA used.

“Maybe he will,” someone else said, “but the guys he was drivin’, I bet they give him a medal for makin’

’em late.”

“Wish *our* driver’d go off the road,” another soldier said. He didn’t sound like a man making a joke. On the contrary—he seemed painfully serious. His name was Gabriel Medwick. He was about six feet three, at least 200 pounds, blond, jut-jawed, and handsome. He could have posed for a Freedom Party recruiting poster, as a matter of fact. And he sounded like a man just this side of shitting himself with fear.

Jorge was afraid, too. Anybody who’d seen combat and wasn’t afraid had some screws loose somewhere. He hadn’t seen a whole lot, and what he had seen wasn’t too intense. The company was probably heading into something worse. But knowing that the all-Confederate boy sitting in the truck with him was more afraid than he was—or less able to hide his fear, which amounted to the same thing—helped steady him.

“Aw, fuck,” Medwick muttered when the truck stopped. It was getting near dawn; gray light had started leaking in through the rear-facing opening in the canvas canopy over the cargo area. *That’s what we are—cargo,* Rodriguez thought. *They use us up, like rations or bullets or barrels.* He wished that hadn’t occurred to him.

“Come on. Get out. We got to head on up to the front.” Sergeant Hugo Blackledge would never show up on a recruiting poster. He had hairy ears and more hair sticking out of his nose and a black five o’clock shadow that came out at noon. His eyebrows grew together above that beaky nose. His chin was barely there at all. He was little and skinny and mean. If he was afraid, he never showed it. He ran his squad with no pretense of fairness or justice. But he never sent anyone anywhere he wouldn’t go himself. And he could whip all of them, Gabriel Medwick included. He wouldn’t fight fair to do it, which only made the men more willing to follow his lead. They’d seen enough to know that fighting fair was for civilians and other fools.

“Where the hell are we, anyways?” someone asked as they scrambled out of the truck.

“Where we’re supposed to be,” Blackledge answered. “That’s all you assholes need to know.” He didn’t expect to be loved. That wasn’t his job.

Captain Cash, on the other hand, was friendly to his men. He could afford to be; he had bastards like Blackledge under him to handle the dirty work. “That town up ahead is Sparta,” he told the soldiers piling out of several trucks. “It’s still ours. We’ve got to make sure it stays ours. Any questions?”

A bird piped in a tree. All the birds up here in the north sounded strange to Jorge. Even the jays were peculiar. They acted quite a bit like the black-throated magpie-jays he knew back home, but they were only about half the size they should have been. That meant they could only screech half as loud.

“What are the Yankees throwing at us?” somebody asked after a pause.

“Everything but the outhouse,” Sergeant Blackledge answered before the captain could say anything. “If they figure out a way to dump that shit on us, they’ll use it, too.”

After that, no one seemed to want to know anything else. “Come on,” Captain Cash said into the uncomfortable silence. “Let’s go forward.”

When Jorge and his companions went into the line in Virginia, they’d replaced other soldiers who left the front for rest and refit and recuperation. Here, nobody was coming back as the replacements went forward. That couldn’t mean all the Confederates up there were dead, or the damnyankees would storm through the breach. But it probably did mean the high command couldn’t afford to take anybody out of the line, and that wasn’t good news or anything close to it.

Confederate 105s banged away at the enemy. Jorge was glad to hear them. They meant things hadn’t all gone to the devil, anyhow. The sun came up. It looked like a nice day.

Then U.S. guns started answering the 105s. Jorge knew enough to throw himself flat. He pulled his entrenching tool off his belt and started a foxhole. He’d long since learned how to dig without raising up more than a few inches off the ground. Pretty soon, he was in a

hole, with the dirt heaped up in front of him to help block fragments.

Foxhole or not, though, he was still liable to get killed. The Yankees had more guns than his side did, and they weren't shy about using them. That was when the gas started coming in. He hadn't seen this kind of bombardment in Virginia. By the time he got there, the war had settled down to skirmishes, with neither side trying very hard to break through.

It wasn't like that here. He needed no more than a few minutes to see as much. The damnyankees had already broken through—if they hadn't driven all the way through Kentucky, they wouldn't have been over the Cumberland and deep inside Tennessee. The Confederates were doing what they could to counterattack and throw the enemy back.

So far, everything they could do wasn't nearly enough.

Even before the shelling stopped, fighter-bombers made it worse. Because they flew so low, they could put their bombs almost exactly where they wanted. They hit the C.S. artillery positions hard, and then came back to strafe whatever else looked interesting.

And then, from up ahead, Jorge heard a shout no foot soldier ever wanted to hear: "Barrels!"

The big, snorting monsters advanced in wedges. Jorge needed a little while to realize they weren't all the same. The damnyankees put the largest and toughest ones in the lead. They blasted the way clear for the older barrels that came behind. *Where are* our *barrels?* he wondered. Wherever they were, they weren't close enough to do anything about these machines.

One of the U.S. machines hit a mine and threw a track. Its machine guns and cannon went on firing even so. Jorge picked off a barrel commander standing up in the cupola with a quick burst from his automatic rifle. That barrel kept on coming, though, and sprayed machine-gun bullets all around.

"Back!" Sergeant Blackledge screamed. "We gotta get back, or we're all dead!"

"What's Captain Cash say?" Jorge asked.

"How can you say anything when you got your fucking head blown off?" the noncom said.

Jorge had no answer for that. The Confederates in and around Sparta, Tennessee, had no answer for the oncoming Yankees. Jorge didn't want to get out of his foxhole, but he didn't want to get killed where he crouched, either. He ran for a shattered house and made it. Then he ran again. He was lucky. A lot of people weren't.

B rigadier General Clarence Potter had got used to long faces. Everybody in the War Department looked as if his favorite aunt had just walked in front of a bus. By the news leaking out of Kentucky and Tennessee, the whole Confederacy might have walked in front of a bus.

What goes around comes around, he thought unhappily. Up in Ohio, the CSA had taught the United States a lot of lessons about how to use armor and mechanized infantry and aircraft together. Who would have figured the damnyankees made such good students? Now they were giving lessons of their own.

And they had more in the way of blackboards and chalk and books than the Confederates ever did. Jake Featherston had counted on a quick, victorious war. When he didn't get one, when he got another grapple instead…A good big man didn't always lick a good little one, but that was sure as hell the way to bet.

If Potter wore a vinegar phiz, then, and if just about everybody he saw looked the same way—well, so what? People had earned the right to look gloomy. He took frowns as much for granted as he took the smell of smoke and corruption in the air and the sight of plywood or cardboard over almost every window. He hardly even noticed that the corners of everybody's mouth turned down.

He hardly noticed, that is, till a young lieutenant—who wore the same hangdog expression as everybody else—escorted Professor Henderson V. FitzBelmont into his office. No matter how tweedy FitzBelmont was, he looked as happy as if he'd just got engaged to an eighteen-year-old bathing beauty. Seeing his smile was like getting a surprise flashbulb in the kisser. Clarence Potter couldn't remember the last time he'd met such unalloyed joy.

"What's up?" he asked. "Whatever you're drinking, I want a slug, too."

Professor FitzBelmont had learned the ropes about security. He didn't let out a peep till the lieutenant saluted, left, and closed the door behind himself. Only after the latch clicked did he say, "General, we are self-sustaining!"

“That’s nice,” Potter answered, deadpan. “So you’re making enough money that you don’t need a handout from the government, are you?”

“No, no, no!” FitzBelmont didn’t quite say, *You damned fool,* but the thought plainly hovered in his mind. Then he sent Potter a suspicious stare over the tops of his spectacles. “I believe you’re having me on.”

“Who, me?” Potter sounded as innocent as a guilty man could. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

But he quickly grew serious. “I’m not sure I do know what you’re talking about, so suppose you spell it out for me.”

“We have a lattice of uranium—enriched uranium, with more U-235 than you’d find in nature—and graphite that is producing more neutrons in each generation than it needs to generate in order to produce the next generation.”

“I see…I think. Does that mean it’ll go boom if you pull out all the stops or whatever you need to do?”

“Well—no,” FitzBelmont admitted. “But it is an indispensable first step.”

“Have the United States already done it?” Potter asked.

“You would know for a fact better than I, General,” Professor FitzBelmont said. Potter wished that were true. He knew the damnyankees had that establishment out in Washington State, but that was all he knew. He hadn’t been able to sneak any spies into the project—or, if he had, they hadn’t managed to get any reports out, which amounted to the same thing. U.S. security there was tight, and all the tighter after the Confederates’ bombing raid a few months before. FitzBelmont, meanwhile, went on, “While I don’t know for sure, I’d say it’s highly likely.”

That matched Potter’s opinion better than he wished it did. The United States wouldn’t be committing the kind of resources they were if they didn’t think they had a winner. Were they spending more than the Confederacy was? They hid the budget as best they could (so did his own government), but he thought they were. “So they’re still ahead of us?” he said.

“Again, I can’t prove it. Again, if I were a gambling man, I’d bet that way,” FitzBelmont said.

“We’re all gambling men right now, Professor,” Potter said. “We’re gambling that you and your people can get this done before the damnyankees do—and before they rip our guts out just in the ordinary way of making war.”

“Rip our…?” Henderson FitzBelmont frowned. “Do I take it that the true state of affairs in Kentucky and Tennessee is less salubrious than the press and the wireless make it out to be?”

“Less…salubrious. That’s one way to put it.” Abstractly, Potter admired the professor’s choice of words. The damnyankees were tearing the Confederacy a new asshole out West, and nobody seemed able to slow them down much, let alone stop them. “We are in trouble over there. They’re aiming at Chattanooga right now. They haven’t got there, but that’s where they’re heading.”

“Oh, my,” Professor FitzBelmont said. “That’s…a long way from the Ohio River.”

“Tell me about it,” Clarence Potter said. He’d almost got sent west a couple of times himself, not as an Intelligence officer but as a combat soldier. The War Department was throwing every experienced officer into the fight. Only Jake Featherston’s loud insistence that he needed a spymaster had kept Potter in Richmond this long. Even Featherston’s insistence might not keep him here forever.

“Unfortunate,” FitzBelmont murmured. “Um…You are aware that my team’s experiments require large amounts of electricity?”

“Yes,” Potter said. “And so?”

“The supply has been erratic lately, erratic enough to force delays,” FitzBelmont said. “I have no idea who can do anything about that, but I’d appreciate it if someone would. If you are the person to ask, I hope you’ll pass the word to the proper authorities.”

Clarence Potter didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry. He ended up laughing, because he didn’t want Henderson FitzBelmont to see him cry. “Have you been paying attention to the war news, Professor?

Any attention at all?”

“I know it’s not good,” FitzBelmont said. “We were just talking about that. But what does it have to do with the electricity supply?”

He was good at what he did. There wasn’t a better nuclear physicist in

the CSA. Potter knew that. He'd had every one of the small band of physicists investigated. But outside his specialized field, Henderson V.

FitzBelmont lived up to almost every cliché about narrowly specialized professors. As gently as he could, Potter said, "You know we've lost a lot of dams on the Cumberland and the Tennessee? The Yankees blew some, and we blew others to try to slow them down." *And it didn't work well enough, dammit,* he added, but only to himself.

"Well, yes, certainly, but…" Much more slowly than it should have, a light went on in FitzBelmont's eyes.

"You're telling me those dams produced some of the electricity I use."

"Not just what you use, Professor, and you aren't the only one feeling the pinch," Potter said. "Some of our factories have had to cut production, and we just can't afford that."

"If we don't have adequate power, heaven only knows how we can go forward," FitzBelmont said. "This isn't something we can do with steam engines and kerosene lamps."

"I understand that. But you need to understand you're not the only one with a problem," Potter said.

How much did that matter? Would the Confederacy let factories work more slowly to make sure the uranium-bomb project stayed on track? Without the weapons the factories made, how were the Confederate States supposed to hold back the latest U.S. thrust? The other side of that coin was, could the Confederates hold back the latest U.S. thrust even with all those factories going flat-out?

If the answer to that was no… *If the answer to that is no, what the devil were we doing getting into this war in the first place?* Potter wondered. Jake Featherston had counted on his quick knockout. The difference between what you counted on and what you got explained why so many people had unhappy marriages.

But if the Confederate States had to count on the uranium bomb for any hope of victory, and if there was no guarantee they would ever get it built, and if there was a more than decent chance the United States would beat them to the punch…If all that was true, the Confederacy was in a hell of a lot of trouble.

"Do you want to see the President, Professor?" Potter asked. "I'm sure

he'd be glad to have this news straight from the horse's mouth." *Well, straight from some part of the horse, anyhow.*

Henderson FitzBelmont shook his head. "Thank you, but that's all right. You can deliver it. I don't mind.

I don't mind at all. President Featherston, uh, intimidates me."

"President Featherston intimidates a lot of people," Potter said. That was true. Featherston intimidated *him,* and he was a lot harder to spook than any tweedy professor ever born. In fairness, though, he felt he had to go on, "I don't think he would try to be intimidating after news like this. I think he'd be much more likely to pull out a bottle and get drunk with you."

By the look FitzBelmont gave him, that was intimidating, too. How many years had it been since he went out and got drunk? Had he ever done anything like that? With most people, Potter would have taken the idea for granted. He didn't with the professor.

"Do I need to know anything else?" he asked. "You've got a self-sustaining reaction, and you need all the electricity you can steal. Is that it?"

"That is the, ah, nucleus, yes." Professor FitzBelmont smiled at his own joke.

So did Clarence Potter, in a dutiful way. As quickly as he could, he eased the professor out of his office.

Then he called the President of the CSA—this couldn't wait. "Featherston here." That harsh, furious voice was familiar to everyone in the CSA, and doubly so to Potter, who'd heard it in person long before most Confederate citizens started hearing it on the wireless.

The line between his own office and the President's bunker was supposed to be secure. He picked his words with care all the same: "I just had a visit from the fellow at the university."

"Did you, now?" Jake Featherston said with sudden sharp interest. "And what did he have to say?"

"He's jumped through one hoop," Potter answered. "I'll send you the details as soon as I can. But we really are moving forward."

"Hot damn," Featherston said. "The fucking Yankees are moving

forward, too. I swear to God, Potter, sometimes I wonder if this country *deserves* to win the war. If we let those nigger-loving mongrels kick the crap out of us, we aren't the kind of people I reckoned we were."

"I don't know anything about that, sir," Potter said, in lieu of something like, *I see. It's not your fault we're losing the war. It's God's fault.* Potter didn't think that was true. But even if it were, it didn't help, because what could a mere mortal do about God? "I do know our friend thinks he can get this done."

"Does he think he can get it done in time?"

Hearing that question made Potter feel better. It showed the President still had a feel for the essential. "I don't know. I don't think anyone knows. It depends on how far along the United States are with their own project."

"Screw the United States," the President said. "Question is, can we keep our heads above water any which way till the professors come through?" That showed a feel for the essential, too. All things considered, Clarence Potter wished it didn't.

D r. Leonard O'Doull had been with a retreating army. Now he served with an advancing one. From things he'd heard, most people's morale was sky high these days. His wasn't. At an aid station, you saw just as much misery going forward as you did going back. The only difference was, he didn't suppose the Confederates were so likely to overrun the tent while he was operating.

"It doesn't seem like enough," he said, looking up from a resection of a kid's ripped-up lower intestine.

Granville McDougald looked at him over his surgical mask. "Yeah, well, you take what you can get, Doc," the veteran noncom said. "Only thing worse than fighting a war and winning is fighting a war and losing."

"Is that really worse?" O'Doull put in another suture, and another, and another. Sometimes he felt more like a sewing machine than anything else. "This poor bastard's going to be left with a semicolon instead of a colon any which way."

"A semi—?" McDougald sent him a reproachful stare. "That's awful, Doc. Period."

Did he really say *awful*? Or was it *offal*? He was right either way. But once you started making puns, you also started hearing them whether they were there or not. And wasn't that one short step from hearing the little voices that weren't there?

"*Is* it better to get shot in a war your side wins than in one where you lose?" O'Doull persisted.

"Better not to get shot at all," McDougald said, a great and obvious truth to which too many people who went down in history as statesmen were blind. But he went on, "If you have to get shot, better to do it so not so many people on your side will get shot after you. Do you really want to see Featherston's fuckers opening up with machine guns whenever they feel like target practice all over the USA?"

"Well, no," O'Doull admitted. He dusted the wounded soldier's entrails with sulfa powder. Maybe the kid would escape the wound infection that surely would have killed him in any earlier war. Maybe.

O'Doull started closing. If the soldier did live, he would have an amazing scar. "Still and all, though, Granny, I wonder if I should have come back from Quebec."

"So you were thinking about French leave, were you?" McDougald said, and O'Doull winced.

Undeterred, McDougald went on, "Can't say as I blame you."

"I was tempted," O'Doull admitted. "I don't *think* Quebec would have let the USA extradite me. But I put the uniform on, and I can't very well take it off again till things are done." Nicole had a different opinion, but he didn't mention that.

"Hey, Doc!" That shout from outside the aid tent warned another casualty was coming in. This time, though, Eddie added, "Can you work on a civilian?"

The tent wasn't far south of Sparta, Tennessee. Not all the Confederate civilians had fled fast enough.

O'Doull had already patched up several. Chances were they wouldn't be grateful, but he figured C.S.

surgeons had done the same up in Ohio for equally ungrateful U.S. citizens. So he answered, "Sure, Eddie, bring him in. I'll do what I can

for the miserable bastard." He paused and turned to McDougald.

"Or do you want me to pass gas while you do the honors?"

"Sure. Why not? Thanks, Doc," McDougald answered.

But when Eddie and the other corpsmen brought in the casualty, it turned out not to be a him but a her.

She was about thirty, groaning the way anyone else with a blood-soaked bandage on the belly would have. "Aw, shit," O'Doull said softly. Most of the time, he didn't get reminded that whole countries were at war, not just armies. When he did, it was like a slap in the face.

"You take the case, Doc," Granny McDougald said. "All I know about female plumbing stops about nine inches deep."

"God, what a braggart you are," O'Doull said. Eddie snorted. The wounded woman, fortunately, was too far gone to pay any attention to the byplay. "Get her up on the table," O'Doull told the corpsmen.

"I'll do what I can for her."

She feebly tried to fight when McDougald put the ether cone over her mouth and nose. How many soldiers had done the same thing? More than O'Doull could count. He and Eddie held her hands till she went limp.

"Get a plasma line into her," O'Doull said. "She's lost a lot of blood."

"Already doing it," McDougald said, and he was. "I'll put a cuff on her, too, so we can see what we've got." With unhurried speed, he also did that. "Pressure is…100 over 70—a little low, but not too bad.

Pulse is…85. A little thready, maybe, but I think she's got a chance."

"Let's see what's in there." O'Doull opened her up—actually, he extended the wound she already had.

"Shrapnel, sure as hell," he said, and then, "I'm going to have to do a hysterectomy."

"Your case, all right," McDougald said. "I wouldn't even know where to start."

"I haven't done all that many myself," O'Doull said. He reached for a

scalpel, and then, after he felt the womb, for forceps. “Here’s what did it, all right.” He held up a jagged piece of metal about the size of a half-dollar. “Must have been nearly spent, or it would’ve torn her up worse than this.”

“Happy day. I’m sure she’s real glad of that,” McDougald said.

“Yeah, I know,” O’Doull agreed. “She’s got a tear in her bladder, too, but I can fix it. Guts don’t seem bad. With any luck at all, she’ll make it.”

“That’d be good,” McDougald said. “She’s harmless now. She can’t have any kids to shoot at U.S.

soldiers when we try this again in 1971.”

“Christ!” O’Doull’s hand almost jerked. “There’s a cheery thought.”

“It’ll happen unless we really knock ’em flat and sit on ’em,” McDougald said. “You hope we will, but what are the odds?”

“Beats me,” O’Doull said. “But we’d have to be crazy to give them a third chance to cream our corn for us.”

“Yeah? And your point is…?”

O’Doull winced again, but went on suturing. “What are we supposed to do? We can’t occupy the whole CSA. They’ll shoot at us from behind trees and throw Featherston Fizzes at us forever if we try. But how do we hold ’em down without occupying them?”

“Kill ’em all,” McDougald said. “Resettle the place from the USA.”

“Congratulations,” O’Doull told him. “You get an A in Jake Featherston lessons.”

“Them’s fightin’ words,” McDougald said. “Put up your dukes.”

“Later,” O’Doull said. “Let me finish sewing this gal up first.”

“This is a funny business, isn’t it?” McDougald said. “She’s not bad-looking, and there are you messing with her private parts, but she’s not a broad or anything. She’s just a patient.”

“Yeah, that crossed my mind, too.” O’Doull paused for a moment to make sure a suture was good and tight. “Once upon a time, between

the wars, I went to a medical conference in Montreal, and I got to talking with this hotshot gynecologist. I asked him if he ever got tired of looking at pussy all day. He kind of rolled his eyes and said, 'Oh, Jesus, do I ever!'"

The medic laughed. "Well, all right. I guess I believe that. Of course, a lot of what he's looking at belongs to little old ladies. The young, healthy, pretty gals mostly don't bother coming to him."

"I wasn't finished yet." O'Doull put in another stitch, then went on, "A couple of years later, this guy's wife divorced him. Not easy to do in Quebec—it's a Catholic country. She had to prove infidelity, and she did—with three different patients of his. So not all the young, pretty ones stayed away."

That made Granville McDougald laugh some more. "See, I know what happened. You asked the wrong question. Maybe he got tired of looking, but do you ever get tired of touching?"

"Good point." O'Doull looked down at the wounded woman. "I do believe she'll pull through. Haven't had to try that particular surgery for quite a while."

"You looked like you knew what you were doing, whether you really did or not," McDougald said.

"Thanks a lot, Granny. You really know how to make a guy feel good about himself." As O'Doull started closing the outer wound and the incision that had widened it, a new thought struck him. "Where are we going to put her? Can't just dump her with the wounded POWs, you know."

"No, that wouldn't work," McDougald agreed. "Where's the closest civilian hospital?"

"Beats me. Somewhere north of us—that's all I can tell you. Oh, there are bound to be some farther south, too, but passing her through the lines won't be easy. And if we keep moving forward, we're liable to blow wherever she's staying to hell and gone."

"Be a shame to waste your hard work," McDougald said. "Tell you what we ought to do—we ought to just send her back to the division hospital and let them figure out what to do with her. They've got more room for her and more people to deal with her than we do, anyway."

O'Doull had dealt with the military bureaucracy long enough to know a perfect solution when he heard one. "We'll do that, all right," he said. "Fixing her up was my worry. Let the guys in back of the line figure out where she's supposed to go."

She went off to the rear in an ambulance with the wounded soldier on whom O'Doull had operated not long before. "They'll probably be pissed off," McDougald remarked.

"Too damn bad," O'Doull answered. They both stood outside the tent, watching the ambulance head off toward Sparta. "What's the worst they can do? Write me a reprimand, right? Like I give a shit."

"There you go, Doc," McDougald said. "That's one nice thing about coming in for the duration—you don't care what the brass hats who run things think of you. Must be nice." He sighed wistfully.

"You're in about the same place, aren't you?" O'Doull pulled out a captured pack of Raleighs. "They probably won't bump you up to lieutenant, and you'd really have to screw up big for them to take your stripes away. You're free." He lit a cigarette and smiled as he inhaled.

"Let me have one of those, would you?…Thanks." McDougald leaned close for a light, then took a deep drag of his own. "You're right and you're wrong, Doc. Yeah, I can tell 'em where to head in, I guess.

But I don't really want to most of the time, 'cause this is my outfit. I'll be here till they don't want me any more. You're freer than that."

"I suppose." One of O'Doull's hands touched the oak leaf on his other shoulder. He didn't feel very free.

"If it weren't for the honor of the thing, I'd rather walk. That's what the fellow said when they tarred and feathered him and rode him out of town on a rail, isn't it?"

"You know who told that joke the first time?" McDougald asked, and O'Doull had to shake his head.

"Abraham Lincoln, that's who."

"Did he?" O'Doull decided he wouldn't tell it again. Eighty years ago, the things Lincoln did—and the things he didn't do—made sure the USA and the CSA would go at each other till the end of time. Few Presidents were better remembered: Washington and Jefferson,

perhaps (their memories somewhat tarnished in the USA because they were Virginians), and undoubtedly Teddy Roosevelt. But only James G. Blaine came close to Lincoln as a failure, and Blaine wouldn't have had the chance to botch the Second Mexican War if Lincoln hadn't botched the War of Secession. Yes, that was one joke Leonard O'Doull would forget.

J efferson Pinkard eyed the letter in front of him with several different kinds of pained incomprehension.

He understood that it was from Magdalena Rodriguez down in Sonora. But he didn't understand much that was in it because, although she tried to write English, what they thought of as English in Sonora wasn't the same as it was in the rest of the CSA. Still, he knew what she had to be asking: why the devil did her husband go and shoot himself?

"I wish to Christ I knew," Pinkard muttered. Every once in a while, a guard couldn't stand what he was doing, and he ate his gun or got rid of himself some other way. Pinkard knew that—nobody knew it better. If it weren't true, he wouldn't be married to Chick Blades' widow. But that Hip Rodriguez should blow off the top of his head…"Goddammit, he fucking *hated* niggers!"

Still muttering, Jeff wondered if he ought to call in another guard from Sonora or Chihuahua to get an exact translation. After a few seconds, he shook his head. Whatever was in the letter would be all through the guard barracks in nothing flat if he did. He shook his head again. He didn't want that to happen. Hipolito Rodriguez was a good man. He didn't deserve to get his name dragged through the mud any more than it had to be. And that wasn't Jeff's only reason….

"He was a *friend,* dammit," Jeff said. And that scared him a couple of different ways. Anything that happened to Hip might happen to him, too. Ever since Rodriguez shot himself, the weight of the ceremonial .45 on Jeff's hip seemed larger and more ominous than it ever had before. And when he picked up a submachine gun to walk through Camp Determination, he often shivered. *What* was Hip thinking when he turned his the wrong way?

And Jeff hadn't realized how much having a real friend here mattered till he suddenly didn't any more. He could talk about stuff with Hip without fearing that Ferd Koenig or Jake Featherston would find out what he said. He could use his war buddy as a back channel to the

guards—and they could use Rodriguez as a back channel to him, too. It worked well for everybody.

Except now it didn't. And under all that lay the hole one friend's death left in the life of another who survived. Hip and Jeff went through desperate and deadly times together. No one else remembered them—no one else Jeff knew, which was all that mattered. When he and Hip talked, they both understood the mud and the blood and the stinks and the fear and the occasional flashes of crazy fun that lit up the horror and the wild drunken furloughs they'd got to take too seldom. Now all that stuff was locked inside Jefferson Pinkard's head. He could explain it to other people, but that was the point. He never needed to explain it to Hip. Hip *knew.*

The telephone rang. Pinkard jerked in his swivel chair. "Son of a bitch!" he burst out. His hand shook as he reached for the telephone. *I'm jumpy as a goddamn cat,* he thought. *Can't let anybody see that, or I'm in big trouble.* "Pinkard here." His voice came out as a satisfactory growl. "What's up?"

"Sir, we've got a new shipment coming in." The guard officer at the other end of the line sounded both pleased and more than a little astonished. "Should be here in an hour or two."

"Good God!" Pinkard said. "Why the hell didn't somebody tell us sooner?"

"Only thing I can think of, sir, is that they didn't want the damnyankees listening in," the officer replied.

Jeff grunted—that did make some sense. "Could be," he said. "And maybe they'll let up on this place for a while anyway. They've had their damn propaganda offensive. It's not like they *really* give a rat's ass about niggers. I mean, who does, for Christ's sake?"

"Not me, sir," the youngster on the other end of the line replied with great conviction.

"Didn't reckon you would," Pinkard said. "Let everybody know what's what. We want to give these coons a nice, juicy Camp Determination hello—and then a nice, juicy good-bye, too."

If he had to, he aimed to raise hell to make sure the guards were ready. Because of the way U.S.

airplanes had pummeled the railroads coming west to Snyder and the

camp, things had been painfully slow lately. It would have been easy for the men in gray uniforms to slack off. But they didn't, which made Pinkard proud. He could tell when the call reached the barracks. Guards exploded out, almost as if they were in a comedy film.

But it wouldn't be funny when that train got here. Pinkard was at the railroad spur watching when it pulled into the camp. He didn't say anything. He would if he had to, but the men in charge of the welcoming committee—he chuckled when he thought of it that way—deserved the chance to handle things themselves till they showed they couldn't.

Engine puffing, brakes squealing, the train stopped right where it was supposed to. The engineer was on the ball, then. That was good, because he didn't fall under Jeff's command. Doors opened. The familiar rank stench that rolled out of the jam-packed cars was even richer and riper than usual: the weather was warming up.

"Out!" guards screamed, gesturing with their submachine guns. "Move, you lousy, stinking coons! *Move!*

"

"Men to the left!" officers added. "Men to the left, women and brats to the right!" One of them kicked a dazed black man, who fell with a groan. "Get up!" the officer roared. "*Get* up, you dumb fucking prick!

You too goddamn stupid to know which is your left and which is your right?"

The Negro probably was. How many days had he been stuck in that jam-packed car, with nowhere to turn around, nowhere to sit down, nowhere to ease himself, nothing to eat, nothing to drink? How many bodies would the guards and the Negro trusties find when they went through the train? There were always a good many. Because summer was here, there would probably be more than there had been on runs earlier in the year.

A submachine gun stuttered out a quick burst. Jefferson Pinkard nodded to himself. Every trainload, a few Negroes thought they could beat the odds by playing possum. Every trainload, they found out they were wrong.

"No, you stupid fuck, you can't carry your suitcase into the camp!" Every time, some Negroes managed to bring things along. What was confiscated was supposed to go straight into the war effort. Some of it

did. The guards took what they wanted first, though. That was one of the perquisites that went with this job.

Many of them barely able to stay on their feet, the black men shambled through the gate and into the southern half of the camp. The women and little children went into the northern half. Every time, men and women waved to one another and promised they would be together again soon. *Yeah, you will, all right—in hell,* Jeff thought.

He sighed. Sure as hell, the senior female guard officer would come around and complain that her girls didn't get a chance to help with the unloading. She'd done that at least half a dozen times. She wanted them to get what she thought was their fair share of the loot.

"Too damn bad," Pinkard muttered. In case something out here went wrong, he didn't want a bunch of flabbling women trying to fix it, even (or maybe especially) if they carried submachine guns, too. They were all right with barbed wire to back them up. They even had advantages over men. Fewer of them had affairs with Negro women. But when they did, they really fell in love with their colored partners. That happened much less often with the men.

By now, the female guards knew how to get the colored women and children into the asphyxiating trucks and the bathhouse on that side of the camp without panicking them. The ones who couldn't manage that were gone. Jeff had had to be firm about that; the guards in skirts had powerful backers in Richmond.

But nobody was more powerful than Ferd Koenig and Jake Featherston, and he'd got his way.

Camp Determination got another shipment of Negroes the next day, and two more the day after that. It seemed like old times again. Barracks started filling up as prisoners came in faster than the camp could process them. That was how Jeff thought of it, and that was how it went down on every report. It seemed so much more…sanitary than talking about killing.

There was some trouble with the prisoners from the last trainload on the second day. As they lined up to

"get deloused and bathed," a man shouted, "You ain't gwine give us no baths! You gwine kill us all!"

He wasn't wrong, either in general or in particular. Two guards

emptied their submachine guns at him. By the time they got done, he had more holes than a colander. They hit other prisoners, too—only fool luck kept them from hitting other guards. Nobody could stay smooth and polite after that. The only way the guards got the Negroes into the bathhouse was by threatening to kill them all on the spot if they didn't get moving.

"An ugly business," Jeff said when he got to the bottom of it. "I hope that damn troublemaking nigger cooks in hell forever. All his fault."

"Yes, sir," agreed the guard officer in charge of those prisoners. "We did everything we could."

"We got the job done—that's what counts most," Pinkard said. "Maybe things'll slow down again so all the spooks who saw this get processed. Then they won't have the chance to say anything to anybody else. That's what really matters."

"Yes, sir," the guard said.

"We'll have endless trouble if we don't keep it smooth. I mean endless," Jeff went on. "Most of the guards I've got here, they didn't serve at a place like Camp Dependable. They don't know what it's like when you have to reduce populations by hand." He meant marching Negroes out into the swamp and shooting them. Saying what he said was easier on the spirit. "They don't know what it's like to have the niggers knowing their population's gonna get reduced, neither. It's like sitting on a bomb with the fuse primed, that's what. You hear me?"

"Uh, yes, sir," the guard officer said once more. He was getting more than he bargained for, more than he wanted, but he couldn't do a thing about it.

And Jefferson Pinkard still wasn't through. "If any little thing goes wrong then, the fuse catches and the bomb goes up. And then it blows your fuckin' ass off. You aim to let that happen? We gonna let that happen?"

"No, sir!" Now the guard got to say something else. It was the right answer, too.

"All right, then," Jeff growled. "Get the hell out of here, and we'll see if we can pick up the processing.

More niggers we do handle before we get the next trainload in, easier things'll be from then on out."

Instead of agreeing this time—or even disagreeing—the guard got the hell out of there, as Jeff had said.

Pinkard nodded to himself. Telling other people what to do was an awful lot better than getting told.

Where he was now, the only people who could tell him what to do were the Attorney General of the CSA and the President. *No wonder I don't like getting calls from Richmond,* he thought.

Then he laughed, because somebody else could tell him what to do: his wife. He laughed again. That was true of any ordinary family man, and what else was he? "Got a new young one on the way," he said wonderingly. He hadn't expected that, but he liked it pretty well, even if Edith did have morning sickness all day long. He looked out over the camp and nodded. "I'm doing this for him, by God."

XI

M ajor Angelo Toricelli stuck his head into Abner Dowling's office. "I have the reply from the War Department decoded, sir."

"Oh, good," Dowling said, and then, after getting a look at his adjutant's face, "No, I take it back. It isn't going to be what I wanted to hear, is it?"

"I'm afraid not, sir." Toricelli walked in and set a sheet of paper on Dowling's desk.

"Thanks." The commander of the U.S. Eleventh Army peered down through his reading glasses. When he looked over the tops of them, Toricelli was in perfect focus, but the typewritten text in front of him blurred into illegibility.

He would just as soon have had it stay unreadable. Philadelphia told him he not only couldn't have any more barrels—he couldn't have any new artillery, either. He got the impression he was lucky to be able to keep what he had, and that it had taken special intercession from the Pope, or possibly from the Secretary of War, to keep him supplied with ammunition.

"So much for that," he muttered.

"Sir?" Toricelli said.

“Philadelphia got all hot and bothered about Camp Determination—for about a month,” Dowling said.

“Now they’ve got bigger fish to fry. Morrell’s drive into Tennessee is going well. I’m not complaining, mind you—don’t get me wrong. We need to give Featherston a couple of good ones right in the teeth.

Lord knows he’s given us too many. But that means they’re forgetting everybody west of Morrell again.”

“Colonel DeFrancis—” his adjutant began.

Dowling shook his head. “His aircraft have been hitting other targets lately, too. I don’t blame him—we do need to knock out the enemy’s factories. But nobody seems to be paying attention to the poor damned niggers.”

“I’m afraid you’re right,” Major Toricelli said. “Signs are that the Confederates are shipping more blacks to the camp and taking more bodies away from it. We’ve got aerial recon photos showing they’ve dug a new trench in that field where they get rid of the bodies.”

“Bastards,” Dowling said. The word didn’t seem nearly strong enough. He doubted whether the language had words strong enough to say everything he thought about the Confederates who ran Camp Determination, the ones who fed Negroes into it, and the ones who, by backing the Freedom Party, proclaimed that it ought to exist.

Major Toricelli shrugged. “What can we do, sir?” By his tone of voice, he didn’t think the Eleventh Army could do anything.

Under normal circumstances, Dowling would have agreed with him. But circumstances here in west Texas weren’t normal. He couldn’t win the war here, no matter what he did. He couldn’t lose it no matter what he did, either. When he got plucked from Virginia and sent to the wilds of Clovis, New Mexico, they told him he’d be doing his job as long as he didn’t let the Confederates take Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Well, the Confederates damn well wouldn’t. They had to be flabbling about what was going on in Kentucky and Tennessee even more than the United States were. Their defensive force wouldn’t get many new men. He was still surprised it had got that unit of Freedom Party Guards.

“I want you to draft some new orders, Major,” Dowling said. Toricelli raised a questioning eyebrow.

Dowling explained: “I want you to order this army to concentrate in and around Lubbock and to prepare for an advance as soon as possible. And get hold of Terry DeFrancis and tell him to get his fanny over here as fast as he can, because we’ll need all the air support we can get.”

“Yes, sir.” Toricelli hesitated. He’d already given the only proper answer a subordinate should. Even so, he went on, “What if the Confederates try getting around our flanks while we’re concentrating?”

“Well, what if they do?” Dowling returned. Major Torricelli’s eyebrow didn’t just rise this time. It jumped. Dowling didn’t care. “They haven’t got enough men or enough barrels around here to surround us and cut us off. This isn’t Pittsburgh, and it damn well won’t be. I aim to make enough of a commotion in these parts so that Philadelphia will *have* to notice me.”

“What happens if something goes wrong?” his adjutant asked.

“I go up before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War and they chop off my head,” Dowling said. That shut Major Toricelli up. Dowling was too old and too stubborn to worry much about what failure would do to his career. Toricelli doubtless worried about *his,* which was tied to his general’s.

“Best way to keep everyone except the Confederates happy is to make sure things *don’t* go wrong.

Draft those orders, Major, and get DeFrancis here on the double.”

“Yes, sir.” Toricelli saluted with mechanical precision and left.

Dowling chuckled under his breath. He’d given General Custer plenty of those halfhearted salutes.

Somehow or other, the old boy made it work in the end, he thought. *I will, too. See if I don’t.*

Terry DeFrancis arrived within the hour. “What’s up, sir?” he asked. “Your adjutant made it sound like you’ve got something interesting cooking, but he wouldn’t go into any detail on the telephone.”

“Good for him,” Dowling said. When Confederate sympathizers weren’t cutting the telephone lines, they were tapping them. Security in occupied west Texas was an unending nightmare. Dowling

explained what he had in mind.

“I like it,” Colonel DeFrancis said with a grin when he finished. “The more we do, the better we do, the more attention Philadelphia has to pay us. May I make one suggestion, though?”

“Go ahead,” Dowling told him.

“I think the axis of attack ought to be northeast, not southeast. For one thing, they’ll be looking for a drive on the camp. For another, it’s not much farther from here to Childress”—he used a map to show what he meant—“than it is to Snyder. If we take Childress, we cut Amarillo off from the east by road and by rail.”

Dowling had to think about that. Cutting Amarillo off was a bigger military objective than threatening Camp Determination. But the camp was a bigger political plum. Not without regret, he shook his head.

“No, Colonel, we’ll continue on our present line for now. If we get the reinforcements we’re after, *then* we can worry about Amarillo. Prepare your mission plans accordingly.”

“Yes, sir,” DeFrancis said. Like Major Toricelli, he sounded dubious. Dowling didn’t care. One way or another, he was going to ram this through. If George Armstrong Custer’s ghost was looking over his shoulder, the old bastard must have smiled.

Shifting soldiers from yon to hither occupied the next four days. Dowling left only tiny screening forces on his flanks, calculating that he wasn’t likely to deceive the Confederates any which way—and also calculating that they didn’t have the manpower or the driving will to hurt his army while it was on the move.

He proved right. On the fifth morning, U.S. guns in and around Lubbock thundered. Bombers overhead dropped tons of death on the enemy. Fighters streaked low over the Confederate lines to shoot up trucks and command cars and troop columns and anything else they caught out in the open.

Two hours after the bombardment started, Dowling ordered his infantry and the little armor he had forward. He went forward himself, in a command car bristling with almost as many wireless aerials as a porcupine had spines. Major Toricelli, who was in the car with him, was also bristling. Dowling didn’t care about that, either. He

wanted to see what happened at the front, not just hear about it from people who were really there.

The first thing he saw was a long file of prisoners in plain butternut and camouflage brown tramping back toward Lubbock, herded along by grinning U.S. soldiers in green-gray. Several of the U.S. soldiers carried captured C.S. automatic rifles—the perfect tools to use if prisoners got out of line. The glum Confederates seemed likely to behave themselves.

“Y’all don’t fight fair!” a Confederate yelled at the command car. Dowling waved back as if acknowledging a compliment.

Naturally, the terrain right on the Confederate side of the line had taken the heaviest pounding from U.S.

bombs and shells. Dowling saw scenes right out of the Great War: cratered trench lines, rusty barbed wire with stretches smashed down flat by barrels so foot soldiers could get through, wrecked field guns lying on their sides. The only thing missing was the all-pervasive stink of death a landscape got after it changed hands three or four times, with neither able to bury all the corpses. Then the rats smiled and grew fat and frolicked as they fed on noisome flesh.

Not all the Confederates had surrendered or died. A nest of them were holed up in a farmhouse and barn. Though cut off and surrounded by U.S. soldiers, they wouldn’t quit. An officer in green-gray approached the barn with a white flag to see if he could talk them into coming out. They fired a burst over his head. They weren’t trying to hit him, but they were letting him know they didn’t intend to give up.

He drew back in a hurry.

“Is that a bunch of Freedom Party Guards?” Dowling shouted to a sergeant serving a mortar.

“Those camouflage cocksuckers?” The noncom paused to drop a bomb down the tube. After a surprisingly small bang, it arced through the air to come down between the house and the barn. “Yes, sir, that’s them. They fight hard.”

“If we get rid of them, then, the Confederates will be in more trouble,” Dowling said.

As if the holed-up elite troops had heard him, they aimed one of their machine guns his way. He hadn’t been under gunfire for a while: not

since he and Daniel MacArthur were trying to hold this part of Texas in the USA before Al Smith's plebiscite. "Get down, sir!" Major Toricelli yelled when bullets kicked up puffs of dust not far from the command car.

"Get down, hell!" Dowling swung the pintle-mounted machine gun toward the barn and let it rip. He had a .50-caliber weapon to play with, not the rifle-caliber gun that was shooting at him. His fired bullets almost as big as his thumb. The barn had to be more than a mile away—not much more than a dot on the horizon. Even so, he had confidence he was doing the enemy some harm.

And the jackhammer roar of the gun was as much fun as a roller-coaster ride. The stink of cordite and the clatter of brass as empty cartridges flew from the breech and fell to the floor of the command car only added to the kick. He went through a belt as happily as a twelve-year-old plinking at tin cans with a .22.

If he could have made the Confederates surrender all by himself, that would have been great. No such luck. A couple of truck-drawn 105s pulled up and flattened both buildings in which the Freedom Party Guards were holed up. The shells set the barn and the farmhouse on fire. Even so, when U.S.

infantrymen cautiously advanced, the surviving Confederates opened up on them with automatic weapons.

All in all, the Freedom Party Guards fought a first-rate delaying action. They did what they set out to do: they tied up enough U.S. soldiers to let their buddies withdraw in better order than they could have otherwise.

But Abner Dowling, with the bit between his teeth, was determined not to let that matter much. He had more men than the Confederates, and more artillery, and more barrels, and many more airplanes. *As long as I don't do anything stupid,* he told himself, *I can drive them a long way.* Could he drive them all the way back to Camp Determination? He aimed to find out.

F lora Blackford had needed a while to get used to picking up the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and reading good news day after day. It seemed strange, unnatural, almost un-American. But instead of stories of disaster in Ohio and retreat in Pennsylvania, the paper was full of the U.S. drive through Kentucky and Tennessee, and of other progress elsewhere. By everything she could tell, U.S. bombers were hitting

Richmond harder than the Confederates were hitting Philadelphia these days. New U.S. airstrips farther south meant Birmingham and Atlanta were starting to catch it, too.

Even the news west of the Mississippi seemed good, though it often got shoved back to page four or page six. Out in Texas, Abner Dowling was quoted as saying, “With more men, I could move even faster.”

Flora wanted General Dowling’s army to move faster. If U.S. soldiers could walk into Camp Determination, or could even take closeups of the vast boneyard where Jake Featherston’s men disposed of dead Negroes, the world would have to sit up and take notice…wouldn’t it?

She wished she hadn’t had that last little afterthought. When the Tsar turned the Cossacks loose on the Jews in another pogrom, did the world sit up and take notice? When the Turks enjoyed their ancient sport of slaughtering Armenians, did the world try to stop them? When the Germans treated the blacks in the Congo even worse than the Belgians had, did anybody get up on his hind legs and complain?

No, and no, and no. So why would the world flabble unduly—or at all—about what the Confederates were doing to their own people?

“To hell with the world, then,” Flora said, there in the more-or-less privacy of her office. “*I* care, whether it does or not.”

Her secretary stuck her head into the office. “Did you call me, Congresswoman?”

“No, Bertha. It’s all right,” Flora said. The other woman retreated. Flora shook her head. It wasn’t all right, or even close to all right. And if the world didn’t care, wasn’t that a sign something was wrong with the poor old globe?

She looked at the newspaper again. Why should Dowling complain that he didn’t have enough men? He was doing something vitally important. Shouldn’t he get all the soldiers he wanted, and more besides?

Her first impulse was to summon the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War and hold the General Staff’s toes to the fire. In 1941, she would have done it. She still might do it, but she’d learned other tricks since then. She called the Assistant Secretary of War instead.

“Hello, Flora!” Franklin Roosevelt boomed when she got through to him. “Let me guess—you’re going to want me to send about six

divisions to west Texas, and to have them all there yesterday."

"Well—yes." Flora didn't like being so predictable. "And now you're going to tell me why you claim you can't do it."

"Simplest reason in the world: we need 'em more farther east," Roosevelt said. "If they go to Kentucky and Tennessee, they gut the Confederacy. Gut it, I say. If I send them out to Abner Dowling, they step on its toes. That will hurt, no doubt about it. But it won't kill, and we want the CSA dead."

"Sending troops to Texas will stop Jake Featherston from murdering Negroes," Flora said.

"Sending troops to Texas will stop Jake Featherston from murdering Negroes…at Camp Determination," Roosevelt said. "It won't do a damn thing—excuse me, but it won't—to stop him from murdering them in Louisiana or Mississippi or east Texas. The only thing that will keep him from murdering them there is knocking the Confederate States flat. Taking land away from the enemy, taking away his factories and his railroads and his highways—that will stop him."

He made more sense than she wished he did. "Is there any way we can compromise?" Flora asked. "I can see why you don't want to send a lot of men and a lot of equipment to Texas. I don't like it, but I can see it. Can you send some, though? The Confederates are bound to be having a hard time out there, too. Even a small reinforcement could tip the balance our way."

"You're very persuasive. You ought to be in Congress." Roosevelt laughed merrily. "Tell you what I'll do. Let me talk to the gentlemen with the stars on their shoulder straps. What they say we can afford, we'll send. If they say we can't afford anything—"

"They can come before the Joint Committee and explain why not." Flora reminded him she had the stick as well as the carrot.

He only laughed again. "You're *very* persuasive," he said. "I suspect you may squeeze a few soldiers out of them after all."

Flora suspected she might squeeze out some soldiers, too. Generals were often happier facing amputation without anesthesia than they were about coming before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Amputation only cost you your leg, not your career, and the pain didn't last nearly so long.

“Anything else?” Franklin Roosevelt asked.

“How’s the other business doing?” Flora wouldn’t go into detail or name names over the telephone.

Lines into and out of Congress and into and out of the War Department were supposed to be extra secure. Some things were too important to entrust to a line that was supposed to be secure, though. She still couldn’t be sure who besides Roosevelt was listening.

He was equally careful, saying only, “Everything seems to be coming along well enough right now.”

“That’s good. They’ve made all the repairs they need?”

“I haven’t heard anything different.”

“All right. Anything new from the foreign factories?” Flora hoped he would understand she was asking how the Confederacy and Germany and England and France—and Russia and Japan, too, come to that—were faring in their quest for a uranium bomb.

“I haven’t heard anything new lately,” he replied. “Of course, just because I haven’t heard it, that doesn’t mean it hasn’t happened.”

“I know,” she said unhappily. That was true even of the Confederates’ project, and they were right across the border and spoke the same language. How much *could* the USA find out about what the Germans, say, were doing? They were allies, but they were being tight-lipped about anything that had to do with uranium. The Russians and the Japanese were probably behind in the race—Flora hoped they were, anyway—but she didn’t see how her country could learn anything about what they were doing unless they got amazingly careless with their codes.

“If I hear anything, you’ll know about it,” Roosevelt promised, and then, “Oh, that reminds me.”

Did he sound a little too casual? Flora thought he did. “Reminds you of what?” she asked, trying not to show it.

“I’d like to send a team to your office and to your apartment, to sweep them for microphones,” he said.

“Don’t want to take chances, you know.”

“No, I suppose not.” Flora sighed. “All right—go ahead.” Of course, the Confederates—or any other spies—could plant mikes again right after the inspection team finished. A whore might be healthy when a government doctor looked her over, then catch something nasty from her next customer and spread it till she was inspected again. In both cases, though, you had to try.

“Thanks, Flora. The leader of the team is a master sergeant named Bernstein. If he’s not there, go somewhere else and call the guards.”

“Will do,” Flora said. “’Bye.” She hung up.

The team showed up at her office the next morning. She exchanged Yiddish gibes with Sergeant Bernstein. If he was by any chance a Confederate spy, he was a brilliant one. Bertha squawked when he and his men ran their detectors over her desk. “Sorry, lady. Gotta be done,” he said. “Anything, Bob?”

he asked the tall, blond soldier who was checking there.

“Looks like zip, Carl,” the private answered. He towered over his boss, who was little and dark and probably hadn’t combed his hair in three or four days.

They also didn’t find anything in Flora’s office. “Either you’re clean or the Confederates are smarter than they look,” Sergeant Bernstein declared.

“Which is it likely to be?” Flora asked.

“Never can tell,” he said seriously. “Most of their sh—uh, stuff—is just a little behind ours, but they’re mighty good with it. And some of what they use *is* ours.” He made a sour face. “You can walk into a wireless shop and buy it right on the street, and the bastards do.”

“Is that the price we pay for being a free country?” Flora asked.

“Don’t ask me. I’m just a *shlemiel* with stripes,” Bernstein answered. “But if we stop being free because those *mamzrim* can steal too easy, that ain’t so good, neither.” He turned to the other soldiers. “Come on, Bob, Dick. We got other places to check.”

Flora found one more question as the men in green-gray packed up to go: “Secretary Roosevelt said you’d come to my apartment, too. When will that be?”

Sergeant Bernstein checked some papers in a clipboard. “Day after tomorrow, probably in the morning.

You be there?”

“If I won’t, my son will,” Flora said. “I’ll tell him you’re coming, and that he should let you in.”

“Oughta work.” Bernstein looked from one of his men to the other. “You guys aren’t ready yet?

Watsamaddawidya?” To get that all out in one word, he had to hail from New York City.

“Well, let me say this—” Dick began.

Bernstein cut him off. “No, don’t say it. Just come on.” To Flora, he added, “Get him started and he won’t shut up.” Dick’s blackly stubbled face burned with resentment, but the sergeant got him out of there before he could loose any of it.

When Flora got home, she was all set to tell Joshua about the soldiers who would stop by in a couple of days. But that never happened. Her son showed her an envelope. “Look what came today!” He sounded excited about it.

That particular envelope, as Flora knew too well, hadn’t changed much since the days of the Great War.

The Old English typography on the cheap paper was almost the same, too: **U.S. Army Department of Selection for Service**.

Joshua might be excited. Flora knew nothing but horror. “We can beat it,” she said automatically. “We can quash it.”

“No,” Joshua said. “This is my country. I’ll fight for it, the same as anybody else would.”

“It’s not a game, Joshua.” Flora knew she sounded desperate. She felt desperate. “Uncle David walks on one leg. Cousin Yossel never knew his father. If anything happened to you, I don’t think I could stand it.”

“Nothing will happen, Mother.” At eighteen, Joshua was confident in his own immortality. An uncle? A cousin’s father? So what? Joshua had never known the first Yossel Reisen, either. He went on, “After the war, they’ll ask me, ‘What did you do?’ Shall I say I hid behind your skirts?”

Yes! Please God, yes! Flora wanted to scream it. Only the certain knowledge that it wouldn't help kept her quiet. She started to cry instead. That didn't help, either, but she couldn't help herself.

S omewhere out ahead in the Atlantic, the British and French fleets prowled. Sam Carsten kept glancing toward the *Josephus Daniels'* Y-ranging screens. Nothing showed up except the returns from the U.S.

ships all around the destroyer escort. No enemy airplanes had smelled out where the U.S. fleet lay.

"This could be the big one," Pat Cooley said.

"You're right—it could," Sam agreed. "I went through the Battle of the Three Navies, and I never thought there'd be a bigger fight than that. But maybe I was wrong."

"This would be a different kind of fight," the exec said.

"Oh, just a little," Carsten said. Southwest of Oahu, U.S. warships had slugged it out with their British and Japanese counterparts with big guns. This time around…"Chances are we'll never see the fleet that sends airplanes at us, and they won't see our ships, either."

"We've got some battlewagons along just in case," Cooley said, "but I think you're right."

"I know they're here. The *Dakota*'s one of 'em." Sam shivered. "I don't ever want to go on another wild ride—you can just bet your ass I don't." A shell hit had jammed the battleship's steering, and she sped on a mad arc through the U.S. fleet, ending up much too close to the enemy. She took a lot of hits, but she kept shooting back, too. To this day, both sides claimed victory in that fight near the Sandwich Islands. As far as Sam could tell, they'd both lost.

Lieutenant, j.g., Thad Walters stiffened in front of the Y-ranging set. "Sir, I've got a bogey to the northeast," the youngster said, his voice quivering with excitement.

"Give me range and bearing," Sam snapped. As soon as he had them, he swung the destroyer escort's blinker light toward the closest cruiser to pass the word. The whole fleet, of course, sailed under wireless silence. Before he started flashing, the cruiser began sending him a signal. As he read it, he laughed.

So did Pat Cooley. “Well, sir, at least their Y-ranging operator isn’t asleep at the switch.”

“Swell,” Sam said. The exec smiled. So did Sam, wryly. He couldn’t win, and he knew it. If he said something like *swell,* he marked himself as an old-timer trying to sound up to the minute. But if he said something like *bully,* he marked himself as an old-timer not bothering to stay up to date, which had to be even worse.

U.S. fighters from the combat air patrol streaked toward the foreign airplane. If they let it keep coming, it would find the fleet and pass the word on to the enemy ships somewhere off to the east. If they shot it down before it found the U.S. ships, that would also tell the limeys and frogs something, but not so much.

And if they made it try to run before they shot it down, they might be able to use its flight path to get an idea of where the enemy lay.

Sam watched the fighters till they vanished from sight, then went over to the Y-ranging screens and watched them there. He could tell just when the enemy aircraft spotted them: it broke off its advance and turned away as fast as it could go.

“What’s that bearing?” he asked Walters.

“Sir, the course is 105—a little south of east,” the Y-ranging officer answered.

“So somewhere along that line from where it started, that’s where the ship that sent it out is likely to be,”

Carsten said.

“Well, we don’t know that for a fact, sir—that airplane could be bluffing, trying to throw us off,” Walters said. “But I think it’s a pretty good bet.”

“Me, too,” Sam said, and then, “Mr. Cooley, is the cruiser reporting that scout aircraft’s course?”

“No, sir.”

“Then signal it over there, if you please. Chances are they’re checking it themselves, but I don’t want to take even the smallest chance with something this important.”

“Aye aye, sir.” Cooley was faster with Morse than Sam was himself.

“Sir, we’ve got a hydrophone contact!” That was Chief Bevacqua. The CPO was the best man on the ship at making sense of what came back from the pings the underwater equivalent of Y-ranging sent out.

“Bearing 165, range about half a mile. It’s shallow, sir, and the contact feels like a goddamn submersible.”

“Jesus Christ!” Ice shot up Sam’s back. A sub that close could sink the *Josephus Daniels* easy as you please. “Change course to 165—we’ll give it the smallest target we can. Man the ashcan flinger! Pat!

Signal the cruiser that we’ve got the worst kind of company!”

“Aye aye, sir!” Cooley said again, but before he could finish the signal the submarine announced its own presence. It cared little for anything as small as the destroyer escort. The light cruiser made a much more tempting target. Two torpedoes slammed into her. As soon as she was hit, the submersible dove.

By then, though, the *Josephus Daniels* hovered over the sub. Depth charges splashed into the Atlantic.

Down below, the submersible would be doing everything it could to get away, but its underwater electric motors were painfully slow. The skipper down there—British? French? Confederate?—would have heard the ashcans going into the water. Could he get away? Could he get deep enough to avoid and evade?

Even up on the surface, each burst from the spread felt like a kick in the teeth. Then Sam heard a noise like a slammed metal door—the pressure hull caving in from the explosions. “We got him,” he said soberly.

“He got us, too,” Cooley said—the cruiser was listing badly.

“Do they want us to take men off, or does their skipper think she’ll stay afloat?” Sam asked. Rage filled him, rage at himself. Destroyers and destroyer escorts sailed with the fleet to keep submarines away. He hadn’t done his job. Any enemy country would gladly trade a sub for a cruiser.

“For now, they think she’ll stay up,” Cooley answered. More flashing Morse came from the cruiser. “We get an ‘attaboy’ for sinking that

submersible. They heard it cave in over there, too."

"Hot damn," Sam said bitterly. He spoke to the hydrophone operator: "Keep your ears open, Bevacqua."

"Will do, sir," the petty officer replied. "I feel like hell on account of that fucker suckered me. He must've snuck in under a warm layer or something. Even so—"

"Yeah. Even so," Sam said. "Well, do your damnedest." He didn't look forward to the after-action report. He had to hope he lived to write one.

More airplanes came off the carriers' flight decks, and more, and still more. They formed up into attacking squadrons above the U.S. fleet, then zoomed off to the east. "I think we've found the enemy fleet," Cooley said.

"That's what we came for." Sam paused. "Of course, they came to find us. If they don't already know where we're at, seeing where our airplanes are coming from will kind of give them a hint."

"I know the limeys have Y-ranging. From what I've heard, theirs may even be better than ours," Cooley said. "I'm not so sure about the French."

"Well, once they see the limeys launching airplanes, they won't do a whole lot of waiting around after that," Carsten said, and the exec nodded. Sailors wrestled more depth charges up on deck to replace the ones the *Josephus Daniels* used to sink the enemy submersible.

Half an hour went by. Then Thad Walters said, "We've got aircraft coming in from the east, sir. They're not likely to be friendlies."

"How far out are they?" Sam asked.

"Maybe fifteen or twenty minutes."

"All right. Thanks." It wasn't, and Sam had no reason to be grateful, but he said the polite words anyway. Then he got on the PA system: "We're going to have company in a little while. Chances are they'll go after the airplane carriers and battleships ahead of us, but you never can tell. Any which way, our job is to get as many rounds in the air as we can. Some of them will do some good, I promise.

We've put a lot of work in on our gunnery. This is where it pays off."

"We're a lot better than we were when you took over this ship, sir," Cooley said.

"Thanks, Pat." This time, Sam did mean it. But he went on, "*Better* doesn't count. Are we *good enough*

? Well, we'll find out pretty damn quick."

Some of the ships farther east, at the very forefront of the U.S. fleet, started firing. Black puffs of smoke fouled the blue sky. Peering between the puffs with a pair of field glasses, Sam spotted wings and fuselages glinting in the sun. His belly tightened. His balls wanted to crawl up from his scrotum. He'd been on a ship attacked from the air as early as 1917. He'd been on the *Remembrance* when the Japanese sank her. Good men were going to die here in the middle of the Atlantic. So would good ships.

With luck, more of them would die a couple of hundred miles to the east, out over the curve of the world.

Neither side's ships would see the other's today.

With a thunderous roar, the *Josephus Daniels'* guns cut loose: .50-caliber machine guns, twin 40mm antiaircraft guns, and the 4.5-inch popguns that were her main armament. Those could reach higher and farther than the lighter weapons, but couldn't fire nearly so fast. "Evasive action, Mr. Cooley," Sam said.

"All ahead flank speed!"

"Aye aye, sir!" The exec relayed the command to the engine room. He started zigzagging as the ship's speed built up. It wouldn't build up enough. Sam wished for the extra six or seven knots a real destroyer could give him. But then, how much difference would they make against an airplane?

A burning fighter slammed into the Atlantic before Sam could see which side it belonged to. A great black cloud of smoke rose from a stricken ship. He swore. He'd known it would happen, but that didn't make it any easier to take.

"We've got to keep *some* carriers," Sam said, more to himself than to anyone else. "Otherwise, we won't be able to land our airplanes when they come home."

A fighter with a blue-white-red British roundel dove on the destroyer escort, guns blazing. Bullets whined through the air and clanged off metal. Here and there, men sprawled in spreading pools of blood. Sailors got the wounded down to the sick bay. The ship had no doctor, only a couple of pharmacist's mates.

They would have to do what they could. When things calmed down, they could transfer the men hurt worst to a bigger ship with a real surgeon or even to a hospital ship.

Uncounted tracers pursued the enemy airplane, but it got away. Exultant shouts rang out a few minutes later, when a torpedo airplane splashed into the sea. Sailors at the forward 40mm guns jumped and swaggered and pounded their hairy chests like so many gorillas.

Too much was going on too fast in too many places for Sam to have more than a vague idea of how this end of the fight was going—and he had no way to know what was happening off to the east. If everything here and there went perfectly, the battleships could storm off and pound the enemy ships to pieces…but he didn't think things were going perfectly. Now several greasy black smoke plumes rose into the clean, salt-scented air.

"I hope we're hurting them worse than they're hurting us," Pat Cooley said, exactly echoing his own thought.

After most of an hour, no more enemy aircraft remained overhead. They'd either gone down or flown off toward the east. They might clash with returning U.S. airplanes coming west. As Sam steered the *Josephus Daniels* toward a listing escort carrier, he realized he might have fought in two great naval battles now where nobody had the faintest idea who'd won.

"**A** great naval victory in the Atlantic!" blared the wireless set behind the bar in the sleazy seaside San Diego saloon. "British and French claims of triumph are the spasmodic bleating of frightened sheep!"

"Baaa!" George Enos said, looking up from his beer. "What do you think, Chief?"

"Just have to wait and see," Fremont Dalby answered. "What happens next will tell the story. They said we were licking the Confederates in Ohio, too, when the bastards were really kicking our ass. Or does it look different to you?"

“Nah, that sounds about right,” George said.

“If we go on and blast the crap out of the convoys coming up from South America, then we honest to God did whip the limeys,” Dalby continued, for all the world as if he had an admiral’s broad gold stripe on each sleeve. “If they go on and link up with the Confederates and give us a hard time in our own waters, they walloped us instead.”

“I got you,” George said. “And if neither one happens—”

“It’s a push,” Fritz Gustafson put in.

“There you go.” Dalby nodded emphatically. The empty glass in front of him, and the ones that had preceded it, no doubt had something to do with that emphasis. He put money on the bar, and the man in a boiled shirt and bow tie behind it gave him a full glass and took away the empty one. After a sip, the gun chief went on, “I mean, I think we really are no shit smacking the Confederates around, ’cause we wouldn’t be down in fucking Tennessee if we weren’t. Past that, though…Well, who knows how much to believe?”

“Who cares?” As usual, Gustafson got a lot of mileage out of a few words.

“That’s it.” George drained his beer and nodded to the bartender. The man worked the tap but didn’t hand over the beer till he got paid. George sipped, then sucked foam off his upper lip. “We’ve got to keep doing our job no matter what the big picture looks like. We’ll figure out what it all means later on.”

Down at the far end of the bar, two Marines started slugging at each other. Sometimes, as George knew too well, a brawl like that made the whole joint explode. This time, other young men in forest-green uniforms grabbed the brawlers and sat on them. “Lots of leathernecks in town lately,” Dalby remarked.

“They train here,” George said.

Dalby shook his head. “I mean even besides that,” he said. “Something’s up, I bet.”

“Could be,” George said. “Maybe they’re going to go down and take Baja California away from the Mexicans.”

“Possible,” Dalby said thoughtfully. “We tried that in the last war, and

it didn't work. Maybe we'd have more luck this time around."

"We could blockade the Confederates at Guaymas." George warmed to the idea—it was his, after all.

"If we did, they couldn't even get their subs out. That would make it like they didn't have any ports on the Pacific."

"I've heard notions I liked less," Fremont Dalby allowed.

"Me, too," Gustafson said, which was a solid accolade.

"If they send the Marines south, I bet we go along, too," George said. "We could do shore bombardment and keep the submersibles away from the landing craft."

Dalby laughed at him. "You tell 'em, Admiral," he said, reversing the thought George had had a moment before. But that held more admiration than derision, for he turned to Fritz Gustafson and said, "He's not as dumb as he looks, is he?"

"Not always, anyhow," Gustafson said—more praise, of sorts.

The next morning, George hardly remembered his prediction. You could get hung over on beer if you worked at it, and he'd been diligent the day before. Black coffee and aspirins took the edge off his pounding headache, but left his stomach feeling as if shipfitters were using blowtorches in there. His buddies seemed in no better shape. That was some consolation, but only some.

Two days later, the *Townsend* put to sea with several other destroyers, the escort carriers that had raided Baja California before, and a gaggle of slow, ugly landing craft. Surveying them as they waddled along, Fremont Dalby said, "It's a good thing the Empire of Mexico has a horseshit Navy. A real fleet could sink those sorry wallowers faster than you can say Jack Robinson."

George would have argued, except he thought Dalby was right. "I'm glad *I'm* not on one of those scows," he said.

"Amen, Brother Ben!" Dalby exclaimed. "You'd be puking your guts out every inch of the way. I know you've got a good stomach—I've seen it. But you could put a statue into one of those damn things and it'd barf brass by the time we got down to Cabo San Lucas."

They didn't get down to Cabo San Lucas. The Marines went ashore

about halfway down the Baja peninsula. That had Dalby and the handful of other old-timers on the destroyer muttering to themselves.

The Army had landed in almost the same spot during the Great War, and had had to pull out not much later. George couldn't see that it mattered one way or the other. Once you got south of Tijuana, Baja California didn't have enough of anything except rocks and scorpions—but it sure had plenty of those.

The Mexican coastal garrison held its fire till the landing craft got close, then opened up with several batteries of three-inch guns that were a generation out of date on the big battlefields farther east but that still worked just fine.

Keeping quiet let those guns escape the fury of the dive bombers that flew off the escort carriers to soften up the landing zone before the Marines went in. As soon as they started firing, all the real warships with the flotilla blasted away with their main armament from ranges at which the smaller land-based guns couldn't reply. One by one, the Mexican cannon fell silent. They weren't playing possum this time, either.

George wouldn't have wanted to be on the receiving end of that shellacking.

But they'd done more damage than anyone on the U.S. side would have expected. A couple of landing craft were on fire, and a couple of more had simply gone down to the shallow bottom of the Pacific.

Machine guns greeted the men in those dark green uniforms who splashed ashore.

The dive bombers returned and pounded the machine-gun nests. So did guns from the *Townsend* and her comrades. Fighters strafed the rocks just beyond the beach. Peering shoreward with binoculars, Fremont Dalby said, "We're whaling the crap out of them. Only bad thing is, you can't hardly see them at all—their khaki matches the landscape real good. The leatherheads stick out like sore thumbs, poor bastards."

"Somebody was asleep at the switch, not giving them the right kind of uniforms," George said. "The Confederates are starting to wear camouflage, for Christ's sake. Least we could do is have our guys not look like Christmas trees in the desert."

"Probably figured we were only fighting Mexicans, so what difference

did it make?" Dalby said. "That's how they think back in Philadelphia. But anybody with a rock in front of him and a gun in his hands is trouble. What are we doing making things easier for him?"

"Acting dumb," Fritz Gustafson said, which was all too likely to be true.

They had the time to gab, because the *Townsend* didn't come close enough to shore for them to open up with their 40mm guns. That would have let the Mexicans shoot back. No enemy airplanes appeared overhead. If they had, the fighters from the escort carriers would have dealt with them before the antiaircraft guns could—George hoped so, anyhow.

He watched the Marines hack out a toehold on the barren Mexican coast. "Boy, if the Confederates weren't over on the far side of the Gulf of California, I'd say the Mexicans were fucking welcome to this Baja place," he remarked.

"You notice the Confederate States didn't buy it when they picked up Sonora and Chihuahua," Fremont Dalby said. "You notice we didn't take it away after we won the Great War. Goddamn Mexicans *are* welcome to it."

George looked at his wristwatch. "Other crew's coming on pretty soon. They're welcome to it, too. I want some shuteye." He yawned to show how much he wanted it. "This watch-and-watch crap is for the birds."

"What? You don't like four hours on, four hours off around the clock?" Dalby said in mock surprise.

"You want more than a couple-three hours of sleep at a time? Shit, Enos, what kind of American are you?"

"A tired one," George answered. "A hungry one, too. If I eat, I don't get enough sleep. If I don't eat, I still don't get enough sleep, but I come closer, and I get hungry like a son of a bitch. I can't win."

Dalby scraped his index finger over his thumbnail. "There's the world's smallest goddamn violin playing sad songs for you. That shows how sorry I am. You're not talking about anything I'm not doing."

"I know, Chief," George said quickly. One advantage of Gustafson's usual silence was that he couldn't get in trouble by opening his big mouth too wide and falling in.

When the other crew took over at the twin 40mm, George raced down to the galley and snagged a ham sandwich and a mug of coffee. He inhaled them, then climbed into his hammock. It was hot and stuffy belowdecks, but he didn't care. The destroyer's five-inch guns roared every so often, but he didn't care about that, either. He thought he could have slept on top of one of them.

He was punchy and groggy when he got shaken awake, and needed a minute or two to remember where he was, and why, and what he was supposed to be doing. "Oh, God," he groaned, "is it that time already?"

"Bet your ass, Charlie," his tormentor said cheerfully, and went on to rout other victims from sleep.

The sun had set. On the shore, tracers zipped back and forth. The U.S. Marines used yellow or red tracer rounds. Maybe the Mexicans had been buying theirs from the Empire of Japan, because they were ice blue. It made for a bright and cheerful scene—or a scene that would have been bright and cheerful if George hadn't known that those tracers, along with all the ordinary bullets he couldn't see, were fired with intent to kill.

"Looks like we're holding more ground than we were when I sacked out," he said.

"Yeah, I think so," Fremont Dalby agreed. "Now that we're holding it, though, what are we going to do with it?"

"Beats me," George said. "But I'll tell you one thing—I'd sooner be fighting Francisco José's boys than Hirohito's any old day."

"Well, if you think I'll argue with that, you're crazier than one man's got any business being," the gun chief replied. "The Japs are tough, and their gear is as good as ours. These guys…They're using stuff left over from the last war, and you have to figure most of 'em don't want to be here."

"Would you?" George said. "It's got to be hell on earth. Hot sun. Rocks. Rattlesnakes—gotta think so, anyway. Most of those guys probably just want to go back to their farms and make like none of this ever happened."

"Sounds good to me," Dalby said. "If we go home and the Confederates go home, who's left to fight?

See? Piece of cake. They'll be calling with the Nobel Peace Prize any goddamn day now. Want to split it?"

"Sure? Why not?" George said. On the barren, desolate coast of Baja California, something blew up with a rending crash. "Hope that was on the Mexican side of the line," George said. Fremont Dalby nodded.

A private came up to Chester Martin with a half-grim, half-sick expression on his face. Seeing that, Martin knew what he was going to say before he said it. But say it he did: "Sarge, they found Don.

Bushwhackers caught him. It ain't pretty."

"Shit," Chester said. "This is worse than Kentucky, all right." Kentucky had gone back and forth between the CSA and the USA. Most people there hated Yankees, but a fair-sized minority didn't. Even some of the ones who hated Yankees understood they didn't come equipped with horns and tails.

Here in central Tennessee, none of the locals seemed to have got the news. They reacted to soldiers in green-gray as if to demons from hell. Some of them ran, while the rest tried to fight back. Civilians weren't supposed to fight back. If anybody'd told that to the Confederates, it didn't sink in.

"What are we going to do, Sarge?" the private asked.

"I know what I want to do," Chester answered. "I want to take hostages. And if the bastard who did that to Don doesn't turn himself in, I want to shoot the son of a bitch."

"Yeah!" the private said savagely.

"I can't do it on my own," Chester said. "My ass'd be in a sling if I tried it. But I bet Captain Rhodes can."

Hubert Rhodes was newly in command of the company, which had had two COs wounded on back-to-back days before he arrived. Unless he was unlucky, Martin didn't think he'd be easy to kill. He was tough and skinny, with a thin, dark mustache and gray eyes that seemed to see everywhere at once.

He didn't mind having a noncom head up a platoon, which gave him another good mark in Chester's book.

When Chester found him, he was field-stripping and cleaning a captured Confederate automatic rifle. He carried it himself, in lieu of the usual officer's .45. He put himself where the enemy could shoot at him, and he wanted to be able to answer with as much firepower as he could.

He looked up before Chester got very close. You couldn't get close to him without his knowing it. "What can I do for you, Sergeant?" he asked. By the way he talked, he came from somewhere in the Midwest.

"Damn Confederate bushwhackers just murdered one of my men, sir," Martin replied. "Murdered him and did nasty things to the body after he was dead. I hope after, anyway."

Rhodes' mouth was never wide and giving. It tightened more than usual now. "What do you want to do about it?" he asked. "What do you want *me* to do about it?"

"Take hostages, sir," Chester said. "We may not make 'em stop this shit, but we can make it expensive for 'em."

Without looking at the weapon he was working on, Rhodes reassembled it. His hands didn't need his eyes' help to know what they were doing. He got up and lit a cigarette: also Confederate plunder.

"Sounds good. Let's do it," he said. "You think ten's enough, or do you want twenty?"

"Twenty," Martin said. "This isn't the first man we lost like that. If Featherston's soldiers shoot us, it's one thing. We shoot them, too. But these cocksuckers…They think nobody can touch 'em because they're in civilian clothes."

"We'll do it," Captain Rhodes said. "Your men up for firing-squad duty if it comes to that? Chances are it will, you know."

"Yes, sir," Chester said without the slightest hesitation. "If it's a Confederate, they'll shoot it."

"Old men? Boys too young to shave? Maybe even women?" Rhodes persisted. "Won't be a lot of men of military age in this Woodbury place. The ones who did live there, the war's already sucked 'em into uniform."

"Any Confederate hostages we take, they'll shoot," Chester Martin said

confidently. “They know damn well the Confederates’d shoot them if they got the chance.”

“Then let’s round up some soldiers, and let’s round up some hostages,” Rhodes said.

Rounding up soldiers was the easiest thing in the world. By then, the whole company had heard about what happened to their comrade. Had Captain Rhodes given the order, they wouldn’t just have taken hostages in Woodbury, Tennessee. They would have wiped the place off the face of the earth.

Woodbury might have held five hundred people before the war started—fewer now, of course. The stores in the center of town were old and weathered; the courthouse—it was a county seat—so shiny and new, it had probably gone up in Jake Featherston’s administration. Slopes north of the courthouse square were given over to crops; those to the south held houses.

Soldiers formed a perimeter around the houses. Then they went through them and seized twenty men, all under eighteen or over fifty except for one who’d lost his right arm, probably in the last war. They also killed one old man who fired a shotgun at the U.S. soldiers heading up his walk. He must not have taken careful aim: he winged one man in green-gray, but most of the blast went over the soldiers’ heads.

Once the hostages were taken, Captain Rhodes assembled the rest of the townsfolk in the square. They stared at him with sullen hatred only slightly tempered by the snouts of the machine guns staring at them from sandbagged revetments.

“We had a soldier murdered by bushwhackers,” Rhodes told the locals. “That kind of cowardice runs dead against the laws of war, and we don’t aim to put up with it. We’ve taken hostages. If the killer doesn’t come forward inside of twenty-four hours, we will execute them.”

“I did it.” A man with a white mustache stepped forward. “You can shoot me if you’ve got to shoot somebody.”

“What did you do to the body after it was dead?” Chester asked.

The man blinked. “I smoked a cigarette over it, by God. Then I went home.”

“You’re a liar. You’re brave, but you’re a liar,” Chester said. “Get back where you belong.” Crestfallen, the man went back into the crowd.

“Anybody else?” Captain Rhodes asked. No one said a word. He looked at his watch. “All right. The clock is ticking.”

One of the hostages started to blubber. “You got no business doing this to me,” he said. “No business, you hear? I never done nothin’ to nobody.”

“Too goddamn bad,” said a man in Chester’s platoon. “You wasted a hell of a chance, then, didn’t you?”

“This won’t bring your soldier back,” another hostage said.

“That’s true,” Chester said. “But maybe it’ll make somebody else with a squirrel gun and not a hell of a lot of sense think twice. And even if it doesn’t, it pays you people back.”

“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” Captain Rhodes agreed. “Except we’re taking a whole mouthful of teeth.”

Confederate artillery came in that evening. Maybe someone managed to slip out of Woodbury and let the enemy soldiers know what was going on. But the shells mostly fell short—the front kept moving south.

Chester wasn’t sorry not to be right up on the firing line for a while. He slept in his foxhole with his Springfield beside him. If anybody tried to give him trouble, he aimed to give it first.

But he slept till sunup, and woke with nothing worse than a stiff back. He didn’t remember being so tight and sore the last time around. Of course, that was more than half a lifetime ago now. He’d been a young man then. He scratched his belly, which was larger these days. No, he wasn’t a young man any more.

“Anybody come forward?” he asked, opening a ration can.

“Get serious, Sarge,” answered one of the soldiers who was already eating. “Those fuckers are brave enough to shoot somebody who isn’t looking, but they won’t put their own necks on the line when it counts.”

“That one geezer who tried to volunteer had balls,” Chester said.

“Sure. But the point is, he didn’t really do anything,” the soldier replied. “The fellow who did sneak around, he’s still sneaking.”

“He must be pretty sneaky, too,” Martin said. “If the people with kin who got taken hostage knew who he was, you have to figure somebody’d rat on him to save a husband or a son or a brother.”

The soldier only shrugged. “Hasn’t happened—that’s all I can tell you.”

“Well, they’ve got…what, another couple of hours?” Chester said. The soldier nodded. Chester shrugged. “We’ll see what happens then, that’s all.”

What happened then was what he’d expected: U.S. soldiers paraded the hostages out to the town square. Some soldiers had set a post in the ground in front of the courthouse. Captain Rhodes ordered the townsfolk of Woodbury out to watch the executions. “This is what you get when civilians try to fight in a war,” he said. “You’d better remember it.” He gestured to Chester Martin. “Will you do the honors?”

“Yes, sir. Don was in my platoon.” Chester waited till the soldiers had tied the first hostage to the pole.

Then he gestured to the men in the firing squad. “Ready!” They brought up their Springfields. “Aim!” The riflemen drew a bead on the white paper pinned over the hostage’s heart. “Fire!”

A dozen rifles barked as one. The hostage slumped against his bonds. Blood poured from his wounds.

He writhed, but not for long. In the crowd, a couple of women screamed. Another one fainted. So did a man.

U.S. soldiers cut the dead hostage down and marched another one, a young one, over to take his place.

The youth’s shout of, “Freedom!” cut off abruptly when the men from the firing squad pulled their triggers. More screams rang from the crowd. A girl about his age tried to charge the soldiers. Not too roughly, they kept her from hurting them or herself, then shoved her back to her relatives. The locals held on to her to make sure she didn’t try again.

Most of the hostages died as well as men could. Four or five wept and

begged. It did them no good.

Chester called, “Ready!…Aim!…Fire!” over and over again. Finally, the men in green-gray cut down the last bloody body.

“Bury your dead,” Captain Rhodes told the townsfolk. “And remember, chances are whoever made us do this is still right here with the rest of you. Some of you may even have a pretty good notion who he is.

But he kept quiet, and you kept quiet, and this is what you get. You leave us alone, we won’t harm you.

If you break the laws of war, you’ll pay. You have paid.”

The courthouse square stank of cordite and blood and shit. It stank of fear, too; Chester had smelled that smell too many times to have any doubts about what it was. For once, he didn’t smell his own fear.

He made sure he patted each man from the firing squad on the back. “You did good,” he told them.

“That wasn’t easy, doing what you guys did. I’m proud of you.”

“Those fuckers had it coming,” said one of the men in green-gray. Several other soldiers nodded.

But another man said, “You’re right, Sarge—it wasn’t easy. They were just…people. They didn’t hurt anybody. I did this once, but I don’t think I ever want to do it again.”

“All right, Lewis. You won’t, then,” Martin promised. “Go off and smoke a cigarette. If you’ve got any booze, take a knock. I’ll look the other way. You earned it.”

“I don’t, Sarge,” Lewis said mournfully.

“Don’t worry about it, Frankie,” another soldier said. “I got a pretty good idea where you can get your hands on some.”

Chester turned his back so they wouldn’t see him smile. They were kids doing a man’s job. *What about me?* he wondered. *I’m no kid any more.* He was trying to do a man’s job, too, and it wasn’t any easier for him than it was for them.

A rifle on his shoulder, Jonathan Moss trudged along through the muggy hell that was summertime in Georgia. He turned to Nick Cantarella and remarked, “Up at 25,000 feet, where I’m supposed to be fighting, it’s cold enough for me to need fur and leather. Even up above this, it’s still that cold.”

“Yeah, well, that’s how the ball crumbles,” the infantry officer answered. “That’s the way the cookie bounces.”

Spartacus looked from one escaped U.S. POW to the other. “You damnyankee ofays, you fuckin’

crazy, you know dat?” the guerrilla leader said.

“Thanks,” Moss said, which wasn’t likely to convince Spartacus he was wrong. Cantarella chuckled. A couple of the blacks who were close enough to listen to the byplay tapped index fingers against their temples or spun them by their ears to show whom they agreed with.

The guerrillas held the countryside. It did them less good than Moss wished it would. With so many big farms growing one big crop—cotton or peanuts or tobacco—and with so many Negroes taken off the countryside after agriculture was forcibly mechanized, the rebels had a devil of a time feeding themselves.

Some of their raids on towns came from no better reason than the need to steal enough food to keep from starving.

Towns were going hungry, too. Trains had cars that mounted machine guns and cannon. Trucks traveled in convoys with machine-gun-toting command cars. Guerrilla bands shot at them and planted explosives under roads and along railroad tracks anyway. Spartacus’ machine-gun-carrying pickup had done some nasty work driving alongside roads and shooting up trucks that stuck to them.

“What are we going to do next?” Moss asked Spartacus. Back in the USA, he wouldn’t have imagined ever taking orders from a black man. But Spartacus unquestionably led this band. A word from him to his followers and both Moss and Cantarella would die the next instant.

But all he said was, “Don’ know fo’ sho’. Wish to Jesus I did. Best thing I kin think of is to keep on movin’ east. Foraging do seem better over dat way.” He had a Tredegar slung over one shoulder—and a ham slung over the other.

“Not so many Mexicans over that way, neither,” Nick Cantarella said.

Moss could follow Cantarella when he spoke. He could follow Spartacus when he spoke, too. Trying to follow one of them on the heels of the other sometimes made him feel he was shifting mental gears too fast for comfort.

“Not yet,” Spartacus said. “Dey hear we’s operatin’ in them parts, though, dey git over there pretty damn quick.”

“Maybe,” Moss said. “But maybe not, too. They aren’t what you’d call eager to mix it up with us.”

“Not their fight,” Cantarella said. “I was them, *I* wouldn’t want anything to do with a bunch of crazy-ass smokes.”

“Ofays hereabouts make them greasers fight,” Spartacus said. “Make ’em pretend to fight, anyways.

How good they aim, how hard they push when they comes after us… Mebbe a different story.”

“Has been so far,” Moss said. Francisco José’s soldiers showed no more enthusiasm about being in Georgia than Moss would have shown in the Yucatan. And if peasants in the Yucatan tried to kill him when he came after them, he wouldn’t go after them very hard.

“Big worry is, they’re liable to find an officer with a wild hair up his ass,” Cantarella said. “They get a guy who makes his troops more afraid of him than they are of us, they can give us trouble.”

Before Moss or Spartacus could answer, the guerrillas’ point man waved. Everybody stopped. They were coming out of pine woods into more open, more cultivated country. Or maybe they weren’t coming out. “What’s up?” Spartacus asked in a penetrating whisper.

“Somethin’ don’t look right up ahead,” answered the point man, a small, scrawny, very black fellow named Apuleius.

“Don’t look right how?” Spartacus asked. “What you mean?”

Apuleius shrugged. “Dunno. Too quiet-like, maybe.”

“Reckon somebody’s layin’ for us out there?” Spartacus asked. The point man shrugged again.

Spartacus frowned. “Can’t go back or stay here fo’ good,” he said. Nobody argued with him; that was self-evidently true. His frown got

deeper. “We gonna have to smoke ’em out, then. I’ll go out, see what they do.”

An Army officer would have sent a private, or several privates, into the open to do the same job.

Spartacus led by force of personality, not force of military law. He had to show the men who followed him that he was worth following. That meant exposing himself to danger instead of them.

Out of the woods he sauntered. He left his Tredegar and the ham behind; he might have been a happy-go-lucky Negro without a care in the world. He might have been…if Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party hadn’t made Negroes without a care in the world extinct.

Along with the rest of the band, Moss and Cantarella watched from the woods. Moss knew more than a little relief that Spartacus hadn’t told the two white men to scout what was up ahead. If Mexican soldiers lurked in the fields, their color might have done the trick. But their accents would have betrayed them to Confederates as soon as they opened their mouths.

For a moment, Moss thought Apuleius was flabbling about nothing. Spartacus strolled along, and nobody bothered him. Then a shout rang out, seemingly from nowhere. Like a chipmunk popping out of its hole, a gray-haired Confederate in a gray uniform stood up in what looked like a plain old field of peanuts. He pointed a rifle at Spartacus.

Three other white men appeared and went over to the Negro. One of them held out his hand. Spartacus produced papers. They were more or less genuine; the Negro whose picture was on them even looked something like the guerrilla leader. Spartacus pointed east down the road toward Perry, the closest town.

The whites put their heads together. After a minute or two, they waved for him to pass on. He sketched a salute and walked off in the direction toward which he’d pointed.

Back in the woods, the men he led scratched their heads. “What you reckon we should oughta do now?”

one of them asked Nick Cantarella. He wasn’t Spartacus’ second-in-command in any formal sense. But the Negroes recognized that he had a professional’s sense of tactics.

“Now we know where they’re at,” Cantarella said, and the black man

nodded. The U.S. officer went on,

“We could set up the machine gun over there, say”—he pointed—“and attack from a different angle while they’re trying to take it out.”

“Could work,” the Negro agreed.

“Yeah.” Cantarella nodded. “But it’d make a lot of noise, and probably draw everybody and his goddamn dog over this way. That ain’t good news. Other thing that occurs to me is, we could just sit on our asses here till dark and try and get past this position then. Spartacus’ll be waiting up the road for us somewhere—you can count on that.”

After talking it over in low voices, the guerrillas decided to wait it out. Moss thought that was a good idea. “We can’t send for reinforcements if things go sour,” he said. “There’s a saying—there are old pilots, and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots.”

“Makes sense,” Apuleius said. As point man, he recognized the need for caution more than most of the others. If he got bold when he shouldn’t, he’d end up killing himself, and probably a lot of his comrades, too.

They waited under the trees. Midges and the nasty little biting flies the Negroes called no-see-’ems buzzed around. Eventually, the sun sank. As darkness deepened, Cantarella peered east with a pair of field glasses some Mexican officer didn’t need any more. “Fuck me,” he said softly.

“Now what’s wrong?” Jonathan Moss asked.

“They’ve got somebody cute in charge of them,” Cantarella answered. “They aren’t leaving. They’re moving to new positions closer to the road so they can make sure nobody sneaks by. What I wouldn’t give for a mortar right now.”

“Fight our way through?” Moss didn’t like the idea, and he was sure his dislike showed in his voice.

“I don’t want to,” Cantarella said. “Even if we win, it’ll cost us. And it’ll draw more of these militia assholes and Mexican soldiers down on us just like shit draws flies.”

“You say the ofays is by the road?” Apuleius asked. Nick Cantarella nodded. “Is all of ’em there?” the Negro persisted.

“I don’t know for sure, ’cause I don’t know how many of ’em were out there to begin with,” Cantarella said. “But a good many of ’em moved. How come?”

“On account of mebbe I kin git us around ’em in the dark,” Apuleius replied. “Wouldn’t want to try in the daytime. They see us sure. But at night, without no moon…Got a fair chance, anyways.”

“Let’s do it.” Cantarella wasn’t a man to whom hesitation came naturally. “We’ll go in full combat array, ready to fight if we have to, but we’ll sneak if we can.” Then he seemed to remember he wasn’t a U.S.

Army captain any more, and couldn’t just give orders. He had much less authority here than Spartacus did. “Is that all right with youse guys?” he asked the guerrillas.

Nobody said no. They got to their feet and shook themselves out into a line from which they could go into action if they needed to. Everyone checked to make sure he had a round chambered and his safety off. Then, as quietly as they could, they left the corner of the pine woods and sneaked left, following Apuleius one man at a time.

The point man found or knew about a track through the fields. A lot of the Negroes were barefoot. They moved as silently as ghosts. Their dark skins also made them harder to spot. Moss, shod and with what didn’t feel like enough dirt on his face and arms, felt conspicuous every time one of his feet came down.

He waited for a shout from near the road, which didn’t seem far away at all. Worse, he waited for a volley from the white men’s rifles, thunder and the lightning of muzzle flashes splitting the night. Those old-timers in gray couldn’t be so blind and deaf…could they?

Maybe they could. Moss spotted a couple of glowing coals in the militiamen’s positions. They were smoking, and they weren’t being careful about it. “Jesus, if I was a fuckin’ sniper…” Cantarella whispered.

Moss didn’t want to say a word, for fear his voice would carry. But he nodded. The same thing had occurred to him. The whites over there should know better. Careless smoking in the trenches got plenty of soldiers killed in the Great War.

No challenge rang out. Nobody fired. None of the guerrillas tripped

over his own feet or dropped his weapon or did any of the other simple, deadly things that were all too easy to do. Apuleius led the line back toward the road. If the militiamen had had a deep position… But there weren't enough of them for that.

Just when Moss thought he was safe, when he could breathe more than tiny sips of air, a human shape loomed out of the darkness ahead. He almost fired from the hip. Then he realized it was Spartacus. "I was hopin' y'all didn't run off an' leave me," the Negro said dryly.

"Not us. That other gal, she nothin' but a pretty face," Apuleius answered. Laughing softly, the guerrillas tramped on through the night.

XII

S ergeant Armstrong Grimes looked at Winnipeg from the prairie due south of the city. As usual, smoke shrouded the view. Bombers the Confederates would have hacked out of the sky with ease were more than good enough to lower the boom on enemies who didn't have fighters or antiaircraft guns. That was as true in Canada as it had been in Utah.

How much good the endless bombing would do…"It's gonna be craters like on the moon," Armstrong said, pausing to light a cigarette.

Not far from him, Yossel Reisen was doing the same thing. He said something even worse: "It's gonna be craters like Salt Lake City."

"Fuck," Armstrong muttered, not because Yossel was wrong but because he was right. Every pile of bricks in Salt Lake hid a rifleman or a machine gun. If it worked the same way here…If it worked the same way here, the regiment would take a hell of a lot of casualties.

A harsh chatter rang out in the distance. Armstrong and Yossel looked at each other in dismay. "It's one of those goddamn machine-gun cunts," Yossel said, and Armstrong nodded. They hadn't been in Canada long, but soldiers' language didn't need long to hit bottom. Machine-gun pickup went through machine-gun whore on the way down.

An antibarrel cannon boomed. The Canucks on the pickup truck went right on shooting back. Pickups were a lot faster than barrels. On flat ground, they were a lot more mobile, too. And they made much

smaller targets. The antibarrel cannon fired again—and missed again.

“Put your spectacles on the next time, dears,” Armstrong said in a disgusted falsetto. Yossel snickered.

The antibarrel cannon boomed one more time. A couple of seconds later, there was a different boom, and a fireball to go with it. “They listened to you!” Yossel exclaimed.

“Yeah, well, that makes once,” Armstrong said.

An officer blew a whistle. Soldiers trotted forward. Armstrong and Yossel veered apart from each other.

They both dodged like broken-field runners, and bent as low as they could. They didn’t want to make themselves easy to shoot.

Every time Armstrong saw a motorcar, he shied away from it. The Canadians used auto bombs, as the Mormons had. They’d added a new wrinkle, too: wireless-controlled auto bombs. They loaded a motorcar with explosives, put it where they pleased, and blew it up from a mile away—from farther than that, for all Armstrong knew—at the touch of a button when they saw enough U.S. soldiers near it to make the detonation worthwhile.

Sooner or later, explosives men—most of them borrowed from bomber squadrons—would go over the motorcars one by one to defang the machines that did carry explosives. That was dangerous, thankless work. The Canadians had booby-trapped some of their auto bombs to go off when somebody tried to pull their teeth.

“One thing,” Armstrong said when he and Yossel happened to dodge together again. The fire from up ahead wasn’t bad—he’d known plenty worse. The Canucks didn’t have many defenders in the outermost suburbs of Winnipeg, anyhow.

“What’s that?” Yossel asked.

“If an auto bomb blows up while you’re trying to defuse it, you’ll never know what hit you,” Armstrong said.

A bullet kicked up dirt between the two men. They both flinched. “Yeah, you got something there,”

Yossel said. Each of them had seen—and listened to—men die knowing exactly what had hit them, and in torment till death released

them. Armstrong had never killed a man to put him out of his misery, but he knew people who had. He knew he would, if he ever found himself in a spot like that. He hoped somebody would do it for him, if he ever found himself in a spot like *that.*

Which was not the sort of thing he wanted to be thinking when he got shot.

One second, he was loping along, happy as a clam (how happy were clams, anyway?). The next, his left leg went out from under him, and he fell on his face in the dirt. He stared in stupid wonder at the hole in his trouser leg, and at the spreading red stain around it.

"Oh, for Christ's sake," he said, more in annoyance than anything else. *I stay lucky for two years, and then this shit happens,* he thought.

Then the pain reached his brain, and he howled like a wolf and clutched at himself. He knew what had hit him, all right, and wished to God he didn't. He scrabbled for the pouch that held his wound dressing, the sulfa powder he was supposed to dust on the wound before he used the bandage, and the morphine syrette that might build a wall between him and the fire in his leg.

"Sergeant's down!" somebody yelled.

"Corpsman!" Two or three soldiers shouted the same thing.

Armstrong detached the bayonet from the muzzle of his Springfield and used it to cut away his trouser leg so he could give himself first aid. He felt sick and woozy. He also bit his lip against the pain. The wound hadn't hurt for the first few seconds after he got it, but it sure as hell did now.

My old man got hit just about like this, he thought as he sprinkled sulfa powder into the hole in his calf.

He'd never had a whole lot in common with his father. This wasn't the way he wanted to start. Merle Grimes still used a cane to take some of the weight off his bad leg. Armstrong hoped that wouldn't happen to him.

He slapped on the bandage. Then he yanked the top off the syrette, stuck himself, and pushed down on the plunger. He felt more squeamish about that than he had about the bandage, or even the wound. He was hurting himself on purpose. He knew he would feel

better soon, but knowing didn't make a whole lot of difference.

Once he'd done what he could for himself, he looked around for cover. He didn't see anything close by.

He pulled his entrenching tool off his belt and started digging. It wouldn't be much of a hole, no doubt, but anything was better than nothing. He piled the dirt from the scrape in front of him. Enough of it might stop a bullet, or at least slow one down.

He'd just got up a halfway decent dirt rampart when medics crouched beside him. "Here you go, Sergeant," one of them said. "Can you slide onto the stretcher?"

"Sure." Armstrong was amazed at how chipper he sounded. He didn't care about anything. The morphine had taken hold while he was digging. He didn't slide so much as roll onto the stretcher.

Another medic looked at his wound. The man with the Red Cross armbands and smock and helmet markings poked at it, too, which hurt in spite of the shot. "He did a pretty good job patching himself up,"

he reported. "I don't think the bones are broken. Looks like a hometowner to me." He gave Armstrong an injection, too, before the wounded man could tell him not to bother.

"Where you from, Sergeant?" asked one of the corpsmen at Armstrong's head.

"Uh, Washington. D.C., I mean," Armstrong answered vaguely. That second shot was kicking like a mule. He felt as if he were floating away from himself.

The medic didn't seem to see anything out of the ordinary in the way he talked. The man laughed. "If that's your home town, you're safer staying away. Damn Confederates have worked it over pretty good, I hear."

"Folks are all right, as far as I know," Armstrong said. Then the corpsmen picked up the stretcher and carried it away. Armstrong had felt as if he were floating before. Now he floated and bounced.

Red Cross flags flying around the aid station and Red Crosses painted on the tents themselves told the Canucks not to shoot this way—or gave them targets, depending. One of the medics let out a yell: "Doc!

Hey, Doc! We got a casualty!”

That’s what I am, all right. With two shots of morphine in him, the idea didn’t bother Armstrong a bit.

“Bring him in!” somebody yelled from the other side of the canvas. In Armstrong went. He smelled ether and other chemicals he couldn’t name—and blood, enough blood for a butcher’s shop. “Where are you hit, soldier?” a bespectacled man asked from behind a surgical mask.

“Leg,” Armstrong answered.

The corpsmen slid him off the stretcher and onto the operating table. The doctor peeled off the bandage he’d put on and studied the wound. “You’re lucky,” he said after perhaps half a minute.

“My ass.” Even doped to the gills, Armstrong knew bullshit when he heard it. “If I was lucky, the fucker would’ve missed me.”

“He’s got you there, Doc,” one of the medics said, laughing.

“Oh, shut up, Rocky,” the surgeon replied without rancor. He turned back to Armstrong. “I’m going to give you a shot of novocaine to numb you up. Then I’ll clean that out. It should heal fine. You may not be as lucky as you like, but you’ll do all right.”

He wasn’t especially gentle, and he didn’t wait for the novocaine to take full effect before he started working with a probe and forceps and a scalpel. Armstrong yipped a couple of times. Then he did more than yip. “Christ on a crutch, Doc, take it easy!” he said.

“Sorry about that.” The surgeon didn’t sound very sorry. He didn’t take it easy, but went on, “No offense, but I want to get you taken care of in a hurry so I can deal with a bad wound if one comes in.”

“Thanks a lot,” Armstrong said. “Easy for you to talk like that—it ain’t your goddamn leg.”

“Well, no,” the medico said. “But it’s not an amputation, either, or a sucking chest, or a belly wound, or a bullet in the head. You’ll be back on duty in six weeks or so. In the meantime, you get to take it easy while you heal. Could be worse.” As he spoke, he did some more snipping. Armstrong yelped again.

After what seemed like forever and was probably about ten minutes,

the surgeon gave him a shot.

“What’s that?” Armstrong asked suspiciously.

“Tetanus—lockjaw,” the man answered. He eyed Armstrong over his mask. “Locking your jaws might be an improvement, all things considered.”

“Funny, Doc. Har-de-har-har. I’m laughing my ass off, you know what I mean?”

“Get him out of here,” the surgeon told the corpsmen. “Some other poor bastard’ll come along pretty damn quick.”

They carried Armstrong over to a tent next to the aid station and put him on a cot. “Ambulance’ll be along in a while,” one of them said.

“Happy day,” he answered. They were shaking their heads when they left the tent. He couldn’t have cared less.

The tent held a dozen cots. Counting his, five of them were occupied. None of the other wounded men was in any shape to talk. One of them had bloody bandages around his head. One had lost an arm. Two had torso wounds. Three, including the man who’d been shot in the head, were deeply unconscious. The other one moaned from time to time, but didn’t come out with any real words.

Looking at them, listening to them, Armstrong reluctantly decided the smartass surgeon had a point. If he had to get wounded, he could have done a lot worse than catching a hometowner. Despite the morphine and novocaine, his leg barked again. He muttered under his breath. Then he brightened—a little, anyhow.

His old man had always thought he wasn’t quite good enough, that he never did enough. If his father tried saying that now, Armstrong promised himself he’d knock his goddamn block off.

L ulu looked into Jake Featherston’s office. “General Forrest is here to see you, Mr. President,” she said.

“Send him in, then,” Jake growled. His secretary nodded and ducked out to bring back the chief of the Confederate General Staff.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III looked pale and pasty: the look of a man who spent most of his time underground and didn’t see the sun very

often. Featherston looked the same way, but he hardly noticed it—he saw himself all the time. Forrest nodded to him. “Mr. President,” he said.

“Hello, General.” Jake leaned forward across the desk. “Are we ready to hit back at those damnyankee sons of bitches?”

“General Patton thinks so, sir, and he’s the man on the spot,” Forrest answered.

“He’s the man on the spot, all right,” Jake Featherston said. His eyes went to the map on the wall of his office. The Confederates had been gathering men and matériel east of the Appalachians for weeks, aiming to strike at the U.S. flank. If everything went the way it was supposed to, they could cut off the Yankees in Tennessee and bundle the ones in Kentucky back to the Ohio. That would put the war on even terms again. But if things didn’t go the way he wanted them to…“We can’t afford to fuck this up.”

“Yes, sir,” Nathan Bedford Forrest III said stolidly.

Jake swore under his breath. He’d never thought it would come to this when he ordered his armies into motion against the USA. The Yankees were the ones who were supposed to be fighting for their lives, not his side.

He swore again, on a different note, a moment later. He’d already survived two assassination tries. If the war kept going down the toilet, he knew damn well he’d have to worry about another one. Even a Vice President as pliable as Don Partridge might start getting ideas. So might Clarence Potter—as if he didn’t have them already. But he might decide to do something about them, the cold-blooded son of a bitch.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III might get some of his own, too.

“Is security tight?” Jake asked.

“Tight as we know how to make it,” Forest answered.

“It better be. It better be tight as a fifty-dollar whore’s twat,” Jake said, and the chief of the General Staff let out a startled laugh. Featherston went on, “If the damnyankees figure out what we’re up to before we get rolling, they can give us all kinds of grief, right?”

“You’d better believe it, sir. If they’ve got a gopher planted

somewhere between here and General Patton's headquarters, that's a problem," Forrest replied. "And if he can pass on whatever he knows, I mean."

"Yeah, yeah," Jake said impatiently. "What are the odds?"

"Mr. President, I just don't know." Nathan Bedford Forrest III spread his hands. "We still have gophers in the USA and with U.S. forces. The Yankees are bound to be doing the same thing to us. Too goddamn hard for one side to root out all the spies from the other. We just sound too much alike.

Whether they've got somebody in the right place, whether the son of a bitch can pass on what he picks up, if he picks up anything…We'll have to find out. I hope to God we don't find out the hard way, but I can't be sure."

Most men in Forrest's place would have told Jake Featherston what they thought he wanted to hear: that everything was fine, that of course the United States had no chance of finding out what was going on.

Reluctantly, Featherston respected the younger man's honesty. If you promised the moon and couldn't deliver, wasn't that worse than not promising in the first place?

"All right. We'll see what happens." Jake tried telling himself what he wanted to hear: "Maybe the Yankees won't believe we'd try coming through the mountains even if some stinking spy tells them we will."

"Maybe." But General Forrest sounded dubious. "Remember, sir, that's General Morrell in charge of their spearhead. He won't be easy to fool. He's the kind who'd take armor through the mountains himself, so he's too likely to think we'd try it, too."

"I suppose." Featherston forced himself to nod. "No, you're bound to be right, dammit. I sure wish we'd punched his ticket for good. Some lousy busybody of a sergeant threw him on his back and toted him out of the line of fire, I hear."

Nathan Bedford Forrest III didn't say anything. The expression on his face was hard for Jake to fathom—and then, all of a sudden, it wasn't. Sure as hell, Forrest was thinking, *Takes one to know one.*

And sure as hell, he was right. Jake damn well had been a lousy

busybody of a sergeant. Clarence Potter remembered that, even if Forrest couldn't.

"Anything else?" Jake asked.

"No, Mr. President. That's what's going on now."

"We'll go from there, then. Tell Patton to give 'em hell. Tell him I said so."

"I will, sir—when I'm sure the damnyankees can't hear me do it." Forrest got to his feet, saluted, and left the office.

Once Jake was sure the general was on his way back to the War Department, he stuck his head out and asked, "Who's next, Lulu?"

"The Attorney General is waiting to see you, Mr. President."

"Well, you know you can send him in," Featherston said.

Ferdinand Koenig lumbered into the office a moment later. Unlike Forrest, he was older than Jake, and also much heavier than the President, who retained a whipcord leanness. "Good morning," Koenig rumbled.

"I hope so," Jake said. "You couldn't prove it by me, though." He pointed at the map. The U.S. thrust aimed straight at Chattanooga. It was getting too close, too.

"I expect you'll do something about that before too long." Ferd Koenig didn't know the details. He didn't need or want to know them, either.

"I expect I will, too." Jake said no more than he had to. The less you told people, the less they could blab. Ferd wasn't the kind of guy who ran his mouth; Featherston wouldn't have put up with him for a second if he were. But even an inadvertent slip might hurt badly here, so why take chances? The President said, "What's on your mind today?"

"About what you'd expect: the mess in Texas."

Jake Featherston grunted. It *was* a mess, no two ways about it. "When we built Camp Determination way the hell out there at the ass end of nowhere, we never reckoned the damnyankees would give us so much trouble about it."

“*That’s* the truth,” Koenig said unhappily.

“Only goes to show the bastards really are a bunch of nigger-lovers,” Jake said. “How far from the camp are they?” He already knew, but didn’t feel like admitting it.

“About forty miles now. They’re throwing everything they’ve got out there into the attack,” the Attorney General said. “They’ve got more out there than we do, too. We need reinforcements, Mr. President. We need ’em bad.”

“I can’t give you more Army men, dammit.” Jake pointed again to the map showing the ominous Yankee bulge. “Everything we can grab, we’re using against that.” He sighed. Talking about Texas meant talking about Kentucky and Tennessee after all. He might have known it would. Things fit together; however much you wished you could, you couldn’t look at any one part of the war in isolation.

“Can I have more Freedom Party Guards, then?” Koenig asked. “I’ve got to do something, Jake, or the damnyankees’ll take the camp away from us. We can’t afford to let that happen—you know we can’t. It screws up the whole population-reduction program, and it hands the USA a propaganda victory like you wouldn’t believe.”

He wasn’t wrong. Sometimes, though, propaganda defeats had to take a back seat when you were nose-to-nose with real military defeat. Jake didn’t want anything to get in the way of cleansing the Confederacy of Negroes, but he didn’t want to lose the war, either. He felt more harried than he’d ever dreamt he could. Never a man who compromised easily, he knew he had to now.

“Yeah, you can raise some more Guards units,” he said. “We aren’t short of weapons and we aren’t short of uniforms, by God. But I’ll tell you something else, too—we better set up a new camp some place where the damnyankees sure as hell can’t get at it. When it’s ready to roll, just move the guard staff and start shipping in niggers.”

“What about the ones who’re already in Camp Determination?” Koenig asked.

“Well, what about ’em?” Jake said. Ferd was a sharp guy, but sometimes even sharp guys missed seeing the obvious.

“Oh.” The Attorney General turned a dull red. To hide his embarrassment, he made a small production of lighting up a Habana. After a couple of puffs, he went on, “Yeah, that’ll take care of itself,

won't it? Jeff Pinkard won't be happy about moving, though. Camp Determination's his baby."

"Tough titty," Featherston said. "Where it's at, his baby's getting to be more trouble than it's worth. If there's no camp in west Texas, the United States don't have any reason for pushing farther in. Except for Determination, what's there?"

"Lubbock," Koenig said. "Amarillo."

"Big fucking deal." Jake was massively unimpressed. "The United States are welcome to both of 'em.

They want to set up their phony state of Houston again, they're welcome to do that, too. Far as I can see, they got more grief from it last time around than anything else."

"You've got a good way of looking at things," Koenig said.

"Well, I hope so. Right now, what we've got to do is take care of the shit that won't wait." Featherston aimed a forefinger at the map one more time. "After we've dealt with that, then we go on with the rest of it." He made everything sound simple and obvious and easy. He'd always had that knack.

Usually, making things sound easy was good enough. In a fight for your life, though…Ferd Koenig could see that, too. "We need to hit the Yankees hard," he said.

"Bet your sweet ass, Ferd." Jake was thinking of Henderson V. FitzBelmont, about whom, he devoutly hoped, the Attorney General knew nothing or next to it. "We will, too. You better believe it."

"I've believed you for twenty-five years now," Koenig said. "I'm not about to quit."

"Good." Jake meant it from the bottom of his heart. "You've believed in me longer than anybody these days." That was true. Of people he still knew, Clarence Potter had met him before Ferd did. But Potter hadn't always followed him. He wasn't sure if Potter ever really followed him. Potter was loyal to the country, not to the Freedom Party or to Jake Featherston himself.

"We've come a long way, you and me," Ferd said. "We've brought the country a long way, too. We're not nigger-free, but we're getting

there.”

“Damn straight,” Jake said. “We’ll get where we’re going, by God. Even if the damnyankees come up Shockoe Hill and we have to fire at ’em over open sights, we won’t ever quit. And as long as we don’t quit, they can’t lick us.”

“I sure hope not,” Koenig said.

“Don’t you worry about a thing. You don’t see any U.S. soldiers in Richmond, do you?” Featherston waited till his old warhorse shook his head, then went on, “And you won’t, either. Not ever. We’re going to win this son of a bitch. Not just get a draw so we can start over twenty years from now. We’re going to win.”

“Sounds good to me,” the Attorney General said.

It also sounded good to Jake Featherston. He hated relying on a goddamn professor, but knew too well he was.

I rving Morrell dismounted from his command barrel a few miles north of Delphi, Tennessee. His force wasn’t within artillery range of Chattanooga, not yet, but U.S. guns weren’t far from being able to reach the linchpin of the first part of the campaign. The United States had come farther and faster than he’d dreamt they could when the summer’s fighting started. To his mind, that said only one thing: the Confederates had thrown everything they could into their opening offensives, and it hadn’t been enough.

They didn’t have enough left to fight a long war.

Which didn’t mean he wasn’t worried about what they did have. The bright young captain whose command car rolled to a stop near Morrell’s barrel wore a uniform with no arm-of-service colors or badges. If a cryptographer got captured, he didn’t want the enemy knowing what he was.

He also didn’t want to spread around what he knew. Morrell’s barrel carried every kind of wireless set under the sun; that was what made it what it was. But if the United States were deciphering C.S. codes, you had to assume the Confederates were doing the same thing to U.S. messages. What the enemy didn’t overhear, he couldn’t very well use against you.

“Hello, Captain Shaynbloom,” Morrell said. “What have you got for me today?”

Sol Shaynbloom was thin and pale, with a bent blade of a nose and thick glasses. He looked too much like someone who would go into cryptography to seem quite real, but he was. He handed Morrell a manila folder. “Latest decrypts, sir,” he said, “and some aerial photos to back them up.”

“Let’s see what we’ve got.” Morrell studied the decoded messages and the pictures. “Well, well,” he said at last. “They are getting frisky over there, aren’t they?”

“Yes, sir,” Captain Shaynbloom said. “More of a buildup on our flank than in front of us, as a matter of fact.”

Morrell had a map case on his hip. He pulled out a map and unfolded it. “So—here and here and here, eh?” He pointed. “That’s probably what I’d do in their shoes, too. They’ll try to cut us off and roll us back to the Ohio.”

“Can they?” the codebreaker asked.

“I hope not,” Morrell said mildly. But that wasn’t what the other man wanted to hear. Smiling a little, Morrell went on, “I think we’re ready for them. If we are, your section will have an awful lot to do with it.”

Shaynbloom smiled. “That’s what we’re here for, sir.” Then his smile disappeared. “If we do smash them as they try to break through, I hope they don’t realize how well we’re able to read their codes.”

“No, that wouldn’t be good,” Morrell agreed. “But sometimes the cards aren’t worth anything unless you put them on the table. This feels like one of those times to me.”

“All right, sir. I guess you’re right,” Captain Shaynbloom said.

I’d better be, Morrell thought. *Being right in spots like this is what they pay me for.* He wasn’t in it for the money, but the extra salary he earned with stars on his shoulder straps acknowledged the extra responsibility he held. And if he was wrong a couple of times, they wouldn’t take the rank or the pay away from him. They would just put him in charge of the beach in Kansas or the mountains in Nebraska and try to forget they’d ever had anything to do with him.

Another command car pulled up alongside the first. “What’s this?”

Morrell said. “I thought they only gave one to a customer.” He made it sound like a joke, but his hand dropped to the butt of the .45 on his belt even so. The Confederates had already tried to assassinate him once. They might well be up for another go at him.

But he recognized the officer who got out. First Lieutenant Malcolm Williamson bore almost a family resemblance to Sol Shaynbloom. Both were skinny and pale and fair, and both looked more like graduate students than soldiers. Williamson also wore an unadorned uniform. Saluting both Shaynbloom and Morrell, he handed the latter an envelope. “We just got this, sir.”

“Let’s have a look.” As Morrell opened the envelope, he asked, “Do you know what’s in it? Can I talk about it in front of you?”

“Yes, sir, and in front of the captain,” Williamson answered. “It’s not that kind of thing—you’ll see in a second.”

“Fair enough.” Nodding, Morrell unfolded the paper in the envelope and read the message someone—maybe Williamson—had scrawled on it. “Well, well,” he said. “So General Patton will be in charge of the Confederate thrust. I’m honored…I suppose.”

“I wondered if he would be,” Shaynbloom said. “He’s sort of fallen off the map the past few weeks.”

“He’s back on it now,” Morrell said. “It’s a compliment to me, I guess, but I could do without it.” He’d heard from someone or other that Patton developed his slashing style by studying his own campaigns during the Great War. Maybe that was true, maybe it wasn’t. If it was, it made for another compliment Morrell didn’t really want. Patton was too good at what he did.

“We’ll lick him, sir.” As a lieutenant, Williamson wasn’t prone to the doubts that could cloud a general’s mind. “Who gives a damn how tough he is? We’ve got the horses to ride roughshod over him.” He didn’t even mix his metaphors, a common failing for everyone from the President on down.

“Do we know their precise start time?” Morrell asked. “If we do, we can disrupt them with spoiling bombardments ahead of time. The more we can do to throw their plan and their timing out of whack, the better off we’ll be.”

Williamson and Shaynbloom looked at each other. They even wore the

same U.S.-issue steel-framed spectacles, though Shaynbloom's lenses were noticeably stronger. As one man, they shook their heads.

"Haven't got it yet, sir," they chorused, Shaynbloom adding, "But it can't be long."

"You're right about that," Morrell said. "They'll know they can't hide a concentration very long. It'll have to be soon. If you find out exactly when *soon* is, let me know as fast as you can. We'll counterpunch if we have to, but getting in the first lick is even better."

"Yes, sir." Their voices didn't sound alike; Williamson's was an octave deeper. They tore off almost identical salutes, returned to their command cars, and roared off to wherever they worked their code-breaking magic. Morrell didn't know where that was; what he didn't know, he couldn't spill if captured.

As things worked out, the Confederates announced their own attack. They chose early afternoon to open their bombardment, hoping to catch U.S. soldiers off guard. By the rumble from U.S. batteries, they didn't.

U.S. airplanes roared into the sky. Morrell couldn't see where they were taking off from; the fields lay farther behind the lines. But he knew they were up there, which was what counted. The Confederates wouldn't catch them on the ground, the way they'd caught so many fighters and bombers in Ohio. U.S.

Y-ranging gear was pointed east, ready to warn the pilots to get airborne before enemy air attackers arrived. And these days, unlike the way things were in 1941, everybody took Y-ranging—and the Confederates—very seriously indeed.

Those fighters and bombers with the eagle in front of crossed swords didn't get airborne just to escape C.S. attacks, either. They were loaded for bear. The Confederates had to deploy through several gaps in the mountains before they could debouche. The harder they got bombed and strafed while still in column, the slower and clumsier their deployment would be. *The less they can bring to the dance,* Morrell thought, remembering how he met Agnes not long after the Great War.

She and their daughter, Mildred, were all right. He'd had a letter not long before. The war hadn't really touched Fort Leavenworth. Out beyond the Mississippi, fighting came in harsh spatters: one that seemed unending over the oil fields in Sequoyah, which each side

torched whenever the other seemed about to retake them, and another in west Texas that had heated up lately. Looked at logically, there was no reason on God's green earth to fight over west Texas. Dark mutters said logic had little to do with it, that the Confederates were up to something really horrible out there, something that needed suppressing regardless of logic.

Having fought without much luck to hold the state of Houston in the USA before Al Smith's plebiscite, Morrell was ready to believe the worst of west Texas. He was also ready to believe the worst of Jake Featherston and all his Freedom Party pals. The only question in his mind was how bad the worst was out there.

He didn't even have time to worry about that, except when he got out of the command barrel to stand behind a tree or smoke a cigarette. He spent almost all of the next forty-eight hours in the turret, as a less mobile commander might have spent them in a map room in a headquarters somewhere far behind the line. He was wryly amused to find it worked out about the same either way. Now much of the front —most of the places where the Confederates were trying to break through—lay behind him.

A map room proved better than the turret for at least one reason: it had the space to put up the maps. He was constantly unfolding and refolding them and using cellophane tape to stick them here and there for a little while. Frenchy Bergeron finally lost patience with him. "What happens if the Confederates attack us here, sir?" the gunner asked pointedly. "How am I supposed to fight those fuckers off if I can't even load my piece?"

"If the fate of this army depends on this barrel and some other one can't do the job, we're in a hell of a lot more trouble than I think we are," Morrell said mildly.

"Well, all right, sir," Bergeron said. "I can see that. But my own neck might depend on shooting that gun, even if the army doesn't."

"I think we're good even so," Morrell told him. "With everything the Confederates are throwing at our left, I don't see how they can have much to use against our front here."

The gunner grunted. Like almost everyone else in the two opposing armies, Bergeron fancied himself a strategist. He came closer to being right than a lot of other people, some of whom held significantly higher rank than his. And he listened to what Morrell didn't say as

well as to what he did. “They’re hitting us from the one side, sir? Not from both sides at once?”

“That’s right.” Morrell nodded. “They don’t have the men for that. And even if they did, they could never get them into place west of us. The mountains help screen their positions in the east, and the travel’s easier to get there, too. What they’re doing is about as good a counterattack as they can hope to put together.”

“But not good enough, right?” Frenchy Bergeron said confidently.

Morrell yawned. He’d been in the saddle for a devil of a long time. “Don’t quite know yet,” he said. “I hope not, but I can’t be sure yet.”

“What happens if they do break through?” the gunner asked.

“Well, I can give you the simple answer or the technical one,” Morrell said. “Which would you rather?”

“Give me the technical one, sir.” Sure enough, Bergeron figured he knew enough to make sense of it.

He was right, too. “The technical answer is, if that happens, we’re screwed,” Morrell replied.

Bergeron started to laugh, then broke off when he saw Morrell wasn’t even smiling. “You’re not kidding, are you, sir?” he said.

“Not me,” Morrell said. “Not even a little bit. So the thing we want to make sure of is, we want to make sure they don’t break through.”

B rigadier General Clarence Potter thought of himself as a cosmopolitan man. He’d gone to college at Yale, up in the USA. He’d traveled up and down the east coast of the CSA, and west as far as New Orleans. He thought he knew his own country well.

But he’d never been to Knoxville, Tennessee, before. He’d never been anywhere like Knoxville before.

The Confederacy’s interior had been a closed book to him. The longer he stayed in and around the town, the more he wanted to get back to Richmond and the War Department. Knoxville made daily U.S. air raids seem good by comparison.

He’d spent most of his time in Charleston and Richmond. Those were sophisticated places. Back before the Freedom Party seized power,

they'd had substantial opposition groups. Chances were they still did, though the opposition had to stay underground these days if it wanted to go on existing.

Knoxville…By all appearances, Knoxville had never heard of, never dreamt of, opposing Jake Featherston. People here were shabby and tired-looking, the way they were in Richmond. The men came in three categories: the very, very young; the ancient; and the mutilated. An awful lot of women wore widow's weeds. But people in Knoxville greeted one another with, "Freedom!" Potter hadn't heard them say it without sounding as if they meant it. Jake Featherston's portraits and posters were everywhere. Even with U.S. soldiers in Tennessee on the other side of the mountains, the locals remained convinced the Confederate States would win the war.

Without sharing their confidence, Potter envied it. He wouldn't have come to Knoxville himself if the CSA weren't in trouble. If pulling someone out of Intelligence and expecting him to command a brigade wasn't a mark of desperation, what was it?

He needed a while to realize that question might not be rhetorical. Jake Featherston could have had reasons of his own in assenting to Potter's transfer. The first that sprang to mind was the one most likely true: the President of the CSA might not shed a tear if his obstreperous officer stopped a bullet.

Who will rid me of this turbulent priest? Henry II shouted, and in short order Thomas à Becket was a dead man. Featherston was more polite: instead of simply ordering his own men to do Potter in or even hinting that he wanted him dead, he sent the man he mistrusted off to where danger was apt to lie thicker on the ground than it did in Richmond.

Remembering some of the U.S. air raids he'd been through, Potter wondered if that was really so. But his was not to reason why. His was to do or, that failing, to die. He didn't want to die and he wasn't sure he could do, which left him in an unpleasant limbo.

He was in limbo another way, too: nobody'd ordered his brigade forward yet. If everything was going according to plan, it would have been committed two days earlier. He didn't think the officers set over him were keeping the outfit in reserve because it had a green CO. A lot of brigades did these days. No, he feared the outfit hadn't got the call because things up at the front were going to hell.

Even though he came out of Intelligence, he couldn't get a handle on

what the war west of the mountains looked like. Nobody wanted to say anything. That in itself was a bad omen. When things were going well, people—and the Freedom Party propaganda mill—shouted it from the housetops. When they weren't…

Good news had a thousand fathers. Bad news was an orphan. The orphanage in Knoxville got more crowded by the day. Potter began to wonder if his brigade ever would get sent to the front. If it didn't, why the devil *had* they called him out of Richmond? Had optimism run that far ahead of common sense?

Maybe it had.

He was just about convinced he would go back to the capital without ever seeing real action when he got the order to move forward. That amused him about as much as anything ever did, and in the usual sardonic way. He had trucks. He had fuel. He'd made damn sure he did. The outfit was rolling inside of an hour. He might have left a few men behind in Knoxville, men who'd got leave and whom the military police hadn't scraped out of the bars and whorehouses. He would worry about and, if need be, punish them later. Better to get where he needed to go when he needed to get there with not quite so many men than to wait around for the rest and show up late.

But he showed up late anyhow, though he didn't intend to. Everything went fine till the brigade rolled past Harriman, about thirty-five miles west of Knoxville. Up till then, Highway 70 had been in pretty good shape. Occasional craters were patched up; Confederate engineers had repaired bombed bridges or set up makeshift spans to do duty for the ones the damnyankees had blown to smithereens.

After Harriman, it was a different story. The Yankees had hit the road hard enough and often enough to get ahead of the repair crews. Potter hadn't seen such devastation since the Great War…except in Richmond, after a bad air raid. But those raids disrupted civilian life. These delayed soldiers on the way to the front, a much more serious business—especially if you were one of those soldiers.

Going off the roads and into the fields alongside them helped, but only so much. For one thing, the fields were cratered, too. Even trucks with four-wheel drive weren't barrels; they didn't laugh off big holes in the ground. And the lead trucks chewed up the ground and made it worse for the ones that came behind.

The worse the bottlenecks got, the more worried Potter grew. "We

have to get rolling," he said to whoever would listen to him, and scanned the western skies like a farmer fearing rain at harvest time. He feared something worse than rain. "If the damnyankees hit us while we're stuck here…"

"Bite your tongue, sir," advised the corporal at the wheel of his command car. "You say that kind of stuff, you're liable to make it come true."

To Clarence Potter, that was superstitious nonsense. He didn't say so, though—what was the point?

Fifteen minutes later, with the brigade still snarled, what both he and the corporal dreaded came true: the howl of airplane engines, rising swiftly to a scream.

He'd done what he could to get ready for air attack. He'd deployed the antiaircraft guns attached to the brigade and the heavy machine guns. He and his men weren't caught flatfooted when the U.S. raiders struck them. Things could have been worse. As it worked out, they were only bad. Bad proved grim enough.

The damnyankees didn't use Asskickers or their equivalents. They just mounted bomb racks under fighters, which turned their explosives loose from not much above treetop height. They hit the trucks on the road and those to either side of it. Fireballs blossomed. Chunks of blazing metal hurtled through the air. So did chunks of blazing flesh.

Like most, Potter's command car carried a pintle-mounted machine gun. He banged away at the enemy airplanes. He'd gone through the whole Great War without firing a weapon at U.S. forces. Now he could hit back. The shattering noise and the stream of hot brass spitting from the breech filled him with fierce, primitive joy. Whether he hurt the damnyankees any was a different question. The unsleeping rational part of his brain knew that, even as the animal inside him whooped and squeezed the triggers and played the stream of tracers like a hose.

A fighter slammed into the ground not far away. That fireball dwarfed the ones the trucks sent up.

Splashes of burning gasoline caught running soldiers. They dropped and writhed and rolled, screaming their torment all but unheard.

After the fighters unloaded their bombs, they came back to strafe the

stalled column. The Confederates had invented the tactic two years earlier. Potter could have done without the flattery of U.S. imitation. He got more chances to use his machine gun. And the fighters, armed with four machine guns and two cannon each, got more chances to turn their weapons on *him.*

They badly outgunned him. They were making better than 300 miles an hour, while he was a sitting duck.

The wonder wasn't that they kept missing him. The wonder was that all their weaponry didn't chew him to red rags.

Bullets cracked past his head. When bullets cracked, they came too damn close. Others kicked up puffs of dust from the dirt a few feet to the left of the command car, and then, a moment later, from the dirt a few feet to its right. He went on firing. Hardly even knowing he was doing it, he changed belts on the machine gun when the first one ran dry.

After what had to be the longest ten or fifteen minutes of his life, he ran out of targets. The U.S. fighters roared off toward the west. He looked around to see what they'd done—and discovered that what had been a brigade was no more than a shattered mess. Not all the trucks were on fire, but about one in three was. Some of the burning trucks carried ammunition, which started cooking off. Flying rounds would cause more casualties, and likely set more fires, too.

The stinks of cordite and burning fuel and burning rubber and burning meat filled the air. So did the cheerful *pop-pop-pop!* of exploding cartridges and the not so cheerful screams and moans of wounded men. Officers and noncoms shouted commands, trying to bring order out of chaos by sheer force of will.

Order did not want to be born; chaos wasn't ready to die.

Potter's driver looked around and summed things up in a handful of words: "Jesus, what a fucking mess!"

"Now that you mention it, yes." Potter sounded dazed, even to himself. He thought he'd earned the right.

He'd had reports of what air strikes could do to troops. He'd read them carefully. He'd imagined he understood them. *So much for that,* went through his mind. The difference between reading about an air strike and going through one was about like the difference between reading about love and making love.

“You did good, sir,” his driver said. “That took balls, standing up there and firing on those bastards. A lot of guys would’ve run for the trees fast as they could go.”

Not far from the command car lay the corpse of a soldier who’d been running for the trees when a cannon round caught him in the middle of the back. The corpse was in two pieces—top half and bottom half. They lay several feet apart. “Running’s not guaranteed to keep you safe,” Potter said. Standing your ground and shooting back at the enemy didn’t guarantee it, either. A bomb had landed right by one of the brigade’s antiaircraft guns. The blast blew the gun itself ass over teakettle. Not much was left of the men who’d served it.

“Can we still go forward?” the driver asked.

“We have to,” Potter said. The question and the automatic answer helped get his brain working again. He hopped down from the command car and started adding orders of his own to the ones that came from his subordinates. Fighting fires, getting the wounded and the dead off to one side, clearing wrecked vehicles from the roadway…It all took time, time the brigade should have used to travel. They were going to be late getting where they were supposed to go.

And they wouldn’t get there at better than two-thirds strength. The Great War was a war of attrition, a war the CSA lost. Attrition had just fallen out of the sky and jumped on his brigade. A few minutes of air strikes, and it was barely combat-worthy. It wouldn’t be able to do the things planners assumed a fresh brigade of reinforcements could do. It couldn’t come close.

How many other Confederate units were in the same boat? And which boat was it, anyway? One that just stopped a torpedo? It sure looked that way to Clarence Potter.

He did the best he could, praying all the while that U.S. fighter-bombers wouldn’t come back. He was agnostic leaning toward atheist, but he prayed anyhow. *It can’t hurt,* he thought. And enemy aircraft did stay away. The brigade, or what was left of it, got moving again. The men could still do their best…however good that turned out to be.

L ieutenant Michael Pound was not a happy man. He’d been happy driving the Confederates from Pittsburgh back into Ohio and then down into Kentucky and Tennessee. Forcing the CSA to dance to the

USA's tune made him happy.

Now, instead of pushing on toward Chattanooga, he and his armored platoon had to leave the front line and shift to the east. If they didn't, the Confederates were liable to drive in the U.S. flank. If that happened, very bad things would follow. Pound could see as much. He took it as a personal affront.

"We'll make them pay—you see if we don't," he growled when his platoon stopped to rest and—at his orders—to maintain their barrels. "If they think they can sidetrack us—"

"They're right, aren't they?" Sergeant Frank Blakey asked. The barrel commander had a large wrench in his hands. He was tightening the links in his barrel's left track.

Pound approved of a commander who could do his own maintenance. He also approved of a noncom who talked back to officers. He'd done plenty of that when he had stripes on his sleeve instead of these silly gold bars on even sillier shoulder straps. A lot of men who became officers late in their careers did their best to ape the style and ambitions of those who'd gained the privilege sooner. Not Michael Pound.

He still thought like a top sergeant, and didn't labor under the delusion that those little gold bars turned him into a little tin god.

So he just laughed and nodded. "Yeah, they are—right this minute, anyhow. But when we get through with them, they're going to be worse off than if they never tried this attack in the first place."

"How do you figure, sir?" That was Mel Scullard, his own gunner. His crew had learned even faster than the others that he didn't get pissed off when people spoke their minds.

"We've got air superiority. We've got more barrels than they do, and better ones now. We've got more artillery than they do, too, in spite of their damn rockets," Pound answered. "If they come out and slug toe-to-toe with us, they just make themselves better targets. They're harder to get rid of when they hang back and make us come at them. It worked like that in the Great War, and it still does."

Sergeant Scullard grunted. "Well, that makes sense." He gave Pound a crooked grin. "How did you come up with it?"

"Accidents will happen," Pound said dryly, and everyone laughed.

Pound went on, “What we have to do is, we have to clobber the Confederates for coming out in the open to bang with us, and then we have to get back down to the real front and push on to Chattanooga.” Everything always sounded easy when he started talking about it. It sometimes didn’t turn out like that for real, but he was convinced that was never his fault.

“We’ll put a lot of driving miles on our barrels,” Sergeant Blakey pointed out.

“Sure.” Pound nodded. Barrels were complex machines that performed right at their limits all the time.

This war’s models were less prone to breakdowns than the lumbering monsters of a generation earlier, but they still failed much more often than he wished they would. He said, “The better we take care of them while we’re on the road, the less trouble they’ll give us.”

All the men he led nodded at that. A barrel crew that took care of its machine spent a lot more time in combat than one that let things slide. Barrels were the logical successors to horsed cavalry. Back in the old days, Pound had heard, a mounted trooper took care of his horse before he worried about himself.

The same rule held good with armored units, though Pound would sooner have used a curry comb on his barrel than a screwdriver. He was old enough to remember the way horses responded when you groomed them. Barrels never would do anything like that.

But, in an age of mechanized warfare, horsed cavalry couldn’t hope to survive. Soldiers in barrels stayed alive and hurt the enemy. That was what the game was all about.

“Are we ready to get rolling?” Pound asked. Nobody said no. The soldiers got back into their steel shells and rumbled northeast.

Before long, they passed a barrel whose men were busy replacing a track. “We hit a mine,” one of the soldiers in coveralls said in response to Pound’s shouted question. “Lucky this is all that happened to us.”

“You’d better believe it,” Pound said. “Well, hurry along—we’ll need everybody we can get our hands on before long.” The other barrelman waved in agreement and returned to his backbreaking work.

The northeast road ran from Dalton toward Pikeville, at the head of the Sequatchie Valley, where the Confederates were trying to break

out. Pikeville was a county seat—a sign still standing near the edge of town so declared. All the same, the place couldn't have held much more than 500 people before the fighting started. Michael Pound doubted it had half that many now. The locals, like most people with half an ounce of sense, didn't want to stick around while bullets chewed up their houses and bombs and shells came down on their heads. They'd lit out for the tall timber, wherever the tall timber was—probably in the mountains to the east.

U.S. artillery was set up south and west of Pikeville, throwing shells at the Confederates as they tried to push forward. The gun bunnies, most of them naked to the waist, nodded to Pound as he and his barrels rattled past. U.S. fighter-bombers roared past overhead. Pound smiled to hear bombs going off not too far away. The harder the enemy got hit before he made it to Pikeville, the less trouble he'd be when he finally did.

Bomb craters said Confederate aircraft were hitting back as best they could. A burnt-out Hound Dog had crashed in a field just outside of town. The front half of the fighter was a crumpled wreck. The Confederate battle flag on the upthrust tail was as much of a grave marker as the pilot was likely to get.

Houses on the east side of Pikeville faced the mountains from which the enemy would come. Pound's barrel pushed its way into one of those houses—literally, knocking down the western wall and poking the gun out through a window on the east side. The other machines in his platoon deployed close by, behind fences and piles of wreckage. They weren't the only barrels taking up positions there. If the Confederates wanted Pikeville and what lay beyond, they would have to pay.

Pound peered out through the now glassless window, waiting. He would have been happier if the enemy never made it as far as Pikeville. If the artillery and fighter-bombers could stop Featherston's columns in their tracks, so much the better. It would let him turn around and head back toward important fighting—fighting that led to advances into the heart of the Confederacy.

But no such luck. Less than an hour after Pound got to Pikeville, U.S. infantrymen who'd been screening the way ahead fell back into the little town. "Up to us now, I'd say," Pound remarked. Without the foot soldiers and the artillery and the airplanes, the Confederates would have been in Pikeville ahead of him, and probably spilling out to the west. He didn't think about that, only about what needed doing next.

“Front!” he called as a Confederate barrel rolling through the cornfields made itself plain.

“Identified!” the gunner sang out. “Range just over a mile, sir.”

“Can you hit the son of a bitch?” Pound asked.

“Hell, yes!” Scullard sounded confident as could be, the way a good gunner should.

“Then fire when ready.” Pound almost nagged Scullard about leading his target—at that range, the shell had a flight time of a second and a half, and the enemy barrel could move enough to make remembering it matter. But in the end he kept his mouth shut. The gunner knew what he was doing. He’d remember to lead the barrel…or if he didn’t, Pound would come down on him after he screwed up.

The gun swung slightly. Then it roared. Michael Pound thought his head would come off. He was head and shoulders out of the turret but still in an enclosed space, and the noise was cataclysmic.

Was it a hit or…? Smoke spurted from the enemy barrel. “Got him!” Pound yelled. “Good shot! You led him just right!” He laughed at himself. He was going to get the lesson in come hell or high water, wasn’t he?

Other barrels opened up on the advancing Confederates. Several more enemy barrels brewed up. The longer U.S. barrelmen used the 3½-inch gun on the new models, the better they liked it. It fired a flat, fast round that could kill anything it could reach. And the improved gunsight made hits more likely. Pound wished he were shooting it himself.

Little by little, he’d decided he might be able to do more good as an officer than he had as a noncom.

Coordinating five barrel crews wasn’t the piece of cake he’d thought it was till he tried it himself. He kept shouting into the wireless, finding out what was going on with all the others and making sure they did what he wanted them to do. And he had to fight his own barrel, too. It was enough to give the one-armed paperhanger a galloping case of the hives.

And the Confederates wanted Pikeville. They *needed* Pikeville. And they were doing their damnedest to take it back from the U.S. soldiers inside it. Their barrels didn’t swarm forward to be massacred in the

open, the way Pound hoped they would. Instead, smoke rounds from C.S. artillery back in the mountains came down between the advancing Confederate forces and the defenders in the little town. Before long, the streamers came together in a ragged fogbank that hid most of what lay behind it.

Out of the fogbank came…trouble. Confederate foot soldiers armed with antibarrel rockets and launching tubes ran through the smoke, flopped down behind the closest cover, and started working their way forward. U.S. machine-gun fire picked off some of them, and more of the riflemen who protected them, but they kept coming in the little rushes experienced troops used.

Before long, rockets trailing tails of fire flew toward Pikeville. More than one U.S. barrel that had stayed too long in its original firing position got hit. Michael Pound's platoon came away unscathed; he'd ordered the machines back to secondary firing positions in the lull the smoke screen gave them.

A rocket slammed into the house where his barrel had been hiding. The house started to burn. Pound smiled to himself. The Confederates would think they'd killed the barrel. They might make some embarrassing mistakes if they thought their mischief-makers had done more than they really had.

And sure enough, a few minutes later a couple of platoons of C.S. barrels charged through the thinning smoke ready to break into Pikeville or die trying. Michael Pound earnestly preferred the second alternative. He was standing in the cupola of a machine that could make his preferences felt. The leading barrels were the latest Confederate model: excellent in their own right, but half a step behind his. They were out in the open. He had cover. It hardly seemed fair. But then, he didn't want a fair fight. He wanted a fight he'd win.

"Front!" he shouted.

"Identified!" Sergeant Scullard continued with the ritual.

Three shots from Pound's barrel killed two Confederate machines, and they were the leading two. One turned into a fireball. A couple of men got out of the other barrel. Machine-gun bullets reached for them, but they might have made cover. Part of Pound hoped they did. He'd bailed out of a stricken barrel himself. He knew what it was like. They were enemies, but they were also men doing the same job he was.

The Confederates kept coming. Another U.S. barrel set the last of

theirs on fire less than a hundred yards outside of Pikeville. Several more green-gray barrels were also burning by then, some from enemy cannon fire, others from those damnable antibarrel rockets.

But the Confederates didn't get into the town. They didn't get around it, either. U.S. reinforcements poured in to make sure they couldn't. Pound was only half glad to see them. He wished they'd stayed farther south and stormed toward Chattanooga.

L ieutenant-Colonel Jerry Dover had the ribbon for the Purple Heart. He didn't much want it. Nobody on either side much *wanted* a Purple Heart, but Dover didn't think he'd earned his. A chunk of shrapnel had torn a bloody line across his forearm. As far as he was concerned, it wasn't worth fussing about. But the rule was that you got a medal if you bled. And so he had one.

Not a lot of officers in the Quartermaster Corps owned a decoration that said they'd been in combat. In a way, it was handy: it made line officers—and even line noncoms—take him seriously. But the wound was so trivial, the decoration embarrassed him.

It did when he had time to think about it, anyway. More often than not, he barely had time to breathe, let alone eat. He smoked like a chimney. As long as he kept breathing, he could do that. It didn't keep him from doing the usual seventeen other things at the same time.

He knew before almost anyone else that the Confederate thrust from the east wasn't going as well as the planners back in Richmond wished it were. As soon as the front just north of Chattanooga got its supply priority restored, he realized the Confederates either had an extravagant success and would soon swarm up from the south or had failed and would soon need to hold on for dear life here. The shipments of barbed wire and land mines said they wouldn't be advancing.

He sent out the supplies as front-line units shouted for them. In the meantime, he quietly swore under his breath. A generation earlier, he'd seen what a losing war looked like. Now he stared another one in the face. He hadn't thought Jake Featherston would land the Confederacy in a mess like this. Who had?

Surely Featherston himself hadn't. *And a whole fat lot of good that does anybody,* Dover thought.

Confederate gunboats came up the Tennessee River as far as Chattanooga and fired big shells at U.S.

forces to the north. Then they turned around again and scooted south as fast as they could go, for U.S.

airplanes struck at them whenever they got the chance. Land-based guns couldn't be as big or move as fast as the ones the gunboats carried. But the boats had trouble moving fast enough to stay safe.

Dover could cheer for them without worrying that their performance reflected on him. The C.S. Navy was responsible for keeping them in fuel, hardtack, and munitions. Some Navy commander had to flabble about that. Dover just hoped their shells blew plenty of damnyankees to hell and gone.

His own worries were the usual sort: getting munitions and other supplies up from the rear and then making sure they reached the front. Keeping his dumps as close to the fighting as he could went a long way toward solving the second problem. The first was harder, especially since he had to deal with new sets of gatekeepers. The dumps in southern and western Tennessee that had nourished the Confederate armies were now withering themselves. Most of Dover's shipments came up from Atlanta, and the quartermasters there had carved out a tidy little empire for themselves, one they didn't care to disturb just because there was a war on.

"Your demands are excessive," a colonel safely behind the lines told Jerry Dover. "You can't possibly be expending so many antiaircraft shells."

"No, huh?" Dover said. "What do you think I'm doing with 'em, pounding 'em up my ass?" Had that colonel in Atlanta been handy, Dover might have done some pounding with him.

Even though he didn't say it, that message must have got across. In frigid tones, his superior said, "You are insubordinate."

"Yes, *sir,* " Dover said proudly. "People keep telling me that. But the ones who do are always farther from the fighting than I am. The guys who really have to go out and shoot things at the Yankees, they like me fine. And you know what, sir? If I have to choose between them and you, I'll take them any old time."

"Have a care how you speak to me." The colonel in Atlanta sounded like a man on the verge of apoplexy. "You'd better have a care, by God. I can have you court-martialed like that—like *that,* I tell you." He snapped his fingers.

“Big fucking deal…sir.” Dover had heard such threats before. “If you do, they’ll kick my ass out of the Army. I’ll go to prison, where it’s safe, or I’ll go home to Augusta, where it’s safe. And I hope they ship you up here to take my place. It’d goddamn well serve you right. And if I don’t get those shells, my next telegram goes to Richmond, not to you.”

“You can’t do that!” the colonel gabbled. “It violates the chain of command!”

No doubt that would have impressed an officer who’d had proper training. It didn’t bother Jerry Dover one bit. “You think Jake Featherston will give a damn about the chain of command when he hears somebody isn’t doing his job and won’t do it? *I* think he’ll have you for breakfast…without salt.”

He was bluffing. He didn’t think any telegram of his would reach the President of the CSA. No doubt the colonel down in Atlanta didn’t, either. But there was always that chance…. And if Featherston did descend in wrath on an obstructive colonel, that man would end up nothing but a smear on the bottom of his shoe.

Dover got his antiaircraft shells. That meant the front got its antiaircraft shells. If he had enemies down in Atlanta, he didn’t give a damn.

He camouflaged his supply dump as elaborately as he could. Netting and mottled tarps covered crates and boxes and stacks. Branches and uprooted saplings made the place next to invisible from the air. That wasn’t just Jerry Dover’s opinion. He sent up a Confederate artillery spotter in a light airplane to look the place over from above. The man said he had a devil of a time finding it. Dover felt proud.

Proud, however, had nothing to do with anything. Dover was also paranoid. Half a mile from the concealed dump, he ordered a dummy depot built right out in the open. He made some token efforts at camouflaging it: the kinds of things a busy, not very bright, not very diligent officer would do so his superiors couldn’t come down on him for not doing anything, but nothing that would really keep enemy bombers from spotting the site.

His men grumbled at the extra work. That ticked him off. “Look,” he said. “The name of the game is being able to hang on to our shit till we have to move it up to the front. If the damnyankees drop bombs on the wrong place, we’ve got a better chance of doing that. Or do you

want the bastards to plaster us here?”

Nobody said yes to that. He would have got rid of any man who did. A lot of officers would have given a man like that a rifle and sent him up to the forwardmost positions to see how he liked things there. As Dover had shown at the Huntsman’s Lodge, though, he was more vindictive toward superiors than toward subordinates. He would have palmed reluctant enlisted men off on some other supply officer; sending them up to the front to get shot didn’t cross his mind.

U.S. reconnaissance aircraft buzzed above Chattanooga almost every hour of the day. Antiaircraft fire didn’t discourage them. There weren’t enough Confederate fighters to drive them away. West of the Appalachians, the United States had air superiority. The Confederates could harry and harass, but they couldn’t stop the Yankees from doing most of what they wanted to do.

Bombs rained down on the dummy depot, smashing it to hell and gone. “You see?” Dover said to anybody who would listen. “You see? We fooled the sons of bitches!” He got busy repairing the dump, just as if it were the real one. He was proud of his realism. He’d even had a few barrels of waste oil at the dummy site so they could send up convincing plumes of greasy smoke.

Enemy bombers hit the fake depot again two days later, even harder. Jerry Dover was so pleased with himself, he could hardly even breathe. He felt like dancing because he’d done such a good job of fooling the damnyankees. How many tons of bombs had they thrown away, smashing up worthless tents and empty crates? Enough to make some of their supply officers very unhappy if they found out about the waste—he was sure of that.

Again, he had his crew run around as if trying to set things to rights. After two wasted U.S. raids, they’d found some enthusiasm for trying to trick U.S. fliers. Antiaircraft guns sprouted like toadstools around the dummy depot. Only a handful of the guns were real. The rest were Quaker cannons: logs trimmed and painted to look like the real thing, on mounts made from whatever junk the soldiers could scrounge.

Close up, they were jokes. From a couple of miles in the air, or from a fighter-bomber streaking by as fast as it could go, they seemed damned convincing.

When he heard the thrum of U.S. bomber engines overhead yet again, Jerry Dover smiled: a smug, complacent grin. The good humor behind

that smile went up in smoke—literally—when the Yankees blasted the kapok out of his genuine dump. All the antiaircraft guns around the real installation were in good working order. They knocked down a few bombers, but not nearly enough. The USA clearly won the exchange.

“How?” he shouted, even as firemen poured streams of water on the smoking wreckage. “How the fuck did they know where we were at?”

“I bet some goddamn nigger tipped ’em off that we were running a bluff,” a sergeant answered.

Dover started to say that was ridiculous, but he stopped with the words unspoken. It wasn’t ridiculous, not one bit. Every black man—and woman—in the CSA had to hate the present government as much as the government hated blacks. Not many Negroes were left in these parts. Even one would have been plenty if he reached the damnyankees.

“I bet you’re right,” was what came out of his mouth.

“Fucking black bastards,” the noncom said. “Freedom Party should’ve done a better job of cleaning ’em out. What did we elect those assholes for, anyway?”

Politics didn’t rear its head so often in this war as it had in the last. A lot of people in the CSA were afraid to talk politics these days. They worried—and with reason—that they could end up in camps if they said the wrong thing to the wrong person. Anything that criticized the government or the Freedom Party was too likely to be the wrong thing, although Jerry Dover hadn’t expected anybody to come down on the Party for not doing enough to get rid of blacks.

“You want to kind of watch your mouth, Pete,” Dover told the sergeant. “Some of these Party people, they don’t take things the right way.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t figure you for a stalwart or anything like that,” Pete answered. “You don’t sound like you’re ready to come when you go, ‘Freedom!’”

“No, huh?” Dover said dryly.

“Nope.” The sergeant shook his head. He stuck a chaw of Red Man in his mouth. His jaw worked; he might have been a cow chewing its cud. But a cow wouldn’t have spat a stream of brown the way he did.

He winked at Dover. “Besides, sir, if you turn me in, you’ll get stuck with some dumb shithead who doesn’t know his ass from the end zone. You like people with a little something upstairs. Me, I like broads with a little something upstairs.” He held his hands in front of his chest.

Dover laughed. “Go on, get out of here,” he said. “You’ve got other things to do besides driving your CO crazy.”

With a sketched salute, Pete ambled off. Jerry Dover stared after him. No wonder people didn’t talk politics any more. Whenever you did, you felt you were suddenly part of a plot. Say anything bad about the powers that be—even listen to someone else saying bad things about the powers without denouncing him on the instant—and you were complicit in indiscretion. You had a hold on the other guy, and he had a hold on you.

“Shit,” Dover muttered. “It shouldn’t be this way.” He felt that very strongly. Not being able to speak your mind had to hurt the war effort. Having people go after people who did speak their minds had to hurt the war effort, too. All the labor wasted in chasing down grumblers could have been turned against the damnyankees instead.

The effort used in chasing down Negroes? Dover wasn’t like Pete; he didn’t think the Freedom Party wasn’t doing enough. But the question of whether the Party should be doing anything at all along those lines never crossed his mind. He might despise the numskulls set over him, but he was still a man of his country and his time and his color.

XIII

D r. Leonard O’Doull finished the amputation. “There we go,” he said. “All things considered, the poor bastard’s lucky.”

“Just losing a foot? I should say so.” Granville McDougald nodded. “Sometimes you lose a leg when you step on a mine. Sometimes it just plain kills you. Or if you step on one of those new bouncing bastards the Confederates are using, it pops up in the air and blows your nuts off. Some fun.”

“Yeah.” O’Doull hated the bouncing mines with a fierce and terrible passion. They were designed to make the ghastliest wounds they could. Some C.S. engineer had probably won himself a bonus for coming up with the idea. He looked at the patient etherized upon the table. “He should do pretty well, though. He just found an ordinary

one.”

Pretty well. It was true. The man would live. He probably wouldn’t get a wound infection. Once he healed enough to wear a prosthesis, he’d be able to get around without too much trouble. How much agony lay between the moment of stepping on the mine and that reasonably favorable prognosis, though?

How much had he gone through before he was carried back to the aid station? No way in hell to measure such things, but he’d already tasted his share of hell, his share and then some.

“Let’s get him off the table,” McDougald said. “We’re bound to have more business before long. Ain’t life grand?”

“Mauvais tabernac,” O’Doull said, and added, *“’Osti!”* for good measure. Granny McDougald laughed, the way he always did when O’Doull swore in Quebecois French. Sometimes, though, the blasphemy of the French curses felt more powerful than the blunt Anglo-Saxon obscenities O’Doull had gone back to using more often than not.

They did get more business, too, but not the kind they expected. Mortar bombs started bursting not far away. “Shit!” McDougald said, and Leonard O’Doull wasn’t inclined to argue with him. They both grabbed the wounded man and lugged him along as they hurried out of the tent. They would have to rebandage him later, but that was the least of their worries. Leaving him there for shrapnel to slice up would have been worse.

“Careful with him, Granny,” O’Doull said as they slid him down into the trench near the tent, the trench they always hoped they wouldn’t have to use.

“I’m trying,” McDougald said. Another mortar round burst nearby. Fragments screeched past O’Doull.

McDougald gasped. Then he said, “Shit,” again, this time in an eerily calm tone of voice.

“You hit?” O’Doull had heard that tone too many times to have much doubt.

“Afraid so,” McDougald answered. “Two wars up at the front, and my very first Purple Heart. Lucky me.” Then he said, “Shit,” again, most

sincerely now. “Son of a bitch is starting to hurt.”

“Get down in here,” O’Doull told him. “I’ll do what I can for you, and I’ll get you on the table as soon as they stop landing things on us.”

“Right,” the medic said tightly. “Well, nice to know I’m in good hands.” Like any other soldier, he carried a morphine syrette in the aid kit on his belt. As soon as he flopped down into the trench, he stuck himself.

His left trouser leg was dark and soggy with blood.

Most soldiers would have used a belt knife or a bayonet to cut away the heavy fabric and get a look at the wound. O’Doull had a scalpel. It didn’t do a better job than any other sharp blade would have, but it felt natural in his hand. He found a long, nasty tear in McDougald’s thigh. “Not too bad, Granny,” he said. “We can patch it up—that’s for damn sure.”

“You’re the doctor,” McDougald said through clenched teeth. “When is that morphine going to kick in?

How long does it take, anyway?” He’d injected himself only a minute or so before. When he was caring for someone else, he could gauge exactly how long the painkiller needed. He wasn’t objective about his own wound, his own torment. Who could be?

“Won’t be long,” O’Doull promised, as soothingly as he could. “I don’t have my needles and suture material with me. I’m going to pinch off a couple of bleeders in there and safety-pin you together till I can get you under the gas for a proper job.”

“You’re the doc,” McDougald said again. He braced himself as O’Doull got to work. On anyone else, he would have watched what his friend was doing. Why not? For a wound like this, he could have done just as well himself. When he was the wounded party, though, he looked anywhere and everywhere except at his injury. In a macabre way, it was funny. He even laughed when O’Doull remarked on it. But he swore savagely when O’Doull pinned the wound’s lips together. Then he laughed again, shakily.

“Crazy how much that little crap hurts, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. Crazy.” O’Doull started bandaging the gash. “You’re going to have yourself a hell of a scar, you know?”

“Oh, boy. Just what I always wanted.” But then McDougald let out a sigh. “Ah, there’s the dope. Christ, that feels good. Almost worth getting hit for, you know? Somebody said it was like kissing God. Now I know what he meant.”

“Don’t like it too much.” O’Doull had known a few doctors who did like morphine too well. Army medics weren’t immune from using the stuff for their own pleasure, either. The powers that be landed on them like a rockslide when they got caught, but a lot of them were sly and careful. People who used drugs weren’t always the crazed addicts in melodramas. A lot of them used just enough to stay happy, and lived more or less normal lives aside from their habit.

More shell fragments whistled and screeched overhead. Even staying in the trench didn’t necessarily do O’Doull and McDougald and the anesthetized soldier with a missing foot any good. If a mortar bomb came down on top of them, that was it. End of story—or the start of a new and horrible one.

Far back of the line—well north of Delphi—U.S. artillery started thundering. The mortar fire stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Did that mean the C.S. mortar crews were casualties? O’Doull hoped so. He didn’t like people shooting at him, not even a little bit.

Eddie the corpsman stared down into the trench. “Jesus, Doc, what the hell happened here?” he asked.

“What do you think happened? I was elected Queen of the May, and I’m about to go into my dance,”

Granville McDougald said before O’Doull could get a word out. Morphine might have dulled his pain, but not his sarcasm.

“Granny got his leg sliced when we were moving the wounded guy on account of the mortar fire,”

O’Doull said. “Can you help me get him up and out so I can work on him?”

“Let me round up a couple more guys. It’ll go better if I do.” Eddie disappeared before O’Doull could say yes or no. *Nobody’s paying any attention to me today,* O’Doull thought aggrievedly. He hoped the Confederates wouldn’t get their mortars upright and shooting while Eddie was looking for help.

They didn’t. Maybe the U.S. artillery really had knocked out the

enemy crews. Three more corpsmen jumped into the trench with O'Doull. They got the man with an amputated foot up onto a stretcher and then, grunting, lifted him out of the trench. "What's going on?" he said vaguely—he was starting to come out from under the anesthesia. He wouldn't feel pain for a while, though; O'Doull had shot him full of morphine while he was still out.

Once the corpsmen got him off the stretcher, it was Granville McDougald's turn. "Take it easy, Granny,"

Eddie said as they lifted him.

"Well, how else am I going to take it?" McDougald answered.

He rolled off the stretcher once they got it up to the level of the top of the trench. Morphine or not, that made him say several pungent things. They got out of the trench themselves, put him back on the stretcher, and carried him into the aid tent.

Sharp, jagged steel fragments had done a good job of ventilating the tent. A big one was stuck in one of the operating table's front legs. It was only about a foot from the cylinder of ether and oxygen up there. If it had punched into that…O'Doull was just as glad it hadn't. Maybe the tent would have gone up in flames, or maybe it would have just gone up—halfway to the moon.

"Well, Granny, I'm going to put you under so I can do a proper job on this," O'Doull said, reaching for the mask connected to the cylinder.

"Sure, Doc. Do what you gotta do." McDougald had anesthetized God only knew how many men himself. But when the mask came down over his nose and mouth, he tried to fight it, the way a lot of wounded soldiers did. It was reflex, nothing more; O'Doull knew as much. Eddie and another corpsman held McDougald's hands till he went to sleep.

O'Doull cleaned the wound, closed off some more bleeders, and then sutured things firmly and neatly.

He nodded to himself. "He'll be all right, won't he, Doc?" Eddie asked. "He's a good guy."

"You bet he is," O'Doull answered. "And yes, he ought to do fine. But he'll need at least a couple of months before he's back on the job."

"We'll be getting a new number-one medic, then." Above the mask he'd put on, Eddie blinked. "That's gonna be weird."

“Boy, no kidding.” O’Doull had come to take Granny McDougald’s unflustered competence very much for granted. Now he’d have to break in somebody else, somebody who’d probably be half his age and who wasn’t likely to know anywhere near as much as McDougald did. O’Doull muttered under his breath. He and McDougald had got on fine living in each other’s pockets for most of two years. It wasn’t a marriage, but it was intimate enough in its own way. Could he do the same with a new guy? He’d damn well have to.

They took McDougald away, still unconscious. O’Doull washed his hands and his instruments. He shook his head all the time he was doing it. He’d imagined himself getting hurt plenty of times. McDougald? He shook his head again. No, not a chance—he’d thought. The veteran noncom seemed enduring as the Rockies.

Which only went to show—you never could tell. O’Doull was still fine, not a scratch on him, and McDougald was lucky he hadn’t lost a leg. O’Doull thought about that, then shook his head. The medic was unlucky to have been wounded at all. But it could have been worse. With all O’Doull had seen himself, he knew how much worse it could have been.

U.S. fighter-bombers roared by overhead, flying south to pound the Confederate positions outside of Chattanooga. O’Doull didn’t look forward to that fight. He couldn’t imagine how taking the enemy bastion would be easy or cheap. *More work for me,* he thought. But he could do without more work.

His ideal day was one where he sat outside the aid tent reading a book and smoking cigarettes. He hadn’t had an ideal day since putting the uniform back on. He didn’t expect to have one till the war finally ended. But every man, even a military doctor, deserved his dreams.

One way not to have to patch up wounded soldiers was to get hit himself. He looked down at his hands.

He didn’t have Granville McDougald’s blood on them any more. He thought about the replacement medic or a surgeon farther behind the front trying to patch him up. He’d seen too many wounds. He didn’t want one of his own.

What he wanted might not have anything to do with the price of beer. Only fool luck Granny stopped that fragment and he didn’t. He wondered how—and whether—to tell Nicole that McDougald was injured.

He talked about Granny in every letter he wrote. She would notice if he suddenly stopped. But she would flabble if he came right out and said his friend and colleague had got hurt. If it happened to Granville McDougald, she would say, it could happen to him, too.

And she would be right.

O'Doull knew he couldn't admit that to her. He didn't want to admit it to himself. The more you thought about things like that, the less you slept, the more likely you were to get an ulcer, the more likely your hand was to shake when it shouldn't…

But how were you supposed to *not* think about something? If someone said, *Don't think about a blue rabbit,* of course nothing else would fill your mind. "You just have to go on," O'Doull murmured. "You just have to go on."

O n the bridge of the *Josephus Daniels,* Sam Carsten said, "I guess maybe we won that fight with the limeys and the frogs after all."

Pat Cooley nodded. "Yes, sir. I guess maybe we did," the exec said. "We wouldn't be trying to take Bermuda back if we didn't, would we?" He didn't sound a hundred percent convinced—more as if he was trying to convince himself, and Sam, too.

"Well, I hope we wouldn't, anyway." Carsten had been aboard the *Remembrance* when a British attack on U.S. fishing boats lured the carrier north—and left Bermuda vulnerable to amphibious assault. Now the United States were trying to return the favor, if that was the word.

U.S. surface ships and airplanes and submersibles kept the British from reinforcing or resupplying the outpost in the western Atlantic. But the British garrison wasn't ready to throw in the sponge. Lots of Royal Marines and soldiers were on the ground. The British had plenty of artillery—some of the heavy pieces big enough to damage a battleship or blow a destroyer escort like the *Josephus Daniels* clean out of the water. And they had fighters and dive bombers at least as good as the Americans could throw at them, and enough fuel to keep their airplanes flying at least for a while.

Along with carriers and battlewagons and smaller escort vessels like the *Josephus Daniels,* troopships and landing craft wallowed toward Bermuda. Sam watched them with a reminiscent smile on his face. "It

looked like this in 1914," he said, "when we landed on the Sandwich Islands."

"You were there for that?" Cooley asked.

"You bet. I was still an able seaman in those days—hadn't even made petty officer," Sam answered. "I was on the *Dakota.* My battle station was at one of her five-inch guns." He chuckled. "Secondary armament, right? Sure. Bigger guns than we've got on this tin can."

"We can do what we need to do." The exec patted the destroyer escort's wheel, as if to say the ship shouldn't listen to her skipper's insults. But he couldn't help adding, "You've seen a lot of action."

"I've got a lot of miles on me, you mean," Sam said with another laugh.

Airplanes roared off the carriers' decks and flew south and east toward the island. They hadn't had strike forces like that in the old days. The *Dakota* had carried a catapult-launched biplane scout that seemed to be made of sticks and baling wire. When it came back—if it came back—it landed on the sea, and the battleship fished it out with a crane. Nowadays, fleets didn't even see each other. Airplanes did the heavy lifting.

He hoped they would do the heavy lifting against Bermuda. If they plastered the runways on the island so the British fighters and bombers couldn't take off…If they did that, his own life expectancy would go up.

He'd been lucky in war so far. He'd had a battleship hit and a carrier sunk under him, but he'd barely got scratched. He hoped that would go on—he liked his carcass the way it was.

Most of the time, Navy men were lucky compared to their Army counterparts. They slept in bunks, or at least in hammocks, not wrapped in a blanket in the mud. They ate pretty good chow, not the canned rations soldiers had to put up with. Most of the time, they were in transit from here to there; except for lurking submersibles, nothing put them in danger minute by minute for days or weeks at a stretch.

But…There was always a but. When things went wrong for sailors, they went wrong in a big way. If a ship went down to the bottom, she could take hundreds of men—even a couple of thousand on a carrier—down with her.

He wished he hadn't had that thought. He reached out and rapped his knuckles on the wheel. Pat Cooley sent him a quizzical look. "What's up, sir?"

"Nothing, not really. Just snapping my fingers to keep the elephants away."

The exec looked around. "Nothing but the Atlantic for miles and miles," he said. "I didn't know the enemy was issuing heavy-duty water wings."

"Gotta watch out for those water elephants," Sam said gravely. "Next time you see something sticking out of the Atlantic, it won't be a periscope—it'll be one of their trunks instead."

"No doubt, sir," Cooley answered. "And the trunk'll probably be packed, too—with explosives or with bushwah, depending."

"Bushwah—no doubt about it," Sam said, his face still straight. "An essential wartime ingredient."

"Wouldn't surprise me a bit," the exec said.

Carsten studied the charts of the waters around Bermuda. The one thing he was sure of was that he didn't want to get too close without a pilot aboard who knew them like the back of his hand. There were too many reefs marked, too many names like Cow Ground Flat and Brackish Pond Flats. There were also too many wrecks charted, some from the eighteenth century, some of blockade runners during the War of Secession, and ungodly numbers from the days of the Great War. He wondered how many wrecks *weren't* marked. He didn't want to add the *Josephus Daniels* to that number.

"Sir, we've got airplanes outbound from Bermuda," the Y-ranging officer said. "They don't intend to sit there and take it."

"And we're still a hundred miles offshore," Carsten said. "Well, we already knew the limeys have their own Y-ranging gear."

"Sure looks that way, sir," Lieutenant Walters said. "Seems like they're trying to keep us from doing too much to the island."

"Can they?" Sam and his executive officer asked the same thing at the same time.

“No way to tell yet,” Walters answered. He watched the screens for another couple of minutes, then grunted. “That’s funny.”

“What’s up?” Sam asked.

“I’m picking up incoming aircraft with a bearing of about 250—a little south of west.” The Y-ranging officer laughed. “Gadget must have the hiccups. It does that once in a while.”

Sam didn’t think it was funny, not one little bit. He looked at Pat Cooley. The exec was looking back at him, similar consternation in his eyes. “How far is it from Cape Hatteras to Bermuda, Pat?” Sam asked.

“About six hundred miles, sir,” Cooley answered.

“That’s what I thought,” Sam said. “If the Confederates wanted to try bombing us, they could, in other words.” He didn’t wait for a reply this time. He just snapped out an order: “Bring the ship to general quarters. Signal the rest of the fleet what we’ve spotted and what we think it means.” Other Y-ranging sets would pick up those airplanes, too, but would the men eyeing the screens know what they were seeing?

Klaxons hooted. Sailors dashed to their battle stations as if someone had tied torches to their tails. “If the limeys can put up airplanes at the same time as the Confederates, things are liable to get interesting,”

Lieutenant Cooley remarked, sounding calmer than he had any business being.

“Interesting. Yeah,” Sam said tightly. “And I hear that the ocean is wet, and Jake Featherston doesn’t always tell the truth, and you’re liable to get hurt if a .50-caliber slug hits you.”

Cooley gave an uncertain chuckle, plainly having trouble making up his mind whether the skipper was being sardonic or had just flipped his lid. The blinker on the closest cruiser started sending Morse.

Cooley and Carsten both turned field glasses toward the signal. CONFIRM C.S. AIRCRAFT, it said, one letter at a time. PREPARE TO DEFEND. AIR COVER LIMITED.

That was all, no matter how much Sam waited and longed for more. “Happy day,” he said, and whistled something without much tune. He went to the speaking tube that connected the bridge to the engine

room: “Be ready to give me flank speed at my order. We’re facing air attack any minute now.”

“Flank speed at your order. Aye aye, sir.” Nobody down in the black gang sounded ruffled. They never did down there. They did all they could do, and they didn’t worry about anything beyond the noise and heat of their province. Sam envied them their simplicity. It was the one thing he missed from his days as a rating. Now he had to think about the whole ship and the tactical situation at the same time.

“One thing,” Cooley said. “The Confederates probably won’t throw Asskickers at us. They don’t have the range to come out this far and make it back to the mainland. That means medium bombers hitting from high altitude, and they aren’t nearly so accurate.”

“Can Asskickers dive-bomb us and then land on Bermuda?” Sam asked.

His exec looked quite humanly surprised for a moment. “I hadn’t thought of that.” Cooley sounded less self-assured than usual. He checked some reference books, and didn’t look happy when he closed them.

“Probably, sir. They may not be able to carry a full bomb load, but I think they can get here.”

“One more piece of good news,” Sam said.

The cruiser that had signaled them opened fire with her five-inch guns. A moment later, the *Josephus Daniels’* pair of four-inchers opened up, too, and then the twin 40mm guns, and then the .50-caliber machine guns. The racket was terrific, astonishing, deafening. Sam knew he didn’t hear as well as he would have liked. Artilleryman’s ear, soldiers called it. This wouldn’t help.

Sure as hell, a gull-winged Confederate Mule stooped on the cruiser. Sam saw the dive bomber release the bomb it carried under its belly a split second before a big shell connected with it. The airplane turned into a fireball. Fragments rained down into the Atlantic. But the bomb caught the cruiser just abaft the bridge. The big ship staggered in the water. A great plume of smoke rose from her.

“Pilot’s a damn fool,” Cooley said. Sam made a questioning noise. The exec explained: “They should be going after the troopships and the carriers. In a fight like this, escorts are chump change.”

He'd just called his own ship chump change, which didn't necessarily mean he was wrong. Another burning Asskicker plunged into the sea. The combat air patrol over the fleet was doing something, anyhow. And the guys at one of the forward 40mm mounts started whooping and dancing like men going out of their heads. They'd shot down an enemy airplane, or they sure as hell thought they had.

More Asskickers pulled out of their parabolic dives and fought for altitude. They were most vulnerable then, since they weren't moving very fast as they climbed. Several of them got hacked out of the sky. But other ominous smoke pillars rose from the fleet.

"It's a big game," Sam said. "I wish I knew what the score was."

"If we get troops ashore on Bermuda, we're winning," Pat Cooley said. "If we don't…If we don't, the Navy Department had a lousy idea."

No sooner had he said that than another destroyer signaled them—the damaged cruiser was no longer close. ADVANCE WITH US TO BOMBARD ISLAND, the other ship's signal lamp flashed.

"Acknowledge and tell 'em we're on the way," Sam said to Cooley.

"Aye aye, sir."

Bermuda was actually made up of several low-lying islands linked by bridges and causeways. The *Josephus Daniels'* fire went in against the airstrip in the northeast. The gunners worked their pieces with furious haste, knowing that the more damage they did, the less chance British and C.S. airplanes would have of getting off the ground and striking back.

Landing boats waddled forward from troopships that stayed out of the artillery range. Hidden gun emplacements opened up on them. Here and there, a boat was hit and went up in flames or simply sank.

But most of the landing craft made it to the beach. U.S. bombers and fighters pounded all the enemy positions they could find. U.S. Army men and Marines swarmed forward. Sam hoped for the best.

T ill Armstrong Grimes got wounded, he'd never been in upstate New York in his life. But a lot of U.S.

military hospitals were in that part of the country, because Confederate bombers had to fly a long way to get there. The one

where he was recuperating lay somewhere between Syracuse and Rochester. Since he wasn't sure which town was which, he would have had trouble nailing it down any better than that.

Lying around doing nothing with nobody to yell at him for it felt strange, almost unnatural. Not worrying about snipers or machine guns felt even stranger. He got plenty of chow—not wonderful chow, but better than the canned stuff he'd been eating most of the time. He got all the cigarettes he wanted, even if they were U.S. barge scrapings instead of Confederate tobacco.

And the nurses were…nurses. Women. Some of them were tough old battleaxes who'd been taking care of people since the Great War. Others, though, were young and cute and friendly. Armstrong hoped some of them would prove more than friendly. Guys who'd been there a while told stories about nurses who helped soldiers recuperate by hopping into bed with them. But soldiers always told stories about women. Armstrong didn't see anything like that, no matter how much he wished he would.

Even so, he couldn't remember the last time he'd been around women who didn't want to blow his brains out. It reminded him there was a bigger world out there than the one that involved storming the next apartment building full of Mormons or Canucks.

So did reading newspapers and listening to the wireless. Oh, they were full of things like the reconquest of Bermuda and the U.S. drive aimed at Chattanooga. But that wasn't all. They didn't go on about the war twenty-four hours a day. There were stories about crime and scandal and films and a lady in Schenectady who'd had quadruplets.

That one impressed the nurses more than it did Armstrong. "Men!" one of them sniffed when she found out Armstrong didn't get it. "Can you imagine trying to take care of four little tiny babies all at once? Can you imagine trying to take care of four two-year-olds all at once? My God!" She rolled her eyes.

Armstrong couldn't imagine anything like that. But, since Susan was young and cute instead of being a battleaxe, he did his best. "Bad?" he asked.

"My God!" she repeated. "My kids are almost two years apart, and they still drive me nuts. But four of them doing the same things, making the same messes, getting into the same trouble all at the same time? I hope she's got lots of people helping her, that's all I can tell

you.”

She wore a wedding ring. Armstrong hadn’t even noticed before. *Damn,* he thought. “Where’s your husband stationed?” he asked.

“He’s in west Texas right now,” Susan answered. “He’s been lucky so far.” She reached out and knocked on the nightstand by his iron-framed cot. “But when I see what can happen to you guys…” She grimaced.

“I’m getting better,” said Armstrong, not the least self-centered young man around. But then he realized that might need something more with it. He did his best: “Most of us are getting better.”

He won a smile from the nurse. “I know,” she said. “But I still worry. How can I help it?”

“I guess you can’t, but it doesn’t do you any good,” Armstrong said. “It doesn’t do your husband any good, either. What’s his name, anyway?” He didn’t give a rat’s ass what the guy’s name was, but asking might make Susan like him better, and who could say where that would take him?

Her smile got bigger—she did appreciate the question. “He’s Jerry,” she said. “He’s so sweet…” Her face went all mushy. If she’d looked at Armstrong that way, he would have been in business. Since she was thinking about Jerry instead, he just lay there and smiled himself and nodded. He didn’t hope the guy would stop an antibarrel round with his face, but he didn’t exactly love him, either.

He watched Susan’s perky behind as she went to check on the wounded man in the next bed. He wasn’t the only recovering soldier watching her. The guys in this ward were wounded, yeah, but they were a long way from dead.

That afternoon, Susan bustled up to him with a different kind of smile on her face. She was pleased for him. “You’ve got visitors,” she announced, then turned and said, “You can come in now.”

In walked his father and mother. His mother gave him a big hug and a kiss. His father squeezed his hand hard and said, “I’m proud of you, son.”

“What? For getting shot?” Armstrong said. “I’m not proud of that. It was just bad luck.”

“No, not for getting shot.” Merle Grimes’ left hand stayed on the head of his cane. “For being brave enough to fight in the front line, and for doing it well.”

His old man had done his fighting a generation earlier, and he must have forgotten how things worked.

You didn’t go to the front line because you were brave. You went there because some slob with stars on his shoulder straps decided your regiment could do a particular job—or maybe because you drew the short straw. And if you didn’t go forward when the other guys did, the Army made sure you caught hell.

If you did go forward, you had a chance of coming through, anyway.

“You’re going to be all right,” his mother said. “The nurse told us so.”

“Yeah, Mom,” Armstrong said. “I probably won’t even have a limp.” They were talking about putting him back on duty once he healed up, so he figured the chances he’d be able to walk straight were pretty fair.

“That’s good,” Edna Grimes said. “Not that it would be the end of the world,” she added hastily, looking at her husband.

“I understood what you meant,” Merle Grimes said. “I’m not ashamed of my limp or anything—I earned it honestly. But I wouldn’t be sorry if I didn’t have it.”

“Thanks for coming, both of you. You didn’t have to do anything like this,” Armstrong said.

“Oh, yes, we did,” his mother and father said together.

“Who’s taking care of Annie?” he asked. His little sister was getting big these days; she didn’t need as much care as she would have a few years earlier.

“Your Aunt Clara has her,” his mother answered. “She says she hopes you get better soon—Clara does, I mean. So does Annie, of course.”

“That’s nice,” Armstrong said, as politely as he could. He didn’t like his aunt, and it was mutual. Clara was his mom’s half sister, and only a couple of years older than he was. They hadn’t been able to stand each other ever since they were little kids. He was surprised Clara

didn't hope he'd got his dick shot off.

His mother always tried to pretend things weren't as bad as they really were. His father, who didn't, chuckled. "She doesn't want to see you dead, Armstrong," he said. "Not unless she does it herself, anyway."

"Merle!" By her tone, Edna Grimes would make Dad pay for that, no matter how true it was.

"Oh, come on, Edna. I was joking," he said. At the same time, though, he tipped Armstrong a wink. He wasn't joking a bit, but he didn't feel like fighting with his wife. He looked at the bandages on Armstrong's leg. "How did it happen?"

"We were pushing north toward Winnipeg. The Canucks had a strongpoint in a farmhouse," Armstrong answered. "I was one of the guys moving up, and the damn machine gun got me. Bad luck, that's all, like I said before." He paused. "How did you get wounded, Dad?" He'd never felt able to ask before. Now they both belonged to the same fraternity. He'd had himself a .30-caliber initiation.

"It was a trench raid," Merle Grimes answered without the slightest hesitation. "We used to pull them all the time, to grab a few prisoners and see what the guys on the other side were up to. The front didn't move then the way it does nowadays. We got in, we threw some grenades around, we caught some Confederates, and we were on our way back when some son of a bitch—excuse me, Edna—nailed me from behind. Stinky Morris and Herm Cassin got me back to our side of the line, and it was off to an aid station after that. It hurt like a… Well, it hurt like anything."

"Yeah. I found out about that. For the first little bit, it was just like somebody knocked me down. But not for long." Armstrong shook his head. "No, not for long." He didn't want to remember that, so he asked,

"How are things back in D.C.?"

"Well, we aren't occupied," his mother said. "It was bad when the Confederates took the town last time around, and it was really bad when the USA took it back. I wasn't much older than you are now when that happened. But in between there was a long stretch that was pretty quiet, when the front was too far north to let guns reach us. Bombers weren't so much back then."

"They are now," his father said. "The Confederates still come over us

two or three nights a week. We're not far from their fields, so they can really load up. We go to the cellars when the sirens start howling, and we hope for the best. You can't do much else. It's almost like being in the line, except you don't get to shoot back yourself."

"I guess." Armstrong had no idea what civilian life in wartime was like. He'd been a conscript when the shooting started. "You have enough to eat and everything?"

"*That's* better than it was the last time around," his mother said.

"I was in the service the last time around, so I can't compare," his father said, "but it's not too bad. Not much meat—there's this horrible chopped ham that comes in cans." He and Armstrong's mother both made faces. He went on, "What we get mostly isn't exciting, and a lot of the fruits and vegetables are canned, too. But nobody's going hungry. Your rations sound like they're better than what we ate in the trenches. Boy, I never wanted to see another bean after I got out."

"We always bitch about what we get," Armstrong said.

His father laughed. "King David's soldiers probably did the same thing."

"Yeah, probably," Armstrong said. "But the biggest thing I don't like is that you get bored. There aren't that many different kinds of rations, and some guys won't like some of them, so that cuts it down more.

You're always happy when you can scrounge some chickens or a pig. Once in Utah, we ate a goat."

His mother made a disgusted noise. His father just sounded interested as he asked, "How was it?"

"Better than I expected," Armstrong answered. "Kinda tough and kinda gamy, but we had this Polack in the squad—Eyechart, we called him, 'cause his name looked really weird with all those s's and z's and w's—who stewed it and stewed it, and it ended up so it was better than rations, anyway."

"Sounds like he had some practice in the old country," his father said.

"Him or his folks—I think he was born here," Armstrong said. "But the coffee's lousy and the cigarettes are worse. That's the, uh, dirty end of the stick."

Merle Grimes chuckled at the just-in-time censorship. Then he said, “Close your eyes.” Armstrong did.

When his father said he could open them, he found himself looking at three packs of Raleighs. “These are for you.”

“Wow, Dad! Thanks!” Armstrong knew he would have to share them with his wardmates. He didn’t care. They were wonderful anyhow. “Where’d you get ’em?”

“A friend of mine has a son who captured a Confederate truck crammed full of them,” his father answered.

“Wow,” Armstrong said again. Short of nabbing Jake Featherston, he couldn’t think of anything better.

“That guy should’ve won the Medal of Honor.” He hadn’t thought a visit from his parents could turn out so well. A truckload of Raleighs! That was almost better to think about than Susan.

N othing official ever came of Cincinnatus Driver’s run-in with Sergeant Cannizzaro. He hadn’t thought it would. Technically, he was a civilian, so they couldn’t even court-martial him. The most they could do was take away his gun and ship him home. That would have pissed him off, but it wouldn’t have broken his heart. He knew he had a better chance of living to a ripe old age in Des Moines than he did hauling supplies through the CSA.

But there were more kinds of results than official ones. The way he handled himself when the Confederates hit the supply column and the way he stood up to the jerk of a U.S. quartermaster sergeant won him respect from his fellow drivers.

“You’re all right, you know?” Hal Williamson sounded half surprised when he said it as they dug into ration cans somewhere in central Tennessee. “Never had much to do with colored fellows before. Ain’t a whole lot of ’em in Manchester, New Hampshire. You kinda believe what folks say. But like I said, you’re all right. You’re just—a guy.”

“What did you expect?” Cincinnatus paused to light a Raleigh. The Confederate from whom he’d taken the pack wouldn’t be smoking again, unless he smoked down in hell. “I ain’t got horns. I ain’t got a tail.”

He was thinking about hell, all right.

“Not what I meant.” Williamson cast about for a way to say what he did mean. He was about Cincinnatus’ age, with steel-rimmed bifocals and with three fingers gone from his left hand. He gestured with that mutilated hand to make his point. “I didn’t figure you people’d have the balls to do some of the things you done.”

“Niggers’re like any other folks.” Cincinnatus used the word on purpose. He *could* use it, though he would have slugged Williamson had he heard it from the white man’s lips. “Some’s smart, some’s dumb.

Some’s brave, some’s cowards. Some’s good-lookin’, some’s mullions.” Hal Williamson blinked at that bit of black slang, but he followed it. Cincinnatus went on, “Maybe I got balls, maybe I don’t. But even if I do, that don’t say nothin’ about what niggers’re like. It only goes to show what *I’m* like. You see what I mean?”

“Maybe.” Williamson lit a cigarette of his own. “It’s like sayin’ all Jews are cheap or all Mexicans’ll pull a knife on you if you look at ’em sideways.”

He probably knew even less about Mexicans than he did about Negroes. There might be a Negro or two in Manchester, but Cincinnatus would have bet there were no Mexicans. Still, he got the point. “That’s what I’m sayin’,” Cincinnatus told him. “Biggest difference between black folks and white folks is, you’re white and we’re black. Next biggest difference is, you been on top. If we was on top, you bet we’d treat you just as shitty as you treated us.”

Williamson blinked again behind those glasses. Cincinnatus chuckled silently; the idea that Negroes *could* be on top plainly had never occurred to the other driver. “Son of a bitch,” Williamson said after a moment, and then, “Well, I bet you would. It’s…What do you call it? Human nature, that’s what.”

“Reckon so,” Cincinnatus said. “Tell you some more human nature: I ever get my hands on Jake Featherston…Do Jesus!”

“Yeah,” the white man said. “But for me it’s on account of he jumped my country. It’s personal for you, ain’t it?”

“You might say so.” Cincinnatus stubbed out his cigarette and twisted his hands as if he were wringing a chicken’s neck—or a man’s. “Yeah, you just might say so.”

They got rolling again a few minutes later, carrying this, that, and the

other thing down past Delphi to where the United States were building up for the attack on Chattanooga. Armored cars accompanied the column. So did a couple of half-tracks full of soldiers. The powers that be probably cared very little about the truck drivers' safety. What they were hauling? That was another story. Here in Tennessee, the column needed all the protection it could get. The only land the United States really held here was land their men were standing on. Everything else belonged to the Confederates.

Even shot-up autos by the side of the road could be deadly dangerous. One of them blew up with an enormous roar as an armored car went by. The vehicle got two flat tires and a dent, but otherwise withstood the blast. Whoever set off the auto bomb would have done better to wait for a soft-skinned truck.

U.S. machine guns sprayed the woods, but that was a forlorn hope. They also fired at other roadside wrecks, which turned out to be a good idea. One burnt-out command car exploded while the closest U.S. vehicle was still a quarter of a mile away. Cincinnatus whooped when it did. "One of Featherston's fuckers cussin' his head off now!" he said jubilantly.

The jubilation didn't last. It never did. Infiltrators or holdouts started shooting at the trucks. A deuce-and-a-half lurched off the road with a driver wounded or dead. Another coughed to a stop when it took a bullet through the engine block. A couple had tires flattened and had to change them. An armored car stayed behind with them to obstruct the snipers and to shoot at them if they broke cover.

Along with most of the other drivers, Cincinnatus went on.

Night was falling when they got to the supply dump. Soldiers holding dim red flashlights guided them to the unloading point. More men waited there with wheelbarrows and dollies. Off in the distance, artillery rumbled.

"Come on, youse guys! Move it!" a familiar voice shouted. Cincinnatus swore under his breath. If that wasn't Sergeant Cannizzaro, he was a blond. "Took youse long enough to get here!" the quartermaster sergeant complained.

Telling him where to go and how to get there was bound to be more trouble than it was worth.

Cincinnatus just sat in the cab of his truck and wished he could have a cigarette. Signs all over the dump screamed NO SMOKING! at the top

of their printed lungs.

“Here you go, Jack.” Somebody handed him a sandwich through the open window.

“Why, thank you kindly,” Cincinnatus said in glad surprise. He was even more surprised—and even gladder—when he bit into it. That thick slab of ham had never lived in a U.S. Army ration can. He didn’t know where the soldier came up with it, but it was mighty good.

He wished for a bottle of beer to go with it. No sooner had he wished than another soldier came along and gave him a bottle of…Dr. Hopper. Soda pop wasn’t the same, but it wasn’t bad, either. It had to be plunder, same as the ham. The taste reminded him he was back in the CSA. Dr. Hopper didn’t come over the border—at least, he’d never seen it up in Des Moines. He hoped they dropped a bomb on the factory that made the stuff…maybe after he’d got hold of a couple of cases for himself for old time’s sake.

Swearing soldiers unloaded his truck. He thought the cussing in this war was even worse than it had been the last time around. People then sometimes seemed faintly embarrassed at what came out of their mouths. Nowadays, men didn’t even notice they were turning the air blue. They swore as automatically as they breathed—and profanity seemed as necessary as air.

“Hey, Sergeant!” somebody called. “You got beds for us?”

“What? You ain’t goin’ back right away?” Cannizzaro sounded genuinely amazed.

A volley of curses—purposeful, not automatic—washed over him. Cincinnatus added his two cents’

worth to the barrage. The idea of crawling along in the dark with useless taped-up headlights, waiting for raiders he couldn’t see to open up, was less than appealing.

Sergeant Cannizzaro knew when he was outgunned. “Awright, already!” he said. “Stay here.” He might have been outgunned in the literal sense. Cincinnatus had traded in his .45 for a captured Confederate submachine gun. Other drivers carried Springfields or even C.S. automatic rifles—although U.S.

infantrymen in the line grabbed most of those. “Like I said, ain’t got no beds,” Cannizzaro went on.

“Youse can spread out bedrolls on the ground, or youse can sleep in your trucks. Ain’t nobody gonna give you no trouble till morning, honest to God.”

Cincinnatus slept under his truck. More men stayed in their cabs, but he couldn’t stretch out at full length in there. With his battered carcass, sleeping all scrunched up mostly meant not sleeping. A crumpled-up jacket made a good enough pillow. Cincinnatus’ battered bones creaked as he turned and twisted to get as comfortable as he could. All that wiggling might have kept him awake for—oh, an extra thirty seconds.

He came back to himself the next morning when somebody gave him a shake and said, “You fuckin’ die under there, Pop?”

“I was restin’,” Cincinnatus said with as much dignity as he could manage around a yawn.

“Yeah, well, you’ll be *ar* rested if you don’t get your ass in gear,” the other soldier said, and he went off to torment somebody else.

Breakfast was scrambled eggs and more slices of that terrific ham. Wherever it came from, Cannizzaro and his merry men had a lot of it. “You ever see anybody skinny in the Quartermaster Corps?” Bruce Donovan asked.

“Yeah, well, what the hell?” Most of the time, Cincinnatus would have been as eager as the other driver to slander Sergeant Cannizzaro and his ilk. Since the guys at the supply dump were sharing their bounty this morning, he was willing to let them off easy.

He wasn’t jumping up and down at the idea of going back up north to get more supplies. Oh, the Army needed them—no doubt about it. But running the gauntlet again, even with armored escorts, didn’t thrill him.

That hardly crossed his mind before Donovan said, “To think I volunteered for this shit.” Cincinnatus couldn’t have put it better himself. Since he couldn’t, he finished his coffee and limped back to his truck.

The convoy hadn’t gone far before it had to stop. The Confederates must have sent bombers over in the night, and a couple of them had scored direct hits on the highway. The bombs must have been big ones, too—the craters were thirty or forty feet wide and at least half that deep. Nobody was going anywhere on that road, not for a while,

especially since similar craters pocked the fields to either side.

Army engineers with bulldozers were busy repairing the damage. Soldiers in green-gray went through the bushes to clear out snipers so the engineers could work without harassing fire. That made Cincinnatus jealous, but the engineers weren't even moving targets. They were sitting ducks.

More engineers were stretching lengths of steel matting—the kind used to make emergency airstrips—across the field to serve as a makeshift road while the real one was getting fixed. After about half an hour, the job was done well enough to suit them. They waved the lead truck forward.

Cincinnatus was glad he wasn't driving lead. But where the deuce-and-a-half ahead of him went, he followed. The matting was a little higher than an ordinary curb would have been. His truck didn't like climbing up onto the stuff, but it could. He bumped along, then jounced down, then climbed up onto another strip of matting. Skirting the bomb craters went slowly, but it went. And those soldiers out there beating the bushes were keeping him safe along with the engineers. He tipped his cap to them, though they couldn't see him do it.

Everybody stepped on the gas once he got back onto the paved highway. Cincinnatus was happy to mash the pedal down to the floorboard. He knew he might be rushing toward danger, not away from it.

All the same, he'd felt like a sitting duck himself back there. He was glad to get away.

Nobody got hurt on the run north from Delphi, which made it a good one. Only three or four shots were fired at the column. They sounded like .22 rounds to Cincinnatus. Those wouldn't come from Confederate soldiers, who had better weapons, but from some civilian with a squirrel gun and a grudge.

U.S. authorities had confiscated all the firearms they could. The penalties for holding on to rifles and pistols were bloodthirsty. The Confederate citizenry didn't seem to care. Cincinnatus wished he were more surprised.

H alfway to Camp Determination. That was how Abner Dowling

looked at it. He wished he'd come farther. He wished his men could have moved faster. But he'd been stalled in front of Lubbock too damn long. The Eleventh Army—such as it was—was moving again. How much anybody back East cared…might be a different story.

He hadn't got the reinforcements he hoped for. Everything the U.S. Army could lay its hands on was going into the drive toward Chattanooga. Dowling didn't much like that, but he understood it.

One reason he wasn't going as fast or as far as he wished he could was that the Confederates *were* bringing in reinforcements: Freedom Party Guard outfits that fought as if there were no tomorrow. They made Dowling scratch his head for all kinds of reasons.

"They've got fewer men in Tennessee and Kentucky than we do, right?" he asked his adjutant one hot, sticky summer morning.

"Certainly seems so," Major Angelo Toricelli agreed.

"They're in trouble over there and we're not, right?" Dowling persisted.

"Unless our newspapers and wireless people are lying even harder than Featherston's, yes, sir," Toricelli said. "Possible, I suppose, but not likely."

"Bet your ass it's not," Dowling said, which made the younger officer blink. "All right, then. We keep saying we can't afford to send anything out here to the ass end of nowhere. But Featherston's sending people, sending equipment, out here like it's going out of style. I know he's a son of a bitch, but up till now I never thought he was a *dumb* son of a bitch, you know what I mean?"

"Yes, sir," Toricelli said. "I can only think of one thing."

"Well, you're one up on me if you can. Spit it out." Dowling had always enjoyed feeling smarter than George Custer. Now he watched his own adjutant feeling smarter than he was.

"To the Confederates, sir, this isn't the ass end of nowhere," Toricelli said.

"Well, yes, but why not?" Dowling asked. "You can't really mean they think killing off Negroes as fast as they can is more important than keeping us out of Chattanooga?"

The words hung in the air after he said them. The oppressive humidity might have borne them up. Major Toricelli nodded. “That’s it, sir. That *is* what I think. Nothing else makes sense to me.”

“Then Featherston really is off the deep end,” Dowling exclaimed.

“Could be, sir. I don’t know anything about that. I’m no head-candler. But whether he’s nuts or not, he’s still running the CSA, and nobody’s trying to stop him that I know of. When he yells, ‘Jump, frog!’ they all ask, ‘How high?’ on the way up.”

“Good God,” Dowling murmured. “If you’ll let your country go down the drain so you can do this instead…I’m not sure a head-candler can help you.”

“I hope nobody can help him,” Toricelli said. “But he’s been at war with Negroes about as long as he’s been at war with the USA. Don’t they say he had a chance to stop the uprisings in the last war, only his superior wouldn’t let him take a servant in for questioning? Something like that, anyway.”

“I think you’re right, or close enough,” Dowling said. “But if he beats us, he can do what he wants with the Negroes later. If he goes on killing them and we lick him…”

“They’re gone, and he dies happy,” Toricelli said.

“He sure as hell dies,” Dowling said. “Send the War Department a report showing the reinforcements we’ve run up against. Send them a summary of what we’ve been talking about, too. They should know we think he thinks that way. Don’t be shy about giving yourself credit, either. You were there ahead of me.”

“Thank you, sir.” Major Toricelli sounded as if he meant that. Dowling understood why. When he served under Custer, nothing was ever the great man’s fault. Anything good accrued to the great man’s credit.

Here, Dowling consciously tried not to imitate his old boss.

He sent an armored probe forward—and got it bloodied. Yes, the Confederates finally were reinforced.

They had new armor of their own, and that meant trouble. They’d go nipping in after his supply line next.

He had the feeling he'd come about as far as he could, or maybe a little farther.

One thing the enemy didn't have was much air power. Dowling summoned Colonel DeFrancis. "I want you to go after those barrels and self-propelled guns, Terry," he said. "Go after their fuel dumps, too.

Let's see how much we can slow 'em down."

"I'll do my goddamnedest, sir," DeFrancis said. "We've got some new inch-and-a-half guns mounted under dive bombers. Turns 'em into barrel busters. They dive, fire from close range, pull up and climb, then do it again. Engine decking hasn't got a prayer of standing up to an armor-piercing round like that."

"Sounds good to me," Dowling told him. "Turn 'em loose. Let 'em hunt. Let's see what they can do.

Let's see if they can keep those bastards off our necks."

"Yes, sir!" Terry DeFrancis sounded enthusiastic. He often did, especially when Dowling was turning him loose on a new and exciting hunt. For most officers, as for most other people in executive positions, what they did was a job. Some of them were better at it than others, but for the able and not so able alike it was work. DeFrancis was different. He enjoyed what he did. He had a good time doing it. Maybe he got a hard-on watching things blow up. Dowling didn't know—he didn't ask. But the colonel's enjoyment made him a better combat officer. He constantly looked for new ways to put the enemy in trouble.

Chances were he grinned when he found them, too.

West Texas made good barrel country. It was nice and flat—you could see for miles. There weren't a lot of forests for barrels to hide in, either. That made for a wide-open fight, and also for a fair fight. But if barrels had trouble hiding from one another, they also had trouble hiding from airplanes. The USA controlled the skies hereabouts. Abner Dowling aimed to make the most of it.

His headquarters wasn't close enough to the airstrip to let him hear DeFrancis' dive bombers and fighter-bombers take off. Why put all your eggs anywhere near the same basket when the prairie was so wide? He stayed where he was, strengthened his flanks in case the aircraft didn't do as much as he hoped they would, and waited to see

what happened next.

Custer wouldn't wait, he thought. *Custer would charge ahead regardless.* And no doubt he was right, because Custer always aimed to get the bit between his teeth and charge ahead regardless. About four times out of five, he ended up wishing he hadn't. The fifth time…The fifth time left him with his reputation as a great general, because the fifth time he charged the other side shattered instead of his own.

Dowling knew he wouldn't go down in the history books as a great general. The two likeliest candidates this time around were Irving Morrell and George Patton. Patton got off to a fast start in Ohio, but Morrell was making up ground—literally as well as metaphorically—in Kentucky and Tennessee. Who held higher honors in the books would probably depend on who won the war.

Some men who realized they weren't going to be great generals turned into failures instead. They drank too much, or they became sour martinets, or they forgot about discipline for themselves and everybody under them. Dowling tried not to commit those particular sins. If he couldn't be a great general, he could be a pretty good one, and that was what he aimed at.

He awaited developments, then. A great general probably would have forced them. A pretty good general could decide he was in no position to force them, which seemed plain as a punch in the nose to Dowling. He consoled himself by deciding it would take a great general to beat him, and so far his Confederate counterpart had shown no signs of greatness. If anything, the fellow on the other side seemed to have more trouble making up his mind than Dowling did.

The awaited developments…didn't develop. No column full of Freedom Party Guards and enemy armor crashed into Dowling's flank from the wide open spaces to the north or south. Dowling briefly wondered whether his opposite number had had his imagination surgically removed when he was only a lad.

Then the aerial reconnaissance photos came in. Terry DeFrancis came in with them—and with a spring in his step and a cigar in his mouth. "Will you look at these, sir?" he said. "Will you just look at them?"

"If you quit waving them around, I will," Dowling said.

"Sorry, sir." DeFrancis set them on his desk.

Dowling spread them out so he could look at several at once. They all seemed to feature vehicles on fire and pillars of smoke mounting up to the sky. Some of the burning vehicles were trucks, but quite a few were barrels. “You hit them hard,” Dowling said.

“Sir, we fucking pulverized them, pardon my French,” DeFrancis said. “They were driving along without a care in the world, right out in the open, and we caught ’em naked with their legs spread. We screwed

’em, too. We screwed ’em to the wall.”

“With news like that, you can speak French to me any old day,” Dowling said.

“Thank you, sir.” Colonel DeFrancis grinned around the cigar. He grew a little more serious as he went on, “Air power matters here. It *really* matters. We’ve got it, and the other guys don’t. That gives them just as much trouble approaching us as a fleet of battleships has approaching an airplane carrier.”

“Don’t get carried away,” Dowling warned. “They can do things battleships can’t. They can camouflage themselves. They can spread out, so you don’t catch so many of them together. I suppose they can even use dummies and hit with their real force while you attack those.”

DeFrancis eyed him. “Sir, I’m glad we’re on the same side. You’ve got an evil, nasty, sneaky mind.”

“You say the sweetest things, Colonel.” Dowling batted his eyelashes at the younger man. Watching a portly, sixtyish general simper and flirt was almost enough to make DeFrancis swallow his stogie. As his air commander had before, Dowling quickly sobered. “You’re doing a terrific job, Terry. I just don’t want you to get too confident.”

“Fair enough, sir,” DeFrancis said. Dowling hoped he meant it. When you were winning, when things were going your way, it was easy to think victory was meant to be. Custer always did. Hell, Custer thought victory was meant to be even when he’d just taken a shellacking. His confidence made his troops pay a fearful butcher’s bill.

In the end, Custer made his vision of victory real. Dowling wanted DeFrancis to do that without causing his own side the misery Custer had. “What’s the next thing you can do that would hurt the enemy most?”

Dowling asked.

“Catch another column flatfooted,” DeFrancis replied at once.

Dowling tried again: “What’s the next thing you can do that would hurt the enemy most, assuming he’s not an idiot?”

Colonel DeFrancis took longer to answer this time. At last, he said, “Well, the more we pound his supply lines, the more trouble he’ll have hitting us.”

“Fine,” Dowling said. “Do it. Even if the War Department won’t send us more men, they don’t seem constipated about shipping us ordnance. As long as we’ve got it, we might as well drop it on the Confederates’ heads.”

“I like the way you think, sir,” DeFrancis said.

“I just hope the bastards in butternut don’t,” Dowling answered. “Keep hammering them. If we can soften ’em up enough, we *will* drive on Camp Determination.” He spoke with no small determination of his own.

“H ey, Sarge!” one of the soldiers in Chester Martin’s platoon called to him.

“What’s up, Frankie?” Martin asked.

“Found this out on patrol. Figured I better bring it in so you could see.” Frankie held out a piece of paper.

“Thanks—I think.” Chester took it. It was cheap pulp, not much better than newspaper grade. The printing was cheap, too: letters blurred, ink smeary. The message, though, was something else again.

YANKEE MURDERERS! it began, and went downhill from there.

The gist was that U.S. soldiers who’d shot hostages couldn’t expect to be treated as prisoners of war.

We shoot mad dogs, it read, *and anyone who slaughters innocent Confederate civilians puts himself forever beyond the pale of civilized warfare.*

“What do you think, Sarge?” Frankie asked.

“Me? I think there’s no such thing as an innocent Confederate civilian, except maybe in his left ear,”

Chester answered. “You tell anybody else about this little love letter?”

Frankie shook his head. “No, Sarge. Not me.”

“Don’t flabble about it if you did—bound to be lots more copies out there,” Martin said. “But don’t go yelling it from the housetops, either. You did good, bringing it to me. I’m going to let Captain Rhodes have a look at it.”

Rhodes studied the flyer, then looked up at Chester. “Thanks for showing this to me, Sergeant. I’ll kick it up to Intelligence, let the boys there check it out. I’d say we hit a nerve.”

“Sir?” Chester said. “How do you mean?”

“Looks to me like the Confederates are saying they can’t protect their own, and they’re trying to scare us into being nice little boys and girls,” Rhodes answered. “Or do you think I’m wrong? You’ve been around the block a few times—you know what’s what.”

“I don’t know my ass from a hole in the ground half the time.” Chester thought about it. “You may be right. I don’t know that you are, but you may be.”

“Fair enough,” Captain Rhodes said. “We’ll see what the Intelligence johnnies think. Hell, they won’t pay any attention to me—I’m just a dumb line officer, so what the fuck can I know?”

“You’re a damn good company commander, sir,” Martin said. “I’ve been around *that* block—I ought to know.”

“Thanks. When you say something like that, I know you’re not blowing smoke up my ass, ’cause you don’t need to,” Rhodes said. “I know damn well we’ve got more good company-level officers than first sergeants.”

He wasn’t wrong. The worst thing he could do to Chester was take away his platoon. And if he did, if some baby-faced shavetail started commanding it instead, who would really be running things any which way? Chester and Hubert Rhodes both knew the answer to that one.

“Do we have any notion when we’re going after Chattanooga, sir?” Chester asked.

“I’m sure *we* do, if we counts the big brains back in Philly,” Rhodes answered. “If you mean, do *I* have any notion, well, no.”

“Can’t be too much longer…can it?” Martin said.

“I wouldn’t think so. Both sides are building up as fast as they can,” the company commander said. “As long as we keep building faster than the Confederates, everything’s fine. And I think we are. We’ve got air superiority here—we’ve got it just about everywhere except between Richmond and Philadelphia.

We can smash them when they try to move men and supplies forward, and they can’t do that to us.”

“We’ve got more men to start with, too,” Chester said. “Their small arms make up for some of that, but not for all of it.”

“Now our barrels are better than theirs, too—till they run out their next model, anyway,” Rhodes said.

“We can lick ’em, Sergeant. We can, and I think we will.”

“Sounds good to me, sir,” Chester said.

If the Confederates thought their U.S. opponents could beat them, they did a hell of a job of hiding it.

Chester had seen that in the last war. You could beat the bastards in butternut, but most of them kept their peckers up right till the end. They kept fighting with everything they had.

Maybe they didn’t have as much as they would have if U.S. airplanes weren’t bombing the crap out of their supply lines. Chester didn’t know about that. They still seemed to have plenty of artillery ammunition. Their automatic rifles and submachine guns didn’t run short of cartridges, either. They had enough fuel to send barrels and armored cars forward when they counterattacked—and they counterattacked whenever they thought they saw a chance to take back some ground.

The terrain south of Delphi didn’t need long to turn into the sort of lunar landscape Chester had known and loathed during the Great War. The stench of death hung over it: something even uglier than the view, which wasn’t easy. Soldiers sheltered in craters and foxholes. Trench lines and barbed wire were thinner on the ground than they

had been a generation earlier, mostly because barrels could breach them.

Nobody liked this kind of fighting, going back and forth over the same few miles of ground. “When do we break out, Sarge?” Frankie asked one day. He was scooping up pork and beans from a can. “We go somewhere new, maybe it won’t smell so bad.”

“Maybe.” Chester’s ration can was full of what was alleged to be beef stew. The grayish meat inside might have been boiled tire tread. Chester had never found a piece with GOODYEAR stamped on it, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t. And the Confederates thought Yankee chow was better than what their own quartermasters dished out! That was a scary thought. He went on, “I asked Captain Rhodes the other day. He didn’t know, either.”

“Well, if he don’t, chances are nobody does. He’s a hell of a smart man, the captain is,” Frankie said.

“That’s a fact,” Chester said.

They were still eating when a Confederate junior officer came forward with a white flag. He asked for a two-hour truce for both sides to pick up their wounded. Martin greeted him with a glare. “Yeah?

Suppose you get some of our guys? You gonna shoot ’em once you take ’em back behind the lines?”

“Good God, no!” the C.S. lieutenant said. “We don’t do things like that!”

“Except maybe to niggers,” Chester said.

He watched the enemy soldier turn red. But the man didn’t even waste his breath denying it. “We don’t do that to soldiers in a declared war,” was all he said.

“Sounds like bullshit to me, buddy,” Chester said. “What about that goddamn leaflet you’ve been spreading all over creation?”

The C.S. lieutenant blushed again. “That wasn’t soldiers who did that. It was Freedom Party guys from the Director of Communications’ office.”

“How the hell are we supposed to tell the difference? You’ve even got Freedom Party Guards coming into the line along with regular

soldiers. What are we supposed to do? Kill all of you bastards and let God worry about it afterwards?"

"I don't have anything to do with ordering that stuff," the Confederate said. "If they come up here, they're soldiers. They perform like soldiers, don't they?" He waited. Martin couldn't very well deny that.

Seeing that he couldn't, the officer went on, "Honest to God, Sergeant, if we find your people, we'll take

'em prisoner. If we start doing things to 'em and you people find out, you've got our POWs to get even with."

That made a certain brutal sense to Chester. He nodded. "All right, Lieutenant. Two hours. Your medics and ours—and probably a little bit of trading back and forth. Got any coffee?" Not much came up into the USA. The Army got most of what there was and stretched it as far as it would go, which made it pretty awful.

"Swap you some for a couple cans of deviled ham. That's the best damn ration around," the lieutenant said.

Before talking to him, Chester had made sure he had some. He would have bet the Confederate wanted it. The lieutenant gave him a cloth sack full of whole roasted beans. Just the smell, the wonderful smell, was enough to pry his eyelids farther apart. "Yeah, that's the straight goods, sure as hell," Chester said reverently.

"I got me some eggs," the lieutenant said. "Got me some butter, too. Gonna scramble 'em up with this ham…" For a moment, they both forgot about the war.

Then the Confederate officer turned and waved to his men. Chester also turned. "Cease-fire!" he yelled.

"Two hours! Medics, forward!" He nodded to the lieutenant. "You can head on back now."

"Thanks." The officer raised his hand in what wasn't quite a wave and wasn't quite a salute. Away he went.

From both sides of the line, men with Red Cross smocks and with the Red Cross painted on their helmets moved up to gather casualties—and to share cigarettes and food and coffee and maybe an unofficial nip or two from a canteen. Men on both sides stood up and stretched and walked around without fear of getting shot. If they were smart,

they tried not to show exactly where their hiding places were. Snipers had a nasty habit of remembering stuff like that.

Corpsmen brought back a soldier with a wound dressing on his leg. “How you doing, Miller?” Chester asked.

“I’m out of the fucking war for a while, anyway.” Miller didn’t sound sorry he’d got hit. A lot of people who caught hometowners felt the same way.

Chester kept smelling that wonderful coffee. He wanted to smash up the beans with the hilt of his belt knife or find a hammer to do it and to make himself three or four cups’ worth of joe right then. The enemy lieutenant had probably brought it forward the same way he’d carried the cans of deviled ham.

The fellow had to know what a damnyankee would want.

Another wounded man came in, this one with a blood-soaked bandage on his head. The medics looked grim. “Bad?” Chester said.

“About as bad as it gets,” one of the medics answered. “Head wound, in one side and out the other. God knows how he’s still breathing, with half his brains blown out. Take a miracle for him to get better.”

“Take a miracle for him to still be breathing this time tomorrow,” another medic said. The man who’d spoken first didn’t tell him he was wrong. Shaking their heads, the stretcher team carried the wounded soldier back towards an aid station.

“Fuck,” Chester Martin said softly. Krikor Hartunian—hell of a name—didn’t belong to his platoon. But he came from Captain Rhodes’ company. He was a baby when his folks were lucky enough to escape from the Ottoman Empire. An awful lot of Armenians hadn’t been so lucky. Some people said the massacres the Turks pulled off helped give Jake Featherston the idea for getting rid of the CSA’s Negroes.

Chester had no idea if that was true. All he knew was that a Confederate bullet had slaughtered Krikor—usually called Greg. The kid’s folks had a farm somewhere in central California nowadays.

Pretty soon, a Western Union messenger would deliver a Deeply Regrets telegram from the War Department. People didn’t want to see Western Union messengers these days. Chester remembered his folks talking about that during the last war. These days, they called the poor kids—who were only doing their job—angels of death. Wasn’t

that a hell of a thing?

Here in southern Tennessee, death came without angels. When the truce ran out, both sides fired a few warning shots. Anybody still up and around and out in the open ran for cover. Then they got back to the business of murder.

XIV

G racchus' band of black guerrillas kept growing. At first, Cassius thought that was wonderful. Then he noticed how worried the rebel leader looked. "What's the matter?" he asked.

Gracchus eyed him with something less than joy. "How'm I gonna keep all you sons of bitches fed?" he burst out.

"Oh." Cassius had no answer for that. He'd eaten well his whole life in Augusta. He'd gone on eating well, or as well as any Negro could, after the Freedom Party enclosed the Terry in barbed wire. Only after he escaped did he discover what living with his belly bumping his backbone was like. A full stomach was better. How his father, his old, fussy, precise father, would have laughed at him for that brilliant discovery! He hoped Scipio, wherever he was, still could laugh. What he hoped and what he feared were very different things.

"Oh," Gracchus echoed sardonically. "Yeah. You kin say, 'Oh.' But you only gots to say it. I gots to do somethin' about it."

Cassius paused to fiddle with the sling to his Tredegar. When he first got the rifle, he messed with it all the time, trying to make the nine-pound weight comfortable. Now, as often as not, he forgot he was carrying it. If the sling hadn't found some way to twist, he wouldn't have noticed it.

"When I was in the city, I reckoned country niggers lived in these little villages," he said. "Y'all'd grow your own corn and raise chickens and pigs and like that. An' I reckoned there'd be plenty o' vittles."

"Used to be like dat," Gracchus said bitterly. "I was a sharecropper. Had me a pot belly—best believe I did." He was skinny as a snake now, and at least as mean. "Freedom Party git in, they start makin' all kinds o' harvesters an' combines an' shit. Put all us niggers outa work, fucked them villages like you wouldn't believe."

"Got the factories set up so they could make barrels, too," Cassius

said.

“That’s a fact.” Gracchus eyed him. “You ain’t dumb, is you?”

“Me?” Cassius said in surprise. He always thought of himself as pretty dumb. He measured himself against his father—what young man doesn’t? His father, as far as he could tell, knew everything there was to know. He could even talk white, and do it better than most whites could. He’d tried to teach Cassius some of what he knew. Cassius could read and write and cipher. Past that, he hadn’t cared to learn. For the first time, he wondered if he’d made a mistake. It was too late, of course. Life didn’t hand you many second chances. If you were black in the CSA, life didn’t hand you many first chances.

“I ain’t talkin’ about Demosthenes over there,” Gracchus said. Demosthenes was larger than Cassius, stronger than Cassius, braver than Cassius. As far as Cassius could tell, Demosthenes feared nothing and nobody. He was hung like a horse, too. On the other hand, he was so dumb he had to remind himself out loud how to tie his shoes. Gracchus went on, “We need folks who’ll do whatever somebody tells ’em to do, an’ do it *right now.* Gots to have folks like dat, no two ways about it. But we gots to have people who kin think some, too.”

“Me?” Cassius said again.

“Reckon so,” Gracchus answered. “Next thing we gots to see is if folks jump when you tells ’em to. We fight the damn Mexicans again, you try it. See what happens. Things go good, got us a new officer.”

“Me?” Cassius knew he was starting to sound like a broken record. What he didn’t know was whether he wanted to be an officer. He didn’t like other people ordering him around. His father could speak volumes on that…if he was in a position to speak volumes on anything. Cassius didn’t see why other people would want him ordering them around, either.

But Gracchus had no doubts. From everything Cassius had seen, Gracchus hardly ever had doubts. That was one of the things that made him a leader. “You,” he said now, with a decisive nod. “If you kin do the job, you better step up an’ do it.”

That cut close to the bone. Francisco José’s Mexicans had made most unwilling soldiers when they first came to the CSA. Now they seemed to realize they weren’t going home any time soon, and that it was the black guerrillas’ fault. Just as blacks wanted revenge on whites, so the Mexican soldiers wanted revenge on blacks.

And if they didn't, unconscripted Confederate whites did. The lame, the halt, the old, the very young…Some of them could take rifles out into the field and go after the rebels haunting Georgia. And even the ones who couldn't served as sentries and guards and did all they could to make life difficult for raiding bands of Negroes—and to fire up the Mexicans so they fought harder, too.

All of which made this march through the central part of the state grim and hungry. Gracchus had scouts out before and behind, to the left and to the right. He knew the guerrillas were hunted, all right. So far, though, they kept slipping through the net.

And how much good does it do? Cassius wondered. He wished he hadn't thought of the raiders as haunting the Georgia countryside. That made them too much like ghosts of what had been there before, what would never come back to life again. Whites in the towns were real. Everything out here…Well, so what? A lot of town dwellers had to see things that way, anyhow.

But without the countryside, where would the Confederates States get their cotton and peanuts and tobacco, their corn and rice and hogs? Thanks to the Freedom Party and the machinery, the countryside needed far fewer workers to produce its crops than it had ten years earlier. But it still needed some, and it still needed the machines. If farmers and farmworkers got shot, if combines got torched, how was the Confederacy supposed to bring in any kind of harvest at all?

Nobody challenged the guerrilla band as it tramped along a narrow blacktop road. Gracchus probably knew where the fighters were going, but Cassius had no idea. The countryside was a whole different world, and not one where he belonged. He knew every alleyway and corner of the Terry—and much good that ended up doing him. Now he had something new to learn. And he would…if he lived long enough.

Something buzzed overhead. For a second, Cassius thought it was a stupid country bug that didn't come into cities. Then he saw other guerrillas pointing and heard them swearing. His eyes followed their upraised fingers. The biplane circling up there had been obsolete as a fighting machine since the mid-1920s, if not longer. But it did just fine spotting people who couldn't shoot it down.

"Goddamn thing," Gracchus snarled. "Bet your ass some fucker with a wireless set bringin' sojers down on us."

That struck Cassius as much too likely. But the biplane pilot had other things in mind, too. He dove on the guerrillas. “Scatter!” three blacks yelled at the same time.

The airplane mounted two machine guns set above the engine and firing through the prop. Cassius could see them winking on and off, on and off, as the pilot fired one short burst after another. Afterwards, he couldn’t have said why he didn’t run like most of the other men. It wasn’t lack of fear. With bullets from the guns cracking past and with others pinging and shrieking as they ricocheted off the paving, he would have been an idiot not to be afraid. Hadn’t Gracchus just called him a smart fellow?

Wounded men screamed to either side of the road. Cassius raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired two shots at the swooping biplane. He knew he wasn’t the only guerrilla shooting at it. But he was sure one of his shots caught the pilot in the chest. He had a good bead on the man, and saw him throw up his arms when he was hit. The biplane never pulled out of the dive, but slammed into the ground less than a hundred yards away.

“Do Jesus!” Cassius exclaimed through the crunching thud of the impact and the roar of the fireball that went up an instant later. “*Do* Jesus!” Machine-gun rounds in the burning wreck started cooking off, *pop!*

pop! pop!, like firecrackers on the Fourth of July. A bullet snapped past Cassius’ head, as if the pilot were still fighting back from beyond the grave.

“You the one who nailed that ofay asshole?” Gracchus asked, coming out from between the rows of corn that grew to either side of the road.

“Reckon I am,” Cassius answered. Then he coughed. The breeze was blowing back from the downed airplane toward him. It was thick with the smells of burning fabric, burning fuel, hot metal—and charred flesh. He thought that odor would stay with him the rest of his life.

“How come you didn’t run and hide?” the guerrilla leader asked.

“Beats me,” Cassius said honestly. “Just didn’t think to, I guess.”

“Didn’t think to? Didn’t fuckin’ think to?” Gracchus came up and gave him an affectionate clout in the side of the head. “Hope you do some more not thinkin’ real soon now, you hear? You know what the ofays

gonna do when they find out you shoot down their fancy airplane? They gonna shit, that's what."

He clouted Cassius again, which the younger man could have done without. Cassius knew better than to say so.

He looked down at the asphalt around his feet. Bullet scars pockmarked it. The white man in that airplane had done his level best to kill him. One of the bullet marks lay right *between* his feet. He started to realize just how lucky he was. It didn't make him feel proud or brave. No, it made him want to shiver instead.

Not everybody was so lucky. The guerrillas were doing what they could for their wounded. What they could do was pitifully little. They could bandage. They could suture—crudely. They could put alcohol or iodine on injuries. If they were desperate enough, they could put ether on a rag and go after a bullet with stolen forceps. Past that…no. Was there a black doctor, a black surgeon, anywhere in the CSA?

Cassius didn't think so. Oh, maybe in New Orleans. People went on and on about what Negroes in New Orleans were supposed to be able to do.

Were there any Negroes, surgeons or otherwise, in New Orleans these days? Or had they all gone to the camps like the rest of Cassius' family? If they had, would any of them ever come out again?

Cassius feared he knew the answer. He knew it, but he didn't want to think about it. Thinking about it would have meant thinking about his mother and father and sister.

"We gots to get outa here," Gracchus said. "Even if that fucker wasn't on the wireless—an' he was bound to be, damn him—they gonna come see how come their airplane done crashed."

"Ambush 'em?" Cassius asked.

Gracchus blinked. He thought. At last, reluctantly, he shook his head. "Don't reckon we could pull free an' disappear fast enough afterwards," he said. "They be on our trail like bloodhounds." Had he ever read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Cassius had, though the novel remained banned in the CSA sixty years after the slaves were—allegedly—manumitted. But he didn't think Gracchus could read at all.

He couldn't very well argue with the guerrilla leader about the risks. Since he couldn't, he made himself nod instead. "Whatever you say."

To a commander, that was always the right answer. Because it was, Gracchus condescended to explain:

“This ain’t the Army. I lose my men, I can’t pick up no telephone an’ git mo’. I gots to find ’em, same way I found you. Sometimes I gots to learn ’em to fight, way I learned you. Don’t want to lose ’em.

Happens, but I don’t want it to. Want the ofays an’ the Mexicans to lose their bastards instead.”

He’d learned war in a sternly practical school. Cassius knew he himself remained a beginner, even if he was a beginner who’d just luckily aced an important test. He nodded and gave back the magic words once more: “Whatever you say.”

“I say we gets outa here,” Gracchus declared. And they did. If Cassius wished for what might have been…this wasn’t the first time, nor the most urgent. He hurried away with the rest.

Every time Jonathan Moss read in captured papers about U.S. advances deeper into Tennessee, he wanted to head north. When he and Nick Cantarella escaped from Andersonville, he never imagined men in green-gray could penetrate the Confederacy the way the USA’s soldiers were. Jake Featherston’s butternut-clad troops were pushing into western Pennsylvania then, and it hadn’t been clear whether anything or anybody could stop them.

No matter what Moss wanted to do now, his desires ran up against reality in the shape of Spartacus.

“Tennessee line still a hell of a long ways from here,” the guerrilla leader said. “Got to git around Atlanta some kinda way if we heads up there. That ain’t country I know.”

“Could you pass us on to an outfit that operates north of you?” Moss asked. “You know, like the Underground Railroad in the old days?”

Spartacus only shook his grizzled head. “Yankee sojers come down here, fine. Till then, I needs you an’

Nick too much to turn loose of you.”

And that was that. The two white men might slip away on their own, but what could they do next? They would be all alone in a country that hated them, all alone in a country where their accents gave them

away whenever they opened their mouths. Could they get up to Chattanooga on their own? It seemed unlikely.

The only hope for help they had came from other bands of black guerrillas. And would some other band's chieftain be any more willing to let them go than Spartacus was? One more unlikelihood.

And if Moss and Cantarella got caught trying to slip away, they would forfeit Spartacus' trust. That wouldn't be good. That would be about as bad as it could get, in fact. So they didn't go north. They went east with the guerrillas instead.

They moved mostly by night. More and more often, Confederate authorities—or maybe it was just the locals on their own—put up a barnstormer's review of antique airplanes during the day to keep an eye out for guerrilla bands. Moss watched the two-deckers from the cover of pine woods with a fierce and terrible longing.

"You could fly one of those fuckers, couldn't you?" Nick Cantarella asked one day, first making sure no blacks were in earshot.

"In my sleep," Moss answered at once. "I flew worse junk than that in the Great War—not a lot worse, some of the time, but worse."

Cantarella looked around again and dropped his voice even lower. "You think we could steal one?"

"You're reading my mind—you know that?" Moss spoke hardly above a whisper. "I only see one hitch."

"Yeah? Walking up to the damn thing, hopping in, and flying off?"

Moss paused. "Well, two hitches," he said sheepishly.

"What's the other one?"

"From here, we need a full tank of gas to get up to the U.S. line. We run low, we can't stop at the local Esso station and tank up."

"Not hardly." The younger man laughed. Then he sobered again. "So how do we know how much gas is in the son of a bitch we take?"

"I fire up the engine and look at what the fuel gauge says," Moss answered. "No matter what it says, though, I've got to take off after that. This isn't one of those deals where you can try again if you don't like what you see."

“Suits me,” Cantarella said. “Suits me fine. Far as I can tell, we’ve done our duty by these people and then some. Time to do our duty for the US of A, too. And you know what else?”

“Tell me,” Moss urged.

“We got one great big thing going for us when we waltz up to that airplane.” Cantarella waited till Moss made a questioning noise. Then he said, “We’re white. They won’t be looking for ofays”—he grinned when he used the word—“to up and steal a flying machine, not in a month of Sundays they won’t.”

Moss didn’t need to think about that very long before he nodded. “Well, you’re right. Too bad we won’t be able to see the looks on their faces after we take off.”

It sounded so good, so easy, so inevitable, that they overlooked something: they weren’t anywhere near an airstrip. They didn’t come anywhere near one for quite a while, either. Their sole relationship with airplanes was hiding from them.

After a few days, Moss told Cantarella, “You ought to suggest to Spartacus that we go hit an airport so they can’t spy on us so well.”

“*I* ought to?” The Army officer pointed at him. “What about you?”

“No.” Moss shook his head. “If it comes from you, it’s strategy. He’s used to that. If it comes from me, it’s *The pilot wants to get his hands on an airplane.* And he’d be right, ’cause I do. Better the other way.”

Whiskers rasped under Cantarella’s fingers as he scratched his chin. “Yeah, that makes sense. I’ll do it,”

he said at last. “Don’t know whether he’ll listen to me, but it’s a pretty good shot.”

“A lot depends on how well they guard their airstrips,” Moss said. “If they’re locked up tight, Spartacus won’t want anything to do with them, and how do you blame him? But if he knows one where the locals are asleep at the switch…”

If there was an airstrip like that, Spartacus *would* know about it. The grapevine worked. Not all Negroes had disappeared from Confederate society—just most of them. There were still cooks and maids and janitors. They heard things. They knew things. And what they heard, what they knew, they managed to pass to guerrilla leaders like

Spartacus.

Nick Cantarella planted the seed. He and Moss waited to see if it would bear fruit. While they waited, they tramped along. They couldn't stay anywhere for more than a couple of days; if they did, they started eating the countryside bare. It seemed bare enough to Moss as things were.

"Got a question," Spartacus said as they marched through a weary night. "You git your hands on an airplane with machine guns in it, could you shoot at the Confederates with it?"

"As long as I have fuel. As long as I have ammo. As long as the motor keeps working the way it's supposed to," Moss said.

"You do it in the nighttime, or you have to wait fo' daylight?"

"Daylight would be better," Moss answered. "A lot better. I wouldn't want to try to land in the dark without good airport lights and without somebody on the wireless talking me down. Night flying's a whole different ballgame."

"All right." Spartacus nodded. "Reckon that means we gots to hit at daybreak, so you kin git the airplane up an' shoot up the town before you lands it somewhere an' we gits you out."

"What town?" Moss asked.

"Name o' the place is Pineview," Spartacus said. "We's about ten miles from there now. They got an airstrip outside—reckon we could swoop down on it."

"Do you want to do that?"

The guerrilla chieftain nodded. "Any way I kin hurt the ofays, I wants to do it. Strips won't be guarded much. I's sure of dat. Ofays don't know we got us a pilot. They reckon we ain't nothin' but a bunch o'

dumb fuckin' niggers. We show 'em. We fuck 'em good—you'd best believe it."

Later that day, Nick Cantarella tipped Moss a wink. If Moss hadn't been looking for it, he never would have noticed. He gave back a discreet thumbs-up.

Spartacus didn't charge ahead without checking. He sent scouts out

under cover of darkness to give the airstrip a once-over. They reported a few strands of barbed wire and some sleepy guards ambling around the perimeter. “We kin take ’em out, then?” Spartacus said.

“Oh, hell, yes, boss,” one of the scouts said. The other black man nodded.

Spartacus smacked his right fist into his cupped left palm. “Let’s go do it, then,” he declared. “We gonna make the ofays shit.” All the colored guerrillas who heard that grinned and clapped and whooped. So did Jonathan Moss and Nick Cantarella. If they had reasons of their own that the Negroes knew nothing about…then they did, that was all.

Since the attack on the airstrip outside of Pineview wouldn’t go in till morning twilight brightened the sky, the guerrillas had plenty of time to grab some sleep early in the evening and deploy as soon as the moon went down. Moss had trouble getting any rest. He was always nervous before missions. Cantarella snored like a buzz saw biting into a knot. If he worried ahead of time, he didn’t show it that way.

Flopped down in the dirt, mud smeared on his face so it wouldn’t show, Moss peered hungrily at the airstrip. There wasn’t much to see: a couple of runways flattened with steamrollers, a couple of old-fashioned airplanes at the end of one of them, a sentry with a limp who patrolled this stretch of barbed wire. Moss knew what wire was supposed to be like. This barely counted for a token effort.

“Let’s go,” Spartacus said. Three men with wire cutters slid forward. The strands of barbed wire parted with soft twangs. The men waved. The rest of the guerrillas loped toward the gaps. Someone shone a flashlight toward the rear. The prize pickup with the machine gun in the bed would be coming, too.

“Halt! Who goes there?” A white man spoke in peremptory tones. When he didn’t get the answer he liked, his rifle barked. Moss saw the muzzle flash. Half a dozen answering shots rang out. The sentry screamed and toppled.

“Come on!” Spartacus shouted. “Ain’t got much time now.”

He was wrong. They had no time at all.

Electric lights blazed on, illuminating the advancing raiders much too well. “Get down!” Nick Cantarella yelled. “It’s a—!” Before he could say *trap* or *ambush* or whatever he was going to say, three machine guns opened up and said it for him.

Spartacus' men were caught out in the open on flat ground at short range. The pickup went up in flames before it even got to the barbed-wire perimeter. Maybe some of the Negroes who'd fed Spartacus information did the same thing for their white bosses. Maybe the whites told them what to feed him.

However that worked, the result was a massacre.

Moss hugged the dirt. Bullets cracked past hardly more than a foot over his head. The gunners were shooting low, trying to pick off anything that moved. He couldn't stay where he was, not if he wanted to stay alive. He crawled toward the pine woods from which the guerrillas had come.

Was somebody with binoculars watching them all the time while they advanced? Moss wouldn't have been surprised. They'd trusted too much, and they'd walked right into the meat grinder. Somebody behind him screamed. Would anyone get away?

"Spartacus still alive?" Nick Cantarella asked.

"Beats me," Moss answered. "I'm amazed I'm alive myself."

"Tell me about it," Cantarella said. "They fucked us good, the bastards. Talk about a sucker punch…"

"I know," Moss said mournfully. "I was just thinking that. Are we far enough away so we can get up and run?"

"Go ahead if you want to. Me, I'm staying flat a while longer."

Moss stayed flat, too. Cantarella knew more about this business than he did. Of course, he'd thought Spartacus knew more about it than he did, too. And he'd been right. But Spartacus didn't know enough to keep from making a disastrous mistake. Even if the leader survived, his band was a shambles.

By the time Moss reached the woods, his knees and elbows were bloody. But he didn't get shot, so he was one of the lucky ones. Spartacus made it back, too. "Do Jesus!" he said over and over again, his voice and his face stunned. "Do Jesus! What do we do now?"

"Keep on fighting or try and disappear," Cantarella said. "Those are your only two choices."

“How *can* I fight after this?” Spartacus said. “How? Do Jesus!” Neither white man had any answer for him.

T he first thing Flora Blackford did when she got up in the morning was turn on the wireless to find out how the war had gone while she slept. The wireless didn’t always tell the truth; she knew that. In the black days of 1941 and 1942, news reports of Confederate advances often ran days behind what really happened. Losses to enemy bombs were minimized, as were U.S. casualties. The uprisings in Utah and Canada had got short shrift—the one in Canada still did.

But, if you knew how to listen, you could get a pretty good notion of what was going on. Today, for instance, the broadcaster declared, “Confederate air raids over Bermuda are of nuisance value only. The enemy has suffered severe losses in terms of bombers and trained crewmen.”

That was true, but, like a lot of true things, didn’t tell the whole story or even most of it. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had had some pungent things to say to the generals and admirals in charge of the reconquest of Bermuda. It was back in U.S. hands, but the whole business had proved much more expensive than anyone expected.

Why hadn’t the generals and admirals figured Confederate bombers would keep paying nighttime visits?

It wasn’t stupidity, not exactly. As far as Flora could see, it was more like the blind certainty everything would go fine, and an unwillingness to examine ways in which things might not go fine.

To the men on the low-lying ground who had to put up with bombs coming down on their heads, it probably looked a lot like stupidity even if it wasn’t.

Flora made coffee and scrambled a couple of eggs. They were the only ones she would eat this week.

She made a point of sticking to the limits rationing imposed on everybody else. Not all Representatives and Senators did, but she didn’t see how government could force such things on the country without observing them itself. Tomorrow it would be corn flakes or toast and jam. She was low on butter, too, but she couldn’t get more till after the first of the month.

“In Europe,” the newscaster went on, “German wireless reports that the Kaiser’s armored units have driven British forces over the Dutch border. For the first time since the outbreak of war, Germany is free of invaders. British Prime Minister Churchill denies the German claim and insists that strong British counterattacks are imminent.”

How can he do both at once? Flora wondered. But Churchill was formidable, no doubt about it. He’d overshadowed Mosley in the British government, and Britain was overshadowing France in the anti-German alliance, though *Action Française* had held power longer.

“Russia claims the German assault column aimed at Petrograd has been turned back with heavy losses,”

the broadcaster continued. “More weight would attach to this claim if the Tsar’s government hadn’t made it repeatedly over the past few weeks, each time without its being true. The situation in the Ukraine, however, remains as confused and chaotic as it has been since the beginning of the war.

“Serbian terrorists have taken credit for the people bomb that exploded in Budapest day before yesterday and killed several prominent Hungarian military officials. The Austro-Hungarian Empire has vowed reprisals.”

Flora sighed as she put salt on her eggs. The cycle of revenge and reprisal was lurching forward another couple of cogs. She saw no end to it. Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Albanians, Macedonians, Bulgarians… Austria-Hungary had security worries that made the USA’s seem simple by comparison.

“In sports…” Flora got up and poured herself another cup of mostly ersatz coffee. She didn’t care about the football scores. Joshua would have, and no doubt still did. But he was off doing his basic training. The apartment seemed empty without him.

Somewhere out in Washington State, scientists were trying to build a bomb that might make soldiers obsolete. With Joshua in uniform, Flora had one more reason to hope they succeeded soon.

And somewhere down in the CSA, other scientists were trying just as hard to build the same damn thing.

Flora didn’t think the Confederates could win the war as a slugging match, not any more. But if they got that bomb ahead of the USA… Roosevelt thought the enemy was running behind. Was he right?

The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War couldn't hold hearings to find out. As far as Flora knew, she was the only committee member who'd ever heard of uranium bombs or understood the difference between U-235 and U-238. There, though, she didn't know how far she knew. Robert Taft might share the secret. So might any other member. The only way to find out was to ask, and asking meant breaching security. She kept quiet. So did any other members who knew. Maybe it would all come out after the war.

She went downstairs and flagged a cab. They were easy to get on this block, where so many Congressmen and Senators lived. "Where to, ma'am?" the driver asked. In most of Philadelphia, Flora would have been *lady,* the same as in New York City. This fellow remembered where he was, and took no chances.

"Congressional Hall," Flora said.

"Yes, ma'am." He probably thought she was a secretary, but politeness could still be good for his tip.

He had to detour from the shortest route a couple of times. Sawhorses and ropes blocked the street.

Signs said, BOMB DAMAGE. "Do you know what's going on?" Flora asked. "I didn't hear any bombers overhead last night."

"Neither did I, ma'am," the cabby agreed. "But I heard one of 'em was an auto bomb and the other one was a people bomb."

"Oy!" Flora said. "Has anyone claimed responsibility? Confederates? Mormons who don't want to give up? Canadians?"

"God only knows," he said. "You can walk along minding your own… darn business, and out of the blue— *kaboom!* "

"Out of the blue makes it worse," Flora said, and the driver nodded. When someone said he'd planted an auto bomb, when a group proclaimed that one of its members hated you enough to blow himself to red mist to hurt you, at least you knew why you'd been injured. When the question hung in the air…When the question hung in the air, what could you do but stay afraid all the time? Flora didn't *think* the cabby had several hundred pounds of TNT in the trunk of his beat-up Packard or under the floorboards, but she couldn't prove he didn't. And he couldn't know she hadn't strapped an explosive belt around her waist. Scary times, all the way around.

As if to prove as much, concrete barricades kept motorcars from getting too close to Congressional Hall.

Flora paid the driver. The Packard wheezed away. She approached the building. Despite her status, despite her Congressional ID, security guards went through her handbag and attaché case. A hard-faced policewoman patted her down. She'd got complaints that some of the women who frisked other women enjoyed themselves as much as men would have. She didn't know what anyone could do about that. This one seemed all business. "You can go on," she said when she finished.

"Thank you so much," Flora said. The sarcasm rolled off the policewoman like rain off a tin roof.

Her secretary was in the office before Flora got there. "Good morning, Congresswoman," she said.

"Coffee's just about ready."

"Thanks, Bertha. It smells good," Flora said. "Isn't it terrible about the bombs this morning?"

"I should say so," Bertha answered. "I hear the people bomb was one of those horrible Mormons."

"Was it? How do they know?" Flora asked.

"I don't know, but I'd believe anything about those people," her secretary said. "They caused us so much trouble, so much misery—why wouldn't they go on doing it even now?"

That wasn't evidence. It wasn't anything even close to evidence. Flora knew as much, even if Bertha didn't. The cease-fire in Utah was holding…mostly. But there were Mormons who weren't ready to give up the fight against the government that had spent a lifetime abusing them. Some didn't care if they lived or died. The United States were painfully learning that men or women who didn't value their own lives were the hardest kind of foes to stop.

"What are my appointments this morning?" Flora already knew most of them, but Bertha couldn't go on ranting about Mormons if she had to check.

"Senator Taft called a few minutes ago and said he'd like to come by," she answered. "I told him it was all right. I hope that wasn't wrong?" She didn't like making mistakes, which made her a good secretary.

Flora had known some who just didn't give a damn one way or the other.

She nodded now. "I'm always glad to see Senator Taft," she said. They disagreed politically more often than not—they disagreed on almost everything, in fact, except that Jake Featherston needed suppressing.

But they had an odd, acrid friendship, each knowing the other was sincere and honest. Flora went on,

"Did he say what it was about?"

"Not to me, he didn't." Bertha sniffed. "Like a secretary should know what was going on? Noooo." She stretched the word out into a long sound of complaint.

"All right. I'll find out when he gets here." Flora carefully didn't smile.

Robert Taft came in about twenty minutes later. "Good morning, Flora," he said. He was only half the man his father had been—literally. He was lean and spare, where William Howard Taft had been wide as a football field. William Howard Taft had been deceptively clever, a good mind darting out from that vast bulk. There was nothing deceptive about Robert Taft's cool, dry, piercing intelligence.

"Good morning." Flora brought him a cup of coffee—he would have done the same for her in his office.

"What can I do for you today?" She was sure he wanted her to do something; he didn't waste time on social calls. His father, who'd lived up to the clichés about fat men, had been far more outgoing.

Sure enough, Robert Taft went straight to business: "I want your support for the measure readmitting Kentucky and Tennessee to the United States."

"Do you really think the time is ripe?" Flora asked. "We don't hold all of either one—we don't hold most of Tennessee. I know some white people in Kentucky really are pro-USA. But in Tennessee, we'd only have Negroes to work with, and how many has Jake Featherston left alive?"

"Some Tennessee whites will work with us. You can always find front men," Taft said, which was probably true. "But the real reason for readmitting them is to show that we aim to end this war by ending the

Confederate States, and that Featherston can't stop us. That was the rationale for reviving Houston, too. And the more states we take back, the more states that fall out of the Confederacy, the more political pressure we put on Richmond. How long will the Confederate people and the Confederate Army go on backing a loser?"

"These U.S. states would be shams—and they'd elect Democrats, not Socialists," Flora said. "Isn't that part of what you have in mind?"

"We can work out an arrangement like the one we used in Utah, if that's what's troubling you," Taft said.

"As long as they stay under martial law, they don't vote in national elections. You won't see the House and Senate swamped with undesirables." He smiled a wintry smile.

Flora considered. A deal like that only put off the evil day. But it was liable to put off the day for a long time, because no Confederate state would be reconciled to returning to the USA any time soon. Anyone who remembered the interwar histories of Kentucky and Houston knew that. She found herself nodding.

"I think we have a deal," she said.

"**H** ere you are, Mr. President." Lulu set the latest pile of wireless intercepts and press clippings from the USA on Jake Featherston's desk.

"Thank you kindly," he said, and put on his reading glasses to go through them. He never let himself be photographed wearing the damned things, but without them print was just a blur these days.

He waited till Lulu left his underground office before he started swearing. She didn't like it. He could cuss out his generals, but he wouldn't swear in front of his secretary. That was crazy, but it was how things worked. Of course, he couldn't stand most of his generals, and he liked Lulu. Keeping her happy mattered to him.

But he had plenty to cuss about. The damnyankees, now that they'd grabbed the ball, showed no signs of wanting to let go of it. Jake shook his head in furious wonder. That wasn't how things were supposed to work. The Confederate States were supposed to jump on the United States with both feet and never let them up again. Jake had intended to make the CSA the dominant country in North America. What he'd intended and what was going on…didn't turn out to be the

same thing, dammit.

The damnyankees were methodically building up in Tennessee, the same way they'd built up north of the Ohio before slamming down into the Confederacy. The counterattack through the mountain gaps into their flank hadn't fazed them. Featherston muttered in profane discontent as he shook his head. The counterattack hadn't fazed them *much.* Without it, they might already be in Chattanooga. Even so, they were gloating about how far they had come.

They were gloating about how well things were going in what they called Houston, too. Part of that was thumbing their noses because they'd revived the state that everyone who lived in it hated. Part of it was a threat; a U.S. officer out there said, "Before too long, we hope to shut down the Confederates' murder factory near Snyder."

"Fuck you, asshole," Featherston growled. That hit him where he lived. Getting rid of the CSA's Negroes was at least as important as putting the United States in their place, as far as he was concerned.

If the Yankees thought they could stop him, they would have to think again.

He made a note to himself to talk to Ferdinand Koenig about that. Before he could do anything about the note, Lulu stuck her head in again and said, "Major General Patton is here to see you, sir."

"Send him in," Jake said. Lulu nodded and withdrew.

Patton came in wearing what was practically dress uniform, with medals hanging on his chest in two rows. That wasn't the way to make Jake Featherston love him. Not that Jake had anything against courage, but he had everything in the world against show-off officers.

Patton's salute could have come straight out of VMI, too. The holsters on his belt were empty, though; the President's guards had his pistols. "Mr. President," he said in his gravelly voice.

"Sit down, General." Featherston waved Patton to a chair. When Patton had taken his seat, Jake fixed him with his stoniest glare. "You didn't give me what I needed, General. You didn't give the country what it needed. What have you got to say for yourself, eh?"

"Two things, sir," Patton replied. "First is, if you're not satisfied with me, put in someone you like better and stick me in a penal battalion.

I'll fight for the Confederate States any way you please. Second thing is, whoever you put in my place will have as much trouble succeeding as I did unless we can get some air cover. My men were naked under the sky, and they paid a dreadful price for it."

Featherston stared at Patton again, this time sourly. The high and mighty general had just taken much of the wind out of his sails. Anyone who volunteered for a penal battalion…Those outfits were made up of officers and men who'd disgraced themselves one way or another. Commanders threw them in wherever the fighting was hottest. Soldiers who redeemed themselves could earn their old rank back. Most of the poor damned bastards ended up as casualties instead. They were there to end up as casualties, and with luck, to help the cause a little before they did.

"I goddamn well ought to throw you in a penal battalion," Jake growled, but even he could hear his heart wasn't fully in it.

"Do whatever you need to do, Mr. President. I'll go." Patton was nearly as stubborn as Jake was himself.

"I'll get more mileage out of you if I keep you in command." Featherston didn't like that conclusion, but he'd had to deal with a lot of things he didn't like lately. "Can you hold Chattanooga?"

"I can try," Patton answered. "If they mass enough force to outweigh us six to one or something like that, though, I don't know how I'll manage it. I'm a better than decent general, sir, but I don't work miracles."

"Will you fight house by house and block by block, make those damnyankee sons of bitches pay the way we paid in Pittsburgh?"

"Yes, sir." Patton didn't hesitate. In that, too, he was like the President of the CSA.

"All right, then. Go do it," Featherston said. It wasn't all right, or anywhere close to all right, but Jake came from the school that didn't believe in showing where it hurt. Anything that gave anyone a grip on you was to be avoided.

Patton rose and saluted again. "You won't be sorry, sir. Or if you are, I'll be too dead to know about it."

Without waiting for a reply, he did a smart about-turn and marched out of the office: a procession of one.

“I’m already sorry,” Jake muttered. He was sorry he had to use an attacking general to defend. He was sorry he had to defend so deep inside the Confederacy. He’d planned to fight this war almost entirely on U.S. soil. Well, what was life but the difference between what you planned and what you got?

He walked to the door and asked Lulu, “Who’s next?”

“General Potter, Mr. President.” She sniffed. She didn’t like Clarence Potter—mostly because Jake Featherston didn’t like him.

Jake hid a smile. That was about as funny as anything he had going on these days. But like Potter or not, the President knew he was useful. “Send him in.”

“Yes, sir.” Lulu sighed.

Although Jake felt like sighing, too, he didn’t, not around Potter. He didn’t trust the Intelligence officer enough to show that he didn’t enjoy his company. All he said after the usual formalities was, “Being in the line isn’t as easy as it looks, is it?”

“No, sir. It’s like juggling knives when someone’s shooting at your feet,” Potter answered. “Maybe experience helps. I hope to God it does, anyway. I’ve got a little now—the hard way. They were grabbing for anybody they could find with wreaths on his collar, and they tapped me. I gave it my best shot. What else could I do?”

“Go out there and kick those Yankees’ asses?” Featherston suggested, not at all sardonically.

“Sir, I would have loved to,” Potter said. “But we hardly even got to the front, let alone fought there.

U.S. air power chewed us to pieces coming through the gaps—slowed us down, gave us casualties, tore the crap out of our trucks and armor. We wouldn’t have been in good shape even if we had done more fighting. We need more airplanes and more pilots.”

“We need more of everything, goddammit,” Jake said.

“Yes, sir. We do.” With four words, Potter skewered every Freedom Party policy—every policy of Jake Featherston’s—at least as far back as the President’s first inauguration. And Featherston couldn’t do one damn thing about it, because all the cross-grained Intelligence officer had done was agree with him.

In lieu of snarling at him for agreeing, Jake asked, “Were you able to keep putting Professor FitzBelmont’s feet to the fire while you were in the field?”

“By messenger, yes, sir,” Potter answered. “It meant letting one more man in on the secret, but Chuck doesn’t blab. And I figured that was better than doing it by telephone or wire or letter. With a messenger in the know, I could really speak my mind.”

“Fair enough,” Jake said. “FitzBelmont’s got to know how bad we need that bomb, and how important it is for us to get it before the United States do.” If the Confederate States got uranium bombs ahead of the USA and kept on getting more of them, shortages of everything else—even airplanes, even manpower—would stop mattering. If the CSA had uranium bombs and the USA didn’t, the Confederacy would damn well win.

“If he doesn’t know, it’s not because he hasn’t been told,” Potter said. “I believe he’s doing everything he knows how to do. I believe he’s the best man we’ve got for the slot, too. Whatever else he is, he’s bright.”

“What about the men the damnyankees have?” Featherston asked. “Have you worked out some kind of way to hit ’em up in Washington again?”

“If we can land a mortar team by submersible, it might be able to get close enough to shell their operation,” Potter said. “I’m not sure how far out their ground perimeter extends. I don’t think we can hit them from the air again. They’re alert for that now. A lot of things you can do once, chances are you can’t do ’em twice. The ground operation would be a suicide run, too, chances are.”

“Yeah, chances are,” Jake agreed. “Either you get dedicated people who don’t care or you don’t tell

’em beforehand how dangerous the mission is. Both ways work.”

“If I can, I’ll use people who know what they’re doing and are willing to do it anyhow,” Potter said. “I don’t like sending people off to die when they don’t know that’s in the cards.”

“If you can, fine. But if you can’t, do it the other way. Don’t get thin-skinned on me, Potter,” Jake said.

“This country is in trouble. If blasting the crap out of the U.S. uranium

factory helps get us out of trouble, we do it. Period. We do it. You got that?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. President. I've got it. You're always very plain about what you want." Clarence Potter spoke respectfully. He spoke obediently. How, then, did he make Jake feel as if he'd just got slapped in the face? He had all kinds of unpleasant talents.

Jake held up a hand. "One other thing I need to find out. Any sign the Yankees know where our uranium works is at?"

"Sir, the first sign of that you'd get would be every U.S. bomber ever built coming straight at Washington University with the heaviest load of bombs it could carry," Potter answered.

He was bound to be right. And he was serious, too; when he talked about the Confederate uranium-bomb project, the subtle mockery disappeared from his voice. He was a Confederate patriot.

Jake Featherston used that button to keep him loyal to the Freedom Party—and loyal to the President of the CSA, too. If Potter ever separated Jake Featherston's cause from the Confederacy's… *If that ever happens, I've got to get rid of him, because then he turns as dangerous as a rattler in my bed,* Jake thought. *I'd better keep a closer eye on him.*

None of his thoughts showed on his face. All he said was, "You're doing a good job of keeping the secret, then. Thanks. That's one more thing the country needs."

"Yes, sir." Again, Potter sounded brisk and assured. But he couldn't resist one more gibe: "We'd be further along now if FitzBelmont got funding sooner."

"Oh, give me a break!" Jake exclaimed—that rubbed him the wrong way. "He came to me with this blue-sky story an idiot dog wouldn't believe. So maybe it'll turn out to be true. I hear a dozen blue-sky stories every day, and damn near all of 'em are nothing but shit. Would *you* have believed this one way back then?"

Potter pursed his lips. "Well, no," he admitted—he was almost compulsively honest. "But somebody made the United States believe it. I wonder how that happened."

"The United States follow the Germans wherever they go—maybe that's got something to do with it,"

Jake said. “I wonder how far along England and France are. Got any ideas?”

“No, Mr. President. They aren’t talking to me.”

“To me, neither,” Jake snarled. “They reckon I’m a poor relation. Well, when we get this here bomb, I’ll show ’em who’s a poor relation to who, by God. See if I don’t. The whole damn *world*’ll see if I don’t.”

J efferson Pinkard heard the distant boom of artillery off to the northwest. He’d heard it before, but only as a rumble on the edge of audibility. Now it was louder and more distinct than he’d ever known it. That meant only one thing: the damnyankees were closer to Camp Determination than they’d ever got before.

When Pinkard called the local commander to complain, Brigadier General Whitlow Ling said, “If you want to put your guards under my command and send ’em off to the front here, I’ll listen to you.

Otherwise, butt out of my business.”

“I can’t do that,” Jeff said.

“Then butt out of my business,” the Army man said firmly.

“But Camp Determination is important to the whole country,” Jeff said.

“And I’m doing every damn thing I know how to do to keep the U.S. Eleventh Army away from it,” Ling said. “If you think you’re helping when you joggle my elbow, you’d better think twice, ’cause it ain’t so.”

“We set up this camp way the hell out here so the Yankees couldn’t get at it,” Pinkard said. “We’ve got important business to take care of here.”

“I don’t know anything about that,” Ling said. “All I know is, General Dowling has more men than I do.

He has a better logistics train than I do. He has a fuck of a lot more airplanes than I do. You want miracles, go talk to Moses.”

“So don’t fight him straight up,” Jeff said. “Go around him.”

“And how am I supposed to do that, when Richmond won’t give me

the barrels I need?" Brigadier General Ling seemed sure the camp commandant wouldn't have an answer for him.

But, thanks to the newspapers and magazine, Jeff did. "Load machine guns and cannons onto a bunch of trucks and go raiding," he said. "The Canucks are doing it to the USA. Hell, the damn niggers in Georgia and Mississippi are doing it to us. Can we fight as smart as a bunch of coons? Hope to God we can."

Had he laid that on too thick? Would Ling hang up on him instead of listening? If Ling thought he could get away with that, he had another think coming, because Jeff would get on the horn to Ferdinand Koenig. If the Attorney General couldn't make a mere soldier say uncle, Jeff was backing the wrong horse.

Ling didn't hang up. He said, "You want us to turn guerrilla, then?"

"I don't care what you call it, General," Pinkard answered. "I want you to make the damnyankees stop. I want you to make 'em go backwards. I don't give a rat's ass how you do it. Here's something you haven't tried, that's all. It's worked good some other places. What have you got to lose?"

He waited. "It wouldn't be that expensive," Ling said in musing tones. "Wouldn't cost that many men, wouldn't cost that much matériel. Might be worth a shot."

"Anything's worth a shot right now, wouldn't you say?" Jeff answered.

Ling only grunted. That was probably as it should be. A soldier wouldn't admit his side was in trouble, even if it was—maybe especially if it was. If he hurt the troops' morale, what would that do? Cause his side more trouble still. "We'll see what happens," Ling said at last, and he did hang up.

"Hooked him, by God," Jeff said happily as he set down his own telephone. "I do believe I hooked him."

He hadn't been sure he could.

He looked out through his window at the men's half of Camp Determination. A long queue of Negroes waited to go into the bathhouse and delousing station. They would go in, all right, but they wouldn't come out again—not breathing, anyhow. Guards with submachine guns flanked them to either side, to make sure nobody did anything stupid or desperate. Right this minute, everything

seemed calm.

The camp was busier than it had been for a while, too. U.S. bombers had eased up on the railroad line leading into Camp Determination. They still hit it every so often, but repairs stayed ahead of damage now. And they'd eased up on Snyder, too. Pinkard thanked God for that. He had his family to worry about, and it mattered more to him than anything else in the world.

As much as he hated to do it, he'd just about decided to send Edith and her boys back to Louisiana.

Maybe he would have looked at things differently if she weren't expecting. But Alexandria was safe in a way Snyder wasn't. Even though it also had a camp nearby, the United States were in no position to bomb it. If they brought bombers south, they wouldn't bother with a half-assed target like Alexandria.

They'd go and unload on New Orleans, which really mattered.

Jeff watched the queue snake forward. Everything went smoothly. He'd set it up so everything would, but seeing that it did still made him feel good. It wasn't a guarantee these days. A year ago, all the Negroes who went through the camp believed the guards when they said the bathhouses and the trucks were just procedures to be put up with as they got transferred somewhere else. Not now. The blacks brought out of colored districts and the captured Red guerrillas had a pretty good idea of what went on here. Jeff blamed damnyankees propaganda for that. It made Camp Determination harder to run, because the inmates understood they had nothing to lose.

He breathed a silent sigh of relief when the last Negro moved through the barbed-wire gate and into the bathhouse. That meant he could go back to his paperwork with a clear conscience. It never went away, and it was the part of the job he hated most. He hadn't signed up to be a bureaucrat. He'd signed up to *do* things, by God. But you couldn't just do things, not in the CSA you couldn't. You had to keep records to show you'd done them, too.

And you had to keep records about things that went wrong. He'd just sent away two more guards from the women's side for having lesbian affairs with the prisoners, and one male guard who'd got caught cornholing colored boys. Those involuntary separations required a mountain of forms. You couldn't just fire somebody for something like that. You almost had to catch people in the act, because those

accusations could ruin somebody's life.

One of the women was raising a stink. She denied everything on a stack of Bibles. Jeff didn't care. He had witnesses to prove she'd been carpet-munching. That was dirty enough when a man did it to a woman (though Pinkard sure didn't complain when Edith went down on him—oh, no!). When another woman did it, it was about as disgusting as cornholing. This gal had to go, and she would.

She'll probably end up a girls' gym teacher, someplace where word of this hasn't spread, Jeff thought. Under the Freedom Party, records were a lot more thorough and complete than they had been back in the old days, but they weren't perfect, not by a long shot.

He'd just signed the last of the papers that would get rid of the dyke when air-raid sirens started wailing and airplane engines droned overhead. A minute or so later, the antiaircraft guns around Camp Determination thundered into action. In the camp compound, he watched guards hastily don helmets.

Falling shrapnel could cave in a man's skull.

The colored prisoners, of course, had no helmets. Jeff only shrugged. That wasn't his worry. If one of the smokes got clobbered, well, so what? It only meant he was buying his plot a little sooner than he would have otherwise.

A thunderous explosion rattled the window in his office. It was safety glass reinforced with chicken wire, but it almost blew out anyhow. That wasn't a bomb going off. That was a bomber crashing, and its whole load blowing up at once. The gunners didn't nail very many, but every once in a while they came through.

Prisoners in the yard were pointing up in the sky at the bomber stream. They were cheering and dancing and urging the damnyankees on. Rage ripped through Pinkard. How *dared* they root for the other side?

They deserved everything they were catching, all right. Whether they would have cheered for the United States if they weren't catching hell from the Confederate States never once crossed his mind.

Not surprising, not when he had other, more important, things to worry about. The bombers started unloading on Snyder again. More antiaircraft guns protected the towns, but flak alone couldn't keep bombers away. If the Confederacy had some fighters of its own in the

air…

But the Confederacy damn well didn't. Basically, Snyder had to sit there and take it. *I* will *get Edith and the boys back to Alexandria, so help me God I will,* Jeff thought. If the damnyankees were going to bomb innocent civilians…Again, he didn't dwell on what the Confederates had done to innocent civilians on the other side of the border, let alone on what the men he commanded were doing to civilians right here in this camp.

He hated those strings of *boom! boom! boom!,* one right after another. Sure, Edith and Willie and Frank would be down in the storm cellar. Sure, it would take a direct hit to harm them. The odds against that were long. But it could happen, as he knew too well. And he couldn't do one damn thing about it. He hated that even more.

Here inside Camp Determination, he was safe as houses. The Yankees had never bombed the camp.

They cared more about the worthless niggers inside it than they cared about the honest white people they were trying to murder.

Another bomber exploded. This one sounded as if it blew up in midair. The United States were paying for things today, anyhow. Sometimes the bombers got off scot-free. That was just plain embarrassing. At least the gunners weren't standing around with their thumbs up their asses.

Jeff knew losing a few bombers wouldn't keep the USA from coming back. He also knew how helpless he was to do anything about it. What choice did he have but wait here till the raid ended and then go back to Snyder and see if he still had any family left?

None. None at all.

Bombers stayed above Snyder for most of an hour. As soon as the bombs stopped falling, Jeff jumped into the Birmingham that was his to use. He didn't wait for a driver, but gunned the engine to life and roared off to find out if his family was all right.

He had to go off the road and onto the shoulder a couple of times to avoid craters. He was glad it hadn't rained any time lately, or his auto might have bogged down. But the fires rising from Snyder made him mutter and curse and pray, all in a confused jumble. *He* knew what he meant, but he doubted anybody else, even God, would have.

Once he got into Snyder, he had to make more detours, both because of holes in the streets and because of burning buildings. The bombs hadn't smashed the town's one fire engine. Its bell clanged like the shrieks of a lost soul as it raced from one disaster to the next. How much good could it do at each stop?

Some, maybe.

Jeff's heart was in his throat when he turned onto his street. A house half a block in front of his had taken a direct hit. Part of a body lay on the front lawn. Pinkard gulped and looked away.

But there were Edith and Frank and Willie. His wife was bandaging a neighbor lady who looked to have been cut by flying glass. His stepsons watched with more interest than horror. They'd seen things like this before. Kids got used to war and other disasters faster than grownups did. For them, it soon became routine.

For Jeff…"Thank God you're all right!" he called as he sprang from the motorcar and ran over to Edith.

"This was a bad one, but we made it into the cellar quick as we could. The windows are already cardboard and plywood, so we didn't lose any glass. I don't smell gas. The power's out, but it'll come back." As Edith talked, she went on bandaging the neighbor lady's head. "There you go, Vera. It's not too deep, and I don't think the scar will be bad."

"Thank you, Edith." With middle-class politeness, Vera nodded to Jeff. "Hello, Mr. Pinkard. Sorry we have to run into each other like this. It's a miserable war, isn't it?"

"It sure is, ma'am." Jeff coughed on the smoke in the air. He shook his fist toward the west. "It's a miserable war, but by God we'll win it."

C abo San Lucas wasn't quite the ass end of nowhere, but you could see it from there. George Enos knew damn well he wasn't any place he wanted to be. As usual, nobody in the Navy bothered asking his opinion. The Marines had taken the place away from the Empire of Mexico. U.S. Army troops were pushing down from San Diego to occupy the rest of Baja California. The godawful terrain and the heat and the lack of water were giving them more trouble than Francisco José's soldiers were.

Also annoying, or worse than annoying, to the men in green-gray and forest green were air raids across the Gulf of California from

Confederate Sonora. C.S. bombers struck by night, when they were harder for U.S. fighters to find and shoot down. The Confederacy didn't keep a lot of airplanes in Sonora, but the ones they had did what any small force was supposed to do: they made the other side hate their guts.

And they were the reason the *Townsend* lingered by Cabo San Lucas. More and more escort carriers came down the coast of Baja California. Sooner or later, they'd try to force their way into the Gulf of California and put C.S. air power in Sonora out of business. When they did, they would need escorts to deal with Confederate and Mexican surface raiders and submersibles. That was what destroyers were for.

"This would go quicker if we got a couple of fleet carriers instead of all these chickenshit little baby flattops," George grumbled. "An escort carrier isn't big enough to hold many airplanes, and the damn things can't make twenty knots if you throw 'em off a cliff."

Fremont Dalby gave him the horselaugh. "Now tell me another one," he said. "Like they're gonna waste fleet carriers down here. Fast as we build more of 'em, they go into the Atlantic. It's just like last time: we cut off England's lifeline to Argentina and Brazil, we screw her to the wall."

"Yeah," George said. That was what the father he barely remembered was doing in 1917, and how the senior George Enos died after the CSA threw in the sponge.

Dalby didn't notice George was feeling subdued. "Maybe— *maybe*— the Sandwich Islands get one," he said. "Depends on how serious we are about going after the Japs."

"Makes sense, I guess," George said. "If it's up to me, though, we wait till we're done with the really important stuff, and *then* we kick their scrawny yellow asses."

"That's how I'd do it, too," Dalby agreed. "'Course, that doesn't mean it's how the admirals will want to handle it. Expecting the brass to do shit that makes sense is like expecting a broad to understand if you screw around on her. You can expect it, yeah, but that don't mean it's gonna happen. Like for instance, you know what I heard?"

"I'm all ears," George said.

"You'd look even funnier than you do now if you were, and that's

saying something," Dalby told him, altogether without malice. George flipped the gun chief the bird. Since Dalby was ribbing him personally, he could get away with that. Had the conversation had anything to do with duty or the ship, he would have had to take whatever abuse the older man dished out. Dalby went on, "Anyway, scuttlebutt is they're keeping a flotilla bigger'n this one off the northwest coast, near where the Columbia lets out into the Pacific. Carriers, escorts, subs, the whole nine yards."

"That's pretty crazy," George said. "Why would they put so many ships up where they don't do any good?"

Fremont Dalby shrugged and lit a cigarette. He held out the pack to George, who took one, too. After a couple of puffs, Dalby said, "It's almost like they're guarding that whole stretch of coast, like there's something up there they don't want the Japs to hit no matter what."

"What could there be?" George asked. "They think the Japs'll bomb the salmon-canning plants, or what?"

"Beats me," Dalby said. "Like I told you, this is all scuttlebutt. Maybe it's just a cloud of stack gas, but the guys I heard it from say it's the straight skinny."

"Something's going on that we don't know about," George said.

Dalby gave him exaggerated, silent applause. "No kidding, Sherlock," he said. George laughed. Maybe it would all make sense after the war was over. Maybe it would never make sense. Some of the dumb stunts the brass pulled were like that, too.

The *Townsend* was one of the lead escorts when a flotilla centered on three escort carriers steamed into the Gulf of California. The flotilla had minesweepers along, too, in case the Confederates and Mexicans had surprises waiting for any newcomers. George would have if he were waiting for trouble from the USA.

"Tell me about it," Dalby said when he worried out loud. "Mines are simple, mines are cheap, mines'll blow your sorry ass sky-high if you hit one. What more could anybody want from the fuckers?"

They didn't hit any mines the first day inside the gulf. On the second morning, klaxons hooted the men to general quarters. "Now hear this! Now hear this! Aircraft approaching from the northeast! Aircraft approaching from the northeast!"

Fighters zoomed off the baby flattops' decks. From what George had heard, Confederate Asskicker dive bombers were great when they operated unopposed, but they were sitting ducks for fighters. He didn't know if what he'd heard was the gospel, but had the feeling he'd find out pretty damn quick.

Confederate fighters escorted the dive bombers. Up till recently, land-based aircraft were always hotter than their carrier counterparts, which needed heavier airframes to stand up to the stresses of catapult-aided takeoffs and landings cut short by tailhooks and arrester wires. But the latest U.S.

carrier-based fighters were supposed to be as tough and fast as anything in the air.

An airplane tumbled down toward the sea. Fremont Dalby had a pair of binoculars. "That's an Asskicker!" he said. "Got the fixed landing gear and flies with its wings going up on either side like a goddamn turkey buzzard."

Another airplane plummeted. "Who's that?" Fritz Gustafson asked.

"Dunno," Dalby answered. "I *think* it was one of ours, though. They've got blunter noses than C.S.

Hound Dogs do."

Two more machines fell out of the sky, both burning. Keeping track of who was doing what to whom got harder and harder. The rolling, roiling fight drew ever closer to the flotilla.

"Here we go." At Fremont Dalby's orders, the gun layers swung the twin 40mm mount toward the closest Confederate airplane. George Enos passed Fritz Gustafson two shells and got ready to give him more. Dalby put the guns exactly where he wanted them and opened fire.

Casings leaped from the breeches. George fed shells as fast as he could. Thanks to Gustafson's steady hands, the twin 40mms devoured them just as fast. Black puffs of smoke appeared all around the oncoming C.S. bombers and fighters. All the other guns on the *Townsend* were blasting away, too: not just the 40mm mounts but the dual-purpose five-inch main armament and the .50-caliber machine guns that were stationed wherever the deck offered a few feet of space. The noise was terrific, impossible, overwhelming.

“Got one!” Everybody at George’s mount yelled the same thing at the same time. George couldn’t be sure a shell from one of his guns hit the Hound Dog, but he thought so. The fighter pilot tried to crash his airplane into the destroyer, but fell short—he went into the drink about a quarter of a mile off the port bow.

George never saw the Asskicker that hit the *Townsend* till too late.

One second, he was passing shells as fast as he could. The next, altogether without knowing what had happened, he was flying through the air with the greatest of ease, like the daring young man on the flying trapeze. Unlike the daring young man, he didn’t have a trapeze. He didn’t have a net, either. The Gulf of California reached up and smacked him in the face and in the gut. If his wasn’t the worst bellyflop of all time, he surely got no lower than the bronze medal.

At least the water was warm. He didn’t swallow too much of it. His life vest kept him from sinking. He looked up just in time to watch a C.S. Mule zoom off not far above the waves. Dalby was right—with those uptilted wings, the damn thing was as ugly as a turkey vulture.

It made a much better killing machine, though.

He didn’t realize what had happened to the *Townsend* till he looked back at his ship. Before that, he thought whatever happened to him was some sort of private accident—though how a private accident could have hurled him close to a hundred yards was anything but obvious. He slowly decided he wasn’t thinking very well at all.

But he didn’t need to be a genius to see the destroyer was history. Her back was broken. Smoke billowed from her. The Gulf of California all around her was full of sailors, some with their heads out of the water and paddling, others facedown and still and dead.

“Holy Jesus!” George blurted. “We got nailed.” That was, if anything, an understatement. Even as he watched, the *Townsend* settled lower in the water. She wouldn’t stay afloat much longer.

But George only thought he was afraid till he saw gray dorsal fins knifing through the water. He’d watched sharks from the destroyer’s deck. That was fine. Watching them from the sea with a free-lunch course spread out all around…George crossed himself. The *Ave Maria* he blurted out might not help, but it sure couldn’t hurt.

He looked around not just for sharks but also for his buddies. He didn’t see Fremont Dalby anywhere. A big blond body floated not far

away. Was that Fritz? George didn't paddle over to see. He didn't want to know that bad.

Fuel oil spread from the stricken destroyer. George swam away from it. That stuff would kill you if you swallowed it. He'd seen as much in the Sandwich Islands. His voice rose with others, calling for nearby ships to pick them up.

The minesweeper that had led the flotilla swung back toward the *Townsend,* whose deck was almost awash now. When the destroyer went down, her undertow dragged luckless sailors too close by under with her. George had got too far away for that to happen to him. But someone not nearly far enough from him screamed. Dorsal fins converged as red spread through the deep blue. George rattled off more Hail Marys, and an Our Father for good measure.

A life ring attached to a line splashed into the sea maybe fifty yards off. He swam over and put it on.

Sailors aboard the minesweeper hauled him in like a big tuna. The ship had nets down. They helped him scramble up the side.

"Well, well—look what the cat drug in," Fremont Dalby said. He was soaked, of course, but he already had a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. Drop Dalby in horseshit and he'd come out with a pony. But his sardonic grin slipped as he asked, "Spot any of the other guys?"

"Maybe Gustafson." George pointed his thumb down at the deck.

"Fuck." The gun chief looked at the oil slick and the bobbing men and debris that were the sole remains of the *Townsend.* "That Asskicker sure kicked our ass, didn't he? Hit us right where it did him the most good, the son of a bitch."

Airplanes were still mixing it up overhead. George Enos hardly noticed. He was luxuriating—rejoicing—in being alive. "We just got ourselves some leave," he said. "And you know what? I wish to God we didn't." Dalby nodded.

XV

J orge Rodriguez and Gabriel Medwick made unlikely friends. Jorge was skinny and swarthy and spoke with a Spanish accent. Medwick was big and blond and handsome in a jut-jawed way. If not for the

war, they never would have met. But they'd shared in the grinding Confederate retreat through Tennessee.

Now, just outside of Chattanooga, the powers that be were saying C.S. troops wouldn't fall back another yard. Jorge didn't know if they were right, but they were saying it.

A lot of men who'd come over from Virginia with Jorge and Gabriel were dead or wounded now. Jorge didn't think much of their replacements. Old-timers in the company doubtless hadn't thought much of him when he first joined it, either. Two company commanders had gone down since Captain Hirsch. They were both supposed to recover, but that didn't help much now. A first lieutenant named Jubal Frisch had the company at the moment, and didn't seem to know what to do with it.

Sergeant Hugo Blackledge hadn't got a scratch. He was another reason Jorge and Gabriel were friends—they both hated him. He had a platoon now, not just a squad. That let him spread his bad temper around more, but did nothing to make it good.

"Why don't they bring in a lieutenant to take over for him?" Medwick mourned.

"Even if they did, he'd still be running the platoon," Jorge said. "That's what sergeants do. The officer would just be—how do you say?—the guy in front."

"The front man," Medwick said.

"That's it. Thanks. The front man, yeah," Jorge said. "Blackledge, he can handle a platoon—no doubt about that."

"Oh, I know. I know." Gabriel Medwick looked around carefully and lowered his voice to a near-whisper. "He can run it, sure. That ain't the problem. The problem is, he's a fuckin' asshole."

"You got that right," Jorge whispered. They both nodded, satisfied they'd figured out at least one small part of how the universe worked.

Blackledge couldn't have heard them. He would have come down on them harder than a six-inch shell.

Somehow or other, though, they both ended up on sentry-go that night. The front wasn't quiet. Snipers and raiding parties slipped back and forth. That was the small change of war, and nobody worried

much about it one way or the other except the people who got wounded or killed. But sentries were a trip wire, too. If a big push came, they were supposed to get word back to the main force.

Jorge peered out into the darkness, all eyeballs and nerves and apprehension. Every time an owl hooted, he thought it was a damnyankee signal. Every time a firefly blinked, he feared it was a muzzle flash. He clutched his automatic rifle and hoped nothing would happen till his relief took over.

Out of the darkness came a low-voiced call: “Hey! You there! Yeah, you, Confederate!”

Jorge crouched in good cover. Even if a machine gun opened up, he was safe enough. So he cautiously called back: “Yeah? What you want?”

“Got some smokes?” The other man had a funny accent—a Yankee accent. “Wanna swap ’em for rations? I can use coffee, too, if you got it.”

“I got cigarettes,” Jorge answered. “Not much coffee. You got deviled ham?”

“Buddy, I got a dozen cans,” the U.S. soldier said proudly. “I came prepared—bet your butt I did.”

“I got three-four packs I can trade you,” Jorge said. “You see a stump by a rock up in front of you?”

A pause, presumably while the would-be merchant scanned the area. “Yeah, I see it.”

“Bueno,” Jorge said. “Put four cans on it, then go away. I put four packs on it, then I go away. You come back and get ’em.”

“And you shoot my sorry ass off,” the U.S. soldier said. “I’ll put two, you put two, then we do it again.

Got to be some kind of way to keep both of us interested in the deal all the way through.”

“All right,” Jorge said, though he didn’t much care whether it went through or not. The only thing that kept him going was the reasonable certainty that killing him would cause more trouble than it was worth.

“Go ahead. I don’t shoot.”

“Fuckin’ better not,” the U.S. soldier said, which was true enough under the circumstances.

He moved quietly. When he came, Jorge didn’t know he was there till he got to within a few feet of the stump and boulder. He set down the cans, waved in Jorge’s general direction, and disappeared again.

But he had style; he made more noise retreating than he had advancing, so Jorge could be sure he really was leaving.

Even so, Jorge’s heart pounded as he went up to the stump. If more Yankees waited nearby, they could jump out and capture him. He’d picked this spot himself, but….

He grabbed the cans and almost forgot to set down the cigarettes. After he did, he headed back to his foxhole. Up came the U.S. soldier. “Yeah, you play fair,” he said as he snatched up the packs. “Here’s the rest.” He set down two more cans and withdrew again.

After Jorge took them and left the last two packs of Dukes, he was tempted to shoot the U.S. soldier when he came forward. But what was the point? It wouldn’t win the war. It wouldn’t move the war toward being won by even a hair’s breadth. It would only start a firefight in which he was liable to get hurt himself. He would fight when he had to. When he didn’t have to, he didn’t want to.

Like a ghost, the U.S. soldier materialized. “Thanks, buddy,” he said, collecting the last two packs of Dukes. “Stay safe. I won’t plug you unless I’ve got to. Try and do the same for me.” He vanished into the darkness again.

The deviled ham would be good. Jorge could always get more smokes. He wondered how long that would last, though. The United States had overrun a lot of tobacco country. How long could the Confederacy go on turning out cigarettes? There was a scary thought.

When his relief came up, he almost shot the other Confederate soldier. It wasn’t even that his countryman messed up the password; he was just jumpy. He went back to the company’s forward position, rolled himself in his blanket, and slept till sunup.

He got coffee and fried eggs from the company cook. When he spooned deviled ham into his mess kit to go with the eggs, his buddies

gave him jealous looks. “Where’d you get that?” Gabe Medwick asked.

“Found it on a tree stump,” Jorge answered, which was technically true but not what anybody would call responsive. Medwick rolled his eyes.

Sergeant Blackledge was blunter: “You trading with the enemy?”

“Uh, yes, Sergeant.” Jorge didn’t have the nerve to lie.

“Didn’t pay more than one pack of smokes for a can, did you?” Blackledge demanded.

“Uh, no, Sergeant.”

“Goddamn well better not. You jack up the price for everybody else if you do.” The sergeant tramped off. Jorge let out a sigh of relief louder and more heartfelt than the one that had escaped him after he finished the deal with the damnyankee.

He was just finishing his coffee when somebody yelled, “Mail call!” He hurried over to see if there was anything from his brothers (POWs were allowed occasional letters, so Pedro sometimes wrote) or from his family back in Sonora. The field-post corporal had a devil of a time pronouncing his last name, but a lot of ordinary Confederates did, so he took that in stride.

“Who’s it from?” Gabe Medwick asked. He had a large family in Alabama, and got letters all the time.

“My mother,” Jorge answered. “Got to remember how to read Spanish.” He said that only for effect. He wouldn’t have any trouble, and he knew it.

When he opened the letter, what he got wasn’t what he expected. *They say your father killed himself,* his mother wrote. *I don’t believe them. I will never believe them, not just because killing yourself is a mortal sin but because your father would not do it. He would only do such a thing if he found out he had committed some great wrong and he had no other way to make up for it. And that is not so. He was doing something great, something wonderful, something important. He always said so when he wrote me. And so it must be a lie. Maybe they tell me these things because he died fighting and he promised me he would not go into any danger when he left to put on the uniform again. I cannot think of anything else that would make them say such things. And they are paying me a pension for him. Would they do that if he really killed himself? I don’t believe it.*

Jorge stared at the scrawled words. He read them two or three times, and they made no more sense than they had at the beginning. He couldn't believe his father would kill himself, either. *Some great wrong,* his mother said. What could his father have done that was wrong? It wasn't in his father to do such a thing…was it? He didn't see how.

"You all right, buddy?" Gabriel Medwick asked. By the look on his face, Jorge got the idea he'd asked the same question before, maybe more than once, and hadn't got an answer for it. Gabe went on, "You look like somebody just reduced your population, man. You got bad news from home?"

A white Confederate from Alabama could no more read Spanish than he could fly, Jorge reminded himself. He didn't want to lie, but he didn't want to tell the truth, either. "It's not as good as it could be, anyhow," he said.

"Not more trouble on top of your dad, I hope?" Medwick knew Hipolito Rodriguez was dead. He didn't know how—up till this moment, Jorge hadn't known how himself. *I still don't, dammit,* he thought fiercely.

"No, not on top of my father, *gracias a Dios,* " Jorge said, which was even true. "Just…trouble winding up his affairs, I guess you would say."

"That's no good," Gabe said seriously. "Stuff like that can get a whole family riled up, with lawyers or maybe guns, depending. Some neighbors of ours started feuding over a will, and now everybody hates everybody else. You don't want something like that to happen."

"No, no," Jorge said again. "I don't think it will. But everything is more…more complicated than anyone thought it would be."

"Not easy when somebody dies. I'm sorry," Medwick said.

"No, not easy," Jorge agreed.

Before he could say anything more, his head went up like a hound's when it took a scent. He didn't smell anything, but he heard trouble in the air. Gabe Medwick shouted it louder than he did: "Incoming!" They both dove for the closest hole in the ground.

It wasn't really big enough for both of them, but they made do. And when the U.S. shells started bursting around them, they both tried to

make themselves as small as they could, which made the hole seem bigger. That had to be crazy, but Jorge thought it was true.

The damnyankees had shelled Confederate positions in front of Chattanooga before, but this was different. That had just been harassing fire. This time, they meant it. They wanted to blow a big hole in the Confederate line right here, smash on through it, and head straight for the city the soldiers in butternut had defended so long and so hard.

They were liable to get what they wanted, too. Jorge had never been in a bombardment like this, not here and not back in Virginia, either. Beside him, Gabe Medwick was screaming for his mother. He wasn't hurt—he was just scared to death. Jorge couldn't blame him, not when he was scared to death, too.

As suddenly as it had begun, the barrage stopped. "Up!" Jorge said. "We've got to get out and fight, or they'll murder all of us."

He looked around…and found he might have been in the mountains of the moon. After a pounding like that, *could* the Confederates fight back?

I f you wanted something and the fellow who had it didn't feel like handing it over, one way to get it was to put a big rock in your fist and then slug him. The USA wanted Chattanooga. The Confederates didn't feel like giving it up. Lieutenant Michael Pound knew a certain amount of pride at being on the pointy end of the rock.

As soon as the U.S. bombardment let up, he got on the wireless circuit to the other barrels in his platoon:

"Let's go get 'em! They think they can stop us. I say they're wrong, and I say we'll prove it."

In war, proving the other guy was wrong often meant proving he had no business breathing. Pound was ready to use that kind of logic against Jake Featherston's men. Why not? Featherston had tried using it against the United States.

As his barrel rumbled forward, Pound wondered if he would spot General Morrell. This was Morrell's operation, and Pound knew how Morrell thought, how he fought, better than anyone else except possibly George Patton. One thing Morrell did was lead from the front. He'd be here somewhere.

“Old home week,” Pound muttered.

“What was that, sir?” Sergeant Scullard asked.

“Nothing. Woolgathering,” Pound said, embarrassed the gunner had overheard him. He still wasn’t used to getting called *sir,* either.

The bow machine gun chattered, knocking over a couple of soldiers in butternut unlucky enough to get caught away from cover. Another Confederate dropped his submachine gun and raised his hands over his head. “What do I do, sir?” The question came back to Pound over the intercom.

“Let him live,” Pound answered. “We’ve got infantry along to scoop up prisoners, and he doesn’t look like he’ll do any more fighting. We’ll play fair when we can.” And when they couldn’t—and there would be times like that—he would do whatever needed doing, and he wouldn’t lose any sleep over it.

He stood up in the turret, riding with head and shoulders out so he could see more. Only a little small-arms fire was coming back at the barrels; the barrage had left the Confederates more discombobulated than usual. Maybe they were finally starting to crack. He could hope so, anyhow.

More soldiers in butternut threw away their weapons and surrendered—or tried to, anyway. A machine gun behind them opened up and cut down several of them. Even the enemy’s machine guns packed more firepower than their U.S. equivalents. C.S. machine guns fired too fast to let you hear individual rounds going off; the noise sounded like the Devil tearing a sail in half.

It was enough to make Pound duck down into the turret and slam the cupola lid shut behind him. He didn’t mind taking chances, but he didn’t like taking dumb ones, and you couldn’t get much dumber than to offer that gun a clean shot at you. “Can you spot the son of a bitch?” he asked Scullard.

“Haven’t yet, sir,” the gunner answered. “Shall I give him a round or two of HE if I do?”

“Damn straight,” Pound said. “They’re starting to shoot their own people now. They might as well be Russians or Japs.”

They rolled past wherever the machine gun was concealed without

spotting it. Pound wasn't too worried about that. Another barrel or the infantry would take care of it. He just hoped it wouldn't cause many casualties before that happened. Any which way, the machine gunners were in more trouble than they knew what to do with. Somehow or other, soldiers who served machine guns—especially soldiers who served them right up to the last minute—had a lot of trouble surrendering.

Pound peered through the periscopes set into the cupola. It wasn't as good as riding with his head out, but it would have to do. He wondered where the Confederate barrels were. They couldn't stay very far behind the line, not unless they didn't intend to fight this side of the Chattanooga city limits. So…where?

"Front!" The gunner spotted the first enemy machine before Pound did. It squatted hull-down behind the rubble of what had been a roadside diner. And its crew had seen this barrel before anyone spotted it.

Even as the gunner yelled for an armor-piercing round, the enemy cannon swung toward the barrel and spat fire.

Clang! Less than a second later, the enemy AP round hit the turret. It was like having your head stuck in God's cymbals when He clashed them together. But the thick, well-sloped armor kept the round from penetrating.

"Thank you, Jesus!" Scullard said.

"Amen!" Michael Pound laughed from sheer relief at being alive. By the shape of its turret, the enemy barrel was an old model, one that carried only a two-inch gun. That cannon was better than good enough when the war started, but not any more. "Give him some of his own medicine, if you please."

"Yes, sir!" The gunner's enthusiasm surely also sprang from relief. He fiddled with the gun-laying controls—but not for long, because they'd be reloading with frantic haste in that other barrel, and they might get lucky the second time around.

The U.S. barrel's gun spoke before the enemy got off his second shot. It wasn't an easy target, not with only the Confederate machine's turret showing. Pound wished he were making it himself. Not that Scullard wasn't a damn good gunner—he was. But Pound knew he was better than a damn good gunner himself. He commanded the

barrel, though. He couldn't hop into the seat on the other side of the turret.

Sometimes you had to trust the men under you, no matter how hard that was. Times like this, he wished he had his stripes back. Being an officer was no fun at all.

And then, suddenly, it was. The 3½-inch AP round punched through that old-fashioned turret as if its steel armor were so much cardboard. It knocked the turret half off the ring, knocked the enemy gun all askew. Then the ammunition stored inside the turret started cooking off. Better not to think about what happened to the Confederate barrelmen when a tungsten-pointed projectile started ricocheting around inside that crowded space. *Much* better not to think about it, because it had almost happened here instead.

"Good shot, Scullard!" Pound said. "Hell of a shot!" You could talk about the shot as if it were part of a game. You could talk about the enemy barrel as if it fought by itself, as if it had no crew inside. That way, you didn't have to think about what happened to the men in there, what you'd just done to them.

"Thank you, sir." The gunner laid an affectionate hand on the cannon's breech. "If our turtle didn't have a thick shell, those fuckers would've done unto us before we could do unto them."

"First shot is better, but we made—you made—the second one count." Pound gave credit where it was due.

Scullard sent him a sly grin. "Bet you wished you were doing the shooting yourself." He knew Pound had been shifting in his seat.

"Well, maybe a little," the barrel commander admitted—he couldn't very well deny it. But he went on,

"Probably just as well I wasn't. You know the controls for this weapon better than I do." That was not only polite but true. He'd fired a few rounds to familiarize himself with the cannon in case something happened to the gunner, but it was Scullard's baby. Pound always thought he could do anything. Maybe getting reminded every once in a while that that might not be true was good for him.

"You're a gent, sir," Scullard said.

Pound laughed. "Only shows you don't know me as well as you think you do, Sergeant." He called the driver on the intercom: "Let's get

moving again. We keep sitting around, we give those bastards too good a shot at us."

"Yes, sir," the driver said. The barrel lurched forward.

A couple of minutes later, machine-gun fire started clattering off the machine's armored side and the turret. It sounded like hail on a corrugated-iron roof. Pound traversed the turret to the left. There was the machine gun, sure as hell, muzzle flash winking like a lightning bug. It had a damn fool running it—he couldn't hurt a barrel with all the ammo in the world. "Front!" Pound sang out.

"Identified, sir," Scullard replied. He spoke to the loader: "HE!"

"You got it." The high-explosive shell went into the breech.

"Fire!" Pound yelled, and the gunner did. The shell casing leaped from the gun and clattered off the turret floor. Dirt and smoke fountained up a few yards in front of the machine-gun nest. "Short!" Pound said.

"Give 'em another round or two. We'll shut the bugger down, by God."

"Yes, sir," Scullard said, and then, "HE again." His sensitive fingers raised the cannon a hair. He fired the gun. This time, the sandbags that warded the Confederate machine gun went flying. One of the men from the crew started to run. Scullard cut him down with a burst from the coaxial machine gun. "That takes care of that."

Pound didn't answer. He was turning his head this way and that, trying to look through all the periscopes set into the cupola. Somewhere not far away, a U.S. barrel was burning. It wasn't one from his platoon, but that didn't matter. He watched a rocket with a tail of fire brew up another U.S. barrel.

That made him angry. "Goddammit, where *is* our infantry?" he said. "They're supposed to keep those bastards with the stovepipes too far off for them to shoot up our barrels that way."

Then he forgot about enemy soldiers with rocket launchers. The Confederates weren't saving all their armor inside Chattanooga—no, indeed. Butternut barrels rumbled forward. So did barrelbusters: self-propelled artillery pieces without turrets, so they had only a limited traverse, but with larger-caliber cannon than barrels carried. The United States were starting to use them, too. They could be dangerous,

both because of the punch they packed and because their low silhouette made them easy to hide and hard to spot.

They were well armored, too, but not well enough—as Pound rapidly proved—to hold out a 3½-inch AP round. The armored melee was as wild as anything Pound had ever seen…till U.S. fighter-bombers appeared overhead and tore into the Confederate machines with rockets of their own. The enemy had no answer to those flaming lances slicing down from the sky. Several barrels and barrelbusters went up in flames. Others pulled back toward better cover.

“Forward!” Pound called to his platoon. One of the barrels couldn’t go forward; it had a track shot off, and needed repairs. The other four, including his, pressed on. “They can’t stop us!” he exulted.

Maybe the Confederates couldn’t, but nightfall did. He wouldn’t have minded storming forward after dark, but he got explicit orders to hold in place. He tried to tell himself it might be just as well. If green-gray infantry did come forward in the night, the enemy wouldn’t be able to use their rocket launchers against U.S. armor come morning. And if the infantry didn’t come up, Pound wanted to know why not.

He didn’t mind the chance to get out of the barrel and stretch his legs—and to empty the bottle into which he and the rest of the turret crew had been pissing all day long. He whistled softly when he got a good look at the groove the enemy AP round scored in the hard steel of the turret before bouncing off.

“That was closer than I really like to think about,” he said to Scullard.

“Bet your ass—uh, yes, sir,” the gunner answered. He greedily sucked in cigarette smoke. Lighting up inside the turret wasn’t a good idea.

U.S. artillery came down on the Confederates not far ahead. Pound approved of that. Things seemed to be going…well enough, anyhow.

Jorge Rodriguez wasn’t just glad to be alive after everything he’d been through the past few days. He was amazed. The damnyankees were throwing everything they had into their drive on Chattanooga. His own side was throwing in everything it had to stop them. If anyone came out of the collision point still breathing, it meant one side or the other was falling down on the job.

If he saw the U.S. soldier who’d traded him ration cans for cigarettes,

he knew he would shoot the son of a bitch in a minute—unless the Yankee shot him first. This wasn't trading time, not any more.

He'd hoped the coming of night would slow the U.S. armored advance. It did, but U.S. artillery lashed the Confederates in their trenches and holes. Nobody talked about artillery much, but it was a worse killer than gunfire. It reached farther back from the line, and it could kill you even if you stayed in your hole. Staying down kept you out of the way of bullets. If a 105 shell came down where you were… If that happened, then you weren't, not any more.

During a lull a little before midnight, Gabe Medwick called, "Hey, Jorge! You still alive?"

"I think so." That was about the most Jorge could say. "How about you?"

"Last time I looked." His friend's laugh was shaky. "Way that last barrage came in, I wouldn't bet on anything."

"You guys want to shut the fuck up?" Yes, Sergeant Blackledge was still breathing, too. *He would be,* Jorge thought darkly. Blackledge went on, "You goddamn well better believe there's damnyankees close enough to hear you runnin' your mouths. Sniper with a scope on his rifle spots you moving around in your hole, you're a Deeply Regrets wire waiting to happen."

He wasn't wrong. Somehow, that made listening to him more annoying, not less. Voice sly, Gabe Medwick said, "What about you, Sarge? You just now talked more'n both of us put together."

"Yeah, but I ain't dumb enough to let those shitheads draw a bead on me, and you dingleberries are,"

Blackledge said. Jorge didn't know what a dingleberry was, but he didn't think it was anything good. He wouldn't have sassed the sergeant. He'd been brought up to respect authority, not to harass it. His father's hard hand made sure of that.

His father…He still didn't know what to make of his mother's letter. Why would his father kill himself?

He'd jumped at the chance to put on the uniform of the Confederate Veterans' Brigades. From his letters, he'd been proud to guard the camp in Texas. What could have made him change his mind?

Nothing but *mallates* in the camp, not from what his father had said. It wasn't as if they were real people or anything. So why would his old man have flabbled about them?

The artillery barrage picked up again. Crouching in his hole with clods of earth thudding down on him from near misses, wondering if the next one in wouldn't be a near miss, Jorge felt more comfortable than he did wondering what was going through his father's mind in the last few seconds of his life. He'd learned to master simple terror. Incomprehension was a different story.

In spite of the shelling, he snatched ten minutes of sleep here, twenty there, so that when the sun came up over Missionary Ridge he felt weary but not quite ready to keel over. If the Yankees felt weary, they didn't show it. Their barrels growled forward even before sunrise. Jorge looked in vain for Confederate armor to throw them back.

An antibarrel gun set one enemy machine afire. A mine blew a track off another. The stovepipe rockets some soldiers were getting stopped a couple of more. But most of the green-gray barrels kept coming, with foot soldiers loping along between them. If you didn't have a stovepipe, what could you do? You could fall back, or you could die.

Jorge fell back. He fired at enemy infantrymen. He had no idea if he hit anybody, but he made the damnyankees hit the dirt. Even slowing them down felt like a victory. Once, sprawled behind what was left of a stone fence, he saw Sergeant Blackledge on his belly not far away. Blackledge nodded to him.

They were both still fighting, even if they were retreating. Jorge looked around for Gabe and didn't see him. He hoped his buddy hadn't stopped something for his country.

On that battlefield, an upright man was a prodigy. An upright man in dress uniform seemed like a hallucination. But the officer who came forward wore a chromed parade helmet with a general's three stars in a wreath on the front in gold plate—or, for all Jorge knew, in solid gold. This spotless apparition also had a pearl-handled revolver in a holster on his left hip, and another one in his right hand.

However magnificent he looked, he sounded like Hugo Blackledge. "Come on, you stinking, cowardly scuts!" he roared. "Drive these Yankee bastards back! They're not getting into Chattanooga, and that's flat. It's ours, and we're damned well going to keep it. Come on! Do you want to live forever?"

Yes, Jorge thought. *Oh, yes.* But the general fired that revolver and ran forward.

“Get moving, you sorry bastards!” Sergeant Blackledge yelled. “Anything happens to General Patton, you fuckers’ll wish the Yankees blew your asses off! Move, God damn you!”

General Patton, fighting at the front line? General Patton, fighting like a private soldier? Like a crazy-brave private soldier? Jorge supposed it was possible. He’d heard weird things about Patton. A general who actually liked fighting for its own sake was a rare breed. Patton filled the bill.

Jorge did go forward to protect the crazy general. He believed Sergeant Blackledge. If anything happened to Patton, the unit that let it happen would catch hell. With the damnyankees throwing hell around in carload lots, that wouldn’t be hard to arrange.

“Incoming!” Gabriel Medwick shouted—he wasn’t hurt after all. Then he added, “Hit the dirt, General!”

Jorge hit the dirt. He knew what that rising, hateful scream in the air was, whether George Patton did or not. *My namesake,* he realized. Patton would be one dead namesake if he didn’t get down.

He didn’t. The shell burst not far away. Smoke and dirt fountained up. Splinters knifed out in all directions. None of them touched Patton. Certain madmen were supposed to be able to walk through the worst danger without getting scratched. As far as Jorge was concerned, Patton qualified. You had to be *loco* to stay on your feet when you heard artillery coming in.

But if you did it, and if by some accident you lived through it, you could pull a lot of soldiers with you.

Jorge and the men near him had started forward to try to keep General Patton from getting himself killed.

When they saw he didn’t, they kept going forward to share his luck—and they drove the startled U.S.

soldiers back before them. The men in green-gray hadn’t dreamt that the battered, pressured Confederates owned this kind of resilience. Jorge couldn’t blame them. He hadn’t dreamt any such thing himself.

And then the spell broke. Patton ran up to a soldier crouched behind a

rock. “Come on, son!” he roared.

“We’ve got Yankees to kill! Up and at ’em!”

The soldier didn’t move. Jorge was close enough to see he was gray and shaking. *Shellshock,* he thought, not without sympathy. Sometimes too many horrible things could happen to a man all at once, or a bunch of smaller things could accumulate over time. Then he’d be worthless for a while, or only good for light duty. If you let him take it easy, he usually snapped out of it after a while. If you tried to make him perform while he was at low ebb, chances were you wouldn’t have much luck.

Patton didn’t. His face darkened with anger. “Get up and fight, you shirking son of a bitch!” he bellowed.

“I’m sorry, sir,” the private said. “I’m doing the best I can, but—”

“No buts,” Patton growled. “I’ll boot your butt, that’s what!” And he did, with a jackboot almost as shiny as his helmet. “Now *fight*!”

Tears ran down the young soldier’s cheeks. His teeth chattered. “I’m sorry I’m not at my—”

He got no further. Patton slapped him in the face, forehand and then backhand. When that still didn’t get the kid moving, the general raised his fancy six-shooter.

“Hold it right there, General!” The shout came from Sergeant Blackledge. But his wasn’t the only automatic weapon pointed somewhere near Patton’s midriff. “Sir, you don’t shoot a man with combat fatigue. You do, you’ll have yourself a little accident.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” Patton said.

“Sir, you pull that trigger, it’d be a pleasure,” Blackledge replied. Jorge listened in astonished admiration.

He’d known Blackledge wasn’t afraid of the enemy. Knowing he wasn’t afraid of his own brass, either…That took a rarer brand of courage.

Jorge waited for Patton to demand the sergeant’s name. He didn’t know whether the general would want to know to arrest Blackledge or to promote him on the spot. But Patton did neither. “All right, then. If you want to stick with a lousy, stinking coward, you can,” he ground

out. “But you’ll see what it gets you.” As if there weren’t U.S. soldiers no more than a hundred yards away, he turned on his heel and stalked off. His gait put Jorge in mind of an affronted cat.

Blackledge called, “Freedom!” after the departing general. Patton’s back stiffened. He kept walking.

“Th-Th-Thank you,” the guy with combat fatigue got out.

“Don’t worry about it, buddy,” Sergeant Blackledge said. “That fancy-pants asshole comes up here for half an hour, so he reckons he’s hot shit. Let him stay in the line for weeks at a stretch like us and see how he likes it. Being brave is one thing. Staying brave when all kinds of shit comes down on you day after day, that’s a fuck of a lot tougher.”

“I—I’ll try and go forward,” the shellshocked soldier said.

Blackledge only laughed. “Don’t worry about it,” he repeated. “We ain’t doin’ any more advancing, not for a while.” He raised his voice: “Everybody dig in! Damnyankees are gonna hear we’re getting frisky in this sector, so they’ll hit us with everything but the kitchen sink.”

“You forget something, Sergeant,” Jorge said.

“Yeah? What’s that?” The sergeant bristled at the idea he could have overlooked anything.

“Any second now, our own side, they gonna start shelling us, too,” Jorge answered.

Sergeant Blackledge stared at him, then grudged a chuckle. “That’d be a good joke if only it was a joke, you know what I mean? Fucking Patton’s probably ciphering out how to get us all killed right this minute.”

“Shoulda scragged him when we had the chance,” Gabe Medwick said. Dirt flew from his entrenching tool as he scraped out a foxhole. Jorge was also doing his best to imitate a mole.

“Nah.” Reluctantly, Blackledge shook his head. “Somebody woulda blabbed, and we’d all be in deep shit then. *Deeper* shit, if there is shit deeper’n this. Besides, who says the next jerk with stars and a wreath’d be any better? Oh, chances are he wouldn’t grandstand so much, but he’d still do his best to get us killed. Generals get their reputations for getting guys like us killed. Some’re smart assholes and some’re dumb assholes, but they’re all assholes, pretty much.”

“Good thing the enemy, he’s got assholes for generals, too,” Jorge said.

Before Blackledge could answer, U.S. artillery started coming in. The sergeant called that one right on the button. Jorge hoped the Yankees didn’t have barrels to follow up the bombardment. If they did, he knew damn well the outfit would have to retreat. He didn’t think they could hold the line they’d been in before Patton brought them forward, either. If they’d had armor of their own, maybe, but one general in a chromed helmet didn’t make up for what was missing.

Barrels painted green-gray *did* come clanking south. Jorge retreated, machine-gun bullets nipping at his heels. His other choice was dying. Patton would have approved of that for him. For himself, he didn’t like it for beans.

I rving Morrell’s barrel rattled forward. The Confederates had done everything they could to fortify the ground in front of Chattanooga. He was doing his best to show them that everything they could do wasn’t nearly enough.

“Time to make some more of those poor sorry bastards die for their country, Frenchy,” he told the gunner.

Sergeant Bergeron nodded. “Long as I don’t have to die for mine, sir, that sounds real good to me.”

“You’ve got the right attitude.” Morrell knew there were times when a soldier didn’t have much choice about dying for his country. Sometimes you had to lay down your life to keep lots of your buddies from losing theirs. Frenchy Bergeron knew that, too; Morrell had seen him in enough action to be sure of it.

Only a man who did know about it could joke about it. But you could also get killed from stupidity or plain bad luck. You not only could, it was much too easy. That was the kind of thing Frenchy was talking about.

The Confederates weren’t crumbling, the way Morrell had hoped they would. They were fighting hard even as they fell back. They knew where he was headed, and they had a pretty good notion of how he would try to get there. That made for slow, expensive combat, not what Morrell wanted at all.

John Abell warned me slicing them up might take two campaigning

seasons, Morrell remembered.

He hadn't wanted to believe it. He still didn't. But there was a pretty fair chance the General Staff officer knew what he was talking about.

"Sir, an infantry counterattack just pushed us back a few hundred yards in Sector Blue-7," someone said in his earphones.

"Blue-7. Roger that," Morrell said. "I'll pass the word on to the people who can do something about it."

Thanks to the fancy wireless gear that crowded the turret of his barrel, he could. The artillerymen at the other end of the connection promised him 105mm fire and brimstone would start dropping on that map sector in a couple of minutes. The Confederates wouldn't enjoy the little gains they'd made. Satisfied, Morrell went back to commanding his barrel.

It was plowing through what had been the last major land defenses in front of the Tennessee River.

Crossing the river and getting into Chattanooga itself would be another adventure, but just getting to it would give the war effort a kick in the pants. From the north side of the river line, the 105s now punishing Sector Blue-7 would be able to knock Chattanooga flat and leave it useless to the Confederate States.

A lot of U.S. generals would have been delighted to do that much. Morrell was a different kind of officer, and always had been. Doing what most people expected and no more didn't interest him. He didn't want to wound the Confederates here. He wanted to ruin them. Chattanooga wasn't a goal in itself, not to him.

It was a gateway. With it in his hands, with communications over the Tennessee secured, he could plunge his armored sword into the Confederacy's heart.

Unfortunately, somebody on the Confederate General Staff, or maybe Jake Featherston himself, had seen that as plainly as Morrell had. The depth of these trench lines; the barbed wire; the minefields—now marked by signs painted with skull and crossbones—and the concrete pillboxes, some of them sporting antibarrel cannon, told the story very clearly. So did the stench of death. The fancy filters that were supposed to keep the barrel's interior free of poison gas if it was buttoned up tight were powerless against the stink.

The barrel clattered past a dead pillbox. Scorch marks around the slit that let a machine gun traverse in there told what had happened. Morrell was a brave soldier, an aggressive soldier. Not for all the money in the world would he have strapped the fuel and gas cartridges for a flamethrower on his back. The men who did were either a little bit nuts—sometimes more than a little bit—or didn't know the odds against them.

Along with disposing of unexploded bombs, lugging a flamethrower was one of the military specialties where the average soldier lasted a matter of weeks, not months. Using men who didn't know as much seemed unfair. That didn't stop the Army. Maybe ignorance was bliss—for a little while.

A U.S. helmet sat on top of a rifle stock. The rifle's bayonet had been plunged into the ground above a hastily dug grave. Did the flamethrower man lie there? Morrell wouldn't have been surprised. He saw two other pillboxes that covered the burned-out one. Of course the Confederates would have interlocking fields of fire; they weren't amateurs. An armor-piercing round had put paid to one of those pillboxes. He couldn't make out what happened to the other one, but a U.S. soldier leaned against it eating from a ration can, so it was under new management.

A salvo of rockets screamed in from the south. The soldier dove into a hole. Morrell hoped that would keep him safe. Sometimes blast from the screaming meemies killed even if shrapnel didn't. As the explosives in the rockets' noses burst, Morrell's barrel shook like a ship on a stormy sea. He hoped he would stay safe himself. Those damn things could flip a fifty-ton barrel like a kid's toy.

"Fun," Frenchy Bergeron said when the salvo ended.

Morrell looked at him. "*How* many times did your mother drop you on your head when you were little?"

The gunner grinned. "Oh, enough, I expect…sir."

"I guess so," Morrell said with feeling, and the gunner laughed out loud.

Were Morrell in Patton's shoes, he would have pulled back over the Tennessee and made the U.S.

commander figure out how to get at him on the south bank. Patton

seemed to want to fight it out as far forward as he could. Some of the things Morrell was hearing from Intelligence suggested Patton had to worry about political pressure from Richmond: or, in plain English, Jake Featherston was screaming his head off.

Fighting the enemy was hard enough. Fighting the enemy and your own leaders had to be ten times worse. Morrell had had his arguments and squabbles with the War Department himself. The suspicion with which he and John Abell had watched each other ever since the middle of the last war proved that—as if it needed proving. But when a president ran the war himself, something was bound to get screwed up somewhere.

Being sure of that made Morrell keep his eyes open in a special way. If Patton goofed, or even if he didn't but a U.S. attack threw his men north of the river into disarray, Morrell's troops might be able to get over the Tennessee before the Confederates knew they'd done it. And if they could, Chattanooga would fall.

How angry would that make Jake Featherston? Angry enough to sack General Patton? Morrell hoped so. Patton made no bones about having learned armored warfare from him. Morrell could have done without the compliment, because the Confederate officer made much too good a pupil. The drive into Ohio was a small masterpiece. The one into Pennsylvania almost worked, too. And the counterattack through the mountains in eastern Kentucky and Tennessee was well conceived; Patton just didn't have the men and matériel to bring it off.

Through a cupola periscope, Morrell watched a U.S. barrel commander leading a platoon of new-model barrels toward the hottest fighting. The sergeant or lieutenant or whatever he was stood head and shoulders out of his cupola. Morrell knew a stab of jealousy. He wanted to fight the same way. Only a cold calculation of his own value to the advance kept him buttoned up in here. That fellow out ahead of him had the freedom insignificance could bring.

"Son of a bitch," Morrell muttered.

"What's cookin', sir?" Sergeant Bergeron asked.

"Nothing," Morrell said. It wasn't quite a lie—it was nothing that would matter to Frenchy. But damned if the broad shoulders on that barrel commander didn't remind Morrell of Michael Pound. He knew they'd finally dragged his old gunner up into officer country, kicking and screaming all the way. Pound was on this front, too. So why

wouldn't he be in charge of a platoon of barrels? No reason. No reason at all.

That barrel stopped and fired. Something too far away for Morrell to make it out very well burst into flames. Morrell slowly nodded. He wouldn't want to be Michael Pound's gunner, not for anything.

Pound knew the business too well. Chances were he made an impossibly demanding commander. But the gunner in that machine had scored a hit. Pound couldn't complain there.

"Steer left a little," Morrell called to his driver. "Follow that platoon up ahead of us. They look like they're going places."

"Yes, sir," the driver said, and he did.

Sweat rivered off Morrell. He wished he were on the cool north German plain, pushing the British back through Holland. You could stand staying buttoned up in a barrel in weather like that. Doing it in late summer in southern Tennessee was a recipe for hell on earth, or possibly a New England boiled dinner.

Barrelmen poured down water by the gallon and gulped salt tablets like popcorn. It helped…some.

Michael Pound's barrel—if that was Pound in the cupola—fired again. Something else blew up. Morrell mentally apologized to that gunner. He was good enough to meet anybody's standards.

A shell clanged off another barrel in the platoon. The round didn't penetrate; the sparks that flashed as it ricocheted away made a pretty fair lightning bolt. The barrel kept moving forward. That hit would have wrecked one of the early models, and probably would have killed a second-generation machine, too. But these babies didn't just dish it out. They could take it, too.

"I'll be goddamned," Morrell said: one of the more reverent curses he'd ever used. "There's the river."

"The Tennessee, sir?" Bergeron said.

"Damn straight. Maybe half a mile ahead," Morrell answered.

"Let's go grab the bank." Yes, Frenchy's promotion was way overdue—he had plenty of aggressive spirit.

And Morrell nodded. “Yeah. Let’s. Then we see what happens next.”

Getting there wasn’t easy. An antibarrel round disabled one of the machines from the platoon ahead. The barrel lost a track; the crew, safer than they would have been if they bailed out, stayed inside and fired back. Machine-gun rounds clattered off Morrell’s barrel. He had an advantage over junior officers: he could call in air strikes and artillery and get what he wanted when he wanted it. He could also summon reinforcements. He did all those things, and resistance faded.

“Careful, sir,” Frenchy Bergeron said when he opened the hatch and stood up in the cupola. He *was* being careful—or he thought he was, anyhow.

The loop of the Tennessee River protecting Chattanooga was summer-narrow, but still too broad and swift to be easy to cross. Beyond lay the city. Smoke from the pounding it had taken partly veiled Lookout Mountain to the south. Morrell wasn’t sorry to see that, not in the least. The Confederates would have observation posts and gun emplacements up there. If they had trouble seeing his men, they would also have trouble hitting them.

He cupped his hands and shouted to the platoon commander whose barrel idled not far away: “That *is* you, Michael! You did a good job getting here.”

“Thanks, sir. I was hoping to see you again.” Pound patted the top of his turret. “We’ve finally got what you could have given us twenty years ago. They should have listened then.”

“Ifs and buts,” Morrell said with a shrug. He wasn’t done being angry, but he was done thinking being angry made any difference.

Pound pointed south, toward Chattanooga. “How do we get over the river?” Even more than Frenchy, he had a grasp of the essential.

Morrell shrugged again. “I don’t know yet, but I expect we’ll think of something.”

“**G** eorgia,” Jerry Dover muttered “I’m back in fucking Georgia.”

He wasn’t very far inside of Georgia, but he was south of the Tennessee line. There was no place in southeastern Tennessee Yankee artillery couldn’t reach. Bombers were bad enough. But you couldn’t keep a major supply depot in range of the enemy’s guns. They would

ruin you.

As Dover had farther north, he built another dump, a dummy, not far from the genuine article. Experience made him sneakier. Instead of leaving this one out in the open, he camouflaged it…not too well. Instead of leaving it empty, he stored things he could afford to lose there: umbrellas, condoms, a good many cigarettes, cornmeal. He put more noncoms at the dummy depot, too, though he made sure they had the best bomb shelters they could. The more realistic the dummy seemed, the better its chance of fooling spies and reconnaissance aircraft.

It got bombed, but not too heavily. The real depot also got bombed—again, not too heavily. The damnyankees dropped explosives on anything that looked as if it might be dangerous, even a little bit.

Dover wished his own side could use bombs—and bombers—with such reckless abandon.

One reason the depots didn't get hit harder was that the United States seemed to have decided the most dangerous things in northwestern Georgia were the highway and railroads up from Atlanta. In their place, Jerry Dover probably would have decided the same thing. If reinforcements and ammunition and rations couldn't get close to Chattanooga, supply dumps didn't matter.

Dover felt sorry for whoever was in charge of keeping the railroad line supplied with rails and crossties and switches and whatever the hell else a railroad line needed. That included everything you needed to fix bridges and reopen tunnels, too. He laughed to himself, imagining that harried officer requisitioning a new tunnel from somewhere, waiting till he got it, and then driving it through a mountain.

When he told the joke to Pete, the quartermaster sergeant laughed fit to bust a gut. Then he said, "You know, sir, nobody who ain't in the business would reckon that was funny."

"Yeah, that crossed my mind, too," Dover answered. "But what the hell? There are doctor jokes and lawyer jokes. Why not supply jokes?"

"Beats me," Pete said. "Just having anything to laugh about feels pretty goddamn good right now, you know?"

"Tell me about it," Dover said.

The more antibarrel cartridges and rockets he sent to the front, the

more trouble he figured Confederate forces were in. Gunboats had almost stopped going up the Tennessee to shell U.S. positions.

Fighter-bombers descended on them like hawks on chickens when they tried. The gunboats couldn't steam far enough south by daybreak to get out of danger. Several lay on the bottom of the river. The day of the river warship had come and gone.

A field-post truck brought the mail to Dover's depot. That kicked most people's morale higher than any jokes could. Men who heard from home glowed like lightbulbs. The handful who didn't seemed all the gloomier by contrast.

Jerry Dover had two letters from his wife. He also had one from Savannah. He put that one aside. His family came first. He read the letters from home in order of postmark. Everything back in Augusta was fine. His son and daughter were flourishing. He wasn't sorry that Jethro, at thirteen, was too young to worry about conscription. No, he wasn't one bit sorry, not the way things were going.

But he read Sally's letters with only half his attention. His eye kept going back to the envelope from Savannah. At last, having gone through the news from home three times, he picked up the other envelope. It looked no different from the ones from Augusta, not on the outside: same cheap, coarse paper on the envelope, same four-cent stamp with a barrel and the word FREEDOM printed across it.

No matter how it looked, he picked it up as warily as an Army engineer dug up a land mine.

Yes, it was from Melanie. He'd known that as soon as he saw the handwriting, let alone the postmark. It wasn't so much that he'd once had a lady friend his wife didn't known about. If that were all…If that were all, he wouldn't have opened the envelope with so much trepidation.

It wasn't even that she wanted money every now and then. She never asked for more than he could afford—and she seemed to know just how much that was. He'd sent Xerxes down to Savannah with cash one time when he couldn't get away himself.

Sometimes, though, Melanie didn't want money. When he was managing the Huntsman's Lodge, she'd sometimes been interested in knowing who came to eat there and what they had to say. She'd made it much too plain that she would talk to Sally if he didn't tell her. So

he did. Why not? If she was blackmailing other people besides him, he wouldn't lose much sleep over it.

But what could she want now that he was back in uniform? If it was only money, he'd pay off. If it was anything besides money…In that case, he had a problem. If she wasn't just a homegrown blackmailer, if she was looking for things another government—say, the USA's (yes, say it—say it loud)—might find interesting, then having Sally find out about her was the least of his worries.

She knew where to find him. He hadn't told her. He didn't know anyone who would have told her. She knew, though. He didn't think that was a good omen.

The faintest whiff of perfume came from the stationery she used. Unlike the envelope, the paper was of excellent quality. It had to date back to before the war. He unfolded the letter and apprehensively began to read.

Her script was fine and feminine. *Dearest Jerry,* she wrote, *I hope this finds you well and safe. I know you are doing all you can to keep our beloved country strong. Freedom!*

He muttered under his breath. Did she mean that, or was it window dressing to lull any censors? He didn't think the envelope was opened before he saw it, but he could have been wrong. Only one way to find out: he kept reading.

Things here haven't changed much since the last time I wrote, she went on. *Prices have gone up some, though, and the stores don't have as much as I wish they did. If you could send me a hundred dollars, it would help a lot.*

He breathed a sigh of relief. He had a hundred dollars in his wallet. He'd had good luck and a good partner at the bridge table two nights before. If that was all…

But it wasn't. He might have known it wouldn't be. Hell, he had known. *You ought to tell me about your friends,* she wrote. *I never hear about how things really are at the front. Where are you exactly?* Dover snorted. As if she didn't know! *What are you doing? How are you going to lick the damnyankees?*

Jerry Dover didn't snort this time. He sighed. He feared he knew what she was asking for. He'd wondered if she would. He hadn't wanted to believe it, but here it was.

And he was liable to end up in trouble on account of it. He'd end up in worse trouble if he told her the things she wanted to know, though. He sent a soldier after his second-in-command here, a bright, eager captain named Rodney Chesbro. "Don't let them steal this place while I'm gone," he said. "I've got to talk to the Intelligence people."

"Find out how we're going to kick the damnyankees in the slats?" Chesbro asked—yes, he *was* eager.

"If they tell you, will you tell me, too?"

"If they say I can," Dover answered, which was less of a promise than it sounded like.

He drove a beat-up Birmingham north toward Chattanooga. The road was in bad shape. He was glad no U.S. fighter-bombers showed up to strafe him or drop explosives on his head. It was only a few miles to Division HQ, but getting there took twice as long as he'd thought it would.

As always, the tent where the G-2 men worked was inconspicuous. Intelligence didn't advertise what it was up to. If you didn't need to talk to those people, they didn't want you around. Dover wished he didn't. But he did. A few words to a scholarly-looking noncom got him sent over to a Major Claude Nevers. "What can I do for you, Colonel?" Nevers asked.

"I have a problem, Major," Dover answered. "I've got a lady friend who's been quietly squeezing me for money for quite a while. I wouldn't waste your time if that were all, but now she's trying to get information out of me, too." He showed the Intelligence officer the letter.

Nevers read it and nodded. "I think you're right. She's smooth, but that's the way it looks to me." He eyed Dover. "You realize we're going to have to look at you, too?"

"Yeah," Dover said without enthusiasm. "But you'd look a lot harder, and you'd have some nastier tools, if I kept mum and you found out about this anyway. So do whatever you need to do, and I'll worry about that later."

"All right, Colonel." Nevers didn't call him *sir*. "Most of the time, I'd remove you from active duty, too.

But we're strapped for men now, and I've heard more than a few people who ought to know talk about what a good job you're doing. So give me the particulars about this, ah, Melanie."

"Melanie Leigh." Dover spelled the last name. "Brunette. Blue eyes. Maybe thirty-five, maybe forty.

About five feet four. Nice figure. You've got the address there. I've been sending her cash now and then for years so my wife wouldn't hear about her. She can't live on what I give her, though. I have no idea if she has other guys on the string, or how many. I don't know how she'd get word out, either—but she likely has a way."

"Uh-huh," Nevers said. "Send her this hundred she wants. Write her a chatty letter about the kind of stuff you do. Tell her funny stories, nothing she can really use. With luck, we'll drop on her before she can write back saying that isn't what she wants."

"Tunnel requisitions," Dover murmured. Major Nevers looked blank. "I understand what you're talking about, Major," Dover told him. "I'll do it. Maybe I'm seeing shadows where nothing's casting them, but…."

"Yes. But," Nevers said. "Go tend to it, Colonel. We'll be in touch."

"Right," Dover said unhappily.

When he got back to the dump, he had to explain to Captain Chesbro that he didn't know how the Confederate States were going to drive the Yankees back to the Ohio by Wednesday next. Writing a cheery, chatty letter to a woman he feared was a spy wasn't easy, but he managed. He let Major Nevers vet it before he sent it out; he didn't want the G-2 man thinking he was warning Melanie. He left it and the money and an envelope with the major to mail. Then he tried to worry about logistics.

He got a call from the major that night—in the middle of the night, in fact. A noncom woke him to go to the telephone. Without preamble, the Intelligence officer said, "She flew the coop, dammit."

Dover said the first thing that came into his mind: "I didn't have anything to do with it."

"I know that," the Intelligence officer answered. "We've had you under surveillance since you came to me earlier today."

We? You and your pals? You and your tapeworm? You and God? Dover was silly with sleepiness.

“How did she know to disappear, then?” he asked.

“Good question,” Major Nevers said. “I hope we find out—that’s all I’ve got to tell you. You’ve exposed a security leak, that’s for damn sure. I suppose I ought to thank you.” He didn’t sound grateful.

Dover, yawning, didn’t suppose he could blame him.

Every time Major General Abner Dowling saw a pickup truck these days, he winced. The Confederates’ improvised gun platforms had caused him a hell of a lot of grief. Their flanking attacks had stalled his drive on Camp Determination and Snyder. They hadn’t made him fall back on Lubbock, let alone driven him over the border into New Mexico, the way the enemy probably hoped. But his men weren’t going forward any more, either.

And so he grimaced when a pickup truck approached Eleventh Army headquarters out there in the middle of nowhere, even though the truck was painted U.S. green-gray and he could see it had no machine gun mounted in the bed. No matter what color it was painted, guards made sure it wasn’t carrying a bomb before they let it come up to the tent outside of which Dowling stood.

He started to laugh when the truck door opened and a brisk woman not far from his own age got out.

“What’s so damn funny, Buster?” Ophelia Clemens demanded, cigarette smoke streaming from her mouth as she spoke.

“The guards were looking for explosives, but they let you through anyhow,” Dowling answered. “You cause more trouble than any auto bomb or people bomb ever made.”

She batted her eyes at him, which set him laughing all over again. “You say the sweetest things, darling,”

she told him. “Do you still keep a pint hidden in your desk?”

“It was only a half pint,” he said, “and now I’ll have to put a lock on that drawer.” That made her laugh.

“Come on in,” he continued. “I’ll see what I can find. It’s good to see

you, by God."

"People I talk to aren't supposed to tell me things like that," the reporter said severely. "They're supposed to say, 'Jesus Christ! Here's that Clemens bitch again!'" She was kidding, and then again she wasn't.

"I never do things I'm supposed to. Would I be here if I did?" Dowling held the tent flap wide. "Won't you walk into my parlor, said the fly to the spider?"

"That's more like it." Ophelia Clemens ducked inside. Dowling followed her. He did produce some whiskey, and even a couple of glasses. As he'd seen her do before, Miss Clemens—she'd never married—knocked hers back like a man. "And *that's* more like it, too," she said. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," Dowling said. "I don't suppose you came way the hell out here just to drink my booze, so suppose you tell me why you did."

"I want to do a piece on Camp Determination," she answered. "I want to show people in the USA what that murderous son of a bitch in Richmond is doing to his Negroes."

"That would be good," Dowling said carefully, "but a lot of what we know is classified. I don't know how much I'm authorized to show the press. Some of what we have shows how we got it, which isn't so good."

"This will have to pass the censors before it goes out," she said. "As for authorization…" She fumbled in her purse, which held only a little less than a private's pack. "Here." She thrust a folded piece of paper at him.

He unfolded it. It was a letter from Assistant Secretary of War Franklin D. Roosevelt, allowing and indeed requiring him to tell Miss Clemens what he knew "since this information, when widely publicized, will prove valuable to the war effort." He set it down. "Well, you've persuaded me," he said. "I'm putty in your hands."

"Promises, promises," Ophelia Clemens said. They both grinned. The game of seduction played for farce, with neither of them intending to conquer, was almost as fun in its own way as it would have been for real. "What have you got?"

Dowling produced aerial photos. “Here’s the camp. The side north of the train tracks—that’s *this* way—holds women and children. The other side, which is older, is for men.”

“Uh- *huh.* ” Like him, the reporter wore bifocals. “How big is this thing?”

“You see these little tiny rectangles here by the men’s side?” Dowling waited for her to nod, then went on, “Those are trucks. They’re about the size of our deuce-and-a-halfs.”

Ophelia Clemens blinked. “The place is *that* big?” Now Dowling nodded. She whistled. “It’s not a camp. It’s a goddamn city!”

“No, ma’am,” Dowling said. “There’s one big difference. A city has a permanent population. People go into Camp Determination, they go through it, but they don’t come out again—not alive, anyway.”

“And your evidence for that is…?”

He passed her more photos. “This is—was—a stretch of Texas prairie not far from the camp. Barbed wire keeps people out, not that anybody who doesn’t have to is likely to want to go out to the back of beyond. The bulldozers give you some idea of scale here. They also dig trenches. You can see that most of those are covered over. The couple that aren’t…Those are bodies inside.” He gave her another picture. “A low-level run by a fighter-bomber got us this one. You can really make out the corpses here.”

“Jesus!” She studied it. “How many bodies are in here? Have you got any idea?”

“Only a rough one,” Dowling answered. “Hundreds of thousands of people, that’s for sure. The experts who are supposed to be good at figuring this stuff out say it’s unlikely there are more than a million… so far, anyway.”

“Jesus!” Ophelia Clemens said again, more violently than before. “Give me that bottle again, will you? I need another drink. Hundreds of thousands, maybe a million—what did they do to deserve it?”

“They were born colored,” Dowling said. “To the Freedom Party, that’s a capital offense.”

“If that’s a joke, it’s not funny,” she said as he passed her the bottle. Her throat worked when she drank.

“I wasn’t kidding,” he told her. “The other thing you have to remember is, this isn’t the only camp the Confederates have. We think it’s the biggest, but we’ve also been able to disrupt operations here better than anywhere else. The ones farther east, in Louisiana and Mississippi, they go right on working all the time, because we can’t reach them.”

Ophelia Clemens looked from one photograph to another with the kind of horrified fascination a bad traffic accident might cause. But motorcars hadn’t banged together here—whole races had. And one was running over the other. “If they keep this up, there won’t be many Negroes left in the CSA by the time they’re done.”

“No, ma’am. That’s not quite right.” Dowling shook his head. Ophelia Clemens made a wordless questioning noise. He explained: “They don’t aim to leave *any* colored people alive. Not one. That’s what they’re aiming for. They don’t even bother hiding it. Hell, some of the Freedom Party Guards we’ve captured brag about what they’re doing. Far as they’re concerned, it’s God’s work.”

“God’s work.” She spat out the words as if they tasted bad. “If I believed in God, General, these photos would turn me into an atheist. These photos would turn the Pope into an atheist.”

“I doubt it,” Dowling said. “The Vatican kept quiet when the Turks slaughtered Armenians. It hasn’t said boo about the Russian pogroms against the Jews. So why should Pope Pius give a damn about what happens to a bunch of coons who mostly aren’t Catholic on the other side of the ocean?”

“Who mostly aren’t Catholic,” Ophelia Clemens repeated. “Yes, that’s about the size of it, I’m afraid.

He’d bellow like a bull if they were. But since he doesn’t care, what are *you* doing about it?”

“I’m trying to take Camp Determination, that’s what,” Dowling answered. “It’s not easy, but I’m trying.”

“Why isn’t it easy? This ought to be one of the most important things we’re doing,” she said. “Hundreds of thousands of bodies…Attila the Hun didn’t kill that many people, I bet.”

“There weren’t so many people to kill back then,” Dowling said. “And why isn’t it easy? Because this is a secondary front, that’s why. I’m

short of men, I'm short of barrels, and I'm short of artillery. I used to be short of airplanes, too, but I'm not any more. Of course, the Confederates are even shorter on everything than I am. That's why I've managed to come as far as I have."

"It's criminal that you're short." Ophelia Clemens' pencil raced across the notebook page. "That smells as bad as all those bodies put together, and I'm going to let the world hear about it."

"No!" Dowling exclaimed. She stared at him in surprise, anger, and something not far from hatred. "No,"

he repeated. "Don't raise a fuss about it. Please. Don't."

His earnestness must have got through to her. Her voice was hard and flat when she said, "You're going to have to explain that," but she didn't sound as if she would poison a rattlesnake when she bit it.

Glad she didn't, Dowling said, "I will. I used to think different, but it's simple, when you get down to it.

The best way to put Camp Determination out of business is to lick the CSA. That's what General Morrell is doing over in Tennessee, and more power to him. More power to him, literally. If I had two or three times the men and matériel I do, I'd be taking them away from him, and I don't want to do that. I can annoy the Confederates. I can embarrass them. He can win the war. Do you see the difference?"

She didn't answer for a long time. At last, she said, "I never thought I'd want to punch a man in the nose for being right."

"It happens," Dowling said. "Look at George Custer, for instance."

"A point," she admitted. "I can't tell you how many times I wanted to punch him, but he won the Great War, didn't he?"

"Oh, not all by himself, but more than anybody else, I think," Dowling answered. "He saw what barrels could do, and he made sure they did it no matter what the War Department said. General Morrell was in on that, too, remember, though he wasn't a general then, of course."

She pointed at him. "So were you."

"Maybe a little." Dowling's main role had been to lie through his teeth to the big wigs in Philadelphia. Had Custer's brutal simplicity failed—

as it was known to do—Dowling would have lied away his own career along with his superior's. But for once Custer was right, and success, as usual, excused everything else.

"Modest at your age?" Ophelia Clemens jeered. "How quaint. How positively Victorian."

"You say the sweetest things," Dowling told her. "Just don't say I want more men, because honest to God I don't. I'm keeping the Confederates busy. They can't send reinforcements east from this front.

They've had to reinforce it, in fact, to keep me away from Camp Determination. And every man they send out here to the far end of Texas is a man they don't have in Tennessee."

"'They also serve who only stand and wait,'" she quoted.

"Is that Shakespeare?" To Dowling, anything that sounded old had to be Shakespeare.

But she shook her head. "Milton, I think."

"If you say so. It's true here, though. Except I'm not standing. I'm staying busy with what I've got. I think I can go another forty miles."

"If you go thirty, you can shell the camp," she said.

"We haven't bombed it because we don't want to go into the Negro-killing business ourselves," Dowling said. "Same problem with shelling. The people in the camp would be on our side if they got guns. They *are* on our side. They just can't do anything about it."

"Any way to change that?" Ophelia Clemens asked.

"I don't see one," Dowling said regretfully. "I wish I did."

XVI

A rtillery was coming down not far from the supply dump where soldiers unloaded Cincinnatus Driver's truck. The Army had put everything as close to the front as it could. With U.S. soldiers on the north bank of the Tennessee River, with the big brass trying to work out how to get across, nobody wanted to run short of anything.

"You need me to, I take this shit right up to the fellas doin' the

fighting," Cincinnatus called to the quartermaster sergeant checking things off on a clipboard.

"That's awright, buddy," the noncom said in a big-city accent. "We'll move it forward—that ain't no skin off your nose. What you gotta do is, you gotta go back, get some more shit, and bring it down to us here."

"I'll do that, then," Cincinnatus said. This fellow didn't mock him. He argued from efficiency, which was reasonable enough.

As soon as the big trucks were empty, the convoy did start north to fill up again. Armored cars and half-tracks escorted it. By now, U.S. forces had a pretty good grip on the roads leading down to Chattanooga. But pretty good wasn't perfect. Holdouts or civilians fired at the convoy. They knocked out two windows and gave a truck a flat. Cincinnatus didn't think they hit anybody, though, which made the northbound journey a success.

When the convoy got to the supply dump, soldiers in green-gray surrounded it. *Something's up,* Cincinnatus thought, and wondered what. A full colonel came forward to lead the trucks to tents that hadn't been pitched when they set out a few hours earlier. The troops the colonel commanded spread out; they set up cloth barriers to make sure no one outside the depot could watch what was going on inside.

"What the hell?" Hal Williamson shouted from the cab of his deuce-and-a-half. Cincinnatus was glad to find he wasn't the only driver wondering if somebody'd slipped a cog—or more than one.

"This is a special transport mission," the colonel shouted. "You are not to talk to anybody about what you're going to see. Do you understand that? Anyone who doesn't care to go along can withdraw now without prejudice."

Nobody withdrew. After that buildup, Cincinnatus was too curious to back out. He and the other truckers hauled vital munitions all the time. What could be more special than the stuff soldiers needed to blow Featherston's fuckers to hell and gone?

"All right!" the colonel said. "The other thing I need to warn you about is, don't panic and don't reach for your weapons when you see what's going on. These men are on our side, the side of the United States of America."

If he hadn't said so, Cincinnatus wouldn't have believed it. As things were, Cincinnatus had trouble believing it anyway. The soldiers who came out of the tents wore Confederate uniforms. They had on Confederate helmets. They all carried submachine guns or automatic Tredegars.

"The fuck?" Cincinnatus was far from the only driver to say that or something very much like it.

"They're on our side," the colonel repeated. "This is the 133rd Special Reconnaissance Company.

They're all U.S. citizens who grew up in the CSA or lived there for years. They look like Confederates, they act like Confederates, they talk like Confederates—and they're going to screw the Confederate States to the wall. The enemy did this to us in Pennsylvania last year. Turnabout, by God, is fair play."

Cincinnatus stared at the pseudo-Confederates. "Do Jesus," he said softly. Little by little, a wide, predatory grin spread across his face. If these fellows sounded as good as they looked, they could cause the Confederates a world of grief.

Were they going to cross the Tennessee? If anyone could do it on the sly, this was the outfit. If they got caught, they'd get killed—probably an inch at a time. You had to have balls to try something like this.

Even so, Cincinnatus' hackles rose when some of them got into the back of his truck. Those uniforms, those weapons, that accent…They all screamed *Murderers!* to him.

"Don't worry, pal," one of them said through the little window between the rear and the cab. "We don't bite, honest." He sounded like an Alabaman, which didn't help.

After the 133rd Special Reconnaissance Company boarded the trucks, the guards at the depot took down the screens. No one from outside could hope to see into the deuce-and-a-halfs. But then everybody just sat there. The trucks didn't roll south. Cincinnatus wanted to *go.* He wanted to get these men out of his truck. They looked so much like the enemy, they gave him the cold horrors, and he couldn't do anything about it.

He must have been wiggling on his seat, because that counterfeit Confederate spoke up again: "Don't flabble, man. It's better if we get

there after dark. If those fuckers don't see us coming, we can surprise

'em better."

"I guess," Cincinnatus said. "Makes sense." And it did. No matter how sensible it was, nothing could make him like it.

Sundown seemed to take forever. He knew it didn't, but it sure seemed to. At last, as twilight deepened, the lead truck rumbled to life. Cincinnatus thumbed the starter button with vast relief. The engine caught at once. He wouldn't have been heartbroken had it died. The false Confederates could have found another truck, and he would have stayed here. No such luck.

He turned on his headlights. He might as well not have bothered. The thin strip that masking tape didn't cover gave a little more light than a smoldering cigarette, but not much. The truck convoy wouldn't hurry down toward Chattanooga, not at night it wouldn't.

It did keep its escort. That was good. In case anything went wrong, soldiers in real U.S. uniforms in the half-tracks might protect the impostors from men who didn't know who and what they were. Those soldiers might protect the drivers, too. If ordinary U.S. troops spotted these fellows in butternut, everybody anywhere near them would need a hell of a lot of protecting. Cincinnatus was sure of that.

He rattled along at about fifteen miles an hour. Every once in a while, on a straight stretch of road, he got up to twenty or so. No shots came from the woods. Maybe all the bushwhackers went to bed early. He could hope, anyway. He followed the narrow stripe of tail light the truck ahead of him showed, and hoped that driver didn't get lost. If he did, all the trucks behind him would follow him straight into trouble.

After a while, Cincinnatus went past the depot he'd visited earlier in the day. He thought it was the same one, anyhow. The artillery duel seemed to have flagged with the coming of night. A mosquito bit him on the arm. He swore and slapped and didn't squash it. Next to the bite of a shell fragment, though, it seemed almost friendly.

Those stripes of red got a little brighter: the truck ahead was hitting the brakes. Cincinnatus did the same.

The driver in back of him was paying attention, too, because that truck didn't smack his rear bumper.

Somebody by the side of the road gestured with a dimmed flashlight.

“You guys with the special cargo—over this way!” he called.

Like the rest of the convoy, Cincinnatus went over that way. The trucks were crawling along now. That made them quieter, but not what anybody would call quiet. With luck, though, gunfire masked most of their noise. This was about as close to the front as Cincinnatus had ever come. Peering through the windshield, he could see muzzle flashes across the river.

Another soldier with a feeble flashlight said, “Lights out!” Cincinnatus hit the switch and went from dimness to darkness. His eyes adapted fast, though. He soon spotted strips of white tape somebody—engineers?—had put down to guide the convoy to where it was supposed to go. He nodded to himself. They’d done things like that during the Great War, too.

“Here we are!” A loud, authoritative voice, that one. If it didn’t belong to a veteran noncom, Cincinnatus would have been amazed. He hit the brakes.

“Let’s go!” *That* voice came from the back of the truck. The U.S. soldiers in butternut piled out. They gathered with their pals from other trucks.

“Good luck.” Cincinnatus almost couldn’t force the words out.

Had the ordinary U.S. soldiers here been briefed? If they hadn’t, there’d be hell to pay in nothing flat.

The thought had hardly crossed his mind before gunfire broke out. Some of the weapons were U.S., others Confederate. Shouts and screams filled the air.

“Do Jesus!” Cincinnatus burst out. He’d feared things might go wrong, but he hadn’t imagined they could go as wrong as this. *Only shows what I know,* he thought bitterly. The Army could screw anything up.

And then, little by little, he realized the chaos and the gunfire weren’t screwups after all. They were part of a plan. The fake Confederates got into rubber rafts and paddled across the Tennessee toward the southern bank, which real Confederates held. Tracers came close to those rafts, but Cincinnatus didn’t think they hit any of them.

He started to laugh. If the shooting fooled him, wouldn’t it fool Jake Featherston’s troops on the far bank? Wouldn’t they think some of

their buddies were getting away from the damnyankees? And wouldn't the phonies be likely to have all the passwords and countersigns real Confederates should have?

So what would happen to the genuine Confederates who greeted the troops they thought were their countrymen? They would get a brief, painful, and probably fatal surprise.

And what would happen *then*? Cincinnatus didn't know, not in detail, but he could make some pretty good guesses. When he did, he laughed some more. The only thing he wished was that he were a white man in one of those rafts, carrying a Confederate automatic rifle. He wanted to see the look on the face of the first real Confederate he shot.

The counterfeits in butternut would be getting close. He couldn't hear the shouts across the water, not for real, but he could imagine them in his mind's ear. He sat in the cab of his truck and swatted at more mosquitoes. He wished for a smoke, but didn't light up. He waited and waited and…

Sudden gunfire on the south bank of the Tennessee. As if that was a signal—and no doubt it was—U.S.

artillery opened up. Cincinnatus could see where the shells came down by the flashes of bursting shells across the river. It made a tight box around the place where Featherston's phony fuckers had come ashore. The artillerymen would have range tables and maps marked with squares so they could put their bombardment right where they needed it.

And more boats started across the river. These weren't paddle-powered rubber rafts; Cincinnatus could hear their motors growling. They would land real U.S. soldiers in real U.S. uniforms and, no doubt, everything the troops needed to fight on the far side of the Tennessee: mortars and antibarrel guns and ammo and command cars and maybe even barrels. The invaders would secure the bridgehead, punch a hole in the enemy defenses, and then try to break out. And the whole enormous force on the north bank would slam in right behind them.

Cincinnatus waved, there in the deuce-and-a-half. "So long, Chattanooga!" he said. "Next stop, fuckin'

Atlanta!"

If things worked. Why wouldn't they, though? Somebody'd planned this one to a fare-thee-well. Once the U.S. forces punched through the lines the Confederates had fortified, what could stop them? They'd be fighting in the open, and the enemy would have to fall back or get rolled up.

Small-arms fire on the other side of the river suddenly picked up. Cincinnatus whooped. He knew what that meant, knew what it had to mean. U.S. soldiers in green-gray were across the Tennessee. "Go, you bastards!" he yelled, as if they were his favorite football team. "Go!"

J ake Featherston didn't order Clarence Potter court-martialed and shot for his failure in the flanking attack on the damnyankees in Tennessee. There was plenty of failure to go around. Featherston extracted a nastier revenge on the Intelligence officer: he kept him in a combat slot.

Potter protested, saying—accurately—that he was more valuable back in Richmond. No one felt like listening to him. The Confederate States needed combat officers. He wasn't the only retread—far from it.

Officers from the Quartermaster Corps, even from the Veterinary Corps, commanded regiments, sometimes brigades. When you ran short of what you needed, you used what you had.

They were using Potter. He hoped they didn't use him up.

He wanted to do in Chattanooga what the United States had done in Pittsburgh. He wanted to tie the enemy down, make him fight house by house, and bleed him white. He thought Jake Featherston wanted the same thing. He hoped that, even if Chattanooga fell, the Confederates could take so much out of the U.S. forces attacking them that the Yankees would be able to go no farther. That would give the CSA a chance to rebuild and regroup.

With C.S. forces holding Lookout Mountain to the south and Missionary Ridge to the east, the defensive position should have been ideal. But Potter couldn't get anybody to listen to him.

George Patton had gone up to talk to the President. Even so, he kept fighting the campaign his own way: hurling troops and—worse—armor into fierce counterattacks, trying to throw the men in green-gray back over the Tennessee. (Potter hated to learn that U.S. soldiers in butternut had confused Confederate defenders long enough to help the main U.S. push get over the river in the first place. That was one

more trick the enemy had stolen from his side. As he'd feared from the beginning, any knife that cut the USA would also cut the CSA.)

"Dammit, we can hit them in the flank and smash them!" Patton shouted, again and again. "It worked in Ohio! It worked in Pennsylvania till they got lucky! It'll work here, too!"

He didn't mention that it hadn't worked in Kentucky and here in Tennessee not long before. And he didn't seem to realize that the Confederates enjoyed the edge in firepower and doctrine in Ohio and also, for a while, in Pennsylvania. Now the U.S. forces understood what was what as well as their C.S.

counterparts.

And the Yankees had the firepower edge, damn them. Whenever the Confederates surged to the attack, they got hit by artillery fire the likes of which they'd never seen in the fondly remembered days of 1941.

Fighter-bombers roared across the battlefield, adding muscle to the bombardment. They had a much better chance of getting away to do it again than the slow, ungainly Confederate Asskickers did.

Even more revolting, the United States had not only more barrels but also better barrels. The Confederates desperately needed a new model to match or surpass the latest snorting monsters from Pontiac. They needed one, but where was it? Where were the engineers who could design it? Where were the steelworkers and auto workers who could build it?

Clarence Potter knew where they were. Too damn many of them were in uniform, doing jobs for which they weren't ideally suited, just like him. The Confederacy was running headlong into the same problem that bedeviled it during the Great War: it couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time. One or the other, yes. One *and* the other? Not so well as the United States.

After Patton's third ferocious lunge failed to wipe out or even shrink the Yankee bridgehead on the south bank of the Tennessee, he called an officers' meeting in an elementary-school classroom. Sitting at one of those little desks, smelling chalk dust and oilcloths, took Potter back over half a century.

"What are we supposed to do?" Patton rasped. "We've got to stop those bastards any way we can. If they get into Chattanooga…If they

get past Chattanooga…We're screwed if that happens. How do we stop 'em?"

Though for all practical purposes only an amateur here, Potter raised his hand. Again, he thought of himself in short pants. He hadn't been shy then, and he wasn't shy now. Patton pointed to him. "Let's make the enemy come to us for a change," he said. "Let's pull back into the city and give him the fun of digging us out. *That* worked up in Pennsylvania. We can make it work for us, too."

"It means abandoning the river line," Patton said.

"Are we going to get it back, sir?" Potter asked.

Patton gave him a dirty look. Chances were the general commanding had intended his remark to close off debate, not keep it going. Potter nodded to himself. Yes, Patton had more than a little Jake Featherston in him. Well, too bad. He shouldn't have called this council if he didn't want to hear other people's ideas.

"We will if we can get some more air support," Patton said.

"From where?" Potter said. "The damnyankees have had more airplanes than we do ever since the Pennsylvania campaign went sour."

Patton's expression turned to outright loathing. He'd been in charge of the Pennsylvania campaign, and didn't like getting reminded it hadn't worked. *Too bad,* Potter thought again. He spoke his mind to Jake Featherston. A mere general didn't intimidate him a bit.

"If the airplanes come—" Patton tried again.

"Where will we get them from?" Potter repeated. "We can't count on things we don't have, or we'll end up in even hotter water than we're in now."

"You talk like a damnyankee," Patton said in a deadly voice. "I bet you think like a damnyankee, too."

"By God, I hope so," Potter said, which made Patton's jaw drop. "About time somebody around here did, don't you think? They've done a better job of thinking like us than we have of thinking like them, and we're paying for it."

"You haven't got the offensive spirit," Patton complained.

“Not when we don’t have anything but our mouths to be offensive with, no, sir,” Potter said. “The more we keep charging the U.S. lines, the more they slaughter us, the worse off we are. Let them come to us.

Let them pay the butcher’s bill. Let them see how well they like that. Maybe we’ll be able to get out of this war with our freedom intact.” He used the word with malice aforethought.

“I’ll report you to the President,” Patton said.

“Go ahead. It’s nothing I haven’t told him, too,” Potter said cheerfully. “Having people who love you is all very well, but you need a few men who are there to tell you the truth, too.” He mocked Featherston’s wireless slogan as wickedly as he took the Freedom Party’s name in vain.

Several officers moved away from him, as if afraid whatever he had might be contagious. He saw a few men nod, though. Some people still had the brains to see that, if what they were doing now wasn’t working, they ought to try something else. He wondered whether Patton would.

No such luck. Potter hadn’t really expected anything different. He thought about going over Patton’s aggressive head and complaining to Jake Featherston himself—thought about it and dismissed it from his mind. Featherston was as fanatic about the offensive as Patton was, or he would have pulled back sooner in Pennsylvania and lost less.

“We open the new counterattack at 0800 tomorrow,” Patton declared. “General Potter, you *will* be generous enough to include your brigade in the assault?”

Potter didn’t want to. What was the point of throwing it into the meat grinder now that it was rebuilt to the point of becoming useful again? Wasted matériel, wasted lives the Confederacy couldn’t afford to throw away…But he nodded. “Yes, sir. Of course, sir. I don’t disobey orders.”

“You find other ways to be insubordinate,” Patton jeered.

“I hope so, sir, when insubordination is called for.” Potter was damned if he’d let the other general even seem to put him in the wrong.

He got the brigade as ready as he could. If they were going to attack, he wanted them to do it up brown.

He didn't think they could reach the objectives Patton gave him, but he didn't let on. Maybe he was wrong. He hoped so. If they succeeded, they really would hurt the U.S. forces on this side of the Tennessee.

It all turned out to be moot.

At 0700, Confederate guns in Chattanooga, on Lookout Mountain, and on Missionary Ridge were banging away at the Yankee bridgehead. Potter looked at his watch. One more hour, and then they would see what they would see.

But then a rumble that wasn't gunfire filled the sky. Potter peered up with trepidation and then with something approaching awe. What looked like every U.S. transport airplane in the world was overhead.

Some flew by themselves, while others towed gliders: they were so low, he could see the lines connecting airplane and glider.

One stream made for Missionary Ridge, while the other flew right over Chattanooga toward Lookout Mountain. "Oh, my God!" Potter said, afraid he knew what he would see next.

And he did. String after string of paratroopers leaped from the transports. Their chutes filled the sky like toadstool tops. Confederate soldiers on the high ground started shooting at them while they were still in the air. Some of them fired back as they descended. By the sound of their weapons, they carried captured C.S. automatic rifles and submachine guns. The damnyankees had seized plenty, and the ammo to go with them, in their drive through Kentucky and Tennessee. Now they were using them to best advantage.

As the paratroopers landed atop Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, a captain near Potter said,

"They can't do that. They can't get away with it."

"Why not?" Potter answered. "What happens if they seize the guns up there? What happens if they turn

’em on us?”

The captain thought about it, but not for long. “If they do that, we’re fucked.”

“I couldn’t have put it better myself—or worse, depending on your point of view,” Potter said. The racket of gunfire from the high ground got louder. The USA had dropped a lot of men up there. They weren’t likely to carry anything heavier than mortars—though God only knew what all the gliders held—but they had the advantage of surprise, and probably the advantage of numbers.

They caught Patton with his pants down, Potter thought, and then, *Hell, they caught me with my pants down, too. They caught all of us.*

“We’re not going to go forward at 0800 now, are we, sir?” the captain asked.

“Sweet Jesus Christ, no!” Potter exclaimed. “We—our side—we’ve got to get those Yankees off the high ground. That comes ahead of this counterattack.” If Patton didn’t like it, too bad.

But no sooner were the words out of his mouth than a wireless operator rushed up to him. “Sir, we’re ordered to hold in place with two regiments, and to bring the third back, fast as we can, to use against Lookout Mountain.”

“Hold with two, move the third back,” Potter echoed. “All right. I’ll issue the orders.” He wondered if he *could* hold with two-thirds of his brigade. If U.S. forces tried to break out of the bridgehead now, at the same time as they were seizing the high ground and guns in the C.S. flank and rear, couldn’t they just barge into Chattanooga and straight on past it? He hoped they wouldn’t try. Maybe their right hand and left didn’t have even a nodding acquaintance with each other. It had happened before.

Not this time. Twenty minutes later, as his rearmost regiment started south toward Lookout Mountain, U.S. artillery north of the Tennessee awakened with a roar. Green-gray barrels surged forward. It was only August, but winter came to live in Clarence Potter’s heart.

D r. Leonard O’Doull worked like a man possessed. In part, that was because the new senior medic working with him, Sergeant Vince Donofrio, couldn’t do as much as Granville McDougald had. Donofrio

wasn't bad, and he worked like a draft horse himself. But Granny had been a doctor without the M.D., and Donofrio wasn't. That made O'Doull work harder to pick up the slack.

He would have been madly busy even with McDougald at his side. The United States hadn't quite brought off what they most wanted to do: close off the Confederates' line of retreat from Chattanooga with paratroops, surround their army inside the city, and destroy it. Featherston's men managed to keep a line of retreat open to the south. They got a lot of their soldiers and some of their armor and other vehicles out through it. Down in northern Georgia, Patton's army remained a force in being. But the Stars and Stripes floated over Chattanooga, over Lookout Mountain, over Missionary Ridge. The aid station was near the center of town.

Up in the USA, newspapers were bound to be singing hosannas. They had the right—this was the biggest victory the United States had won since Pittsburgh. It was much more elegant than that bloody slugging match, too.

Which didn't mean it came without cost. O'Doull knew too well it didn't. He paused in the middle of repairing a wound to a soldier's left buttock to raise his mask and swig from an autoclaved coffee mug.

His gloved hands left bloody prints on the china. He set the mug down and went back to work.

"Poor bastard lost enough meat to make a rump roast, didn't he, Doc?" Donofrio said.

"Damn near. He'll sit sideways from now on, that's for sure," O'Doull replied. "Like the old lady in *Candide.* "

He knew what he meant. He'd read it in English in college, and in French after he moved up to the Republic of Quebec. But Sergeant Donofrio just said, "Huh?" O'Doull didn't try to explain. Jokes you explained stopped being funny. But he was willing to bet Granny would have got it.

He finished sewing up the fellow's left cheek. The stitches looked like railroad lines. It was a nasty wound. You made jokes that didn't need explaining when somebody got hit there, but it was no joke to the guy it happened to. This fellow would spend a lot of time on his belly and his right side. O'Doull didn't think he would ever come back to the front line.

After the stretcher-bearers carried the anesthetized soldier away, they brought in a paratrooper who'd got hurt up on Lookout Mountain. He had a splint and a sling on his right arm and a disgusted expression on his face. "What happened to you?" O'Doull asked him.

"I broke the son of a bitch, sure as hell," the injured man replied. "Looked like I was gonna get swept right into a tree, so I stuck out my arm to fend it off, like. Yeah, I know they teach you not to do that. So I was a dumb asshole, and I got hurt without even getting shot."

"Believe me, Corporal, you didn't miss a thing," O'Doull said.

"But I let my buddies down," the paratrooper said. "Some of them might've bought a plot 'cause I fucked up. I shot myself full of morphine and took a pistol off a dead Confederate, but even so…. I wasn't doing everything I should have, dammit."

"What did you do when the morphine wore off?" Donofrio asked.

"Gave myself more shots. That's wonderful stuff. Killed the pain and kept me going just like coffee would. I've been running on it two days straight," the corporal said.

Sergeant Donofrio looked at O'Doull. "There's one you don't see every day, Doc."

"Yeah," O'Doull said. Morphine made most people sleepy. A few, though, it energized. "You've got an unusual metabolism, Corporal."

"Is that good or bad?"

"Neither, I don't think. It's just different. Why don't you get up on the table? We'll put you under and make sure your arm's set properly and get it in a cast. That'll hold things together better than your arrangement there."

"How long will I take to heal up?" the soldier asked as he obeyed.

"A couple of months, probably, and you'll need some more time to build up the arm once you can use it again," O'Doull said. The paratrooper swore resignedly. He wasn't angry at being away from the fighting so much as for letting his friends down.

O'Doull gave him ether. After the soldier went under, the doctor waved for Vince Donofrio to do the honors. Setting a broken bone and putting a cast on it were things the medic could do. He took care of

them as well as O'Doull might have.

They fixed several more fractures: arms, ankles, legs. Paratroopers didn't have an easy time of it. Coming down somewhere rugged like the top of Lookout Mountain was dangerous in itself. Add in the casualties the desperate Confederates dealt out and the U.S. parachute troops suffered badly.

But they did what they were supposed to do. They silenced the enemy guns on the high ground. They turned some of those guns against the Confederates in and in front of Chattanooga. And they made Featherston's men fear for their flank and rear as well as their own front. If not for the paratroopers, the Stars and Bars would probably still fly above Chattanooga.

The wounded men seemed sure the price they'd paid was worth it. One of them said, "My captain got hit when we were rushing a battery. 'Make it count,' he told us. He didn't make it, but by God we did like he said." He'd had two fingers shot off his left hand, and couldn't have been prouder.

"Only thing worse than getting hurt when you win is getting hurt when you lose," Donofrio remarked after they anesthetized the paratrooper. "Then you know your country got screwed along with you." Maybe sergeants thought alike; Granny'd said the same thing.

They treated wounded Confederates who went a long way toward proving the point. "You bastards win, you're gonna screw us to the wall," said a glum PFC with a bullet through his foot. "I gave it my best shot, but what the hell can you do when you stop one?" He seemed sunk in gloom.

"You came through alive," O'Doull said. "Whatever happens, you're here to see it."

"Hot damn," the Confederate answered. Donofrio put him under. O'Doull did what he could to patch up the damage from the bullet. He didn't know if the wounded man would ever walk without a limp, but he was pretty sure he saved the foot.

Away went the wounded PFC. Next up on the table was a much more badly hurt Confederate, with an entry wound in the right side of his chest and a far bigger exit wound in the right side of his back. Bloody foam came from his mouth and nostrils. He wasn't complaining about how the war was going. He was gray and barely breathing.

Sergeant Donofrio got a plasma line into him before O'Doull could even ask for it. O'Doull wished he could transfuse whole blood. They were supposed to be working the bugs out of that, but whatever they were doing hadn't got to the field yet. This guy needed red cells to carry oxygen, but he would have to use his own.

That means I've got to keep him from bleeding to death in there, O'Doull thought unhappily. He opened the Confederate's chest even as Donofrio stuck the ether cone over the man's face. The wounded soldier was too far gone to care.

The bullet had torn hell out of his right lung. O'Doull hadn't expected anything different. He cut away the bottom half of the organ, tying off bleeders as fast as he could.

"Make it snappy, Doc," Donofrio said. "His BP's dropping."

"I'm doing everything I can," O'Doull answered. "Keep that plasma coming."

"I gave him the biggest-gauge needle we have," the medic answered. "Only way to get it in there faster is with a fuckin' funnel."

"All right," O'Doull said, but it wasn't—not even close. Too much blood loss, too long trying to breathe with that ruined lung…He knew exactly when the wounded man died, because he felt his heart stop. He swore and tried open-chest massage. He won a couple of feeble contractions, but then the heart quivered toward eternal silence. O'Doull looked up and shook his head. "Shit. Close the line, Vince.

He's gone."

"Oh, well. You tried, Doc. Don't feel bad about it." Every time they lost somebody, O'Doull heard the same thing. There wasn't much else *to* say. Donofrio went on, "Not like he was one of ours, anyway."

"I work just as hard on them," O'Doull said. "That way, I can stay honest when I hope they work just as hard on our guys."

"Well, yeah," Donofrio said. "But even so…You know what I mean."

O'Doull nodded. He knew exactly what the younger man meant. He worked as hard as he did on enemy wounded not least because he knew. As long as he was honest about that, losing Confederate casualties bothered him as little as possible. If he only went through

the motions, if he lost men he might have saved by working harder… Well, how could he shave in the morning without wanting to slice the razor blade across his throat?

Corpsmen lifted the dead Confederate off the operating table and carried him away. O'Doull peeled off his gloves. He threw them into a trash can. He had blood on his arms up past the gloves; he'd been deep inside the soldier's chest. He scrubbed with strong soap that smelled of carbolic acid, then went to get a towel with his wrists bent up so the water would run away from his fingers. Hands dried, he took a deep breath. "Whew!" he said. "Feels like I'm coming up for air."

"Enjoy it while you can," Vince Donofrio said. "Chances are it won't last long." He stretched and twisted his back. Something in there crackled. He was grinning as he took off his mask. "*That's* better. Wonder what Chattanooga's like. Haven't hardly had a chance to look around."

"Chattanooga's a mess," O'Doull said, which was true in the same sense that Jake Featherston was not a nice person. Chattanooga was bombed and shelled and shot up. But that wasn't all of what Donofrio meant. O'Doull went on, "Probably not all the women refugeed out."

"Sure as hell hope not." Chasing skirt was Donofrio's hobby, the way fishing was for some men and carpentry for others.

"Be careful what you catch. After you've got it for a little while, you'll decide you don't want it any more." O'Doull knew a lot of skirt-chasers, and didn't understand any of them. He was happy enough with one woman. Oh, he looked at others, but he didn't touch. Plenty of men did.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm a big boy, Doc," Donofrio told him impatiently. The medic was ready—eager—to comb through the ruins of Chattanooga for anything that didn't take a leak standing up.

"Just remember your initials," O'Doull warned.

"Funny. Fun- *ny,* " Vince Donofrio said. "Har-de-har-har. See? I'm busting up."

"Yeah, well, use a pro station when you're done laughing," O'Doull said. "Sulfa's pretty good for the clap, but it doesn't do anything about syphilis."

“I know, I know. I’ll be careful,” Donofrio said. “Is that other new stuff coming out of the labs—that peni-whatever-the-hell—is that as good as everybody says it is?”

“Haven’t got my hands on any, so I don’t know for sure,” O’Doull answered. “The literature sure makes it sound like the Second Coming, though, doesn’t it?” He’d seen plenty of literature like that for one patent medicine or another, and that always turned out to be less than met the eye. But people raved about penicillin in professional journals. That was different. He hoped it was, anyway. Drugs that killed germs without poisoning patients gave doctors an edge they’d sorely missed in the Great War.

“I’m gonna slide outa here if I get a chance,” Donofrio said. He didn’t; not even a minute later, corpsmen brought in a Confederate groaning with a shattered shoulder. The medic went to work without complaint.

If he was thinking about women while he did, well, wasn’t that better than brooding about blood and bullets and broken bones?

A rmstrong Grimes was new to the rituals of the repple-depple. He’d stayed with the same unit from Ohio to Utah to Canada. Now he didn’t belong to anybody or anything. He’d been dissolved away from everything that went before, and was floating free. He was a—what the hell did they call them in chemistry? He muttered to himself, flogging his memory. An ion, that was it. He was an ion.

The replacement depot had been a high school somewhere in the middle of Tennessee. He didn’t know exactly where, or care very much. All he knew was that it was a hell of a lot hotter and muggier than Manitoba. And he knew the locals here, like the ones up there and the ones in Utah, didn’t like U.S.

soldiers worth a damn. A barbed-wire perimeter with sandbagged machine-gun nests around the depot rubbed that in.

He lit a cigarette. Confederate tobacco was easy to come by around here, anyway. He sucked in smoke, held it, and blew it out. The kid in the seat next to his said, “Bum a butt off you, Sergeant?”

“Sure.” Armstrong held out the pack.

“Thanks.” The kid took one, pulled a lighter out of his pocket, and got

the Duke going. He smoked it halfway down, then said, “You rather go to the front, or do you want occupation duty?”

“Christ! The front!” Armstrong said. “I’ve done occupation duty. You can have it. I want to get some licks in at the real enemy for a change. What about you?”

“I got wounded when we were outflanking Nashville,” the kid answered. “If I could find a nice, quiet spot where nothing much happens…”

“You’re an honest goldbrick, anyway,” Armstrong said, laughing.

“I’d have to smoke funny cigarettes to really believe it, not nice ones like these,” the young private said.

“The only guys who draw duty like that are Congressmen’s kids.”

“Not even them. There was one in my outfit—well, a nephew, but close enough,” Armstrong said. “He was a regular joe, Yossel was. Did the same shit everybody else did, took the same chances when the shooting started. He had balls, too—sheenies must be tougher’n I figured.”

Up at the front of the repple-depple, where the principal would have given the students what-for, a personnel sergeant sat reading a paperback with a nearly naked girl on the cover. A young officer came up and spoke to him. He nodded, put down the book, and picked up a clipboard. He read off several names and pay numbers. Men grabbed their gear and went out with the shavetail.

A few more soldiers came in and found seats. The personnel sergeant called other names and numbers.

Men slung duffel bags or shouldered packs and found themselves part of the war again. A poker game started. Armstrong stayed away. He’d played a lot of poker in the hospital, and had less money than he wished he did because of it.

Another lieutenant talked with the personnel sergeant. The sergeant looked at his clipboard. Among the names he read was, “Henderson, Calvin.” The kid next to Armstrong got up and walked to the front of the room. Then the noncom said, “Grimes, Armstrong,” and rattled off his pay number.

He got up, too. His leg hurt a little, but he got around all right. He

went up and said, “I’m Armstrong Grimes.”

“Hello, Sergeant. I’m Lieutenant Bassler,” the officer said. “I’ve got a squad for you. You’ve led a squad before?”

“I’ve led a platoon, sir,” Armstrong answered.

Lieutenant Bassler took it in stride. “Good. You’ll know what you’re doing, then. Where was that?”

“In Utah, sir, and up in Canada.”

“All right. And you’re in the repple-depple because…?”

Did you foul up? Did they take your platoon away from you? Armstrong could read between the lines. “I got wounded, sir.” He touched his leg. “I can use it pretty well now.”

“Ah. I caught one about there myself last year,” Bassler said. “Gives us something in common, even if we don’t much want it.”

“Hell of a lot better to shoot the other guy,” Armstrong agreed.

“Well, you’ll get your chance. Come on,” Bassler said.

“Hold it.” The personnel sergeant held up a hand. “I gotta sign these guys out.” Armstrong and Cal Henderson and the other men signed on their lines on the clipboard. Now the military bureaucrat nodded approval. He reminded Armstrong of his own father. He wanted all the i’s dotted and the t’s crossed, and he didn’t think anything was official till they were.

When the soldiers got outside, Armstrong said, “Sir, you mind if I load my weapon? Never can tell what’s waiting out here.”

The question wasn’t just practical, though it was that. It would also show him something about how Lieutenant Bassler thought. The officer nodded right away. “You’d all better do that,” he said, and pulled his own .45 from its holster.

Armstrong put a clip in his Springfield and chambered a round. All but one of the other men also had Springfields. The odd man out—his name, Armstrong remembered, was Kurowski—carried a submachine gun: not a Confederate model, but a big, brutal Thompson, made in the USA.

The lieutenant had a couple of command cars waiting to take his new

men down to the front. He said,

“I’ll handle the machine gun on one of these. Who wants to take the other one?”

“I’ll do it, sir,” Cal Henderson said. “I’ve used a .30-caliber gun before. Haven’t fired one of these big mothers, but they work the same way, right?”

“Near enough,” Lieutenant Bassler said. “A .50-caliber gun shoots farther and flatter and harder, that’s all.”

“Sounds good to me,” Henderson said. It sounded good to Armstrong, too.

But Lieutenant Bassler didn’t put him in with the kid. The officer stuck Armstrong in his own command car, and grilled him as they thumped down the battered road. He got more out of Armstrong about where he’d fought and what he’d done. He probably also learned a bit about how Armstrong thought, but that didn’t occur to Armstrong till later.

When they came into Chattanooga—luckily, without needing to use the machine guns on the way—Bassler said, “Ever see anything this torn up?”

“Sir, this isn’t a patch on Ogden and Salt Lake City,” Armstrong answered. “The Mormons hung on till they couldn’t hang on any more. Then they pulled back a block and did it again.”

An old man picking through ruins with a stick glared at the command cars as they went by. If he had a rifle…But he didn’t—not here, anyway—so he could only hate.

“What do we do with them—what do we do to them—once we lick them?” Bassler said. “How do we keep from fighting another round twenty, twenty-five, thirty years from now? How do we keep them from putting bombs under their shirts and blowing themselves up when they walk into a crowd of our soldiers?”

Armstrong remembered that woman in Utah, when he was heading for R and R. He shivered despite the humid heat. “Sir, I wish to hell I knew,” he said. “I’m just a dumbass sergeant. What do *you* think? How do we do it?”

“Either we make them like us—”

“Good luck!” Armstrong broke in. “Uh, sir.”

“Yeah. I know.” Bassler wasn’t more than a few years older than Armstrong. When he grinned, the difference hardly showed. “Fat chance. But if we could do that, it would sure save us a lot of trouble down the road. If we can’t, maybe we can make them too scared of us to turn terrorist very often.”

“That’s what they tried in Utah,” Armstrong said. “It sort of worked, but only sort of. You start shooting hostages and stuff, you just make people hate you worse.”

“I’m afraid you’re right,” Bassler said sourly. “And the Confederate States are a lot bigger than Utah.

We occupy them all, there are bound to be lots of places where we’re too thin on the ground to do it right. And those are the places where trouble starts.”

“I know one thing we could do,” Armstrong said. Bassler raised a questioning eyebrow. Armstrong went on, “We could give what’s left of the nigger’s guns. If half the shit they say about what Featherston’s fuckers are doing to them is true, they’ll want payback like you wouldn’t believe. They may not love us, but they sure as hell have to hate the bastards who’ve been screwing ’em over for so long.”

Lieutenant Bassler stayed quiet for so long, Armstrong wondered if he’d said something dumb. Well, too bad if he had. Bassler shouldn’t have asked him if he didn’t want to know what he thought. Then the young officer said, “You know, Grimes, I’m going to pass that up the line. We don’t think about the Negroes in the CSA as much as we should. I’m sure we’re doing some things to help them, same as the Confederates did what they could to help the Mormons in Utah.”

“Mostly the Mormons used our weapons, sir,” Armstrong said. “That way, they could get ammo from us.

Sometimes they took our guns, too. But they already had a lot when we got there, yeah.”

“Uh-huh,” Bassler said. “But that’s not my point. My point is that we ought to be using the Negroes systematically, and we aren’t. Somebody with stars on his shoulder straps needs to think about that.

Maybe the President does, too.”

Armstrong was convinced they wouldn't think about it on the suggestion of a no-account noncom. Then they drove through the gap between Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, the gap U.S. forces now held. Bare-chested gun bunnies fed 105s that sent death down into Georgia. Eyeing the high ground to either side, Armstrong said, "My hat's off to those paratroopers. They saved us a world of grief."

"You can sing that in church, Sergeant," Bassler said. "We got over the Tennessee with a ruse, and we took the mountains with a trick. Makes you wonder what we'll have to do to go forward from here."

"Well, the country looks easier, anyway," Armstrong said. "If we start banging barrels through the gap, can those butternut bastards stop us?"

"Good question. I think we'll find out before too long, once the logistics buildup gets done," Bassler said.

They were close enough to the front to watch incoming artillery burst less than a quarter of a mile away.

Bassler tapped the driver on the shoulder. "This'll do. We'll hoof it from here. They'll start aiming at the command cars if we come much closer." Looking grateful, the driver hit the brakes.

Armstrong ended up with Cal Henderson in his new squad. He was introduced to Whitey and Woody and Alf and Rocco and Hy and Squidface and Zeb the Hat. When he said, "Let's try not to get each other killed, all right?" they all nodded.

"You've been through some shit," Squidface opined. "That's good."

"A little bit," Armstrong allowed. "You guys look like you have, too."

"Hell, we're here," Squidface said. He was a PFC, skinny and dark and needing a shave. He didn't have tentacles or even particularly buggy eyes. One of these days, Armstrong figured he'd find out how the nickname happened. Till then, he didn't need to flabble about it.

The Confederates threw a little more artillery at the U.S. positions. Nobody in Armstrong's new squad even moved. These guys were veterans, all right; they could tell by listening when falling shells were liable to be dangerous. They watched Armstrong as the shells burst, too. They wanted to see if he got all hot and bothered. When he lit up a Duke and went on talking as if nothing were happening, they relaxed a little.

“You guys think we can break out?” he asked. He’d heard what Lieutenant Bassler had to say. These men would have to do the bleeding. *So will I,* Armstrong thought. (So would Bassler—second lieutenants were expendable, too. But Armstrong didn’t worry about him.) They all loudly and profanely insisted they could. Armstrong figured that meant they’d get the chance to try before real long.

J onathan Moss counted himself lucky to be alive. He didn’t think what was left of Spartacus’ band would attack another airstrip any time soon. Doing it once had cost the black guerrillas too much.

“They was layin’ for us,” Spartacus said. He, Moss, Nick Cantarella, and a dozen or so Negro fighters sat around a couple of small campfires. “Was they layin’ for anybody who come by, or did somebody rat on us?”

That was an ugly thought. A Negro would have to be crazy or desperate to betray his comrades to whites in the CSA, but it could happen. If a man knew his loved ones were in a camp, could he make a bargain with the Devil? Of course he could. Moss could find other reasons that might make a black turn traitor—simple jealousy of Spartacus came to mind—but saving kin stood highest on the list of likely ones.

“Some lyin’ nigger might be sittin’ right here next to me,” Spartacus said. “Damn cottonmouth might be gittin’ ready to bite again.”

The guerrillas stirred. One of them, a heavyset fellow called Arminius, said, “We went to the damn airstrip on account o’ these ofays. Anybody sell us out, reckon they’s the ones. Like calls to like, folks say.”

“It couldn’t very well have been us,” Moss said. “You people have kept an eye on us ever since we joined the band. You think we don’t know that? I don’t blame you for doing it, but it’s no secret.”

He talked like a lawyer: he reasoned from evidence. No surprise—he *was* a lawyer. Sometimes, though, legal tactics weren’t what the situation called for. Moving quickly but without any fuss, Nick Cantarella got to his feet. “Anybody says I kiss Jake Featherston’s ass can kiss mine.” He eyed Arminius. “Shall I drop my drawers for you?”

The black man jumped up with a roar of rage. He charged Cantarella. He was a couple of inches taller than the escaped POW, and much

wider through the shoulders. He wasn't afraid of anything—Moss had seen that plenty of times.

He swung an enormous haymaker, intending to knock Cantarella into the middle of next week. No doubt the white officer tried to infuriate him so he would fight foolishly. Cantarella got what he wanted. He grabbed Arminius' arm, jerked, and twisted. The Negro let out a startled squawk as he flew through the air. He landed hard. Cantarella kicked him in the side.

Arminius groaned, but tried to yank Cantarella's foot out from under him. "Naughty," the U.S. officer said, and kicked him above his left ear. Arminius groaned and went limp. The brawl couldn't have lasted half a minute. Cantarella looked around. "Anybody else?"

No one said anything. "Sit down," Spartacus told him. "I don't reckon you done nothin'. I reckon you did, you be dead no matter how fancy you fight. You gots to sleep some o' the time."

"Throw water on Arminius," Cantarella said. "He'll be fine once his headache goes away. I don't think I broke anything—didn't do it on purpose, anyhow."

A bucket— *no, they call it a pail here,* Moss thought—from a nearby creek revived Arminius. He didn't remember the fight or what led up to it. He did say, "My head bangin' like a big ol' drum."

"I bet it is," Spartacus said. He eyed Cantarella. "Where you learn dat?"

"Here and there," Cantarella answered.

"You learn me how to do it?"

"Probably," the U.S. officer said. "Most of the time, it's no damn good. Somebody got a gun, he'll punch your ticket for you before you get close enough to throw him through a wall."

"Learn me anyways," Spartacus said. "Mebbe I got to impress some niggers, git 'em to jine up with me.

I do dat fancy shit, dey reckon I's tough enough to suit." He paused. His mouth twisted. "Hope I find me some niggers to impress. Ain't so many left no more, 'cept for the ones already totin' guns."

He was right about that. Ten years earlier, the countryside hereabouts

would have been full of sharecropper villages, full of blacks. Mechanization and deportation had taken care of that. Not many Negroes remained out here, and fewer all the time. Mexican soldiers and Freedom Party stalwarts and guards from the towns took ever more to train stations. Off they went to one camp or another. And it grew clearer and clearer that the camps didn't house them, or not for long. The camps just killed them, as fast as they could.

"Assembly line for murder," Jonathan Moss murmured.

"What you say?" Spartacus asked.

"Nothing. Woolgathering, that's all." Moss was glad the guerrilla chief hadn't understood him.

Nick Cantarella had. "Army's coming," he said. "Won't be too fucking long, either. Chattanooga's fallen.

Even the Confederate propaganda mill can't spew lies about that any more. If our guys aren't in Georgia already, they will be pretty damn quick. Territory north of Atlanta's rough, but it's not *that* rough. I don't think Featherston's fuckers can stop 'em once they get rolling again."

"We still be breathin' when they gits here?" Spartacus asked. "Can't hardly think about hittin' towns no mo'. Got to stay alive first."

"What happen to me?" Arminius asked, holding his head as if afraid it might fall off any minute now.

Considering what Cantarella did to it, it might, too. Moss wouldn't have wanted a well-aimed shoe clomping into the side of *his* noggin.

"You done did somethin' dumb, dat's what," Spartacus answered, and then came back to the problem at hand: "Wanna *hit* the damn ofays. Don't wanna jus' lurk out here like swamp niggers in slavery days."

"You can get dynamite, right?" Cantarella asked. Spartacus nodded. Cantarella went on, "And you can get alarm clocks, too, yeah?"

"Reckon so," Spartacus said. "What you thinkin' 'bout? People bombs is too risky, even if we finds folks willin' to do it. These days, ofays see a nigger they don't know, they jus' start shootin'. Can't get close enough to blow up a lot of 'em."

"Auto bombs," Cantarella said. "Set the timer for sunup, but drive in

during the middle of the night, park the son of a bitch, and then get out if you can. All the shrapnel flying, auto bombs make a mess of things even if they don't have a big crowd around 'em."

Spartacus sighed. "Yeah, we do dat. Dey don't patrol as good as dey oughta. But it ain't the same, you hear what I say?"

"We hear," Moss said. He didn't want to make himself too prominent right now. The guerrillas had attacked the airstrip on his account. He would have enjoyed strafing Confederates in Georgia if he'd stolen an airplane. He would have enjoyed flying off to U.S.-held territory even more. Instead…Instead, the band wrecked itself. That was all there was to it. Spartacus and the surviving Negroes—fewer than half those who'd gone to the airport—didn't want to admit that, even to themselves, for which he couldn't blame them. But it was true.

They'd fought the Mexicans on even terms before the debacle. Now they ran from them. They had to.

They would get chewed to bits if they didn't.

A buzz in the air overhead made everybody look up nervously. "Reckon the woods hides our fires good enough?" Spartacus said.

"We'll find out," Nick Cantarella answered.

That wasn't what Moss wanted to hear. And, a minute or so later, he wanted even less to hear the screech of falling bombs. They wouldn't be big ones—ten-pounders, say, thrown out of the airplane by hand the way bombardiers did it back in the early days of the Great War. But when he had no trench or foxhole to jump into, all he could do was flatten out on the ground and hope for the best.

The Confederate pilot wouldn't be aiming any fancy bombsight, not in an obsolete airplane like the one he was flying. He'd just fling the bombs out and hope for the best. Not much chance of doing damage that way, not unless he got lucky. But when the first bomb knocked down a tree less than a hundred yards from the fires, Moss wasn't the only one who cried out in fear.

More bombs rained down, some bursting farther away, others closer. Fragments snarled past. One man's cries went from fear to pain. Moss got up and bandaged the gash in the Negro's leg. He didn't have needle and thread, but used a couple of safety pins to help close the wound.

“Thank you kindly, suh,” the guerrilla said, and then, “Hurts like a motherfucker.”

“I’m sorry—I don’t have any morphine,” Moss said.

“Didn’t reckon you did,” the black man answered. “Somebody ’round here will, mebbe. When the bombs let up, he get up off his ass an’ stick me. You got balls, ofay, movin’ while they’s comin’ down.”

“Thanks.” Moss didn’t think the risk was especially large, which was why he’d done it. He didn’t say that, though. Being old and white isolated him from Spartacus’ band. No one till Arminius had blamed him for the fiasco at the airstrip, but it stuck in his mind—and, no doubt, in the guerrillas’ minds, too. Any way he could find to win back respect, he gladly accepted.

After a few minutes, the little puddle-jumper of an airplane buzzed and farted away. The Negro Moss had bandaged was the only man hurt. Spartacus said, “We gots to git outa here. That pilot, he gonna tell the ofays an’ the greasers where we at. They come after us in the mornin’.”

“We ought to pull out, yeah,” Nick Cantarella said. “But we should set up an ambush, blast the crap out of those bastards when they poke their noses where they don’t belong.”

Spartacus thought about it. At last, reluctantly, he shook his head. “Can’t afford to lose nobody now.

Can’t afford to lose no machine gun, neither.”

Cantarella looked as if he wanted to argue. After a moment, he shrugged instead. “You’re the boss. Me, I’m just a staff officer.”

“Nah. Them fuckers never come up where they kin hear the guns,” Spartacus said. Moss and Cantarella both guffawed. Most of the guerrillas looked blank. Sure as hell, Spartacus had seen staff officers in action—or in inaction—when he wore butternut during the last war. The men he led weren’t old enough to have fought for the CSA the last time around.

If they’d had the chance, if they’d been treated decently, they might have done it this time. How many divisions could the Confederates have squeezed from their colored population? Enough to give the USA fits; Moss was sure of that. But the Freedom Party didn’t want Negroes on its side. It wanted them gone, and it didn’t care what that did to

the country.

Moss shook his head. He didn't have it quite right. The Freedom Party thought getting rid of Negroes was more important than using them. That struck Moss as insane, but it made whites in the CSA happy.

Jake Featherston wouldn't have got elected if it didn't; it wasn't as if he ever made any secret about what he had in mind.

The guerrillas had to rig a litter of branches and a blanket to take the wounded man along—he couldn't walk. He offered to stay behind and shoot as many soldiers and stalwarts as he could, but Spartacus wouldn't let him. "Can't do enough with no rifle, and we ain't leavin' no machine gun here," he said. They got the Negro—his name was Theophrastus—onto the litter and hauled him away.

Moss let out a mournful sigh. If things had worked out the way he wanted, he would be back on the U.S.

side of the line now. He might be flying a fighter again. How much had they improved while he sat on the shelf here? He didn't—couldn't—know. But he was still fighting the enemy, which he hadn't been while stuck in Andersonville. It wasn't much, but it would have to do.

"**W** ay to go, Pat!" Sam Carsten held out his hand. "I knew you'd do it. Now get out there and give 'em hell."

"Thank you, sir." The exec shook the proffered hand.

"You don't call me *sir* any more. I call you *sir* now…sir," Sam said. Cooley was getting his own ship, and getting promoted away from the *Josephus Daniels.* He hadn't yet put on his oak leaves or sewn the thin gold stripe that transformed him from lieutenant to lieutenant commander onto each sleeve, but he had the rank even without its trappings.

Rank or no rank, he shook his head. "Doesn't seem right. It *isn't* right, dammit. You've taught me so much…."

"My ass," Carsten said like the old CPO he was. "You knew more than I did when I got here. Now you know a lot more than I do, and the Navy Department's finally figured it out. We both knew this day was coming. You're headed for the top, and I'm doing the best job I know how, and that's the way it ought to be."

“You ought to have a carrier, not a destroyer escort,” Cooley blurted.

“What the hell would I do with a carrier? Run it on the rocks, that’s what.” Sam had to belittle that; he didn’t want to—he didn’t dare—admit how much he wanted it. He thought he knew what to do. He’d spent enough time aboard the *Remembrance,* first as a rating and then as an officer. But even the baby flattops they were cranking out now had three-stripers in command, and he knew he’d be lucky if he ever made two and a half. He was damn lucky to have made a lieutenant’s two.

“You could swing it,” Pat Cooley said. “You can handle men. You know guns. You know damage control. For everything else”—he winked—“you could lean on your exec till you got the hang of it.”

Sam laughed. “You remember to lean on yours,” he said. “You’re the Old Man now. You’re the good guy, the mild guy. Let him be the professional son of a bitch. That’s his job. It’s not yours any more.”

“I won’t forget.” Cooley slung his duffel over his shoulder.

As he walked off the deck and onto the gangplank that led to the Boston Navy Yard, the crew called out good luck and good wishes to him. Cooley waved and grinned. He hadn’t been an out-and-out Tartar, the way a lot of execs were. The sailors might not love him, but they did respect him.

“Wonder who we’ll get now,” one grizzled petty officer said to another.

“Some hotshot who shaves once a week,” the other CPO predicted. “Well, we’ll break him in, by God.”

“Yeah, we’ll—” The first chief noticed Sam listening and shut up with a snap.

“I know what you guys will do,” Sam said, holding in a smile. “Remember, I’ve done it myself. If you don’t ride the guy *too* hard, everything’ll be jake.”

“Sometimes we forget you’re a mustang, sir,” the first chief said sheepishly. “You just act like an officer, you know?”

Was that a compliment or an insult? Sam didn’t try to parse it. With a snort, he said, “Yeah, like the oldest goddamn lieutenant in the U.S.

Navy. If I'm not a mustang, I'm a screwup. Better for the ship if I came up the hawser."

Those were the magic words. If something was good for the ship, nobody would say a word about it.

The two chiefs didn't hang around, though. They went off someplace where they could slander the outgoing and incoming execs—and probably the skipper, too—without getting overheard.

As for Sam, he walked back to his cramped cabin and wrestled with the ship's accounts. After a spell in combat, you could always write some things off as lost in action, which simplified your life. He thought about keeping accounts for an airplane carrier. That almost made him decide not to touch the job with an eleven-foot bohunk, which was what you used when a ten-foot Pole wouldn't reach. But if he ever got the chance, he knew he would leap at it.

He laughed, but he was angry, too. Pat Cooley had given him a new itch, even if it was one he didn't think he'd ever be able to scratch.

More shells and small-arms ammunition came aboard. So did all kinds of galley supplies. The ship got refueled, too, and he had to sign off on everything. One of these days, if the *Josephus Daniels* didn't get sunk under him, he'd have to turn her over to somebody else, and he wanted the books to balance, or at least get within shouting distance of balancing, when he did.

The new exec came aboard the next day. Lieutenant Myron Zwilling couldn't have been more different from Pat Cooley had he tried for a week. He was short and squat and dark. He was also fussily precise; if he had a sense of humor, he kept it so well hidden, even he didn't know where it was. He stared at Sam's right hand.

A glance at Zwilling's hand told the skipper what he was looking for: an Annapolis ring. Zwilling's was lovingly displayed, and couldn't have been polished any brighter. "Reporting as ordered, sir," he said, trying to hold in his disappointment at not finding Sam a Naval Academy graduate. When he saluted, the ring flashed in the sun.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Zwilling," Sam said, reflecting that the new exec was either an optimist or a jerk, one. How could a two-striper in his mid-fifties possibly be anything but a mustang? "We'll give 'em hell, won't we?"

"I hope to aid in making this ship an efficient fighting unit, sir,"

Zwilling said, and Sam's heart sank. He had nothing against efficiency. But he didn't want to sing hymns to it, and Zwilling plainly did.

"Have you ever served on a D.E. before?" Sam asked.

"No, sir," Zwilling replied. "My last tour of duty was aboard a fleet oiler, and before that I was a junior officer on the *Idaho.* I have my personnel records with me for your review."

Of course you do, Sam thought. That wasn't fair, but he couldn't help it. Trying not to show what he was feeling, he said, "Well, let's give you the quick tour, then. There'll be places where you want to watch your head—not a lot of room in one of these babies."

"I'll be careful, sir," Zwilling said, and Sam believed him. He was unimpressed with the pair of 4.5-inch guns that made up the *Josephus Daniels'* main armarment. "The secondary weapons on a battleship are bigger than these," he sniffed.

"Tell me about it. I fought a five-incher on the *Dakota,* " Carsten said.

"As battery chief?" Zwilling asked with his first show of interest in his new skipper as a human being.

"Nope." Sam shook his head. "I was a loader when the Great War started, and ended up running a gun."

"A loader. I see." Zwilling looked as uncomfortable as if Sam had admitted to eating with his fingers when he was a kid. There wouldn't be any talk about professors or courses, not on this ship there wouldn't.

Sam took him through the destroyer escort: galley, bunkrooms, engines, and all. Finally, he said, "What do you think?"

"Everything seems orderly enough," the new exec allowed. "Still, I'm sure there's room for improvement."

"There always is," Sam said, not liking the way the commonplace sounded in Zwilling's mouth. "Do you think you can find your way back to your cabin from here?"

"I do." Zwilling didn't lack for confidence, anyhow.

"Well, ask a sailor if you get lost." Sam inserted the needle with a smile. "I'll let you get settled, and we'll talk some more in the

wardroom tonight.”

“Yes, sir.” Zwilling saluted again and strode off.

After Sam went up on deck, he watched a sailor standing on the pier kissing a redheaded woman good-bye. A couple of sniffling little boys in dungarees stood by her, so she was probably the sailor’s wife. After a last embrace, he slung his duffel bag and asked the officer of the deck for permission to come aboard.

“Welcome to the *Josephus Daniels,* ” Sam said. “Who are you, and what do you do?”

“I’m George Enos, Junior, sir,” the sailor answered. “I jerked shells on a 40mm on the *Townsend.*

Goddamn Confederate Asskicker sank her in the Gulf of California.”

“Well, we can use you.” Carsten paused. Enos? The name rang a bell. He snapped his fingers. “Wasn’t your mother the one who…?”

“She sure was,” Enos said proudly. “My father was a fisherman before he went into the Navy, and so was I.”

“Good to have you aboard,” Sam said. “Good to meet you, too, by God.”

“Thank you, sir.” The sailor cocked his head to one side. “Have we ever met before? You look kind of familiar.”

With his very blond hair and pink skin, Sam sometimes got mistaken for other fair men. He shook his head. “Not that I know of, anyway. You live around here?” After Enos nodded, Sam went on, “I’ve been through more times than I can count, so you may have seen me somewhere, but I’ve got to tell you I don’t remember.”

“Maybe it’ll come to me.” Enos grinned like a kid. “Or maybe I’m talking through my hat. Who knows?

Will I go on a 40mm here, sir?”

“Have to see how everything shakes down, but I’d say your chances are pretty darn good,” Sam answered. “Go below for now and sling your duffel somewhere. The chiefs will take charge of you.”

“Aye aye, sir.” With a crisp salute, George Enos headed for a hatch.

He could have been a kid when we bumped into each other, Sam realized. *But if he was, why would he remember me?* He shrugged. He had no way of knowing. Maybe it would come back to Enos. And maybe it wouldn't. The world wouldn't end either way.

Orders came the next day: join up with a task force heading east across the Atlantic to raid Ireland. *This is where I came in,* Carsten thought. He'd run guns to the micks during the Great War, and shelled—and been shelled by—British positions in Ireland afterwards. The difference this time around was an abundance of British land-based air. He wondered how much the Navy Department brass down in Philly had thought about that.

When he showed Myron Zwilling the orders, the new exec just nodded and said, "That's what we'll do, then."

"Well, yeah," Sam said. "I'd like to have some kind of hope of coming back afterwards, though."

"If they need to expend us, sir—" Zwilling began.

"Hold your horses." Sam held up a hand. "If they need to expend us on something important, then sure.

We needed to take Bermuda back if we could—I guess we did, anyhow. I've pulled some raids on the Confederates that I think really hurt those bastards. But this? This looks chickenshit to me."

"You don't know the big picture, sir," Zwilling said.

He was right. Sam didn't. "What I do know, I don't like."

"You can't refuse the mission," the exec said.

He was right again. That would mean a court-martial, probably, or else just an ignominious retirement.

"I'm not refusing it," Carsten said hastily. "I'm worrying about it. That's a different kettle of fish."

"Yes, sir." The way Zwilling said it, it meant, *No, sir.*

You're not helping, Sam thought. An exec was supposed to be a sounding board, someone with whom he could speak his mind. He wasn't going to get that from Myron Zwilling. He didn't need to be an Annapolis grad to see as much.

“We’ll give it our best shot, that’s all.” Sam thought about George Enos, Jr. “And we’ll make damn sure all the antiaircraft guns and ashcan launchers are fully manned.”

“Of course, sir,” Myron Zwilling said.

XVII

G eorgia. Chester Martin looked south and east. He was really and truly in Georgia, if only in the northwesternmost corner of the state. When he looked across it, though, he knew what he saw on the other side.

The end of the war.

Damned if I don’t, he thought. If the U.S. Army could grind across Georgia, it would cut the Confederate States in half. It would take Atlanta, or else make the city worthless to the CSA. How could the enemy go on fighting after that? Oh, both halves of a worm wiggled for a while if you sliced it in two…but not for long.

And the Confederates had to know that as well as he did. Their artillery stayed busy all the time. They staged night raids with everything from big bombers down to little puddle-jumping biplanes that flew along at treetop height and peeked right into your foxhole.

No matter what they did at night, the USA ruled the daytime skies. Two-engine and four-engine bombers pounded Confederate positions. So did U.S. fighter-bombers. After they dropped their bombs, they climbed to go after the outnumbered C.S. Hound Dogs that still rose to challenge the U.S. air armada.

And fewer Hound Dogs rose each week than had the week before. Little by little, the Confederate States were getting ground down.

U.S. artillery on Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge sent volleys as far into Confederate territory as they would reach, announcing that the high ground had a new owner. Some of the guns up there had belonged to the Confederacy. Unlike small arms, their artillery shared several calibers with its U.S.

equivalents. They must have thought they would capture U.S. guns, not the reverse. But those streams of paratroopers floating down from the sky caught them by surprise.

Captain Rhodes came forward and cautiously looked at the fields and pine woods ahead. He didn't use field glasses—they were a dead giveaway that an officer was up there snooping, and an invitation to a sniper to draw a bead on him. He looked from one end of a trench, walked fifty feet with his head down, then popped up for another peek.

Some of the fields out there were minefields. The Confederates had marked some of them with signs that said MINES! or warned people away with skulls and crossbones. Some of the signs were genuine.

Others, by what Chester had seen before, were bluffs. And real minefields sometimes went unmarked, too. Advancing U.S. soldiers and barrels would find them the hard way—and probably come under machine-gun fire once slowed down in them.

"We can take those bastards," Rhodes said.

Chester Martin nodded. "Yes, sir. I think we can, too. Won't be too easy, won't be too cheap, but we can do it."

The company commander turned and looked west. "We ought to be cleaning out the rest of Tennessee, too, so we don't have such a narrow front here. We can sure as hell do that. Even now, the Confederates have a devil of a time getting men and matériel from east to west."

"Yes, sir," Chester said again. "That's how Nashville fell—almost an afterthought, you might say."

"Sure." Rhodes grinned. "Goddamn big afterthought, wasn't it? But you're right, Sergeant. Once we pushed past to the east, once we got over the Cumberland, Nashville stopped mattering so much. The Confederates had bigger worries closer to home. So they pulled out and let us march in, and they tried to hold Chattanooga instead."

Chester looked back over his shoulder toward the city Captain Rhodes had named. "And they couldn't do that, either," he said happily.

"Nope." Rhodes sounded pretty happy, too. "They're like a crab—they've got claws that pinch, and a hard shell to go with it. But once you crack 'em, there's nothing but meat inside."

"Sounds good to me—except the meat in our rations is better than the horrible tinned beef they use,"

Martin said. “Even they call it Dead Donkey. But their smokes are still good.” He took a pack of Dukes out of his pocket and offered it to Rhodes. “Want some?”

“Thanks. Don’t mind if I do.” The company CO took one, lit it, and started to hand the pack back.

“Keep it,” Chester said. “I’ve got plenty. Lots of dead Confederates these days, and lots of POWs who don’t need cigarettes any more.”

“Thanks,” Rhodes repeated, and stuck the pack in his shirt pocket. He took a drag, blew it out, and then shook his head. “Hate to pay you back for your kindness this way, Chester, but I don’t know what I can do about it.”

“What’s going on?” Chester grew alert. It wasn’t the same sort of alertness he used around the enemy, but your own side could screw you, too.

“Well, I hear repple-depple’s coughed up a shiny new second looey for us, so I’m afraid you’re going to lose your platoon,” Rhodes said.

“Oh.” Martin weighed that. It stung, but not too much. “I’ll live. When they made me a first sergeant after I reupped, I figured they’d have me breaking in shavetails. I’ve had some practice by now. I think I’m halfway decent at it.”

“Fine.” Rhodes set a hand on his shoulder. “You’ve got a good attitude. I’m glad you’re not getting pissy about it.”

“Life is too short.” On the battlefield, Chester had seen how literally true that was.

Second Lieutenant Boris Lavochkin turned out not to be what he expected. Oh, he was young. The only second lieutenants who weren’t young were men up from the ranks, and they didn’t need a graying first sergeant to ramrod them. Lavochkin was squat and fair and tough-looking, with the meanest, palest eyes Chester Martin had ever seen.

“You’re going to show me the ropes, are you?” the youngster asked.

“That’s the idea, sir.” Martin sounded more cautious than he’d thought he would.

“And you’ve done what to earn the right?” Lieutenant Lavochkin

seemed serious.

“I lived through the Great War. I ran a company for a while. I’ve seen a good bit of action this time around, too…sir.”

Those icy eyes measured Chester like calipers. “Maybe.” Lavochkin took off his helmet to scratch his head. When he did, he showed Chester a long, straight scar above his left ear.

“You got hit, sir?” Chester said. That had to be why Lavochkin was coming out of the replacement depot.

He shrugged broad shoulders. “Only a crease. You’ve been wounded, too?”

“Once in the arm, once in the leg. You were lucky, getting away with that one.”

“If I was lucky, the shithead would have missed me.” Lavochkin peered south. “Give me the situation in front of us. I want to lead a raid, let the men see I’ll go where they go. They need to know I’m in charge now.”

A lot of shavetails wouldn’t have been, even with the rank to give orders. Lavochkin…Lavochkin was a leader, a fighter, a dangerous man. He’d go places—unless he stopped a bullet. But they all took that chance.

“Sir, maybe you’d better check with Captain Rhodes before we go raiding,” Chester said.

Lavochkin scowled. That made him look like an even rougher customer than he had before. In the end, though, he nodded. “I’ll do that,” he said.

Rhodes came up to Chester a couple of hours later, a small, bemused smile on his face. He glanced around to make sure the new lieutenant wasn’t anywhere close by before remarking, “Looks like we’ve got a tiger by the tail.”

“Yes, sir. I thought so, too,” Martin said. “You going to turn him loose?”

“I sure am,” the company commander answered. “He needs to find out what he can do, and so do we.

And if things go wrong, well, you've got your platoon again, that's all."

"If I come back," Chester said. "I'm not gonna let him take my guys out by himself. I'm going, too."

Lieutenant Lavochkin didn't like that. "I don't need you to hold my hand, Sergeant."

"I'm not doing it to hold your hand, sir," Chester said evenly. "I'm doing it for my men."

"In case I don't cut it?"

"Yes, sir." Martin didn't beat around the bush.

Lavochkin gave him one of those singularly malignant stares. Chester just looked back. The young officer tossed his head. "Well, come on, then. We'll see who learns something."

The raid went in a little before midnight. Lavochkin knew enough to smear mud on his face to darken it.

He carried a captured Confederate submachine gun along with the usual officer's .45. He also had a Great War trench knife on his belt. Was he showing off, or had he been in some really nasty places before he got hurt? *We'll find out,* Chester thought.

Lavochkin moved quietly. The Confederate machine-gun nest ahead sat on a small rise, but brush screened one approach most of the way up. Chester would have gone at it from that direction, too.

Lavochkin slid forward as if he could see in the dark.

Suddenly, he stopped moving. "They've got wire, the bastards," he said. He didn't ask for a wire-cutter—he had one. A couple of soft twangs followed. "This way—stay low." Chester flattened out like a toad under the wheels of a deuce-and-a-half. He got through.

Before long, he could hear the Confederates at the machine gun talking. He could smell their tobacco smoke, and see the glow of a cigarette coal. They had no idea U.S. soldiers were in the neighborhood.

"Everybody ready?" Lavochkin whispered. No one denied it. Chester was close enough to the lieutenant to see him nod. "All right, then,"

he said. “At my signal, we take ’em. Remember, we want prisoners, but shoot first if you’re in trouble. Runnels, scoot over to the left like we planned.”

“Yes, sir,” the soldier said softly. He was little and skinny; Lavochkin had picked the right guy for quiet scooting. *He’s a prick, but I think he knows what he’s doing,* Chester thought.

Lavochkin’s signal was nothing if not dramatic. He pulled the pin from a grenade and tossed it about halfway between Runnels and the Confederate position. As soon as it burst, Runnels, who carried a captured automatic rifle, fired several quick rounds.

Naturally, the Confederates in the machine-gun nest started shooting at the noise and muzzle flashes.

Chester saw the flame spurting from their weapons. He hoped Runnels was all right. He hoped he would be all right himself, too, because he was up and running for the enemy entrenchment as fast as he could go.

Runnels squeezed off another burst to keep Featherston’s men thinking about him and nobody else. He yelled like a wild man, too. The deception worked just the way Lieutenant Lavochkin hoped it would.

The Confederates didn’t notice the footfalls of the onrushing U.S. soldiers till the men in green-gray were right on top of them. Martin heard a startled, “What the fuck?” as one of the machine gunners tried to swing his piece around.

Too late. Lavochkin cut him down with three accurate rounds from his submachine gun. Then he leaped down into the entrenchment. The rest of the U.S. soldiers followed. Chester hadn’t used a bayonet for anything but opening cans and holding a candle since trench raids a generation earlier. He discovered he still knew how. He stuck a machine gunner who was grabbing for a submachine gun of his own. The sharpened steel grated on a rib, then went deep. The Confederate let out a gurgling shriek as he crumpled.

Seeing one of their buddies spitted like a pig made the rest of the Confederates quit trying to fight and surrender. “Let’s get ’em out of here,” Lavochkin said. “Get the guns off the tripods and take them, too.”

“Let’s get *us* out of here,” Chester said. “We woke up the rest of the

butternut bustards.”

Sure as hell, shouts and running feet said the Confederates were rallying. Runnels alertly fired at them.

That made them hit the dirt. They didn’t know if he was there by himself or had buddies close by. The raiders scrambled out of the nest with captives and booty and hurried back toward the U.S. line. A few wild shots sped them on their way, but they made it with nothing worse than a sprained ankle and a fat lip from one of the Confederates before three men jumped on him.

Intelligence officers took the prisoners away for grilling. In the trench from which they’d started out, Lavochkin eyed Chester Martin. “Well, Sergeant?” he said. “Do I pass?”

“So far, so good, sir,” Chester answered. “The other half of the test is, not doing that kind of shit real often. You know what I mean?” Lavochkin scowled at him, but slowly nodded.

G eorge Enos thought the *Josephus Daniels* was a step down from the *Townsend* as a ship. She was smaller and older and slower and more crowded. But she seemed a tight ship, and a happy one, too.

From what he’d seen and heard, those two went together almost as often as the cliché claimed.

He’d slept in a hammock on the *Townsend.* Having to sling one on the *Josephus Daniels* was no surprise, and no great disappointment. He started to make himself at home, learning, for instance, that her sailors hardly ever called her by her last name alone. He also found out that Josephus Daniels had been Secretary of the Navy during the Great War. After all the time he’d spent on the *Townsend,* he still didn’t know who Townsend was. With the ship at the bottom of the Gulf of California, he wasn’t likely to find out now.

Everyone liked the skipper. Sam Carsten’s craggy face and pale, pale hair kept trying to ring a bell in George’s mind. He’d seen Carsten somewhere before, and not in the Navy. He kept picturing an oak tree….

Nobody had a good word to say about the exec. That was also normal to the point of boredom. But people did speak well of the just-departed Pat Cooley. “This Zwilling item ain’t fit to carry Cooley’s

jock," said Petty Officer Second Class Clem Thurman, who was in charge of the 40mm gun near the bow whose crew George joined.

"No?" George said. Somebody was plainly meant to.

"Fuck, no." Thurman spat a stream of tobacco juice into the Atlantic. "Cooley was the kind of guy who'd find out what you needed and pull strings to get it for you. This new one, he looks in the book for reasons to tell you no." He spat again.

"That's no good," George said.

"Tell me about it," Thurman said. "You ask me, this mission we're on is no damn good, either. Ireland? I got nothin' against micks—don't get me wrong. We give them guns so they can yank on Churchill's nuts, that's great. We get our ass shot off tryin' to give 'em guns—that's a whole different story, Charlie."

George looked east. Nothing but ocean ahead there. Nothing but ocean all around, ocean and the rest of the ships in the flotilla. None of those ships was a carrier. They didn't have even a baby flattop along.

The cruisers carried scout aircraft, but how much good would those do when enemy bombers appeared overhead? *Not enough* was the answer that occurred to George.

"Yeah, well, maybe we're better off without an escort carrier," Thurman said when he grumbled about it.

"Eighteen knots? Hell, they can't get out of their own way—and if we get jumped, thirty airplanes probably won't be enough to stop the limeys, especially since most of 'em won't be fighters."

"No wonder the skipper has us at gunnery practice all the time," George said.

"No wonder at all," the gun chief agreed. "'Course, the other thing is, he served a gun himself when he was a rating. He knows what's going on."

"He seems like a pretty good guy," George said.

"Bet your ass," Thurman said. "He's on our side—and I'm not just saying that on account of the new exec is a dipshit. Carsten knows what makes sailors tick. He works us pretty hard, but that's his job. I

was in this ship when he took over, and the difference is night and day."

George had been part of a good gun team on the *Townsend.* This one could beat it. They went through more live ammo than the *Townsend*'s skipper would have wanted to use. Sam Carsten's attitude seemed to be that everything was fine as long as they had enough to fight with when action came.

They went on watch-and-watch a little more than halfway across the Atlantic: at the point where, if they were unlucky enough, a British patrol aircraft flying out of Limerick or Cork might spot them. The Irish rebels were supposed to be trying to sabotage those patrol flights, but who could guess how much luck they'd have?

"Now hear this." Lieutenant Zwilling's cold, unpleasant voice came on the PA system. "We have a wireless report that one of our submersibles just torpedoed a British destroyer about 300 miles east of here. No reports of other British warships afloat in that area. That is all."

"Sounds good to me," Petty Officer Thurman said. "The gatekeeper's gone. We hope like hell he is, anyway."

They made the closest approach at night. At midnight, they lowered a speedboat into the ocean. It replaced two lifeboats; its skeleton crew consisted of men either from Ireland or of Irish blood. They were making a one-way trip to the Emerald Isle. George passed crates of weapons and ammunition to the crane handlers, who lowered them into the speedboat. Each ship in the flotilla was doing the same thing. The irregulars battling the British occupation of their homeland would get a lift…if the munitions and men arrived.

Big, powerful gasoline engines rumbling and growling, the speedboats roared off to the east. The *Josephus Daniels* turned around and hightailed it back toward the USA. The black gang pulled every rev they could out of her engines. They wanted to get as far away from the Irish coast as they could by the time the sun came up.

She *was* slower than the *Townsend.* Thurman had mocked an escort carrier's eighteen knots. George wasn't happy with the destroyer escort's twenty-four or twenty-five. The *Townsend* broke thirty easy as you please. The flotilla stuck together to help with antiaircraft protection. With really fast ships, it could have got thirty or forty miles closer to home by dawn.

And if it had, maybe the British flying boat wouldn't have spotted it. The cruisers' scout airplanes went after the big, ungainly machine. They even shot it down, but the damage was done. George was sure of that. Somewhere in the direction of the rising sun, armorers were loading explosives onto bombers.

Maybe fighters would come along as escorts, if they could fly so far. George shuddered, remembering the carrier-launched fighter that shot up his fishing boat.

Waiting was hard, hard. Time stretched like taffy. Maybe nothing would happen. Maybe…

"This is the captain." Sam Carsten sounded much more sure of himself on the PA than Zwilling did. "The Y-ranging officer says we'll have visitors in a bit. Give them the kind of friendly American welcome they expect. Do your damnedest, boys. If we ride out this wave, chances are we get past the range where their low-level bombers can hit us. They may send high-altitude heavies after us, but those babies have to be lucky to hit a moving target from three miles up. That's all."

George looked back toward Ireland again. He felt silly as soon as he did. Of course the Y-ranging set reached farther than the Mark One eyeball. It wouldn't be worth much if it didn't. But those airplanes with the blue-white-red roundels were on the way.

"At least I can shoot back now," George muttered.

"What's that, Enos?" Petty Officer Thurman asked.

"When I was a fisherman, a limey fighter shot up my boat. I was lucky—everything missed me. But the son of a bitch killed a couple of my buddies." George set a hand on the 40mm's breech. "This time, by God, I've got a gun, too."

Thurman nodded. "There you go. Pay those fuckers back."

"Hope so," George said. "Don't much like the idea of air attack again, though, not when my last ship got bombed out from under me." The Gulf of California had been warm and calm. The North Atlantic in the latitudes of Ireland was rarely calm and never warm. If the *Josephus Daniels* went down, how long could he stay afloat? Long enough to get picked up? He had to hope so.

"We'll get 'em." Thurman sounded confident. Like a captain, a gun

chief was supposed to. Underlings could flabble. The guys in charge stayed above all that.

The *Josephus Daniels* built up speed. As far as George could judge, pretty soon she was going flat out.

Even so, the cruisers in the flotilla could have walked away from her and the other destroyer escorts.

They could have, but they didn't. George was glad to see them stick around. They put a lot of shells in the air—and, he told himself in what was half cold-blooded pragmatism and half shameful hope, they made bigger targets than destroyer escorts did.

"Bandits within ten miles," Lieutenant Zwilling said over the PA system. "Bearing 090. Won't be long now."

Everybody stared back the way they'd come. George pointed and yelled, "There!" as soon as anybody else. And if he could see the enemy airplanes, they could see his ship, too.

One of them flew in low and slow, straight for the *Josephus Daniels.* "Fuck me if that ain't a torpedo bomber!" Thurman yelled. He swung the twin 40mm mount around to bear on it. "We've got to blast the bastard!"

"Fuck me if it's not a two-decker!" George exclaimed as he passed shells and the gun began to roar.

"Which war are we in, anyway?" Next to Japanese airplanes, it seemed downright primitive.

Tracers shot red, fiery streaks toward the biplane. "It's what they call a Swordfish," Thurman said.

"Looks like a goddamn stringbag, don't it? But it can do for us if we don't knock it down first."

They did. The Swordfish's right wing tilted down and touched a wavetop. Then the airplane cartwheeled and broke up. It never got the chance to launch the torpedo.

"One down!" Thurman shouted exultantly. He couldn't be sure his gun had nailed the British torpedo bomber. Several others were also shooting at it. Another Swordfish, this one trailing smoke, went into the Atlantic. But white wakes in the water said some of the slow, ugly

two-deckers managed to launch their torpedoes.

The *Josephus Daniels* zigzagged as hard as she could. George automatically adjusted as the ship heeled first one way, then the other. He kept passing shells. The gun never ran dry. After this, if there was an after this, he would really be part of its crew—this was baptism by total immersion.

British fighters buzzed overhead like wasps. Every so often, they would swoop down and sting, machine guns blazing on their wings. George had never got a good look at the one that shot up the *Sweet Sue.*

Now he did. The fighters seemed much more up-to-date than the torpedo bombers. He wished they didn't.

One of them raked the *Josephus Daniels* from end to end, bullets clanging and whining as they ricocheted off steel and striking home with soft wet thwacks when they met flesh. Wounded men's shrieks rang through the gunfire.

Petty Officer Thurman caught two bullets in the chest. Looking absurdly surprised, he flailed his arms a couple of times to try to keep his balance. Then, crumpling, he tumbled off the gun mount and splashed into the sea. Only a puddle of blood said he'd ever stood there.

"Jesus!" George said.

One of the aimers, a guy named Jorgenson, stepped up to take over the twin 40mm. The loader took his place. And George stepped into the loader's slot. Jorgenson screamed at a sailor running by to jerk shells. The man started to squawk, but then settled down and started doing it.

The British fighter got away anyhow.

George had practiced as loader, both here and on the *Townsend.* He knew what to do, and he did it. It kept him too busy to see what was going on, which might have been a blessing in disguise. After a while, Jorgenson said, "Hold up." George did. That gave him his first chance in several minutes to raise his head.

No more airplanes. He looked around in dull wonder. Where did they go? Back toward Ireland, he supposed. He didn't think they'd come off

a British carrier. A couple of U.S. ships had fires, but they were all still moving. With luck, they'd get out of range before the next limey strike—if there was one—could come this far. With more luck, the speedboats had landed their weapons without getting spotted. To the brass in the Navy Department, that was the only thing that mattered.

I n a way, getting out of Richmond was a relief for Jake Featherston. He felt stifled in the concrete bunker under the Gray House, and in the Confederate capital as a whole. The damnyankees were clobbering the city with everything they had, and they had more than Jake ever dreamt they would. He'd done his best to flatten Philadelphia, and his best was pretty good, but the United States were doing worse in and to Richmond.

In another way, though, leaving the bunker, leaving the capital, made him sweat bullets. As long as he stayed in the bunker, he was safe. All the reinforced concrete above his head laughed off even direct hits.

It had taken several, without any damage to speak of. Once he got down to Georgia, he felt secure enough. But getting there…

The trouble was, you never could tell who was reading your signals, even the ones in the codes your cryptographers swore were unbreakable. Those codes might not be such an ultra enigma to the USA.

Maybe traitors had delivered cipher machines to the enemy. Maybe the Yankees were just better codebreakers than anybody in the CSA figured.

And if they were, and if their fighters bounced Jake's transport airplane or their bombers hit his train…Well, in that case Don Partridge became President, and the Confederate States went straight down the crapper.

But it hadn't happened, not this time. He was down here talking things over with General Patton. And the Yankees were in Georgia. Not much of Georgia, but they were over the state line. Not Kentucky. Not Virginia. Not Tennessee. Georgia. They'd never got into Georgia in the last war. He hated their being here now.

"You want my head, sir? You can have it. I won't say boo," Patton told him, as he had up in Richmond.

"I promised I'd hold Chattanooga, and I didn't do it. It's my fault, no one else's. If you need a head to roll, here's mine."

Not without a certain reluctance, Featherston shook his own head. “Nah. Who would I get that was better? Besides, could they have run you out unless the paratroopers dropped on Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge?”

“No way in hell—uh, Mr. President,” Patton said.

“Well, I didn’t reckon so myself,” Jake said. “All right—they fooled us once, damn them. Can they do it again?”

“Not that way, anyhow,” the general answered.

“I didn’t think so, either,” Jake said. *If they can, we’re in even worse shape than I figured.* “So your job now is to hold ’em where they’re at, not let ’em break loose into Georgia.”

“I understand the need, sir,” Patton said. “I know how important Atlanta’s industry and rail junctions are.

I’ll do everything I know how to do with the men I’ve got. I wish I had more.”

“You’ve got everything we can give you. Tell you the truth, you’ve got more than I can afford to give you,” Featherston said. “Manpower… Well, we’re moving more women into factories and onto farms.

That frees up some new soldiers, anyhow. And we’ve got some new weapons we’ll be trying out here.”

“New barrels?” Patton asked eagerly. “You have no idea how galling it is to see the Yankees outgunning and outarmoring us. Barrels are supposed to be our strength, not theirs.”

“The new ones are on the drawing boards,” Jake said. “They’ll go into production as soon as we iron out the kinks. It would’ve happened sooner, but U.S. bombers pounded the crap out of the factories in Birmingham, and that set us back.” If the United States weren’t able to base bombers in Kentucky and Tennessee, they would have had a much harder time bombing a town in Alabama. Featherston couldn’t growl too loud about that, not when Patton had offered his head and he’d declined to take it.

“Well, all right, Mr. President.” By the way Patton said it, it wasn’t. It didn’t come close. Gathering himself, the general asked, “What have you got for us, then?”

“New rockets. These babies can reach way the hell up into Tennessee from here, maybe even into Kentucky,” Jake said. “They aren’t *real* accurate yet, but they’ll let us shoot at things we haven’t been able to touch for a while. They’re better than bombers, that’s for sure—we don’t lose a whole crew of trained men whenever one fails.”

“I hope they help.” Patton sounded less delighted than Featherston hoped he would. Most generals—most officers, come to that—were stick-in-the-muds. Jake had seen as much during the Great War. After he took over, he’d tried to get rid of as much dead wood as he could. But he couldn’t retire or shoot the whole Confederate officer corps, no matter how tempting the idea was.

He could put Patton in his place, though. “What’s this I hear about you slapping an enlisted man around?”

“Yes, sir, I did that, and I’d damn well do it again.” Patton had the courage of his convictions, anyhow.

“The yellow coward wouldn’t go forward after a direct order. He blathered about combat fatigue. What nonsense!” He spat with magnificent contempt. “I would have got him moving, too—hell with me if I wouldn’t—if not for some near-mutineers. I hope the Yankees killed the lot of them when they overran Chattanooga. Some good would come from the loss in that case.”

“General, I don’t like slackers. Nobody does. But I’ve seen shellshock. Some men do break,” Jake said.

“When I took the oath in 1934, I promised that soldiers would get a square deal from their officers.

Christ knows I didn’t last time around. I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt—once. But if I hear about anything like this again, you’ll have dug yourself one goddamn deep hole. You got that?”

“You always make yourself very plain, Mr. President.” Patton plainly didn’t like it.

Too bad, Jake thought. Had they promoted him to lieutenant for scenting the Negro uprising of 1915, he probably never would have become President of the CSA. The boiling resentment he still felt at being passed over fueled his rise to power.

A young officer came up to the President and the general. Saluting

nervously, the kid said, “Sir—uh, sirs—Y-ranging reports Yankee airplanes on the way. You might want to think about getting under cover, in case they decide to unload on us up here near the front.”

“Y-ranging,” Jake muttered. That was one more place where the USA had the jump on the CSA. If not for some quiet help from Britain, the Confederacy might still be without it. But he nodded to the kid and to Patton. “Come on, General. No phony heroics today. The country needs us, and we’d better stay alive.”

“What do you mean, ‘phony heroics’?” Patton asked as the junior officer led them to a well-reinforced bombproof. “Some men even of high rank are fond of fighting at the front. In my opinion, that is as it should be.”

“Not if they throw their lives away to do it,” Jake said. “We can’t afford gestures like that, not in the spot we’re in. You don’t see me going right up to the front any more, do you? You reckon I don’t want to?”

Patton might have wanted to make a comment or two along those lines. Whatever he wanted, he didn’t do it. Featherston’s record for fighting up near the front all through the Great War spoke for itself. And, when things were going better, he’d already served the guns this time around. You could say a lot of things about him—he knew the things his enemies did say. But the only way you could call him yellow was to lie through your teeth.

Bombs started thudding home a few minutes after Jake and Patton went to the shelter. Dirt pattered down between the planks that shored up the ceiling. Kerosene lamps lit the bombproof. Their flames wavered and jerked when bombs hit close. Once, the junior officer moved one of them back from the edge of the table on which it sat. Jake didn’t get the feeling he was in any great danger, not down here.

“How long you think this’ll go on?” he asked the kid.

“Twenty minutes to a half hour, sir, if it’s the usual kind of raid.”

“They’re trying to wear us down,” Patton said.

They were doing a pretty damn good job of it, too. Jake held that thought to himself. If Patton couldn’t see it for himself, he didn’t need to hear it. “What will the Yankees be doing up top?” Featherston asked the youngster.

“Maybe some raids to grab prisoners and squeeze them.” The officer looked unhappy. “We lost a machine-gun nest like that last week. But they may just sit tight and let the airplanes pound on us.”

“How many do we usually shoot down when they come over like this?”

“A few. Not enough. The antiaircraft guns do what they can, but we really need fighters to make the enemy pay.”

“We need more fighter pilots, too,” Patton said. “Some of the kids who get into Hound Dogs these days…don’t have enough practice before they do. Let’s put it that way. If they live through their first few missions, they learn enough to do all right. But a lot of them don’t, and that costs a man and a machine.”

“I know. Ciphering out what to do about it’s not so easy, though,” Jake said. “If we slow down the training program, the pilots pick up more experience, but we don’t get ’em soon enough to do us much good. If we rush ’em, they’re still green when they come out. Like you say, General, the ones who live do learn.”

“Sometimes they get killed anyway, uh, sir,” the junior officer said. “The damnyankees just have too many airplanes.”

Featherston glared at him. He didn’t like being reminded of that. And, since the front had moved south, Confederate bombers weren’t hitting U.S. factories so hard. The ones out in California and the Pacific Northwest, which the CSA could hardly hit at all, were also making their weight felt. In a war of production, the United States had the edge—and they were using it.

After a little more than half an hour, the bombs stopped falling. “Let’s get up there and see what the hell they did to us this time,” Jake said.

They’d turned the area into one of the less pleasant suburbs of hell, that was what. Craters pocked the red earth. Smoke rose here and there from fires the bombs had set. Several motorcars lay flipped over onto one side or on their roofs. Stretcher bearers and ambulances took casualties back to aid stations.

The wounded men groaned or screamed, depending on how badly hurt they were. Nobody shouted,

“Freedom!”

Biting his lip, Featherston said, “It’s a bastard, isn’t it?”

“Can’t fight a war without casualties, sir,” Patton said.

“I know that,” Jake said impatiently—he couldn’t let the general think he’d found a weak spot. “But I didn’t reckon they could do so much damage so quick. What if they did push through after an air raid like that? Could we stop ’em?”

He watched Patton pick his response with care. Patton, after all, was the general whose flank attack through the mountains hadn’t driven the USA out of Tennessee and Kentucky, and the general who hadn’t held Chattanooga when it desperately needed holding. “Sir, we’d make it mighty warm for them,”

Patton said at last.

That meant he didn’t know. Jake had no trouble reading between the lines. “If they break out again, we’re in a lot of trouble. A *lot* of trouble, you hear me?”

“We’re doing everything we can with what we’ve got,” Patton said. “That’s the Lord’s truth. If you can pull any more rabbits out of your hat, I’d love to have ’em. Maybe those rockets you talked about will do some good. I hope so. But if there’s anything bigger, I sure want to get my hands on it as quick as I can.”

Jake thought of Professor FitzBelmont and his team at Washington University. He could still win—the CSA could still win—if they got their uranium bomb built faster than the damnyankees did. If the USA beat them to that punch…Well, if that happened, a breakout in Georgia wouldn’t matter any more.

“I may have something for you, General, but I don’t know when yet,” Featherston said. “When you get it, though, it’ll be a humdinger.”

Patton looked northwest. “Sir, it had better be,” he said.

F lora Blackford smiled whenever she got a letter from Joshua. That wasn’t often enough to suit her—two a day wouldn’t have been enough to suit her—but he did write two or three times a week, when he found the chance and wasn’t too tired. Camp Pershing was in upstate New York, between Rochester and Syracuse. To Flora, that was the back of beyond. Joshua liked the weather. How he’d like it

when September turned to November and then to January was liable to be another story.

He even liked the food in the mess halls, which was a truly alarming thought. By what Flora gathered from his letters, they fried everything and let him eat as much as he wanted. To an eighteen-year-old, that made a pretty good start on heaven.

He wrote about how they were whipping him into shape, and how he was stronger and faster than he'd ever been. They were turning him into the best kind of killer they knew how to manufacture. Part of Flora hated that—she didn't want him conscripted at all. But if he had to wear the green-gray uniform, shouldn't he be a fit, well-trained soldier? Wouldn't that give him the best chance of coming home in one piece?

She wished she hadn't thought of it that way. She wished she didn't have to think of it that way. As a Congresswoman, as a President's widow, her wishes usually came true. Not the ones that had to do with Joshua, not any more. He had wishes of his own, and the will to thwart her. He had them, and he used them, and she had to pray his enthusiastic patriotism didn't get him killed.

The next morning, someone blew himself up while Flora was on her way in to the battered hall where Congress met in Philadelphia. The blast was only a couple of blocks away, and made the taxi's window rattle. *"Gottenyu!"* she exclaimed. "Was that what I'm afraid it was?"

"I think so, ma'am." The driver was close to sixty, and one of the hands he put on the wheel was a two-pronged hook. "Those crazy bastards don't know when to quit."

"You don't even know who it was," Flora said.

"Do I need to?" he returned. "Whoever'd strap on explosives and push the button's gotta be nuts, right?"

"You'd hope so." But Flora wasn't so sure. Apparently rational, cold-blooded groups were starting to use people bombs for a very basic reason: they worked. Nothing else disrupted life the way they did.

Every time you got on a bus, you looked at all the other passengers, wondering if you could spot the one about to martyr himself—or herself—for the sake of a Cause. And those other people were looking at you, wondering if you were that one.

A Mormon unhappy with the truce terms? A Confederate agent who'd got close to somebody Jake Featherston wanted dead before pushing the button? Somebody with a personal grievance and access to explosives? A genuine nut? She wouldn't know till she heard over the wireless or read the answer in the paper.

She tipped the driver heavily when he dropped her off. "Thank you, ma'am, but you don't have to do that," he said.

"I didn't do it because I had to. I did it because I wanted to," she told him.

He touched the hook to the patent-leather brim of his cap. "Mighty kind of you," he said, and drove off.

Kind? Flora doubted it. She'd given him extra money not least because cabs like his saved her from worrying about the other passengers on a bus. That was less egalitarian than it should have been, but she couldn't make herself feel very guilty about it. She didn't want to get blown up, and that was that.

She had to show her ID to get into the building. Before she could get past the entrance hall, a burly guard checked her purse and briefcase and a policewoman patted her down. By the woman's smirk, she enjoyed it the way a man might have. Flora didn't know what could be done about that, either. Nothing, probably.

She hurried to the room where the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War was meeting. Several Senators and Congressmen were already there. "Morning, Flora," one of them said. "We pounded the, uh, crud out of Atlanta last night, if half of what they say on the wireless is true."

"Good," Flora replied. About half of what they said on the wireless usually was true.

"You all right?" the Congressman asked. "You look a little poorly." Foster Stearns was a granite-ribbed Democrat from New Hampshire: a reactionary, a class enemy, and a good fellow. One of the things Flora had found in Congress was that the people on the other side of the aisle didn't have horns and a tail. They were just people, no worse and no better than Socialists, and as sincere about what they believed.

"I've been better," Flora said. "I heard a people bomb—I'm pretty sure that's what it was—go off when I was coming in."

“Oh!” everybody exclaimed. Foster Stearns pulled out a chair and made her sit down. Somebody—she didn’t see who—gave her a paper cup. She took a big swig, thinking it was water. It turned out to be straight gin, and almost went down the wrong pipe. She managed to swallow before she had to cough.

She wasn’t used to straight gin right after breakfast—or any other time. But the swig seemed to help. She was less upset afterwards than she had been before.

More committee members came in. They knew about the bomb, too. “Took out quite a few folks, the miserable son of a bitch,” one of them said, and then, “Excuse me, Flora.”

“It’s all right,” Flora answered. “That’s not half what I think of him.”

“Are we all here? Shall we get started?” A Senator and a Congressman asked the same thing at the same time.

Along with everybody else, Flora looked around the conference room. Robert Taft wasn’t there. And that meant something was wrong. They should have convened five minutes earlier, at nine on the dot. He was always on time, as reliable as the sunrise. “Somebody call his apartment,” Flora said.

Somebody went outside to do that, and came back a couple of minutes later. “His wife says he left forty-five minutes ago. He was walking in —trying to lose ten pounds.” More than one committee member chuckled, remembering his rotund father.

Flora knew where Taft lived—much closer to Congressional Hall than she did. And she could make a pretty good guess about how he would have come here. When she did, she gasped in dismay. “I hope I’m wrong,” she said, “but…”

“What is it?” Congressman Stearns asked. Then he must have drawn his own mental map, for he went pale as milk. “Sweet Jesus Christ, you don’t think the people bomber got him?”

“I don’t know,” she answered, “but he would have been in about the right place at about the wrong time.

And the Mormons and the Confederates both hate him like rat poison. The Canadians, too, come to that.”

“We’d better find out.” Foster Stearns and three other committee members said that or something very much like it. Stearns added, “We don’t even have to adjourn, because we never convened. Come on!”

They all hurried toward the entrance.

“Has Senator Taft come in?” Flora asked the butch policewoman.

“Not by this way,” she answered, and he would have.

Flora and the rest of the committee members looked at one another, their consternation growing.

Somebody said, “Maybe we’d better start calling hospitals. Philadelphia Methodist is closest to where the bomb went off, isn’t it?”

“That’s right,” Foster Stearns said while Flora was still forming the picture in her mind. He nodded to the policewoman. “Where’s the nearest telephone we can use?”

“Down that hallway, sir, on the left-hand side.” She pointed. She was more polite to him than she had been to Flora. With a wave of thanks, Stearns trotted off.

Along with the other committee members, Flora followed him. Maybe there would be more than one telephone, so they could call several hospitals at once. And even if there weren’t, they would hear the news as soon as he got it.

He was already talking when Flora came up. “You do have casualties there?” he asked. “How many?

Have any gone to other hospitals, too?” To the other Representatives and Senators, he said, “At least a couple of dozen. It’s a bad one.” He spoke into the handset again: “Is Senator Taft there?…He is? How is he? This is Congressman Stearns. I’m on a committee with him.” He waited. Someone spoke into his ear. Flora knew the answer right away—he looked as if the person on the other end of the line had punched him in the stomach. “Thank you, Miss.” He hung up the telephone like a man moving in the grip of a bad dream.

“He’s gone, isn’t he?” Flora said.

“He is.” Stearns nodded dazedly. “Massive internal injuries, she said. They did everything they could, but….” He spread his hands.

“Do they know who the bomber was?” Two or three people asked the same question.

Now Stearns shook his head. “Only pieces left. The woman at the hospital said it was a man. Maybe what he’s got in his pockets will tell them more—or maybe it won’t.”

Something flashed through Flora’s mind. A story she’d read to Joshua, back when he cared about stories and not Springfields. “Pocketses,” she muttered, but the memory wouldn’t take any more shape than that. “Whoever did it, he hurt us when he did. Robert was a good friend to his friends, and a bad enemy to his enemies.”

“He was a stiff-necked old grouch,” she heard one of her fellow Socialists whisper to another.

That was also true; no one who’d ever had much to do with Robert Taft would or could deny it. Taft had no patience for people who didn’t measure up to his own stern notions of rectitude. Despite wide political differences, he and Flora had got on well for years. Beyond any doubt, that said something about her. They made odd friends, the austere Ohio aristocrat and the New York garment worker’s daughter, odd but good.

And now they didn’t. *I’ll have to go to the funeral,* she thought. She had a black dress that was getting too much wear these days. Part of that was the war’s fault, part her own for reaching her fifties. No matter how often you told them not to, people kept dying on you.

“I think,” Congressman Stearns said, “we’d better go back and let some unhappy Army officers know we’re adjourning.”

Going on the way Taft wanted would have meant convening the committee and raking those bungling officers over the coals. Flora was sure of that. She was just as sure she had no more heart for it than her colleagues did.

Two of the officers—a brigadier general and a colonel—were in the conference room when the committee members returned. “Good God!” the colonel exclaimed when he heard the news. “He was a son of a bitch—everybody knew that—but he was *our* son of a bitch, and everybody knew that, too.”

His words more pungently echoed Flora’s. She kept feeling at the hole losing Robert Taft left in her spirit.

It seemed as real, and as painful, as the hole from a lost tooth in her mouth. The dentist gave her codeine after doing his worst to her. There was no codeine for a hole in the spirit. It would have to hurt till time turned it from an open, bleeding wound to a scar.

Before she even knew she was doing it, she started to cry. So much already lost in this war. And she thought about Joshua's latest letter. She'd lost so much—and she still had so much to lose.

J efferson Pinkard thought Humble, Texas, was mighty well named. It lay twenty miles north of Houston, and was about the size of Snyder—three or four thousand people. For a while after the turn of the century, Humble might have been Proud: they struck oil there, and a lot of people got rich. Then the mad inflation after the Great War wiped out everybody's money, rich and poor alike, and after that the wells started running dry. Some of them still pumped, but they weren't making anybody rich these days.

Lumber from the pine woods around the town helped business keep going.

Humble would just about do, Jeff decided. He'd looked at a lot of small towns in southeastern Texas, and this one seemed best suited to his purposes. A railroad ran through it; building a spur off the main line would be easy. Local sheriffs and Mexican soldiers had already cleaned most of the Negroes out of the area. If he had to build a new camp here, he could do that.

He'd rather have stayed in Snyder, but that wouldn't fly much longer. Who would have thought the United States cared enough about Negroes to try to keep the Confederates from getting rid of them?

What business of the damnyankees was it? If they wanted to let their blacks live, they could do that. But they didn't like them well enough to let more from the CSA come over their border.

Jeff could see advantages to starting over. He could do things the right way from the beginning. The bathhouses that weren't would go up as an organic part of the camp, not as add-ons. He could build a proper crematorium here, get rid of the bodies once and for all, instead of dumping them into trenches.

Yes, it could work.

It would disrupt routine, though. To a camp commandant, routine was

a precious thing. Routine meant the camp was operating the way it was supposed to. When routine broke down, that was when you had trouble.

Of course, if you looked at it another way, routine at Camp Determination had already broken down.

Damnyankee bombing raids and the U.S. Eleventh Army's drive toward Snyder had ruined it. How could you run a proper camp when you weren't sure how much population you needed to reduce from one day to the next? How could you when you didn't know whether soldiers in green-gray would start shelling you soon? That hadn't happened yet, but Jeff knew it could.

When he talked to the mayor of Humble about running up a camp outside of town, that worthy said,

"You'll use local lumber, won't you? You'll use local labor?"

"Well, sure," Jeff answered. "As much as I can, anyways."

"Sounds good, General," the mayor said, eyeing the wreathed stars on either side of the collar on Jeff's uniform. Pinkard didn't explain about Freedom Party ranks—life was too short. The mayor went on,

"Once you get this place built, reckon you'll want to keep some local boys on as guards? And some of the older fellas who maybe got hurt the last time around or maybe aren't up to marching twenty-five miles a day?" The mayor himself, with a big belly, a bald head, and a bushy white mustache, fell into that last group.

"I'll do what I can," Jeff said. "If they've got what it takes, I'll use 'em."

The mayor beamed. He thought Pinkard had made a promise. Jeff beamed, too. He knew damn well he hadn't. The mayor stuck out his pudgy hand. "Sounds like we got ourselves a deal," he said.

"I hope so," Jeff said, shaking on it. "Still have to clear things with Richmond, too, you understand." *If you don't understand that, you don't understand anything.*

But the mayor did. "Well, sure, General. That's how things work nowadays, isn't it?" he said. "You want to use my telephone?" He seemed proud to have one on his desk.

“I sure as hell do,” Pinkard answered. He slid the telephone over to his side of the desk, but didn’t pick up the handset or dial the long-distance operator till the mayor ate humble pie and scurried out of his own office. Then Jeff listened to the inevitable clicks and pops on the line as his call went through. And *then* he listened to the voice of Ferdinand Koenig’s secretary, which was sultry enough to fit into any man’s wet dream.

“Oh, yes, sir,” she purred. “I’m sure he’ll speak to you. Hold on, please.”

“I thank you kindly.” It wasn’t even that Jeff was a week and several hundred miles away from his wife.

Edith could have been standing beside him and he would have been extra polite to a woman with a voice like that.

“Koenig here.” The Attorney General of the CSA, by contrast, sounded like a raspy old bullfrog. But he had Jake Featherston’s ear, so he didn’t need to be sexy. “You find what you were looking for, Pinkard?”

“Reckon I did, sir. I’m in a little town called Humble, up north of Houston. Got a railroad line, and a spur to a new camp’d be easy to build. Mayor’s damn near wetting his pants, he wants it in his back yard so bad.”

“Humble, you say? Hang on. Let me look at a map.” There was a pause while Koenig rustled papers; Jeff listened to him do it. He came back on the line. “All right—I found it. Yeah, that looks pretty good.

Yankee bombers’d have a devil of a time getting there from anywhere, wouldn’t they?”

“If they wouldn’t, sir, we are really and truly fucked,” Pinkard replied.

A cold silence followed. Then the Attorney General said, “You want to watch your mouth. I’ve said that before, haven’t I?”

“Yeah, I reckon you have.” Jeff wasn’t eager to kowtow to a voice on the line from Richmond, no matter how important that voice’s owner was. “But wasn’t I telling you the truth?” He used Jake Featherston’s catchphrase with sour relish. “Things don’t look so good right now, do they?”

“Maybe not, but we’ll lick the damnyankees yet. You just see if we don’t.” Ferd Koenig sounded absolutely confident.

“Hope like hell you’re right, sir.” Jeff meant that. “Can we talk about this Humble place some more?”

The biggest advantage he saw to closing down Camp Determination was purely personal: it would let him get his family the hell out of Snyder without looking as if they were running away. They’d come through every Yankee bombing raid so far, but how long could they stay lucky? Long enough, he hoped.

He wondered if Koenig felt like raking him over the coals some more, but the Attorney General backed off. “Yeah, let’s do that,” he said. “Reckon it’ll suit.”

“All right, then. Next question is, how do we get it built? I used niggers to run up Camp Determination, but I don’t figure that’d work this time around. Can I get me a team of Army engineers, or are they all busy over in Tennessee and Georgia?” That Jeff could mention the Army’s being busy in Georgia said how badly things were going.

Ferd Koenig didn’t hesitate. “You’ll have ’em,” he promised. “Population reduction is a priority, by God.

We’ll take care of this, and in jig time, too. You get ready to finish what you’ve got going on at Camp Determination, and we’ll run up the camp by Humble. Plans’ll be about the same as the ones you used before, right?”

“Yes, sir, except we’ll want the bathhouses built in instead of tacked on, if you know what I mean,”

Pinkard said. “And I’d like a crematorium alongside, too. More ground in use around here—not so much room for dozers to scrape out the big old trenches we’d need.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Ferd Koenig said. “We’ve got ’em in place at a couple of other camps.

Design’s already taken care of, so all we’ve got to do is run up another one.”

“That sounds good. I thought so, but I wasn’t sure,” Jeff said.

“Let me write it down so I make sure I have it straight.” Koenig did,

then read it back. “That about cover things?”

Jeff thought before he answered. If he’d forgotten something, getting it fixed after the engineers left wouldn’t be so easy. But he couldn’t think of anything—and then he did. “Mayor here wants to make sure you hire locals for some of the work.”

“Oh, sure—we always take care of shit like that. Gotta keep those boys happy, too,” the Attorney General said indulgently. “You get ready to move, ’cause this one’ll go up faster’n hell. We don’t want to pull the engineers off the line any longer than we have to.”

“I’ll handle that, sir,” Jeff said. “You can count on it.”

“If I couldn’t, somebody else’d be there. Freedom!” Koenig hung up.

The mayor was plainly worrying about his telephone bill when Jeff called him back in. Jeff wondered if the man had ever called anywhere as far away as Virginia. He would have bet against it. But the mayor’s face lit up when Jeff said, “Well, Ferd Koenig reckons Humble will suit us as well as I do. Some Army engineers’ll come in to run up the camp, and then, by God, then we’ll get down to business.”

“That’s mighty fine news—mighty fine,” the mayor said. “Uh—you do recall I’d like some of our people from around these parts to help do the work?”

“Ferd says the engineers’ll take care of that,” Pinkard told him. His repeated use of the Attorney General’s nickname seemed to impress the mayor even more than the near-promise.

“Good news. Damn good news.” The mayor reached into his desk and pulled out a bottle and a couple of glasses. “We ought to have us a drink to celebrate.”

“I sure don’t mind,” Jeff said. The mayor’s whiskey turned out to be rotgut, but Jeff didn’t flabble. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t drunk rotgut before. One drink led to several, and to his staying over in Humble a night longer than he’d intended. The mayor offered to get him a girl for the evening, but he turned that down. He was more practical than virtuous. Any woman the mayor got him would be a pro, and with a pro you never could tell what you were bringing home to your wife. That wouldn’t be so good, especially not with a baby on the way pretty soon.

He set out across Texas for Snyder the next morning. As usual, the

sheer size of the state flabbergasted him. The drive in the old Birmingham felt more like crossing a country. Even real cities like Dallas and Fort Worth seemed dwarfed by the immensity all around them. Bomb damage seemed diminished and spread out, too. He knew the USA had hit both towns hard the year before, but he saw only a few battered, firescarred buildings.

West of Fort Worth, woods grew scarcer and the prairie stretched as far as the eye could see. Every so often, Jefferson Pinkard began to spot shot-up motorcars by the side of the road. Some were merely pocked with bullet holes. A couple had bloodstains marring the paint of one door or another; a hasty grave was dug beside one of those. And some were charred wrecks: autos where a bullet had gone through the engine or the gasoline vapors in a mostly empty fuel tank.

Pinkard kept a wary eye on the sky. The Birmingham had nowhere to run to and nowhere to hide if U.S.

fighters or fighter-bombers swooped down. Maybe he could get out and hide in a ditch while they shot up the auto. That was his best hope, anyhow.

When he stopped for gas in a little town called Cisco, the woman who pumped it said, “Reckon you’re either mighty brave or mighty damn dumb, comin’ so far in broad daylight.”

“I can go faster,” Jeff said.

“Yeah, but you can end up dead faster, too,” she replied. “Your funeral —if you get one.”

Jeff remembered the grave next to the motorcar. He remembered the bloodstains he’d seen, too. And he stayed in Cisco for a roast-beef sandwich and a couple of bottles of beer, and waited till twilight deepened to get going again. Maybe he wasted a few hours. Maybe he saved his own life. He never knew one way or the other.

Crawling along with headlights masked down to slits, he didn’t get into Snyder till not long before dawn.

He drove with special care in town, because craters scarred so many streets. You could crash down into one before you saw it. But he made it home, and found he still had a home to come back to. “Sorry to bother you, hon,” he told Edith. “We’ll be able to clear out, go somewhere safer, before real long.”

“Thank you, Jesus!” she said, and squeezed him tight despite her swollen belly.

C assius was proud of his new boots. They fit him perfectly, and the Mexican soldier who’d worn them before didn’t need them any more. Somebody—Napoleon?—said an army marched on its stomach.

Food mattered, all right, but so did your feet. The shoes in which Cassius got out of Augusta were falling apart, so he was glad to get such fine replacements.

“Lucky bastard,” Gracchus said. His feet were very large and very wide. Cassius’ were of ordinary size, like the rest of him. He’d never thought of that as luck before, but maybe it was.

“We’ll get you some, boss,” he said—as much of a title as the guerrilla leader would take.

“Have to slit ’em,” Gracchus said morosely. The shoes he wore now were slit on either side, to make room for his uncooperative feet. What that lacked in style, it more than made up for in comfort. Gracchus eyed Cassius thoughtfully. “You know how to drive?”

“Wish I did.” Cassius shook his head. “Folks never had an auto or nothin’, though. How come?”

“Want to steal me a pickup truck from somewheres, mount a machine gun in the back,” Gracchus said.

“Some of the other bands been doin’ it, I hear tell. Raise all kinds of hell that way. Ain’t as good as havin’ our own barrel, but it’s about as good as a bunch o’ niggers can hope for.”

About as good as a bunch o’ niggers can hope for: eleven words that spoke volumes about how things were in the Confederate States of America. Crouched in pine woods, hoping the whites and Mexicans wouldn’t put airplanes overhead to hunt for the band and hoping the trees would screen the fires and guerrillas if they did, Cassius had his own worm’s-eye view of what those words meant.

He also had his own reasons for wanting to hit back at the Freedom Party and everyone who stood with it: everyone in the CSA who wasn’t black, or as close as made no difference. “Don’t know how to drive,” he said, “but you bet I do me some fancy shootin’ if you put

me in the back o' that truck."

Gracchus chuckled. "Every nigger in the band I talk about this with say the same thing. A couple o' the gals, they say they give me what you ain't even got if only I put 'em back dere."

Cassius hadn't dared approach the handful of women who marched and fought along with Gracchus'

men. They were tougher than he was, and he knew it. The word *intimidated* probably would have sprung to his father's mind. It didn't occur to Cassius; he just knew that those gals scared hell out of him.

"Where you gonna get a pickup?" If he thought about the truck, he didn't have to think about the women.

"Off a farm, I reckon," Gracchus answered. "Damn ofays mostly keepin' 'em locked up tight nowadays, though. They know what we kin do if we git our hands on one."

Locks didn't usually stop Gracchus when he set his mind on whatever lay behind them. His scouts didn't need long to find a farm with a pickup truck that would do. The farm had a telephone line so the whites there could call for help if guerrillas attacked them. Gracchus only smiled when he noted that. Among the tools his irregulars carried were several wire cutters.

"Dey kin call all dey please," he said. "It don't go through, ain't that a shame?"

The guerrillas grinned, white teeth shining from dark faces. Despite those grins, they spent a couple of days sizing up the farm before they made their move. If the whites brought in riflemen or a machine gun of their own under cover of night, they could give raiders a wicked surprise. Gracchus couldn't afford to get surprised that way.

After the telephone line was cut, he pitched a rock through a farmhouse window to get the attention of the people inside. When curses said somebody was awake in there, he shouted, "Throw out the keys to your truck an' we goes away. We don't hurt nobody. We jus' takes the truck an' goes."

"Over my dead body!" the man inside yelled. In a lower voice, he went on, "Sal, call the militia!"

"Can't get the operator!" Sal said in despairing tones.

“Las’ chance, ofay!” Gracchus shouted. “We kin hot-wire the truck if we gotta, but we gonna have to shoot you to make sure you don’t start shootin’ your ownself when we takes it away.”

A rifle shot split the night. The bullet didn’t miss Gracchus by much, but it missed. The guerrillas knew what to do. Some of them started banging away to make the people inside keep their heads down.

Others, Cassius among them, ran toward the farmhouse. He wished he had a helmet to go with his boots.

But a helmet wouldn’t stop a rifle round, either.

The defenders had several firearms. If they raised enough of a ruckus, someone at a nearby farm might telephone the authorities or go out to get help. The guerrillas had to win quickly, take the truck, with luck kill the whites, and disappear before superior force arrived.

“I’ll shift them fuckers,” a Negro called. “Break me a window an’ see if I don’t.”

Cassius was close enough to a window to smash it with the butt of his Tredegar. Had one of the farm family waited on the other side of the glass, he would have caught a bullet or a shotgun blast with his teeth. That crossed his mind only later. He did know enough to get away fast once the stock hit the window.

A few seconds later, a Featherston Fizz sailed in through the opening he’d made. He heard it shatter on the floor inside. That would spread blazing gasoline in a nice, big puddle. “Burn, you goddamn ofays!” he yelled. “Burn in your house, an’ burn in hell!”

Flames lit that room from the inside. They showed a white man standing in the doorway to see if he could do anything about the fire. Cassius snapped a shot at him. He wasn’t the only guerrilla who fired at the white man, either. The fellow went down, either hit or smart enough not to offer a target like that again.

Another Featherston Fizz flew into the farmhouse. Cassius liked the idea of roasting whites with a weapon named for the founder of the Freedom Party. He’d run into a phrase in a book one time— *hoist with your own petard.* He didn’t know what a petard was (though his father likely would have), but he got the sense of it anyhow. Those Fizzes were petarding the devil out of the family in there.

They stayed in the burning building as long as they could. They stayed

a lot longer than Cassius would have wanted to. Then they all charged out the back door at once, shooting as they came. Had they made it to the woods, they might have escaped. But they didn't. In the light of the fire behind them, they made easy targets. An old man in a nightshirt killed a woman with him before he went down. Another woman, hardly more than a girl, blew off her own head with a shotgun.

They had to fear what the Negroes would have done with them—to them—had they taken them alive.

And they had reason to fear that. Revenge came in all kinds of flavors. If you could get some with your dungarees around your ankles…well, why not? It was nothing whites hadn't done to blacks through the centuries of slavery. Cassius' own mother couldn't have been above half Negro by blood. He himself was lighter than a lot of guerrillas in Gracchus' band. He wasn't light enough to pass for white, though—not even close. In the CSA, that was as black as you had to be to get reckoned a Negro, as black as you had to be these days to get shipped off to a camp and have your population reduced.

"Let's get outa here!" Gracchus shouted. "The ofays, they see the fire fo' sure."

"We oughta stay, shoot the bastards when they come," somebody said.

"You dumb fuckin' nigger, you reckon dey think a fire in the middle o' the night go an' happen all by itself?" Gracchus said scornfully. "They don' jus' bring the fire engines. They bring the armored cars an'

the machine guns, too—bet your ass they do. I say get movin', I mean get movin'!"

No one argued any more. Cassius did ask, "We got us the pickup?"

"Oh, hell, yes," Gracchus answered. "Leonidas done drove it off five minutes ago."

"All right by me," Cassius said. "I was busy five minutes ago."

"Lots of us was," the guerrilla leader allowed. "Ain't busy now, though, so git."

Cassius got. Part of him regretted missing the chance to ambush the whites who'd come to the farm family's rescue. But he knew Gracchus was right: who would ambush whom wasn't obvious. Best not to

tempt fate.

Somewhere up in the northwestern part of Georgia, the Stars and Stripes already flew in place of the Stars and Bars. Sooner or later, the Yankees would break out into the rest of the state. Cassius could see that coming. All the black guerrillas could. If they could stay alive and keep harrying the Confederates till the U.S. Army arrived…

If we can do that, we win the war, Cassius thought.

Then he wondered whether winning the war would be worth it. What did he have to go back to in Augusta? Nothing. His family was gone, his apartment not worth living in. The rest of the guerrillas were no better off. They'd already lost, no matter how the war went.

"Boss?" he said as the guerrillas loped away.

"What you want?" Gracchus asked.

"Suppose the United States lick Jake motherfuckin' Featherston. Suppose we're still breathin' when that happens. What the hell we do then?"

"Don't know about you, but I got me a big old bunch of ofays I wants to pay back," the guerrilla leader answered. "Reckon that'll keep me busy a while."

Cassius nodded. "Sure enough, we can do that for a while. But what kind of *life* we gonna have? What kind of country this gonna be? Can't kill *all* the damn whites—wouldn't be nobody left then. Gotta live with 'em some kinda way. But *how*? How we go on, knowin' what they done to us?"

"Fuck, I dunno. I ain't never worried about it. Ain't had time to worry about it—been too worried about stayin' alive," Gracchus said. "Lookin' down the road…You don't want to think too goddamn much, you hear what I'm sayin'? Spend all your time thinkin' 'bout tomorrow, you ain't gonna live to git there."

That made some sense. But Cassius said, "We ain't old or nothin'. We make it through this goddamn war, we got a lot o' time ahead of us. Maybe we go on up to the USA. They ain't so hard on niggers there."

"That's a fact—they ain't," Gracchus said. "But here's another fact—they don't like niggers much, neither. If they did, they woulda let

more of us git away when the Freedom Party first took over. But they didn't. They closed their border so we had to stay in the CSA an' take whatever Featherston's fuckers done dished out. Yankees like us better'n they like Confederate sojers, but it don't go no further'n that."

He didn't just make some sense there—he made much too much. "What're we supposed to do, then?"

Cassius wanted to wail the question. Instead, it came out as more of a panting grunt. It was the sort of thing he would have asked his father when he and Scipio weren't quarreling.

His father would have had a good, thoughtful answer for it. Gracchus just shrugged and said, "We gots to stay alive. We gots to hit the ofays till the war's done, an' go on hittin' 'em afterwards. Past that…Hell, I don't know nothin' past that. Find out when I gits there, if I gits that far."

The way things were, maybe that *was* a good, thoughtful answer. If you were someplace where you couldn't make plans, didn't trying only waste your time? For now, what was there besides fighting and taking whatever vengeance you could? Cassius trotted on. He couldn't see anything besides that now himself.

XVIII

Every time an officer Lieutenant-Colonel Jerry Dover didn't know came to the supply dump, his stomach started knotting up. He kept wondering if someone from Intelligence would take him off and do horrible things to him because of Melanie Leigh. Every time it didn't happen, Dover relaxed…a little.

He saw plenty of unfamiliar officers, too, enough to keep his stomach sour, enough to keep him gulping bicarbonate of soda. Lots of that came to the front; given what soldiers ate, they needed it.

Some of the new officers he dealt with came from outfits just arrived in northwestern Georgia to try to stem the Yankee tide. Others were men in new slots, the officers they replaced now being wounded or dead.

One day, a brigadier general showed up and asked, "You fought in the line in the last war, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," Dover answered. "I was only a noncom then, though."

“I was a first lieutenant myself,” said the officer with the wreathed stars. “We’ve both got more mileage on us than we used to. I have a regimental command slot open—Colonel McCandless just stopped some shrapnel with his face, and he’ll be on the shelf for weeks. If you want it, it’s yours.”

“Sir, I’ll take it if you order me to,” Dover answered. “But I don’t think I’d be better than ordinary in that slot. As a supply officer, I’m pretty goddamn good. If somebody ordinary replaces me here, that might hurt the war effort worse than if you have some different ordinary officer take charge of your regiment.”

The brigadier general studied him. *Wondering if I’m yellow,* Dover thought. The officer’s eyes found the ribbon for the Purple Heart above Dover’s left breast pocket. “How’d you get that?” he asked.

“A scratch on my arm. Not worth talking about,” Dover answered.

Maybe the general would have decided he was a liar and a blowhard if he came up with some fancy story of a wound suffered in heroic circumstances. His offhand dismissal seemed to satisfy the man. “Stay where you are, then, Dover,” the brigadier general said. “You’re doing well here—I know that, and it’s one of the reasons I thought about you for a combat post. But you have a point: this work is important to the war effort, too, and it needs to be done right. I’ll find somebody else for the regiment.”

After the general left, Dover lit a cigarette. He had to stir the butts in the glass ashtray on his cheap desk to make room for it. One of the sergeants who helped keep the depot going stuck his head into the tent and asked, “What was that all about, sir?” Like any sergeant worth his stripes, he assumed he had the right to know.

Dover saw no reason not to tell him. “About what you’d figure, Pete—he thought about moving me up to the front, but he decided I can do more here.”

“Christ, I hope so!” Pete said. “You’re really good at this shit. I don’t even want to think about how much trouble I’d have breaking in some new asshole, and some of those clowns just never do get what’s going on.”

“Nice to know I’m a comfortable old asshole,” Dover said, and Pete laughed. Dover tossed the sergeant the pack of Raleighs.

“Thanks,” Pete said. “Even smokes are getting hard to come by, the

way the damnyankees keep tearing things up between here and Atlanta. That never happened the last time around, did it?"

"I don't think so," Dover answered. "I don't remember running short, anyway." He looked north and west. His personal worries weren't the only ones he had. "You think we can stop the Yankees if they try to break out again?"

"Reckon we'd better," Pete said dryly. "They start heading for Atlanta, we better start trying to see how much they'll let us keep if we quit."

That was about how Dover saw it, too. "Careful how you talk," he told Pete, not for the first time. "Lots of people flabbling about defeatism these days."

"Yeah, well, nobody'd be defeatist if we weren't getting fucking defeated," the sergeant said, which was nothing but the truth. "I'd almost like to see Atlanta fall, to tell you the truth, just so I could laugh while some of the Quartermaster Corps fat cats there got it in the neck. Those cocksuckers have done more to lose us the war than any three Yankee generals you can think of."

"You expect me to argue? You're preaching to the choir," Dover said. "Now they use the bad roads and the torn-up train tracks for excuses not to send us what we need."

"Did I hear right that you told one of the shitheads down there you were gonna send Jake Featherston a wire about how lousy they were?" Pete asked.

"I said it, yeah," Dover admitted. "Don't know that I'd do it. Don't know that it would do any good if I did."

"You ought to, by God. They've been getting fat and living soft off Army goods since the war started,"

Pete said. "If Featherston can't rein 'em in, nobody on God's green earth can, I reckon."

Maybe nobody could. Jerry Dover was inclined to believe that, which was another reason he hadn't sent the telegram. Before he could say so, air-raid sirens started howling. Somebody clanged on a shell casing with a hammer, too, which was the emergency substitute for the sirens.

"Head for shelter!" Dover said. He heard U.S. airplane engines

overhead even before he got out of the tent. The dugout into which he and Pete scrambled was as fancy as any he'd known in the Great War. It had all the comforts of home—if your home happened to be getting bombed.

"Maybe they aren't after us," Pete said.

"Here's hoping," Dover agreed. Northwestern Georgia had plenty of targets. Then explosions started shaking the ground much too close. The supply dump was one of those targets.

Something on the ground blew up—a roar different from the ones bombs made. Jerry Dover swore. He hoped the secondary explosion didn't take too much with it. He was as careful with ordnance as he knew how to be. He didn't store much of it in any one place, and he did build earth revetments around each lot. That minimized damage, but couldn't stop it.

Another secondary explosion proved as much, as if proof were needed. Dover swore some more. A couple of other soldiers in the bombproof laughed, as much from nerves as for any other reason. A lucky hit and the bombproof might not be; it might turn into a tomb.

"Sometimes the bastards get lucky, that's all," Pete said.

"I don't want them to get lucky, goddammit," Dover said. "What if they're starting the big push now?

The guys at the front will need everything we can send 'em."

"And if the damnyankees break through, *we'll* be the guys at the front," Pete said.

That made Dover wish he hadn't already used up so much good profanity. Then, instead of cussing, he started to laugh himself, which made Pete send him a fishy stare. He still thought it was funny. Here he'd gone and turned down a combat command, but he was liable to get one whether he wanted it or not.

A *big* explosion sent dirt trickling down between the planks on the shelter's roof. "I hope to God that was one of their bombers crashing," Pete said.

"Me, too," Dover said. "Why don't they go away and bother somebody else?" He knew why perfectly well. That didn't keep him from wishing

anyway.

The bombers stayed overhead for more than two hours. That had to mean several waves of them were pounding Confederate positions. Now that the United States had airstrips down in southern Tennessee, they were only a short hop away. And they were making the most of it, too.

After no bombs had fallen for fifteen minutes or so, Dover said, “Well, let’s see what’s left upstairs.” He hoped something would be. He also hoped he wouldn’t come out when a new wave of enemy bombers appeared overhead. *That’d be just my luck, wouldn’t it?* he thought sourly.

The passage out from the bombproof’s outer door had a dogleg to keep blast from getting in. It also had several shovels stashed near that outer door, in case the men inside needed to dig their way out. But Jerry Dover could see daylight when he got the door open.

He could see daylight, yes. He could also see smoke, and smell it: smoke from burning rubber and explosives and wood and paint and several other things. His eyes stung. He coughed again and again.

Behind him, Pete said, “How bad is it?” He was coughing, too. Dover wished he were wearing a gas mask. He hoped the Yankees hadn’t blown up any gas shells, or he might really need one.

“I don’t think it’s good,” he answered. Getting out of the trench was easy. A near miss had built a nice, convenient ramp. If that one had burst a hundred feet to the left…No, you didn’t have to fight at the front to see combat these days.

He and Pete and the other soldiers hurried up to ground level and looked around. “Fuck,” Pete said softly, which summed things up pretty well.

Enemy air strikes had pounded Jerry Dover’s supply dumps before. That was part of the cost of doing business in a war. He didn’t think one of his depots had ever taken a beating like this before, though.

Eight or ten fires raged. Yes, one of them was an enemy bomber’s pyre—he could see the airplane’s tail sticking up. But the damnyankees had done a lot more damage here than they’d taken doing it.

Hoses were already playing on some of the worst blazes. Dover felt proud of his men. They knew what they had to do, and they did it.

And in doing it, they took chances front-line soldiers never had to worry about.

Of course, the men at the front had worries of their own. Pete cocked his head to one side, listening.

“Firing’s picked up—fuck me if it hasn’t.”

Dover listened, too. He said the worst thing he could think of: “Yeah, I think you’re right.”

“They’re trying to break out.” Pete found something bad to say, too.

“Sure sounds that way,” Dover allowed.

“Think they can do it, sir?” Any time Pete used an officer’s title, he needed reassurance.

Right now, Dover longed for reassurance, too. “Hope to hell they can’t.”

A telephone rang. He would have bet the bombardment had blown up the instrument or broken the lines that made it work, but no. He ran over to it and admitted he was there and alive.

“Dover, you’ve got to send me everything, fast as you can!” He recognized the voice of the brigadier general who’d offered him a regiment. “They’re coming at me with everything they’ve got. If you have a division’s worth of dehydrated infantry, pour water on ’em quick and get ’em up here.”

In spite of everything, Dover smiled. But he had to say, “Sir, I don’t know what the hell we’ve got right this second. They just bombed hell out of the dump, too.”

The general’s opinion of that violated all the Commandments with the possible exception of the one against graven images. “We’re doing all we can, dammit, but how can we hang on if we don’t have enough bullets and shells?” he said.

“I’ll get you what I have, sir.” Dover slammed down the handset and yelled orders. He had to interrupt himself when the telephone rang again. “Dover here,” he said.

“Rockets! Antibarrel rockets!” another harried officer screamed in his ear. “Damnyankee armor’s tearing holes in my lines! They’ve got these

goddamn flail barrels to clear mines, and they're going through us like a dose of salts. If we don't stop 'em quick, we are dead meat, you hear me? Fucking dead meat!"

Dover didn't know what a flail barrel was. He didn't know how many antibarrel rockets had escaped the Yankee bombs. He didn't even know who was yelling at him. He managed to find that out. He rapidly figured out one other thing, too: the United States were pushing hard here. If they did break through… *If they break through, we've lost the damn war for sure,* Dover thought. He dashed off to do what he could to stop them.

Signs with skulls and crossbones on them warned the world a minefield lay ahead. Lieutenant Michael Pound was pretty sure the signs and the field were genuine. When the Confederates bluffed, they usually slanted the bones and the word MINES. These stood straight.

He was a hard charger, but he didn't want to tear across that field and blow a track or maybe get the bottom blasted out of his barrel. And he didn't have to. "Here comes a flail," he said happily, ducking down into the turret to relay the news to his gunner and loader and to get on the wireless to the other machines in his platoon. He'd had to make himself remember to do that when he first became an officer.

Now he did it automatically.

Sergeant Mel Scullard grinned. "Those bastards sure are funny-looking," he said.

"Well, I won't argue with you," Pound told the gunner. "But who gives a damn? They do the job, and that's what counts."

Some engineer must have been smoking funny cigarettes when he came up with the flail barrel. He mounted a rotor drum on a couple of horizontal steel bars out in front of the barrel's chassis. The barrel's engine powered the contraption. Lengths of heavy chain came off the drum. As it rotated, the chains spanked the ground ahead of the oncoming machine. They hit hard enough to touch off mines before the barrel itself got to them. And other barrels could follow the path the flail cleared.

Naturally, the Confederates did everything they could to blow up flail barrels before they got very far.

But, after the pounding U.S. artillery and aircraft had given the

defenders here, they couldn't do as much as they wanted to. The Confederate Army remained brave, resourceful, and resilient. It wasn't so responsive as it had been earlier in the war, though. You could knock it back on its heels and stun it if you hit it hard enough, and the USA had done that here.

"Follow the flail!" Pound commanded, and his driver did. They all wanted to get past the minefield as fast as they could. The pine woods ahead weren't cleared yet. That meant they were bound to have Confederate soldiers—and, all too likely, Confederate barrels—lurking in them.

The other machines in Pound's platoon followed him, as he followed the flail barrel. Every commander rode with his head and shoulders out of the cupola, the better to see trouble. He was proud of them. He hadn't ordered them to do it. He wouldn't have given an order like that. They got out there on their own.

Fires in the woods sent up smudges of smoke. There weren't enough of them to drive out the lurkers, however much Pound wished there were. If they had an antibarrel cannon waiting…

They did. Sensibly, they fired at the flail barrel first. If they knocked it out, all the machines behind it would expose themselves to danger among the mines. Their AP round scored a direct hit…on the flail.

The gadget fell to ruins, but the barrel kept going. Now it was as vulnerable as any of the others.

"Front!" Pound sang out—he'd seen the muzzle flash.

To his relief, Mel Scullard sang out, "Identified," which meant he'd seen it, too. To the loader, he added,

"HE!"

With a thrum of hydraulics, the turret traversed to the left. As it steadied, Pound ordered the barrel to stop to give the gunner a better shot. If the gun in the woods was drawing a bead on him at the same time…Well, that was the chance you took.

Several cannon spoke at once: the antibarrel gun and at least four barrels' main armaments. An AP round dug a furrow in the dirt a few feet to the right of Pound's machine. He was surprised it didn't touch off a mine or two. The other shells all burst close to the same place in the woods.

“Gun it!” Pound yelled to the driver. If they hadn’t knocked out the gun or wounded the crew, more murderous projectiles would come flying out of there. “Stay behind the flail barrel,” he added a split second later.

“How come?” the driver asked. “He’s not gonna do any more flailing.”

“Well, no,” Pound said, and let it go at that. Some people weren’t very bright, and you couldn’t do anything about it. The lead barrel’s flail might have taken a knockout, but it could still show where at least one mine lay—the hard way.

Pound wished he hadn’t thought that—it might have been a jinx. A few seconds later, the flail barrel did hit a mine. It slewed sideways and stopped, its right track blown off. It didn’t catch fire, but it was hideously vulnerable out there. The commander traversed his turret till it faced the woods, putting as much armor as he could between himself and the enemy. Past that, he had to wait for a recovery vehicle and hope.

Losing the flail barrel left Pound in the lead. He could have done without the honor, but he had it like it or not. He got on the wireless to the other barrels in his platoon: “Stay behind me. If I make it through, you will, too. And even if I don’t, you won’t have far to go, so you may make it anyhow.”

He could see the signs at the far edge of the minefield. Only a couple of hundred yards to go…Maybe a hundred yards…Maybe fifty…It would be a shame to run over one now, with the end of the field so close….

“Made it!” he said, a great whoop of relief, as if all his troubles were over.

No matter how much he savored the moment, he knew better. The Confederates had a strongpoint up ahead on some high ground called Snodgrass Hill. They’d put a lot of guns up there, most of which could fire AP ammo. Hitting a moving barrel with an artillery piece wasn’t easy, but horrible things happened when gunners did. Not even the latest U.S. barrel had a prayer of surviving a tungsten-tipped 105mm round. Pound drove past a couple of burnt-out hulks that showed as much. One of them had the turret blown off and was lying upside down ten feet away from the chassis. That wasn’t the kind of thing a barrel commander wanted to see.

Much more welcome were the fighter-bombers working over Snodgrass Hill. They hit the Confederates again and again, bombing and strafing. Two or three of them went down, but the fire coming from the hill decreased dramatically.

“Couldn’t have done that in the last war,” Pound said.

“No, sir,” Sergeant Scullard agreed. “But their goddamn foot soldiers wouldn’t have been carrying stovepipes then, either.” He sprayed some bushes up ahead with a long burst from the coaxial machine gun. If any Confederates with antibarrel rockets crouched there, they didn’t get the chance to fire them.

Machine guns at the base of Snodgrass Hill held up U.S. infantry. Barrels painted green-gray knocked out the machine-gun nests one by one. Antibarrel cannon farther up the hill knocked out some U.S.

barrels. Michael Pound got on the wireless and screamed for artillery support. Being only a lowly platoon commander, he didn’t have a set that let him talk directly with the gun bunnies. He yelled loud enough to make the soldier he did talk to say, “Keep your hair on, pal. I’ll get the word through, honest to Pete.”

“You’d better,” Pound said. “Otherwise, if they find you mysteriously strangled with telephone wire, they’ll know just who to suspect.” On that encouraging note, he switched off.

He couldn’t have been the only barrelman yelling for HE. The barrage didn’t land on Snodgrass Hill fast enough to suit him, but it would have had to go in yesterday to do that. Land it did. The lower slopes of the hill went up in smoke and shrapnel and poison gas. Watching all that come down on the Confederates, anybody would have thought nothing could stay alive under it.

Pound knew better. Featherston’s fuckers had trenches, and they had gas masks, and they had balls. As soon as things eased off even a little bit, they’d pop up and start serving all the guns that weren’t knocked off their wheels. He didn’t want that to happen—it was the last thing he did want.

He had no idea if he was the highest-ranking barrel officer down near the bottom of Snodgrass Hill. He didn’t care, either. He sent his platoon an order barrels didn’t hear every day: “Charge!” A moment later, he added, “And bring everybody else with you if you can. Let’s get them before they get us!”

He stood up in the cupola to wave all the U.S. barrels forward. The commanders in his other machines were doing the same thing. A short round from his own side burst much too close to his barrel. Shell fragments whined past his head. He turned the wave into an obscene gesture aimed at the artillery he'd wanted so badly only a few minutes before. You were just as dead if your buddies got you as you were if the bad guys put one between your eyes.

With a few more barrels of their own, the Confederates probably could have broken up the charge before it got rolling. But they didn't have enough, and one of the U.S. barrels killed the first C.S. machine that showed itself. The infantrymen in butternut with stovepipes mostly stayed down in their holes; they wanted to live just like anybody else. And the charge pounded on.

Before long, Pound ducked down and closed the cupola hatch. By then, rounds didn't have to fall short to be dangerous. He was brave enough, but not suicidal. He thought of himself as a coldly practical man.

Whether that kind of man would have led a charge up the heavily defended hill was a question he never worried about.

Both his barrel's bow machine gun and the one beside the main armament chattered. Brass casings clanked down onto the floor of the fighting compartment. "This is kind of fun, you know?—like a pinball arcade," Sergeant Scullard said. "They pop up here, you shoot 'em, then they come up somewhere else, so you gotta knock those guys down, too."

"I can tell you one difference," Pound said dryly.

"Yeah? What's that, sir?" Scullard didn't even need to look at what he was doing to feed a new belt of cartridges into the coaxial machine gun.

"In the arcade, they don't shoot back," Pound answered. Machine-gun bullets and shell fragments clattered off the barrel's thick steel skin.

"God knows we've been through worse."

"You aren't wrong," Pound agreed. They were almost to the top of Snodgrass Hill now, and resistance was thinning out. Too much had landed on the Confederates too fast. They were groggy, like a boxer who'd taken too many rights. In the ring, the ref would have stopped the fight before the loser got badly hurt. Hurting the other side was

the point of the exercise here.

Pound's barrel rolled over the tube of an overturned 105. Even if the Confederates drove the USA off this hill, they'd never use that gun again—or if they tried, the first round would blow up inside it.

Wouldn't that be a shame? Pound thought.

He looked around for more enemy soldiers to shoot or guns to wreck, and he didn't see any. He wasn't quite at the crest of the hill—why give somebody on the far side a clean shot?

More airplanes appeared. He needed a moment to realize they were Confederates: Asskickers with rockets slung under their wings. When the dive bombers salvoed them, they looked like lances of fire slashing across the sky. They tore into the U.S. forces on Snodgrass Hill like lances of fire, too. And Pound couldn't do a thing about it. He'd seen a few barrels with a .50-caliber machine gun mounted in front of the commander's cupola to serve as an antiaircraft weapon. He didn't have one, but he was thinking he'd get one as soon as he could.

The Asskickers sped off to the south. They couldn't linger, or U.S. fighters would hack them down.

They'd done damage, no doubt about it. But they hadn't driven U.S. forces off of Snodgrass Hill. They didn't have a chance of doing that, not by themselves, and no Confederate ground counterattack materialized. The strongpoint seemed to be the center of the C.S. position here, and it had just fallen.

C larence Potter knew the wintry pleasure of being right. The Confederates had hit the United States as hard as they could, and the USA didn't quite fall over. Now the United Sates were hitting back, and they had the CSA on the ropes. The Confederates' problem was that they'd kept trying to land haymakers when they should have been doing their damnedest not to get hit. He thought of everything his country had squandered on aggressive counterattacks that it should have kept under cover or in reserve. If that wasn't enough to drive a man to drink, he didn't know what would be.

If Chattanooga had held, they still might have had a chance. Chattanooga was the cork in the bottle. U.S.

paratroopers had yanked the cork. Now the damnyankees could spill

out into the heart of the Confederacy, into country that hadn't seen Yankee invaders even in the War of Secession.

And the enemy knew it, too. It didn't do any more to expect U.S. generals to stay half a step behind their opposite numbers in butternut. The United States banged through the improvised C.S. lines in northwestern Georgia…oh, not with the greatest of ease, but not with the kind of effort that ruined them, either. They could bang some more whenever and wherever they chose to.

Meanwhile, General Patton was trying to piece together another line. This one, of necessity, was longer than the one centered on Snodgrass Hill. It was also weaker. Fewer men and barrels were doing their damnedest to cover more ground. Their damnedest, Potter feared, wouldn't be good enough.

His own brigade was stationed near Calhoun, Georgia, defending the line of the Oostanaula and Coosawattee Rivers. He wished the rivers were as wide as their names were long. But even if they were, how much difference would it make? The Yankees had crossed the Ohio and the Cumberland. They would be able to deal with obstacles like these.

Right now, they weren't trying very hard. Their artillery and his fired at each other across the rivers. Not a half hour went by when his brigade didn't take at least one casualty. Replacements trickled in more slowly. He would have bet the commander of the U.S. outfit to the north didn't have that worry.

His stomach started to knot up when General Patton paid him a call. He feared he knew what Patton would want, and he was right. "How soon do you think your brigade can be ready to strike a blow for—"

"Freedom?" Potter interrupted, turning the Party slogan into a jeer.

Patton turned red. "You still don't have the proper attitude, Potter."

"That's a matter of opinion, sir," Potter replied. "I don't think we can win the war any more, not on the battlefield." He thought about U-235 and Professor FitzBelmont. If the Confederacy still had hope, it lay there. Did Patton know about uranium bombs? Potter hoped not. He went on, "Seems to me what we ought to do now is try not to lose it on the battlefield."

"You're a defeatist. I'll report you to the President," Patton snarled.

Such a threat would have chilled the blood of ninety-nine percent of the officers in the Confederate Army. Potter yawned in Patton's face. "Go ahead. He knows how I feel."

Patton stared at him. "Then why doesn't he throw you in irons, the way you deserve?"

"Because he knows I think with my head, not with my heart or my balls," Potter answered. "It's really a useful technique. You ought to try it one of these days…sir."

"You can go too far, General," Patton warned. "Watch yourself."

"Sir, you can do whatever you please to me, and I really don't care. I'm Clarence Potter, and I'm here to tell you the truth." Potter appropriated President Featherston's phrase with malicious glee. Patton gaped at him. Smiling a chilly smile, Potter went on, "We can't afford the head-knocking style you've been using. What will it take to make you see that? The damnyankees in Atlanta? In Savannah, on the ocean? In Mobile, on the Gulf of Mexico? From where I sit, you're greasing the skids to get them there."

"How dare you say such a thing to me?" Patton thundered. "How *dare* you? I'll have you court-martialed and drummed out of the Army, so help me God I will!"

"Good luck," Potter said. "I've got a Stonewall in my pocket that says you can't do it." He took out the goldpiece and tossed it up and down. "Worse thing that'll happen is that the President'll overrule the court and order me back to Richmond. My bet is, he'll overrule the court and keep me right here."

His calm voice must have held conviction. Patton stood there breathing hard, his cheeks a mottled and furious red. Then, suddenly, he lashed out and slapped Potter in the face. While Potter was grabbing—successfully—for his glasses, Patton ground out, "All right, you son of a bitch! Will you meet me on the field of honor tomorrow morning? *Have* you honor? One of us will go down in history as a casualty of war, and the other will be able to continue the campaign as he thinks best."

He was dead serious. He was also deadly serious, his hands hovering near the fancy pistols he wore on each hip. He looked ready—more than ready—to plug Potter on the spot. Replacing his spectacles on his nose, Potter said, "As challenged party, I believe I have the choice of weapons, sir?"

Patton actually bowed. Did he imagine himself a knight in shining armor? Hadn't he got that idiocy knocked out of him during the Great War? Evidently not, for he was courtesy itself as he replied, "That is correct, sir. Pistols, swords, rifles at long range if you prefer a contest of skill…I am entirely at your disposal in that regard."

"I'd like to choose horse turds at five paces to show you what a fool you are," Potter said.

"Do not make a mockery of this, General. I will not abide it," Patton warned. "I have challenged; you have accepted. The weapons must be lethal."

"I just said I'd like to. I didn't say I would," Potter answered. "Lethal, is it? All right, sir. I'll give you lethal weapons, and see how you like it." By the carnivorous smile on Patton's face, he expected to like it very much. Then Potter said, "I choose flamethrowers at ten paces."

General Patton's jaw dropped. Some of the high color left his face. "You are joking," he got out with some effort.

"Not me," Potter said. "Isn't that lethal enough to suit you? We'll both be burnt meat in nothing flat. Well, sir? You wanted a duel. I goddamn well gave you one. Do you still want it?"

For a horrible moment, he thought Patton would say yes. His superior might be furious enough to immolate himself if he could take the man he hated with him. But Patton, though his lips drew back from his teeth in a furious grimace, shook his head. Nobody who'd ever seen what a flamethrower could do wanted one to do it to him. Back in gaslight days, a moth would sometimes fly into the flame of a lamp.

That was about what jellied gasoline did to a man.

Then, to Potter's amazement, George Patton started to laugh. "By God, General, you have more spunk than I gave you credit for!"

He admires *me,* Potter thought, more bemused yet. *I made myself into a bigger jackass than he did, and he* admires *me for it.* Some of the Austro-Hungarian alienists who were probing the shape of man's psyche would probably have had some interesting things to say about that. Wearily, Potter said, "The United States are the enemy, sir. You're not, and I'm not, either. They're the ones we've got to lick—and the ones we've got to keep from licking us."

“Well said! Very well said!” In a final surreal touch, Patton bowed again. “Please accept my apologies for the slap and the insult. While I was provoked, I see now that I was hasty.”

“I’ll let it go.” But Potter had enough of the old code in him—and enough pride—to go on resenting what Patton had done. Aiming a flamethrower at him would have been a treat. It would, unfortunately, have been a last treat.

Patton, perhaps still unnerved, made what was for him an astonishing choice: he condescended to ask,

“Since you seem unhappy with my plans for engaging the Yankees, General, what would you do instead?”

“Fight for time,” Potter answered at once, thinking again of Professor FitzBelmont and U-235. How far were he and his crew from building a bomb that could give the CSA a fighting chance again? And how far were their U.S. counterparts from building a bomb that would end all the Confederacy’s chances?

“You will perhaps understand a campaign needs more detailed goals and objectives than that.” Patton could have sounded snotty. In fact, he did; that was part of his nature. But he didn’t sound anywhere near as snotty as he might have, and Potter gave him reluctant credit for it.

“Yes, sir,” Potter said. “If you ask me, our goal is to keep the Yankees out of Atlanta. We can’t afford to lose it, partly because of all the factories and partly because it’s such an important rail junction. Transit between the East Coast and everything from Alabama on west goes to hell if Atlanta falls, and that goes a long way toward losing the war for us. Objectives would have to do with containing the U.S. advance as close to the Georgia-Tennessee border as we can.”

“And driving it back,” Patton said.

Potter shrugged. “If we can, at this stage of things. But mostly I want to make the U.S. forces come at us. I want to use the defender’s advantage for everything it’s worth. I want the United States to have casualty lists three, four, five times as long as ours. They’re bigger than we are, but they can’t afford that kind of thing forever. If they bleed enough, maybe they’ll get sick of banging their heads against a brick wall and give us a peace we can live with.”

And if we drop uranium bombs on them a year after that, it’d damn well

serve them right, he thought. *Would they hit us first? I don't know. I didn't used to think so. Now, though, we may have given them too many reasons not to let us have another chance.*

"In your opinion, then, we cannot hope to win the war on the ground." Patton spoke like a judge passing sentence.

Potter didn't care. "Sir, they're in Georgia. Doesn't that speak for itself? They're cleaning up the pockets of resistance west of their thrust through Kentucky and Tennessee, too, and we haven't been able to keep them from doing that. Between Richmond and Philadelphia, we've stayed even with them in the air.

Everywhere else? Here, for instance? You know the answer as well as I do. We haven't matched their latest barrel yet, either."

"We're ahead of them in rockets," Patton said.

"Yes, sir," Potter said. "Those will hurt them. Those *have* hurt them. They'll make us lose slower. Do you really think they can make us win?" *Maybe if we put a U-235 bomb in the nose of one. But how much does one of those damn things weigh? When will we have a rocket that can get it off the ground? In time for this war?* You'd have to be a wild-eyed optimist to believe anything like that.

"Yours is a counsel of despair," Patton said.

"I don't want to throw my brigade away charging their guns," Potter said. "I want to make them throw their brigades away charging my guns. I don't think that's despair. Where we are now, I think it's common sense."

"When I give you orders, I expect you to obey them."

"When I get orders, I expect them to be ones I'm better off obeying."

They glared at each other. Neither had convinced the other—Potter knew that. Swearing under his breath, Patton stormed out of Potter's tent. Potter wondered what he would do if Patton commanded him to go over the river line and attack the enemy. *I'll refuse,* he decided. *Let him do what he wants after that. It'll keep the brigade in being a while longer, anyhow.*

The orders arrived two hours later. Potter's men were to hold in place. Patton laid on a counterattack farther west. Potter sighed. Patton had grasped the letter, not the spirit. He didn't know what he could do

about that. Well, actually, he did know: he couldn't do a damn thing.

Guns blazing, the counterattack went in. It drove U.S. forces back a couple of miles, then ran out of steam. Potter wished he'd expected anything different.

T he *Josephus Daniels* rode the waves in the North Atlantic—rode them like a roller-coaster car going up and down ever taller, ever steeper bumps. George Enos took the motion in stride: literally, as he had no trouble making his way around the destroyer escort despite the roughening seas. Though not a big warship, the *Josephus Daniels* made a platform ever so much more stable than the fishing boats that bobbed on the ocean like little corks in a bathtub…and sometimes sank as if going down the drain.

He wasn't worried the *Josephus Daniels* would sink—not on her own, anyhow. She might have help from British, French, or Confederate submersibles, though.

At least she was out of range of British land-based airplanes. George had gone through too many attacks from the air, both here and in the tropical Pacific, ever to want to help try to fight off another one.

"We're still floating," the sailors boasted. Most of them were kids. They'd helped rescue men whose ships had gone to the bottom, but they'd never been sunk themselves. They were cocky because of it. It hadn't happened to them, so they were sure it couldn't.

With the *Townsend* at the bottom of the Gulf of California, George knew better. The water there was shallow. Maybe one day somebody would salvage her for scrap metal. Unless someone did, she'd never see the surface again. Neither would the men who'd died aboard her or who hadn't been able to get off before she went down.

Sam Carsten knew better, too. The captain sometimes talked about how he'd been on the *Remembrance* when the Japanese sank her. That made George wonder if he'd seen the skipper in the Sandwich Islands.

It seemed logical, but he didn't think so. The memory, if it was a memory, felt older than his stint there.

When he thought of the skipper, he thought of Boston, and not of Boston the way it was now, either: not the Boston he'd occasionally come back to since joining the Navy. When he thought of Sam Carsten, he thought of his home town a long time ago, back in the

days when he was a kid.

Sunshine flashing off the gilded dome of the State House, seen from across Boston Common…

When that came back to him, his mouth fell open in amazement. He felt like a man who'd just scratched an itch he'd thought he would never be able to reach. "Son of a bitch!" he said softly. "*Son* of a bitch!"

Then he wanted to tell the skipper about it. That would have been next to impossible on a battlewagon or an airplane carrier. For an able seaman to get an audience with the captain of a ship like that was like getting an audience with God. It shouldn't have been that hard on the *Josephus Daniels.* Sam Carsten was only a two-striper, and a mustang to boot. He should have had—he probably did have—a soft spot for the men from whose ranks he'd risen.

He wasn't the problem. His exec was. Lieutenant Myron Zwilling seemed convinced God Himself needed to stand in line to see the skipper. As for a mere rating…Well, in Zwilling's mind the question hardly arose.

But there were ways around the executive officer. The skipper was a gunnery fanatic. He lavished most of his attention on the two four-inch guns that gave the *Josephus Daniels* what little long-range bite she had, but he didn't forget the 40mm mounts, either.

Picking a time when Carsten seemed a bit less rushed than usual, George said, "Ask you something, sir?"

"What's on your mind, Enos?" The captain of a bigger ship wouldn't have known all his men by name, but Sam Carsten did.

"You've been in Boston a good many times, I expect," George said.

"That's a fact—I told you so once. Anybody who's been in the Navy as long as I have, he says he hasn't been in Boston a lot, he's a damn liar," Carsten replied.

"Yes, sir. Do you remember one time when you were out on the Boston Common and you went under a tree to get out of the sun?" George said. "There was a family having a picnic under there—a woman, and a boy, and a girl. This would have been—oh, some time around the start of the Twenties. I was ten, eleven, maybe twelve. Does that ring any kind of bell, sir?"

Sam Carsten's face went far away as he thought back. "No," he said, but then, "Wait a minute. Maybe.

Damned if it doesn't. Somebody said something about the *Ericsson.* " Because of what had happened to the destroyer at the end of the Great War, any Navy man who heard about it was likely to remember.

And, when the skipper remembered that, it brought everything flooding back to George. "I did!" he said.

"I told you my father was on her."

"There was a girl along with you, yeah," Carsten said slowly. "She was younger than you, I think."

"My sister Mary Jane," George said.

Carsten shook his head in slow wonder. "Well, if that doesn't prove it's a small world, I'll be damned if I know what would. I wanted to get under that tree so I wouldn't burn, and your mother was nice enough to let me share it."

He was almost as fair as a ghost; George had seen him blotched with zinc-oxide ointment several times, and it wasn't much paler than his skin. No, he wouldn't have liked summer sun in Boston, not one bit.

And…"My mother *was* a nice person," George said.

"Nice-looking, too. I remember that," the skipper said. Would he have tried to pick her up if he'd met her without her children? Had he tried anyhow, in some way that went over the kids' heads? If so, he'd had no luck. He eyed George. "You say *was*? I'm sorry if she's not living any more."

"She's not." That brought memories back, too, ones George would sooner have left submerged. "She took up with the writer who did the book about how she went and shot the Confederate submersible skipper. Bastard drank. They would fight and make up, you know? Except the last time, they didn't. He shot her and then he shot himself."

"Jesus!" the skipper said. "I'm sorry. That must have been hell."

"It was…pretty bad, sir," George said. "If he wanted to blow his own brains out, fine, but why did he have to go and do that to her, too?"

Carsten set a hand on his shoulder. “You look for answers to stuff like that, you go crazy. He did it because he went around the bend. What else can you say? If he didn’t go around the bend, he wouldn’t have done anything like that.”

“I guess so.” That wasn’t much different from the conclusion George had reached himself. It made for cold comfort. No—it made for no comfort at all. What he wanted was revenge, and he couldn’t have it.

Ernie robbed him of it when he turned the gun on himself.

“Sure as hell, you were right about one thing—I did look familiar.” Sam Carsten tried to steer him away from his gloom. “I wouldn’t have known you in a million years, but you were just a kid then. Damned if I don’t recall that day on the Common, though. How about that?” He walked down the deck shaking his head.

“So you weren’t just blowing stack gas when you said you ran into the Old Man once upon a time,”

Petty Officer Third Class Jorgenson said. He still had charge of the 40mm mount. “How about that?”

“Yeah, how about that?” George agreed. “I thought so, but I couldn’t pin it down till now.”

The crew for the gun spent as much time working together as they could. Because of casualties, just about everyone was in a new slot. Till they figured out how to do what they had little practice doing, they would be less efficient than the other gun crews. That could endanger the ship.

Because the skipper was a fiend for good gunnery, he encouraged them and kept their usual bosses from loading extra duty on them. Carsten wanted them to spend as much time at the gun as they could. They steadily got better. Fremont Dalby would have had some pungent things to say about their performance.

Jorgenson *did* have pungent things to say about it. But they improved.

The *Josephus Daniels* went back to patrolling east of Newfoundland. The men who’d been in her for a while told stories of earlier adventures on that duty. If a quarter of what they said was true, she’d had some lively times. The limeys worked harder at smuggling arms into Canada than the USA did at smuggling them into Ireland. Canada

and Newfoundland had a much longer coast than the smaller British isle, which gave the enemy more chances to slip through.

Navy Department doctrine was that stopping the arms smuggling would snuff out the Canadian rebellion.

The sailors didn't believe it. "What? The fucking Canucks can't find any guns of their own? My ass!"

Jorgenson said when the talk got around to the patrol.

Klaxons hooted. That killed a bull session. George and Jorgenson raced toward the bow. They got to their gun in a dead heat. The rest of the crew wasn't more than a couple of steps behind them. "What's going on?" asked the new shell-jerker, a big blond kid named Ekberg.

"Beats me," Jorgenson answered. "Maybe it's a drill." He was even bigger than Ekberg, and almost as fair, though neither of them matched the skipper.

"Now hear this!" The PA system crackled to life. Lieutenant Zwilling's harsh voice got no sweeter blaring from the speakers: "Y-ranging gear has picked up an unidentified aircraft approaching from the south.

Exercise caution before opening fire, as it may be friendly. Repeat, exercise caution before opening fire, as it may be friendly. But do not endanger the ship."

George swore, and he wasn't the only one. The exec wanted to have his cake and eat it, too. Don't shoot the airplane down, but don't let it make an attack run, either? How was that supposed to work?

A minute or so later, the PA came on again. "This is the captain," Sam Carsten said. "The ship comes first. If we have to fish some flyboys out of the drink afterwards, we'll do that. We're trying to find out who's in the airplane, but no luck so far. If we open up on the wireless, we tell everybody in the North Atlantic where we're at, and we don't want to do that."

"See, the skipper tells us what's what," Jorgenson said. "The exec just bullshits."

"Lieutenant Cooley, he was all right," Ekberg said. "This guy, though —you can keep him."

"Damn airplane *ought* to be one of ours," Jorgenson said. "Don't see

how the limeys could've snuck a carrier this far west without us knowing." He paused. "'Course, sometimes they fly fighters off their merchantmen. One of those assholes carrying a bomb could be real bad news."

"Confederate seaplane?" George suggested.

Jorgenson frowned. "Right at the end of their range. They couldn't get home again unless they refuel somewhere." The frown turned into a scowl. "They might do that, though. Maybe the limeys have a station or two on the Newfoundland coast. We can't keep an eye on everything. So yeah, maybe.

Whatever it is, we'll find out pretty damn quick." He swept the southern sky with a gun commander's binoculars.

Somebody farther astern spotted the airplane first and let out a yell. George had a shell in the breech of each gun in the mount. He was ready to open up as soon as Jorgenson gave the word. The gun chief swung the twin 40mms to bear on the target.

“It *is* a seaplane,” he said, still peering through the field glasses. George felt smart for about fifteen seconds. Then Jorgenson went on, “It’s one of ours. That’s a Curtiss-37, sure as shit. Stand easy, boys—we’re all right.”

“Don’t shoot! Repeat—do not shoot!” Lieutenant Zwilling blared a few seconds later. “The airplane has been positively identified as nonhostile.”

George needed a moment to translate that into English. Then he realized the exec said the same thing as Jorgenson, though not so clearly.

The seaplane buzzed past, the eagle and crossed swords plainly visible on its sides. It waggled its wings at the *Josephus Daniels* and flew on toward the north. “Nice *not* to need to fight for a change,” George said, and none of the other sailors at the mount told him he was wrong.

W hen a bath meant a quick dip in a creek, Jonathan Moss did what anybody else would: he mostly did without. Sometimes, he got too smelly and buggy to stand himself, and went in for a little while. He came out with his teeth chattering—fall was in the air, even in Georgia.

“Jesus, I miss hot water!” he said.

“Yeah, no kidding.” Nick Cantarella had just taken a brief bath, too. “We’re both skinny bastards these days, you know?”

Moss ran a hand along his ribs. “You mean this isn’t a xylophone?”

“Funny. Funny like a crutch. And you’ve got more meat on your bones than I do,” Cantarella said.

“Not much,” Moss said. “You started out built like a soda straw, and I didn’t. That’s the only difference.”

They both got back into the ragged dungarees and collarless work shirts that would have been the uniform of black guerrillas in the CSA had the guerrillas enjoyed anything so fancy as a uniform. In one way, the only difference between them and the rest of Spartacus’ band was their lighter skin. In another…

“You ofays!” Spartacus called. He used the word as casually as a white

Confederate would have used *niggers.* Most of the time, it meant the Confederate whites the guerrillas were fighting. But it could mean any white at all, too.

“What is it, boss?” Jonathan Moss asked. The band didn’t run on anything like military discipline, but Spartacus fancied his title of respect.

“How come the United States done lost the War of Secession? You lick them damn Confederates then, nobody have to worry ’bout ’em since.”

Moss and Cantarella looked at each other. Any schoolchild in either country knew the answer to that, or at least the short version. But Spartacus and the rest of the blacks with him were never schoolchildren.

The Confederate States always did everything they could to discourage Negroes from getting any kind of education. They didn’t want them to be anything more than beasts of burden with thumbs.

“Shall I do the honors, or would you rather?” Cantarella asked.

“I can, unless you’re hot to trot,” Moss said.

Cantarella waved him forward. “Be my guest.”

“Well, the first thing that happened was, the Confederates had a good general in Virginia and we had a lousy one,” Moss said. “McClellan was never a match for Robert E. Lee—not even close. And Abe Lincoln didn’t get rid of McClellan and put in somebody who knew what he was doing. We blame Lincoln for a lot, and it starts right there.”

“He wanted to be good to niggers, though,” Spartacus said. “Ofays down here don’t reckon so, they don’t secede in the first place.”

That was probably true. From the U.S. viewpoint, it was one more thing for which to blame Lincoln. If someone sensible like Douglas had won the election…In that case, there wouldn’t have been a War of Secession in the first place.

“It gets worse,” Moss said. “Lincoln couldn’t do anything when England and France recognized the CSA after Lee beat McClellan up in Pennsylvania. Neither could anybody else in the United States.”

“What difference recognizing the Confederate States make?” Spartacus

said. “They there whether they recognized or not.”

“After the limeys and frogs recognized them, they broke our blockade,” Moss said. “They had better navies than ours. Then they shipped the Confederates whatever they needed, and got cotton back. And they could blockade U.S. ports if we didn’t make peace with the CSA.”

“They could, and they did,” Nick Cantarella put in.

“They ganged up on us again twenty years later, after the Confederates bought Chihuahua and Sonora from Mexico,” Moss said. “When we lost the Second Mexican War, that’s what made us decide to line up with Germany. That way, we had a…what would you call it, Nick?”

“A counterweight,” Cantarella said.

“There you go.” Moss nodded. “With Germany on our side, we had a counterweight to England and France. And that’s how things have been for the last sixty years.”

“How come y’all don’t let niggers in the USA when things is tough fo’ us down here?” Spartacus might not know much about what had happened a long time ago, but he had that piece of recent history straight. Chances were every Negro in the CSA did.

Moss and Cantarella eyed each other again. They both knew the reason. They both feared it would be unpalatable to the Negroes around them. And they both feared the guerrillas would recognize a lie.

Sighing, Moss told the truth: “A lot of whites in the USA don’t like Negroes much better than whites here do.”

A low hum ran through the guerrillas. It was, Moss judged with more than a little surprise, a hum of approval. “Leastways you don’t put no sugar on a spoonful o’ shit,” was how Spartacus put it.

“I don’t care if them Yankee ofays likes us or not,” another guerrilla said. “Ain’t never had no ofays like us. Don’t hardly know what I’d do if’n they did. Long as they ain’t tryin’ to murder us, that’ll do fine.”

Several other Negroes nodded. One of them said, “Wish them damnyankees’d come farther down into Georgia.”

“Amen!” Two or three Negroes spoke together, as if responding to a preacher. One of them added,

“That’d be about the onliest thing that could save the niggers down here. That or the Second Coming, one.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” Spartacus said dryly.

“Well, hell, I know Jesus ain’t comin’,” the guerrilla said. “But the damnyankees, they might.”

“They’re moving again. *We’re* moving again,” Nick Cantarella said. “I don’t think the Confederates can stop us from breaking out of our bridgehead south of Chattanooga. And once we’re loose in north Georgia…”

“Yeah!” Again, the response might almost have come in church.

“They gonna get here soon enough to do us any good?” Spartacus answered his own question with a shrug. “We gots to las’ long enough to find out, dat’s all.”

One way the guerrillas survived was by never staying in one place very long. Mexican soldiers and white militiamen hunted the Negroes —not all the time, but too often. Not staying around to be found was simple common sense.

Of course, moving had dangers of its own. You could walk into trouble as well as away from it. But Spartacus’ point man, Apuleius, was as good as anybody Jonathan Moss ever saw. He was as good as anybody Cantarella ever saw, too. “Put that little so-and-so in our uniform and he could sneak a division of barrels right on into Richmond,” Cantarella said.

“Wouldn’t be surprised,” Moss agreed. “Or he could, anyway, if we let Negroes join the Army.”

“Yeah, well, that’s horseshit, too,” Cantarella said. “You know smokes can fight, and I know smokes can fight, and if Philly’s too goddamn dumb to know smokes can fight, then fuck Philly, you know what I’m sayin’?”

Apuleius held up the band outside an abandoned sharecropper village. He didn’t think it *was* abandoned.

“Somebody in dere,” he told Spartacus after crawling back through

the forgotten, overgrown vegetable plots around the place.

“How you know?” Spartacus asked. “Looks quiet enough. Ain’t no smoke or nothin’.”

“Not now,” the point man said. “But sure enough was some not long ago. An’ when I git close, I smell me some people ain’t had no baths in a hell of a long time.”

He kept himself cleaner than most of the other guerrillas. Moss had thought that was because he was unusually fastidious, and had even wondered if he was a fairy. Now he saw good sense lay behind it. If Apuleius didn’t smell himself, he had a better chance of sniffing out other people.

“You reckon they ofays or Mexicans?” Spartacus asked.

“Likely ofays,” Apuleius answered. “They stink worse. The Mexicans, they washes when they gits the chance.”

“How we gonna smoke ’em out?” Spartacus suddenly grinned a predatory grin. “Reckon you kin wiggle back close enough to chuck a grenade into the middle o’ things?”

“I kin try.” The point man didn’t sound thrilled, but he didn’t say no.

“Well, why don’t you wait a bit?” Spartacus said. “Let us set up the machine gun at the edge o’ the brush. Then we be ready to give them ofays a proper how-do-you-do.”

The two-man machine-gun crew positioned their precious weapon. The rest of the guerrillas, riflemen all, took cover where they could. Moss hoped the bush he crouched behind wasn’t poison oak.

Apuleius worked his way forward again. Moss presumed he did, anyhow; were the point man visible to him, he would have been visible to whoever was inside the village, too. Moss didn’t see the grenade fly, either.

He sure heard it when it went off. And all of a sudden that village didn’t seem abandoned any more.

Militiamen, some in gray uniforms, others with clothes no fancier than the guerrillas wore, boiled out of the tumbledown shacks that hadn’t been anything much when they were in good repair and looked even more sorrowful now. The white men were cussing and clutching their

weapons and pointing every which way. Some of those flying fingers aimed at Apuleius, but others flew in the opposite direction.

“Now!” Spartacus said.

Along with the rest of the riflemen in the band, Moss started shooting at the youths, mutilated men, and old-timers who made up the local militia. The machine gun spat death at the village. Death had visited it before—where were the sharecroppers who once lived there? Where were their wives and children?

Gone to camps, most of them, if they were like most of the Negroes in Georgia.

As soon as the gunfire gave him cover, Apuleius tossed another grenade into the village. This one made the militiamen yell and scream even more than they were already doing. The kids, the ones who’d never seen real fighting before, suffered worse than the veterans. Men who’d come under fire knew they needed to get down and get behind something when bullets started flying. The youngsters stayed upright much too long—and paid for it.

“Fish in a barrel,” Nick Cantarella said happily, sprawled behind a bush not far from the one that hid Moss.

A bullet snapped past between them. “Fish don’t shoot back,” Moss said.

One of the militiamen had got his hands on a fancy C.S. automatic rifle. He sprayed bullets back at the guerrillas almost as fiercely as the machine gun fired at his side. A couple of Negroes howled when they were hit, but the noise they made was as nothing beside that from the militiamen caught in the ambush.

When Spartacus ordered a withdrawal, the machine gun gave covering fire. The militiamen didn’t seem to have any stomach for coming after them, anyhow. Were Moss one of them, he wouldn’t have, either, not after the way they got shot up.

“Keep movin’!” Spartacus called. “They be all over the place round these parts now.” He was sure to be right, though Moss wasn’t sure how many militiamen and Mexican soldiers the local authorities could scrape together.

Litter bearers carried one of the wounded men. The other, shot through the right arm, was able to walk—and to swear with

remarkable fluency. Moss looked around for Apuleius. He didn't see the point man, but that proved nothing. Apuleius might need to wait till dark before making his getaway, and he'd caught up with the band before. Odds were he could do it again.

Would any of it matter? Could they hang on till the U.S. Army came down here or put the Confederates out of business? Moss had no idea. With his scheme for stealing an airplane as dead as too many of the men who'd helped him try, he could only hope.

"**B** ad one, Doc!" Eddie called as he brought the casualty into the aid station.

Leonard O'Doull knew the medic was right even before he saw the casualty. When you smelled something that reminded you of a pork roast left too long in the oven…then it was a bad one, all right.

Vince Donofrio wrinkled his nose. "Christ, I hate burns!" he said.

"Me, too," O'Doull said. "But I sure don't hate 'em near as much as the poor bastard who's got one."

The wounded man came out of a barrel. That much was plain from what was left of his coverall. One leg was charred, and he was howling like a wolf. "Has he had morphine?" O'Doull asked.

"Three shots, Doc," Eddie answered. O'Doull bit his lip. Sometimes even the best painkiller was fighting out of its weight. Eddie went on, "Ether'll put him out."

"Yeah." O'Doull turned to Sergeant Donofrio. "Get him under, Vince."

"Right," Donofrio said tightly. The man's hands were burned, too, and so was his face, though not so badly. He tried to fight when Donofrio put the ether cone over his mouth and nose. As gently as Eddie could, he held the wounded man's arms till they went limp. His screams faded then, too.

"How much can you do for him, Doc?" Eddie asked.

"Me? Not much. I just want to get rid of the tissue that'd go gangrenous if I left it. Then the specialists take over."

"That tannic-acid treatment they give 'em?" Donofrio asked.

“That’s right,” O’Doull said. “Tans their hide, scars it fast so they don’t weep fluid out through the burns.

They get better results with it than with anything they used to do.”

“Tans their hide…” Donofrio shuddered. “Must hurt like hell while the poor guy’s going through it.”

“I bet it does, yeah,” O’Doull said. “But if you’ve got burns like that, you already hurt like hell. You heard this guy before you knocked him out. How many syrettes of morphine did you say he had in him, Eddie?”

“Three,” the medic answered. “I hear these guys with the burns, a lot of ’em turn into junkies ’cause they need so much dope to get ’em through it while it’s bad.”

“I’ve heard the same thing,” Donofrio said.

“Yeah, so have I,” O’Doull said. “You can’t blame ’em, though. If they didn’t have the drugs, a lot of them would kill themselves. There just isn’t pain much worse than a bad burn.”

He methodically went on debriding flesh that would never heal. The smell made him hungry and nauseous at the same time. That was one more reason to hate burns. “What happened to the rest of the barrel crew?” he asked.

“Don’t know for sure,” Eddie said. “All I know is, he’s the only one we brought back. Maybe the other guys all got out and didn’t get hurt. Here’s hoping.”

“Here’s hoping,” O’Doull agreed. His eyes met Sergeant Donofrio’s over their masks. They both shook their heads. Much more likely that the other four men in the crew never made it out at all. Much more likely that they burned to death. What kind of memories were now dimmed inside this fellow’s head?

Would he hear his buddies’ shrieks for the rest of his life? *Too bad there’s no morphine for the soul,* O’Doull thought.

The burned soldier was still mercifully unconscious when the corpsmen took him off for more treatment farther back of the line. O’Doull shed his mask. So did Vince Donofrio. “That was a tough one,”

Donofrio said.

“Burns are about as bad as it gets,” O’Doull agreed. “I’m going outside for a cigarette. You want one?”

“After a case like that? What I want is a good, stiff drink. I guess a butt’ll have to do.” Donofrio was another one who didn’t drink when he might have to deal with patients soon. O’Doull approved, though he wouldn’t have said anything as long as the medic didn’t show up smashed.

He pulled out a pack of Raleighs, gave one to Donofrio, and lit another for himself. After the first drag, he said, “Getting away from the smell in there is good, too.”

“Bet your ass,” Donofrio said. “That’s another thing smoke is good for.” He inhaled, held it, and then blew out a blue-gray cloud. Even after that, he made a face. “You know what it reminded me of? Like there’s spare ribs in the oven and the telephone rings, you know, and it’s the gal’s sister, and she gets to yakking and doesn’t look at the clock till she smells stuff burning—and then it’s too damn late.”

“That sounds about right,” O’Doull said. “I wonder why they call them spare ribs. I bet the pig didn’t think so.”

Donofrio laughed. “Good one, Doc! I bet I steal it.”

“You better not,” O’Doull said, so seriously that the medic looked surprised. He went on, “You’ll cut into my royalties if you do.”

“Royalties?” Donofrio snorted. “You want royalties, go to Mexico or France or England.”

“Sure, tell an Irishman to go to England for the king,” O’Doull said. “You know how to win friends, don’t you?”

“In a poker game, right?” Donofrio could be even loopier than Granny McDougald.

“Poker game.” O’Doull shook his head. He couldn’t get the wounded barrelman out of his thoughts.

“That poor son of a bitch sure had the cards stacked against him.”

“Yeah.” The medic scowled, too. “One good thing—his face came through pretty good. He won’t have to go through life like that guy in

the book— *The Phantom of the Catacombs,* that's what the name of it was. You ever see the movie they made from it? Scared the crap outa me when I was a kid."

"I was grown up by then, but I know what you mean," O'Doull said. "They ought to do a talking version now. They have for a lot of the old silents, but not that one—not yet, anyway."

"Who do you suppose they'd get to play the Phantom?" Donofrio asked. "You could put anybody in one of the other parts, but the Phantom? Everybody who saw the movie would be comparing him to Lon Chaney."

"Not everybody," O'Doull said. "The silent version's more than twenty years old now. Most people younger than you never saw it. They would have stopped showing it as soon as talking came along.

When was the last time you saw a silent movie?"

"Been a while," Donofrio admitted after a little thought. "You don't even worry or wonder about crap like that, but it disappears when you aren't looking. Like Kaiser Bill mustaches, you know? Now it's just a few stubborn old farts who wear 'em, but my old man sure had one in the last war. Everybody did.

Hell, I think even my mother did."

O'Doull laughed. "You said it—I didn't."

"My mother's a nice lady," Donofrio said. "She heard me going on about her like that, she wouldn't beat me up…much."

A green-gray truck pulled up. "You guys get ready to take your aid station forward," the driver said.

"Front's moving up again. You're too far behind the line."

He sounded as if he came from Kansas or Nebraska. All the same, O'Doull said, "I don't know you from a hole in the ground. Give me the password." Confederates in Yankee clothing remained a nuisance. O'Doull hoped U.S. soldiers with drawls were also making the enemy sweat.

"Oh—Sequoyah!" The truck driver couldn't sing worth a damn, but that was the opening for a hot new Broadway show, and the day's password. He pointed at O'Doull. "Now give me the countersign, or I'll

figure you're one of Featherston's fuckers in disguise."

Fair was fair. "Away we go!" O'Doull said dutifully. The driver nodded. O'Doull turned to Donofrio.

"Time to pack up and leave our home sweet home."

"Leave, my ass—we take it with us," Donofrio said, and then, with a shrug, "What the hell? It's not like we never did it before."

"I'd rather go forward than back," O'Doull said, and the medic nodded.

As Donofrio said, they'd had practice knocking down the aid station. And it was designed to fit inside the rear compartment of a deuce-and-a-half. Military engineering extended to things besides rifles and barrels. Making aid stations go into the trucks that had to move them fit the bill, and the people who'd put things together knew what they were doing. Even the operating table folded up for a smooth fit.

"Let's roll," the driver said.

Roll they did, down past Dalton, Georgia, toward Resaca. O'Doull and Donofrio rode in the cab with the driver; Eddie and the other corpsmen who gathered casualties stayed in the back of the truck.

Several bodies hung in the Dalton town square. HE SHOT AT SOLDIERS, said the placard tied around the neck of one of them. The others bore similarly cheery messages.

"They love us down here," Donofrio said, eyeing the bodies.

"Who gives a damn if they love us?" the driver said. "Long as they know they better not screw with us, that's all that counts."

Oderint dum metuant. An ancient Roman playwright had put that into three words. *Let them hate as long as they fear.* English was a less compact language than Latin. O'Doull didn't suppose he could expect a truck driver to match a poet's concision.

War's wreckage littered the landscape: burnt-out barrels from both sides, crashed airplanes, smashed houses and barns, hastily dug graves with helmet-topped rifles taking the place of headstones. O'Doull nodded to himself. The aid station had got too far behind the front. Smelling death again reminded him what war was like.

Brakes squealed when the driver stopped. Small-arms fire came from up ahead. “This about right?” the man asked.

“Should do,” O’Doull answered. Vince Donofrio’s head bobbed up and down.

They got out and started setting up what they’d taken down not long before. The corpsmen wrestled with canvas and ropes and tent pegs. As soon as they had the tent up, O’Doull and Donofrio put in the operating table and medical supplies. Before long, the doctor and senior medic were ready for business again. Eddie and his pals headed up toward the front to see what kind of business they could bring back.

“Hope we don’t see them for a while,” O’Doull said.

“That’d be nice, wouldn’t it?” Donofrio cocked his head to one side, listening to the gunfire up ahead.

“You really think all that shit’s flying around and nobody’s getting hurt?”

“No,” O’Doull admitted. “But you’re right. It would be nice.”

They had a respite of most of an hour. That was about how long the corpsmen would have needed to walk up to the fighting, find someone wounded and give him emergency first aid, and then lug him back to the relocated aid station.

The first wounded man came back cussing a blue streak. A bandage swathed his left hand. Another one soaked up blood from his left buttock. “Same fucking bullet clipped off a finger and a half and got me in the ass,” he growled.

“Could’ve been worse,” Donofrio said. “Could’ve been your other hand.”

“Up yours, Jack,” the wounded man told him. “I’m a lefty.”

“Oh.” For a moment, the medic looked as foolish as he sounded. “Sorry. How was I supposed to know?”

“You coulda kept your goddamn mouth shut.”

“Let’s get you on the table,” O’Doull said. “I’ll do what I can for your hand, and I’ll see if I can dig out the bullet.”

“Hot damn! So I get to turn the other cheek, huh?” the soldier said.

O’Doull winced. Donofrio reached for the mask attached to the ether cylinder with nothing but relief.

Putting this guy under would shut him up, anyway.

XIX

R ain poured down from a leaden sky. Off in the distance, lightning flashed. Irving Morrell counted hippopotamuses—or was it hippopotami? Whichever, he counted twelve of them before the dull boom shook his barrel. The stroke was more than two miles away. But the rain, dammit, was here, there, and everywhere.

The barrel squelched forward through mud that was starting to look like tomato soup. U.S. armor all over northern Georgia was squelching—except in the places where it was flat-out stuck. The low ceiling grounded fighter-bombers. Even regular artillery was less accurate in godawful weather like this, and shell bursts spent themselves in the mud instead of spreading as they did most of the time.

“Dammit, we need to keep rolling,” Morrell muttered. But how? He’d broken out of the bridgehead south of Chattanooga. No way in hell the Confederates could drive U.S. forces back into the bottle and pound down the cork.

But Morrell didn’t think small. He wanted Atlanta. He wanted it so bad he could taste it. He wanted to see Jake Featherston try to fight a war with the Stars and Stripes flying over the chief Confederate junction between east and west. And he thought he could take Atlanta—as long as his men kept moving, kept pushing, didn’t let up on the bastards in butternut, didn’t give them a chance to regroup, reorganize, catch their breath.

October wasn’t listening to him. The summer had been drier than usual. Fall seemed to be making up for it all at once. “Unfair,” Morrell said. The enemy couldn’t stop him. The enemy had a devil of a time even slowing him down. Why was the weather doing the Confederacy’s dirty work for it?

Dirty work it was. Plowing through this gunk, the command barrel kicked up a bow wave like a destroyer at flank speed. But seawater was clean, not mixed with mud. Anyone this bow wave splashed would turn the color of rust—if he hadn’t already from trying to make

his own way through the muck.

More lightning flashed. After a dozen or so hippos, thunder boomed. The rain came down harder than ever. Swearing under his breath, Morrell ducked down into the turret and closed the hatch behind him.

“Thank you, sir,” the new gunner said. Clark Ashton had an infectious grin. “Wondered if I’d have to start bailing there.”

“Not that wet,” Morrell said, though it didn’t miss by much. Frenchy Bergeron had shoulder straps with gold bars on them now, and a platoon somewhere around here. So did Michael Pound, if he hadn’t got hurt since Morrell saw him last. *My gunners—a substitute for OCS?* Morrell thought with a wry grin.

“No forty days and forty nights?” Ashton said. “Sure coming down like it. If you see a big boat with giraffes and elephants and a guy with a beard, you better watch out.”

“The Ark came down on Mount Ararat,” Morrell said. “That’s in Armenia, not Georgia. The Turks and the Russians have to worry about it. Not us, thank God.”

“Isn’t there a Georgia right next to Armenia?” Ashton asked. “Maybe we’ve floated over from this one to that one.”

“Maybe you’ve floated clean out of your skull,” Morrell said. The gunner took a seated bow, which wasn’t easy in the crowded turret. Morrell rolled his eyes. That only made Ashton bow again.

Word coming in on the command circuits made Morrell do worse than roll his eyes. Unit after unit reported that it couldn’t go forward. Artillery was bogging down too far behind the line to give any kind of worthwhile support. Armored cars couldn’t leave the roads to scout; their tires made them more prone to getting stuck in the mud than barrels or armored personnel carriers. Even infantry units were having heavy going…and soldiers hated nothing worse than flooded trenches and foxholes.

At last, Morrell decided struggling to go forward would cost more than it was worth. He ordered all front-line units to hold in place to give the artillery and logistics train a chance to catch up. He wanted to be ready to reopen the attack when the rains let up—if they ever did.

“You don’t think we’ll sink in the mud if we stop here, sir?” Ashton asked.

Morrell muttered under his breath. That didn’t just strike him as possible; it struck him as likely. He ordered the driver forward till they came to a paved road. That also had its drawbacks. The barrel was too exposed to make him happy. But the curtain of rain drumming down hid the machine almost as well as a smoke screen. And he didn’t want to have to summon an armored recovery vehicle to rescue him if he did bog down. His reputation would be a long time recovering from something like that.

“Here we are,” Ashton said. “The middle of nowhere. Isn’t it lovely this time of year?”

“This isn’t the middle of nowhere,” Morrell said. The gunner raised an eyebrow, as if to say he was too well-bred to argue but it sure looked that way to him. “It isn’t,” Morrell insisted. “Where we are right now, this has to be the southern end of nowhere. Down a little farther, you’ve got Atlanta, and Atlanta’s definitely somewhere.”

Clark Ashton thought for a bit, then nodded. “Somewhere we can’t get to right now,” he said.

“Well, no. Thanks for reminding me,” Morrell said. “When this barrel rolls into Atlanta, the war’s just a long spit from being over.”

Ashton listened to the rain pounding on the barrel’s metal skin. “Seems to me God’s got the long spit right now.”

Morrell grunted. “Seems that way to me, too, and I wish to hell it didn’t.” He patted the front pocket of his coveralls. “And I wish I could have a cigarette.”

“Good luck, sir,” the gunner said. Morrell’s chuckle was distinctly halfhearted. He wasn’t about to light up inside the turret. Barrelmen did that every once in a while, but you had to be really desperate for a butt to take the chance. He would have growled like an angry bear if Ashton or the loader smoked in here, which meant he couldn’t do it himself. Normally, he would have just stood up in the cupola if he wanted a nicotine buzz. With water coming down in buckets, that wouldn’t work, either.

“Won’t kill me to go without,” he said mournfully, and patted that front pocket again.

“How long do you think it’ll be before we can start advancing again?” Ashton asked.

Laughing, Morrell said, “What is it about gunners? You guys can’t stand not to know about anything, can you?”

“I don’t know about anybody else, but I sure can’t,” Ashton said.

“Tell you what,” Morrell said. “Talk to God. If you can make the sun come out and dry up the mud, we’ll roll. Till somebody does…we won’t.”

“If God listened to me, sir, I wouldn’t be in a turret with you—no offense. I’d be in bed with a blonde—or a brunette, or a redhead. I’m not a fussy guy. Any kind of girl would do.”

“Blonde,” the loader said. “If you’re gonna ask, don’t be shy, for Chrissake. With big jugs, too.” He gestured.

“There you go,” Ashton said. “That’d work for me.” He glanced over at Morrell. “What about you, sir?”

“One of these days, I wouldn’t mind leave to go back to Kansas,” Morrell said. “That’s where my wife and daughter are.”

“Yes, sir,” the gunner said. “But you’re here now, and there’s plenty of broads around, and some of

’em’ll put out even if you’re a damnyankee.”

“I don’t need it that bad,” Morrell said. “Agnes isn’t fooling around on me back there, and I don’t feel right about cheating on her.”

Ashton and the loader looked at each other. He could read their minds, though they said not a word.

Poor old guy, they had to be thinking. *If he had more get up and go in him, he’d nail some of these Confederate bitches any which way.* Maybe they were right. Morrell hoped not, but he recognized the possibility. A man in his twenties was a hard-on with legs. A man in his fifties damn well wasn’t, and never looked or acted more idiotic than when he pretended he was.

His earphones crackled with a new report: “Sir, our forward scouts say there’s a Confederate buildup centered on map square Red-14.”

“Have you called artillery in on it?” Morrell asked, maneuvering the map so he could see where the devil Red-14 was. Folding and unfolding the damn thing inside the turret reminded him of a crowded flat with laundry drying on lines strung across the front room. The square lay south and east of Resaca, not too far from where he was himself.

“Yes, sir,” said the voice on the wireless. “Doesn’t seem to be enough to break ’em up. Sure could use a spoiling attack.”

“Well, I believe you,” Morrell said. “Haven’t got a whole lot to spoil with, though. And this damn rain…”

“How much trouble can they cause if they break through there?” the voice asked.

Morrell looked at the map again. He did some more muttering. If everything went precisely wrong, the Confederates could retake Resaca. That would complicate his life. It would mean Atlanta wouldn’t fall any time soon. And it would put him in hot water with the War Department, where you were only as good as what you did yesterday.

“How big a buildup is it?” he asked. If it was brigade strength, maybe even division strength, he *would* put in a spoiling attack. He wouldn’t just put it in, either—he’d lead it himself. He knew he couldn’t put his hands on anywhere near a division’s worth of men and matériel, but he didn’t care. The Confederates wouldn’t be so sure of that. When barrels came at them out of a curtain of rain, wouldn’t they think twice before they tried attacking? He thought so—they couldn’t afford to get too intrepid. On the other hand, they couldn’t afford *not* to get too intrepid, either. How did you judge?

He knew how he judged. If they were there in corps strength, he’d have to receive an attack instead of delivering one. That was where he drew the line between aggressiveness and stupidity.

“Sir, best estimate is division strength,” said the man at the other end of the wireless connection.

“Heigh-ho,” Morrell said. “Let’s go.” He thumbed the TRANSMIT button. “Well, we’ll see if we can knock ’em back on their heels. Out.” Then he started calling the armored and infantry in the neighborhood. He wondered if their COs would groan and fuss and flabble and say they couldn’t possibly move in this downpour. Nobody did. They wanted to hit the Confederates. “We’ve been thumping ’em like a big

bass drum from Pittsburgh down to here," an infantry colonel said. "Let's do it some more."

Clark Ashton beamed at him when the command barrel squelched forward. "Frenchy told me to expect action when I rode with you," he said. "He wasn't blowing smoke, was he?"

"We aren't here to give those butternut bastards a big kiss," Morrell answered. "We're here to blow 'em to hell and gone. And I aim to."

His scratch force pushed in the Confederate pickets with the greatest of ease. Featherston's men didn't seem to dream that anybody could bring off an attack in weather like this. Some of them panicked when they found they were wrong.

Barrels loomed up out through the rain. Morrell called out targets. Clark Ashton hit one after another.

Maybe Frenchy Bergeron had told him he'd better be a good gunner if he was going to get along with his new commander. Or maybe even the powers that be feared what Irving Morrell would say and do if they saddled him with a gunner who didn't know his trade.

The Confederates fell back. Morrell started laughing fit to bust. The rain that had helped the CSA was helping him instead now. The enemy couldn't tell how small his force really was. The way the U.S.

barrels and soldiers pushed forward, they had plenty of weight behind them. They'd have to be nuts to push like that if they didn't. Featherston's men, sure they were sane, fell back. Irving Morrell, just as sure he wasn't, laughed and laughed.

C arefully conned by a pilot who knew his way through the minefields, the *Josephus Daniels* came into New York harbor. Sailors stood at the rail admiring the tall buildings and boasting of the havoc they would wreak when they got liberty. Sam Carsten remembered leaves of his own when he was a rating, from Boston all the way to Honolulu.

He fondly recalled the lady—well, woman—he'd visited just before he first met George Enos, Jr. And wasn't that a kick in the head? Funny the kid remembered it after all these years. Actually, Enos was no kid any more—he had to be past thirty. *And how many miles have* you *got?* Sam asked himself. Some questions were better left unanswered.

As usual, the pilot knew his business. A good thing, too, since in his line of work your first mistake was much too likely to be your last. Blowing a ship halfway to the moon would get you talked about, and not kindly, even if you lived through it.

“We have the first liberty party ready?” Sam asked Myron Zwilling as the ship approached its assigned quay.

“Yes, sir,” the executive officer answered. “All men with good disciplinary records.”

“That’s fine for the first party,” Sam said. “But I want everybody to be able to go ashore unless we get called back to sea sooner than I expect right now.”

“Yes, sir,” Zwilling repeated, but he didn’t sound happy about it. “Some of them don’t deserve the privilege, though.”

“Oh, come on,” Sam said. “Nobody’s knifed anybody, nobody’s slugged anybody, nobody’s got caught cooking hooch.” There was some illicit alcohol aboard the *Josephus Daniels.* There’d been some aboard every ship in which Carsten ever served. As long as the chiefs kept things within reasonable bounds, as long as nobody showed up at his battle station too toasted to do his job, the skipper was inclined to look the other way.

“No one’s been caught, no.” By the way the exec pursed his lips, he was inclined to act like a revenuer in the hills of West Virginia. Only Sam’s manifest unwillingness to let him held him back. “But I’m morally convinced there’s a still on this ship, and I’d like to get rid of it as soon as possible.”

“We’ll see,” Sam said. “Meanwhile, though, we’ll do it the way I said.”

“Aye aye, sir.” Zwilling couldn’t disobey an obviously legal order, no matter how much he wanted to.

Happy sailors poured ashore after the destroyer escort tied up. Sam went ashore, too, not to roister but to consult with his superiors. “We keep getting good reports about you, Carsten,” said a captain not much younger than he was.

“Sir, I deny everything,” Sam said, straight-faced.

The officers in the conference room chuckled. One of them sent up smoke signals on his pipe. The captain who’d spoken before said,

“How’s the new executive officer shaping?”

“He’s brave and he’s diligent, sir.” Sam believed in getting the good out ahead of anything else. But there was more to say, and he said it: “He’s…kind of a stickler for rules and regulations, isn’t he?”

“Does that interfere with how well he does his job?” the captain asked.

“No, sir, but I had a happier ship with Pat Cooley in that slot,” Sam answered.

“Would you say he’s disqualified from command?”

“No, sir.” Sam left it right there.

He tried to, anyhow. The captain asked, “Would you be happy serving under him?”

Sam had to answer that one truthfully, no matter how little he wanted to. “No, sir,” he repeated.

One of the officers who hadn’t said anything wrote a note in a little book whose pages were held together by a spiral wire. Sam hoped he hadn’t just murdered Lieutenant Zwilling’s career. “Why not?”

the captain asked.

“He’ll do everything by the book,” Sam replied. “We need the book. It’s a good thing we’ve got it. But you need to know when to throw it out, too.” He waited to see if they would contradict him. When they didn’t, he went on, “I’m afraid he doesn’t.”

The officer with the notebook wrote in it again. “Thanks for being frank with us,” he said.

“Sir, I’m not happy about it,” Sam said. “Within his limits, he’s a solid officer. He’s plenty brave—I already said that. He’s conscientious. He works hard—nobody on the ship works harder.”

“That’s what the exec is for,” said the captain who did most of the talking.

“Well, yes, sir, but over and above that,” Sam said. “He sticks his nose in everywhere—sometimes, probably, when people wish he wouldn’t. Even when somebody who does that is right all the time, ratings resent it. When he isn’t, that only makes things worse.”

“You’re saying Lieutenant Zwilling sometimes intervenes mistakenly?” the captain asked.

He wasn’t twisting Sam’s words, but he was interpreting them harshly. “It’s not too bad, sir,” Carsten said.

“It’s not too good, either, or you wouldn’t be talking about it,” the captain returned. “Will you tell me I’m wrong?”

“No, sir,” Sam said once more. Lieutenant Zwilling wouldn’t love him—he knew that. But he didn’t love his new exec, either. Pat Cooley had spoiled him.

“Anything else about your ship that we ought to know?” the captain asked.

“Nothing you don’t already know about the class, sir,” Sam answered. “She’s not fast enough to run from a fight, and she doesn’t have the guns to win one.”

That made the officer taking notes smile. “Didn’t you outfight one of the limeys’ merchant cruisers?” he said.

“Yes, sir, but only ’cause they couldn’t shoot straight,” Sam said. “If they’d hit us a couple of times, it would have been all over—the wrong way.”

“Destroyer escorts do a fine job in the roles for which they’re designed,” the captain who did most of the talking said primly.

“Yes, sir,” Carsten agreed. “For escorting convoys, for going after submarines—no problems there. But the *Josephus Daniels* has done a lot of things she’s not designed for, too. If she keeps doing them, her luck’ll run out one day. I know it’s a busy war. I’m not complaining—but you asked.”

“Most people would say everything was fine and let it go,” the captain remarked. “They’d be afraid of messing up their careers if they popped off.”

Sam laughed. “What have I got to worry about, sir? I’m never going to command a cruiser, let alone anything bigger. Either I stay on my ship till the war’s over or I get a real destroyer. The difference isn’t worth flabbling about. So I guess I can tell the truth if I feel like it.”

“Yond Carsten has a hard and mustang look,” the note-taking officer said. “Such men are dangerous.”

That rang a bell in Sam’s mind. He had to reach way back to figure out why. *“Julius Caesar!”* he exclaimed. “We did that in English the semester before I chucked school and chucked my father’s farm and joined the Navy.”

“If you still remember, you either had a really good teacher or a really bad one,” the officer said. “Which was it?”

“Miss Brewster was good,” Sam answered. “I can still quote the start of *The Canterbury Tales,* too….

But this isn’t a literature class.”

“No,” the other officer said—wistfully? “But you’ve told us what we need to know. Why don’t you go enjoy New York City? If you can’t have a good time here, chances are you’ve got no pulse.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll do that.” Carsten got to his feet and saluted. The captain who’d done most of the talking returned the gesture. Sam left before the assembled officers changed their minds. A young lieutenant commander was waiting to go before them next. Saluting him as he went, Sam hurried out.

He flagged a cab. “Where to, Skipper?” the driver asked. He almost dropped his teeth—she was a woman, a brassy blonde somewhere around forty-five.

But why not? If she was pushing a hack, a man could do something more closely connected to the war.

“Why don’t you take me to a show?” he said. “Something with singing and dancing and pretty girls in it?”

He didn’t want to go to a burlesque house and watch strippers. Well, actually, he did, but he didn’t want to run into sailors from his ship when he did it. Being the skipper had a few drawbacks.

So he let the lady cab driver take him to Broadway instead. That was a longer ride and a classier destination than he’d had in mind, but what the hell. The Winter Garden was a big, fancy theater.

JOSÉ’S HAYRIDE, the marquee said. “This’ll do it?” Sam asked as he paid the driver.

“Pal, if this doesn’t do it, you’re dead,” she answered, unconsciously echoing the officer with the notebook.

Quite a few Army and Navy men were buying tickets, which seemed encouraging. They cost a five-spot, which was either encouraging or appalling, depending on how you looked at things. A pretty usherette guided Sam to his seat.

He liked the music—Woody Butler was one of his favorites. The comic had his trademark greasepaint glasses marked on his face. He spent most of his time leering at the female lead. So did Sam. The cab driver hadn’t been kidding. Daisy June Lee had a beautiful face, legs to die for, and a balcony that outdid anything in *Romeo and Juliet.* By the howls and whistles from the audience, she was wreaking havoc on every man there. Sam gave forth with his share and then some.

She didn’t show as much of herself as a stripper would have, but what she did show was more worth watching. It wasn’t one of Woody Butler’s best scores, but it was better than most of what the competition put out. Besides, when Daisy June Lee was on stage the orchestra could have been playing kazoos and bazookas for all Sam cared. And even when she wasn’t, the comic with the painted-on spectacles kept him laughing.

He joined the standing ovation when the show ended. When Daisy June Lee took her bows, he hoped she would explode out of her tight top. She bowed extra low, too, as if challenging the laws of gravity.

That made the applause even louder and more frantic. The top, of course, stayed in place. She grinned out at the servicemen; she knew what they wanted.

Then the comic came out and made as if to unbutton his shirt. He looked wounded unto death when the crowd laughed instead of cheering. That only made people laugh louder, which made him look more wounded yet.

Sam hated to leave, even if he knew perfectly well that Daisy June Lee was bound to have a boyfriend—and even if she didn’t, she wouldn’t give a damn about an overage two-striper. *A man’s reach should exceed his grasp/ Or what’s a heaven for?* —another fragment from his lit class ran through his head.

He waved down another cab in front of the Winter Garden. This driver was a man: a man with a hook doing duty for his left hand, the one that stayed on the wheel. He drove well enough. Sam tipped him

better than he had the woman who'd taken him to the theater.

"Everything all right?" he asked Lieutenant Zwilling when he came aboard the *Josephus Daniels.*

"Yes, sir," the exec said. "You're back sooner than I expected."

Sam shrugged. "I had a good time." *Except when I was talking about you, I'm afraid.* "You want to see a gal you'll never forget, go watch *José's Hayride* at the Winter Garden."

"Maybe I will, sir." By the way Zwilling spoke, he didn't mean it. What did he do for fun? Anything?

Poor bastard, Sam thought. Zwilling probably got his kicks telling other people what to do. If that wasn't a dead-end street, Sam had never seen one.

F lora Blackford turned on the wireless in the kitchen and waited for it to warm up as the coffee started to perk and she used a spatula to turn the eggs frying in a pan. The eggs got done about the time the wireless came on. A few seconds later, two slices of toast popped up. The coffee, running behind schedule, didn't get dark enough to suit her till she'd almost finished breakfast.

She almost didn't recognize the patriotic song coming out of the wireless. The singer and her band didn't seem well matched. She was more than good enough, in a conventional way. The band, by contrast, did things with syncopation and harmonies nobody else in the USA would have imagined. Flora paused with a bite of fried egg halfway to her mouth. *Is that…?* she wondered.

The song ended. "That was Kate Smith, with 'God Bless the Stars and Stripes,'" the announcer said.

"Backing her is the famous colored combo, Satchmo and the Rhythm Aces."

"Thought so!" Flora said, and got up to pour herself a cup of coffee.

"Satchmo and his musicians *do* bless the Stars and Stripes," the announcer continued, laying on the propaganda with a trowel. "They know too well the bars in the Stars and Bars stand for the imprisonment of their people. We'll be back with the news on the hour following these important messages. Please stay tuned."

Those messages were important only to the advertisers who paid for them: a soap company, a cosmetics company, a prominent brand of fountain pens, and a cigarette maker that said its products came from

"the finest tobacco available." She didn't know how many letters she'd had from constituents in the armed forces complaining about the cigarettes that came with their rations. She couldn't do anything about those complaints, however much she wanted to; U.S. tobacco simply didn't measure up to what the Confederates grew.

"And now the news," the announcer said once his station finally ran out of commercials.

"U.S. forces report significant advances in northern Georgia and western Tennessee despite the rainy weather that has slowed operations in recent days," the newscaster said. "Our bombers punished Atlanta and Birmingham in heavy raids on industrial areas. Damage to both cities is reported to be extensive."

"Good," Flora murmured, though she wondered how true the reports were. If clouds covered the targets, the bombers would drop their loads anywhere they could. If the bombs came down on houses instead of factories…well, who lived in the houses? People who worked in the factories. Any which way, bombardment hurt the C.S. war effort.

"Farther north, our bombers also pounded Richmond," the newscaster said. "Our losses were light. Little by little, we continue to beat down the enemy's air defenses. Confederate strikes against Washington and its environs produced only slight damage. No enemy bombers appeared over Philadelphia last night."

As far as Flora knew, that was true. She hadn't heard any sirens. They were loud and insistent enough to make sleeping through them almost impossible. She'd done it once or twice, but no more than once or twice.

"Significant advances have also taken place in northern Arkansas, in Sequoyah, and in western Texas, where Confederate resistance seems to be crumbling," the newsman said.

Flora hoped that wasn't intended only to keep listeners happy with good news from a front far enough away that they couldn't easily check up on it. The U.S. Eleventh Army was driving on Camp Determination now. If it fell, U.S. propagandists really would have

something to crow about. And, if it fell, wouldn't that also mean the Freedom Party would have a harder time killing off Negroes in the CSA?

"In an amphibious assault, U.S. Marines recaptured Wake Island, west of the Sandwich Islands," the newsman said. "There was no fighting, the Empire of Japan having withdrawn its forces before the Marines landed. Japan no longer holds any U.S. possessions."

And about time, too, Flora thought. That conflict would probably peter out now, the way it had a generation earlier. One of these days, there would have to be a reckoning with Japan—but not yet.

Fighting through the fortified islands of the western Pacific to reach the enemy's homeland was a distinctly unappetizing prospect.

Had Japan been able to seize the Sandwich Islands, the USA would have had a devil of a time getting them back. The U.S. West Coast would have become vulnerable to Japanese air raids. Flora remembered the Japanese strike on Los Angeles during the Pacific War, the strike that nailed the lid down on the coffin of her husband's reelection hopes. Japan and the CSA could have worked together to cause more trouble in the eastern Pacific these days. But that wouldn't happen now.

"In foreign news," the broadcaster continued, "the Kaiser's forces have inflicted a heavy defeat on the Russian Army east of Kiev, and it now appears certain that the capital of Ukraine will remain in German hands. The Tsar's wireless broadcasts speak of renewing the offensive as the Russians find the chance—as close to an admission of failure as we are likely to hear from them."

Flora's smile was wry. One rule held true in this war: everybody lied. Some countries lied more than others—the Confederate States, France, and Austria-Hungary came to mind. But everyone was guilty of what Churchill called terminological inexactitude now and again. You couldn't stretch things too far.

Otherwise they'd break, and the truth would bite you. But you could let your own people down easy and persuade the other side you still had plenty of fight left…whether you did or not.

"Heavy German bombing raids on Petrograd, Minsk, and Smolensk damaged Russian factories and railroad yards in those cities," the newsman said. "And the Germans have promised to aid the nationalist uprising in Finland, and say they will recognize the Finnish

provisional government.

“As if to counter that German move, the Tsar is appealing to the Russians’ ‘little brothers in the Balkans’—his term—to rebel against Austria-Hungary, whose government he terms ‘unnatural and detested by God.’ In Vienna, the King-Emperor Charles was quoted as saying that if God ever hated any regime, it was surely Russia’s.”

Takes one to know one, Flora thought. *Yeah, and you know ’em all.* The schoolyard taunts carried more weight when backed up by millions of men and all the munitions two industrialized countries could turn out.

“In western Europe, Germany claims to have begun the liberation of Belgium from British occupation.

Prime Minister Churchill says this is utter rubbish, and claims the British Army is merely readjusting its lines. Time will tell.

“German wireless has warned that, if the war continues much longer, England, France, and Russia face what the broadcaster termed ‘unprecedented destruction.’ The French government’s response is too crude to repeat over the air.”

Flora wondered whether the French knew as much as they thought they did. Germany had split the uranium atom before the United States did. The Kaiser could call on an impressive array of nuclear physicists. The United States were getting close to a uranium bomb. Wasn’t it likely the Germans were closer yet?

How close were the Confederate States? That was Flora’s biggest worry. All she knew was what she heard from Franklin Roosevelt, and the Assistant Secretary of War knew less than he wished he did.

Flora shook her head. Roosevelt admitted to knowing less than he wished he did. It wasn’t the same thing.

When the newsman started talking about the weather and the football scores, Flora turned off the set.

She drank another cup of coffee, did the dishes, called a cab, and went downstairs to wait for it. It showed up in about ten minutes, which was par for the course. The driver held the door open for her.

“Congressional Hall, please,” Flora said as she got in.

“Yes, ma’am.” The man had gray hair and walked with a limp. Flora

couldn't remember the last time she'd seen a healthy young man who wasn't in uniform. Her own son was a healthy young man…and now he was in uniform, too. Maybe the CSA's uranium bomb wasn't her biggest worry after all.

The cabby knew the shortest way through the maze of bomb damage that still tied up Philadelphia in the third autumn of the war. Flora gave him a big tip for making good time.

"Thanks a bunch, ma'am." He tipped his cap.

"Thank *you,* " she said, and got out her ID to show to the guards at the entrance.

"Go on in, Congresswoman," one of them said—but only after he carefully examined it. When would these painstaking inspections relax? At the end of the war? Ever? The soldier went on, "One of the ladies will finish checking you."

In front of a blast barricade, a uniformed woman went through Flora's handbag and briefcase and patted her down. Then she said, "Go ahead."

"Thank you," Flora said resignedly. She doubted the new security measures would end with the war.

Too many splinter groups would still have causes and people ready to die for them.

She navigated the maze of drab corridors to her office. A good thing no birds flew these hallways; she was often tempted to leave a trail of bread crumbs, and she couldn't be the only person who was. Her secretary looked up from the typewriter. "Good morning, Congresswoman."

"Good morning, Bertha." Flora let herself into her inner office and closed the door behind her. She telephoned Franklin Roosevelt.

"He's in a meeting, Congresswoman," Roosevelt's secretary said. "He should be back in about an hour."

"Have him call me when he can, please." Flora had plenty to do while she waited. The paperwork never went away, and the elves never took care of it when she went home at night. And the telephone rang four or five times before it was the Assistant Secretary of War.

“Hello, Flora,” Roosevelt said. “What’s up today?”

“I wondered if you noticed the news item where the Germans warned England and France and Russia about unprecedented destruction,” Flora said. “Does that mean they’re getting close?”

“I missed it,” Roosevelt answered after a thoughtful pause. “I hope someone close to the project heard it.

I hope so, but I don’t know, so I’ll pass it along. In case you’re wondering, we haven’t heard a word from the Germans about this yet.”

“I didn’t think we had,” Flora said. If uranium bombs worked the way the people with slide rules thought they would, the postwar world would have two kinds of country in it: the ones with those bombs, which would be powers, and the rest, which…wouldn’t. “That reminds me—any new word about how the Confederates are doing?”

“Nope. I wish there were, but there isn’t,” Franklin Roosevelt said. “Their number one man in this area hasn’t gone anywhere. He’s still right where he was before the war.”

“But they’re still working on it?”

“Well, we sure think so. They know we are—we found that out. They wouldn’t just ignore it themselves.”

“No, they wouldn’t. I wish they would, but no,” Flora said unhappily. “Are they working on it there, then?”

The Assistant Secretary of War paused again. “Don’t know,” he said at last. “We haven’t been able to prove it, not even close, but…. Maybe some people ought to pay a call on them there if they really are.

It’s a backwater place, not a lot of targets, so nobody’s gone after it much. Not a lot of obvious targets, I should say. We can probably spare some personnel to find out. Even if the answer is no, we remind more Confederates that they never should have started this war in the first place.”

“Yes.” Flora wondered what her question would end up doing to a backwater place somewhere in the CSA. Some people who’d passed a quiet war would suddenly discover that hell had decided to picnic on their front lawn. She shrugged. If that helped keep Joshua safe, she

didn't care.

C incinnatus Driver liked the idea of being in Georgia. Georgia was, without a doubt, the deep South. In Kentucky, he'd been right across the border from the USA. Foreign ideas easily wafted south; people said Louisville and Covington were the least Confederate cities in the CSA. Tennessee reminded him of Kentucky, though it seemed…more steeped in the Stars and Bars, perhaps.

But Georgia—Georgia was something else. It was a sign that the United States were really getting somewhere in this war. And it was a scary place for a Negro in the service of the USA to be.

"Ofays here ain't gonna catch me," he told a couple of the other truck drivers as they ate supper in a half-wrecked house on the outskirts of Jasper, Georgia, in the hill country north of Atlanta. "I got one bullet I save for me if I'm ever in that kind o' trouble. Quick and clean is better'n the other way."

"I guess I can see that," Hal Williamson said. "White folks around here don't like you one whole hell of a lot, do they?"

"White folks around here don't like anything that's got anything to do with the USA," Bruce Donovan said. Before Cincinnatus could get mad, he added, "But they especially don't like colored folks—that's plain enough."

"Yeah—ours or their own," Williamson said.

That made Cincinnatus want to start clobbering white Georgians with his cane…or else to put a clip in his gun and start shooting them. He didn't think U.S. authorities would arrest him if he did. Odds were they'd just take the gun away from him and send him home. That had temptations of its own, but he thought he did more to hurt the CSA by hauling supplies than he would by murdering a few Confederate civilians.

Williamson lit a Duke, then held out the pack to Cincinnatus and Donovan. After he lit up, he said,

"Stories the Negroes tell—man, they'll curl your hair."

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus said. His hair was already as curly as it could be. He'd seen the same thing in Kentucky and Tennessee and now

Georgia: U.S. soldiers were a magnet for the surviving Negroes in the Confederate States. They mostly came in by night; they hid during the day so white Confederates couldn't finish the job of capturing them and sending them to camps or killing them on the spot.

They were ragged and filthy and skinny, some of them starvation-skinny. They couldn't tell stories about the camps farther south and west, except to say that people who went in didn't come out. But they could talk about years on the dodge, scrounging and stealing and hiding. A few talked about whites who protected them for a while. Those stories relieved Cincinnatus; he'd known some decent whites in Covington, and didn't want to think the Freedom Party had turned all white men in the Confederate States into devils.

Donovan tossed his ration can into a dark corner of the room. The clank it made alarmed all the drivers.

You never could tell who was lurking in the dark. Maybe it was a Negro, looking for a new lease on life from the U.S. invaders. Or maybe it was a sniper, a bypassed soldier in butternut or a civilian with a hunting rifle and a grudge against damnyankees.

"What the hell?" To Cincinnatus' relief, that half challenge came in unmistakable U.S. accents.

"It's just us. Sorry," Donovan said, also in tones that could only have been forged north of the Mason-Dixon line.

"Well, watch it. Get your dumb ass shot off if you do shit like that very much." For all the soldier knew, he was cussing out a general. He didn't care.

Donovan sighed. He knew he'd been careless, too. He needed a couple of minutes to get back to the subject at hand. When he did speak again, it was much more quietly: "Some of the colored gals who come in, they're damn good-looking."

"How come you're so surprised?" Cincinnatus asked, a certain edge in his voice.

"He musta figured they'd look like you," Hal Williamson said dryly, which deflated him and set them all laughing.

How many Negro women had Bruce Donovan seen in person before he started driving a truck through the Confederate States? Any? Cincinnatus had no way of knowing. Maybe not. If he came from a

small town in the Midwest or the mountains, he might have gone his whole life without running into anybody who wasn't the same color he was.

Then Donovan and Williamson shared a glance that excluded Cincinnatus. He didn't call them on it, but he knew what it meant. Some of the colored women coming to the U.S. lines were pathetically anxious to make sure the soldiers in green-gray didn't turn them back. They had ways to persuade that black men didn't. Several thunderous bulletins about fraternization and VD had already come down from on high.

When you had to order something more than once, it was a sign people weren't listening to you.

Soldiers *would* screw if they got the chance. Who wouldn't? And Confederate blacks *were* more likely to carry the clap and syphilis than whites. Who would have bothered treating them, back in the days before the war? Even up in Covington, Cincinnatus knew he might easily have got himself a dose if he hadn't married young. Plenty of guys he knew had.

"What the hell are we going to do with this country once we get done stomping it flat?" Williamson asked, as if his fellow drivers had an answer that eluded the President of the United States and the Congress in Philadelphia. "Everybody white who stays alive'll hate our guts. All that means is another war as soon as these assholes get back on their feet."

"Sure worked that way last time around," Cincinnatus said.

"Anybody sticks his head up and causes trouble, we got to kill him. Simple as that." Donovan made it sound simple, anyhow.

"How does that make us any better than Jake Featherston?" Williamson asked.

"I'll tell you how." Cincinnatus did have an answer for that. "If you're black here, you don't gotta stick your head up. Freedom Party don't care. They want to kill you any which way. Long as we leave folks who don't cause trouble alone, we're miles ahead of them bastards, miles and miles."

Williamson grunted. "Well, you're right about that." He pulled out the pack of cigarettes again, looked at it, and shook his head. "Nah. This'll keep. I want to grab some shuteye, is what I really want to do."

“Yeah!” Cincinnatus and Donovan both sounded eager. Cincinnatus always sounded eager for sleep these days. He was working harder than he would have in civilian life, and he wasn’t as young as he had been once upon a time.

His back wouldn’t like sleeping on the floor wrapped in a blanket, with a rolled-up jacket doing duty for a pillow. The rest of him didn’t care at all. He sank into slumber like a submersible slipping below the surface of the sea, and he dove deep.

It was still dark when he woke. For a muzzy moment, he thought another thunderstorm was pummeling northern Georgia. Then he realized this was manmade thunder. Muzzle flashes flickered on the walls of the battered house where he slept. The artillery roared and roared and roared again.

“Gun bunnies are working overtime.” Hal Williamson sounded as drunk with sleep as Cincinnatus felt.

“Hope they blast the shit outa whatever they’re aimin’ at.” Cincinnatus waited for some comment from Donovan. All he heard was a snore. He would have thought this barrage loud enough to wake the dead.

Evidently not. A few minutes later, he was asleep again himself. You could get used to damn near anything.

Were the fellow who shook him awake at sunup in the Army, he would have been a top sergeant. The man had a leg gone below the knee and was a couple of years older than Cincinnatus, so he was a civilian, too. But he sure as hell acted like a top kick. “Come on, you lazy bums!” he yelled. “You think the goddamn war’s gonna wait for you to get your beauty rest?”

“Have a heart, Ray,” Cincinnatus groaned—a forlorn hope if ever there was one. But hot coffee and real fried eggs resigned him to being conscious. What the ration cans called scrambled eggs weren’t worth eating, even if the ham that came with them wasn’t too bad.

“Where we going?” Williamson asked as he refilled his tin coffee mug.

“Southeast.” Also like a good top sergeant, Ray had all the answers. “Soon as we break out of these fucking chickenshit mountains, get out into the flat country, the Confederates can kiss their sorry ass good-bye. They can’t stop us now. Weather can sometimes, but they can’t.

We get down into the flat country, they won't even slow us down."

Maybe he was right. Maybe he was wrong. It sounded good to Cincinnatus any which way. The latest depot was only a few hundred yards off. He drove his truck over to it. Soldiers filled the back with heavy wooden crates of artillery ammunition. He liked that. If they needed more shells farther forward, things were going the way they were supposed to.

He didn't know exactly where the truck convoy was heading. All he had to know was that he was going the same way as the truck in front of him. He shook his head. No, one more thing: if they got bushwhacked, he knew he had to fight back. He had plenty of ammo for the piece on the seat beside him.

But the convoy got through. There'd been more bushwhacking farther north. Here, the Confederates still seemed startled to see Yankee invaders. Cincinnatus feared that wouldn't last long. If the Confederates could raise hell behind U.S. lines in Kentucky and Tennessee, they could do it here, too.

The gun bunnies were happy to see them. Even though summer was gone and the day was cool, a lot of artillerymen stayed stripped to the waist. "Keep this shit coming, buddy!" said a blond kid with a skull-and-crossbones on his left upper arm. "We'll blow the whole damn CSA to hell and gone."

"Sounds good to me," Cincinnatus answered.

"Yeah, I bet," the youngster said. "If you could push a button and smash up the country, you'd do it like *that,* I bet." He snapped his fingers.

"You was in my shoes, wouldn't you?" Finding a white man who understood what a Negro might be feeling always surprised Cincinnatus.

Then the gun bunny winked at him. "Bet you can keep a secret," he said. Cincinnatus made a noncommittal noise. The artilleryman went on, "One of my great-great-grandfathers was about the color you are. Maybe we're cousins, way the hell down the line."

"Maybe we are." Cincinnatus kept his voice neutral as he asked, "So you're passin', then?" The fellow with the tattoo couldn't have more than one-sixteenth Negro blood in him: less, probably, since Cincinnatus had some white blood in him. If the gun bunny hadn't

said he was part colored, Cincinnatus never would have guessed.

“Yeah, I’m passing. It’s easier. You’ve got to know that. None of my girlfriends ever knew—that’s for damn sure. And besides, if the government thought I was a nigger, they never would have let me join the Army. And you know what? I want to kick Jake Featherston’s ass just as much as you do.”

“More power to you, then,” Cincinnatus told him. Would the artilleryman’s kids, when he had them, ever find out they were part Negro? And would it be good or bad if they didn’t? Some of each, probably—most things worked out like that. After a moment, Cincinnatus added, “I got me a couple of half-Chinese grandbabies in Des Moines.”

“How about that? Country’s turning into a regular zoo.” The kid grinned. Cincinnatus grinned back. They reached out at the same time and shook hands.

Driving away from the front, Cincinnatus wondered how many people with a thin streak of Negro blood were passing for white in the CSA. As many as could get away with it; he was sure of that. Acting white instead of black made things easier and more convenient in the United States. Down here, it was a matter of life and death.

He rolled past a burnt-out Confederate barrel in a field. U.S. technicians were salvaging what they could from the machine. Four hastily dug graves lay nearby. Cincinnatus nodded to himself. Death wasn’t coming just to Negroes in the CSA. Whites were getting their share, too. “Good,” he muttered, and drove on.

J ake Featherston stared at the situation maps pinned to the wall of his underground office. He swore under his breath. Despite everything George Patton could do, the abscess in northwestern Georgia was bursting, and damnyankees were spreading all over the landscape. How the hell was the country supposed to hang on to Atlanta? How the hell was it supposed to go on with the war if it couldn’t?

He swore again. He knew the answer to that: uranium bombs. Somehow, the Confederacy had to stand the gaff till they were ready, and to hope like anything the USA didn’t get them first. “Got to hang in,”

Featherston said softly. “Got to hang on. Got to.”

A moment later, Lulu poked her head into the office. “Professor FitzBelmont is here to see you, Mr.

President,” she said, and sniffed slightly. She didn’t know why the tweedy physics professor was so important to the Confederate States. Jake didn’t think she did, anyhow. Whenever he put something about the uranium-bomb project in writing, he took care of it himself, bypassing her. Security for this couldn’t be too tight. He wouldn’t have let his own shadow know about U-235 if he could have helped it.

All he said now was, “Thanks. Send him in.”

Henderson V. FitzBelmont closed the door behind him. He nodded to Jake. “Mr. President,” he said, and then, belatedly, “Uh—freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jake didn’t get angry at the forced way the professor brought out the slogan, as he would have with most people. He waved him to a chair and asked, “How are you?”

“Sir, I’m alive,” FitzBelmont said wearily as he sat down. “I’m alive, and I’m not hurt. I’ve always tried to be a rational man. I don’t have much use for the idea of miracles. Things are what they are, that’s all.

But if anyone wants to say it’s a miracle that I’m here now, I won’t argue with him.”

“I heard Lexington got hit hard,” Featherston said sympathetically. From all the reports he had, Lexington had got one night’s worth of what Richmond took several times a week. “You see what it’s like when you come here. Now you’ve been through it yourself.”

“Seeing it’s one thing. Going through it…” The professor shook his head in stunned disbelief. “How does anybody go through *that* and stay sane?”

“It’s like anything else, Professor—the first time it happens, it’s the worst thing in the world, but when it happens twenty, fifty, a hundred times, it’s just something you’ve got to deal with and go on,” Jake said.

“If they bomb Lexington fifty times, there won’t be anything left,” Henderson FitzBelmont said, horror in his eyes. “There’s not a whole lot left now.”

“Town’s been lucky up till now,” Jake remarked. Off in the Blue Ridge Mountains, without much industry to draw enemy bombers, Lexington

had largely escaped the war. The President of the CSA leaned forward. He could think of only one reason bombers would visit Lexington. “How much damage did they do to the project?”

“Well, sir, the works weren’t badly hurt. A lot of bombs hit around them, but not very many on them,”

FitzBelmont answered.

“That’s good news!” Jake meant it from the bottom of his heart. The sooner the CSA got uranium bombs, the better—it couldn’t be too soon.

FitzBelmont raised a warning hand. “It’s not so simple, Mr. President. I wish it were. We lost several men who specialized in enriching the uranium we have and extracting element ninety-four from it—jovium, we’re calling that.”

“Wait a minute. Ninety-four? Uranium’s ninety-two, right? What happened to ninety-three?” Jake Featherston could no more become a nuclear physicist than a clam could fly. But he had a devil of a memory for details.

“Element ninety-three—saturnium, we’re calling it right now—doesn’t have an isotope that yields a useful fission product,” FitzBelmont answered.

“It won’t go boom?” Jake Featherston translated academese into English.

“It won’t go boom.” The professor looked pained, but he nodded. “And Martin, Collins, Delancey, and Dean knew more about isolating jovium than anybody else, and the raid killed three of them and left Delancey…well, maimed.” He grimaced. “I saw him afterwards. It’s not pretty.”

Jake had seen a great many horrors in his life. Henderson FitzBelmont probably hadn’t. He looked a little too young to have fought in the Great War. Chances were he didn’t go in for street fighting, either. “How long will he be out?” Featherston asked.

“I don’t know yet, sir. He’s lost a leg and a hand,” FitzBelmont answered. “He won’t be back soon—I can tell you that.”

“Damn!” Jake said. FitzBelmont wasn’t kidding when he said Delancey’d got maimed. “All right, then.

Who are your next best people in Lexington? Who can you bring in from somewhere else? The work has to go on, even if you take casualties. That's part of what war's all about."

"I understand that, but physicists are harder to replace than riflemen," Professor FitzBelmont said stiffly.

So there, Featherston thought. The professor went on, "Just about everyone in the Confederacy who could help is already in Lexington. There weren't very many nuclear physicists here to begin with. We might be able to bring in a few men from Tulane. They won't begin to fill the shoes of the people we lost, though. The ones I mentioned were only the most important."

"Damn!" Featherston said again. "So that means the Yankees sure as hell know where we're working on the bomb." Henderson V. FitzBelmont blinked behind his spectacles. Jake spelled it out for him: "Why the fuck else would they plaster Lexington? Your uranium works is the only thing going on there that matters to the war."

"How…unfortunate," FitzBelmont muttered.

"Tell me about it!" Featherston pointed to the situation map. "The country's in trouble, Professor. If anybody's got a chance to save it, you're the man. Whatever you need, we'll give you."

"What I need most is time. If you hadn't sent me packing when I first came to you…"

FitzBelmont had nerve, to remind Jake of his mistakes. The President of the CSA sighed heavily. "Ask me for something I've got, dammit. Yeah, I was wrong. There. You happy? Not many people ever heard me say that, and you better believe it. But I thought you were selling me snake oil. Can you blame me? It sounded too fantastic to be true. Still does, but I reckon it is."

"Yes, sir, it is. The United States think so, too," FitzBelmont said, which made Jake wince. The physicist went on, "If the Yankees hit us once in Lexington, aren't they likely to do it again? We may take more damage the next time around."

"I've already pulled four antiaircraft batteries away from Richmond and sent 'em west," Jake said. "I've pulled two wings of night fighters, too. We'll get hit harder here, but we can live with that. We can't live without you. I didn't want to do anything special about Lexington

before. If we had all kinds of defenses around a no-account little college town, the United States'd be bound to wonder why. Well, now the damnyankees know why, so we'll do everything we can to hold 'em back."

"Thank you, Mr. President." FitzBelmont hesitated, then asked his question: "What do you think the odds are?"

"Not as good as I wish they were." Featherston wanted to lie, but feared the USA would show he was lying in short order. "We can make hitting Lexington expensive for them. I know that for a fact. I can't promise we'll keep everything off you. How much time would you lose if you packed up and went somewhere else?"

"A good deal. Several weeks, anyhow—maybe months." Henderson V. FitzBelmont eyed the map to which Jake had pointed. "Besides, where would we go?"

That was a much better question than the President wished it were. With airstrips in southern Tennessee, the United States could strike most of the Confederate heartland. "Miami? Houston? Habana? Those look like about your three best choices."

By the expression on FitzBelmont's face, he liked none of them. Neither did Jake Featherston. But he didn't like leaving the facility where it was, either. *The devil and the deep blue sea,* he thought. Yet the devil lurked *in* the deep blue sea. U.S. submersibles prowled the Confederate coast. If they sank a ship with the uranium project aboard, they sank the CSA, too.

"How much of your work can you move underground?" he asked. "That'll give the damnyankees a harder time, anyhow."

"It will also involve delay." But Professor FitzBelmont looked thoughtful. "With reinforced concrete above it, perhaps…"

"You need concrete? I'll give you concrete till it's coming out your ass," Jake said. "And we'll give the Yankees something new to think about pretty soon, too."

"May I ask what?" The professor was starting to get the hang of security.

Normally, Jake wouldn't have said boo, but he needed something to buck up FitzBelmont's spirits—and his own. He made the rules. He could break them. "Yeah," he said. "We've got us a project down in

Huntsville, too. Pretty soon—any day now, matter of fact—we'll be able to fire rockets with a ton of TNT in the nose a couple of hundred miles into Yankeeland. Let's see 'em try and stop those, by God!"

"That would help. I can see as much. How accurate are they?"

"They can hit a city. They can't hit a city block." Jake stabbed a finger out at Professor FitzBelmont.

"How heavy will your uranium bomb be? Put one of those in a rocket and it'd be the perfect weapon, near enough."

"Calculations are still theoretical. The best estimate is on the close order of ten tons," FitzBelmont answered.

"Shit!" Jake said feelingly. "Need bigger rockets or smaller bombs. Which do you reckon I could get first?"

"Since we don't have any bomb at all yet, getting larger rockets would seem easier," the professor said.

"Makes sense," the President of the CSA agreed. "I'll tell the boys in Huntsville to get on it, and pronto.

Damnyankees haven't sniffed them out yet, so they can work without having the sky fall on 'em." He muttered under his breath. "Only a matter of time, probably. Spies everywhere. Everywhere, I tell you."

He made himself brighten. It wasn't easy. "Wouldn't that be something, though? A rocket big enough to throw a uranium bomb all the way to San Francisco and Seattle?"

"That would be…remarkable," FitzBelmont said. "Of course, a just peace would be even better."

"I offered the United States a just peace two years ago," Featherston said angrily. His definition of *just* boiled down to *just what I want.* "They wouldn't take it, the bastards. I figured we'd better grind it out of 'em, then, on account of they sure aimed to grind it out of us."

Henderson V. FitzBelmont started to say something. It probably would have been something like, *Look how things are now. Would they be worse if you'd made a softer proposal?* Had he said any such thing, Jake would have blown up in his face. The physicist wasn't so good with people, but he saw that, all right.

“We are going to win this sucker. *Win* it, you hear?” Jake growled. “We are going to lick the Yankees right out of their boots. Lick ’em, by God. Lick ’em so they stay licked, so we never have to worry about ’em again. It *will* happen, and you’ll help make it happen. That’s how it’s gonna be. Got it?”

FitzBelmont said the only thing anybody with an ounce of sense would have said: “Yes, Mr. President.”

Maybe he meant it. Maybe he didn’t. But he said it, and he *would* produce for Jake Featherston and for the Confederate States of America. He *would* produce, and the Confederate states *would* win. Jake looked at the unfortunate situation map, then deliberately turned away from the unfortunate situation it portrayed. No matter what was going on in northern Georgia, the Confederate States *would* win.

T he house Jefferson Pinkard rented in Humble, Texas, was one of the finest two or three in town. Edith and Willie and Frank liked it fine. Of course, they would have liked a tent in the woods outside of Humble almost as well. Anything that got them away from the Yankee air raids on Snyder would have looked like paradise on earth to them. Getting away from Snyder looked pretty damn good to Jeff, too.

And Camp Humble looked even better. Ferd Koenig had wanted to call it something fancy: Camp Devastation, or maybe Camp Destruction. Jeff talked him out of it. “Look,” he said in a long, angry telephone call, “any nigger who hears he’s goin’ to Camp Destruction, he’ll know he’s got nothin’ to lose. He’ll be more dangerous than a goddamn rattlesnake. There’s such a thing as asking for trouble, and giving a camp a name like that—well, it’s the picture in the book.”

He got his way. The Attorney General grumbled and harumphed, but the Attorney General was way the hell off in Richmond. He wouldn’t have to live with the consequences of a name like that. No—he’d just blame Jeff for the riots and dead guards that sprang from it.

Camp Humble, now…What could sound more harmless? And what could be more deadly? This camp was done *right.* Everything Jeff had learned the hard way at Camp Determination went into Camp Humble from the start. The bathhouses had a bigger capacity than his old ones. He had more trucks to help them along. And he had a big, fancy crematorium set up right at the edge of the camp. No more mass graves, no, sir. When Camp Humble reduced its Negro population, it would reduce the coons right down to nothing.

Leaves no evidence behind, he thought. He couldn't do anything about the mass graves outside of Snyder. Now that Camp Determination was empty and blown to hell and gone, he doubted that the Confederates would bother trying to hold on to Snyder and the territory nearby. They needed soldiers even more farther east. Those graves handed the United States a propaganda victory on a silver platter.

Well, too bad. They could yell all they wanted. It wouldn't make a dime's worth of difference in who won the war.

He sighed. Back when he ran up Camp Determination, he'd figured it was in a damn good spot. So had everybody set above him in the CSA. That only went to show people weren't always as smart as they thought they were. Yes, Snyder, Texas, was out at the ass end of the Confederacy. The damnyankees could reach it anyhow. The older, smaller camps farther east were still going great guns.

And now Camp Humble was, too. Negroes who came in here got dealt with in jig time. All the improvements Jeff had designed into the new camp paid off. Camp Humble also had a Y-ranging station, massive antiaircraft batteries all around it, and a fighter wing assigned to help protect it. U.S. bombers could get here, even if they had to come a long way to do it. They wouldn't meet a friendly reception if they tried.

So far, they hadn't tried. Maybe they didn't know where the new camp was. If they didn't, they would soon enough; you couldn't keep a place this size secret very long. But making air raids expensive might be enough to keep them away.

Jeff muttered under his breath. Over by Spencer, the CSA hadn't been able to make Yankee air raids expensive enough. The USA battered down C.S. air defenses, and went right on battering till U.S.

warplanes dominated the skies. That couldn't happen here—not so far inside C.S. territory. Pinkard hoped like hell it couldn't, anyhow. If U.S. airplanes started owning the sky over Houston and Humble, the Confederate States were in deep.

He muttered again. By the news filtering out of Georgia, the Confederate States were in deep anyhow.

That there *was* news out of Georgia—no matter how the Party and the government tried to keep it quiet—told how very deep his country was in.

A train whistle blew, off in the distance. Jeff kept the window to his office open a little way so he could hear those three blasts whenever they came. He intended to go on doing that unless it was snowing outside or something. As usual, he wanted to know what would happen before it did. He still prowled through Camp Humble with a submachine gun, looking for trouble spots before they showed up. And when he heard those three toots from the train whistle, he still erupted from the office and headed for the unloading point like a jackbooted force of nature.

Guards in gray uniforms hustled to take their places where the spur from the line through Humble stopped at the camp. Some of them led big, mean, snarling dogs—coon hounds, they laughingly called them, though the German shepherds were nothing like the beasts that went after four-legged coons.

"Come on!" Jeff shouted. "Move your lazy asses!" Anybody who got in position after he did was in trouble, and everybody knew it. Some of the guards, the men from the Confederate Veterans' Brigades, moved slower than their younger counterparts. He could put the old farts in the stockade or ship them home, but that was about it. He could send younger guards straight to the front if they fucked off. He'd done it, too, though only twice.

The train whistled again. Jeff Pinkard was anything but an imaginative man, but he couldn't help thinking how mournful that sound was. And yet…Who would mourn the Negroes who went into the bathhouses and the trucks and the crematorium? Nobody white in the CSA, that was for damn sure.

Here it came, smoke puffing from the stack. Sparks flew as steel wheels ground against steel rails. The engineer knew just what he was doing. He stopped the locomotive alongside the flagpole that was his mark and waved to Jeff. As Pinkard waved back, the fellow in the tall cap inside the engine took a pint of whiskey out of his coat and swigged from it. Then he gave a throat-cutting gesture, and then a thumbs-up.

If he hadn't added the thumbs-up, Jeff would have reported him for drinking on duty and for political unreliability. As things were, the camp commandant just grinned.

"Out! Out! Out!" the guards screamed as they unlocked the crowded cars. "Get moving, you stinking, rasty niggers! Form two lines! Men on

the left! Women and brats on the right!" When the Negroes stumbled out of the cars, the guards reinforced the orders with cuffs and kicks. A dog leaped forward and bit a woman. Her shrill scream made the blacks move faster to keep the same thing from happening to them.

Into the camp they went, those who could move. Other Negroes—trusties—carried and dragged those who couldn't move straight to the trucks. The story was that they were going to a clinic some distance from the camp. In fact, the trucks would go far enough to make sure they were dead, then bring them back to the crematorium. More trusties, these always under the watchful eyes of guards, would load the corpses into the fire, and that would be that.

Before long, the trusties would get it in the neck—in the nape of the neck, to be precise—and go up in smoke themselves. They didn't know that yet; they thought they were saving their worthless black hides by going along with the guards. But Jeff and the others in gray uniforms had plenty of Negroes to choose from. Blacks were flooding into Camp Humble faster than even this magnificent facility could get rid of them.

Guards and trusties went through the train together, pulling out corpses and the live Negroes who were either too far gone to come out on their own or were playing dead. The bodies went straight to the crematorium. The shammers went straight to the trucks.

One of them saw the wreathed stars on Jeff's collar and stretched out his hands in appeal. "I didn't do nothin', suh!" he said, plainly sensing that nothing good was likely to happen to him. Trusties holding him tight and guards aiming automatic weapons at him gave pretty fair hints.

"You broke a rule," Jeff said stonily. "They said come out, and you damn well didn't. There's a punishment barracks next to the clinic." By now, he brought out the soothing lies with the greatest of ease. "You spend some time in there, you'll learn to behave yourself when you get back here."

The Negro went on squawking, but these weren't the bad kind of squawks. As long as he thought he would be coming back, he was willing to go where the trusties were taking him—not eager, maybe, but willing. He would have kicked up all kinds of trouble had he thought he was heading for his last truck ride.

Before long, the crematorium went to work. The trusties took jewelry

and dental gold from the corpses and gave them to the guards. Keeping any of that stuff sent a trusty into the flames alive. So far, the guards hadn't caught any of them sticking rings up their ass or anything. Sooner or later, it was bound to happen. Some people *would* try to steal no matter what.

Smoke belched from the stacks. Jeff swore softly. The smoke smelled like greasy burnt meat. The outfit that ran up the crematorium had sworn on a stack of Bibles that the smoke would be clean, that you'd never know in a million years they were burning bodies. "Lying bastards," Pinkard muttered. Yeah, some people tried to steal, all right, no matter what. They weren't all black, either.

He wrinkled his nose against the stink. Sometimes half-charred bits of flesh came flying out of the stacks, sucked up along with the hot gases. There was a lot more soot than the manufacturers promised, too.

Pulling out a notebook, Jeff scribbled in it. Before long, he'd send Richmond a nasty letter. With luck, he could put the company's ass in a sling. He did some more muttering. He hoped the people back in Richmond weren't too busy with the war to come down on some not so petty grifters who'd grabbed a fat contract by promising more than they could deliver.

He wondered if he ought to see where he could put mass graves in case the crematorium just didn't work out. That would be harder around here than it was around Snyder; this country was more thickly settled.

And the ground here was a lot swampier than it was farther west. The stink from graves might be even worse than what the crematorium turned out. All those bodies might pollute the ground water and start epidemics, too. He supposed he'd have to talk to a doc about that.

So goddamn many things to worry about.

But Camp Humble was up and running, even if it had a few rough spots. Camp Determination was nothing but a memory. Jeff could go home to Edith and his stepsons every night proud of what he'd accomplished. And pretty soon he would have a baby of his own. Wouldn't that be something?

One of the guards came up to him. "Sir?"

"What's up, Cromartie?" Jeff tried to know everybody's name.

Cromartie looked shamefaced. “Sir, I’ve got the clap,” he blurted. “Troop Leader Mauch said I had to tell you, or he’d tear off my dick and stuff it up my…. Well, he said I had to let you know.”

“You fucking idiot,” Jeff said, which was exactly Cromartie’s trouble. “Did you catch it here?”

“Reckon so, sir. I sure didn’t have it before.”

“All right. Get your sorry ass over to the doc. He’ll have some pills for you. I’m gonna gig you three days’ pay, and word of this will go on your record.”

Miserably, Cromartie nodded. Even more miserably, he shuffled away. Jeff laughed, but only quietly—no fool worse than a horny fool. The laughter didn’t last. No matter how well Camp Humble ran, he wished he were still several hundred miles farther west. That would have meant the Confederacy was winning the war.

XX

A bner Dowling walked the mayor of Snyder, Texas, through what was left of Camp Determination. The mayor was a plump, middle-aged fellow named Jethro Gwynn. He walked with a limp and a stick; he’d fought for the CSA in the Great War. “You say you didn’t know what was going on here?” Dowling growled.

“That’s a fact, sir,” Gwynn answered. “All the barbed wire and everything…They kept people out, you know.” He sounded earnest and persuasive. Dowling didn’t believe him for a minute.

Neither did Major Angelo Toricelli. “Well, what did you think was going on when all those trains stopped here? People got off those trains. Thousands and thousands and thousands of them got off. Nobody ever got on. Didn’t that kind of make you wonder?”

“No, sir,” Gwynn said blandly. “All them trains went through Snyder sealed up tight. Couldn’t prove by me they had people in ’em.”

“What are we going to do with this lying son of a bitch, sir?” Dowling’s adjutant demanded.

“Here, now. You got no cause to talk about me like that,” Jethro Gwynn said. “Whatever went on here, it was none of my damn business, and I didn’t ask no questions.”

Major Toricelli's hand dropped to his pistol. "For three cents cash I'd blow your lying brains out. It's more than you're worth, too."

"Nobody who lives in town paid much attention to this place," the mayor of Snyder insisted. "It was just here, that's all."

That was too much for General Dowling. "All right, Mr. Gwynn," he said. "You're going to come for a little ride with me."

"Where are we going?" Gwynn asked, sudden apprehension in his voice.

"Don't worry—it's not far," Dowling answered. "And even if it were, you'd be smart to come along. I bet if I looked in my pocket I could find three cents for Major Toricelli." His hands folded into fists. He wanted to beat the snot out of this Texan, the kind of urge he hadn't had since his West Point days. "Get moving. You think you're unhappy now that the United States are here, you give me any trouble and you'll find out you don't know jack shit about unhappy—not yet you don't, anyway. But you will."

He must have been persuasive. Without another word, Jethro Gwynn walked back to the command car that had brought him out from Snyder. The driver and the other two soldiers waiting in the vehicle glared at him. Dowling didn't think he'd need to give them three cents. If the mayor got even a little out of line, he could have an unfortunate accident for free.

"Take us to that field, Clancy," Dowling told the driver. "You know the one I'm talking about?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I sure do," Clancy said. The motor was still running. The driver put the command car in gear. It rolled along a well-paved highway—a remarkably well-paved highway, seeing that it ended in the middle of nowhere.

The wind was blowing from the field. Dowling's nose wrinkled. So did Jethro Gwynn's. "Maybe we don't need to go any further," the mayor of Snyder said.

"Shut up," Major Toricelli said, his voice hard and flat.

"I think we'll keep going," Dowling said. "We're almost there anyhow, eh, Clancy?" He gave Gwynn a sour stare. "Clancy and I have been here before. Have you, Mr. Mayor?"

“No!” Gwynn said. “Christ, no!”

“I wonder why not,” Dowling said. Jethro Gwynn didn’t answer. Nothing was the best thing he could have said, but it wasn’t nearly good enough. The command car passed through a barbed-wire gate a barrel might have flattened. To the driver, Dowling added, “Stop by the closest trench—the open one.”

“Yes, sir,” Clancy said, and he did.

“Well, let’s get out of here and have a look around, shall we?” Dowling descended from the command car. He waited for the mayor to join him. Plainly, the mayor didn’t want to. Just as plainly, the savage expressions the U.S. soldiers wore told him he had no choice. Looking as glum as a man possibly could, he got down, too. Major Toricelli followed him.

“Come over here, God damn you.” Toricelli shoved him toward that trench, which hadn’t been covered over like the rest. “Take a good look. Then tell me you didn’t know what the hell Camp Determination was up to.”

“Please…” Jethro Gwynn said, but nobody wanted to listen to him. Feet dragging in the dirt, he scuffled his way forward.

Even in October, curtains of flies buzzed above the trench. Crows and ravens and vultures flew away as the men approached, but they didn’t go far. The rations were too good for them to want to leave. The stench was overpowering, unbelievable; it seemed thick enough to make the air resistive to motion.

Dowling knew it would cling to his uniform, his skin, his hair. He also knew he would have to bathe several times to get rid of it.

“Go on,” he said harshly. “Take a good look.”

Gwynn gulped. How many Negroes—men, women, children—lay in this trench, all bloated and stinking and flyblown and pecked by scavenger birds? Thousands, surely. The trench was long and deep and about two-thirds full. Had the Confederates not pulled out of Camp Determination and blown the place up, they would have filled the trench with corpses and then scraped out another trench, closer to the entrance, and started in on that one, too. They’d set this up very efficiently.

“Well?” Dowling said. “What do you think, Mr. Gwynn? How do you

like it?”

“I had no idea,” the mayor of Snyder gasped, and then he leaned forward and threw up. He was neat about it; he missed his shoes. Wheezing, coughing, spitting, he went on, “Honest to God, I didn’t.”

“You lying sack of shit.” Dowling pointed to the closed trench beyond this open one, and then to the next closed trench, and then to the next and the next. “What did you think they were doing here? Running a hospital?”

“I didn’t ask any questions,” Gwynn said. “I didn’t want to know.”

“That sounds a little more like the truth, anyway—not much, but a little,” Major Toricelli said.

“Not enough,” Dowling said. “Nowhere close to enough. Come on. Let’s go back to the command car.”

“Can we head back to town?” the mayor asked eagerly.

“Not yet, Charlie,” Dowling said. After they got in, he told Clancy, “Go on all the way up to the first trench.”

“Yes, sir,” the driver said.

Again, Jethro Gwynn didn’t want to get out. This time, Major Toricelli gave him a shove. “We had to look at this, asshole,” he said. “You damn well can, too.”

Bulldozers had scraped off the dirt from part of the first trench. The bodies in there were a couple of years old. They were mostly bones, with rotting clothes and bits of skin and hair here and there.

Halloween in hell might have looked like this.

“They’ve been doing it ever since this camp opened up, for the last two years or so. How many bodies are here all told, do you think?” Dowling said. “And you have the brass to try and tell me you didn’t know what was going on? God, what a shitty excuse for a liar you are.”

“What a shitty excuse for a human being,” Toricelli said.

Gwynn puked again. He didn’t try denying things any more, though. Maybe that was progress.

“And do you know what the best part is?” Major Toricelli said. “Once your smokes here were dead, the guards had people who went into their mouths with pliers or whatever the hell and yanked out all their gold fillings. Waste not, want not, I guess.”

Gwynn looked revolted in a new and different way. “You’re making that up. Nobody would do such a thing.”

“It’s the God’s truth, Mr. Gwynn.” Abner Dowling held up his right hand as if taking an oath. “So help me. We had Graves Registration people put on gas masks and look at the bodies up close. They didn’t find any dental gold. None—not a crown, not a filling, not a bridge. Nothing. What they did find was lots of dead colored people with teeth yanked out or teeth broken to get the gold from them. And how do you like *that*?”

Had Gwynn looked any greener, Dowling would have been tempted to mow him. The mayor of Snyder said, “I swear on my mother’s name, General, and by our Lord Jesus Christ, I never knew nothin’ about that. Nothin’. Pulling teeth? That’s…just sick.” He bent over and retched some more. This time, he had nothing in his stomach to bring up.

The dry heaves were nasty. Dowling watched without sympathy till Gwynn’s spasm finally ended. “So you really did know they were killing off Negroes at the camp, then?” he said.

“Well, I had a pretty good notion they were,” Jethro Gwynn admitted in a ragged whisper. “I didn’t ask any questions, though. None of my business, I reckoned.”

“You passed by on the other side of the road, like the priest in the Good Book,” Dowling said in a voice like iron.

By then, Gwynn was in no shape to quarrel. “I guess maybe I did.”

“I’ve got one more question for you. Then I’ll take you back to town,” Dowling said. “Why don’t you like grubbing gold out of Negroes’ mouths once they’re dead? They don’t need it any more then. Isn’t killing ’em what’s really wrong?”

“You know, I never looked at it that way,” the mayor of Snyder said seriously. “I mean, they’re just a pack of rebels and troublemakers. But this…” He gulped. “It’s different when you see it with your own eyes.”

“You liked the idea. You didn’t want to know what it meant, that’s all. Or have you got the nerve to tell me I’m wrong?” Dowling asked.

“No, that’s a fact, a true fact,” Gwynn said. “You think about gettin’ rid of niggers and you think, *Hell, country’d be better off without ’em.* You don’t reckon they’re—people, or anything.”

“Well, what the hell are they, then?” Dowling demanded. When Jethro Gwynn didn’t answer the question, he did it himself: “They’re dead, that’s what. And I bet the worst of ’em has a better hope of heaven than you do, Mr. Gwynn. Come on, damn you.” He shoved the mayor of Snyder toward the command car.

Gwynn didn’t say anything as Clancy drove him back to town. The U.S. soldier let him off in front of his real-estate agency. The mayor fled inside and slammed the door behind him, as if that would keep Dowling and his men from coming back.

Having shown Jethro Gwynn what Camp Determination was all about, Dowling grabbed Snyder’s leading (and only) banker, two attorneys, an accountant, and a doctor. With a happy—for him, anyhow—afterthought, he also grabbed their wives. He took them out to the camp together in a deuce-and-a-half. They all denied they’d had any idea what it was doing.

“I thought you might say that,” he told them.

The truck driver drove them to the mass graves. They turned pale even before the stink started filling the back of the truck. All but one of them vomited at the first trench. Two women fainted. So did one of the lawyers. The doctor passed out when he heard about taking dental gold from the corpses.

“We ought to bring the whole town through here, sir,” Major Toricelli said on the way back to Snyder.

“By God, I’m tempted,” Dowling said. “Maybe I will.”

His own headquarters were well upwind from the mass grave. He bathed and bathed that night, and still smelled, or thought he smelled, the stench of death clinging to him.

His telephone rang early the next morning. The accountant in Snyder had shot his wife and three children, then turned the pistol on himself. Another call came in a few minutes later: the banker’s wife had swallowed rat poison. Then the telephone rang again: Mayor Gwynn

had hanged himself from the chandelier in his real-estate office.

“Maybe they’ve got consciences after all, if you kick ’em hard enough,” Dowling said, not altogether without satisfaction. “Who would have imagined that?”

S ergeant Armstrong Grimes hadn’t been in the big fight since the Confederates came north into Ohio.

He liked fighting on enemy turf much better. He liked facing the real enemy much better, too. Utah, Canada…It wasn’t that they weren’t dangerous places. His leg still pained him in wet weather like they were having now. No, the point was that he’d got shot in a fight that didn’t matter, a fight that said nothing about who would win the war.

Lieutenant Bassler pointed to a wooded hill in front of Hollysprings, Georgia: a nowhere town that never would have mattered to anyone more than five miles away if it didn’t lie on a road leading south toward Atlanta. “The Confederates are dug in there,” he said. “We’re going to be part of the force that takes the high ground away from them.”

“Yes, sir,” Armstrong said. Cautiously—Confederate snipers were loose in front of the hill—he peered forward. After ducking down again, he added, “Don’t hardly see ’em. They’re probably just waiting for us there under the trees.”

“Afraid you’re right,” the company commander said. “Nothing we can do about it, though.”

“I hope they pound the crap out of the place before they send us in,” Armstrong said. “Will we have a lot of armor support?” He assumed they’d have some, which wouldn’t have been a sure bet in the sideshows where he’d fought before.

“They say we will,” Bassler told him. “Maybe they’re blowing smoke up my ass, but I don’t think so.

Softening-up is supposed to start tomorrow at 0500. We go in two hours later.”

“Yes, sir,” Armstrong repeated. He probably wouldn’t have slept late tomorrow anyhow, but now he knew damn well he wouldn’t.

He took the news back to his squad. The men greeted it with the enthusiasm he'd expected. "Hot shit,"

Squidface said. "Featherston's fuckers get another chance to blow my dick off. Just what I've been waiting for—yeah, you bet."

"I wish one of these Confederate broads *would* blow my dick off," Woody said. The other soldiers laughed. Then they went back to studying the hill. They might not be strategists, but they'd learned tactics the hard way.

Cal Henderson summed it up: "Taking that place out is liable to be expensive as shit if they're laying for us under those pines."

"Air bursts. Lots of air bursts," Squidface said. Armstrong found himself nodding. You could fuse a shell so it went off as soon as it touched anything at all—a branch, for instance. Air bursts like that slashed the ground below with fragments. Unless you were in a bunker dug into a trench wall, you'd catch hell.

"Grab as many Z's as you can now," Armstrong said. "Artillery opens the show at five tomorrow morning. We go in a couple of hours later."

No, he didn't get much sleep himself. Having nerves was silly—he couldn't do anything about whatever would happen soon—but he did all the same. Because he was awake at least as much as he was asleep through the night, he heard barrels rattling up to the start line under cover of darkness. Lieutenant Bassler had got that right, anyhow.

The bombardment started at five on the dot. Star shells lit up the hill bright as day. High-altitude bombers droned overhead, dropped loads of death, and kept on going. They'd blast Atlanta or some other C.S.

town, then fly north and land, after dawn let them see what they were doing.

Confederate artillery woke up in a hurry. Quite a few shells fell on the U.S. front line, but none dangerously close to Armstrong's squad. The men huddled in their foxholes and waited for the brass whistles and the shouts that would send them forward.

It was getting light when U.S. fighter-bombers zoomed in to put the finishing touches on the preliminaries.

Armstrong was glad to see them. They could hit targets the high-altitude airplanes were too likely to miss.

“Boy!” Whitey yelled. “They’re beating the holy bejesus out of that place, aren’t they?”

“Here’s hoping,” Armstrong said.

Several soldiers nodded at that. They were like the guys he’d fought beside in Utah: they’d been through the mill, they knew it was no damn good and wouldn’t get any better, and they kept going anyway. He didn’t have anybody just out of the repple-depple in his squad, though the company carried several replacements. He took another look at that hill. By the time they got to the top of it, he feared the squad would need some new men. He hoped to hell it wouldn’t need a new sergeant.

Engines roaring, U.S. barrels clattered forward. Lieutenant Bassler’s whistle shrilled. “Let’s go!” the company commander shouted. “Keep your heads down, don’t bunch up, and I’ll see you when we get there!”

He made a good leader for a front-line outfit. He always sounded confident, and he didn’t send his men anywhere he wouldn’t go himself. Armstrong feared they were going into a meat grinder now. Sometimes that came with the job. He didn’t like it, but he couldn’t help it.

Mortar bombs started falling as soon as the U.S. barrels and soldiers began to advance. Screams followed some of the bursts. Medics scooped up the wounded and carried them back to the rear. Other bursts sounded curiously subdued. They didn’t throw many fragments. Armstrong knew what that meant.

Swearing, he shouted, “They’re heaving gas at us!” and put on his mask. One more annoyance, one more inconvenience, in a war that seemed full of nothing else but.

A bullet cracked past him, about belly-button high. He was flat on his belly in the muddy grass before he knew how he’d got there—reflexes really did take over in time of danger. A moment later, he got up and started running again, dodging like a star halfback in a professional league.

Another bullet missed him by not nearly enough. He hit the dirt again. This time, he spotted the muzzle flash. “There!” he yelled, pointing toward a foxhole just in front of the edge of the trees.

With several U.S. soldiers shooting in his direction, the Confederate took his life in his hands whenever he popped up to fire. The men in green-gray worked their way closer to the foxhole. One of them shouted for him to give up. He answered with a burst from his automatic rifle. A shriek said he wounded someone. But two grenades flew into the hole. After that, he didn't fire any more.

Other Confederates farther back did. Armstrong was glad when he got in among the trees himself. He had plenty of cover then, from upright trunks and from those the U.S. bombardment had knocked over.

Not least because of all the havoc the shells and bombs had wreaked, the woods smelled powerfully of pine. The fresh, clean, spicy scent made an odd backdrop for the brutal firefight that went on under the trees.

Armstrong ran past a young Confederate he thought was surely dead —the man had stopped a couple of fragments with his belly and another with his chest. But the soldier in butternut groaned and moved, and almost scared Armstrong out of a year's growth.

Crouching beside him, Armstrong asked, "How bad is it?"

"I'm done, Yankee," the enemy soldier answered, gasping against the pain. Blood ran from his mouth and nose.

"You want morphine?" Armstrong said. "I'll give you some."

"Already got it." The kid had to be younger than Armstrong himself, and Armstrong was only twenty.

After another gasp, the Confederate said, "Don't help much." Armstrong believed him; nothing would help much, not with those wounds.

That led to another question: "Shall I finish you or yell for the medics?"

"I'm done. Told you that." The soldier took as deep a breath as he could. "Get it over with. No blame on you. I'll thank you for it."

"All right, then." One quick round did the trick. Armstrong hoped somebody on either side would do the job for him if he ever needed it as bad as this kid did. He hurried on, leaving the corpse where it lay.

The Confederates had several machine-gun nests with interlocking fields of fire on the forward slope.

You couldn't approach one without exposing yourself to fire from another. The shelling and bombing hadn't hurt them; they were made of cement, not sandbags. A soldier with a flamethrower tried to deal with one of them, but a bullet to the fuel tank drenched him in the fire he hoped to shoot. That was a bad way to go; the stench of burnt meat made Armstrong's stomach heave.

Then two barrels ground close enough to shell a Confederate bunker. After three or four hits, the guns inside stopped shooting back. "Careful!" Armstrong yelled when U.S. soldiers started moving forward again. "They might be playing possum." They weren't, but Lieutenant Bassler thumped him on the back for worrying about it.

The barrels methodically smashed three more machine-gun nests. Then one of them hit a mine and threw a track, while a Confederate with a stovepipe rocket set the other one on fire. One last concrete emplacement went on hurling death at the men in green-gray. Two U.S. soldiers with captured Confederate automatic rifles sprayed bullets back. The machine guns focused on them, which was what the men with the automatic rifles had in mind. While they kept the Confederates inside the emplacement busy, another soldier with a flamethrower crept toward it.

A jet of golden fire spat from the nozzle of his infernal device. It shot through the narrow concrete slit that let the machine guns traverse. Armstrong heard screams from inside. They didn't last long. He got another whiff of that charred-pork smell as he loped past the machine-gun nest. It was dead now, and so were the men inside it.

Up till then, the Confederates resisted fiercely. After the last bunker fell, the spirit seemed to go out of the soldiers in butternut. Instead of dying in place or falling back to fight again from another position, more and more of them tried to surrender. Some succeeded, and went to the rear with hands high and with broad grins of relief on their faces. Others ran into U.S. soldiers in a vengeful mood or just without the time or manpower to bother with prisoners.

Armstrong trotted past a Confederate soldier out in the open who looked to have got shot while trying to give up. That was too bad. If he ever found himself in a mess like this, he hoped the men on the other side would let him yield. But not a damn thing in war came with a money-back guarantee.

He made it to the top of the hill before he quite realized he was there. A couple of mortar teams were launching bombs at Hollysprings to announce that the hill had changed hands. A lieutenant from another company in the regiment was yelling for men to go on and take the town. After the fight on the hill, nobody looked thrilled about rushing into another big one right away.

“You made it, Sarge.” There was Squidface, smoking a Duke some Confederate wouldn’t need any more. He held out the pack to Armstrong without being asked.

“Thanks.” Armstrong took one and leaned close to get it started. He sucked in smoke, then blew it out.

It eased the worst of his nerves, anyhow. “Yeah, I’m still here. Looked like they started to lose it a little bit once we took out their machine guns.”

“Uh-huh. I thought so, too,” Squidface said. “Don’t hardly see that with these butternut bastards. Say what you want about ’em, they fight hard.”

“Maybe they see the writing on the wall,” Armstrong said. “Wouldn’t that be something?” He tried to imagine Jake Featherston giving up. The picture didn’t want to form. Neither did one of the United States’ accepting anything less than unconditional surrender and full occupation of the Confederacy.

Artillery shells screamed in from the south. Armstrong hit the dirt and started digging. Sure as hell, the Confederates hadn’t quit yet.

C assius relaxed in a hut that had once belonged to a sharecropper. The roof leaked. The mattress was ancient and musty. He didn’t much care. Right this minute, nobody seemed to be hunting Gracchus’

guerrilla band. With the damnyankees pounding toward Atlanta, central Georgia had more urgent things to worry about than a few blacks with stolen guns.

Not being dogged wherever he went felt wonderful to Cassius. Gracchus, by contrast, was insulted.

“They reckons we don’t count fo’ nothin’,” the guerrilla leader grumbled. “Gots to show ’em we does.”

“Ought to lay up for a while first.” That wasn’t Cassius; it was a scarred veteran named Pyrrhus. “Rest and relax while we can.”

Gracchus shook his head. “They shippin’ all kinds o’ shit up toward the no’th. We hit some o’ dat, make it harder fo’ Featherston to fight the Yankees.”

“We get hit, make it harder for us to fight anybody,” Pyrrhus said.

“You don’t got the nerve, you kin stay where you’s at,” Gracchus told him.

The older Negro refused to rise to the bait. “Got me plenty o’ nerve, an’ everybody knows it. Got me some sense, too, an’ you sure ain’t showin’ none.”

“Only way we live through this is if the Yankees come,” Cassius said. “Yankees stay away, sooner or later the militia an’ the Mexicans hunt us down an’ kill us. If we can help the USA, we oughta do it.”

“Hear dat?” Gracchus said. “This is one smart nigger. You don’t want to listen to me, listen to him.”

“You reckon he smart on account of he say the same thing you do. That ain’t reason enough,” Pyrrhus answered. “United States’re comin’ whether we do anything or not. You reckon they get down into Georgia on account o’ what niggers done? Wish it was so, but it ain’t likely.”

Gracchus scowled at him. So did Cassius. It wasn’t likely at all. Another Negro said, “Sure enough wouldn’t mind a little rest-up, anyways.”

At that, Gracchus looked almost ready to explode. Cassius caught the guerrilla leader’s eye and shook his head, ever so slightly. If Gracchus blew up now, he could split the band. Where would they come by new recruits to make either half big enough to be dangerous if that happened? Negroes were thin on the ground in rural Georgia these days.

To Cassius’ relief, Gracchus got the message, or enough of it to keep from losing his temper. He went on glowering at the men who’d thwarted him, but at least he had the sense to see he *was* thwarted for the time being. “We lay up,” he said reluctantly. “We lay up fo’ now, anyways. But if we sees a chance, we takes it.”

“Fair enough,” Pyrrhus said. Some of the other black guerrillas nodded, all seeming relieved the quarrel wouldn’t explode in their faces.

They didn’t live off the fat of the land. The land had little fat to live off. White farmers had armed guards.

Some had squads of Mexican soldiers garrisoned on their land. The henhouses and barns might have been bank vaults. Before too long, the guerrillas would have to raid to eat.

Birdlime and nets brought in songbirds. Cassius had never imagined eating robins and doves, but they weren’t bad at all. “My granddaddy, he used to talk about all the passenger pigeons when he was a pickaninny,” Gracchus said. “Way he told it, you could eat them birds fo’ weeks at a time.”

“Where they at now?” Pyrrhus asked. “Sure don’t see ’em around none.”

“Po’ birds got their fuckin’ population reduced,” Gracchus answered. “Might as well be niggers.”

Two nights later, a Negro sneaked out of Madison, Georgia, the town closest to the tumbledown sharecropping village, with word that a truck convoy had stopped there for the night and would go on to the northwest in the morning. “You ain’t goin’ back,” Gracchus said. “You comin’ wid us. You lyin’, you dyin’.”

“Give me a gun. I want a shot at the ofays my ownself,” the Negro replied.

“I gives you a gun,” Gracchus said. “I gives you one after we gits away. You kin shoot the ofays then.”

“You don’t trust me none,” said the town Negro, whose name was Jeroboam.

“Bet your ass I don’t,” Gracchus said. “I don’t know you from a cowflop. Ain’t got no reason to trust you—yet. But you give me one, we git on fine.”

Jeroboam knew the road that led to the front. Like a lot of rural roads, it was badly potholed; money’d gone into guns and barrels and murder camps and main highways, not the roads that meandered between them. One of those potholes let the guerrillas plant explosives

without digging under the roadbed from the side, which would have taken longer and been much too conspicuous once done.

Gracchus placed his men in the high grass and bushes to either side of the road southeast of the bomb.

The CSA had too much to do to bother clearing weeds, either. With any luck at all, the white Confederates would pay for their neglect.

Jeroboam lay in the bushes only a couple of strides from Gracchus. He was bound and gagged; nothing he did or said would warn the men in the approaching truck convoy—if there was an approaching truck convoy. He hadn't squawked when Gracchus told him what they were going to do. Cassius hoped that argued he was truthful. If it didn't, it argued that he was a good actor.

With autumn here, fewer bugs bothered Cassius than would have a few months earlier. He scratched anyway. He knew he was lousy. The only thing he had to kill lice was kerosene, a cure almost worse than the problem. He'd always been clean; his mother was neat, his father downright fastidious. Now they were almost surely dead, and he had nasty little bugs crawling over his scalp.

"Heads up!" somebody called. Cassius flattened himself into the grass. Why did people say that when they meant *duck down*? He supposed it came from football or some other game.

Then, catching the low rumble of approaching trucks, he stopped worrying about things that didn't matter. How much protection did they have with them? If four or five armored cars and half-tracks were in the convoy, the plan was to blow up the lead vehicle and then just slip away. Getting into an expensive skirmish was the last thing Gracchus wanted.

Closer…Closer…The machine in front was a truck. It was, in fact, a captured U.S. truck—blockier than C.S. models—with a coat of butternut paint slapped on over the original green-gray.

Gracchus had the plunger whose wires led to the explosives in the roadway. He jerked down on it at just the right moment. The truck went up in a fireball that engulfed the one behind it, which was following too close. The other trucks in the convoy slammed on the brakes. As soon as they did, Cassius and the rest of the black guerrillas started shooting.

He'd never fired a rifle till he joined Gracchus' band. He sure knew

what to do with one now. He fired again and again, working the bolt on the Tredegar and slapping in a fresh clip when the one he was using ran dry. The rifle butt slammed against his shoulder again and again. He'd be sore tomorrow…assuming he was still alive.

The drivers had rifles and submachine guns of their own, and started shooting back. And then Cassius heard an unmistakable machine gun banging away, and ice walked through him. That sure sounded as if it came from a weapon most likely to be mounted on an armored vehicle. He hoped the guerrillas had some Featherston Fizzes, but getting close enough to throw one could prove more dangerous to the man with it than to his intended target.

And then he heard something else: a deep rumble from the northwest, rising swiftly to multiple screams in the air. Yankee fighter-bombers had spotted the convoy with the burning trucks corking its way forward.

The airplanes gleefully swooped down for the kill.

Cassius had imagined hell on earth, with the Confederate military playing a star role in the roaster. Now he saw it: truck after truck smashed by bombs or by machine-gun and cannon fire. Gouts of flame erupted from the road. The trucks couldn't run, couldn't hide, couldn't even shoot back. The men inside them died where they sat—or, if they tried to run for cover, the black guerrillas shot them.

Only one thing was wrong with the fire and brimstone visited upon the convoy—some of it slopped over onto Gracchus' band. Not all the bombs hit right on the road. Neither did all the shells and bullets.

Chances were the U.S. pilots didn't even know the Negroes were there. If they knew, they didn't give a damn. Their mission was to smash up enemy transport. They did that up brown. Everything else was just a detail.

To them, it was a detail. It was liable to get Cassius killed. He hugged the ground while bullets smashed down much too close and blast tried to pick him up and throw him away. Somebody close by screamed,

"No! No! No!" After a little while, he realized he was making those noises.

The U.S. warplanes couldn't have lingered more than ten minutes. They came, they saw, they destroyed.

And the truck convoy was much more thoroughly wrecked than either Gracchus or Jeroboam could have imagined.

“Shitfire!” Gracchus cried in a mix of awe and outrage. “Ain’t even nothin’ left fo’ us to steal!”

“Hell you say,” Pyrrhus answered, and paused to shoot a dazed and bloodied Confederate truck driver who staggered toward him. As the white man fell, the guerrilla went on, “Almost got myself squashed by a big old crate of rations—landed in these bushes here.”

“Well, that’s somethin’.” Gracchus sounded as if he didn’t know how much it was. Cassius didn’t, either.

You could eat Confederate rations and you wouldn’t be hungry afterwards. Past that, he had nothing good to say for them. He’d heard even Confederate soldiers traded cigarettes or coffee with the enemy to get food better than their own.

“Mother!” a dreadfully wounded Confederate screamed. *“Motherrr!”* Cassius drew a bead on him and shot him through the head.

“Why you go an’ do dat?” a Negro asked. “Shoulda let the damn ofay suffer.”

“I’d shoot a dog,” Cassius said.

“Yeah, but a dog, he wouldn’t shoot you,” the other rebel said.

After a moment, Cassius decided he had a point. Instead of admitting it, he changed the subject, calling out to Gracchus, “You gonna let that Jeroboam loose?”

“Reckon I better,” the guerrilla leader said. “He wasn’t lyin’, that’s fo’ damn sure. An’ we ought to write a nice thank-you to them Yankees. They done a lot of work fo’ us.” He laughed. “Reckon they done mo’ work than we coulda did our ownselves.”

He wasn’t wrong. “Wonder how many of us those U.S. pilots hit,” Cassius said, and laughed at himself.

He was sure he was the only rebel in the band—maybe in the state—who would have said *those pilots.*

To the other Negroes, it would have been *them pilots.* Like it or not, Cassius was his father’s son.

The guerrillas had lost one man dead and two more wounded, neither seriously. “Watch what happen to them trucks, an’ do Jesus! I don’t hardly mind gettin’ shot,” one of the injured men said. The dead guerrilla had stopped a 20mm cannon shell with his chest. Chances were he wouldn’t have agreed.

Carrying the rations and other small bits of loot, the black rebels made their getaway. Behind them, the shattered convoy sent up great dark plumes of smoke. Before long, whites would come out from Madison to see what had happened—not that they could be in much doubt—and do what they could for anyone left alive.

Cassius smiled as he trotted away. God hadn’t come down from the heavens to give the guerrillas a hand, but the next best thing had.

J orge Rodriguez wondered how long he could go on. He wondered how long the Confederate States could go on, too. If the damnyankees kept pounding on them the way they had been, it wouldn’t be much longer. Autumn or no autumn, rain or no rain, the United States were driving on Atlanta, and Jorge didn’t see how the Confederacy could stop them.

He didn’t worry about it all that much, either. He worried about staying alive. With everything the damnyankees were throwing at his regiment, that was plenty all by itself.

Kennesaw Mountain was heavily wooded country. U.S. artillery was firing shells fused for air bursts. If you didn’t have a good foxhole, the fragments knifing down from above would cut you to ribbons. Jorge did. He was proud of the hole, which he’d dug himself. He could fire from it when enemy soldiers drew near. But it also had a small shelter strengthened with boards—what they would have called a bombproof in the Great War—scraped out under the forward lip. When the shelling got bad, he’d duck under there and stay fairly safe.

Right this minute, there was a lull. He could get out of his hole, ease himself behind a tree, smoke a cigarette. He could, yes, as long as he stayed wary as a cat at a coon-hound convention. Things had a way of picking up with no warning. If you didn’t dive back into your hole in a hurry, you’d be a casualty.

“Stay alert, men!” Captain Malcolm Boyd called. “They’re liable to throw paratroops at us like they did in Tennessee.”

If the United States tried an air drop here, they had to be crazy. It looked that way to Jorge, anyhow.

Too many paratroops would get stuck in trees and die before they could start fighting.

“We’ve got to hang on to Marietta no matter what, too,” the company commander added. “We don’t hang on to Marietta, how the hell can we hold Atlanta?”

There he made more sense to Jorge. Marietta was the cork in the bottle—probably the last cork in the bottle in front of Atlanta. If it fell, Atlanta almost had to. And if Atlanta fell, the Confederate States were in a hell of a lot of trouble. So everybody said, anyhow. Jorge knew things everybody said weren’t always right, but this one felt too likely to laugh off.

He wished he wouldn’t have heard so many things like, *We’ve got to hang on to Chattanooga no matter what.* The Confederates couldn’t hang on to Chattanooga. Now they were paying for losing it.

An automatic rifle rattled up ahead. When Jorge first went into the Army, that would have meant the man with the rifle wore butternut. No more, not necessarily. The Yankees had captured a lot of C.S.

automatic weapons on their long drive south. They’d captured the ammo the rifles used, too—or maybe they were making their own. Jorge didn’t know about that. He did know he had to wait and hear more before he could be sure who was out there.

Sure as hell, the bangs that followed came from U.S. Springfields. In the CSA, nobody but home guards and Mexican soldiers used bolt-action rifles these days. The damnyankees were still a long step behind when it came to small arms. Some Confederate soldiers wondered what the enemy was doing in Georgia if that was so.

To Jorge, the answer looked clear enough. Yes, Yankee soldiers carried Springfields. But whole great swarms of Yankee soldiers carried them. U.S. artillery matched anything the Confederacy turned out. So did U.S. airplanes, and the United States had more of them than the Confederate States did. As for barrels…Jorge didn’t want to think about barrels. The USA’s new monsters outclassed everything the CSA made.

He peered down the forward slope of Kennesaw Mountain. He couldn’t see the enemy troops, but he had a pretty good idea where

the gunfire was coming from. The damnyankees were probing in front of his regiment, trying to find a way through. He could have done without the compliment, if that was what it was.

The automatic rifle chattered again. *Right about…there,* Jorge judged. If the fellow who carried it kept coming forward, he'd probably show himself somewhere near those two pines.

And, a couple of minutes later, he did—not for very long, but long enough. Jorge fired a short burst from his own automatic rifle. The U.S. soldier threw up his hands and toppled. Jorge didn't think he'd get up again. He looked around for a new target.

Easier to think of what he'd just done as hitting a target. If he thought of that figure in green-gray as a soldier, as a man, then he had to think about everything shooting his fellow soldier, his fellow man, might mean. But a target was only a target. You could shoot at a target for fun, if you felt like it.

Almost as much to the point, targets didn't shoot back.

Jorge wondered if another U.S. soldier would try to retrieve the automatic rifle. If a man in green-gray did, it would be his last mistake. But the rifle lay where it fell. The damnyankees seemed confident they could drive the Confederates back and then retrieve it. Jorge had to hope they were wrong.

He waited for the next artillery barrage or armored assault or gas attack or air raid or whatever the enemy had in mind. Instead, a U.S. officer waved a white flag from behind a tree and shouted, "Can I come forward?"

Firing on both sides died away. Sergeant Blackledge shouted back: "Yeah, come ahead. What do you want?"

The Yankee emerged, still holding the flag of truce. As he approached the Confederate lines, he answered, "Want to try to talk you people into surrendering, that's what. You keep fighting, we'll squash you flat."

"Yeah, now tell me another one," Blackledge jeered. "You want to win one on the cheap, that's all."

"Not this time," said the man in green-gray. "We'll take some of your guys behind our lines, show you what we've got. I don't believe you can stop us, or even slow us down very much."

“You’ll do what?” The sergeant sounded as if he couldn’t believe his ears. Jorge didn’t blame him. The damnyankees had never said anything like *that,* not where he could hear it. He’d never heard of anything like it, either.

Calmly, the U.S. officer repeated himself. He went on, “Will you take me back? This is what they’d call a limited-time offer on the wireless. If you don’t take me up on it pretty damn quick, you’ll find out whether I’m lying or not. Oh, yeah—better believe you will.”

If he was acting, he could go out on the road. The confidence that filled his voice seemed frighteningly convincing. Maybe Sergeant Blackledge thought the same thing, because he said, “Come on up, damn you. I’m gonna put a blindfold on you before you go back of the line, though. You won’t do any spying under flag of truce.”

“Have it your way,” the Yankee said. “Like I told you, you can look at what we’ve got.” He walked forward. The sergeant put a rag over his eyes and led him back toward C.S. officers. Nobody on either side fired. A few U.S. soldiers came out and swapped rations for smokes and coffee. Jorge just sat tight and waited.

After about twenty minutes, the blindfolded U.S. officer returned, three worried-looking Confederates in his wake. He took off the rag and nodded to Sergeant Blackledge. “Cease-fire will last till these gentlemen come back,” he said. “After that, it’s up to them.”

“We won’t open up unless your guys do,” the noncom replied.

Away they went, the one man in green-gray and the three in butternut. Jorge was sure the Confederates would see only what their enemies wanted to show them. That was liable to be plenty. He waited. He smoked. He climbed out of his hole to take a leak. He didn’t want to be a POW; one of his brothers already languished in a camp. He didn’t want to get killed, either.

An hour and a half later, the C.S. officers returned. Their U.S. guide stopped between the lines. “You can still change your minds,” he said. “This is your last chance, but you can. You’ll spare your men a lot of grief.”

“We’re obliged to defend this position, Major,” a Confederate colonel said. “We will do so to the best of our ability.”

“You’ll be sorry,” the Yankee said. “Your men will be sorrier. I can’t

answer for what will happen to them when we cut loose."

"We have to take the chance, sir," the Confederate replied. "We have our duty, as you have yours. With our country in danger, our personal safety is of small concern."

"That sounds very pretty. You'll find out what it means. You're sure?" The U.S. officer waited. No one said anything more. The major shrugged and returned to his own lines. One of the Confederates used a field telephone to tell their headquarters what they'd done. All three of them stayed on the front line.

Jorge admired that. They could have retreated to safety. Instead, they were sticking it out.

Somewhere between five and ten minutes went by. Then the United States opened up with everything they'd shown the Confederate officers and more besides. Jorge didn't think he'd ever gone through a bombardment like this. Fighter-bombers stooped on the C.S. line and added their weight of hellfire to the mix. He heard shrieks through the thunder of exploding ordnance. Jorge carried a rosary in his pocket, and fingered the beads to thank God and the Virgin that his own shrieks weren't among them.

Wise in the Yankees' ways, he popped up from his hole the instant the barrage lifted. Sure as the devil, soldiers in green-gray scrambled forward. He shot one of them. Another alert Confederate nailed a different one. The rest hit the dirt or ducked behind trees. But they weren't giving up. That would have been too much to ask for. They kept on coming. They just didn't think it would be a walkover any more.

More shells and some mortar bombs started dropping on the Confederates. Shouts and curses off to the left warned that enemy troops had reached and were probably piercing the line there. A moment later, enfilading fire made the probability a sure thing.

"Back!" Sergeant Blackledge yelled. Jorge might have known nothing the USA fired at the Confederates could hurt him. "They'll cut us off if we stay!"

"The sergeant's right!" Captain Boyd added, perhaps relieved Blackledge spoke up before he had to.

"We need to save ourselves!"

Jorge didn't want to get out of his hole, any more than a mouse wanted to come out into the middle of the floor. Bullets and flying fragments did dreadful things to soft, tender flesh. But he'd get captured or killed if he stayed here. Out he came, and ran up the north slope of Kennesaw Mountain toward one of the two crests.

A bullet slammed into a tree trunk just to his left. A big shell burst behind him—at least a six-incher.

None of the fragments tore into him, but blast—a St. Bernard puppy the size of a building—picked him up and shook him and dropped him on his face. He scrambled up again, knowing he was lucky to be able to. Blast could kill all by itself. Had that shell come down a little closer…

Best not to think of such things. He ducked behind another tree to see how close the damnyankees were.

Two or three were too damn close for comfort. He fired at them. They went down, though he didn't think he'd hit them. But he would have done the same thing in their boots. Why take chances when you were winning?

"Way to go, Rodriguez," Sergeant Blackledge said from behind another tree. He seemed to be everywhere at once. "Make 'em earn it, by God. They won't come on like their pants are on fire now, the bastards."

"Sure, Sarge." Jorge hadn't thought of anything more than saving his own skin. He still wasn't sure he could do that. The U.S. major hadn't been kidding. The United States put a rock in their fist before they hit Kennesaw Mountain. More shells came down. He huddled in what wasn't enough shelter. *"¡Madre de Dios!"* When he got scared into Spanish, things were pretty bad. "What can we do?"

"Try and stay alive." As usual, Blackledge was relentlessly pragmatic. "Try and find some place where we can make a stand, slow the shitheels down. Try and hit back when they give us the chance. Sooner or later, they will—I hope." He swore, plainly wishing he hadn't tacked on the last two words.

"Marietta's gonna fall, isn't it?" Jorge asked. The sergeant didn't answer. For a second, Jorge thought he didn't hear. Then he realized the noncom didn't want to say yes. If Marietta fell, Atlanta was in deep trouble. If Atlanta fell, the Confederate States were in deep trouble. And Marietta *would* fall, which meant….

P urple martins perched in the shattered trees in the park square at the center of Marietta. The birds were flying south for the winter; they didn't care that the trees had taken a beating. There were still plenty of bugs in the air. All the artillery in the world couldn't kill bugs.

Chester Martin, in green-gray, didn't care that the trees were burned and scarred, either. As far as he was concerned, the Confederate States were getting what was coming to them. And he hoped he was going south for the winter. Atlanta wasn't that far away. How much did the enemy have between here and there? Enough? He didn't think so.

A man with a white mustache hung from a lamppost. A sign around his neck said, I SHOT AT U.S.

SOLDIERS. He'd been there a couple of days, and was starting to swell and stink. Chester hardly looked at him. Maybe he'd do a little good; maybe he wouldn't. Confederate bushwhackers and diehards and holdouts and red-ass civilians kept on harrying the occupiers all the way back to the Ohio River. Hostages kept dying because of it. Which side would run out of will first remained unclear.

The trees in the park weren't all that had been shattered in Marietta. The Confederates fought hard to hold it. Not many houses were whole. Glassless windows might have been the eye sockets of skulls.

Scorch marks scored clapboard. Chunks of walls and chunks of roofs bitten by shellfire gave the skyline jagged edges.

And Marietta's people seemed as ravaged as the town. They were skinny and dirty, many of them with bandages or simply rags wrapped around wounds. They stared at the U.S. troops trudging south through their rubble-strewn streets with eyes that smoldered. Nobody said anything much, though. As Chester had seen in other Confederate towns, his buddies were quick to resent insults. A man with a rifle in enemy country could make his resentment felt.

A scrawny woman whose hair flew every which way cocked a hip in a pose meant to be alluring. "Sleep with me?" she called.

"Jesus!" said one of the soldiers in Chester's squad. "I've been hard up before, but not *that* hard up."

"Yeah." Chester nodded. "I think she's a little bit cracked. Maybe more than a little bit."

An old man whose left sleeve hung empty scowled at him. Chester nodded back, more politely than not.

He understood honest hate, and could respect it. He wondered if the respect he showed might change the Confederate's mind. It didn't, not by the look on the man's face. Chester didn't suppose he should have been surprised.

A burnt-out C.S. barrel sat inside the ruins of a brick house. The last few feet of the barrel's gun poked out through a window. The gun tube sagged visibly. Eyeing it, Chester said, "Must've been a hell of a fire."

"Yeah, well, it couldn't happen to a nicer bunch of guys," said the soldier who didn't want the scrawny woman.

Chester grunted. He didn't love Confederate barrelmen. What U.S. soldier did? Those enemies were too good at killing his pals. But he didn't like to think of them cooking like beef roasts in a fire so hot it warped solid steel. That was a bad way to go, for anybody on either side. He wanted the enemy barrel crew dead, sure. Charred to black hideousness? Maybe not.

"Come on, step it up!" Lieutenant Lavochkin yelled. "We aren't camping here. We're just passing through, heading for Atlanta."

Chester looked forward to fighting for Atlanta the way he looked forward to a filling without novocaine.

Atlanta was a big city, bigger than Chattanooga. The United States couldn't take it by surprise, the way they had with the Tennessee town. If U.S. forces tried smashing straight into it, wouldn't the Confederates do unto them as the USA had done to the Confederacy in Pittsburgh? Fighting one house at a time was the easiest way Chester knew to become a casualty.

Maybe the brass had a better plan. He hoped like hell they did. But if so, nobody'd bothered passing the word down to an overage retread first sergeant.

A kid wearing what looked like his big brother's dungarees said, "Get out of my country, you damnyankee."

"Shut up, you lousy brat, or I'll paddle your ass." Chester gestured with his rifle. "Scram. First, last, and only warning."

To his relief, the kid beat it. You didn't want to think a nine-year-old could be a people bomb, but he'd heard some ugly stories. Boys and girls didn't fully understand what flicking that switch meant, which made them more likely to do it. And soldiers sometimes didn't suspect children till too late.

"Hell of a war," Chester muttered.

Some of his men liberated three chickens to go with their rations. They didn't have time to do anything but roast poorly plucked chicken pieces over a fire. The smell of singeing feathers took Chester back half a lifetime. He'd done the same thing in the Great War. Then as now, a drumstick went a long way toward making your belly stop growling.

He was smoking a cigarette afterwards when a grenade burst not far away. Somebody screamed. A burst of fire from a submachine gun was followed by another shriek.

"Fuck," said a soldier named Leroy, who was more often called the Duke.

"Never a dull moment," Chester agreed. "We're licking these bastards, but they sure haven't quit."

As if to prove it, the Confederates threw in a counterattack the next day. Armor spearheaded it: not barrels, but what seemed more like self-propelled guns on tracked chassis. They weren't mounted in turrets, but pointed straight ahead. That meant the enemy driver had to line up his machine on a target instead of just traversing the turret. The attack bogged down south of Marietta. A regiment of U.S.

barrels made the C.S. barrelbusters say uncle.

Chester examined a wrecked machine with a professional's curiosity. "What's the point of these, sir?" he asked Captain Rhodes. A U.S. antibarrel round had smashed through the side armor. He didn't want to think about what the crew looked like. You could probably bury them in a jam tin.

"These things have to be cheaper to build than barrels, and quicker to build, too," the company commander answered. "If you've got to have as much firepower as you can get, and if you need it yesterday, they're a lot better than nothing."

"I guess," Chester said. "Ugly damn thing, isn't it?"

“Now that you mention it, yes—especially if you’re on the wrong end of it,” Rhodes said. “Get used to it, Sergeant. You can bet your ass you’ll see more of them.”

He was bound to be right. And if they were cheap and easy to make…“What do you want to bet we start cranking ’em out, too?”

Captain Rhodes looked startled, but then he nodded. “Wouldn’t be surprised. Anything they can do, we can do, too. We’re lucky we’ve kept our lead in barrels as long as we have. Maybe the Confederates were too busy with these things to pay as much attention to those as they should have.”

“Breaks my heart,” Martin said dryly.

The company commander laughed—but not for long. “Be ready for a push of our own, soon as we can move more shit forward. When the Confederates hit us, they use stuff up faster than they can resupply.

Might as well kick ’em while they’re down.”

“Mm?” Chester weighed that, then nodded. “Yeah, I bet you’re right, sir. I’ll get the men ready. You think we’re going into Atlanta?”

“Christ, I hope not!” Rhodes blurted, which was about what Chester was thinking himself. Rhodes went on, “We do try to go straight in there, a lot of us’ll come out in a box.”

“Looks like that to me, too. So what do we do instead?” Chester asked. “Just bomb it flat? Or maybe try and flank ’em out?”

“My guess is, we go that way.” Captain Rhodes pointed east. “We do that, we cut the direct train and truck routes between Richmond and Atlanta. Yeah, the Confederates can get around it, but we put ourselves in a good position for hitting the lines and the roads coming up from the south. I’d sure rather do that than charge in with my head down.”

“Me, too,” Chester said fervently. “Amen, in fact. You think the brass has the smarts to see it like you do?”

“Well, we’ll find out,” Rhodes replied with a dry chuckle. But he didn’t seem too downcast. “Start of this campaigning season, we were chucking the Confederates out of Ohio. Now they’re trying to get us out of Georgia. I think maybe General Morrell knows what he’s doing.”

“Here’s hoping,” Chester said, which made the company commander laugh out loud.

The U.S. push went in three days later. The Confederates had done what they could to build a line south of Marietta, and it held for most of a day, but once U.S. armor cracked it the enemy didn’t have much behind it. Then Confederates fired what had to be half the rockets in the world at the advancing men in green-gray. They were scary—hell, they were terrifying. They caused casualties, not a few of them. But, without enough men in butternut on the ground to hold it, the rockets couldn’t stop the U.S. forces.

And the main axis of the U.S. attack aimed not at Atlanta but at Lawrenceville, almost due east of Marietta. Captain Rhodes looked uncommonly smug. Chester Martin didn’t say boo. How could he?

The captain had earned the right.

Heavy bombers and fighter-bombers stayed overhead all the time, tearing up the countryside south of the U.S. advance and keeping the Confederates in and around Atlanta from striking at the U.S. flank. Lots and lots of artillery fire came down on the enemy, too. Chester approved of every single shell and wished there were more.

Every time U.S. forces crossed a railroad line, demolition teams tore hell out of it. Every time U.S. forces crossed a paved road that ran north and south, engineers dynamited bridges and blew craters in the roadway. Even if the Confederates rallied and drove back the men in green-gray, they wouldn’t move much into or out of Atlanta any time soon.

For the first time, Confederate prisoners seemed to lose heart. “Thanks for not shootin’ me,” one of them said as he went to the rear with his hands high. “Reckon we’re whipped any which way.”

“See what Featherston’s freedom got you?” Chester said.

“Well, we’re rid of most of our niggers, anyways, so *that’s* good,” the POW said. “But hell, Yank, you’re right—we coulda done that without gettin’ in another war with y’all.”

“You started it,” Chester said. “We’ll finish it.”

Freedom Party Guards, by contrast, still believed they’d win. “Wait till the secret weapons get you,” said a man in camouflage overalls.

“You’ll be sorry then.”

“Yeah, the bogeyman’ll get you if you don’t watch out,” Chester jeered. The captured Confederate glared at him. Under the guns of half a dozen soldiers in green-gray, he couldn’t do more, not if he wanted to keep breathing. “Take him away,” Chester said. “Let him try his line of bullshit on the Intelligence boys.”

“It ain’t bullshit!” the Freedom Party Guardsman said. “You’ll find out! And you’ll be sorry when you do, too.”

“Yeah, sure, buddy,” Chester said. Two men took the POW off to the rear.

“The crap they come up with,” another U.S. soldier said, lighting up a Habana he’d taken from a prisoner. “He sounded like he believed it, too.”

“People used to believe the world was flat,” Chester said. The soldier laughed and nodded. But the Guardsman *had* sounded mighty sure of himself. And Chester remembered all the rockets the Confederates seemed to have pulled from nowhere. He was a little more worried than he let on—not a lot, but a little.

F lora Blackford hurried into the House chamber. She’d got the summons to the joint session of Congress only a little while before. Other Representatives and Senators were grumbling at having to change plans to get here on time. She understood why. The President wouldn’t ask for a joint session much in advance. That would give the Confederates—and maybe other enemies—more time to come up with something unpleasant.

The Speaker of the House rapped loudly for order. When he got something close to quiet, he said,

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have the distinct honor and high privilege of introducing the President of the United States, Charles W. La Follette!”

Applause rang through the hall. Charlie La Follette took his place behind the lectern. He was tall and ruddy and handsome, with a splendid shock of white hair the cartoonists loved. He’d been President for almost a year and a half now, but still didn’t seem to have stepped out from under Al Smith’s shadow.

Maybe today was the day.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, my fellow Americans, 1943 has blessed our arms with victory,”

he said. “When the year began, we were driving invaders from western Pennsylvania. Now Pennsylvania and Ohio have been liberated, and our armies stand not far from Atlanta, the hub of the Confederate States of America.”

More applause washed over him, loud and fierce. He grinned and held up a hand. “We have also driven deep into Texas, and seen with our own eyes the horror the Confederates have visited on their Negro population. The murder factory called Camp Determination, at least, will perpetrate those horrors no more.”

This time, the applause was more tentative, though Flora clapped till her palms hurt. Pictures of those enormous mass graves—the words hardly did them justice—had been in all the weeklies for a while.

Even so, the furor was less than she’d hoped for. People either didn’t care or didn’t want to believe what they were seeing was true.

“Everywhere, Confederate forces are in retreat,” the President said. “Even Jake Featherston must see that he cannot hope to win the war he started two and a half years ago. This being so, I call on him to surrender unconditionally and spare his country the bloodshed further resistance would cause.

“Though they do not deserve them, I promise him and his leading henchmen their lives. We will take them into exile on a small island, and will guard them there so they can no longer trouble North America and blight its hopes. Confederate soldiers will be disarmed and sent home. All Confederates, white and colored, will be guaranteed life, liberty, and property.

“Think well, President Featherston. If you reject this call, both you and your country will regret it. We will leave wireless frequency 640 kilocycles unjammed for your reply for the next forty-eight hours. You *will* be sorry if you say no.” He stepped away from the microphones on the lectern, putting notes back into an inside pocket of his jacket as he did.

Flora applauded again. So did most of the other members of Congress. If the war ended now… *If it ends now, Joshua won’t get hurt,* she thought. That alone gave her plenty of reason to hope. Hope or not,

though, she feared Featherston would ignore the call.

The hall emptied as fast as it had filled. Now no one had a great big target to aim at. Flora hurried to her office. She tuned the wireless set there to 640. She didn't know how long the President of the CSA would take to answer, but she wanted to hear him when he did.

He needed less than two hours. "Here is a statement by President Featherston of the Confederate States of America," an announcer said.

"I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth." That familiar, rasping, hate-filled voice snarled out of the wireless set. "And the truth is, people of the USA and President La Follette, we aren't about to surrender. We've got no reason to. We're going to win this war, and you'll be laughing out of the other side of your mouth pretty damn quick.

"Philadelphia will get the message in just a few minutes. Philadelphia will get it twice, matter of fact. You wait, you watch, and you listen. Then you figure out who ought to be doing the surrendering. So long for now. You'll hear more from me soon."

Flora said something that would have shocked her secretary. It amounted to, *The nerve of the man!* He couldn't have bombers that close to Philadelphia. U.S. Y-ranging gear would have picked them up. And there was bound to be a heavy combat air patrol above the de facto capital of the USA. Bombers—even captured U.S. bombers or C.S. warplanes painted in U.S. colors—might not get through. But Jake Featherston had sounded devilishly sure of himself.

Terrorists inside the city? People bombers waiting to press their buttons? Flora's mouth tightened. She knew those were both possibilities. Could Featherston be so sure they'd do their job on short notice?

Maybe that was why he hadn't answered right after President La Follette's speech. Or…

A loud explosion rattled Flora's teeth and put ripples in the coffee in her half-full cup. Long experience told her that was a one-ton bomb going off not nearly far enough away. No air-raid sirens howled. It hadn't fallen from an enemy bomber. Flora was sure of that.

Maybe three minutes later, another blast echoed through Philadelphia, this one a little farther from her office. *"Vey iz mir!"* she exclaimed.

She didn't know what Featherston and his minions had done, but no denying he'd kept his promise.

After about a quarter of an hour, he came back on the wireless. "I'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to say I told you the truth," he crowed. He must have waited till he got word his plan, whatever it was, had worked. "See how you like it, Philadelphia. Plenty more where those came from, and we'll spread 'em around, too. Surrender? Nuts! We just started fighting."

If anyone in Philadelphia knew what the Confederates had done, Franklin Roosevelt was likely to be the man. What point to having connections if you didn't use them? Flora dialed his number, hoping she'd get through.

She did. "Hello, Flora!" Roosevelt still sounded chipper. As far as she could tell, he always did. But he went on, "Can't talk long. Busy as the Devil after a fire at an atheists' convention right now."

"Heh," Flora said uneasily. "You must know why I'm calling, though. What did the Confederates just do to us?"

"Well, it looks like a rocket," the Assistant Secretary of War answered. "Two rockets, I should say."

"Rockets? You mean they had them set up somewhere outside of town and fired them off when Featherston told them to?"

"No, I don't think that's what happened, not from the first look we've had at what's left of them."

Franklin Roosevelt kept that jaunty air, but he sounded serious, too. And he wasted no time explaining why: "Our best guess is, they shot them up here from Virginia."

"From Virginia? *Gevalt!* " Flora said. "That's got to be—what? A couple of hundred miles? I didn't know you could make rockets fly that far."

"Unfortunately, *I* can't. But Jake Featherston can, damn his black heart," Roosevelt said.

"What can we do to stop them?" Flora asked.

"At this end, nothing. They get here too fast," he said. "If they've got bases or launchers or whatever you call them, maybe we can bomb

those. I hope so, anyway. But I don't know that for a fact, you understand."

"How much damage did they do?" Flora found one bad question after another.

"One blew a big hole in a vacant lot. The other one hit in front of an apartment building." Now Roosevelt was thoroughly grim. "Quite a few casualties. But it would have been worse at night, with more people at home and fewer out working."

"Do they aim them at Philadelphia? Or do they aim them, say, at the corner of Chestnut and Broad?"

Yes, all kinds of nasty questions to ask.

"Right now, your guess is as good as mine. If I had to bet, I'd say they just aim them at Philadelphia. A rocket can't be *that* accurate…can it? But that's only a wild-ass guess—excuse the technical term."

In spite of everything, Flora smiled. "Thanks, Franklin. I needed that. What are we going to do? If we can't stop these rockets and we can't even warn against them, how do we go on?"

"As best we can," Roosevelt answered. "Stick a rabbit's foot in your purse if you don't already have one. Remember that every time the Confederates build one of these, they don't build something else.

And some will be duds, and some will go boom without doing much damage. As much as anything else, they're trying to scare us."

"They're pretty good at it, aren't they?" Flora said. Roosevelt laughed merrily, as if she were joking.

What he hadn't said was that some of the rockets would blow houses and apartments and factories to kingdom come. Then something even worse than that occurred to her. "Can they load anything besides ordinary explosives onto these…things?"

"You mean like gas? I think explosives would hurt us more," Roosevelt said.

Flora had no doubt he was being dense on purpose. "Gas, maybe," she said. "Or other things." She didn't want to say too much on the telephone.

Obviously, neither did he. “Not right away,” he answered. “I’ve already talked with some people. They need a bigger rocket or a smaller thing. So that’s all right for a while, anyhow.”

“For a while. How long is a while?”

“I have no idea. If it’s not till we finish licking them, it doesn’t matter. And now I’ve got to go. Other people to talk to. Stay safe.”

“How?” Flora asked, but she was talking to a dead line. Sighing, she hung up, too. She heard no more bangs out of the blue. That was something. Maybe Featherston had only two ready, and more would have to wait a while. Again, though, how long was a while? Not nearly so long as the Confederates would need to load a uranium bomb on a rocket—Flora was all too sure of that.

Her secretary looked into the inner office. “Were those booms the Confederates or the Mormons, Congresswoman?”

“Mr. Roosevelt says they were the Confederates, Bertha,” Flora answered.

Bertha nodded. “Figured you’d be talking to him. How did they sneak the bombs in? Can’t we stop stuff like that?”

Were the rockets secret? The War Department would probably like to keep them that way, but it would be like trying to classify the sunrise. Like it or not, everybody would know about them before long. Flora told Bertha what she’d heard.

“All the way up from Virginia? How do they do that?” Bertha said.

“If we knew, we’d do it, too,” Flora said dryly. “I bet like anything we’re trying to figure it out, though.”

“Oh, boy.” Bertha didn’t sound impressed, for which Flora could hardly blame her. “What’s to keep us all from getting murdered in our beds without even any warning?”

Nothing, Flora thought. “We’re going to take Atlanta pretty soon. If we smash the Confederate States to pieces, they won’t be able to go on with the war.”

“Oh, boy,” her secretary repeated. “How long will that take?”

“I don’t know. Not too long, I hope.” *Please, God, let it be before they*

send Joshua into action. I haven't asked You for much, but give me that.

"They'll be shooting off these skyrocket things all the time till then?" Bertha asked.

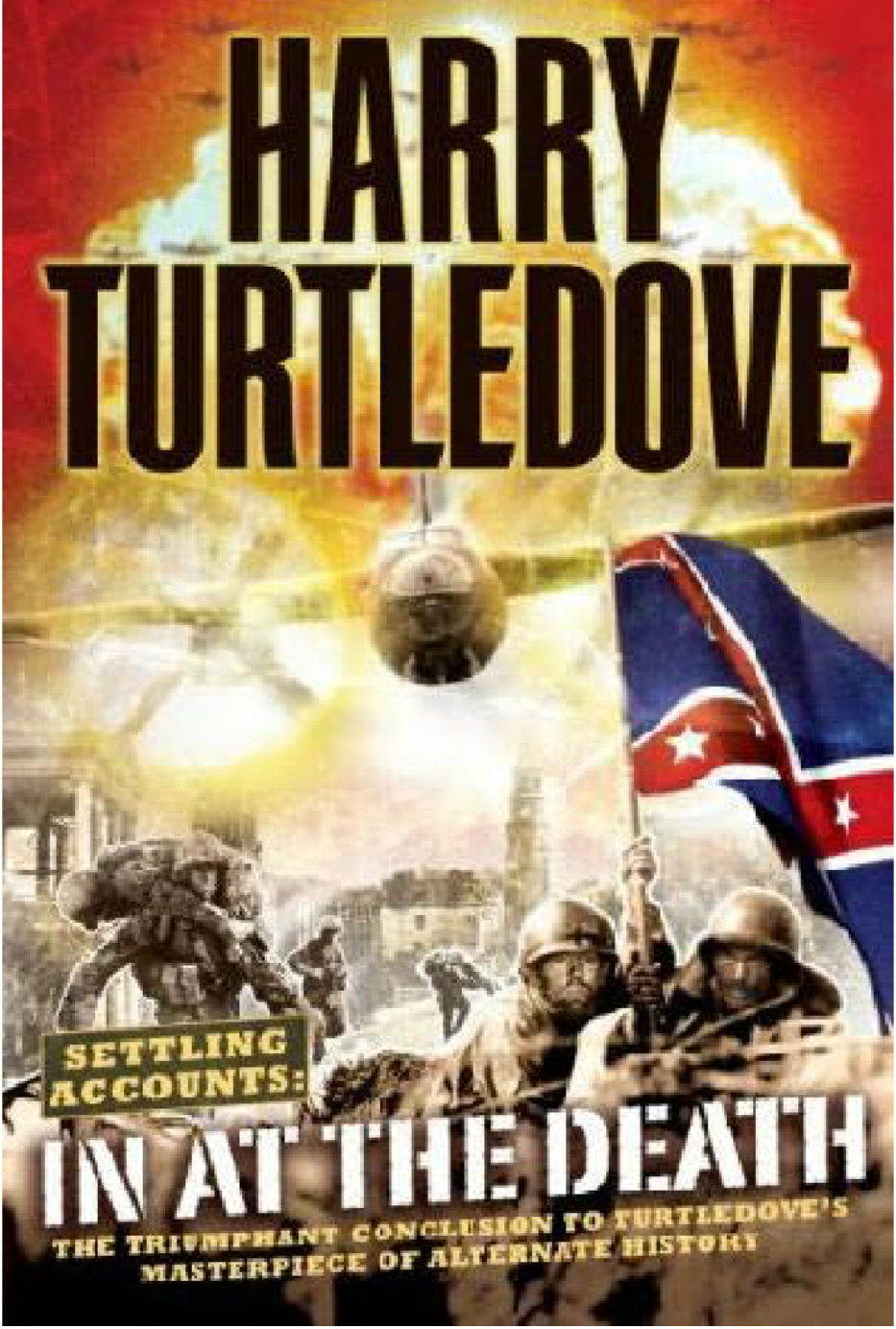
"Not if we can bomb the places where they shoot them from," Flora said.

"Hmp." Bertha made a noise redolent of skepticism. "Did anybody know what a nasty war this would be before they went and started it?"

"Does anybody ever?"

"What are we going to do?" Bertha asked.

"What can we do? We're stuck in it. We've got to win," Flora said. Bertha didn't say no, but she didn't say yes, either.


HARRY
TURTLEDOVE
SETTLING ACCOUNTS:
IN AT THE DEATH
THE TRIUMPHANT CONCLUSION TO TURTLEDOVE'S MASTERPIECE OF ALTERNATE HISTORY

In at the Death

Settling Accounts [4]

Harry Turtledove

Rating:***

Tags:Fiction - Alternate History

In At the Death

Harry Turtledove

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About the Author

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I

B rigadier General Clarence Potter crouched in a muddy trench north of Atlanta. Overhead, U.S.

bombers flew through what looked like flak thick enough to walk on. Potter saw smoke coming from a couple of enemy airplanes, but the airplanes went on about the business of pounding the hub of the Confederate States of America flat.

Most of the bombs fell behind Potter, in the heart of Atlanta. As usual, the United States were going after the railroad yards and the factories that made the capital of Georgia so vital to the CSA. As far as Potter could tell, the latest bombardments were overkill. By now, Atlanta's importance was gone with the wind.

The locals, those who hadn't refugeed out or been blown sky high, seemed stunned at what had happened to their city. Disasters, to them, were for other places. New Orleans had suffered the indignity of capture in the War of Secession. Louisville had been lost in that war, wrecked in the Second Mexican War, lost again in the Great War, and spent an embarrassing generation as a U.S. city afterwards.

Richmond had been battered in the Great War, and was taking it on the chin even harder now. But Atlanta? Atlanta just kept rolling along.

Except it didn't. Not any more.

Bombs were falling closer now, working their way north. Potter had seen that happen before. The lead airplanes in a formation would put

their bombs about where they belonged—or where the bombardiers thought they belonged, anyhow. Bombardiers farther back would use those early explosions as targets.

But, being human, the bomber crews didn't want to hang around any longer than they had to, so they released their bombs a little sooner than they might have. Work that all the way back through a bomber stream, and…

"And I'm liable to get killed by mistake," Potter muttered. He was in his early sixties, in good hard shape for his age, with iron-gray hair and cold gray eyes behind steel-rimmed spectacles. His specialty was intelligence work, but he commanded a division these days—the Confederacy was running low on capable, or even incapable, line officers. His cynical cast of mind either suited him for the spymaster's role or came from too many years spent in it. Even he didn't know which any more.

"General Potter!" a soldier yelled. "You anywhere around, General Potter?" No doubt for his own ears alone, he added, "Where the fuck you at, General Potter?"

"Here I am!" Potter shouted back. Not a bit abashed, the runner dove into the trench with him. "Why are you looking for me?" Potter asked crisply.

"*You're* General Potter? *Our* General Potter?" The young soldier didn't seem convinced despite Potter's dirty butternut uniform and the wreathed stars on either side of his collar.

"Afraid I am, son." Potter knew why the runner was dubious, too. "Back before the Great War, I went to college up at Yale. I learned to talk like a damnyankee to fit in, and it stuck. Now quit dicking around. What's up?"

"Sir, General Patton's on the telephone, and he needs to talk to you bad," the kid replied.

"Oh, joy." Potter had no trouble containing his enthusiasm. No matter what George Patton imagined he needed, Potter knew *he* didn't need to talk to Patton. But Patton commanded an army, not just a division. He headed all the forces trying to keep the USA away from Atlanta. Potter knew damn well he had to render unto Caesar—not that Patton thought Julius Caesar, or anyone else, his equal. "All right.

Field telephone still at the same old stand?"

“Uh, yes, sir.”

“Then you stay here. No point getting both of us blasted just because General Patton’s got the galloping fantods.”

“Thank you, sir.” The runner gaped at him.

Potter hardly noticed. He scrambled out of the trench, getting more tomato-soup mud on his uniform.

Fall 1943 had been wet. *A good thing, too*, he thought. *Without the rain and the mud, the damnyankees’d probably be at the Atlantic, not Atlanta*. He knew he exaggerated. He also knew he didn’t exaggerate by as much as he wished he did.

He scuttled over the cratered landscape like a pair of ragged claws. *Who was the crazy Englishman who wrote that poem?* He couldn’t come up with the name. Bombs whistled down from above. None did more than rattle his nerves.

The field telephone was only a couple of hundred yards from where he’d sheltered when bombs started falling. The soldier with the ungainly apparatus and batteries on his back huddled in a foxhole.

Barring a direct hit, that was fine. Potter wished he hadn’t thought of the qualifier. The operator held out the handpiece to him.

“Thanks,” Potter said, and then yelled, “Potter here!” Field-telephone connections were generally bad, and bombs going off in the background definitely didn’t help.

“Hello, Potter. This is Patton!” The army commander also shouted. No one was likely to mistake his rasping voice for anybody else’s, even over a field telephone. Potter supposed the same was true of his own. That turned out not to be quite true, for Patton went on, “If the damnyankees capture a telephone, they can put on one of their men claiming to be you and talk me out of everything I know.”

“Heh,” Potter said dutifully. He was sick of being suspected and twitted because of the way he talked.

“What do you need, sir? The runner said it was urgent.”

“He’s right,” Patton answered. “I’m going to send the corps that your division is half of against the U.S. forces between Marietta and Lawrenceville. You’ll go in by way of Chamblee and Doraville, and cut

off the Yankees east of there. Once we drive them out of Lawrenceville or destroy them in place there, we reopen communications from Atlanta to the northeast."

"Sir, do you really think a one-corps attack will shift the U.S. forces in that area?" Potter tried to ignore the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Patton's answer to every military problem was to attack. He'd won great triumphs in Ohio and Pennsylvania in 1941 and 1942, but not the one in Pittsburgh that might have knocked the USA out of the war. And his counterattacks against U.S. forces in Kentucky and Tennessee and Georgia this year had cost the Confederate States far more men and matériel than they were worth.

"We need to reopen that route now, General," Patton replied. "Even if that weren't obvious to anyone with a map, I have orders from the President."

What Jake Featherston wanted, Jake Featherston got. The only thing the President of the CSA wanted that he hadn't got was the one he'd needed most: a short, victorious war. Even getting a war the country could survive didn't look easy any more.

Speaking carefully, Potter said, "Sir, the Yankees already have more force in place than we can throw at them. If you try to knock a brick wall down with your head, you hurt your head worse than the wall."

"It's not so bad as that, Potter," General Patton insisted. "They offer us their flank. We can go through them like a ripsaw through balsa wood."

Potter admired him for not saying *like a hot knife through butter*. Patton had his own way of speaking, as he had his own way of doing things. For better and for worse, he was his own man. Right now, in Potter's view, it was for worse.

"If that's their flank, it's not soft, sir," Potter said. "And they have lots of artillery covering the approach. As soon as we start moving, we'll get plastered." Two bombs burst close enough to rattle him.

"Hell, we're getting plastered now."

"We've had this argument before, farther north," Patton said heavily.

"Yes, sir. I have to say the results up there justified me, too," Potter said.

“I don’t agree. And I don’t have time for your nonsense, either, not now. As I say, my orders come from the President, and leave me no room for discretion,” Patton said. “You will attack, or I will relieve you and put in someone else who will.”

Do I have the courage of my convictions? Potter wondered. To his relief, he discovered he did.

“You’d better relieve me, then, sir,” he said. “I’m sorry for the men you’ll throw away, but I won’t be a party to it.”

“You son of a bitch,” Patton said. “You yellow son of a bitch.”

“Fuck you…sir,” Potter said. “Sorry, but you won’t get to pin the blame for your mistakes—and the President’s mistakes—on me.”

“Brigadier General Russell will go forward to take your division,” Patton said. “Don’t wait for him.

You *are* relieved, effective immediately. Come back here to central headquarters at once—at once, do you hear me? We’ll see which shelf the War Department decides to put you on after that.”

“On my way, sir,” Potter answered, and hung up before Patton could say anything else. He shouted for a driver.

His yells attracted a captain on his staff before they got him a motorcar. “What’s the commotion about, sir?” the officer asked.

“I’ve been relieved,” Potter said bluntly. The captain’s jaw dropped. Potter went on, “Brigadier General Russell will take over for me. He’s going to send you northeast to try to cut off the damnyankees in Lawrenceville. I don’t think you can do that, but give it your best shot. When I told General Patton I didn’t think you could, he pulled the plug on me. Orders from the President are that you’ve got to try. I wish you luck.” He meant that. This wasn’t the first time he’d got caught between loving his country and looking down his nose at the man who ran it.

He had time for a handshake before a command car showed up. The driver didn’t seem happy at being out and about with bombs falling. Potter wasn’t happy, either. What could you do?

They made it. They took longer than they would have without all the air raids—but, again, what could you do? Atlanta had taken a nasty

beating. One little diner had a jaunty message painted on the plywood that did duty for a front window: OPEN FOR BUSINESS WHILE EVERYTHING AROUND US GOES TO HELL.

“What did you do—walk?” Patton growled when Potter strode into headquarters, which were in an ugly building on Block Place, just west of the cratered remains of the railroad yard.

“Might have been faster if I did,” Potter answered.

Patton muttered. Potter wasn’t contrite enough to suit him. Most men, seeing their military career going up in smoke, would have flabbled more. “I spoke with the President,” Patton said.

“Oh, boy,” Potter said.

Patton muttered some more. Potter wasn’t impressed enough to suit him, either. Of course, Potter had had more to say to—and about—Jake Featherston than Patton ever did. “There’s an airplane waiting for you at the airport,” Patton ground out. “You’re ordered back to Richmond.”

“So the damnyankees can shoot me down on the way?” Potter said. “Why didn’t Featherston order me executed here?”

“I wondered if he would,” Patton retorted. “Maybe he wants to do it personally. Any which way, get moving. You’ll find out what he has in mind when you get there—if you do. I hope you sweat all the way.

Now get out.”

“Always a pleasure,” Potter said, and flipped Patton a salute in lieu of the bird.

Atlanta’s airport was at Hapeville, nine miles south of town. The airplane was a three-engined transport: an Alligator, so called because of its corrugated aluminum skin. U.S. transports were bigger and faster, but Alligators got the job done. The Confederate States had had to rebuild their military from scratch in the 1930s. Not everything got fully modernized: too much to do too fast. Most of the time, slow, obsolescent transports didn’t matter too much.

If, however, a U.S. fighter got on your tail…

Cussing Patton under his breath, Potter *did* sweat till the Alligator,

which also carried several other officers and a nondescript civilian who might have been a spy, got well away from Atlanta. The airplane wasn't out of the woods yet; he knew that. U.S. aircraft from Kentucky and Tennessee raided western North Carolina and Virginia. But his odds had improved.

He started sweating again when they neared Richmond, which vied with Paris as the most heavily bombed city in the world. They got down just before sunset. Two hard-faced men in Freedom Party Guard camouflage uniforms waited for Potter. "Come with us," one of them growled as soon as he got off. Having no choice, he did, and wondered if he was going for his last ride.

W ithout much modesty, false or otherwise, Lieutenant Michael Pound reckoned himself the best platoon commander for barrels in the U.S. Army. He also would have bet he was the *oldest* platoon commander for barrels in the Army. He'd been learning armored warfare ever since most of his counterparts were born.

Right now, things were pretty simple. The Confederates were pushing north and east out of their defenses in front of Atlanta. If they broke through, they would cut off and probably cut up a lot of good men.

Michael Pound didn't think they had a chance in church of breaking through. He stood up in the cupola of his green-gray barrel to get a better look around than the periscopes could give him. His shoulders barely fit through the opening; he was built like a brick. He needed—and hated—reading glasses these days, but he still saw fine at a distance.

His barrel sat under the pines near the edge of a wood. The crew had draped branches over the glacis plate to help hide the big, bulky machine. The other four in the platoon sat not far away, in the best cover their ingenious commanders could find. Soggy fields of red mud—which looked unnatural to someone from close to the Canadian border like Pound—lay to the south. If the Confederates wanted to try coming this way, they couldn't very well fool anybody.

Which didn't mean they couldn't get fooled. From behind, Pound could see trenches and foxholes and machine-gun nests. From in front, most of those would be camouflaged. He could see the signs marking the borders of minefields, too. The enemy wouldn't spot them till too late…unless the sappers who'd laid the mines wanted them seen, to channel C.S. attacks.

More U.S. infantry waited among the trees with the barrels—and Pound's platoon was far from the only armor on hand. If the bastards in butternut figured this was an exposed flank, they'd get rapped on the knuckles in a hurry.

And they did. They must have. Artillery started screaming down on the fields and on the pine woods.

Michael Pound ducked into the turret and clanged the hatch shut. He felt sorry for the poor bloody foot soldiers. They'd get bloodier in short order. Air bursts were very bad news for troops caught under trees. Shells fused to burst as soon as they touched branches showered sharp fragments on the ground below.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than fragments clattered off the barrel. They sounded like hail on a tin roof, which only proved you couldn't go by sound.

"Lord help the infantry," said Sergeant Mel Scullard, the gunner. He managed to put up with having a longtime gunner set over him—at least, he hadn't tried to brain Pound with a wrench while the platoon commander slept.

"I was thinking the same thing," Pound replied. "It does even out some, though. Nobody fires antibarrel rockets or armor-piercing rounds at them."

"Goddamn stovepipe rockets," Scullard said. "If I caught a Confederate with one of those things, I'd shove the launcher up his ass and then light off a round. And that, by God, would be that."

"My, my. How the boys in the striped pants who put together the Geneva Convention would love you," Pound said.

The gunner's opinion of the Geneva Convention and its framers was blasphemous, scatological, and almost hot enough to ignite the ammunition stowed in the turret. Laughing, Pound wagged a forefinger at him. Scullard used a different finger a different way.

Pound peered through the periscopes set into the cupola. Had he been standing up, he could have used field glasses for a better view. Another rattle of sharp steel against the barrel's armored skin reminded him there were times to be bold and times to be smart, and this sure as hell looked like a time to be smart.

And he could see enough, if not quite everything he wanted. "They're

coming, all right," he said.

"Infantry first—probably probing to find out where the mines are and whether we've got any weak spots.

And when they find some, that's where the barrels will try and get through."

"Let the goddamn barrels come," Scullard said. "They'll regret it."

In the first year and a half of the war, U.S. forces were sorry more often than not when they came up against C.S. barrels. Confederate machines had bigger guns, stronger engines, and thicker, better-sloped armor. But the newest U.S. models finally got it right. Their 3½-inch guns outclassed anything the enemy used, and their powerplants and protection also outdid the opposition. With problems elsewhere, the Confederates were slow to upgrade their barrels.

Some of the machines advancing now weren't barrels at all, but squat, ugly assault guns. Pound, a purist, looked down his nose at them. But throw enough of them into the fight and something would probably give. Quantity had a quality of its own.

"What's the range to those bastards?" he asked.

Scullard checked the rangefinder. "More than a mile and a half, sir. Even a hit at that range isn't a sure kill—they've got thick glacis plates."

"Take a shot at the lead machine anyway," Pound said. "If you do kill it way the hell out there, the rest of them will know right away they've got a tough row to hoe."

"I'll do it, sir," the gunner answered. Then he spoke to the loader: "Armor-piercing!"

"I thought you'd never ask," Joe Mouradian said, and handed him a long, heavy cartridge with the nose painted black.

Scullard traversed the turret a little to the left. He peered through the rangefinder again, raised the gun, peered once more, muttered, and brought the cannon up a hair farther. Pound wouldn't have hesitated so much. He had uncommon confidence in himself. He wasn't always right, but he was always sure. He was sure he ought to keep quiet now. Scullard's style was different from his, but the gunner usually hit

what he aimed at.

If he didn't hit here, Pound intended to say not a word. It *was* long range, even for a gun that fired on a fast, flat trajectory like the 3½-incher.

Boom! Inside the turret, the noise wasn't too bad. Right outside, it would have seemed like the end of the world. Michael Pound looked through the periscopes, hoping he could see the shot fall if it missed.

But it didn't. The lead Confederate assault gun suddenly stopped. Greasy black smoke spurted from it. A hatch in the side opened. Somebody bailed out. More smoke belched from the hatch.

"Good shot! *Good* shot!" Pound thumped Scullard on the back. "Now kill the next one. The others will think twice about coming on after that."

"I'll try, sir," the gunner said, and then, "AP again, Mouradian!"

"Right." The loader slammed another round into the breech.

Scullard traversed the turret to the right. He fired again, then swore. That was a miss. Pound swore, too; he saw no puff of dust to mark where the shot came down. The wet weather complicated lives all kinds of ways.

Scullard tried again. This time, the shot went home. The assault gun slewed sideways and stopped, a track knocked off its wheels. The enemy could probably fix it, but that would take a while. In the meantime, it was out of the fight, a sitting duck. Odds were somebody would blast it before it got fixed.

Other U.S. barrels opened up. More C.S. assault guns and barrels got hit. Others stopped to return fire. Having expended three rounds from this spot, Pound figured it was time to move. They would have a good idea where he was, the same as if he'd lit three cigarettes on a match. He ordered the barrel back and to the left to a secondary firing position he'd marked out ahead of time.

Nobody ever said the Confederates lacked guts. They pressed the attack hard. Pound could see only his little part of it, like any soldier at the front. Thanks to the mines and the machine guns and the barrels and the fighter-bombers that swooped down on the enemy, the men in butternut never made it across the open ground and into the pine woods. They tried three different times, which only meant they

paid a higher price for failure than if they'd left well enough alone after the first time.

When they sullenly pulled back late that afternoon, Pound said, "We ought to go after them. We might be able to walk right into Atlanta."

"Easy to walk *into* Atlanta, sir," Scullard said. "If we do, though, how many of us'll walk out again?"

Pound grunted. Having seen what the fighting in Pittsburgh was like, he didn't want to wind up on the other end of that. But watching the enemy get away went against all his instincts.

Then rockets started screaming down on the open ground in front of the woods and on the trees as well. Blast made even the heavy barrel shudder on its tracks. The Confederates were doing everything they could to discourage pursuit. He feared the foot soldiers were catching it hard.

Even so…"They won't take Lawrenceville away from us like that," he said.

"No, sir," Scullard agreed. "We'll likely try a flanking move from there, I bet. If we can make them leave Atlanta without us going in and taking it away from them, that sounds goddamn good to me."

"To me, too," Pound said. "The cheaper, the better."

The order to move forward came early the next morning. The axis of the advance was southeast: not straight towards Atlanta, but deeper into central Georgia. That warmed the cockles of Michael Pound's heart. It also told him that General Morrell, whom he'd known for many years, still had what it took.

Morrell was all but inviting the Confederates in Atlanta to strike at his flank again. If they did, he would give them lumps.

They didn't. Watching their first counterattack fail must have taught them something. Pound didn't—wouldn't—believe they'd lost too many men and too much equipment for another try. They'd counterattacked again and again, all the way down from the Ohio River—usually before they should have. And it had cost them a lot more than standing on the defensive and making U.S. forces come to them would have done. Maybe they were finally wising up.

But if they were, it was liable to be too late. If they didn't come out of

Atlanta, men and barrels in green-gray would curl around and cut them off from the east and south as well as from the north. And what would stop Irving Morrell's armor from slashing across the rest of Georgia to Savannah and the Atlantic and cutting the Confederacy in half?

Nothing Second Lieutenant Pound could see.

Here and there, the Confederates still fought hard. The Freedom Party Guard units, in their mottled uniforms, had the best gear the CSA could give them and a vicious determination to use it. They took few prisoners, and mostly didn't let themselves get captured. And their fanatical resistance got them…

Not very much. Jake Featherston didn't have enough Guard outfits to go around. He didn't come close. In between the towns they defended and the strongpoints they manned lay…again, not very much.

Most Confederate soldiers, like most soldiers most places, weren't so enthusiastic about dying for their country. Militias of beardless boys and old men mixed bolt-action Tredegars from the last war with hunting rifles and shotguns. Some of them were brave. It hardly mattered. They didn't have what they needed to fight a real army.

Mel Scullard machine-gunned a kid who was running up to the barrel with a Featherston Fizz. The youngster fell. The burning gasoline from the bottle made his last minutes on earth even worse than they would have been otherwise.

With cold eyes, the gunner watched him die. "You want to play against the first team, sonny, you better bring your best game," he said.

"That's about the size of it," Pound agreed. "And most of *their* first team is in Atlanta, and it's doing them less and less good the longer it sits there. In the meantime, by God, we'll just clean up their scrubs."

C assius began to think he might live through the war. Black guerrillas who took up arms against the CSA and the Freedom Party always hoped to live, of course. But hoping and believing were two different things. Sooner or later, he'd figured, Gracchus' band would run out of luck. Then he'd either die on the spot or go to a camp the way his mother and father and sister had. Quick or slow, it would be over.

Now…Maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't. He'd already watched U.S.

fighter-bombers stoop on a truck convoy the Negroes stalled with a land mine planted in a pothole. What followed wasn't pretty, which didn't mean he didn't like it. Oh, no—it meant nothing of the sort.

And the rumble and growl of artillery in the northwest wasn't distant or on the edge of hearing any more. Now it grew into an unending roar, louder by the day and as impossible to ignore as a toothache.

Whenever the guerrillas camped for the night, the same phrase was on their lips: "Damnyankees comin'

soon."

They wanted the U.S. soldiers to get there soon. They would likely die if the U.S. soldiers didn't. They called them damnyankees anyhow. There as in so many other things, they imitated Confederate whites.

They found yellow women prettier than brown ones and much prettier than black ones. They liked straight hair better than kinky, sharp noses better than flat. In all of that, they were typical of the Confederacy's Negroes.

The main way they weren't typical was that they were still alive.

Not far away, trucks rattled through the darkness, bringing C.S. troops forward to try to stem the U.S. tide. The guerrillas let most convoys go. They couldn't afford to get into many real fights with real soldiers. Gracchus had enough trouble scraping up new recruits as things were. Except for the scattered, harried rebel bands, not many Negroes were left in the Georgia countryside.

"Suppose the damnyankees come," Cassius said, spooning up beans from a ration a Mexican soldier would never open now. "Suppose they come, an' suppose they kill the Confederate sojers an' the ofays who put on white shirts and yell, 'Freedom!' all the goddamn time."

Gracchus was gnawing on a drumstick from a chicken liberated from a white man's coop. "Then we wins," he said, swallowing. "Then we starts puttin' our lives back the way they was 'fo' all this shit happen."

In a way, that sounded wonderful. In another way…"How? How we do dat, boss?" Cassius asked.

"All the Yankee sojers in the world ain't gonna give me my ma an' pa an' sister back again. They ain't gonna bring back all the niggers the ofays done killed. We is like ghosts of the folks what used to be here

but ain't no more."

Gracchus scowled as he threw the leg bone aside. "*We* ain't ghosts," he said. "The ones who got killed, they's ghosts. I bet this whole country have more hants'n you kin shake a stick at, this war finally done."

Cassius didn't exactly believe in hants. He didn't exactly not believe in them, either. He'd never seen one, but so many people were sure they had, he had trouble thinking they were all crazy or lying. He did say, "Hants ain't slowed down the ofays none."

"Might be even worse without 'em," another Negro said.

"How?" Cassius asked, and nobody seemed to want to answer that.

He didn't want to take the argument with Gracchus any further. He didn't want the guerrilla chieftain to think he was after that spot himself. As far as Cassius was concerned, Gracchus was welcome to it.

But, even if he kept quiet, he still thought he was right. Blacks in the CSA had had a vibrant life of their own, much of it lived right under the white majority's noses. With so many Negroes dead, how would the survivors ever start that again? How could they even live alongside the whites who hadn't tried to stop Freedom Party goons from stuffing them into trains for one-way journeys to camps, who'd often cheered to see them disappear? What could they be but a sad reminder of something that had once been alive but was no more? And if that wasn't a ghost, what was it?

The next morning, a scout came back in high excitement. "The Mexicans, they's pullin' out!" he said.

"They ain't goin' up to the front to fight?" Gracchus asked. "You sure?"

"Sure as I's standin' here," the scout replied. "They's marchin' south."

"They ain't here to fight the damnyankees," Cassius said. "They is here to keep us in line."

Francisco José's men were less enthusiastic about going after Negroes than white Confederates were.

But their being here let the Confederacy put more men in the field against the United States. They did inhibit the rebel bands…some.

“If they’s buggin’ out fo’ true, they must reckon the Confederate Army can’t hold the Yankees back no mo’.” Gracchus’ voice rose with excitement. “Do Jesus, I hope they’s right!”

The black guerrillas got another surprise the next day. A Confederate captain approached a scout with a flag of truce. The scout blindfolded him and brought him into camp. No one offered to take the blindfold off once he got there, either.

That didn’t seem to faze him. “I have a proposition for you people,” he said.

“Go on. Say your say. Tell your lies,” Gracchus answered.

“No lies. What I ask is very simple: leave us alone while we fight the USA,” the C.S. officer said.

“You stay quiet, we won’t come after you. We’ll even give you rations so you don’t have to plunder the countryside.”

“Put rat poison in ’em first, I reckon,” Gracchus said.

“If you agree, I will come back as a hostage and food taster,” the captain said. “Don’t jog our elbow.

That’s all we want. You tell us no, you’ll get the stick instead of the carrot. I promise you that.”

“Shoulda started leavin’ us alone a hell of a long time ago,” Cassius said.

Shrugging, the soldier said, “Maybe you’re right, maybe you’re wrong. Too late to worry about it now, though. It’s water under the bridge.”

“Easy fo’ you to say, ofay.” Some of Gracchus’ rage and hatred came out. “You ain’t got no dead kinfolks.”

“Hell I don’t,” the captain said, and Cassius realized he hated them at least as much as they hated him.

“Damnyankee bombs blew up my mother and father and sister. Another sister’ll limp forever on account of ’em. And you’re helping the USA. Far as I’m concerned, we ought to feed you rat poison, and better than you deserve. But I don’t give those orders. I just follow them.”

“You got nerve.” Gracchus spoke now with a certain reluctant

admiration.

“I told you—I’ve got orders,” the Confederate said. “So what’ll it be? Will you back off and let us fight the United States, or do we come in here and clean out all of you raggedy-ass coons?”

Gracchus didn’t answer right away. He wasn’t an officer with a chain of command behind him and the automatic authority to bind and to loose. He couldn’t order his fighters to obey a truce if they didn’t want to. Cassius knew *he* didn’t. He spoke to the captain: “You coulda done that, reckon you would’ve a long time ago.”

“You don’t get it, boy,” the white said, and never knew how close he came to dying on the spot. He continued, “Before, you were just a rear-area nuisance. But if you think we’ll let you fuck with us when the front’s so close, you better think again.”

Maybe he had a point of sorts. But even if he did…“What happens when the Yankees push you outa here?” Cassius ground out. “You reckon we ain’t got us a lot o’ bills to pay? You reckon we ain’t gonna pay ’em soon as we git the chance?”

That got home. The C.S. captain bit his lip. “All the more reason for us to get rid of you now,” he said.

“You kin try.” Gracchus seemed to have made up his mind. “Yeah, you kin try, but I don’t reckon you kin do it. When the war started, you coulda got what you wanted from us easy. All you had to do was leave us alone. Well, you didn’t do nothin’ like that. You know what you done. Like my friend here say”—he named no names—“we owes you too much to set it down. We takes you back to your own folks now. Ain’t got nothin’ left to say to each other no more.”

As the scout led the blindfolded officer away, Cassius found himself nodding. Gracchus had nailed that, probably better than he knew. All across the Confederate States of America, whites and Negroes had nothing left to say to each other.

“Reckon we better get outa here,” Gracchus said after the white man in butternut was gone. “They ain’t gonna wait around. Soon as he tell ’em we say no, they gonna pound the shit outa where they thinks we’s at.”

He proved a good prophet. Artillery started falling not far from their camp inside of half an hour. A couple of Asskickers buzzed around overhead, looking for targets they could hit. The Negroes stayed in the

woods till nightfall.

“You reckon they come after us from the same direction as that captain?” Cassius asked Gracchus.

“Mos’ likely,” the guerrilla leader answered.

“Maybe we oughta rig us an ambush, then,” Cassius said. “That’ll learn ’em they can’t run us like we was coons an’ they was hounds.”

“We *is* coons,” Gracchus said with a grim chuckle. He clapped Cassius on the back. “But yeah, you got somethin’ there. We see what we kin do.”

Next morning, right at dawn, close to a company of Confederate soldiers approached the woods where the guerrillas sheltered. Cassius and a couple of other Negroes fired at them, then showed themselves as they scurried away. That was dangerous. A fusillade of bullets chased them. But nobody got hit.

Shouting and pointing, the Confederates pounded after the fleeing blacks. Down deep, the ofays still thought Negroes were stupid and cowardly. They wouldn’t have pursued U.S. soldiers with so little caution.

The machine gun opened up from the flank and cut them down like wheat before the scythe. The Confederates were brave. Some of them tried to charge the gun and take it out with grenades. They couldn’t work in close enough to throw them. The white soldiers broke off and retreated. They did it as well as anyone could, leaving not a wounded man behind.

“We done it!” Cassius whooped. “We fuckin’ done it!”

Gracchus was less exuberant. “We done it this time,” he said. “Ofays ain’t gonna make the same mistake twice. Next time, they don’t reckon it’s easy.”

That struck Cassius as much too likely. Gracchus moved his band away from the ambush site as fast as he could. Artillery and bombs from above started falling there a few minutes later—probably as soon as the beaten Confederate soldiers could send back word of where they ran into trouble.

Armored cars and halftracks began patrolling the roads around the

guerrilla band. The Negroes got one with a mine, but the vehicles trapped them and hemmed them in, making movement deadly dangerous. Before long, they started getting hungry. The rations the Confederate captain had promised in exchange for quiet seemed better to Cassius every time his belly growled.

“Reckon we kin hold ’em off when they come again?” he asked Gracchus.

“Hope so,” the guerrilla leader answered, which was a long way from yes.

Cassius made sure his rifle was clean. He didn’t want it jamming when he needed it most. How much good it would do him against a swarm of Confederates supported by armor…he tried not to think about.

Then one night the northwestern sky filled with flashes. Man-made thunder stunned his ears. The C.S.

attack the guerrillas were dreading didn’t come. The Confederates needed everything they had to hold back the U.S. forces hitting them.

And everything they had wasn’t enough. Soldiers and vehicles in butternut poured back past and through the guerrillas’ little territory. They weren’t interested in fighting the blacks; they just wanted to get away. Wounded men and battered trucks and halftracks floundered here and there. The Negroes scrounged whatever they could.

And then Cassius spotted an advancing barrel painted not butternut but green-gray. It had a decal of an eagle in front of crossed swords on each side of the turret. He burst into unashamed tears of joy. The damnyankees were here at last!

A fter capturing Camp Determination and the vast mass graves where its victims lay, Major General Abner Dowling had trouble figuring out what the U.S. Eleventh Army should do next. He’d handed the United States a huge propaganda victory. No one could deny any more that the Confederates were killing off their Negroes as fast as they could.

Some of the locals were horrified when he rubbed their noses in what their country was up to. The mayor of Snyder, Texas, and a few of its other leading citizens killed themselves after forced tours of the graves.

But others remained chillingly indifferent or, worse, convinced the

Negroes had it coming. *Only coons* and *goddamn troublemakers* were phrases Dowling never wanted to hear again.

He scratched at his graying mustache as he studied a map of west Texas tacked on the wall of what had been the mayor's office. Snyder, under military occupation, was doing without a mayor for now.

"What do you think, Major?" he asked his adjutant. "Where do we go from here?"

Major Angelo Toricelli was young and handsome and slim, none of which desirable adjectives fit his superior. "Amarillo's too far north," he said judiciously. "We don't have the men to hold the front from here to there."

Dowling eyed the map. If that wasn't the understatement of the year, it came in no worse than second runner-up. "Abilene, then," he said. It was the next town of any size, and it didn't lie that far east of Snyder.

"I suppose so." If Major Toricelli was eager to go after Abilene, he hid it very well. Dowling knew why, too. Even if the Eleventh Army captured Abilene…Well, so what? Taking it wouldn't bring the USA much closer to victory or do anything more than annoy the Confederates.

With a sigh, Dowling said, "We've pretty much shot our bolt, haven't we?"

"Unless they're going to reinforce us, yes, sir," his adjutant answered.

"Ha! Don't hold your breath," Dowling said. Hanging on to the men Eleventh Army had was hard enough.

"Maybe you'll get a new command, sir," Major Toricelli said hopefully.

"Sure. Maybe they'll send me to Baja California." Dowling's voice overflowed with false heartiness.

His adjutant winced. The USA had tried to take Baja California away from the Empire of Mexico during the last war, tried and failed. This time around, the United States seemed to have succeeded. And, having taken Baja California away from Mexico, what did the USA have? Baja California, and that was all: miles and miles and miles of the driest, most godforsaken terrain in the world.

Holding Baja California mattered for only one reason. It let the United States sit over the Confederates in Sonora. U.S. ships could block the outlet to the Gulf of California. U.S. airplanes in Baja California could easily strike the C.S. port at Guaymas. Of course, Confederate aircraft in Sonora could hit back at the warships and the air bases. They could, and they did. The luckless brigadier general in charge of that operation was welcome to it, as far as Abner Dowling was concerned.

“With what you’ve done here, you ought to get a command closer to the *Schwerpunkt*,” Major Toricelli said.

“How about Sequoyah?” Dowling asked innocently.

That *was* closer to the center of things than west Texas, which didn’t mean Toricelli didn’t wince again anyhow. Sequoyah was a bloody mess, and probably would go on being one for years. Thanks to a large influx of settlers from the USA, it had voted not to rejoin the Confederacy in Al Smith’s ill-advised plebiscite. But the Indian tribes in the east, who’d prospered under Confederate rule, hated the U.S.

occupation. And most of the oil there lay under Indian-held land.

The oil fields had gone back and forth several times in this war. Whoever was retreating blew up what he could to deny the oil to the enemy. When the United States held the oil fields, Confederate raiders and their Indian stooges sabotaged whatever wasn’t blown up. That led to U.S. reprisals, which led to bushwhacking, which led to hell in a handbasket.

“About the only thing we could do to make Sequoyah work would be to kill all the redskins in it.”

Dowling sighed. “And if we do that, how are we any better than the goddamn Confederates?”

“Those Indians really are fighting us,” Toricelli said.

“Sure.” Dowling’s chins wobbled as he nodded. “But if you listen to Confederate wireless, you hear all the stories about the terrible wicked black guerrillas. Some of that’s got to be bullshit, sure. But not all of it, because we both know the War Department helps the guerrillas when it can.”

Major Toricelli looked unhappy, but he nodded. One of the reasons Dowling liked him was that he would look facts in the face, even

when they were unpleasant.

As if on cue, a soldier from the signals unit stuck his head into the office and said, “Sir, we just got a message that needs decoding.”

“I’ll take care of it,” Toricelli said, and hurried away. Dowling wondered what was going on. Eleventh Army wasn’t important enough to receive a lot of encrypted transmissions. The Confederates were welcome to read most of the usual messages it did get.

“Well?” Dowling asked when his adjutant came back forty-five minutes later.

“Well, sir, we’re ordered to step up air attacks against Abilene.” Toricelli had the look of a man who’d gone hunting in the mountains and brought home a ridiculous mouse.

“We can do that,” Dowling allowed. He even understood why the order was coded—no point to letting the Confederates haul in more antiaircraft guns to shoot down U.S. bombers. But, after what he and Toricelli were talking about, the order felt anticlimactic, to say the least.

Colonel Terry DeFrancis was one of the youngest officers of his rank in the Army. He was also one of the better ones; his fighters had established U.S. dominance in the air over west Texas. “Pound the crap out of Abilene?” he said when Dowling told him about the new order. “Sure. We can do that, sir. I’ll step up the recon right away, so we know what we’re up against.”

“Step up the recon over other targets, too,” Dowling said. “No use advertising what we’re up to.”

“Will do, sir,” DeFrancis promised. “You’re sneaky, you know that?”

“Well, I try.” Dowling paused to light a cigarette. No two ways about it—Raleighs and Dukes beat the hell out of anything the USA made. And Confederate cigars…Reluctantly, Dowling brought his mind back to the business at hand. “That’s one thing I had to pick up on my own. General Custer never much went in for being sneaky.”

“What was it like serving under him?” Colonel DeFrancis asked.

“It wasn’t dull, I’ll tell you that. He always knew what he wanted to do, and he went ahead and did it.”

Dowling nodded. That was true, every word of it. It was also the sanitized, denatured version of his long association with the man who was, by his own modest admission, the greatest general in the history of the world. Dowling suspected he'd kept Custer from getting sacked several times. He also suspected he'd kept himself from getting court-martialed at least as often. But Terry didn't need to hear about that.

"Was he as much of an old Tartar as everybody says?" DeFrancis had already heard something, then.

"Well…yes." Dowling couldn't say no without making himself into a bigger liar than he wanted to be.

"But he won the war, pretty much. He got the job done. Morrell was under his orders when he used that armored thrust to roll up the Confederates and take Nashville."

"That's true." Dowling gave a reminiscent shiver. Custer and Morrell had gone against War Department orders to mass their barrels. Dowling himself had lied like Ananias, writing reports that denied they were doing any such thing. Had Philadelphia found out he was lying, or had the attack failed…The aftermath wouldn't have been pretty.

And it wasn't a sure thing, not ahead of time. A lot of Custer's straight-ahead charges at the enemy failed, and failed gruesomely. Dowling knew how nervous he was before the barrels crossed the Cumberland. If Custer had any doubts, he never showed them.

"You know, Colonel, he really is the hero of the last war. In an odd way, he's the hero of the whole first part of this century," Dowling said. "He knew what he wanted to do, and he found a way to make it work."

"We just have to go and do the same thing, then," DeFrancis said. "I expect we can." He saluted and hurried off.

Abner Dowling stubbed out his cigarette. He didn't have George Armstrong Custer's relentless drive, or even Terry DeFrancis'. He was a sane man in a business where the crazy and the obsessed often prospered. He hoped his ability to see all sides of a problem gave him an edge over commanders with tunnel vision. He hoped so, but he was a long way from sure it did.

Major Toricelli stuck his head into the office. "Sir, there's a local who wants to see you. His name is Jeffries, Falstaff Jeffries. He runs the big

grocery on the edge of town."

"Has he been searched?" Dowling didn't want to talk to a people bomb, or even a fellow with a pistol in his pocket. But his adjutant nodded. So did Dowling. "All right. Send him in. You know what's eating him?"

"No, sir. But I expect he'll tell you."

Falstaff Jeffries didn't live up to his name. He was short and skinny and somber, nothing like Shakespeare's magnificent clown. He did have the virtue of coming straight to the point: "Where am I going to get more food, General?"

"Where were you getting it?" Dowling asked.

"From farther east. That's where everything comes from out here," Jeffries answered. "Except now I'm on the wrong side of the line. Folks're gonna start getting hungry pretty damn quick unless somebody does something about it."

"I don't think anyone will starve," Dowling said. "Plenty of rations, if it comes to that."

The storekeeper looked at him as if he'd just ordered no presents at Christmastime. "Rations." Jeffries made it into a swear word. "How in blazes am I supposed to run a business if you go around handing out free rations?"

"A minute ago, you were talking about people going hungry," Dowling reminded him. "Now you're flabbling about where your money's coming from. That's a different story, and it's not one I care much about."

"That's on account of you don't have to worry about feeding your family." Falstaff Jeffries eyed Dowling's expanse of belly. "You don't worry about feeding at all, do you?"

"I told you—nobody'll starve," Dowling said tightly. "Not you, not your family, and not me, either."

"But my store'll go under!" Jeffries wailed.

"There's a war on, in case you didn't notice," Dowling said. "You're alive, you're in one piece, your family's all right. Count your

blessings."

Jeffries muttered something under his breath. Dowling wouldn't have sworn it was "Damnyankee," but he thought so. The grocer rose. "Well, I can see I won't get any help here."

"If you think I'll open our lines so your supplies can get through, you're even crazier than I give you credit for, and that's not easy," Dowling said.

Jeffries took a deep breath, then seemed to remember where he was and to whom he was talking. He left without another word, which was no doubt wise of him. Abner Dowling hadn't acted like a military tyrant in the west Texas territory Eleventh Army had conquered, but the temptation was always there.

And, if he felt like it, so was the power.

L ieutenant-Colonel Jerry Dover was not a happy man. The Confederate supply officer had had to pull back again and again, and he'd had to wreck or burn too much that he couldn't take with him. His dealings with the higher-ups from whom he got his supplies, always touchy, approached the vitriolic now.

"What do you mean, you can't get me any more antibarrel rounds?" he shouted into a field telephone.

Coming out of the restaurant business in Augusta, he was much too used to dealing with suppliers who welshed at the worst possible time. "What are the guns supposed to shoot at the Yankees? Aspirins? I got plenty of those."

"I can't give you what I don't have," replied the officer at the other end of the line. "Not as much getting into Atlanta as there ought to be these days."

Dover laughed a nasty, sarcastic laugh. "Well, when the U.S. soldiers come marching in, buddy, you'll know why. Have fun in prison camp."

"This is nothing to joke about, goddammit!" the other officer said indignantly.

"Who's joking?" Dover said. "Only reason they haven't gone in yet is, they don't want to have to fight us house to house. But if you don't get

out pretty damn quick, they'll surround the place—and then you won't get out."

"General Patton says that won't happen," the other officer told him, as if Patton had a crystal ball and could see the future.

"Yeah, well, when a guy wants to lay a girl, he'll say he'll only stick it in halfway. You know what that's worth," Dover said. "You want to keep the Yankees away from your door, get me those shells."

"I don't have any I can release."

"Aha!" Jerry Dover pounced. "A minute ago you didn't have any at all. Cough up some of what you're holding out on me, or you'll be sorry—will you ever."

"If I do that, they'll put my tit in a wringer," the officer in Atlanta whined.

"If you don't, you'll get your ass shot off," Dover said. "*And* I'll tell all the front-line soldiers you're holding out on me. You can find out if our guys or the Yankees get you first. Doesn't that sound like fun?"

"You wouldn't!" The other officer sounded horrified.

"Damn right I would. I was in the trenches myself the last time around. I know how much real soldiers hate it when the quartermasters don't give 'em what they need to fight the war."

"I'll report your threats to General Patton's staff!"

"Yeah? And so?" Dover said cheerfully. "If they put me in the line, maybe I'm a little worse off than I am here, but not fuckin' much. If they throw me in the stockade or send me home, I'm safer than you are. Why don't you just send me the ammo instead? Don't you reckon it's easier all the way around?"

Instead of answering, the supply officer in Atlanta hung up on him. But Dover got the antibarrel ammunition. As far as he was concerned, nothing else really mattered. If the other man had to tell his superiors some lies about where it went, well, that was his problem, not Dover's.

Even with that shipment, the Confederates east of Atlanta kept getting driven back. Too many U.S.

soldiers, too many green-gray barrels, too many airplanes with the eagle and crossed swords. If something didn't change in a hurry… *If something doesn't change in a hurry, we've got another losing war on our hands*, Dover thought.

He'd never been one who screamed, "Freedom!" at the top of his lungs and got a bulge in his pants whenever Jake Featherston started ranting. He'd voted Whig at every election where he could without putting himself in danger. But he had some idea what losing a second war to the USA would do to his country. He didn't want to see that happen—who in his right mind did? Following Featherston was bad.

Not following him right now, Jerry Dover figured, would be worse.

He stepped away from the field telephone, shaking his head, not liking the tenor of his thoughts. How could anybody in the Confederacy have thoughts he liked right now? You had to be smoking cigarettes the Quartermaster Department didn't issue to believe things were going well.

Or you had to read the official C.S. Army newspaper. A quartermaster sergeant named Pete handed Dover a copy of the latest issue. It was fresh from the press; he could still smell the ink, and it smudged his fingers as he flipped through *The Armored Bear*.

If you looked at what the reporters there said, everything was wonderful. Enemy troops were about to get blasted out of Georgia. *A shattering defeat that will pave the way for the liberation of Tennessee and Kentucky*, the paper called it. *The Armored Bear* didn't say how or when it would happen, though. Soldiers who weren't in Georgia might buy that. Jerry Dover would believe it when he saw it.

The Armored Bear spent half a column laughing at the idea that the damnyankees could threaten Birmingham. *This industrial center continues to turn out arms for victory*, some uniformed reporter wrote. A year earlier, the idea of U.S. soldiers anywhere near Birmingham really would have been laughable. C.S. troops were battering their way into Pittsburgh. They went in, yes, but they didn't come out. Now the story sounded more as if the writer were whistling his way past the graveyard. Had the Yankees wanted to turn on Birmingham, it would have fallen. Dover was sure of that. They thought Atlanta was more important, and they had the sense not to try to do two things at the same time when they could make sure of one.

Photos of night-fighter pilots with gaudy new medals on their chests

adorned the front page. The story under the photos bragged of air victories over Richmond, Atlanta, Birmingham, Vicksburg, and Little Rock. That was all very well, but why were U.S. bombers over all those towns?

And another story bragged of long-range rockets hitting Washington, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh (not a word about the great battle there the year before), and Nashville (not a word that Nashville was a Confederate city, either).

There is no defense against these weapons of vengeance. Traveling thousands of miles an hour, they strike powerful blows against the Yankee aggressors, the paper said. *Soon improved models will reach New York, Boston, Indianapolis, and other U.S. centers that imagine themselves to be safe. Confederate science in the cause of freedom is irresistible*.

Jerry Dover thoughtfully read that story over again. Unlike some of the others, it told no obvious lies.

He hoped it was true. If the Confederates could pound the crap out of U.S. targets without wasting precious pilots and bombers, they might make the enemy say uncle. It struck him as the best chance they had, anyway.

On an inside page was a story about a football game between guards and U.S. POWs down at Andersonville, south of Atlanta. A photo showed guards and prisoners in football togs. Dover thought the piece was a failure. So what if the guards won? If they were healthy enough to play football, why the hell weren't they healthy enough to fight?

Maybe that wasn't fair. And maybe the guards had pull that kept them away from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Dover knew which way he'd bet.

The story almost pissed him off enough to make him crumple up the paper and throw it away. Almost, but not quite. One thing in chronically short supply was toilet paper. Wiping his butt with the football-playing guards struck him as the best revenge he could get.

Later, he asked if Pete had seen the story about the Andersonville football game. The noncom looked disgusted. "Oh, hell, yes," he answered. "Closest those bastards ever get to real Yankees, ain't it?"

"Looks that way to me," Dover said. "I wondered if you saw things the same."

“Usually some pretty good stuff in *The Armored Bear*,” Pete said. “Shitheads who turn it out fucked up this time, though.”

Maybe he imagined soldiers—sergeants like himself, say—sitting around a table deciding what to put into the Army newspaper. Dover would have bet things didn’t work like that. The writers likely got their orders from somebody in the Department of Communications, maybe in a soldier’s uniform but probably in a Party one. Everything in the paper was professionally smooth. Everything made the war and the news look as good as they could, or a little better than that. No amateur production could have been so effective…most of the time.

But when the truth stared you in the face, what a paper said stopped mattering so much. “Reckon we can stop the damnyankees?” Pete asked. “If we don’t, seems like we’re in a whole peck o’ trouble.”

“Looks that way to me, too,” Dover answered. “If they take Atlanta… Well, that’s pretty bad.”

We should have stopped them in front of Chattanooga, he thought glumly. *Now that they’re through the gap and into Georgia, they can go where they please*. The paratroop drop that seized Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge from the Confederates and made them evacuate Chattanooga was a smart, gutsy operation. Dover admired it while wishing his side hadn’t been on the receiving end.

When night fell, he slept in a tent with a foxhole right next to it. U.S. bombers came over at night even more often than in the daytime. The heavy drone of engines overhead sent him diving into the hole even before the alarm sounded. Bombs burst with heavy thuds that reminded him of earthquakes. He’d never been in any earthquakes, but he was sure they had to be like this.

Antiaircraft guns thundered and lightninged, filling the air with the sharp stink of smokeless powder.

Dover listened hopefully for the concussive thud of stricken bombers smashing into the ground, but in that he was disappointed. Fewer bombs fell close by than he expected from the number of airplanes overhead, which didn’t disappoint him a bit.

Then something fluttered down from the sky like an oversized snowflake and landed on top of his head. He grabbed the sheet of cheap pulp paper. The flash of the guns showed him a large U.S. flag, printed in full color, with text below that he couldn’t make out in the

darkness and without his reading glasses.

“More propaganda,” he murmured with a sigh of relief. If the damnyankees wanted to drop their lies instead of high explosives, he didn’t mind a bit. Had that been a bomb falling on his head…

He stuck the sheet into a trouser pocket and forgot he had it till the next morning. Only when it crinkled as he moved did he remember and take it out for a look.

Confederate soldiers, your cause is lost! it shouted, and went on from there. It urged him to save his life by coming through the lines holding up the picture of the Stars and Stripes. Maybe U.S. soldiers wouldn’t shoot him if he did that, but it struck him as a damn good recipe for getting shot by his own side.

If his own side’s propaganda was bad, the enemy’s was worse. *Look at the disaster Jake Featherston has led you into. Don’t you want true freedom for your country?* it said. All Jerry Dover wanted—all most Confederates wanted—was to see the Yankees go away and leave his country alone. They didn’t seem to understand that. If the sheets falling from the sky meant anything, they thought they were liberators.

“My ass,” Jerry Dover said, as if he had a U.S. propaganda writer in the tent with him. The United States had invaded the Confederate States four times in the past eighty years. If they thought they’d be welcomed with anything but bayonets, they were even bigger fools than Dover gave them credit for—not easy but not, he supposed, impossible.

And if the Confederates wanted to change their government, they could take care of it on their own.

All the bodyguards in the world wouldn’t keep Jake Featherston alive for long if enough people decided he needed killing. No Yankees had to help.

Dover started to chuck the propaganda sheet, then changed his mind. “My ass,” he said one more time, now happily, and put it back in his pocket. As with the story in *The Armored Bear*, he could treat it as it deserved.

N ovember in the North Atlantic wasn’t so bad as January or February, but it was bad enough. The *Josephus Daniels* rode out one

big swell after another. On the destroyer escort's bridge, Sam Carsten felt as if he were on God's seesaw. Up and down, up and down, up and down forever.

"You still have that hydrophone contact?" he shouted down the speaking tube to Vince Bevacqua.

"Yes, sir, sure do," the chief petty officer answered. "Coming in as clear as you can expect with waves like this."

"All right, then. Let's give the submersible two ashcans," Sam said. "That'll bring it to the surface where we can deal with it."

He shouted the order over the PA system. The launcher crew at the *Josephus Daniels*' bow sent the depth charges flying into the ocean one at a time, well ahead of the ship. They were set to detonate not far below the surface. Sam felt the explosions through the soles of his feet.

Something rude came out of the speaking tube. "Had my earphones on when the first one burst,"

Bevacqua said. "That'll clean your sinuses from the inside out." He paused, then went on, "The sub's making noises like it's blowing water out of its dive chambers. Ought to be coming to the surface."

"We'll be ready for anything," Carsten promised.

And the destroyer escort was. Both four-inchers bore on the submarine when it surfaced. So did several of the the ship's twin 40mm antiaircraft guns and her .50-caliber machine guns. A swell washed over the sub's bow—and almost washed over the conning tower, too. This weather was tough to take in the *Josephus Daniels*. It had to be ten times worse in a submersible.

Sailors ran up a flag on the sub: the white, black, and red jack of the Imperial German Navy. Sam breathed a sigh of relief. "This is the one we're supposed to meet, all right," he said.

"So it would seem, sir," Lieutenant Myron Zwilling agreed. Sam wished he had more use for the exec.

Zwilling was brave enough and more than willing enough, but he had all the warmth and character of an old, sour-smelling rag. Men obeyed him because he wore two stripes on his sleeve, not because he made

them want to.

The submersible's signal lamp started flashing Morse. "We—have—your—package," Sam read slowly. "He knows English, then. Good."

He handled the destroyer escort's blinker himself. WILL APPROACH FOR PICKUP, he sent back.

COME AHEAD. BE CAREFUL IN THESE SEAS, the sub signaled.

Sam wished Pat Kelly were still aboard. But his old exec had a ship of his own, a newer, faster ship than the *Josephus Daniels*. He was probably showing his whole crew what a demon shiphandler he was.

Sam wasn't, and never would be. Neither was Zwilling. Since he wasn't, Sam kept the conn himself.

As he steered closer to the submersible, he ordered Bevacqua to keep paying close attention to any echoes that came back from his hydrophone pings. The CPO laughed mirthlessly. "Oh, I'm on it, Skipper. Don't you worry about that," he said. "It's my neck, too, after all."

"Good," Sam said. "Long as you remember."

German subs weren't the only ones prowling the North Atlantic. Plenty of U.S. boats were out here, too. More to the point, so were British, French, and Confederate submarines. The odds against any one of them being in the neighborhood were long, but so were the odds against filling an inside straight, and lucky optimists did that every day.

In both the Great War and this one, U.S. admirals and their German counterparts dreamt of sweeping the British and French fleets from the North Atlantic and joining hands in the middle. It hadn't happened then, and it wouldn't happen this time around, either. The enemy kept the two allies apart, except for sneaky meetings like this one.

NEAR ENOUGH, the submersible's captain signaled. But Sam steered closer, anticipating the next swell with a small motion of the wheel. The sub's skipper waved to him then, seeing that he knew what he was doing. He lifted one hand from the wheel to wave back. THROW A LINE, came the flashes from the ugly, deadly, rust-streaked boat.

IS THE PACKAGE WATERPROOF? Sam asked.

JA, the submersible skipper answered. Sam knew more German than that; his folks had spoken it on the farm where he grew up. He ordered a line thrown. A German sailor in a greasy pea jacket and dungarees ran along the sub's wet hull to retrieve it. Sam wouldn't have cared to do that, not with the boat pitching the way it was. But the man grabbed the line, carried it back to the conning tower, and climbed the iron ladder, nimble as a Barbary ape.

The German skipper tied the package, whatever it was, to the end of the line. Then he waved to the *Josephus Daniels*. The sailor who'd cast the line drew it back hand over hand. When he took the package off it, he waved up to Sam Carsten on the bridge.

After waving back, Sam got on the blinker again: WE HAVE IT. THANKS AND GOOD LUCK.

LIKEWISE FOR YOU, the German answered. He lifted his battered cap in salute. Then he and the other men on the conning tower disappeared into the dark, smelly depths of the submersible. The boat slid below the surface and was gone.

A moment later, the sailor brought the package—which was indeed wrapped in oilskins and sheet rubber, and impressively sealed—up to the bridge. "Here you go, sir," he said, handing it to Sam and saluting.

"Thanks, Enos," Carsten answered. The sailor hurried away.

"Now into the safe?" the exec asked.

"That's what my orders are," Sam agreed.

"Wonder why the brass are making such a fuss about it," said Thad Walters, the Y-ranging officer.

"Beats me," Sam answered with a grin. "They pay me *not* to ask questions like that, so I'm going to lock this baby up right now. Mr. Zwilling, come to my cabin with me so you can witness that I've done it.

Mr. Walters, you have the conn." Having a witness was in the orders, too. He'd never had anything on board before that came with such tight security requirements.

"Aye aye, sir." The exec's voice stayed formal, but he sounded more pleased than otherwise. Red tape was meat and drink to him. He would have done better manning a desk ashore and counting turbine

vanes than as second-in-command on a warship, but the Navy couldn't fit all its pegs into the perfect holes. You did the best you could in the slot they gave you—and, if you happened to be the skipper, you did the best you could with the men set under you. If they weren't all the ones you would have chosen yourself…Well, there was a war on.

Sam's cabin wasn't far from the bridge. It wasn't much wider than his own wingspan, but it gave him a tiny island of privacy when he needed one. Along with his bed—which he didn't get to use enough—he had a steel desk and a steel chair and the safe.

He shielded it with his body as he spun the combination so the exec couldn't see it: more orders. The metal door swung open. "I am putting the package in the safe," he intoned, and did just that. "The seals are unbroken."

"Sir, I have observed you doing so," Myron Zwilling said, like a man giving responses to a preacher in church. "And I confirm that the seals are unbroken."

"All right, then. I'm closing up." Sam did, and spun the lock once more to keep it from showing the last number.

"Now we go back to Boston?" the exec said.

"Just as fast as our little legs will carry us," Sam replied. Zwilling gave him a look of faint distaste. Sam sighed silently; if the exec was born with a sense of whimsy, he'd had it surgically removed as a kid. And the *Josephus Daniels*' legs were indeed little. She couldn't make better than about twenty-four knots, far slower than a real destroyer. The only reason that occurred to Carsten for picking her for this mission was that she was one of the most anonymous ships in the Navy. The enemy wouldn't pay much attention to her. If he didn't command her, he wouldn't pay much attention to her himself. As they left the cabin, Sam added, "I am locking the door behind me."

"Yes, sir," Zwilling said. "You're also supposed to post two armed guards outside until you remove—whatever it is—from the safe."

"Go get two men. Serve them out with submachine guns from the arms locker and bring them back here. I'll stand guard in the meantime," Sam said. "If Jake Featherston's hiding under the paint somewhere, I'll do my goddamnedest to hold him off till you get back with the reinforcements."

"Er—yes, sir." The exec seemed relieved to get away.

This time, Sam sighed out loud. Pat would have sassed him right back instead of taking everything so seriously. Well, what could you do?

Before long, the armed guards took their places in front of the door to the captain's quarters. Sam went back to the bridge. "I have the conn," he announced as he took the wheel from Walters. "I am changing course to 255. We are on our way back to Boston." He rang the engine room. "All ahead full."

"All ahead full. Aye aye, sir." The response came back through a speaking tube. The black gang would wring every knot they could from the *Josephus Daniels*. The only trouble was, she didn't have many knots to wring.

Every mile Sam put between himself and the spot where he'd met the U-boat eased his mind. That it also meant he was one mile closer to his own country did nothing to make him unhappy, either. He wanted nothing more than to get…whatever it was out of his safe and off his ship. He didn't like having men with automatic weapons outside his door at all hours of the day and night. Were it up to him, he would have been much more casual about the mysterious package. But it wasn't, so he followed orders.

He also followed orders in maintaining wireless silence till he got within sight of Cape Ann, northeast of Boston. A couple of patrolling U.S. seaplanes had already spotted him by then and, he supposed, sent their own wireless signals, but nobody—especially not his exec—would be able to say he hadn't done everything the brass told him to do.

Two Coast Guard cutters steamed out from Rockport and escorted the *Josephus Daniels* across Massachusetts Bay as if she had royalty on board. Sam didn't think the Germans could have dehydrated the Kaiser and stuffed him into that flat package, but you never could tell.

When a pilot came aboard to steer the destroyer escort through the minefields outside of Boston harbor, Sam greeted him with, "The powers that be won't like it if you pick the wrong time to sneeze."

The pilot had flaming red hair, ears that stuck out like jug handles, and an engagingly homely grin. "My wife won't like it, either, sir," he answered, "and that counts a hell of a lot more with me."

"Sounds like the right attitude," Sam allowed. Myron Zwilling clucked like a fretful mother hen. Yes, he worshipped at Authority's shrine.

They got through the invisible barricade and tied up in the Boston Navy Yard. As soon as they did, a swarm of Marines and high-ranking officers descended on them. One of the captains nodded when he saw the guards outside Sam's door. "As per instructions," he said.

"Yes, sir," Sam said, and when was that ever the wrong answer?

Everybody waited impatiently till he opened the safe and took out the package. He wondered what would happen if he pretended to forget the combination. Odds were the newcomers had somebody who could jigger the lock faster than he could open it with the numbers.

"Here you go, sir." He handed the package to a vice admiral. "Any chance I'll ever know what this is all about?"

"No," the man said at once. But then he unbent a little: "Not officially, anyhow. If you can add two and two, you may get a hint one day."

Even that little was more than Carsten expected. "All right, sir," he said.

"Officially, of course, none of this ever happened," the vice admiral went on. "We aren't here at all."

"How am I supposed to log that, sir? 'Possessed by ghosts—summoned exorcist'?" Sam said. The vice admiral laughed. So did Sam, who was kidding on the square.

II

C amp Humble wasn't perfect, but it came as close as Jefferson Pinkard could make it. The commandant probably had more experience with camps designed to get rid of people than anybody else in the business. One thing he'd learned was not to call it that or even think of it like that. *Reducing population* was a phrase with far fewer unpleasant associations.

That mattered. It mattered a surprising amount. Guards who brooded about the things they did had a way of eating their guns or otherwise doing themselves in. If you gave it a name that seemed innocuous, they didn't need to brood so much.

Back at Camp Dependable, outside of Alexandria, Louisiana, guards had actually taken Negroes out into the swamps and shot them. That

was hard on the men—not as hard as it was on the Negroes, but hard enough. Things got better when Jeff thought of asphyxiating trucks. Then the guards didn't have to pull the trigger themselves. They didn't have to deal with blood spraying everywhere and with screams and with men who weren't quite dead. All they had to do was take out bodies and get rid of them. That was a hell of a lot easier.

And the poison-gas chambers he'd started at Camp Determination in west Texas were better yet.

They got rid of more blacks faster than the trucks did, and saved on fuel besides. The prairie out by Snyder offered plenty of room for mass graves as big as anybody could want. Everything at Camp Determination would have been, if not perfect, at least pretty damn good, if not for the…

"Damnyankees," Pinkard muttered. "God fry the stinking damnyankees in their own grease." Who would have figured the U.S. Army would push into west Texas? One of the reasons for building Camp Determination way out there was that it was the ass end of nowhere. The enemy hadn't seemed likely to bother a camp there.

But the Freedom Party underestimated how much propaganda the USA could get out of the camps.

And earlier this year the United States had attacked everywhere they could, all at once: not seriously, but hard enough to keep the CSA from reinforcing the defenders in Kentucky and Tennessee, where the real action was. And it worked. Kentucky and Tennessee were lost, and Georgia was in trouble.

And Camp Determination was lost, too. The United States had bombed the rail lines coming into the camp so it couldn't reduce population the way it was supposed to. And they'd also bombed the crap out of Snyder; Jeff thanked God his own family came through all right. The Confederate defenders finally had to pull back, so now the Yankees had all the atrocity photos they wanted.

And Jefferson Pinkard had Camp Humble. Humble, Texas, just north of Houston, lay far enough east that the United States wouldn't overrun it unless the Confederacy really went down the drain. The USA had a much harder time bombing the rail lines that came through here, too. So Negroes came in, they got into trucks that took them nowhere except to death, or they went into bathhouses that pumped out cyanide instead of hot water. After that, they went up in smoke.

Literally.

Pinkard scowled. The crematorium wasn't up to snuff. The outfit that built it had sold the CSA a bill of goods. The smoke that billowed from the tall stacks stank of burnt meat. It left greasy soot wherever it touched. Sometimes bits of real flesh went up the stacks and came down a surprising distance away. You couldn't very well keep Camp Humble's purpose a secret with a thing like that stinking up the air for miles around.

Somebody knocked on the door to Jeff 's office. "It's open," he called. "Come on in." A guard with a worried look obeyed. Guards who came into the commandant's office almost always wore a worried look; they wouldn't have been there if they didn't have something to worry about. "Well?" Jeff asked.

"Sir, we got us a nigger says he knows you," the guard said.

"And you waste my time with that shit?" Pinkard said scornfully. "Christ on a crutch, McIlhenny, it happens once a trainload. Either these coons know me or they're asshole buddies with the President, one. Like anybody'd be dumb enough to believe 'em."

"Sir, this here nigger's named Vespasian," McIlhenny said. "Says you and him and another coon named, uh, Agrippa used to work together at the Sloss Works in Birmingham. Reckon he's about your age, anyways."

"Well, fuck me," Jeff said in surprise.

"He's telling the truth?" the gray-uniformed guard asked.

"I reckon maybe he is," Jeff said. "The last war, they started using niggers more in factory jobs when white men got conscripted. I did work with those two, hell with me if I didn't."

"We didn't send him on right away," McIlhenny said. "Wanted to find out what you had in mind first.

You want, we can get rid of him. Or if you want to see him, we can do that, too."

"Vespasian." Jefferson Pinkard's voice was far away. He hadn't thought about Vespasian in years.

Sometimes the years he'd put in at the steel mill seemed to have happened to someone else, or in a different lifetime. But he said, "Yeah, I'll talk to him. He wasn't a bad nigger—not uppity or anything.

And he worked pretty hard."

"We were gonna put him in a truck," the guard said. If they had, Vespasian wouldn't be seeing anybody this side of the Pearly Gates. He looked apprehensive. Asphyxiating somebody the commandant really knew wouldn't do wonders for your career.

"Well, I'm glad you didn't." Pinkard heaved his bulk out of the chair behind his desk. A lot of fat padded the hard muscles he'd got working in the foundry. He grabbed a submachine gun off a wall bracket and made sure the drum magazine that fed it was full. If Vespasian had some sort of revenge in mind, he wouldn't go on a truck after all. Instead, he'd get ventilated on the spot. "Take me to him. He in the holding area?"

"Sure is, sir," the guard answered. Camp Humble had one, to give the guards the chance to deal with prisoners who were dangerous or just unusual.

"You searched him?" Jeff took nothing for granted. Some of the people who worked for him were dumb as rocks.

But the guard nodded. "Sure did, sir. Up the ass and everything." He made a face. "He ain't got nothin'."

"All right, then," Jeff said. It sounded as if the men in gray were on the ball this time.

When they got to the holding area, he found two more guards aiming assault rifles at Vespasian. One of them blinked. "Be damned," he said. "This mangy old coon wasn't blowing smoke, then?"

Vespasian wasn't exactly mangy, but he was only a shadow of the burly buck who'd worked alongside Jefferson Pinkard half a lifetime earlier. He was gray-haired and scrawny, and looked like a man who'd been through hell. If his train ride from Birmingham to Camp Humble was like most, he had.

A powerful stench clung to him. He hadn't washed in a long time, and hadn't always made it to a toilet or a slop bucket, either.

He nodded to Jeff not as one equal to another, but as a man who knew another man, anyhow. “Really is you, Mistuh Pinkard,” he said, his voice desert-dry and rough. “Been a hell of a long time, ain’t it?”

“Sure as hell has,” Jeff answered. He turned to the guards. “Get him some water. Reckon he can use it.”

“Do Jesus! You right about that,” Vespasian croaked. When the water came—in a pail, not a glass—he drank and drank. How long had he gone without? Days, plainly. And when he said, “That was mighty fine,” he sounded much more like his old self.

“What ever happened to that no-account cousin of yours or whatever the hell he was?” Jeff asked.

“You know the one I mean—the guy they threw in jail. What the hell was his name?”

“You mean Leonidas?” Vespasian said, and Jeff nodded. The black man went on, “They let him out after the las’ war was over—decided he weren’t no danger to the country or nobody else. He kept his nose clean afterwards. Got married, had a couple chillun. Died o’ TB a little befo’ the new war start.”

“How about that?” Jeff said. “I plumb lost touch with Birmingham lately.” He hesitated, then waved the guards away. “I’ll be all right, dammit,” he told them. “I got a gun, and he ain’t dumb enough to give me no trouble.” They didn’t like it, but the man who made the rules could break them, too. When the guards were out of earshot, Jeff asked Vespasian, “Ever hear what happened to that gal I used to be married to?”

“Yes, suh.” Vespasian nodded. “She went downhill pretty bad. Got to drinkin’ an’ carryin’ on with men. Ain’t heard nothin’ ’bout her in a while, though. Dunno if she’s alive or dead.”

“Huh.” Jeff ’s grunt was more self-satisfied than anything else. Run around on him, would Emily?

Whatever she got after he cut her loose served her right, as far as he was concerned. “Bitch,” he muttered under his breath. “Probably had a goddamn taxi meter between her legs.”

Vespasian either didn’t catch that or had the sense to pretend he didn’t. He lifted the pail to his mouth again. Pinkard tensed. If he

threw it…But he set it down and wiped his mouth on his filthy sleeve. “Ask you somethin’ now, suh?”

“Go ahead,” Jeff told him.

“What you do with me, now that I’m here?”

“You give people trouble?”

“Now, Mistuh Pinkard, you know I ain’t like that,” Vespasian said reproachfully.

“I sure do.” Jeff nodded. “I told McIlhenny the same thing when he said you were asking for me. So you just stay in the barracks and do like the guards tell you, and everything’ll be fine.”

“Sure weren’t fine comin’ here.” Vespasian didn’t sound as if he believed a word of it. He was nobody’s fool, evidently. Jeff knew what kind of lies he was telling. He didn’t have anything against Vespasian as a man, but he didn’t have the kind of affection for him that would have made him want to keep his former coworker around in defiance of the rules. The rules said the Confederacy needed to get rid of blacks. They caused the country more trouble than they were worth. From everything Jefferson Pinkard had seen, that was the gospel truth. And it was just Vespasian’s hard luck that he’d finally wound up at Camp Humble.

So Jeff shrugged and spread his hands and went right on lying. “I am sorry about that, honest to God.

Wish it could’ve been better. But there’s a war on.” That was the handy-dandy excuse for anything these days.

“Ain’t no reason to leave a man in his own filth. Ain’t no reason to have people die on the way to this here place,” Vespasian said. “What’s gonna happen to us all now that we’s here?” Fear and apprehension roughened his voice.

“You got to remember, this is nothin’ but a transit camp,” Jeff said—one more lie piled on all the others. “You’ll get some food, you’ll get cleaned up, and we’ll send you on the way again.” And so they would, on a journey from which Vespasian wouldn’t come back. “Then you’ll sit out the war somewhere else. Once we’re done licking the damnyankees, I reckon you’ll go on back to Birmingham. We’ll sort all that shit out then.”

“I got to wait till we lick the USA, reckon I’ll be at that other camp forever,” Vespasian said.

The gibe held much more truth than Jeff wished it did. It also played on his own fears. He tried not to show that, but he did call the guards back. “Take him off to the barracks that’s scheduled for the bathhouse next,” he told them. “Once he gets cleaned up, we’ll go from there.”

“Yes, sir,” the guards chorused. One of them nudged Vespasian. “Come on. You heard the boss. Get moving.”

Away Vespasian went. Did he know Jeff had just ordered him liquidated? Pretty soon, he’d go up the crematorium stack, one more smudge of soot in a system that didn’t work as well as advertised. Jeff might have found a lesson there had he been looking for one. Since he wasn’t, he didn’t worry about it.

He had a job to do, and he aimed to keep at it till it was done.

C ongresswoman Flora Blackford was sick to death of war. She didn’t know of anyone in the USA who wasn’t. But she also didn’t know of anyone except a few fools and lunatics who wanted to make peace with the Confederate States and Jake Featherston. There’d been more doubt and disagreement during the Great War. Had the European powers patched up a peace then, odds were the USA and CSA would have done the same. Now…The one thing Featherston had done was unify the United States—against him. No arguments about workers’ solidarity now, not even from the hardcore wing of the Socialist Party. Getting rid of the enemy came first.

Her secretary stuck her head into Flora’s inner office. “The Assistant Secretary of War is on the line, Congresswoman,” she said.

“Thank you, Bertha. Put him through,” Flora said.

She picked up the telephone on her desk even before the first ring finished. “Hello, Flora,” Franklin Roosevelt boomed. “How are you this lovely morning?”

Flora looked out the masking-taped window. It was pouring rain, and the weatherman said there was a chance of sleet tonight. Winter hadn’t got to Philadelphia, but you could see it coming. Roosevelt’s office down in the bowels of the War Department was only a few blocks from hers. “Have you been down there so long you’ve forgotten it’s not July any more?” she asked.

He chuckled merrily. “Well, you can see when you come over.”

Telephone lines coming out of the War Department and the Congressional office building were supposed to be the most secure in the USA. Saying too much over them wasn’t a good idea anyhow.

Roosevelt had something interesting, though. Flora was sure of that. “On my way,” she told him, and hung up.

Had the weather been halfway decent, she would have walked. As things were, she flagged a cab.

Even the short ride showed her a couple of hits from the new Confederate rockets. They were aiming at the center of government, but weren’t especially accurate; they fell all over Philadelphia. No warning was possible. The only thing you could do to stay safe was to be somewhere else when they came down.

“Ain’t they terrible? Ain’t they wicked?” said the cab driver, a middle-aged woman. “How come we don’t got nothin’ like that?”

“I expect we’re working on them.” Flora wasn’t exactly giving away military secrets by admitting that.

“We shoulda done it first,” the cabby said. “Blow them Confederate bastards to kingdom come without our boys gettin’ hurt.”

“That would be good.” Flora thought of her own son. Joshua was in basic training now. Pretty soon, if the war didn’t end first, they’d give him a rifle and turn him loose on the enemy. The enemy, unfortunately, had rifles—among other things—too.

Flora paid the driver, opened the cab’s door, opened her umbrella, and splashed up the broad stairs to the entrance to the War Department. She didn’t get *very* wet, but she didn’t exactly stay dry, either.

At the entrance, soldiers examined her ID with remorseless care before letting her in. She didn’t get very far in even then, not at first. A hard-faced woman frisked her in a sandbagged revetment that could blunt the force of a people bomb. Only then did a private with peach fuzz escort her down, down, down to Franklin Roosevelt’s office.

“You look like something the cat dragged in,” the Assistant Secretary of War exclaimed. “Can I fix you a drink? Purely medicinal, of

course.”

“Of course,” Flora said, deadpan. “Thanks. I’d love one.”

The medicinal alcohol turned out to be some fine scotch. “Confiscated from a British freighter,”

Roosevelt explained. “I arranged for a friend of mine in the Navy Department to get some good Tennessee sipping whiskey, and this is how he scratched my back.”

“Nice to have friends,” Flora said. “I like scotch better, too.”

“I still owe him a little something, or maybe not such a little something,” Roosevelt said. “The Navy’s been nice to us lately.”

“Has it?” Flora said. When Roosevelt nodded, she went on, “Does that have something to do with why you called me over?”

He beamed at her. “I knew you were smart. It sure does. A few days ago, one of our destroyer escorts met the U-517 somewhere in the North Atlantic. The Navy and the Germans worked out just where. It doesn’t matter anyhow, except that they *did* meet. The skipper of the submersible passed a package to the skipper of the *Josephus Daniels*—that’s the destroyer escort. Our ship brought the package in to Boston, and now we’ve got it.”

“What is it?” Flora asked. “Something to do with uranium, unless I’m crazy.”

“Right the first time,” Franklin Roosevelt agreed. “We finally managed to talk the Kaiser into letting us know just how far along the Germans are.”

“And?”

“And they’re ahead of us. Well, no surprise—most of the top nuclear physicists come from Germany or Austria-Hungary, and Bohr from Denmark is working for them, too,” Roosevelt said. “But this will speed us up. I don’t know all the details yet. Our people are still trying to figure out what the details are, if you know what I mean. It’s good news, though.”

“Sounds like it,” Flora said. “Have we got any good news about these Confederate rockets?”

“Not much.” Roosevelt’s jaunty smile slipped. When it did, she could see how worn and weary he was. He looked like a man busy working himself to death. She couldn’t even say anything, because he was far from the only one doing the same thing. He paused to light a cigarette and suck in smoke through the holder he liked to use. “About all we can do is bomb their launchers, and they’ve made them portable, so the damn things—excuse me—aren’t easy to find.”

“And in the meantime we sit here and take it,” Flora said. “Can we bomb the factories where they make the rockets?”

“When we find ’em, we’ll bomb ’em,” Roosevelt promised. “I wish the Confederates would paint *Rocket Factory* on the roof in big letters. It sure would make reconnaissance a lot easier. We do keep plugging away.”

“I’m so glad,” Flora murmured, which made Roosevelt laugh. “What about the town where they’re working on uranium? Are we still giving it the once-over?”

“Every chance we get,” he replied. “They’ve got antiaircraft fire like you wouldn’t believe all around Lexington—oops. Pretend you didn’t hear that.”

“Pretend I didn’t hear what?” Flora said, and Franklin Roosevelt laughed again.

“Yeah, the flak is thick enough to land on, the pilots say,” he continued, “and they put night fighters in the air, too. They’ve quit pretending it’s not important. They know we know it is, and they’re doing their best to keep us away.”

“I take it their best isn’t good enough?”

The Assistant Secretary of War shook his strong-jawed head. “Not even close. We’re punishing them—that’s the only word for it. I happen to know their boss researcher went to Richmond not long ago to squall like a branded calf. I wish I would have found out sooner. I might have tried to arrange to put him out of action for good.”

“You have people in Richmond who can arrange that?” Flora asked with faint, or maybe not so faint, distaste. The Confederates made a policy of rubbing out U.S. officers they found dangerous. Turnabout was fair play, but even so…“War is a filthy business.”

“It sure is. And the only thing worse than a war is a lost war. Two of

those a lifetime ago almost ruined the country forever," Roosevelt said. "So, yes, there are people who would have tried to make sure Professor So-and-So never stood up in front of a blackboard again. No guarantees, of course, but we would have had a go at it."

"Would killing him make that much difference to the Confederate war effort?"

"No way to be sure, but we think so. He gets almost anything he wants when it comes to money and equipment. They know how important a uranium bomb is for them. If they get it first, they can still lick us.

If they don't, we'll knock them flat and then we'll start kicking them."

"*Alevai*," Flora said. Roosevelt looked quizzical; no reason he should know Yiddish. She explained:

"It means something like *hopefully* or *God willing*."

"He'd better be willing. If He's not, He's as sleepy as Elijah said Baal was," Roosevelt said. "They *need* licking, dammit. That Camp Determination turned out to be even worse than you said. I hadn't imagined it could, but there you are. What General Dowling found would gag a maggot. It really would."

Flora resisted the impulse to shout, *I told you so!* She had, over and over again, but it was too late to do anything about that now. Instead, she said, "It's not the only camp they're running. They've got plenty more, from east Texas to Alabama. If we can wreck the rail lines going into them, we slow the slaughter, anyhow."

"We're doing some of that," Roosevelt said. "It's not our top priority, I admit. Beating the enemy in the field is. But we're doing what we can." He clicked his tongue between his teeth. "With all the effort the Confederate States are putting into the camps, I think Featherston would just as soon kill off his Negroes as beat us. If that's not insane, it's certainly strange."

"Depends on how you look at things," Flora replied. "Even if they lose, the Negroes will still be gone for good. And the Freedom Party thinks it *is* good."

"If they lose, the Freedom Party is gone for good. I don't think they've figured that out yet," Roosevelt said grimly. "If they lose, chances are the Confederate States of America are gone for good, too. I'm sure

those goons haven't figured that out yet."

"What do we do with them?" Flora asked. "Can we occupy everything from the border of Alaska all the way to the Rio Grande?"

"Can we *not*?" Roosevelt returned, and she had no good answer for him.

"What we got from the Germans really will help us build our bomb?" she said. He was bound to be right about one thing: winning came first.

"The physicists say it will. They're right more often than they're wrong, seems like. They'd better be, anyhow," Roosevelt said. "I just pray some British or French sub hasn't carried papers like that to the Confederacy."

"*Oy!* " That dismayed Flora into Yiddish again. "That would be terrible!"

"It sure would," Roosevelt said. "And the Confederates have something to trade for it, too. I bet the English and the French would just love to shoot rockets way into Germany."

"*Oy!* " Flora repeated. "What can we do about it?"

"Sink all the submersibles we can, and hope we get the one that's packed full of secret plans,"

Roosevelt answered. "And yes, I know—what are the odds? But we can't very well tell the enemy not to help their allies. That would make them more likely to do it, not less."

"I'm afraid you're right," Flora said after thinking it over. She sighed. "When we broke into Georgia, I thought the war was as good as won. But it'll come right down to the wire, won't it?"

"Maybe not. Maybe we'll just knock them flat," the Assistant Secretary of War said. "But they've got some rabbits they could pull out of the hat. We'll do everything we can to steal the hat or burn it, but if they hang on to it…Last time around, we could see we'd win months before we finally did. Not so easy to be sure now. That's not for public consumption, of course. Officially, everything's just fine."

"Officially, everything's always fine. Officially, everything was fine when the Confederates were driving on Lake Erie to cut us in half,"

Flora said.

“Can’t go around saying things are bad and we’re losing. People might believe us.”

“Why? They don’t believe us when we tell them everything’s just fine. By now, they must figure we lie to them all the time.” Flora listened to herself with something approaching horror. Had she really turned so cynical? She feared she had.

T he British ambassador is here to see you, Mr. President,” Jake Featherston’s secretary announced.

“Thanks, Lulu. Send him in,” the President of the CSA said.

Lord Halifax was tall and thin, with a long bald head and a pinched mouth and jaw. He reminded Jake of a walking thermometer, bulb uppermost. No matter what he looked like, though, no denying he was one sharp bird. “Mr. President,” he murmured in an accent almost a caricature of an upper-class Englishman’s.

“Good to see you, Your Excellency.” Featherston held out his hand. Halifax shook it. His grip wasn’t the dead fish you would expect. The President waved him to a chair. “Have a seat. Glad you came through the last raid all right.”

“Our embassy has an excellent shelter. Indeed, these days the shelter *is* the embassy, more or less,”

Halifax said. “The chaps who stay on, I’m afraid, draw hazardous-duty pay.”

You can’t stop the United States from bombing the crap out of your capital. That was what he meant, even if he was too much the diplomat to come out and say it. “Yeah, well, I hear the Germans and Austrians up in Philadelphia get bonuses, too,” Jake said. *They may be hurting us, but we’re still in it.*

In meetings like this, words were smoke screens, concealing what lay behind them.

“Indeed,” Halifax said, which might have meant *It could be* or, just as easily, *My ass*.

“I’m hoping your country can do more to keep the Canadians fired up

against the United States," Jake said.

"Believe me, Mr. President, we're doing everything we can, this being in our interest as well," Lord Halifax replied. "The naval situation in the Atlantic remaining complex, however, we cannot do as much as we would wish. And events on the Continent naturally influence other commitments of scarce resources."

Jake had no trouble translating that into plain English. The Germans were pushing England and France back. The limeys didn't have so much to spare for adventures on this side of the Atlantic as they'd had when things were going better closer to home.

"What the damnyankees aren't using up there, they're shooting at us," Featherston said. "If we go under, they aim everything at you. How long do you think you'll last if they do?" They had a generation earlier, and the United Kingdom didn't last long. Chances were it wouldn't now, either.

And Lord Halifax couldn't shoot that one back at him. The USA could go after Britain in a big way if the CSA went under—could and would. But if Britain went down, Germany wouldn't care about the Confederacy. The Confederate States were no threat to the Kaiser, not till they got a uranium bomb.

When they did, the whole goddamn world needed to watch out.

"I said we were doing everything we could, Mr President, and I assure you I meant it most sincerely,"

the British ambassador said. "We appreciate the CSA's importance to the overall strategic picture, believe you me we do. Our task would become much more difficult if the United States was prosecuting the Atlantic war with all their energy and resources."

You are *tying the damnyankees down for us*. Again, Halifax's words were pretty straightforward.

He had to figure Jake could see that much for himself. And Jake could.

He leaned forward across his desk toward the limey. "Fair enough," he said, his rasping voice and harsh, half-educated accent contrasting sharply with Halifax's soft, elegant tones. "Now we come down to it. If you need us in the war, if you need us to lick the USA for you, why

the hell won't you tell us what all you know about uranium bombs? We've got our own project going—you can bet your bottom dollar on that. But if you give us a hand, it helps you and us both. Sooner we start blowing the damnyankees sky-high, the happier everybody'll be. Except them, I mean."

Halifax's bony face never showed much; he would have made a dangerous poker player. But his eyebrows rose a fraction now. Maybe he hadn't expected Jake to be so direct. If he hadn't, he didn't know the President of the Confederate States as well as he thought he did.

"Uranium is an extremely delicate subject," he said at last.

"Tell me about it!" Featherston exclaimed. "Even so, you think the United States aren't working on a bomb of their own? Suppose they get it before we do. They'll blast Richmond off the map, and New Orleans, and Atlanta—"

"Assuming Atlanta hasn't fallen by then," Halifax said.

Fuck you, Charlie. Featherston almost said it, and diplomacy be damned. At the last instant, he bit his tongue. What he did say was, "Yeah, well, suppose they knock us out of the war. Then what? How long before London goes up in smoke? About as long as it takes to get a bomb across the ocean."

Lord Halifax looked physically ill. "The United States aren't our only worry on that score," he choked out.

"I know. Damn Germans started this whole mess. Somebody should've strangled that Einstein bastard when he was a baby." Jake scowled. "Too late to get all hot and bothered about it now. Look, I don't even know how far along you guys are. Maybe we're ahead of you."

The British ambassador winced, ever so slightly. *Ah, that got him*, Jake thought with an internal grin.

The mere idea that backward half-colonials across the sea could get ahead of the high and mighty lords of creation on their own foggy island had to rankle.

To make sure it did, Jake added, "After all, we're a long ways ahead of you when it comes to rockets. Ask the Yankees if you don't believe me."

Halifax winced again, more obviously this time. Jake Featherston's

internal grin got wider. “Quite,”

Halifax muttered: a one-word admission of pain.

“Reckon we can work a swap?” Jake asked. “We’ll tell you what we know. We’re not afraid of our allies. If you want to shoot rockets at the Germans, more power to you. Blow ’em to hell and gone. I won’t shed a tear, and you can bet your…backside on that.”

“An interesting proposal,” the ambassador said. “I am not authorized to agree to it, but I shall put it to the Prime Minister. If he deems it feasible, we can proceed from there.”

“How long will that take?”

“My dear sir!” Lord Halifax spread his hands. “That’s in Winston’s court, I’m afraid, not mine. I will say he is not a man in the habit of brooking delay.”

Featherston wondered if they really did speak the same language. He thought he understood what the British ambassador meant, but he wasn’t sure. Hoping he did, he answered, “He’d better not wait around. You’re in trouble, and so are we. The more we can help each other, the better our chances, right?”

“One could hardly disagree,” Halifax said.

“Fair enough.” But Jake wasn’t smiling. He was scowling. “Thing you’ve got to remember is, this cuts both ways. You want what we know about rockets—any fool can see you do. You want to get, but you don’t want to give. And I’m here to tell you, your Lordship, sir, that ain’t gonna fly.”

Lord Halifax *was* a diplomat. If Featherston’s bluntness offended him, he didn’t let on. “I assure you, Mr. President, I intend to make your views plain to the Prime Minister. What happens after that is up to him.”

Jake knew perfectly well he would have the hide of any Confederate ambassador who exceeded his authority. In fairness, he couldn’t blame Winston Churchill for feeling the same way. But his definition of fairness was simple. If he got what he wanted, that was fair. Anything less, and the other side was holding out on him.

Most of the time, he admired Churchill. Like him, the Prime Minister

had spent much too long as a voice crying in the wilderness. In a way, Churchill had a tougher job than he did. Britain needed to worry about fighting both the USA and the German Empire.

But Britain hadn't been invaded the last time around. She hadn't been disarmed and had to start over.

All she'd lost was Ireland—and the way the Irish felt about their longtime overlords meant she might be better off without it. With Ireland gone, the British didn't have to worry about keeping the lid on a country where a third of the population hated the guts of the other two-thirds. Ireland was under British control now, to keep the USA from using it as a forward base, but military occupation had a whole different set of rules. The limeys weren't as tough on the micks as the Freedom Party was on Confederate Negroes, but they didn't take any crap, either.

"Tell him not to wait around, that's all," Jake said. "For his sake and ours."

"Winston is a great many things, but not a ditherer. He may from time to time find himself mistaken. He hardly ever finds himself unsure," Halifax said. "I do not know what his answer will be. I am confident you will have it in short order."

"Good. Anything else?" Jake was no ditherer, either.

"The United States are making a good deal of propaganda capital from that camp they captured in Texas," Lord Halifax said. "Did you have to be quite so open in your destruction of the colored populace?"

"You know what, Your Excellency? I don't give a shit how much the damnyankees squawk about that." Jake wasn't being truthful, but he didn't care. He had to make the limey understand. "What we do inside our own country is nobody's business but ours. We've had a nigger problem for hundreds of years—even before we broke away from England. Now I'm finally doing something about it, and I really don't care who doesn't like that. We're going to come out of this war nigger-free, or as close to nigger-free as I can make us."

"Your solution is…heroic," Halifax said.

Jake liked that better than the British ambassador probably intended. He felt like a hero for reducing the CSA's colored population. "I keep my campaign promises, by God," he said.

“No one has ever doubted your determination.” Lord Halifax got to his feet. “If you will excuse me…”

He left the President’s office.

When Lulu looked in after Halifax was gone, Jake Featherston asked, “Who’s next?”

“Mr. Goldman, sir.”

“Send him in, send him in.”

Saul Goldman had grown bald and pudgy in the twenty-odd years Jake had known him. That had nothing to do with anything. The little Jew still made a damned effective Director of Communications.

Because he did, he could speak his mind to the President, or come closer than most of the glad-handing yes-men who surrounded Featherston.

“I don’t know how I can present any more losses in Georgia,” he said now. “People will know I’m whistling in the dark no matter what I say.”

“Then don’t say anything,” Jake answered. “Just say the Yankees are spewing out a pack of lies—and they are—and let it go at that.”

Goldman cocked his head to one side, considering. “It could work…for a while. But if Atlanta falls, sir, it’s a propaganda disaster.”

“If Atlanta falls, it’s a fucking military disaster, and the hell with propaganda,” Featherston said. “I don’t think that’ll happen any time soon.” He hoped *he* wasn’t whistling in the dark. The news from Georgia was bad, and getting worse despite the fall rains.

“You know more about that than I do. I’m not a general, and I don’t pretend to be,” Goldman said.

“Don’t know why the hell not,” Jake told him. “Seems like every damn fool in the country wants to tell me how to run the war. Why should you be any different?” He held up a hand. “I know why—you aren’t a damn fool.”

“I try not to be, anyhow,” Goldman said.

“You do pretty well. Half of being smart is knowing what you’re not smart at,” Jake said. “Plenty of folks reckon that ’cause they know

something, they know everything. And that ain't the way it works."

"I never said it was," Goldman answered primly.

"Yeah, I know," Jake said. "You make one."

A s far as Irving Morrell knew, he was unique among U.S. generals, with the possible exception of a few big brains high up in the General Staff. His colleagues thought about winning battles. After they won one, if they did, they worried about the next one.

Morrell was different. He thought about smashing the Confederate States of America flat. To him, that was the goal. Battles were nothing in themselves. They were just the means he needed to reach that end.

Back when the CSA still had soldiers in Ohio, he'd drawn a slashing line on the map, one that ran from Kentucky through Tennessee and Georgia to the Atlantic. That was where he was going now. He aimed to cut the Confederacy in half. Once he did, he figured the Confederate States would do what anything cut in half did.

They would die.

The question uppermost in his mind now was simple: could he go on to the ocean without bothering to capture Atlanta first? Would the enemy die fast enough afterwards to make the risk worthwhile?

He pondered a map. The chart was tacked to the wall of what had been a dentist's office in Monroe, Georgia, more than fifty miles east of Atlanta. He would have used the mayor's office, but a direct hit from a 105 left it draftier than he liked.

Monroe had had a couple of big cotton-processing plants, both of them now rubble. It had had a couple of fine houses that dated back to the days before the War of Secession, both of them now burnt.

War had never come to this part of the CSA before. It was here now, and it made itself at home.

Reluctantly, Morrell decided Atlanta would have to fall before he stormed east again. It gave the enemy too good a base for launching a counteroffensive against his flank if he ignored it. Too many roads and railroads ran through the place. He couldn't be sure enough his air power would keep them all out of commission to ignore it. Taking chances was one thing. Taking stupid chances was something else

again.

He didn't want to charge right into the city. He aimed to envelop it instead. That way, the Confederates couldn't do unto him as the USA did unto them in Pittsburgh. An attacking army that took a city block by block put its own dick in the meat grinder and turned the crank.

No help would come to Atlanta from the north or the east, and the bulk of the CSA's strength lay in those directions. The Confederate States were like a snail. They had a hard shell that protected them from the United States. Once you broke through, though, you found they were soft and squishy underneath. How much could they bring in from Florida or Alabama? Not nearly enough—or Morrell didn't think so, anyhow.

Back when he first proposed his slash, the General Staff estimated it would take two years, not one.

When Chattanooga fell, he'd hoped to prove them wrong. He might yet, but racing ahead for the sake of speed wasn't smart.

"Then don't do it," he muttered, and headed out of the office. On the floor lay the dentist's diploma from Tulane University, the glass in the frame shattered. Morrell wondered whether the man was still practicing in Monroe or had put on a butternut uniform and gone up toward the front.

Two black men carrying rifles stalked along the street. They wore armbands with USA on them. White civilians fell over themselves getting out of their way. They waved and nodded to Morrell: not quite salutes, but close enough. He nodded back. The Negro guerrillas made him nervous, too. But they scared white Confederates to death, which was good, and they knew more about what was going on here than U.S. troops did, which was even better.

Sometimes they shot first, without bothering to ask questions later. Morrell was sure they'd killed a few people who didn't deserve killing. But how many Negroes who didn't deserve killing were dead all across the CSA? A little extra revenge might be too bad, but Morrell didn't intend to lose any sleep about it.

Except for guerrillas, not many Negroes were left in and around Monroe, or anywhere U.S. armies had reached. White people seemed to suffer from a kind of collective amnesia. More often than not, they denied there'd ever been many blacks close by. In Kentucky, they said the Negroes mostly lived in Tennessee. In Tennessee, they said the

Negroes mostly lived in Georgia. Here in Georgia, they pointed two ways at once: towards Alabama and South Carolina. Was that selective blindness, a guilty conscience, or both? Morrell would have bet on both.

“Young man!” A Confederate dowager swept down on him. “I need to speak to you, young man!”

Morrell almost looked over his shoulder to see whom she meant. He’d passed fifty a couple of years before, and his weather-beaten features didn’t seem young even to himself. But her gray hair and the turkeylike wattles under her chin said she was some distance ahead of him. “What can I do for you, ma’am?” he asked, as politely as he could.

“Young man, I know you come from the United States, and so are ignorant of a good deal of proper behavior, but I must tell you that colored people are not permitted to go armed in this country,” she said.

He looked at her. He did his best to look through her. “They are now.”

“By whose authority?” she demanded.

“Mine.” He tapped the stars on his shoulder strap.

“You should be ashamed of yourself, in that case,” she said.

Of itself, his hand dropped to the .45 he wore on his belt. “Lady, I think you better get lost before I blow your stupid head off,” he said. “You people did your best to murder every Negro you could catch, and you have the gall to talk to me about shame…There’s not a word low enough for you.”

“The nerve!” The matron flounced off. Reality hadn’t set in for her. He wondered if it ever would, or could.

Over in Texas, General Dowling had taken local big shots through the Confederate death camp and into the mass graveyard so they could see with their own eyes what their country had done. Some of them had the decency to kill themselves afterwards. Others just went on the way they had before.

Morrell wished he had one of those camps to show the locals. Then they wouldn’t be able to shrug and pretend there’d never been that many Negroes in this part of the CSA. But he feared the matron

wouldn't be much impressed afterwards. She was one of those people for whom nothing seemed real if it didn't happen to her.

Somebody'd painted YANKS OUT! on a wall. Morrell grabbed the first soldier he saw. "Get some paint and grab a couple of these assholes and have 'em clean this shit up," he told the man in green-gray.

"If they give you a hard time, do whatever you have to do to get 'em to pay attention."

"Yes, *sir*!" the soldier said, and went off to take care of it with a grin on his face.

Artillery rumbled, off to the northeast. Morrell cocked his head to one side, listening, gauging. Those were Confederate guns. The enemy was still trying to blunt the U.S. attack and drive Morrell's forces back. He didn't think Featherston's men could do it. Before long, counterbattery fire or air strikes would make those C.S. gun bunnies sorry they'd ever been born, and even sorrier they'd tried messing with the U.S. Army.

From what Morrell had seen, the only thing Confederate civilians were sorry about was that their army hadn't done a better job of keeping the damnyankees away. Somehow, that left him imperfectly sympathetic.

"General!" Another woman called to him. This one was young and blond and pretty, pretty enough to remind him how long he'd been away from Agnes. She also looked mad enough to spit nails.

"Yes?" He'd give her the benefit of the doubt as long as he could.

"Those niggers of yours!" she snapped.

"What about 'em?" Morrell didn't want them getting out of hand and raping all the women they could catch. He could understand why they'd want to. He could sympathize, too. But he wasn't running a mob.

He was running an army, or trying to.

"They *looked* at me. They *leered* at me, the grinning apes," the blond woman said. "You ought to string them up and horsewhip them."

Morrell needed a moment to realize she was dead serious. When he did, he almost wished the Negroes had dragged her into an alley and

done their worst. “That’s not how things’ll work from here on out, so you’d better get used to it,” he said. “Nobody gets whipped for looking. Heck, I’m looking right now. You’re worth looking at, no offense.”

“Well, of course.” As pretty women often did, she took her good looks for granted. “But I don’t mind it from you—too much. You’re a Yankee, but you’re not a nigger.”

“If they touch you and you don’t like it, you can complain. If anybody touches you and you don’t like it, you can complain,” Morrell said. “But they can look as much as they want.”

“You mean you won’t do anything about it?” The blond woman sounded as if she couldn’t believe her ears. She looked disgusted, almost nauseated.

“That’s what I said,” Morrell told her.

“You damnyankees really *are* animals, then.” She pursed her lips, perhaps getting ready to spit at him.

“If you do anything stupid,” he said, “you’ll find out just what kind of animal I am. You won’t like it—I promise.”

He didn’t shout and bluster. That had never been his style. He didn’t need to. He sounded like a man who meant exactly what he said, and for a good reason: he was. The local woman stopped looking like somebody saving up spit. She did look a little deflated. Then she gathered herself, flung, “Nigger-lover!”

in his face instead of saliva, and stalked off. Fury gave her a fine hip action. Morrell admired it. He was sure the Negro auxiliaries had, too.

Up till now, he hadn’t had much use for Negroes. Few whites in the USA did. Had he seen a couple of black men staring at a white woman’s butt on a street corner in, say, Indianapolis, that might have offended him. In Monroe, Georgia? No. In fact, he smiled. The enemies of his enemies were his friends, all right.

After dark, Confederate bombers came over Monroe and dropped explosives on the U.S. soldiers in and around the town—and on their own people. A thin layer of low clouds hung above Monroe, so the Confederates might as well have been bombing blind. They couldn’t come over by day, not unless they wanted to get slaughtered. In their shoes, Morrell supposed he would have preferred bombing blind to

not bombing at all, too.

He had a few minutes' warning from Y-ranging gear that spotted the approaching bombers and sounded the alarm before they started unloading. U.S. night fighters were also starting to carry Y-ranging sets. So far, those sets were neither very strong nor very easy to use, but they were already making night operations more expensive for the CSA. Pretty soon, electronics might make nighttime raids as risky as daylight ones.

Crouching in a trench with bombs crashing down around him, Morrell could see a day where neither side on a battlefield would be able to hide anything from the other. How would you fight a war then? You could be so strong you'd beat your enemy even if he did see what you had in mind. You could, yes, but it wouldn't be easy, or economical.

Or you could make him think all your fancy preparations meant one thing and then go and do something else instead. Morrell nodded to himself. If he had his druthers, he would play it that way. If the enemy kept staring at the cape, he wouldn't see the sword till too late. You saved your own men and matériel that way…if you could bring it off.

The all-clear warbled. Morrell got out of the trench and went back to his cot. He didn't know how much damage the Confederates had done. Probably some—probably not a lot. Without a doubt, they'd screwed a lot of U.S. soldiers out of a night's sleep. That counted, too, though no civilians who hadn't got up groggy after an air raid would think so. Morrell yawned. His eyes closed. Air raid or not, the Confederates didn't screw him out of more than forty-five minutes.

J onathan Moss had been on the run ever since a tornado let him break out of the Andersonville POW

camp. Joining Spartacus' band of Negro guerrillas had kept the Confederates from getting him (it had also kept the guerrillas from shooting him and Nick Cantarella). But joining them also ensured that he stayed on the run.

U.S. forces weren't far away now. The rumble of artillery and the thud of bursting bombs came from the north by day and night. Running off to the troops from his own side would have been easy as pie…if not for God only knew how many divisions' worth of Jake Featherston's finest between him and them.

“We gots to sit tight,” Spartacus told his men—again and again, a sure sign they didn’t want to listen to him. “We gots to. Pretty soon, the Yankees, they comes to us. Then we is free men fo’ true. We is free at las’.”

Moss and Cantarella caught each other’s eye. Moss doubted it would be so simple. By the New York infantry officer’s raised eyebrow, so did he.

And, however much they wished they weren’t, they turned out to be right. For a long time, the countryside a hundred miles south of Atlanta had been a military backwater: peanut farms and cotton fields, patrolled—when they were patrolled—by halfhearted Mexican soldiers and by militiamen whose stamina and skill didn’t match their zeal. Good guerrilla country, in other words.

No more. With the U.S. irruption into northern Georgia, with the threat to Atlanta, southern Georgia suddenly turned into a military zone. Encampments and supply dumps sprouted like toadstools after a rain. Truck convoys and trains brought supplies and soldiers up toward the front.

All that gave Spartacus’ band and the other black guerrillas still operating chances they’d never had before. If they mined a road and delayed a column of trucks, if they sprayed machine-gun bullets at a tent city in the middle of the night, they really hurt the Confederate war effort. From everything Jonathan Moss gathered from the news and rumors he picked up, the Confederate States couldn’t afford even fleabites on their backside. They already had too much trouble right in front of them.

The enemy seemed to feel the same way. When Spartacus’ guerrillas did strike, the men in butternut went after them with a ferocity they hadn’t seen before. If Spartacus hadn’t been fighting in country he knew better than the enemy did, the Confederates would have wiped out his band in short order. As things were, his men scrambled from woods to swamp, half a jump ahead of their pursuers.

Moss developed a new appreciation for possum and squirrel and turtle. The Negroes called one kind of long-necked terrapin, chicken turtles, presumably because of how they tasted. Moss couldn’t see the resemblance. He didn’t spend much time bitching, though; any meat in his belly was better than none.

Looking down at what was left of himself one weary evening, he said,

“Back before the war, I had a potbelly. One of these days, I’d like to get another one.”

“Some of the shit we eat makes Army rations look good,” Nick Cantarella agreed. “Don’t know that I could say anything worse about it.”

Amusement glinted in Spartacus’ eyes as he looked from one white man to the other. “I’s mighty sorry to inconvenience you gents—*mighty* sorry,” he said. “If ’n you knows where we kin git us some ribs and beefsteaks, sing out.”

“Steak! Jesus!” Cantarella started to laugh. “I even stopped thinking about steak. What the hell’s the point?”

“How about Confederate rations?” Spartacus asked, the mockery gone from his voice.

Hearing the change in tone, Moss grew alert. “What do you have in mind, boss?” he asked.

Spartacus smiled; he liked hearing the white men in his band acknowledge that he outranked them.

“They got that new depot over by Americus,” he said.

“Think we can hit it?” Cantarella asked.

“Hope so, anyways,” Spartacus answered. “I got me a pretty good notion where they keeps the ration tins, too. See, here’s what I got in mind…”

He sketched on the muddy ground with a stick. He wouldn’t have done so much explaining for the other Negroes, but he thought of the escaped U.S. soldiers as military professionals, and valued their opinion. With Nick Cantarella, that was justified. Moss knew it was a lot less so for him.

He listened to Spartacus and tried to look wise. Cantarella, sure as hell, had a couple of suggestions that made the guerrilla leader nod in admiration. “Yeah, we do dat,” Spartacus said. “We sure ’nough do dat. Featherston’s fuckers, dey don’t know which way dey should oughta run.”

“That’s the idea,” Cantarella said. “If they go in a bunch of wrong directions, the right one gets easier for us.”

The guerrillas struck at night. They stayed under cover while the sun was in the sky. Doing anything else would have asked to get slaughtered. A Negro threw a grenade into the depot from the north, while another black banged away with a Tredegar—trying to stir up the anthill.

They did it, too. Whistles shrilled. Men shouted. Soldiers boiled out after the Negroes. Moss hoped the guerrillas had splendid hidey-holes or quick legs.

As soon as the Confederates were well and truly stirred, the guerrillas' machine gun opened up from the west. Nick Cantarella had finally persuaded the gunner to fire short bursts and not squeeze off a belt of ammo at a time. It made the weapon much more effective and much more accurate.

Somebody inside the supply dump yelled, "Let's *get* those coons, goddammit! They come around here, they give us the chance to wreck 'em. We better not waste it." Shouted orders followed. The officer—he plainly was one—knew what he was doing, and how to get his men to do what he wanted.

A scream said at least one machine-gun bullet struck home. The Confederates fired back. They also started moving against the machine gun. A few black riflemen posted near the guerrillas' heavy weapon discouraged that. They were more mobile than the machine-gun crew, and gave the C.S. attackers some unpleasant surprises.

But the big surprise the guerrillas had in mind came from the far side of the supply depot. As soon as the Confederates were well engaged to the west, Spartacus whistled to the rest of the band and said,

"Let's go!"

As it always did when he went into action, Jonathan Moss' heart pounded. He clutched his Tredegar and loped forward. Cutters snipped through the strands of barbed wire around the depot. The supply dump was new and in a rear area. The Confederates hadn't had the time or energy to protect it the way they would have closer to the front.

"No shootin' here, remember—not unless you got to," Spartacus called quietly. "In an' out fast as you can, like you was screwin' with her pappy asleep right beside you." From the way some of the Negroes chuckled, they'd done things like that.

Most of them carried rifles or pistols or submachine guns. Three or four, though, pushed wheelbarrows instead. Moss couldn't imagine a homelier weapon of war. But a man with a wheelbarrow could move much more food than someone who had to carry a crate in his arms or on his back.

"What the hell?" a Confederate called—the Negroes weren't quiet enough to escape all notice.

"We're on patrol here," Moss said, doing his best to imitate a Southern accent. "Why the devil aren't you chasing those damn niggers?"

"Uh—on my way, sir."

Moss heard rapidly retreating footsteps. He knew he'd better not laugh out loud. In his own ears, he hadn't sounded much like a Confederate at all. But he had sounded like a white man, and the soldier never dreamt he'd run into a damnyankee here. To him, anybody who sounded like a white had to be on his side, and anybody who sounded like an authoritative white had to be entitled to order him around.

"How d'you like being a Confederate officer?" Nick Cantarella whispered.

"Fine, except the bastards don't pay me," Moss whispered back.

"Hell they don't," Spartacus said. "We's at the payoff now. In there, boys—grab an' git!"

The Negroes rushed into the tent that sheltered crates of rations from the elements. Soft thumps announced that several of those crates were going into the wheelbarrows. The guerrillas emerged, their grins the most visible thing about them.

Then a shot rang out. "Jesus God, we got chicken thieves!" a Confederate screamed.

One of the chicken thieves shot him an instant later. "Scram!" Spartacus said—surely the most succinct order Moss had ever heard. It was also just right for the circumstances.

Firing as they went, the guerrillas withdrew from the depot. Men with rifles and submachine guns covered the wheelbarrows' retreat. When a bullet struck home with a wet slapping sound, a hauler dropped. Nick Cantarella grabbed the wheelbarrow handles and got it moving

again.

They made it out of the supply dump and back into the woods. Moss' greatest worry was that the Confederates would pursue hard, but they didn't. "Shit, they already did more than I figured they would,"

Cantarella said. "They're rear-echelon troops, clerks and stevedores in uniform. If they wanted to mix it up, they'd be at the front."

"I guess," Moss said. "I'm not complaining, believe me."

Cantarella gave him the ghost of a grin. "Didn't think you were. That was smart, what you did there to keep the one asshole off our ass."

"Thanks." Praise from the other Army officer always made Moss feel good. It made him feel like a real soldier, not a pilot stuck in the middle of a ground war he didn't understand—which he was.

Once the guerrillas got clear of the depot, Spartacus abandoned the wheelbarrows. His men grumbled, but he held firm. "Gotta do it," he said. "Otherwise, them wheels show the butternut bastards every place we been. Trail's a lot harder to get rid of than footprints."

Moss and Cantarella took their turns playing pack mule along with everybody else. White skin gave them no special privileges here. If they'd tried to claim any, they wouldn't have lasted long. Moss wondered whether Confederates caught in like circumstances would have been smart enough to figure that out. After some of the things he'd seen in Georgia, he wouldn't have bet on it.

His back grumbled at lugging—toting, they said down here—a heavy crate. He was the oldest man in the guerrilla band. Spartacus, who'd been a Confederate noncom in the Great War, was within a couple of years of him, but Spartacus was the CO. Nobody expected him to fetch and carry.

After what seemed like forever, the Negroes and the U.S. soldiers they'd taken in got back to the swampy hideout from which they'd started. And then…to the victors went the spoils. "Let's eat!"

Spartacus said, and they did.

C.S. military rations were nothing to write home about. In truces to pick up wounded men, Confederate soldiers traded tobacco and coffee to their U.S. counterparts for canned goods made in the USA. And U.S. rations, as Moss knew too well, wouldn't put the Waldorf out of

business any time soon.

But greasy hash and salty stew filled the belly. Moss' had rubbed up against his backbone too often lately. He was amazed at how many tins of meat he could bolt down before he even started getting full.

"Man, I feel like I swallowed a medicine ball," Nick Cantarella said after a while.

"Yeah, me, too," Moss said. "I like it."

He lit a cigarette, the way he might have after a fine meal in a fancy restaurant. He'd had plenty to eat, and nobody was shooting at him right this minute. How could life get any better?

C incinnatus Driver wanted to strut through the streets of Ellijay, Georgia. Strutting wasn't in the cards when you walked with a cane and a limp, but he felt like it anyway. How could a black man from the USA *not* want to strut in a little town his country had taken away from the Confederacy?

Here I am! he felt like shouting. *What are you ofay bastards gonna do about it?* And the whites of Ellijay couldn't do one damn thing, not unless they wanted the U.S. Army to land on them with both feet.

The hamlet seemed pleasant enough, with a grassy town square centered on a rock fountain. Groves of apple and peach trees grew nearby; Cincinnatus had heard the trout and bass fishing in the nearby stream was first-rate. Ellijay probably made a nice place to live…for whites.

Whenever the locals saw Cincinnatus, though, the way they acted gave him the chills. They stared at him as if he were a rare animal in a zoo—a passenger pigeon come back to life, say. They hadn't thought any Negroes were left in these parts, and didn't bother hiding their surprise.

"What're you *doin'* here?" a gray-haired man in bib overalls asked around an enormous chaw.

"Drivin' a truck for the United States of America," Cincinnatus answered proudly. "Helping the Army blow all this Confederate white trash to hell and gone."

He thought the Georgian would swallow the cud of tobacco. “You can’t talk that way! You ought to be strung up, you know that?”

Along with his cane, Cincinnatus carried a submachine gun some Confederate soldier would never need again. He gestured with it. “You try, Uncle, an’ it’s the last dumb thing you ever do.”

“Uncle? *Uncle?* ” That pissed the white man off as much as Cincinnatus hoped it would. It was what Confederate whites called Negroes too old to get called *boy*. Throwing it in the local’s face felt wonderful. “You can’t speak to me that way! I’ll talk to your officer, by God, and he’ll teach you respect.”

Cincinnatus laughed in his face. “You’re the enemy, Uncle, and we done beat you. We don’t need to waste respect on the likes of you.”

Muttering under his breath, the local stomped off. Cincinnatus hoped he did complain to an Army officer. That would serve him right—wouldn’t it just? Cincinnatus tried to imagine what the officer would tell him. He couldn’t, not in detail, but it would boil down to, *Tough shit, buddy. Now fuck off and leave me alone*. He was sure of that.

Technically, Cincinnatus wasn’t even in the Army. The U.S. Navy accepted Negroes, but the Army didn’t—though he’d heard talk that that might change. If it did, it would matter to his son, but not to him.

He was both overage and not in any kind of shape to pass a physical.

But he could still drive a truck. A lot of drivers were overage civilians, many of them with not quite disabling wounds from the Great War. They freed up younger, fitter men to go to the front and fight.

And, when Confederate bushwhackers hit them, they showed they still knew what to do with weapons in their hands, too.

When Cincinnatus first volunteered to drive after getting back to U.S. territory, he’d carried a .45. He patted the ugly, functional submachine gun with almost the affection he might have shown his wife.

Elizabeth had got him out of some tough spots, and so had the captured Confederate piece. And it didn’t talk back.

U.S. 105s north of Ellijay thundered to life. Somebody—a spotter in a light airplane, maybe—must have seen Confederates up to something. With luck, the guns would disrupt whatever it was. Before long,

Confederate artillery would probably open up, too, and maim or kill a few U.S. soldiers. Always plenty of fresh meat on both sides in war.

U.S. forces might push farther east from Ellijay, but they were unlikely to go farther north soon. They held this part of Georgia mostly to keep the enemy from bringing reinforcements down towards Atlanta.

They didn't want any more of it—they were shield, not sword.

The drivers guarded their own trucks. Several men who weren't on sentry duty sat around a liberated card table playing poker. Soldiers probably would have sat on the ground, but it wasn't comfortable for geezers with old wounds and assorted other aches and pains. Green U.S. bills and brown C.S.

banknotes went into the pot. They had good-natured arguments—and some not so good-natured—about what Confederate money was worth. Right now, in the drivers' highly unofficial rate of exchange, one green dollar bought about $2.75 in brown paper.

"Call," Hal Williamson said. A moment later, Cincinnatus' friend swore as his three sevens lost to a nine-high straight.

"Come to papa." The other driver raked in the pot.

Williamson got to his feet. "Well, that's about as much money as I can afford to lose till Uncle Sam gives me some more," he said.

One of the kibitzers sat down in the folding chair he'd vacated and pulled out a fat bankroll of green and brown. "I'm not here to lose money," he announced. "I'm gonna win me some more."

"Emil's here. We can start now," another poker player said. The guy with the roll flipped him off. The other man turned to Cincinnatus. "How about you, buddy? Got any jack that's burning a hole in your pocket?"

"Nope," Cincinnatus said. "Don't play often enough to get good at it. Don't like playin' enough to get good at it. So why should I throw my money down the toilet?"

"On account of I got grandkids who need shoes?" suggested the man sitting at the card table. "We need suckers in this here game—besides Emil, I mean."

“You’ll see who’s a sucker,” Emil said. “You’ll be sorry when you do, too.”

“If you’re no good at somethin’, why do it?” Cincinnatus said.

“Well, there’s always fucking,” the other driver replied, which got a laugh.

“Maybe *you* ain’t no good at that,” Cincinnatus said, which got a bigger one. “Me, though, I know what I’m doin’ there.”

“That’s telling him,” Williamson said.

Cincinnatus’ answering grin was crooked. Even his buddies seemed surprised when he held his own in banter or didn’t turn cowardly when he got shot at or generally acted like a man instead of the way they thought a nigger would act. It might have been funny if it weren’t so sad. These were U.S. citizens, men from a country where Negroes mostly had the same legal rights as anybody else, and they thought—or at least felt down deep somewhere—he ought to be a stupid buffoon.

What about white people in the Confederate States? His mouth tightened, the grin disappearing altogether. He knew the answer to that, knew it much too well. They thought Negroes were so far below ordinary human beings that they got rid of them without a qualm. And what would the local in overalls say about that? He’d probably say the Confederacy’s Negroes had it coming.

“Fuck him, too,” Cincinnatus muttered.

“Who? Dolf there?” Williamson nodded toward the poker player who’d gone back and forth with Cincinnatus. “What’d he do to you?”

“No, not Dolf. This peckerhead redneck I was talkin’ with in town,” Cincinnatus answered, not even noticing he was tarring the Confederate with the same kind of brush whites in the CSA used against blacks. “He reckoned I was uppity. If I was really uppity, I would’ve plugged the son of a bitch.”

“Probably no great loss,” Williamson said. “We’re gonna have to kill a lot of these Confederate assholes to scare the rest into leaving us alone.” Again, Confederate whites might have talked about Negroes the same way.

The next morning, soldiers loaded crates of 105mm shells into the back of Cincinnatus' truck. The convoy of which he was a part rattled north to replenish the guns that had been firing at the Confederates the day before. The artillery position was only a few miles away. Even so, a halftrack and three armored cars came along with the trucks. No one inside Ellijay seemed eager to take on the assembled might of the U.S. Army, but things were different out in the countryside. It seethed with rebellion.

Two bushwhackers fired from the undergrowth that grew too close to the side of the road before the convoy got halfway to where it was going. One bullet shattered a truck's windshield. Another flattened a tire. The armored cars sprayed the bushes with machine-gun fire. Cincinnatus hadn't seen any muzzle flashes. He would have bet the soldiers in the armored cars hadn't, either.

One of those cars stayed behind to help the truck driver with the flat change his tire—and to shield him from more bullets while he worked. Cincinnatus hoped the driver would be all right. He had to keep going himself. He wished a barrel with a flail were preceding the convoy. That way, it would probably blow up any land mines before they blew up people. As things were…

As things were, they didn't run into—or over—any. Cincinnatus figured the convoy was lucky. He also figured it had no guarantee of being lucky again on the way back. Who could guess what holdouts or stubborn civilians were doing while nobody in a green-gray uniform could see them?

Gun bunnies unloaded the crates. "We'll give 'em hell," one of them promised. Cincinnatus nodded, but the artillerymen couldn't do anything about the enemies likeliest to hurt him.

He wished he could stay by the gun pits. Bushwhackers didn't come around here. But then, as he was driving back towards Ellijay, he heard thunder behind him. A glance in the rear-view mirror told him the artillerymen were catching it. Wherever you went, whatever you did, the war would reach out and grab you and bite you.

Snipers fired a few shots at the trucks on the way back to the depot. When they got there, one of the drivers said, "You guys are gonna have to help me out of the cab. They got me in the knee."

"Jesus, Gordie, how come you ain't screamin' your head off?" another driver asked. "How the hell'd you make it back?"

Gordie started laughing to beat the band. “On account of I lost that leg in 1915,” he answered.

“Fuckers ruined the joint in my artificial one, but that’s about it.”

“How’d you work the clutch without your knee joint?” Cincinnatus asked.

“Grabbed the leg with my hand and mashed down on the sucker,” Gordie said. “Wasn’t pretty. Don’t figure I did my gear train any good. But who gives a damn? I made it back. ’Course, the leg’s just a piece of junk without that joint. Better find me a wheelchair or some crutches—I ain’t goin’ anywhere without ’em.”

Cincinnatus had a lot of parts that didn’t work as well as they should have. He wasn’t out-and-out missing any, though, and he never would have imagined that losing a leg could prove lucky for anybody.

If they’d already got you there once, they couldn’t do it again.

The supply dump stocked both wheelchairs and crutches. That didn’t surprise Cincinnatus, although it saddened him. Maimed men were a by-product of war. The powers that be understood as much.

Gordie’s leg went out for repairs. Technicians who dealt with such things were also necessary. When it came back, the amputee was full of praise. “Feels like I just got new spark plugs on my Ford,” he said.

“Joint’s smoother and easier to work than it ever was before, I think. Quieter, too.” He still walked with a rolling gait like a drunken sailor’s, but so did anybody who’d lost a leg above the knee. The roll locked the joint till the next step. Cincinnatus also thought the artificial leg was quieter now than it had been.

Except for harassing fire as he drove his routes, everything seemed pretty quiet. He’d drifted into a backwater of the war. Part of him wanted to be doing more. The rest—the larger portion—thought that part was out of its tree.

III

G eorge Enos, Jr., liked being back on the East Coast. When the *Josephus Daniels* came in to the Boston Navy Yard for refit or resupply—or even to deliver a package—he had a chance for liberty, a chance

to see his wife and kids. Unlike a lot of sailors, he preferred getting it at home to laying down money in some sleazy whorehouse and lying down with a girl who was probably more interested in the current crossword puzzle than in him.

That didn't stop him from lying down with a whore every once in a while. It did leave him feeling guilty whenever he did. That, in turn, meant he drank more on liberty than he would have otherwise. He couldn't get drunk enough to stop feeling guilty, which didn't keep him from trying.

When he came into Boston, he didn't have to worry about it. He could go to bed with Connie with a clear conscience. And, being away so much, he felt like a newlywed whenever he did. Most of his married buddies weren't lucky enough to have caught a warm, willing, pretty redhead, either.

"I wish you didn't have to leave," she said, clinging to him with arms and legs the night before he was due back aboard his ship. When she kissed him, he tasted tears on her lipstick.

"Wish I didn't have to go, too," he answered. "But it'd be the Shore Patrol and then the brig if I tried to duck out. They'd bust me down to seaman third, too. You fight the Navy, you're fighting out of your weight."

"I know," she said. "But—" She didn't go on, or need to. *But* covered bombs and torpedoes and mines and everything else that could mean this was the last liberty George ever got. She clung to him tighter than ever.

He found himself rising to the occasion once more, which told how long it had been since his last liberty. In his thirties, he didn't do that as automatically as he had once upon a time. "Hey, babe," he said.

"Hey."

"Ohh," Connie said when he went into her—more a sigh than a word. He wasn't sure he could come again so soon after the last time, but he did, a moment after she gasped and quivered beneath him. But then she started crying all over again. "I don't want you to go!"

"I don't want to, either. But I've got to." He stroked her hair and kissed her in the hollow of her shoulder, all of which made things worse instead of better.

Finally, after she cried herself out, she reached for a tissue and blew her nose. “Good thing the lights are out,” she said. “I must look like hell.”

“You always look good to me,” he said, and that started her crying again.

He wasn’t very far from blubbering himself, but he didn’t. He did fall asleep a few minutes later.

Connie couldn’t tease him about that, because she’d already started to breathe deeply and slowly herself.

She fed him an enormous plate of bacon and eggs the next morning. The way the boys stared at it said how unusual it was. They ate oatmeal as they got ready for school. Connie ate oatmeal, too, and drank coffee that smelled like burnt roots. “Rationing that bad?” George asked.

“Well, it’s not good—that’s for sure,” his wife answered. “Better for us than for a lot of folks. I know people at T Wharf, so I can get fish for us. We’re tired of it, but it’s better than going without.”

“Sure.” George remembered his mother talking about doing the same thing during the last war. All over the country, no doubt, people were doing what they could to get along.

What George could do was shoulder his duffel bag, kiss Connie and the kids good-bye, and head for the closest subway station. When he came up again, he was on the other side of the Charles, half a block from the Boston Navy Yard.

He and the duffel got searched before the guards let him in. “All right —you’re not a people bomb,”

one of the men said.

“Has that happened here?” George asked.

“Not here at the Yard, no, but it sure as hell did in New York City. Twice,” the guard answered.

“Jesus!” George said. “Nobody’s safe anywhere any more. I’d rather put to sea. At least out there I know who’s on my side and who isn’t.” With a nod, the guard waved him on.

Armorers were bringing crates of ammunition aboard the *Josephus Daniels*. They were eloquently obscene, creatively profane. George had heard that before among men with especially dangerous trades.

It gave them a safety valve they couldn't find any other way. He paused not just to give them room but also to admire their invectives. He'd thought he'd heard everything, but they showed him he was wrong.

He was almost sorry when they finished and walked down the pier. "Permission to come aboard?" he called as he set foot on the destroyer escort's gangplank.

"Granted," answered Thad Walters, who had officer-on-deck duty. After the formal response, he unbent enough to ask, "Liberty good?"

"Yes, sir," George said. "Kids are growing like weeds. Connie pisses and moans about the rationing, but she's sure keeping them fed." He turned to salute the flag at the stern.

"Well, that's good." The grin on the OOD's face said he knew George and Connie didn't spend all their time talking about rations. He was younger than George himself. Chances were he didn't spend all his time thinking about Y-ranging gear, either. He went on, "Well, stow your gear below and get used to the ship again. You'd better—we put to sea tomorrow morning, early and"—he looked at the cloudy sky —"not too bright."

"Aye aye, sir." After his own apartment, the accommodations belowdecks were a rude reminder that he was back in the Navy's clutches. Everything was cramped and smelly. Instead of a bed to share with his wife, he had a hammock in a compartment full of snoring, farting sailors. If he tried to roll over, he'd fall out.

Some kid was bragging about how many times he'd done it in a whorehouse. Only a couple of guys were even half listening to him, and they mainly seemed interested in telling him what a liar he was.

George thought the same thing. Anybody who boasted about what a great lover he was had to be lying, even if he didn't always know it.

Chow was another disappointment: some kind of hash and lumpy mashed potatoes. Connie would have been ashamed to put slop like that on the table no matter how bad rationing got. The coffee was better than hers, though. The Navy and the Army got most of the real

bean that came into the USA; civilians had to make do with ersatz.

Maybe because he'd gone without real coffee for a couple of days and it hit him harder when he drank it again, maybe because his own mattress had spoiled him, he had a hell of a time going to sleep that night. He knew he'd stagger around like a zombie in the morning, but he lay there in the hammock staring up at the steel ceiling not nearly far enough above his head.

A pilot had brought the *Josephus Daniels* in through the minefields shielding Boston harbor from enemy submersibles. Another one took her out again. A small patrol boat followed the destroyer escort to pick up the pilot and bring him back. George stayed at his 40mm mounts till well after the pilot was gone. The powers that be had installed the guns to shoot at airplanes, but they could also do dreadful things to subs forced to the surface.

"We have ourselves a new assignment." Sam Carsten's voice blared from the loudspeakers. George still thought it was bizarre that he'd met the man now his skipper when he was a kid in Boston. Carsten went on, "We're heading for Bermuda, and then for the central Atlantic. We're going to try to find convoys bringing food up from Argentina and Brazil to England and France. And when we do, we'll sink

'em or capture 'em."

Excitement tingled through George. This was the work his father had done in the last war. It was what finally made Britain decide she'd had enough. And it was the work that cost his father his life.

"Some of you poor devils are polliwogs," the skipper boomed. "When we get to the Equator, King Neptune and the shellbacks aboard will take care of that."

George laughed. He'd been initiated into the shellbacks when he crossed the Equator for the first time.

He could hardly wait to give the new fish a taste of what he'd got.

And he had another reason for wanting to get down by the Equator. The North Atlantic was kicking up its heels. He had a strong stomach, and he'd known worse seas than this in a fishing boat that made the *Josephus Daniels* seem as sedate as a fleet carrier. That meant he kept down what he ate. It didn't mean he enjoyed himself. And using the

heads was rugged, because a lot of guys were desperate and weren't neat. Some of them didn't make it to the heads. The skipper had cleaning parties out all the time.

They almost kept up with the sour stink. Almost, here as in so many places, was a word nobody really wanted to hear.

The ship approached Bermuda from the northeast. That made for more time at sea, but lessened the chance of meeting C.S. bombers or seaplanes on the way in.

"No liberty here," Carsten announced as they tied up in the harbor. "Sorry, guys. We don't have time.

On the way back to the USA, I'll give you the best blowout I can, and that's a promise."

By the way the old-timers on the destroyer escort nodded, the skipper kept promises like that.

George wasn't surprised. Keeping them seemed in character for Carsten. Being a mustang, he knew what ratings liked better than most officers with Annapolis rings did. And one of the things they liked was officers who delivered on their promises.

Because of the threat from the Confederate mainland, the crew spent the night at battle stations, four hours on, four off. A handful of bombers did come over. Bermuda had Y-ranging gear far more powerful than the set the *Josephus Daniels* carried; sirens started shrieking before the destroyer escort picked up the bombers.

And even after the ship did, the gunners were firing by earsight, hoping to get lucky or to nail a bomber caught by the blazing searchlights ashore. Yellow and red tracers crisscrossed the night sky.

U.S. night fighters were up over Bermuda, too. George wondered if they had their own Y-ranging sets. If they did, it didn't seem to do them much good. He heard the harsh crump of bombs—none very close—but saw no bombers going down.

Even after the all-clear sounded, ships and land-based guns kept throwing shells around. George was glad he had a helmet on. Shrapnel clattered down from the sky like sharp-edged hail. It could kill the people who'd fired it even if it didn't do a damn thing to its intended targets.

“Boy, I enjoyed that,” he said when the other gun crew relieved him and his comrades.

“You be able to sleep?” his opposite number asked.

“Fuck, yes. I don’t care if the Confederates come back and the noise starts up all over again. I’ll sleep.”

And, some time in the wee small hours, the Confederates *did* come back. They couldn’t take Bermuda away from the USA, but they could make sure the United States didn’t enjoy holding it.

George opened his eyes when the shooting started again, then closed them and began to snore louder than ever.

The *Josephus Daniels* sailed the next morning, her tanks topped off and ammunition replenished. The Atlantic was a changed beast; as the destroyer escort steamed south, the ocean went from tiger to kitten.

The sun shone warm and bright. The air turned sweet and mild. George was reminded of the weather in the Sandwich Islands. It didn’t get any better than that.

British submersibles. French submersibles. Confederate submersibles. Misguided U.S. submersibles.

Confederate seaplanes. Maybe even bombers and torpedo-carriers from a prowling British carrier. This part of the Atlantic was like the Sandwich Islands in more ways than the weather: it was also full of danger. Standing by the breech of the twin 40mm, George hoped he wouldn’t follow in his father’s last footsteps, as he’d already followed in so many.

D r. Leonard O’Doull watched Sergeant Vince Donofrio chatting up a well-fed blond Georgia farm girl with a mixture of amusement and exasperation. The senior medic seemed to try his luck with everything female from fourteen to fifty. This one—her name was Billie Jean—fell toward the lower end of the range, but not so low that she didn’t have everything a woman needed. She also had an inch-long cut on her left index finger, which was what brought her to the U.S. aid station in the first place.

Donofrio had given her a shot of novocaine and put a couple of stitches in the cut. In O’Doull’s professional opinion, it needed nothing

but a bandage, but Donofrio had motivation beyond the purely professional.

“I never reckoned Yankees could be so kind and helpful,” Billie Jean said, which showed the sergeant had made some progress, anyhow.

“I’m a medic. We help everybody on both sides.” Donofrio turned to O’Doull for support. “Ain’t that right, Doc?”

“That’s our job.” O’Doull could hardly deny it—it was true. He said it himself, somewhere between once a day and once a week. Here, though, he wished he weren’t agreeing with the horny sergeant. He’d never sewn up a pretty girl’s wound in the hope of getting into her pants.

Then he shook his head and started to laugh. When he sutured a cut on Lucien Galtier’s leg up in Quebec, that put him in the good graces of the man who became his father-in-law. It didn’t hurt him with Nicole, either. Still, he wasn’t inclined to look at Vince Donofrio and Billie Jean Whoozis and intone, *Bless you, my children*.

As if Vince cared. “Can I walk you home, sweetie?” he asked.

Billie Jean frowned. O’Doull gave her points for that. “I don’t know,” she said. “Some of the guys here, they don’t like it if they see a girl walkin’ with a Yankee.” At least she didn’t say *damnyankee*.

“Like I said, I’m a medic,” Donofrio said. “I don’t give trouble, and I don’t want trouble.” He had a

.45 on his hip, just in case. So did O’Doull.

He also had the gift of gab, even though his boss was the Irishman. He talked Billie Jean into letting him tag along. And he talked O’Doull into letting him go, which was harder. “You be back in an hour, you hear me?” O’Doull growled. “And I don’t mean an hour and one minute, either. I don’t see you here in an hour’s time, I send a search party out after you, and you won’t like it when they find you.”

“I promise, Doc.” The senior medic crossed his heart. Billie Jean laughed.

Ten minutes later, corpsmen brought a soldier with a hand wound into the aid station. He’d passed out, or he would have come in under his own power. One look at the injury told O’Doull the hand would have to go. He hated to do it, but he didn’t see any way to save the

mangled remnants. He wished Vince were there to pass gas, but he could act as his own anesthetist.

“What happened to the guy, Eddie?” he asked as he put the ether cone over the wounded man’s mouth and nose. “Do you know? This is about as ugly a hand wound as I’ve ever seen.”

“I thought the same thing, Doc,” the corpsman answered. “He was by a boulder when we found him, and the boulder had blood all over it. I’m guessing, but I’d say a big old chunk of shell casing mashed his hand against the rock.”

O’Doull nodded. “Sounds reasonable. But he’ll have to make do with a hook from here on out. I hope he wasn’t left-handed, that’s all.”

“Didn’t even think of that.” Eddie looked and sounded surprised.

The amputation went as well as an operation like that could. The cutting was over in a hurry; patching things up, as usual, took longer. At last, O’Doull said, “Well, that’s about all I can do. Poor bastard won’t like it when he wakes up.”

“Any other doc would’ve done the same thing—only not as well, chances are,” Eddie said. They’d worked together a long time.

“Thanks,” O’Doull said wearily. “I’d like a drink, but I think I’ll settle for a cigarette.” He stepped outside the aid tent to light up. He’d smoked the Raleigh almost down to the butt when he happened to look at his watch. An hour and five minutes had passed since Vince Donofrio decided to walk Billie Jean home, and he wasn’t back. O’Doull swore in disgust. He didn’t care if Vince had got lucky. The medic wouldn’t think he was by the time O’Doull got through with him.

Finding soldiers for a search party was the easiest thing in the world. He waved to the first squad he saw coming up the road and told them what he needed. The Army had made him a major so he could give enlisted men orders. “Right,” said the corporal in charge of the squad. “So what do we do if we catch him laying this broad?”

“Throw cold water on him, pull him off, and haul his sorry ass back here,” O’Doull replied angrily, which made the soldiers grin. They went off with a spring in their step and a gleam in their eye.

When they weren’t back in half an hour or so—and when Donofrio, shamefaced or not, didn’t show up on his own—O’Doull started to

worry. He almost welcomed a man with a leg wound. Patching it up let him think about other things besides the medic and why he might be missing. Why the devil had he let Donofrio go? But he knew the answer to that: because Vince would have sulked and fumed for days if he hadn't, and life was too short. But if life turned out to be literally too short…

By the time another hour went by, O'Doull began to dread what would happen when the search party came back. Then they did. One look at the corporal's face told him he hadn't wasted his time worrying.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Both dead," the noncom said grimly. "Beaten, stomped, kicked—you name it, they got it, the guy and the gal both. We found 'em in a field not far from the side of the road. The medic's holster was empty, so his pistol's gone. Some goddamn Confederate's got it now."

"Jesus!" O'Doull felt sick. He'd never been responsible for a man's death like this before. Plenty of wounded soldiers had died while he was working on them, but he was doing his goddamnedest to save them. Here, one word— *no*—would have saved Vince Donofrio. It would have, but he hadn't said it. He forced out the next question: "What now?"

"Sir, I've already talked to a line officer," the squad leader said. "We beat the bushes for the motherfuckers who did it. We take hostages. We put out the call for the guilty bastards to give themselves up. Then we blow the fuckin' hostages' heads off." He sounded as if he looked forward to serving in the firing squad.

"Jesus!" O'Doull said again. "How many people are going to die because Vince thought Billie Jean was cute?"

"She wasn't cute when we found her, sir," the corporal said. "They… Well, shit, you don't want to hear about that. But she wasn't. Neither was he."

O'Doull crossed himself. "I shouldn't have let him go. But he liked her looks, and I didn't think anything would happen this time, so—"

"You never think anything'll happen *this* time," the corporal said. "Only sometimes it does."

"Yeah. Sometimes it does." O'Doull covered his face with his hands.

“Here’s one I’ll carry on my conscience the rest of my life.” Yes, this was much worse than losing a patient on the table.

“We’ll get ’em,” the corporal said. “Or if we don’t, we’ll get enough of the bastards who might have done it to make the rest of the assholes around here think twice before they try anything like that again.”

“Fat lot of good any of that will do Vince,” O’Doull said.

“Sir, I’m sorry as hell about that. It’s part of the war around these parts,” the corporal said. “Sooner or later, I expect we’ll put the fear of God into the Confederates.”

That wouldn’t do Vince Donofrio any good, either. O’Doull didn’t say so—what was the use? The noncom saluted and led his squad away. Eddie came up to O’Doull. “Not your fault, Doc,” he said.

“You just did what anybody else would’ve done.”

“I guess so,” O’Doull said. “But if it went wrong when somebody else did it, it’d be his fault, right? So how come it’s not mine?”

“You couldn’t know he’d run into bushwhackers,” the corpsman said.

“No, but I could know—hell, I did know—he might, and I let him go anyway. Shit.” O’Doull wanted to get into the medicinal brandy, but he didn’t think he deserved it. He wished a wounded man would come in so he’d be too busy to brood about what had happened—he could drown his sorrows in work as well as alcohol. But the poor slob who’d have to stop something so he could get busy didn’t deserve that.

After a while, deserving or not, a soldier with a smashed shoulder came in. Acting as his own anesthetist again, O’Doull did what he could to clean out the wound and fix it up. Eddie assisted, long on willingness but not on skill. *Have to get a new senior medic*, O’Doull thought. He’d worked with Granny McDougald for a couple of years, with Vince Donofrio for only about three months. Now somebody else would have to figure out his quirks and foibles.

The local commandant wasted no time. Soldiers seized hostages that afternoon. They gave the men who’d ambushed Vince and Billie Jean forty-eight hours to surrender. If not…Well, if not it was a tough war all the way around.

“Has anybody ever given himself up?” O’Doull asked Major Himmelfarb, who’d sent out the ultimatum.

“It does happen once in a blue moon,” the line officer answered. “Some of these bastards are proud of what they’ve done. They’re willing—hell, they’re eager—to die for their country.” He shrugged. “We oblige ’em.”

No one came forward to admit to killing Vince Donofrio and the girl whose finger he’d sewn up.

Major Himmelfarb asked O’Doull if he wanted to watch the hostages die. He shuddered and shook his head. “No, thanks. I see enough bullet wounds every day. It won’t bring Vince back, either.”

“That’s a fact.” Major Himmelfarb looked as if he wanted to call O’Doull soft but didn’t think he could. Instead, he went on, “Maybe it will keep some other dumb, horny U.S. soldier from getting his dick cut off. We can hope so, anyway.”

“Right,” O’Doull said tightly, wishing the other officer hadn’t told him that. Sometimes you found out more than you wanted to know. He hoped the medic was dead by then.

U.S. custom was to assemble the people from the nearest town—here, it was Loganville, Georgia—to witness hostage executions and, with luck, to learn from them. Nobody in the CSA seemed to have learned much from them yet. O’Doull listened to one flat, sharp volley of rifle fire after another in the middle distance: twenty-five in all. Before they got to the last one, he did dip into the brandy. It didn’t do a damn bit of good.

He kept wondering if Billie Jean’s father or brothers or maybe even husband (had she worn a wedding ring?—he didn’t remember, and Vince wouldn’t have cared) would show up at the aid station. Then he wondered if those people were part of the crowd that had got the girl and the medic. Would they have lulled them into a false sense of security before springing the trap? He never found out.

Eddie stayed in the aid tent as his first assistant for three days. Then the replacement depot coughed up a new senior medic, a sergeant named, of all things, Goodson Lord. He was tall and blond and handsome—he really might have been God’s gift to women, unlike poor Donofrio, who only thought he was.

O’Doull greeted him with a fishy stare. “How hard do you chase skirt?” he demanded.

“Not very much, sir,” Lord answered. Something in his voice made

O'Doull give him a different kind of fishy look: did he chase men instead? Well, if he did, he'd damn well know he had to be careful about that. Queers didn't have an easy time of it anywhere.

"Make sure you don't, not around here," was all O'Doull thought he could say. "The guy you're replacing did, and they murdered him for it." Sergeant Lord nodded without another word of his own.

When a U.S. soldier came in with a bullet in the hip, Lord proved plenty capable. He knew much more than Eddie, and probably more than poor Vince had. The aid station would run just fine. That was O'Doull's biggest concern. Everything else took second place, and a distant second to boot.

A rmstrong Grimes and his platoon leader crouched—sprawled, really—in a shell hole northeast of Covington, Georgia. Armstrong was wet and cold. A hard, nasty rain had started in the middle of the night and showed no signs of letting up. The Confederates had a machine gun in a barn half a mile ahead.

Every so often, it would fire a burst and make the U.S. soldiers keep their heads down.

"Wish we had a couple of barrels in the neighborhood," Armstrong said. "They'd quiet that fucker down in a hurry. Even a mortar team would do the trick."

"Well, it's not that you're wrong, Sergeant," Lieutenant Bassler replied. "But what we've got is—us.

We're going to have to take that gun out, too. We leave it there, it stalls a battalion's worth of men."

"Yes, sir," Armstrong said resignedly. It wasn't that Bassler was wrong, either. But approaching a machine gun wasn't one of the more enjoyable jobs infantry got.

"For once, the rain helps," Bassler said. "Bastards in there won't be able to see us coming so well."

"Yes, sir," Armstrong said again. He knew what that meant. They'd be able to get closer to the gun before it knocked them down.

"You take your squad around toward the back of the barn," Bassler

said. “I’ll lead another group toward the front. We ought to be able to work our way in pretty close, and then we’ll play it by ear.”

“Yes, sir,” Armstrong said one more time. He didn’t have anything else to say, not here. Bassler wasn’t just coming along. He’d given himself the more dangerous half of the mission. You *wanted* to follow an officer who did things like that.

“All right, then. I’ll give you ten minutes to gather your men. We’ll move out at”—Bassler checked his watch—“at 0850, and I’ll see you by the barn.”

“0850. Yes, sir. See you there.” Armstrong scrambled out of the hole and wiggled off toward the men he led. The machine gun opened up on him, but halfheartedly, as if the crew wasn’t sure it was really shooting at anything. He dove into another hole, then came out and kept going.

“Password!” That was a U.S. accent.

“Remembrance,” Armstrong said, and then, “It’s me, Squidface.”

“Yeah, I guess it is, Sarge,” the PFC answered. “Come on. What’s up? We goin’ after that fuckin’

gun?”

“Is the Pope Catholic?” Armstrong said. “Our guys go to the right, the lieutenant goes to the left, and when we get close whoever sees the chance knocks it out. Will you take point?”

Squidface was little and skinny and nervous—he made a good point man, and a good point man made everybody else likely to live longer. But even the best point man was more likely to get shot than his buddies. He was there to sniff out trouble, sometimes by running into it.

“Yeah, I’ll do it.” Squidface didn’t sound enthusiastic, but he didn’t say no. “Who you gonna put in behind me?”

“I’ll go myself,” Armstrong said. “Zeb the Hat after me, then the rest of the guys. Or do you have some other setup you like better?”

“No, that oughta work,” Squidface said. “If anything works, I mean. If the guys at the gun decide to go after us—”

“Yeah, we’re screwed in that case,” Armstrong agreed. “You got plenty of grenades? Need ’em for a job like this.”

“I got ’em,” Squidface said. “Don’t worry about that.”

“Good. We move at 0850.”

Armstrong gathered up the rest of his squad. Nobody was thrilled about going after the machine gun, but nobody hung back, either. At 0850 on the dot, they trotted toward the barn. The rain had got heavier. Armstrong liked that. Not only would it veil them from the gunners, the drum and drip would mask the noise they made splashing through puddles.

Somewhere off to the left, Lieutenant Bassler’s men were moving, too. *Maybe it’ll be easy*, Armstrong thought hopefully. *Maybe the guys at the gun won’t know we’re around till we get right on top of them. Maybe—*

The gun started hammering. Despite the rain, Armstrong had no trouble seeing the muzzle flashes.

They all seemed to be aimed right at him. He yipped and hit the dirt—hit the mud, rather.

Nobody behind him screamed, so he dared hope the burst missed the men he led, too. He peered ahead. He didn’t see Squidface on his feet, but nobody with his head on straight would have stayed upright when the machine gun cut loose.

He hoped the platoon commander and his guys were taking advantage of all this. They could be getting close…

Then the hateful gun started up again. This time, it was aimed away from Armstrong and his squad.

“Up!” he shouted. “Get cracking!” He splashed forward. And there was Squidface, up and running, too.

Armstrong breathed a silent sigh of relief. He’d feared he would lope past the point man’s corpse.

They’d got within a couple of hundred yards when the machine gun cut off once more. “Down!”

Squidface yelled, and suited action to word.

Armstrong threw himself flat, too. Three seconds later, a bullet snarled through the place where he'd been standing. That made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Somebody behind him yowled like a cat with its tail in a rocking chair—Whitey, he thought. His mouth shaped the word *Fuck*.

Three or four guys from Lieutenant Bassler's group opened up on the machine-gun crew—they could see the Confederates better than Armstrong and his squad could. Then another machine gun farther back opened up on them.

This time, Armstrong said, "Fuck," out loud. He might have known—and Bassler might have known, too—that the Confederates would have one gun covering another. Once the men in green-gray knocked out this one, they would have to stalk the next. And if they didn't take more casualties doing it, God would have doled out a miracle, and He was as niggardly with them as a quartermaster sergeant was with new boots.

As soon as the gun in the barn swung back to Lieutenant Bassler's men, Armstrong and his squad rushed it. They hadn't given themselves away by firing, so the gun farther back didn't know they were around—and the men they were attacking didn't realize how much trouble they were in till too late.

Squidface threw the first grenade. Armstrong's first flew at the same time as the PFC's second. The Confederate machine gunners howled. The gun got off a short burst. This time, two bullets came closer to Armstrong than they had any business doing. Another grenade knocked the machine gun sideways. The soldiers in butternut who could still fight grabbed for their personal weapons. None of them fired a shot.

Armstrong's men made sure of that.

"Turn the gun around," Armstrong said. "We'll let the assholes at the next position farther back know their turn's coming up."

None of his men was a regular machine gunner. But if you could use a rifle, you could use a machine gun after a fashion. They'd all practiced with them in basic training. And the C.S. weapon was about as simple to use as a machine gun could be. Squidface aimed the gun while Zeb the Hat gathered fresh belts of ammunition.

"You know," Squidface said as he squeezed off a burst, "this goddamn thing has a bipod, too. We could take it off the tripod mount and bring it along with us."

"Are you volunteering?" Armstrong asked.

"Yeah, I'll do it," Squidface said. "Why the hell not? We sure get a lot of extra firepower, and we can probably liberate enough ammo to keep it fed."

"It's yours, then." Armstrong was all for extra firepower. If Squidface wanted to carry the machine gun instead of a lighter rifle, that was fine with him.

The Confederates back closer to Covington realized what machine-gun fire coming their way was bound to mean. They returned it. Armstrong flattened out like a nightcrawler under a barrel. The Confederates shot a little high, so nobody got hit.

"Way to go!" Lieutenant Bassler's voice came out of the rain. "Shall we stalk these next assholes, too?"

A gung-ho lieutenant was good. A lieutenant who got *too* gung-ho wasn't, because he'd get people killed. "Sir, I have one man wounded, maybe two," Armstrong answered. "Let's round up a mortar team and see if we can drop shit on the bastards instead."

When Bassler didn't say yes right away, Armstrong got a sinking feeling. The platoon commander was going to tell him no. That machine-gun crew up ahead would be waiting for the U.S. soldiers to come at them—not a chance in hell for surprise. Armstrong didn't want an oak-leaf cluster for his Purple Heart.

But before Lieutenant Bassler could issue what might literally have been a fatal order, a couple of Confederates fired short bursts from their automatic rifles in the direction of the gun Armstrong's squad had just captured. Nobody got hurt, but the U.S. soldiers hit the dirt again. Armstrong jammed an index finger up against the bottom of his nose to kill a sneeze. *Wouldn't get a Purple Heart for pneumonia*, he thought, *but I'd sure as hell end up in the hospital with it*.

The extra gunfire convinced Bassler he'd had a bad idea. "They've got a regular line up there," he said. "That gun's not just an outpost, the way this one was. No point slamming our faces into it—a mortar team's probably a better plan. Good thinking, Sergeant."

"Uh—thank you, sir," Armstrong answered. When was the last time an officer told him something like that? Had an officer *ever* told him anything like that? Damned if he could remember.

Squidface winked at him. "Teacher's pet."

"Yeah, well, up yours, Charlie," Armstrong replied. "You want to charge a machine-gun nest when Featherston's fuckers are waiting for you, go ahead. Don't let me stop you."

"No, thanks," Squidface said. "Already got my asshole puckered once today. That's plenty. Hell, that's once too many."

"Twice too many," Zeb the Hat said. "Why ain't we twenty miles back of the line, eatin' offa tablecloths an' screwin' nurses?"

"'Cause we're lucky," Armstrong said, which drew a chorus of derisive howls. "And 'cause no nurse ever born'd be desperate enough to screw you, Zeb."

"Huh! Shows what you know, Sarge." Zeb the Hat launched into a story that was highly obscene and even more highly unlikely. It was entertaining, though, almost entertaining enough to make Armstrong forget he lay sprawled in cold mud with an enemy machine gun not nearly far enough away.

A few minutes later, mortar bombs started bursting somewhere near that C.S. gun. Through the driving rain, Armstrong couldn't tell how close they were coming. "Hey, you guys at the gun, fire off a burst,"

Lieutenant Bassler said. "Let's see if they answer."

“I’ll do it if you want, sir,” Squidface said, “but if I was a Confederate I’d sandbag and see if I could lure us in.”

“Fuck me,” Bassler said. “Yeah, you’re right. Maybe we’d better sit tight for a while, wait till reinforcements come up.”

Armstrong liked that order just fine. He drew back into the barn and lit a cigarette. It wasn’t so bad in here. It was dry—though the roof dripped—and nobody was shooting at him right this minute. What more could you want? *A horny nurse*, he thought, and then, *Yeah, wish for the moon while you’re at it.*

Jorge Rodriguez had a stripe on his sleeve. Making PFC meant he got another six dollars each and every month. It meant he got to tell buck privates what to do. And it meant the Confederate Army didn’t care that he was a greaser from Sonora. He’d convinced the people above him that he made a pretty decent soldier.

Sergeant Blackledge treated him no different on account of his promotion. Blackledge treated everybody under him like dirt all the time. And not just people under him—the sergeant had threatened to shoot General Patton if he didn’t quit slapping a soldier with combat fatigue. As far as Jorge was concerned, that took more guts than bravery against the damnyankees.

“Hey, Sarge!” Gabriel Medwick called as Jorge sewed on his stripe. “How come I don’t get promoted, too?” He sounded more than half joking—he and Jorge were buddies. He was tall and blond and handsome: the Freedom Party ideal. Jorge was none of the above. They got on well anyhow.

“Next time we need a guy, I reckon you will,” Blackledge answered. “In the meantime, don’t get your balls in an uproar. You can’t buy more’n a couple of extra fucks on a PFC’s pay, so if you get too horny to stand it in the meantime, just pull it out of your pants and beat it.”

That made Jorge snicker, but it shut Gabe up like a gag—and turned him sunset-red, too. He was as innocent as if he’d been born into the previous century; Jorge wondered if he’d heard about the facts of life before the Army grabbed him. Girls would have fallen all over him, too. Hardly any of the girls in Georgia wanted to look at Jorge, much less do anything else. He wasn’t a nigger, but he wasn’t exactly white, either.

Georgia girls might not think he was good enough to lay them, but

they thought he was plenty good enough to keep the damnyankees away. He crouched in a muddy foxhole on Floyd Street, in front of what had been the Usher House. He gathered it had been a local landmark before the war came this way. But U.S. artillery and air strikes had accomplished its fall. Half a dozen columns had stretched across its front. Now they—and the house timbers—were knocked every which way, like God's game of pick-up-sticks.

Orders were to defend Covington to the last man. Sergeant Blackledge had some lewd remarks about orders like that. Jorge understood why, too. The veteran noncom had no problems about killing Yankees. He'd done a lot of it. He was much less happy about the prospect of getting killed himself.

Who wasn't?

But Jorge could also see why the powers that be issued those orders. U.S. forces were curling down from the northeast. Every town they took cut off one more route into and out of Atlanta. Every advance they made brought more roads and railroad lines into artillery range. If they kept coming, Atlanta would fall—or else they would just strangle it and let it wither on the vine. The Confederacy had to stop them somewhere. Why not Covington?

Rising screams in the air made Jorge duck down low and fold himself up as small as he could. He didn't need the shouts of "Incoming!" to know artillery was on the way.

Most of it came down in back of the positions his squad was holding. In a way, that was a relief. It meant there was less risk of a round's butchering him right this minute. But it left him worried about what was coming next. Were the damnyankees trying to cut the town off from reinforcements? If they were, did that mean they'd try to smash through soon?

"Barrels!" somebody shouted. Jorge could have done without such a prompt answer to his question.

If the U.S. soldiers thought they could waltz into Covington, they had to change their minds in a hurry.

A rocket took out the lead U.S. barrel, and an antibarrel cannon set two more on fire. Confederate artillery pounded the poor damned infantrymen loping along with the barrels. The rain kept Jorge from seeing them, but he knew they'd be there. U.S. attacks worked about the same as the ones his side used.

Enemy fire eased. “Taught ’em a lesson that time,” Gabe Medwick said.

“*Sí*.” Jorge nodded. “Now what kind of lesson they gonna try and teach us?” He had a Sonoran accent, but his English was good.

“They’ve gotta know they can’t drive us outa here as easy as they want to,” his pal said.

“*Sí*,” Jorge repeated, and he nodded again. “But they don’t always gotta drive us out to make us move.”

“Huh?” Medwick might be blond and brave and handsome, but there were good and cogent reasons why nobody had ever accused him of being bright. That was probably a big part of why Jorge had a stripe and he didn’t.

Jorge didn’t try to explain things to Gabe. Life was too short. If he was lucky, he was wrong, in which case the explanation would only be a waste of time anyhow. He just said, “Well, we find out,” and let it go at that.

More U.S. artillery came down on Covington. A lot of it landed up toward the front line. Yes, the Yankees were annoyed that the defenders didn’t lie down and quit. Before long, the shelling eased up again and a U.S. officer approached under a flag of truce. “What the hell you want?” Sergeant Blackledge yelled.

“You fought well,” the lieutenant answered. “Your honor is satisfied. Throw down your weapons and surrender and you’ll be treated well. If you keep fighting, though, you don’t have a chance. We can’t answer for what will happen to you then.”

Blackledge had to wait for a Confederate officer to answer that; it wasn’t his place. After a couple of minutes, somebody did: “We’re ordered to hold this position. We don’t reckon you can drive us out. If you want to try, come ahead.”

The lieutenant in green-gray saluted. “You asked for it. Now you’ll get it.” He turned around and went back to his own lines.

“Hunker down, boys! Hunker down tight!” Sergeant Blackledge yelled. “We went and pissed the damnyankees off, an’ they’re gonna try and make us pay for it.”

Jorge pulled his entrenching tool off his belt and went to work with it. What he could do to improve his foxhole wasn't much, though. What U.S. guns could do to wreck it was liable to be a lot more. And the enemy's cannon wasted little time before they started trying to knock Covington flat again. Jorge swore in English and Spanish when he heard gas shells gurgling in and people shouting out warnings. Gas wouldn't do as much in the rain as it would on a clear day, but he still had to put on his mask. Raindrops on the glass in front of his eyes made him seem to peer through streaked and splattered windows. Could he shoot straight? If he had to, he had to, that was all.

"Barrels!" That shout filled him with fear, because even with an automatic rifle he couldn't do anything about a barrel. He had to depend on others to take care of that part of the job—and if they didn't, he was dead even though he hadn't made any mistakes.

But they did. That antibarrel cannon knocked out two more U.S. machines in quick succession. The rest pulled back instead of charging into Covington.

"You can't answer," Sergeant Blackledge jeered. "You ain't got the balls to answer, you stinking Yankee cocksuckers." Talking through the mask, he sounded as if his voice came from the far side of the moon. That made him seem more scornful, not less.

No more barrels drew within range of the gun. U.S. infantry didn't swarm forward, either. Machine gunners and riflemen—and the artillery—made the Confederates keep their heads down. Some of the machine guns were captured C.S. weapons. Jorge knew the difference when they fired. His own side's guns spat far more rounds per minute than the ones the USA made.

Like Blackledge, he thought the U.S. lieutenant was trying to bluff the defenders of Covington out of a position from which they couldn't be forced. The truth turned out to be less simple. With all those shells landing close by, he didn't want to stick up his head and look around. But before long he had to—he could hear something going on to the south.

Because of what the rain was doing to the lenses on his gas mask, he couldn't see very far. But things weren't going well outside of town, though his ears told him more about that than his eyes could. Barrels were moving forward there—forward from the U.S. point of view, that is. They had plenty of artillery and small-arms support, too.

What kind of line did the CSA have south of Covington? Jorge didn't know. Up till now, he hadn't worried about it. He realized that maybe he should have. Heavy fire came from a little east of due south.

After a while, it came from due south. After another little while, it came from west of due south.

You didn't have to be a professor with frizzy, uncombed hair and thick glasses to figure out what that meant. The damnyankees had tried to force a breakthrough there, and it looked as if they'd done it. The next interesting question was what they would do with it. They didn't keep anybody waiting long for an answer. Shells and machine-gun bullets came into Covington from the south as well as from the east and north. There was also firing from southwest of town, which wasn't good. If the defenders held their ground much longer, they'd be hanging on to a surrounded town. Those stories didn't have happy endings.

Other soldiers saw the same thing. They must have—otherwise, why would they start slipping out of Covington to the west? And why would Sergeant Blackledge watch them slip away without ordering them to stop or, just as likely, shooting them in the back?

"We gonna get orders to pull out, Sarge?" Gabriel Medwick asked.

"Beats the shit out of me," Blackledge answered. "If we don't, though, we'll spend the rest of the war in a POW camp…if the Yankees bother taking prisoners. If they don't, we'll be lucky if they waste the time to bury us."

Jorge didn't worry much about what happened to his body once he was done using it. But he wasn't—nowhere close. And dying to keep a third-rate town out of U.S. hands for a few extra minutes struck him as a waste of his precious and irreplaceable life. "When you gonna go, Sarge?" he called.

"Pretty damn quick," Blackledge said. "This place ain't worth throwin' myself down the crapper for.

Unless somebody orders me to stay, I'm gone." And if somebody did order him, he might suddenly become hard of listening. It wouldn't surprise Jorge at all.

Before long, a worried-sounding lieutenant said, "We'd better pull back. If we don't, they're liable to cut us off."

“Would you believe it?” Sergeant Blackledge said. “Boy, if the officers can see it, you know it must be obvious.”

Despite the noncom’s sarcasm, Jorge felt better about pulling back with the lieutenant’s permission.

U.S. forces didn’t make it easy. As soon as they realized the Confederates were withdrawing from Covington, men in green-gray pushed into the town from the northeast. Two mortar bombs burst closer to Jorge than he cared to think about. Fragments hissed and snarled past him. He felt a ghostly tug at his trouser leg, and looked down to discover a new tear. But he wasn’t bleeding.

Things got more dangerous, not less, when he left Covington behind. The Yankees who’d broken through to the south lashed the fields with gunfire. Jorge was glad to scramble into a truck and get out of there much faster than he could have hoofed it.

Gabe Medwick sat across from him. “We got to hold ’em somewheres, or else we ain’t gonna keep Atlanta,” he said. He might not be bright, but he had no trouble seeing that. Who would?

“How can we hold, they keep pounding on us like this?” Jorge asked.

“Beats me.” His buddy shrugged. “But if we don’t, we won’t just lose Atlanta. We’ll lose the damn war.”

You also didn’t need to be bright to see that. Neither Jorge nor any of the other wet, weary soldiers in the truck tried to argue with him. They’d got out of Covington alive. Right now, that seemed more than enough.

F irst Sergeant Chester Martin looked at his company’s new transport with a raised eyebrow.

Command cars, halftracks, guerrilla-style pickup trucks with a machine gun mounted in the bed…anything that could move pretty fast and shoot up whatever got in the way. They were going to head east from Monroe, Georgia, till they ran into something tough enough to stop them…if they did. The Great War hadn’t been like this at all. In those days, both sides measured advances in yards, not miles.

Lieutenant Boris Lavochkin, Martin’s platoon commander, didn’t remember the Great War or give a damn about it. Chester was supposed to ride herd on him, as he had with other young lieutenants.

It wasn't easy with Lavochkin, who had a mind and a cold, hard will of his own.

Chester suspected Lavochkin wouldn't stay a second lieutenant long. He had higher rank written all over him—if he didn't stop a Confederate bullet. But one of the things that marked him for higher rank was a propensity for going where enemy bullets were thickest. Chester would have minded less had he not needed to go along.

"My platoon—listen up!" Lavochkin said. And it *was* his platoon, which surprised Chester Martin more than a little. "We're going to go out there, and we're going to smash up every goddamn thing we bump into. We're going to show these sorry clowns that their government and their troops aren't worth the paper they're printed on. And we're going to show them what war is like. If they wanted one so bad, let's see how much they want it when it's in their own backyard."

A savage baying rose from the men. Lavochkin was an unusual leader. He didn't make his soldiers love him. He made them hate the other side instead. And he left them no doubt that he felt the same way—or that he'd make them sorry if they were soft or hung back.

"Nobody's going to mind if you bring back goodies, either," he finished. "Lavochkin's Looters, that's us! They'll be howling from New Orleans to Richmond by the time we get through with 'em!"

That got another fierce cheer from the men. They liked the idea of making the CSA pay for the war.

They liked the idea of lining their own pockets while they did it, too. Chester caught Captain Rhodes'

eye. They shared bemused grins. Captain Rhodes was a pretty damn good company CO, but he didn't know what to make of the tiger now under his command, either.

The soldiers piled into their motley assortment of transport. Martin would have liked to get into a command car with Lieutenant Lavochkin, but Lavochkin didn't want him that close at hand. He climbed into a halftrack instead. Yes, it was the lieutenant's show, all right.

Nobody seemed to expect a U.S. force to head east from Monroe. Morrell's troops had been using the town as a pivot point for the move to isolate Atlanta. They held off C.S. attacks from the north and, that done, wheeled around Atlanta instead of trying to break in. But with

the main city in Georgia still in Confederate hands, no one in butternut was ready for raiders to strike in any other direction.

Every time the U.S. soldiers spotted an auto or truck on the road, they opened up with their machine guns. What .50-caliber slugs did to soft-skinned vehicles wasn't pretty. What they did to softer-skinned human beings was even uglier. The shock from one of those thumb-sized bullets could kill even if the wound wouldn't have otherwise.

And when Lavochkin's Looters and the rest of Captain Rhodes' company rolled into High Shoals, the first hamlet east of Monroe…It would have been funny if it weren't so grim. The locals greeted them with waves and smiles. It didn't occur to them that soldiers from the other side could appear in their midst without warning.

Lieutenant Lavochkin showed them what a mistake they'd made. He sprayed bullets around as if afraid he'd have to pay for any he brought back to Monroe. Women and children and old men ran screaming, those who didn't fall. Glass exploded from the front windows of the block-long business district. And Lavochkin howled like a coyote.

When he opened up, everybody else followed his lead. Grenades flew. A soldier with a flamethrower leaped out of a halftrack and shot a jet of blazing jellied gasoline at the closest frame house. It went up right away.

High Shoals had to be too small to have a militia of its own. There were probably as many U.S.

soldiers as locals in the little town. In moments, though, two or three people found old Tredegars or squirrel guns and started shooting back. Chester spotted a muzzle flash. "There!" he yelled, and pointed toward the window from which it came. A machine gun and several rifles answered, and no more bullets came from that direction.

The raiders hardly even slowed down. Leaving ruin and death and fire behind them, they went on along the road toward Good Hope, a town that was about to see its name turn into a lie. Good Hope might have been a little larger than High Shoals, but the people there were no more ready for an irruption of damnyankees than their fellow Georgians farther west had been.

In Good Hope, all the U.S. machine guns opened fire at once. People fell, shrieking and writhing and kicking. They looked like civilians anywhere in the USA. One of the women who caught a bullet was a

nice-looking blonde. *Waste of a natural resource*, Chester thought, and fired his rifle at a man with a big belly and a bald head with a white fringe of hair. Another round caught him at the same time as Chester's. He didn't seem to know which way to fall, but fall he did.

When the shooting started, some people came rushing out of houses and shops to see what was going on. People always reacted like that. It was the worst thing they could do, but a good many did. They paid the price for mistimed curiosity, too.

Lavochkin shot up the filling station. That got a good blaze going in nothing flat. He whooped as flames shot skyward from the pumps. "See how you like it, you bastards!" he yelled. "Hope your whole town burns in hell!"

As in High Shoals, a few determined people in Good Hope tried to fight back. Bullets came from upstairs windows and from behind fences. Overwhelming U.S. firepower soon silenced the locals' rifles and pistols. But one alert and determined man drove his auto sideways across the street to try to keep the green-gray vehicles from going any deeper into Georgia. He paid for his courage with his life. A fusillade of bullets not only killed him but flattened three of the tires on the motorcar.

And in the end he delayed the U.S. column only a few minutes. A halftrack rumbled forward and shoved the hulk out of the way. "Good thing we didn't set the son of a bitch on fire," Chester said. "Then we would've had to look for a way around."

"Screw it," said the soldier sitting next to him. "We would've found one. C'mon, Sarge. You think these sorry civilian assholes can stop us?"

"Doesn't look like it—that's for sure," Chester answered.

East of Good Hope, the column bumped into a platoon of short, swarthy soldiers in uniforms of a khaki yellower than the usual Confederate butternut. Mexicans, Chester realized, probably out chasing Negro guerrillas.

Like the locals, the Mexican troops took a few fatal seconds too long to realize the approaching soldiers weren't on their side. Some of Francisco José's men waved and took a few steps toward the command cars and halftracks.

"Let 'em have it, boys!" Captain Rhodes sang out. Everybody who

could get off a shot without endangering U.S. soldiers in front of him opened up. The Mexicans went down like wheat before the harvester. A few tried to run. A few tried to shoot back. They got off only a handful of rounds before they were mowed down, too. A U.S. corporal yowled and swore and clutched his shoulder. Chester thought he was the first U.S. casualty of the day.

Southeast of Good Hope lay Apalachee. Rhodes ordered the U.S. vehicles to stop about a mile outside of town. Lieutenant Lavochkin's broad features clouded over. "You're not going to let this place off easy, are you, sir?" he demanded. "That's not what we're here for."

"I know what we're here for, Lieutenant. Keep your shirt on." The company commander seemed to enjoy putting Lavochkin in his place. Chester Martin would have, too, but it wasn't always easy for a noncom. Rhodes went on, "Mortar crews—out! Let's give them a few rounds from nowhere before we pay our respects. That should make them good and glad to see us when we roll into town."

As the men with the light mortars set up and started lobbing bombs towards Apalachee, Lieutenant Lavochkin smiled a smile Chester wouldn't have wanted to see aimed at him. Lavochkin pointed it toward the enemy, where it belonged. He gave Rhodes the most respectful salute Martin had ever seen from him.

Apalachee might have been an ants' nest that somebody had kicked when Captain Rhodes' company came in. People were running every which way. Wounded men and women screamed. A few buildings had chunks bitten out of them.

A middle-aged man in a business suit ran toward the lead command car. The left arm of his jacket was pinned up: he had no arm to fill it. "Thank God you're here!" he yelled. "We got a call from Good Hope that there were Yankees loose, and then they went and mortared us."

"How about that?" Boris Lavochkin took aim with the command car's machine gun.

"Uh-oh," the Georgian said: the last phrase that ever passed his lips. He started to turn away, which did no good at all. Lavochkin's burst almost cut him in half.

People shrieked and fled. Bullets and grenades made sure they didn't get far. Wails filled the streets.

Chester shot a man who was reaching into the waistband of his

trousers. Did he have a pistol stashed there? Nobody except him would ever know now. The bullet from the Springfield blew off the top of his head.

“This hardly seems fair,” said the private next to Chester. “Not like we’re fighting soldiers or anything.”

“They’re all the enemy,” Chester answered, working the bolt and chambering a new round. “If they can’t find enough soldiers to keep us from getting at civilians, what does that say?”

“I bet it says we’re winning.” The private grinned. He had a captured C.S. automatic rifle, and lots of magazines for it. Unlike Chester, he hardly bothered aiming. He just sprayed bullets around. Some of them were bound to hit something.

“I bet you’re right.” Chester Martin shot a man who drove his auto into range at exactly the wrong time. The fellow might not even have known U.S. soldiers were loose in Apalachee. He didn’t get much of a chance to find out, either.

Lieutenant Lavochkin shot up another gas station—he seemed to enjoy that. This one rewarded him with a spectacular fireball. Had he been closer when he opened up, the flames might have swallowed his command car.

“Whoa!” shouted the kid next to Chester. “Hot stuff!”

“Yeah,” Chester said. “We’re hot stuff, and the Confederates can’t do much about it, doesn’t look like. If we had enough gas, I bet we could make it damn near to the ocean.”

“That’d be something,” the private said.

But things stopped being so much fun not long after they got out of Apalachee. An enemy barrel blew a command car into twisted, burning sheet metal. U.S. soldiers leaped out of the vehicles that carried them and stalked the metal monster. It wasn’t a new model, but it was plenty tough enough. It wrecked another couple of vehicles and shot several soldiers before somebody clambered up on top of it and threw grenades into the turret. That settled that: the barrel brewed up.

“Fools,” Boris Lavochkin said scornfully. “They didn’t have infantry along to protect it.”

“They probably didn’t have any to spare,” Chester said. Lavochkin thought that over. Then he smiled again. Any soldier in butternut who saw that smile would have wanted to surrender on the spot.

F lora Blackford found a place to sit on the Socialists’ side of the aisle. Congressional Hall was always crowded during a joint session. President La Follette hadn’t called many. He seemed to think actions spoke louder than words. Oddly, that made his words resonate more when he did choose to use them.

The Speaker of the House introduced him: “Ladies and gentlemen, I have the distinct honor and high privilege of presenting to you the President of the United States!”

Charlie La Follette took his place behind the lectern. The lights gleamed off his silver hair. Along with everybody else in the hall, Flora applauded till her hands were sore. La Follette was an accidental President, but he was turning out to be a pretty good one.

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you,” he said. “I come before you today—I come before the people of the United States today—to help right a wrong that has continued in our country for too long.

“We do not have a large number of Negro citizens in the United States. Most Negroes in North America have always lived in the Confederacy. This is partly our own fault, as we have been slow to accept refugees from the oppression that has long existed there.

“Not caring for a man because of the color of his skin is one thing. Leaving him to die in a country that hates him is something else again. It is a mistake, a reprehensible mistake, and not one we will continue to make. Any human being, regardless of color, is entitled to live free. I will ask that legislation be introduced in Congress to make sure this comes true.

“And, I fear, we have committed another injustice. For too long, we have believed that Negro men lack the courage to fight for their country. We have never conscripted them into the Army or even let them volunteer. In the Navy, we let them cook food and tend engines, but no more. This is not right, not if they are men like any others, citizens like any others.

“As if further proof were needed, colored guerrilla fighters in the Confederate States have shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that courage is not a question of black and white. Without their brave

efforts, our war against Jake Featherston's vicious tyranny would be even harder and more perilous than it is.

"No law prevents the enlistment and conscription of Negroes into the armed forces of the United States. We have relied on long-standing custom instead. I say to you that this custom will stand no longer. By its dreadful example, the Confederacy shows us how evil prejudice of any sort is. This being so, I have today issued an executive order forbidding discrimination on the basis of race in the recruitment, training, and promotion of all U.S. military forces."

He paused there, perhaps wondering what kind of applause he would get. Flora clapped hard. So did almost all the Socialists and Republicans listening to President La Follette. And so did most of the Democrats in Congressional Hall. Flora was sure Robert Taft would have if a people bomb hadn't killed him; he was a conservative, yes, but one with a strong sense of justice. Only a few reactionaries, men who harked back to the days when their party dominated the states that became the CSA and the attitudes that went with those days, sat on their hands.

President La Follette beamed out at Congress. He must have got a better hand than he expected.

Sounding relieved, he continued, "Under the terms of the executive order, Negro men from the ages of eighteen to forty-eight will have sixty days to register for conscription at the center nearest their homes.

Once registered, they will be selected at random on the same basis as whites—and, for that matter, on the same basis as Orientals and Indians. Failure to register within sixty days will lead to the same penalties for them as for anyone else who tries to evade conscription."

Flora wouldn't have talked about penalties right after lifting the bar of discrimination. She didn't think Al Smith would have. Charlie La Follette didn't have such sure political instincts. If he did, he might have got elected on his own hook instead of being chosen to balance the Socialist ticket. Instincts or not, though, he was getting the job done.

If a bomb blew Jake Featherston to hell, how would the Confederate States fare under Don Partridge? As far as Flora could see, the Vice President of the CSA was a handsome, smiling, brainless twit. She suspected Featherston chose him as a running mate because he was a

nobody: not a rival, not a threat. The previous Confederate Vice President had tried to murder his boss, and by all accounts damn near succeeded. Nonentities near the center of things were safer. As long as Jake Featherston survived, it didn't matter. His ferocious energy drove the CSA. But if he died…

Wishing he would made Flora miss a few words of President La Follette's speech. When she started paying attention again, he was saying, "…and 1944 is only two weeks away. It will be the fourth year of the war. But I pledge to you, people of the United States, it will also be the last! This is our year of victory!"

A great roar went up from the assembled Senators and Representatives. They sprang to their feet, clapping and cheering. No one hung back, not the most ardently revolutionary Socialists and not the most hidebound Democrats. The only alternative to beating Jake Featherston was losing to him, and he seemed to have gone out of his way to show the United States how horrid that would be.

"The birthday of the Prince of Peace is almost here," La Follette said after the Congressmen and

-women reluctantly took their seats again, "and we shall have peace. That is my pledge to you. We shall have peace—and on our terms."

He got another stormy round of applause. If the United States won the war by this coming November, he would get more than that: he likely *would* get elected President on his own hook. And he would have earned it, too.

Flora wondered whether he would threaten to rain a new destruction on the Confederate States if they didn't give up, the way the Kaiser had warned Britain and France. But he kept silent there. Thinking about it, Flora decided it made sense. Jake Featherston knew what the United States was working on.

He was working on the same thing himself. If he got it first, he might win yet. Every U.S. bombing raid on the C.S. uranium project made that less likely, but you never could tell. The Confederacy's rockets warned that its scientists and engineers were not to be despised, even if its leaders were.

"North America must have peace," was the way Charlie La Follette chose to finish. "Four times now, during one long lifetime, war has ravaged our continent. It must never come again—never, I say! Before the War of Secession, the United States stood off England in the fight

that gave us our national anthem and defeated Mexico to plant our flag on the Pacific coast. We dominated the continent, being the sole power at its heart. And, when this cruel war ends at last, we shall do the same again!”

There! He’d said it! That was probably more important than obliquely warning the Confederates about uranium bombs. Charlie La Follette had declared there would be no more Confederates, no more CSA, when the war was over. If he could go down in history as the Great Reuniter, wouldn’t he make people forget about Abraham Lincoln and the way the United States fell to pieces during his luckless term in office?

Senators and Representatives contemplating the end of the Confederate States cheered even louder than they had before. It wasn’t given to many men to be in at the birth of something wonderful. If you couldn’t do that, being in at the death of something foul was almost as good.

Congressmen and -women crowded up to congratulate the President as he stepped down from the rostrum. Flora started to, but then changed her mind. Charlie La Follette would know how she felt. And she wanted to find out what Jake Featherston had to say about his opposite number’s speech. She didn’t think she would need to wait very long.

But when she got to her office, Bertha waved a message form at her. “Mr. Roosevelt would like to see you as soon as you can see him, Congresswoman,” she said.

“Is he coming here, or does he want me to go to the War Department?” Flora asked.

“He called right when the President finished. When I told him I expected you back soon, he said he was on his way,” her secretary answered.

Roosevelt got there about fifteen minutes later. He wheeled himself into Flora’s inner office and closed the door behind him. “What’s going on, Franklin?” she asked.

“Well, I’m afraid I have bad news, and I wanted you to hear it straight from me,” the Assistant Secretary of War said. “The Confederates landed raiders in Washington State—we think by submersible—and they fired a good many mortar rounds at the uranium project.”

“*Gevalt!* ” she exclaimed. “How bad is it?”

“They did some damage, damn them. We’re still trying to figure out just how much,” Roosevelt replied. “Two or three mortar bombs hit one of the dormitories, too. We lost some talented people, and they won’t be easy shoes to fill.”

“How close are we? Can we go on without them?”

Franklin Roosevelt shrugged broad shoulders. “We have to. And we’re getting very close. I don’t know how much this will delay us. I’m not sure it’ll delay us at all. But I’m not sure it won’t, either.” He spread his hands. “We just have to see.”

“What about the Confederate project? Are we delaying it?”

“If we’re not, it isn’t from lack of effort. That town will never be the same, and neither will that university. But they’re burrowing like moles, putting as much as they can underground. That’s delaying them all by itself. They haven’t quit, though. I don’t think that bastard Featherston knows what the word means.”

“They won’t get another chance to do this to us. They’ve already had too many,” Flora said.

“Charlie made a good speech there,” Roosevelt agreed. “I bet Jake Featherston’s mad enough to spit rivets.”

“Shall we see?” Flora reached for the knob on her wireless set. Even after it warmed up, static stuttered and farted as she turned the tuner to a frequency Featherston often used. The USA and CSA kept jamming each other’s stations as hard as they could. Richmond’s main transmitter, though, punched through the jamming more often than not.

Sure enough, the Confederate President came on the air right away. “I don’t need to tell you the truth, on account of Charlie La Follette just did it for me,” Featherston snarled. “The truth is, he aims to wipe the Confederate States clean off the map. Charlie La Follette thinks he’s Abe Lincoln. Turned out Lincoln couldn’t wipe us out. Old Charlie’ll find out the hard way he can’t, either. I know the Confederate people won’t let the country down. They never have. They never will. And Charlie La Follette will hear from us real soon now. You bet he will. So long.”

He wasn't kidding. At least a dozen long-range rockets slammed into Philadelphia in the next few minutes. One of them missed Congressional Hall by alarmingly little. Flora felt the jolt in the soles of her feet. The rockets didn't announce themselves. They flew faster than sound, so the *boom!* when they went off was the first and only sign they were on the way.

After the salvo ended, Roosevelt said, "He can annoy us doing that, but he can't beat us. And we can beat him on the ground. And we are. And we will."

"But how much will be left of us by the time we do?" Flora asked.

The Assistant Secretary of War stuck out his chin. "As long as we have one man standing after he goes down, nothing else matters."

As long as the one man we have standing is my son, nothing else matters, Flora thought. But Franklin Roosevelt had a son in the Navy. Maybe he was thinking the same thing.

IV

M ajor Toricelli stuck his head into Abner Dowling's office. "Sir, you've got a call from Philadelphia."

"Do I?" Dowling viewed the prospect without delight. "What do they think I've gone and done now?"

Calls from the War Department, in his copious experience, seldom brought good news.

But his adjutant said, "I don't *think* it's that kind of call, sir. It's General Abell. Shall I transfer it in here?"

"You'd throw a fit if I said no. So would he," Dowling said. A moment later, the telephone on his desk rang. He picked it up. "Abner Dowling here."

"John Abell, sir," said the voice on the other end of the line, and Dowling recognized the brainy General Staff officer's cool, cerebral tones. "I hope you're well?"

"Tolerable, General, tolerable," Dowling replied. "Yourself?"

“I’ll last out the war,” Abell said, which might have meant anything or nothing. “I have a question for you: how would you like to come back to the East and command an army in what we hope will be one of the decisive attacks of the war?”

How would you like to go to bed with a beautiful blonde who’s passionately in love with you?

Yes, there were dumber questions, but not many. “What’s not to like?” Dowling asked.

And John Abell told him what there was not to like: “Your army-group commander would be General MacArthur.”

“Oh,” Dowling said. MacArthur had commanded a division in George Custer’s army in the Great War while Dowling was Custer’s adjutant general. When MacArthur led an army in northern Virginia this time around, Dowling had commanded a corps under him for a while. The two men didn’t get along well—which was, if anything, an understatement.

“We could use you back in Virginia, sir,” Abell said. “You have experience with aggressive offensive action, and you have experience fighting Freedom Party Guards. You’d do the country a service if you came back.”

“And what would I do to myself?” Dowling asked. Brigadier General Abell didn’t answer; he had to figure that out on his own. “Who would take over for me here if I left?” he inquired. “Still lots of work that needs doing.”

“We were looking at giving Colonel DeFrancis a star and putting him in charge of Eleventh Army,”

Abell said. “He should handle it, and his coming from the air-operations side of things would be an advantage on such a broad front. Or do you think I’m wrong?” *Is there anything about Terry DeFrancis we don’t know?* he meant.

“No, I’m sure he’ll do a bang-up job.” Dowling had to answer that quickly and firmly, so Abell would have no doubts. “He’s a fine officer, and he knows the situation here, so he won’t have to waste any time figuring out what’s going on. He’s young to make general, but wars do that.”

“So they do,” said Abell, who, like Dowling, had waited a long time

for stars. “I’ll see you here in Philadelphia, then, as fast as you can come. Orders will be cut by the time you get to the airstrip outside of Snyder. Take care.” He hung up without waiting for Dowling’s good-bye.

“Pack a duffel, Angelo,” Dowling called to his adjutant. “We’re on our way to Philly, and then to Virginia.”

“Who takes over here?” Toricelli asked.

“Terry DeFrancis,” Dowling replied. “My guess is, his telephone’s ringing right about now.”

Sure enough, DeFrancis’ auto pulled up in front of Eleventh Army headquarters just as Dowling and Toricelli were ready to leave for the airstrip. “Congratulations on getting back to the real war, sir!”

DeFrancis called as he jumped out.

“Congratulations to you, General,” Dowling said. They shook hands.

“I’ve got a hot transport waiting for you at the field,” DeFrancis said. “It’ll take you up to Wichita. I don’t know what they’ve got laid on for you after that, but General Abell sure sounded like he wants you in Philadelphia fast as you can get there.”

Dowling and Toricelli threw duffel bags with enough personal belongings to keep them going for a little while into a command car. After one more handshake with DeFrancis, Dowling told the driver, “Step on it!”

“Yes, sir!” The corporal needed no further encouragement. He drove like a bat out of hell—perhaps like a bat a little too eager to go back there.

The two-engined transport took off with an escort of four fighters. Terry DeFrancis hadn’t mentioned that. Dowling was grateful all the same. U.S. air power dominated the skies in west Texas, but the Confederates still got fighters up in the air every now and then. Even a hot transport was no match for a Hound Dog.

Neither the Texas Panhandle nor western Sequoyah had suffered too badly in the war. The fighting in Sequoyah was mostly farther east, where the oil wells were. Where the oil wells had been, rather. The oil fields had changed hands several times during the war. Whenever they

did, the side pulling out blew them up to deny them to the enemy. The conquerors would start making repairs and then have to retreat themselves—and carry out their own demolitions. By now, Sequoyah's oil wells were some of the most thoroughly liberated real estate on the face of the globe.

In the last war, Sequoyah had started out as Confederate territory. C.S. cavalry raids terrorized Kansas till the USA slowly and painfully overran that state's southern neighbor. These days, though, Wichita was a backwater. The arrival of a major general, even if he was only passing through on his way somewhere else, made airport personnel flabble.

"Your airplane is ready and waiting, sir!" said the major in command of the field.

"Thanks," Dowling said. "Where do I go from here?"

"Uh, St. Louis, sir," the major said. "Didn't they tell you?"

"If they had, would I be asking?" Dowling asked reasonably.

He got into St. Louis just as the sun was setting. That was a relief: he wasn't sure they would have turned on landing lights for his airplane. Confederate bombers from Arkansas came up often enough to leave blackout regulations tightly in place.

At the airport there, they offered him the choice of a Pullman berth on a fast train east or a layover and the first flight out in the morning. He chose the layover. A bed that didn't bounce and shake had its attractions.

He spent less time in it than he would have liked. The Confederates came over at eleven and then again at two. Instead of a bed that didn't bounce, Dowling got two doses of a chilly trench. Bombs whistled down and burst too close for comfort. He wondered if he would be able to fly out the next morning.

He did. The raid left the airport with a working runway, and didn't hit the airplane waiting to take him east. On the way, he got a bird's-eye view of what the war had done to the United States.

Only occasional craters showed on the ground till he flew over what had to be eastern Indiana. From there on, it was one disaster after another: deserted, unplowed farmland, with towns and cities smashed

into ruins. How long would repairing the devastation take? How much would it cost? What could the country have done if it didn't have to try to put itself together again? He couldn't begin to guess. That was a question for politicians, not soldiers. But a soldier had no trouble seeing the USA—and the CSA, too—would have been better off without a war.

Though Dowling didn't see what had happened to the Confederate States, he knew that had to be worse than what he was looking at. "If they were smart, they would have left us alone," he said to Major Toricelli.

"If they were smart, they never would have elected that Featherston bastard," his adjutant replied.

Dowling nodded—there was another obvious truth.

His airplane landed outside of Pittsburgh to refuel. As it spiraled down toward the runway, he got a good look at what the battle had cost the city. His first thought was, *Everything*. But that wasn't an obvious truth. Smoke rose from tall stacks—and from some truncated ones—from steel mills that were either back in business or had never gone out of business. Nobody had bothered repairing shell-pocked walls or, sometimes, roofs. Those could wait. The steel? That was a different story. Trucks on the roads, trains in the railroad yards, and barges on the rivers took it where it needed to go.

When he got out of the airplane to stretch his legs and spend a penny, his nose wrinkled. He'd expected the air to be full of harsh industrial stinks, and it was. He hadn't expected the stench of death to linger so long after the fighting ended.

"Not as bad as the graves outside of Camp Determination," Toricelli said.

"Well, no. I don't think anything in the whole world is that bad," Dowling replied. "But this is what the Great War battlefields were like. Most of the ones this time around aren't so foul. They move faster and cover more ground, so there aren't so many bodies all in the same place."

"Except here there are," his adjutant said.

Dowling nodded. "Yeah. Except here there are."

Philadelphia was another bomb-pocked nightmare of a city, another

place where factories sent up defiant plumes despite the destruction. A green-gray motorcar met Dowling at the airport. “I’ll take you to the War Department, sir,” said the bright young captain who accompanied the enlisted driver.

“How bad are these long-range rockets we hear about?” Dowling asked as the auto picked its way through streets often cratered and rubble-strewn.

“They sure aren’t good, sir,” the captain answered. “First thing you know is, they go boom—and if you’re there when they do, then you aren’t any more.”

That was convoluted, but Dowling got the message. Damage grew worse as the auto got closer to the center of town. A lot of the rockets seemed to have fallen there. Dowling saw the finned stern of one sticking up, and curved sheet metal from a couple of more.

The War Department had taken lots of near misses but no direct hits Dowling saw. He had to show his ID before they let him in. Even after he did, they patted him down. No one apologized—it was part of routine. The captain took him down to John Abell’s office. “Good to see you, sir,” Abell said, his usual bloodless tones sucking the warmth from the words.

“And you,” Dowling replied, which wasn’t entirely true but came close enough. He pointed to a map of Virginia on Abell’s wall. “What are we going to do to them?”

Abell got up and pointed. “This is what we’ve got in mind.”

Dowling whistled. “Well, whoever came up with it sure didn’t think small.”

“Thank you,” Abell said. That made Dowling blink; the General Staff officer was more likely to see what could go wrong than what could go right. This scheme, though, definitely counted on things going right.

“You really think they’re on their last legs, don’t you?” Dowling said.

“Last leg,” John Abell replied. “They’re standing on it in Georgia. If we hit them here, too, the bet is that they fall over.”

“It could be.” Dowling hesitated, then said the other thing he thought needed saying: “Is General MacArthur really the right man to knock

them over?”

“If you want command of the army group, sir, you won’t get it.” Now Abell’s voice was as icy as Dowling had ever heard it, which said a good deal.

“No, no, no. I wasn’t asking for myself. After a question like that, I wouldn’t take it if you gave it to me on a silver platter,” Dowling said. “But if we’ve got somebody better than that scrawny bastard handy, we ought to use him.”

The General Staff officer relaxed fractionally. “Since you put it that way…Well, General Morrell is busy in Georgia, which is also of vital importance. And General MacArthur is the man on the spot, and familiar with conditions.”

“All right,” Dowling said. It wasn’t, not really, but he’d made the effort. “When we’re ready down there, I’ll do everything I can.”

C larence Potter was so glad to get away from Georgia and George Patton that he almost didn’t mind shuttling back and forth between Richmond and Lexington every few days. President Featherston couldn’t seem to make up his mind whether he wanted Potter to pick up his work in Intelligence again or act as liaison with the uranium-bomb project.

Either way, Potter figured he was better suited to the work than he was to commanding a division under Patton. As far as he could see, the only things that suited a man to command a division under Patton were a rhino’s hide and an uncanny ability to turn off one’s brain. That probably wasn’t fair—Patton had grievances with him, too. Potter didn’t much care. *Not* dealing with Patton was such a pleasure.

Of course, not dealing with the general meant dealing with the President of the CSA—and, incidentally, with Professor FitzBelmont. But Potter had been dealing with Jake Featherston since the Great War, and he scared the living bejesus out of the professor. He could handle both of those jobs without wanting to retread his stomach lining twice a day.

FitzBelmont was a man facing a problem all too common in the CSA these days: he was trying to do a key job without quite enough men or resources, and with the damnyankees pounding the crap out of him from the air. Back before the United States found out what was going

on there, Washington University had been a lovely, leafy, grassy campus. Potter remembered what a joy coming to Lexington had been after the devastation visited on Richmond.

Lexington was making up for lost time these days. Everything except the uranium-bomb project had abandoned the university campus, which looked like a real-estate poster for a subdivision in one of the ritzier neighborhoods of hell. The slagged and cratered earth might have caught smallpox. Ruins of what had been elegant, graceful buildings, many dating back before the War of Secession, offered a sorry reminder of better times. Only the square, brutal simplicity of reinforced concrete, ton upon ton of it, had any hope of surviving the Yankees' nightly visits.

Down below that concrete, the pile was turning uranium into jovium, which was what FitzBelmont had christened element 94. Enough jovium would go boom, just like U-235. Making it go boom, though, wasn't so simple.

"With U-235, we could shoot a plug into a hole in a bigger chunk, and then everything would go up,"

FitzBelmont said.

"Why can't you do that with the jovium, too?" Potter asked.

"Our calculations show it would start going off too soon and get too deformed for a full blast," the physicist answered.

"Well, you seem to think you *can* make it go off," Potter said, and Henderson FitzBelmont nodded.

Potter asked what looked like the next reasonable question: "How?"

"We have to slam a lot of pieces down into a sphere—that's what the math says," FitzBelmont replied. "It's harder than making a U-235 bomb would be, because it's so much more precise. But getting the jovium is easier, because we can chemically separate it from the uranium in the pile."

"My chemistry prof at Yale told me transmutation was nothing but a pipe dream," Potter said.

"Mine told me the same thing." FitzBelmont shrugged. "Sometimes the rules change. They did here.

Transmutation isn't chemistry—it's physics."

"It could be black magic, and I wouldn't care," Potter said. "As long as we say, 'Abracadabra!'

before the damnyankees do, nothing else counts."

"They're doing their best to make sure we don't. Are we doing the same to them?" the professor asked.

"What we can. Getting to Washington State isn't easy for us, and it got tougher after they went and grabbed Baja California from Mexico," Potter said. Henderson FitzBelmont looked blank. He was no military man. Patiently, Potter explained: "It makes it much harder for us to get ships and subs out of Guaymas. But we did it not so long ago, and we attacked their facility."

"And?" FitzBelmont asked eagerly.

"And past that I don't know," Potter admitted. "The attack went in—that's all I can tell you for sure.

The United States keep real quiet about their project, same as we keep quiet about ours. We haven't picked up any leaks to let us know what we did—none I've heard, anyhow."

"We can't hit them the way they hit us," FitzBelmont said mournfully. "And it looks like they started work on this before we did."

Potter had been worrying about those very things for quite a while now. Except for getting the latest strike at the Yankee project started, he couldn't do much but worry. "That means we have to be smarter," he told the physicist. "We're up to that, aren't we? If we make fewer mistakes and don't get stuck in blind alleys, we can still win. You're as good as anybody they've got, right?" *You'd better be, or we're history*.

"Yes, I think so," FitzBelmont replied. "They may well have more highly competent people than we do, though. And I worry about Germany a good deal. The Kaiser's physicists, and the ones he can draw from Austria-Hungary, are the best in the world. Has the President been able to get any technical help from *our* allies?"

"If he has, he hasn't told me," Potter said. "I'll ask him next time I'm in Richmond."

That was only a couple of days later. Traveling inside Richmond was safer by day. U.S. airplanes mostly came at night. Confederate defenses and fighters still made daytime raids too costly to be common. The bombers had taken a terrible toll all the same. Intact buildings stood out because they were so rare. The streets were full of holes of all sizes. The smell of death floated through the air.

The grounds to the Gray House might have been hit harder than anything else in Richmond. The United States wanted Jake Featherston dead. They wanted to avenge Al Smith, and they thought the Confederacy would grind to a halt without its leader. Potter feared they were right, too, which made him leery of plots against Featherston.

After going underground, after a couple of unpleasantly thorough searches, he was escorted to the waiting room outside the President's office, and then into Featherston's presence. The President's secretary sniffed as she closed the door behind him.

"Lulu doesn't much fancy you." Jake Featherston sounded amused, which was a relief. "She doesn't reckon you think I'm wonderful enough."

How right she is. But saying that was impolitic. "The country needs you. I know it." Potter could tell the truth without giving away his own feelings.

"What's the latest from Lexington?" Featherston asked, letting Lulu go.

"They're doing everything they know how to do, and the United States are trying to make sure they can't," Potter answered. "Do you know what we did in Washington State?"

"Something," the President answered. "They've had repair crews in there—I know that for a fact.

Don't know much more, though."

How did he know even that much? A spy on the spot? Reconnaissance aircraft? Intercepted signals?

Whatever the answer was, the word hadn't come through Potter. "How are things in Georgia?" he asked. The wireless didn't say much, which was never a good sign.

"We're going to lose Atlanta," Featherston said bluntly. "They didn't

want to come in, so they're sweeping around. They want to trap our army in there and grind it to pieces."

"For God's sake don't let them!" Potter exclaimed. The President had thrown away one army in Pittsburgh. Didn't he see he couldn't afford to do that again?

He must have, for he nodded. "We're pulling out. We're wrecking the place, too. They won't get any use from it when they get in." He paused. "When Patton challenged you to a duel, did you really choose flamethrowers?"

"Yes, sir," Potter answered. "For a little while, I thought he'd take me up on it, too."

"That wouldn't've been pretty, would it?" the President said. Potter shook his head; it would have been anything but. Featherston went on, "He was spitting rivets at you, though. Let me tell you, he was."

"Let him spit rivets at the damnyankees," Clarence Potter said. "It would hurt 'em a lot more than some of the other things he's tried."

"Yeah, I know." Featherston scowled. "But who have I got who'd do better?"

Potter grunted. That, unfortunately, was much too good a question. He found a question of his own: "If we can't lick the USA no matter who we've got in the field, why are we still fighting?"

"Well, for one thing, they want unconditional surrender, and I'll see 'em in hell first," Jake Featherston answered. "And, for another, the longer we hold on, the better the chance FitzBelmont and the other slide-rule boys have of blowing 'em a new asshole."

Reluctantly, Potter nodded. The Confederate States had shown they were too dangerous for the United States to give them another chance to rebuild and try again. It was a compliment of sorts, but one the Confederacy could have done without now. As for the other…"What if they get a uranium bomb first?"

"Then we're fucked." Featherston's response had, at least, the virtue of clarity. "Then we don't deserve to win. But that won't happen, so help me God it won't. We are going to lick those bastards right out of their boots. You wait and see."

When he said it, Potter just about believed it—a telling measure of how persuasive Featherston could be. But afterwards, coming up aboveground once more, seeing the devastation that had been a great city, Potter shivered. How often lately had Jake Featherston taken a good long look at what had become of his capital and his country?

That afternoon, Potter and Nathan Bedford Forrest III walked through the disaster that was Capitol Square. Washington's statue still survived; not even a mountain of sandbags had saved Albert Sidney Johnston's. "What the hell are we going to do?" the chief of the General Staff said—quietly, so no passerby could hear.

"What the hell *can* we do?" Potter answered. "We're stuck between the Yankees and Jake Featherston. If we dump Featherston—if we kill him, I mean, because he won't be dumped—the United States land on us with both feet. And if we keep fighting—"

"The United States land on us with both feet anyhow," Forrest finished bitterly.

"They won't let us quit," Potter said. "They aim to wipe us off the map, same as they did in the War of Secession."

"Featherston never should have started this damn war," Nathan Bedford Forrest III said.

"Oh, cut the crap…sir," Potter said. His superior gaped. Not caring, he went on, "You aren't mad at him for starting the war. You were all for it. So was I. So was everybody. You're just mad because we aren't winning."

"Aren't you?"

"Sure, but at least I know why. I—" Clarence Potter broke off.

"What?" Forrest said, but then he heard it, too: the distant rumble of artillery suddenly picking up. He frowned. His eyes, which were more like his famous great-grandfather's than any other feature, narrowed. "Damnyankees haven't done that much firing for quite a while."

"They sure haven't," Potter agreed. "I wonder if they think they can catch us with our pants down here because we've moved so much stuff to Georgia." *I wonder if they're right.* He didn't say that out loud.

Nathan Bedford Forrest III had enough to worry about, and the same

thought was bound to be going through his mind.

The chief of the General Staff stood there listening, his head cocked to one side. After a minute or so, he shook himself; he might almost have come out of a trance. “I’d better get back to the War Department, find out what the hell they’re up to,” he said.

“I’ll come with you,” Potter said. Forrest didn’t tell him no, even though he didn’t have a formal place there any more. The gunfire went on and on. Halfway back to the War Department building, both men broke into a trot.

C assius and Gracchus strode through the streets of Madison, Georgia. They both wore U.S. Army boots on their feet and green-gray U.S. military-issue trousers. Only their collarless chambray work shirts said they weren’t regular U.S. soldiers—those and their black skins, of course. Even the shirts had Stars-and-Stripes armbands on the left sleeve. The Negroes were at least semiofficial.

Gracchus carried a captured C.S. submachine gun; Cassius still had his bolt-action Tredegar. Both of them were alert for anything that looked like trouble. Madison had only recently fallen to the United States. The whites here didn’t like seeing their own soldiers driven away. They were even less happy about Negroes patrolling their streets.

A couple of days earlier, somebody’d fired at one of Gracchus’ men. The guerrilla got his left hand torn up. Madison got a lesson, a painful one. The U.S. commandant, a cold-eyed captain named Lester Wallace, grabbed the first ten white men he could catch, lined them up against a brick wall, and had them shot without even blindfolding them first.

“Nobody fucks with anybody under U.S. authority in this town,” he told the horrified locals in a voice like iron, while the bodies still lay there bleeding. “Nobody, you hear?”

“Jesus God, it was only a nigger!” a woman shrilled.

“Anybody who comes out with that kind of shit from now on, I figure you just volunteered for hostage duty,” Wallace said. “Far as I can see, the black folks around here are worth at least ten of you assholes apiece—I mean at *least*. They didn’t start murdering people for the fun of it. You ‘Freedom!’-yelling cocksuckers did.”

“We didn’t know what happened to the colored folks who got shipped out,” an old man quavered.

“Yeah—now tell me another one. You give me horseshit like that, you’re a volunteer hostage, too,”

Captain Wallace said. “You didn’t know! Where’d you *think* they were going, you goddamn lying bucket of puke? To a fucking football game?”

Cassius didn’t know what he’d thought Yankees would be like. This chilly ferocity wasn’t it, though—he was sure of that. A lot of U.S. soldiers hated the enemy with a clear and simple passion that shoved everything else to one side.

“You know, I never had much use for smokes,” a skinny corporal who needed a shave told Cassius out of the blue one day. “But shit, man, if Featherston’s fuckers have it in for you, you gotta have somethin’ going for you.”

Was that logical? Cassius wondered what his father would have thought of it. But there was a brutal logic that beat down the more formal sort. *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*. That was working here.

It had a flip side. *The friend of my enemy is my enemy*. As Cassius and Gracchus patrolled Madison, Cassius said, “Ain’t never gonna be safe for niggers around here without Yankees close by from now on.”

“Reckon not,” Gracchus said, “but how safe was it for us ’fore the damnyankees done got here?”

That question answered itself. His family hauled out of church and taken off to a camp. His own life on the run ever since. The precarious life black guerrillas led, knowing there would be no mercy if they got caught.

“Well, you got me,” Cassius said.

They tramped into the town square. A bronze plaque was affixed to a small stone pillar there.

Somehow, the little monument had come through the fighting that leveled half the town without even a nick. Gracchus pointed to the plaque. “What’s it say?” he asked. Cassius had taught him his letters, but he still didn’t read well.

“Says it’s the Braswell Monument,” Cassius said. “Says in 1817

Benjamin Braswell done sold thirteen slaves after he was dead so they could use the money to educate white chillun. Says they raised almos'

thirty-six hundred dollars. Ain't that grand?"

"Sold niggers to help ofays. That's how it goes, sure as hell." Gracchus strode up to the Braswell Monument, unbuttoned his fly, and took a long leak. "Show what I thinks o' you, Mr. Benjamin fuckin'

Asswell."

A couple of white women with wheeled wire shopping carts were hurrying across the square. They took one look Gracchus' way and walked even faster. "They don't like your dark meat," Cassius said.

"My meat don't like them, neither," Gracchus replied. "I start fuckin' white women, I ain't gonna start fuckin' no ugly white women, an' they was dogs."

They hadn't been beautiful. Some Negroes in U.S. service didn't care. They took their revenge on Confederate women for everything Confederate men had done to them. A few U.S. officers reacted as badly to that as Confederate men might have. Not everyone in the USA loved Negroes, not by a long shot. But most men who wore green-gray uniforms hated the enemy worse than the blacks he'd oppressed.

"Know what I feel like?" Gracchus said as he and Cassius resumed their patrol. "I feel like a dog that jus' pissed somewhere to say, 'This here place mine.'"

"Dunno if it's yours or not," Cassius said. "Sure as shit don't belong to the Confederate ofays no mo'."

As if to emphasize that, the U.S. troops had run up a barbed-wire stockade just outside of Madison to hold C.S. prisoners of war. Cassius wasn't the only Negro drawn to that stockade as if by a magnet.

Seeing soldiers in butternut—and, better still, seeing Freedom Party Guards in brown-splotched camouflage—on the wrong side of the wire, stuck inside a camp, disarmed and glum while he carried a weapon, was irresistibly sweet.

"They gonna reduce your population!" a Negro from a different band jeered at the POWs. "They gonna put you on a train, an' you ain't

never gettin' off!"

Some of the captured Confederates looked scared—who could know for sure what the soldiers on the other side would do? Some swore at the black guerrilla. One stubborn sergeant said, "Fuck you in the heart, Sambo. They already put your nappy-headed whore of a mama on the train, and she deserved it, too."

A few seconds later, he lay dead, a bullet through his chest. A U.S. corporal, hearing the shot, came running. "Jesus!" he said when he saw the corpse. "What the hell'd you go and do that for?"

The Confederates in the stockade were screaming and pointing at the Negro who'd fired. The guerrilla was unrepentant. "He dogged my mother," he said simply. "Ain't nobody gonna dog my mother,

'specially not some goddamn ofay fuckhead."

"Christ, I'm gonna have to fill out papers on this shit," the noncom groaned. "Tell me what the fuck happened."

Several POWs tried to. They did their best to outshout the guerrilla who'd killed the sergeant. Cassius weighed in to balance them if he could.

"He said *that* to this guy?" the corporal said when he finished.

"He sure did," Cassius answered.

"Shit on toast," the noncom said. "He told me that, I bet I woulda blown his fuckin' head off." The POWs screamed at him, too. He flipped them off. "Listen up, assholes—something you better figure out.

You lost. These guys"—he pointed at Cassius and the other Negro —"they won. Better get used to it, or a hell of a lot of you are gonna end up dead. And you know what else? Nobody's gonna miss you, either."

"We won't ever put up with bein' under niggers!" a captive shouted.

"That's right!" Two or three more echoed him.

"Then I figure you'll be underground." The corporal pointed to the corpse. "Take your carrion over to the gate. We'll put him where he belongs."

He got more curses and jeers, and ignored all of them. After he went away, the other Negro stuck out his hand to Cassius. “Thanks for backin’ me. I’m Sertorius.”

“My name’s Cassius.” Cassius took the proffered hand. As he had with Gracchus, he asked, “Reckon we ever be able to do anything down here without the Yankees backin’ our play?”

“No,” Sertorius said calmly. “But so what? Yankees don’t come down here, fuckin’ Confederate ofays kill us anyways. They really did take my mama, God damn them to hell an’ gone.”

“Mine, too, an’ my pa, an’ my sister,” Cassius answered.

“How come they miss you?”

“On account of I didn’t go to church. That’s where they got everybody else.”

“I heard stories like that before,” Sertorius said. “If there’s a God, He got Hisself a nasty sense o’

humor.”

“Reckon so.” Cassius had wondered about God even before the ofays got his family. He’d always kept quiet, because he knew his mother didn’t want him saying—or thinking—things like that. He had the feeling his father was sitting on the same kind of doubts. The older man never talked about them, either.

One of these days, the two of them might have had some interesting things to say to each other. They never would now.

The black guerrillas had a camp alongside that of the U.S. soldiers who guarded the POWs and made sure the lid stayed on in Madison. They slept in U.S. Army tents, and used U.S. Army sleeping bags.

Those gave them better, softer nights than they’d had most of the time on their own.

They got U.S. Army mess kits, too, and ate U.S. Army chow with the men from north of the Mason-Dixon line. They didn’t have to wait till the soldiers in green-gray were served before they got fed. They just took their places in line, and the cooks slapped down whatever they happened to have.

Sometimes it was good, sometimes not. But there was always plenty. For Cassius, whose ribs had been a ladder, that was plenty to keep him from complaining.

When he went into Madison, kids would ask, “Got any rations? Got any candy?”

No. Starve, you little ofay bastards. That was always the first thought that went through his head.

But hating children didn’t come easy. They hadn’t done anything to him. And some of them looked hungry. He knew what being hungry was all about.

Then one of them called, “Hey, nigger! Got any candy?”

He didn’t shoot the boy, who must have been about eight. That would have got him talked about. He did say, “You call me a nigger, brat, you can damn well starve for all I care.”

The kid looked at him as if he were crazy. “Well, what are you if you ain’t a nigger?”

“A colored fellow, or a Negro, or even a black man,” Cassius answered. “Call somebody a nigger, it’s an insult, like.”

“You’re a nigger, all right, an’ you suck the damnyankees’ cocks,” the brat squeaked. He didn’t get a handout from Cassius, or a lesson. He also still didn’t get shot, but he came much closer to that than to either of the other two.

He’d likely feel the way he did till the day he died. So would countless others just like him. In the face of hate like that, what *were* the surviving Negroes in the CSA supposed to do? After the war ended, how could they settle down and make a living? If U.S. soldiers didn’t back them, how long would they last? Not long—that seemed only too obvious.

And if U.S. soldiers did back them, the white majority—much larger now than before the murders started—would hate Negroes more than ever…assuming such a thing was possible.

“We is fucked,” Cassius said sorrowfully. “We is *so* fucked.”

“What? On account o’ that ofay kid?” Gracchus said. “Little shithead run his mouth like that, he get hisself killed goddamn quick, an’

nobody be sorry, neither."

"No, not on account o' him," Cassius said, which wasn't exactly true. "On account of everything." He started to explain, then gave up. What was the use? Once upon a time, he would have found a place in Augusta—not the place he would have had if he were white, but a place. He would have fit in. Now?

Now he carried a Tredegar, and he was ready to kill any white who got in his way. That too was a place…of sorts.

C hester Martin smoked a cigarette outside of Monroe, Georgia, and waited for the next raiding party to head east. The company-strength expedition had proved what the brass thought before—the Confederates hadn't had anything worth mentioning to oppose a U.S. thrust. Why not try it again, in greater strength?

To Chester, the answer seemed obvious enough. If you hit them there once, wouldn't they get ready to make sure you couldn't do it again?

Lieutenant Boris Lavochkin looked at him—looked through him—with those cold, pale Slavic eyes.

"You're welcome to stay behind when we go, Sergeant," he said.

"You know I don't want to do that, sir," Chester said. "But I don't want to get my tit in a wringer, either, not when I don't have to."

"No guarantees in this business," Lavochkin said.

He wouldn't listen. Everything had come his way for a long time now. He thought it would keep right on happening. And he wasn't the only one. The brass never would have signed off on a raid if they didn't think it would fly. Maybe they were right. Chester could hope so, anyhow.

He did talk to Captain Rhodes, who, he was sure, knew his ass from his end zone. "If they're laying for us, sir, we'll be all dressed up with no place to go," he said.

"What do you think the odds are?" the company commander asked.

"Well, sir, we sure as hell won't take 'em by surprise twice," Martin answered.

"No, but how much can they do about it?" Rhodes said.

“Don’t know, sir,” Chester said. “I bet we find out, though. If I wanted to be a goddamn guinea pig, I would’ve bought myself a cage.”

That made Captain Rhodes grin, but he didn’t change his mind. “We’ve got our orders,” he said.

“We’re going to go through with them. If we run into trouble, I expect we’ll have backup. But I think we have a decent chance to bang on through, same as we did the last time around.”

“Hope you’re right, sir.” Chester didn’t believe it. Nobody above him cared what he believed. To the men in his platoon, he was God the Father to Lavochkin’s Son and Rhodes’ Holy Ghost. To the officers above him, he was just a retread with a big mouth. And the fellows with shoulder straps were the ones whose opinions mattered.

Two mornings later, the long, muscular armored column rolled down the road from Monroe to Good Hope, the same road the smaller raiding band had traveled not long before. Chester thought that might surprise whoever was in charge of the Confederate defenders. They wouldn’t believe anybody could be dumb enough to hit them the same way twice running. Chester had trouble believing it himself.

They didn’t run into any traffic on the way to Good Hope. They also didn’t run into any ambushes, for which Chester was duly grateful. Maybe the C.S. brass really couldn’t believe their foes would try the same ploy twice.

Good Hope looked like holy hell. Only a couple of people were on the street when the U.S. command cars and armored vehicles rolled in. The Confederate civilians didn’t think the green-gray machines were on their side this time. They took one horrified look, screamed, and ran for their lives.

Maybe that did them some good; maybe it didn’t. Machine guns and cannon cut loose as soon as the U.S. column came into the little town, and didn’t let up till it rolled through. Martin looked back over his shoulder after he was outside of Good Hope. Clouds of smoke announced that raiders were on the loose. If the enemy had telephone and telegraph lines back up from the last assault, people were already letting C.S. military authorities know about the new one.

If there were any C.S. military authorities in this part of Georgia… Perhaps there weren’t. Perhaps the Confederate States really were falling into ruin. Chester could hope so, anyhow.

Trouble came between Good Hope and Apalachee. The road went through some pine woods. The column stopped because a barricade of logs and rocks and overturned wrecked vehicles blocked it.

Getting barrels up to knock the obstruction aside wasn't quick or easy, not with trees of formidable size alongside the narrow, badly paved road.

And as soon as the column bogged down, C.S. troops in the woods opened up with automatic weapons, mortars, and stovepipe rockets. Chester didn't think there were a whole lot of them, which didn't mean they didn't do damage. Several soft-skinned vehicles and a halftrack caught fire. Wounded men howled.

U.S. soldiers hit back with all the firepower they'd brought along: heavy machine guns and cannon on their vehicles, along with the rifles and automatic rifles and submachine guns the men carried. Nobody could come close to the column and live, which didn't help all that much when it wasn't going anywhere.

After half an hour or so, U.S. barrels did shoulder the roadblock out of the way. The column went on, minus the vehicles put out of action. When the soldiers got to Apalachee, they tore into it even more savagely than they had at Good Hope. Not much was left of the hamlet when they came out the other side.

Chester hoped they wouldn't duplicate the whole route from the last raid. That would give the Confederates more chances to bushwhack them, and would also mean they were tearing up more stuff they'd already wrecked once. He nodded in approval when they left the road and started cross-country, heading as close to due east as made no difference.

Whenever they came to a farmhouse, they shot it up. If the people who lived there made it very plain they were giving up—if they came out with hands high—the soldiers let them flee with the clothes on their backs. If they showed fight or even if they just stayed inside, they got no second chances.

A startling number of rural Georgians seemed to think a few rounds from a squirrel rifle or a shotgun would set the U.S. Army running. They paid for their education. None of them would ever make that mistake, or any mistake, again. Often, their families died with them.

"That's kind of a shame, sir," Chester said as a woman trapped in a burning farmhouse and likely wounded shrieked her life away.

“Think of it as survival of the fittest,” Captain Rhodes replied. “If they’re dumb enough to fire on us, they’re too dumb to deserve to live.”

“She probably didn’t have a gun,” Martin said.

The company commander shrugged. “She was dumb enough to marry somebody who did. We aren’t here to talk to these people, Sergeant. We’re here to teach ’em that fucking with the United States is as dumb as it gets.”

Inside the farmhouse, cartridges started cooking off. The woman’s shrieks mercifully faded. “I’d say she’s got the point, sir,” Chester said. “Fat lot of good it’ll do her from here on out.”

Before Rhodes could answer, Chester and he both heard airplane motors overhead. They expected U.S. fighter-bombers to pound whatever lay ahead of them. Then a fearsome scream rose with the rumble. Chester had heard that noise too many times, though not so often lately.

“Asskickers!” he yelled, and threw himself flat.

Anybody who could get to an automatic weapon opened up on the vulture-winged C.S. dive bombers. The Mules ignored the ground fire and planted their bombs in the middle of the thickest concentrations of vehicles they could find. One landed right on a halftrack. The fireball caught a couple of nearby soldiers and turned them into torches. The Asskickers came back again to strafe the U.S.

soldiers. Machine-gun bullets stitched the ground much too close to Chester. He scraped away with his entrenching tool, not that it would do a hell of a lot of good.

And then the dive bombers were gone. Captain Rhodes looked around at the damage they’d done.

“Fuck,” he said softly. “You all right, Chester?”

“Yeah.” Martin scrabbled in his pockets for a cigarette. “Boy, I forgot how much fun that was.”

“Me, too,” Rhodes said. “We’ve got used to dishing it out. That’s a lot more fun than taking it.”

“Bet your ass—uh, sir.” Chester needed three tries before he could

strike a match; his hands were shaking. Then he held out the pack to Rhodes. The company commander didn't waste time trying to light one on his own. He just leaned close to Chester and started his the easy way.

Lieutenant Lavochkin came up. "We ought to push on, sir," he said. "We can do a lot more damage before nightfall."

He didn't care about the air attack. All he wanted to do was keep hitting the Confederates. That was either admirable or slightly insane, depending. Captain Rhodes sighed and blew out a ragged plume of smoke. "We'll see to the dead and wounded, and then we'll go on," he said.

Some of the dead didn't leave enough remains to bury. Maybe the Confederates would tear up the graves the men in green-gray quickly dug, but Chester could hope they wouldn't. Plenty of C.S. soldiers lay in U.S. soil, for the most part quietly.

When the war was over, they would probably sort all of that out. They'd done the same thing after the Great War. By all the signs, this war was bigger and nastier than the one that had lasted from 1914 to 1917. What would they call it when it was done? The Greater War? The Worse War? Right now, it was just the War, commonly with an obscene adjective stuck on in front.

They did roll on after an hour or so, and took a would-be Confederate ambush from behind. The enemy soldiers seemed highly offended at that—those who lived through the encounter, anyhow. U.S.

soldiers took prisoners, as much to keep their intelligence officers happy as because they really wanted to. One of the men in butternut complained, "Y'all weren't suppose to come where you did."

"That's what she said," Chester answered, which left his buddies laughing and the POW shaking his head.

Home guards and Mexicans tried to make a fight in Stephens and Hutchings, two little towns in front of Lexington. They got blasted out of the way in short order in both places. They were brave, but bravery and small arms and a few mines didn't go very far against halftracks and barrels. The two villages went up in flames.

Lexington was a tougher nut to crack. The defenders had a couple of quick-firing three-inch guns, leftovers from a generation earlier. For

all Chester knew, they'd been sitting on the courthouse lawn ever since. If they had, somebody'd kept them well greased. And some old-timer— *probably a guy a lot like me*, Chester thought—knew what to do with them. Shells rained down on the advancing U.S. soldiers.

But the Confederates didn't seem to have any armor-piercing ammunition. Those three-inchers weren't made for barrel busting, anyway. They did hurt some men on foot and in soft-skinned vehicles, but that was enough to make the soldiers in green-gray angry without being enough to stop them. As the December sun went down, Lexington got the same treatment as the two smaller towns in front of it.

The U.S. soldiers camped in the ruins. "See?" Lieutenant Lavochkin said. "Piece of cake."

"Expensive piece of cake…sir," Chester said woodenly.

Lavochkin shrugged. "They paid more than we did. And we can afford it better than they can."

Both those things were probably true. In the cold calculus of war, they were also probably the only things that mattered. A guy who'd just stopped shrapnel with his belly cared about none of that. Chester lit a Raleigh and thanked God he hadn't.

O ne of the first things Dr. Leonard O'Doull found out about Sergeant Goodson Lord was that he hated his name. "My mother's maiden name, and I've got it for my first one," the new medic said. "If I had a dime for every time I got called Good Lord, I'd be a goddamn millionaire."

"I believe it," O'Doull said. "Didn't your folks realize what they were doing?"

"I doubt it," Lord replied. "Neither one of 'em's got much of a sense of humor, I'm afraid."

"How about you?" O'Doull asked.

"Me, sir?" Sergeant Lord gave him a wry grin. "I earned mine the hard way. It was either laugh or murder some yokking asshole before I was twelve years old."

"Well, I spent a couple of years working with a guy who answered to

Granny," O'Doull said. "If I say Good Lord every once in a while, I may not be talking to you."

"Can't ask for more," Lord said.

"And I'll tell you one more time—careful about the women around here."

"Hey, I like screwing—who doesn't?" the noncom said. "I hope I'm not too dumb about going after it."

He didn't seem to swish now, even if O'Doull had wondered before. He was on the young side of thirty. Most guys his age would have said the same thing—unless they came out and admitted that they thought with their dick. "*Try* not to get murdered," O'Doull said earnestly. "I hate breaking in a new guy every couple of months, you know what I mean?"

"Sir, I will do my best," Sergeant Lord said.

He did his best with the wounded, too. He was at least as good as Vince Donofrio had been, and he was plainly a better anesthetist. O'Doull still missed Granville McDougald, but Lord would definitely do.

And the wounded kept coming in as U.S. forces cut off one road into and out of Atlanta after another.

O'Doull worked like a maniac to keep the hurt men from dying or getting worse right away, then sent them off to field hospitals farther back of the line.

He spent quite a bit of time patching up a sergeant's left hand, which had taken a bullet through the palm. "I *think* he'll have pretty good function there," he said when the surgery was done. "Hope so, anyway."

"I bet he will, Doc," Goodson Lord said. "You really do pay attention to the little stuff, and it matters.

I've seen some guys just stitch up a wound like that and let it go. They figure the doctor in the rear'll take care of it, and sometimes they're right and sometimes they're wrong. Myself, I always thought it was a lazy, shitty thing to do."

“I’m with you. The more you do right the first time, as soon as you can, the less you have to be sorry for later,” O’Doull said.

Sometimes you couldn’t do much. The corpsmen brought in a soldier in the mottled camouflage uniform of a Freedom Party Guard; he’d been shot through the head. “Why did you bother?” Lord said after one look at the wound.

“Well, you never can tell,” Eddie answered.

That was true. Every once in a while, O’Doull got a surprise. But he didn’t think he would this time.

The wounded man was barely breathing. His pupils were of different sizes and unresponsive to light, his pulse reedy and fading. Brains and blood and bits of bone dribbled out of a hole the size of O’Doull’s fist.

“I can clean things up a little, but that’s it,” O’Doull said. “He’s in God’s hands, not mine.” He didn’t think God would hang on tight, either.

The Confederate died halfway through the cleanup. He gave a couple of hitching last breaths and then just—stopped. “That’s a mercy,” Sergeant Lord said. “Other mercy is, he never knew what hit him.

How many bad burns have you seen, Doc?”

“One is a million too many,” O’Doull answered, and the senior medic nodded. When O’Doull thought of those, he didn’t think of seeing them, though. The smell, like pork left too long in the oven, rose up in his mind as vividly as if a burned barrelman lay on the table in front of him.

And they got themselves a different kind of casualty, one brought in not by the medics but by an irate platoon commander. “Sir, this sorry son of a bitch has the clap,” the lieutenant said in a voice that seemed barely done changing. “Isn’t that right, Donnelly?”

“’Fraid so,” Donnelly said. “Hurts like hell when I piss.”

“Well, we can do something about that,” O’Doull said; guys with VD were just as much out of the fight as if Jake Featherston’s men had plugged them. “Drop your pants, Donnelly, and turn the other cheek.”

“You gonna give me a shot?” the soldier asked apprehensively.

“Yup.” O’Doull readied the needle—a big one.

“I thought you got pills for the clap.” Donnelly might well be fearless in the field, but he sure wasn’t here.

“You used to. This penicillin clears it up faster and better, though,” O’Doull said. “Now bend over.”

“You fuck around, Donnelly, I’ll have you bend over and I’ll kick your sorry ass—I won’t stick it,”

the kid lieutenant said.

By the expression on Donnelly’s face, he would rather have got a kicking than a shot. But he saw he had no choice. He yelped when the needle went home. O’Doull pushed in the plunger with a certain malicious glee. “For Chrissake, wear a rubber next time,” he said.

“It’s like screwing in socks,” Donnelly whined.

“Well, your sweetheart sure gave you something to remember her by,” O’Doull said. “What did you give her?”

“Four cans of deviled ham. She was skinny as all get-out. How was I supposed to know she’d give me a drippy faucet?”

“You’re supposed to think about shit like that,” his platoon commander snapped before O’Doull could say anything. “How many times did you hear about it in basic?”

“Yes, sir,” Donnelly said. O’Doull had a good notion of what he *wasn’t* saying: that the only thing he’d cared about was getting his jollies.

That was natural enough. Of course, so was running away if somebody started shooting at you.

Soldiers could learn not to. They could also learn not to screw without being careful. They could, but this one hadn’t.

“Clap isn’t the only thing to worry about down here,” O’Doull said. “Medic who worked with me got murdered for laying a Confederate woman.”

“I wasn’t worried about that, sir. I wasn’t worried about anything,” Donnelly said.

He wouldn’t listen. O’Doull could see that. “Well, pull your pants up

and get the hell out of here," he said. "If you come down with another dose, so help me God I'll find a bigger needle." The threat might work if anything did.

It made Donnelly look worried as he covered himself again, anyhow. The lieutenant kept barking at him as he led him away from the aid station. "How often does that happen?" Lord asked.

"Every now and again," O'Doull answered. "At least this guy didn't have a chancre."

"Penicillin'll do for syphilis, too," Sergeant Lord said.

"Sure a lot better than the chemicals full of arsenic we used before," O'Doull agreed. "And before that it was mercury and all kinds of other poison."

The senior medic made a face. "I think I'd rather have the pox. A lot of the time, something else would kill you before it got bad."

"Maybe," O'Doull said. "But maybe not, too. A lot of the time, you'd get sick over and over, one thing after another. They'd all be different. They'd all *look* different, anyhow. But they'd all have syphilis at the bottom. Damn thing's the great pretender."

"You know more about it than I do, sir," Sergeant Lord said. "I played the trombone before I got conscripted. I knew some guys who had it, and it didn't seem to bother them all that much."

"Seem to is right," O'Doull said, and then, "The trombone, eh? Have one with you?"

"Afraid not, sir. It's not like a flute or even the trumpet—not so easy to carry around."

"Too bad. Well, maybe you can liberate one."

"Maybe." Goodson Lord looked dubious. "I've seen fiddles and pianos and guitars in these pissant Confederate towns, but that's about it."

"Well, let the corpsmen know. Let the guys in front of us know," O'Doull said. "You'd be amazed at what they can come up with—besides the clap, I mean."

"If I want that, I'll get it myself," Lord said. O'Doull snorted.

Since the medic didn't seem to want to spread the word, O'Doull did it for him. Inside of three days, Eddie produced a horn. "Here you go," he said. "Merry Christmas."

"I'll be a son of a bitch," Goodson Lord said. He took the trombone and started to play. Notes smooth and mellow as butter filled the tent. They made the Army bugles O'Doull was used to seem like screeching blue jays by comparison.

"Wow!" Eddie said. "You really *can* play that so-and-so."

"You think I was lying?" Lord asked, lowering the trombone.

"No, not like that," Eddie answered. "But there's playing, and then there's *playing*, you know?

You're really good!"

"Oh. Thanks." The corpsman's enthusiasm made the sergeant blink. He started to play some more.

He got about thirty seconds into a number from *Oh, Sequoyah!* before a corpsman brought in a man with a piece of shrapnel in his thigh. "You can blow that thing, man," the soldier said. "Can you keep playing while the doc works on me?"

"Sorry," Lord said after a quick look at the wound. "I think we're gonna have to knock you out."

"Aw, hell," the wounded man said. As far as Leonard O'Doull could remember, that was the first time he'd ever heard a man ask *not* to be anesthetized.

Sergeant Lord got the patient etherized on the table. O'Doull cut away the man's trouser leg and started cleaning out the wound and tying off bleeders. He could see the femoral artery pulsing in there, but it wasn't cut. If it had been, the man likely would have bled out before he got back to the aid station.

O'Doull sewed him up and injected him with penicillin and tetanus antitoxin. "These aren't so bad," he said. "He should heal up fine."

"You do like to work on 'em when they turn out that way," Lord agreed. "How many amputations have you done?"

"I couldn't even begin to count 'em. They're like burns: more than I

ever wanted to, that's for damn sure," O'Doull said.

"Yeah, same here," Lord said. "They're easy to perform, they're fast, and the patient usually comes through 'em pretty well. But you know he'll never be the same afterwards, the poor bastard."

"Ain't it the truth?" O'Doull said sadly. "Most of the time when I do an amputation, I feel more like a butcher than a surgeon."

"That's about the size of it," Lord said.

O'Doull wished they hadn't been talking about it, because the very next man the corpsman carried in had a foot and lower leg smashed beyond the hope of saving. The doctor pulled out the bone saw and did what he had to do. As Sergeant Lord had said, the soldier would probably pull through. Whether he would be happy about it was a different question. O'Doull wasn't likely ever to learn his answer to it.

F ayetteville lay south and even a little west of Atlanta. A rail line ran through it. Once the U.S. Army got astride that line, it would pinch off one more Confederate artery into the beleaguered capital of Georgia. Lieutenant Michael Pound didn't think the enemy would be able to hold Atlanta much longer after that happened.

Being a platoon commander, Pound wore earphones more often than he wanted to. Instead of doing as he pleased, he had to keep track of what the other units in the regiment and the other barrels in his platoon were up to. He thought it cramped his style.

"Marquard's platoon has lost three barrels at square G-5," a voice from somewhere in back of the line intoned. "Need armor there to cover the infantry advance."

Pound checked the map. If his platoon was where he thought, they were right on the edge of G-5

themselves. "Pound here," he answered on the same frequency. "We can cover. Do you know why they lost them? Over."

He waited. He didn't have to wait long. "Roger your covering," the voice said. "Report is that the losses are due to enemy barrels. Over."

"What the hell's wrong with Marquard?" Pound asked, but not with the TRANSMIT key pressed. He happened to know that the other lieutenant had new-model machines. To his way of thinking, you had

to be worse than careless to lose three in a hurry to C.S. barrels. You damn near had to be criminally negligent.

He wirelessed the news to the other four barrels in his platoon. By what their commanders said, they felt the same way. “We’ll take care of it,” one of the sergeants promised. “Those butternut bastards can kiss their butts good-bye.”

“Damn straight!” Pound said. He led a bunch of hard-charging pirates, men who thought the same way he did. “Let’s go get ’em. Follow me.”

He led the platoon west and a little south, to come in where the luckless Marquard had got in trouble.

He hadn’t got far before realizing the trouble might not be what he thought. There sat a dead U.S. barrel in a field—not just dead but decapitated, for the turret lay upside down, about ten feet from the chassis.

“Fuck,” Sergeant Scullard said. “Where’d they get a gun that could do that?”

“Good question,” Pound said, which didn’t answer the gunner. He got on the platoon circuit again: “Be careful, guys. Use all the cover you can. I think Featherston’s fuckers just came up with something new.”

For most of a year, the latest U.S. barrels had dominated the battlefield. If they couldn’t do that any more…then everything got harder. Michael Pound approved of easy, not that the enemy cared.

He flipped up the lid to the cupola and stood up in the turret. He needed to be able to *see*; the periscopes built into the cupola just didn’t do the job. There wasn’t a lot of small-arms fire. If the C.S.

gunners who nailed that U.S. barrel opened up on him with an automatic rifle or a machine gun…that was better than having them shoot at his barrel with whatever monster gun they had.

One of the other barrels in his platoon was about a hundred yards to his left. He saw a blast of flame burst from a thick stand of bushes, heard a thunderous roar, and a moment later watched the other U.S.

barrel brew up. The men inside couldn’t have had a chance—and that gun, whatever it was, would be aiming at him next.

“Front!” he bawled as he tumbled back into the turret.

“Identified,” Scullard answered. “I’m going to give it AP. I think a hull’s hiding in there.”

“I don’t know. I didn’t see one.” But Pound added, “If you got a better look, go with what you think.”

Mouradian had already slammed the round into the breech. The gunner fired the piece. The cannon’s bellow was slightly muffled inside the turret. Smoke and fire spurted from the heart of the bushes.

Michael Pound whooped and thumped Sergeant Scullard on the back. “Gimme another round!” Scullard told the loader. He fired again. More flames burst from the bushes. *Shame Moses isn’t here*, Pound thought.

“Sir, I think that son of a bitch is history,” Scullard said.

“I think you’re right,” Pound said. “And if you weren’t so quick—and if you weren’t so sure about what was hiding there—we would be instead.” He spoke into the intercom: “Move forward—carefully. I want to see what the hell we killed.”

“Yes, sir,” the driver answered.

By the time Pound’s barrel drew near, the bushes were burning briskly. Through them, he got a pretty good look at a low hull, a turret as smoothly curved as a turtle’s carapace, and a gun that looked as if it came off a destroyer.

“Fuck,” Scullard said again. “Gonna be a ton of work killing these babies.”

“We can do it. You did it,” Pound said.

“I know,” the gunner said. “But they can kill us, too, easy as you please. I hope the Confederates don’t have a lot of ’em.”

“Me, too,” Pound admitted. “We can’t go marching around like no gun can touch us any more—that’s for sure.” Sometimes U.S. new-model barrels, confident in their armor, would almost dare C.S.

machines to shoot at them. If you did that against one of these barrels, they’d bury your ashes in a tobacco pouch.

He got on the wireless to pass what he’d found to division HQ. “Roger

that," came the reply. "We've had a couple of other reports about them."

The soldier on the other end of the connection sounded calm and relaxed. Why not? He was well behind the line. "Why the devil didn't you pass the word along?" Pound yelled. "You damn near got me killed!"

"We said the losses were due to enemy barrels," the wireless man answered, as if that were enough.

He probably thought it was.

Pound took off the earphones. "We can beat the enemy," he said to nobody in particular, "but God help us against our own side."

"Headquarters being stupid again?" Scullard asked sympathetically.

"They'd have to wise up to get to stupid." Warming to his theme, Pound added, "They've got their headquarters in their hindquarters."

"And we're the ones who'll end up paying for it," the gunner predicted.

"Guy in one of our uniforms coming up," Mouradian said.

That sent Pound out of the cupola again, a captured Confederate submachine gun at the ready. Just because somebody wore a U.S. uniform, he wasn't necessarily a U.S. soldier. But he stopped by himself before Pound could tell him not to come any closer. "You nailed that fucker," he said. His harsh accent claimed he was from Kansas or Nebraska, but that didn't prove anything, either.

"Yeah," Pound answered. "And so?"

"More of 'em around—bound to be," said the U.S. soldier—Pound supposed he was a U.S. soldier, anyhow. "Can you clear 'em out?"

"Who knows?" Pound didn't just look at the monstrous machine his barrel had just wrecked. He looked back at the U.S. barrel the Confederates had killed. Those were five men of his, five friends of his, gone in the wink of an eye. He hadn't had even a moment to grieve. He still didn't, not really.

"Those other guys, they walked into a buzz saw," the infantryman in green-gray said. "Bam! Bam!

Bam! They went out one after another. I don't think they ever knew what got 'em."

Pound hoped the men in the barrel from his platoon didn't know what got 'em. Was that a 4½-inch gun on the C.S. machine? A fiveincher? Whatever it was, it was devastating.

A Confederate machine gun started snarling. The foot soldier threw himself flat. Pound ducked down into the turret. He got on the platoon circuit with the survivors: "We're moving up. For God's sake, watch it. We aren't the biggest cats in the jungle any more."

How many of those big barrels did Featherston's men have? How fast were they? How maneuverable? How well did they do on bad ground? A barrel's engine could be as important a weapon as its gun. But the gun in that bastard…

"Kinda revs up the pucker factor, doesn't it, sir?" Scullard said, which came unpleasantly close to echoing Pound's thoughts.

"Maybe a little," he answered, his voice as dry as he could make it. He didn't want to admit he was scared, but he couldn't very well deny it, either. He got on the wireless: "Any chance of sending up some more armor to G-5? We don't know what's ahead of us, and it feels pretty naked around here."

"Well, we'll see what we can do," said the wireless operator on the other end of the line. He was sitting in a chair under canvas somewhere. For all Michael Pound knew, he was eating bonbons and patting a cute nurse on the ass to hear her giggle. He wasn't up here at the sharp end of the wedge, wondering if he'd cook like a pot roast in the next few seconds.

Two rounds of HE silenced that chattering machine gun. The country was pine woods and little clearings. Pound stayed away from the clearings when he could and dashed across when he couldn't.

Somewhere ahead lay the Georgia Southern line, somewhere ahead and to the right the unreduced town of Fayetteville. If everything worked, the enemy would have to abandon it along with Atlanta. Pound had been confident. He wished he still were.

He also wished the enemy were still counterattacking. That would have made things easier. Then those big honking barrels would have had to show themselves. As things were, they lurked in ambush. The

only way to find one was…the hard way.

Having foot soldiers along came in handy. Pound waited in the woods while the men in green-gray trotted across a field. A big round of HE slammed into the poor bloody infantry. Some U.S. soldiers went flying, while others flattened out and dug in.

“See where that came from, sir?” Scullard asked.

“Bearing was almost straight ahead of us—behind that twisted tree with the chunk of bark missing,”

Pound answered, peering through the periscopes. “If he’s smart, he’ll back away—he ought to figure our guys have armor with ’em.”

“Maybe he’ll get greedy instead,” the gunner said.

Pound wouldn’t have, but the enemy crew did. They fired twice more at the infantrymen in the field.

They had good targets in front of them, and they were going to take advantage of it. To give them their due, they didn’t have any room to retreat, not if the CSA wanted to hang on to the railroad line.

“Identify ’em now, Mel?” Pound asked.

“Oh, hell, yes,” Scullard said, and then, to the loader, “AP!” He added, “Be ready for another round as fast as you can. If the first one doesn’t do the trick, we’ve got to try again.”

“Right,” Mouradian said.

If the second one doesn’t do the trick, we’ve got to get away— if we can, Pound thought. The C.S. barrel would know where the shots were coming from, and would answer. Pound didn’t want to be on the receiving end of that reply.

The gun spoke twice in quick succession. Scullard didn’t wait to see if the first round hit before sending the second on its way. As soon as he’d fired both of them, Pound shouted, “Reverse!” The barrel jerked backward.

No enemy antibarrel rounds came after it. Pound popped out of the turret to see what they’d done to the C.S. barrel. Smoke rose from behind the tree, an ever-growing cloud. He spotted motion back there —somebody’d got out and was running away. That impressed him in

spite of himself. His own barrel wouldn't have let anybody inside survive, not after it got hit twice. The Confederates had themselves some deadly dangerous new toys here. He hoped like anything they didn't have too many of them.

V

I rving Morrell posed for U.S. photographers in front of the Atlanta city hall. New Year's Day for 1944

was chilly and overcast, with the wet-dust smell of rain in the air. Morrell didn't care. He would have posed for these pictures in the middle of a deluge.

"A year ago, we were still mopping up in Pittsburgh," he said. "Now we're here. We've done pretty damn well for ourselves, by God."

"Did you expect the Confederates to evacuate the city?" a reporter asked.

"They were going to lose it either way," Morrell answered. "The question was, would they lose Atlanta, or would they lose Atlanta and the army that was holding it? They saved a good part of the army by pulling out."

They'd saved more than he wished they would have. They'd started the evacuation at night, and bad weather had kept U.S. fighter-bombers on the ground, so their columns hadn't got the pounding they should have. Patton's army was still a going concern, somewhere over near the Alabama border. Morrell didn't know what his C.S. opposite number would do with the men he had left, but he figured Patton would think of something.

A rifle banged, not too far away. Holdouts and snipers still prowled Atlanta. The Confederates had planted lots of mines. They'd attached booby traps to everything from fountain pens to toilet seats. The Stars and Stripes might fly here, but the town wasn't safe, and wouldn't be for quite a while.

"How much does this victory mean?" another reporter called.

"Well, the enemy will have a lot tougher time fighting the war without Atlanta than he would have with it," Morrell said. "It was a factory town and a transport hub, and now he'll have to do without all

that.”

The reporter waved at the wreckage. “Doesn’t look like he could have done too much with it even when he had it.”

“You’d be amazed,” Morrell said. “We’ve seen how places that look beaten to death can go right on producing till they finally change hands.”

A plaque on the bullet-pocked terra-cotta wall behind him said ATLANTA RESURGENS, 1847–1927.

The city hall had gone up in the brief spell of prosperity that followed the CSA’s devastating postwar inflation. Then the worldwide economic collapse sucked down the Confederacy along with almost everybody else, and paved the way for the rise of Jake Featherston.

“What do you aim to do now, General?” another reporter inquired.

By his earnest voice and expectant look, he really expected Morrell to answer in detail. Some reporters never did figure out that their right to a good story stopped where it began to endanger U.S.

soldiers. As gently as he could, Morrell said, “Well, I don’t want General Patton to read about it in tomorrow’s paper, you know.”

“Will you drive west into Alabama or east toward the Atlantic?” This fellow was stubborn or stupid or both.

“Yes,” Morrell answered. The reporter blinked. Some of his colleagues, quicker on the uptake, grinned. Morrell said, “That’s about all, boys. Happy New Year.”

A few more flashbulbs popped. He didn’t mind that—the Confederates already knew he was in Atlanta. Bodyguards closed up around him as the press conference ended. He didn’t care for the guards, but he didn’t care to get killed, either. Enemy snipers would have loved to get him in their sights.

The State Capitol wasn’t far away. A lot of people on his staff had wanted him to make his headquarters there. He said no, and kept saying no till they believed him. Demolition men were still going through the building, which looked like a scaled-down version of the Confederate Capitol in Richmond—at the moment, including bomb damage. They’d already found a couple of dozen booby traps there… and how many had they missed?

A small, none too fancy house a couple of blocks away seemed a better, safer bet. The demolition experts had swept it, too, and found it clear. The Confederates didn't have enough ordnance or time to booby-trap *everything*, which came as a relief.

Morrell had other things to worry about, plenty of them. Sitting on his desk when he got back were photos of wrecked new-model C.S. barrels. By all reports, they were half a step ahead of the U.S.

machines that had dominated the battlefield for most of 1943. How far could that race go? Would there be land dreadnoughts one day, with twelve-inch guns and armor thick enough to stop twelve-inch shells?

You could build one now. What you couldn't build was an engine that would make it go faster than a slow walk—if it moved at all.

He was glad the reporters hadn't asked him anything about the new enemy machines. He wouldn't have had much of an answer for them, except to note that the Confederates didn't seem to have very many. How long would that last? *Hit Birmingham harder by air*, he wrote. Notes helped him remember the million things he had to do. They were already dropping everything but the kitchen sink on the town. Have to throw that in, too.

A large explosion stunned the air and his ears. He ducked, not that that would have done him any good had the blast been closer. He hauled out his notebook again. *Hit Huntsville, too*, he scribbled.

Intelligence said the Confederates made their rockets there. Not many of them had crashed down on Atlanta yet, but how long would that last? Not long enough—he was dismally sure of it.

He was also sure he couldn't do a damn thing about the rockets except smash the factories that made them and the launchers that sent them on their way. Once they got airborne, there was no defense.

If Featherston had had them from the beginning…That would have been very bad. He was content to leave the thought there. Neither side had all of what it needed when the war began. Part of what the war was about was finding out what you needed. He'd heard rumors that higher-ups in Philadelphia were all excited about some fancy new explosive. Maybe that would end up meaning something, and maybe it wouldn't. They'd throw money and talent at it and see what happened next. What else could they do?

Another big boom rattled his nerves. He didn't know if the enemy was working on super-duper explosives. The ordinary sort people had been using since the end of the last century seemed plenty good enough.

Now he had to figure out what to do himself. The reporter had given him his two basic choices: he could keep his original plan of driving to the sea, or swing west against Birmingham and Huntsville. If the War Department ordered him to go west, he would, he decided. Otherwise, he wanted to cut the Confederacy in half. If the offensive in Virginia came to something, where would Jake Featherston run then? And could the Confederate West stand on its own for long without orders from Richmond—and without Featherston's ferocious energy available to stiffen spines? Finding out would be interesting.

An aide stuck his head into the bedroom Morrell was using for an office. "Sir, the mayor of Atlanta would like to speak to you."

"He would, would he?" Morrell said. "So he didn't run away with the Confederate army?"

"I guess not, sir."

"Well, send him in, then. Let's see what he's got to say for himself."

The mayor had gray hair and was skinny as a rail. He introduced himself as Andrew Crowley. When Morrell asked him why he hadn't fled, he answered, "I wanted to protect my people, so I chose to remain." He threw back his head, a gesture straight out of a corny movie.

"That's nice," Morrell said. "How many Negroes are you protecting?"

"I was speaking of Confederate citizens, sir," the mayor answered, "not of Confederate residents."

One word made all the difference in the world.

"They all look like people to me," Morrell said.

"You don't understand the way we do things in this country," Crowley told him.

"Maybe I don't," Morrell allowed. "Of course, if you hadn't invaded mine I wouldn't be down here now. Since I am, I have to tell you that murder looks a lot like murder, no matter who you do it to. I haven't got a whole hell of a lot of sympathy for you, Mr. Mayor."

“We did what the government in Richmond told us to do,” Crowley insisted. “Don’t see how you can go and flabble about that.”

“Yeah, sure. Now tell me you never once yelled, ‘Freedom!’ in all your born days.”

Andrew Crowley’s hollow cheeks turned red. “I—” He stopped. Maybe he’d been about to deny it.

But how many people could give him the lie—to say nothing of the horse laugh—if he tried?

“Here’s what’s going on,” Morrell told him. “We’ll try to keep your people from starving. We’ll try to keep them from coming down sick. If they stay quiet, we’ll leave ’em alone. If they don’t, we’ll make

’em sorry. Shoot at a U.S. soldier, and we’ll take twenty hostages and shoot ’em. Kill any U.S. soldier, and we’ll take fifty hostages and shoot ’em. Kill a Negro, and it’s the same price. Got that? Is it plain enough for you?”

“You’re as cruel and hard as the government warned us you would be,” Crowley whined.

“Tough beans, Mr. Mayor.” Was Morrell enjoying himself playing the tyrant? As a matter of fact, he was. “Your soldiers were every bit as sweet in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Only difference now is, the shoe’s on the other foot. Hope you like the way it feels.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” the mayor said. “Fifty people for a worthless nigger? If that’s not a joke, it ought to be.”

“Chances are you don’t need to worry about it much,” Morrell said. “I bet you’ve taken most of yours off to be killed by now. Isn’t that right?”

“Even if it is, the idea’s ridic—” Crowley broke off several words too late. He went red again, this time at what he’d admitted by letting his mouth run free.

“Get out of my sight,” Morrell said. “I don’t think we’ve got much to say to each other. You wouldn’t like it if I told you what I thought. Just get out before I chuck you in the calaboose.”

Crowley got. This probably wasn’t the interview he’d wanted to have.

Morrell didn't intend to lose any sleep about that. He went into the bathroom and washed his hands. He wasn't Pilate, turning his back on the truth. He knew it when he ran into it, and its touch disgusted him.

He was glad he was only a soldier. He didn't have to try to figure out how to administer captured C.S.

territory on any long-term basis. All he had to worry about was making sure the locals didn't give his men too much trouble. The War Department didn't care if he got rough doing it. That suited him fine, because the little he'd seen south of the Ohio inclined him to be gentle.

A long lifetime earlier, this had been part of the country he'd grown up in, the country he served. It wasn't any more. Nothing could be plainer than that. Attitudes toward the USA, attitudes toward Negroes…

Jake Featherston hadn't been in the saddle here for even ten years. But the hatreds he'd exploited and built on had been here long before he used them to such deadly effect. You couldn't create those out of nothing. Without them, the black rebellions during the Great War wouldn't have had such lasting and terrible aftereffects. Did whites here have guilty consciences? They had plenty to feel guilty about, that was for sure. If they didn't, the CSA's Negroes never would have launched uprisings almost surely doomed to fail.

Will the Confederates go on fighting for the next eighty years even if we wipe their country off the map? That was Morrell's greatest dread, and the greatest dread of everyone in the USA who thought about such things at all. The Mormons were bad. Canada gave every sign of being worse. But the Confederate States? If these people stayed determined, they could be an oozing sore for a long, long time.

If the United States *didn't* wipe their country off the map, wouldn't they start another big war in a generation? And wouldn't that be even worse?

G eorge Enos, Jr., was a shellback. You couldn't get to the Sandwich Islands from Boston by sea without becoming a shellback. That gave him the privilege of harrying the poor, hapless polliwogs aboard the *Josephus Daniels*. The sailors who hadn't crossed the Equator before paid for the honor of swearing allegiance to King Neptune.

The poor polliwogs got sprayed with saltwater from the hoses. Some of them were painted here and there with iodine. The cook who doubled as a barber cut their hair in strange and appalling ways. One rating who was inordinately proud of his handlebar mustache got half of it hacked off. Anyone who squawked got thumped, too.

Sid Becker, a chief petty officer who might have been the hairiest man George had ever seen, played King Neptune. His mermaids had mop tops for wigs, inflated condoms for breasts, and some kind of padding to give them hips. They also had hellacious five o'clock shadows, no doubt to emulate their sovereign.

Polliwogs had to kiss each stubbly mermaid and then kiss King Neptune's right big toe, which was as hairy as the rest of him. George and the other shellbacks whooped as they gave out what they'd taken when they were initiated into the fraternity of the sea.

Sweetest of all, as far as George was concerned, was that Myron Zwilling was a polliwog. King Neptune didn't respect rank or anything else; that was a big part of what made the ceremony what it was. The exec did have the sense to know he couldn't complain about anything that happened to him.

He didn't have the sense to know he ought to look as if he were enjoying it. He went through it with the air of a man who had no choice. George wondered if he was noting who did what to him for payback later. He wouldn't have been surprised—that seemed like Zwilling's style.

After crossing the Equator, the ship got back to work: keeping Argentine beef and grain from getting across the Atlantic, and keeping the Royal Navy from interfering. She could do the first on her own. For the second, she had help from a pair of escort carriers: the *Irish Sea* and the *Oahu*. The limeys had carriers in these waters, too. If one side's airplanes found the other…there would be a big brawl.

George was glad Captain Carsten gave the crews so much gunnery practice. The more time he put in as a loader, the faster he got. The more shells the twin 40mm mount threw, the better the chance it had of knocking down an enemy Swordfish or Spitfire before the airplane could perpetrate whatever atrocity its crew had in mind. Maybe even more than the other sailors in the gun crew, George liked that idea. They hadn't been attacked from the air when they couldn't shoot back. He had.

Having their own airplanes along enormously extended how far they could see. A wireless call sent the flotilla steaming south after a convoy more than a hundred miles away. The enemy freighters and their escorts would have got away if the baby flattops hadn't joined the destroyers and cruisers in the South Atlantic.

"Keep an eye peeled for subs," Swede Jorgenson warned as the *Josephus Daniels* picked up speed.

The new gun chief added, "Be just like the limeys to have a couple traveling with the convoy just to fuck us over."

Even though the destroyer escort had its fancy new hydrophone, that struck George as good advice.

He scanned the blue water for a telltale periscope. Maybe it wouldn't help, but it sure couldn't hurt. He didn't want to die the way his father had. He didn't want to die at all, but especially not that way.

Fighters and dive bombers streaked off the escort carriers. These new carriers didn't seem to have torpedo airplanes aboard. Scuttlebutt said the brass had decided they were sitting ducks, and dive bombers could do the job better.

Reaching the enemy convoy took a while. The *Oahu* and the *Irish Sea* slowed down the rest of the U.S. ships. The baby flattops were no faster than any of their predecessors. "Snails with flight decks,"

Jorgenson said scornfully.

"Yeah, but they're *our* snails with flight decks," George answered, and the crew chief grinned at him.

"Now hear this! Now hear this!" Lieutenant Zwilling said over the PA system. "Our aircraft report one enemy destroyer sinking and one on fire. The convoy is breaking up in flight. That is all." That was plenty to set sailors slapping one another on the back.

They steamed on. Then the *Josephus Daniels* and another destroyer escort pulled away from the ships that still stayed with the airplane carriers. "Something's going on," Jorgenson said.

"Do you think so, Sherlock?" Marco Angelucci said. The new shell-jerker laughed to take any sting from the words.

“Wish the exec or the skipper would tell us what,” George said.

He’d hardly spoken before Zwilling came on the PA again. “We are in pursuit of a pair of enemy freighters that broke north from the pack of ships in the convoy. Our purpose is the capture or incapacitation of these vessels.”

“Boy, the skipper wouldn’t talk like that,” Jorgenson said.

“No kidding,” George said. “He’d say something like, ‘We’re after two of the bastards who’re trying to get away. We’ll take ’em or sink ’em.’”

The gun chief nodded. “Wonder how come the exec doesn’t talk like that.”

“’Cause he talks through his ass instead of his mouth?” Angelucci suggested.

When the ship swung farther east, George wondered why. Was a U.S. airplane shadowing the freighters and wirelessing their moves back to the *Josephus Daniels*? That was the only thing that made sense to him.

Then he let out a catamount whoop. His finger stabbed toward the horizon. “Smoke!” he yelled.

Before long, the freighter making the smoke spotted the exhaust spewing from the *Josephus Daniels*’

funnels. The other ship sheered away, trying to run. The destroyer escort was slow for a warship, but had no trouble overhauling her. The four-incher in the forward turret boomed, sending a shot across her bow.

A moment later, the Argentine flag came down from the staff at the stern. Sailors along the rail waved whatever white rags and scraps of cloth they could get their hands on.

“We’ve got her!” Sam Carsten’s voice boomed from the PA. “We’re going to put a prize crew aboard her and take her back up to the USA. Whatever she’s carrying, better we have it than the damn limeys.”

“A prize crew?” Jorgenson laughed out loud. “That’s something right out of pirate-ship days. I wonder if the guys still get a share of what she’s worth.”

“Is that what they used to do?” George asked. “How do you know

about that old-time stuff?”

“There’s this limey writer, or I guess maybe he’s an Irishman. Anyway, his name’s C. S. O’Brian. He writes about fighting Napoleon like you’re there. You think swabbies got it bad now, you oughta read what it was like way back when.”

“Loan me one,” George said, and Jorgenson nodded.

Lieutenant Zwilling came down from the bridge to choose the prize crew. A chief came with him, to serve out submachine guns to the men he picked. If the sailors on the freighter—her name was the *Sol del Sud*—tried getting cute, they’d be sorry.

“All old shellbacks,” George remarked as the sailors crossed to the *Sol del Sud*.

“You noticed that, too, eh?” Jorgenson said. Now George nodded. On one level, it made sense; men who’d crossed the Equator before likely had more experience than men who’d been polliwogs only a few days earlier. But wasn’t the exec taking off men who’d given him a hard time when he was getting initiated? It sure looked that way to George.

As soon as the boats came back from the captured freighter, the *Josephus Daniels* hurried off after the other ship she’d been assigned. “Damn lumbering scow couldn’t’ve got far,” George said.

She hadn’t. Before long, smoke came over the southeastern horizon. Again, the destroyer escort had no trouble running her down. Again, a shot crashed across her bow. She was the *Tierra del Fuego*, by looks a near twin to the *Sol del Sud*, but her captain seemed more stubborn. Another shot from the four-incher thundered past her, this one just in front of her bridge. “Next one we’ll hit you with!” Carsten thundered over the PA. The *Tierra del Fuego* struck her colors.

Lieutenant Zwilling pointed at George. “Enos, go aboard her,” he snapped. The CPO handed George a tommy gun and several drums of ammo.

George said the only thing he could: “Aye aye, sir.” Maybe they’d take her back to Boston. He could hope so, anyhow. But yeah, the exec was clearing the destroyer escort of the people who’d had too good a time when he suffered with the other polliwogs.

One of the rubber-breasted mermaids and King Neptune himself were also in the prize crew: the CPO

held command. When George told Becker what was going on, he shrugged and said, “I bet you’re right, but I don’t care. Zwilling ain’t as smart as he thinks he is. I bring this baby in all right, maybe I go up through the hawse hole like the skipper. Only chance I got—I sure as hell can’t pass the goddamn exam.

Lord knows I’ve tried.”

When George got up on the *Tierra del Fuego*’s deck, he eyed the sailors standing there. Would they give trouble, or were they just glad his ship hadn’t sunk them? “Any of you guys speak English?” he asked.

Two men raised their hands—the skipper and a fellow with a lightning-bolt patch on his sleeve. *The wireless man*, George thought. “I do,” the fellow said.

“Good. Tell your pals nobody’s gonna hurt ’em as long as they do what we say,” George said.

“They’ll be POWs in the USA, and they’ll go home after the war.” The wireless man rattled off some Spanish. A moment later, one of the sailors from the *Josephus Daniels* knocked him down and yelled at him, also in Spanish.

“Any of these assholes says anything with *puto* or *chinga* or *maricón* in it, beat the shit out of him,

’cause he’s cussin’ you,” the sailor said. “They ain’t gonna dick around with us.” He spoke in Spanish to the would-be interpreter, then came back to English: “I told him to try it again, only not to get cute this time.”

A couple of men from the destroyer escort’s black gang went below to look at the engines. One of them came back up shaking his head. “They’re oil-burners—she’d make even more smoke if they weren’t,” he reported. “But they’re about as old as they can be and still burn oil. Ain’t no surprise she couldn’t outrun us.”

Chief Becker took charge of the pistol and the couple of shotguns in the *Tierra del Fuego*’s arms locker. “Don’t look like she ever had anything more,” he said. “Enough to try and put down a mutiny, and that’s about it.”

At his orders, the freighter’s sailors pointed her bow north and got her up to about eight knots. She lumbered along. George would rather

have gone north aboard a fishing boat. It would have bounced worse, but it would have gone over the waves instead of trying to slice through them. He didn't look forward to riding out a gale in this wallowing tub.

Before long, they recrossed the Equator. Nobody asked whether any of the Argentine sailors were polliwogs. George didn't know whether the greasers talked about King Neptune. All he knew was that he had to keep an eye on them.

Day followed day. The chow on the *Tierra del Fuego* was different from what he would have eaten on the *Josephus Daniels*—not really better or worse, but different. He tried *yerba maté* tea. The stuff wasn't bad: better than he expected. It had more kick than regular tea, not so much as coffee.

If a British or Confederate seaplane spotted them flying the Stars and Stripes, they were history.

George tried not to think about that. He blessed the fogs and mists that shrouded the *Tierra del Fuego* as she got farther north. They made navigation harder, but she was going by the seat of her pants anyway. When she came closer to the U.S. coast, no doubt she'd get an escort for the last leg of her journey. She'd need one, too.

In the meantime…In the meantime, it was just the ship and the sea. For George, that wasn't so bad.

R ichmond. The front was Richmond. In the bunker under the ruins of the Gray House, Jake Featherston shook his fist toward the north and cursed a God Who seemed to be cursing him and the CSA.

Ever since the war started, people were saying that whoever could do two big things at once would win. The Confederacy had never managed it. Neither had the damnyankees…till now. They were still going great guns down in Georgia. And they were pushing out of the Wilderness and heading straight for the Confederate capital.

U.S. artillery hadn't fallen on Richmond yet. The ground between the Rapidan and the capital was likely the most heavily fortified stretch on the face of the earth. If the Yankees came, they had to come that way. Both sides knew it. Whatever artifice could do to stop them, artifice had done.

But along with artifice, the Confederate States needed men—men they

didn't have. Too many soldiers had died in the Great War. Too many had died or gone off into captivity in Ohio and especially Pennsylvania this time around. And too many were doing everything they could to fight the USA farther south. That left a lot of the bunkers and gun emplacements between the Rapidan and Richmond nothing more than…what did the Bible call them? Whited sepulchers, that was it.

Featherston jumped when the telephone rang. He picked it up. "Yeah?" he said harshly.

"Lord Halifax on the line, sir," Lulu said.

"Put him through," Jake said at once. Was a rat deserting the sinking ship?

"Mr. President?" That plummy British accent.

"What's up?" Jake asked the ambassador. If Halifax *was* bailing out, he'd put a flea in the bastard's ear, all right.

"I have some papers you may perhaps be interested in seeing," the British ambassador said.

"Well, bring 'em on over, then," Jake told him. He was so relieved that Halifax was staying put, he couldn't refuse him anything.

When Halifax got there, it gave Jake an excuse to throw out Nathan Bedford Forrest III. He didn't want to listen to the chief of the General Staff anyhow; Forrest was too gloomy to be worth listening to.

By the noises he made, he feared Richmond would fall. Even if that was true, Jake didn't want to hear it.

So he bundled Forrest out and brought in the ambassador instead. "What's up?" he asked again.

Lord Halifax opened his fancy attaché case: buttery leather polished till it gleamed, with clasps that looked like real gold. He pulled out a document held together with a fat paper clip. "Here you are, Mr.

President. I honestly didn't believe they would turn these loose, but they did. You must have made an even more favorable impression on the Prime Minister than I thought. He does admire a…purposeful man, no doubt of that."

Jake Featherston hardly heard him. He was flipping through the papers. He didn't understand more than one word in ten, and he didn't understand any of the math. But he knew the word uranium when he saw it. And he knew about element 94, even if the limeys were calling it churchillium and not jovium.

"Did your scientists name it after Winston because it's supposed to make a big boom when it goes off?" he asked with a sly grin.

"Officially, it's a compliment to his office. We call 93 mosleyium after the Minister of War," Halifax replied. "Unofficially…well, I shouldn't wonder if you're right."

"I'll get this to our people who can use it just as quick as I can," Jake said. "And I want you to thank Winston for me from the bottom of my heart. What he did here, it means a lot to the country and it means a lot to me personally."

"He found your point about the need to continue the struggle against the United States by any means necessary alarmingly persuasive," Lord Halifax said. "If you fail, Britain is most dismally surrounded by the Yankees and the Huns."

"How close are you to getting one of these bombs?" Jake asked.

The British ambassador shrugged narrow shoulders. "Haven't the foggiest, I'm afraid. Were I not ambassador to a country also taking part in this research, I doubt I should know there is any such thing as uranium."

"Mm—makes sense," Featherston allowed. That was the only reason the Confederate envoys in London and Paris knew about uranium and what you might be able to do with it. But they hadn't been able to pry anything out of England or France. He damn well had.

"Will you be able to hold Richmond, sir?" Halifax asked.

"Hope so," Jake said. "But even if we don't, we'll keep fighting. As long as we've got a puncher's chance, we'll hang on. And with this"—he tapped the document with a nicotine-stained forefinger—"we do."

"Very good," the British ambassador said. But he meant it the way limeys did, so it might have been *all right*. He didn't mean it *was* very good, just that he'd heard. "I shall convey your determination to London. Bombing is picking up there, I'm afraid, though it's not so bad as here."

“Damn squareheads have airfields closer to you now,” Jake said. Lord Halifax looked like a man who’d just sat on a tack but was too polite to mention it. Featherston knew why. He hadn’t been…diplomatic. *Well, too bad*, he thought. He’d told the truth, hadn’t he? He’d told the truth all the time while he rose—it looked that way to him, anyhow. He didn’t see any point to stopping now.

And he was telling the truth again. The Kaiser’s forces had bundled the British out of northwestern Germany, out of Holland, and back into Belgium. They were threatening Ypres—universally pronounced *Wipers* by English-speakers—again, as they had in the Great War. When it fell then, it was a sign that the Entente couldn’t hold on against the Central Powers. If it fell this time around, it would be another verse of the same song.

“We are doing everything in our power to deny them the use of those air bases,” Halifax said.

“Sure, sure.” Jake nodded and smiled. He probably should have kept his mouth shut even if he did tell the truth. Didn’t he owe Halifax that much? The ambassador—and his government, of course—had come through for the Confederacy in a big way. “Between us, your Lordship, sir, we’ll lick the bad guys yet.”

“Between us, yes. And the French and the Russians will have something to say about it as well.” Lord Halifax grimaced again. “I worry about the Russians. Failure the last time around cost them the Ukraine and Finland and Poland and the Baltic states and a Red insurrection at least as unpleasant as yours.” *He* was being diplomatic; the Tsar’s fight against the Reds had been bigger and bloodier than anything the CSA went through. After a pause to light a Habana, he continued, “They’re wavering again, I fear. When they couldn’t beat the Germans, or even the Austrians…If they go out, heaven only knows what sort of upheaval will follow.”

“Hell with that,” Featherston said. “If they go out now, you and France get the shaft. The Kaiser can pull everything away from the east and shoot it all at you.”

“Quite.” British reserve had its uses. Lord Halifax got as much mileage from one soft-spoken word as Jake would have from five minutes of cussing. He rose and held out an elegantly manicured hand.

“Always a pleasure, Mr. President. I do hope the document proves valuable to you.”

“I’m sure it will be.” *I’ll know just how valuable by this time tomorrow*, Jake thought as he shook it. Aloud, he went on, “England’s always been the best friend the Confederacy has. We know that, and we never forget it.”

One more time, the truth. English recognition in 1862, English forcing of the U.S. blockade, had ensured the Confederacy’s independence. English help during the Second Mexican War made sure the CSA got to keep Chihuahua and Sonora, even if an invasion of the USA from Canada came to grief in Montana.

Well, the Confederate States of America paid their debts to the UK in 1914. This time, no debt was involved: both countries wanted revenge against the enemies who’d beaten them. And remembering alliances past didn’t mean you *had* to do anything but remember. Jake understood that perfectly well.

Did Lord Halifax? No doubt; he was twisty as a snake.

As soon as the British ambassador bowed his way out, Featherston summoned a courier. The bright young lieutenant saluted. “Freedom!”

“Freedom!” Jake echoed. He handed the man the British document. “Get these pages photographed.

As soon as you’ve done that, haul ass to Washington University in Lexington and deliver them to Professor FitzBelmont.”

“Yes, sir.” The courier hesitated. “If it’s such a tearing hurry, sir, why wait for the photography?”

“Because this *has* to get through,” Jake answered. “Even if something happens to you”— *even if the damnyankees roast you like a barbecued porker*—“FitzBelmont *has* to get it. So we make a copy before we send you off.”

“All right, sir. I understand.”

“Good. Tell the fellow in the photo lab to call me as soon as he does what he needs to do.” With this document, Jake intended to take no chances whatever.

“Yes, sir,” the lieutenant said again. He saluted and hurried away. He didn’t even need to leave the armored underground compartment to find a photographic technician. Anything that had to do with running

a country, you could do here.

Now he would have some idea of what was going on in Lexington. So would the man who photographed the pages. That worried Jake less than it would have a few months before. If one of them reported to the damnyankees…well, so what? The United States already knew the Confederate States were working on a uranium bomb. The United States knew where, too. Otherwise, they wouldn't have started pounding the crap out of Lexington. If they knew the limeys were helping out, how did that change things? Didn't it just give them a brand-new worry? It looked that way to Jake Featherston.

The courier hadn't been gone more than a couple of minutes before the telephone on his desk jangled again. He eyed it the way a man in the woods might eye a rattler with a buzzing tail. Unlike a man in the woods, he couldn't walk away from it no matter how much he wished he could.

He picked it up. "Featherston here…What the hell do you mean, they're over the North Anna?" He'd expected bad news—that was the kind that got to the President in a hurry. He hadn't expected news this bad, though. "How the devil did they do that? Which dumb-shit general had his thumb up his ass to let

'em?…Jesus Christ, they can't have *that* much armor—can they?" He sounded worried even to himself.

That was no good. You needed to sound calm, even—no, especially—when you weren't.

He gave orders to try to stem the green-gray tide. The damnyankees couldn't shell Richmond yet, no, but it wouldn't be long if they kept going like this.

"Over the North Anna. *Son* of a bitch," Jake muttered after he hung up. He started looking at the maps on his office walls in a new way. Richmond really might fall. And if it did, he needed somewhere else to go, a place from which he could keep fighting till FitzBelmont and the rest of the high foreheads came through.

He'd never thought it would come to this. He'd figured the United States would roll over and show their yellow belly when he cut them in half. When that didn't happen, he'd been sure losing Pittsburgh would make them quit. When they didn't lose Pittsburgh…About then, he realized he had a tiger by the tail.

Can't let go, he thought. And the Yankees had a tiger by the tail, too. If they didn't know that yet, they would. He nodded to himself. They sure as hell would. No matter where he had to do it from, he'd make them pay for every single thing they'd done to his country. He'd make them pay plenty.

A rmstrong Grimes was happy as a clam in a country where they'd never heard of chowder. Along with the rest of his platoon, he tramped east toward the Savannah River and the sea. They'd told Lieutenant Bassler the Confederates didn't have a whole hell of a lot in front of them. So far, they looked to be right.

"Keep your eyes peeled, though," he warned the men in his squad. "Don't want to get your nuts shot off doing something dumb."

"Shit, Sarge, I don't want to get my nuts shot off doing something smart," Squidface said.

"You've got a point," Armstrong said. "Now put a hat on it."

The PFC flipped him off. He gave back the bird. When he took over the squad, the men had been wary about him. They'd come through a lot together, and they weren't about to trust somebody from the repple-depple till they saw he deserved it. By now, Armstrong had paid his dues and then some. He was part of the life of the platoon, somebody to razz and somebody to put them through their paces. They followed his orders not just because he had three stripes but because they'd seen he had a halfway decent notion of what he was doing.

Up ahead, a Confederate machine gun chattered. That tearing-sailcloth noise sobered people in a hurry. Men kind of hunched down to make themselves into smaller targets. They moved away from one another to make a burst less likely to take out several of them at once. Armstrong did all that himself, too, before he even thought about it. He knew his trade, the same as the other guys did.

Most of them did, anyhow. A couple were new men fresh out of the replacement depot. A tall, gangly kid called Herk had taken Whitey's place. He stared around in mild surprise when the soldiers around him spread out. Then a bullet cracked past his head. He knew what that meant, all right, and awkwardly dropped to the ground.

"You gotta move faster'n that, man," Armstrong told him. "Otherwise,

you'll damn well stop one, and I ain't got time to nursemaid you."

"I'll try, Sarge." Herk was willing. He was just unskilled.

"Sure." Armstrong swallowed a sigh. He'd hit it, all right—he couldn't nursemaid the replacements. In a perfect world, they would have joined the unit when it got taken out of the line so the veterans got to know them a little bit. Here, it was baptism by total immersion. Experienced soldiers shied away from the new guys. Raw men didn't just get themselves maimed and killed; they also brought trouble down on their comrades, because the Confederates who aimed at them also hit guys near them.

If they made it through a couple of weeks of action, they learned the ropes and turned into decent soldiers. A lot of them didn't, though. Not too many Confederates stood in front of Armstrong's platoon right now. The ones who did knew their business. The only new Confederate soldiers were the ones who'd been too young for conscription when the war started.

From the ground, Herk asked, "We gonna go after that machine gun, Sarge?"

"Not if we can find a barrel or a mortar team to do it for us," Armstrong answered. "We want to lick these fuckers, yeah, but we don't want to pay too much while we're doing it."

"Now you hope the lieutenant feels the same way," Squidface said, his grin half sly, half resigned.

"Bet your ass I do." Armstrong could hope, anyhow. Lieutenant Bassler had pretty good sense…as far as lieutenants went. He didn't think he had an infinite supply of soldiers to do whatever he thought needed doing, and he didn't send his men anywhere he wouldn't go himself. Things could have been worse.

And they rapidly got that way. That rising howl in the air wasn't artillery. It was even worse.

"Screaming meemies!" Squidface yelled while Armstrong was still sucking in wind to shout the same thing. Everybody who wasn't already on the ground threw himself flat. Armstrong got out his entrenching tool and started digging like a madman.

The salvo of rockets shrieked home before he'd thrown up more than a shovelful of red dirt. A couple of dozen of them slammed down

within a few seconds. Armstrong got picked up and thrown around while chunks of jagged iron whined through the air. Whether he lived or died wasn't up to him; it was just luck one way or the other. He hated that more than anything else about combat. Sometimes whether you were a good soldier didn't matter worth a dime.

When he came down and stopped rolling, he looked around. There was Herk, blood running from his nose but otherwise seeming all right. There was Squidface, who hadn't even lost his cigarette.

And…there was Zeb the Hat's head, attached to one shoulder and not much else. The rest of what was probably his body lay thirty yards away.

Herk got a good look at that and lost his breakfast. Armstrong had already seen a lot of bad things, but his stomach wanted to empty out, too. Squidface's lips silently shaped the word *Fuck*. Or maybe he said it out loud; Armstrong slowly realized he wasn't hearing very much.

Squidface said something else. Armstrong shrugged and pointed to his ears. The PFC nodded. He came over and bellowed, "He was a hell of a good guy."

"Yeah," Armstrong shouted back. "He was."

That was about as much of a memorial as Zeb the Hat got. Armstrong dragged his two pieces together so Graves Registration would know they went with each other. The surviving soldiers helped themselves to Zeb's ammunition and ration cans—he didn't need them any more. Armstrong took out his wallet and found his real name was Zebulon Fischer, and that he was from Beloit, Wisconsin. The billfold held only a couple of bucks. Had he had a real roll, Armstrong would have sent that to his next of kin.

More shrieks in the air announced another salvo of rockets. Armstrong went flat again. These screaming meemies came down off to the left, not all around him. He had more of a chance to dig in, and used it. The Confederates in this part of Georgia didn't seem inclined to let U.S. soldiers come any farther.

After the rockets slammed down, Armstrong breathed a sigh of relief: nothing bad had happened to him or his men. Then shouts came from the left. He needed a little while to make out what people were saying. The first salvo really had pounded the crap out of his hearing. After a while, though, he got the message: Lieutenant Bassler was wounded.

He swore. God only knew what kind of half-assed new man the repple-depple would cough up. Then somebody said, “Looks like you’re in charge of the platoon, Sergeant.”

“What the hell?” Armstrong said. Two of the other three sergeants were senior to him.

“Yeah, you are,” the soldier insisted. “Same goddamn rocket got Borkowski and Wise. One of ’em’s dead—looks like the other one’ll lose a foot.”

“Shit.” Armstrong had got a platoon before, and the same way—everybody above him got wounded or killed. That was the only way a three-striper could command a platoon…or, if enough things went wrong, a company. He didn’t really want the honor. As usual, nobody cared what he wanted.

“What are we gonna do?” the news bringer asked, something not far from panic in his voice. “We stay here, Featherston’s fuckers’ll just keep pounding the shit out of us.”

“Tell me about it,” Armstrong said unhappily. The Confederates would be loading up more screaming meemies right this minute. If he ordered a retreat, his own superiors would tear the stripes off his sleeve.

They’d call him a coward, and he wouldn’t be able to prove them wrong. Which left…“We gotta move up.”

They would have to take out that machine gun now, like it or not. He didn’t, but he was stuck.

Squidface came to the same unwelcome conclusion: “That goddamn gun’s gonna have to go.”

“Uh-huh.” Armstrong nodded. “You’ve got the squad for now.”

“Fuck of a way to get it,” Squidface said, but then he nodded, too. “You don’t want the platoon, either, do you?”

“Not like this,” Armstrong answered. “Keep the guys spread out. And watch that Herk, for Chrissake. He’ll get his ass shot off before he knows what’s what.”

“I ain’t his goddamn babysitter, for cryin’ out loud.” After a moment, Squidface nodded again. “Well, I’ll try.”

Armstrong hadn't gone very far before he realized the machine-gun emplacement could murder the whole platoon. It had an unobstructed field of fire to the west. No way in hell would they be able to sneak up on it. He yelled for the wireless man and got on the horn to regimental HQ: "This is Grimes, in charge of Gold Platoon, Charlie Company. We need a couple of barrels to knock out a nest at square, uh, B-9."

Some uniformed clerk well back of the line asked, "What happened to what's-his-name? Uh, Bassler?"

"He's down. I've got it," Armstrong growled. "You gonna get me what I need, or do I have to come back there and tear you a new asshole?"

"Keep your hair on, buddy," replied the fellow back at headquarters. "We'll see what we can do."

That wasn't enough to keep Armstrong happy—not even close. Yet another barrage of screaming meemies roared in. They were mostly long, but not *very* long. Armstrong damn near pissed himself. He knew plenty of guys who had. You didn't rag on them much, not if you had any sense. It could happen to you.

Half an hour later, after still more rockets—again, mostly long—the barrels showed up. Without getting out of the foxhole he'd dug, Armstrong pointed them toward the machine-gun nest. They clattered forward. The machine gun opened up on them, which did exactly no good. There was no place for advancing U.S. soldiers to hide. That also meant there was no place for C.S. soldiers with stovepipe antibarrel rockets to hide. The barrels shelled the machine-gun nest into silence.

"Let's go." Armstrong hustled to catch up with the barrels. So did his men. Anyone who'd been in action for even a little while knew armor made a hell of a life-insurance policy for infantrymen. It could take care of things that stymied foot soldiers—and it drew fire that would otherwise come down on their heads.

And the ground pounders were good for barrel crews' life expectancy, too. They kept bad guys with stovepipes and Featherston Fizzes from sneaking close enough to be dangerous. Barrels that got too far out in front of the infantry often had bad things happen to them before anybody could do anything about it.

"Come on, Herk!" Armstrong yelled, looking back over his shoulder

and seeing that the new guy wasn't moving fast enough. "Shake a leg, goddammit!"

"I'm coming, Sarge." Yeah, Herk was willing. But he didn't understand why Armstrong wanted him to hurry up. He wasn't urgent and he wasn't alert. With the best will in the world, he was asking for trouble.

Armstrong figured he'd buy a piece of a plot—or maybe a whole one—before he figured out what was what. Too damn bad, really, but what could you do?

Meanwhile, the Confederates with the screaming meemies were still lobbing them where the U.S.

soldiers had been, not where they were now. Before long, the rocketeers would find out they'd goofed—with luck, when the barrels put shells or machine-gun bullets through them.

Armstrong trotted on. He heard a few bursts from up ahead, but nothing really bad. The bastards in butternut all carried automatic weapons. Nothing you could do about that. But if there weren't enough of them, what they carried didn't matter. And, right here, there weren't.

W hen Sam Carsten thought of prize crews, he thought about pigtailed sailors with cutlasses boarding sailing ships: wooden ships and iron men. But the *Josephus Daniels* was shorthanded because a couple of freighters that would have gone to England or France were bound for the USA instead.

Sam gave Lieutenant Zwilling the conn so he could straighten out some of the complications detaching men had caused. He was talking with a damage-control party—damage control being something about which he knew more than he'd ever wanted to learn—when Wally Eastlake, a CPO who'd played one of King Neptune's mermaids when the destroyer escort crossed the Equator, sidled up to him and said,

"Talk to you for a second, Skipper?"

When a chief wanted to talk, listening was a good idea. "Sure," Sam said. "What's on your mind?"

Instead of answering right away, Eastlake drew himself out of earshot of the damage-control party. A couple of snoopy sailors started to follow, but the chief 's basilisk stare made them keep their distance.

In a low voice, Eastlake said, “Notice anything funny about the prize crews the exec took for those Argentine pigs?”

“Not a whole lot,” Sam answered. “Mostly guys who’ve been in for a while, but that’s more good than bad, you ask me. You need men with some experience when they go off on their own.”

“If that was all, sure,” Eastlake said. “But the guys who’re gone, they’re the ones who busted a gut laughing when he stopped being a polliwog. I’d be gone myself, I bet, except I was holding it in and busting up where it didn’t show. Swelp me, Skipper, it’s the God’s truth.” He drew a cross on his chest.

“Oh, yeah?” Sam said.

“Swelp me,” the chief said again.

Carsten thought about it. He hadn’t had much to do with the festivities. They were designed to let ratings get their own back. Even if the captain just watched, it dampened the fun. But he also had a pretty good notion of who’d enjoyed themselves most at Myron Zwilling’s expense—and who’d had reasons for enjoying themselves. Eastlake was right—an awful lot of those people weren’t on the ship any more.

“Son of a bitch,” Sam said softly.

“Yeah,” Eastlake said. “I didn’t think you noticed—you got bigger shit to worry about. But I figured you oughta know.”

“Thanks—I guess.” Now Sam had to decide what to do about it, or whether to do anything at all.

Zwilling could deny everything and say he hadn’t done it consciously. How would you prove he was lying? For that matter, maybe he wasn’t. Or he could say he damn well had done it, and so what?

“You think I shoulda kept my big trap shut?” Eastlake asked.

“No. I’d rather know what’s going on,” Sam answered. “I’ll take care of it.” The CPO nodded. He didn’t ask Sam *how* he’d take care of it, which was a good thing, because Sam still didn’t know.

When he got back to the bridge, the exec was keeping station with the other warships in the flotilla.

Zwilling was competent, precise, painstaking. The tip of his tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth, as if he were a grade-schooler working on a big paper. He'd never be the shiphandler Pat Cooley was.

He was plenty good enough to get the job done, though. Chances were he was better than Sam, who'd come to the wheel late. Whether he'd be better in an emergency, when instinct and balls could count for more than carefully acquired skill, was a different question.

"Anything interesting going on?" Sam asked.

"No, sir. All routine," Zwilling answered.

"All right. In that case, why don't you let Thad have it for a bit?" Sam nodded toward the Y-ranging officer. "He can use the practice. You never know what could happen if a British fighter or bomber chews up the bridge."

"Aye aye, sir." Zwilling stepped away from the wheel. Lieutenant Walters took it, a wide grin making him look even younger than he did most of the time.

Carsten gestured to the exec. "Come to my cabin, why don't you?" Yes, he was going to take the bull by the horns. He didn't know what else to do.

"Of course, sir." Zwilling's eyes narrowed. He knew something was up, but he couldn't very well say no.

The cabin, small for one man, was crowded with two. But, with the door closed, it was about the only place on the destroyer escort that offered reasonable privacy. Sam sat down on the bed and waved the exec to the metal chair, saying, "I've got a question for you."

"Sir?" Zwilling didn't show much. Well, with a superior getting ready to grill him, Sam would have shown as little as he could, too.

"When you picked prize crews for those freighters we nabbed, how did you go about it?"

Zwilling still didn't show much. He would have made a pretty fair poker player, and probably did. "I mostly chose men with above-average experience, sir. They'll be on their own going north. They'll need to be extra alert for enemy action, and for trouble from the sailors. New fish are less likely to do well in a situation like that."

“I see.” Sam would have said the same thing. It was even likely to be true. But it wasn’t likely to be the whole truth. With a sigh, Sam went on, “Did you also choose men who gave you a hard time when we crossed the Equator?”

Now the exec knew which way the wind was blowing. His mouth tightened. He hunched in on himself, just a little. But his answer was forthright: “Yes, sir. We’re better off without some of those troublemakers on board. That was a criterion of mine, too.”

Thinking about the men who were gone, Sam shook his head. “They mostly aren’t troublemakers, Mr.

Zwilling. They have good records. They may not love you, but that’s not the same thing.”

By Zwilling’s scowl, it was to him. “They’re bad for discipline, sir. I’m not sorry to be rid of them.”

“I’m sorry you used personal dislikes to influence what you did,” Carsten said. “If I were you, I wouldn’t do that again. I’m disappointed you did it once.”

“If you’re unhappy with me, sir, may I request a transfer off this ship?” Zwilling asked. “You need to have confidence in your executive officer.”

He didn’t say anything about his needing to have confidence in Sam. That would have been insubordinate, and he was a stickler for the proprieties. But it hovered in his tone and in the way he eyed Carsten.

With another sigh, Sam nodded. “Yes, I think that’ll be best for everyone. This won’t go in your papers. You didn’t do anything against regulations. But you did something I don’t fancy, and I won’t try to tell you any different.”

“Is that all, sir?” The exec’s voice might have come from a machine.

“Yes, that’s all. Go take the conn back.” As far as the ship was concerned, Zwilling was fine. With the sailors, on the other hand… *And with me, too*, Sam thought sadly. There were skippers for whom Myron Zwilling would have been the perfect exec. Men who did things strictly by the book themselves would have been wild for him. But Sam flew by the seat of his pants. That drove Zwilling nuts, and the exec’s insistence on routine grated on the mustang just as much.

Sam followed Zwilling back to the bridge. When the exec said, “I have the conn, Mr. Walters,” the Y-ranging officer almost jumped out of his skin. Sam didn’t blame him. Zwilling didn’t sound like a machine any more. He sounded like a voice from beyond the grave.

Christ! Sam thought, now alarmed. *I hope he doesn’t go hang himself from the first pipe fitting he finds*. He didn’t want the exec dead, only off his ship and onto one where he fit better.

Thad Walters retreated in a hurry. His eyes asked Sam what had happened in the cabin. Sam couldn’t tell him, even in private; that would have been monstrously unfair to Zwilling.

Then Sam shook his head. It wouldn’t be so simple after all. Even now, people would be buzzing that Chief Eastlake had talked with him. And they would know all too soon that he and the exec had talked in his cabin. They would add two and two, sure as hell. And when Zwilling left the ship, Eastlake would be a power to reckon with indeed.

That wasn’t good. You didn’t want the crew thinking a CPO could hang an officer out to dry. Even more to the point, you didn’t want a CPO thinking he could hang an officer out to dry. In this particular case, it happened to be true, which only made things worse. Sam shook his head again. Eastlake would have to go, too. That wasn’t fair, but he didn’t see that he had any other choice.

He wished for word of an enemy convoy. He almost wished for word of enemy aircraft on the way in.

Anything that took his mind off the ship’s internal politics would have been nice. But no enemy freighters came into sight. The sky remained clear of everything but the sun. The only thing he had to worry about was Myron Zwilling steering the *Josephus Daniels* with a face that looked as if he were watching his family tortured and killed.

Was I too hard on him? Sam wondered. He played back the conversation in his cabin inside his head. He really didn’t think so. The only other thing he could have done was pretend he didn’t know anything about what Zwilling had pulled. And that wouldn’t fly, because Chief Eastlake *would* let the crew know he’d told Sam what was going on. Their respect would get flushed right down the head.

And so would Sam’s self-respect. He’d never been any damn good at pretending. Oh, sometimes you had to. If you were dealing with a superior you couldn’t stand, a little constructive hypocrisy didn’t hurt.

But that was about as far as he could make himself go. Ignoring this would have felt like ignoring a bank robbery right under his nose.

Lieutenant Walters took a long look at his Y-ranging gear. The screens must have been blank, for he stepped away from them and over to Sam. In a low, almost inaudible voice, he asked, “Sir, what’s going on?”

Sam glanced at Lieutenant Zwilling. The exec didn’t turn around. Did his back stiffen, though? Was he listening? It didn’t matter any which way. Sam said what he would have said if Zwilling were down in the engine room: “Nothing that’s got anything to do with you.”

“Yes, sir.” The Y-ranging officer nodded, but he didn’t go back to his post. Instead, he asked, “Is it anything that will hurt the ship?”

Zwilling’s ravaged voice and face made that query much too reasonable. But Sam didn’t think he was lying when he shook his head. “No, we’ll be all right,” he said. “It’s…” He stopped. Even saying something like *It’s a personnel matter* went too far. Were he in the exec’s place, he wouldn’t want anybody running his mouth about him. “Just let it go, Thad. It’ll sort itself out.”

“I hope so, sir.” Walters returned to his post. He’d needed nerve to make even that much protest.

Muttering to himself, Sam turned away. He didn’t like the idea of blighting Zwilling’s career. He hadn’t liked it back in New York City, and he liked it even less here. But try as he would, he didn’t see what else he could do. Zwilling had made his bed; now he had to lie in it.

And what will the fancy-pants officers back in the USA think about me when they get wind of this? Sam wondered. Now that he’d been a lieutenant for a while, he wanted to make lieutenant commander. That would be pretty damn good for somebody who started out an ordinary seaman.

Would the men who judged such things decide he could have handled this better?

After worrying at it and worrying about it for a couple of minutes, he shrugged. The ship had to come first. If the brass hats didn’t care for what he’d done, he’d retire a lieutenant, and the world wouldn’t end. When he first signed up, even CPO had seemed a mountain taller than the Rockies, but he’d climbed a lot higher than that.

So he'd go on doing things the way he thought he needed to. And if anybody away from the *Josephus Daniels* didn't like it, too damn bad.

T he telephone on Jefferson Pinkard's desk jangled. He picked it up. "This is Pinkard."

"Hello, Pinkard," said the voice on the other end of the line. "This is Ferd Koenig, in Richmond."

"What can I do for you, sir?" Jeff asked the Attorney General, adding, "Glad to hear you still *are* in Richmond." From some of the things the papers were saying, the capital was in trouble. Since the papers always told less than what was really going on, he'd worried.

"We're still here. We aren't going anywhere, either," Koenig said. As if to contradict him, something in the background blew up with a roar loud enough to be easily audible even over the telephone. He went on, "We'll lick the damnyankees yet. You see if we don't."

"Yes, sir," Jeff said, though he'd already seen all the war he wanted and more besides in Snyder.

Coming east to Humble was a wonderful escape. U.S. warplanes hardly ever appeared over the city of Houston (far, far away from the damnyankee abortion of a state that carried the same name) and had never been seen over this peaceful town twenty miles north of it.

"Wait till we get all our secret weapons into the fight," Koenig said. "We're already throwing those rockets at the USA, and we've finally got new barrels that'll make their best ones say uncle. Bigger and better things in the works, too."

"Sure hope so." From everything Pinkard could see, the Confederate States needed bigger and better things if they stood a chance of winning.

"Believe it. The President's promised we'll have 'em, and he keeps his word." Ferdinand Koenig sounded absolutely convinced, despite yet another big boom in the distance. He went on, "But there's something I need from you."

Of course there is. You wouldn't have called me if there wasn't, Jeff thought. Aloud, all he said was, "Tell me what."

“I want you to go through your guards. Anybody who’s fit enough to fight, put him on a train for Little Rock. We’ll take it from there,” the Attorney General said.

“*Everybody* who’s fit enough to fight?” Pinkard asked in dismay.

“That’s what I said.”

“Sir, you know a lot of my guys are from the Confederate Veterans’ Brigades,” Jeff said. Those were men the C.S. Army had already judged not fit to fight, mostly because of wounds from the Great War.

“Yes, I understand that. Sort through them, too. Some of ’em’ll probably do—we aren’t as fussy as we used to be,” Koenig said. “But you’ve got plenty of Congressmen’s nephews and Party officials’

brothers-in-law. Come on, Pinkard—we both know how that shit works. But we can’t afford it any more.”

“Shall I get on the train myself, then?” Jeff asked. “Reckon I still know which end of a rifle’s which.”

“Don’t be dumb,” Koenig told him. “We’ve got to keep the camp running. That’s damn important, too. Way things are, though, we need every warm body we can get our hands on at the front.”

“Well, I’ll do what I can, sir,” Jeff said.

“I reckoned you would,” the Attorney General replied. “Freedom!” The line went dead.

“Freedom,” Jeff echoed as he hung up, too. Once the handpiece was back in the cradle, he added one more word: “Shit.”

He wondered how few guards he could get away with sending. The men on the women’s side, sure.

They wouldn’t be a problem. He could always replace them with dykes. Plenty of tough broads ready to send Negro women to the bathhouses. Plenty of tough broads *eager* to do it. And if some of them ate pussy in the meantime…well, hell, as long as the colored gals got what was coming to them sooner or later, Jeff supposed he could look the other way in the meantime. Yeah, lezzies were disgusting, but there was a war on, and you had to take the bad with the good.

Losing guards from the men’s side would hurt more. He couldn’t bring

female guards over here. Some of them, the butch ones, would have liked it. But it would stir up trouble among the coons if he tried it, and it would stir up more trouble among his men. So he'd have to do some pruning, and then live with personnel being gone.

Congressmen's nephews. Party bigwigs' brothers-in-law. Sure, he had some guys like that. He didn't want to get rid of all of them. They were the young, the healthy, the quick here. You couldn't run a camp with a bunch of old farts who couldn't get out of their own way… could you? He hoped he wouldn't have to find out, and feared he would.

He got on the intercom, and then on the PA system, to summon Vern Green to his office. The guard chief got there about fifteen minutes later. "What's up, sir?" Pinkard told him what was up. He looked disgusted when he heard. "Well, for God's sake! They reckon our boys gonna win the damn war all by their lonesome?"

"Beats me," Jeff answered. "But when the Attorney General tells you you got to do this and that, you can't very well say no."

Green looked more disgusted yet, but he nodded. "I'll ask around," he said. "Maybe we can fix it."

He had his own back channels to Richmond. Someone in the capital would be keeping an eye on Jeff for the government or the Party or both. Usually, that made the guard chief the camp commandant's rival.

They both wanted to pull in the same direction today, though.

"Yeah, you do that," Jeff said. "But don't hold your breath. War news is bad enough, they'll be grabbing anybody they can get their hands on."

"Uh-huh," Green said. They both had to be careful when they talked about how things were going.

Either could report the other for defeatism. But they couldn't afford to pretend they were blind, either. If the news were better, Richmond wouldn't be prying men loose wherever it could. The guard chief went on, "You got a roster handy?"

"Sure do." Jeff spread papers out on his desk. "I've made some marks already."

Green looked at them. He nodded. “What you’ve got makes sense. We can always come up with guards in skirts for the women’s side.”

“Just what I was thinkin’,” Pinkard agreed. “The ones over here, though…That’s gonna be a bastard.

Bastard and a half, even.”

“Yeah.” The guard chief nodded again. “Some of these guys’ll bawl like castrated colts when you tell

’em they got to go and fight the damnyankees. Some of their fathers’ll bawl even louder.”

“Tell me about it,” Jeff said with a wry grin. “But I know what to do about that, damned if I don’t. I’ll just say, ‘You want to squawk, don’t you come squawkin’ to me. Go squawk to Ferd Koenig, on account of he gave the orders. Me, I’m only doin’ like he said.’”

Vern Green smiled a slow, conspiratorial smile. “Ain’t gonna be a whole lot o’ folks with the brass to try that.”

“Hell, *I* wouldn’t,” Jeff said. “I know when I’m fightin’ out of my weight. Anybody who wants to take a swing at it, well, good luck.” He peered through his reading glasses at the roster. “Let’s see how we can finish this off and still have enough left to do our jobs here.”

Neither of them ended up happy about what they came up with. But they both agreed Camp Humble could go on reducing population without the guards they’d ship to Little Rock. Then they wrangled about who would announce the transfers. Jeff wanted the guard chief to do it. Green insisted the words had to come out of the commandant’s mouth. In they end, they split the difference. Pinkard would announce the Attorney General’s order, while Green read the names of the men who would go to Little Rock.

Even assembling the guards was tricky. Like any soldiers or bureaucrats, the men knew a break in routine was suspicious. To them, change was anything but good. And they started yelling their heads off when Jeff announced that Ferd Koenig required some of them to go to the front.

“Shut up!” Pinkard yelled, and his bellow was enough to rock them back on their heels and make sure they damn well *did* shut up, at least for a little while. Into that sudden, startled silence, he went on, “Y’all reckon I want to do this? You’re out of your goddamn minds if you do.

You reckon I've got any choice?

You're just as crazy if you think so, and a lot stupider'n I figured you were."

"We won't go!" somebody yelled, and other guards took up the cry.

“Oh, yes, you will,” Jeff said grimly. “I don’t believe you catch on. You ain’t just fuckin’ with me, people. Y’all are fuckin’ with Ferd Koenig and Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party and the Confederate government. You’ll end up in the stockade, and then they’ll ship your sorry asses to the front any which way. And if you don’t end up in a penal battalion for raising a ruckus, then I don’t know shit about how things work. And I damn well do.”

A shudder ran through the guards. They didn’t want to go to the front as soldiers. That was nasty and dangerous. But if you went to the front in a penal battalion, you were nothing but dead meat that hadn’t got cooked yet. And they threw you straight into the fire.

“You still talkin’ about not goin’?” Jeff asked. Nobody said anything this time. He nodded in something approaching satisfaction. “That’s more like it. Maybe y’all ain’t as dumb as you look after all.

Hell, you go and mutiny, maybe they don’t send you to the front at all. Maybe they just line you up and shoot you.” He waited for another shudder, and got it. Then he went on, “Vern here’ll read out the names of the men who’re going to Little Rock. You hear your name, be ready to ship out tomorrow at 0600. You ain’t ready, you got more trouble’n you know what to do with, I promise. Vern?”

One by one, the guard commander read the list of names. Some men who got called jerked as if shot.

For a few, or more than a few, that was bound to be anticipation. Others cursed Green or the Freedom Party. And still others reacted with complete disbelief. “You can’t do this to me!” one of them cried. “Do you know whose cousin I am?”

“You ain’t Ferd Koenig’s cousin, and you ain’t Jake Featherston’s cousin, either,” Jefferson Pinkard said in a voice like iron. “And as long as you ain’t, it don’t matter for shit whose cousin you are. You got it?”

“You can’t talk to me that way!” exclaimed the guard with the prominent—but not prominent enough—cousin.

“No? Seems like I just did,” Jeff answered. “You can get on the train tomorrow morning, or you can go to the stockade now and get on another train after that. You just bet your ass you won’t be happy if you do, though.”

The cousin said not another word. Green went back to reading names. He got more howls of protest.

Some guards did some virtuoso cussing. But nobody else said he wouldn't go. Nobody else said he had a relative important enough to keep him from going, either. As far as Jeff was concerned, that was progress.

He waited with the shivering guards the next morning. All but two of them were there. Those two had skipped camp. They'd be the military police's worry from now on. He figured the MPs would track them down and make them sorry. The train pulled in right on time, snorting up in the beginnings of morning twilight—sunup was still a ways away.

Doors opened. Glumly, the guards climbed up and into the passenger cars. When they'd all boarded, the train chugged off. Its light was dim. Even here, lights could draw U.S. airplanes. You didn't want to take chances you didn't have to.

After the train pulled away, Jeff went to the kitchen for fried eggs, biscuits and gravy, and coffee. He'd done his duty. He wasn't happy about it, but he'd done it. Pretty soon, Camp Humble would start doing its duty again, too. Even with a reduced guard contingent, the camp would keep on working toward making the Confederate States Negro-free.

That was damned important work. Jeff was proud to have a part in it. He just wished the damnyankees and the war wouldn't keep interfering.

VI

L ieutenant-Colonel Jerry Dover didn't have Atlanta to kick around any more. The senior supply officers there couldn't make his life miserable any more. They'd either fled or died or were languishing in U.S. POW camps. The Stars and Stripes flew over the capital of Georgia. And so…

And so…Alabama. Dover had never figured he would have to try to fight the damnyankees from Alabama. Now he could scream at Huntsville for not getting him what he needed.

It was less fun than screaming at Atlanta had been. The chief

quartermaster officer in Huntsville was a brigadier general named Cicero Sawyer. He sent Dover anything he had. When he didn't send it, he didn't have it. Dover could complain about that, but Sawyer complained about it, too.

"Anything that comes from Virginia and the Carolinas, forget it," he told Dover on a crackling telephone line. "They can't get it here."

"Why not?" Dover demanded. "We've still got Augusta. We've still got Savannah. We've still got shipping. Damnyankees can't sink every freighter in the goddamn country."

"Reckon the big reason is all the shit that's going on up in Virginia right now," Sawyer said. "They want to hang on to every damn thing they can so they can go and shoot it at the Yankees there."

"Yeah, well, if they forget this is part of the country, too, pretty soon it won't be any more," Dover said. "Let's see how they like that."

"I know," Sawyer said wearily. "I've got two worries myself. I got to keep the soldiers supplied—that means you. And I've got to keep the rocket works going. We're hurting the USA with those things, damned if we're not."

"That's nice," Dover said. "In the meantime, I need boots and I need raincoats and I need ammo for automatic rifles and submachine guns. When the hell you gonna get that stuff for me?"

"Well, I can send you the ammunition," Brigadier General Sawyer answered. "That comes out of Birmingham, so it's no problem. The other stuff…Mm, maybe I can get some of it from New Orleans.

Maybe."

"If you don't, I'm gonna have men coming down with pneumonia," Dover said. "Boots wear out, dammit, and they start to rot when it's wet like it is now. The guys who have shelter halves are wearing them for rain hoods, but they aren't as good as the real thing."

Sawyer sighed. "I'll try, Dover. That's all I can tell you. You aren't the only dumpmaster yelling his head off at me, remember."

"Why am I not surprised?" Dover hung up with the last word.

Dumpmaster was a word that fit him much too well right now. His

supply depot was small and shabby.

The nearest town, Edwardsville, was even smaller and shabbier. Close to a hundred years earlier, Edwardsville had been a boom town, for there was gold nearby. Then the mother lode in California shot the little Alabama gold rush right behind the ear. Some of the fancy houses built in Edwardsville's first—and last—flush of prosperity still stood, closed and gray and grim.

"Well?" Pete asked when Dover hung up.

"He promised us the ammo," Dover told the veteran quartermaster sergeant. "As far as the rest of it goes, we're screwed."

"Not us. We got the shit for ourselves," Pete said. Supply officers and noncoms lived well. That was a perquisite of the job. Pete went on, "It's the poor bastards a few miles east of here who get the wrong end of the stick."

Jerry Dover nodded unhappily. In the last war, the average Confederate soldier had been about as well supplied as his Yankee counterpart. Through the first couple of years of this fight, the same held true.

But the Confederate States were starting to come apart at the seams, and the men were paying for it.

"Ammo's great," Pete went on. "What if everybody's too damn hungry and sick to use it, though?"

"I already told you," Dover answered. "In that case, we're screwed." He looked around to make sure nobody but Pete could hear before adding, "And we're liable to be."

Off to the northwest lay Huntsville, where the rockets came from. Off to the west lay Birmingham, where anything made of iron or steel came from. Off to the east lay damnyankees who knew that much too well. When they got ready to push west, could they go right on through the Confederates standing in their way?

Although Dover hoped not, he wouldn't have bet against it.

"How many niggers in these parts?" Pete asked, not quite out of a clear blue sky.

"Well, I don't exactly know," Dover answered. "I don't think I've seen

any, but there could be some skulking around, like."

"Could be, yeah. I bet there are," Pete said. "I bet they get one look at what all we got here, then they light out to tell the Yankees."

"I bet you're right. We saw it often enough farther east," Dover said. "Maybe we ought to do some hunting in the woods around here." He remembered too well the black raiders who'd plundered his dump in Georgia.

"Maybe we should." Pete grinned. "I ain't been coon hunting since I was a kid."

"Heh." Dover made himself grin back. He'd heard jokes like that too many times to think they were very funny, but he didn't want to hurt Pete's feelings.

The hunt was no joke. Jerry Dover feared it was also no success. He couldn't get any front-line troops to join in, which meant he had to do it with his own men, men from the Quartermaster Corps. They could fight if they had to; they were soldiers. They'd had to a couple of times, when U.S. forces broke the lines in front of them. They hadn't disgraced themselves.

But there was a big difference between a stand-up fight and hunting down Negroes who didn't want to get caught or even get seen. Regular troops probably would have had a hard time doing that. It was more than the men from the supply dump could manage. They might have made the blacks shift around. They caught no one and killed no one. The day's only casualty was a corporal who sprained his ankle.

That evening, Birmingham caught hell. The bombers came right over the supply dump, flying from east to west. When the alarms went off, Dover scrambled into a slit trench and waited for hellfire and damnation to land on his head. As the Hebrews in Egypt must have done, he breathed a silent sigh of relief when the multi-engined Angels of Death passed over him, bound for other targets.

He felt guilty about that, and angry at himself, but he couldn't help it. Yes, the Confederacy was still going to get hurt. Yes, other men—and women, and children—were still going to get blown to bits. But his own personal, precious, irreplaceable ass was safe, at least till the sun came up.

He grimaced when he realized just how many U.S. airplanes were

heading west. The damnyankees had loaded up their fist with a rock this time. Alabama boasted only two targets worth that much concentrated hate. The bombers' course told him they weren't bound for Huntsville. "Sorry, Birmingham," he muttered.

Birmingham, without a doubt, would be, and shortly was, even sorrier. He cowered in a trench more than seventy miles east of the city. Even from there, he could hear the bombs going off: a low, deep roar, absorbed almost as much through the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet as through the ears.

"Where the hell's our fighters?" Pete howled, as if Dover had a couple of dozen stashed away in the depot.

"We don't have enough," Dover answered. That had been true ever since the front lay up in Tennessee. It was more obviously, more painfully, true now. U.S. factories were outproducing their C.S.

counterparts. Dover supposed U.S. pilot-training programs were outpacing their Confederate counterparts, too.

"How're we supposed to lick 'em if we can't go up there and shoot 'em down?" Pete wailed.

Jerry Dover didn't answer. The only thing he could have said was, *We can't*. While that was liable to be so, it didn't do anybody any good. If the writing was on the wall, Pete would be able to see it as well as anybody else.

The bombers didn't come back by the same route they'd taken going in. When Dover realized they weren't going to, he nodded in grudging respect. The Yankees weren't so dumb, dammit. C.S.

antiaircraft guns would be waiting here for the returning airplanes. So would whatever night fighters the local Confederates could scrape up. Maybe Y-ranging gear could send the fighters after the U.S.

bombers anyway. Dover hoped so. He was far from sure of it, though.

He wasn't sorry to climb out of the muddy trench. If chiggers didn't start gnawing on him, it would be nothing but dumb luck. Pete came out of his hole at about the same time. "Ain't this a fun war?" the sergeant said.

"Well, I could think of a lot of words for it, but I'd probably have to

think a long time before I came up with that one," Dover answered.

"They knocked the shit out of Birmingham," Pete said.

"Can't argue with you."

Pete looked west, as if he could see the damage from where he stood. "You reckon the place can keep going after they hit it like that?"

"Probably," Dover replied. His eyes were well enough adapted to the dark to let him see Pete start.

He went on, "Why not? We bombed plenty of Yankee towns harder than that, and they kept going. The USA hit Atlanta day after day, week after week, and it kept making things and shipping them out till just a little while before we finally lost it. Hard to bomb places back to the Stone Age, no matter how much you wish you could."

"Well, I sure as hell hope you're right." Pete pulled a pack of cigarettes from a breast pocket. He stuck one in his mouth and bent his head to light it. The brief flare of the match showed his hollow, unshaven cheeks. Remembering his manners, he held out the pack. "Want a butt, sir?"

"Don't mind if I do. Thanks." Dover flicked a lighter to get the proffered cigarette going. After a couple of drags, he said, "If they flatten Birmingham and Huntsville and maybe Selma, not many factory towns left between here and New Orleans."

"Yeah." Pete grunted. "Whole state of Mississippi's nothin' but farms, near enough. Farms and rednecks, I mean. Used to be farms and rednecks and niggers, but I reckon we took care o' most of the coons there. That's one good thing, anyways."

"Let me guess—you're not from Mississippi." Dover's voice was dry.

"Hope to shit I'm not, sir," Pete said fervently. "I came off a farm about twenty miles outside of Montgomery, right near the edge of the Black Belt. Well, it was the Black Belt then. Likely ain't no more."

"No, I wouldn't think so." Jerry Dover left it there. He thought the Confederacy had more urgent things to do than hunt down its Negroes. Jake Featherston thought otherwise, and his opinion carried a lot more weight than a jumped-up restaurant manager's. But if he'd put those coons into factories instead of getting rid of them, how

many more white men could he have put into uniform? Enough to make a difference?

We'll never know now, Dover thought.

"You know how many Mississippians it takes to screw in a light bulb?" Pete asked out of the blue.

"Tell me," Dover urged.

"Twenty-seven—one to hold the bulb, and twenty-six to turn the house round and round."

Dover laughed his ass off—that one did take him by surprise. Here he was, his country crashing down around his ears, and he laughed like a loon at a stupid joke. If that wasn't crazy, he didn't know what would be. He didn't stop laughing, either.

W hen Jonathan Moss heard barrels clanking toward him, he feared it was all over. If the Confederates wanted to put that kind of effort into hunting down Spartacus' guerrilla band, they could do it. Moss knew that all too well. So did all the survivors in the band.

"Got us some Featherston Fizzes?" Spartacus called.

"We'd do better trying to hide," Nick Cantarella said.

"Ain't gonna hide from that many machines," the chieftain said, and Moss feared he was right. He went on, "We headin' fo' heaven, might as well send some o' them motherfuckers down to hell."

Moss wasn't so sure of his own destination, but he'd been living on borrowed time long enough that he didn't worry too much about paying it back. An old bolt-action Tredegar wasn't much use against a barrel, but he hoped a driver or a commander would be rash enough to stick his head out for a look around. If one of them did, Moss hoped to make it the last rash thing he ever tried.

There came one of the big, snorting monsters. Moss swore under his breath. The barrel was buttoned up tight. Just his luck to spot a crew who knew what they were doing. He also saw that barrel design had come a long way while he was on the shelf here in Georgia. This green-gray machine was different from any he'd seen before.

Green-gray…His eyes saw it, but his brain needed several seconds to

process it, to realize what it meant.

His jaw had just dropped open when Nick Cantarella, a little quicker on the uptake, let out a joyously obscene and blasphemous whoop: “Jesus fuckin’ Christ, they’re ours!”

“Them’s Yankee barrels?” Spartacus sounded as if he hardly dared believe it. Jonathan Moss knew how the guerrilla leader felt—he hardly dared believe it himself.

“Sure as shit aren’t Confederate,” Cantarella answered as two more machines rumbled down the road. The ground-pounder took a long look at them. “Wow,” he breathed. “They’ve really pumped up the design, haven’t they?”

“I was thinking the same thing. These look like they’re twenty years ahead of the ones we were used to,” Moss said. War gave engineering a boot in the butt. Moss thought of the airplanes he’d flown in 1914, and of the ones he’d piloted three years later. No comparison between them—and no comparison between these barrels and their predecessors, either.

If he walked out in front of them with a rifle in his hands, he’d get killed. The Negroes in Spartacus’

band didn’t have that worry. U.S. barrelmen, seeing black faces, would know they were among friends.

Again, the guerrillas figured that out at least as fast as he did. Several of them broke cover, smiling and waving at the oncoming barrels. The lead machine stopped. The cupola lid on top of the smooth rounded turret flipped up. “Boy, are we glad to see youse guys!” the barrel commander said in purest Brooklynese, his accent even stronger than Cantarella’s.

“We’s mighty glad to see you Yankees, too,” Spartacus answered. “We gots a couple o’ friends o’

yours here.” He waved for Moss and Cantarella to show themselves.

Cautiously, Jonathan Moss came out from behind the bush that had hidden him. The barrel’s bow machine gun swung toward his belly button. A burst would cut him in half. He set down the Tredegar and half raised his hands.

“Who the hell are you?” the barrel commander asked. “Who the hell’re both of youse?”

“I’m Jonathan Moss, major, U.S. Army—I’m a pilot,” Moss answered. In scruffy denim, he looked more like a farmer—or a bum.

“Nick Cantarella, captain, U.S. Army—infantry,” Cantarella added. “We got out of Andersonville, and we’ve been with the guerrillas ever since.”

“Well, fuck me,” the barrel commander said. “We heard there might be guys like you around, but I never figured I’d run into any. How about that? Just goes to show you. How long you been stuck here?”

“Since 1942.” By the way Moss said it, it might as well have been forever. That was how he felt, too.

“Fuck me,” the kid in the barrel said again. He looked around. “Gonna be some foot soldiers along any minute. We’ll give you to them guys, and they’ll do…whatever the hell they do with you. Clean youse up, anyway.” That confirmed Moss’ impression of himself. Cantarella looked even more sinister, because he had a thicker growth of stubble.

Sure enough, infantrymen trotted up a couple of minutes later. At least half of them carried captured Confederate automatic rifles and submachine guns. The lieutenant in charge probably wasn’t old enough to vote. “Where are the closest Confederates?” he demanded, sticking to business.

“Down in Oglethorpe, other side o’ the river,” Spartacus answered. “They got some sojers there, anyways.”

“You lead us to ’em?” the young officer asked.

Spartacus nodded. “It’d be my pleasure.”

“All right. We’ll clean ’em out—or if we can’t, we’ll call for the guys who damn well can.” The lieutenant took a couple of steps towards Oglethorpe before he remembered he hadn’t dealt with Moss and Cantarella. He pointed to one of his men. “Hanratty!”

“Yes, sir?” Hanratty said.

“Take these Robinson Crusoes back to Division HQ. Let the clerks deal with ’em.” The lieutenant raised his voice: “The rest of you lazy lugs,

c'mon! We still got a war to fight."

"Robinson Crusoes?" Moss said plaintively. The infantrymen tramped south, boots squelching through the mud. The barrels rumbled along with them. The Confederates in Oglethorpe were in for a hard time.

Nobody paid any attention to the newly liberated POWs, not even the blacks with whom they'd marched and fought with for so long.

Well, there was Hanratty. "You guys were officers?" he said. Jonathan Moss managed a nod. So did Cantarella, who looked as stricken as Moss felt. Hanratty just shrugged. "Well, come on, sirs."

Still dazed, Moss and Cantarella followed. Moss had known the ropes with the guerrillas, and before that in Andersonville, and before that as a flier. Before long, he'd probably be in a situation where he knew them again. For now, he was in limbo.

Division HQ was a forest of tents a couple of miles to the north. Hanratty turned his charges over to the sentries there, saying, "My outfit scraped up these two Crusoes running with the niggers. One's a major, the other one's a captain. They're all yours. I gotta get back to it—can't let my guys down." With a nod, he headed south again.

"Crusoes?" Moss said once more. Not even *Robinson Crusoe* s this time.

"That's what we call escaped POWs who've been on their own for a while, sir," the sentry said.

Maybe he was trying to be kind, but he sounded patronizing, at least to Moss' ears. He went on, "You guys come with me, uh, please. I'll take you to the doc first, get you checked and cleaned up, and then they'll start figuring out what to do with you next."

"Oh, boy," Cantarella said in a hollow voice. Moss couldn't have put it better himself.

The doctor wore a major's gold oak leaves, but he didn't look much older than that kid lieutenant. He poked and prodded and peered. "Fleas, lice, chiggers, ticks," he said cheerfully. "You're scrawny as all get-out, too, both of you. Do a lot of walking barefoot?"

"Some, after our boots wore out and before we could, uh, liberate some more," Moss admitted.

"Hookworm, too, chances are. And some other worms, I bet." Yes, the

doctor sounded like somebody in hog heaven. “We’ll spray you and give you some medicine you won’t like—nobody in his right mind does, anyway—and in a few days you’ll be a lot better than you are now, anyhow. And we’ll feed you as much as you can hold, too. How does that sound?”

“Better than the worm medicine, anyway,” Moss said. “You make me feel like a sick puppy.”

“You *are* a sick puppy,” the doctor assured him. “But we’ll make you better. We’ve learned a few things the last couple of years.”

“When do we get back to the war?” Nick Cantarella asked. “If the United States are down here, Featherston’s fuckers have to be on their last legs. I want to be in at the death, goddammit.”

“Me, too,” Moss said.

“When you’re well enough—and when we make sure you are who you say you are.” The doctor produced two cards and what looked like an ordinary stamp pad. “Let me have your right index fingers, gentlemen. We’ll make sure you’re really you, all right. And if you’re not, you’ll see a blindfold and a cigarette, and that’s about it.”

“If you think the Confederates would let somebody get as raggedyassed as we are just to infiltrate, you’re crazy as a bedbug, Doc,” Cantarella said.

“Well, you aren’t the first man to wonder,” the doctor said easily.

For the next few days, Moss felt as if he’d gone back to Andersonville. He and Cantarella were under guard all the time. The food came from ration cans. The worm medicine flushed it out almost as fast as it went in. That was no fun. Neither was the idea that his own country mistrusted him.

At last, though, a bespectacled captain said, “All right, gentlemen—your IDs check out. Welcome back to the U.S. Army.”

“Gee, thanks.” Moss had trouble sounding anywhere close to enthusiastic.

The captain took his sarcasm in stride. “I also have the pleasure of letting you know that you’re now a lieutenant colonel, sir—and you, Mr. Cantarella, are a major. You would have reached those ranks had

you not been captured, and so they're yours. They have been for some time, which is reflected in the pay accruing to your accounts."

"That's nice." Moss remained hard to please. Nobody got rich on an officer's pay, and the difference between what a major and a light colonel collected every month wasn't enough to get excited about.

"When can we start fighting again?" Cantarella demanded, as he had before.

"You'll both need some refresher training to get you back up to speed," said the captain with the glasses. "Things have changed over the past couple of years, as I'm sure you'll understand."

"How much hotter are the new fighters?" Moss asked.

"Considerably," the captain said. "That's why you'll need the refresher work."

"Will I get back into action before the Confederates throw in the sponge?"

"Part of that will be up to you," the captain answered. "Part of it will be up to the Army as a whole, and part of it will be up to Jake Featherston. My own opinion is that you shouldn't waste any time, but that's only an opinion."

"We *are* going to lick those bastards?" Nick Cantarella said.

"Yes, sir. We are." The captain with the specs sounded very sure.

"What'll happen to Spartacus and his gang?" Moss asked, adding, "They're damn good fighters. They wouldn't have stayed alive as long as they did if they weren't."

"We've started accepting colored U.S. citizens into the Army," the captain said, which made Moss and Cantarella both exclaim in surprise. The captain continued, "Since your companions are Confederates, though, they'll probably stay auxiliaries. They'll work with us, but they won't be part of us."

"And if they get out of line, you won't have to take the blame for anything they do." As a lawyer, Moss saw all the cynical possibilities in the captain's words.

The other officer didn't even blink. "That's right. But, considering

everything the enemy has done to them, not much blame sticks to Negroes acting as auxiliaries in the Confederate States.”

“Is it really as bad as that?” Having been away from even Confederate newspapers and wireless broadcasts since his escape, Moss had trouble believing it.

“No, sir,” the captain said. “It’s worse.”

S omewhere ahead lay the Atlantic. Cincinnatus Driver had never seen the ocean. He looked forward to it for all kinds of reasons. He wanted to be able to say he had—a man shouldn’t live out his whole life without seeing something like that. More important, though, was what seeing the ocean would mean: that the United States had cut the Confederate States in half.

He hadn’t been sure it would happen. This thrust east across Georgia had started out in a tentative way. The United States was trying to find out how strong the Confederates in front of them were. When they discovered the enemy wasn’t very strong, the push took on a life of its own.

And anywhere soldiers went, supplies had to go with them. They needed ammo. They needed rations.

They needed gasoline and motor oil. Cincinnatus didn’t like carrying fuel. If an antibarrel rocket—or even a bullet—touched it off…

“Hell, it’s no worse than carrying artillery rounds,” Hal Williamson said when he groused about it.

“That shit goes up, you go with it.”

He had a point. Even so, Cincinnatus said, “Artillery rounds blow, they take you out fast. You get caught in a gasoline fire, maybe you got time to know how bad things is.”

“Well, maybe,” the white driver said. “They give you a truckload, though, I figure it’ll go off like a bomb if it goes.”

“Mmm…maybe.” Cincinnatus paused to light a cigarette. “Got us plenty o’ cheerful stuff to talk about, don’t we?”

“You wanted cheerful, you shoulda stayed home,” Williamson said.

Cincinnatus grunted. That held more truth than he wished it did. But he said, “I tell you one cheerful thing—we’re beatin’ the livin’ shit outa Featherston’s fuckers. That’ll do for me. Only thing that’d do better’d be beatin’ the shit outa Featherston.”

“Could happen,” the other driver said. “You believe even half of what *Stars and Stripes* says, he won’t be able to stay in Richmond much longer. Where’s he gonna run to then?”

With another grunt, Cincinnatus replied, “You believe half o’ what *Stars and Stripes* says, we won the goddamn war last year.”

Hal Williamson laughed. “Yeah, well, there is that. Those guys lie like they’re selling old jalopies.”

“They got a tougher sell than that,” Cincinnatus said. “They got to sell the war.”

“Soon as the Confederates jumped into Ohio, I was sold,” Williamson said. “Bastards tried to knock us flat and steal the war before we could get back on our feet again. Damn near did it, too— *damn* near.”

He was right about that. “Same here,” Cincinnatus said. “’Course, they ain’t as likely to shoot our asses off as they are with the kids in the front line.”

“Still happens, though. You know that as well as I do. We’ve lost more drivers than I like to think about,” Williamson said.

“Oh, yeah. I won’t try to tell you anything different. All I said was, it ain’t *as* likely, and it ain’t,”

Cincinnatus said. He waited to see if the other driver would keep arguing. When Williamson didn’t, Cincinnatus decided he’d made his point.

The next morning, he picked up a load of canned rations and headed for the front. He liked carrying those just fine. The soldiers needed them, and they wouldn’t blow up no matter what happened. He couldn’t think of a better combination.

About every third Georgia town had Negro guerrillas patrolling the streets along with U.S. soldiers.

Whenever Cincinnatus saw some of them, he would tap his horn and wave. The blacks commonly grinned and waved back. “You a Yankee

nigger?" was a question he heard again and again.

"I'm from Kentucky," he would answer as he rolled past. Let them figure that out. Yes, he'd grown up in the CSA, but he'd spent most of the second half of his life under the Stars and Stripes. His children were Yankees—no doubt about it. They even sounded as if they came from the Midwest…except when they got upset or angry. Then an accent more like his own would come out. But he was more betwixt and between than any one thing. He probably would be for the rest of his life.

U.S. authorities here took no chances. Bodies hung in almost every town square. That was supposed to make the living think twice about giving the USA any trouble. Seeing how much trouble the living gave the USA, Cincinnatus had his doubts about how much good it did. But those dead men wouldn't bother the United States again. He had no doubts about that at all.

Would the United States need to kill every white male in the Confederate States above the age of twelve? If they did need to, would they have the will to do it? Cincinnatus wasn't so sure about that, either. And even if the United States did set out to slaughter white male Confederates, wouldn't it be the same kind of massacre the Confederate whites had inflicted on their Negroes?

"Damn ofays have it coming, though," Cincinnatus muttered, there in the cab of his deuce-and-a-half.

Reluctantly, he shook his head. You couldn't play God like that, no matter how much you wanted to.

Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party really and truly believed blacks had it coming, too. Nothing Cincinnatus had seen while stuck in Covington or while driving a truck through the wreckage of the CSA gave him any reason to think otherwise. Sincerity wasn't enough. What was? What could be?

"We got to stop killing each other. We *got* to," Cincinnatus said. Then he started to laugh. That would have been a fine thought…if he'd had it somewhere else, when he wasn't hauling food to soldiers dedicated to putting the Confederate States of America out of business for good.

The roads here didn't seem to be mined, the way so many had been in Tennessee. Up there, the enemy had known which way U.S. truck convoys were going. Here, they didn't. Cincinnatus wasn't sure U.S. commanders knew where their forces were going from one day to the

next. And if they didn't, how could the Confederates?

Every so often, snipers would take pot shots at the trucks from the woods. When they did, U.S.

armored cars and halftracks lashed the pines with bullets. That took care of that…till the halftracks and armored cars drove on. Then, more often than not, the unharmed bushwhackers would climb out of their holes and start banging away at U.S. trucks again.

Cincinnatus watched the woods as closely as he watched the road, then. He kept a submachine gun on the seat beside him, where he could grab it in a hurry if he needed to. He didn't want to get shot, but he *really* didn't want to get captured. One of the bullets in the captured Confederate weapon might be for him if he had to use it that way.

He wondered how many movies he'd seen where the bad guy snarled, *You'll never take me alive, flatfoot!* He didn't think he was the bad guy in this particular melodrama, but the Confederate skulkers wouldn't feel the same way about him.

Everything went fine till the convoy got to Swainsboro, Georgia, not far from where the trucks would unload. The woods around Swainsboro were particularly thick. The town itself had a turpentine plant, a couple of planing mills, and a furniture factory to deal with the timber. In the cleared areas, farmers raised chickens and turkeys, hogs and goats. All in all, it was a typical enough backwoods Georgia town—or so Cincinnatus thought till a *big* bomb went off under a deuce-and-a-half a quarter of a mile in front of him. He was still in town; the other truck had just cleared Swainsboro.

The poor driver never knew what hit him. His truck went up in a fireball that would have been even bigger had he carried anything inflammable. Chunks of metal and asphalt rained down around Cincinnatus as he slammed on the brakes. Something clanged off a fender. Whatever it was, it sounded big enough to leave a dent. He was amazed his windshield didn't blow in and slash his face to ribbons.

No sooner had he stopped—just past the last buildings on the outskirts of town—than he grabbed for the submachine gun. He'd been through bombings before. Usually, the bomb was intended to stall the convoy so bushwhackers could hit it from the sides. His head swiveled. He didn't hear any gunfire, and wondered why not.

As the trucks ahead of him moved forward, he put his back in gear. An armored car went off the road to one side, a halftrack to the other. The light cannon and machine guns the armored vehicles carried were potent arguments against getting gay with the convoy. Cincinnatus hoped they were, anyhow.

He ground his teeth when he had to leave the paving and go off into the mud to the side. The truck's all-wheel drive kept him from bogging down, but getting stuck was the least of his worries. If those bastards had planted more explosives next to the road…He'd seen that before, too.

He'd just got back up onto the road—and breathed a sigh of relief because he'd made it—when an antibarrel rocket trailing fire streaked out of the woods and slammed into the armored car's side. Those rockets were made to pierce much thicker armor than that. The armored car burst into flames.

Cincinnatus fired into the trees again and again. *Short bursts*, he reminded himself. The muzzle wouldn't pull up and to the right if he didn't try to squeeze off too many rounds at a time. That fire trail pointed right back to where the man with the launcher had to be. If Cincinnatus could nail him…

He growled out a triumphant, "Yeah!" when he did. A man in bloodied Confederate butternut staggered out from behind a loblolly pine and fell to his knees. Cincinnatus squeezed off another burst.

The Confederate grabbed at his chest as he toppled. He lay there kicking. How many bullets did he have in him? Men often proved harder to kill than anyone who wasn't trying to do it would imagine.

This bastard, though, had surely killed everybody in the armored car. No hatches opened; no men got out. And the driver hadn't got out of the blasted truck, either. No way in hell he could have. So the Confederate had extracted a high price for his miserable, worthless life. If all his countrymen did the same…

But they couldn't. Cincinnatus had already seen as much. The enemy soldiers had the advantage of playing defense, of making U.S. forces come to them. But the United States also had an advantage. They could pick when and where to strike. And they could concentrate men and barrels where they thought concentrating them would do the most good. Breakthroughs were easier to come by in this war than they had been the last time around.

How many more would the USA need? Cincinnatus thought about that with half his mind while the rest got the truck rolling down the road again, and scanned the woods to either side. He'd spot the Confederates no doubt lurking in there only if they made a mistake—he knew that. Those bastards were human beings just like anybody else, though. They could screw up the same way U.S. soldiers could.

A good thing, too. Cincinnatus' shiver had nothing to do with the nasty weather. If the Confederates hadn't screwed up a couple-three times, they'd be ruling the roost now. A few Negroes still survived in the CSA. Had Jake Featherston won everything his heart desired, everything south of the border would be lily-white.

So…One more push into Savannah, and how long would the butternut bastards go on screaming,

"Freedom!" with their goddamn country split in two? The United States could turn north and smash one half, then swing south and smash the other. Or maybe the body would die once the USA killed the head.

Cincinnatus patted the submachine gun. He sure hoped so.

J orge Rodriguez and Gabriel Medwick both sewed second stripes onto their sleeves. Jorge was lousy with a needle and thread; back in Sonora, sewing was work for women and tailors. He was surprised to find his friend neat and quick and precise. "How come you can do that so good?" he asked, ready to rag on Gabe.

"My ma learned me," Medwick answered matter-of-factly. "She reckoned I ought to be able to shift for myself, and knowing how to sew was part of it."

That left Jorge with nothing to say. Ragging on his buddy was one thing. Ragging on Gabe's mother was something else, something that went over the line. Instead of talking, Jorge sewed faster—not better, but faster. He wanted to get the shirt back on. Even sitting in front of a campfire, it was chilly out.

Artillery opened up behind him, from the direction of Statesboro. Covington was a long way northwest now, and long gone. Statesboro guarded the approaches to Savannah. The town wasn't that well fortified, not by what Jorge had heard. Why would it be? Back before the war, who would have imagined eastern Georgia would be crawling with damnyankees? Nobody in his right mind, that was for sure.

Imagine or not, though, U.S. soldiers swarmed through this part of the state. Everybody figured they were heading for Savannah. They'd been pushing the Confederates back toward the southeast for weeks. Where else would they be going?

Sergeant Hugo Blackledge appeared in the firelight. He had a gift for not being there one second and showing up out of nowhere the next: a jack-in-the-box with a nasty temper. He commanded the company these days. All the officers above him were dead and wounded, and replacements hadn't shown up. Jorge's promotion to corporal was older than Gabe's, even if their sets of stripes had both arrived at the same time. That meant Jorge had a platoon, while his friend only led a section.

"How's it feel, making like lieutenants?" Blackledge asked with a certain sardonic relish.

"Don't want to be no lieutenant," Gabriel Medwick said. "I got enough shit to worry about already."

"You said it," Jorge agreed.

As if to underline their worries, U.S. artillery came to life. Jorge listened anxiously, then relaxed as the shells roared over his head. That was counterbattery fire aimed at the C.S. guns. As long as the big guns shot at each other, as long as they left the front-line infantry alone, Jorge didn't mind them…much.

Sure enough, the U.S. shells came down well to the rear. Jorge finished sewing on his new stripes and put his shirt back on. Gabe, fussily precise, lagged behind.

"What are we gonna do?" Jorge said.

His buddy looked up from his sewing. "Fight the damnyankees. Keep fighting 'em till we chase 'em back where they came from."

"¿Como?" Jorge asked, startled into Spanish. The question sounded every bit as bleak in English:

"How?"

"President'll figure out some kinda way." Medwick sounded a hundred percent confident in Jake Featherston.

Sergeant Blackledge lit a cigarette. “Don’t get your ass in an uproar about that kind of shit, Rodriguez,” he advised. “You can’t do nothin’ about it any which way. All we got to worry about is the damnyankees in front of us.”

“That’s bad enough!” Jorge exclaimed, because Blackledge made it sound as if the U.S. soldiers were nothing to worry about. Rodriguez wished they weren’t but knew they were.

“Yeah, well, so what? You’re still here. I’m still here. Hell, even pretty boy’s still here.” Blackledge blew smoke in Gabriel Medwick’s direction.

“Up yours, too, Sarge,” Medwick said without rancor. When he first got to know Blackledge, he wouldn’t have dared mouth off like that. Neither would Jorge. And the formidable noncom would have squashed them like lice if they had dared. Now they’d earned the right, not least simply by surviving.

“All we can do is all we can do,” Hugo Blackledge said. “We’ve put up a hell of a fight, seeing as they outweigh us about two to one.”

“We’ll lick ’em yet,” Gabe said as he finally put his shirt back on.

“Uh-huh.” Sergeant Blackledge nodded. Jorge had seen nods like that, from doctors in sickrooms where the patient wasn’t going to get better but didn’t know it yet. You kept his hope up as long as you could. Maybe it didn’t do any good, but it didn’t hurt, either. And he felt better, for a little while, anyway.

Jorge’s dark eyes met the sergeant’s ice-gray ones in a moment of complete mutual understanding.

Gabe didn’t get it, and probably wouldn’t till Savannah fell, if then—and if he lived that long. The patient in the sickroom was the Confederacy. And chances were it wouldn’t get better.

“Got another one of those Dukes?” Jorge asked Blackledge.

“Sure do. Here you go.” The older man held out the pack.

Jorge got to his feet and walked over to take one. As he leaned forward so Blackledge could give him a light, he whispered, “We’re fucked, *sí*?”

“Bet your sorry butt we are,” Blackledge answered.

“Thanks.” Jorge sucked in smoke. But he was more grateful for the candor than for the cigarette.

When morning came, he looked up the road along which he’d been retreating. A couple of dead Confederates lay there, about three hundred yards in front of the line. Nobody’d tried to retrieve their bodies. For one thing, it was too likely that U.S. snipers would shoot anyone who did. For another, C.S.

engineers had booby-trapped the corpses. Any damnyankee who flipped them over looking for souvenirs would regret it.

Nobody’d set up a kitchen anywhere close by. Jorge made do with a ration can. It was U.S.-issue deviled ham, the favorite canned meal on both sides of the front. Jorge hadn’t swapped cigarettes to get his hands on this one. He’d taken three or four cans off a dead Yankee. Looking at those bodies out there made him shake his head as he ate. Maybe he’d been lucky not to get blown to kingdom come.

It wasn’t as if the damnyankees wouldn’t have other chances. Sooner or later—probably sooner—they would start pushing hard toward Savannah again. The only question was whether they’d do it right here or somewhere a little farther west. If they did it right here, Jorge knew he’d have to retreat or die. If they did it farther west, his choices would lie between retreating and getting cut off and trapped.

He didn’t think the C.S. line could hold. As for counterattacks…Well, no. When a sergeant commanded a company, when a new corporal was leading a platoon, this army would have a devil of a time holding its ground. Pushing the enemy back seemed far beyond its power.

Too many damnyankee soldiers. Too many damnyankee barrels. Too many airplanes with the eagle and crossed swords. With Atlanta gone, with Richmond in trouble, with Birmingham getting pounded, how could the Confederacy reply?

No U.S. troops came close enough to try to plunder the booby-trapped corpses. That left Jorge more relieved than anything else. Advancing U.S. soldiers would have meant more hard fighting. He’d seen enough—more than enough, in fact—to last him a lifetime. He knew he hadn’t seen the end of things here. Either he’d have to do more fighting or he’d have to fall back. Chances were, he’d have to do both. If he didn’t have to do either one today, or maybe even tomorrow, so much the better.

Quiet lasted through the afternoon and into the evening. He smoked and ate and dozed and listened to the problems of a soldier in his platoon who had woman trouble back in North Carolina. Somebody'd sent Ray a letter that said his wife (or maybe fiancée; Jorge wasn't quite sure) was fooling around on him with a mechanic who was back there because he'd already lost an arm in the fighting.

"Shoulda blown off his shortarm instead," Ray said savagely. "What I want to do is, I want to go on home and take care o' that my own self."

"Well, you can't," Jorge said. "They catch you deserting, they shoot you. Then they hang up your body to give other people the message."

"It'd be worth it. Then Thelma Lou'd know how much I love her," Ray said.

Jorge wondered why he'd got stuck listening to this crap. He himself hadn't had a fiancée, let alone a wife, back in Baroyeca. The few times he'd lain down with a woman, he'd had to put money on the dresser first. But he was the platoon leader. That must have made him seem to Ray like someone who knew what he was doing. He wished he seemed that way in his own eyes.

He knew enough to be sure Ray was talking like a fool. Anybody who wasn't in love with Thelma Lou would have known that. "She just laugh when you get in trouble," Jorge said. "Then she go on fooling around with this asshole."

"Not if I kill him, she don't." Ray was as stubborn as he was stupid, which took some doing.

"Then she fool around with somebody else," Jorge said. "A gal who cheats on you once, she cheats on you lots of times. You don't get her back like she never screwed around at all." Ray's jaw dropped.

Plainly, that had never crossed his mind. *Dumb as rocks*, Jorge thought sadly. He went on, "Or maybe this letter you got, maybe it's bullshit. Whoever sent it to you, there ain't no return address, right?"

"I dunno," Ray said, which covered more ground than he realized. "You might could be right, but I dunno. Kinda sounds like somethin' Thelma Lou'd go and do."

So why do you give a damn about her? Jorge didn't scream it, however

much he wanted to. He could tell it would do no good. “You can’t go nowhere,” he said. “You don’t want to let your buddies down, right?” Ray shook his head. He wasn’t a bad soldier. Jorge pressed on: “You can’t get leave, and there’s lots of military police and Freedom Party men between here and your home town. So stay. All this stuff, if it really is anything, it’ll sort itself out when the war’s done. Why worry till then?”

“I guess.” Ray didn’t sound convinced, but he didn’t sound like someone on the ragged edge of deserting, either.

Sergeant Blackledge swore when Jorge warned him of the trouble. “This ain’t the first time he’s had trouble with that cunt,” he said. “But you were dead right—if he does try and run off, he ain’t gonna get far, and he’ll land in more shit than Congress puts out.”

Half an hour after that, a captain and a second lieutenant and six or eight enlisted men showed up: a new company CO, a platoon commander, and some real live (for the moment, anyhow) reinforcements.

Would wonders never cease? The captain, whose name was Richmond Sellars, walked with a limp and wore a Purple Heart ribbon with two tiny oak-leaf clusters pinned to it.

“I told ’em I was ready to get back to duty,” he said, “so they sent my ass here.” He pointed to the lieutenant, who had to be at least forty and looked to have come up through the ranks. “This is Grover Burch. Who’s in charge now?”

“I am, sir. Sergeant Hugo Blackledge.” Blackledge likely wasn’t happy to see company command go glimmering. Jorge wasn’t thrilled about losing his platoon. The good news was that he wouldn’t have to listen to complaints like Ray’s so much. They’d be Burch’s worry, and Sergeant Blackledge’s, too.

“Well, Blackledge, why don’t you fill me in?” Sellars said. He’d seen enough to know he’d be smart to walk soft for a while.

The sergeant did, quickly and competently. He said a couple of nice things about Jorge, which surprised and pleased the new corporal. Then Blackledge pointed northwest. “Not really up to us what happens next, sir,” he said. “The damnyankees’ll do whatever the hell they do, and we’ve got to try and stop ’em. I just hope to God we can.”

F orward to Richmond! That had been the U.S. battle cry in the War of Secession. It would have been the battle cry during the Great War, except the Confederates struck north before the USA could even try to push south. And in this fight…

In this fight, the CSA had held the USA in northern Virginia. The Confederate States had held, yes, but they weren't holding any more. Abner Dowling noted each new U.S. advance with growing amazement and growing delight. After U.S. soldiers broke out of the nasty second-growth country called the Wilderness, the enemy just didn't have the men and machines to stop them. The Confederates could slow them down, but the U.S. troops pushed forward day after day.

A command car took Dowling and his adjutant past burnt-out C.S. barrels. Even in this chilly winter weather, the stink of death filled the air. "I didn't believe I'd ever say it," Dowling remarked, "but I think we've got 'em on the run here."

"Yes, sir. Same here." Major Angelo Toricelli nodded. "They just can't hold us any more. They'll have a devil of a time keeping us out of Richmond."

"I hope we don't just barge into the place," Dowling said.

He glanced over at the driver. He didn't want to say much more than that, not with a man he didn't know well listening. His lack of faith in Daniel MacArthur was almost limitless. He'd served with MacArthur since the Great War, and admired his courage without admiring his common sense or strategic sense. He doubted whether MacArthur *had* any strategic sense, as a matter of fact.

"I've heard we're trying to work out how to get over the James," Major Toricelli said.

"I've heard the same thing," Dowling replied. "Hearing is only hearing, though. Seeing is believing."

A rifle shot rang out, not nearly far enough away. The driver sped up. Toricelli swung the command car's heavy machine gun toward the sound of the gunshot. He didn't know what was going on. He couldn't know who'd fired, either. The shot sounded to Dowling as if it had come from a C.S. automatic rifle, but about every fourth soldier in green-gray carried one of those nowadays—and the other three wanted one.

Toricelli relaxed—a little—as no target presented itself. “Back in the War of Secession, they would have had a devil of a time taking the straight route we’re using,” he remarked. “The lay of the land doesn’t make it easy.”

“Around here, the lay of the land’s got the clap,” Dowling said. His adjutant snorted. So did the driver.

An adjutant was almost obligated to find a general’s jokes funny. A lowly driver wasn’t, so Dowling felt doubly pleased with himself.

He’d been exaggerating, but only a little. The rivers in central Virginia all seemed to run from northwest to southeast. Major Toricelli was right. Those rivers and their bottomlands would have forced men marching on foot to veer toward the southeast, too: toward the southeast and away from the Confederate capital.

But barrels and halftracks could go where marching men couldn’t. And U.S. forces were pushing straight toward Richmond whether Jake Featherston’s men liked it or not.

So Dowling thought, at any rate, till C.S. fighter-bombers appeared. The driver jammed on the brakes. Everybody bailed out of the command car. The roadside ditch Dowling dove into was muddy, but what could you do? Bullets spanged off asphalt and thudded into dirt. Dowling didn’t hear any of the wet slaps that meant bullets striking flesh, for which he was duly grateful.

A moment later, he did hear several metallic *clang!* s and then a soft *whump!* That was the command car catching fire. He swore under his breath. He wouldn’t be going forward to Richmond as fast as he wanted to.

He stuck his head up out of the ditch, then ducked again as machine-gun ammo in the command car started cooking off. Embarrassing as hell to get killed by your own ordnance. Embarrassing as hell to get killed by anybody’s ordnance, when you came right down to it.

After the .50-caliber rounds stopped going off, Dowling cautiously got to his feet. So did the driver.

Dowling looked across the road. Major Toricelli emerged from a ditch there. He wasn’t just muddy—he was dripping. His grin looked distinctly forced. “Some fun, huh, sir?”

“Now that you mention it,” Dowling said, “no.”

“We’d better flag down another auto, or a truck, or whatever we can find,” Toricelli said. “We need to be in place.”

He was young and serious, even earnest. Dowling had been through much more. With a crooked grin, he replied, “You’re right, of course. The whole war will grind to a halt if I’m not there to give orders at just the right instant.”

Who was the Russian novelist who’d tried to show that generals and what they said and did was utterly irrelevant to the way battles turned out? Dowling couldn’t remember his name; he cared for Russian novels no more than he cared for Brussels sprouts. With the bias that sprang from his professional rank, he thought the Russian’s conclusions absurd. He remembered the claim, though, and enjoyed hauling it out to bedevil his adjutant.

“They do need you, sir,” Major Toricelli said. “If they didn’t, they would have left you in Texas.”

“And if that’s not a fate worse, or at least more boring, than death, I don’t know what would be,”

Dowling said.

While he and Toricelli sparred, the driver, a practical man, looked down the road in the direction from which they’d come. “Here’s a truck,” he said, and waved for it to stop.

Maybe he was persuasive. Maybe the burning command car was. Either way, the deuce-and-a-half shuddered to a halt, brakes squealing. Over the rumble of the engine, the driver said, “You guys look like you could use a lift.”

“You mean you’re not selling sandwiches?” Dowling said. “Damn!”

The driver eyed his rotund form. “You look like you’ve had plenty already…” As his eyes found the stars on Dowling’s shoulder straps, his voice trailed off. Too late, of course, and the glum look on his face said he knew it. “Uh, sir,” he added with the air of a man certain it wouldn’t help.

“Just get me to Army HQ in a hurry, and I won’t ask who the hell you are,” Dowling said.

“Pile in. You got yourself a deal.” Now the driver sounded like somebody’d who’d just won a reprieve from the governor.

Before long, Dowling repented of the bargain. The trucker drove as if he smelled victory at the Omaha 400. He took corners on two wheels and speedshifted so that Dowling marveled when his transmission didn’t start spitting teeth from the gears. Other traffic on the road seemed nothing but obstructions to be dodged.

“What are you carrying?” the general shouted. The engine wasn’t rumbling any more—it was roaring.

“Shells—105s, mostly,” the driver yelled back, leaning into another maniacal turn. “How come?”

Major Toricelli crossed himself. Dowling wondered who was more dangerous, the Confederate fighter-bomber pilot or this nut. Well, if the shells went off, it would all be over in a hurry. Then, brakes screeching now, the driver almost put him through the windshield.

“We’re here,” the man announced.

“Oh, joy,” Dowling said, and got out of the truck as fast as he could. Toricelli and the soldier who’d driven the command car also escaped with alacrity. The truck drove off at a reasonably sedate clip. The madman behind the wheel probably felt he’d done his duty.

A sentry with a captured C.S. submachine gun came up. “I know *you*, sir,” he said to Dowling. “Do you vouch for these two?” The muzzle swung toward Toricelli and the driver.

Never saw ’em before. The words passed through Dowling’s mind, but didn’t pass his lips. The sentry was too grim, too serious, to let him get away with them, and too likely to open fire before asking questions. “Yes,” was all Dowling said.

“All right. Come ahead, then.” The sentry gestured with his weapon, a little more invitingly than he had before.

Familiar chaos enveloped Dowling as he stepped into the big tent. The air was gray with tobacco smoke and blue with curses. People in uniform shouted into telephone handsets and wireless sets’ mikes.

But they just sounded annoyed or angry, the way they were supposed to sound when things were going well.

He remembered headquarters in Columbus, back in the first summer of the war. He remembered the panic in officers' voices then, no matter how they tried to hold it at bay. They couldn't believe what the Confederates were doing to them. They couldn't believe anyone could slice through an army like a housewife slicing cheddar. They didn't know how to do it themselves, and so they'd figured nobody else knew, either.

They almost lost the war before they realized how wrong they were.

Now they knew what was what. Now they had the barrels and the bombs and the artillery and the men to turn knowledge into action. Better still, they had the doctrine to turn knowledge into *effective* action. Yes, they'd learned plenty of lessons from the enemy, but so what? Where you learned your lessons didn't matter. That you learned them did.

One of the men at a field telephone lifted his head and looked around. When he spotted Dowling, he called, "Message for you from General MacArthur, sir."

"Yes?" Dowling tried not to show how his stomach tightened at that handful of words. Daniel MacArthur often seemed incapable of learning anything, and the lessons he drew from what happened to him verged on the bizarre. His scheme to land men at the mouth of the James and march northwest up the river to Richmond…

I managed to scotch that one, anyhow, Dowling thought. *I earned my pay the day I did it, too*.

"Well done for your progress, and keep it up," the man reported. "And the general says he's over the Rapidan River east of Fredericksburg and rapidly pushing south. 'Rapidly' is his word, sir."

"Is it?" Dowling said. "Good for him!" The Confederates had given MacArthur a bloody nose at Fredericksburg in 1942. There wasn't much room to slide troops east of the town. Abner Dowling wouldn't have cared to try it himself. But if MacArthur had got away with it, and if he was driving rapidly from the Rapidan and punning as he went…"Sounds like Featherston's boys really are starting to go to pieces."

"Here's hoping!" three men in Army HQ said in one chorus, while another two or three added, "It's about time!" in another.

Dowling liked prizefights. People said of some boxers that they had a

puncher's chance in the ring. If they hit somebody squarely, he'd fall over, no matter how big and tough he was. That was the kind of chance the CSA had against the USA. But when the United States didn't—quite—fall over, the Confederate States had to fight a more ordinary war, and they weren't so well equipped for that.

Did Featherston have one more punch left? Dowling didn't see how he could, but Dowling hadn't seen all kinds of things before June 22, 1941. He shrugged. If the United States seized Richmond and cut the Confederacy in half farther south, what could Featherston punch with?

"Tell General MacArthur I thank him very much, and I look forward to meeting him in front of the Gray House," Dowling said. Forward to Richmond! Things really were going that way.

A s far as Dr. Leonard O'Doull was concerned, eastern Alabama seemed about the same as western Georgia. The hilly terrain hadn't changed when he crossed the state line. Neither had the accents the local civilians used. Shamefaced U.S. soldiers caught social diseases from some of the local women, too.

This penicillin stuff knocked those down in nothing flat, though. It was better than sulfa for the clap, and ever so much better than the poisons that had been medicine's only weapons against syphilis.

"Move up, Doc!" a noncom shouted at O'Doull one morning. "Front's going forward, and you gotta keep up with it."

"Send me a truck, and I'll do it," the doctor answered. Sergeant Goodson Lord played a racetrack fanfare on his liberated trombone. The soldier who brought the news thumbed his nose at the medic.

Grinning, Lord paused and returned the compliment, if that was what it was.

By now, O'Doull had moving down to a science. Packing, knocking down the tent, loading stuff, actually traveling, and setting up again went as smoothly as if he'd been doing them for years—which he had. He was proud of how fast he got the aid station running once the deuce-and-a-half stopped. And every forward move meant another bite taken out of the Confederate States.

He hadn't been set up again for very long before he got a hard look at what those bites meant. "Doc!

Hey, Doc!" Eddie the corpsman yelled as he helped carry a litter back to the aid station. "Got a bad one here, Doc!"

O'Doull had already figured that out for himself. Whoever was on the litter was screaming: a high, shrill sound of despair. "Christ!" Sergeant Lord said. "They go and find a wounded woman?"

"Wouldn't be surprised, not by the noise," O'Doull answered. "It's happened before." He remembered an emergency hysterectomy after a luckless woman stopped a shell fragment with her belly.

What had happened to her afterwards? He hadn't the faintest idea.

When he first saw the wounded person, he thought it was a woman. The skin was fine and pale and beardless, the cries more contralto than tenor. Then Eddie said, "Look what they're throwing at us these days. Poor kid can't be a day over fourteen."

This time, O'Doull was the one who blurted, "Christ!" That *was* a boy. He wore dungarees and a plaid shirt. An armband said, NATIONAL ASSAULT FORCE.

"You damnyankees here're gonna shoot me now, ain't you?" the kid asked.

"Nooo," O'Doull said slowly. He'd seen National Assault Force troops before, but they were old geezers, guys with too many miles on them to go into the regular Army. Orders were to treat them as POWs, not *francs-tireurs*. Now the Confederates were throwing their seed corn into the NAF, too.

"They said you'd kill everybody you got your hands on," the wounded boy said, and then he started shrieking again.

"Well, they're full of shit," O'Doull said roughly. He nodded to the stretcher-bearers. "Get him up on the table. Goodson, put him out."

"Yes, sir," Lord said. When the mask went over the kid's face, the ether made him think he was choking. He tried to yank off the mask. O'Doull had seen that before, plenty of times. Eddie and Goodson Lord grabbed the boy soldier's hands till he went under.

He'd taken a bullet in the belly—no wonder he was howling. O'Doull cut away the bloody shirt and got to work. It could have been worse. It hadn't pierced his liver or spleen or gall bladder. He'd lose his left

kidney, but you could get along on one. His guts weren't *too* torn up. With the new fancy medicines to fight peritonitis, he wasn't doomed the way he would have been a few years earlier.

"I think he may make it." O'Doull sounded surprised, even to himself.

"I bet you're right, sir," Goodson Lord said. "I wouldn't have given a dime for his chances when you got to work on him—I'll tell you that."

"Neither would I," O'Doull admitted as he started closing up. His hands sutured with automatic skill and precision. "If he doesn't come down with a wound infection, though, what's to keep him from getting better?"

"*Then* we can kill him," Lord said. O'Doull could see only the medic's eyes over his surgical mask, but they looked amused. The kid had been so sure falling into U.S. hands was as bad as letting the demons of hell get hold of him.

"Yeah, well, if we don't kill him now, will we have to do it in twenty years?" O'Doull asked.

"He'll be about old enough to fight then," Sergeant Lord said.

That was one of too many truths spoken in jest. But what would stop another war between the USA and the CSA a generation down the road? After the United States walloped the snot out of the Confederates this time around, would the USA stay determined long enough to make sure the Confederacy didn't rise again? If the country did, wouldn't it be a miracle? And wouldn't the Confederates try to hit back as soon as the USA offered them even the smallest chance?

"Once you get on a treadmill, how do you get off?" O'Doull said.

"What do you mean, sir?" Lord asked.

"How do we keep from fighting a war with these sons of bitches every twenty years?"

"Beats me," the medic said. "If you know, run for President. I guaran-damn-tee you it'd put you one up on all the chuckleheads in politics now. Most of 'em can't count to twenty-one without undoing their fly."

O'Doull snorted. Then, wistfully, he said, "Only trouble is, I don't have any answers. I just have questions. Questions are easy. Answers?" He

shook his head. “One reason old Socrates looks so smart is that he tried to get answers from other people. He didn’t give many of his own.”

“If you say so. He’s Greek to me,” Goodson Lord replied.

They sent the wounded Confederate kid off to a hospital farther back of the line—all the way back into Georgia, in fact. O’Doull, who had a proper professional pride in his own work, hoped the little bastard would live even if that meant he might pick up a rifle and start shooting at U.S. soldiers again twenty years from now…or, for that matter, twenty minutes after he got out of a POW camp.

The front ground forward. Before long, Birmingham would start catching it from artillery as well as from the bombers that visited it almost every night. O’Doull wondered how much good that would do.

The Confederates might be running short of men, but they still had plenty of guns and ammunition. The bombing that was supposed to knock out their factories didn’t live up to the fancy promises airmen made for it.

Featherston’s followers still had plenty of rockets, too. Stovepipe rockets blew up U.S. barrels.

O’Doull hated treating burns; it gave him the shivers. He did it anyway, because he had to. Screaming meemies could turn an acre of ground into a slaughterhouse. And the big long-range rockets threw destruction a couple of hundred miles.

“Hell with Birmingham,” Sergeant Lord said, picking screaming-meemie fragments out of the thigh and buttocks of an anesthetized corporal. “We’ve got to take Huntsville away from those fuckers. That’s where this shit is coming from.”

“No arguments from me.” O’Doull held out a metal basin to the senior medic. Lord dropped another small chunk of twisted, bloody steel or aluminum into it. *Clink!* The sound of metal striking metal seemed absurdly cheerful.

“Well, if you can see it and I can see it, how come the brass can’t?” Lord demanded. He peered at the wounded man’s backside, then dug in with the forceps again. Sure as hell, he found another fragment.

“Maybe they will,” O’Doull said. “They swung a lot of force south of Atlanta to make the Confederates clear out. Now we’re better

positioned to go after Birmingham than we are for Huntsville, that's all."

"Maybe." Lord sounded anything but convinced. "Me, I think the brass are a bunch of jerks—that's what the trouble is."

Of course you do— you're a noncom, O'Doull thought. He too was given to heretical thoughts about the competence, if any, of the high command. Yes, he was an officer, but as a doctor he wasn't in the chain of command. He didn't want to be, either. There often seemed to be missing links at the top of the chain.

Missing links…His memory went back to biology classes in college, in the dead, distant days before the Great War. He remembered pictures of low-browed, chinless, hairy brutes: Neanderthal Man and Java Man and a couple of others thought to lie halfway between apes and *Homo* laughably called *sapiens*. He imagined ape-men in green-gray uniforms with stars on their shoulder straps and black-and-gold General Staff arm-of-service colors.

The picture formed with frightening ease. "Ook!" he muttered. Sergeant Lord sent him a curious look.

O'Doull's cheeks heated.

He also imagined hulking subhumans in butternut, with wreathed stars on their collars. Confederate Neanderthals also proved easy to conjure up. *A good thing, too*, O'Doull thought. *We'd lose if they weren't as dumb as we are*.

And wasn't Jake Featherston the top *Pithecanthropus* of them all? "Ook," Leonard O'Doull said again, louder this time. Then he shook his head, angry at himself for swallowing his own side's propaganda. Sure, Featherston had made his share of mistakes, but who in this war hadn't? The President of the CSA had come much too close to leading his side to victory over a much bigger, much richer foe. If that didn't argue for a certain basic competence, what would?

"You all right, sir?" Goodson Lord asked, real concern in his voice.

"As well as I can be, anyhow," O'Doull answered. What worried him was that Jake Featherston could still win. The Confederates had come up with more new and nasty weapons this time around than his own side had. The fragments Lord was cleaning up—another one clanked into the bowl—showed that. If the enemy pulled something else out of his hat, something big…

“Hey, Doc!” That insistent shout from outside drove such thoughts from his mind. No matter what the Confederates who weren’t Neanderthals came up with, all he could do was try to patch up the men they hurt.

“You all right by yourself?” he asked Lord.

“I’ll cope,” the senior medic said, which was the right answer.

The new wounded man had had a shell fragment slice the right side of his chest open. The corpsmen who brought him in were irate. “It was a short round, Doc,” Eddie said. O’Doull could all but see the steam coming out of his ears. “One of ours. It killed another guy—they’ll have to scrape him up before they can bury him.”

“That kind of shit happens all the time,” another stretcher-bearer said.

“Happens too goddamn often.” Yeah, Eddie was hot, all right.

“I think so, too.” O’Doull had also seen too many wounds on U.S. soldiers inflicted by other U.S.

soldiers. He hated them at least as much as Eddie did. All the same…“Let’s get to work on him. The less time we waste, the better.”

Collapsed lung, lots of bleeders to tie off, broken ribs. O’Doull knew what to expect, and he got it.

The wound was serious, but straightforward and clean. O’Doull knew he had a good chance of saving the soldier. By the time he finished, he was pretty sure he had. If the war lasted long enough, the man might return to duty.

“Won’t he be proud of his Purple Heart?” Eddie was a little rabbity guy. Somehow, that only made his sarcasm more devastating.

“He’s here to get one, anyway,” O’Doull said. “You told me he had a buddy who bought the whole plot, right?”

“Yeah.” Eddie nodded.

“Well, this is better. This guy’ll probably end up all right,” O’Doull said. Eddie didn’t answer, which might have been the most devastating comeback of all.

VII

W hen Cassius walked down the street, white people scurried out of his way. That still thrilled him. It had never happened before he started this occupation duty. His whole life long, he'd been taught to move aside for whites. Dreadful things happened to colored people who didn't.

Now he had a Tredegar in his hands and the U.S. Army at his back. Anybody who didn't like that—and there were bound to be people who didn't—and was rash enough to let him know it could end up suddenly dead, and no one would say a word. Other members of Gracchus' band had shot whites in Madison for any reason or none, and then gone about their business. Oh, the ofays in town flabbled, but who paid attention to them? Not a soul.

White women were particularly quick not just to get out of the way but to get out of sight. Cassius had seen that ever since he got here. Shooting wasn't the only revenge Negroes could take on their former social superiors. Oh, no—not at all.

Cassius scowled when he saw blue X's painted on walls. Those would come down or get painted over in a hurry—they were shorthand for C.S. battle flags. If a property owner didn't cover them up, U.S. soldiers would assume he was a Confederate sympathizer. They'd probably be right, too. Right or wrong, they'd make him sorry.

More than a few whites had already disappeared from Madison. The U.S. Army said they'd gone into prisons farther from the front. Negroes loudly insisted the U.S. soldiers had shipped them to camps.

Cassius had done it himself. He *wanted* the ofays quivering in their boots. They'd made him quiver too damn long.

They'd made him fight back, too. Tales of horror like that were liable to make the local whites fight back. Cassius didn't care. If the ofays wanted to try, they could. He figured the U.S. Army *would* start massacring them then.

And he would get to help.

He came to a street corner at the same time as another Negro marching from a different direction.

"Mornin', Sertorius," he said. "How you doin'?"

“I’s tolerable,” his fellow guerrilla replied. “How ’bout yourself?”

“Could be worse,” Cassius admitted. “We got us plenty o’ grub, we got warm places to sleep, an’ we got all the Yankees on our side. Yeah, sure enough could be worse.”

“Amen,” Sertorius said, as if Cassius were a preacher. “Couple months ago, things *was* worse.” He wore a U.S. helmet, and made as if to tip it. Cassius returned the gesture with the cap he had on. “See you,” Sertorius added, and went on marching his assigned route.

“See you.” Cassius also walked on. Odds were they would see each other at the end of the day. They weren’t living in fear, the way they had when they skulked and hid in the countryside. The ofays feared them now. Cassius liked that better. Who wouldn’t?

And sometimes the ofays were starting to treat them with respect. A kid maybe eight or nine years old came up to Cassius. “Got any rations you can spare?” he asked, his voice most polite.

Cassius would have told a grown man to go to hell. A skinny kid, though, was a skinny kid. Cassius started to reach for one of the ration cans in his belt pouch. Then he took another look at the boy. His hand stopped. “You called me a goddamn nigger before,” he said. “You said I sucked the damnyankees’

dicks. Far as I’m concerned, you kin starve.”

The white boy looked almost comically astonished. “I didn’t mean it,” he said, and smiled a winning smile.

How dumb was he? How dumb did he think Cassius was? That was the real question, and Cassius knew the answer—dumb as a nigger, that was what he thought. “Now tell me one I’ll believe,” Cassius said scornfully.

If looks could have killed, he would have fallen over dead on the spot. The white kid started to say something—probably something as sweet and charming as the insults he’d dealt out the last time he ran into Cassius. Then he glanced at the Tredegar and went away instead. That was the smartest thing he could have done. Cassius likely would have shot him if he’d run his mouth twice.

An old man came up behind him. “You won’t even feed a little boy?” the geezer asked. “What’s the world coming to?”

“I ain’t gonna feed that little bastard no matter what the world’s comin’ to,” Cassius answered. “Some other kid, maybe, but not him.”

“Why not?”

“On account of he done called me a nigger and a cocksucker.”

Well, you are a nigger. Cassius could see it in the old white man’s shrewd gray eyes. The fellow had sense enough not to say it, though. And cocksucker was an insult to anybody. “Oh,” was all that came out of the ofay’s mouth. He walked on past Cassius, careful not to come close enough to seem threatening.

At noon, another black man took over Cassius’ beat. Cassius went back to the tents outside of town to see if the U.S. Army cooks had any hot food. Sure enough, big kettles of chicken stew simmered over crackling fires. Cassius dug out his mess kit and got in line.

“How’d it go?” asked the white soldier in front of him. “Any trouble with the local yokels?”

“Nah.” Cassius shook his head. But then he corrected himself: “Well, a little. This kid who don’t like niggers—an’ I *know* he don’t like niggers—tried to bum food offa me.”

“Hope you told him to fuck himself,” the soldier said. “Little asshole can starve for all I care. Just save somebody on our side the trouble of shooting him once he grows up.”

“You reckon another war’s comin’?” Cassius asked as the line snaked forward.

“Shit, don’t you?” the white man replied. “Sooner or later, we’ll let these Confederate bastards back on their feet. A half hour after we do, they’ll clean the grease off the guns they got stashed away and start greasin’ us.”

Was that savage cynicism or sage common sense? When it came to gauging the chances of peace and war, how much difference was there? Cassius didn’t know. He did know Confederate whites despised both blacks and U.S. whites. He’d always known C.S. Negroes didn’t love whites—and how little reason they had to love them. Now he’d discovered that white soldiers from the USA couldn’t stand Confederate whites, either. That was reassuring.

Plainly, quite a few soldiers in green-gray didn't like Negroes, either. But they hated Confederate whites more—at least while they were down here. Confederate whites wanted them dead, and were willing—no, eager—to pick up weapons and make sure they died. Negroes in the CSA, by contrast, made natural allies. The enemy of my enemy… *is at least worth dishing out rations to*, Cassius thought.

The cook loaded his mess kit with as much chicken stew as anybody else got. "Here y'are, buddy,"

he said, his lips barely moving because of the cigarette that dangled from the corner of his mouth.

"Thanks." Cassius moved on.

When he got a cup of coffee to go with the stew, he found it heavily laced with chicory. But it came from the same big pot—almost a vat—that served the U.S. soldiers. No one was giving him particularly lousy coffee. The good stuff was hard to come by—that was all. As long as he got his fair share of what there was, he had no kick coming.

He made sure he washed his mess kit after he finished eating. The U.S. Army came down hard on you if you didn't. One dose of a jowly sergeant screaming in his face about food poisoning and the galloping shits was enough to last him a lifetime. He did notice that the sergeants screamed just as loud at white men they caught screwing up. Again, as long as they tore into everybody equally, Cassius could deal with it.

Once he'd policed up—a term that had sounded funny when he first heard it, but one he was used to now—he went over to the POW camp outside of Madison. Watching Confederate soldiers behind barbed wire was even more fun than looking at animals in cages had been when his father took him to the zoo.

The Confederates were like lions—they'd bite if they got half a chance. But he had claws of his own.

The Tredegar's weight, which often annoyed him, seemed more like a safety net close to the prisoners. "I had a gun myself, I'd shoot you for totin' that thing," a POW said, shaking his fist.

"You could try," Cassius answered. "Some other ofays done tried before, but I'm still here."

"You know what happens to uppity niggers?" the POW said.

“Sure do. They git shot.” Cassius started to unsling the rifle. “Same thing happens to uppity prisoners.”

The Confederate shut up. Cassius let his hand drop.

Some of the other POWs weren’t uppity. They were just hungry. They begged from U.S. soldiers, and they begged from Negroes, too. “Got any rations you don’t need?” one of them asked, stretching out his hands imploringly to Cassius.

“You feed me if I was in there?” Cassius asked.

“Well, I hope so,” the man answered after a perceptible pause for thought. “I’m a Christian, or I try to be.”

“Reckon Jake Featherston’s a Christian, too?”

“Sure he is,” the POW said, this time without hesitation. “He loves Jesus, same as you’n me. Jesus loves him, too.”

“Fuck you, you ofay asshole.” Cassius turned away. “You can starve.”

“You ain’t no Christian,” the Confederate called after him.

“If Jake Featherston is, I don’t want to be.” Cassius walked off. He wondered if the POW would cuss him out as he went. But the man kept quiet. A few untimely demises had convinced the C.S. prisoners that they needed to watch their mouths around the surviving Negroes.

Cassius’ mother would have landed on him like a thousand-pound bomb if she heard him say he didn’t want to be a Christian. She prayed even when things looked worst—no, especially when they did. And she got caught in church, and went straight from church to one of Jake Featherston’s murder factories.

What did that say about how much being a Christian was worth? Not much, not so far as Cassius could see.

Maybe she was in heaven, the way she always thought she would be. Cassius hoped so. He had trouble believing it, though. He had trouble believing anything these days.

He found Gracchus that evening. Gracchus thought about things, too. “You reckon we’ll ever fit in again?” Cassius asked.

The former guerrilla leader didn’t even pretend not to understand

what he was talking about. “In Georgia? Naw.” Gracchus shook his head.

“Don’t just mean Georgia,” Cassius said. “I mean anywhere. The Confederate ofays all hate us.” He didn’t love whites in the CSA, either, but he left that out of the mix, continuing, “Ofays from the USA don’t all hate us, I reckon, but they’s so different, ain’t no way we belong in Yankeeland, neither. So what does that leave?”

“Nothin’.” Gracchus managed a crooked grin. “When you ever know a nigger who had more’n dat?”

“You got somethin’ there,” Cassius admitted. His father had had more: a kingdom of the mind, a kingdom whose size and scope Cassius was only beginning to realize he’d never fully grasped. But what did all of Xerxes’ quiet wisdom win him in the end? Only another place on the train bound for hell on earth. Cassius said, “I could kill ofays for the rest o’ my life an’ not even start payin’ them fuckers back.”

“It’s a bastard, ain’t it?” Gracchus said. “Maybe Jake Featherston wins, an’ maybe he loses. But we-uns, we-uns already done lost.” Cassius started to answer, but what could he say that Gracchus hadn’t?

Y es, the front was Richmond. There had always been a danger in putting the Confederate capital so close to the U.S. border. Richmond made a magnet for U.S. ambitions. McClellan had threatened it in the War of Secession; a better general likely would have taken it then. Even in the Second Mexican War, the USA dreamt of marching in. During the Great War, the flood tide of green-gray had reached Fredericksburg on its way south before the Confederate government decided it had had enough.

And now…Now Jake Featherston was red-hot, almost white-hot, with fury, but not even his unending, unyielding rage could stiffen the Confederate armies north of the capital. “God damn it to hell!”

he screamed at Nathan Bedford Forrest III. “We need to bring more men into the line up there!”

“Sir, we haven’t got any more men to move,” Forrest replied.

“Get ’em from somewhere!” Jake said.

“Where do you recommend, sir?” the chief of the General Staff asked.

“Shall we pull them out of Georgia? Or maybe out of Alabama?”

“No! Jesus Christ, no!” Featherston exclaimed. “The fucking country’ll fall apart if we do.” The country was falling apart anyway, but he knew it would fall apart faster if he pulled soldiers away from the sectors where they were fighting hardest. “What have we got left in the Carolinas?”

“What was there is either up here or down in Georgia,” Forrest replied. “It has been for weeks.” He paused, then licked his lips and asked, “Are you sure you aren’t overworked, Mr. President?”

“I’m tired of nobody doin’ what needs doin’—I sure am tired o’ that,” Jake growled.

“That’s…not quite what I meant, sir.” Nathan Bedford Forrest III licked his lips again. “Don’t you think the strain of command has been a little too much for you? Shouldn’t you take a rest, sir, and come back to duty when you’re refreshed and ready to face it again?”

“Well, I don’t rightly know,” Featherston said slowly. “Do you really reckon I’m off?”

“The war hasn’t gone the way we wish it would have, and that’s a fact.” Forrest sounded relieved—and surprised—that Jake wasn’t hitting the armored ceiling in fourteen different places.

“Maybe somebody with a fresh slant on things can stop the damnyankees, or at least get a peace we can live with out of them.”

“I suppose it’s possible, but I wouldn’t bet on it.” Under the desk, out of the general’s sight, Jake’s left hand hesitated between two buttons. The first one, the closer one, would send the nearest guards rushing into the office. But the chief of the General Staff plainly had a coup in mind. If he hadn’t suborned those guards, he wasn’t worth the paper he was printed on. “Who do you have in mind to take over afterwards? You?” Keep the son of a bitch talking. Jake’s finger came down on the other button.

“I’ll take military command,” Nathan Bedford Forrest III replied. “But I think Vice President Partridge is the better man to talk peace with the United States. Everything stays nice and constitutional that way.”

He was keeping Jake talking, too, waiting till his men got here to back his play.

You stupid piece of shit. Only way to get me out of this chair is to murder me. Featherston let a little anger show, but only a little—the sort he might show if he *was* thinking of stepping down. “Do you reckon even the Yankees are dumb enough to take Don Partridge seriously?” he demanded. “I sure as hell don’t.”

“If he’s speaking in the name of the President, or as the President, they’ll have to listen to him.”

Nathan Bedford Forrest’s eyes kept slipping toward the door and then jerking back to Jake. The President of the CSA wanted to look that way, too, but he didn’t. He had more discipline in his pinkie than Forrest did in his whole worthless carcass.

“So who all figures the country’d be better off without me?” Jake asked. “Don must be in on this, too, right? How about Clarence Potter? He’s a fellow with pretty fair judgment—always has been.” He was also a fellow Featherston had suspected for years.

To his surprise, Forrest shook his head. “As a matter of fact, no. He thinks you’re the best war leader we’ve got. I used to think so, too, but —”

He broke off. There was a commotion outside, shouts and screams and then a couple of gunshots and more screams and shouts. One of the bullets punched through what was supposed to be bulletproof glass in the door. Almost spent, it ricocheted off the wall above Jake’s head and fell harmlessly to the floor.

An instant later, the door flew open with a crash. Four soldiers in camouflage uniforms burst into the President’s office. Jake and Nathan Bedford Forrest III pointed at each other. “Arrest that man!” they both yelled.

Four automatic-rifle muzzles bore on the chief of the General Staff. So did the .45 Jake Featherston plucked from a desk drawer. “Hold it right there, traitor!” one of the soldiers roared.

“Freedom!” the other three shouted. They were Party Guards, not Army men. Nathan Bedford Forrest III seemed to notice that for the first time. His face turned gray as tobacco smoke. Jake Featherston watched with almost clinical interest. He’d never seen a man go that color before—not a live man, anyhow.

“How—?” Forrest gasped. That used up all the breath he had in him.

He might have been a hooked crappie, drowning in air he couldn't breathe.

"What? You reckon I've only got one set of guards round this place?" Jake said. "You might be dumb enough to do something like that, but I sure ain't." He turned to the men who'd rescued him. "Make sure everything's secure down here. You find anybody you don't figure you can rely on, grab the son of a bitch. We'll sort out who's what later on. In the meantime, we squeeze answers out of this asshole. He'll sing. He'll sing like a fucking canary."

"You bet, boss." One of the Freedom Party Guards—a troop leader—grinned a sharp-toothed grin.

"Once we get going, we can make a rock sing." The three-striper laughed.

So did Featherston. "He won't be a rock," he predicted. Part of him wanted to laugh at what an amateurish excuse for a coup Nathan Bedford Forrest III tried to bring off. Talking him into stepping down of his own accord! If that wasn't the dumbest thing in the world, Jake didn't know what would be.

"Your granddad'd be ashamed of you," he told Forrest.

"Great-grandfather. And no, he wouldn't—he didn't like tyrants any better than I do," the suddenly former chief of the General Staff replied. He could talk a good game, but some games weren't about talk, and he'd never figured that out.

"Take him away," Jake said. He didn't want to argue with Forrest, and he didn't have to, either. But the other man hadn't the least idea what he meant. If the original Nathan Bedford Forrest planned a coup, he would have done it right. This smudgy carbon copy—hardly a Forrest at all in looks, except for the eyes—didn't know the first thing about how to manage one.

Away he went, perhaps too numb to realize yet what kind of hell he was heading for. Well, he'd find out pretty damn quick. The only thing that excused a plot was winning. Failure brought its own punishment.

Jake went out into the antechamber. Lulu sat at her desk as calmly as if two Army men didn't lie dead not ten feet away. "I knew you'd take care of that foolishness, Mr. President," she said. "Shall we call somebody to get rid of this carrion?"

“Mm—not quite yet,” Featherston answered. “Let me bring in some more men I’m sure I can count on.” The worst thing about having somebody mount a coup was being unable to trust the people around you afterwards.

But if he couldn’t count on the Freedom Party Guards, he couldn’t count on anybody—and if he couldn’t count on anybody, Nathan Bedford Forrest III’s strike would have worked like a charm. Jake went back to the telephone on his desk. Had Forrest had the brains to suborn the operator and keep the President from getting hold of loyal troops? That might make things dicey, even now.

But no. Within a minute, Featherston was talking with a regimental commander named Wilcy Hoyt, who promised to secure the Gray House grounds with his troops. “Freedom!” Hoyt said fervently as he rang off.

Would the men who backed Forrest fight? Would they try to take Jake out, reckoning it was their best chance? In their shoes, Featherston would have done that. He still had his .45. But the pistol was there to protect him against a visitor who turned out to be an assassin. It wouldn’t help much against a squad of soldiers determined to do him in.

As soon as he got off the telephone with Hoyt, he went out and grabbed an automatic rifle from one of the dead guards. Even that wouldn’t do him as much good as he wished, but it was better than the pistol.

If he had to go down, he aimed to go down fighting.

“Will there be more shooting, Mr. President?” Lulu asked.

“Well, I don’t know for sure, but there may be,” Jake answered.

“Hand me that other rifle, then,” his secretary said.

Featherston stared at her as if she’d suddenly started speaking Swahili. “You know how to use it?”

“Would I ask if I didn’t?” she said.

He gave her the Tredegar. She could handle it, all right. And two rifles blasting anybody who tried to break in were bound to be better than one. “Where the devil did you learn something like this?” Jake

inquired.

“A women’s self-defense course,” Lulu answered primly. “I thought I’d be shooting at Yankees, though, not traitors.”

“Rifle works the same either way,” Jake said, and she nodded. He supposed she’d feared assaults on her virtue. His own view was that any damnyankee who tried to take it would have to be desperately horny and plenty nearsighted, too. He would never have said anything like that, though. He liked Lulu, and wouldn’t hurt her for the world—which he wouldn’t have said about most people he knew.

But the people who showed themselves at the doorway to the outer office were Freedom Party Guards: Featherston loyalists. Jake had the first few come in without their weapons and with their hands up. They obeyed. The obvious joy they showed at seeing him alive and in charge of things left him with no doubt that they were on his side.

When they’d set up a perimeter outside the office, he began to feel more nearly certain things were going his way. “Get me another outside line,” he told Lulu. She nodded. Jake snorted in soft contempt.

No, Nathan Bedford Forrest hadn’t known thing one about running a coup. Well, too goddamn bad for him. Jake got down to business: “Put me through to Saul Goldman.”

“Yes, Mr. President,” Lulu said, and she did. That the Confederate Director of Communications remained free made Jake snort again. Didn’t Forrest know you couldn’t run a country without propaganda? Evidently he didn’t. He’d left the best liar and rumormonger in the business alone. Had Saul said no, how would Forrest have publicized his strike even if he pulled it off?

No need to flabble about that now. “Saul? This here’s Jake,” Featherston rasped. “Can you record me over the telephone and get me on the air? We’ve had us a little commotion here, but we got it licked now.”

“Hold on for about a minute and a half, sir,” the imperturbable Jew replied. “I need to set up the apparatus, and then you can say whatever you need to.” He took a bit longer than he’d promised, but not much. “Go ahead, Mr. President.”

“Thank you kindly.” Jake paused to gather his thoughts. He didn’t need long, either. “I’m Jake Featherston, and I’m here to tell you the

truth. Truth is that a few damn fools reckoned they could do a better job of running our precious country than me. Other truth is that the traitors were wrong, and they'll pay. Oh, boy, will they ever…"

A nother new exec. Sam Carsten wondered what he'd get this time. He'd had one pearl of great price and one burr under the saddle. The powers that be might have told him to make do without. He could have done it, but it wouldn't have been any fun. He would have had to be his own ogre instead of playing the kindly, benevolent Old Man most of the time.

But a new officer had been chosen and brought down to the destroyer escort on a flying boat. And now Lieutenant Lon Menefee bobbed in the light swells of the South Atlantic as a real boat carried him from the seaplane to the *Josephus Daniels*.

"Permission to come aboard, sir?" he called when the boat drew up alongside the warship. By the matter-of-fact way he said it, the *Josephus Daniels* might have been moored in the Boston Navy Yard, not out on her own God only knew how many hundred miles from the nearest land.

"Permission granted," Sam said, just as formally. A rope ladder tied to the port rail invited Lieutenant Menefee upward. He stood up in the boat, grabbed the ladder, and climbed steadily if not with any enormous agility.

A couple of sailors stood by to grab him as he came over the rail. He turned out not to need them, which made Sam think better of him. "Reporting as ordered, sir," he said with a crisp salute.

"Good to have you aboard." Returning the salute gave Carsten the chance to look him over. He liked what he saw. Menefee was in his late twenties, with a round face, a solid build, and dark whiskers that said he might have to shave twice a day. His eyes were also dark, and showed a wry amusement that would serve him well…if Sam wasn't just imagining it, of course. Among the fruit salad on his chest was the ribbon for the Purple Heart. Pointing to it, Sam asked, "How'd you pick that up?"

"A Japanese dive bomber hit my destroyer somewhere north of Kauai," Menefee replied with a shrug.

"I got a fragment in the leg. The petty officer next to me got his head blown off, so I was lucky, if you can call getting wounded lucky."

“All depends on how you look at things,” Sam said. “Next to not getting hurt, getting wounded sucks.

But it beats the hell out of getting killed, like you said.”

“Yes, sir.” Lieutenant Menefee cocked his head to one side. “I don’t mean this any way bad at all, sir, but you aren’t what I expected.”

Carsten laughed. “If I had a nickel for every officer who served under me and said the same thing, I’d have…a hell of a lot of nickels, anyway. Who expects to run into a two-striper old enough to be his father?”

“That’s not what I had in mind. Besides, I already knew you were a mustang,” Menefee said. “But you’re not…” He paused, visibly weighing his options. Then he plunged, like a man throwing a double-sawbuck raise into a poker game. “You’re not a hardass, the way I figured you might be.”

He had nerve. He had smarts, too. If that had rubbed Sam the wrong way, it could have blighted things between skipper and exec from then on out. But Menefee had it right—Sam *wasn’t* a hardass, except every once in a while when he needed to be. “I hope not—life’s mostly too short,” he said now.

“How come you had me gauged that way?”

“Well, I knew the executive officer you had before didn’t last very long,” Lon Menefee said. “If you’re in my shoes, that makes you wonder.”

“Mm, I can see that it would,” Sam allowed. “Why don’t you come to my cabin? Then we can talk about things without every sailor on the ship swinging his big, flapping hydrophones towards us.”

“Hydrophones, huh?” Menefee’s eyes crinkled at the corners. His mouth didn’t move much, but Sam liked the smile anyway. “Lead on, sir. You know where we’re going.”

“I’ll give you the grand tour in a bit,” Sam said. “Come on.”

After he closed the door to the captain’s little cabin, he pulled a bottle of brandy and a couple of glasses from the steel desk by his bed. “Medicinal, of course,” Lieutenant Menefee observed.

“Well, sure,” Sam said, pouring. “Good for what ails you, whatever the

devil it is.” He handed the new exec one of the glasses. “Mud in your eye.” They both drank. The brandy wasn’t the best Sam had ever had—nowhere close. But it was strong, which mattered more. “So you want to hear about the old exec, do you?”

“If I’m going to sail these waters, sir, shouldn’t I know where the mines are?”

“That seems fair enough,” Sam said, and told him the story of Myron Zwilling. He finished, “This is just my side of it, you understand. If you listen to him, I’m sure you’d hear something different.” One corner of his mouth quirked upward. “Yeah, just a little.”

“I’ll bet you one thing, sir,” Menefee said: “*He* wouldn’t figure the story had two sides. He’d tell me his was the only one, and he’d get mad if I tried to tell him anything different.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Sam said. Zwilling hadn’t had any doubts. Sure as hell, that was part of his problem. “Do *you* see things in black and white, or are there shades of gray for you?”

“I hope there’s gray,” Menefee said. “Black and white make things easier, but only if you don’t want to think.”

That sounded like the right answer. But did he mean it, or was he saying what he thought his new skipper wanted to hear? *I’ll find out*, Sam thought. Aloud, he said, “Things aboard ship are pretty much cut-and-dried right now. They’ll stay that way, too, I hope, unless we need to pick another prize crew.”

“I’ll be all right with that,” Menefee said. “I just got here, so I don’t know who doesn’t like me and who really can’t stand me. Those are about the only choices an exec has, aren’t they?”

“Pretty much,” Sam said. “Is this your first time in the duty?”

“Yes, sir,” the younger man replied. By the way he said it, a second term as executive officer wouldn’t be far removed from a second conviction for theft. Maybe he wasn’t so wrong, either. Didn’t a second term as exec say you didn’t deserve a command of your own?

“Just play it straight, and I expect you’ll do fine,” Carsten said, hoping he was right. “Pretty soon you’ll have a ship of your own, and then somebody else will do your dirty work for you.”

Menefee grinned. “I’ve heard ideas I like less—I’ll tell you that. But I don’t know. The war’s liable to be over before they get around to giving me my own command, and after that the Navy’ll shrink like nobody’s business. Or do you think I’m wrong, sir?”

“It worked that way the last time around—I remember,” Sam said. “This time? Well, who knows?

After we get done beating the Confederates on land, we’ll still need ships to teach Argentina a lesson, and England, and Japan. One of these days, the Japs’ll have to learn they can’t screw around with the Sandwich Islands.”

“Can we go on with the little fights once the big one’s over? Will anybody care, or will people be so hot for peace that they don’t give a damn about anything else?”

“We’ll find out, that’s all,” Sam said. The questions impressed him. Plainly, Lon Menefee had an eye for what was important. That was a good asset for an executive officer—or anybody else. “All we can do is what they tell us to do,” Sam went on, and reached for the brandy bottle. “Want another knock?”

“No, thanks,” Menefee said. “One’s plenty for me. But don’t let me stop you.”

“I’m not gonna do it by myself.” Sam put the bottle back into the desk drawer. He eyed Menefee, and wasn’t astonished to find the new officer eyeing him, too. They’d both passed a test of sorts. The exec would have a friendly drink, but didn’t care to take it much further than that. And Menefee had seen that, while Sam didn’t live by the Navy’s officially dry rules, he wasn’t a closet lush, either. And neither of them had said a word about it, and neither would.

As the desk drawer closed, Menefee said, “Will you give me the tour, then, and let me meet some of the sailors who won’t be able to stand me?” He spoke without rancor, and in the tones of a man who knew how things worked—and that they would work that way no matter what he thought about it. The slightly crooked grin that accompanied the words said the same thing. Sam approved, having a similar view of the world himself.

He took Menefee to the bridge first. Thad Walters had the conn, which meant a petty officer was minding the Y-ranging screens. The *Josephus Daniels* just didn’t carry a large complement of officers.

When Sam told the new exec that the chief hydrophone operator was a CPO, Menefee raised one eyebrow but then nodded, taking the news in stride.

“Lots of antiaircraft guns. I saw that when I came aboard,” Menefee remarked when they went out on deck.

“That’s right, and I wish we carried even more,” Sam said. “The only ship-to-ship action we’ve fought was with a freighter that carried a light cruiser’s guns. We whipped the bastard, too.” Sam remembered the pride—and the terror—of that North Atlantic fight. “Most of the time, though, airplanes are our number-one worry. Way things are nowadays, warships can’t get close enough to shoot at other warships. So, yeah—twin 40mm mounts all over the damn place, and the four-inchers are dual purpose, too.”

“Sure. They’ve got more reach than the smaller guns.” Lieutenant Menefee nodded. “Things look about the same to me. If we don’t find some kind of way to keep bombers off our backs, the whole surface Navy’s liable to be in trouble.”

“During the Great War, everybody flabbled about submersibles. This time around, it’s airplanes. But as long as we bring our own airplanes with us, we can fight anywhere. And the carriers need ships to help keep the bad guys’ airplanes away from them, so I figure we can keep working awhile longer, anyhow.”

“Sounds good to me, sir.” Menefee gave him another of those wry grins.

When they got to the engine room, the new exec started gabbing with the black gang in a way that showed he knew exactly what he was talking about. “So you come from engineering?” Sam said.

“Shows a little, does it?” Menefee said. “Yes, that’s what I know. How about you, sir?”

“Gunnery and damage control,” Sam answered. “We’ve got the ship covered between us—except for all the fancy new electronics, I mean.”

“Most of the guys who understand that stuff don’t understand anything else—looks that way to me, anyhow,” Menefee said.

“Me, too,” Carsten agreed. “If you can figure out all the fancy circuits, doesn’t seem likely you’ll know how people work. I wouldn’t want one

of those slide-rule pushers in charge of a ship." But then he stopped himself, holding up his right hand. "Thad's an exception, I think. He can make the Y-ranging gear sit up and roll over and beg, but he's a damn good officer, too. You'll see."

"He's mighty young. He's had the chance to get used to it right from the start," Menefee said. Sam nodded, carefully holding in his smile. To his eyes, Lon Menefee was mighty damn young, too. But the new exec was right—there were degrees to everything. Young, younger, youngest. Sam couldn't hide the smile any more. Where the hell did *old fart* fit into that scheme?

N ot Richmond, not any more. Richmond was a battleground. Basically, everything north of the James was a battleground—except for what had already fallen. And the damnyankees had a couple of bridgeheads over the river, too. They hadn't tried to break out of them, not yet, but the Confederates couldn't smash them, either. And so, when Clarence Potter left Lexington to report to Jake Featherston on what the physicists at Washington University were up to, he headed for Petersburg instead of the doomed capital of the CSA.

Getting to Petersburg was an adventure. Getting anywhere in the Confederacy was an adventure these days. But the Confederate States had hung on to equality in the air in northern Virginia, Maryland, and southern Pennsylvania longer than they had anywhere else. They'd hung on, and hung on, and hung on…till they couldn't hang on any more. That was how things stood now.

Antiaircraft guns still blazed away at strafing U.S. fighters and fighter-bombers. But antiaircraft guns were just annoyances. What really held enemy aircraft at bay were your own airplanes. And the Confederates didn't have enough to do the job any more.

His motorcar went off the road several times. It raced for a bridge once, and hid under the concrete shelter with bullets chewing up the ground to either side till the aerial wolves decided they couldn't get him and went off after other, easier game. Then, cautiously, the driver put the butternut Birmingham in gear.

"Some fun, huh?" Potter said.

The look the PFC at the wheel gave him told him how flat the joke fell. "Hope to Jesus whatever the hell you're doin' on the road is win-the-war important," the kid said. "If it ain't, we got no business

travelin', on account of the damnyankees're too fuckin' likely to shoot our dicks off. Sir."

Potter wanted to clutch himself like a maiden surprised. The mere thought was appalling. Reality was worse. He'd seen it. He wanted no closer acquaintance with it than that. But he said, "It just may be, soldier. If anything can nowadays, it's got a pretty fair chance."

"Hope so," the driver said. This time, his suspicious stare was all too familiar. "How come you talk like a Yankee yourself?"

"'Cause I went to college up there a million years ago, and I wanted to fit in," Potter replied. "And if I had a dime for every time I've answered that question, I'd be too rich to worry about an Army post."

"Reckon we'll go through security before we get real far into Petersburg." The driver sounded as if he was looking forward to it, which meant he didn't completely believe Potter. *And if I had a dime for that, too…* the Intelligence officer thought.

He figured Petersburg would be something out of Dante, and he was right. Soldiers and bureaucrats and civilian refugees thrombosed the streets. People moved forward by shouting and waving fists and sometimes by shooting guns in the air. Potter saw bodies hanging from lampposts. Some said DESERTER.

Others said SPY. He felt the driver's eye on him, but pretended he didn't.

Sure as hell, there were security checkpoints almost every block. "Papers!" the soldiers or Freedom Party Guards—more and more Guards as Potter neared the center of town—would shout. The wreathed stars on his collar meant nothing to them. Considering that Nathan Bedford Forrest III and other high-ranking officers had risen against Jake Featherston, that made more sense than Potter wished it did.

Then a Freedom Party Guard checked off his name on a clipboard. "You're on our list," said the man in a camouflage smock. "You come with me right now." By the way he jerked the muzzle of his automatic rifle, Potter would be sorry if he didn't—although perhaps not for long.

"Where are you taking me?" Potter asked.

"Never mind that. Get out of your auto and come along," the Party

Guard said.

Not seeing any other choice but starting a firefight he couldn't hope to win, Potter got out of the Birmingham. "Good luck, sir," the driver said.

"Thanks." Potter hoped he wouldn't need it, but it never hurt.

None of his escort—captors?—demanded the pistol on his belt. He wondered whether that was a good omen or simply an oversight. One way or the other, he figured he'd find out before long. "Now that we've got him, what the hell do we do with him?" another Party Guard asked.

The one who'd decided Potter was a wanted man checked the clipboard again. "We take him to the Lawn, that's what," he answered.

It meant something to the other Freedom Party Guard, if not to Clarence Potter. The security troops hustled him along. Nobody laid a finger on him, but nobody let him slow down, either: not quite a frog-march, but definitely something close.

The Lawn, on Sycamore near the corner of Liberty, turned out to be a tall red-brick house much overgrown by ivy. The grass in front of it had gone yellow-brown from winter cold. More Freedom Party Guards manned a barbed-wire perimeter outside the house. They relieved Potter of the .45 before letting him go forward. Before he could go inside, a stonefaced Army captain gave him the most thorough—and most intimate—patting down he'd ever had the displeasure to get.

"Do you want me to turn my head and cough?" he asked as the captain's probing fingers found another sensitive spot.

"That won't be necessary." The young officer didn't change expression at all.

"Necessary… *sir*?" Potter suggested. He didn't usually stand on military ceremony, but he was sick and tired of being treated like a dangerous piece of meat.

He watched the captain think it over. The process took much longer than he thought it should have. At last, grudgingly, the man nodded. "You *are* on the list, and it looks like you're clean. So…it won't be necessary, sir. Are you happy…sir?"

“Dancing in the goddamn daisies,” Potter replied.

That got the ghost of a grin from the young captain. “Go on in, then, sir.” No audible pause this time.

“The boss will take care of you.”

“Who—?” Clarence Potter began, but the captain had already forgotten about him. Somebody else was coming up to the Lawn, and needed frisking. Those educated hands had more work to do.

Muttering, Potter went on in. When he saw Lulu typing on a card table set up in the foyer, he figured out what was going on.

She paused when she recognized him. He almost laughed at the sniff she let out. She never had liked him—she never thought he was loyal enough to the President. But it wasn’t funny any more. The way things were these days, suspicion of disloyalty was liable to be a capital offense.

“General Potter,” the President’s secretary said.

“Hello, Lulu,” Potter answered gravely. “Is he all right?”

“He’s just fine.” She got to her feet. “You stay right there”—as if he were likely to go anywhere. “I’ll tell him you’re here.” The Confederate States of America might be going down the drain, but you couldn’t tell from the way Lulu acted. She came back a moment later. “He wants to see you. This way, please.”

This way took him through the living room, down a hall, past four more guards—any one of whom looked able to tear him in half without breaking a sweat—and into a bedroom. Jake Featherston was shouting into a telephone: “Don’t just sit there with your thumb up your ass, goddammit! Hurry!” He slammed the handset down.

Lulu’s cough said she disapproved of the bad language even more than of the man she escorted.

“General Potter is here to see you, sir,” she said. She still didn’t care for Potter, though, not even a little bit.

“Thank you, darling,” Jake said. Watching him sweet-talk his secretary never failed to bemuse Potter.

He wouldn’t have bet Featherston could do it if he hadn’t seen it with

his own eyes again and again.

“Come in, Potter. Sit down.” He pointed to a chair. “Lulu, hon, please close the door on your way out.”

Please! Who would have thought it was in the President’s vocabulary?

Lulu gave Potter a fishy stare, but she did as Jake Featherston asked. “Reporting as ordered, Mr.

President,” Potter said, sinking into the overstuffed chair. It was all red velvet and brass nails, and looked like something from a Victorian brothel.

“How close are they to a uranium bomb?” Featherston didn’t waste time or politeness on Potter. The President looked like hell: pale and haggard and skinny, with big dark circles under his eyes. How much did he sleep? Did he sleep at all? Potter wouldn’t have bet on it.

“They’re getting closer, sir,” he answered. “They’re talking about months now, not years—if the damnyankees’ bombs don’t set them back again.”

“Months! Jesus Christ! We can’t wait months!” Jake howled. “Haven’t they noticed? This goddamn country’s falling apart around their ears! Atlanta! Richmond! Savannah’s going, and God only knows how long Birmingham will last. We need that fucker, and we need it yesterday. Not tomorrow, not today—yesterday! Months!” He rolled his eyes up to the heavens.

“Sir, I’m just telling you what Professor FitzBelmont told me,” Potter said. “He also said that if you think you can find someone who’ll do it better and faster, you should put him in charge.”

Featherston swore. “There isn’t anybody like that, is there?”

“If there is, Mr. President, I sure don’t know about him,” Potter answered. “Shall we try disrupting the U.S. program again?”

“What the fuck difference does it make?” Featherston said bitterly. That alarmed Potter, who’d never before heard him back away from anything. Even more bitterly, the President went on, “Shit, they’re licking us without uranium bombs. I never would’ve reckoned they could, but they damn well are. Makes you wonder if we *deserve* to live, doesn’t it?”

“No, sir. I have to believe that,” Potter said. “This is my country. I’ll do everything I can for it.”

Featherston cocked his head to one side. “Ask you something?”

“You’re the President, sir. How can I say no?”

“You sure never had any trouble before. But how come you didn’t throw in with Bedford Forrest III and the rest of those bastards?”

“Sir, we’re in a war. We need you. We need you bad. Whoever they brought in instead would have been worse. Chances are the Yankees wouldn’t have made peace with him, either, not this side of—what do they call it?—unconditional surrender. That kills us. Way it looks to me is, we’ve got to keep fighting, because all our other choices are worse. Maybe the slide-rule brigade can save us. It’s the best hope we’ve got, anyhow.”

He realized he’d just admitted he knew about Forrest’s plot, even if he hadn’t gone along with it. If Jake wanted his head, he could have it. But that had always been true, ever since the Richmond Olympics. “Well, I get straight answers from you, anyway,” the Confederate President said. “Listen, you go back and tell FitzBelmont I don’t care what he does or who he kills—we’ve got to have that bomb, and faster than months. Get his head out of the clouds. Make sure he understands. It’s his country, too, what’s left of it.”

“I’ll do my best, sir. I don’t know how much I can hurry the physicists, though,” Potter said.

“You’d better, that’s all I’ve got to tell you,” Featherston said. Clarence Potter nodded. He’d seen the President of the CSA angry before—Jake Featherston ran on anger the way trucks ran on gasoline.

He’d seen him gleeful. He’d seen him stubborn and defiant. But never—never till now, anyway—had he seen him desperate.

N ext stop, Birmingham!” Michael Pound said exultantly. It wasn’t spring yet, not even here in Alabama, where spring came early. It wasn’t spring, no, but something even sweeter than birdsong and flowers filled the air. When Pound sniffed, he didn’t just smell exhaust fumes and cordite and unbathed soldiers. He smelled victory.

The Confederates hadn’t quit. He didn’t think they knew the meaning of the word. Some of their terrifying new barrels came into the front line without so much as a coat of paint—straight from the factories

U.S. bombers and now artillery were still trying to knock out. The crews who fought those shiny metal monsters were brave, no doubt about it. But all the courage in the world couldn't make up for missing skill.

And, while the Confederate machines trickled from their battered factories in dribs and drabs, U.S.

production went up and up. Maybe a new C.S. barrel was worth two of the best U.S. model. If the USA had four or five times as many barrels where it mattered, how much did that individual superiority matter?

Not enough.

Pound guided his barrel past the guttering corpse of a machine that had tried conclusions with several U.S. barrels at once. That might have been a brave mistake, but a mistake it undoubtedly was. The Confederates had made so many big mistakes, they couldn't afford even small ones any more.

Somebody not far away fired an automatic rifle. Maybe that was a U.S. soldier with a captured weapon. On the other hand, maybe it was a Freedom Party Guard aiming at a barrel commander riding along with head and shoulders out of the cupola. Regretfully, Michael Pound decided not to take the chance. He ducked down into the machine.

"Where the hell are we, sir?" Sergeant Scullard asked. The gunner didn't get nearly so many chances to look around as the barrel commander did.

Despite having those chances, Pound needed to check a map before he answered, "Far as I can tell, we're just outside of Columbiana."

"And where the fuck's Columbiana?"

Unless you were born and raised in central Alabama, that was another reasonable question. "Twenty, maybe thirty miles from Birmingham, south and a little bit east," Pound said. "Town's got a munitions plant in it, run by the C. B. Churchill Company—that's what the map notes say, anyhow."

"Fuck," the gunner repeated, this time as a term of general disapproval. "That means those butternut assholes'll fight like mad bastards to keep us out."

“They’ve been fighting like mad bastards for almost three years,” Pound said. “How much good has it done ’em? We’re in the middle of Alabama. We’ve got ’em cut in half, or near enough so it makes no difference. If they had any brains, they’d quit now, because they can’t win.”

“Yeah, and then they’d spend the next hundred years bushwhacking us.” Scullard was not in a cheerful mood.

Pound grunted. The gunner might have meant that for a sour joke. Even if he did, it made an unfortunate amount of sense. In a standup fight, the Confederacy was losing. But how much fun would it be to occupy a country where everybody hated your guts and wanted you dead? After the Great War, the United States hadn’t enjoyed trying to hold on to Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah. If the USA tried to hang on to the whole CSA…

“Well, nobody ever said the Army would go out of style any time soon,” Pound said.

“A good thing, too,” Scullard replied. “If we’re in deep shit now, we’d be in a lot deeper without this baby.” He rapped his knuckles on the breech of the barrel’s main armament, adding, “I just wish we had more like it.”

“They’re coming,” Pound said. “Maybe not as fast as if we’d started sooner, but they are. We can make more stuff than the Confederates can. Sooner or later, we’ll knock ’em flat, and it’s getting on toward sooner.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a Confederate antibarrel rocket slammed into a U.S.

machine a quarter of a mile away. The green-gray barrel brewed up, sending an enormous and monstrously perfect smoke ring up and out through the open cupola. Fire and greasy black smoke followed an instant later as the barrel slewed to a stop. Pound didn’t think anybody got out.

He swore under his breath. The United States were making more stuff than the Confederate States could, yes. Sometimes, though—too damn often, in fact—the Confederates made better stuff. The automatic rifles their infantry carried, these antibarrel rockets, the screaming meemies that could flatten acres at a volley, the long-range jobs that reached into the USA…The enemy had talented engineers.

Their cause stank like a dead fish, but they were good at what they did.

Scullard must have seen the U.S. barrel go up, too. “I hope we knock ’em flat sooner,” he said. “That way, the mothers don’t have the chance to come up with anything *really* nasty.”

“Yeah,” Michael Pound said. That marched with his own thoughts much too well.

Fields and forest surrounded Columbiana. Two routes led up to the town from the south: a county road whose thin blacktop coat the barrels’ tracks quickly wrecked, and a railroad line maybe a hundred yards to the west. They were both nice and straight, and Pound couldn’t have said which he distrusted more. They both let the Confederates see what was coming long before it got there.

And what they could see, they were too likely to be able to hit. That blazing barrel said as much. Of course, banging your way through the woods was asking to get nailed by some kid in butternut crouching behind a pine tree. You’d never spot him till he fired off his stovepipe, and that was too damn late.

Pound stood up in the cupola. He wanted to find out just how much U.S. armor was close enough to follow his platoon’s lead. He hoped the other barrels would follow, anyway. If they didn’t, he was liable to end up slightly dead.

Or more than slightly.

Sometimes, though, a barrel’s engine was as important a weapon as its cannon. This felt like one of those times. Accidentally on purpose, he sent his orders over the all-company circuit instead of the one that linked him to his platoon alone: “Men, we are going to charge up this miserable little road as fast as we can go. We are going to blast anything that gets in our way, and we’ll be inside Columbiana before Featherston’s fuckers figure out what hit ’em.” *I hope*. “Follow me. If this goes wrong, they’ll get my barrel first.” He switched to the intercom so he could talk to his driver: “You hear that, Beans?”

“Yes, sir.” The driver’s name was Neyer, but he rarely had to answer to it. His fondness for one particular ration can had given him a handle he’d keep till he took off his uniform…or till he got blown to smithereens, which might happen in the next couple of minutes.

Don’t think about it, Pound told himself. *If you think about it, you’ll get*

cold feet. “Then gun it,”

he said. He was sure his own platoon would come with him. The rest… *Don’t think about that, either*.

The engine roared. The barrel zipped forward. Flat out, it could do better than thirty. On rough ground, going like that would have torn out the kidneys of the men inside. On the road, it was tolerable… barely.

“Shoot first if you see anything,” Pound advised, shouting over the noise.

“Going this fast, the stabilizer ain’t worth shit,” the gunner answered.

“Shoot first anyway. Even if you miss, you make the other guy duck. Then you can make your second shot count.”

Scullard grunted. Pound knew damn well he was right, but he could see that it wasn’t the sort of thing where you’d want to bet your life if you didn’t have to.

As they neared Columbiana, they found there were Confederate soldiers on the road. The men in butternut hadn’t figured the Yankees would be dumb enough or crazy enough to thunder down on them like that. The bow machine gun and the coaxial machine gun in the turret both started jackhammering.

The C.S. troops scattered.

“Give ’em a couple of rounds of HE, too,” Pound said. “Something to remember us by, you know?”

“Yes, sir!” Scullard said enthusiastically, and then, to the loader, “HE!”

The main armament thundered twice. A 3½-inch shell carried enough cordite to make a pretty good boom when it burst. One round went off in the middle of a knot of fleeing Confederates. Men and pieces of men described arcs through the air.

“Nice shot!” Pound yelled. Only later did he remember he was cheering death and mayhem. They were what he did for a living, his stock in trade. Most of the time, he took them for granted. He wondered why he couldn’t quite do it now.

Then he did, because the barrel roared into Columbiana. He had no

time to think about killing—he was too busy doing it. The barrel crew might have been an extension of his arm, an extension of his will.

“Where the hell is Lester Street?” he muttered. That was where the C. B. Churchill Company was, and had been since 1862. A glance through the periscopes built into the cupola told him what he needed to know. The biggest building in town, the one with the Stars and Bars flying over it, had to be the munitions factory. “Send a couple of HE rounds in there, too,” he told the gunner. “Let ’em know they’ve just gone out of business.”

“Right.” But before Scullard could fire, machine-gun bullets rattled off the barrel’s sides and turret, clattering but doing no harm. The bow gunner sent a long burst into a general store with a big DRINK DR.

HOPPER! sign out front. Pound had tried the fizzy water, and thought it tasted like horse piss and sugar.

The enemy machine gun abruptly cut off.

Boom! Boom! Pound watched holes appear in the munitions plant’s southern wall. He giggled like a kid. Sometimes destruction for its own sake was more fun than anything else an alleged adult could do.

He wondered whether Jake Featherston had an advanced case of the same disease.

And then he got more in the way of destruction than even he wanted. Maybe one of those HE rounds blew up something inside the factory. Maybe somebody in there decided he’d be damned if he let the plant fall into U.S. hands. Any which way, it went sky high.

Pound and his barrel were more than half a mile away. Even through inches of steel armor, the roar was overwhelming. The barrel weighed upwards of forty tons. All the same, the front end came off the ground. The machine might have been a rearing horse, except Pound was afraid it would flip right over onto its turret. Scullard’s startled “Fuck!” said he wasn’t the only one, either.

But the barrel thudded back down onto its tracks. Pound peered out through the periscopes again.

One of the forward ones was cracked, which said just how big a blast that was. It must have knocked half of Columbiana flat.

“Well,” he said, “we liberated the living shit out of this place.”

F lora Blackford was listening to debate on a national parks appropriation bill—not everything Congress did touched on the war, though it often seemed that way—when a House page hurried up to her. His fresh features and beardless cheeks said he was about fifteen: too young to conscript, though the Confederates were giving guns to kids that age, using up their next generation.

“For you, Congresswoman,” the page whispered. He handed her an envelope and took off before she could even thank him.

She opened the envelope and unfolded the note inside. *Come see me the second you get this—*

Franklin, it said. She recognized the Assistant Secretary of War’s bold handwriting.

Any excuse to get away from this dreary debate was a good one. She hurried out of Congressional Hall—leaving was much easier than getting in—and flagged a cab. The War Department was within walking distance, but a taxi was faster. When Franklin Roosevelt wrote, *Come see me the second you get this*, she assumed he meant it.

“Heck of a thing about this Russian town, isn’t it?” the driver said.

“I’m sorry. I haven’t heard any news since early this morning,” Flora said.

“Bet you will.” The cabby pulled up in front of the massive—and badly damaged—War Department building. “Thirty-five cents, ma’am.”

“Here.” Flora gave him half a dollar and didn’t wait for change. A newsboy waved papers and shouted about Petrograd, so something *had* happened in Russia. Maybe the Tsar was dead. That might help the USA’s German allies.

She hurried up the scarred steps. At the top, her Congressional ID convinced the guards that she was who she said she was. One of them telephoned Roosevelt’s office, deep in the bowels of the building.

When he’d satisfied himself that she was expected, he said, “Jonesy here’ll take you where you need to go, ma’am. Somebody will check you out as soon as you get inside.”

Check you out was a euphemism for *pat you down*. The tight-faced woman who did it took no obvious pleasure from it, which was something, anyhow. After she finished and nodded, Jonesy—who looked even younger than Flora's own Joshua—said, "Come along with me, ma'am."

Down they went, stairway after stairway. Her calves didn't look forward to climbing those stairs on the way up. Franklin Roosevelt had a special elevator because of his wheelchair, but no mere Congresswoman—not even a former First Lady—got to ride it.

"Here we go." Jonesy stopped in front of Roosevelt's office. "I'll take you up when you're done."

Don't go wandering around on your own. Nobody ever came out and said that, but it always hung in the air.

The captain in the Assistant Secretary of War's outer office nodded to Flora. "Hello, Congresswoman. You made good time. Go right in—Mr. Roosevelt is expecting you."

"Thanks," Flora said. "Can you tell me what this is about?"

"I think he'd better do that, ma'am."

Shrugging, Flora walked into Franklin Roosevelt's private office. "Hello, Flora. Close the door behind you, would you, please? Thanks." As always, Roosevelt sounded strong and jovial. But he looked like death warmed over.

He waved her to a chair. As she sat, she asked, "Now will you tell me what's going on? It must be something big."

"Petrograd's gone," Roosevelt said bluntly.

"A newsboy outside was saying something about that," Flora said. "Why does it matter so much to us? To the Kaiser, sure, but to us? And what do you mean, gone?"

"When I say gone, I usually mean *gone*," Franklin Roosevelt answered. "One bomb. Off the map.

G-O-N-E. Gone. No more Petrograd. Gone."

"But that's imposs—" Flora broke off. She was as far from Catholic as she could be, but she felt the impulse to cross herself even so. She was

glad she was sitting down. “Oh, my God,” she whispered, and wanted to start the mourner’s Kaddish right after that. “The Germans… Uranium…” She stopped. She wasn’t making any sense, even to herself.

But she made enough sense for Roosevelt. He nodded, his face thoroughly grim. “That’s right. They got there first. They tried it—and it works. God help us all.”

“Do they have more of them?” Questions started to boil in Flora’s head. “What are they saying? And what about the Russians? Have England and France said anything yet?”

“We got a ciphered message yesterday that made me think they were going to try it,” the Assistant Secretary of War said. “They were cagey. I would be, too. Wouldn’t be good to say too much if the other side is reading your mail, so to speak. And the Kaiser just talked on Wireless Berlin.” He looked down at a piece of paper on his desk. “‘We have harnessed a fundamental force of nature,’ he said. ‘The power that sets the stars alight now also shines on earth. A last warning to our foes—give up this war or face destruction you cannot hope to escape.’”

“My God,” Flora said, and then again, “My God!” Once you’d said that, what was left? Nothing she could see—not for a moment, anyhow. Then she did find something: “How close are we?”

“We’re getting there,” Roosevelt said, which might mean anything or nothing. The exasperated noise Flora made said it wasn’t good enough, whatever it meant. Roosevelt spread his hands, as if to placate her. “The people out in Washington say we’re getting close,” he went on. “I don’t know if that means days, weeks, or months. They swear on a stack of Bibles that it doesn’t mean years.”

“It had better not, not after all the time they’ve already used and all the money we’ve given them,”

Flora said. If not for the money, she never would have known anything about the U.S. project. And she found another question, one she wished she didn’t need to ask: “How close is Jake Featherston?” Even with the Stars and Stripes flying in Richmond for the first time since 1861, she thought of the Confederacy boiled down to the terrifying personality of its leader.

So did Franklin Roosevelt, as his answer showed: “We still think he’s behind us. We’re plastering his uranium works every chance we get,

and we get more chances all the time, because we're finally beating down the air defenses over Lexington. His people have put a lot of stuff underground, but doing that must have cost them time. If we're not ahead, he's got miracle workers, and I don't think he does."

"*Alevai*," Flora said, and then, "Do they have any idea how many dead there are in Petrograd?" Part of her wished she hadn't thought of that. Most of the dead wouldn't be soldiers or sailors. Some would be factory workers, and she supposed you could argue that the people who made the guns mattered as much in modern war as the people who fired them. All the generals did argue exactly that, in fact. But so many would be street sweepers and dentists and waitresses and schoolchildren…Thousands? Tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands? From one bomb? "My God!" she exclaimed again.

Franklin Roosevelt shrugged the broad shoulders that went so strangely with his withered, useless legs.

"Flora, I just don't know. I don't think anyone knows yet—not the Germans, not the Russians, nobody.

Right now…Right now, the whole world just took a left to the chops. It's standing there stunned, trying not to fall over."

That wasn't the comparison Flora would have used, but it was vivid enough to make her nod. Before she could say anything—if she could find anything *to* say beyond one more "My God!"—the captain from the outer office came in and nodded to Roosevelt. "Sir, the Tsar just issued a statement."

"What did he say?" Roosevelt and Flora asked at the same time.

The captain glanced down at a piece of paper in his left hand. "He calls this a vicious, unholy, murderous weapon, and he condemns the massacre of innocents it caused." That went well with Flora's thoughts.

"Did he say anything about surrender?" Franklin Roosevelt asked.

"No, sir." The young officer shook his head. "But he did say God would punish the Kaiser and 'the accursed scientists and people of Germany'—his words—even if the Russian Army couldn't do the job."

"How can he keep fighting if Germany can drop bombs like that and he can't?" Flora asked, not really aiming the question at either Roosevelt or the captain. Was God listening? If He was, would He

have let that bomb go off? “Moscow, Minsk, Tsaritsyn…” She ran out of Russian cities. She did, yes, but she was sure the Germans wouldn’t.

“Russia always takes more losses than her enemies,” the Assistant Secretary of War said. “That’s the only way she stays in wars. But losses on that kind of scale? I don’t think so, not for long.”

“If the Tsar tries to go on fighting and the Germans drop one of those on Moscow, say, don’t you think all the Reds who’ve gone underground will rise up again?” the captain asked. “Wouldn’t you?”

“How many Reds *are* left?” Flora asked. “Didn’t the Tsar’s secret police kill off as many as they could after the last civil war?”

“They sure did,” Franklin Roosevelt said, and the captain nodded. Roosevelt went on, “We know the secret police didn’t get everybody, though. And the Reds are masters at going underground and staying there.”

“They have to be, if they want to keep breathing,” the captain added.

“So the short answer is, nobody—nobody on this side of the Atlantic, that’s for sure—knows how many Reds there are,” Roosevelt said. “Something like a uranium bomb will bring them out, though, if anything will.”

“And if *it* doesn’t kill them,” the captain said. “Chances are, there are a lot of them close to Petrograd and Moscow.”

Flora nodded. Those were the two most important Russian cities, and the Reds were like anybody else—they’d want to stay as close to the center of things as they could. Her thoughts went west.

“England and France have to be shaking in their boots right now,” she said. “Unless they’ve got bombs of their own, I mean.”

“If they had them, they would use them,” Roosevelt said. “The war in the west has turned against them—not as much as the war here has turned against the CSA, but enough. If the Kaiser’s barrels really get rolling across Holland and Belgium and northern France, it won’t be easy to stop them this side of Paris.”

“Paris,” Flora echoed. The Germans hadn’t got there in 1917; the French asked for an armistice before they could. Kaiser Wilhelm granted it, too. Looking back, that was probably a mistake. Like the

Confederates, the French weren't really convinced they'd been beaten. "This time, the Germans ought to parade through the streets, the way they did in 1871."

"Sounds good to me," Roosevelt said. "Keep it under your hat, but I've heard Charlie La Follette's going to go to Richmond."

"Is it safe?" Flora asked.

"Not even a little bit, but he's going to do it anyhow," Roosevelt answered. "Abe Lincoln couldn't, God knows James G. Blaine couldn't, even my Democratic cousin Theodore couldn't, but La Follette can. And there's an election this November."

"Good point," Flora agreed. How many votes would each photo of President La Follette in the ravaged and captured capital of the Confederacy be worth? Maybe as many as the uranium bomb had killed, and that was bound to be a lot.

VIII

I n! In! In!" Sergeant Hugo Blackledge bellowed. "Move your sorry asses before you get 'em shot off!"

Corporal Jorge Rodriguez hurried aboard the little coastal freighter. Fires in Savannah lit up the docks almost bright as day. Every so often, a flash and a boom would mark another ammo dump or cache of shells going up in smoke. The port was falling. Anybody who stayed to try to hold up the damnyankees would end up dead or a POW. Orders were to get out as many soldiers as could escape.

Nervously, Rodriguez looked up into the sky. If any fighters came over right now, they could chew his company to pieces. But they mostly stayed on the runways after dark. With a little luck, this ship—the *Dixie Princess*, her name was—would be far away from Savannah by the time the sun came up.

"Ever been on a boat before?" Gabe Medwick asked.

"No," Jorge admitted. "You?"

"A little rowboat, fishin' for bluegill an' catfish," his friend said. "This ain't the same thing, is it? Not hardly." He answered his own question.

Soldiers from eight or ten regiments—not all of them even from the

same division—jammed the *Dixie Princess*. They eyed one another like dogs uncertain whether to fight. Sailors in gray dungarees elbowed their way through the butternut crush. They knew where they were going and what they were doing, which gave them a big edge on the troops they were carrying.

The rumble of the engines got deeper. Rodriguez felt the deck vibrate under his boots. The freighter pulled away from the pier and down the Savannah River toward the sea.

Only gradually did Jorge realize there were antiaircraft guns on deck. More sailors manned them.

Some wore helmets painted gray. Others stayed bareheaded, as if to say a helmet wouldn't make any difference in what they did. A soldier near Jorge lit a cigarette.

"Kill that, you dumb dipshit!" Sergeant Blackledge yelled. "Kill it, you hear me? You want some damnyankee to spot your match or your coal? Jesus God, how fuckin' stupid are you, anyways?"

"All right, all right," the offender muttered. Down to the deck went the smoke. A boot mournfully crushed it out.

"Now, when it gets light y'all got to keep your eyes peeled for damnyankee submarines," Blackledge went on. "One of them fuckers puts a torpedo in our guts, it's a hell of a long swim to land, you know what I mean?"

"Boy," Gabriel Medwick muttered, "he sure knows how to make a guy feel safe."

Jorge laughed. That was so far wrong, it was funny. It would have been funny, anyway, if he weren't aboard this floating coffin. How many men were with him? He wasn't sure, but it had to be a couple of thousand. A damnyankee submersible skipper who sank the *Dixie Princess* would probably get the biggest, fanciest medal the USA could give out.

"You reckon it's true, what happened to that town in Russia?" somebody not far away from him asked.

"It's bullshit, you ask me," another soldier answered. "Damn Kaiser's just runnin' his mouth. Stands to reason—a city's too fuckin' big for one bomb to take out."

“You hear about that?” Medwick asked Jorge.

He nodded. “I hear, *sí*, but I don’t know what to believe. What do *you* think?”

“I hope like anything it’s bullshit,” his buddy said. “If it ain’t…If it ain’t, we all got more trouble than we know what to do with. If the Germans have a bomb like that, if it’s really real, how long before the Yankees do, too?”

“¡Madre de Dios!” Jorge crossed himself. “One bomb, one city? You couldn’t fight back against something like that, not unless…Maybe we get those bombs, too.”

“Maybe.” Gabe seemed doubtful. “If we get ’em, we better get ’em pretty damn quick, that’s all I got to say. Otherwise, it’s gonna be too late.”

He wasn’t wrong, however much Jorge wished he were. The fall of Savannah meant the Confederate States were cut in half. People were saying that Richmond had fallen, too, and that Jake Featherston had got out one jump ahead of the U.S. soldiers coming in. Some people said he *hadn’t* got out, but that didn’t seem to be true, because he was still on the wireless.

What can I do about any of that? Jorge wondered. The only answer that occurred to him was, *Not much*. He yawned; it had to be somewhere not long after midnight. He couldn’t even lie down and go to sleep: no room to lie down. He dozed a little standing up, the way only a tired veteran could.

Dawn was just painting the eastern horizon—all ocean, flat out to the edge of the world—with pink when he saw another ship ahead. No, it was a boat, much smaller than the *Dixie Princess*. It had a blinker that flashed Morse at the freighter. Up on the bridge, where no soldiers were allowed, a sailor—maybe an officer—answered back.

“What’s going on?” Gabe Medwick asked around a yawn.

“Beats me,” Jorge answered. “We just gotta wait and find out.” If that didn’t sum up a lot of soldiering, what did?

The *Dixie Princess* changed course and followed the smaller craft toward the low-lying coast ahead.

Her guide zigged and zagged in a way that made no sense to Jorge. And whatever the guide did, the *Dixie Princess* did, too.

Then somebody said, “We better not hit one of them damn mines, that’s all I got to say. That’d be worse’n getting torpedoed.”

A light went on in Jorge’s head. They had to be heading towards a port, one warded by mines to keep out U.S. warships. And the small boat knew the way through the floating death traps. Jorge hoped like hell it did, anyhow.

WELCOME TO BEAUFORT, a sign said. Jorge would have guessed the name was pronounced *Bofort*.

What his guess was worth, he found out when a man with bushy white side whiskers called, “Welcome to Bew-fort, y’all! Where d’you go from here?”

Jorge hadn’t the faintest idea. Somebody—probably an officer—called, “Where’s your train station?”

“Mile outside o’ town,” the old-timer said, pointing west. “We like our peace and quiet, we do. Ain’t but one train a day anyways.”

“Jesus H. Christ!” the officer exploded. “This is as bad as it would’ve been before the War of Secession!”

“No, sir.” The white-whiskered man shook his head. “We had the hurricane back in ’40, and the really bad one back in ’93, an’ we came through both o’ them. And besides, we was full o’ niggers in the old days. Ain’t hardly got no more coons around now, though. Don’t hardly miss ’em, neither. More room for the rest of us, by God.”

Odds were the Negroes had done most of the hard work. Sailors had to jump down from the *Dixie Princess* and grab the mooring lines that bound her to the pier. Gangplanks thudded onto the rickety planking.

“Disembark! Form up in column of fours!” an officer shouted. “We will proceed to the railroad station and board transportation for Virginia!”

“Well, now we know what we’re doing, anyway,” Gabe Medwick said.

“*Sí*.” Jorge nodded. “But one train a day? How big a train is it gonna be? How long we gonna have to wait?” He looked up at the sky,

which was sunny and blue. “We ain’t that far from Savannah, even now.

What if a damnyankee airplane sees us? They come and drop bombs on our heads, that’s what.”

“Better not happen, that’s all I’ve got to say.” Medwick shivered at the idea, though the day felt more like spring than winter.

Down the gangplanks went the soldiers. As corporals, Jorge and Gabe tried to gather their squads together, but they didn’t have much luck. The soldiers had got too mixed up in the desperate boarding in Savannah. “Hell with it,” Sergeant Blackledge said—he was trying to gather a whole section, and having no more success than the squad leaders. “We’ll sort things out when we get wherever the hell we’re going.”

They marched through Beaufort. Though it wasn’t at all far from Savannah, the war might have forgotten all about it. Only some small, shabby houses with broken windows and with doors standing open spoke of the blacks who’d lived here till not long before.

Old men and those too badly maimed to fight—and a few women, too—crewed fishing and oystering boats. Truck gardens grew all around the town. Women and kids and the old and injured tended them, too.

At the station, the railroad agent stared at the long butternut column in unabashed horror. “What in God’s name am I supposed to do with y’all?” he said.

“Get on the telegraph. Get trains down here, dammit,” an officer answered. “We got out of Savannah.

They want us up in Virginia. Fuck me if we’re gonna walk.”

“Well, I’ll try,” the agent said doubtfully.

“You better.” The officer—he was, Jorge saw, a colonel, with three stars on each side of his collar—didn’t even bother disguising the threat.

The agent clicked away on the telegraph. A few minutes later, an answer came back. “They’ll be here in two-three hours,” he reported.

Jorge would have bet that the time promised would stretch, and it did. The trains didn’t get there till midafternoon. He had enough food

in his pockets and pouches to keep from getting hungry before then, but he wondered if anybody would feed the soldiers on the way north. He wondered how bad the fighting would be, too. He'd served in Virginia before coming down to Tennessee. *Wherever things get tough, that's where they send me*. He was surprised at how little he resented that. It wasn't as if he were the only one in the same boat.

On the train, his two stripes won him a seat, even if it was hard and cramped. What with all the men standing in the aisles, he counted himself lucky. No matter how uncomfortable he was, he didn't stay awake long.

His eyes opened again when the train rolled through the town of St. Matthews. Except for a good many women wearing widow's weeds, the place seemed as untouched by the war as Beaufort. Jorge wasn't used to landscapes that hadn't been torn to bits. A town with all its buildings intact, without barricades and foxholes and trenches, seemed unnatural.

"It does, doesn't it?" Gabe Medwick said when he remarked on that. "It's like the place isn't important enough to blow up, almost."

Jorge hadn't looked at it quite like that, which didn't make Gabe wrong. He turned to ask one of the soldiers in the aisle what he thought, only to discover that the man was sound asleep standing up, much deeper under than Jorge had been on the *Dixie Princess*. How exhausted did you have to be to lose yourself so completely while you were upright?

After that, the train passed into North Carolina. There was a sign by the tracks that said so. The license plates on the autos went from white with blue letters and numbers to orange with black. Other than that, he couldn't see any difference. If the Confederate States had a safe haven, he was rolling through it.

Somebody at the front of the car dished out ration tins from a crate. They weren't good, but they were better than nothing. Drinks were bottles of Dr. Hopper, warm and fizzy. Jorge belched enormously.

Virginia was another sign at the border, and motorcar license plates with yellow characters on a dark green background. It was also, before long, the cratered, shattered, bombed-out landscape Jorge had grown used to. He nodded to himself. He knew what he'd be doing here.

R and R. Armstrong Grimes had gone out of the line in hostile country before. Did the people in Utah hate U.S. soldiers even more than the people here in Georgia did? He wouldn't have been surprised. But the locals here had nastier weapons with which to make their lack of affection known.

That meant Camp Freedom—the name had to be chosen with malice aforethought—had maybe the most extensive perimeter Armstrong had ever seen. Foxholes and barbed-wire emplacements and machine-gun nests and entrenchments gobbled up the fields for a couple of miles around the camp on all sides.

"Shit on toast," Squidface said as Armstrong's weary platoon made its way through the maze of outworks. "What all's inside here, the fucking United States mint?"

"They don't have soldiers, the bad guys go and take the mint away," Armstrong said.

"Well, yeah, Sarge, sure." Squidface spoke in calm, reasonable tones. "But they care about money, and they mostly don't care about us."

Armstrong grunted. It wasn't as if the PFC were wrong. Soldiers got the shitty end of the stick every day of the week, and twice on Sundays. If the other side didn't screw you, the assholes in green-gray who stayed safe behind the line would. The only people he trusted these days were smelly, dirty men in ragged uniforms that said they actually did some fighting. They knew what was what, unlike the jerks who campaigned with typewriters and telephones.

He didn't love MPs, either, not even a little bit. One of the snowdrops—he wore a white helmet and faggy white gloves—pointed and said, "Delousing station and showers are over that way. Where's your officer, anyway?"

"In the hospital." Armstrong jabbed a thumb at his own chest. "This is my outfit now."

The MP sniffed. A platoon with a sergeant in command couldn't be anything much, his attitude said.

Somebody from the back of the platoon said, "Boy, Featherston's fuckers'd send him to Graves Registration in nothing flat."

"Who said that, goddammit?" the MP shouted. "I'll kick the crap out of you, whoever you are."

“Don’t worry, Sergeant. I’ll deal with him,” Armstrong promised. All right, so the snowdrop wasn’t yellow. But he didn’t realize combat troops wouldn’t fight fair. They’d ruin him or kill him, and then laugh about it. Getting away in a hurry was the best plan.

Back in the Great War, Armstrong’s father said, delousing meant baking your clothes and bathing in scalding water full of nasty chemicals, none of which kept the lice down for long. The spray that a bored-looking corporal turned on the men now was nothing like that. But it had one advantage over the old procedure: it really worked.

There was nothing wrong with showering under scalding water. “Wish I had a steel brush, to get all the dirt off,” Squidface said, snorting like a whale.

“Yeah, well, if you didn’t have a goddamn pelt there, you could get clean easier,” Armstrong said.

Squidface was one of the hairiest guys he’d ever seen—he had more hair on his back than a lot of guys did on their chest. “If the Confederates ever kill you, they’ll tan your hide for a rug.”

“Ahh, your mother,” Squidface said. Only somebody who’d saved Armstrong’s bacon plenty of times could have got away with that. Squidface qualified. So did several other guys from the platoon.

After the shower, food. Along with canned rations, Armstrong had eaten a lot of fried and roasted chicken in the field—plenty of henhouses around, and you didn’t need much more than a skillet or, in a pinch, a sharp stick to do the cooking. But this was fried chicken done right, not half raw and half burnt.

The hash browns were crisp and just greasy enough, too. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d seen a regular potato that didn’t come out of a can. Yams and sweet potatoes were all right for baking, but they just didn’t cut it when you sliced them up and put them in hot lard.

And apple pie! And vanilla ice cream on top! “Goddamn!” Squidface said reverently. “I think I just came in my pants.”

“I know what you mean.” The size of the bite Armstrong took would have made a boa constrictor jealous.

“I want a slice of cheese to put on my pie, not ice cream,” Herk said. The replacement was a veteran now, entitled to a veteran’s gripes—and entitled to get razzed like a veteran, too.

“Herk wants to cut the cheese.” Squidface held his nose.

“You were the one who came in your pants,” Herk retorted. “Me, I want a broad.”

Up and down the long table, soldiers nodded solemnly, Armstrong among them. This camp had everything for giving soldiers a good time except a whorehouse. Bluenoses made sure the U.S. Army didn’t officially sponsor any such thing. If you wanted a woman, you had to find your own—which could get you killed if you picked the wrong one, and could easily leave you with a disease that would land you in big trouble when the Army found out you’d caught it.

Squidface had several suggestions on how Herk could satisfy himself, each more alarming than the one before. “Shut up already,” Armstrong said after a while. “You’re making me lose my appetite.”

“You better show up for sick call in the mornin’, Sarge,” Squidface said. “Something’s sure as shit wrong with you.”

The line for the nightly movie was almost as long as the one for a brothel would have been. Armstrong got a seat just before they showed the newsreel. “Here is the first film from ruined Petrograd!” the announcer said importantly.

Armstrong had seen plenty of ruined cities. He’d seen Provo and Salt Lake City, and you couldn’t ruin a place any worse than they got ruined. Or he thought you couldn’t, till the camera panned across what was left of Petrograd. The Russian town was *leveled*, all the way out to the horizon. When the camera got to something that stuck up from the devastation, it moved in for a closer look.

It was an enormous bronze statue of a man on horseback—or it had been. Now it looked melted, melted from the top down. Armstrong tried to imagine what kind of heat could have done such a thing.

“This was the statue of Peter the Great, who founded Petrograd,” the announcer said. “Now he demonstrates the power of our allies’ scientific accomplishments.”

“Fuck our allies,” Squidface said. “We don’t get one of those ourselves pretty damn quick, the goddamn Kaiser’ll drop one on Philly next.”

That struck Armstrong as a pretty good guess. He made a guess of his own: “What do you want to bet Featherston’s got guys in white lab

coats working on one, too? With his fucking rockets, he could throw one anywhere in the USA."

"Shit." Squidface looked around, as if expecting one of those rockets to crash down any second now.

"You're right."

As a matter of fact, Armstrong was wrong. The most powerful Confederate rockets reached only a couple of hundred miles. That meant they couldn't touch most of the USA, especially since the areas C.S. soldiers actually controlled shrank by the day. But, with a bomb like that, worry outran reality with ease.

"On our side of the Atlantic…" the newsreel announcer said. The screen showed the charred wreckage of gracious homes that had to date back to long before the War of Secession. It showed sunken ships in a bombed-out harbor district. It showed dirty, unshaven Confederate soldiers shambling off into captivity.

"We was there. We seen that," Squidface said.

"Better believe it," Armstrong agreed.

"On our side of the Atlantic, the capture of Savannah cuts the Confederate States in half," the announcer said proudly. "This on the heels of the loss of Richmond…"

The Stars and Stripes flew over the wreckage of the Confederate Capitol. U.S. soldiers prowled the cratered grounds of the Gray House, walking past twisted and overturned antiaircraft guns. Scrawny civilians got meals at a U.S. field kitchen.

"How long can the enemy hope to keep up his useless resistance in the face of overwhelming U.S.

might?" the announcer asked, as if the soldiers watching the newsreel would be able to tell him.

The answer they were supposed to give him was, *Not very long*. Armstrong had seen enough propaganda to understand that. But this time the newsreel had outsmarted itself. The fearsome bomb that leveled Petrograd made you think twice. It made Armstrong think twice, anyhow. If the Confederates came up with one of those, or more than one, before the United States could, they were liable to win

the war in spite of losing their capital and getting their country cut in half. Drop something like that on Philadelphia and New York and Boston, and the United States would really have something to worry about.

Drop one on Birmingham, Armstrong thought savagely. *Drop one on New Orleans. Drop one on fucking Charleston*. Like most people from the USA, he particularly despised the city where the War of Secession broke out.

After the newsreel came a short feature, with the Engels Brothers involved with an actor plainly meant to be Jake Featherston. “I’ll reduce your population!” he yelled, which made the Brothers get into a ridiculous brawl to see which of them would be eliminated. That was all propaganda, too, but it was funny. Armstrong and Squidface grinned at each other in the darkness.

And the main feature was a thriller, with the Confederates after the secret of a new bombsight and the heroine thwarting them at every turn. She was pretty and she had legs up to there, which might have made Armstrong root for her even if she saluted the Stars and Bars.

After the feature, he got to lie down on a real bed. He hadn’t done much of that lately—oh, a few times, when he flopped in a house some Georgians had vacated, but not very often. With snoring soldiers all around him, he could relax and sleep deep. Out in the field, he might as well have been a wild beast.

The least little noise would leave him not just awake but with his heart pounding and with a rifle or a knife in his hand.

Bacon and eggs and more hash browns and halfway decent coffee the next morning were wonderful, too. So was eating them without peering this way and that, afraid of holdouts and snipers and his own shadow if it caught him by surprise.

“You know, this is pretty damn good. I could really get used to this.” He was surprised at how surprised he sounded.

“It is, isn’t it?” Squidface sounded surprised, too. Had he been in the war from the start? Armstrong didn’t know. But he’d sure been in it long enough to turn into a vet.

“I think this is called peace. We used to have it all the time.” Armstrong didn’t think about those days very often. He’d gone from high school almost straight into the Army. He’d been a boy then. If he

wasn't a man now, he didn't suppose he ever would be.

"Not quite peace," Squidface said. "No pussy around. We went through that when we got here."

"Well, yeah, we did," Armstrong admitted. "All right, it isn't quite peace. But it beats the shit outa where we were at before." Squidface solemnly nodded and stuffed another slice of bacon into his mouth.

T hey gave George Enos shore leave after he helped bring the *Tierra del Fuego* back to New York City. They gave it to him, and then they forgot about him. He grabbed a train up to Boston, had a joyous reunion with Connie and the boys, and set out to enjoy himself till the Navy decided what the hell to do with him next.

The Navy took so long, George wondered whether he ought to look for a slot on a fishing boat going out of T Wharf. He could have had one in a minute; the Navy had sucked in a lot of first-class fishermen.

But he had plenty of money as things were, with so much back pay and combat pay in his pocket. And if he was out a few hundred miles from shore when he got called back to active duty, there would be hard feelings all around. His wouldn't matter. The Navy's, unfortunately, would.

He was back from church one Sunday morning when the telephone in his apartment rang. He'd found he liked Catholic services. He'd converted for Connie's sake, and never expected to take the rigmarole seriously. But the fancy costumes and the Latin and the incense grew on him. If you were going to have a religion, shouldn't you have one with tradition behind it?

"I bet that's my ma," Connie said as she went to answer the call. "She was saying she wants us over for dinner…. Hello?" The pause that followed stretched too long. As soon as she spoke again, her tone told George it wasn't her mother on the other end of the line: "Yes, he's here. Hold on…. George! It's for you."

"I'm coming," George said. Connie's stricken face told him who the caller was likely to be. He answered formally, something he rarely did: "This is George Enos."

"Hello, Enos. This is Chief Thorvaldson, at the Navy Yard. The *Oregon*'s going to put to sea day after tomorrow, and she's got a slot

for a 40mm loader. You fit that slot, and you've had a long leave.

Report aboard her by 0800 tomorrow."

"The *Oregon*. 0800. Right, Chief." George said what he had to say. Standing there beside him, Connie started to cry. He put his arm around her, which only made things worse.

"A battleship, Enos. You're coming up in the world," the CPO said. "You could hide your old destroyer escort in her magazines."

"Sure," George said, and hung up. He didn't much want to sail on a battleship. Like a carrier, it would draw enemy aircraft the way a dog drew fleas. But he couldn't do anything about that, either. With a sigh, he tried to smile at his wife. "We knew it was coming, babe. War's getting close to over, so I probably won't be gone real long now."

"I don't want you gone at all!" She clung to him fiercely. "And things can still go wrong at the end of a war. Look at your father."

He wished he'd never told her that story. Then he shrugged. He would have thought of it himself, too.

He jumped when the telephone rang again. Connie picked it up. "Hello?…Oh, hi, Ma. God, I wish you'd been on the line a few minutes ago…Yes, we can come, but we can't stay late. George just got a call from the Navy…The *Oregon*. Tomorrow morning…'Bye." She hung up. "Pa's got lobsters, so it'll be a good supper, anyway."

"Won't see them in the Navy," George agreed.

Lobsters, drawn butter, corn on the cob…It wasn't quite a traditional New England boiled dinner, which didn't mean it wasn't damn good. "Enjoy it, George," Connie's father said, sliding a Narragansett ale down the table to him. "Navy chow ain't even like what the Cookie makes on a fishing boat. I know that."

"It's the truth, Mr. McGillicuddy," George said sadly. He took a pull at the cold bottle of ale. It wasn't *bad*, but he'd had better. He didn't say anything about that. Narragansett went back further than he did.

"How long have they been brewing this stuff, anyway?"

"It's been around about as long as I have, and I was born in 1887," McGillicuddy answered. "Can't tell you exactly, 'cause I wasn't paying much attention to beer back then, but that's about it, anyhow."

“Sounds right,” George said. He was born in 1910, and Narragansett had been a Boston fixture his whole life long. He took another swig from the bottle.

What with all the food and the ’Gansett, he wanted to roll over and go to sleep when he and Connie and the boys got back to their apartment. But he wanted to do something else, too, and he did. Connie would have thought something was wrong with him if he hadn’t. And God only knew when he’d get another chance. “Gotta make it last,” he said, lighting a cigarette to try to stretch the afterglow.

“I should hope so.” Connie poked him in the ribs. “Don’t want you chasing after chippies when your ship gets into some port that isn’t Boston.”

“Not me.” George lied without hesitation. *Not very often, anyway*, he amended silently.

“Better not.” His wife poked him again. “Give me one of those.” He could reach the nightstand more easily than she could. He handed her the pack. They were Niagaras, a U.S. brand—they tasted of straw and, he swore, horse manure. But they were better than nothing. Connie leaned close to him for a light.

He stroked her cheek. “Thanks,” she said, whether for the smoke or the caress he didn’t know.

He managed an early-morning quickie, too. Connie wouldn’t have put up with that except on a day when he was shipping out. He kissed the boys good-bye—they bravely fought against the sniffles—and, duffel on his shoulder, headed across the Charles for the Boston Navy Yard.

Before he got in, Marine guards patted him down and searched the denim sack. Finding nothing more lethal than a safety razor and a clasp knife, they let him through. “Can’t be too careful,” one of the leathernecks said.

“Last week down in Providence, this shithead showed up in a lieutenant commander’s uniform—he’d rolled the officer in an alley behind a bar. He blew up two guards—poor bastards—but he didn’t get to the ships, and that’s what counts.”

“Story didn’t make the news,” George said.

“No—I guess they sat on it,” the guard replied. “But one of the guys

who bought a plot was my brother-in-law's best friend since they were kids. I knew Apple a little bit myself. He was a good guy."

"Apple?" George had heard a lot of nicknames, but that was a new one on him.

"Like a baby's arm holding one," the Marine explained. "Be some sad broads around, I'll tell you.

Now pass on through."

Finding the *Oregon* was easy enough. George looked for the biggest damn ship tied up at any of the piers, and there she was: a mountain of steel bristling with guns of all sizes, up to the dozen fourteen-inchers of her main armament. She could smash anything that came within twenty miles of her—but, in these days of airplane carriers, how many enemy ships were likely to?

George shrugged; that wasn't his worry. He went up the gangplank and paused at the end. Catching the officer of the deck's eye, he said, "Permission to come aboard, sir?"

The OOD was a lieutenant. George had had a two-striper for a skipper before. "Granted," the name said. He poised pen and clipboard. "And you are…?"

"George Enos, sir."

The officer checked him off the list. "You're new, then," he said, and George nodded. The OOD went on, "What was your previous duty? And your battle station?"

"I was on a destroyer escort, sir—the *Josephus Daniels*. My battle station was loader on a 40mm mount. When they ordered me to duty here, they said that was where you'd put me." He knew the powers that be would do whatever they damn well pleased, but he'd got his druthers in. "I can do just about anything if I have to. I was a fisherman before the war, and I came back to the USA in the prize crew of a freighter we took in the South Atlantic."

"Uh- *huh*. You realize we can check all this?"

"Yes, sir. It's all in my jacket, anyway." George wasn't talking about clothes, but about the paperwork any sailor carried with him.

“Uh- *huh*,” the OOD said again. Then he turned and called, “Caswell!”

“Yes, sir?” A petty officer materialized behind him.

“Here’s Enos. Put him on the number-three 40mm mount—he’s a loader. Show him where he’s supposed to go for general quarters and where he can sling his hammock.”

“Aye aye, sir. Come on, Enos.” Caswell had a thin, clever face and cold gray eyes. George didn’t think getting him mad was a good idea. You’d pay for it, and you’d keep on paying, maybe for years.

He didn’t want to get the senior rating mad at him any which way. “Show me where to go and what to do, and I’ll go there and do it,” he said. He’d hoped for a bunk, given the size of the battlewagon, but he could live with a hammock. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t had one before… and the *Oregon* would carry a much bigger crew than the *Josephus Daniels* did, too.

Caswell took him to his battle station first. That he still had his duffel slung over his shoulder seemed to mean nothing to the petty officer. Caswell wasn’t carrying anything himself, after all. George could see right away that the 40mm mounts on the *Oregon*’s deck were added long after the ship was built. That was no surprise; every warship these days piled on as much AA as she could without capsizing. The number-three mount was on the port side, well forward.

George eyed the awesome bulk of the two triple fourteen-inch turrets not far away. “What’s it like when they go off?” he asked.

“Loud,” Caswell said, and said no more. *No shit*, George thought. That boom would probably blow the fillings out of your teeth, and maybe the hair off your head. He didn’t want to think about the big guns going off when he had a hangover. If that didn’t kill you, you’d wish it would.

He looked up and down the deck. Yeah, there was a lot of antiaircraft: 40mms, and .50-caliber and

.30-caliber machine guns as well. And the five-inch guns of the secondary armament could fire AA rounds, too. “Anybody bores in on us, we can make him mighty unhappy,” he remarked.

“We better,” the petty officer replied. “We fuck up once, we’re toast.” That was nothing but the truth.

A well-placed bomb could sink even this floating, fighting fortress. Caswell lit a cigarette. He didn't offer George one, but he did say, "Come on. I'll take you below."

There were bunks on the *Oregon*. But there were also lots of hammocks. Since George was a new fish here, his getting one was no man-bites-dog story. The sailors on either side of him seemed good enough guys—a hell of a lot friendlier than Caswell, that was for sure.

"Give me the straight skinny," George said to one of them, a broad-shouldered man who went by Country. "Is she a madhouse or is she a home?"

"She's a home…mostly." Country's harsh Midwestern accent said he hadn't grown up near the sea.

"Mostly? When do things go wrong?"

The other sailor tipped him a wink. "You'll find out," he said, and that was all George could get out of him.

L ieutenant-Colonel Jerry Dover looked around at the latest place his supply dump had come to rest.

He looked at Pete, who'd done a hell of a lot of retreating with him. "From Edwardsville to Albertville,"

Dover said. "Reckon that'd make a good title for my memoirs when I write 'em up?"

"For your what?" The quartermaster sergeant gave him a blank look. "This Albertville place don't look like it's good for squat."

"It's bigger than Edwardsville," Dover said. Pete couldn't very well argue. Edwardsville had had only a couple of hundred people in it. Albertville, northwest of the other town—on the road to Huntsville, in other words—had three, maybe even four, thousand. It boasted a cotton gin and a cotton mill and a cottonseed-oil plant and a cornmeal mill. The local high school bragged about how it trained future farmers.

While Pete didn't argue, he didn't seem much impressed, either. "Horseshit's bigger'n dogshit, too, but shit's still shit, you ask me." He pulled out a pack of Raleighs. With Kentucky and Tennessee lost, with North Carolina cut off from Alabama, even good tobacco was getting

scarce. Seeing Dover's longing expression, he gave his superior a smoke and a light. After his drag, he added, "And the Confederate States are in deep shit right now, and that's the God's truth."

"You think I'm gonna pat you on the ass and go, 'No, no, everything's fine,' you're out of your tree,"

Dover answered. "They're already knocking Birmingham flat. If we lose Huntsville, too…"

"We're fucked," Pete finished for him. "Without the rockets, we can't do *anything* against the damnyankees."

"Yeah." Jerry Dover smoked in quick, worried puffs. "If Birmingham and Huntsville go, what's left?

New Orleans and Little Rock and Texas. God Himself couldn't lick the USA with New Orleans and Little Rock and Texas, and I bet He wouldn't be fool enough to try. Which is more than I can say for Jake Featherston."

Pete looked around nervously. "Jeez, sir, careful how you talk. You seen how many soldiers they've hanged from trees with DEFEATIST around their necks?"

"They won't hang me—or you, either," Dover said. "We're still doing our jobs—and we're doing 'em pretty goddamn well, too. That's a hell of a lot more than most people can say—including the President.

Wasn't either one of us who lost Richmond."

"He says we'll get it back," Pete said.

"Freedom!" Dover replied—without a doubt, the most sardonic Party salutation in the history of the CSA. In one politically safe word, he called everybody who'd ever believed anything Jake Featherston said an idiot. He'd believed some of those things himself—not all of them, but some—so he knew he was an idiot, too.

Pete cocked his head to one side, like a bird dog taking a scent. "Firing's picking up at the front."

Jerry Dover listened, too. "Shit. You're right. Yankees are laying down more artillery than they've used for a while. If that doesn't mean another push is on its way…"

“Can’t afford many more,” Pete said.

“*Any* more,” Dover corrected. “If they start shelling Huntsville *and* bombing it, how’s it going to keep doing what it’s got to do?”

Before Pete could answer, Dover’s field telephone jangled. The noncom sketched a salute and ducked out of Dover’s tent. “Albertville supply depot here,” Dover said as he picked up the telephone.

He listened, then answered, “I’m light on 105 shells, but I’ll send you what I’ve got.” He yelled for Pete to come back. Would Cicero Sawyer be able to get him more artillery rounds after he sent off what he had here? He had to hope so.

“I’ll get ’em moving,” Pete promised when Dover told him what he needed. “We don’t have as many as I wish we did, though.”

“Yeah, I know. I said the same thing,” Dover answered. “Anything is better than nothing, though.”

Was anything *enough* better than nothing? Dover didn’t know. Once more, he had to hope. The telephone rang again, and then again. The soldiers farther forward sounded more and more desperate.

“Things are falling apart up here!” one of them yelled.

“We can’t hold!” another cried.

“I’ll send what I can,” Dover said, and rang up Huntsville. “Whatever you’ve got,” he told Sawyer.

“They’re taking it on the chin here.”

“I’ll do what I can,” Cicero Sawyer answered, sounding much like Dover himself. “We aren’t getting stuff as fast as I wish we would, either.”

“Great.” Dover meant anything but what he said. “How are we supposed to fight a war if we don’t have anything to fight with?”

“Good question,” Sawyer said. “If you don’t have any other good questions, class is dismissed.” He hung up.

Swearing, so did Jerry Dover. After he finished cussing, he checked to see how many clips he had for his automatic rifle. He had the bad feeling he might need it before long.

The next time he saw Pete, he noticed the noncom was carrying a submachine gun. Pete's eyes went to his weapon, too. Neither of them said anything. If you didn't talk about what worried you, maybe it would go away and leave you alone.

Or maybe it wouldn't.

As he'd learned to do in the last war, Dover tracked the battle with his ears. He didn't like what he was hearing. The Yankees seemed to be pushing forward, straight toward his dump. And they seemed to be outflanking it on both sides.

A corporal came up to him. "Sir, shouldn't we be getting ready to pull out of here?"

"Yeah, I guess maybe we should." He'd had to move or abandon a lot of dumps in the Confederacy's grinding retreat. He wondered why he was dicking around with this one.

A staff car—a butternut Birmingham packed to the gills with officers and men—rattled up to the supply dump. "Get the hell out while you still can!" somebody yelled from inside. "The damnyankees're right on our ass!" The auto jounced away. The load it carried was too much for its springs.

Maybe the load Dover carried was too much for his. But he started shouting the orders he'd used so often before: "Set the time charges in the ammo! Start blowing up the supplies! Come on, dammit!

We've got to get out of here, see where else we can make a stand."

Shells started landing close by. Then machine-gun bullets snapped and whined past his head—not aimed fire, not yet, but they meant U.S. soldiers sure as hell were too damn close. Before long, the Yankees *would* see what they were aiming at, and that wouldn't be good. And the rounds were coming in from three sides, not just from the front.

"Fuck," Dover muttered. He really had waited too long this time. He raised his voice to a shout: "Get out, men! Save yourselves!"

He'd just gotten in a truckload of new-model field telephones, lighter and better all around than the ones that had soldiered through the war. They still sat in their crates; he hadn't had a chance to send any of them forward yet. He shot them up, one short burst at a time. If his own side couldn't use them, he was damned if he'd let the bastards in green-gray get them.

“Come on, sir! Let’s get out of here!” Pete sat behind the wheel of another military Birmingham. The irony of the auto’s name struck home for the first time, here much too close to the city where it was made. Dover hopped in. Pete headed northwest, toward Huntsville.

They got maybe a quarter of a mile up one of the most godawful roads Dover’s kidneys had ever met when a burst of machine-gun fire off to one side made the quartermaster sergeant grunt. Pete slumped over, half his head blown off. The Birmingham started limping as if it had a flat—later, Dover found out it had two. With no one controlling it, it slewed off the bumpy asphalt and hit a pine tree. Luckily, it wasn’t going very fast. Dover was bruised and shaken, but not hurt. He bailed out.

“Hold it right there, motherfucker!” somebody with a U.S. accent yelled. “Drop that piece, or you’re dead meat!”

Dover froze. He looked around wildly for somewhere to run, somewhere to hide. If he moved, the hidden Yankee could plug him before he took more than a couple of steps. Slowly and carefully, he set the automatic Tredegar on the ground. “I’ve got a pistol on my belt,” he called. “I’m going to take it out and put it with the rifle.”

“Don’t get cute with it, asshole.” That was another U.S. soldier, one with a deep bass rasp. Jerry Dover couldn’t see him. “We got enough firepower to saw you in half like a fuckin’ board.”

“The last person who thought I was cute was my mother,” Dover said, which won him raucous laughter from the unseen enemy troopers. Holding his .45 between thumb and forefinger, he laid it down next to the rifle. Then, without being asked, he raised his hands above his head. “You got me.”

Not two but four U.S. soldiers cautiously came out of the bushes. Two of them had leaves and branches on their helmets, held in place with strips of inner tube. Two carried ordinary Springfields; one a heavy, clunky U.S. submachine gun; and one a captured C.S. automatic rifle. They all needed shaves.

They smelled of old sweat and leather and tobacco and mud: like soldiers, in other words.

“Son of a bitch,” one of them said as they drew near. “We got us a light colonel.” The two stars on either side of Dover’s collar weren’t made to be visible from very far off. Why let snipers pick out officers

the easy way?

“Cough up your ammo,” said the guy with the Confederate weapon. Without a word, Dover gave him the clips he had left after shooting up the field telephones. His captors also relieved him of watch and wallet and cigarettes. He went right on keeping quiet. They weren’t supposed to do that, but it happened all the time. And they didn’t have to take him prisoner. He could end up dead if any one of them decided to pull the trigger.

“I guess we oughta send him back,” said the one with the deep voice. He was a corporal, and one of the pair with leaves nodding above his head. “Officer like that, the guys in Intelligence can squeeze some good shit out of him.”

“Maybe.” The Yankee with the submachine gun aimed it at Dover’s face. “Who are you, buddy?

What do you do? C’mon. Sing.”

“My name is Jerry Dover. I’m a lieutenant colonel.” Dover rattled off his pay number. “I ran the supply dump back there by Albertville.” According to the Geneva Convention, he didn’t have to say that.

Self-preservation argued it would be a good idea.

“Quartermaster, huh? No wonder you got good smokes,” the one with the deep voice said. He turned to the guy with the automatic rifle. “Take him back to battalion HQ, Rudy. Don’t plug him unless he tries to bug out.”

“Gotcha,” Rudy said. He gestured with the captured weapon. “Get movin’, Pops. You run, it’s the last dumbass stunt you pull.”

“I’m not going anywhere, except wherever you take me,” Dover said. He was so relieved not to get shot out of hand, he didn’t even resent the *Pops*. He *was* old enough to be the damnyankee’s father.

“Will you please bury my sergeant there?” he asked his captors, pointing to the Birmingham. “He was a good man.”

“We round up some more of you butternut bastards, they can take care of it,” the corporal said. The Yankees weren’t going to dig for an enemy themselves.

“Move it,” Rudy said. Hands still high, Jerry Dover trudged off into

captivity.

D uring the last war, Chester Martin remembered, the Confederates had seen the writing on the wall in northern Virginia. As the summer of 1917 went on, the spirit gradually leaked out of the men in butternut.

They wouldn't stand and fight till they couldn't fight any more, the way they had earlier. They would throw away their rifles and put up their hands and hope their U.S. opposite numbers didn't murder them.

The same thing was happening in Georgia now. Even some of the Freedom Party Guards had the message: the Confederate States weren't going to win this time around, either. Some of the men in brown-splotched camouflage smocks had a hard time surrendering. But then, anybody who tried to surrender to Lieutenant Lavochkin had a hard time.

Chester admired the platoon leader's courage. Past that…If everybody on the U.S. side were like Boris Lavochkin, the war probably wouldn't have been anywhere near so tough. But Chester didn't think he wanted to live in a country that produced a lot of men like that. Living with one of them was tough enough.

Getting to Savannah seemed to have amounted to the be-all and end-all of General Morrell's strategy.

Once the port fell, once the sickle slice cut the Confederacy in half, things were confused for a while. The powers that be needed some time to figure out what to do next. After you went to bed with the girl of your dreams, what did you say when you woke up beside her in the morning?

Martin's platoon, along with the rest of the regiment and a couple of more besides, crossed the Savannah River and went up into South Carolina. The swamps on that side of the river seemed no different from the ones in Georgia. The people over there spoke with the same mushy drawl. They hated damnyankees just as much as the Georgians did, even if they hadn't been able to muster more than a few soldiers to try to keep the invaders in green-gray out of their state.

"South Carolina seceded first, boys," Captain Rhodes told the company. "This goddamn state got the CSA rolling. Been a hell of a long time since then, but we finally get to pay the bastards back."

As far as Martin was concerned, too much water had gone under the bridge to care about which drop went first. What difference did it make now? He despised all the Confederate states equally. Why not?

Men from each and every one of them were equally eager to do him in.

What did give him chills were the empty villages through which his outfit passed. He'd seen the like in Georgia. Once upon a time—say, up until a couple of years earlier—Negro sharecroppers had lived in them. Those people were almost all gone. He would have bet dollars to doughnuts they were almost all dead. Before long, their flimsy shacks would crumble and fall down, and then who would remember that they'd ever lived here?

Local whites didn't want to. Lieutenant Lavochkin brought the mayor of a little town called Hardeeville to a nameless village a couple of miles away. The mayor didn't want to come; a rifle to the back of his head proved amazingly persuasive.

"What happened to these people?" Lavochkin demanded.

"Well, I don't rightly know." The mayor was a white-mustached fellow named Darius Douglas. He walked with a limp that probably meant he had a Purple Heart stashed in a drawer somewhere.

"What do you mean, you don't know?" Lavochkin rapped out. "You suppose they all decided to go on vacation at the same time?"

Douglas had fine, fair skin. When he turned red, the flush was easy to see. "Well, I reckon not," he admitted. "But a lot of 'em was gone a while back, off to towns and such. The fancier the farm machinery got, the fewer the niggers we needed."

"How come we didn't see 'em in Savannah, then?" The lieutenant's voice was silky with danger.

"How come we don't see 'em anywhere? How many niggers you got in Hardeeville, damn you?"

"Don't have any, I don't reckon, but we never did," Darius Douglas answered. "Hardeeville, it's a white folks' town. Niggers came in to work, but they didn't live there. They lived in places like this here."

"Do you know what you are? You're a lying sack of shit, that's what,"

Lieutenant Lavochkin snarled.

“If you came out and said, ‘Yeah, we killed ’em, and I don’t miss ’em a fucking bit,’ at least you’d be honest. This way…Christ, you know what you assholes did, but it makes you jumpy enough so you don’t want to own up to it, not when you’re talking to people like me.”

“I always knew damnyankees was nigger-lovers,” the mayor of Hardeeville said. “Nobody else’d make such a fuss over a bunch o’ damn coons.”

“Yeah? So who’s gonna make a fuss over you?” Lavochkin asked. Before Mayor Douglas could answer, the U.S. officer shot him in the face. Douglas dropped like a sack of beans in the middle of a muddy, overgrown street.

“Jesus!” Chester Martin exclaimed. “What the hell’d you go and do that for…sir?”

The platoon commander looked at him—looked through him, really. “You going to tell me he didn’t have it coming?”

“Jesus,” Martin said again. “I dunno. He didn’t kill any of those coons himself, I don’t think.” The late Mr. Douglas was still twitching a little, and still bleeding, too. The iron stink of blood mingled with the foulness of bowels that had just let go.

“No, he didn’t kill ’em. He just waved bye-bye when they went off to the camps,” Lavochkin said.

“All these Confederate cocksuckers did the same goddamn thing. Far as I’m concerned, they all deserve a bullet in the head.”

As far as Martin was concerned, that had nothing to do with anything. “We deal with that after the war’s over, sir. You start shooting civilians for the hell of it, we’re going to have reprisals come down on our heads, and we need that kind of crap like we need a root canal.”

Lavochkin grunted. “I’m not afraid of these assholes. They’re whipped.”

“How many replacements do we need right now?” Chester asked. The lieutenant grunted again. “They haven’t all quit yet, so let’s not fire ’em up. What do you say to that?”

He could tell what Lieutenant Lavochkin wanted to say. Lavochkin

wanted to call him yellow, but damn well couldn't. Scowling, the lieutenant did say, "If I'm not a good boy, I don't get promoted, right?

You think I give a flying fuck about that?"

Chester shrugged. He hoped Lavochkin did. It was the only hold he had on the cold-blooded young officer. Lieutenant Lavochkin liked killing too much, and Chester didn't know what he could do about it.

Yeah, you killed in a war—that was what it was all about. But the guys who enjoyed it caused more trouble than they solved. Martin wondered whether the platoon commander needed to have an unfortunate accident.

He didn't let that show on his face. If he had, he was sure Lieutenant Lavochkin would have plugged him with as little remorse as he'd shot Darius Douglas. *If I have to take him out, I can't fuck up,*

'cause I'll only get one chance, Martin thought unhappily.

"Let's go back to Hardeeville," Lavochkin said, which was anything but a retreat.

"What will you say when the people ask what happened to the mayor?" Chester wondered.

"Shot resisting U.S. authority." The lieutenant's voice remained hard and firm. He didn't sound the least bit guilty. Chester wondered whether he knew how to feel guilty. The first sergeant wouldn't have bet on it. As far as Lavochkin was concerned, anything he did was right because he did it. How did that make him any different from Jake Featherston, except that Featherston had more scope for running wild than an infantry lieutenant did?

"Come on, you guys," Chester called to the men in the platoon. "You heard the lieutenant—we're heading back to Hardeeville. Keep your eyes open when we get there, in case of trouble." *In case the locals go nuts because we scragged the mayor*. He didn't say that, but he hoped the men could work it out for themselves.

Most of them seemed able to. They tramped back toward the little town as if advancing into battle.

They moved in small groups, warily, keeping an eye out ahead and to all sides.

Hardeeville was a block of shops, a filling station, a saloon, and a few houses. Before the war, it might have held two or three hundred people. With the men anywhere close to military age gone, it was smaller than that now. When the mayor's wife saw the U.S. soldiers coming back without him, she screeched,

"Where's Darius?"

"Dead," Lavochkin said flatly. "He resisted our authority, and—" Whatever he said after that, Mrs.

Douglas' shriek smothered it. *She* made a fuss over the late mayor.

A shot rang out from one of the houses. A U.S. soldier went down, grabbing his leg. "Shit!" he yelled.

Chester didn't think the cartridge was anything more than a .22, but that didn't mean it felt like a kiss.

Three soldiers with automatic rifles emptied their magazines into the front of the house. Glass and chunks of wood flew. A woman and a twelve-year-old boy staggered out. Both of them were bleeding.

The boy still clutched the .22. He tried to raise it and shoot at the U.S. soldiers again, but he fell over instead, blood puddling under him.

"Fuck," said one of the men in green-gray. He was no happier about shooting a kid than anyone else would have been. Yeah, the kid had fired first. Yeah, he was an enemy. That didn't make it much better.

Had things ended there, they would have been bad. But they didn't. They got worse. Somebody fired from another house. A Featherston Fizz came flying out of nowhere and burst at the feet of a U.S.

soldier. He screamed like a damned soul as flames engulfed him. And one of the old men in Hardeeville laughed.

"Take 'em out!" Lieutenant Lavochkin yelled. "Take 'em all out!"

Chester's first shot knocked over the old man who thought watching a Yankee burn was funny. His second shot hit the old woman next to the old man right in the middle of the chest. She crumpled before she had a chance to screech. Of course, Chester's wasn't the only bullet that hit her—not even close. All the soldiers in the platoon were letting go with everything they had.

They started throwing grenades into the houses closest to them. A couple of men had grenade launchers on their rifles. They lobbed grenades all over Hardeeville, almost at random. “It’ll come down on somebody’s head!” one of them whooped as he pulled the trigger and sent one off…somewhere.

The men and women and kids on the street went down as if scythed. Their dying cries—and the gunfire, and the grenades bursting randomly all over the little town—brought more people out to see what was going on. The U.S. soldiers shot them down, too.

It was madness, red-hot madness. Chester Martin felt it as he fired and reloaded, fired and reloaded, and slapped in clip after clip. He didn’t know how many Confederates he killed. He didn’t much care, either. Along with his buddies, he went through the town. By the time they got done, there wasn’t much town left—it burned behind them. And just about everybody who’d lived in Hardeeville was dead.

Chester stood there shaking his head, like a man whose fever had suddenly broken. “Wow,” he said, looking back on the devastation. “What did we just do?”

“Settled their hash,” Lieutenant Lavochkin answered. “I don’t think too much of this needs to go into the after-action report, do you?”

“Christ, no!” Chester thought about some of the things he’d just done. He wished he hadn’t. He wished he hadn’t done them, too. So, no doubt, did Hardeeville. Well, it was too late for him, and much too late for the little town. He had the rest of his life to try to forget. Hardeeville…didn’t, not any more.

C onfederate Connie was on the air again. To most people in the USA, the music the propaganda broadcaster played was hot stuff, at or past the cutting edge. Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Moss—he was still getting used to the silver oak leaves on his shoulder straps—had heard stranger, wilder rhythms when Spartacus’ guerrillas got their hands on a guitar and a fiddle.

Here he was, at a big air base just outside of Dayton, Ohio, not far from where the Confederates swarmed over the border not quite three years before. The base didn’t exist then. Now, unless the Kaiser’s airmen had something fancier, it was the biggest training center in the world.

The song ended. Like most of the other guys at the base, Moss thought listening to Confederate Connie was more fun anyway. She had a contralto like a wet dream.

“Well, you Yankee boys, aren’t you proud of yourselves?” she said, as if she were waiting for you to get back into bed with her and didn’t want to wait very long. She was probably fifty-five and frumpy, but she sure didn’t sound that way. “Your *brave* soldiers went and wiped Hardeeville right off the map.”

“Where the hell’s Hardeeville?” somebody asked.

“Shut up,” said Moss and two other men. Listening to Confederate Connie didn’t just remind you why you fought. It reminded you why you were alive.

“That’s right,” she went on. “They marched into a defenseless town and they murdered everybody in it—men, women, children, everybody. Then they burned it down on top of the bodies. No more Hardeeville, South Carolina. Gone. Right off the map. Some fun, hey? Aren’t you proud to live in a country that does stuff like that?”

Nobody could keep the men around the wireless set quiet after that. “Oh, yeah, like the CSA never murdered anybody!” a pilot said.

“Where’s your coons, you lying cunt?” somebody else added.

“If they killed everybody, how come you know it happened?” demanded yet another flier.

Confederate Connie actually answered the last question, saying, “The Yankees missed a couple of women, though. They played dead in the blood and then got away. And now, to make you feel good about what your boys in green-gray managed to do, here’s a tune by Smooth Steve and the Oiler Orchestra, ‘How about That?’”

Music blared from the wireless, more of the syncopated noise the Confederates liked better than most people in the USA did. Jonathan Moss listened with at most half an ear. He wasn’t the only one; plenty of people were still telling Confederate Connie what a liar she was.

Moss wasn’t so sure. He’d heard enough war stories to believe a unit could go hog wild and massacre anybody who got in its way. He didn’t believe troops would do anything like that just for the fun of it. If somebody in Hardeeville had fired at them, though…In that case,

the town was what soldiers called shit out of luck. Probably all the men who'd torn up the place wished they hadn't done it—now. That was liable to be a little late for Hardeeville's innocent—and not so innocent—civilians.

A fellow with a bombardier's badge above the right pocket of his tunic said, "What's she getting her tit in a wringer for, anyway? I bet I blow up more people three times a week than those ground-pounders did. But I do it from twenty thousand feet, so I'm a fuckin' hero. It's a rough old war."

Along with the bombardier's badge, he wore the ribbons for a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star with an oak-leaf cluster. If he wasn't a hero, he would do till the genuine article came along. He also had a view of the war cynical enough to give even Moss pause.

The next morning, Moss got summoned to the commandant's office. He wondered how he'd managed to draw that worthy's notice, and what kind of trouble he was in. Major General Barton K. Yount was a sixtyish fellow who might have looked like a kindly grandfather if he weren't in uniform. "Have a seat, Moss," he said. His accent suggested he'd been born somewhere not far from here.

"Thank you, sir," Moss said cautiously, and sat with just as much care. *The condemned man got a hearty meal* went through his mind.

General Yount must have realized what he was thinking. "I didn't call you in here to ream you out, Colonel," he said. "I want to ask you a question."

"Sir?" The less Moss said, the less he might have to regret later on.

But Yount came straight to the point: "You've flown a lot of different airplanes, haven't you?"

"Well, yes, sir. I started with a pusher job in 1914, and I'm still doing it, so I must have, eh?"

"That's right." Yount smiled and nodded. "How would you like to add a turbo job to the list?"

A crazy grin spread across Moss' face. "Sir, I'd kill for a chance like that. Only reason I haven't is, I didn't know who needed bumping off."

Turbos were going to turn propeller-driven airplanes obsolete as soon as the boys with the slide rules and the thick glasses worked the

gremlins out of them. They were already sixty or eighty miles an hour faster than the hottest prop-driven fighters. The drawbacks were unreliable engines and landing gear, among other things. Turbos were widowmakers on a scale that hadn't been seen since the early days of the Great War. Moss was one of thousands of pilots who didn't give a damn. He wanted that chance so bad he could taste it.

Major General Yount's smile got wider. He knew Moss was kidding… up to a point. "You've got it, Colonel. You can call it a reward for a hard time, if you like. There's one thing I do have to warn you about, though."

"What? That it's dangerous? I already know, sir. I'm ready to take the chance."

"No, no." The training commandant shook his head. "I assumed you knew that. But you also have to know that for the time being we aren't using turbo fighters anywhere except above U.S.-occupied territory. If you get shot down or forced to crash-land because of engine trouble, we don't want this machinery falling into enemy hands. You must agree to that before you begin flight training here."

"Oh." Moss didn't try to hide his disappointment. "I wanted to go hunting."

"I understand that. You wouldn't be a good fighter pilot if you didn't. But I hope you follow the reasoning behind the order."

"Yes, sir," Moss said reluctantly. Even more reluctantly, he added, "All right, sir. I agree to the condition."

"Good. In that case, report to Building Twelve at 0730 tomorrow morning. You'll learn about the care and feeding of your new beast."

Several turbo fighters sat on the runway outside of Building Twelve. Moss got there early so he could walk around them before he went in. They looked weird as hell. The fuselage was almost shark-shaped.

The wings swept back from root to tip. He'd never seen or imagined anything like that before. The turbos had no tailwheel. They sat on a nosewheel instead, so the fuselage rested parallel to the ground instead of sloping down from nose to tail. The engines sat in metal pods under the wings. Yeah, the new fighter was one peculiar bird. But the longer Moss stared, the more he nodded to himself. It might look different, but it also looked deadly.

He wasn't the only pilot giving the new airplanes a once-over. "Fly one yet?" he asked a much-decorated major.

"Yeah," the younger man answered.

"What's it like?"

"Like your first girl after you've been jacking off too goddamn long."

Moss laughed. That wasn't what he'd expected, but he liked the way it sounded. He went into the building to hear about the care and feeding of the Boeing-71, as the new turbo was officially known. The major doing the lecturing had some fresh and nasty burn scars on his left arm, and walked with a limp.

Moss wondered if he'd got hurt in a turbo, but didn't ask. He didn't really want to know. Nobody else seemed curious, either.

He learned about the instruments, about the guns (four 30mm cannon in the nose—one hell of a punch), about the strange and temperamental landing gear, about what to do if an engine quit or caught fire, about what to do if both engines went out (not the most encouraging bit of instruction he'd ever had), about tactics against the Confederates' hottest prop-driven Hound Dogs, about everything he needed to know before he plopped his butt down in the cramped-looking cockpit.

He had to make himself listen. He knew he was hearing all kinds of stuff that would help keep him alive. He was a pro; he understood that. Even so, all he wanted to do was get in there and find out what the bird could do.

After what seemed forever and was only a week, he got his chance in a two-seat trainer. U.S. armies had driven the Confederates out of Petersburg. Birmingham and Huntsville were under artillery assault.

Moss wondered if there'd be any enemy airplanes left for him to face when he finally went on duty in the new turbo—people were calling them Screaming Eagles, and the brass didn't seem to mind too much.

The noise inside the cockpit was different. He felt it all through his body instead of just hearing it. He gave the turbo some throttle. It raced down the runway—it needed half again as much tarmac as a prop job. As he came up to takeoff speed, the instructor said, "Ease the stick back. Not too much, now. You do everything by little bits with this baby."

“Right,” Moss said, and then he was airborne. He gunned the turbo a little. When he felt what happened, he whispered, “Ohh.” Sure as hell, the murmur wasn’t much different from the one he’d made as he first slid into Beth Sullivan when he was seventeen. He’d forgotten you could mix so much delight and awe and astonishment.

The instructor chuckled. How many other pilots had made that same sound in his earphones? “It’s something, isn’t it?” he said.

“Wow,” Moss answered, which wasn’t a hell of a lot more articulate. After a moment, he tried again:

“It’s like angels are pushing.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Now the instructor sounded thoughtful; he hadn’t heard that before, anyway. He paused for a moment, then said, “Remember, they can turn into devils in nothing flat if you screw up—or even if you don’t. Sometimes only God knows why the engines flame out or throw a rotor or just up and quit. And if you don’t want to be asking Him face-to-face, you’ve got to get out of the bird in a hurry.”

“I understand,” Moss said. The single-seat Screaming Eagle had one of the nicest cockpit canopies he’d ever seen, a sleekly streamlined armor-glass bubble. The trainer’s canopy was longer and more bulbous, to accommodate the longer cockpit with two men. Could you yank it back quick enough to bail out? He hoped so.

At the instructor’s command, he swung the turbo into a turn. You couldn’t come close to turning as tight as you could in a prop job. But you wouldn’t want to dogfight in a Screaming Eagle anyway, not when you could outdive, outclimb, and just plain outrun anything else in the air.

Landing with a nosewheel as the first flight ended felt strange, but he did it. He couldn’t stop smiling when he got out of the fighter. If this wasn’t love, what was it?

IX

G eorgia. Now Alabama. Cincinnatus Driver didn’t care where they sent him. That he could drive through states which didn’t come close to bordering the USA shouted louder than any words that the Confederacy was cracking up.

Enemy wireless programs still denied the obvious. They promised vengeance on the United States and swore C.S. victory lay right around the corner. “Those bastards are so full of bullshit, no fuckin’ wonder their eyes are brown,” Hal Williamson said. He paused to drag on a cigarette. The smoke, like the battery-powered wireless set, was loot from a captured Confederate supply dump. The enemy had destroyed what he could, but he’d had to retreat too fast to get rid of everything.

“We will take our revenge on the damnyankees!” the announcer brayed. “Our rockets will drop from the skies and punish them as they only dream of punishing us! We will wipe their corrupt and filthy cities off the map one after another!”

Cincinnatus lit up a Raleigh of his own. “Turn him off,” he said. “Screechin’ like that’ll ruin my digestion.”

“I hear you,” Williamson said, and turned the power knob till it clicked. The ranting Confederate broadcaster—he must have studied at the Jake Featherston school of drama—fell silent. Williamson made as if to throw a rock at the set. “Goddamn lying cocksucker.”

“Yeah,” Cincinnatus said, and hoped he was right. U.S. newscasters went on and on about the German bomb that leveled Petrograd. If the Germans could do something like that, could the Confederates match them? You didn’t want to think so, but was it impossible?

Hal’s thoughts ran along a different train track: “Besides, where’ll the dickheads get their rockets once we’re done with Huntsville?”

“Yeah!” This time, Cincinnatus sounded much happier. Everybody knew the enemy rockets came from there. If the Confederates couldn’t throw their superbomb at the USA, what good would it do them?

And, even before Huntsville got overrun, it was catching holy hell. Battery upon battery of 105s pounded away at the town. Their muzzle flashes brightened the horizon from the north all the way around to the southeast. The deeper *crump!* of bursting bombs said U.S. airplanes came over Huntsville, too.

How anybody could go on working while high explosives were knocking his city flat was beyond Cincinnatus. The Confederates seemed intent on trying, though.

Before the drivers settled down for the night, they cut cards to see

who would stand sentry when.

Cincinnatus got a three-hour shift right at the start. That was good news and bad mixed together. He would have to stay awake longer when he was hungrier for sleep than for a good steak. But when he did climb into the cabin of his truck and roll up in blankets, he wouldn't have his sleep interrupted…unless Confederate raiders hit.

And they might. He knew that too well, which was why he carried his submachine gun with the safety off. C.S. regulars were thin on the ground. Raiders, damn them, popped out of nowhere. Some were bypassed soldiers, others civilians with a chip on their shoulder. If they could throw a few grenades or stitch a burst of automatic-weapons fire through a truck park, the damage they did more than paid for itself even if they got scragged.

A lot of the time, they didn't. They disappeared into the darkness and were never seen again.

"Bastards," Cincinnatus muttered. His leg hurt. So did his shoulder. They did a lot of the time, even though he took enough aspirins to give himself a perpetual sour stomach. Run out in front of a motorcar and you weren't the same again afterwards.

He prowled around the parked trucks, doing his best to move quietly. Not far away, he heard a sound like crazy screeching. He froze for a second before realizing it was a raccoon. Those unearthly noises could get you going.

His wristwatch had numbers and hands that glowed in the dark. When his stretch on patrol ended, he shook his replacement awake and curled up on the seat of his truck. Whatever happened from then till sunup happened without him.

Somebody had liberated a ham. Toasted over a fire, a thick slab of it was delicious, and beat the hell out of the canned scrambled eggs Cincinnatus also ate. The coffee tasted as if it was at least half chicory.

He'd had blends like that when he lived in Covington. He was used to it; he even kind of liked it. Some of the white drivers grumbled.

Hal Williamson put things in perspective: "Shit, guys, it's better than no coffee at all." Nobody found any easy way to argue with that.

The drivers headed for the closest dump to load up with whatever the

troops might need today (or whatever the quartermaster had, which wasn't always the same thing). Before they got there, a bird colonel in a command car waved them down. "You men have empty trucks, right?"

"Yeah? So?" the lead driver asked. Being technically a civilian, he could get away with things that would have put a soldier in the stockade. Cincinnatus was only two trucks behind, and could hear everything that went on between the driver and the officer.

That worthy didn't even blink at the near-insubordination. "So you're going to come with me instead of going wherever the hell you were going."

"We can't do that!" the lead driver exclaimed. "They'll have our heads."

"No, they won't," the colonel said. "Whatever you were doing, what I've got for you is more important. Unless you're on your way to pick up a bunch of those kraut superbombs, this trumps everything. And I will have your guts for garters if you fuck with me, buddy—I promise you that."

The lead driver considered, but not for long. "Colonel, you talked me into it," he said. Cincinnatus would have said the same thing; he didn't think the colonel was bluffing.

All the man said after that was, "Follow me." He got into the command car, nudged the driver, and took off. The truck convoy rumbled after him.

They headed straight for Huntsville—straight for the front, in other words. Cincinnatus began to wonder if the colonel wasn't one of those Confederate impostors who showed up every now and then.

Even more than raiders, they caused trouble all out of proportion to their numbers. If this son of a bitch was leading a whole column of trucks into an ambush…

Cincinnatus glanced over to the submachine gun beside him. He had as many bullets as he could for the Confederates, and one more for himself afterwards. They wouldn't take him alive no matter what.

The command car pulled up in front of a nondescript factory building—or it would have been, except for the barbed-wire perimeter surrounding it. Soldiers stood at the doorway, soldiers in green-gray

uniforms. Cincinnatus breathed a sigh of relief.

“Let them come out!” the colonel shouted. The soldiers waved and nodded. They threw the doors wide.

“Do Jesus!” Cincinnatus gasped. His next thought after an ambush had been that the USA might have overrun another camp where the Confederates got rid of their Negroes. He turned out to be wrong, but what he saw was just about as bad. He hadn’t imagined anything could be.

The men who came shambling out were white. They wore striped uniforms, the way convicts had back when Cincinnatus was a kid. The trousers and shirts looked as if they were made for some much larger species. And so they had been—Cincinnatus didn’t think any of these skeletons on legs weighed more than 120 pounds. Most of them weren’t anywhere close to that. A powerful animal stench came from them.

“Do Jesus!” Cincinnatus said again. He was out of the truck and limping toward them before he thought about what he was doing. He had several ration cans in pouches on his belt. “Here!” he called, and tossed them to the closest captives.

He wasn’t the only driver doing the same thing. Anyone who had enough himself—even someone who was only hungry—would have wanted to feed these bright-eyed walking skeletons.

But the food almost touched off a riot. The drivers didn’t have enough with them to give everybody some. The starving men who didn’t get any tried to steal from the ones who did. Finally, the U.S. guards had to break things up with rifle butts. “Hate to do it,” one of them said. “It’s like hitting your puppy

’cause he wants a bone. These guys can’t help it—they’re that hungry. But what can you do? Otherwise, we’ll have an even bigger goddamn mess on our hands.”

“You’ll all get some soon!” the colonel shouted. “Honest to God, you will! That’s what the trucks are here for—to take you to where there’s food.”

That turned the trick. The boneracks in stripes swarmed onto the trucks, which could hold many more of them than of human beings of ordinary dimensions. “Who are you poor bastards?” Cincinnatus asked.

“We’re politicals,” a scrawny man said, not without pride. “I’m a Whig. I was mayor of Fayetteville, Arkansas.” He looked more like a disaster than a one-time public official. A weak breeze—never mind a strong one—would have knocked him over in a heap. “I didn’t like the Freedom Party. Still don’t, by God. And this is what it bought me.”

“What were you doin’ in there?” Cincinnatus asked. But the mayor of Fayetteville didn’t hang around to chat. That might have cost him a place in a truck, and he wasn’t about to take a chance.

One of the guards answered for him: “They were putting rockets together, that’s what—the big mothers that go miles and miles. Featherston’s fuckers figured they might as well work ’em to death as just shoot ’em.”

“Oh,” Cincinnatus said in a hollow voice. When the guard said *work ’em to death*, he wasn’t kidding.

Some of the men still coming out of the factory would plainly die before they got fed. The dreadful odor that accompanied them from the building said more than a few men were already dead in there.

And yet…What happened to these political prisoners was horrible, no doubt about it. But they still got to try to stay alive. Some of them might have staved off death since before the war began.

The Confederacy’s Negroes never got even that much of a chance. They went into camps—and they didn’t come out. The politicals who hated the Freedom Party still labored for the Confederate States.

Negroes would have done the same…had anyone asked them to.

Nobody seemed to have. The Freedom Party and a lot of white Confederates wanted their Negroes dead—and they got what they wanted. As horrible as this was, it could have been worse. That was, perhaps, the scariest thought of all.

As Cincinnatus got back into the cab of his deuce-and-a-half, he also wondered whether that bird colonel would have made such a fuss if the rocket factory were full of Negro laborers. He shrugged; he couldn’t be sure one way or the other. But if he had his doubts—well, who could blame him, considering all the things he’d seen, all the things he’d escaped?

None of which made the plight of the starving, stinking politicals who jammed the back of the truck anything less than dreadful. Yes, if they

were black they would have been dead already. But they couldn't last long as things were. Cincinnatus put the truck in gear and drove them off toward whatever help the U.S. Army could give.

Even with no more than a scratch force of guards, Camp Humble went right on doing what it was designed to do: reducing population. Jefferson Pinkard was proud of that. He was proud of the men he had left, and he was proud of the way he'd designed the camp. It was so smooth, it almost ran itself. You just didn't need a whole lot of guards to herd Negroes from the trains to the trucks and bathhouses, and then to chuck bodies into the crematoria. Everything went as smoothly as it did in any other well-run factory.

Every few weeks, the latest batch of Negro trusties who thought they'd dodged death by playing along discovered they'd made their last mistake. The only thing Jeff kept on being unhappy about was the ovens. The company that made them had come out a couple of times to try to get them to perform better, but without much luck. Pinkard's conclusion was that the contractor had sold him a bill of goods from the start. The greasy black smoke that belched from the stacks and the burnt-meat stench that went with it were part of the operation, and he couldn't do a thing about it.

Trains still brought Negroes to the camp, trains from Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana and Arkansas and Texas. He'd also had loads of blacks from Florida and Cuba arrive. The local authorities rounded up their Negroes and sent them to Houston or Galveston by ship. He'd heard reports that subs operating in the Gulf of Mexico had sunk some of those ships. That was funny, in a grim way: the damnyankees were doing some of the Confederacy's work for it.

The telephone on his desk rang. He scowled. Why couldn't people just leave him alone and let him take care of his job? It rang again. Scowling still, he picked it up. "Pinkard here," he rasped.

"This here's Lou Doggett, General," the mayor of Humble said. Pinkard wasn't a general; he had a Party rank instead. But he didn't argue. He'd been a PFC the last time around. If somebody wanted to call him *General*, he didn't mind a bit.

"What's up?" he asked now.

"Well, I'll tell you, General—the wind's blowing this way from your camp, and it's pretty bad,"

Doggett answered. “This ain’t how you told me it was gonna be when you put that camp in.”

“It ain’t the way I thought it was gonna be, neither,” Jeff answered. “But it’s the way it is. I don’t know what else I can tell you.”

“If it don’t get better pretty damn quick, I’m gonna talk to the Governor,” the mayor warned.

Jeff Pinkard laughed. “Go right ahead. You do that. Be my guest. You reckon the Governor amounts to anything when you set him next to Ferd Koenig and Jake Featherston?”

To his surprise, the mayor of Humble answered, “Matter of fact, General, I sure do. Richmond’s gone. Even if it wasn’t, there’s damnyankees in between here and there. What the hell can Koenig and Featherston do way out here?”

He might be right. A nasty chill of fear ran through Pinkard when he realized as much. Like any government, the Confederacy ran because people agreed it ought to. What happened if they stopped agreeing? What happened if Texas Rangers came out here with guns? How could you know ahead of time?

“Let me ask you a question, your Honor,” Pinkard said heavily. “Who went down on his knees beggin’ for me to put this here camp where it’s at? Who damn near jizzed in his dungarees when I said I would? Was that anybody who looks like you?”

“That was then,” Doggett returned. “You didn’t tell me it was gonna stink the way it does and belch out black smoke you can see for miles.”

“I didn’t know, goddammit. Those bastards who put in the ovens and the stacks went and rooked me,” Jeff said. “But even if it does stink, it’s doing something the country needs. You gonna try and tell me I’m wrong?”

“Well, no. I got no more use for coons’n any other decent, God-fearing white man does,” the mayor said. “But godalmightydamn, General, it sure *does* stink. Makes the whole town smell like a barbecue pit some stupid fool went and forgot about. You’re in a fancy uniform, so you get to give orders. Me, I got voted in, and I got a hell of a lot of people here in Humble who sure ain’t gonna vote for me again ’cause of that smell. I mean, gettin’ rid o’ niggers is one thing. Doin’ it so you can smell ’em roast—that’s a whole different story.”

“You want to eat roast beef, but you don’t want to butcher your cow,” Jeff said. “Camp’s gotta be somewhere. I liked it where it was at before, too, but the damnyankees went and ran us out of there.

That ain’t my fault.”

“I didn’t say it was, but it’s another problem. Suppose we go and lose the war.”

“That’s defeatism,” Jeff said automatically.

The mayor of Humble astonished him by replying, “Oh, cut the crap, General. We’re fucked, and you know it as well as I do. Like I said, Richmond’s gone. They chopped us in half in Georgia. The President’s on the run. How are we gonna win? I wish we could, but I ain’t a blind man. And suppose we lose, like I said. What if the damnyankee soldiers march in here and ask, ‘What the devil were you doin’ with a murder camp there on your doorstep, Mr. Mayor?’ What do I tell ’em then, hey?”

“Fuck,” Pinkard muttered under his breath. That was insubordination so bad, it was damn near treason. Or it would have been, if it weren’t such a good question.

Suppose we do go and surrender. Suppose the Yankees do come marching in. What do I *tell them?* The only answer that came to mind was, *I was just doing what the bigwigs in Richmond told me to do*. Would they buy that? What would they do to him if they didn’t?

“General? Hey, General! You there?” How long had Doggett been yelling in his ear? A little while, evidently. He’d had other things to worry about.

“Yeah? What is it?” he managed, dragging himself back to the business at hand.

“You don’t get that camp cleaned up in jig time, I *will* talk to Governor Patman. You see if I don’t.”

“You’ll be sorry if you do.” Jeff thought he meant that, anyway. He knew damn well he had more firepower than the Texas Rangers could bring to bear against him. But whether his guards had the will to fight other Confederate white men…He wasn’t so sure about that. He hoped like anything he wouldn’t have to find out.

“If you’re smart, General, you’ll take off your uniform, put your wife

an' young 'uns in a civilian motorcar, and head for some town where nobody knows your face. You think the damnyankees'll have questions to ask *me*? What'll they say to *you*?"

Pinkard hung up. He did it by sheer reflex. The mayor's thoughts didn't just run parallel to his. They'd got ahead of them on the same road. If U.S. soldiers came here, they *would* have things to say to him.

Unpleasant things.

"But I can't leave," he said aloud. No matter what the Yankees had to say to him, he was proud of everything he'd done here, and over in Snyder, and outside of Alexandria, too. He'd had an important job to do, and he'd done it well. If not for him, the whole population-reduction program would have been a hell of a lot less efficient. Didn't that count for anything?

The Attorney General thought so. Hell, the President of the Confederate States of America thought so.

What else mattered?

Nothing else mattered—as long as his side was calling the shots. Never mind Texas Rangers. U.S.

soldiers wouldn't like what he'd done. And the main reason they wouldn't like it—or so things seemed to him—was that his own side did.

"Fuck 'em," Jeff muttered. "Fuck 'em all."

He wondered whether Mayor Doggett would send cops around to give Edith and the boys a hard time. He didn't intend to put up with anything like that. Maybe his guards would have trouble against the Rangers. Against this little town's one-lung police force, though, they could start a reign of terror.

No sooner had that crossed his mind than the telephone rang again. He said some things that should have melted the glass out of the windows in his office. What did Doggett want now? "Pinkard here," he snarled.

"Jeff, it's me." That wasn't the mayor—it was Edith. "My pains have started. We're going to have us a baby."

"Oh, good God!" Jeff said, mentally apologizing to the Lord whose

name he'd done worse than take in vain a moment before. "You ready to go down to Houston?"

"I sure am!" his wife answered. "Miss Todd next door, she'll take care of Willie and Frank till you can get home."

"I'll send a guard with an auto for you right away," Jeff said. He couldn't leave the camp himself right now, especially not after the brawl with the mayor. Humble wasn't big enough to boast a hospital of its own. But it was only twenty miles from Houston, so that shouldn't matter.

He summoned a reliable troop leader to drive one of the Birminghams attached to Camp Humble. As he gave the three-striper his orders, he thought, *Damn, I wish Hip Rodriguez was still around to do this for me*. His old Army buddy would have done it right, one hundred percent guaranteed. Oh, Porter was more than reliable enough, but still…. As always, Pinkard knew a moment of pained incomprehension when he thought about Hipolito Rodriguez. What the devil made Hip eat his submachine gun? He was doing a good job, and doing a job that needed doing.

That was something to brood on as he poured himself a big snort from the highly unofficial bottle in a desk drawer. He couldn't have taken the whiskey along if he had torn himself away from this and gone to the hospital. What could he do in the waiting room, anyway? Worry. He could do that here, too. He could, and he did.

Dammit, what possessed Hip to do that? He didn't see any damnyankee writing on the wall; things were going well enough when he shot himself. Why, then? It was as if he'd suddenly decided he'd made some vast mistake, and blowing off the top of his head was the only way he could fix it.

"But that's crazy," Jeff said, taking a slug from the drink. "Just plain old crazy." It wasn't as if Hip didn't believe in getting rid of Negroes. He couldn't have had woman troubles, either. Jeff knew Hip got laid every once in a while on the women's side. Not many male guards didn't. (For that matter, the same was true of female guards.) He felt guilty about fooling around on his wife—Jeff remembered as much from the Great War. But he didn't feel all *that* guilty, which Jeff also knew.

So what went wrong, then? The obvious answer—that Hip couldn't stand killing people any more even if they were black—stared Pinkard

in the face. It had ever since Rodriguez shot himself. And ever since then, Jeff had stubbornly refused to look at it.

He didn't change now. He'd come too far down this road to change… unless he put the barrel of a gun in his own mouth and pulled the trigger. He refused to look at doing that, either. Instead, he finished the drink and poured another one.

He kept on drinking for the next seven hours. The camp didn't fall to pieces in that time, which was just as well, because he wouldn't have cared if it had. He spilled whiskey when the telephone rang.

"Pinkard here," he slurred.

"Congratulations, sir! Your wife is fine, and you've got a boy!" Troop Leader Porter said. "What'll you name him?"

"Raymond," Jeff answered at once—drunk or sober, he knew. "Raymond Longstreet Pinkard." He knew where he stood, too, even now.

Every time Irving Morrell came into Philadelphia, the city looked worse. The Confederates kept finding new ways to hit the de facto capital of the USA. U.S. forces had driven the Confederates from their own capital and held bridgeheads across the James. The rocket factories in Huntsville were history. But Jake Featherston's forces kept launching their damn birds. Not all of them had been driven out of range of Philly, not yet. Their bombers still managed to sneak up here by night, too. Fresh craters and wrecked buildings loudly insisted the war wasn't over yet.

But the people in Philadelphia had a jaunty spring in their step that wasn't there the last time Morrell came into town. Maybe it was all the general's imagination, but he didn't think so. Folks figured things were on the downhill slope. And, by God, they had plenty of good reasons to think so.

Not without pride, Morrell knew he'd given them more than a few of those good reasons himself.

His driver, a sergeant with a Purple Heart and three oak-leaf clusters—not the kind of decoration anybody in his right mind would want to win—said, "We've got those cocksuckers whipped, don't we, sir?"

"Well, we'd have to screw up pretty good to blow things now,"

Morrell allowed. “Are you on permanent light duty, Sergeant, or will you go back to the front? You’re two wounds ahead of me, and I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.”

“I’ll be at it again in a couple of weeks, sir,” the noncom answered. “None of ’em’s been real bad. I limp a little from the latest one, and I’ve lost a finger, but the other two…hell, I don’t even notice ’em if I don’t see the scars. For a guy who’s not real lucky, I’m pretty lucky, you know?”

“Yeah,” Morrell said, and he did. The way the sergeant put it was kind of loopy, but it made sense anyway. The Ford rolled past a wall with a few bomb scars and a big splash of dried blood. Morrell was afraid he knew what that meant: “People bomb?”

“Afraid so, sir. They think this one was a diehard Mormon. He took out four or five soldiers when he went.”

“Damn,” Morrell said. How long would the USA—and other countries all over the world—have to worry about people willing, even eager, to die for their cause? Get some dynamite, some nails or scrap metal, and there you were: your own artillery shell. And you could aim yourself better than the best gunner in the world. The assumption in war had always been that the other guy didn’t want to die. How were you supposed to protect yourself against somebody who did?

“Mormons. Canucks. Confederates,” the sergeant said mournfully. “Even what they call peace won’t be the same.”

“I was just thinking the same thing,” Morrell said. “I don’t know what to do about it. If you get any brainstorms, for Christ’s sake tell the War Department. You’ll be a captain faster than you can blink.”

“No offense, sir, but I don’t know if I want to be an officer.” With some relief, the noncom hit the brakes in front of the War Department. “Here you go. You don’t even have to tip me.”

“Heh,” Morrell said. He stepped between concrete barriers that kept autos from getting too close: they could carry a lot more explosives than mere people could. The War Department building had a big chunk bitten out of a corner. Those C.S. rockets weren’t supposed to be real accurate, but one seemed to have landed right on the money.

Not even stars on his shoulder straps kept him from having to show his ID, or from getting patted down after he did. He submitted without

a murmur; times were still dangerous. Once he'd placated the entrance dragons, an escort took him down to General Staff headquarters.

It hadn't been buried so deep the last time he came to the War Department. Of course, if it weren't now, it might have gone sky high when that rocket came down. "Here's General Abell's office, sir," the escort said. "Telephone when you need to come up again, and somebody will take you."

"Thanks," Morrell said. The kid gave him a crisp salute and hurried down the corridor. Morrell was much less eager to enter John Abell's sanctum, but he did.

"Welcome," the General Staff officer said with what passed for warmth from him. Brigadier General Abell sometimes reminded Morrell of a ghost mostly congealed into the real world. He was tall and thin and pale, and so cool of manner that he sometimes hardly seemed there at all. The General Staff suited him perfectly; he was a dab hand at moving divisions around, but would have been hopeless with dirty, smelly, wisecracking, foul-mouthed soldiers.

"Thanks," Morrell answered, and couldn't help adding, "See? It wasn't a two-year campaign after all."

"So it wasn't. Congratulations." Yes, Abell was in a gracious mood. "We managed to attrit the enemy so he couldn't resist with as much persistence as I thought he might utilize when we first broached the issue early last year."

Morrell distrusted officers who said *utilize* when they meant *use*. As for *attrit*…Well, obviously it came from *attrition*, but that didn't mean he ever wanted to hear it again. He managed a nod.

That seemed to satisfy John Abell. "The question now, of course, is, *Where do we go from here?* "

He could speak clear English when he wanted to. Why didn't he want to more often? "On the western flank, Birmingham and Huntsville are pretty much in the bag," Morrell said. "We're hitting Selma and Mobile hard from the air. We'll get to 'em before too long. New Orleans…Well, we can bomb it. If we smash the levees, we can flood a lot of it. But we won't get soldiers there any time soon."

"A reasonable estimate," Abell agreed. "And in the east?"

"I'm shifting most of the effort there up into South Carolina," Morrell

replied. “Charleston, Columbia…If the General Staff has a different idea, I expect you’ll let me know.” He wondered if that was part of the reason he’d been summoned to Philadelphia. What did they think he would do if he stayed down in the Confederacy and got orders he didn’t like? Set up on his own? He admired Napoleon as a soldier, but not as a politician.

“At present, no. That seems adequate, or more than adequate,” John Abell said. He acted nervous, though.

For a moment, that made no sense at all to Morrell. The United States was manifestly winning the war.

They’d cut the CSA in half. The campaign in Virginia was going well at last. Even the minor struggles in Arkansas and Sequoyah and west Texas all inclined toward the USA. So why wasn’t Abell even happier?

Morrell didn’t expect hosannas and backflips from the General Staff officer. He’d known Abell too long and too well for that. But still… Then a light went on, a light as bright and terrible as the sun. “That goddamn superbomb!” Morrell exclaimed. “How close is Featherston?” He didn’t ask how close his own country was. That, he assumed, would be a secret more tightly held than the other.

“Ah. Good. You do understand the basic difficulty under which we labor,” Abell said. “The answer is, we just don’t know—and that is our principal area of concern at this point in time.”

“I can see how it might be,” Morrell said dryly. If the Confederates could blow a city off the map with one bomb, they hadn’t lost yet, not by a long chalk. “We are trying to do something about this?”

“As a matter of fact, yes,” John Abell said. “Before too much longer, the question may be moot, but at the moment it remains relevant.”

And what was *that* supposed to mean? Were the United States about to capture the CSA’s superbomb works? Or was his country close to getting a superduperbomb of its own? “Anything you can tell me without bringing the wrath of the great god Security down on your head?” Morrell inquired.

“Our own research along those lines is making good progress,” Abell said, and not another word.

Even that much was more than Morrell expected. “Well, all right,” he said, and took out two packs of Dukes. He pulled a cigarette from one

and stuck it in his mouth; the other he tossed on Abell's desk.

"Here you go. Spoils of war."

"Thanks." Abell opened the pack and held out a cigarette. Morrell gave him a light. The General Staff officer never went near the front. He probably got sick of the nasty U.S. tobacco—unless other officers who wanted to stay on his good side kept him in smokes. Maybe his desk was full of them. You never could tell.

"Those bombs are going to change the way we fight. They'll change the way everybody fights,"

Morrell said.

"We are commencing studies on that topic," Abell said.

"How? We don't know enough yet," Morrell said. "And that reminds me—how come the Kaiser hasn't flattened London or Paris? Did he only have the one bomb? How long till he gets another one?"

"I don't know the answer to *that*," Abell replied, "but I do have an idea why Petrograd went up in smoke and the Western capitals haven't."

"I'm all ears," Morrell said.

"Prevailing winds," Abell told him. "These bombs spew poison into the air, and the wind can carry it a long way. From Petrograd, the stuff goes deeper into Russia. From London or Paris, the Germans could give themselves a present."

"A present they want like a hole in the head," Morrell said. John Abell nodded. Morrell stubbed out his cigarette and shuddered. "That makes these damn things even worse than I thought."

"The only thing worse than using them on somebody is somebody else using them on you," Abell said.

"Have we stopped the Confederates from using one on us?"

"We hope so."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Morrell asked.

"They're working on this thing in a Virginia mountain town. We have bombed it so heavily, next to nothing is left aboveground," the

General Staff officer replied.

Morrell had listened to a lot of presentations. He could hear what wasn't said as well as what was.

"What are they doing underground?"

"Well, we don't precisely know." Abell sounded as uncomfortable as he ever did. "They've burrowed like moles since the bombing started. That's why I hope we've kept their program from producing a uranium bomb, but I can't be sure we have."

"Terrific," Morrell said. "How do we find out for sure?"

"If they use one on us, we failed," Abell said. "It's as simple as that, I'm afraid."

"Oh, boy," Morrell said in distinctly hollow tones. "That's encouraging." He looked up at God only knew how many feet of steel and concrete over his head. "If they drop one on Philadelphia, will it get us all the way down here?"

"I don't think they can do that, anyhow," Abell replied. "I'm told a uranium bomb is too heavy for any airplane they have. We're having to modify our bombers to carry the load."

"Mm. Well, I guess that's good news. So they've got to wait till their rockets get out of short pants, then? Or do they have an extra-special rocket ready to go?"

"We don't believe so," John Abell said. "But then, we didn't know about the ones they do have till they started firing them at us."

"Tell you one thing," Morrell said as he lit another cigarette. Abell made a questioning noise. Morrell explained: "You sure know how to cheer a guy up."

Y ankee bombers still didn't come over Lexington, Virginia, very often in the daytime. C.S. fighters and heavy flak made that an expensive proposition. Clarence Potter thanked God for small favors. He would have thanked God more for big ones, but the Deity didn't seem inclined to give the Confederate States any of those nowadays.

A crane swayed a crate into the cargo bed of a truck that looked ordinary but wasn't. This machine had a very special suspension. Even

so, the springs groaned as the crate came down.

Potter watched the loading process with Professor Henderson FitzBelmont. “You’re sure this damn thing will work?” Potter said.

FitzBelmont looked at him. “No.”

“Thanks a lot, Professor,” Potter said. “You sure know how to cheer a guy up.”

“Would you rather have me lie to you?” FitzBelmont asked.

“Right now, I really think I would,” Clarence Potter told him. “I hate to try this if there’s an even-money chance we’ll get nothing but a squib.”

FitzBelmont shrugged. “It’s untested. Ideally, we would have more time and more weapons. Things being as they are…”

“Well, yes. There is that,” Potter said. Just getting back to Lexington from Petersburg had been nightmare enough. “All right. We’ll try it, and we’ll see what happens, that’s all. Wish us luck.”

“I do,” Professor FitzBelmont said. “In my own way, I’m a patriot, too.” His way wasn’t so different from Potter’s. Neither man went around shouting, *Freedom!* They both loved the Confederate States all the same.

Potter climbed into the cab of the truck next to the driver, a sergeant. “We ready, sir?” the noncom asked in accents not much different from Potter’s own.

“If we’re not, we never will be—which is, of course, always a possibility,” the Intelligence officer said.

The sergeant looked confused. “We’re ready, Wilton,” Potter assured him. “Now we see what happens.”

Several command cars and armored cars rolled north and slightly east with the special truck.

Everybody in them spoke the same kind of English as Clarence Potter: all the men could pass for Yankees, in other words. Both sides had used that trick during the war whenever they thought they could get away with it. *One more time*, Potter thought. *It’s coming down toward the end, but we’re going to try it one more time*.

In the War of Secession, Stonewall Jackson had played the Shenandoah Valley like a master violinist.

In his hands, it turned into a dagger, an invasion route aimed straight at the USA's heart. The same thing happened again during the Great War, with the Confederate charge that almost got to Philadelphia. After 1917, the United States occupied the northern end of the Valley and fortified it so the Confederate States couldn't try that again. And Jake Featherston didn't; he drove up through Ohio instead.

The Shenandoah Valley was also the CSA's granary. The United States, busy elsewhere and fighting for survival, hadn't tried to take the Valley away from the Confederacy. They had dropped a hell of a lot of incendiaries on it. One U.S. wag was supposed to have said that a crow flying up the Shenandoah Valley would have to carry its own provisions.

Things weren't quite so bad as that—but they sure weren't good. Potter drove past too many fields whose main crops were ash and charcoal, past too many barns and farmhouses that were nothing but burnt-out skeletons of their old selves. Even after a wet winter, the air smelled smoky.

He had bigger worries than the way the air smelled. The first time they came to a bridge, he said, "This is what they call a moment of truth."

"Sir?" Sergeant Wilton said. "They're supposed to have strengthened it."

"I know." Potter left it right there. The Confederate States were in their death agony. He knew it, even if Wilton didn't. Things that were supposed to get done might…or they might not. You never could tell.

And if they didn't… *I'm screwed*, Potter thought. Only one way to find out. "Take it across," he said.

"Yes, sir." The driver did. The bridge held. Potter breathed a sigh of relief. Now—how many more bridges across the winding Shenandoah before they got to the head of the Valley? How many bridges beyond that? Again, only one way to find out.

They made it over, again and again. The truck's transmission and engine weren't happy; they'd been beefed up, too, but they were even more overstrained than the suspension. If the damn thing crapped out…well, they had some spare parts, but it wouldn't be good news.

Potter tensed again—for the millionth time—when they came into Luray, the northernmost town in the Valley the CSA held, just as the sun was setting. If things there weren't ready, they were screwed again.

But the stuff they needed was waiting for them. Potter let out one more sigh of relief.

But for the caves outside of town and a nitrates plant that had drawn its share of U.S. bombs, Luray's chief claim to fame was a two-and-a-half-story brick courthouse near the center of town. Potter's convoy stopped there. A work crew dashed out and spread canvas over the truck and the vehicles accompanying it. Then, under that cover, they got to work, slapping green-gray paint over the butternut that had identified them. As soon as the paint was even close to dry, they put U.S. markings all over the machines. Those couldn't hide their Confederate lines, of course, but after almost three years of war both sides were using lots of captured equipment.

And the disguise didn't end with the truck and the armored cars and command cars. Potter and his comrades put on U.S. uniforms. He became a major, which suited him well enough. If the damnyankees captured him in their togs, they'd shoot him. He shrugged. At the moment, that was the least of his worries.

"You have the passwords and countersigns?" he asked the veteran first sergeant in charge of the unit there.

"Yes, sir, sure do. We went out and took a couple of prisoners less than an hour ago," the noncom answered. He was of about Potter's vintage, a man who'd been through the Great War and didn't flabble about anything. He gave Potter what he needed.

Potter wrote it down to be sure. "Thanks," he said. The retread sergeant nodded. The patch over his left eye and the hook sticking out of his left tunic cuff told why he was in a backwater like this. Despite them, he was a better man than most at the front.

The chameleon convoy rolled out of Luray before sunup. Potter wanted to get into U.S.-held territory while it was still dark. That would help keep his vehicles from giving themselves away right where people were most likely to get antsy about them.

Yankee country started just a couple of miles north of Luray. If somebody'd spilled the beans—not impossible with the CSA visibly

coming to pieces—a couple of companies of real U.S. soldiers could have swooped down and ended a lovely scheme before it really got rolling.

But no. The sergeant's raid for prisoners hadn't even made the U.S. forces jumpy. Potter and his merry band got several miles into Yankeeland before they came to a checkpoint. The passwords he'd picked up in Luray worked fine. A kid second lieutenant asked, "What is all this crap, uh, sir?"

"Matériel captured from Featherston's fuckers," Potter answered crisply—he knew what the enemy called his side. "We're taking it north for evaluation."

"Nobody told me," the shavetail complained.

"It's a war," Potter said with more patience than he felt. "They wouldn't tell you your name if you hadn't had it issued ahead of time."

"No shit!" the lieutenant said, laughing. "All right, sir—pass on."

On they passed. The sun came up. They crossed over the Shenandoah again at Front Royal. Nobody on their side had specially reinforced that bridge. "Think it'll take the strain, sir?" Wilton asked.

"If they ever sent a barrel over it, it will," Potter said. "Barrels are a hell of a lot heavier than this baby."

They made it. They stopped at a fuel dump and gassed up, then went on. The farther they got from the front line, the less attention U.S. soldiers paid them. They just seemed to be men doing a job. One nine-year-old kid by the side of the road gaped, though. He knew they were driving C.S.

vehicles—Potter could tell. He probably knew every machine and weapon on both sides better than the guys who used them did. Plenty of kids like that down in the CSA, too. It was a game to them. It wasn't a game to Clarence Potter.

Harpers Ferry. John Brown had come here, trying to start a slave uprising. Robert E. Lee led the men who captured him. And, three years later, Lee came through again on the campaign that won the Confederate States their independence. Maybe this trip north would help them keep it.

Over the Potomac. Into Maryland. Into the USA proper. Potter had come this way almost exactly thirty years earlier, with the Army of Northern Virginia's thrust toward Philadelphia. They'd fallen short then. Had they taken the de facto capital, they might have had a triumphant six weeks' war. Jake Featherston had hoped for the same thing this time around. What you hoped for and what you got weren't always the same, dammit.

Maryland looked prosperous; Pennsylvania, when they got there, even more so. Oh, Potter spied bomb damage here and there, but only here and there. This land hadn't been *fought over* the way so much of the CSA had. It had got nibbled, but not chewed up. The United States was too big a place for bombing alone to chew them up. Pittsburgh, now, Pittsburgh probably looked as if it had had a proper war, but Potter and his band of cutthroats headed east, not west.

Drivers in military vehicles coming the other way waved to him and honked their horns as they passed.

He always waved back. They figured he was returning from the front with something important. Nobody bothered checking his papers or asking him where he was going or why. The United States *were* a big place. Once beyond the usual military zone, security for people who looked and sounded like U.S.

soldiers eased off. He'd counted on that when he put this scheme together.

Jake Featherston wanted him to go all the way into downtown Philadelphia. He didn't intend to. There of all places, security would tighten up again. He couldn't afford to have anybody ask questions too soon. Some overeager goon with a Tommy gun or a captured automatic Tredegar could mess everything up if he got suspicious at just the wrong time.

No, not downtown. Potter stopped west of it, on the far side of the Schuylkill River. At his order, Wilton pulled into a parking lot. Potter ducked into the back of the truck and set two timers on the side of the crate—he wasn't going to take chances with only one. The driver, meanwhile, raised the hood.

"What's going on?" somebody called.

"Damn thing's broken down," Wilton answered. "We've got to round up a mechanic somewhere."

He and Potter jumped into one of the command cars. “Back the way we came,” Potter said. “Fast as you can go.” He eyed the man who’d questioned them. The fellow only shrugged and ambled into a shop. Maybe he’d seen breakdowns before.

“How long, sir?” asked the corporal behind the command car’s wheel.

“Not long enough,” Potter said. “Step on it.”

Fifteen minutes later, the world blew up behind them.

I rving Morrell wasn’t looking west when the bomb went off. He was standing at a counter, trying to decide between a chocolate bar and a roll of mints. All of a sudden, the light swelled insanely, printing his shadow on the wall in back of the sidewalk stand. The fat little old woman behind the counter screeched and covered her eyes with her hands.

“Good God!” Morrell said, even before the roar of the explosion reached him. His first thought was that an ammo dump somewhere had blown sky high. He didn’t think of a bomb. The explosion seemed much too big for that.

He forgot about the candy and ran out into the street. Then he realized just how lucky he’d been, because a lot of windows had turned to knife-edged flying shards of glass. The magazine stand and snack counter where he’d been dithering didn’t have a window of any sort, so he’d escaped that, anyhow.

He stopped and stared. He wasn’t the only one. Everybody out there was looking west with the same expression of slack-jawed disbelief. No one had ever seen anything like that rising, boiling, roiling cloud before. How high did it climb? Three miles? Four? Five? He had no idea. The colors put him in mind of food—salmon, peach, apricot. The top of the cloud swelled out from the base, as if it were a toadstool the size of a god.

The roar came then, not just in his ears but all through his body. He staggered like a drunken man. But it wasn’t his balance going; the ground shook under his feet. A blast of wind from nowhere staggered him. Also out of nowhere, rain started pelting down. The drops were enormous. They left black splashes when they hit the ground. When one hit his hand, he jerked in surprise—the rain was hot.

“Where’s it at?” somebody asked.

“Across the river, looks like,” a woman said.

It looked that way to Morrell, too. The rain shower didn’t last more than a couple of minutes. It hadn’t ended before he started trying to scrub the filthy drops from his skin. He remembered what John Abell had told him a few days before: uranium bombs put out poison. And what else could that horrible thing be? No ammunition dump in the world blew up like that.

How much poison was in the rain? How much was in that monstrous toadstool cloud? *Am I a dead man walking?* he wondered.

“We gotta go help,” said the man who’d asked where the blast was. He hurried toward the Schuylkill River.

His courage and resolve shamed Morrell. Of course, the stranger—who was plump and fiftyish, with a gray mustache—didn’t know what Morrell did. If ignorance was bliss…

After a moment’s hesitation, Morrell followed. If he was already poisoned, then he was, that was all.

Nothing he could do about it now. Overhead, that cloud grew taller and wider. Winds began to tear at it and tug it out of shape…and blow it toward downtown Philadelphia.

Crowds got worse the farther west Morrell went. Everybody was pointing and staring and gabbling.

You fools! Don’t you realize you might all be dead? No, Morrell didn’t shout it out. But it filled his thoughts.

Damage got worse the farther west he went, too. All the windows that had survived years of Confederate air raids were blown out. Motorcars and trucks had windows shattered, too. Drivers, their faces masks of blood, staggered moaning through the streets. Many of them clutched at their eyes.

Morrell knew what that was bound to mean: they had glass in them.

As he neared Philadelphia’s second river, he saw buildings brutally pushed down and vehicles flipped onto their sides or upside down. Some men stopped to help the injured. Others pressed on.

And then Morrell got a chance to look across the Schuylkill. That part of the city was almost as heavily built up as downtown. Or rather, it

had been. Next to Morrell, a skinny woman crossed herself.

He felt like doing the same thing. Almost everything over there was knocked flat. A few buildings that must have been uncommonly strong still stood up from the rubble, but only a few.

A bridge across the Schuylkill survived, though it leaned drunkenly to one side. How long it would stay up, God only knew. People staggered across it from the west. Some had had the clothes burned off of them. Morrell saw several with one side of their face badly seared and the other fine: they must have stood in profile to the bomb when it went off.

“His shadow!” a dreadfully burned man babbled. “I saw his shadow on the sidewalk, all printed like, but not a thing left of George!” He slumped down and mercifully passed out. Morrell wondered whether he would ever wake. He might be luckier not to.

A loudspeaker started to blare: “All military personnel! Report at once to your duty stations! All military personnel! Report at once to—”

Morrell didn’t exactly have a duty station. He headed back to the War Department. The catastrophe across the river was bigger than any one man. And he had a better chance of finding out what was going on at the military’s nerve center.

So he thought, anyway. But one of the guards who patted him down asked, “What the hell happened, sir? Do you know?”

“Not exactly,” Morrell answered. “I was hoping people here did.”

Before a private took him down to John Abell’s office, he paused in a men’s room and washed off as much of the filthy rainwater as he could. “Why are you doing that, sir?” asked the kid, who went in with him.

“Just in case,” Morrell answered. Getting rid of the horrible stuff wouldn’t hurt. He was sure of that.

Abell always looked pale. He seemed damn near transparent now. He might have aged ten years in the few days since Morrell last saw him. “My God!” he said. “They beat us to the punch. I didn’t think they could, but they did.”

“Have you been up top?” Morrell asked. “Did you see it with your

own eyes?”

“No.” Abell had always wanted to deal with things from a distance. Was that a strength or a weakness? *Probably both at once*, Morrell thought. The General Staff officer went on, “How did they get it here? They couldn’t have used an airplane—I swear to God they don’t have a machine that can carry it. And our Y-ranging gear didn’t spot a thing coming up from the south.”

“They must have sneaked it in, God damn them,” Morrell said. “Remember how they broke through in eastern Ohio? They had a whole battalion of guys in our uniforms, in our vehicles, who could talk like us.

What do you want to bet they did the same damn thing again—and made it work?” He’d made it work himself, getting over the Tennessee River in front of Chattanooga.

Abell managed a shaky nod. Then he reached for a telephone. “With a little luck, they won’t get away.

We can shoot every last one of them if we catch them in our uniforms.”

Morrell nodded. That was what the laws of war said. Whether the USA would want to shoot those Confederates if it caught them might be a different story. How much could they tell interrogators about their uranium-bomb project?

“We’d better catch them,” Abell said as he slammed down the telephone after barking into it with unaccustomed heat. “They can’t get away with that. How many thousands of people did they just murder?”

Would it have been better had the enemy dropped the bomb out of an airplane and then flown away?

Would it have been better had he dropped ton after ton of ordinary bombs instead, or machine-gunned as many people as he’d killed in this one blast? Morrell found himself shaking his head. It wouldn’t have been any better, but it would have been more familiar. That mattered, too. The uranium bomb was something brand new. Poison gas had carried some of that same whiff of horror during the last war.

People took it for granted now.

Would they come to take uranium bombs for granted, too? How could they, when each one could devastate a city? And these were just the early ones. Would next year's model level a whole county, or maybe a state?

"My God," Abell said again. "Those stinking crackers…and they beat us. There won't be one stone left on top of another one by the time our bombers get through with Lexington—I'll tell you that."

The last time he and Morrell talked about uranium bombs, he'd waltzed around the name of the town where the CSA was working on them. This time, he'd slipped. He was human after all, and would probably have to do penance before the altar of Security the Almighty.

He realized as much a few seconds too late. "You didn't hear that from me," he said in some embarrassment.

"Hear what?" Morrell asked innocently.

"I wonder if we could drive down the Shenandoah Valley and take that place away from them," Abell said. Even though he was embarrassed, now that the cat was out of the bag he was letting it run around.

"Wouldn't take long to pull an assault force together." Morrell spoke with the assurance of a veteran field commander. "Don't know how hard the Confederates would fight back—hard as they can, I bet.

Now that they've used one bomb, how long do they need to build another one?"

"That I can't tell you, because I don't know. I wouldn't tell you even if I did, but I don't," Abell said.

"Days? Weeks? Months? Twenty minutes? I just have no idea."

"All right," Morrell said. The General Staff officer was liable to lie about something like that, but Morrell didn't think he was, not this time. He went on, "This would have been a lot worse if they'd brought it here by the government buildings instead of blowing it up across the river."

"I don't think they could have—it wouldn't have been easy, anyhow," Abell said. "We search autos and trucks before we let them in here. Auto bombs are bad enough, but put a couple of tons of high explosive in a truck…" He didn't finish, or need to. "One of those was

plenty to make us clamp down."

"Good for you, then. You just saved the President and Congress and us. I mean, I hope you did."

Morrell told him about the black rain. "Exactly how dangerous is that stuff, anyway?"

"We'll all find out. I don't know the details. I'm not sure anybody does." Abell looked down at his own soft, immaculately tended hands. "I do believe you were wise to wash off as much as you could. It's like X-rays: you want to keep the exposure to a minimum."

Morrell looked at his own hands and at his uniform, which still bore the marks of those unnatural drops. Were there little X-ray machines in them? Something like that, he supposed. Maybe there were more in the dust in the air. "We sure never learned any of this stuff at West Point," he said.

"Who knew back then?" John Abell said. "Nobody, that's who. Half of what we learned just went obsolete."

"More than half," Morrell said. "New rules from now on."

"If we live long enough," Abell said.

"Yeah. If." Morrell looked at his splotched uniform again. "I think the new Rule Number One is, *Don't get in a war with anybody who's got this damn bomb*."

"A little too late for that now," the General Staff officer pointed out.

"Don't remind me," Morrell said.

I 'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth."

This wasn't the familiar studio in Richmond, from which Jake Featherston had bellowed defiance at the world since the days when he was a discredited rabble-rouser at the head of a withering Freedom Party.

He had no idea whether that wireless studio still stood. He would have bet against it. Richmond had fallen, but the Confederates put up a hell of a fight before they finally pulled out.

Portsmouth, Virginia, then. It wasn't where Featherston wanted to be—he'd always wanted to broadcast in triumph from Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. *And I will yet, goddammit*, he thought savagely. But Portsmouth would have to do for now. The station had a strong signal, and somehow or other Saul Goldman had patched together a web to send Jake's words all over the CSA—and up into Yankeeland, too. If Saul wasn't a wizard, he'd do till a real one showed up.

The speech. "Truth is, we just showed the damnyankees what we can do. Just like the Kaiser—one bomb, and *boom!* A city's gone. Philadelphia will never be the same." He didn't exactly say the uranium bomb (no, from the reports he got from FitzBelmont, it was really a jovium bomb, whatever the hell jovium was) had blown up all of Philly. If his Confederate listeners wanted to think he'd said that, though, he wouldn't shed a tear.

"Maybe St. Louis the next time. Maybe Indianapolis or Chicago. Maybe New York City or Boston.

Maybe Denver or San Francisco. Who knows? But one bomb, and *boom!* No more city, whatever it is."

He didn't say when the next C.S. jovium bomb would go off. He had excellent reason for not saying anything about that: he had no idea. Henderson FitzBelmont didn't even want to guess. U.S. bombers were hitting Lexington harder than ever. Some of the bombs had armor-piercing noses, too, so they dug deep before going off. They were causing trouble.

But the CSA got in the first lick anyway!

"The damnyankees reckoned they had us down for the count," Jake gloated. "They forgot about how much we love…freedom! They'll never lick us, not while we can still load our guns and fire back. And we can."

As if on cue, cannon boomed in the distance. The studio insulation couldn't swallow all of that noise.

Some were antiaircraft guns banging away at the U.S. bombers that constantly pounded the whole Hampton Roads area. And others were the big guns from the few surviving Confederate warships, now turned against land targets rather than enemy cruisers and destroyers. The damnyankees were pushing toward Portsmouth and Norfolk by land. Anything that could slow them down, the Confederates were using.

Since some of that artillery noise was going out over the air, Featherston decided to make the most of it. “You hear that, people?” he said. “That noise shows we *are* still in the fight, and we’ll never quit. They say our country doesn’t have a right to live. I say they don’t have a right to kill it. They won’t, either. If you don’t believe me, ask what’s left of Philadelphia.”

He stepped away from the mike. Behind the glass wall that took up one side of the studio, the engineer gave him a thumbs-up. This wasn’t the fellow he’d worked with for so long in Richmond, but some stranger. Still, Jake thought he’d given a good speech, too. Nice to find out other folks could tell.

“Well done, Mr. President,” Saul Goldman said when Jake stepped out into the corridor. “What a speech can do, that one did.”

“Yeah.” Featherston wished the Director of Communications hadn’t put it like that. What a speech could do…A speech might make soldiers fight a little longer. It might make factory hands work a little harder. All that would help…some.

No speech in the world, though, could take back Kentucky or Tennessee. No speech in the world could take back Atlanta or Savannah, or unsever the divided body of the Confederacy. No speech could take back the rocket works in Huntsville, and no speech could keep Birmingham from falling any day now.

No speech, not to put too fine a point on it, could keep the Confederate States of America from being really and truly screwed. “Dammit,” Featherston said, “I didn’t reckon things’d end up like this.”

“Who would have, sir?” Goldman was loyal. Not only that, he didn’t aspire to the top spot himself, maybe because he knew damn well no Confederate general or Party bigwig would take orders from a potbellied little Hebe. The combination—and his skill at what he did—made him invaluable.

They also meant Jake could talk more freely to him than to anyone else except perhaps Lulu. “No, this ain’t how things were supposed to work,” the President repeated. “Swear to God, Saul, if the Yankees lick us, it’s on account of we don’t *deserve* to win, you know what I mean?”

“What can we do? We *have* to win,” Goldman said.

Featherston nodded. He had the same attitude himself. “We’ll keep fighting till we can’t fight any more, that’s what. And we won’t surrender, not ever,” he said. “If we ever stop fighting, it’ll only be on account of we got nobody left to fight with, by God.”

The Director of Communications nodded. “You’ve always been very determined. I knew it right from the first time you started broadcasting on the wireless.” He shook his head in wry wonder. “That’s more than twenty years ago now.”

“Sure as hell is,” Jake said. You could see those years in Goldman’s gray hair, in how little of it he had left, in his waistline and double chin. On the outside, time had dogged Featherston less harshly. He had lines on his face that hadn’t been there then, and his hairline had retreated at the temples, too. But he remained whipcord lean; hate burned too hot in him to let him settle down and get fat. “And you know what?” he went on. “Even if the war turns out rotten, I’ve had a good life. I’ve done most of the things I always aimed to do. How many men can say that, when you get right down to it?”

“Not many,” Goldman agreed.

“Damn right.” Featherston paused to light a cigarette. He didn’t like to smoke just before he went on the air; his voice was raspy enough anyway. “The folks who live down here after this war is over, whoever the hell they turn out to be, they won’t have to worry about nigger trouble ever again, no matter what. And that’s thanks to me, goddammit.” He jabbed a thumb at his own chest.

“Yes, Mr. President.”

But Goldman didn’t sound happy. Jake had artilleryman’s ear, and didn’t hear so well as he had once upon a time. While he might miss words, though, he was still dead keen for tone. “What’s eating you, Saul?” he asked.

“I guess it’s the way you put it, sir,” the Director of Communications said slowly. “I can see the Tsar talking about Jews like that, or the Ottoman Sultan talking about Armenians.”

When nobody flabbled much about the way the Sultan got rid of his Armenians, that had encouraged Jake to plan the same for the blacks in the CSA. He’d said as much in *Over Open Sights*, too. Because he liked Goldman, he was willing to believe the other man had just forgotten. “The Tsar’s a damn fool, even if he is on the same side as us,” he said. “Jews are white men, dammit. And so are Armenians…I

reckon. Can't talk about those folks the same way you do about niggers. Biggest mistake folks here ever made was shipping niggers over from Africa. Nobody ever tried to fix it…till me. And I damn well did."

Saul Goldman still didn't look convinced. Maybe his being Jewish was finally causing problems after all. His people had been persecuted unjustly. That might make it hard for him to see that Negroes really deserved what the Freedom Party was giving them. If he was getting pangs of conscience now, he'd sure taken his own sweet time doing it. Trains had been carrying blacks off to the camps since before the war started, and Saul's propaganda helped justify it to the Confederate people and to the world.

"C'mon outside," Jake told him. "Maybe you need some fresh air. It'll help clear your head."

"Maybe." Goldman didn't argue. Like anyone who bumped up against Jake Featherston, he'd soon come to realize arguing with him didn't do a damn bit of good.

It was a fine spring day. The savage heat and humidity that would close down soon hadn't yet descended on Portsmouth like a smothering blanket. A newly arrived hummingbird, ruby throat glittering, sucked nectar from a honeysuckle bush. The smell of growing things filled the air.

But so did nastier odors: the stench of death and the slightly less noxious stink of spilled fuel oil.

Yankee bombers had been punishing Hampton Roads ever since the war began. They had reason to, damn them; this was the most important Confederate naval installation on the Atlantic coast.

As in Richmond, few buildings had survived undamaged. Not many warships were fit to put to sea from here, either. Salvage crews were clearing a sunken cruiser and destroyer from the channel. That steel would find another use…if the Confederacy lasted long enough.

It will, dammit, Featherston thought, angry at himself for doubting. The sun sparkled off the waves—and off the thin, iridescent layer of fuel oil floating atop them. A moored cruiser, laid up with engine trouble and bomb damage, let go with a salvo of eight-inch shells. They'd come down on the damnyankees' heads soon enough.

A few U.S. airplanes buzzed over Hampton Roads. Jake took that for

granted nowadays. C.S. air power did what it could, but it couldn't do enough to hold the enemy at arm's length any more, not even above Virginia. By the sound of the engines, most of the engines were above Newport News, on the north side of the mouth of the James. Antiaircraft guns flung shells at them, but the bursts were too low to bring them down.

Jake pulled a notebook out of his breast pocket and wrote, *We need stronger AA*. The Confederate States needed lots of things right now. He had no idea when engineers could get around to designing a larger-caliber antiaircraft gun, let alone manufacture one, but it was on the list.

He looked down to put the notebook back in his pocket. That spared his eyes when a new sun sprang into being above Newport News, six or eight miles away from where he was standing. He suddenly had two shadows, the new one far blacker than the old. Slowly, the new shadow started to fade.

Saul Goldman had his hands clapped over his face—maybe he'd been looking the wrong way. Jake stared north in open-mouthed awe, even when a quick, fierce, hot blast of wind almost knocked him ass over teakettle. That toadstool cloud rising high into the sky was the most terrifying thing he'd ever seen, but it had a strange and dreadful beauty of its own.

Goldman took his hands away. He blinked. Tears ran down his face. "I can see you—sort of," he said. "Is…this what we did to Philadelphia?"

"Yeah." Jake's voice was soft and dreamy, almost as if he'd just had a woman. He might not have been able to stop the damnyankees from making their bomb, but in spite of everything he'd finished ahead of them. Both sides had staggered over the finish line. Still, the CSA won first prize.

"*Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'may rabo…*" Saul went on in a language Jake didn't know.

The President of the CSA hardly noticed. He'd struck first, and he'd struck at the enemy capital.

Newport News? He snapped his fingers. Who cared?

X

I 'm Jake Featherston, and I'm here to tell you the truth." The voice coming out of the wireless set and the boundless arrogance it carried were absolutely unmistakable. The President of the CSA went on, "If the Yankees reckoned they'd blow me up when they dropped their fancy bomb, they reckoned wrong, and they went and killed a big old pile of innocent women and babies, the way the murderers always do."

"Damn!" Flora Blackford turned off the wireless in disgust. Blasting Jake Featherston off the face of the earth was the only way she saw to end this war in a hurry. Blasting Newport News off the face of the earth had its points, but it was only one town among many.

The lies Featherston could tell! To listen to him, the U.S. uranium bomb was designed solely to slaughter civilians. What about the one his men had touched off right across the Schuylkill from downtown Philadelphia? Well, that one was an attack against the U.S. government and military. It was if you believed Featherston, anyhow. Of course, if you believed Featherston there you also likely believed him when he said ridding his country of Negroes was a good idea, when he said the USA had forced him into war, and when he said any number of other inflammatory and improbable things.

If Jake Featherston said he believed in God, it would be the best argument Flora could think of for either atheism or worshipping Satan, depending. She nodded to herself and wrote that down on a notepad. It would make a good line in a speech.

One thing Featherston had said even before the U.S. uranium bomb went off did seem to be true, worse luck: the United States hadn't caught the Confederate raiders who'd brought the bomb north.

Flora supposed those raiders wore U.S. uniforms and could sound as if they came from the USA. All the same, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War would have to look into the Army's failure to hunt them down.

But the Joint Committee had something else on the agenda this morning. They were going across the Schuylkill for a firsthand look at what the explosion of a uranium bomb was really like.

As she took a cab to Congressional Hall to meet with her colleagues, she couldn't help noticing that a lot of west-facing buildings had their paint scorched or seared off. On some, the paint had come through

intact only in patterns: taller structures closer to the blast had shielded part of the paint but not all.

“They say we blew that Featherston item right off the map,” the driver remarked. He seemed healthy enough, but he was at least ten years older than Flora, which put him in his mid-sixties at the youngest.

“It isn’t true,” she answered. “I just heard him on the wireless.”

“Oh,” the cabby said. “Well, that’s a…darn shame. Don’t hardly see how we’ll get anywhere till we smoke his bacon.”

“Neither do I,” Flora said sadly. “I wish I did.”

When the cab pulled up in front of Congressional Hall, she gave him a quarter tip, which pleased him almost as much as seeing Jake Featherston stuffed and mounted would have. “Much obliged, ma’am,” he said, touching a forefinger to the patent-leather brim of his cap. He was grinning as he zoomed away.

Flora wasn’t surprised to find Franklin Roosevelt there with the members of the Joint Committee.

“First we’ll see what one of these damn things can do,” he said. “Then you’ll rake me over the coals for not getting ours first and for not keeping the Confederates from finishing theirs.”

“Did you think they could beat us to it?” she asked.

He shook his big head. “No. I didn’t think they had a prayer, to tell you the truth. They’re formidable people. All the more reason for squashing them flat and making sure they never get up again.”

“Sounds good to me,” Flora said.

They went to the Schuylkill in a bus. Two Army officers helped Roosevelt out of his wheelchair and into a seat, then manhandled the chair aboard. “Considering some of the terrain we’ll be crossing, maybe I should have brought a tracked model,” he said, sounding a lot more cheerful than Flora could have under the same circumstances.

The bus didn’t cross at the closest bridge. Some of the steel supporting towers on that one had sagged a bit, and Army engineers were still trying to figure out whether it would stay up. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had to chug north to find one that was sound. Then the bus went back south and west till wrecked buildings and

rubble in the road made the driver stop.

“We’re not quite a mile from the center of the blast,” one of the officers said. “It gets worse from here.”

He wasn’t wrong. It got worse, and worse, and worse again. Before long, only what had been the stoutest, sturdiest buildings had any walls standing at all. Even they weren’t just scorched but half melted in a way Flora had never imagined, much less seen.

One of the Army officers pushed Franklin Roosevelt forward. When the rubble got too thick to let the man advance with the Assistant Secretary of War, his colleague would bend and grab the front of the wheelchair. Together, the two would get Roosevelt over the latest obstacle and push him on toward the next.

Steel and even granite lampposts sagged like candles in the hot sun. How hot had it been when the bomb went off? Flora had no idea—some physicists might know. Hot enough, plainly. Hot enough and then some.

Somewhere between half a mile and a quarter of a mile from what the officers were calling ground zero, there was no sidewalk or even rubble underfoot. Everything had been fused to what looked like rough, crude glass. It felt like hard, unyielding glass under Flora’s feet, too.

“My God,” she said over and over. She wasn’t the only one, either. She watched a Catholic Congressman cross himself, and another take out a rosary and move his lips in prayer. When you saw something like this, what could you do but pray? But wasn’t a God Who allowed such things deaf to mere blandishments?

“Can the Confederates do this to us again?” someone asked Roosevelt.

“Dear Lord, I hope not!” he exclaimed, which struck Flora as an honest, unguarded response. He went on, “To tell you the truth, I didn’t think they could do it once. But they’ve got an infiltrator—his name’s Potter—who’s so good, he’s scary. We think he led their team. And so…they surprised us, damn them.”

“Again,” Flora said.

Roosevelt nodded. “That’s right. They surprised us again. They almost ruined us when they went up into Ohio, and then they did…this. But

do you know what? They're going to lose the war anyway, even if we didn't fry Jake Featherston like an egg the way he deserves."

"Why didn't we?" a Senator asked.

"Well, we had intelligence he was in the Hampton Roads area, and I still believe he was," Roosevelt replied. "But he wasn't right where we thought he was, which is a shame."

"Why didn't we catch the people who did this?" Flora said. "The ones who brought the bomb up here, I mean. The wireless has been saying we haven't, and I want to know why not. They can't play chameleon that well…can they?"

"It seems they can," Roosevelt said morosely. "Just before I joined you at Congressional Hall, I had a report that Confederate wireless is claiming the bombers got out of the United States. I can't confirm that, and I don't know that I'll ever be able to, but I do know we don't have them."

"Yes, I've heard the Confederates making the same claim." Flora kicked at the sintered stuff under her feet. "We don't have any witnesses, do we?"

"None who've come forward," Franklin Roosevelt said. "I'm sure there were some, but when a bomb like this goes off…" He didn't finish. Flora nodded anyhow. When a bomb like this went off, it took a whole neighborhood with it. Anyone who saw the truck—she supposed it was a truck—the bomb arrived in and wondered about it died in the blast.

"From now on, they'll be calling the police and the bomb squad any time anything bigger than a bicycle breaks down," a Congressman said.

"That's already happened," Roosevelt said. "It's got cops all over the country jumping like fleas on a hot griddle, but I don't know what we can do about it. People are nervous. And I'm afraid they've got a right to be."

"Anyone need to see anything else?" the Army officer behind him asked. When nobody said yes, the man started pushing Roosevelt back toward the bus.

The members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War went back, too. The bus took them east over the Schuylkill to Philadelphia

General Hospital, the closest one to survive the blast. The Pennsylvania Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases, only a couple of blocks from ground zero, was now as one with Nineveh and Tyre: a tallish lump in the melted glass, no more.

“I think you people are a bunch of ghouls to rubberneck here,” a harried doctor said. “And I think you were crazy or stupid or both at once to rubberneck over there. Don’t you know that goddamn bomb left some kind of poison behind? We’ve had plenty of people who weren’t too bad, and then their hair falls out and they start bleeding internally—and out their noses and eyeballs and fingernails and, uh, rectums, too—and they just up and die. You want that?”

“Nobody told us,” a Senator said faintly.

“*Nu?* Now I’m telling you,” the doctor said. “And now I’ve got to do some work.”

Hearing that was plenty for Flora, but some of her colleagues wanted to see what the doctor was talking about. She went with them, and ended up wishing she hadn’t. People with ordinary injuries were heartbreaking enough, and the bomb caused plenty of those. If a window shotgunned you with knifelike shards of glass, or if your house fell down on you and you had to lie in and under the ruins till somebody pulled you out, you weren’t going to be in great shape.

But there were others, worse ones, who made her have a hard time sleeping that night, and for several nights afterwards. The people with what the nurses called uranium sickness, which had to be what the doctor described. And the burns…There were so many burns, and such horrible ones. How many hands with fingers fused together did she see, how many faces with melted noses, how many moaning sufferers with eyes boiled out of their heads?

She was glad to escape. She didn’t have the stomach for such things. One of her colleagues said,

“Well, at least we’ve paid the Confederates back for this.”

By then, the members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War were climbing into their bus.

Flora pointed back to the hospital. “I’m sure that makes the people in there very happy,” she said.

The Congressman gave her an odd look. “I don’t believe your heart’s

in this any more," he said.

"You've been a rock since the start. Why not now?"

"Because now I've seen the difference between enough and too much," Flora answered. "And what these bombs do is too much." She looked a challenge at him. "Go ahead—tell me I'm wrong." He didn't. He couldn't. She hadn't thought he would.

A bner Dowling had dreamt of seeing Richmond in his professional capacity ever since his West Point days. Those were long behind him now, but here he was, striding through the streets of the captured Confederate capital with not a care in the world…except for breaking his neck in the rubble, stepping on a mine, setting off a booby trap, or getting shot by one of the snipers who still haunted the ruins.

He turned to his adjutant. "You know, it's a funny thing," he said.

"What's that, sir?" Angelo Toricelli was sporting silver oak leaves instead of gold on his shoulders—the spoils of victory.

"We mashed this damn place flat, but next to what happened to Philadelphia and Newport News it's nothing but small change."

"Oh." The younger officer nodded. "Well, we had to do it the hard way, not all at once. If they'd held out a little longer, though…"

"Wouldn't have broken my heart," Dowling said. "I know that sounds cold, but it's the Lord's truth. A superbomb's about the only thing that would have got these people's attention."

As if to underscore the point, somebody with an automatic weapon opened up in the distance.

Dowling started to dive for cover, then checked himself: none of the bullets came anywhere near. A shattered storefront nearby had FREEDOM! painted on it. That graffito and CSA were everywhere in Richmond. The locals didn't like the idea of living under the Stars and Stripes for the first time since 1861.

Something moved back behind the storefront. Dowling's hand dropped to the .45 on his belt. It wasn't much of a weapon against an automatic Tredegar, but it was what he had. Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli's pistol leaped from its holster. "Come out of there!" he

barked.

The kid who did couldn't have been much above seven years old. He looked at the green-gray uniforms, then asked, "You a couple of nigger-lovin' damnyankees?" Before Dowling or Toricelli could answer, the kid went on, "Got any rations? I'm mighty hungry."

"Why should we feed you if you call us names?" Dowling asked.

"What names?" The little boy didn't get it. He'd probably never heard U.S. soldiers called anything else. He rubbed his belly. "Gimme some rations. Y'all got any deviled ham?"

"Here, kid." Toricelli took a can out of a pouch on his belt and tossed it to the boy. "Now you got some. Scoot." The boy disappeared with his prize. Looking faintly embarrassed at himself, Toricelli turned to Dowling. "Maybe he'll grow up civilized."

"Yeah, maybe," Dowling said, "but don't hold your breath."

High overhead, a swarm of bombers flew south like wintering birds. Below the James, the Confederates still fought as stubbornly as they could. If they wouldn't give up, what was there to do but keep pounding them till they didn't have any choice? Dowling wished he could see something, but he couldn't.

"Once we win, do we really want to try to run this place?" he asked, speaking more to God than to his adjutant.

But his adjutant was the one who answered: "What choice have we got, sir?"

Dowling wished he knew what to say to that. If the USA beat the CSA, what happened next? As far as Dowling could see, the USA had two choices. The United States could leave an independent Confederacy, or they could reunite North America under the Stars and Stripes. An independent Confederacy was dangerous. What had just happened to Philadelphia told how dangerous it was.

But if Virginia returned to the USA…well, what then? If all these states that had been their own nation for eighty-odd years returned to the one from which they'd seceded, wouldn't they spend years trying to break away again? Wouldn't there be guerrillas in the mountains and the woods? Wouldn't there be people bombs in the cities? Wouldn't the locals send Freedom Party bastards to Congress, the way Kentucky and Houston had between the wars?

“Winning this goddamn war will be almost as bad as losing it would have been,” Dowling said in a voice not far from despair.

“That crossed my mind, too, sir,” his adjutant said. “How many of these sons of bitches will we have to kill?”

“As many as it takes,” Dowling answered. “If we don’t kill any more than that just for the fun of it, our hands are…pretty clean, anyway.”

He had to look around to orient himself. The United States had knocked most of Richmond flat, while the Confederate defenders had flattened much of the rest. They’d fought hard. They never seemed to fight any other way. But there hadn’t been enough of them to keep U.S. soldiers from breaking in.

Jefferson Davis. Robert E. Lee. Stonewall Jackson. Old Pete Longstreet. Woodrow Wilson. The famous Confederates of ages past had to be spinning in their graves—unless U.S. bombs had already evicted them. A pity Jake Featherston wasn’t spinning in his. Well, the time for that was coming.

“You know, sir, in a way they’re lucky here,” Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli said.

“Oh, yeah? How’s that?” Dowling asked.

“It’s like I said before—if they’d kept fighting a little longer, they *would* have had a uranium bomb come down on their heads. Then they’d think what’s left here was paradise by comparison.”

“Well, you’re bound to be right about that,” Dowling said. “Except most of them wouldn’t be doing any thinking—”

“Like they do anyway,” his adjutant put in.

That stopped him, but only for a second. “Because they’d be dead,” he finished. A lot of them already were. The stench in the air left no doubt of that.

Stench or no stench, though, he’d done something a lot of the most important people in U.S. history never managed. He’d remembered long-gone Confederate dignitaries before. Now Lincoln and McClellan, James G. Blaine and John Pope, and Teddy Roosevelt and George Custer sprang to mind.

Not a one of them had ever set foot in Richmond. *But here I am, by God!* Dowling thought proudly.

“General! Hey, General Dowling, sir!” somebody behind him yelled. “Guess what, sir!”

“That doesn’t sound so good,” Angelo Toricelli said.

“No, it doesn’t.” Slowly, ponderously, Dowling turned. “I’m here. What is it?”

“Guess what?” the soldier said again, but then he told what: “We just found a whole family of nig—uh, Negroes, all safe and sound.”

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Dowling said. A few blacks had come out of hiding when U.S. soldiers entered Richmond, but not many. After the uprising here, Jake Featherston’s goons had been uncommonly thorough. Every surviving Negro seemed a separate surprise. “Who are they? How did they make it?”

“They were servants to some rich guy before the war,” the soldier answered. “Carter, I think his name was, from the Tarkas estate. Or maybe I’ve got it backwards—dunno for sure, sir. But anyway, he and his people have been hiding them ever since colored folks started having trouble here.”

“How about that?” Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli said. “Just when you think they’re all assholes, somebody goes and does something decent and fools you.”

“They’re human beings,” Dowling said. “They aren’t always the human beings we wish they were, but they’re human beings.” He raised his voice to call to the soldier: “Send this Carter fellow to my headquarters. I’d like to talk to him.”

“Will do, sir,” the man replied.

Dowling’s headquarters were in a tent in Capitol Square, not far from the remains of the statue of Albert Sidney Johnston. George Washington’s statue, smothered in sandbags, still stood nearby. He got back there just before Jack Carter arrived. The Virginian was tall and trim and handsome, with gray eyes, black hair, and weathered features; he looked to be some age between thirty-five and sixty.

“Welcome,” Dowling told him. “I’d like to shake your hand.”

Carter looked at him—looked through him, really. “I’m sorry, General, but I don’t care to shake yours.”

This wasn’t going to go the way Abner Dowling had thought it would. Whatever Carter was, he wasn’t the U.S. liberal somehow fallen into the CSA Dowling had thought him to be. “Maybe you’ll explain why,” the U.S. soldier said.

“Of course, sir. I’d be glad to,” Jack Carter replied. “My chiefest reason is that I am a Confederate patriot. I wish you were hundreds of miles from here, suing for peace from victorious Confederate armies.”

“That’s nice,” Dowling said. “Jake Featherston wishes the same thing. He won’t get his wish, and you won’t get yours. Santa Claus doesn’t have those in his sack.”

“Jake Featherston. Do me the courtesy, if you please, of not mentioning that name in my presence again.” Carter’s loathing might have been the most genteel Dowling had ever met, which made it no less real.

“Sorry about that. He’s still President of the Confederate States.”

“He’s an upstart, a backwoods bumpkin. His father was an overseer.” Jack Carter’s lip curled. That was one of those things people talked about but hardly ever saw. Dowling saw it now. Carter went on,

“My family has mattered in this state since before the Revolution.”

A light went on in Dowling’s head. “*That’s* why you saved your Negroes!”

“Yes, of course. They’ve served us for as long as we’ve served Virginia. To lose them to the vulgar excesses of that demagogue and his faction…” Carter shook his head. “No.”

“*Noblesse oblige*,” Dowling murmured.

“Mock me if you care to. We did what we thought right for them.”

Dowling wasn’t sure whether he was mocking or not. Without a doubt, Carter had risked his own life and his family’s to protect those of his servants. That almost required admiration. And yet…“Did you do anything for other colored people, Mr. Carter?”

“That was not my place,” Carter said simply. “But you’ll find I was not

the only one to take the measures I thought necessary."

He was bound to be right. Some other whites had hidden Negroes and helped them escape the Freedom Party's population reductions. Some had, yes, but not very many. "Maybe you'd better go,"

Dowling said.

Jack Carter took a step back. "You thought we might be friends because of what I did. I assure you, sir, I am more sincerely your enemy than Jake Featherston ever dreamt of being. Good day." He bowed, then stalked out.

He might be a more sincere enemy, but Jake Featherston made a more dangerous one. Carter was content to abhor from a distance. Featherston wasn't. He wanted to kill what he didn't like, and he was much too good at it.

A sergeant with the wireless patch on his left sleeve burst into the tent. "Paris, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Paris?" Dowling's first thought, absurdly, was of Helen of Troy.

The sergeant set him straight: "Yes, sir! Paris! The Kaiser just blew it to hell and gone. Eiffel Tower's nothing but a stump, the report says!"

"Jesus Christ!" Dowling said, and then, "Will anything still be standing by the time this damn war gets done?"

N obody messed with Lavochkin's Looters as they fought their way up the South Carolina coast toward Charleston. Nobody shot at them from ambush. Nobody gave them any guff when they went through a town. Confederate soldiers who surrendered to them seemed pathetically grateful to have the chance.

"You see?" Lieutenant Boris Lavochkin said. "You *can* put the fear of God in these assholes. You can, and we did."

Chester Martin didn't answer that. He pretended he didn't hear it. He wished he could pretend he'd had nothing to do with the massacre in Hardeeville. But he had. He was no damn good at lying to himself.

Even if he were, the nightmares that tore apart even his exhausted sleep would have made him stop trying.

He wasn't the only one who had them. Several guys in Lavochkin's platoon were jumpier than a cat at a Great Dane convention. Some replacements knew what was going on as soon as they came in. "Aren't you the guys who—?" they would say, and stop right there.

Others, more naïve or less plugged in, tried to figure out what was going on. They usually said something on the order of, "How come you guys are so weird?"

If anything bothered Lieutenant Lavochkin, he didn't show it. If anything, he was proud of what had happened in Hardeeville. "Nobody fucks with my outfit," he would tell anyone who wanted to listen. "I mean nobody. You fuck with us, tell the carver what you want on your goddamn headstone, 'cause you are all over with."

Captain Rhodes kept shaking his head. "I never expected anything like this to happen to me," he said one evening. He and Chester had got outside of some pretty good cherry brandy a Confederate had left behind. Booze blunted nightmares.

"War's a filthy business," Chester said. "God knows I saw that the last time around. I think the trenches were even worse than what we're doing now. For fighting in, I mean."

"Yeah, for fighting in," the company CO agreed. Or rather, half agreed, for he went on, "But what happened in Hardeeville, that wasn't fighting. That was just…murder for the fun of it. And what the Confederates are doing in those goddamn camps, that isn't fighting, either. That's murder for the fun of it, too, 'cause the smokes can't fight back. This war's filthier than the last one was. The horrible stuff then just kinda happened, 'cause they couldn't help it. This time, they're making it horrible on purpose."

He knew about the last war from what he'd read and what people told him. He wasn't anywhere near old enough to have fought in it. "You have a point, sir," Chester said. "Some of a point, anyway."

Disagreeing too openly with a superior didn't do. But he damn well *had* been through the Great War.

"What about the guys who started using gas? You think they weren't being horrible on purpose?"

"Well, you got me there," Rhodes admitted. Chester liked shooting the bull with him not least because he would admit somebody else had a

point. He didn't have anything close to Boris Lavochkin's messianic confidence in his own rightness…and righteousness. What was Lieutenant Lavochkin but a scale model of Jake Featherston?

Featherston had flushed a whole country down the toilet. Lavochkin had only a platoon to play with—so far. But Chester was part of the platoon. If the lieutenant threw it away, the first sergeant went with it.

He didn't want to think about that, so he took another swig. Yeah, cherry brandy made a good thought preventer. The bottle was damn near empty. He passed it to Captain Rhodes, who put the kibosh on *damn near*.

"Charleston up ahead," Chester said. "Won't be long now."

"One more city," Rhodes said.

"Oh, it's more than that." Chester knew he sounded shocked. But Rhodes would have gone to school in the lull of the 1920s. Back then, nobody thought you needed to remind anybody of just how and why the USA and CSA got to be mortal foes. They would stay peaceful and live happily ever after. And if pigs had wings…

Chester remembered his own school days, before the Great War. They pounded you over the head with the War of Secession then. They kept saying that one day the USA would pay the CSA back. And the United States did. And then the Confederate States had some backpaying to do. *And that's how come I'm sitting on my ass somewhere south of Charleston*, Chester thought.

"I wouldn't mind marching through there," he said. "Give them one in the eye for Fort Sumter, you know?"

"Well, yeah," Rhodes said. But it didn't mean so much to him. Martin could tell. He didn't have that *This is where it all began, and we'll damn well end it here, too* kind of feeling. Maybe Lieutenant Lavochkin would. Or maybe he hated the whole Confederacy equally. All things considered, Chester didn't want to ask him.

He woke with a headache the next morning. Strong coffee and a couple of aspirins helped. Incoming artillery, on the other hand…Even now, the Confederates counterattacked whenever they thought they could drive their foes back a couple of miles. A U.S. machine gun opened up no more than twenty yards from Chester. His head didn't explode, which only proved he was tougher than he thought.

Then he had to do some shooting of his own, and that was even worse. A lot of the Confederates didn't hit the dirt as fast as they should have. *New men*, Chester thought with an abstract sympathy that didn't keep him from killing them as fast as he could. They would have done the same to him if they could. But they'd got thrown into the fight too soon to know what they were doing, and a lot of them would never have the chance to learn now.

U.S. armor rattled up to put the final quietus on the Confederate attack. A couple of barrels had Negroes riding on them. The blacks had probably shown the barrel crews shortcuts through the coastal swamps. One of them gleefully blazed away at the men in butternut with a submachine gun. The cannons'

bellow made Chester dry-swallow three more aspirins.

The barrels pushed past the U.S. foot soldiers and went after the Confederates. "Come on!"

Lieutenant Lavochkin yelled. "Follow me! We don't leave them to do the work by themselves." He jumped out of his hole and loped along with the green-gray machines.

No matter what Chester thought about him, he was dead right there. Armor and infantry worked better as a team than either one did by itself. "Come on, guys!" Chester scrambled from his foxhole—he wasn't limber enough to leap the way the lieutenant did. "Let's go get those bastards!"

Some Confederates stayed stubborn to the end, took a few Yankees with them, and died. Some gave up as soon as they could. Most of those lived; killing in cold blood a poor, scared kid who only wanted to quit didn't come easy. The ones who hesitated were lost.

A youngster with a face full of zits and enormous gray eyes full of terror threw down his submachine gun and raised his hands high over his head. "Don't shoot me, Mr. Damnyankee!" he blubbered to Chester. He couldn't have been more than sixteen. "I give up!"

Chester gestured with the muzzle of his rifle. As it pointed to the young soldier's midsection, a dark stain spread across his crotch.

"Oh, Jesus!" he wailed. "I went and pissed myself!"

"It happens," Chester said. He'd done it himself in two wars now, but he wasn't going to tell that to a kid he was capturing. He gestured

with the rifle again. “Go on back there, and they’ll take care of you one way or another.”

“Thank you! Thank you! God bless you!” Hands still high, the boy trudged off toward the rear.

And, one way or another, they would take care of him. Maybe they’d take him all the way back to a POW camp. Or maybe they’d just shoot him. Whatever they did, it wasn’t Chester’s worry any more.

The damned Confederates kept fighting as hard as they could. Chester captured another guy who had to be older than he was. The National Assault Force soldier had lost his upper plate, and talked as if he had a mouthful of mush. “Maybe we fought each other the lasht time around,” he said.

“Could be,” Chester allowed. “I was on the Roanoke front, and then in northern Virginia. How about you?”

“Nope. I wash in Tenneshshee,” the Confederate retread said. “Never reckon you bashtards’d get into Shouf Carolina.”

“You fuck with us, Pops, and that’s what happens,” Chester told him. “Go on back to the rear. They’ll deal with you.”

“Uh-huh,” the old-timer said bleakly. Unlike the kid, he knew what could happen to him. But he went.

He’d passed the first key test: he hadn’t got killed out of hand. All the others would be easier. Of course, you only had to fail one and that was all she wrote.

“Come on!” Lieutenant Lavochkin shouted. “We push hard, we’ll be in Charleston tomorrow! Maybe even by sundown!” Chester thought he was right, too. Try as they would, the Confederates didn’t have enough to stop the men in green-gray.

All of which turned out to have nothing to do with anything. The wireless man shouted for Captain Rhodes: “Sir, we’ve got a stop order! Nobody’s supposed to advance past map square Gold-5.”

“Oh, yeah?” the company CO said. “Let me talk to Division.” He talked. He listened. He talked some more. Then he did some shouting of his own: “All troops halt! I say again, all troops halt! We have to stop right here.”

“No!” Lieutenant Lavochkin said. “We’ve got ’em licked! The brass can’t screw us out of this.”

“Lieutenant, the halt order comes straight from the War Department,” Captain Rhodes said. “You can write ’em a nasty letter when this is all over, but for now we are damn well going to halt.”

“No!” Lavochkin repeated.

“That is an order, Lieutenant.” Rhodes’ voice turned icy. “From the War Department and from me. Is that plain enough? Next stop, the stockade.”

“They can’t keep us out of Charleston!” Lavochkin raged. “The enemy hasn’t got a chance! The dumbshit brass hats in Philly don’t know diddly-squat. I’m going forward anyway, and taking my men with me. We’ll see you in Charleston, too.”

“No, sir,” Chester Martin said. Lavochkin stared at him, caught between fury and astonishment. But a first sergeant was there to keep a lieutenant in line. Chester went on, “I think we better follow the order.”

“You’ll pay for this, Sergeant,” Lavochkin said.

Chester shrugged. Slowly and deliberately, he sat down on the muddy ground and lit a cigarette. “I’ll take my chances…sir.” He wondered whether Lavochkin would go on by himself. The rest of the platoon was stopping. The lieutenant’s face had murder all over it, but he stopped, too.

He fumed and swore for the next three hours. “God damn it to hell, I could have been in Charleston by now. We all could,” he said. Chester didn’t think so, but the lieutenant wasn’t so far wrong. Why *had* the brass called a halt with the city so close?

When the fireball rose over Charleston, when the toadstool cloud—weirdly beautiful and weirdly terrifying—rose high above the town where the War of Secession started, he understood. So did Captain Rhodes. “Lieutenant, do you really want to get any closer to that place?” Rhodes asked.

“Uh, no, sir,” Boris Lavochkin answered in an unwontedly small voice.

“Do you think following orders might be a good idea every once in a while, even if you don’t happen to like them personally?” Captain

Rhodes persisted.

“Uh, yes, sir.”

“Congratulations. That *is* the right answer, Lieutenant. Do you realize you and whoever you dragged with you would have ended up dead if you did manage to break into Charleston?”

“Uh, yes, sir,” Lavochkin said again, still more softly than usual.

“Then remember that, goddammit,” Rhodes barked.

“Yes, sir,” the young lieutenant said one more time. And no doubt he would…for a while. How long?

Not long enough, I bet, Chester Martin thought.

P ortable wireless sets would have been a lot better if they lived up to their name. Luggable was more like it, as far as Leonard O’Doull was concerned. The damn things were too damn big and too damn heavy, and so were the batteries that powered them. Those batteries didn’t last long enough, either.

Still, having a wireless set was better than not having one, especially since U.S. Wireless Atlanta went on the air. USWA had the power to punch through all the jamming the Confederates put out, and it brought the word—or the U.S. version of the word—into the heartland of the CSA: over near Birmingham, for instance.

It also gave U.S. personnel something to listen to besides Confederate Connie. Her sultry voice kept reminding O’Doull he’d been away from home too damn long. He knew she told lies every time she opened her mouth. Like hundreds of thousands of other guys, he kept listening to her anyway. She sounded like bottled sex.

When he said something like that one evening, Eddie nodded. Then the corpsman said, “She’s probably sixty and fat and ugly.”

“Yeah, she probably is—life works that way too goddamn often,” O’Doull agreed. “But she sure *sounds* hot.”

“She doesn’t do that much for me,” Sergeant Goodson Lord said.

O’Doull reached for his wrist. “Do you have a pulse, man?” Sergeant Lord jerked his arm away. Not for the first time, O’Doull wondered

whether the senior medic was a fairy. How could you like women and not like Confederate Connie?

Eddie looked at his wristwatch. “Seven o’clock,” he said. “Time for the news.” He switched the wireless from Confederate Connie’s music to USWA.

He couldn’t have timed it better if he tried for a week. “Hello,” said a deep voice with a distinctive U.S. accent. “I’m Eric Sevareid, and I’m here to tell you the *real* truth.” All the men in the aid station grinned. How many times over how many years had they heard Jake Featherston open up a can of worms with that bullshit?

“Hope the Confederates listen up,” Goodson Lord said. “They’d better.” He might be a queer, but if he was, he was a patriotic queer. *Long as he doesn’t grab* my *ass, I can live with that*, O’Doull thought, and felt proud of his own tolerance.

“Today, President La Follette again called for the surrender of the Confederate States,” Sevareid said on the wireless. “In his words, ‘Only by quitting the war now can the CSA hope to escape destruction of a sort the world has never seen before. Newport News and Charleston are just the beginning. We *will* put an end to this evil regime one way or another. Which way that will be is the only thing left for existing Confederate officials to decide.’”

“That’s telling ’em!” Eddie said. He was as mild and inoffensive a little guy as ever came down the pike, but he hated the CSA. He wouldn’t have had to see so much misery if not for Jake Featherston.

“Featherston’s reply was, ‘We aren’t going to lay down for the United States, and they can’t make us do it,’” Sevareid continued. “He is believed to have broadcast that reply from somewhere in North Carolina. Richmond, of course, is in U.S. hands. Featherston narrowly escaped the Newport News bomb, and U.S. forces are now pushing toward Hampton Roads. Before long, he will be a president without a country.” The broadcaster’s voice showed unmistakable satisfaction.

“In the European half of the war, German drives against Russia continue,” Sevareid said. “The Tsar’s army shows signs of disintegration, but Petrograd Wireless—now broadcasting from Moscow after the destruction of Petrograd—denies reports that the Tsar is seeking an armistice from Germany.”

“If Russia bails out, England and France are done,” Lord opined.

“France is about done anyway,” Eddie said. “Bye-bye, gay Paree.” He waved.

Half a lifetime spent in the Republic of Quebec speaking French almost all the time made O’Doull look at France differently from most Americans. It was the sun around which Quebec revolved whether they were on the same side or not. And when the heart of the sun was torn out…

“Despite the loss of Paris, France also denies any plan to leave the conflict,” Eric Sevareid said. “The new King of France, Louis XIX, vows revenge against Germany. And Winston Churchill was quoted by the BBC as saying, ‘We can match the Hun bomb for bomb. Let him do his worst, and we shall do our best. With God’s help, it will be good enough.’”

“With him and Featherston, the bad guys have all the good talkers,” Sergeant Lord said. “Doesn’t seem fair.”

“Churchill’s a better speaker than Featherston any day,” O’Doull said. “He’s not such a bastard, either.”

“That’s what you say, Doc,” Eddie put in. “Ask the Kaiser, and I bet he’d tell you different.”

Since he was bound to be right—what did the Kaiser care about the CSA?—O’Doull didn’t argue with him. He gave his attention to the wireless: “Japan has sent Russia an ultimatum over several Siberian provinces. If the Tsar’s forces do not evacuate them, the Japanese threaten to take them by force.”

“Wait a minute!” Lord said. “The Japs and the Russians are on the same side.”

“They’re on the same side against us,” Leonard O’Doull said. “Otherwise? Forget it. The Japs already screwed England in Malaya. They’ve got Australia sweating bullets. They’re the ones who’ve done the best for themselves in this war. If they’d driven us out of the Sandwich Islands, nobody could ever touch

’em.”

“Won’t be easy, even the way things are,” Eddie said.

“They haven’t used any of these new superbombs yet,” O’Doull said. “I wonder how close they are to building one.”

“Well, if they weren’t working on ’em before, they sure as hell are now,” Goodson Lord said. That was another obvious truth.

Back before the Pacific War, people in the USA would have wondered whether the Japanese were smart enough to do something like that. Not any more. The Pacific War was a push, or as close as made no difference, but Japan bombed Los Angeles while the United States never laid a glove on the home islands. This time around, the United States hadn’t tried breaking through the Japs’ island barricade, either. All the fighting had been on U.S. soil and in U.S. waters. The United States was too busy fighting for their life against the Confederacy to give Japan more than a fraction of their attention.

It had been quiet up at the front. Suddenly, it wasn’t any more. Machine guns and automatic weapons started banging away. “It’s getting dark outside!” Lord exclaimed. “What the hell do they think they’re shooting at?”

“They don’t care,” O’Doull answered. “Somebody imagined he saw something, and as soon as one guy starts shooting they all open up.”

“We better get up there,” Eddie told his fellow corpsmen. They scurried out of the aid station. Before long, they’d likely be back with wounded men.

Eric Sevareid went on talking about the world and the USA. He had a good wireless voice, a voice that made you think he was your friend even though you’d never met him and never would. You wanted to believe what he said. You wanted to believe what Jake Featherston said, too, even after you knew what a liar he was. If he didn’t believe it himself, he put on one hell of an act.

“Will the corpsmen be able to find us in the dark?” Goodson Lord asked.

“Don’t know,” O’Doull answered. “But I’ll tell you something—I’m not gonna put on a light. If our own side doesn’t shoot us because of it, the enemy would.”

Not even fifteen minutes later, he heard the too-familiar shout of “Doc! Hey, Doc!” from somewhere off to the left.

“Hey, Eddie!” he yelled back. A battery of 105s was thundering behind the U.S. lines. Pretty soon, C.S. artillery would open up, too, or they’d start shooting off screaming meemies, and then hell really would be out to lunch.

In the meantime…“We got a sucking chest, Doc!” Eddie said.

O’Doull swore. That was a bad wound, one that would kill the soldier who had it unless everything went right—and might kill him anyway. “How are we fixed for plasma?” he asked Sergeant Lord.

“We’ve got enough,” Lord answered.

“Good,” O’Doull said. “Grab a big needle—chances are we’ll want to pour it in as fast as we can.”

Sweat made the corpsmen’s faces shine when they brought in the wounded soldier. Heat and humidity were starting to build toward summer. O’Doull noticed only out of the corner of his eye; most of his attention focused on the corporal on the stretcher. The man had bloody foam on his lips and nostrils.

Sure as hell, he’d taken one through the lung.

“Get him up on the table,” O’Doull told the corpsmen. To Goodson Lord, he said, “Get him under.”

“Right,” Lord said. He jammed the ether cone down on the noncom’s face as soon as the corpsmen put him in position. The plasma line went in next. The corporal already seemed unconscious, so O’Doull started cutting even before the anesthetic would have fully taken hold. Seconds counted here.

When he opened the guy up, he found the chest cavity full of blood. He hadn’t expected anything different. He had a fat rubber tube ready to go to siphon it out of there. How bad was the wound? Did he have time to tie off the major bleeders in the lung, or would he have to do something more drastic?

He needed only a moment to decide he couldn’t do anything that took a long time. His vorpal scalpel went snicker-snack and took out the bottom two lobes of the right lung. That left him with just a few vessels to tie off, and he knew where they were—he didn’t have to go looking for them. You could live with a lung and a third. You could live with one lung if you had to, though you wouldn’t have an easy time if you did anything strenuous for a living.

With the worst of it done, he repaired the wound in the corporal’s back. “What’s his BP?” he asked as he worked.

“It’s 95 over 68,” Goodson Lord answered, checking the cuff. “Not real great, but it’s pretty steady, anyway.”

“All right.” O’Doull dusted the inside of the chest cavity with sulfa powder, then started closing up.

He’d read in a journal that the powder probably helped less than people said it did. He used it anyhow.

Why not? It wouldn’t hurt.

“What do you think?” Sergeant Lord asked while he finished. He left a honking big drain in the incision. That could come out later.

“If shock doesn’t get him, if he doesn’t hemorrhage…” O’Doull shrugged, wishing for a cigarette.

“I’ve done what I can. Maybe he’ll make it. I can hope so, anyway.” The corporal would be dead for sure if he hadn’t got here. If he lived — *If he lives, score one for me*, O’Doull thought. That wasn’t a bad feeling to have, not even a little bit.

L ieutenant Michael Pound had fought through the Battle of Pittsburgh. He’d seen what a city looked like after two armies jumped on it with both feet. Now, on the outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama, he was seeing it again.

Confederate General Patton was holed up inside Birmingham, and he wasn’t coming out. The USA had forced him out of Atlanta, but he refused to pull what was left of his army out of the Alabama factory town. He refused to surrender, too. “If you want me, come and take me,” he told the U.S. officers who went in to parley with him.

“I don’t want to dig the son of a bitch out a block at a time,” Sergeant Mel Scullard grumbled.

“Expensive goddamn real estate, y’know?”

“Yeah.” Pound nodded. “Maybe we won’t have to.”

“How come, sir?” the gunner asked. “Can’t just leave him there.”

“No, but if we gave one to Newport News and we gave one to Charleston, how long will it be before we give one to Birmingham, too?” Pound said.

Scullard laughed a particularly nasty laugh. “’Bye, George!” he said, waving. “See you in hell, like you deserve!”

“That’d be pretty good, all right,” Joe Mouradian agreed. “But what if they blow us up, too? We ain’t that far outside of town ourselves.”

“Urk.” Pound hadn’t thought of that. The more he did, the more it worried him. The brass would be eager to get rid of Patton. After Jake Featherston and maybe Ferdinand Koenig, he was the most dangerous character the Confederacy had. If one of those superbombs took him out but hurt or maybe killed some of their own guys, how much would the fellows back in Philadelphia care? Not a whole hell of a lot, not unless a dedicated cynic like Michael Pound missed his guess.

He stuck his head out of the cupola for a quick looksee. He wasn’t sure what a superbomb could do to Birmingham that lots and lots of ordinary bombs and artillery shells hadn’t already done. The place had been torn up and burned more times than anybody could count. Everything that wasn’t green was gray or black, and just about all the walls he could see either listed or had chunks bitten out of them or both.

But the remnants of Patton’s Army of Kentucky still lurked in the ruins. They were stubborn men with automatic weapons and stovepipe rockets. They wouldn’t be winkled out easily or cheaply. Maybe a superbomb could get rid of them the way DDT got lice out of clothes.

As if to prove the Confederate States were still in business, somebody squeezed off a burst from one of their carnivorous machine guns. Pound ducked down into the barrel. He didn’t want to win a Purple Heart, not this late in the game. He didn’t want to buy a plot, either.

“Anything worth going after, sir?” Scullard asked.

“Not…right this minute,” Pound answered. He prided himself on being an aggressive soldier. And he was still ready to go forward whenever anybody told him to. Without anything obviously urgent ahead, though, he was just as well pleased to sit tight.

This must be what the end of the war feels like, he thought. Yeah, you were still willing. But how eager were you when pushing too hard might get you killed just when things wound down?

Sitting tight didn’t mean sticking his head in the sand like an ostrich. Standing up in the open cupola wasn’t smart right now. All right—next best thing, then. That was looking out through the periscopes

built into the cupola. He couldn't see as much with them as he could head and shoulders above there, but…

"Powaski!" he shouted to the bow gunner and wireless man. "Ten o'clock! Somebody sneaking up on us, maybe 150 yards!"

"I'm on it," Powaski answered over the intercom. The bow gun wasn't useful very often. Pound had heard talk that the next generation of barrels would dispense with it and go with a four-man crew instead of five. This once, though, it was liable to be a lifesaver.

It started to chatter now. Pound watched tracers spang off brickwork and fly every which way. The turret hummed as Scullard traversed it so he could bring the coaxial machine gun—and maybe the cannon, too—to bear.

Like any well-trained gunner, Powaski squeezed off short bursts. You didn't want to burn out your machine-gun barrel and have to change the son of a bitch. But the butternut bastard behind the bricks got the bow gunner's rhythm quicker than he had any business doing. As soon as Powaski eased off the trigger after a burst, he popped up and let fly with a stovepipe rocket.

"Aw, shit!" Pound said. It was a long shot for one of those babies. Maybe this one would fall short or fly wide left or right like a bad field goal…

Maybe it would, but it didn't. It caught the barrel right in the glacis plate. The thick armor there nearly kept the hollow-charge warhead from penetrating. *Nearly* mattered with everything but horseshoes and hand grenades—and, it turned out, hollow-charge warheads, too.

Powaski and Neyer both screamed. Pound didn't think either of them had a prayer of getting out. And inside a barrel, nine million different things could catch fire, especially when a white-hot gout of flame played across them.

Pound screamed himself: "Out!" Some of the things that could catch fire were his boots and his coveralls. They could, and they did. He screamed again, without words this time. Then he shot out through the cupola. He never remembered opening it, but he must have.

Next thing he knew, he was on the ground beside the burning barrel, on the ground and rolling away.

Mel Scullard had got out, too. More of his clothes than of Pound's

were burning.

Drop and roll and beat out the fire. That was what they taught you. Doing it while you were actually burning…Well, if you could do that, you were disciplined indeed. Michael Pound surprised himself—he was. He got some more burns on his hands putting out his boots and the legs to his coveralls, but he did it.

Easy, when it's either that or make an ash of yourself, he thought, and started to laugh. Then he realized it wasn't just his clothes—he'd been on fire, too. He howled like a wolf instead.

A foot soldier in green-gray ran up to Mel Scullard with a bucket of water and put him out. Scullard was already shrieking—yes, he'd got it worse than Pound. "Corpsman!" the soldier yelled, and then,

"Hold on for a second, buddy, and I'll give you a shot."

What about me? Pound wondered. He fumbled for the wound kit on his belt. That was a brand new hell—an inferno, in fact—because his hands *were* burned. He managed to get out the syringe and stick himself. He wanted instant relief. Hell, he wanted a whole new carcass. Every second he had to wait seemed an eternity. *Maybe this is what Einstein means about relativity*.

Inside the burning barrel, ammunition started cooking off. He hoped it wouldn't keep medics back.

The first team that got there carried Sergeant Scullard away. "We'll be right back for you, pal," a little bespectacled guy called to Pound. He didn't wait for an answer.

Right back turned out to be something more like fifteen minutes. By then, the morphine syrette had kicked in. It didn't make the pain disappear, but did shove it into a dark closet so Pound didn't have to give all of his attention to it. Anything was better than nothing.

Here came that same stretcher team. "Ease onto the litter, there," the little guy said—he seemed to be in charge. He looked at Pound's legs with experienced eyes. "Not *too* bad."

"It's never too bad when it happens to somebody else," Pound snarled, in no mood for sympathy.

The little guy blinked, then nodded. "Well, I'm not gonna tell you you're wrong." He turned to the other bearers. "On three…One…

Two…Three!” Up went the stretcher.

“How come we get the heavy guy *after* the light one, Eddie?” a bearer grumbled.

“’Cause we’re lucky, that’s why,” said the guy with the glasses. “Come on. Let’s move.”

They took Pound back to an aid station a few hundred yards behind the line. Morphine or no morphine, he yelled and swore whenever a stretcher-bearer missed a step. He felt ashamed at being such a slave to pain, which didn’t mean he could do anything about it.

Red crosses flew everywhere on and around the aid-station tent, which didn’t keep bullet holes from pockmarking the canvas. “Doc’s still busy with your buddy,” Eddie said. “Want another shot?”

“Yes, please!” Pound said, in lieu of grabbing him by the shirtfront and making him use the syrette. He hardly noticed the bite of the needle. The second shot really did send the pain off into some distant province.

He thought so, anyway, till they picked him up again and lugged him inside. That hurt in spite of all the morphine. “How’s Mel?” he asked the doctor, who was scrubbing his hands in an enameled metal basin.

“He’s the other burned man?” The doctor had a funny accent, half New England, half almost French-sounding. He waited for Pound to nod, then said, “I think he’ll make it. He won’t be happy for a while, though.” He turned to Eddie. “Get this one up on the table, and we’ll see how happy he’ll be.”

“Right, Doc,” Eddie said.

Somebody—a medic, Pound supposed—stuck an ether cone over his face. The gas didn’t just smell bad; it smelled poisonous. Even as consciousness faded, he tried to tear off the cone. They wouldn’t let him.

When he woke up, his legs hurt so bad, he wasn’t sure he’d really been anesthetized. But he lay in a bed somewhere that wasn’t the aid station. His groan brought a real, live female nurse. She wasn’t beautiful or anything, but she was the first woman from the USA Pound had seen in a devil of a long time.

“In pain?” she asked briskly.

“Yes,” he said, thinking, *What the hell do you expect?*

Even though she’d asked a dumb question, she had the right answer: “I’ll give you a shot.” As she injected him, she went on, “The tannic-acid dressings do hurt, I know, but you’ll heal much better because of them. Your burns won’t weep so much, and you’re less likely to get infected.”

“Oh, boy,” Pound said. Everything else seemed secondary to the way he felt. He tried to look around, but his eyes weren’t tracking real well yet. “Is Mel Scullard here?” he asked, adding, “He’s my gunner.”

“Yes, he’s three beds down,” the nurse said. “He hasn’t regained consciousness yet.”

Poor Mel. He did *get it worse than I did*, Pound thought. Then the morphine started to kick in. It struck faster now than it had right after he got burned. Maybe that meant he wasn’t fighting so much pain.

He could hope so, anyhow. “Ahh,” he said.

“We have to be careful with this stuff,” the nurse told him. “We don’t want you getting hooked.”

Right then, Pound couldn’t have cared less if he had to stick a needle in his arm every hour on the hour for the rest of his life. If it made him stop hurting, that struck him as a good deal. Down underneath, there wasn’t much difference between people and animals. War brought that out all kinds of ways. Pound wished like anything he hadn’t found out about this one at firsthand.

T he officers’ POW camp to which the Yankees took Jerry Dover was somewhere not far from Indianapolis. The train trip that brought him there wasn’t much fun, but it was instructive just the same.

Confederate wireless went on and on about all the sabotage that raiders behind U.S. lines were still perpetrating in Georgia and Tennessee and Kentucky.

Well, maybe they were. Even so, the train didn’t have to stop once. It didn’t even have to slow down.

As far as Dover could tell, it didn’t make any detours. Yes, bridges and overpasses were guarded. Yes, concrete blockhouses with machine guns sticking out of them protected some stretches of track. But trains

seemed to get wherever they needed to go, and to get there on time.

Jerry Dover's train also had no trouble crossing the Ohio. All the bridges across what had been the C.S.–U.S. border should have been prime targets. They probably were. If this one, near Evansville, had ever been hit, it had also been efficiently repaired.

Evansville itself had been bombed. But it hadn't been flattened, the way so many Confederate cities were. It lay in the western part of Indiana, well away from the early thrust north that almost won the war for the CSA.

"They should have done a better job here," complained the artillery captain sitting next to Dover.

"It's a big country," Dover said. "They couldn't get all of it."

"Well, they should have," the younger man repeated glumly.

He wasn't wrong. But if the United States turned out to be too big to let the Confederacy smash them all up, didn't that go a long way toward explaining why the war was going as it was? It sure looked that way to Dover.

Actually reaching the camp also told Dover his country was fighting out of its weight. He knew how the CSA housed prisoners of war. The Confederacy's camps were no sturdier than they had to be, because his country had nothing to spare. They probably didn't break Geneva Convention rules—you didn't want to give the enemy an excuse to take it out on POWs from your side—but he would have been amazed if they didn't bend them.

Camp Liberty! (with the exclamation point—a sardonic name if ever there was one) wasn't like that.

Dover wouldn't have wanted to assault it with anything less than an armored brigade. It didn't just have a barbed-wire perimeter: it had a wall and a moat, with barbed wire on top of the wall and outside the machine-gun towers beyond the water. You got in there, you weren't going anywhere.

Inside, the buildings were as solid as if they were meant to last a hundred years. Yes, Indiana had harder winters than Georgia, but even so…. The lumber and the brickwork and the labor the United Statescould afford to lavish on a place like this were daunting.

If the military clerk who signed him in were twenty-two years old and fit, Jerry Dover really would have been alarmed. But the man had to be at least sixty-five, with a white Kaiser Bill mustache the likes of which Dover hadn't seen since he quit fighting the damnyankees in 1917. Didn't this guy know they were as out of fashion as bustles? Evidently not; he seemed proud of his.

"You're in Barracks Twelve, and you'll sleep on cot seventeen," the clerk declared in harsh Midwestern tones. "Numbers are large. I don't think you can miss 'em."

After that, Dover felt he ought to get lost on general principles. He couldn't, though, because the Yankee was right. Directional signs told you just where everything was. Barracks 12 was a brick building with a poured-concrete floor. Starting a tunnel and keeping it hidden would be a bitch, or more likely impossible.

Two stout coal-burning stoves sat there to heat the hall in winter. A wireless set was playing an insipid Yankee tune when Dover walked in. The Confederates punished POWs for clandestine wirelesses. U.S.

authorities equipped the halls with them. That was daunting, too.

A colonel in his late thirties ambled up to Dover. "Howdy. I'm Kirby Smith Telford," he said, Texas in his voice and in his name. "I'm the senior officer hereabouts. They caught me outside of Chattanooga late in '43."

Jerry Dover introduced himself. "They shot up my command car and got me in front of Huntsville," he said. "I was up near Chattanooga, too. Had to clear out my supply dump quick as I could when the damnyankees' paratroops came down."

"Yeah, that screwed everything up, all right." Telford watched him with a blue-eyed directness that looked friendly but, Dover realized, wasn't. "You sound like you've been around. I reckon somebody in here'll be able to vouch for you."

"Vouch for me?" Dover echoed. "I'm a POW, for crying out loud. What the hell else am I gonna be?"

He didn't think the colonel would have an answer for him, but Kirby Smith Telford did: "Maybe a Yankee plant. They try it every now and then, see what they can find out about us. Pretty soon you'll find out who you can talk in front of and who you've got to watch yourself

with. I don't mean any offense, Colonel—don't get me wrong—but right now I don't know you from Adam, so I'll be careful what I say around you."

"However you please. I don't mean any offense, either, but right now I don't know how much difference it's gonna make," Dover said.

Telford's face clouded. "That's defeatist talk," he said stiffly.

"I've got news for you, Colonel. The damnyankees didn't capture me outside of Huntsville because we're winning."

The senior officer turned away from him without another word. Dover contemplated winning friends.

He'd just lost one. Even if somebody did vouch for him now, Telford wouldn't want much to do with him. *Well, too goddamn bad*, Dover thought. *If he doesn't like the truth, he can read a novel*.

He found cot 17. It was a better bed than the one he'd had in his own tent. It had a footlocker underneath. Dover didn't have much to stick in there, not after the soldiers who caught him relieved him of his chattels personal. They hadn't shot him, and they could have. Next to that, robbery was a detail.

He stretched out on the cot. He'd been sitting up ever since he got on the train somewhere near the Alabama–Georgia border. Two minutes later, he was snoring.

What might have been the voice of God—if God talked like a Yankee—blasted him awake: "Supper call! Supper call!" The camp had a PA system! He was sure the Confederates had never thought of that.

Supper wasn't fancy, but it wasn't bad: fried chicken, green beans (overcooked, of course—the ex-restaurateur did notice that), and French fries. You could take seconds. The apple pie for dessert was actually pretty good. Dover turned to the captain sitting next to him and said, "Hell of a note when the enemy feeds us better than our own side did."

"Yeah." The younger officer—except for some other obvious retreads, all the men in here were younger than Dover—looked surprised. "Hadn't thought about it like that, but you're right."

If I am, what does it mean? Dover didn't like any of the answers that occurred to him. The most obvious one was the one that was probably

true. The United States were enough richer than the Confederacy that they didn't have to worry about pennies and dimes. They could afford to do little things like build sturdy POW camps and give enemy soldiers decent rations. The CSA couldn't. The Confederates had enough trouble taking care of their own men.

Nothing to do after supper but troop back to the barracks hall. A couple of card games got started.

Two officers bent over a chess set. By the way they shot pieces back and forth as the game opened, they'd already played each other a great many times.

Dover played a fair game of checkers, but chess had never interested him. He figured he'd play poker or bridge one of these days, but he didn't feel like it now. He went up to Kirby Smith Telford, who was reading a news magazine and shaking his head every now and then. "Can I get some paper and a pencil?" Dover asked. "I'd like to let my family know I'm in one piece."

"They'll have a Red Cross wire by now," Telford said, which was likely true, but he handed Dover a sheet of cheap stationery imprinted CAMP LIBERTY!, an envelope, and a pencil. "Don't seal it when you're done," he warned. "Censors look over everything you write."

"I reckoned they would," Dover said. After more than ten years of Freedom Party rule in the CSA, he took censorship for granted. No reason the damnyankees wouldn't have it, too. "Thanks," he added, and went back to his own cot.

As he went, he felt Colonel Telford's eyes boring into his back. Did the other officer think he hadn't been respectful enough? Did they worry about that crap here? If they did, why, for God's sake? What difference did it make now? As for Dover, he'd cussed out generals. He was damned if he'd get all hot and bothered about somebody whose three stars didn't even have a wreath around them.

He wished he could have grabbed some table space. Writing at the cot was awkward, but he managed. *Dear Sally*, he wrote, *I bet you will have heard by now that I'm a POW. I'm up here in the USA, in Indiana. I'm not hurt. They're treating me all right. I love you and the kids. I'll see you when the war is over, I guess. XOXOXOX— Jerry*.

He looked at the letter. After a shrug, he nodded. It said everything he needed to say. He couldn't see anything the censor would flabble about. He folded the paper, put it in the envelope, and wrote his home

address on the outside. No matter what Telford had said, he started to lick the glue on the flap, but caught himself in time. *I'm a creature of habit, all right*, he thought.

Somebody turned on the wireless. Women sang about war bonds in yapping Yankee accents. They wouldn't have made Dover want to buy. When the advertisement ended, an announcer said, "And now the news."

None of the news was good, not if you were a Confederate POW. Dover assumed U.S. broadcasts bent things the same way his side did. But you could bend them only so far before you started looking ridiculous. When the newsman said Birmingham was surrounded, it probably was. When he said U.S.

soldiers had freed more starving political prisoners from rocket factories on the outskirts of Huntsville, they probably had. Using politicals for work like that sounded like something the Freedom Party would do. So did starving them.

And when the fellow said the Tsar was asking the Kaiser for an armistice, how could you doubt him?

After Petrograd went up in smoke, Russia had hung on longer than Jerry Dover thought it could. But all good things came to an end. England and France would be in even more trouble now that Germany didn't have to fight on two fronts.

Two Confederate cities had already gone up in smoke. So had a big part of Philadelphia. The war on this side of the Atlantic sounded like a game of last man standing. Who could make superbombs faster?

Who could get them where they needed to go? How long could the poor bastards on the other side stand getting pulverized?

Odds were the United States could make bombs faster. They made everything else faster. Odds were the USA could deliver the goods, too. How long could even Jake Featherston stay stubborn when death rained down on his country from the skies?

Camp Liberty! Dover winced. Odds were he'd get his liberty back when his country finished losing the war.

J onathan Moss savored the feeling of being at a forward air base again. He was a little southwest of Atlanta—not too far from where he'd pounded the ground with Gracchus' guerrillas. Comparing what he could do now with what he'd done then was funny, in a macabre way. The new turbo fighter could take him as far in an hour as he could march in a month.

Every time he flew off towards Alabama, he hoped to pay the Confederates back for all the time away from his specialty they'd cost him. The pilot who'd shot him down might have killed him instead. So might the soldiers who'd taken him prisoner. He didn't dwell on that. Resenting them for turning him into a guerrilla helped keep and hone his fighting edge.

His biggest trouble these days was finding someone to fight. The Confederates didn't—couldn't—put up many fighters any more. He had a pretty good notion of what his Screaming Eagle could do, but he wanted to put it through its paces against the best opposition the enemy could throw at it.

If the turbo wasn't going after the latest souped-up Hound Dogs or Razorbacks or Mules, it didn't have much point. It carried enough firepower to make a fair ground-attack aircraft, but only a fair one: it went so fast and covered so much ground, it couldn't linger and really work over a target. It had bomb racks, but using it as a fighter-bomber struck Moss as the equivalent of using a thoroughbred to pull a brewery wagon. Sure, you could do it, but other critters were better suited to the job.

And so he wished the United States had come up with it a year and a half earlier. It would have swept Confederate aircraft from the skies. As things worked out, enemy airplanes were few and far between anyhow, but getting them that way had taken a lot longer and cost a lot more.

His pulse quickened when he spotted a pair of Hound Dogs well below him. The newest Confederate aircraft got a performance boost by squirting wood alcohol into the fuel mix. They were a match for any U.S. piston-engined fighter. They weren't a match for a turbo—not even close.

He gave the fighter more throttle and pushed the stick forward. As he dove, he wondered what kind of pilots sat in those cockpits. These days, the Confederates had two types left: kids just out of flight school who might be good once they got some experience but didn't have it

yet, and veterans who'd lived through everything the USA could throw at them and who'd be dangerous flying a two-decker left over from the last war.

The way these guys stuck together, leader and wingman, told him right away that they'd been through the mill. So did the speed with which they spotted him. And so did the tight turns into which they threw their aircraft. The one thing a turbo couldn't do was dogfight a Hound Dog. You'd get in trouble if you tried. They'd turn inside you and get on your tail in nothing flat.

Even if they did, they wouldn't stay there long. In a turbo, you could run away from anything in the world except another turbo.

Moss climbed again for a new pass. The Hound Dogs dove for the deck. He followed them down, smiling when his airspeed indicator climbed over 500. No piston job could touch that, not even diving for all it was worth.

They knew he was after them, all right. They stuck together all the same. Yes, they'd been flying together awhile, or more than awhile. He had to guess which way they'd break when he got close. He chose right, and that was right. They started to turn so they could shoot back at him, but his thumb had already come down on the firing button atop the stick.

When the cannon boomed, pieces flew from the C.S. wingman's Hound Dog. The pilot struggled for control and lost. The fighter spun toward the ground. The pilot wouldn't have an easy time bailing out.

Meanwhile, though, the leader was shooting at Moss. Well, he was trying to: your sights wouldn't let you lead a turbo airplane. It just flew too fast. The leader's tracers went behind the turbo as it zipped past him.

Swinging through as tight a turn as he could make, Moss came back at the C.S. fighter. The Hound Dog didn't want any more of him. Its pilot wanted nothing more than to escape. And he did, too, getting down to treetop height and dodging and jinking in a way Moss couldn't hope to match.

"All right, buddy—I'll see you some other time." Inside his cockpit, Moss sketched a salute. That was a good flyer over there on the other side. Yeah, he was a Confederate son of a bitch, but he made one hell of a pilot.

Time to break off, then. When Moss pulled back on the stick, the turbo seemed to climb hand over hand. No prop job could come close to matching that performance. You had to trade speed for height, but the turbo had so much speed that it sacrificed much less than a Hound Dog or similar U.S. fighter. If Moss could have seen this in 1914…

He'd flown a two-decker pusher when the Great War broke out. That was the only way anyone had figured out to get a machine gun firing straight ahead. No interrupter gear to fire through the spinning prop, not yet. Moss laughed. That technology was turning obsolete right before his eyes.

He hadn't had a wireless in his pusher, either. He hadn't had an enclosed cockpit, let alone oxygen.

He hadn't worn a parachute. If he went down, he was a dead duck. And, with an airplane made of wood and canvas and glue and wire, with an engine almost aggressively unreliable, plenty of those early airplanes did go down, even with no enemies within miles.

He laughed once more. Now he sat behind sheet metal and bulletproof glass in an armored seat. He could fly more than twice as high as that pusher could have gone. But he still flew, or flew again, with aggressively unreliable engines. Maybe he could bail out now if they went south on him. On the other hand, maybe he couldn't.

Finding the airstrip from which he'd taken off was another adventure. Just any old field wouldn't do.

The turbo had a high takeoff and landing speed. It needed a lot of runway. One that was fine for prop jobs likely wouldn't let him land.

Instead of the base, he spotted another airplane: a Confederate Grasshopper buzzing along over U.S.

territory to see what it could see. Grasshoppers were marvelous little machines. They could hover in a strong headwind and land or take off in next to nothing. For artillery spotting or taking out casualties or sneaking in spies or saboteurs, they couldn't be beat. Moss knew that several captured specimens were wearing the U.S. eagle over crossed swords instead of the Confederate battle flag.

The guy in this one saw him coming before he got close enough to fire. It scooted out of the way with a turn no honest fighter could match. Try to shoot down a Grasshopper whose pilot knew you were

there and you'd end up talking to yourself. It was like trying to kill a butterfly with an axe.

More for the hell of it than any other reason, Moss made another pass. With effortless ease, the Grasshopper evaded him again. He didn't even bother opening fire. And the observer in the back of the light airplane's cockpit squeezed off a burst at him with his pintle-mounted machine gun. None of the tracers came close, but the defiant nose-thumbing—it couldn't be anything else—tickled Moss' funny bone. He would have had a better chance against the Grasshopper in his 1914 Curtiss pusher than he did in a Screaming Eagle.

He made it back to the airfield and eased the turbo down to the ground. You had to land gently. The nosewheel was less sturdy than it should have been; sometimes it would break off if you came down on it too hard. The first couple of pilots who'd discovered that would never learn anything else now.

"How'd it go?" a groundcrew man asked as Moss climbed down from the cockpit.

"Nailed a Hound Dog," he answered. The groundcrew techs cheered. Somebody pounded him on the back. He went on, "His buddy dove for the deck and got away—bastard was good. And I made a couple of runs at a Grasshopper, but *ffft!* " He squeezed his thumb and forefinger together, miming a watermelon seed squirting out between them.

"Take an even strain, Colonel," a groundcrew man said. "Those suckers'll drive you bugshit." The others also made sympathetic noises.

"How'd she perform?" another tech asked.

"Everything went fine this time around." Moss banged a fist off the side of his head in lieu of knocking wood. "Engines sounded good, gauges looked good all the way through, guns behaved themselves, nosewheel wasn't naughty." He turned to eye it. There it was, all right, looking as innocent as if its kind never, ever misbehaved. No matter how innocent it looked, he knew better.

Leaving the Screaming Eagle to the men who fed and watered it, he walked over to the headquarters tent to report more formally. His flight suit kept him warm up over thirty thousand feet. Here in the muggy warmth of Georgia spring, he felt as if it were steaming him.

Colonel Roy Wyden ran the turbo squadron. He was a boy wonder, just past thirty, with the ribbons for a Distinguished Service Cross and a Bronze Star among the fruit salad on his chest. When Moss told him he'd knocked down a C.S. fighter, Wyden reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a bottle and two glasses. He poured a couple of knocks of good Tennessee sipping whiskey—spoil of war—and said, "Way to go."

"Thank you, sir." Moss tasted the drink and added, "*Thank* you, sir." Wyden grinned at him—and seemed even younger. Moss went on, "I went after a Grasshopper, too, but he got away a lot easier than the Hound Dog's buddy."

"Those goddamn things. There ought to be a bounty on 'em," Wyden said. "A Screaming Eagle isn't exactly the weapon of choice against them, either."

"Tell me about it!" Moss exclaimed. "He fired at me. I never laid a glove on him. He's back there somewhere laughing his ass off."

"They'll drive you to drink, all right." As if to prove it, Wyden sipped from his own whiskey. He glanced over to Moss. "Does that Hound Dog make you an ace in both wars?"

"No, sir. I made it the first time, but I've only got three this round," Moss said. "I spent too damn long on the shelf in Andersonville and then running around with the black guerrillas."

"You ought to get some credit for that. It's not like you didn't hurt the Confederates while you were doing it."

"The war on the ground's an ugly business." Some of the memories that surfaced in Moss' mind made him finish his drink in a hurry. "*Our* war with the CSA is ugly. The one the Negroes are fighting…No quarter on either side there. And what Featherston's fuckers would have done to me for fighting on the Negroes' side—"

"Better not to think about that," Wyden broke in.

"Yeah. I know. Just staying alive took luck. If the Confederates hadn't had all of their regulars fighting the USA, they would've hunted us down pretty damn quick. Jake should've started in on his blacks sooner, or else left them alone till after the war. Trying to get rid of them at the same time as he was fighting us only screwed him up."

“He figured he’d whip us quick and then take care of the smokes.” Wyden got outside the last of his drink. “Tough shit, Eliot.”

For some reason, Moss thought that was the funniest thing he’d ever heard. He started giggling.

Nobody in the guerrilla band, not even Nick Cantarella, would have made that kind of joke. Moss hadn’t known how much he missed it till he heard it again.

W hen George Enos saw land off the *Oregon*’s port bow, he realized how much the war had changed.

That was the coast of North Carolina out there. Even six months earlier, coming so close would have been asking to get blown to pieces. Now some of the big wheels back in Philadelphia thought the Navy could get away with it.

George hoped like hell they were right.

Two battleships, two heavy cruisers, two escort carriers to give them air cover, the usual destroyers and supply ships that accompanied a flotilla: now they were paying a call on the Confederate States. The gamble was that the Confederates couldn’t pay a return call on them.

“Listen up, guys,” said Wally Fodor, the chief in charge of George’s antiaircraft guns. “We can put a hell of a lot of shells in the air. No goddamn Asskicker’s gonna make a monkey out of us, right?”

“Right!” the gun crew shouted. George didn’t know about the other guys, but he was as pumped up as he would have been if he were playing in a big football game. That was for glory and for cash, though. He was playing for his neck here.

Dive bombers roared off the baby flattops’ decks. They would send a message to a state that had mostly been shielded from the war ever since it started. U.S. fighters circled overhead. Any Confederate airplanes that tried to visit the flotilla would get a warm reception.

Smoothly, almost silently, the *Oregon*’s forward pair of triple turrets swung so the big guns bore to port. The barrels elevated a few degrees. “Brace yourselves!” Fodor yelled. He covered his ears with his hands and opened his mouth wide to help equalize the pressure inside his head.

In the nick of time, George did the same. The guns thundered, right over his head. He staggered—he couldn't help it. He felt as if somebody'd dropped a boulder on his noggin. In spite of his precautions, his ears wanted to move to a far country where things like this didn't happen. "Wow!" he said.

Shore had to be twenty miles away, maybe more. Some little while went by before the distant roar of bursting fourteen-inch shells came back to George's abused ears. He was amazed he heard them—or anything else.

"Good morning, Morehead City!" Wally Fodor whooped.

George imagined people going about their business, probably not even suspecting anything was wrong, when all of a sudden— *wham!* Fourteen hundred pounds of steel and high explosive coming down on your head could ruin your whole day.

The guns bellowed again. When George reached for his ears this time, it was to see if they were bleeding. They didn't seem to be. He couldn't imagine why not. The other battleship—she was the *Maine*—was firing, too. Those detonations were just loud. Or maybe his ears were so stunned that nothing this side of cataclysmic really registered.

"Well, if they didn't know we were in the neighborhood before, they damn well do now," Tom Thomas said. People mostly called the shell-jerker Ditto; George wondered what the devil his parents were thinking of.

More booms said the latest shells were striking home—or maybe those were bombs from the carriers'

airplanes. Smoke began to rise from the shore. The cruisers from the flotilla had to get closer to land than the battlewagons before opening up. Their eight-inch main armament didn't have the range of the bigger ships' heavier guns. Before long, they started firing, too.

"This is so neat!" Ditto said. "Ever think we could get away with shore bombardment?"

"We ain't got away with it yet," Fodor answered. George Enos was thinking the same thing. But he was the new kid on the block, so he kept his mouth shut. The gun chief went on, "When we steam out of aircraft range, then I'll be happy. And even after that there's fuckin' subs."

The main armament fired again. *Fired* was the word, too. The gouts of flame that shot from the muzzles were almost as long as the gun barrels. If God needed to light a cigar, this was where He'd do it.

Up above the bridge, the Y-ranging antenna spun round and round, round and round. It would spot enemy airplanes on the way in, anyway. How much good that would do…Well, knowing the bastards were coming was better than not knowing they were.

Inshore from the *Oregon*, not far from the cruisers, a tall column of water suddenly sprang into being.

A moment later, another one appeared, even closer to the U.S. warships.

"What the hell?" somebody said. "Those aren't bombs—we woulda got the word the bombers were loose."

"They must have shore guns," Wally Fodor said. "Soon as we spot the flashes, they're history. And they'll have a bitch of a time hitting us. We can move, but they're stuck where they're at."

A few more rounds fell near the cruisers. Then, as abruptly as they'd begun, they stopped. Either the Confederates had given up or U.S. gunfire put their cannon out of action. George neither knew nor cared what the right answer was. As long as those guns kept quiet, that suited him fine.

Then the PA system came to life with a crackle of static: "Now hear this! Now hear this! Enemy aircraft approaching from the north! Expect company in five or ten minutes!"

George's stomach knotted. *Here we go again*, he thought. He'd had a ship sunk under him; he knew disasters could happen. He didn't want to remember that, but he didn't see how he could help it, either.

"Just like a drill," Chief Fodor said. "They haven't got us yet, and we aren't about to let 'em start.

Right?"

"Right!" the gun crew shouted again. George was as loud as anybody. How loud he yelled made no difference in the bigger scheme of things, but it wasn't bad if it helped him feel a little better.

Some of the fighters that had been circling over the ships zipped away to see if they could meet up with the intruders before the C.S. airplanes got the chance to intrude. Others held their stations. If the enemy bombers got past the first wave of fighters, they still wouldn't have a free run at the flotilla.

"You've been through this before, right?" Fodor asked George. "I mean for real, not just for practice."

"Sure, Chief," George answered. "I've got it from the Japs and Featherston's fuckers and the limeys. I don't like it, but I can do it."

"That's all you need," the gun chief said. "I thought I remembered you lost your cherry, but I wanted to make sure."

Airplane engines scribed contrails across the sky. *Their wakes*, George thought. But the comparison with ships misled. It wasn't just that airplanes were so much faster. They also moved in three dimensions, not just two like surface ships.

A destroyer's antiaircraft guns started going off. So did the heavy cruisers'. Then George saw a couple of gull-winged ships that looked only too horribly familiar. "Asskickers!" he yelled, and his wasn't the only cry that rose.

One of the slow, ungainly Confederate dive bombers went down trailing smoke a moment after he shouted. It splashed into the Atlantic a mile or so from the *Oregon*, and kicked up more water than the shells the coastal guns had fired.

The other C.S. Mule bored in on the battleship. The *Oregon* heeled in as tight a turn as she could make, but she was large and cumbersome and much less nimble than, say, the *Josephus Daniels* would have been. That made her action less evasive than George wished it were.

He didn't have much time to worry about it. "Commence firing!" Wally Fodor shouted. The shell-jerkers started passing George ammo. He fed the twin 40mms' breeches like a man possessed.

Casings leaped from the guns and clattered on the deck. Bursts—puffs of black smoke—appeared all around the attacking airplane.

But it kept coming. The bomb under its belly dropped. The Asskicker zoomed past, hardly higher than the tops of the battleship's masts. The bomb burst on the ocean, less than fifty yards from the *Oregon*.

Water hit George like a fist in the face. Next thing he knew, he was flat on his back, partly on the deck, partly on Ditto Thomas, who'd stood right behind him. "Get— *glub!* —offa me, goddammit!"

Thomas spluttered, spitting out what looked like about half of the ocean.

"Yeah." George scrambled to his feet and gave Ditto a hand to haul him up, too. Ditto rubbed at his eyes. George's also stung from seawater. The other men from the gun crew were picking themselves up.

Wally Fodor had a cut on his ear that bloodied the shoulder of his tunic. Could you get a Purple Heart for something like that? George wouldn't lose any sleep over it, and he didn't think Wally would, either.

At that, the number three mount got off lucky. Guys were down at the next 40mm mount, too, only they weren't getting up again. A fragment of bomb casing had taken off one sailor's head like a guillotine blade. Another man was gutted as neatly as a fat cod on a fishing trawler. But cod didn't scream and try to put themselves back together. And you couldn't gaff a sailor and put him on ice in the hold, though it might have been a mercy.

Stretcher-bearers carried him below. The *Oregon* boasted not one but two real doctors, not just a pharmacist's mate like the *Josephus Daniels*. Could they do anything for a guy with his insides torn out?

Doctors were getting smarter all the time, and the fancy new drugs meant fever didn't always kill you.

Even so…

George didn't get the chance to brood about it. "Come on!" Fodor yelled. Did the CPO even know he was wounded? "Back to the gun! We may get another shot at the sonsabitches!"

Suddenly, though, the sky seemed bare of Confederate aircraft. One limped off toward the north, toward land, trailing smoke as it went. The rest—weren't there any more. A rubber raft bobbed on the surface of the Atlantic: somebody'd got out of one of them, anyhow.

The *Oregon*'s main armament boomed out another thunderous broadside. Half a minute later, the *Maine* also sent a dozen enormous

shells landward. The air attack had made them miss a beat, but no more.

“Jesus!” George said, his ears ringing. “Is that the best those sorry suckers can do?”

“Sure looks like it.” Chief Fodor sounded surprised, too. He noticed the blood on his shoulder, and did a professional-quality double take. “What the fuck happened here?”

“Maybe a splinter nicked you, or maybe you got hurt when the water knocked you down,” George answered.

“I be damned,” Fodor said. “I always heard about guys getting hurt without even knowing it, but I figured it was bullshit. Then it goes and happens to me. I be damned.”

A U.S. destroyer steamed toward the downed Confederate flier. Somebody on the destroyer’s deck threw the man a line. He didn’t climb it. After a minute or so, a sailor went down into the raft with him and rigged a sling. The men on deck hauled the Confederate up—he must have been wounded. He was probably lucky not to be strawberry jam. Then they lowered the line to their buddy. Up he swarmed, agile as a monkey.

The big guns on both battlewagons bellowed again. If that was all the Confederates could do to stop them…If that was all, the Confederacy really was coming apart at the seams.

P aperwork. Jefferson Pinkard hated paperwork. He’d never got used to it. He didn’t like being a paper-shuffler and a pen-pusher. He could manage it, but he didn’t like it. Working in a steel mill for all those years left him with the driving urge to go out there and *do* things, dammit.

To soothe himself, he kept the wireless going. If he listened with half an ear to one of the Houston stations playing music, he didn’t have to pay so much attention to all the nitpicking detail Richmond wanted from him. Muttering, he shook his head. No, not Richmond. Richmond was gone, lost, captured.

Jake Featherston and what was left of the Confederate government were somewhere down in North Carolina now, still screaming defiance at the damnyankees and at the world.

Camp Humble went right on reducing population. Trains still rolled in

from Louisiana and Mississippi and Arkansas and east Texas. Ships brought Negroes from Cuba to the Texas ports. He aimed to go right on doing his job till somebody set over him told him to stop.

Without warning, the song he was listening to broke off. An announcer came on the air: “We interrupt this program for a special proclamation from the Governor of the great state of Texas, the Honorable Wright Patman. Governor Patman!”

“What the—?” Jeff said. Something had hit the fan, that was for damn sure.

“Citizens of Texas!” Governor Patman said. “A hundred years ago, this state was an independent republic, owing allegiance to no nation but itself. We joined first the USA and then the CSA, but we have never forgotten our own proud tradition of…freedom.” That was the Party slogan, yeah, but he didn’t use it the way a good Party man would.

Jeff muttered, “Uh-oh.” No, he didn’t like the way Patman used it at all.

Sure as the devil, the Governor of Texas went on, “The Confederate government has brought us nothing but ruin and a losing war. The United States have already stolen part of our territory and revived the so-called state of Houston that blighted the map after the last war. They have killed our soldiers, bombed our cities, and ruined our trade. The Confederate government is powerless to stop them or even slow them down.”

“Uh-oh,” Pinkard said, and then, for good measure, “Aw, shit.”

“Since the Confederate government cannot protect us, it is no longer a fit government for the great people of Texas,” Governor Patman said. “Accordingly, by my order, the state of Texas is from this day forward no longer part of the so-called Confederate States of America. I hereby restore the Republic of Texas as a free and independent nation, on an equal footing with the Confederate States, the United States, the Empire of Mexico, and all the other free and independent nations of the world.

“As my first act as provisional President of the Republic of Texas, I have asked the government of the United States for an armistice. They have recognized my administration—”

“Jesus! I fuckin’ bet they have!” Jeff exclaimed. What a mess! And he was, literally, in the middle of it.

“—and agreed to a cease-fire. All Texas soldiers are ordered to no longer obey the so-called Confederate authorities. All other Confederate troops within the borders of the Republic of Texas may hold in place and be disarmed by Texas authorities, or may withdraw to territory still under the rule of the so-called Confederate States. The United States have agreed that the forces of the Republic of Texas are not obliged to hinder this retreat, nor will we—so long as it remains peaceful and orderly. U.S. forces reserve the right to attack retreating C.S. forces, however, and neither will we interfere with them on the ground, in the air, or at sea.

“At this point in time, that is all. As peace returns at last after the madness of the Featherston administration, I call on God Almighty to bless the great Lone Star Republic of Texas. Thank you, and good afternoon.”

“That was Governor—uh, excuse me, President—Wright Patman of the, uh, Republic of Texas.” The wireless announcer sounded as flummoxed as everybody else had to be. He went on, “President Patman has brought peace to Texas, and what could be a more precious gift?”

“He’s bugged out on the war, that’s what he’s done, the goddamn traitor son of a bitch!” Jeff Pinkard shouted, as if Patman and the announcer were there to hear him.

He remembered what Mayor Doggett had told him to do if the damnyankees got close: take his family and get the hell out in a civilian auto and civilian clothes. The advice looked a lot better now than it had then. But Raymond was tiny, and Edith still wasn’t over birthing him, and…

The telephone rang. If that was Edith, and she’d listened to the wireless…“Pinkard here.”

It wasn’t Edith. It was Vern Green, and *he’d* listened to the wireless. “Fuck a duck!” the guard chief cried. “What the hell are we gonna do, sir? Can we get outa here? The damnyankees’ll crucify us if they catch us.”

“They’re still way the hell over on the other side of the state,” Jeff said uneasily.

“All the better reason to get out now, while we still can,” Green said. “That asshole Patman, he’s surrendering to them, near as makes no

difference. There'll be U.S. soldiers all over Texas fast as they can move."

Part of Jeff said Vern Green was flabbling over nothing. There wouldn't be U.S. soldiers *all over* Texas no matter what—the state was too damn big for that. But there might be U.S. soldiers here at Camp Humble in the next day or two. The Yankees wanted this place closed down, and they wanted that bad.

He'd never dreamt he would have to worry about something like this. "Anybody who wants to disappear, I won't say boo," he said slowly. "Do what you think you gotta, that's all. Hell, you may be right."

"Much obliged, sir," Green said, and hung up. Jeff knew what that meant: he planned on bailing out.

How much did what he planned matter? A guard knocked on Jeff 's door. When the camp commandant let him in, the man said, "Sir, there's a Texas Ranger captain named Hezekiah Carroll out there, and he wants to see you."

Pinkard didn't want to see the biblically named Texas Ranger. What choice did he have, though? "All right," he growled. "Bring him on in."

Carroll was tall and weathered and tough-looking. But if he was as tough as he looked, why wasn't he in the Army? Before Jeff could ask him, he said, "You will have heard of the reestablishment of the Republic of Texas?"

"Yeah, I've heard of it. Getting out while the getting's good, are you?" Jeff said.

"Yes," Carroll answered baldly. "You will also have heard that Confederate troops may evacuate?"

"I heard that, too, all right," Jeff allowed. "What about it?"

"It doesn't mean you. That's part of the deal Governor—uh, President—Patman cut with the Yankees," Carroll said. "They say Confederate combat soldiers are welcome to leave. But you people—they want y'all. Crimes against humanity, they call it."

"Oh, my ass!" Pinkard exploded. "You gonna tell me you're sorry we're taking care of our nigger troubles? Yeah, sure—go ahead. Make

me believe it."

Captain Carroll turned red. All the same, he said, "What I think hasn't got diddly-squat to do with it. I know damn well this is the best deal Texas can get. If you and your people try to evacuate this camp, we will stop you, and that's the God's truth."

"Christ! I never thought my own side would fuck me!" Jeff tried to figure out what to do. With all the machine guns in the guard towers, he could hold off the Rangers, or anybody else who didn't have artillery, for a long time. But what good did that do him when he needed to get the hell out of here?

None. Zero. Zip.

Maybe he could mount machine guns in some of the camp trucks and shoot his way past the Rangers.

Yeah, it might work once, but it was more than a hundred miles from Humble to the Louisiana border.

Could he win a running fight? Not a chance in church, and he knew it.

"I am a citizen of the Republic of Texas, and my country has an armistice with the USA," Carroll said.

"I have to abide by the terms of the armistice, and I will. I'm only following orders, same as you were doing here. But the country that gave you orders is going down the crapper, and mine's just getting started."

Only following orders. That was the main defense Pinkard had if he ever did get in trouble for what the camps did. It sounded pretty goddamn hollow when somebody else threw it in his face.

"Listen—let's do it like this." He wasn't used to pleading; he hadn't had to do it for a lot of years. He gave it his best shot, though: "We can keep it unofficial. Let us slide on out of here a few at a time—how's that? Then nobody'll be any wiser when we're gone, nobody'll get in any trouble, and we can get back to doing what needs doing once we're somewhere that's still fighting." He didn't even cuss out Wright Patman, no matter how much he wanted to.

But Hezekiah Carroll shook his head. "Sorry about that—I *am* sorry about that. I would if I could, but I can't, so I won't. I don't reckon you understand how bad the damnyankees want you. They told the—

the President they would bomb the living shit out of Austin if you got away."

"They're a bunch of nigger-lovers, that's why! And you're throwing in with 'em!" Jeff couldn't keep his temper down forever.

"What we are is out of the war. You think we want the damnyankees dropping one of those superbombs on Dallas? You think we want 'em to drop one on Houston or Austin or San Antone? You better think again, buddy."

"But—But—Christ on His cross, you're cutting the CSA off from Sonora and Chihuahua. You can't do that!"

"No, huh? Just watch us," Captain Carroll said. "White folks don't need all those greasers around anyway. If Francisco José wants 'em back, he's welcome to 'em, far as I'm concerned."

Realization smote Pinkard. "If we were smokin' *their* sorry asses, I bet you'd let us go!" he said.

Carroll neither affirmed nor denied. He just said, "Things are the way they are. And so you know, the Yankees are flying in a team to take charge of this place. They ought to be landing in Houston pretty soon. Won't be more than a couple of hours before they're here. Whatever you've got to say from now on, you can say to them." He left the office without a salute, without a nod, without a backwards glance.

Vern Green burst in a moment later. "What are we gonna do?" he cried.

Jeff told him what the Texas Ranger had said. "If you and the guards still want to try and skip, I still won't say boo," he finished. "Maybe you'll get away, maybe you'll get your ass shot off. I don't know one way or the other. With Edith and the kids here, I'm fuckin' stuck."

"Damnyankees'll hang you," Green warned.

"How can they? I was doing what Ferd Koenig told me to do," Jeff said. "Could I say, 'No, we got to treat the niggers better'? He'd shoot me if I did. 'Sides, the job needed doing. You know it as well as I do."

"Sure. But the Yankees won't." Green sketched a salute. "I am gonna try and get away. Wish me luck."

“Luck,” Jeff said. Not much later, he heard spatters of gunfire in the near distance. He had a couple of drinks at his desk.

Two and a half hours after that, a man in a green-gray uniform with gold oak leaves on his shoulder straps walked in. “You’re Brigade Leader Pinkard?” he asked in U.S. accents.

“That’s right,” Jeff said, a little surprised the Yankee officer got the Party title right.

“Major Don Little, U.S. Army,” the other officer said, and then, “You’re under arrest.”

A rtillery fire came down near Armstrong Grimes’ platoon—not *real* close, but close enough to make them pucker some. Through the man-made thunder, Squidface said, “How come we ain’t in Texas?”

“How come you ain’t a beautiful woman?” Armstrong answered. “How come you ain’t even an ugly woman, for cryin’ out loud? If you didn’t know how to handle a gun, you’d be fuckin’ useless.”

“Ah, you’ve been talkin’ to my old man again,” Squidface said in mock disgust.

He remained stubbornly male. And central Alabama, where the war was very much alive, remained nothing like the state—or even the Republic—of Texas, where it had died. Instead, soldiers on both sides were doing the dying here. The Confederates didn’t have enough to keep the United States away from Selma and Montgomery, but they didn’t seem to know it yet.

Armstrong didn’t mind showing them. He did mind getting killed or maimed on a bright spring day when the air smelled green and the birds sang and the bastards in butternut couldn’t possibly win even if they wiped out every U.S. soldier south of Birmingham. Why couldn’t they see the shit had hit the fan and just give up? That would have suited him fine.

But the Confederates down here were a stubborn bunch. They didn’t just fight back—they kept throwing in local counterattacks. A little farther east, one of those had driven U.S. forces back ten or fifteen miles before it finally ran out of steam. By now, the enemy had lost all that ground again, and more besides. He’d thrown away men and barrels he couldn’t possibly hope to replace. What the hell was the point? Armstrong couldn’t see it.

Some of the shells from his latest barrage sounded funny. So did the bursts they made when they hit the ground. “Oh, for Chrissake!” Armstrong said, almost as disgusted with the men he was facing as he had been when he fought the Mormons. He raised his voice: “Gas!” he yelled. “They’re throwing gas at us!” Why were they bothering? What was it supposed to prove?

He put on his mask. It was annoying. It was inconvenient. If they wanted to attack here, they’d have to wear masks, too, and be annoyed and inconvenienced. And his own side’s gunners would probably give them a big, lethal dose as soon as they found out this crap was going on. *Serve ’em right*, Armstrong thought, sucking in air that smelled like rubber instead of spring.

Off to the left, somebody—he thought it was Herk, but how could you be sure when a guy was talking through a mask?—shouted, “Here they come!”

Armstrong peered in that direction through porthole lenses that needed cleaning. Sure as hell, the Confederates *were* pushing forward, their foot soldiers backed up by a couple of assault guns and one of their fearsome new barrels. Somebody must have fed their CO raw meat.

A U.S. machine gun started chattering. The masked soldiers in butternut dove for cover. The barrel’s massive turret swung toward the machine-gun nest. The main armament fired once. Sandbags and somebody’s leg flew through the air. The machine gun fell silent.

That did the Confederates less good than it would have earlier in the war. Armstrong had a captured automatic rifle. Squidface had his own gun. Herk was banging away with a C.S. submachine gun. Plenty of other captured weapons and U.S.-issue Tommy guns gave the guys on Armstrong’s side a lot more firepower than they would have had even a year earlier.

Mortar rounds started landing among the unhappy C.S. soldiers, too. Armstrong whooped. “See how you like it, you bastards!” he shouted. “It’s better to give than to receive!” Then a U.S. barrel put an AP

round through an assault gun’s glacis plate. The assault gun slewed sideways, sending greasy black smoke high into the sky. He whooped again. That pillar of smoke marked four men’s funeral pyres. They weren’t his buddies, so he didn’t care.

A moment later, the other assault gun hit a mine and stopped with a

track blown off. That was the signal for every U.S. barrel in the neighborhood to open up on it. It didn't last long—what could have?

Recognizing the minefield, the enemy barrel's crew also stopped. A couple of rounds hit it, but bounced off. Armstrong stopped whooping and swore. AP rounds *could* penetrate those monsters—he'd seen it happen. But it didn't happen all the time.

And the metal monster started picking off U.S. barrels, one after another. Its big gun could penetrate any U.S. machine's frontal armor with no trouble at all. Still swearing, Armstrong wished for a stovepipe rocket like the ones Jake Featherston's men carried. If any of those had been captured, they didn't seem to be in the neighborhood. Too bad.

How come the Confederates get all the good stuff first? he wondered. They did, damn them.

They'd carried automatic weapons against Springfields. They had the screaming meemies and the stovepipe antibarrel rockets and the long-range jobs. They even used the superbomb first.

And a whole fat lot of good it did them, because there weren't quite enough of them anyway, not if they wanted to conquer a country that could put three times as many soldiers in the field. He supposed Featherston's fuckers got the fancy weapons because they really needed them. The USA muddled along with ordinary stuff, and eventually got the job done.

The local Confederate attack bogged down when the big, nasty barrel stopped going forward. The C.S. infantry knew they couldn't push their foes out of the way without armor support. They went to ground and dug in. Artillery and mortar rounds rained down on them. Dig as they would, their holes weren't so good as the ones they would have had in prepared defensive positions.

Two fighter-bombers zoomed in and ripple-fired rockets from underwing racks. One of those, or maybe more than one, hit the C.S. barrel. The rocket got through the armor where the AP rounds hadn't.

The barrel started to burn. Somebody bailed out of the turret. Every U.S. soldier around fired at the barrelman, but Armstrong thought he made it to cover. *Too bad*, he thought.

Whistles blew. Somebody who sounded like an officer yelled, "Let's

push ’em back, boys! With their armor gone, they won’t even slow us down.” Then he said the magic words: “Follow me!”

If he was willing to put his ass on the line, he could get soldiers to go with him. “Come on!” Armstrong called, scrambling out of his own scrape in the ground. “Let’s go get ’em! We can do it!”

And damned if they couldn’t. Oh, some of the Confederates fought. There were always diehards who wouldn’t quit till the last dog was hung. But there weren’t very many, not this time around. Some of the men in butternut drew back toward their own start line. Others raised their hands as U.S. soldiers drew near.

“Don’t shoot me! Sweet Jesus, buddy, I don’t want to die!” an unshaven corporal called to Armstrong. Another Confederate soldier near him also held his hands high.

“Waddaya think?” Armstrong asked Squidface.

“We can take ’em down the road,” Squidface answered.

“’Bout what I figured,” Armstrong agreed. He raised his voice: “Herk! Take these guys down the road.”

“You sure, Sarge?” Herk asked.

“Yeah—go on. Go deal with ’em,” Armstrong said.

“Right.” Herk gestured with his captured weapon. “Come on, you two.” The Confederate soldiers eagerly went with him. After he led them around behind some trees, the submachine gun stuttered out two short bursts. He came back. “It’s taken care of,” he said.

“Attaboy. C’mon. Let’s go,” Armstrong told him. If you told one of your men to take somebody back, you really meant to make a prisoner of him. If you told your guy to take him down the road…Well, it was a hard old war. Sometimes you didn’t have the manpower or the time to deal with POWs. And so—you didn’t, that was all.

Somebody up in the middle of the fighting was on the horn to U.S. artillery. The USA didn’t have screaming meemies, but battery after battery of 105s did a hell of a job. The barrage moved in front of the advancing soldiers, and fell with terrible power on the line from which the Confederates had jumped off. They couldn’t hold that line, not with the men they had left after the counterattack failed. They would have done better not to try to hit back at the U.S. forces.

Sunset found Armstrong and his men several miles farther south than they had been at daybreak. He camped in an empty sharecropper village. He'd seen a lot of those here. This was supposed to be the Black Belt, the heart of Alabama Negro life. But the heart had been ripped out of the state.

Or so he thought, till a sentry said, "Sarge, we got niggers comin' in—maybe half a dozen."

"Fuck me," Armstrong said. That didn't happen every day. "Well, go on, Snake—bring 'em in. We can spare the rations for 'em."

"Right," Snake said—he had a rearing rattler tattooed on his left forearm. He came back a few minutes later with two skinny black men, an even skinnier woman, and three kids who were nothing but skin and bones…and, in the firelight, eyeballs and teeth.

The soldiers gave them food, which got their immediate undivided attention. After the Negroes had eaten enough to blunt the edge of their hunger, Armstrong asked, "How'd you people stay alive?"

"We hid. We stole," one of the men answered. His accent was so thick, Armstrong could hardly follow him.

"Now we is free again," the woman said. "Now we kin live again."

"Long as they's sojers here. Long as they's Yankees here," the second man said. "Reckon the white folks here'd get rid of us pretty damn quick if they seen a chance."

Armstrong reckoned the Negro was right. Not many white Confederates seemed unhappy about what had happened to the blacks who'd lived alongside them. The only thing the whites were unhappy about was losing the war.

"What is we gonna do?" the first man asked, as if a kid sergeant from Washington, D.C., had answers for him.

"Hang around with soldiers as much as you can. We won't screw you," Armstrong said, although he knew some of the guys in the platoon liked Negroes no better than most Confederates did. And some of the guys *would* want to screw the woman. Yeah, she was skinny as a strand of spaghetti. Yeah, she was homely. Yeah, she might have VD. If she stayed around very long, somebody would make a pass at her.

And trouble would follow, sure as night followed day.

They can hang around with soldiers, Armstrong decided, *but they won't hang around with my platoon. I'll send 'em to the rear, let somebody else worry about 'em*. He nodded to himself. That definitely sounded like a plan.

And when he put it to the Negroes, they didn't squawk a bit. "Rear sounds mighty good," the first man said. "We done seen us enough fightin' to las' us fo' always." All the other blacks solemnly nodded.

Come to that, Armstrong had seen enough fighting to last him for always, too. *Maybe*, he thought hopefully, *I won't have to see much more*.

T here was a poem about the way the world ended. Jorge Rodriguez hadn't had as much schooling as his folks wished he would have. When you grew up on a farm in Sonora, you didn't get a whole lot of schooling. But he remembered that poem—something about not with a bang but a whimper.

He knew why it came to mind now, too. He was thinking that the fellow who'd written that poem didn't know what the hell he was talking about.

Buckingham, Virginia, wasn't a whole lot more than a wide spot in the road. It didn't even have a gas station, though it did boast a couple of hotels that dated back to before the War of Secession. It lay west and a little south of Richmond, and Jorge's outfit had orders to hold it in spite of everything the damnyankees could do.

The indomitable Hugo Blackledge had charge of the company—all the new officers were either casualties or missing in action. Jorge led one platoon, Gabe Medwick another. Blackledge looked around at Buckingham. "We'll dig in," he said. "We'll fight as long as we can, and then we'll pull back and fight somewhere else. This chickenshit hole in the ground ain't worth dyin' for, and that's the God's truth."

"That's not what the high command told us." Medwick sounded worried.

"They ain't gonna kill us for moving back after we fight," Jorge assured him. "They're too fucked up for that. But I think the sergeant, he's right. We make a big stand here, the damnyankees blow us up for sure." His wave encompassed the country town. "And for what, *amigo*?

For what?”

Gabe had no answer for that. Nobody who’d done any fighting would have. Buckingham would have fallen a while ago if the main Yankee thrust from Richmond hadn’t gone southeast, through Petersburg toward Hampton Roads. But the United States had enough men to push west, too…and the Confederacy, by all the signs, didn’t have enough men to stop them.

Still, if you weren’t going to surrender you had to try. Somebody’s rear-guard action up ahead gave the company a couple of hours to entrench and to eat whatever rations and foraged food they happened to have on them. A command car towing an antiaircraft gun came through town. Sergeant Blackledge flagged it down. “Got any armor-piercing rounds?” he asked.

“A few,” one of the gunners answered.

“Good,” Blackledge said. “Stay here. You’ll have a better chance to use ’em than you would have wherever the hell you were going.” He didn’t quite aim his automatic rifle at the command car, but he looked ready to. Jorge was one of the men who stood ready to back his play.

The gunner didn’t need long to figure out what was what. “You talked us into it,” he said after a barely perceptible pause. “Show us where to set up.”

He and his crew had just positioned the gun when U.S. 105s started landing on Buckingham. The first few fell short, but the rest came down right in the middle of town. Huddling in a foxhole, Jorge knew what that meant: the Yankees had a forward artillery observer hidden in the trees somewhere, and he was wirelessing the fall of the shot back to the batteries that were firing. Killing him would have been nice, but who could guess where he lurked?

Fighter-bombers worked Buckingham over next. They dropped bombs. They fired rockets. And they dropped fish-shaped pods of jellied gasoline, as if the town were under attack by flamethrowers from the sky. Some burned men screamed. Some, Jorge feared, never got the chance. One of the fine hotels from before the days of the War of Secession went up in flames. It had lasted for a century, but no longer.

After the damnyankees softened up the town, infantry and armor came forward. Why do things the hard way when you could take it easy? That was what the U.S. officer in charge must have thought, anyhow.

But nothing turned out to be easy for the men in green-gray. That antiaircraft gun knocked out two barrels in quick succession. The others pulled back in a hurry. Machine-gun and automatic-weapons fire sent U.S. foot soldiers diving for cover. The Confederates in Buckingham raised a defiant cheer.

If they'd had barrels of their own, if they'd had air support, if they'd had more ground-pounders, they could have driven the enemy back toward the James. If they'd had all those things here, they also would have had them lots of other places. The war would have looked very different.

Since they didn't have any reinforcements, they had to wait for the U.S. forces to regroup and take another crack at Buckingham. "Pull back into the woods south of town!" Sergeant Blackledge called.

"We'll let them beat on the place while it's empty, then move back into our old holes and give 'em a surprise."

Smoke from the burning buildings in Buckingham helped screen the withdrawal from Yankee observers. And Blackledge knew just what was coming. More shells, more bombs, more rockets, and more napalm descended on Buckingham. Jorge crossed himself. He was glad to crouch half a mile away from all that destruction.

As soon as the last fighter-bombers roared off to the north, Sergeant Blackledge yelled, "C'mon!

Hustle up! We gotta get back to our places before the enemy infantry starts moving up!"

Trotting forward, Jorge saw that the antiaircraft gun wouldn't stop any barrels this time around. It lay upside down, the tires on the gun carriage all burnt and melted and stinking. How many stovepipes did the company have? He swore under his breath. The cannon could kill from much farther away than one of those rockets.

At least no jellied gasoline smoldered in his foxhole. He slid down into it and waited for the push that was bound to come. He felt more resigned than afraid. He wondered why. Probably because he'd been in lots of other bad spots. What was one more? *My grave, it could be*.

Not far away, Gabe Medwick was praying. His version of the Lord's Prayer had words a little different from Jorge's. *Protestant*, the Sonoran thought condescendingly. But both versions meant the same

thing, so how much did the words really matter?

“Hang in there, boys,” Hugo Blackledge said. “We been screwin’ so long with a limber dick, why the fuck *can’t* we row the damn boat with a rope?” In spite of himself, Jorge laughed. Sometimes obscenity wasn’t so far from prayer.

Here came the damnyankees again. They were more cautious this time—they didn’t want another bloody nose. The Confederates in Buckingham held their fire till the enemy soldiers and fighting vehicles got very close. Then they all opened up at once. Howls of dismay from the U.S. soldiers said they’d hoped it would be easy this time. No matter what they hoped, it wasn’t.

A lancehead riding a shaft of fire, a stovepipe rocket incinerated a green-gray barrel. But other U.S.

machines sensibly stayed out of stovepipe range. They raked Buckingham with high-explosive rounds and machine-gun bullets. That let Yankee infantry grab a toehold on the north side of town—not enough Confederates could put their heads up to stop the enemy.

And the Yankees pushed forward to either side of Buckingham, too. There weren’t enough men in butternut to hold them back. “Hey, Sarge!” Jorge called urgently. “We done what we could do here, *sí*?”

“Bet your ass.” Blackledge raised his voice to a formidable roar: “Back! Back, goddammit! We’ll make another stand at the next town south, wherever the fuck it is!”

Disengaging under fire wasn’t easy, either. A less experienced outfit might not have been able to bring it off so neatly. But Jorge had plenty of practice making a getaway from overwhelming U.S. strength. So did his buddies. They left the wounded behind for the Yankees to take care of. That gave the hurt soldiers a better chance than they would have had if they got dragged along. The men in green-gray mostly fought fair.

The ground rose south of Buckingham. No roads led south, only tracks and game trails. The soldiers trudged past a couple of farms carved out of the forest. A woman in homespun stared at them from a cornfield. Was that a pipe in her mouth? Damned if it wasn’t. Jorge hoped the Yankees wouldn’t shell her farm trying to kill the retreating C.S. soldiers.

On he went. Armor wouldn’t have an easy time coming after him,

anyhow. Artillery started probing for the Confederates. Suddenly, Jorge hated the trees. Air bursts were deadly, and the only thing you could do to protect yourself was dig in with a roof over your head. Any hanging branch might touch off a shell and rain fragments down on you.

A hundred yards away from him, Gabe Medwick fell with a wail, clutching his arm. “No!” Jorge yelled, and rushed over to his friend. When he got there, he saw Gabe had a leg wound, too. With the best will in the world, the kid from Alabama couldn’t go on.

“Hurts,” Gabe got out through clenched teeth.

“I bet it does.” Jorge clumsily injected him with morphine, then bandaged the wounds. The leg wasn’t too bad. The arm…Jorge hoped Gabe would keep it, but it looked pretty chewed up. “The Yankees, they take care of you,” Jorge said, feeling helpless.

“Don’t want nothin’ to do with no damnyankees.” Gabe sounded like a petulant child.

“Here.” Jorge gave him his canteen and some rations. “You sit tight and yell for them when they get close. *Buena suerte, amigo*.” He hurried away, not knowing what else to say.

Before long, Jorge got to pick up a canteen from a man an air burst had shredded. There were worse things than getting wounded. The flies were just starting to gather on one of those things.

Jorge stumbled up to the top of the line of hills and then down the other side. The company, what was left of it, was hopelessly scattered. Through a break in the trees, Jorge caught a glimpse of a town down below. “That place is where we’re going!” Hugo Blackledge yelled. “We’ll form up there and figure out what the hell to do next.”

What *could* they do? Jorge had no idea. But he had a target now, somewhere to go. As he picked his way through thicker stands of timber, the town disappeared, but he could always find it again. It looked bigger than Buckingham, not that that was saying much.

When he drew closer, he got a glimpse of armor in the town. He’d wondered when he would see more of it. Hell, he’d wondered if the Confederates had any armor left in central Virginia. There were already soldiers in the streets, too. Maybe the CSA could throw one more rally together. Even after you thought your side had done everything it could, it kept surprising you.

The first few men from the company, Jorge among them, had come out onto open ground within a quarter of a mile of the town when Sergeant Blackledge let out a theatrical wail of despair: “They’re Yankees!”

And they were. They even had some sort of portable PA system. “Surrender!” somebody blared.

“Surrender or die! First, last, and only warning! There is no escape!”

There wasn’t, either. The barrels and the automatic weapons ahead could tear the dismayed Confederates to pieces. They’d lost their last race with the enemy. Blackledge set down his automatic rifle and walked into captivity with his hands and his head high.

If he can do it, so can I, Jorge thought. He laid his weapon on the ground and walked toward the waiting U.S. soldiers. One of them pointed into the town. “Line up by the courthouse,” he said, not unkindly. “Some trucks’ll take you off to prison camp.”

“All right.” Jorge pointed back the way he’d come. “We left wounded in the woods. My buddy’s there.”

“We’ll get ’em—don’t flabble about it. You move along now.”

Dully, Jorge obeyed. The men with whom he’d endured so much tramped through the late-afternoon stillness in the little town of Appomattox—a sign on the courthouse gave him the name of the place—toward the end of the war.

T hings were quiet outside of Birmingham, and inside, too. Cincinnatus Driver approved of that. After all the shells that had flown back and forth, a truce was holding now. A U.S. officer had gone into Birmingham to confer with C.S. General Patton.

None of the drivers, of course, knew what the U.S. officer would tell the surrounded general. That didn’t stop them from guessing. “If he don’t quit, I bet we drop a superbomb on him,” Cincinnatus said.

“Sounds good to me,” Hal Williamson said. Several other men nodded. Williamson went on, “All the trouble Patton’s caused, we ought to drop a bomb on the fucker anyway.”

More nods, Cincinnatus’ among them. “I wonder when he’ll come out,” the Negro said. The officer, a major, had gone in not far from

their encampment. If he came out the same way, maybe he would tell them what was what. You could hope so, anyway.

“How long d’you think he’ll give Patton?” somebody asked.

“I wouldn’t give him long,” Williamson said. “If it’s surrender or get one of those bombs in the kisser, what does he need to figure out?”

Cincinnatus lit a cigarette. Not even tobacco smoke soothed him much. He wanted to know what was going on there inside the battered heart of the Confederate industrial town.

So did the other drivers. “That Patton’s a stubborn bastard,” one of them said. “What if he doesn’t give in?”

“His funeral, in that case,” Cincinnatus said, and then, “Couldn’t happen to a nicer fella…. Well, it could happen to Jake Featherston, but I reckon that’s comin’, too.”

Williamson pointed into the ruin that was Birmingham. “Here comes our guy,” he said. “And look!

He’s got one of those butternut bastards with him.”

Sure enough, two men came out of the city, each of them carrying a large flag of truce. The C.S.

officer looked clean and neat despite the disaster that had befallen the place he was defending. He also looked as unhappy as if he were burying his only son. That told Cincinnatus most of what he needed to know.

“They givin’ up, suh?” he called to the U.S. officer, the rising lilt in his voice saying he already had a good notion of the answer.

All the drivers burst into cheers when the major nodded. “They sure are,” he answered, “or it looks that way, anyhow. We’ve still got a few little things to iron out—that’s why Captain Monroe is with me.”

The Confederate started to give the men standing near the big green-gray trucks a polite nod. Then he saw Cincinnatus among them. “You have those damned black terrorists here?” he demanded of the officer in green-gray.

“I ain’t a guerrilla.” Cincinnatus spoke for himself. “I don’t blame those folks for risin’ up—don’t get me wrong—but I ain’t one of them.

I'm a citizen of the USA, and proud of it, too."

"That's telling him!" Hal Williamson said.

Captain Monroe looked even more mournful than he had before. The U.S. major, whose name Cincinnatus still didn't know, grinned from ear to ear. "You asked, Captain," he said. "Now you know."

"It's still wrong," Monroe said stubbornly. "Niggers got no business fighting."

"You call me nigger again, you ofay asshole, you ain't gonna last to dicker your goddamn surrender,"

Cincinnatus said. Captain Monroe's jaw dropped all the way to his chest. He couldn't have been more astonished if an Army mule had cussed him out.

"Somebody doesn't seem to agree with you," the U.S. major observed. "And since he's here, maybe he's got a point, you know?"

Monroe shook his head. Cincinnatus hadn't expected anything different. Speaking of Army mules…When it came to the Confederates' views of Negroes, they could have given the beasts mulishness lessons.

As the two officers went back to confer with U.S. higher-ups, Hal Williamson thumped Cincinnatus on the back. "That butternut bastard can't make nasty cracks about you!"

"He better not," Cincinnatus said. "The guys who can talk are the guys who end up winnin'. You lose, you got to listen to the fellas on the other side doin' the braggin'."

"That's us!" Two drivers said it at the same time. Cincinnatus nodded.

After that, with the ceasefire holding, the drivers had nothing to do but sit around and smoke and eat and play cards. Cincinnatus didn't mind, not even a little. Nothing could go wrong while he was in the middle of a big U.S. army. Nobody was likely to shoot at him from ambush. His truck wouldn't hit a mine and explode in flames. And they gave him the same combat bonus for this as they did for driving through bushwhacker country.

Three hours later, the U.S. major and C.S. Captain Monroe returned, both of them with their white flags. The officer in green-gray was all smiles, while Monroe, his shoulders slumped, his head bowed, showed

nothing but gloom.

“It’s all over,” the U.S. major said. “They’ll come out. One more nail in the coffin, and a big one, too.”

“Did you have to say that?” Monroe barked.

“I’m sorry, Captain, but will you tell me it’s not the truth?” the major asked. The Confederate officer didn’t answer, which in itself told everything that needed telling. The major nodded to the group of truck drivers. “We gave them one thing: Patton gets to address his men after they lay down their arms.”

“Why not?” Cincinnatus said. “Talk is cheap.” His pals laughed. The U.S. major didn’t, but mostly, Cincinnatus judged, to keep from offending his C.S. counterpart. As for Captain Monroe, his glare said Cincinnatus belonged in a camp even if he was a U.S. citizen. Cincinnatus scowled back, remembering how close he’d come to ending up in one. How many other Negroes from Covington’s barbed-wire-enclosed colored district were still alive? Any? He just didn’t know.

The two officers went back into Birmingham. Cincinnatus listened to shouts, some of them amplified, inside the city. *Spreading the word*, he judged. After another hour or so, Confederate soldiers started coming out. They weren’t carrying weapons, and they held their hands above their heads. A few had bits of white rag tied to sticks. They were skinny, and their uniforms had seen a lot of wear, but, like Captain Monroe, they all looked surprisingly well bathed and well groomed. Patton was supposed to be a stickler for stuff like that.

They weren’t shy about scrounging ration tins from anybody in green-gray they saw. “Thanks, pal,”

one of them said when Cincinnatus tossed him a can. Then the man did a double take at his dark skin. He looked at the can. “Yeah, thanks,” he repeated, and went on.

“Wow,” Hal Williamson said. “This place made half the shit they threw at us, seems like. And now it’s out of business.” He mimed swiping the back of his hand over his forehead in relief.

“So where do we drop the superbomb we were gonna put here?” another driver asked.

“New Orleans. Gotta be New Orleans.” The answer came to

Cincinnatus as soon as he heard the question. “Satchmo won’t like it, but too bad for him.”

“No offense, Cincinnatus, but I don’t much care for the music he plays,” Hal said.

Cincinnatus shrugged. “Well, I can see that, ’cause it ain’t what you’re used to. Me, I grew up in the CSA, so it sounds right to me. And he’s damn good at what he does, whether you like it or not.”

“So is Jake Featherston,” Williamson said, which was true but not exactly a compliment. Cincinnatus thought about rising to it and arguing for real, but why? When a whole Confederate army was surrendering, what point to a dumb little quarrel?

More and more soldiers in butternut and Freedom Party Guards in camouflage uniforms trudged out of Birmingham. The Party guards looked even sorrier about giving up than the Army men did. Had they seen any chance to fight on, they would have grabbed it. But they didn’t—even they knew the jig was up.

Hall nudged Cincinnatus. “Look! That’s Patton! That has to be Patton.”

“Sure does,” Cincinnatus said. Nobody else would have worn a chromed helmet with wreathed stars picked out in gold. Nobody else would have worn not one but two fancy six-shooters, either. Patton’s look of loathing made everything from the other soldiers and the Freedom Party Guards seem downright benign by comparison.

Patton already had U.S. soldiers walking along watching him as if he were a lion in a zoo—a dangerous beast that couldn’t hurt anybody any more. Cincinnatus and the rest of the drivers fell in with them.

The Confederate soldiers—now the Confederate POWs—stood in rough ranks in a battered, cratered field. U.S. troops, many armed with captured automatic weapons, guarded them. More U.S.

soldiers rubbernecked like Cincinnatus. Engineers had set up a microphone in front of the prisoners. The U.S. commander was a long-faced, bald brigadier general named Ironhewer; he waited by the mike for Patton’s approach.

Patton saluted him with immense dignity. General Ironhewer returned the military courtesy. Patton took off his pistols and handed them, still holstered, to Ironhewer. This time, the U.S. general saluted him first. He gave the ceremonial weapons to an aide, then went up to the

microphone.

“Men of the Army of Kentucky,” he said in Midwestern accents, “General Patton has asked leave to speak to you one last time. As this battle ends, as peace between our two countries draws near, I did not see how I could refuse him this privilege.” He nodded to the C.S. commander. “General Patton.”

Ironhewer stepped away from the microphone and Patton took his place. “Thank you, General, for the courtesy you have shown me and the kindness you are showing my men,” he said, his voice thick with unshed tears. He needed a moment to gather himself before continuing. “Soldiers, by an agreement between General Ironhewer and me, the troops of the Army of Kentucky have surrendered. That we are beaten is a self-evident fact, and we cannot hope to resist the bomb that hangs over our head like the sword of Damocles. Richmond is fallen. The cause for which you have so long and manfully struggled, and for which you have braved dangers and made so many sacrifices, is today hopeless.

“Reason dictates and humanity demands that no more blood be shed here. It is your sad duty, and mine, to lay down our arms and to aid in restoring peace. As your commander, I sincerely hope that every officer and soldier will carry out in good faith all the terms of the surrender.

“War such as you have passed through naturally engenders feelings of animosity, hatred, and revenge.

But in captivity and when you return home a manly, straightforward course of conduct will secure the respect even of your enemies.” Patton paused. He brushed a hand to his eyes, then went on. “In bidding you farewell, rest assured that you carry with you my best wishes for your future welfare and happiness. I have never sent you where I was unwilling to go myself, nor would I now advise you to a course I felt myself unwilling to pursue. You have been good soldiers. Preserve your honor, and the government to which you have surrendered can afford to be and, I hope, will be magnanimous.”

Still very erect, he saluted his men. Some of them cried out his name. Others let loose with what they still called the Rebel yell. Tears now streaming down his face, Patton waited for the tumult to die down a little. Then he stepped into the ragged ranks of the rest of the POWs.

Defeated Confederate soldiers shook his hand and embraced him.

Cincinnatus watched them with a little sympathy—but not much. “We done licked ’em here,” he said to Hal Williamson. “Now we got to finish it everywhere else.”

XII

***D** id* taking your own airplanes with you mean a flotilla could operate close to enemy-held land? It hadn’t at the start of the war, as Sam Carsten remembered too well. Land-based C.S. airplanes badly damaged the *Remembrance* when her bombers struck at Charleston.

Well, all kinds of things had changed since then. Charleston was no more—one bomb from a (land-based) airplane had seen to that. And the fleet approaching Haiti had not one airplane carrier but half a dozen. Only one of those was a fleet carrier, newer and faster and able to carry more airplanes than the *Remembrance* had. The others were smaller, and three of them slower. Still, together they carried close to three hundred airplanes. If that thought wasn’t enough to give the Confederate defenders on the western part of the island of Hispaniola nightmares, Sam didn’t know what would be.

He had a few nightmares of his own. The Confederates still had airplanes on Haiti, in the Bahamas, and in Cuba. They had submersibles and torpedo boats. They had a sizable garrison to hold Haiti down and to keep the USA from using the Negro nation as a base against them in the Caribbean. They had…

“Sir, they have troubles, lots of them,” Lon Menefee said when Sam flabbled out loud. “All those colored folks on these islands hate Jake Featherston like rat poison. Why, Cuba—”

“I know about Cuba,” Sam broke in. “The *Josephus Daniels* ran guns in there a couple of years ago, to give the rebels a hand.”

“Well, there you go, then.” The new exec damn near dripped confidence. “Besides, they may have airplanes, but have they got fuel? We’ve been pounding their dumps and hitting the shipping from the mainland. We can do this. I honest to God think we can, sir.”

“Hey, here’s hoping you’re right,” Carsten said. It wasn’t just that Menefee was a kid, because he was plenty old enough to have served through the whole war. But he wasn’t the Old Man. The *Josephus Daniels* was Sam’s responsibility. If anything went wrong, the blame landed squarely on him. Command made you the loneliest, most worried man in the world—or at least on your ship. The poor son of a

bitch in charge of the destroyer half a mile away knew what you were going through, though. So did the sub skipper who was trying to send you to the bottom.

Bombers and covering fighters roared off the carriers' flight decks. Squadron after squadron buzzed off toward the southwest, toward Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince. More fighters flew combat air patrol above the fleet.

Battleships' guns roared. The battlewagons didn't rule the fleet the way they had when Sam enlisted back before the Great War started. But their big guns still reached far enough and packed enough punch to make them great for shore bombardment.

Sam's gaze went forward, to one of the *Josephus Daniels*' pair of four-inch guns. His smile was fond but wry. That gun could shoot at enemy aircraft from longer range than the twin 40mms that had sprouted like mushrooms everywhere there was free space on the deck. For shore bombardment…Well, you'd better be hitting some place where the bad guys couldn't hit back.

Slow, squat, ungainly landing craft surged forward. The troops on them were going to take Haiti away from the Confederate States. If everything went right they were, anyhow. If the operation went south, every skipper in the fleet and every brass hat up to and including the Secretary of the Navy would testify under oath before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War.

"Anything?" Sam asked Thad Walters.

The Y-ranging officer shook his head. "I've got our aircraft on the screen, sir, but I'm not picking up any bandits."

"I'll be damned." Sam glanced over to Lon Menefee. "Maybe you're right. Maybe the butternut bastards are further gone than I thought."

"Sure hope so," Menefee said. "Tell you one thing: when the Marines and the Army guys go ashore, their venereal rate's gonna climb like one of those fighters. Lots of infected people in Haiti, and the gals there'll be mighty glad to see 'em."

"Well, with the spiffy new pills and shots we've got, it's not as bad as it used to be. Still not good,"

Sam added hastily—you couldn't sound complacent about VD. The

idea of lying down with a colored woman didn't drive him wild. But if you were a horny kid and there were no white gals for three islands around, you'd take whatever you could get. He remembered some of his own visits to brothels full of Chinese girls in Honolulu during the last war.

A yeoman came up onto the bridge. "Carriers report airplanes heading our way from Cuba, sir."

"Thanks, van Duyk," Sam said. Carriers had stronger Y-ranging sets than his ship did.

The men already stood at battle stations. Sam passed the word that the enemy was on the way. After he stepped back from the PA microphone, Lon Menefee said, "Well, we're not first on their list, anyhow."

He was bound to be right about that. The Confederates would want to hit airplane carriers and battlewagons and, he supposed, landing craft before they bothered with a lowly destroyer escort. All the same, Sam said, "If we end up on their plate, they won't send us back to the kitchen. And we don't want to get loose and sloppy, either."

"You've got that straight, sir," Menefee said at once.

"That's what she said," Sam answered, and the exec snorted. Overhead, some of the fighters from the CAP streaked off toward the west. Was that a good idea? If more enemy aircraft came at the fleet from another direction, from the Bahamas or from Haiti itself, they might catch the ships with their pants down.

These days, battles mostly happened out of sight of one side's fleet or the other's. This one might start out of sight of both. And that record would be hard to top, unless one of these days you got a fight something like the Battle of the Three Navies back in Great War days.

"I have bandits on the screen, sir," Lieutenant Walters reported. "Bearing 250, approaching…well, pretty fast. Looks like they're about ten minutes out. Our boys are on 'em."

"Thanks, Thad," Sam said, and passed the word to the crew. Then he asked, "Any sign of bandits from some different direction?"

Walters checked his screens before answering, "No, sir."

Sam grunted. That sounded more like what he'd hoped than what he'd

expected. Echoing his thoughts, Lon Menefee said, “The Confederates really must be at the end of their tether.”

“Well, maybe they are. Who woulda thunk it?” Sam called down a speaking tube to the hydrophone station in the bowels of the ship: “Hear anything, Bevacqua?”

“Not a thing, sir,” the CPO replied. “Nothin’ but our screw and the ones from the rest of the fleet.

Jack diddly from the pings when I send ’em out.”

“All right. Thanks. Sing out if you do, remember.”

“Better believe it, sir,” Bevacqua said. “It’s my ass, too, you know.”

Hearing that float out of the speaking tube, Menefee raised an eyebrow. It didn’t faze Sam a bit. “Is he wrong?” he asked. The exec shook his head.

Another destroyer escort off to the west started firing. A moment later, so did the *Josephus Daniels*.

“They’re going after the carriers,” Sam said, watching the Confederate airplanes.

“Wouldn’t you?” Menefee asked.

“Maybe. But if I could tear up the landing craft, I might want to do that first. This is about Haiti, after all,” Sam said. If it was about the island any more. For all he knew, it might have been about hurting the United States as much as the Confederacy could, and nothing more than that. On such a scale, carriers were likely to count more than landing boats.

But not many C.S. airplanes came overhead. Sam didn’t know how many had set out from Cuba, but he would have bet a lot of them never made it this far. The CAP was doing its job.

The yeoman hurried back up to the bridge. “Our men are ashore, sir,” he said. Sam sent the news out over the loudspeakers. The crew cheered and whooped. Van Duyk didn’t go away. “There’s more news, sir,” he added in quieter tones.

“What’s up?” Apprehension gusted along Sam’s spine.

“Hamburg’s gone, sir,” van Duyk answered. “One of those bombs.”

“Jesus!” Sam said. Churchill hadn’t been kidding, then. England had caught up with the Germans, or at least come close enough to wreck a city. “What does the Kaiser say?”

“Nothing yet, sir,” van Duyk said. “But I sure wouldn’t want to be living in London right now.”

“Me, neither,” Sam agreed. “Or anywhere else a German bomber could get to.” Or a British bomber…Did the limeys have aircraft that could lug what had to be a heavy bomb across the Atlantic to New York City? Did they have bombers that could fly across the Atlantic almost empty and pick up their superbombs in the CSA? That would be easier—if the Confederates had any new superbombs to pick up. All kinds of unpleasant possibilities…

And he couldn’t do a goddamn thing about any of them. All he could do was clap his hands when the forward four-inch gun turned a C.S. bomber into a smear of smoke and flame in the sky.

Abruptly, it was over, at least around the *Josephus Daniels*. He couldn’t spot any more Confederate airplanes above the ship. The gunners went on shooting awhile longer. They didn’t believe in taking chances.

“Boy,” Lon Menefee said. “I hope the guys going ashore have as easy a time as we did.”

“Yeah, me, too,” Sam said. “You would’ve thought the Confederates could throw more at us.”

“A year ago, they could have,” the exec said. “Two years ago, they were throwing the goddamn kitchen sink.”

Carsten nodded. For the first year of the war, things had looked mighty black. Pittsburgh said the CSA wouldn’t be able to conquer the USA. Till then, even that was up in the air. If the Confederates had taken it and gone on toward Philadelphia—But they hadn’t. They couldn’t. And afterwards it became clear they’d thrown too much into that attack, and didn’t have enough left to defend with.

That was afterwards, though. At the time, no one had any idea whether they would fall short. What looked inevitable after the fact often seemed anything but while shells were flying and people were dying.

By how much *did* the Confederates fall short in Pittsburgh? Sam didn't know, and he wasn't sure anyone else did. All the same, he would have bet the answer was on the order of *only a little bit*.

Lon Menefee's thoughts ran in a different direction: "Wonder how many smokes our guys'll find alive on Haiti."

"Hadn't worried about that." Sam bared his teeth in what was anything but a smile. "They would've had guns—they were a country before the butternut bastards jumped on 'em. I hope they gave Featherston's fuckers a good big dose of trouble." No, he didn't particularly love Negroes, but he didn't want to see them dead, either—especially if they were making the Confederates sweat.

Cassius hadn't thought patrolling Madison, Georgia, and keeping white folks in line could get dull, but it did. Anything you did over and over got dull. Well, he didn't suppose screwing would, but he hadn't done enough of that to count as "over and over." A few hasty grapples with women who'd been part of Gracchus' band at one time or another were the sum of his experience.

He knew just enough to know he wanted to know more.

And he knew enough to be worried about whether he'd ever get the chance for it. One muggy evening at supper, he asked Gracchus, "Where we gonna find us some nice gals to marry?"

The guerrilla chief looked down at his mess kit, as if hoping one would turn up there. But he had the same roasted pork ribs and sweet potatoes and green beans as Cassius—only those, and nothing more.

"Beats me. Beats the shit outa me," he said heavily. "Most of the niggers left alive down here is the ones in the bands. Ain't a hell of a lot of gals who wanted to pick up a Tredegar."

"Don't I know it! Sometimes I gets so horny, can't hardly stand it," Cassius said. "Plenty of white women left with no husbands on account of the war…"

"Good fuckin' luck! Good *fuckin'* luck!" Gracchus said. "Yeah, plenty o' white widows. An' you know what else? They's sorry their husbands is dead. An' they's even sorrier we *ain't*."

Cassius wished he thought the older man were wrong. Unfortunately, he didn't. A shortage of black women and a shortage of white men

should have had an obvious solution. Before the war, during the war, saying that where any white could hear him would have got him a one-way ticket to the graveyard.

Would things be any different once the CSA finally threw in the sponge? *Fat chance,* he thought.

“Be a few gals don’t care what color man they got, long as they got one,” Gracchus predicted. “A few—the ones who git horny the same way a guy does. But even supposin’ you find one, where you gonna set up housekeepin’ wid her? Any place you try, how long ’fore the neighbors burn your house down, likely with the both of you in it?”

“The Yankees—” Cassius began.

Gracchus shook his head. “Yankees can’t be everywhere. ’Sides, most of ’em don’t want us messin’

wid no white women, neither. They kin use us, yeah. But they ain’t gonna stick their necks out fo’ us when they don’t got to, and you kin bet your ass on dat. Hell, you mess wid a white woman, you *is* bettin’ your sorry ass on dat.”

“Shit,” Cassius said, again not because he thought Gracchus was wrong but because he didn’t.

“Maybe we go up to the USA, then. Got to be some colored gals there who’d give us the time o’ day.”

“Might not be too bad, if the Yankees let us,” Gracchus allowed. “But we ain’t U.S. citizens any more’n we’s Confederate citizens. We don’t belong nowhere. You don’t believe me, go ask a white man.”

Once more, he made more sense than Cassius wished he did. Every time you tried to get around what Jake Featherston and the Freedom Party had done to Negroes in the Confederate States, you banged your head into a stone wall instead.

The next morning, a couple of Confederate privates and a corporal came up to Cassius as he was on patrol. None of them was carrying a weapon. When they saw him, they all raised their hands and stood very still. “Don’t shoot, pal,” the corporal said. “We’re just lookin’ for somebody to surrender to, that’s all. Reckon you’re it.”

Had they worn the camouflage of the Freedom Party Guards, Cassius would have been tempted to plug them no matter how they tried to

sweet-talk him. Who could guess what guards were doing when they weren't fighting the Yankees? Cassius could, for one. Maybe they were closing Negroes up behind barbed wire. Or maybe they were shoving them into the hell-bound trains from which nobody came back. It wasn't by accident that Freedom Party Guards had a tough time giving themselves up to the U.S. Army's new black auxiliaries.

But these three were just in ordinary butternut. If they'd gone out of the way to give Negroes a hard time, it didn't show. And the noncom hadn't been dumb enough to call Cassius *boy*. He gestured with his rifle. "Y'all come with me. POW camp's right outside of town. You don't give nobody trouble, you'll be all right."

"Had enough trouble," the corporal said, and both privates nodded. The two-striper went on, "Me, I got a Purple Heart and two oak-leaf clusters. One more wound and I'm a goddamn colander. Enough is enough. Damnyankees wouldn't be here in the middle of Georgia if we weren't licked."

"Damn right." If the Yankees weren't here, Cassius probably wouldn't have been, either. Sooner or later, the militias and the Mexicans would have squashed Gracchus' band. "Get movin'. Keep your hands high, and don't git close enough to make me jumpy, or you be mighty sorry."

"You got the piece," the corporal said. "You call the shots."

As they tramped through Madison, the other two soldiers opened up a little. One was from Mississippi, the other from Arkansas. They'd had enough of the war; they were heading home. Cassius thought they were nuts to try to get through two states full of U.S. soldiers, but they weren't the first men to tell him a story like that. As Confederate armies came apart at the seams, as men thought of themselves ahead of their country once more, the whole thrashing corpse of the CSA seemed full of people in uniform on the move. Some were trying to get somewhere, like these. Others were trying to get away either from Confederates who didn't want them deserting or from U.S. soldiers who had reason to want to catch them.

"Never reckoned we'd get whupped," the corporal said mournfully. "First time I got shot was in Ohio.

Second time was in Pennsylvania. Third time was in Tennessee, just outside of Chattanooga. Things weren't going so good by then."

“I suppose I can see how you’d say that,” Cassius allowed. “But if you was a colored fella here in Georgia, things never went good. Ain’t many of us left alive.”

“We were up at the front, fighting the damnyankees. We didn’t know nothin’ about none o’ that,” the private from Arkansas said quickly. Too quickly? Cassius wasn’t sure. He did know the U.S. guards at the POW camp questioned new prisoners about what they’d done before they got caught. Every so often, they arrested somebody and took him away for more grilling.

“Nabbed yourself some more of these sorry sacks of shit, did you?” a U.S. sergeant in Madison called to Cassius, and gave him a thumbs-up. Cassius waved back.

“He’s got no cause to call us that,” the C.S. corporal said. “I wouldn’t call him that if I went and captured him—and I got me a few damnyankees during the war.”

The private from Mississippi nodded. “*You* didn’t cuss us when you caught us,” he said to Cassius.

“Your mama must’ve learned you manners.”

“She did.” Cassius’ eyes suddenly stung. “And then you goddamn ofays went an’ shipped her to a camp, an’ my pa, an’ my sis, too, an’ I reckon they’s all dead now.”

None of the Confederate soldiers said much after that, which was smart of them. And yet the Mississippian had a point of sorts. Cassius *hadn’t* cursed the Confederates when they gave themselves up to them. Some of that was because swear words weren’t enough to let him tell them what he thought of them. But some of it was because Confederate whites and Confederate blacks understood one another in ways U.S. whites never would. They might not like one another—hell, they might and often did hate one another. But they and their ancestors had mostly lived side by side for hundreds of years. Each knew how the other ticked.

“Score three for the good guys!” a guard outside the POW compound called as Cassius brought the captives up to the entrance.

“I leave these fellas with you?” Cassius asked.

“Yeah, I’ll take care of ’em from here on out,” the guard replied. He carried a submachine gun, a heavy U.S. Thompson. It would do the

job if it had to. “C’mon, you lugs,” he told the Confederates.

“This is the end of the line for you.”

“I don’t mind,” the corporal said. “Like I told this fella here”—he nodded toward Cassius—“I already been shot three different times. I’m still here. I’m still walkin’. One more, maybe my luck woulda run out.”

“Damn war’s over with,” one of the privates added. “We lost. Ain’t much point to fighting any more.”

“You guys aren’t so dumb,” the U.S. soldier said. “Kick you in the teeth often enough and you get the idea.” He led them off into captivity. They didn’t seem the least bit sorry to go. They’d managed to give up without getting killed. And the chow inside the barbed wire was bound to be better than what they’d scrounged on their own. How much food the Yankees took for granted had already astonished Cassius.

The men in butternut were scrawny enough to make him sure it would amaze them, too.

Cassius went back on patrol. Unlike the POWs, he had to earn his victuals. And damned if another pair of Confederate soldiers didn’t come into Madison an hour and a half later. They’d also made sure they weren’t carrying weapons before they showed themselves.

Seeing Cassius—and seeing his rifle—they wasted no time raising their hands. “We ain’t people bombs or nothin’, Rastus,” one of them said. “Cross my heart we ain’t.” He lowered his right hand for a moment to make the gesture.

“My name ain’t Rastus,” Cassius retorted. But, again, as long as they didn’t wear camouflage or call him *nigger* or *boy*, he was willing if not precisely eager to let them give up.

The same soldier in green-gray still stood at the entrance to the POW camp when Cassius brought in his next set of captives. “Son of a bitch!” the Yankee said. “You’re turning into a one-man gang!”

“They know they’s licked,” Cassius said. “Don’t bother ’em to give up now, like maybe it did befo’.”

“That’s about the size of it,” one of the Confederates agreed. “What’s the point to gettin’ shot now?

Sure ain't gonna change how things turn out."

"You got that right, anyway," the U.S. soldier said. "Well, come on. We'll get you your rooms at our hotel, all right. You can have the caviar or the pheasant under glass. The barmaid'll be along with the champagne in a few minutes, but it costs extra if you want her to blow you."

Both men in butternut stared. So did Cassius; the Yankee's deadpan delivery was mighty convincing.

Then the Confederates started to laugh. One of them said, "Long as I don't get blown *up*, that's all I care about right now."

"Amen!" said the other new POW, as if responding to a preacher in church.

On that kind of simple level, Cassius had no trouble understanding and sympathizing with them. When he tried to fathom their cause, though… *If they had their way, I'd be dead, same as the rest of my family. How can they want that so bad? I never done nothin' to them*.

They didn't care. They feared Negroes might do something to them, and so they got in the first lick.

That was Jake Featherston all the way—hit first, and hit hard. But he hadn't hit the United States quite hard enough. He got in the first lick, but they were getting the last one. *And I'm still here, too*, Cassius thought. *You may not like it, you ofay asshole, but I damn well am*.

S itting in the Humble jail was a humbling experience for Jeff Pinkard. Even if the Republic of Texas had seceded from the Confederate States, the guards at the jail were all U.S. military policemen. They wore green-gray uniforms, white gloves, and white helmets with MP on them in big letters. They reminded him of a lot of the men who'd guarded Camp Humble and the other camps he'd run: they were tough and brave and not especially smart.

They wouldn't let his wife or stepsons in to see him. They wouldn't let him see his new baby. All he had for company was Vern Green; the guard chief moped in the cell across the hall.

Three hulking U.S. MPs came for Jeff early in the morning. They all carried big, heavy U.S.

submachine guns. “Come on, Pinkard,” one of them—a sergeant—said, his voice cold as Russian Alaska.

Jeff thought they were going to take him outside and shoot him. Who was there to stop them? Not a soul. He fought to keep a wobble out of his voice when he said, “I want to talk to a lawyer.”

“Yeah? So did all the coons you smoked. Come on, asshole,” the MP said. One of his buddies unlocked the cell door. Jeff came. Fear made his legs light. All he could do was try not to show it. If you were going to die anyway, you wanted to die as well as you could.

He squinted against the sun when they led him out of the jail. He hadn’t seen so much sunshine since they locked him up. Looking back at the jail building, he saw the U.S. and Texas flags flying side by side above it. His mouth tightened. Both those flags reminded him of the Stars and Bars; both, now, were arrayed against it.

Barbed wire and machine-gun nests and armored cars defended the jail and the buildings close to it.

Seeing Jeff glance at the new fortifications, the MP sergeant said, “Nobody’s gonna spring you from this place, so don’t get your hopes up.”

“Way you’ve got it set up, you must reckon an awful lot of folks want to,” Jeff replied. The noncom scowled at him but didn’t answer. Jeff smiled to himself—that shot must have got home.

What had been a bail bondsman’s office down the street from the jail now had U.S. soldiers standing guard in front of it. The Lone Star flag might fly over the jail, but Pinkard didn’t see any Texas Rangers.

The damnyankees were running this show. He didn’t think that was good news for him.

One of the guards opened the door. “Go on in,” the MP sergeant said.

“What happens when I do?” Jeff asked suspiciously.

“The bogeyman gets you,” the MP snapped. When Jeff neither panicked nor asked for any more explanation, the Yankee gestured impatiently. “Just go on. You wanted a lawyer. They’re gonna give you one. More than you deserve, if anybody wants to know what I think.”

Pinkard didn't give a rat's ass for what the MP thought. A lawyer was more than he'd thought he would get from the U.S. authorities. Of course, having one and having one who'd do any good were two different critters. He was playing by Yankee rules now, and he knew damn well they'd be stacked against him.

In he went, before the snooty sergeant could tell him again. Sitting at what had been the bondsman's desk was a skinny fellow with curly red hair, a big nose, and a U.S. major's gold oak leaves. "You're Jefferson Pinkard?" the man asked.

"That's right." Jeff nodded. "Who're you?"

"My name is Isidore Goldstein," the major answered. *I figured he was a hebe*, Jeff thought. *Well, chances are he's smart, anyway*. Goldstein went on, "I'm part of the Judge-Advocate's staff. I'm an attorney specializing in military law. I will defend you to the best of my ability."

"And how good are you?" Pinkard asked.

"Damn good, matter of fact," Goldstein said. "Let's get something straight right now: I didn't want this job. They gave it to me. Well, that's how it goes sometimes. I don't like you. No—I despise you. If you've done one percent of what they say you've done, I'd stand in the firing squad and aim at your chest. And we both know you've done a hell of a lot more than that."

"If you're *my* lawyer, why do they need some other asshole to prosecute me?" Jeff said.

He surprised a laugh out of Goldstein. The Yankee lawyer—the Yankee Jew lawyer, almost a stock figure in Confederate movies about the depravities of life in the USA—said, "But you gotta understand something else, too. My job is defending people. Guilty people need lawyers. Guilty people *especially* need lawyers. Whatever they let me do, I'll do. If I can get you off the hook, I will. If I can keep 'em from killing you, I will. That's what I'm supposed to do, and I'll damn well do it. And like I say, I know what I'm doing, too."

Pinkard believed him, not least because Goldstein plainly didn't care whether he believed him or not.

"So what are my chances, then?"

“Shitty,” Goldstein answered matter-of-factly. “They’ve got the goods on you. They know what you did. They can prove it. You get rid of that many people, it’s not like you can keep it a secret.”

“Everything I was doing, I was doing ’cause I got orders from Richmond to take care of it,” Jeff said.

“Far as the laws of my country went, it was all legal as could be. So what business of your country is it what I was doing inside of mine?”

“Well, that’s one of the arguments I aim to use,” Isidore Goldstein said. “You’re not so dumb after all, are you?”

“Hope not,” Jeff said. “How come you reckoned I was?”

“One way to do what you did is just do it and never think about it at all,” the U.S. attorney said. “I figured you might be like that, where you’d go, ‘Yeah, sure,’ and take care of things, like. But you’ve got too many brains for that—I can tell. So why *did* you do it?”

“’Cause the niggers were screwing my country. Honest to God, they were. First time I went to combat in 1916, it wasn’t against you Yankees. Oh, hell, no. I was fightin’ the damn coons in Georgia after they rose up and stabbed us in the back.”

Goldstein pulled a notebook out of his left breast pocket and wrote something in it. “Maybe that will help some. I don’t know, but maybe,” he said. “The charge, though, is crimes against humanity, and that can mean whatever the people who make it want it to mean.”

“Sounds chickenshit to me,” Jeff said. “They gonna make believe the niggers weren’t up in arms against our government long before we went to war with the USA? They can do that—I sure can’t stop

’em—but they’re a pack of goddamn liars if they do.”

The military attorney did some more scrawling. “Maybe you want to forget the word *nigger*.”

“How come?” Pinkard asked, genuinely confused.

“Because you hammer another nail into your coffin every time you say it,” Goldstein answered. “In the United States, it’s an insult, a fighting word.” The idea that Negroes could fight whites without having the whole country land on them with both feet deeply offended Jeff. He was shrewd enough to see saying so wouldn’t do him any good. He

just nodded instead. So did Isidore Goldstein, who went on, “And they’ll say things were so bad for the colored population in the Confederate States under Freedom Party rule that it had no choice but to rebel.”

“Well, they can can say any damn thing they want,” Jeff replied. “Saying something doesn’t make it so, though.”

“‘I’m Jake Featherston, and I’m here to tell you the truth,’” Goldstein quoted with savage relish. “Yes, we’ve noticed that.”

“Oh, yeah. You damnyankees never once told a lie. And every one of you just loves coons, too. And I bet your shit don’t stink, either.”

“All of which would be good points except for two minor details.” The lawyer ticked them off on his fingers: “First one is, the United States are going to win and the Confederate States are going to lose.

Second one is, you really are responsible for upwards of a million deaths.”

“So what?” Jeff said. That made even Goldstein blink. Angrily, Pinkard said it again: “So what, goddammit? Who gave the orders to drop those fucking superbombs on our cities? You think that asshole ain’t a bigger criminal than me? You gonna hang him by the balls? Like hell you will! Chances are you’ll pin a medal on the motherfucker instead.”

“Again, two minor details,” Goldstein said. “First, you used the superbomb before we did—”

“Yeah, and I wish we woulda started a year ago,” Jeff broke in. “Then you’d be laughing out of the other side of your face.”

Goldstein continued as if he hadn’t spoken: “And, again, we’re winning and you’re not. You might do well to sound sorry for what you’ve done and to blame it on Featherston and on Ferdinand Koenig. I’m afraid I don’t think it will do you much good, but it may do you some.”

“You want me to turn traitor,” Jeff said.

“I’m trying to tell you how you have some small chance of staying alive,” Isidore Goldstein said. “If you don’t care, I can’t do much for you. I’m very much afraid I can’t do much for you anyhow.”

“I’ll tell you what I’m sorry about. I’m sorry we lost,” Pinkard said. “I’m sorry it comes down to me havin’ to try and beg my life from a bunch of damnyankees. Seems like I got a choice between dyin’ on my feet and maybe livin’ on my knees. You had a choice like that, Mr. Smartass Lawyer, what would you do?”

“I don’t know. How can any man know for sure before he has to find out the hard way?” Goldstein said. “But I’m still Jewish. That says I likely have some stubborn ancestors up in the branches of my family tree.”

Jeff hadn’t thought of it like that. He didn’t exactly love Jews. But, like most Confederates, he aimed the greater portion of his scorn at Negroes and a big part of what was left at Mexicans. (He wondered what Hip Rodriguez would do in a mess like this. He didn’t think Hip would crawl; greaser or not, Hip was a man. But why— *why*, dammit? —did he go and eat his gun?)

“There you are, then,” Jeff said.

“Yeah, here I am. And here you are, and how the hell am I supposed to defend you?” Goldstein shook his head. “I’ll give it my best shot. Better than you deserve, too. But then like I said, it’s the guys who don’t deserve a defense who deserve it most of all.”

What was that supposed to mean? Jeff was still chewing on it when the U.S. MPs took him back to jail. He looked around as he walked, hoping for a glimpse of Edith. No luck. Wherever she was, she wasn’t close by. He wondered whether he’d ever see her again. If the Yankees hanged him, would they be cruel enough to keep her away even then? He never wondered what the Negroes on their way to his bathhouses thought of him.

T hese days, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had less to do. Congress had set it up to hold the Army’s feet to the fire—and the Navy’s, too. With the war almost won, the Senators and Representatives didn’t have much to criticize. Flora Blackford wished the superbomb had vaporized Jake Featherston—but so did the Army. Sooner or later, it would catch him. Either that, or he’d die fighting to escape capture. Flora didn’t much care which, as long as the world was rid of him.

A Senator was grilling a Navy captain about why the United States was having so much trouble matching the new German submersible

designs. Those promised a revolution in submarine warfare once the USA got them right. That hadn't happened yet.

"Isn't it a fact, Captain Rickover, that the German Navy has had these new models in service for almost a year?"

"Yes, but we only got the plans a few months ago," Rickover answered. *You tell him*, Flora thought: the captain was a Jew, one of the few to rise so high. He had no give in him, continuing, "We'll get the boats built faster than the *Kriegsmarine* did, but we can't do it yesterday. I'm sorry. I would if I could."

"I don't need you to be facetious, Captain."

"Well, I don't need you to play Monday-morning coach, Senator, but the rules are set up to let you do that if you want to."

"Mr. Chairman, this witness is being uncooperative," the Senator complained.

"I am not," Rickover said before the chairman could rule on the dispute. "The distinguished gentleman from Dakota—a state famous for its seafaring tradition—wants the Navy Department to accomplish the impossible. The merely improbable, which we've done time and again, no longer satisfies him."

The Senator from Dakota spluttered. The chairman plied his gavel with might and main. Before Flora found out how the exciting serial ended, a page hurried up to her and whispered, "Excuse me, Congresswoman, but you have a telegram."

"Thank you." Flora stood and slipped out. *Escaping this nonsense is a relief, nothing else but*, she thought.

Then she saw the kid in the Western Union uniform, darker and greener than the one soldiers wore.

When a messenger boy waited for you, did you really want the wire he carried? Too often, it was like seeing the Angel of Death in front of you. Her hand shook a little as she reached out for the flimsy yellow envelope.

"Much obliged, ma'am," he said when she gave him a quarter. He touched two fingers to the brim of his cap in a sort of salute, then hurried away.

She had to make herself open the envelope. The blood ran cold in her veins—it almost didn't want to run at all—when she saw the telegram was from the War Department. *The Secretary of War deeply regrets to inform you…* Tears blurred the words; she had to blink several times before she could see to go on. *…that your son, Joshua Blackford, was wounded in action on the Arkansas front. The wound is not believed to be serious, and a full recovery is expected*. The printed signature of a lieutenant colonel—an assistant adjutant general—followed.

"How bad is it, ma'am?" the Congressional page asked.

"Wounded," Flora answered automatically. "The wire says they think he'll get better."

"I'm glad to hear it," the page said. If the war went on another year—which didn't seem likely—he might be in uniform himself. He probably had friends who already were. Did he have any who'd been unlucky? Flora didn't want to ask.

She hurried over to the bank of telephones down the hall from the committee meeting room. Instead of calling Lieutenant Colonel Pfeil, whose signature probably went out on dozens of wires a day, she rang up Franklin Roosevelt. In one way, a wounded private was no concern of his. But when the wounded private was the son of a Congresswoman who was also a former First Lady and who was friends with the Assistant Secretary of War…Maybe Roosevelt would know more than he might if she were calling about Private Joe Doakes.

She got through in a hurry. "Hello, Flora." Roosevelt didn't sound as ebullient as usual, so he probably knew something. "Yes, I had heard. I'm sorry," he said when she asked.

"What happened?" she demanded.

"Well, this is all unofficial, because I'm not supposed to keep track of such things, but I understand he's lost the middle finger on his left hand," Roosevelt said. "Bullet or a shell fragment—I don't know which, and I'm not sure anyone else does, either. Not a crippling wound…Um, he isn't left-handed, is he?"

"No," Flora said. She didn't know whether to be relieved it wasn't worse or horrified that it had happened at all. She ended up being both at once, a stew that made her heart pound and her stomach churn.

“That’s good. If he isn’t, I’d say it’s what the men call a hometowner.”

“A hometowner.” She’d heard the phrase, too. “*Alevai*,” she said. “By the time he gets well, the war will be over, won’t it?”

“We sure hope so,” Roosevelt answered. “Nothing is ever as sure as we wish it would be, but we hope so.”

“Do you know where he is? The wire didn’t say.”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure I can find out for you. Are you in your office?”

“No, I’m at a telephone outside the committee meeting room. But I can get there in five minutes.”

“All right. Let me see what I can find out, and I’ll call you back.” The Assistant Secretary of War hung up.

Flora ducked back into the meeting room to explain what had happened. The Senators and Representatives made sympathetic noises; a lot of them had fought in the last war, and several had sons at the front this time around. Captain Rickover gave her his best wishes from the witness stand.

The telephone was ringing when she hurried into her office. Bertha stared in surprise. “Hello, Congresswoman! How funny you should walk in. Mr. Roosevelt is on the line for you.”

“I’ll take it right here,” Flora said, and grabbed the handset away from her secretary. “Hello, Franklin!

Here I am.”

“Hello, Flora. Joshua is in the military hospital in Thayer, Missouri, which is right on the border with Arkansas.”

“Thayer, Missouri,” Flora repeated. “Thank you.” She hung up, then turned to Bertha. “Get me to Thayer, Missouri, as fast as humanly possible.”

That turned out to be a flight to St. Louis and a railroad journey down from the big city. Bertha squawked till she found out why Flora needed to make the trip. Then she shut up and arranged the tickets with her usual competence.

Landing in St. Louis, Flora saw to her surprise that it had been hit

almost as hard as Philadelphia. The war in the West never got the press things farther east did. But Confederate bombers still came up to strike St. Louis, and long-range C.S. rockets fired from Arkansas had hit the town hard.

The train ride southwest from St. Louis to Thayer was…a train ride. Every few miles, a machine-gun nest—sometimes sandbagged, more often a concrete blockhouse—guarded the track. Here west of the Mississippi, spaces were wide and soldiers thin on the ground. Confederate raiders slipped north every now and again. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War would have had something sharp to say about that…if it hadn't had so many other bigger things closer to home to worry about.

Thayer had gone up as a railroad town. It had flourished, in a modest way, as a cross-border trading center—and then suffered when the war strangled the trade that kept it going. The military hospital on the edge of town put a little life back into the economy—but at what a cost!

Joshua wasn't in his bed when Flora got there to see him. She feared something had gone wrong and he was back in the doctors' clutches, but the wounded man in the bed next to his said, "He's playing cards in the common room down at the end of the corridor, ma'am."

"Oh," Flora said. "Thank you."

When Flora walked in, Joshua held five cards in his right hand. Bandages swathed the left. He put down the cards to toss money into the pot. "See your five and raise you another five." Then he looked up from the poker game. "Oh, hi, Mom," he said, as if they were bumping into each other back home. "Be with you in a minute. I have to finish cleaning Spamhead's clock."

"In your dreams, kid. I'll raise you five more." Another greenback fluttered down in the center of the table. The sergeant called Spamhead did have a square, very pink face. He seemed to take the nickname for granted. Flora wouldn't have wanted to be called anything like that.

He won the pot, too—his straight beat Joshua's three tens. Joshua said, "Oh, darn!" All the other poker players laughed at him. What would he have said if his mother weren't there to hear it? Something spicier, no doubt. He stood up from the table and walked over to Flora. "I didn't think you'd get here so fast."

“How are you?” Flora asked.

Joshua raised his wounded hand. “It hurts,” he said, as he might have said, *It’s sunny outside*. “But not too bad. Plenty of guys here are worse off. Poor Spamhead lost a foot—he stepped on a mine. He’s lucky it wasn’t one of those bouncing ones—it would’ve blown his balls off…. Sorry.”

“It’s all right,” Flora told him. “How else can you say that?” *Spamhead got mutilated, and Joshua think’s he’s lucky. I can see why, but…* “What does your doctor say?”

“That it was a clean wound. That it’s nothing much to flabble about. That—”

“Easy for him to say,” Flora broke in indignantly. “He didn’t get hurt.”

“Yeah, I know. I thought of that, too,” Joshua said. “But he’s seen plenty worse, so it’s not like he’s wrong, either. I’ll heal from this, and I’ll heal pretty fast. The only thing I won’t be able to do that I could before is give somebody the finger with my left hand.”

“Joshua!” Flora wasn’t exactly shocked, but she was surprised.

Her son grinned sheepishly, but not sheepishly enough—he’d done that on purpose. “I didn’t even think of it,” he said. “The medic who took me back to the aid station was the one who said it first.”

“Terrific. Now I know who to blame.” Flora sounded as if she were about to haul that medic up before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. She was tempted to do it, too. She recognized abuse of power when she saw it, which didn’t mean it failed to tempt her.

Maybe Joshua saw the temptation gleaming in her eyes, for he said, “Somebody else would’ve come up with it if he hadn’t. I would have myself, I bet—it’s the way soldiers think.”

“Terrific. I don’t want you thinking like that,” Flora said. Joshua didn’t answer. He just looked at her—looked down at her, to remind her he was taller, to remind her he was grown if not grown up, to remind her that he didn’t care how she wanted him to think. He would think the way he chose, not the way she did. She squeezed him, careful of the gauze-shrouded hand. “I’m glad you’re going to be all right. I’m gladder than I know how to tell you.”

“Sure, Mom.” Joshua took it for granted. Flora didn’t, couldn’t, and knew she never would. She started to cry. “I’m fine, Mom,” Joshua said, not understanding at all. He probably was. Flora knew too well that she wasn’t.

E ver feel like a piece on a chessboard, sir?” Lon Menefee asked.

Sam Carsten nodded. “Now that you mention it, yes.” The comparison wasn’t one he would have made himself. Poker, pinochle, and checkers were more his speed. He knew how the different chessmen moved, but that was about it.

But the *Josephus Daniels* sure was making a long diagonal glide across the board of the Atlantic right now. Something big was in the wind. The Navy Department had found a more urgent assignment for her than protecting the carriers that protected the battlewagons that bombarded the coast of Haiti while Marines and soldiers went ashore.

“I’m sure not sorry to get out of range of land-based air,” he said. “Even with our own flyboys overhead, I don’t like that for hell.”

“Worked out all right,” Menefee said.

Sam had to nod. “Well, yeah. When the butternut bastards on the island saw they wouldn’t be able to hold us, they couldn’t give up fast enough.”

The exec laughed. “D’you blame ’em?”

“Christ, no!” Sam said. “If they didn’t surrender to us, the Haitians would’ve got ’em. They weren’t up for that.” Haiti had won its freedom from France in a bloody slave revolt that shocked the South a century and a half before. What the Negroes there now would have done to the Confederate soldiers they caught…Carsten’s mouth tightened. “The blacks probably wouldn’t have treated Featherston’s fuckers any worse than they got treated themselves.”

“Yes, sir,” Menefee said, “but that covers one hell of a lot of ground.”

“Mm.” Sam let it go at that. Again, the exec wasn’t wrong. The Confederates had set up one of their murder factories outside of Port-au-Prince. At first, they’d just killed Haitian soldiers and government officials. Then they’d started in on the educated people in the towns: folks who might give them trouble one of these days. Before long, all you needed was a black skin—and how many Haitians didn’t have one

of those?

“They’ll pay,” Menefee predicted. “If we can arrest the guys who ran that camp in Texas, we can do the same with the sons of bitches in the Caribbean.”

“I expect you’re right,” Sam said. A wave rolling down from the north slapped the *Josephus Daniels*’

port side and made the destroyer escort roll a little. She was heading east across the ocean as fast as she could go, east and north. Musingly, Sam went on, “I wonder how long we’ll stay out of range of land-based air.”

“You think U.S. troops will land on Ireland the way we did on Haiti, sir?” Menefee asked. “That’d be a rougher job. Logistics are worse, and the limeys aren’t knocked flat the way the Confederates were.”

“It’s one of the things I’m wondering about,” Sam answered. “The other one is, what’s the Kaiser going to do now? Yeah, England dropped a superbomb on Hamburg, but how many more does Churchill have? You don’t want to piss the Germans off, because whatever you go and do to them, they’ll do to you doubled and redoubled.” He wasn’t a great bridge player, either, but he could talk the lingo.

“Beats me,” Menefee said. “I expect we’ll find out before too long.”

The *Josephus Daniels* remained part of the flotilla that had landed troops on Haiti. Sam felt a certain amount of satisfaction because the destroyer escort wasn’t the slowest ship in it—the baby flattops were.

He wouldn’t have done without them for the world; if he really was sailing against the British Isles, he wanted all the air cover he could get. In fact, he wanted even more air cover than that.

Summer in the North Atlantic was much more pleasant than winter. Days were longer, seas were calmer, and the sun was brighter. Lon Menefee tanned. Sam reddened and burned and wore his hat whenever he went out on deck. He exchanged resigned looks with the handful of sailors who came close to being as fair as he was.

Nobody on the destroyer escort was eager to run into the Royal Navy. Britain’s fleet didn’t have the worldwide reach it had enjoyed before the Great War. Where it still went, though, it remained a highly capable outfit.

A destroyer off on the other side of the flotilla heard, or thought she heard, a submersible lurking in the sea. She prosecuted the sub with a shower of ashcans. There was no triumphant signal showing the enemy boat—if it was an enemy boat—had gone to the bottom. Sam didn't much care. As long as the sub couldn't launch torpedoes, he stayed happy.

He began haunting the wireless shack, as he'd done aboard several other ships, he'd served. He noticed he wasn't the only one; all the officers and chiefs seemed to be waiting for the other shoe to drop.

But he was asleep in his cabin when it did. The clatter of running feet on the steel of the corridor floor woke him a split second before someone pounded on the door. "It's open!" he called, turning on the lamp and sitting up in his narrow bed. He didn't have two more sailors right over his head, the way he did when he first put to sea.

Yeoman van Duyk burst into the cabin. "They've gone and done it, sir!" he said, his voice cracking with excitement.

"Who? The Germans?" Sam asked around a yawn. A hot flask full of coffee stood on the steel nightstand. He grabbed for it—he didn't think he'd need to worry about sleep any more tonight.

"London?"

"Yes, sir." Van Duyk nodded. "And Brighton, and Norwich—all at the same time, or close enough."

"Sweet Jesus!" Sam exclaimed. As he poured from the hot flask, he found himself wanting to improve the coffee with a slug of medicinal brandy. He didn't, not with the rating standing there. "Did they get Churchill? Did they get the King?"

"I took this off the German wireless, sir, so they don't know," van Duyk answered. "No word from the BBC yet."

"All right. Thanks." Sam's guess was that the Prime Minister and King Edward and his family would have got out of London even before the RAF hit Hamburg. They had to know the Kaiser would land a superbomb there sooner or later. "What else did the Germans say?"

"That they had more where those three came from, and that they were ready to knock England for a loop if that was what it took to get the limeys out of the war."

“Jesus!” Sam said again. “How much of this poor, sorry world’s gonna be left if we keep blowing chunks of it off the map?”

“Beats me, sir,” van Duyk said. “I better get back to the shack.” He sketched a salute and disappeared.

“And I better get my ass up to the bridge,” Sam said, even though nobody was there to hear him. He put on his shoes and jacket; he’d slept in the rest of his clothes. He’d look a little rumpled, but the world wouldn’t end.

The exec had the conn when Carsten came in. “You heard, sir?” Menefee asked.

“You bet I did,” Sam answered. “Three at once? They must be turning those bastards out in carload lots.”

“They’re lucky they didn’t get one of their bombers shot down.”

“Damn right they are. I bet they snuck ’em in as part of a big raid. That way, the limeys couldn’t know which machines to go after. Maybe they had fighters flying escort, too—with the Y-ranging sets they’ve got nowadays, you can see what you’re going after even at night.”

“Makes sense.” The exec nodded. “You’ve been thinking about this.”

Sam gave him a crooked grin. “Didn’t know it wasn’t in the rules. But you’re right—I have. I figured the Kaiser had to hit back. If I was him, how would I go about it?”

“What will England do now?” Menefee wondered.

“Depends on how many bombs she’s got, I suppose,” Sam said. “If she has more, she’ll use ’em. If she doesn’t…How can she go on?”

“Beats me,” Menefee said.

“Hell, if it wasn’t for Churchill, I bet England would have quit already,” Sam said. “Him and Featherston—the other side’s got the stubborn so-and-sos.”

“Now we hope he’s dead,” the exec said.

“Amen.” Sam and Thad Walters spoke at the same time. They looked at each other and grinned.

But Churchill wasn't dead. He went on the BBC about half an hour later. Van Duyk called Sam down to the wireless shack. The British Prime Minister was speaking from "somewhere in the United Kingdom." He sounded furious, too. "If the Hun thinks we are beaten, let him think again," he thundered.

"We shall avenge this monstrous crime. Even now, the Angel of Death unfolds his wings over a German city I do not choose to name. With weeping and repentance shall the Kaiser rue the day he chose to try conclusions with us."

"Wow!" Sam said. "Too bad he's not one of the good guys—he gives a hell of a speech."

"Yes, sir." Van Duyk turned the dial on the shortwave set. "Sounds like the Germans are going to get hit right about now. Let's see what they have to say."

He found the English-language German wireless. "There is a report of what may have been a superbomb explosion between Bruges and Ghent, in Belgium," the announcer said, only the slightest guttural accent betraying his homeland. "One of our turbo-engined night fighters brought down a British bomber in approximately the same location. If the Angel of Death sought to spread his wings over Germany tonight, he fell short by a good many kilometers."

Van Duyk whooped. "Up yours, Winston!" Sam said. He hurried up to the bridge to spread the news.

"Oh, my," Lon Menefee said. "Well, how many more cards do the limeys have?"

"We'll find out," Sam said. "Stay tuned for the next exciting episode of 'As the World Goes up in Smoke,' brought to you by the Jameson Casket and Mortuary Company. Our slogan is 'You're going to die sometime—why not now?'"

"Ouch!" Lieutenant Walters said.

"Lord, it's the way things look," Carsten said wearily. "This can't go on much longer—can it?" He sounded as if he was pleading—and he was.

"Ask Featherston. Ask Churchill," Lieutenant Menefee said. "They're the ones who have to quit."

“Can’t happen soon enough,” Sam said. “It’s pretty much pointless now. We know who won. We know who lost. Only thing we don’t know is how many dead there are.” He paused. “Well, maybe Churchill has enough bombs left to force a draw. Doesn’t look like Featherston does.”

“I just don’t want to see a bomber coming over *us* at thirty thousand feet, that’s all,” Walters said.

“Yipes!” Ice walked up Sam’s spine. “I didn’t even think of that.” He made as if to look at the sky.

No CAP at night. It wouldn’t be flying anywhere near so high, anyway. Who’d ever imagined you might need to? But a superbomb didn’t need to score a direct hit to ruin a warship. He wanted to turn around and run for home. But he couldn’t, and the *Josephus Daniels* steamed on.

T his is going to hurt a little.”

Michael Pound had come to hate those words, because a little always turned into a lot. He’d never imagined changing dressings on his burned legs could hurt so much. And, at that, there were plenty of guys who had it worse than he did. Some of the badly burned men—pilots and other aircrew, most of them, and a few soldiers from barrels with them—needed morphine every time they got fresh bandages.

He didn’t, not any more.

He missed the stuff now that he wasn’t getting it, but not enough to make him think he’d turned into a junkie. It did do more against pain than whatever else they had; codeine wasn’t much stronger than aspirin by comparison. He could bear what he had to live with, though. When he heard other men howling, he understood the meaning of the phrase *it could be worse*.

The military hospital was somewhere near Chattanooga. Formidable defenses kept snipers and auto bombs at bay. From what everybody said, holding the CSA down was proving almost as expensive as conquering the damn place had been. That wasn’t good, but Pound couldn’t do anything about it.

He got his Purple Heart. He got a Bronze Star to go with his Silver Star. He didn’t particularly think he deserved one, but nobody asked him. He got promoted to first lieutenant, which thrilled him less than

the brass who gave him a silver bar on each shoulder strap probably thought it would. And he got a letter from General Morrell. Morrell wasn't just an old acquaintance—he was a friend, despite differences in rank. And he'd been wounded, too. A letter from him really did mean something.

"You should do very well, Lieutenant," a doctor told Pound one day. "A lot of third-degree burns are much deeper, and impair function even when they heal well. You'll have some nasty scars, but I don't think you'll even limp."

"Terrific," Pound said. "How would you like it if somebody said something like that about your legs?

Especially when you were hurting like a son of a bitch while he did it?"

The doctor pulled up the left sleeve of his white coat. His arm had scars that made nasty look like an understatement. "I was in a motorcar crash ten years ago," he said. "I know what I'm talking about—and now we can do things for burns they didn't dream of back then."

"Can you use your hand?" Pound asked.

"Thumb and first two fingers," the doctor replied. "The tendons and nerves to the others are pretty much shot, but I've got the important ones, anyhow. You don't have that worry—I know your toes work."

"Uh-huh," Pound said unenthusiastically. He knew they worked, too; the therapists made him wiggle them. That made him forget about the rest of his pain—it felt as if a flamethrower were toasting them.

"Just hang on," the doctor said. "It's a bitch while it's going on, but it gets better. You have to give it time, that's all."

Pound couldn't even tell him to go to hell, because the other man had been through what he was in the middle of now and had come out the other side. "It *is* a bitch," was as much as he thought he could say.

"Oh, I know," the doctor answered quietly. "I still miss the needle sometimes, but I'll be damned if I go back to it…and you can take that any way you please." He nodded and walked on to the next patient.

He looked like such a mild little fellow, too: the kind who slid through life without anything much ever happening to him. Which only

proved you never could tell. Michael Pound had seen that plenty of times with soldiers he got to know. He wondered why he was so surprised now.

He wished he could get up and do things, but he was stuck on his back—or sometimes, to stave off bedsores, on his stomach. The therapists said he could put weight on his feet in a couple of weeks. He looked forward to that, and then again he didn't. Till you'd been through a lot of pain, you didn't understand how much you wanted to stay away from more.

In the meantime, he had magazines and newspapers and the handful of books in the hospital library.

He voraciously devoured them. He also had the wireless. He would have listened to news almost all the time. The other guys in the ward plumped for music and comedies and dramas. Pound endured their programs—he couldn't try throwing his weight around, not unless he wanted everybody else to hate him.

But the news was all that really mattered to him.

Sometimes the other burned men gave in to him, too, especially in the middle of the night when they were all too likely to be awake and when the regular programs were even crappier than they were the rest of the time. And so he was listening to a news program when a flash came in.

"We interrupt this broadcast," said the man behind the mike. "This just in from the BBC—the Churchill government has fallen. Parliament voted no confidence in the Churchill-Mosley regime that has run the United Kingdom for more than ten years. Pending elections, a caretaker government under Sir Horace Wilson has been formed. Wilson has announced that his first action as Prime Minister will be to seek an armistice from the Kaiser."

The room erupted. A nurse rushed in to quiet the whoops and cheers. When she found out what had happened, she let out a whoop herself.

"They only had two!" Pound said.

"Two what?" the nurse asked.

"Two bombs," Pound and two other guys said at the same time. Pound went on, "They had two, and the second one didn't go off where they wanted it to, and that was it. Now the Germans can blow up their

cities one at a time, and they can't hit back."

"Wow," the nurse said. "Are you a general? You talk like a general."

"I'm a lieutenant," he answered. "I've got gray hair 'cause I was a sergeant for years and years. They finally promoted me, and they've been regretting it ever since."

She laughed. "You're funny, too! I like that."

He wished he had a private room. Maybe something interesting would have happened. The ward didn't even boast curtains around the beds. Whatever they did to you, everybody else got to watch.

After a while, you mostly didn't care. This once, Pound might have.

"Only Featherston left," said the man in the next bed.

"What do we do when we catch him?" somebody asked.

"String him up!" The answer came from Pound and several other wounded soldiers at the same time.

It also came from the nurse. She suggested stringing the President of the CSA up by some highly sensitive parts of his anatomy. Coming from most women, that would have shocked Pound. He'd seen that nurses had mouths at least as raunchy as those of soldiers. It made sense: nurses saw plenty of horrors, too.

"My God," someone else said. "The war really is just about over."

Nobody made any snide comments about that. Maybe the other men in the ward had as much trouble taking it in as Michael Pound did. The war had consumed his whole being for the past three years—and before that, when he'd been down in Houston before it returned to the CSA, he might as well have been at war.

He wondered what he'd do when peace finally broke out. Would the Army want to keep a first lieutenant with gray hair? The service needed some grizzled noncoms; they tempered junior officers'

puppyish enthusiasm. But he'd never be anything more than a junior officer himself, and he was much too goddamn old for the role.

If they turned him loose, if they patted him on the back and said, *Well done— now we'll go use up somebody else*, what the hell would he do then? He had no idea. The thought was frightening enough.

The Army had been his life since he was eighteen years old.

They couldn't just throw him out…could they?

"Shit," another burned man said. "This fuckin' war's never gonna be over—excuse my French, miss."

"I've heard the words before," the nurse said dryly.

The soldiers laughed. The one who'd been talking went on, "It won't be. Honest to God, it won't.

Maybe the Confederate government finally surrenders, yeah, but we'll stay on occupation duty down here forever. Lousy bushwhackers and diehards won't start singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner'

tomorrow, and you can take that to the bank. We have grandchildren, *they'll* be down here shooting at waddayacallems—rebels."

Three or four guys groaned, probably because they thought the burned man was likely to be right.

Michael Pound felt like cheering, for exactly the same reason. He didn't—everybody else would have thought he was nuts. But he felt like it. If the war, or something a lot like the war, went on and on, the Army wouldn't have any excuse to throw him out on his ear.

Well, it wouldn't have any excuse except maybe that he'd made himself too obnoxious for the brass to stand. Not without pride, he figured he was capable of that.

"Once we get done licking the Confederates, do we go after the Japs next?" asked the guy in the next bed.

If the General Staff of the burn ward of the military hospital outside Chattanooga had their way, the answer to that one was no. Pound wouldn't have minded seeing the Sandwich Islands, but not as a way station to a battle somewhere even farther off in the Pacific. The Japs had their sphere, and the United States had theirs, and as long as neither side poached on the other that was fine with him.

He did say, "I bet they're working overtime in Tokyo, trying to figure out how to build a superbomb."

"Wouldn't you be?" said the soldier next to him.

"You bet I would," Pound answered. "As long as we've got it and they

don't, it's a club we can use to beat them over the head. I bet the Tsar's telling all his scientists they're heading for Siberia if they don't make one PDQ, too. If the Germans have one and the Russians don't, they're in big trouble."

He wondered whether Austria-Hungary would try to make one. Berlin was the senior partner there, and had been since the early days of the Great War. Germany had saved Austria-Hungary's bacon against the Russians then, and again this time around. But Vienna had some clever scientists, too. You never could tell, Pound decided with profound unoriginality.

"Before long, everybody and his mother-in-law's going to have those… miserable things." A soldier had mercy on the nurse's none-too-delicate ears. "How do we keep from blowing each other to kingdom come?"

That was a good question. It was probably *the* question on the minds of the striped-pants set these days. If the diplomats came up with a halfway decent answer, they would earn their salaries and then some.

Michael Pound thought about the CSA's rockets. If you could load superbombs onto bigger, better ones, you could blow up anybody you didn't like, even if he didn't live next door. Wouldn't that be fun?

Could you make a rocket shoot down another rocket? Airplanes shot down airplanes…some of the time, anyhow. Why shouldn't rockets shoot down rockets…some of the time, anyhow? Would that be enough? Pound had no idea, which left him in the same leaky boat as everybody else in the world.

XIII

J ake Featherston felt trapped. The skies over North Carolina had been lousy with damnyankee fighter-bombers coming down from the north. Now that he'd crossed into South Carolina, the skies were lousy with damnyankee fighter-bombers coming up from the south. He and the handful of loyalists who clung to him through thick and thin moved by night and lay up by day, like any hunted animals.

Only chunks of the Confederate States still answered to the Confederate government: pieces of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina; the part of Cuba that wasn't in revolt; most of Florida;

most of Sonora and Chihuahua (which, cut off by the goddamn treasonous Republic of Texas, might as well have been on the far side of the moon); and a core of Mississippi, Louisiana, and most of Arkansas.

If the war would go on, if the war could go on, it would have to go on there.

One thing wrong: Jake hadn't the faintest idea how to reach his alleged redoubt. "What are we going to do?" he demanded of Clarence Potter. "Jesus H. Christ, what *can* we do? They're squeezing us tighter every day, the bastards."

"O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams," Potter answered.

"What the hell is *that*?" Jake said.

"Shakespeare. *Hamlet.*"

"Hot damn! I don't need to go back to school now, thank you kindly." Featherston glared at the longtime foe who'd done him so much good. "What are you doing here, anyway? Why don't you give yourself up to the USA? You can tell 'em you've hated my guts since dirt."

"If things were different, I might," Potter said calmly. "But I'm the guy who blew up Philadelphia, remember. And I did it wearing a Yankee uniform, too."

"I'm not likely to forget." Jake's laugh was a hoarse, harsh bark. "You got out again, too, in spite of everything. I bet those sons of bitches are shitting rivets on account of it."

"Bad security," Potter said. "If we had another superbomb, we could get it up there."

That made Featherston cuss. They would have another bomb in a few months—if the United States didn't overrun Lexington first, which seemed unlikely. Henderson FitzBelmont had moved heaven and earth to make one superbomb. Now, when the CSA needed lots of them, he got constipated. You couldn't count on anybody—except yourself. Always yourself.

"But now the United States want to kill me worse than you ever did," Potter went on. "And they've got an excuse, because I wore their uniform. So in case they find out who I am, I expect I'm dead.

Which means I'm all yours, Mr. President."

"All mine, huh? Then why the devil ain't you a redheaded gal with legs up to here?"

"You can't have everything, sir. You've still got Ferd Koenig along for the ride, and you've still got Lulu."

She sat in a different motorcar, parked under some trees not far away. Jake looked over in that direction to make sure she couldn't overhear before he said, "She's a wonderful woman in all kinds of ways, but not that one. I do believe I'd sooner hump me a sheep."

"Well, she doesn't do anything for me, either, but she worships the ground you walk on," Potter said.

"God knows why."

"Fuck you, too," Featherston said without rancor. "She's a good gal. I don't want to make her unhappy or anything, so she better not hear that from you."

"She won't. I don't play those kinds of games," Potter said, and Jake decided to believe him. The Intelligence officer wasn't usually nasty in any petty way. After a moment, Potter went on, "You know, you're right—you *are* nice to Lulu. You go out of your way to be nice to Lulu. How come you don't do that with anybody else?"

There was a question Jake had never asked himself. Now he did, but he only shrugged. "Damned if I know, Potter. It's just how things worked out, that's all. I like Lulu. Rest of the world's full of assholes."

"I wish I could tell you you were wrong," Potter said. Airplanes droned by overhead—Yankee airplanes. They were going to hit something farther north. Columbia was already in U.S. hands, so they could drop their load on North Carolina and then land in Virginia. With a sigh, Potter asked, "How are we going to make it out West? Do you think we can get an Alligator to land anywhere near here? Do you think it could fly across Georgia and Alabama without getting shot down?"

"Wouldn't bet on it," Jake answered mournfully. "What I was thinking was, if we put on civvies and make like we're a bunch of guys who gave up, we can say we're going home and sneak across what the damnyankees are holding, and they won't be any wiser. How do you like it?"

Potter pursed his lips. “If we can’t get an Alligator, maybe. If we can, I believe I’d sooner fly at night and take the chance of getting blown out of the sky.”

Jake scowled at him. Potter looked back unperturbed, as if to say, *Well, you asked me*. He was one of the few men who never sugarcoated their opinions around the President of the CSA. Reluctantly, Featherston respected him for that. And he was too likely to be right, damn him. “I’ll see what we can come up with,” the President said.

When his shrunken entourage drove into Spartanburg, South Carolina, he found the colonel in charge of the town’s defenses lost in gloom. “Damnyankees are on the way, and to hell with me if I know how to stop ’em,” the officer said.

“Do your best,” Jake answered. “Now let me get on the horn to Charlotte.” That was the closest place where he thought he was likely to find a transport. And he did. And, after some choice bad language, he persuaded the authorities there to fly it down to Spartanburg.

“If it gets shot down—” some officious fool in Charlotte said.

“If it doesn’t get here, *you’ll* get shot down.” Jake wasn’t sure he could bring off the threat. But the jerk up in Charlotte couldn’t be sure he couldn’t.

The Alligator landed late in the afternoon. Ground crew personnel swarmed out with camouflage nets to make it as invisible as they could. “Do we really want to do this?” Ferd Koenig asked.

“If you don’t, then stay here,” Featherston answered. “Say hello to the U.S. soldiers when they catch you.” The Attorney General bit his lip. He got on the airplane with everybody else.

“Don’t know exactly how we’ll land if we have to do it in the dark,” the pilot said.

“You’ll work something out,” Jake told him.

“Well, I sure as hell hope so.” But the pilot didn’t sound too worried. “One thing—if I think this is crazy, chances are the damnyankees will, too. Maybe we’ll surprise ’em so much, we’ll get through ’em just like shit through a goose.”

“Now you’re talking. You take off in the wee small hours,” Jake said. “Fly low—stay under the Y-ranging if you can. Goddammit, we aren’t

licked yet. If we can just make the enemy see that occupying our country is more expensive than it's worth, we'll get their soldiers out of here and we'll get a peace we can live with. May take a while, but we'll do it."

He believed every word of it. He'd been fighting his whole life. He didn't know anything else. If he had to lead guerrillas out of the hills for the next twenty years, he was ready to do it. After so many fights, what was one more? Nothing to faze him—that was for sure.

After they got airborne, the pilot asked, "Want me to put on my wing lights?"

"Yeah, do it," Jake answered. "If the Yankees see 'em, they'll reckon we're one of theirs. I hope like hell they will, anyway."

"Me, too," the pilot said with feeling, but he flicked the switch. The red and green lights went on.

The Alligator droned south and west—more nearly south than west at first, because neither the pilot nor Jake wanted to come too close to Atlanta. If U.S. forces would be especially alert anywhere, they both figured that was the place.

Looking out of one of the transport's small side windows, Jake had no trouble figuring out when they passed from C.S.-to U.S.-held territory. The blackout in the occupied lands was a lot less stringent. The Yankees didn't expect Confederate bombers overhead, damn them. And the worst part was, the Yankees had every right not to expect them. The Confederacy didn't have many bombers left, and mostly used the ones it did have in close support of its surviving armies.

Turbulence made the Alligator bounce. Somebody gulped, loudly. "Use the airsick bag!" three people shouted at the same time. The gulper did. It helped—some.

And then turbulence wasn't the only thing bouncing the Alligator. Shells started bursting all around the airplane. Suddenly, the road through the air might have been full of potholes—big, deep ones. A major general who wasn't wearing a seat belt went sprawling.

"Get us the fuck out of here!" Jake yelled. If Lulu sniffed or squawked, he didn't hear her.

Engines roaring, the transport dove for the deck. The antiaircraft guns pursued. Shrapnel clattered into the wings and tore through the

fuselage. Somebody in there shrieked, which meant jagged metal tore through a person, too.

“We’re losing fuel!” the pilot shouted. “Lots of it!”

“Can we go on?” Jake had to bellow at the top of his lungs to make himself heard.

“Not a chance in church,” the pilot answered. “We’d never get there.”

“Can you land the son of a bitch?”

“If I can’t, we’re all dead,” the man answered. Jake remembered that he hadn’t been thrilled about landing at night even in Confederate-held territory. How much less enthusiastic would he be about a nighttime emergency landing on enemy soil? *I told him to put on the wing lights*, Jake thought. *Did it matter? Too goddamn late to worry about it now*.

He hated having his fate in somebody else’s hands. If he was going out, he saw himself trading bullets with the damnyankees and nailing plenty of them before they finally got him. This way… *Dammit, I’m a hero. The script isn’t supposed to work like this*.

“Brace yourselves!” the pilot shouted. “Belts on, everybody! I’m putting it down. I think that’s a field up ahead there—hope like hell it is, anyway. Anybody gets out, let Beckie know I love her.”

One of the engines died just before the Alligator met the ground—that was one hell of a leak, all right.

The transport was built to take it and built to land on rough airstrips—but coming down in a tobacco field with no landing lights was more than anybody could reasonably expect.

But it got down. It landed hard, hard enough to make Jake bite the devil out of his tongue. One tire blew. The Alligator slewed sideways. A wingtip dug into the ground. The transport tried to flip over. The wing broke off instead. The fire started then.

“Out!” the pilot screamed. “Out now!” The airplane hadn’t stopped moving, but nobody argued with him. Jake was the second man out the door. He had to jump down to the ground, and turned an ankle when he hit. Swearing savagely, he limped away.

“Fuck!” he said in amazement. “I’m alive!”

C larence Potter wondered how many nasty ways he could almost die. This blaze was a lot smaller than the radioactive fire he'd touched off in Philadelphia, but it was plenty big enough to give a man an awful fore-taste of hell before it finally killed him. To the poor chump roasting, how could any fire be bigger than that?

He heard Jake Featherston's obscene astonishment from not far away. It summed up how he felt, too.

He'd scrambled away from the burning Alligator right after the President of the CSA. Was everybody out? He looked at the pyre that had been a transport. Anybody who wasn't out now never would make it, that was for damn sure.

"Where the hell are we?" Ferdinand Koenig's deep voice came from over to the right.

"Somewhere in Georgia—I can't tell you anything else." That was the pilot. Nobody would have to deliver his message to Beckie…yet.

But they weren't free and clear, not by a long shot. "Let's get out of here," Potter said. "This field will be swarming with Yankees in nothing flat."

Some of the Confederate big shots weren't going anywhere. "I think my leg is busted," said the general who'd replaced Nathan Bedford Forrest III as chief of the General Staff. Potter couldn't remember his name; as far as Potter was concerned, the officer wasn't worth remembering. "I'm not going anywhere quick."

"You can surrender, Willard. Don't reckon they're shooting soldiers—only politicians," Jake Featherston said. "Just don't tell 'em I'm around."

"I wouldn't do that, sir," Willard said. *First name or last?* Potter wondered. Hell, it didn't matter to anybody but Willard any more.

"General Potter is right," Saul Goldman said. Potter blinked. He hadn't even known the Director of Communications got on the Alligator. Goldman was so quiet and self-effacing, he could disappear in plain sight.

Lulu was hurt, too, hurt badly. "I don't want the Yankees to get me, Mr. President," she told Jake.

“Will you please shoot me and put me out of my misery?”

“I don’t want to do that!” Featherston exclaimed.

“Please,” Lulu said. “I can’t go on. It’s the last thing you can do for me, since…Oh, never mind. You didn’t care about that, not with me.”

She knew what she was talking about. Jake had put it more pungently the afternoon before, but it amounted to the same thing. The President of the CSA muttered to himself. He started to turn away, then turned back. Potter had rarely seen him indecisive—wrong often, sometimes disastrously so, but hardly ever at a loss. “Christ,” he said under his breath.

“Hurry,” Lulu said. “You can’t stay here.”

Potter hadn’t imagined he would find Lulu agreeing with him, either. “Christ,” Jake said again, a little louder this time. Then he yanked the .45 out of the holster he always wore. He fired, and whispered,

“Sorry, Lulu,” as he did. “Come on!” Now he almost shouted. “Let’s get the fuck away from here.”

They stumbled and limped through the field. The only light came from the burning Alligator, and they were trying to put it behind them as fast as they could. “That must have been hard, sir,” Potter said after a while: cold comfort, he realized as soon as he spoke, if any at all.

“Feels like I just shot my own luck,” Featherston answered, his voice rough with—tears? “That make any sense at all to you?”

“Sense? No,” Potter answered. As the President glared at him, he added, “I understand what you mean, though. Let’s hope you’re wrong, that’s all.”

“Yeah. Let’s.” Jake’s voice stayed harsh. “You know what? You’re liable to be our ace in the hole.

We do run into damnyankees, you can talk for us, make ’em think we’re on their side.”

“I hope I can, anyhow,” Potter said. He’d done it up in the USA. If he couldn’t do it again—they were up the well-known creek, that was all. “I hope I don’t have to. I hope there aren’t any Yankees within miles.”

“That’d be nice.” Featherston didn’t sound as if he believed it was

likely. Since Potter didn't, either, he would have let it rest there. But Featherston went on, "Best thing we can do is get into some town the Yankees didn't bother garrisoning. We borrow a couple of motorcars from loyal people, we can head west…. Wish to hell I knew just where we were at."

Potter did. They were in trouble, that was where. Jake Featherston yelled for the pilot and asked him.

"Somewhere east of Atlanta—can't tell you closer," he replied. "I was going to fly south a little while longer, then swing west. That's about as good as I can do right now. Beg your pardon, sir, but I'm fuckin' surprised I'm in one piece."

"You did good, son," Jake said—he was never shy about patting small fry on the back. That was probably one of the things that had helped him rise and kept him on top. "Yeah, you did good. So where's a town?"

"Let's find a road," Potter said. "Sooner or later, a road's got to take us into a town." He didn't say what kind of town a road would take them into. They just had to trust to luck on that. No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than Featherston's mournful comment followed it.

He found the road by the simple expedient of stepping down into it. He came closer to hurting himself then, than he had in the Alligator's crash-landing. "Which way?" Ferdinand Koenig asked. *North or south, east or west?* was supposed to follow that question, but Potter had no idea which direction was which. Evidently, neither did anyone else.

But there was the moon, a thin waning crescent, so that had to be the east. Which meant the North Star should be about…there. And there it was, with the rest of the Little Dipper curling from it.

Jake Featherston worked it out at the same time as Potter did. "This way," he said, pointing. "We'll keep on heading south, see what the hell happens." He'd most likely spent more time in the field than anybody else here. He would be able to figure out which way was which as soon as he set his mind to it.

Down the road they went, a ragged squad, some hale enough, others limping. Most of them had pistols; one officer carried an automatic Tredegar. If Yankee soldiers came on them, they wouldn't last long. Potter understood that perfectly well. He wondered how many of the others did.

He also wondered how long they could keep going. Sooner or later, their minor injuries would catch up to them. And more than a few of them were, to put it politely, not men accustomed to taking much exercise. Ferd Koenig, in particular, resembled nothing so much as a suet pudding in a gray Freedom Party uniform.

Potter realized they should have changed into civilian clothes before they got on the Alligator. Too late to worry about that now. Too late to worry about lots of things now. *Would I be here if I'd managed to shoot Jake at the Olympics?* No, of course he wouldn't; the President's bodyguards would have gunned him down. But maybe the country wouldn't have been in the mess it was in.

Or maybe it would have—how could you tell? The Vice President in those days hadn't been an amiable nonentity like Don Partridge. Willy Knight of the Redemption League wanted to do a lot of the same things Jake Featherston did. The only reason he didn't get a chance was that the Freedom Party grew bigger faster. A couple of years later, he came close to assassinating Jake himself.

And close counted in…? Horseshoes and hand grenades, was the soldiers' joke. Knight disappeared off the face of the earth after that. Potter supposed he'd died in one camp or another. Or maybe he just got summarily killed and dumped in the James. Any which way, he was gone.

"Can we get away?" somebody asked.

"Believe it," Jake Featherston said instantly. "If you believe it, you can do it. That's what life's all about. Believe it hard enough, work for it with everything you've got, and you'll get it. Look at me."

He was right—and he was wrong. He'd climbed from nowhere to the top of the heap in the CSA.

He'd run the country for ten years. And now the Confederate States of America— *are getting it, all right*, Clarence Potter thought. *Nice to know I can still make stupid jokes at a time like this*.

Off in the distance, like the roar of faraway lions, he heard the rumble of truck motors. They neared far faster than lions would have, and they were likely to be far more dangerous. "Hit the dirt!" Potter sang out.

The Confederate dignitaries scrambled off to the side of the road and hid behind bushes and in ditches.

It would have been funny if it weren't so grim. *This* was what the Confederate States of America had come down to: a dozen or so frightened men hiding so the damnyankees wouldn't catch them.

One after another, the heavy trucks pounded past. Exhaust stank in Potter's nostrils. He got a glimpse of soldiers in green-gray in the rear compartments and heard a couple of windswept snatches of bad language in U.S. accents. Then, after a few seconds that were among the longest of his life, the last deuce-and-a-half was gone.

"God damn them, they'll find Willard, and that'll spill the shit in the soup," Jake Featherston said.

Potter wouldn't have put it the same way, which didn't mean he disagreed with the President. Jake went on, "We *got* to make it to a town quick, grab us some autos, and get the fuck out of here." That also seemed like good advice.

"Let's get moving," the pilot said. He was younger than just about everybody else there—and also the man the Yankees were least likely to shoot out of hand if things went wrong.

Move they did. Fifteen minutes later, they all hid and flattened out as more trucks growled up the road.

These machines had an ambulance with them, which likely meant the Yankees had indeed found the head of the C.S. General Staff. Would they rough Willard up? Would he keep quiet if they did? *Next episode of the serial*, Potter thought.

He began to pant. His feet started hurting—he was wearing dress shoes, not marching boots. The sky lightened in the east. "Where the hell's that town?" somebody said, voice numb with fatigue. "Feels like we've been going down this goddamn road forever."

"Couldn't have said it better myself," Potter said. He was definitely getting a blister on his left heel. If it worsened, he wouldn't be able to keep up. The damnyankees would catch him—and, he suspected, that would be that in short order.

Featherston pointed. "Sign up ahead." Half an hour earlier, they wouldn't have seen it till they were right on top of it.

Potter, with his weak eyes, would have been one of the last men to be able to read it. Somebody called out the name of the town on the sign and said it was a mile and a half off, so he didn't have to.

“Where the hell are we?” Ferd Koenig demanded—the name meant as little to him as it did to Potter.

“Smack in the middle of Georgia,” Jake answered confidently. Did he carry a map of the CSA in his mind detailed enough to include a nowhere of a place like this one? Potter wouldn’t have been surprised.

Jake knew all kinds of strange things, and remembered almost everything he heard. That wasn’t the problem. The problem was, he’d come up with too many wrong answers from what he knew—or maybe, if you went and aimed the CSA at the USA, there weren’t any right ones.

C assius yawned. He hadn’t been on patrol all that long, but the antiaircraft fire woke him up ahead of when he would have had to crawl out of the sack anyway. He wondered what the hell was going on. The Confederates hadn’t sent any airplanes over Madison for quite a while.

He yawned again and shook his head. For all he knew, somebody’d got a wild hair up his ass and started shooting at a Yankee airplane, or maybe at something imaginary. You never could tell with something like that.

“Anything goin’ on?” he asked Gracchus when he replaced the other Negro at the north end of town.

“More guns an’ tracers an’ shit than you can shake a stick at,” the older man replied.

“I knew *that*,” Cassius said. “Got me up early. See a real airplane, though?”

“Not me,” Gracchus said. “*Somethin’* funny goin’ on, though. They wouldn’t’ve sent out so many sojers in trucks if there wasn’t.”

“Soldiers?” Cassius echoed. Gracchus nodded. “Huh,” Cassius said. “Bet you’re right, then. They got somethin’, all right, or they think they do.”

“I know what I’s gonna get me.” Gracchus yawned till his jaw seemed ready to fall off. “Gonna get me some shut-eye, is what. You kin march around the nex’ few hours an’ earn your vittles. I’s gone.” He patted Cassius on the back and headed off toward the Negro guerrillas’—the Negro auxiliaries’, now—camp.

All mine, Cassius thought, and then, *Hot damn*. By now, the whites in Madison were pretty well cowed. They hadn't given any real trouble for several weeks.

That thought had hardly crossed his mind when he heard somebody's voice in the distance, floating through the clear, quiet early morning air. He started to bark out a challenge—it was still before the Yankees' curfew lifted. Then he looked north along the highway that led down from Athens. Damned if at least a dozen ofays weren't heading his way.

The rosy light of dawn showed them well enough. Cassius didn't think they could see him: he stood in the deep shadow of some roadside pines. He scurried behind one of them. Challenging that many men when he was by himself didn't seem like a good idea. Maybe they were Yankees, in which case a challenge would be pointless. If they weren't, they were trouble. That many Confederates wouldn't be running around together at daybreak unless they were trouble.

He waited and watched as they got closer. He almost relaxed—they were in uniform, and who but U.S. soldiers would be in uniform around here? But then he saw that the uniforms were gray and butternut, not green-gray. He wanted to scratch his head, but he stood very still instead. Whoever these people were, he didn't want them spotting him. One of them carried a better rifle than his, and almost all of them had holsters on their belts.

"Come on, goddammit," a rangy, middle-aged man up near the front of the pack said loudly. "We're almost there."

That voice…Cassius knew it instantly. Anyone in the CSA would have. Anyone black in the CSA would have reacted as he did. The Tredegar leaped to his shoulder. He could almost fire over open sights—the range couldn't have been more than a hundred yards. He'd never aimed so carefully in all his life. Take a breath. Let it out. Press the trigger—don't squeeze.

"Get us some motorcars, and—" the rangy man went on as the rifle roared and bucked against Cassius' shoulder. The bullet caught the fellow right in the middle of the chest. He got his left foot off the ground for one more step, but he never finished it. He crumpled and fell instead.

Cassius worked the bolt and fired again, as fast as he could. Jake Featherston jerked before his face hit the asphalt. While he was lying

there, Cassius put another bullet into him. This one made red bits spurt from his head. Cassius chambered one more round. When you were shooting a snake, you didn't know for sure what it took to kill him.

One of the men in butternut knelt by the President of the CSA. The just-risen sun shone from his spectacles and their steel frames. He leaned toward Jake Featherston. Cassius could easily have shot him, too, but waited instead to see what happened next. The bespectacled man started to feel for Featherston's wrist, then shook his head, as if to say, *What's the use?* When he rose, he seemed suddenly old.

The rest of the Confederates might have turned to wax melting in the sun, too. When Cassius saw they slumped and sagged, he began to believe Jake Featherston was dead—began to believe he'd killed him.

Were the tears in his eyes joy or sorrow or both at once? Afterwards, he never knew.

"Y'all surrender!" he shouted blurrily, and fired another shot over the Confederates' heads.

As if on cue, Gracchus ran up the road from Madison. Four or five white men in green-gray pounded after the Negro. One by one, the Confederates standing in the roadway raised their hands above their heads. The officer with the automatic Tredegar carefully set it on the tarmac before he lifted his.

Only then did Cassius step out from behind the tree. Gracchus skidded to a stop beside him. "Who is them ofay shitheads?" the guerrilla chief panted.

"Dunno. Big-ass ol' Confederates, that's all I kin tell you," Cassius said. "But I just shot me Jake motherfucking Featherston. That's him on the ground there, an' he's dead as shoe leather."

"No," Gracchus whispered. The U.S. soldiers heard Cassius, too. They stared north toward the knot of Confederates and the corpse in the road. Then they stared at Cassius.

"Kid, I'd give my left nut to do what you just done," one of them said.

"My right nut," said another.

"Do you know how famous you just got?" a third one added.

“It doesn’t matter,” Cassius said. “He killed my whole family, the son of a bitch. Shooting’s too good for him, but it’s all I could do. I heard his voice, and I knew who it was, and then— *bang!* ”

Gracchus set a hand on his shoulder. “You got that, anyways. Rest of us, we don’t got nothin’. He done kilt all our famblies. But you kilt him? You really an’ truly did?” His voice was soft with wonder.

“I sure did.” Cassius sounded amazed, too, even to himself. “Now I want to see him dead.”

He walked forward, his rifle still at the ready in case any of the men ahead tried something. He had only one round left in the clip, but he wasn’t too worried about that, not with Gracchus and those U.S.

soldiers to back him up.

Flies were already starting to buzz above the blood pooling around the corpse in the roadway. Cassius stirred the body with his foot. Jake Featherston’s lean, hungry face stared sightlessly up to the sky. A fly landed on his cheek. It crawled over to the rill of blood that ran from the corner of his open mouth and began to feed.

“Well, you did it. You just sank the Confederate States of America.” The officer with glasses talked like a Yankee. But he wore a C.S. uniform with, Cassius saw, a general’s wreathed stars on his collar.

He took off his spectacles and wiped his eyes with his tunic sleeve. “Jake Featherston was a son of a bitch, but he was a great son of a bitch—and you killed him.”

He looked as if he wanted to say more. Telling off somebody with a Tredegar was never a good idea, though.

Another man, a heavy fellow in a gray Party uniform, figured that out, too. He said, “Who would’ve reckoned a…colored kid could do in the President?” The pause meant he’d almost said *nigger*, or more likely *goddamn nigger*, but he swallowed anything like that before it got out.

“Who the hell are you people, anyway?” one of the U.S. soldiers—a sergeant—demanded.

“Ferdinand Koenig, Attorney General, CSA,” the heavy man answered. Cassius almost shot him, too.

Koenig ran the camps. He was Jake Featherston’s enforcer. But

shooting anybody with his hands up wasn't so easy.

"Clarence Potter, brigadier general, CSA," said the man with glasses.

"Christ!" the sergeant in green-gray said. "You're on our list! You're the asshole who blew up Philly!"

"You know that?" Potter blinked, then actually bowed. "Always an honor to be recognized," he said.

Cassius found himself surprised into admiration. Potter had style, in a cold-blooded way.

The other Confederates gave their names and ranks. The only one Cassius had heard of was Saul Goldman, whom he thought of as the Confederacy's chief liar. But the rest were all big shots, too, except for a young captain with a pilot's wings on the right breast pocket of his tunic.

"Do Jesus!" Gracchus said. "There here's 'bout what's left o' the Confederate gummint, ain't it?"

"Where's what's-his-name? The Vice President?" The U.S. sergeant snapped his fingers. "Partridge in a pear tree—him?"

Even with their cause in ruins and themselves in captivity, several of the Confederates smiled at that. A couple of them even laughed. "The Vice President isn't with us," General Potter said. "If you look under a flat rock, you'll find a lizard or a salamander or something. It's bound to be just as smart as Don."

"Jesus, Potter, show a little respect," Ferd Koenig said. "He's President now, wherever he is."

"Only proves we're screwed, if you ask me," Potter said calmly.

Three command cars rumbled up from Madison: probably called by wireless. Their machine guns added to the U.S. firepower. A photographer jumped out of one of them. "Godalmightydamn," he said, aiming his camera at the corpse in the road. "That really is the motherfucker, ain't it?" He took several pictures, then looked up. "Who punched his ticket for him?"

Gracchus gave Cassius a little shove. "This fella right here."

A flashbulb went off in Cassius' face. He saw green and purple spots.

“Way to go, sonny. You just turned famous, know that? What’s your name, anyway?”

“Cassius,” he answered. Now two people, both white, had thrown fame in his face. “I’m Cassius. I don’t care nothin’ about famous. Only thing I care about is, that bastard’s dead an’ gone.”

“You may not care about famous, buddy, but famous is gonna care about you,” the photographer predicted. “Bet your ass it will. You’re gonna be the most famous smoke in the whole goddamn US of A.”

Smoke wasn’t exactly an endearment, but Cassius was too dazed to get very upset about it. More command cars and a halftrack came up the road. Some of the people who got out were soldiers. Others were reporters. When they found out Cassius had shot Jake Featherston, they all tried to interview him at once. They shouted so many questions, he couldn’t make sense of any of them.

Some of the reporters started grilling the captured Confederates, too. The prisoners didn’t want to talk, which seemed to upset the gentlemen of the press.

Cassius kept looking at the body every so often. *I did that*, he told himself. *I really did*.

“Don’t pay these mouthy fools no mind,” Gracchus advised him. “You don’t got to say nothin’ to ’em if you don’t care to. You *done* somethin’ instead.”

It wasn’t enough. If Cassius could have killed Jake Featherston five million or six million or eight million times, it might have come close to being enough. But he’d done all he could do. He made himself nod. “Yeah,” he said.

N ot far outside of Pineville, North Carolina, Irving Morrell stood up in the cupola of his barrel for what he hoped was the last time in the war. Sweat ran down his face. He was glad to escape the iron oven in which he’d ridden north. The cease-fire continued to hold. With a little luck, it would soon turn into something more like a real peace.

A monument of piled stone, two or three times as tall as a man, marked the place where James Polk had been born. Since Polk was President of the United States before they split into two countries, this seemed a good place for the representatives of those two countries to meet.

Close to the monument stood what could only have been a Negro sharecropper's cabin. It was empty now, windows broken, door hanging half open. If meeting at Polk's birthplace symbolized something, that deserted cabin meant something else altogether. Where were the blacks who'd called it home?

Anywhere on this earth? Morrell doubted it.

The sergeant in charge of another U.S. barrel peered up the road toward Charlotte with field glasses.

He waved to Morrell. "Here they come, sir!"

"Thanks," Morrell said.

A moment later, his own Mark One eyeball picked up the approaching autos. As they got closer, he saw that the Confederates were scrupulously abiding by the terms of the cease-fire agreement. All three motorcars were unarmed. The first flew a large white flag from its wireless aerial. So did the third. The middle auto had two aerials. One flew the Stars and Bars, the other the flag of the President of the Confederate States.

Morrell's barrel was flying the Stars and Stripes from its antenna. That guided the Confederates to the proper machine. He could have blown them to hell and gone. Even now, when they were giving up, the temptation was very real. Instead, he climbed down from the barrel as the Confederate motorcars stopped under his guns.

A Confederate officer—a general, Morrell saw—got out of the lead motorcar. He walked up to Morrell and saluted stiffly. "Good day, sir," he said. "I recognize you from many photographs. My name is Northcote, Cyril Northcote. After the, ah, recent unfortunate events, I have the dubious privilege of being the senior General Staff officer not in captivity."

Morrell returned the salute. "Pleased to meet you, General Northcote."

"Meaning no disrespect to you, sir, but I'm afraid I can't say the same," Northcote answered bleakly.

"Well, General, under the circumstances, I don't see how I can take offense at that," Morrell said.

"Yes. Under the circumstances." Northcote spoke as if each word pained him. The door to the middle C.S. motorcar opened. A young-

looking blond man in a sharp gray civilian suit came out. General Northcote waved to him and he came forward, his perfectly shined shoes flashing in the bright sun.

Machinelike, Northcote said, “General Morrell, it is my duty to present to you the President of the CSA, Mr. Don Partridge. Mr. President, this is U.S. General Irving Morrell.”

“Mr. President,” Morrell said formally. He did not offer to shake President Partridge’s hand—he was under orders from Philadelphia to do no such thing.

Partridge’s hand did start to rise, but fell back like a dead thing when he realized no handshake would be forthcoming. Close up, his round face didn’t just look young. It looked boyish, as if none of the past three years of struggle had registered with him or on him at all. How was that possible? Morrell didn’t know, but it seemed to be.

“General,” Partridge said, and managed a nod.

Morrell nodded back; he had no orders against that. “Mr. President, you have come here under the terms of the cease-fire now in place to agree to the unconditional surrender of all forces still under command of the Confederate States of America. Is that correct?” He sounded like a man speaking from a script, and he was.

President Partridge had to work to manage another nod. “Yes. That’s right.” He sounded surprised and hurt, as if wondering how fate—and Morrell—could do such a thing to him.

“All right, then. I have the terms of the surrender here.” Morrell took two copies of the document from his left breast pocket and unfolded them. “I would like to go over them with you before you sign so no one can say afterwards that there was any misunderstanding. Is that agreeable to you, sir?”

“Have I got a choice?” Don Partridge sounded bleak, too.

“Only going on with the war,” Morrell answered.

“Then I haven’t got a choice.” Partridge sighed. “Go ahead, General. We can’t fight any more, or I wouldn’t be here.”

Morrell thought that had been true ever since Savannah fell, if not since Atlanta did. But Jake Featherston kept the Confederacy going

months longer than anybody would have imagined, and what he did to Philadelphia… *He may have killed me yet, even if it takes years*. Well, it was over now, thank God.

“All right. Here we go—Article One says you surrender unconditionally to the United States all forces on land, at sea, and in the air who are at this date under Confederate control,” Morrell said.

Don Partridge nodded. “That’s what I’m here for.” Under his breath, he added what sounded like,

“Goddammit.” Morrell pretended not to notice.

“Article Two says your high command will immediately order all Confederate authorities and forces to cease operations on Thursday, July 14, 1944, at 1801 hours Eastern Summer Time: today at a minute past six,” the U.S. general went on. “Your forces will hold in place. They will hand over weapons and equipment to U.S. local commanders. No ship or aircraft is to be scuttled or damaged. Machinery, armaments, and apparatus are to be turned over undamaged. This specifically includes your superbomb works in Lexington. Is that plain enough for you?”

“I understand you,” Partridge said. “We won’t do any damage to them. Your bombers have already done plenty, though.”

“Make sure you don’t use that as an excuse for any sabotage there,” Morrell warned. “My government is very, very serious about that. If your people get cute, they’ll be sorry.”

“They’re already sorry,” the President of the CSA said. “We’ll go along.”

“You’d better. Now—Article Three. At that same time—6:01 today—all your camps killing Negroes are to cease operations,” Morrell said. “Camp authorities are to make every effort to feed their inmates.

U.S. supply convoys will reach them as soon as possible. Camp personnel will surrender to the first U.S.

officers who arrive. Anyone who flees instead of surrendering will be liable to summary execution—we’ll shoot the bastards on sight. Have you got *that*?”

“I’ve got it,” Don Partridge answered. “Some of them will likely take their chances anyway.”

He was bound to be right there. Even so, Morrell went on, “That brings us to Article Four. Your high command will at once issue orders to the appropriate commanders that they obey any commands issued by the U.S. War Department and carry them out without argument or comment. All communications will be in plain language—no codes.”

“Agreed.” By the way he spat it out, the word seemed to taste bad in Partridge’s mouth.

“Good.” Again, Morrell left the new and unhappy Confederate President what little pride he could.

“Article Five says that a final political settlement may supersede this surrender.”

That got him a glare. “When you decide how you want to carve us up, you’ll go ahead and do it, you mean,” Partridge said.

Yes, Morrell thought. Aloud, he said, “Sir, I’m only a soldier. I don’t have anything to do with that.”

Yeah, I’ll pass the buck. “Article Six now. If your high command or any forces under your control fail to act in accordance with this surrender, the War Department will take whatever punitive or other action it deems appropriate. If you disobey or fail to comply, we will deal with you in accordance with the laws and usages of war.”

“You won. We lost. You’ll do whatever you damn well please,” Don Partridge said.

“That’s about the size of it, sir,” Morrell agreed. “And if there’s any doubt or dispute about what these terms mean, the decision of the United States will be final.” He handed Partridge both copies of the instrument of surrender. “Have you got a pen?”

“Yes.” Partridge took one from an inside pocket. He read the terms to make sure they said what Morrell claimed they did. Maybe he wasn’t so dumb as people in the USA thought. Maybe he’d been playing possum to make sure Jake Featherston didn’t do unto him as he’d done unto Willy Knight.

Chances were it wouldn’t matter now one way or the other. Biting his lip, Partridge signed. He thrust one copy back at Morrell. “Here.”

“Thank you.” Morrell tried to stay what the diplomats called correct.

We hate each other, but we don't let it show. "Do you have wireless equipment to let you relay the news of the surrender to your commanders so they can issue the appropriate orders? You are welcome to use U.S. equipment if you don't."

"I do, thank you very much," Partridge replied. *So there*, Morrell thought. The President of the CSA went back to his motorcar. Morrell watched him talk into a microphone in there.

Morrell made small talk with General Northcote till Partridge got out again. Then he asked, "All taken care of?"

Don Partridge nodded. "Yes. You will have full cooperation from all our officials. And now, if you will excuse me, I'd like to get back up to Charlotte and do what I can to keep things running."

"Um—I'm afraid not," Morrell said.

"Pardon me?" Partridge raised a pale eyebrow.

"I'm afraid not," Morrell repeated, more firmly this time. "You have surrendered—the Confederate States have surrendered—unconditionally. There is no Confederate government right now, sir. There isn't anything, not till the United States say there is."

"What does that make me, then?" President Partridge demanded.

"My prisoner, sir," Morrell answered.

He'd captured a swarm of prisoners in the course of two wars. He'd never had one cuss him out with the virtuoso splendor Don Partridge showed. Partridge must have listened to his boss a lot; by all accounts, Jake Featherston could swear like a muleskinner. Morrell let Partridge have his say. Why not?

In the end, it made no difference. The USA had the firepower, and the CSA didn't.

"At a minute past six tonight, Mr. President, it's all over," Morrell said when Partridge finally ran down. "They'll remember you as the man who made peace."

"They'll remember me as the man who threw in the sponge," Partridge said. "Or else they won't remember me at all." Considering how little he'd done up till now, Morrell reflected, he might well be

right.

T he Confederates in front of Lavochkin's Looters weren't giving up without a fight. They kept firing even after word came that the Confederacy was giving up. Chester Martin stayed deep in his muddy foxhole. He was damned if he wanted to get hurt when it didn't mean a thing. He just looked at his watch every now and then and waited for 6:01 to roll around.

Lieutenant Boris Lavochkin still gave the impression of eating too much raw meat. "If those assholes fire even one shot—even one—after surrender time, we're going to roll on over them and clean them out!" he shouted.

We? You and your tapeworm? Martin wondered. Didn't the lieutenant know he was the only one who still felt like fighting? Maybe he didn't, because he went right on yelling. But if he wanted to charge the C.S. position at 6:02, he'd do it by himself. Martin would have bet everything he owned on that.

The second hand spun round and round. The minute and hour hands didn't seem to want to move, but they did. And when 6:01 came, Chester Martin lit a Raleigh and blew out a grateful cloud of smoke.

"Son of a bitch!" he said. "I made it."

He still didn't straighten up or show himself. For all he knew, his watch was a couple of minutes fast.

Then he heard a picket call, "Goddamn—they're coming out!" The man sounded awed, not blasphemous.

Chester decided he could look out. Men in butternut were coming through the bushes, their hands high, their eyes either empty or else burning with hate. "Well, you've got us," one of them said, spitting a stream of tobacco juice off to the side. "And a hell of a git you've got."

He had a point. The Confederates were scrawny and filthy and ragged. Quite a few of them were walking wounded. They looked more like hoboes in uniform than soldiers. But they could fight. Through two wars, Chester had never found any reason to doubt that.

"Give 'em rations, boys," Captain Rhodes called. "It's all over now." Lieutenant Lavochkin, Chester was sure, would never have said any such thing.

Once you got up into your fifties, you didn't scramble out of a foxhole. You emerged with dignity.

Coming into the open with the enemy in sight seemed dangerous, wrong, unnatural. Chester remembered that from 1917, too.

He caught the eye of the closest Confederate soldier—a kid who couldn't have been more than sixteen. "Want some chow?" he asked.

"Much obliged," the youngster answered. Martin tossed him a can. As he caught it, he said, "What'll y'all do with us now?"

"Beats me," Chester said. "Make sure we've got all your weapons, I bet—we have to take care of that. Then? Who knows? Somebody up top'll tell us, and we'll do it, whatever it turns out to be."

"You did this before, didn't you? You coulda fought against my pa, too," the young Confederate said as he used the key to get the lid off the can.

"Yeah, well, we had to lick you people twice." Chester wondered whether the kid even heard him. He was shoveling canned beef stew—which tasted like tire tread in mud gravy—into his mouth with his dirty fingers. It wasn't one of the better U.S. rations, but the new POW didn't care.

Not far away, Captain Rhodes was talking with a Confederate sergeant with a beer belly and gray stubble. The guy could have been a defeated butternut version of Martin himself—he was plainly a retread. "Take me to your demolitions people," Rhodes was saying. "We want to make sure we get your explosives under control."

"Well, I'll do it, but we don't have a hell of a lot of that stuff left," the veteran noncom said.

"Cut the shit, Charlie," Rhodes told him, which was almost exactly the thought going through Chester's mind. "You figure you're gonna squirrel that crap away for people bombs and auto bombs and toys like that? You better think twice, that's all I've got to say. We *will* take hostages—lots of 'em. We'll shoot

'em, too. If there's not a white man left alive from Richmond to Key West, nobody in the USA's gonna shed a tear. You can take that to the bank."

The sergeant glared at him with undisguised loathing. “I believe you. You damnyankees are all a bunch of nigger-lovers.”

“I know one nigger I love right now—the kid who shot Jake Featherston,” Captain Rhodes answered.

“Get it straight, Sergeant. Your government’s surrendered. If it hadn’t, how long did you have to live? A couple of days, maybe—not much more. After that, we would’ve flattened you like a steamroller. If you fuck with us now, we will anyway. And you know what else? We’ll enjoy doing it, too.”

Chester stared. No, that wasn’t Boris Lavochkin with an extra bar on each shoulder strap. Captain Rhodes was usually a pretty mild fellow. Usually, yeah, but not always. He meant every word of this.

And the C.S. sergeant knew it, too. “Well, come on, then,” he said. “I’ll take you to ’em. Just don’t blame me if they ain’t got everything you want.”

“I’ll blame somebody—that’s for damn sure.” Rhodes looked around. His eye lit on Chester. “Gather up a squad, Sergeant, and come along. We may need to do some persuading here.”

“Sure will, sir.” Martin rounded up a dozen men, just about all of them with automatic weapons instead of Springfields. They followed Captain Rhodes behind what had been the enemy line.

That was scary, especially with the sun sinking in the west. If somebody hadn’t got the word or just didn’t give a damn…Chester was sure there would be little spasms of fighting for days. He didn’t want to get stuck in one, that was all. And he didn’t want them to turn into a full-scale rebellion against the U.S.

occupiers. If they did, the USA really might have to kill piles and piles of Confederate hostages. He didn’t look forward to that. No matter what Captain Rhodes said, he didn’t think it would be fun.

Not all the Confederate soldiers had put down their arms yet. The men in butternut scowled at the men in green-gray. Nobody did more than scowl, though. The enemy troops had to know about the surrender, even if they didn’t like it.

“If we were as big as the United States, we would’ve whipped y’all,” a corporal said.

“If pigs had wings, we’d all carry umbrellas,” Chester answered. “You so-and-sos shot me twice.

That’s enough, goddammit. I don’t want your kids trying to shoot my kid.”

The U.S. soldiers walked past a battery of worn-looking 105s. Rhodes told off four or five men to take charge of the guns and their ammunition. “God only knows what a son of a bitch with an imagination can do with an artillery shell,” he remarked. Chester could think of a few things, all of them unpleasant.

He was sure real explosives people could come up with a lot more.

He chatted with the Confederate veteran, who turned out to have also fought on the Roanoke front in the Great War. “Yeah, that was pretty bad, all right,” the other sergeant said. “I got hit twice—a bullet once, a shell fragment in the foot the other time.”

“I got it once then and once this time around,” Chester said. “Lucky, if you want to call it that. Shit, we both lived through two rounds, so we are lucky.”

“Plenty who didn’t—that’s for damn sure.” The Confederate pointed. “The people your captain’s looking for are just ahead there.”

As a matter of fact, they weren’t—they’d bugged out. But they’d left their stock in trade behind in earthwork revetments roofed with planks and corrugated sheet iron. Captain Rhodes set a guard over the explosives and fuses and blasting caps. Shaking his head, he said, “How many setups like this are there all over the CSA? How many’ll get emptied out before our guys show up? How much trouble is that gonna cost down the line?”

Lots. Quite a few. Quite a bit. Chester had no trouble finding answers for questions like that. He looked around. This wasn’t good guerrilla country—too flat and too open. Other places, though…

Hearing them talking, an armed Confederate ambled up to see what was going on. His eyes widened.

“Jesus!” he yipped. “You’re damnyankees!”

Chester grinned at him. “Nothing gets by you, does it?”

He stopped grinning a second later, because the Confederate soldier

aimed a submachine gun at his midsection. “Hold it right there! Y’all are my prisoners.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!” Captain Rhodes said, though Chester noted that he kept his hands away from his .45. “Don’t you know your side surrendered?”

“My ass!” the man in butternut said. “We’d never do anything like that.”

“Go find some of your buddies,” Chester said. “Talk to them. We aren’t bullshitting you, man. How’d we get so far behind your line if we were just sneaking around?”

“Beats me.” The enemy soldier gestured with the submachine gun. “You come with me. If you’re lyin’, you’ll be sorry.”

“However you want.” Chester never argued with a man who could kill him. “Let’s go. I won’t even get mad after you find out what’s what.”

The other man turned out not even to know Jake Featherston was dead. He no more believed that than he believed his country had surrendered. And, no doubt to drive Chester crazy, they couldn’t find anybody else in butternut. That veteran sergeant had disappeared—with luck to head for a POW camp, without it to go off and make trouble.

At last, just as the sun was setting, they found another Confederate soldier. To Chester’s enormous relief, he had got the news. “’Fraid the Yankee’s tellin’ you the truth,” he said to his countryman. “It’s all over. We’re licked.”

“Son of a bitch bastard!” Chester’s erstwhile captor said. “If that ain’t the biggest crock o’ crap…We weren’t even losing.”

“Hello—this is South Carolina. What am I doing here if you guys are winning?” Martin asked. The Confederate gaped at him as if that had never once crossed his mind. Chester got the idea not a whole lot of things *had* crossed the other fellow’s mind. “Why don’t you hand me that piece so my guys don’t shoot you for having it?”

Reluctantly, the soldier in butternut gave him the submachine gun. Even more reluctantly, he raised his hands. “My pappy’s gonna whup me when he finds out I quit,” he said glumly.

“Not your fault,” Chester said. “The whole CSA gave up.”

“Pappy won’t care,” the soldier predicted. “He’ll whup me any old way.”

“Did he fight in the last war?” Chester asked.

“I hope to shit he did!”

“Then he gave up once himself. Tell him so.”

“Like he’ll listen. You don’t know Pappy.”

As far as Chester was concerned, that was just as well. “Let’s go back to the explosives shed,” he said. “I want my captain to know you found out we weren’t pulling your leg.”

“Still can’t hardly believe it. And the President bought a plot?” The Confederate shook his head. “Holy fuckin’ shit!”

He could cuss as much as he pleased. Chester had his weapon. He remembered the Navy guys who’d got torpedoed after the cease-fire in the Great War. Thank God he hadn’t gone that way himself!

G eorge Enos, Jr., was thinking of his father as the *Oregon* steamed toward the surfaced Confederate submarine. That bastard of a sub skipper hadn’t wanted to quit when the Great War ended, so he’d fired one last spread of torpedoes—and little George grew up without a man around.

This submersible was playing by the rules. It had surfaced and broadcast its position by wireless. Now it was flying a large blue flag in token of surrender. Men in dark gray uniforms stood on the conning tower and on the deck, though nobody went near the deck gun. Taking on a battlewagon with that little excuse for a weapon was closer to insane than anything else, but you never could tell.

A lieutenant with a bullhorn strode up to the *Oregon*’s bow. “Ahoy, the Confederate sub!” he bawled.

“Do you hear me?”

On the sub, a fellow in a dirty white officer’s cap raised a loudhailer to his own lips. “I hear you,” he answered. “What are your instructions?”

“Have you jettisoned your ammunition?”

“Yes,” the Confederate answered.

“Have you removed the breechblock from your gun?”

“Done that, too.”

“Are the pistols out of your torpedoes? Are the torpedoes rendered safe?”

“Yes. We’ve followed all the surrender orders.” The enemy officer didn’t sound happy about it.

“Do you have any mines aboard?” asked the lieutenant on the *Oregon*.

“No—not a one.”

“All right. We are going to send an officer and a CPO to inspect your boat before we give you your sailing instructions for Baltimore. Stand by to receive a boarding party.”

“Very well,” the Confederate skipper said. “But if the surrender order didn’t tell us we had to do exactly what you tell us, I would have something different to say to you.”

“You would be trying to sink us, and we would be dropping depth charges on your head,” the U.S.

lieutenant said. “Things are what they are, though, not what you wish they were.”

“And ain’t that the sad and sorry truth?” the sub skipper said. “We will receive your boarders—we won’t repel them.” That made George think of pigtailed sailors with bandannas and cutlasses, and of clouds of black-powder smoke. No more, no more.

The officer who crossed to the submersible was barely old enough to shave. The chief might have been his father, as far as years went. George knew what would happen. The ensign would write up the inspection report, and the chief would tell him what to say.

They came back after a couple of hours. The ensign was nodding and grinning, but George kept his eyes on the CPO. When he saw that the senior rating seemed satisfied, he relaxed. Nobody on that sub would give the U.S. Navy any more trouble.

After talking with the ensign (and also glancing at the chief), the

lieutenant picked up his bullhorn again. “You are cleared to proceed to Baltimore. Keep flying your blue flag by day, and show your navigation lights at night.”

“Understood,” the C.S. skipper said.

As if he hadn’t spoken, the lieutenant went on, “Remain fully surfaced at all times. Report your position, course, and speed every eight hours. All wireless transmissions must be in plain language. A pilot will take you through the minefields. Obey any instructions you may receive from U.S. authorities.”

“We’ll do it,” the Confederate replied. “Is there anything else, Mommy, or can we go out and play now?”

Several U.S. sailors snickered, George among them. The lieutenant went brick red. “No further instructions at this time,” he choked out.

The C.S. skipper doffed his cap in sardonic salute, then disappeared down the hatch into the submarine. It moved off to the northwest, in the direction of Chesapeake Bay.

The lieutenant was still steaming. “If I ever run into that son of a bitch on dry land, I’ll punch him in the nose,” he ground out.

“Take an even strain,” said the chief, who’d gone aboard the Confederate submarine. “We won. They lost. Let him talk as big as he wants—it doesn’t change what really matters.”

“No, but it makes me look like a jerk. All I was doing was making sure he understood the surrender terms. We don’t want the kind of trouble we had the last time around.”

“I should say we don’t.” The CPO looked this way and that till he spotted George. “Here’s Enos. He knows more about that kind of shit than you and me put together. His old man was on the *Ericsson*, and his ma’s the gal who went down to the CSA and plugged the skunk who put her on the bottom.”

“Really?” The lieutenant, unlike the chief, didn’t know George by sight. At a quick gesture from the CPO, George took half a step away from the twin 40mm mount. The lieutenant said, “You’re Sylvia Enos’ son?”

“Yes, sir.” George was always pleased when somebody remembered his mother’s first name.

“I read her book,” the officer said. “It was one of the things that made me decide to join the Navy. I thought I ought to help do things right, so people like her didn’t have to pick up guns and take care of it themselves.”

“Yes, sir,” George repeated, less enthusiastically this time. Whenever he thought about *I Shot Roger Kimball*, he couldn’t help also thinking about the hard-drinking hack who did the actual writing. His mother should have known better than to have anything to do with Ernie except for the book. She should have, but she hadn’t, and so she was dead, and so was he. And if Ernie hadn’t shot himself, George would gladly have killed him.

The lieutenant seemed to run out of things to say, which might have been a relief for him and George both. “Well, carry on, Enos,” he said, which was strictly line-of-duty. He hurried back toward the *Oregon*’s towering bridge. George returned to the gun mount.

Some of the men on the gun crew already knew who he was and who his mother had been. Unlike the lieutenant, they also knew better than to make a fuss about it. “Officers,” one of them said sympathetically.

“Yeah, well…” George spread his hands. “What can you do?”

“Jack diddly,” the other sailor said. “Put up with ’em the best way you can. Try not to let ’em fuck you over too bad.”

“They’re like women,” a shell-jerker said. “You can’t live with ’em, and you can’t live without ’em, neither.”

“Nope.” George shook his head. “If you could get pussy from officers, they’d be good for something.

Way things are, too many of ’em are—”

“Good for nothing!” Three guys on the crew said the same thing at the same time. They grinned at one another, and at George. The banter about what officers would be like if they were equipped the way women were went on and on. It got louder and more hilarious and more obscene with each succeeding joke as each sailor tried to top the fellow who’d gone before him.

George’s grin stretched wider and wider. It wasn’t just that the guys were funny. Everybody was all loosey-goosey. Unless some Confederate diehard hadn’t got the word, nobody would be shooting at the *Oregon* or bombing her or trying to torpedo her. They’d made it through the war.

“Now all we got to worry about is the crappy cooks in the galley,” George said.

“See? They should be broads, too,” one of the other guys put in. “Then they’d know what they were doin’.”

“And if they did feed us somethin’ shitty, they could really show us they was sorry,” somebody else said. It went on from there.

They spotted another surfaced submarine later that day. This one flew the Union Jack, not a blue surrender flag like the Confederate boat. “I have no quarrel with you gentlemen,” the captain called through a loudhailer, “but I will not go to one of your ports. I have received no such orders. We have an armistice with Germany and you, but we have not surrendered.”

“We can blow you out of the water,” warned the U.S. officer with whom he was parleying.

“No doubt,” the British sub skipper replied politely. “But we have done nothing provocative, and have no intention of doing any such thing. Are you really so eager to put the war on the boil again?”

Muttering, the young U.S. officer got on the telephone to the bridge. He was muttering louder when he hung up. “You may proceed,” he told the Royal Navy officer.

“Thanks ever so.” The limey actually tipped his cap. “May we meet again—and not in our professional capacities.”

“We ought to blow him up anyway,” the U.S. officer growled—but not through the bullhorn.

Sailors in the British submarine were bound to be thinking the same thing about the *Oregon*. As long as the boat stayed surfaced and didn’t aim either bow or stern at the battleship, George figured he wouldn’t flabble. If the submarine dove…

It didn’t, not till it was out of sight. George hoped the *Oregon*’s Y-ranging set watched it even farther than that. Since no Klaxons hooted, he supposed everything stayed hunky-dory. Thinking about women officers was a lot more fun than worrying about getting sunk.

“I bet the limeys never do surrender, not the way the Confederates did,” Wally Fodor said. The gun chief went on, “I bet they just bail out of the fight on the best terms they can, same as they did in the last war. Long as they got their navy in one piece, they’re still a going concern.”

“Till somebody drops a superbomb on their fleet, anyway,” George said.

“Yeah, but the Kaiser’s got to be sweating about how big Japan’s getting. Hell, so do we,” Fodor persisted. “The Japs don’t have the superbomb yet, so England’s the only one who can give ’em a hard time—unless we want to go through the Pacific one goddamn island at a time.”

Nobody at the twin 40mm mount wanted anything like that. George, who’d already had a long tour in the Sandwich Islands, *really* didn’t want anything like that. He’d paid all the dues against Japan he felt like paying.

“Tell you one thing,” he said. “All this bullshitting is a lot better than sweating out bombs and torpedoes for real.”

“Amen!” That went up from several sailors at once.

“We licked Jake Featherston, and the limeys look like they’ve had enough, anyway,” George went on.

“Pretty soon, we’ll be able to get our old lives back again.” Did he look forward to going after cod from T Wharf? He wasn’t so sure about that, but coming home to Connie more often sounded mighty good.

XIV

D r. Leonard O’Doull donned a professional scowl and glared at the unhappy young PFC standing in front of him. “That’s one of the most disgusting chancres I’ve ever seen,” he growled. It was red and ugly, all right, but he’d run into plenty just like it. The kid didn’t have to know that, though.

Quivering, the PFC said, “Sorry, sir.” He looked as if he was about to cry.

“Were you sorry while you were getting it?” O’Doull asked.

“Uh, no, sir.” The youngster in green-gray turned red.

“Why the hell didn’t you wear a rubber?”

“On account of I didn’t figure I needed to. She was a *nice* girl, dammit. Besides, it feels better when you’re bareback.”

It did. O’Doull couldn’t quarrel about that. He could ask, “And how does it feel now?” The PFC hung his head. O’Doull went on, “Do you still think she was a nice girl?”

“No, sir,” the kid said, and then, apprehensively, “What are you going to do to me, sir?”

“Me? I’m going to fix you up, that’s what.” O’Doull raised his voice: “Sergeant Lord! Let me have a VD hypo of penicillin.”

“Coming up, Doc.” Goodson Lord produced the requisite syringe.

The PFC stared at it with something not far from horror. “Jeez Louise! You could give an elephant a shot with that thing.”

“Elephants don’t get syphilis. Far as I know, they don’t get the clap, either.” O’Doull nodded to the kid, who wasn’t far wrong there, either—it was a big needle. “Bend over.”

Most unwillingly, the U.S. soldier obeyed. “Shit,” he muttered. “I went through the last year and a half of the war. I got a Purple Heart. And I’m more scared of your damn shot than I was of the screaming meemies.”

He wasn’t the first man to say something like that. With bullets and shells and rockets, you could always think they’d miss. When somebody aimed a hypodermic at your bare ass, he’d damn well connect.

And O’Doull did. The PFC let out a yip as he pressed home the needle and pressed in the plunger.

“You get one on the other side three days from now. If you don’t show up, you’re in a lot more trouble than you are for coming down venereal. You got that?”

“Yes, sir,” the kid said miserably. “Can I go now, sir?”

He really did want to escape if he was that eager to return to the clutches of his regular superiors.

O’Doull couldn’t do anything but stick him, but they could—and would—give him hell. Still, he wasn’t quite finished here. “Not yet, son. You need to tell me the name of the woman you got it from, where she lives, and the names of any others you’ve screwed since. We don’t want ’em passing it along to any of your buddies, you know.”

“Oh, hell—uh, sir. Do I gotta?”

“You sure do. VD puts a man out of action just as much as a bullet in the leg does. So…who was she? And were there any others?”

“Damn, damn, damn,” the PFC said. “There’s just the one, anyway. Her name is Betsy, and she lives a couple of miles from here, on a farm outside of Montevallo.”

Montevallo was a pissant little town south of Birmingham. It boasted a small college for women; O’Doull had wondered whether the soldier got his disease from a student with liberal notions. Evidently not.

Montevallo also boasted a large oak called the Hangman's Tree, which had come through the war undamaged. The doctor wondered whether the tree and the college were related. The PFC wouldn't know about that, though.

"You have a last name for Miss Betsy?" O'Doull asked. The soldier shook his head. O'Doull sighed.

"One of the things you'll do between now and when I stick your ass again is take some men and get her and bring her back here so we can treat her, too. Got that?"

"Yes, sir." It was hardly more than a whisper.

"You'd better have it. And *now* you can go," O'Doull said. The PFC slunk away. O'Doull sighed.

"Boy, I enjoyed that."

"I bet," Sergeant Lord said. "Still, it beats the crap out of trying to take out a guy's spleen, doesn't it?"

"Well, yeah," O'Doull admitted. "But damn, we've had a lot of venereals since the shooting stopped."

He sighed one more time. "Don't know why I'm so surprised. The guys can really go looking for pussy now, and the Confederate women know they've lost, so they'd better be nice to our troops. But I keep thinking about Donofrio, the medic you replaced. VD isn't the only thing that can happen to you."

"You told me about that before," Lord said, so politely that O'Doull knew he'd told him at least once too often. The medic went on, "I'm not going to make a fuss about any silly bitch down here."

"Well, good," O'Doull said, and wondered if it was. Would Goodson Lord make a fuss about a silly boy instead? O'Doull hoped not. If the sergeant was queer, he seemed to be discreet about it. As long as he stayed that way, well, what the hell?

Betsy came in the next day, cussing out the soldiers who brought her in a command car. She was about eighteen, with a barmaid's prettiness that wouldn't last and a barmaid's ample flesh that would turn to lard before she hit thirty. "What do you mean, I got some kind of disease?" she shouted at O'Doull.

“Sorry, miss,” he said. “Private, uh, Eubanks”—he had to remember the soldier’s name—“says you left him a little present. We can cure you with a couple of shots.”

“I bet he didn’t catch it from me. I bet the dirty son of a bitch got it somewhere else and gave it to me!” she screeched.

From the freshness of the U.S. soldier’s chancre, O’Doull doubted that. Out loud, he said, “Well, you may be right,” which was one of the useful phrases that weren’t liable to land you in much trouble. It didn’t matter one way or the other, anyhow. “I’m going to need to examine you, maybe draw some blood for a test, and give you a shot, just in case.”

“What do you mean, examine me? Examine me *there*?” Betsy shook her head, which made blond curls flip back and forth on either side of her face. She would have seemed more alluring—to O’Doull, anyway—if she’d bathed any time lately. “You ain’t gonna look up my works, pal, and that’s flat, not when I never set eyes on you till just now. What kind of girl d’you reckon I am?”

Had O’Doull told the truth there, he would have had to listen to more screeching. “This is a medical necessity,” he said. “I’m a doctor. I’m also a married man, in case you’re wondering.”

Betsy tossed her head in splendid scorn. “Like that makes a difference! I know you’re just a dumb damnyankee, but I didn’t think even damnyankees were that dumb.”

O’Doull sighed. It *didn’t* make any difference; he’d seen as much plenty of times in Rivière-du-Loup.

He wished he were back there now. Better— *much* better!—sweet Nicole than this blowsy, foul-mouthed gal. “Get up on the table, please,” he said. “No stirrups, I’m afraid. It wasn’t made with that in mind.”

“Stirrups? What the hell are you talkin’ about?” Betsy said. “And I done told you I don’t want to get up there.”

O’Doull’s patience blew out. “Your other choice is the stockade,” he snapped. “Quit fooling around and wasting my time.”

“Oh, all right, goddammit, if I gotta.” Betsy climbed onto the table and divested herself of her drawers.

O'Doull put on rubber gloves. He felt as if he needed them more here than with most of the ordinary war wounds he'd treated. "Having fun?" she asked him as he got to work.

"In a word, no," he answered, so coldly that she not only shut up with a snap but gave him a fierce glare, which he ignored. He went on, "You've got it, all right. You ought to thank your boyfriend for getting you over here."

"Not likely!" she said, and added some verbal hot sauce to the comment.

"However you please," O'Doull told her. "Roll over onto your stomach so I can give you your first shot." Goodson Lord ceremoniously handed him a syringe.

"Will it hurt?" she asked.

"A little." O'Doull jabbed the needle home. She yipped. He didn't care. "You need to come back in three days for your second injection," he told her.

"What happens if I don't?" Betsy sure hadn't said no to PFC Eubanks—or, odds were, to a lot of guys before him—but she was cooperating with O'Doull as little as she could.

"Two things," O'Doull said. "We come and get you, and we tell your folks and everybody in Montevallo how come we came and got you."

"You wouldn't do that!"

"When it comes to getting rid of VD, we'll do whatever it takes. Dammit, this is for your own good."

"Then how come it hurts?" Betsy whined.

"If we didn't treat you, you'd hurt more down the line," O'Doull said. Actually, a lot of syphilis patients didn't have symptoms for years after the primary lesions went away. Some never did. But syphilis was also the great pretender; a lot of ills that seemed to be other things really went back to the spirochete that caused it. If you could get rid of the germ, you needed to.

"Might as well get used to it, Doc," Sergeant Lord advised. "This is what we'll see from here on out—guys with drippy faucets, guys in

auto crashes, every once in a while a guy who steps on a mine or something."

"Could be worse," O'Doull said. "Long as we don't start having lots of guys who guerrillas shot, I won't kick."

"Amen to that," the medic said.

"Can I go now?" Betsy asked, much as her boyfriend in green-gray had.

"Yes, you can go," O'Doull answered. "If you don't come back for your next shot, remember, we'll make you sorry you didn't."

"I won't forget," she said sullenly. "My pa, he'll kill me if he finds out." By the way she scurried away from the aid tent, she meant that literally.

"Wonder how many round-heeled broads we'll give the needle to," Lord said.

"Quite a few, I bet," O'Doull said. "And if it's going to be that kind of practice, you can handle it as well as I can." He was thinking about home again. He wasn't a career soldier; he had a life away from the Army. He had it, and he wanted to go back to it.

Goodson Lord gave him a shrewd look. "Won't be too long before they start figuring out how to turn people loose, I bet. You paid your dues and then some."

"Yeah." O'Doull nodded. *And once I get back into the Republic of Quebec, they'll never pry me out again*. There had been times when his practice in Rivière-du-Loup bored him. He hadn't been bored the past three years. Scared out of his mind? Astonished? Appalled? All of those, and often, but never bored. He was amazed at how wonderful ennui seemed.

A bner Dowling stared at Lexington, Virginia, with nothing less than amazement. He turned to his adjutant and said, "Damned if it doesn't look like they used a superbomb on this place."

Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli nodded. "Yes, sir. The fun we had getting here should have given us a hint, I suppose."

"Fun? Heh. That's one word for it, I guess," Dowling said. As the crow flew, Lexington was only about 110 miles from Richmond. Dowling

wished he'd flown from the capital—the former capital?—of the CSA. He'd gone by command car instead, and the roads were disastrously bad…which said nothing about the wrecked bridges and the places where mines were still being cleared. What might have been a two-and-a-half-hour drive ended up taking a day and a half.

Something moved in the rubble. At first he thought it was a stray dog. Then he realized what it really was: a possum. It looked like a cat-sized rat that had got its nose stuck in a pencil sharpener. The long, bare pinkish tail seemed vaguely obscene. Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli was looking in the same direction.

"If that's not the ugliest thing God ever made, damned if I know what is," he said.

"Now that Jake Featherston's dead, I agree with you," Dowling said, which jerked a laugh from the younger man.

Washington University lay on the north side of town. U.S. soldiers who'd come down from the north right after the surrender were already thick on the ground there. The only way you could tell the university grounds from the rest of Lexington these days was that they'd taken an even heavier pounding from the skies.

It didn't do enough, dammit, Dowling thought. In spite of everything that came down on their heads, the Confederate physicists managed to put together a superbomb. Abstractly, Dowling admired the achievement. Staying abstract when they'd blown a big chunk of Philadelphia off the map wasn't so easy, though.

The surviving physicists were housed in tents surrounded by barbed wire and machine-gun nests. A U.S. colonel named Benjamin Frankheimer was in charge of them. Before he let Dowling in to talk with the prisoners, he checked with the War Department.

"Weren't you told to expect me?" Dowling asked.

"Yes, sir," Frankheimer replied. "But we haven't met, and I wanted to make sure they confirmed that a man of your description went with your name."

"You're…a careful man, Colonel."

"Taking care of people who know this kind of stuff, I need to be, sir." Frankheimer scratched his nose. It was much the most prominent feature on his face: he was little and skinny and looked very, very

Jewish. Dowling guessed he'd got this job because he was a scientist himself…till he noticed the fruit salad on the colonel's chest. It showed he'd won a Distinguished Service Cross, a Silver Star with oak-leaf cluster, and a Purple Heart with oak-leaf cluster. Frankheimer had had himself a busy war.

"Well?" Dowling said. "Am I who I say I am?"

"Oh, yes, sir. No doubt about it," Frankheimer answered. "You're free to go in and do whatever you need to do—now."

"Thanks." Dowling sounded less sarcastic than he might have. The men inside this heavily guarded compound weren't just dynamite—they were a hell of a lot more explosive than that, and they'd proved it.

He wasn't astonished when he and Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli had to surrender their sidearms before going in, either. He didn't think of physicists as tough guys, but you never knew. If the fellows with the white lab coats and the slide rules didn't have the chance to grab any weapons, they wouldn't be tempted.

The first man he saw inside the compound sure didn't look like a tough guy. The fellow was about fifty, on the skinny side, and walked with a limp and a cane. "Can you tell me where Professor FitzBelmont is?" Dowling called to him.

"That tent there." The middle-aged man pointed.

"Thanks." Dowling ducked inside.

He recognized FitzBelmont right away; the photos he'd studied were good likenesses. Tall, tweedy, bespectacled: he *looked* like a physicist, all right. He gave Dowling a grudging nod. "Pleased to meet you," he said, and then, "I've already met a lot of U.S. officers"—so he probably wasn't *very* pleased.

"Come outside with me, Professor," Dowling said. "We've got some talking to do."

"If you like," FitzBelmont said. "But anything you say to me, my colleagues can also hear. What are you going to do with us, anyway?"

"Well, that's one of the things I'm here to talk about," Dowling answered. "More than a few people in Philadelphia who want to string

you up by the thumbs, paint you with gasoline, and light a match. Then there are the ones who think that's too good for you."

Some of the scientists and technicians in there with FitzBelmont flinched. He didn't. "I don't understand why," he said. "We were serving our country in the same way that your scientists were serving the United States. If your service is permitted, even heroic, why shouldn't ours be, as well?"

He had a scientist's detachment—or maybe he was just a natural-born cold fish. "There is a difference, Professor," Dowling said.

"I fail to see it," Henderson FitzBelmont said.

"Why am I not surprised?" Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli murmured.

"Hush," Dowling said, and then, to FitzBelmont, "It's simple. I'll spell it out for you. We won. You lost. There. Is that plain enough?"

"To the victors go the spoils?" FitzBelmont said. "Is that what this war was about?"

"That's part of it. If you don't believe me, ask Jake Featherston," Dowling answered. FitzBelmont turned red, so maybe at one point or another he *had* asked the late, unlamented President of the CSA.

Dowling continued, "The other part is, now you can't go on murdering your own smokes any more."

FitzBelmont got redder. "I didn't know anything about that."

"I ought to kick your scrawny ass for lying, you miserable son of a bitch," Dowling said with weary revulsion. "If I had a dime for every Confederate shithead who told me the same thing, I'd be too rich to wear this uniform—you'd best believe I would. Where the hell did you think all the coons in fucking Lexington disappeared to? You think somebody swept 'em under the goddamn rug?"

"I never even considered the issue," Professor FitzBelmont said.

Dowling almost did haul off and belt him. But the way FitzBelmont said it gave him pause. Unlike most of his countrymen, the physicist might have been telling the truth. From the reports the USA had on FitzBelmont, he had trouble noticing anything bigger than an atomic nucleus.

“How many millions did they do in, Angelo?” Dowling asked.

“Best guess right now is about eight million, sir,” his adjutant replied. “But that could be off a million either way, easy.”

“And you never considered the issue?” Dowling tried to wither Henderson FitzBelmont with his scorn.

“I’m afraid not,” FitzBelmont said, unwithered. “We had no Negroes at all involved in the project.

Even our cooks and janitors were whites or Mexicans. Negroes were deemed to be security risks, and so we did not see them. It’s as simple as that, I’m afraid.”

The Confederates had good reason to think Negroes might be security risks. Blacks had brought the USA lots of good intelligence data. Dowling didn’t know how much in the way of physics a cook or janitor could understand. Understand it or not, anybody could steal papers, though. Which reminded him…

“Under the terms of the surrender, you’re supposed to keep all your paperwork intact. You’ve done that?”

“What survives of it, yes, certainly.”

“What’s that mean?” Dowling demanded.

“You ought to know,” Professor FitzBelmont said. “Your airplanes have been bombing Lexington for the past year. Do you think you didn’t do any damage? You’d better think again.”

“Huh,” Dowling said. The Confederate physicist had a better excuse than *The dog ate my homework*

. He and his pals could have destroyed anything, and then blamed it on U.S. bombers. Dowling didn’t know what he could do about it, either.

“It is possible for you to expect too much of us, you know,” FitzBelmont said.

“Maybe. I’m not the expert,” Dowling agreed. “But you will be interrogated by people who are experts—I promise you that. Even if your paperwork is gone, they’ll figure out what you were up to.

And yes, you’re obliged to cooperate with them.”

“If we don’t?” the physicist asked.

Dowling made hand-washing motions. “God help you, in that case. You can bet your bottom dollar nobody else will.”

“You have an unpleasant way of making your point,” Professor FitzBelmont said.

“Thank you,” Dowling answered, which stopped FitzBelmont in his tracks.

After a moment, the physicist asked, “When will they let us go?”

“Beats me,” Dowling answered cheerfully. “Suppose you’d won. When would you have let our superbomb people go? Ever?”

“I…don’t know,” the Confederate scientist said slowly. That, at least, struck Dowling as basically truthful. Henderson FitzBelmont went on, “Surely you understand that we can’t be dangerous to the United States without facilities like the ones we had here. You can’t make a superbomb with a blackboard and chalk.”

“I don’t know anything about that. It’s not my call to make, anyhow,” Dowling said. “My job is to make sure you’re here, to make sure you’re well protected, and to put you at the disposal of our scientists when they get around to needing you. I’m taking care of that right now.”

“How about making sure we’re well treated?” FitzBelmont asked.

“Believe me, Professor, you are,” Dowling said. “You have shelter. You have enough to eat. You have a doctor and a dentist when you need one. Compared to the average white man in the CSA these days, you’re in hog heaven. Compared to the average Negro in the CSA… Hell, you’re alive. That puts you ahead of the game right there.”

Professor FitzBelmont looked severe. “If that’s a joke, General, it’s in poor taste.”

“Who’s joking?” Dowling said. “You’re the one who didn’t look at what was going on with your Negroes, you say? We’re going to hang some of the bastards who did that to them. Crimes against humanity, we’re calling it. Considering what happened in Philadelphia, you ought to thank your lucky stars we aren’t charging you with the same thing…yet.”

“How could you do that when your own scientists built the bombs that blew up Newport News and Charleston? Where is the justice there?”

Dowling shook his head. FitzBelmont really didn’t get it. “How much justice would you have given our guys if you won? As much as you gave your own smokes? We don’t need justice, Professor—I told you that once already. We may use it, but we don’t need it. We damn well won.”

C olonel Roy Wyden eyed Jonathan Moss with what looked like real sympathy. “What are we going to do with you?” Wyden asked.

“Beats me, sir,” Moss answered. “Not much call for a fighter jockey any more, is there? Especially one who’s my age, I mean.”

“I’m sorry, but there isn’t,” Wyden said. “Your file shows you weren’t in the military straight through.

What did you do between the wars?”

“I’m a lawyer, sir.”

Wyden brightened. “Well, hell, you’ll make more money after you muster out than you’re pulling down now.”

Moss laughed harshly. “It ain’t necessarily so. My specialty was occupation law. For one thing, the Canadian uprising’s still going. For another, they’ll change all the rules once they finally do knock it flat.

And, for another, I don’t want to go back to it anyway. A terrorist blew up my wife and my daughter.

Maybe the bomb was meant for me—I don’t know. But that’s the big reason I rejoined. So I don’t really have anywhere else to go.”

“Jesus! I guess you don’t. I’m sorry. I didn’t know your story,” Wyden said.

“Not like I’m the only one who’s had the roof fall in on him,” Moss said. “I’ll land on my feet one way or another.”

“If you think you will, chances are you’re right,” Wyden said. “Let me make a few telephone calls for you, see if I can line something up.”

“What have you got in mind?” Moss asked.

“I don’t want to tell you yet, in case it doesn’t pan out,” Wyden answered. “Are you willing to give me a couple of days to see if it will?”

“Sure. Why not?” Moss managed a wry grin. “It isn’t like I’ve got a hell of a lot of other stuff going on.” He left Colonel Wyden’s tent more intrigued than he’d thought he would be.

Wyden didn’t summon him back for three days. When he did, he came straight to the point: “How would you like to go to the Republic of Texas?”

“To do what?” Moss inquired.

“They’re going to try the bastards who ran Camp Determination and then Camp Humble,” Wyden answered. “They’ve got guys lined up from here out the door to prosecute them, but their number one defense lawyer, a guy named Izzy Goldstein, was in an auto wreck last week. He’s in the hospital, pretty torn up—no way he’ll be able to fill that slot now. So they’re looking for a legal eagle. Are you game?”

Moss whistled softly. “I don’t know. I mean, I think those guys are guilty as shit. Don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” Wyden answered. “You’re the lawyer, though. Don’t guilty people deserve to have somebody on their side, too?”

That was a commonplace argument in law school. Moss had always believed it there. He’d acted on it, too, when he was doing occupation law up in Canada. A lot of his clients there weren’t guilty of anything worse than falling foul of U.S. occupation procedures. This…This was a different story. “Only thing worse would be defending Jake Featherston himself.”

“Funny you should mention that,” Wyden answered. “The people I talked to said they were gonna shoot him without trial if they caught him. That colored kid just took care of it for them, that’s all. Look, you don’t have to do this if you can’t stomach it. I’m not giving you orders or anything—I wouldn’t, not for this kind of thing. But you were at loose ends, and it’s military justice, so you’re qualified, you know what I mean? Your call. One of the guys there remembers you from Canada. He said you were a son of a bitch, but you were a smart son of a bitch.”

“From a military prosecutor, that’s a compliment…I guess,” Moss said. Colonel Wyden grinned and waited. Moss lit a Raleigh to help himself

think. “Damn,” he muttered, sucking in smoke. He blew it out in what was at least half a sigh. “Tell you what. Why don’t I go over there and talk to one of those assholes? If I decide to take it on, I will. If I don’t…I won’t, that’s all.” The Army couldn’t put much pressure on him. If it did, he’d damn well resign his commission. Then he’d have to figure out what to do with the rest of his life as a civilian, that was all.

Roy Wyden nodded. “Sounds fair enough. If you do tackle it, you’ll be doing them a favor, not the other way around. I’ll cut you orders for transit to Houston—the city, not the state. That’s gonna confuse the crap out of people for a while.”

And so Jonathan Moss found himself riding a train across Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. It was, perhaps, the most surreal journey of his life. He passed through the part of the Confederacy that the United States hadn’t occupied during the war. Not many soldiers in green-gray had entered that part of the country yet. It felt very much like going into enemy territory.

The Confederate States still felt like a going concern there, too. The Stars and Bars flew from flagpoles. Soldiers in butternut still carried weapons. Nobody gave him any trouble, though, for which he was duly grateful.

His train had an hour’s layover in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He got out to stretch his legs and grab a sandwich and a Dr. Hopper—he’d spent enough time in the CSA to get used to the stuff. When he came back to the platform, he found three or four Confederate soldiers facing off with a squad of men in green-gray who’d just got off a truck. Plainly, the U.S. troops were there to let the town know things really had changed and the surrender was no joke.

Just as plainly, the C.S. soldiers didn’t want to believe it. “Well, hell,” one of them said, “y’all may have whupped those sorry bastards back East, but you never licked us.” His pals nodded.

As if by magic, all the U.S. soldiers brought up their weapons at the same time. Their sergeant stepped forward and shoved the mouthy Confederate to the floor. He kicked him in the ribs—probably not hard enough to break any, but not with any token little thump, either. “How about now, fucker?” he asked.

“Have we licked you yet, or do we have to blow your goddamn head off to get the message across?

Talk fast, or you're dead meat."

"Reckon…maybe…I'm licked," the man in butternut wheezed.

"Bet your sweet ass you are." The sergeant kicked him again, then stepped back. "Get it straight—you fuck with us, we make you sorry you tried, on account of we'd sooner kill you than look at you."

As long as U.S. forces felt that way, Moss judged, they at least had a chance of staying ahead of any Confederate insurgency. The soldier in butternut struggled to his feet. His buddies helped him get away from the men in green-gray. All the new occupiers looked ready to spray bullets around the train station.

They grinned at Moss. "We showed him!" one of them crowed.

"You bet," Moss replied, and their grins got wider. What would they say if they found out he was heading west to see if he wanted to defend the Confederate officers who ran a murder factory? Nothing he wanted to hear—he was sure of that. And so he didn't tell them.

When he passed from Louisiana to Texas, the Lone Star flag replaced the Stars and Bars. He wondered how long the United States would go on letting the Texans pretend they were independent.

Recognizing their secession from the CSA had been a useful way to get them out of the war, but he didn't think it was likely to last.

A Texas Ranger stood on the platform holding a small cardboard sign with his name on it. When Moss admitted who he was, the Texan—who was short and wiry, going dead against the image the men of his state liked to put across—said, "I'm here to take you to the city jail, sir."

"Then let's go," Moss answered.

The Ranger didn't have much to say. Houston seemed almost intact. Not many Confederate cities were farther from U.S. bomber bases. People on the street wore old, shabby clothes, but they didn't look hungry.

"How do you feel about working with the United States?" Moss asked when the auto—a Confederate Birmingham—stopped in front of the red-brick fortress that housed prisoners.

"Sir, where we were at, it looked like the best thing to do." With that

less than ringing endorsement, the Texas Ranger killed the engine. He hopped out and held the door open for Moss.

U.S. officers meticulously checked Moss' ID and then patted him down before admitting him to the building. He got checked and searched again when he went into the visitors' room. A tight steel mesh separated his side from that of the man he might be representing.

In came Jefferson Pinkard. The fellow who'd run Camp Determination and Camp Humble was about Moss' age. He had a big, burly frame: muscles with a lot of fat over them. He looked tough, but not vicious. Moss knew how little that proved, but found it interesting all the same.

Pinkard was giving him the once-over, too. "So the damnyankees found another bastard willing to speak up for me?" he asked in a Deep-South drawl.

"I don't know that I am yet," Moss answered. "Why did you want to kill off as many Negroes as you could?"

Had Pinkard denied it, Moss would have walked out. He didn't, though. He said, "Because they were enemies of my country. They were shooting at us before we started fighting you Yankee bastards."

"Men, women, and children?" Moss said.

"They're black, they don't like us," Pinkard said. "'Sides, what business of yours is it, anyway? They were Confederate niggers. We can do what we damn well please in our own country. Far as I know, we didn't do anything to coons from the USA."

As far as Moss knew, that was true. He thought it was Pinkard's strongest argument. A country was sovereign inside its own borders, wasn't it? Nobody had gone after the Ottoman Sultan for what he did to the Armenians or the Tsar for pogroms against Jews…or the United States for what they did to their Indians. But…"Nobody ever made camps like yours."

"Nobody ever thought to." Jefferson Pinkard didn't sound repentant—he sounded proud. "Fuck, you assholes are gonna hang me. You won, and I can't do shit about it. But the only thing I was doing was, I was doing my job. I did it goddamn well, too."

"I read that the mayor of Snyder killed himself after he got a look at

the mass graves your camp had there," Moss said.

"Some people are soft," Pinkard said scornfully. "Yeah, we lost the war. But we'll never have to worry about niggers down here, not the way we did before. Hell, you can even ask these chickenshit Texas traitors—they'll tell you I'm all right in their book. I helped clean out Texas along with the rest of the CSA. You can defend me or not, however you please. I know what I did, and I'm damned if I'm sorry."

You're damned, all right, Moss thought. Did guilty people really and truly need lawyers just like anybody else? Did he want to be one of them? There were all kinds of ways to go down in history. Was this the one he really had in mind?

If he didn't do it, who would? Whoever it was, would the fellow do as good a job as Moss would himself? He had to doubt it, especially with the Army's chief defense lawyer already down for the count.

He didn't believe anybody could get Pinkard off, but he'd always enjoyed giving military prosecutors a run for their money.

In the end, that—and being at loose ends as a pilot with the war over—decided him. "Do you want me to defend you? I'll give it my best shot."

"D'you reckon you can get me loose?" Pinkard asked. "Or was I right the first time?"

"Long odds against you, mighty long. Anybody who tells you different is lying, too, just so you know."

The camp commandant grunted. "Fuck. It looked that way to me, too, and to that Goldstein guy, but I was hoping maybe you saw it different. But, shit, even if you don't, Colonel Moss, I'm mighty glad to have you. Do whatever the hell you can, and see if you can embarrass 'em before they put a noose around my neck."

He didn't have unreasonable expectations, anyhow, which was the start of being a good client. "I think we've got ourselves a deal," Jonathan Moss said. Because of the wire screen, they couldn't even shake on it.

A lot of the Confederate officers at Camp Liberty! sank into despair when they finally believed their country had surrendered. Most of the ones who took the surrender hardest had been in there longest.

They hadn't seen the disasters of the past year and a half with their own eyes. Jerry Dover had. He knew damn well that the Confederate States were licked.

"Yeah, we lost," he'd say whenever somebody asked him about it—or sometimes even when nobody did.

"Why don't you soft-pedal the doom and gloom, Dover?" Colonel Kirby Smith Telford asked him.

The senior C.S. officer was convinced Dover wasn't a Yankee plant, which didn't mean he was happy with him. "People already feel bad enough without you rubbing it in."

"Christ on a crutch, it's over. We're licked," Dover said. "How can it be doom and gloom after we're doomed?"

"Keeping our chins up means we can respect ourselves," Telford answered. "It makes U.S. forces respect us more, too."

That last might even have been true. It left Dover no happier. "What difference does it make?" he demanded. "We don't even have a country any more. The United States are occupying the whole CSA.

Far as I can see, that turns us into damnyankees."

"My ass," Telford said. "I'll see them in hell before I bow down and worship the goddamn Stars and Stripes."

"Yes, sir. I feel the same way," Dover said. "Only problem is, as long as we feel that way, why should the Yankees let us out of this place?"

"Why? Because the war's over, dammit, that's why." But not even Kirby Smith Telford could make himself sound as if he thought that was reason enough.

The U.S. authorities showed no signs of letting their commissioned POWs go free. After a few days, Colonel Telford asked them why not. The answer he got left him scowling.

"They say they're investigating to see if they need to charge any of us with this 'crimes against humanity' crap," he reported.

Jerry Dover didn't like the sound of that. It struck him as being vague enough to let the United States do whatever they pleased. "What exactly do they mean by that?" he asked.

“Well, what they were mostly talking about with me was finding out whether we ever gave niggers up to the people who shipped ’em off to the camps,” Telford answered.

“Oh.” Dover relaxed. About the most hideous thing he’d done as a quartermaster officer was send gas shells up to the front. Since the damnyankees had used gas themselves, they couldn’t very well get their bowels in an uproar about it…unless they felt like getting their bowels in an uproar. If they did, who was going to stop them?

Nobody this side of the Kaiser, that was who.

Someone said, “They can’t treat us this way,” so maybe he thought he *was* the Kaiser, or else somebody even more important.

Kirby Smith Telford looked bleak and sounded bleaker. “Not much we can do about it. Not anything we can do about it, far as I know. If they decide to line us up and shoot us, who’s going to complain to them?”

“It ain’t right,” the other Confederate officer said. Telford only shrugged.

Who’d complained when the Confederacy got rid of its Negroes? Dover knew he hadn’t. He also knew his fellow officers wouldn’t appreciate his pointing that out. Sometimes the smartest thing you could do was just keep your big mouth shut. Dover, a man who liked to yell at people, had been a long time learning that. He had the lesson now, though.

One by one, the officers in his barracks hall got summoned to their interrogations. A few left Camp Liberty! not much later. The rest stayed where they were, fuming and cursing their damnyankee captors.

Dover wondered how smart the victors were. If these POWs hadn’t been embittered Yankee-haters who would do anything they could to hurt the USA once they finally got free, they were more likely to turn into men with views like that the longer they sat and stewed.

Of course, maybe the U.S. authorities didn’t intend to let them go at all. Dover imagined stooped, white-haired POWs dying of old age as the twentieth century passed into the twenty-first. He shivered.

Not even the Yankees could stay vengeful for upwards of half a century…could they?

They seemed to be questioning prisoners in roughly the order the Confederates had been captured.

That meant Jerry Dover had quite a while to wait. He was perfectly willing to be patient.

Kirby Smith Telford came back from his grilling hot enough to cook over. “I’m a special case, the sons of bitches say,” he rasped.

“How come?” Dover asked. “You were just a combat soldier, right? Why are they flabbling about you, then?”

“On account of I’m from Texas, that’s why,” Telford answered. “From the goddamn traitor Republic of Texas, now. If I’m gonna get outa here, I have to swear to be loyal to a country”—he made as if to spit at the very idea—“that betrayed the country I grew up in.”

“You could just ask them to ship you back to some other part of the CSA,” Dover said.

“I tried that. It only made things worse,” Telford said bleakly. “They reckoned I said that because I wanted to raise trouble for them. I didn’t mean it that way—not then I didn’t. But Jesus God! If I get out of here now…” He didn’t say what he would do then. What he didn’t say, nobody could report to the authorities. Dover didn’t have much trouble figuring it out, though.

“Probably should have done whatever they told you to do, and then gone on about your business afterwards,” he said.

“Yeah. I figured that out, too, only not quick enough to do me any goddamn good.” Kirby Smith Telford sounded almost as disgusted at himself as he did at his Yankee interrogators.

Dover’s turn came about a week later, on a summer day as hot and sticky as any in Savannah. The officer who questioned him was a major about half his age, a fellow named Hendrickson. He had a manila folder with Dover’s name on it. It was fat with papers. Dover wondered whether that was a good sign or a bad one.

“You were in the Quartermaster Corps,” Major Hendrickson said. He had a prissy little hairline mustache that didn’t go with the shape of his face.

“I sure was,” Dover said.

“You were taken outside of Huntsville.”

“That’s right.”

“You fought in the Great War, but you’re not career military.”

“Right again.” This ground seemed safe enough.

Hendrickson lit a cigarette—a nasty U.S. brand. He didn’t offer one to Dover. Instead, he went through some of the papers in the folder. “Tell me what you did between the wars.”

“I managed a restaurant in Savannah, Georgia,” Dover replied. Hendrickson asked him for the name of the place. “The Huntsman’s Lodge,” Dover said, wondering why that could possibly matter.

It seemed to; Major Hendrickson grunted and checked something off. Dover tried to see what it was, but he couldn’t read upside down well enough to tell. The interrogator went on, “Did you employ Negroes in this restaurant?”

“Yeah,” Dover said. “Cooks and waiters and cleanup crew. Couldn’t hardly get along without ’em.”

“We don’t seem to have any trouble,” Hendrickson said primly. Dover only shrugged; he didn’t care how damnyankees ran their eateries. The interrogator riffled through his papers some more. “Was one of these Negroes a man named, uh, Xerxes?”

He botched the name, so Dover almost didn’t recognize it. “Xerxes?” He said it the right way, as if the first X was a Z. “Yeah, he worked for me for years. Hell of a smart guy. Probably would’ve been a lawyer or a Congressman if he was white. But how the devil did you know that?”

Annoyingly, Hendrickson answered a question with another question: “Do you remember his son’s name?”

“Have to think about that—I only met him a couple of times. He was…Cassius. How come?” Before the Yankee major answered, Dover’s jaw dropped. “Sweet suffering Jesus! Not *that* Cassius?” The U.S. wireless wouldn’t shut up about the Negro who’d shot Jake Featherston.

Major Hendrickson nodded. “The very same. And it just so happened your name came up a couple-three times when we questioned him.”

“Oh, yeah?” Dover had never imagined his fate could rest on a black man’s—hell, on a black kid’s—word. “What’d he have to say?”

Before answering, Hendrickson shuffled papers, even though he had to know already. Dover wanted to clout him, but made himself sit tight. “He said you treated his old man pretty decent. Said you saved his whole family from a cleanout once. Is that a fact?”

“Yeah.” Dover didn’t want to make a big deal out of it now. He’d saved Scipio and his family—and several other colored workers and theirs—as much to keep the Huntsman’s Lodge going as for any other reason. But this U.S. soldier didn’t need to know that. “What about it?”

“Well, it means you aren’t real likely to be a hardcore Freedom Party man,” Hendrickson said. “Will you swear an oath to live peacefully in Georgia and not to cause trouble for the United States if we let you go?”

“Major, I have lived through two wars now. I have had enough trouble to last me the rest of my days,”

Dover said. “Read me out your oath. I will swear to it, and I will live up to it.”

“Raise your right hand,” Hendrickson said. Dover did. The oath was what the U.S. soldier said it was.

Dover repeated it, swore to it, and then signed a printed copy in triplicate. “Show one copy to U.S.

military authorities on request,” Hendrickson told him. “We will give you the balance of your back pay and a train ticket to Augusta. You can wear your uniform, but take off your rank badges before you leave the camp. The C.S. Army is out of business.”

Kirby Smith Telford scowled at Dover as he packed a meager duffel and took the stars off his collar.

Other POWs eyed him with varying mixtures of envy and hatred. He didn’t care. He was going home.

A young captain looked at Cincinnatus from across a no-doubt-liberated card table that did duty for a desk. “You are Cincinnatus Driver,” he said.

“Yes, sir. I sure am,” Cincinnatus agreed.

“You have been serving as a civilian truck driver attached to the U.S. Army since the end of 1942,”

the captain said.

“That’s right, too. Did the same thing in the las’ war,” Cincinnatus said.

“Yes—so your records indicate. According to your superiors, you always performed your duties well, in spite of your physical limitations.”

“Always done the best I could,” Cincinnatus answered. “I had to stick around when it got tight—couldn’t hardly run.”

“You’re probably eager to return to your family in, uh, Des Moines”—the captain had to check Cincinnatus’ papers before naming his home town—“now that we have achieved victory.”

Cincinnatus nodded. “Sure am. You know anybody who ain’t?”

To his surprise, the officer took the question seriously. “There are always some who are more comfortable in the Army. They don’t have to think for themselves here—they just have to do as they’re told. And they never have any doubts about who’s on their side and who isn’t.”

The young officer was probably right. No, he was bound to be right. “Hadn’t thought of it that way, sir,” Cincinnatus said. “But me, I’m a big boy. I can take care of myself, and I can make up my own mind. And if the government’s ready to muster me out, I’m real ready to go home.”

“That’s what you’re here to arrange,” the captain said. “I have your final pay warrant here, and I have a train ticket to get you home.”

“Ask you a favor, sir?”

“I don’t know. What is it?”

“Can you arrange my train route to take me through Covington, Kentucky? I was born and raised there, and I want to see if any of my people in the colored quarter came through in one piece.”

“It’s irregular. It’s an extra expense…” The officer in green-gray

frowned, considering. “Let me talk to my superiors. You may have to stay in Alabama an extra day or two while we set things up—if they approve, that is.”

“I don’t mind,” Cincinnatus said. “Not even a little bit.”

He stayed an extra three days, in fact. The rest of the drivers in his unit headed for home long before he did. Hal Williamson shook his hand and said, “Good luck to you, buddy. Goddamn if I didn’t learn something from you.”

“What’s that?” Cincinnatus asked.

“Colored guys—you’re just like anybody else, only darker,” Hal answered.

Cincinnatus laughed. “Shit, I’ll take that. Good luck to you, too, man.”

He got the travel orders he wanted. Back in Confederate days, he would have had to ride in a separate car. No more. Some white passengers looked unhappy at sharing a row with him, but nobody said anything. That suited him well enough. He didn’t ask to be loved: only tolerated.

The Stars and Stripes flew over Covington. A blue X that stood for the C.S. battle flag showed up on walls all over town. So did the word FREEDOM! The CSA had lost the war, but not everybody had given up.

Buses were running. He took one east from the train station to the colored quarter by the Licking River, or what was left of it. He sat up near the front of the bus, the first time he’d been able to do that here regardless of whether Covington flew the Stars and Stripes or Stars and Bars.

Not all the fences and barbed wire that sealed off the colored quarter had come down yet. But ways through the stuff were open now. Cincinnatus got off the bus a couple of blocks from Lucullus Wood’s barbecue place. If anyone had come through what the Confederates did to their Negroes, he would have bet on the Red barbecue cook.

Houses and shops stood empty. Windows had broken panes; doors sagged open. Leaves drifted on lawns. Ice shivered up Cincinnatus’ spine. What was that fancy word people used when they talked about dinosaurs? This place was *extinct*.

A stray cat darted across the street and behind some untrimmed bushes. Cats could take care of themselves without people. Cincinnatus didn't hear any barking dogs. He should have, if the colored quarter had any life left to it.

When he saw somebody else on the street, he jumped in surprise and alarm. It was an old white man in a cool linen suit, his white hair shining under his Panama hat. The white man seemed as startled to spot a Negro as Cincinnatus was to see him. Then, all of a sudden, he wasn't. "I might have known it would be you," he said. "You're tougher to kill than a cockroach, aren't you?"

"Go to hell, Bliss," Cincinnatus said wearily. "Lucullus still alive?"

"His place looks as dead as the rest of this part of town," Luther Bliss answered. The longtime head of the Kentucky State Police sighed. "I tried to get him out once they closed off the colored quarter, but I couldn't do it. Don't know what happened to him, but I'm afraid it's nothing good. Damn shame."

"They go and kill everybody?" Cincinnatus asked. "They really go an' do that?"

"Just about," Bliss said. "And you were in bed with 'em for a while. Doesn't that make you proud?"

"Fuck off and die," Cincinnatus said coldly. "I was never in bed with the goddamn Freedom Party, and you know it."

Luther Bliss spat. "Maybe. I never knew anything about you for sure, though. That's how come I never trusted you."

Cincinnatus laughed in his face. "Don't give me that shit. You never trusted your own grandma."

"If you'd known the old bat, you wouldn't've trusted her, either. She was an evil woman." Nothing fazed Bliss. His mournful hound-dog eyes pierced Cincinnatus. "So you drove a truck, did you?"

"Keepin' tabs on me?"

"Damn straight I was," Bliss replied. "You deserve it. But things are all over now. The United States won, and if we kill enough Confederates to keep the rest quiet we'll do all right."

He waited. Cincinnatus laughed again. “What? You reckon I’m gonna argue with you? We better kill a lot of them bastards. Otherwise, they’ll be killin’ us too damn soon.”

“Well, we agree about something, anyway,” Luther Bliss said. “I hope to God I never see you again.

You gave me too much to worry about—more than Lucullus, even. He was smarter than you, but I always knew where he stood. With you, I had to wonder.”

“You son of a bitch,” Cincinnatus said. “You kept me in jail for two years. Wasn’t for that Darrow ofay, you never woulda let me out.”

“I still say I was doing the USA a favor by keeping you in.” Nothing would ever make Bliss back up or admit he might have been wrong, either.

The two men warily sidled past each other. Cincinnatus went on toward the barbecue shack. He didn’t trust Bliss’ word about anything—he had to see with his own eyes. But the secret policeman wasn’t lying here. The place Lucullus had taken over from his father sat quiet and deserted. Oh, the building still stood, but piles of dead leaves and broken windows said no one had come here for a long time. Even the wonderful smell that had always wafted from the shack was gone. You could gain weight just from that smell. No more, dammit. Nothing in Covington would ever be the same.

Sighing, Cincinnatus walked on to the house his father and mother had shared till she passed away.

He’d lived there himself, getting over his accident, helping to take care of her as she slid deeper into senility, and then simply trapped in Covington. The house was still standing, too. Cincinnatus supposed his father still owned it. Even with a shell hole in the front yard and a little shrapnel damage, it was bound to be worth something.

Who would want to buy a house in the colored district, though? How many Negroes would want to live here, even with Covington passed back to the USA? How many Negroes were left to live in Covington and all the other towns that had flown the Stars and Bars? Not enough. Nowhere close to enough. Would whites eventually settle in this part of town, too? Or would they tear everything down and try to pretend Negroes had never been a part of life south of the Mason-Dixon Line and the Ohio?

Cincinnatus couldn't know which, but he sure knew which way he'd bet.

Sore and sad, he walked on through the almost-deserted quarter instead of heading back to the bus stop and the train ride on to his family. His feet knew where he was going better than his head did.

Before long, he found himself in front of the Brass Monkey. He'd drowned a lot of sorrows in that bar while he was stuck here.

He almost jumped out of his shoes when a voice floated out through the door: "C'mon in! We're open!"

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus walked inside. There was no electricity, so his eyes needed a little while to adjust to the dimness. A black man sat at the bar, nursing a whiskey. Another one stood behind it, fanning himself. It was the same bartender who'd been there before. "Didn't reckon I'd see you alive,"

Cincinnatus remarked.

"I could say the same thing about you," the man answered. "When the *po* lice done took you away, I reckoned you was dead meat."

"I was on a list," Cincinnatus said.

"Figured you was. That's why they took you away."

"No, a different kind o' list. They went an' exchanged me an' my pa fo' a couple of Confederates who got stuck up in the USA."

"Lucky," the bartender observed.

"Yeah, I reckon," Cincinnatus said. "How'd you get by?"

"Me? I was lucky a different kind o' way." The bartender fanned harder and didn't go on.

The black man at the bar said, "Cambyses, he done the butternut bastards enough favors, they didn't take him off to no camp."

"Shut your mouth!" the bartender squawked indignantly.

"Shit, don't make no difference now," the other man said. "Me, I done the same damn thing. I ain't what you call real proud o' myself, but I ain't dead, neither, an' a hell of a lot o' folks is."

Cincinnatus had been about to buy himself a drink—he could have used one. Instead, he turned around and walked out. Had those two Negroes survived by ratting on their fellows? He'd always wondered about Cambyses, and he seemed to have been right to wonder. Had they bought their lives at too high a price?

They wouldn't say so. As for Cincinnatus, he was mostly surprised the Confederates had let them live.

Maybe the whites just hadn't had time to kill them before Covington fell. How many Negroes down here had made the same Devil's bargain to survive? He was heading back to Des Moines, back to the USA.

He thanked God he wouldn't have to find out.

W ith a wheeze that said it might not get much farther, the train stopped at the little station in Baroyeca.

Jorge Rodriguez wore his butternut uniform, shorn of his stripes and all Confederate insignia. It was all the clothing he had. He'd been living on the ration cans the Yankees gave him when they let him out of the POW camp. If he never ate anything that came from a tin can again, he wouldn't be sorry. He was even sick of the famous deviled ham. Enough was enough, and then some.

Jorge was the only one who got off at Baroyeca. There on the platform stood his mother, his brother Pedro, and his sister Susana and two of her little children. Jorge hugged everybody and kissed everybody and slapped Pedro on the back. His older brother had been a POW much longer than he had.

"Do you know when Miguel is getting home?" Jorge asked.

Their other brother had been captured, too, and wounded as well. Pedro shook his head. "I haven't heard anything. One of these days, that's all."

"Soon, God, please." Their mother crossed herself.

When Jorge saw the *alcalde*'s house, he saw the Stars and Stripes flying above it. "Even here!" he said in dismay.

"Even here," Pedro agreed. "We lost. You can get into big trouble if you show the Confederate flag.

All we can do is what the Yankees tell us—for now."

He sounded as if he was ready to pick up the fight again if he ever saw the chance. Jorge wasn't so sure. He'd seen a lot more war than his brother had—enough to satisfy him for a long, long time, if not forever. As long as you could live your life, how much difference did it really make which flag flew over the *alcalde*'s house?

There was Freedom Party headquarters, where his father spent so much time. It stood empty, deserted. "What happened to *Señor* Quinn?" Jorge asked.

"He went off to war himself, when things got hard and they started calling in older men," his mother answered. "After that, nobody here knows. He hasn't come back—I know that."

"Maybe he will," Jorge said. Who could guess how long all the Confederate soldiers would need to come home, especially if they lived in out-of-the-way places like Baroyeca? Maybe Robert Quinn lay in a U.S. hospital. Maybe he was still in a camp. As the war ran down and surrender finally came, the Yankees took prisoners by the tens, maybe by the hundreds, of thousands.

"Let's go home," his mother said. Actually, what she said was *Vamos a casa*. She mixed English and Spanish indiscriminately. Most people her age did. Jorge and Pedro smiled at each other. They'd used more English even when they lived here. Since going into the Army, the only time Jorge had spoken any Spanish was when he ran into another soldier from Sonora or Chihuahua. Even then, he and the other man would mostly speak English so their buddies from the rest of the CSA wouldn't tab them for a couple of dumb greasers.

Home was a three-mile walk. Jorge carried his little nephew part of the way. After a sixty-pound pack and a rifle on his back, Juanito didn't seem to weigh much. It was hot, but Jorge was used to heat. The air was dry, anyhow; he wouldn't have to wring himself out when he got to the farmhouse.

"Better weather than farther east," he said, and Pedro nodded.

A black-headed magpie-jay sat on a power line and screeched at the people walking by below. Jays in the rest of the CSA were smaller, with shorter tails. They didn't sound the same—but they did sound like cousins.

When he got to the farmhouse, it seemed smaller than he

remembered. It also seemed plainer and poorer. He hadn't thought anything of the way he lived before he went into the Army. People who lived around Baroyeca either scratched out a livelihood from farms like this one or went into the mines and grubbed lead and silver—never quite enough silver—out of the ground.

By local standards, his family was well off. They had running water and electricity, though they hadn't when Jorge was younger. They'd talked about getting a motorcar. Jorge had needed to go up into the rest of the CSA, the part where everyone spoke English all the time, to realize how much he'd grown up without. If nobody around you had it, though, you didn't miss it.

"Like old times, having two of my sons home and the third one on the way." His mother was invincibly optimistic. He thought so, anyhow, till her face clouded and she went on, "If only your father were here to see it."

"*Sí*," Jorge said. Nobody seemed to want to say any more than that. Hipolito Rodriguez's death, so far from all his family, would cast a shadow over them for the rest of their lives. *Why* had he shot himself?

He'd been doing work he thought the country needed, and doing it for his Army buddy from the last war.

What could have gone wrong?

It was almost as if he'd listened to Yankee propaganda about the camps, and that even before there was much Yankee propaganda. If *mallates* were people like anybody else, then putting them in those camps was wrong. If. No matter what the damnyankees said, Jorge had trouble believing it. Most Confederate citizens would. His father would have—he was sure of that.

Could something he saw, something that happened at the camp, have changed his mind? Jorge also had trouble believing that. And, with no way to look inside his father's mind and understand what he was thinking, it would stay a mystery forever.

His mother cooked tacos stuffed with shredded pork and spices fiery enough to make his nose run—he wasn't used to them any more. He ate and ate. Yes, this kind of food beat the devil out of canned deviled ham. And there were *chicharrones*—pieces of pigskin fried crisp and crunchy that gave your teeth a workout.

"This is wonderful," Jorge said. "I ate boring food so long, I forgot

how good things could be.”

His older brother laughed. “I said the very same thing when I got here—didn’t I, *mamacita*?”

“Yes, exactly the same thing,” Magdalena Rodriguez answered.

“Let’s hope we can hear Miguel say it, too,” Susana said.

“And soon, please, God,” their mother said. Someone knocked on the door. “It’s the postman.” She got up to see what he had.

There were a couple of advertising circulars and a large envelope that looked official. And it was: it came from something called the U.S. occupying authority in the former state of Sonora. Magdalena Rodriguez fought through the pronunciation of that. When she opened the envelope and unfolded the piece of paper inside, she made a face.

“All in English,” she said.

“Let me see.” Jorge could read English well enough. And, in fact, the paper was aimed at Pedro and him. He frowned at the eagle in front of crossed swords on the letterhead; people using that emblem had done their level best to kill him. Now they were telling him what he had to do as a returned prisoner of war.

And they weren’t kidding around, either. Returned POWs had to report to the *alcalde*’s office once a week. They had to renounce the Freedom Party. They had to report all meetings of more than five people they attended.

Pedro laughed when Jorge said that. “More than five people here now,” he observed. “Do we report this?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Jorge said. He kept reading. Returned POWs could not write or subscribe to forbidden literature. They couldn’t keep weapons of caliber larger than .22—either pistols or longarms.

“I’m surprised they let you have any,” his sister said when he read that.

“Somebody who was writing the rules had to know every farm down here has a varmint gun,” Jorge said. His father had taught him to shoot, and to be careful with firearms, when he was a little boy. “If they said we couldn’t keep guns at all, we wouldn’t pay any attention to them. They think this keeps them out of trouble.”

“You can kill somebody with a .22,” Pedro said.

“Sure,” Jorge agreed. “But you have to hit him just right.”

“Are you sure they really let us out of the camps?” his brother asked.

He shrugged. “We’re here. This isn’t so good, but they’ll get tired of it after a while. They have to.

How many soldiers can they put in Baroyeca?”

“As many as they want,” Pedro said.

But Jorge shook his head. “I don’t believe it. They’d have to stick soldiers in every little town from Virginia to here. Even the Yankees don’t have that many soldiers…I hope.”

Pedro thought about it. “Mm, maybe you’re right. The war is over. The Yankees will want to go home, too.”

“Sure they will. Who wouldn’t?” Jorge said. “Being a soldier is no fun. You march around, that’s not so bad. But when you fight, most of the time you’re bored and uncomfortable, and the rest you’re scared to death.”

“And you can get hurt, too,” their mother said softly, and crossed herself again.

Jorge and Pedro had both been lucky, coming through the war with nothing worse than a few scratches. Their brother hadn’t. The roll of the dice, the turn of the card…Some guys had a shell burst ten feet away from them and didn’t get badly hurt. Some turned into hamburger. Who could say why?

God, maybe. From everything Jorge had seen, He had a rugged sense of humor.

One of these days, he wanted to talk that over with Pedro—and with Miguel, too. Not here, though.

Not now. Not with their mother listening. She believed, and she hadn’t seen so many reasons not to believe.

Well, all that could wait. It would have to, in fact. “How is the farm?” he asked his mother. He would be here for a long time. This was what counted now.

“Not so bad,” she answered, “but not so good, either. We all did everything we could. With so many men in the Army, though”—she spread her hands—“we couldn’t do everything we wanted to. The livestock is all right. The crops…Well, we didn’t go hungry, but we barely made enough to pay for the things we need and we can’t get from the land.”

“It’s about what you’d expect,” Pedro said. “If we work hard, we can bring it back to the way it was before the war—maybe better. If the Yankees let us, I mean.”

“I think maybe they will. They don’t care so much about us—we’re too far away,” Jorge said.

“Virginia, Tennessee—they really hate the people there. And Georgia, too. I think they’ll come down on them harder and leave us alone unless somebody here does something stupid like try to rise up.”

Pedro didn’t say anything. Jorge realized that wasn’t necessarily good news. No, his brother hadn’t seen so much fighting as he had. Maybe Pedro was still ready for more. Jorge knew damn well he wasn’t. Bombers dropping loads on Baroyeca, without even any antiaircraft to shoot back? Believe it or not, the mere idea made him want to cross himself.

XV

P eople in the United States said Washington, D.C., had Confederate weather. Armstrong Grimes’

father, who was from Ohio, said so all the goddamn time. Armstrong had always believed it. Why not?

His old man wouldn’t waste time and effort lying about anything so small.

But now Armstrong was stuck in southern Alabama in the middle of summer, and he was discovering that people in the USA didn’t know what the hell they were talking about. He’d already found that out about his father—what guy growing up doesn’t?—but discovering the same thing about the rest of the country came as a bit of a jolt.

Every day down here was like a bad day back home. It got hot. It got sticky. And it never let up. U.S.

soldiers gulped salt tablets. When the sweaty patches under their arms dried out—which didn't happen very often—they left salt stains on their uniforms. He itched constantly. Prickly heat, athlete's foot, jock itch…You name it, Armstrong came down with it. He smeared all kinds of smelly goop on himself.

Sometimes it helped. More often, it didn't.

And there were bugs. They had mosquitoes down here that could have doubled as fighter-bombers.

They had several flavors of ferocious flies. They had vicious little biting things the locals called no-see-'ems. They had chiggers. They had ticks. They had something called chinch bugs. The Army sprayed DDT on everything and everybody. It helped…some. You would have had to spray every square inch of the state to put down all the nasty biting things.

Local whites hated the men in green-gray who'd whipped their armies and made them stop killing Negroes. Bushwhackers shot at U.S. soldiers. You looked sideways at every junked motorcar by the side of the road. It could go boom and take half a squad with it.

The U.S. Army didn't waste time fighting fair, not after the surrender. Every time a U.S. soldier got shot, ten—then twenty—Confederates faced the firing squad. The number for an auto bomb started at a hundred and also quickly doubled.

Armstrong hadn't been on any firing squads while the war was going on. Now, with three stripes on his sleeve, he frequently commanded one. The first couple of times he did it, it made his stomach turn over. After that, it turned into routine, and he got used to it.

So did the soldiers who did the shooting. They went about their business at the same time as they argued about whether it did any good. "Just makes these motherfuckers hate us worse," Squidface opined.

"They already hate us," Armstrong said. "I don't give a shit about that. I just don't want 'em shooting at us."

"If we don't get the assholes who're really doin' it, what do we accomplish?" Squidface asked.

"Shootin' little old ladies gets old, you know?"

“We shoot enough little old ladies, the ones who’re left alive’ll make the trigger-happy guys knock it off,” Armstrong said.

“Good fuckin’ luck.” Squidface was not a believer.

Armstrong trotted out what he thought was the clincher: “’Sides, we kill all the whites down here, nobody’ll be left to go bushwhacking, right?”

“Shit, now you’re talkin’ like a Confederate nigger,” Squidface said. “We do that, won’t be *anybody* left alive down here.”

“Wouldn’t break my heart.” Armstrong wiped his face with his sleeve. The sleeve came away wet—big surprise. “Best thing they could do with this country is give it back to the possums and the gators.”

Squidface laughed, but he wouldn’t give up on the argument—what better way to kill time? He suggested a reason to leave some Confederates alive: “Nobody gets laid any more if we kill all the women. Some of the ones we grease are cute. That’s a waste of good pussy.”

“How come you haven’t come down venereal yet?” Armstrong asked.

“Same reason you haven’t, I bet,” Squidface answered. “I’m lucky. And when I figure maybe I won’t be lucky, I’m careful. The broads down here, they’re nothin’ but a bunch of whores.”

“They lost,” Armstrong said, which went a long way towards explaining things. He added, “A lot of

’em, their husbands or boyfriends aren’t coming back, either.”

He supposed he had been lucky. He’d got an education down here that was a hell of a lot more enjoyable than anything they’d tried to cram down his throat in high school. He hadn’t cared about English lit or medieval history or practical math. This—this was stuff he wanted to learn.

The one thing he was glad about was that none of the women who’d enlightened him had come before his firing squad. That would have been worse than embarrassing, and it might have landed him in trouble.

Orders against what the brass called fraternization had gone out. Getting anyone to listen to them was another story.

“Far as I’m concerned, it’s the same now as it was when we were shooting at each other,” he said. “I just want to serve out my hitch, take off the goddamn uniform, go back home, and figure out what the hell to do with the rest of my life.”

“Want to hear somethin’ funny?” Squidface said.

“I’m all ears,” Armstrong answered.

“Me, I’m thinkin’ about turning into a lifer.”

“Jesus Christ! C’mon with me, buddy. I’m taking you to the aid station. You’re down with something worse than the clap. You’ve got softening of the brain, damned if you don’t.”

“Nah. I been thinkin’ about it,” Squidface said. “Thinkin’ hard, too. Say I go back to Civvy Street.

What’s the best thing that can happen to me?”

“You get out of the Army,” Armstrong answered at once.

“Yeah, and then what? Best thing I can see is, I spend the next forty years working in a factory, I find some broad, we have some kids and get old and fat together. Big fucking deal, pardon my French.”

That was, in broad outline, the future Armstrong saw for himself, too. It didn’t seem so bad—but, when Squidface laid it out, it didn’t seem so good, either. But when the other choice was staying in…“Would you rather get your balls shot off instead? I already got one Purple Heart. That’s about five too many.”

“It won’t be as bad now as it was,” Squidface said. “What I figure is, if I stay in, I can end up a top kick pretty goddamn fast. They’re gonna lose all kinds of senior noncoms—some of those sorry assholes are Great War retreads, and they ain’t gonna stick around. People’ll call me First Sergeant Giacopelli, not Squidface. I’ll get to tell lieutenants where to head in. Even captains won’t look at me like I’m dogshit on the bottom of their shoe. I’ll have more fruit salad on my chest than the mess hall has in cans.”

“You’re gonna do what you’re gonna do,” Armstrong said. “Don’t figure I can talk you out of it. Hell, I wish you luck, if it’s what you really want. But I’m not gonna go that route.”

“You’ll end up in an office somewhere, with a secretary to blow you if

your wife won't. You're a smart guy," Squidface said. "I'm just a sap from the wrong side of the tracks. Army's the first place I ever got anything like a square deal."

"If I'm so smart, what am I doing here?" Armstrong asked. Squidface laughed. Armstrong wished he hadn't made the crack about secretaries. His own father had worked in a Washington office since time out of mind. Armstrong didn't have any reason to think his old man was unfaithful, but now he'd wonder.

That wasn't so good.

Then somebody let out a yell, and Armstrong and Squidface both jumped up to see what was going on. The guy who yelled was a captain. Seeing Armstrong, he said, "Gather up your platoon, Grimes, and take 'em into Hugo. We've got trouble there."

"Yes, sir," Armstrong said, and then, "Can you tell me what kind of trouble, so they know what to look out for?"

"There's a gal says a nigger raped her. He says she gave it up, and she only started yelling when somebody saw him leaving her house. All the white folks in town want to hang him up by the nuts. Before we got down here, they'd hang a coon for whistling at a white woman, let alone fucking her."

"What are we supposed to do, exactly?" Armstrong asked.

"He's in the town jail. Don't let 'em haul him out and lynch him. We're still figuring out what really happened—trying to, anyway. So that's what's going on. Go deal with it. Do whatever you have to do to hold the jail. White folks here have to know we're the law in these parts nowadays. They aren't. Got it?"

"Yes, sir," Armstrong replied—the only possible answer. *Go deal with it*, he thought. *Right*. Turning to Squidface, he said, "Let's round 'em up."

"Sure, Sarge." Squidface said the only thing *he* could.

They tramped into Hugo in full combat gear, weapons loaded and ready. Finding the jail was the easiest thing in the world—it was the building with the mob in front of it. A squad of scared-looking U.S.

soldiers in the jail looked as if they didn't think they could hold the

mob out if it attacked. They might well have been right, too.

“Break it up there!” Armstrong yelled from behind the crowd of irate Alabamans. “Go home!”

They whirled, almost as one. For a second, he wondered if they would charge his men. The sight of so many more soldiers in green-gray—and so many automatic weapons—seemed to give the locals pause.

“We want the nigger!” one of them yelled. Then they all took up the cry: *“We want the nigger!”*

“Well, you aren’t gonna get him,” Armstrong said. “He’s ours to deal with, once we work out what really went on. You people go on home. First, last, and only warning: we start shooting, we don’t quit.”

“What he done to that white gal, just killin’s too good for him!” shouted a man with a gray mustache stained by tobacco juice. “We’re gonna—”

“You’re gonna shut the fuck up and go home right now, or you’re gonna end up dead,” Armstrong broke in. “Those are the only choices you got. *We’ll* deal with the colored guy, or maybe with the whore he was trickin’ with.” That caused fresh tumult. He silenced it by chambering a round. The harsh *snick!*

cut through the crowd noise like a sharp knife through soft sausage. “Enough of this shit,” Armstrong said. “Beat it!”

He wondered if they would rush him in spite of everything. He also wondered if he and his buddies could shoot enough of them to break the rush before they got mobbed. Then, sullenly, the crowd dispersed. They were willing to kill to defend Confederate womanhood, but less enthusiastic about dying for it.

“Whew!” Armstrong said.

“Yeah.” Squidface nodded. “Ain’t you glad the war’s over?”

“Christ, we almost started it up again,” Armstrong said. “And you want to keep on doing crap like this? You gotta be out of your tree.”

“Hey, I won’t be bored, anyway,” Squidface made light of it, but he wasn’t about to change his mind.

“Got a butt on you?”

“Sure.” Armstrong handed him a pack. “Wonder if that coon really did give her the old what-for?”

“Who cares?” Squidface paused to flick his Zippo, sucked in smoke, and went on, “Way I look at it is, all the shit these white Freedom Party assholes gave the spades, who gives a shit if they get some of their own back eight inches at a time?”

“Mm, you’ve got something there.” Armstrong lit a cigarette, too. “Besides, I bet she’s ugly.” He and Squidface both laughed. Their side had won. They could afford to.

C assius had wondered about a lot of things in his life. Whether he would be famous never made the list.

A Negro in the CSA had no chance at all of reaching that goal, so what point to wondering about it?

All he had to do, it turned out, was be a halfway decent shot. Knock one man over, and his own world turned upside down and inside out. No, he hadn’t expected that. He hadn’t even imagined it.

None of which kept it from happening.

First, U.S. officers inside Madison grilled him. He told his story. There wasn’t much of a story to tell:

“Soon as I seen it was Jake Featherston, I shot the son of a bitch. Shot him some more once he was down so’s he wouldn’t get up no mo’.”

“What’ll we do with him?” one officer asked another over Cassius’ head. They might as well have been talking about somebody in the next county.

“Hell, I don’t know,” the second Yankee answered. “If it was up to me, though, I’d put him up for a Congressional Medal of Honor.”

“Can’t,” the first officer said.

“Why the hell not?”

“He isn’t a U.S. citizen.”

“Oh.” The second officer laughed sheepishly. “Yeah. You’re right. But he just did more for us than a fuck of a lot of guys who are.”

One thing that happened because he'd shot Jake Featherston was that he didn't have to go out on patrol any more. He didn't have any more duties at all, in fact. He could eat as much as he wanted and sleep as late as he wanted. If they'd issued him a girl, he would have had the whole world by the short hairs. And if he'd asked, they probably would have. But he didn't think of it, and no one suggested it, so he did without.

A few days later, a newsreel crew filmed him. He told them the same story he'd given the Army officers. One of them asked, "Did you feel you were taking revenge for all the Negroes Jake Featherston hurt?"

"He didn't hurt 'em, suh—he done *killed* 'em," Cassius answered. "My ma an' my pa an' my sister an' Lord knows how many more. Can't hardly get even for all that jus' by killin' one man. He needed killin'—don't get me wrong. But it ain't enough—not even close."

"Why didn't you get taken with the rest of your family?" asked the white man from the USA.

"On account of I didn't go to church on Sunday. That's where they got grabbed."

"Do you think God was saving you for something else?"

"Beats me," Cassius answered. "Plenty of other times I could've got killed, too."

"What are you going to do now?"

Cassius spread his hands. "Suh, I got *no* idea."

Plenty of other people had ideas for him. Next thing he knew, he was on a train heading for the USA.

He'd never ridden on the railroad before, and he would have gone hungry if one of the whites escorting him hadn't taken him to the dining car. The food was good—better than U.S. Army chow. It didn't measure up to what the Huntsman's Lodge or his mother had made, but he didn't figure anything ever would, not this side of heaven.

He took some satisfaction in seeing what the USA had done to the CSA—and the Carolinas had been a Confederate redoubt till late in the war. As he passed through Virginia, he saw what the United States had done where they weren't fooling around. He saw white people

living in the midst of the rubble. They were filthy and grubby and scrawny. He'd gone through that himself. He might have been sorry for them…if he'd seen more than a tiny handful of blacks living alongside them. Since he didn't, he stifled whatever sympathy he would have felt.

Then he crossed into the USA. Another country! Not only that, a country where they just treated Negroes…not too well. His father had always been cynical about the United States. Compared to what Cassius had survived, though, being treated…not too well looked pretty goddamn good.

The United States didn't look so good. The part he saw, the stretch between the Maryland-Virginia border and Philadelphia, looked almost as bomb-pocked and trampled as the land farther south had. He wondered how any part of this poor battered continent would ever climb back to its feet again.

He saw the edges of what the superbomb had done to Philadelphia. The edges were bad enough.

What were things like at the center, where the bomb went off? Maybe not knowing was better.

They put him up in a hotel not far from Congressional Hall. "Anything you want—anything at all—you just telephone and ask for it," a bright young lieutenant said. "They'll bring it to you."

"Thank you kindly," Cassius said, and then, "Show me how to work the telephone, suh, please."

"You never used one before?" The officer, who couldn't have been more than a year or two older than Cassius, blinked.

"No, suh," Cassius answered. "Weren't more than a couple in the Terry—where I come from—even before things got bad. After that, we didn't have nothin'."

"All right." The white man—he was blond and blue-eyed and handsome; in the CSA, he might have become a Freedom Party Guard—showed him what to do. "You know about hot and cold water taps, right?"

"Well, we always had to heat our own, but I can cipher out what's hot and what's cold. An' we had the bathroom down the hall. Mighty nice, puttin' it right here."

“I bet. My folks grew up in a place like that. I’m lucky I didn’t have to. They’ll be delivering a dress uniform for you tonight, too. You go up to Congress tomorrow, so they can thank you for getting rid of Featherston.”

“Oh, my,” Cassius said.

He tried the telephone, and ordered a steak and fried potatoes. Fifteen minutes later, somebody knocked on the door. A white man in a fancy getup a lot like what Cassius’ father had worn brought in a tray. “Here you are, sir,” he said in a funny foreign accent. Cassius understood tips. They’d given him pocket money, so he handed the waiter fifty cents. With a nod and a smile, the man left. *I did that right*, Cassius thought.

Again, the food reminded him Army cooks didn’t know everything there was to know. Was it as good as what the Huntsman’s Lodge made? Pretty close, if it wasn’t.

He’d just finished eating when the uniform arrived. It fit perfectly. How did they do that? Did they measure him while he wasn’t looking? The fabric was buttery soft. The only differences from a real U.S.

Army uniform were plain brass buttons and no U.S. on his collar. He had an auxiliary’s armband instead.

Well, he was one.

His visit to Congress passed in a blur. Dozens of people shook his hand. One of them, he realized just after it happened, was the President of the USA. Charlie La Follette didn’t look nearly so fierce as Jake Featherston. But he’d won. *And I helped*, Cassius thought dizzily.

He got dizzier a moment later. Along with a resolution expressing the Thanks of Congress, they gave him a reward—$100,000, tax-free. The Congresswoman who made a speech about that was Flora somebody. Afterwards, she told him, “If you like, I’ll find someone you can trust to help you look after the money. You don’t want to waste it.” Then she smiled. “Or maybe you do—I don’t know. But it would be a shame.”

“Thank you, ma’am. Reckon I take you up on that.” Cassius had never imagined so much money. But he remembered how his folks always squeezed every penny to get by. He didn’t think he wanted to waste this, not when it could set him up for life. *Maybe waste a little*, he

thought.

He gave wireless interviews. He talked to Bill Shirer and Eric Sevareid and Walter Winchell. He could hardly understand Winchell's rapid-fire, slang-filled New York accent. If he hadn't heard a few soldiers talking that way, he probably wouldn't have been able to follow at all.

Each broadcaster asked the question a different way, but they all wanted to know the same thing: what did killing Jake Featherston feel like? The more he told the story, the further from the reality of it he felt.

A few days later, as if remembering it had overlooked something, Congress voted Cassius a fresh honor: it declared him a citizen of the United States. He felt more excited than someone from, say, the Empire of Mexico might have. Up till now, he'd never been a citizen of any country. Negroes in the CSA were residents, but they didn't have the rights citizens did.

The Congresswoman who'd offered to help him sent over an accountant: a thin, quiet man named Sheldon Klein. He always wore a glove on his left hand. Cassius watched it and saw only his index finger and thumb move, so he probably had some kind of war wound there.

"Yes, if we invest in bonds and some carefully chosen stocks, we can provide you with a very decent income without touching your principal at all," he said.

"My what?" Cassius asked.

"Your principal. That means the basic amount of money you have now. It will still be there, and you can live off what it earns," Klein answered. He didn't say, *You dumb nigger*. He didn't even act as if he thought it.

"Any chance I can make more money?" Cassius asked.

"I'm sure you will," the accountant said. "There will probably be a book about you, and a film as well.

The fees from those you can either spend as they come in or add to the nest egg and make your investment income larger. And nothing stands in the way of your pursuing an education and having a career like anyone else."

Cassius hadn't even thought about that. "What about—?" He brushed a couple of fingers across the black skin on the back of his other hand.

"A difficulty. Not an impossible difficulty, not in this country," Sheldon Klein replied. "If you work hard, you can overcome it. And, if I may speak frankly, even people who dislike most Negroes will go out of their way for the man who rid the world of Jake Featherston."

That wasn't fair, which didn't mean he was wrong. "Don't like to take advantage," Cassius said slowly.

"If you can, if you aren't hurting anybody—why not?" Klein said. "You spent your whole life up till now disadvantaged, didn't you? You were a Negro in the Confederate States, so of course you did. Do you even read and write?"

"Yes, suh. My pa, he learned me. He knew…all kinds of things." Cassius realized he had no idea just how much his father knew. He'd never had the chance to find out. Even having his letters made him stand out in the Terry.

He also saw he'd surprised Klein. "All right. That will help you, then," the white man said. "The stronger your foundation, the bigger the house you can build on it."

"Reckon you're right." Something else occurred to Cassius. "What do you make out of this?"

"Off of you? Not a dime. Congresswoman Blackford would skin me if I charged you," Klein answered. "I may get some extra business when people find out I work for you, but that's a different story. Oh, and just so you know—it's easy for an accountant to steal from you. Every so often, you should pay somebody else to check up on what I do."

Cassius started to say he was sure he wouldn't need to. Then he saw Klein was telling him he shouldn't be sure of things like that. And the accountant wouldn't be the only one who could screw him if he wasn't careful. So he nodded back and said, "Thanks. Reckon I will." By the way Sheldon Klein nodded, he'd passed a small test—or maybe not such a small one.

Sam Carsten remembered coming home after the last war. He'd been a petty officer on the *Dakota* then, and eager to learn more about the strange and exciting new world of naval aviation. He'd been on the *Remembrance* when the new airplane carrier launched. After some

detours, he'd been aboard her when she got sunk, too.

Coming home with the *Josephus Daniels* was different. She was *his*. He wondered what the Navy would do with her after the war. She'd done everything they asked of her while the country needed ships. When you got right down to it, though, she couldn't do any one thing very well.

And he wondered what the Navy would do with him after the war. A middle-aged lieutenant up through the hawse hole…He might have had a better chance of hanging on if he'd stayed a CPO. The Navy needed grizzled old chiefs. Grizzled old midgrade officers? That was a different story, too.

Since he couldn't do anything about it, he tried not to worry. He steered the destroyer escort to her berth in the Boston Navy Yard himself. By God, he could get the job done. As sailors on the pier caught lines and made her fast, he nodded to Lon Menefee and said, "Well, we made it."

"Yes, sir." The exec nodded. "In style, too."

"As much as the old beast has." Was Sam talking about the ship or himself? Even he wasn't sure.

Men who'd got leave happily hurried off the destroyer escort. A lot of them wouldn't stay in the Navy much longer. They would pick up the threads of the lives they'd led before they put on the uniform. Sam couldn't very well do that. He'd cut those threads thirty-five years before. But if they put him on the beach he'd have to find something else to do.

He wished he had any idea what.

"She's in your hands for a bit, Lon," he said. "I get to go talk to a board."

"All things considered, I think I'd rather have a tooth pulled," Menefee said judiciously. "Matter of fact, I'm sure of it."

"Ha! Your time will come, and soon, too." Sam wasn't kidding. The exec was still in his twenties. He had plenty of time to climb the links in the chain of command. Carsten wished he did himself.

That was one wish he wouldn't get. At least he had sense enough to

know it. He set his cap at the proper angle, left the bridge, and then left the *Josephus Daniels*. A commander who couldn't be much older than Lon Menefee started to salute him, then jerked his arm down. Without smiling, Sam did salute the younger man. That kind of thing happened all the time when you had more wrinkles than stripes.

Two younger but senior officers did salute him before he got to the meeting room where he supposed he would hear his fate. As was his habit when they did that, he returned the salutes with an admiral's dignity. If one of his stripes were of thick gold… *If I had an admiral's pay!* he thought. You couldn't get rich in the service no matter what, not if you were honest, but if you won flag rank you did pretty well for yourself.

He laughed, which made a passing sailor give him a funny look. A lieutenant's pay was nothing to speak of, but he had a fair bit of money sitting in one account or another. When had he had time to spend any of it?

When he walked in to face the board, one of the men on it was a rear admiral and two were captains, all about his age. The last fellow was also a four-striper, but of much more recent vintage, his handsome face unlined, his brown hair unfrosted with gray. He grinned, jumped to his feet, and held out a hand.

"Hello, Sam!" he said. "How are you?"

"Mr. Cressy!" Sam exclaimed. "Good to see you!" He shook hands with the former exec of the *Remembrance*. "You're going up as fast as I thought you would, sir. Is that the ribbon for a Navy Cross?"

Dan Cressy looked embarrassed. "I was lucky."

"You're lucky you're alive. That's one of the ways you get a Navy Cross," the rear admiral said. He turned back to Sam. "Take a seat, Lieutenant Commander Carsten."

"Lieut—" Sam blinked. "Thank you, sir!" Two and a half stripes! He'd made it at last! Wonder filled him as he sat down. He'd climbed about as high as a mustang could hope to get. But he couldn't relax even now. The Navy might be giving him a pat on the back at the same time as it was giving him a kick in the ass. A promotion on the way out the door was anything but unheard of.

"You had yourself a busy war," the rear admiral observed. "Captain Cressy's told us part of the story, and your record since you got a ship

of your own speaks for itself."

"I took her where I got sent, sir," Carsten answered. "I did what my orders told me to do. I'm just glad we didn't get cut up too bad doing it."

"Your attitude does you credit," one of the senior captains said. "Captain Cressy predicted you would tell us something like that."

"He should talk. 'I was lucky'!" Sam glanced toward Cressy. "No offense, sir, but you sandbag like a son of a gun."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Cressy said, deadpan. Everybody laughed.

The rear admiral returned to business. "You had a little trouble with your previous exec, Carsten. How does Lieutenant Menefee suit you?"

"He's a fine officer, sir," Sam said quickly—he didn't want to screw Menefee. "I recommend him without reservation. That's the short answer. Details are in his fitness reports, but it all boils down to the same thing."

"Short answer will do for now." The rear admiral nodded to one of the captains, who wrote something down. The admiral's sea-gray eyes swung back to Sam. "Where do you see yourself going from here?"

"As long as it's in the Navy, sir, I'll take a shot at whatever you want to give me," Sam replied.

"We've heard that before," said the captain, who was taking notes.

"Haven't we just?" the rear admiral agreed. "I don't think the Navy's going to shrink the way it did after the last war. We've got the Japs to keep an eye on, God only knows how friendly Germany will stay, and we really are going to sit on the Confederates—and the damn Canucks—this time around. We won't leave you on the beach."

"That's mighty good to hear, sir," Sam said. "Will Congress give us the money we need to do all that good stuff?"

The rear admiral glanced over to Captain Cressy. "Well, you were right. He's plenty sharp."

"I said so, didn't I?" Cressy returned.

“You sure did.” The flag officer gave his attention back to Sam. “They will for this year, anyhow, because we’re still running on war appropriations. What happens after that…I’ve never believed in borrowing trouble. Have you?”

“Only when I worry about my ship,” Sam answered.

All the senior officers sitting across from him nodded. “There is that. Yes, indeed. There is that. You understand what command’s all about, all right. Suppose we give you a choice. You can keep the *Josephus Daniels* and go on occupation patrol in Confederate waters. Or, if you’d rather, you can have a real destroyer out in the Sandwich Islands. I don’t know what kind of duty that would be. Technically, we’re still at war with the Empire of Japan, but it looks like we’ll let things peter out on the *status quo ante bellum*, same as we did the last time around. You may end up gathering moss out there. If you go down to the Confederacy—to the South, I suppose I ought to call it, since we’re going to try to hold on to it…”

“If I go down there, it won’t be dull, whatever else it is,” Sam finished for him.

“Well, yes,” the rear admiral said. “That’s how it looks.”

“I’ll hang on to the DE, sir,” Sam said. “If I were Captain Cressy’s age, I’d take the bigger, newer ship. It’d look spiffier in my service jacket. But I figure I can do more good keeping the Confederates in line. The Pacific war…” He shook his head. “The supply lines are just too damn long to let either side fight a proper war out there.”

“That’s how it’s been so far, anyhow,” Captain Cressy said. “If we get airplanes that can carry a superbomb from Midway, say, to the Philippines—”

“Or if they get one that can carry a superbomb from Guam to Honolulu,” the rear admiral broke in.

“Or if either side gets a bomber that can fly a superbomb off an airplane carrier,” Sam said.

“*There’s* a cheerful thought. With these new turbos, it’ll probably happen in the next few years,” the rear admiral said. “Or else the smart boys’ll make the bombs smaller, so the prop jobs we’ve already got can carry them. Interesting times, interesting times.” However interesting they might be, he didn’t sound as if he looked forward to

them.

Sam understood that, because he knew he didn't. "Sir, how the heck is the Navy going to fight a war when one airplane with one bomb can knock out a flotilla?"

"You want the straight dope?" the rear admiral asked.

"Yes, sir!" Sam said eagerly.

"All right. The straight dope is, right now nobody has the faintest idea in the whole wide world. If you've got any hot suggestions, put 'em down in writing and send 'em to the Navy Department. They'll go into the mix—you bet your sweet ass they will."

"The only idea I've got about a superbomb is, being under it when it goes off is a bad plan."

"You're even with everybody else, Sam," Captain Cressy said. "Hell, you're ahead of some people.

There are officers and civilians in Philadelphia who think the Kaiser is our buddy and the Japs don't know how to build superbombs, so why worry?"

"I believe you. Even though it's Philadelphia, I believe you," Sam said. "Some people don't believe things are real till they happen to them. And if a superbomb happens to you, it's too late."

"Sometimes you can talk till you're blue in the face, and it doesn't do you one damn bit of good.

Makes you wonder." The rear admiral shook his head. "All right. We'll cut orders for you, and we'll get your ship refitted. And congratulations again, Commander."

"Thank you, sir!" Sam got to his feet and saluted. Hearing it that way sounded even better. It was as if he'd got the whole third stripe, not just half of it. Most of the time, people didn't bother calling you *Lieutenant Commander*, any more than they bothered calling you *Lieutenant, Junior Grade*. Sam knew all about that. He'd been a j.g. for a long time.

Two and a half stripes! And they still had a slot for him! He really hadn't expected the one, and he'd flabbled about the other. Once he got back to his ship, he owed all the officers drinks. Well, he could

take care of that. He could tie one on if he felt like it—he'd earned the right. *Maybe I will*, he thought.

When am I ever going to have another promotion party? The answer to that was all too plain. Never.

S omebody said you could never go home again. Back in Augusta, Georgia, Jerry Dover would have said that whoever it was had a point. The city he came back to wasn't the one he'd left when he joined the Confederate Army.

When he left, the war hadn't touched Augusta. Negro rebels had set off auto bombs in town, but that was different. So was the isolation of the Terry from the white part of town. Whites and Negroes had always lived apart. Barbed wire between them didn't seem to matter so much—not if you were white, anyhow.

Everything had got shabby even before he joined up. Nobody put any effort into keeping things neat; that all went into doing whatever it took to beat the damnyankees. Well, the whole damn country did whatever it took to beat the damnyankees, and that turned out not to be enough.

And now the whole damn country was paying for it.

Augusta sure was. The Stars and Stripes flew over city hall for the first time in more than eighty years.

The Yankees had captured the town more or less by sideswipe in their drive down the Savannah River to the port of the same name. They'd bombed it a few times, but the Confederates didn't make a stand here. Jerry Dover had seen what happened to places where one side or the other made a stand. He thanked heaven Augusta wasn't one of them.

Incidental damage was bad enough. Streets had craters in them. Walls had chunks bitten out of them.

Most windows stared with blind eyes. The smell of death was old and faint, but it was there.

His family had survived. His house was—mostly—intact. He supposed he ought to thank heaven for all that, too. As a matter of fact, he did. But he would have liked things better if the town and the way of life he'd liked so well had come through the war in one piece.

They hadn't. It wasn't just that U.S. soldiers tramped through the streets of Augusta now. The life, the energy, were gone from the city. Like the rest of the CSA, it had done everything it knew how to do. It didn't know how to do anything any more.

So many men were missing. A lot were dead. A lot were maimed. Some remained in U.S. POW

camps, though every day more came back on the train. But even the ones who were there seemed missing in action. After a losing war, how could you give a shit about putting things back together and making a living again?

Jerry Dover was one of the most hardheaded, practical men around. *He* had a hell of a time giving a rat's ass about what happened next. And if he did, what about his countrymen? He saw what about them. They came back, and they had no idea what the hell to do after that.

A lot of them drank. Good booze was in short supply, and hideously expensive when you could find it.

There was plenty of rotgut and moonshine, though. The Yankees didn't mind if taverns opened up.

Maybe they figured drunks would be too bleary to bother them. And maybe they were right.

Maybe they weren't, too. Some of the drunken ex-soldiers didn't care what happened to them any more. They would pick a fight for the sake of picking it. The Yankees, who weren't *ex*-soldiers, had a simple rule: shoot first. Augusta crackled with gunfire. The U.S. soldiers often didn't bother burying corpses. They left them on the sidewalk or in the gutter to warn other hotheads.

Because the United States played by the Geneva Convention rules and paid him at the same rate as one of their officers, Dover had money in his pocket when he got home. Green money—U.S.

money—was in desperately short supply in the conquered Southern states. No one knew what brown money—Confederate cash—was worth any more, or whether it was worth anything. In the bad days after the Great War, one U.S. dollar could have bought billions, maybe trillions, of Confederate dollars. It wasn't that bad now, but it wasn't good. Not even the occupying authorities seemed sure what to do about the currency of a defunct country.

Putting all that together made leaving the house an adventure every time Jerry did it. He needed to look for work; his greenbacks wouldn't last forever, or even very long. But he was lucky if he could get more than a couple of blocks before jumpy kids in green-gray challenged him.

On a typical hot, muggy afternoon, a Yankee corporal barked, "Hey, you!"

"Yes?" Dover stopped in his tracks. He didn't want to give the soldiers any excuse to do something he'd regret later.

"You fight in the war?" the corporal snapped.

"Yes," Dover said.

The noncom held out his hand. "Let's see your release papers."

"I'm going to reach into my left trouser pocket to get them out," Dover said. He waited till the U.S.

soldier nodded before moving. When he did, he moved slowly and carefully. He showed the Yankee he was holding only papers. "Here."

"Gimme." The corporal examined the papers and then sent Dover a fishy stare. "You were a light colonel, and they let you go anyway?"

"No, not me. I'm still back in Indianapolis," Dover answered.

"Funny guy. I'm laughing my ass off," the U.S. soldier said. Dover's big mouth had got him into trouble before. *When will I learn?* he wondered unhappily. The soldier in green-gray went on, "How come they turned you loose? And don't get cute with me, or you'll be sorry."

"I was only in the Quartermaster Corps. And I signed the papers that said I wouldn't give any more trouble. Hell, I know we lost. You guys wouldn't be here if we didn't," Dover said.

"Bet your balls, buddy." The corporal scratched his bristly chin. "Doesn't seem like enough, somehow. Not a lot of officers released yet."

"Well, there is one thing more," Dover admitted reluctantly.

"Yeah?"

"The guy who shot Jake Featherston, his father used to work in the

restaurant I managed. Maybe he said I wasn't a total bastard."

"Maybe he was lying through his teeth. Or maybe you are." The corporal gestured with his tommy gun. "C'mon with me. We'll get this shit sorted out."

"Right," Dover said, resignation in his voice. If he said no, he'd get shot. So they went to the corporal's superiors. Dover told his story over again. A U.S. second lieutenant with more pimples than whiskers called somebody on a field telephone. The kid—he had to be younger than the corporal—talked, listened, and hung up.

"They'll get back to us," he said.

"What am I supposed to do in the meantime?" Dover asked.

"Wait right here," the baby-faced officer answered. Dover didn't say anything, but he couldn't have looked very happy. The lieutenant said, "What's the matter, Pops? You got a hot date stashed somewhere?"

"No," Jerry Dover said with a sigh. His last "hot date," down in Savannah, had blackmailed him and was probably some kind of Yankee spy. That didn't mean sitting around in a green-gray tent made his heart go pitter-pat with delight. Since his other choices seemed to be the stockade and the burial ground, he sat tight.

After a while, they gave him a couple of ration cans. He ate without another word. He'd had U.S.

rations plenty of times during the war and in the POW camp. Eating them in his home town added insult to injury.

After two and a half hours, the field telephone rang. The lieutenant picked it up and listened. "Really?"

he squeaked in surprise. "All right—I'll take care of it." He hung up and eyed Jerry. "Your story checks out."

"It should. It's true," Dover said.

"I know that—now. I wouldn't've believed it before." The junior officer scribbled something on Dover's papers. "There. I've written an endorsement that should keep them from hauling you in again."

"That'd be nice," Dover said, and then, belatedly, "Thanks." Maybe

the endorsement would do some good, maybe it wouldn't. But at least the kid with the gold bars made the effort. Dover supposed a lot of Yankees would have laughed to see him get in trouble time after time. He put the papers back in his pocket.

"You're done here," the lieutenant said. "You can go."

"Thanks," Dover said again, and ambled off.

He got stopped one more time before he made it to the Huntsman's Lodge. This U.S. patrol didn't haul him in, so maybe the lieutenant's endorsement really did help. Stranger things must have happened, though Dover had a hard time thinking of one.

The Huntsman's Lodge was open for supper. That didn't surprise Jerry Dover; the fancy places always made it. Most of the customers were U.S. officers. Some of them were eating with pretty girls who definitely didn't come from the USA. That didn't surprise Jerry Dover, either. It was the way the world worked.

Most of the waiters and busboys were Mexicans. The ones who weren't were whites: a couple of sixteen-year-olds and a couple of old men. That was a revolution; in the prewar CSA, most whites would sooner have died than served anyone.

One of the Mexicans recognized Dover. The short, swarthy man came over and shook his hand.

"Good to see you again, *Señor*," he said.

"Good to be seen, by God," Dover answered. "Willard Sloan still running things here?"

"*Sí*—uh, yes. I take you to him."

Dover grinned. "You reckon I don't know the way, Felipe?"

All the same, he let the waiter escort him to the tiny, cramped office where he'd put in so many years.

Seeing Sloan behind *his* battered desk was a jolt. The current manager of the Huntsman's Lodge was in his late forties, with a lean face, a bitter expression, and hard blue eyes. When he sat behind the desk, you could hardly tell he used a wheelchair. His legs were useless; he'd got a bullet in the spine during the Great War.

He eyed Jerry Dover with all the warmth of a waiter eyeing a patron sliding out the door without paying his check. “Think you can take my job away from me, do you?” he said.

“That’s not what I came here for,” Dover answered, which was at least partly true. “Just…wanted to see how things were. I spent a lot of years here, you know.”

“Yeah,” Sloan said glumly. “Owners know you’re back yet?”

“No,” Dover said.

“Maybe I ought to plug you now, then.” Sloan sounded serious. Did he keep a pistol in a desk drawer? The way things had gone in the CSA, maybe it wasn’t such a bad idea. The cripple gave Dover another wintry stare. “Or maybe I just ought to shoot myself, save somebody else the trouble.”

“Hey, I only want to get…started over.” Dover didn’t want to say *get back on my feet again*, not to a man who never would. “Doesn’t have to be here.”

“But this’d suit you best.” Willard Sloan didn’t make it a question.

“If you’ve done a halfway decent job since I left, the owners’ll keep you on,” Dover said. “I bet they’re paying you less than they paid me.” Would he work for less than he had before? Damn right he would. But he didn’t tell Sloan that.

“Yeah, they jewed me down pretty good,” the present manager agreed. “What can you do, though?”

“Not much,” Dover said. What could *he* do? He could let the owners know he was around. He’d likely taken care of that just by showing up here. If they wanted him back, they’d get word to him—and too bad for Willard Sloan. If they didn’t…he’d have to figure out something else, that was all.

T hick wire mesh in the Houston jail’s visiting room separated Jefferson Pinkard from the new damnyankee officer the U.S. authorities had chosen to defend him. As he had with Isidore Goldstein, he growled, “Dammit, I didn’t do anything in your country. I didn’t do anything to anybody from your country. I didn’t do anything the people in my country didn’t want me to do, either.”

The damnyankee—he was called Moss, and he was about as exciting as his name—shook his head.

“None of that counts. They’re charging you with crimes against humanity. That means you should have known better than to do that stuff even if they told you to.”

“My ass,” Jeff said angrily. “Goddamn coons always hated the Confederate States. They fucked us when they rose up in the last war.

Hell, first time I went into action, it wasn’t against you Yankees. It was against Red niggers in Georgia.

You reckon they wouldn’t’ve done it again? Like hell they wouldn’t. Only we didn’t give ’em the chance this time around.”

Moss shook his head again. “Women? Children? Men who never did anybody any harm? You won’t get a court to buy it.”

“Well, shit, tell me something I don’t know,” Pinkard said. “You assholes are gonna hang me.

Anything I say is just a fuckin’ joke, far as you’re concerned. Why’d they even bother giving me a new lawyer when Goldstein got hurt? Just to make it look pretty, I bet.”

“I wish I could tell you you’re wrong,” Moss replied, which took Jeff by surprise. “Chances are they *will* hang you. But I’ll fight them as hard as I can. That’s my job. That’s what lawyers do. I’m pretty good at it, too.”

Jeff eyed him through the grating. He still wasn’t much to look at: a middle-aged man who’d been through the mill. He did sound like somebody who meant what he said, though. Jeff knew professional pride when he heard it. He thought Moss *would* do the best job he could. He also thought it wouldn’t do him one goddamn bit of good.

“Can you give me anything to show there were Negroes you didn’t kill when you could have?” Moss asked. “That kind of thing might help some.”

“Nope.” Pinkard shook his head. “I did what I was supposed to do, dammit. I didn’t break any laws.”

“How many Negroes went through your camps?” Lieutenant Colonel Moss asked. “How many came out alive? How many had trials?”

“Trials, nothing,” Jeff said in disgust. “Trials are for citizens. Niggers aren’t citizens of the CSA. Never have been. Never will be now, by God.” He spoke with a certain doleful pride. He’d helped make sure of that.

“Even there, you’re wrong,” Moss said. “There were Negro citizens in the Confederate States—the men who fought for them in the Great War. They went into your camps just like the rest. U.S. authorities can prove that.”

“Well, so what? They were dangerous,” Jeff insisted. “You leave out the ones who learned how to fight, they’re the bastards who’ll give you grief down the line. When we take care of stuff, we do it up brown.”

The Yankee sighed. “You aren’t making it any easier for me—or for yourself.”

“What the hell difference does it make?” Pinkard demanded. “You said it yourself—they’re gonna hang me any which way. I’ll be damned if I give ’em excuses. I did what I was supposed to do, that’s all.”

“Are you sorry you did it?” Moss said. “You might be able to persuade them to go a little easier on you if you make them believe you are.”

“Easy enough to leave me alive?” Jeff asked.

“Well…” The military attorney hesitated. “You are the one who started using trucks to asphyxiate Negroes, right? And you are the one who started using cyanide in the phony bathhouses, too, aren’t you?”

“How’d you know about the trucks?” Jeff asked.

“There’s a Confederate official in Tennessee named…” The lawyer had to stop and check his notes.

“Named Mercer Scott. He told us you were responsible for coming up with that. Is he lying? If he is, we have a better chance of keeping you breathing.”

Jeff considered. So Mercer was singing, was he? Well, he was trying to save his neck, too. Chances were he wouldn’t be able to do it, not when he ran Camp Dependable after Jeff moved on to Camp Determination. The trucks first showed up at Camp Dependable. They made life a lot easier for guards than taking Negroes out into the

swamps and shooting them. Was the mechanic who'd made the first one still alive? Jeff didn't know. It probably didn't matter. Other guards back at the camp by Alexandria would be able to back Mercer up. As for the cyanide, he had plenty of correspondence with the pest-control company that made it. If he tried to deny things there, he was screwed, blued, and tattooed.

And so, with a heavy sigh, he shook his head. "No, I did that stuff, all right. I did it in the line of duty, and I don't need to be ashamed of it."

"You were trying to kill people as efficiently as you could," Moss said.

"I was trying to dispose of niggers as efficiently as I could, yeah," Pinkard said. "They were a danger to the Confederate States, so we had to get rid of 'em."

"Jake Featherston could have settled on redheads or Jews just as easily," the lawyer said.

"Nah." Jeff shook his head. "That's just stupid. Redheads never did anything to anybody. And Jews—hell, I don't have a lot of use for Jews, but they pulled for us, not against us. Look at Saul Goldman."

"He's under arrest, too," Moss said. "They'll hang him for all the lies he told and all the hatred he stirred up."

Jefferson Pinkard laughed. "You dumbass Yankees reckon we need to get talked to to hate niggers?

We can take care of that on our own, thank you kindly. And so can you-all. Otherwise, you would've opened up the border and let 'em all in back before the war. Sure as hell didn't see that happening."

Moss wrote himself a note. "I'll bring it up at the trial. Some of the Negroes' blood is on our hands."

"Think it'll help?" Jeff asked.

"No," Moss said. "It'll just make the judges mad, because they'll aim to lay all the blame on you. But I'll get it on the record, anyhow."

"Hot shit," Jeff said.

The lawyer shrugged. "I can't promise to get you off the hook, not when I don't have a chance in church of delivering. They're going to do what they're going to do. I can slow them down a little and piss

them off a little, and that's about it."

"It ain't fair," Jeff said. "You can't blame me for doing what my country wanted me to do. It's not like I broke any of my laws. You're changing the rules after the game is over."

"You're probably right, but so what?" Moss answered. "Millions of people are dead. Millions of people got killed for no better reason than that they were colored. The government of the USA has decided that that's a crime regardless of whether it broke Confederate law or not. I can't appeal against that decision—they won't let me. I have to play by the rules they give me now."

"Well, I had to play by the rules they gave me then. What's the goddamn difference?" Jeff said.

Moss reached into his briefcase and pulled out some photographs. He held them up so Pinkard could see them. They showed the crematorium at Camp Humble and some of the mass graves back at Camp Determination. "This is the difference," Moss said. "Doesn't it mean anything to you?"

"It means they're gonna fuck me," Jeff said. "That lousy crematorium never did work the way it was supposed to."

"I know. I've seen your letters to the company that built it," Moss said. "The people in charge of that company are also charged with crimes against humanity. The whole Confederacy went around the bend, didn't it?"

"Nope." If Jeff admitted that, he admitted he'd done something wrong. No matter what the damnyankees thought, he was damned if he believed it. "We were just taking care of what we had to do, that's all."

The U.S. officer sighed. "You don't give me much to work with, but I'll do what I can."

He sounded as if he meant it, anyhow. "Thanks," Jeff said grudgingly.

"Right." Moss put papers back into the briefcase, closed it, pushed back his chair, and got up.

"We've done about as much as we can today, looks like."

He left. He *could* leave. Guards took Jeff back to his cell. He wasn't going anywhere, not until the damnyankees decided it was time to try him and hang him. The unfairness of it gnawed at him. When you won the war, you could do whatever you goddamn well pleased.

He imagined the Confederate States victorious. He imagined Jake Featherston setting up tribunals and hanging Yankees from Denver to Bangor for all the nasty things they'd done to the CSA after the Great War. There'd be Yankee bastards dangling from every lamppost in every town. Well, he could imagine whatever he pleased. Things had worked out the other way, and the sons of bitches from the USA were getting a brand new chance to work out on the Confederacy.

Where was the justice in that? Nowhere, not as far as he could see.

Of course, he couldn't see very far, not where he was. He could see lots and lots of iron bars, a forest of them. They weren't even damnyankee iron bars. They came to his eyes courtesy of the city of Houston. What mattered, though, was his own cell. It boasted a lumpy cot, a toilet without a seat (God only knew what kind of murderous weapon he could have come up with if they'd given him a toilet seat), and a coldwater sink. He knew why he didn't get hot water—that would have cost money, heaven forbid.

And he was an important prisoner, too. He had the cell to himself. Most cells held two men. He wouldn't have minded the company, but worrying about what he wanted wasn't high on anybody's list.

Well, his own, but nobody gave a rat's ass about that any more. He'd been a big wheel for a long time.

He'd got used to shoving Army officers around and arguing with the Attorney General. Now he might as well have been a coon himself, up on a drunk-and-disorderly rap.

Except they wouldn't hang a coon for that. They were going to hang him higher than Haman.

An attendant brought him a tray of food. He'd gone to jail in Birmingham a few times in his younger days. The chow then had been lousy. It still was.

"Sorry, buddy," the attendant said. "If it was up to me, I'd give you a fuckin' medal for what you did with the nigs."

“A medal doesn’t do me a hell of a lot of good,” Jeff said. “Can you get me out of here instead?”

The attendant shook his head. “Nope. No chance. Too many Yankees around. They’d hang me right alongside of you, and I got five kids.”

Jeff could see the fear in his eyes. He would have said no if he were a fairy with no kids and no hope of any. The attendants were locals. Even though Texas was calling itself the Republic of Texas these days, they loved blacks no more than any other white Confederate did. But they loved their necks just fine. Nobody would help an important prisoner, nobody at all.

M y name is Clarence Potter,” Potter told the U.S. interrogator in Philadelphia. “My rank is brigadier general.” He rattled off his pay number. “Under the Geneva Convention, that’s all I’ve got to tell you.”

“Screw the Geneva Convention,” the interrogator answered. He was a major named Ezra Tyler, a real Yankee from New England. “And screw you, too. You blew up half of Philadelphia. And you did it wearing a U.S. uniform. You get caught after that, the Geneva Convention won’t save your sorry ass.”

“You won. You can do whatever you want—who’s going to stop you?” Potter said. “But you know you used U.S. soldiers in C.S. uniforms in front of Chattanooga—other places, too. And you dropped two superbombs on my country, not just one. So who do you think you’re trying to kid, anyway?”

Major Tyler turned red. “You’re not cooperating.”

“Damn straight I’m not,” Potter agreed cheerfully. “I told you—I don’t have to. Not legally, anyway.”

“Do you want to live?”

“Sure. Who doesn’t? Are you people going to let me? Doesn’t seem likely, whether I cooperate or not.”

“Professor FitzBelmont doesn’t have that attitude.”

“Professor FitzBelmont isn’t a soldier. Professor FitzBelmont knows things you can really use. And Professor FitzBelmont is kind of a twit.” Potter sighed. “None of which applies to me, I’m afraid.”

“A twit?” One of Tyler’s eyebrows rose. “Without him, you wouldn’t have had a superbomb.”

“You’re right—no doubt about it,” Potter said. “Put a slide rule in his hands and he’s a world beater.

But when he has to cope with the ordinary world and with ordinary people…he’s kind of a twit. You didn’t have much trouble getting him to open up, did you?”

“That’s none of your business,” the interrogator said primly.

Henderson V. FitzBelmont, in his tweedy innocence, wouldn’t have known what Tyler meant, but Potter did. “Ha! Told you so.”

“He…appreciates the delicacy of his position. You don’t seem to,” Tyler said.

“My position isn’t delicate. In international law, I’m fine. Whether you care about international law may be a different story.”

“We’re treating you as a POW for the time being. You weren’t *captured* in our uniform. You’ll have a trial,” Major Tyler said. “But if we charge you with crimes against humanity—”

“Will you charge the Kaiser? What about Charlie La Follette? Like I said, you used two superbombs on us. We only had one to use on you.”

“That’s different.”

“Sure it is. You won. I already told you that, too.”

“Not what I meant, dammit.” Tyler went red again. “We dropped ours out of airplanes, the way you would with any other bomb. We didn’t sneak them over the border under false pretenses.”

“Over, under, around, through—so what?” Potter said. “Shall I apologize because we didn’t have a bomber that would carry one of the goddamn things? I’m sorry, Major—I’m sorry we didn’t have more, and I’m sorry we didn’t have them sooner. If we did, I’d be interrogating you.”

Ezra Tyler changed the subject, which was also the victor’s privilege: “Speaking of crimes against humanity, General, what did you know about your government’s extermination policy against your Negroes,

and when did you know it?”

Fear trickled through Potter. If the Yankees wanted C.S. officials dead, they could always throw that one at them.

“All I knew was that I was involved in sniffing out the Negro uprising in 1915—which really did happen, Major, and which really did go a long way toward losing us that war. And I know there was a black guerrilla movement—again, a real one—before the start of this war. Those people were not our friends.”

“Do you think your government’s policy had anything to do with that?”

Of course I do. You’d have to be an idiot not to. I’m not that kind of idiot, anyway. Aloud, Potter said, “I’m a soldier. Soldiers don’t make policy.”

“Yes, you are a soldier. You returned to the C.S. Army after the 1936 Richmond Olympics, where you shot a Negro who was attempting to assassinate Jake Featherston.”

“That’s right.”

“Before that time, you opposed Featherston politically.”

“Yes, I was a Whig.”

“You traveled to Richmond for the Games. You had a gun. You were close to a President you opposed. Did you go there intending to shoot him yourself?”

“It’s not illegal to carry a gun in the CSA, any more than it is here. The language in our Constitution comes straight from yours.” For the past eight years, Potter had been automatically saying no to that question whenever it came up. Saying yes would have got him killed—an inch at a time, no doubt. He needed a deliberate effort of will to tell the truth now: “Scratch that, Major. Yes, I went up there with that in mind. Maybe things would have gone better if I did it, or if I let the coon do it. They couldn’t have gone much worse, could they? But it’s a little late to worry about it now.”

Major Tyler grunted. “Well, maybe. After all, of course you’d make that claim now. Amazing how many Confederates always hated Jake Featherston and everything he stood for—if you ask them, anyhow… What’s so funny?”

Potter's laughter was bitter as wormwood. He'd lied convincingly enough to make a connoisseur of liars like Jake Featherston believe him. All the other Confederate big shots had, too. Now he was telling the truth—and this damnyankee wouldn't take him seriously. If he didn't laugh, he would cry.

"You can believe whatever you want—you will anyhow," he said. "I believe plenty of people who yelled, 'Freedom!' when that looked like the smart thing to do will tell you now that they never had anything to do with anything. They know who's on top and who's on the bottom. Life is like that."

The major wrote something in his notebook. "You're so cynical, you could go any way at all without even worrying about it. Down deep, you don't believe in anything, do you?"

"Fuck you, Tyler," Potter said. The Yankee blinked. Potter hadn't lost his temper before. "Fuck you in the heart," he repeated. "The one woman I ever really loved, I broke up with on account of she was for Featherston and I was against him."

"Will she testify to that?" the interrogator asked.

"No. She's dead," Potter answered. "She was in Charleston when your Navy bombers hit it back in the early days of the war." He barked two more harsh notes of laughter. "And if she were there at the end, she would have gone up in smoke with the rest of the city because of your superbomb."

Major Tyler gave him a dead-fish look. "You're in a poor position to complain about that, wouldn't you say?"

"Mm, you may be right," Potter admitted. That made the Yankee blink again; he didn't know Potter well enough to know his respect for the truth. *Who does know me that well nowadays?* Potter wondered. He couldn't think of a soul. That bespoke either a lifetime wasted or a lifetime in Intelligence, assuming the two weren't one and the same.

"If we were to release you, would you swear a loyalty oath to the United States?" the interrogator asked.

"No," Potter said at once. "You can conquer my country. Hell, you did conquer my country. But I don't feel like a good Socialist citizen of the USA. I'd say I was sorry I don't, only I'm not. Besides, why play games? You aren't going to turn me loose. You're just looking for the best excuse to hang me."

“We don’t need excuses—you said so yourself, and you were right,” Tyler replied. “Let me ask you a slightly different question: would you swear not to take up arms against the USA and not to aid any rebellion or uprising against this country? You don’t have to like us for that one, only to respect our strength. And if you violate that oath, the penalty, just so you understand, would be a blindfold and a cigarette—a U.S. cigarette, I’m afraid.”

“Talk about adding insult to injury,” Potter said with a sour smile. “Yes, I might swear that oath.

There’s no denying we’re knocked flat. And there’s also no denying that pretty soon I’ll get too old to be dangerous to you with the worst will in the world. Things will go the way they go, and they can go that way without me.”

“By your track record, General, you could be dangerous to us as long as you’re breathing, and I think we’d be smart to make sure you don’t sneak a telegraph clicker into your coffin,” Ezra Tyler said.

“You flatter me,” Potter told him.

“I doubt it,” the U.S. officer replied. “If we were to release you, where would you go? What would you do?”

“Beats me. I spent a lot of years as a professional soldier. And when I wasn’t, in between the wars, I lived in Charleston myself. Not much point going there, not unless I want to glow in the dark.” Potter took off his glasses and polished them with a handkerchief. It bought him a moment to think. “Why are you going on and on about turning me loose, anyway? Are you trying to get my hopes up? I’ve been on the other end of these jobs, you know. You won’t break me like that.”

If they started getting rough…He had no movie-style illusions about his own toughness. If they started cutting things or burning things or breaking things or running a few volts—you didn’t need many—through sensitive places, he would sing like a mockingbird to make them stop. Anybody would. The general rule was, the only people who thought they could resist torture were the ones who’d never seen it. Oh, there were occasional exceptions, but the accent was on *occasional*.

Major Tyler shrugged. “Our legal staff has some doubts about conviction, though we may go ahead anyway. If you were captured in our uniform…But you weren’t.”

“Don’t sound so disappointed,” Potter said.

“What did you think when that colored kid shot President Featherston?” the Yankee asked out of a blue sky.

“I didn’t know who did it, not at first,” Potter answered. “I saw him fall, and I…I knew the war was over. He kept it going, just by staying alive. If he’d made it to Louisiana, say, I don’t think we could have beaten you, but we’d still be fighting. And I’d known him almost thirty years, since he was an artillery sergeant with a lousy temper. He made you pay attention to him—to who he was and to what he was.

And when he got killed, it was like there was a hole in the world. We won’t see anyone like him any time soon, and that’s the Lord’s truth.”

“I say, thank the Lord it is,” Tyler replied.

“He damn near beat you. All by himself, he damn near did.”

“I know. We all know,” Tyler said. “And everybody who followed him is worse off because he tried.

He should have left us alone.”

“He couldn’t. He thought he owed you one,” Potter said. “He was never somebody who could leave anybody alone. He aimed to pay back the Negroes for screwing him out of a promotion to second lieutenant—that’s how he looked at it. He wanted to, and he did. And he wanted to pay back the USA, too, and you’ll never forget him even if he couldn’t quite do it. I hated the son of a bitch, and I still miss him now that he’s gone.” He shook his head. Major Tyler could make whatever he wanted out of that, but every word of it was true.

XVI

T he doctor eyed Michael Pound with a curious lack of comprehension. “You can stay longer if you like, Lieutenant,” he said. “You’re not fully healed. You don’t have to return to active duty.”

“I understand that, sir,” Pound answered. “I want to.”

He and the doctor wore the same uniform, but they didn’t speak the same language. “Why, for God’s sake?” the medical man asked. “You’ve got it soft here. No snipers. No mines. No auto bombs or people bombs.”

“Sir, no offense, but it’s boring here,” Pound said. “I want to go where things are happening. I want to make things happen myself. I needed to be here—I needed to get patched up. Now I can walk on my hind legs again. They can put me back in a barrel, and I’m ready to go. I want to see what the Confederate States look like now that they’ve surrendered.”

“They look the way hell would if we’d bombed it back to the Stone Age,” the doctor said. “And everybody who’s left alive hates our guts.”

“Good,” Pound said. The doctor gaped. Pound condescended to explain: “In that case, it’s mutual.”

He held out his hospital-discharge papers. “You sign three times, sir.”

“I know the regulations.” The medical man signed with a fancy fountain pen. “If you want a psychological discharge, I daresay you’d qualify for that, too.”

“Sir, if I want a discharge, I’ll find a floozy,” Pound said. As the doctor snorted, Pound went on, “But you’ve even got things to really cure VD now, don’t you?”

“As a matter of fact, we do. Curing stupidity is another story, worse luck.” The doctor kept one copy for the file and handed back the rest. “Good luck to you.”

“Thanks.” Pound took the papers and limped across the street to the depot there for reassignment.

“Glutton for punishment, sir?” asked the top sergeant who ran the Chattanooga repple-depple. He was not far from Pound’s age, and had an impressive spread of ribbons on his chest—including one for the Purple Heart with two tiny oak-leaf clusters on it.

“Look who’s talking,” Pound told him. The noncom chuckled and gave back a crooked grin. Pound asked, “What have you got for me?”

“Armor, eh?” the sergeant said, and gave Pound a measuring stare. “How long did you wear stripes on your sleeve instead of shoulder straps?”

“Oh, a little while. They finally promoted me when I wasn’t looking,” Pound said.

“Thought that was how things might work.” The sergeant didn’t have

to be a genius to figure it out. A first lieutenant with graying, thinning hair and lines on his face hadn't come out of either West Point or the training programs that produced throngs of ninety-day wonders to lead platoons. Every so often, the school of hard knocks booted out an officer, too. The sergeant shuffled through papers. "What's the biggest outfit you were ever in charge of?"

"A platoon."

"Think you can swing a company?"

Pound always thought he could do anything. He was right more often than he was wrong, which didn't stop him from occasionally bumping up against a hard dose of reality. But, since he would never again be able to get back to the pure and simple pleasures of a gunner's job, he expected he could handle a larger command than any he'd had yet. "Sure. Where is it?"

"Down in Tallahassee, Florida," the personnel sergeant said. "Kinda tricky down there. They didn't see any U.S. soldiers during the war, so a lot of them don't feel like they really lost."

"No, huh?" Pound said. "Well, if they need lessons, I can give 'em some."

"There you go. Let me cut you some orders, then. I'll send a wire to the outfit down there, tell 'em they've got their man. And we'll give you a lift to the train station." The sergeant sketched a salute.

"Pleasure doing business with you, sir."

"Back at you." Pound returned the military courtesy.

Seeing the train gave him pause. It said—screamed, really—that the fighting wasn't over yet. A freight car full of junk preceded the locomotive. If the track was mined, the car's weight would set off the charge and spare the engine. There was a machine gun on the roof of every fourth car, and several more gun barrels stuck out from the caboose. You didn't carry that kind of firepower unless you thought you'd need it.

He already knew what Georgia looked like. He'd helped create that devastation himself. He was moderately proud of it, or more than moderately. He changed trains in Atlanta. Walking through the station hurt, but he didn't let on. Released Confederate POWs in their shabby uniforms, now stripped of emblems, also made their way through the

place. They were tight-lipped and somber. Maybe the people in Tallahassee didn't know the CSA had lost the war, but these guys did.

The new train also had a freight car in front and plenty of guns up top. Pound looked out on wrecked vehicles and burnt farmhouses and hasty graves—the detritus of war. He thought the devastation would have a sharp edge marking the U.S. stop line, but it didn't. Bombers had made sure of that. Towns had got leveled. Bridges were out. He sat there for several hours waiting for the last touches to be put on repairs to one.

"Why don't we go back or go around?" somebody in the car asked.

"Because that would make sense," Pound said, and no one seemed to want to argue with him.

He got into Tallahassee in the late afternoon, then, and not the morning as he'd been scheduled to do.

It wasn't remotely his fault, but he didn't think it would endear him to his new CO, whoever that turned out to be.

A sergeant standing just inside the doorway held a sign that said LIEUTENANT POUND. "That's me,"

Pound said. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"It's all right, sir. I know the railroads on the way down here are really screwed up," the noncom said.

"I've got an auto waiting for you. Can I grab your duffel? Colonel Einsiedel said you were coming off a wound."

"Afraid I am." Pound took the green-gray canvas sack off his shoulder and gave it to the sergeant.

"Sorry to put you to the trouble, but if you're kind enough to offer I'll take you up on it."

"Don't worry about it, sir. All part of the service." The sergeant was in his early twenties. He'd probably been a private when the war started, if he'd been in the Army at all. Michael Pound knew what his curious glance meant. *You're the oldest goddamn first looey I ever saw*. But the man didn't say anything except, "I've got it. Follow me."

The motorcar was a commandeered Birmingham. The sergeant drove

him past the bomb-damaged State Capitol and then north and east up to Clark Park, where the armored regiment was bivouacked. It wasn't a long drive at all. "Tallahassee's the capital of Florida, isn't it?" Pound said. "I thought there'd be more of it."

"It's only about a good piss wide, sure as hell," the sergeant agreed. "Christ, the Legislature only meets for a coupla months in odd-numbered years. We had to call 'em back into session so we could tell

'em what to do."

"How did they like that?" Pound asked.

"Everybody hates us. We're Yankees," the sergeant said matter-of-factly. "But if anybody fucks with us, we grease him. It's about that simple. All of our barrels have a .50-caliber machine gun mounted in front of the commander's cupola, and we carry lots of canister, not so much HE and AP. We're here to smash up mobs, and we damn well do it."

"Sounds good to me." Pound had wished for a machine gun of his own plenty of times in the field.

Now he'd have one—and a .50-caliber machine gun could chew up anything this side of a barrel. And if God wanted a shotgun, He'd pick up a barrel's cannon firing canister. Canister wouldn't just smash up a mob—it would exterminate one.

Barbed wire surrounded Clark Park. So did signs with skulls and crossbones on them and a blunt warning message: HEADS UP! MINES! U.S. guards carrying captured C.S. automatic rifles talked to the sergeant before swinging back a stout, wire-protected gate and letting the Birmingham through.

"Had trouble with auto bombs or people bombs?" Pound asked. "Do they shoot mortars at you in the middle of the night?"

"They tried that shit once or twice, sir," his driver answered. "When we take hostages now, we're up to killing a hundred for one. They know we'd just as soon see 'em dead, so they don't mess with us like they did when we first got here. Now they've seen we really mean it."

"That sounds good to me, too." Pound was and always had been a firm believer in massive retaliation.

The sergeant drove him up to a tent flying a regimental flag—a

pugnacious turtle on roller skates wearing a helmet and boxing gloves —that looked as if some Hollywood animation studio had designed it.

Colonel Nick Einsiedel looked as if some Hollywood casting office had designed him. He was tall and blond and handsome, and he wore the ribbons for a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

“Good to have you with us,” he told Pound. “I did some asking around —you’ve got a hell of a record.

Shame you didn’t make officer’s rank till the middle of the war.”

“I liked being a sergeant, sir,” Pound said. “But this isn’t *so* bad.” As Einsiedel laughed, he went on,

“How can I be most useful here, sir?”

“That’s the kind of question I like to hear,” the regimental CO replied. “We’re trying to be tough but fair—or fair but tough, if you’d sooner look at it that way.”

“Sir, if I’ve got plenty of canister for the big gun and a .50 up on my turret along with the other machine guns, you can call it whatever you want,” Pound said. “The people down here will damn well do what I tell ’em to, and that’s what counts.”

Colonel Einsiedel smiled. “You’ve got your head on straight, by God.”

“I’ve been through the mill. Maybe it amounts to the same thing.”

“Wouldn’t be surprised,” Einsiedel said. “One thing we don’t do unless we can’t help it, though—we don’t send a barrel out by itself. Too many blind spots, too good a chance for somebody to throw a Featherston Fizz at you.”

That didn’t sound so good. “I thought the locals were supposed to be too scared of us to try any crap,” Pound said.

“They are—supposed to be,” the regimental CO answered. “But in case they aren’t, we don’t want to lead them into temptation, either. Does that suit you?”

“Oh, yes, sir. I want to know what I’m getting into, that’s all,” Pound said.

Einsiedel gave him a crooked grin. “Whatever you get into down here,

make sure you go to a pro station afterwards, 'cause chances are you'll end up with a dose if you don't."

"Understand, sir," Pound said, thinking back to his joke with the doctor before he got released.

"Uh—is there an officers' brothel in town?"

"Officially, no. Officially, all the brown-noses back up in the USA would pitch a fit if we did things like that. Unofficially, there are two. Maude's is around the corner from the Capitol. Miss Lucy's is a couple of blocks farther south. I like Maude's better, but you can try 'em both."

"I expect I will. All the comforts of home—or of a house, anyway," Pound said. Colonel Einsiedel winced. Pound figured he'd got off on the right foot.

Like most Congressional veterans, Flora Blackford spent most of her time in Philadelphia. As summer swung towards autumn every other year, though, she went back to the Lower East Side in New York City to campaign for reelection. And this was a Presidential election year, too.

She thought Charlie La Follette ought to win in a walk. But the Democrats had nominated a native New Yorker, a hotshot prosecutor named Dewey, to run against him. Dewey and his Vice Presidential candidate, a blunt-talking Senator from Missouri, were running an aggressive campaign, crisscrossing the country saying they could have handled the war better and would ride herd on the beaten Confederacy harder. President La Follette and his running mate, Jim Curley of Massachusetts, had to content themselves with saying that the Socialists damn well *had* won the war. Would that be enough? Unless people were uncommonly ungrateful, Flora thought it would.

Normally, she wouldn't have wanted to see Congressman Curley on the ticket. He came straight from the Boston machine, an unsavory if effective apparatus. But Dewey's would-be veep was a longtime Kansas City ward heeler, and the Kansas City machine was even more unsavory (and perhaps even more effective) than Boston's.

Visiting Socialist Party headquarters felt like coming home again. The only difference from when she worked there thirty years earlier was that the butcher's shop underneath the place was owned by the son of the man who'd run it then. Like his father, Sheldon Fleischmann was a

Democrat. And, like his father, he often sent cold cuts up anyhow.

The district had changed. Far fewer people here were fresh off the boat than had been true in 1914.

Native-born Americans tended to be more conservative than their immigrant parents. All the same, Flora worried more about the national ticket than her own seat. The fellow the Democrats had nominated, a theatrical booking agent named Morris Kramer, had to spend most of his time explaining why he hadn't been in uniform during the war.

"He's got a hernia," Herman Bruck said. He'd been a Socialist activist as long as Flora had. "So all right—they didn't conscript him. But do you think anybody wants a Congressman who wears a truss?"

"If he didn't wear it, his brains would fall out," somebody else said. That got a laugh from everyone in the long, smoky room. Half the typewriters stopped clattering for a moment. The other half wouldn't have stopped for anything this side of the Messiah.

"I won't give him a hard time for not going into the service," Flora said. "The voters know the story."

If they didn't know it, she *would* make damn sure they found out before Election Day. "I want to show them what having somebody who's been in Congress for a while means to them."

"Well, you've got a chance to do that," Bruck said.

"I know," Flora answered unhappily. During the Great War, C.S. bombers hardly ever got as far north as New York City. They did little damage on their handful of raids. It wasn't like that this time around, worse luck.

Most of the Confederates' bombs had fallen on the port—most, but far from all. Some rained down on the city at random. In a place so full of people, the bombardiers must have assumed they would do damage wherever their explosions came down—and who was to say they were wrong?

Flora's district had suffered along with the rest of New York. Bombs had blown up apartment buildings and clothing factories and block after block of shops. Incendiaries had charred holes in the fabric of the city. Rebuilding wouldn't be easy or quick or cheap.

One advantage incumbency gave Flora was her connections down in Philadelphia. If she asked for money to help put her district back together, she was more likely to get it than a Congressman new in his seat.

Her campaign posters got right down to business when they talked about that. DO YOU WANT A NEW

KID ON YOUR BLOCK? they asked, and showed Morris Kramer in short pants pulling a wheeled wooden duck on a string. That wasn't even remotely fair, but politics wasn't about being fair. Politics was about getting your guy in and keeping the other side's guy out. Once you'd done that, you could do all the other neat stuff you had in mind. If you stood on the sidelines looking longingly toward the playing field, all the neat ideas in the world weren't worth a dime.

"We want to make this district a better place than it was before the war," Flora said to whoever would listen to her. "Not the same as it used to be, not just as good as it used to be. Better. If we can't do that, we might as well leave the ruins alone, to remind us we shouldn't be dumb enough to fight another war."

Herman Bruck brought a blond kid in a captain's uniform up to her one afternoon at the Socialist Party headquarters. "Flora, I'd like you to meet Alex Swartz," he said.

"Hello, Captain Swartz," Flora said. "What can I do for you?" She had no doubt that the earnest young officer with a roll of papers under one arm was on the up and up. Whether Herman Bruck had an ulterior motive in introducing him…Well, she'd find out about that.

"Very pleased to meet you, ma'am," Alex Swartz said. He had broad, Slavic cheekbones and a narrow chin, giving his face a foxy cast. "I graduated from Columbia with a degree in architecture two weeks before the war started. I'm on leave right now—in a week, I go back down to occupation duty in Mississippi. But I wanted to show you some of the sketches I've made for how things might look once we put them back together."

"I'd like to see," Flora said, not exaggerating too much. If the sketches turned out to be garbage, she could come out with polite nothings, let the captain down easy, and then get on with her reelection campaign and with taking care of the damage in the district.

But they weren't garbage. As he unrolled them one by one and talked about what he had in mind, she saw she wasn't the only one who'd

been thinking along those lines. The sketches showed a more spacious, less jam-packed, less hurried place than the one her constituents lived in now.

“This is a lot like what I have in mind,” she said. “I particularly like the way you use green space, and the way you don’t forget about theaters and libraries. The next question is, how much does it all cost?”

That was the one that separated amateurs from professionals. She wouldn’t have been surprised if Alex Swartz hadn’t worried about it at all.

He had, though. “Here—I’ve made some estimates,” he said, and pulled a couple of folded sheets of paper from his left breast pocket. “Not cheap, but I hope not too outrageous.”

“Let’s have a look.” Flora peered through the bottoms of her bifocals. She found herself nodding.

Captain Swartz had it just about right—what he was proposing wasn’t cheap, but it wasn’t too expensive, either. If you wanted to do things right, you had to spend some money. “Not bad, Captain.

Not bad at all.”

“Do you think…there’s any chance it will happen?” he asked.

“There’s some chance that some of it will,” she answered. “I can’t say any more than that. Nothing the government touches ever ends up looking just the way you thought it would before you started—you need to understand that right from the beginning, or else you start going crazy.”

Swartz nodded. “Got you.”

“Are you sure? You’d better, or you’ll end up very disappointed. Most things end up as compromises, as committee decisions that don’t make too many people too unhappy. Some good stuff goes down the drain. So does some crap. Which is which…depends on who’s talking a lot of the time.”

“Getting some of this built is better than leaving it all as pretty pictures,” Captain Swartz insisted.

“Pretty pictures are too easy.”

“That sounds like the right attitude,” Flora said.

“One thing you find out pretty darn quick in the Army—you won’t get everything you want,” Swartz said.

“It’s no different in politics,” Flora said. “We don’t always have to shoot at people to make that clear, though, which is all to the good.”

Captain Swartz looked about sixteen when he grinned. “I bet.” Then the grin slipped. “Didn’t I hear your son got wounded? How’s he doing?”

“He’s getting better,” Flora answered. “It was a hand wound—nothing life-threatening, thank God.”

And it kept him out of action while the war finally ran down. Maybe it kept him from stopping something worse. She could hope so, anyway. Hoping so made her feel not quite so bad when she thought about what *did* happen to Joshua.

“Glad to hear it,” the architect said. “I admire you for not keeping him out of the Army or getting him a job counting paper clips in Nevada or something. You would’ve had the clout to do it—I know that.”

“Captain, I’ll tell you what isn’t even close to a secret. I’m his mother, after all. If he’d let me do something like that, I would have done it in a heartbeat,” Flora answered. “But he didn’t, and so I didn’t.

If, God forbid, anything worse would have happened, I don’t know how I would have looked at myself in a mirror afterwards.”

“Well, I can see that,” Alex Swartz said. “But I can see how he feels about it, too. You don’t want to think your mother’s apron strings kept you out of danger everybody else had to face.”

“No, and you don’t want to get killed, either.” Flora sighed. “He came through it, and he didn’t get hurt too bad. That means I don’t hate myself…too much.” She tapped an unrolled drawing with the nail of her right index finger. “I really think you’re on to something here with these sketches. I hope we can make some of them more than sketches, if you know what I mean. The district will be better off if we can.”

His eyes glowed. “Thank you!”

“You’re welcome,” she said. “Remember, I grew up here, in a coldwater flat. We’re too crowded. I like the open space that’s part of

your plan. We need more of it here. We'd be better off if the whole district had more, not just the parts the Confederates bombed."

"Using war as an engine for urban improvement—" Captain Swartz began.

"Is wasteful," Flora finished for him. She didn't know if that was what he was going to say, but it was the truth. She went on, "But if it's the only engine we've got, *not* using it would be a crime. And the way things are on the Lower East Side, I'm afraid it is."

"If I got out of the Army before Election Day, I was going to vote for you anyway," he said. "Now I want to vote for you two or three times."

From behind Flora, Herman Bruck said, "That can probably be arranged."

"Hush, Herman," Flora said, though she knew he might not be kidding. She turned back to Captain Swartz. "Instead of doing that, take your plans to Morris Kramer. If he wins, he can do his best to push them through, too. And they're important. They ought to go forward regardless of politics." Did she really say that? Did she really mean it? She nodded to herself. She did. When it came down to the district, you could…every once in a while.

F rom Virginia all the way down to Florida—except the area around Lexington, Virginia, which was the most special of special cases—Irving Morrell's word was law. *Military governor* was a bland title, but it was the one he had. In the Roman Empire, he would have been a proconsul. That held more flavor, at least to him. A Roman, to whom Latin came naturally, might have disagreed.

Morrell had always had a bitch of a time with Latin. He set up shop in Atlanta. It was centrally located for his current command, and it also hadn't taken the pounding Richmond had. One of these days, the states under his jurisdiction might rejoin the USA. That was the long-term outlook in Philadelphia.

Morrell would believe it when he saw it. Right now, his main job was making sure smoldering resentment didn't burst into flaming revolt.

Thick tangles of barbed wire strengthened by iron and concrete pillars made sure autos couldn't come within a couple of hundred yards of his headquarters. No auto bomb was going to take out the whole

building. Everyone who approached on foot, male or female, was methodically searched.

Security was just as tight at other U.S. headquarters throughout the fallen Confederacy. Neither that nor brutal retaliation for attacks had kept a couple of colonels and a brigadier general from joining their ancestors.

“And these people are supposed to become citizens?” Morrell said to his second-in-command. “How long do they expect us to wait?”

“The French and Germans don’t love each other, either,” Harlan Parsons replied.

“But they both know they’re foreigners,” Morrell said. “The Confederates speak English. These states used to belong to the USA. And because of that, the bigwigs in Philadelphia think it can happen again, easy as pie. And I’ve got one thing to say to that: bullshit!”

“You get to try to make it work,” Brigadier General Parsons said. “Aren’t you lucky…sir?”

“Yeah. I’m lucky like snow is black,” Morrell answered.

His number two sent him a quizzical look. “You’re the first officer I ever heard who used that line and wasn’t Jewish.”

“I knew I stole it from somebody. I forgot who,” Morrell said.

The telephone on his desk rang. Parsons picked it up. “General Morrell’s office.” Maybe he could protect his superior from the slings and arrows of outrageous—or outraged—idiots. Here, though, he listened for a little while and then said, “I’ll pass you through. Hold on.” Putting his hand over the mouthpiece, he told Morrell, “It’s Colonel Einsiedel, down in Tallahassee.”

“Thanks.” Morrell took the telephone. “Hello, Colonel. What’s gone wrong now?” He assumed something had. People didn’t call him to talk about the weather.

Sure enough, the local commander said, “We’re facing a boycott here. All the locals are pretending we don’t exist. And they aren’t going into any of the stores that sell to us. Some of the merchants are starting to feel the pinch.”

“That’s a new one,” Morrell said. “Any violence?”

“Not aimed at us,” Colonel Einsiedel answered. “They may have used some strong-arm tactics to get their own people to go along. What are we supposed to do about it?”

“Ignore them. Wait it out,” Morrell said. “What else is there?”

“Some of the storekeepers don’t want to sell to us any more,” the

colonel said. “They’re trying to get out of the deals they made. It’s hard to blame them. If they keep doing business with us, they starve.”

“You can’t let ’em get away with that. If you do, this time tomorrow there won’t be a shop in the old Confederacy where we can buy anything. We aren’t niggers, and our money’s good.”

“Yes, sir. We’ll try,” Einsiedel said. “One of my lieutenants said we ought to shoot any storekeeper who won’t sell to us.”

Morrell laughed. “Damned if that doesn’t sound like Michael Pound.”

“How the devil did you know, sir?” The colonel in Florida sounded flabbergasted.

“You mean it is?” Morrell laughed again. “Well, I can’t say I’m surprised. I’ve known Pound for twenty-five years now. He has a straightforward bloodthirstiness that would scare the crap out of any General Staff officer ever born. He’s not always right, but he’s always sure of himself.”

“Boy, you can say that again,” Einsiedel said. “All right, sir. We’ll see what we can do to nip this stuff in the bud.”

“Don’t be too gentle,” Morrell said. “We won the war. If they think they’re going to win the peace, they can damn well think again.”

“I sure hope so,” Colonel Einsiedel said, which wasn’t exactly the encouraging note on which Morrell would have wanted the conversation to end. But the colonel hung up after that, so Morrell couldn’t pump him any more without calling him back. Deciding that would make more trouble than it saved, Morrell put the handset back into its cradle instead.

“Boycott, huh?” Brigadier General Parsons said. “That’s…different.”

“Yeah. It lets them annoy us without giving us a good excuse to shoot them,” Morrell said. “Some of them are still fighting the war, even if they don’t carry guns any more. Every time they make us blink, they figure they’ve won a battle.”

“So we don’t blink, then,” Parsons said.

“That’s about the size of it.” Morrell hoped he could get his own officers to go along. Not all of them would see that this was a

problem.

Michael Pound did, by God! Morrell smiled and shook his head. Pound saw problems and solutions with an almost vicious clarity. As far as he was concerned, everything was simple. And damned if watching him in action didn't make you wonder whether he had it right and everybody else looked at the world through a kaleidoscope that made everything seem much more complicated than it should have.

The telephone rang again. "General Morrell's office," Harlan Parsons said. This time, he didn't hesitate in answering on his own hook: "That's right. As of the surrender, Negroes have the same rights on ex-Confederate territory as whites do. Anyone who tries to go against that goes up against the U.S.

government…. Yes, that includes intermarriage, as long as the people involved want to go through with it."

After he hung up, Morrell asked, "Where?"

"Rocky Mount, North Carolina," his second-in-command answered. "Nice to know there are still some Negroes there."

"Still *some* Negroes all through the CSA," Morrell said. "Just not many." He'd heard so many stories of survival by luck and by stealth and by guerrilla war that they started to blur. He'd heard some of survival by the kindness of whites, but fewer than he wished he had.

"Featherston turned a whole country upside down and inside out," Parsons said. "It'll never be the same down here. Never. How many dead?"

"Six million? Seven? Ten?" Morrell shrugged helplessly. "I don't think anybody knows exactly. Maybe they can figure out how many Negroes the Confederates shipped to their camps. I bet it'd be easier to count how many are left now, though. Then subtract from how many there were before the Freedom Party started killing them, and the number you get is how many bought a plot."

"Those Freedom Party bastards had to be out of their skulls," Parsons said: far from the first time Morrell had heard that opinion. "Imagine all the effort they put into killing colored people. All the camps they had to build, all the trains they had to use…They would have done better if they aimed that shit at us."

"They would have done a hell of a lot better if they'd put their

Negroes into factories to make stuff to throw at us, or if they put them in uniform and pointed them at us," Morrell said. "Or that's how it looks to me, anyhow. But they saw it different. Far as Featherston was concerned, getting rid of Negroes was every bit as important as whaling the snot out of us."

Parsons spiraled a forefinger by his right ear. "Out of his skull," he repeated.

"Yeah, I think so, too—most of the time. But for people who were crazy, they sure went at it like they knew what they were doing." Morrell shivered. "Those camps ran like barrel factories. Negroes went in, and corpses came out. If that was what they were aiming for, they couldn't have done a smoother job."

"I know. Those phony bathhouses, so the colored people wouldn't know they were gonna get it till too late…" Parsons shuddered, too. "But don't you have to be crazy to *want* to do something like that?"

"When the Ottomans started killing Armenians after the Great War, I sure thought so," Morrell answered. "Maniacs in fezzes…But shit, the Confederates aren't *that* different from us, or they weren't till they started yelling, 'Freedom!' all the damn time. Biggest difference is, they had lots of Negroes and we only had a few. So could *we* do something like that, too?"

Harlan Parsons looked horrified. "Christ, I hope not!"

"Yeah, well, so do I," Morrell said. "But what's that got to do with anything? If we decide we can't stand Negroes or Jews or Chinamen or whoever the hell, do we fish the designs for these asphyxiating trucks out of the file and start making our own?"

"I don't *think* so, sir," his second-in-command replied. "For one thing, the Confederates went and did that. Maybe we can learn our lesson from them."

"Here's hoping." Morrell nodded. "You might have something there. I sure hope you do. Who'd want to go down in history as the next Jake Featherston?" He answered his own question: "Nobody. I hope."

"Now if only the people down here could get it through their damn thick heads that what the Freedom Party did was wrong," Parsons said.

"If they would have thought it was wrong, it never would have

happened in the first place," Morrell said. "If they hadn't voted Featherston in, or if they hadn't let him go after the colored people… They did, though. And you said it, General. This is a whole different landscape here now."

How *would* the area that had made up the CSA get along without Negroes to do the jobs whites didn't want or felt to be beneath their dignity? He'd already seen part of the answer. Lots of Mexicans had come north to work in the fields and to wait tables and cut hair and clean house. Unless the USA posted machine guns every few hundred yards along the Rio Grande, the Mexicans would keep on coming, too. They could do less and get more money for it here than they could in Francisco José's ramshackle empire. Without machine guns, how were you going to keep them away?

Well, that wasn't his worry. The Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of War would figure out what to do about it, and then they'd tell him. And then he would have to do it—or try to, if it turned out to be one of the stupid orders that came out of Philadelphia every now and then.

Bang! When Morrell heard that noise, he ducked first and thought later. So did Harlan Parsons.

Nothing else happened, though. Parsons straightened with a sheepish smile. "I *think* it was only a backfire."

"I think you're right," Morrell said. "That's a relief, isn't it? One of these days, we may even be able to hear that noise without flinching."

"One of these days—but not soon," Parsons said.

Morrell nodded. The war hadn't just changed the Confederate States. It had changed his own country. And it had changed *him*, and changed every soldier on both sides who came through alive.

Starting at loud noises was the least of it. The last time around, one Confederate soldier came out changed enough to convulse his country a generation later. Who would change things this time around—and how?

C ongratulations, Dr. O'Doull! Congratulations, Lieutenant Colonel O'Doull!" Colonel Tobin said. He was the U.S. officer in charge of this part of Alabama, and he was proud of it, God help him. He handed Leonard O'Doull the little velvet box containing a lieutenant colonel's

silver oak leaves as if it were the Holy Grail.

“Thank you, sir.” O’Doull was much less impressed. He also suspected Tobin had chosen to promote him to try to persuade him to stay in the Army. If so, the man was barking up the wrong tree. “Sir, I’ve been away from my family a long time now. With the war over and done, I’d like to arrange to return to civilian life.”

“So would we all,” Tobin said. “But you can’t deny soldiers are still getting wounded, can you? And you can’t deny they’re coming down with, uh, unpleasant diseases, either.” He didn’t want to come right out and say VD.

“No, sir. I can’t deny any of that. Still, it is peacetime—formally, anyhow. And with our new antibiotics, a medic can do just as much for syphilis and gonorrhea as I can.”

Colonel Tobin winced when he heard the names. But he didn’t retreat. “I’m very sorry, but the United States still need you. You did sign up to serve at the country’s pleasure, you know.”

That was a trump against most men in U.S. service. Against Leonard O’Doull? Not necessarily. “Sir, meaning no disrespect, but I’m going to have to get hold of my government and see what it thinks of your refusing to discharge me.”

“*Your* government?” Tobin had bushy eyebrows, and got a good theatrical effect when he raised one.

“You have a different one from everybody else’s?”

“Yes, sir,” O’Doull said, which made the colonel’s eyebrow jump again—this time, O’Doull judged, involuntarily. He pulled a maroon passport out of his trouser pocket. “As you see, sir, I’m a citizen of the Republic of Quebec. Actually, I have dual citizenship, but I’ve lived in the Republic since the last war. I met a girl up there, and I stayed and started a practice in Rivière-du-Loup.”

“Good God. Let me see that.” Tobin took the Quebecois passport as if it were a poisonous snake. He found the page with O’Doull’s picture and grunted in surprise, as if he truly hadn’t expected to see it there. Shaking his head, he handed the passport back. “You’d better get hold of your officials. If they write me and say they want you to go on home, I have a reason to turn you loose. Till then, though, you’re a U.S. military physician, and we do need your services.”

Damn, O'Doull thought. He had no idea whether the authorities in the Republic would send that kind of letter. But he couldn't deny that Colonel Tobin was playing by the rules. "All right, sir. I'll do that, then." O'Doull put the passport back in his pocket. Colonel Tobin seemed glad to see him go.

"Well, Doc? Any luck?" Goodson Lord asked him when he got back to the aid station.

"Depends on what you mean." O'Doull displayed his new rank insignia. Sergeant Lord shook his hand. "As for getting out," O'Doull went on, "well, yes and no. If I can get a letter from my mommy—I mean, from my government—Tobin will have a real, live piece of paper to give him an excuse to turn me loose. Till then, I'm here."

"Hope like hell they give it to you," Lord said. "If I had an angle like that, you bet your sweet ass I'd use it. Playing a horn beats the crap out of this."

"You're a good medic," O'Doull said.

"Thanks. I try. Some guy comes in bleeding, you don't want to let him down, you know what I mean?" Lord said. "Even if I am halfway decent, though, it's not like I want to do it the rest of my life."

"That seems fair," O'Doull allowed.

He wondered how long the United States would be able to occupy the Confederate States. The government might want to do it, but the soldiers on the ground were a lot less enthusiastic. They chafed under the discipline they'd accepted without thinking when their country was in peril.

They drank whatever they could get their hands on. They got into brawls with the locals and with one another. Despite all the thunderous orders against fraternizing with Confederate women, they chased skirt as eagerly as they would have back home. And what they chased, they caught. They caught all kinds of things—the penicillin they got stuck with testified to that.

"I don't know what the hell her name was," said a private most unhappy about his privates—he had one of the drippiest faucets O'Doull had ever seen. "It was dark. She said, 'Five dollars,' so I gave it to her. Then she gave it to me."

"She sure did. Bend over. I'm going to give it to you, too," O'Doull

said. The soldier whined when the shot went home. O'Doull persisted: "Where was this? At a brothel? We need to know about those."

"No…" The soldier sighed with relief as the needle came out. "I was going back to my tent after I stood sentry, you know? And she called, and I felt like it, so I paid her and I screwed her in the bushes.

And the bitch gave me something to remember her by."

O'Doull sighed. "Oh, God, I am so tired of this."

"Yeah, well, let me tell you somethin', Doc—it's even less fun on this end of the needle." The soldier did up his pants. "Is that it? Am I done?"

"No. You have to come back in three days for another shot," O'Doull answered. The other man groaned. O'Doull felt like groaning himself. *This is why I need to get out of the Army*, he thought glumly. "And I have to see your dogtags. Your superiors in the line need to know you came down venereal."

The soldier with the clap *really* didn't like that. If Goodson Lord and Eddie hadn't opportunely appeared, he might have stormed out of the aid station and forgotten about the second half of his cure.

Eddie held a wrench; Sergeant Lord had a tire iron. O'Doull got the information he needed.

As soon as he'd written that down, he started in on the letter to the powers that be in the Republic of Quebec. Finding an envelope for it was easy. Coming up with a postage stamp wasn't. Soldiers in Confederate territory who were writing to the USA got free franking. Writing to Quebec, O'Doull didn't, and he'd used his last stamp a few days before on a letter to Nicole. He thought about using Confederate stamps, but they'd been demonetized. Eventually, a mail clerk came up with the requisite postage, and the letter went on its way.

And then he forgot about it. He went back to being a busy Army doctor, because an auto bomb killed several U.S. soldiers and wounded two dozen more. He hated auto bombs. They were a coward's weapons. You could be—and, if you had any brains, you were—miles away when your little toy went off. And you could laugh at what it did to the people you didn't like.

Digging jagged chunks of metal out of one soldier after another,

O'Doull wasn't laughing. He didn't think the locals would be laughing very long, either, even though they probably were right now. "How many hostages will the authorities take after something like this?" he asked.

"Beats me," Goodson Lord answered. "But they'll shoot every damn one of 'em. You can bet your last nickel on that."

"I know. And that will make some diehard mad enough to build another bomb, and then it just starts up again. Ain't we got fun?" O'Doull said.

"Fun. Yeah," Lord said. "How's this guy doing?"

"We would have lost him in the last war—this kind of belly wound, peritonitis and septicemia would have got him for sure. But with the antibiotics, I think he'll pull through. His colon's more like a semicolon now, but you can live with that."

"Ouch!" Lord said. The pun seemed to distress him more than the bloody work he was assisting with.

He'd done the work lots of times. The pun was a fresh displeasure. O'Doull had pulled it on Granny McDougald before, but not on him. *I'm getting old*, he thought. *I'm using the same jokes over and over*.

After he'd repaired as best he could the wounded who were brought to him, he took a big slug of medicinal brandy, and poured another for Goodson Lord. He wouldn't have done that during the fighting.

No telling then when more casualties were coming in, and he'd wanted to keep his judgment as sharp as he could. Now he could hope he wouldn't have anything more complicated than another dose of clap to worry about for a while.

He lit a cigarette. It was a Niagara, a U.S. brand, and tasted lousy. But the C.S. tobacco firms were out of business—for the moment, anyway. Bad smokes beat no smokes at all.

Puffing on a Niagara made him think of heading north again, out of the USA and back to the country he'd adopted. Living in the Republic of Quebec meant returning to a backwater. Things happened more slowly there. Movies got to Rivière-du-Loup months, sometimes years, after they were hits in the United States. Most of them were dubbed into French; a few had subtitles.

O'Doull's English would have got even rustier than it had if not for the need to read medical journals and try to keep up with the miracles happening in the USA—and the miracles the USA imported from Germany. Back before the United States fostered Quebecois independence, Canada tried ramming English down the locals' throats. Older people still remembered the language, but not fondly. Younger ones wanted nothing to do with it.

He could live with that if he had to. He had lived with it, for years. You took the bad with the good wherever you went. By now, his college French had picked up enough of the local accent to let people who didn't know him think he was born in *La Belle Province* himself. Of course, not many people in Rivière-du-Loup didn't know him. As far as he was concerned, that was part of the good.

"Penny for 'em," Sergeant Lord said.

"Thinking about going home again," O'Doull answered.

"Figured you were," Lord said. "You're right here, but your eyes were a million miles away."

"Better than the thousand-yard stare the poor mudfoots get when they've been through the mill,"

O'Doull said. Lord nodded. They both knew that look too well.

O'Doull stubbed out the cigarette and lit another one. He'd done something useful today, anyhow. If Colonel Tobin had sent him home, it would have been up to Goodson Lord. The guy with the shrapnel might have died then. Granny McDougald could have pulled him through, but O'Doull didn't think Lord was up to it.

But if the Confederates kept a rebellion smoldering for years, was that reason enough for him to stay down here till it finally got stamped out, if it ever did? He shook his head. He'd paid all the dues he felt like paying—more than he'd had to pay. He wasn't so goddamn young any more. He'd had that thought not long before, too. He wanted the rest of his life for himself.

Whether the U.S. Army or the authorities in the Republic wanted him to have it might be a different question. Well, he'd done what he could along those lines. Off in the distance, a train whistle blew. He smiled. If all else failed, he could hop a freight. What did the the soldiers say when you came out with something stupid? *And then you wake up*—that was it.

Doctor Deserts! Heads for Home in Spite of Orders! He saw the headlines in his mind's eye. Yes, it would be a scandal. It would if they caught him, anyhow. If they didn't, he was home free. The Republic wouldn't extradite him—he was sure of that.

Stop it, he told himself. *You'll talk yourself into it, and then you'll really be up the creek*.

Seventeen days after he wrote his letter, one with a Quebecois stamp came back. He opened the envelope with a strange mix of apprehension and anticipation. If they said no…But if they said yes…!

And they did! In stilted English, a bureaucrat in Quebec City proclaimed that he was a valuable medical resource, and vitally needed to serve the populace of Rivière-du-Loup. He grinned from ear to ear. He'd been called a lot of things before, but never valuable, let alone a medical resource. He hurried off to show Colonel Tobin the letter.

J onathan Moss didn't like Houston. It was even hotter and muggier than Georgia and Alabama, and that was saying something. New Orleans was supposed to be just as bad, or maybe worse, but you could have a good time in New Orleans. If you could have a good time in Houston, Moss hadn't found out how.

Defending a man he loathed sure didn't help. Defending a man who might be the biggest murderer in the history of the world made things worse. And defending a man who might be the biggest murderer in the history of the world and didn't seem the least bit sorry about it, who seemed proud of what he'd done, made things *much* worse.

Defending Canadians who'd fallen afoul of occupation authorities was worth doing. This, on the other hand…Moss wished Major Isidore Goldstein hadn't smashed his stupid motorcar and himself. Then *he* would be going through the torments of the damned right now. Moss would rather have been flying turbo fighters, even though there was no one to fly them against any more. Would he rather have been sitting on the shelf? Sometimes he thought yes, sometimes no.

Pinkard's trial, and that of guard chief Vern Green, and those of several other guards from Camp Humble and its predecessor farther west, went on in what had been the Confederate District Courthouse in Houston. The exterior was modeled after the Parthenon: all elegant columns. But it was built from cheap concrete, not marble, and it was

starting to crumble in Houston's savage weather.

Filling in for Confederate judges were U.S. Army officers. They'd shot down Moss' arguments for getting Jefferson Pinkard off the hook one after another. No, he couldn't claim Pinkard was only acting on orders from Richmond.

"The charge is crimes against humanity," said the chief judge, a craggy brigadier general named Lloyd Meusel. "The defendant is assumed to have been aware that, regardless of orders, it is illegal and criminal to have murdered innocent people in literally carload lots by various ingenious methods and then either burying them in mass graves or burning them so that their passing became a stench in the nostrils of mankind forever."

"Dammit, they weren't all that innocent," Pinkard said—he wouldn't keep his mouth shut, which was something any defendant needed to know how to do. "Plenty of rebels—and they all hated the CSA."

And, of course, that gave the military prosecutor, a bright young major named Barry Goodman, the chance to pounce. He grabbed it. "May it please the court," he said, "how many of the Negroes who passed through these extermination camps were tried and convicted of any crime, even spitting on the sidewalk? Is it not a fact that the only thing they were guilty of was being colored, and that this became a capital crime in the Confederate States?"

General Meusel leaned over backwards to be fair. "Well, Major, we are here to determine whether that is a fact. We can't assume it ahead of time."

"Yes, sir," Goodman replied. "I will endeavor to demonstrate and document its truthfulness. I believe I can do that."

Jonathan Moss believed he could, too. Moss had seen the photographs taken outside of Snyder, and the documents captured from the meticulous files kept at Camp Humble. They offered overwhelming evidence of what the CSA had done. And Goodman put them into evidence, again and again.

He had letters where the gasketing of trucks was said to be tightened up "to improve their asphyxiating efficiency." Jefferson Pinkard's initials said he'd read and approved—and approved of—those letters.

Goodman had other letters about the construction of the bathhouses at

Camp Humble, and about the airtight doors that made sure Negroes didn't escape from the "termination chambers." He had letters to and from the people who provided the cyanide for the termination chambers. And he had a small mountain of letters complaining about the shoddy workmanship and design of the crematoria of Camp Humble.

Just listening to those letters being read into evidence pissed Pinkard off. Jonathan Moss could tell.

And it wasn't because his client had written them. It was because Pinkard still wanted to slug the bastards who'd sold him a bill of goods about the body-burning ovens and their smokestacks.

After court adjourned that day, Moss badly needed a drink. Soldiers in U.S. uniform were not welcomed with open arms in most of Houston's watering holes. Out of consideration for that fact, the Army had set up an officers' club and one for enlisted men in the courthouse basement. Moss hied himself thither for a snort.

Barry Goodman was already down there, working on a double whiskey over ice. That looked so good, Moss ordered the same thing. "Every day when General Meusel turns us loose, I feel like I ought to go back to the barracks and take a bath," he said.

"Tell me about it!" the prosecutor exclaimed. "You've got it worse than I do, Counselor, because at least I'm on the side of the angels this time, but I am so sick of wading through this shit…"

"You know what the worst part is?" Moss paused to drink so the whiskey would put a temporary shield between him and his current duty.

"I'm all ears," Goodman said.

"Talk about wading through shit? We've barely got our feet wet. We ought to hang the Cyclone people—they knew what the cyanide was going for. We ought to hang the people who fixed up the trucks, and the people who made the bathhouses, and the engineers who designed the airtight doors, and the ones who designed the heavy-duty crematoria, even if they didn't know what the hell they were doing—"

"Did you see your client, Colonel? He still hates those people for botching the job," Goodman broke in.

"I know, I know," Moss said wearily. "But you can't put *that* into

evidence, thank God."

"Like I need to," Goodman said, which was nothing but the truth. He added, "Besides, d'you think the judges didn't notice?"

"They did." Moss knocked back the drink and signaled for another. As the uniformed bartender made it, he went on, "And we need to hang the guys who built the crematoria, and the guys who installed them, and…Where does it end, Major? Does anybody down here have clean hands?"

"Good question." The prosecutor finished his drink. He also waved for a refill. "We can't kill all of them, though. I don't think we can, anyway. If we do, how are we better than they are?"

"If we don't, plenty of guilty bastards walk," Moss said. "When I was in Alabama, occupation officials were already starting to slide around the ban on using Freedom Party personnel to run things. All the people with brains and energy were in the Party, they said. Those were the people who could get things done. So they used them, and they bragged about how things were coming back to life."

The bartender brought them their fresh drinks and took away the empty glasses. Goodman stared down into his whiskey as if hoping for answers there, not just surcease. He shook his head. "I don't know what you can do. A lot of them are going to get off, and they'll brag about what they did till they're old and gray."

"Except when Yankees are around," Moss said. "Then they'll swear up and down that they didn't know what was going on. Some prick will probably write a book that shows how they didn't really massacre their Negroes after all."

"Oh, yeah? Then where'd the smokes go?" Goodman asked. "I mean, they were there before the war, and then they weren't. So what happened?"

"Well, we killed a bunch of 'em when we bombed Confederate cities." Moss was a well-trained attorney; he could spin out an argument whether he believed in it or not. "Some died in the rebellion.

Some went up to the USA. Some died of hunger and disease—there *was* a war on, you know. But a massacre? Nah. Never happened."

Barry Goodman's mouth twisted. "That's disgusting. That'd gag a maggot, damned if it wouldn't."

“Bet your ass,” Moss said. “You think it won’t happen, though? Give it twenty years—thirty at the outside.”

“Disgusting,” Goodman repeated. “Well, we’re gonna hang some people, anyway. Better believe we are. Maybe not enough, but some. And Pinkard’s one of ’em.”

“I’ve got to do everything I can to stop you,” Moss said. “And I will.”

“Sure.” Major Goodman didn’t despise him for playing on the other side, the way several military prosecutors up in Canada had. That was something, anyhow. “You have a job to do, too. But they aren’t just asking you to make bricks without straw. They’re asking you to make bricks without mud, for cryin’

out loud.”

Since Moss knew exactly the same thing, he couldn’t very well argue. He just sighed. “I’d feel better about defending him if he thought he was a murderer, you know? If he felt bad about it, if he felt guilty about it, he’d be somebody I could give a damn about. I’d *want* to get him off the hook. It wouldn’t be just an assignment. But as far as he’s concerned, everything he did was strictly line of duty, and every one of the Negroes he got rid of had it coming.”

“I know. I’ve seen the documents, and I’ve seen him in court. What he was doing, it was a job for him. He turned out to be good at it, so they kept promoting him.” Goodman shook his head. “And look where he ended up.”

“Yeah. Look.” Moss looked at his glass. It was empty again. How did that happen? Two quick doubles were making his head spin, so that was how it happened. If he got another one…If he got another one, he’d stagger back to BOQ, and he’d need aspirins and coffee in the morning. His client deserved better than that. On the other hand, his client also deserved worse than that. He glanced over to Goodman. “I’ll have another one if you do.” That would even things up—and salve his conscience.

The prosecutor laughed. “I was going to say the same thing to you. I need another one, by God.” They both waved to the barkeep. Stolidly, the enlisted man built two more doubles.

Moss got about halfway down his before a really ugly thought surfaced. “What if *we* elected somebody because he wanted to get rid of all the people with green eyes in the country? Do you think he

could find guys like Pinkard to do his dirty work for him?”

Barry Goodman frowned. “It’d be harder,” he said slowly. “We haven’t hated people with green eyes since dirt, the way whites hate blacks in the CSA.”

“Yeah, that’s true.” Moss conceded the point. Why not? They weren’t in court now. “All right—suppose we elected a guy who wanted to get rid of our Negroes, or our Jews. Could he get help?” Was Goodman Jewish? With a name like that, maybe yes, maybe no. His looks didn’t say for sure, either.

Whatever he was, he answered, “I’d like to tell you no, but I bet he could. Too damn many people will do whatever the guy in charge tells ’em to. They figure he knows what he’s doing, and they figure they’ll get in trouble if they don’t go along. So yeah, our Featherston could get his helpers. Or do you think I’m wrong?”

“Christ, I wish I did,” Moss answered. “But the Turks did it to the Armenians way back when, and the Russians have been giving it to the Jews forever. So it’s not just the Confederates going off the deep end.

They were more efficient about it than anybody else has been, but we could do that, too.”

“Now we’ve got this big, ugly, bad example staring us in the face,” Goodman said. “Maybe it’ll make everybody too ashamed to do anything like it again. I sure want to think so, anyhow. It’d give me hope for the goddamn human race.”

“I’ll drink to that. To the goddamn human race!” Moss raised his glass. Goodman clinked with him.

They drank together.

U .S. authorities in Hugo, Alabama, took their own sweet time about trying the Negro accused of raping a white woman there. They wanted to let things calm down. Armstrong Grimes approved of that.

He’d managed to stave off one riot in front of the jail. He knew he might not be so lucky the second time around.

He’d lost his enthusiasm for the uniform he wore. He’d gone through

the whole war from start to finish. All right, fine. He'd seen the elephant. He'd got shot. He'd paid all the dues anybody needed to pay. As far as he was concerned, somebody else could come down and occupy the CSA.

The government cared for his opinion as much as it usually did. It already had him down at the ass end of Alabama, and it would keep him here as long as it wanted to. If he didn't like it, what could he do about it? Not much, not when his only friends for hundreds of miles were other U.S. soldiers in the same boat he was.

So all right. He was stuck here. But he was damned if he'd give the U.S. Army a dime's worth more than he had to. Sitting quiet and not stirring up the locals looked mighty good to him.

To his surprise, Squidface stayed all eager-beaver. "You outa your mind?" Armstrong asked the Italian kid. "The more you piss these people off, the more likely it is somebody'll shoot at you."

"Somebody's gonna shoot at us. You can bet your ass on that," Squidface answered. "But if we keep these shitheads off balance, like, it'll be penny-ante stuff. We let 'em start plotting, then half the fuckin'

state rises up, and we have to level everything between here and the ocean to shut it down. You know what I'm sayin', man?"

Armstrong grunted. He knew, and didn't like knowing. He wanted to think like a short-timer, somebody who'd escape from the Army soon. To Squidface, who wanted to be a lifer, the problem looked different. Squidface wanted long-term answers, ones that would keep this part of Alabama not quiet but quieter for years to come. Armstrong didn't give a damn what happened in 1946 if he'd be out of here by 1945.

If. That was the question. The Army seemed anything but eager to turn soldiers loose. Despite taking hostages, despite shooting lots of them, it hadn't clamped down on the diehards in the CSA. No matter what the surrender orders said, everybody knew Confederate soldiers hadn't turned in all their weapons or all their explosives. And they were still using what they'd squirreled away.

"You think they can make us sick enough of occupying them, we give it up and go home?" he asked Squidface.

The PFC's mouth twisted. "Fuck, I hope not. We'll just have another war down the line if we do. And they gotta have more guys down here who know how to make superbombs. Genie's out of the bottle, like. So

if it's another war, it's a bad one."

"Yeah." Armstrong agreed unenthusiastically, but he agreed. "But if they hate us forever and shoot at us from behind bushes forever, how are we better off? It's like a sore that won't scab up."

"Maybe if we kill enough of 'em, the rest'll figure keeping that shit up is more trouble than it's worth."

Squidface had an odd kind of pragmatism, but Armstrong nodded—he thought the same way.

Two days later, a sniper killed a U.S. soldier. When that happened these days, people in Hugo tried to get out of town before anybody could grab them as hostages. The occupying authorities discouraged that by shooting at them when they saw them sneaking off.

Armstrong ended up leading a firing squad. The rifles issued to the men doing the shooting had one blank round per squad per victim. If you wanted to, you could think that maybe you hadn't really killed anybody. You could also think you could draw four to a king and end up with a royal flush. By the time you'd pulled the trigger twenty times, your odds of innocence were about that low.

After the shootings, a U.S. officer spoke to the people left in Hugo: "Get it through your heads—we *will* punish you. If you know beforehand that somebody's going to shoot at us, you'd better let us know.

If you don't, we'll keep shooting people till we run out of people to shoot."

Armstrong got drunk that night. He wasn't the only one from the firing squad who did. He hated the duty. Shooting people who could shoot back was one thing. Shooting blindfolded people up against a wall? That was a different business, and a much nastier one.

"No wonder those Confederate assholes invented all those fancy ways to kill niggers," he said, very far in his cups. "You shoot people day after day, you gotta start going bugfuck, don't you?"

"Don't sweat it, Sarge," said Squidface, who'd also poured down a lot of bad whiskey. "You're already bugfuck."

"You say the sweetest things." Armstrong made kissing noises.

For some reason—no doubt because they were smashed—they both thought that was the funniest thing in the world. So did the other drinkers. Pretty soon everybody was pretending to kiss everybody else. Then somebody really did it, and got slapped. That was even funnier—if you were drunk enough.

Nothing seemed funny to Armstrong the next morning. Strong coffee and lots of aspirins soothed his aching head and gave him a sour stomach instead. He got a different kind of headache when he went into Hugo to buy a ham sandwich for lunch instead of enduring rations.

"I don't want your money," said the man who ran the local diner. "I don't want to serve you. I don't aim to serve any Yankee soldier from here on out, but especially not you."

"What did I do?" Armstrong was still hung over enough to be extra grouchy. *I don't need this shit*, he thought unhappily.

"You told those bastards to shoot my brother-in-law yesterday, that's what. Your damn captain made me watch you do it, too. I ought to feed you, by God, and put rat poison in your sandwich. I'd do it, too, if you bastards wouldn't murder more folks who never done you no harm."

"You're gonna get your ass in a sling," Armstrong warned. All he wanted was a sandwich, not an argument.

"I ain't hurting nobody," the local said. "I don't aim to hurt nobody, neither. But I don't want Yankee money any more. I don't reckon anybody in this here town wants Yankee money any more."

If he hadn't said that last, Armstrong might have walked out in disgust. As things were, he growled,

"Conspiracy, huh? You *are* gonna get your ass in a sling." He didn't just walk out; he stomped out.

And he reported the conversation to the first officer he found. "A boycott, eh?" the captain said.

"Well, we'll see about *that*, by God!"

They did, in short order. By the end of the week, nobody in Hugo would sell U.S. soldiers anything.

On Friday, an edict came down from the military governor in Birmingham. It banned “failure to cooperate with U.S. authorities.” If you tried going on with the boycott, you’d go to jail instead.

Naturally, the first question that went through Armstrong’s mind was, “If a girl doesn’t put out, can we arrest her for failure to cooperate?”

“Sure, Grimes,” said the major who was getting the troops up to speed on the new policy. “Then you can arrest yourself for fraternizing.”

“Ah, hell, sir,” Armstrong said. “I knew there was a snatch—uh, a catch—to it.”

“Thank you, Karl Engels,” the major said dryly. “Can we go on?” Armstrong nodded, grinning. Karl was his favorite Engels Brother. He’d even talked about growing a long blue beard and joining the comedy troupe himself.

Maybe the people who joined the boycott figured they were safe because they weren’t doing anything violent. The failure-to-cooperate order was announced over bullhorns and posted in notices nailed to every telegraph pole in the towns where boycotters were trying to show their displeasure.

As soon as somebody said he wouldn’t sell a soldier something after that, the offender disappeared.

“Where you taking old Ernie?” a local asked Armstrong when he was one of the men who arrested the man who ran the Hugo diner.

“To a camp,” Armstrong answered.

“A camp? Jesus God!” The local went pale.

Armstrong laughed a nasty laugh. “What? You think we’re gonna do to him like you did to your niggers? That’d be pretty goddamn funny, wouldn’t it?”

“No,” the local said faintly.

“Well, I don’t think we’ll waste his sorry ass—this time,” Armstrong said. “But you bastards need to get something through your heads. You fuck with us, you lose. You hear me?” When the Alabaman didn’t answer fast enough to suit him, he aimed his rifle at the man’s face. *“You hear me?”*

“Oh, yeah.” The local nodded. He was old and wrinkled himself, but he was game. “I hear you real good.”

“You better, Charlie, ’cause I’m not bullshitting you.” Armstrong lowered the weapon.

And the boycott collapsed even faster than it had grown. Some of the men and women who got arrested came back to Hugo. Others stayed disappeared. Armstrong didn’t know what happened to them. His best guess was that they *were* in prison camps somewhere. But he couldn’t prove that the United States weren’t killing them the way the Confederate States had killed Negroes. Neither could the locals. It made them uncommonly thoughtful.

“See?” Squidface said. “This is how it’s supposed to work. We keep these bastards on their toes, they can’t do unto us.”

“I guess,” Armstrong said.

The next day, a land mine ten miles away blew a truck full of U.S. soldiers to kingdom come. U.S.

authorities methodically took hostages, and shot them when the fellow who’d planted the mine didn’t come forward. Rumor said that one of the soldiers who’d done firing-squad duty shot himself right afterwards.

“Some guys just can’t stand the gaff,” was Squidface’s verdict.

“I guess,” Armstrong said. “But I don’t like firing-squad duty myself. I feel like a goose just walked over my grave.”

That was the wrong thing to say around Squidface, who goosed him. The wrestling match they got into was more serious—more ferocious, anyhow—than most soldierly horseplay. Squidface eyed a shiner in a steel mirror. “You really do have this shit on your mind,” he said.

Armstrong rubbed bruised ribs. “I fuckin’ told you so. How come you don’t listen when I tell you something?”

“’Cause I’d have to waste too much time sifting through the horseshit,” Squidface answered, which almost started another round.

But Armstrong decided his ribs were sore enough already. “They let soldiers vote, who’d you vote for?” he asked.

“Dewey,” Squidface answered at once. “He’s got a chickenshit mustache, but the Dems wouldn’t’ve been asleep at the switch the way the Socialists were when Featherston jumped on our ass. How about you?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Armstrong agreed. “I bet the Socialists’d pull us out of here faster, though.”

“Just on account of you think like a short-timer doesn’t make you one,” Squidface said. Armstrong sighed and nodded. Wasn’t *that* the truth?

XVII

H ey, Chester!” Captain Hubert Rhodes called. “C’mere a minute.”

“What’s up, sir?” Chester Martin asked.

“Got something from the War Department that might apply to you,” the company commander answered. “You’re over fifty, right?”

“Yes, sir,” Martin answered. “And some of the shit I’ve been through, I feel like I’m over ninety.”

“Well, I can understand that.” Rhodes took a piece of paper out of his tunic pocket. He was in his early thirties, at the most—he didn’t need to put on glasses before he read something. “Says here the Army is accepting discharge applications from noncoms over fifty who aren’t career military. That’s you, right?”

“Yes, sir,” Chester said again. “Jesus! Have I got that straight? They’ll turn me loose if I ask ’em to?”

“That’s what it says. See for yourself.” Rhodes held out the paper.

Chester’s current reading specs had cost him half a buck at a local drugstore. He’d lost track of how many pairs of reading glasses he’d broken since reupping. These weren’t great, but they were better than nothing. He read the order, wading through the Army bureaucratese. It said what Captain Rhodes said it said, all right. “Where do I get this Form 565 it talks about?” he asked. “Or is the catch that they haven’t printed any copies of it, so I’m screwed regardless?”

Rhodes laughed, for all the world as if the Army would never pull a stunt like that. But then, like a magician with a top hat, he pulled out

a rabbit—or rather, a Form 565. “Came with the bulletin. I wish I could talk you into sticking around, but I know I’d be wasting my breath.”

“’Fraid so, sir. I got shot once in each war. Nobody can say I didn’t do my bit. I have a wife and a life back in L.A. I want to get back while I’ve still got some time left.” Chester looked at the form. “I’ve got to get my immediate superior’s signature, huh? Well, Lieutenant Lavochkin won’t be sorry to see me go—I’ve cramped his style ever since he got here.”

“Good thing somebody did, at least a bit,” Rhodes said. Both men laughed, more than a little uneasily.

Chester didn’t want to think about the massacre he’d been part of. Officially, Rhodes didn’t know about that. But what he knew officially and what he knew were different beasts. He went on, “If Boris gives you any trouble, send him to me. I’ll take care of it.”

“Thank you, sir. I appreciate it, believe me,” Chester said. “I’m gonna hunt him up right now. Sooner I get everything squared away, happier I’ll be.”

“All right.” Rhodes stuck out his hand. “It’s been a pleasure serving with you, and that’s the God’s truth.”

“Thanks,” Chester repeated as they shook. “And back at you. The lieutenant…” He shrugged. No, he wouldn’t be sorry to say good-bye to the lieutenant.

He found Boris Lavochkin right where he thought he would: on the battered main street of Cheraw, South Carolina. Lavochkin carried a captured automatic Tredegar and looked extremely ready to use it.

By the way he eyed Chester as the veteran noncom approached, he might not have minded using it on him. Lavochkin didn’t like getting his style cramped.

Chester pretended not to notice. “Talk to you a second, sir?”

“You’re doing it,” Lavochkin answered, and lit a cigarette. He didn’t offer Chester one, and Chester wasn’t sure he would have taken it if Lavochkin had.

“Right,” Chester said tightly. He explained about the War Department ukase, and about Form 565.

“So all I need is your signature, sir, and pretty soon I’ll be out of your hair for good.”

“You’re bugging out?” Boris Lavochkin didn’t bother hiding his scorn.

“Sir, I’ve put in more combat time than you have,” Martin answered. “Like I told Captain Rhodes, I’ve got a life outside the Army, and I aim to live it. I’ve seen as much of this shit as I ever want to, by God.”

“Suppose I don’t sign your stupid form?”

“Well, sir, I’ve got three things to say about that. First one is, you better go talk to Captain Rhodes.

Second one is, you damn well owe me one, on account of I kept you from killing all of us when we superbombed Charleston. And the third one is, you can bend over and kiss my ass.”

Lavochkin turned a dull red. Chester stood there waiting. He had a .45 on his belt; few U.S. soldiers ever went unarmed in the former CSA, peace or no peace. But the lieutenant could have shot him easily enough. Lavochkin didn’t, even if the Tredegar’s muzzle twitched. He was a bastard, but a calculating bastard. “Give me the damn thing. It’ll be a pleasure to get rid of you,” he snarled.

“Believe me, sir, it’s mutual.”

Leaning the automatic rifle against his leg, Lavochkin pulled a pen from his left breast pocket and scribbled something that might have been his name. He thrust Form 565 back at Chester. “There!”

“Thank you, sir.” Chester’s voice was sweet—saccharine-sweet. Boris Lavochkin gave him a dirty look as he took the signed Form 565 back to Captain Rhodes.

Rhodes signed, too, and without kicking up any fuss. “I’ll send this back to regimental HQ, and they’ll move it on to Division,” he said. “And then, if all the stars align just right, they’ll ship you home.”

“Thanks a million, Captain.” When Chester spoke to Hubert Rhodes, he sounded as if he meant it, and he did.

“You don’t owe the country anything else, Chester,” Rhodes said. “I’d like you to stick around,

’cause you’re damn good at what you do, but I’m not gonna try and

hold you where you don't want to be."

"That's white of you." Martin listened to what came out of his mouth without thought. He shook his head. "There's an expression we have to lose."

"Boy, you said it." Rhodes nodded. "Especially down here, where the whites aren't on our side and the Negroes are—what's left of 'em."

"Yeah," Chester said grimly. Some Negroes had come out of hiding now that U.S. troops were on the ground here. Some more, skinny as pipe cleaners, had come back from the camps in Texas and Louisiana and Mississippi. Back before the Freedom Party got its massacre going, South Carolina had had more blacks than whites. It sure didn't any more—not even close.

The ones who had lived through everything wandered around like lost souls. Chester couldn't blame them. How could they rebuild their shattered lives in towns and countrysides where whites had shown they hated them? Chester wouldn't have wanted to try it himself, and he was a middle-aged man with a decent education and a considerable sense of his own worth. What chance did an illiterate sharecropper or his barefoot, maybe pregnant wife have?

While he was wondering about that, a white man in a snappy suit approached him and Hubert Rhodes and said, "Talk to you, Captain?"

"You're doing it," Rhodes said. "What's on your mind?"

"My name is Walker, Nigel R. Walker," the man said. "Up until the surrender, I was mayor of Cheraw. Now there's some foolish difficulty about letting me go back to my proper function in the community."

Rhodes looked at him—looked through him, really. "You were a Party member, weren't you, Mr.

Nigel R. Walker?"

"Well, sure," Walker said. "Membership for officials was encouraged—strongly encouraged."

"Then you're out." Rhodes' voice was hard and flat. "No Freedom Party members are going to run things down here any more, and you can take that to the bank. Those are my orders, and I'm going to follow them."

“But you’re being unreasonable,” Walker protested. “I know of several towns in this state where men with much stronger Party ties than mine are very actively involved in affairs.”

Chester knew of towns like that, too. Some occupying officials wanted to put things back together as fast as they could. They grabbed the people who were most likely to be able to do the job. If some of those people had screamed, “Freedom!” for a while, they didn’t care. They thought of themselves as efficiency experts. What Chester thought of them wasn’t fit to repeat in polite company.

“I know some U.S. officers are skirting those orders,” said Captain Rhodes, who felt the same way he did. “And if they can do that with a clear conscience, then they can. I can’t. I can’t come close. As far as I’m concerned, you disqualified yourself when you joined that pack of murderous goons. Is that plain enough, Mr. Nigel R. Walker, sir, or shall I tell you what I really think of you?”

“I’m going to take my objections to your superiors, Captain.” Walker strutted off, his stiff back radiating anger.

Rhodes sighed. “He should have asked Lavochkin—Boris would have plugged him. You see, Chester? He *is* good for something.”

“Damned if you’re not right,” Martin said. “The nerve of this asshole, though!”

“He was a big fish in a little pond,” Rhodes said, and Chester nodded—nothing except possibly the Apocalypse would ever make Cheraw a big pond. Rhodes went on, “He thinks he has the right to go on being a big fish.”

“Ought to ship him to one of those camps. That’d teach him more about rights than he ever dreamt of, the fucker,” Chester said savagely.

“Yeah.” The company commander sighed again. “He may even be a decent guy. For all I know, he is.

Plenty of people *did* join the Party because it was a meal ticket. I’ve never heard any Negroes claim he was especially bad. But I’ve never heard ’em say he was especially good, either. To me, that means he’s tarred with the Party brush. He might not have done anything much, but he didn’t try to stop anything, either. So screw him.”

“No, thanks—too damn ugly,” Chester said. Rhodes laughed. Chester

started thinking of Rita. He'd been a good boy ever since he put the uniform back on, and he knew his right hand better than he'd ever wanted to.

One day followed another. The weather started turning cool and nasty. That was what Chester thought at first, anyhow. Then he realized that, compared to what he would have had to put up with in Toledo, it was pretty damn good. He'd lived in Los Angeles long enough to get spoiled.

He felt more alert now than he had since the very last days of the war. He didn't want to get hurt just when he was about to head home. Well, he didn't want to get hurt any old time, but he especially didn't want to get hurt now. And he knew too well that he could. Cheraw was no more reconciled to the Stars and Stripes than any other part of the dead but still writhing CSA. Locals probed every day to see how much they could get away with. U.S. authorities clamped down hard. That only gave the locals more reasons to hate damnyankees—as if they needed them.

At last, his discharge orders came. So did a travel voucher that would send him up to Philadelphia and then across the country through U.S. territory. He couldn't have been happier: the sooner he left the Confederacy forever, the happier he'd be.

He was painfully hung over when he boarded the northbound train—but not too hung over to notice the machine guns it carried. He hoped it wouldn't have to use them; they might make his head explode.

Captain Rhodes and a bunch of guys from his platoon—a lot of them the worse for wear, too—saw him off. Lieutenant Lavochkin didn't. Chester didn't miss him.

Rhodes and the soldiers waved and shouted as the whistle screeched and the train pulled out of Cheraw. "Lucky stiff!" somebody called. *Yeah*, Chester thought, gulping three aspirins. He was going home.

Abner Dowling knew more about uranium than he'd ever imagined he would. Before the war, he wasn't sure he'd ever heard of the stuff. Oh, maybe in chemistry, back in the dark ages around the turn of the century. Yes, it was an element. So what? You didn't do experiments with it, the way you did with copper and sulfur and things like that.

And he knew about saturnium and jovium, which was what the Confederate physicists called elements 93 and 94. Just to confuse the

issue, U.S. scientists had named the same elements neptunium and plutonium. He gathered they had different handles in every country that had found them. Back in the vanished days when he was at West Point, no one had dreamt they existed.

“Boy, I didn’t know how obsolete I was till I got here,” he complained to Angelo Toricelli. “Most of what I thought I knew turns out not to be so, and stuff I never imagined is what really counts. You can’t win.”

“Sir, if it makes you feel any better, I didn’t learn this stuff in school, either,” his adjutant answered.

That *did* make Dowling feel better. Misery, or at least confusion, loved company. “After they reassign us, you know, they’ll have to put permanent bloodhounds on us, to make sure nobody knocks us over the head and hijacks us on account of what we know,” he said.

“Maybe, but maybe not,” Toricelli said. “I mean, you can bet your bottom dollar that everybody who wants a superbomb either has one by now or is already working on one as hard as he can. What do those people need with us?”

“Go ahead. Be that way!” Dowling said. “But if I catch you talking to a Jap in glasses or a beautiful Russian piano player, you’ll be in more trouble than you can shake a stick at, and you’d better believe it.”

“I’d like to talk to a beautiful Russian piano player,” Toricelli said wistfully. “Hell, I’d like to talk to a beautiful piano player from Seattle.”

If you were a career officer, you often didn’t have time to find a wife. Dowling never had, and he was far from alone in the fraternity of war. George Custer had made it work—although Dowling often thought George was the steed Libbie rode to glory. Irving Morrell was married, too, and by all accounts happily.

It could happen. Odds against it were longer than they were in a lot of trades, though.

“Just as long as you don’t say too much to a beautiful piano player from Lexington,” Abner Dowling warned.

“I wouldn’t do that, sir.” His adjutant sounded hurt. “Besides, I haven’t seen a gal here I’d want to give the time of day to.”

Dowling nodded. “I know what you mean.” He didn’t suppose

Confederates were uglier or handsomer than U.S. citizens, taken all in all. But the war had hit hard here, especially in the last few months, when the USA tried to blast Lexington flat to keep the CSA from building a superbomb. It didn't work, but it did take its toll on the locals. People hereabouts still looked haggard and hungry. The Shenandoah Valley was some of the richest farmland in the world, but it got hit, too…and not so many folks were left to raise crops, either.

"And even if I did find a woman I liked here, well, I might want to lay her, but I don't think I'd ever marry a Confederate," Toricelli said. "I'd wonder why she wanted to marry me, and all my superiors would wonder whether I'd gone out of my mind."

He wasn't wrong. A marriage like that could blight his hopes for promotion. It could also blight his life if it didn't work, and it was much too likely not to. Even so…Dowling said, "You wouldn't be the first, you know. We've already had a couple of petitions from enlisted men to let them marry local girls."

"I'd better know, sir," his adjutant said. "That paperwork crosses my desk before it lands on yours."

"Yes, yes." Dowling didn't want the younger man to think he was forgetting things like that. As soon as they started believing you were past it, you were, whether you knew it or not. Hastily, Dowling went on, "I'm the one who has to decide, though. That's one more thing they didn't teach at West Point. Does this PFC really have good reason to marry a Virginia woman? Should I ship him back to the USA instead? Or should I just hose him down with cold water till he comes to his senses?"

"Cold water would put a lot of these proposals or propositions or whatever they are on ice,"

Lieutenant Colonel Toricelli said gravely.

Dowling sent him a severe look. Toricelli bore up under it like the soldier he was. Dowling said, "If I do let them get married and things go sour, they'll blame me. Plenty of perfectly normal marriages go bad, God knows. Usually it's nobody's fault but the bride and groom's. Figure anybody would remember that?"

"Fat chance," Toricelli said. "Sir."

"I know. But the one where the guy knocked the gal up…I am going

to approve that one, hell with me if I'm not. If I say no, her father's liable to use a shotgun on our soldier, and then we'll have to take hostages, and it'll just be a goddamn mess. I'll pay for an unhappy marriage to stay away from firing squads."

"That makes sense, sir," Toricelli said. "Kind of a cold-blooded way to look at things, but it makes sense."

"You get as old as I am, if you're hot-blooded you're either dead or you're George Custer, one,"

Dowling said. "I know damn well I'm not Custer—thank God!—and I wasn't dead last time I looked.

So…I try not to blow my cork unless my cork really needs blowing."

His adjutant returned a sly stare. "Like with General MacArthur, right?"

"I won't waste my time answering that, even if it is true." Dowling stood on his dignity, a shaky position for a man of his bulk.

Before his adjutant could call him on it, a noncom stuck his head into the office and said, "Sir, that professor guy wants to see you."

"FitzBelmont?" Dowling asked.

The sergeant nodded. "That's him."

Dowling didn't want to see the physicist. He said, "Send him in," anyway. Sometimes what you wanted was different from what you needed. If this wasn't one of those times, he could have the pleasure of throwing Henderson FitzBelmont out on his ear.

When FitzBelmont came in, he looked as angry and as determined as a professorial man could.

"General, when am I going to get my life back?" he demanded. "It is now almost four months after the surrender, but your interrogators continue to hound me. To be frank, sir, I am tired of it."

"To be frank, sir, I don't give a flying fuck." Abner Dowling didn't blow his cork, but he didn't need to waste politeness on FitzBelmont, either. "When you went to work for Jake Featherston, you sold your soul to the Devil. Now you've got to buy it back, one nickel at a time. If the boys aren't finished with you, too bad. You have a train to

catch, or what?”

“I would like to be a normal human being in a normal country, not a…a bug under a microscope.” The professor didn’t have the force of personality to hold anger together very long. His voice went high and shrill and petulant.

“Sorry, but that’s what you are. Get used to it,” Dowling said. “You’re going to be under the microscope for the rest of your life. You’re too dangerous for us not to keep tabs on you. If you don’t believe me, ask what’s left of Philadelphia.”

“I can’t do that again. You’ve made very sure I can’t,” FitzBelmont said. “And some of your interrogators are nothing but idiots. You know more about the physics of fission than they do.”

“God help them if that’s true.” Dowling hadn’t known anything about 235 and 238 and the other magic numbers till this assignment landed on him. He hoped he’d learned enough to be effective, but he wouldn’t have sworn to it.

“Well, it is,” Professor FitzBelmont said. “One imbecile asked me why we didn’t use iron instead of uranium. It was easier to find and to make, he said, and much cheaper, too. The frightening thing is, he was serious.”

“And the answer is…?” Dowling asked.

“Very simple, General. I’m sure you can figure it out for yourself: you can do whatever you please to iron, but you’ll never make a superbomb out of it. The same goes for lead or gold or most other things you can think of.”

“Not all of them?” Dowling said sharply.

Professor FitzBelmont hesitated. “If I didn’t know for a fact that your physicists were already working on this, I wouldn’t say a word. Not ever.”

“Well, you already did. Now go on,” Dowling told him.

“It’s theoretically possible, using isotopes of hydrogen with a superbomb for a fuse, you might say, to make a bomb a thousand times as powerful as the ones we have now, a bomb that burns the way the sun burns—a sunbomb, you might say.”

“A thousand times as strong as a superbomb?” Dowling’s mind bounced off that like a rotary saw recoiling from a spike driven into a tree trunk. “Good God in the foothills! You could blow up a thousand Philadelphias or Petrograds?”

“You could blow up an area more than thirty times as wide as the area those bombs destroyed,”

FitzBelmont said. “Area varies as the square of the diameter, of course.”

“Of course,” Dowling agreed in a hollow voice. “So a…a sunbomb could pretty much blow Rhode Island off the map?”

“How big is Rhode Island?” By the way FitzBelmont said it, he didn’t waste time keeping track of U.S. geography.

“I don’t know exactly,” Dowling said. “A thousand square miles—maybe a little more.”

Henderson FitzBelmont got a faraway look in his eyes. *Doing the math*, Dowling realized.

FitzBelmont finally nodded. “Yes, that’s about right. One of those bombs should destroy most of it. Why do you have such a small state?”

“Beats me.” Dowling couldn’t recall enough colonial history to come up with the reason. It didn’t matter, anyhow. What did matter…“How long would it take to build one of these sunbomb things?”

“I don’t know,” FitzBelmont said. “I would be surprised if anyone had them in five years. I would be surprised if no one had them in twenty-five.”

“Good God!” Dowling said again. If God wasn’t in the foothills, He was probably running for them.

The general tried to imagine a world where six or eight countries had sunbombs. “How would you fight a war if a bunch of your neighbors could blow you into next week if you got frisky?”

“General, I wouldn’t,” FitzBelmont said bleakly. “Whether that will stop the politicians…”

“Ha!” Dowling stabbed out a forefinger at him. “You’ve got your nerve

saying something like that after you went and worked for Jake Featherston."

The professor turned red. "He led my country in time of war. What should I have done? *Not* helped him?"

That wasn't a question with a simple answer. Had the CSA won, U.S. scientists would have asked Confederate interrogators the same thing, hoping to stay out of trouble. *Yeah, but we weren't gassing our own people by the millions*, Dowling thought. To which victorious Confederates would have replied, *So what?* And if all or even most physicists felt the way FitzBelmont did…The world was in big trouble, in that case.

W hen Jorge Rodriguez could, he walked into Baroyeca to meet the train. He couldn't always. Farm work had no peaks and valleys, the way soldiering did; you needed to keep at it every day. The damnyankees still hadn't let Miguel out of their POW camp. Jorge hoped he was all right. Maybe he'd been wounded, and word never got to Sonora. Maybe he was dead, and word never got here. He hadn't written since the end of the war, and things inside the CSA were falling apart by then.

But maybe he would get off the train one afternoon, good as new or somewhere close. The hope kept Jorge walking. He'd seen enough to know you never could tell. And if he stopped in at *La Culebra Verde* for a glass of beer before he came home, well, it was nothing his father hadn't done before him.

Every so often, nobody got out when the train stopped in Baroyeca. It wasn't a big city, and never would be. If not for the silver and lead mines in the hills back of town, it wouldn't have been a town at all.

When the mines closed between the wars, the town almost died. Even the trains stopped coming for a while.

Jake Featherston had fixed that. He'd fixed lots of things. You couldn't say so, not unless you wanted to get in trouble with the Yankees. Jorge had enough sense to keep his *boca cerrada*. A couple of people who didn't…disappeared.

One afternoon, a tall, balding fellow whose remaining hair was yellow mixed with gray stepped down and looked around in wonder. Anybody with that coloring and those beaky features stood out in swarthy, *mestizo*-filled Baroyeca.

“*Señor* Quinn!” Jorge exclaimed—not his brother, but another familiar face he hadn’t seen for a long time.

“*Hola*,” Quinn said, and then went on in his deliberate, English-accented Spanish: “You’re one of Hip Rodriguez’s boys, but I’m damned if I know which one.”

“I’m Jorge,” Jorge answered in English. “Pedro’s back, too. I was hoping Miguel would be on the train. That’s why I came. But the damnyankees are still holding him. How are you, *Señor* Quinn?”

“Tired. Whipped,” Quinn said. “Just like the rest of the country.” The train pulled out of the station, heading south. Quinn and Jorge both coughed at the dust it kicked up.

Jorge looked around. Nobody was in earshot. In a low voice, he asked, “Are you going to start the Freedom Party up again, *Señor* Quinn?”

“Not officially, anyway. I’d put my neck in the noose if I did,” Quinn answered. He’d lived in Baroyeca a long time, building the Party up from nothing and nowhere. Also quietly, he continued, “As far as *los Estados Unidos* know, I’m nothing but another POW. If they find out I was an organizer, God knows what they’ll do to me.”

“They won’t hear from me,” Jorge promised. “My father, he always thought you were a good man.”

“Well, I always thought he was a good man, too,” Robert Quinn said. “I was sad to hear he’d passed away, and even sadder to hear how. I’ve wondered about that a lot, and it doesn’t make much sense to me.”

“It doesn’t make much sense to anybody.” Jorge didn’t mention Camp Determination. The way things were nowadays, you kept your mouth shut about what went on in places like that. What could his father, a good Party man, have seen or felt that made him decide those camps weren’t doing the right thing? It had to be something on that order. Jorge was sure no personal problem would have made Hipolito Rodriguez eat his gun.

“Tell you what,” Quinn said, still softly. “If nobody down here rats on me, well, we’ll see what we can do if the damnyankees step on our toes too hard. We may not be able to hold meetings and stuff, but that doesn’t mean the Freedom Party’s dead. It’s not dead unless we decide it’s dead. How’s that sound?”

“Good to me.” Jorge didn’t say *Freedom!* or *¡Libertad!* or give the Party salute. You were asking for trouble if you did things like that. But he knew he wouldn’t be the only one watching the United States to see what they did.

And he also knew the United States would be watching Baroyeca, as they would be watching all of the CSA, or as much of the country as they could. If they sensed trouble, they would land on it with both feet. You played the most dangerous game in the world if you even thought about rising up against the damnyankees.

“Can I buy you a glass of beer, *Señor* Quinn?” Jorge asked.

“No, but you can let me buy you one, by God,” the Party organizer answered. “I’ve got plenty of money, believe me. Some of the people who think they can play poker haven’t got the sense God gave a duck.”

Jorge smiled. “All right. Do you remember where *La Culebra Verde* is?”

“I’d damn well better,” Quinn said. *“¡Vámonos, amigo!”*

It was dark and cool and quiet inside the cantina. A couple of men looked up from their drinks when Jorge and Robert Quinn walked in. It stayed quiet in there, but now the silence was one of suspense.

Slowly and deliberately, the bartender ran a damp rag over the counter in front of them. “What can I get for you, *señores*?” he asked.

“Dos cervezas, por favor.” Quinn set a U.S. half-dollar on the bar. He sat down on a stool. Jorge perched next to him. The bartender made the silver coin disappear. He drew two beers and set them in front of the new customers.

“Thanks.” Jorge put down another quarter. “One for you, too, or whatever you want.”

“Gracias.” Bartenders didn’t always want the drinks customers bought them. This time, though, the man in the boiled shirt did pour himself a beer.

“¡Salud!” Quinn raised his glass. He and Jorge and the bartender drank. “*Madre de Dios*, that’s good!” Quinn said. Was he even a Catholic? Jorge didn’t know. He’d never worried about it till now.

One of the men at a table in the back raised a finger to show he and his friends were ready for a refill.

The bartender filled glasses and set them on a tray. A barmaid picked them up and carried them off, her hips swinging. Jorge followed her with his eyes. So did Robert Quinn. They grinned at each other. Once you got out of the Army, you remembered how nice it was that the world had pretty girls in it.

As the beers emptied, the bartender murmured, “Good to have you back, *Señor* Quinn. We didn’t know if we would see you again.”

“Good to be back,” Quinn said. “There were some times when I wondered whether anybody would see me again, but war is like that.”

“*Sí*.” Jorge remembered too many close calls of his own. The man behind the bar was about his father’s age. Had he fought in the Great War? Jorge didn’t know; again, he’d never wondered till now.

“What are we going to do here, Jorge?” Robert Quinn asked. “Are you ready to live quietly under the Stars and Stripes? Or do you remember what your country really is?” He hadn’t been so bold in the train station. Could one beer have done it to him?

Jorge looked down at his glass. He looked around the cantina. His mind’s eye took in the rest of Baroyeca and the family farm outside of town. All that made him feel *less* determined than he had over at the station. “*Señor* Quinn,” he said sadly, “I have seen all the fighting I want to see for a long time. I am sorry, but if the damnyankees do not bother me, then I do not care to bother them, either. If they do bother me, the story will be different.”

“Well, that’s a fair answer,” Quinn said after silence stretched for more than half a minute. “You’ve done your soldiering. If you don’t want to do it again, who can blame you? I wish you felt different, but if you don’t, you don’t.” He drained his glass and strode out of *La Culebra Verde*.

“Did you make him unhappy?” the bartender asked.

“I’m afraid I did. He doesn’t want the war to be over, but I’ve had enough. I’ve had too much.” He wondered how Gabe Medwick was getting along. He hoped the U.S. soldiers had picked up his wounded buddy back in the Virginia woods. Was Gabe back in Alabama by now, or did he still languish in a POW camp like Miguel?

And what about Sergeant Blackledge? Jorge would have bet anything that he was raising trouble for the Yankees wherever he was. That man was born to bedevil anybody he didn't like, and he didn't like many people.

The bartender drew another beer and set it in front of Jorge. "On the house," he said. "I don't want to go to the hills. I don't want the United States shooting hostages here. I don't want to be one of the hostages they shoot. *Por Dios*, Jorge, enough is enough."

"Some men will eat fire even if they have to start it themselves," Jorge said, looking at the door through which Robert Quinn had gone.

"He will find hotheads. People like that always do. Look at Jake Featherston." The bartender never would have said such a thing while the Freedom Party ruled Baroyeca. It would have been worth his life if he had. He went on, "I don't think anyone will speak to the *soldados* from *los Estados Unidos* if *Señor* Quinn stays here quietly. But if he goes looking for stalwarts…Then he's dangerous."

Was the bartender saying he would turn in Robert Quinn if Quinn tried to raise a rebellion? If he was, what was Jorge supposed to do about him? Kill him to keep him from blabbing? But that was raising a rebellion, too, and Jorge had just told Quinn he didn't want to do any such thing.

He also didn't want to sit by while something bad happened to his father's old friend. Sometimes nothing you did would help. He had the feeling that that was true for much of the CSA's last war against the USA.

He also had the feeling it would be true if Confederates tried to mix it up with the USA in the war's aftermath. Yes, they could cause trouble. Could they cause enough to make U.S. forces leave? He couldn't make himself believe it.

When he came back to the farm alone late that afternoon, his mother's face fell, the way it always did when he came back alone. "No Miguel?" she asked sadly.

"No Miguel. I'm sorry, *mamacita*." Then Jorge told of meeting Robert Quinn as the Freedom Party man got off the train.

His mother only sniffed. Next to her missing son, a man who wasn't from the family didn't cut much ice. The news excited Pedro, though.

“Does he want to—?” He didn’t go on.

“Yes, he does,” Jorge answered. “I told him I didn’t.” He spoke elliptically, as Pedro had, to keep from making their mother flabble.

Pedro looked discontented. But Pedro hadn’t done a whole lot of fighting. He’d spent most of the war behind barbed wire. He didn’t have such a good idea of what the United States could do if they decided they wanted to. Jorge did. What he’d seen in Virginia as the war wound down would stay with him for the rest of his life. The overwhelming firepower and the will to use it scared him more than he was willing to admit, even to himself.

“What are we going to do? Sit here quiet for the rest of our lives?” Pedro asked.

“You can do what you want,” Jorge answered. “Me, I’m going to stay on the farm and see how things go. We have a crop this year, and that’s enough for now. If things change later, if the United States make life too hard to stand…Then I’ll worry about it. Not until.”

“What kind of patriot are you?” his brother asked.

“A live one,” Jorge answered. “That’s the kind I want to go on being, too. *Los Estados Confederados* are dead, Pedro. Dead. I don’t think they’ll come back to life no matter what we do.”

“You think we’re beaten.”

“*Sí*. That’s right. Don’t you?”

Pedro didn’t answer. He stormed out of the farmhouse instead. Jorge started to go after him, then checked himself. His brother could figure out what was going on without him. Jorge hoped he could, anyhow.

T he *Oregon* cruised off the Florida coast. The weather was fine. It felt more like August than October to George Enos. Back home in Boston, the leaves would be turning and it would be getting cold at night.

Everything stayed green here. He didn’t think autumn would ever come.

All the same, he didn’t want to stay stuck on the battleship the rest of his life. He wanted to get home to Connie and the boys. Fighting in a war was one thing. Yeah, you needed to do that; he could see as

much. Occupation duty? As far as he was concerned, they could conscript somebody else for it.

He griped. Most of the sailors on the *Oregon* who weren't career Navy guys were griping. Griping let off steam, and did no other good he could see. Nobody who mattered would pay attention. Nobody who mattered ever paid attention to ratings. That was how the Navy operated.

"Hey, you sorry bastards are stuck," Wally Fodor said. "We can't just pretend the fucking Confederates'll be good little boys and girls, the way we did the last time around. We know better now, right?"

"All I know is, this ain't what I signed up for," George answered. "I got a family. My kids hardly remember who I am."

"As soon as you swore the oath and they shipped your sorry rear end to Providence, they had you.

They had you but good," the gun chief said. "You might as well lay back and enjoy it."

"I've been screwed long enough," George said. "Too damn long, to tell you the truth. I want to go home. I'm not the only one, either—not even close. Congress'll pay attention, whether the brass does or not."

"Don't hold your breath—that's all I've got to tell you." Fodor gave what was much too likely to be good advice.

In the meantime, there was Miami, right off the starboard bow. If anybody got out of line, the *Oregon*

's big guns could smash the city to bits. That was what battleships were good for nowadays: blasting the crap out of people who couldn't shoot back. In the Great War, they'd been queens of the sea. Now they were afterthoughts.

"Think we'll get liberty?" one of the shell-jerkers asked, a certain eagerness in his voice. Miami had a reputation almost like Habana's. Didn't hot weather produce hot women? That was how the stories went, anyhow.

George didn't know whether to believe the stories. He did know he'd been away from Connie long enough to hope to find out if they were true. He could hope it would be his last fling before he went back to his wife for good. That would help him feel not so bad about doing

what he wanted to do anyway.

But Wally Fodor repeated, “Don’t hold your breath. Besides, do you really want to get knocked over the head if you go ashore? They don’t love us down here. Chances are they’re never going to, either.”

“Hey, I don’t care about love,” the shell-jerker said. “Long as I can get it in, that’s good enough.”

Laughter said it was good enough for most of the gun crew.

They didn’t get liberty. They did get fresh produce. Boats came alongside to sell the battleship fruit and meat and fish. Fresh orange juice and lemonade appeared in the galley. So did fresh peas and green beans, and salads with tender lettuce and buttery avocados and tomatoes and celery. The sailors ate fried shrimp and fried fish and spare ribs and fried chicken.

George had to let his belt out a notch. The chow beat the hell out of any Navy rations he’d had before.

Bumboats brought out fresh water, too, enough so the crew didn’t have to use seawater and saltwater soap when they showered. If that wasn’t a luxury, he’d never known one. Peace had its advantages, all right.

He’d just stripped off his uniform to get clean when an enormous explosion knocked him ass over teakettle. “The fuck?” he said, which was one of the more coherent comments from the naked sailors.

Klaxons hooted. He ran for his battle station without thinking about his clothes. Bodies lay on the deck. He’d worry about them later. Right now, he had a job to do, and he could do it with pants or without. He wasn’t the only naked man heading for duty—not even close.

Petty Officer Fodor had a cut on his face and another one on his arm. He didn’t seem to notice either one. “They blew up a goddamn bumboat,” he said. “Right alongside us, they blew up a goddamn bumboat.”

“They’re idiots if they did,” George said. The *Oregon*, like any modern battleship, had sixteen-inch armor belts on either side to protect against gunfire and torpedoes. They weren’t perfect, as the melancholy roll of torpedoed battlewagons attested. But they were a hell of a lot better than nothing. A blast that might have torn a

destroyer in two dented the *Oregon* and killed and hurt people exposed to it without coming close to sinking her.

“This is the captain speaking!” the PA blared. “Odd-numbered gun stations, aid in casualty collection and damage assessment. Even numbers, hold your posts.”

As the skipper repeated the order, George and the other men from his twin-40mm mount dashed off to do what they could for the sailors who hadn’t been so lucky. There were a lot of them: anybody who’d been on deck when the bumboat exploded was down and moaning or down and thrashing or down and not moving at all, which was worst.

Some of the paint was burning. Men already had hoses playing on the fires. The stink made George’s asshole pucker. When your ship got hit, that odor was one of the things you smelled. And he almost fell on his face skidding through a puddle of seawater from the fire-fighters.

He knelt by a burned man who was clutching his left shoulder. “C’mon, buddy—I’ll give you a hand,”

he said.

“Thanks.” The wounded sailor groped for him. “Sorry. I can’t see a goddamn thing.”

“Don’t worry about it. The docs’ll fix you up.” George had no idea whether they could or not. The other man’s face didn’t look good, which was putting it mildly. “Your legs all right? I’m gonna get you on your feet if I can.”

“Give it a try,” the injured man said, which might have meant anything. He groaned and swayed when George hauled him upright, but he didn’t keel over again. George got the fellow’s good arm around his own shoulder. He also got blood on his own bare hide, but that was something to flabble about later.

Helping the other sailor down three flights of steep, narrow steel stairs when the poor guy couldn’t see where to put his feet was an adventure all by itself. George managed. Other sailors and groups were carrying injured men and trying to get them down in stretchers without spilling them out.

In the sick bay and in the corridors outside it, the battleship’s doctors and pharmacist’s mates were working like foul-mouthed machines. One of the mates took a quick look at the sailor George had brought

down. “Put him there with them,” he said, pointing to a group of other men who were hurt but not in imminent danger of dying. “We’ll get to him as soon as we have a chance to.”

“Good luck, pal,” George said as he eased the wounded sailor down. It was painfully inadequate, but it was all he could offer.

“Thanks. Go help somebody else,” the other man said. Somebody—maybe a pharmacist’s mate, maybe a rating one of the doctors had dragooned—stuck a needle into him. Morphine sure wouldn’t hurt.

George was helping to get another injured man down to first aid when someone said, “I wonder what we’ll do to Miami for this.”

“Blow the fucking place off the fucking map,” the wounded sailor said. That sounded good to George.

He’d heard of people bombs and auto bombs, but a boat bomb? The son of a bitch who thought of that one had more imagination than he knew what to do with. George hoped he’d been on the boat and pressed the button that blew it up. If he had, maybe the scheme would die with him.

Or was that too much to hope for?

“Hell of a note if we’ve got to inspect every boat that brings us supplies,” a CPO said. “Sure looks like we will, though.”

When George got down to sick bay this time, he noticed a group of badly hurt men nobody was helping. They had to be the ones the doctors thought wouldn’t get better no matter what. No time to waste effort on them, then. That was cruel logic, but it made sense.

The *Oregon*, he learned later, lost 31 dead and more than 150 wounded. In response, the U.S. Army seized 1,500 Miamians. Some of the attempted seizures turned into gun battles, too. The locals knew what the soldiers were coming for, and weren’t inclined to give themselves up without a fight. Because of the casualties the Army took rounding up the hostages, it rounded up more hostages still.

Guns aimed toward the city, the *Oregon* sailed close inshore. The sharp, dry *crack!* s of rifle volleys came across the water, one after another after another. They got the message across: if you messed with the USA, you paid. And paid. And paid.

Some of the sailors weren't satisfied even so. "We ought to blast the shit out of that place," Wally Fodor said. "Those assholes fucked with us, not with the Army. We ought to give them a fourteen-inch lesson."

"Sure works for me," George said. All right, so battleships were shore-bombardment vessels these days. There was a shore that needed bombarding, and it was lying there naked and undefended in front of them.

But the order didn't come. The men pissed and moaned. That was all they could do. They couldn't open up on Miami without orders. Oh, maybe they could—the men on the smaller guns, anyhow—but they were looking at courts-martial and long terms if they did. Nobody had the gall to try it.

Discipline tightened up amazingly. They'd taken it easy after the Confederate surrender. They didn't any more. You never could tell what might happen now. George would have bet skippers and execs all around the fleet were preaching sermons about the battleship. That was just what he wanted, all right: to serve aboard the USS *Object Lesson*.

"Isn't it great?" he said to Fodor. "All those guys are going, 'See? You better not be a bunch of jerkoffs like the clowns on the *Oregon*. Otherwise, the Confederates'll blow your nuts off, too.'"

"Yeah, that's about the size of it, all right," the gun chief agreed. "They can fix up the scar on the side of the ship and slap fresh paint all over the place, but the scar on our reputation ain't gonna go away so fast. Goddamn Confederate cockknockers took care of that in spades."

"Fuck it," George said. "I just want to get back to Boston in one piece. Goddamn war was supposed to be over months ago."

"You think we were down here for no reason?" Fodor patted the gun mount. "I wish they would've lined up the hostages right there on the beach. Then we coulda opened up on 'em with the 40mms. Boy, we would've gone through 'em in a hurry."

"Yeah." George hadn't thought of the antiaircraft guns as weapons that could substitute for a firing squad. But Wally Fodor wasn't wrong. "You turn these babies on people, you know what you've got?

You've got Grim Reapers, that's what."

“I like it,” Fodor said, and damned if he didn’t show up the next day with a can of white paint and some stencils. GRIM REAPER 1 went on the right-hand gun barrel, GRIM REAPER 2 on the gun on the left.

“Way to go, Enos. Now they’ve got names.”

“Oh, boy.” George tried not to sound too gloomy. He was stuck on the *Oregon*, though, and he wished to God he weren’t.

A fter so long in the war zone, Cincinnatus found Des Moines strange. Sleeping in his own bed, sleeping with his own wife—that was mighty good. Getting used to a peacetime world wasn’t so easy.

He flinched whenever an auto backfired or a firecracker went off. He automatically looked for somewhere to hide. He noticed white men half his age doing the same thing. They noticed him, too. “You go through the mill, Pop?” one of them called when they both ducked walking down the street after something went boom.

“Drove a truck all the way through Kentucky and Tennessee and Georgia,” Cincinnatus answered.

“Wasn’t right at the front, but I got bushwhacked a couple-three times.”

“Oughta do it,” the white man agreed. “I was in Virginia, and I got shot. Then they sent me to Alabama. I don’t think I’ll ever stop being jumpy.”

“Man, I know what you mean,” Cincinnatus said with feeling. They gave each other waves that weren’t quite salutes as they passed.

Cincinnatus knew just where he was going: to the recruiting station where he’d signed up to drive a truck. It was right where it had been. UNCLE SAM STILL NEEDS YOU! said the sign out front. He went inside.

Damned if the same recruiting sergeant wasn’t sitting in there, doing paperwork with a pen held in a hook. The man looked up when the door opened. “Well, well,” he said, smiling. “I know you, and your name will come to me in a second if I let it. You’re Mr.—Driver.”

“That’s right, Sergeant.” Cincinnatus smiled, too. “I first came in here, I called you *suh*.”

“You didn’t know the ropes then. I see you do now,” the noncom answered. “I’m glad you came through in one piece. I bet you cussed the day you stuck your nose in here plenty of times.”

“Best believe I did,” Cincinnatus said. “You mind if I sit down?”

“Not even a little bit. I remember you had a bad leg. And you can see I’m busy as hell right now, right?” The sergeant got to his feet. “Can I grab you a cup of coffee?”

“I’d thank you if you did,” Cincinnatus replied. “Stuff ’s startin’ to taste good again.”

“We’re getting real coffee beans for a change, not whatever kind of crap we were using instead,” the recruiting sergeant said. “You take cream and sugar?”

“Both, please.” Cincinnatus hesitated. “You know, I never learned your name the las’ time I was here.”

“I’m Dick Konstam—a damn Dutchman, but at your service. You’ve got a fancy handle. I remember that, but you’d better remind me what it is.”

“Cincinnatus—that’s me…. Thank you kindly.” Cincinnatus sipped from the paper cup. The coffee was strong, but it hadn’t been sitting on the hot plate long enough to get bitter yet. He took another sip.

Then he asked the question he’d come here to ask: “Sergeant Konstam —uh, Dick—how the hell do I get myself to fit back into things? Wasn’t near so hard the last time around.”

Konstam paused to light a cigarette. It was a Niagara. He made a sour face. “Tobacco still sucks.” He blew out smoke. “You sure you want to talk about that with me, Cincinnatus? What makes you think I’ve got any answers?”

“You done it yourself. And you’ve seen plenty of other fellows come and go through here,”

Cincinnatus said. “If you don’t know, who’s likely to?”

“Well, I hated everything and everybody when I caught this.” Sergeant Konstam held up the hook.

Cincinnatus nodded; he could see how that might be so. The white

man took another drag—he handled a cigarette as deftly as a pen. After he exhaled a gray stream of smoke, he went on, “But life is too short, you know? Whatever you’ve got, you better make the most of it, you know?”

“Oh, yeah. I hear that real good,” Cincinnatus said.

“Figured you did. You’re a guy who busts his hump. You made something out of yourself, and that’s pretty goddamn tough for somebody your color. Probably a lot easier to be a shiftless, no-account nigger the way most people expect.”

“Know somethin’?” Cincinnatus said. The sergeant raised a questioning eyebrow. Cincinnatus explained: “Think maybe this is the first time I ever heard a white man say *nigger* an’ I didn’t want to punch him in the nose.”

“Yeah, well, some colored guys *are* niggers. It’s a shame, but it’s true. And some Jews *are* kikes, and some Dutchmen *are* goddamn fuckin’ squareheads—not me, of course.” Konstam flashed a wry grin.

“We got rid of all those assholes, we’d be better off. Good fuckin’ luck, that’s all I got to tell you. We’re stuck with ’em, and we just have to deal with ’em the best way we know how.”

“Like them Freedom Party goons,” Cincinnatus said.

Sergeant Konstam nodded. “They fill the bill, all right. Only good thing about them is, we *can* shoot the fuckers if they step out of line. Nobody’s gonna miss ’em when we do, either.”

“Amen,” Cincinnatus said. “If I was whole myself…” He didn’t want to go on and on about his physical shortcomings, not when he was talking to a mutilated man. “My work was messed up after I got back from Covington. Ain’t gonna get no better now.”

“Remind me what line you were in.”

“Had me a hauling business. Had it, yeah, till before the war. Damned if I know how to put it back on its feet now. Ain’t got the money to buy me a new truck. Even if I did, I need somebody to give me a hand with loadin’ an’ unloadin’ now.”

“Got a son?” Konstam asked.

“Sure do,” Cincinnatus said, not without pride. “Achilles, he graduated high school, an’ he’s clerking for an insurance company. He don’t want to get all sore and sweaty and dirty like his old man. And you know what else? I’m damn glad he don’t.”

“Fair enough. Good for him, and good for you, too. Insurance company, huh? He must take after his old man, then—wants to make things better for himself any way he can. Maybe his kids’ll run a company like that instead of working for it.”

“That’d be somethin’. Don’t reckon it’d be against the law up here, the way it would in the CSA.

Don’t reckon it’d be easy, neither. Achilles’ babies, they’re half Chinese.”

Konstam laughed out loud. “Ain’t that a kick in the head! Who flabbled more when they got hitched, you and your wife or your son’s new in-laws?”

“Nobody was what you’d call happy about it,” Cincinnatus said. “But Achilles and Grace, they get on good, and it ain’t easy stayin’ mad at people when there’s grandbabies. Things are easier than they were a while ago, I got to say that.”

“Glad to hear it.” Dick Konstam whistled through his teeth. “I wasn’t exactly thrilled when one of my girls married a Jewish guy. Ben hasn’t turned out too bad, though. And you’re sure as hell right about grandchildren.” His face softened. “Want to see photos?”

“If I can show you mine.”

They pulled out their wallets and went through a ritual as old as snapshots. If people had carried around little paintings before cameras got cheap and easy, they would have shown those off, too.

Cincinnatus and the sergeant praised the obvious beauty and brilliance of each other’s descendants.

Cincinnatus didn’t think he was lying too hard. He hoped Dick Konstam wasn’t, either.

The sergeant stuck his billfold back in his hip pocket. “Any other problems I can solve for you today, Mr. Driver?”

He hadn’t solved Cincinnatus’ problem. He had to know it, too. But he

had helped—and he sounded like a man who wanted to get back to work. “One more thing,” Cincinnatus said. “Then I get out of your hair. How can I keep from wantin’ to hide behind somethin’ every goddamn time I hear a loud noise?”

“Boy, you ask the tough ones, don’t you?” Konstam said. “All I can tell you is, don’t hold your breath.

That took me years to get over. Some guys never do. Poor bastards stay nervous as cats the rest of their days.”

“Don’t want to do that.” But it might have more to do with luck than with what he wanted. Slowly and painfully, he got to his feet. “I thank you for your time, Sergeant, an’ for lettin’ me bend your ear.”

“Your tax dollars in action,” Konstam replied. “Take care of yourself, buddy. I wish you luck. You haven’t been back all that long, remember. Give yourself a chance to get used to things again.”

“I reckon that’s good advice,” Cincinnatus said. “Thank you one more time.”

“My pleasure,” the sergeant said. “Take care, now.”

“Yeah.” Cincinnatus headed for home. A work gang with paste pots were putting up red, white, and blue posters of Tom Dewey on anything that didn’t move. HE’LL TELL YOU WHAT’S WHAT, they said.

They were covering up as many of Charlie La Follette’s Socialist red posters as they could. Those shouted a one-word message: VICTORY!

Cincinnatus still hadn’t decided which way he’d vote. Yes, the Socialists were in the saddle when the USA won the war. But they also helped spark it when they gave Kentucky and the state of Houston back to the CSA after their dumb plebiscite. The promise of that vote helped get Al Smith reelected in 1940.

The colored quarter in Covington was empty because of the plebiscite. If Cincinnatus wanted to, he could blame the auto that hit him on the plebiscite. Oh, he might have had an accident like that here in Des Moines chasing after his senile mother. He might have, yeah. But he *did* have it down in Covington.

How much did that count? He laughed at himself. It counted as much

as he wanted it to, no more and no less. Nobody could make him vote for the Socialists if it mattered a lot in his own mind. Nobody could make him vote for the Democrats if it didn't. "Freedom," he murmured—in the real sense of the word, not the way Jake Featherston used it. Cincinnatus grinned and nodded to himself. "I'm here to tell you the truth." The truth was, he was free.

When he got back to the apartment, he found his wife about ready to jump out of her skin with excitement. Half a dozen words explained why: "Amanda's fella done popped the question!"

"Do Jesus!" Cincinnatus sank into a chair. When he left Des Moines not quite two years earlier, his daughter hadn't had a boyfriend. She did now. Calvin Washington was a junior butcher, a young man serious to the point of solemnity. He didn't have much flash—hell, he didn't have any flash—but Cincinnatus thought he was solid all the way through. "She said yes?"

Elizabeth nodded. "She sure did, fast as she could. She thinks she done invented Calvin, you know what I mean?"

"Expect I do." Thoughtfully, Cincinnatus added, "He's about the same color she is."

"Uh-huh." His wife nodded again. "It don't matter as much here as it did down in Kentucky, but it matters."

"It does," Cincinnatus agreed. That an American Negro's color did matter was one more measure of growing up in a white-dominated world, which made it no less real. Had Calvin been inky black, Cincinnatus would have felt his daughter was marrying beneath herself. He didn't know whether Amanda, a modern girl, would have felt that way, but he would have. Were Calvin high yellow, on the other hand, he might have felt he was marrying beneath himself. Since they were both about the same shade of brown, the question didn't arise. "When do they want to get hitched?" Cincinnatus asked.

"Pretty soon." Elizabeth's eyes sparkled. "They're young folks, sweetheart. They can't hardly wait."

"Huh," Cincinnatus said. It wasn't as if his wife were wrong. Whether he was ready or not, the world kept right on going all around him.

T he first thing Irving Morrell said when he got into Philadelphia was, "This is a damned nuisance."

John Abell met him at the Broad Street station, as he had so many times before. “If you want to get it quashed, sir, I’m sure we can arrange that.”

“No, no.” Regretfully, Morrell shook his head. “The man’s a cold-blooded son of a bitch, but even a cold-blooded son of a bitch is entitled to the truth.”

“Indeed,” the General Staff officer murmured. Abell was a cold-blooded son of a bitch, too, but one of a rather different flavor. He had two virtues, as far as Morrell could see: they were on the same side, and Abell didn’t go around telling the world how goddamn right he was all the time. Right now, he asked,

“Shall I take you over to BOQ and let you freshen up before you go on?”

Morrell looked down at himself. He was rumpled, but only a little. He ran a hand over his chin. Not perfectly smooth, but he didn’t think he looked like a Skid Row bum, either. He shook his head. “No, let’s get it over with. The sooner it’s done, the sooner I can head west and see my wife and daughter.”

“However you please,” Abell said, which meant he would have showered and shaved and changed his uniform first. But he left the editorializing right there. “My driver is at your disposal.”

“Thanks.” Morrell followed him off the platform.

They didn’t have far to go. Morrell didn’t have to look at the slagged wreckage on the other side of the Schuylkill, which didn’t mean he didn’t know it was there. Its being there, in fact, was a big part of why he was here.

There was no fresh damage in Philadelphia now that the war was over. Some of the wrecked buildings had been bulldozed, and the rubble hauled away. Repairmen swarmed everywhere. Glass was beginning to reappear in windows. “Looks…neater than it did before,” Morrell remarked. “We’re starting to come back.”

“Some,” Abell said. “It won’t be the way it was for a long time. As a matter of fact, it will never be the way it was.”

“Well, no. You can’t step into the same river twice.” Some Greek had said that a couple of thousand years before Morrell. He didn’t remember who; John Abell probably did. Morrell, no great lover of

cities, didn't much care how Philadelphia rose again. As long as it had peace in which to rise, that suited him.

The War Department had set up a Tribunal for Accused Confederate War Criminals in a rented office building not far from the government buildings that dominated the center of town. Despite the stars on Morrell's shoulder straps and those on John Abell's, getting in wasn't easy. Security was tight, and no doubt needed to be.

A neatly lettered sign outside a meeting room turned courtroom said UNITED STATES OF AMERICA VS.

CLARENCE POTTER, BRIGADIER GENERAL, CSA. "I would never tell you to perjure yourself," Abell said as they paused outside the door, "but I wouldn't hate you if you did, either."

"I'm Irving Morrell, and I'm here to tell you the truth," Morrell said. Abell winced. Morrell went on in.

Inside the makeshift courtroom, everyone except a few reporters and the defendant wore green-gray.

The reporters were in civvies; Clarence Potter had on a butternut uniform that, even without insignia, singled him out at a glance. Morrell knew of him, but had never seen him before. He was a little older and more studious-looking than the U.S. officer expected, which didn't mean he wasn't dangerous. He'd already proved he was.

His defense attorney, a U.S. major, got to his feet. "Since General Morrell has chosen not to contest our subpoena, I request permission to get his remarks on the record while he is here."

He faced a panel of five judges—a brigadier general sitting in the center, three bird colonels, and a lieutenant colonel. The general looked over to the light colonel who seemed to be the prosecutor. "Any objections?"

"No, sir," that officer replied. *I'm stuck with it*, his expression said.

"Very well," the chief judge said. "Come forward and be sworn, General Morrell, and then take your seat."

When Morrell had taken the oath and sat down, Potter's defense counsel said, "You are aware that General Potter is on trial for conveying the Confederate superbomb to Philadelphia while wearing the U.S. uniform for purposes of disguise?"

“Yes, I know that,” Morrell said.

“This is considered contrary to the laws of war as set down in the 1907 Hague Convention?”

“That’s right.”

“Had the Confederates ever used soldiers in U.S. uniform before?”

“Yes, they had. Their men in our uniforms helped get a breakthrough in eastern Ohio in 1942. They even picked men who had U.S. accents. It hurt us.”

“I see.” The defense attorney looked at some papers. “Were the Confederates alone in using this tactic?”

“No,” Morrell said.

“Tell the court about some instances when U.S. soldiers under your command used it.”

“Well, the most important was probably the 133rd Special Reconnaissance Company,” Morrell replied. “We took a page from the CSA’s book. We recruited men who could sound like Confederates.

We armed them with Confederate weapons, and put them into Confederate uniform.”

“Where did you get the uniforms?” asked the major defending Potter.

“Some from prisoners, others off casualties,” Morrell said.

“I see. And the 133rd Special Reconnaissance Company was effective?”

“Yes. It spearheaded our crossing of the Tennessee in front of Chattanooga.”

“Surprise and deception made it more effective than it would have been otherwise?”

“I would certainly think so.”

“Thank you, General. No further questions.”

The chief judge nodded to the prosecutor. “Your witness, Colonel Altrock.”

“Thank you, sir.” Altrock got to his feet. “You say you were imitating Confederate examples when you dressed our men in enemy uniform, General?”

“I believe that’s true, yes,” Morrell said.

“Would you have done it if the enemy hadn’t?” Altrock asked.

“Objection—that’s a hypothetical,” the defense attorney said.

After the judges put their heads together, their chief said, “Overruled. The witness may answer the question.”

“Would I? Would we?” Morrell pursed his lips. “Probably. It’s too good a move—and too obvious—to ignore.”

“No further questions,” Altrock said. One had done him enough damage.

“Anything on redirect?” the chief judge asked Potter’s lawyer, who shook his head. The judge nodded to Morrell. “You are dismissed, General. We appreciate your testimony.”

Clarence Potter spoke for the first time: “If I may say so, I appreciate it very much.” His own accent might have inspired him to dress up Yankee-sounding Confederates in U.S. uniforms.

“I don’t love you, General, but if they hang you it should be for something you did and we didn’t.”

Morrell got to his feet. He nodded to the judges and left the courtroom.

John Abell wasn’t waiting there any more. Morrell hadn’t expected him to hang around. The driver was. “Where to, sir?” he said. “Wherever you need to go, I’ll take you there.”

“Back to the train station, quick, before somebody else here decides he needs me,” Morrell answered.

“By God, I *am* going to see my wife and daughter.”

The driver grinned. “I know how you feel, sir. Let’s go.”

Two and a half hours later, Morrell was on a train bound for Kansas City. He traveled through the stretches of western Pennsylvania, Ohio,

and eastern Indiana that had seen the hardest fighting inside the USA. Looking out the window at the devastation was like falling back in time. Down in the occupied Confederacy, hardly anyone looked out of train windows. What people saw there was too likely to hurt.

The United States was luckier, but this one stretch of terrain had suffered as much as any farther south.

Morrell breathed easier when he neared Indianapolis. C.S. bombers had hit the city, but nowhere near as hard as they'd pummeled Washington and Baltimore and Philadelphia. And the only soldiers in butternut who'd made it to Indianapolis went into the POW camps outside of town. Some of them still languished there. Most had gone home by now. Some of the ones who had would make U.S. authorities sorry they'd ever turned them loose. Morrell was as sure of that as he was of the scars on his thigh and shoulder, but what the hell could you do?

St. Louis had taken a beating, and Missouri went up in flames whenever war broke out. Even three generations after the War of Secession, it had some stubborn Confederate sympathizers. Lines were fluid in the West, too; C.S. raiders had little trouble sneaking up from Arkansas and raising hell.

Kansas City and Leavenworth, as well as the fort nearby, had also suffered. But, as the war went on, the Confederates found troubles of their own closer to home. Morrell knew Agnes and Mildred had come through without a scratch. To him, selfishly, that was all that mattered.

They were waiting for him when he got off the train. Agnes was about his age, but her black hair showed not a streak of gray. Maybe that was a miracle; more likely it was dye. Morrell didn't care either way. His wife looked damn good to him, and she had ever since they met at a dance right here in town.

He was amazed at how shapely Mildred had got. She was nineteen now, but the years had gone by in a blur for him. He eyed Agnes in mock severity. "You've been feeding her again," he said sternly. "Didn't I warn you about that? See what happens?"

"I'm sorry, Irv." Agnes sounded as contrite as he was angry—which is to say, not very.

"Daddy!" Mildred was just plain indignant.

He gave her a kiss. “It’s good to see you, sweetheart. You’ve grown up as pretty as your mother.”

That he meant. Mildred was certainly better off with Agnes’ looks than with his own long-faced, long-jawed countenance. He wasn’t an ugly man, but a woman with features as harsh as his wouldn’t have been lucky.

“How long can you stay?” Agnes asked.

“They promised me a couple of weeks, but you know what Army promises are worth,” Morrell answered. The rueful twist to his wife’s mouth said she knew much too well. He went on, “We’ll just have to make the most of the time, however long it turns out to be.”

“Of course we will.” Agnes looked at Mildred. “That’s good advice any old time.” She had her own bitter experience; she’d lost her first husband in the early days of the Great War.

Mildred wasn’t impressed. With a toss of the head, she said, “I thought I graduated from high school.”

Morrell started to give her a swat on the behind for sass, but checked himself. She was too big these days for a man to spank. He contented himself with asking, “Have you been giving your mother lip all the time I’ve been gone?”

“Every single minute,” Mildred answered proudly. That took the wind out of his sails.

“Let’s go home,” Agnes said. “We have a lot of catching up to do.” She winked at Morrell. He grinned. He looked forward to trying to catch up, anyhow.

All over the country—and all over the wreck of the CSA, too—survivors were trying to catch up with their families and trying to make them grow. Some reunions would be smooth, some anything but.

Morrell put one arm around his wife, the other around his daughter. They walked off the platform that way. *So far, so good*, he thought.

XVIII

C larence Potter took his place in the Yankee courtroom. The Yankee

kangaroo courtroom, he feared it was. The judges had let his lawyer question witnesses and even bring in Irving Morrell, but how much difference would any of that make? He'd superbombed the town where they were trying him. Evidence?

Who gave a damn about evidence? If they felt like convicting him, they bloody well would.

He nodded to Major Stachiewicz, who'd defended him. "You did what you could. I appreciate it."

"I didn't do it for you, exactly. I did it for duty," the damnyankee said.

"I understand that. I don't want to marry you, either. But you made an honest effort, and I want you to know I know it," Potter said.

"All rise!" said the warrant officer who doubled as bailiff and recording secretary.

Everyone in the courtroom got to his feet as the judges came in. As soon as the judges sat down, Brigadier General Stephens said, "Be seated." Potter sat. He didn't want to let the enemy know he was nervous. In the rows of seats in the spectators' gallery behind him, reporters poised pens above notebooks.

Verdict day today.

The chief judge fixed him with an unfriendly stare. "The defendant will please rise."

"Yes, Your honor." Potter stood at attention.

"Without a doubt, General Potter, you caused greater loss of life than any man before you in the history of the North American continent," General Stephens said. That was cleverly phrased. It ignored the hell the USA's German allies unleashed on Petrograd earlier, and it also ignored the hell the United States visited on Newport News and Charleston. All the same, it remained technically true.

"Also without a doubt," Stephens continued, "you were able to do what you did thanks to a ruse of war, one frowned on by the Geneva Convention. Carrying on the fight in the uniform of the foe skates close to the edge of the laws of war."

He looked as if his stomach pained him. "However…" He paused to pour himself a glass of water and sip from it, as if to wash the taste of

the word from his mouth. Then he had to say it again: “However…”

Another long pause. “It has also been demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that U.S. forces utilized the identical ruse of war. Executing a man on the other side for something we also did ourselves strikes the court as unjust, however much we might wish it did not. This being so, we find you not guilty of violating the laws of war in bringing your superbomb to Philadelphia.”

Hubbub in the courtroom as reporters exclaimed. Some rushed out to file their stories. No one paid any attention to the chief judge’s gavel. Through the chaos, Potter said, “May I tell you something, sir?”

“Go ahead.” No, Brigadier General Stephens was not a happy man. And, over at the prosecutor’s table, Lieutenant Colonel Altrock looked as if he’d just found half a worm in his apple.

“I want to thank the court for its integrity, General,” Potter said. “I have to say, I didn’t expect it.” *Not from Yankees* was in his mind if not on his tongue.

Stephens had to know it was there, too. His mouth twisted. “Your enemies are men like you, General,” he said. “That, I believe, is the principal meaning of this verdict.”

Potter inclined his head. “The point is well taken, sir.”

“Happy day,” Stephens said bleakly. “Please understand: we don’t approve of you even if we don’t convict you. You will be under surveillance for the rest of your life. If you show even the slightest inclination toward trouble, it will be your last mistake. Do I make myself clear?”

“Abundantly.” Clarence Potter might have complained that he was being singled out for discriminatory treatment. He might have—but he wasn’t that kind of fool, anyhow.

“Very well. I gather the men who debriefed you have now finished?”

“Yes, sir,” Potter said. “They have squeezed me flatter than a snake in a rolling mill.” He’d told them everything about his trip up from Lexington to Philadelphia. Why not? Come what might, he wouldn’t do that again. He’d told them a lot about Confederate intelligence operations, too, but not everything. They thought he’d told them more than he really had. If they wanted to ferret out C.S. operatives up

here, though, he thought they'd need more than he'd given them.

The U.S. brigadier general didn't laugh, or even smile. "You may collect the balance of the pay owed you as an officer POW under the Geneva Convention. And then you may…go." He drank more water.

Go where? Potter wondered. Nothing left of Charleston, not any more. And not much left of Richmond, either. Not much left of the CSA, come to that. He was a man without a country. Turning him loose might have been the cruelest thing the USA could do. All the same, he preferred it to getting his neck stretched.

"May I ask a favor of the court, sir, before I return to civilian life?" he said.

"What sort of favor?" If you needed a dictionary illustration for *suspicious*, General Stephens' face would have filled the bill.

"May I beg for a civilian suit of clothes? This uniform"—Potter touched a butternut sleeve with his other hand—"is less than popular in your country right now."

"There are good and cogent reasons why that should be so, too," the chief judge said. But he nodded a moment later; he was at bottom a fair-minded man. "I admit your request is reasonable. You will have one. If, however, you had asked for a U.S. uniform in place of your own, I would have refused you.

You've already done too much damage in our clothing."

"My country is no longer at war with yours, General." *My country no longer exists*. "While our countries were at peace, I lived peacefully"—*enough*—"in mine. I intend to do the same again."

The suit they gave him didn't fit especially well. The wide-brimmed fedora that went with it might have looked good on a twenty-five-year-old…pimp. The kindest thing he could say about the gaudy tie was that he never would have bought it himself. He knotted it without a murmur now. The less he looked like his usual self, the better he judged his chances of getting out of Philadelphia in one piece.

Green banknotes—no, they were bills up here—filled his leatherette wallet. He wondered what the economy was like down in the ruins of the CSA. Would inflation run mad, the way it had after the Great War? Or were the Yankees ramming their currency down the Confederacy's throat this time? Either way, a wallet stuffed with greenbacks looked

like good insurance.

They even gave him a train ticket to Richmond. That settled where he would go, at least for the time being. If he didn't have to pay for the ticket, he could hang on to some more of his POW pay.

That seemed a good thing, because he had no idea how to make more money. All his adult life, he'd been either a soldier—and the bottom had been blown out of the market for Confederate soldiers—or a private investigator—and he was, at the moment, one of the least private men on the continent.

His chuckle was sour, but not sour enough to suit one of the U.S. MPs keeping an eye on him.

"What's so damn funny?" the Yankee asked.

"I may be reduced to writing my memoirs," Potter answered, "and that's the kind of thing you do after you don't expect to do anything else."

The MP's glance was anything but sympathetic. "You want to know what I think, Mac, you already did too goddamn much."

"That only shows I was doing my job."

"Yeah, well, if I was doing my job…" The U.S. sergeant swung his submachine gun toward Potter, but only for a moment. Discipline held. *A good thing, too*, Potter thought.

They hustled him out of the courthouse through a back door. A crowd of reporters gathered at the front of the building. None of them paid any attention to the aging man in tasteless clothes who went by in the back seat of a Ford.

U.S. train stations didn't work exactly the same way as their C.S. equivalents did, but they were pretty close. Potter found the right platform at the Broad Street station and waited for the train to come in.

Some of the men on it turned out to be released Confederate POWs. Some looked like Yankee hotshots on their way down to the CSA to see what they could make by picking the corpse's bones.

Some just looked like…people. Potter wondered what they thought of him. In his present getup, he thought he looked pretty shady.

He got to Richmond late in the afternoon. A U.S. first lieutenant stood on the platform holding a sign with his name on it. He thought of walking by, but why give the United States excuses to land him in trouble? “I’m Clarence Potter,” he said.

“My name is Constantine Palaiologos,” the U.S. officer said. “Call me Costa—everybody does.” His rueful smile probably told of lots of childhood teasing. “Since I got word you’d be coming here, I found an apartment for you.”

“How…efficient,” Potter murmured.

Lieutenant Palaiologos didn’t even try to misunderstand him. “We do intend to keep an eye on you,”

he said. “The building wasn’t badly damaged during the war, and it’s been repaired since. It’s better than a lot of people here are living.”

“Thanks…I suppose,” Potter said.

He smelled death in the air as the lieutenant drove him through the battered streets. He’d smelled it in Philadelphia, too; it was part of the aftermath of war. It was stronger here, not surprisingly. People looked shabbier than they did in the USA. They walked with slumped shoulders and downcast eyes—they knew they were beaten, all right. For the first time since the early days of the Lincoln administration, the Stars and Stripes flew all over the city, not just above the U.S. embassy.

The apartment building didn’t look too bad. Some of its neighbors still showed bomb damage, but it even had glass in the windows again. Freshly painted spots of plaster probably repaired bullet holes, but there weren’t a whole lot of buildings in Richmond that a bullet or two hadn’t hit.

“So—is this where you keep all the old sweats?” Potter asked.

“No, General,” Palaiologos answered seriously. “We try to separate you people as much as we can.

The further apart you are, the less you’ll sit around plotting and making trouble.”

In the USA’s shoes, Potter probably would have arranged things the same way. He let the young lieutenant show him his new digs. It

was…a furnished apartment. He could stand living here. Once he got a wireless and a phonograph and some books, it might not even be too bad.

“Did I see a stationery store around the corner?” he asked.

“I think so,” Lieutenant Palaiologos said.

“As long as you’ve got a motorcar, will you take me over there and run me back?”

“All right.” Palaiologos spoke without enthusiasm, but he didn’t say no.

Potter bought a secondhand typewriter, a spare ribbon, and two reams of paper not much better than foolscap. He got the U.S. officer to lug the typewriter up to the flat, which was on the second floor.

“I said I might write my memoirs,” Potter told him after he put it on the kitchen table. “I may as well.

Maybe the book’ll make me enough money to live on.” Palaiologos’ grunt was nothing if not skeptical (and weary—the typewriter weighed a ton). Potter didn’t care. He ran a sheet of paper into the machine.

HOW I BLEW UP PHILADELPHIA, he typed in all caps. By Clarence Potter, Brigadier General, CSA (retired). He took out the title page and put in another sheet. I first met Jake Featherston late in 1915….

O ne more Election Day in New York City. One more trip to Socialist Party headquarters over the butcher’s shop. One more tray of cold cuts from the Democrat downstairs.

Flora Blackford put corned beef and pickles on a bagel. “One more term, Flora,” Maria Tresca said.

“*Alevai*.” Flora knocked wood. One reason she kept getting reelected was that she never took anything for granted. She wasn’t too worried this time around, not for herself. She hadn’t been worried about the national ticket, either, not till the past couple of weeks. Now…“I hope Charlie La Follette does what he ought to.”

On paper, the President of the USA had the world on a string. The war was over. He’d been at the helm when his country won it. The United

States bestrode North America like a colossus: the Stars and Stripes flew from Baffin Island to below the Rio Grande. Surely people would be grateful for that…wouldn't they?

Not if they listened to the Democrats, they wouldn't. Tom Dewey and his running mate were saying the war was all the Socialists' fault in the first place. If Al Smith hadn't given Jake Featherston his plebiscite, the Confederate States wouldn't have got Kentucky and the state of Houston back. How could they have gone to war without Kentucky?

Nobody now seemed to remember there'd been guerrilla war in Kentucky and Houston and Sequoyah before the plebiscite. Flora agreed that Al Smith might have chosen better. But what he did choose wasn't halfway between idiocy and treason, no matter how the Democrats made it sound.

They were saying they could have fought the war better, too. And they were saying the United States went into it unprepared because the Socialists spent years gutting War Department budgets. Those budgets hadn't been exactly luxurious when Democrat Herbert Hoover ran things, either. Because of the economic collapse, nobody'd had much money to spend on guns…nobody but Jake Featherston.

The Democrats blamed the collapse on the Socialists, too. More to the point, they blamed it on Hosea Blackford. That made Flora see red. Yes, her husband was President when it happened. That didn't make it his fault. Except, in too many people's minds, it did. Hosea was a one-term President.

Herman Bruck looked at his watch. Every two years, he seemed a little plumper, a little grayer. *Oh, and I haven't changed at all*, Flora thought. That would have been nice if only it were true.

"Seven o'clock," Herman said ceremoniously. "The polls are closed." He turned on a wireless set.

None of the results from the East Coast would mean anything for a while. That wouldn't stop the broadcasters from reporting them and pontificating over them. It wouldn't stop inexperienced people from flabbling over them if they were bad or from celebrating too soon if they were good.

"Dewey jumps out to an early lead in Vermont!" a reporter said breathlessly. Flora had to fight the giggles. Of *course* Dewey led in Vermont. The sky would have to fall for him to do anything else.

Vermont had been a rock-ribbed Democratic stronghold for years.

“Do you think we can hold New York?” Maria asked. That was a more important question. New York had a ton of electoral votes. It went Socialist more often than not, but Dewey the Democrat was a popular governor. How many people would vote for him for President because of that? Enough to swing the state?

“I hope so,” Flora said. She didn’t know what she *could* say past that. Polls called the race close, but she didn’t have much faith in them. Pollsters had proved spectacularly wrong before.

Maine held its elections early, and had already gone for Dewey. A moment later, New Hampshire also fell into his column. Again, none of that was too surprising; only in landslide years did upper New England fall out of the Democratic camp.

But when early returns showed Dewey with a substantial lead in Massachusetts and Connecticut, Flora began to worry. Both states were in play in most elections. Herman Bruck said, “All depends on where the returns are coming from,” which put the best possible face on things. He wasn’t wrong, but they shouldn’t have needed to fret so soon.

New Jersey seemed to be going Socialist, and by a solid majority. That made Flora breathe a little easier, anyhow. Any year the Socialists lost New Jersey would probably not be a year where they held on to the Presidency.

To drive her crazy, returns from Pennsylvania started coming in before any from New York. Those showed the race there neck and neck. How many people in western Pennsylvania were blaming the Socialists for the Confederate invasion two years earlier? Flora thought that would have happened regardless of who was running the country at the time, but she could see how others might see things a different way.

“Here is some of the early tally from New York,” the newsman said. Everybody yelled for everybody else to hush. “These results show Governor Dewey with 147,461 votes to President La Follette’s 128,889. In the race for Senator—”

“Where are they coming from?” This time, Bruck wasn’t the only one to ask the question. Several people shouted it at the same time. The newscaster? He went blithely on to results from West Virginia.

“I’ll find out,” Herman Bruck said, and got on the telephone with the canvassing headquarters downtown. When he hung up, he might have been a balloon that had sprung a slow leak.

“What’s the matter?” Flora asked, seeing his face.

“Those are city returns, not upstate,” he answered. The news felt like a blow in the belly to Flora.

New York political battles centered on whether Socialist New York City could outvote the Democratic hinterland. If New York City leaned Democratic…

If New York City leaned that way, it was liable to be a long, unhappy night.

And it was. The air in Socialist district headquarters went blue with tobacco smoke, and bluer with profanity. State after state fell to the Democrats. The Republican candidate, the energetic young Governor of Minnesota, stole his home state and Wisconsin from the Socialists in three-cornered races, and also took traditional Republican strongholds like Indiana and Kansas.

Flora held her own seat. Her margin was down from the last election, but she still won upwards of fifty-five percent of the vote. All the same…“I don’t think we’re going to do it,” she said somewhere around one in the morning.

“How could they be so ungrateful?” Herman Bruck said. “We won the war for them. What more could they want?”

A country too strong for the Confederates even to think of attacking, that’s what. Flora looked around in the gloomy, smoky headquarters. No, the ghost of Robert Taft wasn’t sitting right behind her.

But it might as well have been. The old Democratic stalwart had an answer for the Socialist *cri de coeur*.

After another hour, the newsman said, “Governor Dewey and Senator Truman are going to claim victory.”

The Vice President–elect spoke first. His high, twangy voice full of good humor, he said, “I’m holding in my hands a copy of the *Chicago Tribune*. The headline reads, LA FOLLETTE BEATS DEWEY! I don’t know where they got that headline from, but tonight Tom Dewey and the Democratic Party are winners!”

Cheers interrupted him. He went on, “And tonight the American people are winners, too!” More cheers.

“It is now my privilege to introduce the new President of the United States, Tom Dewey!”

“Thank you, Harry,” the President-elect said. “I am humbled and honored to be chosen to lead the United States in these tense and trying times. I call on all people—Democrats, Socialists, and Republicans—to unite behind me to bind up the wounds of war and help guide the country into an era of peace and one of renewed prosperity and hope.”

Applause almost drowned him out. He said all the right things. Charlie La Follette could have used his speech without changing more than a couple of words. Flora would rather have heard it from La Follette than Dewey.

La Follette had gone back to Wisconsin to vote. He didn’t even carry his home state. A few minutes after the Democrats, he came on the wireless. “The people have spoken,” he said. “I congratulate Governor Dewey—President-elect Dewey, as he is now—and wish him the best of luck in the next four years. I did not expect to be President of the United States during the most profound crisis of the twentieth century. Under Jake Featherston, the Confederate States aimed not merely at beating us but at crushing us and subjecting us so we could never rise again. Instead, we triumphed in the hardest war ever fought on this blood-soaked continent.

“Perhaps we did not do everything as well as we might have. That is easier to see in hindsight than it was through foresight. But the people have called us to account for it, as is their right. May the new President fare well in ruling the territories we have gained, and in the complex field of international relations. With superbombs, everyone is suddenly everyone else’s nearest neighbor. I will serve President Dewey in whatever capacity he may find useful, or in none if that be his pleasure. Serving the people of the United States has been the greatest privilege of my life. Thank you, God bless you, and good night.”

“That was Charles La Follette, the outgoing President of the United States,” the announcer said unnecessarily.

“A good good-bye,” Herman Bruck said as the wireless started catching up on races that remained close.

“I wanted a good victory speech, dammit,” Flora said. All through the crowded Socialist headquarters, heads bobbed up and down.

“Changeover time,” Maria Tresca remarked, and it would be. It looked as if the Democrats would also capture the House, though the Senate would stay in Socialist hands. But an earthquake would hit the executive branch. Since 1920, only Herbert Hoover’s single term had broken the Socialists’ hold on the Presidency. Lots of new and untested officials would try out lots of new and untested policies.

Flora might have been in line to chair the House Judiciary Committee. Not now. Back to the minority.

That hadn’t happened very often since the end of the Great War. If the Democrats proposed foolish laws now that they ruled the roost, she would do her best to keep them from passing.

“Why are the people so ungrateful?” Bruck wondered out loud.

“There’s a story,” Maria said. “Back in the days when Athens held ostracisms to get rid of politicians they didn’t like, an illiterate citizen who didn’t recognize Aristides the Just came up to him and asked him to write ‘Aristides’ on a potsherd. He did, but he asked why. The man answered, ‘I’m tired of hearing him called “the Just.” ’ And that’s what happened to us, or something like it.”

Flora found herself nodding. She said, “Still, it’s a shame to run on a platform where the main plank is

‘Throw the rascals *in*.’”

She got a laugh. If it was tinged with bitterness—well, why wouldn’t it be? She thought the Socialists deserved better than they’d got from the people, too. No matter what she thought, though, she couldn’t do anything about it. Every so often, the government turned over. The world wouldn’t end. The country wouldn’t go down the drain—even if the party in power always tried to make the voters think it would if the opposition won.

She’d lost a brother-in-law to war. Her own brother had lost a leg. Her son lost only a finger. Other than that, Joshua was fine, and it wouldn’t much affect the rest of his life. Next to important things like that, how much did elections really matter?

A l the arguing was over. Jonathan Moss had done everything he

could. He'd tried his damnedest to convince the U.S. military court that Jefferson Pinkard had followed his own superiors' legal orders when he ran his extermination camps in Louisiana and Texas. He'd done his best to persuade them that the USA had no jurisdiction over what the Confederates did to their own people.

Now the military judges were deliberating. Pinkard sat in the courtroom, large and blocky and stolid.

Only the way his jaw worked on some chewing gum showed he might be nervous.

"You gave it everything you had," he told Moss. "I thought that Jew who got hurt was hot stuff, but you're good, too. Don't reckon he could've pulled any rabbits out of the hat that you didn't."

"Thanks," Moss said. If he'd satisfied his client, his own conscience could stay reasonably clear. That was just as well, because he had no doubt in his own mind that Pinkard was guilty. If they didn't hang him, would they—could they—hang anybody?

"All rise!" the warrant officer who transcribed the proceedings intoned as the panel of judges entered the courtroom.

Moss stood and came to attention. Jeff Pinkard stood but didn't. He'd loudly denied that the court had any jurisdiction over him. That wouldn't endear him to the men who judged him. Everyone sat down again.

"We have reached a verdict in *United States vs. Jefferson Davis Pinkard*," the chief judge said.

Beside Moss, Pinkard stiffened. His jaw set. He might claim he was ready for the Army to convict him, but he wasn't, not down deep. Who could be? No one was ever ready to face his own death.

"The defendant will please rise," the chief judge said.

Pinkard did. This time, without being asked, he did come to attention. Maybe the solemnity of the moment pressed on him in spite of himself. He'd fought in the Great War. Nobody said he'd been anything but brave. Nobody said that about Jake Featherston, either. Bravery wasn't enough, not by itself. The cause for which you showed courage counted, too.

“Jefferson Davis Pinkard, we find you guilty of crimes against humanity,” the chief judge said.

Pinkard’s shoulders sagged. The breath hissed out of him, as if he’d been punched in the gut. The officer pronouncing his fate continued, “We sentence you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, at a date to be set by competent military authority. May God have mercy on your soul.”

Jonathan Moss jumped to his feet. “Your Honor, I appeal this conviction and the sentence you’ve imposed.”

“You have that privilege,” the chief judge said. “Appeals will be heard by the Secretary of War and, no doubt, by the President of the United States. I do not believe the upcoming change in administrations will affect the process.”

He was bound to be right. The outgoing Socialists wouldn’t show mercy to someone like Jeff Pinkard.

They were the ones who’d brought him to justice in the first place. And the Democrats had campaigned by saying, *If we were running things, we would have been even tougher*. Still, you had to go do everything you could.

“Do you have any statement for the record, Mr. Pinkard?” the chief judge asked.

“Damn right I do,” Pinkard said—he had no quit in him. “You can hang me. You won, and you caught me, so you can. But that don’t make it right. I was doing a job of work in my own country, following orders from the Attorney General of the CSA—”

“Ferdinand Koenig has also been sentenced to death, among other things for giving those orders,” the chief judge broke in.

Jeff Pinkard shook his head. He was furious, not bewildered. “It’s none of your goddamn business what we did. It wasn’t your country, and they weren’t your people.”

“We made it our business,” the chief judge replied. “We want people everywhere to get the message: doing things like this is wrong, and you will be punished for it. And besides, Mr. Pinkard, you know as well as I do—if you’d won the war, you would have started in on us next.”

Pinkard didn't even waste time denying it. He just said, "Yeah, and you'd've had it coming, too. Fuck you all, assholes."

"Take him away," the chief judge said, and several burly soldiers did just that. With a weary sigh, the chief judge used the gavel. "This court is now adjourned."

Major Goodman came over to Moss. "You did everything you could, Colonel. You had a losing case and a losing client. He's a cold-blooded, hard-nosed son of a bitch, and he deserves everything he's going to get."

"Yeah, I know," Moss said. "You still have to try. He's got courage. I was just thinking that a minute ago."

"Courage is overrated. How many brave butternut bastards did we just have to kill?" the military prosecutor said. "You have to understand what you're fighting for. Otherwise, you're an animal—a brave animal, maybe, but an animal all the same."

"I won't argue with you. I feel the same way," Moss said.

"He can't complain he wasn't well represented," the chief judge said. "You did a fine job, Colonel.

You did everything we let you do, and you would have done more if we'd left more in the rules."

"Not letting me do more will be part of the appeal," Moss said. "The question of jurisdiction still troubles me."

"You saw the evidence," the chief judge said. "Did you go to Camp Humble and see the crematoria and the barracks and the barbed wire? Did you go out to Snyder and take a look at the mass graves?"

"No, sir. I didn't want to prejudice myself against him any worse than I was already," Moss said.

"All right. I can understand that. It speaks well of you, as a matter of fact. But what are we supposed to do with him? Tell him not to be naughty again and turn him loose? I'd break every mirror in the house if we did."

"Well, so would I, when you put it that way," Moss said. "One of the reasons I don't feel worse about defending him is that I knew he wouldn't get off no matter what I did. Still, technically…"

The chief judge made a slashing motion with his right hand. “The law is about technicalities a lot of the time. Not here. We aren’t about to let quibbles keep us from making Pinkard and Koenig and the rest pay for what they can. I hear we were going to shoot Featherston without trial if we caught him, but that got taken care of.”

“Didn’t it just?” Moss said. “That colored kid’s got it made. He’ll be a hero the rest of his life. Too damn bad all the other blacks had to pay such a price.” He suspected one reason the United States were making so much of Cassius was to keep from noticing their own guilty conscience.

“What about you, Colonel?” the chief judge asked. “You’re going through the motions with the appeal, and we both know it. What are you really going to do once this case winds down?”

“Looks like private practice,” Moss answered without enthusiasm. “In wartime, the Army didn’t mind using pilots with gray hair. I even got to fly a turbo in combat, and that was something, no two ways about it. But they don’t want to keep me in that slot now, and I can’t even say I blame ’em. Fighter pilot is really a young man’s game.”

“I was impressed with the way you handled yourself here,” the judge said. “Are you interested in joining the Judge Advocate’s staff full time? This is one of those places where you can count on skill to beat reflexes. Look at me, for instance.” His hair was grayer than Moss’.

“Huh,” Moss said: an exclamation of thoughtful surprise. “Hadn’t even thought of that, sir. Don’t know why not. Probably because I got this assignment taking over from the poor guy in the motorcar crash. It always felt temporary to me.”

The chief judge nodded. “I take your point. And if you’ve had enough of living on an officer’s salary, I can see that, too. You’ll eat steak more often if you go civilian.”

Moss started to laugh. “I’ll tell you another reason you took me by surprise: I spent my whole career between the wars, trying to kick military justice in the teeth up in Canada.”

“I know. I checked up on you,” the chief judge said calmly. “If you wanted to, you could do the same thing here. Lord knows you’d have plenty of business.”

“That crossed my mind, sir,” Moss said. “Can’t say it thrills me, though. Far as I can see, the Canucks got a raw deal. I think I’d say the

same thing if I didn't fall in love with a Canadian girl. But the white Confederates? I was on the ground in Georgia for a couple of years, remember. Those people deserve everything they're getting, and another dollar's worth besides."

"Think about switching sides, then," the chief judge said. "Plenty more trials coming up. Not all of them will be as cut-and-dried as Jefferson Pinkard's, either. We do need people who can conduct a good defense, and you've shown you can do that and then some. But we need prosecutors, too."

He was bound to be right about the upcoming trials. How many people had helped shove Negroes into cattle cars? How many had run up barbed wire and put brick walls around colored districts in the CSA? How many had done, or might have done, all the things the Confederacy needed so it could turn massacre from a campaign promise to reality?

And what would they say now? *I was at the front* or *I was working in a factory* or *I never liked the Freedom Party anyway*. Some would be telling the truth. Some would be telling some of the truth.

Some would be lying through their teeth. Sorting out who was who and giving the ones who deserved something what they deserved would take years. God only knew it would take plenty of lawyers, too.

"I don't think I'd want to defend Vern Green, say, any time soon," Moss said. The guard chief at the Texas camps Pinkard had run was on trial here, too, and it was a sure thing his neck would stretch along with his boss'. "One of these is about as much as I can stomach, at least from this side. Somebody where there really was some doubt about what he did…That might be a different story."

"Nobody wants to do many of these," the chief judge said. "I don't think you *can* do many of these, not if you're going to stay sane. We try not to drive our staff members loopy…on purpose. Think about it. You don't have to make up your mind right away. In fact, if you want to think about it over a drink down in the officers' club…God knows I need one, and I bet you do, too."

"Sir, that is the best idea I've heard in a long time," Moss said.

Whiskey probably didn't do much for the thought process. It worked wonders on Moss' attitude, though. And attitude mattered here at least as much as actual thought. Was this what he wanted to do with the

rest of his working life?

Halfway down the second drink, he asked, “Will the Judge Advocate’s staff handle claims by Negroes against whites in the CSA?”

“I don’t know.” The chief judge looked startled. “There’ll sure be some, won’t there?”

“Only way there’d be more was if more Negroes lived,” Moss answered. “But if you’re involved in that, count me in. And if you’re not, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. I can’t think of anything down here that needs doing more.”

“Now that you mention it, neither can I,” the chief judge said.

He’d sentenced Jefferson Pinkard to hang. That was his—and the USA’s—obligation to the dead.

That the USA might also have an obligation to the living didn’t seem to have crossed his mind till now.

Moss wondered how many other important people’s minds it also hadn’t crossed. Too many—he was sure of that. People in the USA kept doing their best not to think about Negroes or have anything to do with them, the same as they had ever since the CSA seceded.

Moss finished that second drink and waved for another one. He was also sure of something else. He was sure he’d found himself a new cause.

W hat happened to your legs?” By the way the girl at Miss Lucy’s eyed Michael Pound, he might have come down with a horrible social disease.

He shrugged. “I got caught in a burning barrel.”

“Oh.” She was about twenty-five, cute enough even if she wasn’t gorgeous, and plainly not long on brains. “That must not have been much fun.”

“Sweetheart, you said a mouthful. And speaking of which…” Pound gestured. With a small sigh, the girl dropped to her knees.

He liked officers’ brothels a hell of a lot better than the ones enlisted men had to use. The girls were prettier. Nobody hurried you here, either. That was best of all. He could take his time and enjoy it. He

could, and he did.

Afterwards, he left the girl—her name was Betty—a couple of dollars for herself. “You don’t need to say anything to Miss Lucy about ’em.”

“Well, I’ll try. But when it comes to cash, that old bitch has a Y-ranging set like you wouldn’t believe.”

Betty spoke with more resignation than rancor.

Pound got back into his uniform. “See you again, maybe,” he said. She nodded. If she was enthusiastic, she hid it very well. She didn’t mind his money, but she sure wasn’t thrilled about him.

Well, he was old enough to be her father. And he was a damnyankee. And she was a whore and he was a trick. That left it fourth down and time to punt.

Miss Lucy’s had a bar, too—one more amenity enlisted men’s brothels didn’t enjoy. Maybe the assumption was that officers wouldn’t get plastered and smash whiskey bottles over each other’s heads.

From everything Pound had seen, whoever made that assumption was an optimist.

Things seemed peaceable enough in there now. Pound stepped in and asked for a whiskey over ice.

“Comin’ up,” said the woman behind the bar. She was one of the working girls; maybe she had her monthlies or something.

“Thanks,” he said when she gave it to him. “Did this place have a regular bartender back before the war?”

“Sure did. But Hadrian, he, uh, don’t work here no more.”

“Right.” Pound knocked back the drink. The booze wasn’t bad, but it tasted foul in his mouth. With a name like Hadrian, the ex-bartender had probably been colored. And the odds that he was dead now were pretty damn good. Pound set the glass on the bar. “Let me have another one.”

“Sure will.” The woman poured whiskey into a fresh glass and added a couple of ice cubes. “Boy, you drank that last one in a hurry.”

“Yeah,” Pound said. She didn’t know what was eating him. She didn’t

have the faintest idea, as a matter of fact. That she didn't was a measure of the CSA's damnation.

Two good knocks of whiskey made Pound a little less graceful on his burned legs than he would have been without them. He walked back to BOQ through deepening twilight. There was a nip in the air.

Tallahassee lay in the northern part of Florida; it got cool in the wintertime, unlike places farther south.

But the weather wasn't the biggest thing on his mind. His head kept going back and forth. He wished he had an eye that would let him see to the rear. This was the time of day when U.S. soldiers got knocked over the head. By the time anyone found them, the bushwhackers were long gone. That didn't keep hostages from being taken and shot, but killing innocent people also made the guerrillas have an easier time recruiting.

He got back to BOQ without any trouble. Most people did, most of the time. Anything that could happen, though, could happen to you. Anybody who didn't understand that never went to war. Being careless—being stupid—made living to a ripe old age less likely. Pound aspired to getting shot by an outraged husband at the age of 103.

When he went to breakfast the next morning, he realized something was up. He didn't know what; Colonel Einsiedel wasn't letting on. Something was cooking, though. A few people in the know were all excited about it, whatever it was. Pound and the others who noticed that tried to get it out of them. The rest of the officers shoveled in bacon and eggs, oblivious to the drama around them.

The double-chinned major sitting next to Pound was one of those. "Dammit, they should have had hash browns," he complained. "I don't like grits." He might not have liked them, but he'd put away a good-sized helping.

Pound didn't like them, either. He also hadn't taken any. He'd doubled up on toast instead. To him, that was simple common sense. It seemed beyond the major.

Dear God! How did we win the war? he thought. That answer seemed only too obvious. There were just as many thumb-fingered, blundering idiots on this side of the former border as on the other one. No matter where you went, you couldn't escape the dullards. Life would have been easier and happier if you could.

That afternoon, the other shoe dropped. Harry Truman was coming to Tallahassee to talk to the troops and to any locals who wanted to listen to him. An officer who was with Pound when the news got out knew exactly what he thought of that: “They better frisk these bastards before they let ’em within rifle range of the guy.”

“Amen!” Pound said, and then, a beat later, “Dibs on the girls.” He held out his hands as if he were cupping breasts. The other officer laughed.

Truman arrived by airplane two days later. That was judged safer than traveling by train. Sabotaging railroad tracks was easy, but Confederate diehards didn’t have much in the way of antiaircraft guns.

Pound’s barrel was one of the machines guarding the airport as the Vice President–elect’s airliner touched down on the runway.

Pound stood up in the cupola and peered at Truman through binoculars. The Senator from Missouri wasn’t young, but he walked with crisp stride and straight back: an almost military bearing. Fair enough—he’d been an artillery officer in the Great War. Not many healthy men in the USA had missed military service in one war or the other. Even fewer in what had been the CSA.

The Vice President–elect spoke in front of the state Capitol. They set up a podium and lectern for him by a palm tree on the lawn in front of the Italian Renaissance building. Sure enough, military policemen and female auxiliaries searched people in civilian clothes before letting them past rope lines half a mile from the podium. They also searched uniformed personnel. The war had shown that people had no trouble getting their hands on uniforms that didn’t belong to them and doing unpleasant things in the other side’s plumage.

What sort of Floridians would listen to the Vice President–elect of the USA? Michael Pound eyed them curiously. Some he recognized—collaborators. They figured they knew which side their bread was buttered on. There’d been some of that flexible breed north of the Ohio a couple of years earlier. They caught hell when they turned out to have guessed wrong. These plump fellows and their sleek women were less likely to be mistaken.

Others—more ordinary folks—seemed honestly curious. That gave Pound at least a little hope. If they could get used to the idea of being part of the USA… *It’d take a miracle, and when was the last one you*

saw? the cynical part of his mind jeered. The rest of him had no good answer.

Colonel Einsiedel stepped up to the mike mounted on the lectern. “Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure and my privilege to present the Honorable Harry S Truman of Missouri, Vice President–elect of the United States of America.”

Along with the other soldiers, Pound clapped till his palms stung. Applause from the local civilians seemed much more measured. Well, that was no surprise. Metal-framed eyeglasses gleaming in the sun, Truman looked out over the crowd. “If anybody would have told me ten years ago that I would come to Florida to speak to my country’s soldiers here, I would have said he was crazy.” To Pound’s ear, shaped in the northern Midwest, Truman’s Missouri twang had more than a little in common with the local drawl.

“Didn’t Jake Featherston say, ‘Give me five years, and you won’t recognize the Confederate States’?”

the Vice President–elect went on. His jaunty grin invited soldiers and locals alike to see the bitter joke.

“Well, the man was right, but not quite the way he expected to be.

“And now the United States have to pick up the pieces. The buck stops with us. If we do this wrong, our grandchildren will be down here fighting guerrillas. If we do it right, maybe we can all remember that we started out as one country. We have a lot of things to put behind us before we’re one country again, but we can try.”

His voice toughened. “That doesn’t mean the USA will be soft down here. You people who spent your lives as Confederates have no reason to love us, not yet. And we have to be careful about trusting you, too. You stained yourself with the darkest crime a people can commit, and too many of you aren’t sorry enough. So things won’t happen in a hurry, if they happen at all.

“But, for the past eighty-odd years, people in the USA and people in the CSA have all called themselves Americans. Maybe, if we work together, one day that will mean what it did before the War of Secession. Maybe it will mean we really are all part of the same country once again. I hope so, anyhow.

That’s what President Dewey and I will work for. We’ll be as firm as we need to be. But we won’t be any firmer than that. If people down

here work with us, maybe we'll get where we ought to go. God grant we do."

He stepped away from the lectern. This time, the applause from the soldiers was less enthusiastic, that from the civilians more so. Pound didn't think it was a bad speech. Truman was setting out what he hoped would happen, not necessarily what he expected to happen. If the survivors in the CSA got rambunctious, the Army could always smash them.

The Vice President–elect didn't just go away. He plunged into the crowd, shaking hands and talking with soldiers and locals alike. Reading the ribbons on Michael Pound's chest, he said, "You had yourself a time, Lieutenant."

"Well, sir, that's one way to put it," Pound said.

"I just want you to know that what you're doing here is worthwhile," Truman said. "We have to hold this country down while we reshape it. It won't be easy. It won't be quick. It won't be cheap. But we've got to do it."

"What if we can't?" Pound asked.

"If we can't, some time around the turn of the century the new Vice President–elect will come down here to tell your grandson what an important job he's doing. And they'll still search the locals before they let them listen."

Pound had no children he knew about. The Army had been his life. But he understood what Truman was talking about. "What do you think of our chances?" he asked.

"I don't know." Truman didn't seem to have much patience with beating around the bush. "We've got to try, though. What other choice do we have?"

"Treating these people the way they treated their Negroes." Michael Pound sounded perfectly serious.

He was. He faced the possibility of massacring twenty-odd million people as a problem of ways and means, not an enormity. The Army had been shooting hostages since it entered the CSA. Now the whole Confederacy was a hostage.

But Truman shook his head. "No. Not even these people will ever turn

me into Jake Featherston. I'd sooner blow out my own brains." He passed on to another officer.

Had Pound worried about his career, he would have wondered if he'd just blighted it. He didn't. He could go on doing his job right where he was. Even if they busted him down to private for opening his big mouth, he could still help the country. And they wouldn't do that. He knew it. He had his niche. He fit it well. He aimed to stay in it as long as he could.

Winter in Rivière-du-Loup started early and stayed late. After close to three years in warmer climes, Leonard O'Doull had to get used to the weather in the Republic of Quebec again. He tried not to grumble too loud. People here would just laugh at him. They took month after month of snow in stride.

They'd never known anything else.

O'Doull had to get used to a new office, too. He hadn't sublet the other one when he rejoined the Army; he'd just let it go. He reached for things in places where they had been, only to find they were somewhere else. Little by little, he made such mistakes less often.

And he had to get used to a practice that wasn't nearly so frantic as what he had been doing. A sty on the eye or a boil on the butt hardly seemed exciting, not after all the quick and desperate surgery he'd performed. In a way, that was heartening. In another way…He felt like a man who'd gone from ten cups of coffee a day to none, all at once. Some of the energy had leaked out of his life.

His wife was convinced that was a good thing. "You're home. You can relax," she told him—and told him, and told him. After a while, he got better at pretending to believe her.

One freezing morning in early December, his receptionist said, "A *Monsieur* Quigley is here to see you." She made a hash of the name, as any Francophone would have. O'Doull had had to get used to speaking French again, too. That came back fast. These days, he sometimes switched languages without noticing he was doing it.

"Send him in," he said at once.

Jedediah Quigley had to be well up into his seventies now. The retired U.S. officer was a little stooped, but still seemed spry. "Your country owes you a debt of gratitude, Dr. O'Doull," he said in elegant Parisian

French. The back-country patois spoken here had never touched his accent, the way it had O'Doull's.

"That's nice," O'Doull replied in English. He waved to the chair in front of his desk, then pulled out a couple of Habanas. "Cigar?"

"Don't mind if I do," Quigley said. "Where'd you come by these?"

"Friend of mine—a sergeant named Granny McDougald—is a medic in the force occupying Cuba. He sent me a present," O'Doull answered. They both lit up and filled the air with fragrant smoke.

Quigley eyed the cigar with respect. "Smooth! That was mighty kind of him."

"I'll say." Leonard O'Doull nodded. "The box got here a few days ago. Granny and I worked together for a long time, till he took a bullet in the leg. He remembered the name of my home town, and so… *Damn* kind of him." O'Doull smiled. McDougald didn't have to do anything like that. If he did it, it was because he wanted to, because he thought the doc he'd worked with was a pretty good guy.

Knowing somebody you thought well of figured you were a pretty good guy would make anybody feel good.

"I'm glad you came through in one piece," Quigley said. "I would have felt guilty if you stopped something."

O'Doull didn't laugh in his face, but he came close. "Tell me another one," he said. "You've got the conscience of a snappy turtle."

"Why, Doctor, you say the sweetest things." Damned if Jedediah Quigley didn't bat his eyes. It was as ridiculous as watching Michelangelo's David giggle and simper.

This time, O'Doull did laugh. "Well, what can I do for you, you old fraud?" he said. "Or what are you trying to do to me?"

"Do to you? If I hadn't taken Lucien Galtier's land for that hospital, you never would have met your wife. Is this the thanks I get?" Quigley said.

"*Merci beaucoup*. There. And you sent me off to war, and I almost got ventilated more times than I can count. I'd call that a push, or close enough," O'Doull returned. "And you never come around for no

reason. What's your game this time?"

"Game?" Quigley was the picture of offended innocence. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"And then you wake up. Now tell me another one—one I'll believe." O'Doull blew a smoke ring.

"I never could do that," Jedediah Quigley complained. He tried, and blew out a shapeless cloud of smoke. He puffed again, and again managed only a smoke blob. O'Doull sat and waited, smoking his own Habana. Sooner or later, the retired colonel would come to the point. If he wanted to go slow, he could go slow. Maybe a patient would come in. That would give O'Doull an excuse to throw him out.

Time stretched. Quigley smoked his cigar down small. He eyed the glowing coal. O'Doull kept on waiting. Here in Rivière-du-Loup, nothing was likely to happen in a hurry. Relearning that had taken O'Doull a while.

"If you were going to improve U.S. Army medical care, how would you go about it?" Quigley asked at last.

"Simple," O'Doull replied. "I wouldn't get in a war."

"You're not as funny as you think you are," the older man told him.

"Who's joking?" O'Doull said. "It's the God's truth. And I'm a citizen of the Republic. You can't do anything horrible to me unless I'm dumb enough to decide I'll let you."

"The way you were when you put on the uniform again?"

"*Oui. Certainement*. Just like that," O'Doull said. "And I damn well *was* dumb, too. *Calisse!* Was I ever!"

"How many lives did you save?" Quigley asked.

"A good many. But any other doc could have done the same. Hell, Granny McDougald could have saved most of them. An experienced medic gets to where he's just about as good as an M.D. He makes up in experience what he's missing in education."

"That's something we'd want to know. Can you write it down, along with anything else you can think of?"

"Why are you picking me? Why are you picking *on* me?" O'Doull

asked. “You’ve got lots of doctors down in the USA and CSA who still belong to the Army. Let them crank out the recommendations.”

“Some of them will.” If anything fazed Quigley, he didn’t let on. “But we want you, too, exactly because you’re an outsider. You don’t have a military career to care about. You don’t need to worry about stepping on toes.”

“Who’s ‘we’?” O’Doull inquired. “You and your tapeworm? We’ve got some new medicines for that, too.”

He couldn’t get a rise out of his not especially welcome guest. “Come on, Doctor. don’t be silly. You know I still have connections.”

“Sure you do. You’re the guy the USA uses to tell the Republic which way to jump,” O’Doull said.

“But I’m not the Republic, and you’re not in Quebec City. So you can play nice or you can get lost.”

“I am playing nice,” Quigley said. “I could be much less pleasant than I am. But if I browbeat you, you wouldn’t do a good job. You really would be helping here, if you’d take the time to do it.”

How nasty could Jedediah Quigley be if he set his mind to it? O’Doull wasn’t sure he wanted to find out. The thought reshaped itself. He was sure he didn’t want to find out. Yes, that was a lot more accurate.

“You talked me into it,” he said. Quigley didn’t even look smug. He knew he was a power in the land, all right. Grumpily, O’Doull went on, “You know, you’ll be making me remember some things I’d rather forget.”

People here didn’t understand what this war was like. They didn’t understand how lucky they were to be ignorant, either. O’Doull would have been happy to let his memories slide down into oblivion, too. But Quigley, damn him, was going to make sure that didn’t happen. Once you started putting things down on paper, they were yours forever-more.

All Quigley said was, “This is for your country’s good.”

O’Doull wasn’t having that. “Guys get their balls blown off for their country’s good. You think that makes them feel any better about it?”

“No, of course not,” Quigley said. “I doubt this will hurt quite so much, though.”

He was right, dammit. Sighing, O’Doull asked, “When do you want this report?”

“Two weeks?”

With another sigh, the doctor nodded. “You’ll have it.” *And stay out of my hair after that.*

“Thank you kindly.” By the way Quigley said it, O’Doull was taking care of something he wanted to do, not something he’d been browbeaten into taking on. The older man rose, nodded, and went on his way.

Outside, snow would lie at least ankle deep. This was Rivière-du-Loup, all right. O’Doull had grown up in Massachusetts. He was used to rugged weather. Rivière-du-Loup outdid everything he’d ever known back in the States. It wasn’t even close.

Half an hour later, he had a patient. “Hello, Doctor,” said Martin Lacroix, a plump, prosperous baker whose shop lay down the street from O’Doull’s new office.

“*Bonjour*,” O’Doull replied. “What seems to be your trouble, *Monsieur*?”

“Well, I have this rash.” Lacroix pulled up his shirt sleeve to display his left biceps. “I’ve tried home remedies on it, but they don’t do much good.”

“I’m not surprised—that’s ringworm,” O’Doull said. “You should keep it covered as much as you can, because it can spread. I’ll give you a prescription to take to the pharmacy. Put it on twice a day, and it should clear things up in a month or so.”

“A month?” the baker said in dismay. “Why not sooner? If you give me a shot or some pills, can’t I get rid of it in a few days?”

People knew there were new medicines that could cure some ailments quickly and easily. Naturally, people thought the new medicines could cure any ailment quickly and easily. But things didn’t work that way. O’Doull spent a while explaining the difference between microbes and fungi. He wasn’t sure Lacroix got it. The baker left carrying the

prescription but shaking his head.

After a case like that, writing about the work O'Doull had done during the war didn't seem so bad.

That, at least, had mattered. This? While he was sewing and splinting and cutting, he'd looked forward to this with a fierce and simple longing. Now that he had it again, he discovered the danger of getting exactly what you thought you wanted. It could prove as unfortunate in real life as in fairy tales.

He was home with Nicole. That was as good as it always had been. But his practice…After you'd spent time as a battlefield surgeon, prescribing ringworm salve didn't seem the same.

Another patient came in. Françoise Boulanger had arthritis. And well she might—she was seventy-seven, and she'd worked hard all her life. She hurt, and she had trouble moving. O'Doull didn't have much to offer her: aspirin to take the edge from pain and inflammation, heating pads and warm baths to soothe a little. He would have given her the same advice before the Great War. If he'd been practicing before the War of Secession, he would have substituted laudanum for aspirin. Françoise might have got hooked on the opiated brandy, but it would have done as much for her pain as the little white pills did, maybe more.

Leaning on her cane, she shuffled out of the office. *Is this what I've got to look forward to for the rest of my professional life? God!* If he could have brought Nicole with him, he would have run for Alabama and a military hospital.

A little boy with strep throat made him feel happier. Penicillin would take care of that, and would make sure the kid didn't come down with rheumatic fever or endocarditis. O'Doull felt he'd earned his fee there and done some real good. All the same, he wasn't used to taking it easy any more. He wondered if he ever would be.

A corporal waited on the platform when Abner Dowling got off the train at the Broad Street station.

Saluting, the noncom said, "I'll take you to the War Department, sir."

"Obliged," Dowling said. The corporal grabbed his suitcase, too. It wasn't heavy, but Dowling didn't complain. Ten years earlier, he knew he would have. He still wasn't as old as George Custer had been when

the Great War broke out, but he needed only another six years.

Philadelphia looked better than it had the last time he was there. More craters were filled in. More ruined buildings were torn down. Of course, the superbomb hadn't gone off right here.

"How are things on the other side of the river?" he asked.

"Sir, they're still pretty, uh, fouled up." The corporal would have said something strong talking with one of his buddies. As he braked for a red light, he added, "That's such a big mess, God knows when they'll set it to rights."

"I suppose," Dowling said.

"Believe it, sir. It's the truth." The corporal sounded missionary in his zeal to convince.

Dowling already believed. He'd spent too much time talking with Henderson V. FitzBelmont to do anything else. FitzBelmont wasn't the most exciting man ever born—an understatement. But he'd put a superbomb together while the United States was doing their goddamnedest to blow Lexington off the map. Dowling didn't like him, but did respect his professional competence. So did the U.S. physicists who'd interrogated him. They were impressed he'd done as much as he had under the conditions in which he had to work.

The War Department looked a lot better than it had when the Confederates tried their best to knock it flat. Now repairmen could do their job without fighting constant new damage. The concrete barriers around the massive structure remained in place. No C.S. diehards or Mormon fanatics or stubborn Canucks—rebellion still flared north of the border—could grab an easy chance to auto-bomb the place.

Dowling walked from the barricades up to the entrance. He wheezed climbing the stairs. His heart pounded. He was carrying a lot of weight around, and he'd just reminded himself how young he wasn't. *I made it through the war, though. That's all that— well, most of what—really counts*.

Despite the stars on his shoulder straps, he got frisked before he could go inside. The soldiers who patted him down didn't take anything for granted. When Dowling asked about that, one of them said,

"Sir, the way things are, we'll be doing this forever. Too many assholes running around loose—uh, pardon my French."

"I've met the word," Dowling remarked. The enlisted men grinned.

A corporal in a uniform with creases sharp enough to shave with took Dowling down into the bowels of the earth to John Abell's office. These days, the more deeply you were buried, the bigger the wheel you were. And Abell *was* a bigger wheel—he now sported two stars on his shoulder straps.

"Congratulations, Major General," Dowling said, and stuck out his hand.

"Thanks." The General Staff officer's grip was stronger than his slender build and pallid face would have made you think. He'd been fair almost to the point of ghostliness even before he started impersonating a mole. But he had to be really good at what he did to rise as high as he had without a field command. Well, that was nothing Dowling hadn't already known.

"What's the latest?" Dowling asked.

"We finally have a handle on the rising in Saskatoon," Abell answered. "They surrendered on a promise that we'd treat them as POWs—and that we wouldn't superbomb the place."

"Good God!" Dowling said. "Were we thinking of it?"

"No—but the Canucks don't need to know that," the younger man replied.

"Well, well. A use for superbombs I hadn't thought of," Dowling said. "Just knowing we've got 'em on inventory is worth something."

"Indeed," Abell said. "Speaking of which, how is Professor FitzBelmont?"

Before answering, Dowling asked, "Am I allowed to talk about that with you?"

Abell's smile was cold, but his smiles usually were. "Oh, yes. That's one of the reasons you were ordered back here."

"He's a more than capable physicist, and he had some good engineers working under him," Dowling said. "That's the opinion of people who ought to know. What with as much of this town as he blew up, I'd say they're right."

"What do we do with him?" Abell asked.

"He's kind of like a bomb himself, isn't he? All that stuff he knows… Damn good thing Featherston didn't want to listen to him at first. *Damn* good thing. If the Japs or the Russians kidnapped him, I'd flabble," Dowling said. "And he'd sing. He'd sing like a nightingale. He'd probably think it was…interesting."

"Our German allies don't want the Russians getting a superbomb," Abell said. "*No* body wants the Japanese getting one."

"Except them," Dowling said.

"Yes. Except them." John Abell jotted something in a notebook. Even upside down, his script looked clear and precise. "Probably about time for him to have an unfortunate accident, don't you think? Then we won't have to worry about what he's up to and where he might go—or, as you say, might be taken."

What had he just written down? *Kill Henderson FitzBelmont*, the way someone else might have written *eggs, salami,* ½ *pound butter*? Dowling didn't know, but that was what he would have bet. And Abell wanted his opinion of the idea, too. What was he supposed to say? What came out of his mouth was, "Well, I think we've learned about as much from him as we're going to."

Abell nodded. "That was my next question."

"If we're going to do this, it really does have to look like an accident," Dowling said. "We give the diehards a martyr if we screw up."

"Don't worry about it. The people we use are reliable," Abell said. "Very sad, but if the professor tried to cross the street in front of a command car…"

"I see." Dowling wondered if he saw anything but the tip of the iceberg. "How many Confederates have already had, uh, unfortunate accidents?"

“I can’t talk about that with you,” the General Staff officer answered. “Some people we can’t convict for crimes against humanity still don’t deserve to live, though. Or will you tell me I’m wrong?”

Dowling thought about that. He thought about everything that had happened in the CSA since Jake Featherston took over. Slowly, he shook his head. “Nope. I won’t say boo.”

“Good. I didn’t expect you would.” Abell gave another of his chilly smiles. “Tell me, General, have you given any thought to your retirement?”

The question might have been a knife in Abner Dowling’s guts. *So this is the other reason they called me to Philadelphia*, he thought dully. He didn’t know why he was surprised. Not many men his age were still serving. But he thought he’d done as well as a man could reasonably do. Of course, when you got old enough, that didn’t mean anything any more. They’d kick you out regardless. If it had happened to George Custer—and it had—it could happen to anybody.

With that in mind, Dowling answered, “Custer got over sixty years in the Army. I’ve had more than forty myself. That doesn’t match him, but it’s not a bad run. I’m not ready to go, but I will if the War Department thinks it’s time.”

“I’m afraid the War Department does,” Abell said. “This implies no disrespect: only the desire to move younger men forward. Your career has been distinguished in all respects, and no one would say otherwise.”

“If I’d held Ohio…” But Dowling shook his head. Even that probably wouldn’t have mattered much.

The only way you could keep from getting old was by dying before you made it. The past three years, far too many people had done that.

“It’s *not* personal or political,” Abell said. “I understand that you feel General Custer’s retirement was both.”

“Oh, it was,” Dowling said. “I was there when the Socialists stuck it to him. There was blood on the floor by the time N. Matoon Thomas got done.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. Custer was a, ah, vivid figure.” Abell wasn’t lying. And the sun was warm, and the ocean was moist. The General Staff officer went on, “I repeat, though, none of those factors applies

in your case."

"Bully," Dowling said—slang even more antiquated than he was. "I get put out to pasture any which way."

"If you'd been asked to retire during the war, it might have shown dissatisfaction with your performance. We needed your experience then. Now we have the chance to train younger men," Abell said.

He was putting the best face he could on it. He wasn't a hundred percent convincing, but he didn't miss by much. Even so…"How long before they put *you* out to pasture?" Dowling asked brutally.

"I may have a few more years. Or they may ask me to step down tomorrow," Abell answered with every appearance of sangfroid. "I hope I'll know when it's time to say good-bye. I don't know that I will, but I hope so."

"Time to say good-bye," Dowling echoed. "When I started, no one was sure what the machine gun was worth. Now FitzBelmont talks about blowing up Rhode Island with one bomb."

"Best thing that could happen to it," Abell observed.

"Heh," Dowling said. "Maybe it is time for me to go."

"Believe me, the Army appreciates everything you did," Abell said. "Your success in west Texas changed the whole moral character of the war."

Dowling knew what that meant. Not even U.S. citizens who didn't like Negroes could stomach killing them in carload lots. That was why Jefferson Pinkard would swing. Dowling's Eleventh Army had shown that the massacres weren't just propaganda. The Confederates really were doing those things—and a lot of them were proud of it.

"Well…thank you," Dowling said. It wasn't exactly what he'd hoped to be remembered for when he graduated from West Point, but it was better than not being remembered at all. As Custer's longtime adjutant, he'd been only a footnote. The one time he'd been important was when he lied to the War Department about what Custer and Morrell planned to do with barrels. That, he hoped, *wouldn't* go down in history. In this war, he'd carved out a niche for himself. It wasn't a Custer-sized niche. If anybody had that one this time around, it was Irving Morrell. But a niche it was.

“You might do worse than think about publishing your memoirs in timely fashion,” Abell said. “A lot of high-ranking officers will be doing that. If you get yours out there before most of the others, it can only work to your advantage.”

If I do that, Dowling thought, *I* will *have to talk about lying to the War Department*. A good many people would read a memoir of his precisely because he’d worked with Custer for so long. But work with Custer wasn’t all he’d done—not even close. Didn’t the world deserve to know as much?

“I’ll think about it,” he said.

“All right.” Abell nodded briskly. He’d solved a problem. Dowling wouldn’t be difficult, not the way Custer had. The General Staff officer went on, “Do you want to head over to the press office to help them draft a release about your retirement?”

“Do I *want* to?” Dowling shrugged. “Not especially. I will, though.” What did Proverbs say? *One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever*. He hadn’t passed away yet, but he was passing. The United States, like the earth, would abide, and he’d helped make that so.

XIX

H i, hon,” Sally Dover said when Jerry came back to the house. “You got a telephone call maybe half an hour ago.”

“Oh, yeah?” Dover gave his wife the kind of absentminded kiss people who’ve been married a long time often share. “Good thing we didn’t take it out yet, then.” That was coming soon, he feared. You could pretend to stay middle-class for a while when you were out of work, but only for a while. After that, you started saving every cent you could, every way you could. The Dovers weren’t eating meat very often these days, and most of the meat they did eat was sowbelly.

“Here’s the number.” She gave him a scrap of paper.

He’d hoped it would be the Huntsman’s Lodge. It wasn’t. He knew that number by heart, of course.

He knew the numbers for just about all the restaurants in Augusta by heart. This wasn’t any of them. If it was anything that had to do with

work, whether in a restaurant or not, he would leap at it now.

He dialed the operator and gave her the number. She put the call through. It rang twice before someone on the other end picked it up. “This is Mr. Broxton’s residence.” The voice was unfamiliar. The accent wasn’t—if the man hadn’t been born in Mexico, Jerry Dover was an Eskimo.

Hope was also unfamiliar. Charlemagne Broxton—and wasn’t that a name to remember?—was the principal owner of the Huntsman’s Lodge. Heart thuttering, Dover gave his name. “I’m returning Mr.

Broxton’s call,” he said.

“Oh, yes, sir. One moment, please,” the—butler?—said. Back before the war, Charlemagne Broxton had had colored servants. Who among the wealthy in Augusta hadn’t? Where were they now? Nobody who’d lived through the war wanted to think about things like that. Nobody on the Confederate side, anyway—the damnyankees were much too fond of asking such inconvenient and embarrassing questions.

“Broxton here.” This voice was deep and gruff and familiar. “That you, Dover?”

No. My name’s Reilly, and I sell lampshades. The mad, idiot quip flickered through Dover’s mind and, fortunately, went out. “Yeah, it’s me, Mr. Broxton. What can I do for you, sir?”

“Well, I hear you’re looking for work,” Broxton said. “How would you like your old job back?”

“I’d like that fine, Mr. Broxton. But what happened to Willard Sloan?” Jerry Dover asked.

Shut up! Are you out of your mind? Sally mouthed at him. He ignored her. No matter how tight things were, he didn’t want to put a cripple on the street. That could have happened to him if a bullet or a shell fragment changed course by a few inches.

“Well, we had to let him go,” Broxton answered.

“How come?” Dover persisted. “Not for my sake, I hope. He could do the job.” Sally looked daggers at him. He went right on pretending not to see.

“Didn’t have anything to do with that,” Broxton said. Jerry Dover

waited. The restaurant owner coughed. “Can you keep this quiet? I don’t want to hurt his chances somewhere else.”

“C’mon, Mr. Broxton. How many years have you known me? Do I blab?” Dover said.

“Well, no.” Charlemagne Broxton coughed again. “We caught him taking rakeoffs from suppliers. Big rakeoffs. And so…”

If some food disappeared from the restaurant, well, that was part of the overhead. The manager and the cooks and the waiters and the busboys all stole a little. Skimming cash was something else again. If you got caught, you got canned. The one might not cost more than the other, but it went over the line.

Dover wondered why Sloan needed to do it. Was he a gambler? Was he paying somebody else off?

(Dover knew too much about that.) Or did he just get greedy? If he did, he was pretty dumb. And so?

People *were* dumb, all the goddamn time.

“If you need me back, you know I’ll be there,” Dover said.

“Good. I hoped you’d say that.” Charlemagne Broxton coughed one more time. “Ah…There is the question of your pay.” He named a figure just over half of what Dover had been making before he went into uniform.

“You can do better than that, Mr. Broxton,” Dover said. “I happen to know you were paying Willard Sloan more than that.” Sally gave him a Freedom Party salute. He scowled at her; that was dangerous even in private. And if you did it in private you might slip and do it in public. His wife stuck out her tongue at him.

Broxton sighed. “Business isn’t what it used to be. But all right. I’ll give you what I was giving Sloan.”

He named another figure, which did indeed just about match what Jerry Dover had heard. Then he said,

“Don’t try fooling around to bump it up, the way Sloan did.”

“If you think I will, you better not hire me,” Dover replied.

“If I thought you would, I wouldn’t have called,” Broxton said. “But I

didn't think Sloan would, either, dammit."

"When do you want me to start?" Dover asked.

"Fast as you can get over to the restaurant," the owner answered. "I've got Luis tending to it now, and I want him to go back to boss cook fast as he can. A greaser in that spot'd steal me blind faster'n Sloan did."

From what Jerry Dover had seen, honesty and its flip side had little to do with color. He didn't argue with Charlemagne Broxton, though. "Be there in half an hour," he promised, and hung up.

Sally flew into his arms and kissed him. "They want you back!" she said. He nodded. Her smile was bright as the sun. She'd worked in a munitions plant during the war, but times had been lean since.

Money coming in was a good thing.

After Dover detached himself from her, he put on a tie and a jacket and hustled off to the Huntsman's Lodge. He didn't want to be late, even by a minute. As he hurried along Augusta's battered streets, he contemplated ways and means. He didn't want the head cook pissed off at him. That was trouble with a capital T. He'd have to find a way to keep Luis sweet, or else get him out of the restaurant.

To his relief, the Mexican didn't seem angry. "I'd rather cook," he said. "The suppliers, all they do is try to screw you. You want to take it, *Señor* Dover, you welcome to it."

Dover's grin was pure predator. "I don't take it, man. I give it." Luis blinked. Then he grinned, too.

Before Dover could give it, he had to find out what was there. He checked the refrigerators and the produce bins. The menu had changed a little since he went into the Army. Part of that was because some things were unavailable. Part of it was because the damnyankees who made up such a big part of the clientele these days had different tastes from the regulars who'd filled the place before the war.

A glance at the list of telephone numbers in the manager's office said a good many suppliers had changed, too. Some of the old bunch were probably dead. Some were more likely out of business. And some of the new ones had been giving Sloan kickbacks.

"Damned if you don't sound like Jerry Dover," said a butcher Jerry'd known for a long time.

“Yeah, it’s me all right, Phil,” Dover agreed. “So your days of fucking the Huntsman’s Lodge are over, through, finished. Got it?”

“I wouldn’t do that!” Phil the butcher sounded painfully pure of heart.

He gave Dover a pain, all right. “Yeah, and then you wake up,” he said sweetly.

He also enjoyed introducing himself to the new suppliers. If they gave him what they said they would and gave him decent prices, he didn’t expect to have any trouble with them. If they tried to palm crap off on him…He chuckled in anticipation. They’d find out. Boy, would they ever!

For tonight, the place would run on what Luis had laid in. From what Dover had seen, the boss cook hadn’t done badly. If he didn’t want the job—well, that made things easier all the way around.

Most of the time, Jerry stayed behind the scenes. He would only come out and show himself to the customers if somebody wasn’t happy and the waiters couldn’t set things right by themselves. Tonight, though, he felt not just an urge but an obligation to look around and make sure things ran smoothly. He didn’t want Charlemagne Broxton to regret hiring him back.

Everything seemed all right. The Mexican waiters and busboys sounded different from the Negroes who’d been here before, but they knew what to do. He’d started hiring Mexicans during the war. He’d already seen that they weren’t allergic to work.

The customers seemed happy. Some of them were locals. One or two even recognized him, which left him surprised and pleased. More were U.S. officers. They didn’t know him from a hole in the wall, which suited him fine. If the local women with them did know him, they didn’t let on.

Then, around ten o’clock, a woman waved to him. She wasn’t local, which didn’t mean he didn’t know her. He wished he’d stayed in his office. Melanie Leigh waved again, imperiously this time. He didn’t want to go over to the table she shared with a U.S. colonel, but he feared he had no choice.

“Hello, Jerry,” she said, as brightly as if she hadn’t been his blackmailing mistress and a likely Yankee spy. “Don, this is Lieutenant-Colonel Jerry Dover. We’ve been friends a long time. Jerry, this is Don Gutteridge.”

“I’m very retired, Colonel Gutteridge,” Dover said, hesitantly offering his hand.

Gutteridge shook it. He was about fifty, in good hard shape for his age. “You were in the Quartermaster Corps, isn’t that right?” he said.

Dover nodded. “Uh-huh. How did you know?” He looked at Melanie. Her blue eyes might have been innocence itself…or they might not have. Knowing her, they probably weren’t.

“Let me buy you a drink, Dover, and I’ll tell you about it,” Gutteridge said. “War’s over. We can talk about some things now that we couldn’t before.”

At his wave, a waiter appeared. He ordered whiskey all around, asking Dover with his eyebrows if that was all right. Dover nodded. The waiter went away. Before the drinks came back, Dover asked,

“Were you Melanie’s…handler? Isn’t that what the spies call it?”

“Yeah, I was, and yeah, that’s what we call it,” Gutteridge answered easily. “You almost got her caught, you know.”

Jerry Dover shrugged, as impassively as he could. “I gave it my best shot. I could afford the money—and I got value received for it, too,” he said. Melanie turned red; she was fair enough to make that obvious, even in the low light inside the Huntsman’s Lodge. Dover went on, “I could afford that, yeah, but I didn’t want to pass on any secrets. And so I talked to some of our own Intelligence boys, and….”

“I didn’t even wait for the answer to the letter I sent you,” Melanie said. “Something didn’t feel right, so I took a powder.”

The drinks arrived. Dover needed his. “How’d you land on me, anyway?” he said.

“In the trade, it’s called a honey trap,” Gutteridge answered for his former lover. “We ran ’em all over the CSA, with people we might be able to squeeze if push ever came to shove again. It wasn’t like your people didn’t run ’em in the USA, either.”

“A honey trap. Oh, boy,” Jerry Dover said in a hollow voice. He looked at Melanie. “I thought you meant it.”

“With you…I came a lot closer than I did with some others,” Melanie

said.

“Great. Terrific.” He finished the drink in a gulp. What did they say? *A fool and his money are soon parted*. He’d parted with money, and he’d been a fool. He’d needed a while to realize how big a fool he’d been, but here it was in all its glory. He got to his feet. “’Scuse me. I have to go back to work.”

Well, he wouldn’t be that kind of fool again—he hoped. He hurried away from the table.

Y ou know what Mobile is?” Sam Carsten said.

“Tell me,” Lon Menefee urged him.

“Mobile is what New Orleans would’ve been if it was settled by people without a sense of humor,”

Sam said. New Orleans was supposed to be a town where you could go out and have yourself some fun.

People in Mobile looked as if they didn’t enjoy anything.

“Boy, you’ve got something there,” the exec said, laughing. “Even the good-time girls don’t act like they’re having a good time.”

“Yeah, I know.” Sam had seen that for himself. He didn’t like it. “Pretty crazy—that’s all I’ve got to tell you. This was a Navy town, too. If a bunch of horny, drunk sailors won’t liven you up, what will?”

“Beats me,” Menefee said.

Sam pointed. “Crap, that’s their Naval Academy, right over there.” It and the whole town lay under the *Josephus Daniels*’ guns. Several C.S. Navy ships and submersibles lay at the docks. U.S. caretaker crews were aboard them. Sam didn’t know what would happen to them. People were still arguing about it. Some wanted to take the captured vessels into the U.S. Navy. Others figured the spares problem would be impossible, and wanted to scrap them instead.

“Academy’s out of business,” Menefee said. Sam nodded. All the cadets had been sent home. They weren’t happy about it. Some wanted to join the U.S. Navy instead. Some wanted to shoot every damnyankee ever born. They weren’t quite old enough to have had their chance at that. The exec waved toward the Confederate

warships. “What do you think we ought to do with those, sir?”

“Razor blades,” Sam said solemnly. “Millions and millions of goddamn razor blades.”

Menefee grinned. Anything large, metallic, and useless was only good for razor blades—if you listened to sailors, anyhow.

Here on the Gulf coast, winter was soft. Sam had wintered in the Sandwich Islands, so he’d known softer, but this wasn’t bad. Things stayed pretty green. It hadn’t snowed at all—not yet, anyhow. “A couple of more days and it’s 1945,” he said. “Another year down.”

“A big one,” Lon Menefee said. “Never been a bigger one.”

He wasn’t old enough to remember much about 1917. Maybe that had seemed bigger in the USA.

Nobody then had known how awful a war could be. A lot of people were inoculated against that ignorance now. And 1917 had shown the USA *could* beat the Confederate States and their allies. Up till then, the United States never had. Now…Maybe now the USA wouldn’t have to go and do this all over again. Sam could hope so, anyhow.

He didn’t feel like arguing with the younger man, nor was he sure he should. “What with the superbomb and everything, I’d have a devil of a time saying you’re wrong.”

“We’ve got it,” the exec said. “Germany’s got it. The Confederates had it, but they’re out. The limeys had it, but—”

“Maybe they’re out,” Sam put in. “You never can tell about England.”

“Yeah,” Menefee said. “Japan and Russia and France all have the hots for it.”

“I would, too, if somebody else had it and I didn’t,” Sam said. “I remember how rotten I felt when Featherston got Philly. If he’d had a dozen more ready to roll, he might have whipped us in spite of everything.”

“Good thing he didn’t,” the exec said. “But how are you supposed to fight a war if everybody’s got bombs that can blow up a city or a flotilla all at once?”

“Nobody knows,” Sam answered. “I mean nobody. The board that

talked to me when we came in for refit right after the war ended asked if *I* had any bright ideas. Me!" He snorted at how strange that was.

"I mean, if they're looking for help from a mustang with hairy ears, they're really up the creek."

"Maybe the Kaiser will be able to keep England from building any more and France from getting started. Japan and Russia, though? Good luck stopping 'em!" Menefee said.

"Uh-huh. That occurred to me, too. I don't like it any better than you do," Carsten said.

"It's going to be trouble, any which way," Menefee predicted.

"No kidding," Sam said. "Of course, you can say that any day of the year and be right about nine times out of ten. But just the same…Hell, if Germany and the USA were the only countries that could make superbombs, how could we stay friends? It'd be like we mopped the floor with everybody else, and we had to see who'd end up last man standing."

"Hard to get a superbomb across the ocean," Menefee said. "We don't have a bomber that can lift one off an airplane carrier, and the Kaiser doesn't have any carriers at all."

"We don't have a bomber that can do it now. Five years from now? It'll be different," Sam said.

"They'll shrink the bombs and build better airplanes. Turbos, I guess. That's how those things always work. I remember the wood and wire and fabric two-decker we flew off the *Dakota* in 1914. We thought we were *so* modern!" He laughed at his younger self.

Lon Menefee nodded. "Yeah, you're probably right, skipper. But the Germans still don't have carriers."

"Maybe they'll build 'em. Maybe they'll decide they don't need 'em. Maybe they'll make extra-long-range bombers instead. If I were fighting the Russians, I'd sure want some of those. Or maybe they'll make rockets, the way the damn Confederates did. I bet we try that, too. How's anybody going to stop a rocket with a superbomb in its nose?"

The exec gave him a peculiar look. “You know what, skipper? I can see why the board asked you for ideas. You just naturally come up with things.”

“Well, if I do, the pharmacist’s mates have always been able to treat ’em,” Sam answered.

Praise—especially praise from a bright Annapolis grad—never failed to make him nervous.

He got a grin from Menefee, but the younger man persisted: “If you’d gone to college, you’d be an admiral now.”

Sam had heard that before. He didn’t believe it for a minute. “I didn’t even finish high school. Didn’t want to, either. All I wanted to do was get the hell off my old man’s farm, and by God I did that. And if I was the kind of guy who went to college, chances are I wouldn’t’ve been the kind of guy who wanted to join the Navy. Nope, I’m stuck with the school of hard knocks.”

“Maybe. But it’s still a shame,” the exec said.

“Don’t flabble about me, Lon. You’re the one who’ll make flag rank. I like where I’m at just fine.”

Sam wasn’t kidding. Two and a half stripes! Lieutenant commander! Not bad for a man up through the hawse hole, not even a little bit. And his superiors still wanted him around. Maybe he *could* dream of making commander, at least when they finally retired him. He sure hadn’t wasted any time sewing the thin gold stripe between the two thicker ones on each cuff.

He’d flustered Menefee in turn. “Flag rank? Talk about counting your chickens! I just want to see what I can do with a ship of my own.”

“I understand that.” Sam had waited a long, long time for the *Josephus Daniels*. But doors opened to young Annapolis grads that stayed closed for graying mustangs.

Menefee pointed across the water. “Supply boat’s coming up.”

Before Sam could say anything, the bosun’s whistle shrilled. “Away boarding parties!” Sailors armed with tommy guns went down into a whaleboat at the archaic command. Others manned the destroyer escort’s twin 40mms. After that bumboat attacked the *Oregon*, nobody took chances.

If the boat didn't stop as ordered, the guns would stop it. But it did. The boarding party checked every inch of the hull before letting it approach. Sam hadn't had to say a word. He smiled to himself. This was the way things worked when you had a good crew.

Sooner or later, conscripts would replace a lot of his veteran sailors. By now, he knew what he needed to know about whipping new men into shape. He didn't look forward to the job, but he could do it.

Meat and fresh vegetables started coming aboard the destroyer escort. The chow was better than it had been when she spent weeks at a time at sea. Sam had never been one to cling to routine for its own sake. If he never tasted another bean as long as he lived, he wouldn't be sorry.

"I'm going to my cabin for a spell, Lon," he said. "The paperwork gets worse and worse—and if something disappears now, we can't just write it off as lost in battle, the way we could before. Damn shame, if you ask me."

"Sure did make the ship's accounts easier," Menefee agreed. "Have fun, skipper."

"Fat chance," Sam said. "But it's got to be done."

Dealing with the complicated paperwork of command might have been the toughest job for a mustang who'd never been trained to do it. You could end up in hock for tens of thousands of dollars if you didn't keep track of what was what, or if you absentmindedly signed the wrong form. Because he'd had to start from scratch, Sam was extra scrupulous about double-checking everything before his name went on it.

He absently scratched the back of his left hand, which itched. Then he went back to making sure of his spare-parts inventory. Some of that stuff—the part that petty officers found useful—had a way of walking with Jesus.

A few minutes later, he noticed his hand was bleeding. He swore and grabbed for a tissue. He must have knocked off a scab or something. When he looked, he didn't see one. The blood seemed to be coming from a mole instead. After a while, it stopped. Sam went back to work.

Things on the *Josephus Daniels* were just about the way they were supposed to be. If he had to turn the ship over to a new CO tomorrow, he could without batting an eye. His accounts were up to date, and

they were accurate—or, where they weren't, nobody could prove they weren't. People said there was a right way, a wrong way, and a Navy way. He'd used the Navy way to solve his problems about missing things.

Sam grinned. Of course he'd used the Navy way. What other way did he know? He'd given the Navy his whole life. He hadn't known he would do that when he signed up, but he wasn't disappointed. He'd sure done more and seen more of the world that he would have if he'd stayed on the farm.

The only way he'd leave now was if they threw him out or if he dropped dead on duty. He'd been scared they would turn him loose when the war ended, but what did they go and do? They promoted him instead.

"Nope, only way I'm going out now is feet first," he murmured. "And even then, the bastards'll have to drag me."

A U.S. warship under his command anchored in Mobile Bay? He'd never dreamt of that when he signed on the dotted line. He hadn't imagined he could become an officer, not then. And he hadn't imagined the USA would ever take the CSA right off the map. The way it looked to him then—the way it looked to everybody—both countries, and their rivalry, would stick around forever.

Well, nothing lasted forever. He'd found that out. You went on and did as well as you could for as long as you could. When you got right down to it, what else was there?

M iguel Rodriguez said…something. "What was that?" Jorge asked.

His brother tried again. "Water," he managed at last.

"I'll get you some." Jorge hurried to the sink and turned the tap. When he was a little boy, he would have had to go to the well. This was so much easier.

Bringing the water back to Miguel, seeing his brother again, was so much harder. Now he understood why the Yankees had kept Miguel so long. Miguel sat in a U.S.-issue military wheelchair. He would never walk again. So said the letter that came with him, and Jorge believed it. His body was twisted and ruined. So was his face. U.S. plastic surgeons had done what they could, but they couldn't work miracles.

The shell that didn't quite kill him damaged his thinking, too—or maybe he was trapped inside his own mind, and his wounds wouldn't let him come out. The U.S. doctors had kept him alive, but Jorge wasn't even slightly convinced they'd done him any favors.

He gave Miguel the cup. His brother needed to take it in both hands; he couldn't manage with one.

Even then, Jorge kept one of his hands under the cup, in case Miguel dropped it. He didn't, not this time, but he did dribble water down what was left of his chin. Jorge wiped it dry with a little towel.

How long could Miguel go on like this? Ten years? Twenty? Thirty? Fifty? Would you want to go on like this for fifty years? If somebody took care of you, though, what else would you do?

Pedro came in and looked at Miguel, then quickly looked away. What had happened to his brother tore at him even worse than it did at Jorge. And what it did to their mother…Jorge tried not to think about that, but he couldn't help it. She'd be taking care of and mourning a cripple for as long as she or Miguel lived.

"Those bastards," Pedro said savagely. "Damnyankee bastards!"

"I think they did the best they could for him," Jorge said. "If they didn't, he'd be dead right now."

Pedro looked at him as if he were an idiot. "Who do you think blew him up in the first place?

Damnyankee *pendejos*, that's who."

He was probably right—probably, but not certainly. Jorge had seen men wounded and killed by short rounds from their own side. He didn't try to tell his brother about that—Pedro was in no mood to listen.

He just shrugged. "It's the war. We all took chances like that. What can you do about it now? What can anyone do?"

"Pay them back," Pedro insisted. "*Señor* Quinn says we can do it if we don't give up. I think he's right."

"I think you're *loco*," Jorge said. "What happens if you shoot somebody? They take hostages, and then they kill them. They take lots of hostages. They've already done it here once. You think they

won't do it again?"

"So what?" Pedro said. "It will only make the rest of the people hate them."

"Suppose they take Susana or her kids? Suppose they take Lupe Flores?" Jorge said, and had the dubious satisfaction of watching his brother turn green. Yes, Pedro was sweet on Lupe, all right. Jorge pressed his advantage: "Suppose they take *Mamacita*? Will you go on yelling, 'Freedom!' then? It's over, Pedro. Can't you see that?"

Pedro swore at him and stormed out of the farmhouse again. Jorge noticed his own hands had folded into fists. He made them unclench. He didn't want to fight Pedro. He didn't want his brother doing anything stupid and useless, either. The Army had taught him one thing, anyhow: you didn't always get what you wanted.

Miguel had listened to everything. How much he'd understood…How much Miguel understood was always a question. It probably always would be. He struggled with his damaged flesh and damaged spirit, trying to bring out words. "Not good," he managed. "Not good."

"No, it isn't good," Jorge agreed. Just how his injured brother meant that…who could say? But Miguel wasn't wrong any which way. If Pedro went and did something stupid, people for miles around could end up paying for it.

Miguel tried saying something else, but it wouldn't come out, whatever it was. Sometimes Jorge thought Miguel knew everything that was going on around him but was trapped inside his own head by his wounds. Other times, he was sure Miguel's wits were damaged, too. Which was worse? He had no idea. Both were mighty bad.

If Pedro really was planning on doing something idiotic…Whatever Jorge did, he would never betray his own flesh and blood to the occupiers. If you did something like that, you might as well be dead, because you *were* dead to all human feeling. But that didn't mean he couldn't do anything at all.

The next time he went into Baroyeca, he did it. Then he went into *La Culebra Verde* and drank much more beer than he was in the habit of putting down. He didn't walk back to the farmhouse—he staggered. If the electric poles hadn't marched along by the side of the road to guide him back, he might have wandered off and got lost.

His mother looked at him with imperfect delight when he came in. “Your father didn’t do this very often,” she said severely. “I wouldn’t stand for it from him. I won’t stand for it from you, either.”

“Shorry—uh, sorry— *Mamacita*,” Jorge said.

“And don’t think you can sweet-talk me, either,” his mother went on. “You can call me *Mamacita* from now till forever, and I’ll still know you’ve come home like a worthless, drunken stumblebum. I told you once, and I’ll tell you again—I won’t put up with it.”

Jorge didn’t try to argue. He went to bed instead. He woke up with his head feeling as if it were in the middle of an artillery barrage. Aspirins and coffee helped…some. Pedro eyed him with amused contempt that was almost half admiration. “You tied a good one on there,” he remarked.

“*Sí.* ” Jorge didn’t want to talk—or to listen, for that matter. He poured the coffee cup full again.

“How come?” Pedro asked him. “You don’t usually do that.” Miguel sat in the wheelchair watching both of them, or maybe just lost in his own world.

“Everything,” Jorge said. “Sometimes it gets to you, that’s all.” He wasn’t even lying, or not very much.

Pedro nodded vigorously. “It does. It really does! But I don’t want to get drunk on account of it. I want to do something about it.”

You want to do something stupid about it, Jorge thought. He kept that to himself. If you got into an argument when you were hung over, you were much too likely to get into a brawl. He didn’t want to punch Pedro—most of the time, anyhow.

The Bible said a soft answer turned away wrath. No answer seemed to work just as well. When Jorge didn’t rise to the bait, Pedro left him alone. He wondered whether he ought to remember that lesson for later. A shrug was all he could give the question. Maybe he would, maybe he wouldn’t.

He went on about his business. Even in winter, the farm needed work. He tended the garden and the livestock. He went into Baroyeca once more, and came back sober. Magdalena Rodriguez nodded to him in somber approval.

Then Pedro went into town a few days later. When he came home, he was wild with rage. “The Yankees! They’ve taken *Señor* Quinn!”

“I was afraid of that,” Jorge said.

“But how could they know what he stands for?” Pedro demanded.

“He talks too much,” Jorge answered, which was true. “And too many people know he was the Freedom Party man here. Someone in town must have blabbed to the *soldados* from *los Estados Unidos*.” Most of that was true, but not all.

“What can we do?” his brother cried.

“I don’t know. I don’t think we can do anything. The Yankees have machine guns and automatic rifles.

I don’t want to go up against them. If you do, you have to be out of your mind.”

Pedro frowned; that wasn’t what he wanted to hear. “I hope nobody decides to inform on me,” he said. “All we’ve got here are a couple of .22s, and you can’t fight anybody with those.”

“Of course not. That’s why the Yankees let us keep them,” Jorge said.

Then his brother brightened. “Maybe we could get some dynamite from the mines, and we could—”

“Could what?” Jorge broke in. “You can’t fight with dynamite, either. What are you going to do, throw sticks of it?”

“Well, no. But if we made an auto bomb—”

“Out of what? We don’t have an auto,” Jorge reminded him. “Besides, do you know how many the Yankees shoot for every auto bomb that goes off?”

“We’ve got to do something for *Señor* Quinn,” Pedro said.

“*Bueno.* What do you want to do? What can you do that will set him free and won’t get us into trouble?”

Pedro thought about it. The longer he thought, the more unhappy he looked. “I don’t know,” he said at last.

“Well, when you answer that, then maybe you can do something. Now we have to worry about keeping ourselves safe, and keeping *Mamacita* safe, and keeping Miguel safe,” Jorge said.

Miguel sat in the wheelchair. Was he listening to his brothers argue, or not paying any attention at all?

Jorge was never sure how much Miguel understood. Sometimes he even thought it varied from day to day. Now, though, Miguel’s eyes came alive for a moment. “Stay safe!” he said clearly. “Get down!”

Was that the last thing he said or the last thing he heard before the shell crashed down and ruined his life?

Jorge wouldn’t have been surprised.

Pedro gnawed on the inside of his lower lip. “You can put up with things easier than I can, Jorge.”

“Sometimes, maybe,” Jorge said.

“But it gets to you, doesn’t it? It gets to you, too.” His brother pointed an accusing forefinger at him.

“Otherwise, why did you need to go to the cantina and get drunk?”

Jorge spread his hands. “Well, you’ve got me there.”

“I thought so.” Pedro sounded smug. Not many things anyone liked better than being sure he knew what someone else was thinking.

“Careful,” Miguel said, maybe at random, maybe not. Was he still thinking about getting shelled? Or was he warning Pedro not to think he was so smart? How could anyone outside the wreckage of his body and mind and spirit guess?

With a sigh, Pedro said, “I *will* be careful. I won’t do anything that gets us into trouble or gets us hurt.”

“That’s the idea.” Jorge hoped his brother would keep the promise. “Maybe things will get better. We just have to wait and see—what else can we do that’s safe?”

“*Señor* Quinn didn’t talk that way.” Pedro wasn’t ready to give up, not quite.

“No, he didn’t,” Jorge agreed. “And look what happened to him. If he’d just tried to fit in, the Yankees would have let him alone, I bet. But he started running his mouth, and—”

“Some dirty *puto* ratted on him,” Pedro said savagely.

“*Sí*. It only goes to show, it can happen to anybody who isn’t careful,” Jorge said.

He knew what he was talking about. He knew more than he would ever talk about. He’d written the anonymous letter that betrayed Robert Quinn to the U.S. authorities. He hadn’t been happy about it, not then. That was why he came home drunk that evening. But he wasn’t sorry now that he’d done it. He’d kept Pedro safe—safer, anyhow. He’d done the same thing for the whole family. They could go on.

After you lost a war, that would do.

G eorge Enos and Wally Fodor and most of the other guys at the twin-40mm mount had their shirts off.

They basked in the warm sunshine like geckos on a rock. “January,” George said to the gun chief.

“Fuckin’ January. I tell you, man, Florida’s been wasted on the Confederates too goddamn long.”

“You got that straight,” Fodor agreed.

It was somewhere close to eighty. Up in Boston, the snow lay thick on the ground. George had just got a letter from Connie talking about the latest blizzard. He missed his wife. He missed his kids. He sure as hell didn’t miss Massachusetts weather.

“When I get old and gray, I’ll retire down here,” he said.

“Good luck, buddy. The Confederates’ll blow your old gray ass from here to Habana,” Wally Fodor said. “Do you really think these guys’ll be glad to see us even by the time we get old?”

“Probably be glad to take our money,” George said.

The gun chief laughed. “Like that’s the same thing. A whore’s glad to take your money, but that doesn’t mean she’s in love with you.” Fodor laughed again. “Hell with me if you ain’t blushing.”

“Hell with you anyway, Wally.” George smiled when he said it, but he knew how uneasy the smile was. He always felt bad about going to brothels. That didn’t stop him, but it made him flabble afterwards.

All the joking stopped when a supply boat approached the *Oregon*. The 40mm crews and even the men on the battlewagon’s five-inch guns covered the vessel while sailors searched it. That was, of course, locking the door with the horse long gone, but what else could you do? The diehards might hurt other warships, but they wouldn’t get the *Oregon* again.

Everybody hoped like hell they wouldn’t, anyhow.

This particular boat proved harmless. So the searchers said. If they were wrong, if the locals had outfoxed them…George did his best not to think about that. He breathed a sigh of relief when hams and flitches of bacon and sides of beef came aboard. Nothing explosive there.

He wasn’t the only one who relaxed after seeing everything was on the up and up. “We keep eating awhile longer,” Wally Fodor said.

“Yeah.” George nodded. “We keep breathing awhile longer, too. Ain’t it a pisser that we aren’t getting combat pay any more?”

“Hey, we’re at peace now, right?” Fodor said, and the whole gun crew laughed sarcastically. He went on, “’Sides, all the bookkeepers in the Navy Department are a bunch of damn Jews, and they make like it’s their own personal money they’re saving, for Chrissake. You ask me, we’re fuckin’ lucky we still get hazardous-duty pay.”

“What would you call it when the bumboat blows us halfway to hell?” George said. “Hazardous enough for me, by God.”

“Amen, brother,” the gun chief said, as if George were a colored preacher heating up his flock.

The gun crews also covered the supply boat as it pulled away from the *Oregon*. If its crew were going to try anything, logic said they’d do it while they lay right alongside the battleship. But logic said people down here shouldn’t try anything at all along those lines. They were well and truly licked. Didn’t they understand as much? By the evidence, no.

A few minutes after the boat drew too far away to be dangerous, the *Oregon*’s PA system crackled to life. “George Enos, report to the

executive officer's quarters! George Enos, report to the executive officer's quarters on the double!"

As George hurried away from the gun, Wally Fodor called after him: "Jesus, Enos! What the fuck did you do?"

"I don't know." George fought to keep panic from his voice. If the exec wanted you, it was like getting called to the principal's office in high school. Here, George figured he'd be lucky to come away with only a paddling. But he wasn't lying to Fodor, either—he had no idea why he was getting summoned like this.

Did they think he'd done something he hadn't? God forbid, had something happened to his family? He found the rosary in his trouser pocket and started working the beads.

Going up into officers' country gave him the willies on general principles. He had to ask a j.g. younger than he was for help finding the exec's quarters. The baby lieutenant told him what he needed to know, and sent him a pitying look as he went on his way. By now, the whole ship would be wondering what he'd done. And he was wondering himself—he had no idea.

He knocked on the open metal door. "Enos reporting, sir."

"Come in, Enos." Commander Hank Walsh was about forty, with hard gray eyes and what looked like a Prussian dueling scar seaming his left cheek. "Do you know a Boston politico named Joe Kennedy?"

"Name rings a bell." George had to think for a couple of seconds. "Yeah—uh, yes, sir. He used to get my mother to do work for the Democrats sometimes." What he really remembered was his mother's disdain for Kennedy. Piecing together some stuff he hadn't understood when he was a kid, he suspected Kennedy had made a pass, or maybe several passes, at her.

"Family connection, is there?" Walsh said. George only shrugged; he hadn't thought so. The exec eyed him. "Well, whatever there is, he's pulled some strings. You can have your discharge if you want it, go back home and pick up your life again. I've got the papers right here."

"You mean it, sir?" George could hardly believe his ears.

"I mean it." Commander Walsh didn't sound delighted, but he nodded. "It's irregular, but it's legal.

No hard feelings here. I know you're not a regular Navy man. I know you have a family back in Boston.

You've served well aboard the *Oregon*, and your previous skippers gave you outstanding fitness reports.

If you want to leave, you've paid your dues."

George didn't hesitate for a moment. Walsh might change his mind. "Where's the dotted line, sir? I'll sign."

The exec shoved papers across the desk at him and handed him a pen. "This is the Navy, Enos. You can't get away with signing just once."

So George signed and signed and signed. He would have signed till he got writer's cramp, but it wasn't so bad as that. When he got to the bottom of the stack of papers, he said, "There you go, sir."

"Some of these are for you, for your records and to show the shore patrol and the military police to prove you're not AWOL." Walsh handed him the ones he needed to keep. "Show them to your superiors, too. We're sending a boat ashore at 1400. Can you be ready by then?"

By the clock on the wall behind the exec, he had a little more than an hour to let people know and throw stuff into a duffel. "I sure can. Thank you, sir!"

"Don't thank me. Thank Joe Kennedy." Walsh raised an eyebrow. "I wouldn't be surprised if you get the chance to do just that once you're home. If Kennedy's like most of that breed, he'll expect favors from you now that he's done you one. Nothing's free, not for those people."

From what George knew of Joe Kennedy, he figured the exec had hit that one dead center. "I'll worry about it when it happens, sir…. Oh! Could you have somebody wire my wife and let her know I'm coming home?"

Commander Walsh nodded. "We'll take care of it. Get moving. You don't have a lot of time."

"Aye aye, sir." George jumped to his feet and saluted. "Thanks again, sir!"

When he showed Wally Fodor his discharge papers, the gun chief made as if to tear them up. George squawked. Grinning, Fodor handed

back the precious papers. “Here you go. Good luck, you lucky stiff!”

A sailor in the waiting boat grabbed George’s duffel at 1400 on the dot. George climbed down into the boat. The sailor steadied him. The boat’s outboard motor chugged. It pulled away from the *Oregon*.

George didn’t look back once.

When he came ashore, he got a ride to the train station in an Army halftrack. “Nice to know they love us down here,” he remarked to the soldier sitting across from him.

“Yeah, well, fuck ’em,” the guy in green-gray said, which only proved the Army and the Navy had the same attitude about the Confederates.

The station was a young fortress, with concrete barricades keeping motorcars at a distance. There were barrels near the entrance, and machine guns on the roof. George showed his papers at the ticket counter and got a voucher for the trip up to Boston. When the train came in, it had machine guns atop several cars. All the same, bullet holes pocked the metalwork.

Most of the men aboard were soldiers going home on leave. When they found out George didn’t have to come back, they turned greener than their uniforms. *You lucky stiff* was the least of what he heard from them. George just smiled and didn’t let them provoke him. He didn’t intend to end up in the brig instead of in Connie’s arms.

Nobody fired at the train while it worked its way through the wreckage of the Confederacy. As George had when he traveled through the USA during the war, he eyed the damage with amazement—and with relief that he hadn’t had to fight on land. He’d seen plenty of danger, but it might have been nothing next to this. Connie’d got mad at him for joining the Navy, but he figured he was more likely never to have come home if he’d waited for the Army to conscript him. Of course, his old man had made the same calculation….

What now? he wondered. Now he would go out to T Wharf, hope his boat didn’t hit a mine loose from its moorings, and come home to watch the kids grow up and to watch Connie get old. It wasn’t the most exciting way to pass the next thirty or forty years he could think of. But he’d had enough excitement to last him the rest of his days. Fishing was honest work. What more could you want, really?

The stretch from the border up past Philadelphia was as battered as

anything down in the CSA. He didn't see any of the damage from the superbomb in Philly—or miss it. The towns closer to New York City hadn't been hit so hard. From New York City north, he saw only occasional damage. The main exception was Providence. The Confederates had plastered the Navy training center as hard as they could.

And then he got into Boston. On other leaves, he'd seen the pounding his home town had taken. Now he had other things on his mind, and hardly noticed. He slung his duffel over his shoulder and pushed out of the train car. Lots of people—sailors, soldiers, civilians—were getting off here.

"George!" Connie yelled, at the same time as the boys were squealing, "Daddy!"

He hugged his wife and squeezed his kids and kissed everybody. "Jesus, it's good to be home!" he said. "You know that Kennedy guy pulled wires for me?"

"I hoped he would," Connie said. "I wrote him about how you'd been in long enough and who your folks were and everything, and it worked!" She beamed.

He kissed her again. "Except on a fishing boat, I'm never leaving this town again," he said. Connie cheered. The boys clapped. They tried to carry the duffel bag. Between them, they managed. That let him put one arm around them and the other arm around Connie. It was an awkward way to leave the platform, but nobody cared a bit.

R ain drummed down out of a leaden sky. Chester Martin's breath smoked whenever he went outside.

It was nasty and chilly and muddy. He only laughed. He'd lived here long enough to know this was nothing out of the ordinary. "January in Los Angeles," he said.

Rita laughed, too. "The Chamber of Commerce tries not to tell people about this time of year."

"Yeah, well, if I were them, I wouldn't admit it, either," Chester said. "They do better with photos of orange trees and pretty girls on the beach."

“I’ve never seen a photo of an orange tree on the beach,” Carl said. While Chester was off being a top kick, his son had acquired a quirky sense of humor. Chester sometimes wondered where the kid had got it. Knowing Carl, he’d probably won it in a poker game.

“You might as well hang around the house today,” Rita said. “There won’t be any work.”

“Boy, you got that right,” Chester agreed. Rain in L.A. left construction crews sitting on their hands.

“In the Army, they just went ahead and built stuff, and the heck with the lousy weather.”

“Yeah, but you’re not in the Army any more. Good thing, too, if anybody wants to know what I think.” By the way Rita said it, he’d better want to know what she thought.

“Hey, you get no arguments from me. It wasn’t a whole lot of fun.” Chester still didn’t want to think about what he’d done in that little South Carolina town. Oh, he wasn’t the only one. He could blame Lieutenant Lavochkin for most of it. He could—and he did. But he was there, too. He pulled the trigger lots more than once. That was one thing he never intended to talk about with anybody.

Carl asked, “If it wasn’t any fun, why did you do it?”

“Good question,” Rita said. “Maybe you can get a decent answer out of him. I never could.” She gave Chester a dirty look. She still resented his putting the uniform back on. Chances were she always would.

He shrugged. “If Jake Featherston beat us this time around, I was just wasting my time in the last war.

I didn’t want that to happen, so I tried to stop it.”

“Oh, yeah. You were going to whip Jake Featherston all by yourself. And then you wake up,” Rita said.

“Not all by myself. That colored kid did, though.” Chester shook his head. “Boy, am I jealous of him.

Me and all the other guys who put on the uniform. But everybody who fought set things up so he could do it.” He looked at his son. “Is that a good enough answer for you?”

“No,” Rita said before Carl could open his mouth. “All it did was get you shot again. You’re just lucky you didn’t get your head blown off.”

“I’m fine.” Chester had to speak carefully. Rita’s first husband *had* bought a plot during the Great War. “Wound I picked up doesn’t bother me at all, except in weather like this. Then it aches a little.

That’s it, though.”

“Luck. Nothing but luck,” Rita said stubbornly, and Chester couldn’t even tell her she was wrong.

“How many people did you shoot, Dad?” Carl asked.

That made Chester think of the massacre again. It also made him think of firing-squad duty. Neither of those was what his son had in mind, which didn’t mean they hadn’t happened. “Some,” Chester answered after a perceptible pause. “I don’t always like to remember that stuff.”

“I should hope not!” Rita made a face.

“Why don’t you?” Carl asked. “You joined the Army to kill people, right?”

Rita made a different face this time, a see-what-you-got-into face. Chester sighed. “Yeah, that’s why I joined,” he said, as steadily as he could. “But it’s not so simple. You look at a guy who got wounded, and you listen to him, and it doesn’t matter which uniform he’s wearing. He looks the same, and he sounds the same—like a guy who’s been in a horrible traffic accident. You ever see one of those?”

Carl nodded. “Yeah. It was pretty bad. Blood all over the place.”

“All right, then. You’ve got half an idea of what I’m talking about, anyway. Well, imagine you just ran over somebody. That’s kind of the way you feel when you’ve been through a firefight.”

“But when you’re in a wreck, the other guy isn’t trying to hit you,” Carl objected.

“I know. Knowing he’s trying to get you, too…I think that’s why you can do it at all. It’s a fair fight, like they say. That means you can do it—or most people can do it most of the time. It doesn’t mean it’s a game, or you think it’s fun,” Chester said. *Unless you’re Boris Lavochkin*, he added, but only to himself. Maybe that was what made

the lieutenant so alarming: killing didn't bother him the way it did most people.

Carl was full of questions this morning: "What about guys who can't do it any more? Is that what they call combat fatigue?"

"This time around, yeah. Last war, they called it shellshock. Same critter, different names." Chester hesitated. "Sometimes…a guy sees more horrible stuff than he can take, that's all. If you can, you get him out of the line, let him rest up awhile. He's usually all right after that. War's like anything else, I guess. It's easier for some people than it is for others. And some guys go through more nasty stuff than others, too.

So it all depends."

"You sound like you feel sorry for soldiers like that. I thought you'd be mad at them," his son said.

"Not me." Chester shook his head. "I went through enough crap myself so I know how hard it is. A few guys would fake combat fatigue so they could try and get out of the line. I am mad at people who'd do something like that, because they make it harder for everybody else."

"Did you run into anybody like that?" Rita asked.

"Not in my outfit," Chester answered. "It happened, though. You'd hear about it too often for all of it to be made up. Over on the Confederate side, they say General Patton got in trouble for slapping around a guy with combat fatigue."

"What do you think of that?" Rita and Carl said the same thing at the same time.

"If the guy really was shellshocked, Patton should have left him alone. You can't help something like that," Chester said. All the same, he was sure Lieutenant Lavochkin would have done the same thing.

Having no nerves himself, Lavochkin didn't see why anybody else should, either.

Before Chester's wife and son could come up with any more interesting questions, the telephone rang.

He stood closest to it, so he got it. "Hello?"

“Hello, Mr. Martin. Harry T. Casson here.”

“What can I do for you, Mr. Casson?” Chester heard the wariness and the respect in his own voice.

Rita’s eyes widened. Harry T. Casson was the biggest building contractor in the Los Angeles area.

Before the war, he’d wrangled again and again with the construction union Chester helped start. They didn’t settle things till well after the fighting started. Now…Who could guess what was on Casson’s plate now? If he wanted to try to break the union—well, he could try, but Chester didn’t think he’d get away with it.

He started off in a friendly enough way: “Glad you’re back safe. I heard you were wounded—happy it wasn’t too serious.”

“Yeah.” The only wound that wasn’t serious was the one that happened to the other guy. Chester asked, “Did you ever put the uniform on again yourself?”

“A few weeks after you did,” Casson answered. “I was bossing construction projects, mostly up in the Northwest. I’m embarrassed to say I didn’t come anywhere close to the sound of guns. Well, once, but that was just a nuisance raid. Nothing aimed my way.”

“You paid those dues last time around.” Chester knew the building magnate had commanded a line company—and, briefly, a line regiment—in the Great War.

“Generous of you to say so,” Casson replied.

“So what’s up?” Chester asked. “Latest contract still has a year to run.”

“I know. All the more reason to start talking about the new one now,” Casson said easily. “That way, we don’t get crammed up against a deadline. Everything works better.”

He was smooth, all right—smooth enough to make Chester suspicious. “You’re gonna try and screw me, and you won’t respect me in the morning, either.”

Harry T. Casson laughed. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Chester.”

“Now tell me another one,” Chester answered. “C’mon, man. We both

know what the game's about.

Why make like we don't?"

"All right. You want it straight? I'll give it to you straight. During the war, you got a better contract than you really deserved," Casson said. "Not a lot of labor available, and there was a war on. We didn't want strikes throwing a monkey wrench into things. But it's different now. Lots of guys coming out of the Army and going into the building trades—look at you, for instance. And it's not unpatriotic to care a little more about profit these days, either."

"So how hard are you going to try to hit us?" Chester asked. When Harry T. Casson told him, he grunted as if he'd been hit for real. "We'll fight you if you do that," he promised. "We'll fight you every way we know how."

"I think you'll lose," the building magnate said.

"Don't bet on it, Mr. Casson. You know how big our strike fund is?" Chester said. Casson named a figure. Chester laughed harshly. "Make it three times that size."

"You're lying," Casson said at once.

"In a pig's…ear," Chester replied. "We've been socking it away since 1942. We figured you'd try to give us the shaft first chance you got. We'll fight, all right, and we'll make your scabs sorry they were born. We whipped Pinkertons before. With all the vets back, like you say, sure as the devil we can do it again. Piece of cake, the flyboys call it."

"Siccing the Pinkertons on you was a mistake. I said so at the time, but my colleagues didn't want to listen," Harry T. Casson said slowly. "Do you swear you're telling the truth about your strike fund?"

"Swear to God." Martin made his voice as solemn as he could.

"Damnation," Casson muttered. "That could be difficult. Not just a hard strike, but bad publicity when we don't need it…Will you agree to extend the present contract unchanged for another two years, then?

Come 1948, both sides can take a long look at where they are and where they want to go."

"You can get your friends to go along with that?" Chester asked.

“Yes, if you’re sure the rank and file will ratify it.”

“They will,” Chester said. “Some of them might want a raise, but they’re doing all right. Staying where we’re at’s a good enough deal.”

“A good enough deal,” Harry T. Casson echoed. “I’m not thrilled with it, but I think you’re right. It will do. Good talking with you, Chester. So long.” He hung up.

So did Chester. He also started laughing like a maniac. “What was that all about?” Rita asked.

“New contract. Two years. Same terms as the wartime one,” Chester got out between guffaws.

“But what’s so funny?” Rita demanded.

Chester didn’t tell her. One more thing he never intended to tell anybody. The real strike fund was smaller than Harry T. Casson thought, not three times as big. He’d raised Casson with a busted flush, and he’d made the magnate fold. Rain? So what? If this wasn’t a good day’s work, for him and for everybody else in the union, he’d never done one. *The sooner we sign the papers, the better*, he thought. But they would. After the war, a contract was…a piece of cake.

E lizabeth clucked at Cincinnatus. “Aren’t you ready yet?”

“I been ready for twenty minutes. So has my pa,” he answered. “You’re the one keeps checkin’ her makeup an’ makin’ sure her hat’s sittin’ just the right way.”

“I’m doin’ no such thing,” his wife said, and Cincinnatus prayed God would forgive the lie. Elizabeth added, “Not every day you marry off your onliest daughter.”

“Well, that’s a fact,” Cincinnatus allowed. “That sure enough is a fact.”

Amanda was at the beauty parlor, or maybe at the church by now. Cincinnatus reached up and fiddled with his tie. He’d never worn a tuxedo before. The suit was rented, but the clothier assured him plenty of white men rented tuxes, too. Seneca Driver wore Cincinnatus’ ordinary suit. It was a little big on him, but he didn’t have one of his own; he’d got away from Covington with no more than the clothes on his back, and money’d been tight since.

“You look mighty handsome,” Elizabeth said.

“Glad you think so. What I reckon I look like is one o’ them fancy servants rich folks had down in the CSA,” Cincinnatus said. “They’re the only ones I ever seen with fancy duds like this here.”

His wife shook her head. “Their jackets always had brass buttons, to show they was servants.” She snorted. “Like them bein’ colored wouldn’t tell you. But anyways, they did. Your buttons is jus’ black, like they would be if you wore them clothes all the time on account of you wanted to.”

Cincinnatus couldn’t imagine anybody wanting to. The tux fit well, yes. But it was uncomfortable. On a hot summer day, it would be stifling, with the high wing collar and the tight cravat. He didn’t even want to think about that. “I ain’t sorry Amanda didn’t want to wait till June,” he said.

“Do Jesus, me neither!” his wife exclaimed. “She try an’ do that, maybe she have herself a baby six, seven months after they do the ceremony. People laugh at you an’ talk behind your back when somethin’

like that happens.”

“They do,” Cincinnatus agreed. There was something he hadn’t worried about. Well, his wife had taken care of it for him. He sent her a sidelong look and lowered his voice so his father wouldn’t hear:

“Only fool luck we didn’t have that happen our ownselves.”

“You stop it, you and your filthy talk,” Elizabeth said, also quietly. He only laughed, which annoyed her more. It wasn’t as if he wasn’t telling the truth. Plenty of courting couples didn’t wait till the preacher said the words over them before they started doing what they would have done afterwards.

For that matter, Cincinnatus had no way of knowing whether Amanda had a bun in the oven right now.

He almost pointed that out to his wife, too, but held his tongue at the last minute. Maybe Elizabeth was already worrying about that, too. If she wasn’t, he didn’t want to give her anything new to flabble about.

Someone knocked on the door. “Ready or not, you’re ready now,” Cincinnatus told Elizabeth.

“There’s the Changs.”

When Elizabeth opened the door, she might have been ready to meet President-elect Dewey and his wife. “Come in!” she said warmly. “Oh, isn’t that a pretty dress!”

“Thank you,” Mrs. Chang said. She didn’t know a whole lot of English—less than her husband—but she understood enough to nod and smile and say the right thing here.

Joey Chang had on an ordinary suit, not a tux—he wasn’t father of the bride, only father of the bride’s sister-in-law. “I bring beer to reception, right?” he said.

“Right!” Cincinnatus said. Mr. Chang was also one of the best homebrew makers in Des Moines.

Since Iowa remained legally dry, that was an important talent. The authorities didn’t seem to be enforcing the law the way they had before the war, but you couldn’t just go round to the corner package store and pick up a couple of cases of Blatz.

“I do it, then,” Chang said. “You have colored people at your wedding, right?”

“Well, I think so,” Cincinnatus said dryly.

“You have Chinese people, too.” Chang nodded and pointed to himself and his wife. Their and Cincinnatus’ grandchildren could have gone into either category. Chang went on, “You have white people, too?”

“Yeah, we will,” Cincinnatus replied. “Some of the guys from the butcher shop where Calvin works.

Little bit of everything.”

“Maybe not so bad,” Joey Chang said. Considering how hard he and his wife had resisted Grace’s marriage to Achilles, that was a lot from him. He insisted they would have liked it just as little had Grace married a white guy. Cincinnatus…almost believed him. Grandchildren had softened the Changs, as grandchildren have a way of doing.

“We should go,” Elizabeth said. “Don’t want to be late.” The church was a block and a half away, so there was very little risk of that. But

Elizabeth *would* flabble. It was a wedding, after all.

“Long as Amanda and Calvin are there—and the minister—don’t hardly matter if we show up or not,”

Cincinnatus said. He made his wife sputter and fume, which was what he’d had in mind. Joey Chang tipped him a wink. Cincinnatus grinned back.

The Changs made much of Seneca Driver as they walked to church. They took old people seriously.

“Mighty nice great-grandchillun,” Seneca said. “*Mighty* nice. I don’t care none if they’s half Chinese, neither. I wouldn’t care if they was red, white, an’ blue. *Mighty* nice.”

Cincinnatus wished he could move along with his back straight and without a stick in his right hand. His leg still hurt. So did his shoulder. The steel plate in his skull made mine detectors go off—an amused Army engineer had proved that one day.

Beat up or not, though, he was still alive and kicking—as long as he didn’t have to kick too hard. With a little luck, he’d see more grandchildren before long. Compared to most of the surviving Negroes in the conquered Confederacy, he had the world by the tail.

Calvin’s father and mother were already at the church. They were pleasant people, a few years younger than Cincinnatus. Abraham Washington ran a secondhand-clothes store. It wasn’t a fancy way to make a living, but he’d done all right. Calvin had a brother, Luther, a year younger than he was. Luther wore a green-gray uniform and had a PFC’s chevron on his sleeve. He looked tough and strong—and proud of himself, too.

“I didn’t see any combat, sir,” he said to Cincinnatus. “Heard stories about what you truck drivers went through, though. What was it like?”

“Son, you didn’t miss a thing,” Cincinnatus answered. “That’s the honest to God truth. Getting shot at when they miss is bad. If they hit you, it’s worse.”

“I told him that,” Abraham Washington said. “I told him, but he didn’t want to listen. He went and volunteered anyway.”

“He got the chance to show he was as good as a white man, and he

went and took it," Cincinnatus said. "How you gonna blame him for that?"

Luther Washington grinned from ear to ear. "*Somebody* understands why I did what I did!"

His father only sniffed. By the way Abraham Washington sounded, his people had lived in Des Moines for generations. He was used to being thought as good as a white man—or nearly as good, anyhow.

Having grown up in the CSA, Cincinnatus could see why Luther was willing to lay his life on the line to get rid of the *nearly*. During the Great War, plenty of Negroes joined the Confederate Army to win citizenship for themselves. Plenty more would have this time around, if only Jake Featherston had let them. That urge to prove himself—that feeling you *had* to keep proving yourself—stayed strong in Negroes on both sides of the old border.

Cincinnatus didn't want to think about Jake Featherston, not at his daughter's wedding. He looked around the church. The Changs had gone over with Achilles and Grace and their grandchildren—who, in Cincinnatus' considered and unbiased (of course!) opinion, were the brightest and most beautiful grandbabies in the whole world.

And there were a few whites, as he'd told Joey Chang there would be. They were doing their best—some doing better than others—to be friendly with the colored people sitting around them.

Cincinnatus smiled to himself. The whites were a small minority here. They were getting a tiny taste of what Negroes in the USA went through all the time.

But it was better here than it ever had been down in the Confederacy. Not good, necessarily, but better. Cincinnatus had experience with both places. He knew when he was better off. He'd voted here.

His children had graduated from high school. Maybe his grandchildren would go to college. Down in the CSA, back before the Great War, he'd been unusual—and an occasional object of suspicion—because he could read and write.

A burly young man whose shoulders strained the fabric of his tuxedo jacket came up. His name was Amos Something-or-other. He was one of Calvin's friends, and the best man. "Wedding procession's forming up," he said.

“That’s us,” Elizabeth said. Cincinnatus couldn’t very well tell her she was wrong.

Amanda seemed ready to burst with glee. That was how the bride was supposed to act on her wedding day. Calvin didn’t look ready to run for his life. For a groom on his wedding day, that would do.

The organist struck up the wedding march. Down the aisle everybody went. A photographer fired off one flashbulb after another. Yellow-purple spots danced in front of Cincinnatus’ eyes.

Up at the front of the church, he and the rest of Amanda’s supporters went to the right, those of Calvin Washington to the left. The minister did what ministers do. After a while, he got to, “Who giveth this woman?”

“I do,” Cincinnatus said proudly.

Amanda and Calvin got to say their “I do”s a couple of minutes later. Amanda’s ring had a tiny diamond on it. Tiny or not, it sparkled under the electric lights. It shone no brighter than Amanda’s smile, though. The kiss the new husband and wife exchanged was decorous, but not chaste.

Down the street three doors to the reception, Joey Chang’s good beer was highly unofficial, but also highly appreciated. The minister drank several glasses and got very lively. Cincinnatus hadn’t expected that. Preachers were supposed to be a straitlaced lot, weren’t they? But if this one wanted to let his processed hair down, why not?

One of the white men congratulated Cincinnatus. “Your daughter’s a pretty girl, and she seems mighty nice,” he said.

“Thank you kindly.” Cincinnatus was ready to approve of anybody who approved of Amanda.

“This is a good bash, too,” the white man said. “People get together and have a good time, they’re all pretty much the same, you know?”

He seemed to think he’d come out with something brilliant. “I won’t quarrel with you,” Cincinnatus said.

“And you’ve got to tell me who makes your beer,” the white man added.

“That fella right over there.” Cincinnatus pointed to Joey Chang, who

held a glass of his own product.

“His daughter’s married to my son.”

“Well, how about that?” the white man said, which was safe enough under almost any circumstances.

“Stir everything around, huh?”

“Why not?” Cincinnatus waited to see if the ofay would go any further.

But he didn’t. He just said, “How about that?” again.

Good, Cincinnatus thought. He wanted no trouble, not today. He never wanted trouble, but he’d landed in some. He wouldn’t worry about that, either. This was Amanda’s day, and it should be a good one. He smiled. He wanted her night to be better yet.

XX

Y ou! Pinkard!” After Jeff Pinkard got convicted in the Yankees’ military court—kangaroo court, he thought of it still—U.S. personnel replaced all the Texans at the Houston jail. He hated those sharp, harsh, quick accents.

“Yeah?” he said. “What is it?”

“Get up,” the guard told him. “You got visitors.”

It was only a week till they hanged him. “Yeah?” he said again, heaving his bulk off the cot. “Visitors?”

That roused his curiosity. The only person he’d seen lately was Jonathan Moss, here to tell him another appeal had failed. He had none left—the President of the USA and the U.S. Supreme Court had declined to spare him. “Who?”

“You’ll find out when you get there, won’t you?” The guard unlocked his cell. Other men in green-gray stood by with submachine guns at the ready. If Jeff got cute, he’d die a week early, that was all. *And nobody’ll miss me, either*, he thought miserably. When you were going to hang in a week, self-pity came easy.

He went down the hall in front of the guards. Was getting shot a quicker, cleaner way to go than the rope? He didn't want to go at all, dammit. As far as he was concerned, he hadn't done anything to deserve killing.

When he got to the visiting room, he stopped in his tracks. There on the other side of the wire were Edith and Willie and Frank, and little Raymond in his wife's arms. All of them except Raymond started to cry when they saw him.

"Aww," Jeff said, and then, "You shouldn't have come."

"We would've done it more, Papa Jeff," Willie said, "only the damnyankees wouldn't let us for a long time."

"We're here now," Edith said. "We love you, Jeff."

"Yeah, well, I love y'all, too," Jeff said. "And a whole fat lot of good it's gonna do anybody."

He went up to the mesh that separated him from his family. He pressed his hands against it as hard as he could. They did the same thing on the other side. Try as he would, he couldn't quite touch them.

"It's not right, Papa Jeff," Frank said. "They got no business messin' with you. It was only niggers, for heaven's sake."

"Well, you know that, and I know that, and everybody down here knows that, too," Jeff answered.

"Only trouble is, the Yankees don't know it, and they're the ones who count."

"Can't anybody do anything?" Edith asked.

"Doesn't look like it. Oh, people *could* do something, but nobody wants to. What do you expect?

They're Yankees."

His wife started crying harder. "It's not fair. It's not right. Just on account of they won the damn war…What am I gonna do without you, Jeff?"

"You'll do fine," Jeff said. "You know you will." *What am* I *gonna do*

without me? he wondered.

That, unfortunately, had no good answer. He was going to die, was what he was going to do. “And don’t you worry none about me. I’ll be up in heaven with God and the angels and stuff.”

He didn’t really believe in heaven, not with halos and harps and white robes. Playing the harp all day got old fast, anyway. But Edith was more religious than he was. If he could make her feel better, he would.

She went on crying, though, which made Willie and Frank snuffle more, too. “I don’t want to lose you!”

“I don’t want it to happen, either, but I don’t have a whole lot to say about it,” he replied.

“You’ve got a baby. You’ve got me. You’ve got my boys, who you raised like you were their daddy,”

Edith said.

All of that was true. It cut no ice with anybody up in Yankeeland. The Yankees went on and on about all the Negroes he’d killed. As if they’d cared about those Negroes alive! They sure hadn’t wanted them going up to the USA. From what he heard, they still didn’t want Negroes from the CSA going up to the USA.

They were going to hang him anyhow. They could, and they would.

A guard came in on the other side, the free side. “Time’s up,” he said.

“We love you, Jeff!” Edith said through her tears. She carried Raymond out. The boys were still crying, too.

“Come on, Pinkard,” said a guard on Jeff ’s side of the visiting room. “Back to the cell you go.”

Back he went. The cell was familiar. Nothing bad would happen to him while he was in it. Pretty soon, though, they’d take him out one last time. He wouldn’t be going back after that. Well, what else did *one last time* mean?

Two days later, he had another visitor: Jonathan Moss again. “Thought you gave up on me,” he said through the damned unyielding mesh.

“I don’t know what else I can do for you,” Moss said. “I wish I did. I haven’t got a hacksaw blade on me or anything. Even if I did, they would have found it when they searched me.”

“Yeah,” Pinkard said. “So—no reprieve from the governor. Hell, no governor. Son of a bitch thinks he’s President of Texas now. No reprieve from the President of the USA. No reprieve from the assholes on the Yankee Supreme Court. So what else is there?”

“Well, you’re not the only one they’re coming down on, if that makes you feel any better,” Jonathan Moss replied.

“You mean, like misery loves company?” Jeff shrugged. “I’d love it if I didn’t have the misery. But yeah, go ahead—tell me about the others. I don’t have a wireless set, and they don’t give me papers, so I don’t know jack shit about what’s going on out there.”

“They hanged Ferdinand Koenig and Saul Goldman yesterday.”

“Goddamn shame,” Pinkard said. “They were good men, both of ’em. Confederate patriots. Why else would you Yankees hang people?”

“For murdering millions? For telling lies about it in papers and magazines and on the wireless?” Moss suggested.

“We didn’t get rid of anybody who didn’t have it coming,” Jeff said stubbornly. “And like your side didn’t tell any lies to your people during the war. Yeah, sure.”

The military attorney sighed. “We didn’t tell lies about things like that. We didn’t do things like that—not to Negroes, not to Jews, not to anybody.”

He undercut what Jeff would have said next: that the USA didn’t have many Negroes to get rid of.

The United States were crawling with Jews. Everybody knew that. Instead, he said, “What other kind of good news have you got for me?”

“If it makes you feel any better, you aren’t the only camp commandant and guard chief to get condemned,” Moss told him. “Vern Green goes right with you here. And…you knew Mercer Scott back in Louisiana, right?”

“Yeah.” Pinkard scowled at him. “You know what? It doesn’t make me

feel one goddamn bit better."

"I'm sorry. If there were anything else I could try, I'd try it. If you have any ideas, sing out."

Jeff shook his head. "What's the use? Nobody in the USA cares. Nobody in the USA understands.

We did what we had to do, that's all."

"'It looked like a good idea at the time.'" Moss sounded like somebody quoting something. Then he sighed. "That isn't enough to do you any good, either."

"Didn't reckon it would be," Jeff said. "Go on, then. You tried. I said that before, I expect. Won't be long now."

In some ways the days till the hanging crawled past. In others, they flew. The last days of his life, and he was stuck in a cell by himself. Not the way he would have wanted things to turn out, but what did that have to do with anything? He asked the guards for a copy of *Over Open Sights*.

"Wouldn't you rather have a Bible?" one of them said.

"If I wanted a Bible, don't you reckon I would've told you so?" Jeff snapped.

A little to his surprise, they brought him Jake Featherston's book. He paged through it. Everything in there made such good sense. A damn shame it hadn't worked out for real. But the Negroes in the CSA were gone, or most of them were, and the damnyankees couldn't change that even if they did win the war.

The night before they were going to hang him, the guards asked what he wanted for supper. "Fried chicken and fried potatoes and a bottle of beer," he answered. They gave it to him, except the beer came in a tin cup. He ate with good appetite. He slept…some, anyhow.

They asked him what he wanted once more at breakfast time. "Bacon and eggs and grits," he told them, and he got that, too. He cleaned his plate again, and poured down the coffee that came with the food.

"Want a preacher?" a guard asked.

Pinkard shook his head. "Nah. What for? I've got a clean conscience. If

you don't, you need a preacher worse'n I do."

They cuffed his hands behind him and led him out to the prison yard. They'd run up a gallows there; he'd listened to the carpentry in his cell. Now he saw it was a gallows built for two. Another party of U.S. guards led Vern Green out from a different part of the jail.

Vern looked like hell. His nerve must have failed him at last. He gave Jeff a forlorn nod. "How come you ain't about to piss yourself like me?"

"What's the use?" Jeff answered. "I'd beg if I thought it'd do any good, but it won't. So I'll go out the best way I know how. Why give these assholes the satisfaction of watching me blubber?"

Reporters watched from a distance. Guards made sure they stayed back. Otherwise, they would have got up to the condemned men and yelled questions in their faces. Jeff figured Yankee reporters had to be even worse than their Confederate counterparts, and the Confederates were pretty bad.

A guard had to help Vern Green up the stairs to the platform. Jeff made it under his own power. His knees were knocking, but he didn't let it show. Pride was the last thing he had left. *And much good it does me, too*, he thought.

Along with more guards and the hangman, a minister waited up there. "Will you pray with me?" he asked Jeff.

"No." Jeff shook his head. "I made it this far on my own. I'll go out the same way."

Vern talked with the preacher. They went through the Twenty-third Psalm together. When they finished, Vern said, "I'm still scared."

"No one can blame you for that," the minister said.

A guard held out a pack of cigarettes to Jeff. "Thanks," he said. "You'll have to take it out for me."

"I will," the guard said. The smoke was a Raleigh, so it tasted good. Vern also smoked one. The guards let them finish, then walked them onto the traps. The hangman came over and set the rope around Jeff 's neck. Then he put a burlap bag over Jeff 's head.

“Make it quick if you can,” Jeff said. The bag was white, not black. He could still see light and shadow through it. His heart pounded now—every beat might be the last.

“I’m doing my best,” the hangman answered. His footsteps moved away, but not far. *They’ve got no right, damn them*, Jeff thought. *They’ve*—A lever clacked.

The trap dropped.

S tuck in fucking Alabama,” Armstrong Grimes grumbled. “What could be worse than this?”

Squidface was cleaning his captured automatic Tredegar. He looked up from the work. “Well, you could be in hell,” he said.

“Who says I’m not?” Armstrong said. “It’s a godforsaken miserable place, and I can’t get out of it. If that’s not hell, what do you call it?”

“Pittsburgh,” Squidface answered, which jerked a laugh out of Armstrong. After guiding an oily rag through the Tredegar’s barrel with a cleaning rod, Squidface went on, “If you’re gonna get screwed any which way, lay back and enjoy it, you know?”

“Tell me another one,” Armstrong said. “Army chow. The people fucking hate us. We’re not careful, we get scragged. Even the broads are scared of us now. If they get friendly, they end up dead. And we don’t take hostages for that, so there’s nothing to hold the locals back.”

“Army chow’s not so bad,” Squidface said. “There’s always enough of it nowadays, anyhow. Back before I went in, I couldn’t always count on three squares.” He was skinny enough to make that easy to believe.

But Armstrong was in the mood to bitch, and he wasn’t about to let anybody stop him. “You’re just saying that ’cause you’re turning into a lifer.”

“Yeah? So? You oughta do the same,” Squidface answered. “God knows how long you’re gonna stay stuck here. You make a pretty good soldier, even if you are a big target. Why not leave the uniform on?

You go back to Civvy Street, you’ll end up bored outa your skull all the goddamn time.”

“I’d sooner be bored than bore-sighted,” Armstrong said.

Squidface ignored the joke. That pissed Armstrong off, because he thought it was better than most of the ones he made. But, as if he hadn’t spoken, the PFC continued, “Besides, you can’t tell me you aren’t getting any down here. Up in the USA, the girls’ll slap your face if you try and cop a feel. You want to fuck, you gotta get married.”

“There’s still whorehouses in the USA,” Armstrong said.

“Yeah? So?” Squidface said again.

He left it right there. Armstrong grunted. With a whore, it was nothing but a business deal. Some of the gals down here were looking for love. They wanted to think they mattered to you, so you mattered to them. They weren’t just going through the motions. That did make it better.

All the same…“You figure because you want to stay in, everybody ought to want to stay in.”

“My ass,” Squidface retorted. “Plenty of the cocksuckers in this company, I wish they’d get the fuck out. Raw recruits who don’t know their nuts from Wednesday’d be better. But you’re all right. You could do it. You might even end up an officer.”

“Christ! What’re you smoking?” Armstrong laughed out loud. “Whatever it is, I want some.”

“I’m serious, man,” Squidface said. “Me, I’m a noncom. It’s what I’m made for. You’ve got more of the ‘Yes, sir!’ they like when they promote people.”

“Oh, man, give me a fucking break,” Armstrong said.

“You do,” Squidface insisted. “Shit, you’re Armstrong. You never got a gross nickname hung on you or nothin’.”

“That’s ’cause I’ve got a gross name instead,” Armstrong said. “Hot damn.”

“All the same.” Squidface wasn’t about to let up. “I can see the newspaper story now. It’s fucking 1975, and Colonel Armstrong Grimes gets a Medal of Honor for leading the regiment that takes Paris away from the Germans.”

“If the Germans want the place, they’re welcome to it, far as I’m

concerned," Armstrong said. "It's full of Frenchmen—or it was till they blew it up."

"So don't listen to me."

"Like I ever did." As long as they were zinging each other, Armstrong was happy enough. But they'd come much too close to getting serious there, and getting serious made him nervous.

He wasn't the only U.S. soldier who got nervous in Alabama. Somebody well up the chain of command had the bright idea that a football game between occupiers and locals might show people that men from the USA weren't so different from anybody else—no horns, no tails, no pitchforks.

The company CO asked Armstrong, "Didn't you play football in high school?"

"Some," he answered. "I was second string. I wasn't that great or anything."

"You want a chance to knock Confederates on their ass without getting gigged for it?"

"Where do I sign up?"

Squidface wanted nothing to do with that. "I'm glad I'm a little guy," he said. "Those assholes on the other side, they're gonna be lookin' for a chance to rack you up. This ain't gonna be no friendly game."

"Yeah, well, we'll work out on them, too," Armstrong said.

"They better have plenty of ambulances ready," Squidface said darkly.

They got uniforms. Whoever was in charge of what they were calling the Peace Bowl had clout. U.S.

soldiers wore blue suits, their Confederate counterparts red. They got cleats to take the place of their boots. They got helmets. Armstrong wondered if he wouldn't do better with his regular steel pot than with this leather contraption.

The athletes on the U.S. team were in much better shape than the high-school guys had been.

Armstrong felt he'd earned something when he got named a starting tackle. They had a quarterback who could really throw and a couple

of ends who could catch. The ends weren't the swiftest in the world, but they'd do.

They played the Peace Bowl at a high-school stadium. U.S. soldiers filled half the stands, locals the other half. To make sure the bowl stayed peaceful, the locals got frisked before they could go inside.

Armstrong got his first look at the red team then. He didn't like what he saw. They were slimmer and rangier than the U.S. players. They looked fast. That wasn't what worried him, though. One glance told him these guys were going to play as if they were fighting to hold the U.S. Army out of Chattanooga.

Squidface had it straight. Peace Bowl, nothing. This wouldn't be football. This would be war.

The red team—they seemed to call themselves the Wolves—won the toss. When the U.S. kicker booted the ball, Armstrong thundered down the field. The first collision was always welcome. He slammed into a guy in red. "Yankee cocksuckin' motherfucker," the man said, and tried to lift a knee into his family jewels.

"Kiss my ass, Charlie." Armstrong twisted and took the knee on his hip pad. "You want to play like that? We'll play like that."

"Bring it on," the other guy said.

And they did. Both sides did, the whole game long. Armstrong got punched and elbowed and gouged and kicked. Every tackle was a piling-on penalty. It was trench warfare, only without trenches. The Confederates *were* faster. The U.S. team was a touch stronger.

One Confederate broke his leg. As far as Armstrong could tell, that was an accident—the tackle looked clean. One U.S. player had his shoulder dislocated. On the next play, the Wolf who dislocated it got racked up. Armstrong couldn't see just what happened to him; somebody was trying to step on his face. Whatever it was, the guy in red got carried off on a stretcher.

With four minutes to go, the Confederates punted to the U.S. team. The blues were on their own thirty, down 28–24. "This is it," the quarterback said in the huddle. "We get a touchdown, we win. We fuck up, we look like chumps in front of these shitheads and in front of our own guys. We gonna let that happen?"

“No!” they chorused.

“All right. Short pass into the left flat on three. Let’s go get ’em.”

“You shot my brother, asshole,” said the guy across the line from Armstrong.

“Don’t worry, cuntlips,” Armstrong said sweetly. “You’re next.”

And he was right, but not the way he meant it. The first mortar bomb hissed in then, and burst right on the midfield stripe. But the red team shielded the blue from most of the fragments. As soon as Armstrong heard the bang, he flattened out. So did the Alabaman who didn’t like him, but the guy in red was bleeding from his back and his leg.

“Fuck,” he said hoarsely.

Another Confederate player was down with a ghastly head wound. It proved again what Kaiser Bill’s army had found out the hard way in the Great War—leather helmets didn’t do one damn thing to stop shell fragments. A couple of U.S. soldiers clutched at themselves and groaned, too. Their uniforms showed the blood more than their opponents’.

Armstrong crawled over to the closer one. He didn’t want to rise up, in case more mortar rounds landed on or near the football field. And they did—one near the far end zone, and another, gruesomely, in the side of the stands filled with people cheering for the red team. Screams and shrieks and wails rose high and shrill.

“Son of a bitch!” Armstrong said, not entirely displeased. “We may not even have to take hostages this time. They’re doing it to themselves.”

The wounded U.S. player expressed an opinion that would have assigned every white person in the former Confederacy to an even warmer if less humid clime. Then he said, “I wish I could bandage myself.

This cloth doesn’t tear for shit.”

“Hang on.” Armstrong extracted a small clasp knife from his right sock. “I’ll fix you up.”

“What are you doing with that?” the other soldier asked.

“Never can tell when it’ll come in handy,” Armstrong said, slicing at

the fellow's shirt. "If I could've got my hands on a derringer, I would've packed one of those, too." He cut at the soldier's tight trousers so he could see the wound. "Not too bad. Looks like you're sliced up some, but I don't think there's any iron in there."

"Oh, boy," the injured player said. Armstrong knew it was easier to be optimistic if you weren't the guy who'd stopped one.

Another round burst on the far side of the field, and then another one in the Confederate side of the stands. The bastards with the mortar could have done much worse to the people they were trying to harm. Instead, they unleashed horror on the men and women who would have applauded had damnyankees been sliced to cat's meat.

"I think the game's over," somebody not far away said.

"Boy, I bet he had to go to college to be smart like that," Armstrong said.

"Heh," said the wounded football player lying beside him. "I hope they drop on that fucking mortar crew pretty damn quick."

"Good luck," Armstrong said. Mortars didn't make a great big bang when they went off. If you drew a mile-and-a-half circle around the football field, the crew was…somewhere in there. If they wanted to throw their weapon in a Birmingham, go somewhere else, and set up again, they could do that, too. And most of the soldiers who could be chasing them were here at the game instead.

The guys in green-gray were emptying from the stands as fast as they could without panic. Medics came out to get the injured off the field. They'd been there for the football injuries, but they knew how to deal with battlefield wounds, too. They'd had plenty of practice. Armstrong stayed right where he was.

He wished he could have stashed an entrenching tool in his sock. Like every U.S. soldier in the CSA, he felt pinned down.

Everything faded. Cassius found that out the hard way. He could remember the fierce, incredulous joy he'd known when he shot Jake Featherston, but he couldn't feel it any more. All he had now was the memory, and it wasn't the same thing.

Fame faded, too. It wasn't that people didn't recall what he'd done, here more than half a year later.

He got greeted with smiles and nods wherever he went. But he wasn't fresh news any more. Too much had happened since. The United States was about to get a new President. That was why he'd been invited down to Washington, D.C.: to see Tom Dewey inaugurated.

He wondered if his would be the only black face at the inauguration. He feared it might. Down in the CSA, he'd always been among his own kind. But Negroes in the United States were thin on the ground.

He had to get used to dealing with white people.

A lot of them didn't know how to deal with him, either. The ones who treated him like an eight-year-old who wasn't very bright were easy to avoid. Even the ones who plainly meant well, though, often acted as if they couldn't expect much from him. In some ways, they bothered him more than the other kind, because they were harder to shake off.

"Such neat handwriting!" gushed the desk clerk at Willard's Hotel when Cassius checked in the evening of January 31. He looked at his signature. *Cassius Madison*, it said in his ordinary script, which was not too bad and not too good. Everybody in the USA needed a surname. He'd taken his from the town outside of which he shot Jake Featherston. Only later did he learn it also belonged to a U.S.

President from before the War of Secession. Were Cassius white, the clerk never would have remarked on how he wrote. The man had to be surprised he could write at all.

Once he'd checked in, Cassius knew what to do at a hotel. He tipped the man who carried his bags up to his room. Watching a white man do what would have been nigger work in the CSA was a kick.

"Thanks," the fellow said, pocketing the half-dollar. "You want a girl, buddy, you talk to me. I'll get you a lulu, I will. Fifteen bucks, and you'll be a happy guy—I guarantee it."

"Not right now," Cassius answered. Right after he came to the USA, he couldn't keep women away from him, not that he tried very hard. But they didn't throw themselves at him like that any more—another sign his fame was wearing thin, and one he really regretted.

The bellhop shrugged. "You change your mind, you can find me. My name's Pete. See you around."

He strode out of the room.

Cassius shrugged. He didn't like paying for it. He did like doing it, though, so maybe he'd hunt up Pete and maybe he wouldn't. In the meantime, he looked at the room-service menu. He ordered a steak and a salad and fried potatoes. Experience had taught him that those were hard for even a kitchen asleep at the switch to screw up too badly.

Another white man, this one with a foreign accent, brought the dinner into his room on a cart. Cassius tipped him, too. With a nod that was almost a bow, the waiter left. Cassius attacked the steak. They'd got medium-rare right, and the meat was pretty tender. He'd had plenty worse.

He went to bed without looking for Pete. He felt more tired than virtuous. He didn't know why sitting on a train for the trip down from Boston should have worn him out—he hadn't done anything *but* sit. But he'd seen several times that traveling long distances could be as wearing as a march with Gracchus'

guerrillas.

After the alarm clock woke him, he showered and shaved and dressed in a sober suit set off by a bright red tie. Then he went downstairs for breakfast.

Willard's, at the corner of Fourteenth and Pennsylvania Avenue, was only a couple of blocks from the White House, on whose battered grounds the inauguration ceremony would take place. It was even closer to the security perimeter, which featured barbed wire, machine-gun nests, and search points.

Even though Cassius had one of the most recognizable faces in the USA and an official invitation, he got frisked. "I shot the President of the CSA," he complained. "You reckon I'm gonna shoot the President of the USA?"

"Not our job to take chances," answered the soldier patting him down. "But I'll tell you something—Congresswoman Blackford came through this checkpoint a few minutes ago. She was married to a guy who was President. One of our gals searched her anyway." He paused. "You're clean.

Go on through."

"Thanks," Cassius said. If they were searching members of Congress, they hadn't singled him out because he was a Negro. He'd wondered.

He showed his invitation to an usher who might have been a soldier dressed up for the occasion. “Oh, yes, sir,” the man said—he couldn’t have been more than a year or two older than Cassius. “Come with me. We’ve got you a place right near the podium.”

Cassius went past bleachers filling up with dignitaries and their wives. A woman waved to him. That *was* Congresswoman Blackford—the soldier hadn’t been lying to him. He waved back.

There was a special grandstand right behind the podium where the new President would be sworn in.

Newsreel cameras in front of the podium would capture the moment so people all over the country could see it. They were sure to capture Cassius. He didn’t mind. Till he learned some skill to help him get through the rest of his life, all he had to trade on was the one moment when his rifle spoke for him.

Some of the people sitting around him were generals and admirals. Others had to be important Democratic dignitaries. Their party had been out of office for eight years. Now they got to run things again. They were friendly to him. They shook his hand and congratulated him. Then they went back to chatting with one another, talking about all the things they would do now that they could do them.

The seats on the podium started to fill up: there were the incoming Vice President and his wife. There was the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. There were outgoing President La Follette and his wife. And there, at last, were incoming President Dewey and *his* wife—and a flock of hard-eyed bodyguards around them.

Vice President Truman was sworn in first. He gave no speech and had no counterpart to shake his hand. President La Follette had been Vice President before the Confederate bomb killed his predecessor, and the office stayed empty after he left it.

When Truman sat down, Dewey stood up. So did La Follette, who took his place beside the Chief Justice. The new President took the oath: “I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

As soon as Dewey finished the oath, President—no, ex-President—La Follette took a step forward and shook his hand. Then he sat down on the podium. The Chief Justice also shook hands with President Dewey. He too sat down.

Dewey stood behind the lectern and its undergrowth of microphones. All the wireless webs would be sending his words live across the country. “It is a privilege to be here,” Dewey said. “You have entrusted me with the great responsibility of winning the peace. I would like to congratulate my distinguished predecessor, President La Follette, for winning the desperate war Jake Featherston started.”

Cassius clapped along with everybody else. Now that Dewey had won, he could afford to be gracious to the man who’d gone before him.

The new President looked out at the crowd. He was young and smartly dressed. He looked eager to get on with things. He sounded the same way: “Now that peace has come, we will be prosperous. And we will stay strong. Some in what were the Confederate States may think they can drive us out. I stand before the people of the United States—I stand before the people of the reunited States—to tell them they are wrong.”

More applause rose. Cassius clapped harder this time than he had before. He wanted the Confederates to get everything that was coming to them and then some. People around him clapped again, too. He didn’t think most of them clapped as loud as they had before. He did think that was too bad.

“And I stand before the foreign powers of the world to remind them that the United States are strong, and to remind them that we shall protect ourselves come what may, and with whatever means seem necessary,” Dewey went on. “The superbomb is an awful, terrifying weapon. We shall not use it unless provoked. But those who might provoke us had better know they do so at their peril.”

This time, the hand he got was loud and long. Was he telling Japan to watch out? Or was he warning the Kaiser? Cassius had found out more about foreign countries since coming to the United States than he ever knew down in Georgia. The only foreign lands he’d ever thought of there were the USA—which wasn’t foreign any more—and the Empire of Mexico, because Mexicans had come to work in Augusta and Mexican soldiers had tried to kill him. The world seemed a wider, more complicated place than it had in the days before he shot Jake Featherston.

“My administration will seek to prevent nations that do not now possess the superbomb from acquiring it,” Dewey said. “We have seen at first hand the devastation it inflicts. The German Empire walks side

by side with us in this effort. Both Germany and the United States recognize the danger to world peace if irresponsible governments gain the ability to split the atom."

Japan, then— not the Kaiser after all, Cassius thought. He also wondered how President Dewey knew the United States and Germany would be responsible. Cassius decided he probably didn't. But they already had the superbomb, and they didn't aim to let anyone else join their club.

Wasn't Dewey whistling in the dark about his chances of succeeding? The thought had hardly crossed Cassius' mind before the President said, "I know preventing others from building superbombs will be neither easy nor cheap. We do intend to try, however. The safety of the world is at stake."

Behind Cassius, a general leaned over to his wife and murmured, "When it doesn't work, he can say we gave it our best shot." Cassius was sure he wasn't supposed to hear that. He was also sure it made more sense than he wished it did.

Dewey continued, "We will cleanse the old Confederate States of the evil influence of the Freedom Party. We will ensure that the Negroes surviving there gain full rights as citizens, and that the atrocities of the past can never come again."

As Cassius applauded that, a newsreel camera swung toward him. He was here not least as Dewey's object lesson. He didn't mind, or not very much. If the new President kept his pledge or even came close, the Negroes who remained south of the Mason-Dixon Line would be better off than they ever had before.

Dewey made more promises about all the wonderful things he would do within the United States.

Cassius didn't know whether they would be wonderful or not. He hoped so. What could you do but hope?

After the speech ended, Dewey turned to the crowd. People came up to congratulate him. He and Truman shook hands and smiled while photographers flashed away. Cassius went down with the rest of the people in his special grandstand.

"Good luck, suh," he said when he worked his way up to Dewey.

“Thank you.” The new President gave his hand a quick, professional pump. “Thank you for everything.

You’ve made my job much easier.”

“I was mighty glad to do it, suh,” Cassius replied. No, nobody would ever think of him without thinking of his one moment. He didn’t mind that very much, either. It was one moment more than most of his luckless people ever got.

A tlanta again. Irving Morrell would rather have stayed home with his family, but even leave was welcome. The Atlantic Military District hadn’t come to pieces while he went back to the USA. (Well, he supposed that, technically, Atlanta was part of the USA again, too. The locals didn’t believe it for a minute. Morrell had trouble believing it himself.)

Things could have been worse. None of the morale officers—there were such things—in *his* command had had the brilliant idea of a soldiers-against-locals football game, the way that maniac in Alabama had.

Why not issue any Confederates with a grudge an engraved invitation? *Plenty of damnyankees to shoot at right here!* The only lucky thing was that the mortar crew hurt their own people worse than the U.S.

soldiers they were aiming at.

Morrell didn’t know what the CO of the Gulf Coast Military District had done with his intrepid football-planning officer. He knew what he would have done himself. If it were up to him, that major or whatever he was would be running the coast defenses of Colorado right now.

He had his own problems. Railroad sabotage just wouldn’t stop. There were too many miles of track, and not enough soldiers to keep an eye on all of them. The War Department didn’t think that kind of offense justified executing hostages, which was the only thing that might have ended it. Morrell supposed the military bureaucrats in Philadelphia had a point. If the U.S. Army murdered Confederates for any little thing, how did it differ from Jake Featherston’s regime except in choice of victims?

But not killing Confederates for any little thing sure made Morrell’s life harder.

Then there were the two dozen command cars in and around Rocky Mount, North Carolina, that somehow got sugar in their gas tanks: as good a way of wrecking an engine as any ever found. The local CO had dealt with that one on his own and sent Atlanta a report later. Morrell approved of officers with initiative. This one had commandeered motorcars from the locals to make up the lack and fined the whole town.

Even fines got tricky, though. Confederate silver and gold were still legal tender; weight for weight, those coins matched their U.S. counterparts. Confederate paper wasn't, not for dealings with the occupying authorities. Brown banknotes stayed in circulation among the locals; there weren't enough green bills to go around yet.

Pretty soon, all Confederate paper would be illegal. Then squeezing the occupied states would get easier, anyhow. Right now, the situation with money was the same as it was most ways. Wherever the U.S. authorities reached, they ruled. Where they didn't, or where they turned their backs even for a moment, the old ways went on.

"Here's an ugly one, sir." A light colonel from the judge-advocate's office set a manila folder on Morrell's desk. "From Greenville, South Carolina. They strung up a Negro for coughing at a white woman."

"Coughing?" Morrell said.

"That's what they do a lot of the time down here instead of whistling like we would," the younger officer explained.

"Do we know who did it?" Morrell asked. "Sounds like those people need stringing up themselves."

"Yes, sir." But the lieutenant colonel sounded unhappy.

"Want to tell me more, or do I need to go through all this stuff?" Morrell set a hand on the folder.

"Well, I can give you the short version," the military attorney said.

"Good!" Morrell was drowning in paperwork. "Do that, then."

"Right. For one thing, we know who did it, but we can't prove anything. Everybody denies it.

Everybody who was there swears he wasn't and nobody else was,

either. As far as they're concerned, that colored guy hanged himself."

"No U.S. witnesses?"

"No, sir."

"All right. You said, 'For one thing.' That means there's something else, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir. That town will go off like a bomb if we arrest these people. Greenville does not want to put up with the idea that a Negro can get fresh with a white woman, no matter what. I don't know if the dead guy really did or he didn't. But the whites may have surrendered to us. They sure haven't given up on the way things were before they did."

"No, huh?" Morrell had heard that song too many times before. It made up his mind for him. "Send orders to the officer in charge there. Tell him to get his heavy weapons ready and make sure he has air support ready to fly. Then tell him to arrest those people and get them out of there. If Greenville rises, we'll level the place."

"Are you sure, sir?" the lieutenant colonel asked.

"If I had a superbomb handy, I'd drop it on those bastards. That's how sure I am. Now let's get cooking."

"Uh, yes, sir." The military attorney saluted and left his office in a hurry.

U.S. soldiers arrested seventeen men and two women in Greenville. The town didn't rise. Morrell hadn't thought it would. Diehards here bushwhacked and raided and made godawful nuisances of themselves. They showed no signs of being ready or able to fight pitched battles against U.S. troops.

He called in a couple of writers from *Stars and Stripes*, the Army newspaper. "I want you to draft a pamphlet for me," he told them. "Aim it at whites in the former CSA. We can call it *Equality*. Tell these bastards they don't have to like Negroes, but they can't go pissing on them the way they did before the war."

"Yes, sir," the men chorused. One of them added, "When do you want it, sir?"

“Say, a week,” Morrell answered. “Then I’ll get War Department approval for it, and then I’ll issue it.

I’ll issue it by the millions, by God. From now on, nobody’s going to be able to say, ‘Well, I didn’t know what the rules were.’ We’ll tell ’em just what the rules are. If they break ’em after that, it’s their own damn fault.”

He got the first draft six days later. He didn’t think it was strong enough, and suggested changes.

When it came back, he sent the text to Philadelphia. He wondered how long things would take there.

With the new administration coming in, the bureaucracy was even bumpier than usual.

But he not only got approval four days later, he also got a message saying that the powers that be had sent his text to the U.S. commandants in the Gulf Coast Military District, the Mid-South Military District, and the Republic of Texas. They had orders to print and distribute *Equality*, too. What the written word could do, it would.

As soon as the pamphlet hit the streets, complaints hit his desk. He might have known they would.

Hell, he had known they would. The former mayor of Atlanta was in prison for aiding and abetting the removal of Negroes from the town. The new town commissioner was a fortyish lawyer named Clark Butler. He would have been handsome if his ears hadn’t stuck out.

He’d always cooperated with U.S. authorities before. He was hopping mad now. “You mean we have to put up with it if a, uh, colored fellow”—he’d learned it wasn’t a good idea to say *nigger* around Morrell—“makes advances to a white woman?”

“As long as he’s peaceable about it, yes,” Morrell asked. “Do you mean to tell me white men never make advances to colored women?”

Butler turned red. “That’s different.”

“How?”

“It just is.”

Morrell shook his head. “Sorry, no. I’m not going to budge on this one.

Maybe it was different before the war, or you thought it was because you were on top and the Negroes were on the bottom. Things aren't like that any more."

Butler scratched the edge of his thin mustache. "Some of the states in the USA have miscegenation laws. Why are you tougher on us than you would be on them?"

"Because you abused things worse," Morrell answered bluntly. "And I don't think they'll keep those laws much longer. You gave them such a horrible example, they'll be too embarrassed to leave 'em on the books."

"You're going to cause a lot of trouble," Butler predicted in doleful tones.

"I'll take the chance." Morrell, by contrast, sounded cheerful. "If people here start trouble, I promise we'll finish it."

"It's not fair," Butler said. "We're only doing what we always did."

"Yes, and look where that got you," Morrell retorted. "Let's take you in particular, for instance. I know you didn't have anything to do with shipping Negroes to camps—we've checked. You wouldn't be sitting there if you did. You'd be in jail with the old mayor. But you knew they were disappearing, didn't you?"

"Well…" Butler looked as if he wished he could disappear. "Yes."

"Good! Well done!" Morrell made clapping motions that were only slightly sardonic. "See? You can own up to things if you try. I would've thrown you out of my office if you said anything different."

"But treating…colored folks like white people? *Equality*?" The city commissioner pronounced the name of the pamphlet with great distaste. "People—white people—won't like that, not even a little bit."

"Frankly, Butler, I don't give a damn." Morrell was getting sick of the whole sorry business. "Those are the rules you've got now. You're going to play by them, and that's flat. If you try to make some poor Negro sorry, we will make you sorrier. If you don't think we can do it—or if you don't think we will do it—go ahead and find out. You won't like what happens next. I promise you that. Wake the town and tell the people. We mean it."

"Colored folks in the same church? Colored kids in the same school?"

Plainly, Butler was picking the most hideous examples he could think of.

And Morrell nodded as if his head were on springs. “That’s right. Negroes working the same jobs as white people, too, and getting the same pay. Oh, I don’t expect colored lawyers right away—you didn’t let them get the education for that. But they’ll get it from here on out.”

“I don’t reckon we’ll put up with it,” Butler said. “I truly don’t. Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!”

“Are you saying that in your official capacity, Mr. Butler?” Morrell asked. “If you are, you just resigned.”

Clark Butler reconsidered. He had a well-paying, responsible job at a time and in a place where jobs of any kind were hard to come by. “Well, no. I wasn’t speaking officially,” he said after a brief pause. “I was just expressing the feelings of a lot of people in this part of the continent—and you know that’s so, General.”

Morrell knew, all right, much too well. After a pause of his own, he replied, “I don’t care what people feel. I can’t do anything about that. But I damn well can do something about how people behave. If you want to hate Negroes in your heart, go ahead. While you’re hating them, though, I will make you sorry if you treat them any different from whites. Have you got that?”

“Equality enforced at the point of a bayonet?” Butler jeered.

“Sounds pretty silly, doesn’t it?” Morrell said with a smile. The city commissioner nodded. But Morrell wasn’t finished: “Still, when you get right down to it, it beats the hell out of camps and ovens and mass graves.”

“I wasn’t involved with that,” Butler said quickly.

“You wouldn’t be talking with me now if you were,” Morrell replied. “But you think you’re serious about what you’re going to do? So are we. You can find out the easy way or the hard way. Up to you.”

Butler left in a hurry after that. Morrell wasn’t sorry to see him go, and resolved to keep a closer watch on him from here on out. He wondered whether the United States *could* enforce anything like equality on the old CSA. He still wasn’t sure—but he aimed to try.

T he only way Clarence Potter could have avoided seeing the pamphlet called *Equality* was to stay in his apartment and never come out. The Yankees plastered the damn thing all over Richmond. During the war, that common a propaganda leaflet would have meant the Quartermaster Corps didn't need to issue toilet paper for a while.

When he first read the pamphlet, he thought it was an A-number-one asswipe, nothing else but. After he looked at it again, he still thought it was an asswipe. But it was a clever asswipe, and a determined one. The damnyankees weren't out to change hearts or minds in the dead CSA. They were out to change behavior. If they rammed different behavior down people's throats from Richmond to Guaymas, they figured hearts and minds would eventually follow.

What worried Potter most was, they had a fighting chance of being right.

He'd watched the same thing happen when the Freedom Party took over the CSA. Even people who didn't like Jake Featherston and the Party started greeting one another with "Freedom!" It was safer.

You couldn't get into trouble if you did it. And, after a while, you didn't even feel self-conscious about it.

You took it for granted. Pretty soon, you took the truth of everything the Party said for granted. And you, and the Confederate States of America with you, followed Jake Featherston into the abyss.

Now the Yankees wanted to push what was left of the Confederacy into… *Equality*. They didn't ask whites to love Negroes. They just said, *Treat them the way you'd treat yourselves, or we'll make you regret it*.

Was there ever a more perverted application of the Golden Rule?

Potter was sure lots of people hated the idea of Negro equality even more than he did. He'd spent sixty-odd years in the CSA; he knew what was what here. But he also knew he was being watched. The damnyankees didn't waste subtlety showing him that—which didn't mean there weren't also subtle spies, ones he didn't notice right away. He assumed his telephone was tapped and his mail read.

And so he sat tight and worked on his memoirs. A generation earlier, he'd done what he could to free the CSA from the onerous terms of the armistice after the Great War. But the Confederacy wasn't crushed then. It wasn't occupied, either. The USA had learned a bar fighter's

lesson since: once you knocked a guy down, you needed to kick him in the head so he couldn't jump up and come after you with a broken bottle.

One day in early March, when spring was just starting to be in the air, he went over to Capitol Square to look around. Woodrow Wilson had declared war on the USA there in 1914. Potter himself and Nathan Bedford Forrest III had halfheartedly plotted against Jake Featherston there, too.

Forrest was dead now, because you needed to be a better plotter than he ever was to go up against the wily President of the CSA. Featherston never found out Potter was involved in that scheme. If he had, Potter knew he would have died himself.

Capitol Square had been battered when the two generals sat on a park bench and talked about where the Confederacy was going. Down the drain, though neither of them knew it at the time.

The square looked even worse now than it had then, which wasn't easy. The grass was still mangy and leprous from winter's freezes. No one had mowed it for a long time. It softened the outlines of bomb and shell craters without hiding them. Signs with big red letters shouted blunt warnings: WATCH WHERE YOU

STEP! and MINES & LIVE AMMO!

Thus cautioned, Potter didn't walk across the square to the remains of the Capitol. A neoclassical building, it had been bombed into looking like an ancient ruin. From the pictures he'd seen, the Colosseum and the Parthenon were both in a hell of a lot better shape than this place.

Workmen were hauling away the wreckage of Albert Sidney Johnston's heroic statue. Like the Confederacy, it was good for nothing but scrap metal these days. George Washington's statue, now out from under its protective pyramid of sandbags, had come through better. Even the Yankees still respected Washington…some, anyhow.

Two blue jays screeched in a tree. A robin hopped on the ground, eye cocked for bugs. A skinny red tabby eyed the robin from behind a low mound of earth. "Go get it," Potter murmured. The cat had to eat, too. But the robin flew off. The cat eyed Potter as if it were his fault. It was a cat—it wouldn't blame itself. Potter sketched a salute. "You're a loser, too," he said fondly. The cat yawned, showing off needle teeth. It ambled away.

He'd been looking for the bench where Forrest first broached getting rid of Featherston and getting out of the war. Once he sold his memoirs, that bench would become a historical monument of sorts. Or rather, it would have, because he saw no sign of it. One more casualty of war.

He found another bench, deeper into Capitol Square. Despite the signs, he didn't blow up getting to it.

He sat down. Getting out of the apartment felt good. So did the sun on his face, though he'd grown used to being pasty during the war. A man in a filthy Confederate uniform was sleeping or passed out drunk in the tall grass not far away. Some newspapers did duty for a blanket.

Potter didn't think the derelict was watching him, though you never could tell. Somebody was, somewhere. He was sure of that. He looked around to see if he could spot the spy. Not this time. That proved exactly nothing, of course.

After the end of the last war, Jake Featherston had spent some time in Capitol Square as a drifter, one more piece of flotsam washed up by the armistice. Then he ran into the Freedom Party—and it ran into him. Before he joined, it was a tiny, hopeless outfit that could keep its membership rolls and accounts in a cigar box. Afterwards…

Now it was more than twenty-five years afterwards. Potter could see that everybody would have ended up better off if Jake Featherston went down some other street and never met the hopeless chucklehead who founded the Freedom Party. Once upon a time, he'd known that chucklehead's name.

He couldn't remember it now to save his life. Well, it sure didn't matter any more.

He closed his eyes. He wished he could close his nose. The stench of death still lingered in Richmond.

It would only get worse as the weather warmed up, too. How many years would it need to go away for good?

"Hey, friend, you got any change you can spare?"

Clarence Potter opened his eyes. The sleeping soldier—he still had a sergeant's chevrons on his sleeve—had come to life. He was filthy, and badly needed a shave. God only knew when he'd bathed last. But Potter didn't smell whiskey along with the—what did that Yankee

soap ad call it?—B.O.

“Here.” He dug in his pocket and found a half-dollar. “Buy yourself something to eat.” He tossed it to the man.

“Much obliged, sir.” The vet caught it out of the air. He eyed Potter. “You went through it, I reckon.”

“Twice,” Potter agreed. “Not always at the front, but yeah—twice.”

“You’ve got the look, all right.” The demobilized soldier stuck the fat silver coin in a trouser pocket.

“You reckon we’ll ever get back on our feet again?”

“Sooner or later? I’m sure of it. When?” Potter shrugged. “It may be later. I don’t know if I’ll live to see it. I hope you do.”

The younger man eyed him. “You talk kinda like a Yankee.” *He* probably came from Alabama or Mississippi.

With another shrug, Potter answered, “I went to college up there.”

“Yeah? You like the Yankees, then? If you do, I’ll give you your money back, on account of I don’t want it.”

“Keep it, son. It’s no secret that I don’t care for the United States. We can’t fight them now—we’re licked. I don’t know if we’ll ever be able to fight them again. But I won’t like them if I live to be a hundred, and my bones tell me I won’t.”

“Huh,” the vet said gravely, and then, “We oughta fight ’em. We oughta kick the snot out of ’em for what they done to us.”

Was he another Jake Featherston, still unburst from his chrysalis of obscurity? It was possible. Hell, anything was possible. But long odds, long odds. How many tens of thousands had there been after the last war? Potter had no idea. He did know only one rose to the top.

He also knew this grimy fellow might be a provocateur, not an embryo Featherston. The Yankees wouldn’t be sorry to have an excuse to stand him against a wall with a blindfold and a last cigarette. No, not even a little bit.

“I have fought the USA as much as I intend to,” he said. “Keeping it up when it’s hopeless only makes things worse for us.”

“Who says it’s hopeless?” the young vet demanded.

“I just did. Weren’t you listening? Even if we rise, even if we take Richmond, what will the damnyankees do? Pull their people out of the city and drop a superbomb on it? How do you aim to fight that?”

“They wouldn’t.” But the man’s voice suddenly held no conviction.

“Sure they would. And if we’d won, we’d’ve done the same thing to Chicago if it rebelled and we couldn’t squash it with soldiers. What else are the damn bombs for?”

The man in the shabby, filthy butternut uniform looked up into the sky, as if he heard the drone of a U.S. heavy bomber. One would be all it took. The cities of the conquered CSA lay naked before airplanes. No antiaircraft guns any more. No Hound Dogs waiting to scramble, either. The only reason the damnyankees hadn’t done it yet was that nobody’d provoked them enough.

“Teddy Roosevelt used to talk about the big stick,” Potter said quietly. “They’ve got the biggest stick in the world right now, and they’ll clobber us with it if we get out of line. We lost. I wish like hell we didn’t. I did everything I knew how to do to keep it from happening. We can’t get too far out of line now, though. It costs too goddamn much.”

“What am I supposed to do with myself, then?” the veteran asked. Tears filled his voice and glistened in his eyes. “I been living on hate ever since we gave up. Don’t hardly got nothin’ else to live on.”

“Clean up. Find a job. Go to work. Find a girl. Plenty of ’em out there, and not so many men. Help build a place where your kids would want to live.” Potter shrugged. “Where we are now, what else is there?”

“A place where kids’d want to live? Under the Stars and Stripes? Likely tell!” the young man said scornfully.

“Right now, it’s the only game in town. Maybe things will change later on. I don’t know. You’ll see more of that than I do.” Potter’s hair was nearer white than gray these days. “But if you go on feeling sorry for yourself and sleeping in the square, maybe get drunk so you don’t have to think about things, who wins? You? Or the USA?”

“I need to think about that,” the vet said slowly.

Potter rose from the bench. “You’ve got time. Don’t take too long, though. It’s out there. Grab with both hands.” He never would have had to say that to Jake Featherston. Jake always grabbed.

And look what it got him. Look what it got all of us. Clarence Potter walked back toward the street the way he’d come, trying to step just where he had before. Again, nothing blew up under him. But how much difference did that make now? Jake Featherston had blown up his whole country.

F lora Blackford loved the smell of a kosher deli: the meaty odors of salami and corned beef harmonizing with the brine and vinegar of the pickle barrel and contrasting with the aromas of bagels and fresh-baked bread. Philadelphia had some decent delis, but you needed to go back to New York City for the real thing.

Her brother waved from a table in the back. David Hamburger had a double chin these days. His brown hair was thinning and going gray. Flora was graying, too. She thought the thirty years just past would have grayed anybody, even if they’d somehow happened in the blink of an eye.

“Don’t get up,” she called as she hurried over to David.

“I wasn’t going to. It’s too much like work,” he said. The artificial leg he’d worn since 1917 stuck out in front of him, unnaturally straight. “Good to see you. You still talk to me even though we won for a change?”

“Maybe,” Flora said. They both smiled. David had been a Democrat, and a conservative one, ever since he got hurt. Violence had done its worst to him, so he seemed to think it would solve anything.

After this round of war, that seemed less foolish to Flora than it had before. Sometimes nothing else would do.

She sat down. A waiter came up. “*Nu?* ” he said. She ordered corned beef on rye and a bottle of beer. David chose lox and bagels with his beer. The waiter scribbled, scratched his thick gray mustache, and went away.

“How are you?” Flora asked. “How’s your family?”

“Everybody’s fine. Me, I’m not too bad,” her brother answered. “How’s Joshua doing?”

She told him what Joshua had said about not being able to give anyone the finger with his left hand.

David laughed an old soldier's laugh. Flora went on, "He's lucky, I know, but I still wish it never happened."

"Well, I understand that," her brother said. "I've had a pretty good life, taking it all in all, but I sure wish I didn't stop that one bullet." David sighed. "I'm lucky, too. Look at poor Yossel—the first Yossel, I mean. He never got to see his son at all."

"I know," Flora said. "I was thinking about that every minute after Joshua got conscripted. But he wanted to join. What can you do?"

"Nothing," David answered. "Part of watching them grow up is figuring out when to let go. When Joshua got old enough for conscription, he got too old for you to stop him."

"He told me the same thing," Flora said ruefully. "He wasn't wrong, but what did it get him? A stretch in the hospital."

"And an idea of what the country's worth," David said. The waiter brought the food and the beer.

David piled his bagel high with smoked salmon and Bermuda onion and ignored the cream cheese that came with them. Flora thought that was perverse, but no accounting for taste. David Hamburger proved as much, continuing, "Now that he's bled for it, he won't want to let it get soft."

Flora had seen reactionary signs in Joshua since he got wounded, and didn't like them. Tartly, she answered, "You don't have to get wounded to love the United States or be a patriot."

Her brother was busy chewing an enormous mouthful. He washed it down with a swallow of beer. "I didn't say you did," he replied at last. "But you sure don't see things the same way after you catch one."

Now Flora was eating, and had to wait before she could say anything. "Putting on the uniform doesn't turn everybody into a Democrat. Plenty of Socialist veterans—quite a few of them in Congress, in fact."

"I know, I know," David said. "Still, if they'd sat on that Featherston *mamzer* before he got too big to sit on—"

“Who was President when Featherston took over?” Flora asked indignantly, and answered her own question: “Hoover was, that’s who. The last time I looked, Hoover was a Democrat.”

“Yeah, yeah.” David did his best to brush that aside. “Who gave away Kentucky and Houston? Al Smith was no Democrat, and he handed the Confederates the platform they needed to damn near ruin us.”

“That was a mistake,” Flora admitted. “The trouble was, nobody here really believed Featherston wanted a war. The Great War was so awful for both sides. Why would anybody want to do that again?”

“He didn’t. He wanted to win this time. And he almost did,” her brother said. “He wanted to get rid of his *shvartzers*, too. Who would have believed *that*? You were ahead of everybody there, Flora. I give you credit for it.”

“Sometimes you don’t want to be right. It costs too much,” Flora said. “Nobody in the USA wanted to let C.S. Negroes in when he started persecuting them. The Democrats were worse about it than the Socialists, though.”

“All right, so we didn’t have things straight all the time, either,” David answered. “Dewey’ll do a better job of holding down the CSA than La Follette would have.”

“That’s the plank he ran on. We’ll see if he means it,” Flora said.

David laughed. “Was there ever a politician you wouldn’t say that about?”

“I can think of three,” Flora replied. “Debs, Teddy Roosevelt, and Robert Taft. When they said they’d do something, they meant it. It didn’t always help them. Sometimes it just left them with a bull’s-eye on their back.”

After a moment’s thought, David nodded. “And two more,” he said: “you and Hosea.”

“Thank you,” Flora said softly. “I try. So did Hosea—and he never got the credit for it he deserved.”

He never would, either, and she knew it, not when the economic collapse happened while he was President. After a pull at her beer, she went on, “I’ll give you another one: Myron Zuckerman.”

“He was an honest man,” her brother agreed.

Flora nodded. “He was. And if he didn’t trip on the stairs and break his neck, I never would have run for Congress. My whole life would have looked different. I would have stayed an organizer or worked in the clothing business like the rest of the family.”

“Zuckerman’s bad luck. The country’s good luck.”

“You say that, with your politics? You’ll make me blush. It’s only because I’m your sister.” Flora tried not to show how pleased she was.

“Hey, I disagree with you sometimes—well, a lot of the time. So what? You *are* my sister, and I’m proud of you,” David answered. “Besides, I know I can always borrow money from you if I need it.”

He never had, not a penny. Flora had always shared with her parents and sister and younger brother, but David stubbornly made his own way. *I’m doing all right*, he would say. It seemed to be true, for which Flora was glad.

He grinned at her. “So what does it mean, what we’ve been through since the Great War started?

You’re the politician. Tie it up for me.”

“You don’t ask for much!” Flora exclaimed. Her brother laughed. He picked up his beer bottle, discovered it was empty, and waved for another one. Flora drank from hers. If she was going to try to answer a question like that, she needed fortifying. “Well, for starters, we’ve got the whole United States back, if we can ever stop the people in the South from hating us like rat poison.”

“Since when do they like us that much?” David said: a painfully true joke. He went on, “We can hold them down if we have to, them and the Canadians.”

“A Negro who got out of the CSA before the Great War said that if you hold a man down in the gutter, you have to get into the gutter yourself,” Flora said. “Do we want to do that?”

“Do we want the Confederate States back in business? Do we want them building superbombs again?” David asked, adding, “The one they used almost got you.”

“I know,” Flora said. “Don’t remind me.”

“Well, then.” By the way David said it, he thought he’d proved his point.

But Flora answered, “Do we want our boys down there for the next fifty years, bleeding a little every day? It would be like a sore that won’t heal.”

“Better that than worrying about them blowing us off the map,” David said. “And they would, too.

We’ve fought them four times in the past eighty years. You think they don’t want to try to get even because we won the last two?”

“No, I don’t think so, not for a minute.” Flora knew some Socialists had thought such things after the Great War. It was unfortunate, but it was true. Nobody thought that way any more, though. Once bitten, twice shy. Twice bitten…“Still, if we can’t turn them into people who belong in the United States, what are we going to do with them?”

“Do we want people like that in our country? People who murdered eight or ten million Negroes?

Even when the Tsar turns loose a pogrom, it’s not as bad as that.”

“A *choleriyeh* on the Tsar.” Flora hated the idea of Russia with a superbomb, too. Germany would have to deal with Russia, though; the USA just didn’t have the reach. She got back to the business at hand: “They didn’t kill *all* the Negroes.”

“No, but they didn’t try to stop the Freedom Party goons, either. They cheered them on, for crying out loud,” David said. “And you know what scares me?”

“Nu?” Flora asked.

“If it happened down there, it could happen here. It could happen to Negroes here, or, God forbid, it could happen to Jews. If you get enough people hot and bothered, anything can happen. Anything at all.”

“God forbid is right,” Flora said. “I like to think we wouldn’t do anything like that…”

“Yeah. Me, too. And how many *shvartzers* thought their white neighbors wouldn’t do anything like that? How many of them are left

to think anything now?" Her brother answered his own question: "Not many."

"Maybe seeing what the Confederates did will vaccinate us against it," Flora said. "We can hope so, anyway."

"*Alevai*," David said.

"*Alevai omayn*." Flora nodded. "But can you imagine a politician saying, 'I want to do the same thing Jake Featherston did. Look how well it worked down there'?"

"Mm, maybe not—not for a while, anyway." David smiled crookedly. "Let's hear it for bad examples.

I always aimed to be one for my children, but massacring people goes a little too far."

"A little. Sure." Flora reached out and set her hand on his. He looked astonished. She realized she hadn't done that in—oh, much too long. "And some bad example you are."

"Hey, I'm a Democrat. How can I be anything but a bad example?"

"You'll have to work harder than that." Flora hoped he wouldn't get angry. He *had* worked hard, all his life.

He didn't. "Here. I'll give it my best shot." He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one. "How am I doing?"

"I think you need to try something else." Flora fought not to laugh.

"Don't know what. I already drink. Don't want to chase women—I'm happy with the one I caught.

And you're the family politician."

"Well! I like that!"

David's smile got crookeder yet. "You know what? Me, too."

Flora pointed to the pack. "Give me one of those."

"You don't smoke."

"So what? Right now I do."

He handed her a cigarette, then leaned close to light it from his. She thought it tasted terrible, but she didn't care, not just then. They blew out smoke together.

About the Author

HARRY TURTLEDOVE is an award-winning author of science fiction and fantasy. His alternate-history works have included several short novels such as *The Guns of the South; How Few Remain* (winner of the Sidewise Award for Best Novel); the Worldwar saga: *In the Balance, Tilting the Balance, Upsetting the Balance,* and *Striking the Balance;* the Colonization books: *Second Contact, Down to Earth,* and *Aftershocks;* the Great War epics: *American Front, Walk in Hell,* and *Breakthroughs;* the American Empire novels: *Blood & Iron, The Center Cannot Hold,* and *Victorious Opposition;* and the Settling Accounts series: *Return Engagement, Drive to the East, The Grapple,* and *In at the Death*. He is married to fellow novelist Laura Frankos. They have three daughters: Alison, Rachel, and Rebecca.

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